

# Priory Park Culvert, Warwick

## Archaeological Evaluation



*understanding heritage matters*

Report No 1128  
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*Working for  
Warwickshire*

**Project:** Priory Park Culvert

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**Planning Reference:** N/A

**Staff:**

**Project Manager:** Pete Thompson

**Fieldwork:** Catherine Coutts, Rob Jones, Kevin Wright

**Author:** Catherine Coutts

**Illustrations:** Candy Stevens

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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)



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## Summary

**Trial trenching has been carried out in the northern part of Priory Park, Warwick, part of which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, in advance of work for a new culvert by the Environment Agency. No archaeological features were recorded and no significant finds were recovered.**

### 1. Introduction

1.1 The Environment Agency is proposing to relieve problems with the existing closed culvert for St John's Brook at the northern end of Priory Park, Warwick, Warwickshire. A new length of open channel has been proposed south of the existing brick culvert, which was built when the railway embankment was constructed in 1851-2.

1.2 The site is located on the northern edge of Priory Park (Fig 1) and the site of the proposed culvert work is in an area of archaeological potential. The site lies at the north-east limit of the Scheduled Monument of St Sepulchre's Priory (SAM 30052) founded in the 12th century. The precinct of the priory extended across the area of the park and on the south side is bounded by a bank and ditch. The Priory mill was situated close to the site of the present works as was the later post-medieval engine house and saw mill (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record No MWA 2155). Following consultation with Warwickshire Museum and the Historic and Natural Environment Information and Advice a programme of archaeological fieldwork was initiated by the Environment Agency.

1.3 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of the excavation of three trial trenches in positions agreed with the Environment Agency's Archaeologist, was commissioned from Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire and carried out in September 2011 and this report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under the site code WP11.

### 2. Location

2.1 The development site is located in the north part of Priory Park in the parish of Warwick at map reference SP 2852 6543. The site currently occupies part of the publicly accessible park land.

2.2 The underlying geology of the area is Bromsgrove Sandstone Formation overlaid by 2nd Terrace River Gravel to the east (British Geological Survey 1984).

### 3. Methodology

3.1 The evaluation aimed to determine, as far as possible, the nature of the archaeological resource on the site and aim to gather sufficient information as to the extent, character, state of preservation and date of any remains within the site. This would allow an assessment of the archaeological remains within the proposed development site. The evaluation was undertaken ahead of any development and may form the first phase of archaeological work.

3.2 The work undertaken involved the excavation of three trial trenches, in the area where the proposed culvert is to be excavated, in places agreed on site with Ed Wilson, Environment Agency Archaeologist, sited to avoid excavating below any tree canopy to minimise damage to tree roots. Prior to archaeologists working on site the area had been cleared of brambles and undergrowth, including a number of immature trees, and the route of the proposed culvert pegged out on the ground.

## 4. Archaeological and Historical background

4.1 The earliest find in the area is a Palaeolithic hand axe found somewhere in the park (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record No MWA 2179; Fig. 1). A Neolithic axe was also found south of the Priory (HER MWA 4269) and a Neolithic or Bronze Age adze was found in the old millpond (HER MWA 2178). A number of writers have suggested that Priory hill may have been the site of an Iron Age hillfort however, no Iron Age material has come from the site (HER MWA 1841). There, are however, records of Romano-British burials being uncovered in the 1860s on the south side of the park (HER MWA 1999).

4.2 Before the medieval priory was constructed two medieval lime kilns, one circular and one square, occupied the site (HER MWA 5519). The kilns are of pre-monastic date and it is thought they may have been associated with the building of the castle or the town's defensive wall. St Sepulchre's Priory was founded in the early 12th-century (HER MWA 10180) with stone quarried from the area just to the north of the buildings (HER MWA 10182). It lies outside of the medieval suburb (HER MWA 7050). The plan of the medieval Priory buildings is uncertain, but they would have been confined to the inner precinct (HER MWA 1958; MWA 10181) on the hilltop where excavations in 1971 and 2002 found fragments of medieval buildings and some undated burials without grave goods, which may have been monastic (HER MWA 4727). Buildings on the site included a church (HER MWA 1961). Following the Dissolution the site was occupied by a large mansion house known as The Priory (HER MWA 5520) which was surrounded by landscaped grounds. The main parts of The Priory were demolished in 1925, leaving only its south range and fragments of the north range. The Priory Estate was bought by Warwickshire County Council in 1940 and the grounds surrounding the mansion house site were conveyed to Warwick Borough Council in 1951 for use as the public park, now known as Priory Park. The Warwickshire County Record Office was built in 1972 on the site of the main range of the mansion house.

4.3 Within the Priory Estate to the north-east of the priory buildings there was a water mill (HER MWA 2155), which by the 18th century had a series of elongated mill ponds to the north-west (HER MWA 1973). Although the earliest reference to the mill dates to 1693, it is likely that this was the medieval Priory Mill. In the late 17th century there are records of the mills providing piped water to the inhabitants of Warwick. In the early 18th century there were two mills under one roof, The Frog Mill and the Priory Mill. The 1851 Board of Health map shows the 'mill' labelled as a 'Engine House, Warwick Waterworks' (Fig. 2) and by 1887 the 'Old Water House' had become a Sawmill (Fig. 3). On a smaller scale map for the Board of Health the proposed line of the railway is marked in outline, as the railway and Warwick station were about to be constructed. It would have been at this point that the brick-covered culvert would have been constructed, to enable the embankment to run over the area. The stream from the mill formerly curved up to the culvert, but after the mill was demolished this was altered so it ran parallel with the embankment, before being channelled in the brick-culvert below the embankment.

4.4 Although within the scheduled area, the current site lies well clear of the priory's conventual buildings and the later gardens of The Priory.

4.5 Little archaeological work has taken place in the immediate vicinity. In 2005 observation of five transfer pits for a gas pipe across the south part of the park revealed no evidence associated with the medieval priory or post-medieval house and park, although disturbed 19th- or 20th-century layers were recorded in the two pits nearest to Coventry Road at the east of the site (Warwickshire Museum 2005, 1; HER EWA 7614). Observation of extensions to the Warwick Nursery School in 2005 and 2007-8 recorded only undated postholes and a pit and post-medieval pottery (Fig 1; Warwickshire Museum 2007, 2008; HER EWA 9104, EWA 9243). Excavations on the priory site in 2000 uncovered pottery of 12th/13th-century date (HER MWA 8799). Trial trenching to the east of the park uncovered the remains of medieval buildings on the east side of Coventry Road (HER MWA 8849).

## 5. Evaluation

5.1 Three trenches were excavated in positions suggested by the Environment Agency Archaeologist, who remained on site for their opening up. They followed the pegged out route already laid out for the new culvert. All trenches were excavated by mini-excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.

5.2 Trench 1 was *c.*18m long and 0.50m deep. Natural light yellow brown clay with pebbles (102) was reached at 0.40m below ground level, overlain by 0.20m of a dark grey brown humic loam, with charcoal fragments and occasional brick (101), which was overlain by a heavily root disturbed topsoil layer with occasional stones and pebbles, occasional brick and asbestos. No archaeological features were noted and no finds recorded.

5.3 Trench 2 was similar to Trench 1. The trench was 0.55m deep and natural light yellow brown compact clay with pebbles was reached at 0.45m below ground level (202). This was overlain by 0.20m of dark grey brown humic loam with occasional charcoal and coal (201), overlain by 0.25m of loose, root-disturbed sandy topsoil (200)

5.4 Trench 3 was a short trench (*c.*6m long) in an area with a fair amount of vegetation cover. The trench was also excavated to a depth of 0.50m, with natural yellow brown clay with frequent pebbles reached at 0.50m. The natural was cut but the remnant of an old rabbit hole (303) filled with loose roots and other organic material (304). The rabbit hole was machined away. This was overlain by 0.20m of grey brown sandy silty clay with occasional roof tile and pebbles (301), itself overlain by 0.30m of very dark grey brown sandy humic topsoil with extensive small root penetration (300).

## 6. Conclusions

6.1 No archaeological features were recorded in the course of the evaluation and no significant finds recovered. The small amount of evidence for human activity in the form of charcoal, brick and tile fragments may relate to the demolished mill site to the west.

## Acknowledgements

Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire would like to thank The Environment Agency for commissioning the work.

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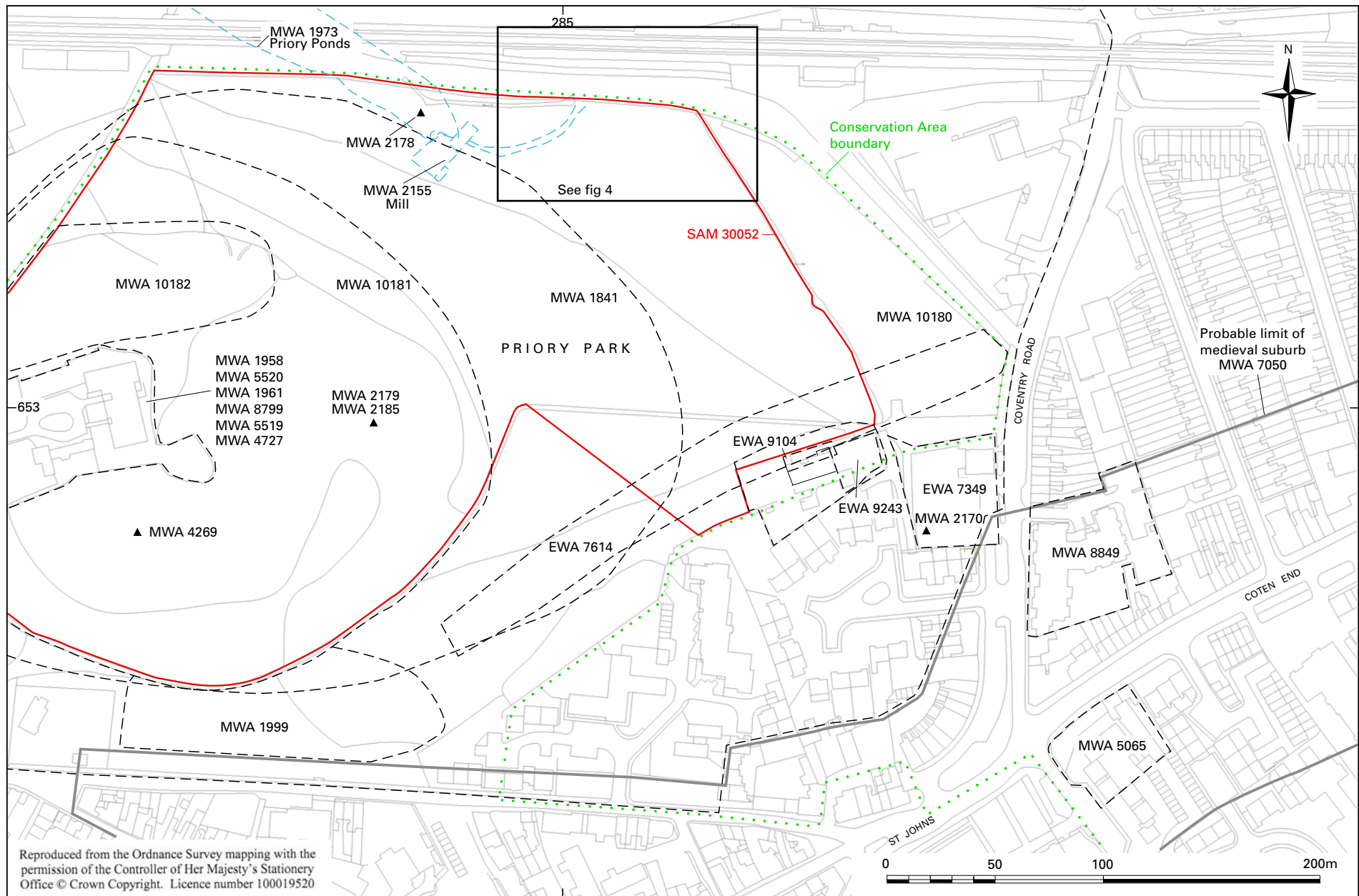


Fig. 1: Site location



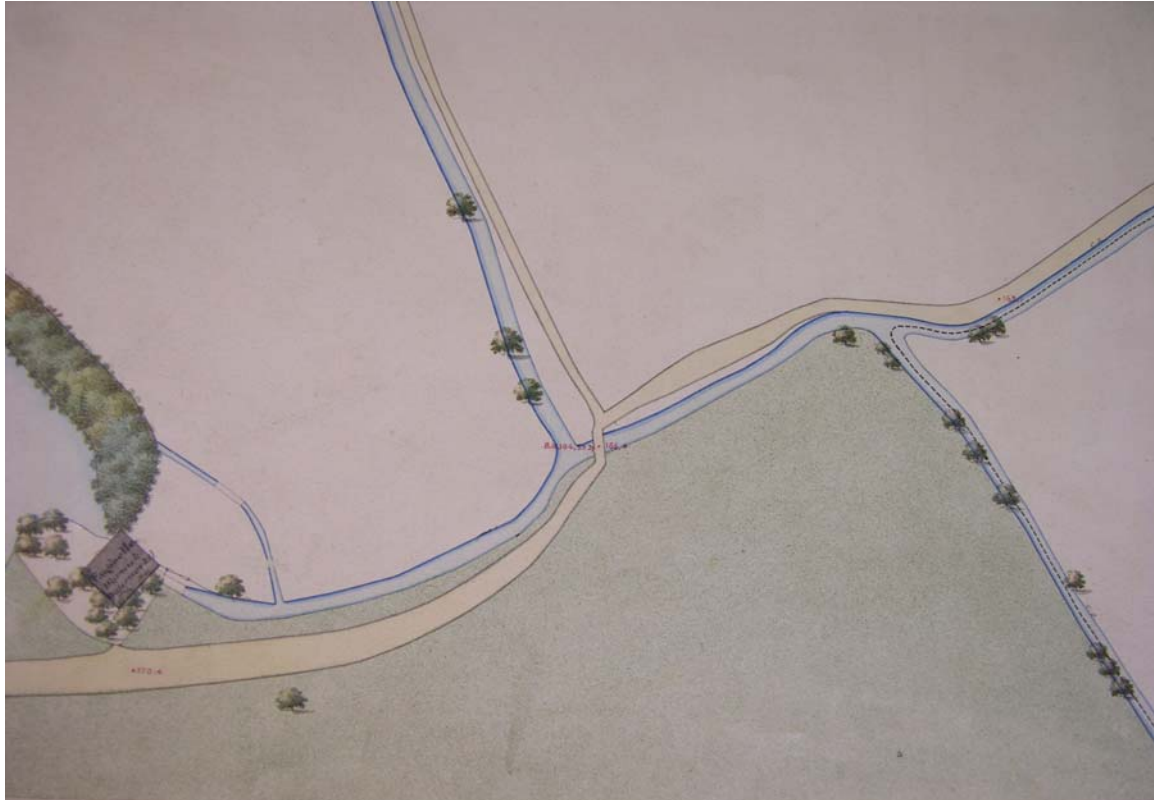


Fig. 2: Detail of area from Board of Health map of 1851, showing the Engine House (Warwick Waterworks)

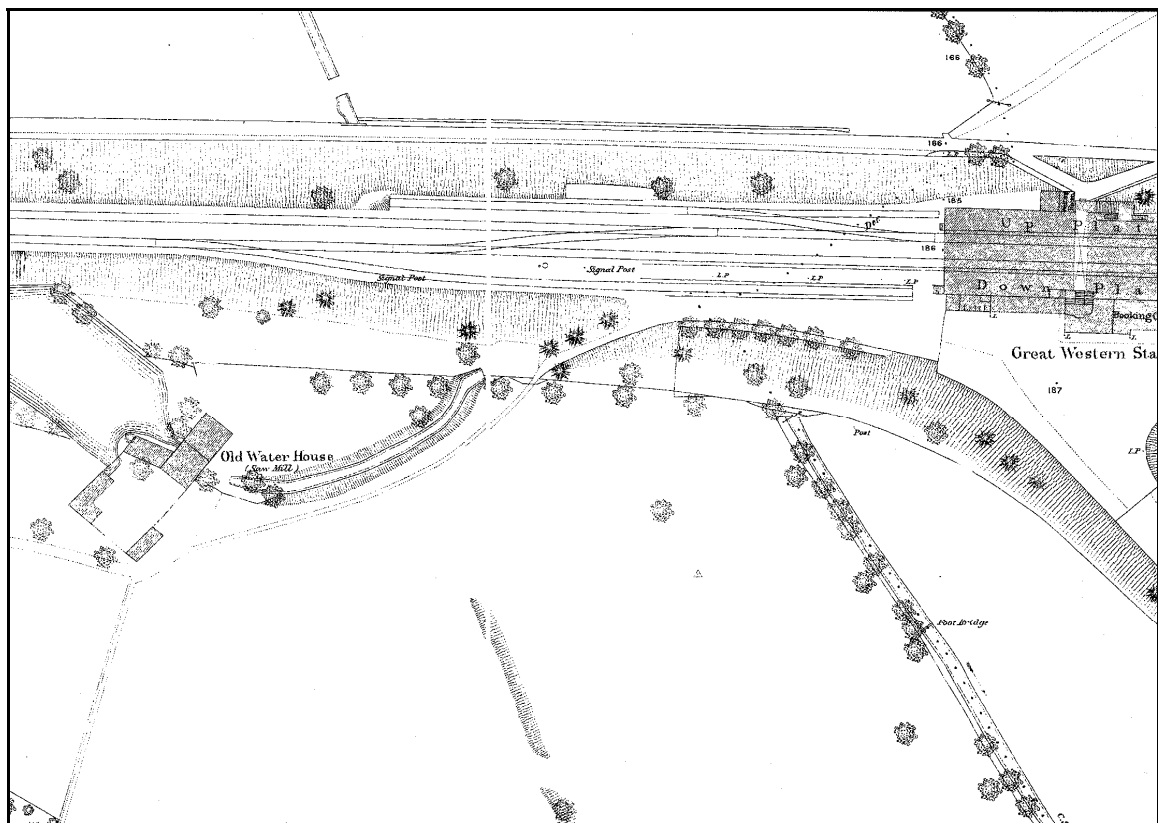


Fig. 3: Detail from the 1887 1:500 Ordnance Survey map

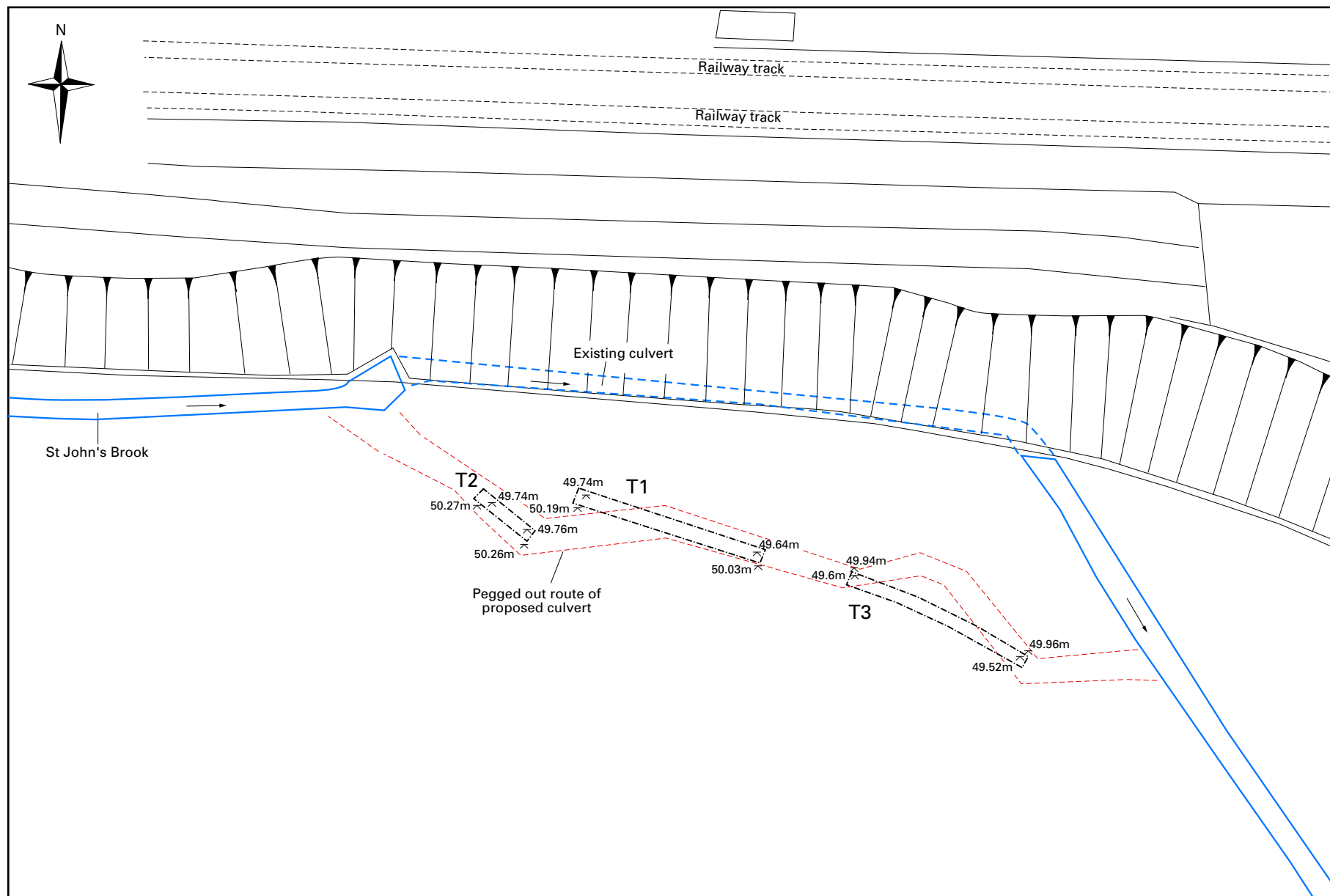


Fig. 4: Location of trenches



Fig. 5: Trench 1 under excavation





Fig. 6: Brick culvert entrance



Fig. 7: Excavation underway





Fig. 8: Trench 2



Fig. 9: Trench 3

