



# **GARDNERS TILES, 99-101 PENNY STREET, LANCASTER**

Lancashire

## **Archaeological Watching Brief Report**



**Oxford Archaeology North**

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## CONTENTS

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<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Circumstances of the Project.....	4
<b>2. METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Project Specification .....	5
2.2 Watching Brief .....	5
2.3 Archive .....	5
<b>3. BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1 Location, Topography and Geology .....	6
3.2 Historical Background .....	6
3.3 Previous Excavations within the Vicinity .....	7
<b>4. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS .....</b>	<b>9</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	9
4.2 The Watching Brief .....	9
<b>5. DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>10</b>
5.1 Archaeological Potential .....	10
5.2 Impact .....	10
<b>6. BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>11</b>
6.1 Cartographic Sources .....	11
6.2 Secondary Sources .....	11
<b>ILLUSTRATIONS .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>PLATES .....</b>	<b>14</b>

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The watching brief was undertaken by Fraser Brown and the report was written by Matthew Town. The drawings were produced by Matthew Town. The report was edited by Jamie Quartermaine and Alan Lupton. The project was managed by Jamie Quartermaine.

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## SUMMARY

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Oxford Archaeology North was commissioned by Askham Construction Ltd Ltd to undertake a watching brief on groundworks at Gardners Tiles, Penny Street, Lancaster (SD 4773 6138), prior to the construction of a proposed residential development.

Penny Street is on the line of a Roman road extending south from the Roman settlement in Lancaster. Cemeteries were laid along this road during this period, and substantial cremation cemeteries and a mortuary enclosure have been identified at the nearby former Streamline Garage. In addition cremations have been found along Penny Street, including the site of 77-79 Penny Street to the north of this development (OANorth 003a).

A programme of archaeological trial trenching was carried out in August 2003, which entailed the excavation of five trial trenches positioned across the site. A nineteenth century cobbled surface, and a heavily truncated feature of undetermined date, were uncovered during the course of the evaluation, but otherwise no archaeological features were identified. The majority of the site had either been leveled to natural soil, or had been disturbed by modern wall footings and drains (OANorth 003a).

Although no significant archaeological deposits were identified, there remained the possibility that the bases of negative features cut into natural, such as cremation pits, could survive despite the truncation of the site. It was therefore recommended that a watching brief be undertaken during the groundworks for the laying of the new build foundations and any services. A watching brief was accordingly undertaken between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of November 2003.

The watching brief confirmed that the site had been heavily truncated during the construction and subsequent demolition, of housing on the site, with the western half of the plot particularly impacted upon by this activity. The eastern half of the plot was also severely truncated during the insertion of concrete service channels, which ran in a north/south direction across the back of the plot. The site was sealed by overburden deposits made up of demolition material, which directly overlay the natural drift geology. A post-medieval well was identified during the watching brief, lying beneath the impact levels of the new development, but no further archaeology was identified. The results of the watching brief only served to confirm the results of the evaluation, which indicated that the site had been severely truncated and that no significant archaeology was likely to survive in the area.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 Askam Construction Ltd Ltd requested that Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) undertake a watching brief on land formerly occupied by Gardener's Tiles, 99-101 Penny Street, Lancaster (SD 4773 6138 (Fig 1)), during the groundworks associated with the construction of a proposed residential development.
- 1.1.2 The development site, 99-101 Penny Street, lies to the south of Lancaster city centre, at the southern end of the historic medieval and Roman core of the town. Within this part of the town there have been identified significant numbers of Roman cremations (*Section 3.2*) and as a result there was a requirement by Lancashire County Archaeological Service (LCAS) to investigate the site in advance of the development. OA North undertook the first phase of works, in the form of an initial watching brief and evaluation, in August 2003 (OA North 2003a).
- 1.1.3 The first phase of works was undertaken on the removal of the former superstructure on the site. Initially, an archaeological watching brief was maintained while the overburden was removed down to the level of the highest archaeological deposit. A programme of trial trenching was then undertaken across the cleared site to examine the potential for sub-surface remains. A nineteenth century cobbled surface, and a heavily truncated feature of undetermined date, were uncovered during the course of the evaluation, but otherwise no archaeological features were identified. The majority of the site had either been levelled to natural soil, or had been disturbed by modern wall footings and drains. This phase of works was reported on separately (OA North 2003a).
- 1.1.4 Although no significant archaeological deposits were identified during the first phase of works, there remained the possibility that the bases of negative features cut into natural, such as cremation pits, could survive despite the truncation of the site. It was recommended that a watching brief be undertaken during the ground works for the laying of the new build foundations and any services. A second phase of works, comprising a further watching brief, was therefore undertaken on the site between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of November 2003. The results of the second phase are set out in this report.

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

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### 2.1 PROJECT SPECIFICATION

- 2.1.1 Askam Construction Ltd Ltd requested that OA North submit proposals for an evaluation prior to development within the site. This project design (OA North 2003a) was prepared in accordance with a verbal brief from LCAS. The project design was adhered to in full and the work was consistent with the relevant standards and procedures of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA), and generally accepted best practice. Following on from the evaluation, a watching brief was recommended during all groundworks for the development.

### 2.2 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.2.1 The programme of field observation recorded the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological features observed during all groundworks for the new development. The recording comprised a full description and preliminary classification of the features and materials revealed on OA North *pro-forma* sheets. A photographic record in digital and colour print formats was also compiled. Any finds recovered were to be returned to OA North for analysis, but in the event, no finds were retained in the course of the watching brief.
- 2.2.2 The groundworks were undertaken using a mechanical excavator fitted with a 0.6m toothless bucket; in the course of which a close liaison between OA North staff and the site contractors was maintained.

### 2.3 ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full archive of the work has been produced to a professional standard in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (1991) and the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long Term Storage* (UKIC 1990). OA North practice is to deposit the original record archive of projects (paper, magnetic, and plastic media) with the Lancashire Record Office.

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### 3. BACKGROUND

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#### 3.1 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 3.1.1 The site is situated at the southern end of the historic core of Lancaster, at the top of a north facing slope. The development site is roughly square in shape, with Penny Street located immediately to the west and running along the entire western boundary of the site. The site is bounded on the north, south and east sides by the walls of commercial buildings.
- 3.1.2 **Geology:** the solid geology of Lancaster consists predominantly of Silesian (Upper Carboniferous) grey-brown or reddened, medium to coarse grained sandstones of the Pendle Grit Formation, which is part of the Millstone Grit Group (British Geological Survey 1992). These sandstones are thickly bedded with thin siltstone partings but with mixed sandstone/siltstone units near the top. The drift geology for the site has been mapped as glaciofluvial sheet deposits of clayey sands and gravels.
- 3.1.3 The Soil Survey (1983) does not classify soils within urban areas but the results of the trench excavated in a nearby site in Aldcliffe Road (LUAU 1995), provides a guide to the soil and drift geology present in the vicinity. Aldcliffe Road showed a sequence of soils, including plough soils and the former ground surface, which overlay a red-brown sandy gravel, which in turn overlay a yellow-brown sandy clay; both of these deposits were interpreted as natural drift geology. These results broadly coincided with the sequence identified at the nearby Streamline excavation (LUAU 2000).

#### 3.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.2.1 **Introduction:** the historical and archaeological background was principally compiled through secondary sources and previous phases of archaeological investigation within the area of the site, and is intended to put the results of the assessment into a wider context.
- 3.2.2 **Prehistoric:** there is little evidence of prehistoric activity in and around Lancaster, but there are three entries in the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) recording findspots of prehistoric burials in the vicinity of the site. Although this suggests a funerary aspect to the area, it provides little evidence of settlement or other activities. The three sites were all found pre 1900, and insufficient information was gathered to rule out the possibility of these being Romano-British burials rather than prehistoric.
- 3.2.3 **Roman:** the major Roman site in Lancaster is the fort located on Castle Hill. This was founded in the AD 70's as part of the conquest and pacification of northern Britain, and was later used by Agricola as he pushed his troops northwards into Scotland. This fort was rebuilt and added to several times on the same site, and the latest of these, in the fourth century, was realigned to lie parallel with the River Lune (Shotter 1993).
- 3.2.4 The main road linking the fort to the overall road system is thought to have been Church Street. Excavations carried out around the area of this road suggest that



small scale settlement along this route began to emerge around the time the first fort was built. During the second century, probably during the reign of Hadrian, the settlement grew much larger, into a thriving community. The full extent of this settlement is unknown, but evidence suggests that it extended eastwards to Cheapside, and south along the line of Penny Street, with the fort and the river Lune as boundaries. It is almost certain that this settlement continued through the fourth century until the realignment of the fort heralded a new era in the town's history, when it shrank dramatically. Reasons for this are unknown, as there is very little evidence from the fifth century (Howard-Davies *et al* forthcoming).

- 3.2.5 Cremation burials have been found during excavations at Penny Street (LUAU 1996), individual burials between King Street and Penny Street (LUAU 1997), at Streamline Garage to the west of Kings Street (LUAU 2000), and another at St Thomas's Church (LUAU 1997). These imply a pattern of funerary activity extending around the southern side of the settlement and dating from the second to the fourth centuries AD.
- 3.2.6 **Medieval:** the early medieval period is represented mainly by a hoard of ninth century coins (Northumbrian stycas) found at Vicarage Fields near to St Mary's church (Newman 1996, 102; Penney 1981, 13). Further evidence from this period comprises fragments of stone crosses from the area of the Priory Church, indicating the presence of an earlier church.
- 3.2.7 By the later medieval period, place names and documentary sources provide the majority of evidence for the area. The Domesday reference to a church suggests that this formed the centre of a vill ('*Chercaloncastre*', Church Lancaster; Newman 1996, 98), which was, at that time, dependent on the manor of Halton (Penney 1981, 13-14). In addition, another vill existed (*Loncastre*) although its precise location is uncertain (White 1993, 11). The centre of Lordship was moved to Lancaster shortly after 1086 and Lancaster Castle, on the site of the earlier Roman fort, was established by 1094 along with a priory on the church site (*op cit*, 19). A borough was created in 1193 with Church Street, Market Street and Penny Street being the main thoroughfares. This may imply a continuation of settlement patterns, surviving from the Roman period, when activity was concentrated in these same areas.
- 3.2.8 **Post-medieval:** the earliest map on record is that produced by John Speed in 1610. This shows Penny Street as a road with continuous building along its eastern side, where the site is located, indicating that it had been occupied prior to this date. Docton's map of 1684 (Docton 1957) and Mackreth's map of 1778 shows the site as fairly unchanged during this period, still with a continuous settlement along the east side. Binns' survey and map of 1821 indicates further building development around the area, which was the trend throughout the nineteenth century.

### 3.3 PREVIOUS EXCAVATIONS WITHIN THE VICINITY

- 3.3.1 **Penny Street 77-79 and 81:** (SD 4773 6158) excavation uncovered the remains of a nineteenth century cellar, two layers of cobbled surfaces and a Roman burial urn located approximately 0.4m below the cobbles. Further features from the Romano-British period were identified at this depth, although most had been

disturbed by the later buildings. A small quantity of burnt bone was retrieved from two pits, one of which contained Roman pottery. Another two features, also of Romano-British date, were interpreted as possible boundaries to a burial plot (OA North 2003b).

- 3.3.2 **Penny Street 1:** (SD 4772 6170) beneath No 1 Penny Street an exposed section of archaeological deposits was examined briefly prior to underpinning and rebuilding works; the recording work was carried out by the Lancaster City Museum staff in 1975 (White 1975). Although a cellar was encountered, deposits were found to survive in the uncellared area. The Roman deposits consisted of a road, with several phases of re-surfacing, and traces of burnt wattle and daub structures which appeared to date to the later expansion of the extramural settlement. No evidence of the expected Roman cemetery was recovered during the work (OA North 2003b).
- 3.3.3 **99-101 Penny Street:** the present development site, 99-101 Penny Street (SD 4773 6044), was subject to an initial archaeological watching brief while the overburden was removed, down to the level of the highest archaeological deposit, and then a programme of trial trenching was then undertaken across the cleared site (OA North 2003a). This revealed only a nineteenth century cobbled surface, and a heavily truncated feature of undetermined date, but no cremations. It was evident that the site had either been leveled to natural soil, or had been disturbed by modern wall footings and drains.
- 3.3.4 **Streamline Garage, King Street:** (SD 4765 6135) the majority of the archaeology uncovered during these excavations was of a secure Romano-British date. The earliest identified feature was a large sub-square enclosure ditch, the corners of the enclosure being defined by sharp right-angles. The enclosure was orientated parallel to Penny Street, it's ditches were kept clean during use, and probably were backfilled during the second century. During backfilling, the ditches became a focal point for cremation burials, with urned and un-urned cremations. Several of the bone assemblages contained animal as well as human bone, which is not common in cremations of the period. Some of the assemblages were found along with iron nails, suggesting that they may have been placed in a box (LUAU 2001).

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## 4. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

- 4.1.1 A continuous presence watching brief was maintained during all works undertaken on the site (Fig 2). During the initial phase of works (OA North 2003a), the overburden which comprised modern building rubble (but no topsoil) across the site was removed mechanically, to just above the highest archaeologically significant deposit or natural on two levels, with the north end of site c0.5m lower than the south end of site. The second phase of groundworks undertaken during this phase of works involved further clearance of overburden, the insertion of services and the excavation of wall foundations.

### 4.2 THE WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.2.1 The watching brief failed to identify any archaeological remains of significance during the course of the groundworks, and removal of the modern overburden succeeded only in exposing the natural drift geology. The natural soil on site (which was found to be excessively compact) comprised greyish-brown sandy gravels and yellowish-brown sandy gravel to the west and north-east of site, with the south and east becoming more of a reddish-brown and greyish-brown clay (Plate 2). The natural was excessively compact, suggesting that some contamination of the soil had occurred.
- 4.2.2 The watching brief confirmed that the site had been heavily truncated during the construction and subsequent demolition of housing on the site, and the western half of the plot had been particularly impacted by this activity. The eastern half of the plot was also severely truncated during the insertion of concrete service channels, which ran in a north/south direction across the back of the plot (Plate 1). The site was sealed by overburden deposits made up of demolition material, which directly overlay the natural drift geology.
- 4.2.3 A post-medieval well was noted towards the centre of the site, approximately 5m east of the location of Test-Pit 3 (OA North 2003a). The well was a stone-lined structure, of unmortared random-coursed sandstone, and measured around 1.2m in width. The well had evidently been back-filled with a similar rubble back-fill to the overburden, possibly derived from the demolition of the buildings which preceded the later super-structure, which itself was demolished during the first phase of works. The well was located below the level of impact of the new development, and therefore only limited recording was possible. It was not excavated, and no dating materials were uncovered; the type and form of the well is consistent with eighteenth and nineteenth century wells in Lancaster, but could conceivably be of medieval date.

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## 5. DISCUSSION

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### 5.1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

- 5.1.1 The development site is located on Penny Street, the line of the main road leading south out from the Roman road and is within the medieval historic core of Lancaster. The number of Roman cremation sites within the vicinity of the development site demonstrate that there was a cemetery to the south of the Roman town. There was also potential for *in situ* remains of the buildings shown on the 1610 map. As a consequence the site had considerable archaeological potential, subject to the survival of any remains.
- 5.1.2 In the event, neither the evaluation nor the watching briefs succeeded in identifying any significant deposits within the development area, other than the post-medieval well, the nineteenth century remains relating directly to former housing on the site, and modern drains and concrete walls.

### 5.2 IMPACT

- 5.2.1 **Impact:** it is evident that the site has been extensively truncated as a result of earlier developments on the site which have apparently removed all medieval and Roman archaeological deposits and upstanding features. It is fair to conclude that the proposed development will not impact on any significant extant archaeological deposits or features.

## 6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

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Figure 1:      Location Map

Figure 2:      Location of Watching Brief

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## PLATES

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- Plate 1:        Excavations in progress at the eastern end of the development area
- Plate 2:        Exposed natural, facing west towards Penny Street



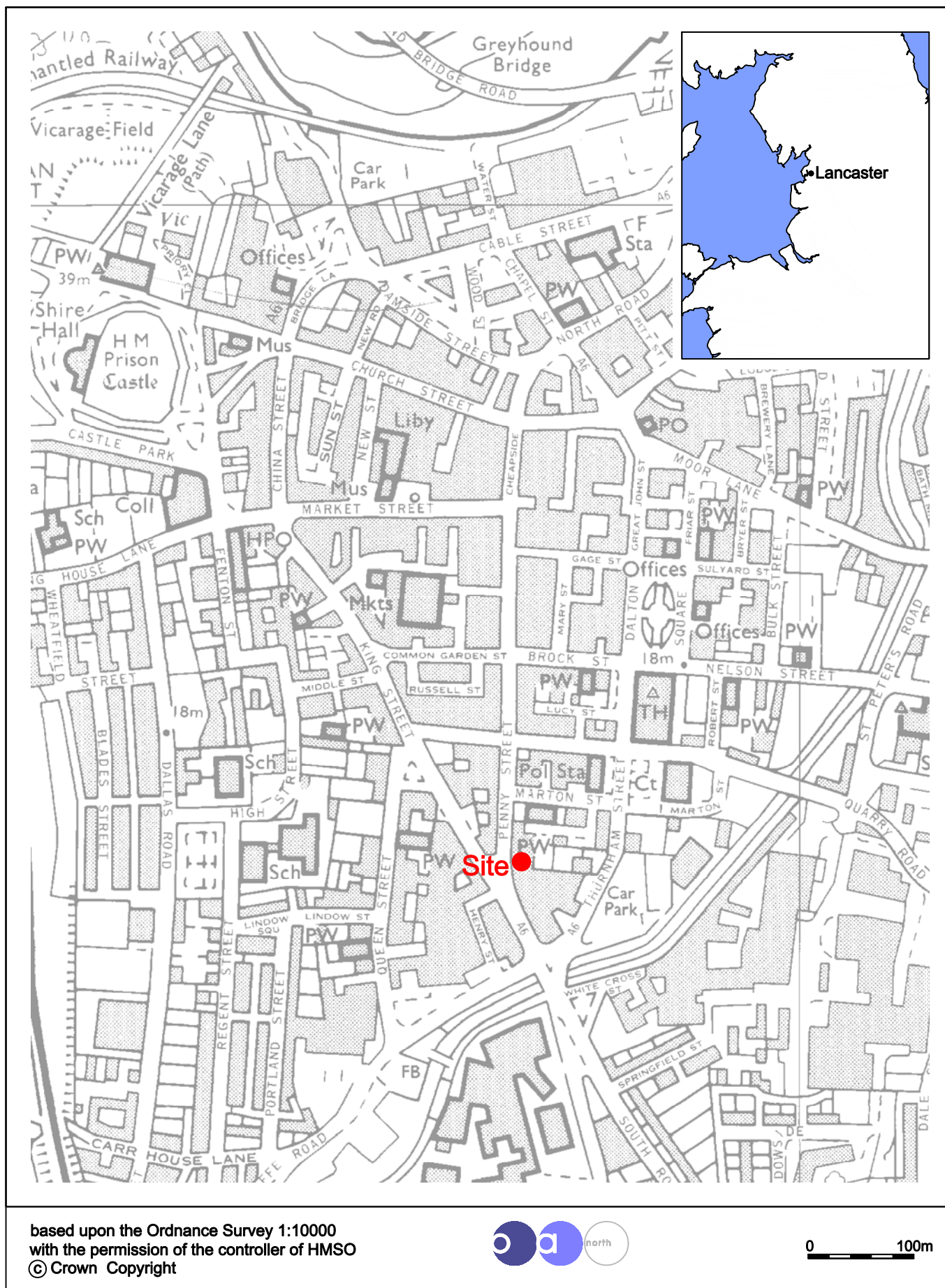


Figure 1: Location map



Figure 2 : Location of Watching Brief





Plate 1: Excavations in progress at the eastern end of the development area



Plate 2: Exposed natural, facing west towards Penny Street