

Northamptonshire Archaeology

An archaeological watching brief at
Bond Street, Coventry
West Midlands
November 2005



Danny McAree

July 2006

Report 06/11

Northamptonshire Archaeology

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	Belgrade Theatre, Coventry	
Short description (250 words maximum)	An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology in Bond Street, Coventry, during the excavation of a shaft to facilitate repairs to a deep bored sewer. A section of the late medieval town wall with a possible foundation for a buttress was exposed, together with the buried medieval topsoil from the time of construction.	
Project type	Watching Brief	
Site status		
Previous work	Belgrade Theatre Watching Brief 2005 Belgrade Plaza Excavation 2005	
Current Land use	Public road.	
Future work	No	
Monument type/ period	Late medieval town wall and buttress.	
Significant finds	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Warwickshire	
Site address	Bond Street, Coventry	
Study area (sq.m or ha)	65m ²	
OS Easting & Northing	43311 27924	
Height OD	80.21m AOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Severn Trent Water	
Project brief originator	Chris Patrick, Coventry City Council	
Project Design originator		
Director/Supervisor	Danny McAree	
Project Manager	Iain Soden	
Sponsor or funding body	Severn Trent Water	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	7 th November 2005	
End date	28 th November 2005	
ARCHIVES	Location	Content
Physical		Pottery, Bone, environmental samples
Paper		Report, drawings and photos
Digital		
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title		
Serial title & volume		
Author(s)		
Page numbers		
Date		

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT
BOND STREET, COVENTRY,
WARWICKSHIRE
NOVEMBER 2005
REPORT 06/11**

Abstract

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology at Bond Street, Coventry, Warwickshire, during emergency excavations for an access shaft to repair a deep bored sewer 8m below the modern road surface. An area 9m by 7m was excavated across Bond Street, to allow the construction of a concrete 'collar' supporting a 5m wide pre-cast concrete section shaft.

At the north of the trench, a 6m length of the sandstone medieval town wall, 2m wide and 1.6m high was exposed. Immediately to the south of the wall and at right angles to it was another sandstone wall, 1m wide, 2.2m long and 1.7m high. This appears to have been a buttress at the rear of the town wall. Both features were cut into a medieval soil and sub-soil buried below later build-up of the site. The excavated area had been heavily truncated by the insertion of modern drainage and service pipes and cable trenches. No other archaeological features were observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology on part of Bond Street, immediately to the east of the Belgrade Theatre extension, Coventry (Fig 1; NGR SP 3311 7924).

The work was undertaken in response to a brief prepared by Chris Patrick, Planning Archaeologist for Coventry City Council relating to a requirement to carry out emergency sewer repairs on a deep bored sewer on the site of the adjoining Belgrade Theatre development (Fig 1).

2 BACKGROUND

Early development of Coventry

There is little evidence of early activity in the historic core of Coventry before the medieval period. Random finds indicate low intensity activity in the area in the prehistoric and Roman periods.

Burials beneath the later Benedictine Priory can be dated to the 9th century and there are indications of developing settlement in the late Saxon period with the discovery of pottery and stonework in the city centre, and of 10th century pottery from the adjoining Belgrade Plaza excavation (McAree et al forthcoming).

The first recorded event in Coventry's history was the founding of a Benedictine monastery, consecrated in 1043 by Earl Leofric of Mercia and his wife, Lady Godiva.

The town that developed around the religious house quickly grew to considerable economic importance and drew the support of the Earls of Chester who built a castle on the high point of the town in Broadgate. The city grew on its craft skills particularly in the making of cloth, but incorporating all the supporting crafts of furriers, tanning, dying, felting, and horn, bone and metal making associated with the cloth and clothes trades. In addition, the underlying Keuper Marl clays and coal seams provided ideal conditions for the development of tile and pottery industries in Hillfields, Stoke and Potters Green. Pottery is also known from Cannon Park.

By the 14th century, the expanding town had attracted other religious orders, the Franciscans (at Greyfriars), the Carmelites (at Whitefriars) and the Carthusians (at Charterhouse). Other religious orders owned land in the city, particularly the Cistercians (at Coombe Abbey) who had granges (farms) at Binley, Ernsford Grange and Canley. The wealth of the city and civic pride were expressed in the construction of a defensive wall with twelve gates and twenty towers. Royal patronage was acknowledged by the deliberate incorporation of the royal manor at Cheylesmore within the circuit of the walls.

By the early 16th century, other cities had encroached on Coventry's markets and with the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539, the city went into serious economic decline.

During the Civil War of 1642-1651, Coventry's strategic central location and its defensible walls made it a stronghold for the parliamentary forces. It was unsuccessfully besieged by the King in the first year of the war, and was used to hold prisoners of war from 1648.

With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 following the period of the commonwealth, King Charles II ordered the town walls to be made indefensible, the city having fought on the 'wrong' side in the conflict.

The town wall

The site lies within the carriageway of Bond Street that extends from the junction with Hill Street in the west to Upper Well Street at the east. Both Hill Street and (Upper) Well Street are recorded in the early records of the city. The junction with Hill Street was originally the location of one of the city gates, as was the junction with (Upper) Well Street.

The line of modern day Bond Street clearly follows the line of the town wall between the two gates as shown on early maps.

John Speed's Map of 1610 shows the city with its defences at the beginning of the 17th century. A prospect of the city by Wenceslaus Hollar in 1656 shows the city defences still intact after the war. Samuel Bradford's Map of 1750 (surveyed 1748) shows much of the walls destroyed being marked '*In Ruins*'. On this map, the original line of the wall at the location of modern Bond Street is marked as '*A Foot way on ye Ruin of the Wall*'. The modern carriageway has clearly been laid over the remnants of the original medieval defences.

Coventry is located on the River Sherbourne, a tributary of the Warwickshire Avon. The Sherbourne lies some 500m to the south of Bond Street and is fed by the Radford Brook that flows south into the city, crossing the line of Bond Street beneath the new Belgrade Theatre extension. In 1451, the brook is believed to have been culverted beneath the town wall, under a tower fitted with a 'spayer' or sluice, so that the flow could be diverted into the ditch to create a more defensible obstacle should the need arise (Soden 2005).

A watching brief on the Belgrade Theatre development in 2005 (Mason, Thorne and Webster) revealed sandstone foundations that may have formed part of this structure.

Although badly damaged by modern service trenches, a 2m wide sandstone wall with substantial foundations and some facing stones was also revealed and marked the original line of the town wall beneath the modern road. Excavations in 2005 (McAree et al forthcoming) in advance of the Belgrade Plaza development along the northern side of Bond Street near its junction with Hill Street revealed the town ditch, 12m wide and 3.5m deep running parallel to the modern carriageway (Fig 2).

In the late 1960s, a 3.5m diameter sewer was bored some 8m deep beneath the city, part of which lies beneath the line of Bond Street and crosses the site of the Belgrade Theatre development. During recent works on this development, piling for the new building damaged this sewer.

In order that essential repairs could take place, a 5m wide concrete shaft had to be constructed 8m deep, down to the damaged sewer. The site of the shaft was immediately to the east of the Belgrade Theatre development, and located in the carriageway of Bond Street (Fig 1 and 2).

The mapped geology of the area is Keuper Marl, stiff red clay of the Triassic Enville Beds. This overlies distinctive coarse-grained red sandstone, which in turn seals Carboniferous coal seams (BGS 1984).

The site lies at 80.21m above Ordnance Datum (AOD).

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief at Bond Street Sewer Repair Scheme, Coventry (Patrick 2005) required that during the works an archaeological watching brief should be carried out to establish the presence and significance of archaeological deposits within the area of the agreed works.

The defined objectives were:

- To record the remains of the medieval town wall and ditch
- To record deposits pre-dating the construction of the wall
- To identify and sample deposits of palaeoenvironmental potential associated with the Radford Brook and the town ditch.

A site-specific risk assessment was prepared. Fieldwork was conducted in accordance with the Health and Safety Policy of Northamptonshire Archaeology and Northamptonshire County Council.

The work was carried out in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (IFA 1999) and with the requirements detailed within the brief.

The specified ground works within the area outlined for investigation were monitored by an experienced archaeologist. This included:

- Observation of removal of the modern road and path surfaces, exposure of service pipes and cables, excavations and works necessary to divert services and the excavation of all materials to a depth of 3.6m into the undisturbed natural clay of the site.
- Archaeological deposits encountered during the watching brief were recorded, photographed and where appropriate sampled sufficiently to determine their date and character.

Recording followed standard Northamptonshire Archaeology procedures. All archaeological features were given a separate context number. Deposits were described on pro-forma context sheets to include details of the context, relationships and interpretation.

Archaeological features and the extent of layers within the excavation were planned at 1:50 scale. Sections and features were drawn at a scale of 1:20 and related to Ordnance Datum. The location of the excavation was surveyed and related to the OS grid and datum level. A photographic record including black and white negatives with related contact prints, colour slides and digital photographs was kept during the watching brief. The field data has been compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing.

4 RESULTS

The works to construct the access shaft down to the deep bored sewer were conducted in four stages.

Evaluation

Two evaluation trenches were cut across the carriageway of Bond Street to establish the presence, depth and location of drains and services. Trench 1, 7m long, 0.6m wide and 1.6m deep was excavated from the kerb on the north side of Bond Street, across the width of the carriageway and into the footpath at the south of the road (Fig 3, Plate 1). Trench 2 was cut at right angles through Trench 1 along the centre of the carriageway in Bond Street. This was 7m long, 0.6m wide and 1.8m deep (Fig 2, Plate 2). These trenches showed that below the modern road surface, it was all made up ground (1026) cut through by drainage, service and cable trenches (Fig 4, Section 1, Plate 1). Trench 2 was excavated entirely within the cut [1015] for a modern water main (Fig 4, Section 2, Plate 2).

Drains and Services Diversion

In order to divert existing drains and services, additional trenches were cut from each end of Trench 1 and linked along the length of the southern footpath of Bond Street (Fig 3). These diversion trenches varied in width from 1.2 to 1.8m wide and were all 1.6m deep to allow for ease of access and for cutting and jointing the pipe-work. The trenches were all cut through made ground and no medieval archaeology was observed in these trenches. The diversion trench was used to re-route the 16" high-pressure water main, a 6" water main and the 12" salt glaze sewer pipe around the proposed location for the access shaft (Plate 3).

Excavation for shaft ‘collar’

A trench 9m long, 7m wide was excavated through the carriageway of Bond Street around the original site of Trench 1 and 2. This was to create the space for the construction of the 5m diameter concrete shaft to be excavated down to the damaged sewer, and for a concrete collar up to 1m wide support the upper rings of the shaft (Fig 5).

The natural geology (1042) was encountered 2.85m below ground level (77.36m AOD). Over this was a layer of subsoil, grey/brown sandy clay (1040, 1041) 0.5m deep. This was very clean, almost sterile with only occasional flecks of ash/ charcoal and occasional small rounded pebbles. This was sealed below dark brown/grey sandy clay loam (1018, 1039) 0.3m deep, slightly humic, with flecks of ash and charcoal, occasional fragments of sandstone and small pieces of broken roof tile and Swithland Slate. Some bone and three sherds of 15th - 17th century pottery were recovered from this layer.

Foundation trench [1043] was aligned east to west along the length of the excavation, cutting the buried soil (1018) and subsoil (1041) to the south and (1039, 1040) to the north and extended 0.3m into the natural (1042). It had vertical sides, a flat base 2m wide and contained the remains of the sandstone town wall (1012), of which the foundation course 0.8m deep comprised roughly hewn sandstone slabs up to 0.8m long and 0.6m wide and 0.4m thick. These were laid into the foundation trench and packed with smaller fragments of sandstone. There was no evidence of bonding in the foundation course while above this the wall was bonded with coarse, soft, yellow lime mortar (Fig 6).

No facing stone was observed on the exposed section of wall. However the cutting of modern drainage or utility trenches had damaged both faces of the wall.

To the north of the wall, another construction trench [1036] cut buried soil. This trench was 2.2m deep and 1.1m wide tapering down to 0.7m at the base. It contained a brick built culvert aligned east to west across the site and sloping downhill to the west (towards the Radford Brook). The culvert measured 0.55m high and 0.35m internally, built of machine cut, plain, unfrogged bricks (9”x 4.5”x 3”) and bonded with cement mortar. The top and base were built of bricks laid on their side to form an arch, the sidewalls were of bricks laid flat using stretcher bond. The base of the culvert was built on a course of brick laid onto a bed of mortar, the upper arch was capped with a layer of bricks laid flat in stretcher bond. The trench was backfilled with the re-deposited upcast from its excavation (1037). The culvert was built tight against the northern face of wall (1012). Its presence made it impossible to establish whether facing stone had survived or been robbed from the wall at this location.

To the south, a utility trench [1015] was aligned east to west along the length of the site. It was machine cut, 1.6m deep and 1.1m wide with vertical sides and a flat base. The lower part of the trench cut into the upper part of wall (1012) removing a section along the south face of the wall and displacing lower layers of stone in the wall below the limit of the trench excavation. This trench contained an initial fill of coarse red sand (1016) 0.8m deep containing a steel 16” high-pressure water main and a 6” plastic water main, the remainder of the trench was filled with Type 1 stone (1017).

At right angles to wall (1012) and 0.5m to the south, foundation trench [1044] cut through the buried soils to the natural. This trench had vertical sides 0.4m deep and 1m wide, it was aligned north to south and was 2m long. It contained a sandstone foundation (1045) built of randomly shaped sandstone blocks in roughly aligned courses, 0.5m deep. Above this the wall was built of shaped and dressed sandstone blocks (1022), very roughly laid, both foundation and wall were bonded with hard, white lime mortar.

The dressed sandstone blocks appeared re-used and the coursing and bonding indicated poor workmanship (Fig 5, Plates 7-8)

Aligned north to south across the excavation were two service trenches [1046 and 1048]. These had vertical sides 0.6-0.8m deep and a flat bases 0.3m wide. Both were packed with clean stiff red clay (1047, 1049) containing a 4" salt glaze storm drains. These curved south-east to north-west across the width of the excavation cutting through wall (1012) to enter brick built culvert (1038) (Fig 5, Plates 9 and 11)

Covering the remainder of the site was a mixed layer of red-grey/brown sandy clay loam (1026) containing varying amounts of broken sandstone, lime mortar, lenses of coarse red, or yellow sand, patches and lenses of pink/grey shale, fragments of brick, tile, cement mortar, concrete, tarmac, ash and gravel. This was made ground, either build-up or levelling layers for the modern road and footpath.

Aligned east to west along the carriageway of Bond Street, a series of modern drainage and utility service trenches were cut into the made ground (1026). To the north of the town wall, two modern plastic gas pipes, an earlier cast iron gas main and a salt glaze storm drain all aligned east to west were cut into the build up layer (1026) below the modern road surface. To the south of the town wall, a cast iron water main, 12" salt glaze sewer pipe and five 4" salt glaze pipes carrying BT cables and a salt glaze storm drain were also cut into the layers below the modern road surface.

Most of the excavated area was sealed below a layer of modern cement concrete (1003) up to 0.3m deep. This formed the base for a layer of granite cobbles (1002) that were in turn covered with modern tarmac (1001) that formed the modern road surface (Fig 3).

Shaft excavation and sewer repair

Once the excavations extended below the last archaeological horizon, the remainder of the shaft was excavated using a mini digger. This was lowered by crane into the shaft to excavate material which was then brought to the surface by a mechanical grab. As the shaft descended fresh concrete sections were bolted to the preceding ring forming a solid concrete structure down to the level of the damaged sewer. None of this work was subject to archaeological supervision.

5 SOIL SAMPLES

By Karen Deighton

Introduction

Four samples were hand collected from two layers of a buried medieval soil. These layers were believed by the excavator to represent a topsoil and a subsoil on either side of the town wall. Analysis was undertaken to establish the nature, preservation and presence of ecofacts and to investigate their contribution to the understanding of the function and economy of the site.

Method

All samples were processed using a siraf tank fitted with a 500-micron mesh and flot sieve. The resulting flots were dried and analysed using a microscope (10xmagnification). Identifications were made with the aid of the author's small reference collection and a seed atlas (Schoch et al 1988)

Results

Preservation

Both waterlogging and charring were observed. Seeds and grains were in reasonable condition, with low levels of fragmentation and abrasion. Charcoal was fragmentary and abraded.

The taxa

Table 1: Taxa by sample and by context

Sample		1	2	3*	4*
Context		1018	1039	1040	1041
Volume (litres)		20	20	10	20
Pos.spelt wheat	<i>Triticum cf. spelta</i>	1			
Breadwheat	<i>Triticum aestivum</i>		3		
Hulled barley	<i>Hordeum vulgare</i>		8		
Naked barley	<i>H.vulgare</i> var.nudum	3	1		
Wheat/barley	Triticum/Hordeum	17	7	2	2
Rye	<i>Secale cereale</i>				2
Cereal	Cereale		4		4
Fat hen	<i>Chenopodium album</i>		2	8	13
Chickweed	<i>Stellaria media</i>				2
Cleavers	<i>Galium aparine</i>				1
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>				1
Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus</i> sp				1
Dock	<i>Rumex</i> sp				2
Elder	<i>Sambucus</i> sp			100	200
Nutshell (indet)		1			
Total		22	25	110	228
Charcoal		1,000	500		

*= waterlogged sample

Values for charcoal fragments are approximate.

Discussion

Samples 1 and 2 come from a buried medieval soil, one sample being taken respectively from the inner and outer side of the town wall. The low frequency of ecofacts in samples 1 and 2 could suggest this material represents, “background” and is not directly associated with any food preparation or agricultural activity. The presence of these ecofacts with large amounts of charcoal suggests they were incorporated with fuel either accidentally or deliberately as waste disposal.

Samples 3 and 4 were both taken from the subsoil below the medieval soil horizon on the inner and outer side of the town wall. The presence of large numbers of un-charred elder seeds in samples 3 and 4 was probably the result of colonisation of the banks of the earlier town ditch, cut back and cleared during the construction of the town wall at this location. It is significant that the external sample (Sample 4, Context 1041) contains a much wider range of ecofacts, almost certainly blown in from the gardens and tofts on the north side of the early town ditch.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The sandstone wall (1012) is undoubtedly the remnant of Coventry’s defensive wall. It is just over 2m wide and survived in places up to 1m above the medieval ground surface. The damage caused by the modern disturbance to both faces of the wall at this point prevented any conclusion as to whether there would have been survival of facing stone or whether it had all been removed at the time of the slighting of the city defences in 1662.

The town wall (1012) was constructed within a foundation trench cut into the natural. The foundations were of irregular sandstone slabs carefully laid and packed with smaller packing fragments of sandstone with no bonding material. Only above the foundation level did the stonework begin to be bonded with coarse yellow mortar. This is consistent with the findings at other excavated lengths of the wall (Gooder 1966, Soden 2005).

The sandstone foundation (1045) and wall (1022) to the south form a single solid block of masonry but have no associated structures, walls or surfaces. The upper part of the wall is poorly built with irregular bonding and coursing despite being constructed with shaped and dressed sandstone blocks. The foundation is laid onto the top of the natural (1042) and is bonded with hard white mortar. It is a stronger and better quality build than the upper part of the wall. On typological grounds, it does not appear contemporary with the build of the town wall.

The location of wall (1022), however, only 0.5m from the inner side of the town wall and at right angles to it would indicate a close association with the city defences. Its size and alignment may indicate it was built to buttress the wall or perhaps to support a timber structure related to the defensive use of the wall. The 2m base of the wall would allow only a narrow fighting platform at the walkway behind the battlements. If there were a need to move ordnance or equipment along the wall, a timber platform perhaps supported by a substantial stone plinth would overcome the difficulty of the narrow medieval walkway, especially where it approached the introduction of the spayer and tower.

The location of this masonry block immediately behind the wall, of later construction and built of re-used sandstone blocks may indicate works put in place to meet a change in use. Either Jack Cade’s Rebellion in 1450 or the strategic role of the city during the English Civil war (1642-1649) would have provided ample impetus for such works.

The town wall (1012) foundations were cut through medieval soils, (1018) on the inner or city side of the wall and (1039) on the outer side of the wall. On both sides of the wall, the subsoil (1040) appeared identical. The outer soil (1039) was lighter in colour and more organic than (1018) but there were few differences in the type of finds recovered from them.

It is probable that the soils represent the original ground surface when the wall was constructed. Any differences in colour and soil structure now being only a reflection of the different activities that have taken place on each side of the wall thereafter. The inner soil lay within the city and would have been exposed to more ash, charcoal and human activity creating classic 'dark earth' in this location. On the ditch side of the wall, there would have been little traffic on the narrow berm between the wall and the edge of the defensive ditch.

Apart from rubbish being deposited, this soil would have remained largely organic producing weeds and undergrowth that may only have been cleared at irregular intervals.

Seeds and pollen from grain and weeds growing on the north side of the town ditch in the gardens and holdings known at this location would provide the background for the range of ecofacts recovered from the soil samples on the external side of the wall. This would account for the differences observed during excavation and analysis of the soil samples.

The earlier recording of part of the wall, a tower and the 'spayer' during the watching brief on the Belgrade Theatre development and the results of the current works have shown that there is substantial survival of the medieval city defences below the modern road surface. Although cut through and damaged by modern drainage and service trenches, it remains a substantial and instantly identifiable monument of the city's medieval past. It is also clear that there is good potential for the survival of other structures adjacent to the town wall, and of the survival of buried soil horizons at a depth of about 1.6m below the modern ground surface

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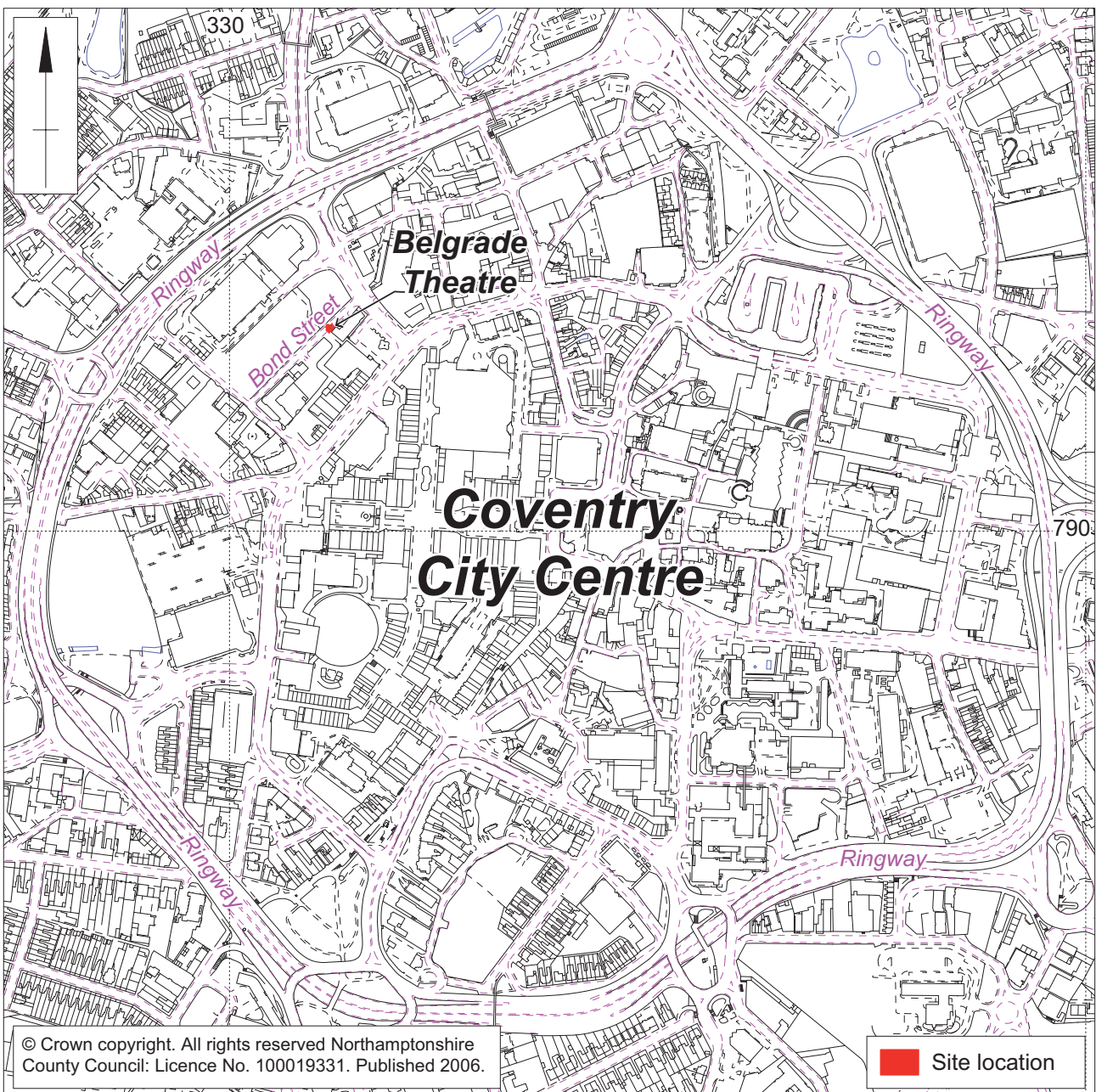
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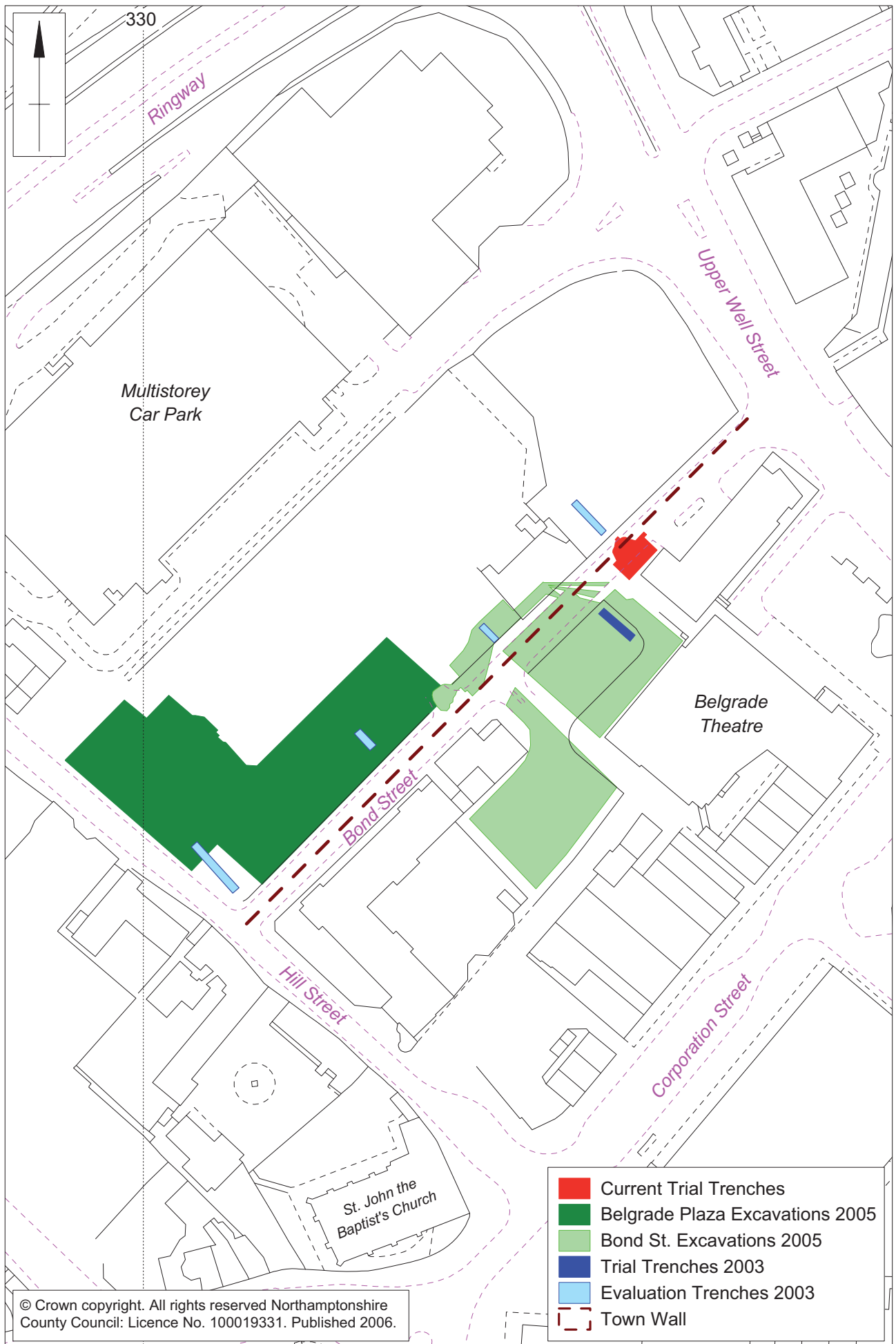
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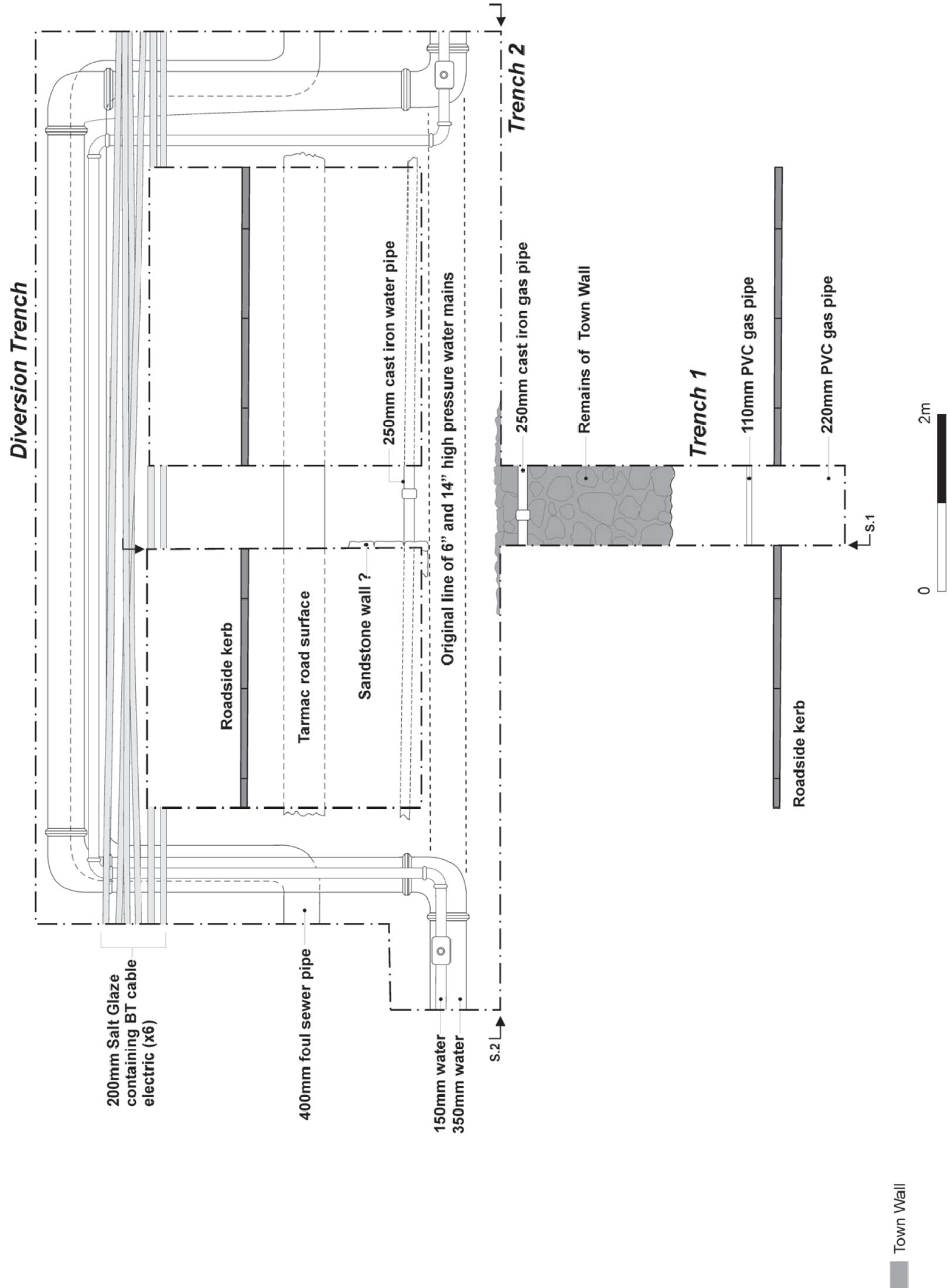


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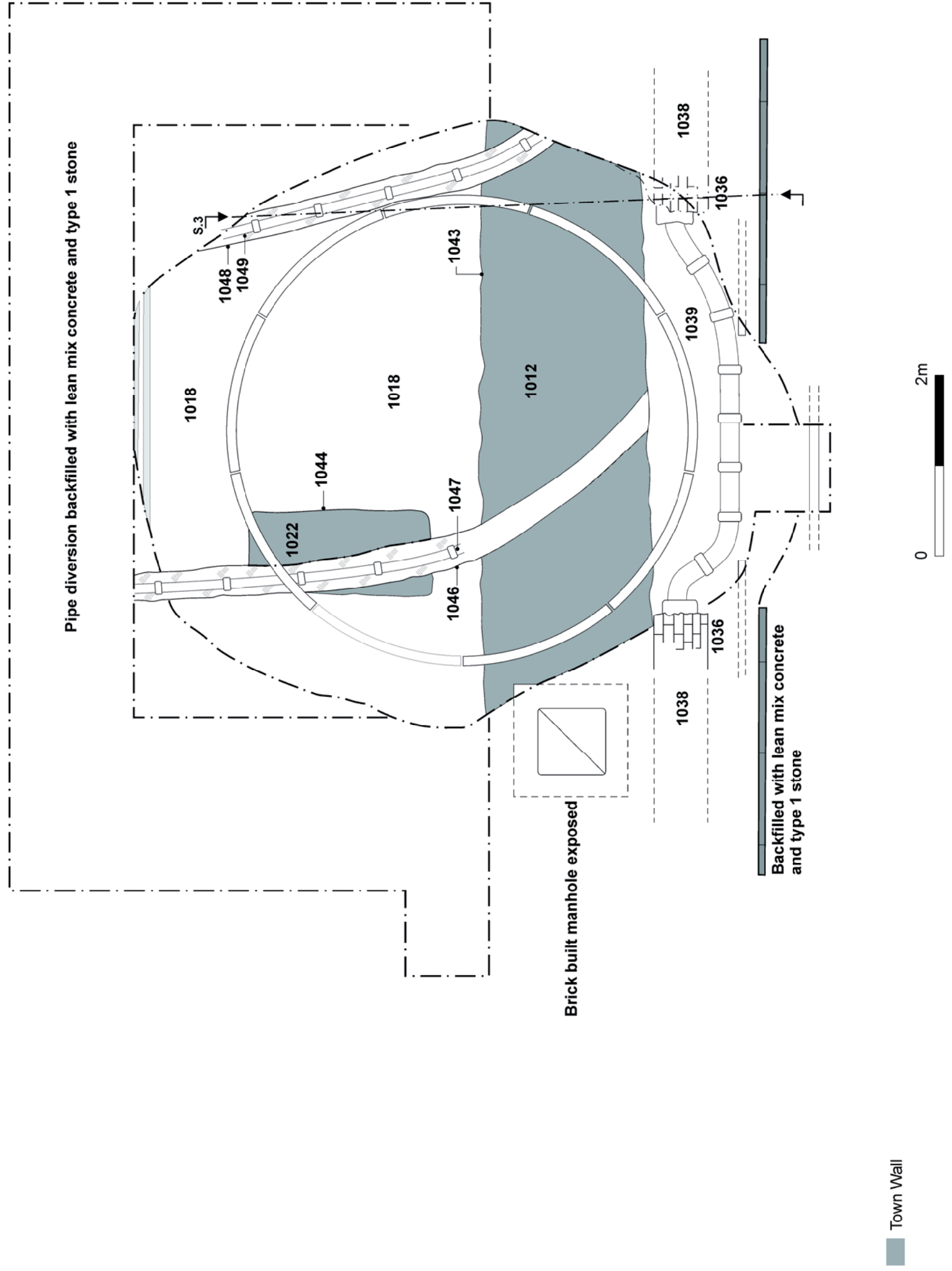
Site location Fig 1



Excavation for Evaluation Trenches & Diversion Trench



Excavation for Shaft and Collar



Archaeological plan of the NW corner of the Temple of Isis at Philae. The plan shows various rooms and features, including a 'Collar' area, a 'SSE' (South-South-East) orientation, and a 'NNW' (North-North-West) orientation. A scale bar indicates 80.21mOD. A legend identifies 'Hard white lime mortar'.

Key features and labels include:

- Rooms: 1001, 1002, 1003, 1004, 1005, 1006, 1007, 1008, 1009, 1010, 1011, 1012, 1013, 1014, 1015, 1016, 1017, 1018, 1019, 1020, 1021, 1022, 1023, 1024, 1025, 1026, 1027, 1028, 1029, 1030, 1031, 1032, 1033, 1034, 1035, 1036, 1037, 1038, 1039, 1040, 1041, 1042, 1043.
- Orientation: SSE, NNW.
- Scale: 80.21mOD.
- Legend: Hard white lime mortar.

Concrete
Town Wall





Plate 1: Trench 1, looking south.



Plate 2: Trench 2, looking east.



Plate 3: Diversion Trench, looking west.



Plate 4: Trench 1, town wall in west section.



Plate 5: Trench 1, town wall north face.



Plate 6: Trench 2, town wall south face.



Plate 7: Trench 1, Stone plinth looking south.



Plate 8: Trench 2, stone plinth looking east.

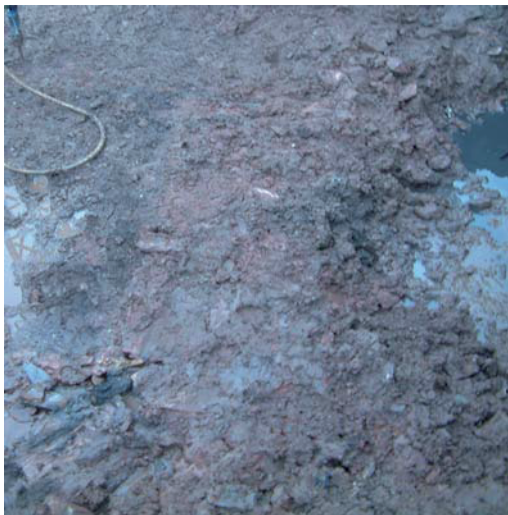


Plate 9: Shaft showing wall and buried soil.



Plate 10: Constructing concrete shaft.



Plate 11: Buried soils and wall.



Plate 12: Wall and natural.