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*Archaeological Watching Brief at
The Corner House,
Birlingham, Worcestershire*



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The Corner House, Birlingham,
Worcestershire*

A report for Mark Yeomans

June 2004

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Project: PJ 118

WSM 33596

***Mercian Archaeology** undertake archaeological projects across much of the West Midlands and the Welsh Marches. **We specialise in Historic Building Recording and Analysis.** We also undertake archaeological watching-briefs, evaluation and excavation, desk-based assessment, historic landscape assessment and osteological analysis. We now also carry out historic reconstruction and can produce illustrations for publication, website or interpretative panels.*

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1. Project Background

1.1. Location of the Site

Birlingham lies in a loop on the River Avon around 3.5 kilometres to the south west of Pershore (NGR SO 9331 4316). The village lies off the A4104 Upton upon Severn to Pershore road and is skirted on the west by the B4080 Tewkesbury Road. The Corner House is a modern build, probably dating from the 1980's and is located opposite the village church (Figure 1).

1.2. Project Details

A planning application was presented to Wychavon District Council for the erection of a domestic extension at The Corner House (W/03/0010). The planning process determined that the proposed development lies within the historic core of a medieval village and its close proximity to the church suggests it may have been built over archaeological remains or deposits at least contemporary with the earliest foundation of the church. 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 2003).

1.3. Reasons for the Watching Brief

The archaeological watching brief has been suggested as the appropriate response to the threat posed to the potential archaeological site by the development process. This would involve the excavation of foundation trenches and service trenches for the proposed extension.

A watching brief is defined as:

A formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be in a specified area on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed (IFA 1999).

A watching brief at the site was proposed in order that a record of any archaeological remains or deposits encountered during the excavation of the foundations for the building may be made and placed into context using our current archaeological knowledge of the area.

2. Methods and Process

2.1. Project Specification

- ❑ The project fieldwork conforms to the Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief (IFA 1999).
- ❑ The archive conforms to the standards and guidelines established by the Archaeological Data Service.
- ❑ The project conforms to a brief prepared by the Planning Advisory Section, Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service (WHEAS, 2003) and for which a project proposal and detailed specification was produced (Mercian Archaeology (2003).
- ❑ Mercian Archaeology adhere to the service practice and health and safety policy as contained within the Mercian Archaeology Service Manual (Williams 2003)

2.2. Aims of the Project

The watching brief aimed to:

- ❑ Use the results of the archaeological work to produce a report highlighting: -
 1. The survival and location of any archaeological deposits.
 2. Make an analysis and interpretation of all identified natural and cultural deposits
- ❑ Based on the above, establish the significance, survival, condition and period of the archaeological remains and place them within context at local, regional or national level where relevant.

3. The Documentary Research

3.1. The Topography

The underlying solid geology of the area around the development site is of 1st and 2nd terrace deposits of the River Avon with possible areas of undifferentiated head deposits (Geological Survey of England and Wales). The overlying soils are non-calcareous pelo-alluvial gleys of the Fladbury series, Stagnogleyic argillic brown earths of the Bishampton series and typical brown earths of the Wick series (Soil Survey of England and Wales). The composite geology, together with skilled resource management and local knowledge has ensured that the land around Birlingham has provided a basis for sustainable self-sufficiency through the millennia, with fertile agricultural land producing fruit, oats, wheat and barley and rich meadowland skirting the river. The terrain is relatively low lying on the edge of the alluvial floodplain of the River Avon to the east.

The topography has, to a certain extent, dictated the communication between the village and the wider area. The Tewkesbury road approaches from the south and traverses the River Severn over Eckington Bridge; it is clear that during the medieval period the bridge would have been an important communication link, not only for Eckington, but also for the people of Birlingham, Defford and Pershore.

A brief archaeological overview

There is limited evidence for prehistoric activity around Birlingham. A flint scraper was found in 1968 near to Hall Farm to the east of the village. The flint was not easily dateable and a wide range from the Mesolithic (c 10000BC) to the Late Bronze Age(c. 700BC) was ascribed (WSM 07729).

There is limited evidence for Roman activity in the area. Metal artefacts collected during a metal detector survey to the west of The Old Rectory on the western side of the village, indicates the presence of a possible Romano-British settlement in the vicinity (WSM 25856). Roman period finds have also been recovered from near Hall Farm. These include a scatter of Severn Valley ware ceramic shards including 2nd century AD black burnished wares, 1st century AD Severn Valley pot rim and 2nd century AD Mancetter-Hartshill mortarium (WSM 07725). One further Roman period find comes in the form of a bronze coin of Marcus Aurelius dating to 161-180AD, which was found at the side of a road in the village (WSM 02441).

Like in most villages in Worcestershire, evidence for the post-Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods is largely obscure. The village is referred to in The Domesday Book, it extended to 3 hides and 1 virgate and there were 3 villagers, 4 smallholders with 4 ploughs, a fishery and 20 acres of meadow (WSM 21343). The village is centred on the church of St James, which was extensively rebuilt in the 19th century by Benjamin Ferry in the style of gothic revival. There

are, however, earlier fabric remains within the church. The tower is 15th century and has served as a dovecote with adapted windows to allow the birds in; the chancel arch is of earlier Norman build (WSM 07702). The village pound was located close to the development site (WSM 02442) and a set of post-medieval stocks sit beneath the church tower (WSM 07703).

3.2. The Cartography

The 1841 Tithe Apportionment Map of Birlingham Parish shows the development plot, but the apportionment does not refer to it, suggesting that at this time the land belonged to the church and was not subject to tithe rents (Figure 2). The map shows the road layout as different to today, with the road heading north further to the west than the present road (Figure 5). A plan dating to 1843 shows the proposed replacement of this road with the present road. The linking road adjacent to the north of the church was also proposed at this time. The proposed route of the new road cut through plot 132 on the tithe map (now includes the development site), between the agricultural buildings to the east and the domestic buildings to the west (Figure 5). The village pound lay adjacent to the south.

The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1884 (Figure 3) shows the road layout as it is today and indicates that the reason for the road replacement, was the construction of The Mansion and laying out of the formal gardens to the north of the church. The map also shows the church much altered from the time of the tithe map.

The 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map shows minor changes in the layout of the agricultural building, one of which is within the development plot (Figure 4).

Cartographic Sources Used

Source	Reference Number
Tithe Apportionment Map of Birlingham (1841)	Worcester Records Office BA 697
1843 Plan of Proposed New Road	Worcester Records Office BA 3940 ref: 705:262 parcel 56
Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 25". Worcestershire Sheet XLVIII.3 (1884)	Worcester Records Office
Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 25". Worcestershire Sheet XLVIII.3 (1904)	Worcester Records Office
Geological Survey of England and Wales: 1:50,000 Sheet 199	County Sites and Monuments Library
Soil Survey of England and Wales: 1:50,000 Sheet 150	County Sites and Monuments Library

Other sources used are referenced within the report.

3.4. The Fieldwork Methodology

The watching brief was undertaken between 18th and 20th May 2004.

The photographic survey was carried out using digital format. A scale was used where possible.

Proforma Record Forms were used to record the site stratigraphy in tandem with site notes to produce the final record contained within this report.

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.

4. The Watching Brief

The watching brief fell into two distinct areas, to the north, where modern disturbance had reduced the ground level and to the south-west, where the land had been heavily made up.

To the north of the property, excavation of the foundation and service trenches revealed a topsoil [100] build-up to a maximum of 0.35 metres. This was a loose greyish-brown sandy loam with frequent small round stones. The topsoil lay over a thin layer of subsoil [102] of stiff orangey-grey sandy clay with significantly less stones. The natural parent material [103] was noted at around 0.45-0.50 metres below the present ground level. This was seen in the new soakaway pit to a depth of 1.45 metres. There were no significant archaeological deposits or features in this area.

To the south-west of the property the soil profile was noticeably different. Foundation trenches were excavated to a depth of 1 metre below the current ground level. It was noted that there is a c.1metre fall from the foot of the building to the road to the south-east. The land here had been built up sometime prior to the construction of The Corner House. The topsoil [100] covered a garden soil [101] of olive-brown sandy loam containing a large percentage of charcoal and ash. This was around 0.12 metres thick and petered out to the south. This lay above the subsoil [102] and natural [103]. The natural dropped off steeply to the south-west and the ground here had been levelled with redeposited loose blackish sandy silt [104]. This sealed a pit [106] filled by a similar material, which could be given a modern date due to the inclusion of 19th century brick fragments [105]. The bottom of the pit was not visible in plan.

There were no significant archaeological deposits or features encountered during the watching brief and no dateable finds were recovered. No dateable finds were removed from site.

5. Discussion of the Physical and Documentary Evidence

The watching brief determined that there were no significant archaeological features or deposits within the development area. It is clear from map evidence that the road passing the western side of the plot was proposed in 1843 and presumably constructed soon after, it appears in its present form on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1884. It is likely that the excavated material from the road construction was used in building up the level of the development site. The pit [106] and its fill [107] may be earlier than the levelling process, although it is unclear from what level the pit was cut as the fill [107] was identical to the build-up material [105]. Therefore, it is also just as likely that the pit is a soakaway, which may date from any time prior to the erection of the building in the 1970-80's. To the north of the building it was clear that there had been some disturbance, probably during demolition of agricultural buildings during the 1970-80's. There were no visible remains of the buildings encountered.

6. Conclusion

The results of the archaeological watching brief demonstrate that there was no evidence for activity prior to the 19th century on the development site. The road adjacent to the west dates from the mid-19th century and it seems likely that material used to level the development site was taken from the road construction. A pit encountered within this material is likely to be a soakaway pit for adjacent agricultural buildings.

7. Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Mark and Sadie Yeomans, the owners of The Corner House and to Michael Wood, the JCB operator; thanks are also due to Mike Glyde, Planning Archaeologist, Worcestershire County Council and the staff of Worcester Records Office.

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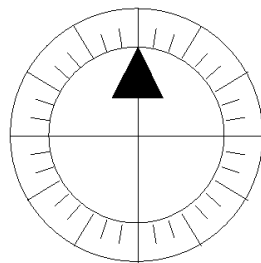
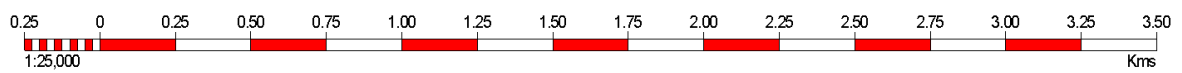
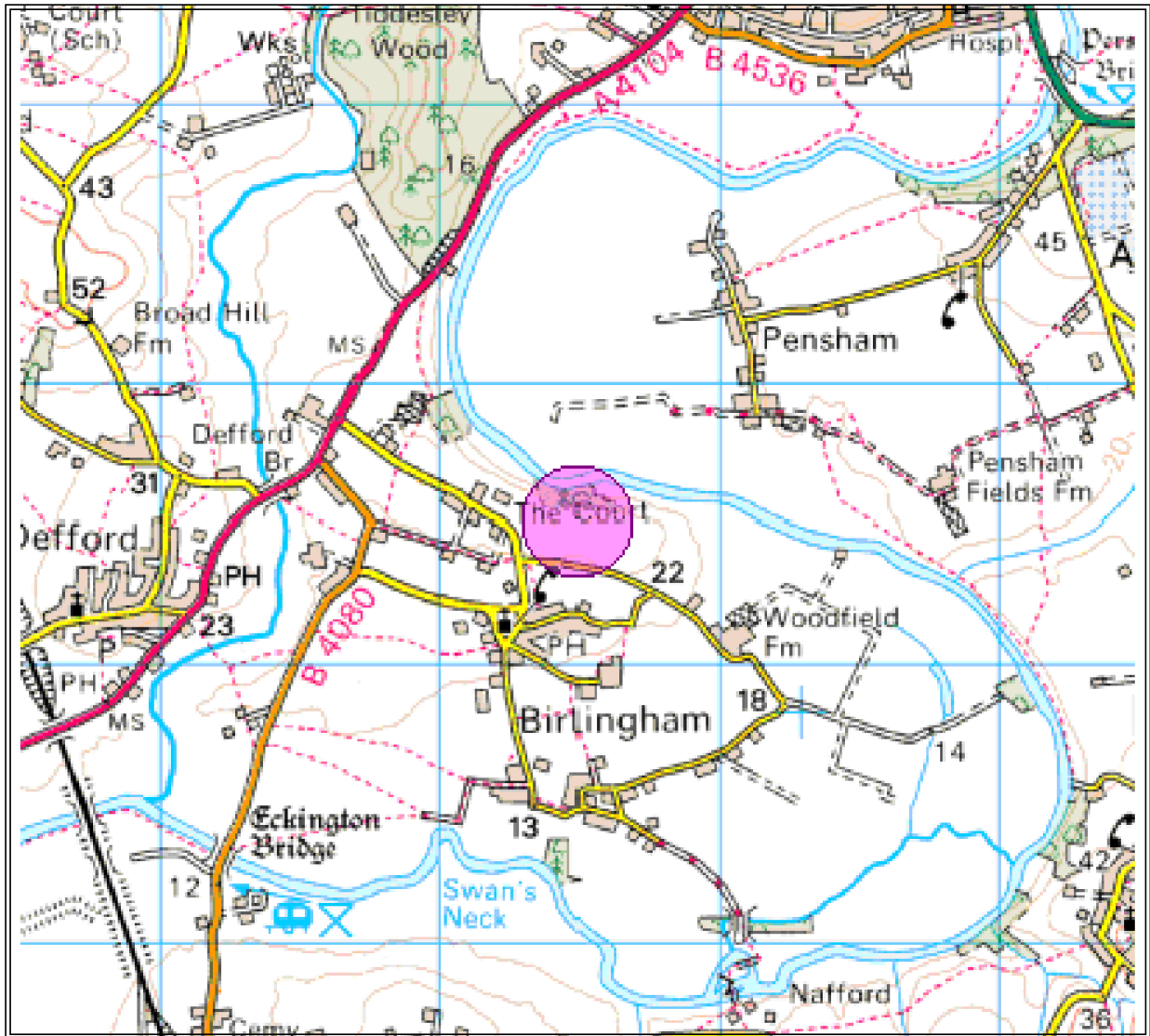
Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Section (WHEAS 2003) *Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief at The Corner House, Birlingham, Worcestershire*

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Figure 1: Location of the Site

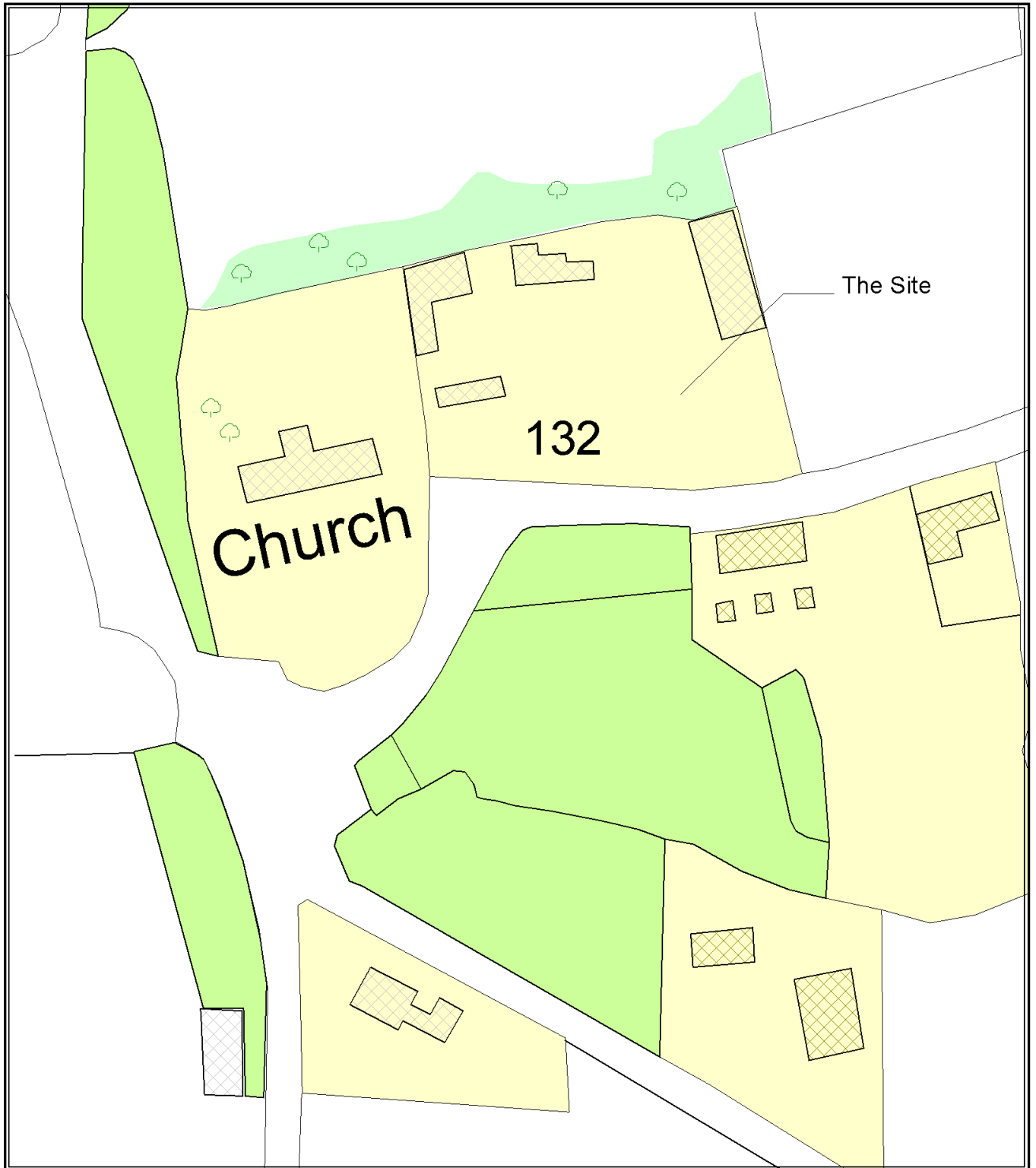


Location of Birlingham, Worcestershire

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Figure 2: Extract from the Birlingham Tithe Map (1841)



The tithe map of 1841 shows the village layout before the road heading north (left) was replaced by the road that cut through plot 132, which now forms part of the Corner House property.

Unknown scale

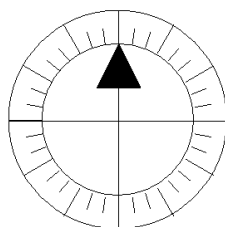
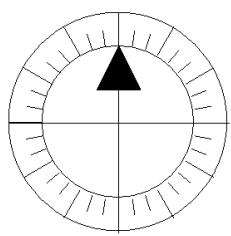
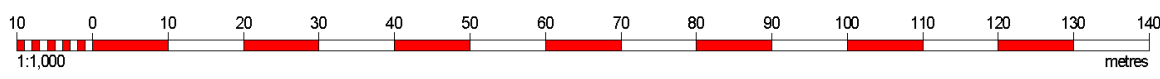
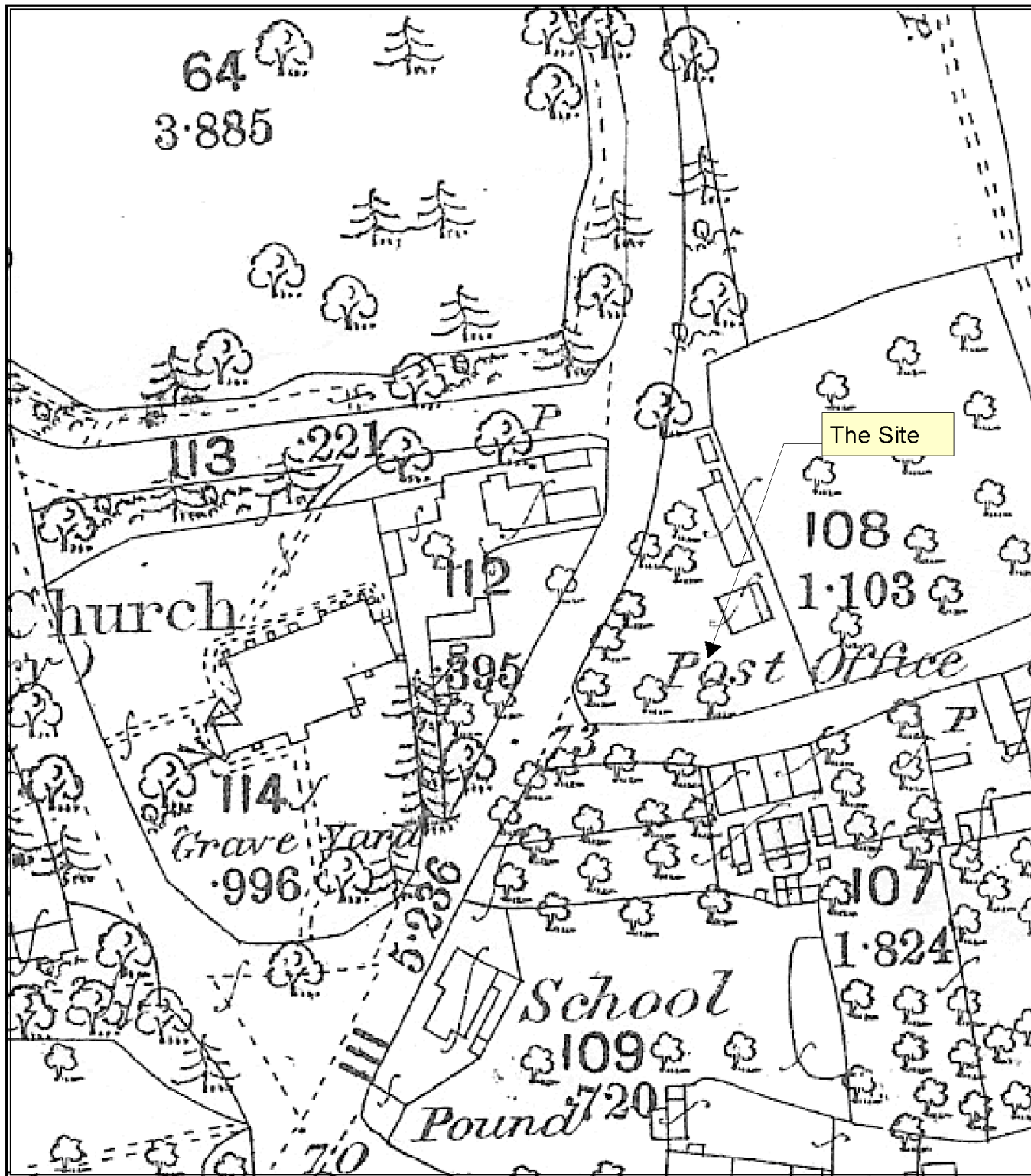
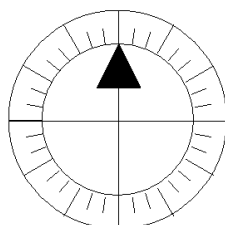
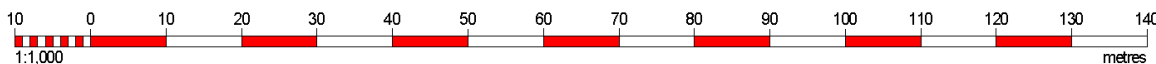
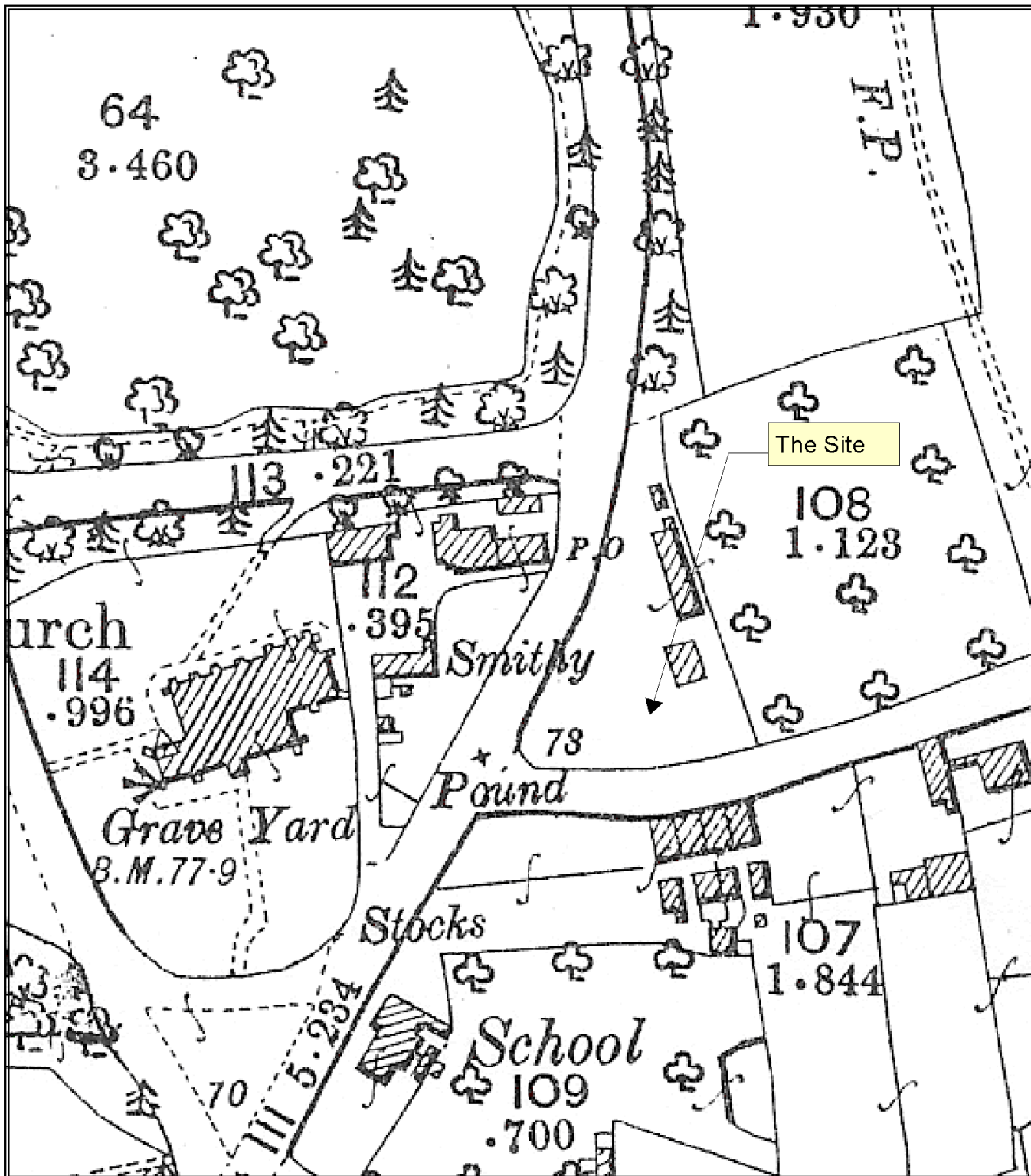


Figure 3: 1st Edition Ordnance Survey (1884)

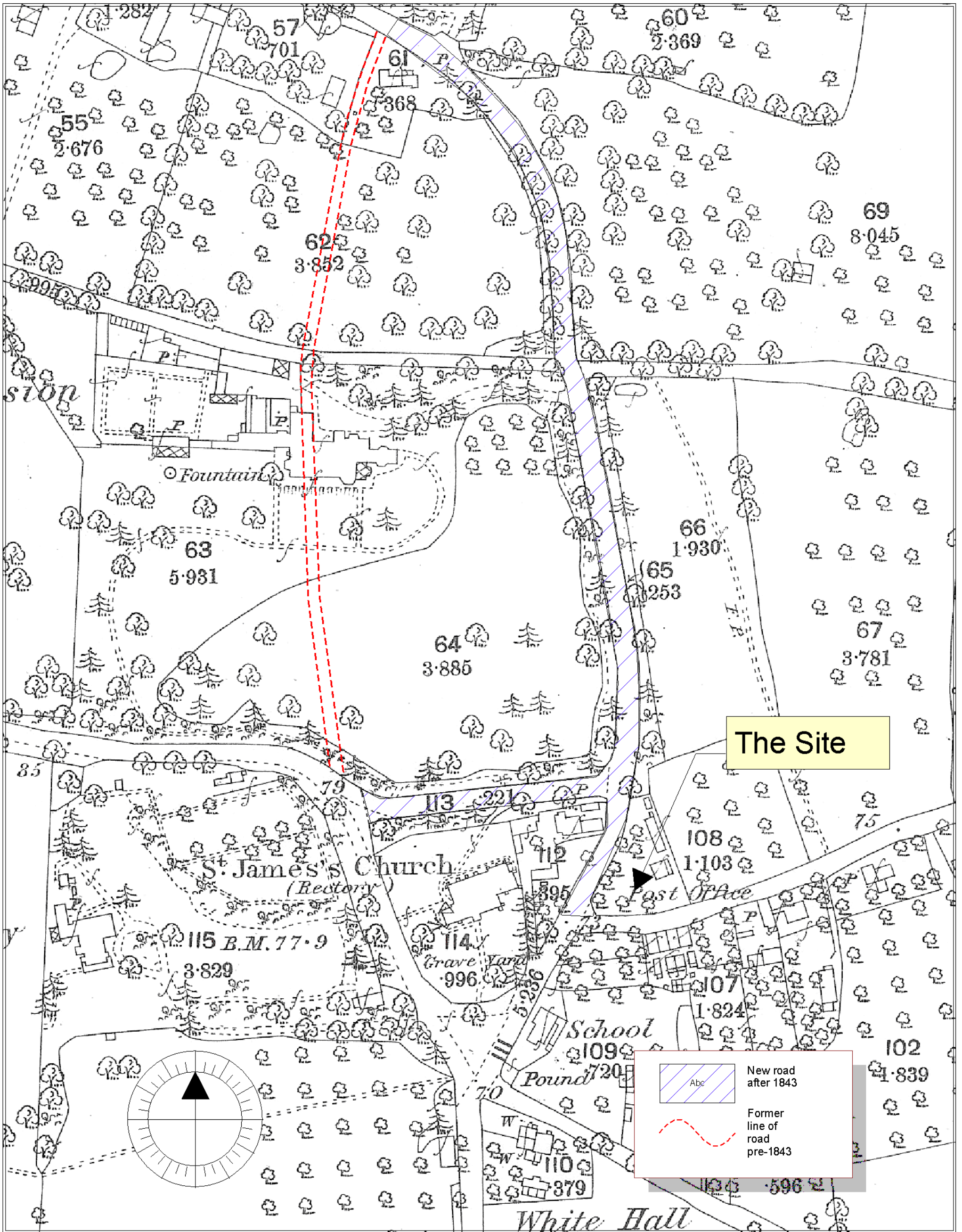


The 1st edition map shows the route of the new road. Also note the additions / alterations to the church.

Figure 4: 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey (1904)



The 2nd edition map of 1904 shows little change from the earlier 1884 edition.



The Site

	New road after 1843
	Former line of road pre-1843

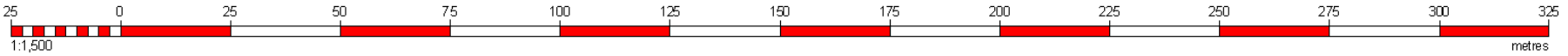


Figure 5: The Road Alterations of the mid 19th Century

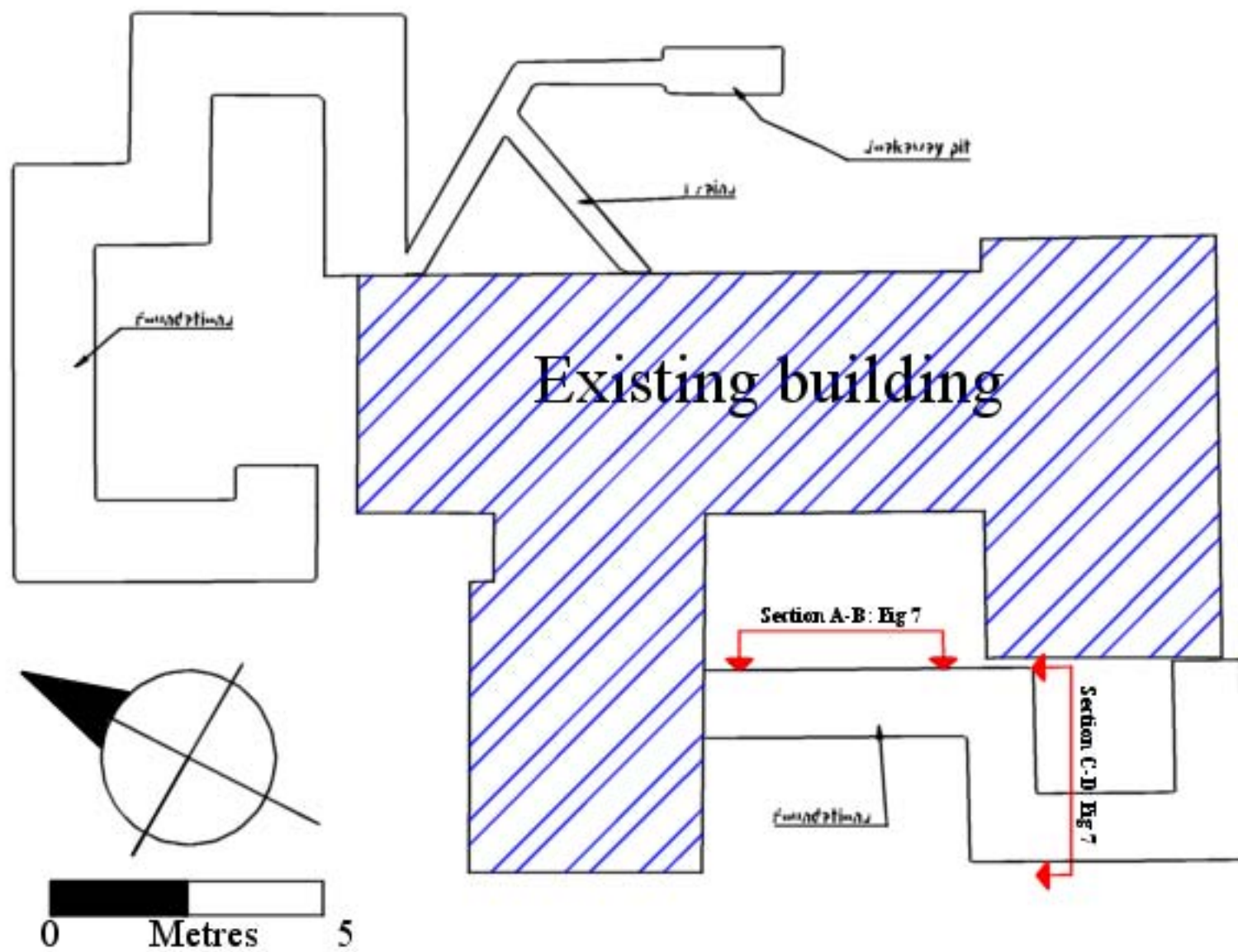
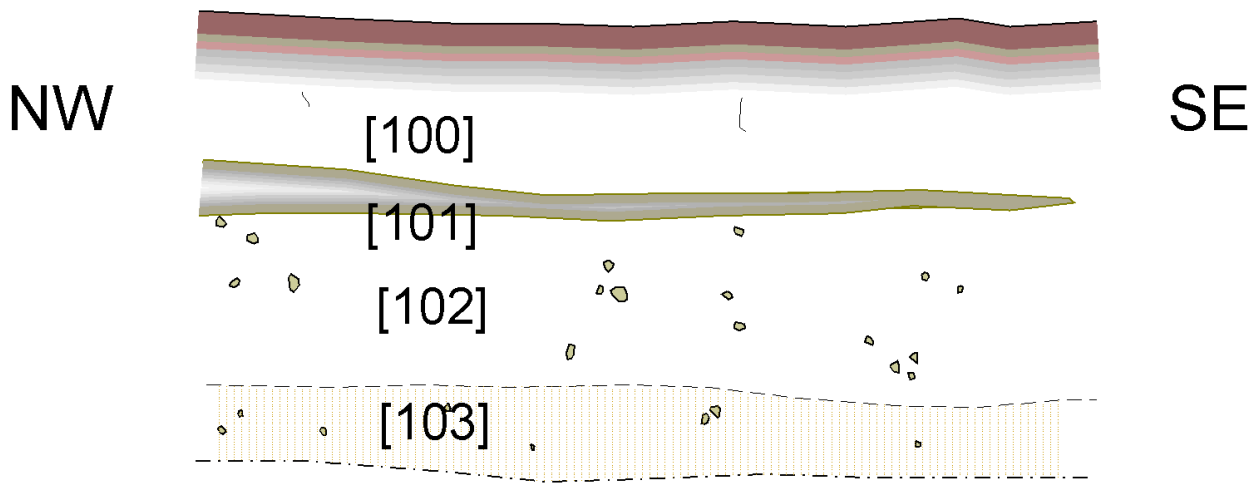


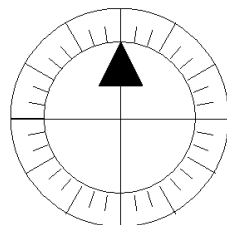
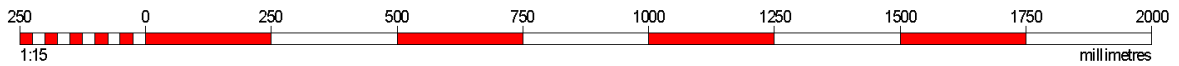
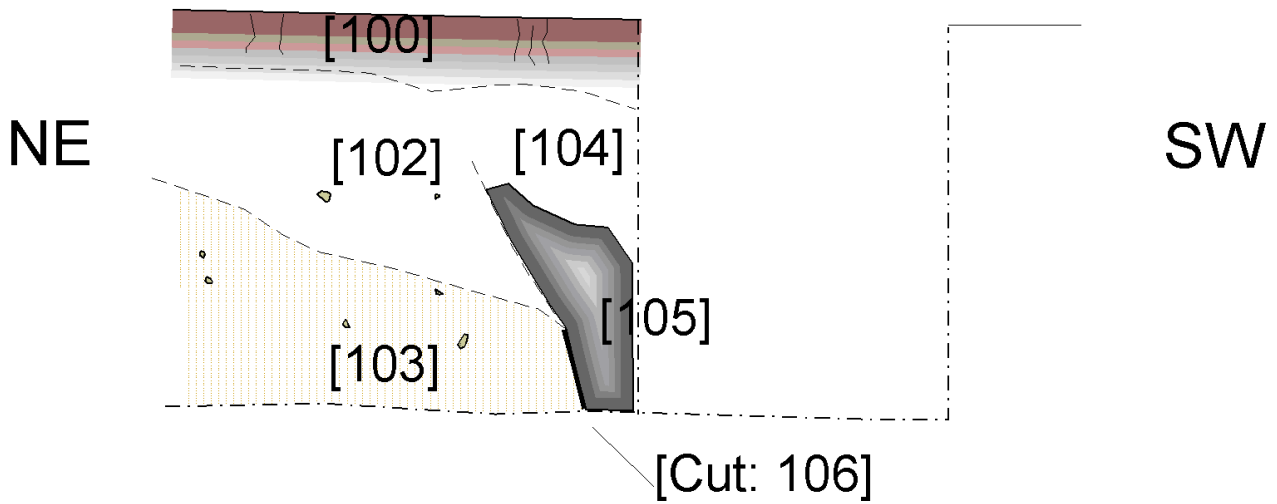
Figure 6: Area of the Watching Brief

Figure 7: Sections A-B and C-D

Section A - B (see Fig 6)



Section C-D (see Fig 6)



See the report for context number details