

Compton Verney House Compton Verney Warwickshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS
DURING CARPARK IMPROVEMENTS



EXPERTISE WHERE YOU NEED IT

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 1957
JULY 2019



*Working for
Warwickshire*

Project: Watching Brief on car park improvements
Commissioned by: Gary Webb for Compton Verney House Trust
Site Code: CV19
Planning Reference: 18/02578/FUL
Planning Authority: Stratford on Avon District Council
National Grid Reference: SP 3136 5252
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SUMMARY

A programme of improvements at Compton Verney House, which included the extension and resurfacing of the car park and the laying of drains, was carried out in January and February 2019. The carpark is located within an area defined on the Warwickshire Historic Environment Record as that of the medieval deserted village of Compton Murdak. Compton Verney House Trust therefore commissioned Archaeology Warwickshire to monitor the groundworks with a view to recording any archaeological deposits that might be disturbed by the groundworks. As part of the project it was agreed that the work would provide useful training for Compton Verney and Archaeology Warwickshire volunteer Hilary Calow to gain first-hand experience in archaeological monitoring techniques as well as, potentially, in finds identification and report writing.

None of the trenches were purposely excavated to archaeological levels and the majority were too narrow or too shallow to be able to fully interpret what was revealed.

Various scatters or deposits of Lias limestone fragments were recorded which may be the remains of surfaces, spreads or the result of infilling depressions or cut features. However, they are equally likely to be naturally-derived phenomena or at least the result of agricultural activity and post-medieval landscaping.

Whilst the carpark is certainly close to, or lies over, some of the remains of the deserted medieval village, no evidence of medieval activity was recorded in the watching brief. The work has definitely not demonstrated that significant medieval deposits would not be found in any future groundworks.

The current project's greater success was in enabling an inexperienced volunteer the opportunity to partake and experience archaeological fieldwork and analysis under the supervision of an experienced mentor. This was the first opportunity for practical archaeology at Compton Verney since joining the volunteer team. In addition to building individual archaeological skills, and understanding of the processes, opportunities and constraints of development-led archaeology it may also inform emerging plans to potentially engage Compton Verney audiences in new archaeology-oriented activities.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Planning permission was granted in December 2018 by Stratford upon Avon District Council for the improvement of the car park at Compton Verney (Planning ref 18/02578/FUL). Although the site lies within an area of archaeological potential and near the site of the deserted medieval village of Compton Murdak, the planning authority did not require an archaeological assessment or specify any archaeological mitigation as part of the planning consent.
- 1.2 Nevertheless, Compton Verney House Trust (CVHT) Head of Landscape & Gardens Gary Webb, proactively commissioned Archaeology Warwickshire to carry out a programme of archaeological observation and recording during the groundworks phase. This included service and drainage trenches and the surface clearance of previously wooded areas so that the existing car park could be resurfaced and extended.
- 1.3 The archaeological watching brief was carried out over 12 days in January and February 2019 by Hilary Calow overseen by Senior Archaeological Officer Pete Thompson.
- 1.4 This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under Site Code CV19. The work was carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Standards and Guidelines (2014).

2 LOCATION

- 2.1 Compton Verney House (NHLE1381862) is in the parish of Compton Verney, Warwickshire, and within Compton Verney Park and Garden (NHLE1000369). The site of the carpark is on the north side of Spring Hill (B4086) and to the east of the lake, centred on National Grid Reference SP 3136 5252 (See Fig 1).

- 2.2 A small brook flows south-east to north-west to the south of the car park into the lake. The ground is largely flat with a slight slope, down from east to west.

- 2.3 The underlying geology of the site is Lower Lias Clay (British Geological Survey, 1968).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The earliest archaeological evidence from the area dates from the early to middle Saxon period in the form of a burial group which included gold ornaments dated to the 7th century (Warwickshire Historic Environment No MWA 1185) discovered in c.1774, during landscaping work associated with the lake. The finds recovered from the burials included gold ornamentation and were of unusually high status. These included a *bracteate, 20mm in diameter, of gold, with a milled or cabled border"found on the neck of a skeleton at the base of a grave mound at Compton Verney. It is an obvious imitation of a sceatta and the burial can thus not be later than the last quarter of the 7th century. In the same mound was another skeleton with a second gold pendant", some 264mm in diameter, which is... "ornamented with applied gold wire, having in the centre a stone or glass-paste" (VCH 1904). The objects are in the Ashmolean Museum (<http://collections.ashmolean.org/object/318000>).*
- 3.2 The exact location of any possible burial mound is uncertain and no earthwork survives. This would certainly be the result if the discovery coincided with landscaping work for or around the lake. Any high status burial mound may be expected to have been in a location with commanding views (Hamerow 2012), but the suggested low-lying position would be at variance to this. Burial groups of this date are likely to have related to a settlement although it is not possible to determine how close or in what direction the settlement lay. It certainly may have been the gestation settlement of Compton (Coutts, 2010) which is recorded as a manor at Domesday 1086.
- 3.3 The Verney family had taken control of the manor of Compton by 1430, evidently as part of a strategy of acquiring land in the area for pastoral exploitation. They did not make Compton their main centre until the early 16th century, at which time the village name Compton Verney began to take precedence over Compton Murdak (the name of the previous lords of the manor) (Dyer, in Pearman, 2000). Richard Verney expelled the tenants of the rectory in 1446, hastening the trend of depopulation, which seems to have set in by 1400. By about 1486, John Rous was able to write in his *Historia Regum Angliae* that Compton Murdak was 'now only a manor and church'.
- 3.4 The deserted medieval village of Compton Murdak (MWA 1187) was subject to archaeological evaluation and investigation in 1991 ((Warwickshire Museum 1991;

- Dyer, in Bearman, 2000). The extent of the village has been hypothesised based on the results of further fieldwork and evidence for the extent of ridge and furrow cultivation indicating the possible limits of the settlement.
- 3.5 The manor house site (Fig 1; MWA 1188) has seen at least seven main building phases in its history (Brindle 1993). It was built, or possibly rebuilt, by Richard Verney in c.1440-2, though how old any previous structure was, and for how long a manor house had existed on the site is uncertain (see above). Further alterations evidently took place in the late 16th or early 17th century, as an illustration of 1656 shows a Jacobean style house, apparently built around a rectangular courtyard with octagonal turrets surmounting two opposing wings. The grounds at this time do not appear to be formal. This house was again rebuilt by George Verney between 1711-1714, and at the same time extensive formal gardens were laid out around it (Dugdale 1730).
- 3.6 From 1760 into the 1770s the house was considerably altered and extended to designs by Robert Adam, creating the mansion house largely as it is seen today. The formal grounds that had been created in the early part of the 18th century were transformed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown into a naturalistic landscape. This was one of many landscape gardens created by Brown in the Midlands and it is estimated that he created about 170 across the country (Hadfield 1977, 55). Work took place between 1868 and 1774 and it is at this time that the Icehouse (MWA 1189) and the pathways in Icehouse Coppice and the West Lawn were created.
- 3.7 Compton Verney was requisitioned during World War II and in 1993 was bought by the Peter Moore Foundation and established as an Art Gallery.
- 3.8 The car park lies within the Registered Park of Compton Verney (Historic England National Heritage List for England, 2010; HER MWA 6363).
- 3.9 A number of archaeological investigations have taken place over the last 30 years. Most recently a Watching Brief was carried out during the erection of the Welcome Centre along with landscaping and new paths. This was close to the car park and revealed the walls of an early ha-ha along with evidence of World War II hutments (Nichols 2015; EWA 10888).

4 AIMS AND METHODS

- 4.1 The main aim of the work was to record any significant archaeological deposits revealed or disturbed by the car park improvement, to collate the fieldwork records into an archaeological archive and present the results of the fieldwork in this report for dissemination.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 An archaeologist was present at intervals during the ground disturbance. Where potential archaeological deposits were encountered, the project manager or supervising archaeologist attended, assessed and recorded them before they were disturbed.
- 4.5 Eight service trenches, numbered 1-8, for the improved car park were observed (see Fig 3). The pipe trenches were between 0.5m and 0.6m wide and were excavated up to a depth of 0.7m to 0.9m. With the exception of trench 1, they were excavated by a machine using a toothed bucket.
- 4.6 The new extended car park areas were reduced by 0.4m to 0.45m.

5 RESULTS

Natural geology

- 5.1 Geological natural across the areas observed was yellowish brown Lias clay with outcrops of Lias bedrock. The Lias limestone occurred variously as compacted layers and looser deposits of Lias stone fragments. Some of these looser bedrock deposits had the appearance of having been manipulated.

Contexts of potential archaeology

- 5.2 In Trench 1, at the southern end of the site (Fig 3; Photos 1 & 2), a compacted layer of irregular Lias stone and other stones (3) was revealed 0.2m below the topsoil. It is possible that the stones formed a “rubble” fill to a depression near the brook or possibly the remnants of a metalled path or surface, although it may also have been a natural outcrop which had been loosened by plough action. Adjoining it to the north-east was a NE/SW, 0.3m wide alignment of stone with a distinct eastern edge (4) which might have been a field drain (Photo 2).
- 5.3 A possible Lias stone surface (10) extended approximately 7m along Trench 3 (see Photos 3 & 4). The surface was flat and may have been laid.
- 5.4 In the middle of Trench 3, in the south-west facing section, a Lias stone deposit (12) with silty clay layer to either side may have been natural, or the edge of a feature, possibly a furrow or ditch (Photo 5).
- 5.5 At the northern end of Trench 3, a small concentration of Lias stone fragments included two layers of stone (14).
- 5.6 Two additional areas were also observed as they were cleared and excavated to a depth of 0.2m (Fig 3). In these areas two large tree roots were excavated and the soil disturbed was observed. In Trench 6 a small piece of 19th or 20th century fluted blue glass was found in the topsoil and a piece of modern CBM on the lias clay natural.
- 5.7 A stone spread (19), possibly a surface was observed in the new area closest to the lake (Photo 6).
- 5.8 Car park surfaces were up to 0.5m deep (8 and 9). Elsewhere, beyond the car park, a layer of topsoil (1) of varying thickness was recorded above the natural.

Finds

- 5.9 In only one trench in the existing car park areas were finds recovered. Four large sherds of thick 19th century hand blown, brown glass, including part of the punt, were dislodged in Trench 7.
- 5.10 A bottle, complete with stopper, marked Hunt, Edmunds & Co Ltd, Banbury was also found in Trench 7. This brewing partnership was formed in 1850 and expanded in the period 1874-1888 into wines and spirits acquiring 64 licenced houses. The company was registered in 1896. It ceased brewing in 1967. A trade mark application was made for a whiskey label in 1935.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The work carried out to improve the car parking area has afforded archaeologists the barest of glimpses at what may lie beneath the car park. None of the trenches were purposely excavated to archaeological levels and the majority were too narrow or too shallow to be able to fully interpret what was revealed.
- 6.2 The various scatters or deposits of Lias limestone fragments such as those observed in trenches 1 and 3 may be the remains of surfaces, spreads or the result of infilling depressions or cut features. However, they are equally likely to be naturally derived phenomena or at least the result of agricultural activity and post-medieval landscaping.
- 6.3 Whilst the carpark is certainly close to, or lies over the some of the remains of the deserted medieval village of Compton Murdak (see Fig 1) no evidence of medieval activity was recorded in the watching brief. Nevertheless, the work has definitely not demonstrated that significant medieval deposits won't be found in any future groundworks.
- 6.4 The current project's greater success was in enabling an inexperienced volunteer the opportunity to partake in and gain experience of archaeological fieldwork and analysis under the supervision of an experienced mentor. This also provided an opportunity to enhance individual archaeological skills, and understanding of the processes and experience some of the constraints of development-led archaeology. The project may also provide experience and awareness to inform any emerging plans to potentially engage Compton Verney audiences in new archaeology-oriented activities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1: Initial topsoil stripping in Trench 1 looking west showing (3) in foreground



2: Trench 1, contexts 3 and 4 after topsoil strip



3: View south along Trench 3 at eastern edge of site



4: Trench 3, Lias stone contexts 10 and 11



5: Trench 3: Layer/deposit (12) in west facing section



6: Layer/surface (19) exposed under previously wooded area near the lake

APPENDICES

A Observed areas or trenches (Fig 3)

Trench	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment
1	Area cleared to south main carpark	25	2.7	0.2	16.1.19 top soil cleared
2	Drain trench	3	1.8		16.1.19 small trench by brook in location of planned drain.. no features or finds
3	Ducting trench	30	0.6	0.9	along edge of existing car park by wellingtonia avenue (photo 3)
4	Ducting trench	80	0.5	0.9	Along roadway
5	Ducting trench	14	0.5	0.9	Extension to trench 3
6	Area cleared to south main car park			0.25 max	Reopened widened trench 1
7	Service trench to small west car park extension	25	0.5	0.8	small west car park extension with spur
8	Service trench along wood to small west car park			0.8	along wood to small west car park

B: List of contexts

Context	<i>Description</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	Dark brown clayey silt		0.18-20	Topsoil
2	Lias clay			Geological natural
3	Compacted lias limestone			Geological natural
4	Linear stone deposit in trench 1			Possible feature, field drain
5	Lias clay in trench 2			Geological natural as context 1
6	Dark brown clayey silt in trench 2			Topsoil as context 1
7	Limestone layer			Trench 3
8	Yellow stone and gravel		0.2	Car park surface
9	Red sand and gravel		0.2	Car park sub surface laid on membrane
10	Lias limestone stone concentration in section			Trench 3
11	Lias limestone stone "surface"	0.5	0.9	Trench 3
12	Dome shaped feature of lias limestone		0.2-0.8	Trench 3
13	Lias limestone thin layer	0.5	0.9	Trench 3
14	Lias limestone fragments at north end		0.6	Trench 3
15	Ducting trench	0.5	0.9	Trench 4
16	Ducting trench	0.5	0.9	Trench 5
17	Ducting trench extension	0.5	0.9	Trench 4
18	Broad area cleared for southern extension to car park		0.25 max	Trench 6
19	Cleared area south of small carpark includes service trench	0.5	0.8	Trench 7
20	Service trench along wood	0.5	0.8	Trench 8

C List of Finds

Context	Material	Quantity	Date/Comments
19	Glass	4	Sherds hand blown port bottle 19th century
19	Glass	1	Beer bottle with stopper Hunt Edmunds & Co Ltd
18	Glass	1	Blue, fluted 19-20th century in Lias limestone
18	Building material	1	Exposed by digger on Lias clay natural
19	Brick	1	Fragment. modern
19	Tile	2	Lime mortar? to exterior
19	Building material	3	
u/s	Pottery	1	1 x modern willow pattern; on spoil heap
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finds to be kept by <i>Compton Verney House Trust</i>

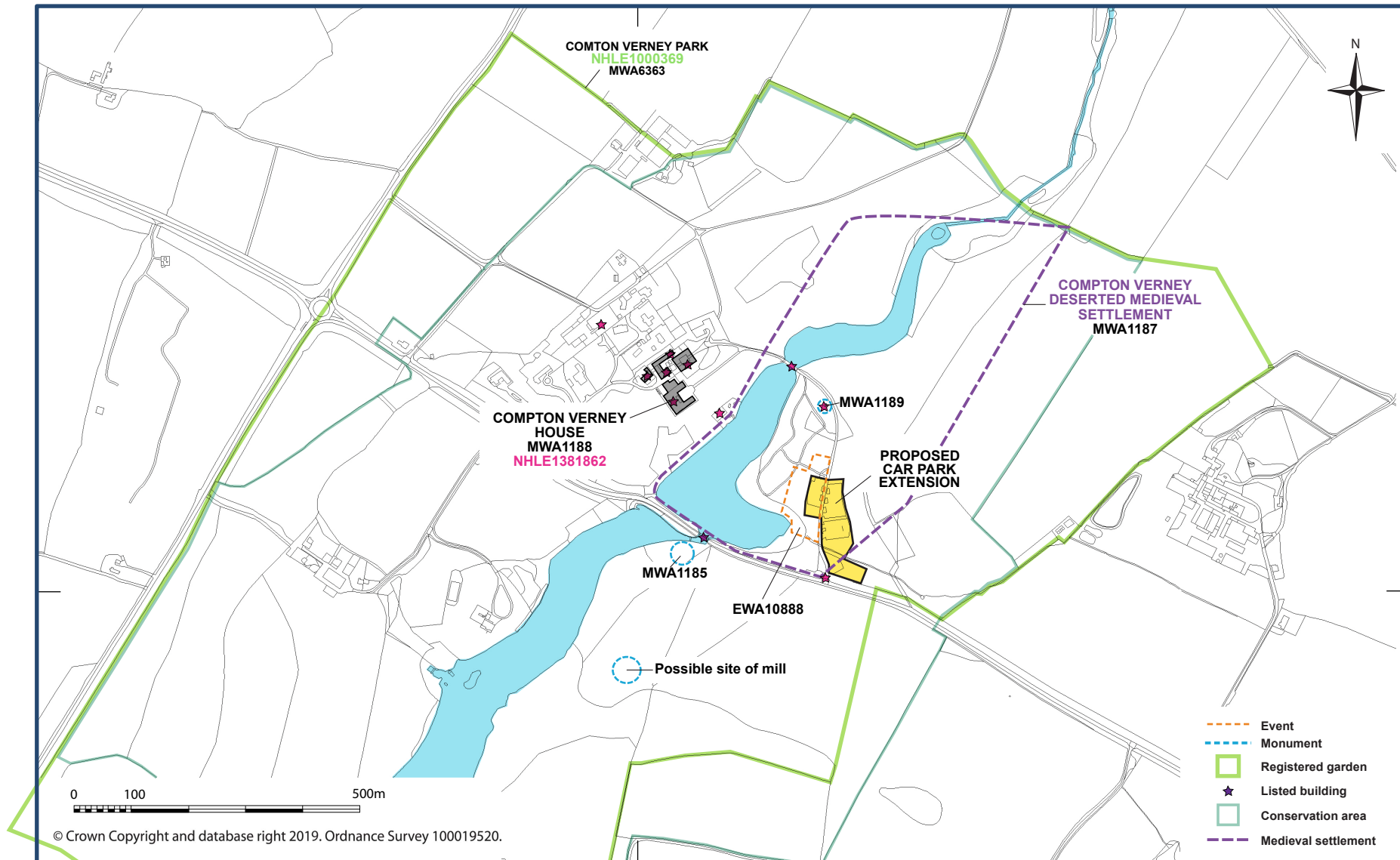


Fig 1: Location of proposed car park extension and relevant Historic Environment information

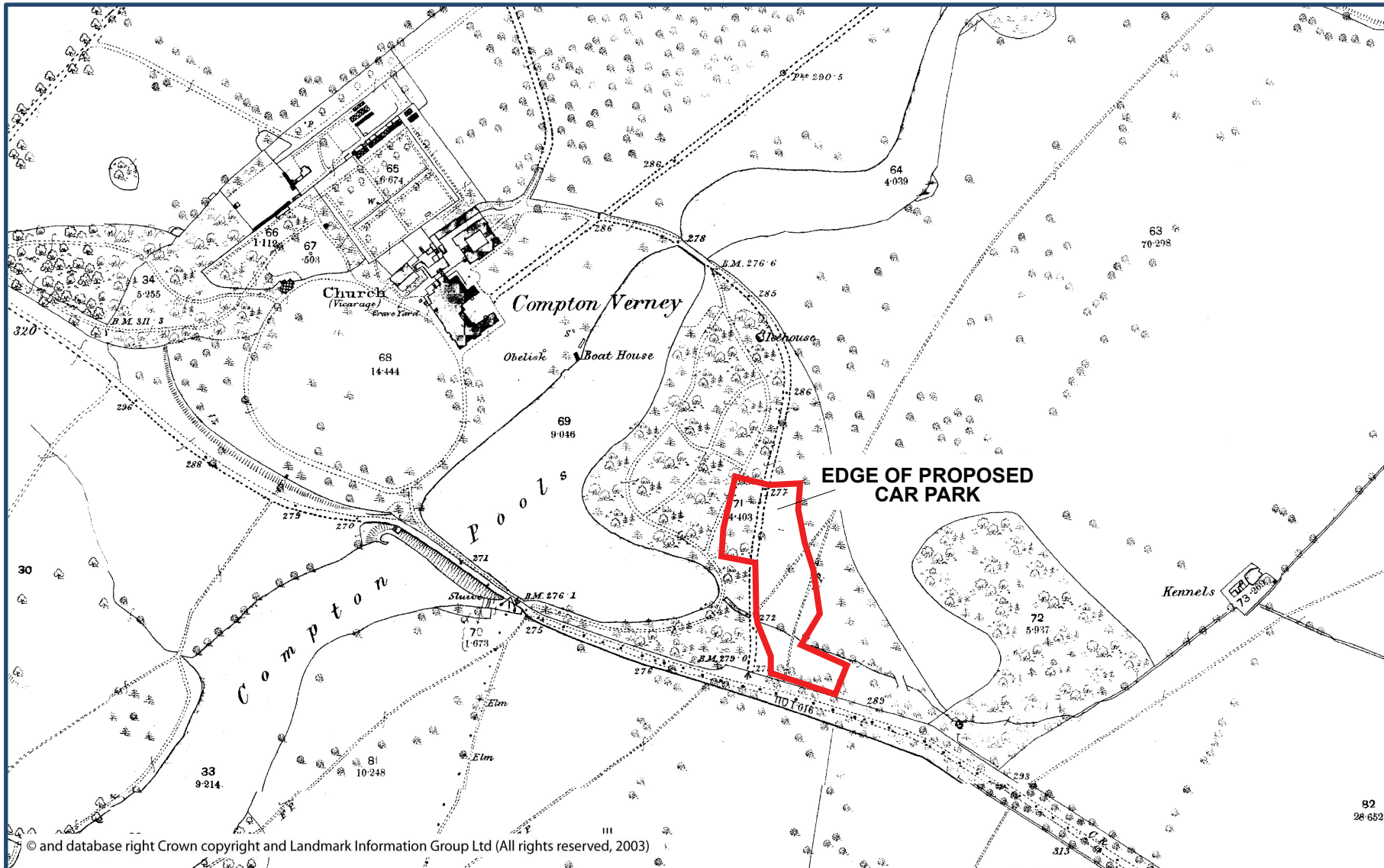


Fig 2: Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1885

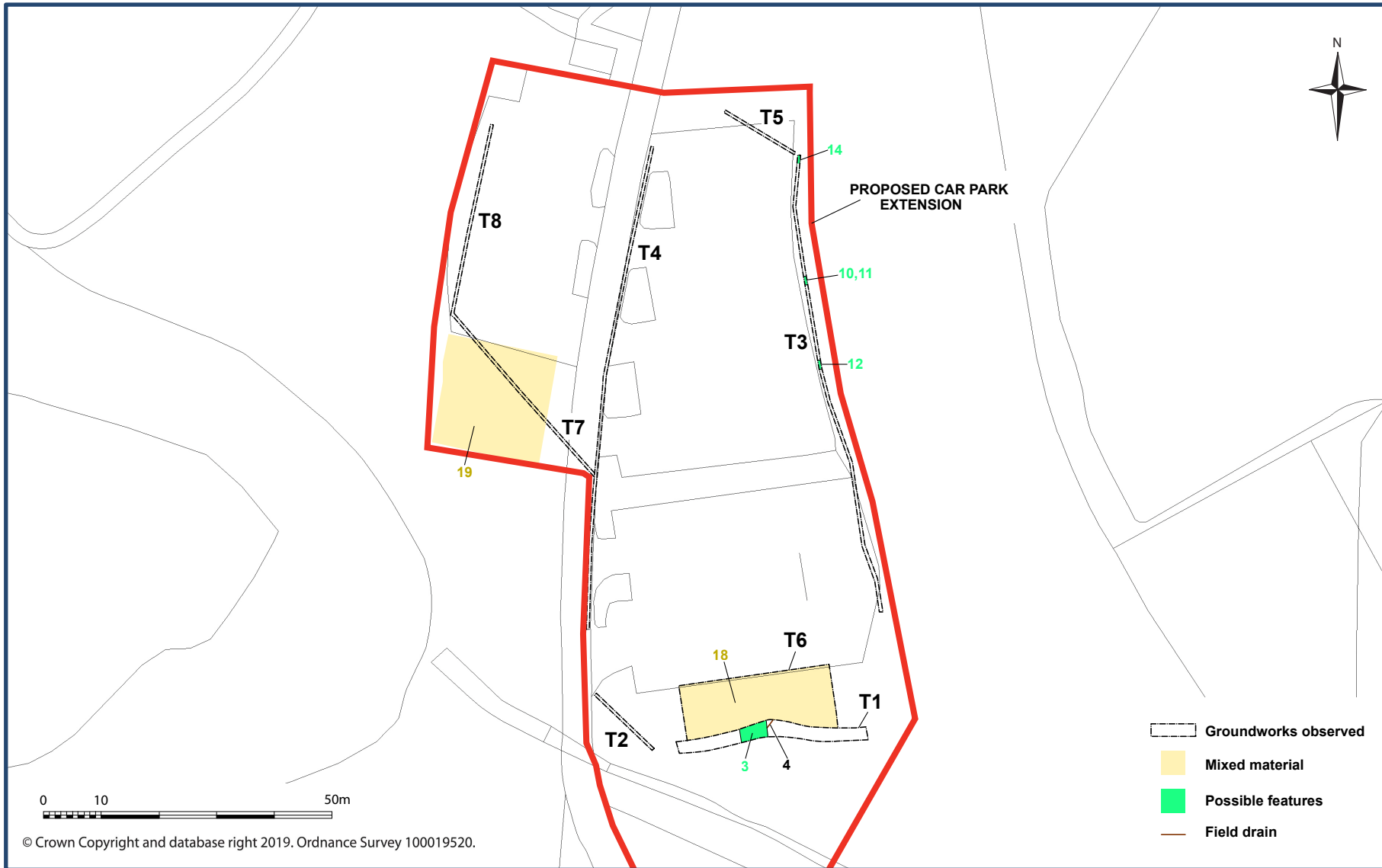


Fig 3: Location of groundworks observed