

**LAND AT THE OLD PRIORY,  
NORTH WOODCHESTER,  
GLOUCESTERSHIRE.**

**NGR: 384121 203088**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

February 2020  
Report No. 1354



**ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTANCY, MANAGEMENT & FIELD SERVICES**

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**Quality Assurance**

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## SUMMARY

On the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2020 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological watching brief on land at the Old Priory, North Woodchester, Gloucestershire (NGR: 384121 203088). The project was commissioned by the landowner, Caroline Hill.

The project comprised the archaeological monitoring of the excavation of 25 tree planting pits, which were situated within the area of Woodchester Roman Villa Scheduled Monument.

The pits were excavated to a maximum depth of 300mm below the top of the Modern topsoil. The excavations penetrated into, but not beyond a clay silt subsoil, which was overlaid by topsoil and turf or leaf litter/humus.

The archaeological works successfully ensured that the excavation of the tree planting pits did not inappropriately impact upon the scheduled monument. No features were revealed by the limited interventions, although, a single fragment of possible Roman brick was recovered, which represented residual building material related to the nearby villa.

## GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

### Archaeology

For the purpose of this project, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

### CBM

Ceramic Building Material.

### Medieval

The period between AD 1066 and AD 1500.

### Natural

In archaeological terms, this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site.

### NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

### OD

Ordnance datum; used to express a given height above sea-level. (AOD Above Ordnance Datum).

### OS

Ordnance Survey.

### Post-medieval

The period between AD 1500 and AD 1900.

### Prehistoric

The period prior to the Roman invasion of AD 43, traditionally sub-divided into; *Palaeolithic* – c. 500,000 BC to c. 12,000 BC; *Mesolithic* – c. 12,000 BC to c. 4,500 BC; *Neolithic* – c. 4,500 BC to c. 2,000 BC; *Bronze Age* – c. 2,000 BC to c. 800 BC; *Iron Age* – c. 800 BC to AD 43.

### Roman

The period traditionally dated AD 43 until AD 410.

### Saxon

The period between AD 410 and AD 1066.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of a programme of archaeological watching brief on land at the Old Priory, North Woodchester, Gloucestershire (NGR: 384121 203088). The works were undertaken by Foundations Archaeology on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2020, during the excavation of 25 tree planting pits, which were located within the area of Woodchester Roman Villa Scheduled Monument. The project was commissioned by the landowner, Caroline Hill.
- 1.2 The monitoring works were conducted in accordance with Scheduled Monument Consent (**SMC Ref. S00228450**), an approved Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), prepared by Foundations Archaeology (2020) and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014).
- 1.3 The CIfA code of conduct was adhered to throughout.

## 2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Scheduled Monument Consent (**SMC Reference Number: S00228450**) was granted for the planting of a tree screen, along the eastern boundary of the site.
- 2.2 The site is located directly west of Nailsworth Stream, with the A46 beyond. To the north are woodland and agricultural fields, to the west is North Woodchester and south is the village of Woodchester. The geology within the site is on the boundary between *Lias Group* and *Inferior Oolite Group* (undifferentiated) - limestone, argillaceous rocks and subordinate sandstone, marlstone rock formation - limestone, with no superficial deposits recorded (BGS – On-line Viewer).
- 2.3 The study area is located within the Scheduled Monument of Woodchester Roman Villa (SM1004839). This is a major Romano-British villa, situated on sloping ground on the western side of Nailsworth Valley. The villa survives as below ground structures, features and deposits, with no visible surface remains. It was first discovered in 1693 and was found to contain at least 64 rooms, grouped around an inner and outer courtyard and has been dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- 2.4 The ruins of the former Church of St Mary's, which was constructed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and is Grade II listed (No. 1090640), are situated within the extent of the scheduled monument, to the northwest of the site. The Old Priory, which is also located to the northwest of the site, comprises a Grade I listed (No. 1340695) large country house, which was constructed around 1580.
- 2.5 A magnetometry and resistivity survey was carried out by Archaeological Surveys Ltd. in 2019, in order to provide an archaeological assessment of the area of the proposed tree planting. The results indicated the presence of several

former field boundaries, with two former ditches extending into the area of proposed planting. The orientation of these boundary ditches appeared similar to extant Post-medieval enclosure boundaries. Geophysical and LiDAR evidence for Medieval ridge and furrow and an associated headland, appeared to demonstrate an early field layout with a different orientation. Through the majority of the proposed tree planting zone, LiDAR data revealed the presence of a low, broad bank that coincided with anomalies present in the resistivity data. The feature may be associated with material deposited during the construction of a railway immediately to the east of the site. The wider area of magnetometry revealed numerous other anomalies of uncertain origin.

- 2.6 The proposed landscaping was therefore situated in an area of high archaeological potential. In recognition of this, Historic England and the National Trust recommended that an archaeological watching brief was necessary, in order to record any archaeological deposits which may be revealed during the course of the tree planting. In light of the results of the geophysical survey, both Historic England and the National Trust required that no trees were to be planted around Anomaly 5, which was identified as a short linear or pit like feature of uncertain origin.

### **3 AIMS**

- 3.1 The principal aim of the archaeological watching brief was to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits.
- 3.2 This aim was achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:
- i) to define and identify the nature of archaeological deposits on site, and date these where possible;
  - ii) to attempt to characterize the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site;
  - iii) where possible to recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples.

### **4 METHODOLOGY**

- 4.1 All excavations in relation to the tree planting were monitored and recorded in order to identify archaeological deposits. The excavations were carried out under the constant direction of an archaeologist. Where machine excavation was required, this was undertaken only for the removal of overburden that had no archaeological significance. Plant was suitable for the task and was equipped with a toothless bucket. The tree planting pits were excavated to a maximum depth of 300mm below the top of the Modern topsoil.

- 4.2 Where archaeological features were present, these were subjected to appropriate levels of investigation and recording. All excavation and recording work was undertaken in accordance with the Scheduled Monument Consent and the approved WSI.
- 4.3 A total of four tree planting pits were archaeologically recorded, in order to provide a representative sample of the revealed stratigraphic deposits.

## **5 RESULTS**

- 5.1 A total of 25 tree planting pits were excavated within the site, as shown in Figure 2. No pits were excavated in the area of Anomaly 5.
- 5.2 The pits were excavated to a maximum depth of 300mm below the top of the Modern topsoil into, but not beyond, an underlying subsoil, which comprised a light brown clay silt, with an average thickness of 0.15m. There was a general paucity of finds within the subsoil; although, a single fragment of possible Roman brick was recovered from subsoil (2402) in Pit 24. The subsoil was overlaid by a dark brown clay silt topsoil, average thickness 0.15m, which was, in turn, overlaid by turf or leaf litter/humus, average thickness 0.04m.
- 5.3 No archaeological features were present within the tree planting pits.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

- 6.1 The excavation of the tree planting pits revealed a relatively uniform stratigraphic sequence, comprising subsoil sealed by topsoil, which was overlaid by turf or leaf litter/humus. In relation to a previously identified 'broad bank' (Archaeological Surveys 2019, 17; Fig. 10), there was no evidence to suggest that the subsoil in this area was a relatively recent deposit, associated with the construction of the railway immediately to the east. A possible Roman brick, present in subsoil (2402), was likely to be residual building material related to the nearby Roman villa.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The archaeological works have successfully ensured that the excavation of the tree planting pits did not inappropriately impact upon the scheduled monument. No features were revealed by the limited interventions, although, a single fragment of possible Roman brick represented residual building material related to the nearby villa.
- 7.2 The archive is currently held at the offices of Foundations Archaeology, but will be deposited in due course with Stroud Museum. A note on the works will be submitted to a relevant archaeological journal and an OASIS record will be created in due course.



## 8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archaeological Surveys Ltd. 2019. *Geophysical Survey: Land at The Old Priory, North Woodchester, Gloucestershire*. Unpublished.

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. 2014. *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief*. Reading.

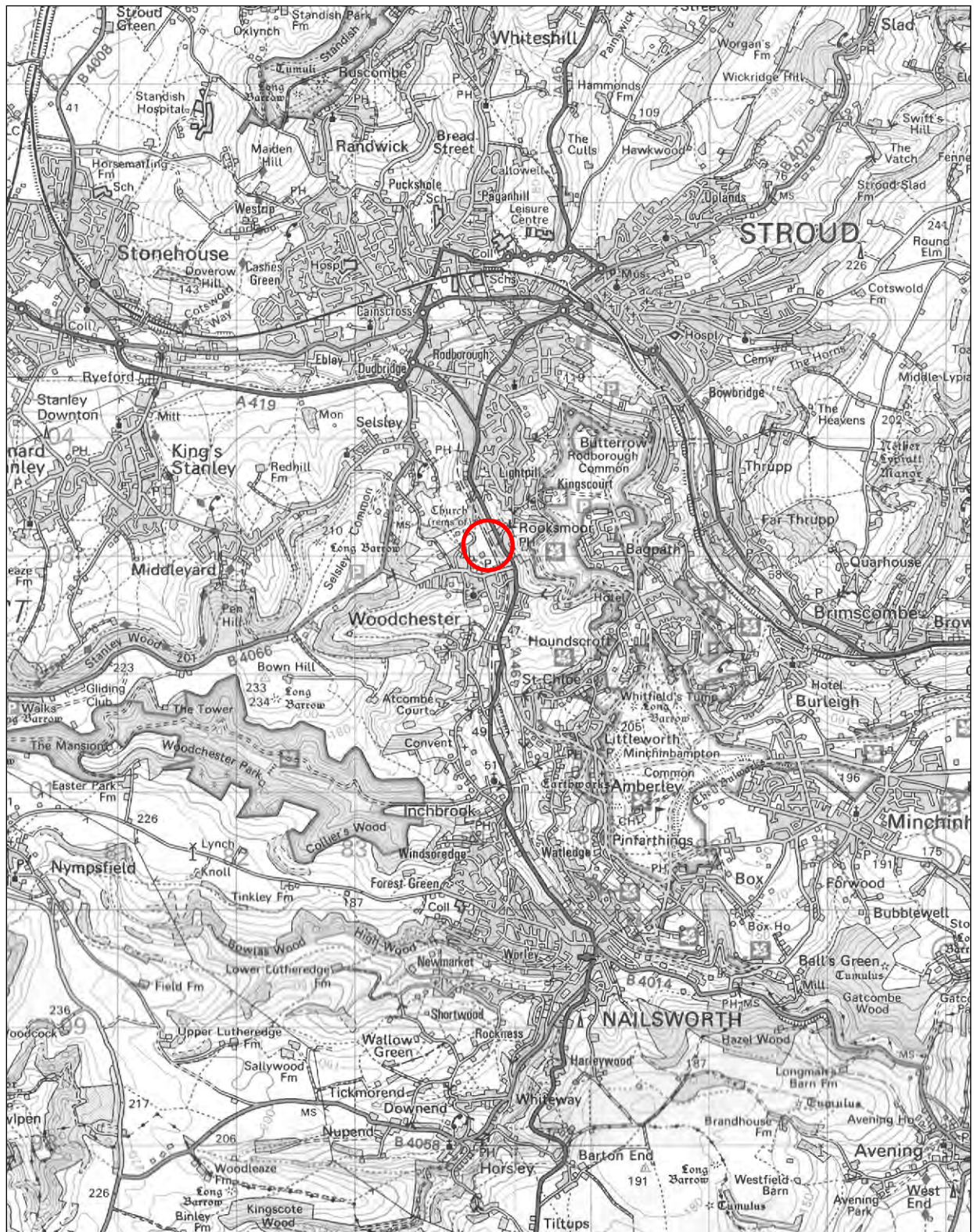
Foundations Archaeology. 2020. *Land at the Old Priory, North Woodchester, Gloucestershire: Written Scheme of Investigation for a Programme of Archaeological Monitoring and Recording*. Unpublished.

## 9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foundations Archaeology would like to thank Melanie Barge of Historic England, Amanda Turner of the National Trust and Caroline Hill, the landowner, for their help during the course of the project.

## APPENDIX 1: Stratigraphic Data

CXT	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	DESCRIPTION	CUTS/LATER THAN	CUT BY/EARLIER THAN
				<b>TREE PLANTING PIT 1:</b> 0.80m long by 0.30m wide.		
100	-	-	0.04	Leaf litter/humus horizon.	101	n/a
101	-	-	0.15	Topsoil: dark brown clay silt.	102	100
102	-	-	0.15	Subsoil: light brown clay silt.	?	101
				<i>No archaeological features or finds were present within the pit.</i>		
				<b>TREE PLANTING PIT 11:</b> 0.60m long by 0.30m wide.		
1100	-	-	0.03	Turf.	1101	n/a
1101	-	-	0.17	Topsoil: dark brown clay silt.	1102	1100
1102	-	-	0.13	Subsoil: light brown clay silt.	?	1101
				<i>No archaeological features or finds were present within the pit.</i>		
				<b>TREE PLANTING PIT 16:</b> 0.90m long by 0.30m wide.		
1600	-	-	0.04	Leaf litter/humus horizon.	1601	n/a
1601	-	-	0.14	Topsoil: dark grey brown clay silt.	1602	1600
1602	-	-	0.16	Subsoil: light grey brown clay silt.	?	1601
				<i>No archaeological features or finds were present within the pit.</i>		
				<b>TREE PLANTING PIT 24:</b> 1.05m long by 0.30m wide.		
2400	-	-	0.03	Leaf litter/humus horizon.	2401	n/a
2401	-	-	0.14	Topsoil: dark grey brown clay silt.	2402	2400
2402	-	-	0.16	Subsoil: light brown clay silt, which contained a <b>single fragment of possible Roman brick</b> (colour, dark orange red; weight, 870 g; 155mm long by 105mm wide by 45mm thick).	?	2401
				<i>No archaeological features were present within the pit.</i>		



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**Site Code: NWG20**  
**Accession Code:**

N









0m  2km

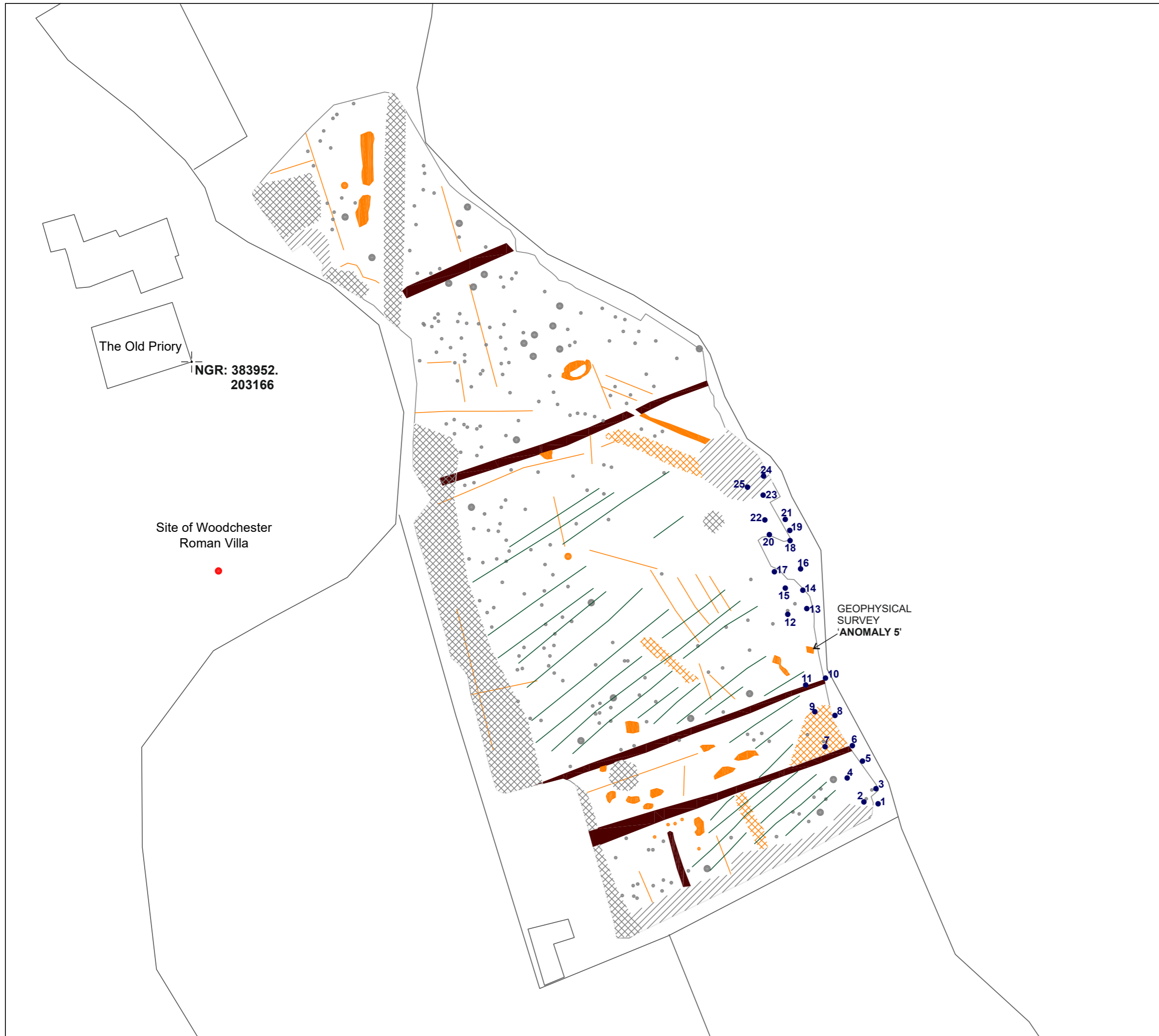
**FIGURE 1: Site Location**



### Geophysical Survey Land at The Old Priory North Woodchester Gloucestershire

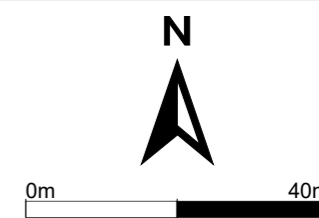
#### Abstraction and interpretation of magnetic anomalies

-  Linear anomalies relating to former boundary walls/banks/ditches
-  Linear anomalies of uncertain origin - ditch-like features
-  Linear anomalies indicative of ridge and furrow cultivation
-  Positive anomalies of uncertain origin
-  Areas of magnetic debris
-  Areas of magnetic disturbance
-  Discrete positive anomaly - pit-like feature/burnt area
-  Strong dipolar anomaly - ferrous object



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Site Code: NWG20  
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1 = TREE PLANTING PIT

**FIGURE 2: Plan Showing Location of  
Tree Planting Pits in Relation  
to the Geophysical Survey**



PHOTOGRAPH 1: SOUTHERN END OF TREE PLANTING AREA  
LOOKING NORTH, AFTER EXCAVATION OF  
TREE PLANTING PITS



PHOTOGRAPH 2: NORTHERN END OF TREE PLANTING AREA  
LOOKING SOUTH, AFTER EXCAVATION OF  
TREE PLANTING PITS



PHOTOGRAPH 3: TREE PLANTING PIT 1, SOUTH FACING SECTION  
(SCALES HAVE INCREMENTS OF 0.10m)



PHOTOGRAPH 4: TREE PLANTING PIT 11, WEST FACING SECTION  
(SCALES HAVE INCREMENTS OF 0.10m)



PHOTOGRAPH 5: TREE PLANTING PIT 16, NORTHWEST FACING SECTION  
(SCALES HAVE INCREMENTS OF 0.10m)



PHOTOGRAPH 6: TREE PLANTING PIT 24, SOUTH FACING SECTION  
(SCALES HAVE INCREMENTS OF 0.10m)

<b>Site Code: NWG20</b> <b>Accession Code:</b>
<b>FIGURE 3: Photographs</b>