

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING  
BRIEF TO THE REAR OF  
15, BRITANNIA SQUARE,  
BARBOURNE,  
WORCESTER

Jo Wainwright

With contributions by Angus Crawford and Darren Miller

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

16 November 2010

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Historic Environment and Archaeology Service,  
Worcestershire County Council,  
Woodbury,  
University of Worcester,  
Henwick Grove,  
Worcester WR2 6AJ

Project 3595  
Report 1802  
WCM 101854



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## Archaeological watching brief to the rear of 15, Britannia Square, Barbourne, Worcester

**Jo Wainwright**

**With contributions by Angus Crawford and Darren Miller**

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### Background information

<i>Client</i>	Jim Pritchard, Pritchard Construction
<i>Site address</i>	15, Britannia Square Barbourne Worcester
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SO 84596 55559
<i>Historic Environment Record (HER) reference</i>	WCM 101854
<i>Planning authority</i>	Worcester City Council
<i>reference</i>	P10D0295, L10D0062
<i>Project design</i>	HEAS 2010
<i>Project parameters</i>	IfA 2008b

### *Previous archaeological work on the site*

There has been no previous archaeological work undertaken on site.

### *Previous archaeological work on associated sites, by Jo Wainwright and Darren Miller*

A good deal of information is available on the archaeology of Britannia Square (Table 1; Fig 1). Most of this information relates to the Roman period, as represented by finds from the site of Springfield House (WSM 96391/100527), its immediate environs (WCM 100328, 100329 and 100601, 101281), and Britannia Square South (WCM 100586, 100560, and 101178). From this, it is clear that the Barbourne suburb was built on the site of intensive Roman settlement activity which included several stone-founded buildings with tiled roofs, mosaic floors and under floor heating systems. However, the full extent of the individual buildings, their plan, and character are all poorly understood. The nature of pre-Roman, Anglo-Saxon, and medieval activity in the area is unknown, although the later development of the suburb is well known from historical evidence (Gregg 1977).

WCM ref	Location	Summary
96931 /100327 /100527	Site of Springfield House	Circular stone wall c30 feet in diameter and more than Roman coins found during construction of Springfield House in 1829. Coins (since lost) dated from early 3 <sup>rd</sup> century to mid 4 <sup>th</sup> century. Exact find-spot unknown. Wall initially interpreted as foundation of tower; since reinterpreted as possible temple, or an apsidal building belonging to a villa
100328	Yard and garden adjacent to Springfield House	Evaluation in advance of extensions 1992. Trenches 5-7 in yard to north of house showed that pre-existing deposits had been removed by modern landscaping. Trench 1 to east of house similarly truncated but produced 10 residual Roman artefacts. Trenches 2-4 in garden to west of house showed probable Roman deposits beneath more recent soils/made ground. Short length of robbed-out stone wall found in Trench 3. 26 Roman artefacts recovered along with 2 sherds of medieval pottery and larger quantities of post-medieval artefacts.
100329	Yard and garden adjacent to Springfield House	Salvage recording during construction works, 1993. Large quantities of Roman material recovered from later soils and one potentially Roman deposit. Short length of sandstone wall may also be of Roman date. Later finds included single sherds of late Anglo-Saxon and medieval pottery, along with much post-medieval material.
100601	Area to north-west of Springfield House	Watching brief on installation of play equipment, 2003. 35 small pits exposed reworked soils, and produced 13 residual Roman artefacts along with larger quantities of post-medieval material.
96393 /100586	Rear of 17 Britannia Square	Watching brief on installation of light well, 1999. Short length of partially- robbed stone wall and mortar floor found in corner of trench, associated with artefacts including Roman pottery, roof tile, hypocaust tile, <i>tesserae</i> , and fragment of mosaic floor.
100559	20 Britannia Square	Watching brief on extension, 1999. No archaeological remains observed.
100560	Rear of Moor Street (south of Back Lane)	Watching brief on sewer replacement works identified Roman demolition layers
100666	14 Britannia Square	Watching brief on groundworks in 1997. No archaeological deposits observed or artefacts recovered.
101178	Britannia Square South	Oral evidence of <i>in situ</i> mosaic being found during groundworks in early 1960s
101281	Springfield, Britannia Square	Programme of works on the excavation of 26 tree pits. Residual Roman building material identified.

*Table 1: Summary of HER records in the vicinity of 15, Britannia Square (excluding standing buildings)*

## Aims

The aims and scope of the project 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 groundworks associated with the development. These were verbally agreed between the Service and James Dinn (Archaeological Officer, Worcester City Council; 14 October 2010).

## Methods

General specification for fieldwork	CAS 1995
Sources consulted	HER
Date of fieldwork	14 October 2010
Area of site	c 60m <sup>2</sup>
Dimensions of excavated areas observed	Foundations      length 8m width c 0.65m depth c 1.35m

### *Access to or visibility of structure/deposits*

Observation of the foundation trench was undertaken after machine excavation (Fig 2). The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits, although any less clear may not have been identified.

### *Statement of confidence*

Access to the trench was after machining had taken place. Therefore visibility of deposits and features was restricted to observation of the sections and trench base.

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface – top and bottom of deposits
100	Topsoil	Friable dark brown sandy silt with moderate pebbles, brick and mortar.	0.30m
101	Rubble	Friable brownish grey loam with frequent brick rubble, mortar and pebbles. Above 102. Probably from building of the present house.	0.30-0.65m
102	dark earth tillage soil	Friable dark brown black sandy silt with frequent charcoal, occasional pebbles and mortar. Above 103. Tillage soil developed from the post Roman to medieval periods.	0.65-0.95m
103	Demolition deposit	Friable mid grey brown slightly sandy loam with frequent tile and other building material. Occasional plaster, pebbles and charcoal. In the south the layer becomes browner and shallower.	0.95-1.35m
104	Fill	Friable light brown silty sand with frequent sandstone rubble. Underlies 103. Fill of pit 105.	1.35m+
105	Pit	Probable sub-circular pit but only part of the feature was in trench and it was not excavated. Pit cutting 107.	1.35m+
106	Wall and foundation	Wall and foundation running east to west. Mixture of limestone and sandstone rough hewn or squared. The core of the feature consisted of unmortared sandstone and limestone rubble with roof tile and box tile. Underlies 103. The top part of this feature was probably robbed out or heavily disturbed during demolition or robbing. Partially machined out.	0.95-0.35m+
107	Natural	Orange sands and beige sands with gravel.	1.25m+
108	Construction cut	Linear construction cut for wall 106. Cuts 107.	1.25m+
109	Unstratified finds	Unstratified spoil finds. Most probably from 103 and 106.	n/a

*Table 2: deposit descriptions*

## Discussion (Figs 2-4)

The natural sands and gravels (107) were seen at about 1.25m below ground surface. Cutting the natural was a linear construction cut (108) for the foundation of a wall. The wall and footing (106) were aligned approximately east to west. Only the southern edge of this feature was seen as the northern part ran underneath the standing building. Part of the wall had been machined away but from the rubble that remained it would seem that the top part of the feature had been robbed out or heavily disturbed, probably during the later Roman period.

Immediately to the south of the wall and cutting the natural was a small, sub-circular pit (105). Alternatively it can tentatively be suggested that this feature is a large posthole, perhaps representing an earlier building. This feature was not excavated, although it appeared to be filled with frequent building rubble (104). Sealing the pit and overlying the wall was a demolition layer (103) containing frequent building material and finds dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century. To the south-west, away from the wall, this layer became shallower and contained less inclusions.

Above the demolition material was a post-Roman tillage soil or dark earth (102). A similar layer has been observed in excavations in the vicinity of the site and in other parts of the city. A layer containing quantities of red brick rubble (101) lay above the tillage soil. This overlay the footings of and is probably associated with the building of no. 15. Topsoil (100) overlay (101). Toward the west side of the site the remains of the foundations of the recently demolished extension were seen cutting the topsoil.

## The finds, by Angus Crawford

### *Artefact recovery policy*

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995, appendix 4).

### *Method of analysis*

All hand-retrieved finds were examined and a primary record was made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. They were identified, quantified and dated to period. A *terminus post quem* date was produced for each stratified context where possible. The date was used for determining the broad date of phases defined for the site.

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; and [www.worcestershireceramics.org](http://www.worcestershireceramics.org)).

### *The artefact assemblage*

The artefactual assemblage recovered is summarised in Tables 3 and 4. The pottery assemblage retrieved from the excavated area consisted of 22 sherds of pottery weighing 845g. In addition fragments of tile, brick, mortar, plaster, *tesserae*, iron slag, stone and animal bone were recovered. The group came from four stratified contexts and could be dated from the Roman period and later (see Table 5). Level of preservation was generally good with the majority of sherds displaying only minor levels of abrasion.

period	material class	count	weight (g)
Roman	ceramic	80	11893
Roman	mortar	2	122
Roman	plaster	1	62
Roman	slag	5	226
?Roman	plaster	1	182
post-medieval/modern	mortar	1	138
	organic	15	294
	stone	1	44
totals		106	12961

Table 3: *Quantification of the assemblage*

### *The Pottery*

All sherds have been grouped and quantified according to fabric type (Table 4). A total of three diagnostic form sherds were present and could be dated accordingly, the remaining sherds were datable by fabric type to their general period or production span. Where mentioned, all specific forms are referenced to Webster (1976 and 1996).

period	fabric code	fabric common name	count	weight (g)
Roman	12	Oxidised Severn Valley ware	17	791
Roman	19	Wheel-thrown Malvernian ware	1	8
Roman	22	Black-burnished ware, type 1 (BB1)	2	16
Roman	38	Oxfordshire white ware	1	22
Roman	43	Samian ware	1	8

*Table 4: Quantification of the pottery by period and fabric-type*

#### *Roman*

The dominant fabric type within the assemblage was of oxidised Severn Valley ware (fabric 12) with 17 sherds weighing 791g. Of these, only three forms could be identified with a partial tankard rim of 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century date (Webster 1976, type 43 to 44; demolition deposit 103) and two Storage jar rims of probable 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century date (Webster 1976, types 4 and 5 to 6 respectively; both unstratified).

Two sherds of Black-burnished ware 1 (fabric 22; demolition deposit 103) were dated from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century from the obtuse lattice patterning typical of later BB1 production.

The remaining Roman pottery consisted of single sherds of wheel-thrown Malvernian ware (fabric 19; context 103), Oxfordshire white ware (fabric 38; unstratified) and Samian (fabric 43; demolition deposit 103). While the wheel-thrown Malvernian and Oxfordshire ware were relatively undiagnostic they could be dated to a general production date of 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century. The remaining sherd of Samian appeared to be of East Gaulish fabric and from the base of Dragendorff 18/31 or 31 bowl. While this fabric could be generally dated from the mid 1<sup>st</sup> to mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century this sherd, therefore, was potentially of late 2<sup>nd</sup> to mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century date (Webster 1996).

#### *Other artefacts*

##### *Tile*

Fifty-six fragments of Roman tile were present within the assemblage. The majority were identified as roofing material, either *tegula* or *imbrex*. However three fragments were identified as box flue-tile (*tubulus*; demolition deposit 103 and unstratified) which would have originally been used for heating as part of a *hypocaust* system.

Two large tile fragments (unstratified), measured between 40 to 45mm in thickness, and were probably intended for general wall or flooring construction.

##### *Tesserae*

Two white *tesserae* of roughly cubed shaped (variable thickness of 10 to 15mm) were identified and appear to have been cut from an unidentified calcite limestone (demolition deposit 103; Nick Daffern, pers com). Neither exhibited any attached remnant mortar so it was uncertain whether either *tessera* originated from a laid mosaic.

##### *Mortar*

Two small fragments of building mortar were recovered from context demolition deposit 103 and identified as Roman. One remaining fragment was consistent with later lime products and could only be dated from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century date (unstratified).

##### *Plaster*

Only one fragment of Roman plaster was present within the assemblage. Preservation was very good and the plaster still retained its original white painted surface.

##### *Slag*

A total of seven pieces of Roman tap and miscellaneous iron slag were recovered. However, the quantity was not suggestive of iron smelting on site as iron slag is frequently present in Roman period (and later) finds assemblages within Worcester.

#### *Environmental Remains*

A single fresh water oyster shell (unstratified) and fragments of animal bone context (demolition deposit 103 and unstratified) were present within the assemblage. Due to the limited amount of environmental material present only weight and count information was recorded and no further analysis was undertaken for this report.

#### *Overview of artefactual evidence*

context	material class	object specific type	fabric code	count	weight(g)	start date	end date	context terminus post quem date
102	ceramic	pottery	12	1	1	43	400	Roman
103	organic	animal bone	0	6	158	0	0	
103	mortar	mortar	0	2	122	43	400	
103	slag	iron slag	0	3	148	43	400	Roman 3 <sup>rd</sup> to 4 <sup>th</sup> century
103	ceramic	pottery	12	5	180	43	400	
103	ceramic	pottery	12	1	28	201	400	
103	ceramic	pottery	22	2	16	201	400	
103	ceramic	pottery	19	1	8	101	400	
103	ceramic	pottery	43	1	8	50	250	
103	ceramic	tesserae	0	2	18	43	400	
103	ceramic	imbrex	0	7	550	43	400	
103	ceramic	tegulae	0	3	146	43	400	
103	ceramic	box flue	0	1	82	43	400	
104	slag	iron slag	0	1	66	43	400	Roman
104	stone	blue lias	0	1	44	0	0	
106	ceramic	tegulae	0	1	146	43	400	Roman
106	slag	iron slag	0	1	12	43	400	
106	ceramic	pot	12	1	62	43	400	
109	ceramic	imbrex	0	19	3542	43	400	n/a – unstratified spoil finds
109	ceramic	box flue	0	2	600	43	400	
109	ceramic	tegulae	0	8	3350	43	400	
109	ceramic	roof tile	0	13	1730	43	400	
109	ceramic	tile	0	2	884	43	400	
109	organic	oyster shell	0	1	48	0	0	
109	organic	animal bone	0	8	88	0	0	
109	plaster	plaster	0	1	62	43	400	
109	ceramic	pottery	38	1	22	201	400	
109	ceramic	pottery	12	7	330	43	400	
109	ceramic	pottery	12	1	108	100	400	
109	ceramic	pottery	12	1	82	100	300	
109	plaster	mortar	0	1	138	1850	2000	
109	plaster	mortar	0	1	182	0	0	

Table 5: Summary of context dating based on artefacts

#### *Roman*

The Roman assemblage is of some importance in further understanding this part of Worcester in the Roman period. The previous identification of substantial wall foundations of Roman date in the vicinity of the site indicate buildings of status in this part of the settlement. The above finds assemblage adds further strength to this assumption.

The building material assemblage included a range of high quality building materials, indicating the use of tiled roofing, plastered and painted walls, central heating (*hypocaust*) and, potentially, mosaic flooring. These materials, given their position over an intact wall probably represent the remains of wall robbing in the late Roman period or later giving associated dating.

The pottery assemblage was of small size and range and therefore only provided limited information about site usage. What information that could be derived was similar to assemblages from sites within Roman Worcester, with Severn Valley wares dominating (tankards and storage jars), alongside Malvernian produced cooking pot and a taste for fine Roman wares evident in a single sherd of imported Samian ware. Overall the assemblage provided limited dating evidence with only one context dated more precisely than generally 'Roman' (context 103; 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century) though it



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would be safe to assume that fully Romanised buildings would be a later feature of Roman Worcester.

#### *Post-medieval*

The post-medieval assemblage consisted of a single unstratified fragment of mortar which may also be of modern date (potentially 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century) and is of no archaeological significance specific to this analysis.

#### *Significance*

Given the small scale of fieldwork the range and quality of finds was impressive. The known potential for substantial Roman remains in this area has been noted previously and has been realised again. The assemblage demonstrates the presence of high quality building and occupation which is poorly represented elsewhere in Worcester.

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### **Conclusions**

The excavations uncovered a wall dated to the Roman period. The presence of demolition debris, dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century, containing material relating to high status buildings overlying this wall suggests that a substantial building was situated here. From the archaeological evidence it would seem likely that the building was to the north, situated underneath no. 15, as the demolition layer thins out and contains less rubble to the south. It has long been recognised that Britannia Square was the site of intensive Roman activity that included several stone-founded buildings with tiled roofs, mosaic floors and under floor heating systems. This wall coupled with evidence from excavations in the vicinity, particularly at no. 17, helps define the extent of this activity.

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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.

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Pritchard Construction at 15, Britannia Square, Worcester (NGR SO 84596 55559; HER ref WCM 101854). The excavations of a foundation trench for a new extension revealed a Roman wall. The presence of demolition debris, dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century, containing material relating to high status buildings overlying this wall suggests that a substantial building was situated here. It would appear that the main building lay to the north, underneath no. 15, as the demolition layer thins out and contains less rubble to the south. It has long been recognised that Britannia Square was the site of an intensive Roman activity that included several stone-founded buildings with tiled roofs, mosaic floors and under floor heating systems. This wall coupled with evidence from excavations in the vicinity, particularly at no. 17, helps to define the extent of this activity.*

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### **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Jim Pritchard (Pritchard Construction) and James Dinn (Archaeological Officer, Worcester City Council).

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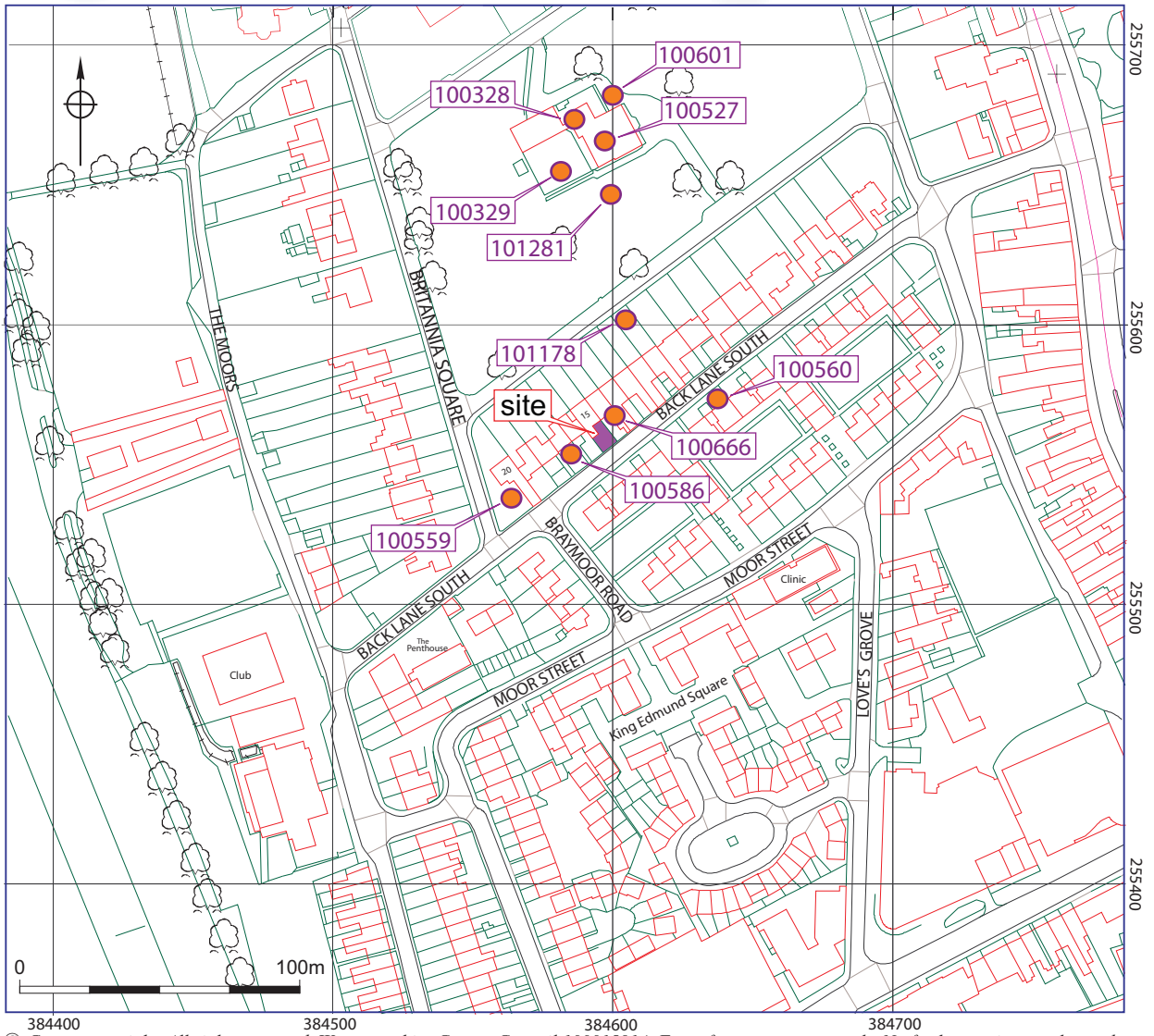
[www.worcestershireceramics.org](http://www.worcestershireceramics.org) pottery fabric series maintained by the Service

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## Figures

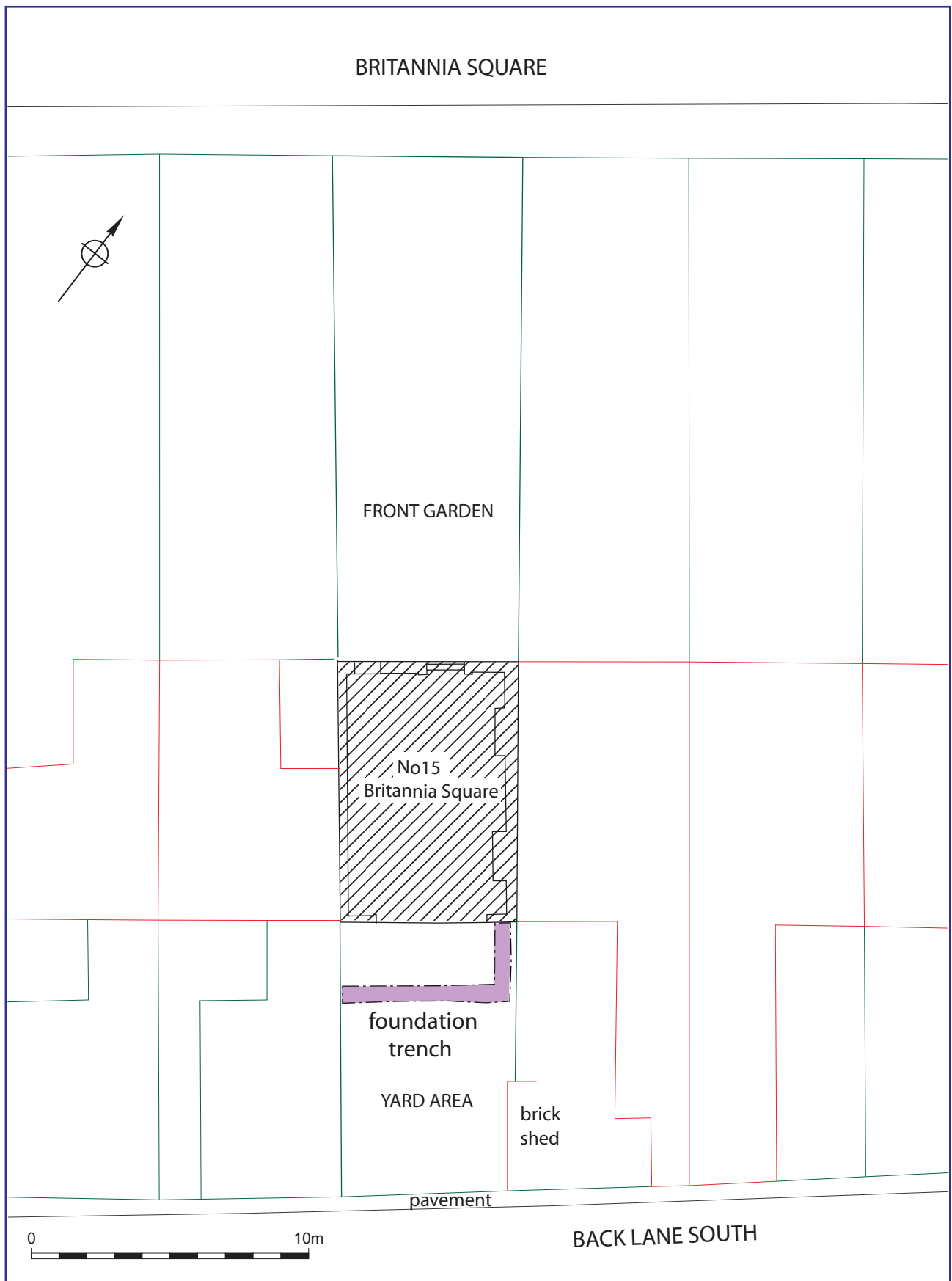




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Location of the site with HER sites in the vicinity

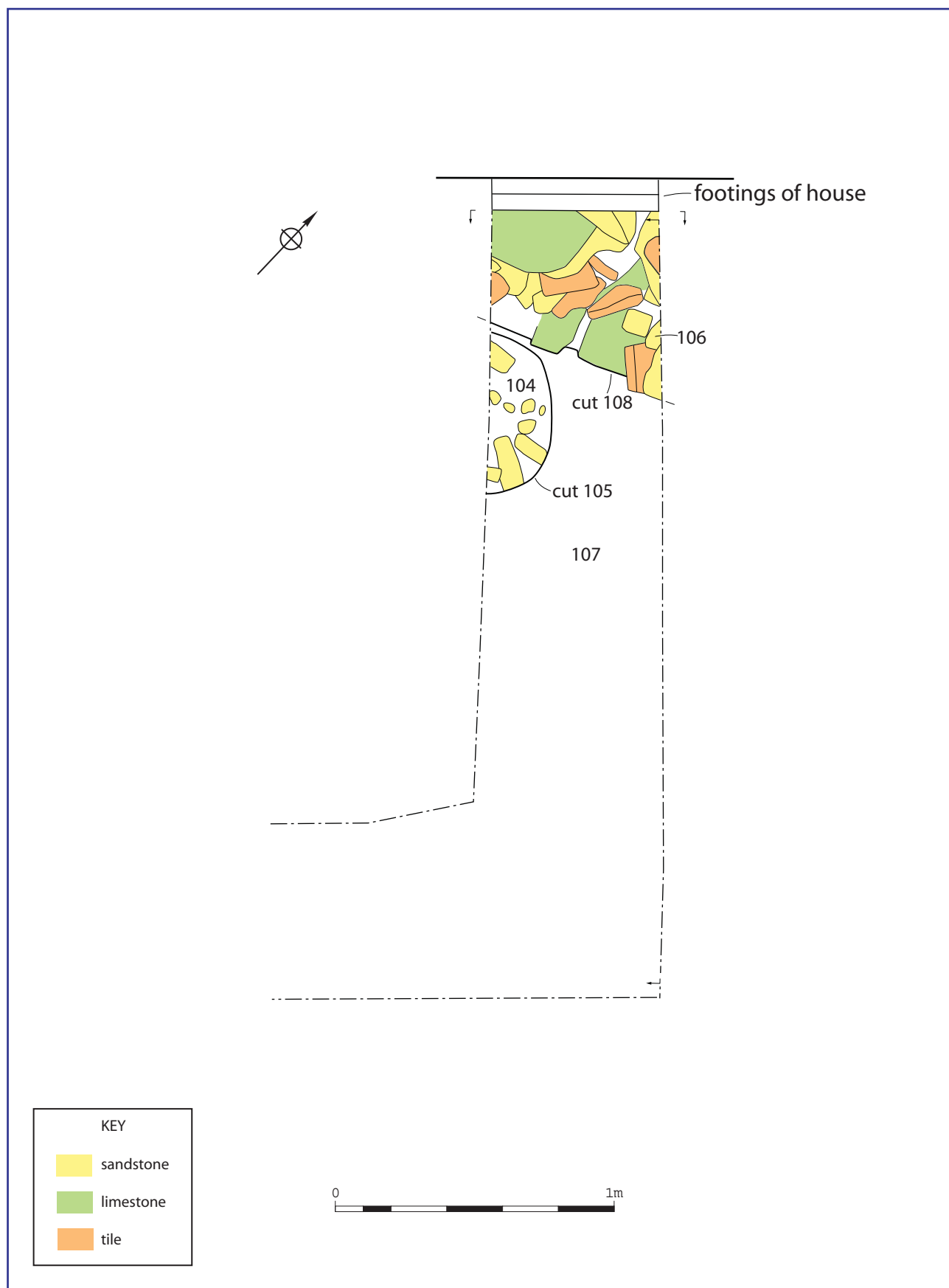
Figure 1



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Trench location plan

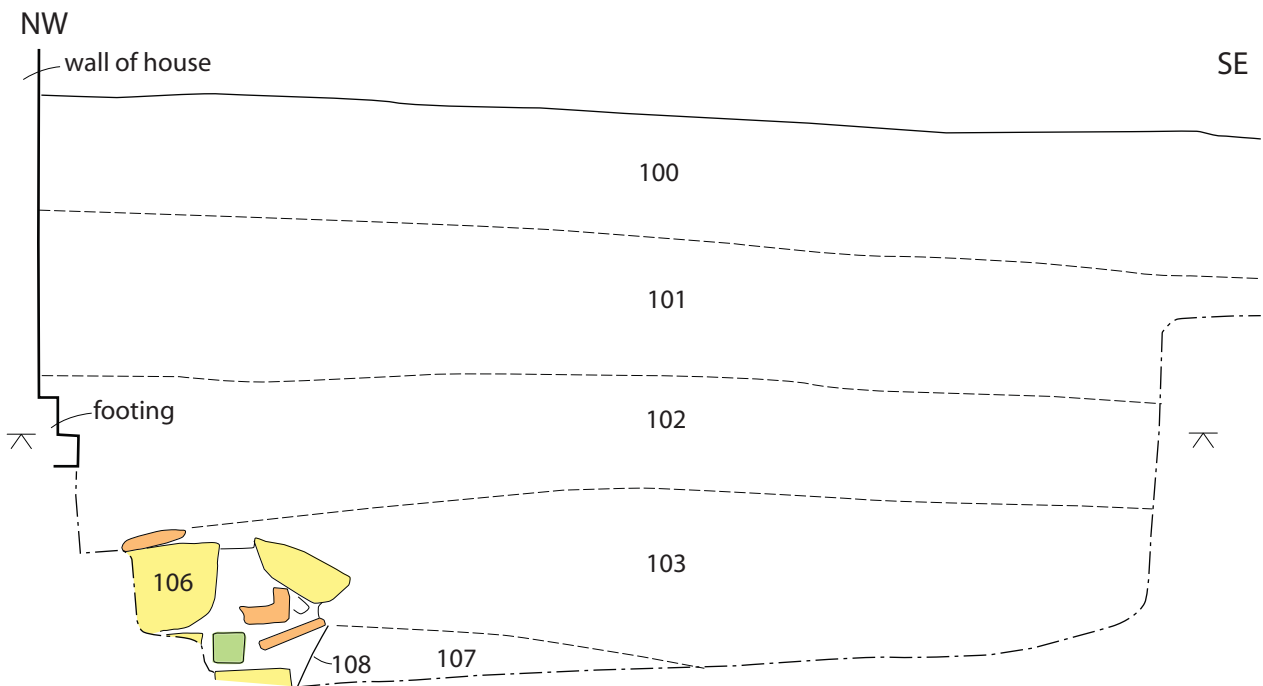
Figure 2



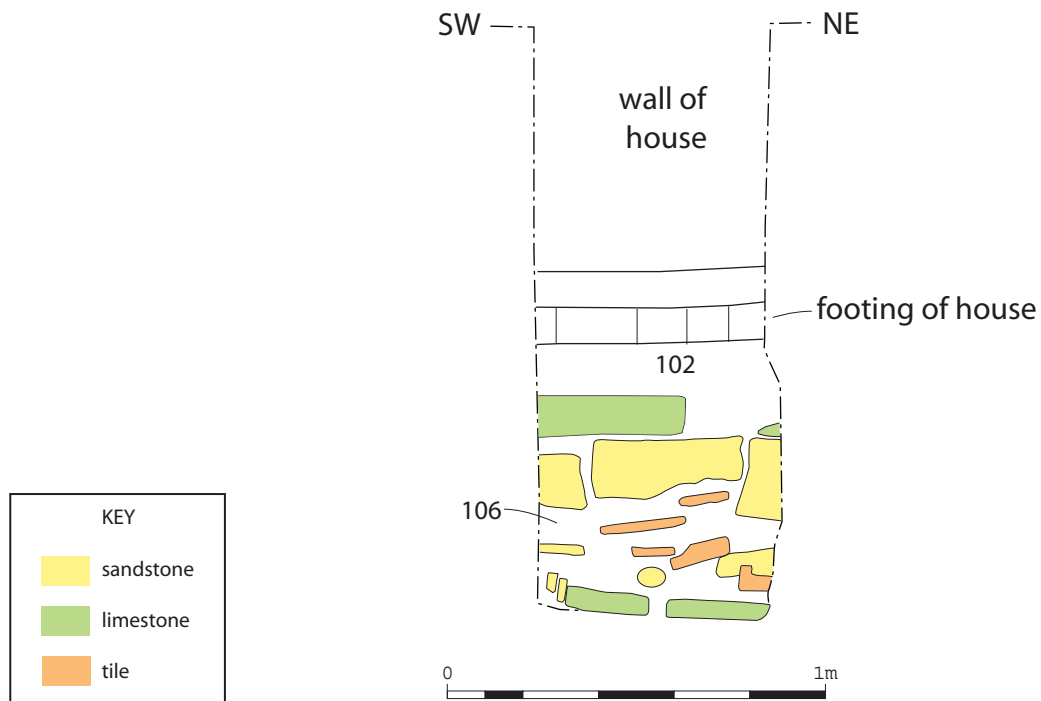
Plan of north end of trench

Figure 3

# SOUTH WESTFACING SECTION



# SOUTH EAST FACING SECTION



Sections

Figure 4



## Plates



*Plate 1 General view of trench from the south-east*



*Plate 2 Wall 106 and pit 105 from above (0.5m scale)*





*Plate 3 Wall 106 from the south-east showing brick footings of standing building above (0.5m scale)*



*Plate 4 Section 1 from south-west showing 102 as dark layer, demolition layer 103 below and wall 106 (1m and 0.5m scale)*

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## Appendix 1 Technical information

### The archive

The archive consists of:

- 5 Context records AS1
- 1 Fieldwork progress record AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 1 Drawing number catalogue AS4
- 28 Digital photos
- 1 Trench record sheet AS41
- 4 Scale drawings
- 2 Box of finds
- 1 Computer disk

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcester City Museum and Art Gallery  
Foregate Street  
Worcester  
WR1 2PW

Tel. Worcester (01905) 25371