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**The Corinium, Cirencester:
An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment**

B.U.F.A.U.



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by
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For further information please contact:
Simon Buteux, Iain Ferris or Gwilym Hughes (Directors)
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 5513
Fax: 0121 414 5516
E-Mail: BUFAU@bham.ac.uk
Web Address: <http://www.bufau.bham.ac.uk>

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Summary

An archaeological desk-based assessment was carried out to inform proposals for a retail development in the Brewery Car Park area of Cirencester (centred on NGR SP 0210 0190). A considerable number of archaeological observations have been made on, and in, the immediate vicinity of the proposed development site: some during area excavations, some for test pits and trial trenches, and the remainder watching briefs and salvage recording.

There is a considerable variation in the depth of archaeological stratigraphy across the study area. This ranges from a thickness of 2m to 4.6m from the present ground level to the natural gravel. Roman levels are generally more deeply buried in the north and east of the study area, occupying the lower 1-2 metres, with a thick band of as much as 1.5m to 2m of dark soil of medieval and post-medieval date above, and an upper level of recent archaeology directly below the modern surface. In the south and west of the study area, the build-up of post-Roman material is generally much shallower, with Roman stratigraphy lying 0.5m to 1m below the modern surface. The post-Roman dark earth deposits encountered over much of the study area do not appear to be present in the southern part at all.

The study area occupies part of the northwestern quarter of the Roman town, and includes the town defences and a small area beyond the defences. It probably contains one complete *insula* and parts of five others, where buildings would have fronted onto inter-*insulae* streets aligned southwest-northeast and northwest-southeast. Watching briefs suggest an initial phase of Roman gravel quarrying, sealed by a deep layer of silts. These could not be differentiated in the watching briefs but may mark successive Roman timber building phases. Above these silts are the remains of mortared stone walls of Roman buildings with successive room floors sealed beneath destruction layers. Evidence for the town defences survives in the form of rampart deposits, robber trenches and intact sections of the town wall. There is little evidence for the nature of the medieval layers although the north and east of the study area lie in the area of the proposed early medieval settlement. There is also a suggestion that a bailey of the medieval castle extended into the study area. Post-medieval archaeology is represented principally by rubbish pits and dumps, cess-pits, and wells to the rear of properties fronting Castle Street and Cricklade Street, and the remains of a pond at the corner of Sheep Street.

All the evidence suggests that, apart from the area outside the town defences, Roman deposits are likely to be found across most of the study area, with areas of localised disturbance. The upper post-Roman levels appear to be highly disturbed where modern development has occurred.

The report suggests that archaeological considerations should be integral to any development design. Should the current development scheme proceed, more detailed assessment and field evaluation will inform the next stage of the work. Following this, mitigation strategies are likely to involve a mixture of preservation *in situ* and preservation by record (including excavation, salvage recording and watching briefs).

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

This desk-based study of the Brewery Car Park area of Cirencester (centred on NGR SP 0210 0190) was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in August 1999. The project was commissioned by Raglan Estates plc to provide information on the archaeological implications of initial proposals for a retail development called 'The Corinium'. The proposals are at an early, 'design intent', stage and as yet the plans are indicative only. This study aims to provide up-to-date information on the levels of archaeological survival across the development area in order to ensure that archaeological concerns form an integrated part of the initial proposals and any consequent development. The report is an enhanced, revised and updated version of a study carried out by BUFAU in 1996 (Ellis 1996) for previous, smaller-scale development proposals, and draws on the earlier text for the central part of the study area.

The study adheres to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-based Assessments* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 1994).

In Section 2, previous archaeological work on and near the development area is listed and described. Several of the sites are fully dealt with by Darvill (1988); subsequent work is described in more detail. This information is then collated in Section 3 and an assessment is made of the depth and survival of deposits likely to be encountered on the site. In Section 4 the archaeological potential is examined in different periods. Section 5 looks briefly at the development impact, suggests possible mitigation strategies, and draws attention to the nature of previous archaeological responses. Section 6 outlines the planning constraints for the study area and finally in Section 7 recommendations for further work are put forward.

1.2 The Site (figs. 1-3)

The study area consists of two blocks of land, one to the east of Sheep Street, bounded by Castle Street, Cricklade Street, Sheep Street and Ashcroft Road and the other to the west of Sheep Street, bounded by Sheep Street, Tetbury Road, Hammond Way and the road linking the latter two. This encompasses the area covered by the development proposals and some additional land, mainly to the south and west, to ensure that all relevant information in the vicinity of the development area is taken into consideration. The study area contains a mix of retail, office and residential buildings, together with surface car parking, paved pedestrian areas and the Cirencester Bowling Club Green in the southeast. The hospital site is a public car park, as is the old Railway Station site. In the centre of the site to the east of Sheep Street is the Tesco supermarket building erected in the 1970s. The majority of the land within the study area lies between 109.7m and 112.6 Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The ground surface to the west of Sheep Street is generally higher than that to the east, although it rises again slightly towards the northeast corner of the study area.

1.3 Scope of Work

No brief was set for the study, and its scope has therefore been decided in the light of the available documentation. This is considerable. The study has been based on two key documents: i) 'Cirencester Town Centre Development. Stage 1 Archaeological Assessment' - a report analysing the archaeology of the proposed Brewery Car Park development (Darvill 1988), and ii) 'Cirencester: Town and Landscape' - the published results of a systematic archaeological survey, the Cirencester Urban Assessment (Darvill and Gerrard 1994).

The documentation on which both these is based is held by the Corinium Museum, and the database incorporates Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) data, Cirencester Excavation Committee records, and additional primary and secondary sources. Work since 1992, the cut off date for the urban assessment, has been added to the archive which also includes detailed archives for the Brewery Car Park area since 1988. Both the Corinium Museum documentation, which represents the core database for Cirencester archaeology, and the Gloucestershire County SMR were consulted. Recent volumes of the journals 'Britannia' and the 'Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society', which record archaeological work annually, have been checked. The most recent published source, Cirencester Excavations Volume V (Holbrook 1998), has also been consulted. This volume concentrates on the results of previously-unpublished excavations which yielded information on the town defences, public buildings and shops, including recent excavations, evaluations and observations undertaken by the Cotswold Archaeological Trust. The present study has focused particularly on the archaeological interventions in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development.

No original historical or documentary research has been undertaken. Much of the relevant material was consulted for the Brewery Car Park development (Darvill 1988) and a repetition of this work was not felt to be appropriate at this stage. A closer examination of the documentary evidence focused solely on the proposed development site may be necessary at a later stage of the archaeological programme, particularly for the area to the west of Sheep Street. However, there is sufficient evidence in Darvill 1988 for the purposes of this report. Ordnance Survey maps have been inspected back to the first edition of 1875.

It should be noted that there are numerous standing buildings of historical interest within the study area. However, assessment of these buildings merits separate treatment and falls outside the scope of this study.

The importance of archaeology in Cirencester, the process of planning the archaeological dimension of a development, the legal constraints, and mitigation strategies are discussed in detail by Darvill and Gerrard (1994, Part IV) and are therefore not repeated in this study, beyond outlining planning constraints and recommending mitigation strategies specifically for the area of the proposed development (sections 6 and 7).

1.4 Geology

The underlying geology is known to be quaternary gravels deposited in a series of

terraces by the River Churn. The gravel, sometimes capped by alluvial clay deposits, is as much as 9m thick and overlies sands and clays of the Kellaway Beds which, in turn, rest on limestone (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, 29). To the west, along Sheep Street, gravels give way to clay and limestone Forest Marble Beds (Darvill 1988, 6).

1.5 Summary of Archaeological Deposit Types

Archaeological observations in the vicinity of the study area have shown that the gravel was quarried in places in the Roman period. Where this had not occurred a buried turf line was recorded (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, 29). Above the gravel was evidence of *in situ* Roman buildings, floors, destruction levels and dumps up to 2.7m deep. The deposits initially consisted of 1st- and early 2nd-century timber buildings, represented by bands of silts, clay and gravel floors. Later these were replaced by stone-walled buildings. These levels were then sealed by dark earth deposits and disturbed material of medieval and post-medieval date lying beneath walls, rubbish pits and other features of 19th and 20th-century date. The dark earth deposits were often at least 1.5m deep, giving a total depth of more than 4m in places.

1.6 Roman, Medieval and Post-medieval Background

There is little recorded evidence of prehistoric activity within the study area. Late Iron Age pottery was recovered from the Mycalex Factory site, and a flint waste flake was recovered from Test Pit 3 during an evaluation in 1989 (section 2.2.1, sites L and G respectively).

The Roman *civitas* capital of *Corinium Dobunnorum* (fig. 2) was built on the site of a Roman fort and its associated civilian settlement or *vicus*. The fort was located in the area between Victoria Road and Watermoor Road, with the *vicus* to the northwest. Although the precise extent of the *vicus* is not known, timber buildings identified from sites within the study area may be associated with it. Initial timber-framed buildings were replaced from the 2nd century AD by stone buildings. The town was surrounded by defences, within which was a grid of metalled streets (Wacher 1995; Holbrook 1998), and the study area, lying within the northwestern quarter of the Roman town, may contain one whole *insula* (XXI) and parts of at least five others. The town contained important public buildings, of which more remain to be discovered, private residential buildings, some with mosaic-floored rooms, and shops along the street frontages. Analysis of the patterns on the mosaics found in Cirencester has suggested that they are products of a single workshop, referred to as the 'Corinian school' (Wacher 1995, 314). The existence of a specialist firm, considered to be one of the major mosaic workshops of the western Empire, and the largest in Britain, is a measure of the wealth of the Roman town in the 4th century.

Within the block of land to the east of Sheep Street, buildings fronting on to two northeast-southwest aligned streets, one to the south of, and parallel with, Castle Street, and one to the north of, and parallel with, Ashcroft Road, are to be expected, as are buildings fronting a northwest-southeast aligned street roughly parallel with Cricklade Street. The line of the town defences runs through the study area to the west of Sheep Street, and the defences in this area were described as an upstanding earthwork in 1850 (Darvill and Gerrard 1994). Outside the western boundary of the study area, extensive cemeteries have been excavated (McWhirr *et al.* 1982).

In contrast to the Roman period, information on the early-medieval period is scarce. therefore post-Roman archaeology in Cirencester is crucial for interpreting the nature of the change to a royal/ecclesiastical centre in the early medieval period, and understanding the problem of continuity from the Roman period. Dark Age and medieval Cirencester developed around the parish church and market place to the northeast of the study area, which includes part of the area of suspected occupation along Cricklade Street and Castle Street (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, figs. 31 and 34). There is little evidence of medieval occupation in the southern and western parts of the study area. More recently, much of the study area lay within the landscaped grounds of the Ashcroft Estate focused on Ashcroft House (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, fig. 43, site no 54180). The pattern of occupation during the post-medieval period remained very similar to that of the medieval period until the mid-19th century when it changed considerably, with developments such as the railway and the hospital on both sides of Sheep Street, and infilling to the rear of properties along Castle Street and Cricklade Street. By 1921, Ashcroft Road had been constructed and there was a spread of buildings over the central and southern part of the block to the east of Sheep Street. The dark earth deposit identified in many of the below-ground interventions is most likely to be a gradual accumulation from the later medieval period until the 19th century - a depth of 2m would represent an annual increase of about 5mm over four centuries. There is little evidence to suggest that the accumulation of this deposit began prior to the medieval period.

2 Previous Work

2.1 Data Retrieval Conditions

The data has been collected under differing work circumstances. Most projects have recorded groundworks undertaken for development purposes, and not all the examinations have recorded the complete sequence from the gravel to the modern surface. Many of the observations have been rapidly sketched under poor observation conditions. Even where the best conditions applied recording work was shaped principally by non-archaeological contractors.

2.2 Archaeological Interventions (fig. 3)

There have been a number of archaeological interventions both within the proposed development area (section 2.2.1) and in the immediate vicinity (section 2.2.2). Those actually within the proposed development area are dealt with more fully. Interventions already described by Darvill (1988) are listed with the PRN allocated by him. There has been additional work carried out in the study area in the very recent past, but as this work is not yet in the public domain, it cannot be included in this assessment (Neil Holbrook, pers. comm.).

Table 1: Summary of Archaeological Work Relating to the Study Area

	Darvill 1988 no	Date	Type	Findings
A	404, 405, 406	1979	WB	early RB levels, industrial feature, RB walls, mosaic floor destroyed, medieval ditch? of castle
B	214	1954	R	med pits, 1.2m RB strata, med industrial pit
C	9	1970	E	RB walls, RB levels disturbed, med ditch ?of castle, med and post-med pits
D	419	1979- 1981	WB	disturbed med and post-med strata, top of RB levels only
E	419	1980	WB	mosaic floor destroyed
F		1996	WB	RB destruction layer?
G		1989	E	test pits, 1st century layers, RB town defences rampart, RB ?quarry scoop, RB street, RB floors, med pits
H		1967	E	RB town wall and rampart
J		1990	WB	RB street
K	23	1951	E	early RB timber buildings, RB walls and floors, mosaic, post-RB ditch
L	24	1961	E	RB gravel quarry, early RB timber buildings, RB walls and floors, post-RB ditch
M	424	1978	R	RB street, walls
N		1992	WB	RB quarry pit, RB walls
P	172	1849	R	mosaic floor
Q		1997	WB	post-med well and wall
R		1997	E	post-med garden soil and yard surface
S		1989- 1990	E/WB	RB floors, street, mosaic destroyed, by builders, pilae tiles, bust of Minerva, ?glass making
T		1995	WB	RB street
U	173/4	1909	R	two mosaic floors
V		1989	WB	RB walls, 2m RB strata
W		1990	R	RB street, roadside ditch, yard surface
X		1990	E/WB	RB gravel quarry, RB street, RB walls, med cobbled surface, med robber trenches
Y		1998	WB	disturbed post-med strata

WB = watching brief; R = record; E = excavation; RB = Romano-British

2.2.1 Archaeological Interventions within the Development Area

(A) The Tesco/Home and Wear Watching Briefs, 1979 (Darvill 1988: PRNs 404, 405 406)

The provision of foundations for the Tesco supermarket, the Home and Wear store and for shops fronting Castle Street were observed by David Wilkinson in 1979. The archive comprises records of a total of 99 foundation holes recorded under difficult conditions. The watching brief recorded the pre-Roman ground level except where cut by gravel pits. This was sealed by silt layers up to 1m in total depth, which were cut by stone wall foundations and sealed by floors - in one area eight successive floor levels were recorded. A possible kiln was recorded and a mosaic pavement near Castle Street was destroyed unrecorded by the contractors. A large medieval ditch was recorded and there was much evidence, particularly toward the Castle Street frontage, of medieval and post-medieval activity, including robbing of Roman walls, rubbish pits, wells and drystone walls. A fragment of a limestone sculpture, possibly a figure of Pan, was recovered.

(B) Observations of Bridges Garage Tank Hole, 1954 (Darvill 1988: PRN 214)

One side of the hole showed disturbance by ?medieval rubbish pits down to the natural gravel. On the other sides 1.2m of Roman stratigraphy was recorded, overlain by sections of walling and a floor cut by the rubbish pits. A medieval sulphur pit was found nearby.

(C) Bridges Garage Excavations, 1970 (Darvill 1988: PRN 99)

Two trenches were excavated by A. McWhirr in 1970. About 1.5m of the upper levels were removed by bulldozer, and trenches were then opened from the lower level. The Roman levels were sampled only, and excavation was abandoned because of flood water. The levels that were examined had been heavily disturbed by medieval and post-medieval activity. A length of Roman wall was recorded running east-west, and the interior of the building was thought to be to the south. The corner of a second building with pitched stone footings was also recorded and a possible robbed-out wall line. Stone-lined medieval cess pits and a medieval ditch were recorded, and a Roman *Dea Nutrix* figurine was recovered.

(D) Watching Brief on Service Trenches for Richleys Shops, 1979-81 (Darvill 1988: PRN 419)

Pipe trenches and manholes were recorded as they were laid out prior to the building of Richleys. The trenches were about 2m deep and recorded the upper Roman levels in places. On the west side of Richleys, the trench was cut to less than 2m with no evidence of Roman levels. South of the shop the upper levels exposed in the trench were disturbed.

To the east of the building there was tree root disturbance and no Roman levels were recorded there at a depth of 2m, but they were noted further south at a depth of 1.7m. East of Richleys lay infilled vaulted cellars with Roman archaeology apparent at 2m below the surface. A copper alloy bracelet was recovered a few metres from Cricklade

Street.

(E) Salvage Recording during Construction of Richleys Shops, 1980 (Darvill 1988: PRN 419)

The construction of the shops at the Mall was not notified to archaeologists, and archaeological observation took place on an emergency basis. Twelve foundation holes were excavated for the two-storey block on the east side of the development, revealing Roman floor levels. A tessellated Roman floor was destroyed by the contractors and only noted by the presence of bonded *tesserae* in spoil loaded on a lorry. Groundwork for the single storey block to the west comprised a further twelve holes, 2m square, most dug to a depth of over 2m, with 3m-deep holes at the east end. The Roman levels were disturbed and only traces of Roman archaeology were seen at the base of the holes which did not penetrate to the natural gravel.

(F) Watching Brief during Extensions to the Tesco Store, 4/5 Farcell Close, 1996 (Turner 1996)

Groundworks for a small extension to the main Tesco store were monitored, and two test pits were excavated down to the natural gravels prior to the insertion of piles. The area had been heavily disturbed in the recent past, and the only deposit of archaeological significance was a yellow clay and limestone layer overlying the natural gravels. This deposit was possibly part of a destruction layer associated with structural remains identified to the east during the construction of the main store.

(G) Test pits Excavated for the Corinium Development, 1989 (Gerrard and Johnson 1989)

Following an initial archaeological assessment ahead of proposals for wholesale development of the Brewery Car Park (Darvill 1988), a Stage 2 archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the Cotswold Archaeological Trust, comprising the excavation of a number of 2m x 2m test pits (Gerrard and Johnson 1989). Of these, seven were located within the study area (fig. 3, G1-G3, G5-G7, G9).

Test Pit 1 (G1), to the west of Sheep Street, confirmed the line of the western defences of the Roman town, showing two clear phases of rampart construction. The first phase was an earthwork rampart, probably from the mid-2nd century. The second phase, possibly dating to the 2nd-3rd century, was represented by layers associated with the heightening of the rampart. This had been achieved by laying a course of massive limestone blocks, dumping clay on top and capping it with pitched limestone. Traces of revetment were also visible, suggesting that this was close to the rear of the rampart. The Roman deposits were directly overlain by dark earth containing medieval material.

Test Pit 2 (G2), at the back of the Memorial Hospital, contained no intact Roman deposits, but a huge depth (1.4m) of medieval and post-medieval black earth contained residual Roman material. Over the black earth deposit lay the remains of an early-modern building beneath the tarmac surface.

Test Pit 3 (G3) revealed a considerable depth of Roman stratigraphy. A flint waste

flake was found on the gravels. The presence of 1st-century pottery represented clear evidence for the presence of the early civilian settlement or *vicus* in this area. Roman levels survived with 2nd-4th century pottery, *tesserae* and painted wall plaster. A sherd of abraded hand-made pottery was dated to the late-Roman/early-medieval period. The levels were cut by a medieval pit and a very deep robber trench which may indicate a Roman sewer rather than the wall of a building. The medieval levels comprised a gravelled area, posthole, and hearth which lay beneath a stone-floored yard. These features were of 12th-15th century date. Above, the post-medieval archaeology was represented by butchers' waste and a wall of 16th- or 17th-century date.

Test Pit 5, in the former station platform, revealed no deposits earlier than the 19th century. The ground had been levelled and a limestone slab surface laid. Subsequently, a new platform was constructed which was eventually removed and the area levelled. Finally the area was gravelled and tarmaced for the car park in 1973.

Test Pit 6 (G6), to the front of the Memorial Hospital, revealed that the natural gravels had been scooped out, possibly in the Roman period. The possible bottom fill of a medieval ditch lay beneath a post-medieval black earth deposit, approximately 1.5m deep.

In Test Pit 7 (G7) the west side of the Roman street between *insulae* XXI and XXII was excavated. It comprised at least eight metallings, with a ditch to its west. A wall line had been constructed directly above the final road surface. The Roman levels were cut by a large medieval pit which was sealed by a considerable depth of black earth.

Clay deposits were identified in Test Pit 9 (G9), to the west of Sheep Street, which were probably part of the earthwork rampart identified in Test Pit 1. Clay layers overlying these deposits represent the heightening of the rampart, which reached a maximum of 1.55m in Test Pit 9.

(H) Excavations in the Railway Station Yard and the Memorial Hospital Gardens, 1967 (Brown and McWhirr 1969)

Trial excavations were carried out in 1967 and 1969 in the grounds of the old railway station yard to the west of Sheep Street. The 1969 excavation did not locate any significant archaeological deposits due to the depth of overburden associated with railway construction. However, the 1967 excavation produced evidence of the town wall and rampart. Trenches were excavated along the line of the town wall through the station yard and in the garden of the Memorial Hospital. These revealed sections of the town wall and associated robber trenches, the rampart and the foundations of a revetment wall. The town wall was shown to have been originally a narrow wall, which was later widened to a width of approximately 3m, and had been cut into the rampart.

(J) Service Trench Excavation, Brewery Car Park, 1990 (King 1990)

Excavation was undertaken along the line of a foul water sewer, much of which repeated the line of an earlier, deeper pipe trench. Roman deposits were badly

disturbed throughout their latest phases by the pipe trench and by medieval pits and robbing, although earlier Roman deposits may survive at a greater depth than was reached during this excavation. Two sections of Roman stratigraphy were recorded in the trench, beneath a medieval or post-medieval dark earth layer. Interior floor surfaces were sealed beneath intact destruction levels, and the west side of street XXI/XXII was recorded.

(K) Excavations on Allotments behind 22-30 Ashcroft Road, 1951 (Darvill 1988: PRN 23)

Excavations undertaken in 1951 by Dr H. W. Catling (Reece 1976), following the discovery of a mosaic floor the previous year, revealed slight medieval activity and substantial Roman deposits relatively close to the surface. Three phases of occupation were identified. Early Roman layers were recorded, representing timber buildings to a maximum depth of 2.1m below the existing surface. Following levelling, the timber structures were replaced by a stone building represented by two east-west walls forming a corridor, flanked on the north by the room containing the mosaic. To the south was a courtyard surface of hard yellow concrete. The Roman layers were cut by a northwest-southeast aligned ditch, probably of medieval date.

(L) Excavations at the Mycalex Factory, Ashcroft Road, 1961 (Darvill 1988: PRN 24)

Excavations were undertaken in 1961 to the south of the Catling excavations, revealing a 2.5m thickness of Roman deposits, the uppermost horizon of which lay only 0.5m below the surface. Natural gravel was contacted 3.5m below the existing surface, and a quarry scoop into the gravel was identified. A 0.75m-thick deposit representing successive timber buildings dating from 60-120 AD was overlain by a levelling layer of rubble and clay. A substantial stone building was constructed after this levelling activity. The building was subject to periodic modification and by the early-3rd century was probably a courtyard-type building, very likely the same building as that identified in the 1951 excavations. Occupation of the building continued well into the 4th century, but eventually it became disused, the area was levelled and was cut by a 5m-wide northwest-southeast aligned ditch, the dating of which remains uncertain.

(M) Observations during Drainage Works in Cripps Road, 1978 (Darvill 1988: PRN 424)

Observations during sewerage and drainage works between Ashcroft Road and the new Tesco store in 1978 revealed a section of a Roman road and part of a building. The road, at a depth of 0.3m below the existing ground surface, ran roughly parallel with Ashcroft Road and has been identified as street XX/XXI on the Roman town plan. To the north of the road, two walls were recorded, one abutting and running parallel to the road, and the second extending off to the north, forming a T-junction. The top of the latter wall was 0.4m below the existing surface and there was no evidence of any disturbance in this area.

(N) Watching Brief at the Memorial Hospital, 1992 (Ings 1992)

A watching brief was carried out in 1992 during the excavation of soakaways in the grounds of the Memorial Hospital, Sheep Street. Six pits were excavated and Roman wall footings were encountered in three of them, whilst a quarry pit was identified in another. Pottery of the 3rd-4th century was associated with the structures, but the limitations of the pits made it difficult to assign relationships or functions to the buildings. There was no evidence of any road surfaces, but the presence of structures adjacent to the western defences within *insula XXI* suggests that there would have been a street serving it, possibly that dividing *insulae XXI* and *XXVIII*. The deposits in the pits were sealed by dark earth.

2.2.2 Archaeological Interventions in the Vicinity of the Development Area

(P) Finding of a Mosaic Floor, Cripps Brewery, 1849 (Darvill 1988: PRN 172)

This was found in 1849 roughly in the area to the rear of 6 Cricklade Street. In 1869 painted wall plaster and fragmentary pavements were also recorded.

(Q) Watching Brief at 10-12 Cricklade Street, 1997 (Turner 1997)

Monitoring of groundworks during an extension to the rear of 10/12 Cricklade Street revealed post-medieval remains. The area had been badly disturbed by modern building activity which had either sealed or destroyed earlier deposits.

(R) Excavation at Brewery Court, 1997 (CAT 1998)

Six test pits were excavated ahead of development proposals at Brewery Court, formerly the back garden of 14 Cricklade Street. No significant archaeological deposits were encountered in the test pits. However, when compared with other interventions in the area, it is likely that Roman remains are present at a lower level than that reached by the test pits.

(S) Test pits and Watching Brief at 20 Cricklade Street, 1989/90 (Walker 1989, Barber 1990)

Preliminary assessment test pits were followed by an archaeological watching brief during the construction of shops at 20 Cricklade Street. The Roman levels uncovered would have lain in *insula XXII*. Test Pit I revealed evidence for timber and stone buildings, possibly associated with the *vicus*. Tesserae and pilae tiles from hypocaust underfloor heating were also recorded, as well as the cast bronze bust of the goddess Minerva. The medieval levels were represented by an undifferentiated dark soil. A post-medieval robber trench cut down to the probable line of a Roman wall was recorded.

In Test Pit 2, the Roman levels related to the exterior of buildings, probably belonging to the timber phase. The upper Roman levels appeared to have been truncated by the medieval dark earth deposits.

During the watching brief, numerous floor levels were recorded, including a fine

mosaic towards the Cricklade Street frontage. Finds included painted wall plaster and evidence for Roman glass making. In both the test pits and the watching brief particular note was made of the silt layers present on many of the floor surfaces.

(T) Watching Brief at Cirencester Bowling Club, 1995 (CAT 1995)

A watching brief carried out during construction work at the Cirencester Bowling Club established that there were archaeological deposits throughout the area, including Roman street metalling and associated silt deposits, overlain by black earth deposits.

(U) Finding of Mosaic Floors, Ashcroft Road, 1909 (Darvill 1988: PRN 173/4)

Two mosaic floors were found to the north of Ashcroft Road in 1909, one at 1.2m below the surface and one at 0.5m below the surface. It is not clear if these floors were adjacent at different levels or whether one superseded the other.

(V) Watching Brief at 32-38 Cricklade Street, 1989 (Gerrard & Johnson 1989)

A watching brief was carried out under difficult conditions during development of three tenement plots at 32-38 Cricklade Street. Limited opportunity for observation during pile construction towards the modern frontage suggested that the top 0.30m of the Roman deposits under the shop frontages may be disturbed by early modern and modern construction but that there are substantial intact Roman deposits beneath the houses along Cricklade Street. Two substantial north-south aligned Roman walls were recorded at a depth of approximately 106m AOD. Observation of a soakaway to the rear revealed almost 2m of undisturbed Roman stratigraphy.

(W) Observations at the Jubilee 77 Club, Ashcroft Road, 1990 (CAT 1992)

Observations during the digging of a cellar at the Jubilee 77 club identified evidence of Roman street metalling, an associated roadside ditch and a possible exterior yard surface. The observations established that post-medieval/modern disturbance was limited to the uppermost 1.2m of deposits, and that approximately 1.70m of archaeological deposits survive intact in this area.

(X) Excavations at 33 Sheep Street, 1990 (King 1990)

Two test pits and an evaluation trench were excavated ahead of development at 33 Sheep Street, followed by a watching brief during construction. The excavations uncovered evidence of Roman gravel quarrying, and firmly located the line of street XX/XXI, represented by a series of surfaces and a roadside ditch. Walls of a possible barn/storage building were recorded, as well as the wall of a quality town house, giving useful information on the peripheral buildings of the Roman town. Medieval remains were relatively insubstantial, consisting of traces of a cobbled surface and robber trenches. Evidence of a post-medieval pond, known from early maps as the Sheep Street pond, was also encountered.

(Y) Watching Brief at Oakley Cottage, 1998 (Thomas 1998)

A watching brief was carried out in the grounds of Oakley Cottage, Tetbury Road during groundworks for a new boundary wall. No significant archaeological remains were identified. The trench was not deep enough to encounter archaeological features over most of its length, and a modern feature cutting the eastern end of the trench is likely to have damaged earlier archaeological remains.

2.3 Other Archaeological Work

Various other artefactual and structural remains have been observed within the study area and are recorded in the Cirencester Urban Assessment database. They consist mainly of antiquarian observations made during construction work, and the range and accuracy of information recorded varies greatly. Two Roman inhumation burials are thought to have come from the study area, but provenance details are scant (Darvill 1988: PRN 142 and 269). Roman and medieval pottery was collected in the 1920s during the construction of Bridges Garage (Darvill 1988: PRN 425). One medieval pot was near complete. This evidence suggests that there was a considerable degree of disturbance but also indicates that there may have been intact medieval levels. A mosaic is reported from a foundation trench at 26 Cricklade Street in 1983 (Darvill 1988: PRN 415), but it is not certain whether the *tesserae* observed had been found *in situ*. Other finds include column bases, sherds of samian pottery, fragments of painted wall plaster and several wells, although the latter cannot certainly be dated to the Roman period. Finds of religious sculptures and altar fragments in the Ashcroft Road area may suggest the existence of a temple in the vicinity.

3 Archaeological Survival

3.1 Relative Levels (figs. 4 and 5)

Crucial to understanding the survival of archaeological deposits is the relative depths as recorded in archaeological interventions (Table 2). The projected diagrammatic cross-section based on the test pits excavated in 1989 (Gerrard and Johnson 1989) shows considerable variation in the relative depths of deposits from all periods (fig. 5). This differential build-up is probably due to the shifting focus of activity within the town (Darvill 1988, 34). Alluvial gravels are present only in the eastern half of the study area and redeposition and gravel quarrying have affected the natural ground levels. It should be noted that although Roman deposits were absent from Test Pits 2 and 6 in the cross-section (G2 and G6, fig. 5), subsequent work in the grounds of the Memorial Hospital has demonstrated that Roman stratigraphy is present in that area (Ings 1992). The depths of the Roman deposits and natural gravels recorded at the Memorial Hospital are slightly lower than those suggested in the diagrammatic cross-section of the inferred depth and extent of archaeological deposits calculated by Darvill (Darvill 1988, fig. 13). Over the whole study area, based on those interventions for which absolute levels were available, the top of the Roman deposits was encountered between 108.1 and 110.3m AOD. In general, the build-up of post-Roman deposits increases from west to east and from south to north.

3.2 Depth of Stratigraphy

Archaeological excavations at Bridges Garage (C) showed that Roman levels had been cut into by later activity. The total depth of stratigraphy was 3.73m. Service trenches for Richleys (D), which were 2m deep on average, located Roman levels only at the southeast corner of the site. The upper levels were highly disturbed. The shop foundation holes (E) showed much disturbance of the Roman levels, whereas the Tesco foundation holes (A) revealed considerable areas of surviving Roman archaeology. Test Pit 3 (G3) demonstrated a total depth of stratigraphy of 2.7m with the Roman levels 1.7m below the surface. These were cut into by medieval pits. The watching briefs at 20 Cricklade Street (S) and 32-38 Cricklade Street (V) revealed substantial Roman deposits buried under up to 2m of later material. In contrast, excavations and observations to the north of Ashcroft Road (K, L, M and X) revealed intact Roman deposits very close to the ground surface - 0.5m in the case of the Mycalex factory excavations (L). Observations in the grounds of the Memorial Hospital to the east of Sheep Street (N) revealed 0.5-1.8m of Roman stratigraphy sealed by 0.7-1.8m of dark earth.

There is no evidence for early stratigraphy outside the town defences within the study area (G5 and Y), but Roman deposits at the ramparts (G1), 1m below the surface, were found to be 1.8m thick. There is a considerable depth of overburden (4-5m) in parts of the railway yard, associated with construction of the railway (Holbrook 1998, 73).

The extent and thickness of any late-Roman and early-medieval deposits in the study area is not clear from the available evidence. Medieval and post-medieval deposits are mostly confined to the tenements and burgage plots fronting onto Castle Street and Cricklade Street.

3.3 Disturbance

The degree of localised disturbance in the study area is considerable. The evidence from archaeological interventions shows that the Roman levels have been severely truncated in places, that the robbing of Roman walls has taken place in the medieval period, that post-medieval wells, pits, and cellars have been cut into previous levels, and that 20th-century disturbance has been considerable and is particularly associated with the construction of recent buildings in the study area. Nevertheless, archaeological work has recorded intact Roman stratigraphy within the study area and, with the exception of the area outside the town defences, it can be assumed that archaeological deposits exist over the entire study area, broken only by localised disturbances. This localised disturbance is well demonstrated by the discovery of Roman wall footings in a soakaway pit in the grounds of the Memorial Hospital (N), immediately adjacent to an earlier test pit (G6) in which no Roman stratigraphy was present. It is also noteworthy that a mosaic floor existed in the study area until destroyed in the 1980s.

Parts of the study area have remained almost untouched by post-medieval and recent development, for example the southern part of the Brewery car park and the bowling green lie outside the presumed extent of the Anglo-Saxon and medieval town, and

Table 2: Depths (above Ordnance Datum) of deposits

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G3	H
Natural	107.5	-	107.7	-	-	c.107.7	108.2	-
Roman	109.0	-	109.0	110.0	-	c.108.5	109.1	-
Medieval	-	-	-	-	-	-	109.6	-
Modern Surface	111.0	110.0	111.3	112.0	-	c.112.0	110.9	-
Total Deposit Depth	3.5m		3.7m			4.3m	2.7m	
	J	K	L	M	N	P	Q	R
Natural	-	-	c.107.3	-	107.6	-	-	-
Roman	110.0	-	c.110.3	c.109.9	109.4	-	-	-
Medieval	-	-	-	-	109.5	-	-	-
Modern Surface	111.0	-	c.110.8	c.110.3	110.3	-	-	c.112.0
Total Deposit Depth			3.5m		2.7m			
	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	
Natural	108.5	-	-	107.4	-	108.2	-	
Roman	110.0	109.8	-	109.3	-	108.9	-	
Medieval	-	c.110.6	-	-	-	109.0	-	
Modern Surface	112.2	c.111.0	-	112.0	c.110.5	110.2	c.115.0	
Total Deposit Depth	3.7m			4.6m		2m		

within the landscaped grounds of the Ashcroft Estate in the post-medieval period. Even where 20th-century development has taken place the level of disturbance is not necessarily high; for example at the Mycalex Factory Roman deposits may be protected beneath concrete floors and machine bases left in place when the car park was extended in the 1970s.

A measure of disturbance is the size and condition of potsherds. Romano-British pottery present in medieval and post-medieval layers is generally reported as being unabraded with sherds of a size suggesting little redeposition. A number of good quality small finds are also recorded. The evidence does not indicate a succession of disturbance episodes.

4 Archaeological Potential

4.1 The Early-Roman Period

The study area contains evidence for early-Roman activity in the form of gravel quarries and scoops, possibly associated with the military fort and *vicus*. The Ashcroft Road excavations (K and L) and the work at 20 Cricklade Street (S) have demonstrated that 1st- and early-2nd-century civilian timber buildings extended as far as the study area. The considerable depth of silt layers at the Tesco site (A) beneath Roman stone buildings must also be associated with this period of activity, and 1st-century pottery was recovered from a test pit (G3). Although it is highly likely that this material relates to the *vicus*, it has been suggested that some of these deposits may relate to a period of civilian occupation after the departure of the army and before the main public building programme commenced (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, 56). There is potential for more deposits from this period to survive in the study area, thus providing valuable information on the nature of occupation, and possibly clarifying the extent and location of the *vicus*.

4.2 The Roman Town

4.2.1 Defences

Although there has been extensive groundwork associated with the railway to the west of Sheep Street, excavations have shown that a considerable amount of evidence relating to the town defences still survives, including intact sections of walls and ramparts. All the trenches excavated in 1967 (H) produced some evidence of the defences (Brown and McWhirr 1969). There is potential within the study area for recovering evidence of pre-defence features such as former ground surfaces, and an early bank that may underlie the 2nd-century defences. Sections of an early bank have already been recognised on the northeastern and southwestern stretches of the circuit, but there are still problems regarding its nature and function (Holbrook 1998, 94). There is also potential for recovering more information regarding the sequence of construction and modification, including dating evidence for the widening of the town wall and the heightening of the rampart.

4.2.2 Streets

In recent publications, the street grid of the Roman town has been rationalised as it was realised that the generally depicted street plan was based on relatively few direct observations (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, 60). The new plan (fig. 2, based on Holbrook 1998, fig. 6) is a more minimal reconstruction, and two Roman streets are depicted in the study area, the northwest-southeast aligned street XXI/XXII and the southwest-northeast aligned street XX/XXI. There has been direct evidence of these two streets from several of the interventions in the study area (see section 2.2.1). Street XXI/XXII has not been directly recorded further north than site G7 but the western boundary of the tenement plots along Cricklade Street follows the projected line of the road and the study area potentially contains evidence to confirm the continuation of this road. Street XX/XXI has been recorded within the study area very close to the edge of the town defences (site X). However, it is clear that there are gaps in our knowledge of the street grid, and there is also a suspected southwest-northeast aligned street dividing *insulae* XXI and XXVIII, roughly parallel with Castle Street. This suggestion is reinforced by the discovery of Roman wall footings in the grounds of the Memorial Hospital (N). However, the street has not been noted in any work south of Castle Street and it is omitted from the more recent street plan (fig. 2). The possibility exists that the study area contains the evidence to confirm its suggested position.

4.2.3 Buildings

It is clear that substantial remains of high quality stone-walled Roman buildings survive from the 2nd-4th century AD in the study area, and there is potential for more such buildings fronting the streets, such as the courtyard house found at the Mycalex Factory site (L). The buildings are well-floored, some with mosaics, and painted wall plaster has been recovered. Building plans have not been recoverable under the circumstances of investigation to date, but should be recognisable given a wide enough area to examine. Little is known about the peripheral buildings of the Roman town in this area. However, the discoveries at the Memorial Hospital (N) and 33 Sheep Street (X) have confirmed that there are remains of Roman stone buildings right up to the western defences, and the study area therefore potentially contains valuable information on the nature of these buildings.

4.2.4 Industry and Agriculture

The recorded evidence from the study area suggests predominantly domestic activity. However, there are a few hints of non-domestic activity such as the possible kiln at the Home and Wear site (A) and evidence of glass-making at 20 Cricklade Street (S). Finds of pottery and animal bone have been plentiful, as well as finds such as the cast bronze of Minerva. The absence of wall plaster and good quality floors associated with one of the structures recorded at 33 Sheep Street (X) may suggest some form of agricultural/industrial activity in that area (King 1990). A similar inference may be drawn from the evidence recovered from the soakaway pits in the grounds of the Memorial Hospital (N).

4.2.5 Burials

The Querns cemetery lay to the west of the study area. Inhumations, cremations and coffins have been recorded immediately to the west of the study area (Reece 1962) and there are also antiquarian records of two human skeletons from within the study area (section 2.3). It is possible that further burials/cremations may extend into the western part of the study area, outside the town defences.

4.3 Early-medieval

The only indication of early-medieval or immediately post-Roman archaeology in the study area is a sherd of hand-made pottery from Test Pit G3 and the wall overlying the Roman street at Test Pit G7, reflecting the general paucity of artefacts and features of secure provenance from this period in Cirencester. The dark earth deposits recorded virtually throughout the study area may possibly relate to this period, but there is little dating evidence and they may well be medieval and post-medieval in date (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, 92). The areas with the highest potential for deposits relating to this period are Castle Street and Cricklade Street. These were important thoroughfares in the medieval period, and there is a possibility that earlier activity occurred along the frontages. More fragile deposits may survive away from the street frontages, under the modern back gardens.

4.4 Medieval

Although generally represented by deep accumulations of dark earth, there is evidence of the survival of medieval features at several of the excavations and watching briefs mentioned above. Pits were recorded at A, B, C, G3, G7, and the sulphur pit at B suggests industrial processes in the area in this period. Intact medieval layers were also encountered at 33 Sheep Street (X). It has been suggested that part of the study area may lie within the bailey of the castle (Darvill 1988, 26), represented by ditches recorded at the Ashcroft Road excavations (L and M), Bridges Garage (C) and during the Tesco watching briefs (A). If so, features such as stakeholes, traces of timber buildings, cobbled surfaces and cess-pits may be expected, where they have not been damaged or destroyed by subsequent activity.

4.5 Post-medieval

As with the medieval period, the main archaeological features of this period occur along Castle Street and Cricklade Street. Post-medieval evidence consists of yards, floors, stone-walled outbuildings, cess-pits, wells, pits and garden soils, although little of this evidence has been examined in circumstances where it could be fully understood. There are also significant accumulations of dark earth containing material of post-medieval date, especially in the rear of the tenements along Castle Street and Cricklade Street. The excavations at 33 Sheep Street (X) revealed traces of what is presumed to be the Sheep Street pond shown on early maps, and Test Pit G5 contained evidence of the construction of the railway station to the west of Sheep Street (G5). Robber trenches following Roman walls in the study area probably represent a change to the use of stone as the major building material. The series of 'snap-shots' produced by Darvill from early maps (Darvill 1988, figs. 6 to 11) show various buildings in the study area to the east of Sheep Street. In these cases,

excavation data can be considerably enhanced by documentary data.

4.6 Research Aims

The main objectives for the Roman period would be:

- i) to understand more about the nature of the pre-urban occupation in the area, establishing whether or not it was a *vicus*, and specifically to understand the nature and extent of the silt levels preceding the stone buildings.
- ii) to recover the plans of Roman structures and understand their function and history, including the nature of the buildings immediately adjacent to the town defences.
- iii) to establish whether or not the town defences follow an earlier earthen bank, as observed elsewhere around the town.
- iv) to understand the sequence of construction and modification of the defences in the 3rd century.
- v) to examine the latest Roman levels and to try to understand the soil formation processes here.
- vi) to add to the national research objectives on Roman towns; their foundation, economy, function, political status, development and decline.

The main objectives for the post-Roman period would be:

- i) to study and interpret any early medieval deposits in the area.
- ii) to understand what processes have been involved in the formation of dark earth deposits.
- iii) to understand the use of the area in the medieval period, including any castle-related activity.
- iv) to map the post-medieval changes in land-use and property ownership.

5 The Development Impact

No detailed construction proposals are known at present, so this discussion is based on the known and predicted depth of deposits over the study area rather than specific threats in any one area. The design of the proposed development should take into account the differential build-up of post-Roman deposits across the study area. In the north and west of the study area, 1.5-2m of disturbed upper deposits overlie the Roman levels, and in some cases, more than 2m of dark disturbed soil lies below the present surface. However, in the south and west, Roman deposits are much less deeply buried, lying at around 1m below the ground surface, and in some areas, for example the Ashcroft Road excavations (L and M) where there was no build up of dark earth, Roman stratigraphy was recorded at less than 0.5m below the modern ground surface.

The archaeological impact of any building work is dependent on how deep ground disturbance is likely to be in specific areas. The archaeological implications of any building work penetrating into Roman levels should be an important consideration. Watching briefs, such as those conducted on the Tesco site, can only hint at what might be recovered and understood under controlled circumstances. There is no doubt that, although disturbed, the Roman levels provide an exceptional resource. Hitherto, the treatment of these levels in this area has not been satisfactory, with three mosaics destroyed unrecorded in the last 20 years, and few excavations under controlled

conditions. The impact on early-medieval and medieval remains is likely to be greater, as such deposits are nearer the surface.

The results of recent archaeological interventions have shown that the damage and disturbance to Roman deposits associated with the construction of modern buildings in the study area is far more extensive than that associated with medieval and post-medieval development. It is therefore important to consider the types of construction methods to be used, and the relatively slighter impact of techniques such as piling should be carefully assessed.

6 Planning Constraints (Fig. 6)

The study area lies within an 'Archaeological Urban Area' and contains an 'Area of High Archaeological Interest', both defined in the Cotswold District Deposit Draft Local Plan (CDC 1993, subject to modification in 1998). Policy 7.29 of this plan states that:

Proposals for development, which would damage or destroy monuments or deposits within areas of high archaeological interest, will not be permitted. Any application affecting such a site must be accompanied by a full assessment of its implications and applicants will be required to show how its archaeological interest will be protected.

The study area also encompasses three of the notification areas of Scheduled Ancient Monument Gloucs. 361 (*Corinium* Roman Town) and several listed buildings. Parts of the study area lie within Cirencester Town and Park Conservation Area.

English Heritage are due to review the extent of the areas of Scheduled Ancient Monument as part of the development of an urban archaeological strategy for Cirencester. However, following consultation with both the Inspector for the region (Rob Iles, pers. comm.) and the Monuments Protection Programme officer (Julian Heath, pers. comm.), there is not likely to be any revision to the scheduling in the near future, and assessment should proceed on the basis of the current scheduling map held by the Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record.

7 Recommendations

- It is important in view of the probable survival of Roman archaeology in particular, that archaeological considerations form a central part of the planning process and that the archaeological implications of the development are fully discussed and properly responded to. More detailed assessment and evaluation will be required before mitigation can be determined. Any mitigation measures should be fully incorporated into the scheme of works for the development proposals.
- The area of proposed development coincides with part of the Scheduled Area, and it will be necessary to consult English Heritage at the earliest possible opportunity regarding development plans in these areas. Scheduled Monument Consent will be required for any below-ground works in this area.

- Preservation *in situ* is always the preferred option for archaeological remains and priority should be given to the preservation option within the area of high archaeological interest. Preservation *in situ* could be achieved through design solutions which should aim for minimal below-ground disturbance in areas where deposits are near the surface, for example by keeping these areas as car-parking or open space.
- When development proposals are known, flexible archaeological responses can be designed. The main aim should be the protection of the stratigraphy from the uppermost horizon of the Roman levels downwards. If disturbance of these levels is unavoidable, then controlled archaeological excavation (preservation by record) must be seen as the correct response. For the upper levels a mixture of excavation, watching brief and salvage recording may be more appropriate.
- The archaeological excavation of a number of evaluation test pits and the monitoring of geotechnical pits in advance of the finalisation of both the development design and the archaeological mitigation strategy would allow firmer and clearer judgements to be made. The purpose of the test pits would be to establish more precisely the extent and height AOD of the surface of the Roman levels. Excavation of the Roman levels themselves would be limited to such minimal work as is required to answer these questions, as the general character of the remains is sufficiently well understood from existing evidence. Other evaluation methods, such as Ground Probing Radar, may also be considered.

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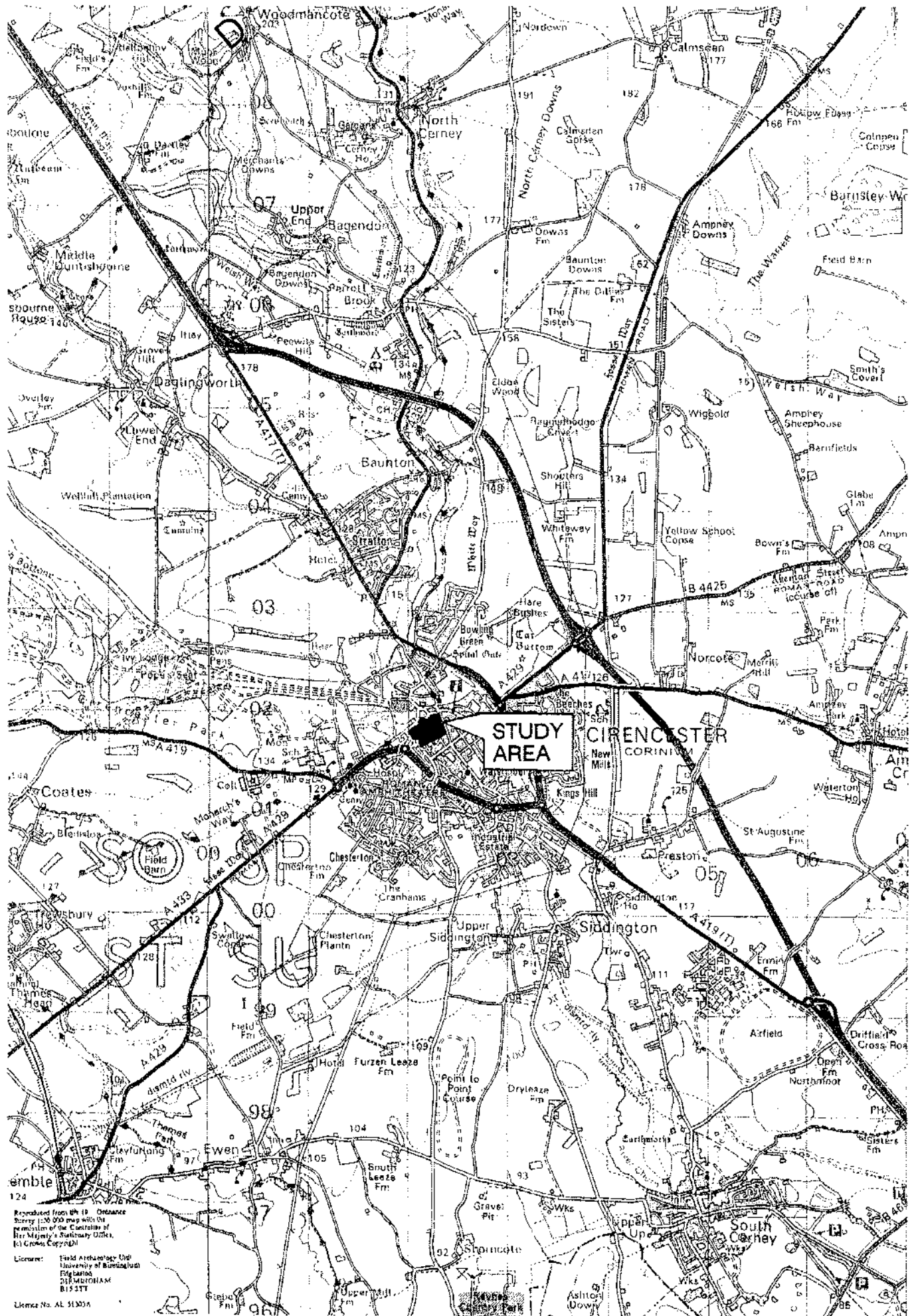


Fig. 1 Location of study area

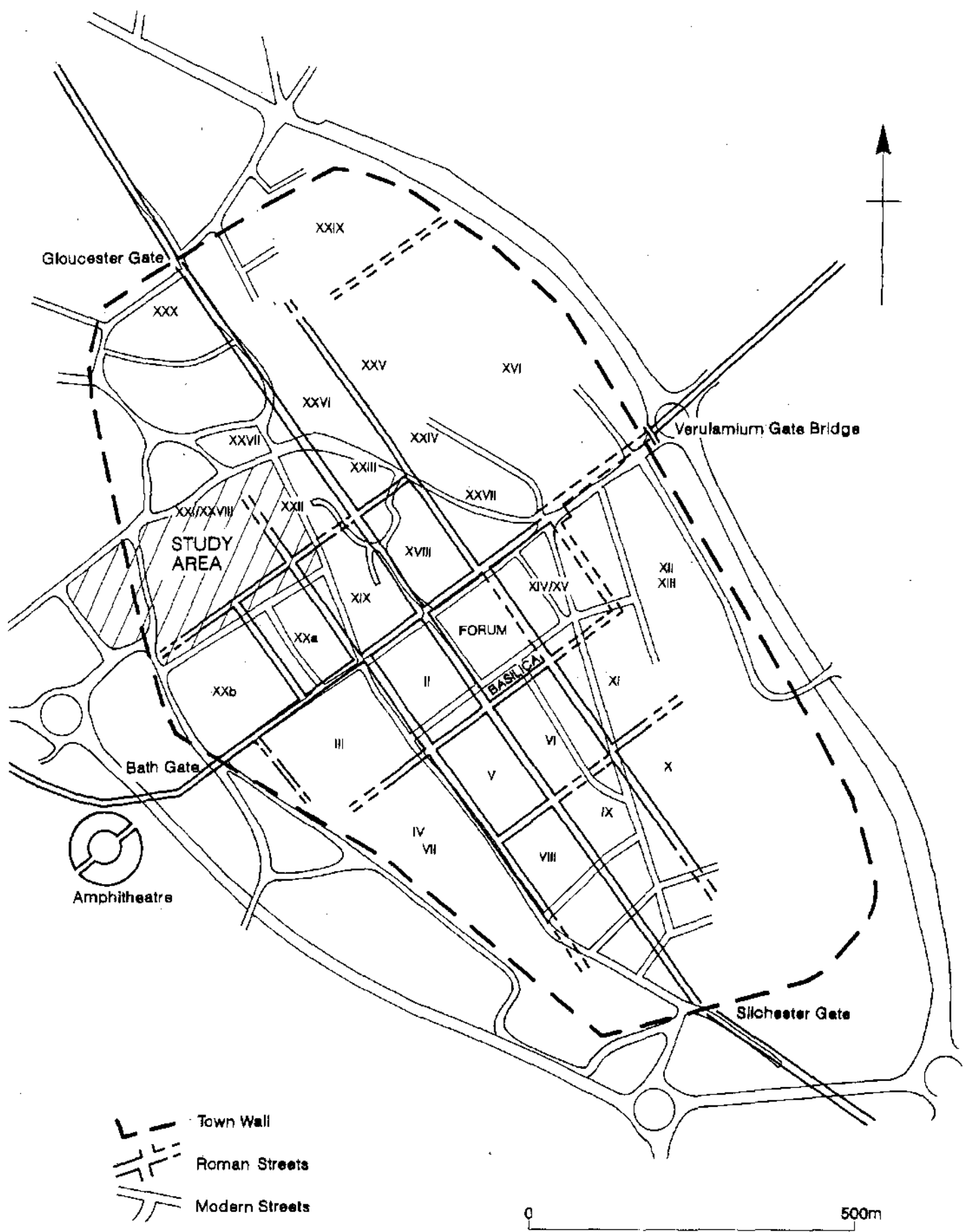


Fig. 2 Study area with Roman street grid (after Holbrook 1998)

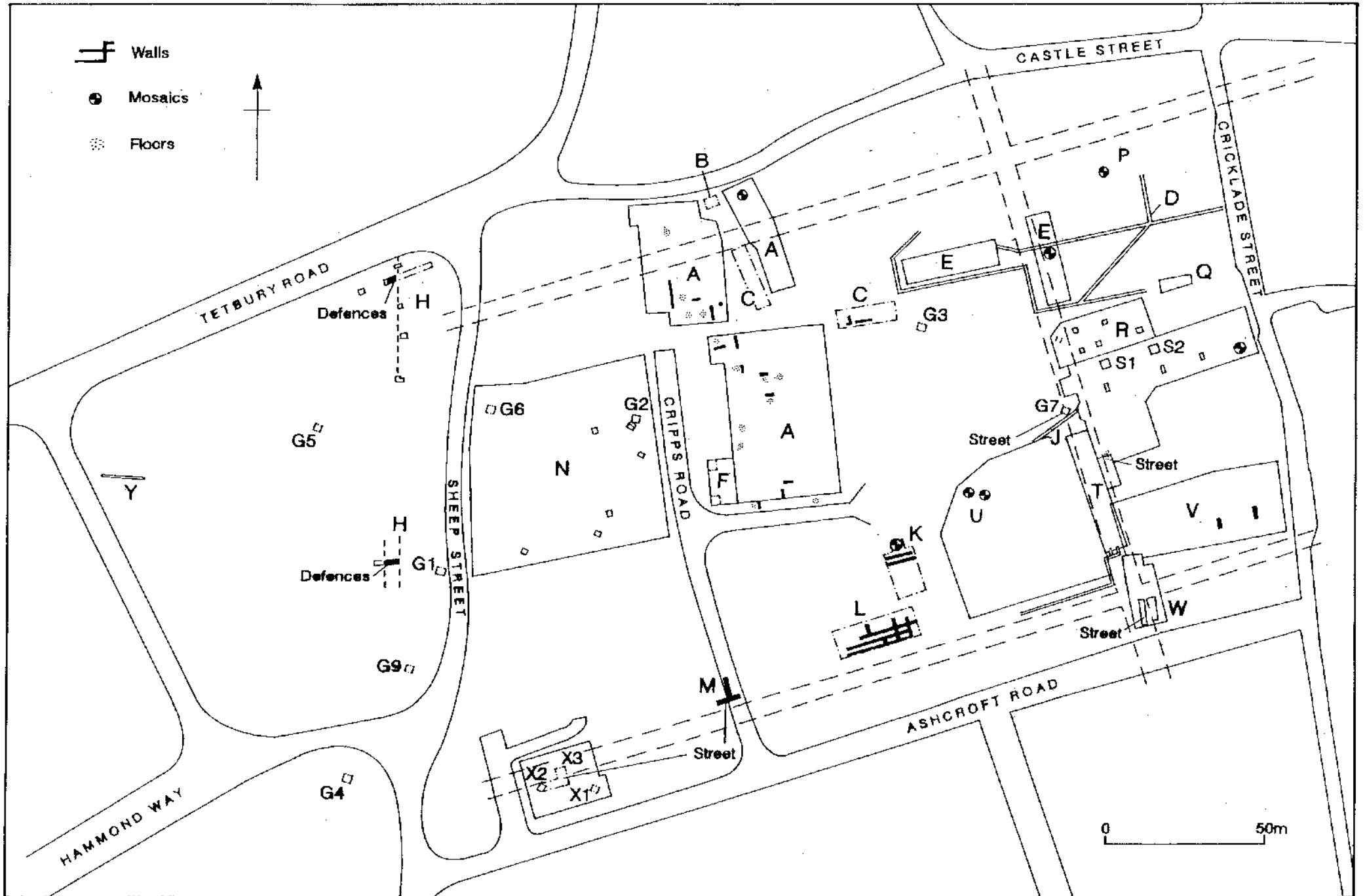


Fig. 3 Study area showing archaeological interventions

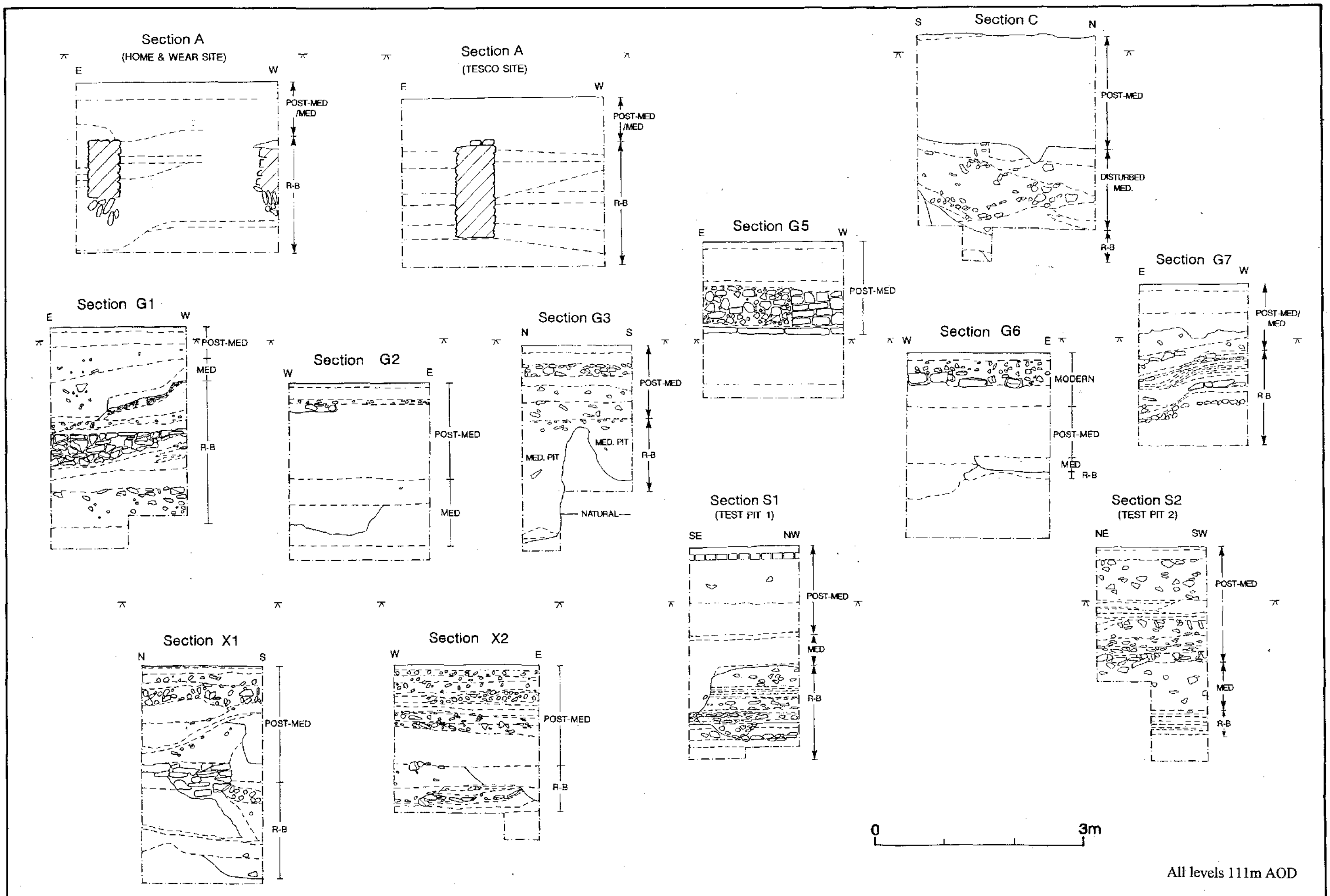


Fig. 4 Selected simplified section drawings

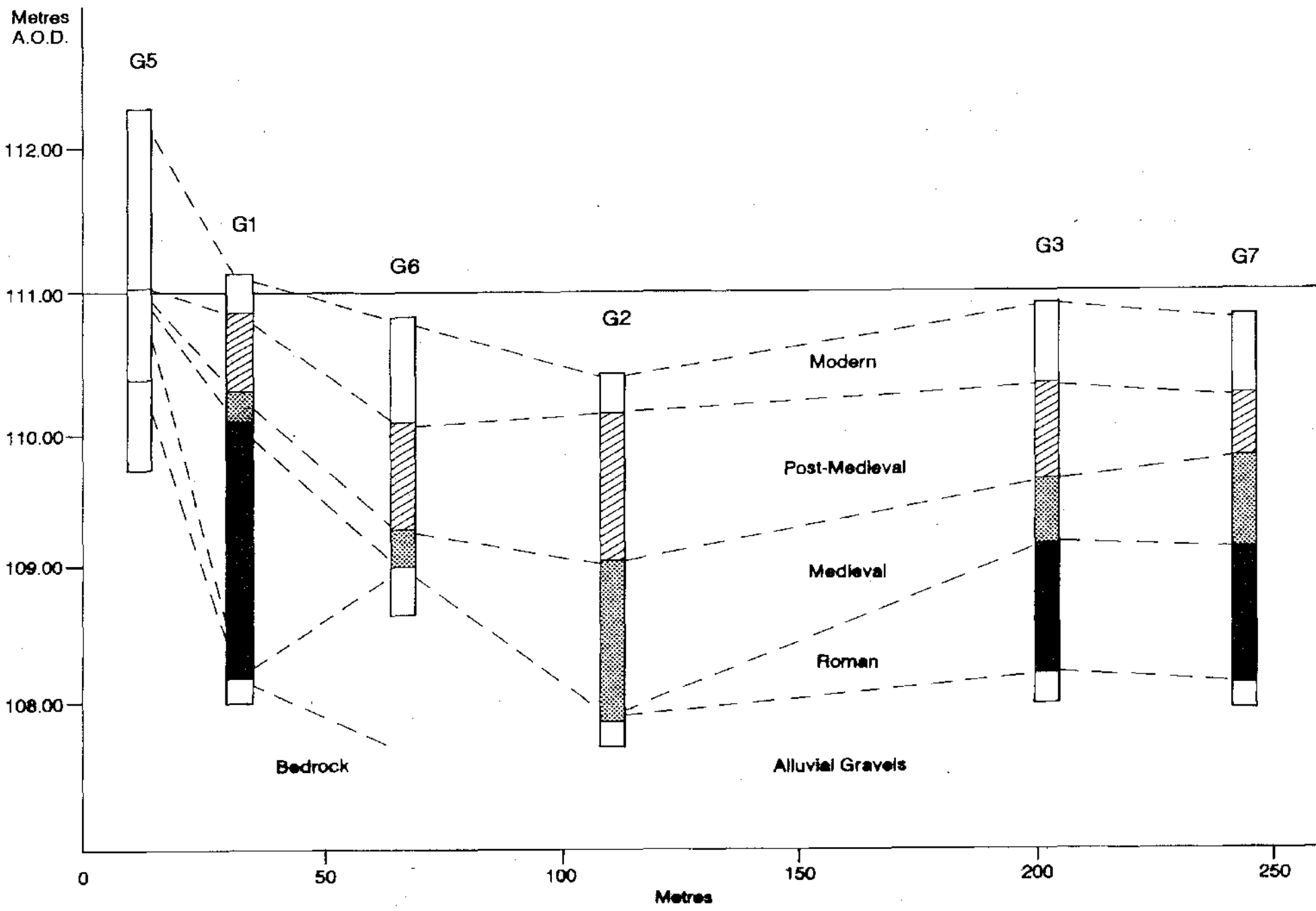


Fig. 5 Projected diagrammatic cross-section of 1989 test pits

(after Gerrard and Johnson 1989)

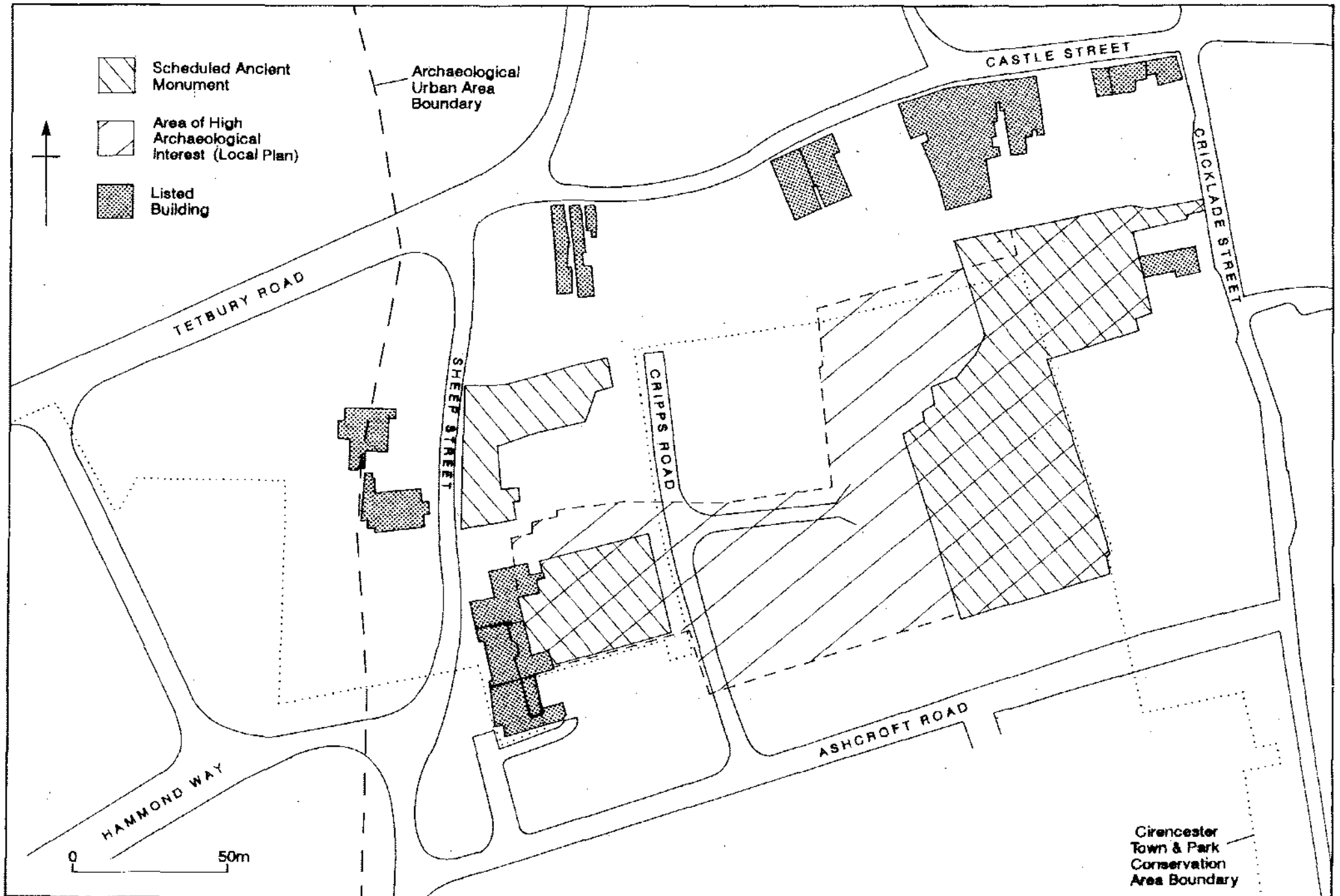


FIG 6 Legal designations

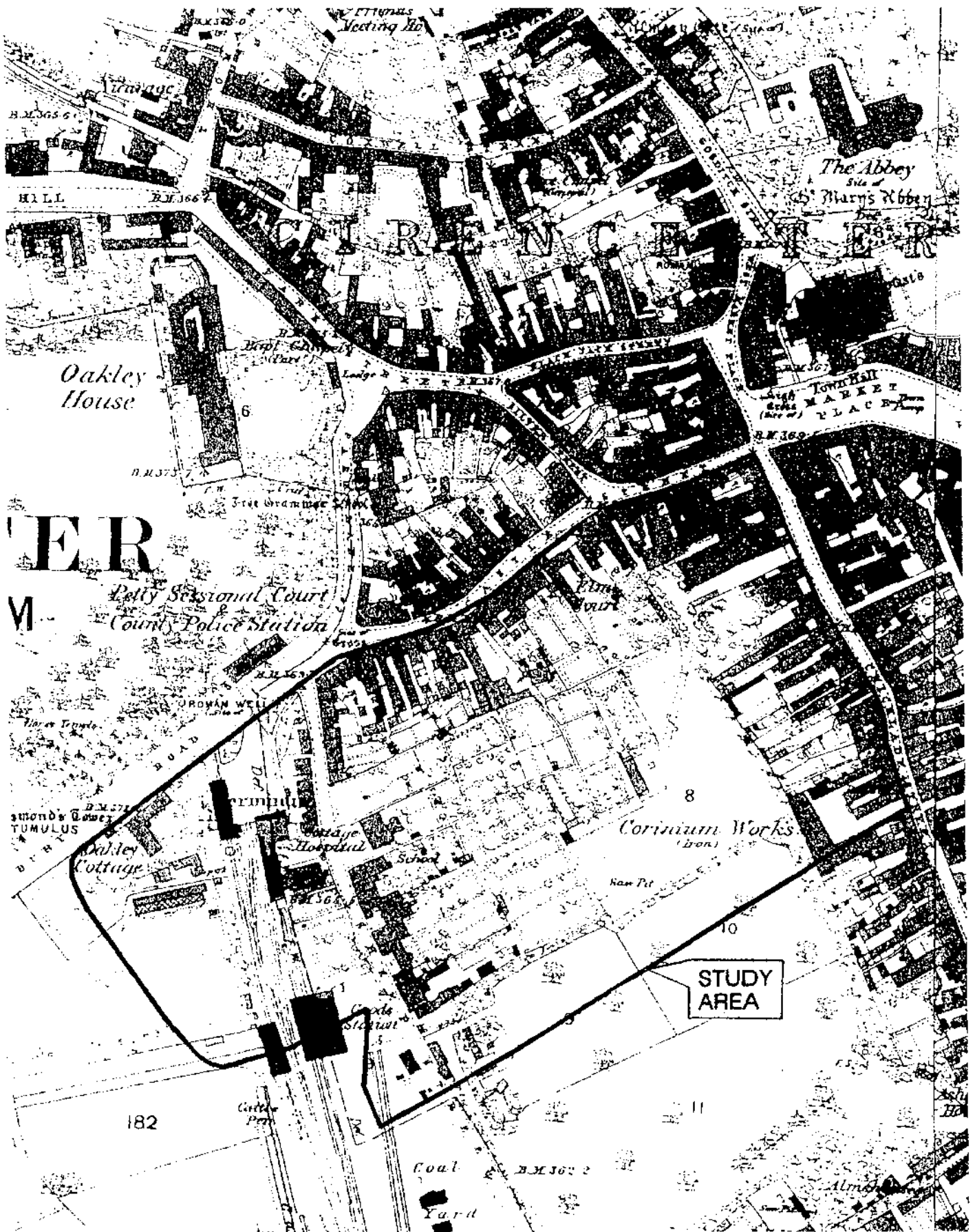


Fig. 7 Study area in relation to 1875 25" OS map