

+

19 Augustus Drive, Alcester, Warwickshire Archaeological Watching Brief



understanding heritage matters

Catherine M Coutts

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 1341
September 2013



*Working for
Warwickshire*

Project: 19 Augustus Drive, Alcester

Commissioned by: Andrew Dilks

Project Report No. 1341

Site Code: AL132

NGR: SP 0859 5728

Planning Reference: 12/02345/FUL

Staff:

Project Manager: Stuart Palmer
Fieldwork: Lis Charles
Author: Catherine Coutts
Illustrations: Candy Stevens

Report checked by: Stuart Palmer

Date: September 2013

Report reference: Coutts, C M, 2013 19 Augustus Drive, Alcester, *Warwickshire: Archaeological Watching Brief*, Archaeology Warwickshire Report 1341.

Archaeology Warwickshire
UNIT 9
Montague Road
Warwick
CV34 5LW

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



Contents

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

Appendices

A	List of Contexts
B	List of Finds

Figures

1	Alcester: location of main Roman sites
2	Site with archaeological sites in immediate vicinity
3	Detail from First Edition Ordnance Map of 1886-7
4	Trenches observed, Section A and Wall plan detail section
5	Detail of wall 10, truncated on near side
6	Southern trench
7	Rubble layer 3 over agricultural soil 4

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on behalf of Mr and Mrs Dilks at 19 Augustus Drive, Alcester, during groundworks for a new side extension. A stone wall was recorded in the southern trench; a single fragment of Roman pottery recovered during the removal of the section of wall suggested the wall may have been Roman in date.

1 Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Stratford on Avon District Council for the demolition of an existing garage and the construction of side extensions to the property at 19 Augustus Drive, Alcester (Planning Ref. S12/02345/LBC). Because of the potential for archaeological deposits to be disturbed or exposed by the development it is a condition of planning permission that, before the development commences, the applicant should secure the implementation of Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) approved by the Planning Authority.

1.2 The proposed development lies within an area of significant archaeological potential. There is therefore a potential for the proposed works to disturb archaeological deposits associated with the utilisation of this area from at least the Roman period.

1.3 In the immediate vicinity of the proposal site are a number of archaeological sites with the remains of Roman buildings and other Roman finds such as coins (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record No MWA 482, MWA 3789, MWA 7400; Fig 1). A number of Roman Roads run close by and the site is just outside of the limit of Alcester's medieval settlement (MWA 9585).

1.4 This report represents the results of the watching brief which was undertaken in July 2013. The archive will be deposited with the Warwickshire Museum under Site Code AL132.

2 Location

2.1 The site lies in the western part of Alcester, on the eastern side of the Augustus Drive and the underlying geology is deemed to be a pocket of Arden Sandstone, in an area surrounded by 1st and 2nd River Terrace Gravels to the east and Marcia Mudstone to the west (British Geological Survey 1974).

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

Prehistoric

3.1 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), 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).

3.2 A small group of postholes and a pit found in Tippet'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)

3.3 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).

3.4 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).

3.5 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).

3.6 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)

3.7 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)

3.8 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).

3.9 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).

3.10 Ordnance Survey mapping from the late 19th and 20th-century shows that the area of Augustus Drive was in agricultural use until the housing estate was built in the 1960s and 70s. The Ordnance Survey map of 1973 shows both 19 Augustus Drive and the former garage in existence.

Sites and interventions recorded on the Warwickshire HER in the near vicinity

MWA	Site type	Description
445	Roman road	Ryknild Street
452	Roman building	Floors and postholes
482	Roman building	Walls and floors
485	Roman finds	Coins and pottery
3789	Roman settlement	Floors and ditches
5496	Roman settlement	Buildings
7400	Roman occupation	Surfaces and ditch
12495	Roman marble	Part of a sarcophagus

4 Aims and Methods

4.1 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.

4.2 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.

4.3 The objective of the work was to conduct an archaeological watching brief during the construction phase of the development. The watching brief was carried out in accordance with the Brief for Archaeological Work (January 2013) issued by the County Planning Archaeologist. The watching brief consisted of the observation of site stripping, ground reductions, foundation trenches, service trenches and any other subsurface disturbance associated with the development.

4.4 All archaeological work was undertaken in accordance with Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire Procedures Manual (revised 2011) and to the appropriate Standard and Guidance of the Institute for Archaeologists.

5 Watching Brief

5.1 The foundation trenches for the new extension were excavated by mini-excavator to a depth of 1.50m and were, on average, 0.60m wide. The lowest level reached was a layer of mottled light greyish brown and reddish yellow clay flecked with charcoal (7) which did not produce any finds, but may have been an occupation layer, or contaminated natural clay. A sandstone wall (10) had been constructed over this layer, measuring some 0.80m across and 0.30m high and running approximately NW-SE. The wall was partly truncated on the east side as the machine tried to negotiate services (13 and 14) located at a higher level. A single sherd of Roman pottery was recovered when the wall was removed, along with a fragment of animal bone.

5.2 Layer 7 was also cut by an irregular modern pit (6), the fill of which (5) was a very dark grey silty clay which contained plastic. The proximity of the pit to the present conservatory foundations suggests it may have been associated with its construction. The fill of the pit, and the wall, were overlain by a 0.90m thick layer of very dark grey silty clay (4) which did not produce any finds, but which is likely to have been an agricultural soil built up during the medieval and post-medieval periods.

5.3 The dark layer 4 was overlain by a rubble layer of dark brown sandy clay silt with numerous bricks (3) thought to be associated with the construction of the housing estate in c.1970. This had been cut (12) for the insertion of a concrete-encased storm drain (2), which ran diagonally across the site and which would have been partly below the garage floor. A small area of dark grey clay (11) below the foundation of the house itself may have been associated with its construction. A small patch of topsoil (9) overlay the rubble in the south-east corner and could be seen less thickly long the length of the southern trench, but this, and the rubble layer 3, were overlaid by 50-150mm of modern concrete, the remnant of the floor of the garage which formerly occupied this area.

6 Conclusions

6.1 A stone wall, recorded at a depth of 1.30m below the present ground surface, was associated with a sherd of Roman pottery and is thought likely to have been of Roman date. The soil overlying this would represent the build-up of material over the subsequent centuries, when the land in this area was in agricultural use.

Acknowledgements

Archaeology Warwickshire would like to thank Mr and Mrs Dilks for commissioning the work. Work on site was carried out by Lis Charles.

Bibliography

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, 1991 Inter-site comparisons between pottery assemblages in Roman Warwickshire: ceramic indicators of site status, *Journal of Roman Pottery Studies* 4, 1-10.

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 Roman pottery, in Cracknell, S, (ed) *Roman Alcester: defences and defended area*, C B A Research Report 106, 58-96.

Evans, J, 1999 Roman pottery. in Palmer, S C, Archaeological excavations in the Arrow Valley, Warwickshire, *Transactions Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society* 103, 101-126.

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.

Hartley, B R, Pengelly, H, and Dickinson, B, 1994 Samian ware, in Cracknell, S, and Mahany, C, *Roman Alcester: Southern Extramural area; 1964-1966 excavations, Part 2: Finds and discussion*, CBA Research Report 97, York, 93-119.

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 1886-87 *First Edition 1:2500 map*, Warwickshire Sheet 37.13/14.
- Ordnance Survey 1905 *Second Edition 1:2500 map*, Warwickshire Sheet 37.13/14.
- 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.
- Palmer, S C, and Gethin, B, 2013 *Acorn House, Evesham Street, Alcester, Warwickshire, Archaeological Evaluation*, Archaeology Warwickshire Report 1308.
- 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>
1	Concrete floor	remains of garage base
2	Concrete encased drain	modern
3	Rubble layer	modern
4	Layer	agricultural soil
5	Fill of pit 6	modern
6	Pit cut	modern
7	Mixed clay layer	possibly natural
8	Layer of clay	variation in natural?
9	Topsoil	
10	Stone wall	Roman?
11	Layer	modern?
12	Cut	construction cut for drain
13	Gas pipe	
14	Electric service	

Appendix B List of Finds

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Comments</i>
10	Pottery	1	small oxidised sherd of Roman pottery
10	Animal bone	1	small fragment of animal bone (not retained)

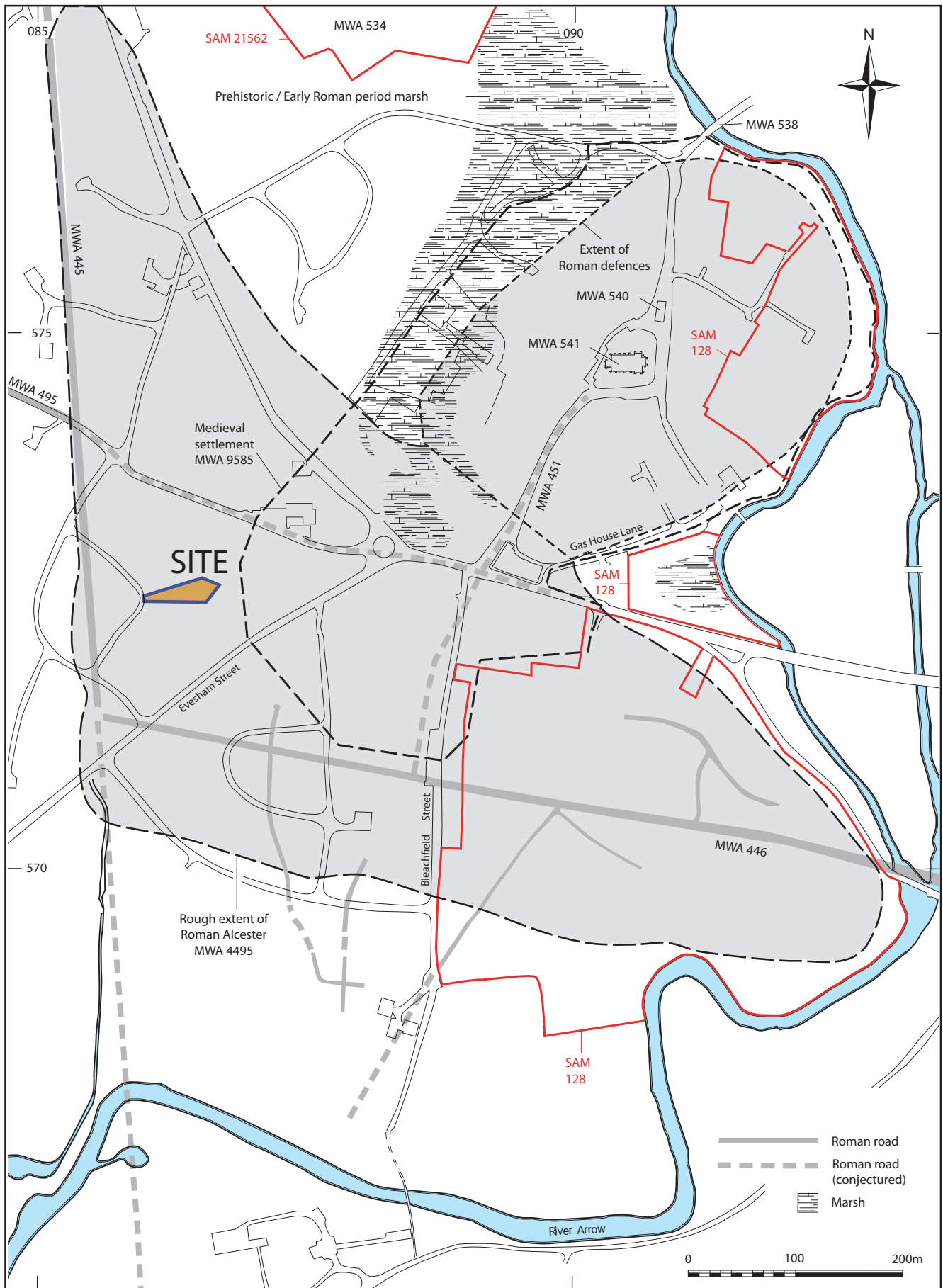


Fig 1: Alcester: location of main Roman sites

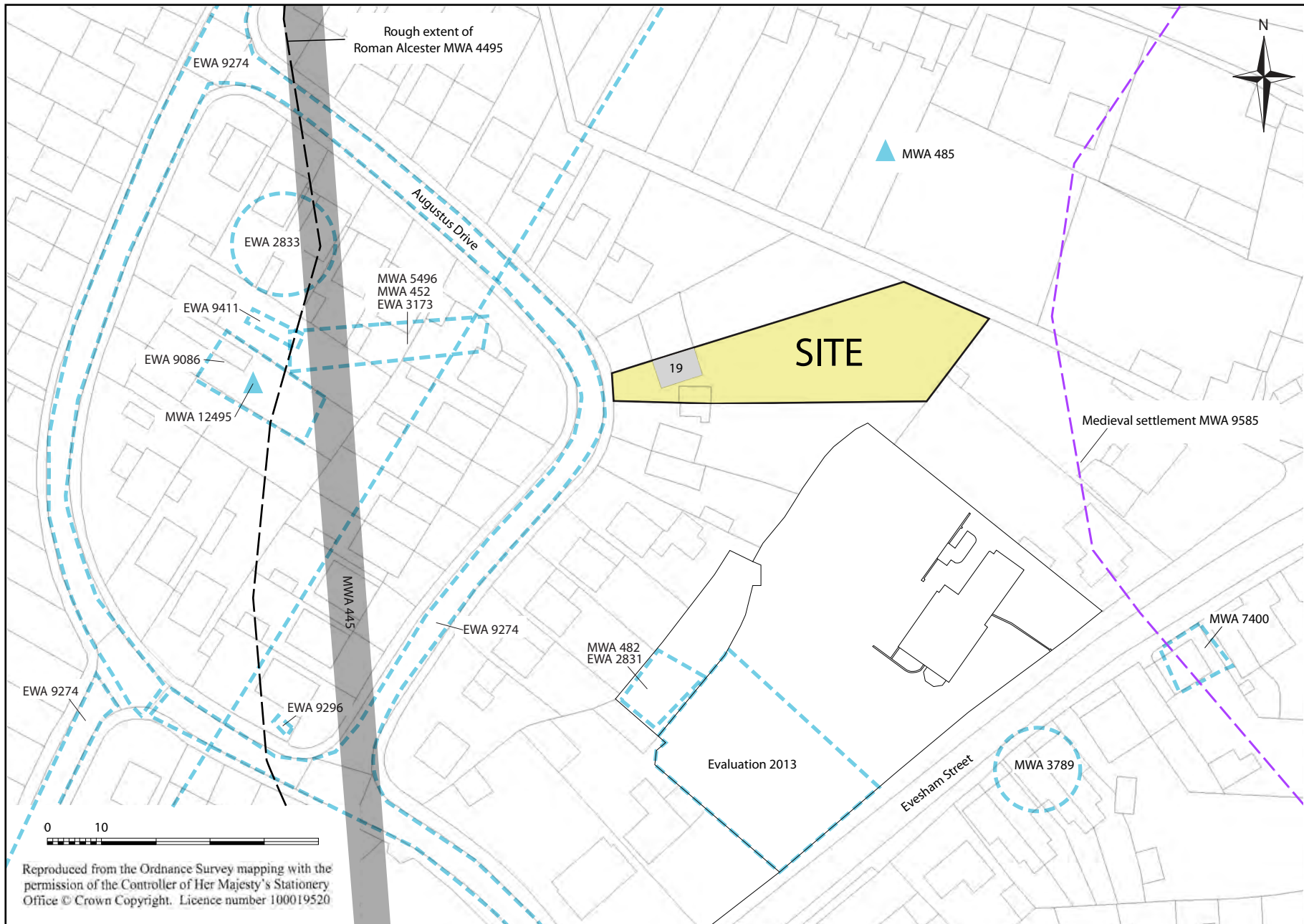


Fig 2: Site with archaeological sites in immediate vicinity

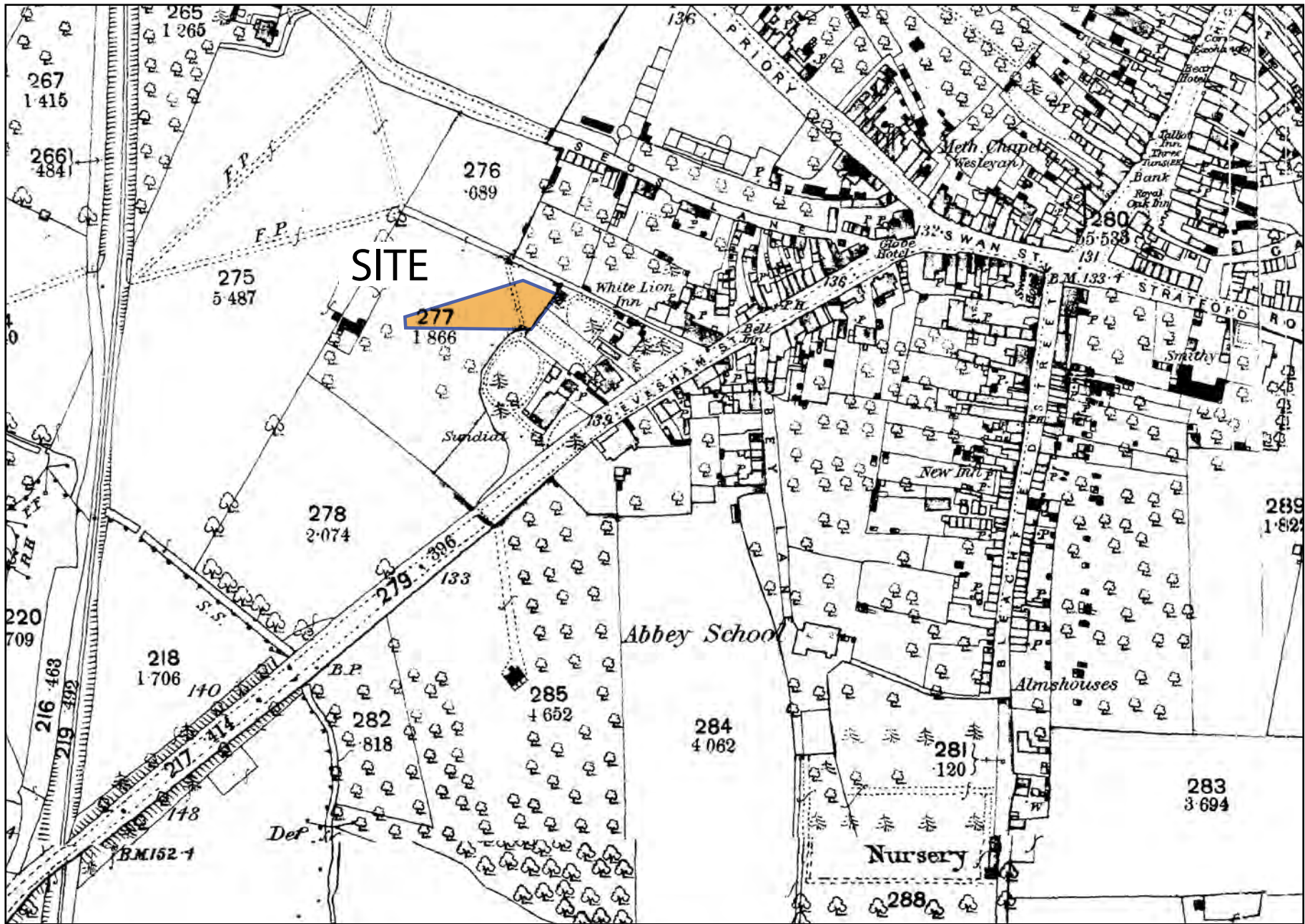


Fig 3: Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886-1887

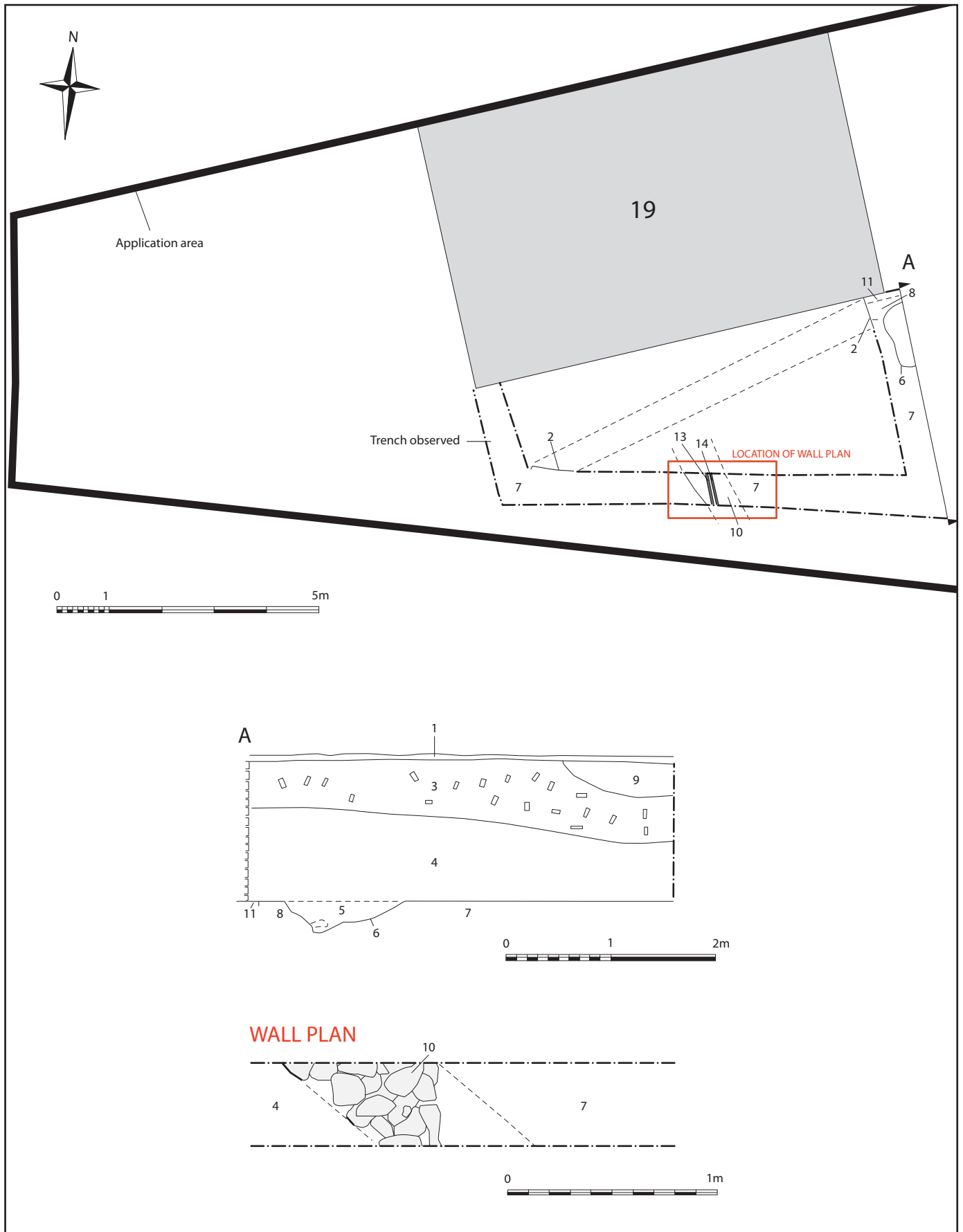


Fig 4: Trenches observed, section A and wall plan detail



Fig 5: Detail of wall 10, truncated on near side



Fig 6: Southern trench



Fig 7: Rubble layer 3 over agricultural soil 4