

The Cumberland Block, Cumberland Road, Devonport, Plymouth.

An Archaeological Evaluation Report



Report ref. 48414.03

August 2000

**THE CUMBERLAND BLOCK, CUMBERLAND ROAD,
DEVONPORT, PLYMOUTH**

An Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Prowting Homes South West to carry out an archaeological evaluation of land at Cumberland Block, Cumberland Road, Devonport, Plymouth, centred on Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference SX 4579 5448. The evaluation was carried out between the 14th and 17th August 2000. This report sets out the results of the evaluation.

The evaluation was carried out according to a Design Brief prepared by the City of Plymouth Archaeology Officer Mr. M. Daniels, and a Wessex Archaeology Written Scheme of Investigation (WA ref. 48414.01). Trenches 1-5 were excavated below the tarmac surface of the current Cumberland Block yard.

All the trenches below the modern tarmac surface revealed modern made-ground or overburden deposits overlying natural slates and clays. Only Trench 5 produced any evidence of any structural remains, consisting of two phases of buildings. These are likely to be late 18th, 19th or 20th century in date.

Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Prowting Homes South West for commissioning this report, and Mr. Alex Cox in particular for his assistance. The co-operation and input of Mr. Mike Daniels and Ms. Sophia Sharif of the City of Plymouth Council Directorate of Regeneration is also gratefully acknowledged.

Joanne Donachie managed the project for Wessex Archaeology, with the fieldwork undertaken by Adrian M. Chadwick, Mark Dunkley and Nick Wells. Rob Goller produced the illustrations. Adrian M. Chadwick compiled this report.

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An Archaeological Evaluation Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Project background

- 1.1.1. Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Prowting Homes South West to carry out an archaeological evaluation of the Cumberland Block, Cumberland Road, Devonport, Plymouth (hereafter known as 'the Site'). The Site is centred on Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference SX 4579 5448 (**Figure 1**).
- 1.1.2. The Site is the subject of development proposals comprising the construction of a series of two and three storey houses, with associated car parking and access out onto Cumberland Road. This evaluation is to form part of an application for planning permission for the development and has been prepared according to a brief for archaeological assessment and evaluation issued by the Archaeology Officer of the City of Plymouth Council Directorate of Regeneration, dated 17th July 2000
- 1.1.3. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains on the Site and consider the impact of the proposed development on such remains as may exist, so that an informed decision may be made as to the need for further archaeological work. The Site has been the subject of a desk-based assessment report (Wessex Archaeology report reference 48414.02).
- 1.1.4. The evaluation was carried out according to the brief prepared by the City of Plymouth Archaeology Officer, and proposals for archaeological assessment and evaluation drawn up by Wessex Archaeology (Report reference 48414.01). The evaluation was carried out according to the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *'Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations'* (1999).

2. THE SITE

2.1. Location

- 2.1.1. The Site consists of an area of land approximately 4000m² in extent, bordered on all sides by buildings or walls (**Figure 1**). To the south, Cumberland Block, a substantial two-storey building with concrete rendering and mortared rubble walls with dressed ashlar quoins and jambs, fronts onto Cumberland Road. Other ranges of buildings form the eastern and northern sides of the Site, backing onto the grounds of the Cumberland Centre hospital complex and Damerel Close. Garages and a wall form the western

side of the Site, and vehicle access to the Site is also from the west, via a gate and alleyway that runs off Madden Road.

2.2. Summary historical background

- 2.2.1. No archaeological evidence from either the prehistoric or historic periods is known from the Site itself until the late 18th century (Wessex Archaeology report reference 48414.02, 6-7), although possible palaeolithic flint artefacts have been found some 100m to the north. Cartographic evidence suggests a building was possibly on the Site in 1780 (*ibid.*, Figure 5a) and certainly buildings were there by 1789 (*ibid.*, Figure 6a), including one fronting onto Cumberland Road.
- 2.2.2. The Site itself falls wholly within both the 18th and 19th century inner defences of Devonport Dockyard, known as the Devonport Lines (*ibid.*, Figure 12). It is located immediately adjacent to the site of George's Bastion (built in the 1750's), a Musketry Keep (c. 1855) and a extant Grade II Listed guardhouse, dating from between 1789-1811. Associated with improvements to the Lines between 1853 and 1858, was the construction of new barrack complex, known as the Raglan Barracks, to the west of the Site. These were designed to replace existing barrack blocks.
- 2.2.3. A plan of the area published in 1811 (**Figure 4a**) shows the Cumberland Block complex (or an earlier phase of it) in some detail. There is an associated caption entitled *Timber Pound* and other numbered and lettered captions to the building. The key (not illustrated) is not easy to read, but it would appear that the main building served a variety of functions, including as a surgery, a kitchen and nurses' room and a magazine. The eastern and northern ranges of buildings may have been serving as an artillery hospital. A Master Gunner's House and a shed for a foreman are also indicated.
- 2.2.4. The style and build of the main body of the Cumberland Block building suggest a 19th century date, although most of the other buildings in the complex appear to be later in date, with the possible exception of part of the northern range. The glacis effect of the lower storey of the Cumberland Block, may represent an earlier phase. This, together with the robust nature of the walls, suggest it was a building designed to be defended.
- 2.2.5. It seems likely that the main building, at least, formed part of a wider military complex, centred on George's Bastion. Since 1859 the headquarters of the 3rd Garrison Brigade of the Royal Artillery was in Devonport (*ibid.*, 10) and it is possible that the buildings on the Site were used by these and other battalions and regiments who rotated through Devonport.

2.3. Topography

- 2.3.1. The area of the Site is relatively flat, on the summit of Devonport Hill. The modern ground level lies between c. 24-27 m aOD (metres above Ordnance Datum). To the south of the Site the ground falls gradually away as the

slopes of Devonport Hill. To the east the gradient of the slope is steeper, with Stonehouse Creek and Stonehouse Bridge at the bottom of the hill.

2.4. Geology

2.4.1. The northern part of the Site lies over the Upper Devonian Old Red Sandstone series, in this area mostly slates, with occasional pockets of clay. An igneous intrusion running south-west to north-east underneath the Site separates these Upper Devonian Slates from Middle Devonian Limestone. This line has been exploited by the course of the Stonehouse Creek (Ordnance Survey 1: 625 000 Geological Survey of England and Wales Sheet 2 1957; 1: 50 000 Drift Geology Sheet 348 1977).

2.5. Modern land use

2.5.1. The Site currently consists of stone, brick and concrete single and two storey buildings, currently disused, surrounding a tarmac-surfaced yard or compound. A gas storage structure is located towards the eastern side of this yard. The structures to the west are single storey brick garages with metal doors. The southern range of the Cumberland Block itself was used as offices and consultation rooms. Other buildings were used as workshops and stores.

3. OBJECTIVES OF EVALUATION

3.1.1. The objectives of the evaluation were to establish whether an archaeological resource exists on the Site, and to define its nature and extent so that:

- The resource can be taken into account in the design process of the proposed development.
- The scope of any further recording work can be assessed, should unavoidable disturbance to the resource occur as a result of the proposed development.

3.1.2. The objectives of the evaluation were informed by the proposals document and the desk-based assessment (Wessex Archaeology report references 48414.01 and .02). The desk-based assessment identified that the Site might contain archaeological remains of prehistoric or early modern date.

4. EVALUATION METHOD

4.1.1. The evaluation method, as set out in the proposals document, consisted of the excavation of five trial trenches, 10 metres long and 2m wide (**Figure 2**).

4.1.2. The trenches were opened using a JCB Sitemaster mechanical excavator fitted with a 1m wide toothed bucket. A toothless ditching bucket was used once the tarmac surface and the bulk of the made ground deposits had been removed. The trenches were then cleaned and investigated by hand. A full written, drawn and photographic record of the evaluation was kept.

- 4.1.3. Heights above Ordnance Datum (m aOD) were established by transferring levels from a survey point recorded on a plan of the Site provided by Prowting Homes South West. The trench locations were established using flexible 30m measuring tapes.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Introduction

- 5.1.1. The positions of the five trenches excavated are illustrated on **Figure 2**. They varied between 0.30m to 0.65m in depth. In Trenches 1-4, the tarmac surface overlay modern made-ground consisting of redeposited sand and stone scalplings.
- 5.1.2. In Trench 5, the tarmac surface overlay made ground consisting of redeposited sand and stone scalplings, lying above mixed rubble and demolition layers.
- 5.1.3. The undisturbed natural geology in Trenches 1-4 consisted of shale and mudstone deposits, varying in texture from compact to loose, and in colour from pale grey to reddish-brown. These were encountered at a depth of 0.20-0.30m. In Trench 5, the natural undisturbed deposits consisted of a mixture of pale grey slates and mudstones, and reddish-brown clays. These were at a depth of 0.65m below the modern yard surface.
- 5.1.4. No archaeological features were noted in Trenches 1-4. Archaeological remains of structures were recorded in Trench 5.

5.2. Trench 1

- 5.2.1. This trench, measuring 10m in length was only 1.5m wide, to avoid a live telephone cable that ran NEE-SWW across the yard immediately to the north of the proposed trench location. No archaeological features were noted. Natural slates and mudstones were encountered at a depth of 0.30m.

5.3. Trench 2

- 5.3.1. Trench 2 measured 10m long by 2m wide. No archaeological features were noted. Natural slates and mudstones were encountered at a depth of 0.30m.

5.4. Trench 3

- 5.4.1. Trench 3 measured 10m long by 2m wide. No archaeological features were noted. Natural slates and mudstones were encountered at a depth of 0.30m.

5.5. Trench 4

- 5.5.1. Trench 4 measured 10m long by 2m wide. No archaeological features were noted. Natural slates and mudstones were encountered at a depth of 0.20m.

5.6. Trench 5

- 5.6.1. Trench 5 measured 7m long by 2m wide. It had to be re-orientated onto an east-west alignment to avoid a live telephone cable, and had to be shortened in length. Nevertheless, this was the only trench where archaeological remains were encountered.
- 5.6.2. Several structural features were recorded (**Figure 3**). The earliest feature in Trench 5 was wall **501**. This consisted of roughly dressed blocks of shale, set into a matrix of hard grey mortar speckled with black inclusions. These blocks were a maximum of 0.30m long, 0.20m wide and 0.15m thick. Wall **501** had been partially robbed or demolished, but lay flush in a rectilinear construction cut (**502**) into the undisturbed natural clay and shale deposits. The principal line of the wall ran for approximately 5.50m on a roughly NEE-SWW alignment, with two southward-running returns at each end, orientated roughly NNE-SSW. These were a maximum of 1.5m long.
- 5.6.3. Wall **501** survived in places to a maximum height of 0.40m, and would appear to represent the external northern wall of a small building. This may be one of the buildings marked on an 1811 map of the Cumberland Block complex (**Figure 4a**), and may thus be late 18th century in date.
- 5.6.4. At the western end of Trench 5, wall **501** had been damaged by the construction cuts of two concrete structures. A square concrete pad, likely to be 19th or 20th century in date, filled cut **506**. Cut **513** abutted the north-west corner of wall **501**. It was filled by a possible rectilinear concrete structure, **512**, which may represent the footings of another wall running approximately NNE-SWW. This wall may have been appended to wall **501** when this was still a standing structure.
- 5.6.5. Wall **501**, structure **512** and the square concrete pad were all covered by a layer of demolition rubble or made-ground, deposit **500**. This deposit could represent deliberate levelling.
- 5.6.6. Towards the eastern end of Trench 5, wall **501** was damaged by cut **504**, the construction trench of brick wall **503**. This wall was 0.40m wide, and survived to a height of 0.60m. It ran across the full 2m width of the trench, and was also on a roughly NNE-SWW alignment. It consisted of machined, frogged bricks set on bed in an English pattern (alternating courses of headers and stretchers). These bricks were 0.65m long, 0.225m wide and 0.105m thick, and were carried on poured concrete foundations 0.08m thick. A tenacious off-white mortar bonded the bricks.
- 5.6.7. The construction cut for wall **503** damaged the rubble demolition/makeup deposit **500**, in addition to cutting across the line of the earlier wall **501**. A cut for a ceramic drainage pipe (cut **505**) also appeared to be associated with wall **503**. It may represent the external wall of a later building, perhaps one of those visible on a later 19th century O.S. map of the Site (**Figure 4b**). The top of this wall had been demolished, prior to the deposition of scalplings and tarmac layers for the modern yard surface.

6. FINDS

- 6.1.1. No artefacts were recovered during the evaluation.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

- 7.1.1. No samples were taken for environmental analysis.

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1. Archaeological features

- 8.1.1. No archaeological features earlier in date than the early modern period were recorded.
- 8.1.2. No pottery or other artefacts were recovered. One hand-made brick likely to be 18th or early 19th century in date was recovered from the rubble demolition/makeup deposit **500**.
- 8.1.3. The evidence clearly indicates there is high potential for 18th and 19th century sub-surface archaeological remains surviving on the Site. The potential for pre-post-medieval remains surviving is considered to be low, although it is possible that discrete features from earlier periods may survive beneath shallow parts of the Cumberland Block buildings themselves. The foundations of the Cumberland Block itself, however, are likely to have destroyed any surviving archaeological remains.

Appendix 1: Excavated contexts Trench 5

Trial Trench 5		7.00m x 2.00m	Surface Height: 26.20m a.O.D.	
Context	Description.	Depth/thickness (m)	Associated finds and samples	
500	Rubble makeup/demolition deposit.	0.45		
501	Stone and mortar wall.	0.40		
502	Construction cut for wall 501.	0.40?		
503	Brick wall.	0.60		
504	Construction cut for wall 503.	0.60		
505	Cut for a drainage/service pipe.	0.60		
506	Construction cut for a concrete pad.	0.30+		
507	Tarmac layer.	0.14		
508	Makeup/scalpings deposit.	0.20		
509	Natural shales and clays.	-		
510	Backfill of construction cut 502.	0.40?		
511	Backfill of construction cut 504.	0.60		
512	Concrete structure/possible wall.	0.50+		
513	Construction cut for structure/wall 512.	0.50+		

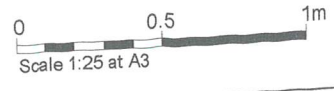
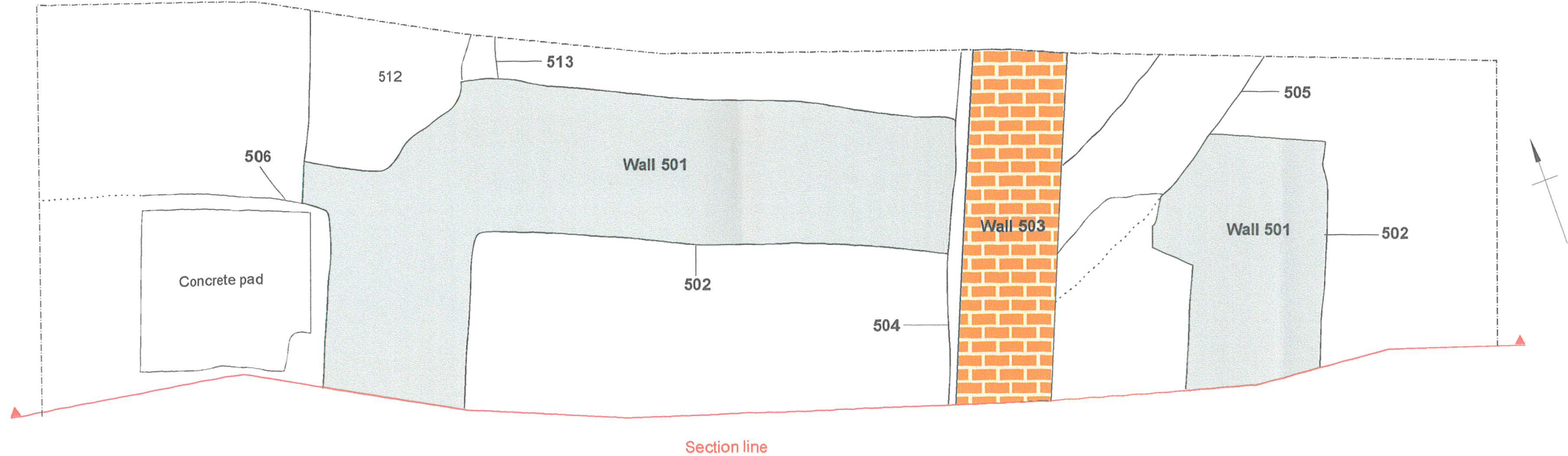
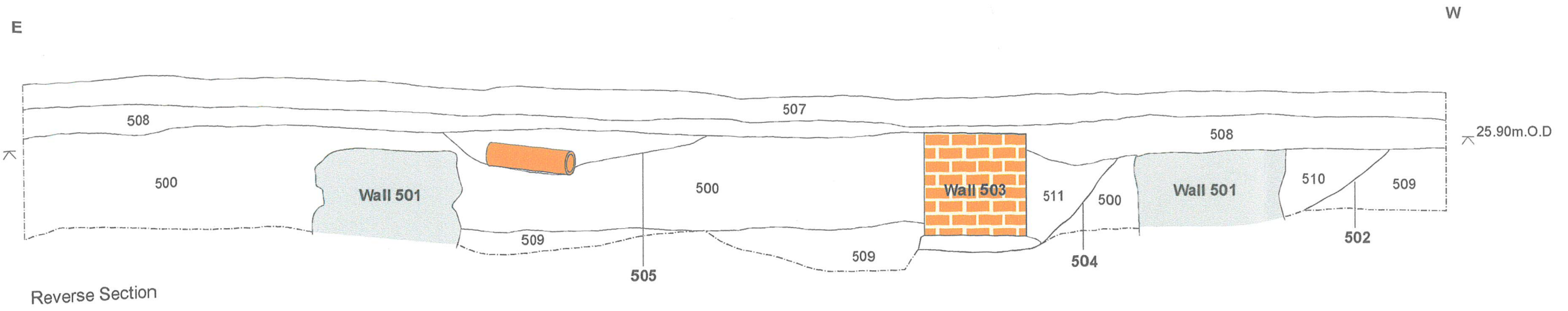
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Site location.

Figure 1

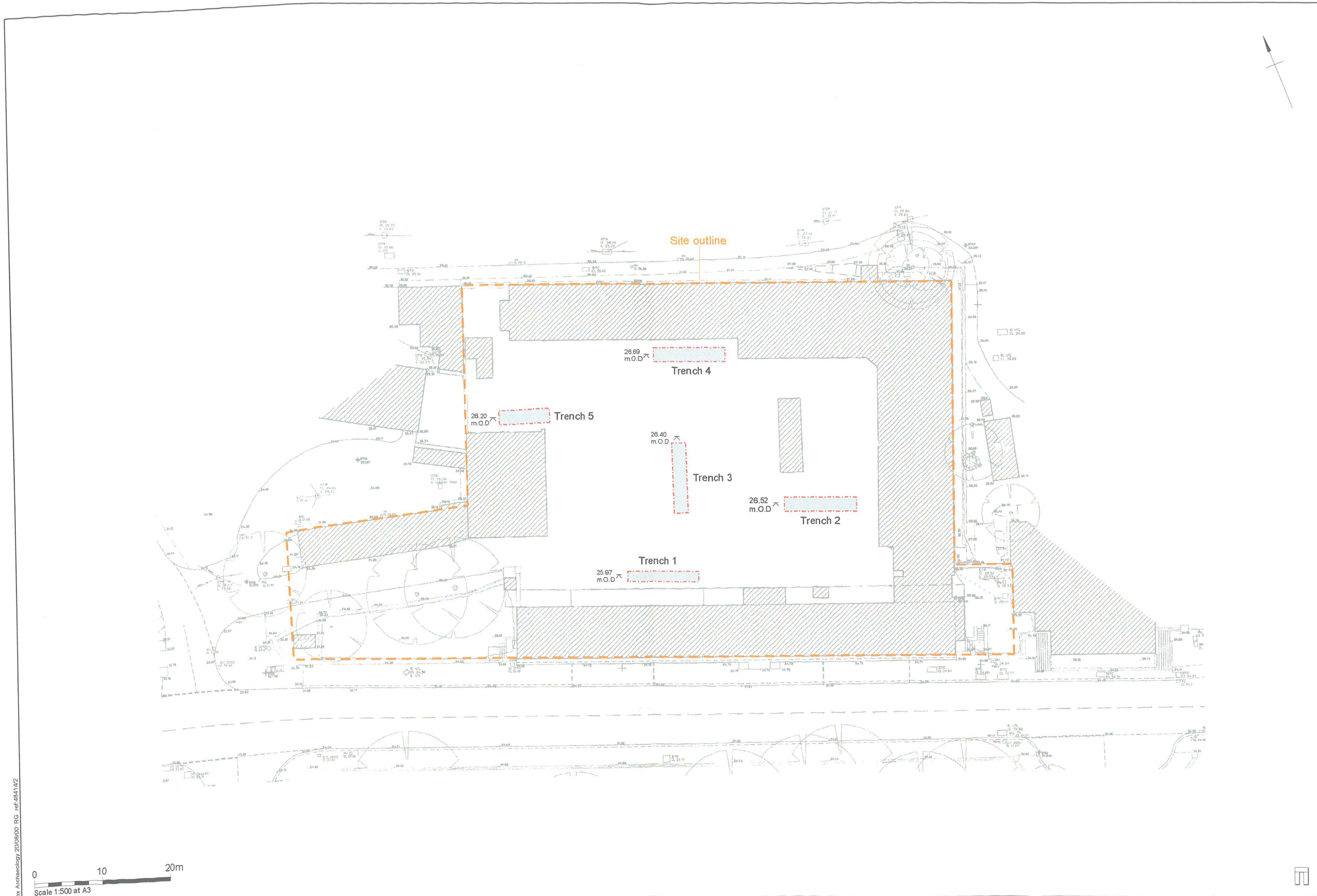


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Trench 5, section and plan



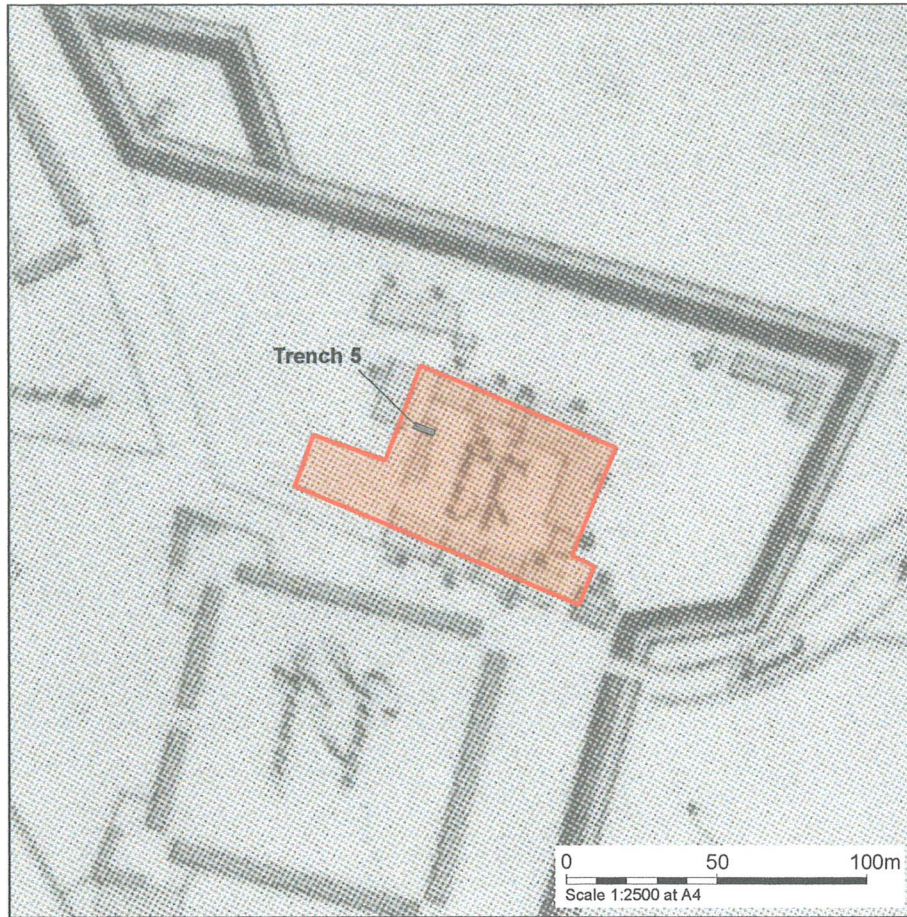
Figure 3



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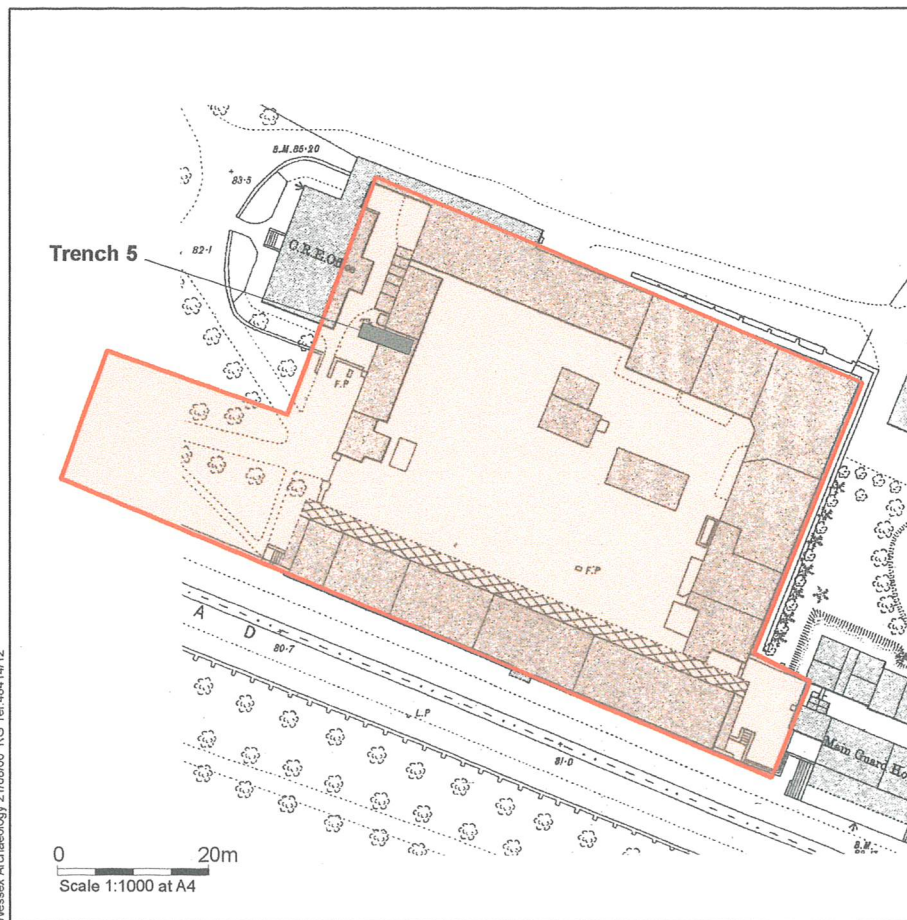
Trench location plan

Figure 2



1811

Figure 4a



1st edition O.S. 1:500 map (1894)

Figure 4b

