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*Archaeological Project at The Boathouse,
Green Hill, Suckley, Worcestershire*



*An Archaeological Project at The
Boathouse, Suckley, Worcestershire*

A report for Marnie Caine

May 2005

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Project: Special

WSM

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1. Project Background

1.1. Location of the Site

The Boathouse lies off an unadopted lane known as Green Hill, which runs northwards along the lower level of the Suckley Hills to the west of Crews Hill. Suckley is located roughly equidistant between Worcester and Ledbury and the closest town is the market town of Bromyard (Figure 1).

1.2. Project Details

The project was not part of any planning application and was undertaken at the request of the current owner of The Boathouse, Marnie Caine, who has a keen interest in the local history and heritage of the Suckley area.

1.3. Reasons for the Project

The Boathouse is a timber-framed cottage with square panelling in a style that suggests it dates from the 17th century (Plate 1). In the garden of the property, there are the remains of a small square rough stone construction, which was at the time of the project, to be combined into a new patio area at the cottage. Mercian Archaeology were requested to carry out a small-scale excavation around the remnant building to attempt to identify its former function and ascribe a date to it.

2. Methods and Process

2.1. Project Specification

- As there was no specific brief for the project, the specification for this project is not included here.

2.2. Aims of the Project

The project aimed to:

1. Record the upstanding fabric of the structure by photograph, description and drawn record.
2. Determine the original function of the structure.

3. Determine the date of construction, alteration and any noted development.
4. Make an analysis and interpretation of all identified natural and cultural deposits

3. The Documentary Research

3.1. The Topography

Suckley is located amidst the hummocky terrain of the Suckley Hills, which extend from the northern end of the Malvern Hills range. The Suckley Hills rise to around 170 metres above Ordnance Datum, with the village situated on the slope at around 85 metres AOD. Suckley is situated on the Leigh Brook, which is a tributary of the River Teme, entering the Teme at Leigh Court (SO 784356).

The underlying geology is mainly of Old Red Sandstone, with clay-marl based soils. The soil type and the nature of the terrain has meant that the agricultural subsistence has been based mainly on cultivation of wheat, beans, peas and fruit, with a large acreage covered by hops until the mid-20th century (VCH IV).

A Brief Archaeological Overview

Historically, the Manor of Suckley was extensive with the border of Herefordshire delineating the lands of Suckley on the south and west, the River Teme to the north and the manors of Knightwick and Leigh enclosing the manor lands. The manor comprised some 2,692 acres, being in the modern parishes of Suckley, Lulsley and Alfrick (VCH IV).

The place-name Suckley has been interpreted to mean 'wood where birds are found' and has an Anglo-Saxon derivative (<http://www.suckley.net/manor.htm>).

At Domesday, Suckley was in the Worcestershire hundred of Doddingtree. The Domesday entry indicates that:-

'The King holds Suchelie. Earl Edwin held it. There are 5 hides. On the demesne are 2 ploughs, there are 22 villeins and 24 borders with 27 ploughs. There are 10 other borders poor men, and a mill worth 6s. and a bee- keeper with 12 hives. The wood is 5 leagues in length and breadth, and there is a fishery there. In Worcester is 1 burgess, but he renders nothing. There is a mill there worth 6s. The tythe of this vill with 1 villein and half a virgate of land St. Mary holds.

Earl Roger gave to a certain Richard half a virgate of land in absolute freedom.' (Thorn and Thorn 1992).

For more information concerning the post-conquest history of Suckley see The Suckley Local History Group website (<http://www.suckley.net/manor.htm>)

The manorial history of Suckley is complex and is not necessary here, but briefly, King John granted the manor to Llewelyn in 1215. The holdings followed a hereditary path via the female line to the Burnell's and then the Hungerford's, who were lords of the manor into the 16th century. The estate was sold to the Colles of Leigh Court in the late 16th century who were the owners of the Suckley holdings at the time that The (present) Boathouse was built, in the 17th century.

The name 'Boathouse' may be confusing and reasonably associated with boats! However, according to the current owner Marnie Caine, the cottage has had various names in the recent past and so the link between the cottage and the name 'Boathouse' is unsure. At Eastham, near Tenbury Wells, there is a (former) farm called Boathouse Farm. Research into the name of the farm indicated that in the vernacular dialect a 'boat' relates to a roll of cloth, also referred to as a 'bolt.' It was recorded in an 18th century probate inventory that the barn at the farm contained linen of allsorts *and a boat* (Mercian Archaeology 2003).

3.2. The Cartography

In 1836 the Tithe Commutation Act was passed by Parliament, resulting in an extensive survey of land across England in order to produce a series of Tithe Apportionment Maps that relayed information about land ownership and use, aimed at converting the commutation of tithe in kind to land taxation (Hoskins 1972, 37). The Boathouse came under the auspices of Suckley Parish, for which a map and apportionment was produced in 1838 (Figure 2). The map shows the cottage with large buildings on the opposite side of the road, these are now gone. A square building is shown in the location of the stone structure, which is the subject of this project. However, the plan does not represent this structure, but rather the piggery that stood there into the 20th century, into which, the square stone structure is incorporated (see below). At the time of the survey in 1838, the property was owned by Daniel White and was occupied as part of his estate (in hand) (WRO: BA 1572; x 760/559).

Only the small-scale 6" to 1 mile 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1884 was available at the Worcester Records Office. This was limited in detail and was not reproduced.

The more detailed 25" to 1 mile 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1905 shows the former piggery with a pair of sties to the north with enclosed yards on the south forming the overall square plan, as seen on the earlier tithe map (Figure 3).

Cartographic Sources Used

Source	Reference Number
Tithe Apportionment and Map of Suckley (1838)	Worcester Records Office BA 1572; x 760/559
Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 25". Worcestershire Sheet XXII.10 (1905)	Worcester Records Office

Other sources used are referenced within the report.

3.4. The Fieldwork Methodology

The field evaluation was undertaken on 24th and 25th June 2004.

The photographic survey was carried out using digital format. A 1-metre scale was used where possible.

Proforma Record Forms were used to record the site stratigraphy in tandem with site notes to produce the final record contained within this report.

4. The Evaluation

The area was cleared of overburden and debris and a plan made before further work commenced (Figure 4).

The upstanding structure was a rough stone masonry construction bonded with a sandy-lime mortar. The structure was relatively small at 1.80 metres square, with wall thickness of 0.50 metres and surviving to a height of 60 centimetres above the present ground level, although the quantity of tumbled stones removed from the area suggests that it was originally at least 1.50 metres high and probably higher. Abutting the western side of the structure was an area of stone flags, which varied in size and shape (see Figure 4). On the northern side of the structure was a remnant section of a former brick building, which still contained an iron grate and the base of a hearth.

In an attempt to understand the square stone structure, the central area (inside the structure) was first cleared of tumbled stones and built-up debris [104](Plate 3). A test-pit (Test-Pit A) was then excavated into the enclosed central part. This revealed that the structure was of a single phase. The structure was buried to 0.40 metres below the present ground level and there was no visible foundation cut, which suggests that either it was constructed from inside to ground level height, within a square cut into the red clay-marl natural [105], or that the strip foundations were cut and the structure built as a tight fit into them. The evidence is unclear, but it seems likely that the square foundation hypothesis is more likely on two counts, firstly because the finds within the red silty-clay [102] over the natural [105] within the central void, were un-abraded and in good condition, suggesting they were deposited and sealed within a short period of time and secondly, that the backfill [102] was slightly less compact than the subsoil layer [101] outside the structure, this [101] was also noticeably graded, with more silt at the top and clayier at the bottom, whereas backfill [102] was well mixed with no noticeable grading of particles.

A second test-pit (Test-Pit B) was excavated below the flagstone floor that surrounds the square structure (Plate 4). The graded reddish silty-clay subsoil contained rare small angular stone fragments and charcoal flecking, indicating some disturbance of this layer. There were also ceramic finds that gave this layer a TPQ of a 19th century date (see Artefactual Evidence section below). The siltiness of the upper level of the layer suggests that this grading may have been exaggerated by water-run off from the hill, which rises steeply to the east.

A further test-pit (Test-Pit C) was excavated into the garden soil at the edge of the stone flagged area in order to determine if there were any surviving return walls on this side. This was negative, although there was a west-east brick wall seen in section along the southern side

of the flagged floor. The excavated material [103] was noticeably darker and more organic than the subsoil [101] suggesting a change in stratigraphy somewhere in this area and possible sunken cut feature(s), although extension was not possible without intrusive work into the well established garden.

5. The Artefactual Assemblage by Derek Hurst

The evaluation produced a small assemblage of forty-two finds, most of which were pottery sherds. The following fabrics were represented: Deerfold/Lingern ware (fabric 150; 1 sherd), post-medieval redwares (fabric 78; 8 sherds), post-medieval buff ware (fabric 91; 4 sherds), modern stoneware (fabric 81.4; 1 sherd), and modern china (fabric 85; 8 sherds). Fabric numbers correspond with a reference series and developed and maintained by the County Archaeological Service Field Section (Hurst and Rees 1992).

5.1. Dating

The finds were used to provide terminus post quem dates for individual contexts as follows:

101 - 19th century

102 - Mid 18th century

103 - 19th or 20th century

104 - 20th century (possibly early 20th)

5.2. Discussion

The pottery assemblage was composed of common fabrics for the area dating from the 18th century onwards, except for a single sherd of Deerfold/Lingen pottery ware (context 102). The latter was residual, as it was associated with other finds dating to the 18th century.

Deerfold/Lingen ware is of particular interest, as it is a little understood industry that was based in the parishes of Wigmore and Brampton Bryan in north Herefordshire, to the north of Leominster. It is largely known from older finds such as the discovery of waste heaps in the 1920s (Watkins 1924) at the production centre. Excavations especially in the 1930s (Watkins 1931) and 1940s (Griffiths 1948, Marshall 1946) recorded some of the kiln sites. Since then potential kiln sites have continued to come to light, but no further excavation has been undertaken. In contrast this type of pottery has been little identified on consumer sites (eg Hereford; Vince 1985). The moated site known as Leominster Castle Moat is one of the first consumer sites to have produced a proportionally substantial assemblage of this pottery (Hurst 2002).

Documentary evidence for the industry commences in 1616 when the potters came to the attention of officials charged with looking after the royal forest of Deerfold for the Crown, as a result of the damage they were doing (Morgan 1956, 133-4). The likely outcome was either that they were fined for their activities or that the forest officials turned a blind eye in return for some bribe being paid. Forest officials of this period were often corrupt, and so it is likely that despite coming to the notice of officialdom that the potters probably continued in business.

There is no clear evidence that these potters were operating much earlier than the early 17th century. However, some of the building materials in a medieval style from the Leominster Castle Moat site were in a similar fabric to the Deerfold/Lingen ware, and this could indicate that earlier ceramic production may also have occurred here. However, none of the early post-medieval kilns so far discovered in the Deerfold/Lingen area produced building materials of medieval style, which, besides, are usually produced in specialised kilns of different design from standard pottery kilns. This supports the contention that another (and, as suggested here, earlier) phase of this industry still remains to be discovered.

5.3. Other finds

The other finds were typical of the 18th century and later (brick, tile, clay pipe glass bottle, stone and metal objects, and animal bone). None of these seemed to be of any intrinsic interest, except perhaps the stone gaming marble, which was made from Blue Lias, a rock type that is more typical of east and south-east Worcestershire than the Suckley area.

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6. General Discussion

The field evaluation highlights the problems associated with keyhole archaeology, where questions are asked and the answers are sought from looking at a microcosm instead of the whole. At The Boathouse, the upstanding and visible fabric of the remaining structure(s) stand on what appears to be a larger levelled platform on the hillside. However, due to the nature of the work, it was unable to determine the character of the platform, i.e. if it was wholly or partially man made, if it was the site of a larger construction and how it relates to the investigated structure and the cottage? In this light, it is difficult, even after the fieldwork, to come to any firm conclusions regarding the site.

First inspection of the square structure showed a similarity in dimension and form with the stone chimney construction attached to the eastern elevation of the farmhouse and this, together with the larger apparent platform, suggested that the structure may have been the surviving base of a chimney at the eastern end of an east-west aligned house, or possibly a detached kitchen. However, this was dismissed as after clearing the site it became apparent that the structure was four sided, whereas a chimneybreast is three sided with an enclosed hearth on the open side. It was also evident that there was no discernable content of ash or fuel ash slag within the area.

Another suggestion is that the feature may represent a former gardrobe. However, this also seems unlikely. The structure would be the right size for a single gardrobe, although the thickness of stone wall seems excessive. Also, unless the base of the gardrobe was totally cleaned of all traces of cess after its final use, it does not display evidence of having been used for the obvious function. Whilst a gardrobe of such construction may have been a feature of townhouses of the 14th –17th centuries, this structure would be excessive for a rural domestic building, which if existed, must have been of modest proportion.

The association between the stone structure, the surrounding flagged area and the remains of the brick building may be the key to interpretation. The brick structure is later than the stone structure, as it was noted to have been cut into and bonded to the north-western corner (Plate2). It is known that there was a piggery standing on the site into the 20th century (Marnie Caine pers comm.) and the northern and southern brick walls are still evident. The hearth with iron grate and lower levels of a fireback must have been used to prepare pigswill, which would have then been tipped into adjacent troughs. It seems that the stone floor was the floor of the piggery, being bounded and enclosed by the brick walls. The worn step of the entrance on the northern side was noted, with a stone flag on the external side of the entrance. The laying of the flag floor appears to be contemporary with the brick build of the piggery (based on the 19th century finds from below the floor and the use of brick typical of 19th century constructions[101]). It therefore seems clear that the flags were intended for this use at this time and do not represent the floor of an earlier domestic building on this site.

The logical extension from this is that the stone structure was related to the piggery, although the finds from within the backfill of the square cut foundation (Test-Pit A) give a TPQ date of half a century earlier and the brickwork of the swill preparation area is demonstrably later. The substantial thickness of the walls and the internal dimensions also cast doubt on this.

One observation that may be relevant is the girth of the walls, which suggest that it may have been a tall structure and one suggestion for function may be a dovecote or pigeon house. However, this would have been unusually small. The smallest recorded dovecote in Herefordshire is in the garden of a house at Mansel Lacy and is around 2.75 metres square (Cooke, undated) and this appears to be one of, if not the smallest recorded dovecote in the West Midlands.

7. Conclusion

The results of the archaeological project at The Boathouse, Suckley were inconclusive with regard to the function and date of a remnant upstanding stone structure, which was originally thought to be part of a detached kitchen associated with the 17th century timber-framed cottage. Dateable finds from the fieldwork indicate that the structure is likely to be an 18th century build, with a stone floored brick piggery built onto it in the 19th century. Various theories of function for the square built stone structure are put forward, i.e. chimney base, wardrobe, dovecote base and part of a piggery, all of which are not in congruence with the data. The finds assemblage spans the period from the 17th century to the 20th century. It may be that further intrusive investigation across the wider site would shed further light onto the development of the structure(s).

8. Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Marnie Caine for her interest, hospitality and patience. Thanks are also due to Derek Hurst of Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service for his expert analysis and comment upon the finds assemblage and to Martin Cook of Mercian Archaeology, for his involvement in the project

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Plates

Plate 1



The Boathouse looking east

Plate 2



The square structure looking east, with the flagged floor (front) and brick pigswill hearth on the right (scale 1 metre)

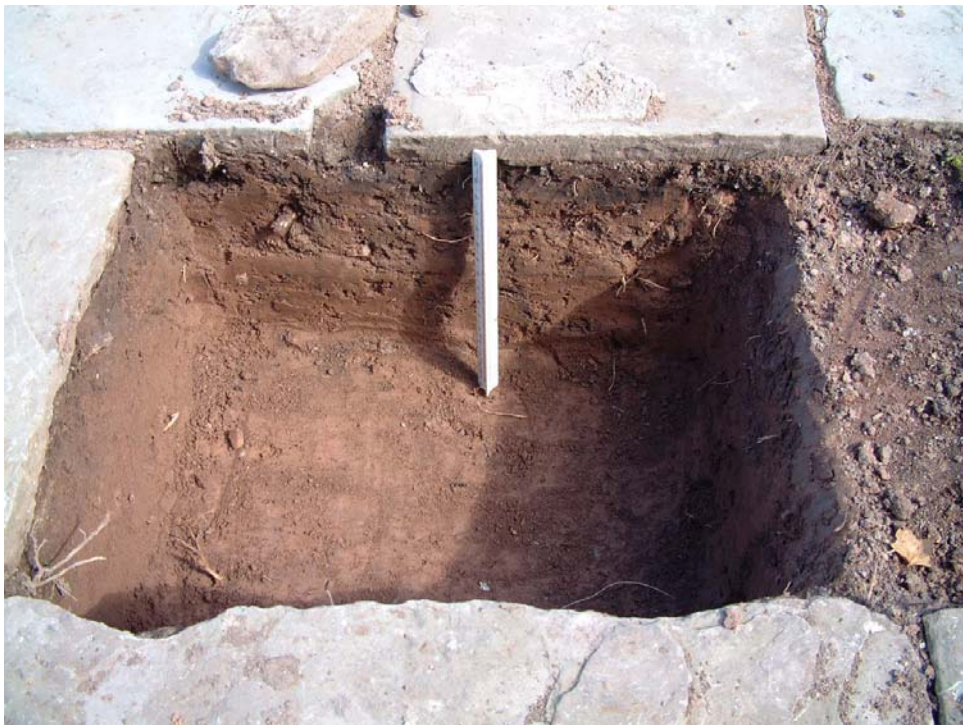
Plates

Plate 3



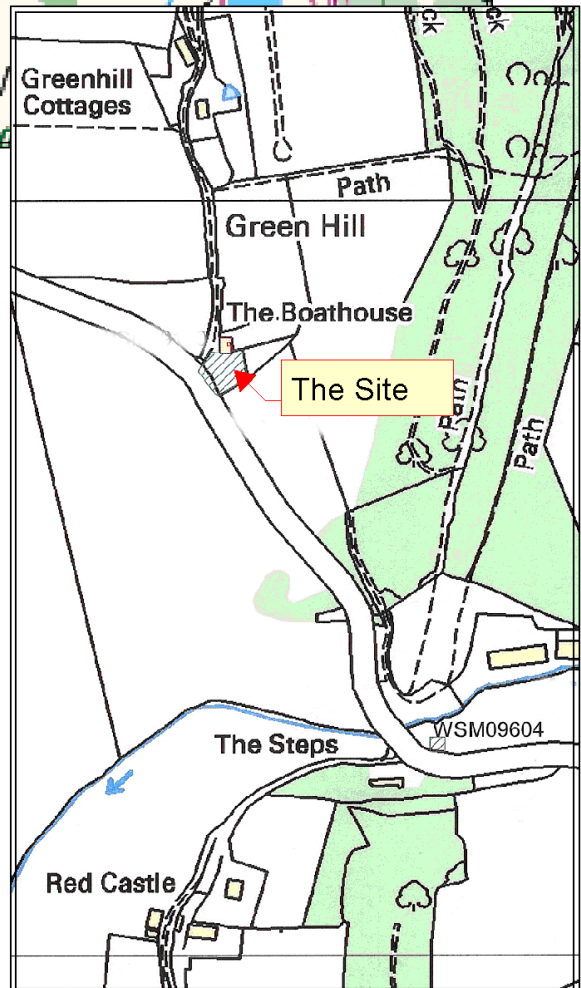
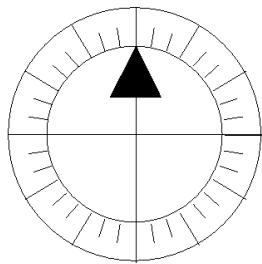
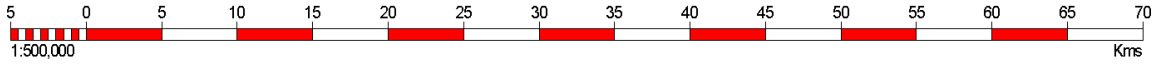
View to the west (scale 1 metre)

Plate 4



Test-pit B (Scale 30 cm)

Figure 1: Location of the Site



Location of the Site at Suckley

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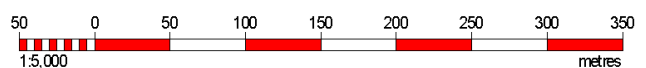
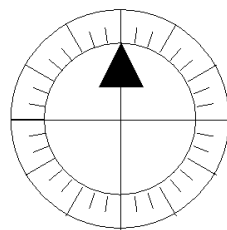
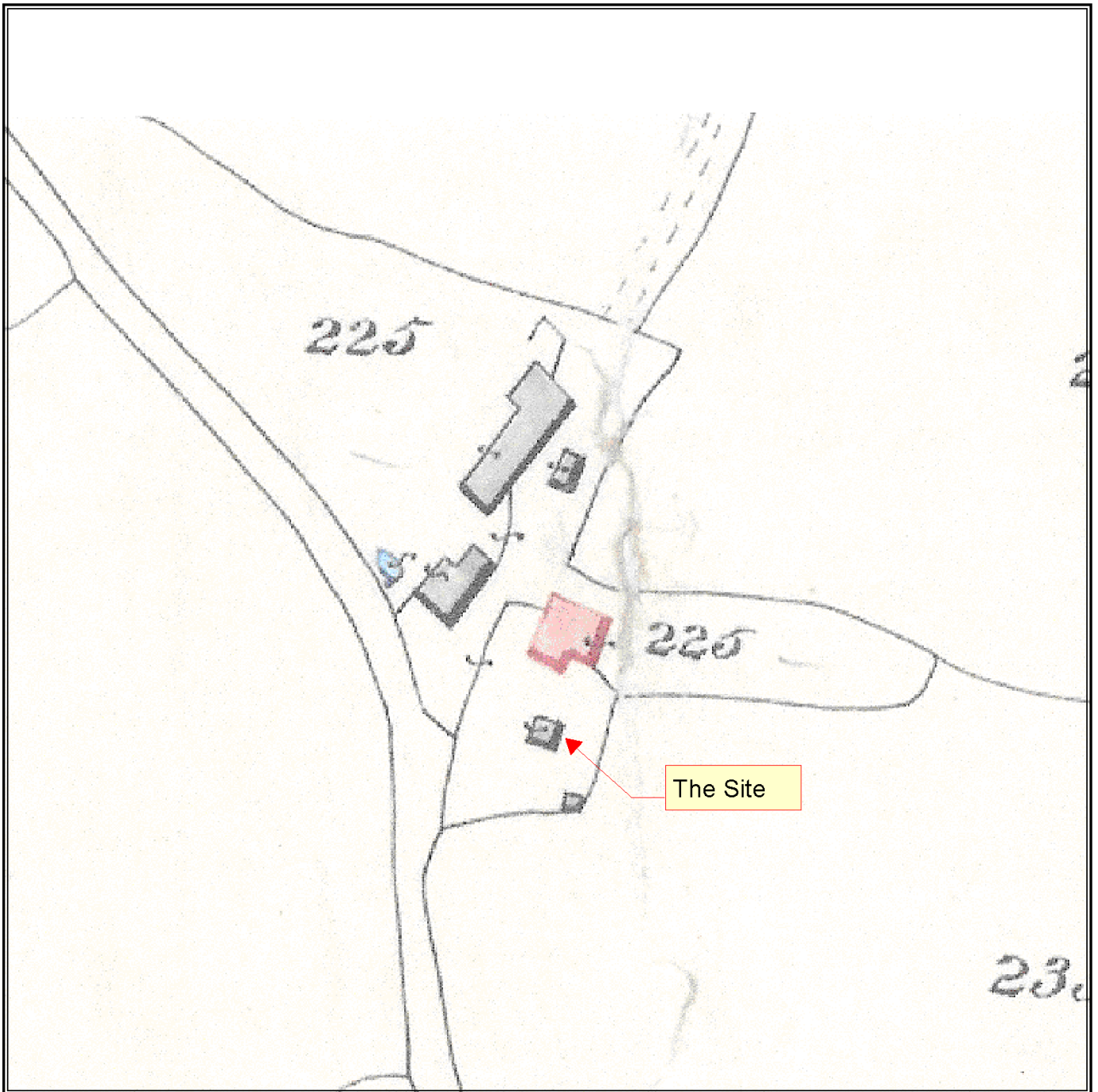


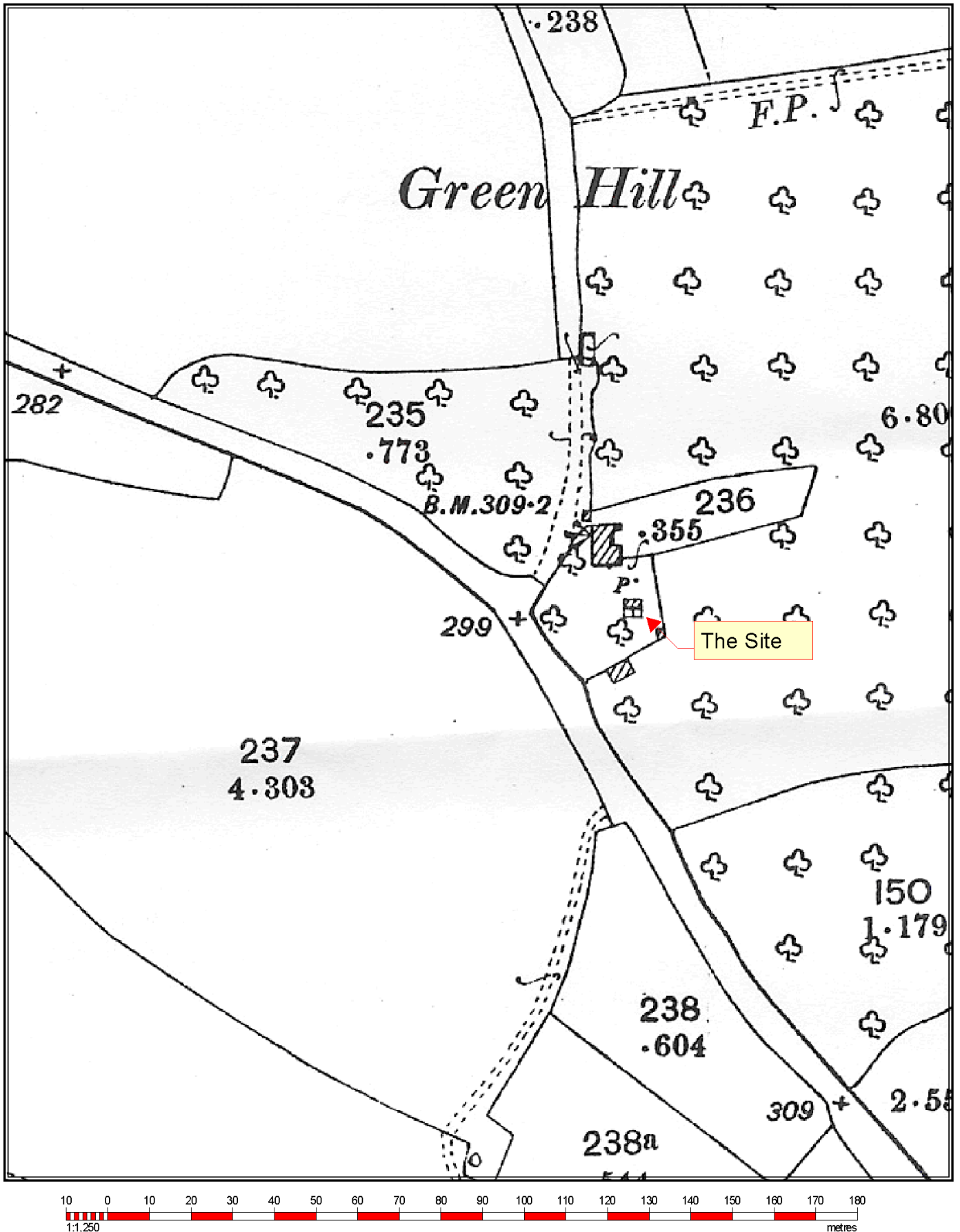
Figure 2: Extract from the Tithe Apportionment Map of Suckley (1838)



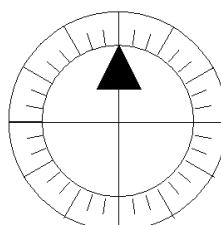
The Tithe Apportionment map showing the layout of buildings at The Boathouse. The cottage is shown in red.

Scale unknown

Figure 3: 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey (1905)



The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map showing the layout at the Boathouse.



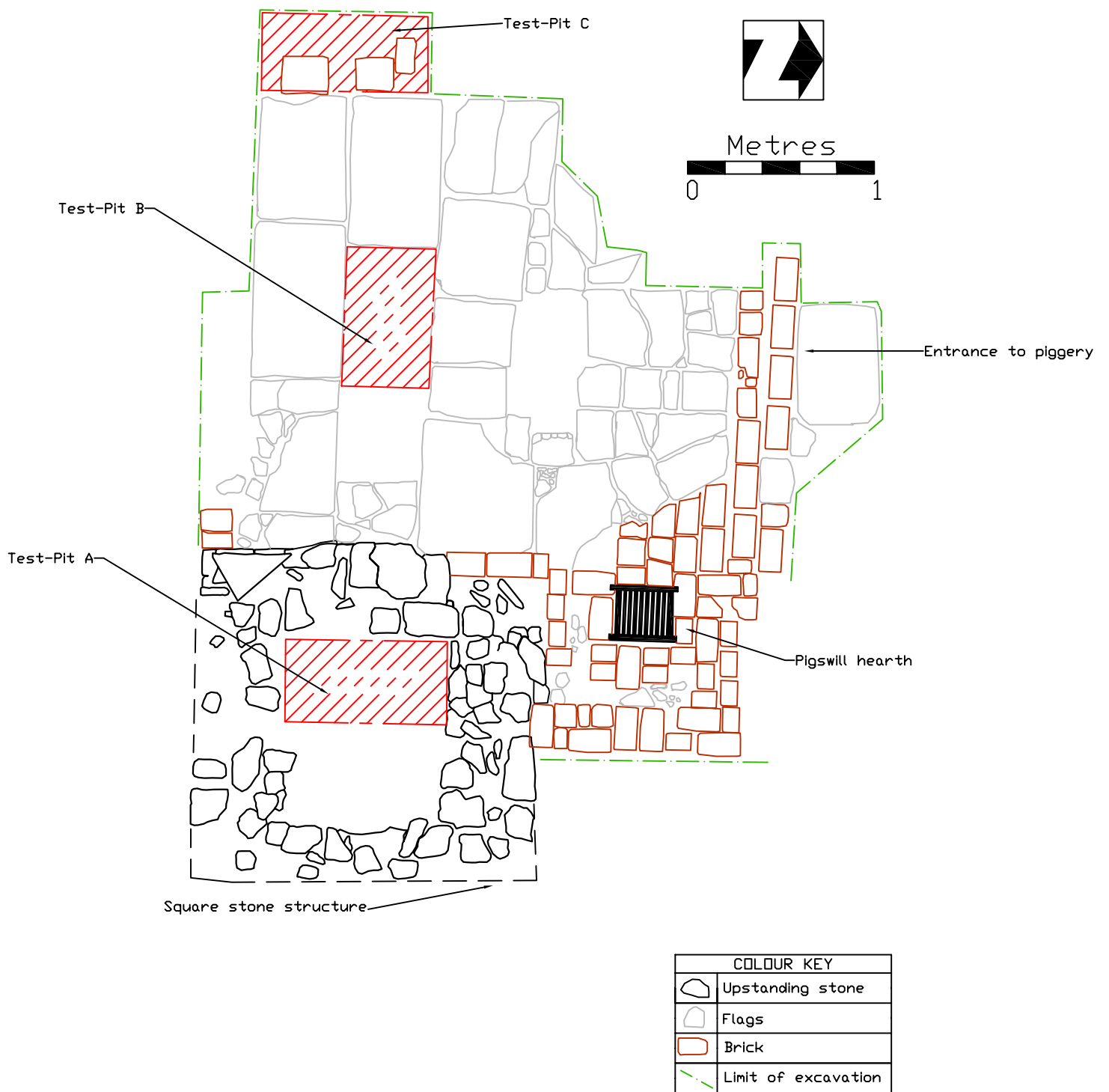


Figure 4: Plan of the site