

Tower Hill, Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire

Archaeological Evaluation



understanding heritage matters

Report No 1219
May 2012



*Working for
Warwickshire*

Project: Land to east of Bidford Fire Station

Commissioned by: Mr J Mistry of OMI Architects

Project Report No. 1219

Site Code: BF12

NGR: SP 0989 5199

Planning Reference: N/A

Staff:

Project Manager: Stuart Palmer

Fieldwork: Rob Jones, Kevin Wright

Author: Bryn Gethin

Illustrations: Candy Stevens

Report checked by: Stuart Palmer

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Archaeology Warwickshire
Historic and Natural Environment
The Butts
Warwick
CV34 4SS

Tel: 01926 412278
Fax: 01926 412974

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

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation was carried out on land to the rear of Bidford-on-Avon fire station. No significant archaeological deposits were identified and the only finds recovered were occasional fragments of modern brick and tile. The site lies within an area replete with archaeological remains but the present work conforms with the negative results from a site immediately to the east that was evaluated in 1991. The combined results suggest that the area lay to the north of the main focus of Iron Age and Romano-British settlement in the area.

1 Introduction

1.1 A proposal has been formulated to develop land adjacent to the Fire Station, Tower Hill, Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire. The site is located on the north side of Tower Hill and lies in an area of significant archaeological potential. Archaeological remains possibly associated with the prehistoric and Romano-British periods have been found nearby along with an Anglo-Saxon cemetery. A previous archaeological evaluation immediately to the east of the present site revealed no archaeological evidence, although a Romano-British quarry was recorded during excavations along the southern boundary of the site in 1971. It was therefore recommended that a programme of archaeological fieldwork be undertaken to better inform decisions on the future development of the site.

1.2 A brief for an archaeological evaluation was prepared by the County Planning Archaeologist in March 2012 which required the excavation of some 60m of archaeological evaluation trench. A Written Scheme of Investigation was agreed with the County Planning Archaeologist on behalf of the Planning Authority and was commissioned from Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire and carried out in April 2012. This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under the site code BF12.

2 Location

2.1 The development site lies some 200m north of the River Avon at SP 0989 5199 at around 35m aod. The site is currently a small paddock. The underlying geology of the area is 1st Terrace River gravel (British Geological Survey 1974).

3 Methodology

3.1 The principal aim of the project was to form an understanding of any archaeological deposits or materials that could be disturbed or destroyed by any development. Secondary aims include placing the results in their wider local and regional contexts as appropriate.

3.2 The objectives of the evaluation were 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 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 Archaeological and Historical Background

4.1 Bidford-on-Avon is a large village on the north bank of the River Avon. The earliest hint of human activity in the area is a Palaeolithic flint scraper (Warwickshire County Historic Environment Number MWA 6131), found during archaeological excavations of a later period site. Several scatters of flint objects have been picked up in fields around Bidford, often by metal detectorists whilst looking for metal objects. These include MWA 6624, a scatter of Neolithic flint objects and MWA 9323, a possible unfinished flint arrowhead. Other prehistoric features and finds have been made during excavations including MWA 6136 and 12912.

4.2 A Roman settlement at Bidford developed at the point where the major Roman thoroughfare, Ryknild Street (MWA 445), crossed the Avon; evidence for settlement has been found close to the current parish church (see below). There are three probable Roman crossing points of the River Avon. The main one is probably the ford (MWA 591) that crosses to the lane immediately east of the church, which marks the line of Ryknild Street. However, two other fords appear to have existed, one just west of the first (MWA 603) and another just west of the bridge (MWA 604). Numerous Roman metal finds have also been found by metal detectorists in and around Bidford (see list below).

4.3 The Roman occupation was superseded by Anglo-Saxon settlement from at least the 5th century AD. This is largely known from the extensive cemetery (MWA 605) found 110m to the north of the bridge and some archaeological features, associated with Saxon settlement, just to the north-east of this (MWA 6132).

4.4 Medieval Bidford was a relatively large village with some pretensions of becoming a small town. The theoretical outline of the settlement is marked on the Warwickshire County Historic Environment Record (MWA 9031; Fig 1). A large triangular area of housing, immediately north of the medieval parish church of St Laurence (MWA 586), represents a medieval market place that has since become infilled. Just to the south-west of this is the site of a market cross (MWA 585). Bidford bridge (MWA 588) is thought to be early 15th century in date but probably replaces an earlier bridge on the same site.

4.5 The present site is a small paddock to the east of the fire station. It is the last part of a much larger irregular field which is shown on both the First and Second Editions of the Ordnance Survey maps of 1886-7 and 1905 (Figs 2 and 3). The surrounding houses and the adjacent main road were all built between the 1970s and 1990s.

4.6 Two archaeological evaluation trenches were excavated in the eastern half of the field in 1991 (MWA 5758; EWA 845) prior to the proposed building of a new library. This was never actually built but a children's play-area now occupies the site. No archaeological features were found although the soil contained a few sherds of Iron Age, Roman and Medieval pottery.

Numerous other monuments are marked on Fig 1. These are:

- MWA 587 Part of a medieval stone mortar found in garden
- MWA 596 Roman gravel pit
- MWA 599 17th century well
- MWA 602 Four burials found during building work with a date range between the late Iron Age and Mid-Saxon period.
- MWA 606 Skeleton found in 1949 during construction of public toilets
- MWA 2437 Wesleyan chapel
- MWA 4035 Findspot of Neolithic worked flints
- MWA 4036 Findspot of Roman coins and brooches found by metal detectorist
- MWA 4037 Various medieval coins and metal finds found by metal detectorist
- MWA 4038 Various post-medieval metal finds found by metal detectorist
- MWA 4080 Medieval seal found by metal detectorist
- MWA 4863 Excavation of trial trenches in 1976 only found remains of post-medieval buildings and a few medieval features
- MWA 4897 Medieval or early post-medieval bronze mount found by metal detectorist
- MWA 5108 Medieval coin mount found by metal detectorist
- MWA 5109 Post-medieval metal finds found by metal detectorist
- MWA 5607 Medieval ditches, pits and finds
- MWA 6135 Roman metal finds and pottery found by metal detectorist
- MWA 6137 Various medieval metal finds found by metal detectorist
- MWA 6138 Various post-medieval metal finds found by metal detectorist
- MWA 6173 Various flint tools found by metal detectorist
- MWA 6177 A roman cremation burial found during excavations
- MWA 6178 A Roman ditch and pit discovered during excavation
- MWA 6623 Roman metal finds found by metal detectorist
- MWA 7808 A single medieval coin found by metal detectorist
- MWA 7963 A small undated ditch found during archaeological work in 1997
- MWA 8187 An archaeological evaluation in 1998 only found a single sherd of pottery in one small gully
- MWA 8207 Post-medieval farmhouse
- MWA 8217 The probable route of a salt way referred to in a charter of 1016 as 'saelt stret'
- MWA 8269 A Saxon brooch of around the 6th century found by metal detectorist
- MWA 8412 Arch observation during building work
- MWA 8684 A toll road running from Wixford to Chipping Campden
- MWA 9031 Possible extent of medieval settlement
- MWA 9327 An 18th century glass ornament found by metal detectorist
- MWA 9328 A medieval coin found by metal detectorist
- MWA 9350 Site of a late 19th century smithy
- MWA 9789 Four coins from the medieval to post-medieval period found by metal detectorist
- MWA 9790 Two medieval coins found by metal detectorist
- MWA 9796 Two post-medieval coins found by metal detectorist
- MWA 9797 Find of three medieval coins found by metal detectorist
- MWA 9798 Find of an early medieval strap end of the 9th to 11th century by metal detectorist
- MWA 9801 Two medieval coins found by metal detectorist
- MWA 10033 Small Saxon dress fitting found by metal detectorist

- MWA 10177 Brick lined soakaway pit and drain associated with The Old Vicarage found during archaeological monitoring
- MWA 10211 Fragment of Saxon brooch found by metal detectorist
- MWA 10329 Five post-medieval coins, 2 medals and a counter found by metal detectorist
- MWA 12432 Work in 2005 and 2006 to the rear of 25a Grange Road identified a few ditches, postholes and other features associated with the adjacent known Roman settlement

Several pieces of archaeological work are also recorded on Fig 1 with event numbers which are prefixed with EWA. These are:

- EWA 846 An archaeological evaluation in 1990 found no archaeological remains
- EWA 7427 An archaeological evaluation in 1998 found a single gully with a single sherd of Romano-British pottery within it
- EWA 9301 An archaeological evaluation in 2005 found no archaeological remains

5 Evaluation

Trench 1 (Figs 4 and 5)

5.1 Trench 1 was 20m long and 1.6m wide. Geological natural (103) was a firm reddish orange sand and gravel exposed at a depth of 0.9m below the current ground surface. It was overlaid by a layer of yellowish brown sandy loam (102) which was 0.19m deep. This was covered by 0.37m of a layer brown sandy loam (101) which contained very occasional small fragments of modern tile. It was sealed by 0.34m of greyish brown sandy loam topsoil (100) which contained very occasional fragments of modern brick.

Trench 2 (Figs 4 and 6)

5.2 Trench 2 was 20m long and 1.6m wide. Geological natural (203) was a firm reddish orange sand and gravel with occasional clay patches, exposed at a depth of 0.88m below the current ground surface. It was overlaid by a layer of yellowish brown sandy loam (202) which was 0.18m deep. This was covered by 0.40m of a layer brown sandy loam (201) which contained very occasional small fragments of modern tile. It was sealed by 0.30m of greyish brown sandy loam topsoil (200).

Trench 3 (Figs 4 and 7)

5.3 Trench 3 was 20m long and 1.6m wide. Geological natural (303) was a firm reddish orange sand and gravel with occasional clay patches, exposed at a depth of 1.00m below the current ground surface. It was overlaid by a layer of yellowish brown sandy loam (302) which was 0.20m deep. This was covered by 0.40m of a layer brown sandy loam (301) which contained very occasional small fragments of modern tile. It was sealed by 0.40m of greyish brown sandy loam topsoil (300) which again contained very occasional fragments of modern brick.

6 Conclusions

6.1 No significant archaeological features were encountered in the evaluation and no significant finds were recovered. However, of interest is the lowest of the three distinct layers in each of the trenches (102, 202, 302). Given that the top layer can be ascribed to modern ploughing, and the middle layer to medieval ploughing, the bottom layer could then represent a relic soil of prehistoric or Roman date. This hypothesis could accord well with the distribution of known nearby sites (Fig 1) and imply that the area was in cultivation prior to the medieval period. Further work in the surrounding area will be required to see if there is any additional evidence for such a theory.

Acknowledgements

Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire would like to thank Mr J Mistry of OMI Architects for commissioning the work. Work onsite was carried out by Rob Jones and Kevin Wright. This report was written by Bryn Gethin and the project was managed by Stuart Palmer.

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Ordnance Survey 1886-1887 *First Edition 1:2500 map*, Warwickshire Sheet 43.12

Ordnance Survey 1905 *Second Edition 1:2500 map*, Warwickshire Sheet 43.12

Appendix List of Contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comments</i>
100	Topsoil layer	
101	Brown sandy loam	
102	Yellowish brown sandy loam	
103	Geological natural sand and gravel	Natural geology
200	Topsoil layer	
201	Brown sandy loam	
202	Yellowish brown sandy loam	
203	Geological natural sand and gravel	Natural geology
300	Topsoil layer	
301	Brown sandy loam	
302	Yellowish brown sandy loam	
303	Geological natural sand and gravel	Natural geology

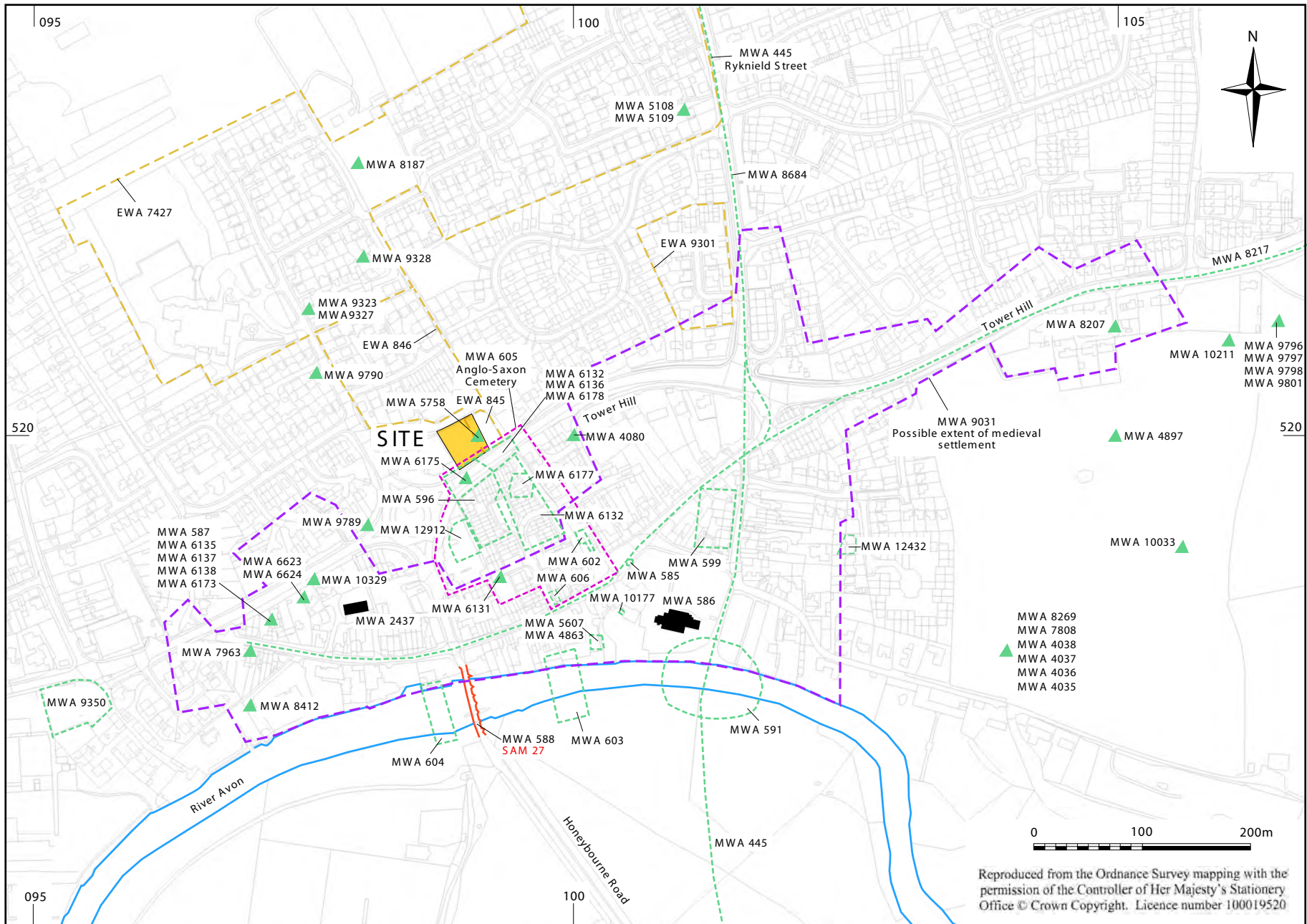


Fig 1: Site location

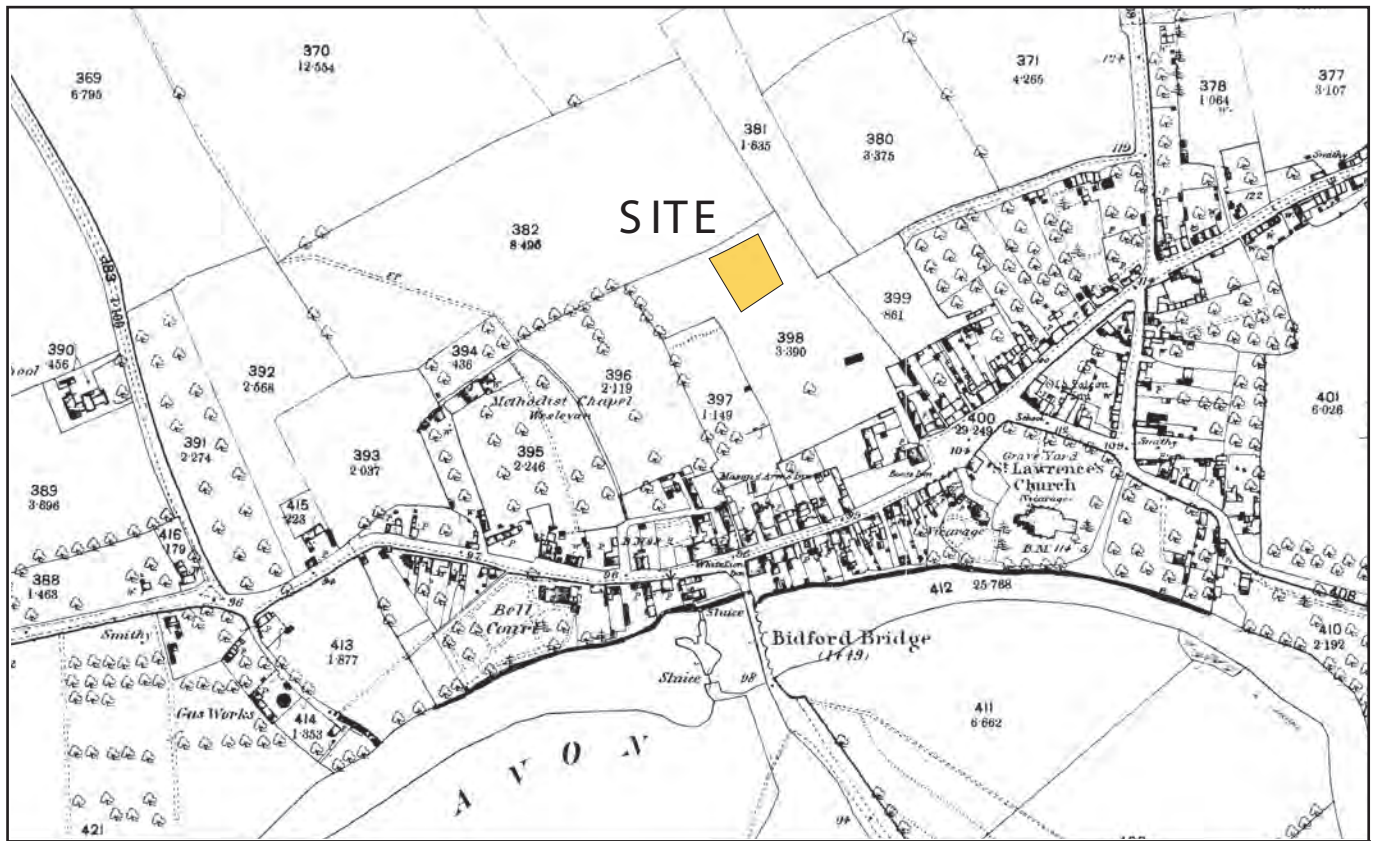


Fig 2: Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1886-1887



Fig 3: Detail from Second Edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1905

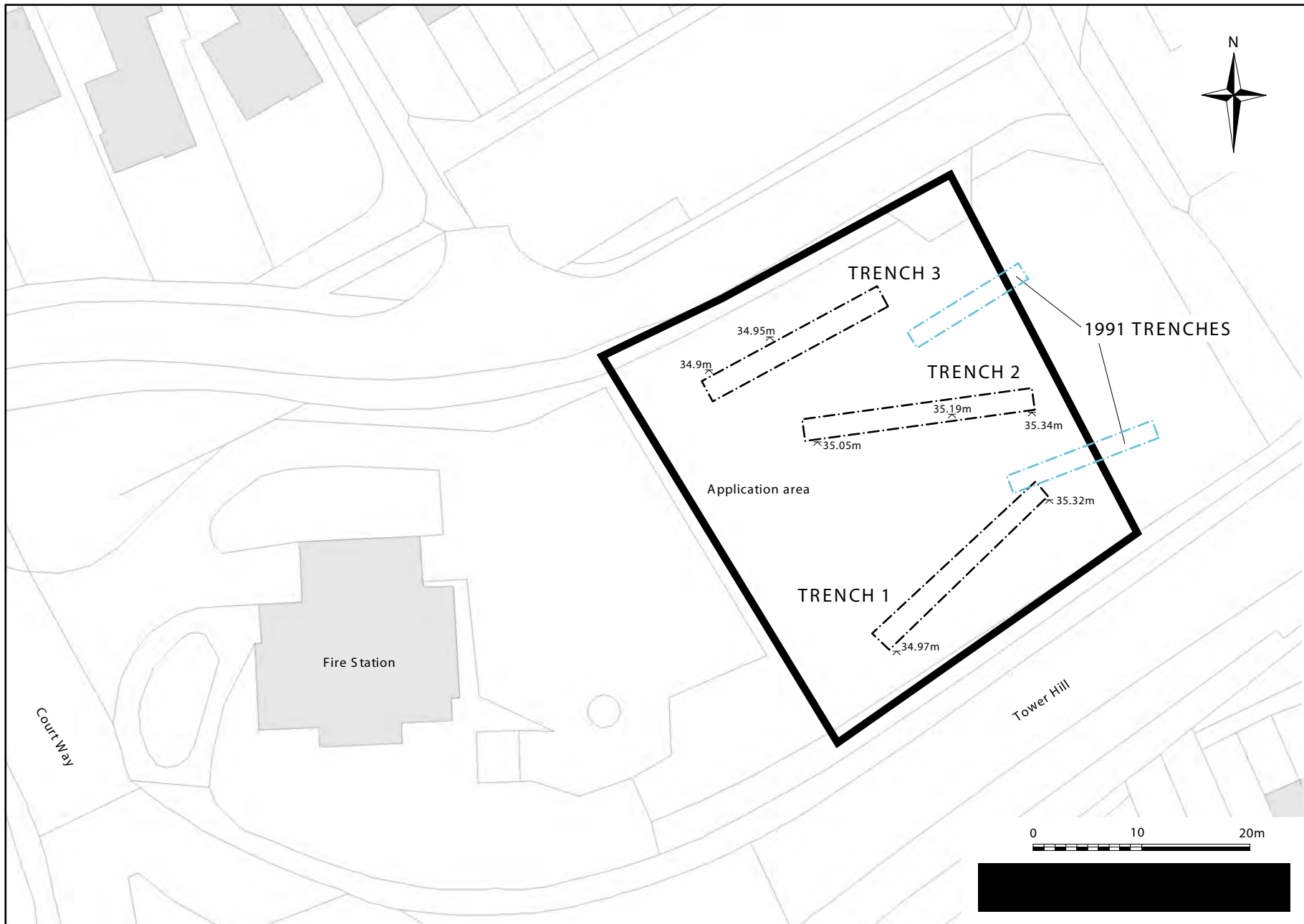


Fig 4: Trench location plan



Fig 5: Trench 1 looking west



Fig 6: Trench 2 looking west



Fig 7: Trench 3 looking north-east