

CAMBRIDGE INDEPENDENT ARCHAEOLOGY – CIA31

Interim report of excavations at Nine Wells, Whittlesford in 2023-2024

Another Villa?

A brief report of our 2023-25 excavations
(Note: 2025 notes not yet added)

The wall to the west (yellow) with intersecting NS interior wall, (red)...?



Report by: ..., ..., ... and ...

Contents

1	Overview	3
2	Trenches as of the end of 2022	3
3	Planned excavations for 2023	4
3.1	The first find of the year	5
3.2	Tr41 extension excavations	6
3.3	Tr44 excavations	10
3.4	Tr45 excavations	13
3.5	Tr46 excavations	14
3.6	Tr47 excavations	15
3.7	Final plan for the 2023 excavations	16
4	Planned excavations for 2024	17
4.1	Trenches showing signs of the wall by the end of 2023	17
4.2	Tr45 excavations	18
4.3	Tr47 excavations	18
4.4	Tr48/49 excavations	19
4.5	Tr50 (Tr41) excavations	19
5	Conclusions from 2023/24 excavations	19
6	References	19
7	Acknowledgements	20
8	Table of figures	20

1 Overview

After discovery of the existence of a wall in our 2016 test trenches, we agreed plans that in the following year we investigate an area to the NE of the wall as well as further test trenches in both 2017 and 2018 to determine the extent of the wall to the NW and SW. From 2019 to 2022, following signs seen in the magnetometry, we investigated what turned out to be a large 'pit complex'. As that was completed in 2022, we agreed that in 2023 we would return to investigate the archaeology of the wall near the SE corner, particularly inside to the SW and the outside to the SE. At this stage we have made good progress, and we are planning to continue in 2025.

2 Trenches as of the end of 2022

By the end of 2022, we had completed as far as we could excavations of the pit complex. Apart from Tr28, which we had completed in 2022, trenches 41, 42 and 43 had been left open and which gave us a good starting point for 2023.



a) The Pits at end of 2022



b) Drone view 2022



c) View North 2022

Figure 1 – Open trenches at the end of 2022

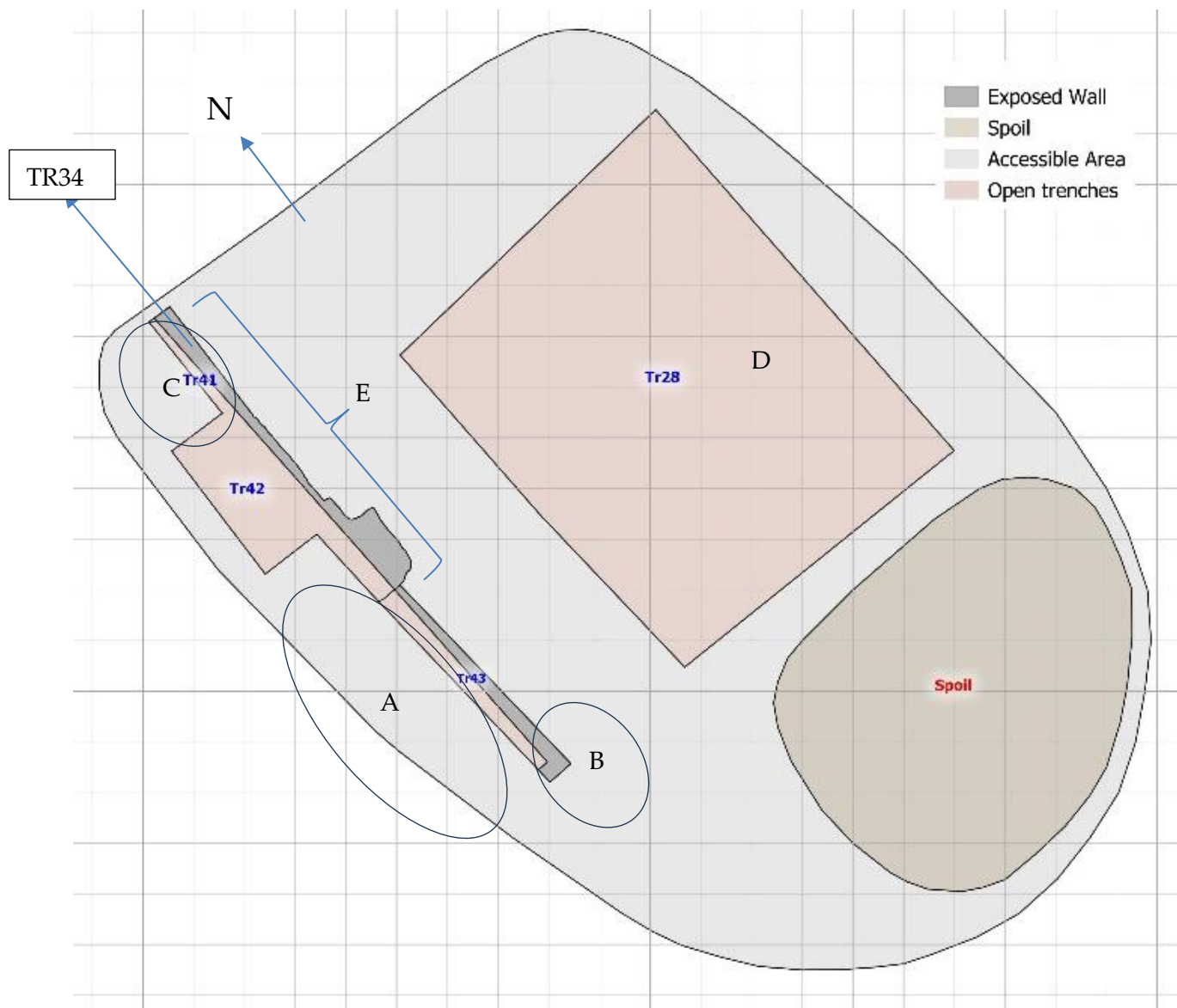


Figure 2 – The excavations as at the end of 2022

3 Planned excavations for 2023

After consideration of what we already knew about the wall, and the fact that as we were limited as to where we could excavate for 2023 due to the planted crop, we agreed to concentrate on:

- A) The area to the inside of the wall (i.e. to the SW side).
- B) The area by the SE corner where a pit was found in trench 20 and a post hole at the SE corner of the wall were identified in 2016 and 2017 respectively.
- C) Extend the SW of trench 41 to see if there is any evidence of an internal. **wall**
- D) The open area of trench 28 would be used as the location for spoil as this was no longer to be investigated and would protect the remaining exposed archaeology.
- E) Clear the back fill from the NE side of the wall down to the terram overlay left from the 2016-18 excavations.

These would be divided into areas suitable for individuals to excavate. The area was divided as per the plan in Figure 3 below.



Figure 3 – Planned excavations for 2023

3.1 The first find of the year

On returning to the site for the first time in 2023, we discovered that the baulk between pits 2 & 7 (?) had collapsed revealing a stone lamp, which is the first we have found on the site since we started in 2009.



Figure 4 – Stone Lamp

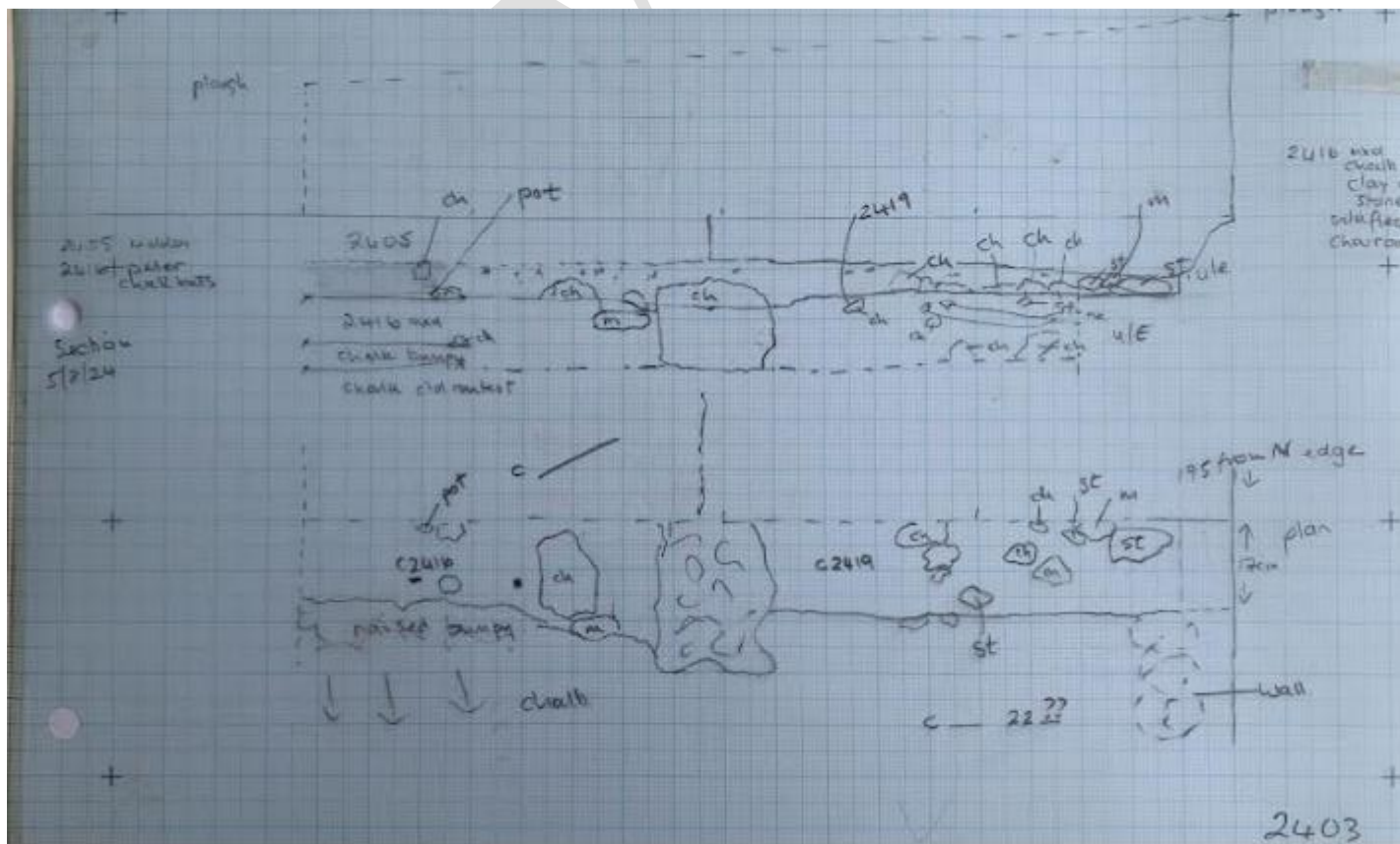
3.2 Tr41 extension excavations

3.2.1 Trench 41 was re-excavated as only a cursory investigation had been done so far. It was revisited, expanded and extended to see if there was any evidence of another internal wall. It was excavated to the west just below the original known NW/SE wall, but did not reveal any signs of an internal wall or wall foundation. However, there was a denser chalk area to its SE end which may have been the remains of a post pad.



Figure xx: TR41 Excavations: Area marked in read is where the potential chalk post hole was seen.

In 2024 this area was investigated further. *Ill bring the actual drawing of course*



Top picture Section 2401: Bottom picture Plan 2403; Dated 5/8/24



Here's the draft for Plan 2403. I have assumed that the artefacts not identified are stone apart from the black blob which I assumed was charcoal. Can you please check those. White is chalk, white with streaks is dippy chalk, reddish...

It seemed clear at the end of 2024 that this area probably needed further investigation in 2025.

4 TR43 The visible roman wall

4.1 The focus of attention in TR43 2022 had been limited in time as it began only mid-September, however earlier the TR43 was investigated for evidence of a possible internal wall towards the west. As often happens in these things, the small amount of stones remaining marked with a red arrow were interesting but in order to investigate further we would have to plan a two by two excavation over the area. We decided that as it was close to the end of the season, we would plan that for 2023 and so for 2022 we would continue to investigate the already visible wall section around the TR21 area to find out about its construction and the shape and depth of the foundation trench.

4.2 A length of 1 metre, just north of where the wall was revealed in TR21 of 2016 was excavated stone by stone to read any information from the process. See Figure xx



These stones turned out to be the interior wall revealed in 2023 in TR44

Area of the 2016 TR21

This area had been excavated in 2018 when investigating what was over the other side of the wall.

Figure xx TR43

4.3 The excavator in 2022 worked from the West side of the wall facing East. Gradually stones were revealed and one by one they were removed in what appeared to be the sequence in which they had been laid in that if a stone 'a' was lying over another stone 'b' it was assumed that 'b' had been put in position before 'a'.



Figure xx Showing the area of excavation investigating the construction of the wall - 2022



Figure xx: A simple depiction of the overlapping stones for the reader's consideration.

4.4 One could surmise:

4.4.1 If the maker was right-handed, it might seem that they might build the wall from left to right, placing each new stone almost on top of the right hand edge of the last stone in position so as to lock the stones somewhat in place, then move on to the next stone and similarly lock the previous stone. Appearing to work right-handed from a left right perspective but working from the west side of the wall. Gradually filling in the width and length of the wall sequentially.

4.4.2 If the maker was left-handed then it might seem that they might approach the building of the wall in a different process. Building from their right-hand side and placing adjacent stones sequentially on the left-hand edge of the previous stone thus building the height and strength in a right to left motion. But would that assume that the worker was sited on the east side of the wall?

How would we know?

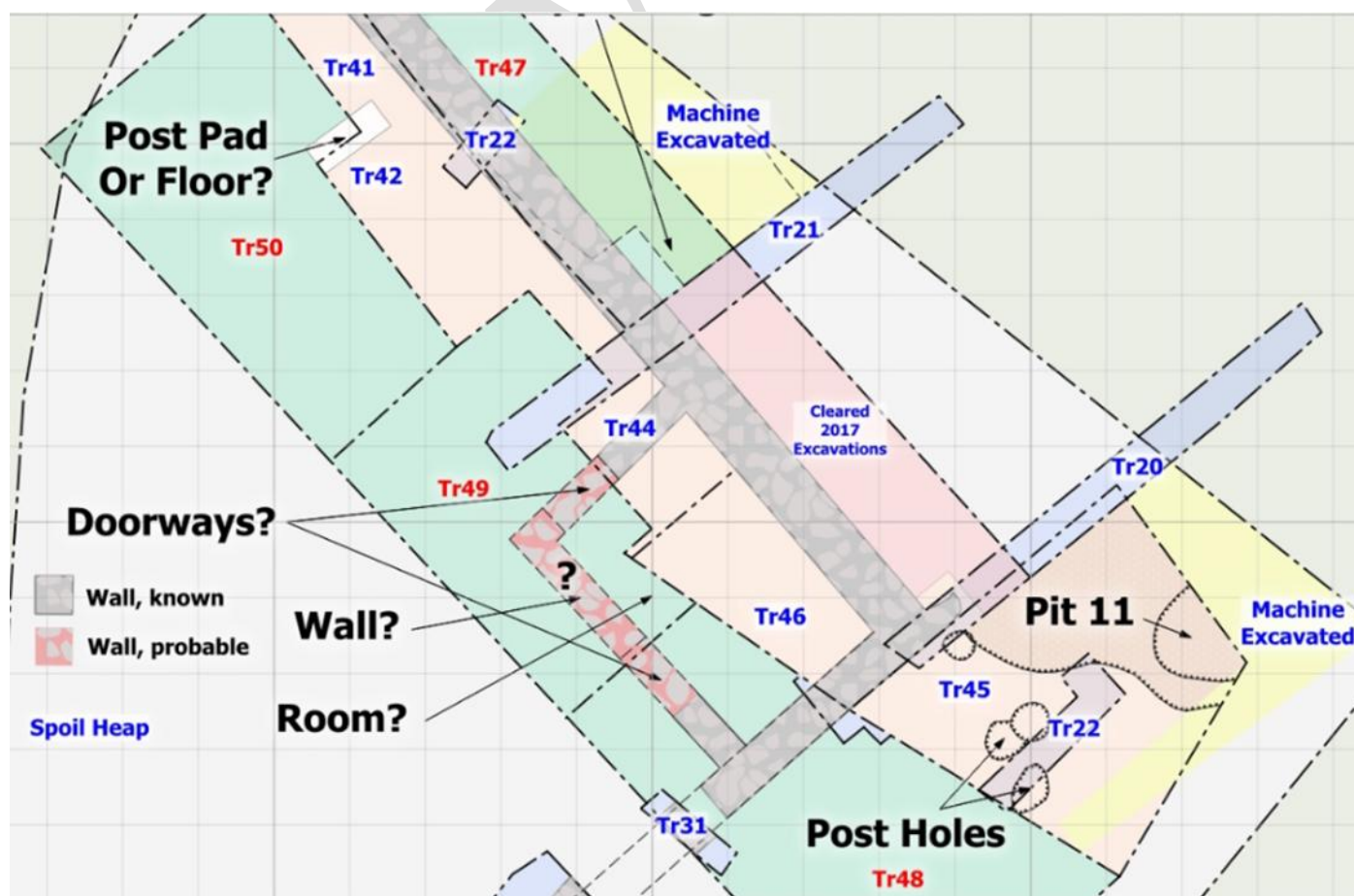
5 Tr44 excavations

5.1 Trench 44 excavations were to investigate any features of the inside of the wall to the SW.

Please refer to the figure xx on page 8 and note the red arrow pointing to some random stones. This was the beginning of the interior wall as seen in 2022.

Here, in 2023, an internal wall was found that extends SW about 1.2m from the main wall where it appears to either end, or, has had some stones removed. Further excavation was planned for 2024 to see where the wall goes, if anywhere.

2024 saw us having to remove a large amount of plough across several pretty large areas, namely over TRs 47, 48, 49 and 50.



(Again Jayne, can you please add a brief note here?).

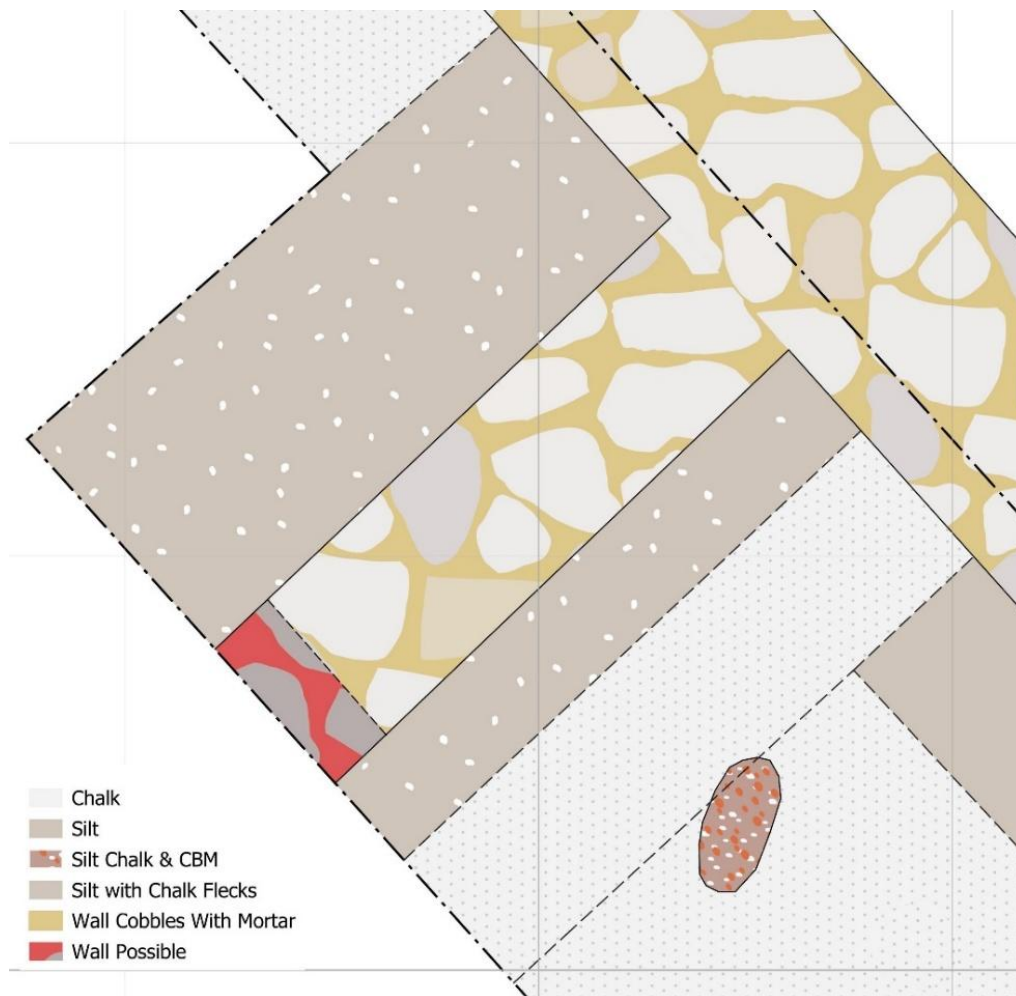


Figure 5 – Trench 44 plan



Figure 6 – Looking NW, the newly discovered internal wall in Tr44

Figure xx , page 12, shows the area before season in 2024 . view from the North to South the areas covering the new TRs49 and 48 and plough to be removed on the right hand side.



4.1 Tr45 excavations

Trench 45 excavations were to investigate any features outside the known wall parameters, including the known post hole from the 2017 excavations.

A number of features were found and confirmed within these excavations. These being a number of additional post holes and another pit (pit 11) that cuts (Mick/Muriel, was that identified in 2023 or 24? and does it cut or cut into pit 1?) into pit 1.

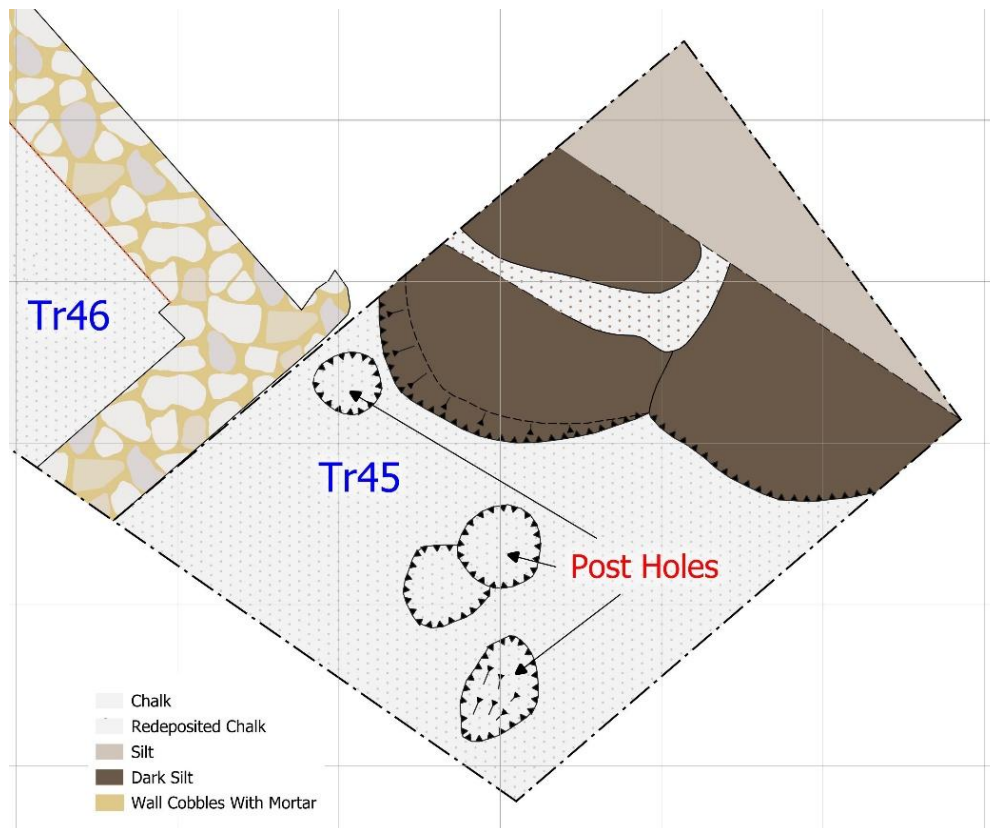


Figure 7 – Trench 45



Figure 8 – Post holes SE of the wall corner of Tr45



Figure 9 – Pits 1 & 11 in Tr45

4.2 Tr46 excavations

Trench 46 excavations revealed no evidence of an internal wall, only a rough chalk surface with potentially a couple of slight depressions, not deep enough for significant post holes, but possibly for a support for a table or bench (shown in the plan in Figure 11), but equally possible just chalk wash out. A small area was excavated to the side of the trench to determine if the chalk surface was natural and it proved to be.

One significant find was what is probably a lead pipe join. The lead is very fragile and breaks easily on touch.



Figure 10 – Possible Lead Pipe Join

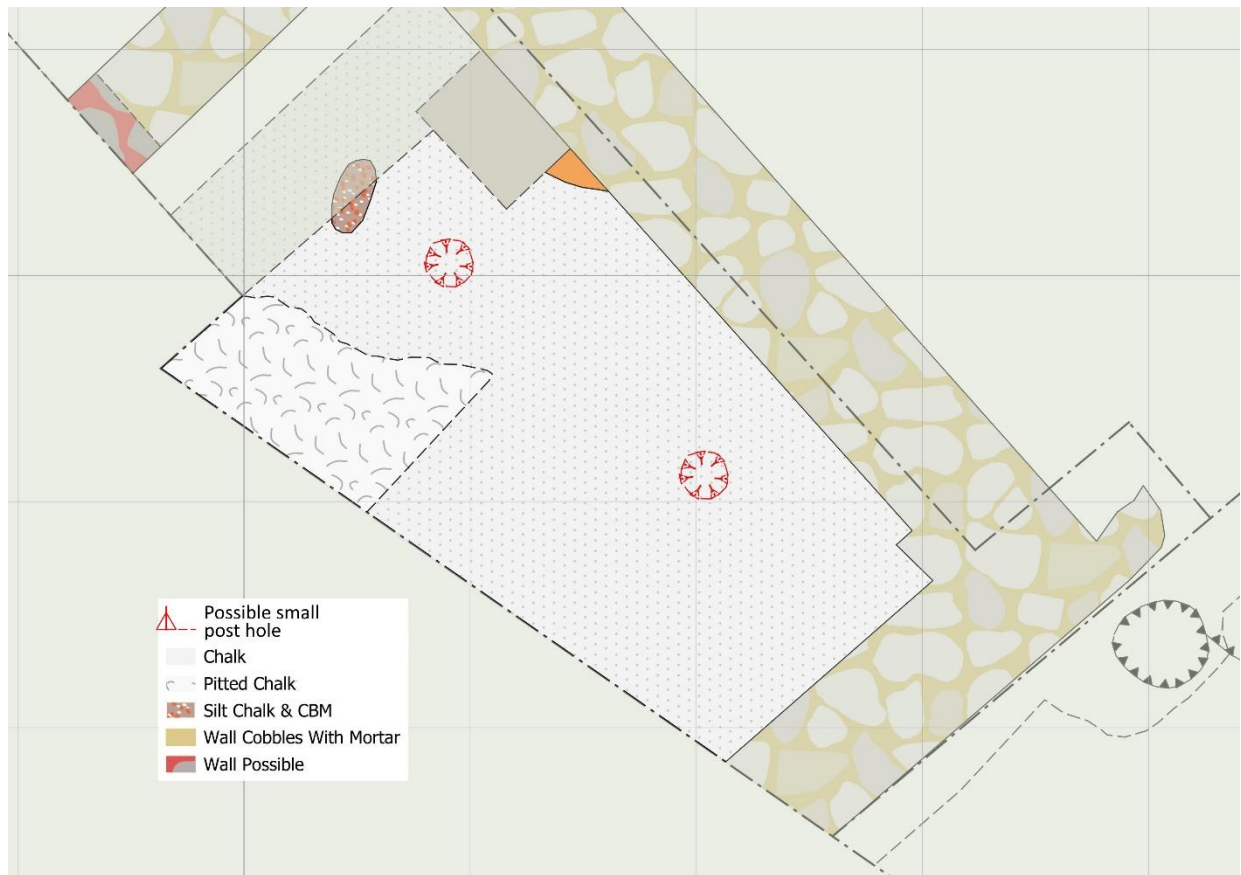


Figure 11 – Trench 46

4.3 Tr47 excavations

Tr47 was only excavated to the bottom of the plough layer apart from a small test area adjacent to the wall and the NW end of the earlier 2017 excavations. A number of tiles were found, but left in-situ for full excavations in 2024.



Figure 12 – The internal wall in Tr41 and topsoil removed in Tr47



Figure 13 – Tiles exposed in a small test area to the SE end of Tr47

4.4 Final plan for the 2023 excavations

At the end of the 2023 digging season, we had TBD

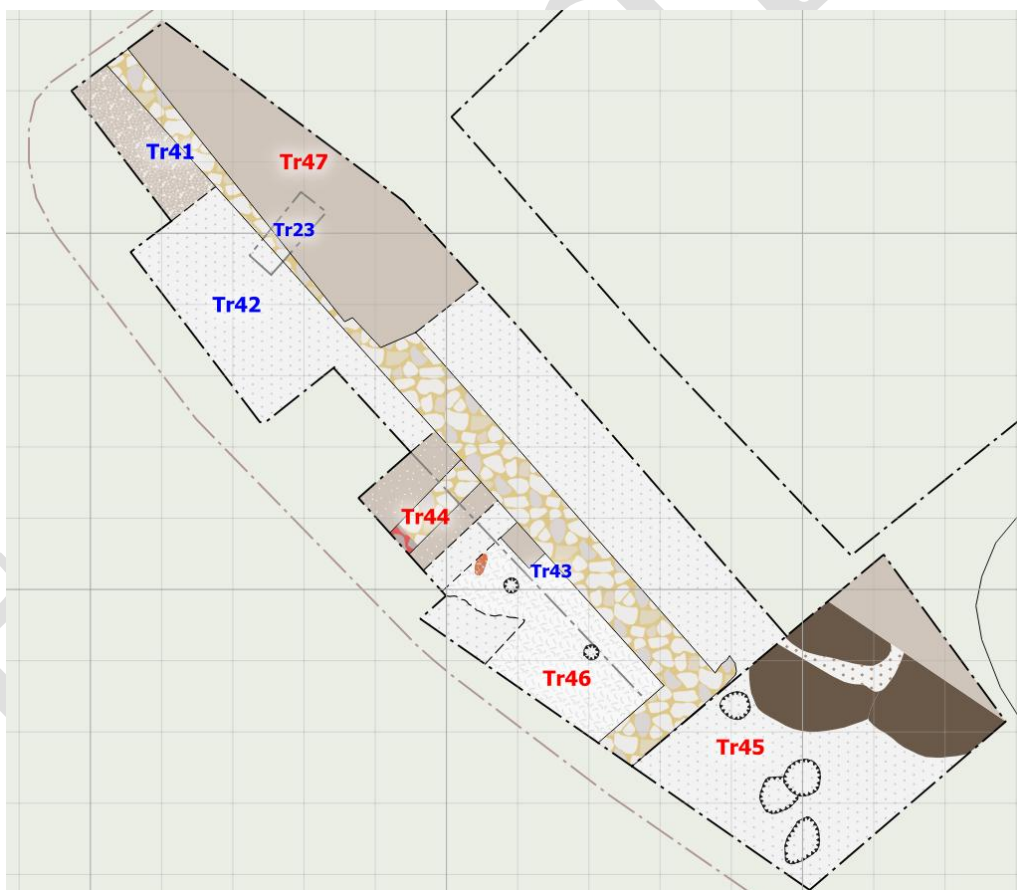


Figure 14 – Final plan of excavations for 2023

5 Planned excavations for 2024

5.1 Trenches showing signs of the wall by the end of 2023

From our initial test pits in 2016 until the end of 2023, we had excavated a number of areas as shown in in Figure 15 below. Though there are a few small gaps (shown by the dotted line), we can be confident that the wall extends some 25m NW to SE and 12m (subject to confirmation in 2025) NE to SW.

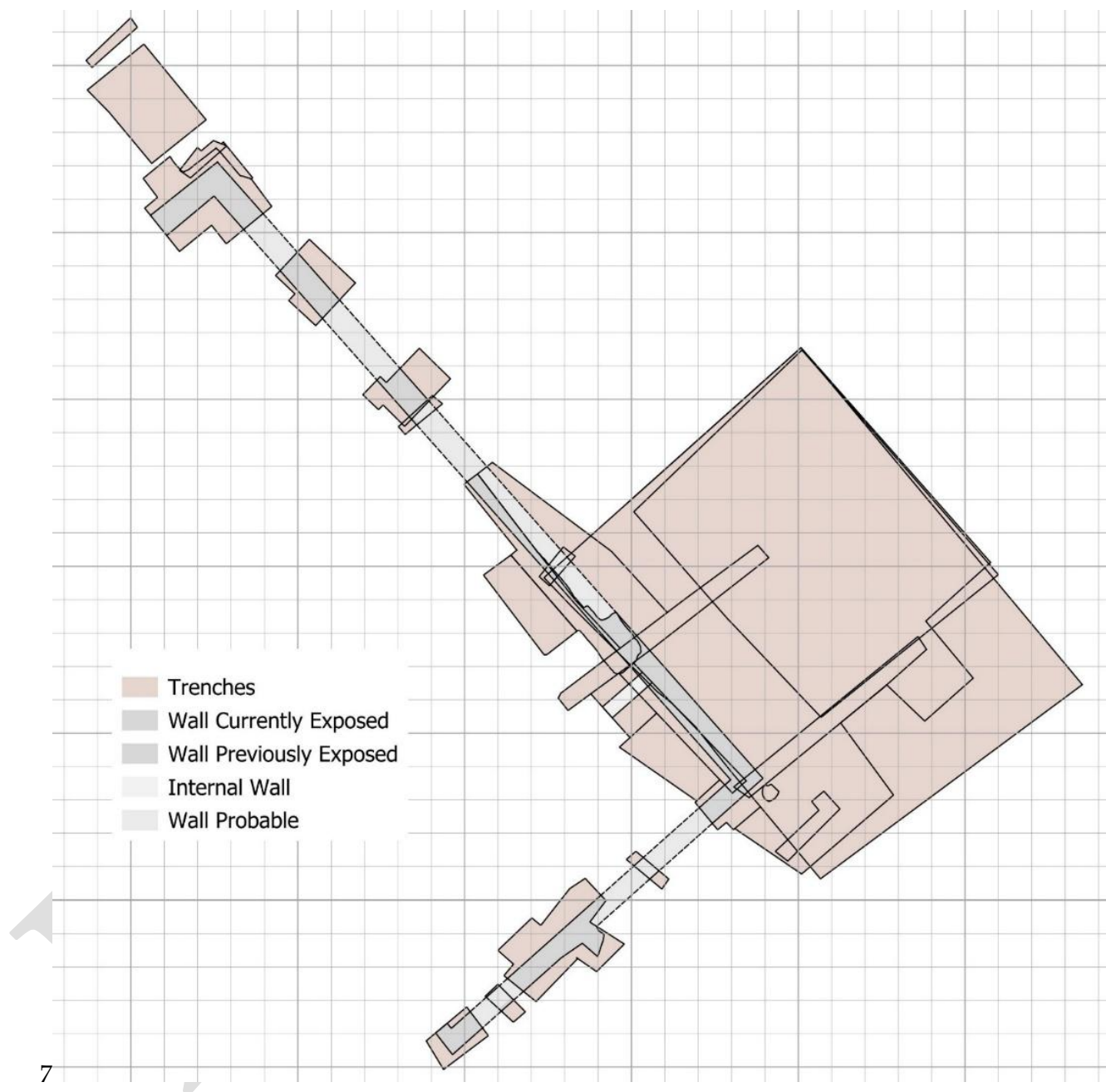


Figure 15 – Excavated trenches (2016-23), showing known and probable walls at the end of 2023

Therefore, based upon known parts of the wall excavated between 2016 and 2023, we planned our excavations for 2024. This was mainly an extension of our 2023 excavations, which would include:

- Further investigations of the inside of the building to determine where the internal wall extended to (Tr48/49)
- Continuing the excavations along the main wall to the NE (Tr47) and further investigate either side the main wall to the SW.

- Investigate the possible post pad in Tr41/50

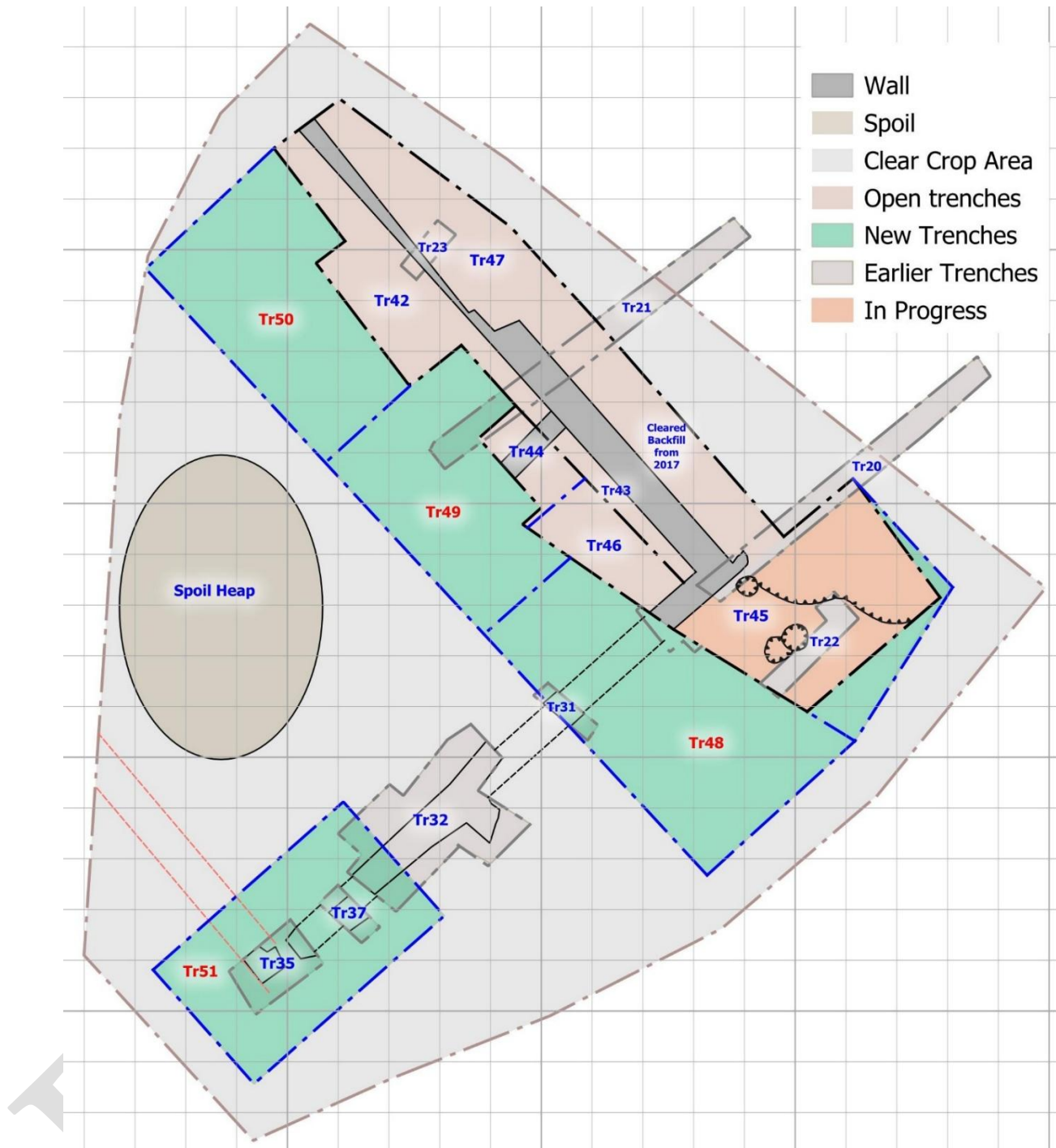


Figure 16 – Proposed excavations for 2024

5.2 Tr45 excavations

Excavations in Tr45 continued in 2024 revealing further layers on chalk and silt as well as the clear cut between pits 1 and 11. Significant finds were... [Mick/Muriel, can you please add a brief note here?](#)

5.3 Tr47 excavations

[Chris, can you please add something brief here?](#)

5.4 Tr48/49 excavations

Initially planned as two separate trenches, but as excavations progressed, the area to the NW of the main wall was essentially dealt with as one.

The major find here was the discovery of the internal wall extending NW from the main wall. It appeared that it was likely to join in some way to the internal wall found in 2023. Also, it was later realized that this internal wall had been cut into the main external wall rather than abutting it.



Figure 17 – Internal wall cut into main wall

Does anyone have a better picture showing this? My others are even worse!!

5.5 Tr50 (Tr41) excavations

This trench was effectively an extension of Tr41 to investigate the possible post pad. Jayne, please add something brief here. SEE PAGE FIVE... IVE INPUT SOME PICTURES, AWFUL PICTURES, THAT ARE PROBABLY NOT IN THE RIGHT PLACE BUT CAN BE MOVED TO THE RIGHT PLACE. I DIDN'T GET MY MAIN CAMERA WORKING THIS YEAR. SO NOT MANY PHOTOS AVAILABLE.

6 Conclusions from 2023/24 excavations

7 References

- 1) CIA – Nine Wells Whittlesford excavations reports from 2009 to 2015 of the temple and the villa/bath area - Bill Hughes, Rodney Scarle, Robert Skeen and Peter Cornelissen et al.
- 2) CIA – Nine Wells Whittlesford excavations reports from 2016 for the test trenches Tr20 and 21 – Jayne Nelson and Mick James
- 3) CIA – Nine Wells Whittlesford Interim Wall report 2017 – Mick James
- 4) CIA – Nine Wells Whittlesford Painted Plaster Report 2016/7 – Jayne Nelson
- 5) Archaeology RheeSearch Group, Report on Bath House Field Geophysical Survey, 2003 - 2007, Cambridgeshire C.C. HER Record No. ECB2713
- 6) Maynard's Journals (in Cambridgeshire C.C. Records Office)

7) Taylor, C and Arbon, A in P.C.A.S. XCVI, 21 – 40

8) **ADD MORE?**

8 Acknowledgements

- To farmers Leslie Harrison (to 2022) and, from 2022, Charlie Deller for their support, site access and interest
- To Cambridgeshire County Farms for site permission and access
- Mark Hinman and his team at Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd for their advice and support throughout planning and excavation and for use of their premises for post excavation finds processing and storage.

9 Table of figures

Figure 1 – Open trenches at the end of 2022.....	3
Figure 2 – The excavations as at the end of 2022	4
Figure 3 – Planned excavations for 2023.....	5
Figure 4 – Stone Lamp.....	5
Figure 5 – Tr41 excavations	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Figure 6 – Trench 44 plan.....	11
Figure 7 – Looking NW, the newly discovered internal wall in Tr44	11
Figure 8 – Trench 45.....	13
Figure 9 – Post holes SE of the wall corner of Tr45	13
Figure 10 – Pits 1 & 11 in Tr45.....	14
Figure 11 – Possible Lead Pipe Join.....	14
Figure 12 – Trench 46.....	15
Figure 13 – The internal wall in Tr41 and topsoil removed in Tr47	15
Figure 14 – Tiles exposed in a small test area to the SE end of Tr47.....	16
Figure 15 – Final plan of excavations for 2023	16
Figure 16 – Excavated trenches (2016-23), showing known and probable walls at the end of 2023	17
Figure 17 – Proposed excavations for 2024.....	18
Figure 18 – Internal wall cut into main wall	19