

Myrtle Cottage, Upper Brailes, Warwickshire

Archaeological Watching Brief



understanding heritage matters

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 1424
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*Working for
Warwickshire*

Project: Myrtle Cottage

Commissioned by: Will Down
Montrose Property Development Ltd
Unit 65, Northwick Business Centre,
Blockley

Project Report No. 1424

Site Code: BM13

NGR: SP 3051 3976

Planning Reference: 13/02026/FUL

Staff:
Project Manager: Stuart Palmer
Fieldwork: Bryn Gethin
Author: Bryn Gethin
Illustrations: Candy Stevens

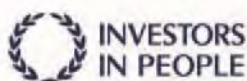
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Archaeology Warwickshire
UNIT 9
Montague Road
Warwick
CV34 5LW

01926 412278
fieldarchaeology@warwickshire.gov.uk
www.warwickshire.gov.uk/archaeology



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SUMMARY

Archaeological observations during construction of a new house at Myrtle Cottage, Upper Brailes, Warwickshire, added further archaeological information to that found during the preceding evaluation. This had uncovered layers containing over 70 sherds of medieval pottery dating from the 12th to early 13th century. The watching brief recovered 12 sherds of pottery from two layers. A single Roman sherd attests to some Roman activity in the Upper Brailes area. The majority of the pottery dated from the 12th to 13th century. However, two sherds may have been later, one being 13th to 14th century in date and another 13th to 15th century. This potentially later element was missing in the evaluation and could show that occupation continued beyond the early 13th century. The relative paucity of the later period pottery however, can still be taken to confirm that the borough foundation in Upper Brailes never really flourished, at least in this part of the settlement.

The evaluation report suggested that the development site lay within a medieval house plot although 19th century development to the north has made the boundaries of the original medieval plot uncertain. The two stone walls exposed in the north-east corner of the site can reasonably be presumed to be medieval in date and may well be part of the foundations of a house. The lack of other stone features in trenches to the south suggests that the rest of the building would have lain to the north. This would mean that the current development site represents the southern part of a long west-east medieval plot, perhaps a burgage plot, running back from the main street and that any remains of a house lie within the northern edge of the development area and in the southern side of the gardens of Myrtle Cottage, to the north.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Stratford on Avon District Council for the erection of a new dwelling with garden room on land adjacent to Myrtle Cottage, Upper Brailes. The Warwickshire Planning Archaeologist Anna Stocks, in her capacity as archaeological advisor to the planning authority, has advised that the proposed development lies within an area of significant archaeological potential, within the probable extent of the medieval settlement at Upper Brailes.

1.2 An initial archaeological evaluation (Gethin 2013) identified some layers containing medieval pottery. It was therefore a condition of planning permission that the site be stripped of soil down to archaeological levels which would then be recorded. However, after an initial observation of some soil stripping it was found that the development did not require the

considerable depth of soil removal envisaged. Therefore Archaeology Warwickshire produced a revised Written Scheme of Investigation (October 2013) for a watching brief on all groundworks taking place on the site. Work was carried out between October 2013 and February 2014. The archive arising from the work will be deposited at Warwickshire Museum under Site Code BM13.

2 LOCATION

2.1 The development site is located on the east side of the main street (the B4035), in Upper Brailes, in the parish of Brailes (National Grid Reference SP 3051 3976). Until recently the site was occupied by a garage, set a few metres back from the street frontage, with the remainder being a private garden. Myrtle Cottage itself is a 19th century building and the development site has been created out of the southern part of the plot of land which it occupies. The new property, when finished, will therefore be known by a different name.

2.2 The underlying geology is recorded by the British Geological Survey (1963) as Lower Lias Clay (BGS 1963).

3 AIMS AND METHODS

3.1 The main aim of the work was to record any archaeological remains disturbed by the development, to collate the records in an archaeological archive and present the significant aspects of the archive in a report for dissemination.

3.2 The secondary aim was to form an understanding of the remains recorded in terms of their character and date, and to place the evidence in its local and regional context.

3.3 The objective of the work was a programme of controlled excavation to development formation levels, or the geological natural, whichever the higher.

3.4 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.

3.5 An experienced archaeologist was made available for each day of ground disturbance when notified by the client in accordance with WSI/Brief planning condition.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 A large number of archaeological sites are recorded on the Warwickshire Historic Environment Record (HER). These cover a long period of time and are shown on Fig 1.

Prehistoric

4.2 The earliest evidence for settlement in the vicinity is the possible site of a Neolithic (c.4000-2300 BC) long barrow (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record No. MWA 2321), as suggested by the place-name 'Long Barrow Field' 1km north-east of Upper Brailes. However, there is no trace of the barrow on aerial photographs. Nearby a large Iron Age settlement has been revealed by geophysical survey and tested by excavation.

Roman

4.3 Romano-British settlement evidence is known to the east of Upper Brailes (MWA 2318) and Roman finds have been recovered from Upper Brailes itself. These include coins and pottery found during limited excavation in 1968 of a site on the east side of High Street (MWA 2322). Two ditches were also excavated, but no dating evidence was recovered. Further finds include a coin of Nero dating to AD55 (MWA 2332) and a 4th-century coin (MWA 2326). Roman pottery has also been recovered from brick-earth pits at the north end of the village (MWA 2312).

Medieval

4.4 Brailes is mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086) as a royal manor with an estimated population of c.665. However this population would have been divided between various settlements in the parish including Upper (Over) Brailes (MWA 2359), Lower (Nether) Brailes (MWA 2315) and others at Winderton and Chelmscote. The settlements continued to expand in the 12th and 13th centuries and in 1248 a grant to hold a weekly market was acquired by the heirs of the Earl of Warwick. Recent work has shown that a borough was also founded in the 13th century, perhaps at the same time as the granting of the market charter. The Hundred Roll of 1279 refers to a number of individuals with the surname 'burgeys' (i.e. Burgess, someone occupying a burgage plot) as well as a number of surnames indicating trade professions such as 'Taylor'. The borough was certainly in Upper Brailes and may have involved some remodelling of the earlier village plus the laying out of a series of burgage plots, probably still represented by the roughly rectangular area of plots running either side of the main north-south street (Fig 2). The same work has also identified the location of the market place as occupying the triangular green space 200m to the south

of the site and just to the east of the former Primitive Methodist chapel (Warwickshire Extensive Urban Survey, Morton, B, forthcoming).

4.5 The medieval village of Upper Brailes probably began to decline during the 14th and 15th centuries, in common with many such settlements in the parish and county. The full extent of the medieval village (MWA 2359) can be made out from the topography of existing properties and the extent of settlement earthworks visible in aerial photographs. A series of settlement earthworks lie to the south and west of the village. Ridge and furrow cultivation from the medieval or later periods is visible on aerial photographs of the parish of Brailes (MWA 6436).

4.6 Evidence of possible medieval burials and a building was located in the 19th century (MWA 2325) at Radnall Bush. More recent work in 1968 suggested possible settlement evidence within an area of ridge and furrow, although no further evidence was recovered of either the building or burials.

4.7 A motte and bailey castle (MWA 2311) lies to the east of the village at Castle Hill. The mound survives and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 21630). It is likely that Robert Newburgh, Earl of Warwick had the castle built in the early-12th century, probably with a timber tower on the motte and a palisade around the small bailey. The castle may well have had a very short life of perhaps no more than 50 years. Several 15th-century jettons and a bronze hinge (MWA 9340) have been discovered to the east of the castle.

4.8 The main road through the village was followed by a medieval Saltway from Droitwich (MWA 8672). Later it became part of a toll road, established from 1781, that ran between Banbury and Barcheston via Brailes (MWA 4828).

4.9 Other finds, including a 1669 halfpenny and a second 17th-century halfpenny (MWA 2330), have been found in Upper Brailes. At land adjacent to Henbrook Lane, post-medieval finds, including a bronze button, a fragment of horse harness (possibly medieval) and clay pipe bowls, were recovered (MWA 7136).

4.10 A Primitive Methodist chapel was built in 1863 (MWA 2305), whilst in Lower Brailes a Quaker meeting house (MWA 2304) was also in use from c.1684. Meetings continued until 1854, when it became a Wesleyan Methodist chapel and a new Methodist chapel was built on this site in 1891.

4.11 At Stonecroft Farm, an archaeological evaluation in 1992 revealed no evidence for medieval occupation (MWA 7231). It was thought likely that extensive 19th-century and modern pitting had disturbed medieval deposits (Warwickshire Museum 1992). At Grove End House, another evaluation was carried out in 1991 which recovered eight sherds of medieval pottery (Oxford Archaeological Unit 1991), but revealed no significant archaeological features (MWA 7250).

4.12 Archaeological work carried out in 2003 at Pleasant View, Upper Brailes, revealed a ditch of unknown date during the excavation of a trial trench prior to the erection of a new dwelling. No further evidence of the ditch or other archaeological features was identified during subsequent observation (MWA 9681).

4.13 In 2007 archaeological evaluation and subsequent observation at land adjacent to Midcot, Upper Brailes, only 100m to the north of the current site, revealed a cultivation soil containing probably 11th-century pottery, and probable linear features, a pit and posthole with 11th- to 13th-century pottery. The pottery in the posthole was thought to be residual, and no definitely medieval structural evidence was found. An undated ditch roughly following the present southern boundary may have been a medieval or early post-medieval predecessor. The absence of later medieval and early post-medieval pottery suggested abandonment of the site or perhaps conversion to pasture in the 14th century. A probable Neolithic quern stone fragment and flint flake along with two sherds of Romano-British pottery were also found along with later 18th and 19th century occupation deposits (Pratt and Rann, 2009).

4.14 An archaeological evaluation in July 2013, consisting of a single 10m trench, identified a number of medieval layers from which 70 sherds of pottery were recovered. This dated from the 12th to the early 13th century, probably before Upper Brailes was re-founded as a borough. No archaeological features were exposed but the relatively large number of unabraded pottery sherds suggested that they had not travelled for before deposition and that the site lay within a part of a medieval house plot. The boundaries of this plot were unclear and may have included part of the adjacent plot to the north, which has now been separated from the development site and is occupied by Myrtle Cottage.

4.15 The Sheldon Estate map of 1867 does not show any development on the current site (WRO CR 1253/5). The first edition 1:2500 map of 1885 shows a small paddock in a larger field.

5 WATCHING BRIEF

5.1 A written scheme of investigation was originally provided to cover a controlled strip of the footprint of the new building and excavation of any archaeological features revealed. When initial observation of soil stripping was undertaken this showed that far less depth was required for the construction of the new house than at first thought and a revised WSI (October 2013) was created to cover an archaeological watching brief on all further groundworks.

5.2 The site lies within the area of the former garage of Myrtle Cottage, part of the plot of land owned by this property being sold off to form the current development site. The whole site sloped downwards from the street frontage, on the west side, to the east.

5.3 Initially between 0.5m and 0.3m of soil was stripped off the site with the greatest depth being on the west side and far less on the east due to the direction of slope.

5.4 The foundation trenches for the new house were excavated using a 0.6m wide toothless ditching bucket and were between 1m and 1.5m deep. They consisted of those for the 2 storey house and also for a single storey 'day room' on the east side.

Deposit sequence

5.5 Geological natural (5), an olive brown clay, was visible in the base of most of the trenching. In the north-west corner of the main building a layer of blue/grey clay (4) was visible in the base of the trench, probably marking the position of a very old wet area, but not obviously part of a medieval archaeological feature. Above both this layer and the geological natural (5) was a layer of brownish grey clay (3), between 0.6 and 0.8m thick, from which 9 sherds of medieval pottery, mostly from the 12th to 13th century but including a sherd from the 13th-15th century and a single sherd of Roman greyware, were recovered.

5.6 In the north-west corner of the trenches for the 'day room' a limestone wall (6) was revealed in section, apparently cut into layer 3. It ran parallel to the foundation trench but clearly mostly lay just to the north, running parallel with, but largely outside of the new development footprint. Three courses of rough limestone rubble were revealed with the flatter parts pointing outwards to create the outer face. The wall was not mortar bonded, but instead was held together by clay, probably derived locally.

5.7 Wall 6 was also exposed within the foundation trench for a new boundary wall on the east side of the property. Here it was seen in plan and was 0.45 wide and was constructed from small to medium limestone fragments. No bonding material other than the surrounding clay loam was observed. A further limestone feature (7), probably another wall, lay only a short distance to the south. This was 0.42m wide and only a single course was visible. Two sherds of 12th to 13th century pottery were found within layer 3, between the two walls. Both walls were exposed at a depth of 0.6m below the current ground surface.

5.8 Overlying layer 3 was a layer of very dark grey clay loam (2). This appeared to be an old topsoil which predated the building of the garage that previously occupied the site existed. Three sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from this layer.

5.9 Cutting across the site of the new house was a large trench (8) for a culvert that until mid-2013 carried excess water from the slopes above the site. This has now been diverted into a new culvert running along the northern edge of the development area. The old culvert trench was up to 2m wide and 1.5m deep. The culvert (10) within the trench consisted of lengths of large concrete piping and the trench was filled by very dark greyish brown clay loam (9). In the south-eastern corner of the site a layer of discrete demolition rubble (11) from the 20th century garage, up to 0.4m thick, was observed in section.

5.10 A service trench was also observed running out into the pasture field immediately south of the development site where it was to link with an existing main drain. This was 0.8m wide and up between 0.6 and 0.8m deep, sloping downwards to the south. Earthworks of the medieval settlement do exist in this field, but no features or finds were observed within the relatively short stretch of trench.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The evaluation had suggested that the development site lay within a medieval property although 19th century development to the north has made the boundaries of the original medieval plot uncertain.

6.2 The most significant finds were the two stone walls exposed in the north-east corner of the foundation trenches of the new building and boundary wall. Their considerable depth below the current ground surface and their style of construction support the contention that they are medieval. These walls were probably part of a building and the position close to the street frontage of the main road, within the medieval borough, along with the evidence for

domestic activity from the pottery, would suggest they were from a domestic house. The absence of any other structural remains in the foundation trenches or the evaluation trench probably reflects the likely alignment of the medieval building. It might also suggest that any further remains lie within the northern edge of the development area and in the southern side of the gardens of Myrtle Cottage, to the north.

6.3 The watching brief uncovered similar evidence to the evaluation trench but considerably less finds. This was likely to be a consequence of trying to locate finds in deep and wet foundation trenches rather than a clear reflection on the actual amounts of pottery present within the various layers exposed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeology Warwickshire would like to thank Will and Josh Down for commissioning the work and Anna Stocks, of Warwickshire County Council, for preparing the brief.

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APPENDICES

A List of Contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1	Recent demolition layer	21st century
2	Old garden soil	18th/19th century
3	Brownish grey clay loam layer	Possibly medieval
4	Bluish grey clay layer	
5	Olive brown clay	Geological natural
6	Limestone wall	Early 13th century?
7	Limestone wall	Early 13th century?
8	Culvert trench	20th century
9	Culvert trench fill	20th century
10	Concrete culvert	20th century
11	Modern layer	21st century

B List of Finds

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Comments</i>
2	Pottery	3	12th-14th century
3	Pottery	9	1 Roman, 7 12th-early to 13th century, 1 13th-15th century
3	Slag	1	Medieval

C Pottery Data

Ctxt	Fabric	WCTS code	qty	wght	Comment
101	Glazed red earthenware	GRE	1	5	bowl?
101	Glazed red earthenware	GRE	1	36	handled jar
101	Modern yellow ware	MGW	1	31	HW
101	Utilitarian whiteware	MGW	2	49	Chamber pot
101	Westerwald stoneware	STG05	1	10	mug/jug, blue ground, applied rosettes
102	Malvernian cpj	StR10	1	4	cooking pot/jar (cpj)
102	Oolitic	CO01	2	17	cpj
102	Sandy calcareous	SC01-09 Group	1	3	cpj, fabric not in TS, moderate-abundant quartz 0.25mm, sparse-moderate ooliths, limestone and shell; brown, grey core
103	Deritend ware	Sg12	1	5	jug, red lattice decoration
103	Early Oxford	Sg03	3	18	cpj
103	Early Oxford	Sg03	1	8	cpj, very pale grey fabric, very overfired
103	Early Oxford-type?	Sg03	1	15	cpj rim
103	Early Oxford/Brill transitional	no code*	1	1	jug, yellow glaze, horizontal combing
103	Early Oxford/Brill transitional	no code*	1	1	
103	Early Oxford/Brill transitional	no code*	1	5	jug, light olive green glaze, horiz combing
103	Early Oxford/Brill transitional	no code*	1	31	jug handle, thin yellow glaze, fine oblique slashing along centre of handle
103	Oolitic	CO01	1	9	cooking pot rim
103	Pellet ware	Sq25.1/Sq26	4	19	cpj
103	Pellet ware	Sq25.1/Sq26	2	6	burnt, heavy soot
103	Reduced sandy ware	RS03	3	16	cpj (2 joining base sherds and 1 body sherd)
103	Reduced Deritend ware	RS01	3	11	
103	Reduced Deritend ware	RS02	3	42	

103	Sandy cooking pot	Sq05 group	4	23	cpj, one sherd with part of a drilled rivet/repair hole
103	Shelly ware (coarse)	CS (coarse)	2	15	heavily abraded/leached interior
103	Shelly ware (coarse)	CS (coarse)	1	5	
103	Shelly ware (fine)	CS	1	1	unsooted
103	Shelly ware (fine)	CS	2	13	base of cpj, heavy soot
103	Shelly ware (fine)	CS	1	18	base of ?cpj, unsooted
103	Shelly ware (fine)	CS	1	2	small frag of jug rim
104	Deritend ware?	RS01?	1	38	base sherd, possible internal burnish? Or may be a result of burnt matter, int carbon deposit or similar
104	Pellet ware	Sq25.1/Sq26	3	17	cpj base
104	Pellet ware	Sq25.1/Sq26	1	2	trace of wavy combing
104	Sandy cooking pot	Sq05 group	11	27	
104	Sandy cooking pot	Sq05 group	2	9	cpj base, sherds join
104	Sandy cooking pot	Sq05 group	1	9	cpj rim, slightly dishd/lid-seated
104	Shelly ware (fine)	CS	6	46	sooted
104	Shelly ware (fine)	CS	1	3	jug, possible corrugated neck
104	Shelly ware (fine)	CS	1	52	plain rounded rim, wide-mouthed bowl

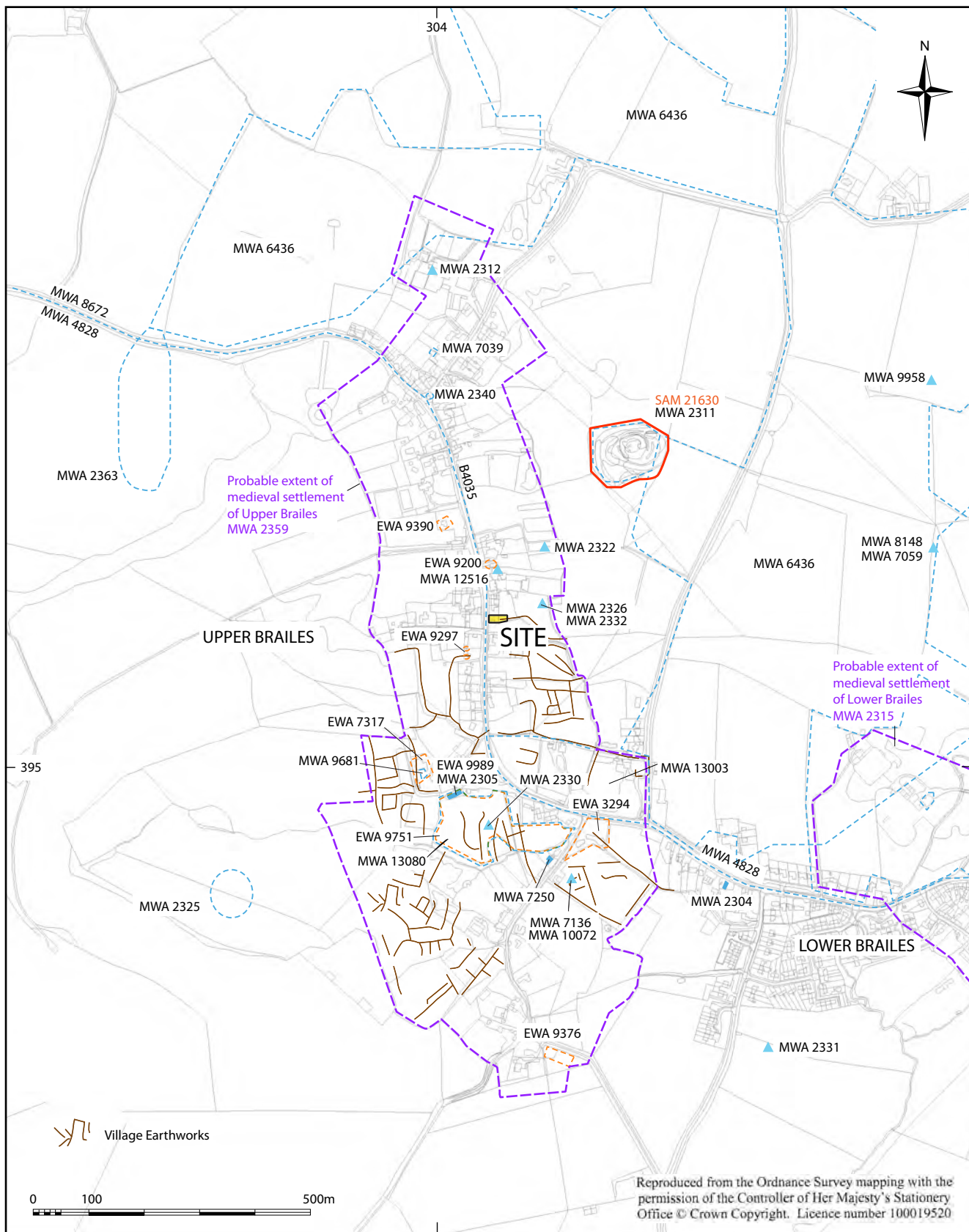


Fig. 1: Site location

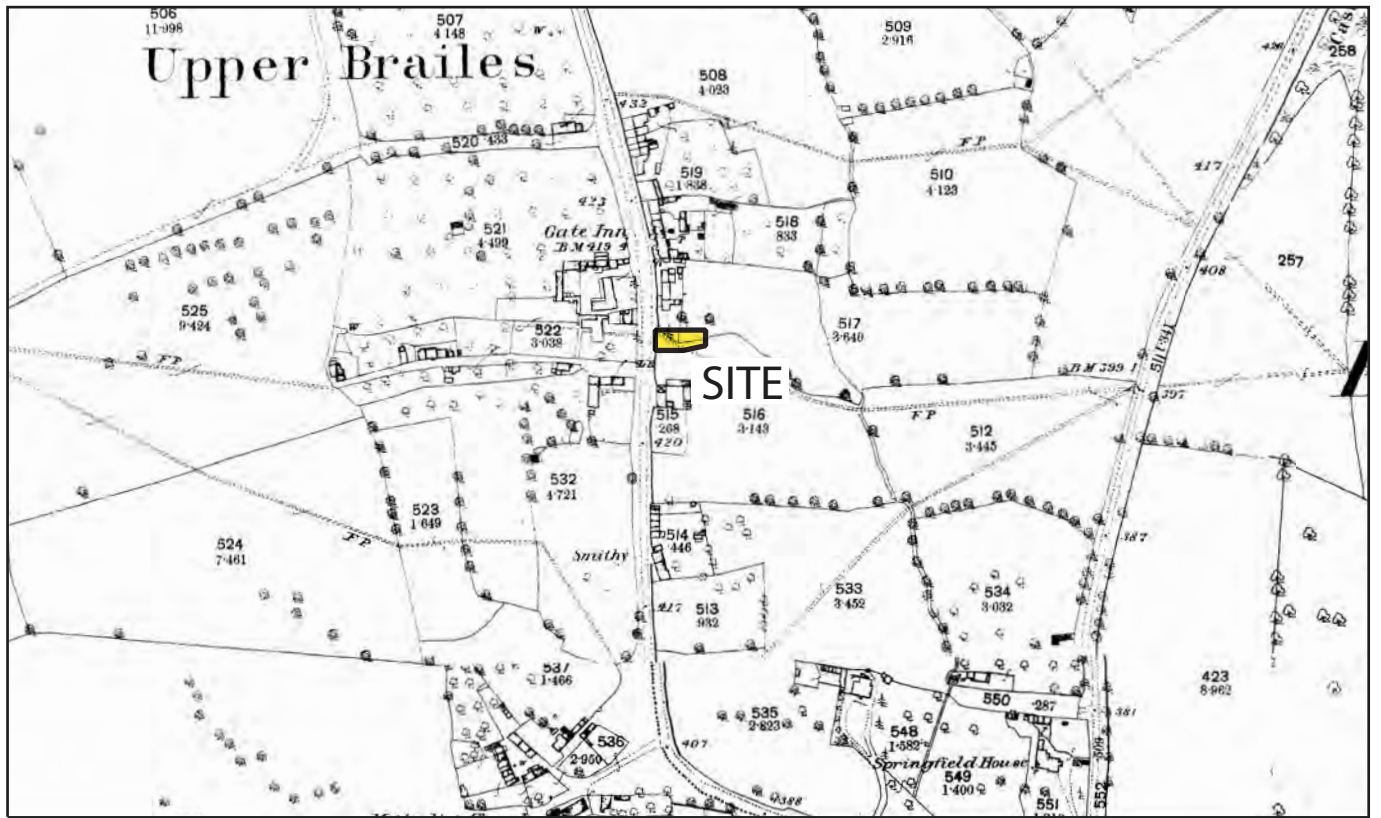


Fig 2: Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1885-1888

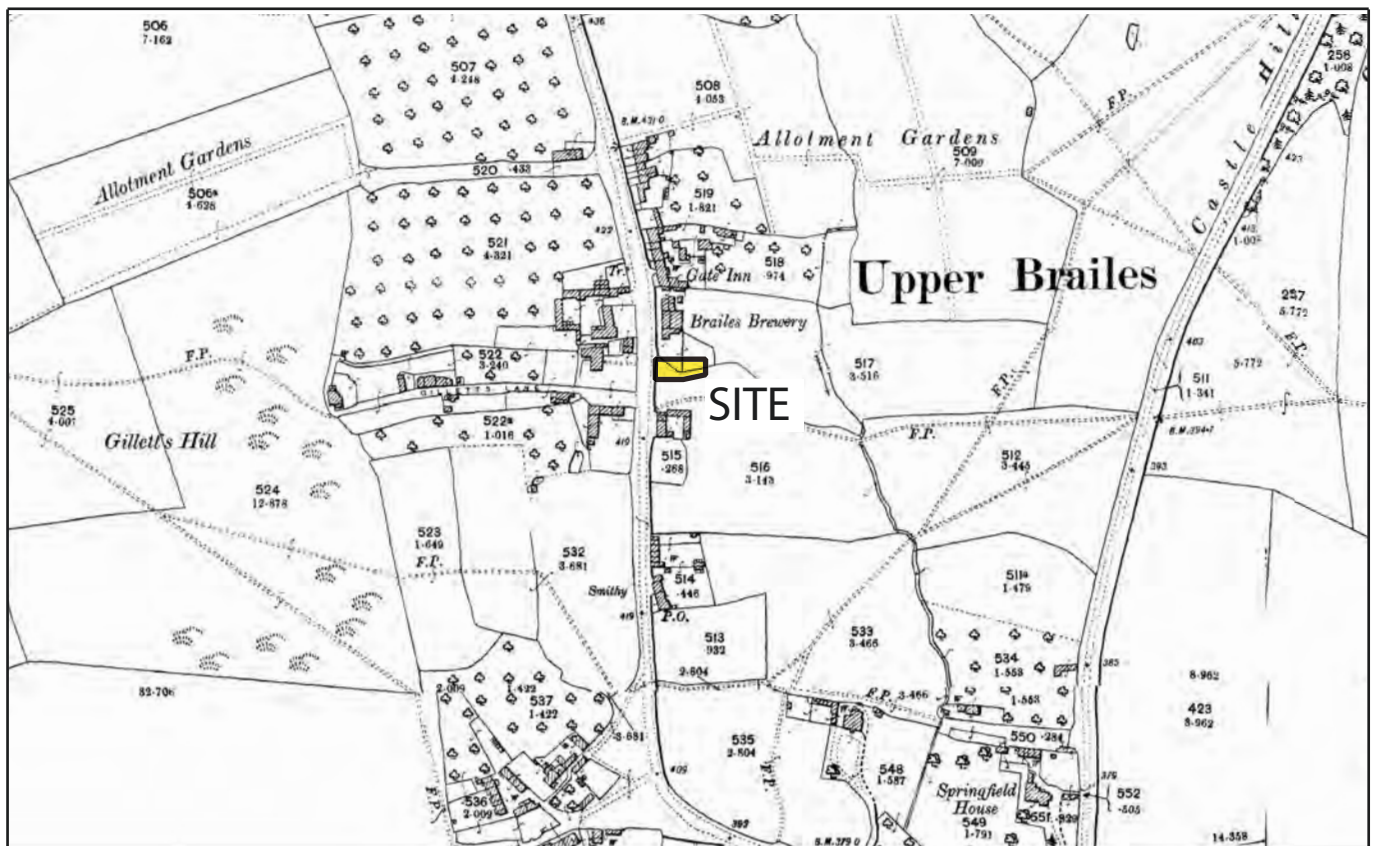


Fig 3: Detail from Second Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1905

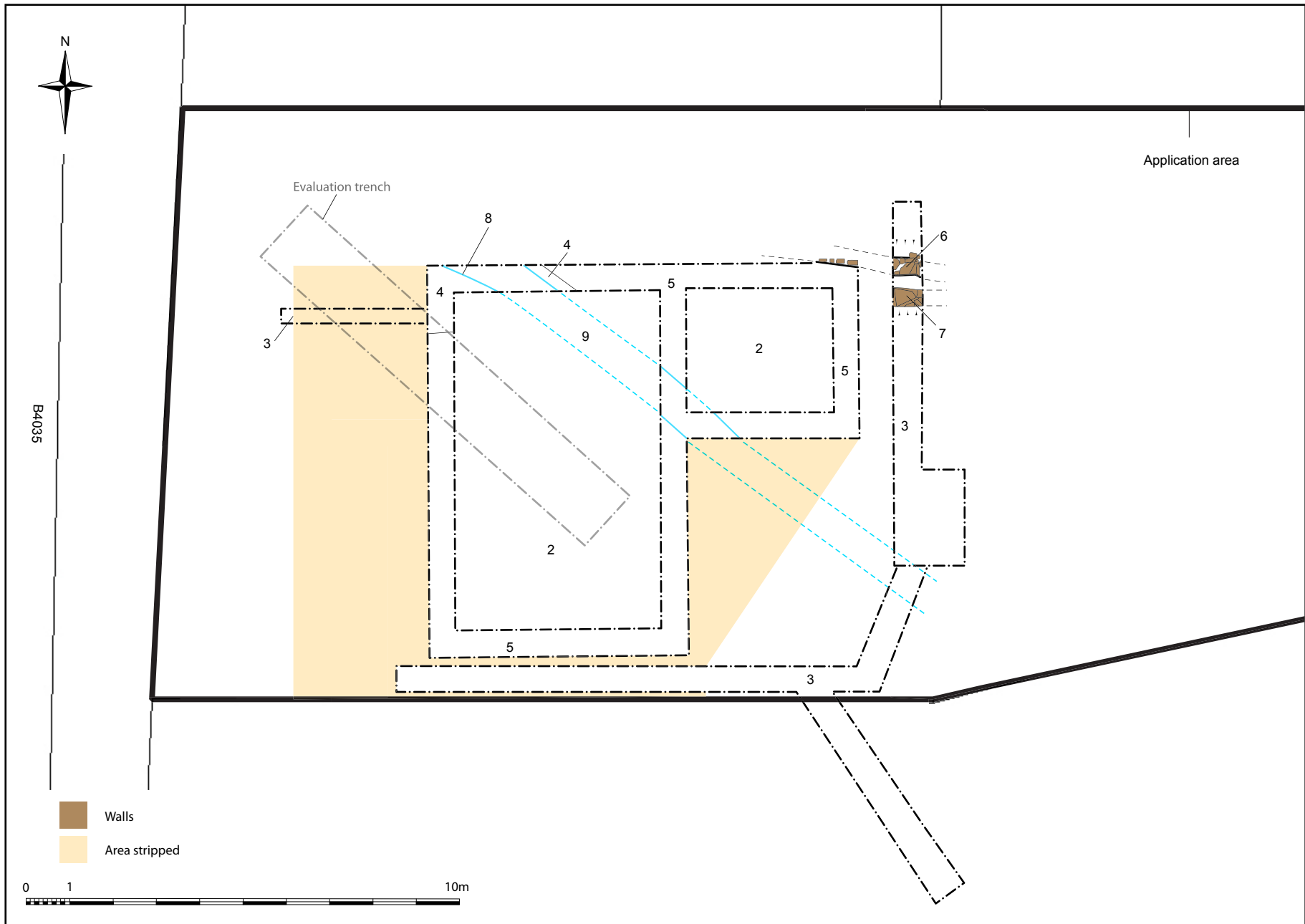


Fig 4: Area and trench observed



Fig 5: Initial soil stripping of western part of the site



Fig 6: Foundation trench at west end of the site



Fig 7: Limestone walls 6 (right) and 7 (left) in the base of a foundation trench



Fig 8: Boundary wall foundation trench looking north. Myrtle Cottage is the white house in the background