

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AT LAND
OFF MANTON LANE
BEDFORD**

PROJECT DESIGN

Project Code: MLB2015
Museum Accession Number: BEDFM 2013.43

Document version: 1.1

31st August 2016

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Non-Technical Summary

This project design has been produced to provide a methodological framework for an archaeological excavation to be undertaken during late September 2016 at land off Manton Lane, Bedford. The work is not prompted by a development proposal but has been initiated by local Roman historians, Steven Cockings and Elizabeth Sayer. In 2010, Iron Age and Roman remains and finds were found within Edith Cavell School south of Manton Lane and Roman remains and finds were found in a pipe trench dug to the north of Manton Lane. Since then the land north of Manton Lane has been subject to geophysical survey and test-pitting, which have enhanced understanding of the nature and distribution of the buried archaeological remains. However, the 'status' of the Roman settlement is still uncertain and it is hoped that the proposed excavation will assist in its interpretation. This project design has been prepared by the local Roman historians, with professional archaeological input from Mike Luke (Project Manager, Albion Archaeology).

Archaeological remains to the north of Manton Lane were first identified by local historians in 2011 when Roman finds and remains were disturbed during the digging of an un-monitored pipe trench. Subsequent investigation by Albion Archaeology funded by Bedford Borough Council was, due to time and budgetary constraints, focussed on excavating two test-pits over a masonry wall found adjacent to Manton Lane (Albion 2011). Local interest in the site resulted in fifteen test-pits/trenches being dug during the summers of 2013, 2014 and 2015 over the field to the north of Manton Lane by volunteers overseen by a professional archaeologist from Albion Archaeology. These and the investigation of the masonry wall have provided information on the nature of the site and the depth of overburden.

In summary, the recovered evidence indicates that the site contains masonry buildings with painted walls, glazed windows and at least one building that featured an underfloor heating system (hypocaust). Perhaps surprisingly, few similar buildings have been found in the Bedford area. In addition, the presence of stucco work, a rare type of decorative moulding found at only a small number of Roman sites in Britain, including Fishbourne Palace, suggests that the site could be of national importance.

The proposed excavation will investigate part of one of the buildings within which stucco is known to survive and the area of a possible hypocaust as both these elements are key to understanding the status of the building and the settlement within which it is situated. Fundraising by the community will enable the volunteer excavation team to be supported by 2/3 professional archaeologists from Albion Archaeology and has secured funding for the processing/packaging of any finds recovered.

In addition to answering archaeological questions, it is intended that the excavation in 2016 will stimulate the interest of local people in their past and provide the opportunity for some to participate in an archaeological project.

Key Terms

Throughout this document the following terms or abbreviations are used:

BBC	Bedford Borough Council
CIfA	Chartered Institute <i>for</i> Archaeologists
HER	Historic Environment Record
HET	Historic Environment Team
Roman historians	Steven Cockings and Elizabeth Sayer
Amateur archaeologists	Members of the Bedford Architectural, Archaeological and Local History Society; Upper Nene Archaeological Society; Colmworth and Neighbours History Society; the Leighton Buzzard Archaeological Society; and the Colchester Roman Society
<i>Procedures Manual</i>	<i>Procedures Manual Volume 1 Fieldwork</i> , 2nd edn, 2001 Albion Archaeology

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location, Condition, Topography and Geology

The site is bisected by Manton Lane, in the northern part of Bedford (Fig. 1). The field to the north of Manton Lane is centred on NGR TL 042/511 and comprises grass and woodland bordered by Manton Lane to the south, a hedgerow to the west and fencing to the north and east.

The height of the land rises from *c.* 48.5m OD at Manton Lane to 60m OD at the top of the slope. The underlying geology is mudstone with some localised sandstone (British Geological Survey South Sheet, 5th Edition, 2007). The drift geology is boulder clay and morainic drift (British Geological Survey South Sheet, 1st Edition Quaternary, 1977).

1.2 Summary of Archaeological Investigations to Date

Detailed description of the archaeological background has been presented in earlier Project Designs and is, therefore, only summarised here.

1.2.1 Discovery

Prior to 2010 no evidence for significant archaeological remains of any period, other than the ridge and furrow earthworks, in this part of Manton Lane were known. During the summer of 2010, Iron Age and Roman remains were uncovered during work to install an access ramp at Edith Cavell Lower School, to the south of Manton Lane.

1.2.2 Pipe trench

In 2011, Roman remains and finds were disturbed during the digging of a pipe trench to the north of Manton Lane. Subsequent investigation by Albion Archaeology funded by Bedford Borough Council was, due to time and budgetary constraints, focussed on excavating two test-pits over a masonry wall found adjacent to Manton Lane (Albion 2011).

1.2.3 Test-pits

During the summers of 2013, 2014 and 2015 a total of fifteen hand-dug test-pits/trenches were opened to the north of Manton Lane. They ranged in size from 1m x 1m to 5m x 3.5m. They were dug by local volunteers under the direction of a professional archaeologist from Albion Archaeology with practical support from Bedford Borough Council. These and the previous investigations have provided much information on the nature, extent and depth of the Roman remains to the north of Manton Lane. An interim archaeological report has been produced summarising the evidence (Luke 2016).

1.2.4 Geophysical surveys

Numerous geophysical surveys have been undertaken within the field to the north of Manton Lane. They comprised resistivity and magnetometer surveys, but the results were ambiguous and did not correspond with the archaeological features found in the test-pits. They were undertaken by:

- Prof. W. E. Martin, from the University of Hertfordshire, in May 2011 (Martin 2011).
- Dr. Kris Lockyear, from the Institute of Archaeology at University College London, in August 2011.
- Stratascan, a professional geophysical survey company in February 2012 (Stratascan 2012) and October 2012 (Stratascan 2013).
- Leighton Buzzard & District Archaeological & Historical Society in May and August 2014.

1.3 Summary of Current State of Knowledge

The majority of the evidence was from the pipe trench and test-pits closest to Manton Lane. This, and the discovery of similar remains by local historians within Edith Cavell Lower School to the south, indicates that the settlement straddles Manton Lane. Only one small ditch was found within a test-pit to the north, suggesting that the northern edge of this part of the Roman settlement corresponds with a terrace located within two test-pits dug into the hillside to level the land. Geophysical surveys undertaken by both professional and community organisations have not produced results that tie in with the excavated evidence.

1.3.1 Buildings

The walls of two buildings with stone foundations were identified within the pipe trench and two test-pits.

The wall foundations of **Building 1** comprised *c.* 0.4m x 0.3m limestone fragments within a *c.* 0.8m-wide foundation trench traced for 12m. To the south, within the pipe trench, the foundations consisted of two pitched courses and a third uppermost, narrower pitched course inset by 0.1m on the east side; all three courses were in herringbone style. To the north only a single course of limestone survived. The deeper foundations to the south are probably explained by the construction of the wall over an earlier feature, possibly a large ditch. The nature of the deposits on either side of the wall suggests that the interior was to the west. Here finer ‘construction’ debris was found but no actual floor surface. The deposits to the east were much coarser and included stones and tiles that presumably derived from the building.

The north-east corner of **Building 2** was identified as a mix of in-situ stones and building debris. These foundations were not excavated but the *c.* 1m-wide wall foundations comprised at least one course of pitched limestone. Although only visible for a short length, the northern wall appeared to have been constructed just south of the terrace. The alignment of the eastern wall did not correspond with that of Building 1 — hence their interpretation as separate buildings. It is possible that they actually represent rooms within one larger building but this could not be determined due to the limited extent of the investigations.

Within Building 2 the top of the underlying geology was *c.* 0.5m deeper than outside the building. The side of the cut was vertical and, although difficult to determine due to the narrowness of the area and water ingress, the base of the cut appeared to be level. It is possible that the cut represents the chamber of a

hypocaust, although it was not possible to determine whether any in-situ *pilae* were present. However, a number of square bricks were observed during the un-supervised insertion of a modern pipe to the west. The deposits within the possible hypocaust chamber contained large quantities of mortar, plaster and stucco work.

Evidence for another three possible buildings was found in the test-pits to the east in the form of large stones, extensive mortar fragments and a beam slot.

1.3.2 Other features

Gravel and stone surfaces were found in two test-pits, in one case above the fill of a probable beam slot indicative of an earlier building. The layers may be external surfaces but due to the limited extent of the investigations it is not impossible that they are floors within buildings.

1.3.3 Discussion of the ‘status’ of the Roman settlement

It is never easy to determine the precise ‘status’ of Roman settlements on the basis of limited investigation. However, it is clear that two of the buildings at Manton Lane are ‘in a different league’ to the numerous farmsteads excavated in the Bedford area, e.g. Biddenham Loop (Luke 2008, 56; Luke 2016, 241–64), Marsh Leys (Luke and Preece 2011, 166–6) and Norse Road (Edgeworth 2001), although buildings with stone foundations have been found within the nearby roadside settlement at Kempston Church End (Dawson 2004, 38–66; Luke 2016, 208–41).

In the past, the mere presence of masonry walls and hypocausts has been taken to indicate the presence of a villa, i.e. a complex of highly ‘Romanised’ buildings where the owners of large and wealthy agricultural estates lived. The best known example in Bedfordshire is at Totternhoe (Matthews *et al.* 1992) c. 40km away.

It is now recognised that this is too simplistic an interpretation and that not all settlements with masonry walls and hypocausts necessarily have to be villas. For example, the bathhouse at Newnham (Ingham *et al.* 2016) and the aisled building at Shefford (Luke *et al.* 2010) may be associated with estate centres rather than villas. In fact, at the time of her study of the Middle and Upper Ouse valleys Meade concluded that ‘there were no proven villas’ in the Bedford area (Meade 2010, 47), which is in marked contrast to the number of villas found in both the Milton Keynes area and the Nene Valley.

Irrespective of whether the Manton Lane settlement is a villa or not, it does contain buildings with significant architectural embellishment and is located in a dominant position within the landscape

2. PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND METHOD STATEMENTS

The project objectives and methodological approach to the project is summarised below.

2.1 Project Objectives

The specific aims of the archaeological investigations are to:

- Improve knowledge and understanding of the ‘status’ of the Roman settlement at Manton Lane.
- In relation to the buildings:
 - Determine if the identification of two stone buildings is correct (rather than the evidence representing different rooms within one larger building).
 - Determine if a hypocaust is present and if this is part of a residential building or a bath house.
 - Date their construction and abandonment.
 - Determine the nature of any activity found outside the buildings.
 - Recover additional stucco work and determine why it survives.
- To provide an opportunity for people to participate in an archaeological project.
- To inform and engage with the local community.
- To promote the site to the residents of Bedford Borough and the wider archaeological community.

2.2 Methodological Standards

Throughout the project the standards set out in the following documents will be adhered to:

CI/A	<i>Charter and by-law; Code of conduct (2014)</i>
	<i>Standard and guidance for archaeological excavation (2014)</i>
	<i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials (2014)</i>
Historic England	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE) Project Managers’ Guide (2015)</i>
Albion Archaeology	<i>Procedures Manual: Volume 1 Fieldwork (2nd edn, 2001)</i>
EAA	<i>Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (2003)</i>
The Higgins Art Gallery & Museum, Bedford	<i>Procedure for Preparing Archaeological Archives for Deposition with Registered Museums in Bedfordshire. Version 2.8 (2010)</i>

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Location

The excavation area is targeted on Building 2 to the east of the pipe trench (Fig. 2).

2.3.2 Removal of overburden

- The depth of overburden has been established by the test-pits and within these the archaeological level is marked by orange plastic.
- The overburden will be removed by a machine fitted with a toothless bucket working under the supervision of a professional archaeologist

2.3.3 Hand excavation, investigation and recording

- All subsequent excavation will be undertaken by hand under the supervision of a professional archaeologist.
- The excavation area will have its own sequence of recording numbers.
- All excavated features and deposits will be recorded in accordance with Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual* (Albion 2001).
- All archaeological features and deposits will be issued a unique number.
- Features and deposits will be excavated stratigraphically.
- Spoil will be scanned for artefacts by both eye and by an experience archaeological metal detectorist.
- The majority of Roman deposits will be dry-sieved.
- Where deposits with obvious environmental potential are present (charred plant remains and/or small animal bones) these will be sampled in line with *Environmental Archaeology: A guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation*, 2nd ed. (English Heritage 2011), and the Albion Archaeology *Procedures Manual*
- All archaeological features will be recorded in plan and (or) section at a scale of 1:20 or 1:10.
- A full photographic record, as appropriate, will be compiled during the process of excavation. This will include working shots, feature record shots and publication shots.

2.3.4 Limitations

- For safety reasons a gap of at least 0.5m will be maintained between the pipe trench and the excavation area.
- Where the excavation area is likely to be below 1m in depth the sides will be 'stepped'.
- The safety of excavation will be determined by the ongoing risk assessment.
- Excavation will cease if major roots of the tree are encountered.
- If burials (human or animal) are encountered, they will not be excavated (beyond the scope of this investigation). With regard the disturbance of human remains, if necessary, a license will be sought from the Ministry of Justice, if required.

2.3.5 Backfilling

- At the end of the fieldwork the excavation will be backfilled.
- If significant remains are encountered or if a return in subsequent years is considered possible then orange plastic will be placed over the base of the excavation area.
- The backfilled area will be monitored to ensure that the ground level is restored in keeping with the ridge and furrow earthworks.

2.4 Publicity

Visitors will be given a guided tour of the excavation and an opportunity to see some of the recently discovered finds. A press release will only be issued once the initial results are known and when work is nearing completion.

2.5 Post-fieldwork Record Consolidation

During, or immediately after fieldwork, all records will be checked and cross-referenced to ensure they are complete and internally consistent. It is hoped that site drawings will be digitised and geo-referenced by Albion Archaeology.

2.6 Post-fieldwork Finds Processing and Packaging

The processing, packaging and cataloguing of finds will follow professional standards and guidelines. It will be organised by Albion Archaeology. Artefacts will be collected and treated in accordance with *CIfA Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (2014), and the *Albion Archaeology Procedures Manual*.

Artefacts identified as Treasure, as defined in the 1996 Treasure Act and subsequent amendments, will be reported to the local Portable Antiquities Scheme officer upon their discovery/identification.

2.7 Finds Stabilisation, X-rays, Conservation and Cataloguing

Any necessary stabilisation, x-raying, conservation and cataloguing of finds will follow CIfA guidelines and be organised by Albion Archaeology, if funding is available. All ironwork, and other materials deemed necessary, will be submitted for x-radiography.

2.8 Reporting Options

Depending on the results of the investigations and funding levels, it is anticipated that the following reporting options will be available:

- “Summaries” submitted to relevant archaeological journals, e.g. CBA South Midlands Group annual report, *Britannia* “sites explored” etc. (as was the case with the 2013 and 2015 investigations).
- Stand-alone “interim” report (as produced in 2016)
- A “preliminary report” (Luke *et al.* forthcoming) has already been produced and submitted to the *Bedfordshire Archaeology* journal, summarising all discoveries and investigation up to, and including, those undertaken in 2014.
- A “grey literature” style report, suitable for deposition in the HER, will be produced after the final season. The report will be sufficiently detailed to allow the results of the project to be interpreted without recourse to the site archive, and place them in their local, regional and national context. It is hoped that this will incorporate the results of previous discoveries in the area.
- Details of the project and its findings will be submitted to the OASIS database in accordance with the guidelines issued by English Heritage and the Archaeology Data Service.

2.9 Archiving

The archive of finds and records generated during the project will be kept secure at all stages of the operation. All records and materials produced will be archived to the standards outlined in Appendix 3 of Historic England's *Management of Archaeological Projects* and MoRPHE. The Higgins Art Gallery & Museum (Bedford) has been contacted concerning deposition of the archive and the previously issued accession number issued for finds (BEDFM 2013.43) will continue to be used. The landowner has agreed for the finds to be deposited with The Higgins once examination has been completed.

2.10 Liaison with the Historic Environment Team

Input will be sought from Bedford Borough Council's Historic Environment Team (HET) prior to commencement of any work. They will also be invited to visit the investigations. Any remains thought to be significant or exceptional will be reported immediately to the HET.

2.11 Team Administration and Health & Safety

A risk assessment will be carried out by the local historians prior to the start of fieldwork and everyone working on site will be required to read it (and sign that they have understood it). As part of the daily Site Briefing, all people working on site will be made aware of their responsibilities and any site-specific hazards. The risk assessment will be reviewed as the project progresses.

It is anticipated that separate documents will be produced providing further information on the site and recording procedures. Anyone who works on the site will have to fill out a form giving their contact details, agreeing to the "site rules", finds waiver and acknowledging that they have read and understood the risk assessment.

3. RESOURCES

3.1 **The “Core” Project Team**

The following individuals comprise the “core” project team, i.e. those that are either involved in the planning of the work or have committed to attend for the majority of the fieldwork:

Steven Cockings, Project co-ordinator: *fund-raising, liaison with landowner and local organisations. Roman historian and small finds specialist. Vice chairman of the Bedfordshire Archaeological Council and executive committee member of the Upper Nene Archaeological Society. Over the last 17 years he has been a consultant for various television documentaries produced by the BBC and commercial broadcasters, including Channel 4's “Time Team”.*

Mike Luke MCIfA, Archaeological director: *day-to-day archaeological responsibility for the archaeological excavation and recording. Works for Albion Archaeology (based in Bedford), but is undertaking this work in his own time.*

Elizabeth Sayer, Project administration and outreach, including volunteers. *Roman historian. Secretary of the Bedfordshire Archaeological Council and executive committee member of the Bedford Architectural, Archaeological & Local History Society and Upper Nene Archaeological Society. She has also appeared in various television documentaries on Roman Britain produced by the BBC and commercial broadcasters, including Channel 4's “Time Team”.*

3.2 **Professional**

It is anticipated that a number of staff from Albion Archaeology will attend the investigations both on a paid and voluntary basis.

3.3 **Volunteers**

As in 2013, 2014 and 2015, a wide range of people from Bedford and further afield will take part in archaeological fieldwork on the site. The same team will be invited back and additional volunteers will be sought. Although there may not be room for everyone to dig, there are a range of other jobs that volunteers can do to assist with the project, e.g. dry-sieving, finds processing, tours, etc.

It is anticipated that a rota of attendance will have to be created and with this in mind anyone who expresses an interest will be asked to fill out a volunteer form describing any relevant experience they have and how much time they can spare.

4. PROJECT TIMETABLE

4.1 *Fieldwork*

It has been agreed with the landowners that main fieldwork will be undertaken between 22nd September and 2nd October 2016 (subject to final confirmations). The first few days will comprise machining and shovel tidying. It is likely that at least one day during this period will be allocated as a “rest day” and the last few days work will be focussed on archaeological recording.

4.2 *Post-Fieldwork*

The precise timing of the post-fieldwork tasks is difficult to determine as it is dependant on individuals’ time (especially where unfunded). Therefore, the following presents a provisional timetable:

- **Post-fieldwork record consolidation** – within 3 months
- **Finds processing, packaging and cataloguing** – within 6 months
- **Finds stabilisation and x-rays** – within 6 months
- ***South Midlands Archaeology and Britannia* summaries** – by end of March 2017
- **“Grey literature” style interim report** – within 12 months
- **OASIS entry** – within 12 months
- **Publication** – TBC

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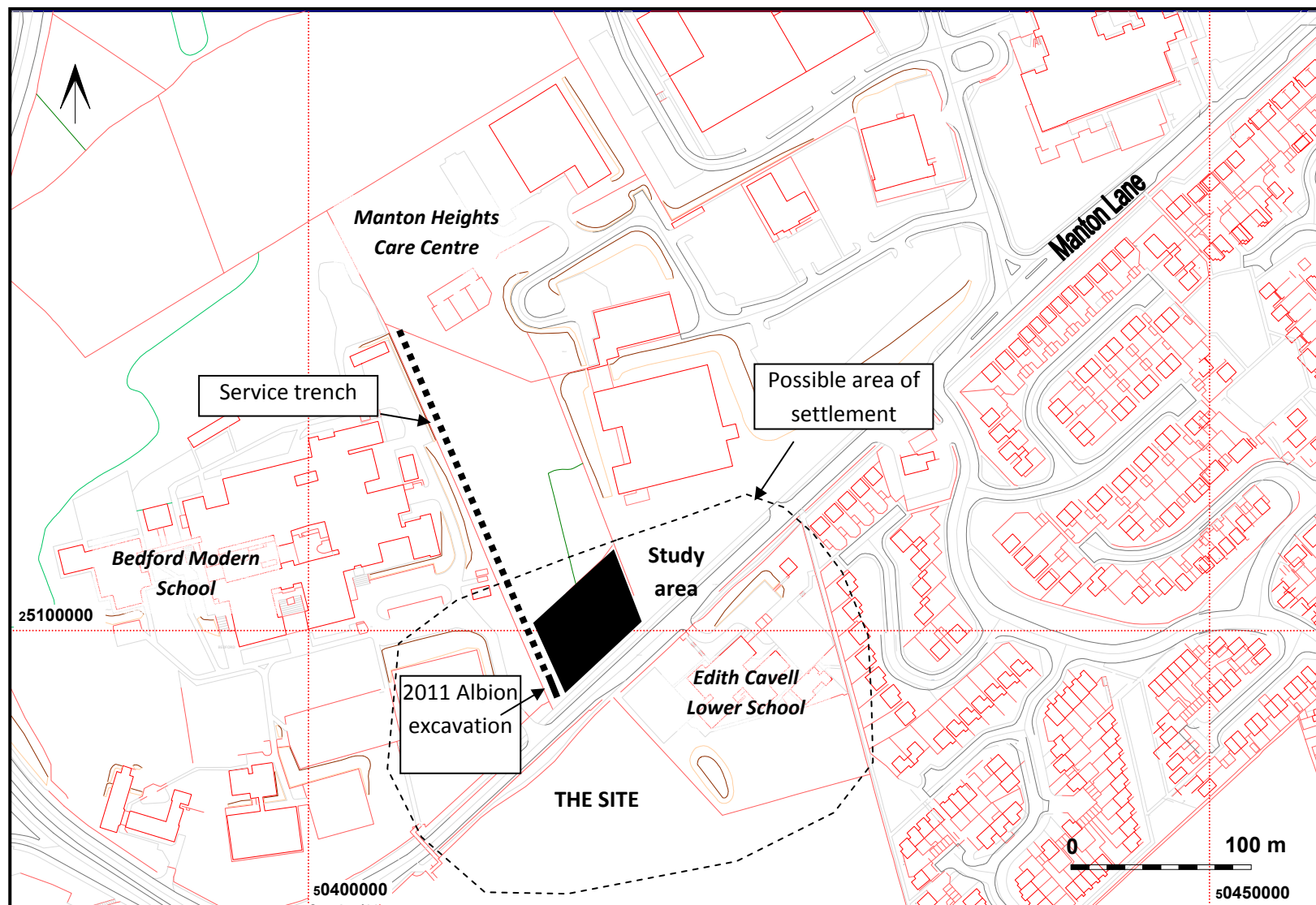


Figure 1: Site location plan (based on and with permission of Albion Archaeology 2011, fig. 1)

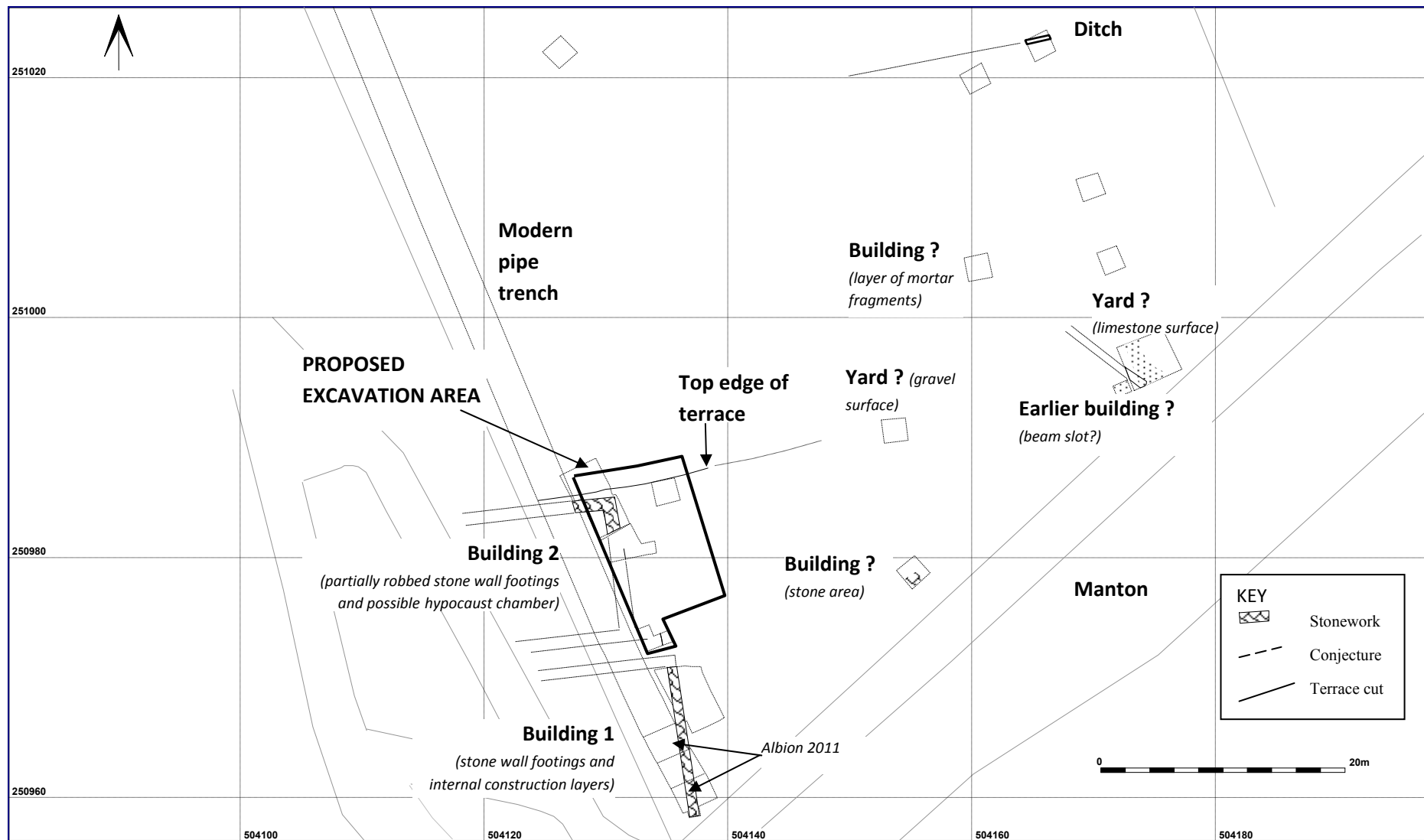


Figure 2: Main archaeological features found in the test-pits and service trench investigation, with location of proposed excavation highlighted