

**Abbey Mead, 3 The Park
Keynsham
Bath & North East Somerset**

Archaeological Watching Brief

NGR ST 65515 68765

BATRM 2016.28



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Avon Archaeology Limited

Bristol: June 2016



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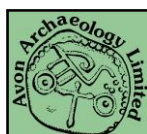
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Abstract

Avon Archaeology Limited were commissioned by Robert Horton of Robert Grace Ltd on behalf of his clients, Mr and Mrs Knight, to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording (Archaeological Watching Brief) during groundworks associated with building renovations at Abbey Mead, 3 The Park, Keynsham.

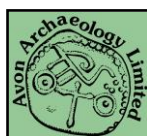
Initial plans for the project included a large single storey extension to the rear (north side) of the existing building to provide a garden room and dining area, with a separate and much smaller, two storey extension planned for the east side of the building to provide a ground floor entrance, wash and cloak room and a further bathroom above.

Changes to the planned renovations meant that only the smaller of the two proposed extensions, was to be built.

The area of excavation which covered an area of no more than 15m² was heavily truncated by service cables and pipes, and although a stratigraphic sequence was examined, no features or deposits of archaeological significance were recorded.

The works carried out for this project arose as the result of a condition imposed by the local authority, and for which a WSI was subsequently written and approved by the B&NES Archaeological Officer.

The archaeological monitoring took place on the 7th of June 2016 by the writer of this report, Rachel Heaton of Avon Archaeology Limited



Acknowledgements

Avon Archaeology Limited wishes to acknowledge the assistance given by Neil and his colleagues during the groundworks; thanks also to Mrs Irene Knight and the two girls, Molly and Ellen, for their interest despite the lack of archaeology! Also to Robert Horton for providing initial details and drawings of plans.

Thanks are also due to Gareth Dickinson and Nick Corcos for their assistance in the production of this report.

Notes

Whereas Avon Archaeology Limited has taken all care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

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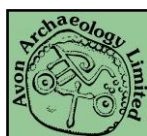
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Abbreviations

AAL	Avon Archaeology Limited
aOD	Above Ordnance Datum
B&NES	Bath and North east Somerset
HER	Historic Environment Record
NGR	National Grid Reference
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation



1 Introduction

Avon Archaeology Limited were (initially) commissioned by Robert Horton of Robert Grace Ltd on behalf of his clients, Mr and Mrs Knight, to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring (Archaeological Watching Brief) at Abbey Mead, 3 The Park, Keynsham where renovation and extensions to the building were planned.

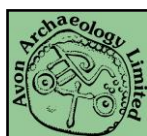
The archaeological element arose as the result of a condition of the planning application, reference 15/01959/FUL set out by the local authority (B&NES) which required all groundworks associated with the project to be monitored.

Initial plans included two separate extensions to the existing building: a large single storey structure to be added to the rear of the building (west) to house a garden room and dining area with a second smaller two storey extension to the north side of the building to provide entrance/cloak and shower room with a bathroom above.

A WSI was subsequently written and approved by the B&NES Archaeological Officer, Richard Sermon (Corcos 2015).

The plans were subsequently changed, reducing the scope of the external elements of the project, with only plans for the smaller extension retained. Archaeological monitoring took place during the excavation of the foundation trenches for the smaller extension on the 6th of June 2016. Rachel Heaton of Avon Archaeology Ltd was in attendance during the groundworks.

The Archive for this project will be deposited with the Roman Baths Museum, Bath under the accession number BATRM 2016.28.

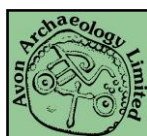


2 Site Location, Topography and Geology

The site is located on the western side of The Park, only 85m to the south-east of the parish church of St John Baptist, and only 70m to the west of the site of the former Augustinian Abbey of Keynsham, although now separated from it by the A4 Keynsham Bypass. It is, though, fairly clear that the site would have fallen well within the western boundary of the abbey precinct, parts of which remain as standing structures to its north and west, and are protected by statutory listing at Grade II level.

The site itself stands at something in the order of 26-27m aOD, and is relatively level. Immediately to the east of The Park, the ground drops away sharply into the artificial cutting made for the Keynsham Bypass in the early 1960s, but this is obviously not the natural profile of the landscape here, and to the east of the main road, levels of around 20m aOD are seen at the site of the former level crossing just behind Keynsham station, on Station Road (now the A4175). As might be expected, the ground continues to slope away to the north-east, as this is the flood plain of the River Avon, and values of 12-13m aOD are recorded on the banks of the river itself.

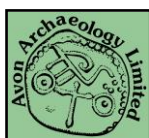
Geologically, the site is underlain by interbedded clays and limestones of the Jurassic period Blue Lias Formation, overlain locally by the Rugby Limestone Member (limestone and mudstone), and the Salford Shale Member (mudstone) (BGS).



3 Archaeological and Historical Background

Keynsham emerges into the documentary record in the pre-Conquest period, but it is clear that by that date, it had already become a place of considerable importance, the location of a major Anglo-Saxon minster church, at the centre of its own hundred, and a major royal manor. At the time of Domesday Book in 1086, Keynsham was a massive manor extending to 50 hides, and when Keynsham Abbey was founded by the Earls of Gloucester in the second half of the 12th century, not only the manor of Keynsham itself, but also the whole of Keynsham Hundred was conferred upon it as an endowment. The site of the former Anglo-Saxon minster is unknown; it is usually presumed to lie under the later abbey, but this is by no means certain, and a case can be made, in fact, for the present site of the parish church of St John as marking the minster's location. We may note again, therefore, that the present development site is within less than 100m of each of these two key historic features of the town. The Abbey itself survived, and indeed flourished, until the Dissolution in the mid-16th century, when it was abandoned, but extensive ruins survived on the site until, as already noted, most of the remaining structures were swept away by the construction of the Keynsham A4 bypass in the early 1960s. The site of the Abbey is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

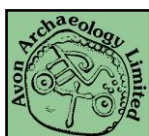
Of central importance at Keynsham, however, is the unusually extensive evidence for occupation in the Romano-British period. This is distinctive in that it is represented by a number of what were clearly very high status sites, including, at Durley Hill, one of the largest known villas in the entire province, for which the term 'palatial' is probably not an exaggeration (Bateman 1999, 10-13, and Map B). The site lies beneath an area that since the 19th century has been the location of the town's cemetery. A large part of the ground plan of the villa has been recorded, and it is clear that as constructed it would have been both a spectacular and, architecturally, highly unusual building (Russell 1985). To the east of the Durley Hill site, a second Roman building, also characterised as a 'villa' in the literature, was discovered during the construction of the Fry's chocolate factory at Somerdale in the early 1920s. However, Bateman (1999, 11) remarks that "the quality of excavation and publication was poor, even by the standards of the day. Consequently, there are differing accounts of the extent of the building and its status". Indeed, the modern histories of both these sites, in terms of the treatment of their archaeology, could at best be described as



'unhappy', and at Somerdale, extremely important survivals, including a major building, were completely destroyed in 1991 during levelling work for playing fields west of the main factory complex. Somerdale has since been suggested as the location of the Roman small town of *Traiectus*, known from a Roman literary source of the 3rd century, and aerial photographic evidence had for long suggested that settlement covered the entire area of the later Hams (Bateman 1999, 12). This has now been confirmed by extensive geophysical survey of a large part of the site, which has shown that the Hams are the location of a small town, certainly of Romano-British date, and the sheer quality of the surviving remains of which could best be described as spectacular. The site, the central part of which lies about 1km to the north of the proposed development, has now been formally designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Bateman (1999, Map B), had previously identified the entire area of The Hams, and a large area on the eastern side of the railway line/bypass, as being potentially very sensitive archaeologically.

In addition to the two main Roman-British sites, Bateman also notes that there have been discoveries of Romano-British material within the medieval town of Keynsham itself, which sits away from Somerdale and Durley Hill, to the south, elevated on a low but locally prominent ridge, on the east-facing lip of the western scarp forming the valley of the River Chew in this area (Bateman 1999, 13).

Although of necessity treated with brevity here, this Roman background is important because it has been suggested that as Keynsham emerged into recorded history as an estate in the pre-Conquest period, parts of it may well have been directly inherited from Romano-British antecedents, and specifically, an estate or estates attached to the known Romano-British occupation sites at Durley Hill and Somerdale (Prosser 1995, *passim*). Just to the west of the development site, immediately to the east of the High St frontage, trial trenching revealed substantial traces of a large building, *apparently* aligned on the same axis as the main abbey building. The only dating evidence seemed to suggest that this structure pre-dated the plan of the medieval town, and it is at least possible, therefore, that it was of Romano-British date (B&NES HER MBN10560 and EBN2682).



There have been numerous archaeological interventions in, and other planning-related studies of, various parts of Keynsham, and together they reveal a picture of a thriving small medieval town with a dense concentration of house plots in the central area, running southwards from the church.

The Development Site

The present house on the development site seems to have been constructed at some point in the 40-odd years which marks the time between the Keynsham tithe map of 1842 (SRO D/D/Rt 363), and the First Edition OS 25" map, surveyed 1880-82. It is not entirely clear what the site was used for prior to the construction of the present house, although it is clear that it lay behind (ie to the east of) the building line of the rear boundaries for the properties fronting onto High St, which almost certainly were established by the early middle ages; indeed from Temple St there is sound archaeological evidence for development having extended a good way south of the church by the 12th century, and even perhaps by the 11th (Bateman 1999, Map D). The area immediately around and to the south of the church is likely to have formed the core of the pre-Conquest occupation area at Keynsham. And it is perfectly possible that the development site is close enough to the church to be within this putative early settlement area (see for example Bateman 1999, Map C). It seems most likely that the land was open and undeveloped pasture or orchard ground.



Plate 1 View of the rear of Abbey Mead, looking east

4 Aims and Methodology

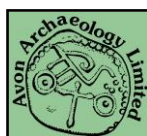
The aims of the archaeological Watching Brief at Abbey Mead were:

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological features encountered
- To determine the extent of previous truncations of any archaeological deposits
- To enable the archaeological officer at B&NES to make an informed decision on the basis of the extent and condition of any archaeology revealed and to add any further possible requirements for further work in order to satisfy the planning conditions
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation.

The work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Corcos, 2015) previously approved by B&NES council Archaeological Officer (Richard Sermon).

Excavation was carried out by the principle contractor using a 360° tracked mechanical excavator with toothless grading bucket, under the supervision of an archaeologist.

All the information regarding the ground works was recorded in field documents, produced and compiled by Avon Archaeology Limited, in addition to a detailed photographic survey and technical drawings. Each deposit encountered was characterised and given a sequential context number.



5 The Monitoring

The monitoring was limited to the foundation trenches for the smaller of the two proposed extensions, the footprint of which covers an area of 15m². Trenching measuring approximately 9m in length, 0.6 to 0.7m wide, was excavated to an average depth of 1.1m against the north side of the existing building (**Figure 2**).

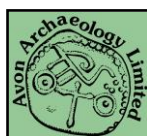
The majority of the trench was heavily truncated by two separate electrical cables, and a water pipe (dry and no longer in use), all running on different alignments as well as stone associated with drainage which was connected to the manhole located to the east of the extension footprint (**Figure 3**). The westernmost section of trenching did however provide a stratigraphic sequence which was less disturbed, and is described below.

The natural, context 108, was reached at a depth of 1.06m below the current ground level. It consisted of a light yellowish brown, sandy silt containing frequent gravel inclusions which was otherwise sterile. It was sealed by context 107, a deposit 0.35m thick consisting of a mid grey brown friable sandy silt, containing occasional flecks of charcoal, and small pieces of angular stone, possibly a buried topsoil. This deposit was very similar in consistency to the natural, deposit 106, and probably itself a re-deposited natural, recorded partially overlaying deposit 107.

Deposit 106 was overlain by deposit 105, a mid brown friable sandy silt, containing occasional flecks of charcoal, and small pieces of angular stone of approximately 0.35m thick. A second narrow band of soft, light brown sandy silt, with occasional flecks of charcoal, deposit 104, sealed deposit 105. It was then overlain by a deposit 103. Deposit 103, was loose, made up primarily of rubble within a sandy silt matrix which was grey brown in colour. Several large pieces of Bath Stone were retrieved from this deposit as well as a piece of Pennant Sandstone slab.

Deposit 103 was cut by 102, which provided a channel for a water pipe to be laid. Cut 102 contained one fill, 101, which contained a lead water pipe as mentioned earlier. The pipe was dry, and had clearly been out of use for some time.

The uppermost, current surface is made up of an area of concrete, layer 100, with associated hardcore levelling used as a base.



No artefacts were recovered during the excavation of the foundation trench.

Context Descriptions

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions
100	Layer	Concrete Surface with hardcore base	0.2m
101	Fill	Dark brown soft sandy silt, fills cut [102]. Contains lead water pipe.	See [102]
102	Cut	Concave sides and rounded base, approximately 0.25m deep, projected width 0.5m wide at uppermost point, contains one fill (101) as well as lead water pipe, no longer in use.	0.25m deep, 0.5m wide at top.
103	Deposit	Rubble deposit, bits of mortar stone, brick and concrete all within a grey brown sandy silt matrix.	Up to 0.25m thick
104	Layer	Narrow band of soft, light brown sandy silt, occasional fleck of charcoal.	0.05m thick
105	Deposit	Mid brown friable sandy silt, contains occasional fleck of charcoal, small pieces of angular stone	0.35m thick
106	Deposit	Light yellowish brown sandy silt containing occasional gravel like inclusions and flecks of charcoal	0.1m thick
107	Deposit	Mid grey brown friable sandy silt, contains occasional fleck of charcoal, small pieces of angular stone	0.35m thick
108	Natural	Top of natural, a light yellowish brown sandy silt containing frequent gravel inclusions which was otherwise sterile.	Reached at 1.05m below surface



6 Conclusions

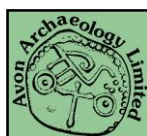
The watching brief was concerned with groundworks associated with the renovations of Abbey Mead house. Two areas of proposed extensions to the building were reduced to one, covering only a small footprint of 15m².

The upper surface was concrete, with levelling hardcore directly below. It sealed a sequence of modern disturbance, mostly by electricity cables, a water pipe and concrete associated with the drainage system.

A stratigraphic section could be recorded at one end of the trench which was not so heavily disturbed by modern services. Here thick bands interspaced with narrow bands of material overlay what can only be described as the top of natural which was reached at the base of the trench. There was no obvious dating material within these deposits; deposit 103 contained pieces of building material, perhaps remains from the construction of the house.

None of the deposits gave any suggestion of garden soils or even subsoils which may have predated the house. The foundation trench did not extend very far from the footings of the existing house (3m), and interestingly no foundation cut was seen within the trench. The house has a large cellar, so perhaps the foundations for the building were constructed directly up against a cut. The alternative theory is that a large area around the house was reduced in height prior to the building's construction and that the deposits recorded were dumped up against the wall rather than cut through.

It is probable that all the deposits recorded during the watching brief were associated with the construction of the main house and were the result of moving material around when the foundations and cellar were excavated during the mid-19th century.



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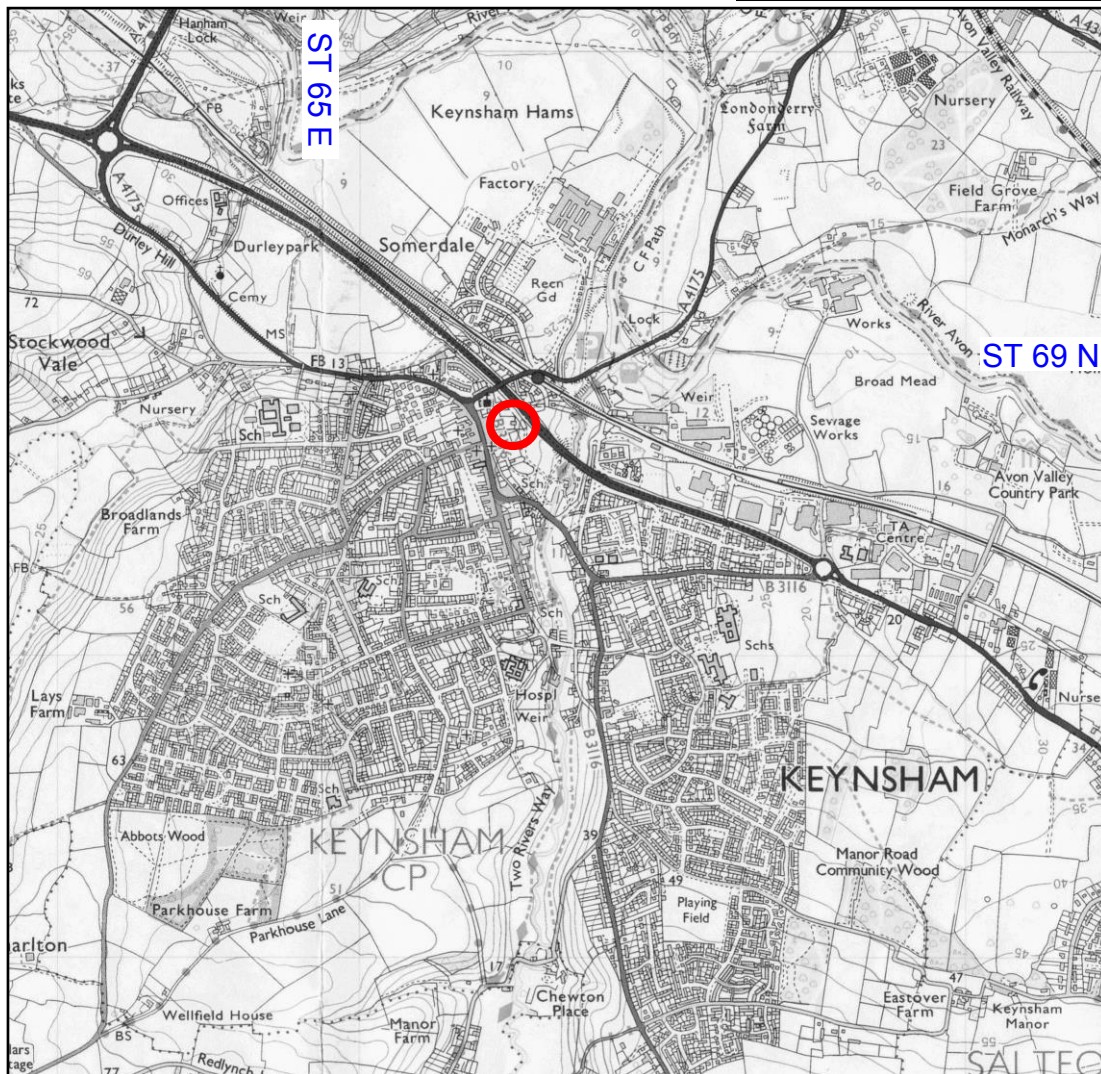
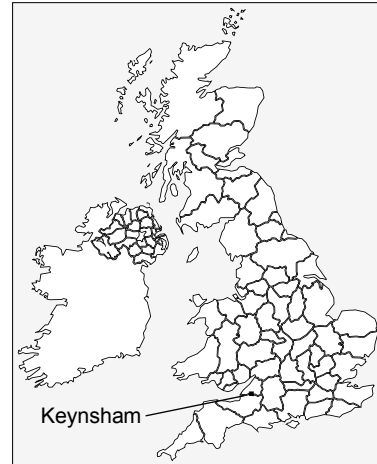
Figure 1

Location of the Study Area

The Study Area



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Site location plan with boundary of Study Area

Figure 2

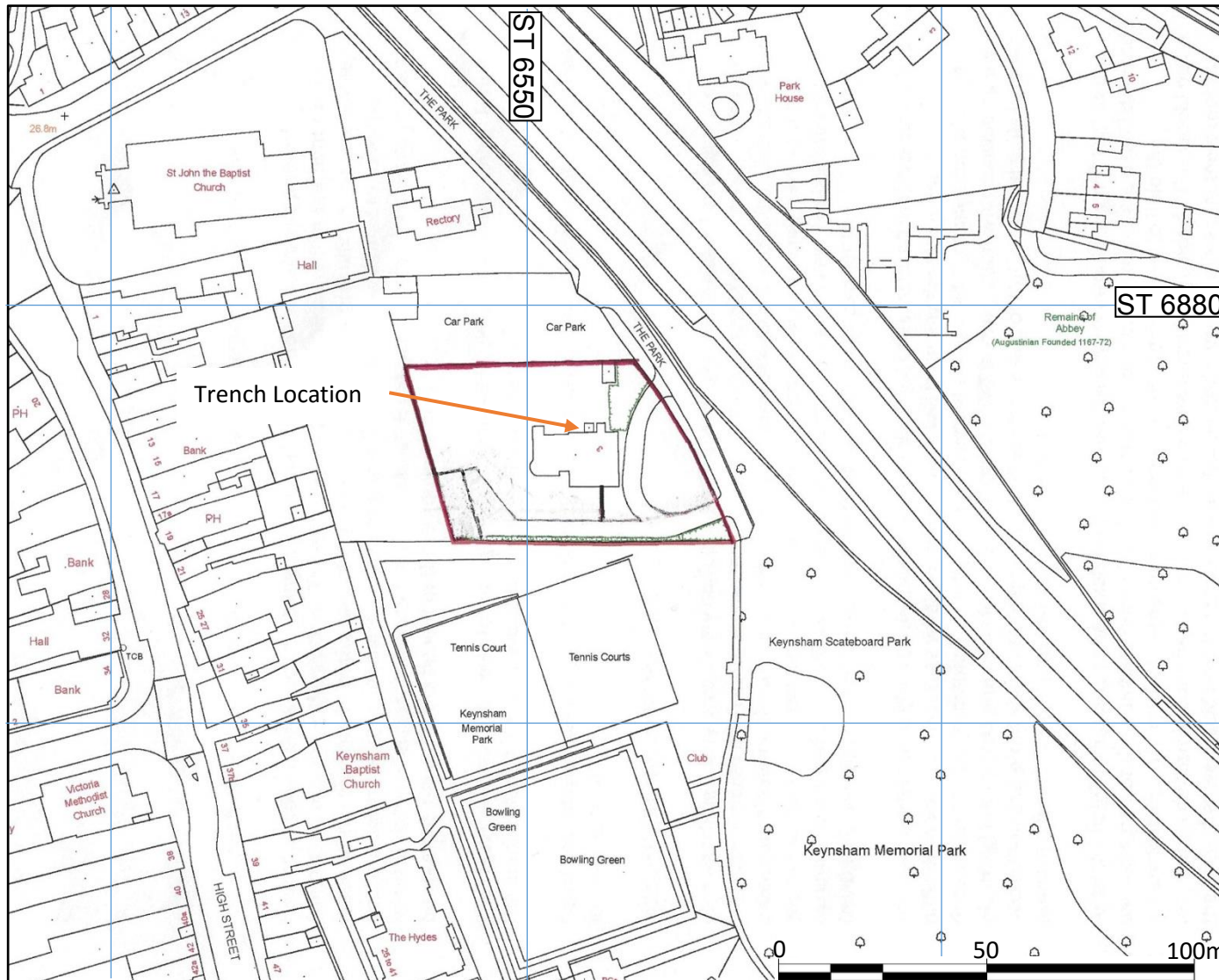


Figure 3

Plan of the foundation trench

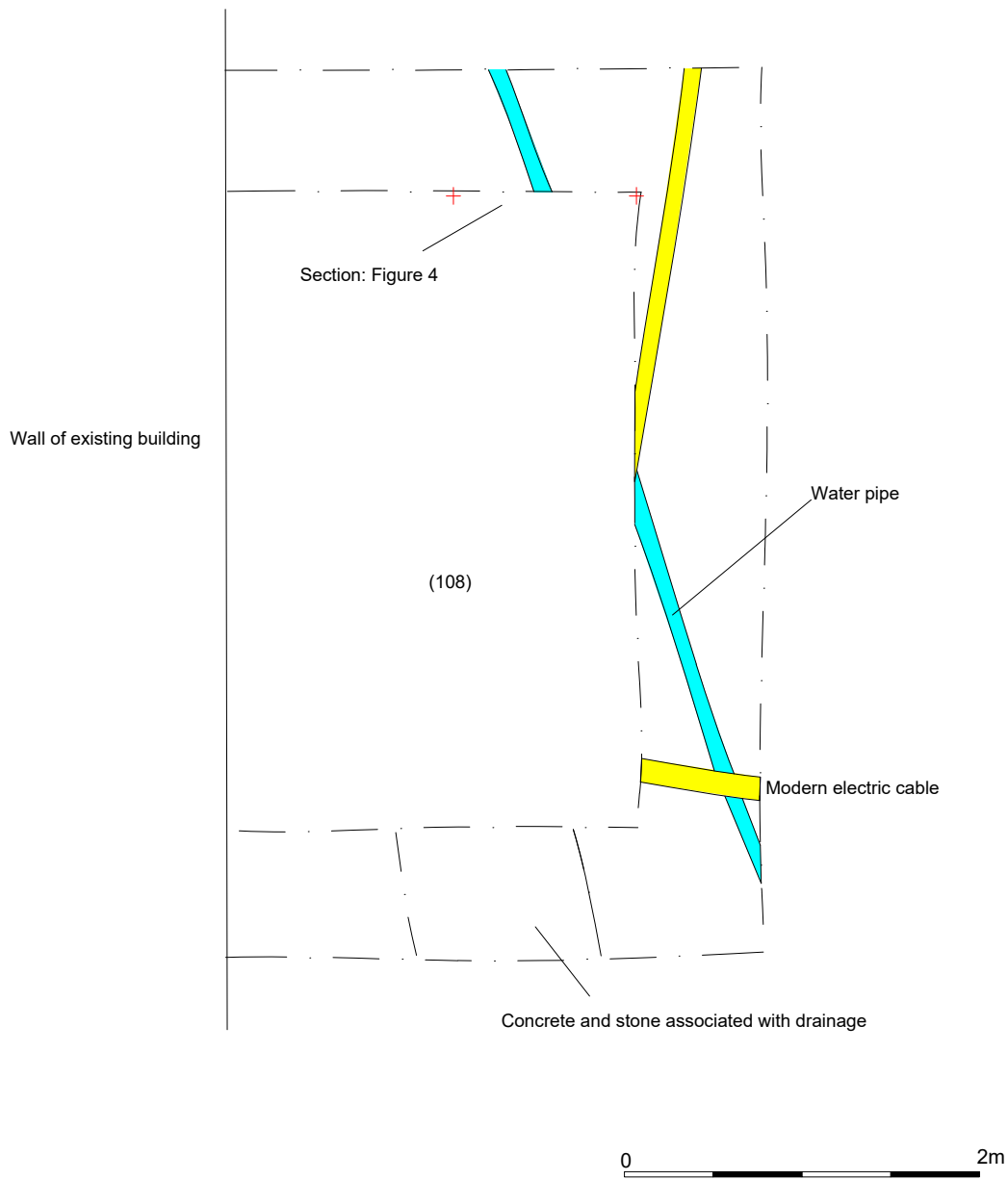


Figure 4

West facing section of foundation trench

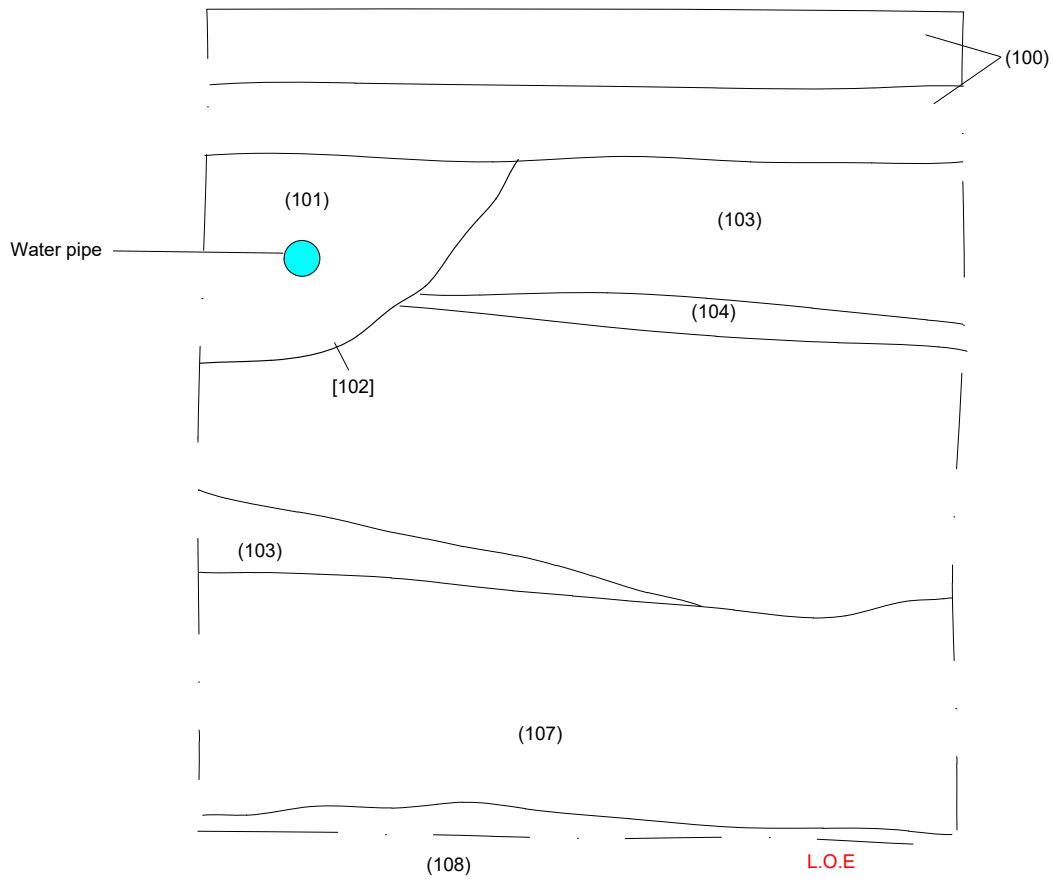




Plate 2: North facing section of the east-west trench, a cable is visible bottom right hand corner.

Plate 3: West facing section of north –south trench, see Figure 4.

Plate 4: Foundation trench during machining

Plate 5: East north by south trench, concrete associated with drainage visible in the centre of the photo.