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**An Archaeological Excavation at
Court Hey Park, Roby,
Merseyside
SJ 4185 9002**

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Contents

1. Introduction and Historical background.....	1
2. The Excavation	1
3. Conclusions.....	2
4. Figures	3
5. Plates	6

Court Hey Park Archaeological Excavation.

1. Introduction and Historical background.

This report describes the results of a programme of archaeological excavation undertaken at Court Hey Park, Roby Merseyside (Figs. 1 and 3). This version is a draft and does not include the full archive and method statement. The project was undertaken on behalf of The Friends of Court Hey Park and Knowsley Borough Council as part of the Gladstone Roots Project and was designed as a programme of community archaeology aimed at allowing members of the public to participate in archaeological excavation.

The excavation aimed to locate and record remains belonging to Court Hey Hall. The Hall was originally constructed for Robert Gladstone (1805-1875), brother of William Ewart Gladstone, and was an imposing L-shaped building constructed in red sandstone (Fig. 2, Plate 1). Little evidence for the Hall existed above ground, though its site is accurately known from cartographic evidence and there was some evidence for its internal layout, including basements.

2. The Excavation

2.1 Methodology

The project consisted of the excavation of a single trench measuring c. 15 x 12 m and covering the location of the south-west corner of the Hall. Approximately 0.3 m of the topsoil was stripped by a JCB using a toothless bucket to reveal the hall's external walls. Further excavation was continued using a toothed bucket to empty a small section of the basement to the basement floor surface. The walls and floor surfaces were then cleaned by hand. Although the project design did not specify direct public involvement in the cleaning stage of the excavation, organised groups were permitted to take part in the cleaning under close supervision by the archaeologists.

2.2 Results

Foundations to the hall (Plates 2 & 3, Fig. 4) were sealed by a layer of topsoil (context 6) and a layer of demolition debris comprising fragments of crushed brick rubble and mortar (context 2). A layer of re-deposited orange brown clay (context 4) appeared to be butting up against the external walls (context 1) and capping the surrounding surface areas. Removal of this clay layer, which was 0.10-0.15 m in depth, revealed sections of York stone flags (context 3) butting up against the external walls around the exterior of the building on its south-western side.

These flags appeared to be covering a narrow drainage gully surrounding the external walls and accessed by five brick drainage grids.

The walls (context 1) were constructed of red brick (?wire cut) and sandy lime mortar and were approximately 0.4 m thick. Two bays, one on the west side and one on the south side of the exposed portion of the building were also constructed in red brick on the exterior and were lined with large grey sandstone ashlar masonry on the interior.

A portion of the rubble fill (context 2) in the interior of the building was cleared in the south-west corner to expose the basement floor (context 7). The exterior walls forming the basement rooms were approximately 0.7 m thick, much wider than the other walls and remained in good condition. The basement floor (context 7) was 1.8m below the top of the exposed basement wall and was composed of concrete, compacted brick rubble and cinders. Small fragments of flagstone remained in the very corner of the basement, suggesting that the floor was originally flagged.

A linear area of compacted gravel and mortar (context 5) was observed running north-south, along the western side of the building. This appeared to be only a thin layer, less than 0.05 m in places and was approximately 1.2 m wide. Remnants of flagstone fragments were observed on the surface, suggesting that this was the remains of a footpath running around the outside of the building.

2.3 Finds

All of the finds recovered from the topsoil (context 6) and the rubble in fill (context 2) were 19th century in date. There were many pottery fragments, all of which were either black glaze ware domestic storage jar fragments or white china, only a sample of which were retained. There were few metal finds recovered from the excavation itself, although metal detectorists from the ?Bolton Metal Detector Club were invited to detect around the soil heaps and the surrounding park area. These finds included musket balls, Victorian and Georgian coins etc. that were retained by the Court Hey Park Trust for display.

3. Conclusions

The deposits uncovered represent the south-west corner of the living area and basement of the house. The northern wall represents a recess in the western side of the house that formed a narrow access yard separating the living area of the house with the servant's quarters and out-buildings located to the north. The south and west wings of the house would have been more desirable for the family living quarters to make the most of the sun moving around the south side of the house in the afternoons, especially given the large semi-circular bay window shown on the historical photographs, unfortunately not located in the excavation due to time constraints.

4. Figures

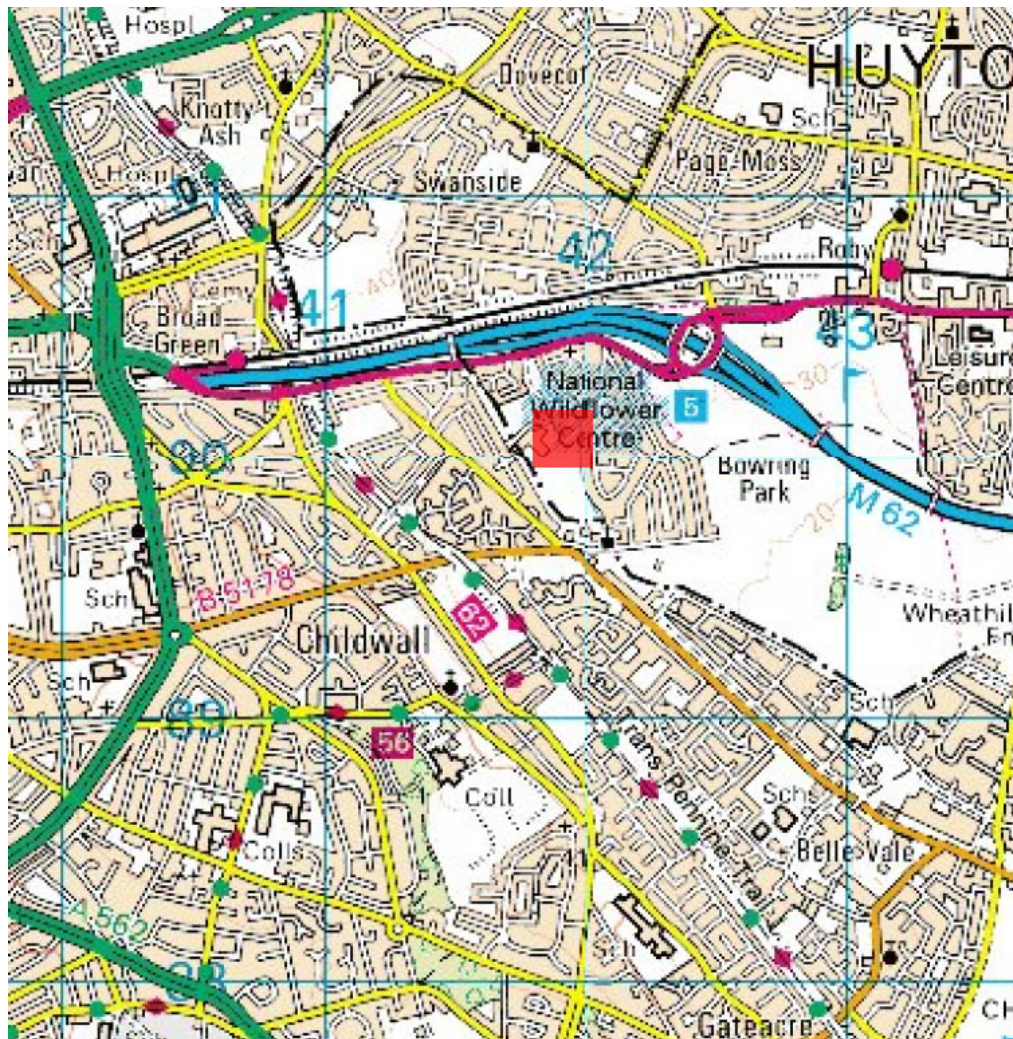


Fig 1. Site location. Not to scale.

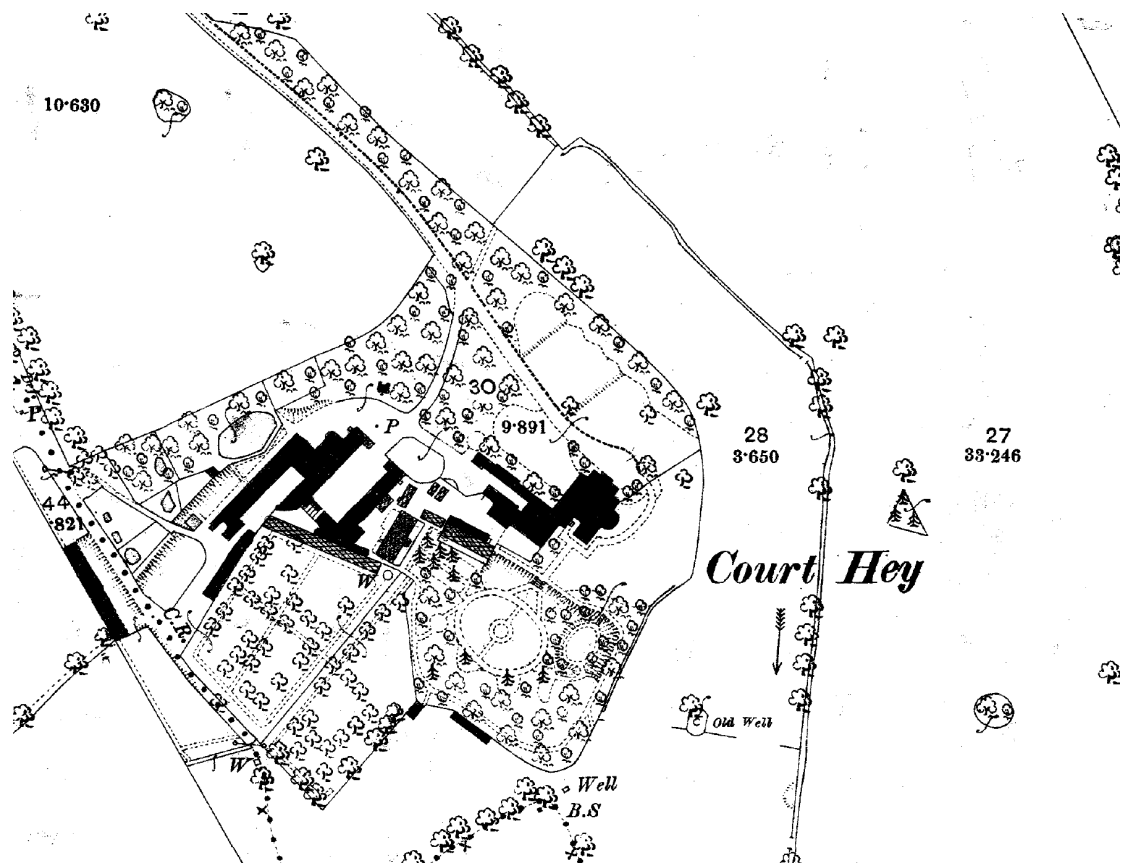
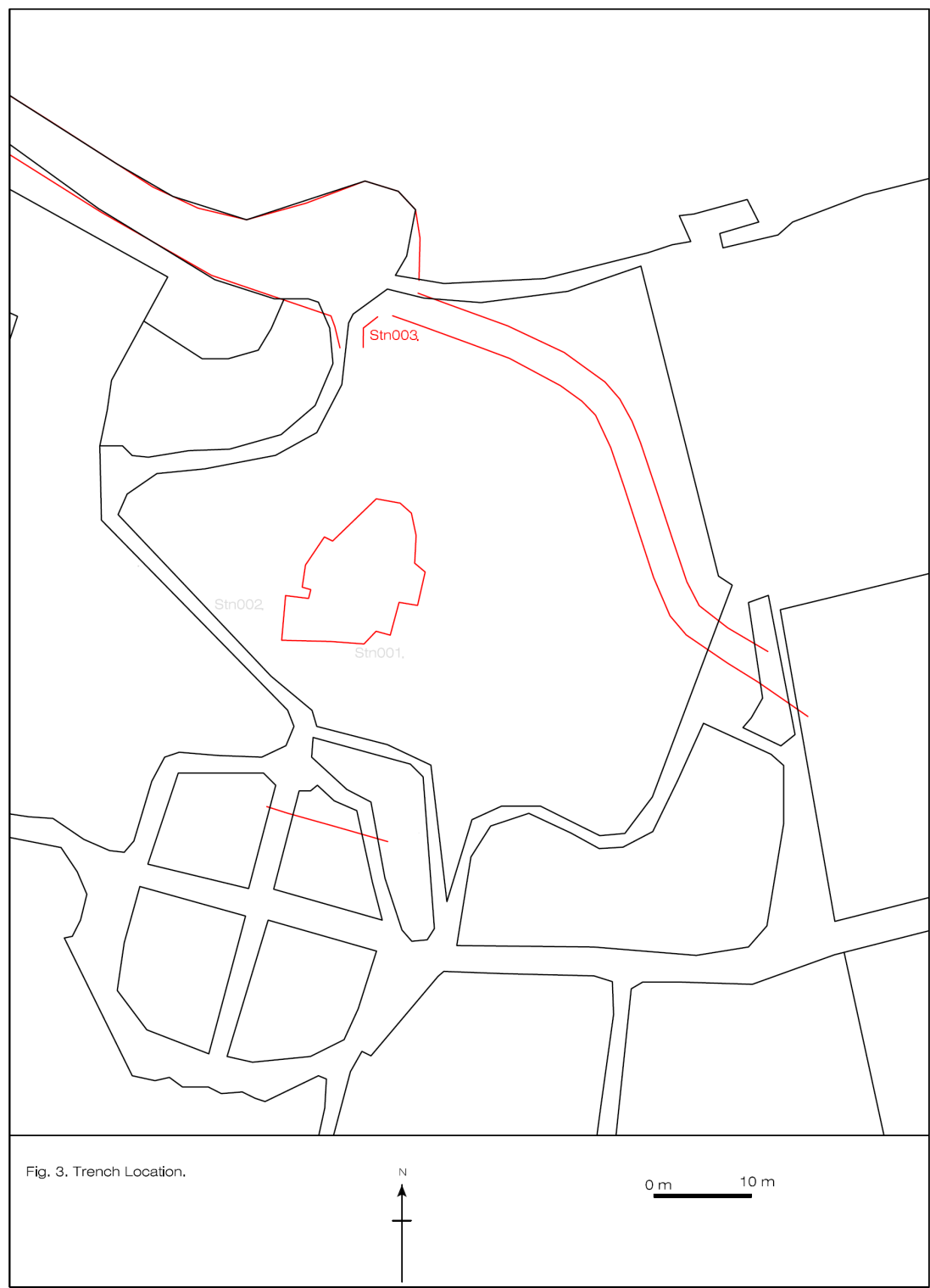
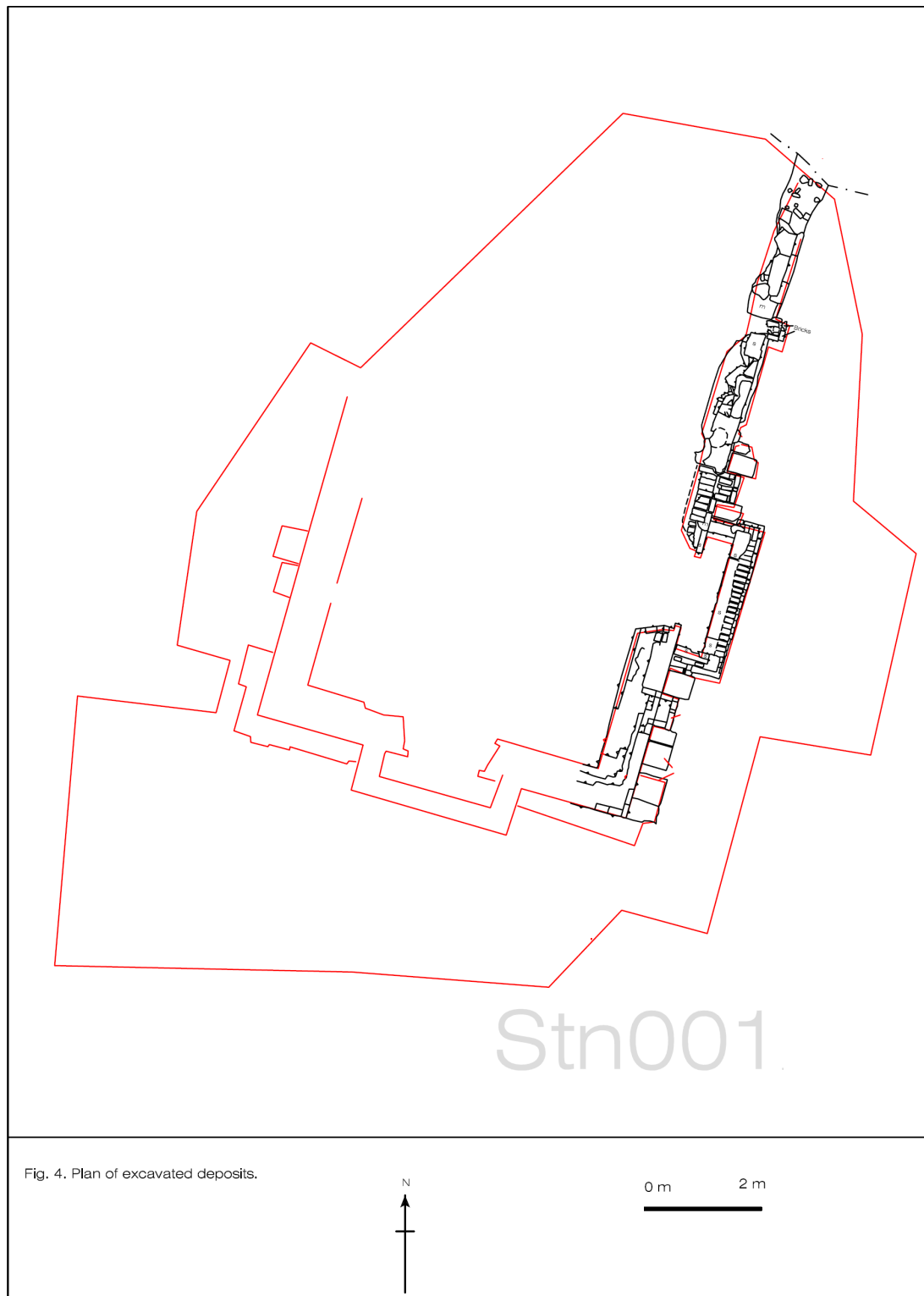


Fig. 2. Plan of Court Hey in c. 1890.





5. Plates



Plate 1. The entrance to Court Hey Hall c. 1940



Plate 2. View of the excavated deposits from the north.



Plate 3. View of the excavated deposits from the south.