

Forbury Gardens Reading

Installation of CCTV Cameras



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeology

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Installation of CCTV Cameras Forbury Gardens, Reading Berkshire

NGR SU 719 736

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In February 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Forbury Gardens in Reading, Berkshire (SU 719 736). The work was commissioned by Scott Wilson on behalf of Reading Borough Council, in advance of the installation of two CCTV cameras and associated cabling. The watching brief revealed part of a semi-circular ditch feature that appears on a 17th century map of Reading that may represent the limit of a walled garden or orchard at this time. Limited evidence relating to demolition activity at the Abbey was also recorded.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In February 2003, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Forbury Gardens in Reading, Berkshire (NGR: SU 719 736). The work was commissioned by Scott Wilson on behalf of Reading Borough Council in respect of Scheduled Ancient Monument consent for the erection of two CCTV camera poles and associated cabling.
- 1.1.2 A project brief was agreed with English Heritage based on the conditions laid down in the Scheduled Ancient Monument consent provided by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2002) detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is generally level and lies on a gravel island within the Thames Floodplain at c 41 m above OD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The following information is based on more detailed work by Oxford Archaeology for the pre-Saxon periods. For post-Saxon periods much information has been drawn from Dr. Cecil Slade's unpublished book 'The Town of Reading and its Abbey, 1121-1997'.
- 1.3.2 The area of the site is known to have produced limited (usually residual) evidence relating to the Prehistoric and Roman periods. However, the very small scale of the CCTV ground works would suggest that the recovery of evidence from this period would be remote.
- 1.3.3 The first major settlement in Reading was of Saxon origin and evidence suggests that it was located in the defensive angle between the rivers Kennet and Thames. The area is adjacent to Forbury Gardens and the Abbey ruins. The settlement probably would not have exceeded 100 to 150 inhabitants. By 870 AD, however, the Manor of Reading had become a royal estate.

- 1.3.4 The first surviving writing of the name Reading occurs around 900 AD but evidence suggests the name dates from earlier times. It was formed from a group's name the 'Readingas', who were the followers of Reada ('the Red') and who bequeathed their name to the place. The term 'Forbury' is also believed to date from the Saxon settlement and means 'area in front of the town'.
- 1.3.5 In the winter of 870 AD the Vikings chose Reading for their winter camp where they built a rampart between the Thames and the Kennet. Reading was destroyed by marauding Danes in 1006.
- 1.3.6 By 1086 some rebuilding had resulted in Reading becoming a borough and is mentioned in the Domesday Survey. After the Norman conquest Reading was apparently too insignificant to have its own castle. However, there are suggestions that Forbury Hill may represent the mound of a medieval castle, but the absence of the feature on early maps would seem to go against this theory - instead, it is most likely to have been formed as part of the Civil War defences.
- 1.3.7 Reading Abbey was commissioned by Henry I in 1121. The precinct wall may have incorporated an embankment originating from the Viking rampart.
- 1.3.8 The Abbey housed 100 monks and stretched across the Forbury Gardens site to the river Kennet. The Abbey church was officially opened and hallowed in 1164 by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket in the presence of Henry II.
- 1.3.9 For the next 400 years the Abbey dominated the town and became one of the most influential establishments in England. The Abbey and the town were independent, relying on one another for economic well being.
- 1.3.10 In 1539 the last Abbot and his 2 monks were executed in front of the Abbey Gate after a mock trial. Henry VIII collected the wealth of the Abbey and dissolved it for royal use. The Abbey buildings were mainly destroyed and the usable building materials sold off. The Abbot's house became a royal residence and after 400 years Reading again became a royal borough.
- 1.3.11 The first known map of Reading was drawn by John Speed in 1610.
- 1.3.12 With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642, Reading was positioned between the Royalist headquarters in Oxford and the Parliamentary headquarters in London. The town was garrisoned by several thousand forces under Sir Arthur Aston. The defences of Reading involved the blowing up of part of the Abbey and considerable destruction of standing structures within the nave and cloisters. The remaining boundary wall was refortified and entrenchments were dug across the Forbury. The mound was also utilised as a gun emplacement.
- 1.3.13 The Forbury area remained an open space and was much used by the townsfolk. In the 19th century it was laid out as gardens with the outer Forbury being formalised in 1861 and as part of a complete garden in 1864.
- 1.3.14 A semi-circular feature is shown on maps of 1643 and 1802 and lies close to the proposed position of Camera 1. The feature lies behind the Civil War defences and probably represents part of an enclosed garden or orchard. In 1809 the feature was

described as ditched and in part pallisaded, with much rubbish having been dumped in this area (Slade 1997)

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 OA extends its thanks to Scott Wilson's for plans of the site; OA's Robin Bashford supervised the excavations.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The ground works were subjected to continuous archaeological supervision. The pits and trenches were excavated by hand except where paving or tarmac required the use of a mini-digger.
- 2.2.2 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Camera Pit 1

- 3.1.1 Camera Pit 1 was located approximately 32 m north-east of the war memorial (Fig.2). The pit measured 1 x 1 m at the base and was 1.2 m deep. The base of the pit was composed of an alluvial sand matrix (18), which was orange-brown in colour. This deposit has been interpreted as the natural geology. The natural sand (18) was seen to be cut by an east to west oriented linear feature (16).
- 3.1.2 The full extent of this feature was not present within the trench although 0.7 m of its width was exposed. Excavation of the fill of 16 revealed it to be a compact, mid grey brown silty sand with flint nodules (17). Fragments of clay pipe and post-medieval pottery sherds were recovered from this deposit. The date of the finds would be consistent with the date of the Civil War defences known on the site immediately to the east: furthermore, it may be that feature 16 represents the semi-circular feature indicated on the maps of 1643 and 1802 (see Figs. 6 and 7).
- 3.1.3 Deposit 17 was sealed beneath a layer of sandy gravel with brick rubble and flint nodules (14). This relatively loose deposit appeared to slope down from the north

west with a maximum thickness of 0.4 m. No finds were recovered from this horizon, which appears to represent a layer of made ground.

- 3.1.4 Layer 14 was sealed beneath a mixed deposit of iron slag and clinker that contained a number of nails and pieces of glass (13). This layer was directly above layer 14 and levelled the slope left by context 14 (Fig.4). This layer may represent the documentary reference recorded as 'much rubbish having been dumped' in 1809 (Slade 1997).
- 3.1.5 Between context 13 and the topsoil there were a further two layers. These have been described as variations in the made ground horizons described above. Context 15 was a layer of mid grey brown silty clay with chalk lumps and flint nodules. This context was only present in the southern part of the Camera Pit.
- 3.1.6 This horizon did not produce finds and had a maximum depth of 0.18 m. Context 12 was of a different composition consisting of a very compact sandy gravel, with lime mortar and brick rubble, flint and pebbles up to a depth of 0.15 m. This horizon is likely to be further dumping within the made ground though it may represent a rude surface though this is unlikely.
- 3.1.7 The sequence was sealed beneath 0.3 m of topsoil from the present day flower beds. This soil was a dark brown silty loam (11).

Camera Pit 2

- 3.1.8 Camera Pit 2 was located 14 m north east of the existing southern gateway, in an area of grass (Fig.3). The pit measured 1 x 1 m at the base and was 1.1 m deep. At the base of the pit was a deposit of mid pinkish brown clay with occasional flecks of CBM (26). This layer was exposed at the maximum depth and was not excavated. This layer may represent a demolition context associated with the destruction of the Abbey.
- 3.1.9 Layer 26 was overlain by a loose mixture of chalk lumps, lime mortar, flint nodules and CBM up to 0.28 m thick (25). This horizon has been interpreted as a demolition horizon associated with the Abbey, however, whether it dates to the dissolution or is redeposited as later landscaping is unclear.
- 3.1.10 Above layer 25 was a garden soil horizon composed of a mid grey clayey silt with small proportions of gravel and charcoal (24). This context was 0.36 m thick. Immediately above context 24 was a very thin layer (0.02 m) of mixed sand and mortar (23).
- 3.1.11 This deposit has been interpreted as either an interface between two separate garden soil layers or a remnant of a rough or temporary surface. This layer was overlain by another garden soil similar in make up to layer 24. This deposit (22) was 0.26 m thick and no finds were recovered.
- 3.1.12 The top of the soil sequence was composed of up to 0.14 m of turf that formed the modern grassy area.

Cable Trenches

- 3.1.13 The cable trenches for each CCTV camera were located as depicted on Figs.2 and 3. Each of the trenches was 0.3 m wide with a maximum depth of 0.3 to 0.35 m. The relatively shallow depths for these trenches meant that the potential for the disturbance of any underlying archaeological deposits was minimal.
- 3.1.14 Cable Trench 1 was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.32 m below ground surface. The trench cut through topsoil/turf or hardcore where it crossed flower beds grassed areas or tarmac paths (41).
- 3.1.15 Cable Trench 2 was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.35 m through topsoil/turf/garden soils or deposits associated with the tarmac path. Excavation was taken deeper to duct under the boundary wall (Fig. 5, S. 4) and the following was observed: The boundary wall (31) was butted by a layer of leaf mould (32) and garden soil (33), which overlay a deposit (34) similar in composition to context 14 observed in Camera Trench 1. The demolition rubble identified in Camera Trench 2 was not present within the Cable Trench.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 None of the finds recovered during the fieldwork appeared to relate to *in-situ* deposits and as such they indicate a relatively high degree of landscaping on the site. None of the finds were dateable to before the 17th century.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits of palaeo-environmental significance were observed during the fieldwork.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 Despite the small scale of the investigation afforded during the watching brief, some relevant information has been obtained. It would seem likely that the semi-circular feature shown on the historic maps was present within Camera Trench 1. Although not fully excavated, it seems probable that this feature dates roughly to the Civil War period. Whether the feature is defensive in nature cannot be ascertained within the remit of this project, although it would appear unlikely as it lies behind the known defensive line of the civil war entrenchments. It is likely that in later periods the feature represented the limit of a walled garden or orchard.
- 4.1.2 Evidence from Camera Pit 2 of demolition rubble may relate to the destruction of the Abbey itself. Dating this material to a particular phase of destruction is problematical given that the destruction occurred over a number of periods i.e. the Dissolution, the Civil War etc. As a result the demolition deposits could represent disturbance and redeposition that relates to some or all of the major destruction and landscaping phases across the site.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

| Context No | Type | Thickness | Width | Description | Comment |
|------------|---------|-----------|-------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 11 | Deposit | 0.3 m | 1 m | Topsoil | |
| 12 | Deposit | 0.15 m | 1 m | Made Ground | C. 19th Century |
| 13 | Deposit | 0.4 m | 1m | Made Ground | |
| 14 | Deposit | 0.4m | 1 m | Made Ground | |
| 15 | Deposit | 0.18 m | 0.4 m | Made Ground | |
| 16 | Cut | 0.2 m | 0.7 m | Linear Feature | |
| 17 | Deposit | 0.2 m | 0.7 m | Fill | c. 17th Century |
| 18 | Deposit | | | Natural | |
| | | | | | |
| 21 | Deposit | 0.14 m | 1.0 m | Turf | |
| 22 | Deposit | 0.26 m | 1.0 m | Garden Soil | 20th Century |
| 23 | Deposit | 0.02 m | 1.0 m | Poss surface | |
| 24 | Deposit | 0.36 m | 1.0 m | Garden Soil | |
| 25 | Deposit | 0.28 m | 1.0 m | Demolition Rubble | Tiles and brick |
| 26 | Deposit | | | Demolition Layer | From Abbey? |
| | | | | | |
| 31 | Wall | | | | |
| 32 | Deposit | 0.1 m | 1.0 m | Topsoil | |
| 33 | Deposit | 0.45 m | 1.0 m | Garden Soil | |
| 34 | Deposit | 0.3 m | 1.0 m | Made Ground | |
| | | | | | |
| 41 | Deposit | 0.3 m | 0.3 m | Turf/Garden Soil | Cable Trench |

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- Oxford Archaeology, 2001 *Forbury Gardens, Reading, Berkshire. Archaeological Monitoring and Mitigation of Proposed Restoration - Written Scheme of Investigation*
- Oxford Archaeology, 2002 *Installation of CCTV Cameras Forbury Gardens Reading - Written Scheme of Investigation*
- Slade, C F, 1997 *The Town of Reading and its Abbey, 1121-1997*
(unpublished)

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Forbury Gardens, Installation of CCTV Cameras

Site code: REFGD 03

Grid reference: SU 719 736

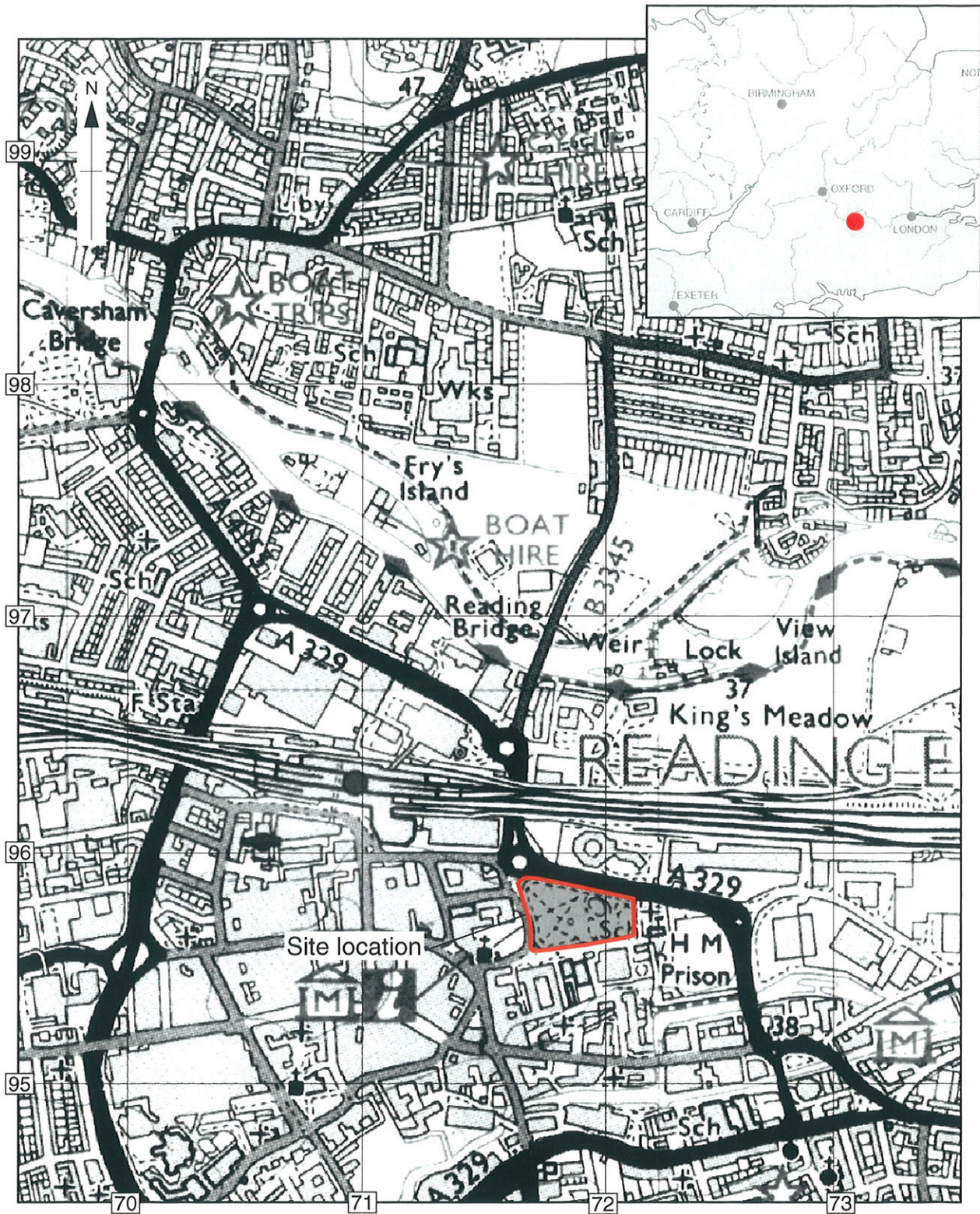
Type of watching brief: Monitoring of Trial Pits

Date and duration of project: February 2003. 3 Days

Area of site: 2x 1 x 1 m pits and cable trenches

Summary of results: The investigation revealed part of a semi-circular map feature possibly of Civil War date originally that may have represented a boundary for an orchard or garden in later periods. Some demolition evidence for the destruction of the Abbey was observed.

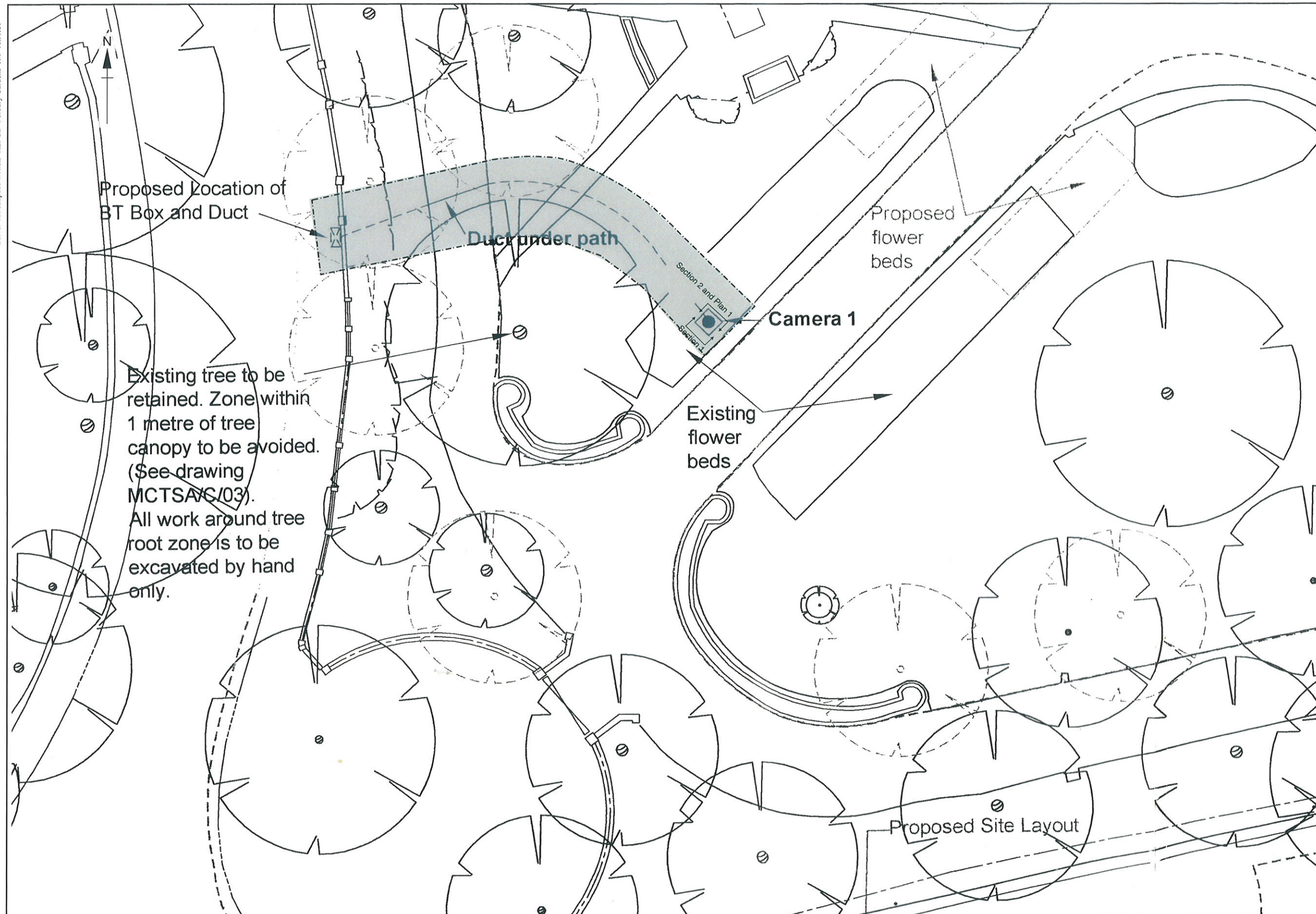
Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Reading Museum and Art Gallery in due course, under the following accession number: REDMG 2003.12










Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

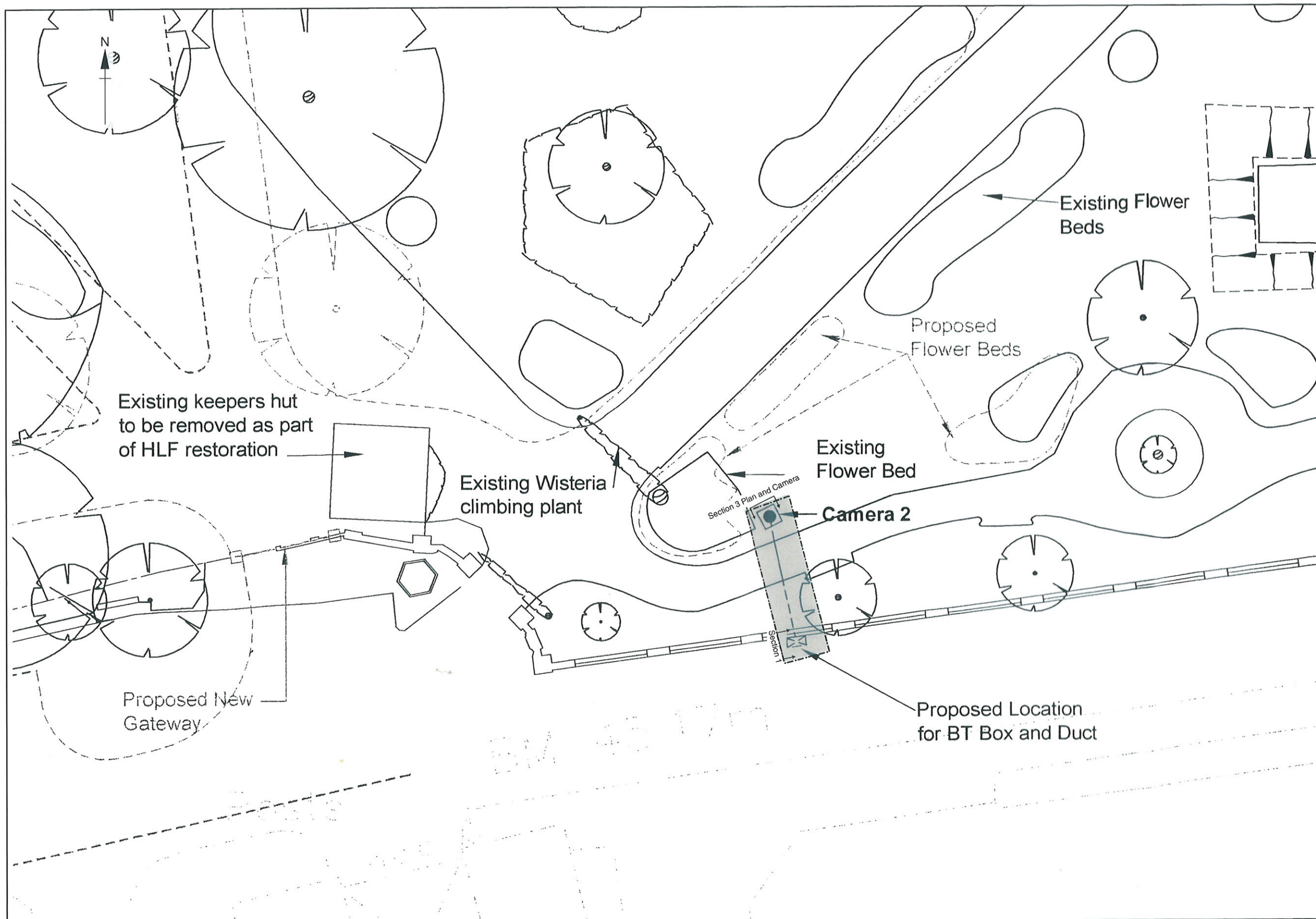


- NOTES**
- Existing Site
-  Existing Site Layout
 -  Existing Trees
- HLF Restoration Proposals
-  Proposed Site Layout
 -  Proposed New Trees
- Proposed CCTV Work
-  Proposed CCTV Camera
 -  Proposed Electric Cable Run (Trench)
 -  Proposed Electric Cable Duct

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Figure 2: Location of Camera Pit 1 and Cable Trench

0 10m
1:200



- NOTES
- Existing Site
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 - Existing Trees
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- Proposed Site Layout
 - Proposed New Trees
- Proposed CCTV Work
- Proposed CCTV Camera
 - Proposed Electric Cable Run (Trench)
 - Proposed Electric Cable Duct

Figure 3: Location of Camera Pit 2 and Cable Trench

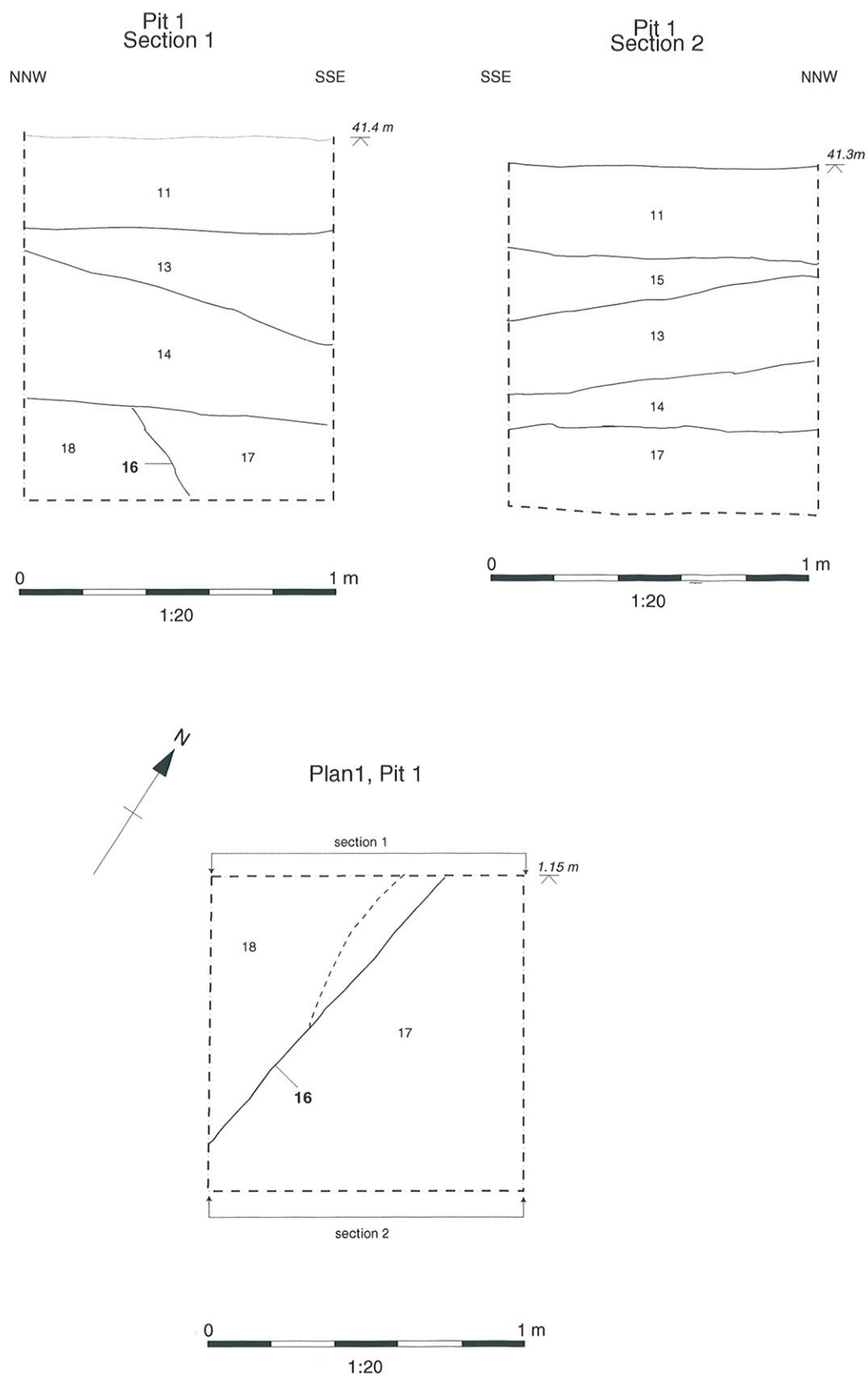


Figure 4: Plan and Section of Camera Pit 1

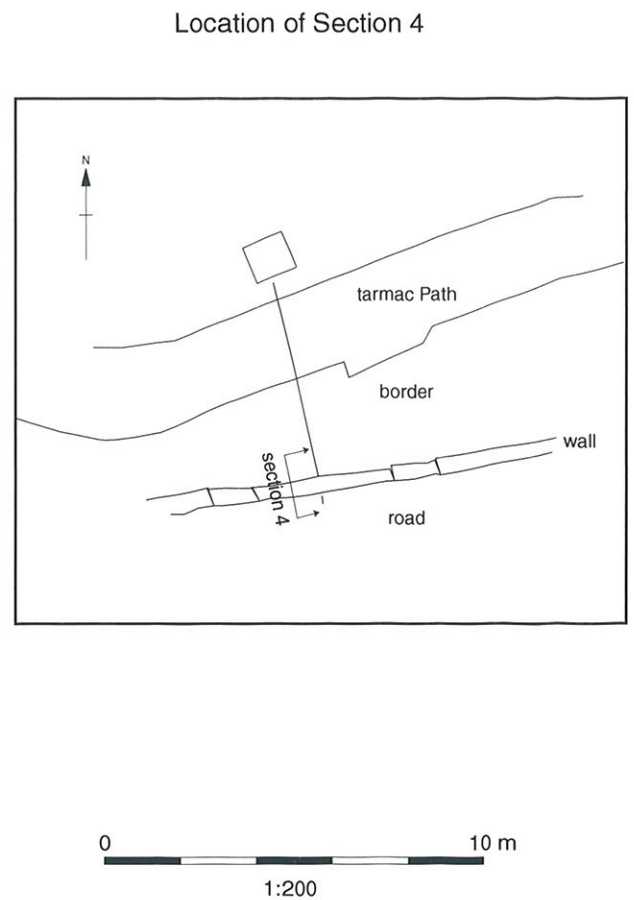
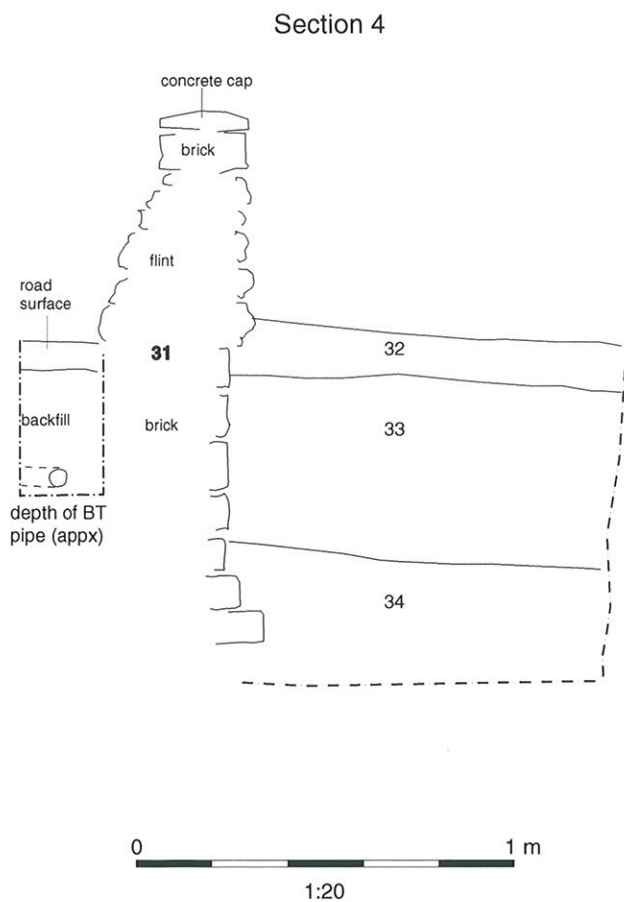
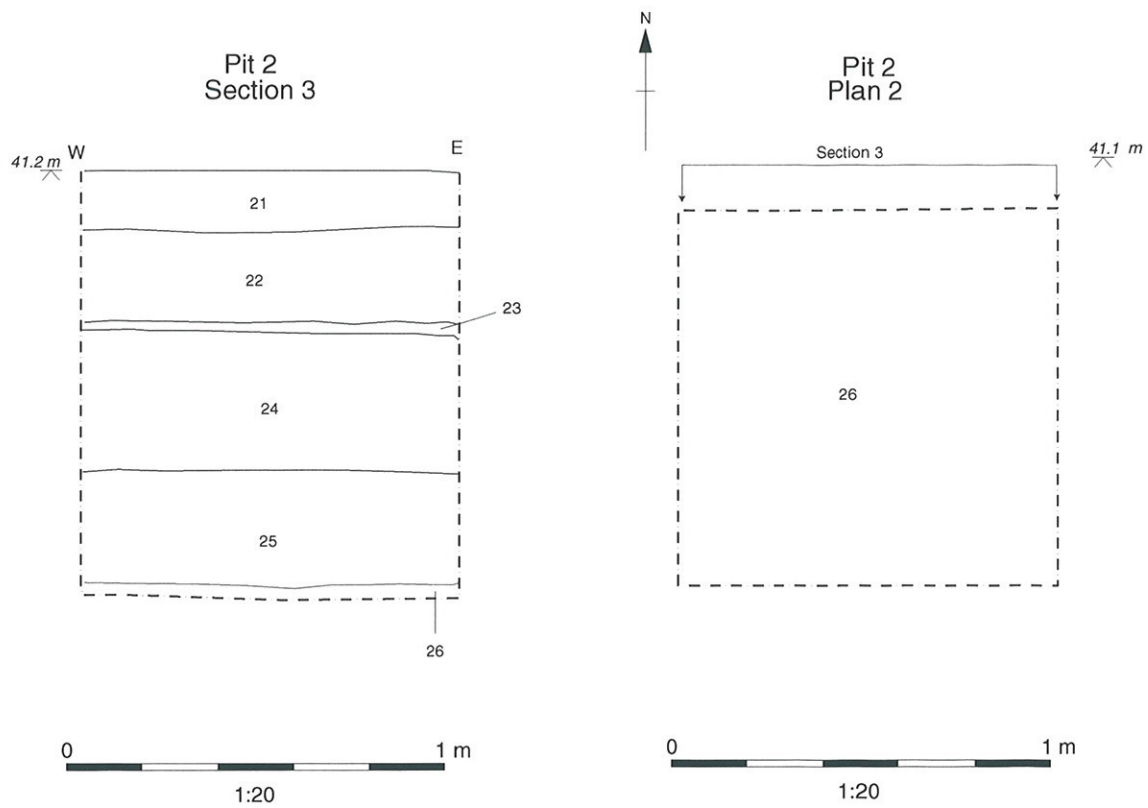


Figure 5: Plan and Section of Camera Pit 2 and Cable Trench

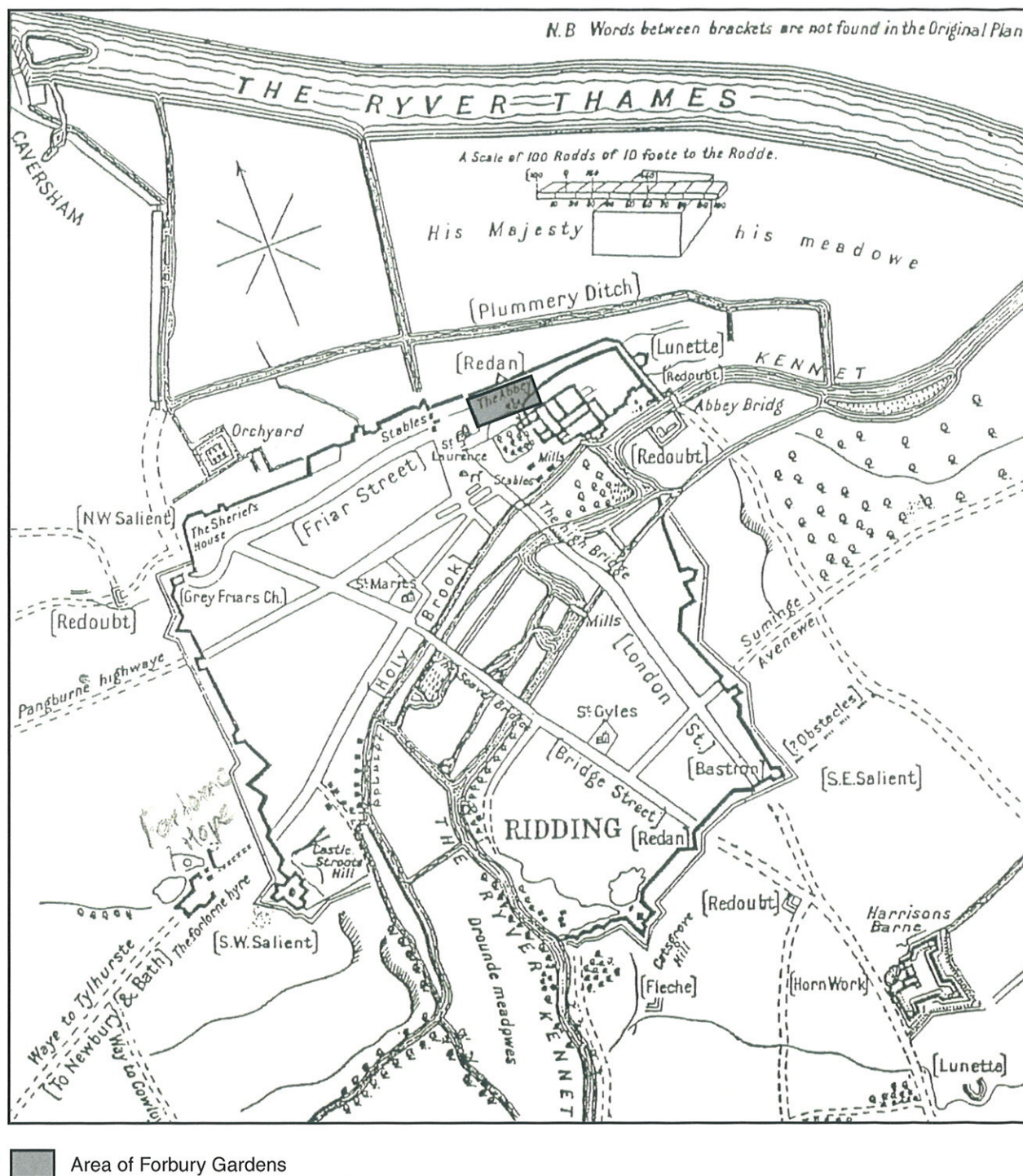


Figure 6: Map of Reading showing Civil war defences 1643

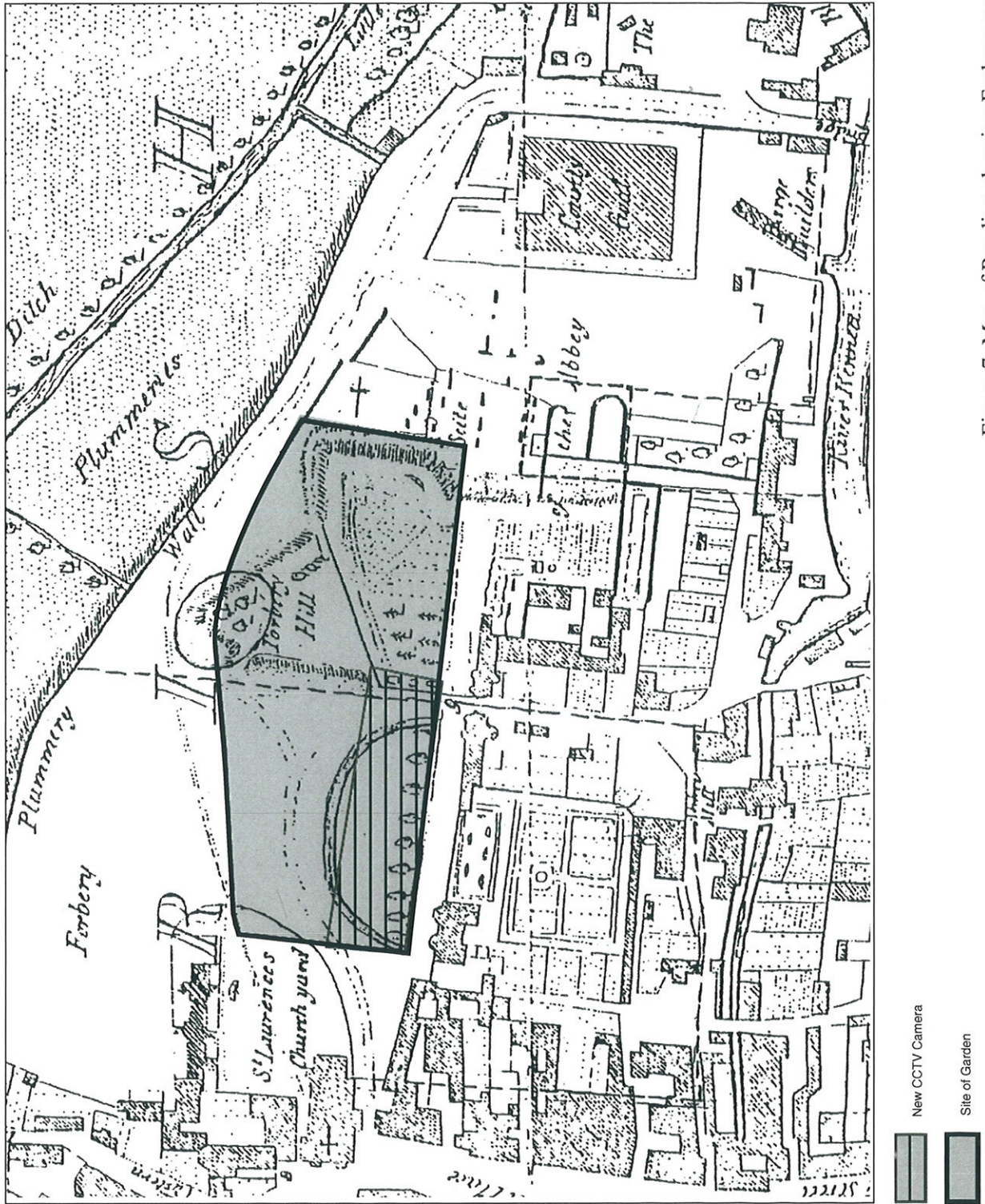


Figure 7: Map of Reading showing Forbury and the Abbey 1802



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