

**No. 15 Ashcroft Gardens, Cirencester, Gloucestershire
Archaeological Test Pit Evaluation**



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FIG. 1 SITE LOCATION PLAN

Cover photograph: The remains of a substantial stone wall in trench 2

Archaeological Test Pit Evaluation for No. 15 Ashcroft Gardens, Cirencester Gloucestershire.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Border Archaeology was commissioned by Mr and Mrs Lamble (No. 15 Ashcroft Gardens, Cirencester) to undertake archaeological work at No. 15 Ashcroft Gardens, Cirencester, GL7 1RD Gloucestershire. Proposed plans for the trench location were provided by Gloucestershire County Council Archaeological Service (Planning Department). The architect for the proposed development (Cotswold District Council planning reference CT 4156/A) was Ms.A. Jackson, 11 Princes Street, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL52 6EB.
- 1.2 An archaeological brief was prepared by Gloucestershire County Archaeology Service outlining an archaeological programme of work.
- 1.3 Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service (Contact: Mr Charles Parry) has highlighted that the area of proposed development as a potentially archaeologically sensitive area due to the presence of substantial Roman remains near by (see section 2). All archaeological work, incorporated into the planning proposal, is set within the non-statutory guidelines of Planning Policy Guidance 16.
- 1.4 The purpose of this test pit evaluation was to assess the nature of archaeological remains and to indicate any mitigation requirements following the evaluation. Included within this report is a brief study outlining the history and archaeology of the immediate area. Used for this study were relevant documentary sources and cartographic sources, as well as information retrieved from the Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR).
- 1.5 The evaluation required stringent on-site procedures that complied with present Health and Safety standards set by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), especially when excavating below 1.2m (below existing ground level).
- 1.6 The site was directed by George Nash. The day-to-day running of the project was undertaken by Neil Shurety. The project archaeologists were Paul Jones and James Archer.
- 1.7 A copy of this report will be submitted to the clients: Mr and Mrs Lamble, their agent Ms A. Jackson and Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service for approval. Further copies of this test pit evaluation report will be deposited with the Regional Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) and Cirencester Museum.
- 1.8 Mr and Mrs Lamble have expressed the desire for all finds area to remain in their possession.

2.0 LIMITED ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This limited archaeological and historic account establishes two main criteria: to recognise the position of nearby archaeological sites and to ascertain their depth. The buildings discovered within the town include the amphitheatre, the basilica, the bath-house, the forum (Tower Street), various commercial buildings, domestic dwellings, mosaics, sewers, shrines, temples and substantial sections of the city wall as well as an aqueduct and several cemeteries (Map 1).
- 2.2 The Roman city of Corinium Dobunorum, found on the River Churn contains some of the finest buildings ever discovered in Roman Britain. Based on coinage, Corinium dates from the 1st century AD; around AD 47 (Wacher 1974). The civilian settlement, covering approximately 240 acres, was established by AD 75 (Darvill 1988). Corinium was, as with other Roman towns and cities, built on a grid system. Three major Roman roads converged onto Corinium; the Fosse Way, Ermin Street and Akeman Street. According to Darvill (1988), Corinium became a wealthy place (judging by its high status public and private buildings).
- 2.3 Within the vicinity of Ashcroft Street and Gardens, a number of excavations have revealed a number of early (1st century) buildings and related features including the bath house and several buildings, probable dwellings with associated mosaics. Recorded on the 1900 and 1925 Ordnance Survey 25" maps (Maps 3 and 4) are a series of Roman remains recoded within the vicinity of Ashcroft Gardens including a 'Tesselated Pavement' (north of Ashcroft Road), a Roman Pavement (between Ashcroft Villas and Quern Lane); a 'Roman Bath' and 'Roman Alter and Reliefs' (found between Ashcroft Road and Ashcroft Villas); a 'Roman Villa' (found where Quern Lane, Cricklade Street and Lewis Lane converge) and a further 'Roman Villa' and 'Roman Well' (found south of Quern Street).
- 2.4 An excavation programme undertaken in 1964 at Ashcroft House, Lewis Lane revealed a number of fine mosaic floors. Two trenches were excavated within the garden area of Ashcroft House. Within these trenches, two mosaics showing mainly geometric forms were discovered. However, the report does not indicate the depth of each mosaic floor. Individual tesserae found within trench 2 of the August 2000 evaluation are similar in description to those found in the grounds of Ashcroft house (Wacher 1971:220). The materials used for individual tesserae are oolitic limestone (white tesserae) and Old Red Sandstone (purple tesserae). According to Wacher (ibid.) tesserae from the 1964 excavation derive from the locality with purple tesserae from the Forest of Dean. The mosaic floors from the 1964 excavation are 'without parallel in Britain' and probably date from the 1st or 2nd century AD (Wacher 1974).
- 2.5 According to Darvill (1988) the projected line of the linear street system of Roman Cirencester runs 20-23m north of present day Ashcroft Road and away from Ashcroft Gardens. Included within this study (and distribution map) were significant remains including a burial site (in Cricklade Street) various walls, mosaics and tessellated floors as well as stray finds.
- 2.6 The recent watching brief at 41 Ashcroft gardens (undertaken by Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service) appears to be the only available report which can determine secure levels for any Roman activity. Due to this report not yet being in the public domain, Border Archaeology was verbally informed of the necessary datum (1.4m b.e.g.l. to Roman activity) by the SMR officer (T.Grubb pers. com.). In trench 2 of the August 2000 evaluation, Roman activity was encountered at approximately 1.2m below the existing ground level.

3.0 GEOLOGY

- 3.1 The soils recorded within both trenches are typical (urban) garden soils - having a rich dark organic fraction. The surrounding drift geology according to the Soil Survey for England and Wales (1983) is of a ELMTON 343b which consist of a shallow well drained brashy calcareous fine loamy soil over (Jurassic) oolitic limestone. In trench 2 similar soils to the ELMTON 343b were recorded.

4.0 TEST PIT EVALUATION STRATEGY

- 4.1 The two trenches were located within the rear garden of No. 15 Ashcroft Gardens and form part the planning process to construct a building extension and garage to the rear of the property. The trench location plan was planned at 1:100 using existing architectural plans of the garden and the proposed development. The existing architect's plan was tied into the Ordnance Survey. Recording of the trench in plan and section was at a scale of 1:20. All features within each trench were drawn and photographed (using 35mm monochrome and colour transparency film).
- 4.2 The evaluation of each trench included a detailed stratigraphic record using a context number system (001 - 006) [Trench 1] and (001 - 012) [Trench 2]. Due to the sensitivity of the surrounding area, both trenches were excavated by hand.
- 4.3 All spoil was scanned for artifacts and recorded as unstratified.
- 4.4 Full written and drawn records of all excavated contexts were made in accordance with archaeological practices set out by the IFA and using the MoLas single-context planning system (where applicable).
- 4.5 A single temporary bench mark (TBM Value = 110.39m OD) was established on site (located close to the two trenches). A known Ordnance Survey Bench Mark of 110.70m OD was located in near by Cricklade Street. From the TBM, all surveying for both trenches was undertaken.
- 4.6 The evaluation programme commenced on the 16th of August and was completed by the 19th of August 2000. Health and Safety considerations dictated that both trenches were back-filled after the completion of the project.

5.0 TRENCH DESCRIPTION (see also Appendix 1)

- 5.1 This test pit evaluation consisted of two trenches, each measuring 1.5m x 1.5m (in plan). Trench 1 was excavated to a depth of 600mm whilst trench 2 was excavated to 1.2m. Trench 1 was located to the rear of the garden whilst trench 2 was located next to an outside toilet within a drive area. All services including domestic drainage were located prior to excavation.
- 5.2 *Trench 1* - In trench 1 six archaeological contexts ([001] to [006]) were recognised - all relating to 19th and 20th century garden activity. Context [001] was a highly organic grassed garden forming part of the rear lawn on the property. The lawn in this area was de-turfed (and replaced after the trench had been excavated and recorded). Directly underlying [001] was a loosely compacted light brown silty soil with frequent quantities of CBM, glass, 19th and 20th century glazed and unglazed earthenware and transfer china [002]. Also recovered was a single Roman pottery sherd (black burnished ware). This context forms part of the deposits of a rear garden domestic refuse area.
- 5.3 Cut into this deposit and located within the northern area of the trench was a loosely compacted light brown medium sandy soil with limestone pea-grit (graded) gravels with several fragments of blue slate and brick [003]. This feature formed part of a previously laid garden pathway. This feature extended into the east and west sections of the trench.
- 5.4 Underlying the pathway and context [002] was a loosely compacted dark-brown coarse sandy soil which extended across the trench. This deposit contained occasional limestone gravels and frequent quantities of 19th century pottery including glazed transfer cream wares, glazed earthen wares, unglazed earthen wares and several sherds of china. This deposit, associated with [002] forms part of an accumulative rear garden refuse area.
- 5.5 Underlying context [004] and extending across the trench was a loosely compacted dark brown yellow silty soil [005]. This accumulative soil contained large quantities of 19th and 20th century pottery including transfer ware and Beryl ware (c.1930). Also present within this context were a small number of fresh oyster shell fragments, cattle and chicken bone. This deposit forms part of rear garden refuse area. Underlying this context and forming the base of the trench was a further accumulative domestic refuse deposit [006]. This deposit consisted of a moderately compacted greyish-brown silty soil with frequent quantities of limestone and occasional pottery including one piece of Samian ware. Similar deposit to contexts [003], [004] and [005].
- 5.6 *Trench 2* consisted of 12 stratigraphic contexts. The trench measuring 1.5m x 1.5m in plan, was excavated to a depth of 1.2m (to the first significant archaeological horizon). The first two contexts, recently laid rear driveway surfaces ([001] and [002]) sealed the 19th century deposits relating to drainage and building debris. Underlying the driveway surfaces was a loosely compacted blackish-brown clayey silty soil [003] with frequent quantities of CBM including frogged brick fragments and occasional mortar flecks - probably 19th century in date. Also recovered were a number of Roman pottery sherds which appear to be residual in context. Although a large proportion of this context contained frequent quantities of building material, this soil can be interpreted as an accumulative garden soil (due to its high organic fraction).
- 5.7 Extending mainly across the north part of the trench was a lightly compacted yellow-brown coarse sandy colloidal soil [004]. Geologically, this soil has a rich oolitic limestone fraction with frequent rounded pebbles which are bonded by a calcium-carbonate (CaCO₃) cement. Archaeological inclusions include fragments of painted wall plaster. The painted plaster fragments, numbering 8 pieces were painted using white, maroon and yellow lacquers. Each fragment showed clear bush-strokes. It should be noted that this deposit was located within the 19th century building activity. It is probable that these fragments may be associated with plaster fragments found within [009] and therefore, Roman in date. The deposit can therefore be interpreted as a soil originating from a deeper (Roman) context which has been probably deposited during the construction of the 19th century dwelling which includes a cellar. Directly underlying [004] and extending across the trench was a loosely compacted blackish-

brown clayey silt soil with frequent quantities of CBM including frogged bricks and occasional mortar flecks - 19th century in date (and the same as context [003]). Recovered from this context were a number of 2nd and 3rd century Roman pottery sherds, these appear to be residual in context and may form part of the disturbance sequence whilst the present standing building was under construction.

- 5.8 Directly below the 19th century deposits and extending across the northern section of the trench was a thin layer black fine sandy-silt deposit [006]. This deposit measures approximately 0.05-0.10m in thickness and clearly separates the 19th century activity from the Roman contexts below. Within this context were frequent amounts of charcoal. It is difficult to ascertain whether or not this deposit is either Roman or late Post-Medieval in date. It should be noted that no modern debris was recovered below this context.
- 5.9 Located within the south-eastern area of the trench was a lightly compacted brownish-yellow course sandy soil with frequent limestone gravels (graded 10-25mm) and several sherds of Roman black burnished ware [007]. This deposit forms part of what can be described as a wall collapse - directly relating to a three course partially standing building [011]. Underlying [007] was a compacted yellow-brown course sandy mortar which has been cemented through natural processes with calcium carbonate (CaCO_3), secreted from large fragments of oolitic limestone (found within this context). Inclusions include large limestone (graded) boulders and stones. Both [007] and [008] are located between 109.24m and 109.22m OD and form part of the wall collapse (associated with the wall [011]).
- 5.10 The most important discovery in this trench was the remains of a substantial limestone faced wall [011]. The collapse of this wall is recorded with contexts [007] and [008]. However, these two contexts can be arguably attributed to long term decaying process. Taking this into consideration, context [009] appears to indicate a more rapid destruction process. This deposit, located within the western area of the trench, consisted of a moderately compacted dark brown-yellow course sandy soil with frequent limestone fragments and gravels. Within this deposit were several sherds of Roman pottery and fragments of painted wall plaster. The fragments were painted similarly to plaster found in context [004]. In addition to the colours painted on the plaster and recorded in [004] was a light blue.
- 5.11 Immediately below this and located within the north-eastern area of the trench and abutting the wall [011] was a moderately compacted greyish-brown clay soil with moderate mortar and charcoal flecking and two sherds of Roman pottery including one piece of (undecorated) red Samian ware and eight sherds of black and grey wares. This deposit ranges from 108.72m OD (highest) to 108.37m OD (lowest) - forming the base of the excavation trench. Immediately south of the deposit, and located in the central and southern areas of the trench and oriented NE/SW, was a substantial limestone wall. The bonding material consisted of a yellow-white lime mortar. On the northern side of the wall the stones have been faced, whilst of internal section of wall appears to have been backfilled with mortared stone. Stones on the northern face were arranged longitudinally against the line of the wall suggesting deliberate coursing. The southern line of the wall was not present (in plan) in the trench. However, prior to backfilling the trench, a small area of the section was excavated to reveal the edge of the wall. As well as the edge of the wall, a number of tesserae (various colours) were recovered. This wall probably forms part of a substantial building, possibly a public building. It should be noted that within a 50m radius of the site there have been a number of public buildings discovered which belong to Roman Cirencester (Corinium Dobunorum). These include a courtyard dwelling with mosaics (SMR No. 8894, SAM 361), Roman mosaics (SMR No. 8944, SAM 361) and the Roman bath house (SAM 361).
- 5.12 The final context recorded in this trench and located within the southern area of the trench and above the wall was a compacted yellow-brown course sandy mortar which has been cemented through natural processes (with calcium carbonate - CaCO_3) deriving from large fragments of oolitic limestone. Inclusions include large limestone (graded) boulders and stones. Similar to context [008] and forming part of the wall collapsing process.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Of the two trenches excavated, trench 2 revealed substantial archaeological remains including a large stone wall. This wall and its associated deposits can be considered as highly significant to the Roman fabric of Cirencester; especially when considering that Roman bath house and a series of private dwellings with mosaics were found within a 50m radius of the trench.
- 6.2 The following recommendations for this site are based on existing architect's plans. The deposits in trench 1, excavated to 600mm cannot be considered significant and therefore any building impacting to this depth should pose no threat to any potential archaeological remains, especially those excavated by Dr John Wacher in 1964 at nearby Ashcroft House (Wacher 1971).
- 6.3 If the present plans to excavate to 1.8m in and around trench 2 are to be implemented, a section of a substantial Roman building would be severely impacted as the proposed building line follows the line of the Roman wall [011]. In order to preserve *insitu* these remains, as discussed with the architect and Mr and Mrs Lamble, the proposed plans will require either a) the realignment of the proposed development (to at least 0.30m north of the wall) and/or the footings for the proposed building to not exceed 1.1m. In both cases, it is recommended that at the very least an archaeological watching brief is implemented whilst construction work is in progress.

7.0 COPYRIGHT

- 7.1 Border Archaeology shall retain full copyright of any commissioned reports, tender documents or other project documents, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 with all rights reserved; excepting that it hereby provides an exclusive licence to the client for the use of the report by the client in all matters directly relating to the project as described in the Project Specification.

8.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Darvill, T. (1988) Cirencester - Archaeological assessment. Cotswold District Council.

Gloucestershire Sites & Monuments Record - Summary Record for sites 8431, 8434, 8894, 8944, 8945, 9186, 11377, 12632, 14638 & 20706.

Rivet, A.L.F & Smith, C. (1979) The Place-Names of Roman Britain. London. BCA

Soil Survey of England and Wales (1983) Silsoe.

Wacher, J. S. (1971) Corinium. London

Wacher, J. S. (1974) The Towns of Roman Britain. London. BCA

8.1 CARTOGRAPHIC SOURCES

Cirencester 1937-8 Tithe Map

Ordnance Survey 1900 25". 1st Edition

Ordnance Survey 1925 25". 1st Edition

FIG. 1 PLAN OF TRENCH 1

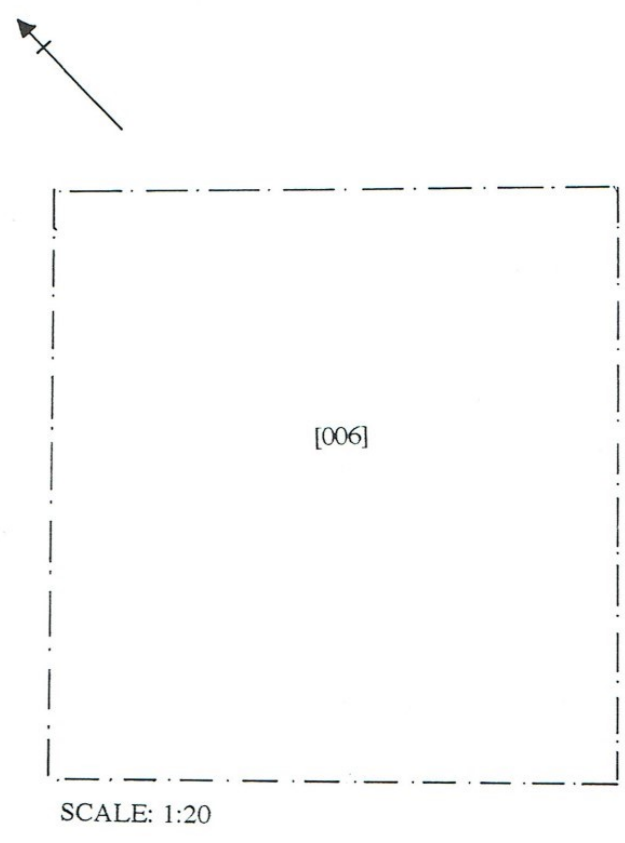
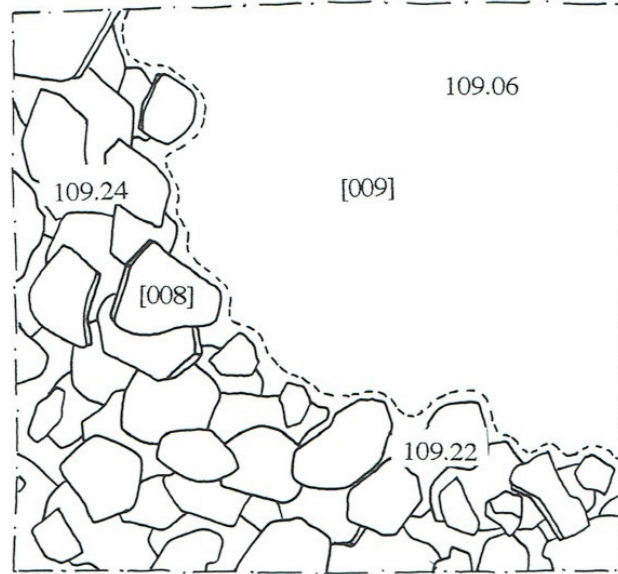
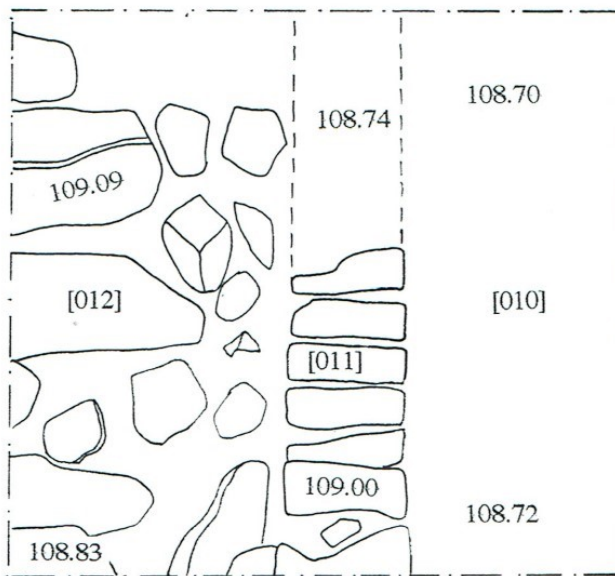


FIG. 2 PLAN OF TRENCH 2



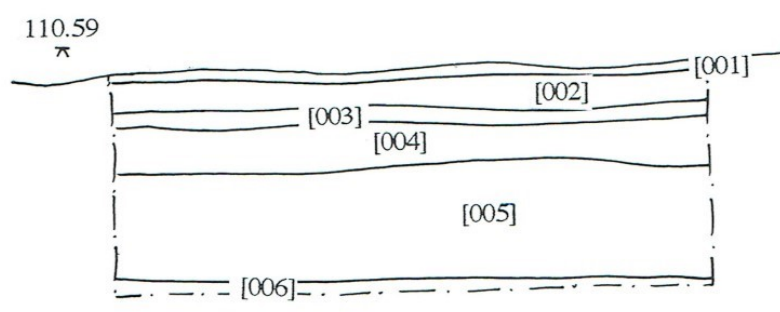
SCALE: 1:20



SCALE: 1:20



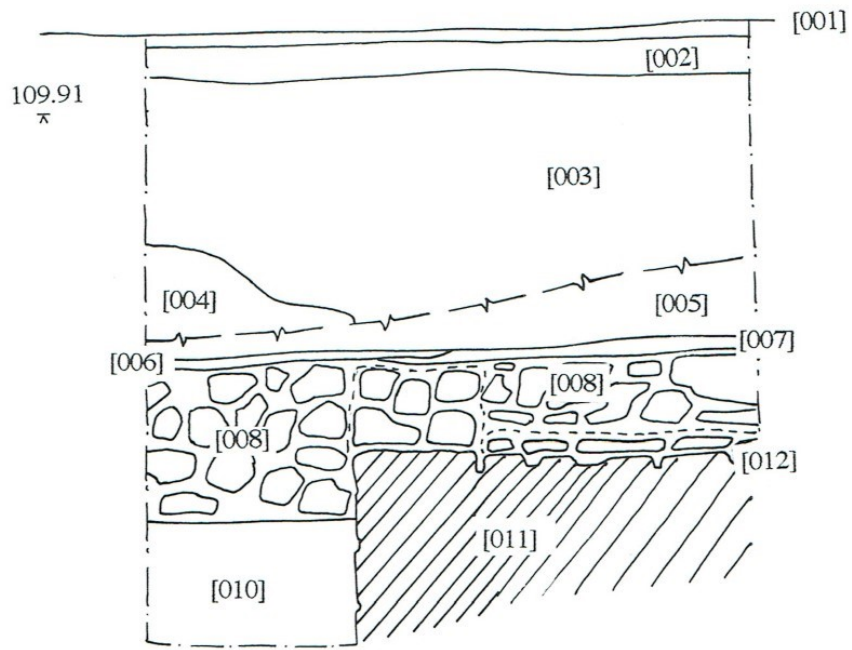
FIG. 3 SECTION OF TRENCH 1



SCALE: 1:20

South-west Facing Section

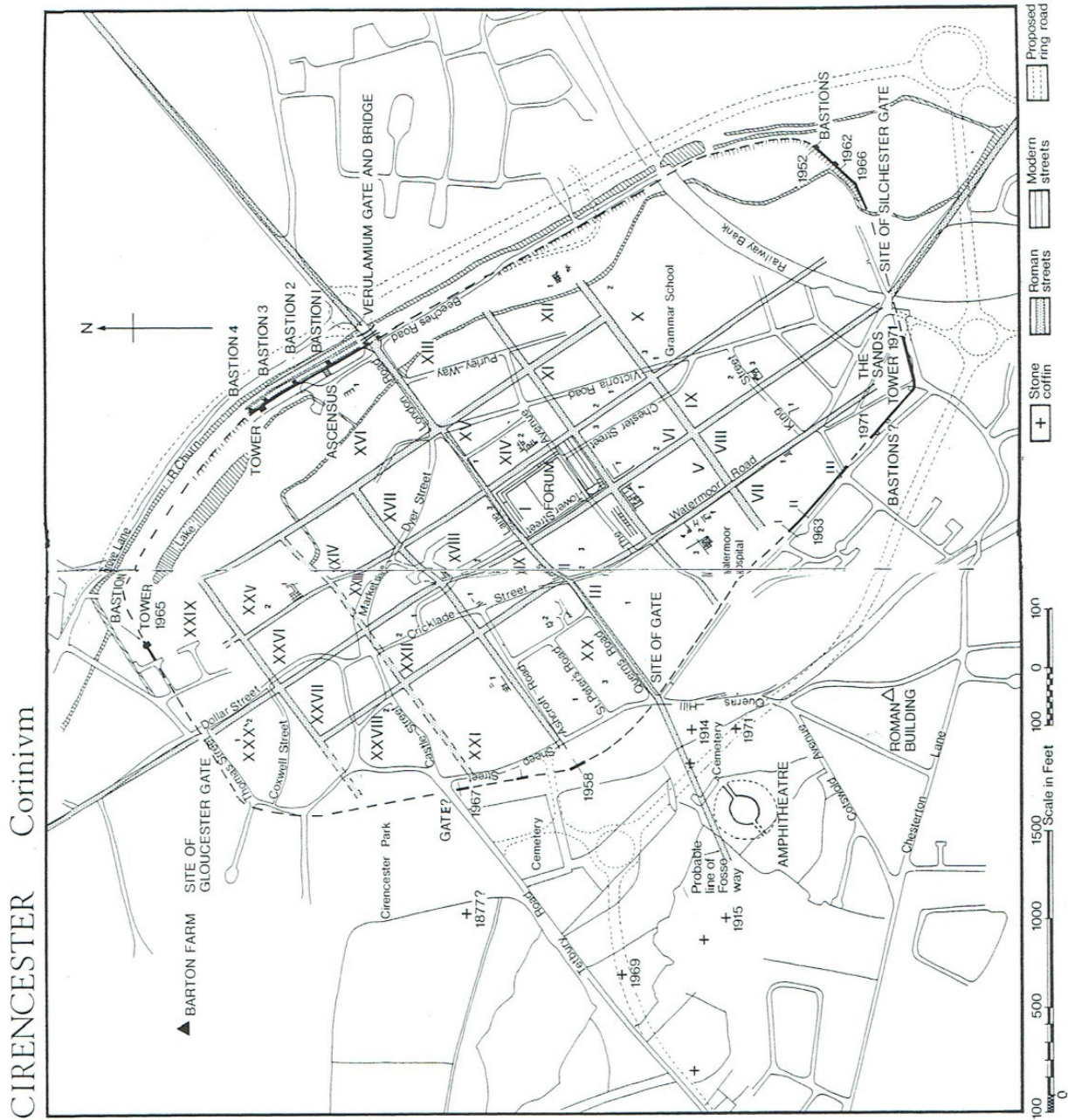
FIG. 4 SECTION OF TRENCH 2



SCALE: 1:20

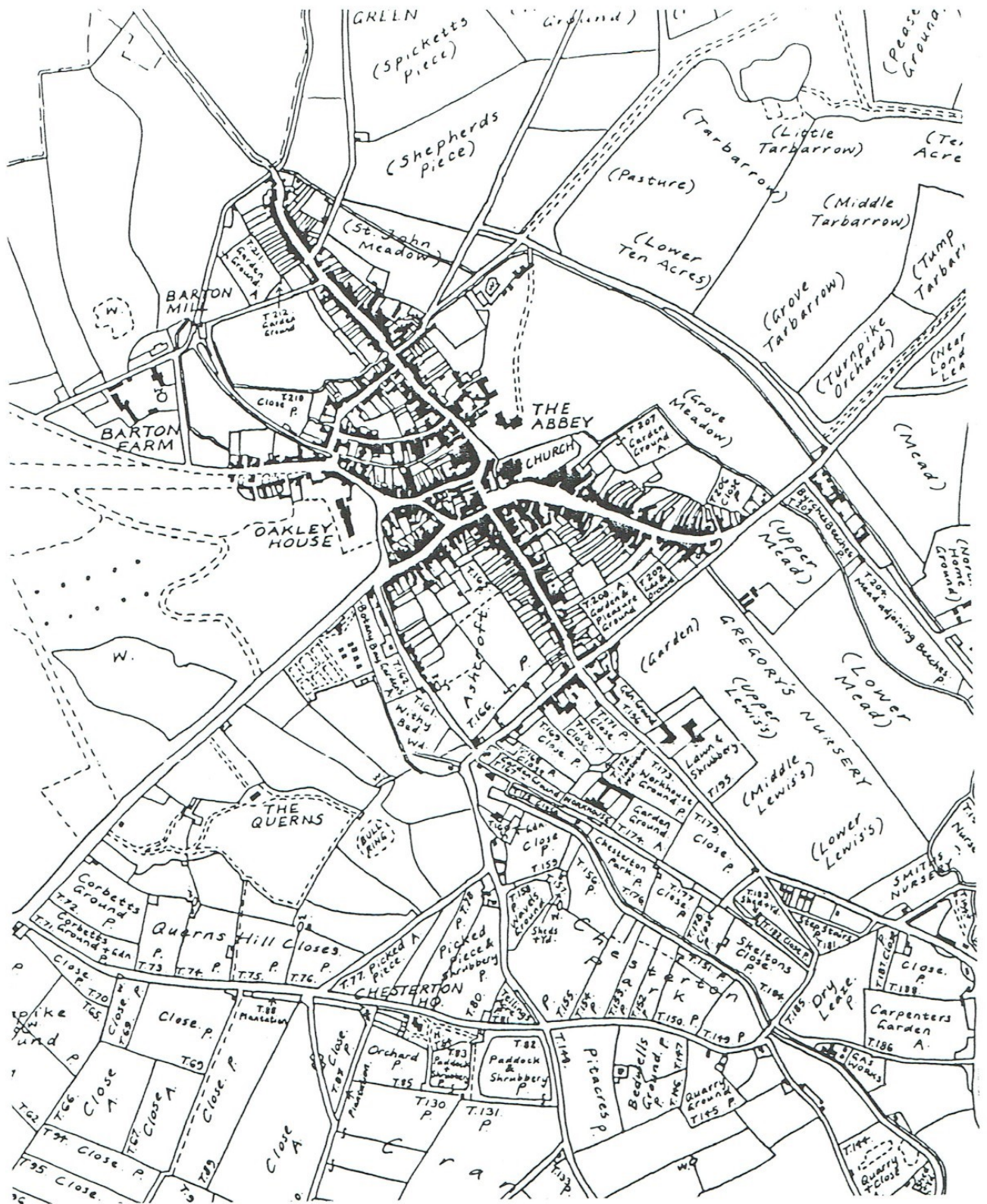
North-west Facing Section

MAP 1. PLAN OF ROMAN CIRENCESTER (AFTER WACHER 1974)

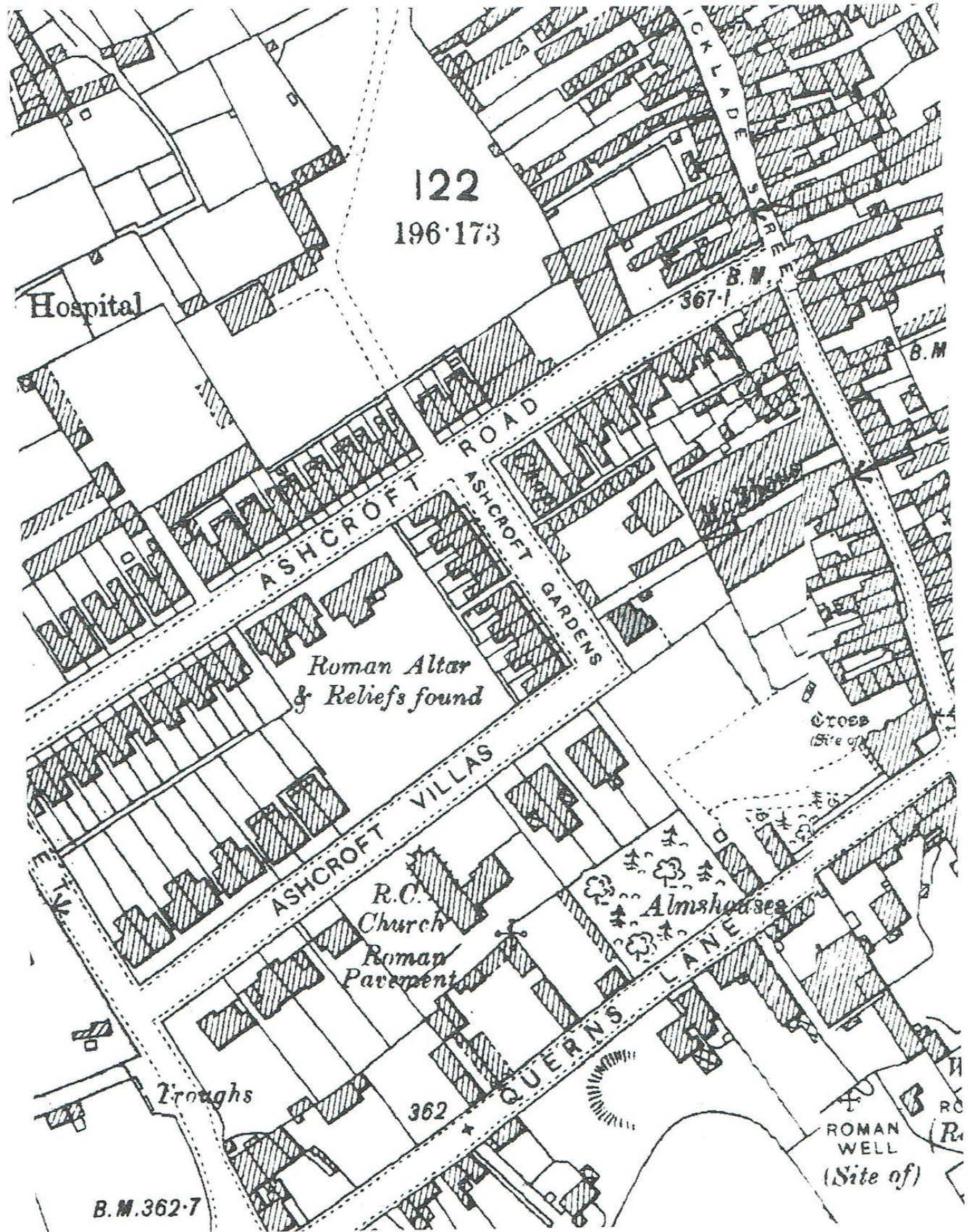


CIRENCESTER Corinium

MAP 2. 1837-8 TITHE MAP OF CIRENCESTER

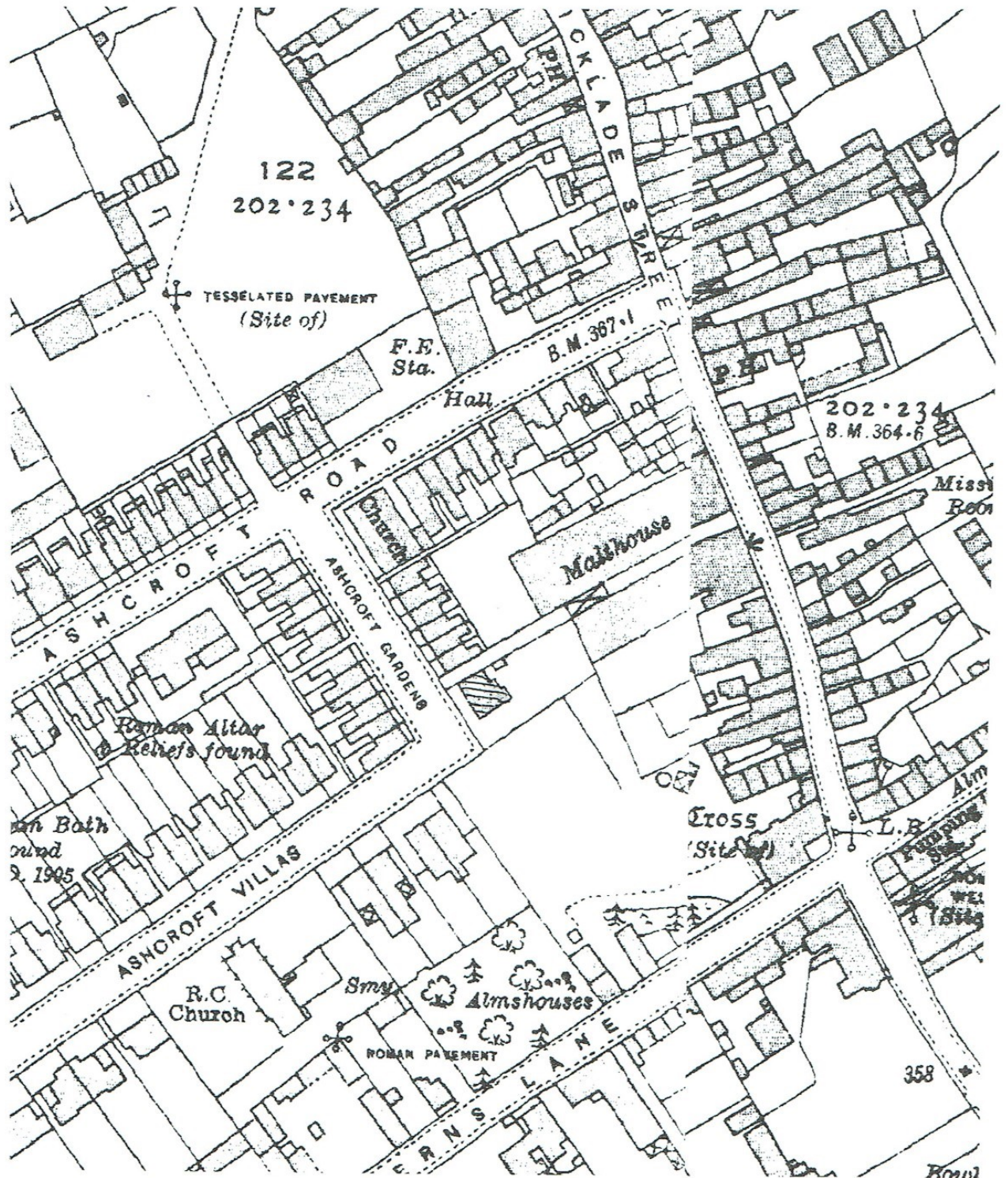


MAP 3. 1900 ORDNANCE SURVEY 25' 1ST EDITION



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MAP 4. 1925 ORDNANCE SURVEY 25" 1ST EDITION



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PLATE 1. TRENCH 1 SOUTH-FACING SECTION OF TRENCH 1



PLATE 2 EXPOSED WALL WITH FACED MASONRY [011] AND SONDAGE



APPENDIX 1 - CONTEXT DESCRIPTION

TRENCH 1

- CONTEXT [001] Highly organic garden soil - grassed - with no inclusions.
- INTERPRETATION: Garden lawn in rear garden of No. 15 Ashcroft Gardens.
- CONTEXT [002] Loosely compacted light brown silty soil with frequent quantities of CBM, glass, 19th and 20th century earthenware and china and one Roman pottery sherd.
- INTERPRETATION: Recent accumulative garden soil with typical garden deposits, possibly forming a domestic refuge area.
- CONTEXT [003] Located within the northern area of the trench was a loosely compacted light brown medium sandy soil with limestone pea-grit (graded) gravels with several fragments of blue slate and brick.
- INTERPRETATION: Forming part of a recently laid garden pathway.
- CONTEXT [004] Loosely compacted dark-brown coarse sandy soil extending across the trench with occasional limestone gravels and frequent amounts of 19th century pottery including glazed transfer earthen wares and china.
- INTERPRETATION: Accumulative garden deposits forming part of a rear garden refuge area.
- CONTEXT [005] Extending across the trench was a loosely compacted dark brown yellow silty soil with large quantities of 19th and 20th pottery including transfer wares and Beryl ware (c.1930). Also present within this context were a number of fresh oyster shells, cattle and chicken bone which may be residual in context.
- INTERPRETATION: Accumulative garden deposits forming part of a rear garden refuge area (Associated with [003],[004] and [006]).
- CONTEXT [006] Moderately compacted greyish-brown silty soil with frequent quantities of limestone and occasional pottery including one piece of Samian ware.
- INTERPRETATION: Accumulative garden deposits forming part of a rear garden refuge area (Associated with [003], [004] and [005]).

TRENCH 2 - contexts have been prefixed by 2 i.e. 2001

- CONTEXT [001] Extending across the rear access of the site is a tarmac surface measuring 0.05m in thickness.
- INTERPRETATION: Rear driveway for No. 15 Ashcroft Gardens.
- CONTEXT [002] Extending across the rear access of the site is a concrete surface measuring approximately 0.10m in thickness. Associated with this and included in the same context as the concrete is a thin hard-core layer.
- INTERPRETATION: Earlier rear driveway surface for No. 15 Ashcroft Gardens.
- CONTEXT [003] Underlying the two driveway surfaces was a loosely compacted blackish-brown clayey silty soil with frequent quantities of CBM including frogged bricks and occasional mortar flecks - probably 19th century in date. Also recovered were a number of 2nd and 3rd century Roman pottery sherds and several pieces of tesserae which appear to be residual in context.
- INTERPRETATION: Building debris with accumulative garden soil activity.

- CONTEXT [004] Lightly compacted yellow-brown course sandy colloidal soil. Geologically, this soil has a rich oolitic limestone fabric with frequent rounded pebbles which are bonded by a CaCO_3 cement. Archaeological inclusion include fragments of painted wall plaster. The painted plaster fragments were painted in white, maroon and yellow. Each fragment showed clear bush-strokes. It should be noted that this deposit appears to be located within the 19th century building activity. It is probable that these fragments are associated with plaster fragments found within [009] and therefore are probably Roman in date.
- INTERPRETATION: Disturbed soil originating from a deeper (Roman) context.
- CONTEXT [005] Underlying this deposit and extending the trench in plan was a loosely compacted blackish-brown clayey silty soil with frequent quantities of CBM including frogged bricks and occasional mortar flecks - probably 19th century in date - same as [003]. Recovered from this context were a number of 2nd and 3rd century Roman pottery sherds and several pieces of tesserae - residual in context.
- INTERPRETATION: Forming part of the 19th century building and garden soil activity of the site.
- CONTEXT [006] Underlying the 19th century activity (associated with the present building) was a thin layer black fine sandy-silt deposit which partially extended across the north-western part of the trench. The deposit measures approximately 0.05-0.10m in thickness. This deposit clearly separates the 19th century activity with the Roman contexts below. Within this context were frequent amounts of charcoal. It should be noted context [004] which above this context may have derived from below [006] hence why the burning only extends partially across the trench (in plan).
- INTERPRETATION: This deposit is probably associated with Roman activity rather than later 19th century [001] - [005].
- CONTEXT [007] Located within the south-eastern area of the trench was a lightly compacted brownish-yellow course sandy soil with frequent limestone gravels (graded 10-25mm) and occasional Roman black wares.
- INTERPRETATION: This deposit forms part of the collapsing process of an underlying (Roman) building [011].
- CONTEXT [008] Underlying [007] is a compacted yellow-brown course sandy mortar which has been cemented through natural processes with CaCO_3 deriving from large fragments of oolitic limestone. Inclusions include large limestone (graded) boulders and stones. Both [007] and [008] are located between 109.24m and 109.22m OD.
- INTERPRETATION: Forming part of the collapsing process of the wall [011].
- CONTEXT [009] Located within the western area of the trench was a moderately compacted dark brown-yellow course sandy soil with frequent limestone fragments, gravels and several sherds of Roman pottery and fragments of painted wall plaster (same as [004]).
- INTERPRETATION: This deposit is associated with the final use/destruction phase of the building (wall).
- CONTEXT [010] Located within the north-eastern area of the trench and abutting the wall [011] was a moderately compacted greyish-brown clay soil with moderate mortar and charcoal flecking and several sherds of Roman pottery including one piece of (undecorated) red Samian ware and eight sherds of back and grey wares. This deposit ranges from 108.72m OD (highest) to 108.37m OD (lowest).

INTERPRETATION: Naturally accumulative soil abutting wall.

CONTEXT [011] Within the central and southern areas of the trench and oriented NE/SW was a substantial limestone bonded wall. The bonding material consisted of a yellow-white lime mortar. On the northern side of the wall the stones have been faced, whilst of internal section of wall appears to have been backfilled with mortared stone. Stones on the northern face were arranged longitudinally against the line of the wall suggesting deliberate coursing. The southern line of the wall was not present (in plan) in the trench.

INTERPRETATION: Wall forming part of a substantial building, possibly a public building.

CONTEXT [012] Within the southern area of the trench and located above the wall was a compacted yellow-brown course sandy mortar which has been cemented through natural processes with CaCO_3 deriving from large fragments of oolitic limestone. Inclusions include large limestone (graded) boulders and stones. Similar to context [008].

INTERPRETATION: Forming part of the collapsing process of the wall [011].

FIG. 1 SITE LOCATION PLAN

(annotated from architect's plans and placed into existing OS grid)

