

Archaeological watching brief at Beechwood Arcade, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire



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Status: Version 2
Date: 30th March 2017
Author: Andrew Walsh and Andrew Mann
Illustrator: Carolyn Hunt
Project reference: P4799
Report reference: 2452
HER reference: Assigned after submission
Oasis id fieldsec1-280656

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An archaeological watching brief at Beechwood Arcade, Cheltenham, Gloucester

Andrew Walsh and Andrew Mann

Illustrations by Laura Templeton

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Beechwood Arcade, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (NGR 395102 222340). It was undertaken on behalf of CgMs Consulting, whose client intends to demolish and replace the façade of the current Beechwood Arcade shopping centre for which a planning application has been submitted and approved subject to a programme of archaeological works.

The site had been heavily truncated by the construction of the Beechwood Arcade in 1989-90 and few archaeological remains survived. These included a number of post medieval brick walls, forming cellars thought to belong to the Royal Hotel, which used to occupy the site. An undated limestone wall, abutting the high street is also thought to be a cellar, but its differing construction method suggests it may be earlier in date.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at the former Beechwood Arcade, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (NGR 395102 222340) (Fig 1). It was commissioned by Hannah Smalley of CgMs Consulting Ltd. Permission has been granted by Cheltenham Borough Council for demolition of the existing front facade to High Street and erection of a replacement (ref 15/01783/FUL). Permission was granted subject to conditions including the requirement of a programme of archaeological works.

The site lies in the historic centre of Cheltenham and within the town's Central Conservation Area. Correspondence between CgMs Consulting and Charles Parry Archaeologist (Development Management) for Gloucestershire County Council established that there was a potential for the survival of archaeological remains of medieval date to be affected by the development and that an archaeological watching brief on associated groundworks was appropriate mitigation.

No brief was issued by Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service. The project conforms to a written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2016) and the *Standard and guidance: Archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014). This WSI was submitted to and approved by Gloucestershire County Council.

2 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible within the constraints of the Client's groundworks.

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was led by Timothy Cornah (BA; MSc), Andrew Walsh (BSc; MSc; ACIfA; FSA Scot) and Andrew Mann (BA, MSc). The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers (BA; MSc). Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt (BA; PG Cert; MCIfA).

3.2 Documentary research

An archaeological heritage statement was produced by Turley Heritage (2015), however this only discusses the built heritage surrounding the proposed development and no HER search appears to have been undertaken. A HER search was however undertaken prior to work commencing.

3.3 List of sources consulted

Cartographic sources

Ordnance Survey map 1885, 1:500, Cheltenham - XXVI.8.11

Ordnance Survey map 1887, 25 Inch, Cheltenham - XXVI.8

Ordnance Survey map 1903, 25 Inch, Cheltenham - XXVI.8

Ordnance Survey map 1923, 25 Inch, Cheltenham - XXVI.8

3.4 Fieldwork strategy

Fieldwork was undertaken between 22-2-17 and 24-3-17.

One new foundation trench was excavated along the frontage of Beechwood Arcade. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. The foundation trench continued further to the north than the area specified in the WSI to include the frontages of no's 127 and 129

which were demolished as part of the development. Excavations in this area and to the rear were monitored concurrently with excavations within the core area and the results are included in this report. Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012).

3.5 Structural analysis

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

3.6 Artefact methodology

3.6.1 Artefact recovery policy

Recovery of artefacts was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event no artefacts pre-dating the modern period were identified or collected.

3.7 Environmental archaeology methodology

3.7.1 Sampling policy

Sampling is undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event no deposits were identified which were considered to be suitable for environmental analysis.

3.8 Statement of confidence in the methods and results

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

4 The application site

The site is located on Cheltenham High Street, in the historic centre of Cheltenham and within the town's Central Conservation Area. The site was formally the frontage of the Beechwood Arcade shopping centre, which was being rebuilt as part of the works.

The site was bounded to the north and south by shops fronting onto the High Street, the east by the rest of the former Beechwood Arcade, and the west by the High Street. The topography of the area is flat, and the underlying geology of the site is mapped as Charmouth Mudstone Foundation, overlain by superficial deposits of Cheltenham Sand and Gravel (BGS 2017).

No significant archaeological sites have been excavated in the vicinity of the development but a Roman coin hoard was discovered close to the site on the High Street in 1816 (SMR 5475) and the site fronts on to the site of the medieval and post-medieval market (SMR 20924).

The historic history of the site was summarised in Turley (2015).

The Application Site originally accommodated the Royal Hotel which was built in circa 1818. It is believed to have been built on the site of the house of John De Le Bere, the town's chief magistrate who died in 1795 and during this time, the building was described as being "situated in the most fashionable part of the High Street, nearly opposite the Assembly Rooms, within a short distance of the Theatre, and a pleasant walk of different spas"

An additional building to the north of the Royal Hotel (also forming part of the Application Site) was constructed in the late 19th century and was utilised as a shop, later a pharmacy (Figure 3.8). The building originally curved onto the former street of Albion Place which provided access to the nearby stables and rear livery yard.

The Royal Hotel and neighbouring buildings (the development site) were still in existence during the mid-20th century as evidenced in historic photographs although alterations are evident. The

buildings were demolished and replaced in 1989-90 by the Beechwood Shopping Centre, which remains today. Albion Place was also in-filled at this time. The central part of the Beechwood Shopping Centre was designed by the architects Fitch Benoy with the 'full Postmodern mix' of architectural styles and materiality employed in its construction. The buildings either side of the Royal Hotel appear to have been largely demolished and rebuilt as part of the Beechwood Shopping Centre development. This is evidenced by historic photographs which illustrate a different size and massing (particularly to the curved building) and the loss of architectural features (including projecting cornice and architraves to the windows). Regardless, these buildings have either been rebuilt or extensively modified during their incorporation into the Beechwood Shopping Centre, and as such; they have lost much of their architectural interest and authenticity.

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the construction of the Beechwood shopping centre (SMR 20663) but this did not identify any significant archaeological remains.

5 Results

5.1 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Fig 1.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

Natural deposits were only observed occasionally during the watching brief as the impact level of the new foundation trenches was higher than the level of the natural. These consisted of soft pinkish red sand (202) overlain by orangey yellow sand upto 0.50m deep. Across much of the site these had been overlain by a layer of soft brownish yellow sand between 0.20-0.50m thick, containing moderate amounts of demolition rubble (201) (Plate 1). It is unclear whether this layer reflects disturbed natural which was mixed with demolition rubble during the construction of the Beechwood arcade or was levelling material brought on to site during construction.

5.1.2 Phase 2: Post-medieval

The only archaeological features identified were limestone and brick walls, that are likely to be of post-medieval date and were probably associated with the Royal Hotel, which used to occupy the site. Along the western side of the monitored area were seven brick walls aligned north-east to south-west (Plates 2-3). Between walls, (300), (301) and (302) was a soft yellowish brown sand (307) containing frequent demolition rubble, thought to be the backfill of a cellar, the lime wash of wall (305) also suggests these walls were exposed and formed cellars. Walls (302) and (305) were butt-ended suggesting they were cellar partitions or doorways. All of the walls along the western edge were bonded with lime mortar except walls (303) and (304), which were bonded with cement mortar.

Along the street frontage a limestone wall (102) appeared to form a cellar aligned north-east to south-west (Plates 4-5). Along the top of the wall a brick wall (101), probably a later addition had been built. In the south-west corner of the structure a number of flag stones c.0.15m thick had been built into the limestone wall and appeared to cap the feature. The structure was not excavated further as the impact level of the new footings had been reached so it remains unclear if this formed part of a cellar or a drain. The limestone parts of the wall also remain undated and it is possible they are earlier than the post-medieval brick wall on top.

5.1.3 Phase 3: Modern

Concrete foundations and floors reinforced with rebar were present across the whole site. These lay directly over the walls discussed above and as a result when they were removed it caused considerable damage to the earlier remains. The concrete footings and floors were between 0.90-1.70m deep and are likely to have truncated most archaeological remains (Plates 6-7).

6 Synthesis

The majority of the archaeological remains are likely to be associated with the Royal Hotel which had previously occupied the site. The walls along the western side of the site suggest that cellars extended from the street frontages to the rear of the property and had been partitioned internally. Parts of these had been lime washed.

The limestone wall along the street frontage is either a cellar or drain and at present is undated. However the different method of construction, being of limestone rather than brick, suggests it may be earlier (possibly medieval) in date.

7 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of CgMs Consulting Ltd at Beechwood Arcade, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (NGR ref S0 95102 22340). The site had been heavily truncated by the construction of the Beechwood Arcade in 1989-90 and few archaeological remains survived. These included a number of post medieval brick walls, forming cellars thought to belong to the Royal Hotel, which used to occupy the site. An undated limestone wall, abutting the high street is also thought to be a cellar, but its differing construction method may suggest an earlier date.

8 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Hannah Smalley (CgMs Consulting), Richard Smalley (CgMs Consulting) and Charles Parry (Gloucestershire County Council).

9 Bibliography

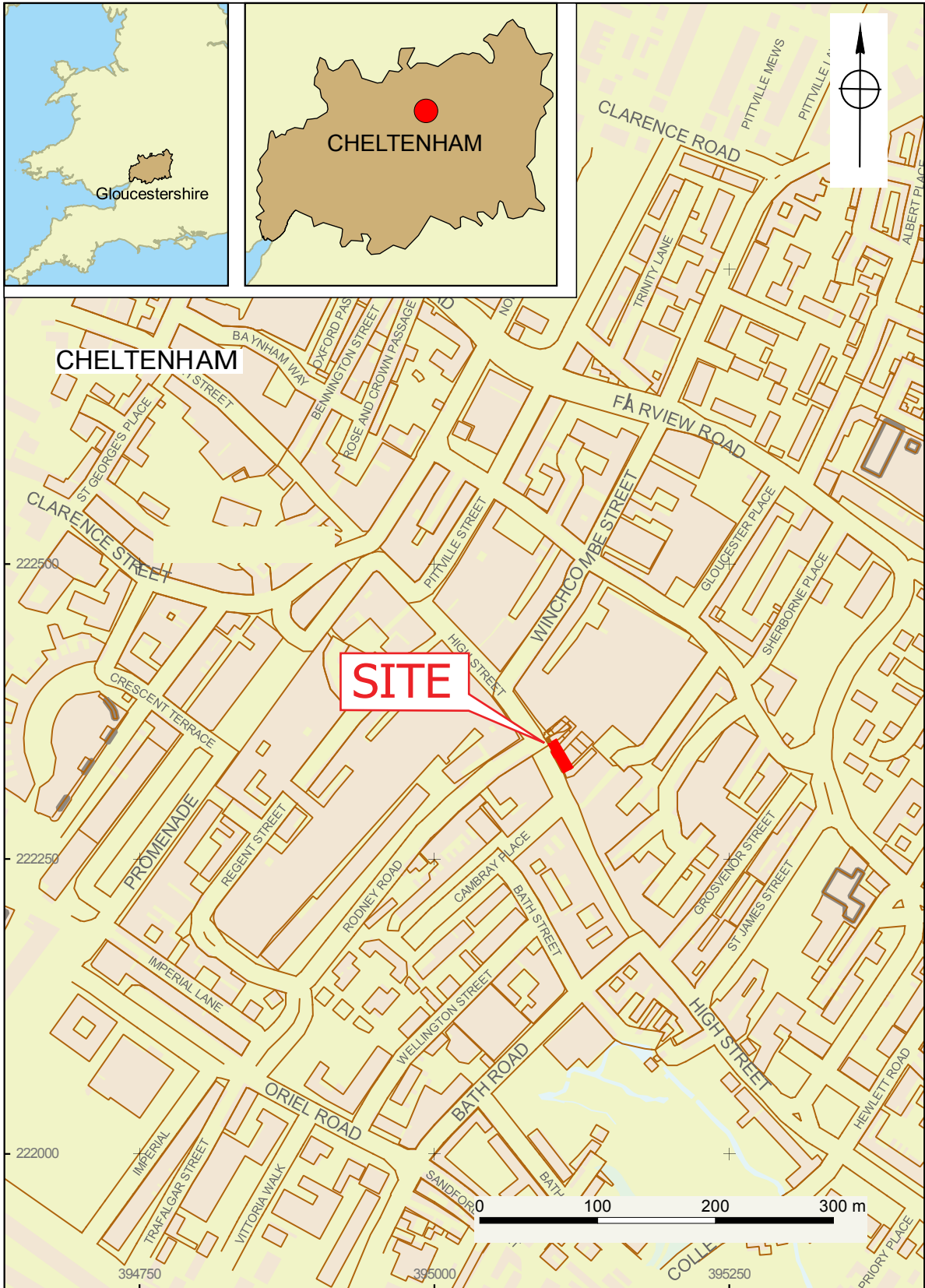
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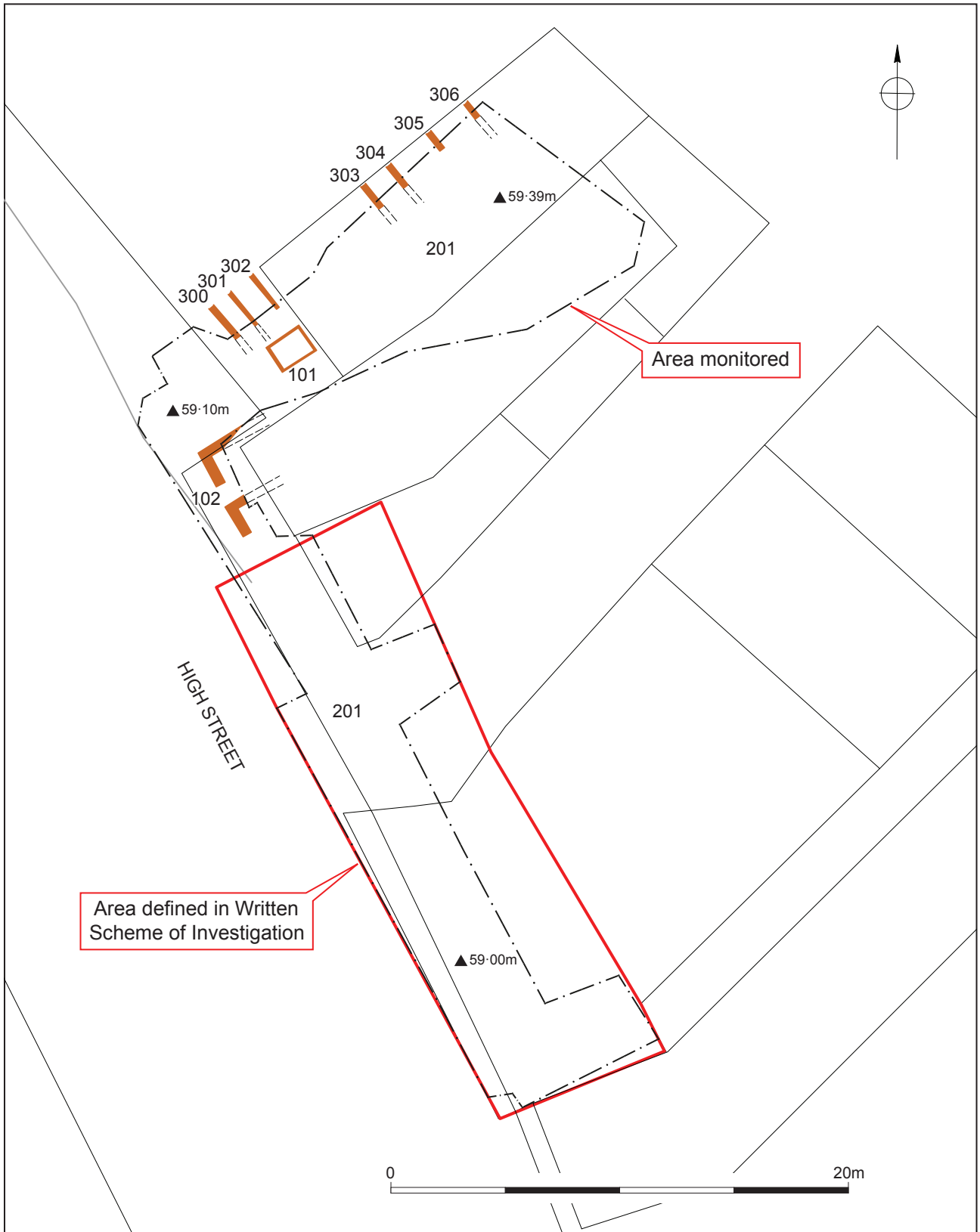
Figures



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Location of the site

Figure 1



Trench Plan

Figure 2

Plates



Plate 1: general view of site, facing NNE, showing sand layer (201)



Plate 2: walls 300-306 along western boundary of the site



Plate 3: walls 300, 301 and 302 along the western boundary of the site. 1m and 0.5m scales



Plate 4: limestone wall (102) facing northwest, 2m scale.



Plate 5: limestone wall (102) facing northeast, 2m scale.



Plate 6: photograph illustrating the amount of concrete used to construct the Beechwood Arcade.



Plate 7: photograph illustrating the amount of concrete used to construct the Beechwood Arcade.

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 62.0m Width: 4.00-9.50m Depth: 0.60-1.70m

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100, 200	Floors and foundations	Concrete floors and foundations reinforced with 1-2 inch diameter rebar. Present across the whole site, between 0.40-1.70m thick.	0.0m-1.70m
101	Culvert	Brick box constructed with machine made bricks, 7x4x3 inches. Wall a minimum of 0.15m deep and 0.50m wide.	0.40m-0.55m
102	Limestone wall	Limestone wall forming a cellar along the street frontage. Formed from uneven coursed limestone blocks, forming a cellar a minimum of 4m wide.	0.55mb.g.s
201	Layer	Soft brownish yellow sand containing moderate CBM fragments and concrete lumps. Possible disturbed natural or levelling layer.	0.40-1.70m b.g.s 0.20-0.40m thick.
202	Natural	Soft, mid pinkish-red sand.	0.60 b.g.s
300	Brick wall	Brick wall aligned north-east to south-west. Wall two courses wide (20cm) of English bond with gritty yellowish lime mortar. Bricks measured 24x11.5x8cm.	0.50-1.10m b.g.s
301	Brick wall	Brick wall aligned north-east to south-west. Wall one course wide (11.5cm) of Stretcher bond with gritty greyish-white lime mortar. Bricks measured 24x11.5x8cm.	0.40-1.10m b.g.s
302	Brick wall	Butt end of a brick wall aligned north-east to south-west. Wall one course wide (11.5cm) of Stretcher bond with gritty yellowish lime mortar. The top course had been bonded with white cement mortar. Bricks measured 24x11.5x8cm.	0.40-1.10m b.g.s
303	Brick wall	Brick wall aligned north-east to south-west. Wall two course wide (25cm) of English bond with gritty grey cement mortar. Bricks measured 24x11.5x8cm. Appears to be paired with wall 304. Inside course of bricks was blue engineering bricks the outside course was red house bricks.	0.0-1.10m b.g.s

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
304	Brick wall	Brick wall aligned north-east to south-west. Wall two course wide (25cm) of English bond with gritty grey cement mortar. Bricks measured 24x11.5x8cm. Appears to be paired with wall 304. Inside course of bricks was blue engineering bricks the outside course was red house bricks.	0.0-1.10m b.g.s
305	Brick wall	Butt end of a brick wall aligned north-east to south-west. Wall two courses wide (25cm) of English bond with gritty yellowish lime mortar.. Bricks measured 23x11x9.5cm. The wall had been lime washed.	0.40-1.40m b.g.s
306	Brick wall	Brick wall aligned north-east to south-west. Wall two course wide (25cm) of English bond with greyish-white cement mortar. Bricks measured 23x11x8x9.5cm.	0.0m-1.70m b.g.s
307	Fill	Backfill of cellar between walls (300, 301 and 302). Mid brownish yellow sand. Soft and uncohesive with frequent CBM fragments and demolition rubble.	0.50-1.10m b.g.s
308	Natural?	Soft and uncohesive yellowish brown sand.	0.50-1.10m b.g.s

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive

The archive consists of:

- 6 Field progress reports AS2
- 2 Photographic records AS3
- 98 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 1 Scale drawings
- 4 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 CD-Rom/DVDs
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Cheltenham art gallery and museum

The Wilson

Clarence Street

Cheltenham

GL50 3JT

Tel: 01242 775704
