



Proposed site of Doncaster Racecourse Hotel SOUTH YORKSHIRE

Archaeological Evaluation and Building Recording



November 2006

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS LTD

Manager : A Boucher BSc MIFA
Assistant manager: N. Oakey BA MA MIFA

**UNIT 1, PREMIERE BUSINESS PARK,
WESTFIELDS TRADING ESTATE,
FARADAY ROAD, HEREFORD
HR4 9NZ**

Tel. (01432) 364901
Fax. (01432) 364900

for: Doncaster Racecourse Management Committee
The Grandstand
Leger Way
Doncaster
S Yorks
DN2 6BB

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Cover picture

Archaeological trial trenching on the site of the proposed hotel development.

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**Proposed site of
Doncaster Racecourse Hotel,
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
NGR SE 600 030**

Archaeological Trial Trenching and Building Recording

Text and Site Work
L Craddock-Bennett BSc
K H Crooks BA

Illustrations
L Craddock-Bennett

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**Proposed site of
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SOUTH YORKSHIRE**
Archaeological Trial Trenching and Building Recording
NGR SO 600 030

1. Summary

Archaeological Investigations Ltd was commissioned by Doncaster Racecourse Management Committee to undertake trial trenching and building recording at Doncaster Racecourse in advance of planning consent for the construction of a new hotel and apartments, together with car parks, on the site of the former pre-parade ring.

Work consisted of trial trenching and rapid recording of the buildings due to be demolished.

No archaeological features or deposits were present on the site, with the only features encountered demonstrated to be modern in date. These were all apparently associated with the racecourse and included a parade ring marked by the position of the lime trees, where a path, concrete bases which held uprights for a fence were located. This paddock was obviously in use until recent times. The lack of subsoil in the area could suggest that it was extensively levelled and landscaped.

Three buildings dating to the early 20th century were photographed in detail, but did not reveal any unique or interesting features.

Archaeological work took place on 13th to 14th November 2006.

2. Introduction

Archaeological Investigations Ltd was commissioned to undertake trial trenching in advance of planning consent for the construction of a new hotel, apartments and car parking. The area affected by the proposals lies between Bawtry Road to the south, and the racecourse itself to the north (Fig. 1). In addition to the pre-parade ring the area is occupied by ranges of buildings housing saddling boxes, the vet's room, ambulance room, a toilet block and accommodation for grooms. The remaining area is turfed.

An archaeological desk-based survey (Boucher & Oakey 2005) demonstrated potential for activity of Prehistoric and Romano-British date in the area.

The site lies at approximately 10m OD. Underlying geology consists of Permo-Triassic Bunter Sandstone with overlying drift geology of older river gravels.

3. Archaeological and historical background (after Boucher and Oakey 2005) (Fig. 5)

3.1 Prehistory (before AD 43)

Records of prehistoric activity within the region of the racecourse comprise isolated findspots and possible cropmarks traced from aerial photographs.

The findspots largely date from the early 20th century and cannot be located with any degree of accuracy. For example SMR 00711/01 encompasses the alleged site of the recovery of flint axeheads in 1911, perpetuated on Ordnance Survey maps between 1931 and 1969. A reference in 1917 states "one of the finest polished axes ever found in Yorkshire was obtained on the Common, and is now in Doncaster Museum" (Jordan 1917, 359). However, this object was described as having been found "many years ago" and may refer to a "very fine greenstone axe head, found near the Doncaster race-course and presented to the museum by Miss Godfrey". This is mentioned in a lecture by T. Sheppard delivered to Doncaster Scientific Society in 1901 and reported in a typescript of extracts from minutes of the society held at Doncaster Museum (Creighton n.d.).

More closely locatable is an assemblage of worked flint found in 1912 or 1913 during alterations to the Rose Hill section of the track (i.e. the southern part). This comprised several 'blue' flakes, a black flake and a knife in red flint (Jordan 1917, 359) and is registered on the SMR as 00719/01-3, although the indicated location appears too far south.

In 1913 Jordan reported to the Doncaster Scientific Society on other prehistoric finds that he had made whilst observing alterations to the Racecourse (typescript held in Doncaster Museum). These do not appear to have been included on the SMR. They included a retouched flake of black flint found near the stands; a circular disc of blue flint, also retouched (a scraper?); and a flake of chert (Creighton n.d.)

These finds form part of a series of observations and discoveries made by Jordan in the neighbourhood. SMR reference 03278 covers a series of artefacts found in Town Field. These include a flint scraper (1903-4), three worked flints including an ovoid knife (1907), a red flint

knife (1914-15), and “a large piece of chert or flint which had the appearance of being a core from which flakes had been chipped” (1918-9) (Creighton n.d.). Other local prehistoric findspots include an axehead found during ploughing on Town Field in 1908 (SMR 00670/01); the butt of a Neolithic polished axe from near Cantley Lane (SMR 00713/01); and a barbed-and-tanged arrowhead from near Ellers Road (SMR 01075/01).

None of these artefacts has been recovered from controlled archaeological excavation, but the quantity of recovered material would imply activity in the area during the Neolithic and Bronze Ages at least. The absence of proper field survey and the lack of any concentration of finds does not permit identification of any putative settlement sites, but the recovery of worked flint from near the stands raises the possibility of early prehistoric activity in the vicinity of the Site.

The minutes of the Doncaster Scientific Society also record Jordan’s comment in 1913 that, when turf was removed “on the far side of the Common, near the Sandall Beat road were seen clear traces of the ancient mode of Terrace Farming, as carried out at Haxey today” (Creighton n.d.). This is expanded upon in an article of 1917 where Jordan describes

“... the discovery under the turf over a very large area, of long strips of land, like occupation plots, about forty feet wide and three to four hundred yards long. They were in the southern part of the Common, at the foot of Rose Hill, parallel to each other, and each plot extending in a southerly direction. I pointed this out to the Borough Surveyor, Mr Kirby, who said he had noticed similar plots near the grand stand, which had been covered up before I saw them” (Jordan 1917, 359).

The southern location accords with the ditches which showed as cropmarks in the area of the geophysical survey immediately to the south of the racecourse and the discovery of similar remains near the Grand Stand may suggest that an organised field system, probably of Late Iron Age or Romano-British date covered the area (Rylatt 2000, 12).

3.2 Romano-British (AD 43-410)

The incidence of casual finds of artefacts continues in the Romano-British period, particularly coins. Amongst those recovered from just outside the study area are a *dupondius* of Hadrian or Antoninus Pius (SMR 04315/01), a bronze *foliis* of Constantine (SMR 04320/01) and a coin of Marcus Aurelius (SMR 001807/01) to the south-east; a worn *sestertius* (SMR 01308/01) to the south-west; and an *as* of Antoninus Pius (SMR 03312/01) to the north-west. A further possible Roman coin from the study area was very corroded, but may be a *sestertius* (SMR 01806/01). It differs from the other coin finds, however, in that it was associated with a hearth uncovered at 18 Newmarket Street, Cantley. This hearth was c. 200m north-east of the location of the kilns and enclosure identified by geophysical survey (SMR 01209/01-04; Bartlett, 1973). It has been stated that survey in the field where geophysics took place recovered pottery of Iron Age and Romano-British date, including a sherd of 2nd century AD Samian (Rylatt 2000, 6).

These kilns immediately north-west of the railway cutting represent the most northerly and westerly known representatives of an extensive industrial complex. By 1980 excavation and geophysical survey had established the location of at least 67 pottery kilns over an area of c. 25km² (Buckland *et al* 1980, 145-6). Little evidence has been found of associated domestic

settlement or other activities. The industry appears to have thrived from the 2nd to the early 4th century and, at least initially, must have served the local market represented by the fort and civilian settlement which underlay modern Doncaster. The fort was c. 2.25km west of the Site with the civilian settlement spreading to the south and east to within 2km of the Site (Buckland and Magilton 1986, 24 and interpretation of information from the SMR), and neither are described in any further detail in this report. The Site, thus, is located between the Roman settlement and the pottery industry.

The course of a major Roman road connecting Lincoln with York via river crossings at Doncaster and Castleford passes through the Study Area to the south of the Site. However, the precise alignment in this area has not been determined. One suggestion notes the road bearing east from Doncaster before swinging south across Belle Vue to join the A638 Bawtry Road (Rylatt 2000, 7). This would be 500m to the south of the Site at its nearest point. The alternative route, preferred by Margary (1957, 142) and Buckland and Magilton (1986, 208) approaches from the south-east along Cantley Lane and Bawtry Road before running across Town Field (Fig. 2). This route runs immediately south of the Site. Both hypothetical routes are shown on a map of 1829.

A spur of this road has been postulated to fork off the Lincoln road and head northwards through Bessacarr Grange, its course being preserved by the eastern edge of Sandall Beat Wood (Margary 1957, 142). The existence of this road has not been substantiated and a possible agger was proved by excavation to be a drystone wall (White 1961, 21).

3.3 Anglo-Saxon and Early Medieval (AD 410-1066)

There is no evidence of Anglo-Saxon and Early Medieval activity on the Site or within the Study Area.

Evidence is slim for activity in the immediate locality during the immediate post-Roman period when it formed part of the kingdom of Elmet and evidence for subsequent Anglian activity is also sparse, but the fact that “the greatest concentration of Scandinavian place-names outside the vicinity of York itself occurs in the Doncaster area” suggests considerable Scandinavian settlement in the 9th century and later (Buckland *et al* 1989, 24). *Bessacarr*, for example, is a hybrid Scandinavian prefix and Old English suffix. It is possible that new *burgh* fortifications appeared at Doncaster at this time, but it is unlikely that the former area of Roman settlement, located as it was at a river crossing point, was ever totally unoccupied. The evidence from Domesday Book for the status of the settlement immediately prior to the Norman Conquest is “enigmatic” (*ibid.*, 31). Cantley is also mentioned in Domesday Book (Morris 1986, 379b). The Tithe Map of 1821 shows surviving strips on Town Field immediately to the north of the site. The date of the establishment of common fields is a matter of some contention, but comparative examples in other parts of the country (Oakey 2000) suggest that it is possible that this field system may have been established prior to the Norman Conquest.

3.4 Late Medieval (AD 1066-1540)

There is only circumstantial evidence of Later Medieval activity on the Site or within the Study Area.

The nearest contemporary evidence is a 14th century heraldic pendant found in Sandall Beat Wood in October 1986, which represents a piece of medieval horse furniture (SMR 02822/01).

Doncaster thrived as a market centre during the later medieval period, achieving its first charter in 1194, but settlement beyond the limits set by the town's defences was not extensive and almost certainly did not extend as far as the Site (Buckland *et al.*, 1989). A route to Lincoln is likely to have continued to run to the south of the Site, but Doncaster and Cantley Commons (shown on the 1821 Tithe Map, Fig. 6) are probably of long establishment. The Tithe Map also shows surviving medieval strips on Town Field running to the northern edge of modern Leger Way and Longdale Avenue, but cultivation is likely to have ceased at this point. The Site of the racecourse (south of the present buildings) would have been common land, probably used for occasional grazing of livestock and other, foraging-style activities. Some more settled and intensive use of squatters cannot be excluded, but it is not apparent in the existing record.

3.5 Archaeological Background (Fig. 1)

Fifteen trenches excavated to determine the nature of anomalies identified during geophysical survey in the Doncaster Bloodstock Sales area located no archaeological features, with only 19th or 20th century land drains, plough marks and possibly field boundaries (Craddock-Bennett, 2006).

Excavations undertaken in the north-eastern part of the racecourse area revealed only deposits associated with demolition of previous racecourse buildings (Mayes 2006).

4. Aims and objectives

The main aim of the project was to provide information to accompany a planning application. The main objectives were to:

- Elucidate the character, distribution, extent and importance of the known and potential archaeological remains that exist in the development site
- Excavate any identified remains affected by the development
- Sample and produce a record of any features/deposits
- Assess, analyse and report on the findings of the work
- Photograph the buildings proposed for demolition and produce a short report on these.

5. Method

Trial trenching

Trenches were positioned in areas of maximum impact from the proposed building (Fig 2). The trench position was tied into features shown on the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 mapping. Of the trenches, five measured 25m in length with a sixth of 18m length. In the event

Trenches 3, 4 and 6 were excavated in two sections, in order to avoid the roots of mature trees and the tarmac path of the existing pre-parade ring, trench while Trench 2 curved in order to avoid tree roots and the path.

Building recording

Photographs were taken using both colour and Black and White 35mm film. Digital photographs were taken to provide backup. The locations of shots were recorded in a photographic register. A complete record of the photographs is recorded on a compact disc which forms part of this report.

6. Results (Fig. 3)

The results of the trial trenching and building recording are described below.

6.1 Trial trenching

The only features present in the trenches were demonstrated to be either of modern or of natural origin. Results are summarised below (Table 1); a brief description of the modern features and deposits investigated in each trench follows.

Table 1

Context	Depth (m)	Description/interpretation
1001	0.16	<i>Mid/dark brown sandy loam topsoil in Trench 1</i>
1002	0.30	<i>Yellow brown interface/topsoil in Trench 1</i>
1003	0.40+	<i>Yellow sand and gravel; natural deposit in Trench 1</i>
2001	0.10	<i>Mid/dark brown sandy loam topsoil in Trench 2</i>
2002	0.15	<i>Yellow brown interface/topsoil in Trench 2</i>
2003	0.2+	<i>Yellow sand and gravel; natural deposit in Trench 2</i>
3001	0.14	<i>Mid/dark brown sandy loam topsoil in Trench 3</i>
3002	0.10	<i>Yellow brown subsoil/interface in Trench 3</i>
3003	0.10+	<i>Yellow sand and gravel; natural deposit in Trench 3</i>
4001	0.22	<i>Mid/dark brown sandy loam topsoil in Trench 4</i>
4002	0.10	<i>Yellow brown subsoil/interface in Trench 4</i>
4003	1.0+	<i>Yellow sand and gravel; natural deposit in Trench 4</i>
5001	0.30	<i>Mid/dark brown topsoil in Trench 5</i>
5002	0.40+	<i>Yellow sand and gravel; natural deposit in Trench 5</i>
6001	0.10	<i>Mid/dark brown topsoil in Trench 6</i>
6002	0.20	<i>Yellow sand and gravel; natural deposit in Trench 6</i>

Trench 2

A single cut feature was encountered, a service trench 0.4m wide and 15m in length. It was aligned approximately north-west/south-east and upon investigation it proved to contain a

modern blue plastic water pipe in the base of the cut. In the centre of Trench 2, on its western side only, was a thin tarmac surface above a 0.26m deep mixed consolidation layer of machine made brick, stone and rubble. The surface and levelling deposit was probably associated with the saddling stables, which lay to the west of the trench.

Trench 3

One feature (3004) was identified at the eastern end of Trench 3. This was a plinth or base formed by two courses of six machine made bricks, roughly mortared together and measuring in total 0.50m long and 0.35m wide. The structure lay immediately beneath the topsoil and was clearly comparatively modern in date. A further possible feature, apparently a pit, was investigated in this trench but was found to be of natural origin, possibly resulting from root activity, as decaying fragments of wood were found in it.

Trench 4

Three features in this trench were investigated: an apparent pit at the northern end of the trench proved to be the result of root disturbance, as did a linear feature in the centre of the trench. Immediately to the south of this feature was an area of disturbance associated with a concrete base for a post.

Trench 5

Two features were identified in Trench 5. The first of these was a linear cut, possibly associated with drainage or water supply and aligned north-east/south-west, along the length of the trench. It was seen in the northern end of the trench only. Upon investigation its modern date was confirmed by the presence of corrugated iron within the fill. Further investigation of this feature did not, therefore, take place. A substantial pit (5004) at the southern end of this trench was sampled for dating evidence. The fill, a mottled orange and brown mixed sand and loam appeared to contain topsoil, suggesting a recent date. This was confirmed when a fragment of tarmac and one of bottle glass were found in the fill.

Trench 6

The only feature observed in the trench was a gravel path, associated with the racecourse paddock, seen in the centre of the trench. This feature lay beneath a thin (0.05m) layer of topsoil and its upper surface was of white limestone or chalk, sealing a further thin layer of topsoil. Beneath this was an earlier surface, 0.11m deep and of red grit. The natural deposit of sand and gravel lay immediately beneath this surface.

There was very little evidence for subsoil throughout the trenches, with the deposit changing gradually. Rather than there being a layer of subsoil the topsoil appeared to merge into the natural, with an interface apparent in Trenches 1-4, though this was not apparent in Trenches 5 and 6.

6.2 Building recording (Fig. 4)

The buildings affected by the proposed development form an 'L' shape to the North and West of the area of trial trenching. In brief they comprised saddling stables, a veterinary stable block and an accommodation block with ambulance room adjoining.

The saddling stables

The saddling stables at the south of the study area is an open fronted iron framed structure with brick elevations and a slated pitched roof (Plates 1,2,3). The earliest evidence for a structure at this location is shown on the 1931 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 9). An alteration to the layout of space is visible on the 1934 plan (Fig. 10) and a more radical alteration is shown on the 1937 Ordnance Survey revision (Fig. 11) when the building appears in its current position.

The interior of the building has a range of stalls set against the southern wall which are likely to have been used to saddle horses. In the south-east corner an internal structure constructed of concrete blocks has been erected for storage.

The veterinary stables

The veterinary stables comprise one unconnected treatment room in the north of the building, and three stable boxes connected to the west by a corridor which currently serves as a kitchen. The building is of iron frame construction with brick walls faced with wooden planking. The pitched roof is covered with slate and ceramic ridge tiles. The interior of the roof is faced with wooden planks to form a pitched ceiling.

The building first appears on the 1924 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 8).

The accommodation block

The accommodation block and ambulance room form one building. The first evidence for a building on the site is the 1903 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey map (fig. 7). The 1821 Tithe map (fig. 6) shows no evidence for a building on this site.

The eastern elevation of the present building is constructed of red brick with timber panelling covering a cast iron superstructure (Plate 10). The roof is covered with slate, and dormer windows are placed at regular intervals (Plate 6). The top of the corner pillars are finished with a geometric brick detail that is reminiscent of Art Deco design (Plate 7).

The western elevation of the building (Plate 8) is constructed of recessed brick panels which have been plastered and painted white. The form of the walls bears strong similarities to those of the saddling barn which may suggest that the current building was modified or entirely rebuilt in the 1930's. All window frames and fittings are made of iron.

On the interior of the building the Ambulance room is entirely separate from the accommodation area. A self contained unit, it comprises a main theatre, toilet and basin room and two treatment cubicles (Plate 9).

The accommodation area is accessed through a separate exterior door and is dominated by a corridor running North to South along the Eastern side of the building (Plate 11). Off this corridor are a range of bedrooms that were inaccessible during our investigation. Separating blocks of bedrooms were two wash rooms (Plate 12), a kitchen and a lounge area.

7. Discussion

No archaeological features or deposits were identified in the trenches. The desk based assessment (Boucher & Oakey 2005) demonstrated only comparatively modern features in the area, though find spots of prehistoric artefacts implied that material of such date could be present. Underlying deposits in this part of the racecourse area were of gravel and sand. Free draining deposits would probably have favoured settlement in prehistoric times, though it is unlikely that pottery kilns such as those identified in the Romano-British industrial complex at Cantley would be present at such a distance from the source of clay.

Previous trial trenching (Mayes 2006, Craddock-Bennett 2006) revealed no archaeological features, though the area investigated was some distance away (Fig. 1). However, the profile of the soil, with topsoil gradually changing to natural with no clearly defined subsoil was similar

In the mid 19th century there was a large man-made embankment around the pre-parade area (Boucher & Oakey 2005). No evidence of this remained in the area of the trial trenching (Trenches 1 and 2). There is evidence that in some parts of the course that the ground was levelled or raised and re-sodded in 1834, 1844 and 1845 (Sheardown 1861) and this or similar landscaping may have taken place in the evaluated area.

The parade ring, remains of which were demarcated by the line of the lime trees and by concrete positions for fence posts was first shown on the 1931 OS map (Boucher & Oakey 2005). It was still in use until last year.

9. Conclusions

The only features or deposits identified in the trial trenches were demonstrated to be of recent date and associated with the racecourse. The method used fulfilled the aims of the project in elucidating the character and extent of archaeological remains in the development site, and in producing a record of the buildings proposed for demolition. The buildings can be securely dated to the early 20th century and it seems unnecessary for any further archaeological work to be carried out prior to their demolition.

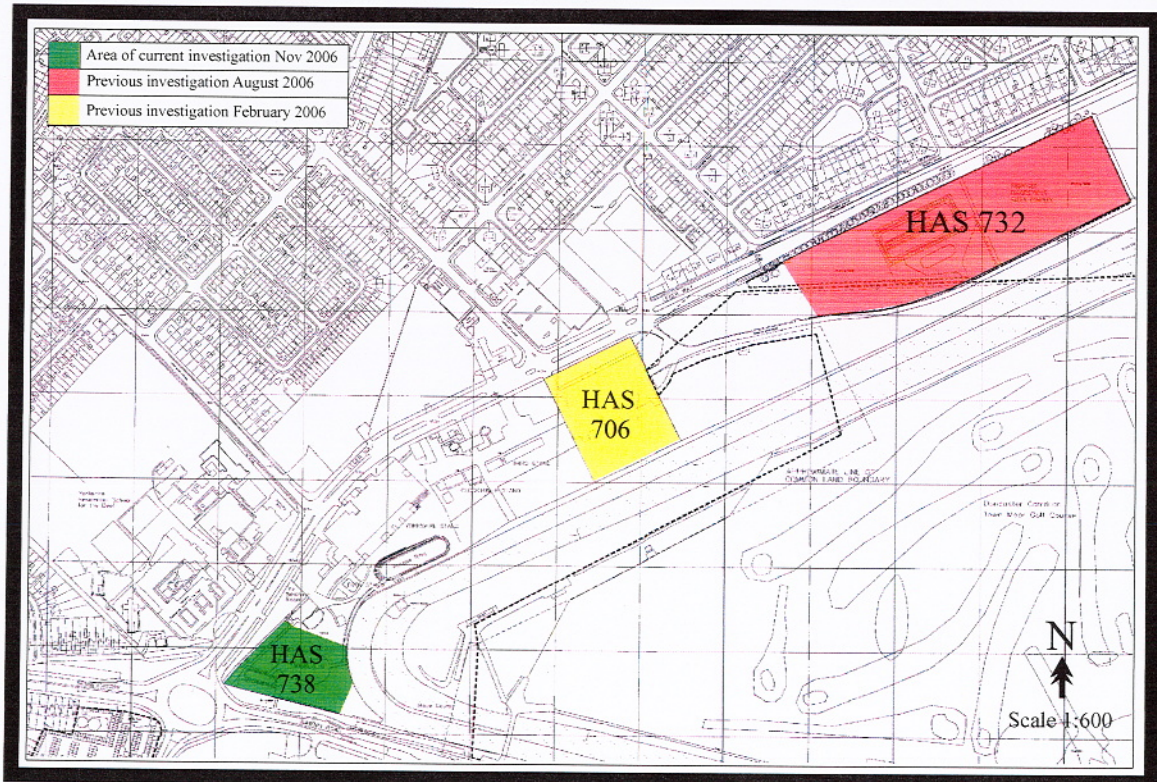
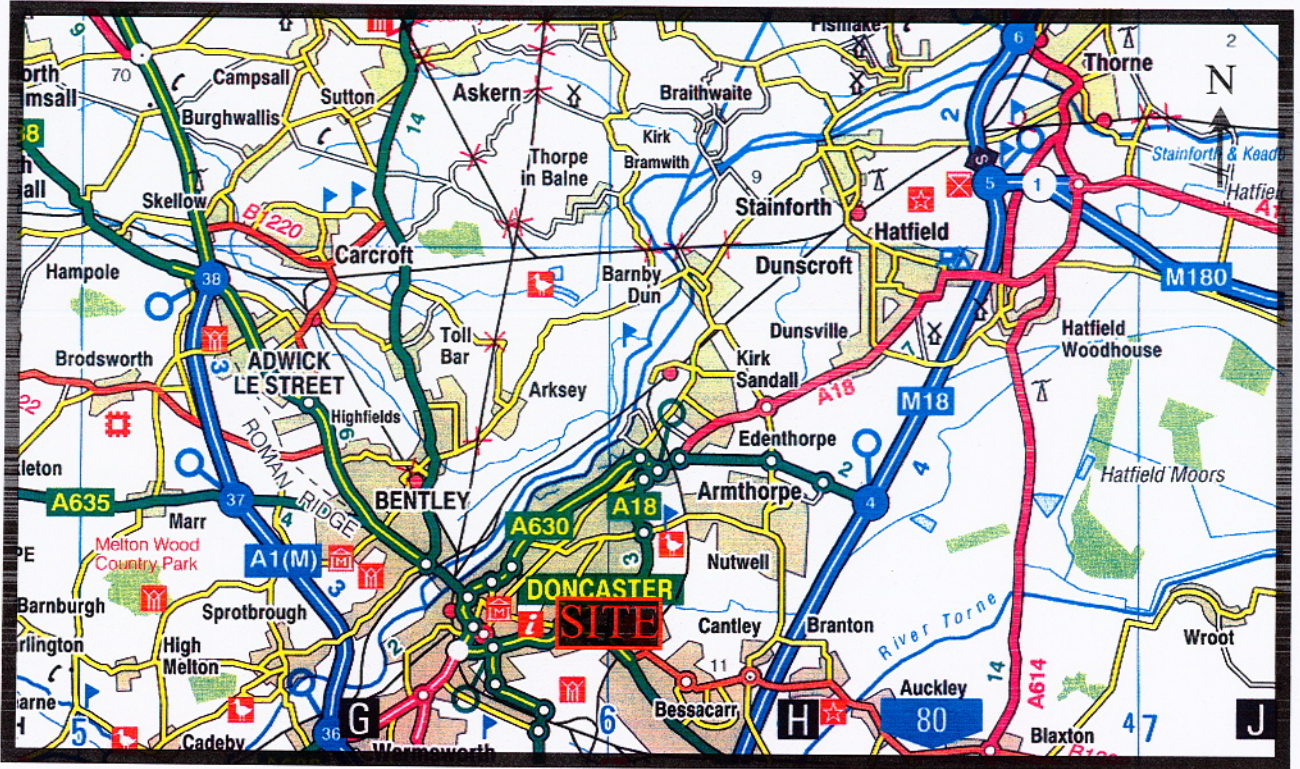
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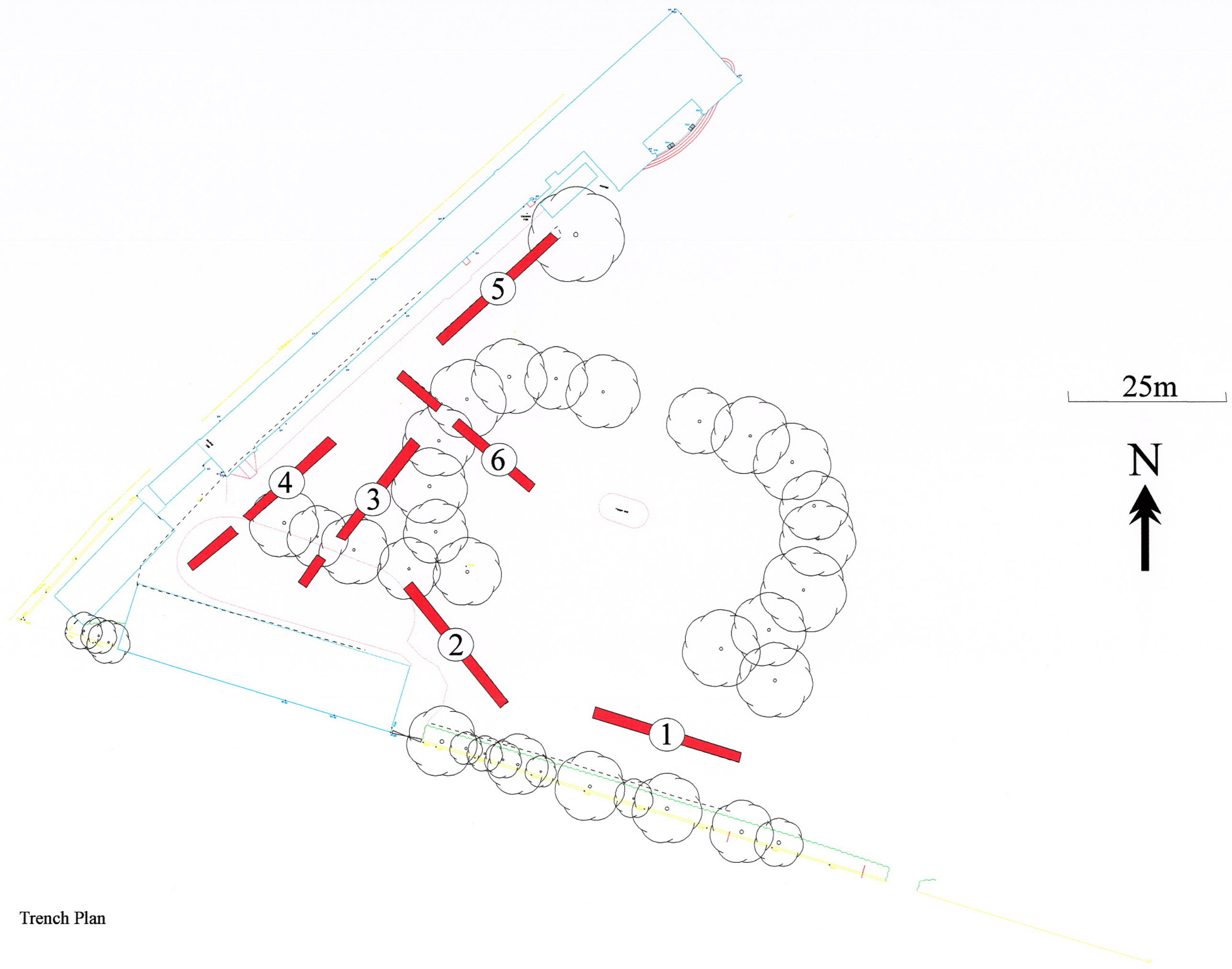
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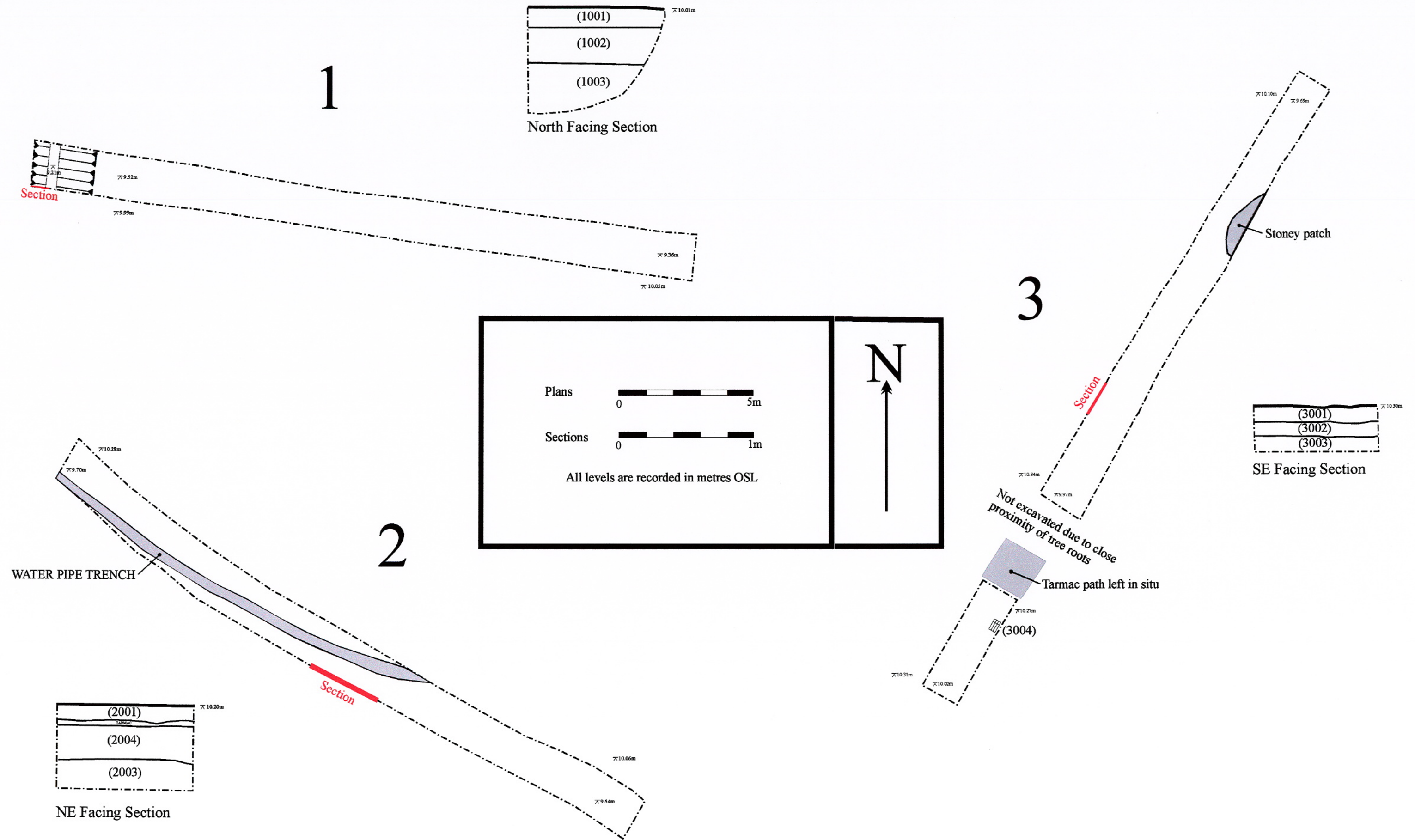
Site Location Map

Figure 1



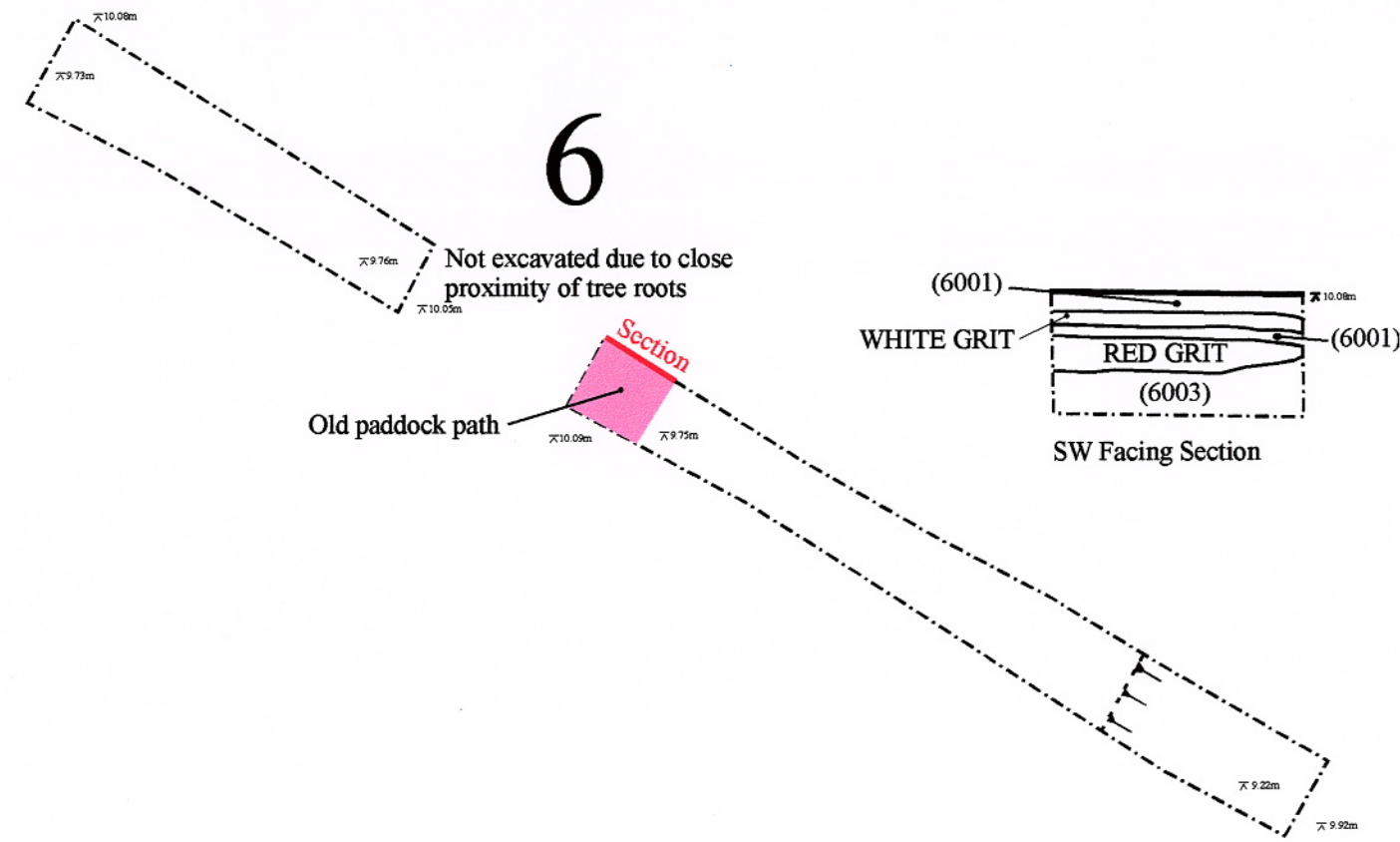
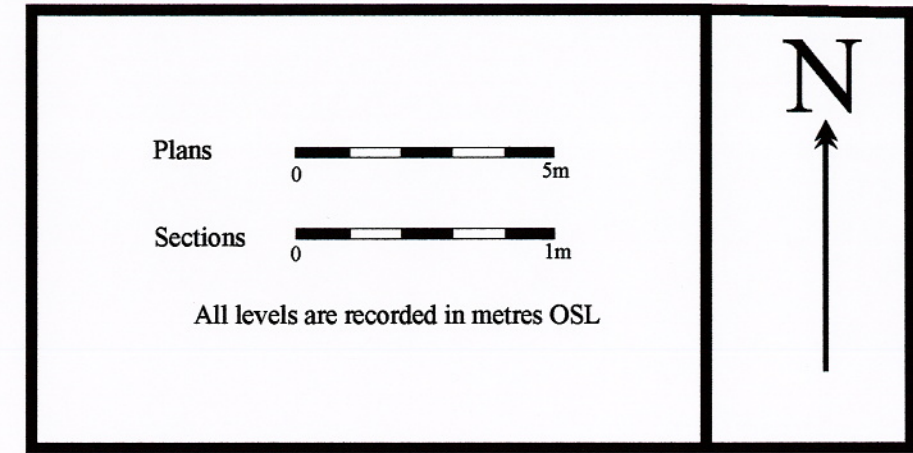
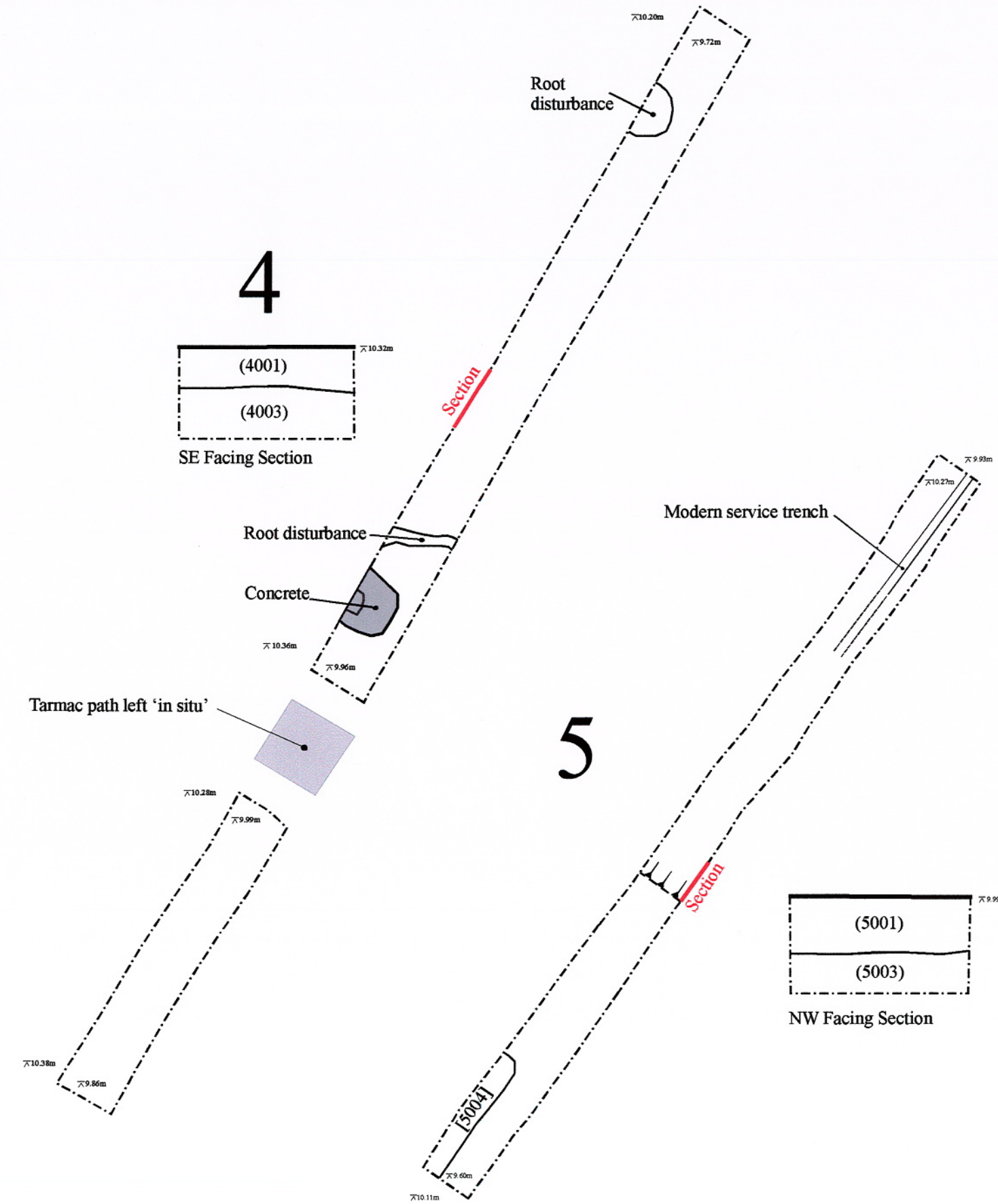
Trench Plan

Figure 2



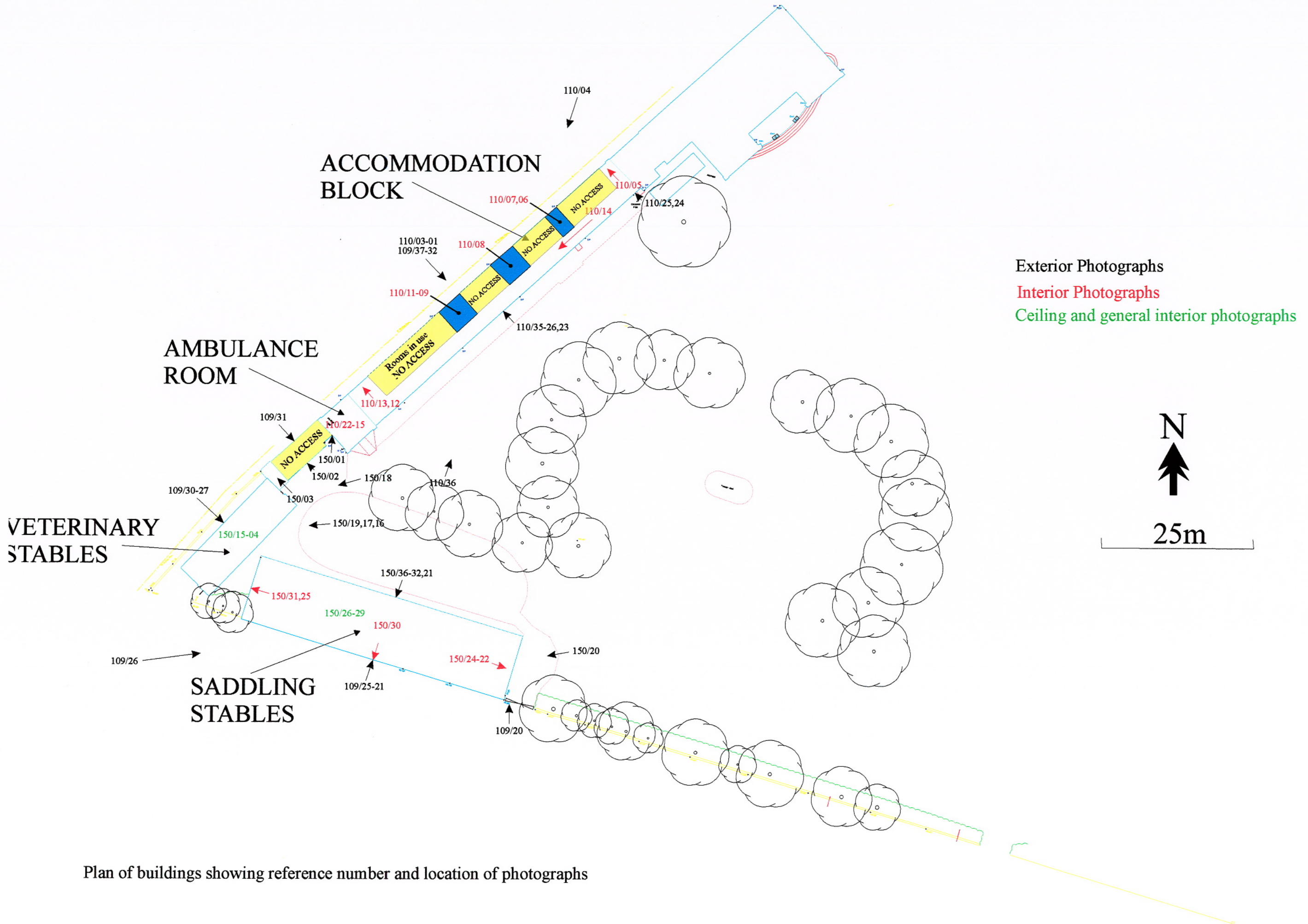
Site Drawings

Figure 3a



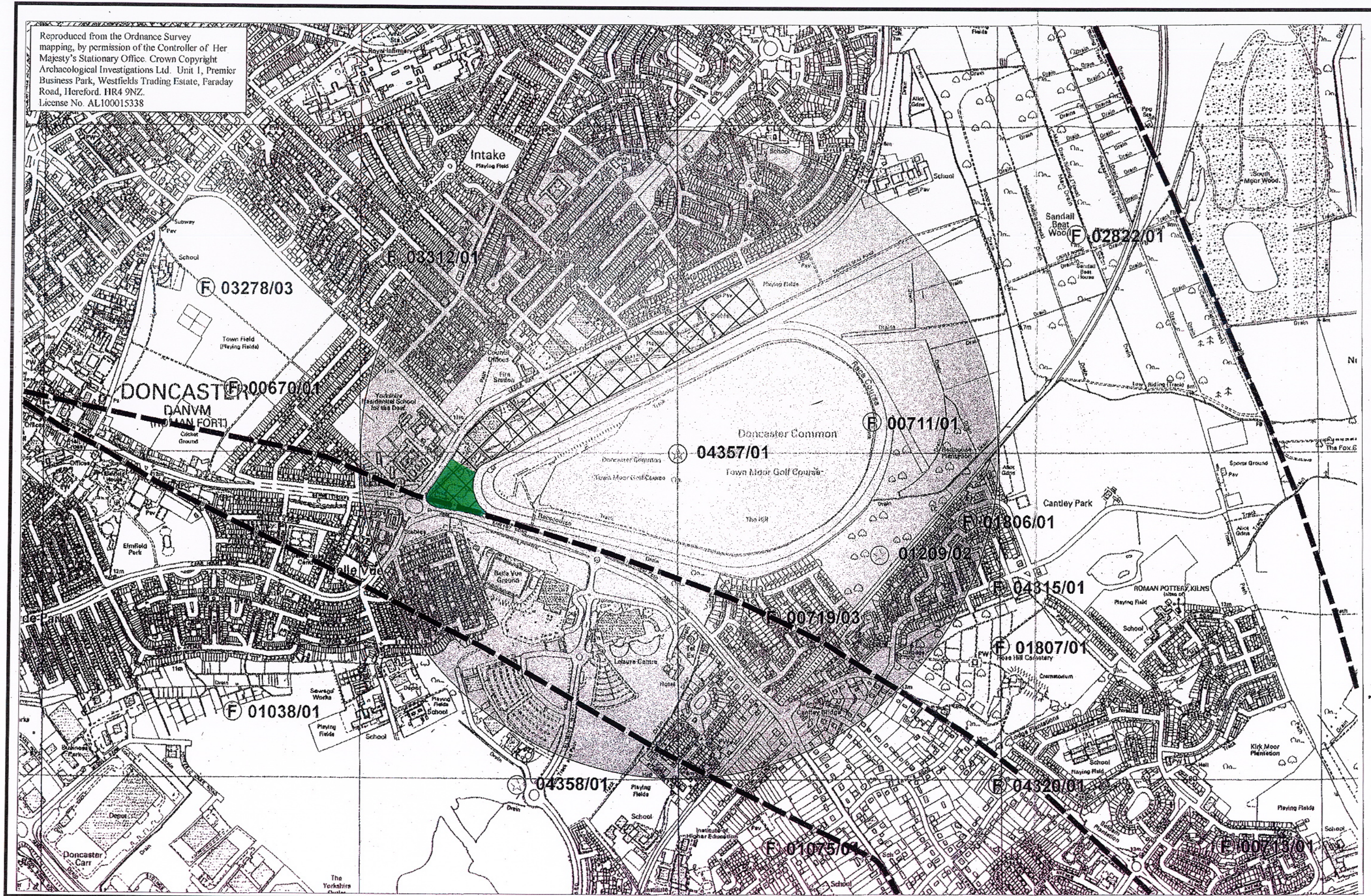
Site drawings

Figure 3b



Plan of buildings showing reference number and location of photographs

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Postulated Alignments of Roman Roads



Study Area 1km circle centred on 04357/01



The Site

SMR Location Map

Figure 5



Figure 6 Extract from 1821 Tithe map.
 (Copied with kind permission of Doncaster Records Office DX/Box/10/15)

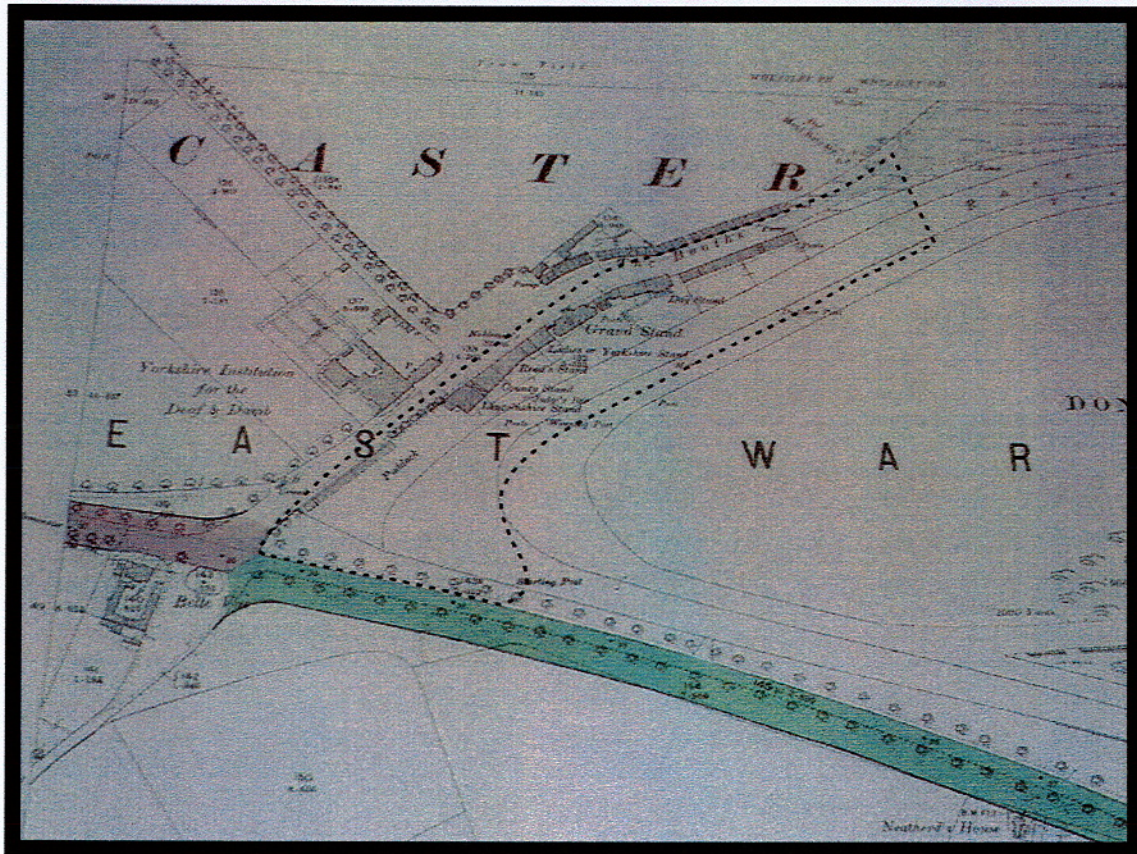


Figure 7 Extract from an 1903 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey 25".
 (Copied with kind permission of Doncaster Records Office Sheet 285 II)

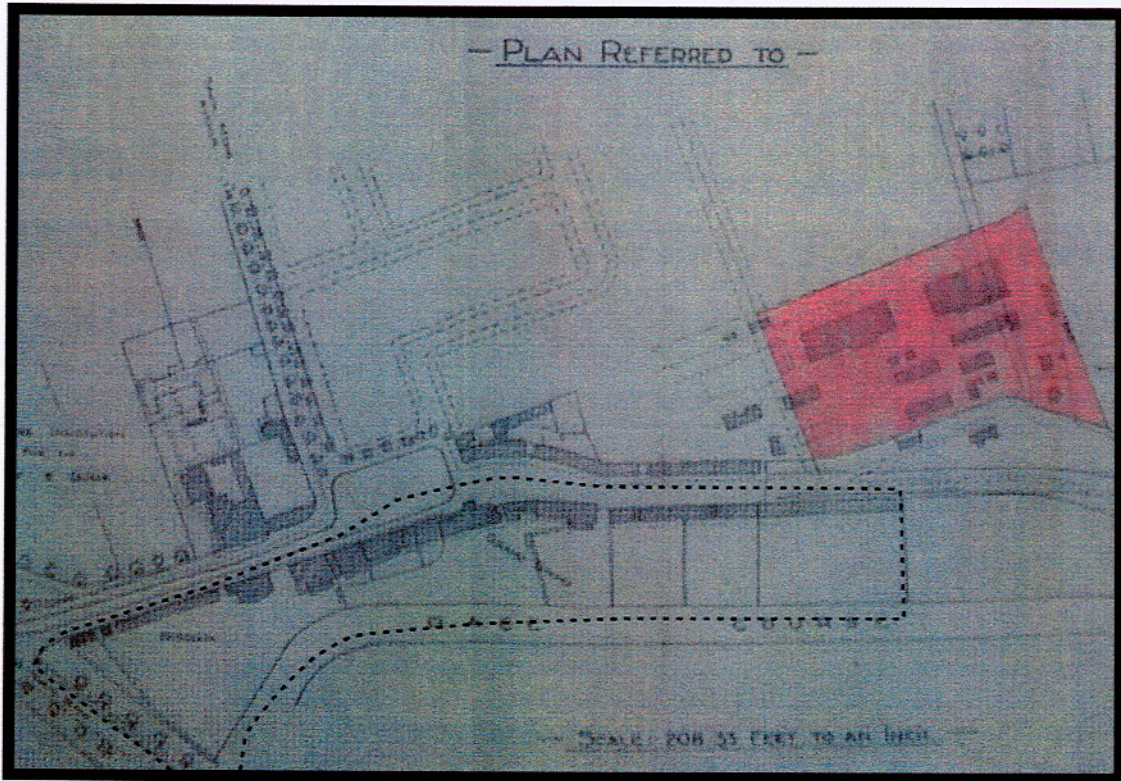


Figure 8 Proposed plans for the site dated 1924-6.
(Copied with kind permission of Doncaster Records Office AB/CLERK/6/1/1)

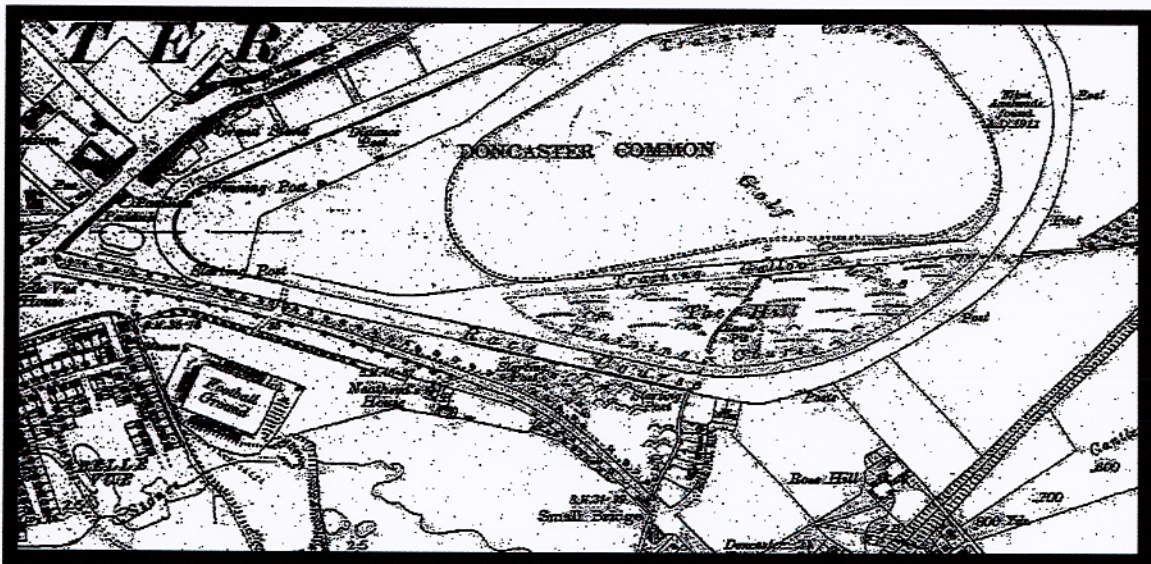


Figure 9 Extract from the Ordnance Survey map of 1931 (Sheet 285 NW)

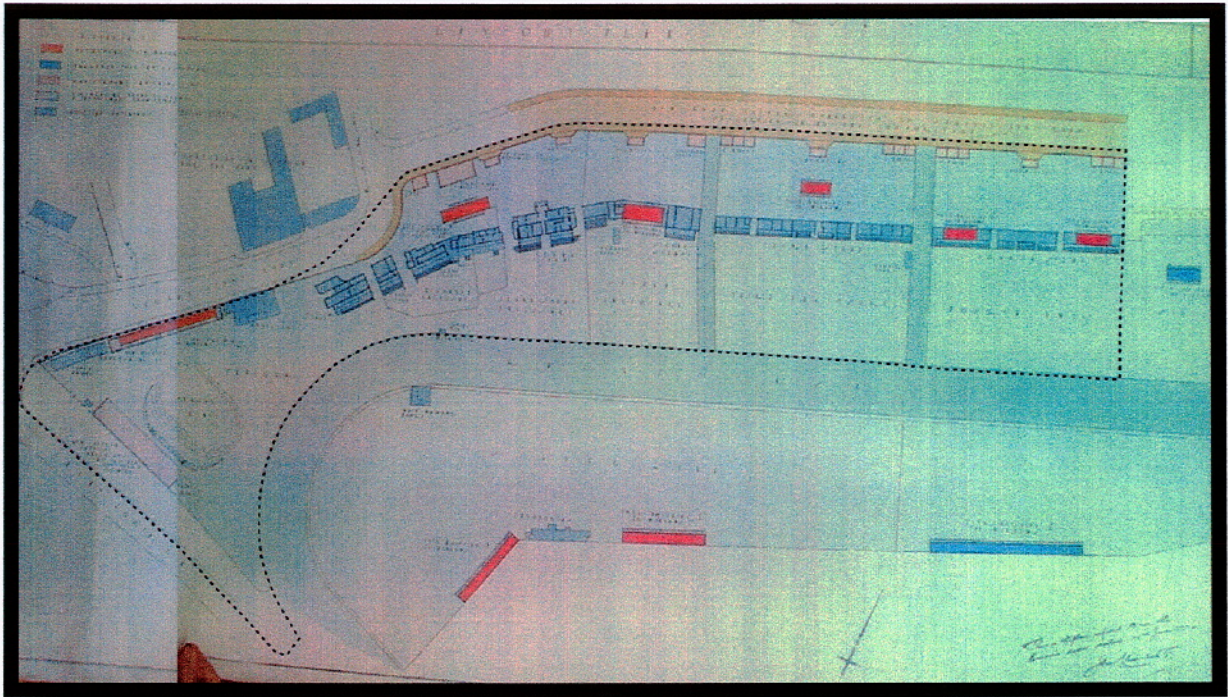


Figure 10 Plan showing the layout of the Tote buildings, 1934
 (Copied with kind permission of Doncaster Records Office AB/ARCH/1/818)

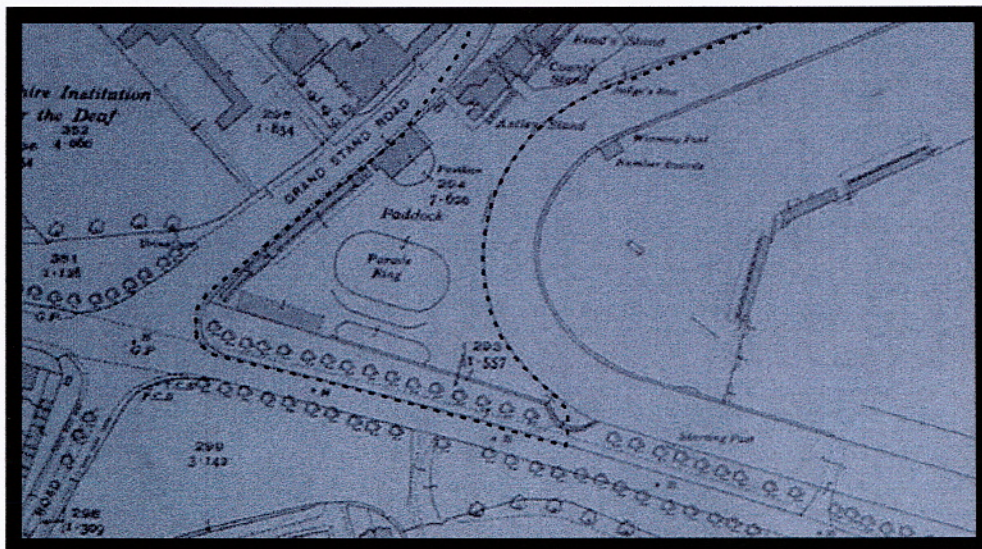


Figure 11 Extract from the 1937 Ordnance Survey revision.
 (Copied with kind permission of Doncaster Records Office DYMCM/3/258.2)



Plate 1 - General view of Saddling building. SW facing. Photo 150/20



Plate 2 - Rear of Saddling building. NE facing. Photo 109/26



Plate 3 - Detail of Saddling building roof. E facing. Photo 150/29



Plate 4 - Veterinary Block. General view looking West. Photo 150/19



Plate 5 - Veterinary Block interior. Iron roof support. Photo 150/15



Plate 6 - Accommodation Block. General shot facing North. Photo 110/36



Plate 7 - Accommodation Block. Brick detail on corner pillars of building. 110/34



Plate 8 - Accommodation Block. General view facing South. Photo 110/04



Plate 9 (above) - Ambulance Room interior showing treatment cubicles. Photo 110/18

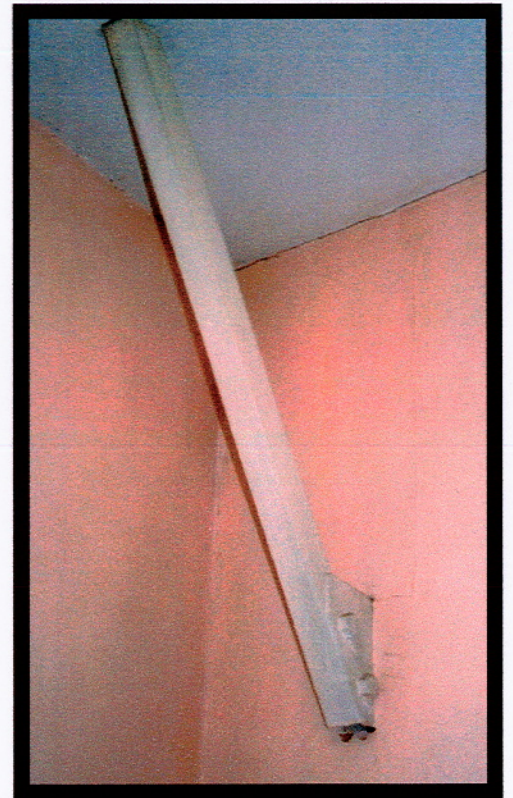


Plate 10 (right) - Accommodation block interior. Iron joist roof support. Photo 110/06



Plate 11 - Accommodation Block. Interior. General shot facing South down main corridor. Photo 110/14

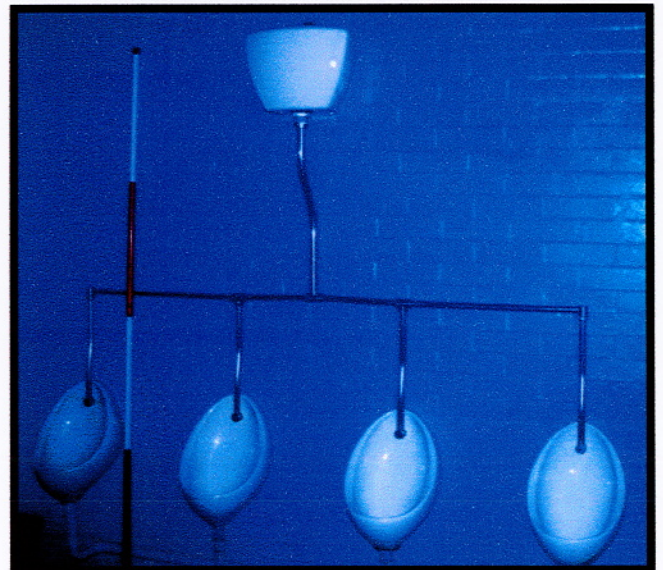


Plate 12 - Accommodation Block. Interior. Urinals in washroom. Photo 110/11