

**PHASE 2, RIDGEWAY, PLYMPTON, DEVON
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

Report no. 41328

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by EBC Construction Limited to carry out an archaeological watching brief during development of land in Plympton, Devon (centred on SX 5419 5622). The development area covers a total of *c.* 750 m², and is situated on the south frontage of Ridgeway, immediately to the west of the Phase 1 development on the site of the former Magistrates Court and Police Station (Wessex Archaeology 1993).

The fieldwork was carried out in January 1996 and comprised the monitoring of all invasive construction groundwork considered to pose a threat to any subsurface archaeological remains. The watching brief revealed the presence of at least two small medieval ditches, as well as the shillet foundations for the post-medieval Ridgeway Methodist Chapel and Sunday School that formerly occupied the site. Although the ditches are dated as medieval, there were no associated structural remains fronting onto Ridgeway, and it is therefore probable that these remains represent plot divisions for burgage tenements, as indicated on early 18th-century maps of Plympton.

Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology would like to acknowledge the assistance shown by the staff of EBC Construction Limited and in particular Mr Nigel Blackman. The collaborative role of the Planning and Transportation Services section, Plymouth City Council, and particularly Dr Keith Ray, City Archaeological Officer, is also acknowledged.

The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Roland Smith, with the fieldwork carried out by Andrew Crockett and David Murdie. Finds analysis was provided by Lorraine Mephram, Finds Manager, and illustrations produced by Erica Hemming. This report was compiled by Andrew Crockett.

PHASE 2, RIDGEWAY, PLYMPTON, DEVON ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by EBC Construction Limited to carry out an archaeological watching brief during their construction programme at Phase 2, Ridgeway, Plympton. The development site (centred on SX 5419 5622; **Fig. 1**) is bounded by Ridgeway to the north, an area of car park to the south, and existing town centre developments to the west and east. The south edge of Ridgeway predominantly marks the parish boundary between Plympton St Mary to the north and Plympton St Maurice to the south.

1.1.2 The watching brief was commissioned to examine and record any archaeological remains that may exist within the footprint for the proposed new building. The potential for such remains had already been demonstrated by the discovery of 13th- to 15th-century remains during archaeological examinations in advance of the Phase 1, Ridgeway, development (Wessex Archaeology 1993). The Phase 1 development was on the site of the former Magistrates Court and Police Station, immediately to the east of this Phase 2 development.

1.1.3 The archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with current planning guidance (*Planning Policy Guidance Note 16*, Department of the Environment, November 1990) and following the advice of the City Archaeological Officer, Plymouth City Council, as set out in his *Brief* for archaeological work on the Phase 1 Ridgeway development, that the site lies 'within the area of the medieval urban settlement of Plympton St Mary'.

1.2 Topography

1.2.1 Although the development area is comparatively level at c. 35 m OD, the Ridgeway, as the name implies, is located along the crest of an east to west aligned ridge, with steep south and north-facing slopes to either side. A tributary of the River Plym flows from east to west at the base of the slope to the south (at c. 10 m OD), discharging into the River Plym c. 2.5 km to the west.

1.3 Geology

1.3.1 The underlying solid geology is recorded as soft Mid-Devonian slate, also known as 'shillet', with more recent drift deposits of alluvium associated with the watercourses noted above.

1.4 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.4.1 Prior to the Saxon period, there is very little evidence for settlement activity in the area of Plympton. Prehistoric earthworks at Borrington Camp, 3 km to the north, and Waste Berry, 4 km to the south-east, are at present the only known indicators for prehistoric settlement in the vicinity. However, documentary sources from the early 15th-century onwards refer to an earthwork known as Crana Castle (*Cranecastell*, AD 1408/9), probably situated at the east end of Ridgeway. The Tithe Map of 1842 identifies two of the fields in this area as *Crownhill Castle Field* (no. 1404) and *Crownhill Castle Quarry* (no. 1573; Gaskell-Brown 1975).
- 1.4.2 Recent work on Station Road (Wessex Archaeology 1995a) has revealed evidence for a pair of parallel east to west aligned ditches considered to be possibly prehistoric. However, these features collectively only produced a single piece of worked flint and several fragments of animal bone, and their interpretation must therefore be viewed with caution. Further to the north, in Colebrook, an isolated Neolithic polished greenstone axe was recovered in 1962 (Fox 1963).
- 1.4.3 Similarly, although a small number of Romano-British coins have been recovered on the site of the Augustinian Priory, c. 500 m to the west, no other contemporaneous settlement evidence has yet come to light.
- 1.4.4 The earliest documentary reference for Plympton is believed to date to the end of the 9th- or beginning of the 10th-century (probably AD 904). This relates to the transfer of the, as yet unlocated, Saxon Minster '*...called Plymenton...*' to Edward the Elder. Although it is probable that the Saxon Minster occupied the site of the later 12th-century Augustinian Priory, excavations on and around the site of the Priory have, as yet, failed to record any such earlier remains (Gaskell-Brown 1975; Brown 1989).
- 1.4.5 It is possible that the transfer of the minster to Edward is related to the establishment of a defended site, or *burh*, in response to Danish incursions at the time (Haslam 1984, 269-71). It has been suggested on topographical grounds by Haslam that if a Saxon *burh* existed in Plympton it probably occupied the area currently bisected by the south to north route of Station Road, c. 250 m to the north-west of the site. It should be emphasised that there is currently no documentary or archaeological evidence to support this interpretation (Bond 1987, 98), despite recent archaeological investigations in the area (Wessex Archaeology 1992; Wessex Archaeology 1995a).
- 1.4.6 The Saxon Minster was disbanded in 1121 by Bishop Warelwast of Exeter, who established an Augustinian Priory in its place, dedicated to St Peter and Paul. At its zenith, the priory was the second largest in Devon, with holdings throughout west and south Devon, and even Cornwall (Gaskell-Brown n.d.). The parish church of St Mary was built to the north of the priory in 1311 (Pevsner 1952).

- 1.4.7 Plympton Castle, a Norman motte and bailey castle established in the early 12th-century by the de Redvers family, is located on the higher ground c. 400 m to the south of the site (Devon Archaeological Society n.d.). The combined presence of the priory and the castle acted as a stimulus for the establishment of the borough of Plympton Erle, by at least AD 1155, and concentrated primarily to the south of the castle.
- 1.4.8 The other main focus of settlement was in Plympton St Mary, which was firmly established by the 14th-century, with the majority of the settlement concentrated along Ridgeway and Station Road (formerly Mill Street). The earliest documentary reference to Ridgeway (*Plymrhigid*) is dated to AD 1155, with documentary records for buildings present by at least the end of the 13th-century (*Serlo do Boltere de [of] Ruggeway*).
- 1.4.9 By the early 15th-century (Rental of Plympton Priory Grange, dated 1408/9) a total of 49 properties and 24 open spaces are recorded along both Ridgeway and Station Road (Gaskill-Brown 1975). The pattern of medieval tenement plots, represented by the alignment of modern property boundaries stretching back from the street frontage, can still be recognised in some areas of Station Road and Ridgeway today.
- 1.4.10 In addition to Plympton Erle and Plympton St Mary, a further small group of buildings is also recorded by the early 15th-century to the south of the priory at *Clapera* (Gaskell-Brown 1975), an area which is recorded as Underwood by the mid 16th-century.
- 1.4.11 The County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), a list of all known sites of archaeological interest within the county, records seven entries in close proximity to the site, in addition to Ridgeway which is recorded as a route of probable 'ancient origin' (SMR no. 175).
- 1.4.12 Two buildings on Station Road have produced pieces of architectural stonework that probably originated from the 12th-century priory (SMR nos. 039 and 040), whilst a silver coin of Edward I (c. AD 1280) was recovered c. 250 m to the south-west of the site (SMR no. 078).
- 1.4.13 Post-medieval structural remains include a house on the north side of Ridgeway with 18th-century origins and 19th-century embellishments (SMR no. 125), in addition to school buildings of 19th-century date which are located c. 100 m further to the north (SMR no. 201). Finally, the Ridgeway Methodist Chapel and Sunday School, which formerly occupied the development site, was recorded as late 19th- or early 20th-century in origin (SMR no. 200).

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The specification for the watching brief was provided by Wessex Archaeology (Wessex Archaeology 1995b), and was prepared in accordance with the normal requirements of the City Archaeological Officer.

2.2 Aims

2.2.1 The specification identified three aims for the project, as follows;

- to ensure the monitoring of all invasive groundworks and the adequate investigation of any archaeological remains,
- to present the results of the watching brief to the clients, the local planning authority and the City Archaeological Officer in sufficient detail and in a coherent manner within a summary report, and to publish the results in an appropriate journal, and
- to prepare the archive in a usable and accessible form for long term storage in The City of Plymouth Museum.

2.3 Fieldwork

2.3.1 Where archaeological deposits or remains were observed, these were to be made clear to the contractor, to allow time, where practicable, for their investigation and recording. Any areas observed by Wessex Archaeology that were deemed of no archaeological interest would be made clear to the contractor.

2.3.2 All archaeological remains would be recorded and planned, using Wessex Archaeology *pro forma* record sheets, including a full photographic record. Where practicable, hand-excavation of features would be carried out, with all artefacts retained, with the exception of undoubtedly modern material, whose presence would be noted.

2.3.3 If considered necessary, a pause in construction work would be instigated to allow detailed investigation of remains. Such a pause would be agreed in advance between Wessex Archaeology, the client and the contractor to minimise any delay to the development programme.

2.3.4 Provision would be made for bulk sampling from appropriate archaeological deposits for artefactual, economic and environmental data.

2.3.5 Observations of ground disturbance would continue until it was clear that no further archaeological deposits were likely to occur within the site area.

- 2.3.6 Three visits were made to the site during January 1996. A planned fourth and final visit was not undertaken because of bad weather.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Summary

- 3.1.1 A total of two ditches and five wall foundation trenches were recorded. Of these, the wall foundation trenches (recorded as foundation trenches **103**, **108**, **113**, **120** and **129**), which were filled with loosely mortared shillet slabs, correspond to the foundations of the late 19th/ early 20th century Methodist Chapel, and will not be discussed further here.

3.2 Stratigraphy

- 3.2.1 In summary, the stratigraphic sequence overlying natural subsoil comprised an upper 0.13-0.20 m thick layer of limestone scalplings (recorded as layers **100** and **123**), overlying an intermittent 0.20-0.25 m layer of greyish brown silty clay (recorded as layers **111**, **116** and **124**) containing profuse quantities of shillet. This in turn overlay a 0.37 m thick primary layer of yellowish to greyish brown silty clay (recorded as layers **101**, **117** and **125**) with occasional shillet fragments. It is very probable that the secondary layer containing profuse quantities of shillet represents the construction and/or demolition phase for the former Methodist Chapel.
- 3.2.2 Natural subsoil (recorded as layers **106**, **118** and **126**) comprised a variable mantle of pale yellowish brown to reddish brown clay and clayey silt, at least 0.20 m thick, with underlying outcrops of slate bedrock (recorded as layers **119** and **127**) noted throughout the area. The ditches recorded below were observed cutting through the upper surface of the natural subsoil.

3.3 Ditches

- 3.3.1 Ditch **110** (also recorded as ditch **131**) was aligned north to south across the development area, and was recorded for a minimum linear distance of at least 19 m. The ditch was *c.* 0.55 m wide, with steep slightly convex sides and a broad slightly rounded base, and was filled to a depth of 0.40 m with a single fill of light yellowish brown fine sandy clayey silt with occasional shillet fragments. Although ditch **110** was not observed in Trench 3 (**Fig. 2**) where it was probably removed by the foundation trench for the Methodist Chapel, it is likely that this feature continued to the north to intersect with the southern edge of Ridgeway.
- 3.3.2 Ditch **105** (also recorded as ditch **133**) was aligned east to west across the development area, and was recorded for a minimum linear distance of at least 8 m. The ditch was *c.* 0.42 m wide, with steep slightly convex sides and a broad flat base, and was filled to a depth of 0.29 m with a single fill of

light yellowish brown fine sandy clayey silt with occasional shillet fragments.

- 3.3.3 Ditch **105** was located to the east of ditch **110**, and whilst it was not possible to examine the intersection of the two features, the western extent of ditch **105** appeared to respect the line of ditch **110**. It is therefore probable that the two features are broadly contemporary, although ditch **110** may be a slightly earlier feature.

4 THE FINDS

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 All finds collected on site were retained, and have been cleaned, marked where appropriate, and quantified both by number and by weight, within each context. This quantification is presented in **Table 1**. Finds were then briefly examined in order to provide broad details of their nature, date range and condition. This information is summarised below.

4.2 Pottery

- 4.2.1 Finds are restricted to sherds of pottery from four contexts. These can be divided into medieval and modern wares. The medieval material consists of sherds of coarse micaceous sandy wares (16 sherds), probably handmade, including one jar rim, with one sherd in a finer, wheelthrown sandy fabric, partially glazed. A broad date range of 13th- to early 14th-century may be suggested. The remaining two sherds are fine white wares of 19th- or 20th-century date.

Table 1: All finds by context

Feature	Context	Med Pottery	P-Med Pottery
Foundation trench 103	102	-	1/2
Ditch 105	104	10/262	-
Ditch 110	109	6/50	-
Foundation trench 129	130	-	1/4
	Total	16/312	2/6

5 ENVIRONMENTAL

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 A single spot sample of 1.5 litres from medieval ditch **105** was processed to retrieve and identify charred material. The sample was processed by standard flotation methods, with the flot retained on a 0.5 mm mesh, and the

residues fractionated into 5.6 mm, 2 mm and 1 mm sieves and dried. The coarse fraction (i.e. > 5.6 mm) was sorted, weighed and discarded.

5.2 Results

- 5.2.1 The small sample produced sparse charred grain and burnt weed seeds, with moderate quantities of charcoal. However, insufficient data was recovered to allow an informed statement concerning the environment and localised economy for the period to which this feature has been dated.
- 5.2.2 The lack of rooty material and unburnt weed seeds is indicative of a well-sealed deposit that has remained relatively undisturbed. Detailed quantification for this sample is held in the site archive.

6 DISCUSSION

- 6.1 In summary, the watching brief has revealed the presence of at least two medieval ditches within the limits of the development area. These comprise a north to south aligned ditch which probably represents the remains of a boundary between two adjacent burgage plots fronting onto Ridgeway, and an east to west aligned ditch which probably represents a subdivision within the easternmost of the burgage plots thus defined.
- 6.2 Dating evidence recovered from these features comprises 13th- and early 14th-century pottery, which concurs with documentary sources which identify settlement on the Ridgeway by at least the end of the 13th-century.
- 6.3 The absence of any associated settlement evidence, such as structural features, refuse pits or occupation surfaces and debris, may suggest that these burgage plots represent some of the 24 unoccupied plots referred to in the 1408-9 rental of Plympton Priory Grange (Gaskill-Brown 1975). This observation should be considered with caution, however, in view of the small proportion of the overall plots examined during this work. Similar ditched property boundaries have recently been recorded in other locations in Plympton St Mary at 80-88 Ridgeway (Wessex Archaeology 1993) and at Station Road (Wessex Archaeology 1995a).
- 6.4 The remaining features comprise foundation trenches associated with the former Methodist Chapel and Sunday School, which was demolished prior to the Phase 2 Ridgeway development. The 19th- or early 20th-century date for pottery recovered from these remains agrees with the recorded date of origin for this building within the county SMR.

7 ARCHIVE

- 7.1 The archive, including the finds, is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology, Old Sarum Park, Salisbury, Wiltshire (site code W1328). It will be deposited in due course with an appropriate registered museum.

8 REFERENCES

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Appendix 1: Context Summaries

Context descriptions are presented in stratigraphic order where applicable, all dimensions are in metres

Thickness = maximum recorded thickness for deposit

Depth = upper and lower limits of deposit in relation to ground surface.

Context	Classification	Description	Thickness	Depth
100 & 123	Scalpings	A modern layer of limestone scalpings, probably deposited prior to the current development as a 'compound' surface.	0.13 - 0.20	0 - 0.20
111, 116 & 124	Construction and/or demolition layer	Dark greyish brown silty clay with frequent to profuse shillet fragments.	0.20 - 0.25	0.16 - 0.50
103, 108, 113, 120 & 129	Foundation trenches	A series of E/W and N/S aligned foundation trenches, with vertical sides and flat bases. These were filled with loosely mortared shillet slabs, and represent foundation trenches for the Methodist Chapel that formerly occupied the site.	0.90	0.30 - 1.20
101, 117 & 125	Subsoil	Dark yellowish brown to greyish brown clayey silt to silty clay with occasional fragments of shillet	0.36 - 0.38	0.35 - 0.84
104 105	Ditch Fill	E/W aligned linear feature at least 8 m in length, with steep slightly convex sides and a broad flat base. Filled with light yellowish brown fine sandy clayey silt with very occasional shillet fragments.	0.29	0.50 - 0.79
110 109	Ditch Fill	N/S aligned linear feature at least 19 m in length, with steep slightly convex sides and a broad slightly rounded base. Filled with light yellowish brown fine sandy clayey silt with very occasional shillet fragments.	0.40	0.80 - 1.20
106, 118 & 126	Natural subsoil	Variable mantle sealing bedrock of yellowish brown to reddish brown clayey silt to clay with occasional shillet fragments.	0.38 - 0.68	0.50 - 1.40
119 & 127	Natural bedrock	Greyish brown bedded shillet.	0.18+	1.40+

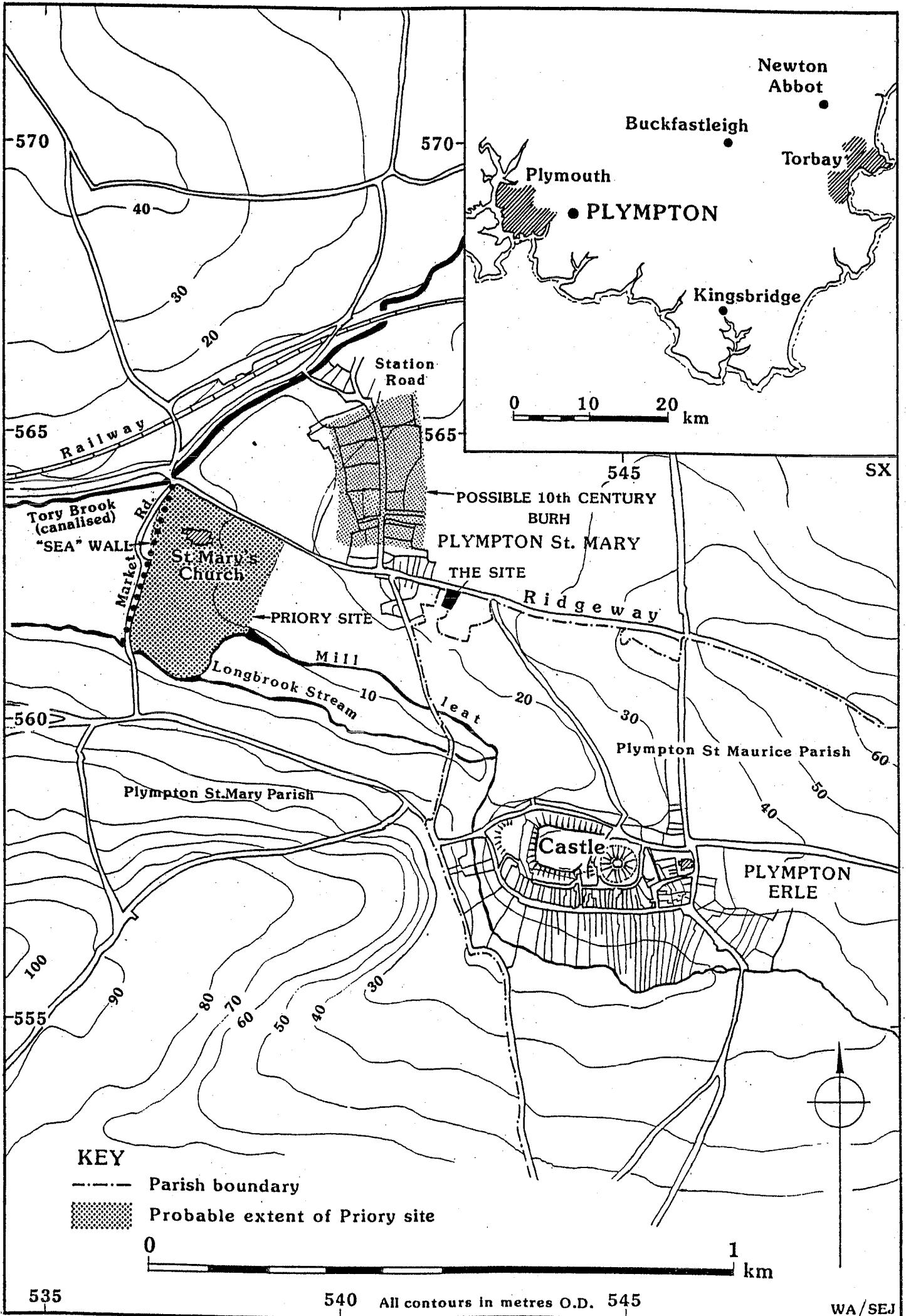


Fig.:1 Site location plan

RIDGEWAY

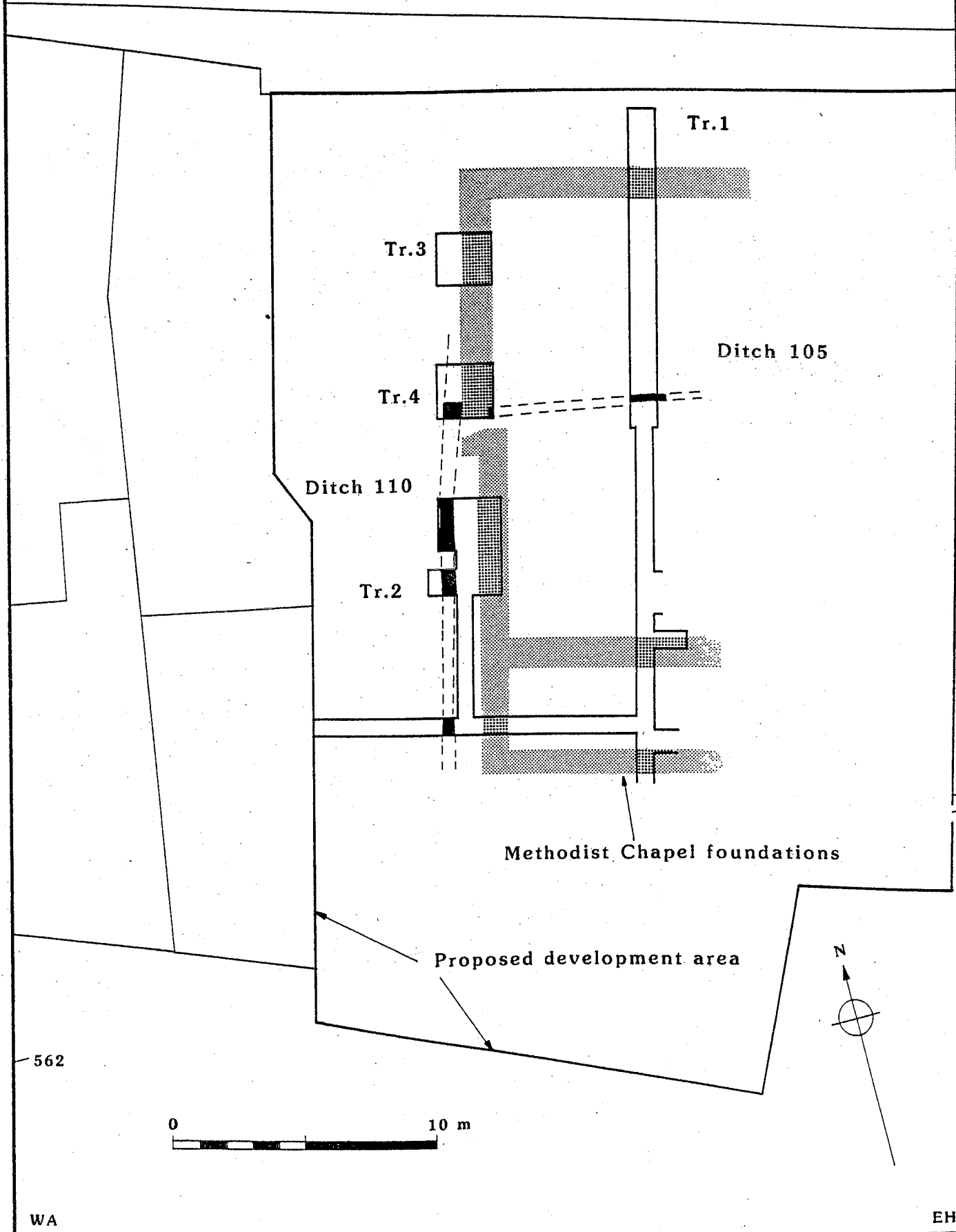


Fig.2 Archaeological feature plan