

# An Archaeological Evaluation of Land Adjacent to Tardebigge Wharf, Alcester Road, Tardebigge, Worcestershire

*A Report for British Waterways*

December 2003

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**Project: PJ 113**

**WSM: 33429**

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## Summary of Results

*An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at land adjacent to Tardebigge Wharf, Alcester Road, Tardebigge in December 2003. The results determined that there were no significant archaeological deposits or features within the evaluated area. It was concluded that the land had been used as arable during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, before being set aside as pasture.*

## 1. Project Background

### 1.1. Location of the Site

Tardebigge Wharf is situated on the Worcester and Birmingham Canal, just to the west of Tardebigge Tunnel, which carries the canal below the B4184 Bromsgrove to Alcester road and the modern A448 bypass that runs parallel to its predecessor. The proposed development site lies on the opposite side of the canal to the wharf, at the bottom of the steep hill that rises up to St Bartholomew's Church to the south (Figure 1). The site is currently under pasture and is used for grazing sheep.

### 1.2. Development Details

A planning application has been made to Bromsgrove District Council for the construction of a 50-space car park on the site (reference B/02/1202). The planning process determined that the proposed development may affect an archaeological site listed on the County Sites and Monuments Record (WSM 12179). The listed site is recorded on an aerial photograph, which shows a circular mark in the field similar in form to many quantified prehistoric features. As a result, the Planning Archaeologist, Worcestershire County Council, advised that the site should be subject to an archaeological evaluation prior to any development taking place, as required site under Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Section 30). A brief of work was written for the project by The Planning Archaeologist, Planning Advisory Section, Worcestershire County Council (WAS 2002).

### 1.3. Topography, Geology and Archaeology

The site lies at the foot of a steep hill overlooked by St Bartholomew's Church, which stands high above to the south. The proposed archaeological feature noted on the aerial photograph (Figure 7) lies in a slight natural basin, with the hill rising steeply to the south and a gentler slope up to the road on the eastern side.

The local soils are reddish fine loamy or fine silty over a clayey matrix, with slowly permeable and Keuper Marl subsoils. The underlying geology is of the Bromsgrove sandstone formation (British Geological Survey 1993).

The landscape today carries much evidence of medieval agriculture with surviving areas of ridge and furrow to the west (WSM 03312; 03313; 03314; 03315; 03316). The remnant ridge and furrow lies to the north of the present church, which was built on the site of the demolished medieval parish church and close to a site identified as a Shrunken Settlement and Holloway (WSM 05694). The ridge and furrow represents the remains of the subsistence farming of the medieval settlement of Tardebigge. The Domesday Survey records that there were 28 smallholders with 12 ploughs farming the surrounding fields (Morris 1982).

The present St Bartholomew's Church was built in 1777 to replace the medieval parish church, which was demolished after its tower collapsed damaging the church beyond repair. The new church was built to the north of the old church, although to date, its exact original location is unknown (Page 1913).

The post-medieval landscape is littered with evidence of mans exploitation of the land for small-scale industry. There are numerous disused pits, and quarries scattered across the immediate area and there are a series of former limekilns (WSM 01712) on the northern side of the Worcester and Birmingham Canal.

To the north of the church lies Church Quarry (WSM 26322). This was connected to the canal by a tramway, which was apparently abandoned in 1815 (WSM 26321). Stone from the quarry was used in the construction of the canal and canal side infrastructure.

The pattern of communication in the area has changed dramatically since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The line of a former road can still be determined in the landscape. It runs from the east of the church down the steep hill, where it is cut by the canal. This is the former road to Webheath, which was made obsolete by the construction of the B4184 Alcester Road. In 1798, Lord Plymouth made an application to sessions to close the old road, which crossed his land (Dickens 1931). The road was known as Dark Lane and the application also proposed to close Back Lane, which joined Dark Lane to the south (Figure 2). It is likely that these roads were closed when Lord Plymouth allowed the canal company to construct the navigation across his land. The road then served as part of the tramway from the quarry.

The Tithe Apportionment Map of 1838 shows that the proposed development site was at this time, divided into two fields, a smaller triangular one to the north called 'Pleck', which was used for arable farming and a larger field to the south, also arable, called 'Sidling Close' (Figure 2). Both were farmed by John Vincent and owned by Clive Robert Henry. (WRO BA1572 s760/564.1).

## 2. Methods and Process

### 2.1. Project Specification

- ❑ The archaeological project conforms to the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation (IFA 1999).
- ❑ The project conforms to a brief prepared by the Planning Advisory Section, Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Section, Worcestershire County Council (WHEAS 2000) 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. Background Research

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork relevant available cartographic sources were consulted. A full search of the Worcestershire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) was commissioned and various archaeological reports were also viewed. The following cartographic sources were specifically consulted:

#### Cartographic Sources

Source	Reference Number
Tithe Map of Tardebigge (1838)	WRO BA1572 s760/564
Ordnance Survey 1 <sup>st</sup> Edition 6”(1888)	Worcestershire sheet XXIII.NW
Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 25”(1884)	Worcestershire sheet XXIII.2
Ordnance Survey 2 <sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition 25”(1904)	Worcestershire sheet XXIII.2
Road Closures and Diversions on the Land of Lord Plymouth (1800)	WRO BA10343/28r899:520

## Primary Sources Consulted that were of use

Source	Reference Number
Tithe Apportionment of Tardebigge (1838)	WRO BA1572 s760/564.1
Canal History	WROBA12,130 989.9:1193
Aerial Photograph of area 6”(1951)	WROBA10,420 f470(vii)

Other sources used are referenced within the report.

### 2.3. The Fieldwork

Prior to the evaluation fieldwork, the aerial photograph depicting the proposed circular feature (kindly supplied by WHEAS) was rectified using *MapMaker* software. This located the identified feature onto a ground plan allowing the trench locations to be determined. An access route had to be left across the northern boundary of the site, however, this did not compromise the trench location.

The evaluation was undertaken between 8<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> December 2003 by Paul Williams and Martin Cook of Mercian Archaeology. The evaluation trenches were excavated by a JCB fitted with a 1.8 metre wide ‘bladed’ bucket.

## 3. The Results

The southern most trench (Trench A) was around 15 metres long and parallel with trench B, which was 18 metres long. A connecting trench (Trench C) was excavated at right angles to Trench A, but the presence of an iron water pipe across the site meant that the join between Trench A and Trench B could not be made (Figure 6). This did not diminish the results.

A build up of 0.24 metres of topsoil [100] had built up over the site. This contained a small quantity of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century pottery. There were two distinct areas of redeposited natural marl [103] sealed below a subsoil [101/102] at 0.46 metres below ground level. These layers sealed a silty sand soil [104] that contained 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery and abundant charcoal. This layer had formed over the undulating natural glacial deposits of mixed bands of sand and red marl, which were encountered at an average of 0.85 below ground level.

An iron water pipe, running approximately south-west to north-east, had been trenched across the evaluated area.

There were no significant archaeological features encountered during the evaluation.

## 4. Analysis of the Results

The surface evidence on the site indicated that there had been some movement of soil down the hillside in the past. The tell tale slippage ridges were noticeable beneath the grass cover, both here and further along the hillside. The area of the evaluation was ridged to the extent that it resembled slight earthworks. However, the excavation proved that the ridging was entirely natural.

The buried soil [104] was extremely silty and well mixed, with finds from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century throughout the deposit. This soil represents a period of arable agriculture, with the presence of much material washed down the hillside before the field grassed over and reverted to pasture.

The redeposited marl [103] was initially thought to be the natural undisturbed parent material. However, excavation proved that it lay above layer [104], which contained cultural material. The redeposited material was compact and sterile, but had well-defined edges, suggesting it was laid rather than spread. It is possible that it was laid to level out the ground at the bottom of the slope, perhaps to allow easier access across the field from the gate in the north-eastern corner, although this is conjecture.

The aerial photograph, upon which the evaluation was based, clearly shows a circular mark on the surface of the evaluated area. Had this been in a field containing a crop it would have suggested a ditch of some form. The moisture contained within the ditch would ensure that the crop above it ripened faster and remained ripe longer than the surrounding crop, thus appearing different to the surrounding crop when viewed from above. However, this would not be noticeable in a short grass crop, such as at this location. This suggests that the marks may have been caused by a lack of water within the subsoil or topsoil, either caused by less permeable material below the surface, or masonry / rubble. Again, the excavation proved otherwise and only natural deposits were encountered. One possible reason for the visible marking may be the location of the area within a slight bowl that may have cast shadows across the area simulating a circle, or perhaps stonier material washed down the slopes had settled in a circular pattern within the basin. However, again this is conjecture.

## 5. Conclusion

The results of the watching brief demonstrate that there were no significant archaeological deposits or layers within the proposed development area. The circular feature seen in the aerial photograph was not encountered during the evaluation and is likely to have been caused by a combination of natural phenomenon.

## 6. Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Nick Ireland of British Waterways, Mick George for supply and operation of the JCB. Thanks are also due to Martin Cook, Deborah Overton for carrying out the SMR search, Neil Lockett for his GIS input and Mike Glyde, Planning Archaeologist, Worcestershire County Council.



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**Cook, M** (2003). Proposal and Specification for an Archaeological Field Evaluation at Land Adjacent to Tardebigge Wharf, Alcester Road, Tardebigge, Worcestershire Worcestershire.

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**Ragg, J M, Beard, G R, George, H, Heaven, F W, Hollis, J M, Jones, R J A, Palmer, R C, Reeve, M J, Robson, J D, and Whitfield, W A D** (1984). Soils and their use in midland and western England, Soil Survey of England and Wales, 12

**Worcestershire Archaeological Service** (2002) Brief for an Archaeological Evaluation at Land Adjacent to Tardebigge Wharf, Alcester Road, Tardebigge, Worcestershire Worcestershire.

## CONTEXT RECORD

Context	Type	Level	Thickness	Date Ascribed
<b>100</b>	Topsoil	GL	Max 0.24	20 <sup>th</sup> c.
Comprised of	Silty-sand with moderate root action in top 0.08m			
Compaction	Loose			
Colour	Dark greyish-brown			
Inclusions	Roots; occasional small round pebble			
Finds	Rare 19 <sup>th</sup> /20 <sup>th</sup> century pottery shard			

Context	Type	Level	Thickness	Date Ascribed
<b>101</b>	Topsoil/subsoil interface	0.24	0.06	19 <sup>th</sup> /20 <sup>th</sup> c.
Comprised of	Silty-sand			
Compaction	Friable			
Colour	Greyish-orangey			
Inclusions	Occasional decayed stone/small round pebble; moderate charcoal			
Finds	None			

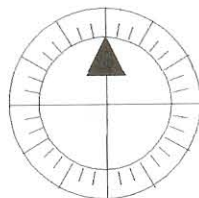
Context	Type	Level	Thickness	Date Ascribed
<b>102</b>	Subsoil	0.30	0.16	
Comprised of	Silty sandy-clay			
Compaction	Friable			
Colour	Reddish-brown			
Inclusions	Moderate marl; rare small sub-round and angular stones			
Finds	None			

Context	Type	Level	Thickness	Date Ascribed
<b>103</b>	Natural	0.46	Variable	19 <sup>th</sup> century
Comprised of	Marl			
Compaction	Compact			
Colour	Red and grey mottled			
Inclusions	None			
Finds	None			

Context	Type	Level	Thickness	Date Ascribed
<b>104</b>	Layer	0.46-0.55	0.30	18 <sup>th</sup> /19 <sup>th</sup> century
Comprised of	Silty sand			
Compaction	Loose			
Colour	Reddish-brown			
Inclusions	Moderate charcoal; occasional small round pebble			
Finds	18 <sup>th</sup> /19 <sup>th</sup> century pottery; clay tobacco-pipe stems; brick/tile fragments			

Context	Type	Level	Thickness	Date Ascribed
<b>105</b>	Natural	Average 0.84	Seen to 1.45	
Comprised of	Marl; sand; compact sand			
Compaction	Compact			
Colour	Various (red, yellow, grey)			
Inclusions	None			
Finds	None			

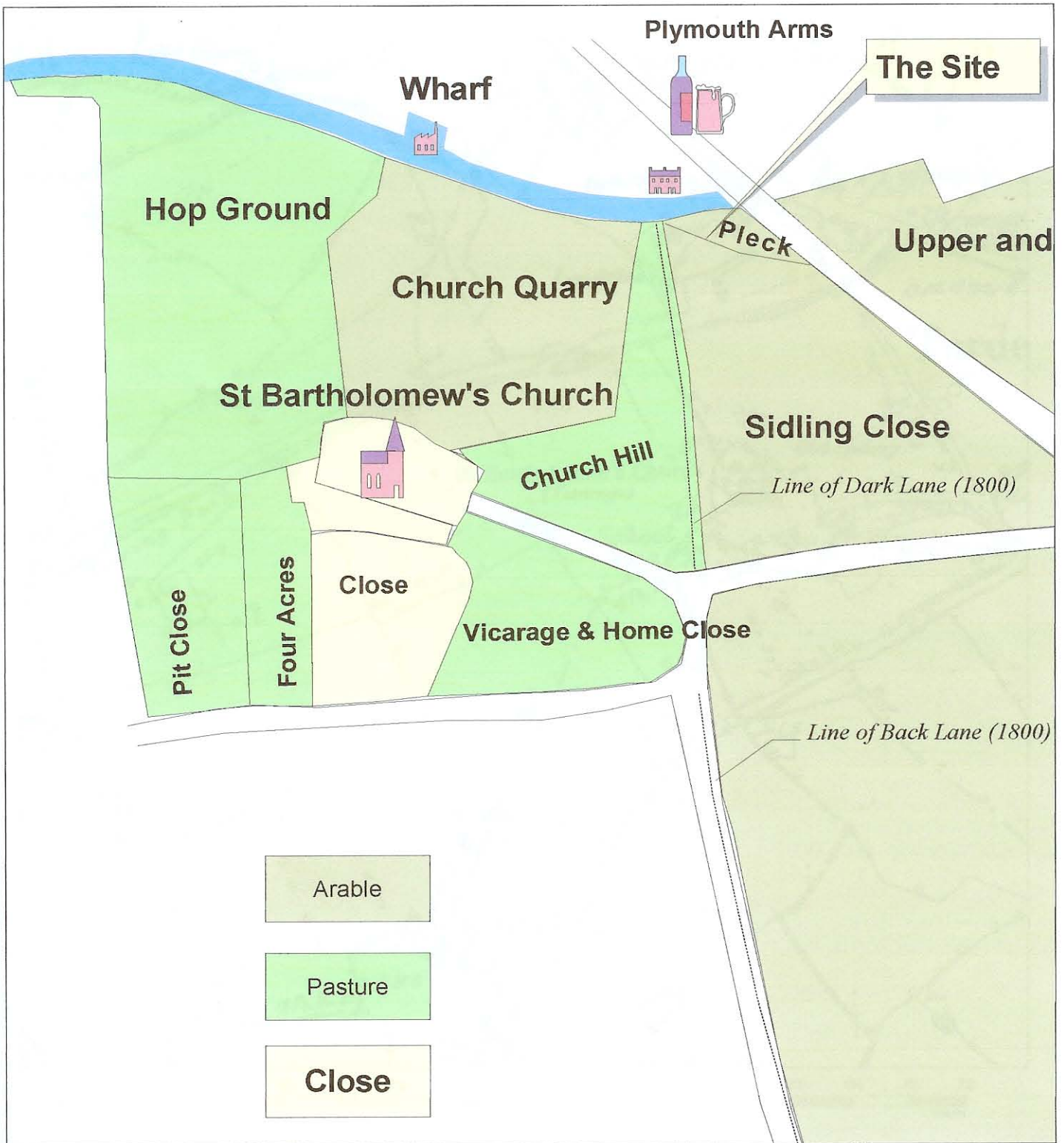
# Figure 1: Location of Site



Location of the site adjacent to Tardebigge Wharf, Tardebigge, Worcestershire



Figure 2. Extract from Tardebigge Tithe Apportionment Map (1838) with additions (1800)



Tithe Apportionment of Tardebigge (1838) with route of roads closed in 1800 (dotted lines) taken from a plan of Lord Plymouth's estate.

Scale is unknown

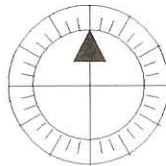
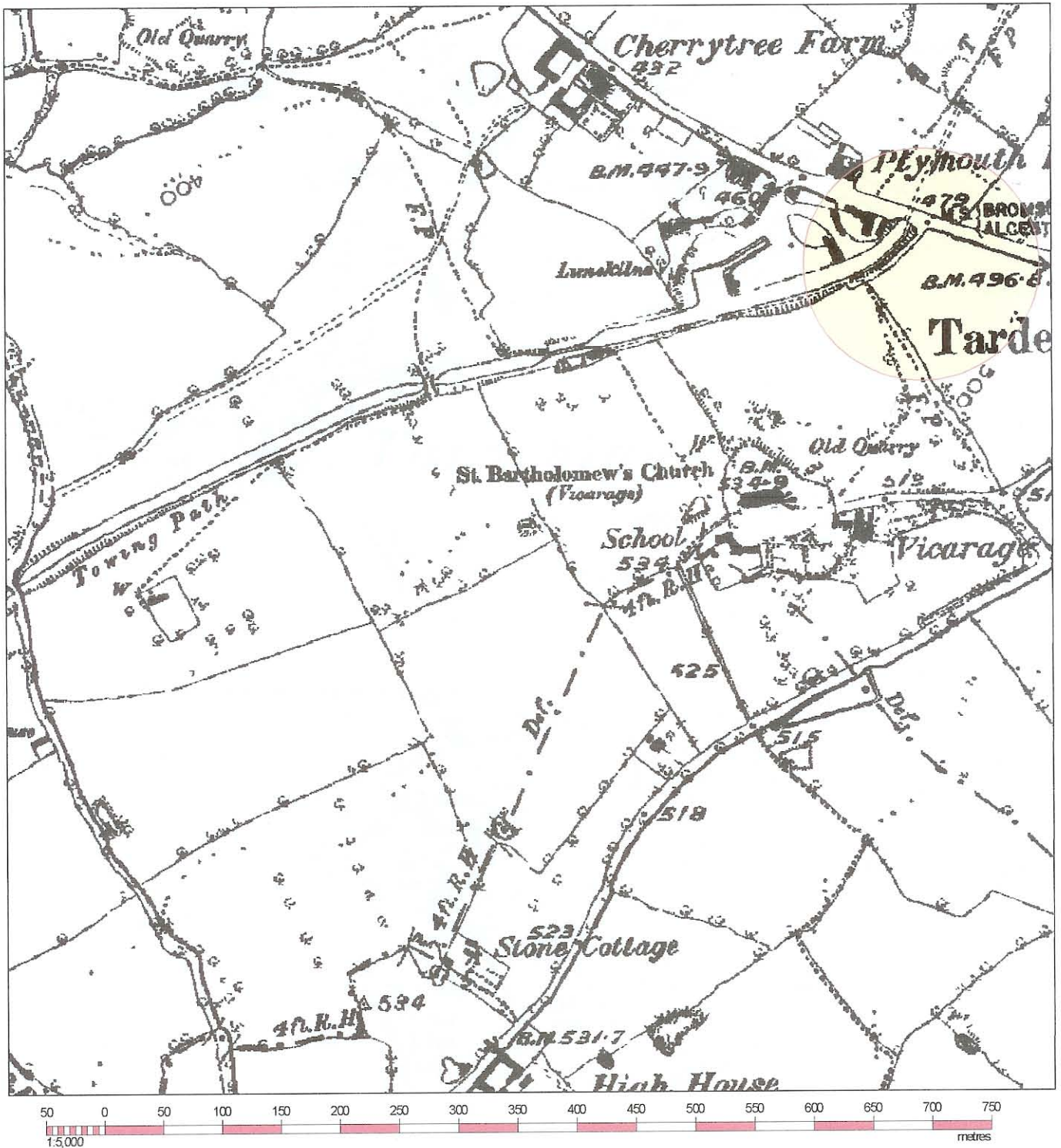


Figure 3. The site at Tardebigge; 1st Edition Ordnance Survey (1888)



The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map shows the site prior to the diversion and construction of new roads.

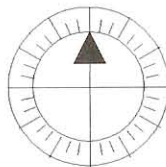
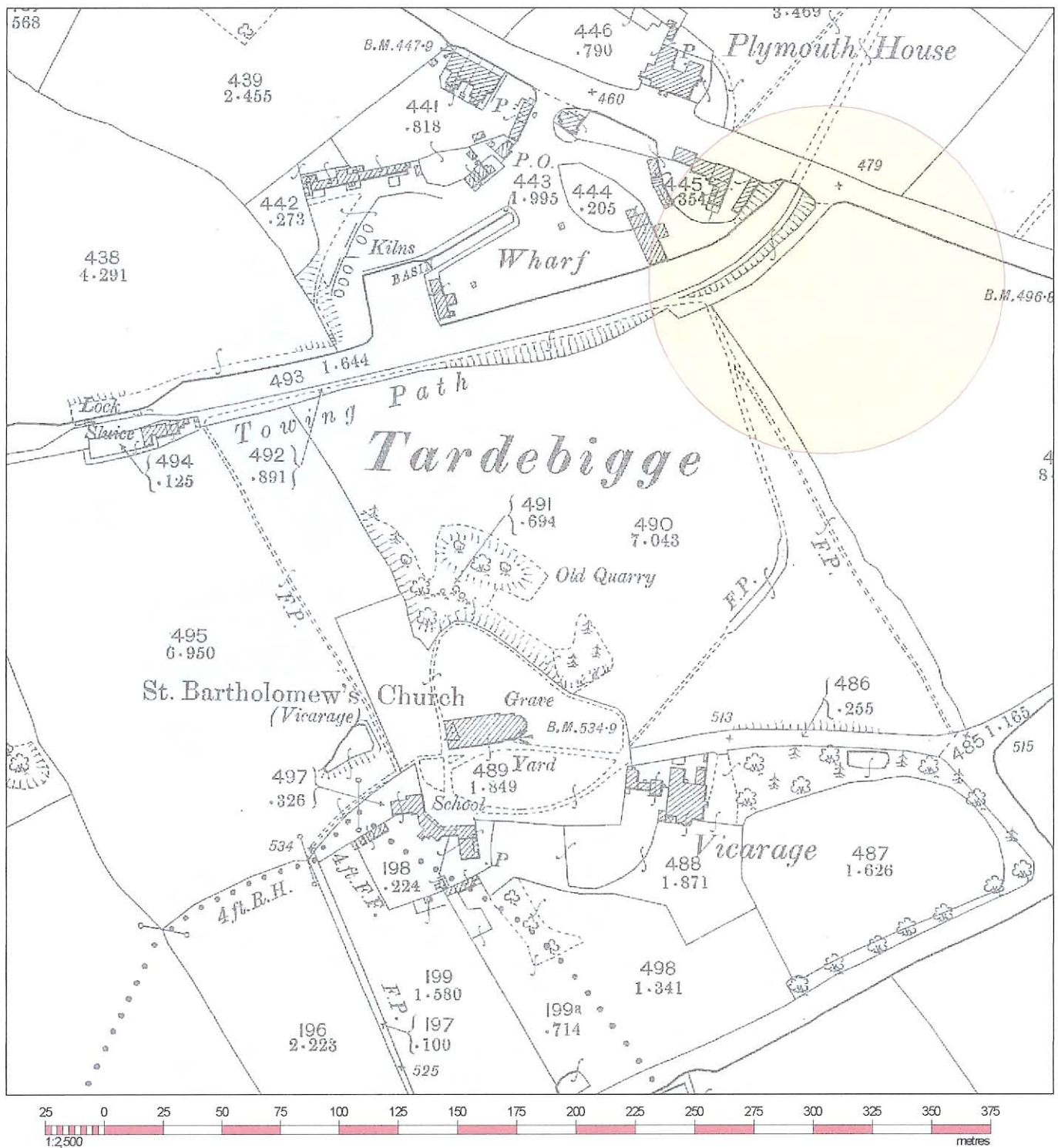


Figure 4. The site at Tardebigge; 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey (1904)



The 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map shows the landscape dominated by the canal, with the kilns adjacent to the wharf on the northern side.

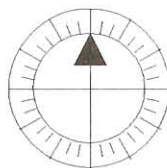
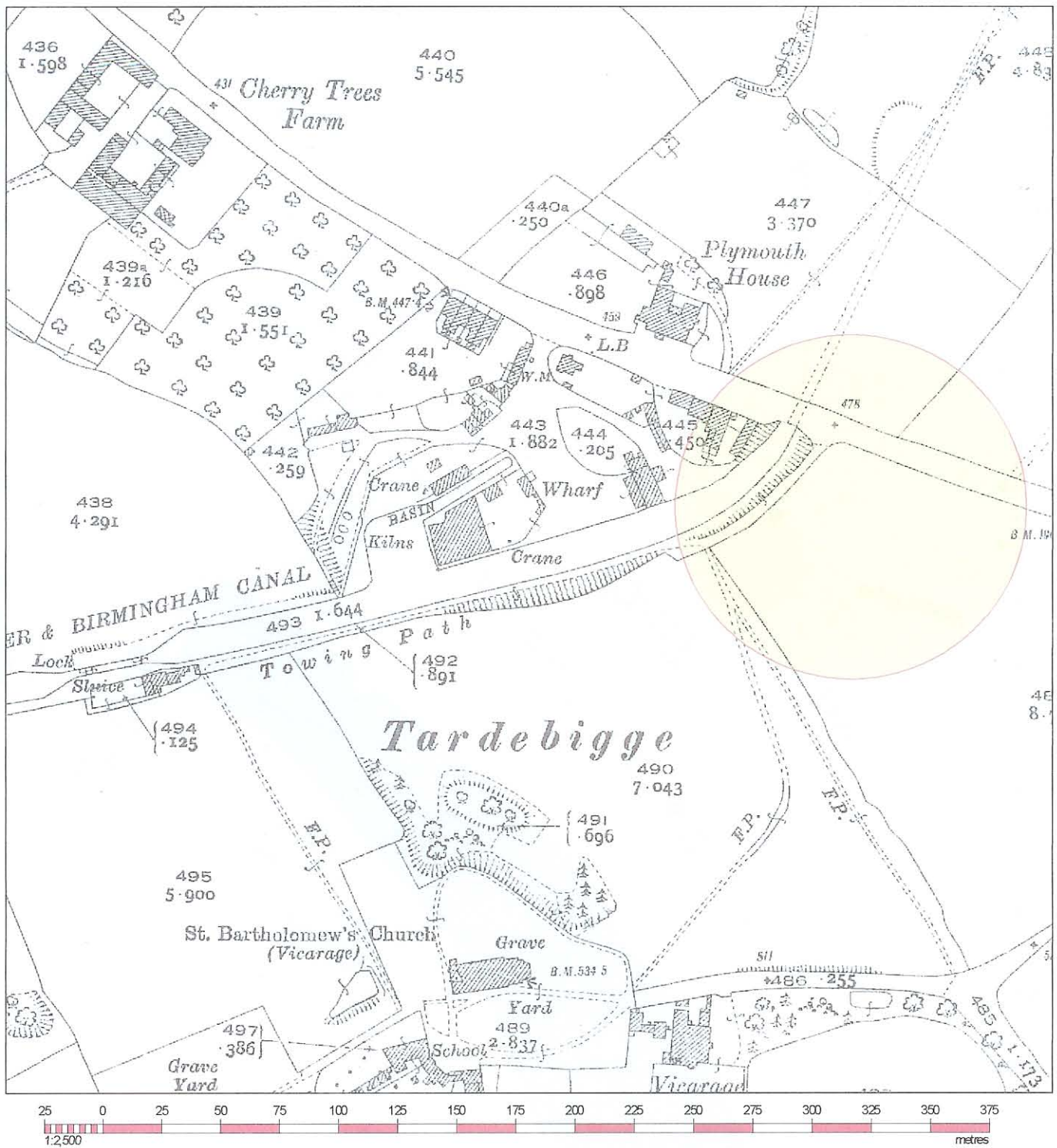
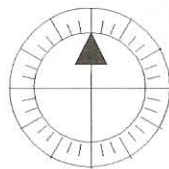


Figure 5. The site at Tardebigge; 2nd (revised) Edition Ordnance Survey (1927)



The revised 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map shows that the site had not changed since 1904, when the 2nd edition map was published.



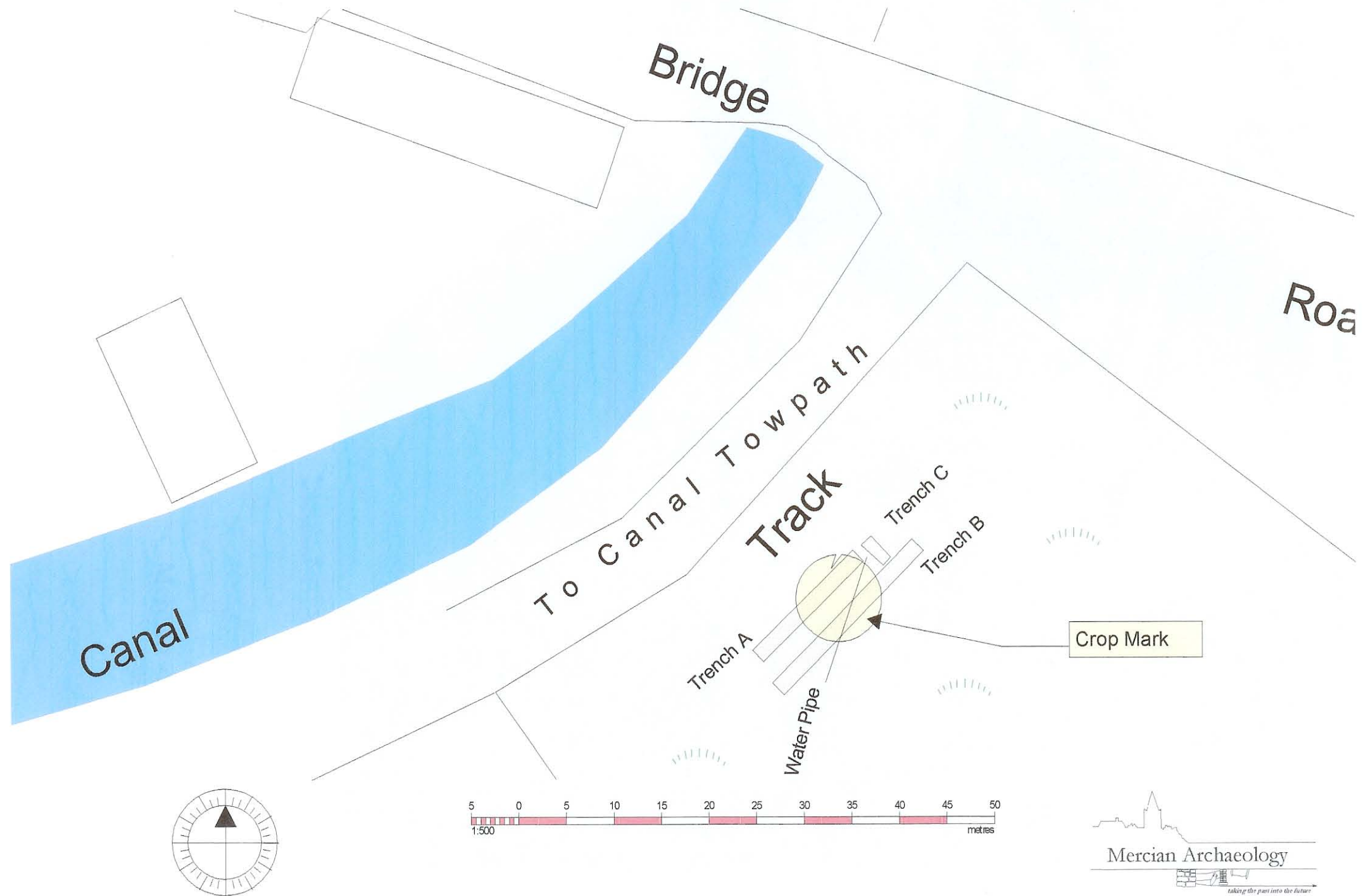
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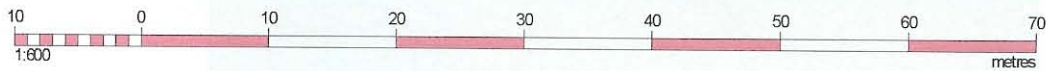
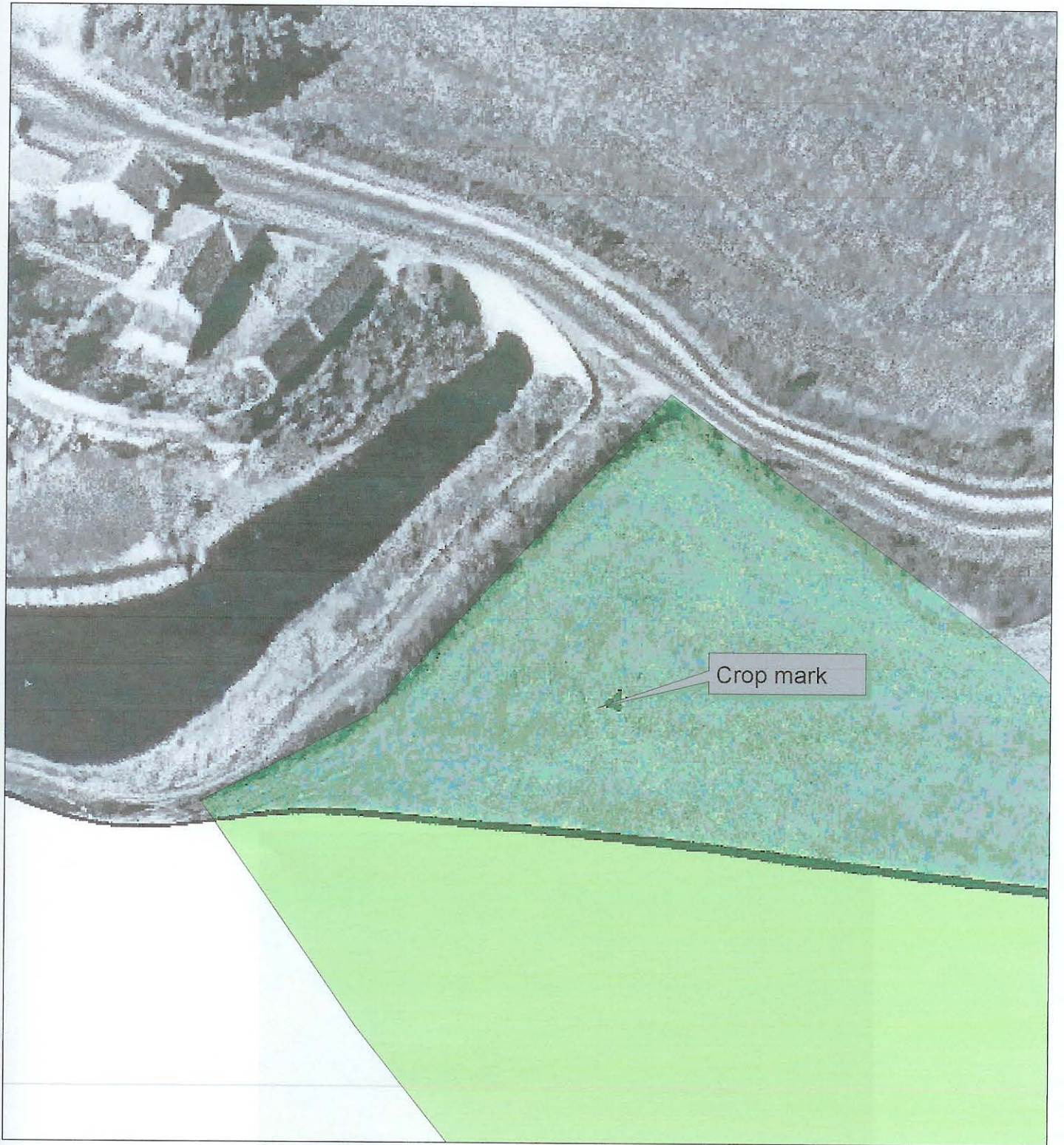
taking the past into the future



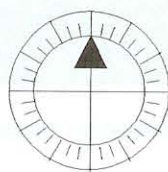
Figure 6. Location of Trenches and Crop Mark



**Figure 7. Rectified Aerial Photograph Showing Crop Mark**



The corner of photograph has been rectified to allow the cropmark to be located on a base map (green area).



# Plates

## Plate 1



*Trench B soil profile (Scale 2 metres)*

## Plate 2



*The site, showing extent of trenching; view to the north from  
Church Hill*