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**Archaeological observation and recording of the
retaining wall at The Croft, Queen Street,
Geddington, Northamptonshire**

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Summary

A Grade II-listed retaining wall at The Croft, Queen Street, Geddington had suffered severe water damage from the previous winter's (2013-14) heavy rains and was in danger of collapse. Listed building consent was granted to take the wall down in stages and subsequently rebuild. The dismantling of the wall and stabilisation of the ground face behind it was undertaken under archaeological supervision. No archaeology was present. The dismantled wall's age remains uncertain but a date pre 1886 is likely, perhaps even as early as before 1808.

Site location, topography and geology

The Croft lies in the centre of Geddington village, which is located c3km from the north-eastern outskirts of Kettering. The River Ise flows through the centre of the village, just over 100m to the north-east of The Croft, which lies at NGR: SP 8928 8282.

The Croft is set back from the frontage of Queen Street behind a listed retaining wall of up to 2.5m height. The ground behind the wall lies c2m above street-level.

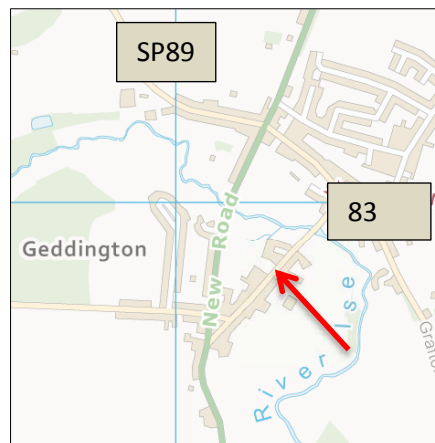


Fig 1: Site location (arrowed); Contains Ordnance Survey data ©Crown Copyright and database right 2014

In order to stabilise this wall, careful dismantling was agreed between the local Authority (Kettering Borough Council) and a proposal set out for the recording of the wall and excavations behind it, in accordance with a works specification which was agreed by Northamptonshire County Council's Assistant Archaeological Advisor, Liz Mordue, as archaeological advisor to Kettering Borough Council, and ratified by the Kettering Borough Council Planning Officer.

Prior to dismantling, a photographic survey of the entire length of the wall was undertaken. Sections from the wall were taken down one course at a time and the reusable stone labelled with the course

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and crated. Sections through the wall were drawn every 5m along its length, while photographic and written records were also made.

Following the dismantling of the wall, an archaeological watching brief was maintained on earthmoving operations behind the wall as a new cutting was made to accept the new wall.

At the end of fieldwork, research on historic documents was carried out to establish if anything was on record relating to the former wall as a guide to its antiquity, and that of the property it served.

Listed building entries for the wall and The Croft are as follows:

Retaining wall and railings to The Croft II GV Wall and railings. Probably 18th and 19th century. Coursed limestone rubble wall with rubble coping to left and brick coping to right of blocked gateway. Iron railings. Included for group value.

The Croft: Farmhouse, now house. Probably 17th century origin, refronted 19th century. Coursed limestone rubble and ashlar, thatched roof, moulded stone ridge and end stacks. Two storeys, four-window range. Three right-hand bays, refaced in ashlar, have a three-light small-paned casement window, a six-panel door (upper two panels glazed) in porch and 20th century French window to ground floor, all with gauged stone heads, and three-light small-paned casement windows with wooden lintels to first floor. Left-hand bay of coursed rubble, has a three-light small-paned casement window to ground and first floors, and a blocked doorway to right, all with wooden lintels. Wing to rear, originally a separate cottage, carries the date, 1748 and has been heightened. Interior: left hand ground floor room has inglenook fireplace and door to wide boards. Central ground floor room also has inglenook and stone chimney piece with cornice within, and a two-panel door. Right-hand ground floor room has a massive six-panel door on HL hinges. Beams boxed.

The bedrock geology of the area is recorded as deposits of ironstone deriving from the Northampton Sand Formation, with possible deposits of mudstone from the Whitby Mudstone Formation at the north-eastern end of the site.

Historical background

During pipe-laying works in 1951, some 80m to the east of the site, the remains of ten iron smelting furnaces dating to the Roman period were found. Associated pottery was said to be dated to the 2nd-3rd centuries (RCHME 1979). While these features are the only known Roman features in the close vicinity, they form part of a wider concentration of Roman activity in the area. A substantial settlement was located in the north-eastern part of the modern town of Kettering. Other known sites include an Iron Age and Roman settlement north of Weekley Hall Wood, c1km to the west.

At Domesday, one hide in Geddington was held by the King and the Abbey of St Edmund's (Bury St Edmund's) held one hide and one virgate.

There was a royal hunting lodge at Geddington and in 1129-30, £17 was spent under Henry I in 'the making of the King's house at Geddington'. It was visited by Richard I (The Lionheart) and the King of Scotland in 1189. No further works are recorded after 1285 and by 1374 no building remained (RCHME 1979). In the 18th century there were 'many foundations' still visible in a close to the north-east of the church called Castle- or Hall-Close (Bridges 1791; see Fig 2 below).

The village is probably known primarily for the late 13th century Queen Eleanor Cross situated in its centre. The Queen had died near Lincoln and her husband, the grieving Edward I, ordered a series of twelve crosses to be built at each of the resting places of the funeral cortège as it made its way to London. Of these crosses only three now remain, two in Northamptonshire.

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The earliest depiction of The Croft is on the 1717 map of Geddington open fields. The map depicts all the furlongs in the open fields of the parish nearly a hundred years prior to its eventual enclosure. The photostat copy of the map held by NRO, though tiny, shows a narrow range parallel to Queen Street in the location of the Croft; given its probable 17th century origin, it is likely that it is the Croft. A series of further buildings extend to the rear.

Besides the Dukes of Buccleuch, the Maidwell family held an estate in Geddington; at Inclosure in 1808, the estate comprised large areas of land around the village, though second in size to those held by the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch, as well as a number of properties within the village. These included The Priory and a range of buildings which appear to include The Croft.



Fig 2: Detail from the 1717 photostat map, The probable Croft is arrowed

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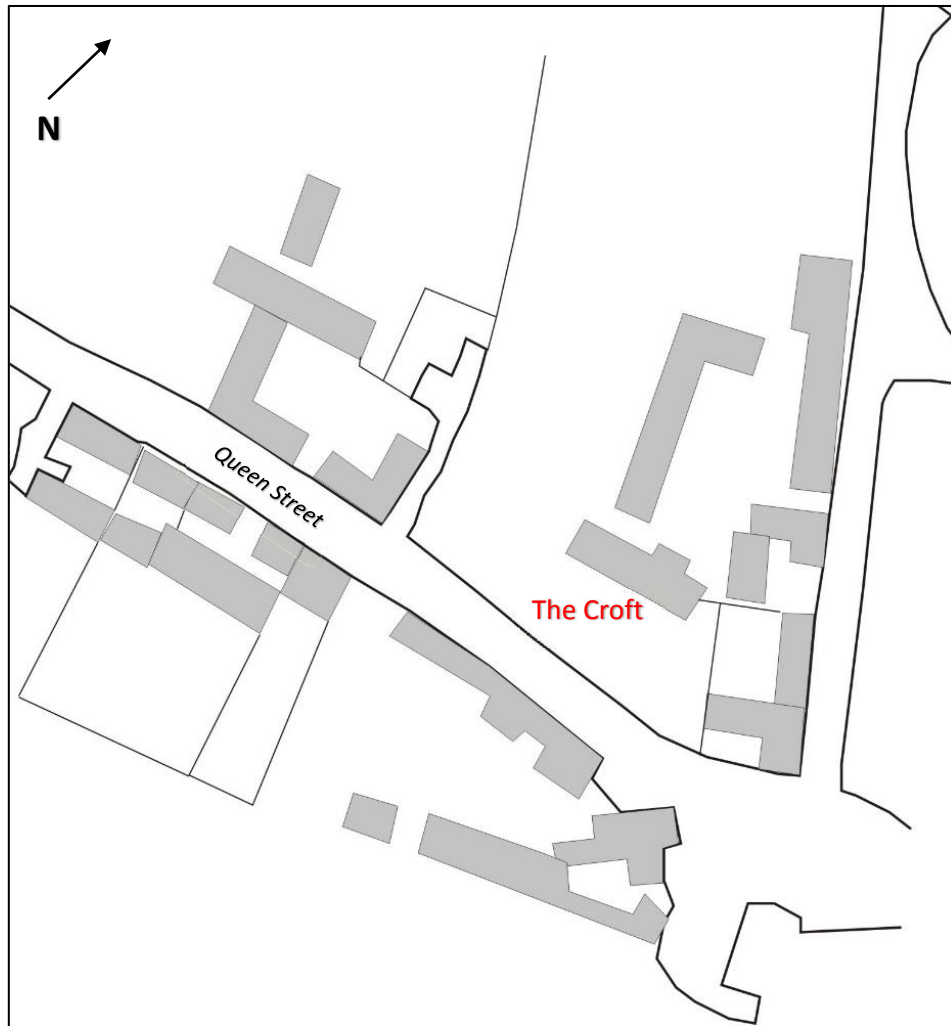


Fig 3: Transcription of 1808 Inclosure Map of Geddington

In 1890, the house was known as Croft House and was occupied by Mrs Bode, by 1906 by Mrs Slough and in 1914 by Miss Roffy. These people appear to have been tenants, with the house owned by Reverend Nash in 1917, when a series of detailed plans of the building as it was were drawn up. No plans for its alteration were present.

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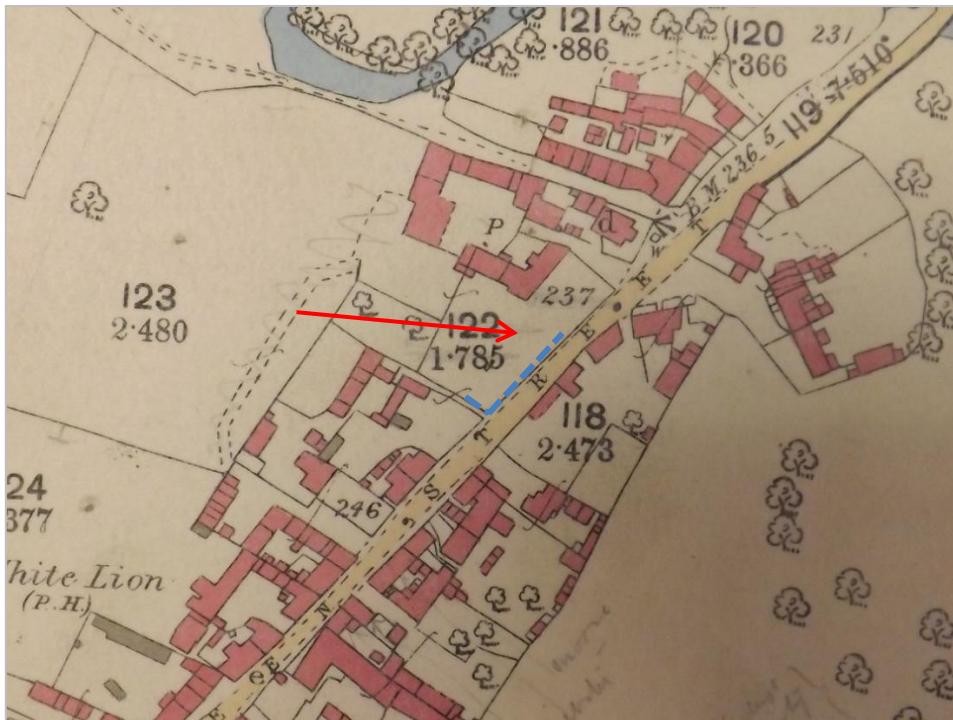


Fig 4: First Edition Ordnance Survey map, 1886; The Croft and its plot are arrowed. The wall as recorded is shown as a dotted blue line.



Fig 5: The Croft, ground floor, as planned in 1917

There were no specific depictions of the part of the retaining wall to be dismantled in any of the historic documents or photographs accessed as part of this project. It may be inferred on the 1886 Ordnance Survey Map but the specific nature of the roadside boundary is unclear. A single photograph taken in 1960 is held in the English Heritage Architectural photo archive at Swindon does depict the far eastern end of the wall, but this is of a portion not dismantled in the current works (EH 4526/48; National Buildings Record XXVI.1(7)).

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The wall at the point of dismantling

As a first stage, before any works could commence, the wall was photographically recorded over its entire 45m east-west length using a short-zoom lens with standard focal-length or minimal wide-angle, both digitally in colour and in black and white negative, with related contact sheet for archive purposes.

The digital photographs were mounted in a continuous photo-montage of the street-facing portion to iron out any converging verticals and with sufficient overlap to ensure full coverage without visual distortion. The result was deposited before works began as an interpretable record pre-dismantling. The images are re-attached to the end of this report.

Dismantling

The wall was dismantled by hand by stonework contractors, with the majority of squared stonework set aside and stored for re-use in the re-built wall. The wall was taken down in blocks of 5 metres along the wall, using approximately the same distance calculations as were relevant for the first phase photography. This comprised 0m at the south-western corner, counting up to 30m north-eastwards along Queen Street, and up to a negative -15m along the passageway off Queen Street.

A pre-arranged archaeological visit was made to record the exposed edge of each 5m-block, photographically where possible (although an oblique photo of each section was usually only possible), and each fresh 'end' drawn at scale to indicate the mode of construction. In cases where a block exposed the intact soil-block behind, this was photographed as an indicator of the newly-exposed stratification.

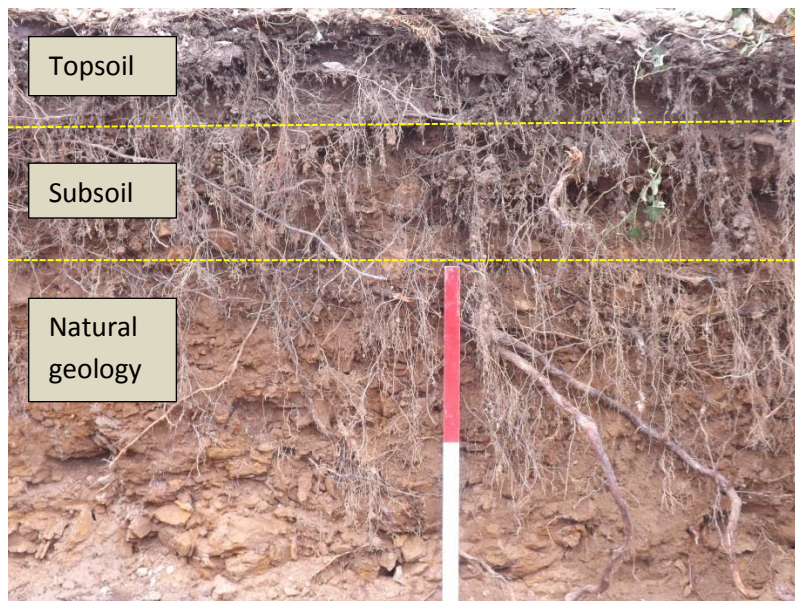


Fig 6: The wall fully removed at about 5m from the corner (0m), exposing the stratification behind. Note the mat of roots which filled the continuous loose cavity behind the wall; scale 1m

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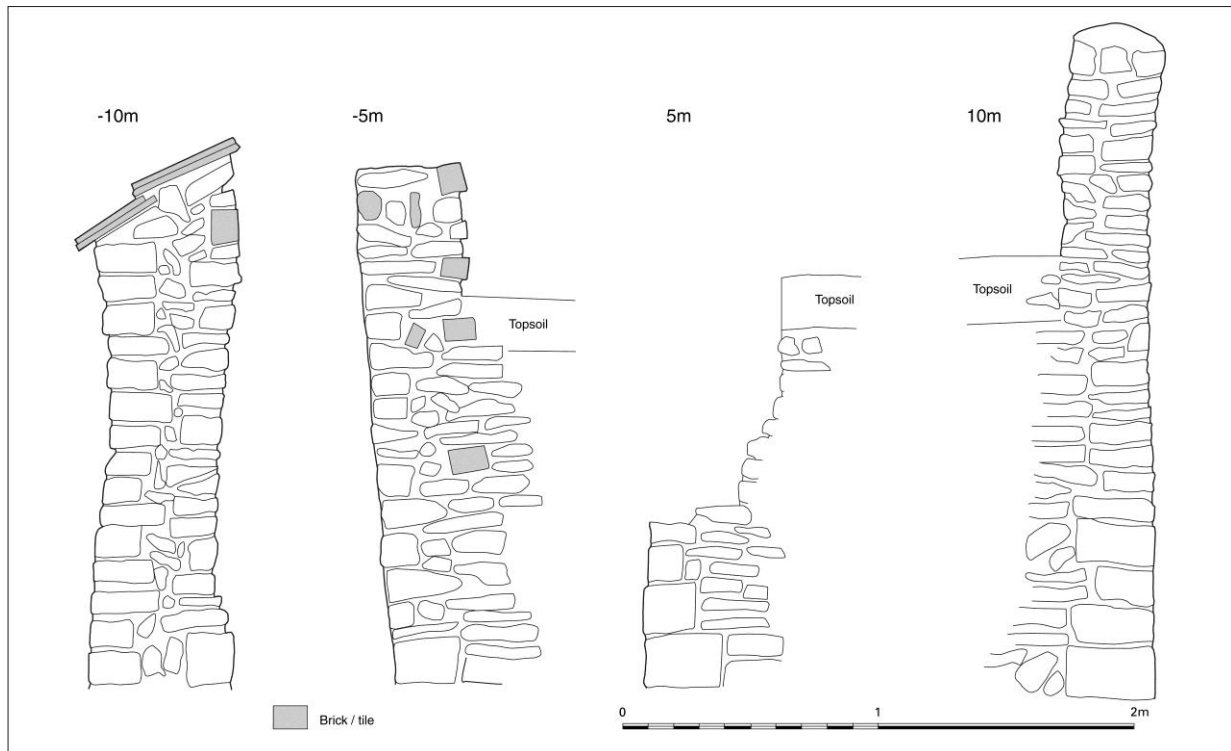


Fig 7: The wall cross-section as recorded at -10m -5m (the north-south portion), where the wall has been topped with tiles to deflect rain; 5m (where an incomplete section was available) and 10m along Queen Street. Drawing by Andy Isham.



Fig 8: The section at 5m from the corner; note the collapse and thrust of loose soils which destabilised the skin; scale 1m.



Fig 9: The wall at around 20m from the corner, preparatory to drawing; scale 1m.

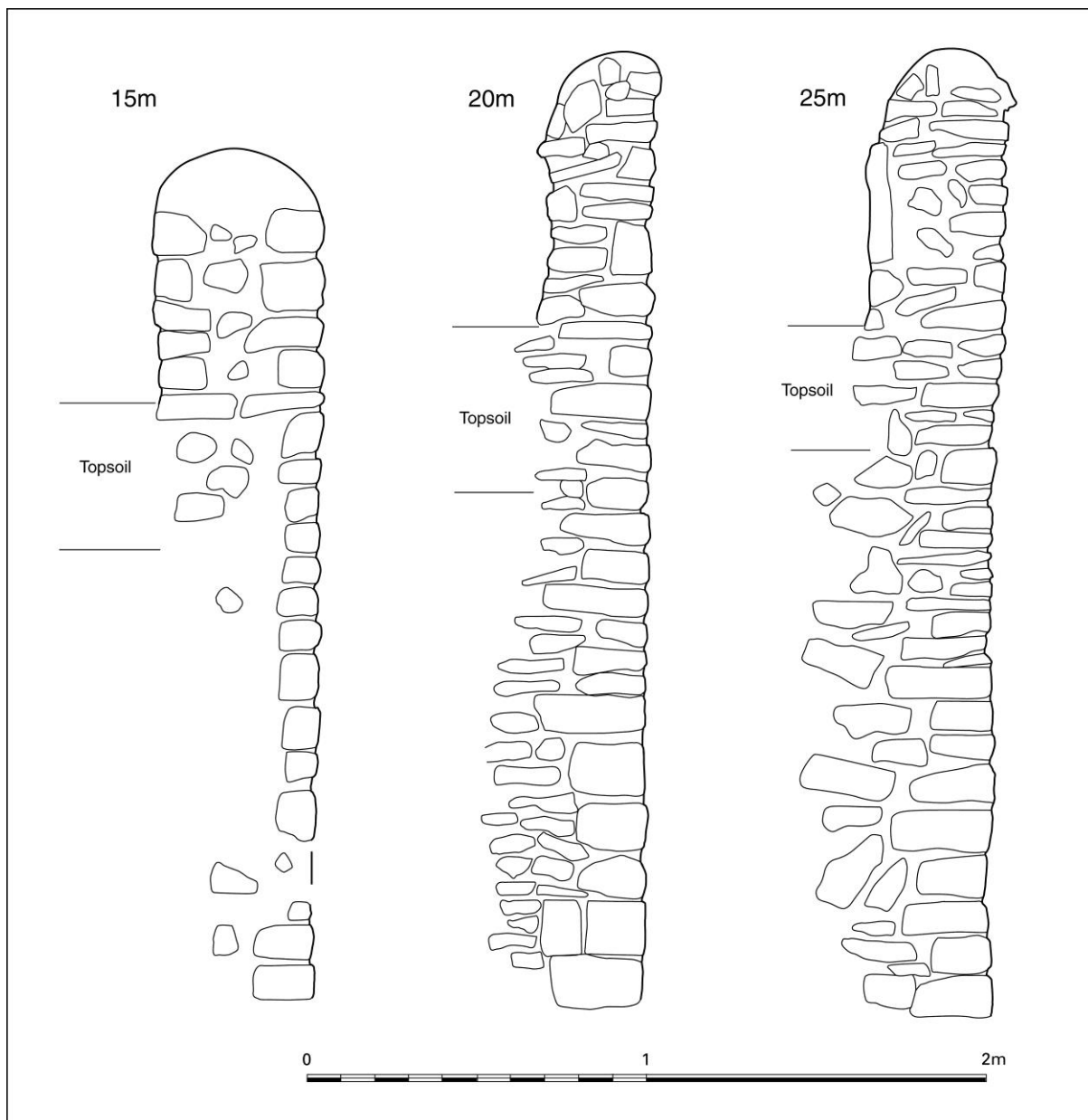


Fig 10: The wall at 15m, 20m and 25m from the corner. The top of the wall here is flanching in profiled mortar/cement. Drawing by Andy Isham.

When Queen Street was formally laid out, the straight course and the even gradient needed, (probably in the approach to the bridge over the River Ise at the eastern end of the street), necessitated the cutting back of the plot adjacent to and in front of The Croft.

Along the entire length of Queen Street the existing wall consisted of little more than an outer skin of limestone, with very little mortar or (in places) hard cement. To the rear of the skin was a sometimes well-laid and sometimes haphazard jumble of limestone pieces, roughly-squared blocks and the occasional brick fragment, all in a sandy soil matrix rich in limestone pieces. This admixture of jumbled materials was interlaced with a thick mat of fibrous roots which stretched down almost the full depth of the wall, from topsoil to pavement level (Figs 6 and 8, for example). This root system, which had reached the garden edge and had nowhere else to go except to fill the cavity behind the wall and drain it of moisture and nutrients, promoted the breakdown of any soil-

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structure. When prolonged heavy rain fell in 2013-14, the degraded stony soils behind the wall skin, simply failed to hold it and it poured through the wall in a number of places, causing the weakening wall to bulge dangerously.

Monitoring the earth-moving behind the wall

A number of visits were made to view the build-up of soils behind the wall following dismantling. This was because the history of the plot was little understood and there was concern that archaeological levels might be buried behind the wall which related to any former Queen Street frontage.

Results

Subsequent to the dismantling of the wall, the raised ground behind it was battered back and the topsoil beyond was removed using a tracked excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The topsoil was a loose dark grey-brown sandy loam, which was matted with roots from garden vegetation that had been removed as part of the works. This was particularly noticeable at the south-western corner of the garden. Amorphous dumps of rubble were also noted; these were concentrated in the area directly behind the retaining wall.

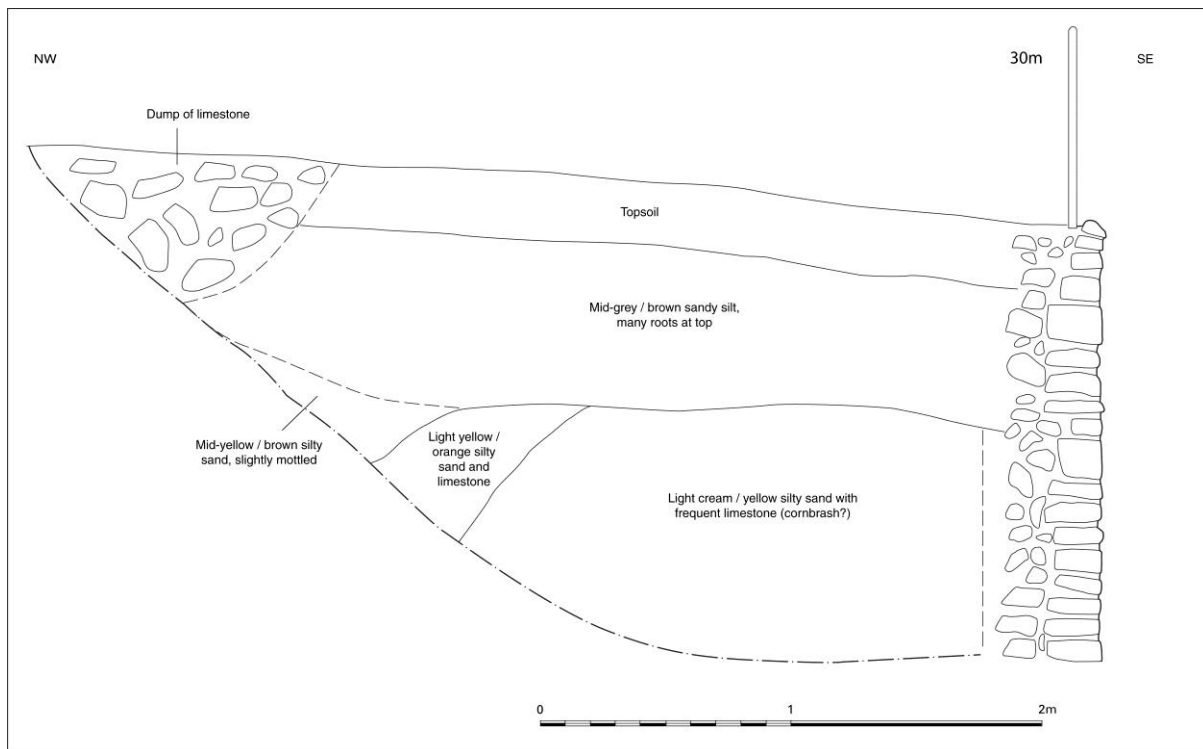


Fig 11: The wall at 30m from the corner. This was the most easterly cut, at which the subsequent batter began. Here too an iron fence began, heading north-eastwards. Drawing by Andy Isham.

The ground face directly behind the wall was battered back at an angle of 45°, extending c4m into the garden. The loose dark grey-brown topsoil overlay a mid grey-brown sandy silt subsoil, up to 0.50m deep. This was heavily disturbed by tree roots. This in turn overlay a light yellow-brown silty sand with frequent limestone pieces, becoming darker with more ironstone-type rubble to the north-west. This was the natural bedrock geology, which for the most part appeared to comprise limestone rather than ironstone. Known outcrops of the Lower Lincolnshire Limestone Member are recorded nearby.

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No pre-modern archaeological features were found and there were no finds predating the late 19th century.



Fig 12: Topsoil strip of the garden to the rear of the wall, looking north-east. Note the far end of the works battered back from the road, recorded in Fig 10; scale 1m

Conclusions

Before dismantling, this listed wall received an appropriate level of recording and during dismantling a high level of attention and recording.

The dismantling of the listed wall revealed no significant aspects of its construction and exposed no archaeology behind it. Rather dismantling showed that it had been poorly constructed, as little more than a skin to a road-side cutting.

There was nothing in dismantling or recording which might indicate the age or origin of the wall. Historic maps make a series of depictions which are insufficient to identify any of them as the wall which was taken down and rebuilt, although a date before 1886 and even pre-1808 is plausible.

Bibliography

Bridges, J, 1791 *History of Northamptonshire*

RCHME 1979 *An Inventory of the historical monuments in the county of Northamptonshire*, Volume 2: *Archaeological sites in central Northamptonshire*, Royal Commission on Historical Monuments England



IS Heritage, 22 October 2014



WEST END



