

# Kenilworth Abbey Fields Car Park, Warwickshire

## Archaeological Watching Brief



*understanding heritage matters*

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 1417  
February 2014



*Working for  
Warwickshire*

**Project:** Abbey Fields Car Park 2013

**Commissioned by:** Warwick District Council

**Project Report No.** 1417

**Site Code:** KF13

**NGR:** SP 286 724

**Planning Reference:** W/12/0028

**Staff:**

**Project Manager:** Pete Thompson/Cathy Coutts  
**Fieldwork:** Cathy Coutts, Rob Jones, Caroline Rann  
**Author:** Cathy Coutts and Caroline Rann  
**Illustrations:** Candy Stevens

**Report checked by:** Pete Thompson

**Date:** February 2014

**Report reference:** Coutts, C. M. and Rann, C. 2013 *Kenilworth Abbey Fields Car Park, Archaeological Watching Brief*, Archaeology Warwickshire Report 1417.

If you have any queries regarding this document please contact

Cathy Coutts  
Senior Archaeologist  
Archaeology Warwickshire  
Unit 9 Montague Road  
Warwick  
CV34 5LW

Tel: 01926 412280

[fieldarchaeology@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:fieldarchaeology@warwickshire.gov.uk)  
[heritage.warwickshire.gov.uk/archaeology](http://heritage.warwickshire.gov.uk/archaeology)



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## Summary

*In 2013 Abbey Fields car park, Kenilworth, was upgraded and groundworks monitored for archaeological features and finds. A number of stone walls and areas of demolition debris were noted, presumably associated with former Abbey buildings, although largely outside of the area previously thought to have been occupied by monastic buildings. Finds included pottery and glazed floor tiles of medieval date, numerous fragments of hand-made roof tile and the base of a 15th/16th-century German stoneware vessel.*

## 1 Introduction

1.1 Scheduled Monument Consent (S00054966 and S0005467) was granted by English Heritage, and planning permission was granted by Warwick District Council (W/12/0028), for the resurfacing of the car park and the provision of pay and display machines, at Abbey Fields car park, Castle Road, Kenilworth, Warwickshire. The site lies on a gravel terrace alongside the River Avon, within the extent of Kenilworth Abbey. A condition of Scheduled Monument Consent required the applicant to secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work to be carried out in conjunction with the works.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of archaeological observation of all groundworks associated with the upgrading, as detailed in a Written Scheme of Investigation, was commissioned from Archaeology Warwickshire and carried out in September 2013. This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under site code KF13.

## 2 Location

2.1 The development site is located at map reference SP 286 724, within the town and parish of Kenilworth (Fig 1). The site has been a car park for a number of years.

2.2 The superficial geology of the area is 2nd River Terrace Sand and Gravels and the underlying geology is the Kenilworth Sandstone Formation (British Geological Survey Viewer <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/data/mapViewers/> accessed September 2013).

### 3 Methodology

3.1 The main aim of the work was to record any archaeological remains disturbed by the development, to collate the records in an archaeological archive and present the significant aspects of the archive in a report for dissemination.

3.2 The secondary aim was to form an understanding of the remains recorded in terms of their character and date, and to place the evidence in its local and regional context.

3.3 The objective of the work was a programme of controlled excavation to development formation levels, or the geological natural, whichever the higher.

3.4 The work undertaken involved the examination of early map evidence as well as records of archaeological remains in the area and local historical journals and other publications.

3.5 An experienced archaeologist was made available for each day of ground disturbance when notified by the client in accordance with WSI/Brief planning condition.

### 4 Archaeological and Historic background

#### **Medieval and Post-medieval (1066 – 1800)**

4.1 St Mary's Abbey was founded in 1122 as a priory but was raised to the rank of abbey in c.1450 (VCH 1951, 133; Warwickshire Historic Environment Record No. MWA 3201). The site is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM No. 35115). The 14th-century abbey gatehouse survives (MWA 6007) as does the building known as 'The Barn' which was probably the abbey's guesthouse (MWA 6008). Substantial parts of the major buildings were excavated in 1890 by T. W. Whitely (Draper 1891) and largely re-excavated in 1922-23 by E. Carey-Hill (Carey-Hill 1929). The parish church of St Nicholas also largely dates to the 14th century (MWA 3219). The abbey may have acted as a focus for settlement during the medieval period and the long narrow burgage plots that are typical of medieval property boundaries can be seen fossilised in the modern property boundaries along High Street. The abbey was dissolved in 1538 and in 1539 the dwellings and closes of the former abbey estate were described in a rental.

4.2 Fishponds once existed along the length of the Finham Brook and one example, marked as the site of Bakehouse Pool on the Ordnance Survey map of 1923 (Ordnance

Survey 1923), still shows in relief (MWA 3289). At the south-eastern corner of the Abbey grounds Finham Brook is crossed by a post-medieval bridge (MWA 3276) which replaced the one Prior Teniesford (1280-1290) had built (WRO MI392/3).

4.3 Resistivity survey was undertaken in two locations in 1996 as part of a scheme designed to investigate the history and archaeology of Abbey Fields. One area over the Abbey church failed to reveal any meaningful results whilst a further area north-west of the gatehouse produced a rectangular anomaly thought to represent either a building or evidence of quarrying (Ireland 1996).

4.4 A number of archaeological watching briefs have been carried out in the vicinity of the abbey. In 1989 two square pits were excavated for the foundations of two pieces of play equipment. In one of these the remains of a sandstone surface was recorded, possibly part of a courtyard or trackway at 0.60m below the ground surface, overlaid by medieval demolition material. The other revealed part of a large stone wall 0.25m below ground level (Hingley *et al.* 1989).

4.5 Two watching briefs in 1994 in the vicinity of the site did not record significant archaeological deposits, but further watching briefs between 1999 and 2001 have revealed fragments of medieval glazed floor tile and a quantity of sandstone rubble (Robinson and Jones 1999), fragments of hand-made roof tile (Gethin and Coutts 2000; Warwickshire Museum 2001b) 14th- to 15th-century pottery and the stone foundations for a building complex associated with the abbey (Warwickshire Museum 2002). A substantial stone wall recorded on the south side of the church which was possibly part of the medieval precinct boundary (Warwickshire Museum 2001a).

4.6 More recently finds of 13th/14th-century pottery, 15th-century floor tile and medieval window glass have been recovered during a watching brief at the Abbey barn (Warwickshire Museum 2003). In 2007 the Abbey Fields car park was completely re-surfaced and a CCTV mast installed. During this work post-dissolution levelling deposits were recorded, along with two fragments of decorated medieval floor tile. A possible medieval wall foundation was also revealed in 2009 in a test pit (Rann 2009). Earlier in 2013 work took place at the children's playground and numerous fragments of roof tile and sandstone were recorded during the removal of a hedge (Rann and Coutts 2013).

## 5 Watching Brief

5.1 In September 2013 Warwick District Council embarked on a programme of improvement works at Abbey Fields car park. The car park surface had degraded in places since its last re-surfacing in 2007 and drainage was a problem in periods of heavy rain. The improvement works included the removal of three trees at the car park entrance (one cut down, two cut down and tree bole excavated) and the excavation of holes for new tree planting. In addition, new kerbing was installed all around the car park, cabling laid for new parking meters, signposting, and improvements made to drainage.

### Tree pits

5.2 The first excavation work took place at the car park entrance, where two lime trees had been cut down. A mini-excavator was used to remove the hardcore (1) and 0.10-0.12m of tarmac (2) and underlying hardcore (5) around the tree at the centre of the entrance, along with the buried stone kerbing from around the tree (3). The excavator removed the tree, making an irregular hole measuring 3.20m north-south and 2.40m west-east and up to 0.90m deep. The root-disturbed soil in the hole was a reddish brown sandy loam with small pebbles (4), containing fragments of roof tile (not retained). A similar reddish brown sandy loam was noted across the car park, although a number of different context numbers were assigned to it (see Appendix A).

5.3 The second lime tree to be removed was at the south-east corner of the car park entrance. The stratigraphic sequence was the same as for the first tree, with reddish brown sandy loam below the entrance road tarmac, while to the east it was overlain by dark grey brown sandy loam topsoil (6), with concrete kerbing visible around the edge of the path to the east (7). This tree pit was more regular in shape and 0.90m deep and two fragments of hand-made roof tile were recorded (not retained). Both tree pits were initially backfilled with the excavated material but were subsequently re-excavated of this mixed material and re-filled with hardcore scalplings.

### Cable duct trenching

5.4 The cable duct trench ran west from the lamp-post on the north side of the car park to the car park's north-west corner, then ran down the west side of the car park, running parallel with its edge. Trenching then continued to the east from the lamp-post, curving around the underground air-raid shelter, in the north-east corner of the car park, to the wall at the top of the steps, near the road. The trench measured 0.30-0.40m wide and 0.45-0.50m deep. For the majority of the cable duct trench the stratigraphic sequence was simply reddish brown

sandy loam (4) overlaid by 0.15-0.20m of topsoil. However, the quantity of roof tile in the lower layer increased markedly towards the west, where it became clear that we were looking at a layer of roof demolition material (9; Fig 3). All this roof tile was hand-made, some had black cores, suggesting it was likely to be medieval. Other finds from layer 4 in the cable trench included a Langerwehe German stoneware pottery tankard base, dating to the 15th/16th century, fragments of medieval floor tile, medieval and post-medieval pottery.

5.5 In the western section of trench the machine scraped over the remains of a sandstone wall (11), roughly 1.20m across, running west-east. To its south was a further 7m of stonework (12) at the trench base, suggesting a length of north-south walling. Another narrower possible cross wall was recorded further to the south (14). The soil overlying 12 and 14, and between them was a dark grey-brown charcoal-flecked loam (13). This, and the reddish brown sandy loam (4) further north was overlaid by 0.10-0.15m of clean brown sandy loam (16), itself overlain by topsoil.

5.6 Further cable trenches were excavated to the electricity substation on the northern edge of the site, and a spur off the western cable trench, measuring 0.66m deep. The lowest level cut into was 0.30m of the ubiquitous reddish brown sandy loam (here numbered 20), was overlain by 0.29m of dark brown sandy loam (18, itself overlain by 70mm of topsoil (6). No features were recorded in this length of trench, although fragments of roof tile were also present here. Unstratified finds, collected by the groundworkers from the spoil, included part of a 17th/18th-century ceramic wig-curler and pottery and glass of 18th-19th-century date. A single sherd of possible Cistercian ware was recovered from layer 20.

#### Kerb trench

5.7 Trenching for the new kerb ran along three sides of the car park. The fourth side was to be kerbed by lengths of timber, fixed to the underlying car park surface. The trench for the new kerb was shallower (c.0.30m deep) and wider (0.60m) than that for the cable duct. While the cable trench had been excavated in the grass alongside the car-park, this trench was excavated along the edge of the car park itself and the spoil put directly into a dumper, to be mounded in the centre of the site.

5.8 The stratigraphy was generally similar to that in the cable trench, but the shallower excavation meant that the sandstone walling exposed in the cable trench was not reached. Another substantial sandstone wall (15) was exposed, however, measuring 1.30m across (Fig 4), further south than wall 11. The south edge of the wall was very well-defined while



the north edge was less clear. A significant quantity of sandstone at the southern end of the trench suggested an area of wall demolition.

5.9 Excavation for the kerb trench at the northern side of the car park entailed cutting through very hard, thick, car park surfacing (19) along the western 10m of the trench. The stratigraphy was similar to that in the cable trench to its north, although the cable trench was cut from a higher level as the ground sloped up to the north. An area of sandstone at the western end of the trench, already disturbed by the excavation for the concrete setting of the wooden corner bollard, suggested another area of wall (31; Fig 5). An area of dark grey sandy loam (18) was recorded in the western part of the trench, possible the remnant of topsoil that was formerly in this area. Further east the stratigraphy was reddish brown pebbly soil overlaid by the car park surfacing. In the eastern kerb trench the reddish brown soil was overlain by 0.15m of brown sandy loam, itself overlain by either 0.20m of topsoil or 80-100mm of topsoil.

#### New drainage

5.10 Excavation took place at the car park entrance for the installation of new drains. A trench excavated in the path had 0.25m of brown sandy loam (30) overlaid by a 0.34m deep layer of brown sandy loam with frequent roof tile fragments and occasional pieces of sandstone (28), itself overlaid by hardcore (25) and tarmac. No features were recorded in this area but layer 28 produced a fragment of medieval floor tile and a fragment of moulded sandstone, as well as floor tiles, one with a sheep hoof print.

#### New tree pits

5.11 In order to compensate for the loss of the two lime trees at the car park entrance, two new trees have been planted along the north side of the avenue, where there were previously gaps and a further tree planted at the corner of the car park. The pits for the new trees were 1m square and c.0.76m deep. The sequence in tree-pit A, near the car park entrance (Fig 6), was as follows: 0.38m of reddish brown sandy loam (23) overlain by 0.26m of greyish brown sandy loam (22), itself overlain by 0.12m of topsoil (21). Layer 22 produced a rimsherd of an early 13th-century jug with an applied prunt of clay, with two deep finger impressions, possibly a very crude face mask. The sherd has an under-glaze of white slip, is likely to come from Alcester and is dated to 1200-1225/50 (Ratkai pers. comm.). A similar stratigraphic sequence was recorded for tree-pits B and C, which filled in gaps in the avenue, alongside the path.

## Sign-posts

5.12 A series of six small trenches was excavated around the car park to hold signage. These were machine excavated to various depths. The stratigraphy is indicated below. No finds were recovered from these trenches, although fragments of roof tile and sandstone were noted.

<i>Sign-post pit</i>	<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Stratigraphy</i>
1	1.20m x 0.30m, 0.52m deep	Tarmac 20mm (24) Hardcore 0.18m (25) Layer 0.32m (26)
2	0.80m x 0.30m, 0.58m deep	Tarmac 30mm (24) Hardcore 0.16m (25) Layer 0.16m (27) Layer 0.23m (26)
3	1.10m x 0.30m, 0.60m deep	Tarmac 30mm (24) Hardcore 0.14m (25) Layer 0.34m (28)
4	1.00m x 0.30m, 0.60m deep	Topsoil 0.12m (29) Layer 0.35m (28)
5	0.80m x 0.30m, 0.57m deep	Topsoil 0.28 (29) Layer 0.28m (28)
6	0.80m x 0.30m, 0.24m deep	Topsoil 0.40m (29) Layer 0.24m (28)

## 6 Conclusions

6.1 Trenching on the western side of the car park revealed evidence for stone walls likely to have been part of the abbey complex, along with an occupation layer and demolition rubble. Fragments of roof tile, and occasional fragments of medieval floor tile, are present across the entire site, suggesting that occupation material and demolition debris has been scattered over the whole of this part of Abbey Fields

## Acknowledgements

Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire would like to thank John Haughton of Warwick District Council for commissioning the work and Ian George (English Heritage) for approving the Written Scheme of Investigation. Thanks to Stephanie Ratkai for her comments on the pottery.

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## Appendix A: List of Contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1	Surface hardcore at car park entrance	
2	Tarmac car park surface	
3	Stone kerbs around trees	
4	Reddish-brown sandy loam layer	
5	Pinkish hardcore below tarmac	
6	Dark greyish-brown sandy loam	
7	Concrete kerbing at path side	
8	Hardcore	
9	Dense rooftile	Demolition layer
10	Red clay layer	
11	Sandstone wall	Foundation
12	Stonework at trench base	Wall?
13	Dark greyish-brown loam	Occupation layer?
14	Narrow wall	Cross wall?
15	Sandstone wall	
16	Brown sandy loam layer	
17	Metal cabling	Unknown service
18	Dark greyish brown sandy clay loam	
19	Concrete car park surface	
20	Reddish-brown sand and pebbles	= 4?
21	Dark greyish-brown sandy loam topsoil	tree hole A
22	Greyish-brown sandy loam layer	tree hole A
23	Reddish-brown sandy loam	= 4?
24	Tarmac car park surface	
25	Hardcore for 24	
26	Reddish-brown sandy loam	= 4?
27	Ash and clinker layer	
28	Brown sandy loam layer	
29	Topsoil -dark greyish-brown sandy loam	
30	Reddish-brown sandy loam	= 4?
31	Possible stone wall	

## Appendix B: List of Finds

<i>Context</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>date/comments</i>
4 (cable trench)	Floor tile	1	medieval
	Roof tile	1	medieval
	Clay pipe	1	stem
	Glass	1	bottle base
	Pottery	12	1 medieval green glazed ( <b>WW01</b> Chilvers Coton A, 1250-1300) 1 Langerwehe German stoneware ( <b>STG01</b> mid 15th-16th century), 1 slipware ( <b>SLPW01</b> , 1680-1730), 1 manganese mottled ware ( <b>MANG</b> 1680-1740), 5 x sherds black-glazed coarseware (18th/19th-century), 1 early 20th-century stoneware, 2 adjoining fragments of post-medieval flower pot with hole in base and side
13	Floor tile	1	Medieval monochrome glazed
20	Pottery	1	Cistercian ware? ( <b>CIST</b> 15th/16thC)
22	Pottery	1	Medieval, probably from Alcester(1200-1224/50)
28	Floor tile	1	Medieval, traces of glaze
	Roof tile	1	Sheep hoofprint
	Stone	1	Moulded sandstone
U/S – electricity cable trench North of car park	Glass	2	1 bottle glass, 1 welder's glass
	Pottery	6	1 whiteware, 1 stoneware jam jar,

			1 fragment of Drab stoneware (Wedgewood, c.1820).
			1 yellow glazed stoneware,
			2 19thC coarseware,
	Ceramic	1	wig curler, 17th/18th century
U/S – S end kerb trench	Roof tile	7	include s one with peg hole
	Pottery	3	2 black-glazed coarseware (18th/19thC)
			1 medieval with splash of green glaze

Unstratified post-medieval pottery and tile not retained

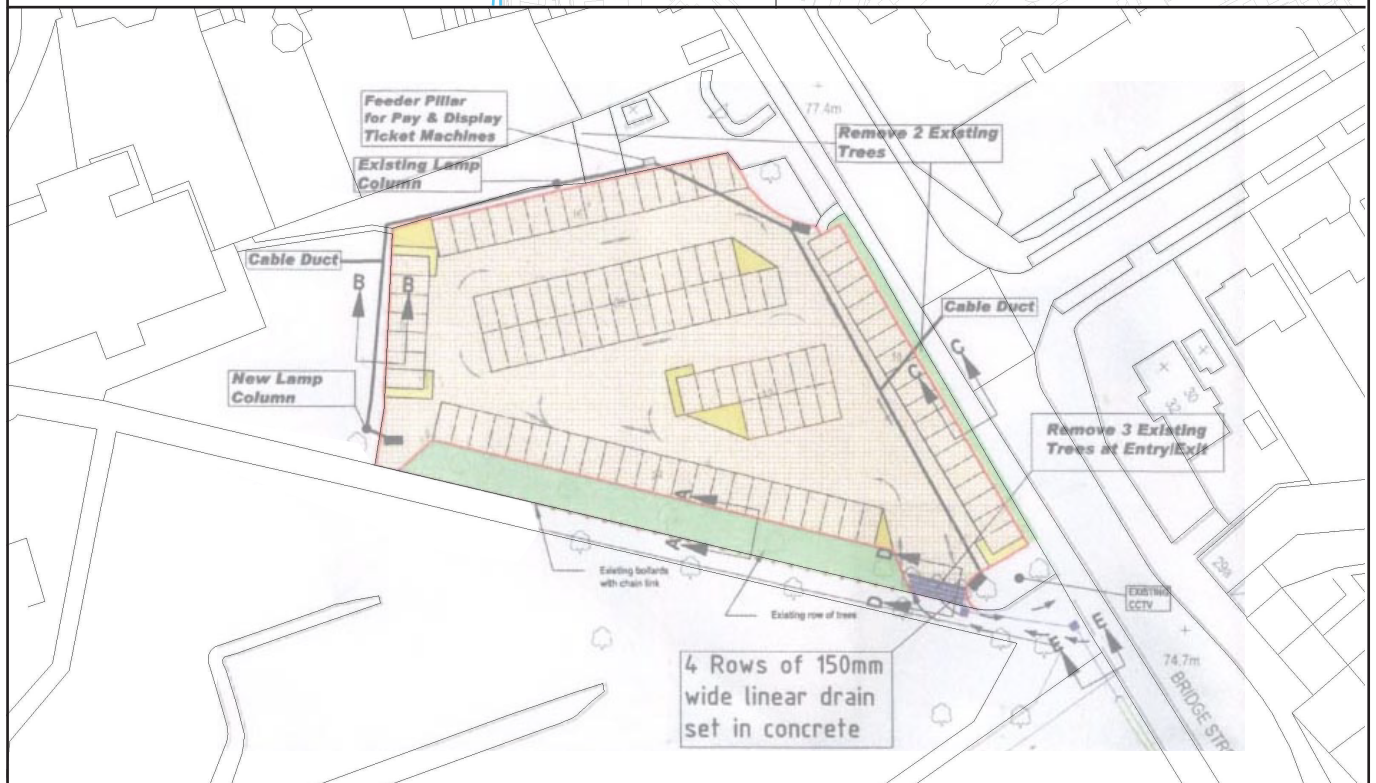
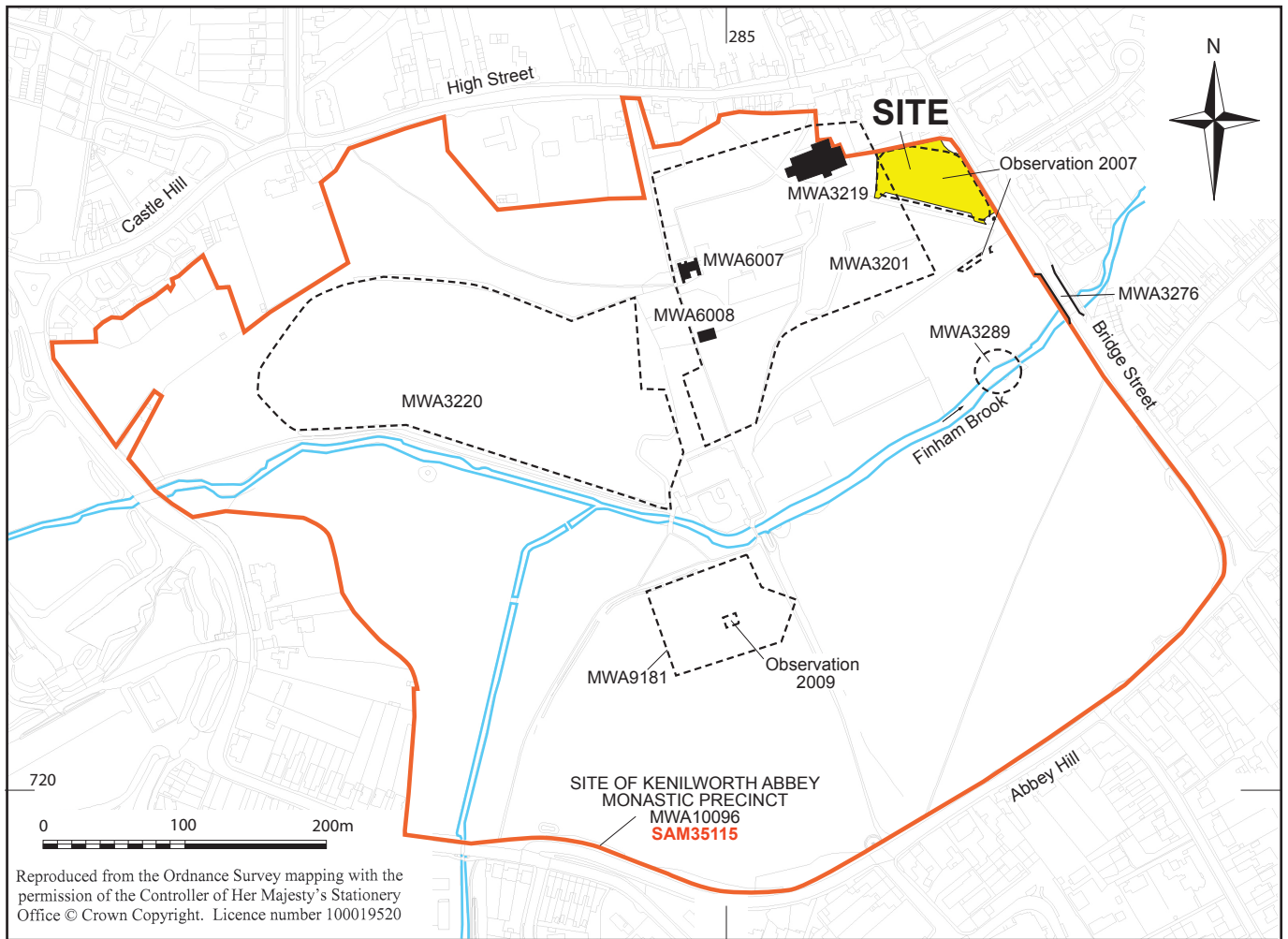


Fig 1: Site and detail of proposed works



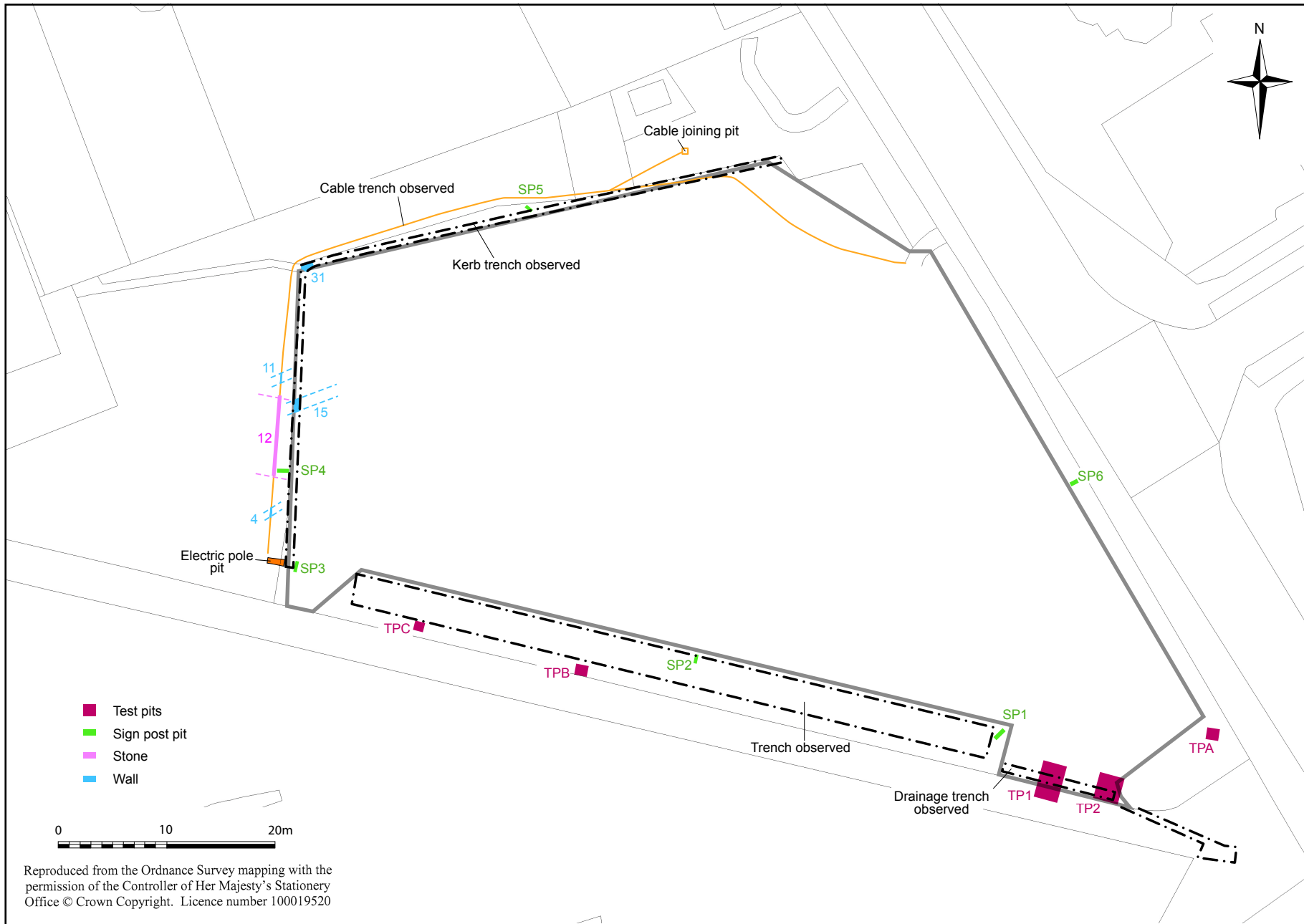


Fig 2: Trenches and test pits observed



Fig. 3: Excavating through demolition layer 9, on west side of car park



Fig 4: Wall 15, in western part of site



Fig 5: Stonework in north-west corner of cable trench (31)



Fig 6: Excavation of tree-pit A