

HERITAGE NETWORK



**LAND AT HOLYWELL HILL
St Albans, Hertfordshire**

HN682

Archaeological Excavation Report



THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD

Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation

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LAND AT HOLYWELL HILL St Albans, Hertfordshire

HN682

Archaeological Excavation Report

Prepared on behalf of National Grid

by

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The cover photograph shows the site before the start of works, looking south

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out by Mark Winter and Joe Eddy. Report text and illustrations were prepared by Mark Winter, and the report was edited by David Hillelson.

The Heritage Network would like to express its thanks to David Bond and Tony Watts of Morrison Utility Services; Eddie Johnson of National Grid; RW Bennett and Son, plant hire; and Simon West, District Archaeologist, St Albans District Council, for their help and co-operation and assistance in the execution of this project.

Summary

Site name and address:	Land at Holywell Hill, St Albans, Hertfordshire		
County:	Hertfordshire	District:	St Albans
Village/town:	St Albans	Parish:	St Albans
Planning reference:	n/a	NGR:	TL 14475 06527
Client name and address:	National Grid, Vicarage Farm Road, Peterborough, PE1 5TP		
Nature of work:	Gas line	Land use:	Park
Site status:	None	Reason for investigation:	Other
Position in planning process:	n/a	Project brief originator:	n/a
Size of affected area:	c.50m ²	Size of area investigated:	c.50m ²
Site Code:	HN682	Other reference:	HOH'07
Organisation:	Heritage Network	Site Director:	David Hillelson
Project type, methods etc.:	Open area excavation	Archive recipient:	Verulamium Museum
Start of work	17/07/2007	Finish of work	25/07/2007
Related SMR Nos:	n/a	Periods represented:	Roman, modern
Oasis UID	heritage1-29590	Significant finds:	Pottery, brick
Monument types:	n/a		
Physical archive:	Pottery, brick		
Previous summaries/reports:	n/a		

Synopsis: In accordance with the National Grid's published environmental policy, the Heritage Network was commissioned to undertake a programme of archaeological excavation in advance of the installation of a new gas main.

The excavation exposed a Roman ditch and masonry building foundation, an undated layer of alluvial silting and a modern pit. With the exception of the modern pit all remains appeared to have been heavily truncated by later activity. A number of concrete structures were noted at the southern end of the site. These are believed to be associated with modern services. The Roman features may be associated with structures identified in an excavation undertaken approximately 20m to the north, in 1968.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared at the request of *Morrison plc*, acting on behalf of *National Grid*, as part of the archaeological excavation of a site located on land at Holywell Hill, St Albans, Hertfordshire. The investigation was conducted in accordance with National Grid's published environmental policy. The scope of the required investigation was defined in consultation with St Albans District Council's archaeological officer (SADA) and the excavation followed the provisions set out in the Heritage Network's approved Project Design dated July 2007.

1.2 The study area is situated to the south of the St Albans' Abbey precinct and the medieval core of St Albans, centred on TL 14475 06527. The site is bounded by Holywell Hill on the east, by the access road to Westminster Lodge (formerly known as Mud Lane) on the north, and by a car park to the south and west. The development proposed the laying of a new gas main on a north – south alignment over a distance of approximately 55m (see Figure 1).

1.3 The aim of the excavation has been to consider the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any such remains which are liable to be threatened by the development, and to provide a local and regional archaeological and historical context for them, in accordance with the current published regional research agenda (Glazebrook 1997, Brown and Glazebrook 2000), if they were discovered.

2. Fieldwork

SITE TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

2.1 The study area consists of a grass verge on the western side of Holywell Hill. The ground is fairly even and lies at approximately 85mOD.

2.2 The natural geology is consistent across the site, being a yellowish brown (10Y 5/6) sandy gravel.

METHODOLOGY

2.3 All work was carried out in accordance with the approved *Project Design*, current health and safety legislation, and both IFA and ALGAO standards.

2.4 The site was opened using a mini digger fitted with a 0.8m wide toothless bucket, under close archaeological supervision.

2.5 The site was machined to the first significant archaeological horizon. Spoil from the machining was inspected for archaeological artefacts.

2.6 All potential archaeological features and deposits were sampled to ascertain their nature, depth, date, and quality of preservation.

2.7 All identified contexts were photographed and recorded using the appropriate pro-forma. Scaled plans and sections were drawn on drafting film at scales of 1:20 and 1:50.

RESULTS

2.8 Before the start of the machining of the overburden, a tarmac surface delimited by kerbstones was observed running across the study area on a NNE-SSW alignment. This has been identified as an access road or path running from the junction of Holywell Hill with Mud Lane (the later access road to Westminster Lodge), to the Air Training Corps / Sea Cadet Centre which formerly occupied an area to the west (Figure 2). The road may have been established in the Second World War or a little later, and went out of use when the road layout was changed in the early 1970s.

Stratigraphy

2.9 The stratigraphy was largely consistent across the site. A 0.20m deep very dark grey (10YR 3/1) crumbly, sandy silt topsoil (1) overlay a layer of tarmac which covered a 0.30m deep black (10YR 2/1) silty sand layer of make up (2). Beneath this was a 0.20m deep very dark grey (10YR 3/1) sandy clay (3) covering a 0.30m deep very dark greyish brown (10YR 3/2) sandy clay (4) beneath which was a 0.35m deep dark yellowish brown (10YR 3/6) sandy clay (5). Beneath this was the yellowish brown (10YR 5/6) sandy gravel natural (6). Towards the southern end of the site several of these layers petered out leaving only topsoil (1) and subsoil (3) above the natural (Figure 3).

2.10 The excavation revealed a number of features and deposits of Roman and modern date. These consisted of a building foundation and linear ditch of Romano-British date, an undated alluvial deposit, and a pit and three concrete structures of modern date.

2.11 Ditch [11] was a linear feature measuring 2.56m wide, 0.08m deep and over 1.30m long (Figure 3). It was orientated east-west and contained fill (12), an olive yellow (2.5Y 5/8), hard clay. This contained occasional charcoal and flint and may represent the very bottom of a clay lined ditch. Finds recovered from fill (12) comprise a single sherd of pottery, identified as quartz-tempered greyware of probable Roman date, and six fragments of Roman ceramic building material, including one piece of tegula. A fragment of animal bone was also recovered.

2.12 Layer (13) was a brown (10YR 4/3), very loose sandy silt. It contained occasional stone and measured 6.00m+ long by 1.30m+ wide by 0.20m deep. This deposit may represent alluviation of the area caused by periodic flooding of the nearby River Ver. No finds were recovered from this layer.

2.13 Pit [14] was a sub-ovular feature measuring 1.30m wide by 0.50m deep by over 0.60m long. The feature continued into the western baulk and contained fill (15), a black (10YR 2/1), loose silt, with moderate stone inclusions less than 0.05m in diameter. Although Roman pottery sherds and tile fragments were recovered from this feature the fact that it was cut through layer 4 suggesting a modern date for it. This is supported by the presence of modern paving slabs within the fill.

2.14 Building [16] is formed by wall foundation [17] and floor [18]. Foundation [17] consisted of large, rounded flints set in a white lime mortar, while floor [18] was formed of yellow opus signinum and was located inside the line of the foundations. The exposed foundations suggest that the south-eastern corner of the building was revealed, consisting of two walls, one aligned north-east to south-west, the other aligned north-west to south-east (see Plate 7).

2.15 Three concrete structures, (19), (20) and (21), were observed in the southern half of the trench. These are modern in date and are believed to be associated with services.

Recorded Contexts

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)		
			Length	Width	Depth
01	Layer	Very dark grey (10YR 3/1) crumbly sandy silt topsoil	-	-	0.20
02	Layer	Black (10YR 2/1) silty sand layer of build up	-	-	0.30
03	Layer	Very dark grey (10YR 3/1) sandy clay	-	-	0.20
04	Layer	Dark yellowish brown (10YR 3/6) to very dark greyish brown (10YR 3/2) sandy clay	-	-	0.30
05	Layer	Dark yellowish brown (10YR 3/6) sandy clay	-	-	0.35
06	Fill	Yellowish brown (10YR 5/6) sandy gravel natural	-	-	-
011	Cut	Ditch	1.30+	2.56	0.08
012	Fill	Olive yellow (2.5Y 5/8), hard clay	1.30+	2.56	0.08
013	Layer	Brown (10YR 4/3), very loose sandy silt			
014	Cut	Pit	0.60+	1.30	0.50
015	Fill	Black (10YR 2/1), loose silt, containing moderate stone less than 0.05m in diameter	0.60+	1.30	0.50
016	Group	Building			
017	Wall	Wall foundation of lime mortar and stone			
018	Floor				

019	Structure	Concrete containing services			
020	Structure	Concrete containing services			
021	Structure	Concrete containing services			

FINDS ASSESSMENT

Concordance

Context	Pottery		CBM		An bone		Mortar		Flint		Comments
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
Machining			5	6010							1 RB, the rest post-med or modern
12	1	4	6*	705	1	9					*tegula/brick
15	2	14	2*	105			6+	23			*keyed tile
16			8*	644							*imbrex/brick
18									6*	900	*mortar attached, used as building material
Total	3	18	21	7464	1	9	6+	23	6	900	

Animal Bone

2.16 One fragment of animal bone, weighing 9g, was recovered from context (12), the fill of Pit [11].

Recommendation

2.17 Due to the size and nature of this assemblage, no further work is proposed.

CBM

2.18 A total of 21 fragments of ceramic building material, weighing 7476g, were recovered from one unstratified and four stratified contexts during the present project. The bulk of this material (17 fragments) is Romano-British in date and includes pieces of tegula, imbrex, brick and keyed tile.

2.19 Most of the Roman material (14 pieces) is in a fine dark red fabric, with fine sand and occasional quartz inclusions. A number of these pieces look overfired. The thicker pieces tend to have a reduced centre. One brick fragment from context (16) is in a different and finer fabric. It is brownish red, highly micaceous and with few visible inclusions. Two pieces of keyed tile were collected from context (15), the fill of pit [14]. These are in a coarser pale orange red fabric, tempered with rounded quartz and sand.

2.20 The fact that the majority of the assemblage is in a similar fabric indicates that all the Roman ceramic building material found on the present site originates from building [16].

Recommendation

2.21 Due to the size and abraded nature of this assemblage, no further work is proposed.

Flint

2.22 Six fragments of flint weighing 900g were recovered from wall [17]. These had mortar attached and had been used as building material.

Recommendation

2.23 Due to the size and nature of this assemblage, no further work is proposed.

Pottery

2.24 A total of 3 pottery sherds, weighing 18g, were recovered from two stratified contexts, (12) and (15). A single bodysherd of Verulamium Region greyware was collected from (12), the fill of ditch [11]. This probably dates to the 2nd century AD. Two abraded oxidised bodysherds of probable 2nd century date were recovered from context (15), the fill of the modern pit [14]. One sherd is from an amphora and the other possibly from a mica-dusted vessel, The small size and abraded nature of these sherds means that no identification as to vessel form is possible.

Recommendation

2.25 Due to the size and nature of this assemblage, no further work is proposed.

3. Discussion

3.1 The study area lies outside the core of both the Roman and medieval centres at St Albans. The perimeter wall of the Roman city of Verulamium (SAM Herts 1) and the line of Watling Street, lie approximately 600m to the west of the study area. The Abbey Church of St Albans (NMR 361899) lies approximately 530m to the north, and its precinct extended to the floodplain of the River Ver, approximately 300m to the north. The medieval core of St Albans developed to the north of the Abbey precinct approximately 650m to the north of the study area.

3.2 An extensive Iron Age and Romano-British settlement with associated cemeteries (NMR 361984) is located at King Harry Lane, approximately 400m west of the present site. This settlement was excavated between 1963 – 1964 and archaeological features including inhumation burials, cremation burials, a large flint built tomb, pottery kilns, and an apsidal building, ranging in date from the 1st century BC to the 4th century AD were investigated. Further evidence of activity from this period includes Iron Age enclosures (NMR 361998) within the former precincts of St Albans Abbey, approximately 300m north-west of the study area. Buildings of possible Roman date have been recorded in the immediate vicinity of the study area.

3.3 Excavations in 1968, by the St Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society, on the corner of Mud Lane and Holywell Hill, approximately 20m to the north-east of the present site, revealed the remains of at least one late Roman masonry building (UAD Event 290) (S. West, pers. comm.).

3.4 The archaeology recorded in the course of the present project consisted of a masonry structure and clay lined ditch [11] dating to the Roman period; a deposit of alluvial silt (13); and four modern features. The Roman structure is on a similar alignment to the building revealed in 1968 and they may well be associated.

Conclusion

3.5 The present project has provided a small keyhole in which to further investigate the presence of extra-mural Roman activity at the bottom of Holywell Hill, first noted in 1968. The corner of a masonry building was exposed, standing just beyond a layer of alluvium demarcating the extent of the floodplain of the river Ver. Unfortunately the site appears to have been heavily truncated, leaving only limited opportunities for investigation and recording.

Confidence Rating

3.6 In the course of the fieldwork, weather and ground conditions were generally acceptable for the identification of potential features and deposits, and for their investigation. There were no circumstances which would lead to a confidence rating for the work which was less than High.

4. Bibliography

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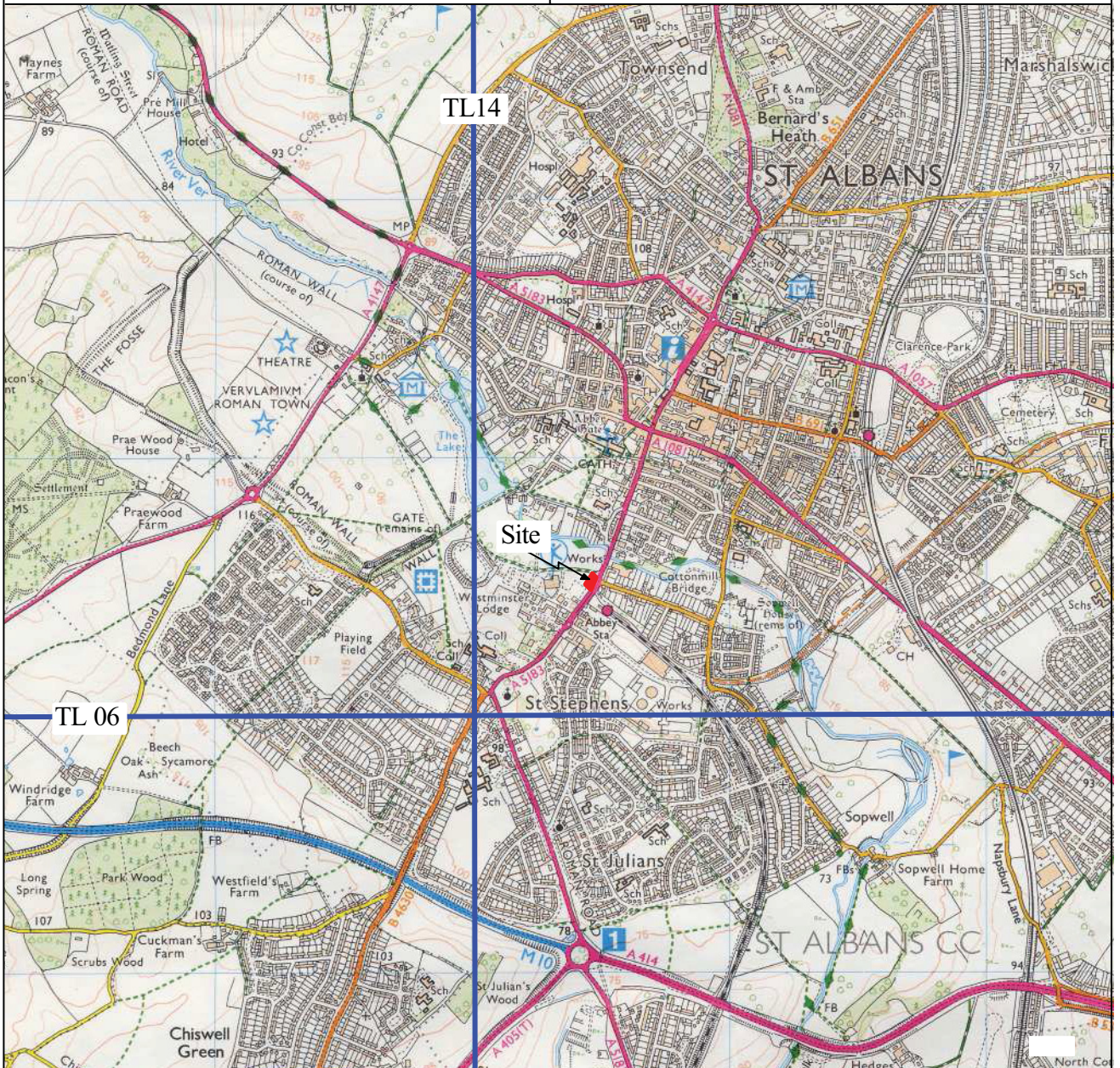
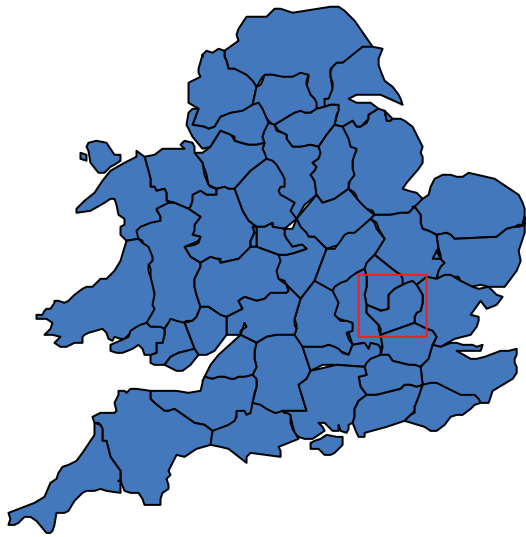
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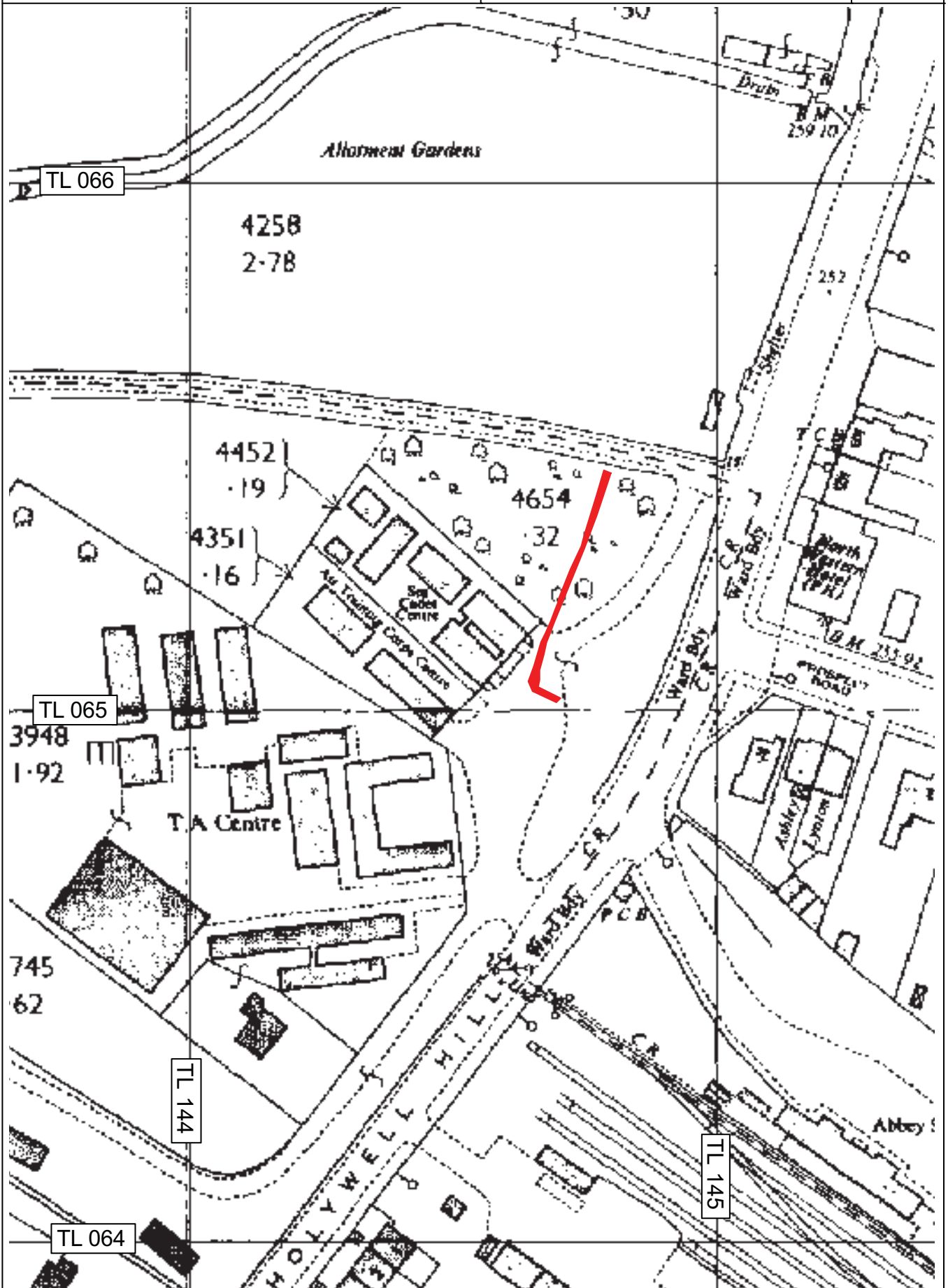
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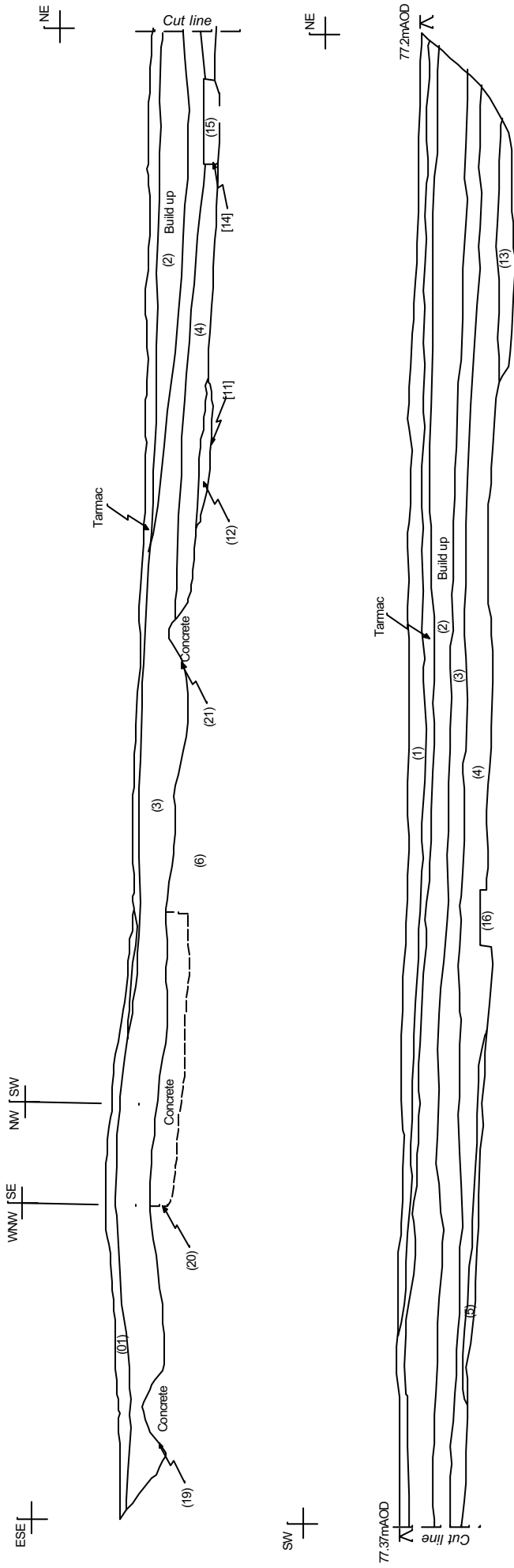
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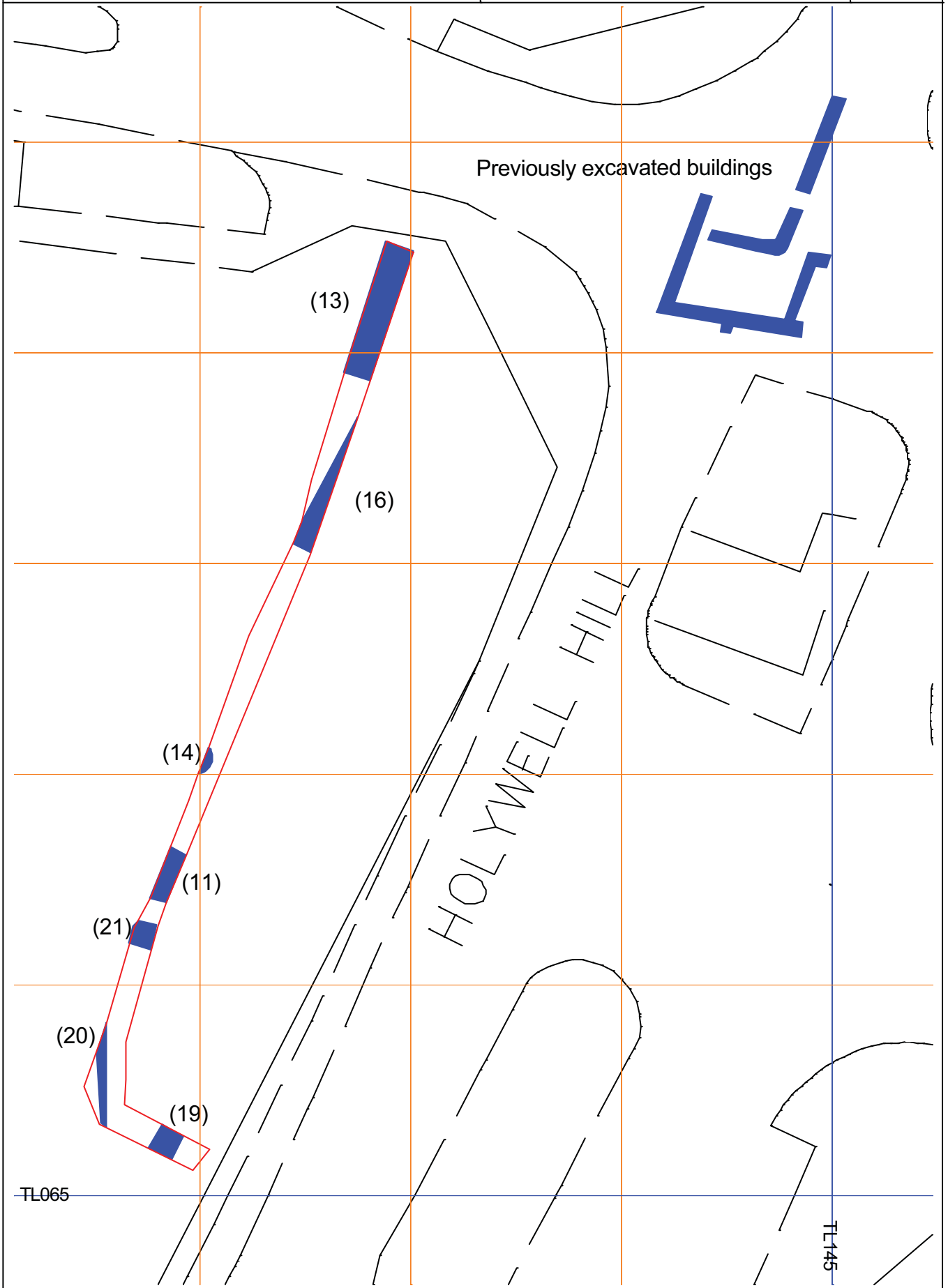


Site layout, 1963-1973

Scale 1:2000



Section through site



Site layout

Scale 1:250



Plate 1: General shot looking south



Plate 2: General shot looking north



Plate 3: General shot looking southeast



Plate 4: Ditch [11] looking west



Plate 5: Layer (13) looking west



Plate 6: Pit [14] looking west



Plate 7: Building 16 looking north



Plate 8: Building 16 looking south