



SALFORD FLOOD IMPROVEMENTS, CASTLE IRWELL, SALFORD

**Archaeological Watching
Brief**



Oxford Archaeology North

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
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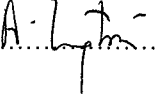
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SUMMARY

In April 2014, Environmental Scientifics Group commissioned Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the course of a geotechnical investigation. This investigation focused on an area contained within a meander of the River Irwell, adjacent to Castle Irwell Student Village, Cromwell Road, Salford (centred on SD 8205 0116), and formed part of a scheme of flood defence improvement. The investigation entailed the excavation of 17 test pits, ten boreholes, and eight window samples.

Historically, this area is known to have contained an early nineteenth-century mansion, named Castle Irwell, an early nineteenth-century golf course, and was also the site of two racecourses; the first operating in the mid-nineteenth century and the second dating to the early and mid-twentieth century. During the watching brief several areas of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century activity were identified. The nineteenth-century remains that were revealed hold low archaeological significance and comprise levelling layers, containing nineteenth-century artefacts, which were present in four of the interventions (TP-105 and TP-117; WS-102 and WS-107). These layers were probably deposited during the establishment of the Castle Irwell grounds, or during the establishment of the mid-nineteenth century racecourse, or even the twentieth-century racecourse. It should be noted, however, that the footprint of the former Castle Irwell mansion was not investigated directly, and whilst the evidence obtained from the geophysical survey and the excavation of the adjacent trial holes suggests that the site was subject to comprehensive levelling during the construction of the Manchester Racecourse, the potential for buried foundations of the mansion house to survive *in-situ* cannot be discounted entirely.

The early twentieth-century remains hold greater archaeological value and include brick walls identified in two test pits (TP-116 and TP-117). These walls probably formed elements of a stable block that was associated with the Manchester Racecourse, which was in operation between 1902 and 1963. The spacing of the test pits may indicate that fairly extensive below-ground remains associated with this building are present within the north-eastern corner of flood-defence area. Any damage or disturbance of the buried remains of the stable complex during future stages of the flood improvement scheme may require archaeological mitigation, the scope of which should be devised in consultation with the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oxford Archaeology North would like to thank the Environmental Scientifics Group and the Environment Agency for commissioning and supporting the project. Thanks are also expressed to Norman Redhead, the Heritage Management Director with the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service, for his advice and guidance.

The archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Lewis Stitt. The report was written by Lewis Stitt and edited by Richard Gregory, and the drawings were produced by Mark Tidmarsh. The project was managed by Ian Miller.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

1.1.1 In April 2014, Environmental Scientifics Group (ESG) commissioned Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) to undertake an archaeological watching brief during geotechnical investigations on behalf of the Environment Agency (EA). This formed a precursor to a programme of flood defence improvement, across an area contained within a meander of the River Irwell, which can be accessed from Castle Irwell Student Village, Cromwell Road, Salford (Fig 1).

1.2 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

1.2.1 The flood defence improvement area (centred on SD 8205 0116) is located within the northern edge of the City of Salford appropriately 2.4km to the north-west of the Manchester's city centre. The area lies on the floodplain of the River Irwell, and is bounded to the north by Kersal Dale, to the east by Higher Broughton, to the south by Charlestown, and to the west by Lower Kersal.

1.2.2 Topographically, the area is predominantly flat, lying at a height of 30m above Ordnance Datum (aOD), albeit at its northern end, which rises steeply from the River Irwell to 50m aOD.

1.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1.3.1 **Introduction:** prior to the archaeological watching brief outlined in this report, the flood-defence area was subjected to a detailed archaeological desk-based assessment, which considered the archaeological and historical background of the area in some detail, and also produced a gazetteer of sites contained within (Nash 2014). The following section, draws heavily on this information, and forms a summary designed to place the watching brief in its local archaeological and historical setting.

1.3.2 **Prehistoric to Roman:** although there is no direct evidence for prehistoric sites, or finds, directly within the flood-defence area, the surrounding area was certainly utilised during this broad period. For instance, Neolithic activity is known at Kersal Moor to the north and also to the east, at Irwell House (Arrowsmith 1993, 3; Nash 2014, 8). Evidence for Bronze Age activity includes the site of a possible barrow to the north-west at Broughton Old Hall, whilst an Iron Age enclosed settlement might once have been located on Rainsough Hill (*ibid*). Although this latter site was destroyed by quarrying in the mid-nineteenth century, excavations within adjacent gardens revealed a possible stockade along with over 1000 sherds of late prehistoric/Romano-British pottery, glass and other artefacts (*ibid*). Furthermore, this site may have been comparable to another potential later prehistoric which lies to the west of the flood-defence area, which is termed 'Castle Hill' on early Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping (*ibid*).

- 1.3.3 Regarding Roman activity, a putative Roman camp has been postulated at the southern end of the flood-defence area, which is denoted as ‘Hylewood’ on early OS mapping. However, there is no direct evidence for the presence of this camp and the only firm evidence for Roman activity close to the area includes a silver denarius of Septimus Severus, which was recovered from somewhere between the flood-defence area and Cromwell Bridge. In addition, a Roman finger ring was discovered near St John’s Church, Higher Broughton (Arrowsmith 1993, 4; Nash 2014, 9).
- 1.3.4 **Medieval to early post-medieval period:** during the medieval period the flood-defence area lay within the township of Pendleton, which formed part of the manor of Salford, and whose place-name is first documented in the twelfth century (Farrer and Brownbill, 1911, 392-396; Nash 2014, 9). In 1261 the township was granted to the Priory of St Thomas the Martyr and remained so until the Dissolution (Farrer and Brownbill 1911, 392-396; Nash 2014, 9). In 1539 Pendleton was then granted to the Bishop of Lichfield and subsequently passed to his nephew, Bryan Fowler, after which it remained in possession of the Fowler family until the beginning of the eighteenth century, when it was bequeathed to the Fitzgerald family (*ibid*). Within the flood-defence area there is no direct evidence for either medieval or early post-medieval activity.
- 1.3.5 **Eighteenth to twentieth century:** by the mid-eighteenth century some small-scale rural development may have occurred within the area. For example, a mid-eighteenth-century estate map names two fields adjacent to the northern bank of the Irwell as ‘Damn Road’ and ‘Mill Riding’, tentatively suggesting the presence of a water mill (Arrowsmith, 1993, 7; Nash 2014, 10). In addition, Yates 1786 map depicts a square structure on the northern bank of the River Irwell, adjacent to the north-eastern boundary of the flood-defence area, which may represent an early mill, perhaps that known as ‘Scar Mill’ (*ibid*).
- 1.3.6 In the first decades of the nineteenth century, aside from the potential mill site on the northern bank of the Irwell (*Section 1.3.5*), the cartographic evidence indicates that the majority of the flood-defence area formed undeveloped land. However, in 1826 a mansion named ‘Castle Irwell’ was constructed on the knoll of Hylewood by John Purcell Fitzgerald, a wealthy landowner from Ireland (Nash 2014, 10). This mansion was a three-storey, brick-built, castellated structure, was accessed from Castel Irwell Lane, and was surrounded by enclosed gardens, which contained ancillary buildings. It was also associated with a subterranean passageway, which ran in a north-east/south-west direction below the western half of the house through the knoll (*ibid*). The building is depicted on the detailed Ordnance Survey map of 1852, which was surveyed in 1848 (Plate 1).
- 1.3.7 Significantly, in 1847 John Purcell Fitzgerald leased part of this land at Castle Irwell to the Manchester Racecourse Committee. This allowed for horse racing on the flat area to the north of the house, within the River Irwell’s meander. This racecourse was closed in 1867, and racing was then transferred to New Barns racecourse in Salford, which is now occupied by Media City (*op cit*, 18; Gregory 2006).



Plate 1: Extract from the Ordnance Survey map of 1852, showing Castle Irwell

- 1.3.8 Within the area of the flood-defence scheme that abuts the northern bank of the Irwell a golf course was also established in 1818, by William Mitchell, which is depicted on late nineteenth-century OS mapping (Nash 2014, 10). This holds some significance as it represents only the second golf course to have been established in England (*ibid*).
- 1.3.9 Further development of the area then occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This included the construction of a footbridge crossing the River Irwell named 'Waterford Bridge' which allowed access from Castle Irwell Road to Lower Kersal (*op cit*, 11). Furthermore, the cartographic evidence indicates that Castle Irwell underwent some modifications. These included extending the mansion, demolishing one, and establishing six new, ancillary buildings, as well as glasshouses (*ibid*).
- 1.3.10 In 1898 Castle Irwell was then purchased by the Manchester Racecourse Committee in order to re-establish a racecourse at this site following the compulsory purchase, in 1899, of the racecourse at New Barns by the Manchester Ship Canal Co (Gregory 2006). The Manchester Racecourse Committee therefore demolished Castle Irwell in *c* 1900, and subsequently opened a racecourse in 1902 (Nash 2014, 10). Early twentieth-century OS mapping indicates that this racecourse lay within the meander of the Irwell and included a sizeable stable block, lying within the flood-defence area, positioned at the north-eastern corner of the racecourse (*ibid*).
- 1.3.11 The racecourse was in closed in 1963, and the golf course to the north was also closed at a similar time. Therefore, across the mid-twentieth century only minor development occurred within the boundaries of the flood-defence area. This merely included the establishment of allotments next to the northern bank of the Irwell, within the north-eastern corner of the flood-defence area. In the late twentieth century most of the flood-defence area was used as sports fields.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.1.1 The geotechnical investigation included the excavation of 17 test pits, excavated to a maximum depth of 3m. Generally, these pits measured 0.6m-wide by 2.6m-long and they were excavated using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. In addition to the test pits, the geotechnical investigation included the drilling of 10 boreholes and eight window samples. Initially these interventions were hand dug to a depth of 1.2m prior to drilling.
- 2.1.2 The archaeological watching brief recorded the location, extent, and character of all surviving features and deposits of archaeological interest contained within the test pits, boreholes, and window samples. This was in accordance with the Project Brief (*Appendix 1*) and also the IfA Standards and Guidance for archaeological excavations (IfA 2008a).

2.2 FINDS

- 2.2.1 The recovery of finds and sampling programmes were carried out in accordance with best practice, following current IfA guidelines (IfA 2008a), and subject to expert advice, in order to minimise deterioration.

2.3 ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the current IfA (IfA 2008b) and English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 1991). The project archive represents the collation and indexing of all the data and material gathered during the course of the project. A copy of this report will be forwarded to the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record (HER).

3. RESULTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1.1 The geotechnical investigation consisted of 17 test pits, ten boreholes, and eight window samples. This section details the results of the archaeological monitoring conducted during the excavation of these interventions. The locations of the interventions are plotted on Figure 2.
- 3.1.2 In all of the test pits the uppermost turf and topsoil was up to 0.3m thick and the majority exposed natural fluvial deposits of sand/silt/gravel, and at times the sandstone bedrock. Four of the test pits (TP-105, TP-114, TP-116, and TP-117) and two of the window samples (WS-102 and WS-107) did, however, contain nineteenth-/early twentieth-century archaeological remains in the form of levelling layers, artefacts, and brick walls.

3.2 TEST PITS

- 3.2.1 **TP-101:** this test pit contained a silty sand layer, 1.3m deep, which was sealed by turf and topsoil. Sandstone bedrock was encountered at a depth of 1.8m below the modern ground surface. No archaeological remains were present.
- 3.2.2 **TP-102:** beneath the turf and topsoil, this pit contained natural sand, with the sandstone bedrock being encountered at a 0.9m depth. No archaeological remains were present.
- 3.2.3 **TP-103:** this pit contained natural sandy silt and this lay directly above sandstone bedrock, which was encountered at a depth of 3m. No archaeological remains were present.
- 3.2.4 **TP-104:** in this test pit, beneath the turf and topsoil, sequential layers of natural sand and silt were present, containing some organic inclusions. These continued down to the base of the test pit, which lay at a depth of 1.2m. No archaeological remains were present.
- 3.2.5 **TP-105:** this test pit measured 3.8m long, 0.6m wide, and was 3m deep. Beneath the turf and topsoil, lay a 0.4m-thick sandy silt deposit. This probably formed a levelling layer as it contained nineteenth-century pottery (*Section 3.4*). This deposit lay above natural silty sand, which extended to the base of the test pit.
- 3.2.6 **TP-106:** this test pit contained a natural sandy silt layer, to a depth of 3m, and no archaeological remains were present.
- 3.2.7 **TP-107:** this test pit was 3m deep and beneath the turf and topsoil, two sequential deposits of natural sandy silt and gravel were encountered. No archaeological remains were present.

- 3.2.8 **TP-108-110:** all of these three test pits contained identical deposits. Beneath the turf and topsoil this included a layer of natural silty sand, which lay above natural sand. No archaeological remains were present in any of the test pits.
- 3.2.9 **TP-111:** within this test pit, beneath the turf and topsoil was a natural sandy silt layer. No archaeological remains were present.
- 3.2.10 **TP-112 and TP-113:** both test pits contained identical deposits. Beneath the turf and topsoil these included a 1.5m thick natural layer of silty sand, which sealed a deposit of natural sandy gravel. No archaeological remains were present in either of the pits.
- 3.2.11 **TP-114:** beneath the turf and topsoil a possible levelling deposit was encountered. This had a 0.5m depth, was composed of silty sand and contained nineteenth-century artefacts (*Section 3.4*). This deposit was also partially truncated by a field drain. This levelling layer sealed, in turn, an organic sandy silt layer, which probably represents a natural deposit.
- 3.2.12 **TP-115:** within this pit natural sand was present, beneath the turf and topsoil. Sandstone bedrock was encountered at a depth of 2.15m. No archaeological remains were present.
- 3.2.13 **TP-116:** this pit contained a demolition layer, which lay directly beneath the turf and topsoil. This layer was composed of a mix of sand, clinker, and crushed ceramic building material, ranged between 0.1m and 0.8m thick, and generally lay above natural sandy silt. However, beneath the demolition layer, in one part of the test pit, a brick wall was encountered, at a depth of 0.4m below present ground level. This wall was aligned north-west/south-east and was constructed from wire-cut bricks, four-courses deep, and four-courses wide. The bricks had dimensions of 0.23 x 0.11 x 0.07m (9" x 4³/₈" x 3") and were bonded with a black-bitumen mortar (Plate 2). The wall was laid upon a light-grey sandy bedding deposit, which had been mixed with lime mortar.
- 3.2.14 **TP-117:** in a similar manner to TP-116 (*Section 3.2.13*), a near-identical brick wall was present in this test pit, which lay at a similar depth. This wall was aligned north-east/south-west, was four-courses wide, and two-courses deep, and it was constructed from wire-cut bricks, measuring 0.23 x 0.11 x 0.07m (9" x 4³/₈" x 3"), that were bonded with black-bitumen mortar (Plate 3). It was also laid upon a light-grey sand and mortar bedding deposit.



Plate 2: The brick wall in TP-116



Plate 3: The brick wall in TP-117

3.3 BOREHOLES AND WINDOW SAMPLES

3.3.1 The majority of the boreholes and window samples encountered natural deposits. However, nineteenth-century artefacts were collected from WS102 and WS107 (*Section 3.4*) and these were probably associated with levelling layers.

3.4 FINDS

3.4.1 In total, 14 fragments of artefacts were recovered from essentially unstratified deposits across the site. The entire finds assemblage comprised fragments of pottery, which possibly derived from a single vessel. This formed an underglaze transfer-printed tableware vessel of a late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century date. This is a very common vessel type of little archaeological interest, which does not contribute to a wider understanding of the development of the site.

4. DISCUSSION

- 4.1 During the course of the watching brief several areas containing nineteenth-century remains were identified (Fig 2). However, in TP-105 and TP-114, and WS-102 and WS-107, these remains hold minimal archaeological value in that they merely constitute levelling layers. These layers contained nineteenth-century artefacts and were perhaps laid down during the establishment of the Castle Irwell grounds, or during the establishment of the 1847-67 Manchester racecourse, or even the later racecourse, which opened in 1902. The geophysical survey of the site carried out at an early stage in the project concluded that structural remains of the Castle Irwell mansion house are likely to have been entirely destroyed (GSB Prospection Ltd 2014), and the results obtained from the archaeological watching brief imply that the site had been subject to comprehensive levelling during the construction of the Manchester Racecourse. However, none of the trial pits were placed within the footprint of the mansion house, and the possibility that buried structural remains survive in-situ cannot be discounted entirely.
- 4.2 In addition to the levelling layers, the watching brief also recorded structural remains in the form of two lengths of *in-situ* brick wall present in TP-116 and TP-117, which hold greater archaeological value (Fig 4). Both test pits lay in the same north-eastern part of the flood-defence area and this location suggests that they form elements of the stables associated with the Manchester Racecourse, which was in operation between 1902 and 1963 (Fig 3). This stable block formed a square enclosure, containing *c* 260 individual stables set within 13 stable blocks (ten double pile and three single pile), and probably had tack rooms on its south-western side (Nash 2014, 18). Significantly, the presence of brick walls in two separate test pits, set some 60m apart, may suggest that below-ground remains associated with these stables exist over a fairly extensive area.
- 4.3 No evidence for any earlier activity on the site was encountered during the watching brief.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 The results obtained from the watching brief has concluded that there is little or no archaeological interest across most of the study area. However, buried remains of the former stable blocks associated with the former Manchester Racecourse evidently survive in the north-eastern corner of the study area. Any damage or disturbance of these buried remains during future stages of the flood improvement scheme may require archaeological mitigation, the scope of which should be devised in consultation with the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service in their capacity as archaeological advisor to Salford City Council.
- 5.2 Whilst no firm evidence for the Castle Irwell mansion house was obtained from either the geophysical survey (GSB Prospection Ltd 2014) or the watching brief, the possibility for buried remains to survive *in-situ* cannot be discounted entirely. The merits of any further archaeological investigation of this part of the study area should be discussed with the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service.

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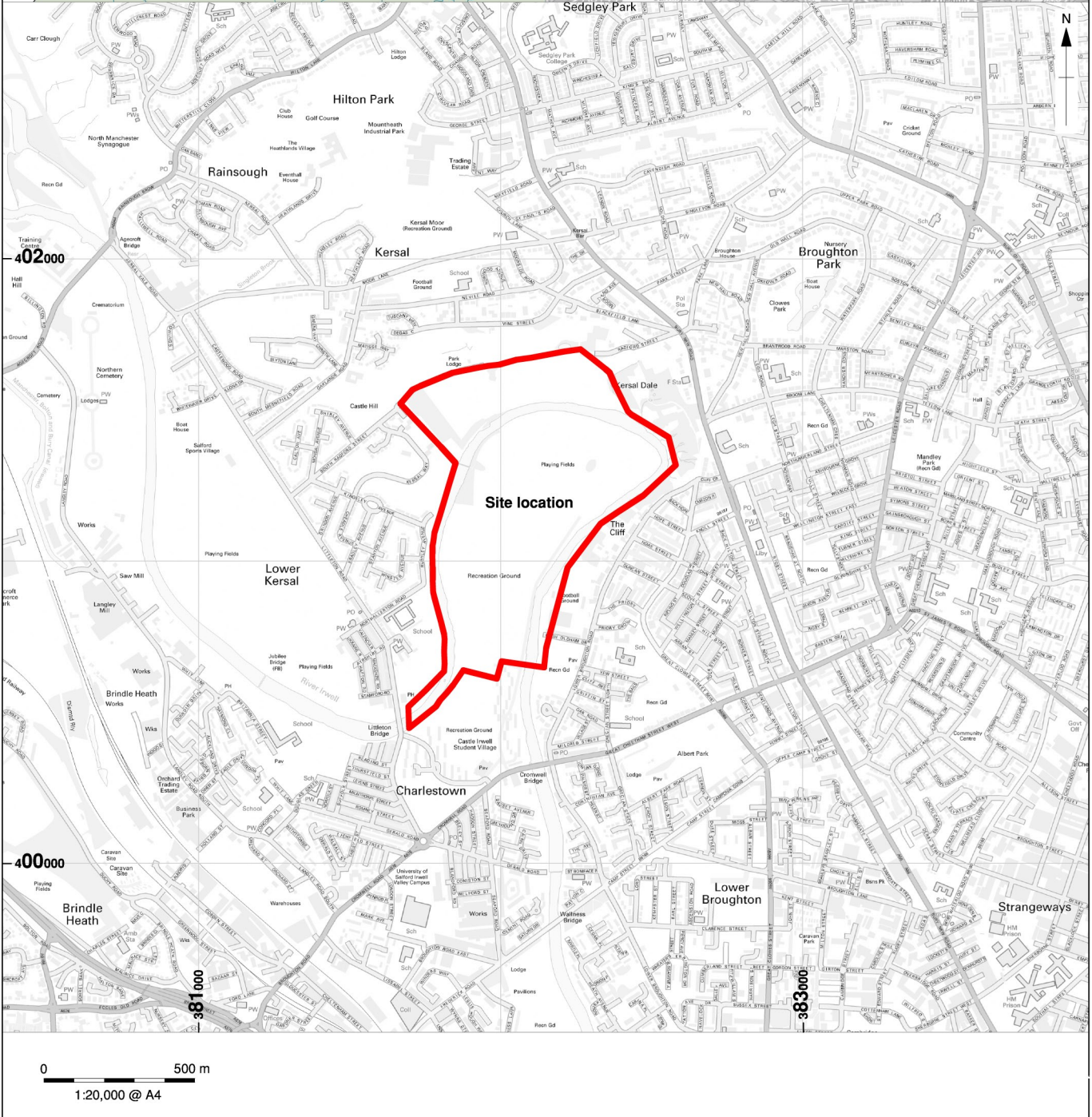
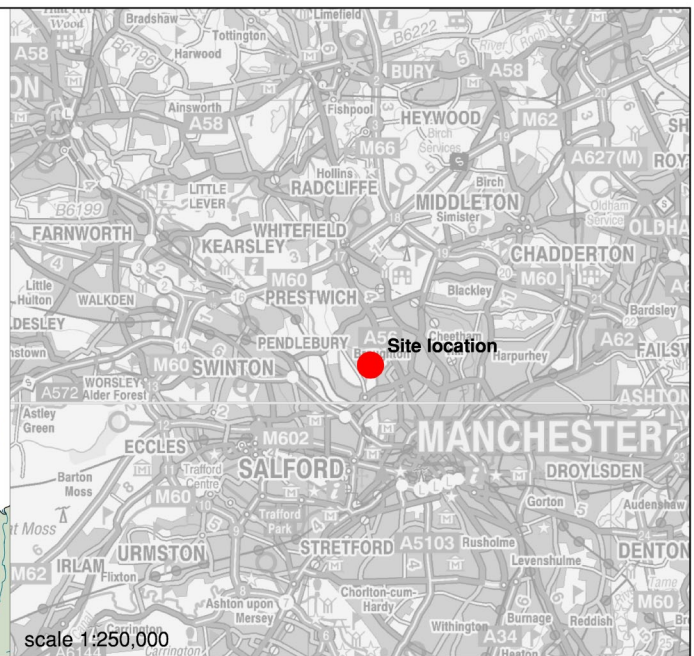


Figure 1: Site location

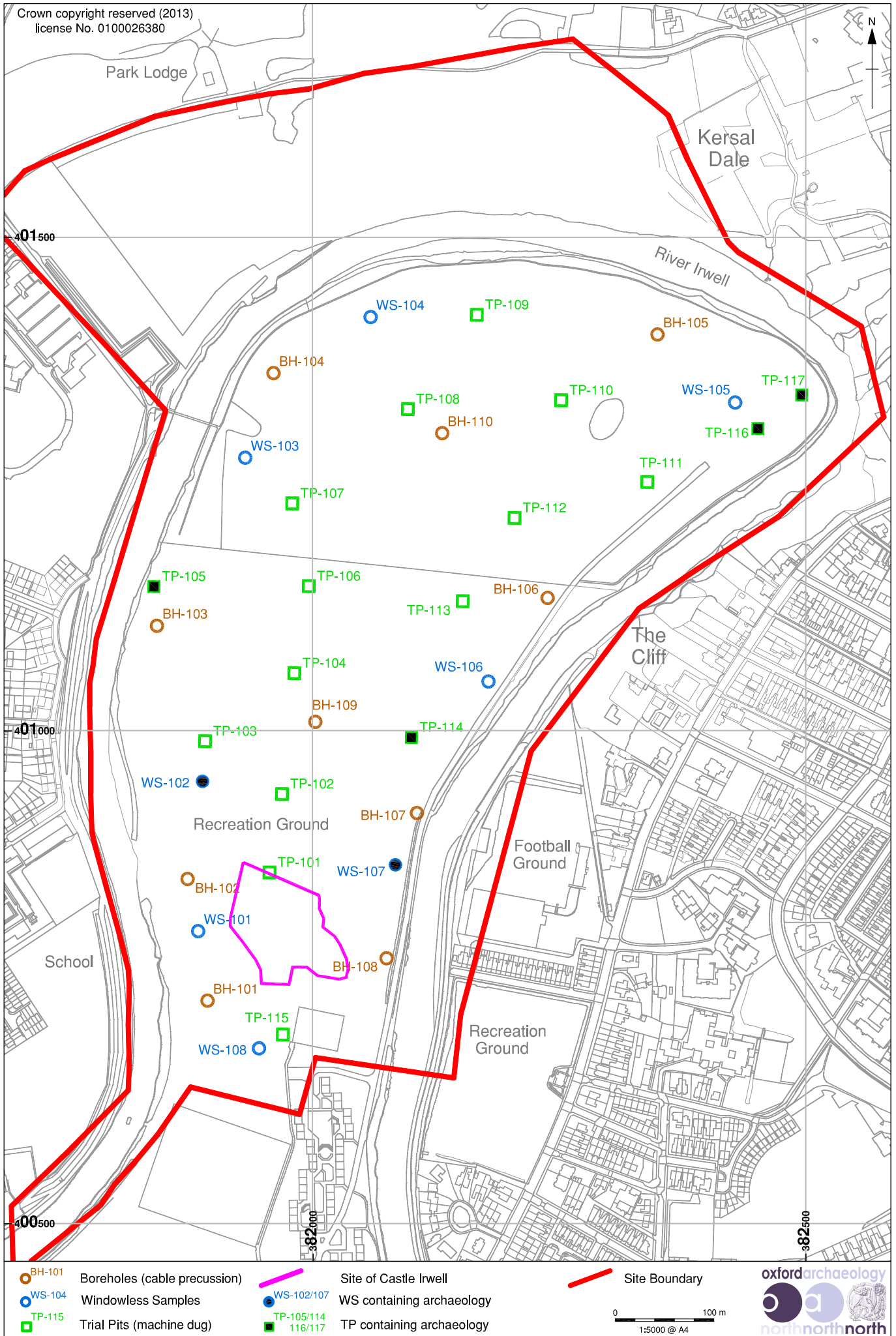


Figure 2: Location of the ground investigation sites

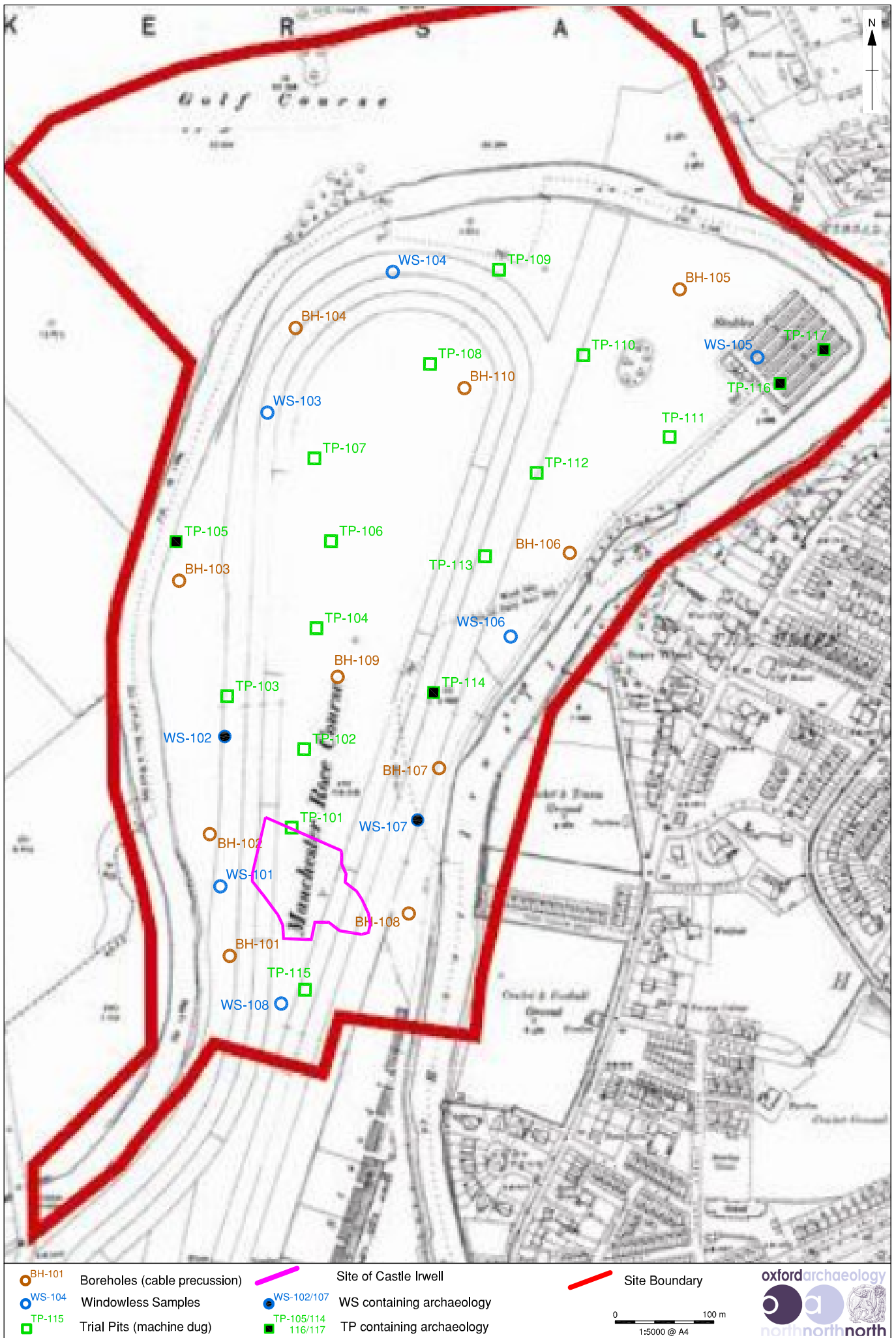


Figure 3: Ground investigation sites superimposed on the Ordnance Survey 25":1 mile map of 1908

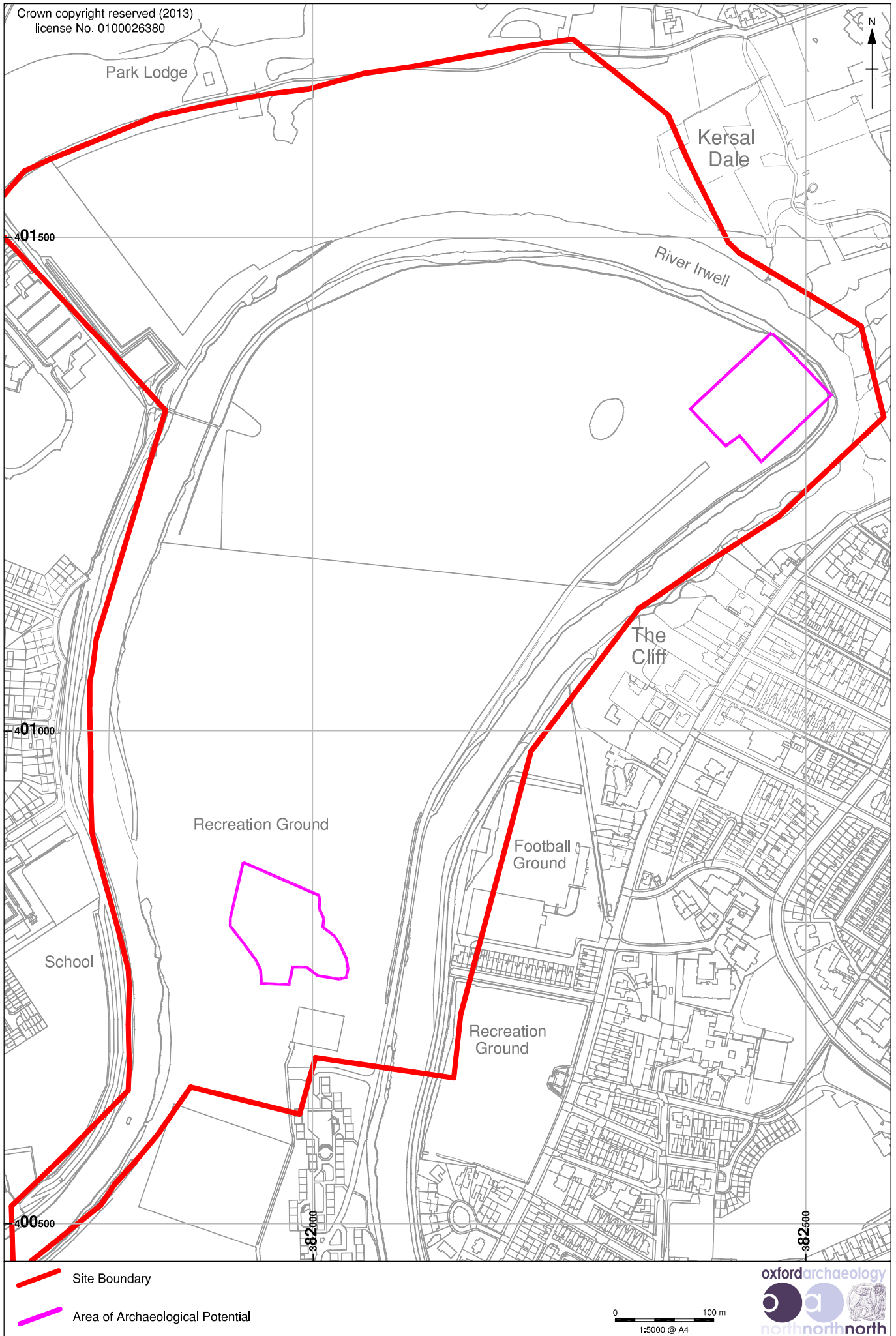


Figure 4: Location of areas of potential archaeological interest