

**Red Horse House,  
25 Henley Street, Alcester,  
Warwickshire**

## **Archaeological Watching Brief**



*understanding heritage matters*

Report No 1203  
January 2012



*Working for  
Warwickshire*

**Project:** Red Horse House, Henley Street, Alcester

**Commissioned by:** Dr Paul Gray

**Project Report No.** 1203

**Site Code:** AL126

**NGR:** SP 0906 5756

**Planning Reference:** S11/01230/FUL

**Staff:**

**Project Manager:** Stuart Palmer

**Fieldwork:** Bryn Gethin and Pete Thompson

**Author:** Bryn Gethin

**Illustrations:** Candy Stevens

**Report checked by:** Stuart Palmer

**Date:** 31/01/12

**Report reference:** Gethin, B, Thompson, P, 2012 *Red Horse House, 25 Henley Street, Alcester, Warwickshire: Archaeological Watching Brief*, Archaeology Warwickshire Report 1203

Archaeology Warwickshire  
Historic and Natural Environment  
The Butts  
Warwick  
CV34 4SS

Tel: 01926 412278  
Fax: 01926 412974

[fieldarchaeology@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:fieldarchaeology@warwickshire.gov.uk)  
[www.warwickshire.gov.uk/archaeology](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/archaeology)

## Contents

	Summary
1	Introduction
2	Location
3	Methodology
4	Archaeological and Historical Background
5	Watching Brief
6	Conclusions
	Acknowledgements
	Bibliography

## Appendix

### List of Contexts

### List of Figures

1	Site location
2	Detail of Sutton's map of 1752 showing the site of Red Horse House
3	Trenches being excavated and the rear of Red Horse House
4	Location of site on First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887
5	Area observed and section A

## Summary

**An archaeological watching brief during the construction of an extension to the rear of Red Horse House, formerly The Red Horse public house, exposed no remains associated with either the Romano-British or medieval towns of Alcester. The remains of a brick wall and brick tank were clearly 19th century in date and related to outbuildings associated with the building's use as a public house. The absence of Roman finds was a surprise. An undated soil layer visible across most of the site might well have represented a Roman level, although geological natural was apparent very close to the existing ground level which tends to suggest that the area had been truncated during later development.**

## 1 Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Stratford-on-Avon District Council for a single storey extension at the rear of Red Horse House, 25 Henley Street, Alcester. The site lies within the limits of both the Roman town of Alcester and the later medieval town and therefore an area of high archaeological potential. A condition of planning permission required that the applicant secured 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 soil stripping and 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. This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under the site code AL126.

## 2 Location

2.1 The development site is located west of Henley Street, Alcester, in the parish of the same name. The site is located at national grid reference SP 0906 5756 and existing Grade II Listed Buildings (LBS 305219) on the site were formerly part of the Red Horse Public House. Archaeological work was undertaken within the rear garden formerly part of a yard.

2.2 The underlying geology of the area is 1st and 2nd Terrace River gravels (British Geological Survey 1974).

## 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. An absence of archaeological remains revealed by the groundworks prompted a discussion with the Planning Archaeologist to conclude the mitigation following the completion of a cross section of trenches and soil stripping.

## 4 Archaeological and Historical Background

### Prehistoric

4.1 There is currently no evidence for Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer activity at Alcester but possible Mesolithic flintwork is recorded from topsoil and a pit group at nearby Oversley Mill (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record Number MWA 6399; Warwickshire Museum 1990). Within Alcester, evidence for pre-Roman activity is elusive and fragmentary. A possible Neolithic and perhaps Bronze Age settlement that was recorded in Meeting Lane in 1927 (MWA 5495), is far from convincing and may more accurately pertain to an isolated flint find spot; one of only a few within Alcester.

4.2 A small group of postholes and a pit found in Tibbets Close were broadly dated to the Iron Age (Cracknell 1989, 12-25) and if the identification is correct, the site may have been part of one of a number of Iron Age settlement foci in the area; although more substantial evidence comes from Cold Comfort Lane (Jones and Palmer 1995, 1999). In addition, a number of undated cropmarks visible on air photographs of the area surrounding the town could represent activity in this period.

### Romano-British

4.3 During the Romano-British period Alcester was an important town, probably known as *Alauna* (MWA 4495; Fig 1). The town probably grew from a *vicus* surrounding a mid-first century fort in the Bleachfield Street area on the junction of two important roads, Ryknild Street and the Droitwich Salt Way. This fort apparently succeeded a short lived fort, indicated by a cropmark at Lower Oversley Lodge on a high ridge that overlooks Alcester from the south (Booth 1996, 32). The fort may have been used as late as the early second century by a small garrison in (perhaps) winter quarters, whereas the town continued to expand and was inhabited throughout the period of occupation (Palmer 1997).

4.4 It is generally assumed that the Ryknild Street on the far west side of the town was an early military road, and that the Roman road to Stratford was later, but perhaps still earlier than the fort (Booth 1994, 167). This road became a significant thoroughfare; its *agger* was still evident as an earthwork in 1958 (Hughes 1960, 11). A large public building, possibly a *mansio*, was built across the road (Booth 1994).

4.5 The Roman settlement was extensive, being far larger than the medieval settlement and comparable to 20th century Alcester. However, a number of areas that have remained free from modern development in the town are collectively Scheduled as an Ancient Monument (Warwickshire No 128: Alcester Roman Town).

4.6 A large part of the town was defended by a rampart in the 2nd century and by a wall in the 4th century (Cracknell 1996). This strength of the defended area was partly enhanced by a marsh on the west side of the town and the river Arrow on the eastern side.

## **Anglo-Saxon**

4.7 There is no unequivocal evidence for continued settlement in Alcester in the early Saxon period, although Anglo-Saxon pottery was recovered from excavations at Lloyds Bank in 1975 (Booth and Evans 2001, 116-123) and 1997 (MWA 501, MWA 8176). In 1964 Hughes recovered a 7th-century silver bracelet from his excavation south of the former Almshouses on Bleachfield Street (MWA 6461) and Alcester may have been that 'celebrated place called Alne' where an ecclesiastical council was held in AD 709 to consecrate the foundation of Evesham Abbey by Ecgwin, Bishop of Worcester. An Evesham Chronicle account of c 1125, had Ecgwin preaching to the wealthy, hardhearted people of Alcester, but being drowned out by the smiths hammers and anvils. Ecgwin's invocation of divine retribution summoned an earthquake which swallowed up both town and smiths. The vacant site was therefore given to Evesham Abbey and though many had since tried to follow the trade of a smith in Alcester, none had succeeded (VCH 1945, 9-22).

## **Medieval and Post-medieval**

4.8 In the medieval period Alcester was a prosperous small town concentrated around the parish church and the present High Street (MWA 9585). The medieval plots fronting on to High Street formed a series of extended narrow properties, and another group of these continued along the north end of Bleachfield Street. The surviving lines of these boundaries may be seen on 18th century estate maps (Sutton 1754; Eyre 1760). A number of late medieval and early post-medieval buildings survive within the town (VCH 1945, 9-12). The church has a 14th century tower but was otherwise rebuilt in the 18th century (MWA 541). Gunnings Bridge stands on the site of one of the medieval bridges of Alcester but the present structure probably dates to the 19th century (MWA 538 and 5293).

4.9 Immediately to the north of the town was the Benedictine abbey of St Mary and St John the Baptist, founded in 1140 by Ralph le Boteler (Scheduled Ancient Monument Number 21562; MWA 534). The abbey would have been an economic as well as religious centre. The financial fortunes of the abbey suffered through the negligence of later abbots, and its status was reduced to a cell of Evesham Abbey in 1465. It was dissolved in 1536 (VCH 1908, 59-61). After this time the site was used as a source of stone for Beauchamp Court and by the 18th century was in agricultural use. The site of the town's water-powered medieval corn mill survives just to the north of the abbey site. This was converted into a needle mill in around 1805 and most of the existing buildings date from the 19th century (MWA 5023).

4.10 The Grade II listed 17th-century town hall was originally the market hall with an open ground floor, enclosed in the 19th century (MWA 540). The town continued to develop as a market town into the 19th century, and also had a thriving industrial base, particularly needle manufacturing. The railway from Redditch to Evesham *via* Alcester opened in 1866, with a further line from Alcester to Bearley opening in 1876, but are both now closed and dismantled.

4.11 Some other significant archaeological finds are shown on Fig 1 and include:

- MWA 458 Findspot of the head and torso of statue, possibly of Mars, now on display in Alcester Heritage Centre
- MWA 464 Section of Roman town defences found in 1978
- MWA 465 Remains of a Roman building found during excavations in the 1960s
- MWA 468 Findspot of Roman coins and pottery
- MWA 469 A trench dug in the centre of Malt Mill Lane and Church Street in 1928 found the remains of a Roman building and associated finds
- MWA 470 Excavations in 1923 found Roman artefacts
- MWA 471 Roman 'gravel paths' and pottery
- MWA 472 A coin hoard was found whilst digging a cellar in 1638. It consisted of over 800 coins in an urn and at least one cremation burial
- MWA 473 Roman pottery found in the area of the Boling Green
- MWA 474 Fragments of mosaic pavement found when the Baptist chapel was built in 1660
- MWA 475 Excavation in the 1920s found more evidence of Roman buildings
- MWA 476 Traces of Roman building indicated by painted wall plaster, mosaic tesserae and associated finds
- MWA 477 Excavation in the 1920s found more Roman building remains including floors
- MWA 479 Traces of Roman rampart and wall line
- MWA 535 Findspot of an ivory crozier head in the shape of a Tau cross, made from walrus ivory and probably late Saxon in date
- MWA 2246 Findspot of a Roman military cart fitting
- MWA 3790 Excavation in 1983 uncovered Roman remains including traces of timber and stone buildings
- MWA 4491 Prehistoric hearths of Bronze Age or early Iron Age date, including pottery
- MWA 4831 Possible traces of Roman rampart seen in foundation trenches
- MWA 5678 Medieval malting kiln found during excavation
- MWA 5679 Iron Age pottery found during excavation
- MWA 5679 Iron Age pottery found during excavation
- MWA 5835 Roman layers and finds found in an archaeological trench in 1988
- MWA 5836 Medieval features including ditches found at the same site as 5835
- MWA 5837 Roman features were found archaeological work including traces of the Roman rampart and walls from up to two buildings
- MWA 5993 Findspot of a 4th century Roman coin
- MWA 7402 In 1983 trial trenches identified part of the Roman rampart
- MWA 7854 A Roman ditch and rubble surface found during construction of a bungalow
- MWA 8150 Roman remains including parts of the town defences found in 1988
- MWA 8151 Medieval remains including a malting kiln found in 1988
- MWA 8686 A 19th century toll road from Alcester to Wootton Wawen
- MWA 9652 Test pits dug beneath the floor of 4 Meeting Lane uncovered sections of stone wall, possibly medieval but more likely Roman in date
- MWA 9662 Roman building material found at 4 Meeting Lane
- MWA 10324 Timber framed house of the late 15th or early 16th century
- MWA 12697 A sandstone foundation was found during service trench digging, possibly Roman but also possibly medieval
- MWA 12698 A sandstone foundation was found during service trench digging in Church Street, almost certainly part of a Roman building

## The Site

### Documentary and Cartographic Evidence

4.12 The present site lies within the Roman and medieval settlement at Alcester, in the northern half of the Roman defended area and on one of the main streets of the medieval town. The earliest map of the area is Sutton's map of 1754 (Fig 2). The map is not accurate by modern standards but does show numerous narrow plots of land stretching back from the Henley Street, which represent the survival of medieval burgage plots laid out when the Borough of Alcester was founded in the 12th century. The site of Red Horse House occupies one of these burgage plots and is probably shown on the 1754 map with numerous outbuildings to the rear.

4.13 The house was part of the 17th century Red Horse public house and it is suggested in the Victoria County History (VCH 1945) that it was previously known as the Greyhound's Head. This might be a mistake as Greyhound House, the next building to the south, was previously the Greyhound Inn. A pub token of the Greyhound's Head dating to 1670 is known and so it did exist somewhere in Alcester. However, it is quite possible that the name 'The Greyhound's Head' evolved as amusing play on the name of its immediate neighbour the 'Greyhound Inn'.

4.14 The Red Horse continued as a public house until 1978 (Mrs Gray, pers comm.). It is Grade II listed and consists of a late 17th or early 18th century brick building on the street frontage with various extensions to the rear, some of which appear to be timber framed and at least 17th century in date. Local historian John Bunting has recently suggested that the brick street frontage dates to 1715 (Mrs Gray, pers comm.).

4.15 The site is shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886-7 and looks somewhat similar to today except for the considerable number of outbuildings to the rear, running down both edges of the plot. A map accompanying a deed of 1894 (kindly supplied by Dr Gray) also gives an excellent view of the pub and its outbuildings and shows the area of the new extension as a small section of walled-off yard. The First Edition map also shows two more pubs, in close proximity to the Red Horse. The previously mentioned Greyhound Inn was just to the south, whilst only a few doors to the north was the Baker's Arms; since demolished to make way for the construction of Henley Court. The closeness of these three large pubs, all with outbuildings to the rear that probably provided stabling (certainly the case with The Red Horse), gives some indication of the former prosperity brought by the nearby market and the need to provide accommodation on market day.

### Archaeological Evidence

4.16 A large amount of mostly small scale archaeological work has happened in and around Alcester. However, almost none of this has happened along Henley Street, particularly the western side. The nearest archaeological work was carried out along Meeting Lane and Tibbets Close and to the rear of the former rectory on Butter Street, adjacent to the church. The lack of archaeological work can be directly linked to the relative lack of modern development in this part of town and there remains no doubt that it lies within an area of high archaeological potential.



## 5 Watching Brief

5.1 Foundation trenches for the proposed extension were observed during two days in January 2012 (Fig 5). The trenches were excavated by a mini-excavator using a toothless bucket and were on average approximately 0.6m wide and 1.1m deep. An archaeologist was present during all the relevant groundworks in order to observe and record any archaeological remains.

### **Natural**

5.2 A layer of natural reddish brown sand and gravel (102) was revealed in the bottom of the foundation trenches. A depth of approximately 0.4m of natural gravel was partially removed during excavation; however no archaeological features or remains were revealed cutting into the natural.

### **Romano-British**

5.3 Unusually in this part of Alcester no evidence of Romano-British activity was revealed on the site; however a layer of greyish brown sandy loam (101) overlaid the natural gravel. This layer contained no finds, but was similar in characteristics to extensive Romano-British deposits recorded elsewhere in the vicinity.

### **Medieval and Post-Medieval**

5.4 No evidence of medieval activity was recorded during the watching brief. The foundations of a partially standing, brick wall (104) were revealed. The wall was 0.22m thick with 0.74m deep foundations comprised of 7 courses. A possible foundation cut and backfill (106) associated with the wall was also recorded. This contained brick and mortar fragments. The wall was part of or added to the site boundary wall and may have formed part of an outbuilding or outside toilet.

5.5 A 2.7m long and 1.4m wide brick structure (105) was revealed at the western end of the proposed footprint. This was formed of 0.2m wide brick walls on all four sides and a tile floor (107). The tiles, approximately 0.2m long, 0.2m wide and 0.02m thick, were set in mortar and covered the internal area of the structure. All tiles were perforated with handmade holes. The floor appears to have been subsequently replaced as it was covered with a layer of air bricks (108) forming a floor surface. Both floors were covered in a thin layer of concreted greyish silt.

5.6 A layer of greyish brown sandy loam (103) with brick debris probably resulted from modern disturbance during the removal of drains, manhole and brick foundations. A layer of grey brown silty loam (100) with occasional brick, tile and concrete fragments formed the existing surface deposit.

## 6 Conclusions

6.1 No evidence associated with Romano-British or medieval activity in this part of Alcester was revealed during the watching brief. There was similarly no evidence for any 17th or 18th century activity which is curious considering the site's history as part of the 17th century Red Horse pub. As a yard area outside the former stables in a busy inn and it is likely that it was kept clear of obstruction and maintained without recourse to digging holes during its functional life. Further outbuildings were added and it is likely that the construction or demolition and removal of these structures may have also caused the removal of potential Romano-British or post-medieval remains.

6.2 The lack of any significant archaeological features may reflect the history of the use of this part of the site within the heart of an inn complex from the 17th to 20th century.

## Acknowledgements

Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire would like to thank Dr Paul Gray for commissioning the work and the County Planning Archaeologist for preparing the brief. Thanks must also go to the contractors Chris and Jason Gough who were very helpful on site and to Mrs Gray for her interest.

## Bibliography

### *Maps*

British Geological Survey 1974 Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales), Solid and Drift Geology, Stratford-upon-Avon Sheet 200.

Eyre 1760 *Earl of Warwick's Estate*, County Record Office N311.

Ordnance Survey 1834 *First Edition one inch to one mile map*, Sheet 51, Worcester.

Ordnance Survey 1886-87 *First Edition 1:2500 map*, Warwickshire Sheet 37.13 and 37.14.

Ordnance Survey 1905 *Second Edition 1:2500 map*, Warwickshire Sheet 37.13 and 37.14.

Ordnance Survey 1923 *Third Edition 1:2500 map*, Warwickshire Sheet 37.13 and 37.14.

Sutton, W, 1754 *Map of Kinwarton and part of Oversley and Alcester*, County Record Office CR Z120/U.

### *Sources*

Booth, P, 1994 *Roman Alcester: the state of knowledge in 1964*, in Mahany, C, ed, *Roman Alcester: Southern extra-mural area, 1964-1966 excavations Part 1*, CBA Research Report

96, 8-11.

Booth, P, 1996 Warwickshire in the Roman Period: a review of recent work, *Transactions Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society* 100, 25-58.

Booth, P, and Evans, J, 2001 *Roman Alcester: Northern Extra-mural Area, 1969-1988 Excavations*, CBA Research Report 127.

Cracknell, S. 1989 Roman Alcester: recent archaeological excavations, *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society* 1985-6, 94, 1-62.

Cracknell, S, ed, 1996 *Roman Alcester: defences and defended area: Gateway supermarket and Gas House Lane*, CBA Research Report 106, Roman Alcester Series 2.

Hughes, H V, 1960 Recent work at Roman Alcester, *Transactions Birmingham Archaeological Society* (1958), 76, 16-17.

Jones, G C, and Palmer, N J, 1995 Alcester, Cold Comfort Lane, *West Midlands Archaeology*, 38, 79.

Jones, G C, and Palmer, N J, 1999 Alcester, Land North of Cold Comfort Lane, *West Midlands Archaeology*, 42, 96-7.

Palmer, S C, 1997 *Archaeological Desktop Assessment: Bleachfield Street Allotment Gardens and the Stratford Road Recreation Ground. Alcester, Warwickshire*, Warwickshire Museum Report.

VCH 1908 *Victoria County History of Warwickshire, Vol II*, London.

VCH 1945 *Victoria County History of Warwickshire, Vol III, Barlichway Hundred*, London, 8-22.

Warwickshire Museum 1990 *Oversley Mill Service Station, Salvage Recording*, Warwickshire Museum Report.

## Appendix

### List of Contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comments</i>
100	Topsoil	Modern
101	Greyish brown sandy loam	Undated, possibly Roman
102	Reddish brown sand/gravel	Natural geology
103	Layer	Modern disturbance
104	Brick wall	19th century
105	Brick structure	19th century
106	Backfill	19th century
107	Tile Floor	19th century
108	Brick floor	19th century

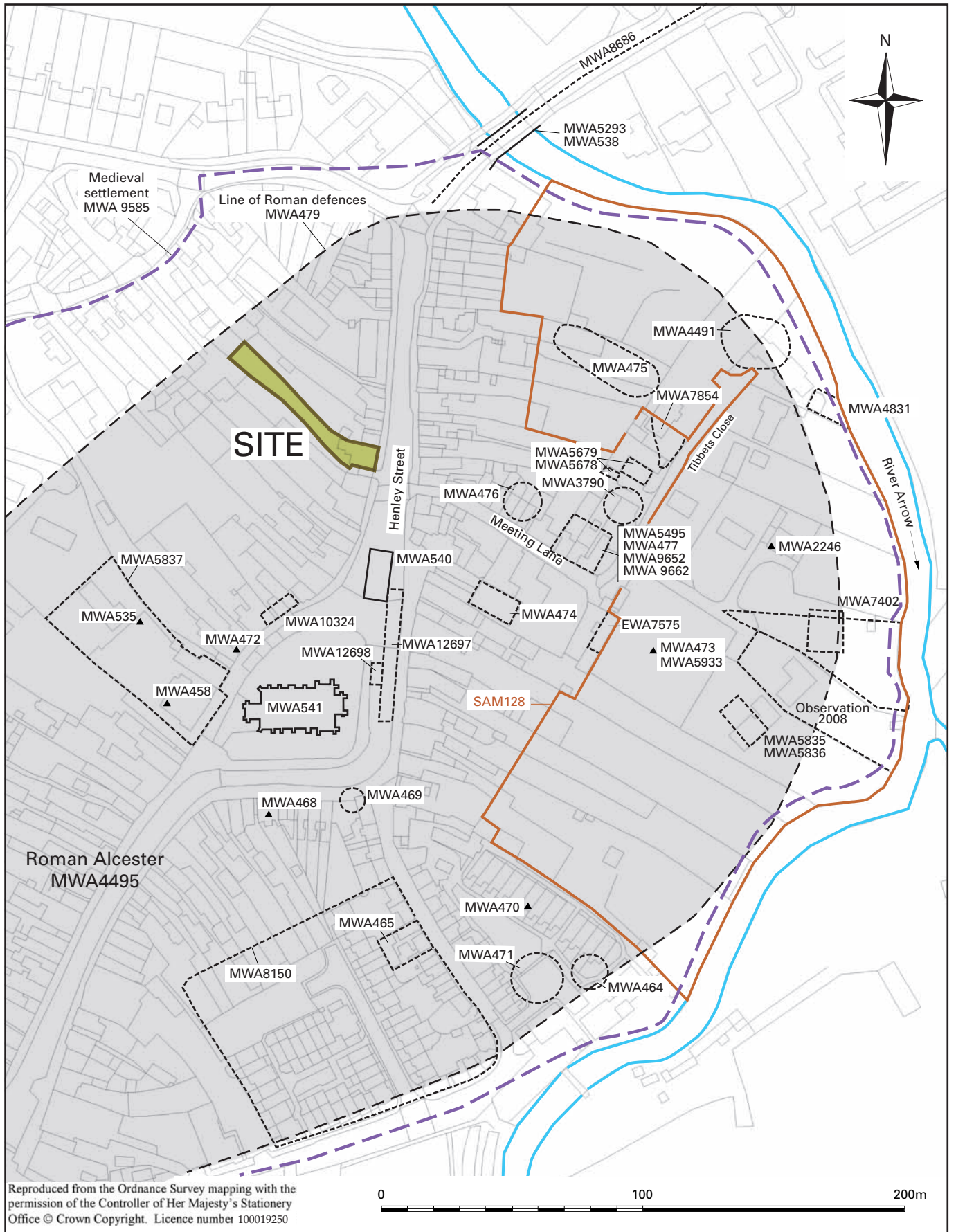


Fig 1: Site location





Fig 2: Detail of Sutton's map of 1752 showing the site of Red Horse House



Fig 3: Trenches being excavated and the rear of Red Horse House





Fig 4: Location of site on First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887

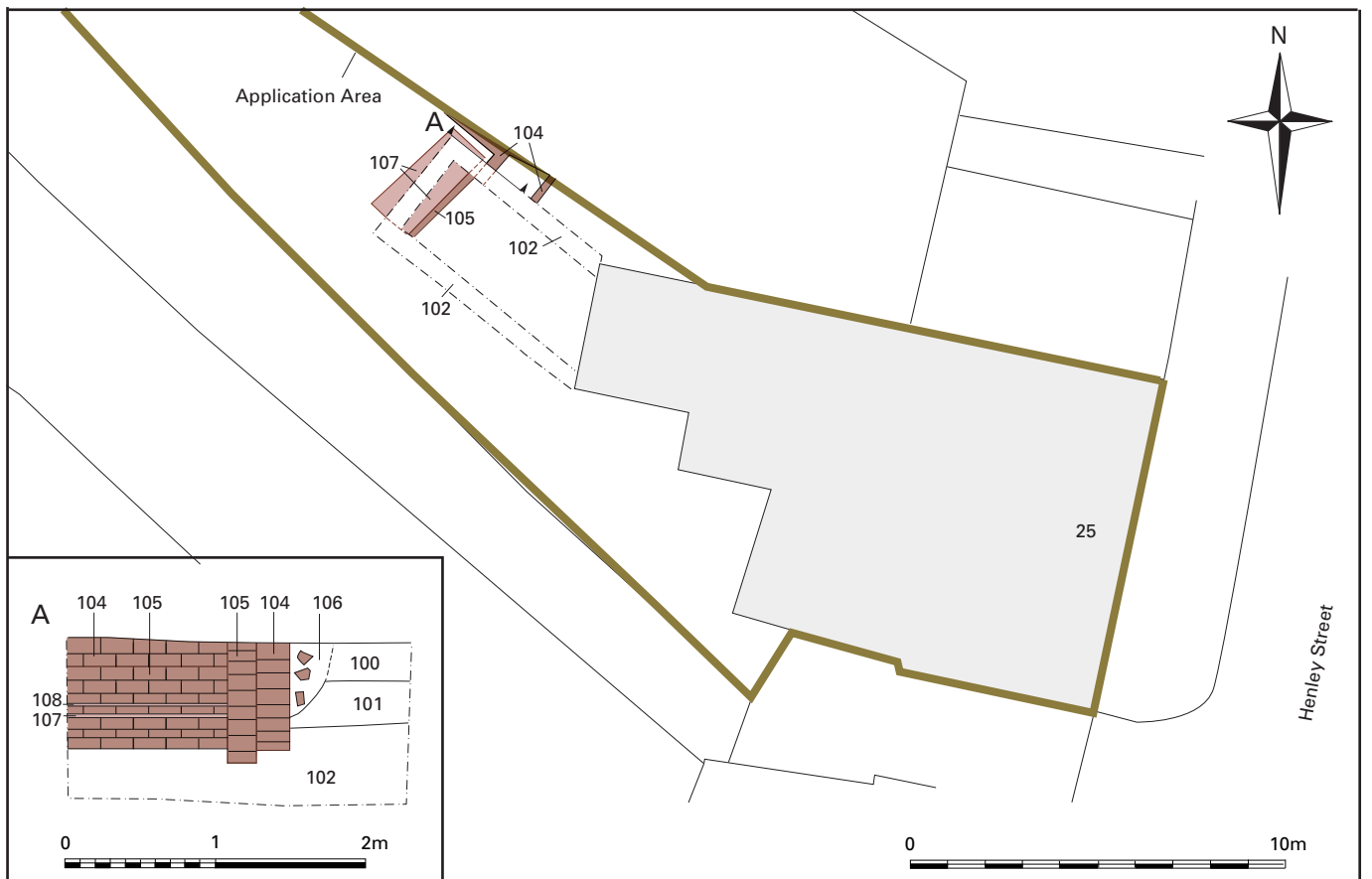


Fig 5: Area observed and section A