

Archaeological Watching Brief
at
**ST. NICHOLAS OF TOLENTINO,
LAWFORDS GATE, BRISTOL.**
for
Construction Total Solutions Ltd



Report No. 1901/2009
BHER No. 4454



Bristol and Region Archaeological Services

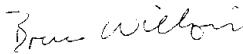
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at
**ST NICHOLAS OF TOLENTINO,
LAWFORDS GATE, BRISTOL**

Centred on
N.G.R. ST 59943 73483

Client: Construction Total Solutions Ltd

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<i>Signature:</i>	
<i>Date Issued:</i>	12th October 2009 

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Abbreviations

AD	Anno Domini	c.	Circa
aOD	Above Ordnance Datum	Km	Kilometre
BaRAS	Bristol & Region Archaeological Services	m	Metre
BC	Before Christ	MoB	Museum of Bristol
BCC	Bristol City Council	NGR	National Grid Reference
BCL	Bristol Central Library	NMR	National Monuments Record
BCMAG	Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery	OS	Ordnance Survey
BHER	Bristol Historic Environment Record		
BRO	Bristol Record Office		
BSMR	Bristol Sites & Monuments Record		

NOTE

Notwithstanding that Bristol and Region Archaeological Services have taken reasonable care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

October, 2009.

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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on the site of a new presbytery for St Nicholas of Tolentino R. C. parish church. This work took place in late September 2009. Remains of the previous building, formerly a Roman Catholic school, had been removed in 2008 and the site excavated down 0.6m or more and then backfilled. Trenching for the new building cut into the natural red-brown sand below and revealed a short length of foundations from the earlier, 1850s, school, and two possible minor features that may have been of recent origin.

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Bristol and Region Archaeological Services (BaRAS) were commissioned by Construction Total Solutions Ltd to undertake an archaeological watching brief during construction of a new presbytery for St Nicholas of Tolentino R. C. Church.
- 1.2 The watching brief was commissioned to comply with the requirements of the City Archaeologist (Bob Jones) in relation to planning application 04/02051/P and in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Bristol and Region Archaeological Services (BaRAS December 2007).
- 1.3 The fieldwork was undertaken on 21st and 29th September 2009 under the supervision of John Bryant who also compiled this report.
- 1.4 The project archive will be deposited with Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery under the Accession Number BRSMG 2008/51 and a digital copy of the report will be made available to the National Monuments Record maintained by English Heritage. The project has been entered in the Bristol Historic Environment Record as: BHER 4454 and in the OASIS Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations as: bristola1- 65407.

2. THE SITE (Figs. 1 & 2 and Cover)

- 2.1 The site (centred on NGR ST 59943 73483) is part of a larger plot to the west and north of the Roman Catholic parish church of St Nicholas of Tolentino, Lawfords Gate, Bristol (Figs. 1 & 2). This particular part lies about 3m west of the south aisle of the church and fronts onto the pavement on the north side of the street. It is approximately 10m, E-W, by 7.50m, N-S, with a small triangular projection along its northern edge. Formerly, this area was occupied by the south-east corner of a much larger, 3-storey, brick building, St Nicholas House, that had been constructed in 1910 as a Roman Catholic school.
- 2.2 Pavement level immediately outside the site climbed from 12.51m aOD, at the eastern end, to about 12.58m at the opposite end. The site had been left roughly levelled after removal of the previous building.
- 2.3 The geology of the study area comprises Triassic Redcliffe Sandstone (British Geological Survey 1967).

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 An archaeological desk-based assessment was previously undertaken for the larger site (Young 2005). It showed that there was no identifiable development on this part of the site until the new school block, approved in 1853 and shown on Ashmead's 1854 survey map and the OS 1:500 plan (**Fig. 3**). This reached to within about 7.5m of the west end of the church's south aisle and ran north for 6m from the pavement edge before setting back westwards by about 1.5m before continuing north again.
- 3.2 In 1910 a 3-storey, red brick school block was erected on the corner of Lawfords Gate and Pennywell Road. This new structure extended further eastwards than its predecessor, to within 3.5m of the church west wall. It also included a basement boiler room, although this was located underneath the north-east corner, i.e. just north of the site for the new presbytery.
- 3.3 After a number of years as a school, the red-brick building became St Nicholas House, used as Diocesan offices. It was removed in early 2008, at which time the foundation of the main east wall was retained, although other walls are thought to have been grubbed out at that time. The building was recorded prior to its removal (BaRAS, forthcoming).

4. AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The fieldwork complied with the methodology contained within the Written Scheme of Investigation (BaRAS 2007). It also followed the *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1999). The aim of the watching brief was to record any archaeological features or deposits revealed during the course of excavations for groundworks associated with the new building.
- 4.2 First stage of the watching brief (Monday 21st September) was to monitor a general reduction in ground level. Concrete piles were then inserted at various locations within the new building footprint using the bored pile system.
- 4.3 A return to the site was made on Tuesday 29th September, when trenches were machined between the various rows of piles.

5. THE WATCHING BRIEF (Fig. 4; Cover and Plates 1-7)

5.1 General ground reduction saw a new, level area created at between 600mm and 750mm below the existing surface, the latter being a little uneven. Work commenced in the north-east quarter of the footprint for the new building, then moved more or less clockwise, completing in the north-west quarter (**Cover & Plate 1**).

5.2 It rapidly became clear the material being removed must have been deposited either at the time of demolition in early 2008 or else soon afterwards. The majority consisted of dark brown soil with a good number of fragments of Pennant Sandstone and red brick, also some patches of redeposited, slightly clayey, red-brown sand (**Plate 2**). However, inclusions comprised, amongst others, lengths of electrical cable, plastic drink bottles, crisp packets, wire, card, and a foot from a Heras fencing panel. Of archaeological interest were one mussel shell and a small sherd of china, neither of which were retained. Towards the western side the red-brown sand beneath was exposed in places, and a more clayey deposit was visible in the west section north of mid-way (**Plate 3**).

5.3 The second phase of the watching brief was barely more revealing (**Plate 4**). Trenches were excavated around the perimeter, together with a north-south trench east of centre and a short trench running east from that (**Fig. 4**). The most easterly trench was dug in an area where the old east wall of St Nicholas House had previously been grubbed out and the excavation backfilled. Elsewhere, the trenches were excavated into the natural slightly clayey red-brown sand. Widths varied a little, i.e. 800mm for the outer trenches, 700mm for the central trench and 600mm for the short one. Pile diameters were approximately 430mm.

5.4 On the outside of the southern trench, at its western end, were the remains of a black-mortared Pennant rubble foundation (**Plate 5**). This ran eastwards for at least 2m from the south-west corner of the trench, but its full extent could not be measured as it disappeared behind boards shoring up the pavement edge. The stonework is most likely to be associated with the 1850s school block.

5.5 Two small possible features were cut by the two internal trenches (**Fig. 4; Plates 6 & 7**). On the north side of the short east-west trench was an area about 500mm wide, containing brown soil, fragments of 60mm-thick red brick and some stones. A smaller feature, containing a few stones only, lay on the west side of the middle trench. Both of these could have been no more than the results of material accidentally compressed in during either the demolition process or recent machining.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The material initially removed to create a working level was clearly a deposit left at, or soon after, demolition in 2008. It may have been no more than coincidence that it bottomed out at approximately the top of the natural sand.
- 6.2 Excavation of the trenches showed that the sand was a clean, natural deposit. Remains of black-mortared rubble probably represented the foundations of the 1850s school building. Two other features may have been no more than material compressed into the sand during demolition in 2008 or machine excavation in 2009.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES CONSULTED

Unpublished Reports

Young, R 2005 *St Nicholas of Tolentino Lawfords Gate Bristol: Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment* (Cotswold Archaeology, CA 05025)

Maps

Ashmead, G 1854 *Plan of Bristol and its Suburbs*
Ordnance Survey 1883 1:500 plan

8. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The fieldwork was undertaken by John Bryant who also produced this report. Illustrations were prepared and the report compiled by Ann Linge. The archive was compiled and prepared for deposition by John Bryant, who also managed the project.

BaRAS would like to thank Mike James and also the staff of Ian James Projects Limited, the groundworkers, for their assistance and co-operation.

APPENDIX 1: Policy Statement

This report is the result of work carried out in the light of national and local authority policies.

NATIONAL POLICIES

Statutory protection for archaeology is enshrined in the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979), amended by the National Heritage Act, 1983. Nationally important sites are listed in the Schedule of Ancient Monuments (SAM). Scheduled Monument consent is required for any work which would affect a SAM.

ODPM PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE

The Planning Policy Guidance of Archaeology and Planning (PPG 16) consolidates advice to planning authorities. The Guidance stresses the non-renewable nature of the archaeological resource, details the role of the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), encourages early consultation with county and district archaeological officers and sets out the requirement for developers to provide sufficient information on the archaeological impact of development to enable a reasonable planning decision to be made.

PPG 16 also indicates the circumstances where further work would be necessary and outlines the use of agreements and conditions to protect the archaeological resource.

DISTRICT POLICY

Bristol City Council Supplementary Planning Document (2006) states (policy SPD No.7, p4):

- (i) There will be a presumption in favour of preserving any archaeological features or sites of national importance, whether scheduled or not.
- (ii) Development which could adversely affect sites, structures, landscapes or buildings of archaeological interest and their settings will require an assessment of the archaeological resource through a desktop study, and where appropriate a field evaluation. Where there is evidence of archaeological remains, development will not be permitted except where it can be demonstrated that the archaeological features of the site will be satisfactorily preserved in situ, or a suitable strategy has been put forward to mitigate the impact of development proposals upon important archaeological remains and their settings; or, if this is not possible and the sites are not scheduled or of national importance, provision for adequately recording the site prior to destruction is made, preferably by negotiating a planning agreement to ensure that access, time and financial resources are available to allow essential recording and publication to take place.

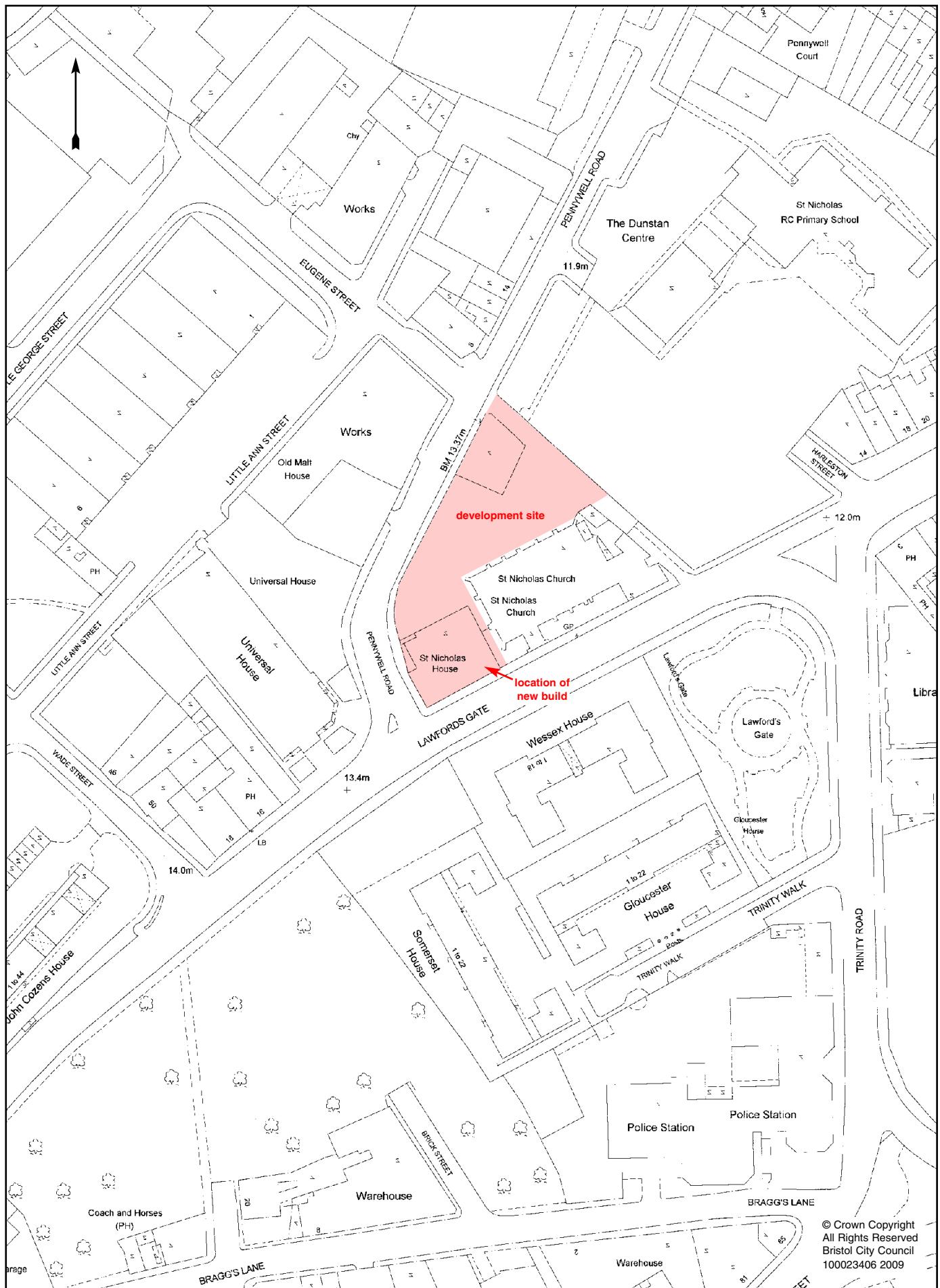


Fig.1 Site location plan, scale 1:1250

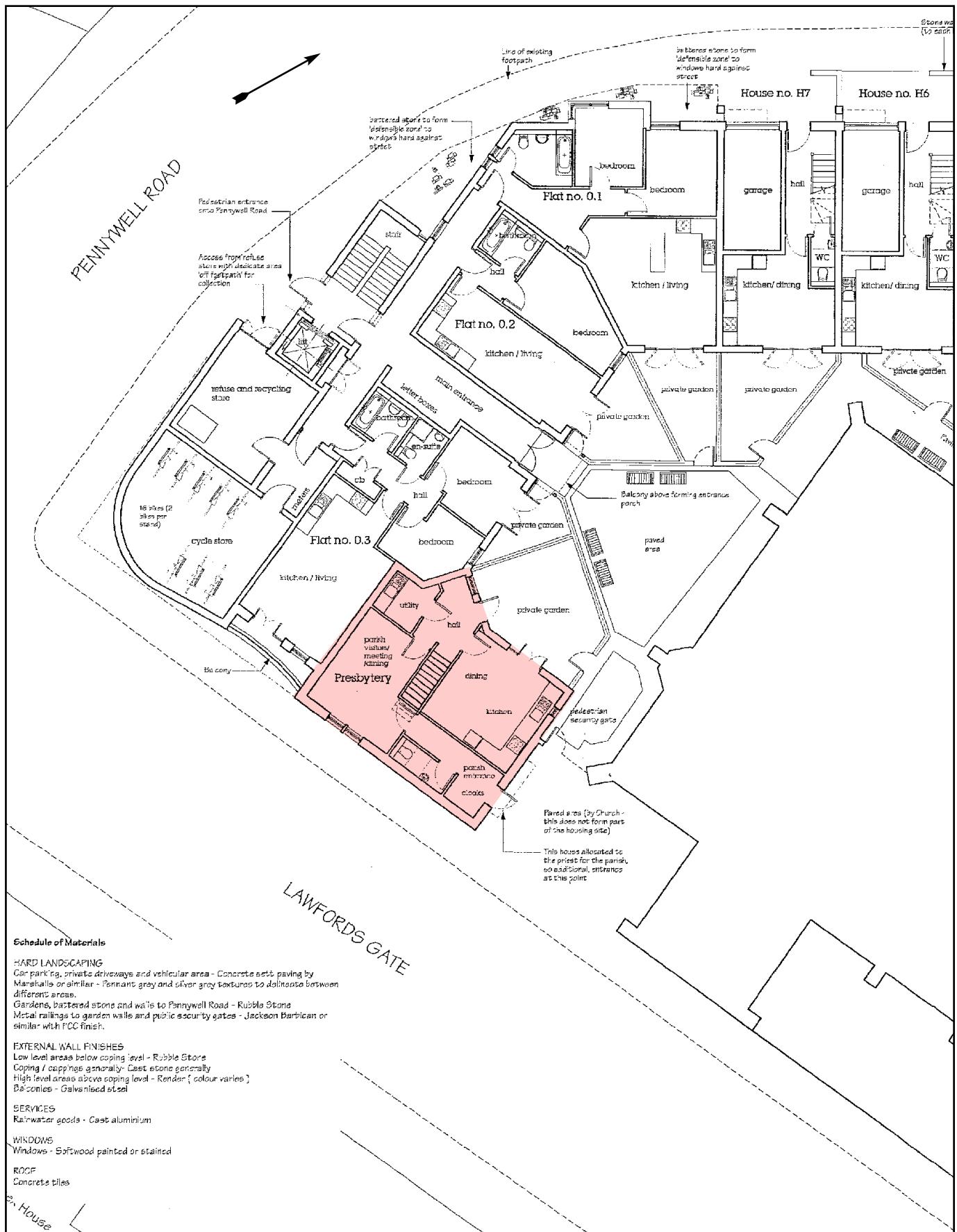


Fig.2 South end of the proposed development, showing presbytery

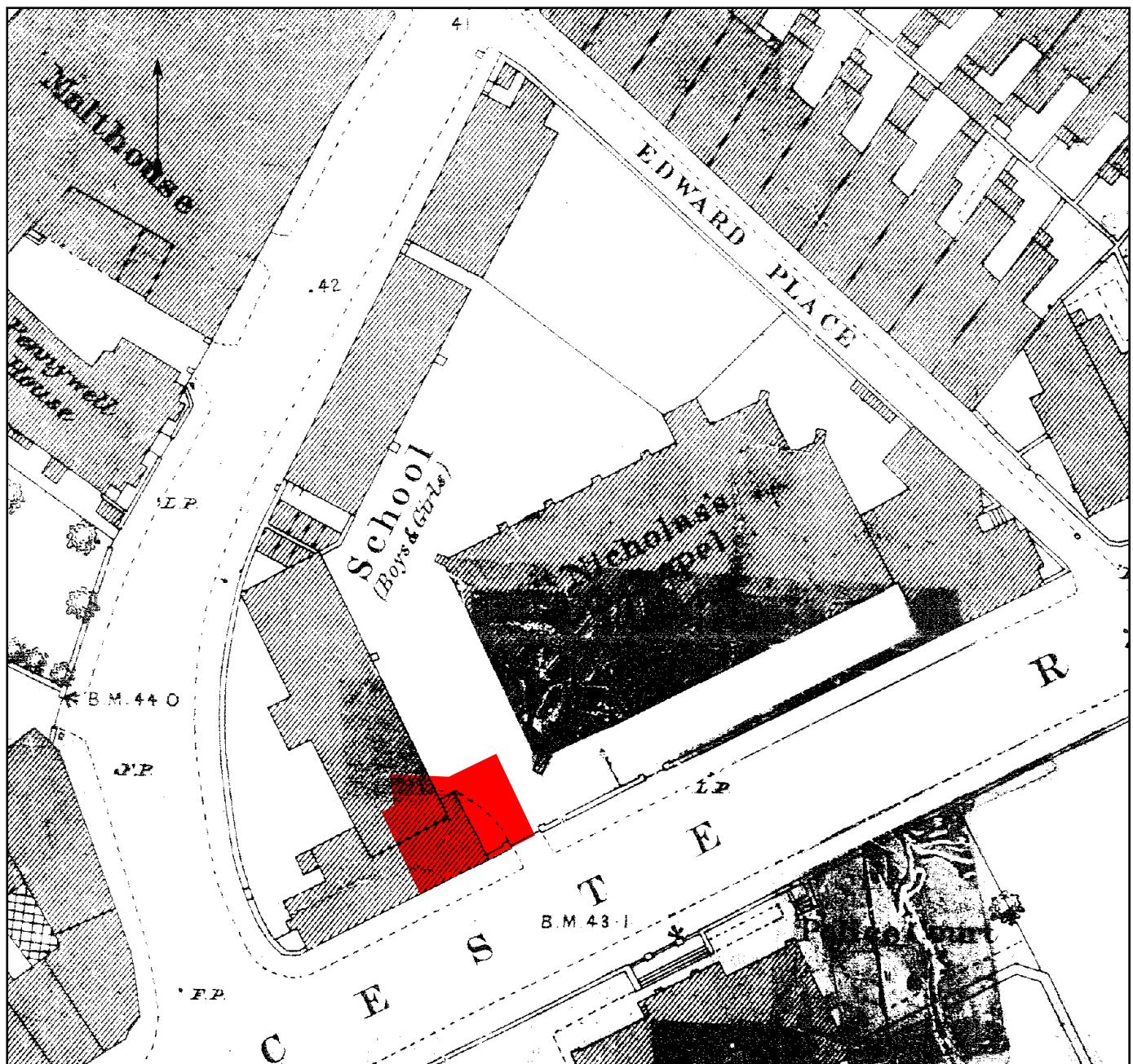


Fig.3 OS 1:500 plan, 1883

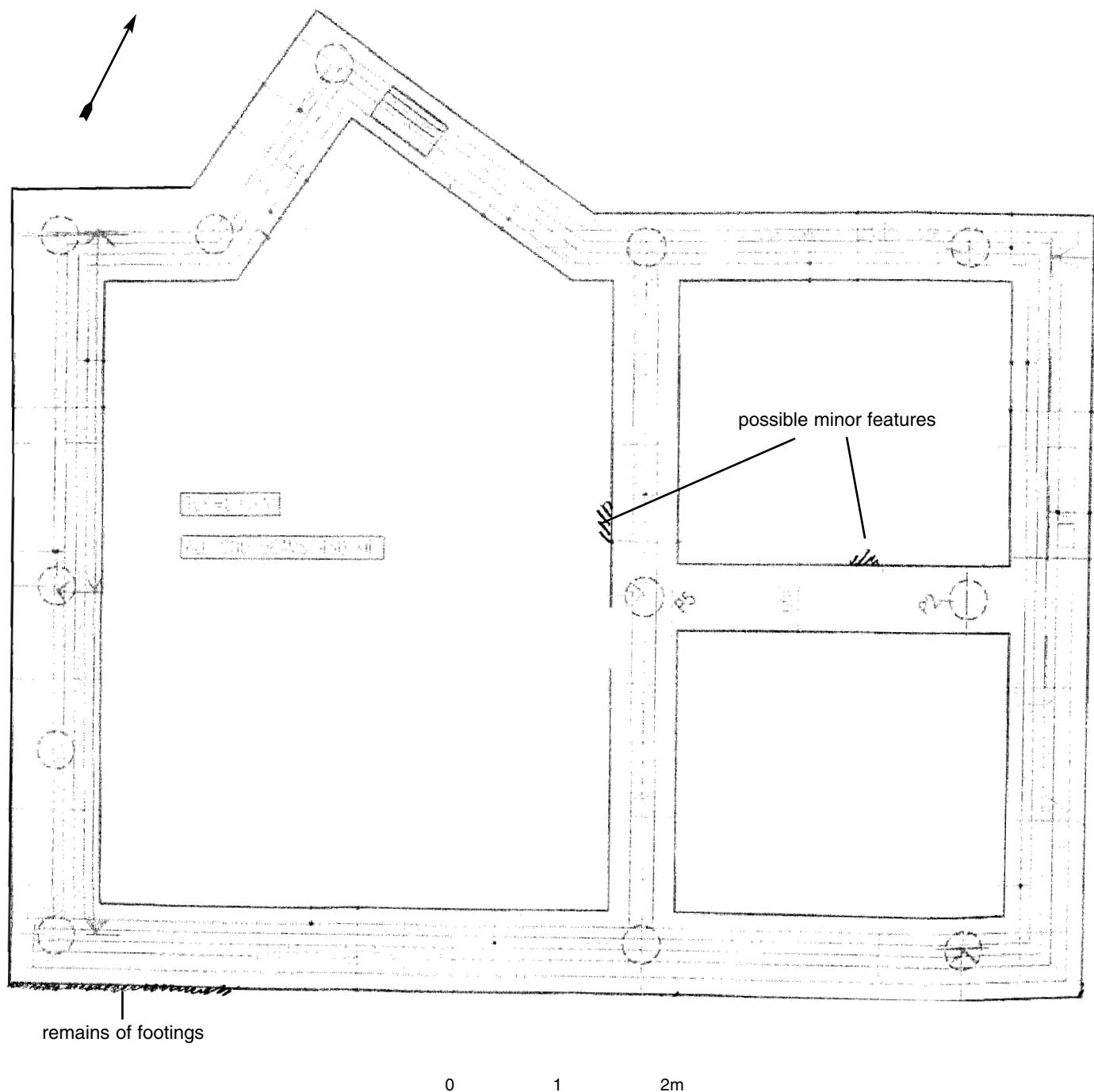


Fig.4 Presbytery foundation plan, showing location of features



Plate 1
Western side during
initial strip, showing top
of sand



Plate 2
Typical material removed
during strip



Plate 3
West section after strip
(1m scale)



Plate 4
Excavation of trenches in progress, looking south-west



Plate 5
Foundations of 1850s school building, from north-west



Plate 6 Possible feature on north side of trench (on right of photo)



Plate 7 Possible feature on west side of middle trench (1m scale)