



Montacute House, Montacute, South Somerset

Archaeological Observations and Recording during Installation of New External Signs



Report No. 53574/3/1

December 2021

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Table of Contents

Part 1: Introduction

1.1	Project Introduction.....	1
1.2	Brief.....	1
1.3	Site Location.....	1
1.4	Geology.....	1
1.5	Archaeological and Historical Background.....	1
1.6	Previous Archaeological Fieldwork.....	2
1.7	Aims and Objectives.....	3
1.8	Groundworks.....	3
1.9	Methods.....	3
1.10	Archive and Dissemination.....	3

Part 2: Results

2.1	Trench 1 North of Cedar Lawn.....	3
2.2	Trench 2 South West of House.....	4
2.3	Trench 3 North Garden.....	4
2.4	Trench 4 South of Cedar Lawn.....	4

Part 3: Finds

3.1	Finds assemblage.....	4
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Part 4: Discussion and Conclusions

4.1	Discussion.....	4
4.2	Conclusions.....	4

Part 5: References	5
---------------------------------	---

Figures	6
----------------------	---

Plates	8
---------------------	---

List of Figures

1	Site Location.....	6
2	Location of observed new signs.....	7

List of Plates

1	General view of Location of Trench 1, with East Court to left and Cedar Lawn to right, looking east.....	8
2	Trench 1 postholes after excavation, looking east.....	8
3	General view of sign installed in Trench 1, looking SE.....	8
4	General view showing location of Trench 2, looking east.....	9
5	Trench 2 after excavation showing stone drain 104 in base of hole, looking east.....	9
6	General view of location of Trench 3, looking south.....	9
7	Trench 3 after excavation, looking south.....	10
8	Trench 4 after excavation, looking south east.....	10
9	Trench 4 after installation of sign, looking east.....	10

Appendix 1 Context Summary	11
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Project Report Summary Page

Project Details			
OASIS Reference	terraina1-503572		
Project Title	New External Signage, Montacute House, Montacute, South Somerset		
Short Description of Project	Terrain Archaeology carried out archaeological observations and recording during the installation of four new signs at Montacute House and gardens. Two signs next to the cedar lawn and one in the North Garden revealed undated garden deposits. The sign at the south west corner of Montacute House revealed part of a post-medieval stone drain.		
Project Dates	Start: 03-12-2021	End: 03-12-2021	
Previous/Future Work	Yes/Don't Know		
Project Code	53574		
Monument Type and Period	Stone Drain (Post-medieval)		
Significant Finds	None		
Project Location			
County/District/Parish	Somerset/South Somerset/Montacute		
Site Address	Montacute House, Montacute, Somerset, TA15 6XP		
Site Coordinates	ST 4995 1712, ST 4990 1714, ST 4996 1729, ST 4991 1702		
Site Area	c. 1m ²		
Height OD			
Project Creators			
Organisation	Terrain Archaeology		
Project Brief Originator	National Trust		
Project Design Originator	Terrain Archaeology		
Project Supervisor	Peter Bellamy		
Project Manager	Peter Bellamy		
Sponsor or Funding Body	National Trust		
Project Archive			
Archive Type	Physical	Digital	Paper
Location/Accession No	National Trust	National Trust	National Trust
Contents	None	Raster images, vector images, text,	Context sheets, report

Montacute House, Montacute, South Somerset Archaeological Observations and Recording during Installation of New External Signs, December 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 Project introduction

The National Trust is improving the external signage at Montacute House, Montacute, South Somerset. Four of the new signs lie close to the house or within the adjacent gardens, in locations that have been identified by the National Trust Regional Archaeologist as requiring an archaeological watching brief during installation.

The fieldwork was carried out on the 3rd December 2021 by Peter Bellamy.

1.2 Brief

No written brief for the works was produced by or on behalf of the National Trust, but the scope of the works was set out by Martin Papworth, National Trust Regional Archaeologist.

1.3 Site Location

Montacute House (listed Grade I) and its park and gardens (Registered Historic Park and Garden Grade I) lie immediately north and east of the village of Montacute, Somerset, at about 50 m above Ordnance Datum (ST 498 171) (Figure 1).

The locations of the four new signs observed lie within the gardens of Montacute House, with one just south of the west frontage of Montacute House, one in the North Garden, and two in the Cedar Lawn area (Figure 2).

1.4 Geology

Bedrock geology is mapped as Jurassic Sandstone of the Bridport Sand Formation, with no recorded superficial deposits (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>).

1.5 Archaeological and Historical Background

The summary below is drawn primarily from Terrain Archaeology's Historic Landscape Assessment of the National Trust Montacute estate (Bellamy *et al.* 2003).

Small amounts of Middle Iron Age and Roman material have been identified within Montacute Park to the east of Montacute House. These discoveries were sealed beneath a substantial layer of alluvium, and it is possible that more extensive Iron Age and Roman landscapes await detection in the area.

The settlement at Montacute was known as Bishopston before Domesday. Immediately following the Norman Conquest, a motte & bailey castle was built on St Michael's Hill. Robert, Count of Mortain (or his son William) established a borough as an addition to the Domesday village at some time between 1086 and c. 1102, and in the 12th century land was given to the abbey of Cluny and a priory was established at the foot of St Michael's Hill.

Montacute prospered during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, mainly as a result of the local cloth industry, but it was in decline by the sixteenth century. The Priory was dissolved in 1539.

The Phelps family settled in Montacute in the late fifteenth century and gradually increased their holdings in the area and purchased the Manor in the early seventeenth century. The Montacute estate remained in the hands of the Phelps family until the first half of the twentieth century. The original Montacute House stood somewhere in the area of the present stable block and was demolished when the present house was constructed by Sir Edward Phelps,

probably in the period 1590–1601. At this time the house faced eastwards on to the former Montacute to Ilchester road. To the west of the house was a void court leading to stables, barns, other outbuildings and ponds. There was a service block to the south of the main house, adjacent to the site of the present observations. A survey of the estate undertaken in 1667, prior to Colonel Edward Phelips making over the estate to his son Sir Edward Phelips in 1668, describes this service block as '*large Woodyard and necessary buildings for Daryes Washing Brewing and Bakeing, a Pigeon house*' (Somerset Heritage Centre DD\PH/226/14). The first surviving map of the estate was produced in 1774 by Samuel Donne and the service block is listed in the 1774 Table of Reference as '*Wood Barton, Dairy House, Brewhouse &c.*' (Somerset Heritage Centre DD\PH/159), which is similar to the description in the earlier survey and it is likely that the layout of the buildings on the 1774 map reflects the 1667 layout. Donne's 1774 map shows an L-shaped range along the north and east sides of the present Laundry Court and another detached building to the south and a wall with an ornate gate running SW from the end of the range (Bellamy *et al.* 2003, map 3).

After a period of difficulty and neglect, the estate was improved in the mid-late eighteenth century by Edward Phelips (1725-97). Among other works in 1785-7, the house was remodelled to face west rather than east by forming a new west front using material from the recently demolished Clifton Maybank House and a new West Drive was constructed. This entailed the demolition of Brook Mill and its millponds to form a new serpentine drive up to the Montacute road.

Another major period of improvement of the house and grounds took place between 1845–1860, supervised by William and Ellen Phelips. A new longer straight West Drive was created sometime before 1853 to join a new re-routed road through Montacute constructed in 1851–3. A new stable block (the present-day stables) was constructed to the south of the old stables. The service block south of the house was lowered and remodelled in 1853 to form what is known as the Laundry Courtyard.

1.6 Previous Archaeological fieldwork

There have been a number of archaeological watching briefs carried out within Montacute Park. In 1992, Wessex Archaeology monitored a new water pipeline from Odcombe to Ilchester, which crossed the eastern side of the park. A number of archaeological discoveries were made, including evidence for Iron Age settlement (Wessex Archaeology 1992, Crockett 1996). In 2002-3 Terrain Archaeology monitored the excavation of a new water main trench along the south side of the Lime Avenue. Numerous field drains were encountered, together with two culverts and the backfill of a former pond (Bellamy & Best 2003).

Close to the house itself, four small trenches were excavated by Martin Papworth and National Trust volunteers in 2000, immediately outside the East Court and a number of possible former garden features were encountered (Papworth, unpublished excavation note, cited in Bellamy *et al.* 2003). Terrain Archaeology maintained a watching brief during the relaying of the paving of the East Terrace in 1999 (Bellamy 1999).

In 2013 Terrain Archaeology observed the groundworks for new drainage in the Laundry Courtyard and the laying of a new fibre-optic cable duct across the West Drive, which revealed deposits probably associated with the 1853 alterations of the Service Block and extensive post-medieval levelling deposits, perhaps associated with the forming of the court behind the house in the early 17th century. Compact stone rubble deposits which probably formed part of the 18th and 19th century West and South Drives were also observed (Trevvarthen 2013). In January 2020, Terrain archaeology observed the excavation of a trench for a replacement gas pipe to the Visitors' Toilets, which revealed three stone structures of probable late eighteenth or nineteenth century buildings or boundaries, together with nineteenth century garden and other made ground deposits (Bellamy 2020).

The installation of two new water tanks for a new wash pad area in the Gardener's Estate Yard in November 2018 was observed by Terrain Archaeology, but no archaeology was revealed (Bellamy 2018).

In 2003, the National Trust Montacute estate was the subject of an extensive Historic Landscape Assessment (Bellamy *et al.* 2003).

1.7 Aims and Objectives

The aim of the archaeological programme of works was to establish and make available information about the revealed archaeological resource and place the archaeological results within the local, regional and national context, as appropriate, to advance understanding of the archaeology of the site and its surroundings.

Its objectives were:

- To investigate and record all the in situ archaeological deposits and features revealed during the programme of works to an appropriate professional standard.
- To record recovered artefacts and other materials to an appropriate standard.
- To present the results in a report to the appropriate standard.

1.8 Groundworks

The four signs were set into the ground with a hole roughly 0.25 m diameter and 0.6 m deep dug by hand for each post. The sign at the north end of Cedar Lawn (Trench 1) had two posts and the remainder had a single post.

1.9 Methods

The methodology, scope, and aims and objectives of the works were set out in a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by Terrain Archaeology in November 2021 (Terrain Archaeology document no. 3574/0/1). All archaeological works were carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for archaeological Watching Briefs* (CIfA 2014), with an archaeologist in attendance during all groundworks that possibly may have exposed pre-modern deposits.

All deposits revealed, irrespective of their apparent archaeological significance, were recorded using components of the Terrain Archaeology recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records. The photographic record of the work was maintained in digital format, and included aspects of its setting, conduct and technical detail.

1.10 Archive and Dissemination

1.10.1 Paper Archive

The drawn and written archive will be deposited with the National Trust at the earliest opportunity following the completion of the project.

1.10.2 Artefacts

No artefacts were recovered from the archaeological works.

1.10.3 Report

A copy of this report will be lodged with the National Trust, the National Trust HBSMR and with Somerset Council's Historic Environment Record (HER). The HER is a publicly funded and accessible resource, and deposition of the report will place it, and the project results, in the public domain.

A digital summary of the archive will be placed with the OASIS project (www.oasis.ac.uk) under the reference code *terrains1-503572*. A digital copy of this report will be uploaded for inclusion in the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) online 'grey literature' library.

2. Results

2.1 Trench 1 North of Cedar Lawn

Trench 1 lay at the north west entrance to Cedar Lawn (Figure 2; Plates 1-3) and consisted of two adjacent postholes. The stratigraphy revealed consisted of a 0.15 m thick layer of modern path deposits (100) over a 0.15 m thick layer of dark yellowish-brown clay and stone (101), which may represent the lower part of the path construction or part of an earlier path. This lay over another yellowish-brown clay and stone layer (102), that may be part of the

landscaping works for the creation of the garden. The remains of an earlier sign with a metal post set in concrete were found in this layer. No dating evidence was produced during the excavation of these postholes.

2.2 Trench 2 South West of House

Trench 2 lay to the west of the south west corner of Montacute House and west of Laundry Court (Figure 2; Plate 4). Part of a stone drain (104) running roughly N-S was found at a depth of 0.45 m below present ground level. It ran about 11.5 m west of the house and part of the west edge of the drain and capstone was revealed (Plate 5). It was sealed beneath a layer of topsoil and turf (103). No dating evidence was found.

2.3 Trench 3 North Garden

Trench 3 lay at the north west corner of the north Garden at the entrance of the path to the Ice House (Figure 2; Plate 6). This revealed a 0.1 m thick turf layer (105) over a clay and stone layer (106), which is part of the landscaping for the terrace of the north garden (Plate 7). No dating evidence was obtained.

2.4 Trench 4 South of Cedar Lawn

Trench 4 lay at the south end of Cedar Lawn (Figure 2; Plate 9). It revealed modern path deposits (107), 0.1 m thick over a layer of mid yellowish-brown clay and stone (108) disturbed by abundant yew hedge roots (Plate 8), similar to context 102 in Trench 1.

3. Finds

3.1 Finds Assemblage

No finds were retained from the observations.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

4.1 Discussion

The very small areas dug for the new signs precluded detailed examination of the stratigraphy and hampered the interpretation of the contexts revealed. Nevertheless, it is clear that no significant archaeology was encountered in any of the trenches and no dating evidence was revealed. In Trenches 1, 3, and 4 the deposits relate either to the modern paths or are part of the landscaping works to form the existing gardens and may relate to the mid nineteenth century improvements by William and Ellen Phelps.

The remains of the stone drain in Trench 2 may relate either to the late eighteenth century service block and other buildings just to the south of Trench 2. Previous watching briefs in this same area in 2013 and 2020 did not expose this drain (Trevarthen 2013, Bellamy 2020).

4.2 Conclusions

The only archaeological feature revealed by the watching brief was a stone drain or culvert of probable late eighteenth century date running close to the west face of the house. Elsewhere, only undated garden deposits were identified.

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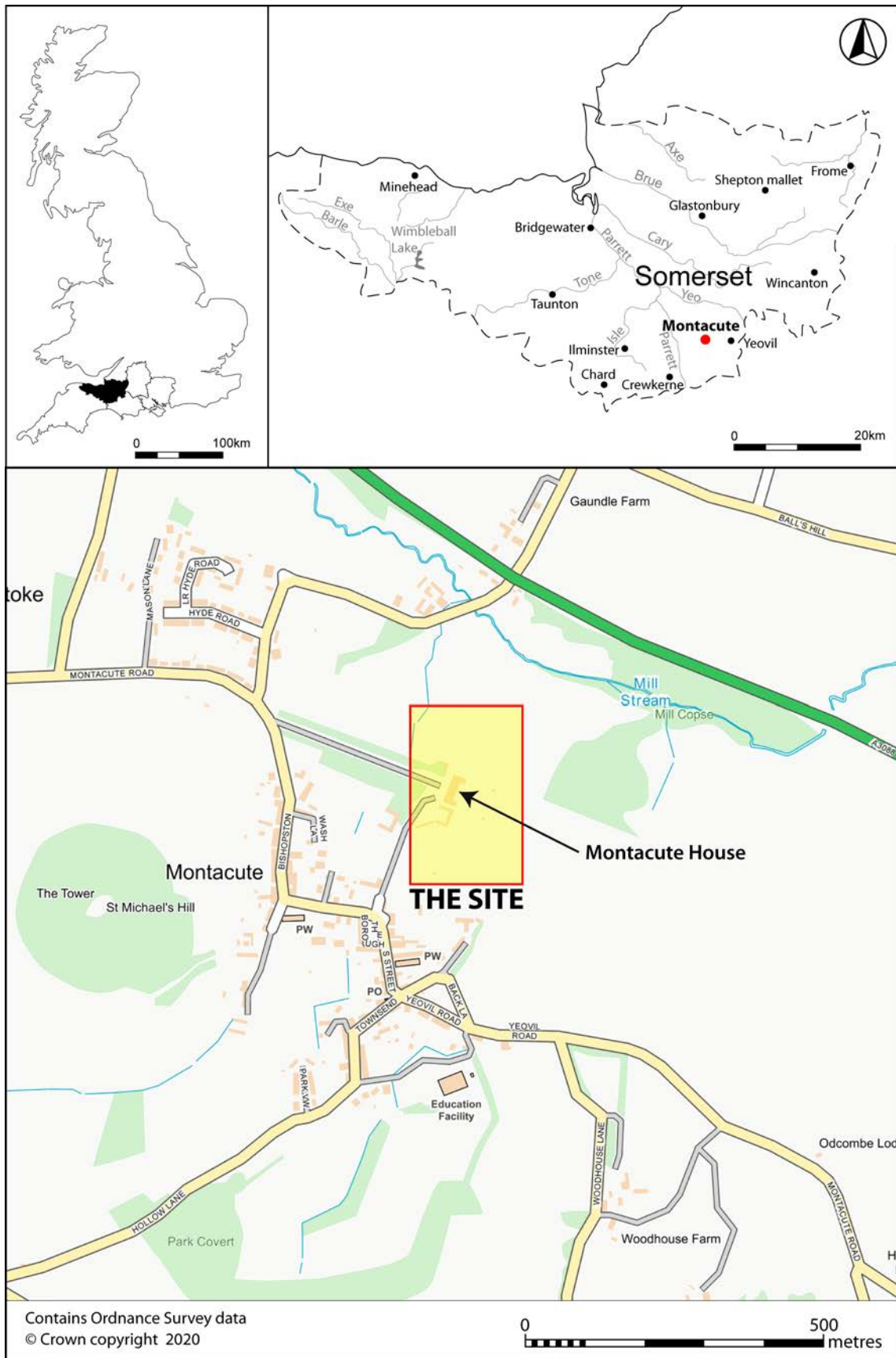


Figure 1: Site Location.

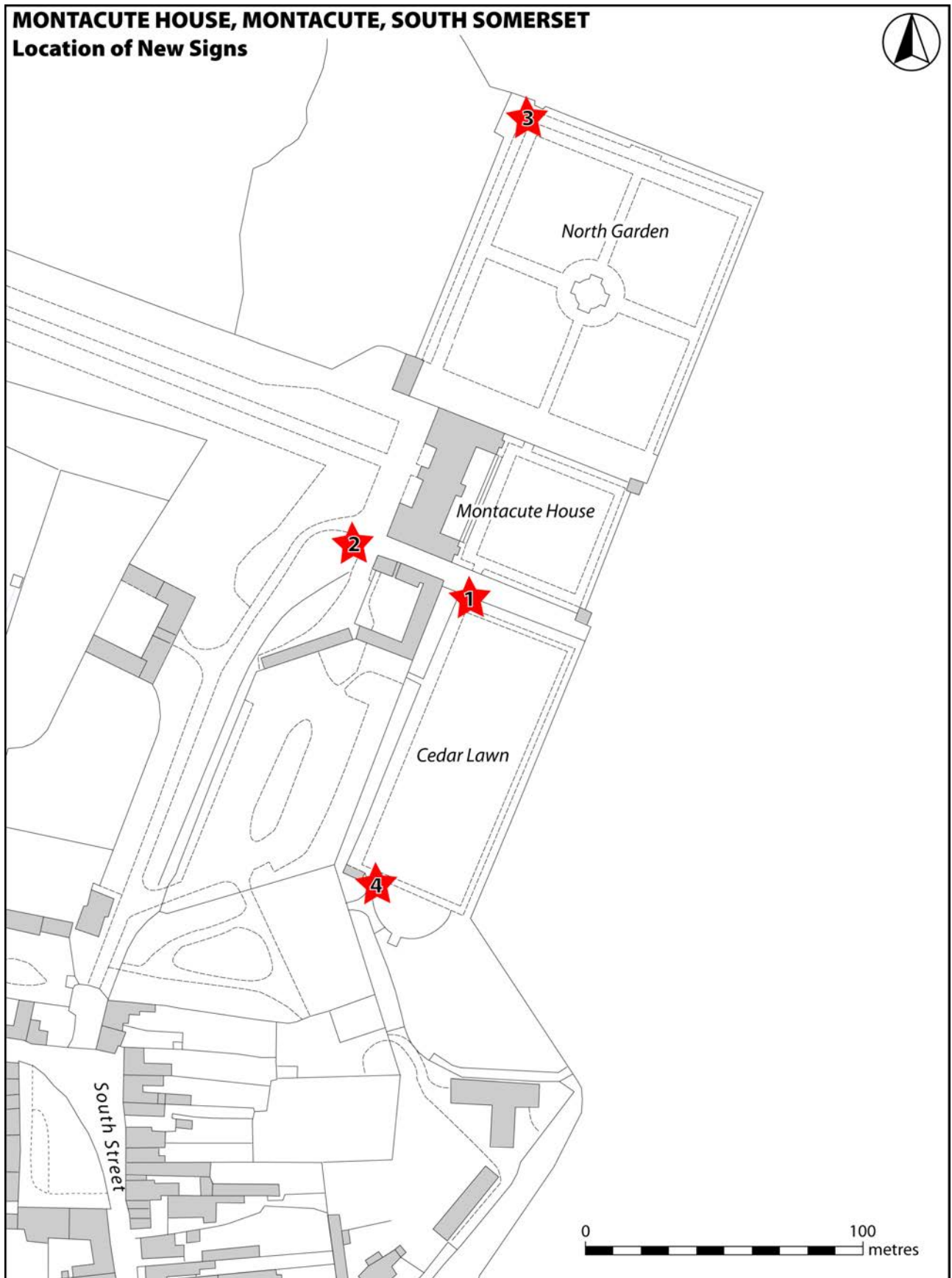


Figure 2: Location of observed new signs.



Plate 1: General view of Location of Trench 1, with East Court to left and Cedar Lawn to right, looking east.



Plate 2: Trench 1 postholes after excavation, looking east. 1m scale.



Plate 3: General view of sign installed in Trench 1, looking SE.



Plate 4: General view showing location of Trench 2, looking east.



Plate 5: Trench 2 after excavation showing stone drain 104 in base of hole, looking east.



Plate 6: General view of location of Trench 3, looking south.



Plate 7: Trench 3 after excavation, looking south.



Plate 8: Trench 4 after excavation, looking south east.



Plate 9: Trench 4 after installation of sign, looking east.

Appendix 1: Context Summary

Trench 1

Diameter: 0.25 m; depth 0.55 m.

Context	Description and Interpretation	Depth (m) below ground level
100	Path: Hard-packed yellowish-brown gravel, stone and sand.	0.00 – 0.15m
101	Made Ground: Dark yellowish-brown clay with abundant small stone.	0.15– 0.30m
102	Made Ground: Mid yellowish-brown clay with abundant stone, with metal post set in concrete.	0.30m +

Trench 2

Diameter: 0.3 m; depth 0.45 m.

Context	Description and Interpretation	Depth (m) below ground level
103	Turf and Topsoil: Dark greyish-brown silty clay and turf.	0.00 – 0.40m
104	Stone Drain: Dressed Ham Hill stone drain with capstone, running roughly N-S.	0.40m +

Trench 3

Diameter: 0.25 m; depth 0.5 m.

Context	Description and Interpretation	Depth (m) below ground level
105	Turf: Mid yellowish-brown silty clay and turf.	0.00 – 0.10m
106	Made Ground: Mid yellowish-brown silty clay with common small stone.	0.10m +

Trench 4

Diameter 0.3 m; depth 0.55 m.

Context	Description and Interpretation	Depth (m) below ground level
107	Path: Hard-packed gravel over a thin cinder layer.	0.00 – 0.10m
108	Made Ground: Mid yellowish-brown silty clay with abundant hard-packed stone and frequent roots.	0.10m +