

# Ivy Grange, Bilton, Rugby, Warwickshire Archaeological Evaluation



*understanding heritage matters*

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 1421  
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*Working for  
Warwickshire*

**Project:** Former Bilton bypass  
**Commissioned by:** Court (Warwickshire) Ltd  
**Project Report No.** 1421  
**Site Code:** RB13  
**Planning Reference:** R12/1155  
**National Grid Reference:** SP 4846 7386  
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## SUMMARY

*Two trial trenches were excavated in an area thought likely to contain medieval or earlier deposits. In Trench 10 the base of a former field boundary ditch was recorded alongside a remnant medieval headland. In Trench 9 a possible quarry pit was exposed although this and another pit remained undated. The absence of any medieval pottery or other finds strongly suggests that the area lies outside the foci of medieval occupation.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by the Rugby Borough Council for the erection of 11 dwellings with associated garaging, sewers and other works on land formerly forming the route of the proposed Bilton bypass, to the rear of 314-322 Bilton Road and to the rear of Lister House, Ivy Grange, Bilton Rugby, Warwickshire (R12/1155). An archaeological condition was attached to the consent as the proposed development lies within an area of significant archaeological potential.

1.2 The planning condition required that the applicant secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation, 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 dwellings and to carry out that evaluation in accordance with that condition. The approved scheme included the provision of 10 trial trenches. This report relates to Trenches 9 and 10 which were excavated in advance of Trenches 1-8 in February 2014 during a period of extremely wet weather.

1.4 The project archive will be stored at the Rugby Museum and Art Gallery (Site Code RB13).

## 2 SITE LOCATION

2.1 The site is situated on level ground centred on national grid reference SP 4846 7386 in the parish of Rugby. The underlying geology of the site is Dunsmore Gravel (BGS 1984).

## 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 The proposed development lies within an area of archaeological potential, within the probable extent of the medieval settlement at Bilton (Warwickshire Historic Environment

Record MWA 9494). There is the potential for the proposed groundworks to disturb archaeological deposits, including structural remains, boundary features and rubbish pits, associated with the occupation of this area during the medieval and later periods.

3.2 The First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1888-9 shows that the site is within the rear boundaries of plots facing Main Street (Fig 2). The curved 'S' shaped plot boundaries might indicate that the site was once part of the medieval open fields; the curved boundaries reflecting the 'S' pattern caused by ridge and furrow ploughing. There was also a building on the Lawford Lane end of the site from at least 1840 as depicted on the tithe map of that date (WRO CR569/34). Other features shown on historic mapping are boundaries and possible orchards (Figs 2, 3).

3.3 The landscape around Bilton has changed dramatically since the end of the last Ice Age some 10,000 years ago. A period of global warming allowed what was probably open tundra to gradually be colonised by birch and pine forest, then later by more mixed deciduous woodland of hazel, oak, lime and elm. This burgeoning forest cover attracted a range of game animals including roe deer, red deer and wild pig. These game animals were followed by small bands of nomadic hunter-gatherers. This period is known as the Mesolithic or middle stone age (8000 BC – 4000 BC) and it is defined by the making and use of a wide range of small flint blades known as microliths and the introduction of the flaked axe or adze.

3.4 In the early 1990s a large area to the west of the site was subject to an archaeological survey (CAT 1992, 1994; CPM 1993; GSB 1992, 1993, 1994; MWA 7432) in advance of housing development (Fig 1). The survey included a programme of fieldwalking, targeted geophysical survey, test pitting and trial trenching. Fieldwalking is undertaken on recently ploughed fields when there is a possibility that artefacts (finds) from buried sites will have been brought to the surface by plough action and can be recovered and recorded.

3.5 At the time of the survey, three fields to the north-west of the site were in a suitable condition and were fieldwalked. In one field the earliest evidence for human activity in the area, a scatter of worked flint tools and the waste flakes created during their production (MWA 7246) dating to the Mesolithic period was found (CAT 1992). Additional Mesolithic flints were found in test pits dug into the topsoil (CAT 1994). Further Mesolithic flintwork was recovered from during the construction of the school playground along with Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age flintwork (MWA 7484; Jones & Meek 1995). Other prehistoric flints were found during fieldwalking to the south-west of the site (MWA 7339; CAT 92).

3.6 At around 4000 BC, the beginning of the Neolithic or New Stone Age (4000 BC – 2500 BC), the way in which people saw themselves and the world they inhabited began to change. Domesticated animals such as cows and sheep, and domesticated crops like wheat and barley were imported from the continent. Communities also began to build burial tombs in which the bones of their ancestors were kept, sometimes being brought out for ceremonies and rituals. People also began to make pottery; at first in the form of simple round-bottomed pots, but over time they became highly stylised with symbolic decorations. By 3000 BC huge ceremonial complexes were constructed where large populations could gather, hold feasts, celebrate important occasions, and settle disputes. A nearby example in Church Lawford parish on the banks of the River Avon has recently been shown to have been in use for 1500 years (Palmer 2006). It was in this period that some communities developed social and religious hierarchies associated with the worship of cosmological gods (the sun and the moon) rather than the ancestors of old. These new elites were buried under huge burial mounds and several have been examined in King's Newnham parish (Palmer 2003).

3.7 The Bronze Age period (2500 BC – 600 BC) witnessed further social changes. During the first 1000 years of this period metalworking technology was introduced from the continent and the control of copper, tin, gold and other prestige goods was used to maintain power over communities. The elite graves of this period were often richly furnished with prestige goods such as weapons and jewellery. From 1500 BC no further burial mounds were constructed whilst farming and the production of food became more important. Communal activity was diverted to the construction of boundaries and field systems.

3.8 Although iron was being cast as early as 1200 BC, the period known now as the Iron Age began around 600 BC and lasted until the Roman conquest in AD 43. This period of population and agricultural expansion witnessed the wide-scale clearance of the wild forest and settlements became more permanent and more substantial. One of the best preserved Iron Age landscapes in the region is being excavated nearby at Ling Hall Quarry in Church Lawford parish. The excavations have shown that round-houses were first constructed at the end of the Bronze Age when the landscape was divided by a series of boundaries. New settlements consisting of round-houses set within ditched enclosures were created in the middle Iron Age and then also the later Iron Age. Removal of the tree cover and intensive farming on the slightly acidic Dunsmore soils encouraged the formation of heathland and further farming became untenable by the early Roman period (AD 200) and the area was largely abandoned until the late 18th/19th-century (Palmer 2002). On the opposite side of Rugby a large settlement at Coton Park has been excavated which appears to have existed throughout the Iron Age (Chapman forthcoming).

3.9 The Dunsmore plateau contains a large number of cropmarks which, based on their size and shape, are likely to represent later Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British settlements and boundary sites. Cropmarks on Dunsmore are formed when pits and ditches are dug into the gravel and later get filled with silts. These features retain rainwater for longer than the surrounding gravel and crops (mainly cereals) planted over these features tend to ripen at a different rate to those growing over the gravel. The differences can often be seen from the air and photographed. Aerial survey has been conducted since the 1960s with the aim of photographing the cropmarks on Dunsmore and the nearby gravel terraces along the Avon and Leam valleys.

3.10 To the north-west of the site two cropmarks are known which are likely to represent settlement sites. The northernmost, MWA 4145, includes a large enclosure subdivided by a smaller enclosure in its north-western corner with a further enclosure attached to its eastern side. The southern cropmark MWA 5684, appears to represent a trackway which divides a few partially visible enclosures. Cropmark MWA 4143 represents an enclosure in which partition ditches and pits are visible as well as near circular features which are likely to represent round-houses. Cropmark MWA 4142 includes a group of rectilinear ditches suggestive of field boundaries whilst to its north the characteristics of cropmark MWA 7188 are less certainly archaeological in origin.

3.11 All the above cropmark sites were subject to geophysical survey during the early 1990s survey (CPM 1993; GSB 1992, 1993, 1994; MWA 7432). The surveyors used a magnetometer which measured the relative magnetism given off from, for instance, areas of burning. This technique is useful in detecting settlement features and can depict the plan of buried features if they contain sufficient burnt or otherwise magnetised material. With the exception of cropmark MWA 7188 which was suggested as being of geological origin and cropmark MWA 4142 which produced anomalies not represented by cropmarks, the geophysical survey was able to add additional detail to all the cropmarks (MWA 4145, MWA 5684 and MWA 4143) and additional survey areas also depicted probable archaeological anomalies. Cropmarks MWA 7188 and MWA 4142 were later examined with a small number of trial trenches although no archaeological features were recorded (CAT 1994). Trial trenching at Bilton High School in 2007 revealed that the trackway and enclosure cropmarks were defined by ditches which yielded Iron Age pottery suggesting occupation in the later part of the first millennium BC (Warwickshire Museum 2007).

3.12 During the Roman occupation (AD 43 – 410) a new ‘continental’ culture was gradually adopted by the native populace. As the population grew, farming capacity increased and a

surplus was produced which could be traded for imported luxuries such as wine and olive oil. Displays of status changed particularly in architectural styles as the traditional round-houses were rebuilt rectangular like those on the continent and large country houses or villas were built outside the emerging towns where trading was conducted using money for the first time. Imperial Rome created a transport system based on a major road network which connected even far-flung parts of the empire. An official travellers rest stop complete with bathhouse was built at nearby Caves Inn (*Tripontium*) on the Watling Street near Rugby.

3.13 The withdrawal of the Roman army and government in AD 410 hastened the collapse of the money-based economy and also the arrival of 'Germanic' settlers whose culture and language were to eventually become dominant. By AD 600 these Anglo-Saxons appear to have colonised much of the Avon Valley as their cemeteries and settlements are widespread along it, although Dunsmore Heath was largely avoided in favour of the more fertile margins along the river valleys. Between AD 700 and AD 900 the current settlement pattern of the area had largely been established, with for instance Bilton including 5 *hides* (Old English units of land) at the time of the Domesday survey (1086).

3.14 To the south of the A4071 Cawston Road a large cropmark complex MWA 4144 probably represents features from multiple periods. The westernmost part is likely to be the earliest and may contain elements of Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British settlement. Later Bronze Age pottery was recovered from within a Romano-British field system discovered during excavations along a pipeline that was inserted through the central part of the cropmark in 1999 (Palmer forthcoming). This work demonstrated that the central part of the cropmark was predominantly associated with the medieval Cawston Grange, a farm owned by the Abbey of Pipewell in Northants which produced vast quantities of bread until it burnt down in the 14th century. The surrounding landscape was imparked by the Abbots and used for hunting and entertaining important visitors. It is possible that the eastern part of the cropmark complex represents the Anglo-Saxon and Norman period village of Cawston which was depopulated by the monks of Pipewell in order to create their Grange (*ibid*).

3.15 To the south of the MWA 4144 cropmark, MWA 4135 represents the supposed site of medieval Cawston prior to the work undertaken in 1999. Further south still lies the site of Cawston House (MWA 4138), built by Thomas Boughton's son, Edward between 1558 and 1589 using stone from the White Friars' church in Coventry, given by the Earl of Leicester (Palmer forthcoming).



3.16 Linear cropmarks (MWA 4144) remain undated despite the work undertaken on the 1999 pipeline (Palmer forthcoming). An undated ditch was found during observations in Lime Tree Avenue (MWA 8248) which may relate to one of the pre-modern field systems in the area and a further undated gully was found in a trial trench (MWA 9735) on the west side of Bilton.

## 4 AIMS AND METHODS

4.1 The main aim of the evaluation was 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.

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 A total of two trenches (Trench 9 and Trench 10) were opened up by a 5-tonne, 360° excavator with a 1.60m wide, toothless ditching bucket. 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

### **Trench 9**

5.1 Trench 9 was 16.4m long and aligned NW/SE. Geological natural, strong brown sandy gravel (902) was reached at a depth of 0.81m below the modern ground surface at the SE end of the trench.

5.2 The trench was evidently aligned over a large hollow 905. This may have been a quarry pit for gravel as it was at least 7m wide. Its exact profile was not established because of the ingress of groundwater and the instability of the trench which was already over 1.2m deep. The hollow contained yellowish brown sandy loam (906) with frequent amounts of small-medium pebbles but remained undated.

5.3 To the south of the quarry cut, was a sub-circular pit 903. This pit had very steep sloping sides and a rounded base which very quickly in-filled with water. It contained very dark grey sandy loam (904) and was also undated.

5.4 The quarry fill was overlaid by a dump of yellowish brown sandy loam (901), between 0.58m and 0.28m at the SE end). This was overlain by 0.55m of very dark grey sandy loam topsoil (900).

### **Trench 10**

5.5 Trench 2 was 26.7m long and was excavated in a broad arc around an extant grass bank that contained several sawn off tree stumps. Geological natural, strong brown sandy gravel (1002) was achieved 1.12m below the current ground surface.

5.6 Approximately in the centre of the trench a large feature 1003, could be seen to cut into the natural. It was approximately 7.30m wide, its east side being 10.35m from the NE end of the trench, and its west side being 7.95m from the west end of the trench. Its exact profile could not be determined, as the trench immediately filled with ground water when machined out. However, a slot was cut into it by the machine and revealed that it was at least 0.20m deep. It contained yellowish brown sandy loam (1004) with frequent amounts of small-medium pebbles but no datable finds. This feature seems likely to relate to the field boundaries shown on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey.

5.7 The large feature fill was indistinguishable from a 0.55m overlying layer of yellowish brown sandy loam (1001), which was sealed under 0.57m of very dark grey sandy loam topsoil (1000). No finds were recovered from either of these layers.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

6.1 No finds were recovered from the evaluation trenches although some modern material was discarded on site. The absence of any medieval pottery or other finds strongly suggests that the area lies outside the foci of medieval occupation.

6.2 The feature in Trench 10 was very likely the base of the boundary ditch shown on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey and the extant bank could be the remains of an earlier plough headland. This tends to confirm the impression that the site lies outside the medieval settlement.

6.3 The unusually thick deposits of topsoil across the area seem likely to be the result of relatively modern redeposition, perhaps from one of the adjacent building programmes.

6.4 The evaluation has established that the proposed new dwellings are highly unlikely to impact on anything of archaeological significance at this end of the proposal site.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Appendices

### A List of contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comment</i>
900	Topsoil	Very dark grey sandy loam
901	Layer	Yellowish brown sandy loam
902	Natural	Strong brown sandy gravel
903	Pit cut	Sub-circular pit with steep sloping sides
904	Pit fill	Very dark grey sandy loam
905	Hollow	Possible quarry pit, of uncertain shape
906	Hollow fill	Yellowish brown sandy loam
1000	Topsoil	Very dark grey sandy loam
1001	Layer	Yellowish brown sandy loam
1002	Natural	Strong brown sandy gravel
1003	Hollow	Possible quarry pit, of uncertain shape
1004	Hollow fill	Yellowish brown sandy loam

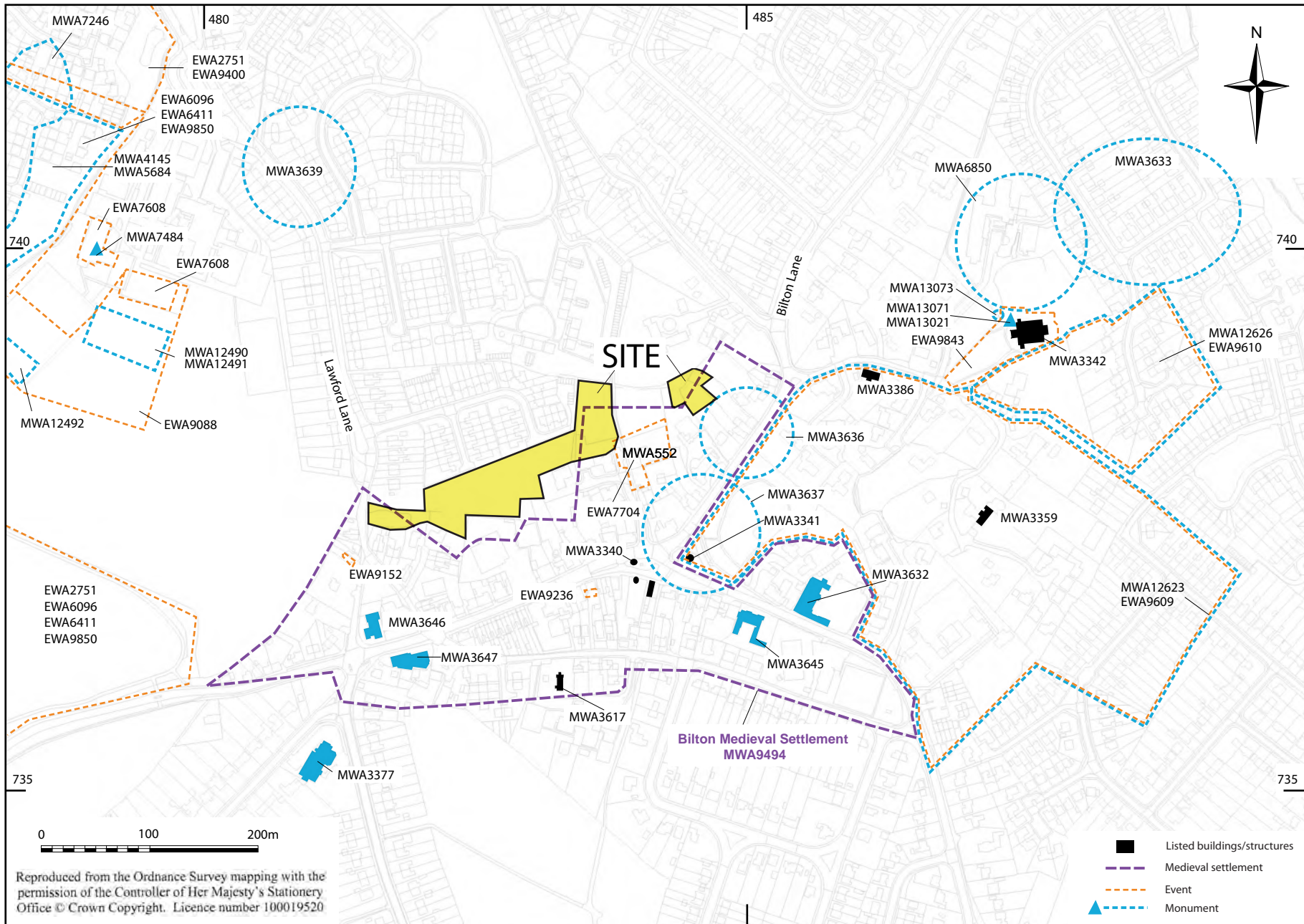


Fig 1: Site location

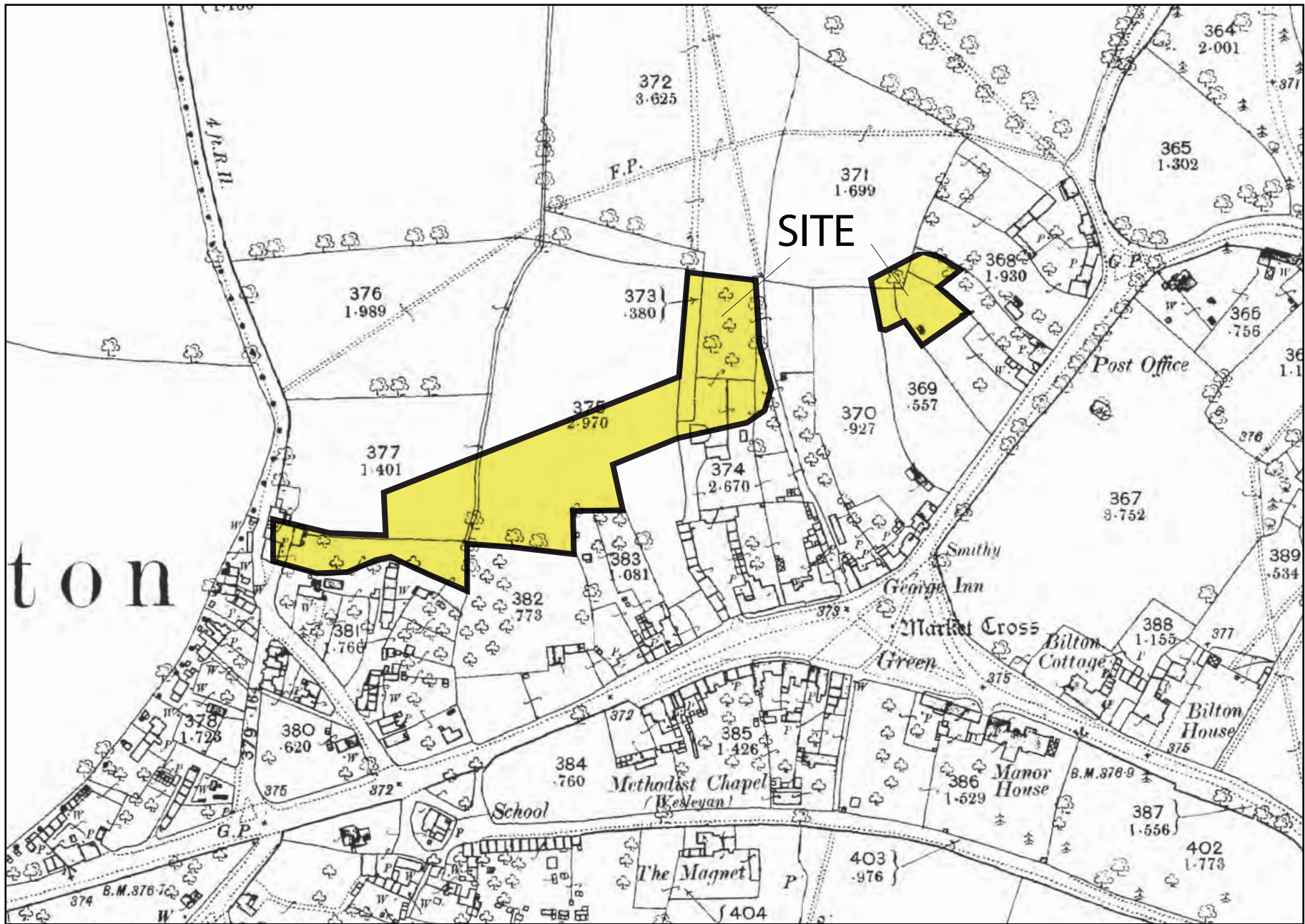


Fig 2: Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey of 1887-9

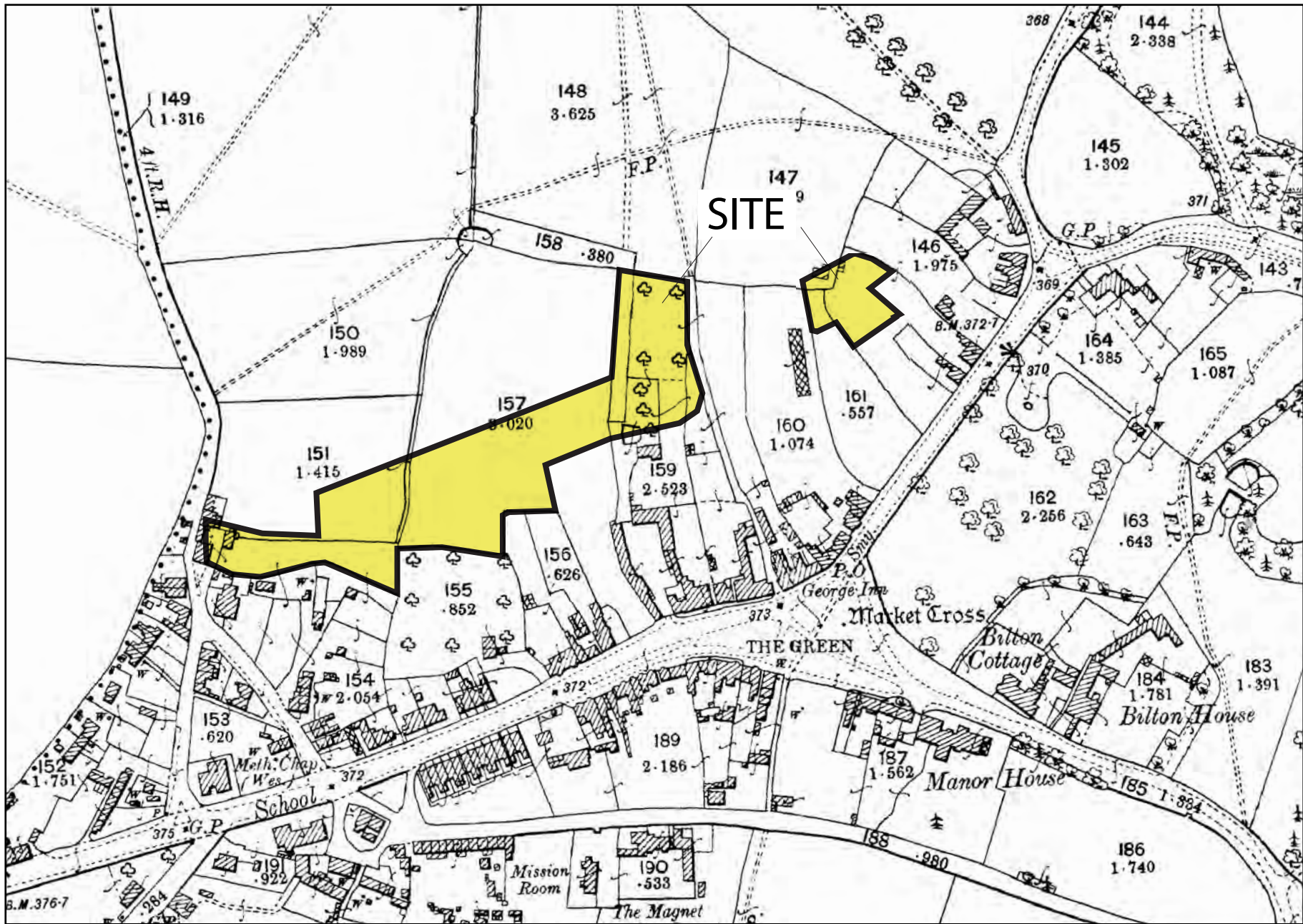


Fig 3: Detail from Second Edition Ordnance Survey of 1905



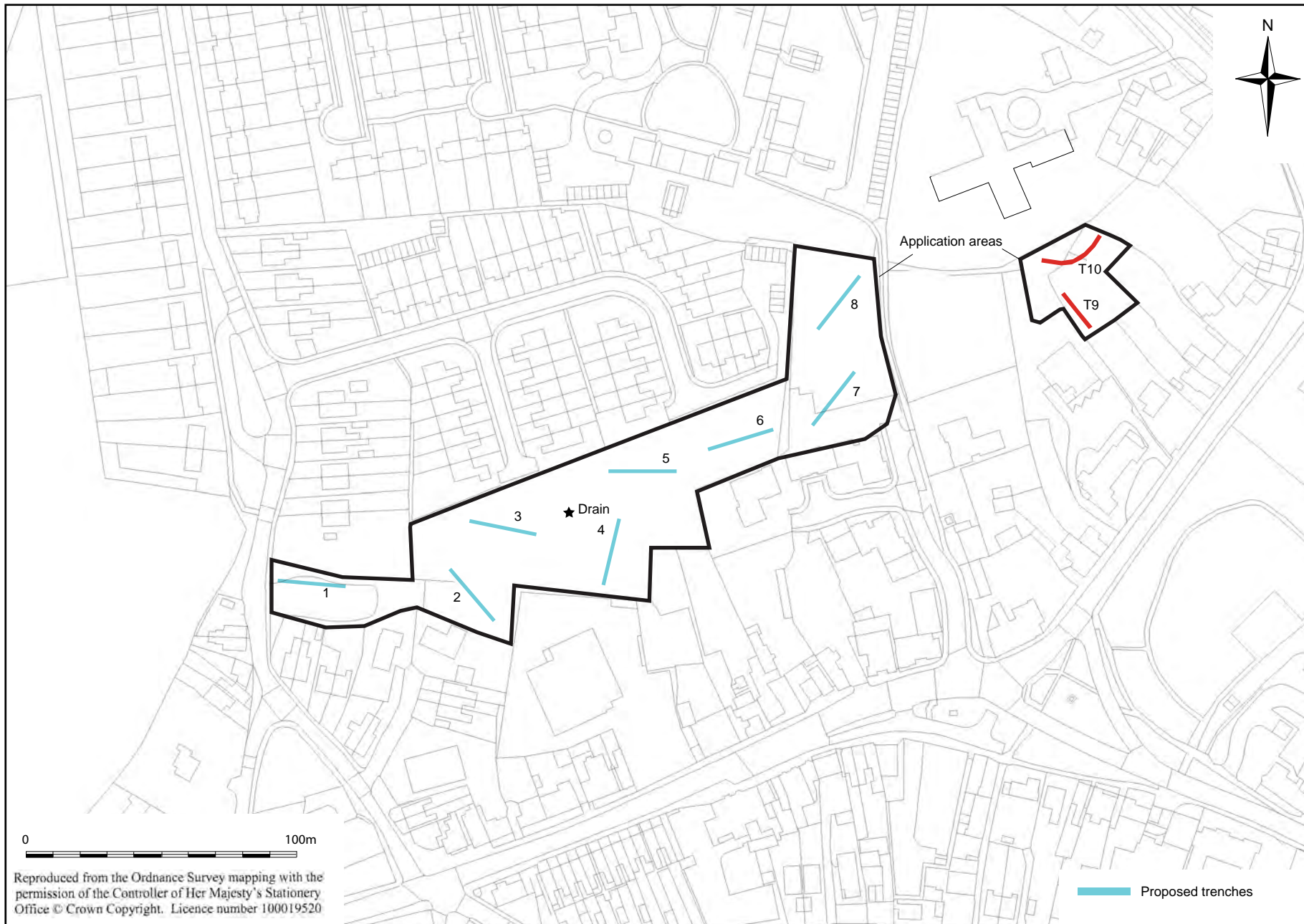


Fig 4: Location of proposed trenches 1-8 and trial trenches 9 and 10

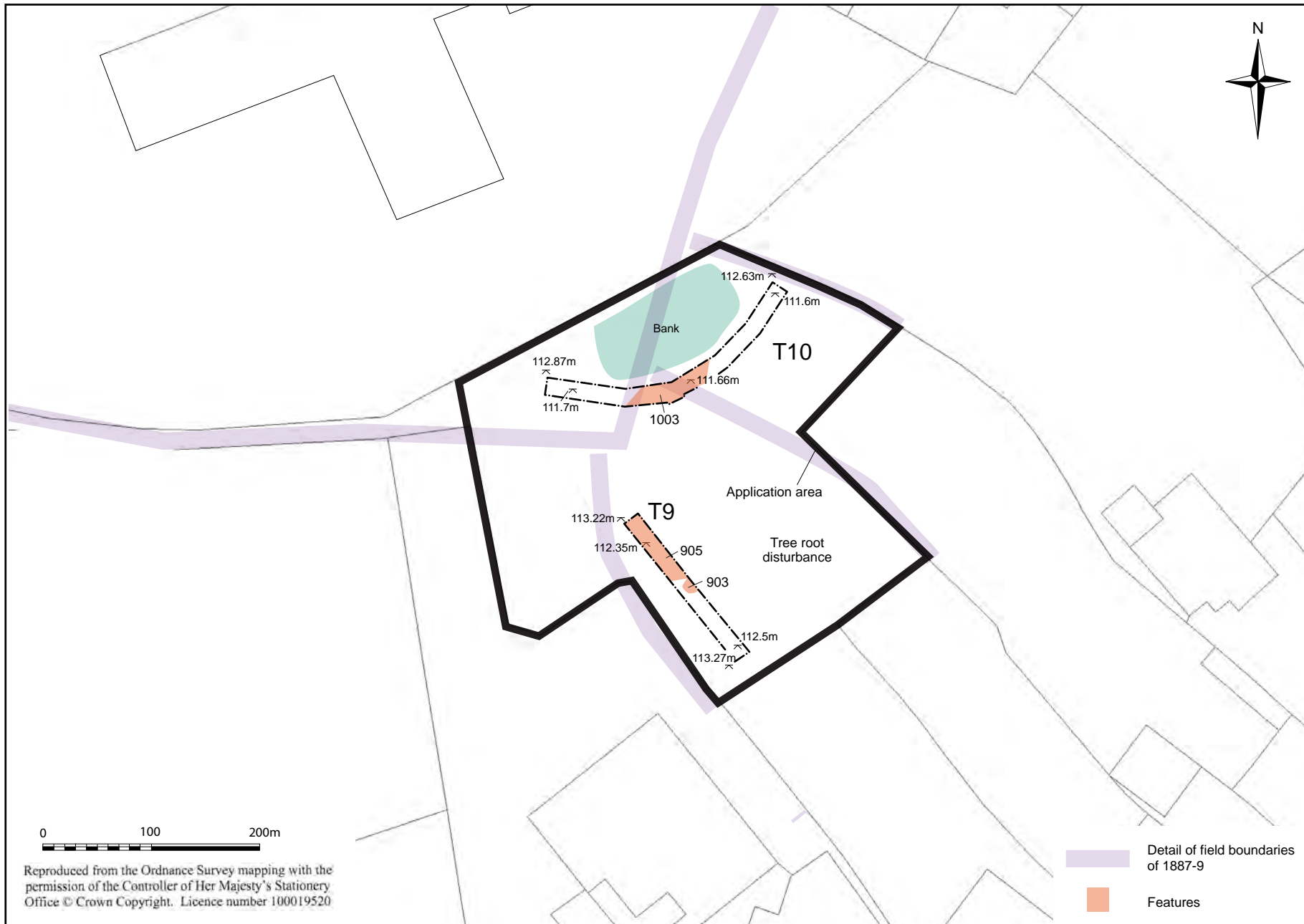


Fig 5: Trial trenches 9 and 10 with 1887-9 field boundary detail



Fig 6: Trench 9, looking NW



Fig 7: Pit 903, looking NE



Fig 8: Trench 10, looking SW



Fig 9: Trench 10, showing Quarry Pit 1003, looking West



Fig 10: Trench 10, looking East



Fig 11: Trench 10



Fig 12: Recording Trench 10