

# Land on the Eastern Side of Mercia Road, Gloucester

## Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment



On behalf of

**Lidl UK GmbH**

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**Avon Archaeology Limited**

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## ABSTRACT

*Avon Archaeology Limited was commissioned by Lidl GmbH to undertake an archaeological desk-based assessment on a site immediately to the north of Gloucester city centre, on the eastern side of Mercia Road. The site is centred on NGR SO 83174 19360, lies just to the west, but outside the boundary of, the Kingsholm Conservation area, and encompasses an area of about 1.3ha. The site is currently occupied by two large modern buildings occupied by various commercial, light industrial and retail enterprises, and associated hard standing used for car parking. It is proposed to replace these buildings with a single retail store, and associated car parking.*

*A previous desk-based assessment, on exactly the same site, was carried out in 2013, but no other archaeological work of any description has since been undertaken within its boundary. There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments, or listed buildings, either within the site itself, or in the immediate vicinity. Historically the site lay within a very large area of low-lying land, known as Meanham, within a meander of a former course of the River Severn, and was used as commonable meadow. It was never subject to any form of formal enclosure, and lay unchanged, and in use as common meadow, well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A railway line was constructed across its southern side in the 1840s, and in the early 1930s, a new road, St Oswald's Road, was established running north-south across its eastern side. In the late 1950s/early 1960s, Mercia Road itself was established, along with the small industrial estate of which the study site now forms a part.*

*The major early Roman settlement and fortress at Kingsholm lies close by on the eastern side of the site, and there have been numerous discoveries of finds, features and structures of that date, over several centuries. This includes the presence of what is taken to be a large, but ill-known extra-mural cemetery of later Roman date. At a later period, Kingsholm was also the site of an important Anglo-Saxon royal hall, to which the term 'palace' is frequently misapplied. A major road leading northwards out of Gloucester, now known as Kingsholm Road, passes close to the east of the site, and is also thought to be of Roman origin. It also seems likely that the northern section of Gloucester's civil war defensive circuit, albeit somewhat ephemeral according to a contemporary account, probably ran not far to the south of the study site.*

*The drainage regime in this area has been highly dynamic in the past, and the river has been heavily braided, with usually several channels in operation at any given time. The site appears to lie on or very close to a former channel of the river, and at the very least it sits in a key transitional zone between the slightly higher, hard rock geology to the east, and the low-lying meadow ground to the west.*

*The extent of any surviving archaeological resource within the site boundary is entirely unknown. At the time of writing (May 2017) there has been no geotechnical investigation of the site, so likewise is the nature and depths of the deposits underlying*



*it highly problematic. While of course the present, modern development on the site is likely to have caused disturbance to underlying deposits, its extent and nature is unknown, in part because it has not been possible to trace contemporary plans and/or drawings of these structures which might have given an indication of the depths and extent of foundations. It seems likely to us that the local authority will be most concerned with the potential of the site in terms of its relatively close proximity to proven, important areas of Romano-British occupation and activity, some of it intense, and also with the presence of riverine alluvial deposits which have been shown elsewhere to present some considerable potential in terms of both the nature and extent of a surviving archaeological resource both within, and sealed by them.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## NOTES

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AAL	Avon Archaeology Limited
aOD	Above Ordnance Datum
BGL	Below Ground Level



GRO	Gloucestershire Record Office
GHER	Gloucester Historic Environment Record
NGR	National Grid Reference
OS	Ordnance Survey



## 1 INTRODUCTION

Avon Archaeology Limited was commissioned by Lidl GmbH to undertake an archaeological desk-based assessment of land to the north of Gloucester city centre, off the eastern side of Mercia Road, and just to the west of Kingsholm. The site centre is just under 800m due north of Gloucester city centre, taken at the point at which the city's four main streets converge. The site is centred at NGR SO 83174 19360, and lies outside, but just to the west of, the Kingsholm Conservation Area. It is currently part of a larger, entirely modern, commercial, retail and light industrial development, and within the site boundary there are currently two large warehouse-type structures occupied by various commercial enterprises, together with associated hard-standing used for vehicle parking. The site occupies a total area of about 1.3ha, and is an irregular rectangle in shape, with its long axis oriented north-south. Its maximum length is just over 135m, and its maximum width just over 100m. It is bounded to the east by a common boundary to the rear gardens of properties fronting onto Dean's Way, to the west by a part of the city's modern arterial road system, to the north by a large, triangular, undeveloped urban 'green', and to the south by a continuation of the commercial retail and light industrial park of which the site itself is a part (**Figures 1 and 2**). There are no listed buildings or scheduled ancient monuments either on the site itself, or in close proximity to it. However, the site of St Oswald's Priory lies about 380m to the south of the site, on the southern side of the main railway line, and 250m to its north-east, is the site of the so-called 'palace' at Kingsholm, of late Anglo-Saxon date, which is also thought to lie directly on or very close to the earliest Roman legionary fortress established at Gloucester. Both are Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The closest listed building is represented by surviving standing structures on the site of St Oswald's Priory, which as already noted, is also a SAM. The site does, however, lie only 300m to the west of the north-south Kingsholm Road, which is very likely to be of Romano-British origin.

The proposed development on the site would involve the demolition of the present structures, and the erection of a new retail store at the eastern side of the site occupying roughly a third of its area, with the remaining two thirds given over to car parking and some peripheral green landscaping.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

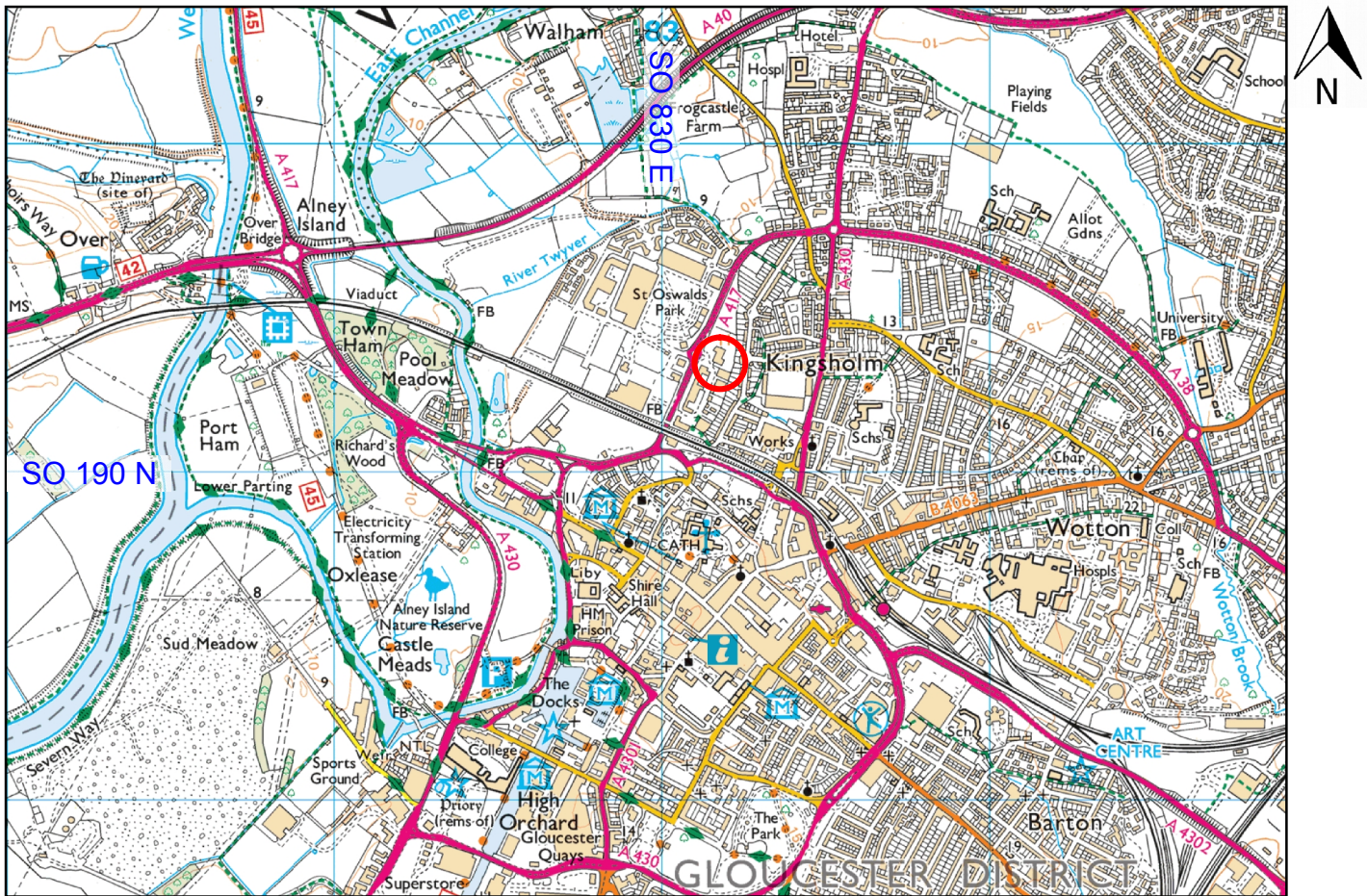
Searches were made of the indices of the collections of the Gloucestershire Record Office, and a variety of online bibliographic resources, most notably

Figure 1

### Location of the Study Area

The Study Area 

Plans and maps based on the Ordnance Survey Sheets are represented by the permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.



Grid lines at 1km intervals

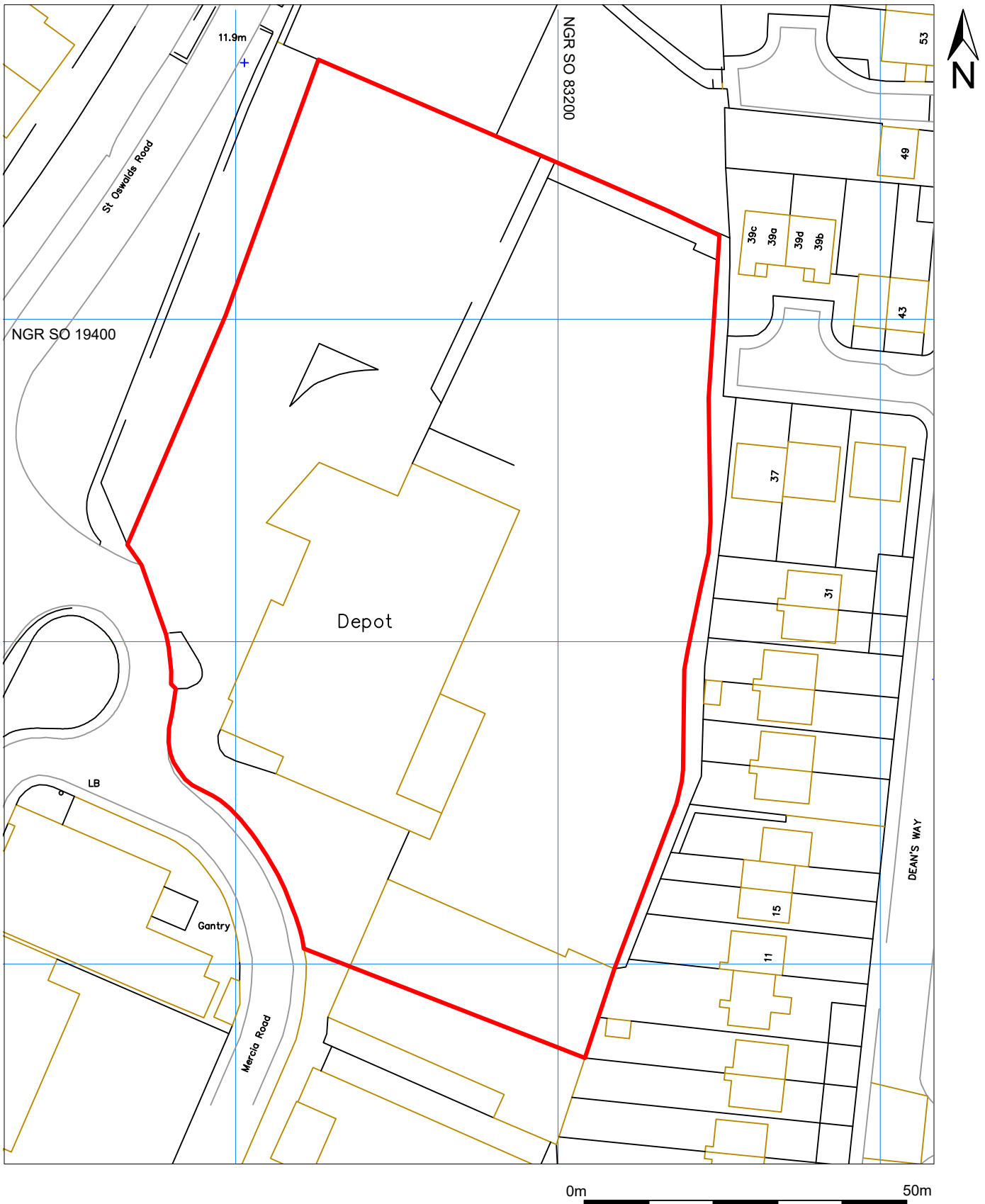
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Figure 2

Site location and boundary of the study area (outlined in red)





COPAC, BIAB, the Archaeology Data Service, and Google Scholar, were used to identify potentially useful sources of information, whether published or otherwise<sup>1</sup>. In addition, a trawl of the local authority HER was carried out on behalf of AAL by Andrew Armstrong, HER Officer for Gloucester City Council, and the most salient results of that search have been incorporated in this report. Mr Armstrong also provided references to salient secondary literature. A visit to the site was made by the author on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2017, and a digital photographic record was made (**Plates 1 and 2**).

### 3 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The historic city of Gloucester lies on the eastern bank of the River Severn, at its lowest practical crossing point, this fact alone representing the fundamental reason underpinning the site's location as, initially, a Roman legionary fortress, and thereafter as one of the province's four *coloniae*. It is important to understand that the course of the Severn in the vicinity of the town has changed, and its present channel now takes it much further to the west than was the case in the Romano-British period; at that time, it flowed roughly NNE/SSW, and its eastern bank lay just under 240m west of the city's Roman west gate (McWhirr 1981, 45; and see further below). The standard playing-card shape of the fortress has its long axis oriented NE/SW, and this is clearly because it is following the alignment of what must originally have been a low but locally prominent bluff, probably a terrace overlooking the river; and the high point of which, represented by a closed contour of 20m aOD surrounding a spot height of 20.7m aOD, lies at the eastern end of Longsmith St. As might be expected, gradients decline gradually to the W and NW, in the direction of the river, and this is most noticeable towards the NW end of Westgate Street, which led to bridging points in both the Roman and medieval periods. Here, immediately east of the river, the elevation declines to a height of only just under 11m aOD. Southgate Street also displays a very gentle downward gradient towards the SW, and an equally modest upward slope to the NE.

As already noted however, the site under consideration here lies some distance to the north of the historic city centre, although still on the eastern side of the present course of the Severn, and firmly within its flood plain. The site itself is to all intents and purposes level, with elevations within both it, and indeed, for a wide radius around it, centring on about 12-13m aOD, although as one

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<sup>1</sup> [www.copac.ac.uk](http://www.copac.ac.uk); [www.biab.ac.uk](http://www.biab.ac.uk); <http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/>; [www.scholar.google.com](http://www.scholar.google.com)

traverses eastwards, out of the river flood plain, this rises to 17m aOD at a point about 600m away from it.

Geologically, Gloucester city sits at the western edge of a NE/SW trending outcrop of Blue Lias limestone and Charmouth Mudstone, consisting of sedimentary strata laid down in the late Triassic and early Jurassic periods. Immediately to the west, however, as the topography might suggest, heights aOD decrease as the ground drops towards the river, and the solid rock geology very rapidly gives way to, and is subsumed beneath the various low-lying alluvial sequences and tidal flat deposits which fill the valley of the upper Severn at this point. As already noted, it is this geological framework from which, above all else, both the location and the orientation of the Roman town and *colonia* of Glevum took its cue.

The geological context of the site itself is similar to that of the city, for it sits on or very close to the same band of Triassic/Jurassic limestones and mudstones upon which the city lies. The geological map also shows, however, that the eastern edge of the wide band of alluvium which marks the extensive flood plain of the river, is such that the site may lie just inside it. The site *appears* to straddle the boundary between the hard rock geology and the drift geology as represented by the alluvium, but this is something of an unknown, and without detailed geotechnical investigation on the site, the detail of the river's depositional regime in this area is somewhat problematic. It appears as though a combination of natural geomorphological processes, mainly involving differential silting, and human interference over the course of successive centuries, have had a major impact on the river's course especially to the north and west of the city. There have been various attempts to chart the earlier courses of the river, a notable early example being by Rowbotham (1978). This writer depicted what he took to be the original, completely natural course of the river in the immediate post-glacial period (his Figure 1), and then made proposals for the river's course in both the Roman and medieval periods (Figures 5 and 6 respectively). In both these latter cases, Rowbotham's reconstructions carry the north-south course of the river considerably to the west of the study site under consideration here. However, a far more recent review, by Rhodes (2006), which in part represents a mild critique of Rowbotham's earlier proposals, suggests instead that a great eastward loop of the old river carried a short stretch of its course virtually right underneath the location of the study site (*ibid*, Figure 1, 10)<sup>2</sup>. The path of this proposed meander, if such it is, can indeed be pretty clearly seen on modern satellite

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<sup>2</sup>I am very grateful to Andrew Armstrong for drawing my attention to these important references.

imagery, and is marked by the lines of modern roads and historic boundaries. It is also extremely clear on historic mapping, in which it is seen to encompass, on its eastern side, a massive area of low lying meadow ground collectively called Mean Ham. This is not in and of itself, however, *proof* of the veracity of Rhodes's suggestion, but if the site does indeed lie right atop a former course of the Severn, this may have implications for the kinds of deposits, and perhaps their archaeological content, that might be expected to be encountered in the case of any excavations for foundations on the site, depending of course on their depth.

### **The Alluvial Sequences – A Brief Overview**

The alluvial deposits of the Severn littoral are generally identified with a number of distinct phases grouped under the collective term, the Wentlooge Series, from the location of its type-site immediately south-west of Newport, south Wales. The nature and thicknesses of these deposits in the North Somerset area are summarised by Rippon (2006, 33-37), but they consist essentially of a band of peat (the Middle Wentlooge Formation) 'sandwiched' between two much thicker layers of estuarine alluvium (the Lower and Upper Wentlooge Formations respectively). Although of varying date dependent on location, much of the Upper Formation is generally considered to represent a marine incursion of post-Roman date, and although at present uncertain, that is also, therefore, likely to be the case with the present study site as well. These deposits, or variations thereof, are pretty much ubiquitous throughout the low-lying coastal areas on both sides of the Upper Severn Estuary littoral; for example, in the Axe Valley, Somerset, below the southern flank of Mendip, a campaign of transect coring by Haslett revealed an estuarine depositional sequence which Haslett equates directly to the Wentlooge Series (Haslett *et al* 2001)<sup>3</sup>.

Archaeologically, these deposits are of crucial importance – it should be noted that a large body of accumulated evidence from fieldwork studies on both sides of the estuary, has identified numerous locations attesting to the fact that parts of the Upper Wentlooge Series *sea* not only prehistoric occupation and activity sites, but also entire Roman and post-Roman landscapes. The Middle and Lower Wentlooge Series also contain extensive evidence of occupation and activity from the Mesolithic through to the Bronze Age<sup>4</sup>. This evidence has, for example, very much informed Steve Rippon's narrative relating to the landscape evolution of the North Somerset Levels in the late prehistoric, Roman

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<sup>3</sup>The Axe Valley deposits are designated the Somerset Levels Formation by Haslett.

<sup>4</sup>Some of this evidence is little short of spectacular – see for example the account of the alluvial preservation of Mesolithic human footprints in Aldhouse-Green *et al*, 1993. Many more similar discoveries have been made since that date – see for example Pryor 2014, 66-69, and Plate 3.

and post-Roman periods (Rippon 2006), but other examples of relevant studies include Young 2006, Yates *et al* 2001, Allen and Fulford 1993, and Barclay *et al* 2008<sup>5</sup>. For example at Worle, the Upper Wentlooge alluvial sequences there have yielded extensive evidence for saltmaking in the Romano-British period on a considerable scale (Cox and Holbrook, 2009). Rippon, in particular, publishes an extremely enlightening cross-sectional transect right through the North Somerset Levels, from south-west to north-east. He shows that in this area at least, the Upper Wentlooge formation is about 4-5m in thickness, and beneath that the peat-dominated Middle Wentlooge is about half a metre thick. The Lower Wentlooge, where it has been tested all the way down to bedrock (most notably along the line of the M5 motorway), extends to a thickness of nearly 17m (Rippon 2006, 33, Fig. 3.1).

The sequences are generally less well known in the inner estuary (ie as one progresses upstream from the estuary proper), at locations such as that occupied by the site under consideration here, but it is at least likely that similar kinds of deposits can be expected. However, Allen and Fulford have reviewed the evidence for the alluvial regime in the stretch of Severn littoral between Gloucester and Awre, 16km to the south-west of Gloucester city centre, on the northern bank of the river. They found evidence for extensive embankment and drainage of this area in the Roman period, little activity in medieval times, but a resurgence in the early modern period, so that there is today very little active saltmarsh. They note that

Most of the Romano-British reclamations are to be found on the left [ie southern] bank of the Severn, and most of these carry a settlement directly on the alluvium. This distribution pattern points to significant differences in the organisation and use of land between the two banks of the river and, when combined with other evidence, suggests that wetland reclamation on the left bank was mostly a feature of the development of large villa estates, with the alluvial settlements representing substantial, outlying farmsteads (Allen and Fulford 1990, 288)<sup>6</sup>.

What chiefly emerges from a consideration of this corpus is that well-preserved sites, with a full range of artefactual and recoverable palaeoenvironmental evidence, can be buried both under and within *metres* of estuarine alluvium and so present no surface expression whatsoever to reveal their existence. This fact

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<sup>5</sup> The literature on the palaeoenvironment of the Severn Estuary littoral, and in particular the role of the various alluvial series as an archaeological resource of unsurpassed richness, is now voluminous, but much is conveniently brought together in the various Annual Reports of the Severn Estuary Levels Research Committee, beginning in 1993. However an important modern overview survey of large parts of the estuary and its archaeological resource can now also be found in Crowther and Dickson 2008.

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Andrew Armstrong for this reference.

needs to be borne in mind as a material consideration when assessing the archaeological potential of any proposed development site lying in these estuarine and/or riverine alluvial areas.

## 4 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### General - City of Gloucester

The sheer quantity of information relating to the history of the city of Gloucester, much of it underpinned by the results of archaeological work, is such that what is presented here can, almost by definition, represent only the most summary account of the most salient points; it is hoped, though, to provide at least basic frameworks of both chronology and the main developments that will be adequate for present purposes<sup>7</sup>.

The early history of Gloucester is of course defined by its origins as a Roman town, itself originating as a legionary fortress, although the final town site did not, in fact, represent the very first major Roman presence in the immediate area. The strategic importance of the river crossing, and the need for a command point in the general area which could control access to it, was recognised early on during the Roman conquest and pacification of lowland Britain; this, at least, seems clearly to be the imperative behind the establishment of a legionary fortress at Kingsholm, slightly to the north of Gloucester, and close by to the east of the study site, perhaps as early as the late 40s or early 50s AD (Wacher 1995, 150). There is a suggestion, indeed, that the choice of specific site for this early fortress may owe something to the presence of a pre-existing late Iron Age settlement, but the indications are extremely vague, and if such a settlement did exist at Kingsholm, its nature and extent are entirely problematic (Hurst 2005, 299). It seems also to have been the case that the western defences of the Kingsholm fort were sited very close to the eastern bank of the former course of the Severn (McWhirr 1981, 11-12).

By the mid 60s, a legionary fortress had been established on the site which was later to become the *colonia* of Glevum, and it is likely that the Kingsholm site was abandoned by this time (McWhirr 1981, 14), although Hurst has suggested recently that there may have been a military presence on the Gloucester site before the Kingsholm fort ceased to operate (Hurst 2005, 299, fn7). The new fort at Gloucester enclosed an area of just over 17ha, and was provided with defences consisting entirely of earthen ramparts and ditches. Surprisingly little

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<sup>7</sup> By far the best and most authoritative starting point for the 'conventional' history of the city of Gloucester, its urban and suburban parishes and satellite settlements, is VCH 1988.

is known about the internal nature of the fortress, although in terms of general layout and the provision and design of barrack blocks, gates, *principia* and ancillary buildings, it seems in essence to have conformed to the 'standard' Roman model, so far as this can be defined (McWhirr 1981, 14-19; de la Bedoyere 2001, 40-85). It is, though, worth noting that at Gloucester, while the main NW/SE road, linking the east and west gates, ran uninterrupted through the centre of the fortress, by contrast the line of the SW/NE road linking the north and south gates was not continuous, but was from the outset blocked by the site of the headquarters building or *principia* (Wacher 1995, 152, fig 65).

The life of the fortress as a military installation was, however, relatively short, for it seems to have lost that function by, at the latest, the late 70s, and thereafter supported civilian occupation at a fairly low level, until its formal elevation to the status of *colonia*, or colony for retired army veterans, probably during the short rule of the Emperor Nerva (96-98AD). Gloucester eventually shared this distinction with three other Romano-British towns, namely Colchester, Lincoln and York. In the late first or early second century, a narrow stone wall, probably intended to act as little more than a revetment, was cut into the front of the old fortress rampart along its entire circuit, and this marked the first phase in 'monumentalising' the defences of the civilian town. Barrack blocks were eventually replaced with dwellings and other buildings, although to date the plan of only a single large town house, of mid second century date, is known with any certainty, on a site at Berkeley Street (Wacher 1995, 156-157). It is nonetheless clear that the second century was a time of extensive rebuilding and expansion, and that some of this was achieved by the amalgamation of a number of previously separate, smaller plots. The plan of the central forum and basilica area is partially known but, as McWhirr remarks,

There are no other plans of the public buildings.....such as the baths or theatre, but there are substantial remains indicating their presence (McWhirr 1981, 23).

One of these large buildings is likely to have been a massive temple, or other porticoed building, lying on the northern side of the Westgate Street frontage<sup>8</sup>. The existing stone and earth defences having been provided with towers in the late second century, at some point in the third century, the town walls were substantially rebuilt, a project probably associated also with the provision of external towers. All of the gate sites, if not indeed the gate structures themselves, appear to have continued in use at least into the late pre-Conquest period (Heighway 2003, 5), with the sole exception of the west gate; this is

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<sup>8</sup>The gates and other monumental public structures are discussed in detail by Wacher, 1995, 156-159.



because the alignment of Westgate Street has been pushed northwards, and does not follow the original Roman alignment. Outside the west gate of the town, the road would have led to a bridge, which from the second century was probably stone built. Substantial, stone-built quays also seem to have been provided in the vicinity of the bridge, fronting the eastern bank of the Severn, probably with associated warehousing; some of this wharfage complex probably occupied land reclaimed from the river frontage (McWhirr 1981, 43; Wachter 1995, 161).

It is extremely important to realise that the space within the defences at Gloucester represents only a part of the colonia's total settlement area, and indeed, only the lesser part. For it has been estimated that as well as the 17ha or so within the defensive circuit, an additional area amounting possibly to some 130ha of development, spread out to the north and west of the town, in the form of extra-mural urban settlement. It is highly unlikely, however, that this represents an area of unbroken development, and it would certainly have contained intermittent open parcels, such as, for example, the site of the old Kingsholm fort; nonetheless, Hurst has suggested a total built-up area of about 50-70ha at Gloucester, both within and outside the defensive circuit, and this compares very favourably with his suggested equivalent figure of 70ha at Cirencester, representing only about 75% of the walled area there (Hurst 2005, 294-296). Neither should Gloucester's extra-mural suburbs be thought of as consisting for the most part of a jerry-built shanty town, which is the usual, albeit highly misleading conception of *vici*, especially those associated with military installations. Although only poorly and intermittently recorded, it is clear that at Gloucester, the development outside the walls boasted substantial and well-appointed structures, some with tessellated floors – the most notable survival of which has been the example from what is probably a public building, maybe part of a baths complex, directly on top of which was constructed the church of St Mary de Lode, to the NW of the NW corner of the town wall. Some of this development seems also to have consisted of structures which can represent nothing other than fairly massive and imposing examples of public architecture (Esmonde Cleary 1987, 78-84; Heighway 2003, 5, and Fig 2; Bryant and Heighway 2004).

One of the means by which an urban area can be approximately defined in the Roman period is by mapping the locations of known cemeteries, since for the most part, and under normal circumstances, these would have lain outside the formal urban boundary (see, for example, Hurst 2005, 295, Fig 1). At Gloucester, three main concentrations of burials are known: in the area of the docks immediately SW of the town's SW wall; to the north of the town, at

Coppice Corner, and part of which appears to encroach on the area of the old Kingsholm fort; and to the NE, along the London Road, at Wotton. A large cemetery has also been found not far outside the east gate, at Barton Street (Esmonde Cleary 1987, 82-84; Hurst 2005, 295, Fig 1; Heighway 2003, 3). The Wotton cemetery is particularly important as it has been the subject of extensive and detailed excavation to modern standards of recording, and involving the application of a battery of scientific techniques in the post-excavation analysis of the skeletal material (Simmonds *et al*, 2008)<sup>9</sup>.

Between the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and the foundation of a minster at Gloucester dedicated to St Peter in the last quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, developments within the town walls are seen only through a distorting haze of sporadic and sometimes conflicting archaeological and historical evidence; although a recent attempt to reconcile these disparate sources has produced more clarity than there was (Heighway 2003). Heighway goes into considerable detail about the possible level of continuity, but for present purposes only the most salient points of her argument need be noted. Her fundamental thesis is that

Gloucester certainly existed, even flourished, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, making use of adapted Roman buildings. What happened next?.....after the 6<sup>th</sup> century there is no evidence of activity in the town until the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Was the minster.....in a largely deserted town? (*ibid*, 5).

At Mary de Lode, a fifth century timber mausoleum, ultimately containing three burials, was built on top of, and deliberately aligned with, the Roman complex underneath it, and its importance lies in its demonstration that Roman rules of burial *outside* inhabited areas clearly no longer applied by that date, and also confirmation about the frequent relationship between Roman buildings and later churches<sup>10</sup> (Bell, 2005).

Some 'traditional' accounts still persist in seeing the year 577 as a defining moment for Gloucester, since that is the date to which the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle attributes the so-called Battle of Dryham, after which the three 'cities' of Gloucester, Cirencester and Bath came under Anglo-Saxon hegemony, the three British 'kings' of these places having been defeated in the course of the

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<sup>9</sup>And indeed such has been the importance of this material that it has formed the basis of continuing scientific investigations and separate publication; see for example Chenery *et al*, 2010.

<sup>10</sup>Although Heighway is at pains to emphasise that she is *not* claiming unbroken continuity of Christian use at St Mary de Lode: "This is not an occasion where a late Roman cemetery burial became the source of a cult.....[and] St Mary's [is not] the site of a late Roman church" (Heighway 2003, 5).

battle. Modern scholarship is, however, now confident in dismissing this account as unhistorical invention, and it is increasingly likely that there never was any such battle. As Carolyn Heighway has remarked,

It is time we put the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century items [of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle], including the battle of Dyrham, into the dustbin. It is 10<sup>th</sup> century West Saxon propaganda, not fifth or sixth century history (Heighway 2000, 5).

By contrast the foundation of St Peter's minster, for which orthodox accounts usually give a date early in the last quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, does seem to have represented a turning point in Gloucester's post-Roman re-emergence, since it acted as a catalyst for growth and renewal within the town, although the actual location of the original, late 7<sup>th</sup> century minster, whether within or outside the town walls, is problematic (Heighway 2003, 5-6). It certainly seems by the 10<sup>th</sup> century to have been on or close to the site of the later abbey, and to have drawn around itself a massive precinct which extended well to the NW of the old town walls, and which completely disrupted the NW quadrant of the town in terms of a new, grid road layout, the major elements of which seem largely to have been in place by about 900. By this date, the main framework of streets was now provided by the East, West, North and Southgate streets, with, for the first time, Northgate/Southgate streets now forming a continuous, unbroken route linking those two gates, completely disregarding the site of the old central forum and its associated basilica building (Heighway 2003, Fig. 1). It is very likely that this highly regular road layout arose directly out of the establishment at Gloucester, at about this date, of a defensive *burh*, founded by the royal house of Mercia, in whose territory Gloucester had long since lain (Heighway 2003, 9-10). As already noted, this basic framework remained essentially on its Roman alignment, with the exception of Westgate Street, which had been pushed somewhat to the north of its original course. Kingsholm had become the site of an Anglo-Saxon royal hall by the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century, and Heighway considers that

there is good reason to suppose that it was a royal residence well before that (Heighway 2003, 3)<sup>11</sup>.

It would have been here, and *not*, as is often stated, at St Peter's minster, that William the Conqueror met his ministers in the winter of 1085 to plan the Domesday survey. After the Conquest, Gloucester was provided with first a motte and timber castle, and subsequently, in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, a new

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<sup>11</sup>Use of the heavily-loaded and misleading term 'palace', as is far too often applied to such buildings, is completely inappropriate in this respect. The so-called Anglo-Saxon 'palace' at Cheddar, in Somerset, is another example of this inappropriate nomenclature.

stone-built castle (Hurst 1984). As already noted, the city had already begun to overspill its built boundaries even in the Roman period, and this expansion continued, in fits and starts, throughout the high middle ages, and into the early modern and modern periods; the only likely hiatus being at the very end of the Roman period and throughout Anglo-Saxon times, when the city and the wider area spent the earlier part of the period in the kingdom of the Hwicce, a sub-kingdom of Mercia, which was eventually absorbed into the larger entity probably by the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Heighway 1987, 35-40).

### **The Site**

The history of the site in terms of its place within the overall administrative and parochial pattern in the immediate vicinity of the city of Gloucester is complex and indeed in some respects obscure. Historically it lay only just outside, to the north of, the formal boundary of the ancient borough (VCH 1988, Figure 1). For a variety of reasons, such as the sharing of field systems, and interlocking and overlapping manorial and parochial jurisdictions, there had developed by the end of the middle ages a bewildering kaleidoscope of detached pieces of parishes, and deeply indented and meandering boundaries. Part of this obscurity, which also includes portions of land that were extra-parochial, arises from very old divisions of land, at various times both before and after the Norman Conquest, between the Crown, Gloucester Abbey, St Oswald's Priory, and Llanthony Priory. The minutiae of these difficult developments are far beyond the scope of the present study, and are, anyway, dealt with at length and in fully-referenced detail by the VCH (VCH 1988, 382-410). For present purposes, therefore, it is sufficient to note that as the location of the site emerges into the post medieval and modern periods, it does so as part of the area to the north of the city known as St Catherine's, to the west of Kingsholm, and occupying a location on the eastern side of an extensive river meander marking a former course of the Severn (Youngs 1979, 174). Historically this was an area of so-called 'hams', a word derived directly from OE *hamm(e)*, the meaning of which 'low-lying, floodable land in a river bend; meadow land', describes precisely its topography and likely land-use (Mills 2011, 522). Historically this large area, covering roughly in the order of 45ha, was known as Mean Ham, and it was also divided into two by a north-south boundary running between the two east-west arms of the meander. The western side of the boundary was known as Archdeacon Meadow with Little Mean Ham, the eastern half was called Great Mean Ham<sup>12</sup>. By the time of the first Ordnance Survey large scale maps of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the eastern extent of the

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<sup>12</sup> These names, and the line of the north-south boundary, persisted into the early 1970s, as attested by historic OS maps.

meander, running north-south, was known as the River Twyver. However, in fact, the Twyver, a tributary of the Severn, historically flowed east to west, marking the northern boundary of Mean Ham, and joining the Severn at Lower Walham, about 780m to the west of the study site; and it seems as though the name had, by this date, become transferred to what had in fact been an old, original course of the Severn itself (Fullbrook-Leggatt 1964). As already intimated, it is highly likely that the whole of this area, coming as it does well within the depositional regime of an earlier course of the Severn, is underlain by river alluvium, and the site lies towards its eastern edge.

The historic maps which can be marshalled for this site show very clearly that it had remained completely untouched by built development since at least the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (see below, **Historic Map Evidence**). In the middle ages Meanham, and indeed a number of the other low-lying meadow grounds to the north of the city, belonged to Gloucester Abbey, but were subject to common rights on the part of the burgesses of the city (VCH 1988, 67).

In terms of its land use, it is hardly surprising that this area was, historically, turned over to meadow, and it had been the case since at least the medieval period (VCH 1988), but numerous later references also attest to this: two poles of land in 'a meadow called Meanham' are noted in a late 17<sup>th</sup> century deed (GRO D3398/1/11/1); Meanham Mead is recorded in 1798 (GRO D936/E117); interestingly, a hint about the way in which the meadow was used is given by a reference in 1800 to a "common meadow called Meanham" (GRO D3117/2947); and indeed it seems clear that Meanham was still regarded as commonable, or at the least, as still carrying common rights, as late as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, since a dispute in 1901 between commoners and Gloucester Corporation, relating to the value of common rights in Meanham and elsewhere, resulted in litigation (GRO D3651/5). Again, however, it seems clear that these later references represent merely the continuance of extremely long practice, since the name itself is derived from Old English (*ge*)*mæne hamm*, the meaning of which is 'the common meadow' (Smith 1964, 139)<sup>13</sup>.

Meanham was not part of the great parliamentary act (1796) and award (1799), which formally enclosed (ie extinguished any surviving common rights on) various discontinuous tracts of land in the vicinity of Gloucester at, or belonging to, Matson, Barnwood, St Mary de Lode, St Catherine and elsewhere (Tate

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<sup>13</sup>The earliest spelling provided by Smith is as late as the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, but in view of the fact that Meanham appears to have been in the hands of one or other of Gloucester's ecclesiastical houses by the medieval period, it is very likely that a much earlier spelling survives somewhere.

1943, 54). By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the only part of Meanham which was subject to tithe was the 57 acres (23ha) of Great Meanham, which was the part of the meadow on the eastern side of the north-south boundary to which we have already alluded (GRO D134/Z29); the reason for this is not entirely clear, although the likelihood is that this part of the meadow had at some point passed out of ecclesiastical hands (ie Gloucester Abbey), and had thus become tithable (**Figure 6**).

There had been some minor impingement on the integrity of Meanham in the medieval period, when a hospital dedicated to St Bartholomew had been founded, reputedly in the reign of Henry II, on a site at its southern extremity, inside the confluence formed by two arms of the River Severn (VCH 1988, 15). The site was abandoned and ruinous by the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, and from that point was taken over by the corporation, rededicated for almshouses, and expanded (VCH 1988, 82)<sup>14</sup>. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the site lay at the centre of a coherent little block of development on the northern and southern sides of Lower Westgate Street. The remaining area of Meanham, however, remained pretty much unsullied until well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and into the 20<sup>th</sup>, despite the fact that westward development of the Kingsholm suburb continued apace on the eastern side of, and indeed right up to, what by then was known as the River Twyver, which as already noted marked the eastern boundary of the meadow.

The two major developments representing incursions into the meadow landscape were both related to transport. The arrival of the Forest Dean Railway (later the Great Western) into Gloucester in the 1840s necessitated the construction of a line running north-west/south-east across the southern side of the old meadow ground, its short eastern stretch within the meadow being carried on a viaduct. This line is still in operation. Of rather more immediate relevance for present purposes was the laying out, in the inter-war period, of the line of St Oswald's Road, running north-south across the eastern side of the former meadow, and designed as part of a more extensive new and upgraded road system intended to relieve the city centre of through traffic (GRO GBR/L6/23/B1235). The earliest surviving building control plans relating to the construction of individual houses on St Oswald's Road all cluster around the mid to late 1930s (these records are in the GRO class GBR/L20/2<sup>15</sup>. The main

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<sup>14</sup>An almshouse building, on the site of St Bartholomew's Hospital, is still there, standing in somewhat forlorn isolation surrounded by a sea of totally unprepossessing, modern development. The present building is of late 18<sup>th</sup> century date, and is Grade II listed. It is now used as a craft and shopping centre, and is known as Westgate Galleria.

<sup>15</sup>Although note that there is what appears to be an aberrant reference to a building control file for a house at 72 St Oswald's Road, dated 1887. On the face of it, it seems as though this can



building control reference for Gloucester, containing an index of street names, is at GRO GBR/L20/1/1). Mercia Road was established at the end of the 1950s, and the present buildings on the site were in place by the early 1970s. The current landlords of the proposed development site, the Watts Group, appear to have had a presence there from its very earliest days in the late 1950s, when they were Watts (Factors) Ltd (GRO DC29/6).

Finally, it should be noted that it was not possible to locate any historic plans and, crucially, sections, relating to the present structures on the site, so that it has not been possible to come to any meaningful view about the depths of the foundations of those buildings, and therefore the potential for damage to any surviving in situ archaeological remains and deposits which may already have been caused by them<sup>16</sup>.

## 5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The strict remit of this study is to consider the evidence for archaeological survival in the vicinity of the study site, based on current knowledge as expressed in the City of Gloucester Historic Environment Record. This specific aspect of this review, therefore, is underpinned by the results of a trawl of the HER carried out on behalf of AAL by Andrew Armstrong, HER Officer for Gloucester City Council. The trawl generated the map of records which is reproduced here as **Figure 11**. It should be stated from the very outset that due to their sheer number, the vast majority of these records cannot be examined individually in detail, and all that can be done here is to give what is hoped is a small representative sample to highlight what is unarguably the most important contributor to the overall corpus of records in this area, which of course is the Romano-British period. A previous desk-based assessment has already been undertaken on exactly the same site, but this fact is *not* noted by the City of Gloucester HER (Watkins 2013).

In the first instance the data become more manageable if we focus down to a radius of about 100m around the site boundary. There are no records at all within the site boundary itself. The closest record is 41875, which lies only just outside the site's eastern boundary, and is an isolated find of a single Roman coin. For present purposes, such finds are effectively meaningless, and the

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only be a mistake – St Oswald's Road most definitely did not exist before the 1930s, and examination of the First Edition OS map did not reveal any other thoroughfare in Gloucester by that name, at about that date. GRO GBR/L20/2/1887/10.

<sup>16</sup>This is absolutely *not* to say that such plans do not survive, but an extensive search of all possible repositories is outside the scope of the present report.

wider trawl has picked up numerous further examples, such as 38997 and which will not be considered further here. The next closest record lies immediately to the south-west of the site, and is a record of a what is probably a modern 'works' shown on an OS map of the 1960s, again of little or no interest for present purposes. Record 38481 relates to observations made in 1996/7 during the excavation of new foundation and service trenches, and may have revealed an earlier course of the River Twyver; so although strictly outside the site, it is very close, and may have implications for present purposes. 14578 relates to the discovery of footings for a stone wall of post-medieval date on Dean's Way.

As already noted, by far the most important elements of the HER trawl overall, both within and outside of the 100m radius area, relate to what it tells us about Romano-British and early medieval activity in the area of the site. In this respect, for example, record 39045 records intermittent features of Roman date, notably ground levels and pitting. Absolutely key, however, is 44479 and its related records. This relates to an evaluation which took place in the early 1990s for redevelopment in Dean's Way, and following a GPR survey of the area which threw up anomalies of potentially archaeological significance. This is only a matter of 40-50m or so to the east of the site's eastern boundary. Five trenches were excavated, at varying points along Dean's Way, and it seems best simply to quote the HER in full in relation to the findings, which noted that:

Excavation was hampered by the water table which was consistently reached at 1.85m. Disturbance varied greatly. Trench 1 was completely occupied by a 19<sup>th</sup> century rubbish pit extending well below 2m. Trenches 4 and 5 provided evidence of river silts from about 1.4m to at least 2m, resting on loose river gravels. The latter were encountered at between 1.8 and 2m. Over 90% of the finds were post-medieval. This may not be surprising given the nature of the deposits. It should however be noted that 19<sup>th</sup> century rubbish pits excavated on Sandhurst Road [the southern end of which lies about 300m to the NE of the present site], similar to that found in Trench 1, did produce large quantities of Roman finds and this may be indicative of the intensity of development in this part of the Roman site.

The combination of GPR and trial holes has suggested that much of the west side of Dean's Way and part of the south end is built over a series of silted water courses, the hollows of which were made up in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This meant that archaeological levels have been protected by over 2m of unconsolidated soil deposits. There may, however, have been a spur of gravel at the north end of the area which could have formed the basis for the siting of a Roman Wharf. The line of the Roman west defences to Kingsholm was confirmed by GPR, with the added possibility of a spur ditch running off the line of the south defences to enclose the river frontage.

Record 38482 is also relevant here, relating as it does to the 'old' Severn, being the most easterly of the three channels which formerly carried the Severn to the west of Kingsholm. In sum, what these records suggest is that the site stands probably not far from the western defences of the Kingsholm fortress, as indicated at least in part by GPR survey, and that at the least it lies on or very close to the line of at least one of the former channels of the Severn, with the possibility of wharfage installations of Romano-British date not far away – although the HER also highlights the unfortunate fact that

The exact location of these extremely important results is unclear because the report does not include a copy or interpretation of the GPR survey.

There is a small handful of records to the west of the site, the nearest being 5587, about 100m to the west of the site's western boundary. This is related closely to the records already cited above in that it is a short excursus on the earlier course or courses of the Severn, and the way that it was both influenced, and perhaps to some extent changed by the presence of the Kingsholm fort, and latterly the Roman city of Gloucester. Again, for present purposes, it is enough to reinforce here the point that the site clearly lay within a highly dynamic riverine environment that was exploited probably throughout the Roman period and afterwards. The HER also, however, is at pains to stress that in the past, understanding of the river's regime has been faulty, and even now there are many unknowns. Slightly further to the north, 44498 records extensive meadows which in the Roman period lay on the western side of the river, although it is possible that there was an island between the various river channels which may have supported prehistoric and later settlement.

East of the site, on the eastern side of Dean's Way, the density of records increases massively, and in part this is no surprise since it is in this area in which lies Kingsholm Roman fortress and associated settlement, and the subsequent Anglo-Saxon royal hall. In the mid-1990s, a series of box pits were dug related to water services in Dean's Way, represented by HER 38469 and related records. Together these interventions recorded a series of cut features, surfaces and deposits of Romano-British date, and one of the surfaces may have been post-Roman. An adult supine inhumation burial, probably of Roman date, was also recovered from one of the boxes and may have been a member of the Kingsholm cemetery, the boundaries of which are known only very imperfectly. This gives us pause because it is only about 150m or so to the north of the study site's northern boundary.

Records relating to Romano-British material on this (eastern) side of Dean's Road are not surprisingly frequent, and it is important to note how often they

appear to represent stratified, firmly sealed and in situ archaeology. Only a small sample can be dealt with here, but it is hoped that they will give some impression of the nature and extent of the potential archaeological resource at locations not very far away from the site. The Gloucester Rugby Club ground is known to be close to, although outside the fortress, which lay to its north, and HER 42748 records a watching brief in 2004 undertaken during construction of a new east stand. The HER reports that the work here produced

A number of pits.....ranging in date from Mid to Late 1st century AD to 13/14th century. Some of the trenches produced evidence of stratified Roman deposits surviving in areas of the site. In addition to the pits, a 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman pottery kiln was also partially exposed during limited ground reduction and remains in situ.....The kiln was partially disturbed by a modern pit and has parallels with a similar kiln discovered at Caldicote, near Chepstow. The absence of evidence associated with the use of the site as a cemetery or any building activity suggests that the area remained as open ground to the south of the early Roman fortress. There was no evidence associated with the later Roman period perhaps pointing to a period of abandonment before the expansion of medieval activities indicated by the pitting.

Similarly, finds and even structures of Romano-British date were found in the course of other development work at the same ground in the course of a watching brief in 1999 (HER 20202).

Immediately to the east of this, HER 709, represents a watching brief on the Kingsholm Road element of a more extensive flood alleviation scheme. Various features of early Romano-British date were revealed, including a timber-lined pit, as well as possible road surfaces. There was also evidence of much later, post-medieval road improvements. HER 1529 is a 'catch-all' record for a wide-ranging and numerous category of stray and individual finds which have turned up in the area of the former hamlet of Kingsholm, and which, with the single exception of a spindle whorl of supposedly Iron Age date, relate entirely to finds of Romano-British metalwork of various kinds, including coins. This record is mapped by the HER only just outside the 100m radius of the boundary of the study site's eastern boundary, with all the obvious implications that that has for the site. Road communications to and from Gloucester in the Roman period were obviously key to the success of the settlement, and a main road northwards from the city towards Droitwich and Worcester, now of course Kingsholm Road, ran only 250m to the east of the site's eastern boundary. This is dealt with in HER 8090, its relevance being that the existence of roadside settlement in the vicinity of major, and even smaller towns, is a well-known feature of the Romano-British period. The settlement at Shepton Mallet in Somerset, along the line of the Fosse Way, is a good example (Leach *et al* 2001; Ellis and Leach 2011).

At 76 Kingsholm Road, only 250 to the east of the study site's eastern boundary, a programme of excavation was undertaken prior to a major programme of redevelopment in the late 1980s. This is a key site. The HER notes that

The site lies outside the presently known south defences of Kingsholm and therefore the presence of military buildings here is one of the best clues to the presence of a much larger fortress (HER 41548).

The work on this site produced built structures, gravel extraction pits reused for dumping rubbish, and containing large amounts of early Roman pottery and animal bone. The HER remarks of these findings that

The regularity of the buildings and the division of land into 9m wide strips does....suggest official land division outside the fortress.

The site also produced no fewer than 58 inhumation burials, with the earlier phases oriented generally north-south but, fascinatingly, later, 4<sup>th</sup> century phases were oriented east-west. The HER explicitly states that, since grave goods were found with these latter burials, they *cannot* [our emphasis] be the result of the advent of Christianity. This is a fundamental misunderstanding, however, based on the misguided premise that the early church took a specific position against burial with grave goods, which in fact it did not. This was actually a much later development, although it was complex and highly variable in terms of both its chronology and distribution. In England, it seems as though the real turning point in terms of the presence or absence of grave goods from Christian burials, was probably the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Notwithstanding this, though, it was perfectly possible for early Christians throughout north-western Europe to be buried with grave goods, and so it may well be that at least a proportion of these inhumations were indeed Christian (Young 1999). There was, on this site, a hiatus in the post-Roman period, with activity not resuming on any realistic level again until the 12<sup>th</sup> century. There is a very large cemetery known from numerous intermittent but very significant finds made from at least the early 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and likely to be of mid to late Roman date, which lay to the north of Kingsholm. A part of it clearly lay along the northern part of the course of what is now Dean's Way, and it is described in detail by HER 38476. The grid reference given by the HER for this feature is only about 300m to the north-east of the study site's northern boundary, and because the full extent of the cemetery is as yet unknown, it is possible that it may spread southwards towards it.

The post-Roman period is much less well represented within the trawl, almost certainly because, simply, the material culture, in terms of both finds and buildings, was more ephemeral, with, for example, wooden buildings rather than

stone. It is always extremely difficult in any context in England bridging the perceived 'gap' between the end of the Roman, and the advent of the early medieval period; there are, though, hints from Gloucester. HER 11275 refers to the discovery in the early 1970s of a probably late Roman mausoleum, surrounded by inhumations of Roman date, but itself containing a secondary burial of a man identified from isotope analysis as coming from eastern Europe. The burial is likely to date from the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and the discovery of characteristically late Roman, probably military metalwork, in the form of buckles and strap ends, has prompted the suggestion that

The individual was a soldier of the Roman army, billeted at Gloucester during the last decades of Roman administration (HER 11275).

The site lies at the south-eastern corner of Kingsholm Close, and is only about 200m to the north-east of the study site's eastern boundary.

Finally, we need to note the fact that the northern stretch of the civil war defences of Gloucester ran not very far to the south of the site, although the exact proximity is unclear. The map accompanying the HER trawl shows a bastion at the very northernmost point of the defences lying only about 70m to the south of the study site's southern boundary. The defences are described in detail in HER 877, but there are large stretches which are known either not at all, or only intermittently. To the south and east, around the city proper, the defences reused the old Roman and medieval wall. To the west, north-west and north-east, new defences were thrown up quickly, which were subject to constant modification and extension. The HER notes a series of archaeological interventions and observations which have identified various elements of the defences, and there are other records (specifically 39474, 39475 and 39476), which may add to the general picture. Matters in this respect have been recently very greatly helped in Gloucester by the accession into the Gloucestershire archives of a remarkable manuscript plan, actually made in the 1640s, of the city's Civil War defences. The plan carries a scale, and is part of a pamphlet published in 1645. It is rather beautifully drawn, and gives all the appearance of having been the result of a proper survey, which with further research, outside the scope of the present study, could perhaps be superimposed onto modern mapping (**Figure 3**). The defences themselves are described in the pamphlet, in an anti-clockwise circuit, and the account of the northern section, that part which will have passed closest to the study site, bears direct quotation (spellings modernised):

Upon the lower part of the city, from the North to the West Gate (being a large tract of ground), there was no ancient defence, but a small work newly raised, with the



advantage of marsh grounds without, and a line drawn within from the inner North Gate under the college wall [ie the north-eastern wall of the cathedral precinct] to the Prior of St Oswald's (GRO D12862)<sup>17</sup>.

The clear inference of this is that while the defence seems clearly to have passed not far to the south of the study site, along this northern part of the circuit, it was not considered necessary to make it massive, precisely because the 'marshes' of Meanham and the other low-lying meadow grounds around it were thought in themselves to present a fairly effective barrier to attack from that side.

Although this overview of the available records has of necessity been brief, it has at least highlighted the richness and density of the known archaeological resource within a relatively short compass of the study site, although the site itself lies in an area in which, as **Figure 11** makes clear, the records begin to thin out rapidly to the west, obviously because this is the transition point between the higher ground to the east, the location of the early Kingsholm fortress and settlement, and the heavily braided channels of the Severn to the west; notwithstanding the fact, as we have already noted, that the regime of the river is highly complex in this area, with multiple channels, and has also undergone extensive artificial modification over centuries.

## 6 HISTORIC MAP EVIDENCE

Apart from the usual run of large-scale Ordnance Survey maps, and as might be expected for a place of Gloucester's importance and historical credentials, there is a range of historic maps, both printed and manuscript, accessible in the Gloucestershire Record Office which depict the city through time. Post-medieval maps do, however, present us with a general view of how the areas in the immediate vicinity of the site have changed, although as always, some caution is called for in their interpretation. A major caveat, however, is that while there are many maps showing the built up, historic part of the city itself, unfortunately rather fewer of them stray very far outside the strict administrative boundary of the historic borough, the east-west line of which to the north of the city is now for the most part subsumed beneath development.

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<sup>17</sup>"An Historicall Relation of the Military Government of Gloucester from the beginning of the Civill Warre Betweene King and Parliament to the removal of Colonell Massie from that Government to the Comand of the Western Forces By John Corbet Preacher of Gods Word" (printed in London, 1645). The plan, and its implications for our understanding of the civil war defences of Gloucester in general, have been recently reviewed in a new survey of the evidence by John Rhodes, 2014.

The historic maps, however, show that it ran through the southern part of Meanham, slightly to the north of the main railway line, although converging with the railway at the western side of the meadow, pretty much where the line is bridged across the present course of the river (eg **Figure 6**). Tracing it eastwards, it is clear that this northern boundary of the historic borough must have run very close, in the order of some 60m or so, to the southern boundary of the study site.

The earliest maps are little better than highly schematic, pictorial representations of the city, and give us little meaningful topographical detail, other than in very general terms. The earliest usable map based on an actual scaled survey that could be found in the GRO, was surveyed in 1780, published in 1782, and was produced by Hall and Pinnell (GRO GL65.36(1); **Figure 4**). The map shows the area of the study site as a completely undeveloped, blank expanse, which is identified by name as Meanham, and the depiction of which is clearly intended to indicate grassland. **Figure 4** shows the boundary of the study site overlain, but this is for indicative purposes only. The map also shows the northern boundary of the historic borough of Gloucester running east-west across Meanham, and depicts in outline, immediately to the south, the putative course of the civil war defences, in the form of walls and projecting bastions and sconces, as they were suspected in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. To the south of the site, the northern suburbs of Gloucester were already creeping northwards, and were beginning to 'lap up' against the southern boundary of Meanham. Immediately to the south-east of the great meadow, Catherine Street was already in existence, although paddocks and other small enclosures on the eastern side of the Twyver remained undeveloped at this date.

Roughly half a century later, in 1843, Arthur Causton produced a splendid survey of Gloucester, which included the greater part of Meanham (GRO D1740/1073; **Figure 5**). The meadow, again, is depicted as merely a blank expanse, with the borough boundary indicated, and the line of what was then proposed as the Dean Forest Railway running south-east/north-west across the southern side of the meadow. The map shows that the railway had acquired, or was in the process of acquiring, parcels of land in the vicinity of the line, but on the eastern side of the Twyver, development was still very limited to occasional buildings, representing the western extent of the hamlet of Kingsholm.

The tithe map for St Catherine's, made surprisingly late in 1851, includes *only* the area of Meanham, and even then, only that part historically known as Great Meanham, to the east of the north-south wet ditch, which separated it from the part to the west known as Archdeacon Meadow and Little Meanham (GRO

GDR/TI/85; **Figure 6**). The total titheable area, from the western ditch, northwards, eastwards and southwards to the River Twyver, encompassed some 55 acres (22.3ha), with the entire extent being described in the tithe schedule as meadow. Again the borough boundary is shown, and the line of the railway. There is no detail whatsoever depicted within the area of Meanham, but this is standard for a tithe map as recording absolute topographical detail was not the purpose of the tithe surveys.

It was not possible to identify, in the holdings of the Gloucestershire Record Office, any intervening map between the tithe and the First Edition of the OS, which included the area of the study site. The First Edition Six Inch OS was surveyed in 1882-83 and published in 1884. It is reproduced here as **Figure 7**, in a composite form from the two sheets which together make up the study site at this scale<sup>18</sup>. This map marks an increasing level of development on the western side of Kingsholm Road, centred on Mark Street, and the progressive development of this area is likely to have been the context for the supposed discovery of Roman coins here in 1880, as recorded on the OS map<sup>19</sup>.

The OS Second Edition six inch sheets were revised in 1901 and published in 1903 (same sheet numbers – see fn 17). Within the bounds of the old great meadow of Meanham there had in fact been very little change in the two decades or so since the First Edition map. A little to the east, a football ground had been established on what in the earlier edition was depicted as allotment and garden ground, and this formed the basis of the present Gloucester Rugby Club ground.

These two earlier maps notwithstanding, and later revisions such as that of 1921, the major change in respect of the area of Great Meanham was the appearance of the present St Oswald's Road, the line of which had clearly been established by 1938, since it appears for the first time on the OS revision of that date (**Figure 9**). This is significant because Mercia Road itself was established later through access off the eastern side of St Oswald's Road. The latter was clearly part of the major traffic relief scheme which included East Court Road, which carried traffic flow around the northern side of the city. In fact, it seems as though St Oswald's Road had been at least mooted as far back as 1933, when the GWR appears to have submitted a plan to the local authority for a bypass road and bridge through St Catherine's Meadow under the GWR at St Oswald's Road (GRO GBR/L6/23/B1235). Certainly, the Gloucestershire archives contain a whole series of building control files for houses and other premises being

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<sup>18</sup>Gloucestershire Sheet 25SW (west), 25SE (east).

<sup>19</sup>This is HER 14580, about which, however, nothing else is apparently known.

constructed in St Oswald's Road in the years before the Second World War, and starting in 1935 (these records are under the GRO classmark GBR/L20/2). Mercia Road itself first appears on historic OS maps of the early to mid-1960s, but already, by 1955, there was a facility on the site which the OS identifies as a Corporation Salvage Depot (**Figure 10**). Documentary evidence, in fact, indicates that Mercia Road was in existence by 1959, since there survives a plan of the industrial estate there, of which the present site forms part, dated for that year, and identifying Mercia Road by name (GRO GBR/L2/7/3/5). The present two standing buildings within the site boundary were in place by the early 1970s (Old Maps).

## 7 SITE VISIT

**Plates 1 and 2** represent part of a photographic record made by the author during a site visit conducted on Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2017. The descriptive captions accompanying the plates will, it is hoped, be reasonably clear and self-explanatory. As might reasonably be expected of a modern industrial estate, the site itself is distinctly unprepossessing in its present form, and it was never very likely that anything whatsoever of either historical or archaeological interest would survive to be visible above ground today. The key to the site is the level of disturbance which has already been engendered by the present, modern buildings upon it, the depths of their foundations, the construction of the various hard road surfaces, and the extent and nature of underground services. However, in the absence of contemporary plans and sections, these matters must, unfortunately, remain somewhat problematic.

## 8 NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK AND LOCAL PLANNING GUIDANCE

Between March 2010 and March 2012, national planning guidelines as they related specifically to the historic environment, were outlined in the document known as PPS (Planning and Policy Statement) 5, *Planning for the Historic Environment*. However, in March 2012, PPS5, and indeed all the other planning policy guidance and statements which underpinned the operation of the national planning process, was replaced by a single, greatly simplified, overarching and integrated document known as the *National Planning Policy Framework* (Dept for Communities and Local Government). Within this document, matters relating to archaeology and the historic environment generally are dealt with in Section 12 (pages 30-32), *Conserving and enhancing the historic environment*. A

detailed examination of the implications of the new framework for the specific site being reported on here, is outside the scope of this study. Section 12 of the NPPF is by definition a much shorter excursus on national planning policy as it relates to the historic environment, than was contained in its predecessor PPS5, although it is at least in principle underpinned by many of the same basic tenets. By far the majority of the document consists of guidance to local authorities in how they should handle matters relating to the historic environment in their own areas, and the essence of the narrative is that, in most cases, decisions relating to the historic environment are devolved down to local authorities in the form of their own Local Plans, Core Strategies, Development Frameworks, Supplementary Planning Documents and so on. It is certainly *not* the remit of the present report to attempt to second-guess how local authorities may interpret the detail of, and still less how they may actually apply in practice, the provisions set out in the new document, and each case must of course be taken on its own merits. However, in the city of Gloucester, the following documents currently provide the fundamental guidance on matters relating to the historic environment:

- ❖ The *Second Stage Deposit Local Plan*, adopted in 2002. In that document, planning policy as it relates to the historic environment, is set out in Chapter Four, with Paras. 4.34 to 4.40 (50-52), dealing with Listed Buildings; Para. 4.41 (52-53), dealing with Conservation Areas; and Paras. 4.41 to 4.53 (53-56) dealing with Archaeology.
- ❖ *Interim Adoption Development Affecting Sites of Historic (Archaeological) Environment Supplementary Planning Document (2008)*. The local authority itself describes this document as a “Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) [which] outlines the Council's planning policy approach in relation to development that affects the sites of the historic environment in Gloucester, and forms part of the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) for the City”.

## 9 CONCLUSIONS

The proposed development site which is the subject of this report lies on the northern side of the city of Gloucester, in an area which was once part of a large tract of common meadow land, part of which was known as Meanham, within a great meander of a former course of the River Severn. It is currently occupied by two very modern buildings, of effectively zero historical or archaeological

worth, as part of a small industrial estate that was being established in the late 1950s, at the same time that Mercia Road itself was established. St Oswald's Road, which runs north-south across the eastern side of Meanham, was established by the mid to late 1930s. The site has been the subject of a previous desk-based assessment, undertaken in 2013.

The drainage regime in this area has been highly dynamic in the past, and the river has been heavily braided, with usually several channels in operation at any given time. The site appears to lie on or very close to a former channel of the river, and at the very least it sits in a key transitional zone between the slightly higher, hard rock geology to the east, and the low-lying meadow ground to the west. The major early Roman settlement and fortress at Kingsholm lies close by on the eastern side of the site, and there have been numerous discoveries of finds, features and structures of that date, over several centuries. This includes the presence of what is taken to be a large, but ill-known extra-mural cemetery of later Roman date. At a later period, Kingsholm was also the site of an important Anglo-Saxon royal hall, to which the term 'palace' is frequently misapplied. A major road leading northwards out of Gloucester, now known as Kingsholm Road, passes close to the east of the site, and is also thought to be of Roman origin. It also seems likely that the northern section of Gloucester's civil war defensive circuit, albeit somewhat ephemeral according to a contemporary account, probably ran not far to the south of the study site.

The extent of any surviving archaeological resource within the site boundary is entirely unknown. At the time of writing (May 2017) there has been no geotechnical investigation of the site, so likewise are the nature and depths of the deposits underlying it highly problematic. While of course the present, modern development on the site is likely to have caused disturbance to underlying deposits, its extent and nature is unknown, in part because it has not been possible to trace contemporary plans and/or drawings of these structures which might have given an indication of the depths and extent of foundations. It seems likely to us that the local authority will be most concerned with the potential of the site in terms of its relatively close proximity to proven, important areas of Romano-British occupation and activity, some of it intense, and also with the presence of riverine alluvial deposits which have been shown elsewhere to present some considerable potential in terms of both the nature and extent of a surviving archaeological resource both within, and sealed by them.



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**1780**

Map of the City of Gloucester by Hall and Pinnell. SRPrints/GL65.51GS

**1798**

Documents relating to a close of meadow called the Harp Ground, near the City of Gloucester (abuttals 1770); six acres in Meanham Mead. D/936/E117.

**1800**

Lease relating to a garden outside the lower Northgate of the City of Gloucester; a close of land formerly the site of a tenement at Kingsholm. D3117/2947.

**1843**

Map of the City of Gloucester by Arthur Causton. D1740/P23

**1850/51**

Map and apportionment of the tithable land of St Catherine's, Gloucester. GDR/TI/85

**1901**

Notes relating to a court case between commoners of Meanham, and Gloucester Corporation. D3651/5.

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GWR, by-pass road and bridge, St Catherine's meadow under GWR at

St Oswald's Road. GBR/L6/23/B1235

.

**1930s**

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Figure 4

Extract from plan of the City of Gloucester by Hall and Pinnell, 1780. GRO SRPrints/GL65.51GS\*; NX3.4(23a)GS. Not to scale, approximate area of site outlined in red, best fit to this survey.





Figure 5

Map of the City of Gloucester by Causton, 1843. GRO D1740/P23. Not to scale, approximate area of site outlined in red, best fit to this survey.



Figure 6

Extract from tithe map for St Catherine's, Gloucester, 1851. GRO GDR/TI/85  
Approximate boundary of study area outlined in red. Not to scale, approximate area of site outlined in red, best fit to this survey.

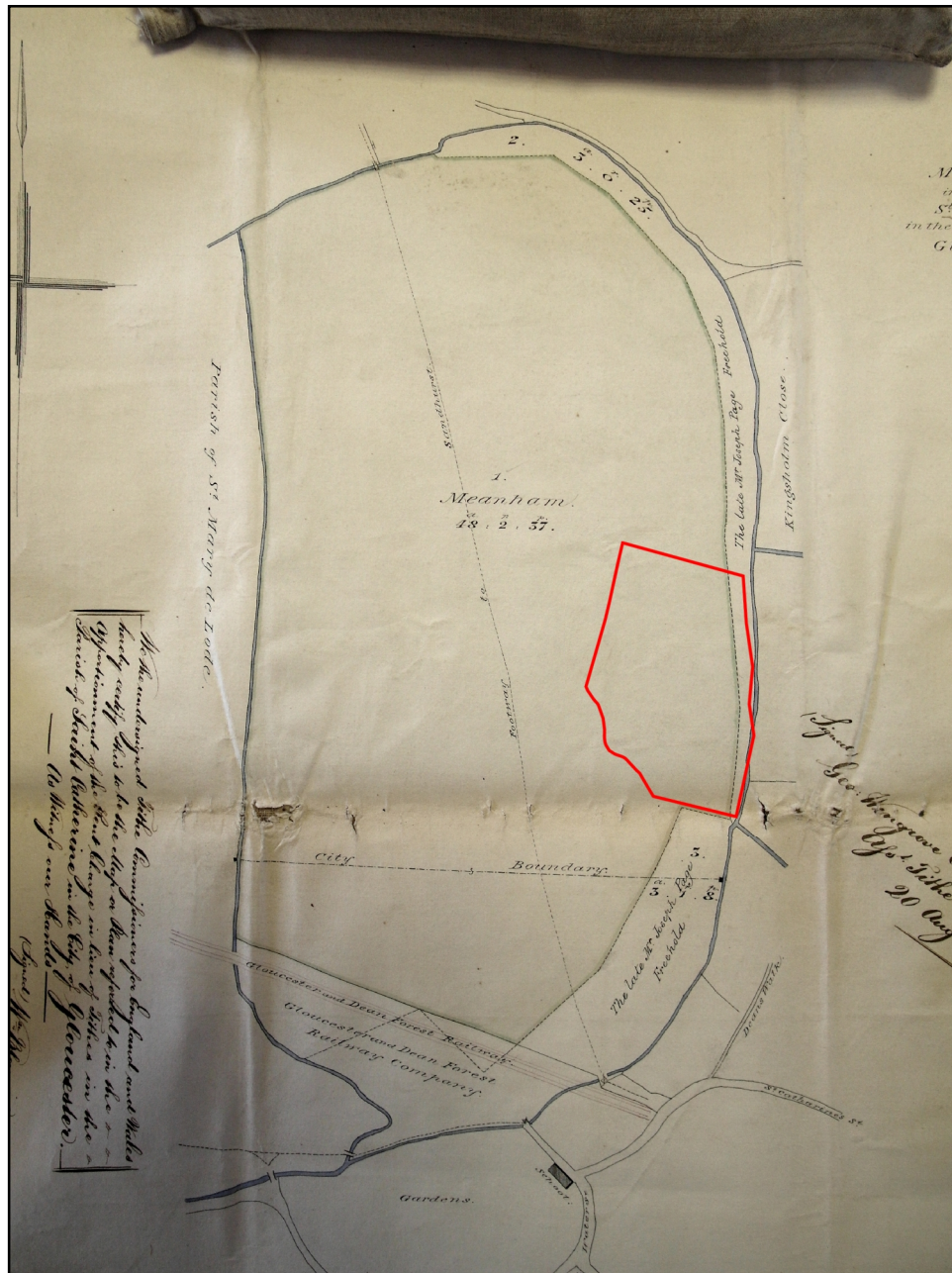




Figure 7

Extract from First Edition 25" OS map, Gloucestershire Sheet 25.15, surveyed 1881-82. Approximate boundary of study area outlined in red. Not to scale. Source: National Library of Scotland.

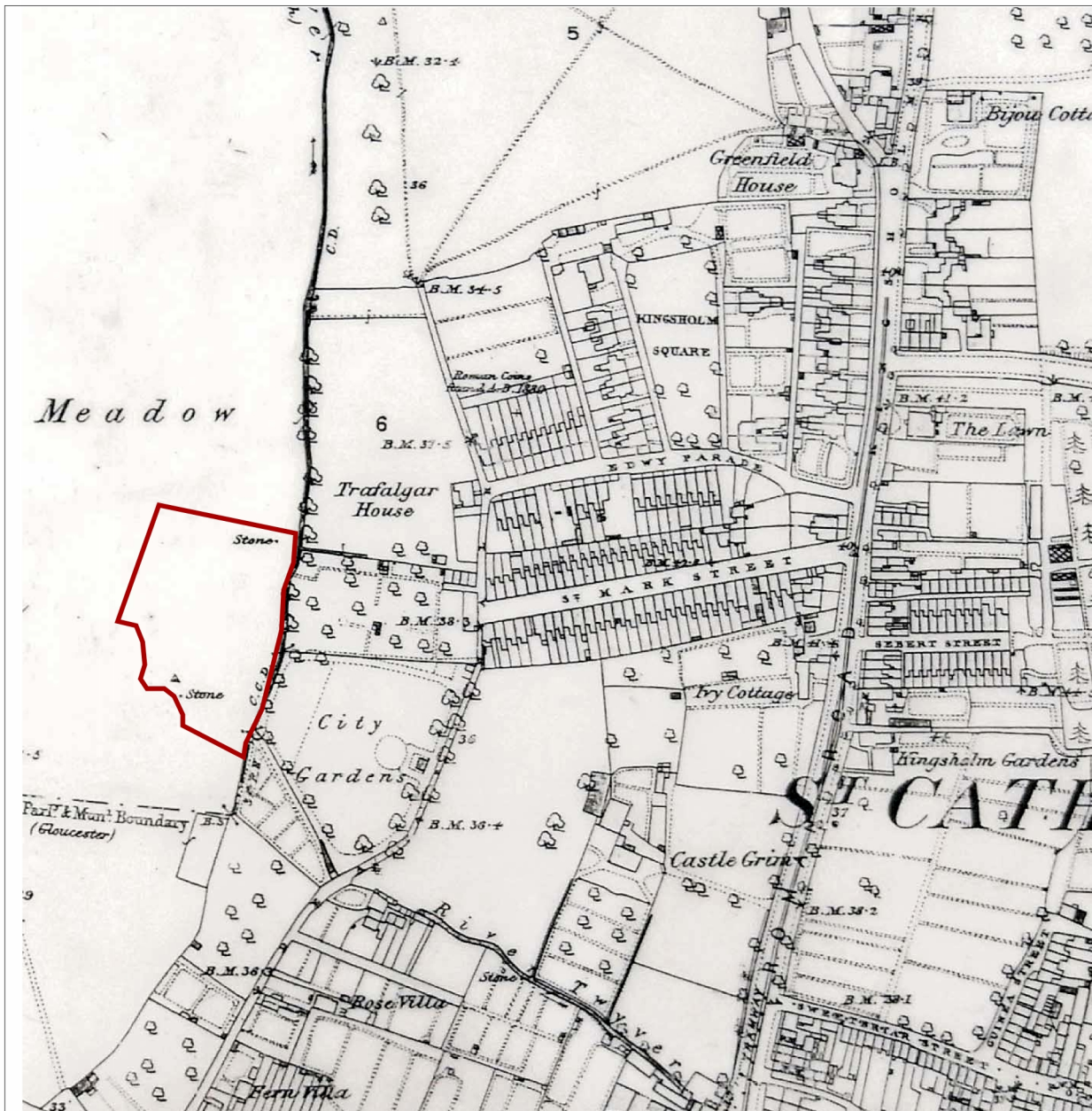


Figure 8

Extract from Second Edition 25" OS map, Gloucestershire Sheet 25.15, revised 1901, Boundary of study area outlined in red. Not to scale. Source: National Library of Scotland.

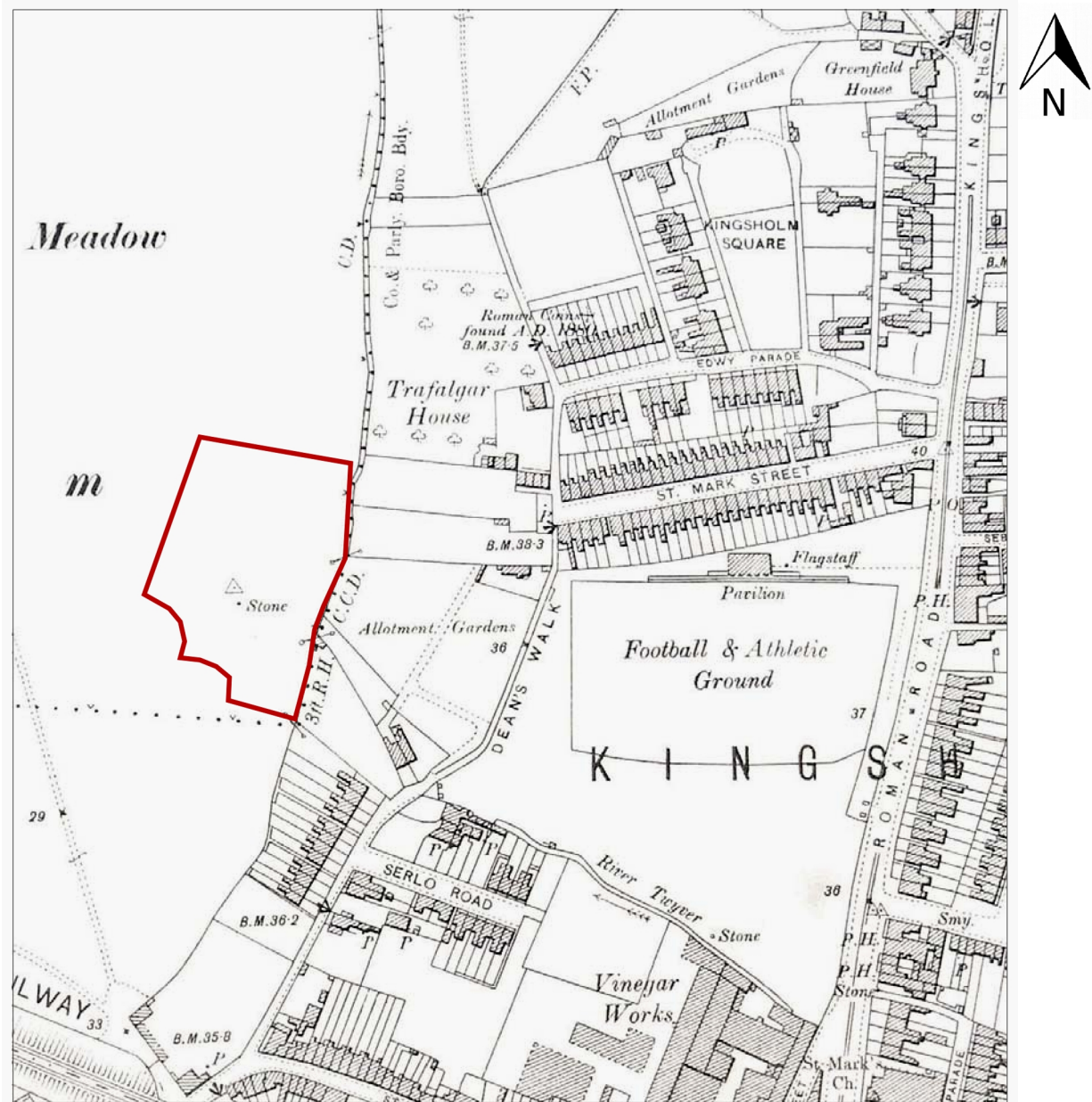




Figure 9

Extract from 25" OS map, edition of 1938, Gloucestershire Sheet 71.12. Not to scale.  
Study site outlined in red.

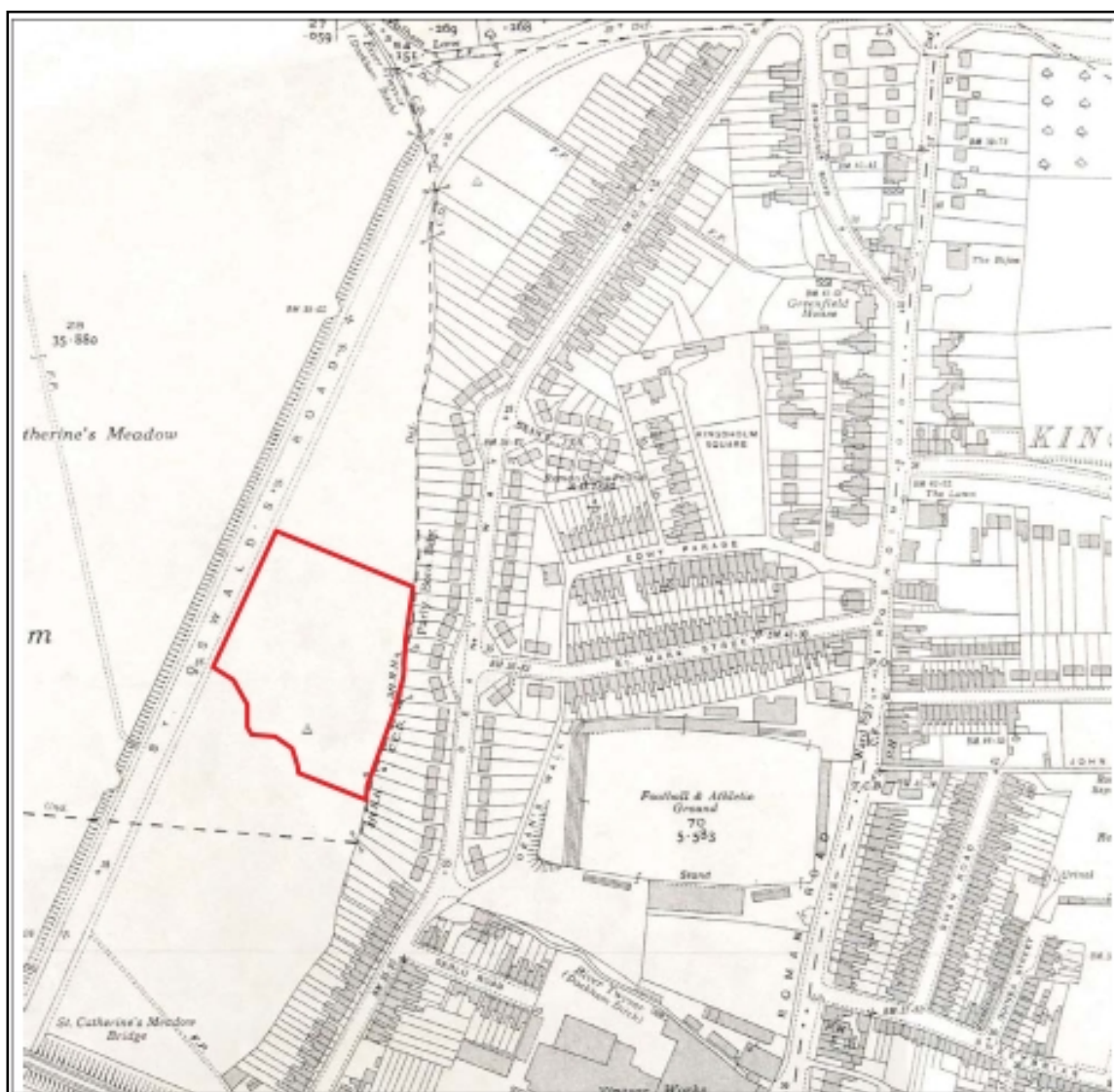


Figure 10

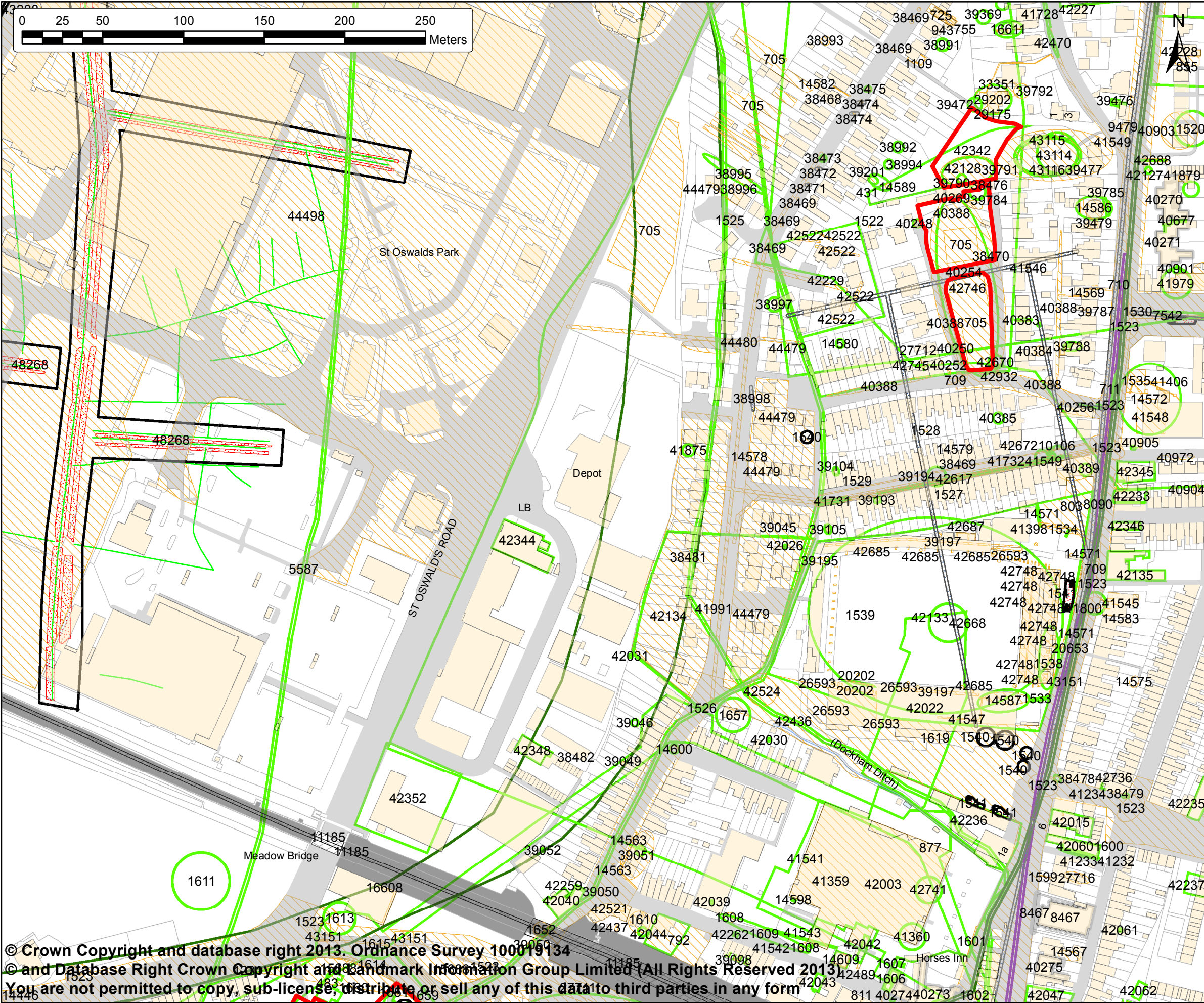
Extract from OS 1:2500 map, Gloucestershire Sheet 71.12, about 1955. Boundary of study area outlined in red. Not to scale.





# Gloucestershire Historic Environment Record

Figure 11



## Historic Environment Record Legend (Not all feature types may be present)

- Untagged items
- General Archaeological Records
- Roman Road
- Archaeological Events
- Listed Buildings
- Cheltenham Local List
- Canals
- Military Records
- Glos Gardens & Landscape Trust
- Turnpike
- Romano British Roads
- Railways
- Tramways
- Cirencester UAD - Berm
- Cirencester UAD - Ditch
- Cirencester UAD - Early\_bank
- Cirencester UAD - Earthwork\_bank
- Cirencester UAD - External\_tower
- Cirencester UAD - Internal\_tower
- Cirencester UAD - Rampart
- Cirencester UAD - Town\_wall
- Area of Land Reclamation
- Non\_Arch

Abbreviations:  
 UAD - Urban Archaeological Database

**DRAWN BY: HER Team**  
**SCALE: 1:2,370**  
**DATE: 05-Aug-2013**  
 This map is reproduced from (or based upon) the Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (c) Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Gloucestershire County Council 100019134 2007.



## Plates



1. Composite panoramic view of the site, looking south-east on the left-hand side of the frame, to south on the right-hand side. The tower of Gloucester Cathedral can be seen in the background. This is the more northerly, and larger of the two buildings currently sitting within the site boundary. Both are modern and in terms of design, are of no architectural, historic or aesthetic interest or value.



2. The southern part of the site showing, in the middle background of the frame, the smaller of the two buildings within the boundary. View to south-east.