

# The Vinehouse, Stoneleigh Abbey South Garden

## Archaeological Recording



*understanding heritage matters*

Report No 1136  
November 2011



*Working for  
Warwickshire*

**Project Name:** Stoneleigh Abbey South Garden Vinehouse

**Commissioned by:** Andrew Mann on behalf of Mr Asghar

**Project Report No.** 1136

**Site Code:** SV11

**NGR:** SP 3209 7117

**Planning Reference:** W10/1637

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## Summary

Archaeological recording took place in the walled South Garden, at Stoneleigh Abbey, Stoneleigh, when work was being undertaken on a 19th-century greenhouse which backed onto a late 18th-century Grade II Listed garden wall. The wall has scars suggesting an earlier building once stood there but nothing is shown on any of the historic maps of the area until 1886. Large quantities of brick rubble were recorded below the topsoil, of the same type as the greenhouse walls, suggesting the possibility of below-ground vaulting for heating pipes. Two large fragments of sandstone carved with vermiculated decoration were also recorded which may have been from a post-medieval grotto or other type of decorative garden feature.

## 1 Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Warwick District Council for the partial demolition, alteration and repair to the existing greenhouse and erection of a pergola in the garden at the South Garden, Stoneleigh Abbey, Stoneleigh, Warwickshire. Because the development site is an area of archaeological potential, within the grounds of a medieval abbey and backing on to a Listed late 18th-century wall, it was a condition of planning permission that the applicant should secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work to be carried out in conjunction with the development.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of archaeological observation of ground reduction and other groundwork, in accordance with a Brief prepared by the Planning Archaeologist on behalf of the Planning Authority, was commissioned from Archaeology Warwickshire and carried out in October 2011. This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under site code SV11.

## 2 Location

2.1 The site is located at national grid reference SP 3209 7117 in the grounds of Stoneleigh Abbey in the parish of Stoneleigh. The development site was in the northern part of the South garden, in one of a series of derelict 19th-century greenhouses, formerly used for growing grape vines.

2.2 The underlying geology of the area is 1st and 2nd Terrace River Gravel Deposits (British Geological Survey 1984).

## 3 Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 An aerial photograph taken in 1959 of a field 250m to the south-east of the walled South Garden shows a variety of rectilinear and circular cropmarks (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record No MWA 2939; HER SP3270/A; not on Fig 1). Although these marks are indistinct they may represent traces of prehistoric or Romano-British settlement which could extend into the area of the proposal site, since both areas lie on the same gravel subsoil.

3.2 The proposed development site lies to the south-east of Stoneleigh Abbey (MWA 2905), a Cistercian foundation of 1155 or 1156. After the Dissolution the abbey became the residence of the Leigh family and was extended in the 18th and 19th centuries. The medieval outer court of the abbey lay to the west of the main ranges and there is no evidence to suggest that any monastic buildings extended as far east as the South Garden. The site lies within Stoneleigh Abbey Park (MWA 2927), now a Grade II\* Registered Park (English Heritage 1986).

3.3 The proposal site covers the western part of a field named the ‘Cunneyore’? in 1597 (Goodwin 1597), the ‘Conery’ in 1749 (Wilkes 1749, Fig 2) and ‘Cunnery Close’ in 1766 (Baker 1766; Fig 3). These names suggest that the field was the site of an artificial rabbit warren, presumably belonging to the abbey. Rabbits were introduced into England around the time of the Norman Conquest (Orgill 1936). These early rabbits were carefully nurtured and protected from predators as they were poorly suited to the climate and became disoriented when moved to new areas (Williamson 1997, 96). In the middle ages rabbits were farmed for their meat and fur, which were highly valued and a Cistercian foundation like Stoneleigh may well have been involved in the trade. The rabbits were housed in artificial warrens (sometimes called ‘pillow mounds’), consisting of long, low earth mounds with stone-built burrows or subsoil slots. Some of the arrangements of stone beneath the mounds may have been intended to facilitate drainage (Williamson and Loveday 1988, 301). These warrens were often located in small enclosures close to residences or in parks which were surrounded by earthworks and fencing and were generally referred to as *Coningers*. The 1597 estate map shows a building in the north-east part of the Cunnery field which may have been the warrener’s lodge. No trace of the pillow mound of the warren survives above ground so any surviving traces of the warren below ground would be of considerable archaeological importance.

3.4 The Cunnery field was surveyed and evaluated in 1993, when proposals were being prepared for housing development in that area (Warwickshire Museum 1993a, 1993b, EWA 891). This revealed evidence of medieval ridge and furrow field systems (MWA 7251) and a medieval boundary ditch and later activity, including remains from a possible 18th-century tile kiln. No trace of the monastic rabbit warren was uncovered.

3.4 The 1749 Wilkes and 1766 Baker estate maps (Figs 2 and 3) show a series of two or three probable fish ponds (MWA 2910) to the north of the river; these lay to the south-east of the South Garden, some in an area that is now wooded and others further to the south-east. The 1766 map shows the gardens to the west of the South Garden and Home Farm laid out down to the river. A map of 1777 of the Parish of Ashow and Stoneleigh Abbey (WRO Z139/5) is similar to that of 1766.

3.5 In the early 19th century the Reverend Thomas Leigh inherited Stoneleigh Abbey and embarked on a programme of ‘landscape improvement’ as was fashionable at the time (English Heritage 1986; Parks 1960-1). On inheriting Stoneleigh Thomas Leigh visited the house and grounds with his cousin, Cassandra Austen and her daughter Jane. Mrs Austen described her visit in a letter to her daughter-in law

*I had figured to myself long Avenues dark Rookeries and Dismal Yew Trees, but there are no such melancholy things. The Avon near the house amidst green Meadows bounded by large and beautiful woods full of delightful walks...We walk a great deal, for the Woods are impenetrable to the sun even in the middle of an*

*August day. I do not fail to spend some time every day in the Kitchen Garden where quantities of small fruits exceed anything you can form an idea of.*

It seems likely that Jane Austen based aspects of her novel *Mansfield Park* on Stoneleigh Abbey; indeed, she writes of a 'Mr Repton' and his landscape improvements in the latter novel (Batey 1977, 19-20). Repton's major effort at Stoneleigh was in re-directing the course of the River Avon immediately south of the abbey, so that it flowed in a wider channel with an island, bridge and weir; the bridge and weir lie immediately to the south of the South Garden. Repton's works were 'not only to increase the motion of the water, but to allure cattle by a gravel bank to stand there in Summer to enliven the Scenery' (Malins 1977, 27).

3.6 The site lies within part of the historic Abbey Gardens which were laid out in the 19th century, probably as part of the work attributed to Nesfield in c.1850. This work took the form of extensive formal planting with hedges of box, clipped yew and formal bedding, as well as a series of terraces, steps, balustrades and urns. The terraces and steps still remain.

3.7 The kitchen garden described by Mrs Austen was not the walled South Garden, which appears to have been laid out in the middle of the 19th century, but is more likely to be the garden to its north-west. By 1887 the South Garden had two substantial glasshouses, the western one with a large coldframe in front of it. Paths ran around the edges of the garden and divided it up into four blocks, with one path running from between the glasshouses to the gate in the southern brick wall and another across the centre of garden (Ordnance Survey 1887; Fig 4). A small structure can be seen in the south-east corner of the garden, enclosed by walling or fencing. A number of trees are depicted along side these paths, although not making up formal avenues. These may be orchard trees.

3.8 By 1905 the South Garden is no longer depicted as having trees or paths, but the structure in the south-east corner still survived and the brick-built barn which forms the South Garden's garage, is shown (Ordnance Survey 1905; Fig 5). By this date it is likely that the site was a productive kitchen garden, a condition which continued until at least the middle of the 20th century according to local sources. The 19th-century formal gardens to the west were remodelled by Percy Cane in the 1930s and the bedding was significantly reduced and largely replaced by turf. In the early post-war period the gardens employed numerous men and boys, with the greenhouses producing soft fruit, tomatoes and cucumbers and the garden itself laid out in horticultural beds. The glasshouses became derelict in the late 20th century and the western one was demolished in recent years. The brick-built boiler house to the south-east of the eastern glasshouse does not appear on the detailed maps of 1887 and 1905, suggesting that it was a later addition.

3.9 The 1961 Ordnance Survey map shows the south garden as an arboretum, although the symbols of deciduous trees shown in 1887 has been replaced by those for coniferous (Ordnance Survey 1961, Fig 6). In more recent years the centre of the South Garden was planted up as a maze, measuring some 30m x 30m, for Lord Leigh's grandchildren, while to the south and east of the garden site a miniature railway was constructed. The latter was still in existence when the site was surveyed in 1993 (On Centre Surveys Ltd 1993) but was demolished by 1998, although traces were noted during the recent laying of a water main in this area.

3.10 Archaeological recording took place during groundworks for the present house in the South Garden in 1999 (EWA 7145) and found what may have been an early drain, although

different in shape and size to those close to the abbey itself, or possibly an artificial rabbit burrow associated with the medieval or early post-medieval rabbit warren, known from field name evidence to have once occupied this area (MWA 9231). An 18th-century brick drain was also recorded, along with 19th-century drains and paths.

3.11 In 2001 recording was carried out to the south of the Stables in an area in which greenhouses are shown on Ordnance Survey maps of 1886, 1905 and 1926 but gone by 1961 (Ordnance Survey 1886, 1905, 1926 and 1961). Here there was evidence for quarry tile floors and subterranean heating pipes being carried through arched brick vaulting along the length of the greenhouse. It is likely that these greenhouses are of similar date to those in the South Garden, and these too would have had quarry tile floors and possibly under-floor heating.

## 4 Observations

4.1 Groundworks took place in two stages, the first comprising ground reduction within the standing greenhouse (Fig 7) and the second including further ground reduction and trenching (Fig 8). Prior to groundworks starting the greenhouse was de-glazed and cleared and the eastern part of the greenhouse demolished (Fig 9). Initially ground reduction to a depth of 0.50m deep took place within the remaining part of the greenhouse, down to a layer of reddish brown clay loam mixed with large quantities of brick, floor and roof tile, slate and the odd lumps of red sandstone (7). Some of the floor tiles were large quarry tiles, *c.*0.30m square. This was overlaid by 0.28m of reddish brown clay loam mixed with very occasional broken bricks, mortar and charcoal flecks (6). This, in turn, was sealed by between 0.15-0.20m of greyish brown loam topsoil (5). Immediately inside the door at the north-west corner of the greenhouse the area was boarded over to protect the entry area floored with blue brick pavers which were being retained.

4.2 Running the length of the inside of the greenhouse was a low single skin brick retaining wall (2; Fig 10), which measured 11m long by 75mm wide and 0.45m high (the height was only revealed after ground reduction, prior to that the upper course had been at ground level). A concrete path (4) butted the north side of wall 2. The path was 0.52m wide and 42mm thick. This in turn was butted by the topsoil (5) of the planting area adjacent to south-facing wall 3. Subsequent ground reduction within the greenhouse revealed natural (12) in the trench excavated for the new plinth wall, while in the majority of the area the lowest level reached was a layer of grey brown loam (11).

4.3 At the east end of the greenhouse was a modern brick water tank (9) constructed from class B engineering bricks, which measured 1.22m long and 0.94m wide and was 0.45m high and butted onto the wall 2. The construction cut for the water tank (8) was 0.10m wide and was only visible on three sides; this was filled with a sticky red clay (10). It had been cut through layers 5, 6, and 7.

4.4 The greenhouse south wall (1) was 11.70m long and at least 0.70m high. The west and east walls were butted onto an early existing garden wall (3), utilised as the rear wall of the greenhouse, which had been whitewashed in order to reflect light. The remaining part of the south wall of the greenhouse had three low arched apertures in its construction, each measured 1.30m in length and 0.30m high (it seems likely that further arches would have existed in the remaining stretch of greenhouse wall, now demolished). These arches were for

vine growing, with the vine roots being planted outside, then the plant directed through the arches, training then along the underside of the sloping roof as they grew. Growing vines with the roots planted outside the greenhouse has long been considered good practice to reduce the need for watering.

4.5 A soakaway was excavated to the south of the greenhouse. This was 1.37m deep and 1.30m x 1.10m across. Natural sand and gravel (12) was reached at a depth of 0.37m and was overlain by *c.*1m of very brown sand and gravel (14). The 1.37m deep trench to the soakaway was 1.40m wide and 0.30m across and ran for a length of 6.65m; its stratigraphy was the same as the soakaway itself.

4.6 Trenching for a new retaining wall in front of the south wall of the greenhouse cut into natural sand and gravel at a depth of 0.80m (Figs 11 and 12). This was overlain by a layer of reddish brown sandy loam (13). This layer produced two large fragments of carved red sandstone both of which are decorated with carving in the form of vermiculation (a form of rustication) and likely to be 18th- or 19th-century in date, or even 17th-century. The curved stone (Fig 13) must have come from an arch or niche. This type of carving was particularly suitable for garden features and it is even possible the stones are from a grotto (Richard Morris pers. comm.). A grotto is mentioned in a *loggia* (an open-sided porch) on the ground floor of the north range of buildings at Stoneleigh in Repton's Red Book (1808). This was one of the features of the house already in existence in 1808 but its date is uncertain. Morris suggests it may have belonged to the Carolean period when grottoes became fashionable in this country (Morris 2004, 43).

## 5 Conclusions

5.1 No archaeological evidence was recorded associated with the medieval abbey or for the associated rabbit warren believed to have existed in the vicinity. The natural sand and gravel in this area was overlain by *c.*0.80m of stratigraphy, largely associated with the former greenhouses and internally suggesting that there may have been brick vaulting for below-ground heating pipes, as recorded in another greenhouse south of the stables. Three apertures were recorded in the extant greenhouse south wall. These were for the external planting of vine roots, with the plants being trained into the greenhouse.

5.2 Two substantial sandstone masonry fragments, decorated with carved vermiculation, were recorded. These are post-medieval in date and likely to have come from a garden feature such as a grotto.

## Acknowledgements

Archaeology Warwickshire would like to thank Andrew Mann for commissioning the work on behalf of the owner, Mr Asghar.



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## Appendices

### A Listed Building Citation

#### Building Details:

**Building Name:** KITCHEN GARDEN  
WALLS INCLUDING GATES AND  
GARDENER'S COTTAGE  
IMMEDIATELY SOUTH OF THE  
STABLES & RIDING SCHOOL  
**Parish:** STONELEIGH  
**District:** WARWICK  
**County:** WARWICKSHIRE  
**Postcode:**

#### Details:

**LBS Number:** 308148  
**Grade:** II  
**Date Listed:** 11/04/1967  
**Date Delisted:**  
**NGR:** SP3198971208

#### Listing Text:

STONELEIGH

6/276 Kitchen garden walls including gates and gardener's cottage immediately south of the stables & riding school (formerly included as part of listing of The Abbey)  
GV II

1770. Tall kitchen garden walls, mostly of red brick with stone copings, but some stone faced, in particular southern wall overlooking river terrace. In southern wall two pairs of wrought iron gates with heraldic crests in the overthrows. Square sandstone ashlar panelled piers to these gates, the eastern pair surmounted by large plaster vases. Within eastern section of the walled gardens an octagonal brick single storey cottage. Low pitched hipped slate roof with central brick stack. Four-centred arched doorway.

Listing NGR: SP3198971210

## **B List of Contexts**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Context type</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Wall	South brick wall of greenhouse
2	Wall	Internal brick wall within greenhouse
3	Wall	Brick garden wall, 18th-century
4	Path	Concrete - modern
5	Layer	Topsoil
6	Layer	Red brown clay loam with occasional brick etc
7	Layer	Red brown clay loam with large amounts of brick and other rubble
8	Cut	Construction cur for water tank
9	Wall	Brick water tank
10	Fill	Red clay fill of tank cut
11	Layer	Grey brown loam, visible in section
12	Natural	Sand and gravel
13	Layer	Reddish brown sandy loam
14	Layer	Light brown sand and gravel
15	Wall	West wall of greenhouse
16	Wall	East wall of greenhouse (formerly internal before eastern part of greenhouse was demolished)

## **C List of Finds**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Comments</b>
7	Pottery, stoneware bottle, broken	5	19th/20th-century
13	Carved sandstone	2	Two large fragments of red sandstone carved with vermiculation

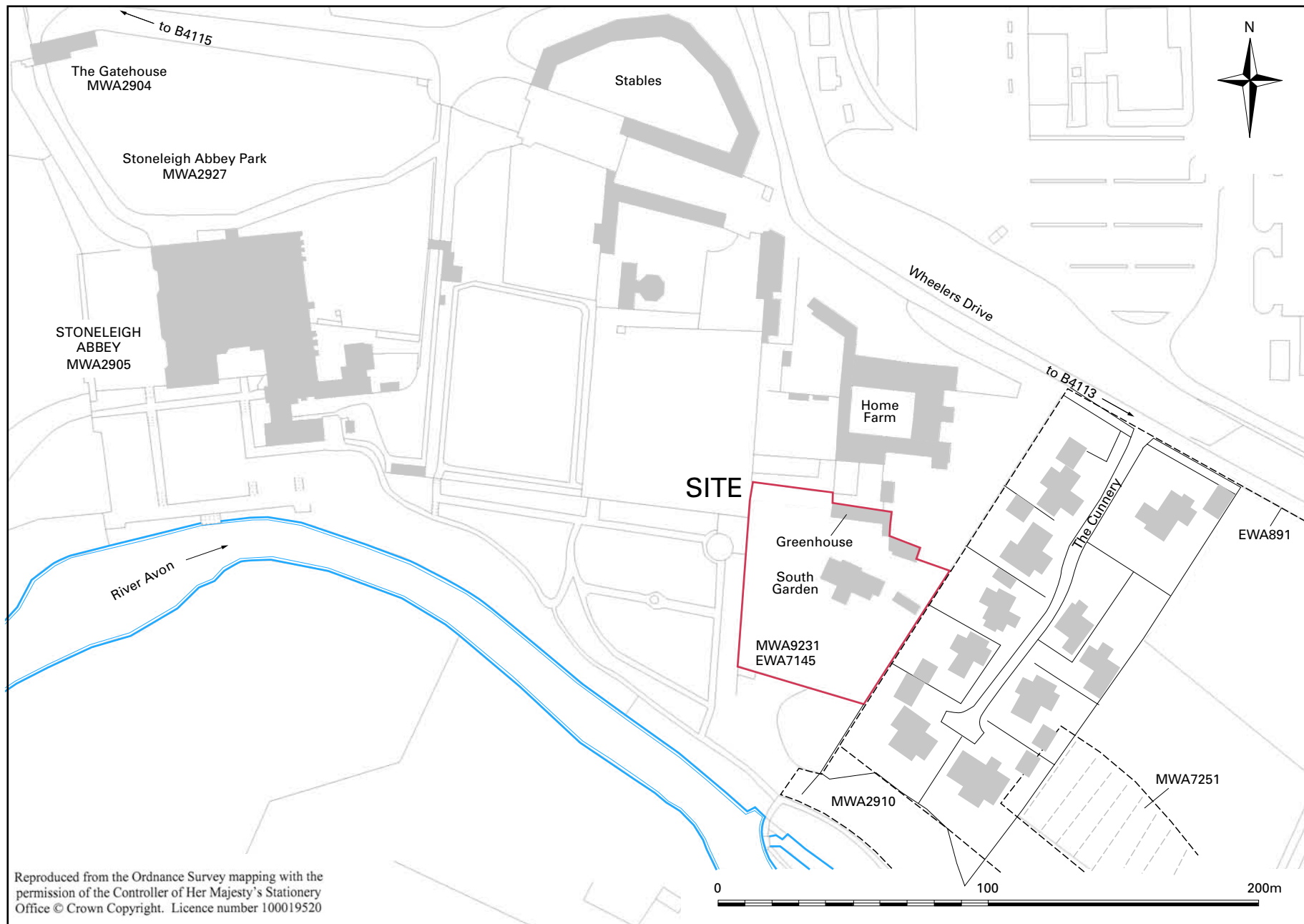


Fig 1: Site location

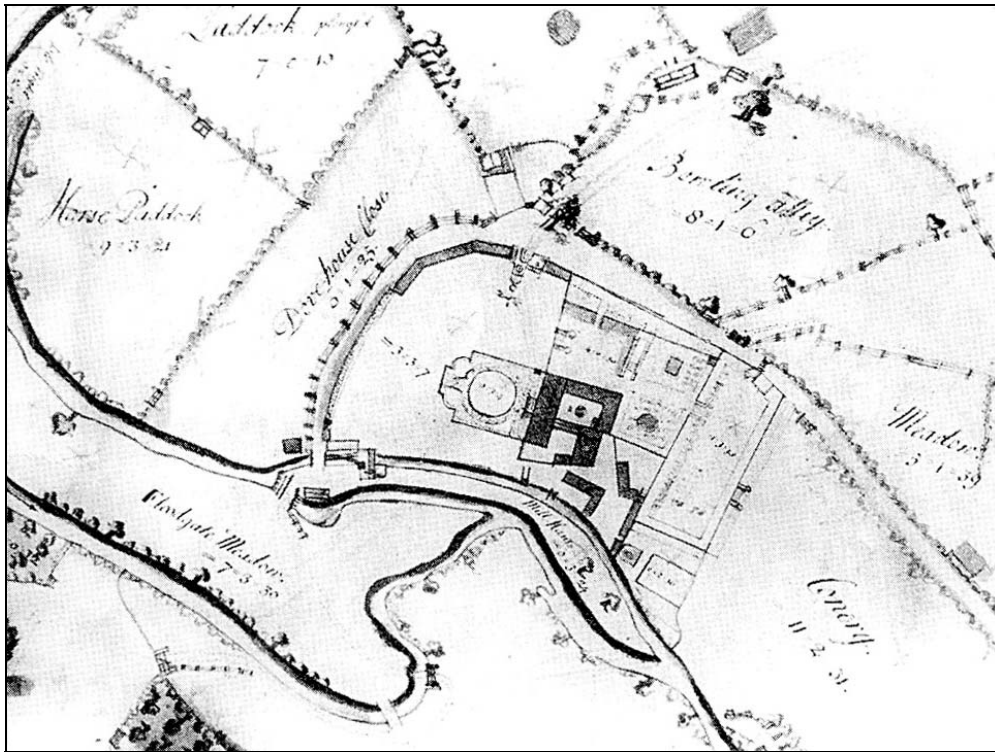


Fig 2: Stoneleigh Abbey 1749, detail from Estate Map by Thomas Wilkes

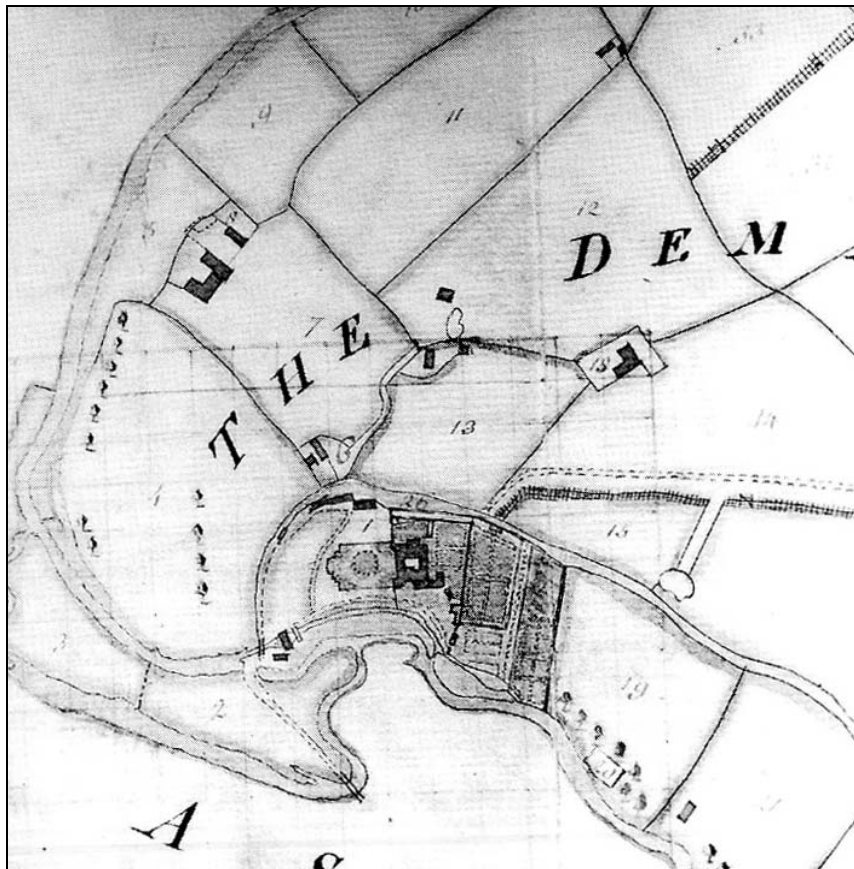


Fig 3: Stoneleigh Abbey 1766, detail from Estate Map by Mathias Baker

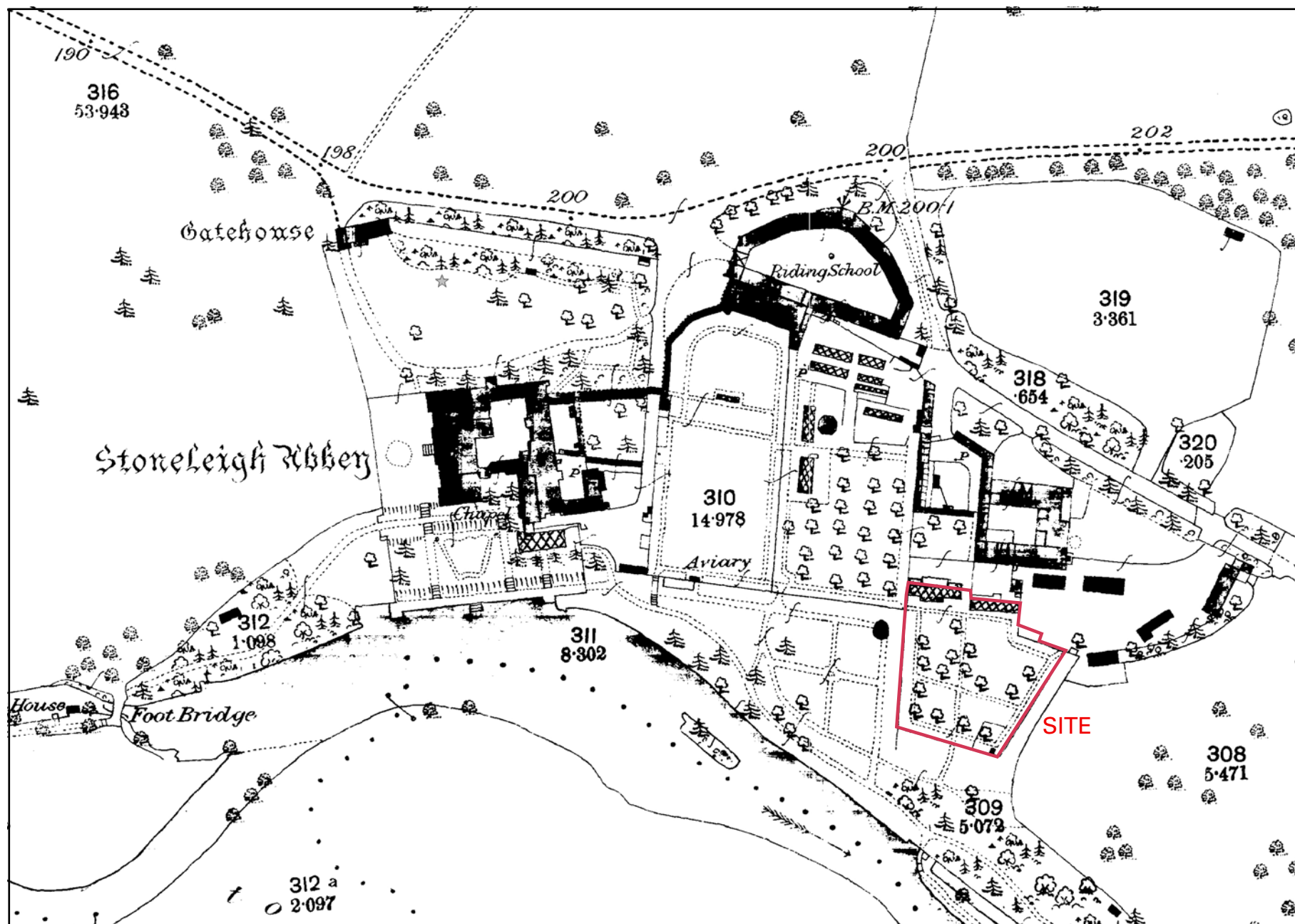


Fig 4: Stoneleigh Abbey 1887, detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey map



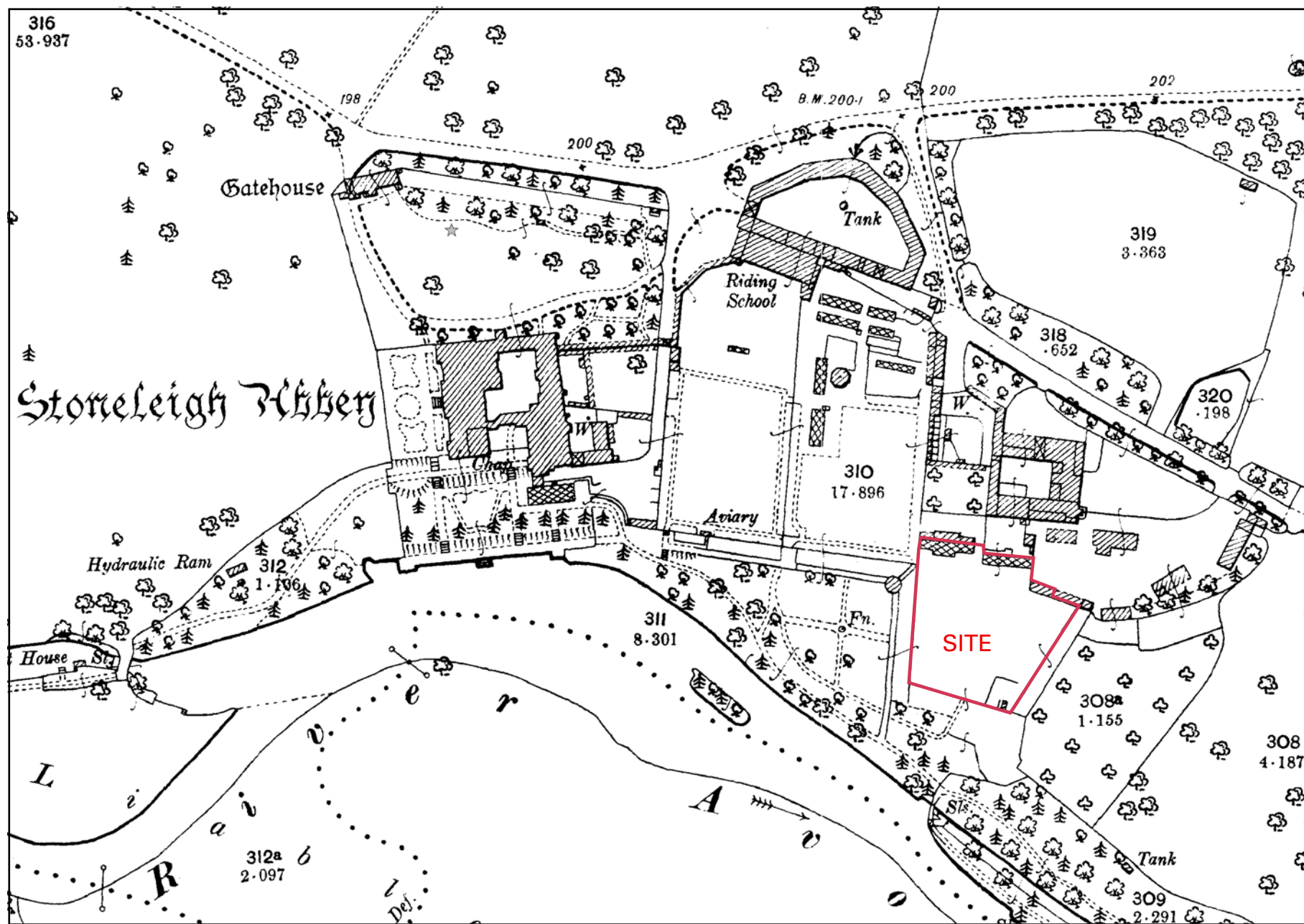


Fig 5: Stoneleigh Abbey 1905, detail from Second Edition Ordnance Survey map



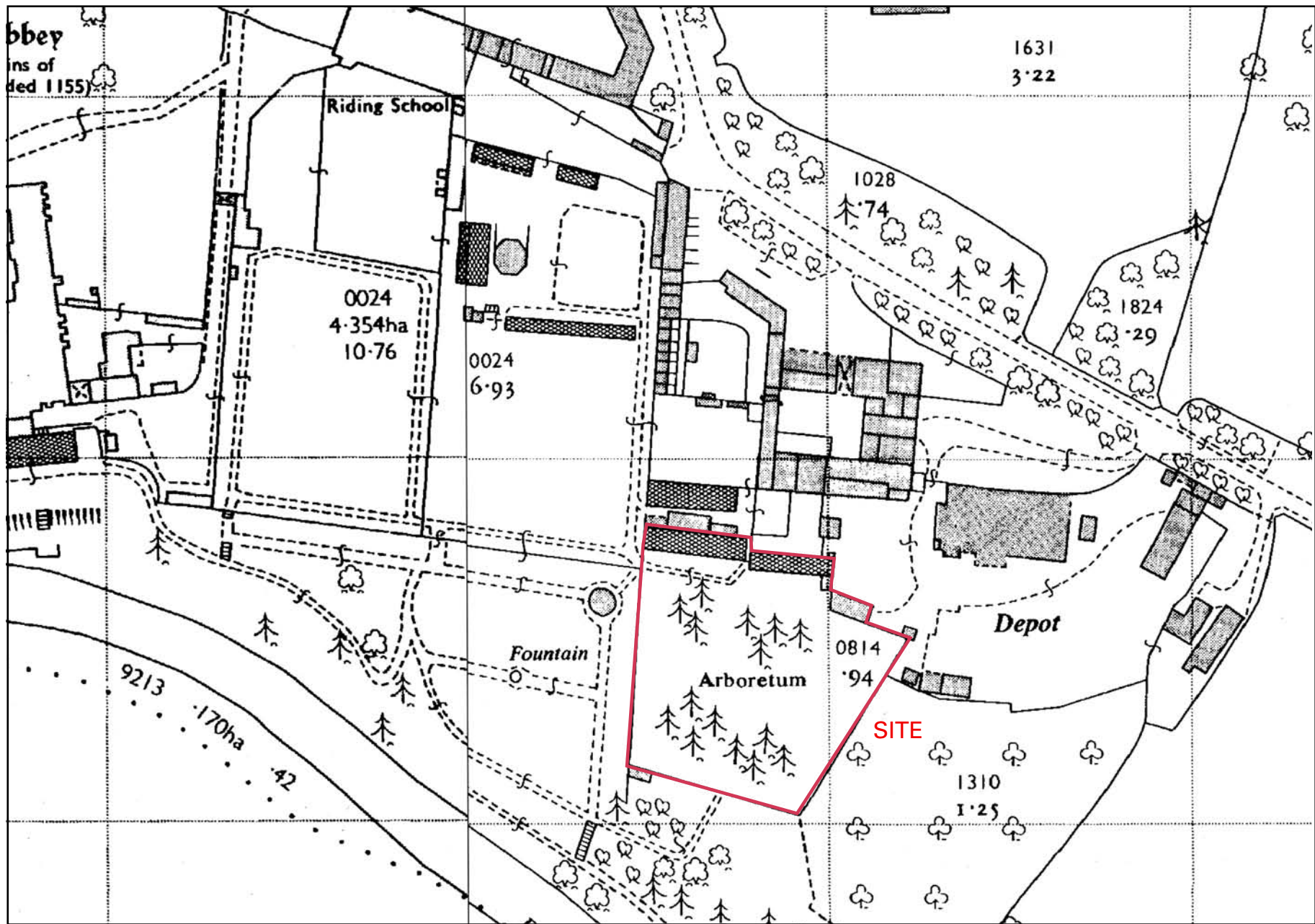


Fig 6: Stoneleigh Abbey 1961, detail from Ordnance Survey map

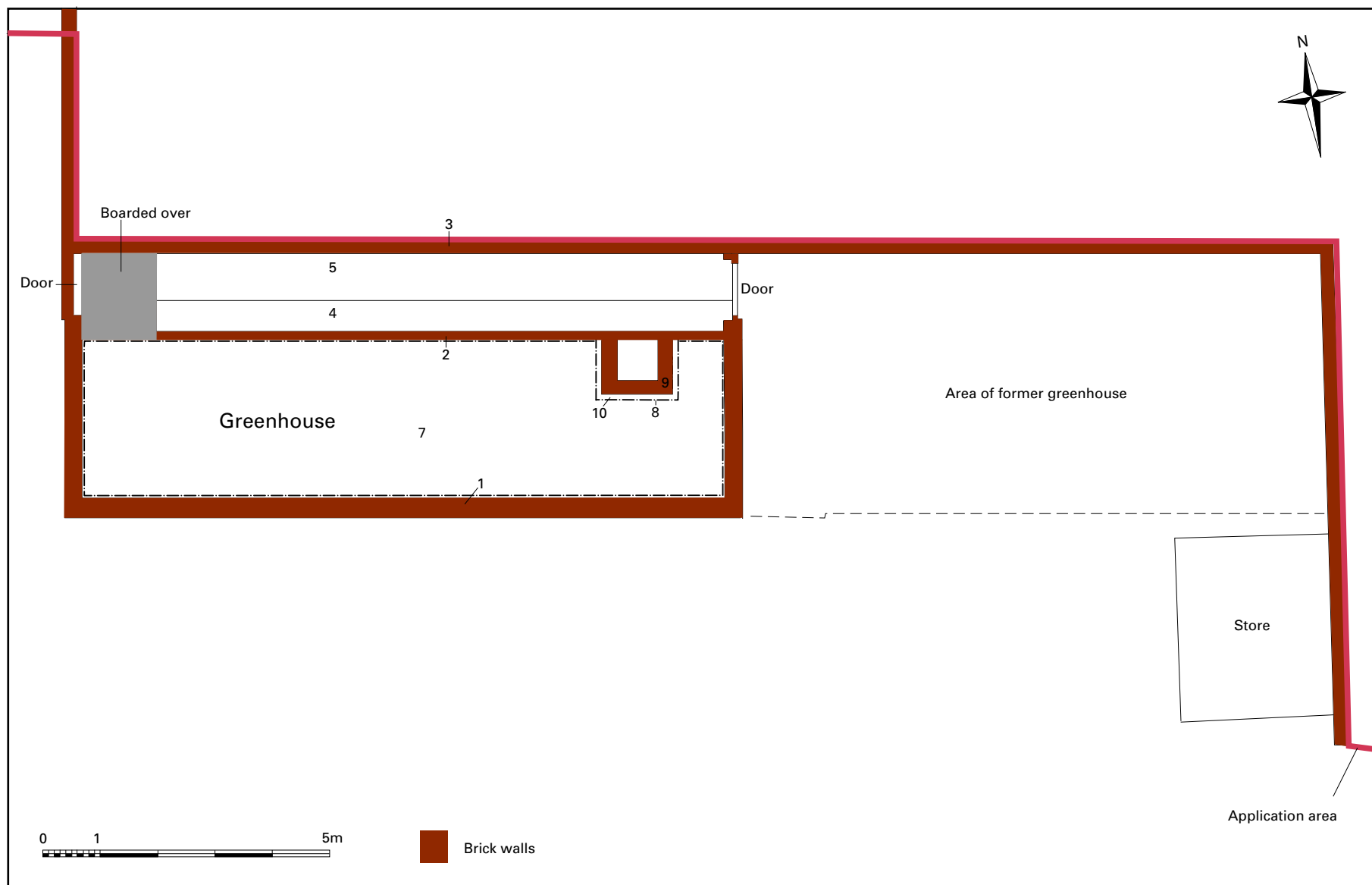


Fig 7: Detail of area observed, start of ground reduction

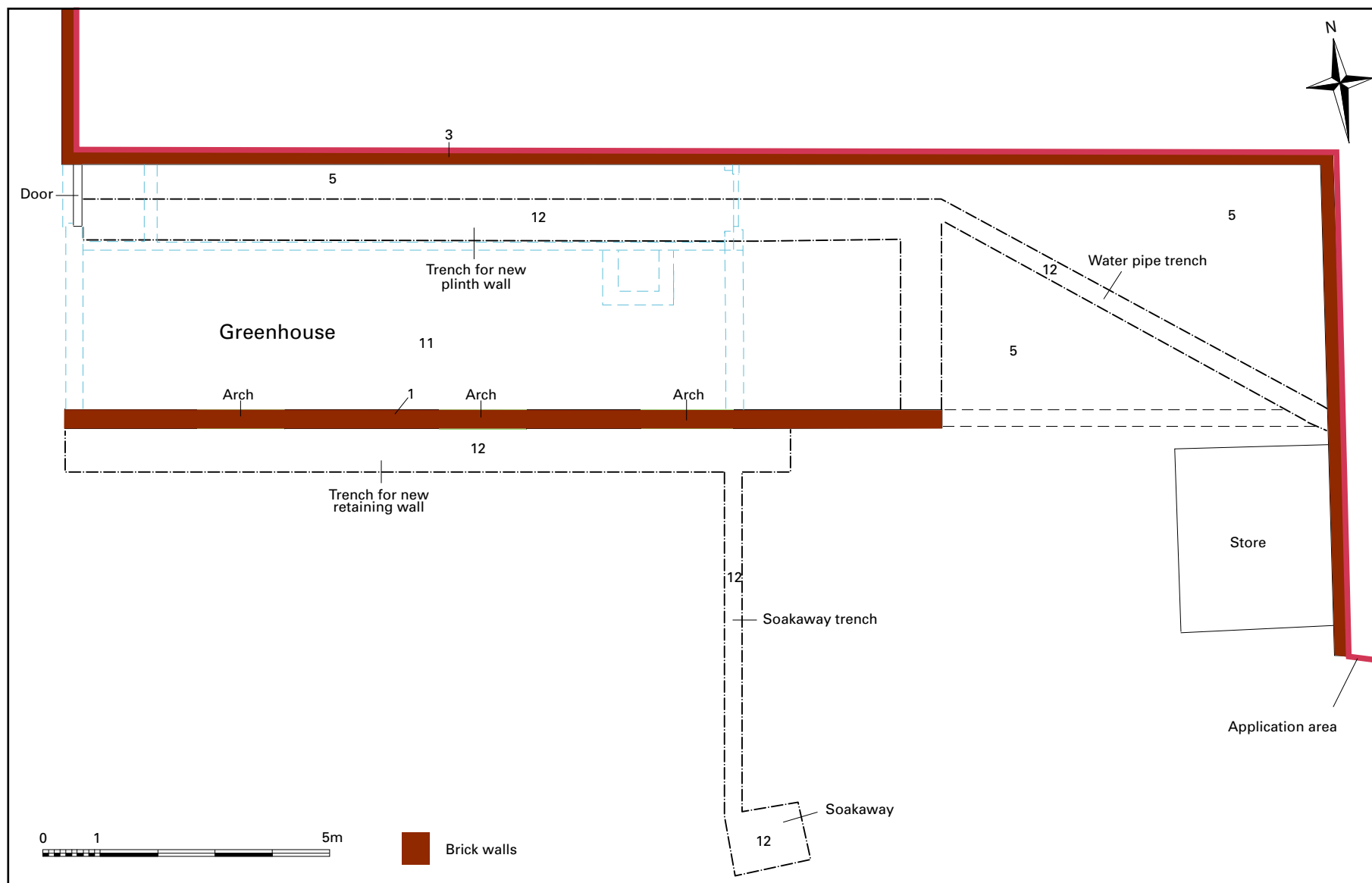


Fig 8: Detail of area observed, end of groundworks





Fig 9: Interior of greenhouse at start of works



Fig 10: Internal wall 2





Fig 11: Greenhouse after ground reduction



Fig 12: Trench in front of greenhouse





Fig 13: Sandstone fragment decorated with vermiculation



Fig 14: Curved sandstone fragment with vermiculation