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Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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March 1993

**A40 (Longford) to M50 (Gorsley) Improvement**

**Archaeological Survey Phase II  
River Severn Mitigation Measures,  
Alney Island, Gloucester**

Prepared for Parkman Consulting Engineers,  
on behalf of the Department of Transport

by

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# **A40 (LONGFORD) to M50 (GORSLEY) Improvement**

## **Archaeological Survey Phase II**

### **River Severn Mitigation Measures, Alney Island,**

#### **Gloucester**

### **1.0 Introduction**

The following report outlines the results of an archaeological assessment carried out by BUFAU on behalf of Parkman Consulting engineers, in response to further proposals, concerning the A40 (Longford) to M50 (Gorsley) Road Improvement Scheme. The assessment consisted of a 'desk top study' of the primary and secondary documentation and field inspection for the area affected by the proposals and should be considered supplementary to the Phase I and II archaeological surveys for this road scheme previously commissioned by Parkman (Borthwick 1990; BUFAU 1992).

### **1.1 Objectives**

The principal objectives of the study were:-

1. To produce information on identified archaeological sites within the designated survey area
2. To identify from original research any further sites of potential archaeological or historical interest
3. To assess the relative importance of the sites identified in a local, regional and national context
4. To assess the impact of proposed works upon the identified archaeological resource.
5. To provide recommendations for further assessment and management of this resource, as appropriate.

### **2.0 The Survey Area**

The new proposals, involving a southern spur of the new road and measures to mitigate its effect upon the River Severn floodplain, comprise a realignment of the A417 to its junction with the A40 at the Over roundabout, and removal of a section of the old 'Over Causeway' and Dock Branch Railway on Alney Island, Gloucester.

The area designated for general assessment consists of a circle, 2km in diameter, focused on the Alney Island area of the Severn floodplain (Fig. 1). More specifically, smaller areas to the north and south of the Over roundabout, potentially to be directly affected by the proposals, were targeted for detailed assessment. In practice, the area bounded by the two divided channels of the River Severn up to Maisemore Ham in the north, known as Alney Island, formed useful natural boundaries within which to concentrate the research. The built-up area on the edge of Gloucester city was not considered relevant to the aims of this assessment, lying outside the likely extent of any affected area.

### **2.1 Geology and Topography**

The area under consideration lies on thick deposits of Lower Lias clays, overlain by river and estuarine alluvium and some fan gravels around Walham and Longford. A more detailed account of the geology of the area is included in the Phase I report (Borthwick 1990).

The landscape consists of wide flat meadows, with a ridge of lias clay running parallel with the river valley to the west of the Severn. The River Leadon cuts through this ridge between Maisemore and Lassington and joins the Severn to the north of Over Hospital. This ridge constricts the width of the Severn floodplain here, providing a convenient crossing point to and from Gloucester westwards across the valley and river, near what is now the latter's tidal limit.

### **2.2 Method**

The documentary research was based upon the examination of cartographic sources combined with a review of secondary sources. The majority of the documentation consulted is held by the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), The County Records Office and the

Gloucester City Museum Index. The National Library of Air Photographs (NLAP) at the Royal Commission for Historical Monuments was also consulted, but a search of material held there produced only one aerial photograph of the survey area, dating from 1935, when the Over Causeway and Telford's Bridge were still in use. However, the depth of alluvial cover in this area makes it unlikely that aerial photographs would yield much useful information concerning buried archaeological sites. All available estate, enclosure and tithe maps covering the survey area, as well as the first edition OS 6" maps, were examined for field name evidence, settlement patterns and landscape development, as well as structures and features which are no longer extant. A walkover survey of the area contained within the two channels of the Severn was also carried out, in order to clarify the documentary evidence.

### 2.3 History and Development of the Landscape

The evidence for prehistoric activity in this area is rather poor and from the early Romano-British period onwards the economic landscape of the area was dominated by the town and city of Gloucester. A fuller summary of the Roman settlement is included in the Phase I report (Borthwick 1990). A road emerged from the west gate of the Roman city, crossed the divided channels of the River Severn via a causeway over Alney Island and, bridging the western channel near the present day Over Hospital, turned west to Mitcheldean. It is thought that an earlier road led from the military fort at Kingsholm, on a line to the north of the railway, approaching Over from the east and making the same crossing of the western channel at Over (Margary 1973, 327). Another road is believed to have left the Gloucester to Mitcheldean road on the western side of the Severn at Over, travelling northwest, ultimately to the Roman settlement at Dymock. The course of this road was explored during the Phase I and II surveys (AR 24) but has not been traced all the way down to Over.

The sub-Roman settlement pattern in the area is little understood and there is almost no evidence for settlement, land use or landscape development of the area for this period. The name 'Walham' is probably an early Anglo-Saxon name indicative

of settlement by 'Welshmen', or later 'slaves', suggesting the survival of post-Roman British communities in this area (Borthwick 1990).

A medieval earthwork to the north of the present day Over Hospital represents the remains of 'The Vineyard', built as a country house for one of the abbots of Gloucester around 1350 and enlarged and moated by Abbot Frocester (1381-1412). It later played a part in the Civil War, when it was used as a strategic base by the Parliamentary forces (1641-1643), only to be subsequently abandoned and robbed for its stone. Further Civil War earthworks were constructed on the east and west sides of Alney Island, but today their precise location is in some doubt.

The early cartographic evidence for the survey area is limited, since for the most part the available estate, enclosure and tithe maps stopped short of the Alney Island area. The most likely explanation for this is that Alney Island, now within the boundary of the City of Gloucester, was extraparochial in the past. The fairly regular shape of the borough was disturbed on the southwest, where a peninsula of land enclosed the site of the castle, later to become the county gaol. Lying outside the borough were a number of extraparochial places with complex boundaries (VCH Vol. IV). The earliest map found to cover the whole of Alney Island was a small scale Survey map from 1756, clearly showing the island with the road crossing it, although no field boundaries are visible on the island itself.

The only detailed field name evidence relates to land peripheral to the survey area on the west of the river. Most of the land contained within the river channels is referred to as 'ham', meaning an enclosure of land beside a river (eg Maisemore Ham, Town Ham, Port Ham). The others refer mainly to meadows, indicating use of the land for pasture. The OS First Edition 6" map is the only map to show land divisions on Alney Island, where the fields have the regularity of late 18th-century parliamentary enclosures. Significantly, the map clearly displays the way in which the field boundaries respect the line of the Roman road and obviously post-date it, whilst the 19th-century railway clearly cuts through pre-existing boundaries. It is apparent that the more obvious

landscape characteristics of this area are largely a result of events occurring in post-Roman times. The industrialised era encroached on this area with the coming of the Hereford to Gloucester canal, and later the Gloucester to Ledbury railway. The basic enclosed field pattern has not changed substantially for nearly 200 years around the survey area, although modern industrial development and road building has occurred, particularly in the south of the area. The land to the north of the A40 around Maisemore Ham is predominantly arable, while the land to the south is predominantly pasture with some modern industrial development.

### 3.0 Identified Archaeological Sites

Within the study area 25 archaeological sites were identified from the County SMR and the City Museum Index. Those site numbers without a SMR prefix are held in the City Museum Index. For the most part sites east of the East Channel of the River Severn, notably within the historic boundaries of the City of Gloucester, have been excluded (Fig. 1).

#### 3.1 Index of Sites

**SMR 384: Medieval earthwork - Over.** Well-preserved three-sided moat and building platform. 'The Vineyard' is attested in medieval records as a residence for the abbots of Gloucester. Used by Parliamentary forces 1641-1643 (see 4225) and by 1647-8 the residence was ruinous and being robbed for its stone. Scheduled Ancient Monument.

**390: Findspot - Castlemeads.** Bone object of unknown date.

**SMR 453: Over Bridge.** The medieval arched bridge at Over was removed when Telford's bridge was constructed in 1826-8. The railway bridge constructed in 1952 is now on the site of the old bridge. Telford's bridge was built 40m upstream and is now preserved in situ as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, with road ends cut off at the bridge limits.

**714: Findspot- Sudmeadow Road.** Roman pottery, bronze ring, two fibulas.

**725: Findspot - Town Ham Allotments.** Roman coin A.D. 293-296.

**734: Findspot - Pump House Bridge, Walham.** Romano-British jar.

**740: Findspot - Pool Meadow, Alney Island.** Roman coin A.D. 323-4.

**741: Findspot - Westgate Allotments.** Roman coins A.D. 309-12.

**3613: Roman river bed, Castlemeads.** Old bed of River Severn observed in Severn-Trent Water Board trench. Encountered a silt horizon at a depth of 2.5m, approximately 10m from west bank of modern channel. Contained Roman tegula tile fragments and burnt and unburnt clay with charcoal.

**3634: Highnam Sewerage Scheme, Over.** Observation of a pipeline trench at a depth of 3.7m. The trench was largely contained within the backfilled Hereford and Gloucester canal (see SMR 5329); elsewhere it cut into natural deposits.

**SMR 4223: Mounds, Alney Island.** Two mounds visible on APs. Field visit suggested spoil from modern drainage digging.

**SMR 4225: Civil War outpost - Over.** Parliamentary forces used the Bishop's/Abbot's residence and moat (see SMR 384) as a strategic post during 1641-3 and constructed the western breastwork. Shortly afterwards they abandoned the site and by 1647 the residence was in ruins.

**SMR 4228: Drainage Ditches - Mean Ham.** Substantial ditches, one of which is part water filled. Visible on Gloucester City AP's.

**SMR 4406: Mound - west of dismantled railway, Over.** Irregular modern? mound now ploughed out and only visible as a cropmark on APs.

**SMR 4407: Mound - west of dismantled railway, Over.** Low ditched modern? mound, now ploughed out and only visible as a cropmark on APs.

**SMR 5329: Hereford and Gloucester Canal.** Course of the canal diverges from the course of the old railway (see SMR 5893) and passes north of 'The Vineyard' to join the River Severn (see 3634).

**SMR 5587: Former Courses of River Severn.** Channels of the Severn formed when the sea level fell during the last Ice Age and now lying below alluvial deposits (see also 3613).

**SMR 5893: Gloucester to Ledbury Railway.** Section of the dismantled 19th-century railway diverges from the course of the old canal (see SMR 53 SMR 5329) and passes to the west of Over Hospital.

**SMR 7123: Roman Road from Gloucester to Mitcheldean.** Leaves Gloucester from the west, traverses Alney island via Over Causeway, crosses the Severn at Over and turns west towards the Forest of Dean.

**SMR 7128: Turnpike House, Highnam.** Turnpike House on Highnam Tithe Award.

**SMR 7160: Findspots, Wintles Brick Pits, Walham.** The precise location is unknown. Roman pottery, horseshoes, fibula, coin and medieval? arrowheads. **SMR 7162: Findspots, Walham.** Roman beaker and triangular glass bead.

**SMR 8668: Over Mill fieldname.** Fieldname 'Over Mill and Pig Orchard from Highnam Tithe Award. Corn mill marked on the First Edition Ordnance Survey 6" map (1881), in the area which is now occupied by part of Over Hospital, constructed in 1897-1902.

**SMR 9603: Possible Brickworks site, Alney Island.** East of the Over channel of the River Severn and south of the A40 bypass, remains of a previously unknown post-medieval brickworks were discovered after the cutting of a ditch outside the roadside embankment. The area is now a playing field and no surface indications are visible. Kilns and a brickworks are marked on the First Edition Ordnance Survey 6" map, adjacent to the river on the Walham side.

**Site 31/87: Watching Brief, Pool Meadow.** Observation of a new sewer line revealed part of the 12th-century Westgate Bridge (Atkin and Garrod 1988, 213-4).

The only area of known archaeological potential to be directly affected by the proposals is the Roman road site (SMR 7123). This is described in detail below.

### **3.2 Over Causeway and river crossing (SMR 453 and 7123)**

**Description.** The Roman road from Mitcheldean to Gloucester (Margary 61) proceeded in a north-west direction from Gloucester's West Gate, traversing Alney Island via Over Causeway and bridging the western channel of the Severn at Over. For the greater part of its length, the road follows the course of the present day A40 Gloucester to Birdwood and A4136 Longhope to Mitcheldean roads. It was originally built as the main route into South Wales, and to provide access to the mining district of the Forest of

Dean. A section of the old Over Causeway, which was still in use until bypassed in 1974, remains as an earthwork with a modern metalled surface sloping up towards Telford's Bridge and terminating before the main railway line. Sections of the road surface have been examined at two locations. To the east of Linton Farm a surface of iron slag was exposed and was associated with a spread of Romano-British pottery (SMR 7122). At Queens Farm in Churcham, a section was excavated through the road, which was found to be 9.5m wide. A Roman coin was found in the disturbed primary road level sealed beneath the secondary metalling (Garrod and Heighway 1974-81, 37).

There is no record of bridging the Severn at Over before the medieval bridge was built, in contrast with the documentation of bridges at Maisemore. When Telford's bridge was built in 1826-8 the medieval bridge was removed, and the Causeway road bent slightly to the north. Remains of the medieval bridge are still visible at low water just to the south of Telford's bridge, beneath the site of the later railway bridge built in 1952, when some timbers from the old bridge were removed. This suggests that the Roman crossing of the river, presumably a bridge, was located in virtually the same position as the medieval bridge. This is in fact the position aimed for by the Over Causeway further to the east, its divergence northwards resulting from new bridge approach works by Telford (Fig. 2).

**Period.** Romano-British. The road is assumed to date to the founding of the colonia at Gloucester c. 60 A.D.. It has remained in use almost continuously as the main western thoroughfare in and out of Gloucester until the 1970's.

**Rarity.** The courses of Roman roads are generally well-documented, although few have been extensively excavated to provide detail of their construction and layout. The approach to a river crossing marks this site out as more unusual.

**Documentation.** Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record 453 and 7123. Margary 1973, 327-8.

**Group Value.** Westwards, the road meets the Dean Road (Margary 614) from the Roman settlement of Ariconium and mid-Wales. It is also thought that another road, the precise course of which is unknown, branched off on the western

side of the Severn at Over and travelled northwest to the Roman settlement at Dymock (Borthwick, 1990 etc). Eastwards, its proximity to Gloucester also enhances the road's group value. It is unlikely that any settlement existed in connection with the road across Alney Island, which is low-lying and subject to frequent flooding.

**Survival/Condition.** The course of the road to the southeast of Telford's Bridge remained in use until 1974 and its position survives as a disused earthwork. The extent to which the Roman road levels may have survived is unknown, although it is possible that subsequent make-up may have preserved the original surface. The land immediately to the west of the Over channel of the Severn, between the railway line and the A40, is now occupied with recent buildings and the road course is not visible. Further to the west, sections of the agger are visible in fields, and excavation at Linton has shown evidence of primary and secondary metalling (see Description above).

**Fragility/Vulnerability.** It is proposed that a section of the old road causeway and Dock Branch Railway to the south of the main railway line be removed as part of River Severn flood mitigation works. Should any remains of the Roman or Medieval roads survive here beneath these later features they will be destroyed.

**Diversity.** The site is of single function, although the course across Alney Island has remained in use for approximately 1900 years, until modern times.

**Potential.** Where Roman roads have remained in use, the effects of later activity have usually meant the destruction of much of the Roman work. However, the surviving earthwork is of considerable size and depending on the methods and material subsequently used to build up the causeway, it is likely that part of the original Roman road remains preserved at a lower level. It would appear that much of the causeway proposed for removal was that constructed by Telford in the 1820's as the approach for his new bridge. The line of the earlier road evidently diverges further south towards the original river crossing and thus remains may well survive beneath the southern end of the 19th-century road causeway and the course of the Dock Branch Railway. There is also the potential here to shed further light on the Roman and medieval crossing

of the western channel of the Severn, and to examine the pre-Roman buried landscape. Considering the relatively poor documentation concerning the causeway itself and this ancient crossing of the River Severn, this site is deemed to have good potential for yielding new archaeological information.

**Recommendation.** If a section of the causeway and the Dock Branch Railway are to be removed (as indicated on Fig. 3), it is recommended that further evaluation through trial trenching is carried out here. This would require a section through part of the road causeway to be affected, preferably at its south eastern end where the earthwork is lower. This section should be continued through the line of the Dock Branch Railway, in both cases to ascertain whether any traces of the Roman road have survived.

### 3.3 Further Areas of Potential Archaeological Interest

No evidence was found for previously unknown buildings or settlement within the survey area. There is some potential for Roman occupation in the northeast of the survey area. Roman remains are recorded at Longford and the near-by place name of Walham possibly indicates Roman and later occupation of the area. However, this is somewhat peripheral to the survey area.

The lack of cartographic evidence for Alney Island makes it more difficult to assess its archaeological potential, but it appears that as this area was not part of any of the surrounding parishes and is very low-lying, it would be unlikely to contain much evidence of settlement. The only Roman evidence comprises individual findspots. No evidence of the position of the Civil War earthworks on Alney Island (Alney Sconce) was encountered, either in the documentary research or in the field. However, the approximate site of Alney Sconce now appears to be occupied by an electricity sub-station. The Maisemore Ham area was fieldwalked in the earlier Phase II survey and yielded almost exclusively post-medieval pottery. Gallows are recorded in Maisemore Ham, adjacent to Maisemore Road.

The medieval and Civil War earthworks at Over are scheduled as Ancient Monuments, as is Telford's bridge. The only fieldname from the north west of the survey area with interesting



historical implications is that of Over Mill. Although the early mill is probably under the hospital, there may still be traces of the mill race extant. As noted above, there may be evidence of the Roman crossing of the Severn still surviving in the area to the east of the western channel. However, the area to the west of the channel is already developed.

#### 4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

##### 4.1 Summary

A 'desk top' and 'walkover' survey in respect of proposals for flood mitigation measures connected with the proposed A40 (Longford) to M50 (Gorsley) road improvement has assessed their potential impact upon archaeological and historical resources at Alney Island, Gloucester.

Evidence derived from this research has not suggested any previously unknown sites but serves to clarify and update the existing and documented information. The only known site with significant potential for the survival of archaeological remains is at Over Causeway, a segment of which is proposed for removal. Documentary information suggests that much of the earthwork to be affected here was constructed by Thomas Telford as an approach to his new crossing of the western arm of the River Severn in 1826-7. However, the southern end of that causeway should overlie the remains of earlier medieval and Roman roads which make for the original river crossing south of Telford's bridge, currently the site of the main railway bridge. Furthermore, these earlier routes will have been

cut or overlain by that section of the Dock Branch Railway (now disused) also proposed for removal.

##### 4.2 Recommendations

1. To assess more fully the impact of a proposal to remove a section of the Over Causeway and Dock Branch Railway at SO 818194 upon potential archaeological resources, a further level of evaluation is required (Fig. 3). Mechanical trial trenching at the southern ends of the sections of causeway and railway to be removed would seek to establish the presence, context, condition and age of any remains relating to former roads, buried land surfaces or other archaeological remains in this area, with a view to proposals for their management.
2. No further assessment appears to be required of the new route proposed for the A417, north from its junction with the A40. Should this route be adopted it is recommended that an archaeological watching brief be maintained here as part of the similar recommendation proposed for the remainder of the A40 (Longford) to M50 (Gorsley) Preferred Route (BUFAU 1992, 10.4.31 and 10.5.4).
3. In the event of further works, or variations to those already proposed and covered by this assessment arising, the existence of those other sites within the study area which are at present unaffected should be taken into account and further assessment be undertaken as appropriate.

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- |                                       |      |  |
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#### Maps

- Castle Meads Estate Map 1756  
 Specimen: A new Survey and Map of the County of Gloucester 1756  
 Barnwood Parish Map 1811

- Highnam Tithe Award 1839  
 Maisemore Ham Enclosure Map 1867  
 Ordnance Survey First Edition 1882 6" map

## **6.0 Acknowledgments**

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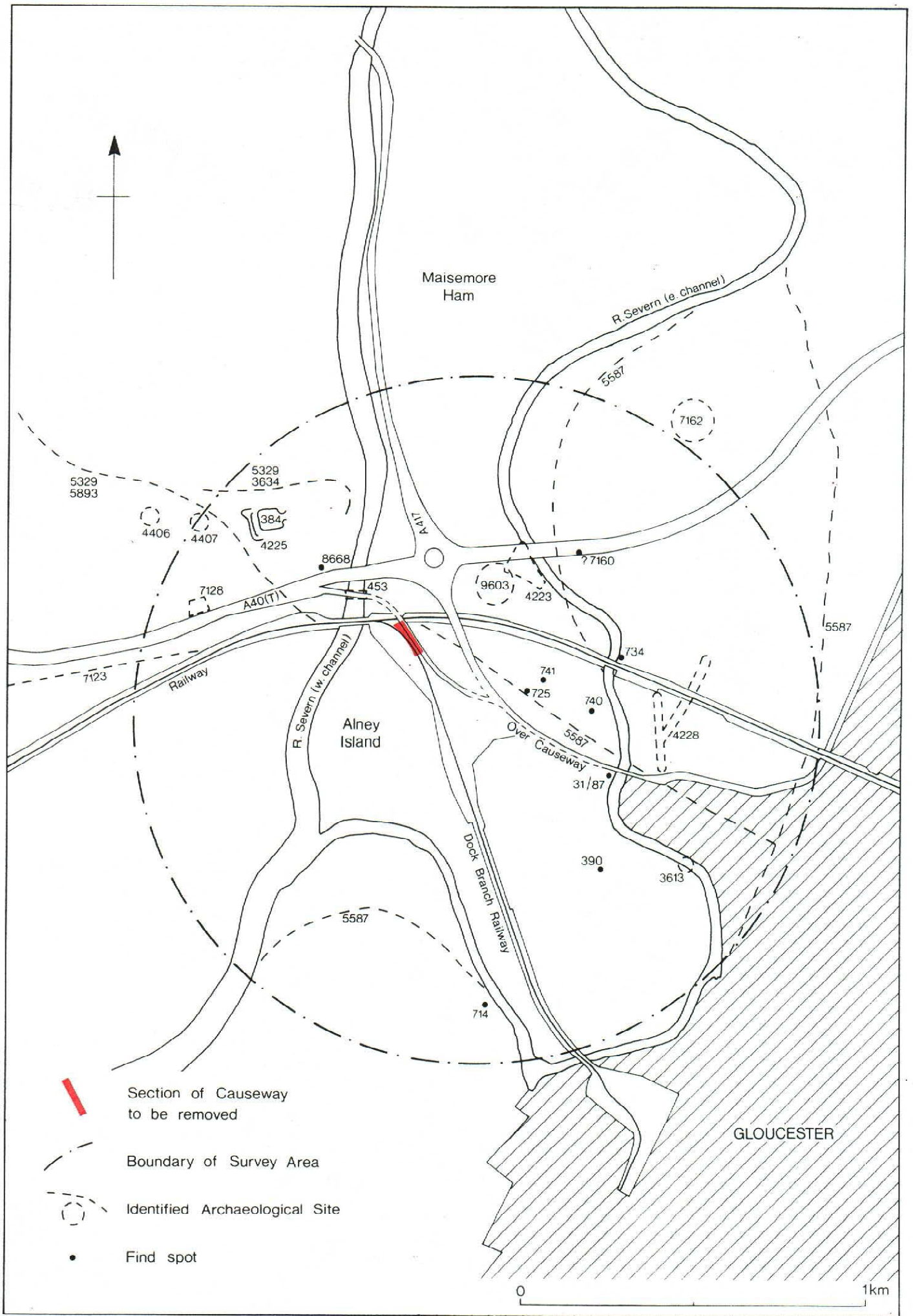


Figure 1

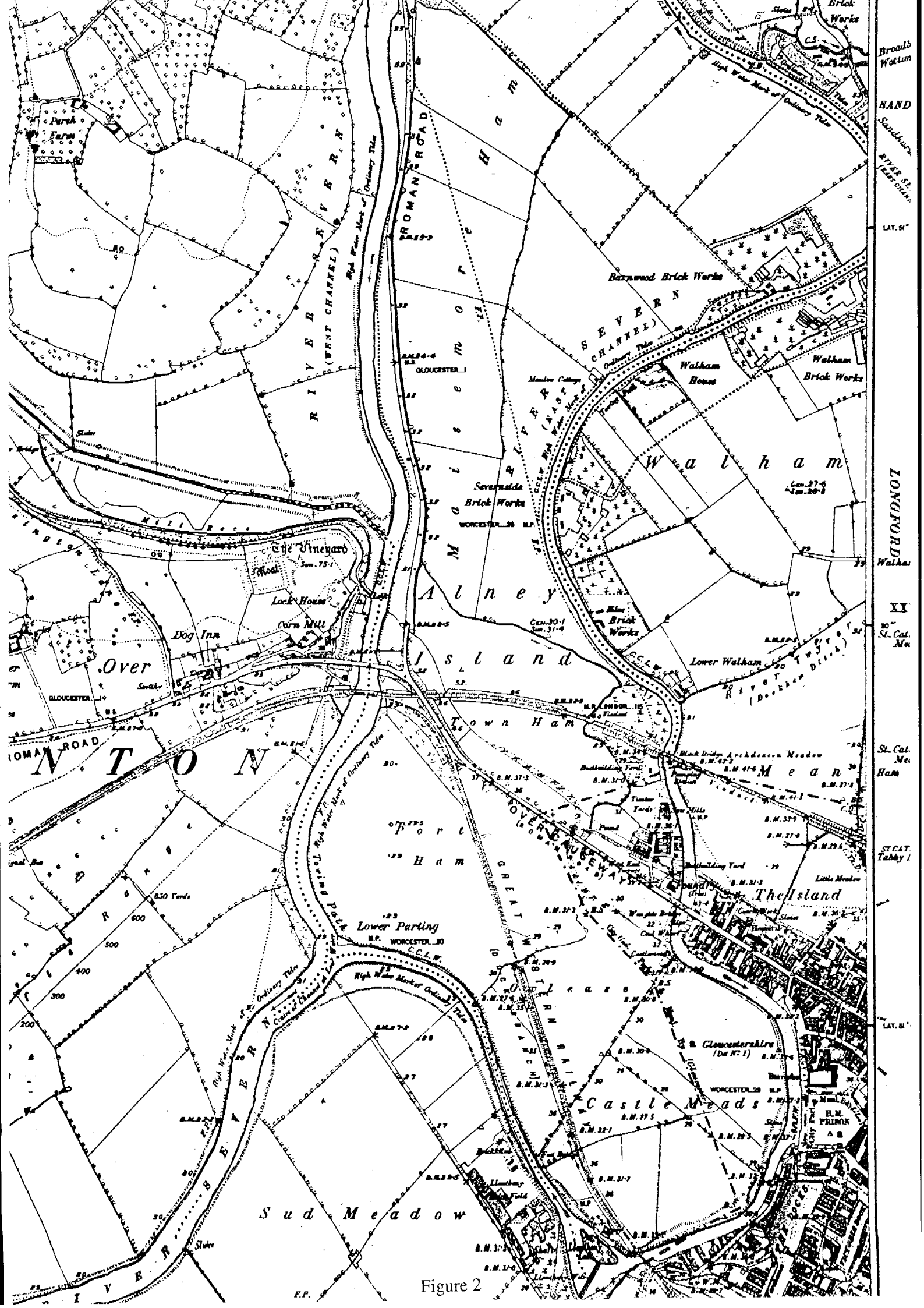
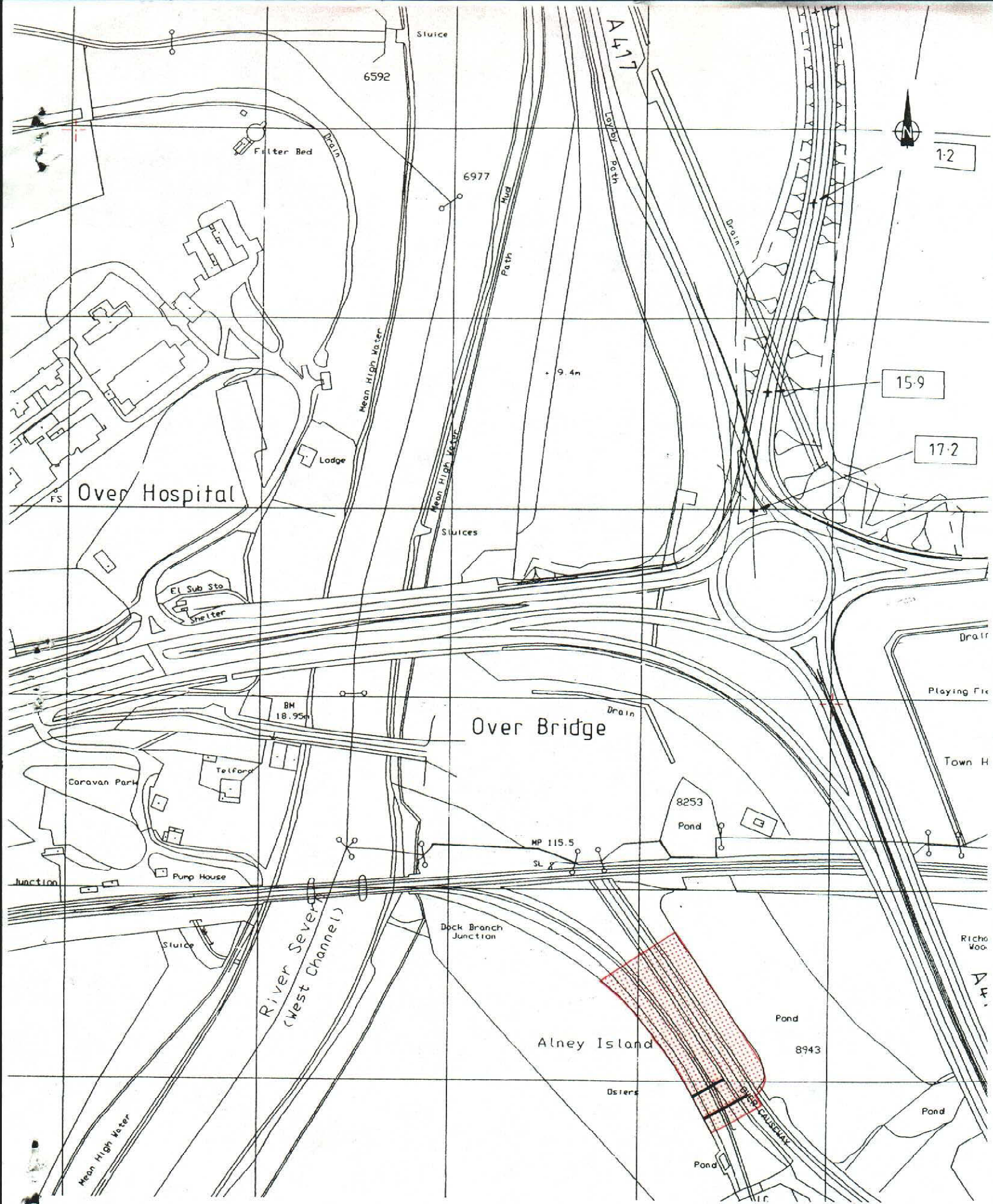


Figure 2



AREA TO BE REMOVED



SUGGESTED TRIAL TRENCHES

Figure 3