

Archaeological Evaluation,

New High School, Matthews Lane, Gorton, Manchester

Client: Laing O'Rourke

Technical Report: Sarah Cattell

Report No: SA/2017/17





Site Location:	Land adjacent to Matthews Lane (Nutsford Vale), Gorton, Manchester, Greater Manchester.		
NGR:	(Centred SJ 877947)		
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In February 2017, Salford Archaeology was commissioned by Laing O'Rourke to undertake an archaeological evaluation on land located adjacent to Matthews Lane, Gorton, Manchester (centred on NGR SJ 87861 95024). The Site Area comprises an open space heath land currently undeveloped within the Gorton area of Manchester.

The assessment aimed to identify, as far as possible, the nature, extent and significance of the archaeological resource, so as to enable informed recommendations to be made for the future treatment of any surviving remains. Trenches were located to investigate the remains of the late 19th century Yew Tree Farm and the possibility of remains associated with Nico Ditch.

Trench 1 was excavated over the site of the farmhouse and was able to uncover limited evidence of structures. Trench 2 was located to investigate the southern farm outbuildings and possible deposits associated with Nico Ditch and uncovered remains of features relating to the farm only. A third was excavated over the site of the main barn but was abandoned due to the removal of archaeological deposits by later landfill.

The evaluation was able to confirm that evidence of 19th century structures remains within 15m of the present site boundary but that all other deposits outside this area were removed by later landfill activity. Nevertheless those areas to have escaped the excavation of the clay pit do retain moderately well preserved evidence of earlier occupation.



1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Centre for Applied Archaeology (CfAA) was commissioned by Laing O'Rourke to undertake an archaeological evaluation on land situated on the northern side of Matthews Lane, Gorton, Manchester Greater Manchester (centred SJ877947).

The purpose of the evaluation was to identify as far as possible the nature, extent and significance of the archaeological resource so as to enable informed recommendations to be made for the future treatment of any surviving remains and the impact of any development works.

1.2 Location, Topography & Current Land Use

The site is located approximately 5km to the southeast of Manchester City Centre and is currently set within an area of open heathland known as Nutsford Vale (**Figure 1**). The excavation site lies in the south-western corner of Nutsford Vale, approximately 3.00m from the park boundary. The topography of the study area is generally level sitting at a height of 59m AOD.

1.3 Geology

The underlying solid geology of the study area as mapped by the British Geological Survey comprises of Sandstone from the Chester pebble beds formation. The overlying drift geology is comprised of Devensian Till - Diamicton, (http://www.bgs.ac.uk).

1.4 Personnel

The project was conducted by professional archaeologists from Salford Archaeology (SA). On-site excavations were conducted by Sarah Cattell and Mandy Burns. The report was compiled, written and illustrated by Sarah Cattell and Mandy Burns. The project was managed by Adam Thompson.

1.5 Monitoring

George Holgate, Mark Young (Laing O'Rourke) Norman Redhead (Greater Manchester Archaeology Advisory Service) and Adam Thompson (SA) monitored the archaeological works.



2.1 Prehistoric

There are no known prehistoric remains or finds from within or near the Study area, and the potential for buried archaeological remains deriving from this period is considered to be low.

2.2 Roman

The study area lies within less than 500m of the possible line of the Roman Road to Buxton. The study area has had relatively little development over the last 250 years, chance finds relating to this period should not be ruled out, although this potential for Roman remains is considered to be low.

2.3 Medieval

Located along the southern boundary of the study area is the line of Nico Ditch, this is s *c*.7km long linear earthwork which is believed to have originally extended between Ashton Moss and Hough Moss. At the western end a second earthwork, known as Carr Ditch is found, which is most likely later in date but continues the line of Nico Ditch to the mosslands at Urmston (Arrowsmith & Fletcher 1993).

The earthwork was composed of a c.3-4m wide 'U'-shaped ditch, which is first mentioned in a charter from 1190-1212 AD relating to the granting of land in Audenshaw. The ditch has been known by several names over its history, the most widely used of these in modern times being Nico or Nikker Ditch, this has been assumed to arise from the Old English 'nicor', meaning a 'water sprite' however, it is most likely to derive from a corruption of the earliest attested names of 'Mykelldiche', 'Mekeldyche' and Muchildich, which are derived from the Anglo-Saxon word 'micel', meaning big or great, whether this refers to the line of the monument or its size is unclear.

The earliest references mention only the ditch, however, Higson c.1850 noted that a' hedge is on the Gorton or Manchester side all along. It seems to imply that when the land was first divided into fields the remains of the old breastwork were used as a cop or backing' (Crofton 1905, 155).

Gorton is named in 1282 as being held in bondage of the lord of Manchester, being assessed as sixteen oxgangs of land and paying 64s rent.



2.4 Post Medieval and Industrial

Up until the Industrial Period the area appears to have consisted of mainly farmsteads, it wasn't until the early to mid-nineteenth century that the area developed into a more industrialised periphery of Manchester City Centre.

The first development visible on cartographic sources was that of Yew Tree Cottage (later farm) on the 1848 OS map. This structure went through various developments through its history, the 1894 OS map illustrates that there were three buildings on the site by this time. The 1923 OS map shows a stand-alone square building in the south-west corner of the study area with a large 'U'-shaped building to the east. By 1958 this building was identified as Yew Tree Farm, with what is assumed to be outbuildings to the east.

The 1923 OS map indicated allotment gardens along the northern edge of the study area which were no longer present on the 1958 map. By this time the entire northern half of the study area was labelled a clay pit. This map also illustrated allotment gardens along the southern boundary of the site.

The study area appears to have gone through much of its development during the Industrial period, as a result of the growing industry in and around Manchester.

2.5 Archaeological Background

No previous archaeological works have been undertaken on the site. A number of excavations have been located along the course of The Nico Ditch, the closest of which was located c.500meast of the study area on land adjacent to Melland Playing fields.



3. Methodology

3.1 Excavation Strategy

The aim of the archaeological evaluation was to progress our understanding of the origins, form and character of the buried remains associated with Yew Tree Farm and Nico Ditch. This information was required to inform the feasibility of the site for future development.

Discussions with Norman Redhead of Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS) led to the design of three trenches across the site to investigate the main farm buildings and the potential for remains associated with the Anglo-Saxon feature, Nico Ditch (Fig 1). The trenches were intended as follows:

- Trench 1 1.50m x 15.00m. designed to assess the nature and extent of remains of Yew Tree Farm farmhouse.
- Trench 2 1.50m x 10.00m. designed to assess the potential for remains of Nico Ditch and southern farm outbuildings.
- Trench 3 1.50m x 15.00m. designed to assess the nature and extent of remains of Yew Tree Farm large barn.

3.2 Excavation Methodology

All archaeological features selected (stratigraphical layers, cuts, fills, structures) to be evaluated by hand tools and recorded in plan at 1:20 or in section at 1:10 using standard single context recording methods with photographs to be taken as appropriate.

Removal of modern overburden (topsoil and subsoil) will be conducted using a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket under the supervision of a professional archaeologist acting as a banksman. Removed overburden will be stored on a single mounded spoil heap located at an appropriate distance away from the main open area excavation or the fenced edges of the compound.

Machine excavation will continue in 100mm spits until either natural geological deposits or significant archaeological deposits are identified. Machine excavation will remain cautious, with preference for surviving information and hand excavation once interfaces are first encountered.



During the machine excavation and until the programme of archaeological works is complete, the open area excavation and spoil heaps will be surrounded by Herras fencing, located not less than two metres away from the edges of either.

Following machine excavation all areas will be cleaned using appropriate hand tools and archaeological features recorded by photography and scaled plan.

3.3 Recording Methodology

A unique text-number site code should be created prior to the commencement of the programme of works.

Separate contexts should be recorded individually on pro-forma context sheets. Plans and sections recorded on drawing sheets at an appropriate scale of 1:10, 1:20, or 1:50, depending on the complexity of the data and features encountered. All drawings will be individually identified and cross referenced, contexts enumerated and principal layers and features annotated with OD level information.

A 'site location plan' indicating the site north and based on the current Ordnance Survey 1:1250 map (reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO) will be prepared. This is to be supplemented by a trench plan at 1:200 (or 1:100), which will show the location of the areas excavated in relation to the investigation area and National Grid Reference. The location of the OS bench marks used and the site TBM will also be indicated.

The OD height of all principal strata and features will be calculated and indicated on the appropriate plans and sections.

Photography of all relevant phases and features should be undertaken with digital formats. General working photographs to be taken during the duration of the archaeological works, to provide illustrative material covering the wider aspects of the archaeological work undertaken. A copy of the digital photographs should be made available to the curatorial body, with the production of the technical archaeological report.



All finds to be recorded by context. Significant "small finds" located within three dimensions to the nearest 10mm and bagged and labelled separately, numbered and a simple description made so that they can be identified within the assemblage.

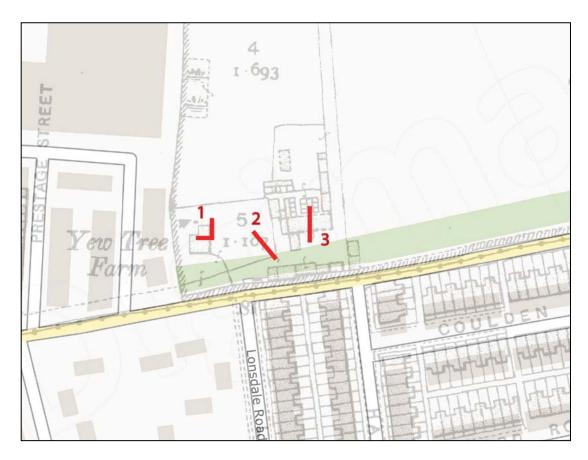


Figure 1. Trench location plan. Reproduced by permission License no.



4. Archaeological Descriptions

Trench 1

This trench was excavated to assess the nature and extent of archaeological remains associated with the 19^{th} and 20^{th} century farmhouse occupying the south-western corner of the site. The trench was L shaped and measured 1.50m wide x 7.50m long east-west and 9.20m long north-south.

Following the removal of vegetation and topsoil a layer of black-brown silty sand (002) was revealed which contained a high volume of brick rubble and moderate inclusions of stone and clinker fragments. This layer covered the full extent of the trench to a depth of 0.20m. Directly below this lay a thin (0.05m) dark brown-black silty sand (003) with frequent inclusions of coal fragments.



Figure 2. Walls (006), (009) and linear [007] at the western end of Trench 1. Looking south.

At the far south-western end of the trench this layer overlay two handmade brick features which were identified within a grey-brown layer of redeposited clay (004). The first of these features was (006), a handmade brick wall laid in stretcher bond with black ash mortar. The wall measured $1.75m \ge 0.40m$ and was aligned east-west and continued southwards beyond the trench edge with two projecting bricks on the northern face. It is possible that at its eastern end, the wall returned beyond the trench edge to the south, although this could not be ascertained. Wall (006) was abutted to the west by a square handmade brick feature (009) measuring 0.65m $\ge 0.65m$. The feature comprised a single U shaped course of bricks surrounding a central void which was filled by (002).



Figure 3. Northern section of Trench 1 showing natural clay (005). Looking south.



Approximately 0.30m east of wall (006) a linear cut [007] was identified to extend northwards by 0.20m from the southern trench edge. The cut appeared to have a square terminus to the west and continued eastwards beyond the edge of the trench. Cut [007] measured 0.75m x 0.20m and was filled by (008), a mid-brown clayey sand with inclusions of coal brick and stone fragments.

No other features were identified within the trench and the redeposited clay was found to directly overlie the natural reddish-yellow clay (005).

Trench 2

This trench was located to investigate the possibility of deposits associated with both the southern extent of Yew Tree Farm and the nearby Nico Ditch and measured 1.50m x 8.50m orientated northwest-southeast.

All features in this trench were encountered below (002), which contained a large quantity of setts in this trench, and (003) both of which are likely to be associated with the demolition and levelling of the site. At the southern end of the trench these layers lay over a rough cobbled surface (015) which measured 1.50m x 3.00m and



Figure 4. General view of Trench 2 showing [011], (014) and (015). Looking south.





Figure 5. Detailed view of (015) showing edging stones in the foreground. Looking south.

continued beyond the trench edges to the east and west. The surface was comprised of sub-rounded stones of varying sizes between 0.10m and 0.30m with a line of sub-rectangular edging stones $c.0.18m \ge 0.25m$ running east-west along the northern extent of the feature. This row of edging stones lay against and was partially covered



by a layer of tarmacadam (014) extending 0.50m northwards. This layer sat within the grey-brown redeposited clay layer identified in Trench 1.

Approximately 0.75m north of (014) a linear feature [011] was identified to be crossing the trench in an east-west alignment. The feature measured 1.60m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.75m at which point its width had reduced to 0.85m. It was revealed to be cut from the base of deposit (002) and through (003), (004) and (005) with gently sloping sides as seen in section. Two fills were identified within the cut, the upper, (013) was a c.0.45m thick layer of crushed and degraded brick. The lower fill, (012) was a grey-brown silty clay with frequent inclusions of 19th and 20th century demolition rubble and occasional ceramic fragments. To the north of [011] the remainder of the trench was excavated to a depth of 1.00m at which point the natural clay was revealed.



Figure 6. Detailed view of [011] showing fill (012). Looking south.



Figure 7. Cut [011] in section showing fill (013). Looking west.



Trench 3

This trench was located to investigate the potential for remains associated with the large barn in the north-eastern area of the Yew Tree Farm yard. The trench was aligned east-west and measured 1.50m x 15.00m.

Following the removal of vegetation and topsoil a dark blackish-brown demolition deposit (016) was encountered which was very compact and contained frequent inclusions of brick, concrete, setts and mortar fragments. This deposit continued to a depth of 0.75m below the topsoil. Directly below this was a 0.50m thick layer of late 20th household waste, both bagged and loose (017). This was removed to reveal a second more compact rubble layer, (018) which was almost identical to (016) and proved difficult to excavate through.

Due to the nature and depth of the deposits encountered, along with information gathered from nearby boreholes it was decided to abandon Trench 3 at this point.



Figure 8. General view of Trench 3 showing (017) and (018). Looking west.



Trench 1

This trench was able to produce the only direct evidence on the site of structures associated with Yew Tree Farm.

Although the positioning of the trench was restricted by the presence of below ground services small scale structures were identified at the south-western end of the trench. Walls (006) and (009) are likely to be associated with the northern end of the main farmhouse building. The nature of wall (009) and its location abutting (006) would suggest its function as the base of a drainage downpipe on the northern wall of the house. This in turn indicates that the area to the north of these features was related to the garden/yard of the farmhouse, although evidence of this was not uncovered.

The function of the negative linear feature [007] to the east of the brick walls could not be ascertained due to its continuation beyond the trench edge. It is possible, however that it relates to either another part of the north wall or an external feature abutting the wall.

The northern part of this trench was excavated to investigate the possibility of remains associated with the later extension to the farmhouse, although no evidence of this structure was identified.

Trench 2

This trench contained two features that are likely to have been associated with the farmyard or ancillary buildings located along Matthews Lane. The cobbled surface (015) appeared to be parallel with the modern alignment of the main road and may represent part of the earlier track that occupied this area prior to the construction of Matthews Lane. Alternatively, this surface may be associated with the farm buildings ranged along the farms southern boundary, either an internal floor or part of the farmyard surface. Either way, the line of edging stones on the northern side of the feature would suggest it lay against another surface or lay along the boundary of a building. The layer of tarmac overlying the edge of the cobbles indicates that the surface was repaired or extended in the 20^{th} century.

The second feature was a linear cut which lay 1.30m north of the cobbled surface in the same alignment. The nature of the fills of this feature suggest that it was filled over a relatively short period in the 20th century, more than likely as a result of the demolition of the farm buildings. Its position parallel to the cobbled surface and silty fill may hint at its original function, possibly as a roadside/trackside drainage ditch.



However if the cobbles represent an internal flooring the cut may be related to the drainage of the associated building.

Trench 3

The lack of any archaeological deposits in this trench is due to the later uses of the site as at first, a clay pit which was then used as landfill. As a result it is reasonable to assume that all archaeological deposits lying in excess of 10m from the present southern site boundary will also have been removed.



6. Discussion

Throughout its more recent history the site has undergone an intensive period of transformation from a small self-contained farm through its uses as a clay pit and landfill site to its current use as public parkland. Prior to this, however, the site, like much of the surrounding area had been part of the rural hinterland of Manchester.

It appears that during the medieval and post medieval periods the site was merely part of the rural land on the periphery of the villages of Gorton and Gorton, however whether this land was cultivated at this time cannot be ascertained. The cartographic evidence indicates that the first structure on the site, Yew Tree Cottage was built some time in the 1840s on land that was previously vacant but it is not unreasonable to suggest that earlier farmsteads may have occupied the wider area in preceding centuries. The presence of Nico Ditch only 5m south of the study area indicates that the landscape had previously been divided in the early medieval period and that this boundary continued to be respected into the 19th century (Murphy 2017). It is likely, therefore, that earlier agricultural residents would have used the earthwork when demarcating their land. Although, the farm buildings and associated structures may have been located further north, at a slightly greater distance from the boundary.

Yew Tree Farm began as a small cottage located just outside Gorton and to the east of the main Manchester to Stockport Road. During the later 19th century the farm seemed to prosper and increase in size to include several outbuildings by 1894, indicating a demand for produce from the surrounding area. This would correlate with the expansion of Gorton and Gorton during this period as they became part of the growing industrial suburbs of Manchester. As the town's production levels soared and the demand for more factories and therefore more workers increased, the rural lands surrounding Manchester were systematically swallowed up by both workers housing in the form long rows of terraces and by smaller scale industrial units and satellite industries. In the case of Yew Tree Farm this expansion took the form of predominantly terraced housing, although dye works and chemical and iron works were also constructed nearby.

Whilst this sudden influx of people may have initially brought prosperity to the farm, it is likely that pressure on space was mounting in the early-mid 20th century. This can be seen in both the 1923 and 1958 mapping showing the boundaries of the farm being eroded by housing to the west and allotments and a clay pit to the north. It was at first the allotments and later the expansion of the clay pit that eventually caused the demise of the farm in the 1960s. Soon after the farm buildings were demolished and the site became known as 'Jackson's Pit'. Prior to the excavation the full southern extent of the pit was not thought to have encroached on the site of the farm, however the recent works have shown that the pit was excavated to with 15m of the present line of Matthews Lane.



Following the end of excavations at the pit, believed locally to be in excess of 50 feet in depth (local resident, *pers comm*), the site was taken over for landfill deposition which continued into the 1970s and accounts for the depth and nature of deposits Trench 3. Since the 1980s the site has been back filled becoming a local open heathland with no further developments allowing those remains of the farm which were not destroyed by clay extraction to survive in a good state of preservation.

The evaluation also sought, in part, to investigate the possibility for further evidence associated with Nico Ditch, the purpose of which is still not fully understood. Four possible functions for the earthwork have been suggested in recent decades; as a drainage channel between Ashton Moss in the east and Chat Moss in the west, as an administrative boundary, as a defensive boundary or as an agricultural boundary. Similarly, the dating of the monument is also unclear, although documentary evidence refers to the earthwork as early as the 12th century it may have been part of a system of ditches across the north of England to defend against the Danish in the late 9th century (Wilson & Nevell, 1997). As no remains or features relating to Nico Ditch were uncovered during the excavation, no further information could be gleaned about the monument.



7. Archive

The archive comprises site drawings and photographs and on-site notes. This archive is currently held by Salford Archaeology and a copy of this report will be forwarded to the client following the publication of the site report.

A copy of this report will be deposited with the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record held by the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service.



8. Acknowledgements

The Centre for Applied Archaeology would like to thank Caroline Marks and George Holgate of Laing O'Rourke for commissioning the archaeological works and Norman Redhead for providing support and advice through Greater Manchester Archaeology Advisory Service.

The on-site excavations were conducted by Sarah Cattell and Mandy Burns. This report was written and illustrated by Sarah Cattell and Mandy Burns. The project was managed by Adam Thompson.



9. Sources

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Maps

OS 1: 2500 Edition 1907, Lancashire Sheet CIV. OS 1: 2500 Edition 1933, Lancashire Sheet CIV. OS 1: 2500 Edition 1958, Lancashire Sheet CIV.

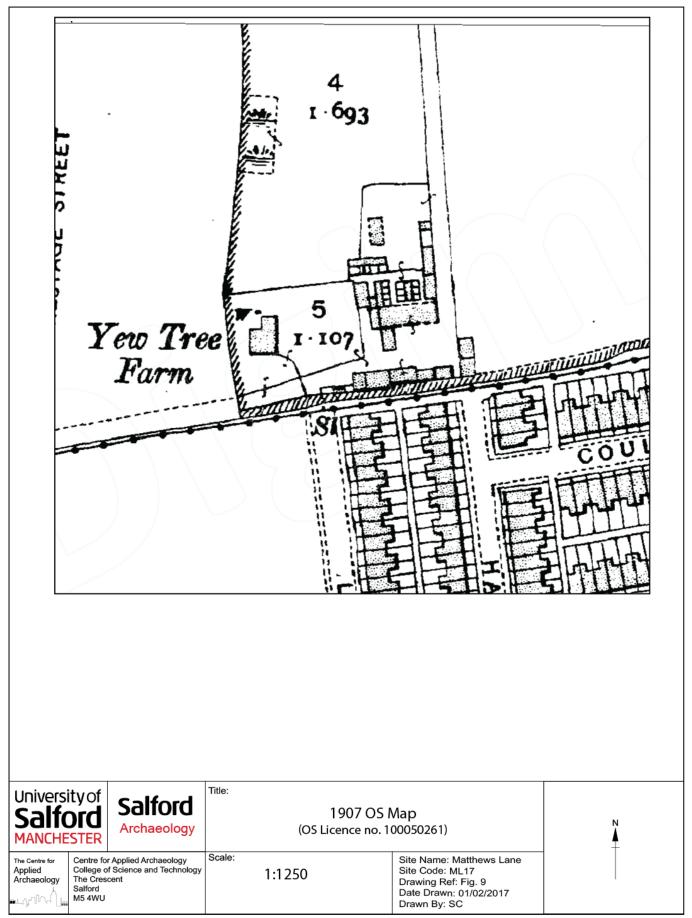
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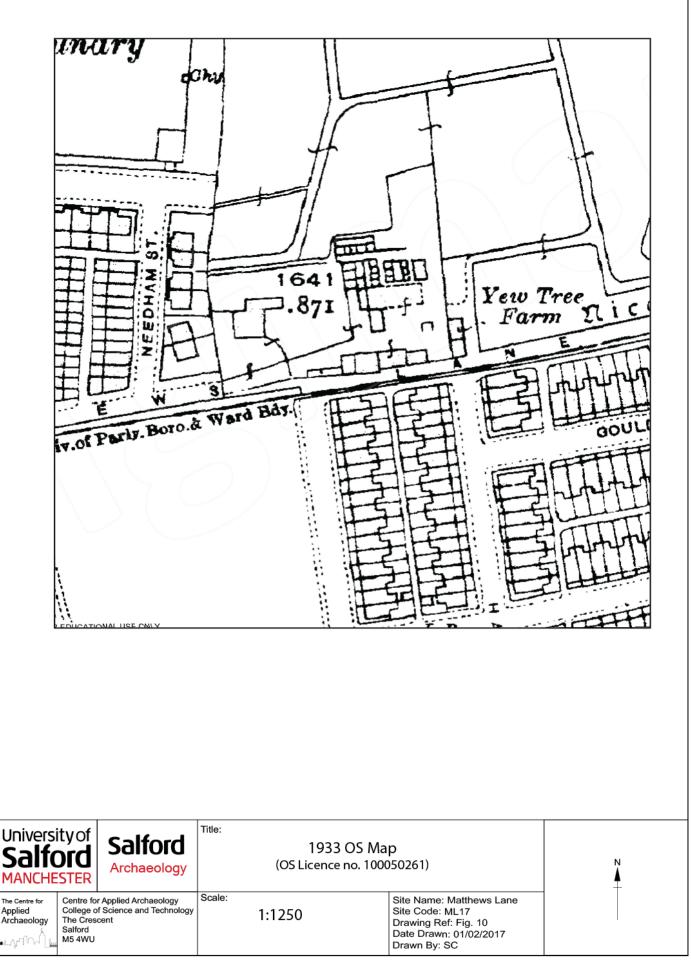
Web Sources

British Geological Survey: <u>http://www.bgs.ac.uk/</u> (accessed 27/02/2017)

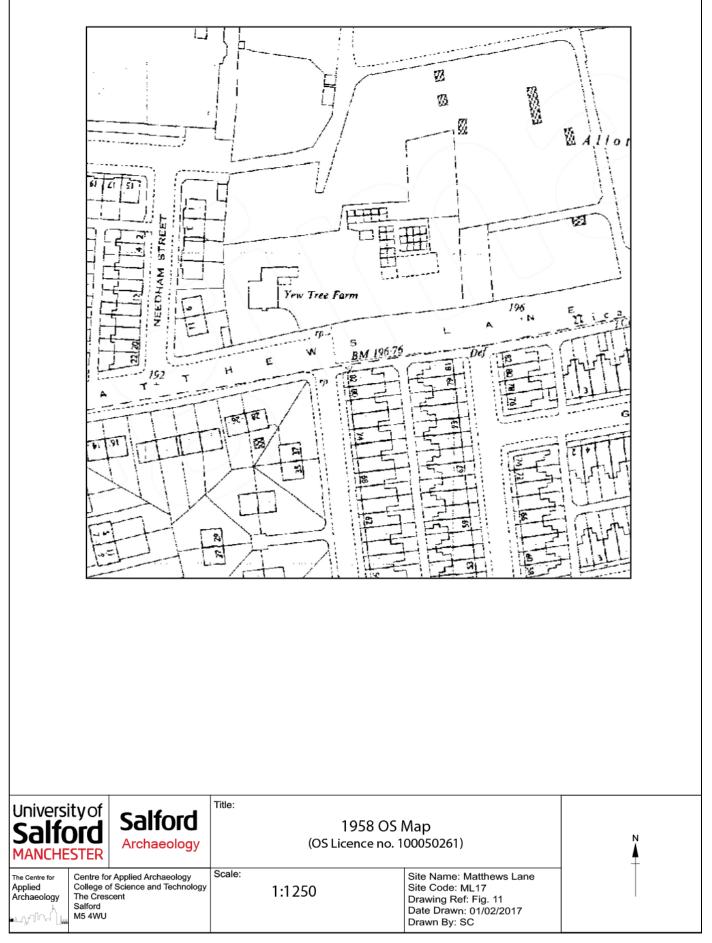


Appendix 1: Figures

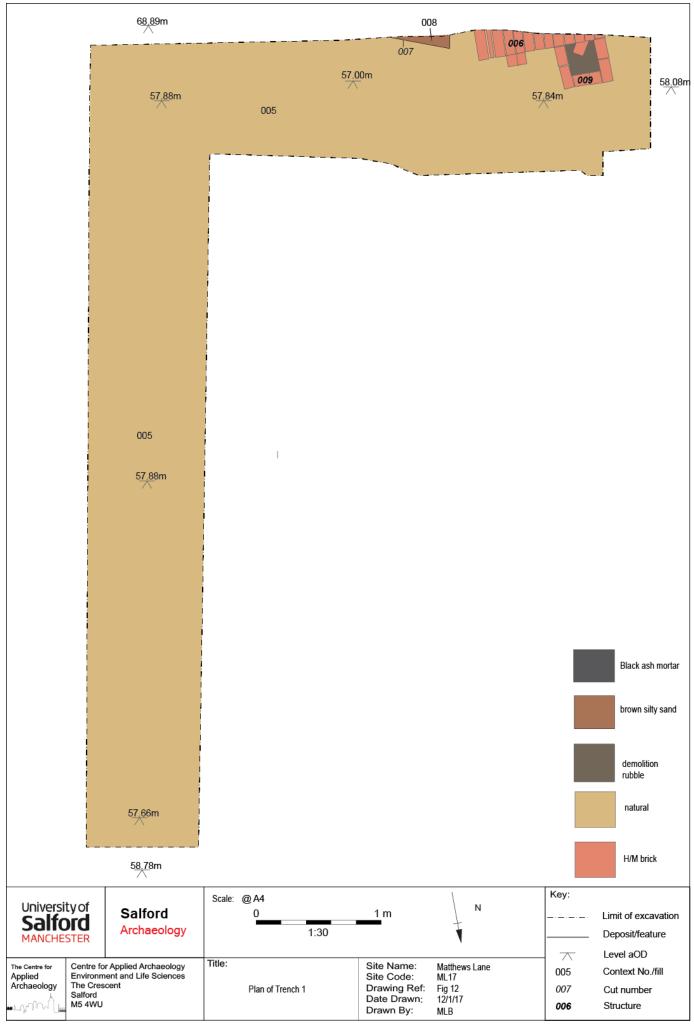






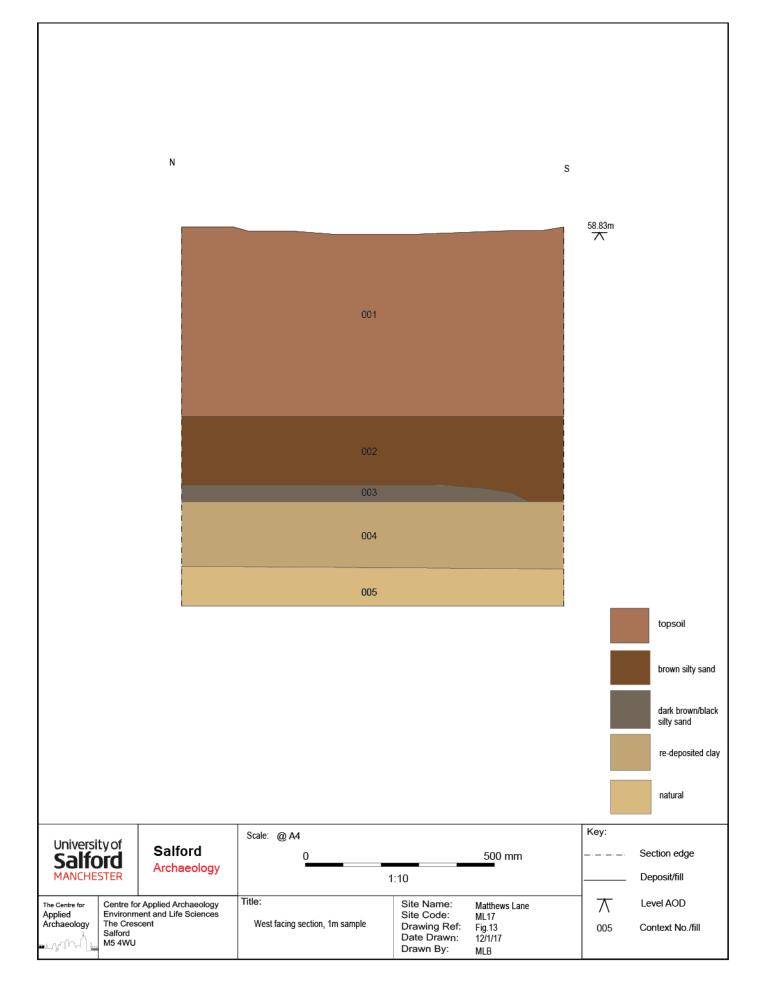




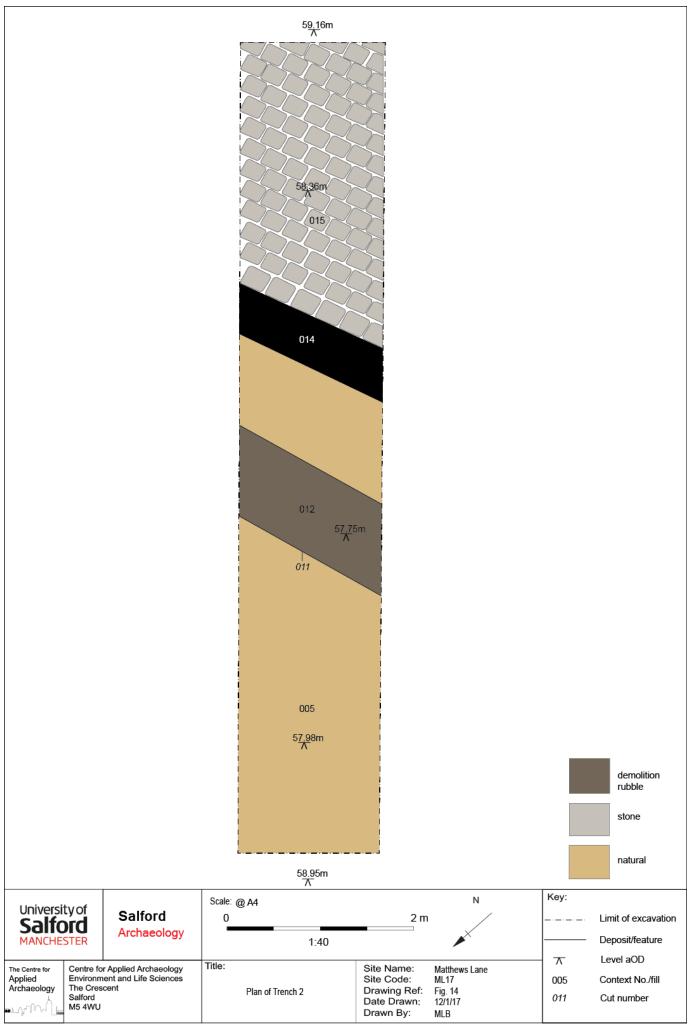


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Archaeological Evaluation, New High School, Matthews Lane, Manchester 2017, (17).



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Archaeological Evaluation, New High School, Matthews Lane, Manchester 2017, (17).

Appendix 2: Context List

Context	Trench	Description
No.		
(001)	All	Topsoil. Brown silty sand with infrequent inclusions of brick and stone fragments. Up to 0.50m thick.
(002)	1 & 2	Black-brown silty sand with a high volume of brick rubble and moderate inclusions of stone and clinker fragments. Approx. 0.20m thick.
(003)	1	Thin band (0.05m) of dark brown-black silty sand with frequent inclusions of coal fragments. Lies below (002).
(004)	1	Grey-brown clay below (003) with occasional fragments of broken brick. Possibly redeposited $c.0.20$ m thick.
(005)	1 & 2	Natural clay, light greyish-yellow with small (<0.20m) lenses of grey clay and occasional river pebbles. Covers base of trench 1.
(006)	1	East-west aligned handmade brick wall. Laid in stretcher bond with black ash mortar, measures $1.75m \ge 0.40m$. Bricks measure $0.23m \ge 0.11m \ge 0.07m$. Extends southwards beyond the trench edge with two projecting bricks on the northern face. Possible return beyond the trench edge to the south.
[007]	1	East-west aligned cut of linear feature lying against the north facing section of Trench 1. Excavated size 0.75m x 0.20m.
(008)	1	Fill of [007]. Mid brown clayey sand with moderate inclusions of brick, stone and coal fragments.
(009)	1	Square handmade brick feature abutting northern face of (006). Single course of bricks surrounding a central void (filled by (002)), measures 0.65m x 0.60m.
(010)	2	Thin (0.10m thick) layer of a black organic deposit with no inclusions. Lies below (002).
[011]	2	Cut of east-west aligned linear feature crossing Trench 2. Feature has gently sloping sides measuring 1.60m at the top and 0.85m at the base, excavated depth 0.75m.
(012)	2	Lower fill of [011]. Grey-brown clay with frequent inclusions of 19^{th} and 20^{th} century demolition rubble and occasional ceramic fragments.
(013)	2	Upper fill of [011]. Layer of crushed and degraded brick $c.0.45m$ thick.
(014)	2	Layer of black degraded tarmacadam lying against and overlapping (015). 0.50m wide and c.0.08m thick.
(015)	2	Area of cobbles at southern end of Trench 2. Comprises sub- rounded cobbles between 0.10m and 0.30m with a line of sub- rectangular edging stones $c.0.18m \ge 0.25m$ running east-west.
(016)	3	Dark brown demolition layer below (001) in Trench 3. Very compact with frequent inclusions of brick, stone, mortar, setts and concrete. 0.75m thick.
(017)	3	Landfill deposit comprising bagged and loose household waste from the late 20 th century. 0.50m thick.



(018)	3	Extremely compact rubble layer containing brick, tarmac, stone and
		concrete. Excavated to a depth of 0.80m but continued below this.









CONSULTANCY



EXCAVATION

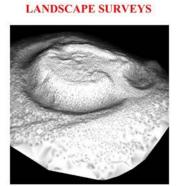


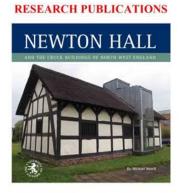
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT



WORKSHOPS & VOCATIONAL TRAINING







DESK BASED ASSESMENTS

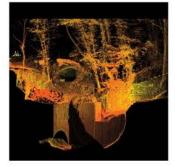


BUILDING SURVEY

WATCHING BRIEF & EVALUATION



3D LASER SCANNING



GEOPHYSICAL SURVEYS



SEMINARS, DAYSCHOOLS CPD EVENTS

