



KDK ARCHAEOLOGY LTD

Archaeological Summary Report

Stone Feature at Upper Alders

Sandy Smith Nature Reserve

Chicksands

Bedfordshire



Quality Check

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CONTENTS

Summary.....2

1. Introduction2

2. Results.....4

3. Conclusions13

4. Acknowledgements.....14

Appendices:

1. OASIS and Site Data.....15

Figures:

1. General location.....1

2. Site location3

3. Plan of feature in situ11

4. Speculative west elevation of feature12

Plates:

1. Entire feature, facing east.....6

2. Entire feature, facing north.....6

3. Entire feature, facing west.....6

4. Entire feature, facing south.....6

5. Stone and brick plinth, facing east6

6. Stone and brick plinth, facing north.....6

7. Stone and brick plinth, facing west7

8. Stone and brick plinth, facing south.....7

9. Scattered stones, facing north7

10. Scattered stones, facing east7

11. Scattered stones, facing south7

12. Stone 1, top piece, facing east7

13. Stone 1 corner decoration, facing east8

14. Stone 1 pediment, facing east.....8

15. Stone 1 side, facing north8

16. Stone 1 underside, facing west8

17. Stone 2, side support, facing north8

18. Stone 2 side, facing east.....8

19. Stone 2 top, facing south9

20. Stone 3, base, facing east.....9

21. Stone 4, side support, facing north9

22. Stone 4 top, facing south9

23. Stone 4 side, facing east.....9

24. Stone 4 lead flashing, facing east9

25. Stone 5 partially buried, facing north.....10

26. Stone 5 partially buried, facing west10

27. Stone 6, facing southeast.....10

28. Stone 7, partially buried side panel, facing southeast.....10

29. Stone 8, broken side panel, facing west.....10

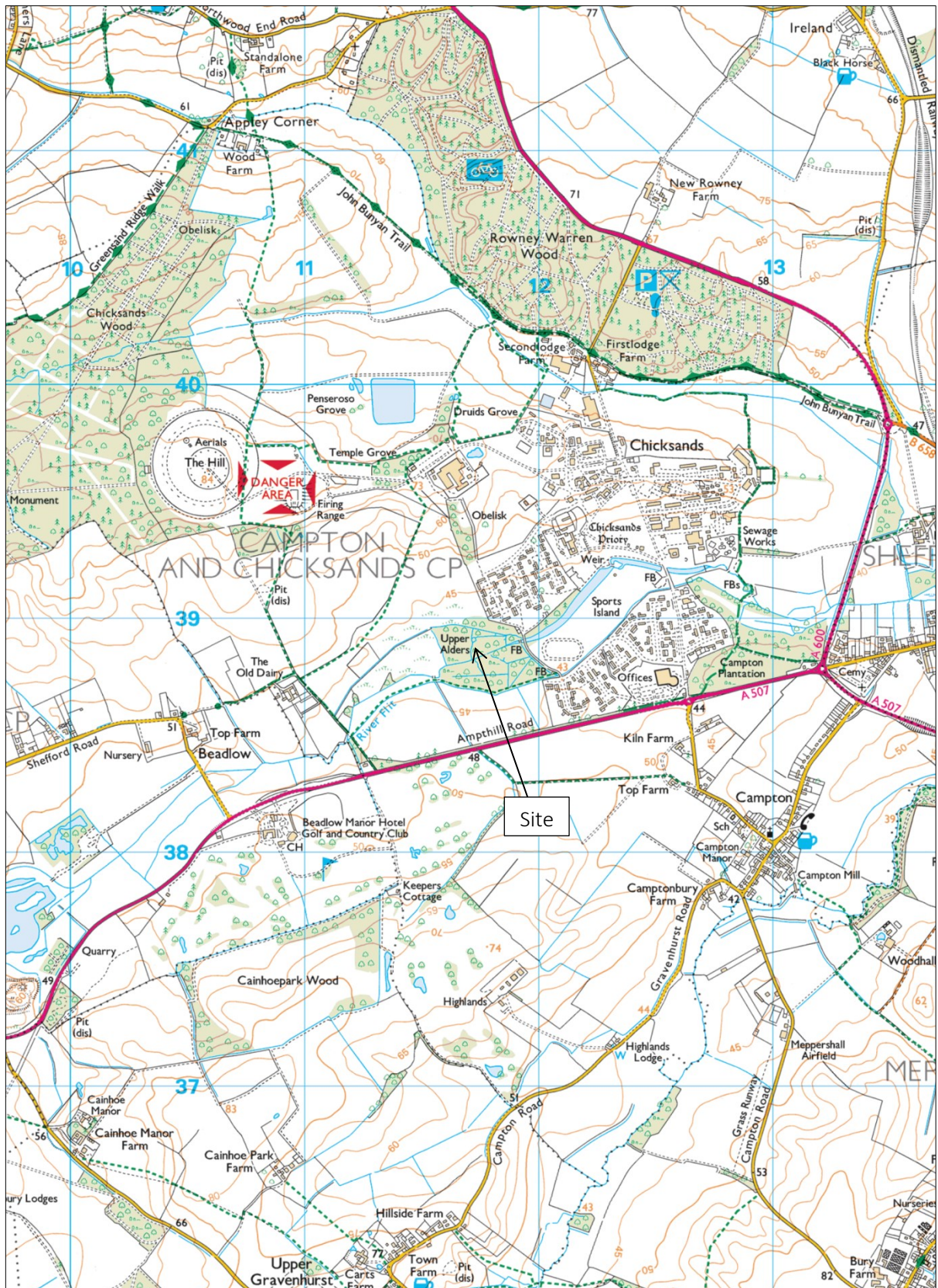


Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)



Summary

In April 2021 KDK Archaeology Ltd undertook a programme of Investigation and Recording of a collapsed stone feature at Upper Alders, Sandy Smith Nature Reserve, Chicksands, Bedfordshire. The feature consisted of an ironstone and brick plinth, as well as several large stone components scattered in the immediate vicinity with a concentration to the west. These included a pediment, a slab base, two wedge-shaped supports and several probable side panels. The structure appears to have been a small folly in a shape similar to a classical style mausoleum, but there is no evidence to suggest that this was its true function. It is located on land that previously belonged to the Chicksands Estate and was most probably constructed in the early to mid-19th century.

1 Introduction

1.1 In April 2021 KDK Archaeology Ltd undertook a programme of Investigation and Recording of a collapsed stone feature at Upper Alders, Sandy Smith Nature Reserve, Chicksands, Bedfordshire. The project was commissioned by Sandy Smith Nature Reserve.

1.2 *The Site*

Location & Description

Upper Alders is an area of woodland located in the south-eastern corner of Sandy Smith Nature Reserve. It is bordered to the north and west by open fields within the Reserve, and to the south by agricultural fields. To the east lies the village of Chicksands. The collapsed stone feature that is the subject of this report is located in the centre of Upper Alders at national grid reference TL 11717 38840. The River Flit also runs east-northeast to west-southwest through the centre of Upper Alders, and runs just 10m to the south of the stone feature (Figs. 1 & 2).

Geology & Topography

The bedrock geology in Upper Alders is comprised of Woburn Sands Formation – Sandstone, formed approximately 101 to 126 million years ago during the Cretaceous Period. The local environment was previously dominated by shallow seas. The superficial deposits consist of peat formed up to 3 million years ago (<https://www.bgs.ac.uk/map-viewers/geology-of-britain-viewer/>). The site is located at 48m AOD.

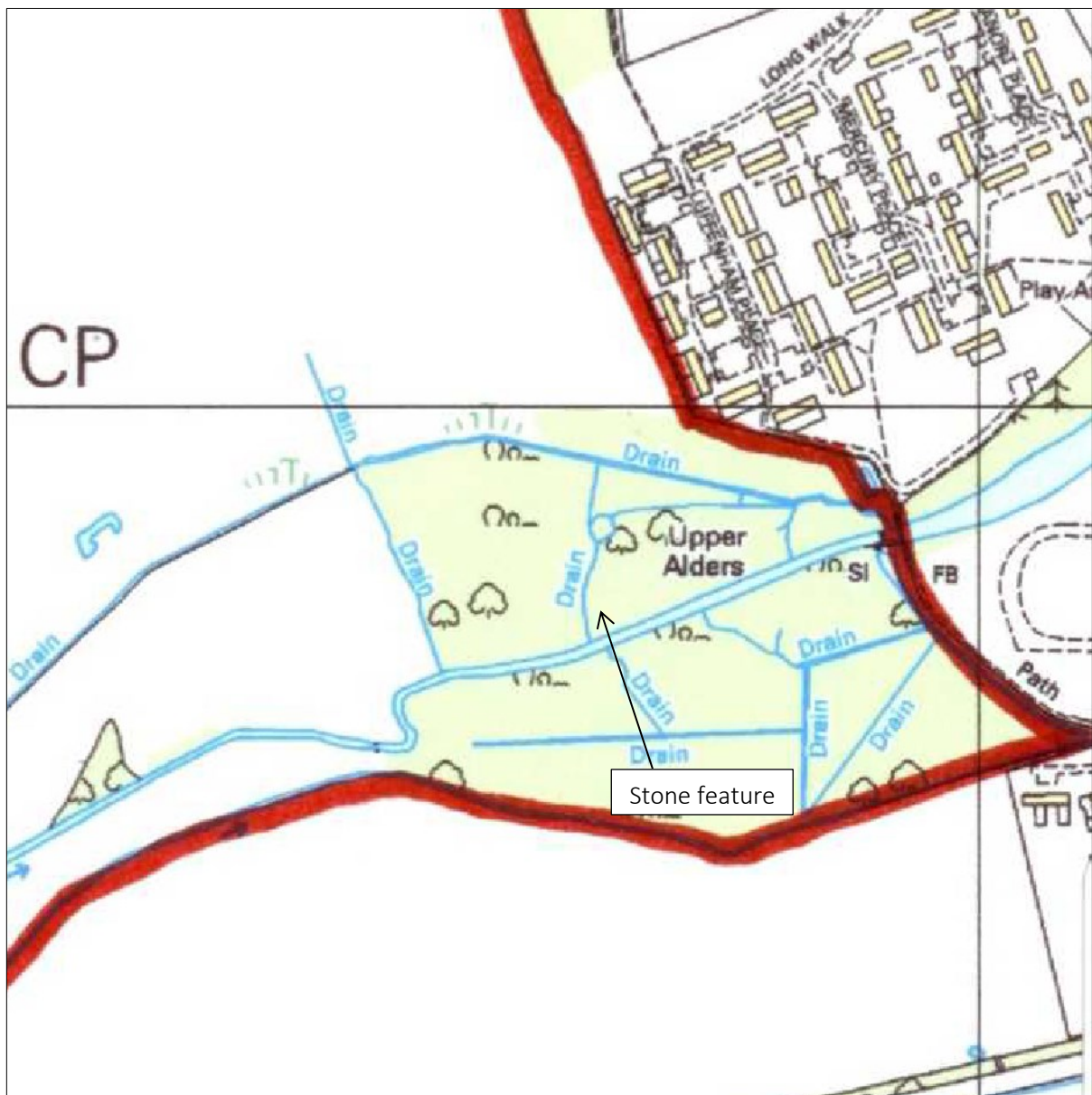


Figure 2: Site location (scale 1: 5000). Red line indicates the boundary of the Nature Reserve.



2 Results

Introduction

A collapsed stone and brick feature was discovered by staff of Sandy Smith Nature Reserve in the centre of Upper Alders, a small area of woodland located on the former Chicksands Estate. The River Flit runs through the woodland and its course was artificially straightened during the 19th century. The collapsed masonry is located approximately 10 metres north of the current course of the river. A good deal of landscaping was carried out during the late 18th and early 19th centuries by the Osborn family, it is unlikely that the feature dates from before this period.

The feature consists of a stone and brick plinth that was initially overgrown with vegetation. Around the plinth is a scatter of at least eight stone components, mainly concentrated to the west. The plinth also leans to the west, suggesting that this is the direction in which the feature collapsed. Most of the stones were at least partially buried prior to recording, although they were not deeper than the topsoil. It is possible that other pieces are buried deeper, but only those immediately accessible were uncovered (Plates 1 – 4).

Description

The entire feature is scattered over an area measuring 5.2m north-south, by 4.85m east-west (Fig 3). The plinth is positioned on the east side and measures 2.06m long, 1m wide and approximately 0.75m high. The lower portion of the plinth consists of ironstone courses 56cm high, roughly finished in an irregular bond. This has the outward appearance of dry stone joints but it has been constructed with lime mortar, which survives in the interior of the masonry. The north side has a harder sand-based mortar. The ironstone pieces vary significantly in size, up to 63cm long and 20cm wide, laid generally flat in courses. Above this are four courses of handmade red brick approximately 30cm high. The bricks mostly measure 22 x 10 x 7cm, but some are 23 x 10 x 6.5cm. Some of the bricks are lightly frogged and most are poorly puddled with few inclusions. They have been bonded with the same hard lime mortar found on the ironstone (Plates 5 – 8).

The upper portion of the feature is scattered primarily to the west and consists of several large moulded pieces that appear to have lain in situ since the structure collapsed. The stones are all oolitic Lincolnshire limestone, possibly from the Weldon quarries (Plates 9 – 11). Stone 1 is the largest of these, measuring 2.07m in length and 1.13m wide. It is currently lying upside down but is evidently the top piece the structure. It has a pediment and a decorative corner moulding, only one of these is visible as two corners are damaged and a third is obscured, however it is likely that all corners sported this moulding. The protrusion is in the shape of a quarter sphere with a curved cyma recta moulding. On the underside currently facing upwards is a raised marking for slotting against other pieces 95cm long by 66.5cm wide. The bottom edge is also chamfered (Plates 12 – 16).

Stones 2 and 4 are opposite counterparts that likely sat on the base and supported the top piece (Plates 17 – 19, 21-24). They are trapezoidal in shape and have dovetail grooves filled with lead flashing that likely acted as mortices. However it is not immediately obvious which way up they were positioned in the feature. It may be that a front section that slotted into these joints is missing. Stone 3 is the base slab that sat directly onto the brick part of the plinth, it has four pilot holes arranged in the top side (Plate 20).

Stones 5 and 6 are both located to the south side of the plinth and both were partially buried. They are rectangular slabs of the same size with iron or lead pins at one end for fixing in place (Plates 25 – 27).



Stones 7 and 8 are also identical slabs, approximately 30cm longer than Stones 5 and 6. Stone 7 is located to the north of the assemblage and was entirely buried. Stone 8 was found to the east of the plinth and has been broken into two pieces. These appear to have been side panels (Plates 28 – 29).

The complete measurements of each stone piece are as follows:

Stone	Dimensions (m)			Description
	W	L	D	
1	1.13	2.07	0.40	Pediment lying upside down, with chamfer on the underside.
2	0.74	1.03	0.46	Side support piece with dovetail joint and lead flashing.
3	0.92	1.83	0.12	Base with 4 fixing holes on the top, plainly worked.
4	0.74	1.03	0.46	Counterpart of St 2, lying other way up.
5	0.38	0.81	0.13	Probable side piece with lead pin sticking out next to a divot.
6	0.38	0.81	0.13	Slab with iron and lead flashing around the edge. Counterpart of St 5.
7	0.38	1.10	0.13	Buried slab, possible side panel, smoothly dressed.
8	0.38	1.10	0.13	Probable counterpart of St 7. Broken into 2 pieces.

Figure 3 shows a plan view of the feature in situ, as it as when found. Figure 4 is a speculative reconstruction of the feature's west elevation. It shows what the feature may have looked like using all available data and estimating the positions of various pieces, while also allowing for the fact that some elements may not have been discovered yet.



Plate 1: Entire feature, facing east



Plate 2: Entire feature, facing north



Plate 3: Entire feature, facing west



Plate 4: Entire feature, facing south



Plate 5: Stone and brick plinth, facing east



Plate 6: Stone and brick plinth, facing north



Plate 7: Stone and brick plinth, facing west



Plate 8: Stone and brick plinth, facing south



Plate 9: Scattered stones, facing north



Plate 10: Scattered stones, facing east



Plate 11: Scattered stones, facing south



Plate 12: Stone 1, top piece, facing east



Plate 13: Stone 1 corner decoration, facing east



Plate 14: Stone 1 pediment, facing east



Plate 15: Stone 1 side, facing north



Plate 16: Stone 1 underside, facing west



Plate 17: Stone 2, side support, facing north



Plate 18: Stone 2 side, facing east



Plate 19: Stone 2 top, facing south



Plate 20: Stone 3, base, facing east



Plate 21: Stone 4, side support, facing north



Plate 22: Stone 4 top, facing south



Plate 23: Stone 4 side, facing east



Plate 24: Stone 4 lead flashing, facing east



Plate 25: Stone 5 partially buried, facing north



Plate 26: Stone 5 partially buried, facing west



Plate 27: Stone 6, facing southeast



Plate 28: Stone 7, partially buried side panel, facing southeast



Plate 29: Stone 8, broken side panel, facing west

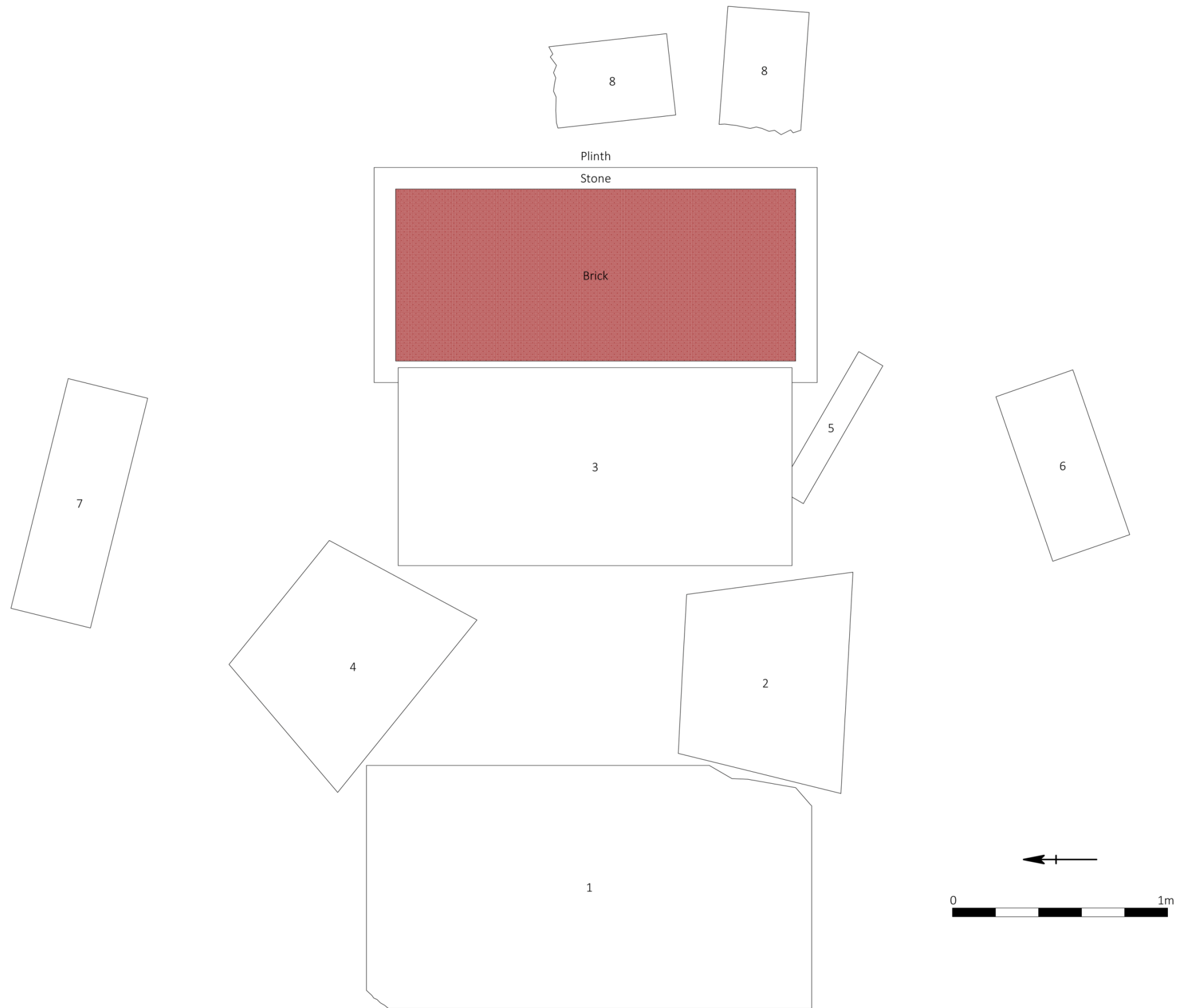


Figure 3: Plan of feature in situ (scale 1:20)

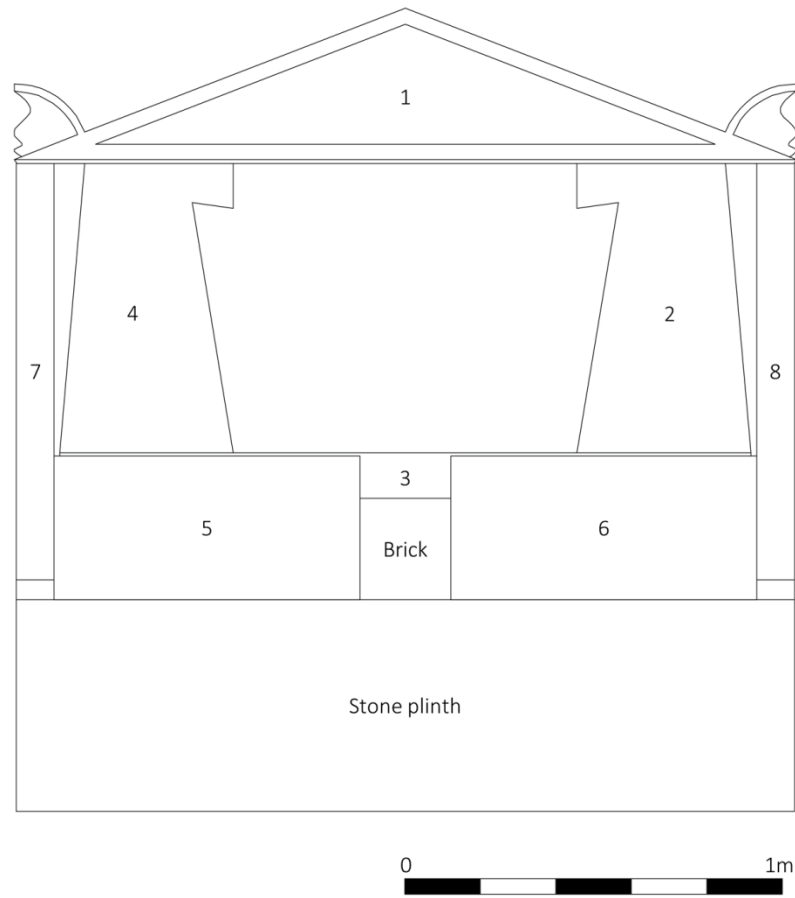


Figure 4: Speculative west elevation of feature (scale 1:20)



3 Conclusions

The stone and brick feature found in Upper Alders is a collapsed masonry structure dating to the post-medieval or Victorian period, and likely relates to landscaping on the former Chicksands estate, owned at that time by the Osborn family. It is not certain whether the surrounding landscape was woodland at the time of its construction, but its proximity to the River Flit would have made it an attractive location for a small monument or folly.

The feature consists of a plinth with an ironstone rubble base and a narrower brick section above. Large limestone components are scattered in the immediate vicinity. These include a slab that sat on top of the bricks. On top of this were wedge-shaped supports and side panels, although it is more difficult to tell how these were arranged or fitted together. The feature was topped with a large pediment that had moulded corner decorations. It is not possible to say for sure whether the feature collapsed naturally over time or if it was intentionally demolished, however it stands to reason that intentional demolition would also have resulted in the reclamation of materials. As the plinth leans significantly to the west, it is likely that it naturally subsided and the excessive weight of the stone pieces on top lead to an accidental collapse.

The feature has no obvious purpose. It is too small to have been useful as a mausoleum, except perhaps for a domestic pet. However there are no visible inscriptions or anything else on the stones to suggest this function, though it must be noted that these may have gone undiscovered. The most likely conclusion is that the structure was intended as a simple form of temple folly. Its date is unlikely to be earlier than the 18th century as classical styled follies were less common before that time. The partial presence of lightly frogged bricks in the plinth, as well as the hardness of the mortar, suggests a date of early to mid-19th century.



4 Acknowledgements

KDK Archaeology is grateful to Sandy Smith Nature Reserve for commissioning this report.

Special thanks go to the staff and volunteers of the Nature Reserve for their assistance during the project.

The fieldwork was carried out by Karin Kaye MA MCI^fA and Chris Martin-Taylor BSc. The report was written by Chris Martin-Taylor, and edited by Karin Kaye.



Appendix: OASIS and Site Data

PROJECT DETAILS			
Project Name & Address	Stone Feature at Upper Alders, Sandy Smith Nature Reserve, Chicksands, Bedfordshire	Project Site Code	584/CSS
OASIS reference	kdkarcha1-501884	Event/Accession no	N/A
OS reference	TL 11717 38840	Study area size	25.22m ²
Project Type	Archaeological Summary Report	Height (mAOD)	48
Short Description	In April 2021 KDK Archaeology Ltd undertook a programme of Investigation and Recording of a collapsed stone feature at Upper Alders, Sandy Smith Nature Reserve, Chicksands, Bedfordshire. The feature consisted of an iron stone and brick plinth, as well as several large stone components scattered in the immediate vicinity with a concentration to the east. These included a pediment, a slab base, two wedge-shaped supports and several probable side panels. The structure appears to have been a small folly in a shape similar to a classical style mausoleum, there is no evidence to suggest that this was its true function. It is located on land that previously belonged to the Chicksands Estate and was most probably constructed in the early to mid-19th century.		
Previous work	-	Site status	-
Current land use	Nature reserve	Planning proposal	-
Local Planning Authority	Central Bedfordshire Council	Planning application ref.	-
Monument type	Folly	Monument period	Post-medieval
Significant finds	Post-medieval folly/decorative monument	Future work	-
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation	KDK Archaeology Ltd		
Project Brief originator	-	Project Design originator	-
Project Manager	Karin Kaye MA MCIfA	Director/Supervisor	Karin Kaye MA MCIfA
Sponsor/funding body	Greensand Trust		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date	15.04.2021	End date	15.04.2021
PROJECT ARCHIVES			
	Location	Content (eg. pottery, animal bone, files/sheets)	
Physical	Greensand Trust		
Paper			
Digital			
BIBLIOGRAPHY (Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report)			
Title	Archaeological Summary Report: Stone Feature at Upper Alders, Sandy Smith Nature Reserve, Chicksands, Bedfordshire		
Serial title & volume	584/CSS/1		
Author(s)	Chris Martin-Taylor BSc		
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