

**EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY
FOR
BEDFORDSHIRE
WOBURN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

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Preface

All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Background to the Project*

English Heritage has initiated a national series of Extensive Urban Surveys. This report is an archaeological assessment of Woburn and forms part of the Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) for Bedfordshire. This survey of the 12 historic towns of Bedfordshire is funded by English Heritage (EH) and managed by the County Archaeological Officer (CAO) of Bedfordshire County Council (BCC). The survey is being jointly undertaken by staff of Albion Archaeology and the Heritage and Environment Group of BCC.

The EUS comprises three stages, Data Compilation, Assessment and Strategy. The first stage, Data Compilation, draws together the accessible history of the town, known archaeological sites and historic buildings data. The Assessment presents this evidence in the form of a report which provides a history of the town, an account of its buried and standing archaeology, together with an assessment of archaeological potential. The Strategy stage will draw on the Assessment to develop a strategic framework for the management of the archaeological resource for each town.

The chronological framework used in the Assessment reports to describe each town's development (normally section 5) reflects the periodisation used in the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER). Any broad dating system of this kind has limitations in the face of the mass of detailed evidence that exists for each town. It has, therefore, occasionally (*e.g.* Bedford in the Saxon and Saxo-Norman periods, or Luton in the early industrial period) been necessary to use slightly different chronological divisions. In addition, the town of Sandy is exceptional in its own right because only the Roman town has been included in the Bedfordshire EUS.

1.2 *Structure of this Document*

This report has been compiled using a number of sources including the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER), the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service (BLARS) and the Albion Archaeology (formerly BCAS) Project Database.

The location and topography of Woburn is described in Section 2. The nature of the evidence is discussed in Section 3 and a historical summary of the town is presented in Section 4. The archaeological and historical development of the town is described by chronological period in Section 5. Section 6 comprises an assessment of Woburn's character, importance and potential. The historical development of the town and areas of archaeological potential are presented in plan form at the end of this report.



2. LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

Woburn is a small market town on the western side of mid Bedfordshire, 2.5 kms from the county boundary with Buckinghamshire. It is not to be confused with the large village of Woburn Sands located 3.6 km to the north-west. The town is situated on land that slopes gently from south to north, with an average height of about 125m AOD. It is centred on SP 949 332. There are no rivers or streams in the town itself, though a small stream runs past it 1km to the west.

The location of Woburn on a crossroads has influenced its basic layout and orientation. The main road running north-west to south-east through the town is the A5130 Newport / London Road. This runs roughly parallel with Roman Watling Street, about 3km to the south-west. A minor road from Leighton Buzzard and Bow Brickhill to Eversholt crosses the A5130 in a south-west to north-east direction. This crossroads forms the centre of town.

The geology comprises Lower Greensand on gravel. Woburn is situated on the Greensand Ridge, which stretches from Leighton Buzzard to Sandy. The Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales, sheet 147, shows the area of the town to be predominantly in urban use. The agricultural land surrounding the town is classed as Grade 3. Extensive parts of the parish are wooded. To the east, north-east and south-east of town is the extensive parkland of the Woburn Abbey Estate.



3. THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

3.1. Previous Archaeological Investigations

There have only been two archaeological investigations within the town of Woburn, both carried out by Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service (now Albion Archaeology). These are shown in Fig 2.

A watching brief (WB229) was carried out in 1995 within the town centre on Duck Lane. This was undertaken due to the rebuilding of a toilet block. A post-medieval brick / cement-lined well and a brick/tile-filled pit were uncovered.

In 1995 a brick lined burial vault was opened within the grounds of the former parish church on the High Street. This prompted an archaeological evaluation (WB252). Only one coffin was recorded.

3.2 Historical Evidence

Volume II of the Victorian County History, published in 1908, gives a fairly detailed history of Woburn. Annette Edwards produced a Historic Town Survey for Bedfordshire County Council in 1974. Maxine Partridge wrote a Parish Survey in 1976. Joyce Godber's 'History of Bedfordshire' gives a good general background.

The map evidence for the parish of Woburn is good, but poor for the town itself. The earliest map to show the town is Jonas Moore's dating to 1661 (BLARS R1/282). The road layout of the town and the organisation of common land are clearly shown. Also shown are a number of buildings. The earliest complete map of the town is the 1884 first edition Ordnance Survey map, with revisions in 1901, 1920 and 1937.

The Bedfordshire and Luton Archive and Record Service (BLARS) holds a small amount of archive material about Woburn, including manorial documents, but the majority of this relates to the post-medieval period. There is an extensive series of parish registers dating from 1602. Census returns from 1801-1991 are also held here. The local studies section of Bedford Library also holds various papers, newspaper cuttings, booklets, etc. Much of the documentary material relating to the town is kept at the Woburn Abbey Estate. The Estate declined to give permission to view the material, a fact which to some degree has limited this survey.

The Historic Environment Record (HER) maintained by Bedfordshire County Council's Historic Environment Section lists over seventy historic buildings ranging in date from the 15th century parish church of St Mary to the Woburn Methodist Church which dates to the early 20th century.



4. HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The earliest mention of Woburn is found in the Saxon 'Aspley' charter of 969, where it is referred to as 'Woburninga Genaere' (Fowler 1920). The name originated from a compound of the Old English 'who' and 'burna' which means 'twisted stream' (Mawer and Stenton 1926). There is no direct evidence to suggest that a settlement existed at this time. However, Woburn is mentioned in Domesday Book of 1086, which states that the manor of Woburn was held by Alric, Thegn of King Edward before the Conquest. After the Conquest the manor passed to Walter Giffard. Mention is also made of 6 freemen who cultivated 2,800 acres of land (Page 1904). Annette Edwards has suggested that the freemen established the settlement at Woburn, but there is no evidence to support this (Edwards 1974).

In 1145 Hugh de Bolebec, who owned land in the vicinity, invited Cistercian monks from Fountains Abbey to set up an abbey here (Page 1912). The foundation of the abbey (about 1.5 km to the east-south-east) must have greatly stimulated the growth of the small settlement nearby, providing the economic conditions for it to develop into a market town.

The right to hold a market and an annual fair was granted to the abbot at Woburn Abbey by Henry III in 1242. Two more fairs to be held in the town were granted to the Abbot by Henry VIII in 1530.

At the Reformation in the mid-16th century the Abbey Estate was granted to Lord John Russell (1st Duke of Bedford). Along with the manor and monastery, he was also granted the right to hold a market and three annual fairs. Rebuilding of the abbey buildings into a country seat took place from the early 17th century. The Jonas Moore map of 1661 shows that piecemeal private inclosure of land had already taken place by that date, no doubt overseen by the Russells. In 1727 the Russell family purchased various houses within Woburn and by 1747 they owned 80% of the value of the parish (Page 1912). Their policy throughout the 18th century was to buy up almost anything that came onto the market. However, although they owned most of surrounding land the town itself retained a degree of independence. In 1802 the Russells owned just under half the properties in Woburn.

During the 18th century the fairs decreased in size - perhaps because of competition from Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard and Bedford (Edwards 1974). But Woburn continued to prosper, partly because of the patronage of the Russells but also because it was on a major transport route from London to Northampton and even on to Liverpool. The main London / Newport road was the first in Bedfordshire to be turnpiked. Coaches passing through the town supported 14 thriving inns in the early part of the 19th century.

It is estimated that the population of Woburn in 1671 was 780 (Spavins and Applin 1983). The first census in 1801 records 1,563 residents. By 1851 the population had increased to 2,049 but it seems the population rapidly declined in the second half of the 19th century. The 1901 census records only 1,129



inhabitants. The decline can be attributed at least in part to the construction of the railways, which bypassed Woburn completely. Inns closed down due to shortage of trade. Many local enterprises, such as the iron foundry and the brewery, went out of business - the buildings subsequently demolished. The town of Woburn, therefore, largely missed out on the Industrial Age. It ceased to be as important as other towns nearby such as Ampthill that were served by the railway, and even nearby villages like Woburn Sands and Aspley Guise eventually outgrew it in size.



5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

5.1 The Prehistoric Period (c10,000 - AD43)

There are no known prehistoric sites within or near the town of Woburn.

5.2 The Roman Period (AD43 - AD410)

There are no known Roman sites within Woburn. It has been suggested that Leighton Street follows the course of a Roman road (HER 5342), running south-west to north-east (Viatores 1964), but this has been questioned by Simco (1984). In 1769 a Roman vessel was found at Longslade, between Woburn and Woburn Sands (HER 11981) and in 1833 Roman pottery was found in Woburn Park (HER 38). There is, therefore, no evidence to suggest that the origin of Woburn could be earlier than the Anglo-Saxon period.

5.3 The Anglo-Saxon Period (AD410 - AD1066)

Woburn is referred to as 'Woburninga Genaere' in an Anglo-Saxon charter of 969. Domesday Book (Page 1904) states that the manor was held by Alric, Thegn of King Edward prior to the Conquest. No archaeological evidence from the Saxon period has yet been found in the town.

5.4 The Medieval Period (AD1066 - AD1550)

At the time of the Domesday survey in 1086, the manor of Woburn was assessed at 10 hides and was worth 100 shillings. There were 8 villeins with 6 ploughs and room for 14 more, 7 bordars, 4 serfs, meadow for 6 plough teams and woodland to feed 100 swine.

The medieval town developed around the crossroads, on the edge of land belonging to the Cistercian abbey. Much of the surrounding land was already enclosed in small closes at the end of the medieval period. Although a study of the abbey itself is beyond the scope of this report, it is important to recognise that the presence of the abbey next to the town had a major influence on town development throughout the medieval period.

5.4.1 Manors

There are records of two manors in the parish, easily confused with each other. The first is the manor of Woburn itself, as described in Domesday Book. The location of the manorial centre is unknown. The second is the manor at Birchmoor, which seems to have come into existence in the 17th century and should not be regarded as a medieval manor at all (Edwards 1974)

5.4.1 Birchmoor

The original settlement may have been at Birchmoor, the site of a deserted medieval village 1km to the north. It seems likely that the present town site only started to grow into a sizeable settlement from the mid-12th century, when the foundation of the abbey provided favourable economic conditions for a market town. Even then, Woburn was situated within the parish of Birchmoor right up to the 16th century (Page 1912).



In the early part of the medieval period (before the foundation of the abbey) Birchmoor was a larger settlement than Woburn. However, the growth of Woburn into a town brought about a corresponding decline in Birchmoor's fortunes. By the post-medieval period there were only a few cottages at Birchmoor Green and a manor house standing. The site of the manor is Birchmoor Farm (HER 4940). To the south of this are the earthworks of the deserted medieval settlement (HER 3926) next to Birchmoor Green, though now badly denuded by deep ploughing. The few surviving areas of medieval ridge and furrow (HER 96) might have belonged to field systems set out around Birchmoor. The Jonas Moore map of 1661 marks a small area of ground as a 'The Churchyard', probably indicating the former site of the church used by early Woburn inhabitants. The church was reputedly demolished in the early 17th century, its stones used to restore St Mary's Church in Woburn.

5.4.1 Old St Mary's Church

The main focus of medieval Woburn was the old St Mary's church (HER 36), now the mortuary chapel, on the west side of the High Street (and not to be confused with the 19th century church of St Mary's on the north side of Park Street). Like Elstow and Marston Moretaine churches, it had a detached tower. Probably originally built in the second half of the 12th century, the church is first mentioned as 'the chapel of old Woburn' in the market charter of 1242, which states that the market was to be held outside the church (Page 1912). It was originally the chapel of ease of the parish church at Birchmoor, only becoming the parish church itself in the early post-medieval period. The building was subsequently completely rebuilt in the early 16th century by the last Abbot. It was pulled down again in 1865, leaving just the tower to be incorporated into the new chapel building. The new St Mary's Church in Park Street was built at the same time.

The spacious churchyard enclosure (HER 8994) includes within it the old primary school (HER 4924), which has some Tudor work, to the north. It also encloses the Parsonage (HER 4926), of Georgian date, to the south.

5.4.5 Market Place

In 1242 the right to hold a weekly Friday market outside the church was granted by Henry III. Tolls of the market belonged to the Abbey throughout the medieval period. As the market grew it probably extended out of the spacious churchyard and onto the broad High Street up to the crossroads and along the first part of Leighton Street. At some point, probably in the late 13th or 14th centuries, a deliberate laying out of the triangular market place took place. The Eleanor Cross, erected in 1292 but long since demolished, stood on the crossroads. Other market structures may also have occupied the market place, especially on the site of the present Town Hall.

5.4.6 Eleanor Cross

Work on the cross began in 1292, and was carried out by Ralph de Chichester at a cost of £60 6s 8d. Its date of demolition is uncertain, but the cross is marked on Jonas Moore's map of 1661. Although nothing of the cross



survives, the fact that the procession and coffin of Eleanor should pass through Woburn on her last journey illustrates that the road was a major north-south routeway in the 13th century, leading directly to London itself.

5.4.7 Streets

The Jonas Moore map of 1661 shows the medieval pattern of streets, including George Street, High Street, Bedford Street, Leighton Street, Duck Lane and Park Street. These would all have existed within the medieval period. Buildings depicted on the market place occupy the same positions as standing buildings today. The triangular market place was possibly much wider and longer in the earlier medieval period, before it was encroached upon by buildings.

5.4.8 Buildings

Virtually nothing of the material fabric of medieval Woburn survives today due to a number of serious fires - most notably the fire of 1595, when 130 buildings were destroyed (Page 1912). Likewise, all the medieval work in the church has been replaced in a series of extensive re-buildings and restorations. The Historic Environment Record identifies some buildings which are thought to contain some medieval timber framing: these are the Woburn Country Shop, 21 Market Street (HER 4931), 34-40 London Road (HER 4942) and the Royal Oak Public House on George Street (HER 4944).

HER	Address	Comments
36	Old St Mary's Church, (now the Mortuary Chapel)	Possibly some C16 th work in the tower, but almost entirely C19 th rebuild
4931	Woburn Country Shop, 21 Market Place	C16 th , reworked C19 th
4942	34-40 London End	C16 th
4944	The Royal Oak Public House, George St	C16 th

Table 1. Medieval buildings in Woburn

5.4.9 Trades

Documentary evidence for occupations and trades is limited for the medieval period. The majority of people would have worked on the land. But the town would also have housed the full range of traders that one would expect to find in any market town. The nearby abbey would have provided work for some of the local population, and created an economic demand for services generally.

5.5 The Post-Medieval Period (AD1550 - AD1850)

The end of the medieval period was marked by the dissolution of the monasteries and the beginning of the great landed estates – the transfer of wealth, land and power away from the church and into the hands of the secular aristocracy. Nowhere is this transition more evident than at Woburn. In 1549 Edward VI granted the tolls of the market along with the manor, monastery and associated buildings to Lord John Russell, the first Duke of Bedford (Page 1912). The Russells soon began to acquire further land and buildings throughout much of mid Bedfordshire whenever it came onto the market, greatly increasing the size of the estate. From the mid-16th century, Woburn should perhaps be thought of as the town 'at the gates' of the Woburn Estate.



Fires in 1595, 1642 and 1724 destroyed many of the medieval buildings and led to extensive rebuilding. This accounts for the predominantly Georgian appearance of the town.

5.5.1 Market Place

In 1737 the Market House was built by the fourth Duke of Bedford on the site of the present Town Hall. The lower storey was used for the market shambles.

5.5.2 Roads and Streets

The Jonas Moore map of 1661 gives a clear picture of roads and streets in the mid-17th century – basically the same as those of today. The Woburn to Hockliffe Road was turnpiked in 1706 (Partridge 1990). Its toll house, known as Ivy Lodge (HER 14321), is located a mile to the south of Woburn. The Woburn to Ampthill road was turnpiked in 1777.

Clearly shown on the map are the main town roads of George Street, High Street, Bedford Street, Leighton Street and Park Street. These have changed little up to the present day.

5.5.3 Elizabethan School

The Elizabethan school (HER 4924), which adjoins the churchyard of St Mary's (HER 8894), is the only early building to fully survive from the late 16th century. Reputedly it was once 3 stories high and was approached by an ancient porch. It was built in 1582 and 35 boys were taught there at that time (though by the beginning of the 19th century the school had been extended and the number of pupils had increased to 150). In the 19th century it was used as a lace school.

5.5.4 Buildings

HER	Address	Comments
4908	11 Bedford Street	Late C16 th . Re-worked in C17 th and C18 th
4924	Old Primary School, Bedford Street	1582, reworked C19 th

Table 2. Late 16th century buildings in Woburn

Fires in 1595 and 1642 destroyed many of the buildings in the town.



HER	Address	Comments
4906	Woburn wine Lodge, 13 Bedford Street	C17 th , reworked in the C18 th and C19 th
4908	11 Bedford Street	C16 th reworked in the C17 th and C18 th
4909	8,9 and 10 Bedford Street	C17 th , C18 th and C19 th
4910	La Cantina Restaurant, 5 and 6 Bedford street	C17 th , C18 th and C19 th
4911	2 (Post Office) and 4 Bedford Street	C17 th and C18 th
4912	The Black Horse Public House, 1 Bedford Street	C17 th and C18 th
4932	Crispin's Restaurant, 22 and 23 Market Place	C17 th , C18 th and C19 th
4934	4 Leighton Street	C17 th and C18 th
14298	7 Bedford Street	C17 th , C18 th and C19 th
14299	2 Crawley Road	C17 th and C19 th
15203	32-33 Leighton Street	C17 th and C19 th

Table 3. 17th century buildings in Woburn

A third fire destroyed a number of houses in 1724. By 1727 the Russell family purchased various houses within Woburn until they owned nearly half of properties in the town. In 1760 the 4th Duke of Bedford built 12 Almshouses (HER 14305) on Bedford Street (Spavins and Applin 1983). Comparison between Jonas Moore's map of 1661 (BLARS R1/282) and Brown's map of 1738 (BLARS R1/237) shows that between the mid-17th century and the early 18th century some development had occurred along the eastern side of the High Street and George Street. Thomas Evan's map of 1817 (BLARS R1/239) shows further development along the main streets of the town.

HER	Address	Comments
4900	19 and 20 Bedford Street	Early C18 th
4902	The Magpie Hotel, 18 Bedford Street	C18 th and C19 th
4903	17 Bedford street	C18 th
4904	16 Bedford Street	Early C18 th , reworked C20 th
4905	14 and 15 Bedford Street	Late C18 th , reworked C20 th
4907	12 Bedford Street	C18 th
4913	Gifford Gallery and Woburn Fine Arts, 11 and 12 Market Place	1725
4914	The reject China Shop, 8-10 Market Place	Early C18 th
4915	4-7 Market Place	Late C18 th
4916	1-3 High Street	C18 th
4917	11 Park Street	C18 th
4918	The Bedford Arms Hotel, George Street	C18 th
4919	The Chestnuts, 7 George Street	Late C18 th
4920	11 George Street	C18 th
4921	13 George Street	Late C18 th
4922	Crowholt George Street	C18 th
4926	The Old Parsonage, Bedford Street	C18 th
4927	47 Bedford Street	C18 th



4928	Serendib, 15 Market Place	Early to mid-C18 th
4929	Parkins Store and Woburn Books, 17 and 18 Market Place	Late C18 th and mid-C19 th
4930	Atrim Antiques, 19 Market Place	1725
4933	1 Leighton Street (former site of Brewery and cottage Hospital)	C18 th
4935	8 and 8A Leighton Street	Mid-C18 th
4937	Genesis House, 14 George Street	Early C18 th
4938	16, 18 and 20 George Street	Early C18 th
4939	Lion Lodge, Park Street	Late C18 th
4941	22 George Street	Early C18 th
4943	34, 36 and 38 George Street	Early C18 th
6585	Hairizon, 4a Leighton Street	C18 th
6588	Old Vicarage Crawley Road	C18 th
6589	40-45 Leighton Street	C18 th
7318	Park Street	C18 th
8498	The Round house, Leighton Street	Early C18 th
9245	5 George Street	C18 th and C19 th
14305	Almshouses 9-18 Bedford Street	1760
14306	19-23 London End	C18 th and C19 th
14307	2-8 London Road	C18 th and C19 th
14310	16 Market Place	Early C18 th
14311	14 Market Place	C18 th and C19 th
14329	10-12 George Street	Early C18 th

Table 4. 18th century buildings in Woburn

Sixteen public houses are listed in the Kelly's Directories of 1806 and 1824. Included in these are the Windmill (HER 8498), the White Lion which is now No 4 Bedford Street (HER 4911), the White Horse, now No 31 Leighton Street (HER 14319) and the Shoulder of Mutton, now No 6 Leighton Street (HER 14317).

HER	Address	Comments
1152	St Mary's Church, Park Street	C19 th
4923	34 and 35 Bedford Street	Early C19 th
4943	34, 36 and 38 George Street	C18 th and C19 th
6560	2 and 3 Leighton Street	1894
6561	Town Hall, The Market Place	1884
6611	Congregational Chapel, Duck Lane	1854
6807	Gasworks, (site of) Near to Timber Lane	1850
8098	Union Workhouse	Early C19 th
14294	38 to 45 Bedford Street	1844
14295	36 and 37 Bedford Street	1844
14296	31 to 33 Bedford Street	1850
14297	23 to 27 Bedford Street	1850
14304	2-8 Staunton House, Bedford Street	C19 th
14309	20 Market Place	Early to late C19 th
14313	40-41 Leighton Street	C19 th
14314	62 and 63 Leighton Street and 1 London End	C19 th
14315	64-67 Leighton street	C19 th
14316	38-39 Leighton Street	C19 th



14317	11-16 Leighton Street	C19 th
14318	23 and 24 Leighton Street/ Timber lane	C19 th
14319	31 Leighton street	C19 th
14320	9 and 10 Leighton Street	C19 th
14321	Ivy Lodge, London Road	Early C19 th century
14322	25-30 Leighton Street	Mid-C19 th
14325	46-49 Leighton Street	Mid-C19 th
14326	No 9 and coach-house of no 7 George Street	Mid-C19 th
14327	30-32 George Street	Mid-C19 th
14328	42-44 George Street	Mid-C19 th
14331	6 and 8 George Street	Early to mid-C19 th
15524	The Old Chapel, Howbury Mews, Leighton Street	1870
16392	Claremont House, 36 Leighton Street	1859

Table 5. 19th century buildings in Woburn

5.5.5 Almshouses

The almshouses (HER 14305) along the western side of Bedford Street in the north of Woburn were built to house poor families in 1760. Further rows were built at the back in the 19th century. These were turned into flatlets in 1968 and renamed Staunton House.

5.5.6 Church / Mortuary Chapel

In the early 17th century part of St Mary's Church (HER 36) was rebuilt using stones from the church at Birchmoor (Spavins and Applin 1983). The church was repaired by the 5th Duke of Bedford at the end of the 18th century. Apart from the base of the tower, it was again completely rebuilt as the Mortuary Chapel in 1865. There is an inscription which reads 'In the year 1865 William Eighth Duke of Bedford built this chapel on the site and from the materials of the parish church'. Church functions were taken over by the new St Mary's Church in Park Street. The Mortuary Chapel is now used as the Heritage Centre.

The advowson of the church, formerly attached to the Abbey, passed to the Dukes of Bedford at the Reformation. This explains why the Russells were able to physically re-locate the church in the 1860s, moving it to a more desirable location near the gates of the estate.

5.5.7 New St Mary's Church

The new church of St Mary's (HER 1152) on Park Street was completed by 1868, designed by Clutton and paid for by the Duke of Bedford at a cost of £35,000. It is built in the Continental Gothic style of the 13th century and originally had a spire, although this has subsequently been taken down. The church, situated at the gates to the estate, should perhaps be thought of as part of the idealised estate landscape, linked together with the avenues, vistas and other landscape features of the park. The dry moat in front of the church is a device to make the building look higher and more impressive from the road.



There is a large crypt underneath the church intended as a burial vault for the Russells. It was never used for this purpose, but is occasionally used for meetings, etc.

5.5.8 Congregational Chapel

In 1804 a Congregational Chapel (HER 6611) was built in New Street off Duck Lane. It was rebuilt in 1842.

5.5.9 Methodist Chapel

The Methodist (Wesleyan) Chapel was built to the south of Leighton Street in 1869 (HER 15524). Its building survives as the 'old chapel' in Howbury Mews.

5.5.10 Baptist Chapel

A Baptist Chapel was built in 1854 on land to the north of Leighton Street. Its site is labelled but not clearly defined on the 1884 OS map. It was demolished by the time of the 2nd edition OS map in 1901.

5.5.11 Estate Cottages

There are several rows of estate cottages in Woburn, easily recognisable from their 'B' for Bedford, ducal coronet and date. Most are located on Leighton Street (e.g. HER 14317, HER 14315). More work needs to be done in studying the development of this class of building, and the social 'improvements' they represent.

5.5.12 Union Workhouse

The Poor Law Union workhouse, situated in the south of Woburn off London End, housed about 100 paupers from Woburn and surrounding villages. Its extensive buildings and lands, covering over 3 acres, are shown on the 1884 OS map. It was demolished in the early 20th century.

The area of the workhouse was screened off from the Woburn Estate by the 18th /19th century plantations of Wayn Close just to the south.

5.5.13 Trade

The site of the original brewery was on Leighton Street (HER 4933). The chief trades mentioned in Kelly's Directory (1785-1890) were in lace, corn, timber, and straw plait. Alongside these there existed shoemakers, butchers, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, tailors, plumbers, glaziers, stonemasons and carpenters. One of the main trades that existed in the general area in the 18th century was brick making. In 1772 Robert Cary supplied bricks and tiles to the Duke of Bedford. The industry was handed down through the family until 1789, but the precise location of the brickworks is unknown. The first edition Ordnance Survey map (1881) shows the site of three clay pits, which are possible locations. One is situated to the south of Woburn (HER 6773) and the other two (HER 6769 & 6771) are located to the south-east of the town. The Union workhouse (HER 8098) was built in the mid-19th century.



5.6 The Industrial Period (AD1850 - AD1914)

The population at the beginning of the industrial period was 2,049 but it declined significantly in the second half of the 19th century to just 1,129 in 1901. Some businesses failed and their buildings were demolished in this period. These included the brewery on Leighton Street (HER 4933), and the engineering and iron foundry works (now the site of Marquis Court) on the west side of Bedford Road owned by W Hensman & Sons. Much of the decline can be attributed to the construction of the railway which bypassed Woburn and killed off the coaching trade at the same time.

Many inhabitants of Woburn, formerly employed directly or indirectly by the Woburn Abbey Estate, were encouraged by the Park Farm Office to seek work in the new industrial towns or to migrate to America.

5.6.1 Industry

The lace trade was still running in the 19th century. The school (HER 4924) was used as a lace school. In 1851 lacemaking employed 319 women in the town. A further 434 were employed in straw plaiting and 58 in straw hat making. The brewery continued in use until 1898 when it was demolished. The associated brewer's house was converted into the cottage hospital (HER 4953) which is now 1 Leighton Street. The engineering works and iron foundry also continued until the late 19th century (Godber 1969).

5.6.2 Buildings

The Town Hall (HER 6561), still standing, was built in 1884 on the site of the former market house. A gas works (HER 6807) was built on the west side of Timber Lane in 1850. This has long since been demolished. A cottage hospital (HER 4933) was situated on Leighton Street in 1898. A larger hospital, built in 1903 just outside the town further to the west, is now Maryland College.

5.6.3 Streets

During the industrial period Leighton Street was rebuilt by the Duke of Bedford and Drakeloe Close was built along the western side of Woburn Road. Development occurred along Leighton Street and Park Street, as shown on the 1884 OS map. Development also took place along Leighton Street and around Duck Lane and Crawley Street in the early 20th Century. The 1902 OS map shows the addition of Timber Lane to the north-western side of Leighton Street.

5.7 The Modern Period (AD1914 - present)

Some modern development occurred at the junction of George Street and Leighton Street in 1902-3. After World War II a modern development took place just off Bedford road around Drakeloe Close. In 1968 the Almshouses (now known as Staunton House) were converted into flats. By comparison with other Bedfordshire towns, Woburn has seen relatively little expansion in modern times – partly because the Woburn Abbey Estate owns most of the surrounding land.



6. ASSESSMENT OF WOBURN'S CHARACTER, IMPORTANCE AND POTENTIAL

6.1. *Character of the Present Town*

Woburn is a very small rural town, whose history has always been closely tied in with that of the nearby Abbey and subsequently (after the Reformation) the Woburn Abbey Estate of the Dukes of Bedford. It is, therefore, quite unique amongst Bedfordshire towns, with an atmosphere and elegance all of its own. Kennet (1978) described it as “a fossilized Georgian elegance built onto a Tudor background whose growth stopped with the end of coaching”. The fact that it was bypassed by the railways meant that industrial development was curtailed. Compared to other towns, little major development has taken place in the last 150 years. The post-medieval town survives, with some notable additions and modifications by the Dukes of Bedford, very much as it appeared on the Jonas Moore map of 1661. Prominent examples of buildings of interest include the Tudor school (16th-17th century), the row of houses on Market Place (17th-18th century), the new church on Park Street and the Town Hall (19th century), as well as the numerous inns.

In 1979 the historic core of Woburn was designated a Conservation Area to conserve the historic buildings and elements of piecemeal and private inclosure surrounding parts of the High Street and George Street. However, the townscape of Woburn is very much a part of the landscape and ultimately has to be understood as such. It is both an integral part of the Woburn Abbey Estate and a-part from it. These contrary aspects are illustrated on the one hand by the situation of the town on the edge or ‘at the gates’ of the estate, and on the other hand by the way the town is surrounded on its eastern, south-eastern and southern sides by extensive 18th / 19th century plantations which serve to screen off the town from estate parkland. Estate cottages in Leighton Street with the characteristic ‘B’ for Bedford and coronet are a physical embodiment of the estate connection. Paradoxically, however, there are less estate cottages in Woburn itself than in the nearby villages of Husborne Crawley, Woburn Sands, Ridgmont, Eversholt, etc.

6.2. *Archaeological Potential*

There is potential for discovering evidence of early town planning, in the form of the original layout and burgage plots laid out by the founders of the town in the early medieval period, and for finding traces of the earlier, smaller and non-urban settlement of Woburn thought to have existed in Saxon times. The origins of Woburn may be bound up with the deserted medieval village of Birchmoor just to the north. Only two small excavations have taken place within the town, which means that the archaeological potential of the town is relatively untapped.

Damage to buried archaeological evidence by subsequent development is not great, although a rapid cellar survey indicates that a large proportion of buildings within the core area of the town have been cellared.



It has been noted that many medieval buildings must have been lost in several fires which swept through Woburn in the 16th to 18th centuries. There are only three surviving late medieval buildings that have been recognised within the historic core of the town. More structures of this date may be hidden behind the Georgian facades and Victorian shop fronts. Some buildings are clearly older than they look, however. For example, the row of houses situated on the Market Place, described as 18th century in the HER, is depicted on the Jonas Moore map of 1661.

6.3 Archaeological Components

The main components of the town's development identified in this survey are described below and shown in Fig 9.

- **Component 1** *Medieval town*

The shape of the town has changed little since it was first mapped in the 17th century, and it is probably safe to assume that it was also broadly the same throughout much of the medieval period. Located on a crossroads, it is likely that the town of Woburn originates in a single planning event of the late 12th century – with the present layout superimposed upon a much smaller settlement. There is potential for finding settlement evidence and property boundaries dating back to this time, with the further possibility of finding traces of earlier occupation. Many wells probably await discovery, since Woburn has no natural watercourse in the town itself. However, the early origins of Woburn are partly to be found in fields just to the north, where the village of Birchmoor was once located. Birchmoor was originally the larger settlement with its church and graveyard serving the people of Woburn. The question, therefore, arises as to whether in fact this deserted village site is the original settlement of Woburn mentioned in the late Anglo-Saxon charter.

- **Component 2** *Old St Mary's Church and churchyard*

St Mary's Church was probably founded in the late 12th century as a chapel of ease to the parish church at Birchmoor, though there is the possibility that it could have been earlier in origin. Two phases of rebuilding in the late 16th century and the 19th century have removed any traces of original stonework. The churchyard is quite extensive and includes within it the 16th century school building and the 18th century Parsonage. It was rebuilt in 1865 as a mortuary chapel and is now the Heritage Centre.

St Mary's moved to a new site in the 1860s, when a new church was built on Park Street. This church, built in mock 13th century Continental Gothic style by the Duke of Bedford, must be considered as very much a part of the designed landscape of the Woburn estate – even if it is situated on the approaches to, rather than actually inside, the estate. The relocation of the church has to some extent shifted the central focus of the town.



- **Component 3** *Street pattern*

The streets of Woburn have remained practically the same since Jonas Moore's map of 1661. Much of the discussion below about the market place is relevant here.

- **Component 4** *Market place*

In the medieval period the market place probably extended from the church in the north to the crossroads in the south and some way down Leighton Street in the west, forming a triangular space on the framework of the street pattern. There could have been a formal laying out of the market place as a deliberate planning event, possibly in the 12th-14th centuries. At some point there must have been infilling of this space, not only with the row of buildings now known as Market Place (thought to be 18th century but predecessors are marked on the Jonas Moore map of 1661), but also with the market house (on the site of the present Town Hall). Presumably there were other market structures too of which no trace remains above ground. The 13th century Eleanor Cross was situated on the crossroads itself, and this must have provided a focal point for town and market life right into the post-medieval period. Its foundations possibly survive under the present road and pavement surfaces.

If the triangular space of the present market place could have been the result of deliberate planning, this may have occurred on the basis of a previous layout. Many market places originated as simply a broadening out of the main street, and Woburn may be no exception. Duck Lane and George Street could have delineated a further triangular space to the south, joining on to the one already described - with subsequent infilling disguising the fact that it was once an open space.



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Figure 1: Location map

Base map reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by Bedfordshire County Council, County Hall, Bedford. OS Licence No. 076465(LA). © Crown Copyright.

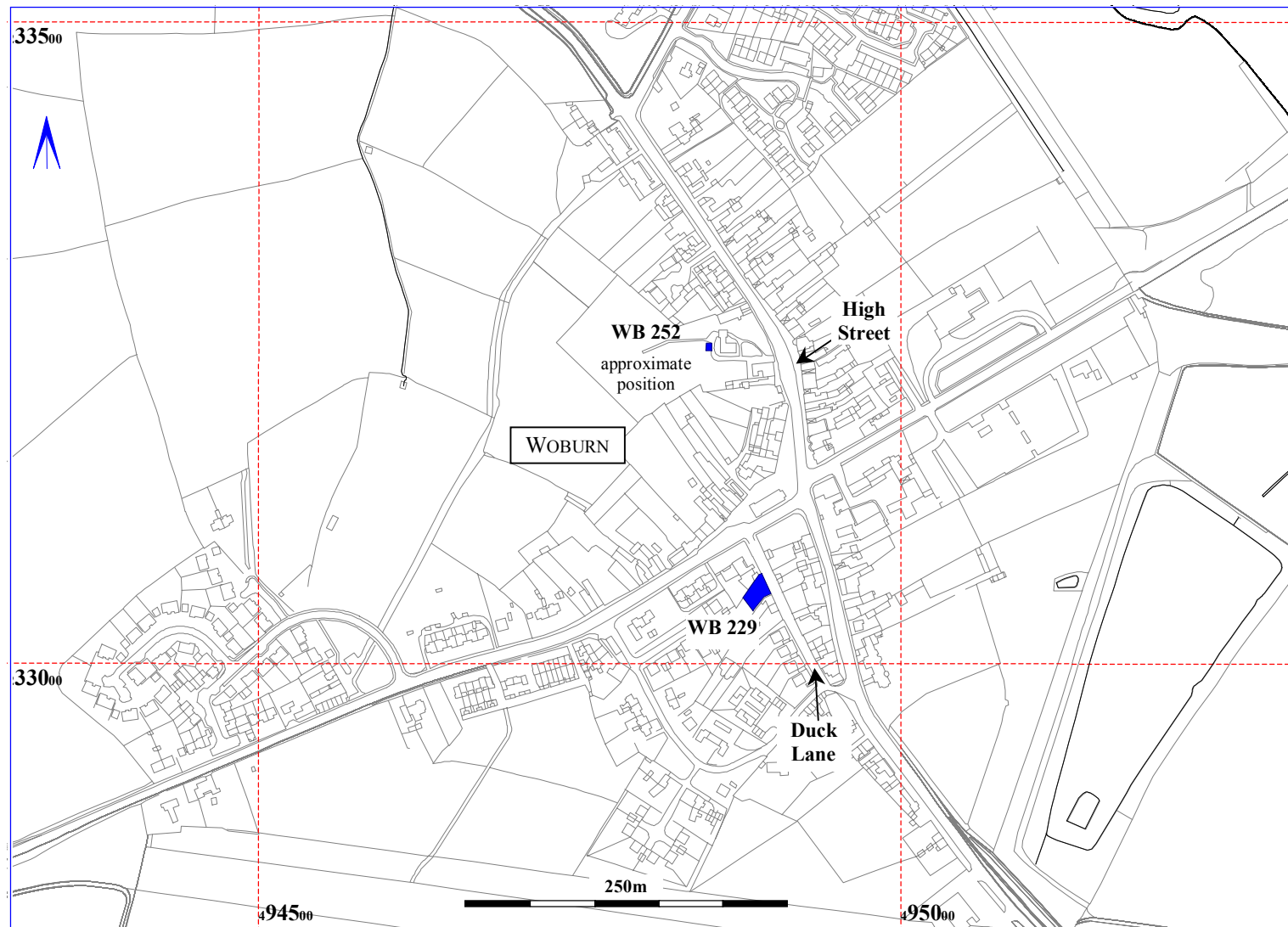


Figure 2: Archaeological excavations

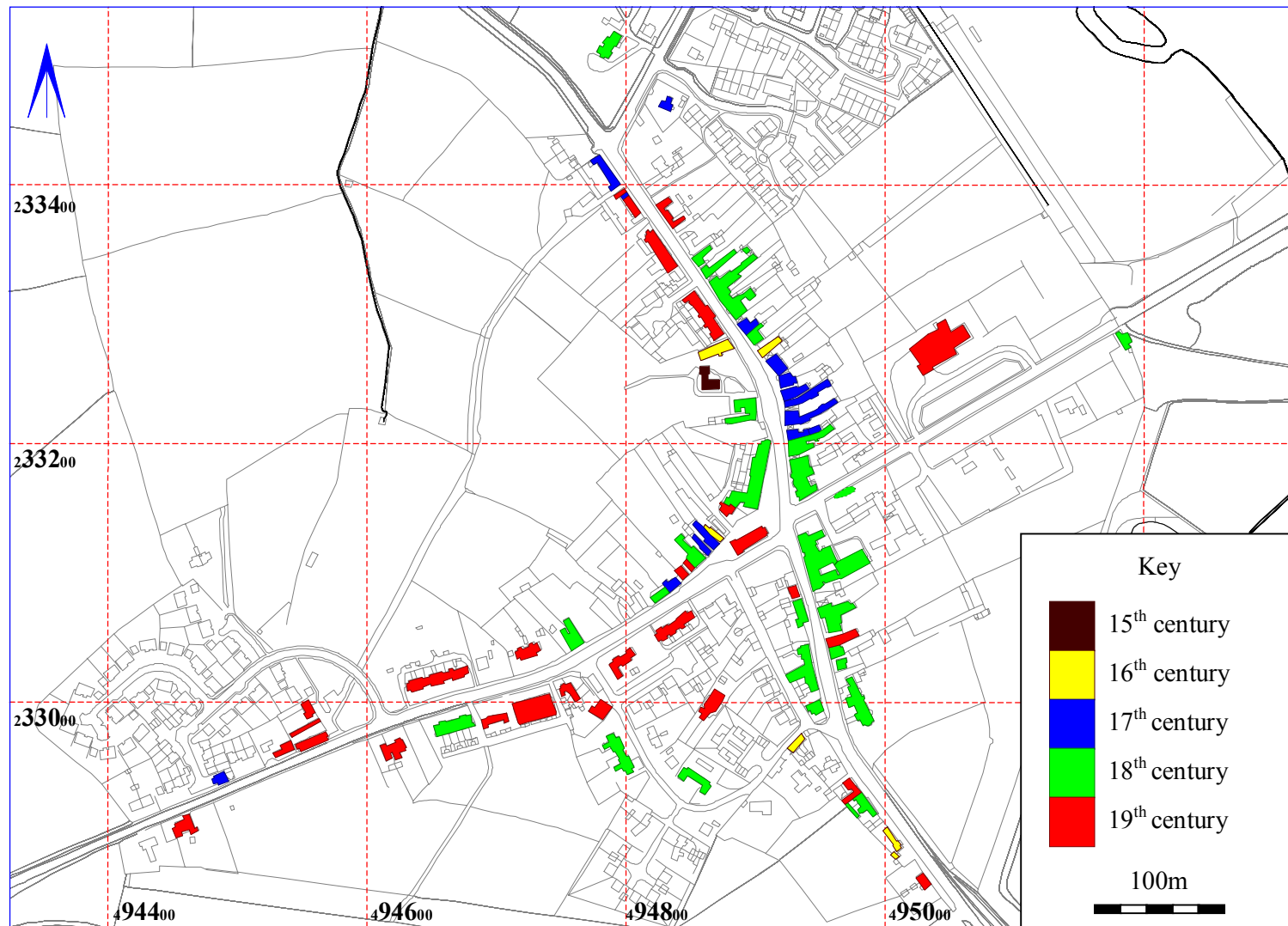


Figure 3: Historic buildings

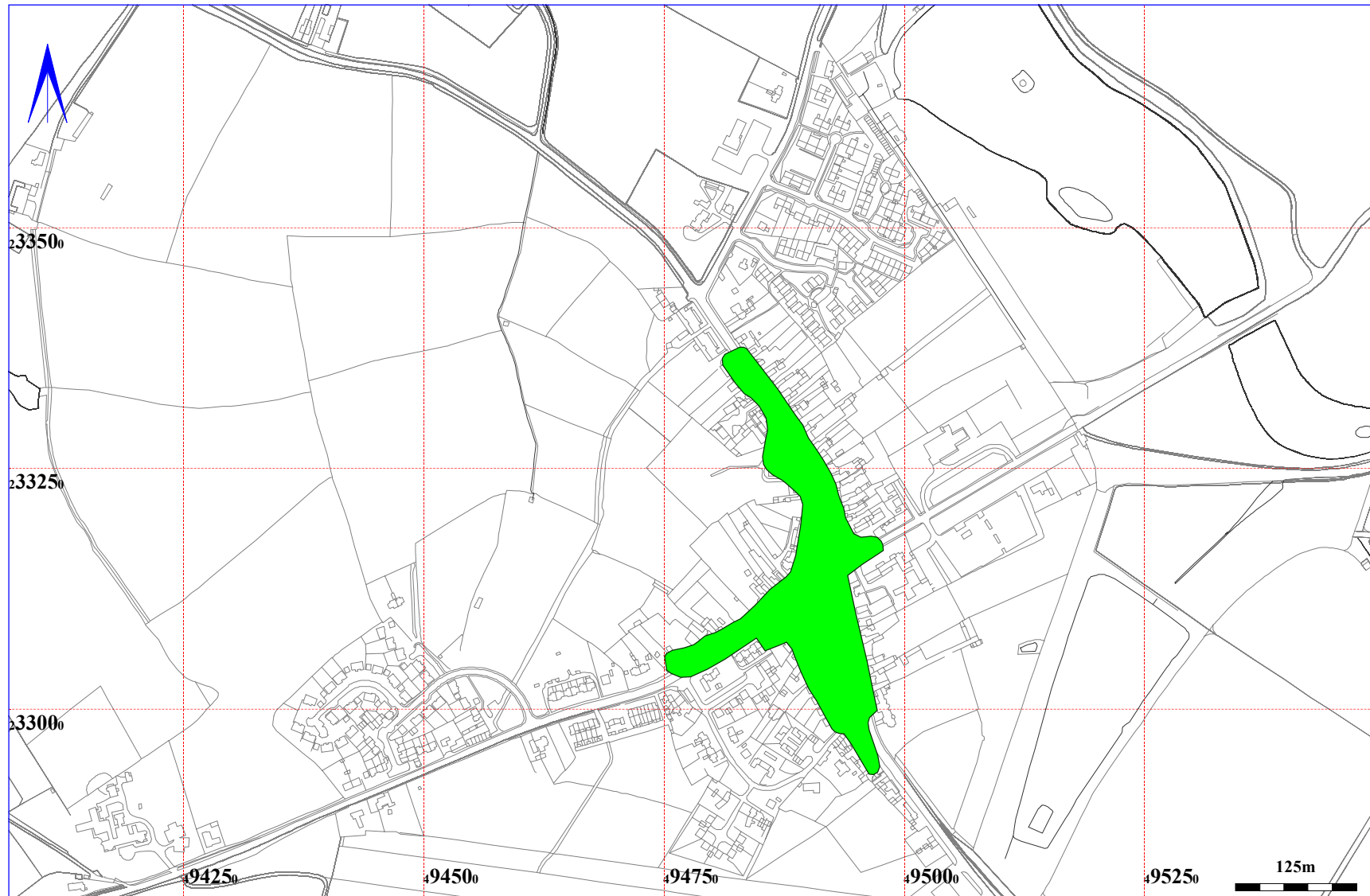


Figure 4: Woburn from Moore's map of 1661: limits of development

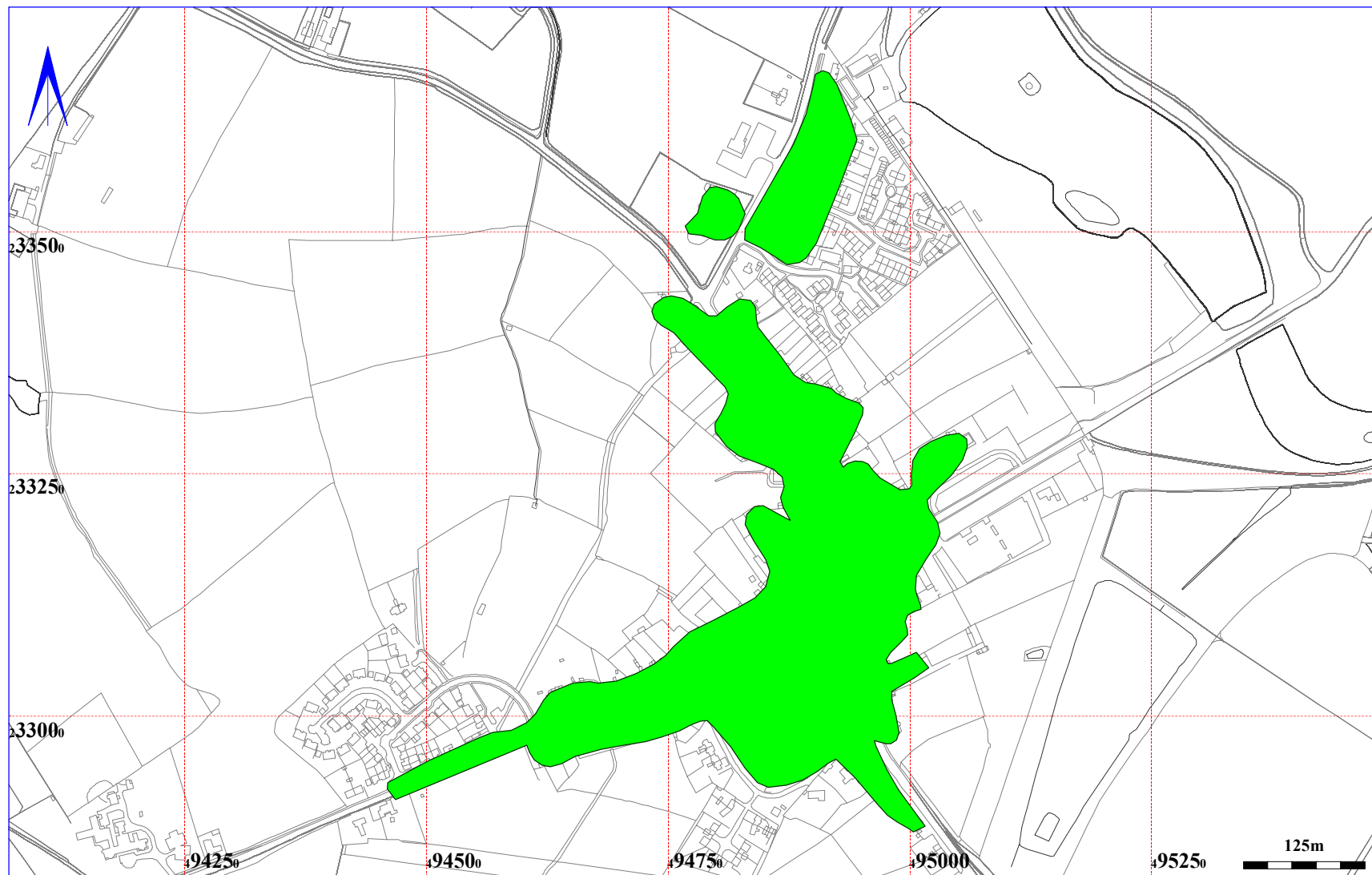


Figure 5: Woburn from the 1st Edition OS map of 1882: limits of development

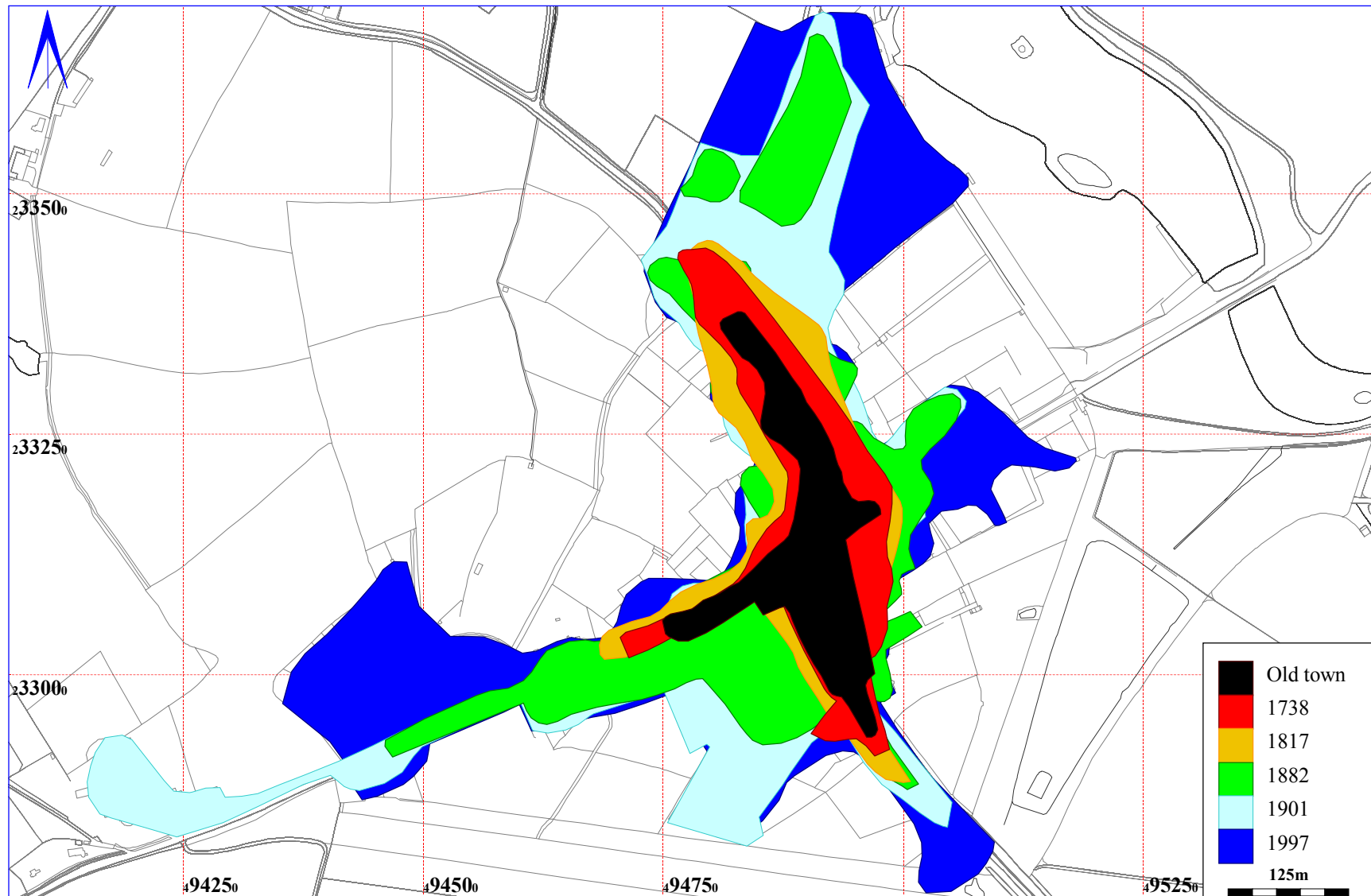


Figure 6: Phases of town development

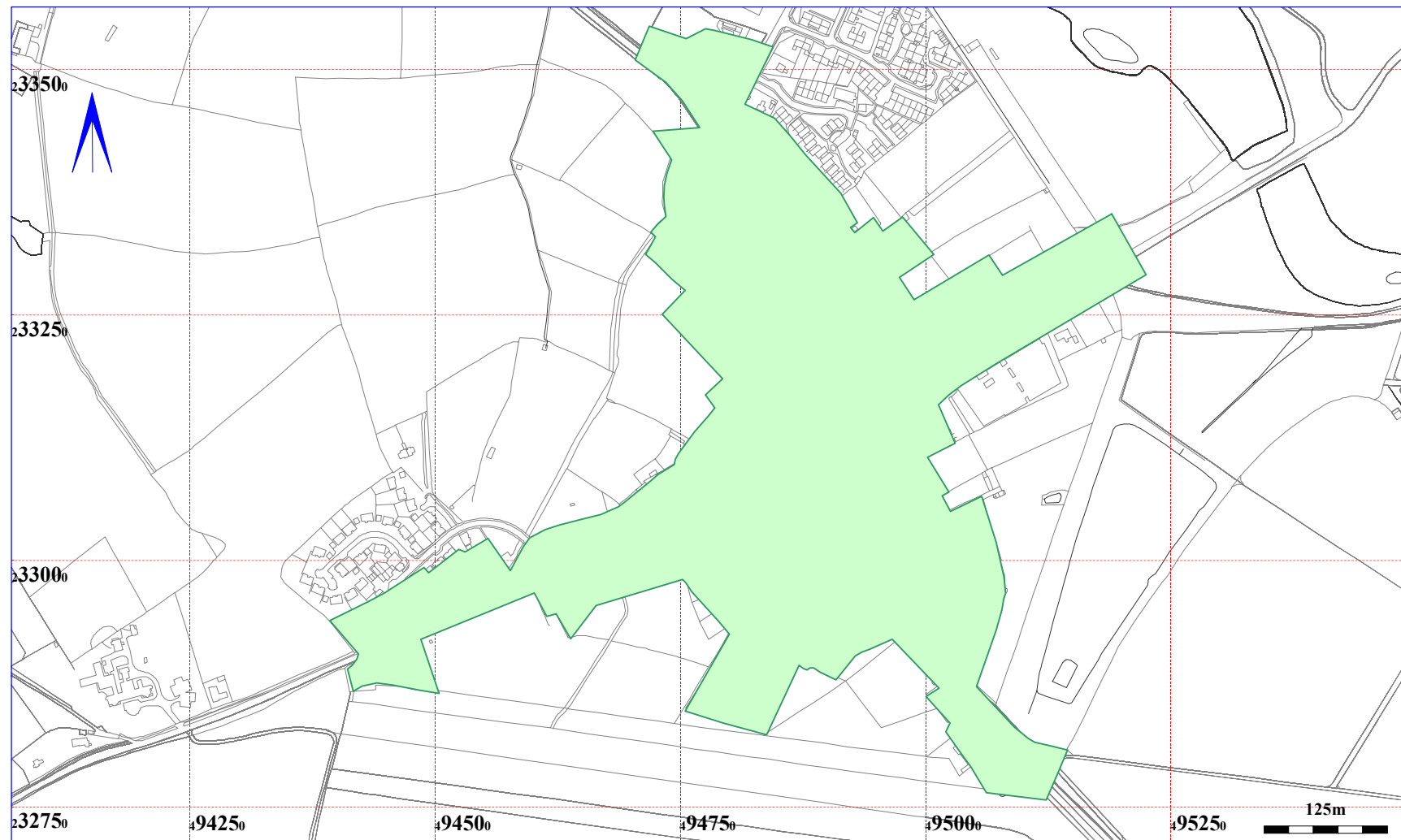


Figure 7: Woburn: the Conservation Area

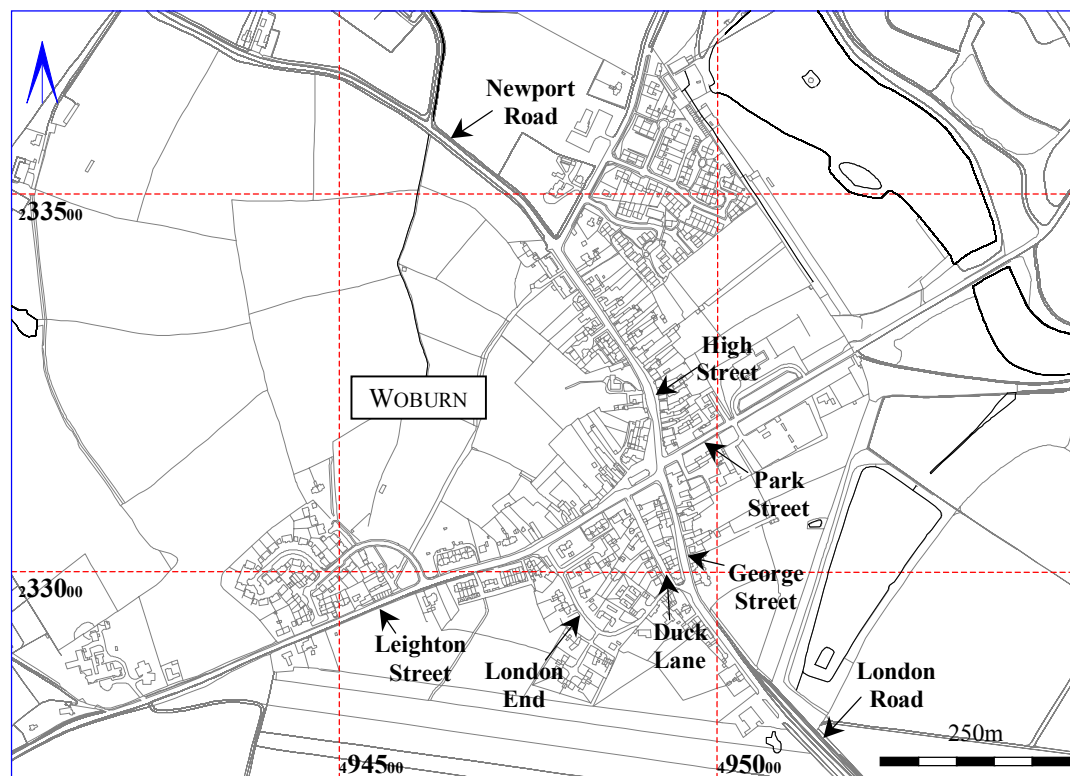


Figure 8: Woburn's main streets

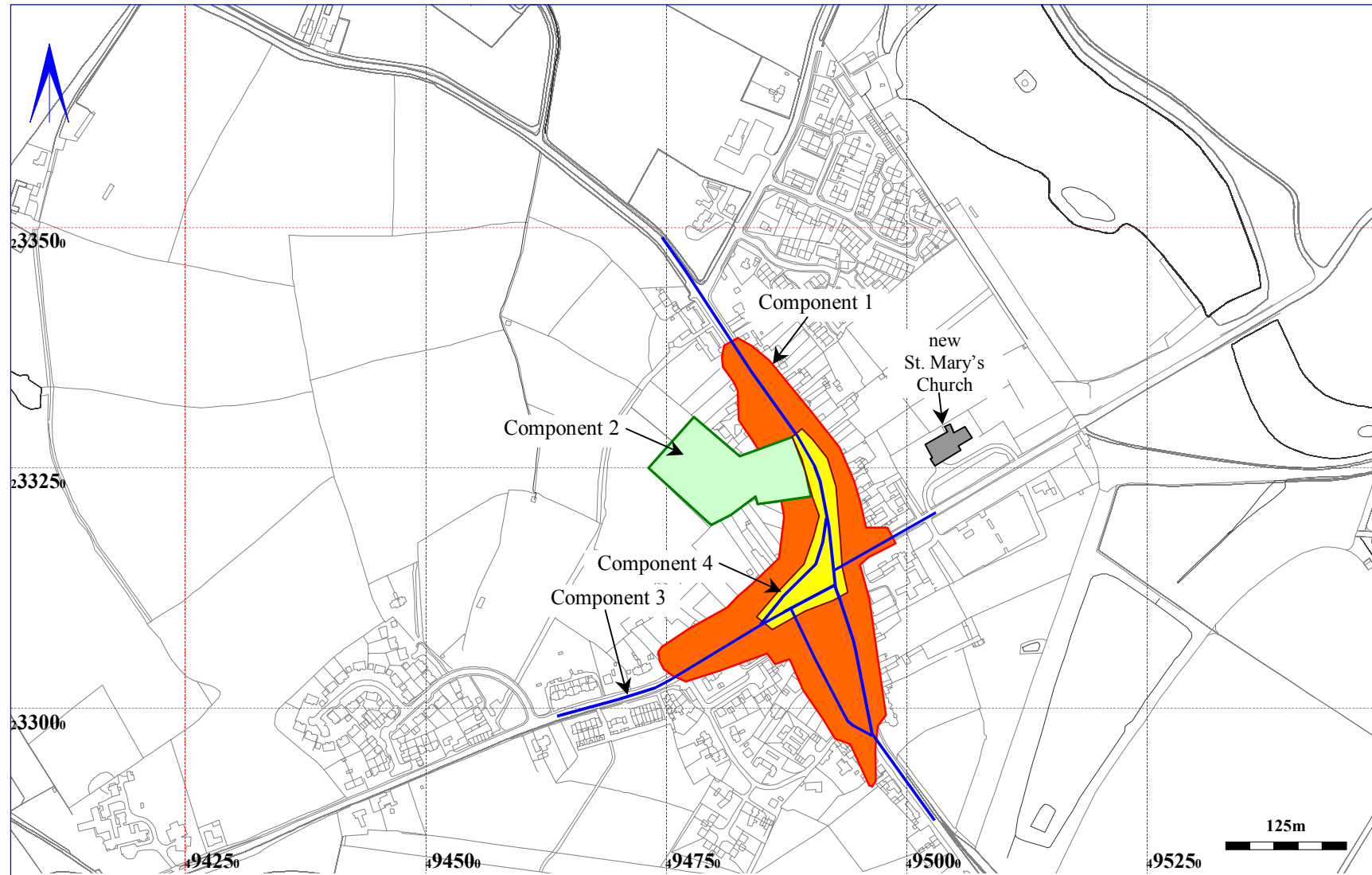


Figure 9: Archaeological components