

Membury Airfield Hospital, Ermin Street, Lambourn Woodlands, West Berkshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Earls Court Farm Ltd

by James McNicoll-Norbury
Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Ltd

Site Code MHL 08/57

July 2008

Summary

Site name: Membury Airfield Hospital, Ermin Street, Lambourn Woodlands, West Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 3230 7560

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 20th - 25th June 2008

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Jamie Lewis and James McNicoll-Norbury

Site code: MHL 08/57

Area of site: 0.9 ha

Summary of results: No archaeological features were identified during fieldwork.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at West Berkshire Museum in due course.

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 04.08.08 Steve Preston✓ 06.08.08
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Report 08/57

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Membury Airfield Hospital, Ermin Street, Lambourn Woodlands, West Berkshire (SU 3230 7560) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Christopher Turner, of Dreweatt Neate, 16-18 Market Place, Newbury, RG14 5AZ on behalf of Earls Court Farm Limited.

Planning permission (app no 08/00259/FUL) has been gained from West Berkshire Council to demolish the existing structures on the site and construct a new agricultural building. The consent is subject to two conditions which require an archaeological watching brief to be carried out during groundworks for the new building and building recording prior to demolition of the former hospital complex. This report deals with the former; a report on the latter will be prepared separately.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and West Berkshire Council's policies on archaeology and the historic environment. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Duncan Coe, Archaeological Officer for West Berkshire Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Jamie Lewis and James McNicoll-Norbury between 20th and 25th June 2008, the site code is MHL08/57.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at West Berkshire Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the south side of Ermin Street (the modern B4000) to the east of the former airfield and just to the north of the M4 and to the south of Lambourn on the Berkshire Downs (Fig. 1). The site itself is located in the area known as Lambourn Woodlands. The underlying geology consists of clay with flints and tertiary debris overlying chalk (BGS 1947), which was observed across the site. The site lies at 195m above Ordnance Datum with a slight slope down to the north-west and more of a slope down to the south-west. The land was previously occupied by the old airfield hospital which has since been demolished, and an area of woodland that has been removed to make way for the new construction works (Fig. 2).

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site stems from its location adjacent to Ermin Street, which is the Roman road from Silchester to Cirencester (Margary 1973). It is possible therefore that Roman roadside settlement or burials may be present. It is also possible that traces of the Roman road traverse the site itself. In general the site lies on the archaeologically rich Berkshire Downs (Richards 1978) though the archaeology of the area of Lambourn Woodlands, which coincides with clay-with-flints capping the chalk, is relatively poorly known. The Iron Age hillfort of Membury lies 2km to the west but, otherwise, recorded observations comprise just a few stray finds of Roman pottery and prehistoric tools.

Two watching briefs carried out on sites also adjacent to the projected Roman road at Ivy Cottage and Stroud's Farm both located less than 1km to the east, did not reveal any deposits of archaeological interest (Ford 1996; Jenkins 2005).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to:

Excavate and record all archaeological deposits and features within the areas threatened by the proposed development;

Should the Roman road be located, to address research topics such as its date, alignment, form, method of construction and extent/date of any repairs. If other roadside activity was present, to determine the nature of this activity, such as whether it is for occupation, burial or some other form of roadside settlement such as official facilities. The relationship of such settlement to the road in terms of the stratigraphic succession could potentially be explored.

In general this was to involve examination of areas of topsoil stripping, landscaping, ground reduction and the digging of trenches for foundations and services as necessary.

Results

Following demolition of the former buildings, the full area of the site was stripped of overburden (topsoil/subsoil where present) that ranged between 0.10m and 0.37m thick, using a 360° machine under continuous archaeological supervision (Fig. 3). This exposed the natural clay-with-flints geology. Several areas of the site, mainly to the north-west, had been previously terraced to provide a level platform for the former buildings with ground reduction by as much as 1m, thus severely truncating the archaeologically relevant horizon.

The stripping , inevitably, revealed areas of disturbance associated with the former buildings on the site, in the form of service trenches and foundation trenches.

Despite the large area of exposed natural geology, no archaeological features or deposits were observed.

Finds

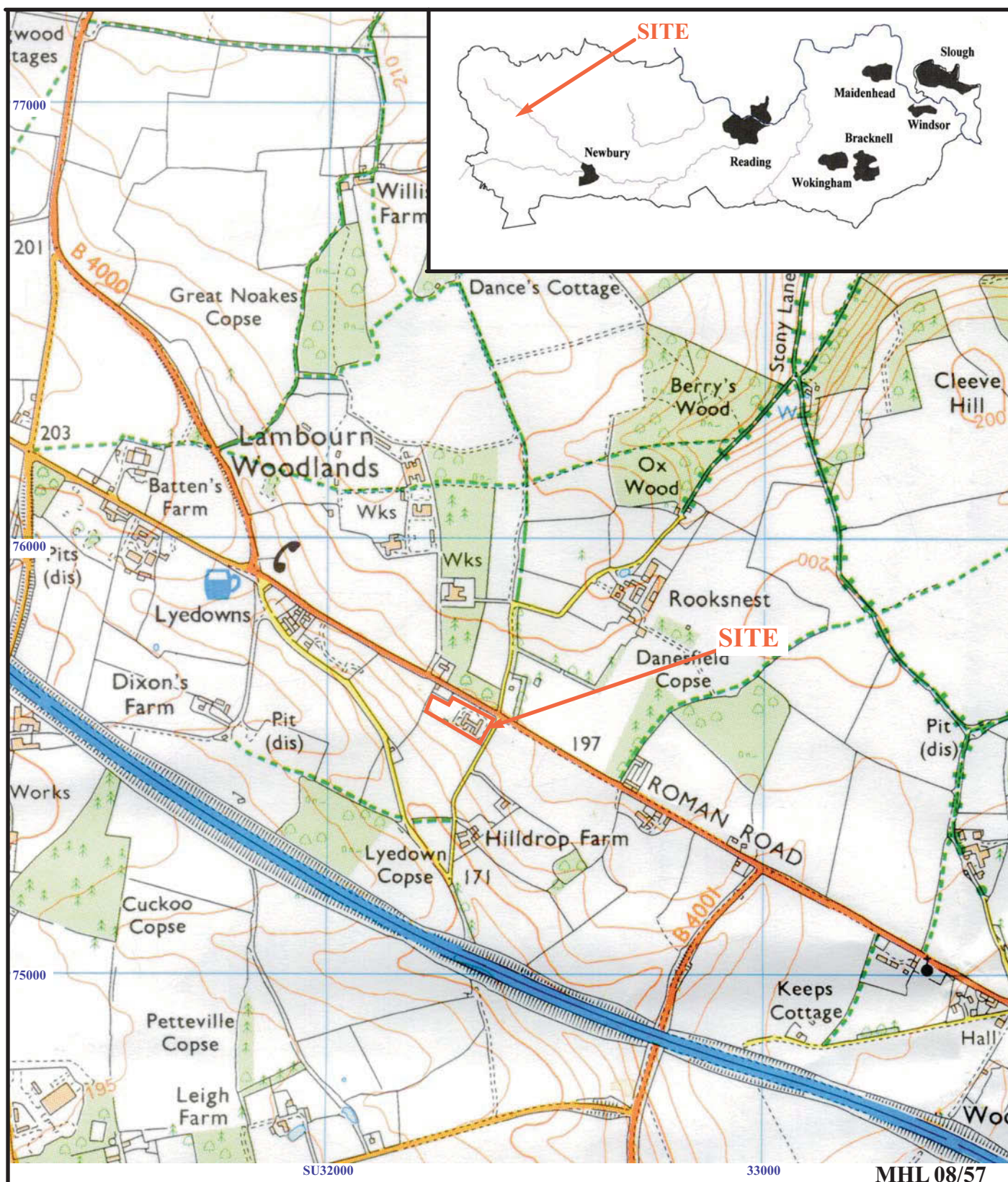
No finds of archaeological interest were retrieved from the site.

Conclusion

Despite the location of the site close to the projected line of Ermin Street Roman road, and the possibility of evidence of the road itself or other signs of Roman occupation, no archaeological features, finds or deposits were observed during the watching brief.

References

- BGS, 1947, *British Geological Survey*, 1:633360, Sheet 267, Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Ford, S, 1996, 'Stroud's Farm, Lambourn Woodlands, Berkshire, an archaeological watching brief', Thames Valley Archaeological Services rep 96/31, Reading
- Jenkins, P, 2005, 'Ivy Cottage, Ermin Street, Lambourn Woodlands, Berkshire, an archaeological watching brief', Thames Valley Archaeological Services rep 05/1171, Reading
- Margary, I D, 1973, *Roman Roads in Britain* (3rd edn), London
- PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO
- Richards, J C, 1978, *The Archaeology of the Berkshire Downs*, Berkshire Archaeol Comm Pubn 3, Reading

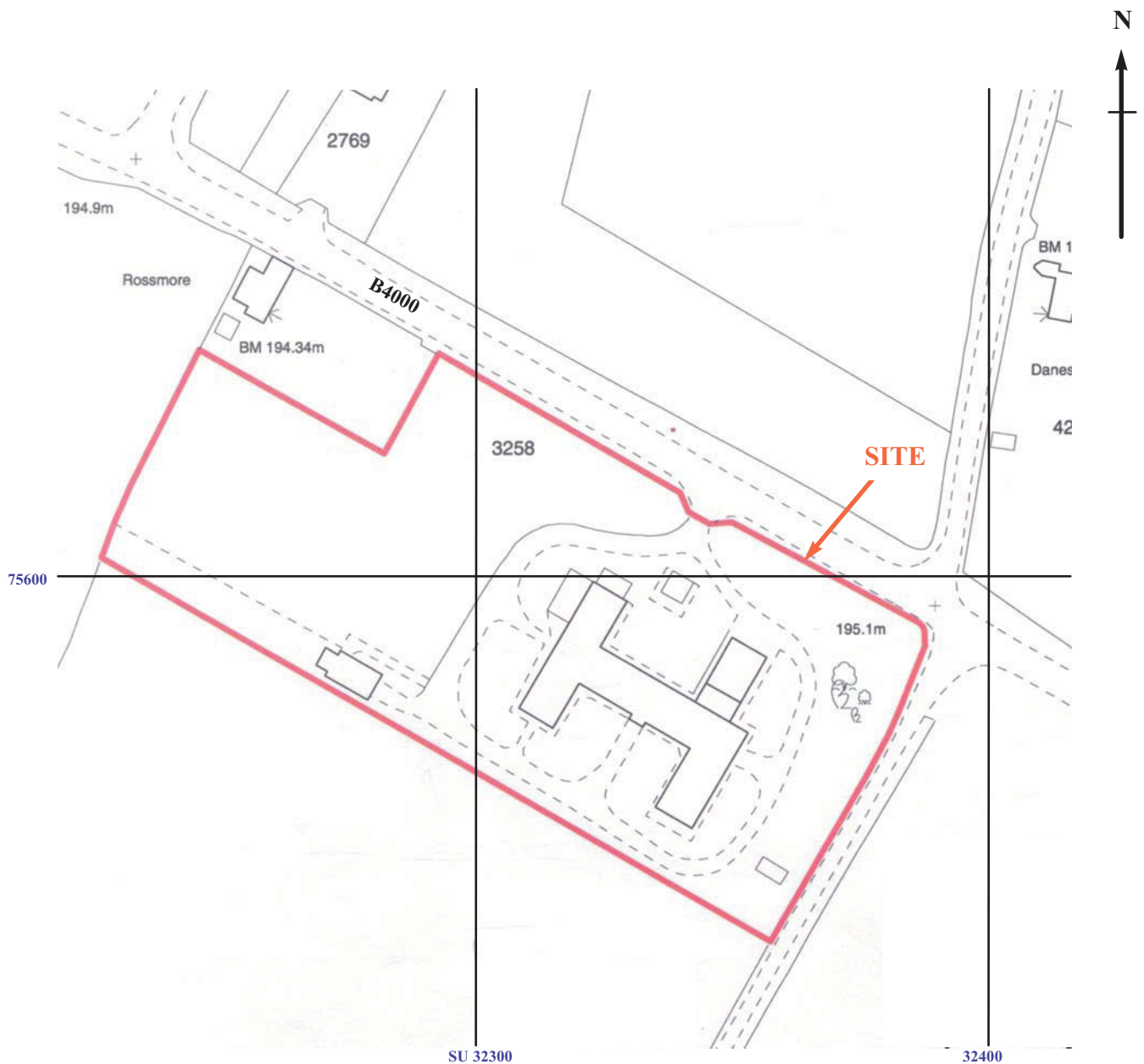


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Figure 1. Location of site within Lambourn
Woodlands and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site.

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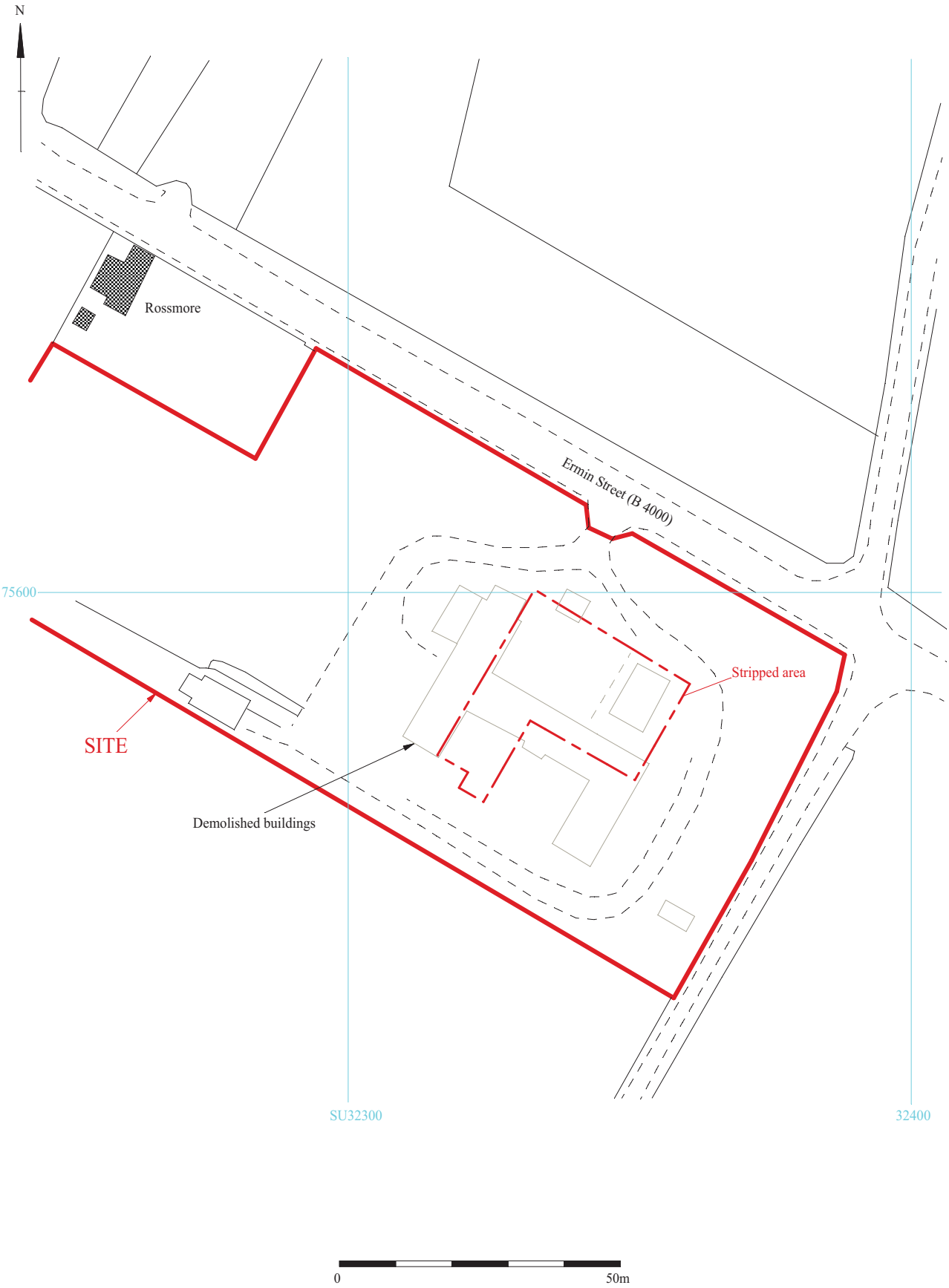


Figure 3. Location of areas observed during watching brief.