

1 Roebuck Park, Alcester, Warwickshire

Archaeological Evaluation



understanding heritage matters

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 1416
February 2014



*Working for
Warwickshire*

Project: Roebuck Park Eval
Commissioned by: Mr Steve Frampton
Project Report No. 1416
Site Code: AL127
Planning Reference: 10/02686
National Grid Reference: SP 0836 5808
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SUMMARY

An archaeological trial trench excavated on the site proposed for a new dwelling on land adjacent to 1 Roebuck Park revealed nothing of significance despite lying adjacent to nearby Iron Age, Romano-British or medieval settlement activity.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Stratford on Avon District Council for the erection of a new dwelling on land adjacent to 1 Roebuck Park, Alcester, Warwickshire. WCC Planning Archaeologist Anna Stocks, in her capacity as advisor to the Planning Authority has determined that the proposed development lies within an area of archaeological potential, adjacent to a foci of Iron Age settlement (MWA 9042) and Roman occupation (MWA 12510).

1.2 It is therefore a condition of the planning permission that, before the development commences, the applicant should secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the Planning Authority.

1.3 Archaeology Warwickshire were commissioned to prepare a Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological evaluation of the site of the proposed dwelling and to carry out that evaluation in accordance with that condition.

1.4 This report presents the results of the fieldwork which was undertaken in February 2014. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under the site code AL127.

2 SITE LOCATION

2.1 The site is located in the north-western part of Alcester, some 300m west of the River Arrow which meanders NW-SE across the flood plain. It is located at National Grid Reference SP.0836 5808.

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 (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record 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).

3.2 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)

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, hard-hearted 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).

Site specific (Fig 1)

3.10 The current site lies adjacent to fields in which Iron Age settlement (MWA 7173, MWA 9042) and a possible Roman surface (MWA 12510), to the north-west of the Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 128) of Alcester Abbey (MWA 534, MWA 9127), with a reasonable potential for deposits associated with any of these phases being present on site.

4 AIMS AND METHODS

4.1 The main aim of the evaluation was to determine if there were any significant archaeological remains in the area of development, to form an understanding of their value and their potential to shed light on the subsequent development of the Alcester area.

4.2 Secondary aims included placing the results in their wider local and regional contexts as appropriate.

4.3 The objective was to locate, record and analyse archaeological materials and deposits and to disseminate the results in an appropriate format.

4.4 One trench was opened up by a 3 tonne, 360° excavator. The excavator used a 1.20m wide, toothless ditching bucket but trench was widened to 1.70m. Topsoil and other plough soils were removed under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist until either the top of archaeological remains or geological natural was reached.

5 RESULTS

5.1 The trench was 7.5m long and aligned N-S. Geological natural, mixed red and yellow clay and gravel (1), was reached at a depth of 0.83m below the modern ground surface. The natural was overlaid by 0.40m of brownish yellow clay loam (2). This was overlain by 0.43m

of very dark grey clay loam topsoil (100). Nothing of archaeological significance was found in this trench.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The evaluation has established that the proposed new dwelling is highly unlikely to impact on anything of archaeological significance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire would like to thank Mr Steve Frampton for commissioning the work.

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

APPENDICES

A List of contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	Topsoil	Very dark grey clay loam
2	Layer	Brownish yellow clay loam, under topsoil
3	Natural	Mixed yellow and red gravel/clay

B Copy of the Planning Archaeologists Brief

Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation

Proposed: Erection of new dwelling on land adjacent to No.1 Roebuck Park, Alcester.

Summary

Planning consent has been granted by the Stratford on Avon Borough Council for the erection of a new dwelling on land adjacent to No.1 Roebuck Park, Alcester (S10/02686FUL). The proposed development site lies within an area of significant archaeological potential.

It is likely that some archaeological deposits of interest may be disturbed or exposed by the development. It is a condition of the planning permission that, before the development commences, the applicant should secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the Planning Authority. This is in line with government advice as set out in Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment.

This brief sets out the requirements for the first phase of archaeological work on the site. This evaluation may inform further archaeological mitigation as part of this development.

1. Location.

1.1 The site is centred on national grid reference SP 0836 5808, in the parish of Alcester.

2. Archaeological Background

2.1 The proposed development lies within an archaeologically sensitive area. Archaeological fieldwork to the west and south-west in the 1990s recorded Iron Age and Romano-British settlement (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record MWA9042), whilst more recent fieldwork during water main renewal identified a possible Roman surface to the immediate vicinity of this site (MWA 12510). There is therefore a potential for the proposed development to disturb archaeological deposits associated with the use of this area during the Iron Age and later periods.

2.2 Further details of archaeological sites in the vicinity of the proposed development can be obtained from the County Historic Environment Record, Warwickshire Museum Field Services Office, The Butts, Warwick, CV34 4SS. (Please note that the online version of the HER may not contain comprehensive or up to date information on individual sites and is not suitable for use in the preparation of specifications, desktop appraisals or other commercial applications).

3. Requirement for an Evaluation

3.1 The proposed development together with associated service trenches, access routes and landscaping could disturb or destroy any archaeological remains which may be present on the site. It is a requirement of the planning consent that the applicant secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the Planning Authority.

3.2 The objectives of the evaluation should be to gather sufficient information to establish presence / absence, character, extent, state of preservation and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of proposed development.

3.3 The evaluation should investigate the whole of the area to be disturbed by the development.

3.4 The project is to comply with the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Code of Conduct* and all relevant IFA Standards and Guidance documents.

4. Evaluation Techniques

4.1 Land use at the time fieldwork is carried out will influence the methods used. The techniques chosen should be selected to cause the minimum amount of destruction and should comply with all relevant health and safety regulations. It is envisaged that the following work would be required:

4.2 Examination of any available maps (printed and manuscript), aerial photographs and other relevant background material including that held by the County Historic Environment Record, County Record Office and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. *This is to be undertaken prior to any on-site fieldwork;*

4.3 Visual inspection of the entire site. This should include examination of any available exposures (e.g. recently-cut field ditches and geological test pits);

4.4 The excavation of a total of 8m length of trial trenching (minimum width 1.6m) across the area to be disturbed by the proposed extension and associated hard landscaping. The positions of the trenches must be agreed with the Planning Archaeologist, or the County Archaeologist in her absence.

4.5 A contingency allowance should be made for an additional 30% of trench length to clarify the character or extent of particular features. Contingency trenching should not be initiated in advance of consultation with the Planning Archaeologist.

4.7. A programme of sampling of appropriate materials for environmental and/or other scientific analysis. Special attention should be paid to any waterlogged deposits encountered;

4.8. Any other investigative techniques as appropriate.

5. Excavation Guidelines

Where trenches are to be opened by machine the following guidelines should be observed:

5.1 The health and safety implications of any use of earth-moving machinery on the site should be taken into account;

5.2 Those preparing the specification should be aware of the past use of the site and the potential for the presence of contaminated ground should be taken into account;

5.3 An appropriate machine should be used. The choice should be influenced by the prevailing site conditions, and the machine must be able to carry out a clean and safe job;

5.4 An appropriate bucket should be used. In most cases this will be a wide, toothless ditching bucket;

5.5 All machining should be carried out under the direct supervision of an archaeologist and should be halted if archaeological deposits are encountered;

5.6 All topsoil or recent overburden should be removed down to the first significant archaeological horizon in successive, level spits. Machining of archaeological deposits can on occasion be justified **but under no circumstances should the machine be used to cut arbitrary trenches down to natural deposits;**

5.7 When determining the level to which machine excavation can be carried out, it should not be assumed that the most recent archaeological remains on the site are the least important;

5.8 The first significant archaeological horizon may be cleaned using the machine, but must be subsequently cleaned by hand and inspected for archaeological features;

5.9 A representative sample of any archaeological features or deposits which are identified must be excavated by hand. No archaeological deposits should be entirely removed unless this is unavoidable. It is not necessarily expected that all trial trenches will be fully excavated to natural stratigraphy, but the depth of archaeological deposits across the entire site must be assessed. The stratigraphy of all trial trenches should be recorded even where no archaeological deposits have been identified;

5.10 All excavation, both by machine and by hand, must be undertaken with a view to avoiding damage to any archaeological features or deposits which appear to be worthy of preservation in situ;

5.11 Any human remains which are encountered must initially be left in situ. If removal is necessary this must comply with the relevant Home Office regulations.

5.12 Contractors may find it convenient to produce digital photographs for ease of dissemination; however, conventional (silver halide) photography should be undertaken for inclusion within the project archive.

6. Evaluation Proposal

A **detailed** evaluation proposal, including the following, should be prepared by potential contractors and submitted to the County Archaeologist or Planning Archaeologist for approval on behalf of the planning authority:

6.1 A description of the background research to be undertaken prior to the fieldwork commencing;

6.2 A consideration of the whole range of investigative techniques and a statement justifying the proposed omission of any technique;

6.3 An explanation of the sampling strategies to be used;

6.4 A description of the proposed methods of survey and excavation, and recording system;

6.5 A projected timetable for work on site, including machine hire time and staff structure and numbers;

6.6 A projected timetable for all post excavation work, including staff numbers and specialist sub-contractors;

6.7 Any significant variations to the proposal must be agreed by the County Archaeologist or Planning Archaeologist in advance.

7. Site Monitoring

7.1 The Warwickshire Museum will be responsible for monitoring the evaluation. A minimum of one week's notice of the commencement of fieldwork must be given by the archaeological contractor to the Museum so that arrangements for monitoring can be made;

7.2 Site inspections will be arranged so that the general site stratigraphy can be assessed in the initial stages of trial trenching, and/or so that the site can be inspected when fieldwork is near to completion but before any trenches have been backfilled.

8. Reporting Requirements

8.1 The evaluation should result in a report including a description of the methodology employed; plans showing survey areas; plans and sections at an appropriate scale showing location and position of trenches dug and features located; upon completion of each evaluation trench at least one long section will be drawn; section drawing should include heights OD; plans should include OD spot heights for all principal strata and features; a list of and spot date for any significant finds recovered and a description and interpretation of the deposits identified.

8.2 The objective account of the archaeological evidence recovered should be clearly distinguished from the interpretation of those features. The methodology used should be critically reviewed.

8.3 Pottery reports will be expected to refer to the appropriate type series, including the Warwickshire type series for Roman, medieval and post-medieval pottery.

8.4 Three copies of the evaluation report should be deposited with the County Historic Environment Record, on the understanding that it will be made available as a public document after an appropriate period (not exceeding 6 months from the completion of fieldwork); a further copy to be sent to the relevant Local Planning Authority Planning Officer.

8.5 The results of the work should be published in an appropriate journal or other publication and should include an account of any structures located and full details of significant finds, illustrated as appropriate. Details of the place and date of publication must be notified to the County Historic Environment Record.

8.6 A summary account of the work should be submitted to the editor of *West Midland Archaeology* and any relevant period journals (*e.g. Medieval Archaeology*) no later than March 31st of the year following completion of fieldwork.

9. Deposition of Archive and Finds

9.1 The archaeological archive arising from the evaluation should be deposited in an appropriate local institution, in a format to be agreed with that institution. The County Historic Environment Record must be notified of the arrangements made. Any finds of archaeological interest should be appropriately conserved and deposited in an appropriate institution: any finds which cannot be so deposited should be fully analysed and published.

9.2 Please note that the Warwickshire Museum will be introducing archive deposition charges for any fieldwork that is commissioned from 1st January 2011. Further information on these charges can be obtained from the Warwickshire Museum Keeper of Archaeology, Sara Wear, on 01926 412033 or sarawear@warwickshire.gov.uk.

Warwickshire Museum
January 2012

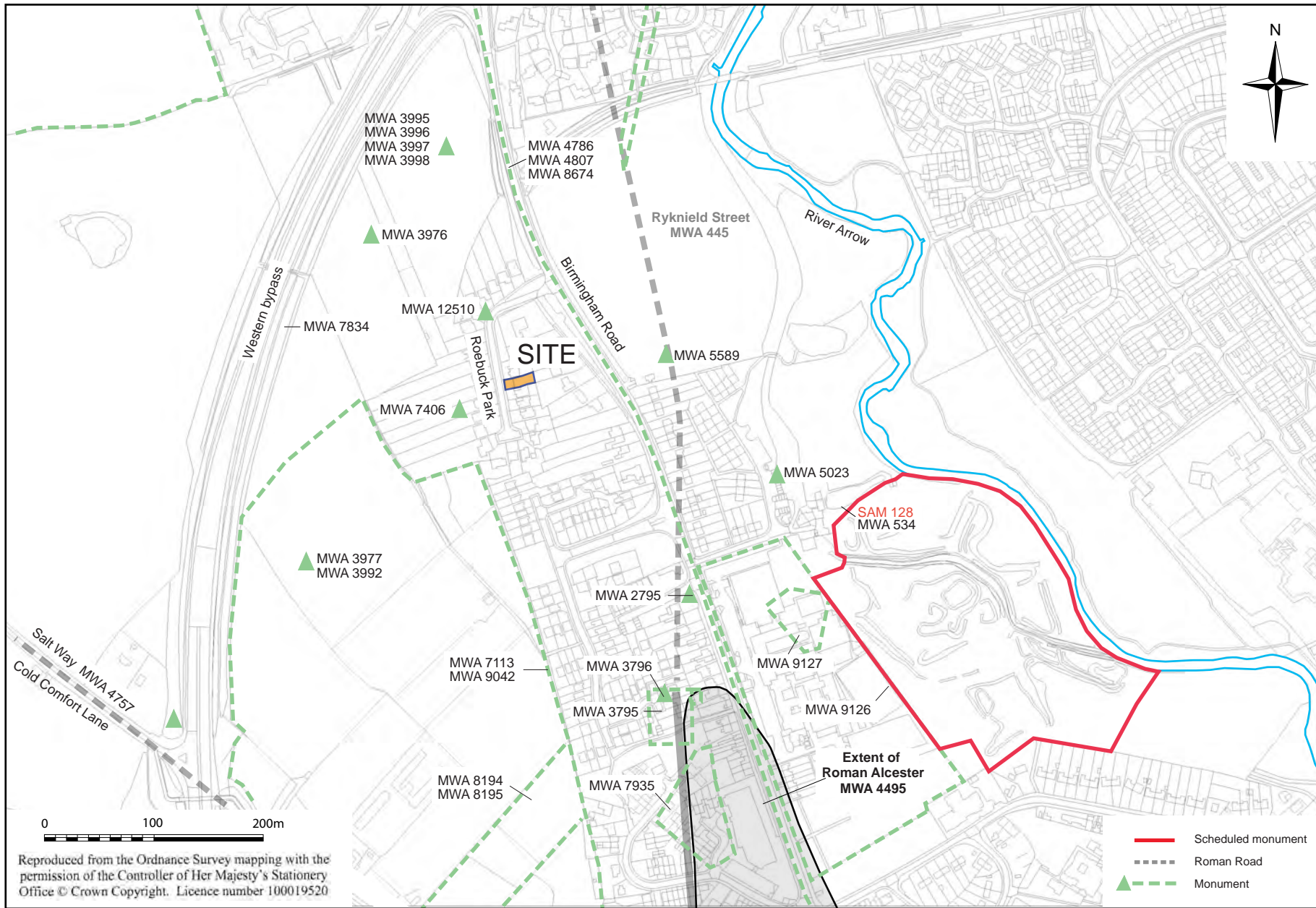


Fig 1: Site location

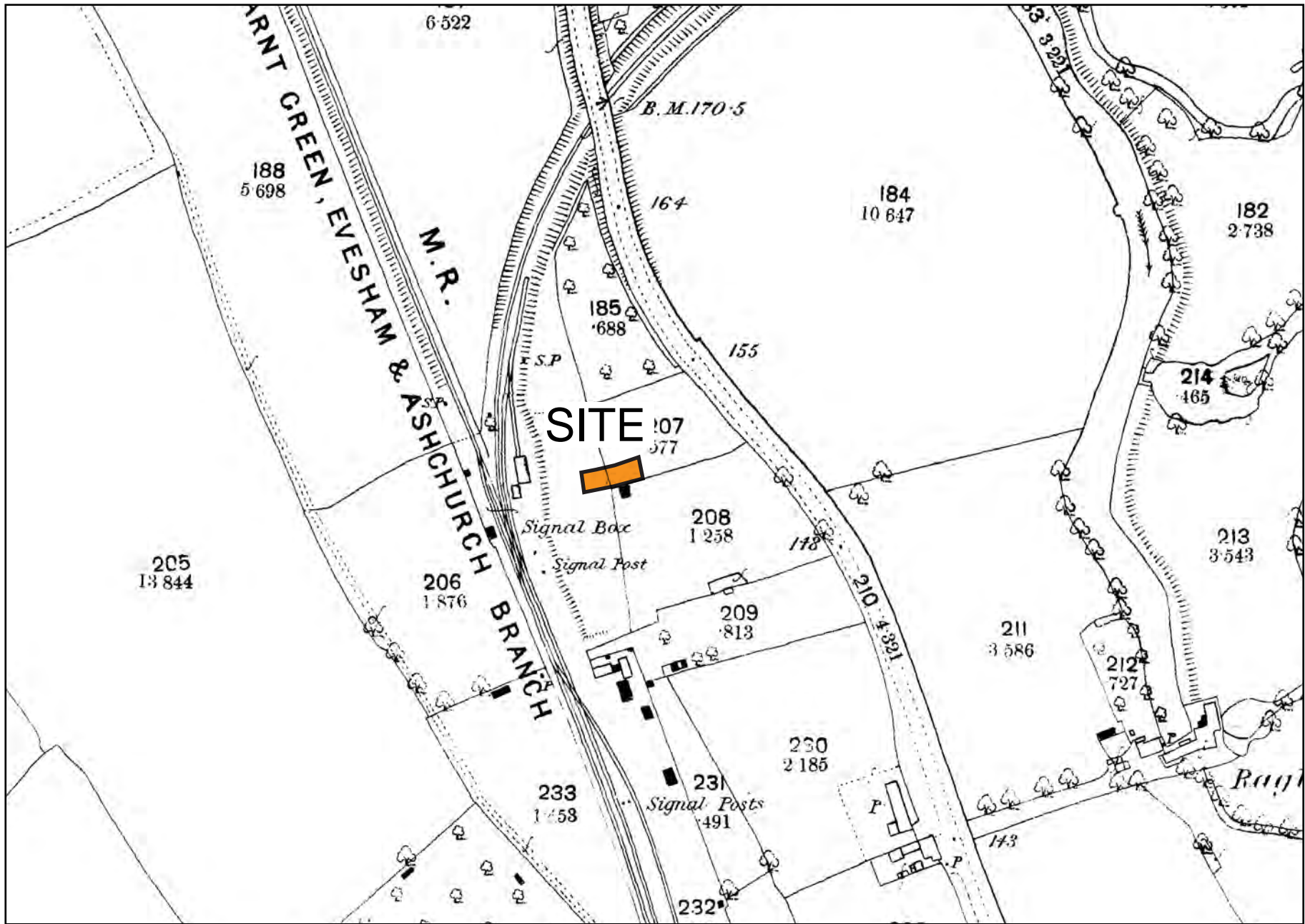


Fig 2: Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887

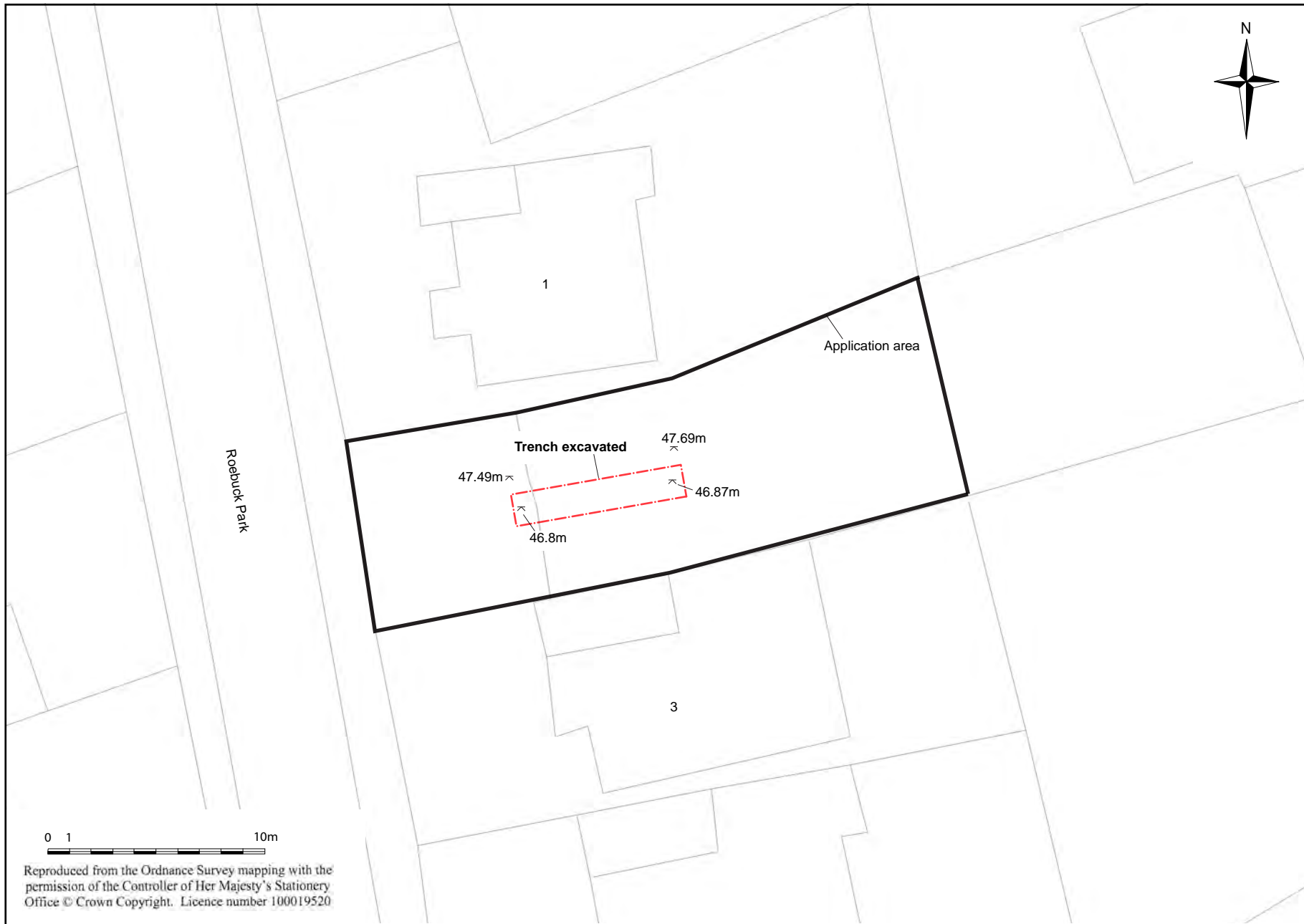


Fig 3: Location of trench excavated



Fig 4: Evaluation trench viewed from the north