

**Report of Archaeological Recording  
July 29<sup>th</sup> – August 1<sup>st</sup> 2003  
Dornoch Square East, Dornoch  
NH 7991/8958 (centred)**

Client: Main McCook Architects on behalf of J A Property Development Ltd

Planning Application No: 02/00314/FULSU

**By  
Stuart Farrell  
B.A A.I.F.A F.S.A.Scot.  
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## **Non-Technical Summary**

*Stuart Farrell was commissioned by Main McCook Architects in March 2003 to undertake an archaeological evaluation at Dornoch Square East, Dornoch (NH 7991/8958) as part of a housing development. Highland Council Archaeology Unit produced a specification for this work.*

*A desktop survey revealed that the site had been a former garage. Excavation work revealed no archaeological features or deposits of interest much of the site had been heavily disturbed by the former garage, with parts of the site having modern disturbance. Finds were made in a subsoil deposit to the rear of the garage possibly relating to a medieval garden or plough soil containing redware pottery and animal bone. One find was made of a fragment of burnt flint possibly of a prehistoric context.*

*No recommendations for further fieldwork for this development have been proposed.*

Figure 1. General Location 1: 50,000



Figure 2. Development Plan 1: 200

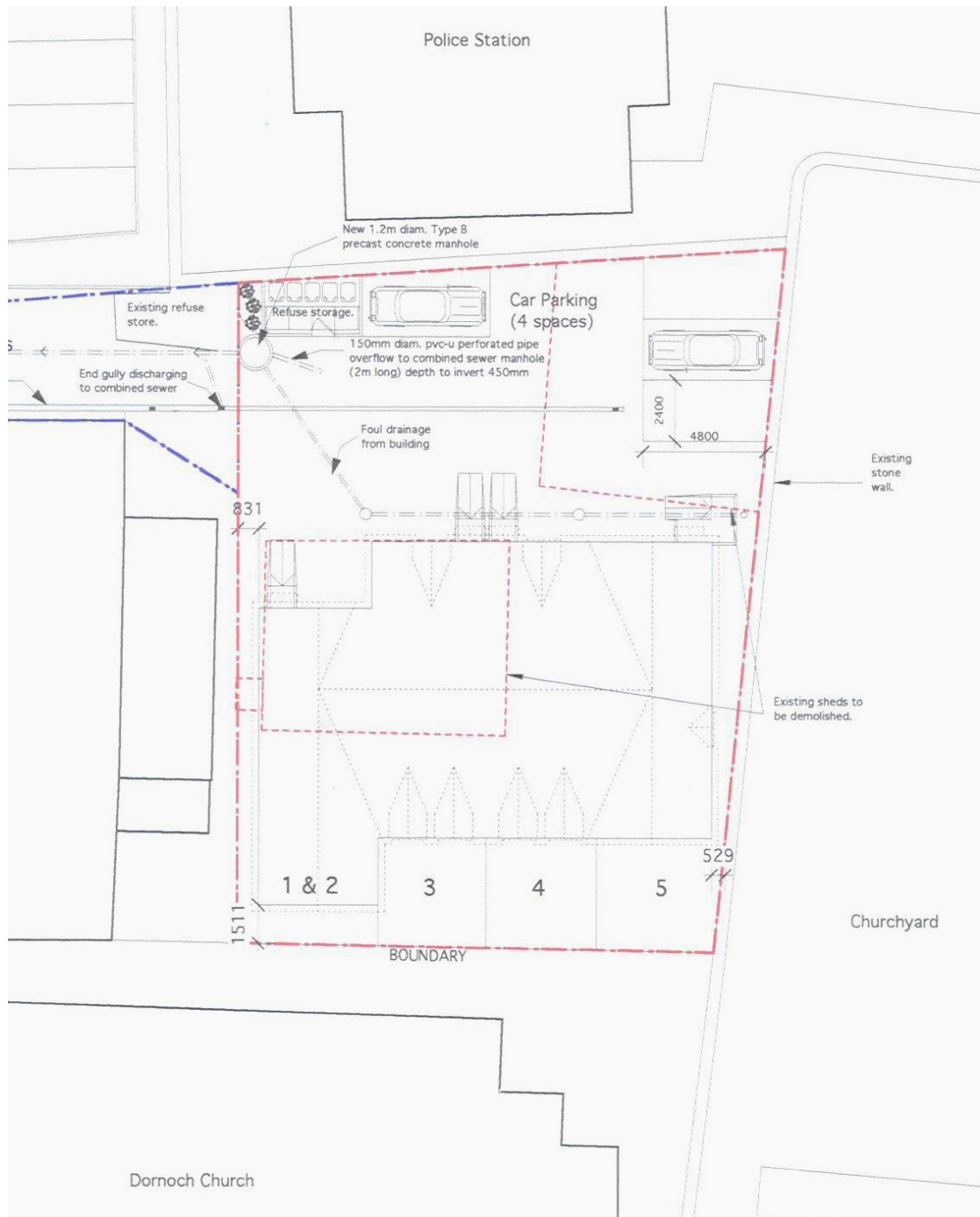






Figure 5. Ordnance Survey map of 1879 (surveyed 1874) 1: 2500



Figure 6. Ordnance Survey map of 1906 (Revised 1905) 1: 2500

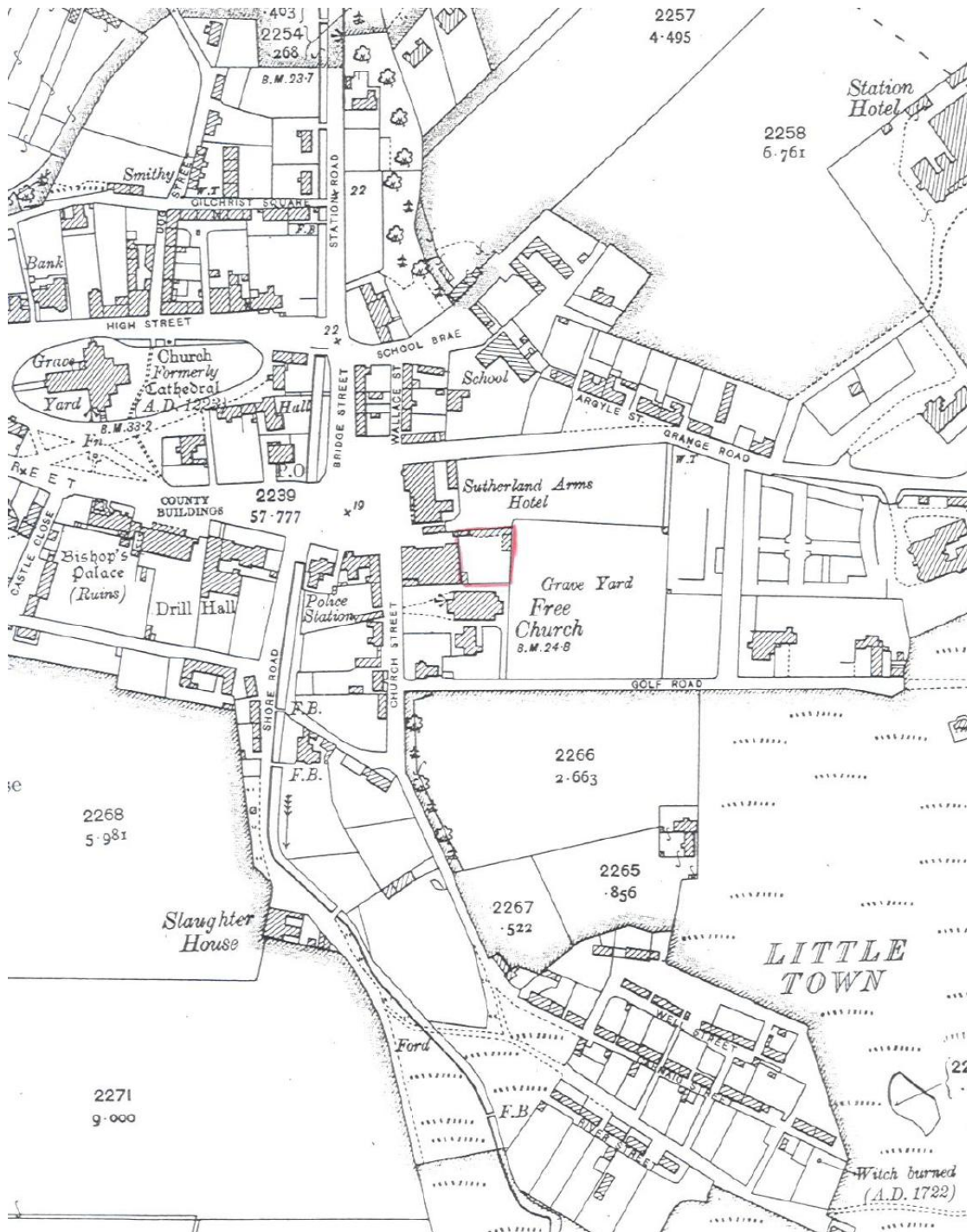




Figure 7. Ordnance Survey map of 1972 1: 2500



LOCATION PLAN

1:2500

## **1. Introduction**

This report is for an archaeological evaluation conducted for Main McCook Architects on behalf of J A Property Development Ltd by the author for a housing development at Dornoch Square East, Dornoch per planning application 02/00314/FULIN.

The work was conducted between July 29<sup>th</sup> and August 1<sup>st</sup> 2003.

## **2. Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the following for their help during the work :

- Mr. C Lawson, of Main McCook Architects;
- Mr. A Miller, of J A Property Development Ltd;
- Mr. J Fraser of J A Property Development Ltd;
- Staff of J A Properties Ltd for onsite works;
- Staff of Adrem Cartographic Services Ltd for site survey work;
- Staff of Highland Council Archaeology Unit;
- Staff of the RCAHMS;
- Staff of the NMRS;
- Staff of Highland Council Archives.

Stuart Farrell  
39a Park Street  
Nairn  
Highland  
IV12 4PP

### 3. Historical Background

The origins of Dornoch are little known; Dornoch Cathedral being built after 1231 which was burnt down in 1570 and rebuilt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The town was a burgh of the Bishop's of Caithness in 1607 and was only made a Royal Burgh in 1628 but the town remained small. The Countess of Sutherland altered much of the town in the period 1810-1815 under a renovation and rebuilding programme. (Gifford, 1992; Coleman, 2001) The development site lies within the principal area of archaeological interest as noted by the Scottish Burgh Survey (Gallagher, 1995).

It is possible that a church of St Finbarr of Cork (died 610) a disciple of St Ninian of Whithorn was in existence at Dornoch prior to 1223, probably as part of a monastic settlement. A writ by David I in the Dunfermline Abbey Register dating between 1127 x 1153 ordered the Earl of Orkney to respect 'the monks who live at Dornoch'. (Coleman, 2001) Therefore the foundation of the See of Caithness by David I between c1147 x 1151 has been seen as a political move against Orkney. Also the foundation of the cathedral and its transference from Halkirk has suggested that a Celtic or Culdee foundation survived at this date (Cowan and Easson, 1976, 203-4). The parish church graveyard was known as St Barr's until the reformation. (Kendrick, 1997)

#### Archaeological Sites

Currently one archaeological site is centred to the development area in both the Highland Sites and Monuments Record and the National Monuments Record of Scotland CANMORE database, a summary of which is as follows:

HSMR – NH78NE 14

NMRS – NH78NE 14

Name – St Finbarr's Monastery, Dornoch

Type – Monastic site

Grid Ref: NH 799/896

Site centred at this location though no evidence for its existence. Possible that remains of ecclesiastical buildings were found in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century when the public school was built (Located at NH 7991/8968) when foundations of square and mortared and round and un-mortared buildings were noted.

#### Archaeological History in the Burgh

Currently only a few small projects of archaeological investigation have been conducted in the burgh. A short summary of these is as follows:

- Excavation work by SUAT Ltd at Dornoch Business Park in 1997 (Coleman, 2001) to the south at NH 797/895 revealed material culture of an 8<sup>th</sup> / 9<sup>th</sup> to a 15<sup>th</sup> century date with the possible remains of enclosures and industrial activity in the form of iron-working.
- Watching brief on service trenches by J Kendrick at the High Street in 1997 (Kendrick, 1997) to the west revealed 3 human burials near the cathedral graveyard and a number of small features including a pit and a number of organic layers though little dating material was recovered.
- A watching brief by the author at Dornoch Abattoir (Farrell, 2002a) to the south at NH 7971/8948 revealed no archaeological features and only 1 sherd of abraded medieval pottery in the topsoil.
- A watching brief by the author at Bank Lane (Farrell, 2002b) to the west at NH 7969/8973 revealed no archaeological features or deposits, though the work was very limited.

#### Cartographic Sources

No large-scale maps of the burgh of Dornoch exist until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The only map of the burgh prior to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century is of the parliamentary boundaries of 1832 (see figure 4) but lacks enough detail to the development area.

The 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the Ordnance Survey at 1:2500 of 1879 (surveyed 1874) (see figure 5) shows a small structure to the northwest corner of the development area. The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of 1906 (revised 1905) (see figure 6) shows the same building as well as another structure along the north side with another adjoining to the northeast corner of the development area; another small structure stands alone to the southwest corner. The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition map of 1972 (see figure 7) shows 2 large main buildings to the centre and northeast area of the development with two other small structures along the east wall.

#### Aerial Photographs

A study of aerial photographs held in the RCAMHMS noted only limited coverage for the area of development, with the latest of 1988 being taken too high to show any detail. Nothing was evident on any of the aerial photographs of 1947 again for being too high. The two buildings marked on the Ordnance survey map of 1972 (Figure 7) are visible on an RAF aerial photograph for 1960 (543/RAF/829/84) and on an Ordnance Survey aerial photograph of 1970 (OS/70/84/91). The two smaller buildings depicted on the OS map of 1972 are not visible on any of the aerial photographs.

#### Summary

The buildings depicted on the various maps and aerial photographs indicate a site of continuing change from the 1870's onwards but without any major development being undertaken. Therefore the potential for earlier deposits is likely to be possibly high.

#### **4. Objectives**

To conduct an archaeological excavation in advance of the development to record those features revealed by that excavation work. A copy of the specification provided by Highland Council Archaeology Unit is enclosed.

#### **5. Methodology**

A back-acting machine with a straight edged bucket excavated the area of the proposed development with any possible archaeological features being cleaned by hand. 1 trench was placed to the south side of the development with a baulk on its north side as a control section and the area around the former garage inspection pit was not excavated due to existing services.

Weather on the days of work (July 29<sup>th</sup> – August 1<sup>st</sup> 2003) was generally bright with sunny periods.

#### **6. Results**

The site recording was carried out in accordance with accepted professional archaeological standards as published by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 1999). Over the construction period a suitably qualified archaeologist was on site to carry out observations and assessment of the area affected by the excavation works.

### Site Location

The site lies to east end of the main centre of town just off the High street and is situated directly to the south of the Police Station (built 1980) and to the north of the Free Church (built 1843-8). The site currently has 2 buildings of corrugated iron and wooden construction. The building to the centre of the development area having a concrete floor and an inspection pit (the site being a former garage).

### Excavation Results

Before the area excavation was made a watching brief on the demolition of the existing buildings (see outlines on figure 2) revealed that the building to the centre had a concrete floor and had been partly excavated to an orange-brown sand natural with an infill of sandstone rubble, both yellow and pink, and rounded cobbles to a depth of 360mm. Traces of the buildings marked on the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition OS map were also traced by a change in stone and concrete rendering on the walls to the NE corner and E walls of the development.

At the start of the clearance of the site a trench was placed to the south side of the development with a baulk on its north side as a control section. Excavation of this trench by machine in very shallow spits revealed a deposit of a light brown sandy subsoil (context 2) that contained medieval redware pottery and animal bone and occasional fragments of shell, though none could be seen as an actual deposit, most of the pottery being small or damaged in antiquity. Removal of this layer revealed a natural of mottled yellow-brown sand to a depth of 1m at the west end rising to 0.4m at the east end. Cleaning by hand of this natural sand revealed no cut features within it, though a small burnt fragment of flint was found. Only upon cleaning up of the north facing section of this trench was it noted that below this sandy subsoil were 2 other layers of possibly earlier land surface's (context 5 & 6 - see section drawing) that these did not extent to the east end of the trench was possibly due to modern disturbance or that the trench sloped away to the west. The first of these was a darker subsoil (context 5) whilst that below was a mixed sandy soil (context 6) (see photograph and section over). It was from this later context that the flint was found.

Finds of modern disturbance at the east end of the trench included a sherd of modern glass embedded into the natural sand. A shallow pit revealed at the east end of the trench (context 4) was deemed by the excavator to be modern (see photograph over).

Modern disturbance in a number of other areas was also evident upon cleaning up of the area to the SE and N parts of the main area of the development upon the removal of the base and rubble from the garage floor. (See figure 3) This included a square cut pit and a number of other irregular shaped features that had modern metalwork within them and are likely to relate to the sites use as a garage. Other modern features to the northeast included a wooden post for the building formerly standing against the east wall. The former inspection pit for the garage had been excavated to a depth of 1.05m and extended 4.4m NS by 1.4m EW. Excavation was not possible on the west side of this feature due to existing services and in likelihood of overall results would have given negative results.

Below: North Facing Section of Trench 1:100



Overall upon the removal of the garage debris and the slight amount of subsoil revealed no features or remains of interest only natural sands of an orange-brown colour or patches of mottled sand intermixed with small cobbles with the whole site lying on a northeast to southwest slope.

### 7. Conclusions

It may be possible that the light brown sandy subsoil revealed to the SW corner of the area of development might be either a medieval garden soil to the rear of a property or the remains of a medieval field due to the pottery being possibly worn by ploughing action. It also is possible that the building of the garage removed in part any earlier deposits as no finds were made in this area and that the existing ground level before work commenced was about 0.5m below that around the church to the south, though the ground around the church may have been built up.

If the sandy subsoil is the remnants of a field, then the medieval burgh of Dornoch may lie closer to the Cathedral and Bishop's Palace than previously estimated, though only further work in Dornoch may determine this. If the subsoil is a garden soil it will give other archaeologists an indication of what to look for in other parts of the burgh in the future.

Top Left: View of site during removal of concrete facing SW.

Top Right: View of possible pit SE corner upon ½ section facing E – scale 0.5m.

Middle Left: View of trench at South side of excavation facing W – scales 1m.

Middle Right: View of section at SW corner facing S – scales 1m.

Bottom left: View of site upon excavation facing SW – scales 1m.

Bottom Right: View of site upon excavation facing SE – scales 1m.



## **8. Recommendations**

No recommendations with regard any further fieldwork for this project is to be proposed due to no archaeological features or deposits of interest being revealed, and it is likely that no other features would be revealed with further work. The small amount of medieval pottery and animal bone recovered will be studied by specialists and a report of their findings forthcoming.

## **9. Archive**

The following is to be deposited in the National Monuments Record in Edinburgh:

- Notebook of results
- Black and white photographs & negatives
- Plan and section drawings
- Context sheets
- Copy of this report

A set of black & white photographs of the features excavated and colour slides showing the progress of the work has been deposited with Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record. Digital images used in this report have been deposited with HSMR on disc as well as a copy of this report as a PDF file.

## **10. Discovery & Excavation in Scotland**

A short summary of the results of this project will be submitted to the Council for Scottish Archaeology's publication *Discovery & Excavation in Scotland*.



## 11. References

- Coleman, R (2001) A Watching Brief and Excavation at Meadows Business Park Dornoch. SUAT Ltd. Unpublished report copy held by HSMR.
- Cowan, I B & Easson, D E (1976) Medieval Religious Houses: Scotland. London.
- Farrell, S (2002a) Report of Archaeological Watching Brief - February 25<sup>th</sup> 2002 Dornoch Abattoir, Dornoch, Highland. Unpublished report copy held by HSMR.
- Farrell, S (2002b) Report of Archaeological Watching Brief - May 28<sup>th</sup> 2002 Bank Lane, Dornoch, Highland. Unpublished report copy held by HSMR.
- Gallagher, D B (1995) Historic Dornoch: The archaeological implications of development. Scottish Burgh Survey. Historic Scotland. Edinburgh.
- Gifford J. (1992) The Buildings of Scotland: Highlands & Islands. Penguin. London.
- Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record entry for NH78NE 14.
- IFA (1999) By-laws, Standards and Policy Statements of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. Reading.
- Kendrick, J (1997) Archaeological Watching Brief at Dornoch 3/11/97-13/11/97. Wordsworth Archaeological Services. Unpublished report.
- National Monuments Record of Scotland CANMORE entries for NH78NE 14.

### Maps Consulted

- Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1:2500 sheet 108.6 Sutherland of 1879 surveyed 1874.
- Ordnance Survey 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1:2500 sheet 108.6 Sutherland of 1906 revised 1905.
- Ordnance Survey 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 1:2500 sheet NH 7889-7989 of 1972.
- Parliamentary Boundaries map of 1832.

### Aerial Photographs Consulted

RAF 106G/Scot/UK 114	4151-4150	23-5-1946	1:10,000
RAF 543/RAF/829	90-92	18-3-1960	1:12,000
OS OS/70/084	124-126	10-5-1970	1:7500
OS 62888	66-65	28-6-1988	1:24,000

## Appendix 1 –Photograph Register

### Black & White

- 1 – View of garage to centre of site facing SE.
- 2 – View of building to NE corner of the development facing E.
- 3 – View of inspection pit within garage facing SW.
- 4 – View of site upon removal of central shed facing SE.
- 5 – View of removal of concrete floor facing NW.
- 6 – View of inspection pit during removal of concrete facing N.
- 7 – Detail pre-ex of possible pit at east end of trench facing E – scale 0.5m.
- 8 – ibid.
- 9 – Detail of possible pit at ½ section at east end of trench facing E – scale 0.5m.
- 10 – View of outline of building remains against E wall – scale 2m.
- 11 – View of NE corner wall of outline of building remains.
- 12 – View of inspection pit facing S – scales 1m.
- 13 – Ibid but facing SW.
- 14 – View of trench at south side of excavation facing W – scales 1m.
- 15 – Ibid but facing E.
- 16 – Detail of section of end of trench facing W – scale 1m.
- 17 – Detail of section of end of trench at SW corner facing N – scales 1m.
- 18 – Detail of section on opposite side of baulk facing N – scales 1m.
- 19 – View of west side of excavation facing S – scales 1m.
- 20 – View of east side of excavation facing SE – scales 1m.
- 21 – View of east side of excavation facing E – scales 1m.
- 22 – View of centre of excavation facing SE – scales 1m.
- 23 – View of east side of excavation facing NE – scales 1m.
- 24 – ibid.
- 25 – View of east side of excavation facing N – scales 1m.
- 26 – View of centre of excavation facing N – scales 1m.
- 27 – View of centre of excavation facing NW – scales 1m.
- 28 – View of west side of excavation facing W – scales 1m.
- 29 – Ibid.
- 30 – View of centre of excavation facing SW – scales 1m.
- 31 – Ibid.
- 32 – View of east side of excavation facing S – scales 1m.
- 33 – View of area of excavation facing SW – scales 1m.

### Colour Slides

- 1 – View of former garage facing SE.
- 2 – View of shed at east side of site facing E.
- 3 – View of inspection pit inside garage facing SW.
- 4 – View of site upon removal of central shed facing SE.
- 5 – View of removal of concrete floor facing NW.
- 6 – View of inspection pit during removal of concrete facing N.
- 7 – Detail pre-ex of possible pit at east end of trench facing E – scale 0.5m.
- 8 – ibid.
- 9 – Detail of possible pit at ½ section at east end of trench facing E – scale 0.5m.
- 10 – View of outline of building remains against E wall – scale 2m.
- 11 – View of NE corner wall of outline of building remains.
- 12 – View of inspection pit facing S – scales 1m.
- 13 – Ibid but facing SW.
- 14 – View of trench at south side of excavation facing W – scales 1m.
- 15 – Ibid but facing E.
- 16 – Detail of section of end of trench facing W – scale 1m.
- 17 – Detail of section of end of trench at SW corner facing N – scales 1m.
- 18 – Detail of section on opposite side of baulk facing N – scales 1m.
- 19 – View of west side of excavation facing S – scales 1m.
- 20 – View of east side of excavation facing SE – scales 1m.
- 21 – View of east side of excavation facing E – scales 1m.

- 22 – View of centre of excavation facing SE – scales 1m.
- 23 – View of east side of excavation facing NE – scales 1m.
- 24 – ibid.
- 25 – View of east side of excavation facing N – scales 1m.
- 26 – View of centre of excavation facing N – scales 1m.
- 27 – View of centre of excavation facing NW – scales 1m.
- 28 – View of west side of excavation facing W – scales 1m.
- 29 – Ibid.
- 30 – View of centre of excavation facing SW – scales 1m.
- 31 – Ibid.
- 32 – View of east side of excavation facing S – scales 1m.
- 33 – View of area of excavation facing SW – scales 1m.

#### Digital Images

- 1 - View of site during removal of concrete facing SW.
- 2 - View of possible pit SE corner upon ½ section facing E – scale 0.5m.
- 3 - View of trench at South side of excavation facing W – scales 1m.
- 4 - View of section at SW corner facing S – scales 1m.
- 5 - View of site upon excavation facing SW – scales 1m.
- 6 - View of site upon excavation facing SE – scales 1m.

#### **Appendix 2 – Context Register**

- 1 – Topsoil – dark brownish black.
- 2 – Subsoil – sandy light brown.
- 3 – Subsoil – sandy dark brown.
- 4 – Cut of shallow pit.
- 5 – Dark brown fill of shallow pit.
- 6 – Deposit – reddish brown sandy soil.