

**44 ASHCROFT ROAD,
CIRENCESTER,
GLOUCESTERSHIRE.**

NGR: 402202 201781

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AND RECORDING

September 2024

Report No. 1661

A. Hood BSc MCIfA



ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTANCY, MANAGEMENT & FIELD SERVICES

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ACCESSION CODE: tbc

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SUMMARY

On 27th and 28th August 2024 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording on land at 44 Ashcroft Road, Cirencester, Gloucestershire (NGR: 402202 201781). The project was commissioned by the homeowner John Dove.

The archaeological works comprised the monitoring and recording of groundworks associated with the construction of a rear house extension.

The groundworks excavations revealed the top of probable Roman stone-rubble and soil deposits at a depth of 0.70m below the Modern ground surface. These were overlain by a dark earth deposit of uncertain date, which was in turn cut into/overlain by late Victorian/early Modern structures and deposits.

Finds recovered during the archaeological monitoring included Roman pottery and CBM, including *tegula* roof tile, probable Roman sandstone roof tile fragments and oyster shell.

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, which can be sub-divided into; *Palaeolithic* – c. 500,000 BC to c. 12,000 BC; *Mesolithic* – c. 12,000 BC to c. 4,000 BC; *Neolithic* – c. 4,000 BC to c. 2,500 BC; *Copper Age (Chalcolithic)* – c. 2,500 BC to 2,200 BC; *Bronze Age* – c. 2,200 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 monitoring and recording undertaken by Foundations Archaeology on 27th and 28th August 2024 at 44 Ashcroft Road, Cirencester Gloucestershire (NGR: 402202 201781). The project was commissioned by the homeowner John Dove.
- 1.2 The archaeological monitoring and recording was conducted in accordance with an approved Project Design (2024) and the following regulations, standards and guidance issued by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA):
- *Universal guidance for archaeological monitoring and recording* (December 2023);
 - *Standard for archaeological monitoring and recording* (December 2023);
 - *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (October 2020);
 - *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives* (October 2020).
- 1.3 The CIfA code of conduct was adhered to throughout.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Planning Permission (Reference **23/03539/FUL**) was granted for the construction of a single storey house extension and works to the basement at 44 Ashcroft Road. In accordance with the principals of NPPF23, a condition for a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording was attached to the permission.
- 2.2 The study area is located approximately 20m north of the junction of Ashcroft Road and Cripps Road. The site is situated to the rear of 44 Ashcroft Road. At the time of the commencement of the fieldwork, the site area comprised part of a paved area, which formed the rear garden of the house. The topography within the site is generally flat at around 112m aOD. The underlying geology is recorded as *Cornbrash Formation* – limestone, overlain by *River Terrace Deposits, 1* – gravel (BGS Online Viewer).
- 2.3 The development is located within the extent of *Corinium* Roman Town, but it is not located within the Scheduled Monument. However, multiple areas of the Scheduled Monument (SM Ref. 1003426) are located near to the site. The site lies within *Insula XXb*, which is known to contain a number of high-status Roman buildings, and it is possible that a previously identified northeast-southwest aligned Roman street is present within the site area. The site is just to the west and south of the known Medieval settlement of Cirencester (Darvill & Gerrard, 1994).

- 2.4 Numerous archaeological finds and features have been identified in the vicinity of the study area. Excavations in 1964, prior to the construction of a housing estate within the grounds of the former Ashcroft House, identified a high-status Roman house, with *in-situ* mosaic floors (McWhirr, 1986). There has also been more recent archaeological works within the vicinity which have identified further archaeological evidence. An evaluation by Cotswold Archaeology at 52-54 Ashcroft Road revealed the remains of a metalled surface of Street L, at approximately 1m below the Modern ground level. Excavations by Cotswold Archaeology at 3-7 Ashcroft Road identified further metalled surfaces at a depth of between 0.5-0.85m below Modern ground level. These surfaces correlated with the projected line of inter insulae Street I. Previous works by Foundations Archaeology at No. 35 Ashcroft Road in 2000 and 2006 identified significant archaeological deposits, including wall, foundations and mosaic tesserae at a depth of approximately 0.7m below the Modern ground level.
- 2.5 The site therefore contained the potential for evidence of Roman and later activity. This did not prejudice the works against the recovery of data relating to other periods.

3 AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the archaeological monitoring and recording were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits, as well as to ensure that significant archaeological remains are identified and appropriately mitigated.
- 3.2 These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:
- to define and identify the nature of archaeological deposits on site, and date these where possible;
 - 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;
 - where possible, to recover a well-dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples;
 - to produce a site archive for deposition with Corinium Museum and to provide information for accession to the Gloucestershire County Council HER.

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The mechanical excavations associated with the construction of the house extension were undertaken by use of a tracked 360° excavator, which was equipped with a toothless grading bucket. The excavations were subject to constant observation by an archaeologist, down to the top of identifiable

archaeological remains, or the natural substrates, whichever was encountered first.

- 4.2 All potential archaeological features and deposits were subject to appropriate levels of investigation.
- 4.3 Archaeological excavation and recording was undertaken in accordance with the approved Project Design and the Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 3: Excavation Manual.

5 RESULTS

- 5.1 The groundworks excavations, as shown in Figure 3, comprised an area reduction, which measured approximately 3.20m long, by 1.10m wide and 0.23m (112.20m aOD) in depth, as well as an adjacent foundation and service trench, which measured approximately 5.50m long, up to 0.70m wide and up to 1.06m (111.37m aOD) in depth.
- 5.2 Deposits (103) and (104) constituted the lowest revealed contexts within the excavation area; the top of deposit (103) was present at a depth of 0.70m (111.75m aOD) below the Modern ground surface, whilst the top of deposit (104) was present at a depth of 0.90m (111.54m aOD). Deposit (103) was partly revealed, and it was 0.55m long, 0.86m wide and 0.35m thick. It comprised irregular limestone fragments/blocks, which were contained within a grey brown gritty soil matrix, with occasional patches of pea-grit. There was no evidence for any mortar present between, or adhering to, the individual stones. Artefacts present within deposit (103) included 14 sherds of Roman pottery, of which 11 sherds were from a single oval, handled fish dish in Dorset black burnished ware; one fragment of Roman ceramic roof tile and a fragment of oyster shell. Deposit (104) was partially revealed in plan immediately adjacent to the northwest and southeast extent of deposit (103). It measured 0.75m in length by 0.80m in width, and it consisted of a beige brown clay silt, which contained frequent pea-grit. Finds from deposit (104) comprised two fragments of Roman ceramic *tegula* roof tile. Due to the limited nature of the investigation the stratigraphic relationship between contexts (103) and (104) was unclear; they were both sealed by layer (102).
- 5.3 Layer (102) was encountered across the extent of the excavated area. At its highest point, it was present at a depth of 0.23m (112.20m aOD) below the Modern ground surface, and it was up to 0.73m thick. Layer (102) consisted of a dark grey brown soft clay silt, which contained occasional pea-grit, as well as five sherds of Roman pottery, two fragments of Roman ceramic *tegula* roof tile and three fragments of probable Roman sandstone roof tile. Layer (102) was overlain by house foundation wall (101)/(105) and make-up layer (106).
- 5.4 House foundation wall (101)/(105) consisted of a course of orange red bricks (101) located directly on top of a concrete and brick-rubble foundation deposit (105). The wall was of late Victorian/early 20th century date. Wall (101)/(105)

was abutted by make-up layer (106), up to 0.15m thick, which consisted of a dark grey brown silt clay, with frequent Victorian/early Modern brick fragments, as well as occasional stones. Deposit (106) was overlain by layer (100), 0.02m thick, which consisted of a mixture of loose dark brown topsoil, with frequent patches of pea-grit. This was, in turn, overlain by Modern concrete paving slabs (107), 0.06m thick, which formed the Modern ground surface.

- 5.5 Preservation conditions appeared to be relatively good, although a Modern service was present cut into layer (102) at the northwest of the excavated area.

6 DISCUSSION

- 6.1 Contexts (103) and (104) appeared to be the top of stone-rubble and soil deposits, which on the basis of their depth below ground and the associated artefacts, can be most likely be confidently dated to the Roman period. Such deposits are entirely typical of that to be expected within the Roman town. Layer (102) also contained Roman artefacts; however, its date was less certain. Previous investigations in the vicinity of the site have revealed the top of stratified Roman deposits at depths of between 0.50m – 1m below the Modern ground surface. The relatively shallow depth below ground (0.23m) of layer (102) suggested that it was possibly a post-Roman ‘dark earth’ layer, which contained residual Roman material. Whatever the case, the date of layer (102) remained highly uncertain. Layer (102) was subsequently cut into/overlain by late Victorian/early Modern structures and deposits of negligible archaeological significance.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The groundworks excavations revealed the top of probable Roman stone-rubble and soil deposits at a depth of 0.70m below the Modern ground surface. These were overlain by a dark earth deposit of uncertain date, which was in turn cut into/overlain by late Victorian/early Modern structures and deposits.
- 7.2 Finds recovered during the archaeological monitoring included Roman pottery and CBM, including *tegula* roof tile, probable Roman sandstone roof tile fragments and oyster shell.
- 7.3 The archive is currently held at the offices of Foundations Archaeology, but will be deposited with Corinium Museum in due course. A digital report/archive will also be submitted to OASIS/ADS. A short note will be submitted for publication in the relevant local archaeological journal.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foundations Archaeology would like to thank Rachel Foster of Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service the homeowner and groundworkers for their help during the course of the project.

APPENDIX 1: The Ceramics and Stone Tile

By Jane Timby

Summary

The archaeological work at 44 Ashcroft Road resulted in the recovery of a modest assemblage of 19 sherds of pottery weighing 243.5 g, dating to the Roman period. Accompanying the pottery are five fragments of ceramic building material (CBM) and three fragments of sandstone roof tile.

Methodology

The pottery was recorded using the recommendations outlined in Pottery Standards (Barclay *et al.* 2016). To this end it was examined macroscopically and sorted into fabrics based on inclusions present, the frequency and grade of the inclusions and the firing colour. The sorted fabrics were quantified by sherd count and weight by recorded context. Rims were additionally coded to form. Where relevant known, named, regional traded Roman wares are cross-referenced to the National Roman fabric reference collection (codes in brackets) (Tomber and Dore 1998). The resulting data was entered onto an MS Excel spread-sheet along with provisional spot dates (Table 1).

Description

Pottery was recovered from two contexts (102) and (103). The overall quality of the assemblage is typical of rubbish material but is quite well-preserved with an overall average sherd weight of 12.8 g. Eleven sherds from a single oval, handled fish dish in Dorset black burnished ware (DOR BB1) came from (103), perhaps suggesting no post-Roman disturbance. The group is composed of a mixture of British regional imports and local wares. Amongst the former are further sherds of Dorset black burnished ware (DOR BB1) from Poole Harbour with a plain-walled dish and jar sherds, one decorated with an oblique burnished line lattice and one sherd of Oxfordshire colour-coated ware (OXF RS); a burnt rim from a flanged bowl (Young 1977, form C51). The local wares comprised one sherd of fine grey ware, probably from North Wiltshire, and one small, handmade sherd of grog-tempered ware. These latter two pieces could be of earlier Roman date, but the contexts are dated to the later Roman period (late 3rd-4th century) from the presence of the regional fabrics and forms.

Ceramic building material (CBM)

In total, five fragments of CBM weighing 733 g were recovered from three contexts. All appear to be of Roman date, with at least two examples of *tegulae* roof tile and one probable imbrex.

Also present are three fragments of sandstone roof tile from the Forest of Dean, a typical roofing material used in the later Roman period, replacing the ceramic CBM. These all point to a well-appointed town house or other structure in the immediate vicinity.

Potential for further work

The absence of any wares of Medieval or later date is perhaps of note, but the sample is extremely small. The profile of the assemblage is entirely that to be expected from a substantial Roman town such as Cirencester, which was receiving a wide variety of pottery from various sources. The small size of the group precludes the usefulness of any further work. There is nothing of great merit within the assemblage to warrant its retention.

References

Barclay A, Knight D, Booth P, Evans H, Brown D & Wood I 2016: A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology: Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group, the Study Group for Roman Pottery and the Medieval Pottery Research Group (http://romanpotterystudy.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Standard_for_Pottery_Studies_in_Archaeology.pdf)

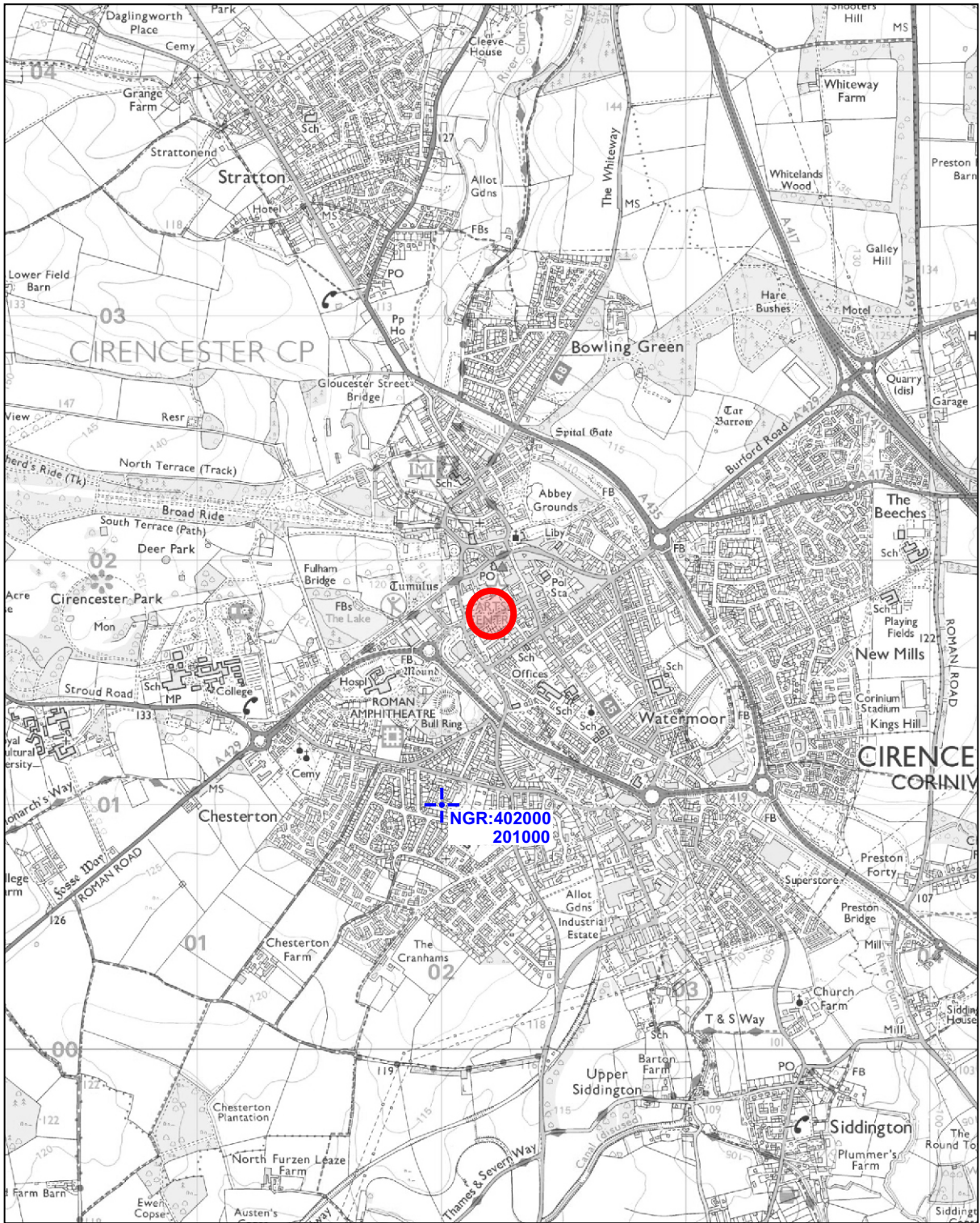
Tomber, R, and Dore, J, 1998: *The National Roman fabric reference collection: a handbook*, Museum of London / English Heritage/ British Museum (<http://www.romanpotterystudy.org/>)

Young, C J, 1977: *The Roman pottery industry of the Oxford region*, BAR 43, Oxford

44 Ashcroft Road, Cirencester, Gloucestershire: Archaeological Monitoring and Recording

Cxt	Fabric	Form	Wt	No	Rim	Comment	Date
102	CBM	tegula	213	2	0	0	Roman
102	DORBB1	dish	10	0	1		IC2-C4
102	DORBB1	(jar) body	9	1	0		C3-C4
102	DORBB1	jar	5	0	1	horizontally split	C3-C4
102	GR	body	2	1	0	hm	early Ro
102	OXFRS	C51 bowl	3.5	0	1	burnt; Young 1977	mid C3-C4
102	STONE	tile	0	0	0	sandstone tile frags x3	Roman
103	CBM	roof tile	169	1	0	nail hole	prob Roman
103	DORBB1	fish dish	166	7	4	1 vessel - oval	C3-C4
103	DORBB1	(jar) body	45	2	0	oblique burn lattice	C3-C4
103	NWILREF	body	3	1	0		C2-C3
104	CBM	tegula	351	2	0		Roman
TOTAL			976.5	17	7		

Table 1: The pottery, CBM and stone tile from 44 Ashcroft Road



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Site Code: ARC24
Accession Code: tbc

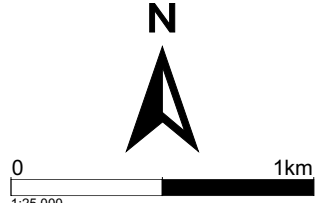
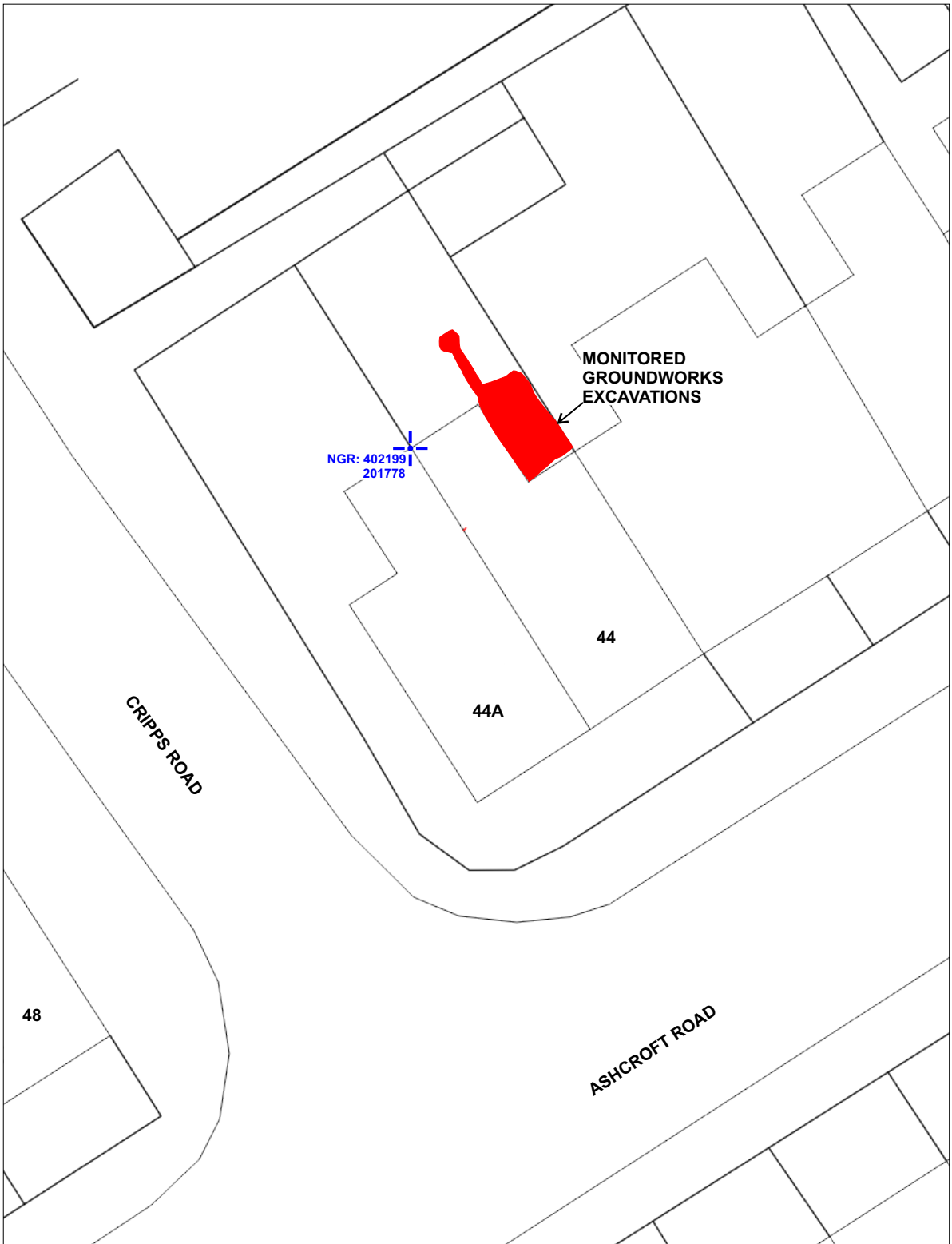


FIGURE 1: Site Location



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Site Code: ARC24
Accession Code: tbc

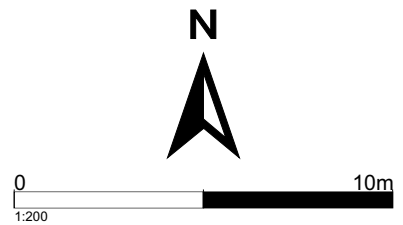
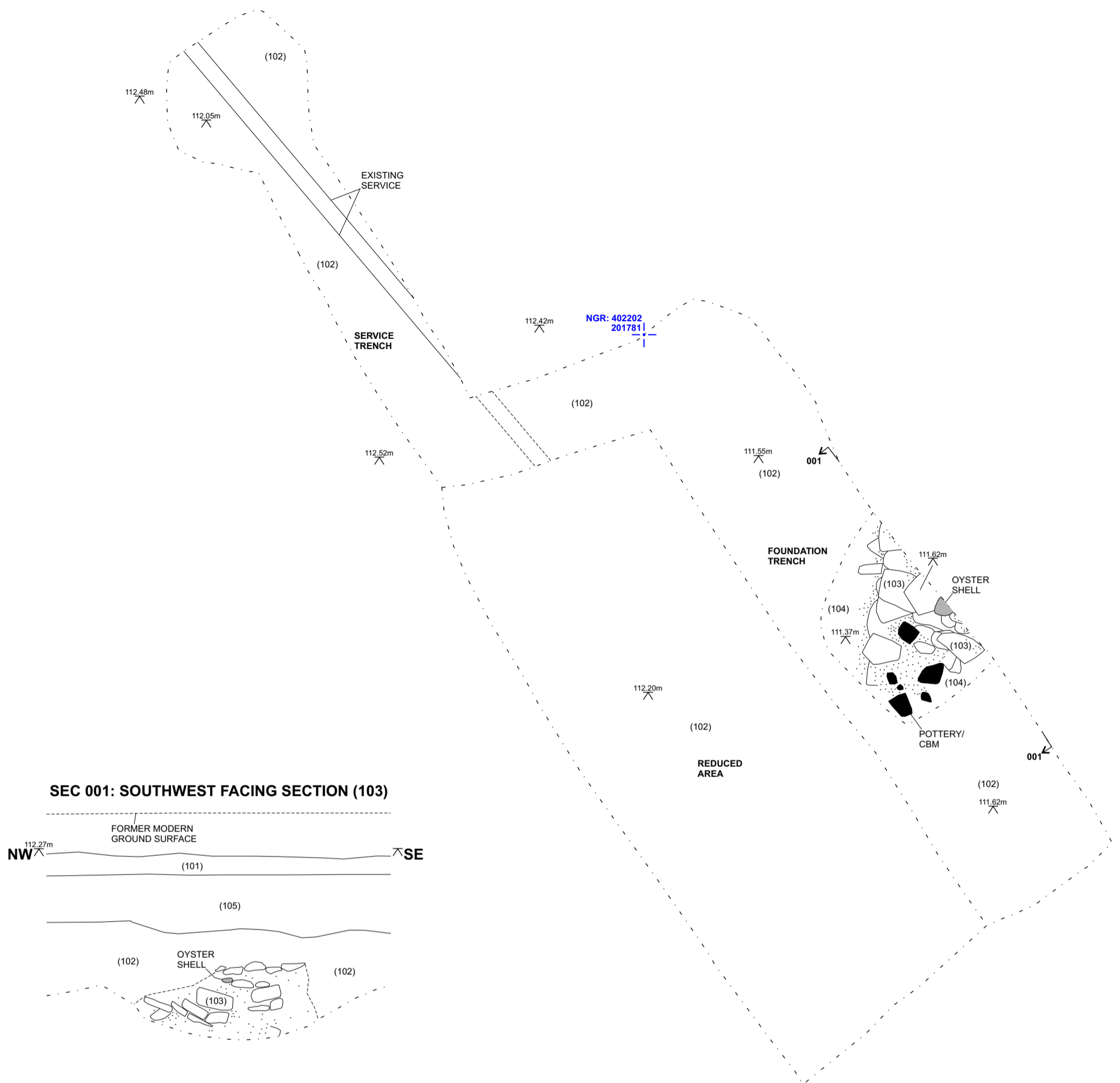


FIGURE 2: Site Plan



PHOTOGRAPH 1: GROUNDWORKS EXCAVATIONS LOOKING SOUTHEAST



PHOTOGRAPH 2: DEPOSIT (103), SECTION 001

