

# Field House, The Pound, Harbury, Warwickshire

## Archaeological Watching Brief



*understanding heritage matters*

Report No 1302  
February 2012



*Working for  
Warwickshire*

**Project:** Field House, The Pound, Harbury

**Commissioned by:** Mr J Greenwell

**Project Report No.** 1302

**Site Code:** HP12

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**Planning Reference:** 12/00150

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## Summary

**An archaeological watching brief at Field House, The Pound, Harbury, revealed some remains associated with medieval settlement. A large ditch, on the east side of the house, may have formed a boundary between two medieval properties. Pottery evidence suggested that it was in use during the 11th century, possibly before the Norman Conquest, and went out of use in the early 12th century. An adjacent gully contained 11th to 12th century pottery, some pre-Conquest in date, along with animal bone and a hone stone for sharpening agricultural tools. A layer within the area of the new garage also contained occasional sherds of 11th/13th century pottery. Some lias stone found in a clump, could have been part of a wall but this remains uncertain. The watching brief has shown that Field House stands within part of the medieval village that was occupied from the late Saxon period through to the first half of the 12th century. The site was later incorporated in the grounds of Harbury House, a 17th-18th century development which appears to have encompassed land formerly occupied by the eastern end of the medieval village. This area has been overbuilt since the 1970s but the grounds of Field House are likely to contain more evidence of medieval settlement.**

## 1 Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted for the construction of extensions and a new garage at Field House, The Pound, Harbury. The site lies within the probable limits of the medieval settlement of Harbury. It was therefore a condition of planning permission that the development be accompanied by a programme of archaeological investigation.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork consisting of the 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 (April 2012) was commissioned from Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire and carried out between June and September 2012 and this report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under the site code HP12.

## 2 Location

2.1 The development site is located west of the in the parish of Harbury at map reference SP 3763 6009. The underlying geology of the area is undivided limestone; partly Blue Lias and partly Lower Lias (British Geological Survey 1984).

## 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, local historical journals and other publications. Fieldwork involved an archaeologist being present during groundworks. As the work progressed it became evident that the observation of all the groundworks involved in the development would not be fruitful. The Planning Archaeologist therefore agreed that the mitigation could be concluded once the major ground reductions and a cross-section of trenches had been observed.

## 4 Archaeological and Historical Background

4.1 The earliest known reference to Harbury (Edburberie) is in the Domesday Survey of 1086, where there are five references, each referring to areas under different ownership. The overall population at this time can be estimated to be around 210. There was a priest at that time and so we can infer the presence of a church. The present church was constructed in the 13th century (VCH 1951, 106; Warwickshire Historic Environment Record No MWA 621). The village, like others in the region would almost certainly have expanded through the 12th and 13th centuries, before declining through the 14th and 15th centuries. Although it may have shrunk in size it clearly remained reasonably prosperous as there are several surviving stone-built houses in the area around the church. One of these has a date stone of the late 1500s, whilst others are probably early to mid-17th century in date.

4.2 It has been suggested that an earthwork within the grounds of Harbury House is Herber's Bury, a fortified mound and ditch from which the village takes its name (MWA 4617). This interpretation is somewhat tenuous as the earthwork appears to be the remains of a pond with a small central island (MWA 8918). The island is no higher than the level of the surrounding ground surface and the pond is well preserved.

4.3 The probable extent of the medieval village (Fig 1) can be reconstructed from early maps and the surviving topography (MWA 9055). Harbury House, a Grade II Listed Building (LBS 307071), dates partly to the 17th century and until recently it stood isolated, with few houses in the immediate vicinity. This area may have become vacant due to late medieval shrinkage of the settlement.

4.4 The village has since re-expanded with several buildings of note, including the windmill which dates to the early 19th century (MWA 622). The field to the west of the church contains two house platforms (MWA 636), which mark the site of buildings shown on a map of 1813.

4.5 The first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887 shows the site as it was when it formed part of the grounds for Harbury House (Fig 2). The development area is shown as garden and woodland. The Pound, which has given its name to addresses in this area, presumably a stock enclosure for rounded up livestock, is also marked.

## 5 Watching Brief

5.1 The watching brief was carried out in two stages. In June 2012 the foundation trenches for an extension on the south-west corner of the house (Fig 4, Area 1) were observed along with a short stretch of trench to the north-west of the house. The foundation trench was excavated, by hand, to a depth of 0.74m. It was cut into a layer of greenish grey clay natural (104). Several lias stone blocks (106) were observed sitting on the natural 104 (section A) but it is uncertain if these were naturally occurring or part of a stone feature such as a wall. They were sealed in a 0.35 to 0.40m layer of grey clay loam (103) which also contained fragments of stone. Layer 103 was overlain by a greyish brown clay loam topsoil (102). These layers were cut by the foundation trench for the existing house (101), which was filled by concrete (105) and dark greyish brown clay loam (100). It was also cut by a modern drain (107). Also visible was the sand bedding for a pathway (110) and its concrete slabs (109).

5.2 In September 2012 the foundation trenches for a large extension on the east side of the house and those for a new garage, along with some soil stripping within the footprint of the new buildings, were also observed (Fig 4, Area 2). The trenches for the new extension were 0.6m wide and up to 1.4m deep. They were excavated down to a solid layer of limestone bedrock (207) which was overlaid by a thick layer of geological natural greenish grey clay (202). The geological natural was cut by ditch 203, which could be seen in various foundation trenches to run in an approximately north-south direction. It was up to 2.3m wide and 0.58m deep with steeply sloping sides and an irregular base. It was filled by a grey clay loam (204) with occasional charcoal flecks. Six sherds of pottery probably dating from the first half of to the 12th century were found within this fill. Just to the east of this ditch, a gully 205, with rounded ends was also uncovered. It was 2.3m long and up to 0.72m wide with steeply sloping sides and a rounded base. It was filled by a grey clay loam (206) from which numerous medieval finds, including 76 sherds of pottery dating largely from the 11th to the 12th century, were recovered. The pottery, mostly from cooking utensils, was all unabraded and had clearly been disposed of in the gully from a nearby dwelling.

5.3 The trenches for the garage (Fig 4, Area 3) were all 0.6m wide and up to 1.4m deep. The ground sloped from east to west and there was a far greater depth of topsoil on the east side. The geological natural bedrock (303) was reached at a depth of between 1.3 and 1.4m. This was overlaid by a layer of natural clay (302), between 0.5 and 0.6m deep. Overlying this was a layer of grey clay loam (301) from which nine sherds of pottery dating from the 11th to the 13th century were recovered. No features could be seen within this layer, although the ground was frequently disturbed by tree roots and any indistinct archaeological remains would have been difficult to see. Overlying layer 301 was between 0.35 and 0.45m of dark greyish brown clay loam topsoil.

## 6 Pottery by Stephanie Rátkai

### Introduction

6.1 Some 92 sherds (1273g) of medieval pottery were found. All the pottery was examined under x20 magnification and compared to the County Type Series (Soden and Rátkai 1998).

6.2 All but nine sherds were from two negative features, a ditch 203 and a gully 205, the majority being from the latter (see Table 1). For the most part the sherds were large and unabraded, and included two complete vessel profiles.

### *Gully 205*

6.3 The final use of the ditch is unlikely to be later than the 12th century. There are virtually no glazed wares apart from a single intrusive Chilvers Coton D jug sherd – the only late medieval sherd from the entire assemblage – although there is a largely unglazed jug sherd decorated with a single band of square roller-stamping below the rim (see below), which has decayed spots of glaze on the interior.

6.4 The ditch appears to be a very much earlier feature dating from well before the 12th century and likely before the Conquest. The evidence for this comes mainly from nine, Late Saxon, St Neots ware sherds. These represent at least four bowls with in-sloping rims, a classic St Neots form. The two Cotswold gravel-tempered ware sherds could also be pre-Conquest, although this ware continued to be made into the 13th century. This ware is often found in conjunction with St Neots ware sherds on rural settlement sites in Warwickshire in the Late Saxon period. It is likely that this pottery entered Warwickshire via the Fosse.

6.5 Pottery such as the shallow straight-sided bowls with thumbled rims (see below) are early forms and are consistent with a late 11th or early 12th century date, although a parallel from Coventry is dated to after 1150 (see below). Similar vessels (but in different fabrics) were found in the earliest layers at Stafford Castle (Rátkai 2007). The presence of Banbury-type wares (see below) and a single shelly ware sherd is also consistent with continuing deposition in the early post-Conquest period. However, a number of sherds appear to be Coventry or other Central Warwickshire-type wares. This would seem to confirm that some deposition, at least, dates to the 12th century.

### *Ditch 203*

6.6 The ditch contained considerably less pottery than gully 205. There were further Banbury-type sherds and a white ware (Fabric WW10) with a thick black core, which was found at both Banbury and Brackley in 12th century contexts. This ware is the equivalent of Northamptonshire fabric 373. Three sherds were in a coarse, sandy fabric (Fabric SC10) with haphazard pieces of shell and limestone fragments. Again, this fabric is most typical of the 12th century. From so few sherds it is difficult to ascertain when the ditch was dug but it seems to have gone out of use at more or less the same time as gully 205.

### *Layer 301*

6.7 As would be expected the condition of the pottery from this layer was less good than that from the cut features. The earliest material was a single, very small, St Neots ware sherd. A highly micaceous, oxidised, glazed sherd with a dull olive glaze is possibly from a Deritend ware jug, likely to date to the 13th century. A second oxidised sherd could possibly be Cannon Park ware and date to the later 13th century.

## The Pottery Fabrics

### *Late Saxon*

6.8 St Neots ware and Cotswold gravel-tempered ware are well-known types and need no further discussion here. Work, (mainly in archive) by the present author indicates that Late Saxon settlement sites in Warwickshire tend to have St Neots and Cotswold gravel tempered ware as their main, often only, types of pottery. This is true as far north as Warwick and as far west as Stratford-upon Avon. The presence of St Neots ware corroborates the documented history of Harbury, which is first mentioned in 1003 (VCH, Vol 6, 104).

### *Central Warwickshire wares*

6.9 CoventryA/Coventry A-type ware is widely distributed in Warwickshire but the core area of concentration is surprisingly circumscribed. It is found in very small quantities in Birmingham to the west and is not very common to the south in Warwick. It is more consistently found to the east and south-east and as such its presence in Harbury is not atypical. No precise date for the inception of Coventry ware production is known but on stylistic grounds the 12th century is generally accepted. To date no kiln sites have been identified.

6.10 Most sherds were from cooking pots. One body-base sherd had an unsooted base and a very distinct unsooted band about 5mm in depth above the base angle, the remainder of the sherd being sooted. This suggests that the cooking pot had been placed in another vessel or on some sort of stand which protected the base and lowest section of the wall from sooting.

6.11 Coventry/Warwick-type wares are in the same tradition as Coventry A ware and may represent the products of different kiln sites situated between Coventry and Warwick. A substantial part of a shallow straight-sided bowl (fabric Sq20), with a finger impressed rim, similar to but larger than the vessel found in Banbury-type ware (see below) was found in the fill of gully 205. A broadly similar form to this was found at the Broadgate East excavations (Rylatt and Stokes 1996, fig 23, 293), although the rim was more akin to fig 17, 124. The examples from Broadgate East were dated to Phase 2 (1150-1250). The form is however uncommon and represents less than 1% of the Coventry A ware vessels illustrated there.

### *South Northamptonshire and North Oxfordshire wares*

6.12 Fabric SV03 is described as Banbury-Brackley-type ware in the Warwickshire County Type Series. The sherd from gully 205 was a very close match to the type sherd. The sherds designated SV03.1 were similar to the type sherd but not such a close match. This fabric, which represents three vessels, all cooking pots, contains abundant, well-sorted sand and is dark grey in colour throughout. The presence of some small calcareous inclusions is shown by a strong reaction on the application of hydrochloric acid. However, these inclusions are otherwise too small to detect readily. Occasional pieces of grey flint were noted, as was a ?quartzitic inclusion, resembling crushed barley sugar. A similar inclusion was noted in fabric SC10.



6.13 The sherd surfaces have a 'sparkle' which examination under x20 magnification reveals to be caused by light reflected off the flattened surface of light coloured grains. These could be quartzitic or could be feldspar; the latter have highly reflective, flat planes of cleavage. Feldspar is most commonly associated with granitic rocks. The closest volcanic formations to Harbury are to the north of Nuneaton (the Caldecote Volcanic Series) and in Leicestershire at Mount Sorrel in the Charnwood Forest. Granitic inclusions are found in pottery made in Chilvers Coton and in the area of Croft, Leicestershire (Potters Marston ware). However, given that the sherds closely resemble Fabric SV03 and contain flint, a SE Midlands source is most likely.

6.14 The sherds came from hand-formed vessels. The fabric looks early but a base-angle sherd from gully 205 is of a post-Conquest type. The exact source and date of this fabric remains uncertain.

6.15 Banbury-type ware is thought to have been first produced around the mid-11th century. Evidence from Banbury Castle (Rátkai forthcoming) suggests that it may just pre-date the Conquest but the evidence is equivocal. Unglazed jugs with bands of square roller-stamping, of the type found in gully 205, are characteristic of this ware and were found at Banbury Castle. Of the remaining sherds most appear to be from cooking pots but there is a shallow, straight-sided bowl with a finger-impressed rim from the fill of gully 2005. This form is recorded at Banbury Castle also, although it is not common.

6.16 A rather mixed range of poorly sorted inclusions are found in Banbury-type ware including rounded and often iron-stained quartz, organics and occasional fairly 'fresh' pieces of flint and/or chert. Another very distinctive fabric (WW10) with a white or pinkish-toned cream body and a thick dark blue-grey to black core has been found at both Banbury and Brackley Castles.

### *Other wares*

6.17 Other post-Conquest pottery was represented by a 3g cooking pot sherd from gully 205, which was too small to identify with any precision. The shelly ware sherds probably came from Northamptonshire but were too small to fabric type with any certainty. Single sherds of Deritend ware (from a jug), and Cannon Park ware were found in layer 301.

## **Discussion**

6.18 The range of fabrics from the two features points to activity in the Late Saxon period. This phase of occupation came to an end at some point in the second half of the 12th century by which time the two features had gone out of use. That there was further later occupation is evidenced by the sherds from layer 301. However, the latest pottery from layer 301 can only date to the early/mid 14th century at the latest. The latest sherd – a Chilvers Coton jug sherd of 15th-century date – was intrusive in gully 205. The paucity of later medieval material, even allowing for the circumscribed nature of the watching brief, suggests that there was a significant change in the way the land in this area was used or managed. It may be significant that a number of grants of land in Harbury were made during the mid- to late-12th century: to Nuneaton Priory (1163-8), and to the Knights Templar (1185). In addition the church was granted to Kenilworth Abbey in the mid-11th century with the addition of two virgates of land (VCH Vol 6, 104-108).

6.19 The range of pottery is fairly typical of this area of Warwickshire. The early post-Conquest to 12th century fabrics compare well with those found at nearby Bascote (Rátkai 2009). With pottery of this date, which is generally strongly utilitarian, basic almost, it is difficult to deduce the type of people who were living at Harbury. The two shallow dishes are not such a common form and perhaps this indicates occupants rather better placed than the basic peasant household, but with such a small sample size of pottery it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions.

6.20 In the later 11th and 12th centuries pottery was obtained from two main sources: the south-east Midlands and the Warwick-Coventry area. The latter provided the lion's share, as would be expected.

**Table 1: Pottery fabrics by context and count**

			203	203	205	205	301	301	Total	Total
			<i>wght</i>	<i>count</i>	<i>wght</i>	<i>count</i>	<i>wght</i>	<i>count</i>	<i>wght</i>	<i>count</i>
<b>Source</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>TS Code</b>								
Cambs.	St Neots ware	CS04			91	9	4	1	95	10
Cotswolds	Cotswold gravel-tempered ware	CO01			10	2			10	2
Central Warks.	Coventry/Warwick ware	Sq20			248	3			248	3
Central Warks.	Coventry/Warwick ware	Sq20.1	15	1	40	6	14	2	69	9
Central Warks.	Coventry A /Coventry A -type ware	Sq20.2			5	1			5	1
Central Warks.	Coventry A /Coventry A -type ware	Sq20.3			525	31	5	1	530	32
Central Warks.	?Coventry ware	Sq21.1			27	2			27	2
Central Warks.	No common name	Sq22			3	1			3	1
Central Warks.	Cannon Park ware	Sq23?					4	1	4	1
N Warks.	Chilvers Con C/D	Sq30			6	1			6	1
NW Warks. (Birmingham)	Deritend ware	Sg12?					7	1	7	1
Warks.	Local cooking pot	Sq01-09			3	1			3	1
Northants?	Shelly ware	CS			3	1	13	2	16	3
Northants?	Coarse sandy calcareous ware	SC10	10	3					10	3
S Northants/ N Oxford	Banbury ware	SV01	2	1	71	4	2	1	75	6
S Northants/ N Oxford	Banbury-Brackley-type ware	SV03			5	1			5	1
S Northants/ N Oxford	New fabric	SV03.1			157	14			157	14
S Northants/ N Oxford	No common name (Nhants fabric 373)	WW10	3	1					3	1
		<b>Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1194</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1273</b>	<b>92</b>

## 7 Conclusions

7.1 Field House clearly lies within the medieval settlement of Harbury. The site was later incorporated into a property that by the 17th-18th century became Harbury House, perhaps with a small park. With the demise in the fortunes of Harbury House the site was by the 1960s, developed by housing.

7.2 The medieval pottery from the site includes some that dates to just before the Norman Conquest, a relatively rare occurrence from a Warwickshire village, particularly from such a small-scale piece of work. The lack of later pottery seems to imply that the village contracted after the 12th century, although it remains possible that later deposits exist elsewhere on the same site.

7.3 It is possible that the large ditch 203 may have formed a boundary between two medieval house plots. The adjacent gully seems to have been associated with nearby domestic activity of 11th to 12th century date as evidenced by the numerous sherds of cooking wares which were often large and had relatively clean breaks. This shows that the pottery had been deposited in the gully shortly after breakage rather than been scraped around a yard or ploughed around a field beforehand.

## Acknowledgements

Archaeology Warwickshire would like to thank Mr and Mrs Greenwell both for commissioning the work and for their friendly interest on site. We would also like to thank the architect Les Ball and the County Planning Archaeologist for preparing the brief.

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## Appendix A List of Contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comments</i>
100	Foundation trench fill	Modern
101	Foundation trench	Modern
102	Topsoil	
103	Layer	
104	Layer	
105	Concrete (within 101)	Modern
106	Stonework	
107	Drain trench	Modern
108	Drain trench fill	Modern
109	Concrete slabs	Modern
110	Sand layer	Modern
200	Topsoil	
201	Layer	
202	Geological natural clay	
203	Ditch	Medieval
204	Ditch fill	Medieval
205	Gully	Medieval
206	Gully fill	Medieval
207	Geological natural bedrock	
300	Topsoil	
301	Layer	
302	Geological natural clay	
303	Geological natural lias limestone	

## Appendix B List of Finds

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Comments</i>
204	Pottery	6	Med
206	Pottery	77	Med
206	A. Bone	2	Med
206	Stone	1	Hone stone, medieval
206	Tile	2	Roof
206	Iron	1	Blade fragment
206	Iron	1	Possible nail
301	Pottery	9	Med
301	Tile	1	Roof

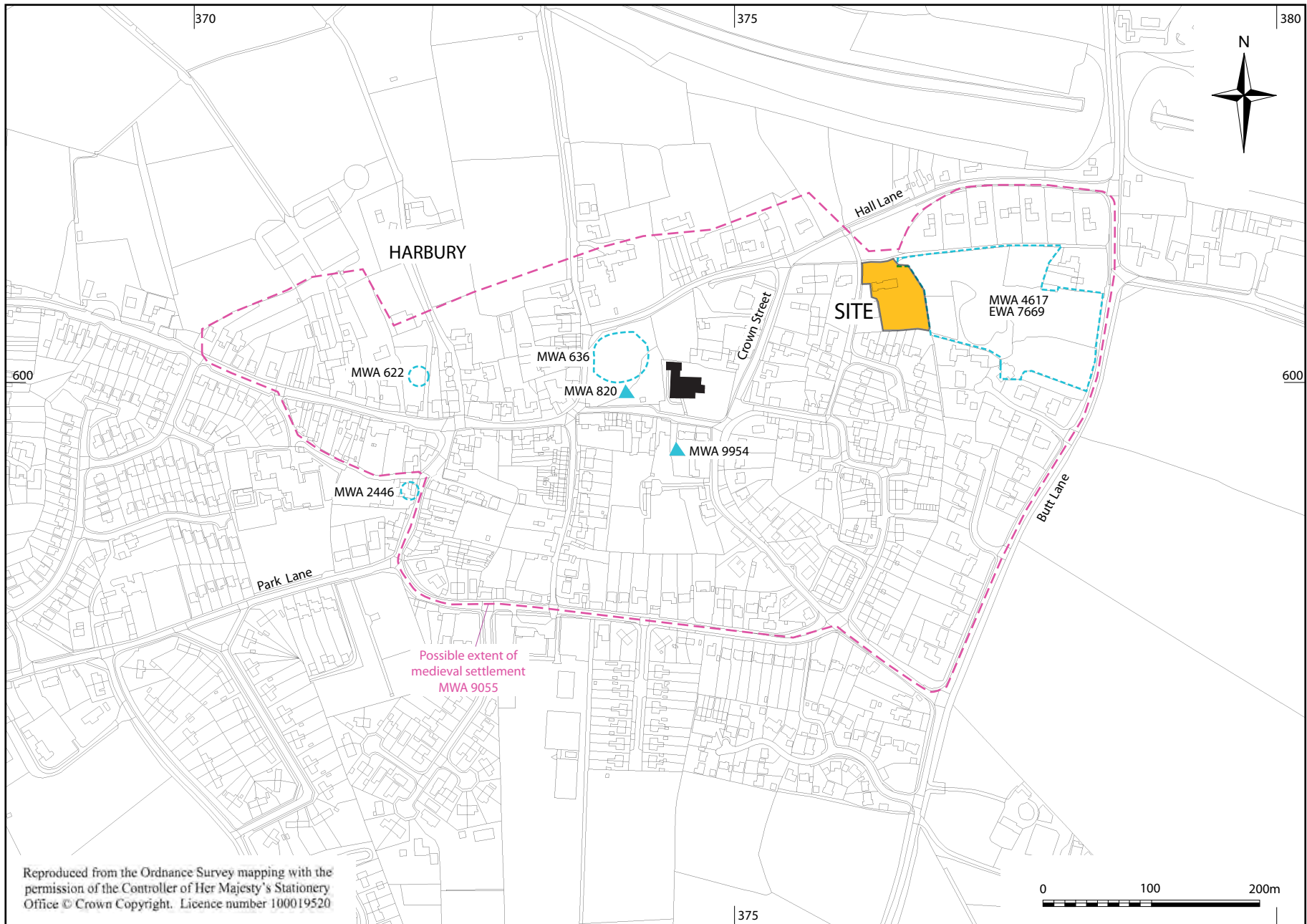


Fig 1: Site location

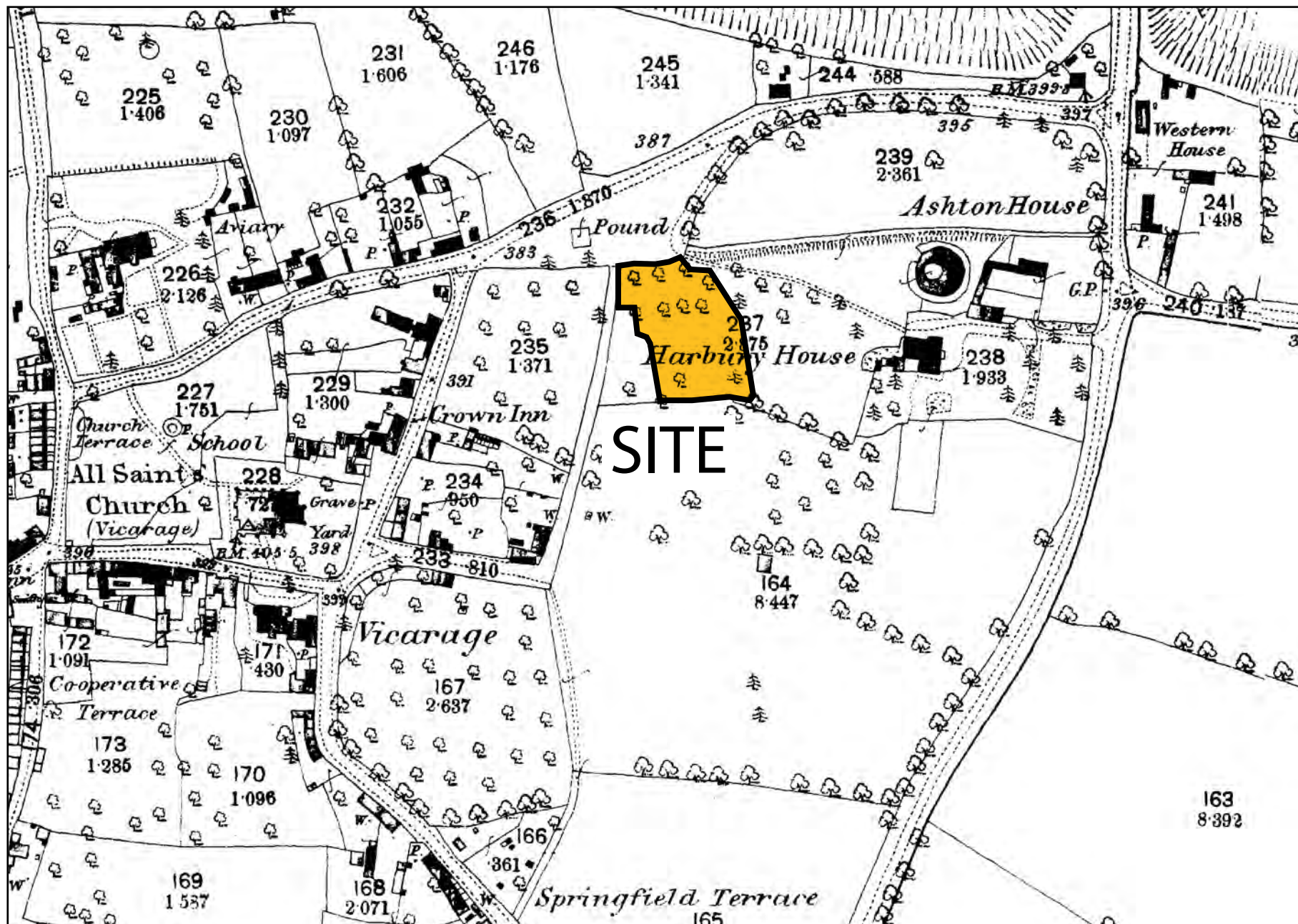


Fig 2: Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1887





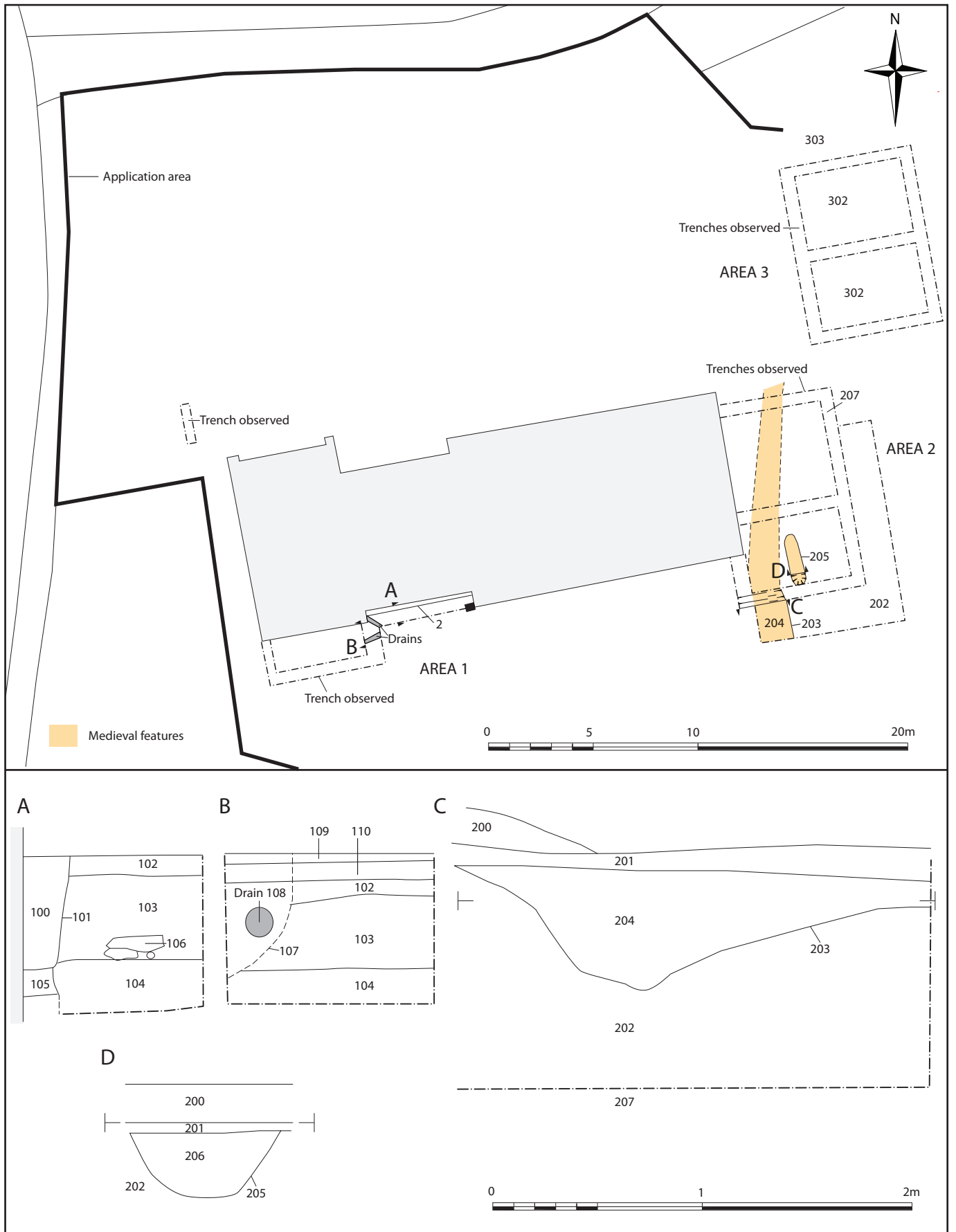


Fig 4: Areas excavated and associated sections



Fig 5: Ditch 203, looking south



Fig 6: Gully 205, looking north



Fig 7: Area 2, new extension, looking north



Fig 8: Area 3, new garage, looking north-west