

ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
WATCHING BRIEF AT  
DODDERHILL SCHOOL,  
DROITWICH SPA,  
WORCESTERSHIRE

Stephen Potten

With a contribution by Angus Crawford

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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Project 3124  
Report 1566  
WSM 37555



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## Archaeological watching brief at Dodderhill School, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire

**Stephen Potten**

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### Background information

<i>Client</i>	Dodderhill School
<i>Site address</i>	Dodderhill School, Crutch Lane, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SO 901 637
<i>Sites and Monuments Record reference</i>	WSM 37555
<i>Planning authority</i>	Wychavon District Council
<i>reference</i>	W/07/00631
<i>Project parameters</i>	IFA 1999

Dodderhill School have commissioned a new classroom and home economics building which is to be located within the main building complex, just south of the existing 'coach house' (Figs 1 and 2). The School sits within the bounds of Dodderhill Roman fort (WSM00603), a scheduled ancient monument (SAM30094) which also encompasses St Augustine's church (WSM00606) and the site of the medieval hospital of St Mary's (WSM00689). The development, however, lies outside the limits of the scheduled area and has not required scheduled monument consent. Most ground breaking activities related to the excavation of the new building's footprint were monitored by the author. This revealed the natural geology across the excavation area and it was not deemed necessary to supervise the further excavation of foundation trenches. A short section of drainage trench to connect the new building to an existing drain was also not monitored.

### *Previous archaeological work on the site*

The site of the school was previously a privately owned property known as Hill Court. Nash (1799, 333) records a house on the site from at least 1573. The earliest building to survive on the site, however, is the main school building, which dates from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century; both it and the coach house are depicted on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map of 1885 (Pevsner 1968, 132; Fig 3).

There have been a number of previous archaeological investigations at the school, most connected with the construction of a junior school building, a multi-purpose hall and a new car park to the south and east of the present development (WSM21408, WSM29108, WSM30035, WSM30036, WSM31926). These have revealed minor features of Roman date associated with the occupation of Dodderhill fort: three pits, two enclosure ditches and a metalled surface (Dawkes 1999a, 1999b). Very little evidence of medieval occupation has been detected and it is conjectured that much material evidence has been lost through post-medieval landscaping (Edwards 1991; Stone 1998; Dawkes 1999a, 1999b).

### *Previous archaeological work on associated sites*

The site of the Roman fort at Dodderhill has been subject to archaeological investigation on several occasions between 1938 and 1985. This work has revealed the general course of the defensive ditches, some evidence of internal structures and occupation, two burials and much Roman artefactual material (McAvoy 2006). The fort was constructed during the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and was probably abandoned *c* AD70; a second phase of occupation is suggested during the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

The earliest extant fabric of St Augustine's church is of late 12<sup>th</sup> or early 13<sup>th</sup> century date (Pevsner 1968, 131). Recent archaeological work at the site, however, has demonstrated the existence of a Saxon church underlying the present building (Robson and Hurst 1998).

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## Aims

The aim of the watching brief was to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible.

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## Methods

No brief or proposal was prepared as the Service was required to attend the site with no notice.

General specification for fieldwork	CAS 1995
Sources consulted	HER Ordnance Survey maps: 1 <sup>st</sup> ed. (1885), 1903, 1927, 1938 <i>See also:</i> bibliography (below)
Date(s) of fieldwork	24 <sup>th</sup> -25 <sup>th</sup> July 2007
Area of site	c 120m <sup>2</sup> ; indicated on Figs 2 and 4
Dimensions of excavated areas observed	Foundations West length c.12.00m width c.5.50m East length c.9.00m Width c.6.00m depth c.0.65-2.30m

### *Access to or visibility of deposits*

The foundation trench for the new building was excavated using a mechanical excavator with a toothed bucket. Observation of the excavated area was undertaken during and after excavation. The exposed surfaces were generally sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits, though any less clear may not have been identified. As a health and safety precaution, access to the western edge of the trench was limited, the side of the trench being c 2.30m deep and un-stepped.

### *Statement of confidence*

With the above caveats taken into account, the access to, and visibility of, deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

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## Deposit descriptions

Context	Description	Interpretation	Depth (below ground level)
100	Loose, cohesive dark blackish brown sandy loam, occasional small-medium sub-rounded stones, rare mortar and CBM flecks.	Topsoil	0.00m - 0.08-0.30m
101	Mixed re-deposited natural, occasional mortar and CBM fragments.	Made ground	0.08-0.30m - 0.20-0.82m
102	Moderately compact, cohesive dark blackish brown sandy silt, occasional charcoal flecks and small mortar and CBM fragments.	Re-deposited topsoil	0.20-0.82m - 0.30-0.90m
103	Moderately compact, cohesive mid brown / mid orangey brown silty clay, occasional small-large CBM fragments, charcoal and mortar flecks.	Made ground	0.30-0.90m - 0.58-1.02m
104	Thin spread of crushed mortar with occasional small CBM fragments.	Made ground	0.58-1.02m - 0.63-1.07m
105	Compact, slightly cohesive mid-light orangey and reddish brown silty clay, blocky in structure with occasional band of blue/grey reduced clay.	Natural	0.63-1.07m+
106	Cut feature viewed in section only. Near vertical sides with a flat base. Filled by 107. Possibly same as 115.	Linear (?) cut	0.78m
107	Moderately compact, cohesive mid-light brown silty clay with a blocky structure, occasional charcoal flecks/small lumps. Minor root activity. Fill of 106. Possibly same as 116.	Fill	0.78m – 1.10m
108	Cut feature viewed in section only. Near vertical but slightly bowed sides with a flat base. Filled by 109.	Pit cut	1.02m
109	Moderately compact, cohesive mid-light brown silty clay, occasional charcoal flecks/small lumps and small-medium CBM fragments, rare small sub-angular stones. Minor root activity. Fill of 108.	Pit fill	1.02m – 1.50m
110	Circular in plan with vertical sides. Not excavated. Filled by 111, and 112.	Cut for brick structure	c 0.50-0.60m
111	Circular brick structure. Bricks: 220mm x 105mm x 75mm, bonded with hard, yellowish white mortar. Inner surface of structure has a hard, concreted greenish lining in places. Fill of 110. Filled by 113.	Brick structure	c 0.50-0.60m
112	Compact, cohesive mid reddish brown clay. Fill of 110.	Backfill	c 0.50-0.60m
113	Moderately compact, moderately cohesive silty loam, moderate mortar flecks/small lumps, occasional small-large CBM fragments and medium-large sub-rounded stones. Fill of 111.	Fill	c 0.50-0.60m
114	Moderately compact, moderately cohesive mixed, re-deposited natural, blocky in structure, occasional small-medium CBM fragments.	Made ground	0.80m-1.55m – c 1.65m
115	Cut feature viewed in section only. Near vertical sides with a flat base. Filled by 116. Possibly same as 106.	Linear (?) cut	0.80m
116	Loose, cohesive sandy silt, abundant flecks/small lumps of charcoal, CBM and mortar. Fill of 115. Possibly same as 107.	Fill	0.80m – 1.10m
117	Brick and sandstone wall bonded with hard, yellowish white mortar.	Wall	c 0.52m
118	Moderately compact, moderately cohesive dark blackish brown silty clay, abundant charcoal flecks/small lumps, occasional mortar flecks/small lumps and small-medium CBM fragments.	Layer	c 0.52m – 0.92m
119	Modern tarmac.	Made ground	0.00m – 0.11m
120	Modern hardcore.	Made ground	0.11m – 0.16-0.41m
121	Moderately compact, cohesive mid brown / mid orangey brown silty clay, occasional small-large CBM fragments, charcoal and mortar flecks.	Made ground	0.16-0.41m - 0.26-0.71m
122	Same as 105.	Natural	0.26-0.71m+
123	Cut feature viewed in section only. Vertical sides with a flat base. Filled by 124.	Cut	0.40m
124	Moderately compact, moderately cohesive dark blackish brown silty clay, occasional charcoal flecks/small lumps and small-medium CBM and mortar fragments. Fill of 123.	Fill	0.40m - 0.62m
125	Sandstone wall. Stones: 500mm x 280mm x 200mm, bonded with friable pinkish mortar. Butted by 126.	Wall	0.29m - 0.59m
126	Brick wall. Bricks: 230mm x 90mm x 65mm and 230mm x 110mm x 70mm, bonded with friable pinkish mortar. Abuts 125.	Wall	0.29m - 0.59m
127	Brick wall. Bricks: 220mm x 110mm x 65mm, bonded with friable pinkish white sandy mortar. Sandstone capping stones. Fill of 129.	Wall	n/a
128	Concrete footing. Fill of 129.	Concrete footing	0.45m - 1.10m
129	Cut viewed in section only. Near vertical sides with a flat base. Filled by 127 and 128.	Construction cut	c 0.40m
130	Cut number applied to 18 <sup>th</sup> /19 <sup>th</sup> century truncation of site.	Cut	c 0.63 - 1.07m

## Discussion

The trench was cut into a steep bank rising westwards from the ground level associated with the coach house to that associated with the driveway leading to the main school building (a rise of *c* 1.20m over *c* 5.50m). This involved the partial removal of a brick partition wall (127), which originally ran from the main school building to the coach house.

The excavation showed the bank to consist of a series of post-medieval make-up layers (101, 102, 103, 104, 114; Fig 5; Plate 1). The made ground lay directly above heavily truncated natural Mercian mudstone. Mercian mudstone generally consists of an upper, weathered portion, which is cohesive and malleable, and a lower, un-weathered portion with a 'blocky' structure and a friable nature. No evidence of the upper portion was observed during the watching brief, indicating truncation down to the un-weathered parent material. Further, the sharp interface between the natural geology and the make-up layers above it suggests rapid deposition of material after the ground surface had been reduced. This landscaping was probably associated with the construction buildings during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Earlier archaeological work to the west and south of the present trench also revealed widespread horizontal truncation of the natural geology (Edwards 1991, 4; Stone 1998; Dawkes 1999a; Dawkes 1999b).

Despite the truncation of the natural geology, two features were observed cutting into the Mercian mudstone, both in the western half of the trench and both also heavily truncated. First, a pit containing tile fragments only datable to a broad period (13<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century; pit 108) and, second, a possible, undated, linear feature running approximately north to south (106=115?). Both are possibly indicative of activity on the site prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century but, in the absence of more precise dating, this cannot be stated with certainty (Fig 5; Plates 1 to 3).

The eastern portion of the trench revealed the remains of three brick- and stone-built structures, all of post-medieval date and all sealed by tarmac (119), hardcore (120) and made ground (121; Fig 4). First, a circular brick-built feature with evidence of a hard, concreted lining in places (as if it had been intended to retain water; structure 111). This was initially interpreted as a well but proved not to have any great depth. The bricks from which it was constructed are of 19<sup>th</sup> century date (pers comm Angus Crawford) and it is probably best interpreted as a drainage feature of some sort, possibly associated with the coach house, or a garden feature. Second, a short stretch of sandstone wall located immediately south of the coach house, to which had been added a curved, much truncated brick wall (structures 125 and 126; Plate 4). Both walls were bonded with the same mortar and were probably contemporary. The bricks are broadly datable to the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, more probably the latter (pers comm Angus Crawford). The sandstone wall was in alignment with the eastern wall of the existing coach house and this structure may therefore represent an extension to the coach house, which has been demolished (the coach house is a brick-built building resting on sandstone foundations). Indeed, the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map (1885) shows subsidiary buildings in exactly this location (Fig 3). Third, a heavily truncated section of brick and sandstone wall located on the southern edge of the trench (structure 117; Plate 5). This structure was crudely built and contained an ashy, charcoal rich deposit containing pottery of 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century date. Its function is unclear.

Within the post-medieval make-up layer 121 several fragments of moulded, green sandstone were recovered, some showing evidence of re-use in a secondary context (a pinkish mortar is found on some surfaces that would not originally have been bonded). These included two fragments of masonry, possibly of medieval date, designed to divert water away from the walls of a building ('drip stones') and two fragments that may have been part of the base of a 17<sup>th</sup> century church monument (pers comm Chris Guy, Worcester Cathedral Archaeologist; Plates 6 and 7). Several parts of St Augustine's church are known to have been demolished during its long history and the church is the most likely source for these items. Notably, the tower was demolished during the Civil War after being heavily damaged; it is likely that other monuments were damaged and removed at the same time.

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## Conclusions

Evidence of considerable post-medieval ground reduction and levelling was recorded during the watching brief, which accords well with the results from earlier archaeological work on the site. Any potential prehistoric, Roman or medieval occupation activity will therefore have been destroyed or heavily truncated on this part of the site. That some Roman features have survived to the south-east, however, indicates that there are areas where survival is possible (Dawkes 1999b).

The remains of structures 125/126 and 117 give some indication of earlier buildings on the site but both were significantly truncated: any other structural remains in the area are likely to be fragmentary. The survival of masonry probably derived from the church is instructive, both for what it tells us about the re-use of material and the light it may shed on the history and development of the church.

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## Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service 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.

*A watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Dodderhill School at Dodderhill School, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire (NGR ref SO901637; SMR ref WSM37555). Despite the proximity of known archaeological sites (Dodderhill Roman fort and St Augustine's church) no evidence of prehistoric, Roman or medieval occupation was located. Evidence of widespread 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century landscaping and ground reduction was recorded, however, and this truncation of deposits most probably explains the lack of material evidence from earlier periods. The truncated remains of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century structures were also observed which give some indication of earlier building arrangements on the site.*

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## Archive

Fieldwork progress records AS2	2
Photographic records AS3	1
Digital photographs	90
Abbreviated context records AS40	12
Trench records AS41	2
Drawings	6
Boxes of finds	Not retained

The project archive is intended to be placed at:	Worcestershire County Museum Hartlebury Castle, Hartlebury Near Kidderminster Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
telephone	01299 250416

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## Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Dodderhill School, Neil Wood of Ansam Construction Ltd., Mike Glyde, Historic Environment Planny Advisor, Worcestershire County Council, and Chris Guy, Worcester Cathedral

Archaeologist. Simon Woodiwiss managed the project; Stephen Potten undertook the fieldwork and report preparation.

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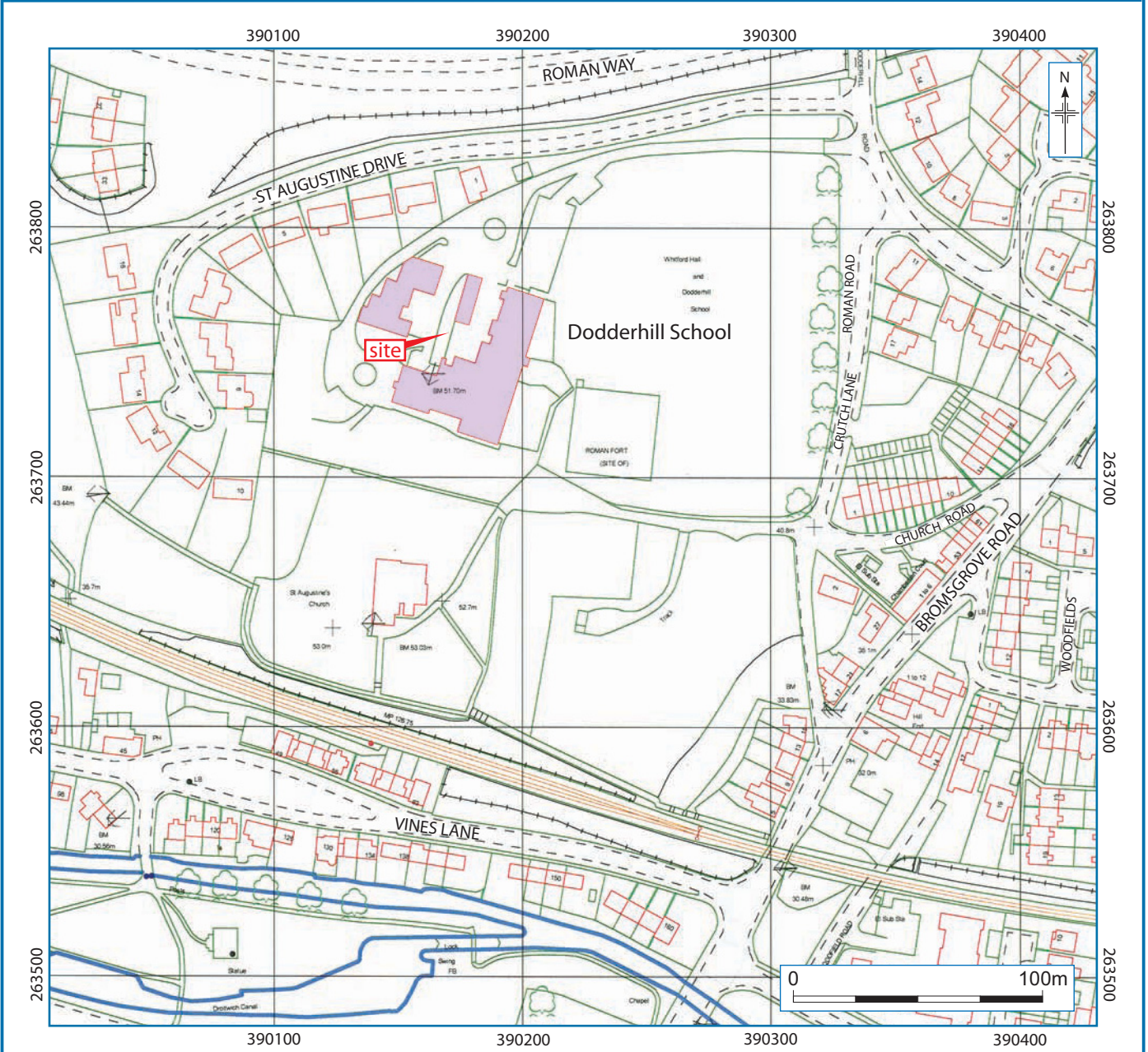
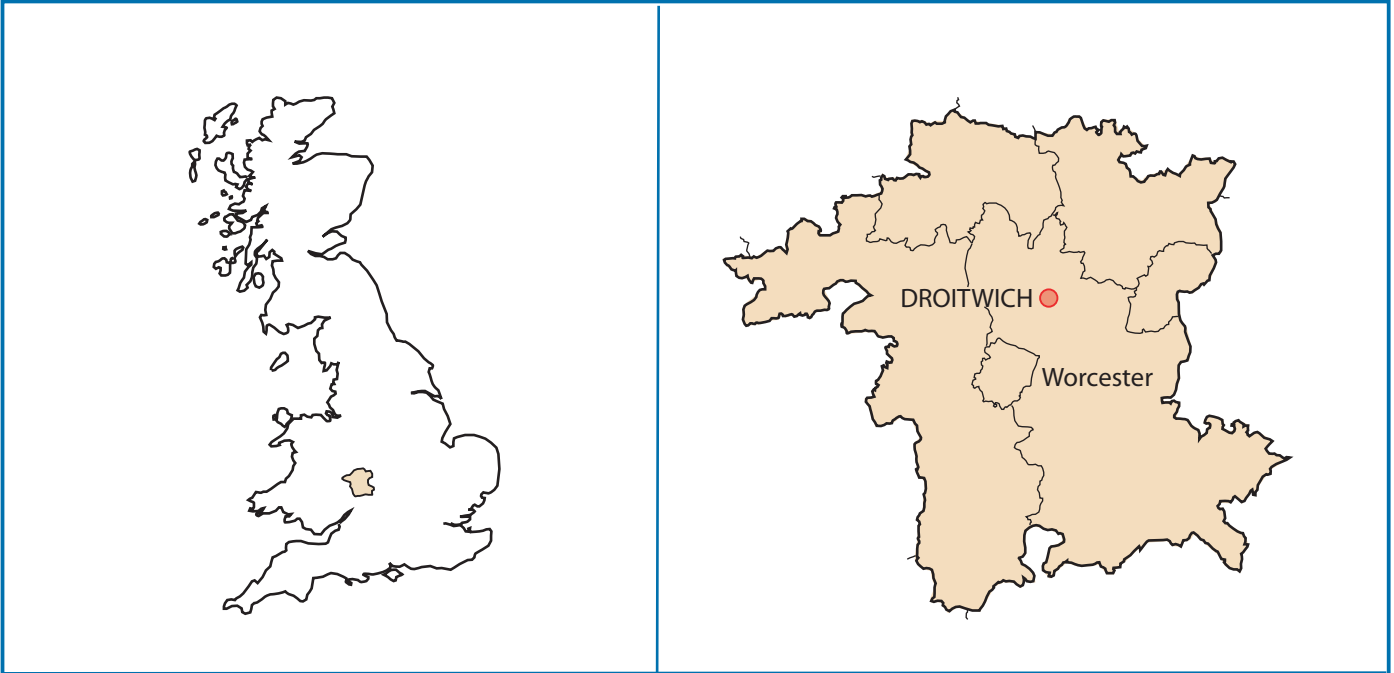
Stone, R, 1998 *Dodderhill School, Droitwich, Worcestershire: a report on an evaluation excavation*, Marches Archaeology, Marches Archaeology Series **020**

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## **Figures**

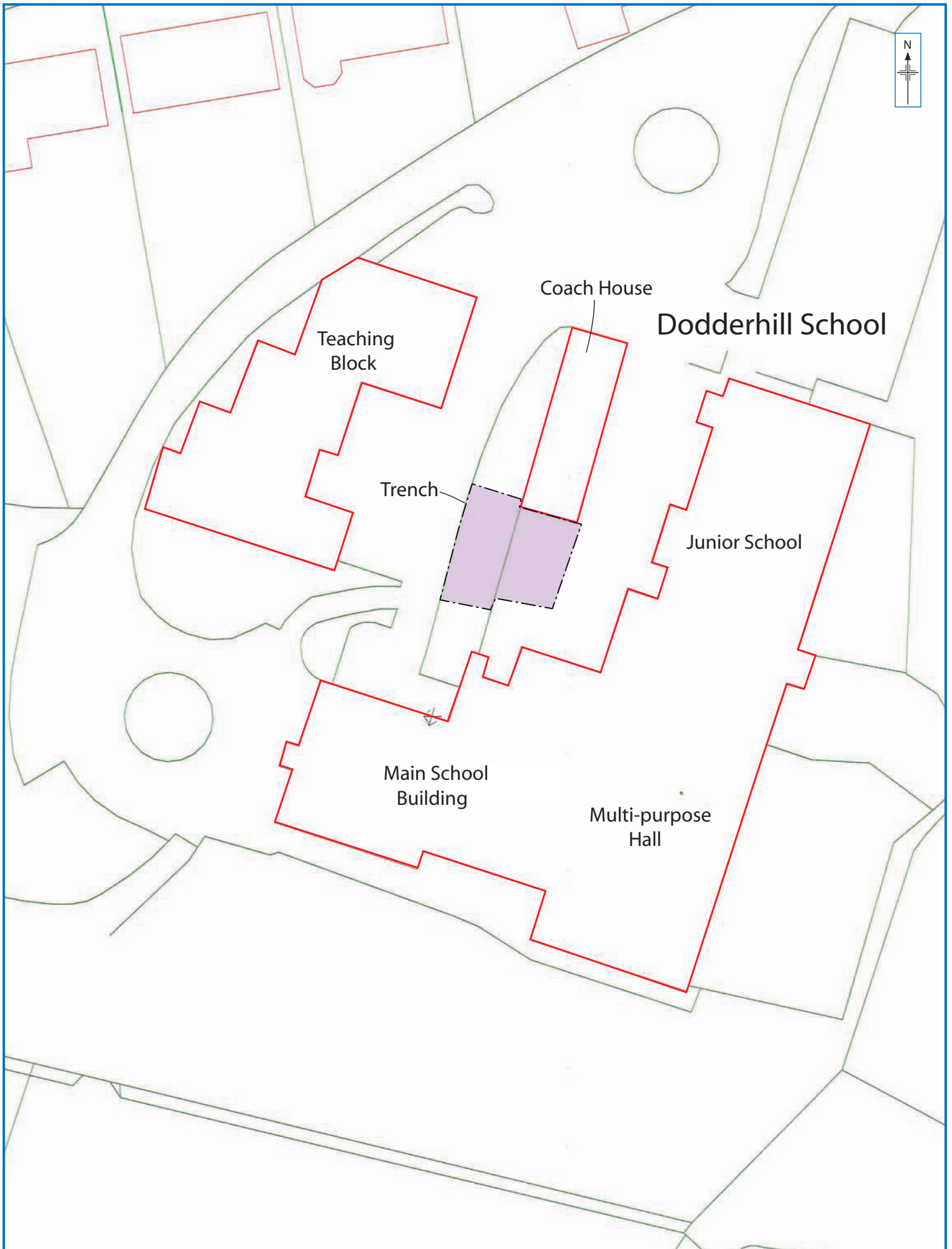




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Location of the site.

Figure 1

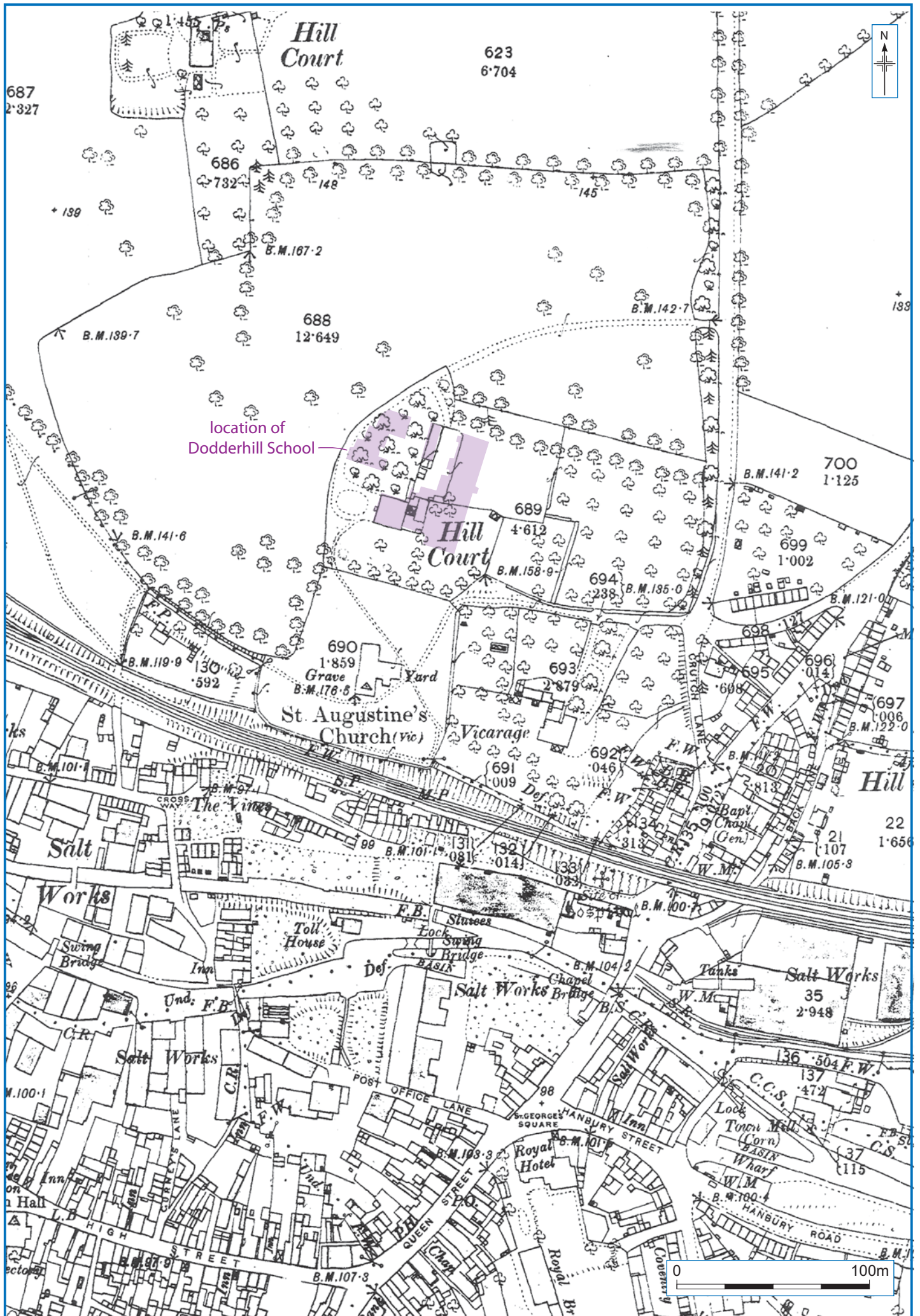


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Layout of school and trench location

Figure 2

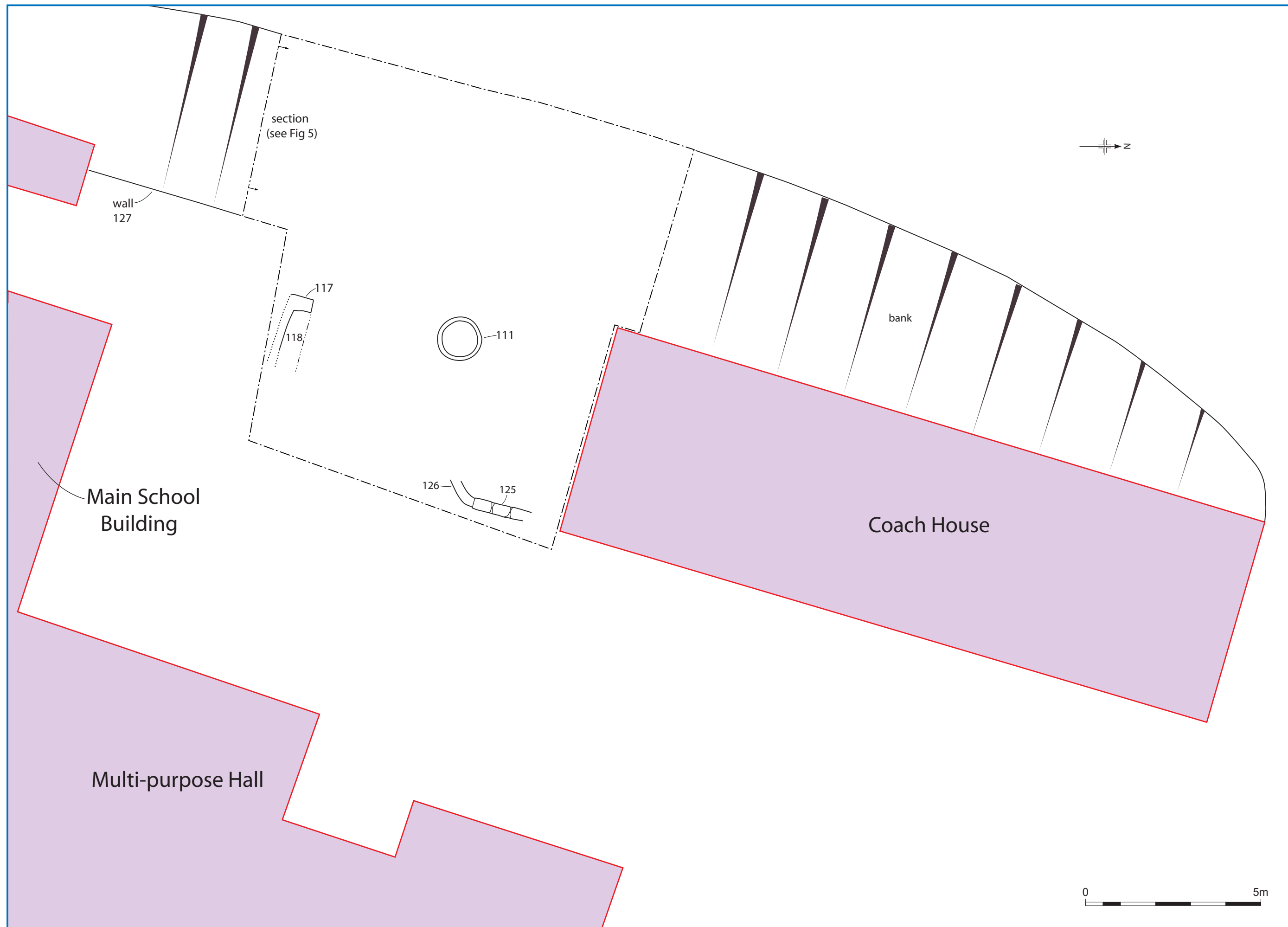




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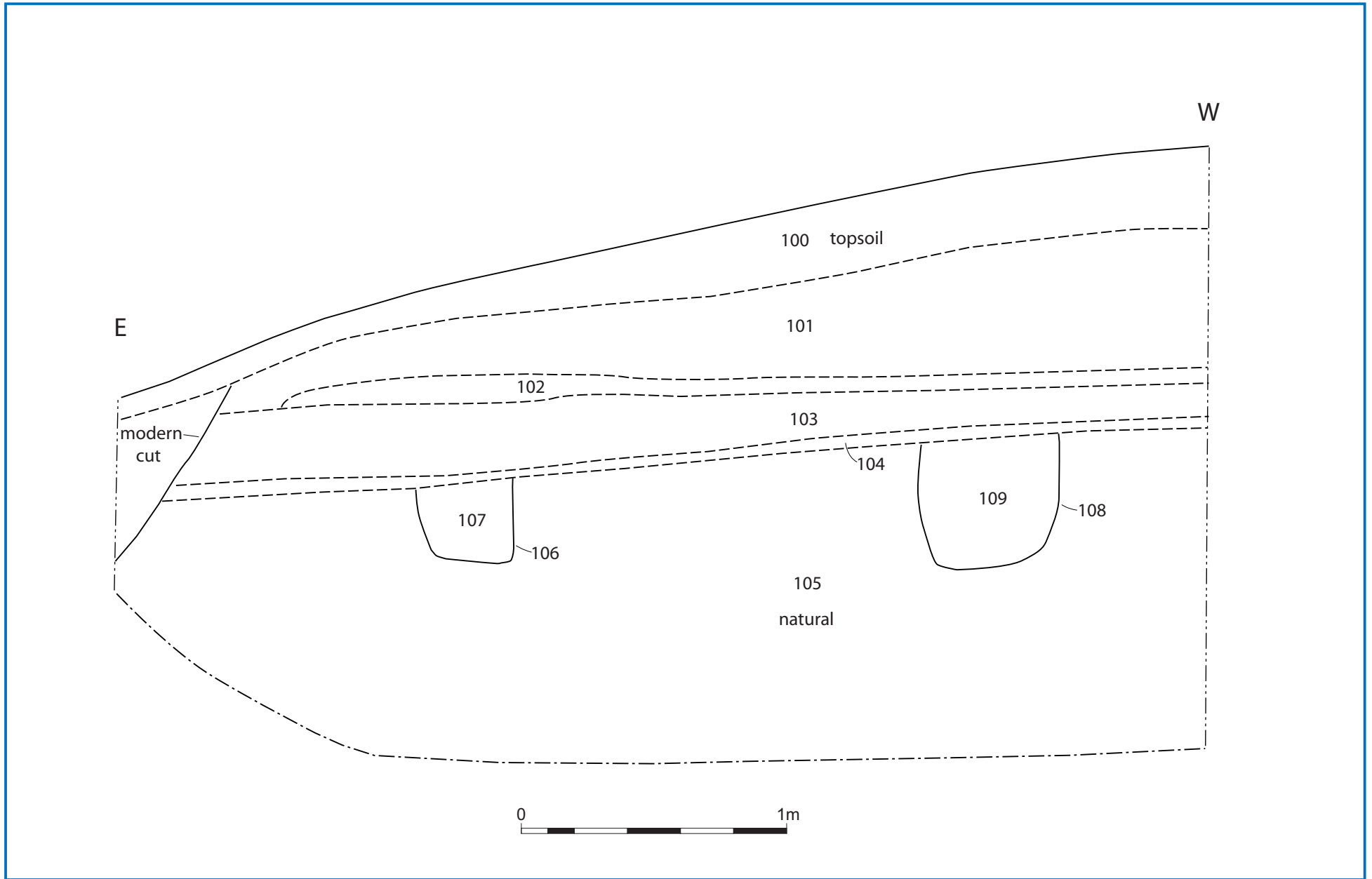
Extract from 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map (1885)

Figure 3



Plan of features encountered

Figure 4



*North-east facing section through bank material*

*Figure 5*

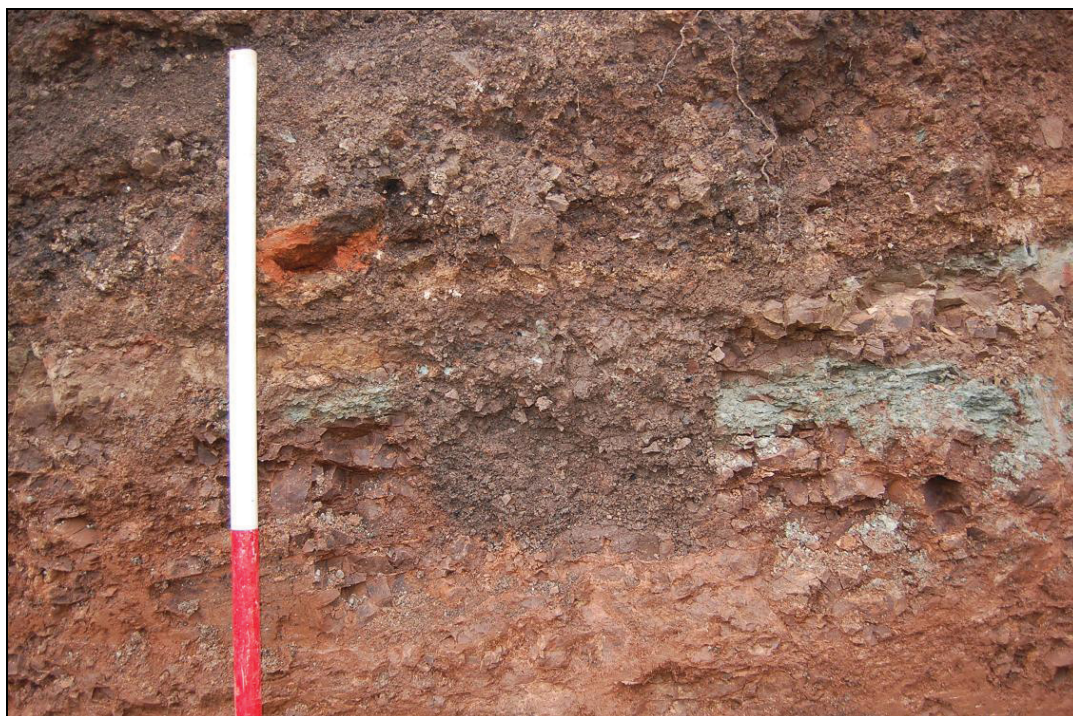


## Plates



*Plate 1: North-east facing section through bank material*





*Plate 2: Cut feature 106*



*Plate 3: Cut feature 108*





*Plate 4: Sandstone wall 125/126*



*Plate 5: Sandstone structure 117*





*Plate 6: Fragment of 17<sup>th</sup> century monument base*



*Plate 7: Fragment of 17<sup>th</sup> century monument base*

## Appendix 1: Finds analysis by Angus Crawford

### Artefact recovery policy

All artefacts from the area of the watching brief were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended).

### Method of analysis

All hand-retrieved finds were examined and a primary record was made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated and a *terminus post quem* date produced for each stratified context.

The pottery and ceramic building material was examined under x20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst and Rees 1992; Hurst 1994).

### Artefactual analysis

The pottery assemblage retrieved from the watching brief consisted of three sherds of pottery weighing 499g. In addition fragments of roof tile, bricks, ceramic drains, oyster shells and an iron nail were recovered. The group came from three stratified contexts and could be dated from the late post-medieval period onwards (see Table 1). Level of preservation was generally good with the majority of sherds displaying low levels of abrasion.

Context	Material	Type	Total	Weight (g)
109	Tile	Roof	13	401
113	Pipe	Drain	1	155
118	Iron	Nail	1	9
118	Pottery	Modern	2	363
118	Pottery	Post-medieval	1	136
118	Shell	Oyster	2	15
118	Tile	Roof	1	263

**Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage**

### Discussion of the pottery

All sherds have been grouped and quantified according to fabric type (see Table 2). All sherds were datable by fabric type to their general period or production span.

The discussion below is a summary of the finds and associated location or contexts by period. Where possible, *terminus post quem* dates have been allocated and the importance of individual finds commented upon as necessary.

Context	Fabric name	Fabric	Total	Weight (g)	Date Range
118	Miscellaneous modern wares	101	2	363	19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> century
118	Post-medieval red sandy ware	78	1	136	18 <sup>th</sup> century

**Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by fabric**

### Late post-medieval to modern period

Only three sherds of pottery were present within the assemblage with two sherds of miscellaneous modern wares (fabric 101) and one sherd of post-medieval red sandy ware (fabric 78). All were

from context 118 with the post-medieval red sandy ware dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the miscellaneous modern ware, in this instance flowerpot sherds, dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **Other finds**

The remaining finds within the assemblage included 13 fragments of roof tile from context 109 which could be broadly dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century and a single roof tile fragment from context 118 which could be dated to the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Further artefacts included a fragment of 20<sup>th</sup> century sewer or drain pipe from context 113, an iron nail of 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century date from context 118 and two oyster shells also from context 118 (undated).

#### **Significance**

The assemblage as a whole is indicative of general rubbish discard from the 18<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century and does not suggest any significant archaeological deposit within the area of the watching brief.

#### **References**

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## Summary of data for Worcestershire HER

Date range	Material	Total	Weight (g)	Specialist report?	Important research assemblage?
	Oyster shell	2	15	N	N
13-18 <sup>th</sup> century	Roof tile	13	401	N	N
18 <sup>th</sup> century	Pottery	1	136	Y	N
19-20 <sup>th</sup> century	Roof tile	1	263	N	N
19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> century	Pottery	2	363	Y	N
19 <sup>th</sup> - early 20 <sup>th</sup> century	Iron nail	1	9	N	N
20 <sup>th</sup> century	Sewer/water pipe	1	155	N	N

### *Summary of the finds assemblage*