



# THE LOWRY STEPS, ASPIN LANE, MANCHESTER,

**Archaeological Watching  
Brief**



**Oxford Archaeology North**

March 2014

**SPIE Garside Laycock**

Issue No: 2013-14/1501  
OA North Job No: L10686  
NGR: 384439 399212

**Document Title:** The Lowry Steps, Aspin Lane, Manchester

**Document Type:** Archaeological Trial Pits and Watching Brief

**Client Name:** SPIE Garside Laycock


**Issue Number:** 2013-14/1501

**OA Job Number:** L10686

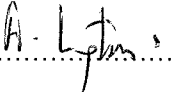
**National Grid Reference:** 384439 399212

Prepared by: Lewis Stitt  
Position: Project Supervisor  
Date: January 2014

Checked by: Ian Miller  
Position: Senior Project Manager  
Date: February 2014

Signed 

Approved by: Alan Lupton  
Position: Operations Manager  
Date: March 2014

Signed.....

**Oxford Archaeology North**

Mill 3, Moor Lane Mills  
Moor Lane  
Lancaster  
LA1 1GF  
t: (0044) 01524 541000  
f: (0044) 01524 848606

w: [www.oxfordarch.co.uk](http://www.oxfordarch.co.uk)  
e: [info@oxfordarch.co.uk](mailto:info@oxfordarch.co.uk)

**© Oxford Archaeology Ltd (2014)**

Janus House  
Osney Mead  
Oxford  
OX2 0EA  
t: (0044) 01865 263800  
f: (0044) 01865 793496

Oxford Archaeology Limited is a Registered Charity No: 285627

**Disclaimer:**

*This document has been prepared for the titled project or named part thereof and should not be relied upon or used for any other project without an independent check being carried out as to its suitability and prior written authority of Oxford Archaeology Ltd being obtained. Oxford Archaeology Ltd accepts no responsibility or liability for the consequences of this document being used for a purpose other than the purposes for which it was commissioned. Any person/party using or relying on the document for such other purposes agrees, and will by such use or reliance be taken to confirm their agreement to indemnify Oxford Archaeology Ltd for all loss or damage resulting therefrom. Oxford Archaeology accepts no responsibility or liability for this document to any party other than the person/party by whom it was commissioned.*

---

## CONTENTS

---

<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Circumstances of Project .....	4
1.2 Location, Topography and Geology .....	5
<b>2. METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	6
2.2 Trial Pits.....	6
2.3 Watching Brief.....	6
2.4 Finds.....	6
2.5 Archive.....	7
<b>3. BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1 Historical Background .....	8
<b>4. FIELDWORK RESULTS .....</b>	<b>13</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	13
4.2 Trial Pit 1 .....	13
4.3 Trial Pit 2 .....	14
4.4 Watching Brief.....	16
<b>5. THE HUMAN REMAINS .....</b>	<b>19</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	19
5.2 The Human Remains.....	19
<b>6 CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Primary Sources .....	21
Secondary Sources .....	21
<b>APPENDIX 1: EXHUMATION LICENCE.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>ILLUSTRATIONS .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Figures.....	23

---

## SUMMARY

---

In November 2013, SPIE Garside Laycock, acting on behalf of Manchester City Council, commissioned Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) to undertake a limited programme of archaeological investigation in Angel Meadow Park in the Shudehill area of Manchester (centred on NGR 384439 399212). The archaeological work was required to inform a scheme of refurbishment, which allows for the renewal of the public access known as the Lowry Steps from Aspin Lane to St Michael's Flags and Angel Meadow Park.

The study area was largely undeveloped land in 1786, when it was purchased by the Overseers of the Poor of Manchester, with the intention of creating a burial ground. This was to service the new working-class population in the area, and soon comprised mass burial pits for the poor, which have been estimated to contain 30,000 - 40,000 unmarked inhumations. The cemetery was full by 1815, after which the area became notorious for activities such as cock-fighting and gambling. In the 1850s, it was flagged over to prevent further illegal excavations, and the area became known subsequently as St Michael's Flags.

The precise location and extent of the burial pits remain uncertain, and it was unknown whether the proposed renewal of the Lowry Steps would impact on buried human remains. In the first instance, two trial pits were excavated adjacent to the access steps, and were intended primarily to establish whether any human remains survived *in-situ*, and thus inform a decision as to an appropriate course of archaeological mitigation. The trial pits were both excavated to a maximum depth of 1.35m. Whilst no fragments of human bones were discovered in the trial pits, it was nevertheless concluded that any excavations to a depth greater than 1.35m required by the development had some potential to uncover human remains. It was thus recommended that the work should be monitored archaeologically to ensure that an appropriate record of any remains uncovered was compiled.

In acceptance of this recommendation, a watching brief was maintained during November and December 2013. Disarticulated human remains were discovered at a depth of 1.4m below the modern ground surface. A licence to exhume the remains archaeologically was obtained from the Ministry of Justice (Licence No 13-0244), and their excavation subsequently was carried out by hand. A total of 917 fragments of human bone were recovered during the course of the work, of which approximately 700 were identifiable. The majority of the human remains had clearly been disturbed previously and lay amongst modern materials, although at least one burial remained *in-situ*. The skeleton was that of a mature adult male, which was discovered at a depth of 2.35m below the modern ground level. Timber staining around the skeleton indicated that the individual had been interred in a single-wood, single-break coffin, and was buried on the traditional east/west orientation.

The archaeological investigation carried out in conjunction with the refurbishment of the Lowry Steps has enabled a small element of an early nineteenth-century cemetery to be examined archaeologically. Whilst the investigation was very limited in scope, it has nevertheless provided some useful archaeological information, and furnished an understanding of the depth of survival of buried human remains across the site.



---

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank Lee Newsham and David Lucas of SPIE Garside Laycock, acting on behalf of Manchester City Council, for commissioning and supporting the project. Thanks are also due to Norman Redhead, the Heritage Management Director with the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS), for his advice and support. Particular thanks are expressed to John Marsden for sharing his considerable knowledge and research of Manchester's burial grounds, and to Liz Long of the Friends of Angel Meadow (FOAM) for her support. Thanks are also expressed to Rekha Gohil, of the Ministry of Justice, for securing the Secretary of State's licence that authorised the exhumation of the human remains.

The trial pit excavation was undertaken by Caroline Raynor and Lewis Stitt, and Lewis Stitt maintained the watching brief subsequently. The human bones were examined by Caroline Raynor, the report was compiled by Lewis Stitt and Caroline Raynor, and the illustrations were produced by Mark Tidmarsh. The report was edited by Ian Miller, who was also responsible for project management.

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

---

### 1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF PROJECT

- 1.1.1 In November 2013, SPIE Garside Laycock, acting on behalf of Manchester City Council, commissioned Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) to excavate two trial pits in Angle Meadow Park in the Shudehill area of Manchester (Fig 1). The trial pits were required to inform a scheme of refurbishment, which allows for the renewal of the public access known as the Lowry Steps from Aspin Lane to St Michael's Flags and Angel Meadow Park.
- 1.1.2 The study area was purchased in 1786 by the Overseers of the Poor of Manchester, with the intention of creating a burial ground. This was to service the new working-class population in the area, and soon comprised a mass burial pit for the poor, which has been estimated to contain 40,000 unmarked inhumations. The pit was full by 1815, after which this open area became notorious for activities such as cock-fighting and gambling. In the 1820s and 1830s some areas of the former burial ground were dug up and sold as fertiliser to local farms. In the 1850s it was flagged over to prevent further illegal excavations, and the area became known subsequently as St Michael's Flags (Hartwell 2001, 289). The precise location and extent of the burial pit remains uncertain, however, and it was unknown whether the proposed renewal of the access steps would impact on buried human remains.
- 1.1.3 The excavation of the trial pits was intended primarily to establish whether any human remains did survive *in-situ* in the study area, and thus inform a decision as to an appropriate course of archaeological mitigation. Two trial pits were excavated under controlled archaeological conditions to a depth of *c* 1.35m in November 2013. This demonstrated that the ground to that depth had probably been disturbed in the late twentieth century, and no human remains were encountered. However, the trial pits were not excavated to the depth of the natural geology, and it was concluded that there was still a potential to encounter human remains at a lower depth.
- 1.1.4 In the light of the findings from the trial pits, the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS), which provides advice on archaeological matters to Manchester City Council, recommended that any ground works to a depth in excess of 1.35m required by the refurbishment works should be monitored archaeologically. An archaeological watching brief was thus maintained during the development ground works in November and December 2013.

## 1.2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 1.2.1 The study area (centred on NGR 384439 399212) is situated on the northern fringe of the city centre (Fig 1). The site lies in Angel Meadow Park, on the south-eastern side of Aspin Lane, directly opposite Little Nelson Street (Plate 1).
- 1.2.2 Topographically, the Manchester Conurbation as a region is within an undulating lowland basin, which is bounded by the Pennine uplands to the east and to the north. The region as a whole comprises the Mersey river valley, whilst the rivers Irwell, Medlock, and Irk represent the principal watercourses in Manchester (Countryside Commission 1998, 125). The study area, however, lies on the south-eastern slope of the valley for the River Irk.
- 1.2.3 The solid geology of the area comprises Carboniferous sedimentary material and a series of Permo-Triassic rocks, consisting mainly of New Red Sandstone. The overlying drift incorporates Pleistocene boulder clays of glacial origin, and sands, gravels, and clays of fluvial/lacustrine origin (Hall *et al* 1995, 8).



Plate 1: Recent aerial view of the study area

---

## 2. METHODOLOGY

---

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1.1 The programme of archaeological investigation comprised the excavation of two small trial pits, followed by the monitoring of earth-moving works necessitated by the renewal of the Lowry Steps. The fieldwork undertaken was consistent with the relevant professional standards and procedures provided by the Institute for Archaeologists, and their code of conduct.
- 2.1.2 All human remains very treated with due respect, and in strict accordance with the Secretary of State's licence that authorised their exhumation (Licence No 13-0244), and Section 25 of the Burial Act 1857.

### 2.2 TRIAL PITS

- 2.2.1 Both trial pits measured approximately 1m<sup>2</sup>, and were excavated to a maximum depth of 1.35m below the modern ground surface. The trial pits were excavated entirely using manual techniques.
- 2.2.2 All information was recorded stratigraphically with accompanying documentation (plans, sections and photographs, both of individual contexts and overall site shots from standard view points). Photographic records were also maintained on special photographic *pro-forma* sheets.

### 2.3 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.3.1 A watching brief was maintained during the ground works required to renew the public steps from Aspin Lane, which necessitated the excavation of new foundations for the retaining walls on each side of the steps (Fig 2). The watching brief was intended primarily to ensure that any human remains discovered during the ground works were treated in an appropriate manner, and in accordance with the requirements of Secretary of State's exhumation licence.

### 2.4 FINDS

- 2.4.1 **Artefactual procedures:** all finds recovered during the excavations were lifted, cleaned, bagged and boxed in accordance with the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (UKIC) *First Aid For Finds* (1998). Recovery and sampling programmes were in accordance with best practice (current IfA guidelines) and subject to expert advice. The human remains have been re-interred in the Southern Cemetery, Manchester.

## **2.5 ARCHIVE**

- 2.5.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation, and in accordance with current IfA and English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 2008). The paper and digital archive will be deposited with the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record on completion of the project.
- 2.5.2 A summary of the results obtained from the archaeological investigation has been submitted for inclusion in the annual fieldwork roundup for 2013 for publication in *Post-Medieval Archaeology*.

---

### 3. BACKGROUND

---

#### 3.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 The study area lies within the area known as Angel Meadow, located in the vicinity of Angel Street and the Church of St Michael with All Angels (Plate 2). This part of Manchester had been an undeveloped and largely affluent area on the western fringe of the town in the mid-eighteenth century. The land was owned at that time by Humphrey Owen, one of the chaplains of the Collegiate Church, who decided to erect a new church dedicated to St Michael. This was intended originally as a ‘carriage church’, to which wealthy Mancunians could drive (Plate 2). The church was consecrated in July 1789 (Aston 1816, 84).

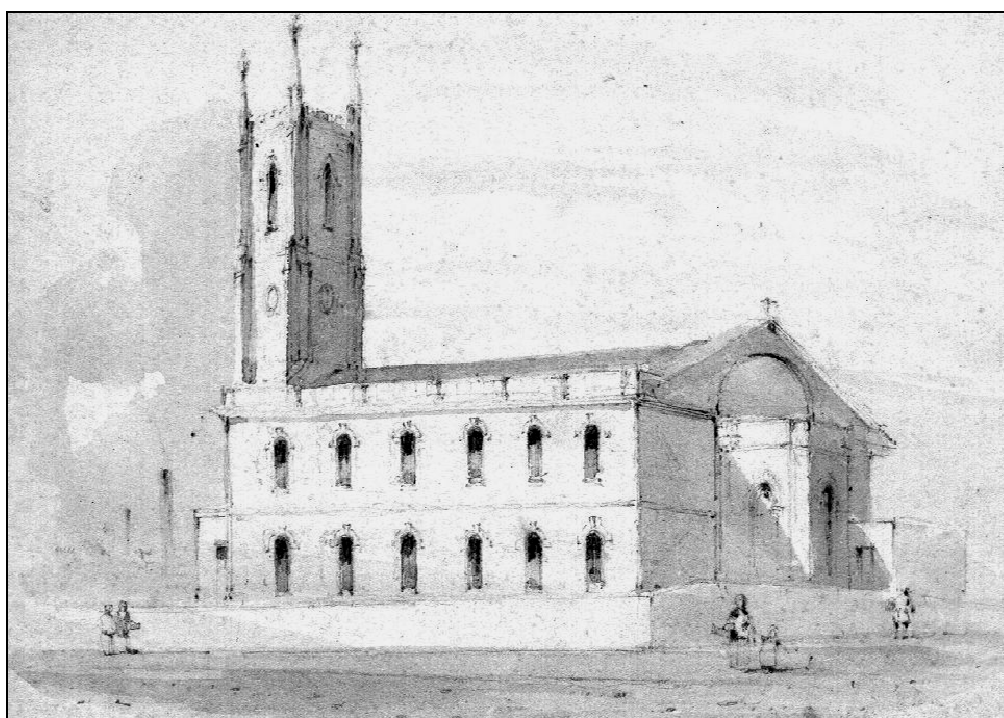


Plate 2: St Michael's and All Angels Church shown in an engraving of c 1850, looking north across Angel Street. The churchyard was to the rear, with the parish burial ground beyond

- 3.1.2 With the absorption of Angel Meadow into the rapidly expanding town, the church predominantly served the new working-class population in Angel Meadow (Gregory 2006; Groundwork nd). It had been intended that the church would have its own churchyard, although the plot that Owen had allocated was considerably larger than was necessary for this purpose (Marsden 2014, 60). Prior to the completion of the church, the parish vestry therefore decided to purchase a large part of the land from Humphrey Owen to establish a new parish burial ground, adjacent to the planned churchyard. Discussions commenced in March 1786, when it was proposed to purchase approximately 10,483 square yards of land for the new parish burial ground, although this was reduced subsequently to 8,000 square yards (*op cit*, 27). The ground was consecrated by the Bishop of Chester and opened for burials in July 1789, and became known as ‘the New Burial Ground’ (Aston 1816, 84).

- 3.1.3 A small mortuary chapel was also erected in the new cemetery, where burial services were performed by the minister of St Michael's Church. Access to the new cemetery and the mortuary chapel was from Back Style Street. Most of the individuals interred in the cemetery were from poor families, and the new burial ground was given over largely, if not exclusively, to common graves. The parish vestry laid down specific guidelines concerning the times at which the poor were to be buried. They required that the burials of poor persons should take place at 2pm from 29 September to 25 March, and 6pm from 25 March to 22 September (Marsden 2014, 28-9).
- 3.1.4 Burial in a common grave was the cheapest form of interment, and was the minimum to be provided for any parishioner in Manchester. The parish vestry for the new cemetery required that two open graves were maintained at all times, with one for the interment of adults and the other for children. The vestry also stipulated that these graves should be nine feet deep and, when filled, should be sealed with two feet of earth (*ibid*).
- 3.1.5 The new burial ground was described by Aston in 1816 as the largest cemetery in Manchester. Aston also provided a description of the 'expeditious and economical method of interring the bodies' in a common grave: 'A very large grave or, more properly, a pit, for the reception of mortality is digged, and covered up (when not used for depositing the remains of the dead) with planks which are locked down in the night, until the whole is packed with coffins piled besides and upon each other. The cavern of death is then closed and covered up with earth, and another pit is prepared and filled in the same manner' (Aston 1816, 84).
- 3.1.6 Aston's almost certainly compiled his observations during the final stage of use of the cemetery, as it was declared full in 1815 and was not used subsequently for burials. It is uncertain how many individuals were interred in the burial ground, and whilst a figure of 40,000 has been quoted, recent research has suggested that this figure is likely to be slightly high. Between the consecration and closure of the cemetery, a total in excess of 31,000 burials were recorded in the Collegiate Church registers, although not all of these would be been interred in the new burial ground. It seems likely that the actual number of people buried in the cemetery was between 30,000 and 40,000 (Marsden 2014, 29).
- 3.1.7 Following its closure as a cemetery, the mortuary chapel was demolished, and the area fell into decline, becoming notorious for activities such as cock-fighting and gambling. In the 1820s and 1830s some parts of the former burial ground were dug up and sold as fertiliser to local farms. The area is annotated as a 'Parochial Burial Ground' on the Ordnance Survey map of 1850 (Plate 3), which also provides a detailed plan of the Church of St Michael's and All Angels, but this fails to illustrate the neglect of the cemetery. This was brought to life in a vivid account published in the Manchester Guardian in 1865, which describes how the boundary wall to the cemetery had been largely dismantled to repair local pigsties and cottages, and how the area facing Back Style Street was used as a dump for domestic refuse. The account also claimed that 'very often are the bones of the dead exposed and carried away and a human skull has been kicked about for a football on the ground' (quoted in Davies 2009).





Plate 3: Extract from the Ordnance Survey map of 1850, with arrow marking the location of the Lowry Steps

- 3.1.8 In 1867, an Order from the Home Office required that the cemetery should be surfaced and fenced in order to arrest the antisocial behaviour and prevent further illegal excavations. The area was levelled subsequently, and covered with flagstones; it became known subsequently as St Michael's Flags (Hartwell 2001, 289). Some two decades later, a proposal to spend £1,500 to turn St Michael's Flags into a children's playground was first raised. The plans included removing the flags, levelling the ground and providing play equipment. However, the proposals were not implemented until 1890, when Manchester Corporation secured an agreement with the vestry to rent St Michael's Flags for a nominal sum and carry out the improvements works (Gregory 2006). This had been completed by May 1891, when a local newspaper proclaimed that St Michael's Flags 'is which is now converted into something more than a bare playground, swings for boys and girls have been erected together with the provision of a large double ball court, and a sand bed for children and a drinking fountain' (*Manchester Courier*, 13 May 1891). The playground is famously depicted in several of Lowry's paintings, including 'The Steps' of 1928 and 'The Playground' of 1945; the access steps have been referred to subsequently as the 'Lowry Steps' on account of this association.
- 3.1.9 It seems likely that pedestrian access from Ashley Lane (now Aspin Lane) was also provided in the early 1890s, together with a similar set of steps from Ludgate Hill (now Irk Street). Other improvements included the installation of public toilets and the erection of a bandstand and, in 1894, the playground was extended when two rows of workers' cottages adjacent to the cemetery were demolished (Marsden 2014, 31).



- 3.1.10 Notwithstanding the improvements to St Michael's Flags, Angel Meadow remained one of the worst slums in Manchester. As late as 1897, when slum clearance was underway in other parts of the city, Angel Meadow was described in a report to the Manchester Statistical Society as 'a grievous blot on our municipal policy' (cited in Hartwell 2001, 289). The Church of St Michael and All Angels had similarly been the focus of criticism in a newspaper article published some years earlier: 'Why one of the ugliest churches in Manchester situated in one of the most crowded and notorious parts of the City should have so long enjoyed the pleasant sounding name "St Michael's, Angel Meadow" is beyond understanding' (*Manchester Guardian* 1888).
- 3.1.11 The church was eventually demolished in 1935, perhaps as a result of the diminished size of the local community in the wake of continued slum clearance. St Michael's Flags also fell into decline during this period (Plate 4), and again developed a reputation as a focus for nefarious activities. The flags were removed in 2001, although the circumstances for their removal are not well documented.



*Plate 4: View across St Michael's Flags in 1972, showing the decay and neglect of the area*

- 3.1.12 In 2004, the Friends of Angel Meadow (FOAM) was formed with the principal aim of campaigning for the regeneration of the area. Following the successful procurement of grants and match-funding, St Michael's Flags (now known as Angel Meadow Park) was subject to improvement and landscaping works, with new public seating, bins and lighting. The restoration of the Lowry Steps from Aspin Lane, and structural repairs to the associated boundary wall, formed a second phase of the regeneration of the area, and was implemented in 2013. At that date, the steps had fallen into disrepair, and had been closed to public access for a number of years (Plate 5).



*Plate 5: The Lowry Steps from Aspin Lane immediately prior to the repair works in 2013*

---

## 4. FIELDWORK RESULTS

---

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 The initial stage of the archaeological investigation comprised the excavation of two trial pits, which were placed close to the top of the Lowry Steps along the western edge of the cemetery, as shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1850 (Fig 3). These were intended to establish whether any buried remains of archaeological significance, and specifically human remains, survived within the area that was to be subject to earth-moving works.

### 4.2 TRIAL PIT 1

4.2.1 Trial Pit 1 was orientated roughly north-west/south-east, and was located on the northern side of the Lowry Steps from Aspin Lane (Plate 6; Fig 2). The earliest deposit encountered within the trench was **105**, a 0.15m thick layer of mid-brown silty-clay mixed with clinker and industrial debris; the base of this deposit was not identified. This was overlain by **104**, a 0.2m thick layer of mid-orange-brown plastic clay with small rounded pebble inclusions. This deposit was in turn overlain by **103**, a 0.21m thick layer of loose clinker and slag which, like **105**, was probably represented a combination of waste material from local industries and domestic hearths, and had been intended as a levelling material following the closure of the graveyard (Plate 7). This deposit was overlain by **102** a 0.35m thick layer of compact orange-brown plastic clay which may have been used as a final sealing layer following the levelling of the site and the last inhumations. This deposit was overlain by **101**, a 0.2m thick layer of dark grey-black ashy silt which was matted with plant roots and contained modern debris.



Plate 6: General view across Trial Pit 1





Plate 7: View of Trial Pit 1 fully excavated

- 4.2.2 The uppermost layer was the modern topsoil (**100**). This comprised a 0.25m thick deposit of loose grey-brown silty clay mixed with modern debris and demolition rubble.
- 4.2.3 Fragments of clay tobacco pipe stems, blue and white underglaze transfer-printed ware pottery, and a fragment of butchered animal bone (likely bovine metapodial) were recovered during the excavation, but were not retained. No fragments of human remains were encountered in the test pit, and there was no firm evidence for any grave goods.

### 4.3 TRIAL PIT 2

- 4.3.1 Trial Pit 2 was placed against the northern retaining wall at the top of the Lowry Steps (Plate 8; Fig 2). The earliest (basal) deposit encountered was a layer (**203**) of mixed clinker and re-deposited clay that was identified at a depth of 1.2m below existing ground level. This was overlain by **202**, a 0.26m thick layer of mid-brown-orange plastic clay which was in turn overlain by **201**, a 0.58m thick layer of clinker and industrial waste mixed with fragments of crushed fire bricks. This deposit was cut by **204**, a north/south-aligned linear feature containing a large ceramic drain (foul pipe) at a depth of 0.3m below modern ground level, and running almost parallel with the back of the Lowry Steps (Plate 9).
- 4.3.2 These deposits were sealed by modern topsoil **200**, a 0.23m deep layer of mid-brown sandy-silt, mixed with fragments of ceramic building material and other twentieth-century debris. No fragments of human remains were recovered from the test pit.



*Plate 8: General view across Trial Pit 2*



*Plate 9: View of Trial Pit 2 fully excavated*



#### 4.4 WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.4.1 The primary aim of the watching brief was to ensure that any human remains encountered during the ground works were dealt with in an appropriate manner. Excavation was carried out very carefully with a mechanical excavator, operating under close and constant archaeological supervision. Upon exposing any human remains, mechanical excavation ceased immediately to enable the remains to be cleaned, recorded and lifted using exclusively manual techniques.
- 4.4.2 A layer of mixed clay mixed and brick rubble (**303**) was encountered beneath the twentieth-century deposits that had been excavated in the initial trial pits. Layer **303** had a maximum depth of 0.35m, although disarticulated human remains were discovered within the upper 0.1m of the layer (Plate 10). These fragments of human remains were clearly not *in-situ*, as the rubble in which they were mixed contained fragments of machine-made bricks of twentieth-century date. The remains comprised fragments of several human skulls, femurs, scapulas and sacrum (Plate 11).
- 4.4.3 Below mixed deposit **303** was a layer of clay (**304**). This comprised a compact mid-orangey brown clay mixed with ash. Disarticulated human remains were recovered from this layer. However, the majority of these remains appeared to have been disturbed previously, and redeposited in layer **304**, seemingly during the twentieth century. However, the remains of at least one burial (**305**) that survived *in-situ* was discovered (Plate 12).



Plate 10: Fragments of several skulls and femurs within **303**



*Plate 11: Disarticulated human remains found within layer 303*



4.4.4 The top of the *in-situ* burial (305) was exposed at a depth of 2.35m below the modern ground level, at the base of the foundation trench for the new retaining walls. The burial was aligned west/east, with the head placed at the western end. The remains comprised part of the skull, the left clavicle and scapula, the left arm, both left and right legs, together with the spine and pelvis. However, the right side of the chest, and the hands and feet were all missing. Discolouration in the soil and fragments of highly degraded wood adjacent to the skeleton is likely to have represented a wooden coffin.



*Plate 12: In-situ burial within layer 304*



---

## 5. THE HUMAN REMAINS

---

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.1.1 The human remains were recovered during archaeological monitoring of ground works carried out by the building contractor. The area in which the remains were discovered appeared to have been subject to disturbance during the twentieth century, and probably with the last 50 years. A total of 917 fragments of human bone were recovered during the course of the work, of which approximately 700 were identifiable. The assemblage of human bone was subject to a rapid visual scan, and no detailed analytical work was carried out, as the remains were recovered from unstratified layers.

### 5.2 THE HUMAN REMAINS

5.2.1 Only one fully articulated skeleton was recovered during the excavation (Sk1), along with one skeleton, which may have been partially articulated (Sk2) along with 917 fragments of disarticulated human remains. All remains were recovered from contexts **104** with ground conditions suggesting a level of disturbance prior to this phase of excavation work.

5.2.2 **Articulated skeletons:** only one skeleton (Sk1) was observed *in-situ*, and was less than 75% complete. The skeleton was that of a mature adult male (ageing and sexing based on cranium, and sub pubic angle). Overall, the condition of the bone was good. Timber staining beneath the pelvis, and around the outside of the skeleton indicate that this individual was interred in a single-wood, single-break coffin and buried on the traditional east/west orientation. Two iron coffin nails were also retrieved from amongst the skeletal remains.

5.2.3 A second set of remains (Sk2), those of a young adult male (probably aged between 16 – 18 years) were not found *in-situ* or articulated, although when collected for study were found to represent around 75% of a complete skeleton, suggesting that the individual had been lifted and re-deposited as a single entity at some point during earlier intrusive site works.

5.2.4 **Disarticulated remains and charnel:** in total, the 700 identifiable fragments cumulatively represent the remains of approximately 24 incomplete sets of human remains, of which twenty were either prime or mature adults, one was a young adult and three were juveniles of less than 6 years.

5.2.5 Bone conditions were variable with a large number of bone fragments being in poor condition, showing high levels of abrasion and demineralisation, much of which can be attributed to the remains being disturbed in probably more than one occasion. Less than 25% percentage of the assemblage could be classed as in a good state of preservation. Fragmentation of the post-cranial skeleton was very variable, with the majority of the bones exhibiting some degree of post-mortem break to them. Some of the individuals had evidently suffered from rickets.

---

## 6 CONCLUSION

---

### 6.1 CONCLUSION

- 6.1.1 The archaeological investigation carried out in conjunction with the refurbishment of the Lowry Steps in Angel Meadow Park has enabled a small element of an early nineteenth-century cemetery to be examined archaeologically. Whilst the investigation was very limited in scope, it has nevertheless provided some useful archaeological information, and furnished an understanding of the depth of survival of buried human remains across the site.
- 6.1.2 Documentary evidence indicates that the depth of the burial pits was intended to be 9ft (2.74m) and that, when filled, the pits were to be sealed beneath 2ft (0.61m) of earth. The shallow depth of the top of the burial pits beneath the ground surface evidently resulted in some of the nefarious activities for which the cemetery became infamous, and led ultimately to landscaping works in the second half of the nineteenth century. The evidence obtained from the archaeological excavation has indicated that this landscaping work effectively raised the ground level across Angel Meadow Park, and that top of human remains now lie at a depth of 1.45m below the modern ground surface. However, these landscaping works, coupled with the original construction of the Lowry Steps, caused considerable disturbance to some of the human burials, which caused fragmentation and disarticulation. There is also some evidence to suggest that some of the human remains were disturbed again during the second half of the twentieth century, causing further fragmentation. An *in-situ* burial was found to survive at a depth of 2.35m below the modern ground surface, and this appeared to be at the base of a burial pit, as there was no clear evidence for any underlying remains.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

### PRIMARY SOURCES

#### *Maps*

Ordnance Survey First Edition 60":1 mile, surveyed 1848, published 1850

#### *Newspapers*

*Manchester Courier*, 13 May 1891

*Manchester Guardian*, 1888

### SECONDARY SOURCES

Aston, J, 1816 *A Picture of Manchester*, Manchester

Countryside Commission, 1998 *Countryside Character; the Character of England's Natural and Manmade Landscape, vol 2: the North West*, Cheltenham

Davies, A, 2009 *Gangs of Manchester*, Preston

English Heritage, 2008 *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment*, London

Farrer, W, and Brownbill, J, 1908 *Victoria County History of the Counties of England: Lancaster*, London

Gregory, L, 2006 *Where Angels Play. An investigation into the lives and deaths of the inhabitants of Angel Meadow, a Mancunian industrial slum*, undergraduate dissertation, University of Manchester

Groundworks, nd *St Michael's Flags and Angel Meadow. Then and Now*, unpubl historical booklet

Hall, D, Wells, CE, and Huckerby, E, 1995 *The Wetlands of Greater Manchester*, Lancaster Imprints 3, Lancaster

Hartwell, C, 2001 *Manchester*, London

Institute for Archaeologists, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-based Assessments*, Reading

Kidd, A, 1996 *Manchester*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Keele

Marsden, J, 2014 *Forgotten Fields: Looking for Manchester's Old Burial Grounds*, Manchester

---

## APPENDIX 1: EXHUMATION LICENCE

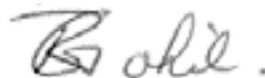
---



### LICENCE FOR THE REMOVAL OF HUMAN REMAINS

The Secretary of State, in exercise of the power vested in him by section 25 of the Burial Act 1857 (20 & 21 Vic., cap.81), grants a licence for the removal of the remains of **persons unknown** from or within the place in which they are now interred at the **St Michael's Flags, Aspin Lane, Manchester (only for the replacement of access steps from Aspin Lane) NGR 384430 399190.**

2. It is a condition of this licence that the following precautions shall be observed:
  - (a) Any removal or disturbance of the remains shall be effected with due care and attention to decency;
  - (b) The ground in which the remains are interred shall be screened from the public gaze while the work is in progress;
  - (c) The removals shall be to the satisfaction of the environmental health office for the district in which the remains are at present interred and in accordance with any additional conditions he or she may impose;
  - (d) The remains shall, no later than **31 December 2014**, be reinterred at Southern Cemetery, Manchester. In the meantime shall be kept safely, privately and decently by Oxford Archaeology North under the control of a competent member of staff.
  
3. This licence merely exempts those from the penalties, which would be incurred if the removal took place without a licence. It does not in any way alter civil rights. It does not confer the right to bury the remains in any place where such right does not already exist.
  
4. This licence expires on **30 April 2014**.



Rekha Gohil  
on behalf of the Secretary of State for Justice

Ministry of Justice  
Licence Number: **13-0244**  
File Number: **OPR/072/107**  
Date: **25 November 2013**

---

## ILLUSTRATIONS

---

### FIGURES

Figure 1: Site location

Figure 2: Location of trial pits and watching brief area

Figure 3: Location of trial pits and watching brief area superimposed on the Ordnance Survey 60": 1 mile map of 1850

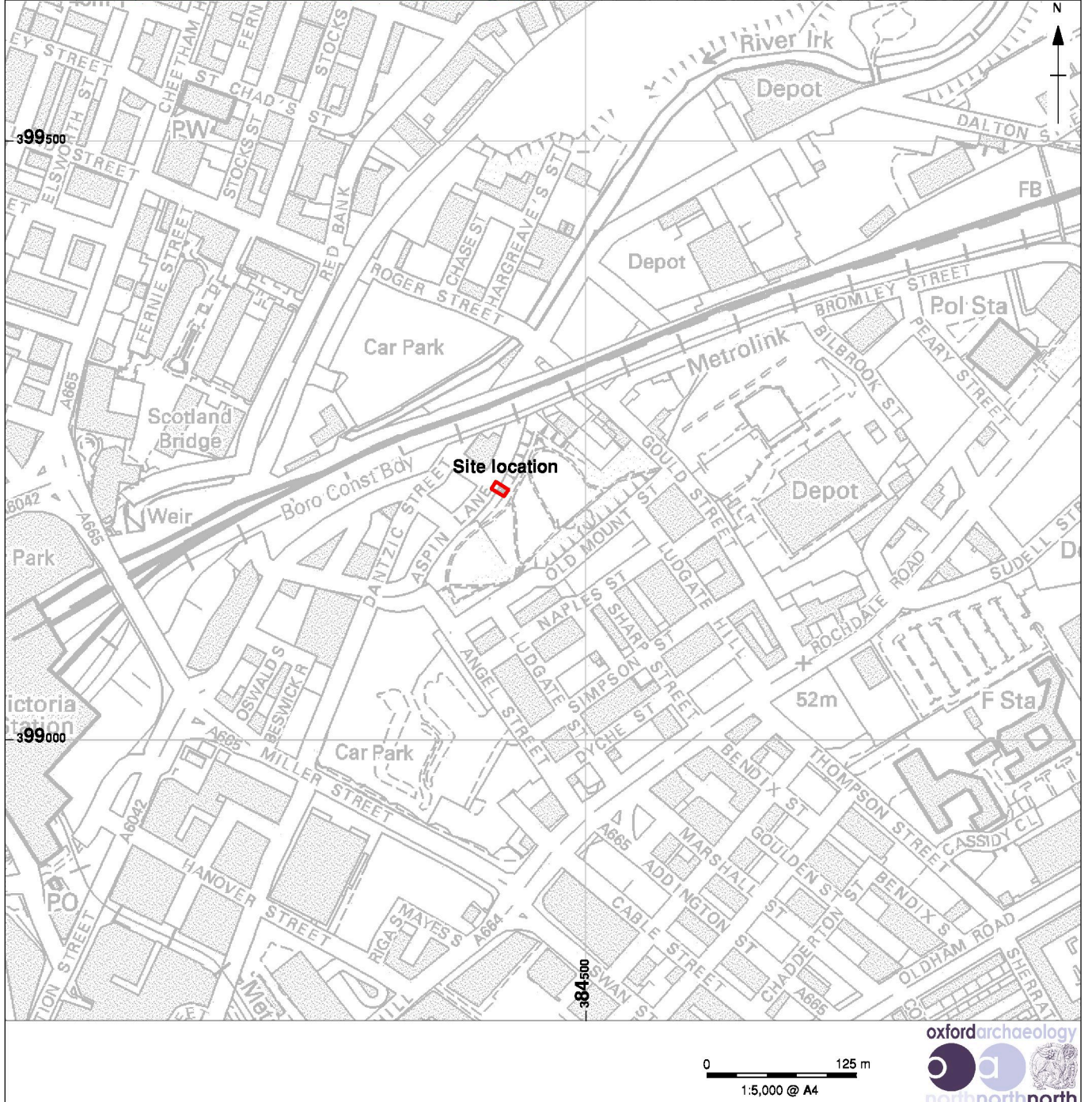


Figure 1: Site location



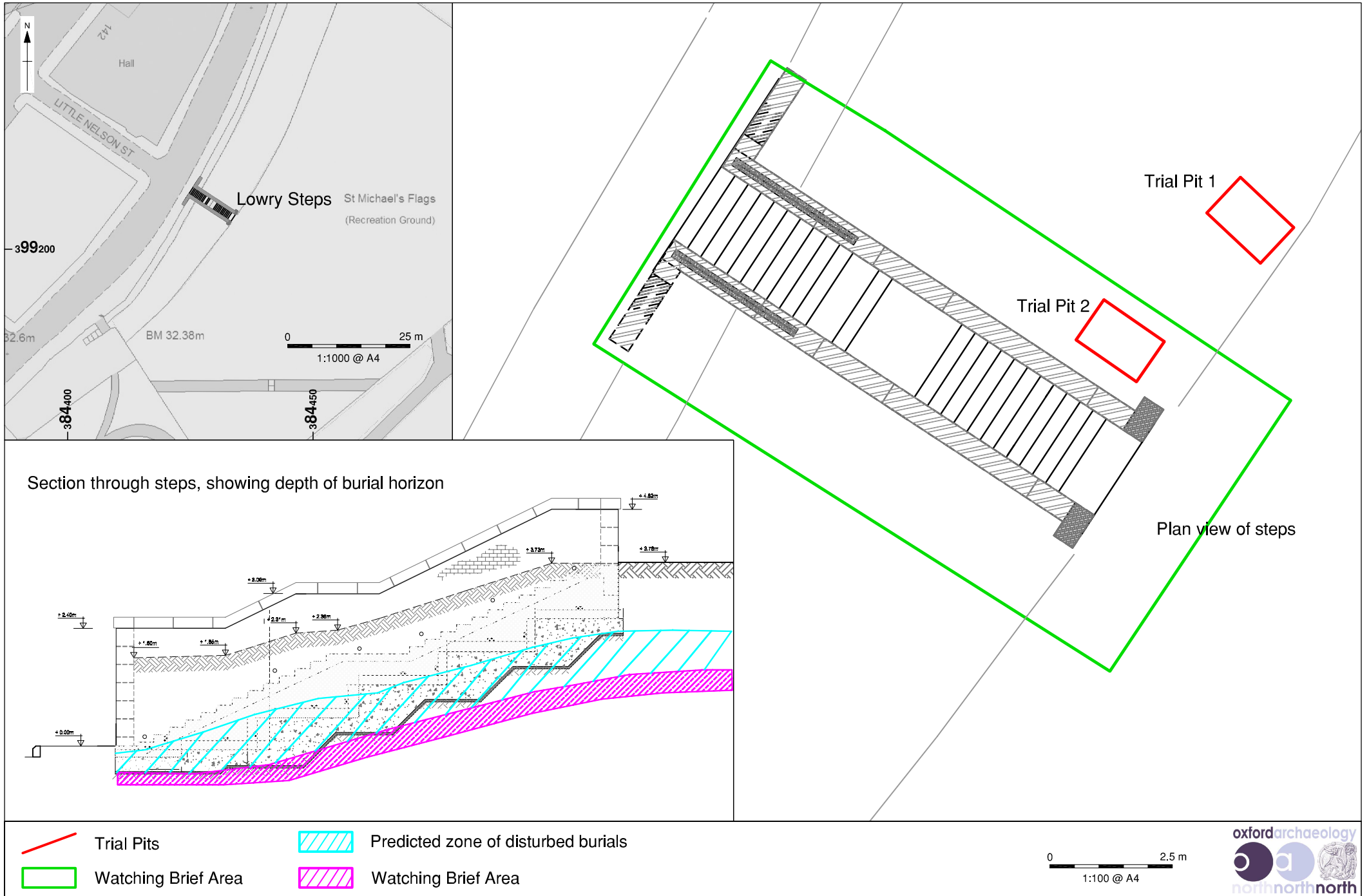


Figure 2: Location of trial pits and watching brief area

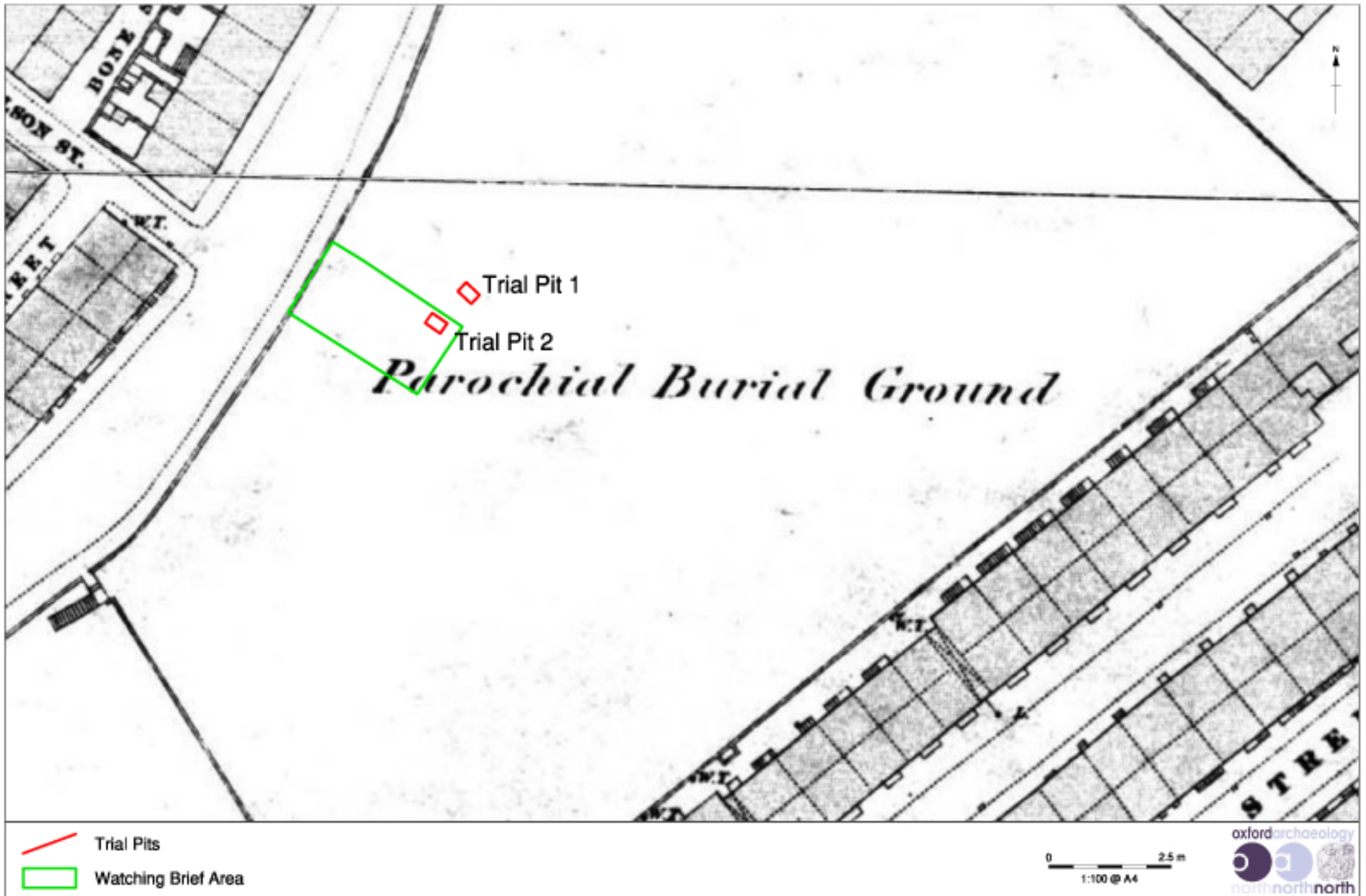


Figure 3: Location of trial pits and watching brief area superimposed on the Ordnance Survey 60":1 mile map of 1850