

RSC Garden Theatre Waterside, Stratford upon Avon Warwickshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



EXPERTISE WHERE YOU NEED IT

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 2143

May 2021



*Working for
Warwickshire*

Project: RSC Garden Theatre
Commissioned by: Greenwood Planning, on behalf of Royal Shakespeare Company
Planning Ref 21/01311/FUL
HER Search Ref/Site code: 21/126, SR21
National Grid Reference: SP 20290 54672
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Date: May 2021
Report reference: Jones, M, 2021 RSC Garden Theatre, Waterside, Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire: *Archaeological Evaluation*, Archaeology Warwickshire Report 2143

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SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was carried out for Greenwood Planning on behalf of Royal Shakespeare Company in advance of the construction of a new temporary outdoor theatre at RSC Garden Theatre. The riverside site is within an area of archaeological potential as Stratford upon Avon has been settled since at least the Anglo Saxon period.

The evaluation established that modern deposits of made ground lie across the site which will effectively protect any archaeological remains that may lie beneath.

Archaeology Warwickshire therefore recommend that no mitigation work is necessary.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Planning permission has been sought from Stratford-on-Avon District Council for a temporary outdoor theatre and permanent new bound gravel surfacing for the riverside walk at RSC Garden Theatre, Waterside, Stratford-upon-Avon.
- 1.2 Archaeology Warwickshire were commissioned to undertake an archaeological evaluation in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (Bradbury 2021) on behalf of Greenwood Planning on for the Royal Shakespeare Company, which took place on the 18th May 2021.
- 1.3 The proposed works consisted of 2 x 20m trenches.
- 1.4 This report presents the results of that work. The archive will be stored at Warwickshire Museum under the site code SR21.
- 1.5 This work was carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Standard and guidance for field evaluation (2020).

2 SITE LOCATION

- 2.1 The site is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) SP 20290 54672 in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the parish of the same name. The site is located in Swan Gardens, to the south of Swan Theatre, on the eastern side of Waterside and to the west of the River Avon.

- 2.2 The British Geological Society (BGS 2021) records the underlying bedrock geology of the site as Mercia Mudstone Group – Mudstone, a sedimentary bedrock formed during the Triassic period. Alluvium, a clay, silt, sand and gravel, is recorded in the western part of the site in proximity to the River Avon.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 The site lies roughly central to the Stratford-upon-Avon Conservation Area and in proximity to a number of Listed Buildings. In total there are 49 Listed Buildings within the study area (41 Grade II, five Grade II* and three Grade I). Notably, the Grade II* Listed late 19th century *Royal Shakespeare Theatre* (National Heritage List for England no. 1207396) and the Grade II Listed *Gateway to the south west of the Swan Theatre* (NHLE: 1187869) are situated to the north of the site, and the Grade II Listed *Arden Hotel* (NHLE: 1279760) and *51, Waterside* (NHLE: 1187868). The Registered Park and Garden *Shakespeare's Garden, New Place* (NHLE: 1001192) lies c.95m to the north-west of the site.

Previous archaeological investigations

3.2 No intrusive archaeological investigations are recorded within the site, although a site visit was carried out in c.1996 to Bancroft Gardens (EWA 6614).

3.3 Several archaeological interventions are recorded in the vicinity of the site. Directly to the north an archaeological evaluation and watching brief were undertaken between 2007 and 2008 (Pole 2008). No significant archaeological finds or features were identified and made ground deposits of redeposited alluvium interpreted as the backfilling of the facilities for the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal were present across an area wider than that of the canal basin on the 1889 OS Map. Burnt deposits and walls relating to the memorial theatre were also present.

Prehistoric

3.4 Stratford-upon-Avon lies on a gravel terrace within a loop of the River Avon. There is considerable evidence for occupation along the river valley from prehistoric times onwards and many archaeological sites have been recorded along it, mostly as cropmarks. Prehistoric evidence within the town itself is scant and mainly comprises chance finds.

3.5 A prehistoric flint artefact was found during archaeological work in Henley Street (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record no. MWA 8718) and a series of Iron Age pits and a ditch were recorded at New Place between 2009 and 2012 (MWA 13516, EWA 10092, EWA 10172, EWA 10173, EWA 10175).

- 3.6 A ford recorded approximately 200m to the NE of the site (MWA 1066) may have been in use in the prehistoric period.

Roman

- 3.7 The Roman road known now as the Saltway (MWA 4757) passes close by the site, but there is very little indication of contemporary occupation in the area (MWA 5911) although a large Roman settlement lies to the west of Tiddington village (Morton 2015).

Medieval

- 3.8 The name Stratford incorporates the Old English *straet* meaning street, *ford* indicating a shallow crossing and *avon* meaning river in Celtic. The site lies outside the possible extent of the 'Old Town' of Stratford which developed around the 8th-century minster, opposite the area which was to become the medieval town (MWA 13319).
- 3.9 In 1196 the town was granted a charter for the creation of a borough by the Bishop of Worcester, and the planned street pattern was developed. This medieval 'new' town of Stratford (MWA 9582) is characterised by uniform burgage plots, while those in the Old Town were less constrained and were more expansive (Bearman 1988). Waterside Street, formerly known as Swine Street, is part of the original grid but the land on its east side, alongside the river and including the site, was most probably common grazing land in the medieval period. No medieval features or finds were identified in the evaluation or watching brief undertaken directly to the north of the site (Pole 2008).
- 3.10 A number of archaeological interventions have been undertaken west of Waterside. An archaeological evaluation (EWA 9277) undertaken c.40m north-west of the site identified a shallow ditch of possible medieval date and several later postholes. An archaeological observation at 10/11 Sheep Street, 140m north-east of the site (EWA 6992) recorded medieval layers containing 13th and 14th century pottery (MWA 8921), alongside post-medieval features (MWA 8922) and fieldwork nearby at 41/42 Sheep Street approximately 170m north of the site (EWA 6994) recovered evidence for medieval and post-medieval pits.
- 3.11 Medieval buildings within the study area include the Guild Chapel of the Holy Cross (MWA 1019; NHLE: 1204554). Some of the original 13th century structure survives. Located nearby on Church Street is King Edwards VI Grammar School (MWA 9205;

NHLE: 1187780), dating from 1417 this building was originally the medieval guildhall (MWA 7173). A building known as the Pedagogue's House (MWA 12609; NHLE: 1298548) is also located nearby. This was also part of the school and was built in c.1503.

- 3.12 The site of New Place, as recorded in documentary sources lies 150m to the west of the site (MWA 13514; EWA 10172). The timber- framed building was constructed in 1483 and was purchased by Shakespeare in 1597, who lived there until his death in 1616.

Post-medieval and modern

- 3.13 A number of timber-framed buildings of 16th-17th century date survive within the town. Several timber framed houses exist along the Waterside, mostly dating around the 1600s (MWA 19136; MWA 30378; NHLE: 1298511/12/13, 1187853, 1187865, 1187866). Nearly all these buildings have been re-fronted in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- 3.14 The Stratford-upon-Avon Canal opened in 1816 and Bankcroft – a marshy undeveloped area to the west of the River Avon and the canal junction was repurposed as a canal wharf (MWA4339) in an area around 50m to the north of the site. There were two basins which were connected by a channel. A watching brief undertaken c.100m north of the site (EWA 9182) identified evidence for the construction and use of the canal basin. The investigations undertaken directly to the north of the site (Pole 2008) revealed several large deposits of alluvial clay across which appeared to derive from the canal. These deposits were present in areas wider than that of the canal basin as identified in the historic cartographic sources.
- 3.15 From the 1760s the works of Shakespeare began to be regularly performed at Stratford. In 1874, an area to the south of the canal basin was donated for the erection of the first Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. The earliest section of the present Royal Shakespeare Theatre (MWA 30376) was constructed in 1877-9, with additions including the Swan Theatre in 1881. The First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886 (FigLandmark 2003a, Fig 2) depicts the site as an undeveloped parcel of land to the south of theatre.

- 3.16 Bancroft Gardens (MWA 8530), a landscaped public park, laid out with lawn and garden, was opened in 1887. Subsequently part of Bancroft Basin was infilled in 1901 to form part of the garden. They encompassed a large area triangular between Waterside and the River Avon and included the area of the site. The Second Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1905 (Landmark 2003b) depicts the site as largely unchanged although a monument is depicted in its far northern extent and paths bound it to the east and west. The monument and paths were extant on the 1914 Ordnance Survey map (Landmark 2003c).
- 3.17 A fire in 1926 destroyed large parts of the auditorium of the original Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. During the investigations to the north of the site (Pole 2008) several burnt deposits and a series of brick walls were identified which related to the sections destroyed by fire. The theatre subsequently had additions in 1928-32, and later in 1984-6 and 2005-11. The Ordnance Survey map of 1966 (Landmark 2003d) no longer depicts the monument but the site is labelled as 'Theatre Garden' with a path only along its eastern extent which curves westwards to meet the theatre in the north. The site has remained undeveloped since this date.

4 AIMS AND METHODS

- 4.1 The main aim of the evaluation was to determine if there are any significant archaeological remains in the area to be developed; to form an understanding of their value and their potential to shed light on the subsequent development of the area.
- 4.2 The objectives were to locate, record and analyse archaeological materials and deposits and to disseminate the results in an appropriate format.
- 4.3 The area was evaluated by means of 2 x 20m long trial trenches (Fig 3). One of the trenches had to be shortened due to the presence of live electricity cables.
- 4.4 Topsoil, former ploughsoils and demonstrably modern overburden were removed by an appropriate machine using a toothless bucket under direct archaeological supervision. Ground reduction was carried out in shallow spits until the uppermost archaeological horizon, or the geological natural was reached (whichever the higher).

5 RESULTS

Geological Natural

- 5.1 Geological natural was only reached at the northern end of Trench 1 (102) within a c.4.0m wide machine excavated sondage. The geological natural consisted of reddish-brown clay and degraded mudstone, exposed at a depth of 1.75m below the current ground surface. Other sondages were machine excavated at the ends of each trench but were abandoned due to the depth exceeding safety limits (ranging between 1.75-1.95m+ below the current ground surface).

Deposit Sequence

- 5.2 Where visible the natural geology was directly overlain by deposits of modern made ground (101 & 201) consisting of mixed lenses of brick/ tile rubble and ashy/ mortar-rich deposits. This made ground was overlain by topsoil (100 & 200).

Archaeological Features and Deposits

- 5.3 No archaeologically significant features or deposits were recorded in the trenches. However, given that geological natural was not observed within large parts of the site, it is possible that archaeologically significant features may survive below the c.1.5-1.8m+ deep deposit of made ground.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 No significant archaeological deposits or finds were recorded in the trenches.
- 6.2 The deposits of made ground encountered in the trenches likely relate to the demolition and subsequent disposal of material from the former Memorial Theatre in 1926. These demolition deposits were used as made ground to create an even level surface for the Swan Gardens.
- 6.3 Given the fact that the geological natural was only observed in one place, there is the potential that archaeologically significant features or deposits could survive beneath the made ground deposits.

Recommendations

- 6.4 The evaluation has established that significant archaeological remains will not be negatively impacted by the proposed works. The works involve the replacement of c. 400mm of the made ground with gravel in order to form a stable surface. Given the considerable depth of the made ground deposits (minimum of 1.35m) this will allow for adequate protection of any deposits that may survive beneath. Archaeology Warwickshire therefore recommend that no mitigation work is necessary.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeology Warwickshire would like to thank Greenwood Planning and Ben Ranner from the RSC for commissioning the work and Edward Brain Plant Hire for providing the excavator and operator.

REFERENCES

Bradbury, F. 2021 RSC Garden Theatre, Waterside, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire:
Written Scheme of Investigation for Trial Trenching.



1: Site, view north



2: Trench 1, view north



3: Trench 1 sondage, view west



4: Trench 2, view south

APPENDICES

A List of contexts

Trench	Context	Description	Depth (m) or height AOD	Comment
1	100	Dark greyish- brown sandy silt	0.3m	Topsoil
1	101	Made ground	1.35m	Made ground
1	102	Reddish- brown mudstone	35.64mOD	Geological natural
2	200	Dark greyish- brown sandy silt	0.3m	Topsoil
2	201	Made ground	1.5m	Made ground
2	202	Reddish- brown mudstone	35.45mOD	Geological natural

Summary for archaeol27-501814

OASIS ID (UID)	archaeol27-501814
Project Name	RSC Garden Theatre, Waterside, Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire: Archaeological Evaluation
Activity type	Evaluation
Project Identifier(s)	SR21 RSC Garden theatre
Planning Id	21/01311/FUL
Reason For Investigation	Planning: Between application and determination
Organisation Responsible for work	Archaeology Warwickshire
Project Dates	18-May-2021 - 18-May-2021
Location	RSC garden theatre NGR : SP 20290 54672 LL : 52.1899206144833, - 1.7046134619048 12 Fig : 420290,254672
Administrative Areas	Country : England County : Warwickshire District : Stratford-on-Avon District Parish : Stratford-upon-Avon
Project Methodology	An archaeological evaluation was carried out for Greenwood Planning on behalf of Royal Shakespeare Company in advance of the construction of a new temporary outdoor theatre at RSC Garden Theatre. The riverside site is within an area of archaeological potential as Stratford upon Avon has been settled since at least the Anglo Saxon period. This work was carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Standard and guidance for field evaluation (2020).

Project Results	<p>No significant archaeological deposits or finds were recorded in the trenches.</p> <p>The deposits of made ground encountered in the trenches likely relate to the demolition and subsequent disposal of material from the former Memorial Theatre in 1926. These demolition deposits were used as made ground to create an even level surface for the Swan Gardens.</p> <p>Given the fact that the geological natural was only observed in one place, there is the potential that archaeologically significant features or deposits could survive beneath the made ground deposits.</p> <p>The evaluation has established that significant archaeological remains will not be negatively impacted by the proposed works. The works involve the replacement of c. 400mm of the made ground with gravel in order to form a stable surface. Given the considerable depth of the made ground deposits (minimum of 1.35m) this will allow for adequate protection of any deposits that may survive beneath. Archaeology Warwickshire therefore recommend that no mitigation work is necessary.</p>
Keywords	
HER	Warwickshire HER - unRev - STANDARD
HER Identifiers	
Archives	PAPER, DIGITAL - to be deposited with Warwickshire Museum

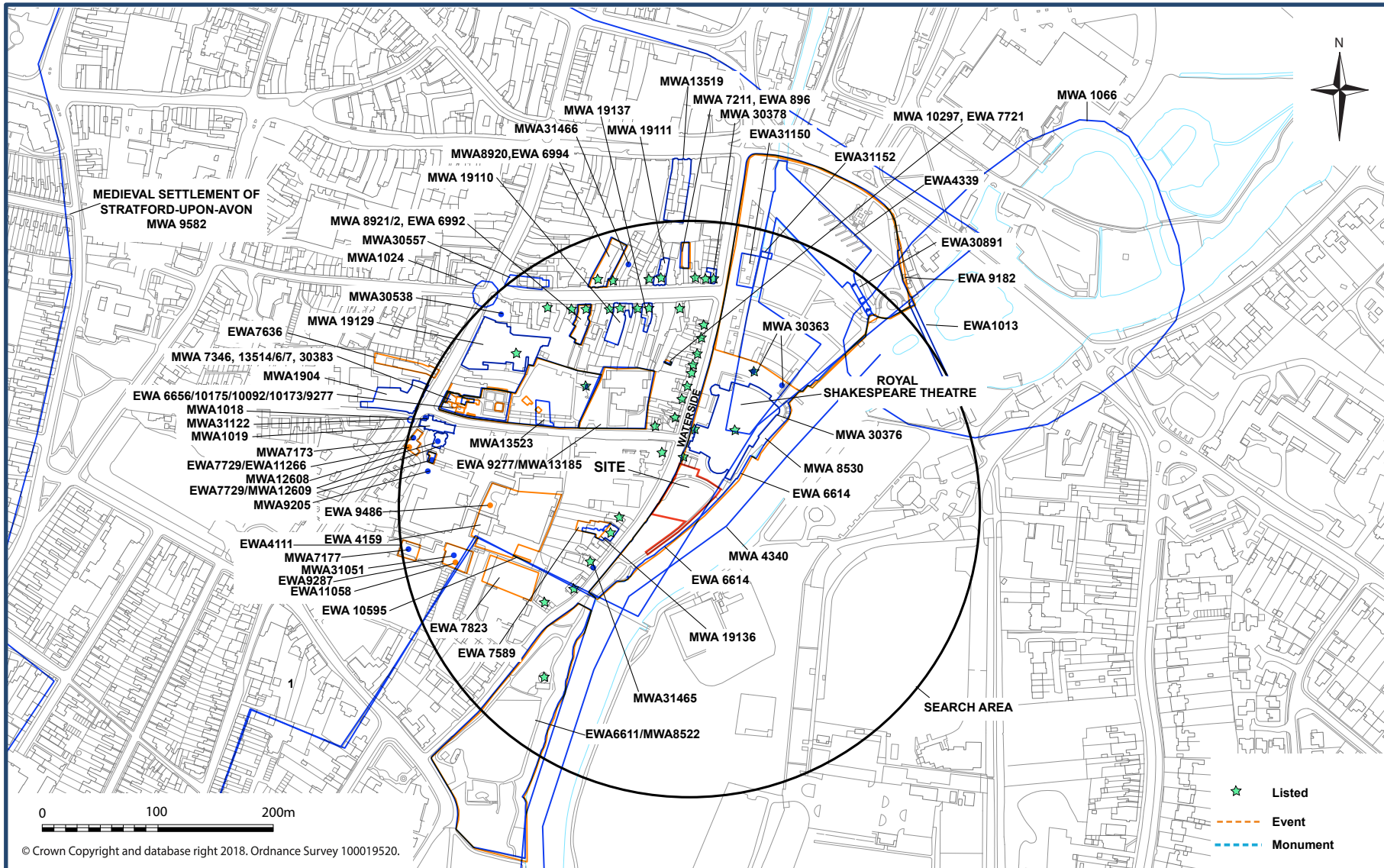


Fig 1: Location of site and Historic Environment information

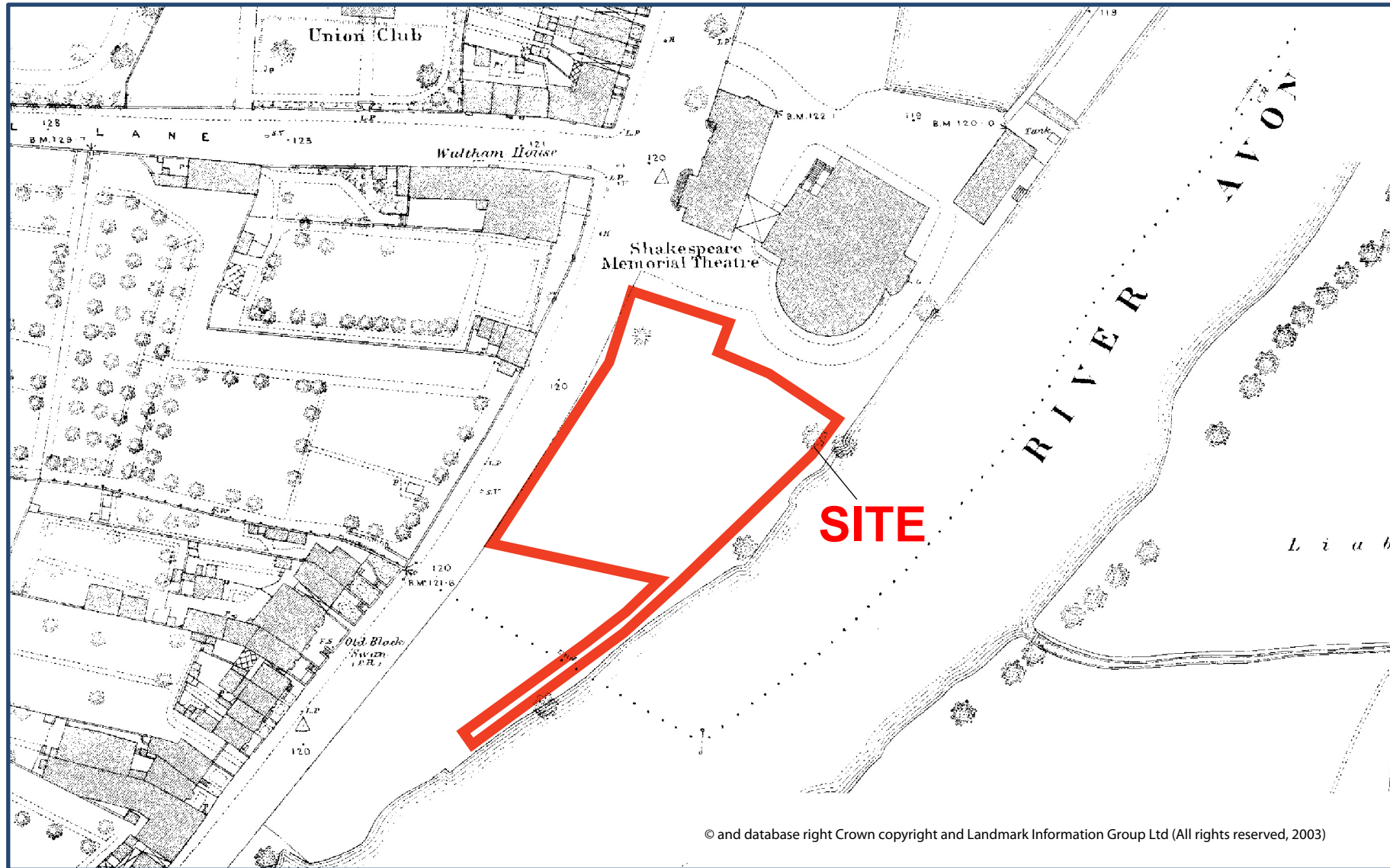


Fig 2: Detail from 1:500 Stratford Town Map of 1888

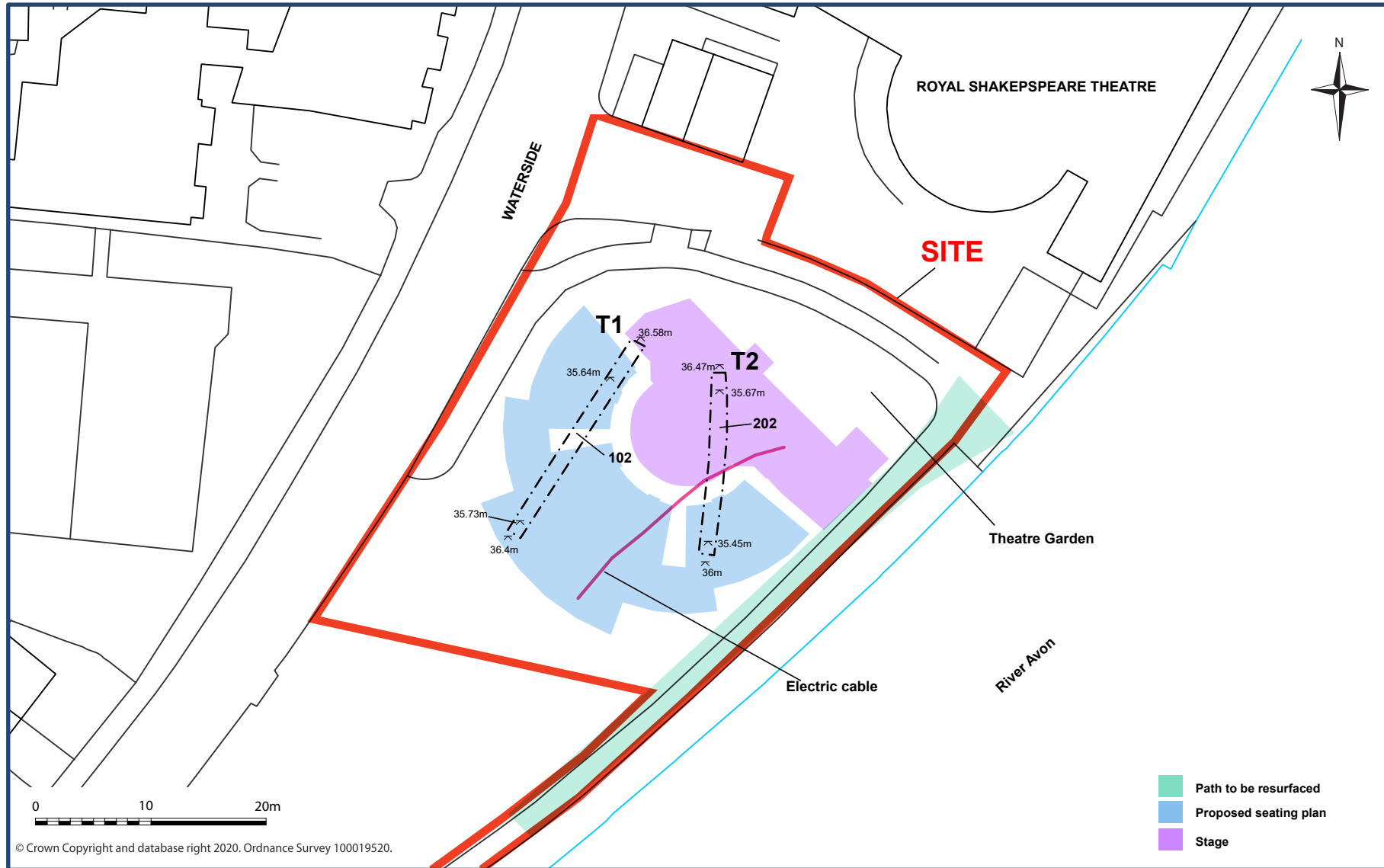


Fig 3: Location of excavated trenches