An Archaeological Evaluation at Seaton Delaval Hall, Northumberland

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Executive Summary

In October 2012 Archaeological Research Services Ltd were commissioned by the National Trust to undertake an archaeological evaluation on land at Seaton Delaval Hall in Northumberland. Seaton Delaval Hall was designed by Sir John Vanbrugh and built between 1718 and 1729 for Admiral George Delaval. It is a Grade I Listed Building (236050) and lies within the Grade II Registered Seaton Delaval Park (2054). The evaluation was conducted in order to assess the likely impact on archaeological remains of the installation of a new electricity cable within the grounds of the hall.*

Eight test pits were excavated along the proposed route of the electricity cable; five in the immediate vicinity of the hall; and three in the area of Hall Farm. The test pits excavated in the vicinity of the hall revealed information relating to the mode of construction of the hall's courtyard as well as the amount of landscaping that took place to the north of the hall to give it its current setting. One test pit, excavated near the pleasure ground, has revealed evidence of a building or wall foundation, overlain by a gravel surface just within and on top of the ha-ha wall. Two test pits excavated within Hall Farm revealed probable evidence of landscaping outside the ha-ha, on its western side

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. In October 2012 Archaeological Research Services Ltd were commissioned by the National Trust to undertake an archaeological evaluation on land at Seaton Delaval Hall in Northumberland. Seaton Delaval Hall was designed by Sir John Vanbrugh in the 1720s for Admiral George Delaval. It is a Grade I Listed Building (236050) and lies within the Grade II* Registered Seaton Delaval Park (2054). The evaluation was carried out in order to investigate the presence/absence of archaeological deposits along the route of a proposed new electricity cable.

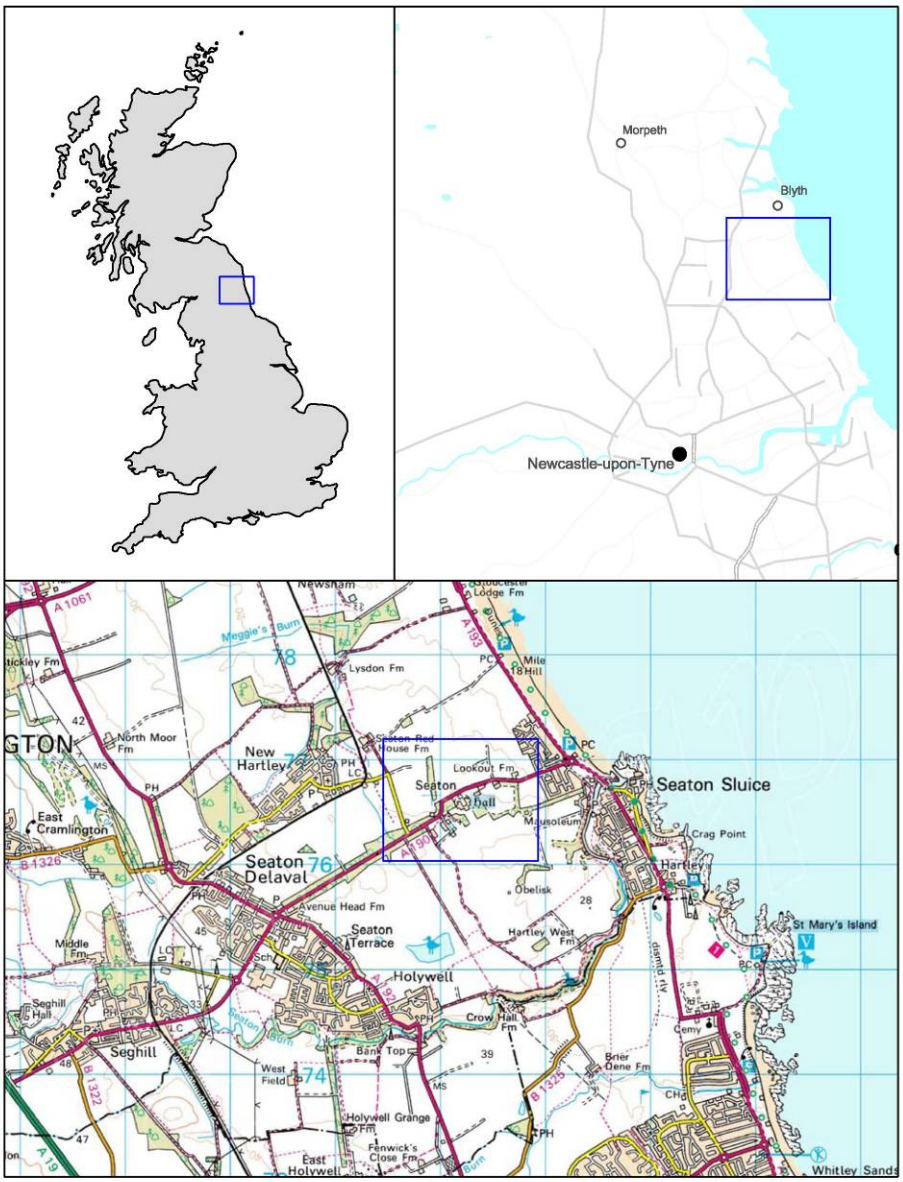

Figure 1: Site location Ordnance Survey data copyright OS, reproduced by permission, Licence no. 100045420

2. LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

2.1. The route of the proposed new electricity cable ran from an overhead cable pole to the southwest of the hall, through the formal garden, before emerging to run

around the north-western wing of the hall before turning south into the courtyard. Eight test pits will be located along this route (figs 2 &3). The site is centred at NZ 32243 76528

2.2. The solid geology of the area consists of Pennine Middle Coal Measures Foundation: Sandstone, overlying a superficial geology of Devensian-Diamicton Till (BGS 2012).

3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. Prehistoric

3.1.1. A cropmark of an oval-shaped enclosure containing a number of circular buildings is recorded *c.*1km north of Seaton Delaval Hall. This was thought to be the remains of a late-prehistoric farmstead. A number of flint artefacts were also discovered at Wheatbridge Park to the west of the hall in 2002 dating to the Neolithic and later prehistoric period.

3.2. Romano-British

3.2.1. Suspected Romano-British settlement is noted in Seaton Delaval village consisting of cropmark enclosures, however these have now been built-over with housing.

3.3. Medieval

3.3.1. The De La Vals were loyal supporters of William the Conqueror and were gifted land in Northumberland in the 1080s as a reward for helping him at the Battle of Hastings. This grant included the manor of Seaton. The Grade I Listed Parish Church of Our Lady (236043) was founded in the late 12th century as the manorial chapel and the medieval village of Seaton was most likely located in association with this monument. Ridge and furrow earthworks are present around the estate, testifying to the medieval occupation of this area.

3.3.2 A list of Northumberland castles and owners in 1415 refers to a castle at Seaton Delaval as 'Turris de Seton de la uale' owned by Willimi Wychester Chlr (Anon 1415). It is also referred to in John Leland's itinerary of 1535-1543 as Delawele Castle (Toulmin-Smith 1910, 63). The castle is first depicted on maps dating to 1600 (Phillips *pers. comm.*) and is marked on the Ordnance Survey First Edition map dating to the 1860s. This shows the 'supposed site of castle' to the west of the Church of Our Lady. Geophysical survey by Durham University in May 2012 identified structural remains to the north of this location, *c.*40m southeast of Test Pit 6 (Villis and Hale 2012). These could potentially be the remains of the documented castle site. The castle may have evolved into the first hall at Seaton Delaval, which was extensively improved in 1628, creating a Jacobean mansion house (Villis and Hale 2012, 4).

3.4. Post-medieval- Modern

3.4.1. The majority of recorded sites in the vicinity of Seaton Delaval Hall date to the post-medieval occupation of the site. Construction of the present hall began in 1718 following designs produced by Sir John Vanbrugh for Admiral George Delaval.

This development included the demolition of the Jacobean mansion and old castle (Villis and Hale 2012, 4). The Grade I Listed Hall (236050) was completed in 1729, after the deaths of both Admiral Delaval and Sir John Vanburgh. It sits within a Grade II* Registered Park and Garden (2054) which also contains several Listed Buildings of various grades including the Orangery, Icehouse, ha-ha, statues and gate piers.

3.4.2. The hall was damaged by fire in 1822 when the central block was gutted along with the east wing whose shell was subsequently demolished. The house was partially restored in 1862-63 when the central block was re-roofed; however it remained an empty shell internally. Further restoration was undertaken in 1959 and the early 1960s, but the house remained uninhabited until the 1980s (Villis and Hale 2012, 4). The National Trust bought the property in 2009 and is currently engaged in the research and conservation of the site.

3.4.3. A range of cottages are depicted to the west of the hall on the Ordnance Survey First Edition Map. These are known to date from at least 1780 and installation of the new electricity cable had the potential to impact upon any remains of these structures. An overlay of the location of these cottages on a modern Ordnance Survey Map is provided in Figure 4, with detail of the test pit locations provided in Figure 5.

4. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

4.1. The aim of the archaeological evaluation was to gather sufficient information to establish the extent, condition, character and date of any archaeological features and deposits within the area of proposed development, and to establish the potential that the proposed development had to impact on significant remains associated with the Grade 1 Listed Hall and its Grade II* Registered Park and Garden.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. The archaeological evaluation comprised eight test pits (Figs. 2-3). Five test pits were dug in the immediate vicinity of the hall and three were located within Hall Farm, to the west of the pleasure ground. The test pit locations were positioned in order to investigate the survival of archaeological deposits along the route of a proposed new electricity cable.

5.2. Eight test pits, each measuring 1m x 1m, were excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2m below ground level. This depth was determined by the inability to safely excavate the pits any further using only hand tools. Each pit was excavated by hand using trowels and hand shovels to remove the contents.

5.3. The deposits were recorded according to the normal principles of stratigraphic excavation. Each context was recorded on pro-forma record sheets which included the following: character and contextual relationships; detailed description (dimensions and shape; soil components, colour, texture and consistency); interpretation and phasing as well as cross-references to the drawn, photographic and finds registers.

Figure 2:

A plan of Seaton Delaval Hall showing the locations of Test Pits 1-5

Scale = 1:500 at A4

Key:

N

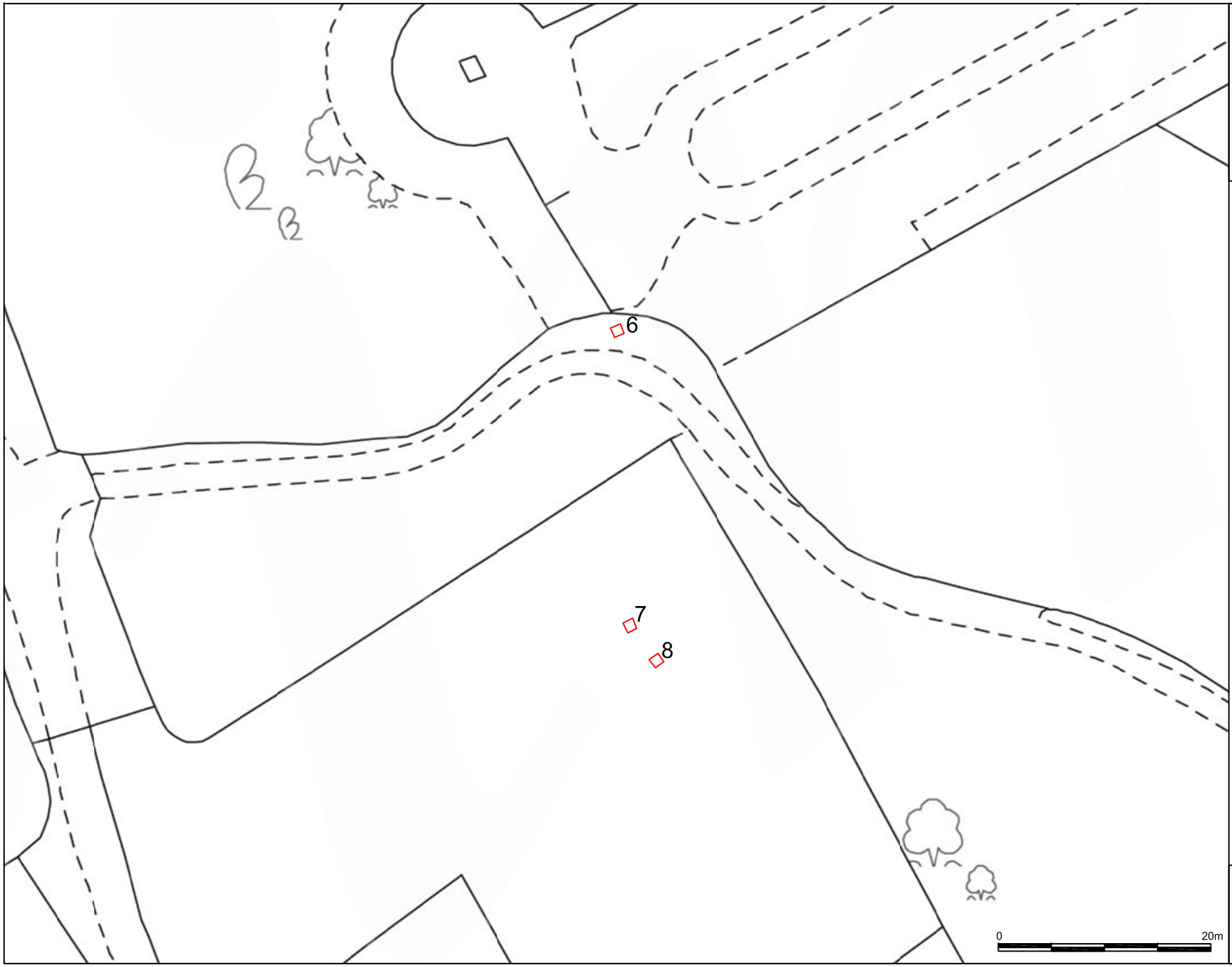

Figure 3:

A plan of the fields around Hall Farm showing the locations of Test Pits 6-8

Scale = 1:500 at A4

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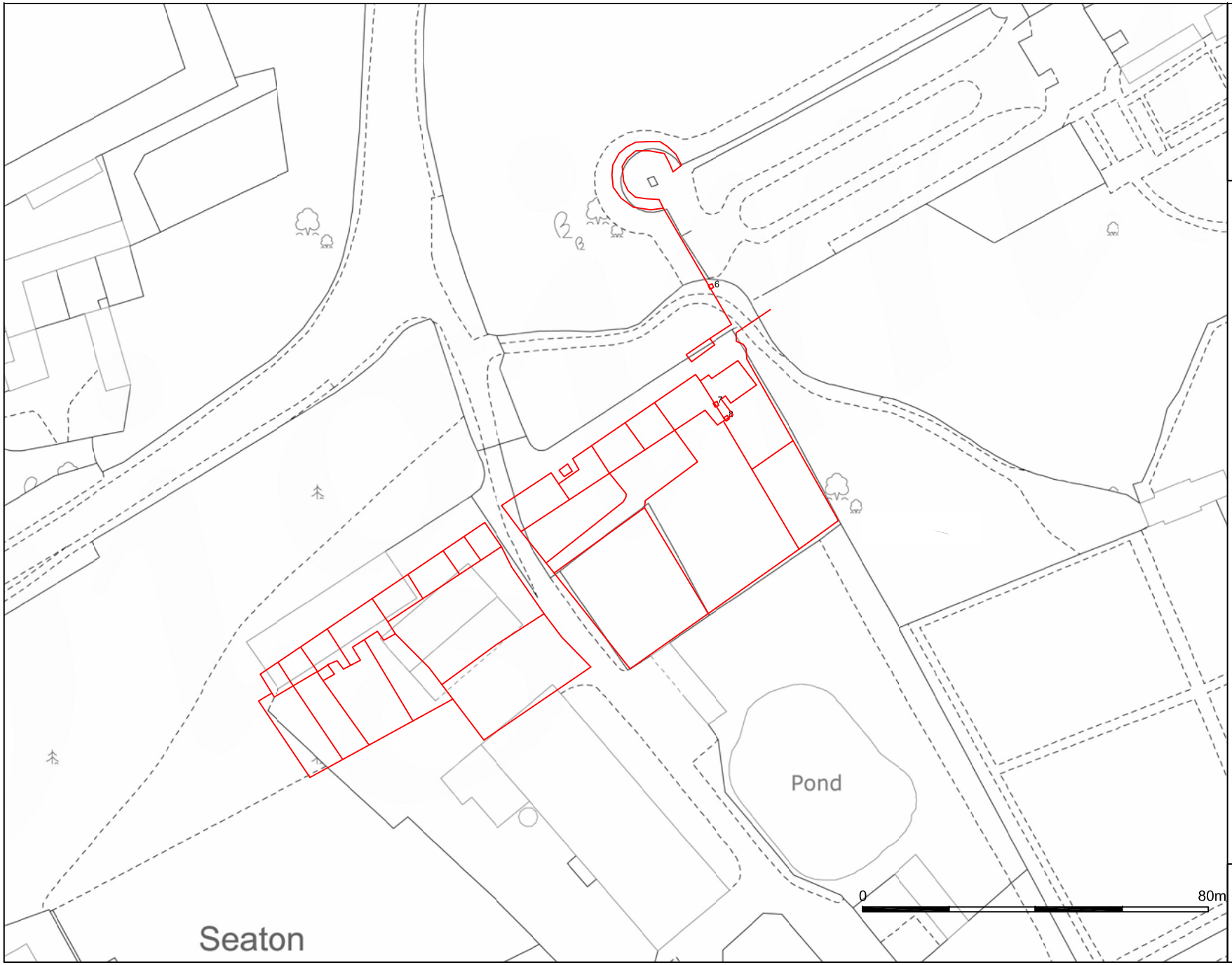

Figure 4:

Overlay of the location of Seaton cottages from the Ordnance Survey First Edition Map of the 1860s

Scale = 1:1250 at A4

Key:

N

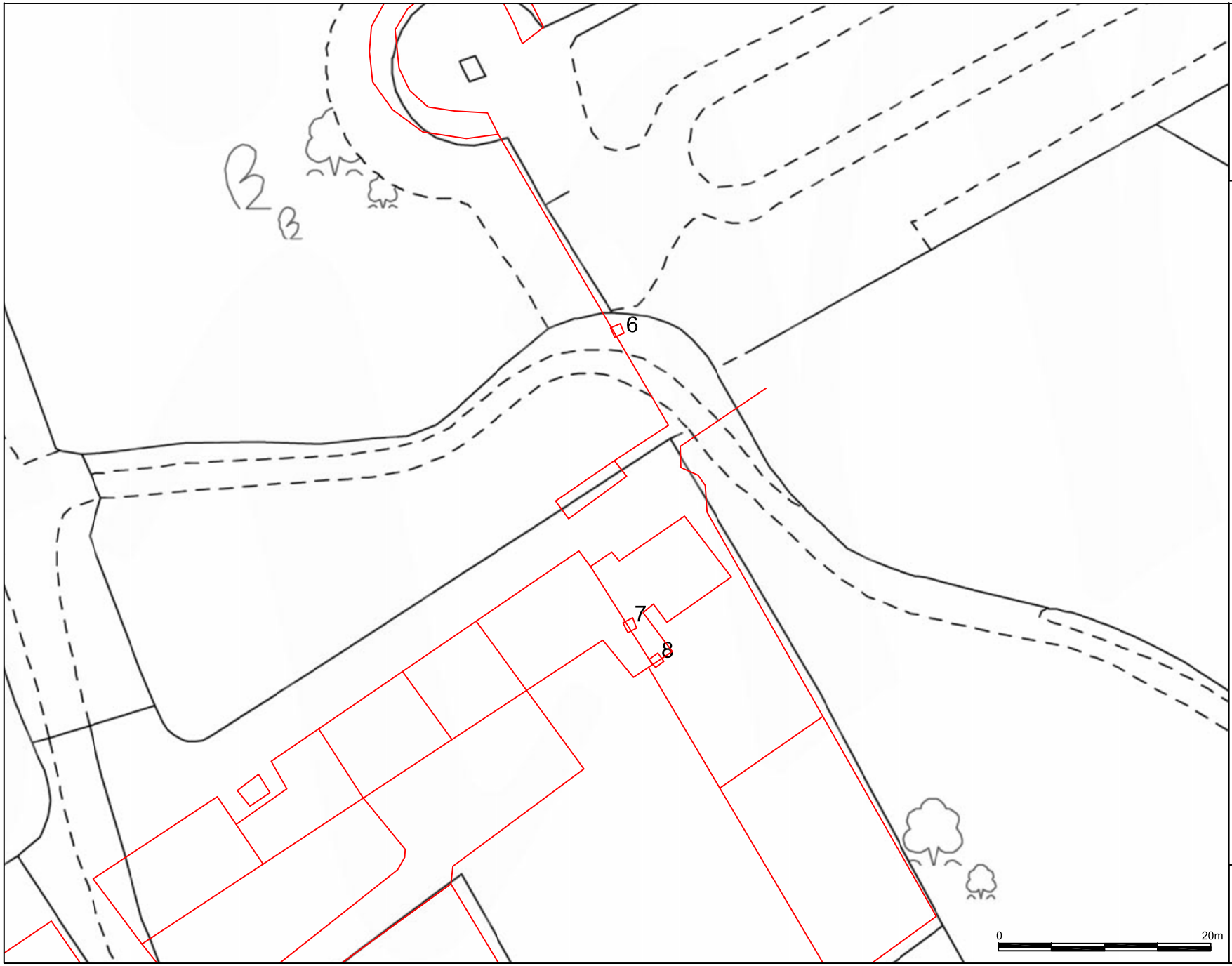

Figure 5:

Overlay of test pit locations in relation to the Ordnance Survey First Edition Map of the 1860s

Scale = 1:500 at A4

Key:

N

5.4. A single plan and a single section of each test pit was drawn at a scale of 1:10. All deposits and the base of each test pit were levelled and heights were expressed in metres above Ordnance Datum.

5.5. A photographic record was maintained including photographs of each test pit. All images were taken in digital format, and contained a graduated photographic scale.

6. EVALUATION TEST PIT RESULTS

6.1. Test Pits 1-4 were excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2m; Test Pits 5 and 8 were excavated to a depth of 0.6m, and Test Pits 6 and 7 were excavated to a depth of 0.5m.

6.2. Test Pit 1 (Fig. 6)

6.2.1. Test Pit 1 was located to the north of the north-western corner of the hall, adjacent to the tarmac trackway on a turf covered slope. The turf and topsoil, consisting of a dark brown silty loam (101), with a depth of approximately 0.2m, was removed to reveal a coarse grey silty clay containing a high proportion of demolition material (102). This had a maximum depth of 0.25m and contained roof tile, 2" bricks, glass, bone and pottery fragments (Figure 7). Context (102) overlay a thin deposit of coarse ash and coal (103) with a maximum depth of 0.08m which was removed to reveal a medium grey/brown sand deposit containing more demolition material (104). Context (104) contained roof tile, 2" bricks, glass, bone and pottery. This demolition material overlay a coarse deposit of sandstone chips in a sand matrix (105) with a maximum depth of 0.11m. The final deposit encountered consisted of a fine grey clay with sandstone inclusions (106) which possibly represented a re-deposited natural. No discrete features were discovered in this test pit, and nor was the natural substrate reached.

6.3. Test Pit 2 (Fig. 7)

6.3.1. Test Pit 2 was located to the north of the north-western wing of the hall, to the east of Test Pit 1, on a turf covered slope. The turf and topsoil consisting of a dark brown silty loam (201), with a depth of approximately 0.19m, was removed to reveal a coarse brown/red silty clay (202) containing pottery fragments, ceramic building materials, glass and bone. This had a maximum depth of 0.2m and overlay a coarse grey/brown sandy clay with frequent stone inclusions and a maximum depth of 0.2m (203). Beneath this deposit a thin layer of crushed grey mortar with a maximum depth of 0.1m (204) was uncovered overlying a deposit of finely textured grey sand with a maximum depth of 0.16m (205). This overlay a coarse yellow grey deposit of construction debris (206) with a maximum depth of 0.07m. This was removed to reveal a coarse pale brown yellow sandy clay with frequent sandstone inclusions (207). This extended beyond the limit of excavation. No discrete features were discovered in this test pit, and the natural substrate was not exposed.

6.4. Test Pit 3 (Fig. 8)

6.4.1. Test Pit 3 was located to the north of the west wing of the hall on a turf covered slope. The turf overlay a green plastic mesh and was removed to reveal topsoil

consisting of aerated dark brown sandy clay with a maximum depth of 0.15m (302). The topsoil overlay a coarse grey clayey sand deposit containing a high proportion of demolition debris (303). This had a maximum depth of 0.19m and contained corroded metal nails, pottery fragments, ceramic building materials and bone. A current blue plastic water pipe was also uncovered within this deposit (303). Beneath the demolition debris a coarse grey clayey sand (304) was uncovered. This contained further demolition debris and had a maximum depth of 0.19m. Context (304) overlay a coarse grey clayey sand containing frequent sandstone chips with a maximum depth of 0.26m (305) which was removed to reveal a deposit of large sandstone rubble blocks within a shallow grey silt matrix (306). This had a depth of approximately 0.2m and overlay a pale brown clayey sand with few inclusions (307). This layer extended below the limit of excavation. No features were discovered in this test pit.

6.5. Test Pit 4 (Fig. 9)

6.5.1. Test Pit 4 was located within the courtyard area to the east of the west wing of the hall, on a level gravel surface. The pea gravel lay within a dark grey silt deposit (401) and had a maximum depth of 0.07m. This was removed to reveal a coarse orange sand containing small angular sandstone chips (402) with a depth of 0.09m. Beneath this layer was a coarse orange-brown sandy clay containing gravel-sized stone inclusions with a depth of 0.09m (403), which was removed to reveal a coarse orange deposit of compacted crushed sandstone with a depth of 0.05m (404). Context (404) overlay a grey orange sand deposit with small rounded stone inclusions and a maximum depth of 0.07m (405) in turn overlying a thin orange sand deposit containing small stone fragments with a maximum depth of 0.07m (406). Beneath this deposit, large sandstone rubble blocks were uncovered within an orange brown silt matrix (407). This matrix had a depth of 0.2m and was removed to reveal a dark grey sandy silt with frequent stone inclusions and flecks of charcoal (408). Context (408) had a depth of 0.28m and contained bone and a corroded metal object. Beneath this deposit an orange brown sand containing gravel-sized stones and sand stone chips was uncovered (409). This extended below the limit of excavation. No features were discovered in this test pit.

6.6. Test Pit 5 (Fig. 10)

6.6.1. Test Pit 5 was located within the courtyard area to the north of the concrete path and east of the west wing of the hall, on a level gravel surface. The concrete path (501) had a depth of approximately 0.08m. The pea gravel lay within a dark grey silt deposit (502) and had a maximum depth of 0.07m. This was removed to reveal a brown grey clayey sand containing infrequent pea gravel, with a depth of 0.17m (503). This filled a vertical cut (510) for a live electricity cable (506). The remainder of the test pit contained a yellow sand deposit with frequent sandstone blocks (504). This had a maximum depth of 0.19m and overlay a dark brown sandy clay with frequent charcoal flecks. This deposit was cut by a 0.24m wide trench (509) for a second active electricity cable (507) filled with yellow grey sand (508). Excavation of this test pit was stopped at the level of the second electricity cable. Deposit (504) extended beyond the limit of excavation.

6.7. Test Pit 6 (Figs. 11 and 12)

6.7.1 Test Pit 6 was located adjacent to the public footpath leading to the Church of Our Lady, immediately inside the area of the ha-ha associated with the hall. The turf and topsoil consisted of dark brown silty loam (601), with a depth of 0.01m. It was removed to reveal a shallow layer of gravel within a blackish silt matrix (607). This had a depth of 0.07m and overlay a deposit of fire reddened stone, possibly degraded sandstone (602). Context (602) had a depth of 0.02m and overlay a deposit of black ashy silt with flecks of brick or tile (603). This had a depth of 0.02-0.04m and was removed to reveal a mid-brown silty clay with frequent large stone inclusions (606). Context (606) had a depth of 0.21m and was cut by a vertical construction trench (604) for a large sandstone structure consisting of angular stones bonded in mortar with an area of possible mortar screed (605). This had dimensions of 0.36m in depth and 0.5m in width within the excavated area of the test pit. This feature was left in-situ and formed the limit of excavation.

6.8. Test Pit 7 (Fig. 13)

6.8.1 Test Pit 7 was located within Hall Farm to the west of the ha-ha associated with the hall, in a grazed paddock. The turf and topsoil consisting of dark brown clayey silt with a depth of 0.27m (701) was removed to reveal a pale brown silty clay with frequent sandstone chips and degraded stones (702). This had a depth of 0.29m and contained glass and corroded metal fragments. This deposit overlay a surface of degraded sandstone slabs or bedrock (703) across the entire test pit and formed the limit of excavation

6.9. Test Pit 8 (Fig. 14)

6.9.1 Test Pit 8 was located within Hall Farm to the west of the ha-ha associated with the hall and to the south of Test Pit 7. The turf and topsoil, consisting of dark brown silty clay loam with infrequent sandstone chips (801), with a depth of 0.22m was removed to reveal a light-brown grey silty sand containing frequent flecks of mortar, broken bricks and sandstone chips, as well as some larger stones (802). This had a depth of 0.35m and contained pottery fragments corroded metal, ceramic building material, glass and bone. Within this deposit a short section of walling was partially revealed along the eastern section of the test pit (803). This consisted of six rubble stones and was two courses deep, running for an excavated length of 0.6m. No discernable cut for this feature was noted. Beneath this walling (803) and deposit (802) a surface of degraded sandstone slabs or bedrock was revealed across the entire test pit (804) and formed the limit of excavation.

Figure 6 Test Pit 1.

Figure 7 Test Pit 1; partial bricks located in (102).

Figure 8 Test Pit 2.

Figure 9 Test Pit 3

Figure 10 Test Pit 4

Figure 11 Test Pit 5

Figure 12 Test Pit 6.

Figure 13 Test Pit 6.

Figure 14 Test Pit 7.

Figure 15 Test Pit 8.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1. The test pits excavated at Seaton Delaval Hall have revealed information relating to the mode of construction of the hall's courtyard as well as the amount of landscaping that took place on the north frontage of the hall. Test Pits 1-3 contained significant depths of deposits of building debris, rubble and sandstone chips showing that the ground level in front of the hall has been artificially raised, most likely to create the current sloping apron between the hall and the road. A buried soil horizon (307) was uncovered in Test Pit 3 at a depth of 0.85m below the present ground level and this may represent the ground level at the time of the hall's construction (33.612m aOD). Within the courtyard Test Pits 4 and 5 contained a layer of crushed sandstone chips (402)/(504) beneath the present gravel surface, most likely forming a levelling deposit for the current surface. In Test Pit 4 a previous gravel surface (403) was recorded overlying a layer of compacted, crushed sandstone chips (404). These deposits represent one or two previous courtyard surfaces which might date to the construction of the hall. Beneath these deposits the ground consisted of several layers of made-ground and levelling deposits, showing that the present ground level in the courtyard is significantly higher than its previous level. No buried soil horizon or ground surface was encountered within the maximum depth of the test pit.

7.2. The test pits excavated near the pleasure ground and in Hall Farm have revealed evidence of a building or wall foundation, overlain by a gravel surface within the enclosed area of the ha-ha, as well as probable evidence of landscaping outside the ha-ha. These test pits were located in order to assess the survival of archaeological features associated with the row of cottages known to occupy this location from at least 1780. The map overlays provided in Figures 4 and 5 show the location of Test Pits 6-8 in association with the mapped evidence of the cottages from the Ordnance Survey First Edition. There was some discrepancy noted between the Ordnance Survey First Edition and the Modern mapping which becomes significant when the size of the excavated areas is small. As the test pits were only 1mx1m in size, it is difficult to establish the relationship between the excavated features and the mapped evidence with any degree of certainty.

7.3. Test Pit 6 contained sandstone rubble wall foundation which may represent the rear side of the ha-ha, being close to the projected line of the ha-ha in this infilled area. Although on balance it appears more likely that this wall foundation represents an earlier structure demolished to make way for the development of the pleasure grounds in this area. The sandstone foundation was overlain by two deposits showing evidence of burning, indicating that this structure may have been destroyed by fire. These burnt deposits were overlain by a gravel surface which is likely to represent a gravel footpath running along the inside, and along the top of, the ha-ha.

7.4. Test pits 7 and 8 were located within the general area of the cottages, seen on the First Edition OS map, however no evidence of the cottages or their demolition was encountered within the excavated areas. The test pits were excavated onto a sandstone surface (703) and (804). Owing to the small size of the excavation, it was not possible to ascertain whether this surface was laid or whether it represented the natural sandstone solid geology of this area. If it was a laid surface it may be associated with the cottages, however on balance it is more likely that the deposit is the natural bedrock. If this is the case, it indicates that the ground level in this area

has been significantly lowered. It seems most likely that this landscaping coincides with the construction of the ha-ha and the need to level out and reduce the ground to the west of it. This suggests that this stretch of the ha-ha was built into an excavated trench, rather than being built as an upstanding wall and infilled behind. The short section of walling noted in Test Pit 8 (803) is difficult to relate to features noted on the Ordnance Survey First Edition, however it may represent a section of probable garden wall located immediately south of Test Pit 8 on the First Edition map. Taken together with the cartographic evidence, the excavations seem to provide a useful insight into the mode of construction of the ha-ha and would seem to suggest the cottages were located somewhere in the gap between test pits 6 and 7, several metres to the north of their mapped location. This mapping discrepancy would explain the lack of structural evidence in test pits 7 and 8. The discovery of structural remains apparently earlier than the ha-ha in test pit 6 would therefore seem to indicate a structure on the site not only pre-dating the cottages, but the laying out of the gardens at the Hall as well.

8. PUBLICITY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND COPYRIGHT

8.1. Any publicity will be handled by the client.

8.2. The National Trust will retain full copyright over any and all report materials arising from this project. ARS Ltd shall surrender such copyright on receipt of final payment.

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9.1. All statements and opinions contained within this report arising from the works undertaken are offered in good faith and compiled according to professional standards. No responsibility can be accepted by the author/s of the report for any errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by any third party, or for loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in any such report(s), howsoever such facts and opinions may have been derived.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

10.1. Archaeological Research Services Ltd would like to thank all those involved with this work, in particular Mark Newman, Helen Nisbet and Kate Phillips from the National Trust.

11. REFERENCES

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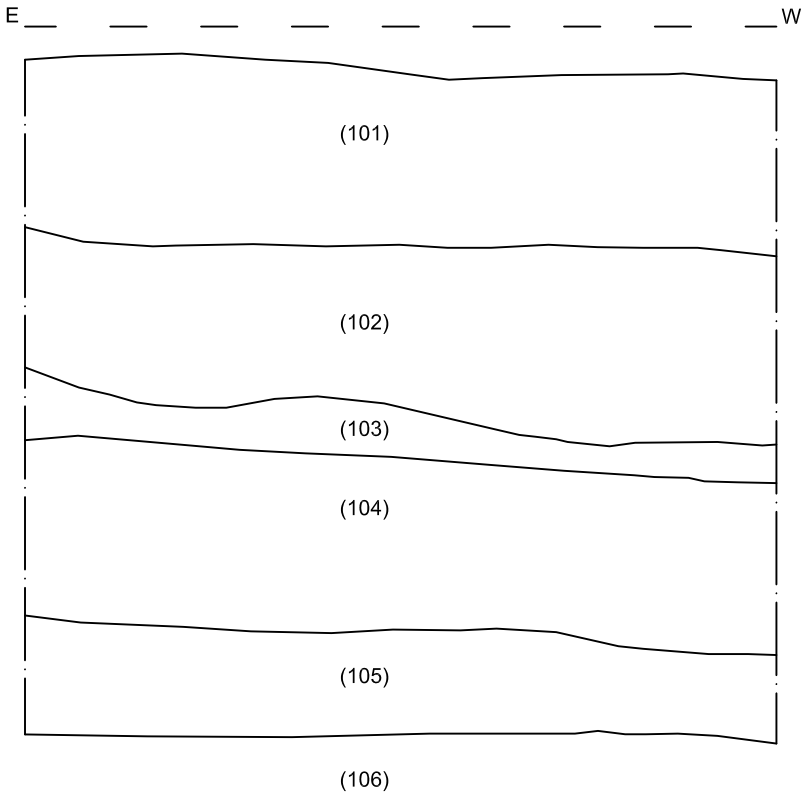
Anon, 1415. *Nomina Castrorum et Fortaliciorum infra Comitatum Northumbrie*

North Facing Section of Test Pit 1



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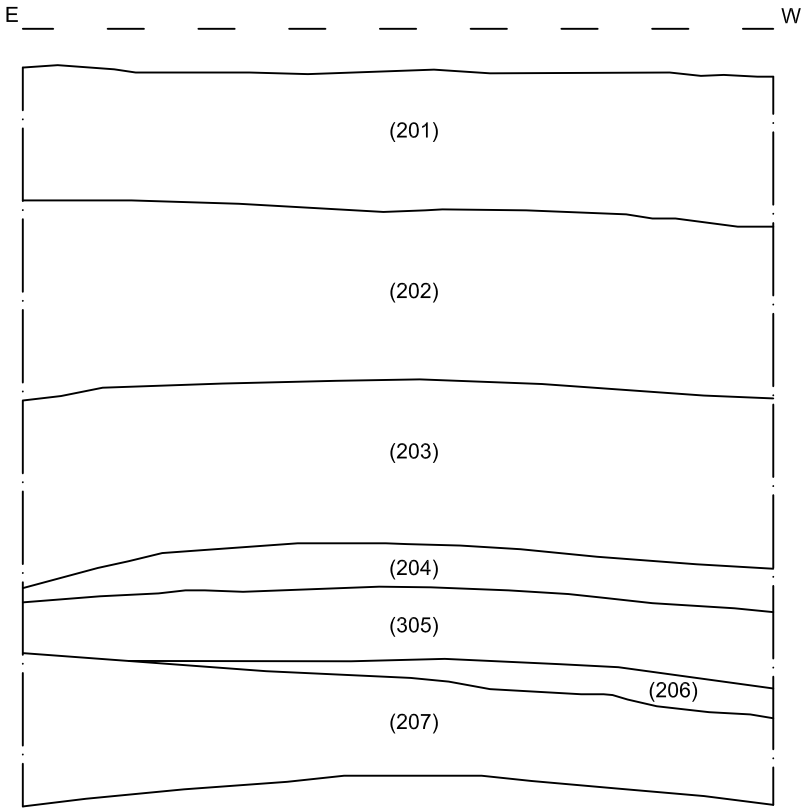

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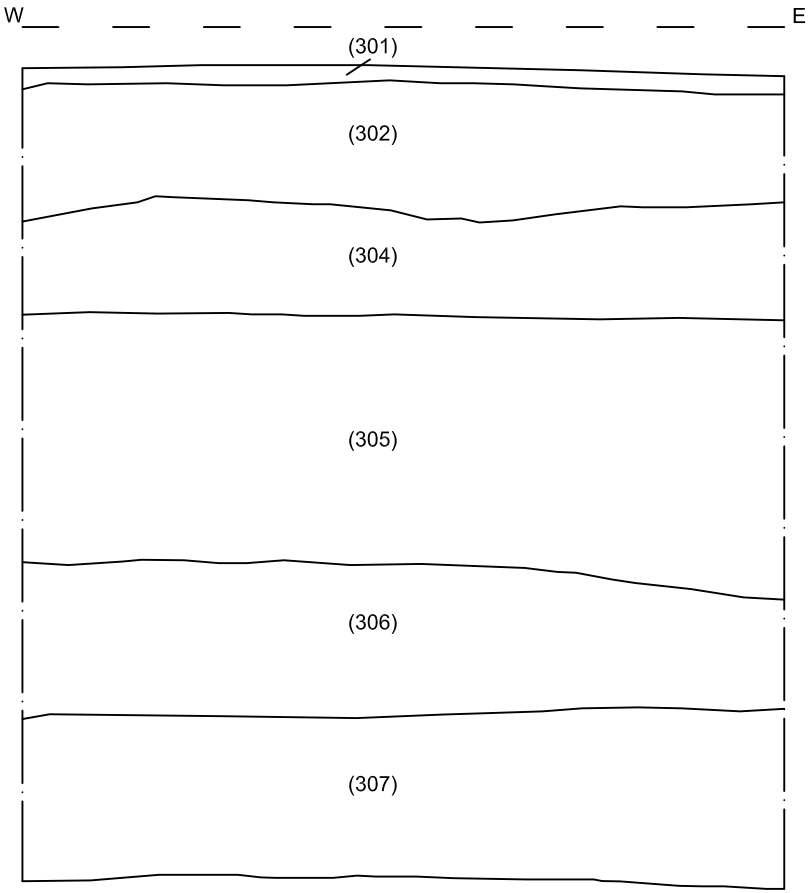
Scale: 1:10

Figure 16 Sections of Test Pits 1 and 2

Key:

Notes:

North Facing Section of Test Pit 3



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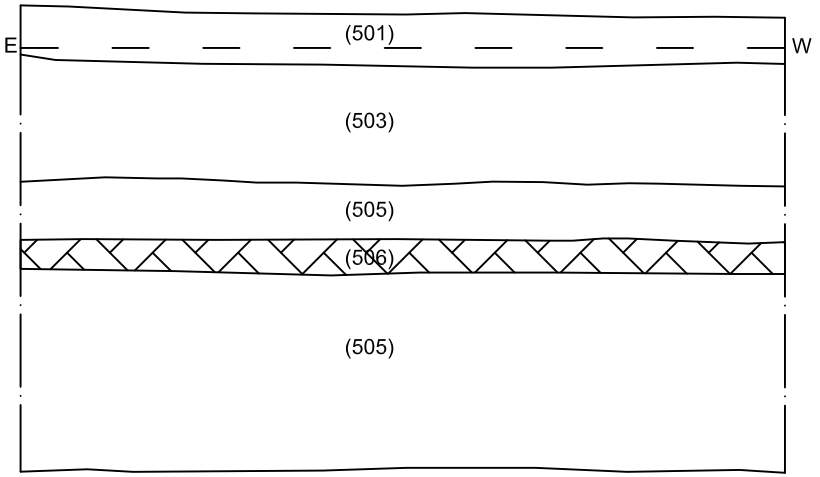

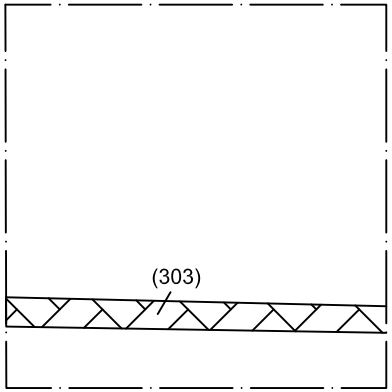

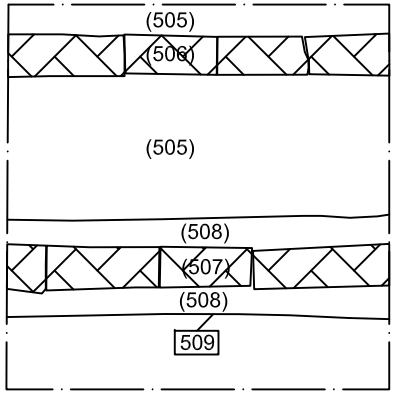

Plan of Test Pit 3 [scale 1:20]

Plan of Test Pit 5 [scale 1:20]

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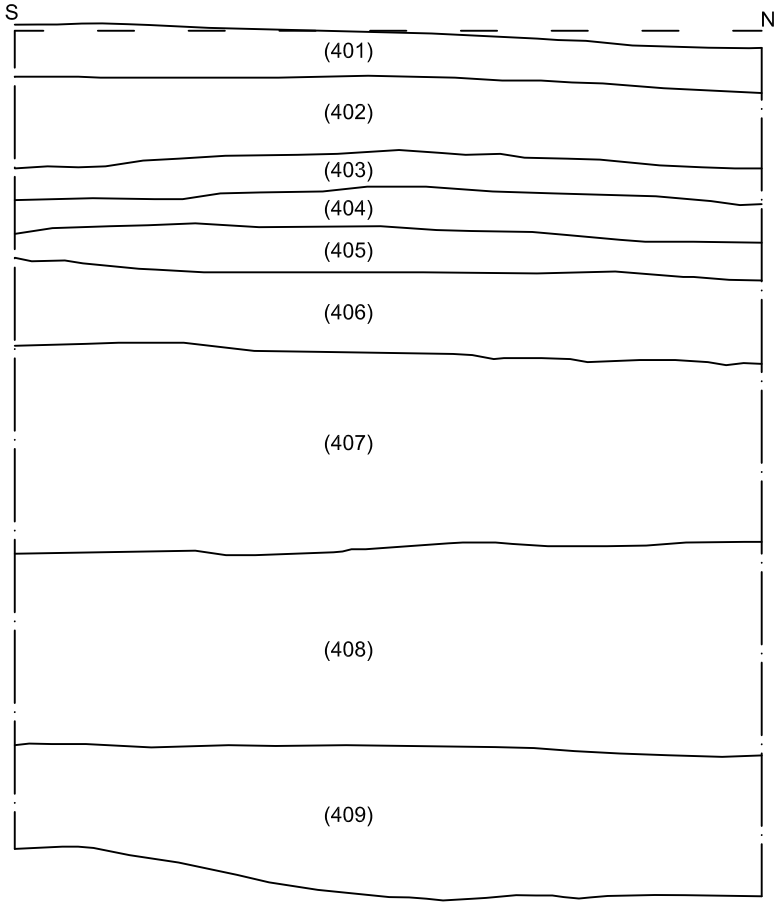
Figure 17 Plans and Sections of Test Pits 3 and 5

Key:

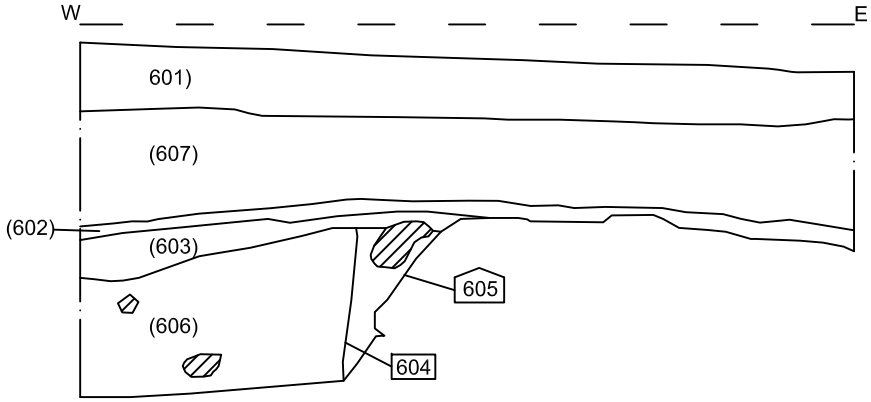
Pipe or cable

Notes:

East Facing Section of Test Pit 4



North Facing Section of Test Pit 6



Plan of Test Pit 6

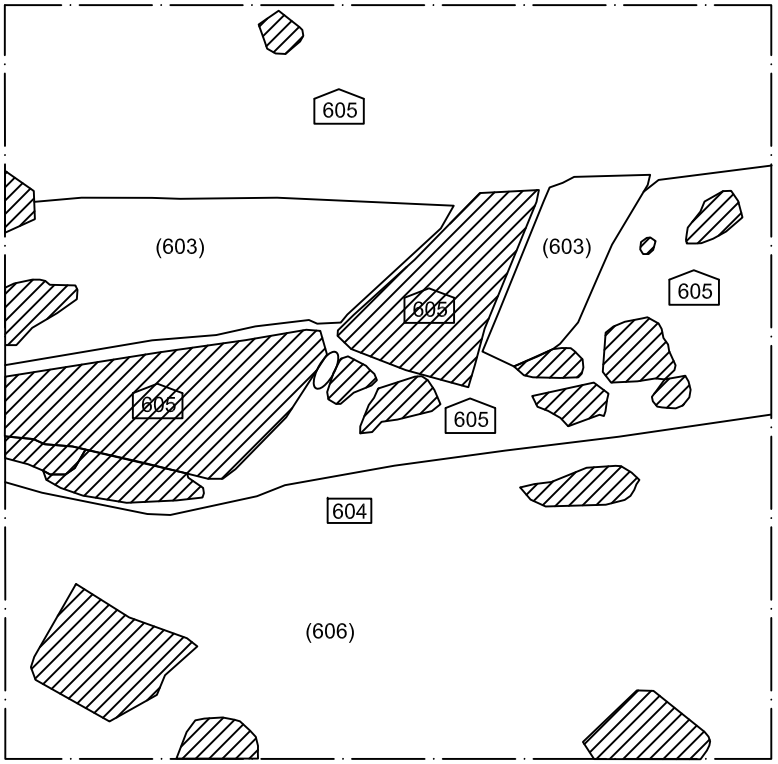


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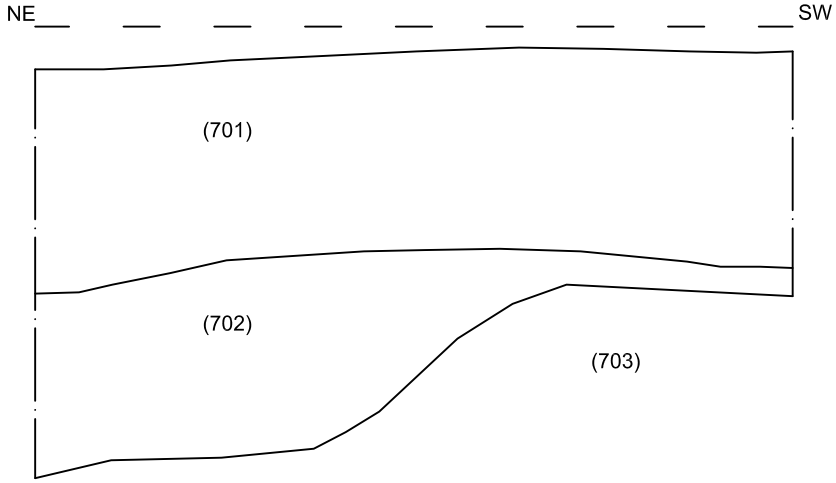
Figure 18 Plans and sections of Test Pits 4 and 6

Key:

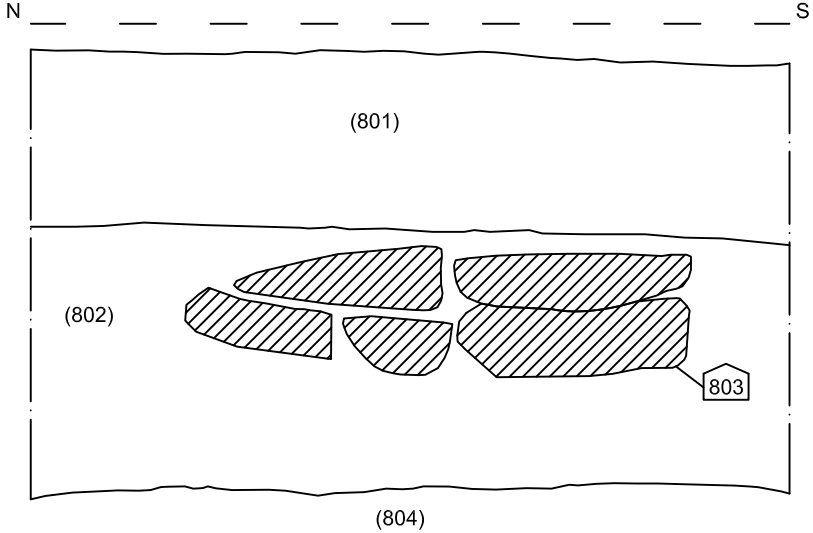
Stone

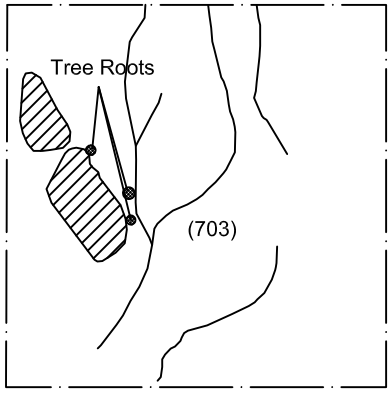
Notes:

Southeast Facing Section of Test Pit 7

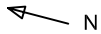


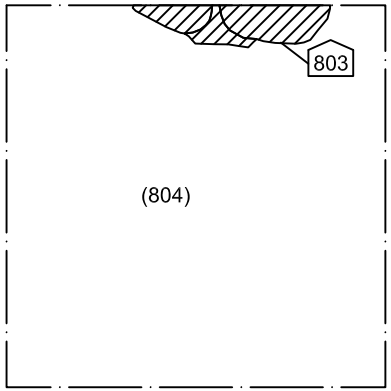
East Facing Section of Test Pit 8





Plan of Test Pit 7 [scale 1:20]





Plan of Test Pit 8 [scale 1:20]

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Saltmeadows Road
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NE8 3DA

Site Code: SEA'12
Drawing Ref:
Date: 29/10/2012
Drawn:GE
Scale: 1:10

Figure 19 Plans and Sections of Test Pits 7 and 8

Key:

Stone

Notes:

APPENDIX II- CONTEXT REGISTER

Context No.	Test Pit	Description
101	1	Topsoil with turf
102	1	Made ground
103	1	Black ashy deposit
104	1	Construction layer
105	1	Broken sandstone
106	1	Natural clay
201	2	Topsoil with turf
202	2	Grey made ground
203	2	Grey made ground
204	2	Thin layer of mortar
205	2	Grey sand
206	2	Brown re-deposited natural/levelling
301	3	Turf and plastic mesh
302	3	Topsoil
303	3	Water pipe
304	3	Grey construction debris
305	3	Grey sand with sandstone
306	3	Large sandstone blocks
307	3	Grey sandy clay
401	4	Silt and pea gravel
402	4	Orange sand with stones
403	4	Orange brown clay with stones
404	4	Crushed sandstone
405	4	Grey orange sand
406	4	Orange sand
407	4	Sandstone blocks
408	4	Dark silt with small stones
409	4	Orange sand with small stones
501	5	Concrete path
502	5	Gravel courtyard surface
503	5	Brown grey sand with gavel
504	5	Yellow sand with sandstone
505	5	Ceramic electricity cable capping tiles
506	5	Ceramic electricity cable capping tiles
507	5	Dark brown sand with sandstone
508	5	Fill of service trench
509	5	Cut of service trench
510	5	Cut of service trench
601	6	Turf and topsoil
602	6	Red burnt layer
603	6	Black ashy deposit
604	6	Cut for (605)
605	6	Wall foundation
606	6	Stony subsoil. Brown loam
607	6	Gravel surface
701	7	Turf and topsoil

702	7	Pale brown silty clay
703	7	Sandstone
801	8	Turf and topsoil
802	8	Light brown grey silty sand
803	8	Structure
804	8	Natural sandstone / laid surface