



An Archaeological Watching Brief at 124 Vines Lane, Droitwich, Worcestershire

A report for Care and Repair Ltd, Wychavon

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Project: PJ 102

WSM: 32515

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1. Project Background

1.1. Location of the Site

Vines Lane runs east to west across the northern peripheries of Droitwich (Figure 1). Number 124 Vines Lane is a semi-detached domestic dwelling probably built a few years prior to the start of World War 2. It is situated on the southern side of Vines Lane adjacent to the River Salwarpe and stands below the imposing St Augustine's Church, which towers above on elevated ground to the north.

1.2. Development Details

A planning application was made to Wychavon District Council for the construction of a single storey extension at 124 Vines Lane (reference W/00/1590). The planning process determined that the proposed development was likely to affect an existing archaeological site (WSM 22023). As a result, the Planning Archaeologist, Worcestershire County Council, placed a 'watching brief' planning condition on the application, for which a brief of work was written (WAS 2001).

1.3. Topography, Geology and Archaeology

The site lies in the valley of the River Salwarpe on a solid geological base of Mercian Mudstone. The town of Droitwich developed around a salt production industry from at least the Iron Age. The properties of brine wells and streams were exploited well into the 20th century. During the 19th and 20th centuries the natural properties of brine were exploited for health purposes as Droitwich diversified and developed into a 'spa town'.

Archaeological remains have been unearthed in the area from at least the mid 18th century. In 1770, during the cutting of the Droitwich Canal, Roman coins and pottery were unearthed (Buteux and Hurst, 1996). In 1912 a skeleton was found in Vines Lane, this was associated with finds of Roman pottery (St Joseph, 1942). The County Sites and Monuments Record locates several archaeological sites in the immediate vicinity of the site. Roman coins were found a little to the west (WSM 12548 and 00673); a Roman cemetery (WSM 06000) containing at least 14 burials was discovered around 200 metres to the northwest on Vines Lane and further Roman burials were found on the opposite side of the lane (WSM 02343). The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map shows the site to be surrounded by saltworks and associated spoil heaps (WSM 10588, WSM 10587, WSM 10585 and WSM 22023).

1.4. Reasons for the Watching Brief

The data contained within the Sites and Monuments Record and the map evidence suggested that the development site lies within an archaeologically sensitive area and that groundwork's associated with the new development may directly affect a specific site (WSM 22023), an area

of Roman salt working activity. As such the Planning Archaeologist requested a watching brief be carried out to monitor all excavation work in the area.

2. Methods and Process

2.1. Background Research

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork all the relevant available cartographic sources were consulted. Work was also carried out at Worcestershire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) and various archaeological reports were consulted. The following cartographic sources were specifically consulted:

- 17th century sketch map of Droitwich
- Map of Droitwich dated 1786
- Ordnance Survey (1885), 1:10,000, Worcs sheet XX11.14
- Ordnance Survey (1903), 1:10,000, Worcs sheet XX11.14
- Ordnance Survey (1927), 1:10,000, Worcs sheet XX11.14
- Ordnance Survey (1938), 1:10,000, Worcs sheet XX11.14

Other sources used are referenced within the report.

2.2. The Fieldwork

The watching brief was undertaken on 16th and 17th April during the excavation of the foundations and drain runs for the new extension. The excavation work was carried out partly by mini digger and partly by hand. Spoil was removed from site into skips, before being taken away. The maximum depth of excavation below present ground level was 1.10 metres.

All finds were collected except homogenous lumps of iron, which could supply no valuable dating or processing evidence. These were noted and then discarded.

The methodology adopted and the favourable working conditions meant that the aims and objectives of the brief could be fully met and the fieldwork was successfully concluded.

3. The Results

The site was levelled by mini-digger, with spoil being removed from site and taken away in skips. This included tarmac garden surface material and topsoil [100]. A maximum of 0.20m of material was removed in order to form a level platform for the laying of the concrete floor slab and insulation of the new build (Site Drawing 2).

A test-pit was excavated by hand at the southern end of the site in an attempt to locate a brine drain, which had been noted discharging brine into the river at the southern end of the garden. The pipe was located 0.76m below the garden surface. The pipe was a brownish earthenware ceramic and although not fully exposed, must have been around 0.30m in diameter. The backfill of the pipe trench was a mixture of ash, clinker and redeposited natural marl. There were no dateable finds from the test-pit.

The foundation for the ring-beam was excavated following the pattern of the external walls of the proposed extension, to a maximum depth of 0.25 metres below the levelled platform (around 0.40m below original garden level). This cut into a layer of blackish silty- sand with a large proportion of ash and clinker [102]. The northwestern section of the ring beam foundation trench cut through a layer of hardcore and limestone chippings [101], which had been laid into [102]. There were no significant finds from this excavation.

The ring beam was to be supported on four mini-piles, one at each corner of the proposed extension. A pit was excavated at the northwest corner, as it was determined that the piling process may interfere with the brine drain, which appeared to be aligned on this corner. The pit was excavated by hand and the brine pipe partially exposed. The east facing section of this pit was cleaned up and the sequence of deposits recorded down to a red and grey mottled marl layer [105], which was just seen in the bottom of the excavation (Site drawing 2). Below [102] was a layer of ash, clinker and coal fragments [103]. This included a complete brick, the dimensions of which, suggested an 18th or 19th century date for the deposition of the layer. Below this layer was a compacted layer of dark grey alluvium [104], which had been stained by leaching of the ashy material above. The mottled red and grey marl [105] below is likely to have been the natural parent material, although there is a possibility that it was a redeposited layer of natural from a past levelling process (see section 4 below). This was seen at around 1.00 metre below the current garden level.

The existing service manhole at the southern end of the site was removed for relocation and a new drain run was excavated to join into the existing manhole to the north of the building area. No further evidence was gained from this excavation.

There was a notable lack of finds across the site. The only stratified find was a complete brick (left in situ). Unstratified finds included three sherds of 19th and 20th century pottery, a small quantity of abraded animal bone and two lumps of homogenous iron (discarded). No significant archaeological deposits or features were noted during the watching brief.

4. Analysis of the Results

The 1786 map of Droitwich shows that Vines Lane was then known as 'Underhill Lane', referring to its location below Dodderhill (Figure 3). The first edition Ordnance Survey map (1885) shows that before the house was built the site was a spoil heap where waste material would have been piled up from the nearby salt works (Figure 4). This would generally have been ash, clinker and fuel waste. The compaction of the alluvium [104] lying above the mottled marl layer [105] was probably a result of the weight of the spoil heap above. Layer [103] represents this period of industrial activity. The second edition Ordnance Survey map (1903) suggests that by this time the area, referred to as 'the Vines' was undergoing regeneration (Figure 5). The spoil heap had gone and the site was an empty plot. Layer [102] represents the levelling of the spoil heap at this time. The top 0.50m of the site [101 and 100] represents levelling and re-modelling during the last century.

The nature of the layer [105] remains unresolved. This was seen only in the bottom of the excavated pit in the northwest corner of the site, about 1.00 metres below the original garden surface. It had the appearance of the natural undisturbed parent material and was interpreted as such whilst the work was in progress. In 1988 a test pit was excavated on the western side of St Augustine Parish Hall, only 30 metres to the east (Hurst 1988). This recorded a layer of 'mottled orange clay with brick and tile fragments', at around 1.00 metres below ground level, above a layer of loam with charcoal. This suggests that this may be the same layer as [105], although there were no visible tile or brick within [105]. The layer of alluvium [104] above [105] suggests that the layer [105] is more likely to be natural. This suggests that the natural dips down to the east.

5. Conclusion

The results of the watching brief demonstrated that the earliest archaeological remains on the site were a levelled layer of waste material from the local salt working industry. The spoil heap was levelled during the 1930's and a pair of semi-detached houses built. There were no significant archaeological features or deposits encountered during the watching brief.

6. Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Martin Cook. Thanks are also due to Rip Kirby of Care and Repair (Wychavon) Ltd, John Grainger and the staff of Lawnswood Construction and Mike Glyde, Planning Archaeologist, Worcestershire County Council. Thanks are also extended to Derek Hurst for his comments on the alluvial sequence of Droitwich.

REFERENCES

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Cook, M (2002) Proposal and Specification for an Archaeological Watching Brief at 124 Vines Lane, Droitwich, Worcestershire

St Joseph, J.K (1941-2) Roman Droitwich, in Transactions of the Birmingham Historical and Archaeological Society **64**, pp 39-52

Buteux, V and Hurst, J.D (1996) Archaeological Assessment of Droitwich, Hereford and Worcester, Hereford and Worcester County Council internal report **312**

Hurst, J.D (1988) Archaeological Evaluation at St Augustine's Parish Hall Site, Droitwich, Worcestershire Archaeological Service internal report

CONTEXT RECORD

Context	Type	Level	Thickness	Date Ascribed
100	Layer	GL	Max 0.35	20 th c.
Comprised of	Silty sandy clay			
Compaction	Loose			
Colour	Blackish-brown			
Inclusions	Brick frags; roots; hardcore; tarmac			
Finds	None			

Context	Type	Level	Thickness	Date Ascribed
101	Layer	0.35	0.15	20th c.
Comprised of	Sand and loose limestone chippings			
Compaction	Loose			
Colour	Orangey grey			
Inclusions	Occasional brick fragment			
Finds	None			

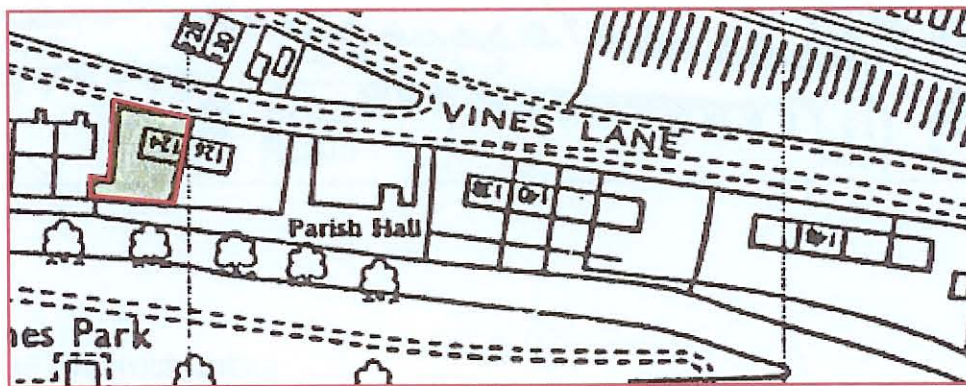
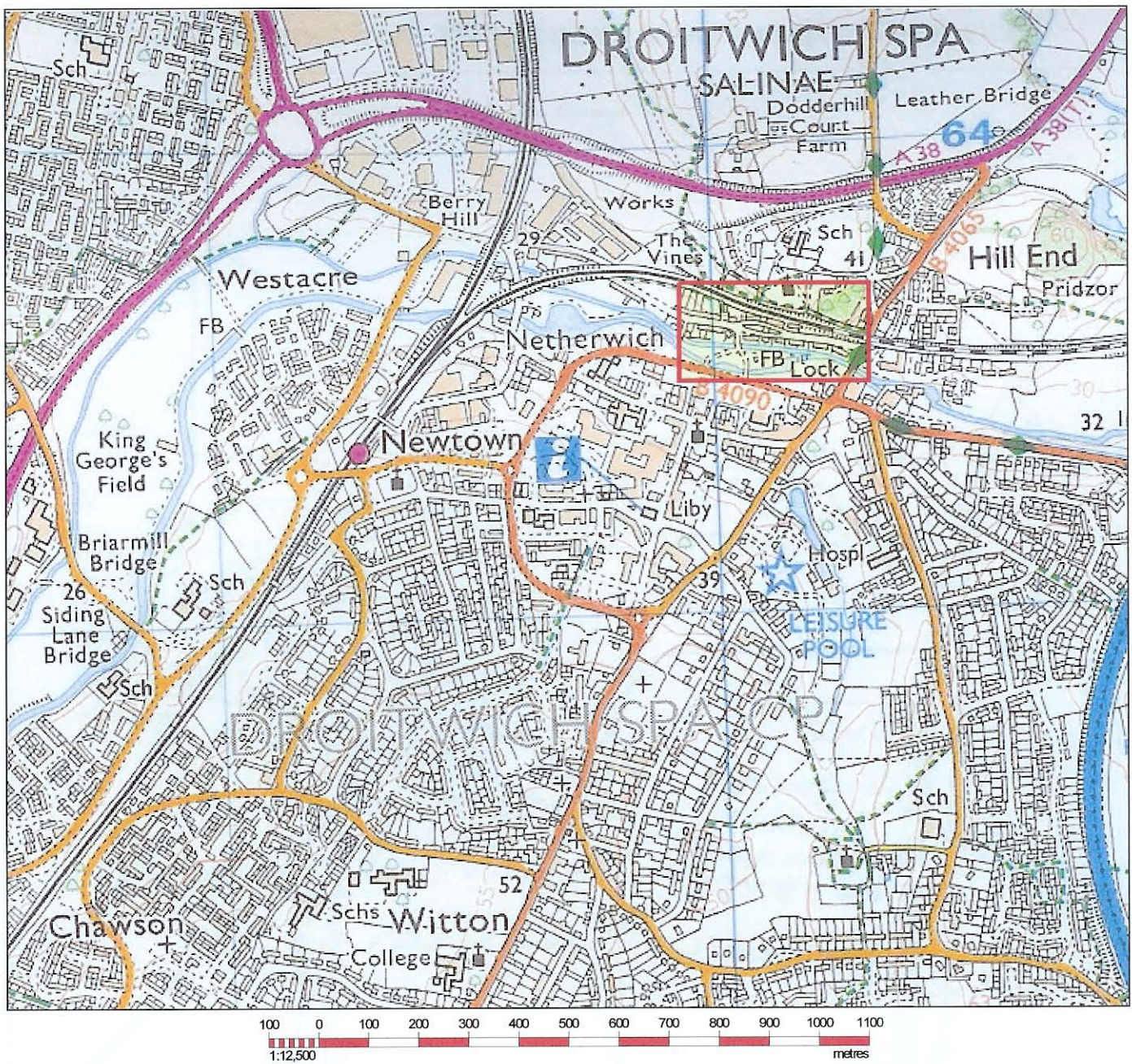
Context	Type	Level	Thickness	Date Ascribed
102	Layer	0.50	0.20	c.19th century
Comprised of	Silty sand			
Compaction	Friable			
Colour	Dark brown			
Inclusions	Coal frags; clinker			
Finds	None			

Context	Type	Level	Thickness	Date Ascribed
103	Layer	0.70	0.20	18th-19th century
Comprised of	Ash, clinker, fuel ash slag and coal residues			
Compaction	Loose			
Colour	Black			
Inclusions	Complete brick			
Finds	Brick (complete)			

Context	Type	Level	Thickness	Date Ascribed
104	Layer	0.90	0.10	Unknown
Comprised of	Alluvium			
Compaction	Compact			
Colour	Grey with black leaching down from layer above			
Inclusions	None			
Finds	None			

Context	Type	Level	Thickness	Date Ascribed
105	Layer	1.00		Natural
Comprised of	Clay/Marl			
Compaction	Friable			
Colour	Orangey red with grey mottling			
Inclusions	None			
Finds	None			

Figure1. Location of Site



Location of the development site at 124 Vines Lane, Droitwich.

Based on extract from Ordnance Survey Explorer Series sheet 204.

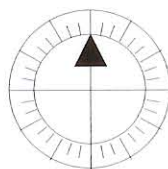
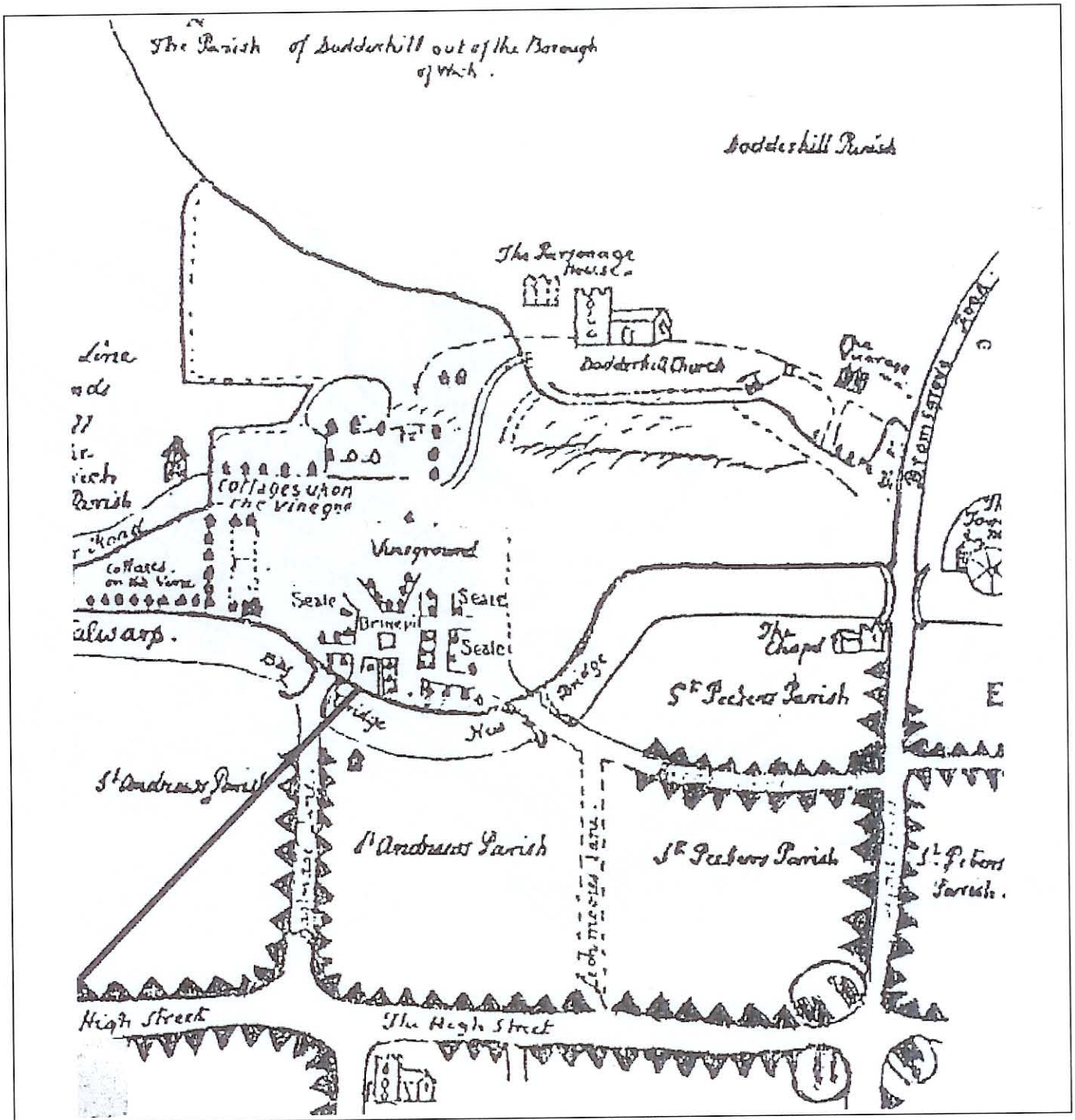
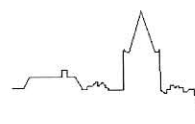
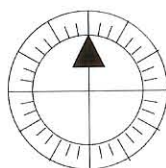


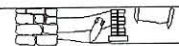
Figure 2. Extract from 17th century sketch map of Droitwich



Sketch map of Droitwich dating from the 17th century shows the Vines Lane area as a 'Vineground'

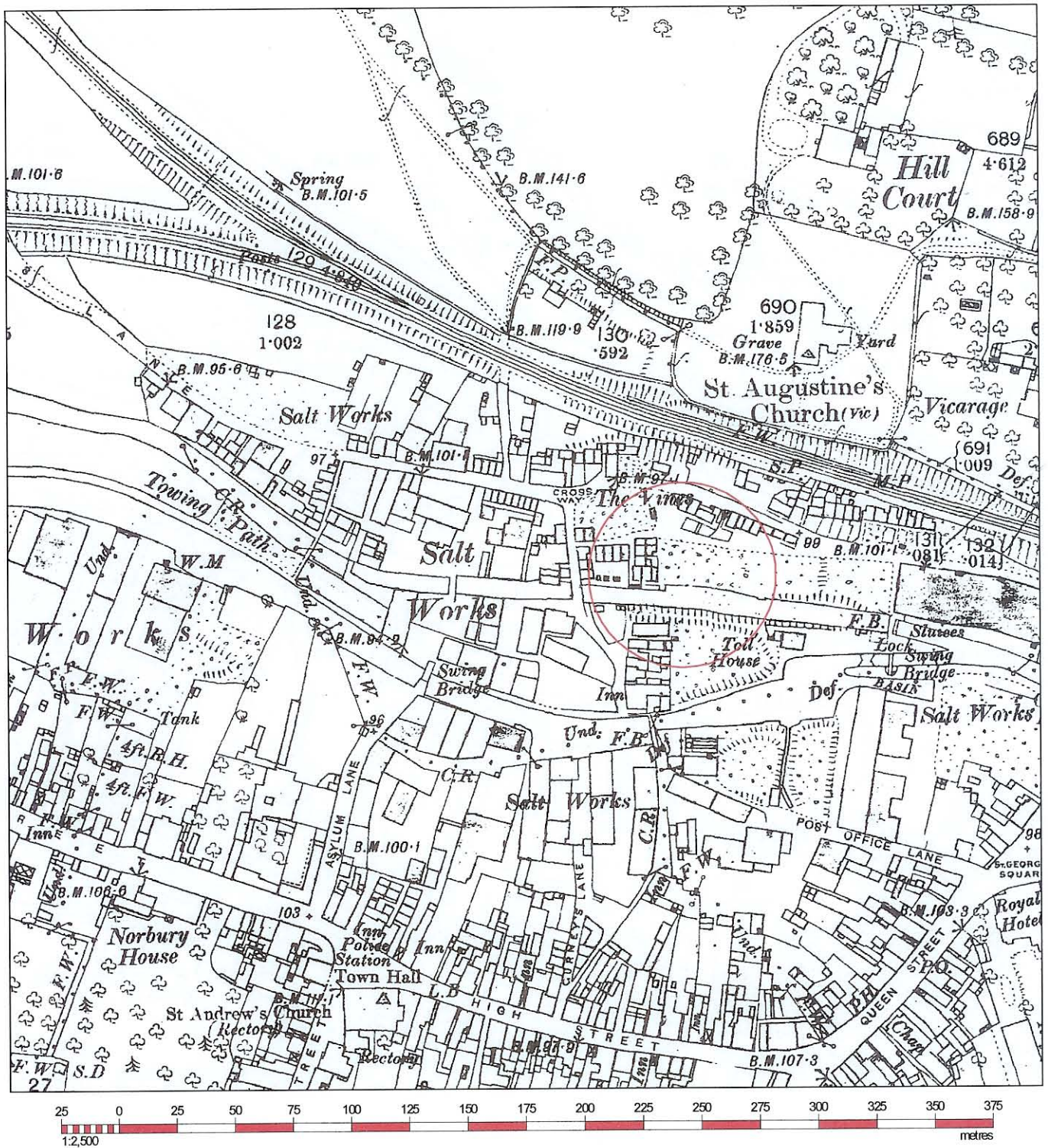


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Figure 4. 124 Vines Lane, Droitwich; 1st Edition Ordnance Survey (1885)



The first edition Ordnance Survey map shows that by 1885, the site was below a spoilheap containing industrial waste from the adjacent saltworks.

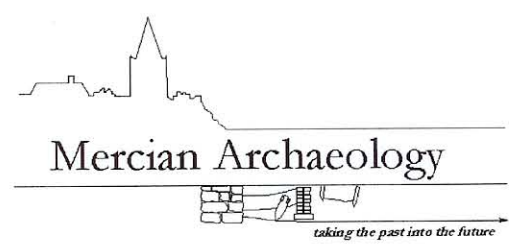
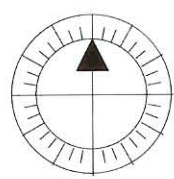
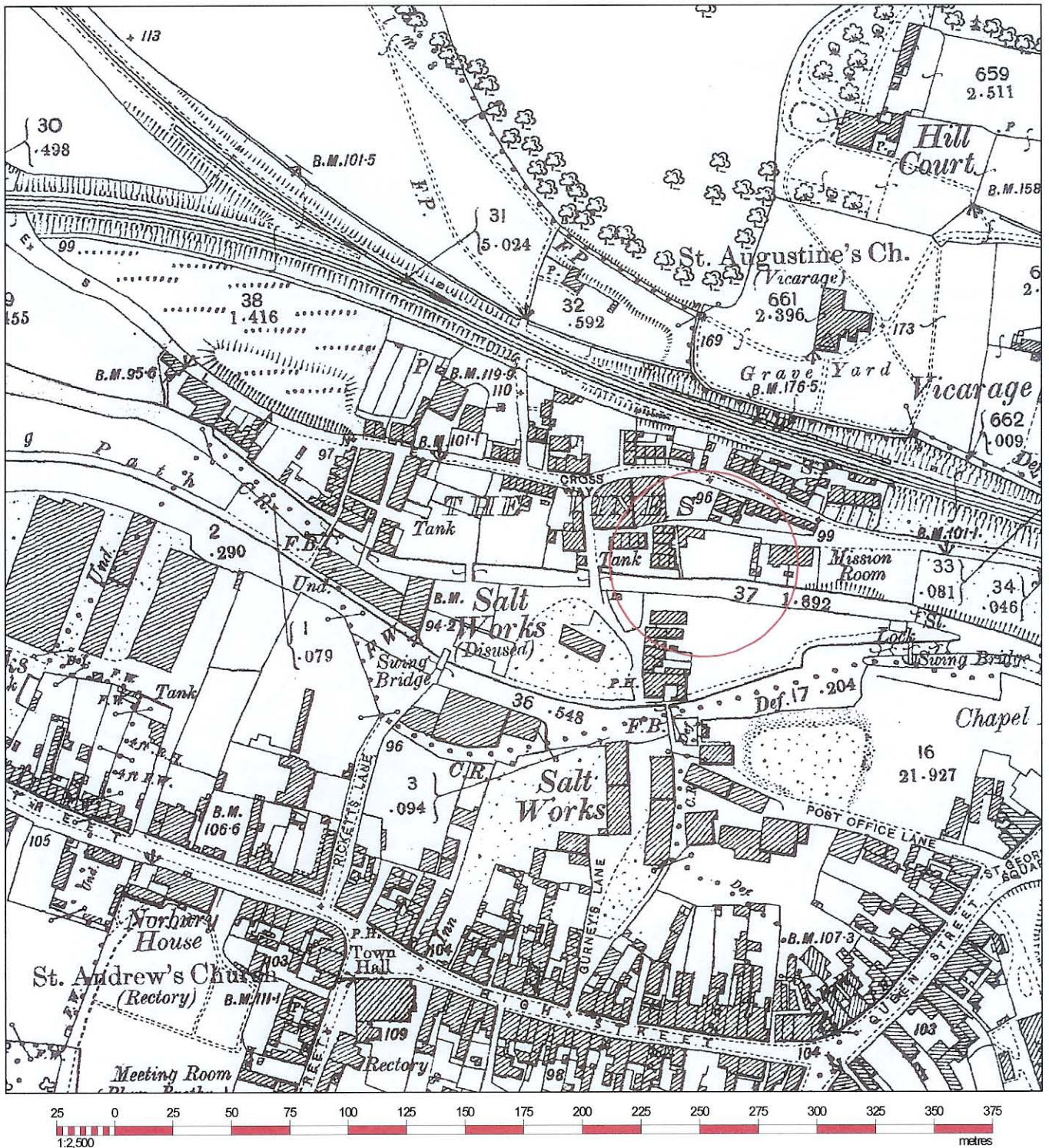


Figure 5. 124 Vines Lane, Droitwich; 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey (1903)



The second edition Ordnance Survey map shows that by 1903 the site had been cleared of spoil. There is a new building just to the north, this is likely to be a workshop rather than a domestic building. The plot boundary has been laid out and takes the form of today's plot.

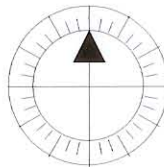
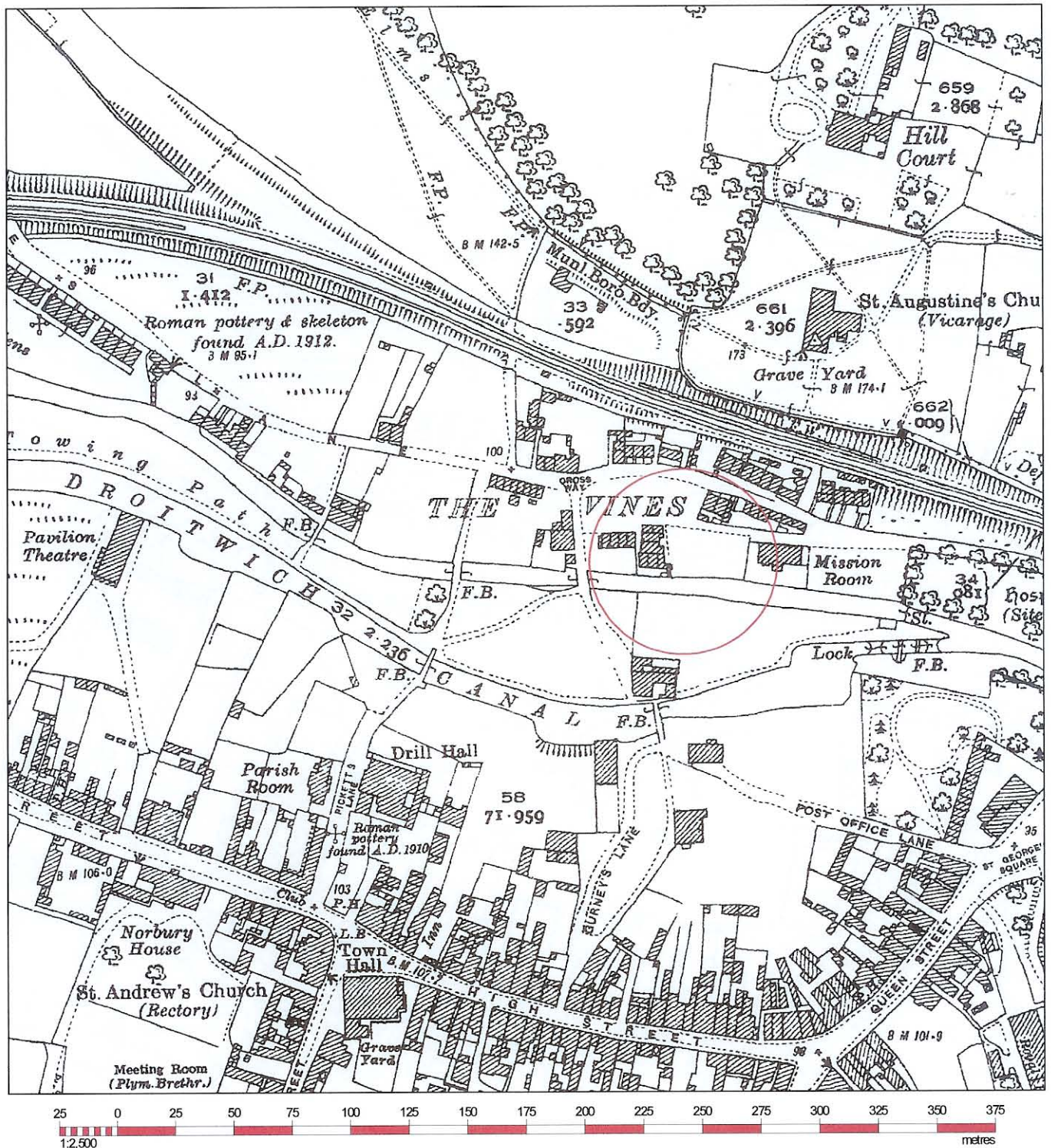
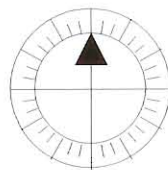


Figure 6. 124 Vines Lane, Droitwich; 3rd Edition Ordnance Survey (1927)

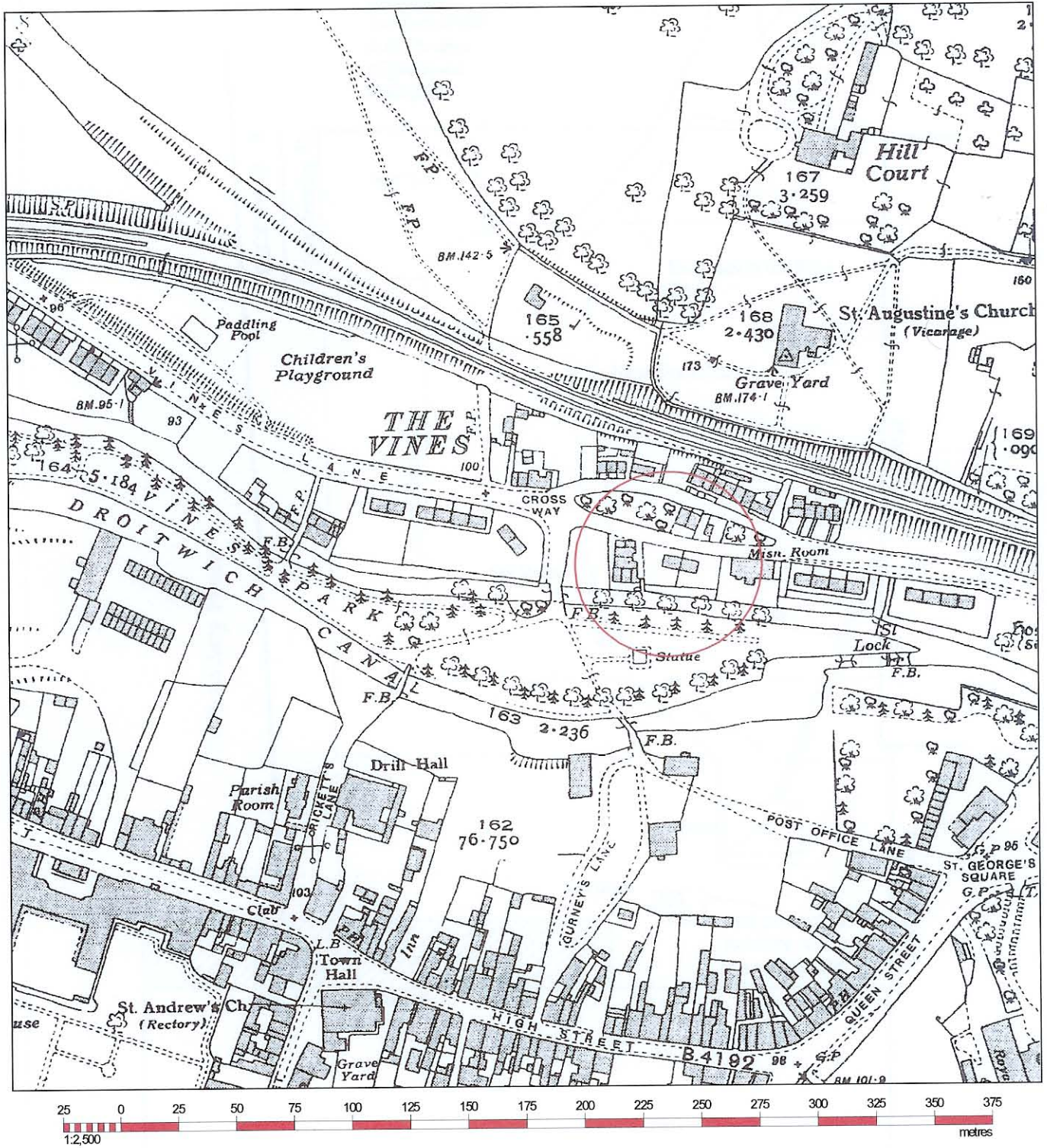


The third edition Ordnance Survey map shows that by 1927, the building just to the north had gone, as had most of the local salt production industry.

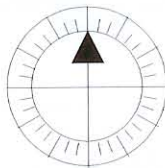


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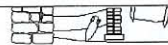
Figure 7. 124 Vines Lane, Droitwich; 4th Edition Ordnance Survey (1938)



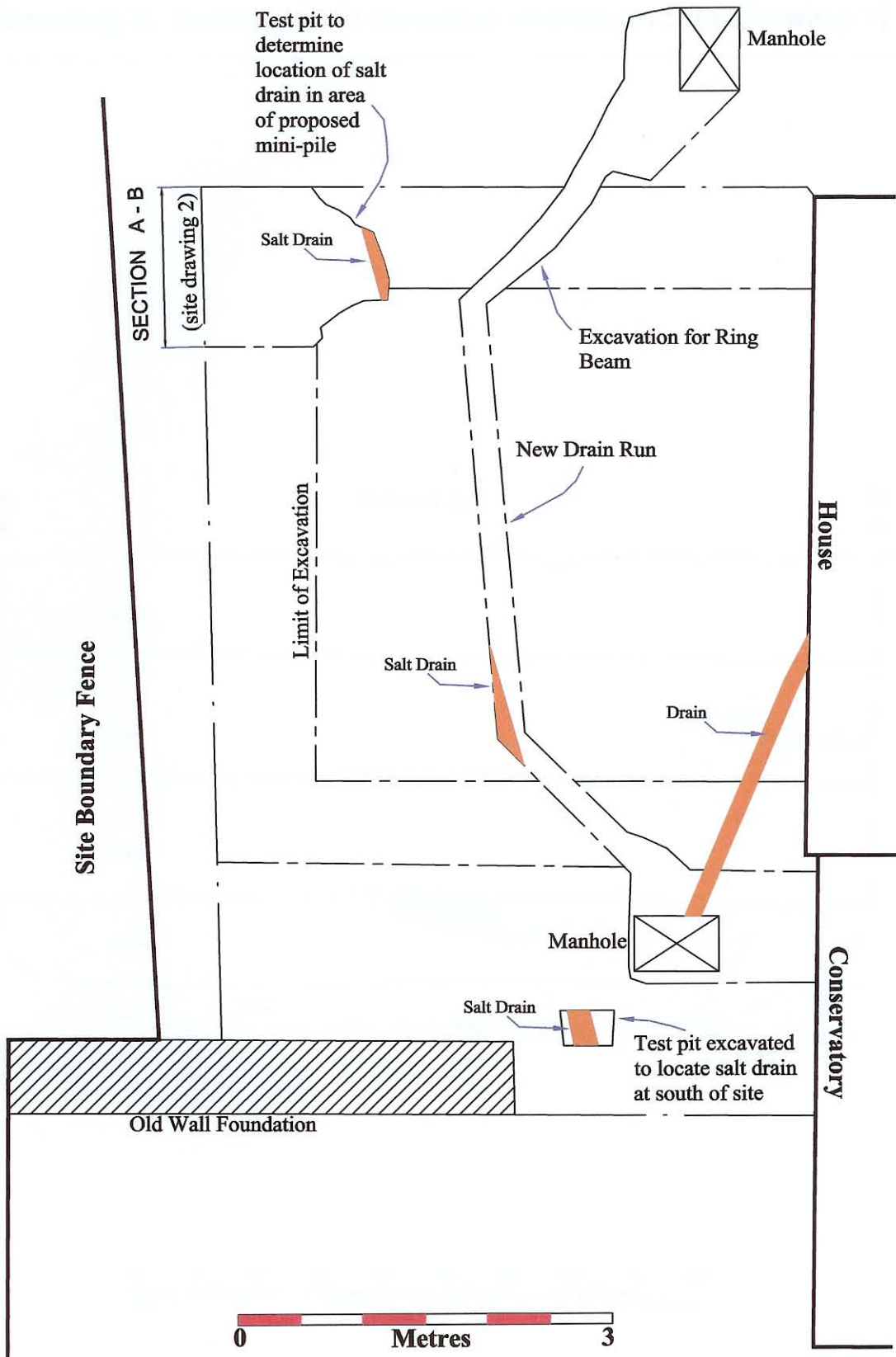
The 4th edition Ordnance Survey map shows that by 1938 number 124 Vines Lane had been built.



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Site Drawing 1:
Plan of the Development
Site



Site Drawing 2. Section A - B (location shown on Site Drawing 1)

