



Mr O. Boaler,
Economic Development Manager,
Rochdale Development Agency,
Number One Riverside,
Smith Street,
Rochdale OL16 1XU

Date: 17th July 2023

Dear Oliver

RE: Touchstones Art Gallery, Rochdale: Archaeology

Many thanks for consulting with the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS) with a view to establishing the potential impact of development works on archaeological remains at Touchstones Rochdale. The western part of the application area contains the Rochdale Central Library, Museum and Art Gallery (Touchstones), a Grade II listed building (List Entry No 1367096), but there are no other heritage assets or sites of potential archaeological interest within the red-line boundary recorded on the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record.

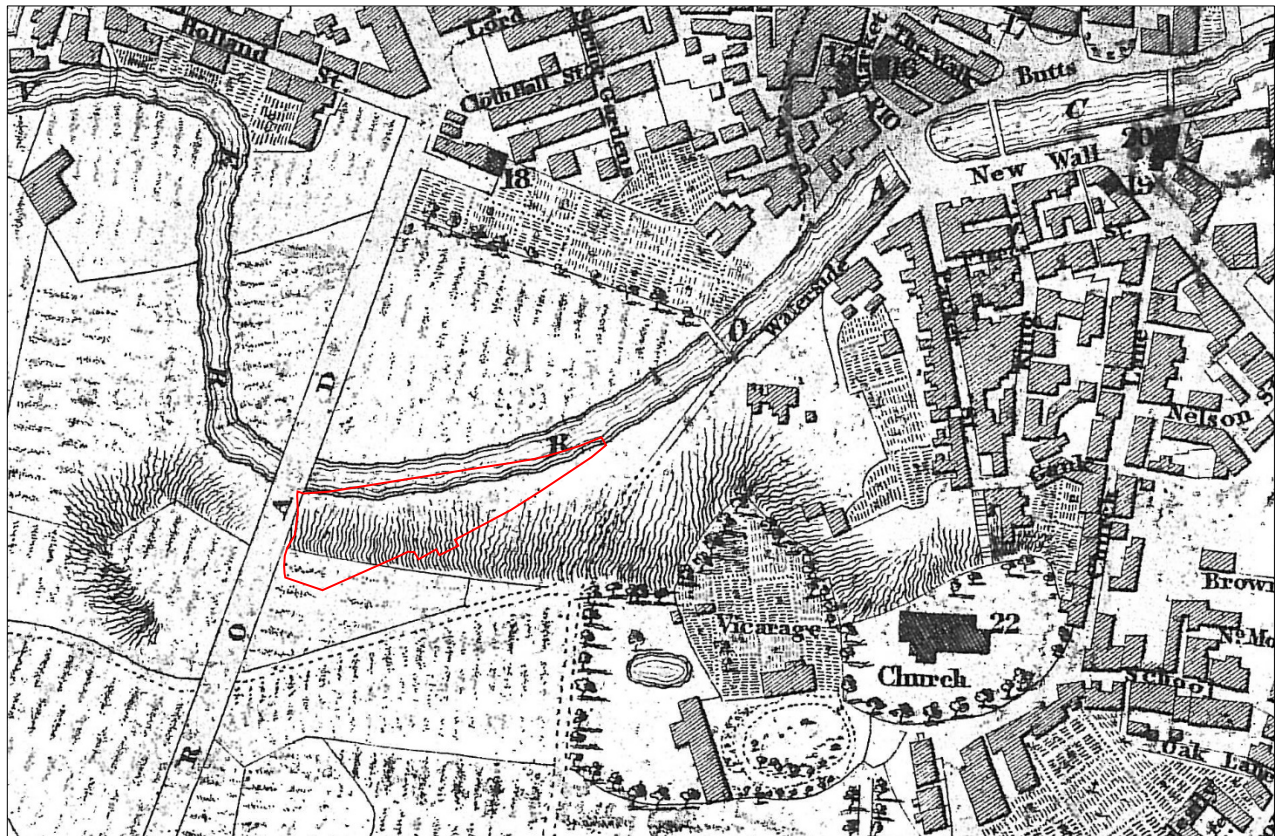
The eastern part of the application site comprises a narrow, triangular-shaped strip of landscaped ground between the River Roch and The Esplanade. This landscaped area is raised from the pavement level of The Esplanade but then falls towards the balustrade forming the northern edge of the site, overlooking the River Roch. A conspicuous mound c. 1.5m high and of uncertain origin lies within this landscaped area; the southern face of the mound has been utilised as a flower bed. A small inspection cover set into the ground to the north of the mound suggest the presence of modern service ducts, whilst the area to the east has been similarly been disturbed by planting schemes.



In terms of known archaeological remains in the area, various artefacts of prehistoric date have been identified in the vicinity of Rochdale, particularly in the upland areas, but nothing has been discovered in the town centre. Similarly, several Roman coins have been found on the periphery of the urban area, but nothing to suggest any settlement in the town centre. Evidence for early medieval activity in the region as a whole is drawn largely from place-names, although there is little firm evidence for activity in Rochdale during this period.

Rochdale was recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086 under 'Recedham Manor', and is one of only four places in the entire Hundred of Salford mentioned by name. By the late 12th century, a motte-and-bailey castle had been established at the northern end of the triangular spur Castle Hill, half a mile to the south-west of Rochdale parish church. Whilst this site is now entirely destroyed and built over, 19th-century surveys show that it had consisted of an irregular bailey, some 30 x 35m, surrounded by an earthen ramparts that were probably surmounted originally by a wooden palisade. The focus of the medieval activity in the area remains uncertain, although the centre of the late medieval town probably lay on the south side of the river, in proximity to St Chad's church with a ford across the River Roch accessed on the northern side from The Butts.

Writing in 1582, Camden described Rochdale as 'a market town well frequented'. The town certainly began to expand significantly during the 1600s, indicated to some degree by the Hearth Tax Returns; in 1666, 228 hearths were recorded for Rochdale. Celia Fiennes, writing in c. 1700, described Rochdale as 'a pretty neat town, built all of stone', whilst some 25 years later Defoe considered it 'a good market town, and of late much improved in the woollen manufacture, as are also the villages in its neighbourhood'. By the end of the 18th century, Rochdale had developed a formidable reputation as a centre for the production of woollen cloth, and the town benefited from a lucrative export trade in woollen goods to Holland, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Russia and Germany. Rochdale rapidly became a boomtown of the Industrial Revolution and amongst the first ever industrialised towns, rising to prominence during the 19th century as an important centre for the production of cotton goods, whilst maintaining a strong woollen industry, focusing in particular on the manufacture of flannel and baize. The site occupied by Touchstones, however, lay beyond the urban area, and is shown on a map of 1831 to have comprised land that sloped steeply down to the River Roch.



Approximate site boundary superimposed on an extract of a map of Rochdale produced in 1831

At the heart of the early development of Rochdale was the bridge across the River Roch, which was probably constructed initially to supplement the fording point across the river during the late medieval period. It remained the principal crossing point across the River Roch until the early 1880s, when Wellington Bridge was built. The short section of the river between these two bridges was covered in several episodes during the early 20th century. This process commenced in July 1904 and the final stretch was completed in 1924, the construction being mostly reinforced concrete using the Hennibique system.

Map regression analysis (see below) strongly suggests that the section of the river between St Mary's Gate and Town Meadows, flowing immediately to the north of the application site, was similarly subject to considerable engineering works during the second half of the 19th century, which rendered the river channel straighter and narrower. This suggestion is supported by the character of the large retaining wall that lines the southern side of the River Roch to the rear of Touchstones, which is clearly of a late 19th-century (or later) construction date. Prior to these improvement works, the southern edge of the river appears to have extended into the application area, as shown on the map of 1831 and the more accurate Ordnance Survey First Edition 1: 1056 Town Plan of 1851.



In summary, the western part of the application site houses the Grade II listed building and will not be subject to any ground-breaking works that will impact on archaeological remains. Conversely, the landscaped ground forming the eastern part of the site, and specifically the mound, will be subject to earth-moving works in order to deliver the development proposals. In view of the brief analysis set out above, however, the area is likely to comprise made ground to some depth, deposited following the construction of the river retaining wall. Similarly, the mound can be no earlier than the late 19th century (and is probably considerably more recent) and is therefore of little or no archaeological interest.

GMAAS is therefore satisfied that there is no archaeological interest in the site, and the proposed development will not have any impact on archaeological remains. As such, GMAAS is happy to advise that no further archaeological study to support a planning application is merited.

Yours sincerely

Ian Miller
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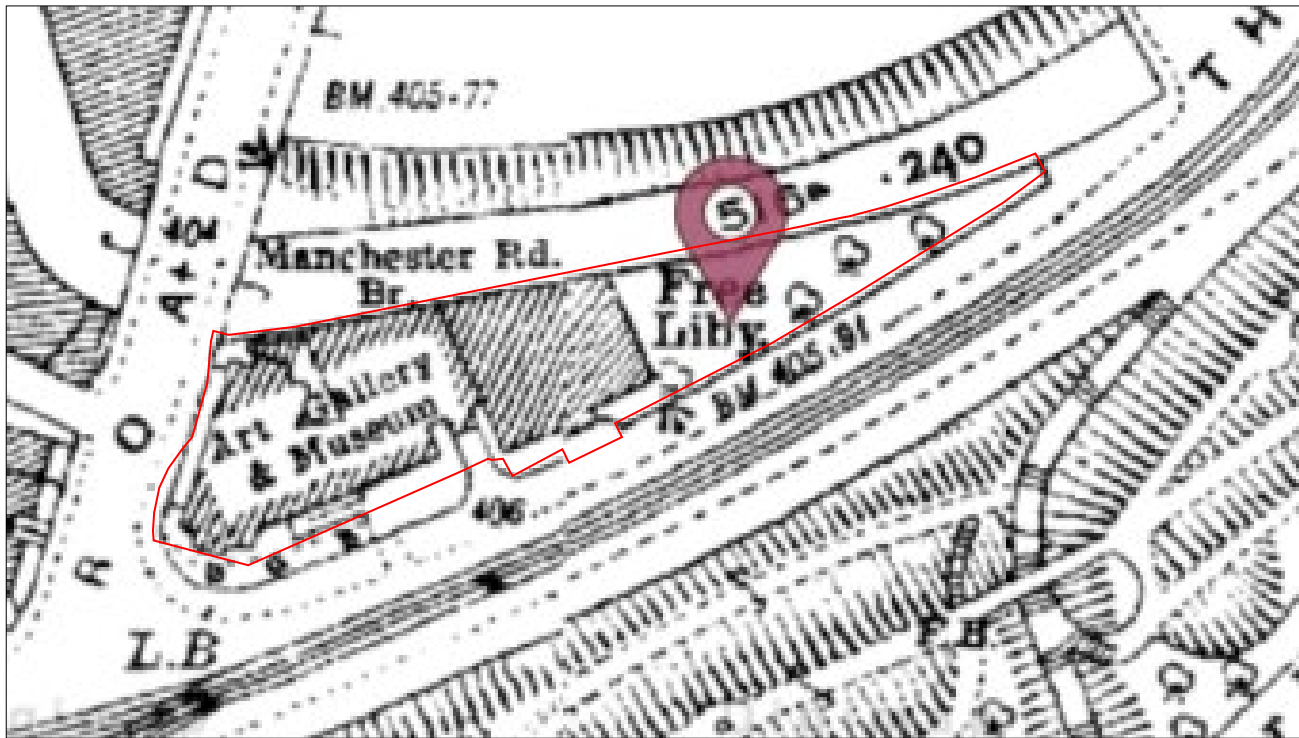
Map Regression



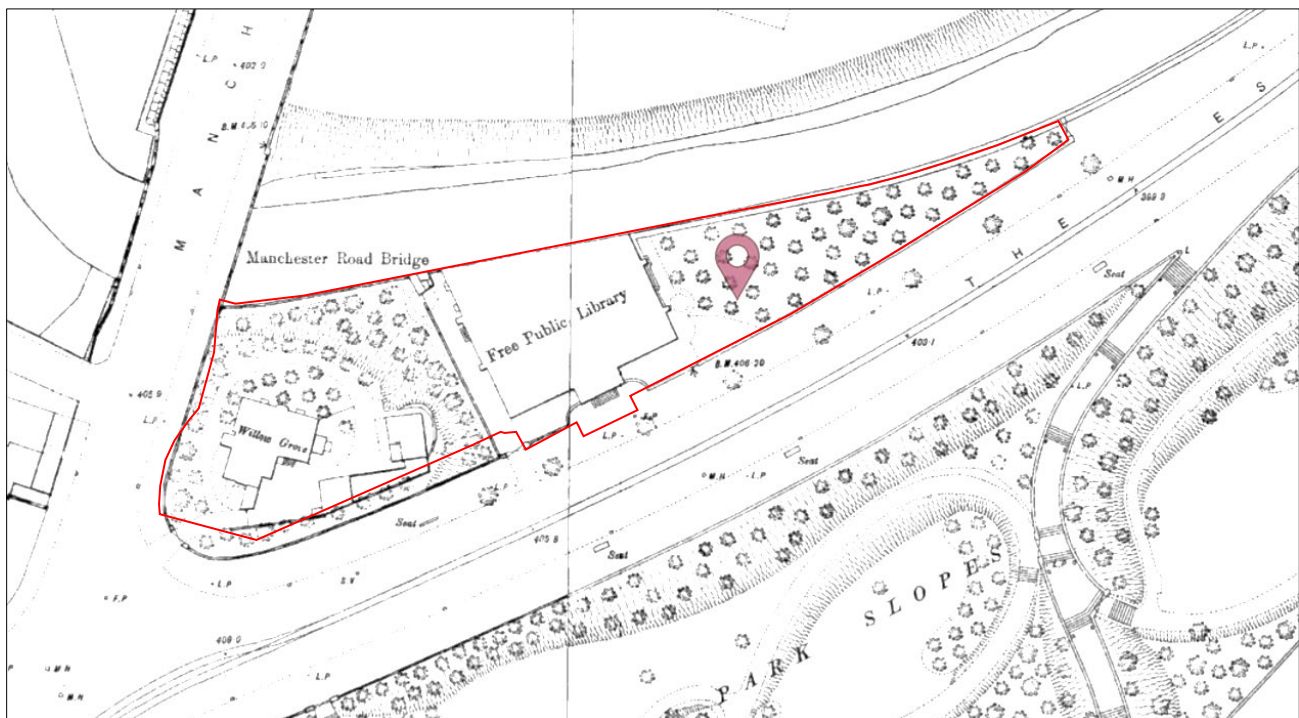
Current Ordnance Survey mapping, marking the centre of the mound within the application area

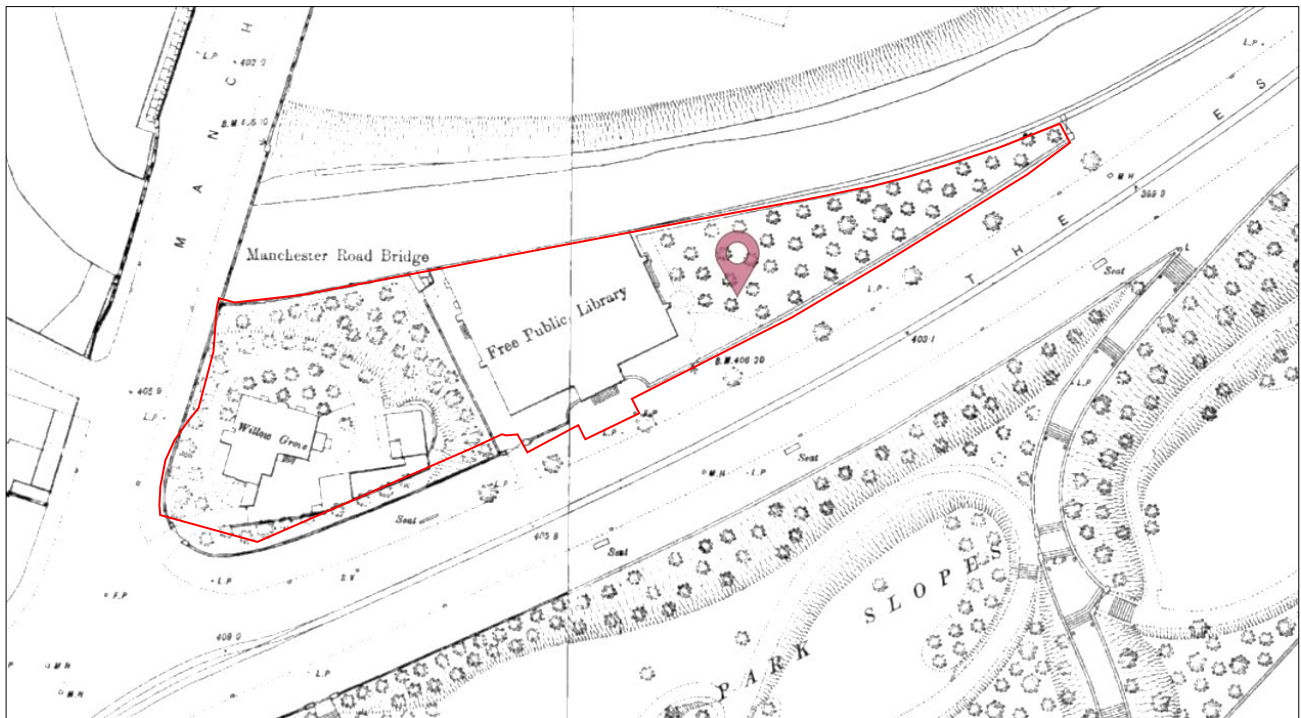


Ordnance Survey 1:1250 map of 1959, marking the centre of the mound within the application area

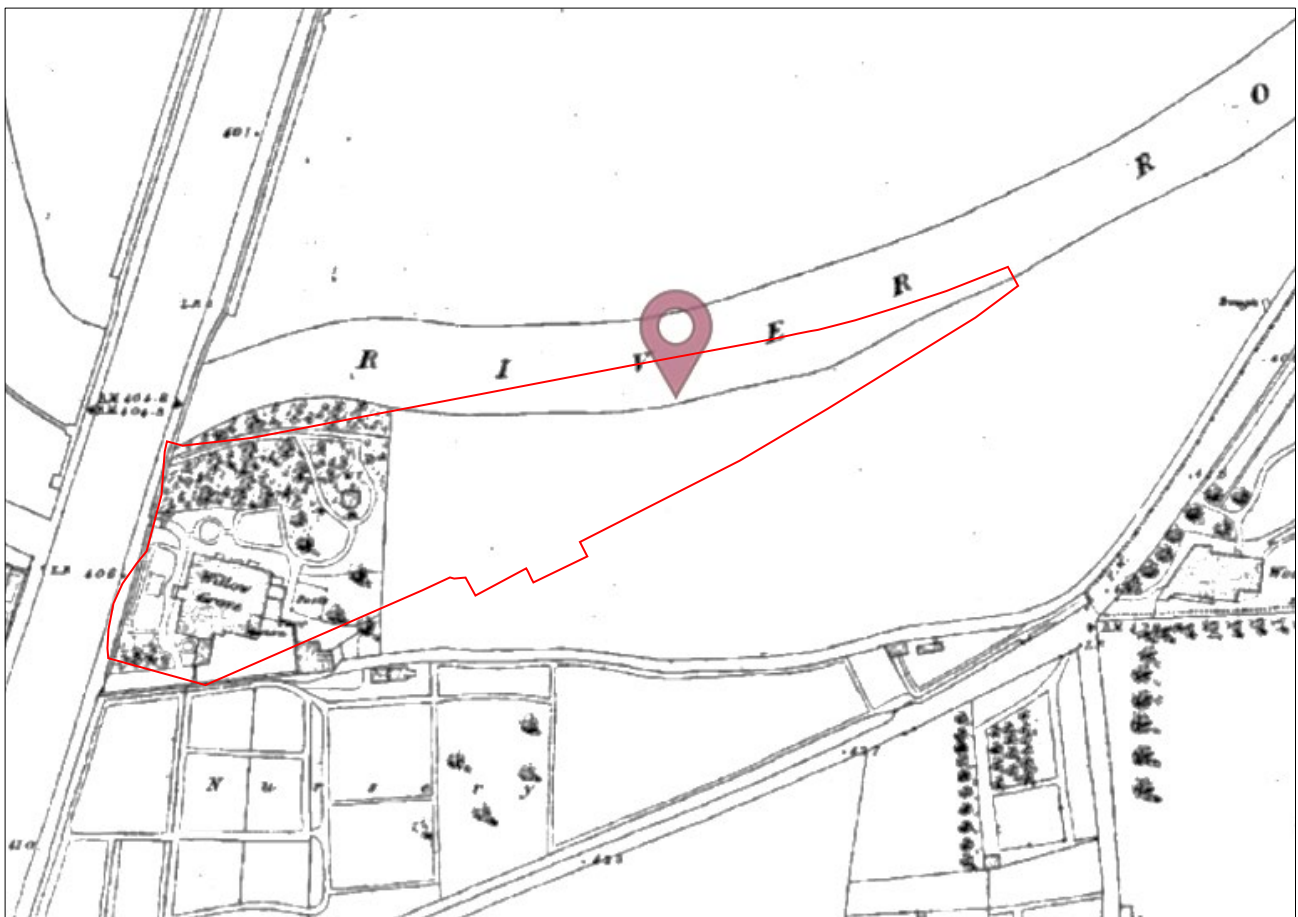


Ordnance Survey 2nd Revision 1:2500 map of 1930, marking the centre of the mound





Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 1:500 Town Plan of 1892, marking the centre of the mound



Ordnance Survey First Edition 1: 1056 Town Plan (1851)