

THE BRIGANTIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE



ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING (‘WATCHING BRIEF’) at THE LODGE, HOLLY HILL, WELL (HAMBLETON DISTRICT), NORTH YORKSHIRE

A report to Mr and Mrs C. Ingram



5th June 2013

THE BRIGANTIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE

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***ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING
(‘WATCHING BRIEF’) at
THE LODGE, HOLLY HILL,
WELL (HAMBLETON DISTRICT),
NORTH YORKSHIRE***

Site centred SE 26464 81805

**In connection with planning consent
(Hambleton District Council) 13/00173/FUL**

A report to Mr and Mrs C. Ingram

OASIS reference: *thebriga1-149281*

Percival Turnbull

5th June 2013

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EPITOME

On instructions from Harrison & Johnson Ltd, on behalf of Mr and Mrs C. Ingram, a programme of archaeological monitoring (a ‘watching brief’) has been undertaken during ground works adjacent to The Lodge, Holly Hill, Well, North Yorkshire. This was required in response to a condition attached to planning consent no (Hambleton District Council) 13/00173/FUL, for the extension and refurbishment of the building. The site is centred on (National Grid Reference) SE 26464 81805.

The site has been the subject of a field evaluation carried out by this Practice in April 2013 (Brigantia, 2013). The Holly Hill area of the village of Well is known to be the location of a group of Roman buildings, the existence of which has been known since the 18th century. Small-scale excavations by Sir Frederick Millbank, then the landowner, and by the Rev^d W.C. Lukis indicated the presence in the close called Mill Garth (immediately east of the site here under consideration) of a hypocausted building of some architectural sophistication, interpreted as part of a bath-suite and assumed at the time to be part of a villa (Pritchett, 1886). Part of a decorated mosaic pavement recovered at this time is still displayed in the north aisle of the parish church. The nature of the buildings was further investigated by excavations between 1938 and 1947, by R. Gilyard-Beer (henceforth in this report referred to as G-B).

The report on the April 2013 evaluation concluded that: *‘Clearly, the results of this evaluation have been archaeologically negative; there is nothing to suggest that Roman buildings survive within the immediate vicinity of The Lodge, and much to indicate that any structures which might have existed have been comprehensively destroyed. The absolute emptiness of Trench 2 (immediately to the north of The Lodge) seems to confirm that this point lies outside the south-western limit of the Roman building group. Trench 1 (immediately east of the north-east corner of The Lodge), by contrast, appears to hold the evidence of the destruction of the ‘dwelling house’: it seems likely that this took place in or about 1860, in connection with the construction of The Lodge, the naturally sloping ground being levelled off with a few large boulders torn from the foundations of the building which G-B was later to investigate, and this being topped-off by the mortary rubble, full of tesserae, shovelled up from the area immediately to the north. ... It is possible that The Lodge was built directly on the site of the outermost Roman building ..., of which no vestige thereafter survived’.*

The watching brief has established that:

The area immediately to the east of The Lodge represents a zone within which archaeological deposits have been destroyed, and the area has been filled with the deposit [103] / [303] which has been derived from the destruction or demolition of parts of a Roman building.

To the south of the axis of the southern edge of The Lodge the *opus signinum* floor of a Roman building survives in substantially good condition. There is potential for the survival of archaeological deposits for between five and seven metres southwards of this line, though such deposits will be interrupted by the drain cuts [307] and [308] which continue to run southwards. The zone of potential preservation is currently under a garden regime.

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INTRODUCTION

1. On instructions from Harrison & Johnson Ltd, on behalf of Mr and Mrs C. Ingram, a programme of archaeological monitoring (a ‘watching brief’) has been undertaken during ground works adjacent to The Lodge, Holly Hill, Well, North Yorkshire. This was required in response to a condition attached to planning consent no (Hambleton District Council) 13/00173/FUL, for the extension and refurbishment of the building.
2. Work was carried out according to a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by this Practice and approved by Hambleton District Council, advised by North Yorkshire County Council.
3. The project has been allocated the OASIS reference *thebriga1-149281*.

THE SITE

4. The site (Fig. 1) is centred on (National Grid Reference) SE 26464 81805.
5. The Holly Hill area of Well lies at the western end of the village; The Lodge is a small, single-storey building of about 1860, constructed as an entrance Lodge to Holly Hill House. To the west is The Tarn, a shallow pond which originated as the mill dam; to the north the ground rises sharply in the scarp which marks the natural northern edge of the valley of the Well Beck and at the foot of which runs the present course of the beck, diverted to serve the needs of the former mill. To the south of The Lodge lies the Masham road, which occupies at this point the natural bed of the beck.
6. The local geology is built of Magnesian Limestone, with a covering of yellow-brown boulder clay and, in the vicinity of the Well Beck, of patches of alluvial sand and gravel. The natural channel of the Well Beck is filled with a form of tufa, created by the redeposition of dissolved limestone, but this does not seem to extend into the area occupied by The Lodge.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

7. The site has been the subject of a field evaluation carried out by this Practice in April 2013 (Brigantia, 2013). The Holly Hill area of the village of Well is known to be the location of a group of Roman buildings, the existence of which has been known since the 18th century. Small-scale excavations by Sir Frederick Millbank, then the landowner, and by the Rev^d W.C. Lukis indicated the presence in the close called Mill Garth (immediately east of the site here under consideration) of a hypocausted building of some architectural sophistication, interpreted as part of a bath-suite and assumed at the time to be part of a villa (Pritchett, 1886). Part of a decorated mosaic pavement recovered at this time is still displayed in the north aisle of the parish church. The nature of the buildings was further investigated by

excavations between 1938 and 1947, by R. Gilyard-Beer (henceforth in this report referred to as G-B).

8. G-B's excavations, published in 1951, revealed several distinct features (Fig. 2):

- A. The 'Hot Baths', close to the middle of Mill Garth and about 50 metres north-east of The Lodge. This is a bath-suite of five rooms, probably including *apodyterium*, *frigidarium*, *tepidarium* and *calidarium*, with a hypocaust and *praeefurnium*. It is a fairly conventional, small bath-suite such as might be expected on the site of a minor villa; the layout of the rooms is compact and rectangular, possibly reflecting the limited space available between the scarp of higher ground to the north and the (original) bed of the Well Beck to the south. Four periods of construction, ending in the late 4th century, were identified. The building remains were very fragmentary, extensively disturbed and robbed and lying close to the surface. In the late 18th century a bee-hive oven and some sort of kiln were inserted into part of the buildings.
- B. Immediately south-west of the bath-suite were the very fragmentary remains of two rooms, so much damaged that it was unclear whether they represented two rooms of a single building, or two quite separate structures. G-B offers a fairly speculative reconstruction. The remains of a hypocaust indicated domestic use. Initial construction belonged to the 2nd century, with a subsequent phase of major reconstruction.
- C. South of those remains lay the feature referred to by G-B as the 'plunge bath'. It lay on the lip of the former valley of the beck, as remodelled by the construction of the Masham road, 40 metres east of The Lodge. It was a well-constructed feature, of massive Magnesian Limestone ashlar, measuring approximately 13 metres from east to west by 5.5 metres, and surviving to a depth of about 2 metres below the surface; the remains of a moulded cornice suggest that this was the full original depth. The floor was of limestone slabs covered with what G-B calls 'tile cement' (presumably *opus signinum*), in turn covered with a white plaster skim. The junction between walls and floor was sealed by a *cavetto* roll of this material. The water had entered this tank by a spot at the west end, and drained through a hole in the east end (*scilicet*, the water was flowing, not still). It should be noted that this feature was not roofed, but was open to the air.
- D. The westernmost building identified by G-B was what he called the 'dwelling house'. This very fragmentary building, much cut about by stone robbing and other activities, lay at its closest proven point no more than 10 metres north-east of The Lodge. G-B was however unable to confirm the southern limit of the structure, and it is possible that it once extended into the area between The Lodge and its outbuildings to the east. G-B's reconstruction indicates a simple wingless corridor-house. The dilapidated condition of the remains may obscure some former elegance: according to G-B the mosaic of which a fragment is displayed in the church belongs to this building, and his own excavations found traces of tessellated pavements, one in the part of the building nearest to The Lodge; G-B's photograph shows a plain pavement with a contrasting band running inside the walls.

9. Quantities of pottery and other cultural material found during G-B's excavations were small, but generally support a chronology extending from the earlier 2nd century. There are,

however, some interesting anomalies. Two Samian vessels, Dragendorff forms 18 and 27, are Claudio-Neronian (the specialist report is by Felix Oswald). Examination of the coarse pottery report reveals a small quantity of material which seems similarly early: the sharply carinated bowl no 88, which has a look of Iron Age C, and the situlate jar no 93 which has a long pedigree in the northern Iron Age. Since the discovery in the 1980s of substantial quantities of *terra sigillata* and other imported finewares at Stanwick (Turnbull, 1983a), where they were associated with native coarsewares and related to the period of the client kingdom of Cartimandua, we need not be surprised by the presence of such material in advance of Petillius Cerealis's annexation of the Yorkshire area at the beginning of the 70s. There is, then, a possibility that some sort of high-status site already existed at Well before the area fell under Roman administration.

10. The Roman remains at Well are often assumed to be those of a villa (e.g., Hartley & Fitts, 1988). This should not be taken for granted, since there are aspects of the site which do not fit well with the idea: the lack of any evidence for economic activity, the disproportionate size of the bath suite when compared with possible living accommodation; above all, the beautifully-constructed tank or cistern which G-B called the 'plunge bath' and which Hartley and Fitts were reduced to describing as an '*open-air swimming bath*'. This feature appears to have been the focus of the whole building group, and to have had the greatest care and art lavished upon its construction. G-B's suggestion, that the site may have been a temple complex built around the shrine of a water deity, has much in its favour. The village of Well has long been important on account of the Well Beck which arises above the village and which is a rare and vital watercourse in an arid limestone area; its significance is commemorated in the village's name and in the former presence there of two 'holy well' sites. It has recently been suggested that the area may have been the focus of water-based religious activity from as early as the Neolithic period (Harding, 2012). Romano-British 'water' shrines are not unknown, and include the temple of Nodens at Lydney Park, the cult centre of Minerva Sulis at Bath, and the shrine of Coventina on Hadrian's Wall. A limestone sculpture from Well has been identified as a finely-wrought image of a female divinity, probably Britannia or Brigantia, dating from the 2nd century (Turnbull, 1983b): it is such a sculpture as might have graced a major cult-centre.

11. G-B's work had left open the question of how far to the south and west (that is to say, in the vicinity of The Lodge) the complex of buildings originally extended: he noted that '*the possibility of a west wing near the south end or of a detached building in that position cannot be dismissed, as the late Mr Walker of Holly Hill said that he had heard that foundations were found but not followed up when the lodge was built, and reference to the plan will show that the lodge stands clear of the west wall of the house. That there were no such detached buildings west of the north end of the house was proved by trenching up to the drive to Holly Hill*'.

12. The report on the April 2013 evaluation concluded that: '*Clearly, the results of this evaluation have been archaeologically negative; there is nothing to suggest that Roman buildings survive within the immediate vicinity of The Lodge, and much to indicate that any structures which might have existed have been comprehensively destroyed. The absolute emptiness of Trench 2 (immediately to the north of The Lodge) seems to confirm that this point lies outside the south-western limit of the Roman building group. Trench 1 (immediately east of the north-east corner of The Lodge), by contrast, appears to hold the evidence of the destruction of the 'dwelling house': it seems likely that this took place in or about 1860, in connection with the construction of The Lodge, the naturally sloping ground*

being levelled off with a few large boulders torn from the foundations of the building which G-B was later to investigate, and this being topped-off by the mortary rubble, full of tesserae, shovelled up from the area immediately to the north. ... It is possible that The Lodge was built directly on the site of the outermost Roman building ..., of which no vestige thereafter survived'.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

13. It is against this background that the watching brief of May 2013 was carried out (Fig. 2). The conservatory and modern extension on the western side of The Lodge were removed, and their concrete base slabs [301] were torn up. This exposed a loose, yellow-brown mortary soil containing fragments of sandstone and limestone rubble, disturbed in places by modern drains (Fig. 3). This was equivalent to the deposit recorded as [103] during the evaluation: it had been interpreted as a levelling deposit, probably associated with the construction of The Lodge in 1860, which contained material derived from the destruction of the Roman building immediately to the north (which G-B had designated the 'dwelling-house'). For the purposes of the watching brief, this deposit has been designated [303]. Through it were excavated foundation trenches for the new construction, forming three sides of a square on the eastern side of The Lodge. Excavation was carried out by a small, tracked, back-acting excavator, and was continuously monitored. Trenches were an average 1 metre in depth, and approximately 1 metre wide (though the actual width varied considerably because of the unstable nature of [303]).

14. Both the northern and eastern foundation trenches were cut only through the mortary rubble [303], which directly underlay turf [302] outside the limits of the concrete slab (Fig. 4). The nature of [303] was identical with that of deposit [103] identified during the previous evaluation. Like [103] it contained quantities of loose *tesserae*, some of sandstone and some of a red ceramic material. Quantities were smaller than those found in the evaluation, but this can be attributed to the lower rate of recovery from a machine-cut trench; proportions, however, were similar, with 24 *tesserae* of grey sandstone and 11 smaller ones of red ceramic material (Fig. 5). No other material whatever was included within the deposit.

15. The southern trench showed a more complex arrangement (see Figs 6 and 7, which show the north-facing section of this trench). Beneath the concrete slab [301] (or, outside the footprint of the former conservatory, beneath a 30 cms layer of garden topsoil [302]) the two ends of the trench were interrupted by deep modern intrusions [307] to the west and [308] to the east, each of which was filled by a modern ceramic drain and penetrated to the full depth of the excavated trench. These cut through [303], the mortary, rubble-filled soil seen over the rest of the site. Here, however, [303] was no more than 30 cms thick and directly overlay an intact floor of *opus signinum* [304], which could be seen in section. This feature was 10 cms thick; it did not survive in the northern section; a small area could be seen in plan for no more than 15cms north of the southern section, but immediately fell away under its own weight. Below the floor was a 10 cms layer of small limestone rubble [305], clearly the original substrate of the concrete floor. Beneath this lay [306], a layer of fine, silty loam with a very high proportion of small pebbles or gravel. This deposit was very black in colour; trial flotation has however suggested that it has no significant organic contents, and the colour appears to derive from soot. A small area of the floor [304] was revealed in plan outside (south of) the development footprint; it could be seen (Fig. 8) to have a smooth, red-pink surface with no obvious signs of damage or heavy wear.

15. Samples of the *opus signinum* were provided by the fragments within the width of the trench (Fig. 9). It seems to have been laid down over the crushed limestone bed [305] in two stages: the bulk of it is a lime concrete with a small admixture of crushed tile, but a large amount of gravel; this is topped by a final screed, only a centimetre or so thick, with a much greater amount of tile, giving a reddish-pink colour to the surface.

DISCUSSION

16. The watching brief has established that:

- i. The area immediately to the east of The Lodge represents a zone within which archaeological deposits have been destroyed, and the area has been filled with the deposit [103] / [303] which has been derived from the destruction or demolition of parts of a Roman building. In this respect, the results of the watching brief confirm those of the previous archaeological evaluation.
- ii. The southern edge of this zone of destruction is coterminous with the axis of the southern edge of The Lodge. There is a strong suggestion that the episode of destruction which created [103] / [303] was associated with the building of The Lodge in 1860.
- iii. The building of which the destruction occasioned the deposition of [103] / [303] appears to have continued the axis of G-B's 'dwelling house'; the numerous *tesserae* recovered from the rubble indicate that it had a floor in much the same style as that described by G-B.
- iv. To the south of the axis of the southern edge of The Lodge the *opus signinum* floor of a Roman building survives in substantially good condition. There is potential for the survival of archaeological deposits for between five and seven metres southwards of this line, though such deposits will be interrupted by the drain cuts [307] and [308] which continue to run southwards. The zone of potential preservation is currently under a garden regime.

17. This exercise has added substantially to our knowledge of the group of Roman buildings at Well, and have supplied an answer to the old question of the extent of the buildings. It is of interest that the surviving floor should be of *opus signinum*, a material which was used characteristically (though by no means exclusively) on account of its impermeable, waterproof, qualities. This underlines the apparent imbalance of the Well buildings, which seem to be heavily over-provided with baths and focussed around what G-B called the 'plunge bath', imposingly built of beautiful ashlar. The idea of the group being a temple complex associated with a water deity, *naiad* or similar is a persuasive explanation. It is worthy of note that no Roman pottery whatsoever was recovered either from the evaluation or from the watching brief at The Lodge (and the overall quantity from G-B's excavations was notably small); ritual disposal of rubbish within a *temenos* might be an explanation.

18. The presence of important surviving Roman deposits suggests a need for some level of management. A depth of topsoil of 30 cms over a similar depth of [103] / [303] should be enough to protect *in situ* remains from normal gardening activities, but the planting of large shrubs, trees etc., on the southern side of the garden should be avoided. Any future service trenches should follow the existing cuts made by [307] and [308]. Alternatively, given the

small area involved, it might be possible at some time to procure the full excavation of the surviving deposits, a solution which might also help further to illuminate this enigmatic site.

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Fig. 4 [303] visible in eastern section.

Fig. 5 *Tesserae* from [303]: those on the left are grey sandstone, those on the right red ceramic material.

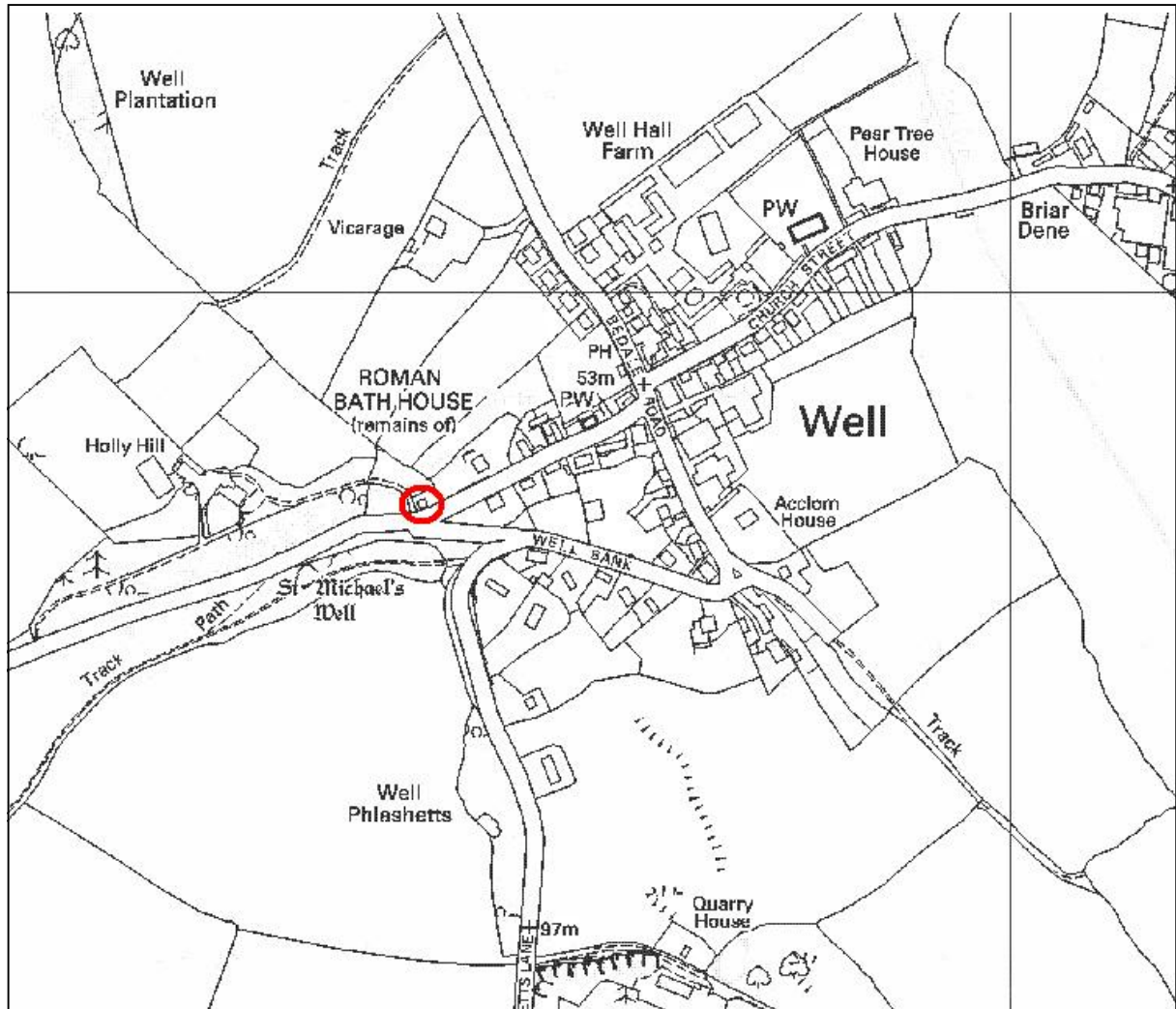
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Fig. 7 Schematic section of southern trench.

Fig. 8 Southern section, showing part of *opus signinum* floor in plan.

Fig. 9 Fragments of *opus signinum* detached from [304].

Fig. 10 Potential zone of survival (shown blue).



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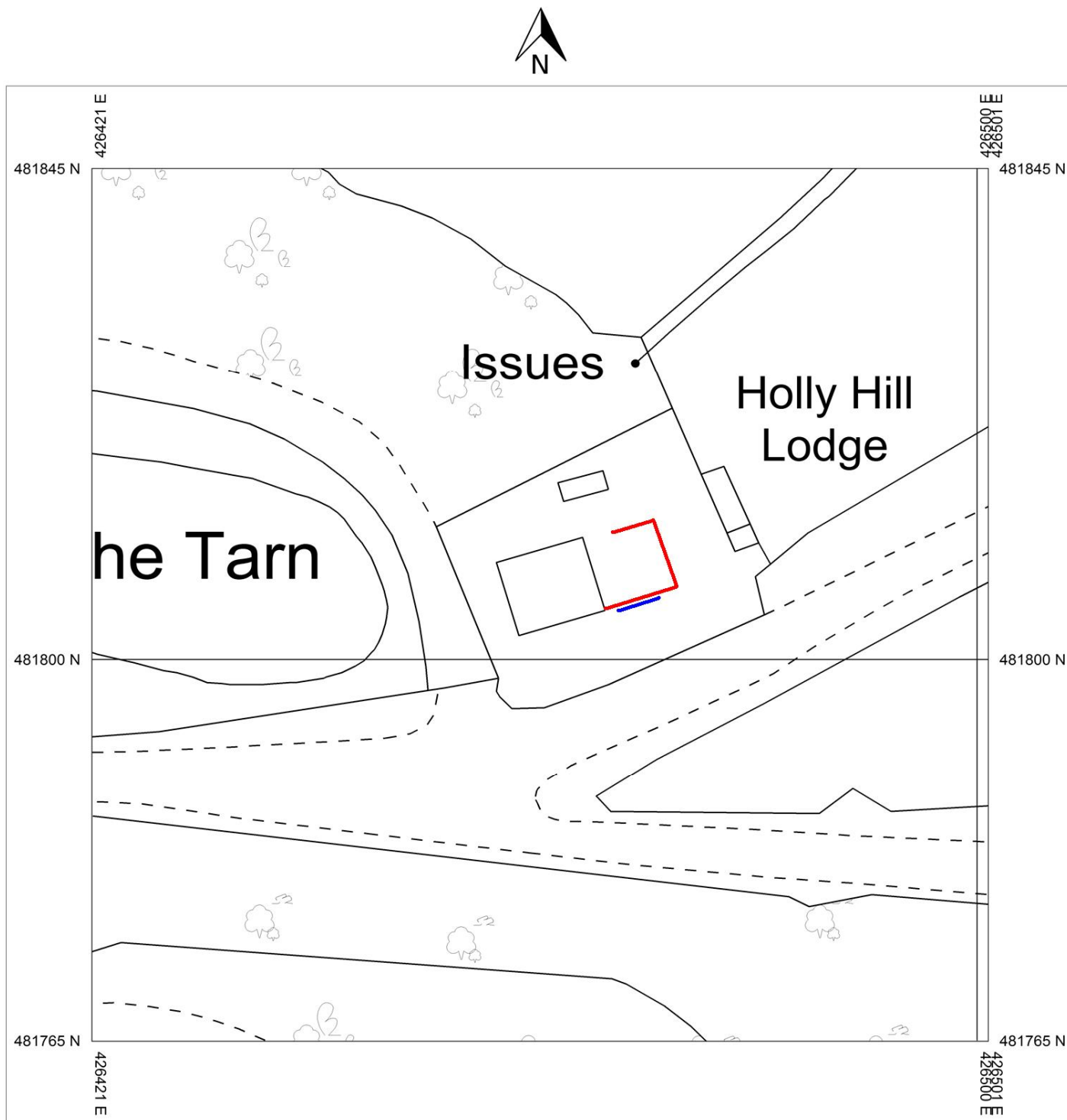
The Lodge, Well: watching brief

Fig. 1

Site location



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The Lodge, Well: watching brief

Fig. 2

Location of watching brief. Excavated trenches are shown in red; the extent in section of the *opus signinum* floor [305] is shown in blue



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0 8 16
Scale 1:500



The Lodge, Well: watching brief

Fig. 3

Surface of [303] after removal of concrete slab



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The Lodge, Well: watching brief

Fig. 4

[303] visible in eastern section.



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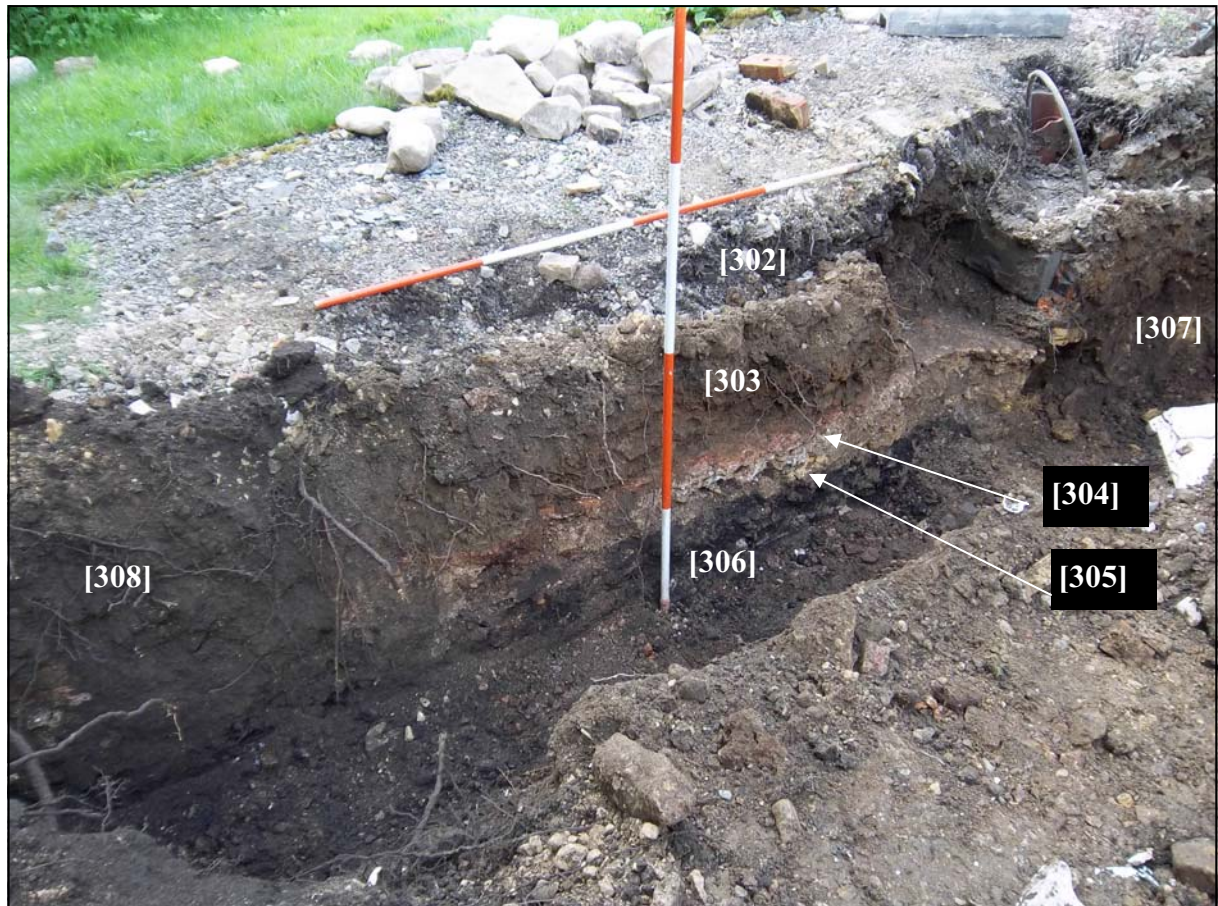
The Lodge, Well: watching brief

Fig. 5

***Tesserae* from [303]: those on the left are grey sandstone, those on the right red ceramic material.**



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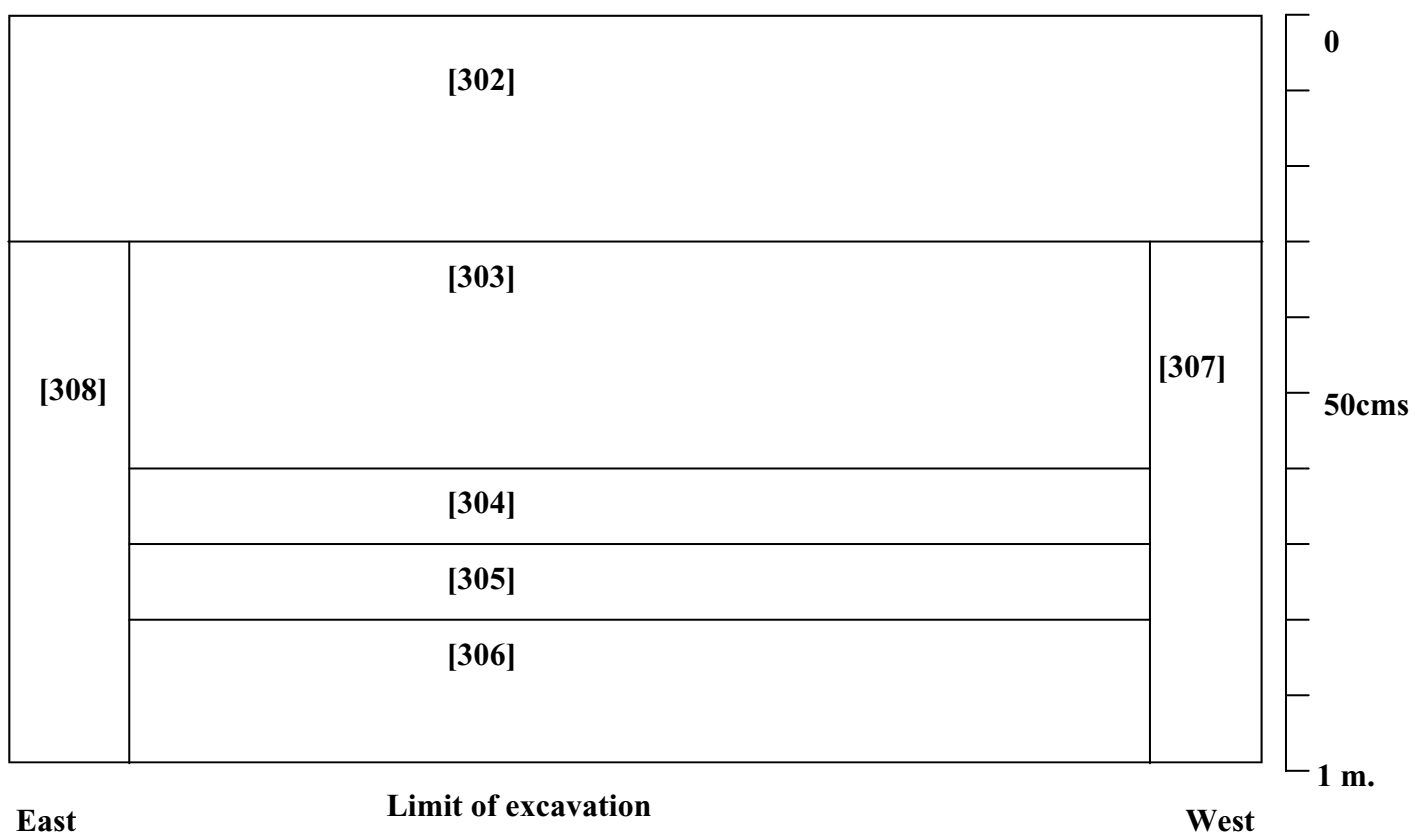
The Lodge, Well: watching brief

Fig. 6

Southern section, showing *opus signinum* floor *in situ*.



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Vertical axis: scale as shown.

Horizontal axis: not to scale.



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The Lodge, Well: watching brief

Fig. 7

Schematic section of southern trench



The Lodge, Well: watching brief

Fig. 8

**Southern section, showing part of *opus
signinum* floor in plan.**



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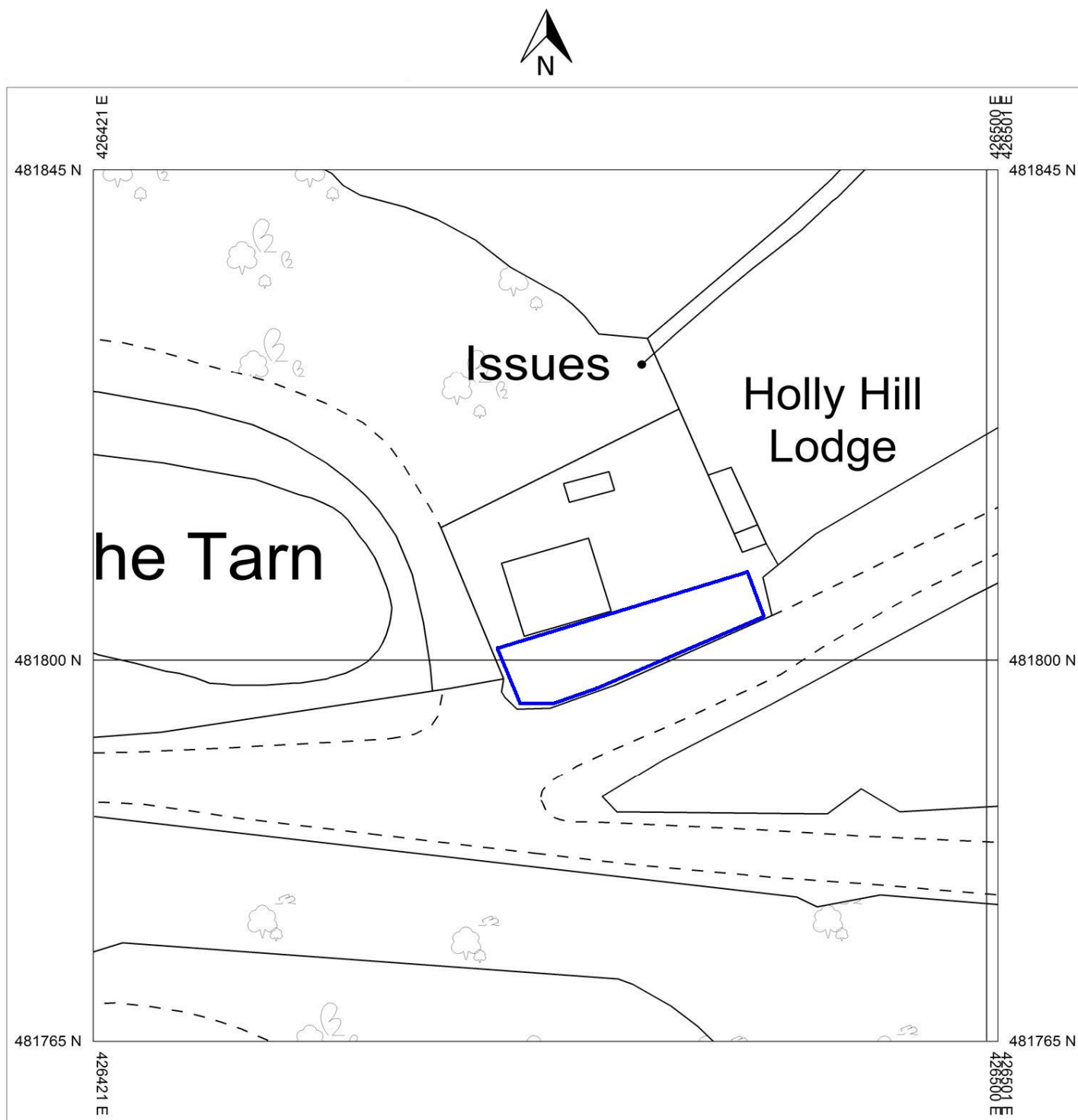
The Lodge, Well: watching brief

Fig. 9

Fragments of *opus signinum* detached from [304].



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0 8 16
Scale 1:500

The Lodge, Well: watching brief

Fig. 10

Potential zone of survival (shown blue).