

Laurel House, Church Street, Welford-on-Avon, Warwickshire

Archaeological Watching Brief



understanding heritage matters

Report No 1205
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*Working for
Warwickshire*

Project: Laurel House, Church Street, Welford-on-Avon

Commissioned by: Mr James Kimpton

Project Report No. 1205

Site Code: WL12

NGR: SP 1477 5219

Planning Reference: 11/01764/FUL

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief carried out during the excavation of foundation trenches at Laurel House, Church Street, Welford-on-Avon exposed no archaeological deposits associated with the surrounding medieval settlement. The remains of two wooden posts might be associated with the very large number of outbuildings depicted on the late 19th century First Edition of the Ordnance Survey which evidently were demolished and replaced by other outbuildings by the 1923 Edition. Several of these latter buildings have subsequently been demolished, with one single brick wall exposed in the foundation trenches and a large amount of building debris mixed in with the upper layer of soil. Pottery dating from the first half of the 19th century and the early 20th century was also recovered from this layer.

Although the site very likely lies within the area of medieval development, it is also likely that any such buildings have been subsumed by the current edifice and/or destroyed by the myriad outbuildings that subsequently developed.

1 Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Stratford-upon-Avon District Council for the erection of an extension at Laurel House, Church Street, Welford-on-Avon (Planning Ref. 11/01764/FUL). The site lies in the valley of the River Avon, a location well-endowed with evidence for settlement in the prehistoric and Roman periods and within the area of the medieval settlement of Welford. A condition of planning permission required the applicant to secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work to be carried out in conjunction with the development.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of archaeological observation of foundation trenches in accordance with a brief prepared by the County Planning Archaeologist on behalf of the Planning Authority, was commissioned from Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire and carried out in January 2012. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under the site code WL12.

2 Location

2.1 The village of Welford-on-Avon lies within a broad loop of the River Avon within the parish of Welford-on-Avon. Laurel House is located on the south side Church Street, at national grid reference SP 1477 5219.

2.2 The underlying geology of the site is Lower Lias Clay (British Geological Survey 1974). Land use prior to the development consisted of a back garden and a conservatory.

3 Methodology

3.1 The watching brief was designed to observe any groundworks associated with the development and record as far as possible, the nature of the archaeological resource on the

site.

3.2 The work undertaken involved the examination of early map evidence as well as records of archaeological remains in the area and local historical journals and other publications. Fieldwork involved an archaeologist being present during appropriate groundworks.

4 Archaeological and Historical Background

4.1 The earliest evidence for human activity in the area comes from a number of Neolithic or Early-Middle Bronze Age flints, recovered to the west of the existing village (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record Numbers MWA 4412, MWA 5312, MWA 5651; Fig 1). Similar densities of such finds have been recorded over much of the county. They do not represent evidence for early settlement but do indicate that this part of the Avon valley was frequented during this timeframe. A Bronze Age socketed axe (MWA 1846) recovered west of the Avon, to the west of the village, may have been dislodged from a burial site of this date.

4.2 Undated cropmarks, also to the west of the existing village may be from a trackway or field system of later prehistoric or more likely Romano-British date (MWA 1815). Finds from this general area also include Romano-British pottery (MWA 3750). What may have been a feature associated with this crop mark system was recorded during an archaeological observation at Welford-on-Avon Primary School (MWA 9833, Palmer and Coutts 2004, 5). Here a ditch with a V-shaped profile was recorded but no finds were recovered from it. An archaeological watching brief at Welford Bowls Club immediately west of the school did not record any archaeological features or finds, although the subsoil levels at which features are likely to survive were not penetrated (EWA 3384).

4.3 To the east of the present development site an assemblage of Romano-British finds including coins, jewellery, a bronze boar figurine, pottery, worked stone, flue tile from a hypocaust and tesserae paving indicate the presence of a Romano-British villa (MWA 1344, MWA 3999). A pipe trench dug across the north end of this site in 1958 revealed a feature which yielded 2nd- and 4th-century material, although its precise location is not recorded.

4.4 North of the Avon a further villa site is known at Luddington (MWA 1796) and west of the river loop a large cropmark complex in Temple Grafton has yielded Romano-British finds (MWA 5652) indicative of a high status settlement or villa which has been Scheduled as an Ancient Monument (Warwickshire Monument 155).

4.5 The earliest historical reference to Welford-on-Avon is in the Domesday Book of 1086 when it was part owned by the Abbey of St Denis in Paris (VCH 1949, 189-190). The medieval village (MWA 9022) developed to the south of a ford across the River Avon on the road from Binton Bridge to Long Marston (VCH 1949, 189). The parish church of St Peter (MWA 1805) was heavily restored in the 19th century (VCH 1949, 191) but still retains considerable elements dating from the 12th to 15th century, particularly its fine Norman door and arcades. Remains of a medieval cross-base (MWA 1806) survive in the churchyard. A mill is mentioned at Welford in the 13th century and the most recent mill on the site was working until 1958, but has since been converted into a house (MWA 1816). Archaeological work on two sites in the east part of the existing village did not record any archaeological features (MWA 8381, EWA 6951). Finds of medieval pottery have been recovered from the

area immediately surrounding the medieval part of the village (MWA 1343, MWA 1803, MWA 2751, MWA 4042, MWA 5190, EWA 9155) and probably derive from manuring of the open fields during the period. The medieval village of Weston-on-Avon (MWA 9021), which lies to the east of Welford, was cited in Gloucestershire in the Domesday Book.

4.6 In 2011 archaeological recording during groundworks at Cider Mill House, on the High Street, recorded several layers and buried features associated with the house. These included a layer of soil containing rubbish from the house with pottery dating between the 14th and 19th centuries. A small north-south ditch, probably dating to the later 18th century, was also found along with two probable 19th century pits on the east side of the house. A single sherd of Roman pottery found within one of these pits was residual (Gethin forthcoming).

4.7 Church Street is clearly one of the original medieval streets of Welford. To the west it leads to Boat Lane which would have run down to a ford over the Avon, since destroyed by the river lock and mill weir. This allowed access to the medieval settlement at Hillborough and then on to Bidford-on-Avon. A large number of timber-framed buildings survive in Welford, particularly on Church Street. It has been suggested that none are earlier than 17th-century in date (VCH 1949, 89). However, at least one of the buildings on Church Street is visibly of crook construction and it may well be that some of them date from the 16th or even 15th century. A fine, three-bay threshing barn with extensive, decorative, vent-work lies in the western part of the village; the building, Pygthle Barn, is shown on a map of c.1800 and appears to be 18th century in date (MWA 8892).

4.8 The 1834 Ordnance Survey does show the site as part of a narrow strip of cottages on the west side of the High Street. The 1884 First Edition Ordnance Survey map shows some of the cottages that now make up Laurel House and several associated outbuildings to the rear. By the time of the Second Edition map of 1901 many of these outbuildings had been removed and replaced by a more extensive group which includes the current store and garage with dovecote. A few more buildings had been added by the time of the Third Edition map of 1923. All of the outbuildings to the east of the garage/dovecote have since been demolished.

5 Watching Brief

5.1 An extant conservatory had recently been demolished to ground level before the site was visited but this involved no groundworks. Trenches for the new extension were then excavated using a tracked machine with a 0.6m toothless ditching bucket. All trenches were 0.6m wide and were all excavated down into geological natural greenish clay (102). At the eastern end of the site the trenches were 1.7m deep but for most they were only 1.2m deep.

5.2 Geological natural clay was reached at a depth of 0.4m at the eastern end of the trench and but was overlaid by an increasingly deep layer of soil (106) the further west the trenches were excavated. Two wooden posts (103 and 104) were visible driven into the clay (102). Post 103 was large and rounded and had a diameter of 0.2m whilst post 104 was roughly squared and 0.15m in diameter. Part of a brick wall (105), only 0.2m wide, was also observed. All were covered by layer 106, a greyish brown sandy loam ranging in thickness from 0.1m at the eastern end of the site and 0.5m at the western end of the site. It contained frequent fragments of brick along with occasional roof tile and other building debris. Fragments of 19th and 20th century pottery were also recovered from this layer. These

included part of a saucer made by 'E Asbury & Co, Longton'. This firm operated between 1875 and 1925 (potteries and ceramics website). No early features were exposed and no pottery earlier than the 19th century was found. Layer 106 was overlain by 0.2m of dark greyish brown sandy loam topsoil (100). At the far eastern end of the site was a layer of modern disturbance (101) associated with the construction of the recently removed conservatory.

6 Conclusions

6.1 No finds or deposits associated with medieval Welford were found during the groundworks, nor were any archaeological features associated with earlier periods exposed. The two wooden posts that were exposed in the trenches might have survived in the natural clay for some time but still seem likely to be associated with post medieval activity on the site. The main feature of the site was the considerable amount of 19th and early 20th century material within layer 106. This included large amounts of brick debris as well as 19th and 20th century pottery. The brick debris and the single brick wall (105) must be associated with the numerous outbuildings that are shown on the First, Second and Third Editions of the Ordnance Survey maps.

6.2 Although no medieval remains were found during the work it remains likely that the site was occupied by some buildings in the medieval period. These would likely have been located in the same place as the current cottages making up Laurel House. Any associated remains to the rear of these seem to have been destroyed, at least in the area of the former outbuildings.

Acknowledgements

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MAPS

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Ordnance Survey 1884 *First Edition 1:2500 map, Warwickshire Sheet 43.16.*

Ordnance Survey 1901 *Second Edition 1:2500 map, Warwickshire Sheet 43.16.*

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Appendices

List of Contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comments</i>
100	Dark greyish brown sandy loam	Topsoil
101	Modern disturbance	20th century
102	Geological natural clay	Natural geology
103	Wooden post	19th/20th century?
104	Wooden post	19th/20th century?
105	Brick wall	19th/20th century
106	Greyish brown sandy loam with brick	20th century

List of Finds

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Comments</i>
106	Pottery	20	Mid 19th to early 20th century
106	Metal and ceramic	1	Brass fitting with ceramic pulley (19th century)

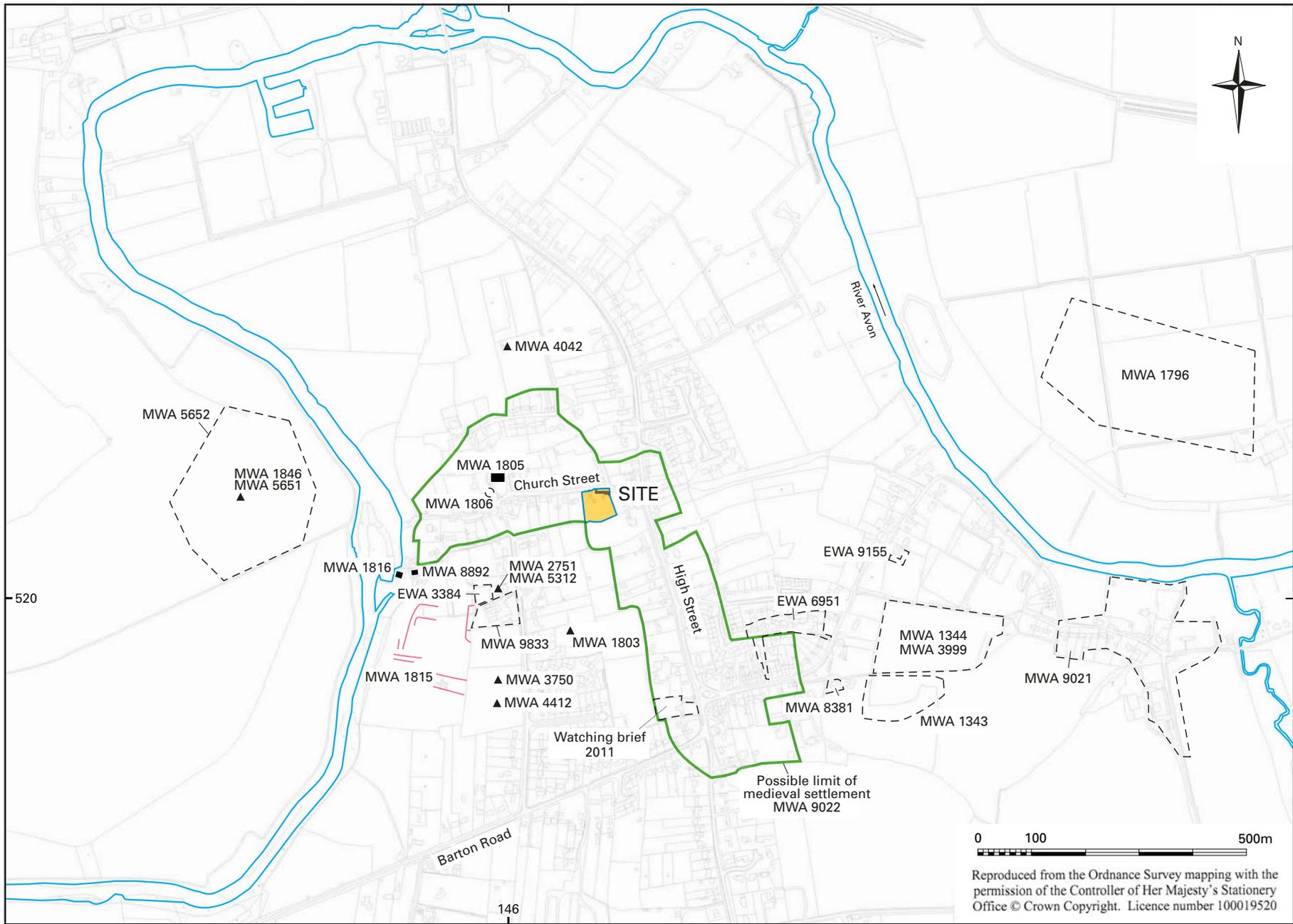


Fig. 1: Site location

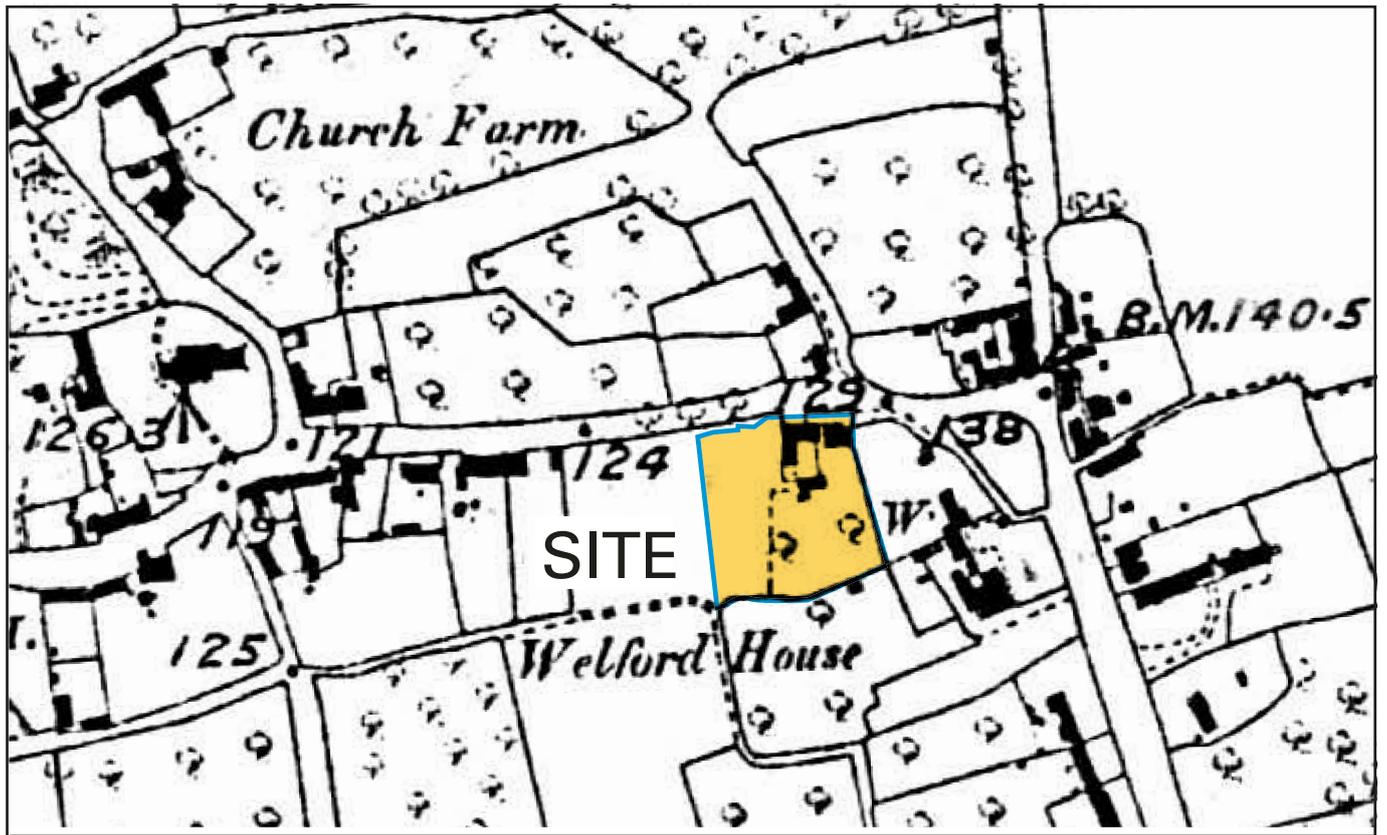


Fig 2: Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1884

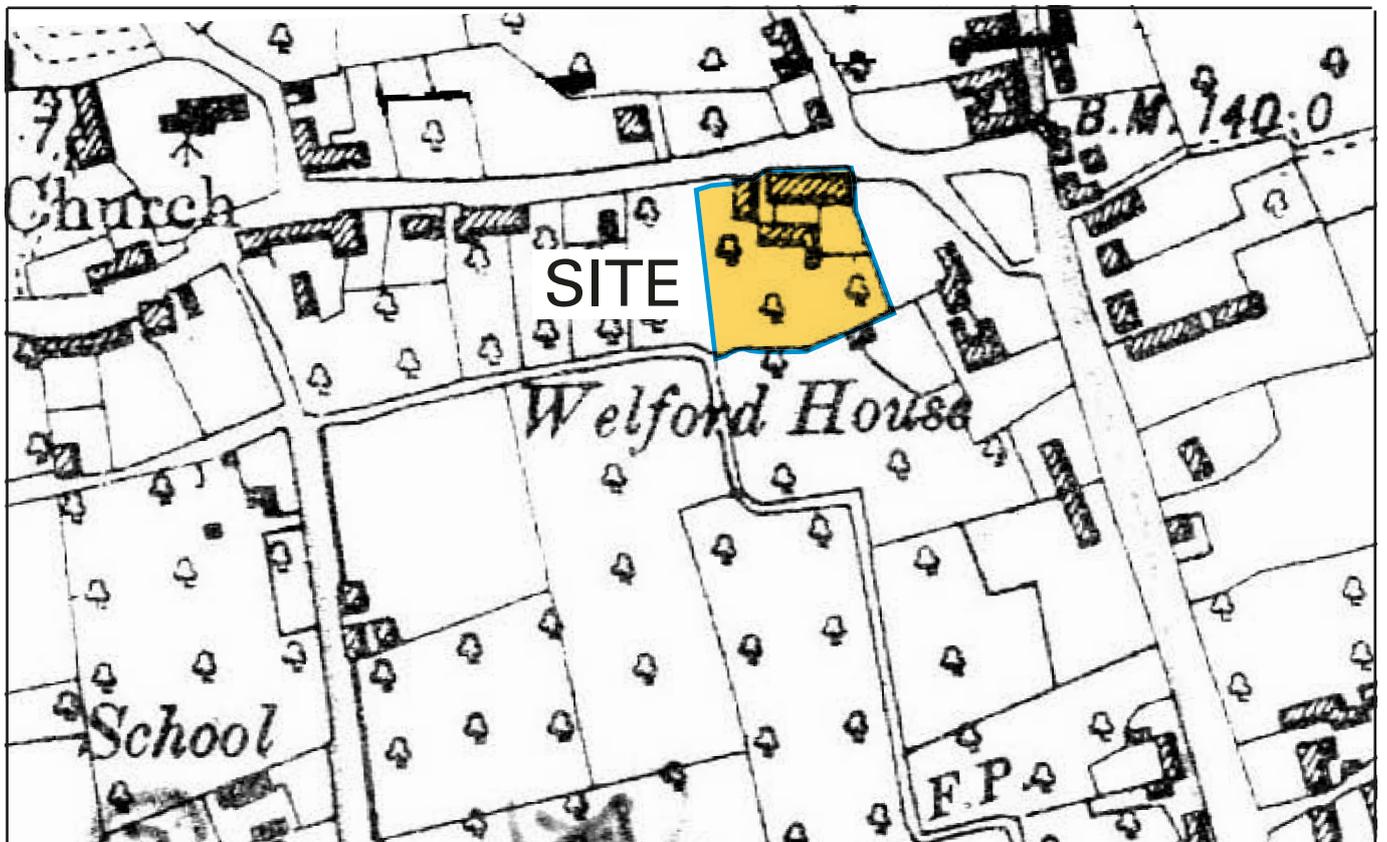


Fig 3: Detail from Second Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1901

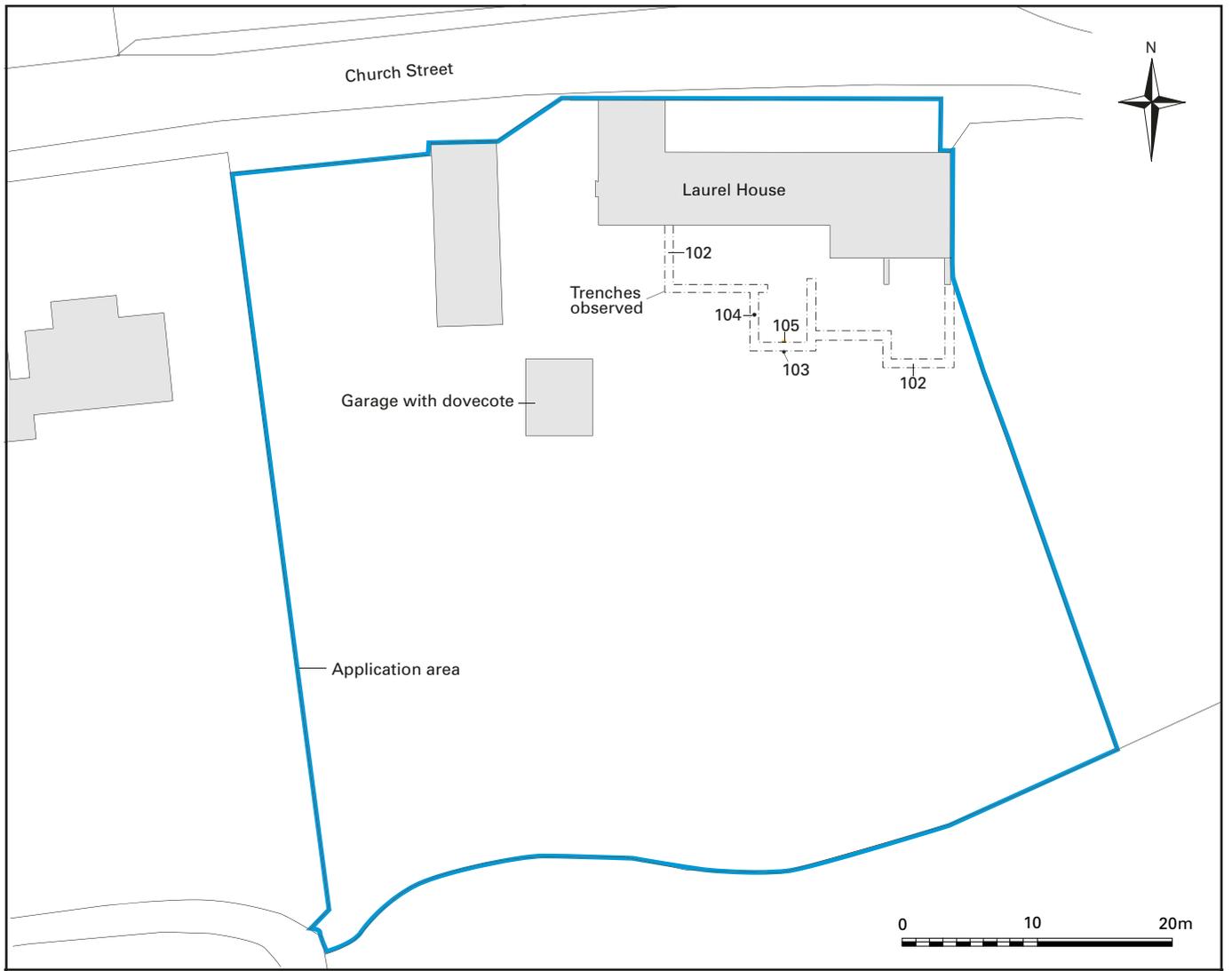


Fig 4: Trenches observed



Fig 5: General view of the foundation trenches approaching completion



Fig 6: Section showing wooden post 103 and the typical make-up of the site