



**Herefordshire
Council**

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Watching Brief in advance of the installation of a Biomass Boiler, Croft Castle, The Croft Estate. Herefordshire



Report prepared by

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Herefordshire Archaeology
Conservation and Environmental Planning
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Regeneration Directorate

Herefordshire Council



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Council*

Watching Brief in advance of the installation of a Biomass Boiler, Croft Castle, The Croft Estate. Herefordshire

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Contents

Summary

1. Introduction
2. Aims, objectives and methods for the study, including reporting
3. Location
4. Background history
5. Fieldwork in 2014
6. Conclusions

Appendix 1 Site Archive

- 2 Acknowledgements
- 3 List of Illustrations
- 4 Bibliography

Summary

This report describes an archaeological watching brief undertaken as part of the ground works associated with the installation of a biomass boiler at Home Farm, Croft Castle. The watching brief was required in order to record any archaeologically significant deposits and / or features present within stratigraphy below the footings of an agricultural outbuilding.

Immediately below the cobbled floor level of the outbuilding were the footings of two stone walls forming the southern and eastern walls of an earlier building. The nature of the construction of the footings together with the presence of a single cut stone support, suggest that this was a 19th century, single story, open fronted structure of 3 or more bays in length.

No other features of archaeological significance were encountered.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGR's are accurate to approximately 10m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50, and 0.02m at 1:20.

Figures contained within this report contain material from the Ordnance Survey. The grid in this material is the National Grid taken from the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (OS Licence 100024168). This material has been reproduced in order to locate the site in its environs.

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1. Introduction

This report (Event No. EHE80064) provides an account of an archaeological watching brief undertaken prior to the installation of a biomass boiler to provide a sustainable heating source for Croft Castle, Home Farm and the Gardener's Cottage on the Croft Estate.

The report sets out briefly the aims and objectives of the project, describes the location, and provides an outline historical background. The report goes on to describe the results of the watching brief and concludes with discussion of the principle findings of the watching brief.

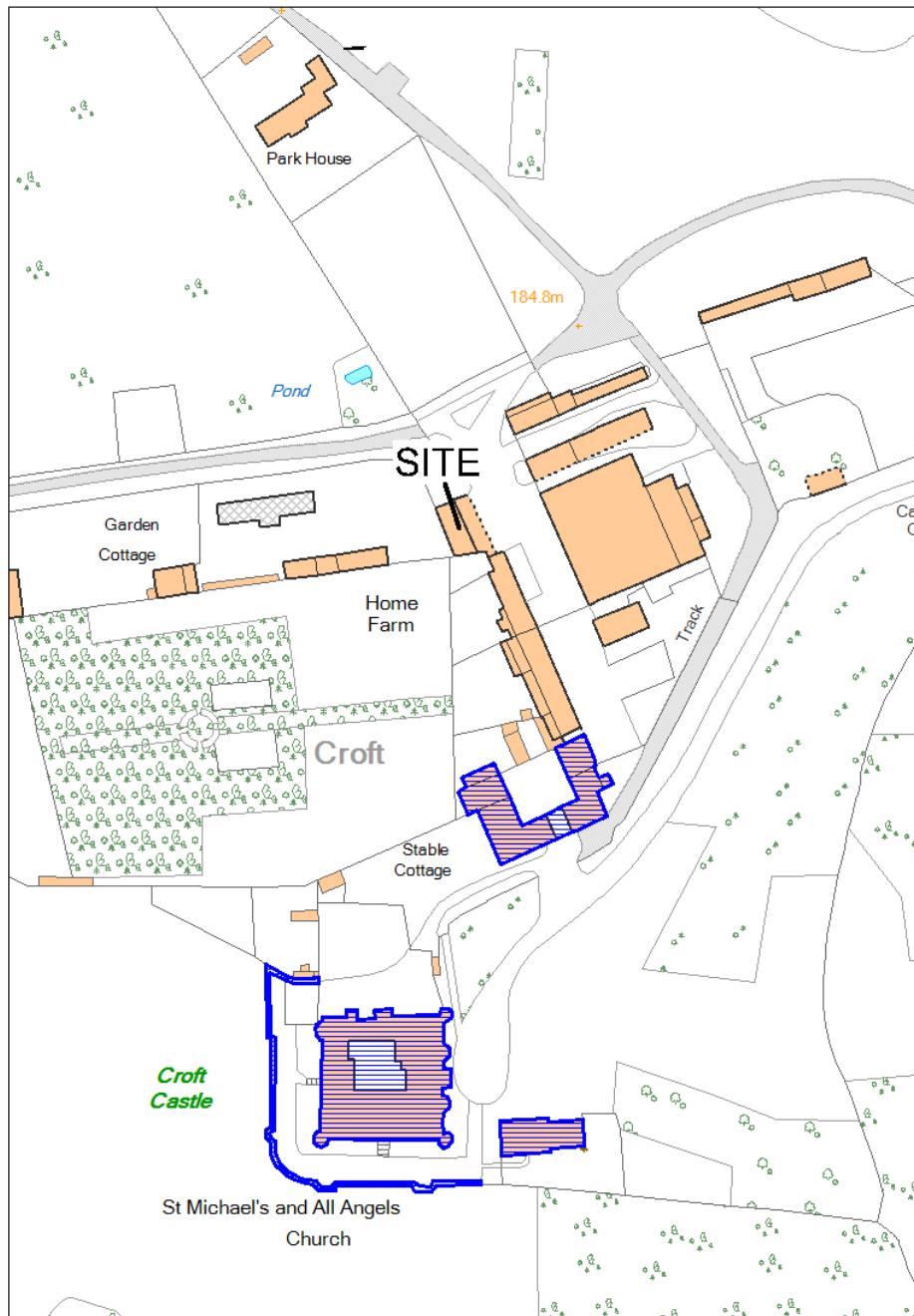


Figure 1: Plan showing the location of the site.

2. Aims, objectives and methods for the study, including reporting

Herefordshire Archaeology was commissioned by The National Trust to undertake a watching brief to cover the removal of the walls and floor levels of a late 19th and early 20th century agricultural outbuilding in order to achieve a level platform onto which a new building to house a biomass boiler is to be housed. This report describes the works associated with the removal of the foundations of the present building, underlying structures and subsoil on the site.

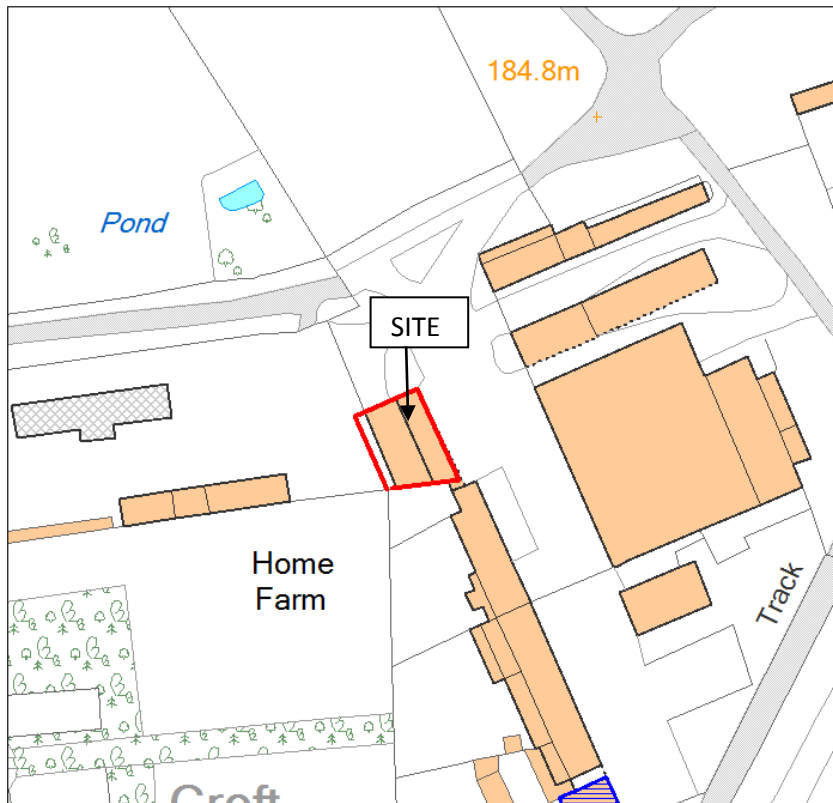


Figure 2: Plan showing the extent of the site covered by the Watching Brief.

3. Location

The Croft Castle Estate is a National Trust property that has been in its ownership since 1957. The Croft Estate covers approximately 720ha and is located 7km north-west of Leominster in North Herefordshire. The property extends across 5km of the upper slopes of a south-facing hillside, from Bircher Coppice in the east to the River Lugg at Aymestrey in the west. The Croft Castle estate currently straddles the civil parishes of Aymestrey, Lucton and Croft with Yarpole. The Croft Estate is known nationally for the complex and prominent Iron Age hillfort of Croft Ambrey. More locally, the estate is known for its fine, castellated mansion and associated parkland.

Geology:

The solid geology comprises limestones and siltstones of the Silurian series (Earp and Hains, 1971). There are localised colluvial deposits in the dry combs and stream-fed valleys. The bedding planes of the often friable rock are evident in numerous quarries on the property. The soils are of the coarse silts of the Munslow Association (Ragg et al, 1984). Excavations in the vicinity of Croft Castle between 2001 and 2004 demonstrated both the thinness of soil cover over bedrock in many locations and the gleyed nature of the colluvial deposits within the valleys.



Figure 3: The site in 2009

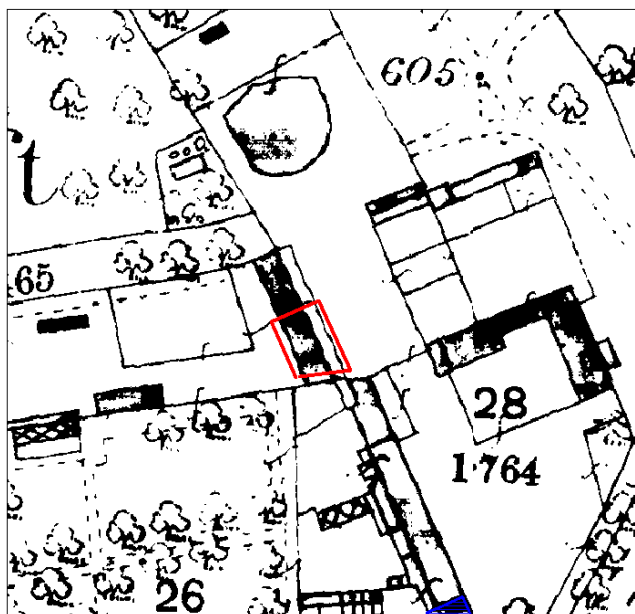


Figure 4: Extract from the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1887

4. Background history and previous historical and archaeological works

The name Croft is Old English meaning “the enclosure” (Eckwall, 1960, 131). Aubrey’s *Monumenta Britannica* (c1690), was a largely haphazard compilation of antiquarian notes. He did however visit Herefordshire on a number of occasions, (he owned land within the county), and his comment “*At Crofts-parke is a large Campe with two great Ditches, called the Ambry: from whence (there) is a lovely Prospect*” is no doubt based on first-hand observation, since he is known to have sold his property at Stretford to Bishop Herbert Croft in 1663 (Barber, 1975,20). As such, Aubrey’s mention of the double bank and ditch at Croft Ambrey is one of the first published records of an “archaeological” observation in the county.

Croft was rendered “Crofta” at Domesday, and appears then to have been a relatively small settlement (one plough in lordship, two ploughs and six household heads) in keeping with the compact size of the later parish, Bernard held the land from William of Ecouis, and Edwin was said to have held it in the time of King Edward the Confessor (see Thorn and Thorn, 1983: 14,5).

Very little is well documented about the medieval Croft family, or its estates. Sir Hugh de Croft was named in the list at the tournament at Dunstable in 1308, and was present at the parliament at York in September 1314 (Croft, 1949,22). William of Croft was Sheriff of Herefordshire in 1425 (Croft, 1949, 36). Richard Croft was Sheriff in 1470-1, 1476 and 1485, and in the latter year was also Receiver in the King’s Household (ibid,40). The family was closely allied to the Mortimers of Wigmore and Ludlow and to the house of York. Croft Castle is first mentioned as such among a list of Herefordshire castles in William of Worcester’s *Itineraries*, in 1497 (Goodbury,2000.6.3). The most illustrious family head was Sir James Croft, who, amongst other appointments, was Controller of the Queen’s Household in 1570 (Croft, 1949,56). It was during his lifetime, in 1536, that John Leland mentioned seeing the fortified manor at Croft from a distance. The Inventory of the property of Sir James Croft, produced at the time of his death in 1590, identifies a number of rooms and structures including a hall, a gallery at least one if not two gatehouses and numerous private apartments (Goodbury, 2000, 2002)

Sir William Croft was a prominent Royalist in the early seventeenth century. He was one of the few of the Herefordshire gentry, and the only head of a major household, to have been killed during the Civil War. He was killed in a skirmish at Stokesay in 1645. His younger brother, Herbert Croft became Bishop of Hereford in 1661, having gained a reputation for loyalty to the Royalist cause, for personal bravery and for outspokenness during the years of the Commonwealth.

The Croft family heavily mortgaged the estate in the early years of the eighteenth century. Eventually the mortgages came into possession of both mansion and estate. During the remainder of that century, the Knight and Johnes families were in ownership and occupation. In 1799, Somerset Davies purchased the house, having already acquired significant parts of the estate land. The Davies and later, Kevill-Davies family remained in ownership and occupation throughout the nineteenth century, eventually selling in 1923 to Sir James Croft, the 11th Baronet (Goodbury,2000).

Statutory constraints:

The principal statutorily defined and protected area of the estate from an historic environment standpoint is the Scheduled Ancient Monument, Croft Ambrey hillfort (SAM Herefordshire 76). The mansion and St. Michael's church are listed (Grade 1) as buildings of Architectural and Historic Interest. The 18th century stable block around a courtyard and the Gothick Wall are also listed (Grade II). The remaining historic environment designation is the inclusion of Croft Castle in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. The park is described as "A landscape park with notable survivals of sweet chestnut plantings of probable C17 date associated with a country house". The Register reference is GD1875. The park is graded II*.

Previous historical and archaeological research

O.G.S.Croft wrote a history of the Croft family (*The House of Croft of Croft Castle*, E.J. Thurston Press, Hereford, 1949). This included mention of documentary references to the castle and estate, and notes by George Marshall on Croft Church (pp. 129-35). Elizabeth Inglis-Jones published an account of the ownership and occupation of Croft Castle by the Knight and Johnes families (in *Peacocks in Paradise*, Faber, 1950). Diana Uhlmann wrote the Guidebook for the property which was first published in 1979 and was last revised in 1990.

Dr. S. Stanford published privately a report on the Woolhope Naturalist's Field Club sponsored research excavations at Croft Ambrey between 1960 and 1966 (Stanford 1974) Advisory staff of The National Trust reported upon the archaeological and biological conservation issues affecting Croft Ambrey in the mid-1980s (Alexander, Claris and Lutley, 1985).

D.M.Young and K.A.Fretwell published historical research on the castle and estate in a volume that arose from a Manpower Services Commission Community Programme project in the mid 1980's, (*Croft Castle Park and Garden Survey, 1986-87*, Fretwell, Knox and Young)

H. Dalwood and R. Waller produced a draft report on an archaeological survey of the whole estate, (*Croft Castle Estate: Survey and archaeological management recommendations, 1992*)

The National Trust has commissioned a series of further studies in recent years, primarily in connection with refurbishment works with the mansion itself between 2000 and 2002. Small scale archaeological watching briefs have been undertaken and reported on which include works on the refurbishment of the Carpenter's Shop as a tea room by Worcester County Archaeology Service and the laying of a new water pipe to supply field troughs by Marches Archaeology.

In 2001-2 Herefordshire Archaeology were commissioned to expand upon the Dalwood and Waller survey report. The entire Estate was re-surveyed and a gazetteer of sites created. (T.Hoverd and K.Ray Herefordshire Archaeology Report 49, 2003)

Herefordshire Archaeology worked in partnership with the National Trust between 2001 and 2004 during which time four seasons of research excavation and fieldwork were undertaken. A series of reports describing these works are in preparation. (T.Hoverd and K.Ray forthcoming).

It is understood that L-P Archaeology undertook fieldwork within the walled garden, aimed at identifying and recording the formal paths during 2012.

During May 2013 a desk-based assessment was undertaken by Herefordshire Archaeology in order to locate a viable route for the pipe runs associated with the proposed installation of a biomass boiler.

In March 2014 two trenches were excavated across the planned route of the biomass pipe trench. These had a bearing on the exact route chosen for the pipe trench within this location.

5 Fieldwork in 2014

Fieldwork took place on the 7th May 2014. The ground-works were undertaken using a six tonne 360 excavator using a 1.2m toothless ditching bucket. Material was removed from site using a dumper and a tractor and trailer.

The area affected by the operations comprised a rectangle approximately 13m long (north / south) by 8m wide (east / west). The agricultural buildings on the site had been demolished to ground level, however, the internal floor level of the building was 0.9m above the level of the rest of the farm yard to the east. In order for the construction of the new building it was required to excavate to a depth corresponding to the height of the present farm yard surface.

The eastern and southern walls of the farm building comprised a rubble stone wall fronted in concrete whilst the western wall appears to have been brick. To the west of the western wall the ground level rises to a height of approximately 1.4m above the level of the farm yard. A 2m wide strip immediately to the west of the building was cut back and battered after the material below the floor was removed. The floor of the current building comprised a mostly cobbled floor with brick patching.

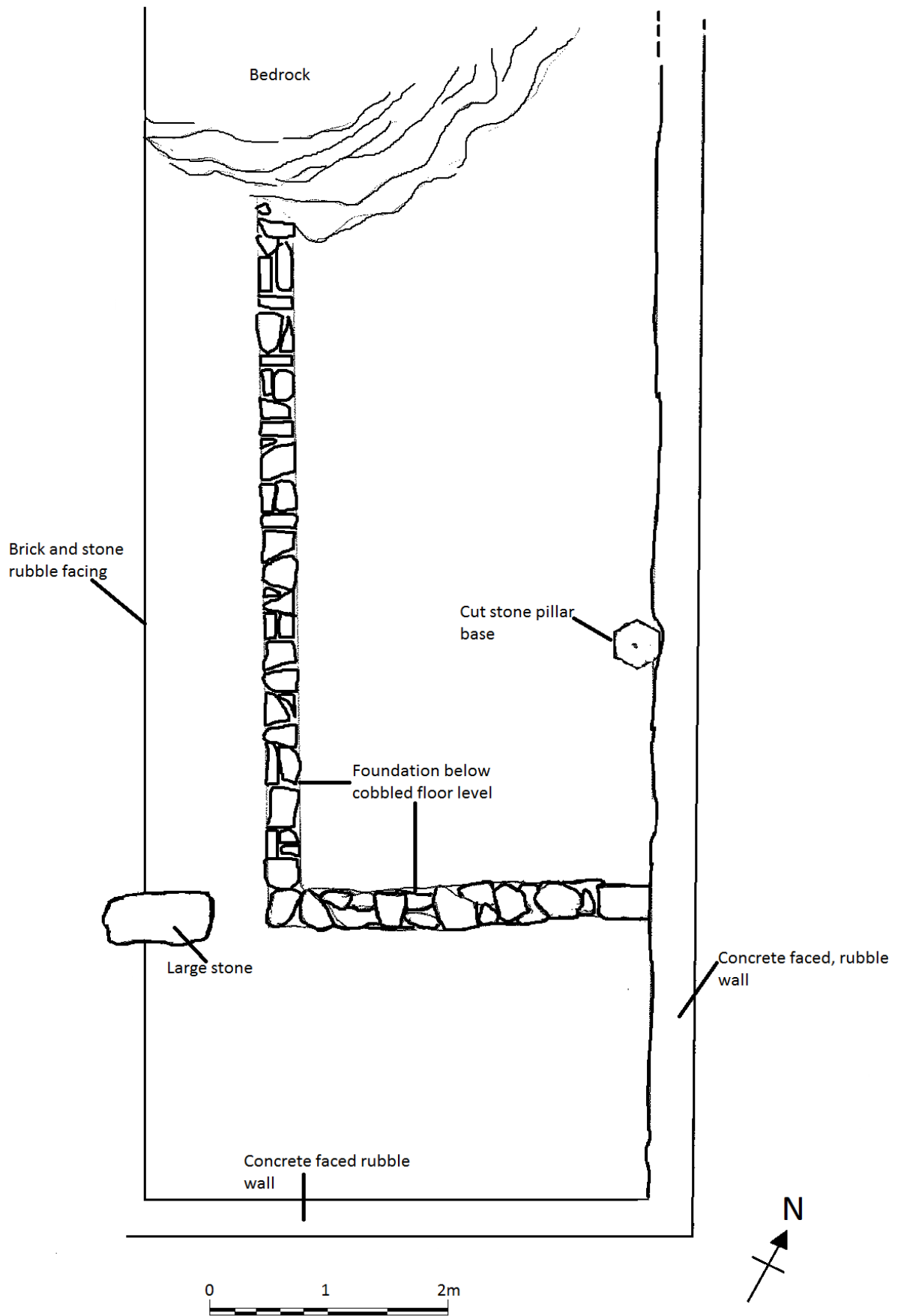


Figure 5: Trench plan showing features of interest.



Plate 1: The site prior to the ground-works taking place



Plate 2: The stone foundation immediately below the cobbled floor.

The cobbled floor of the present structure was removed and the material stored in order for the cobbles to be re-used at a later date. Immediately below the cobbled floor were the foundations of the southern and western wall of a building. The foundations, (Plate 2 and Figure 4), comprised an “L” shaped wall approximately 0.35m wide, roughly squared stone

enclosing and area of approximately 3m wide (east / west) and over 6m long (north / south). The foundations survived to a depth of two or three coursed (dependent on the thickness of the stone), to a maximum depth of 0.3m. No floor levels were encountered associated with this structure, the area either side of the walls was filled with loose, re-deposited bedrock with occasional broken bricks. The front of the structure (the eastern wall), was on the line of the wall line of the present structure and appears to have been a series of cut stone pillars (plate 3). The thickness of the foundations, their depth and the presence of one surviving stone pillar, would suggest a relatively lightly built, open fronted and single storey structure, perhaps a cart shed or similar.



Plate 3: Stone pillar with remains of iron ferrule.

Plate 4: Vertical view of pillar.



Below the footings was a 0.3m thick layer of re-deposited bedrock containing occasional brick fragments and some large fragments of charcoal. A single sherd of mid 19th century pottery was recovered. Bedrock was encountered within the northern third of the site before the desired depth was achieved. No other features or deposits of archaeological significance were present.



Plate 5: Bedrock within the northern half of the site.



Plate 6: Re-deposited natural over bedrock.

Conclusions

The watching brief has recorded the structural remains of a lightly built, single storey, open fronted agricultural building dating from the mid to late 19th century. This is almost certainly all or a part of the long narrow building which is depicted on the 1887 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map (Figure 4).

The only other feature / artefact of interest on the site was a 1.2m square and 0.45m thick, roughly squared stone. This was located immediately to the west of the south western corner of the foundations. This was set vertically and surrounded by brick fragments and late 19th / early 20th century debris. Its use and origins are unknown.

Appendix

Site Archive:

8 Context Sheets

1 trench plan

25 digital photographs

This document.

Acknowledgements:

The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of David Coope and Ian Grafton of the National Trust for their assistance and co-operation during this project.

List of Illustrations:

Figure 1: Plan showing the location of the site.

Figure 2: Plan showing extent of the site.

Figure 3: The site in 2009

Figure 4: Extract from the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1887

Figure 5: Trench plan showing features of interest.

Plate 1: The site prior to the ground-works taking place

Plate 2: The stone foundation immediately below the cobbled floor.

Plate 3: Stone pillar with remains of iron ferrule.

Plate 4: Vertical view of pillar.

Plate 5: Bedrock within the northern half of the site.

Plate 6: Re-deposited natural over bedrock.

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