



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

Community-led Excavation Report

Broadfield Park
Slopes,
Sparrow Hill,
Rochdale

Client:

Rochdale
Development Agency

Technical Report:

Dr Colin Elder and Ian
Miller



GMAAS
Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service



Site Location: Broadfield Park Slopes lies on Sparrow Hill to the south of Rochdale Town Hall in Rochdale town centre. Postcode OL16 1AB

NGR: SD 89660 13210

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Author: Colin Elder
Position: Project Officer
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Approved By: Ian Miller
Position: Director
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Signed: 

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Contact: GMAAS, Centre for Applied Archaeology, Peel Building, University of Salford, Salford M5 4WT

Telephone: 0161 295 4467 Email: i.f.miller@salford.ac.uk

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Summary

Rochdale Development Agency has submitted an application to the National Heritage Lottery Fund with a proposal to resolve a significant flooding issue on the Grade II listed Broadfield Park Slopes, situated immediately to the rear of Rochdale Town Hall in Rochdale (centred at NGR SD 89630 13185). Initial investigation of the site's hydrology has concluded that there is an urgent need to restore the remarkable Georgian water-management system on the Slopes to offset the risk of sink holes forming and leading ultimately to the destabilisation of the landscape. The project also offered considerable potential to investigate the archaeology of Broadfield Park Slopes through a programme of meaningful public engagement. In order to capitalise on this unique opportunity, the Rochdale Development Agency offered an archaeological training programme to volunteers from the local community, coupled with the delivery of a large community-led excavation focused on the Broadfield Park Slopes in summer 2023.

Broadfield Park Slopes incorporates Packer Spout and the southerly continuation of the historic thoroughfare of Packer Street to provide a direct link up the steep slope to the medieval parish church of St Chad. There are tantalising documentary indications that this part of Rochdale was occupied during the 7th and 8th centuries with the present St Chad occupying the site of an earlier church, but the presence and extent of an associated Anglo-Saxon settlement awaits confirmation. Packer Street was certainly an important thoroughfare from at least the later medieval period, providing a direct route between the church and the original bridge across the River Roch, and likely represented the core of the later medieval settlement and lay at the heart of post-medieval development of the town. It was hoped that the archaeological investigation might shed fresh light on this key period in the town's early development, or at least help to characterise the nature of the archaeological remains across the Broadfield Park Slopes and the potential for the area to yield remains of a medieval or even early medieval date.

The three-week community excavation, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and supervised by GMAAS and the Slopes Dig Team, uncovered the substantial foundations of Charles Kershaw's 19th-century Central Corn Mill, which was demolished in 1934. Earlier remains included historic surfaces associated with the former Leyland House that were discovered in a narrow trench placed slightly higher up the steep slope to the parish church. This trench lay adjacent to the ancient thoroughfare of the church steps and whilst medieval remains proved to be elusive, the excavation yielded fragments of 17th- and early 18th-century pottery and demonstrated a tantalising potential for earlier material to survive at a lower depth.

Nearly 1,000 people from local communities and schools engaged with the excavation, either through direct participation or by taking advantage of the daily tours and open days that were offered. The majority of the participants had not taken part in an archaeological excavation previously and it was especially encouraging to see a large number of younger participants becoming inspired by the quest to explore Rochdale's past. It is hoped that this groundswell of local appetite to engage with Rochdale's rich heritage and archaeology can gain momentum and continue to encourage the next generation of local archaeologists.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Rochdale Development Agency has submitted an application to the National Heritage Lottery Fund with a proposal to resolve a significant flooding issue on the Broadfield Park Slopes, situated on Sparrow Hill immediately to the rear of Rochdale Town Hall in Rochdale (centred at NGR SD 89630 13185; Figure 1). The Slopes are of considerable archaeological and historical interest, and form part of the wider Broadfield Park, a Grade II listed Park and Garden (List Entry 1001522). Initial investigation of the hydrology of the Slopes concluded that there is an urgent need to restore the Georgian water-management system to offset the risk of sink holes forming and leading ultimately to the destabilisation of the landscape.

The Broadfield Park Slopes were probably part of the lands granted to the Abbey of Stanlow in 1211 by Roger de Lacy; at their base, a natural spring (Packer's Spout), was an important stopping point for the packhorses travelling the packhorse routes via Packer Street. Following the Dissolution of the 1530s, the Slopes passed to the Parish of Rochdale as glebe land. They seem to have remained part of the agricultural land that was at the heart of Rochdale's economy as a market town and centre for the important regional woollen trade. The spring was tapped for a reservoir in 1760 and continued to provide Rochdale with piped water until as late as 1898. It is not known whether the spring was a natural feature that was exploited during the medieval period, although this seems possible. The precise layout of the mid-18th-century water-management system is similarly uncertain and warrants further archaeological investigation in tandem with resolving the current flooding issues.

In addition to further understanding the historic drainage, the project to address flooding offered considerable potential to investigate other aspects of the rich heritage and archaeology of Broadfield Park Slopes through a programme of meaningful community engagement. In order to capitalise on this unique opportunity, the Rochdale Development Agency offered the local community five places on a ten-week volunteer archaeological training programme. The trainees were introduced to modern archaeological practice by a specialist team from the University of Salford, and were guided through the approach taken to designing, implementing and delivering an archaeological research project. As part of this programme, the trainees opened a series of 13 test pits across the Slopes to characterise the archaeological resource and inform a decision regarding the best location for the community excavation.

The trainees were joined during the programme by seven volunteers from the local community to learn the practical skills required to undertake archaeological excavation, and jointly prepared the groundwork for delivering the community led excavation on the Broadfield Park Slopes in summer 2023. The five archaeology trainees completed their training programme successfully and progressed to accept short-term contracts of employment with the University of Salford to supervise the community excavation on the Broadfield Park Slopes in conjunction with GMAAS. The community excavation was delivered between late July and mid-August 2023, and involved opening four trenches across the Slopes (Figure 2).

2. The Setting

2.1 Site Location and Description

The study area (centred on NGR SD 89660 13210) occupies Broadfield Park Slopes, part of the Grade II listed Park and Garden that lies on the north side of Sparrow Hill in Rochdale town centre. The Slopes form part of a natural amphitheatre that encloses the magnificent Grade I listed Town Hall and rises to the medieval St Chad's Church at the top of Church Stile (Plate 1). The natural topography resulted from the torrent of post-glacial melt waters of the River Roch over 13,000 years ago. This geological action created a natural spring line two thirds of the way up the steep-sided Broadfield Park Slopes, which produced fresh water that was said to be 'as clear as diamonds'.



Plate 1: Location of the Broadfield Park Slopes project area

The underlying solid geology consists of the Pennine Lower Coal Measures (Westphalian A) and millstone grit of the Carboniferous period. The predominant drift geology comprises glacial sands and gravels, with some alluvium (<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/beta.html>).

The development of Rochdale was in no small part due to the topography of the area, and the town developed at the junction of several key trade and communication routes. Important trans-Pennine routes via Blackstone Edge led to the north-east, with routes to the north heading off across the Rossendale Fells into central Lancashire, and westwards to Bury and Bolton. The valley of the River Roch narrowed around Rochdale, providing a convenient fording point for the route southwards to Manchester, which would undoubtedly have been of importance as packhorse ways by the medieval period (Tindall nd, 1).

3. Historical Background

3.1 Introduction

The following summary of Rochdale's development draws on both published and unpublished literature, documentary research and cartographic evidence and aims to contextualise the archaeological results described in *Section 5*.

Various remains of prehistoric date have been identified in the general area, particularly in the upland areas (Fishwick 1889). The discovery of remains from these periods in Rochdale town centre, however, is severely limited. The Romano-British period is slightly better represented through the discovery of chance finds, including the Castlemere hoard of coins that was found a short distance to the south of Broadfield Park (Lewis 1848). The sparsity of archaeological evidence predating the medieval period in Rochdale, however, is likely to be due to the level of redevelopment of the town during the 19th and 20th centuries (Pearson *et al* 1985).

3.2 Early Medieval

Although the origins of the parish of Rochdale are unclear, it is possible that it was created during the middle Anglo-Saxon period when the wider area was incorporated into the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria (Pounds 2000, 3; Newman 2006, 91). The parish was the most extensive of the parishes contained within the Hundred of Salford, which formed a large Anglo-Saxon territorial unit immediately north of the River Mersey and including the Irwell Valley (Fishwick 1889, 1). The parish may eventually have been coextensive with the manor of Rochdale, which according to Domesday was held in 1066 by Gamel the Thane who still held some land there in 1086 (Morgan 1978). It seems probable that the major Anglo-Saxon settlement within the Rochdale parish was probably located in the area now covered by the modern town. The presence of an Anglo-Saxon settlement at Rochdale tallies well with the dedication of its parish church to St Chad, the late 7th-century Anglo-Saxon bishop of Lichfield (Fishwick 1889, 127).

Rochdale is listed in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as 'Recedham', the 'ham' element of which is Old English in origin referring to a settlement that was perhaps a product of Anglo-Saxon colonisation dating to the 7th or 8th century (Ekwall 1922, 55). Similarly, although the element 'Reced' might have been the Celtic name for the River Roch, it is also possible that it has an Old English origin meaning 'hall' (*ibid*).

3.3 Medieval

Documentary sources suggest that the town was renamed 'Rachedal' in c. 1195, meaning 'valley of the river Roch'. The parish of Rochdale at that time covered over 41,000 acres, extending north to Bacup and Todmorden (now in West Yorkshire), and from the Cheesden Valley in the west to Saddleworth in the east.

By the late 12th century, a motte-and-bailey castle had been established at the northern end of the triangular spur of Castle Hill, half a mile to the south-west of the parish church. Whilst this site is now entirely destroyed and built over, 19th-century surveys show that it had consisted of an irregular bailey, some 30 x 35m, surrounded by earthen ramparts that were probably originally surmounted by a wooden palisade (GMAU 2010, 30).

The whole manor had been assigned to the Lord of Clitheroe by 1212, and was held by Roger de Lacy, and several under tenants. By 1251, Rochdale had become important enough to have been granted a charter for a weekly market, and an annual fair on the feast of St Simon and St Jude in October. It has been suggested that the original market place was located on Church Stile, near the parish church, although firm evidence is lacking. It was probably during this period that a borough was also created (Fishwick 1889).

The Church of St Chad is thought to have served an enormous parish, rather than a substantial town. The oldest part of the existing church, which occupies high ground on the south side of the town overlooking the river, dates to the 13th century (Hartwell *et al* 2004, 588). However, there is some evidence to suggest that an earlier church occupied the same site, and fragments of Norman masonry are said to have been discovered during renovation in 1815 (Fishwick 1889, 12). It is certainly clear that considerable investment was expended in reconstructing the church during the 13th century, although there is some evidence to suggest that the 13th-century chancel was not notably bigger than its predecessor, which may thus have been comparatively large (Farrer and Brownbill 1911).

Following the death of Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, in 1311 Rochdale passed to the Earls of Lancaster who held the manor until the end of the 15th century (Fishwick 1889, 21). During the 15th century the manor was also leased to various stewards, and from 1462 until 1616 these were members of the influential Byron family with large land holdings across the area.

The focus of medieval activity in the area awaits confirmation, and the pattern of settlement may have comprised a spread of innumerable folds, representing little clusters of agricultural and proto-industrial buildings (Hartwell *et al* 2004, 585). Whilst it is tempting to suggest that the centre of the medieval town probably lay on the south side of the River Roch, in proximity to the Church of St Chad, conclusive evidence is lacking. However, Packer Street is clearly associated with the medieval church, providing a direct route to Rochdale Bridge, and is a likely candidate for a main thoroughfare in the early settlement.

The date at which the first bridge across the River Roch in Rochdale was constructed is not known; it seems likely that it existed by 1324, as a document of that date refers to 'John of the Brig', which may be associated with a bridge (Taylor 1956). In addition, it is likely that there was a ford across the river at The Butts during the medieval period; a ford is referred to in early 17th-century documents (Curren 1610), and Sir Robert Heath's *Survey of the Manor of* 1626 (Fishwick (ed), 1913).

3.4 Post-medieval Period

In 1582, Camden described Rochdale as 'a market town well frequented'. The regional importance of the town at this time is implicit from the detail provided by Saxton's map of Lancashire, which was published in 1577, and marks the town in bold letters. Manufacturing and mining industries became of increasing importance to the local economy during this period; the confiscation of the lands that had belonged to Whalley Abbey, and the general suppression of religious houses following the Dissolution of the Monasteries, produced a new race of landlords, whose number was increased by the sale of Byron estates in the early part of the 17th century (Fishwick 1913). The town certainly began to expand significantly during the 1600s, indicated to some degree by the Hearth Tax Returns; in 1666, 228 hearths were recorded for Rochdale.

The 1626 *Survey of the Manor* notes that the bridge across the River Roch to the west of the ford was 'in decay', although it was not known who was responsible for the repairs (Fishwick (ed) 1913). Records in the Lancashire Quarter Sessions dated 23 July 1663 make further reference to the perilous state of the bridge (LRO/QSP/244/1), but in 1676 Gabriel Gartside and Joseph Dearden are reported to have expended £75 5s 2d on repairs to the bridge (QSP/457/7). The bulk of the costs incurred were for transporting 'free stone', indicating that the bridge was of stone construction.

Celia Fiennes, writing in c 1700, described Rochdale as 'a pretty neat town, built all of stone', whilst some 25 years later Defoe considered it 'a good market town, and of late much improved in the woollen manufacture, as are also the villages in its neighbourhood' (Furbank *et al* 1991).

Some indication of the form and distribution of the settlement during this period is provided by a *Plan of the Rochdale Glebe*, which was produced in 1754-7 (Plate 2). This plan appears to show the core of the town to have been focused to the north of the parish church, between Church Lane and Packer Street, the latter probably deriving its name from its medieval use as a packhorse route between the Church of St Chad and the Rochdale Bridge. This is annotated as 'A Stone Bridge', with a second river crossing a short distance to the west named 'Capt Ogden Bridge'. The areas subject to the community excavation in 2023 largely occupy a plot identified on the plan as 'Leyland Bank'. The town is shown to have a similar layout on *A Plan of the Vicarage* of 1764, which also shows the 'new' settlement on the north bank of the river, with ribbon development extending northwards along Whitworth Road and north-eastwards along Yorkshire Street (Plate 3).



Plate 2: Plan of the Rochdale Glebe in 1754-7, with arrow marking the location of the study area



Plate 3: Extract from A Plan of the Vicarage of 1764, with arrow marking the approximate location of the 2023 excavation area

These two mid-18th-century plans also show Church Lane as a principal thoroughfare; this lane probably superseded Packer Street as the medieval packhorse road northwards from the parish church. Church Lane provided a gentler gradient for wheeled traffic, although its broad sweep north-eastwards from the church necessitated a sharp westward dog-leg at the river in order to connect with Yorkshire Street at Rochdale Bridge. The effect of the shift in emphasis from Packer Street to Church Lane was considerable. There were reportedly only six dwellings along Church Lane in 1625, yet it was far more populous by the mid-17th century with houses stretching from the church down to the River Roch (Fishwick 1889, 48).

The growth of the town throughout the 18th century can be attributed largely to its involvement in industry and trade. During this period, Rochdale developed a formidable reputation as a centre for the production of woollen cloth, and the town benefited from a lucrative export trade in woollen goods to Holland, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Russia and Germany (Aiken 1795, 248). Rochdale also became an important centre for the cross-Pennine trade in woollen cloth, represented by the numerous merchant's houses, warehouses and inns that were established in the town during the late 1700s to service this trade. An important group of these buildings survives along Yorkshire Street and connected streets on the north side of the River Roch, reflecting the position of the area at the terminus of the Georgian trade route across the Pennines to Yorkshire. The evidence available, however, suggests that another important but earlier group of warehouses and buildings connected with the packhorse trade was focused along Packer Street on the south side of the river on the approach to Rochdale Bridge. Indeed, Packer Street was described in 1600 as the 'leading business street' in the town.

3.5 Industrial Period

Samuel Curwen visited Rochdale in 1771 and noted that it was 'remarkable for (its) many wool merchants; it has a large woollen market, the merchants from Halifax etc, repairing hither weekly'. He also noted that 'every considerable house is a manufactory, and is supplied with a rivulet or little stream, without which the business cannot be carried on' (Fishwick 1889, 57-8). The River Roch was also exploited as a source of power during this period although it was subject to sudden flooding (Robertson 1875, 265-6), suggesting that settlement during this period may have been set back some distance from the river's banks.

The extent of the town at this time is depicted on William Yates' map of Lancashire of 1786, which provides the earliest reliable map of the town, albeit published at a small scale (Plate 4); it is likely that the layout of the town as depicted by Yates reflected the late medieval street pattern. This map shows that the core of the 18th-century town was focused to the north of the parish church, around St Mary's Gate and the river crossing at The Butts. Packer Street is shown to have been lined with a continuous row of buildings on both sides.



Plate 4: Extract from Yates' map of Lancashire of 1786, with arrow marking the location of the 2023 excavation area

Packer Street supposedly witnessed a surge in building activity during the late 17th century. At this time, the glebe land was rented out to 'prosperous and overcrowded' citizens to build new houses, and as a result created two handsome streets: Packer Street and Church Lane (Taylor 1956, 58). Parish records provide a certain amount of detail regarding the occupations of the inhabitants residing on Packer Street, which included all manner of trades and crafts. As a commercial street it generated a considerable amount of wealth and was reputedly 'the locality of the most respectable shops' and 'two of the leading hotels' (Robertson 1875, 329).

Other properties advertised for auction in the late 18th century included 'cottages or dwelling house situate at the lower end of the Packer Street used as a public house, and called the Lower Anchor, with stabling and appurtenances thereto belonging' and another cottage on Packer Street that was used as a public house known as the Higher Anchor, with outbuildings. The latter was said to be in the possession of Mrs Stott, a widow, at the annual rent of £8 plus two-yearly ground rents. All of the properties were held by lease under the Vicarage of Rochdale. A large proportion of the trades listed in the parish records were either weavers or were engaged in textile-related roles, providing good evidence for domestic handloom weaving. Anecdotal evidence suggests this household industry persisted into the 19th century. Henry Kelsall, a prominent figurehead and industrialist was said to have started out with a 'few handlooms and jennies in a Packer Street house' in the early 19th century (Taylor 1956, 93). Other trades included shoemaking, tailoring and hatting. A notice printed in 1793 advised that a John Ashworth, described as a bread baker and grocer of Packer Street in Rochdale, had assigned his estate and effects to Benjamin Meanley, an iron monger, Robert Holt, a butcher, and James Holt, innkeeper (*The Leeds Intelligencer*, 15 April 1793).

Rochdale became a boomtown of the Industrial Revolution during the late 18th century, and amongst the first ever industrialised towns. The Rochdale Canal was a key highway of commerce during this time used for the haulage of cotton, wool, and coal to and from the area. The canal was opened between Rochdale and Manchester by 1799, and was completed as the first trans-Pennine route in 1804 (Hadfield 1994).

Rochdale rose to prominence during the 19th century as an important centre for the production of cotton goods, whilst maintaining a strong woollen industry, focusing in particular on the manufacture of flannel and baize. The town enjoyed a 'golden age' during the Cotton Famine of the 1860s, when woollens became once more price-competitive with cotton goods; the population of the town increased by over 60% during this period (Williams with Farnie 1992).

The first detailed map of Rochdale is provided by Swire's survey of 1824, which was produced at a scale of 9": 1 mile. This map shows Rochdale Bridge to have been the principal thoroughfare connecting the putative medieval core of Rochdale on the south bank of the river with the expanding settlement on the north bank. A row of commercial / residential properties line the side of Packer Street as it crosses the site, with the Roch Foundry to the rear, set in the large gardens of a villa residence known as The Wood. Buildings on Water Side are also shown, together with the footbridge across the River Roch.

The next available plan of Rochdale is that provided by Murphy's survey of 1831, which was produced at a scale of 1": 5 chains and shows broadly the same configuration of buildings shown by Swire. Greater detail of individual buildings, however, is provided by the 1844 tithe map for Castleton (Plate 5). This shows that the properties lining the west side of Packer Street, all of slightly different sizes and plan forms, many with outshuts and yards to the rear (Figure 3). The Roch Foundry is shown to have been expanded to comprise three main buildings set at a right angle to Packer Street. The villa residence in the centre of the site is identified as The Wood, with a non-residential building to the rear probably representing a stable and coach house. In 1851, the Ordnance Survey published the first edition 1:1056 Town Plan of Rochdale (Figure 4), provides further detail of the buildings occupying the site, although essentially replicates the layout of buildings shown on the 1844 tithe map.



Plate 5: Extract from the 1844 tithe map for Castleton, marking the current study area

In 1858, the newly elected Council raised the idea of building a new town hall. Land was purchased on the south bank of the River Roch in November 1863 and, in January 1864, a competition was announced for the designs of the building. This competition was won by William Henry Crosland of Leeds, and the foundation stone was eventually laid by John Bright in March 1866. The grand building was provided with a spacious esplanade in front, and a steep wooded slope as a backdrop (Sharples *nd*, 1). During this period, the Council decided to construct an elaborate drinking fountain adjacent to the south bank of the river at the bottom of Drake Street. The fountain was erected in 1863, and comprised a square base covered with stone-coloured canvas, with the monogram 'A.E' exhibited in block letters on two sides, and 'A.C.' placed on the opposite sides (*Rochdale Observer* March 1863).

With plans for the Town Hall in preparation, Rochdale Corporation made steps to acquire the Leyland Bank for resale as building plots. It was from the townspeople that the impetus for a park came, demanding public recreation grounds as a matter of civic pride and a means of job creation during the 'Cotton Famine' of the early 1860s. Broadfield Park was duly laid out in the 1870s to provide open space and pleasure grounds for the people of Rochdale. Its development was intrinsically linked with the completion of Rochdale Town Hall in 1871, creating a new civic centre on the south side of the river.

The Town Hall project evidently necessitated the clearance of all the other buildings within the vicinity, including The Wood and the properties along Packer Street. Similarly, buildings lining the southern bank of the River Roch along Water Side to the west of Rochdale Bridge were also cleared and replaced with The Esplanade, which opened in 1871. The scale of the Town Hall, its associated square and The Esplanade reflect the considerable civic pride of Rochdale at this time. The extent of remodelling is captured on the Ordnance Survey Town Plan of 1892 (Plate 6). The buildings along the east side of Packer Street were steadily rebuilt from 1870 onwards, with a mixture of civic and commercial buildings such as a bank of 1870, the Post Office of 1875, the Central Hotel of 1880 and the Empire Hall of c. 1904.

The magnificent gothic hall was completed in 1871 and set the tone for Rochdale's town centre. However, this new symbol of the town's civic pride overlooked the River Roch, which was little more than an open sewer by the late 19th century; a prominent visitor to Rochdale in 1857 described the town as having 'a little bridge that spans like a rocking horse an imaginary stream in which there is nothing liquid but mud...the town is in the shape of a tea-cup, with a gutter at the bottom' (quoted in Milne 1977). In redressing this situation, a decision was taken to gradually cover the river and, by July 1904, the first phase of this ambitious project, from Yorkshire Street to Wellington Bridge, was completed (Cole 1988, 35). The entire scheme was completed in 1924, combining seven bridges. The covering of this entire area also allowed the council to build a tramway centre.

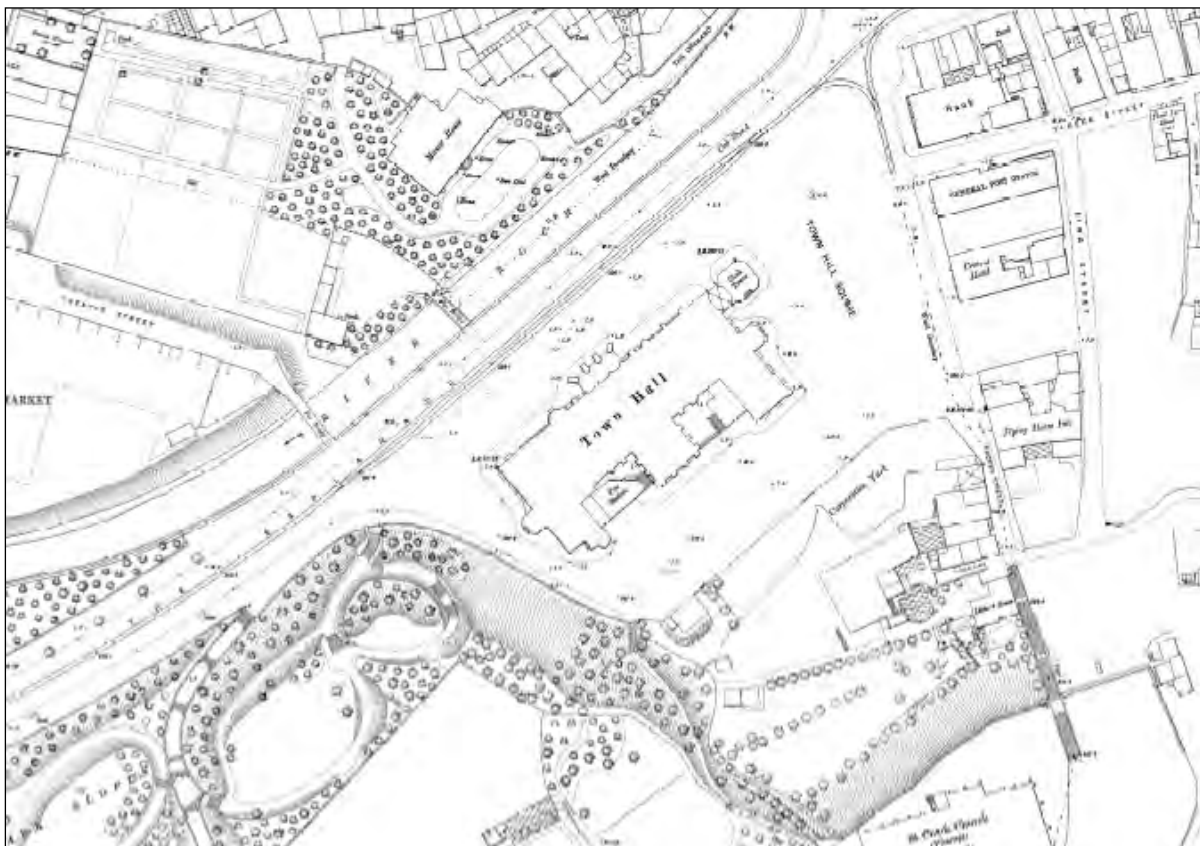


Plate 6: Extract from the Ordnance Survey Town Plan of 1892

It was also during the late 19th century that Charles Kershaw established the large Central Corn Mill (Plate 7). The footprint of the corn mill first appears on the Ordnance Survey Town Plan of 1892, which depicts an L-shaped building at the foot of the Broadfield Park Slopes with the front elevation facing the Town Hall. Several small outbuildings are also shown attached to the rear of the corn mill, together with several glass-roofed buildings, one of which occupied the site of the current Packer Spout (Figure 5). Some of these outbuildings appear to have been remodelled slightly by the late 1920s, together with the clearance of a row of single-depth buildings that lined the north side of Packer Place (Figure 6).



Plate 7: The Central Corn Mill captured in an early 20th-century photograph

The Central Corn Mill was cleared to enable the creation of Packer Spout Gardens in 1934, together with various improvements to the spring water-management and drainage system. The layout of the Slopes following this major landscaping works is captured on the Ordnance Survey map of 1959 (Figure 7).

4. *Aims, Objectives and Methodology*

4.1 *Project Rationale*

Through working closely with local communities the wider project intended to create a strong and developed vision for how the Grade II listed Broadfield Park Slopes could be transformed from an underused and underappreciated heritage asset into a vibrant and safe public outdoor space that reveals and shares the histories of the origins of the town of Rochdale with a wider range of people, whilst simultaneously addressing the urgent need to restore the historic water-management regime on the Slopes.

One of the principal aims of the archaeological element of the project may therefore be summarised as intending to engage all sectors of the local community, including schools, with the archaeology and heritage of Broadfield Park Slopes and Sparrow Hill, and provide an enjoyable learning experience for those who like to be involved directly in an archaeological project or simply observe the activities as a visitor to the park. The project also aimed to establish the site's potential to yield evidence for late medieval and post-medieval Rochdale.

4.2 *Objectives*

The principal objectives of the archaeological element of the project were:

- to elicit a detailed understanding of the rich archaeology and heritage of the area through a community-led archaeological investigation to enable the story of Rochdale's origins to be shared;
- to develop volunteer skills through detailed research and on-site investigation;
- to map and record the remains of the early Georgian water-management system to assist in its restoration and enable the importance of fresh water to the development of the town to be explained;
- to investigate the origins and development of Packer Spout;
- to investigate the possible medieval structures that form the site boundary;
- to investigate lost structures that occupied the foot of the Slopes in the 19th century;
- to produce an archive for the project;
- to make available the results of the work in an appropriate format.

4.3 *Research Questions*

The archaeological project has the potential to inform a suite of research questions, which may include:

- is there any evidence of medieval activity around the spring or on the Slopes?
- was the spring a focal point for early settlement in Rochdale?
- where was the late medieval market place?
- what is the character and date of the boundary features at the top of the Slopes?
- how was the water supply distributed from Packet Spout and can the early Georgian water-management system be mapped?

4.4 Test Pits

A programme of initial intrusive archaeological investigation via the excavation of a series of test pits was implemented to establish the presence, extent, significance and date of any archaeological remains that survive across the study area (Figure 2). This was necessary to help determine the precise location of the excavation areas and was also needed to be undertaken in advance of stabilisation works to the Slopes to ensure that a strategy to offset the harm of the proposed works to the archaeological resource of the site.

In total, 13 test pits were opened across the site by The Slopes Dig Team. These test pits were targeted on the footprint of known historic buildings, namely the rear yards of Leyland Chambers on Packer Street and the Central Corn Mill, and areas that did not appear to have been subject to 19th- and 20th-century development. Other logistical considerations such as ground conditions were taken into account and influenced the positioning of the test pits.

All of the test pits were excavated by hand once the locations had been checked for live services using a CAT-scanner. The turf and topsoil were removed and stored on plastic sheeting. Other excavated material was stored separately. Structures and surfaces revealed within the test pit were subject to manual cleaning and recording. Standard archaeological recording methods were employed, comprising a written record (both description and interpretation with annotated sketches where appropriate), scaled drawings both in plan and in section, photographic record, and retrieval and annotation of archaeological finds.

4.5 Open-area Community Excavation

The excavation aimed to engage up to 1,000 community participants with ranging levels of archaeological experience, including those with physical limitations. One of the primary aims of this excavation was to guide, encourage, train, and nurture the participants in the techniques of archaeological excavation, and a particular emphasis was placed on the quality of experience for those taking part. In addition, school groups of up to 30 pupils per group were involved in the excavation and a range of associated activities. Four areas across the Slopes were targeted for excavation, based on the results obtained from the initial test pits (Figure 2).

5. Results: Initial Test Pits

In order to locate and characterise the below-ground archaeological remains located within the site, a series of test pits (TP) was excavated across the Slopes between 20 June and 6 July 2023 by The Slopes Dig team and an additional team of volunteers; under the supervision of GMAAS. During this period, 13 test pits measuring an average of 1.5 x 1.5m were excavated to the first archaeological horizon or to a maximum depth of 1.00m. The results of each of these test pits is described below.

5.1 Test Pit 1

TP1 was located 2.00m to the west of the retaining wall for the base of the steps. This trench measured 1.90 x 1.50m with a maximum depth of 1.00m (Plate 8). Ten potential archaeological phases were excavated within TP1. The earliest deposit was *1008* that covering the base of the test pit (Figure 9). Layer *1008* comprised a friable red and dark grey mottled sandy material with occasional small-rounded stones. It was only excavated to a shallow depth of 0.15m before reaching the maximum depth of the test pit (1.00m), but nevertheless yielded several pottery sherds of brown and yellow slipware, consistent with a late 17th- to 18th-century date.

Sealing layer *1008* was a deposit of friable, mottled yellow and reddish sand [*1007*], which was 0.06m thick with no inclusions or finds. Sealing *1007* was *1006*, a compact dark grey layer of organic material with lenses of mid-yellow sand that contained occasional small semi-rounded stones.

Cutting layers *1008*, *1007* and *1006* was *1009*, which was uncovered in the south-western corner of the test pit. Cut *1009* appeared semi-circular in plan, measured at least 0.32m long by 0.20m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.40m, revealing an uneven base and inconsistent break of slope (Figure 9). Filling cut *1009* was *1010*, which was composed of a firmly compacted black loamy soil with occasional semi-angular stones. Full excavation of fill *1010* yielded no finds.

Sealing layer *1006* and fill *1010* was *1005* a loose friable layer of mid-yellow sand measured at a thickness of 0.05m, with no inclusions. Sealing layer *1005* was *1004* and *1003*, which discrete lenses deriving from the same depositional event. Layer *1004* / *1003* comprised a compacted high-energy deposit of mottled yellowish and blue clays, with lens of grey sands measured to be at least 0.25m thick. This layer included frequent inclusions of slag, broken bricks, rounded stones, clay smoking pipes, and pottery sherds.

On top of demolition / levelling layer *1003* / *1004* was a layer of topsoil [*1001* / *1002*] that was composed of compact dark grey sandy silt, with live rooting and occasional semi-rounded small stones. Excavation of layer *1001* / *1002* yielded no finds.



Plate 8: Test Pit 1 excavated fully

Due to depth restrictions, the excavation of TP1 was halted at a maximum depth of 1.00m, at which point the natural geology had not been encountered. The earliest phase uncovered in the test pit was layer 1008, which contained sherds of brown and yellow slipware pottery of a late 17th- to early 18th-century date. Due to the test pit's proximity to the Church Steps, it is likely that this layer is contemporaneous to the construction of the current steps, and that a deeper excavation in this area may yield evidence for earlier, and potentially medieval, route between the parish church and Packer Street.

The uneven nature of cut 1009 and the archaeological sterile fill [1010] suggests that this feature is likely to have been created by natural processes (eg animal tunnelling or rooting). The fact that the feature was sealed by layer 1005 suggests that the surface of fill 1010 and layer 1006 may have served as ground-level prior to the events leading to the deposit of 1005 and 1004 / 1003.

The inclusions contained in 1004 / 1003 were consistent with demolition debris and suggest that this layer resulted from an intentional backfilling or the creation of a levelling layer. The finds yielded from layer 1004 / 1003 included fragments of clay tobacco pipes, purple-ware and slipware, which is further evidence that this was an intentional event which occurred sometime after 1009 was filled by 1010.

The topsoil excavated in TP1 [1002 / 1001] is likely a result of both natural processes and the landscaping works that took place on the Slopes during the 20th century.

5.2 Test Pit 2

TP2 was located in the eastern part of the study area, 2.00m to the east of the top section of Packer Spout. This test pit measured 1.50 x 1.50m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.65m (Plate 9). Three potential archaeological phases were identified in TP2.

The earliest feature encountered in TP2 was a cobbled surface [0200], which was comprised of sub-rounded grey stones that ranged in size between 0.10 x 0.07m and 0.20 x 0.09m; the cobbles were not removed but were left *in-situ* (Plate 9). Cobbled surface 0200 was sealed by a tarmac surface [0201], which was at least 0.03m thick.

Tarmac surface 0201 was sealed by the topsoil [0202]. The topsoil was comprised of a dark grey silty sand and was 0.62m thick, with an abundance of live rooting.



Plate 9: Test Pit 2 excavated fully, featuring cobbled surface 0200

Excavation of cobbled surface 0200 did not yield any datable materials and is not present on the historical maps of the area. However, this surface did sit within the property of Leyland Chambers and is likely to have been associated with the external area of the property. The topsoil in TP2 was rather thick in comparison to the other test pits, suggesting that this area was affected by the landscaping works in the 20th century.

5.3 Test Pit 3

TP3 was located in the central part of the study area, 2.00m to the west of the top section of Packer Spout. This test pit measured 1.50 x 1.50m and had a maximum depth of 0.72m (Plate 10). Six potential archaeological phases were identified in TP3.

The earliest archaeological phase was represented by a layer of light grey clay [0300] of an undetermined thickness. Set onto clay 0300 was an east/west-aligned wall [0301] that was formed from a combination of hand-made bricks, machine-made frogged bricks and refractory bricks of various sizes, mortared by a black-ash mortar and laid in an unrecognisable bond. The fabric of the wall was characteristic of a late 19th-century construction date. Sealing brick wall 0301 was a layer [0302] that comprised sandy silt with frequent semi-rounded stones, broken glass and brick fragments; it had a maximum excavated depth of 0.61m.

Set within layer 0302 were two ceramic drains [0303 and 0304]. Drain 0303 was 0.74m long with a diameter of 0.13m, whilst drain 0304 was 0.58m long with a diameter of 0.13m and a connector with a diameter of 0.24m.

Set on top of layer 0302 was a possible rough cobbled surface [0305] in the south-east section of the test pit. This roughly cobbled surface was formed of semi-rounded stones and brick, with 0.62m by 0.24m of this feature exposed.

TP3 was sealed by a layer of dark grey topsoil [0306] measuring 0.10m thick and comprised of sandy silt with live rooting.



Plate 10: Test Pit 3 excavated fully, featuring wall 0301

5.4 Test Pit 4

TP4 was located in the north-east quadrant of study area, 5.00m from the northern boundary wall. This test pit measured 1.70 x 1.70m, dug to a maximum depth of 0.66m (Plate 11). Four potential archaeological phases were identified in test pit.

Two contemporaneous floor surfaces represented the earliest archaeological features uncovered in the test pit. Surface 0500 was formed by two flagstones, the more exposed of these stones was measured 1.15 x 1.08m and 0.04m thick. Abutting 0500 was a surface of rectangular cobbles [0501]. The cobbles in this surface ranged between 0.05m long by 0.05m wide and 0.06m thick, and 0.28m long by 0.05m wide and 0.06m thick.

Sealing these surfaces was a low energy fill [0502], which comprised of a dark greenish-grey organic material measured to be 0.34m thick. Organic layer 0502 contained occasional small semi-angular stone, sherds of pottery and glass. Above layer 0502 was a light-pinkish-grey fill [0503] comprised of sandy clay, measured at 0.18m thick. Fill 0503 contained occasional small semi-angular stone, sherds of pottery and glass.

Capping the test pit was a layer of medium grey sandy silt topsoil [0504], which contained live rooting and occasional small semi-angular stones. This layer was 0.14m thick.



Plate 11: Test Pit 4 excavated fully, featuring surfaces 0500 and 0501

5.5 Test Pit 5

TP5 was located in the south-eastern corner of the site, 2.00m east of the Church Steps, placed between the stone retaining wall of the church to the south and a smaller wall made of Yorkstone to the north. Due to the presence of a live tree and shrub to the east of test pit, and a low voltage cable powering the streetlights to the west, excavation was limited to a width of 0.60m and a length of 2.30m (the distance between the two walls). This test pit was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.74m on its southern extent, but a drain was encountered only 0.23m deep elsewhere. Two potential archaeological phases were uncovered, whilst the walls on either end of the trench suggest further archaeological activity below the archaeological horizon obtained in the test pit.

The earliest archaeological phase encountered was a drain [0502] that comprised an iron grate, hand-made bricks and worked stone of a probable late 19th-century date (Figure 10). The excavated portion of the drain was 1.90m long, 0.40m wide, and 0.51m deep (Plate 12). The hand-made bricks forming the southern end of this drain each measured 0.22 x 0.11 x 0.07m, laid as runners, and bonded by a white lime mortar; six courses of brick were uncovered on the southern edge of the drain. The stones forming the northern run of this drains were grey rectangular cut stones. Along the western edge of the drain the stones were measured to be 0.72m long by 0.20m wide. The stones capping the drain were at least 0.30m wide and 0.50m long. The iron grate was at least 0.30m wide by 0.30m long and 0.03m thick.

Drain 0502 was sealed by layer 0501, which comprised a mid-grey sandy silt with frequent inclusions of large semi-angular stones and brick fragments. Layer 0501 was removed from the top of the drain, but also at the southern end of the drain, with a maximum thickness of 0.51m. Layer 0501 was capped by a layer of mid-grey sandy silt topsoil [0500]. The topsoil had frequent live rooting with a maximum thickness of 0.23m.



Plate 12: Test Pit 5 excavated fully, featuring drain 0502

5.6 Test Pit 6

TP6 was located 5.00m to the west of the Church Steps, and 4.00m to the east of TP2. It measured 1.50 x 1.50m with a maximum depth of 1.10m (Plate 13). Three potential archaeological events were uncovered in TP6.

The earliest archaeological event was represented by a very compact layer of fine-grained dark yellow sand [0600]. This layer had rare small semi-rounded and semi-angular stones, measured to be at least 0.48m thick. Set into sand layer 0600 was a brick and stone structure [0601] in the north-eastern quadrant of TP6. The stone within feature 0601 was a possible Yorkstone, laid flat within the brickwork, measured at least 0.72m long by 0.18m wide. The hand-made bricks were red clay, measuring 0.22 x 0.11 x 0.07m, bonded by a white lime-based mortar, forming a two-course rectangle with no recognisable pattern. This earlier structure [0601] was abutted by a north-east to south-west-aligned brick wall [0602] that abutted brick and stone rectangular feature 0601 at a 45-degree angle. The bricks in wall 0602 were hand-made red clay bricks measuring 0.22 x 0.11 x 0.07m, laid mostly as runners and bonded by a white lime-based mortar. The wall was four-courses high, measured 0.89m long by 0.35m wide and 0.38m high.

These structures [0601 and 0602] were sealed by a high-energy sandy silt fill [0603] with occasional inclusions of large brick fragments, broken glass, and occasional semi-angular stones. Fill 0603 was measured to be 0.37m thick. The test pit was capped by a layer of topsoil [0604], which comprised a dark grey sandy silt, with live rooting and occasional small stones. This layer was 0.25m thick.



Plate 13: Test Pit 6 excavated fully, showing brick and stone structure 0601

5.7 Test Pit 7

TP7 was located in the centre of the site, 3.50m to the west of TP3. This trench measured 1.50 x 1.50m with a maximum depth of 0.78m (Plate 14). Two potential archaeological phases were excavated within this test pit.

The earliest archaeological feature was a box-drain system [0702] that was formed by two drains (aligned north to south and east to west) that met at a 90-degree angle at the eastern edge of the test pit. This drains was built from red hand-made bricks and square slate tiles at the base and top. The component bricks each measured 0.24m long by 0.11m wide and 0.07m high, and comprised entirely of runners bonded with a sandy lime mortar. The only intact piece of slate was measured 0.30 x 0.30m with a thickness of 4mm. Both drainage runs were at least 1.50m long, 0.30 wide, and 0.26 high.

Drain system 0702 was sealed by a mid-grey high energy fill [0701], comprised of sandy silty with frequent inclusions of poorly sorted brick fragments, semi-angular-stone, glass and mortar, which varied in size between small to large. The layer was 0.68m thick and was capped by a layer of mid-grey topsoil [0700], which was 0.10m thick and comprised of sandy silt, with live rooting and occasional small semi-angular stone.



Plate 14: Test Pit 7 excavated fully, showing drainage system 0702

5.8 Test Pit 8

TP8 was located in the north-west quadrant of the site, measured 2.00 x 2.00m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.87m (Plate 15). Excavation of this test pit was stopped after reaching a 0.87m depth as groundwater was encountered at 0.30m below the contemporary ground level, which flooded the test pit. Two potential archaeological phases were nevertheless identified.

The earliest archaeological feature excavated in the test pit was a high-energy mid-grey fill [0803] composed of sandy silty with frequent inclusions of large brick fragments and semi-angular stones which was at least 0.41m thick. On top of fill 0803 was a possible structure [0802] that was comprised of three rectangular blocks of worked stone [0802]. These grey stones formed a U-shaped structure with its opening facing north. The parallel stones ran north to south at least 2.00m long by 0.60m wide and 0.04m thick. The middle stone running east to west was at least 0.80m long by 0.40m wide and 0.15m thick.

Capping structure 0802 was a high-energy mid-grey fill [0801]. This fill had an imperceptible interface with fill 0803, the two fills had the same composition and inclusions. The higher fill [0801] was 0.16m thick, and was capped by a layer of mid-grey sandy silt topsoil [0800] that was 0.10m thick.



Plate 15: Test Pit 8 excavated fully

5.9 Test Pit 9

TP9 was located in the centre of the southern half of the site, abutting a walking path on the southern edge of the test pit. This trench had a footprint of 1.50 x 1.50m and was excavated to a depth of 0.45m before it was abandoned due to the presence of groundwater. The excavated portion of this test pit was archaeological sterile.

5.10 Test Pit 10

TP10 was also located in the centre of the southern half of the site, abutting a walking path on the southern edge of the test pit. This trench had a footprint of 1.50 x 1.50m and was excavated to a depth of 0.40m but was similarly abandoned due to the presence of groundwater. The excavated portion of this test pit was archaeological sterile.

5.11 Test Pit 11

TP11 was also located in the centre of the southern half of the site, abutting a walking path on the southern edge of the test pit. This trench had a footprint of 1.50 x 1.50m and was excavated to a depth of 0.60m but was similarly abandoned due to the presence of groundwater (Plate 16). The excavated portion of this test pit was archaeological sterile.



Plate 16: Test Pit 11 excavated as fully as possible prior to groundwater inundation

5.12 Test Pit 12

TP12 was located 12.00m to the west of the steps for the Packer Spout and 7.00m to the south of the northern retaining wall. This test pit measured 1.50 x 1.50m with a maximum depth of 1.18m (Plate 17). Six potential archaeological events were uncovered during the excavation of the test pit.

The earliest archaeological event encountered was layer 1207, a well-compacted black sandy silt layer that was at least 0.32m thick. Layer 1207 contained the occasional small semi-rounded stone and sherds of pottery. Sealing 1207 was a well-compacted and homogenous layer [1206] comprised of dark grey sands with frequent inclusions of slag, stone, small brick fragments, and pottery sherds; this layer was 0.13m thick. Layer 1206 was sealed by a compact layer of fine yellow sand with rare small sub-rounded stones; this layer was a maximum of 0.17m thick, which was in turn sealed by a heterogenous layer [1204] composed of dark grey silty sand with frequent inclusions of large ceramic building materials, brick fragments, glass, stoneware, porcelain, and pottery. This layer measured 0.31m thick.

Capping layer 1204 was another well-compacted sandy silt soil with rare small semi-rounded stones, measured to be 0.17m thick. This homogenous layer was sealed by a friable layer [1202] of crushed ceramic building materials, brick fragments and clay, measured to be 0.06m thick. The uppermost excavated layer was topsoil 1201, which was a well-compacted dark-grey sandy silt that measured 0.04m thick.



Plate 17: Test Pit 12 excavated fully

5.13 Test Pit 13

TP13 was located against the northern edge of the Packer Spout on its western extent. This test pit measured 1.42 x 0.64m and had a maximum depth of 0.60m (Plate 18). The earliest archaeological feature uncovered in the test pit was a brick wall [1301] (same as 2103 in TP2), which was formed of hand-made bricks that each measured 0.24 x 0.11 x 0.07m and were bonded with a sandy lime mortar in an English garden bond. The excavated portion of this north / south-aligned wall survived to a height of 0.28m and was 0.62m long by 0.30m wide. Wall 1301 was abutted to the east by wall 1302, which was similarly composed of hand-made bricks that each measured 0.25 x 0.10 x 0.07m and bonded with lime mortar. The excavated portion of the wall was 1.08m long by 0.20m wide and it survived to a height of 0.28m.

Abutting wall 1302 at the western end of its southern elevation was another wall [1303] composed of identical materials. The excavated portion of this wall was 0.71m long by 0.20m wide and it survived to a height of 0.28m. Its southern end was abutted by the vestiges of a fourth wall [1304], again composed of hand-made bricks bonded with lime-based mortar, but only survived to a height of 0.07m.

Whilst the physical relationship between the four walls discovered in the test pit demonstrated a sequence of seemingly separate construction events, the similarity of the material employed suggested that they were all of broadly the same date. The character of the component bricks and their bonding material was consistent with a construction date in the 18th to early 19th centuries, and may represent the remains of structures shown to the rear of Leyland House on the Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 1:1056 Town Plan of 1851. The walls were all sealed by a layer of demolition material [1305] that had a maximum depth of 0.60m.



Plate 18: Test Pit 13 excavated fully, showing the sequence of wall foundations excavated

6. Results: Community Excavation Areas

6.1 Area 1

Area 1 was located 2.00m west of the steps for Packer Spout and 1.10m to the south of the retaining wall delineating the north end of site. It measured 10.61 x 9.24m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 2.00m (Plate 19). It was placed across the northern part of the footprint of Charles Kershaw's 19th-century Central Corn Mill in an area that is shown on earlier mapping to have been formal gardens (Figures 4 and 5).

The substantial foundations for an L-shaped wall [2102] were located in the northern part of the excavation area, surviving east / west for a distance of 11.83m along the entire trench with a right angle at the western end to the north / south-aligned limb that was excavated for a distance of 1.17m but continued beyond the southern edge of the trench (Figure 11). Wall 2102 was composed of a combination of brick and stone that were bonded with a sandy lime mortar and survived to a height of 16 courses, including slightly offset foundation courses (Plate 20). It undoubtedly represented the northern wall of the corn mill (Figures 5 and 6).



Plate 19: The remains of the Central Corn Mill exposed in Area 1

The northern external wall of the mill [2102] was abutted at the eastern end of its internal elevation by wall 2103 (Plate 19). The wall was composed of hand-made bricks set in lime mortar and was 0.24m wide, almost certainly having formed a partition inside the corn mill. Further evidence for the internal layout of the corn mill was provided by structure 2104, which was located in the eastern part of the trench and comprised a series of five brick-built walls that together formed a rectangular chamber that survived to a height of 1.10m.



Plate 20: The foundations of the corn mill exposed in Area 1

A rectangular chamber [2106] uncovered in the southern part of Area 1 represented the remains of another internal feature of the Central Corn Mill (Figure 11). This feature measured 2.53m in length, 1.20m in width and around 1.10m in height. It comprised four walls of hand-made bricks set in lime-based mortar that had been keyed together, indicative of a single construction event of probable mid-19th-century date. The parallel east / west-aligned wall were 2.53m long and were connected by north / south-aligned walls that measured 1.20m in length. The base of chamber 2106 was lined by a floor of hand-made bricks [2105], which may potentially have represented part of a larger and earlier surface.

A surface of stone setts [2101] located against the northern edge of Area 1 abutted the north-facing, external, elevation of wall 2102 (Figure 11). It comprised rectangular stone setts that each measured 0.16m long, 0.08m wide and 0.08m thick, and one large flagstone at the eastern end. Surface 2101 was aligned east / west along much of the excavated trench, and almost certainly represented an external yard to the mill, situated between the building and the southern boundary wall to Town Hall Square. This surface and other structural remains of the Central Corn Mill were sealed by deposit 2200, a layer of rubble that was at least 1.6m deep. Layer 2200 probably represented material deriving from the demolition of the corn mill and the creation of Packer Spout Gardens in 1934.

6.2 Area 2

Area 2 was located 4.00m east of the steps for Packer Spout and 1.10m to the south of the retaining wall delineating the north end of site (Plate 21). It measured 13.00 x 4.65m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.20m, uncovering the remains of a building shown on mid-19th-century historic mapping to have been to the rear of the properties lining the Packer Street frontage and immediately to the east of the later Central Corn Mill (Figures 3-6).



Plate 21: The excavated remains exposed in Area 2, looking south

A brick-built structure [2201] composed of three walls was exposed towards the eastern end of the excavated area (Figure 12). The two parallel, north / south-aligned walls were each 2.08m long and were connected by a 0.85m-long wall at the southern end (Plate 22). The component walls comprised machine-pressed frogged bricks bonded with an ash-rich mortar. The location of these walls correspond broadly to the rear of properties fronting onto Packer Street, as shown on the Ordnance Survey Town Plan of 1851 (Figure 4)

The eastern wall of structure 2201 was abutted by an east / west-aligned wall [2209] that continued beyond the eastern edge of the excavated trench. Wall 2209 was composed of machine-pressed bricks and was just 0.25m wide. The northern side of this wall was abutted by the vestiges of a cobbled surface [2202] composed of squared stone setts that similarly continued beyond the eastern edge of the excavated trench (Figure 12). The excavated remains of two other walls [2205 and 2206] similarly appeared to be part of the same construction event, and all probably represented structural elements of the building the fronted onto Packer Street. A small spread of rectangular stone blocks [2207] was located at the north of the trench, abutting wall 2206. This surface was raised slightly above wall 2206, suggesting it may have been a later addition.



Plate 22: Structure 2201 looking north, 1m scale

Structure 2201 was flanked to the west and east by the remnants of floor surfaces [2203 and 2208]. Surface 2208 was composed largely of flagstones with two discrete patches of squared stone setts (Plates 22 and 23). It was excavated for a distance of 2.53m but continued beyond the southern edge of the excavated trench. The surface was not removed during the course of the community excavation and there is still some potential for earlier remains to survive at a lower depth beneath the flagstones and stone setts. Surface 2203 was composed of brick.

Another surface [2217] uncovered at the western end of the trench was composed of a mixture of hand-made and machine-pressed bricks. The component bricks were bonded with ash-rich mortar that was indicative of a late 19th-century construction date. The surface was not removed during the course of the excavation, and there is considerable potential for remains deriving from earlier period to survive beneath.

The eastern edge of surface 2217 was bounded by the foundation course for a north / south-aligned wall [2216]. This was again constructed of machine-pressed bricks bonded with ash-rich mortar, indicative of a later 19th-century construction date. It seems probable that wall 2216 had formed the north-eastern end of the corn mill (Figures 5 and 6).

Situated immediately to the east of wall 2216 were the remains of another surface [2213], although this was composed of squared stone setts and flagstones (same as 0500 and 0501 in TP4). Surface 2213 covered most of the western half of Area 2, extending beyond the area of excavation into the north, south and west edges of the trench. It was exposed to a maximum distance of 4.74m, but was not removed during the course of the community excavation. Seemingly associated with surface 2203 in the southern part of Area 2 was a spread [2214] of irregularly shaped, angular, grey stones (possibly a large flagstone that has been broken up during demolition or excavation).



Plate 23: Surface 2208, looking north, 1m scale



Plate 24: Surface 2203, concrete 2210 and wall 2209 looking east, 1.00m scale

Set on top of surfaces 2203 and 2208 was 2210, a thin layer of poured concrete located at the eastern end of Area 2 (Plate 24). It was cut at its south-eastern end by a modern pipe that was aligned south-west / north-east. Sealing the whole of Area 2 was a demolition layer [2200] that was at least 0.40m thick.

6.3 Area 3

Area 3 was located on the Broadfield Park Slopes between Packer Spout and the bottom of the Church Steps (Figure 2). The earliest phase of archaeological activity was represented by a very compact layer of fine-grained dark yellow sand [2303] (same as 0600 in TP6). This layer had rare small semi-rounded and semi-angular stones, measured to be at least 0.48m thick. Set into this sand layer was brick and stone structure 2304 and 2305 (same as 0601 in TP6) in the north-eastern corner of Area 3 (Figure 13). The stone was a possible Yorkstone, laid flat within the brickwork, measured at least 0.72m long by 0.18m wide. The hand-made bricks each measured 0.22 x 0.11 x 0.07m, bonded by a white lime-based mortar to form a two-course rectangle with no recognisable pattern. The fabric of this feature was consistent with a construction date in the late 18th or early 19th century, but could potentially be somewhat earlier.

This earlier structure was abutted by a north-east / south-west-aligned brick wall [2303] (same as 0602 in TP6) that abutted feature 2305 / 2304 / 0601 at a 45-degree angle. The bricks in 2303 / 0602 were hand-made and each measured 0.22 x 0.11 x 0.07m, laid mostly as runners and bonded by a white lime-based mortar. Wall 2303 was four-courses high, measured 0.89m long by 0.35m wide and 0.38m high. Sealing these brick structures [2305 / 2304 / 0601 and 2303 / 0602] was a sandy silt fill [0603] with occasional inclusions of large brick fragments, broken glass, and occasional semi-angular stones. This fill was 0.37m thick.



Plate 25: Aerial view of Area 3 excavated fully, looking west

Located in the western third of the trench were rounded cobbles 2301 (same as 0200 in TP2). This cobbled surface was at least 3.45m long by 1.30m wide and was comprised of sub-rounded grey stones that ranged in size between 0.10 x 0.07m and 0.20 x 0.09m (Plate 25).

A spread of stone setts [2302] exposed in the centre of the trench overlaid the rounded cobbles 2301 / 0200 at their interface, seemingly representing a later addition (Plate 27). Stone setts 2302 were 0.20m by 0.11m and 0.06m thick and covered an area of at least 3.55m long by 1.19m wide (Figure 13). Overlapping both cobbled surfaces was a tarmac surface [2306] that was capped by a layer of dark grey sandy silt topsoil that was 0.25m thick.



Plate 26: South-facing view across cobbled surface 2301 / 0200



Plate 27: South-facing view across stone setts 2302

6.4 Area 4

Area 4 was located 2.00m to the west of the top of Packer Spout connecting TP3 and TP7 (Figure 2). The trench measured 8.00m long by 3.38m wide with a maximum depth of 0.78m (Figure 14). Due to an abundance of surface water in this area during the community excavation, however, work on Area 4 was halted due to health and safety concerns.

The earliest archaeological feature excavated in Area 4 was an L-shaped structure [2401] comprised of hand-made bricks bonded with ash-rich mortar in an English garden wall pattern, consistent with a late 19th-century construction date. The wall formed the southern edge of the excavated trench (Plate 28). The exposed portion of this wall continued for a distance of 5.11m on an east / west alignment, with its north elevation exposed in the trench, and then turned 90 degrees to extend 0.75m north / south. Wall 2401 was 0.29m wide and it was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.65m.

Abutting wall 2401 to the east was a layer of light grey clay [0300] of an undetermined thickness, encountered at 0.72m below the modern ground-level. Set onto clay 0300 was an east / west-aligned wall [2403] (same as 0301, TP3), which was 0.40m wide and comprised a combination of hand-made bricks, frogged bricks and refractory bricks of various sizes. These were mortared together by a black-ash mortar and laid in an unrecognisable pattern. Wall 2403 / 0301 extended beyond the edge of the excavated trench (Figure 14). The fabric of these walls suggested that they were associated with the Central Corn Mill but they lay a short distance to the south of the mill footprint shown on historic mapping (Figures 5 and 6).



Plate 28: View across Area 4 looking south-west

Sealing wall 2403 / 0301 was layer 0302, which comprised sandy silt with frequent semi-rounded stones, fragments of broken glass and brick, and had a depth of 0.61m. Set within layer 0302 were two ceramic drains [0303 and 0304]. Drain 0303 was 0.74m long with a diameter of 0.13m, whilst drain 0304 was 0.58m long with a diameter of 0.13m and a connector with a diameter of 0.24m (Plate 29).

A layer of light grey clay [0703] of an undetermined thickness at the eastern end of Area 4 was encountered at a depth of 0.78m below contemporary ground level. Built upon layer 0703 was a box drain system [2402] (same as 0702 in TP7). This box drain was formed by two drains (running east to west, for 0.88m, the north to south, for 0.77m) which met at a right angle at the western edge of the trench (Figure 14). The fabric of the drain structures comprised hand-made bricks with square slate tiles at the base and top (Plate 30).

This box drain system [2402/0702] was sealed by layer 0701, which comprised sandy silty with frequent inclusions of poorly sorted brick fragments, semi-angular-stone, glass and mortar, which varied in size between small to large and probably represented 20th-century demolition. This layer was 0.68m thick. This demolition layer was capped by a layer of mid-grey topsoil [0700], which comprised sandy silt, with live rooting and occasional small semi-angular stone. Topsoil 0700 was 0.10m thick.



Plate 29: Drains 0303 and 0304, looking north



Plate 30: West-facing view of box drain 2402

6.5 The Finds

A large assemblage of finds were recovered from the four excavation trenches. This assemblage was dominated by fragments of pottery, together with lesser quantities of clay tobacco pipes, metalwork, ceramic building materials, glass, animal bone and marine molluscs. A brief assessment of each class of artefact is provided in the following sections. The aim of the finds' assessment was to evaluate all classes of archaeological material from the excavation to assess their research potential and significance.

Finds were collected using a 100% collection policy when recovered. All finds were washed on site, except organic material and metal, which were dry brushed, and grouped by material for assessment.

The Pottery

The pottery assemblage was scanned to identify the major ware types and forms present. The fragments were generally in good condition and undoubtedly reflect the disposal of domestic material.

The earliest pottery in the assemblage comprised fragments of Blackware pedestal cups (Plate 31) and multi-handled tygs. Blackwares, also referred to as dark-glazed finewares, were a development of late medieval Cistercian-type tradition, and the excavated sherds may be ascribed a date range spanning the late 16th and early / mid-17th centuries. A few sherds of Midland Purple-type wares were also recovered from the excavation and may similarly date to as early as the 16th century although an early / mid-17th-century date is perhaps more likely (Plate 32).

Decorated slipwares that included sherds of Staffordshire slipwares and slip-trailed hollow wares dating from the later 17th to early 18th century were also present (Plate 33). Similar material was recovered from the community excavation of Town Hall Square in 2021, but a larger range and increased quantity of material was discovered in the 2023 excavation.

The pottery assemblage was dominated by later material, however, including dark-glazed coarse earthenware, stoneware, and refined white earthenware, the latter often with transfer printed decoration, with a date range spanning the later 18th and 19th centuries.

Dark-glazed coarse earthenware formed a large part of the pottery assemblage, as may have been anticipated as such wares generally form a large proportion of urban assemblages in the North West region. Recognisable forms included small and large storage jars and pancheons. Precise dating of this material is difficult as these typically utilitarian forms change little over time, although the even and thickly applied glaze noted on many sherds does suggest a broad 19th-century date for manufacture.

Stoneware was also represented primarily by storage vessels, particularly large jars and bottles, including examples used by local brewers (Plate 34). Most of the stoneware likely dates from the late 18th century and into the period 1860-70. Both table wares and coarse wares are evident within the assemblage, with the majority belonging to the latter forms.

In contrast, the refined white earthenware consists for the most part of fine or table wares. These are typified by plates and cup forms, with a few more utilitarian forms such as jars. White slip-coated ware and unglazed red earthenware was also present in the pottery assemblage, together with smaller quantities of industrial slipwares (Plate 35), a highly decorated pottery type that gained in popularity as the 19th century progressed, and favoured by inns and taverns (Barker 1993; Rickard 2006). Fragments of mottled ware were also present in the assemblage. These popular wares were produced during the first half of the 18th century with known production centres in south-west Lancashire (Philpot 2015,147).

Other minor ware types within the assemblage included 19th-century brown glazed earthenware, typically represented by teapots.

The assemblage has some potential to make a contribution towards a greater understanding of later 18th- and 19th-century ceramic traditions in Greater Manchester. As such, the assemblage is considered to have some research potential.



Plate 31: Fragments of Blackware cups



Plate 32: Midland Purple-type vessel



Plate 33: Fragments of Stafford slipware and trailed slipware from TP 1



Plate 34: Fragments of a local stoneware bottle recovered from layer 0302



Plate 35: Fragments of industrial slipware vessels recovered from layer 0302

The Clay Tobacco Pipes

The assemblage of clay tobacco pipes recovered from the excavation comprised fragments of stems and bowls, although most of these were small. None of the fragments were decorated or had makers' marks although the size and form of the bowls suggested a broad date range spanning the late 17th to later 19th centuries (Plates 36 and 37).



Plate 36: Fragments of clay tobacco pipes recovered from TP 1



Plate 37: Fragments of clay tobacco pipes recovered from Area 1

Other Material Categories

The other finds' categories included ceramic building materials, glass, metalwork, animal bones and occasional marine mollusc shells.

A small assemblage of ceramic building material comprised fragments of brick and tile, together with sherds of salt-glazed drainage pipes. These items are difficult to date with precision, although are probably 19th century.

The vessel glass represented in the assemblage comprises green and blue glass bottles with a date range spanning the later 18th and 19th centuries, together with embossed bottles of types that came into general use in the 1840s and screw-top opening of the later 19th century.

The group of metal objects for the most part comprised either iron nails or were unidentified due to corrosion deposits.

The few marine mollusc shells were all oysters, which were a common source of food in the 19th century, especially amongst the poorer sectors of society (Dickens 1836-7). The advent of the railways enabled oysters to be transported cheaply to inland industrial towns; Henry Mayhew in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851-51) reported that 500 million oysters passed through London's Billingsgate Market during this period (Stott 2004).

In summary, the other materials categories did not yield any artefacts that warrant further examination.

7. Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The community excavation carried out in the summer of 2023 has provided an invaluable opportunity to evaluate the archaeological potential of the Broadfield Park Slopes, and has made a significant contribution to the dataset generated from the previous community excavation on Town Hall Square in 2021. It has provided fascinating evidence for the former Central Corn Mill that dominated views towards the Slopes from the late 19th century, together with physical remains deriving from buildings that lined the southern end of Packer Street in the 18th century. The latter included the stone surfaces uncovered in Area 3, and potentially those in Area 2. In both cases, however, there was insufficient time during the three-week community excavation to excavate beneath these surfaces, which were all left *in-situ*. There is still considerable potential for earlier archaeological layers to survive intact beneath these stone surfaces, the investigation of which should be a key objective for future investigation. Any such layers could feasibly contain evidence for medieval activity on the Slopes, and are very likely to retain debris from post-medieval occupation of the area when Packer Street was considered to be the commercial heart of the town. In particular, the area between and including Packer Spout and the Church Steps would seem to have the greatest potential for further investigation, as indicated by the green shading on Plate 38.



Plate 38: Area of highest archaeological potential denoted by green shading superimposed on an aerial photograph of the excavation area

7.2 Phasing

The archaeological remains revealed in the four excavation areas represent broad but distinct phases in human activity in this historic part of Rochdale town centre. Whilst the earliest of these phases that was evidenced by physical remains dates to the late 17th / early 18th centuries, it should be stressed that the natural geology was not exposed in any of the four areas excavated, raising the potential for earlier archaeological layers to survive intact at a lower depth. The absence of medieval and early post-medieval phases in the stratigraphic narrative from the community excavation does not by any means imply that there was no human activity during these key periods in the development of Rochdale, but rather that the earliest archaeological layers were not investigated during the community excavation. Additionally, it remains possible that the flagstone boundary wall between the churchyard to St Chad and the top of the Slopes is medieval in origin, and this possibility has yet to be investigated fully.

Phase 1: Late 17th / Early 18th Centuries

Human occupation of the site during the later post-medieval period is testified by the recovery of the interesting assemblage of pottery fragments dating to the 17th and early 18th centuries. This likely derived from domestic properties along the Packer Street frontage, including what became known as Leyland Chambers. It is also possible that some of the floor surfaces uncovered in Area 2 and Area 3 may have derived from this initial phase, although confirmation awaits further investigation.

The importance of Packer Street in relation to the early trade and industry of Rochdale has been outlined above. In its heyday, the street had a respectable reputation and was the commercial hub of the town at the start of the 17th century, although little is known about the precise character of the built environment and status of the residents, although the pottery assemblage recovered from the community excavation implies an element of affluence. Further archaeological investigation is likely to add more physical evidence and provide a better insight into life in the area during the 17th and early 18th centuries. Further investigation may also enable a date to be ascribed to a building that first occupied the site of Leyland Chambers.

Phase 2: Later 18th / Early to mid-19th Centuries

Activity from the later 18th to the early / mid-19th century is represented by elements of the finds' assemblage, together with the vestiges of buildings and external cobbled surfaces. The installation of the water-management across the Slopes was also an important addition to the Slopes during this period. This system is not understood or mapped completely and warrants further investigation.

Phase 3: Later 19th Century

This phase commences with the documented redevelopment of the area from the mid-1860s to enable the construction of the Town Hall and associated Town Hall Square, which necessitated the demolition of properties along the eastern side of Packer Street and landscaping work on the Slopes to create Broadfield Park. Some of the demolition material uncovered in Area 2 could potentially have been deposited during this period.

The later 19th century was perhaps best represented in the archaeological record, however, by the substantial foundations of Charles Kershaw's Central Corn Mill (Plate 39). The precise date that the corn mill was built remains uncertain although its architecture is typical of the 1870s and 1880s, and its footprint appears on the Ordnance Survey Town Plan of 1892. The construction of this large building evidently necessitated some terracing on the Slopes to provide a level foundation platform. This engineering project may have necessitated the construction of wall 2401 in Area 4, the position of which does not correspond to the footprint of the corn mill shown on historic mapping (Figures 5 and 6) but was built of the same materials as those used in wall 2102 (Area 1), which almost certainly represented the foundations for the north wall of the corn mill (Plate 40). It was not possible to excavate the remains in Area 4 much beyond their upper level due to the volume of groundwater that inundated the trench, thereby precluding a full examination of wall 2401.

The evidence from the excavation also suggested that some of the material excavated from the slopes may have been used to level the ground to the north as it fell towards the River Roch (Plate 40). The excavation also demonstrated some potential for archaeological remains to survive beneath the northern part of the building's footprint, following the fall of the natural ground level towards the River Roch.



Plate 39: Central Corn Mill, Rochdale, with Leyland's Chambers and St Chads behind. Photograph taken after the creation of Town Hall Square in the foreground



Plate 40: Excavation beneath the foundations of the Central Corn Mill in the northern part of Area 1

Phase 4: 20th Century

This late phase of activity was represented by demolition material deriving from the clearance of the Central Corn Mill and the creation of the Packer Spout Gardens in 1934, together with various improvements to the spring water-management and drainage system. It was during this period that the current steps and hard surfacing around Packer Spout was introduced. It seems most likely that archaeological levels will survive intact beneath the steps and hard surfacing that encompasses the water feature. Any such remains could potentially throw fresh light onto the Georgian water-management system and also an understanding of activity on the Slopes during the later medieval and post-medieval periods.

7.3 Community Engagement

The 2023 project on the Slopes highlighted the importance of community heritage projects as a tool for engagement and education. A thorough evaluation of the community engagement secured through the archaeology activities is presented in a separate report prepared by Minerva Heritage Ltd. In summary, however, the project directly engaged nearly 1000 people. Approximately half of the people who took part in the Big Dig 2.0 were under 20 years old, totalling nearly 450 children who participated in the excavation. These included approximately 160 pupils from Broadfield Community Primary School and Hamer Community Primary School who participated in the excavation. The feedback received from all of the participating groups and individuals was overwhelmingly positive, and nearly all the children who participated expressed an interest in attending another similar event. Similarly, the feedback received from the teachers, group leaders, and family members helped to emphasize the lack of similar heritage focused community events within Rochdale or Greater Manchester.

The volunteer trainee programme was designed for local people to work alongside professional archaeologists on a planned programme of training, with the aim of assisting the trainees in their career pathways and possible future employment in the heritage sector. Five trainees were recruited from the local community, and these were from a wider age range than envisaged.

All five of the trainees completed the programme successfully and progressed to accept short-term contracts of employment with the University of Salford to supervise the community excavation on the Broadfield Park Slopes in conjunction with GMAAS. Each of the trainees reported that their confidence and ability to demonstrate workplace skills, as well as archaeology skills, had received enormous, life-changing in some cases, boosts from the training programme. The trainees also reported significant changes to their sense of wellbeing in a variety of ways that they did not expect. It was therefore evident that the archaeology engagement activity returned very positive outcomes in terms of developing people's skills and affording people a sense of greater wellbeing.

The community excavation elicited considerable interest from the local and regional community and featured in numerous media reports, helping to raise the profile of the project. A selection of these can be viewed via the website links listed in the Sources section.

8. *Archive and Dissemination*

8.1 *Archive*

The archive is currently held by the Greater Manchester Archaeology Advisory Service (GMAAS). The digital archive consists of digital survey drawings, digital photographs, and other electronic data. As part of the archiving process, the on-line OASIS (Online Access to Index of Archaeological Investigations) has been completed. All archiving will be carried out to the standards set out in the Code of Conduct of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2014a and 2014b).

8.2 *Dissemination*

The results obtained from the community led excavation are presented in this report, a copy of which will be deposited with the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record and a further copy deposited with Touchstones Rochdale, where they will be available to the public. In addition, an overview of the project, including the community led excavation across Town Hall Square in 2021, is set out in a volume of the *Greater Manchester's Past Revealed* series of illustrated booklets that is dedicated to the history and archaeology of Rochdale; this booklet is scheduled for final production in November 2023.

9. Conclusion

9.1 Significance

The community led archaeological investigation of the Broadfield Park Slopes in 2023 has provided a valuable opportunity to assess the archaeological potential of a key area of historic Rochdale. The most prominent remains uncovered in the excavated trenches dated to the later 19th century and may be regarded as being of local importance. However, the excavation also indicated that archaeological remains pre-dating the 18th century are likely to survive relatively undisturbed across the site, especially in the area between Packer Spout and the Church Steps. Any physical evidence for human activity on the Slopes during the later medieval and post-medieval periods would potentially be of regional importance, given the paucity of archaeological evidence for these periods in urban centres across the county.

9.2 Further Work

The Broadfield Park Slopes certainly warrants further archaeological investigation. This should aim in particular to furnish evidence for human activity in the locale from the medieval and post-medieval periods. Further excavation could be usefully targeted, for instance, on the areas beneath the stone surfaces exposed in Areas 2 and 3, as these surfaces may well have been laid across earlier layers of archaeological interest. Similarly, the existing Packer Spout and the Church Steps may also overlie earlier remains, whilst the boundary wall between the top of the Slopes and the parish church of St Chad warrants further investigation to elucidate its original construction date.

An important feature of the Broadfield Park Slopes that also warrants some further archaeological investigation is the Georgian water-management system, the details of which are incompletely understood.

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The report was compiled by Ian Miller and Colin Elder and the drawings were produced by Richard Ker and Sarah Mottershead.

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Appendix 1: Figures

- Figure 1: Site location
- Figure 2: Trench and test pit locations superimposed onto modern mapping
- Figure 3: Excavation areas superimposed on the Castleton tithe plan of 1844
- Figure 4: Excavation areas superimposed on the Ordnance Survey Town Plan of 1851
- Figure 5: Excavation areas superimposed on the Ordnance Survey Town Plan of 1890
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- Figure 10: Plan of Test Pit 5
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- Figure 12: Plan of Area 2
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- Figure 14: Plan of Area 4



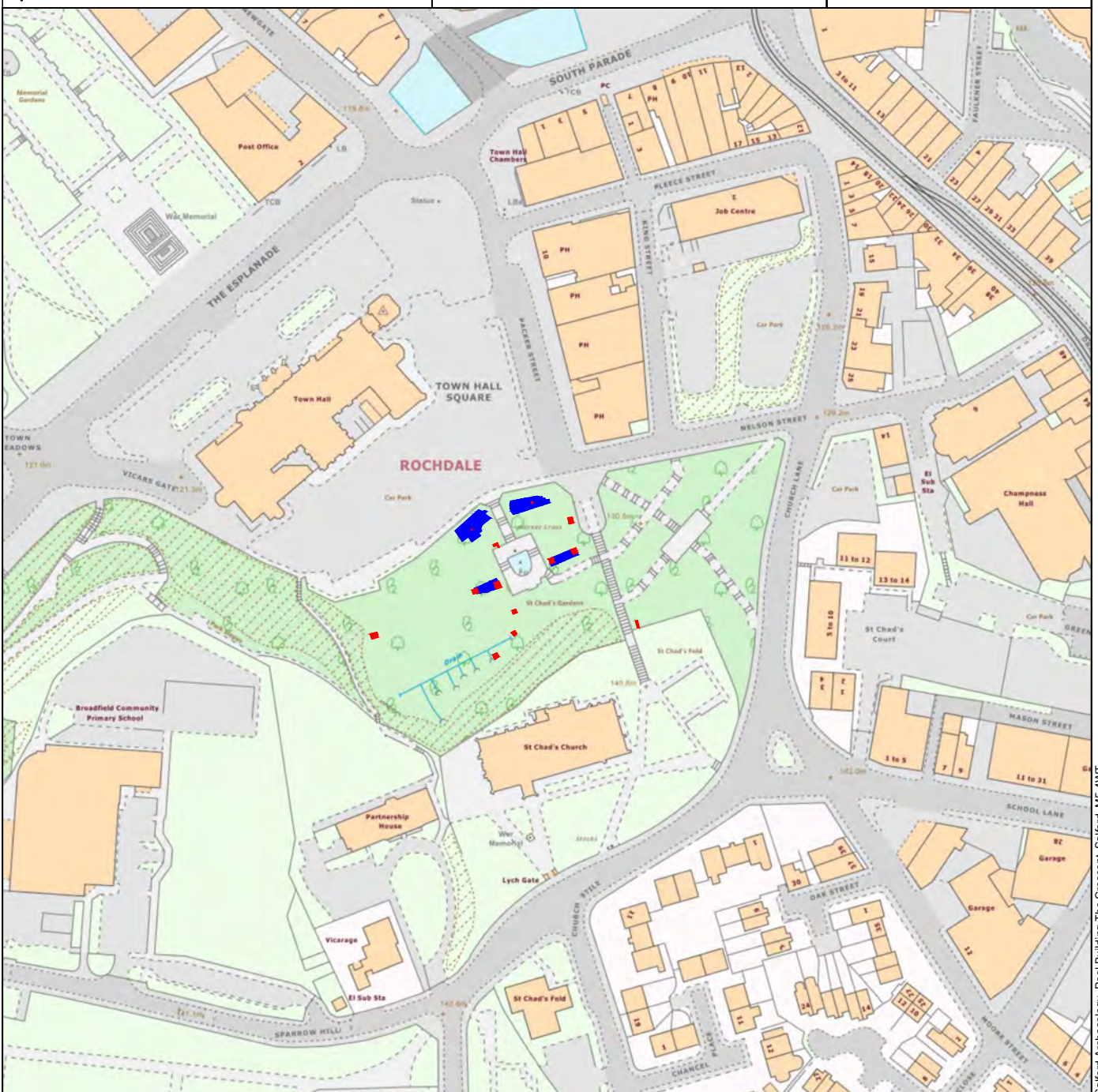
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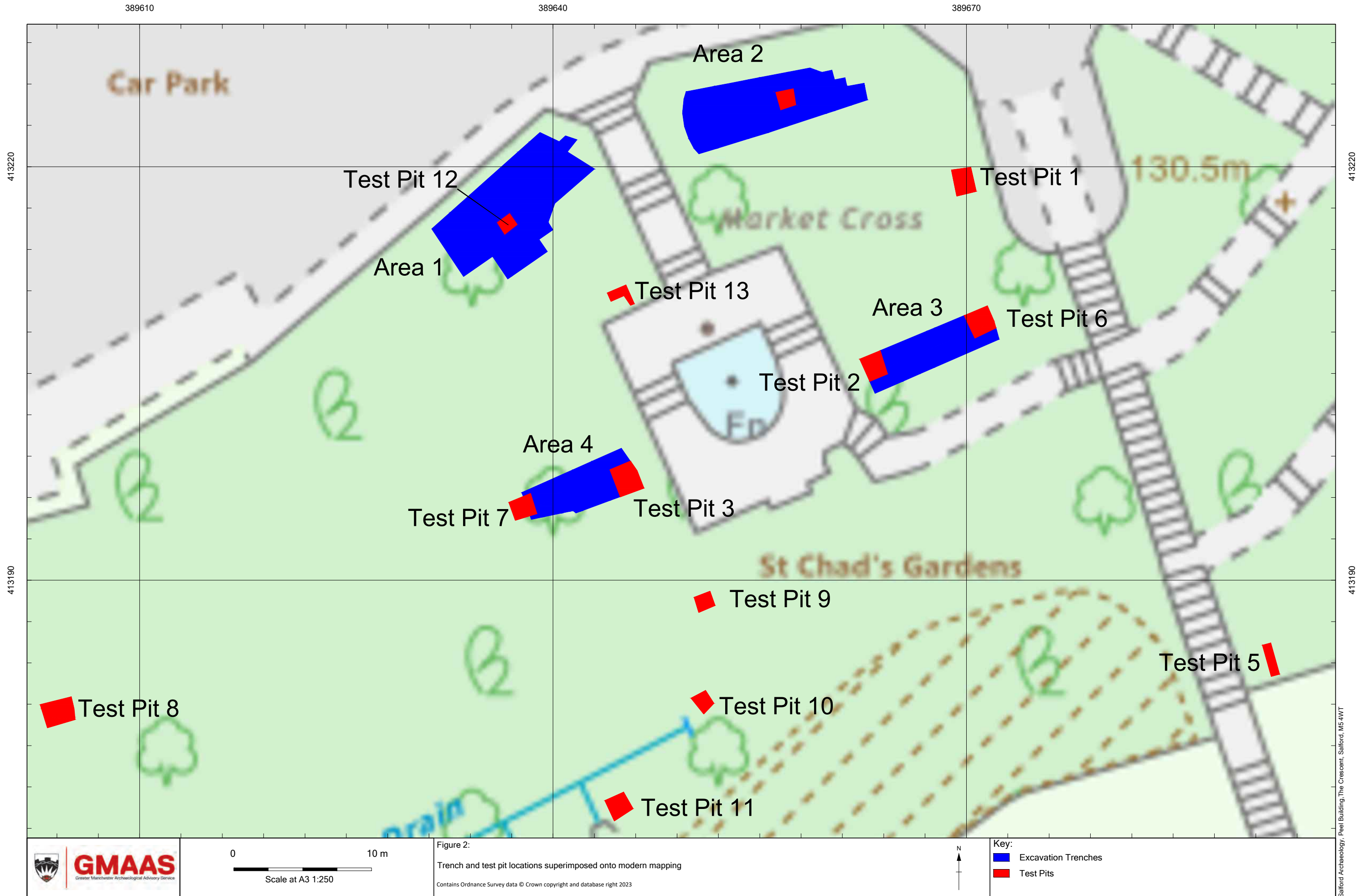
Site location

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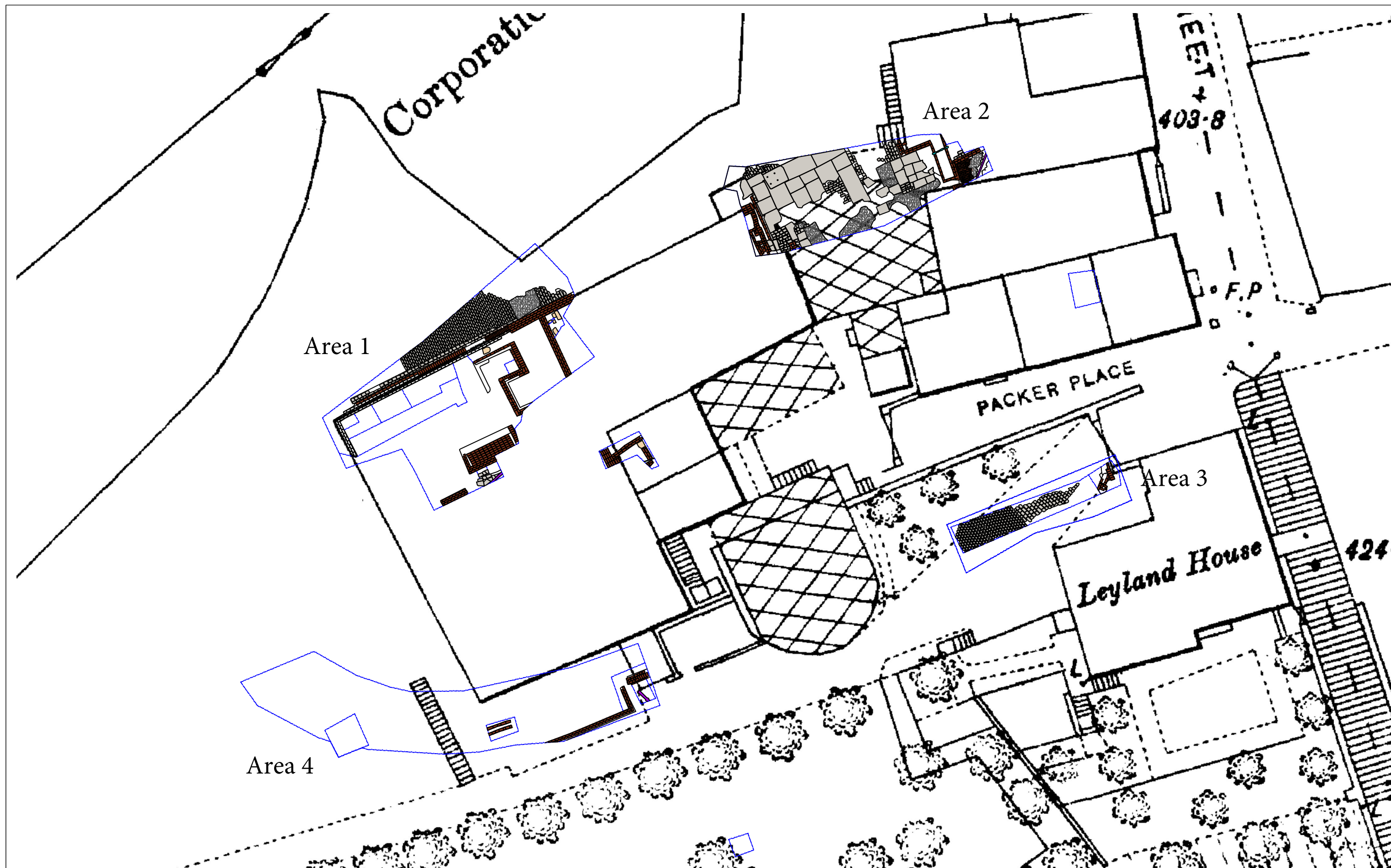

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0  10 m
 Scale at A3 1:200

Rochdale Big Dig 2.0 Figure 4
 Excavation areas superimposed on the Ordnance Survey Town Plan of 1851


 N

Key:
 Trench / Test pit
 Brick
 Flag / Sett
 Stone
 Metal
 Ceramic drain
 Concrete





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0 10 m
Scale at A3 1:200

Rochdale Big Dig 2.0 Figure 6

Excavation areas superimposed on the revised county Ordnance Survey plan of 1928, revised 1930



Key:

Trench / Test pit
 Brick
 Flag / Sett

Stone
 Metal
 Ceramic drain

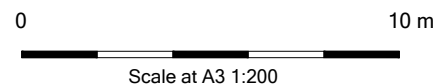
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Rochdale Big Dig 2.0 Figure 7

Excavation areas superimposed on the Ordnance Survey plan of 1959

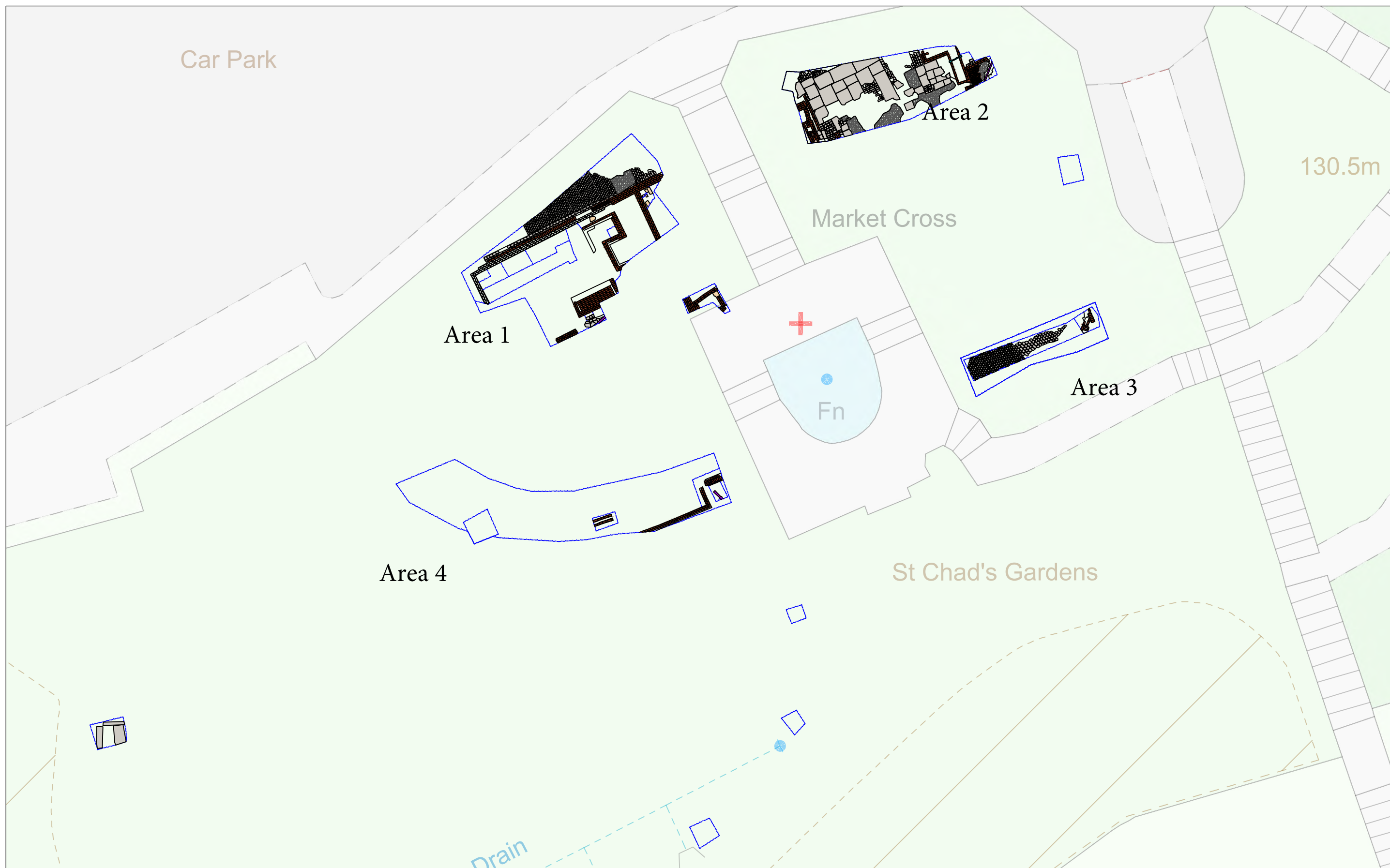


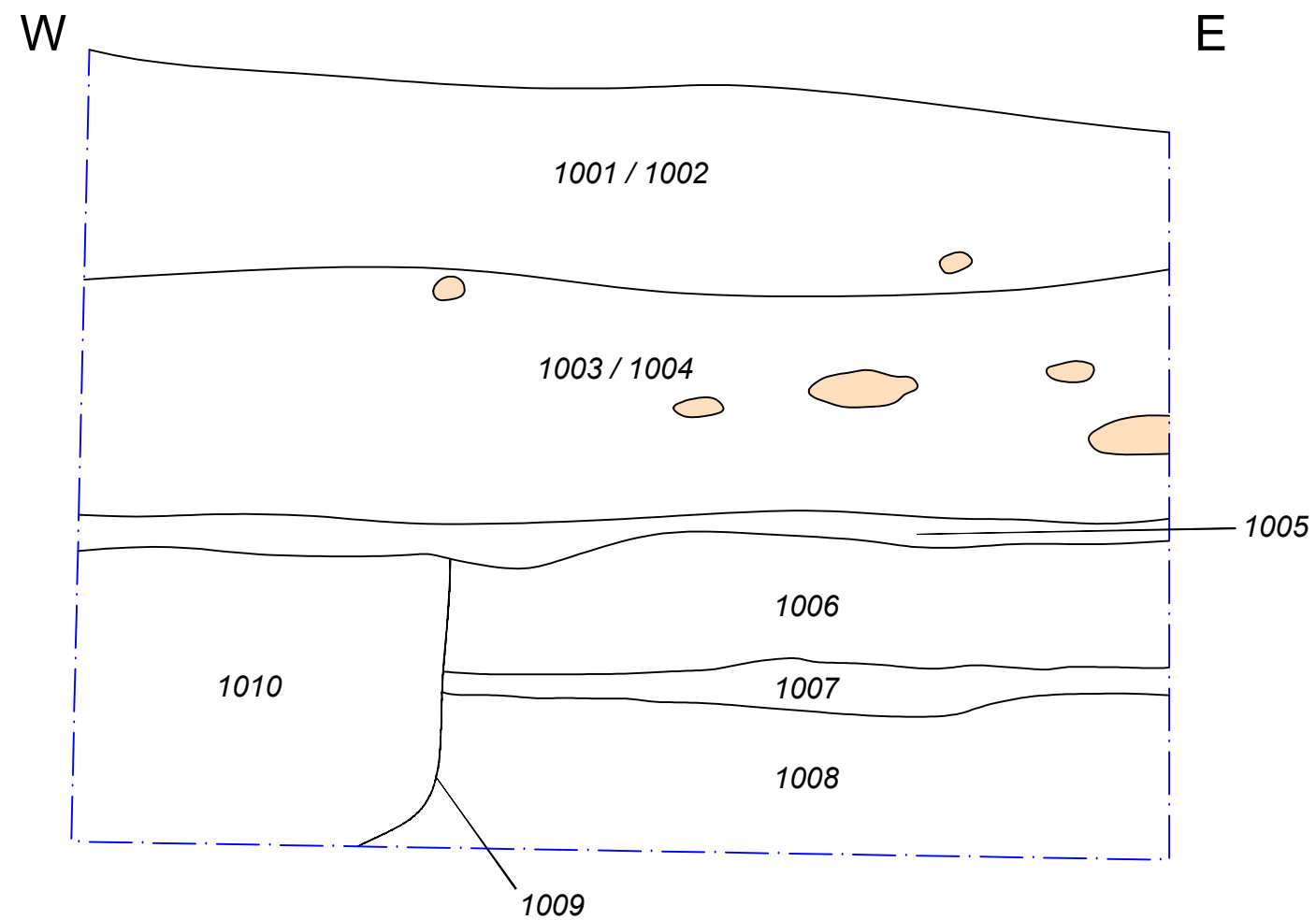
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- Brick
- Flag / Sett

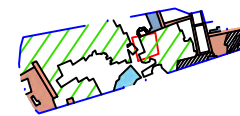
- Stone
- Metal
- Ceramic drain

- Concrete

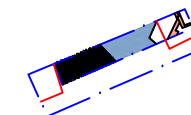




Area 2



TP1
Section



Area 3



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0 500 mm
Scale at A3 1:10

Figure 9:
South-facing section of Test Pit 1



Key:
Sand
Limit of Excavation

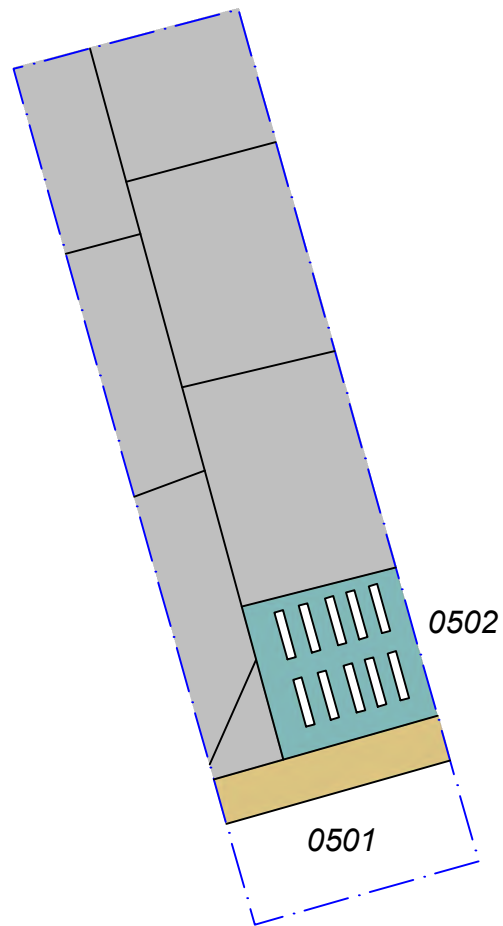


Figure 10:

Plan of Test Pit 5



Key:

- Stone Drain
- Brick Drain
- Metal Grid
- Limit of Excavation



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0 1 m
Scale at A4 1:20

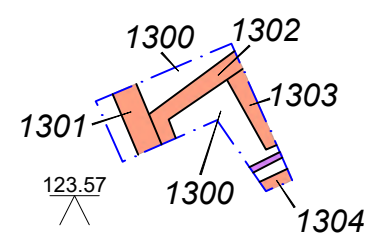
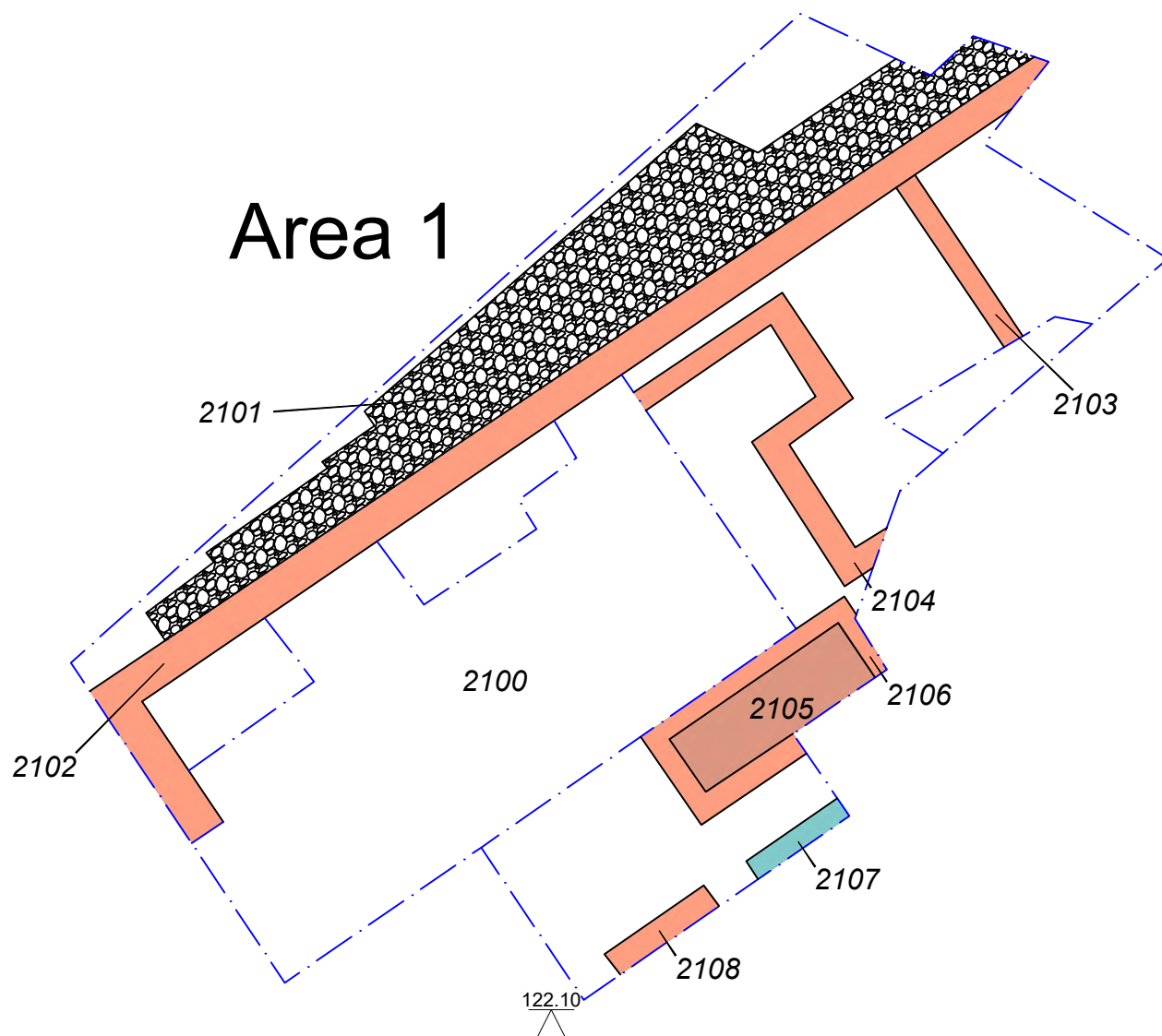
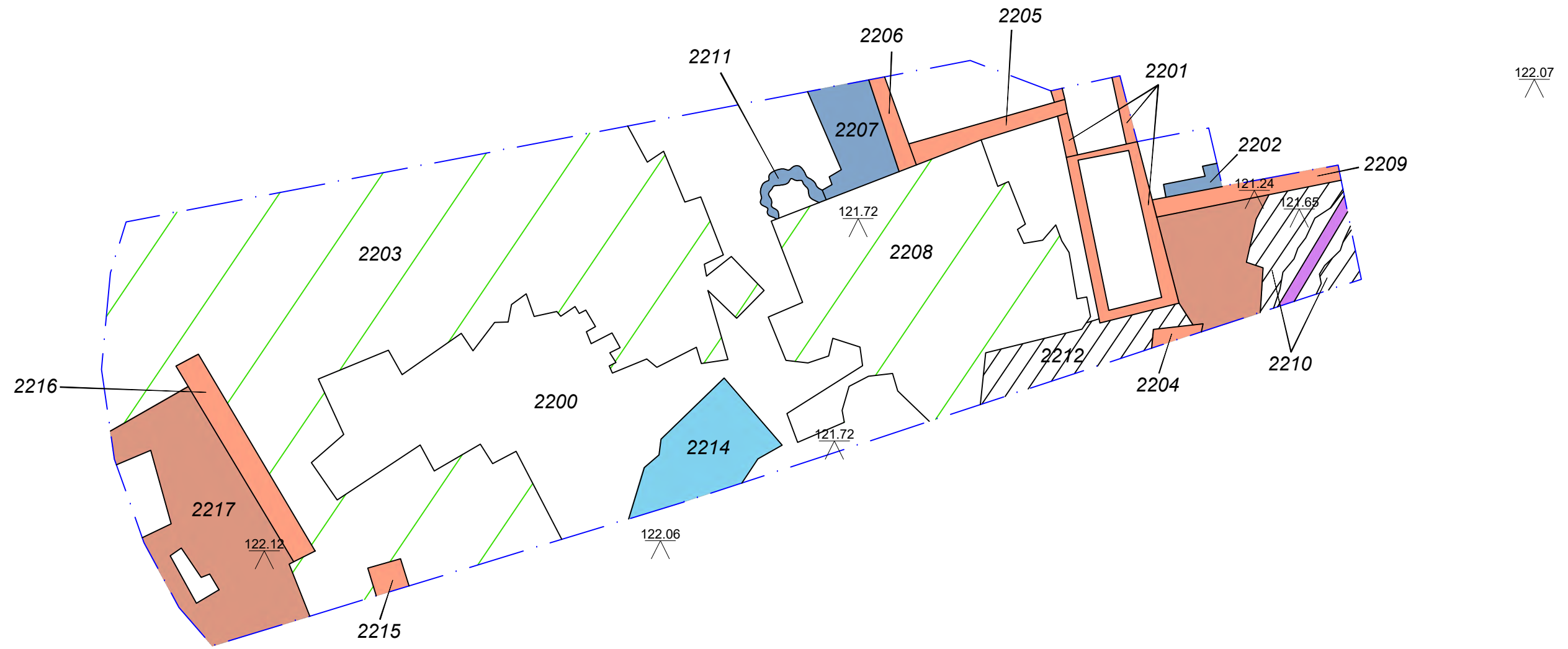
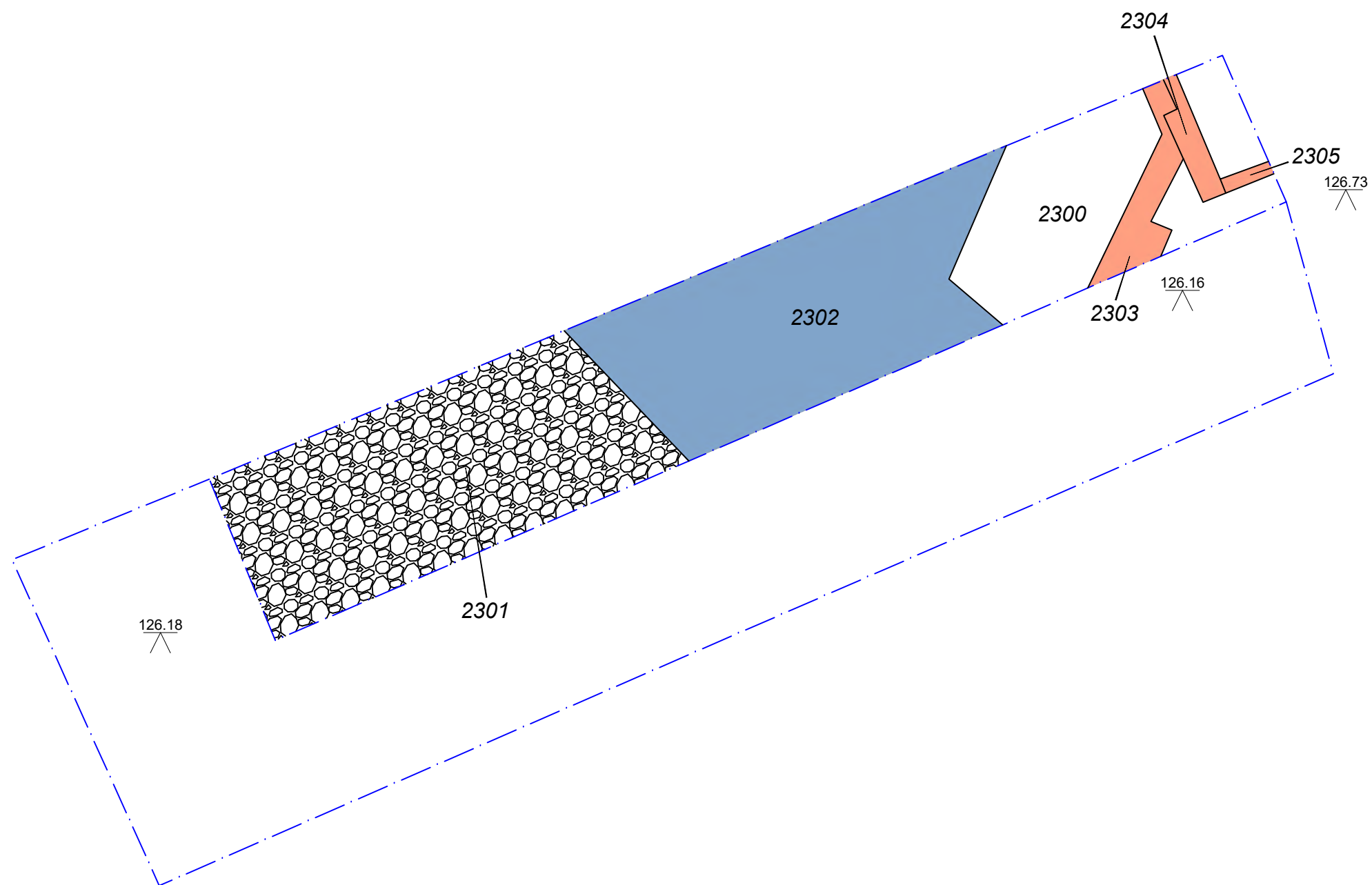


Figure 11:
Plan of Area 1 and Test Pit 13





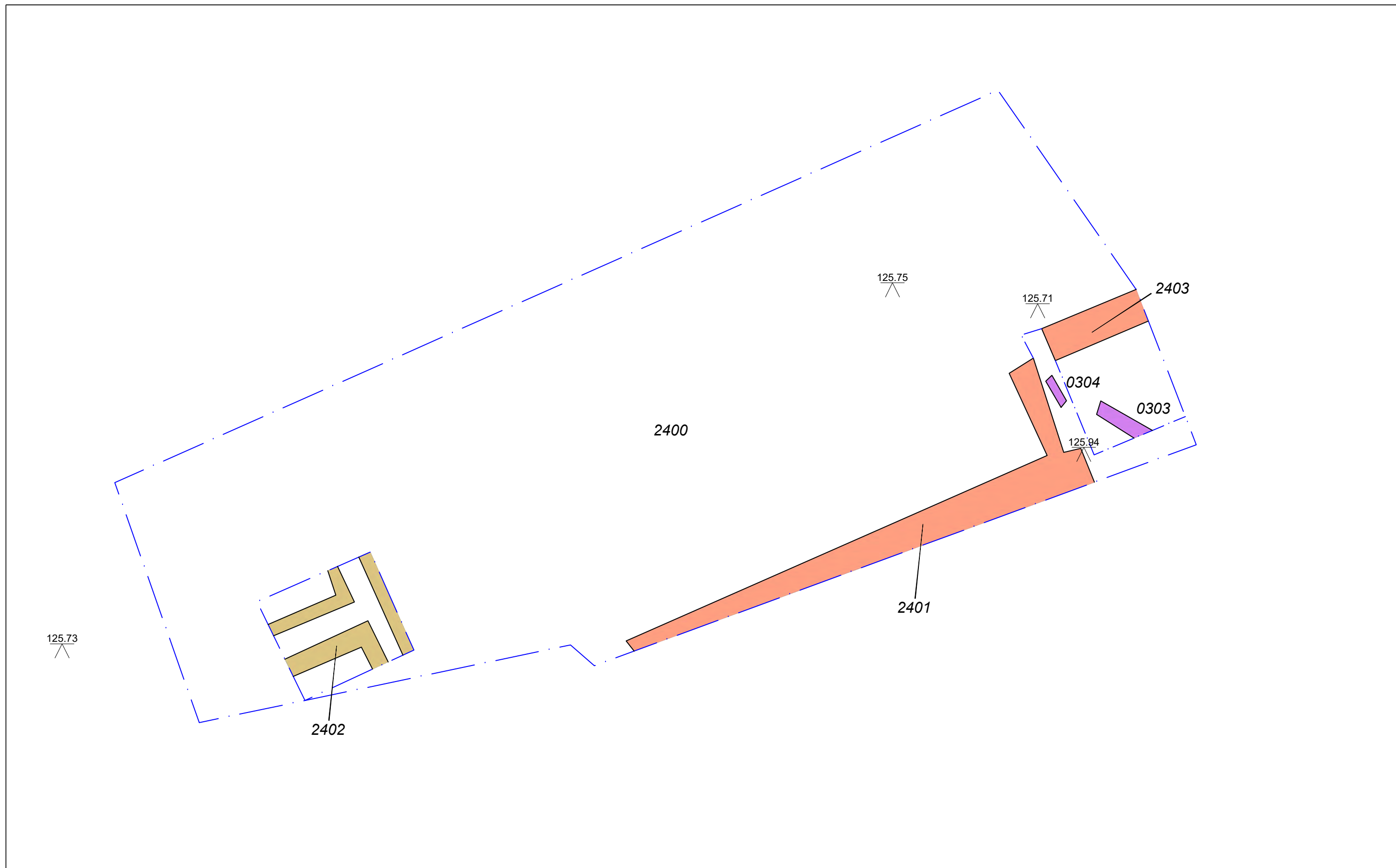


Figure 14:
Plan of Area 4