

**14B High Street, Alcester,  
Warwickshire**

## **Archaeological Watching Brief**



*understanding heritage matters*

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 1355  
September 2013



*Working for  
Warwickshire*

**Project:** 14b High Street, Alcester

**Commissioned by:** Mrs Linda Jennings

**Project Report No.** 1355

**Site Code:** AL133

**NGR:** SP 0900 5737

**Planning Reference:** 12/02774/LBC

**Staff:**

**Project Manager:** Pete Thompson  
**Fieldwork:** Bryn Gethin, Rob Jones  
**Author:** Pete Thompson, Caroline Rann  
**Illustrations:** Candy Stevens

**Report checked by:** Stuart Palmer

**Date:** 27/09/13

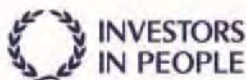
**Report reference:** Thompson, P and Rann, C, 2013 *14B High Street, Alcester, Archaeological Watching Brief*, Archaeology Warwickshire Report 1355

If you have any queries regarding this document please contact

Pete Thompson  
Senior Archaeologist  
Archaeology Warwickshire  
Unit 9  
Montague Road  
Warwick  
CV34 5LW

Tel: 01926 412278

[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

A	List of Contexts
B	List of Finds

## Figures

1	Site location
2	Site with archaeological sites in immediate vicinity
3	Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886-7
4	Detail from Second Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1905
5	Areas and trenches observed
6	Possible Roman wall in foundation trench
7	Area observed, looking north

## Summary

**Archaeological observations during the construction of an extension to 14b High Street Alcester, uncovered a wall which could have been Roman. A layer, containing pottery and other finds dating from the Roman period to the 19th century, was consistent with that of a garden soil in an urban area that has been occupied for many centuries.**

### 1 Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Stratford on Avon District Council for a single storey side extension and addition of toilet/shower at Back of Beyond, 14B High Street, Alcester, B49 5AD. The site lies on a gravel terrace alongside the River Avon, a location well-endowed with evidence for settlement in the prehistoric and Roman periods. 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 soil stripping and foundation trenches in accordance with a brief prepared by the County Planning Archaeologist on behalf of the Planning Authority (March 2013), was commissioned from Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire and carried out in April 2013. This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum.

### 2 Location

2.1 The development site is located at map reference SP 0900 5737, within the town of Alcester which is in the parish of the same name (Fig 1). The site was formerly occupied by garden.

2.2 The superficial geology of the area is Wasperton Sand and Gravel (British Geological Survey Viewer <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/data/mapViewers/> accessed September 2013).

### 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 the groundworks.

## 4 Archaeological and Historical Background

### Prehistoric

4.1 There is currently no evidence for Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer activity at Alcester but possible Mesolithic (c 8000-4000 BC) flintwork is recorded from topsoil and a pit group at nearby Oversley Mill (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; Figure 2), is far from convincing and may more accurately pertain to an isolated flint find spot; one of only a few within Alcester, although a Neolithic pit was recorded in Bleachfield Street (MWA 4492).

4.2 A small group of postholes and a pit found in Tibbet's Close were broadly dated to the Iron Age by 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.

### Roman (AD 43 – 410)

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 an ad hoc settlement (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. If it existed then this fort will have 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 Bleachfield Street 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 (MWA 446) was later, but perhaps still earlier than the fort (Booth 1994, 167). This road became a significant thoroughfare; its embankment (*agger*) was still evident as an earthwork in 1958 (Hughes 1960, 11). A large public building, possibly an official stopover place (*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 21st 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 'defended area' lay to the south of an area of marshland.

## **Anglo-Saxon (AD 410 – 1066)**

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 (1066 – 1800)**

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 parish church has a 14th century tower but was largely 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 is of probable 19th century date (MWA 538).

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, not on plan).

## **Site Specific**

4.10 The site now encompasses part of the rear plots of the two properties to the south-west. On the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (1886-7; Fig 3) the property boundary was very long and narrow, extending down to the Gas Works. A long outbuilding with a smaller square one attached to the south of it stood independently in the centre of the plot. This is clearer to see on the Second Edition Ordnance Survey map (1905) where the outbuilding is hatched (Fig 4).

4.11 Archaeological work has taken place near to the site. Further north along the High Street, at No 12, an archaeological watching brief (EWA 7620) found no archaeological finds or features. It is possible that the site had been truncated as both medieval and Roman archaeological deposits were recorded at number 8a High Street (EWA 7038).

4.12 To the south of the site at least six burials were uncovered during an archaeological watching brief at 28 High Street (EWA 7534). Archaeological work during the redevelopment of the Riverside Works, uncovered Romano British through to post-medieval features (EWA6162 and EWA7772).

### **Sites and interventions recorded on the Warwickshire HER in the vicinity**

MWA452	Roman Building
MWA482	Roman Building
MWA485	Roman finds; coins and pottery
MWA492	Roman Coin
MWA3789	Roman occupation
MWA3792	Roman finds
MWA4541	Post-medieval pit
MWA5496	Roman buildings
MWA7400	Roman occupation
MWA12495	Roman sarcophagus
MWA12699	Roman building and surfaces
MWA13107	Undated limestone wall
MWA13170	Stone foundation
EWA3039	Archaeological work at Gateway store
EWA3147	Watching brief at 27 High Street
EWA7048	Archaeological evaluation at Market Place
EWA9597	Watching brief on gas pipe trenches
EWA9941	Observation of drainage at HSBC

## **5 Watching Brief**

5.1 Ground reductions took place within the footprint of the extension and foundation trenches and a drain trench were then excavated (Fig 5). However, geological natural was not reached in the 0.4m deep and 0.5m wide trenches.

5.2 A limestone wall (105) running north-east to south-west was recorded in the foundation trenches at a depth of 0.85m below the surrounding ground level. It was 0.23m wide with no apparent bonding material. No evidence to date the wall was recovered but it could have been Roman. It was overlain by 101, a layer of dark-greyish brown, sandy loam up to 0.4m deep and packed with pebbles. The latest pottery recovered from this layer was a sherd of 19th-century stoneware. Residual Roman and medieval finds included a Roman melon bead, two *tesserae* and twelve sherds of medieval pottery.

5.3 Cutting layer 101 was a limestone wall footing (104). It was found in the south-western corner of the excavations and ran north-west to south-east along the former property

boundary. It could be seen further to the south surviving to a greater height. Also cutting layer 101 was a brick wall footing (102). This was constructed using red handmade bricks of probable 19th-century date.

5.4 A brick tank (103) was attached to the wall footings. This structure may have been used previously for water storage. It had a brick base (106) and was filled with dark greyish-brown, silty loam (107). A large number of 20th-century glass bottles were noted in the fill; these were not retained.

5.5 Overlying the area was a deposit of very dark greyish-brown, silty loam topsoil (100). This was removed to a depth of 0.45m prior to the excavation of foundation trenches.

## 6 Conclusions

6.1 Geological natural was not reached during the watching brief. The earliest feature on site was a limestone wall that does not correspond to any buildings depicted on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map. It could have been part of a Roman structure given the density of occupation activity of that date in the vicinity. The *tesserae*, recovered from the overlying layer, indicate that a high status building was located nearby.

6.2 The long narrow property boundary depicted on early maps is indicative of a medieval burgage plot. Whilst no medieval features were found during the excavations, pottery of this date was recovered. Later finds included a coin of George III.

6.3 Layer 101 was probably an old garden soil and could have incorporated the upper horizon of archaeological deposits in that part of Alcester as the site is within both the Roman and medieval towns.

## Acknowledgements

Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire would like to thank Barry Harding for initiating the project and are due to Mrs L Jennings for commissioning the work and the County Planning Archaeologist for preparing the brief.

## Bibliography

British Geological Survey Viewer <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/data/mapViewers/> accessed September 2013

Booth, P M, 1980 *Roman Alcester*, Warwickshire Museum.

Booth, P M, 1982 Recent work on Ryknild Street at Alcester, *Transactions Birmingham Warwickshire Archaeological Society* 92, 136-144.

Booth, P M, 1989 Excavations at 64 Bleachfield Street, Alcester, Warwickshire, 1981, *Transactions Birmingham Warwickshire Archaeological Society* 1983-4, 93, 9-32.



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

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

British Geological Survey 1974 *1:50,000 Series, England and Wales, Sheet 200 Stratford-upon-Avon, Solid and Drift Geology*.

Coutts, C, 1997 Alcester, adj, Lloyd's Bank, Bleachfield Street, *West Midlands Archaeology* 40, 70-71.

Cracknell, S, 1983 Alcester, Warwickshire (SP 091 575), *West Midlands Archaeology* 26, 81

Cracknell, S, 1987 Alcester, Roman stone building at 64b-d Bleachfield Street, *West Midlands Archaeology* 30, 40.

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

Cracknell, S, and Mahany, C, 1994 *Roman Alcester: Southern Extra-mural Area, 1964-1966 Excavations Part 2*, CBA Research Report 97.

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

Evans, J, 1996 *The Gas House Lane site; Roman pottery*, in Cracknell, S. Roman Alcester; defences and defended area, CBA Res Rep 106, York, 58-97.

Evans, J, 2001 *Material approaches to the identification of different Romano-British site types*, in James, S, and Millett, M, eds, *Britons and Romans: advancing an archaeological agenda*, CBA Research Report 125, 26-35.

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

Ferguson, R, 2001 *Roman pottery*, in Booth, P. Explosion site excavations (AES 76-7), 173-300, in Booth P. and Evans, J. eds, *Roman Alcester; northern extramural area; 1969-1988 excavations*, Roman Alcester series Vol 3, CBA Research Report 127, York, 177-231.

Geophysical Surveys 1990 *Report on Geophysical Survey, Stratford Road, Alcester*.

Gethin, B, 1995 *Archaeological observation at 18 Bleachfield Street, Alcester, Warwickshire*, Warwickshire Museum.

Gethin, B, and Thompson, P, 2006 *Archaeological observation of the Alcester Flood Alleviation Scheme, Area 1: Oversley Bridge and Area 3A: South of Stratford Road, Alcester*, Warwickshire Museum Report Number 0650.

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

Jones, G C, 1994 *Archaeological Observation and Recording at 68 Bleachfield Street*, Warwickshire Museum.

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.

Jones, C, 2010a *Archaeological observation of excavation for a drain culvert inspection chamber south of Stratford Road, Alcester, Warwickshire*, Warwickshire Museum Report 1018.

Jones, C, 2010b *Archaeological Observation of ground investigation for flood defence pumping stations at Alcester, Warwickshire*, Warwickshire Museum Report 1023.

Lamb, R, 1975 Alcester, Gas House Lane, *West Midlands Archaeological News Sheet* 18, 49.

Langley, R S, 1994 *Site L*, in Mahany 1994, 136-40

Lines, G, 1992 *The New Inn, 25 Bleachfield Street, Alcester, Warwickshire: Archaeological Observation*, Warwickshire Museum.

Mahany, C M, 1965 Guillaume's Factory, *West Midlands Archaeological News Sheet* 8, 3.

Mahany, C M, ed, 1994 *Roman Alcester: Southern Extramural Area: 1964-1966 Excavations, Part 1: Stratigraphy and Structures*, CBA Research Report 96, Roman Alcester Series 1.

Moffett, L H, 1985/6 Charred plant remains. pp 23 and microfiche M1:E12-F4, in Cracknell, S et al, Roman Alcester, recent excavations, *Transactions Birmingham Warwickshire Archaeological Society* 94, 1-61.

O A U 1996 *Site of Former Hockley Chemical Works, Stratford Road, Alcester, Warwickshire: Post-excavation Assessment and Updated Project Design*, Oxford Archaeological Unit.

- Ordnance Survey 1886-7 *First Edition 1:2500 map*, Warwickshire Sheet 36.15 & 36.16
- Ordnance Survey 1905 *Second Edition 1:2500 map*, Warwickshire Sheet 36.15 & 36.16
- Palmer, S C, 1991 *The Old Fire Station, 52 Stratford Road, Alcester: Archaeological Evaluation, October 1991*, Warwickshire Museum.
- Palmer, S C, 1993 *Stratford Road Alcester (AL29): Archaeological Evaluation*, Warwickshire Museum.
- Palmer, S C, 1997 *Archaeological Desktop Assessment: Bleachfield Street Allotment Gardens and the Stratford Road Recreation Ground. Alcester, Warwickshire*, Warwickshire Museum Report.
- Parker-Pearson, M, 1985 *Alcester Plough Damage, Warwickshire SAM 128, Warwickshire*, Unpublished manuscript held at the Warwickshire Museum
- Poulton 1975 *A Geophysical Survey at Alcester, Warwickshire*, Unpublished manuscript held at the Warwickshire Museum
- Roseveare, M J, 2009 *Arrow Fields, Alcester, Warwickshire: Geophysical Survey Report*, ArcheoPhysica Ltd, Hereford.
- Sutton, W, 1754 *Map of Kinwarton and part of Oversley and Alcester*, County Record Office CR Z120/U
- Taylor, S J, 1969 Alcester, Warwicks, Nos. 27-33 Bleachfield Street, *West Midlands Archaeological News Sheet* 12.
- Taylor, S J, 1970 Bleachfield Street, Alcester, Warwickshire, *West Midlands Archaeological News Sheet* 13.
- Taylor, S J, 1973 Unpublished draft held at the Warwickshire Museum
- Thorpe, T, 1747 *Manor of Oversley: Throckmorton Estate*, Warwickshire County Record Office CR 1998/12
- 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 1989 *Stratford Road Redevelopment - archaeological evaluation*, Warwickshire Museum
- Warwickshire Museum 1990 *Oversley Mill Service Station, Salvage Recording*, Warwickshire Museum Report.
- Warwickshire Museum 1993 *Stratford Road Alcester (AL29), Warwickshire - Archaeological Evaluation*, Warwickshire Museum Report

Warwickshire Museum 2008 *Archaeological investigations of the Alcester Flood Alleviation Scheme, Newport Drive and Willow Close, 2002, Post-excavation assessment and proposal for detailed analysis and reporting*, Warwickshire Museum Report 0744.

Webster, P V, 1976 Severn Valley ware: a preliminary study, *Transactions Bristol Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, **94**, 18-46.

WRO DR 360/170 Photograph of part of map at Ragley, now lost.

## Appendix

### A List of Contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comments</i>
100	Very dark greyish brown silty loam	Topsoil
101	Dark grey sandy loam, packed small pebbles	Layer
102	Brick wall	Foundation
103	Brick water tank	19 <sup>th</sup> century
104	Limestone wall	Foundation
105	Limestone wall	Foundation?
106	Brick floor, lime mortar	Floor of water tanks
107	Dark greyish brown silty loam	Fill of tank

### B List of Finds

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Detail/pottery code</i>	<i>Number</i>
101	Coin	1800- George III	1
101	Pottery	Slipware/SLPW01	1
101	Pottery	Creamware/CRW	4
101	Limestone	Tesserae	2
101	Pottery	Midlands Blackware/MB02	1
101	Limestone	Stopper	1
101	Pottery	Coarseware/CW01	1
101	Pottery	Hand painted	1
101	Glass	Melon Bead	1
101	Pottery	Manganese Mottled Ware/Mang	1
101	Pottery	Midlands Yellow/MY01	1
101	Animal Bone		3
101	Pottery	Midlands Purple/MP	1
101	Clay Pipe	Stems	6
101	Pottery	Medieval residual	12
101	Pottery	Roman residual	24
101	Pottery	Stoneware 19 <sup>th</sup> century	1
107	Glass	19 <sup>th</sup> /20 <sup>th</sup> century bottles	not retained

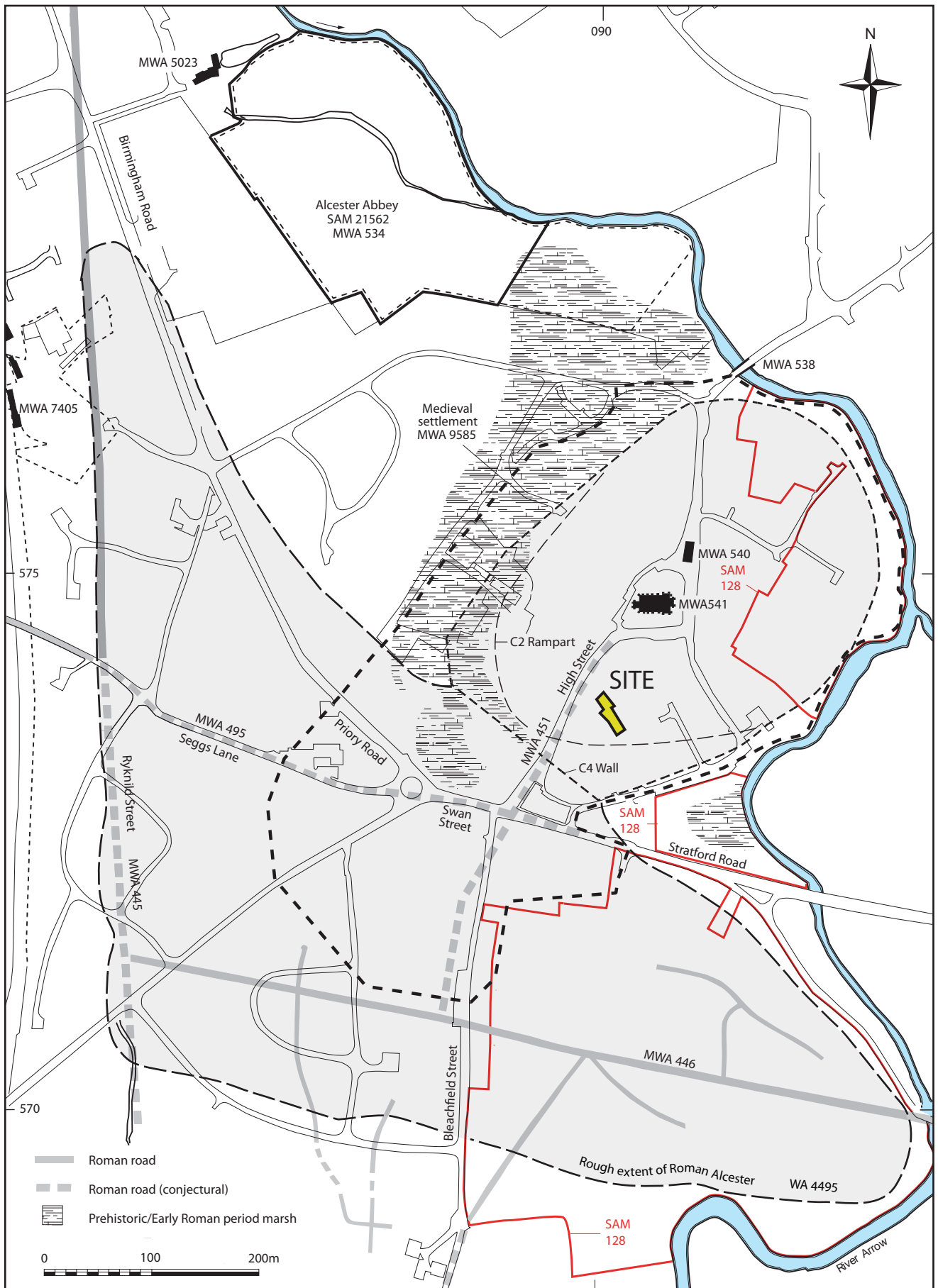


Fig 1: Site location

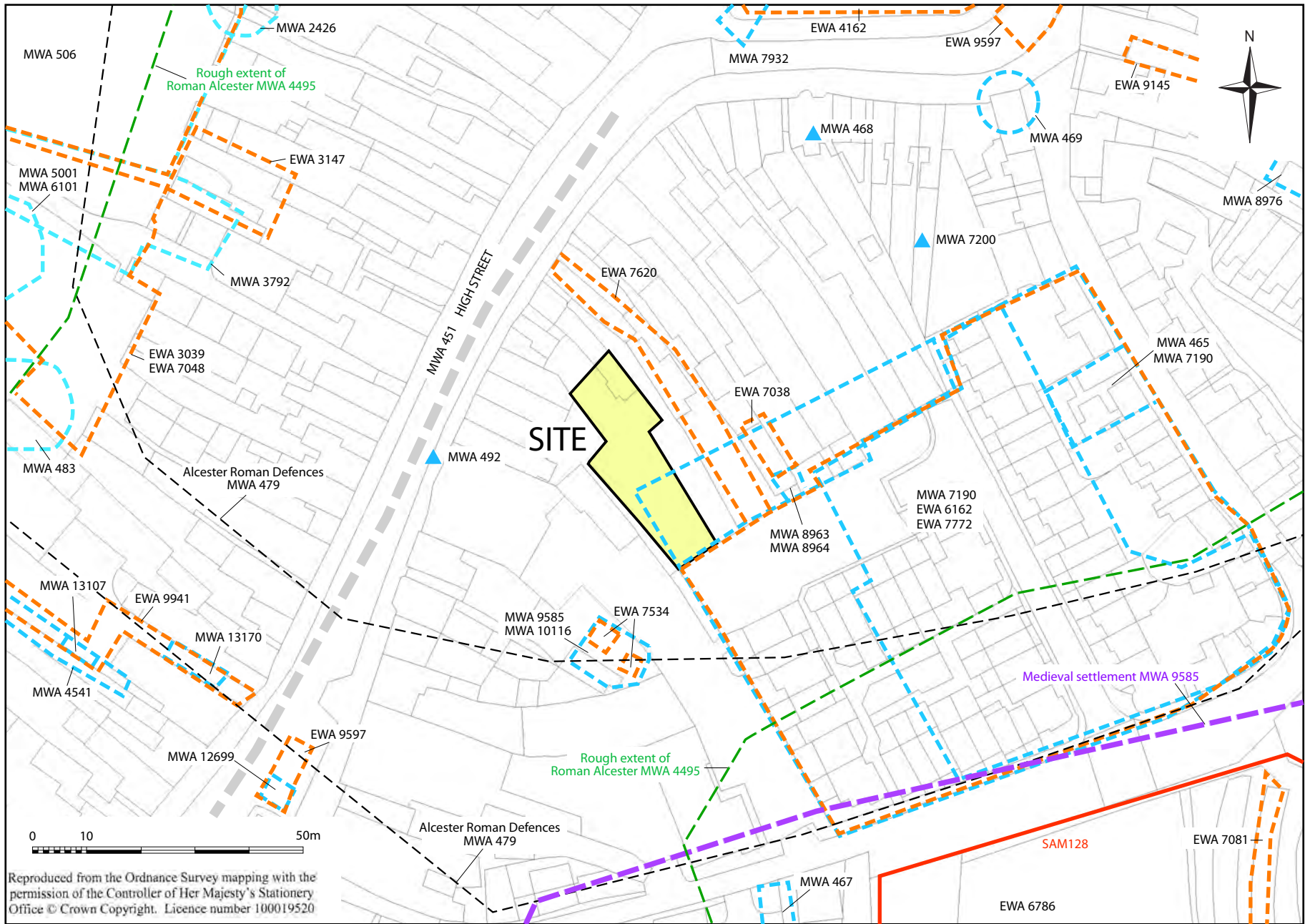


Fig 2: Site with archaeological sites in immediate vicinity



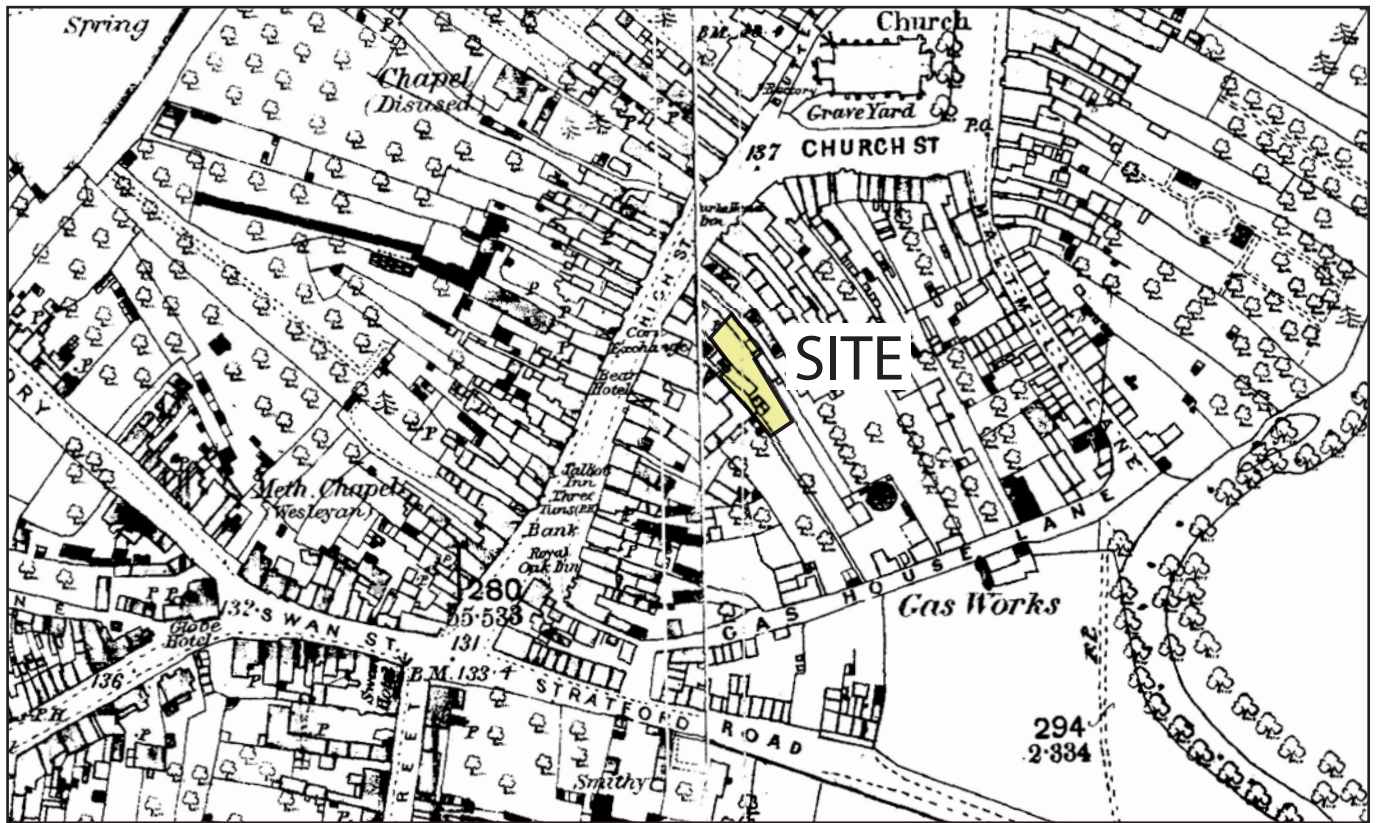


Fig 3: Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886-7

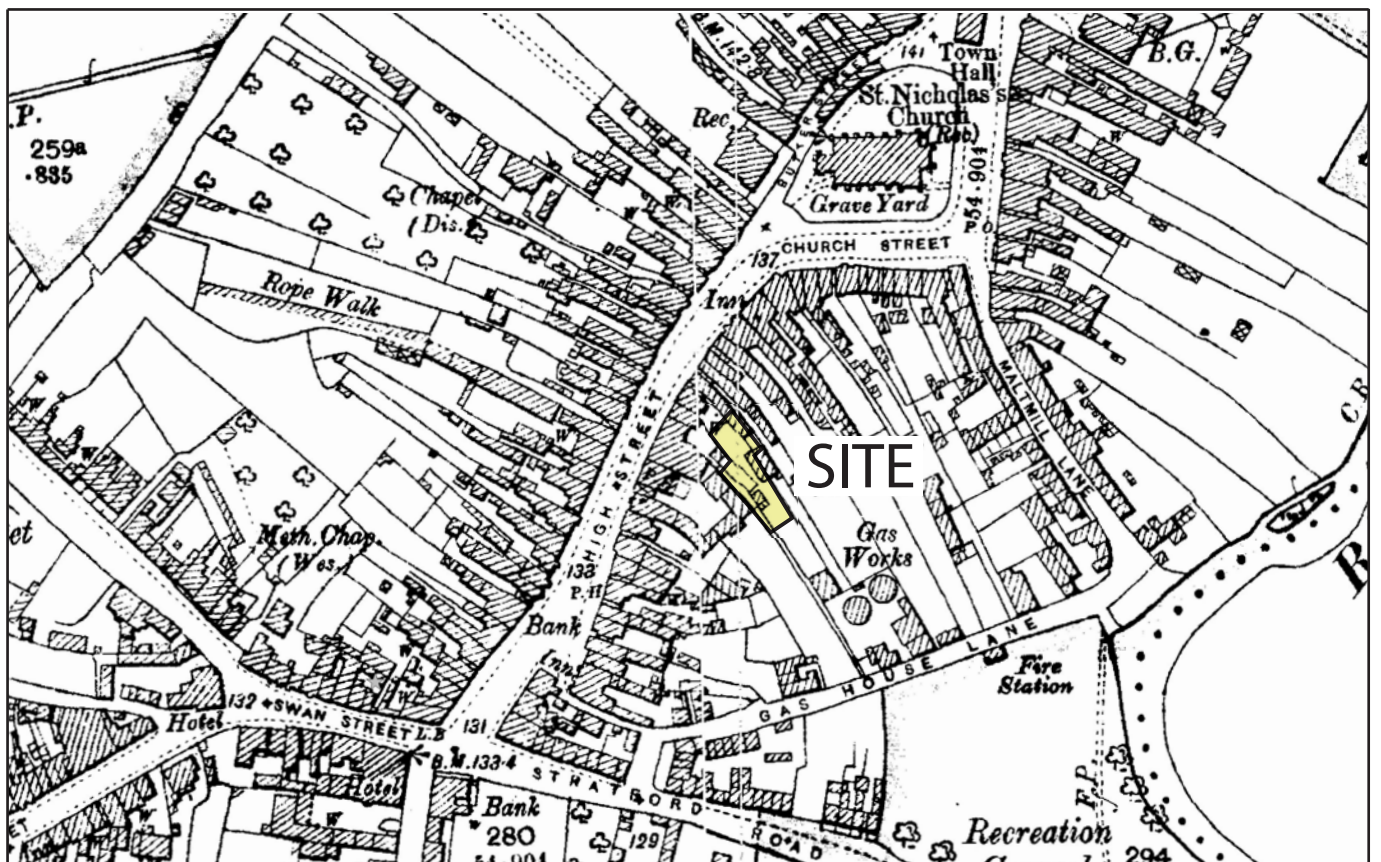


Fig 4: Detail from Second Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1905



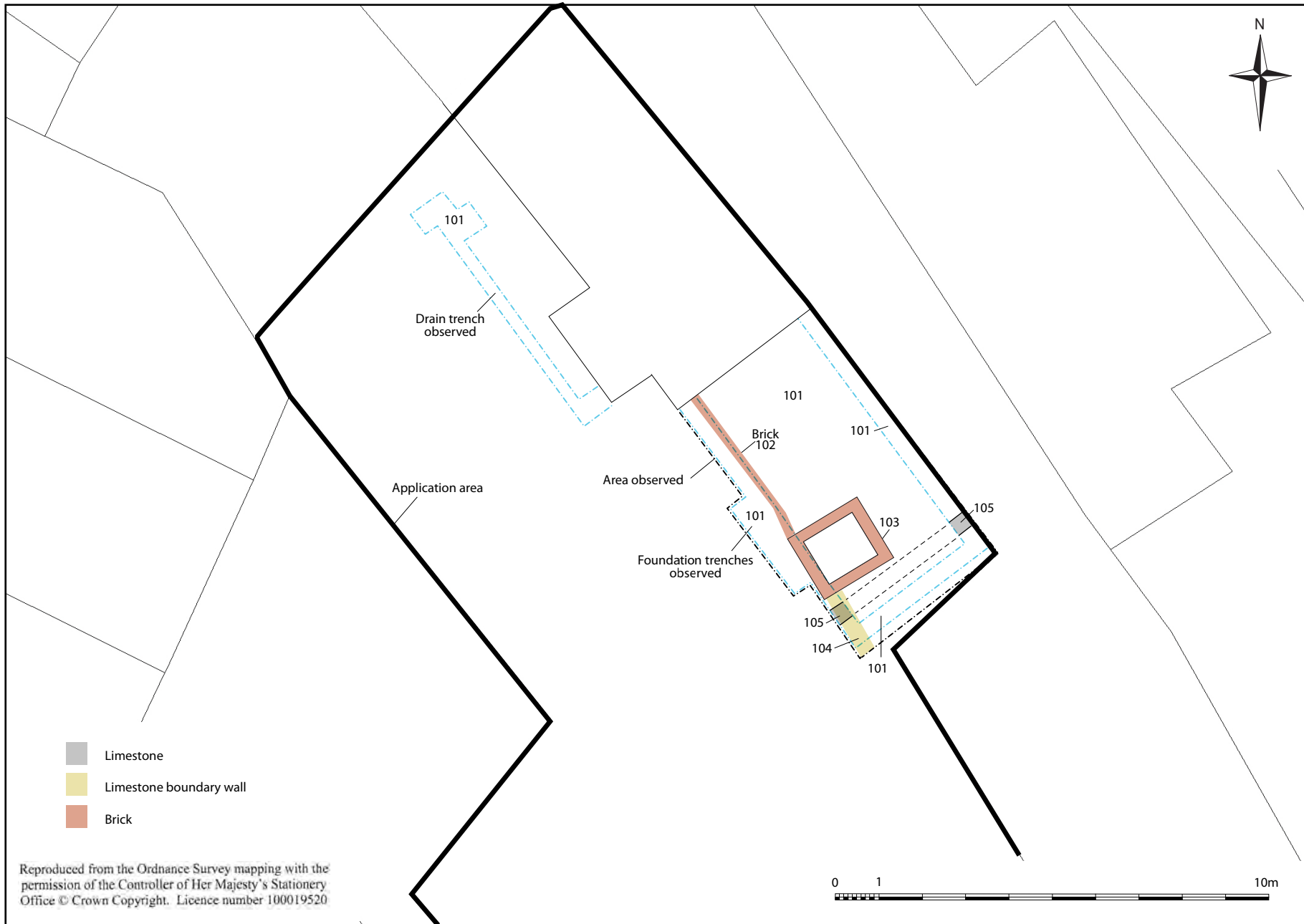


Fig 5: Area and trenches observed



Fig 6: Possible Roman wall in foundation trench



Fig 7: Area observed, looking north