

**Damson Tree Cottage
34 Birmingham Road, Ansley
Warwickshire**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



EXPERTISE WHERE YOU NEED IT

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 18105

December 2018



*Working for
Warwickshire*

Project: Damson Tree Cottage, 34 Birmingham Road,
Ansley, Warwickshire

Commissioned by: Daniel Swift

Site Code: ABR18

Planning Reference: PAP/2018/0031

Planning Authority: North Warwickshire

National Grid Reference: SP 2967 9170

Project Manager: Caroline Rann MCIfA

Fieldwork: Edwin Pearson BSc, Samuel Hirst BSc

Author: Samuel Hirst BSc and Dr Alexander Portch

Illustrations: Candy Stevens

Checked by: Peter Thompson BA

Approved by: Stuart Palmer MCIfA

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Please address enquiries to: **Stuart C Palmer MCIfA**



Principal Archaeologist & Business Manager
Archaeology Warwickshire

UNIT 9
Montague Road
Warwick

CV34 5LW
01926 412278

01926 412280

stuartpalmer@warwickshire.gov.uk

www.warwickshire.gov.uk/archaeology

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SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation, comprising five trial trenches, was carried out on behalf of Mr Daniel Swift, as a condition of the planning permission secured for the demolition of existing outbuildings and the erection of six additional dwellings.

No archaeological features were observed in any of the trenches despite the site's location in close proximity to the hypothesised extent of the medieval settlement of Ansley. Reconsideration of cartographic evidence and the results of recent fieldwork suggest medieval Ansley was centred instead on the small settlement now known as Church End situated just over half a kilometre to the north.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Outline planning permission has been granted by North Warwickshire Borough Council for the demolition of existing outbuildings and the erection of 6 additional dwellings, including car parking and garages and an additional single garage serving 34 Birmingham Road, with appearance and landscaping reserved (PAP/2018/0031). It was a requirement of planning permission that a programme of archaeological evaluative work be carried out prior to the development, in line with a Written Scheme of Investigation approved by the Planning Authority.
- 1.2 Archaeology Warwickshire were commissioned to undertake an archaeological evaluation to assess the development's potential implications for the historic environment. This work took place on 21st November 2018. The work was carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for field evaluation (2014) and the approved WSI.
- 1.3 Copies of this report will be provided to Historic England and a record will be submitted to OASIS.

2 SITE LOCATION

- 2.1 The application area is centred on National Grid Reference SP 2964 9173 in the village of Ansley, in the parish of the same name. The site is located off Birmingham Road, although slightly set back from the thoroughfare. It is bordered on the north-east and south-east by residential development, and looks out onto farmland to the north-west and south-west.

- 2.2 The underlying bedrock geology of the site is Whitacre Member – mudstone and sandstone which is overlain by glacial deposits belonging to the Thrussington Member - Diamicton (British Geological Survey 2018).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistoric/ Roman /Anglo Saxon

- 3.1 The Warwickshire HER records no entries within the search area relating to these periods. There are no HER entries for the Saxon period within the search area.

Medieval

- 3.2 Despite the lack of Anglo-Saxon evidence, occupation during this period is implied by the pre-Conquest origins of some of the place-names in the area. *Ansley* or *Hanslei* possibly describes a hermitage in a wood or a clearing (VCH 1947). Domesday records it having land for 5 plough teams in 1066 when under Countess Godiva.
- 3.3 The possible extent of the medieval settlement at Ansley has been plotted, based on the extent shown on the Ordnance Survey 1st edition mapping of 1888 (MWA 9489) and is taken to comprise linear development along the present-day Birmingham Road. Greenwood's map of 1822 (C. & J. Greenwood 1822), however, depicts this area as a scatter of houses lining the road north-west out of *Nuthurst Heath*, a place name apparently no longer in use other than for Nuthurst Heath Farm further to the south-east. According to that map, the settlement of Ansley was instead located some 600m to the north in the area now known as *Church End*. Beighton's 1725 Map (Beighton 1730) does not show any settlement features in the vicinity of the site, with the place name Ansley also applied to a settlement in the location of present-day Church End. The evidence from Beighton's map suggests, therefore, that the settlement now known as Ansley is in fact unlikely to have medieval origins.

Post-medieval/ Industrial

- 3.4 Ansley is located within the Warwickshire Coal Field and from around the middle of the 18th century settlements in this area began to expand rapidly. Coal was worked on a small scale in the parish prior to this (VCH 1947). An earthwork, located in fields to the south of the settlement and some 200m south-east of the proposal site (MWA 3936), has been interpreted as having possible medieval origins, although an alternative explanation is that it could have arisen from trial pitting associated with exploratory coal workings. Historic Ordnance Survey maps (Landmark 2003a, b) identify a number of "*old coal pits*" within the wider landscape which also includes working collieries and mineral railways. No evidence of coal mining activity is shown on the proposal site on either the 1888 1st or 1903 2nd County Series editions, or the

1957 National Grid A5 edition (Landmark 2003c) or later aerial photographs viewable on Google Earth however (earth.google.com).

- 3.5 The only other feature recorded in the search area is a non-conformist congregational chapel (MWA 2427) towards the northern end of the settlement.

Map Regression/ Aerial Photographs

- 3.6 The historic Ordnance Survey maps indicate that the application site historically fell under residential use (north-east), and fields (south-west). The 1st edition mapping (Landmark 2003a) shows buildings in the same locations as the two buildings which border the Birmingham Road at the north-eastern end of the site with the area behind them being part of a long narrow field. One of the buildings is identified as *Smithy* on the Ordnance Survey 2nd edition mapping (Landmark 2003b). This basic arrangement is still unchanged on the Ordnance Survey National Grid A5 edition of 1957 (Landmark 2003 c). By the time of the 1999 Google Earth aerial images (earth.google.com) the remainder of the application site had been taken into the garden curtilage of the roadside properties. Vegetable plots and some boundary structures are depicted but otherwise no significant structural features are present.
- 3.7 An aerial photograph of 1948 (Grid Ref: 2991; Sortie: 541-RAF-213; Frame: 4061; Angle: vertical; Date: 08/12/1948; Size: 198x238mm; Format: black & white print) adds to the picture shown on the Ordnance Survey maps with mining trial workings shown in the adjacent field and only 15m to the south-west of the application site.

Previous Archaeological Work in the Vicinity of the Site

- 3.8 There has been little archaeological work in the vicinity of Ansley until recently. Archaeological evaluation on the opposite side of 34 Damson Tree Cottage took place in advance of a housing development in 2016, comprising geophysical survey and trial trenching. The geophysical survey identified no significant archaeological anomalies, the only features found being interpreted as modern in origin (EWA 10541).
- 3.9 A field evaluation undertaken in 2017 by Archaeology Warwickshire (EWA 10588) revealed undated gullies, pits and postholes but no finds although one pit with burnt red clay lining suggested *in-situ* burning.

4 AIMS AND METHODS

- 4.1 The main aim of the evaluation was to determine if there were any significant archaeological remains in the subject area; to form an understanding of their value and their potential to shed light on the subsequent development of the area.
- 4.2 Secondary aims included placing the results in their wider local and regional contexts as appropriate.
- 4.3 The objectives were to locate, record and analyse archaeological materials and deposits and to disseminate the results in an appropriate format.
- 4.4 Five trenches were opened up by a small 360° excavator fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless digging bucket. The trenches were located as specified within the WSI, but with an adjustment to two of the trenches in order to avoid above ground obstructions. Due to these adjustments, 90m of trial trenching was conducted rather than the 100m proposed within the WSI.
- 4.5 Topsoil, former ploughsoils and demonstrably modern overburden were removed under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist until either the uppermost archaeological horizon, or the geological natural was reached.

5 RESULTS

Geological Natural

- 5.1 The geological natural across the whole site was light greyish brown clay (102, 202, 302, 402 and 502) with frequent inclusions of medium to large sub-angular stones. The geological natural was encountered at a depth of 0.4-0.66m below the existing ground surface.

Deposit Sequence

- 5.2 Overlying the geological natural was a layer of light brown silty clay with intrusions of frequent medium to large stones. The proportion of clay within this geological interface became slightly higher in trenches four and five, at the south and south eastern end of the site.
- 5.3 The topsoil across the site was recorded to a depth of 0.2-0.3m and was a dark brown silt with the inclusion of occasional pebbles and infrequent hints of greyish brown silt.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 No significant archaeological deposits or finds were recorded on the site.
- 6.2 The results of this work complement both the findings of a geophysical survey conducted near Damson Tree Cottage in 2016 (EWA 10541) and the small number of undated archaeological features discovered during an evaluation by Archaeology Warwickshire in 2017 (EWA 10588). The latter included linear gullies that were thought to most likely comprise former field boundaries or drainage features, in addition to postholes of probable modern date and a single, isolated pit with evidence for in-situ burning.
- 6.3 Taken together the evidence derived from archaeological investigations in Ansley to date suggest that if any settlement existed in the medieval period it is unlikely to have occurred within the vicinity of Damson Tree Cottage. Similarly it seems improbable that the low level of occupation described in Domesday was concentrated in that area. Given that the place name *Ansley* (or *Hanslei*) refers to a hermitage in a woodland clearing (see above, Section 3), any pre-medieval settlement is likely to have been limited in extent making it difficult to identify its precise location. 18th and 19th century cartographic sources also depict the place name Ansley as being applied to what is now known as Church End, more than half a kilometre north of the site and centred on St Laurence's Church, with the present-day settlement instead comprising part of a place known then as Nuthurst Heath. Consequently, evidence for the settlement referred to in Domesday, and potentially later inhabited in the medieval period, is more likely to be found in Church End and its hinterland. This area has been identified as the possible location for a shrunken medieval settlement (MWA156).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1: Trench 1, facing north east



2: Trench 2, looking south east



3: Trench 3, looking south east



4: Trench 4, looking north west



5: Trench 5, looking north west

APPENDICES

A List of contexts

Trench	Context	Description	Depth (m)	Comment
1	100	Dark brown silt with occasional pebbles	0.20	Topsoil
1	101	Light brown silty clay with frequent medium to large stones	0.20	Geological interface
1	102	Light greyish brown silty clay with very frequent stones		Geological natural
2	200	Dark brown silt with occasional pebbles	0.25	Topsoil
2	201	Light brown silty clay with frequent medium stones	0.35	Subsoil
2	202	Light brown silty clay with very frequent stones		Geological natural
3	300	Dark greyish brown silt with occasional pebbles	0.23	Topsoil
3	301	Brown silty clay with moderate pebbles	0.27	Subsoil
3	302	Light brown clay with frequent stones		Geological natural
4	400	Dark brown silt with very occasional stones	0.30	Topsoil
4	401	Light brown clayey silt with frequent stones	0.36	Subsoil/old ploughsoil
4	402	Light greyish brown silty clay with frequent stones		Geological natural
5	500	Dark brown silt with very occasional small stones	0.2	Topsoil
5	501	Light greyish brown clayey silt with moderate medium stones	0.25	Geological interface
5	502	Light greyish brown silty clay with very frequent stones		Geological natural

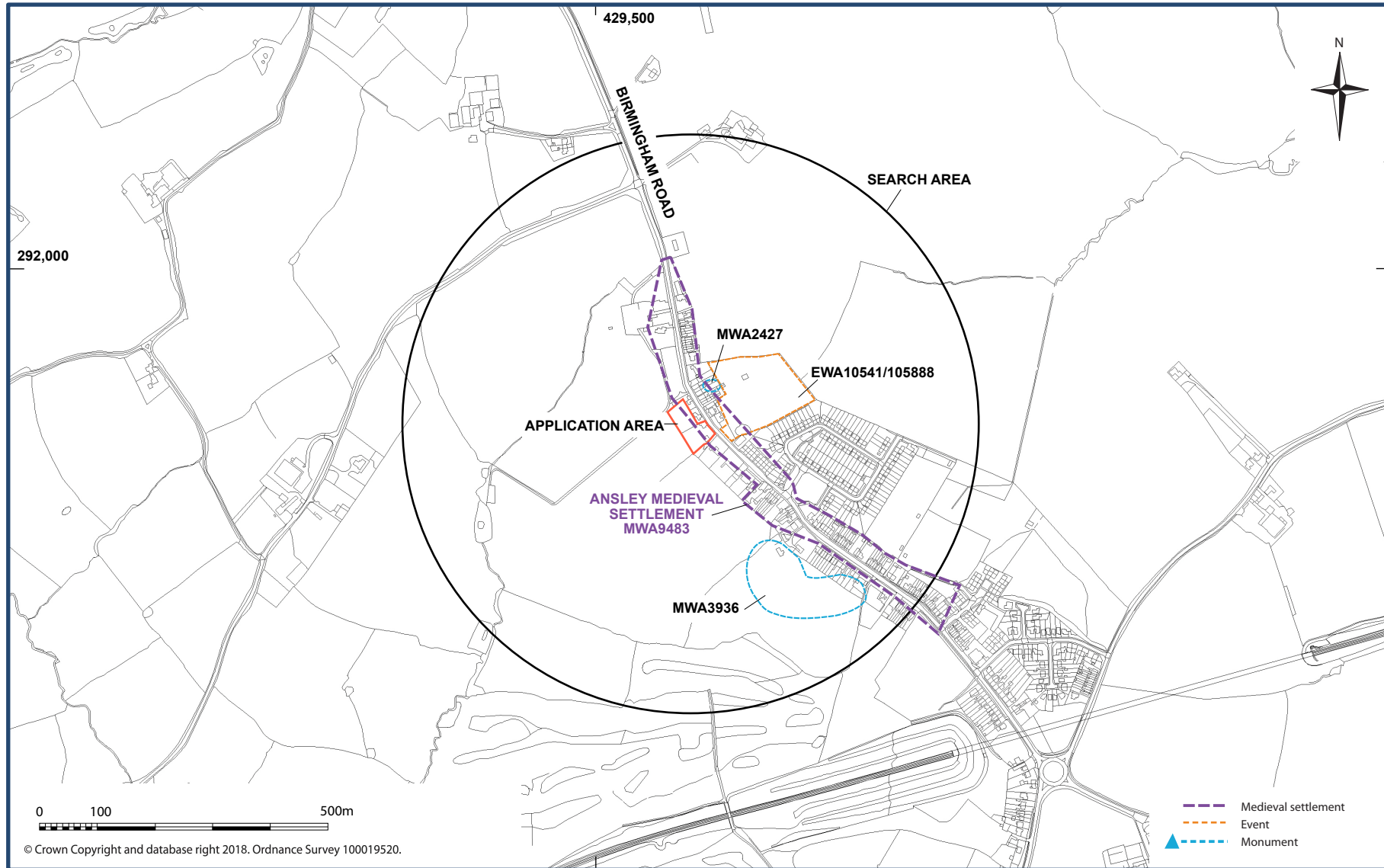


Fig 1: Location of application area and Historic Environment information

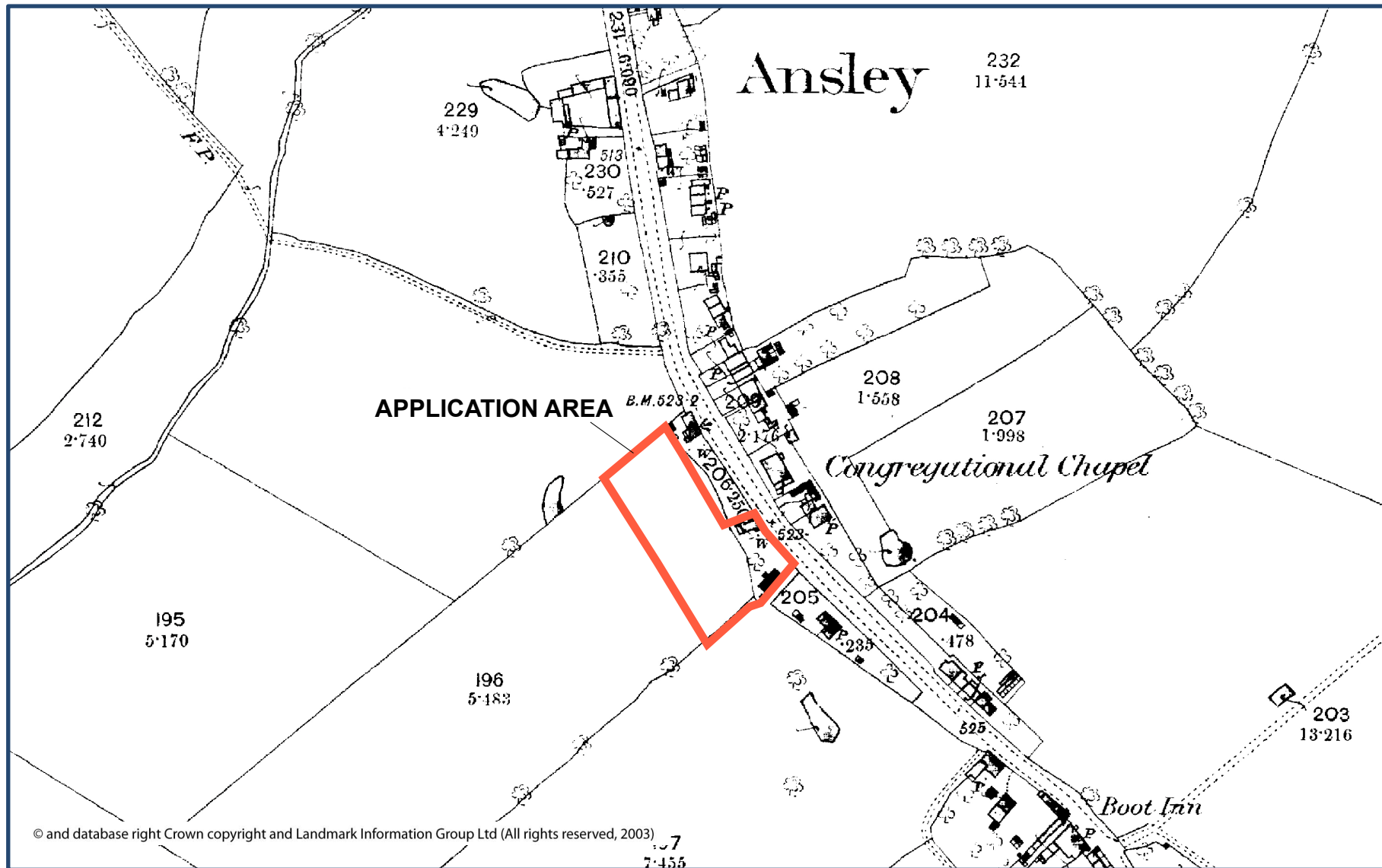


Fig 2: Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1888

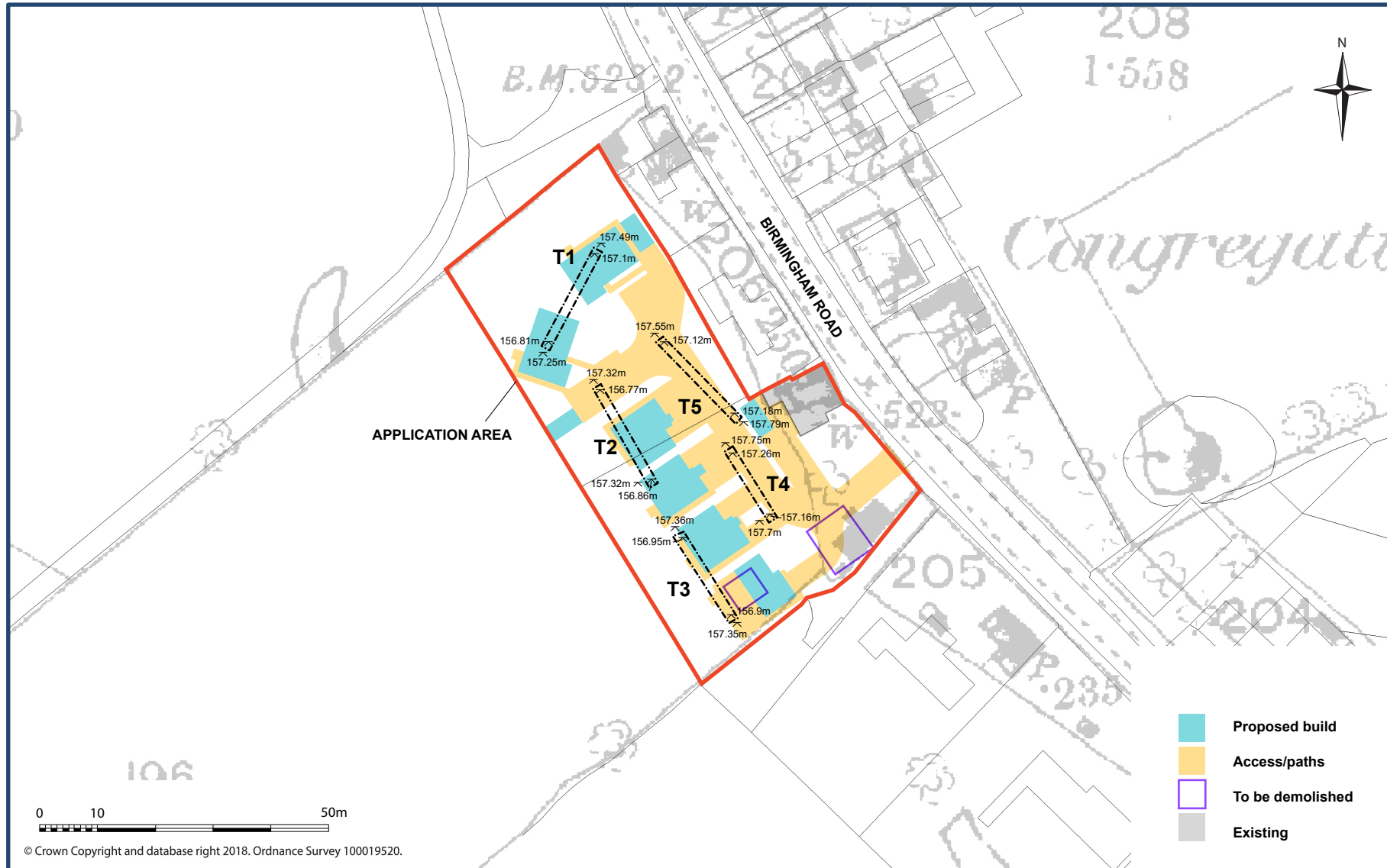


Fig 3: Location of excavated trenches with Ordnance Survey mapping of 1888