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THE MILL RACE, SUTTON, SHREWSBURY
An Archaeological Watching Brief on Earthworks associated
with Repairs to the Kingfisher No.2 Bridge (Rea Brook)

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A Report for
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1 INTRODUCTION

The Kingfisher No 2 Bridge (Rea Brook) currently carries a footpath and cycle track between Sutton Road and Adams Ridge, Shrewsbury, across the Rea Brook and the Mill Race. The bridge is a 19th-century former railway bridge of the Severn Valley Railway (opened in 1862 and closed in 1963; Environmental Record (Sites and Monuments Record) [SMR] No. 06024). In late January 2008 the bridge suffered a partial collapse and emergency works were undertaken to prevent a total collapse and a potential blockage of the Rea Brook. The work would involve the diversion of the Rea Brook into the south end of the channel of the former Mill Race (SMR No. 62653) for a distance of about 275 metres.

The Mill Race is a former mill leat that served a number of water mills along the Rea Brook valley in the Sutton and Abbey Foregate areas of Shrewsbury from the medieval period through to the 20th century. Because of the archaeological significance of the Mill Race it was considered necessary that an archaeological watching brief should accompany the groundworks associated with the emergency repairs. The Archaeology Service was commissioned by the Highways and Bridges section, Shropshire County Council to carry out this watching brief.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Mill Race runs between the Sutton and Abbey Foregate areas of Shrewsbury, and is the course of a former millstream running parallel to the Rea Brook on its east side for a distance of over 2km. Although the stream has not been in use as a watercourse since the middle of this century, with the exception of its northern end it is still traceable for much of its length.

The millstream is generally supposed to have been constructed by the monks of Shrewsbury Abbey in the early medieval period, and there is a reference to the Abbey's mills in an early foundation charter (Owen and Blakeway). However, the Domesday Book records that the Abbey received a substantial income from its burgesses and mills only three years after its foundation, suggesting that the mills were perhaps a legacy from the late Saxon settlement in the Abbey area (Baker, 2002).

In the past, excavations and a watching brief have taken place at Sutton Mill (Wharton, 1975, and Walker, 1994) just to the north of the beginning of the millstream, at the Trill Mill in Shrewsbury (Earthworks, 1991) and at the northern end of the millstream in the Abbey Foregate area (Hannaford in Baker, ed, 2002). In the early 1990s two watching briefs were carried out in the present study area during clearance and dredging of the stream as part of the works involved in the creation of the Rea Brook Country Park (Hannaford, 1991, and Stamper, 1992).

The watching brief in 1991 was in the area of the Mill Race to be affected by the proposed works. The 1991 exercise recorded a 19th century weir (SMR No. 08152) and deposits in the channel that predated the later post-medieval weir and dams. The weir itself showed at least two phases in its construction: a reinforced gravel bank of late 17th/early 18th century date and a 18th/19th century brick and sandstone structure, which had clearly remained in use until the stream was finally abandoned in the mid 20th century. About 55m further north, and 10m south of

another overflow channel, a number of wooden stakes were found in the west bank of the re-cut edge of the stream. In the 1992 watching brief, a large boulder lying between the Mill Race and the Rea Brook was identified as a probable parish boundary marker (SMR No. 04584).

3 THE 2008 WORKS

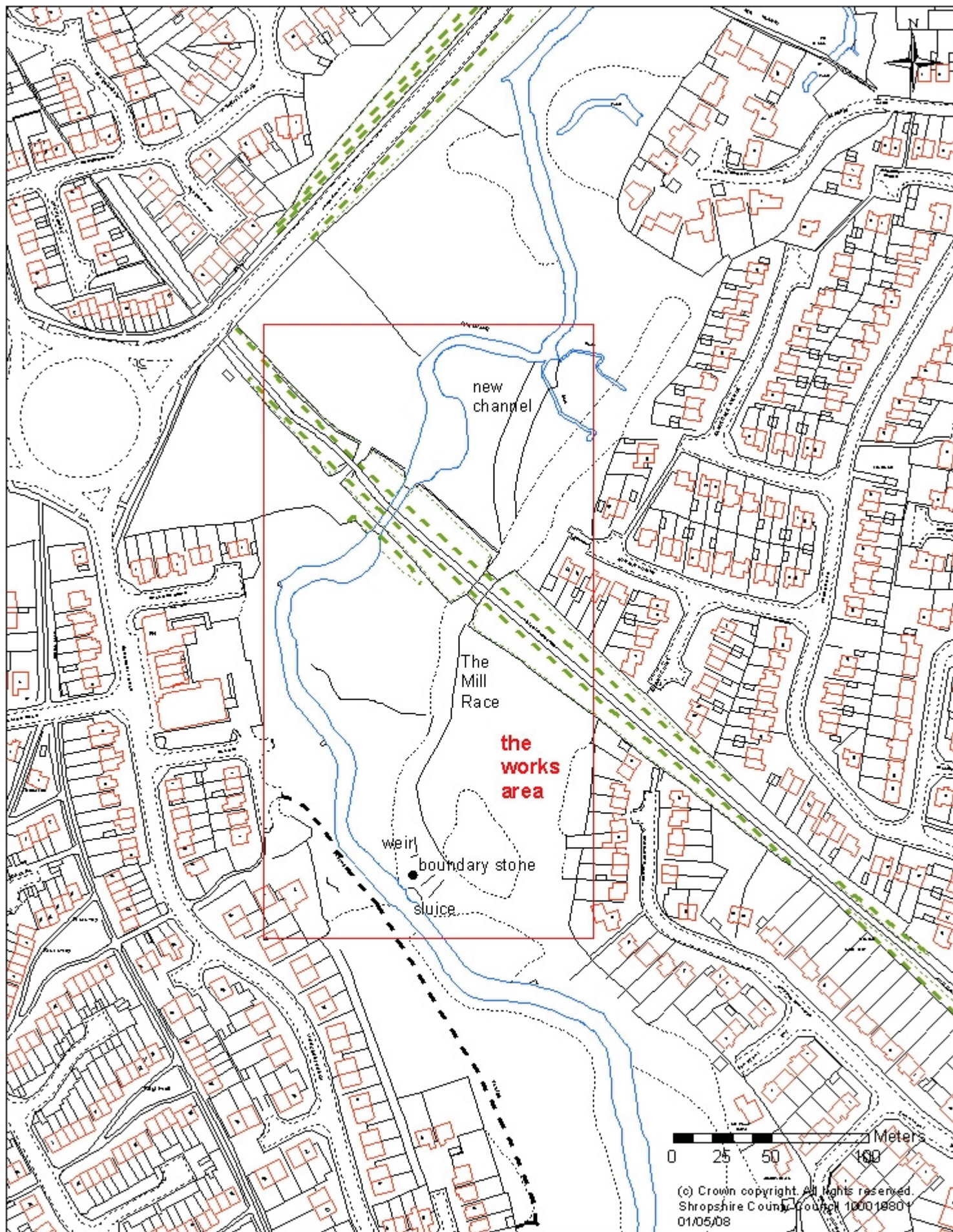
At the southern end of the work area, a new cutting was made from the Rea Brook into the Mill Race. The east bank of the Mill Race was cut back by about 4m to widen the stream course, and take the Rea Brook through the Mill Race arch of the railway bridge. The bed of the Mill Race was excavated here and a concrete saddle formed to reinforce the base of the bridge. A new channel was then cut from the north side of the bridge through meadowland to rejoin the Rea Brook

At the southern end of the works area, the area occupied by the 19th century weir and the boundary stone was avoided. The cutting from the Rea Brook into the Mill Race ran close by another brick and concrete feature on the edge of the Rea Brook, possibly a capping across a former sluice channelling water into the Mill Race from the Rea Brook. The feature comprised a wall of red bricks of 19th-century date 4.5m long by 0.6m wide, capped with concrete. It was located 18m south of the known weir, and corresponds to a channel at the junction of the Rea Brook and the Mill Race as shown on the 1902 OS 25" map. A photographic record was made of this feature, which was also avoided by the works.

No other significant archaeological features were seen in the excavations.

4 REFERENCES AND SOURCES CONSULTED

- Baker, N J (ed)**, 2002: *Shrewsbury Abbey*, Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society Monograph Series No. 2
- Hannaford, H R**, 1991: *Archaeological Recording of Excavations at the Mill Race, Sutton, Shrewsbury*, Shropshire County Council Archaeology Service Report No. 5
- Owen, H, and Blakeway, JB**, 1825: *History of Shrewsbury*
- Stamper, P**, 1992: *A Watching Brief at the Mill Race, Sutton, Shrewsbury, Shropshire*, Shropshire County Council Archaeology Service Report No. 23
- Wharton, A**, 1978: Interim Report - Sutton Lower Mill (unpublished report)



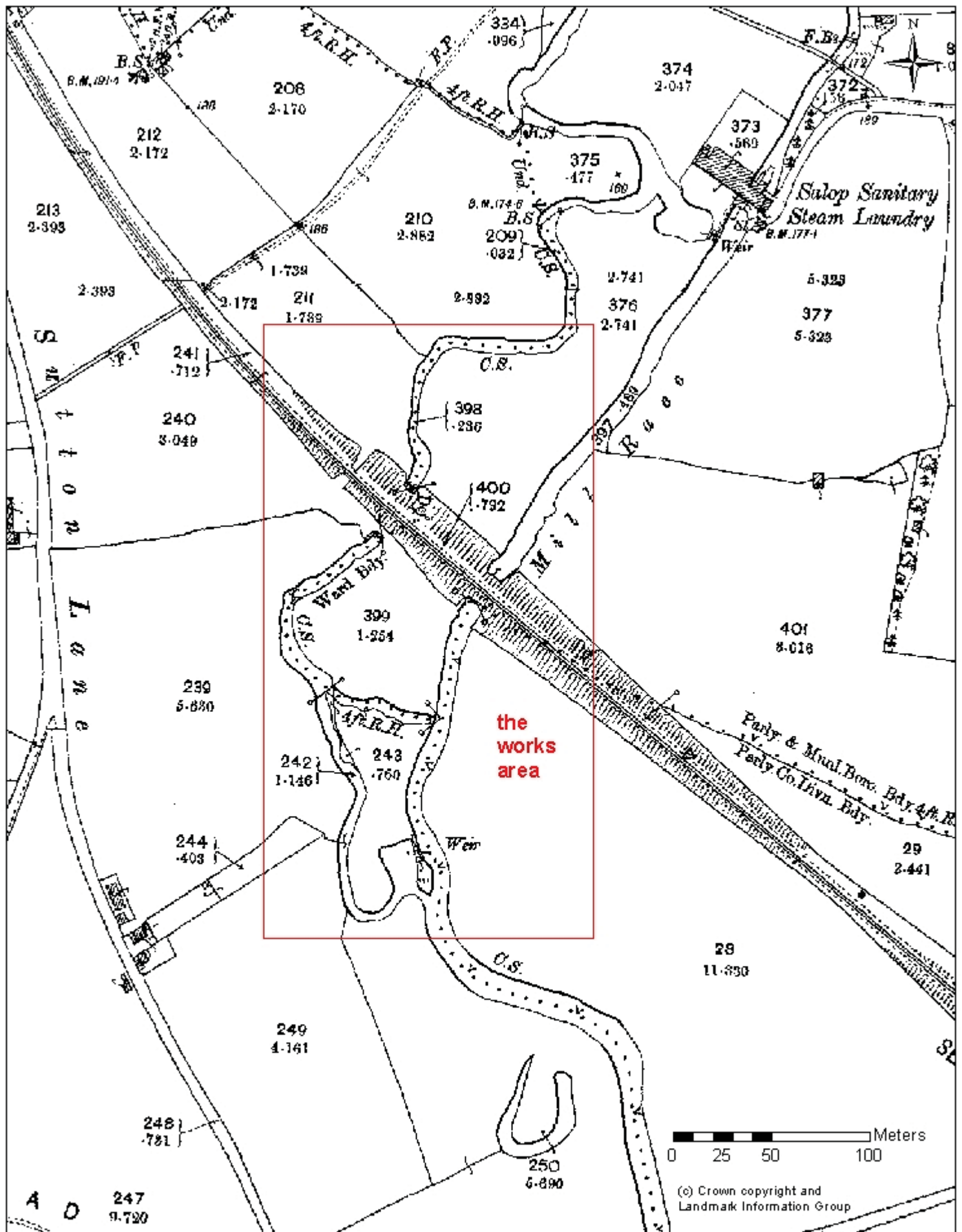


Figure 2: Extract from the 1902 ed OS 1:2500

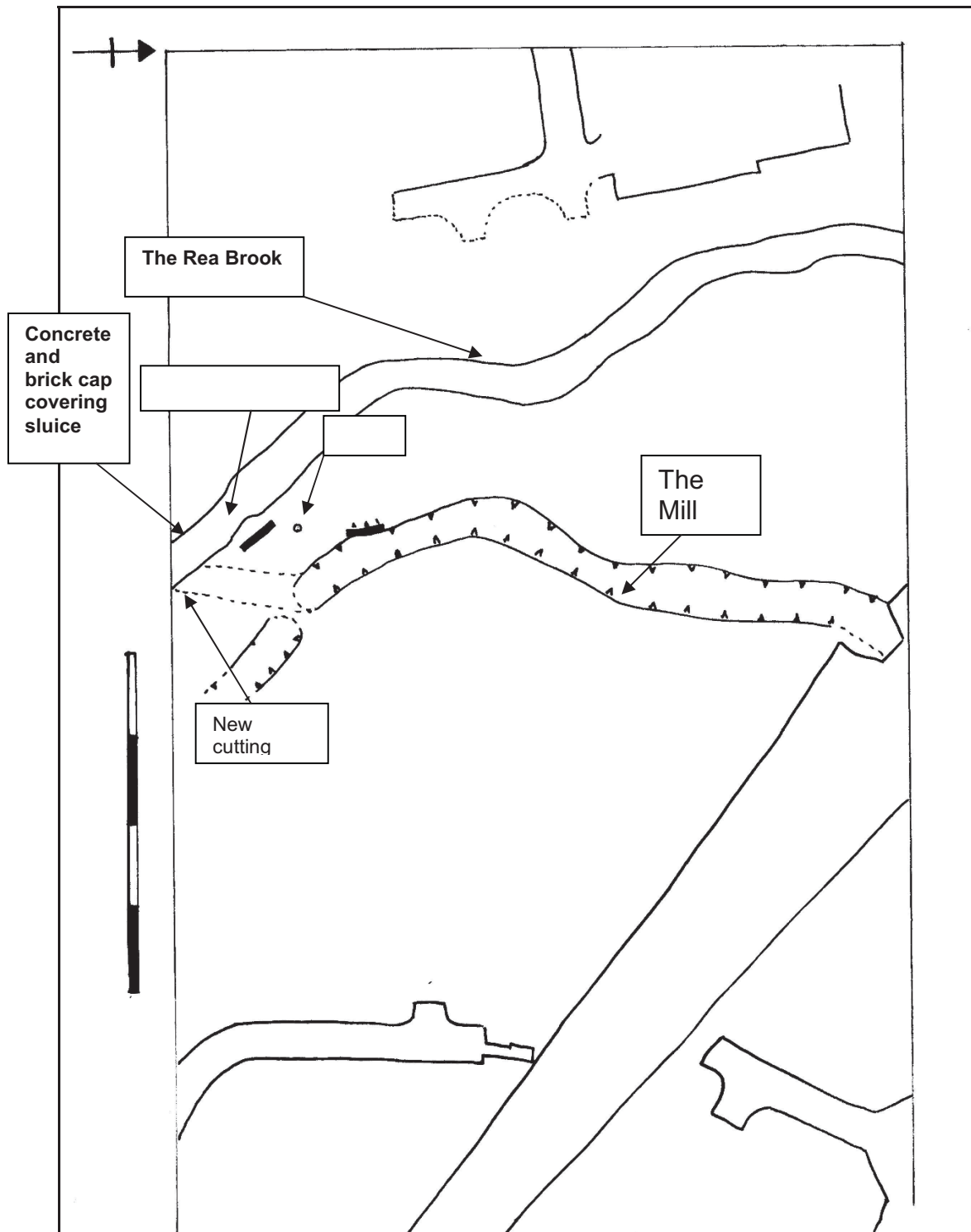


Figure 3. Location plan showing main archaeological features (scale is in 20m increments)



The mill stream, looking north, before widening



Cutting back of the bank of the mill stream



The brick and concrete cap over the sluice, with the Rea Brook in the background



The remains of the 19th century weir with the Rea Brook in the background

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The boundary stone at the southern end of the mill stream



The new channel north of the railway bridge (looking south)



The saddle under the former railway arch



The Mill Race in water

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