FORMER AUCTION ROOMS, THE PLANKS, SWINDON

NGR: SU 1595 8360

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

May 2009

Report No. 649

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SUMMARY

Between April 2008 and May 2009 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological recording on the site of the former auction rooms at The Planks in Swindon (NGR: SU 1595 8360). The project was commissioned by EDP, acting on behalf of Greystone Developments UK Ltd.

As a condition of planning permission, a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording was required by Swindon Borough Council prior to the construction of three new dwellings and the change of use of the existing building into five new dwellings (S/07/2449/TB). The project required the monitoring of all appropriate groundworks within the proposed development area. The watching brief followed on from an evaluation phase of works (Foundations, 2007).

This report presents the findings of the archaeological watching brief undertaken between April 2008 and May 2009.

The monitoring work allowed sight of the natural ground in all of the observed footings. No archaeologically significant deposits were present within the monitored areas, other than continuations of the surfaces identified in Test-pit 1 (2007 evaluation), within the western part of the sewage tank cut and part of the service trench feeding it. The results of the evaluation indicated that the earliest of these surfaces may be of medieval origin, while the two cobbled surfaces were of post-medieval date; the latter at least probably relating to the former use of the site as a yard for the auction house.

The evidence from the watching brief demonstrates a similar stratigraphic sequence to that identified in the evaluation test-pits, with natural clays overlain by yellow sand with limestone grits and fragments, also probably of natural origin. This sand and limestone layer was overlain by a mid-dark grey silty clay, which was also identified in the evaluation test-pits and may be a natural accumulation of garden soil. No evidence for any of the archaeological features, identified during the evaluation, extended into the footprint of the building.

The archive has been prepared in accordance with *MoRPHE* (English Heritage 2006) and *Guidelines for the preparation of archaeological archives for long-term storage* (UKIC 1990). It will be deposited with Swindon Museum and Art Gallery. An OASIS form will also be completed and submitted.

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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.

Iron Age
The period from *circa* 600 BC to the start of the Roman period in AD 43.

Medieval
The period from AD1066 to *circa* 1500.

Natural
In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site, in this case sand and gravel.

Neolithic
Division of the prehistoric period dated approximately between 4500 BC and 2000 BC.

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 after *c.* AD 1500

Prehistoric
For the purpose of this report Prehistoric is defined as being the period prior to the Roman invasion of AD43.

Romano-British
The period between AD 43 – *circa* AD 410.

Saxon
The immediate post-Roman period traditionally dated from AD 410 to AD 1066.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Between April 2008 and May 2009, Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological recording at the site of the former Auction Rooms at The Planks in Swindon (NGR: SU 1595 8360). The project was commissioned by EDP, on behalf of Greystone Developments UK Ltd.

1.2 As a condition of planning permission, a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording was required by Swindon Borough Council prior to the construction of three new dwellings and the change of use of the existing building into five new dwellings (S/07/2449/TB). The project required the monitoring of all appropriate groundworks within the proposed development area. The watching brief followed on from an evaluation phase of works (Foundations, 2007).

1.3 The archaeological work was undertaken in accordance with the principals of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning (DoE 1990) and the archaeological policies of Swindon Borough Council.

1.4 The work was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Foundations Archaeology 2008). The project was undertaken in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* issued by the Institute for Archaeologists (1994, revised 2001, 2008). The Code of Conduct of the Institute for Archaeologists was adhered to throughout.

1.5 This report constitutes the results of the archaeological works.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

2.1 The site lies close to the centre of Old Town in Swindon. Previous archaeological works within the area of Old Town have identified the presence of Roman, Saxon and Medieval finds and features. The study area itself is located within the area of the Medieval town and lies close to the remains of Holy Rood Church. This was the parish church for Swindon from 1154 until its partial destruction in 1852.

2.2 An evaluation was undertaken on the site in 2007 (Foundations). Three test pits were excavated, which revealed the presence of probable Medieval beaten earth floors in Trenches 1 and 2 and a possible Medieval wall in Trench 3, demonstrating that there was occupation of 12th-14th century date within the site area. The Medieval deposits were sealed by successive episodes of Post-medieval make-up, levelling and cobbled surfaces beneath the modern concrete yard surface.

2.3 The study area therefore contained the potential for the preservation of archaeological features and deposits, predominately dated to the Roman,

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Saxon and Medieval periods. This, however, did not prejudice the works against the retrieval of information from other periods.

3 AIMS

3.1 The aims of the recording were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits, in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature, extent, preservation and potential of any surviving remains.

3.2 These aims were 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 characterise the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site;

iii) To recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 The archaeological specification required the monitoring of groundworks associated with the new development. These works comprised a reduction in level within the footprint of the new building and yard to the west, as well as the excavation of foundation and service trenches for the new build, all of which was to be undertaken using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket, working under the constant supervision of an experienced archaeologist.

4.2 Available spoil tips were scanned by eye for unstratified finds across the entire study area.

4.3 Any significant archaeological deposits and/or features within the study area were to be manually cleaned, investigated and recorded in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation. Where Health and Safety was not an issue, hand excavation of features was to be undertaken.

4.4 All excavation and recording work was undertaken in accordance with the specification and the Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 3: Excavation Manual.

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5 RESULTS

5.1 Natural deposits of clay were encountered, across the development area, at an average depth of 1.70m from the existing ground surface. The stratigraphic sequence for each trench is given in tabular form in Appendix 1 and is summarised below.

5.2 The natural blue grey clay was predominantly overlain by a layer of yellow sand and stone up to 0.50m thick, which may represent a natural deposit, although in one place it seemed to overlie a concrete block. This deposit was absent only in Section 2 and was in turn sealed by a layer of dark brown silty clay up to 0.50m thick. This deposit appears to be equivalent to a similar layer identified in the evaluation test-pits excavated to the west in 2007 and is likely to represent garden soil or a natural soil accumulation. It was overlain by demolition rubble from the building that previously occupied the site and which was predominantly removed as part of the site reduction.

5.3 With the exception of a single trench against the southern boundary of the site, reduction of the entire area of the yard to the west of the new building, along with the excavation of services, was undertaken without archaeological monitoring. It is possible that the services may have impacted on archaeological deposits, but the remaining groundworks within the yard area are understood to have consisted solely of the removal and replacement of the existing hardstanding. It was not, therefore, possible to identify any continuation of the archaeological deposits identified during the evaluation phase in test-pits 2 and 3. The single trench in this area which was monitored (Section 9) was excavated only to a depth of 0.80m from the modern ground surface into a make-up layer of yellow-green sand.

5.4 In May 2009, a cut for a sewage tank (4.30m deep) was excavated to the north of the new building, immediately adjacent to Test-pit 1, which was visible in the east facing section. The stratigraphic sequence revealed within the sewage tank cut was essentially the same as across the site, with natural clays at a depth of 1.95m from the modern ground surface overlain by 0.90m of yellow sand and gravel.

5.5 In the western part of the sewage trench cut, the sand and gravel was overlain by a layer of dark grey brown silty clay averaging 0.30m thick, beneath a 0.07m thick compact dark orange brown clay layer with occasional limestone fragments, equivalent to context (106) in Test-pit 1. No finds were recovered from the surface within the cut for the sewage tank.

5.6 The surface was overlain by a disturbed layer of sand, gravel and small limestone slabs, forming the remnants of a cobbled surface, which appeared to slope very slightly down from north to south and is equivalent to surface (104) from the evaluation. The cobbled surface was itself sealed by a make-up/levelling layer of dumped clay interleaved with bands of sand and rubble

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up to 0.30m thick, from which fragments of post-medieval brick, tile and slate were recovered.

5.7 This layer is equivalent to (103) in the test-pit. A second cobbled surface equivalent to surface (102), measuring up to 0.15m thick, overlay this. It was sealed in turn by a 0.25m thick modern concrete surface.

5.8 The central and eastern parts of the sewage trench cut fell within the area of the demolished building. The stratigraphic sequence within this part of the site comprised 0.80m of dark grey silty clay directly beneath demolition rubble. No evidence was recovered from these parts of the sewage trench cut for a continuation of any of the surfaces. This suggests either that the surfaces had been destroyed during construction of the former building, or that they were contemporary with it and did not originally extend beneath its footprint. The absence of the possible beaten earth floor suggests that the former interpretation is more likely.

5.9 Due to Health and Safety considerations, it was not possible to illustrate the sections of the sewage tank.

5.10 No archaeological finds or features were identified during the course of the watching brief, with the exception of the compact earth surface and cobbled surfaces located in the western part of the sewage tank cut and which comprised continuations of surfaces identified in Test-pit 1 during the evaluation. No continuation of the archaeologically significant features identified in Test-pits 2 and 3 was identified within the monitored areas, although comparison of the stratigraphic sequence suggests that they should have survived had they extended into the area of the new building (Figure 4).

5.11 The stratigraphic sequence, visible in section in the service trench feeding the sewage tank, was identical to that revealed in the sewage tank cut.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 The monitoring work allowed sight of the natural ground in all of the observed footings. No archaeologically significant deposits were identified within the monitored areas, other than continuations of the surfaces identified in Test-pit 1 (evaluation: Foundations, 2007), within the western part of the sewage tank cut and part of the service trench feeding it.

6.2 The results of the evaluation indicated that the earliest of these surfaces, a possible beaten earthen floor, may be of medieval origin, while the two cobbled surfaces were of post-medieval date; the latter at least probably relating to the former use of the site as a yard for the auction house.

6.3 The evidence from the watching brief demonstrates a similar stratigraphic sequence to that identified in the evaluation test-pits, with natural clays

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overlain by yellow sand with limestone grits and fragments, also probably of natural origin. This sand and limestone layer was overlain by a mid-dark grey silty clay, which was also identified in the evaluation test-pits and may be a natural accumulation of garden soil.

6.4 There was no evidence that any of the archaeological features, identified during the evaluation, extended into footprint of the building. This may be because the ground in this area was truncated during the construction of the previous build, but it may, in part, be due to the fact that some groundworks were not monitored as a result of a lack of notification.

6.5 No artefactual or ecofactual material was present within the observed area, with the exception of modern and late post-medieval material (glass, plastic, tin cans, ceramic building material etc). None of this material was retained.

6.6 No suitable contexts were identified for environmental sampling or scientific dating.

6.7 The archive is currently held at the offices of Foundations Archaeology. It comprises:

Colour slides
Black and white photographs
Digital photographs
Record sheets
Correspondence
Written Scheme of Investigation
Risk Assessment and Health and Safety Method statement

6.8 The archive has been prepared in accordance with *MoRPHE* (English Heritage 2006) and *Guidelines for the preparation of archaeological archives for long-term storage* (UKIC 1990). It will be deposited with Swindon Museum and Art Gallery under an accession code to be confirmed. An OASIS form will also be completed and submitted.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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UKIC (1990) *Guidelines for the preparation of archaeological archives for long term storage*

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8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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APPENDIX 1

Tables

Section 1

Context	Type	Depth (m)
101	Concrete	0.13
102	Sand & building rubble	0.50
103	Brick wall	0.70
104	Natural clay	0.2 (to the top of stone)

Section 2

Context	Type	Depth (m)
201	Rubble layer	0.60
202	Dark grey silt clay	0.30
203	Natural clay	1.10 (to base of trench)

Section 3

Context	Type	Depth (m)
301	Sand	0.10
302	Dark grey silt clay	0.28-0.50
303	Sand with limestone grit	0.08-0.30
304	Natural clay	0.50 (to base of trench)

Section 4

Context	Type	Depth (m)
401	Dark grey silt clay	0.50
402	Sand with limestone grit	0.20
403	Natural clay	0.78 (to base of trench)

Section 5

Context	Type	Depth (m)
501	Dark grey silt clay	0.20
502	Green sand	0.08
503	Sand with limestone grit	0.29
504	Natural clay	0.38 (to base of trench)

Section 6

Context	Type	Depth (m)
601	Rubble layer	0.06
602	Dark grey silt clay	0.30
603	Sand with limestone grit	0.15
604	Natural clay	0.74 (to base of trench)

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Section 7

Context	Type	Depth (m)
701	Dark grey silt clay	0.30
702	Sand with limestone grit	0.15
703	Natural clay	1.02 (to base of trench)

Section 8

Context	Type	Depth (m)
801	Yellow-green sand	0.30
802	Dark grey silt clay	0.20
803	Sand with limestone grit	0.20
804	Natural clay	0.55 (to base of trench)

Section 9

Context	Type	Depth (m)
901	Dark brown silt sand	0.10
902	Yellow clay silt	0.30
903	Red-brown clay silt	0.05
904	Yellow-green sand	0.38 (to base of trench)

Sewage Tank cut

Context	Type	Depth (m)
1001	Concrete	0.16
1002	Cobbled surface	0.11
1003	Clay, sand, rubble make-up	0.3
1004	Disturbed cobbled surface	0.12
1005	Orange brown clay surface	0.07
1006	Dark grey silt clay	0.3
1007	Sand with limestone grit	0.9
1008	Natural clay	2.34 (to base of trench)

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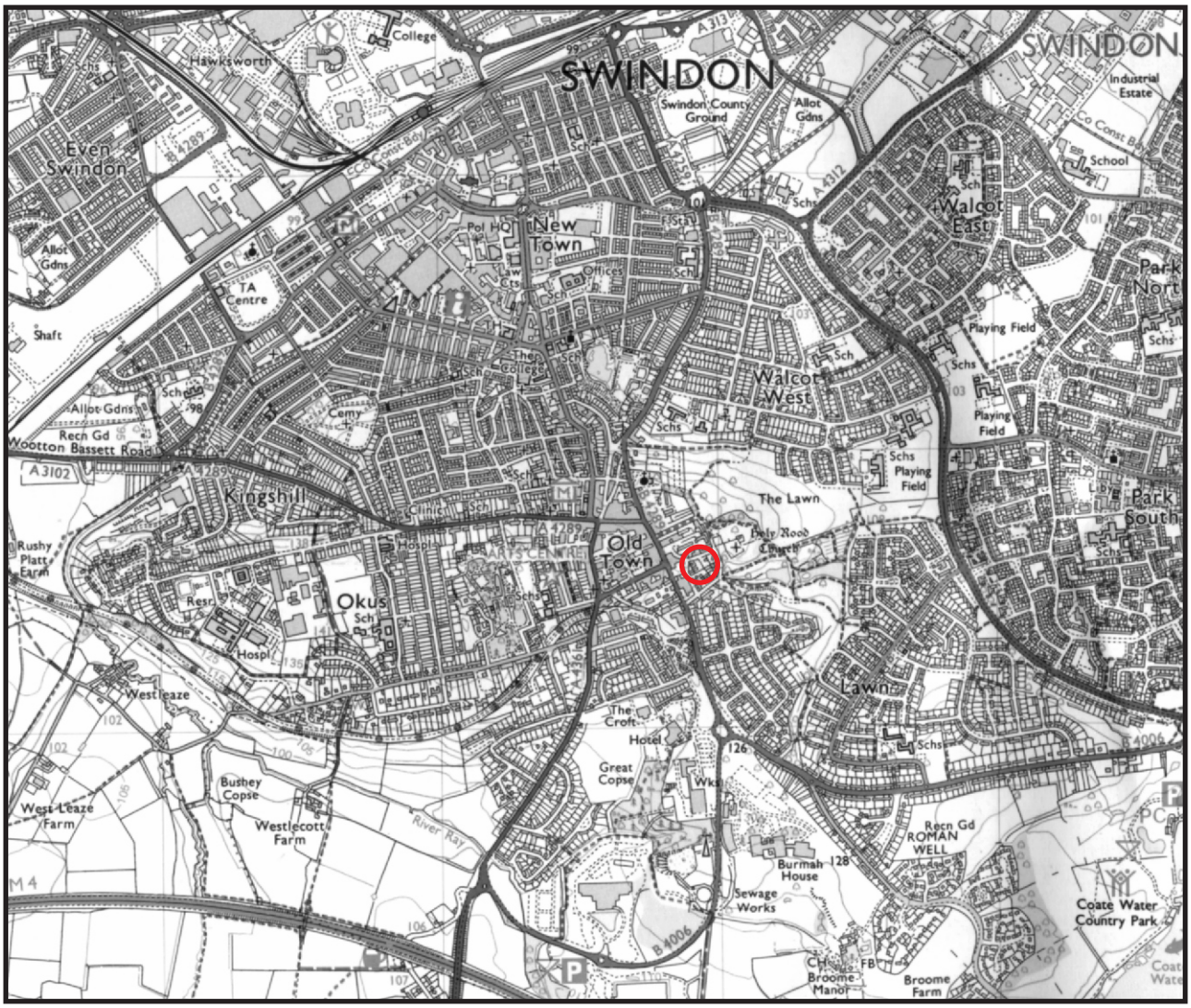

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Accession Code:

N

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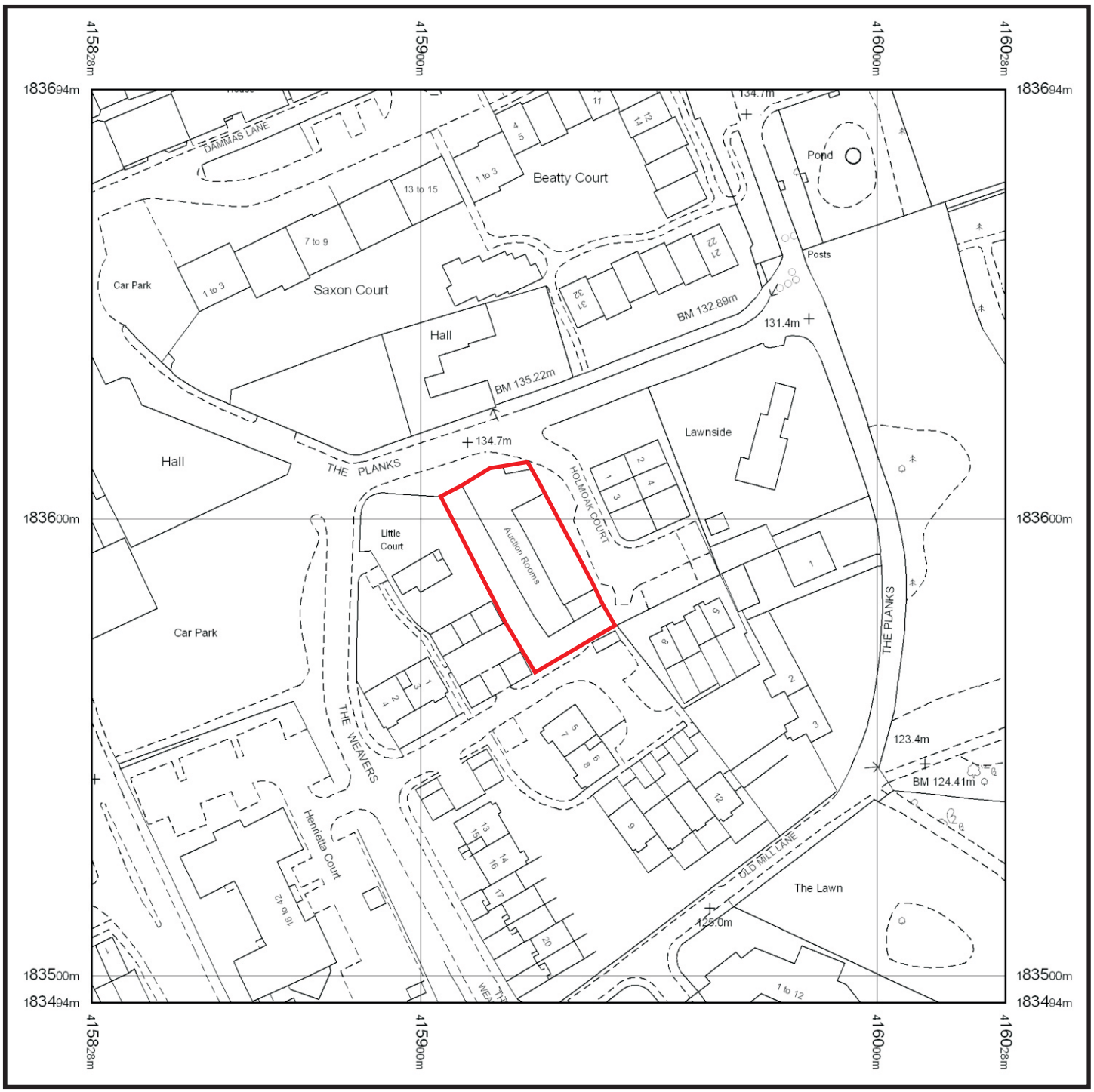
FIGURE 1: Site Location



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Accession Code:

N

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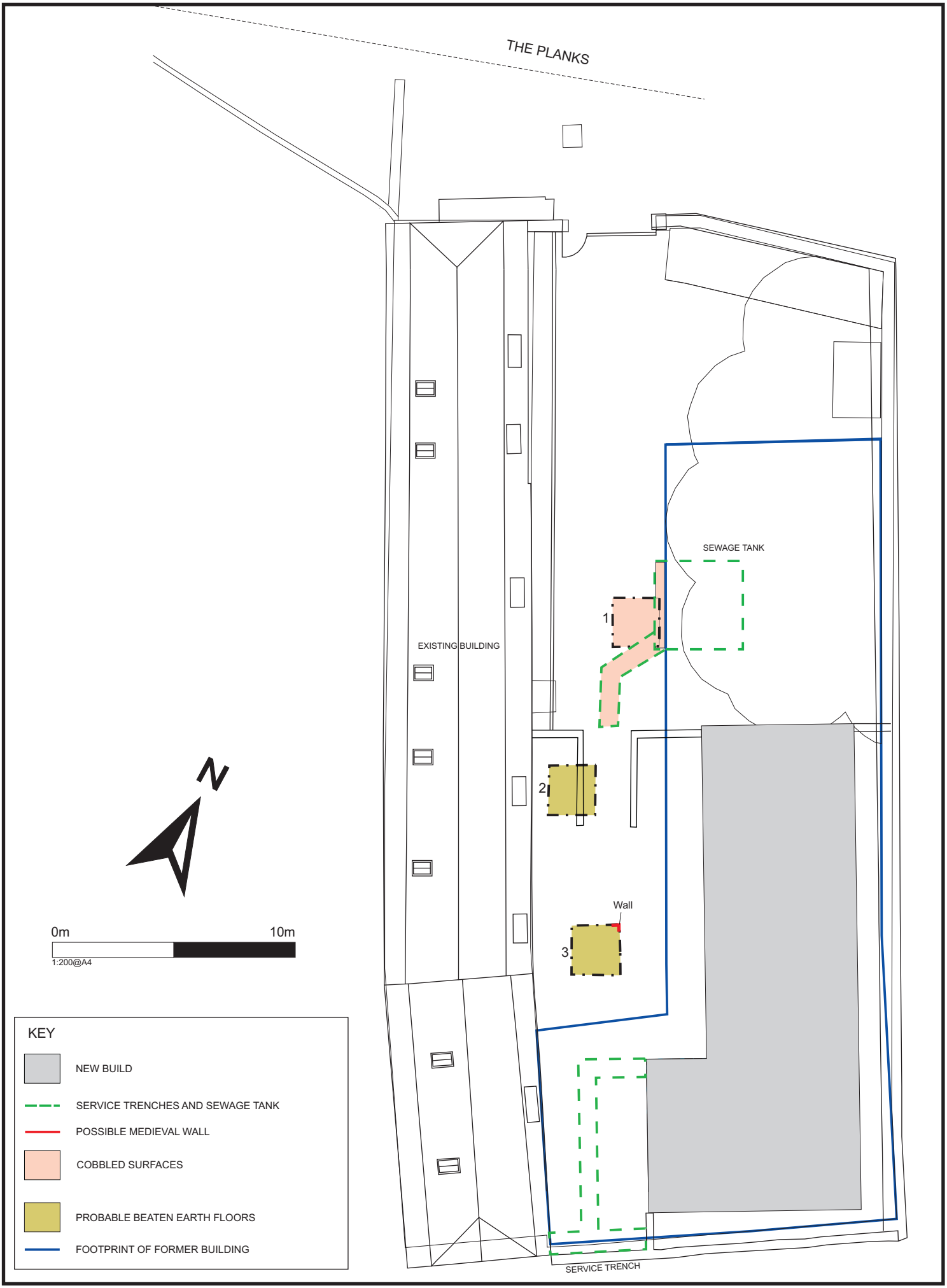
FIGURE 2: Study Area Location

Site Code: TPS08

FIGURE 3 :Trench Locations



Site Code: TPS08

FIGURE 4 :Location of Archaeological Features