

**LADYFIELD HOUSE,  
THE STREET,  
MORTIMER,  
WEST BERKSHIRE.**

**NGR: SU 6683 6405 (centred)**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

March 2021  
Report No. 1409



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**Quality Assurance**

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## **CONTENTS**

Summary

Glossary of Archaeological Terms and Abbreviations

- 1 INTRODUCTION
- 2 PROJECT BACKGROUND
- 3 AIMS
- 4 METHODOLOGY
- 5 RESULTS
- 6 CONCLUSION
- 7 BIBLIOGRAPHY
- 8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Stratigraphic Data

## **FIGURE LIST**

- Figure 1: Site Location
- Figure 2: Site Plan
- Figure 3: Recorded Representative Sections
- Figure 4: Section Photographs

## **SUMMARY**

Between 23<sup>rd</sup> June and 8<sup>th</sup> July 2020 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological watching brief at Ladyfield House, The Street, Mortimer, West Berkshire (NGR: SU 6683 6405 - centred). The project was commissioned by Melvin Blunt of Morris and Blunt Ltd.

The archaeological works comprised the monitoring of groundworks associated with alterations to and extension of an existing dwelling.

The excavation of foundation and service trenches mostly penetrated into, but not beyond, Post-medieval/Modern soil layers. Natural substrates were only exposed in two discrete areas, in the northern and central parts of the garden to the west of the house. No archaeological features or finds were present within the monitored excavations; however, this does not preclude the possibility that archaeological deposits could exist at lower levels.

## GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

### Archaeology

For the purpose of this project, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

### CBM

Ceramic Building Material.

### Medieval

The period between AD 1066 and AD 1500.

### Natural

In archaeological terms, this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site.

### NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

### OD

Ordnance datum; used to express a given height above sea-level. (AOD Above Ordnance Datum).

### OS

Ordnance Survey.

### Post-medieval

The period between AD 1500 and AD 1900.

### Prehistoric

The period prior to the Roman invasion of AD 43, traditionally sub divided into; *Palaeolithic* – c. 500,000 BC to c. 12,000 BC; *Mesolithic* – c. 12,000 BC to c. 4,500 BC; *Neolithic* – c. 4,500 BC to c. 2,000 BC; *Bronze Age* – c. 2,000 BC to c. 800 BC; *Iron Age* – c. 800 BC to AD 43.

### Roman

The period traditionally dated AD 43 until AD 410.

### Saxon

The period between AD 410 and AD 1066.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of a programme of archaeological watching brief undertaken by Foundations Archaeology between 23<sup>rd</sup> June and 8<sup>th</sup> July 2020 at Ladyfield House, The Street, Mortimer, West Berkshire (NGR: SU 6683 6405 - centred). The project was commissioned by Melvin Blunt of Morris and Blunt Ltd.
- 1.2 The watching brief was conducted in accordance with an approved Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), prepared by Foundations Archaeology (2020) and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014).
- 1.3 The CIfA code of conduct was adhered to throughout.

## 2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Planning permission (**Application Number: 19/02781/HOUSE**) was granted for alterations and extension to Ladyfield House, including the demolition of an existing rear extension.
- 2.2 Ladyfield House is located to the south of the village of Stratfield Mortimer, immediately south of St Marys Church. It is bounded to the east and southeast by Foudry Brook and to the west and southwest by the church graveyard.
- 2.3 The ground surrounding the house slopes gently downwards from the northwest (approximately 55.50m AOD), towards the brook at the southeast (approximately 54.00m AOD). The underlying geology is recorded as *London Clay Formation* – clay, silt and sand, with possible overlying *Alluvium* – clay, silt, sand and gravel to the southeast, towards Foudry Brook (BGS Online Viewer).
- 2.4 The first reference to the village of Stratfield Mortimer is in the Domesday Book, where it is referred to as *Stradfield*, which means open land traversed by a Roman road (MWB3596). The manor was recorded as being held by Ralf Mortimer in 1086, which suggested that the village had Saxon origins.
- 2.5 The nearby Church of St Mary the Virgin is a Grade II listed Victorian church (List Entry No. 1135795). The current church was constructed in 1869 and replaced a smaller Medieval building, possibly of 15<sup>th</sup> century date. The stained glass of the west window contains some 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century pieces, also present are two brasses to R Travet and his wife dated 1441. These are likely to have been elements of the earlier Medieval church. A Saxon stone coffin lid was found in two pieces under the tower of the Medieval church when it was pulled down in 1866. This is now contained within the chancel of the Victorian church and was found to have an inscription referring to *Aegelwardus*, who died in 1017. This could suggest evidence for an earlier

church at this location and a church is recorded at Stratfield Mortimer by the Domesday Survey.

- 2.6 The Domesday Survey also records that a mill was attached to the manor of Stratfield Mortimer, there is also mention of a watermill in 1304 and in 1449-50, but no mention of it past this date. The site of the mill/watermill is unknown, but it is thought that Ladyfield House is on the site of the miller's house (MWB20112).
- 2.7 In 1430 the manor house of Mortimer was recorded as being in a 'poor state of repair'. The exact site of Mortimer Manor is not known, but it would have been close to St Mary's Church and is thought to have been on the site of the current Church Farm (MWB21020).
- 2.8 A long pond is present parallel to Foudry Brook, close to Ladyfield House. It is shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS maps and it is marked as 'Fish Pond' on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition map (MWB3599). The pond is approximately 95m by 12m and is located less than 30m south of Ladyfield House. This feature is currently undated, but it is possible that it has Medieval origins.
- 2.9 An excavation by TVAS on land to the west of Ladyfield House and the church identified a large domestic Medieval oven, along with three earlier ovens. The site also contained further features which included a group of postholes, a linear feature and a pit. A large quantity of brick and tile was recovered during these works, which was mainly Medieval in date; however, some pieces of Roman *tegula* and *imbrex* had been reused in the oven (MWB15526). Fragments of cremated bone were also recovered from within the oven, which included four fragments of human bone from a sub-adult over 5 years of age.
- 2.10 The *Silchester Environs Project* has recorded an extensive area of Medieval and Post-medieval field boundaries, which were visible on lidar as earthworks, to the north of the Devils Highway (MWB22211). Further identified features included ridge and furrow (MWB22213), along with dispersed linear features of uncertain date, which were visible as cropmarks on aerial photographs to the west of St Marys Church (MWB22214), as well as a possible Post-medieval water meadow, to the east of Foudry Brook (MWB22216).
- 2.11 The site therefore contained the potential for evidence of Saxon and later activity. This did not prejudice the works against the recovery of data relating to other periods.
- 2.12 In light of the archaeological potential, the archaeological advisor to West Berkshire Council required a watching brief during the groundworks associated with the project.

### 3 AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the archaeological watching brief were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits, as well as to ensure that significant archaeological remains were identified and appropriately mitigated.
- 3.2 These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:
- to define and identify the nature of archaeological deposits on site, and date these where possible;
  - to attempt to characterize the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site;
  - where possible to recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples;
  - to produce a site archive for deposition with West Berkshire Museum and to provide information for accession to the West Berkshire County Council HER.

### 4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 All intrusive groundworks were monitored and recorded, in order to identify archaeological finds and deposits. These works consisted of the excavation of foundation trenches for the new extension and a new footbridge over Foudry Brook, as well as the excavation of associated service trenches. Groundworks were carried out under the constant supervision of the archaeologist. Where machine excavation was required, this was used only for the removal of non-significant overburden. Plant was suitable for the task and was equipped with a toothless grading bucket; although, due to the occurrence of hard concreted natural gravels, it was occasionally necessary to utilise a toothed digging bucket, as appropriate.
- 4.2 All archaeological investigation, excavation and recording was undertaken in accordance with the approved WSI and the Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 3: Excavation Manual.
- 4.2.1 Where it was unsafe to enter an excavation, all recording was undertaken from above.

### 5 RESULTS

- 5.1 A description of representative contexts identified during the course of the project is presented in Appendix 1. A site plan showing the location of the monitored excavations and representative sections is presented in Figure 2.



Representative section drawings and photographs are given in Figures 3 and 4 respectively. A summary of the results is given below.

- 5.2 Probable natural sand clay and gravel (122)/(127) was revealed in the areas around Sections 005 and 006, which were located in the north and central parts of the garden to the west of Ladyfield House. At the location of Section 005, the top of the natural (122) was located 0.52m beneath the Modern ground level. It was overlain by two subsoil layers (121)/(120) and a subsequent topsoil (119). The lowest subsoil (121) contained occasional CBM fragments. There were no other artefacts from any of these layers. At the location of Section 006, the natural (127) was present 0.74m below the Modern ground level. It was sealed by a clay sand subsoil (126), which was overlain by a probable buried former topsoil (125). This was, in turn, sealed by a make-up layer (124), which consisted of plastic clay. This was subsequently sealed by topsoil (123). Rare to occasional CBM flecks/fragments were present within layers (123), (124) and (126). There were no other artefacts from any of these layers.
- 5.3 The remainder of the excavations failed to penetrate to natural levels and were dug through, and into, variable soil deposits (Sections 1 to 4, 7 to 8), which were devoid of archaeological features or artefacts. Deposits (105), (106), (110), (118) and (131) contained Modern artefacts, whilst layers (102), (105), (106), (111), (112), (118), (121), (123), (124), (126) and (129) contained CBM fragments or flecks.
- 5.4 The excavations which abutted the west side of Ladyfield House partially revealed the subterranean parts of the house wall (114) (Sections 003 and 004, Photographs 3 and 4). The exposed wall consisted of approximately 16 courses of cherry orange machine-made bricks, which extended to a depth of at least 1.20m below the Modern ground level. The bricks were bonded by a white beige hard cement and, where visible, they were set in a stretcher – stretcher pattern. The base of the wall was not exposed. On the basis of the brick fabric and type of cement, it is likely that the house wall was of Victorian or later date.
- 5.5 A single cut feature [117] was visible in Section 004. The function of this feature was unclear; however, it contained a loose soil fill (118), which was associated with Modern bricks and it was, therefore, likely to be fairly recent in date and probably associated with the house.
- 5.6 No archaeological features or finds were present within any of the monitored excavations. Modern artefacts and CBM were noted, but not retained.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The development excavations at Ladyfield House mostly penetrated into, but not beyond, Post-medieval/Modern soil layers. Natural substrates were only exposed in two discrete areas, in the northern and central parts of the garden to

the west of the house. No archaeological features or finds were present within the monitored excavations; however, this does not preclude the possibility that archaeological deposits could exist at lower levels.

- 6.2 The archive is currently held at the offices of Foundations Archaeology but will be deposited in due course with West Berkshire Museum under Accession Code NEBYM:2020.22. A short note will be submitted for publication in the relevant local archaeological journal and an OASIS form will also be submitted to ADS.

## **7 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. 2014. *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief*. Reading.

Foundations Archaeology. 2020. *Ladyfield House, The Street, Mortimer, West Berkshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*. Unpublished.

## **8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Foundations Archaeology would like to thank Sarah Orr and Beth Asbury of West Berkshire Council, as well as Melvin Blunt of Morris and Blunt Ltd., for their help during the course of the project.

Ladyfield House, The Street, Mortimer, West Berkshire: Archaeological Watching Brief

APPENDIX 1: Stratigraphic Data

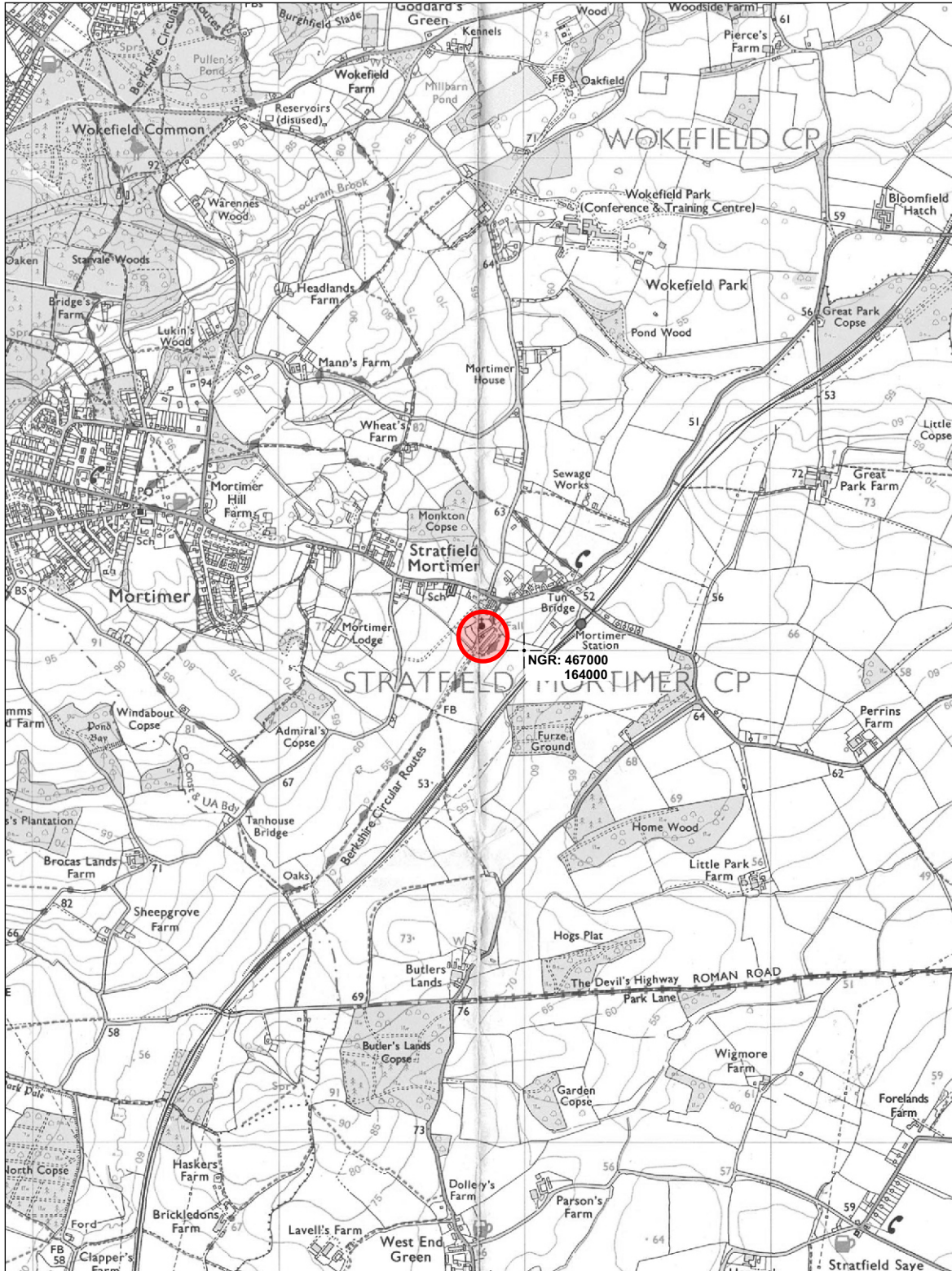
CXT	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	DESCRIPTION	CUTS/LATER THAN	CUT BY/EARLIER THAN
				<b>SEC001</b>		
101	n/a	n/a	0.30	Topsoil: dark grey brown clay silt.	102	n/a
102	n/a	n/a	0.23	Layer of mid brown clay sand, which contained occasional CBM fragments.	103	101
103	n/a	n/a	0.09	Layer of orange brown sand clay.	?	102
				<b>No archaeological features or finds were present.</b>		
				<b>SEC002</b>		
104	n/a	n/a	0.07	Concrete surface.	105	n/a
105	n/a	n/a	0.09	Beige to brown mixed soil and rubble, which contained frequent stones and CBM fragments, as well as occasional Modern detritus.	106	104
106	n/a	n/a	0.11	Layer of grey silt sand, which contained occasional stones and occasional CBM fragments, as well as a fragment of Post-medieval/Modern glass.	107	105
107	n/a	n/a	0.21	Layer of light grey clay sand, which contained frequent small stones.	108	106
108	n/a	n/a	0.29	Layer of dark brown sand silt, which contained occasional small stones.	?	107
				<b>No archaeological features or finds were present.</b>		
				<b>SEC003</b>		
109	?	0.16	0.06	Concrete kerb.	110	n/a
110	n/a	n/a	0.16	Layer of mixed soil and loose cement, which contained frequent Modern detritus.	111	109
111	n/a	n/a	0.36	Deposit of mid grey brown plastic clay silt, which contained occasional stones and rare CBM fragments.	112	110
112	n/a	n/a	0.94	Deposit of dark brown silt sand, which contained occasional brick fragments.	113	111
113	n/a	n/a	0.36	Deposit of variable brown to orange brown clay sand, which contained occasional stones.	?	112
114	n/a	n/a	1.20	Exterior of southwest facing wall of Ladyfield House. The wall consisted of approximately 16 subterranean courses of cherry orange machine-made bricks, which were bonded by a white beige hard cement. Uncertain stratigraphic relationship with soil deposits to the southwest.	?	?
				<b>No archaeological features or finds were present.</b>		

**Ladyfield House, The Street, Mortimer, West Berkshire: Archaeological Watching Brief**

CXT	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	DESCRIPTION	CUTS/LATER THAN	CUT BY/EARLIER THAN
				<b>SEC004</b>		
114	n/a	n/a	0.80	Exterior of southwest facing wall of Ladyfield House. The wall consisted of approximately 11 subterranean courses of cherry orange machine-made bricks, which were bonded by a white beige hard cement. The bricks were set in a stretcher-stretcher pattern. Uncertain stratigraphic relationship with soil deposits to the southwest.	?	?
115	n/a	n/a	0.07	Concrete surface.	118	n/a
116	n/a	n/a	0.75	Dark brown clay sand, which contained occasional small stones.	?	[117]
[117]	?	0.97	0.74	Cut feature with a steep sloping southwestern edge. Contained fill 118. Probable Modern feature associated with Ladyfield House.	116	118
118	?	0.97	0.74	Fill of [117]: loose light grey brown clay sand, which contained frequent Modern bricks and occasional Modern detritus.	[117]	115
				<b>No archaeological features or finds were present.</b>		
				<b>SEC005</b>		
119	n/a	n/a	0.13	Topsoil: light grey brown sand silt.	120	n/a
120	n/a	n/a	0.19	Layer of dark brown clay silt, which contained occasional small stones.	121	119
121	n/a	n/a	0.23	Layer of light brown clay sand, which contained frequent small stones and occasional CBM fragments.	122	120
122	n/a	n/a	0.30	Possible natural: bright orange brown sand clay.	?	121
				<b>No archaeological features or finds were present.</b>		
				<b>SEC006</b>		
123	n/a	n/a	0.19	Topsoil: dark grey brown clay sand, which contained occasional CBM fragments.	124	n/a
124	n/a	n/a	0.15	Layer of beige orange plastic clay, which contained rare CBM fragments.	125	123
125	n/a	n/a	0.23	Layer of dark grey brown clay sand, which contained frequent small stones and occasional charcoal flecks. Probable buried former topsoil.	126	124
126	n/a	n/a	0.25	Layer of light brown clay sand, which contained occasional stones and rare CBM flecks.	127	125
127	n/a	n/a	0.77	Possible natural: variable orange brown to bright orange firm clay sand and gravel.	?	126
				<b>No archaeological features or finds were present.</b>		

**Ladyfield House, The Street, Mortimer, West Berkshire: Archaeological Watching Brief**

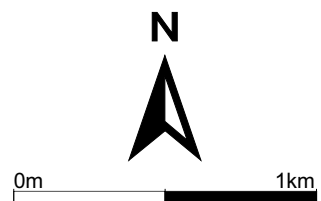
<b>CXT</b>	<b>L(m)</b>	<b>W(m)</b>	<b>D(m)</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>CUTS/LATER THAN</b>	<b>CUT BY/EARLIER THAN</b>
				<b>SEC007</b>		
128	n/a	n/a	0.38	Topsoil: dark grey brown sand silt.	129	n/a
129	n/a	n/a	0.31	Layer of mid brown silt sand, which contained rare CBM fragments.	130	128
130	n/a	n/a	0.27	Layer of light brown orange silt sand.	?	129
				<b>No archaeological features or finds were present.</b>		
				<b>SEC008</b>		
131	n/a	n/a	0.25	Topsoil: dark grey brown sand silt, which contained occasional stones and rare Modern detritus.	132	n/a
132	n/a	n/a	0.27	Layer of mid grey brown sand silt, which contained occasional small stones.	?	131
				<b>No archaeological features or finds were present.</b>		



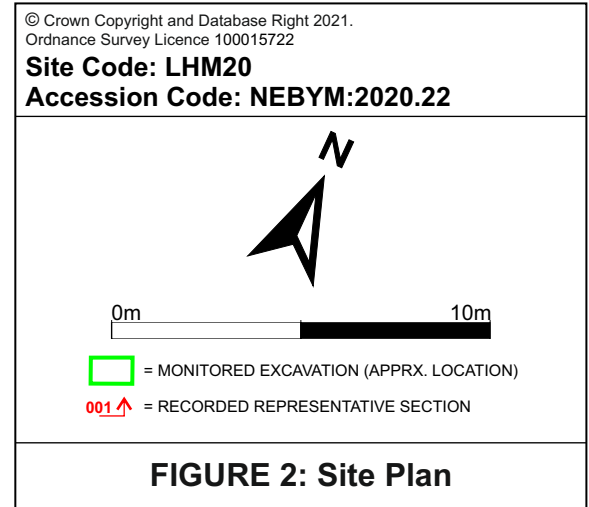
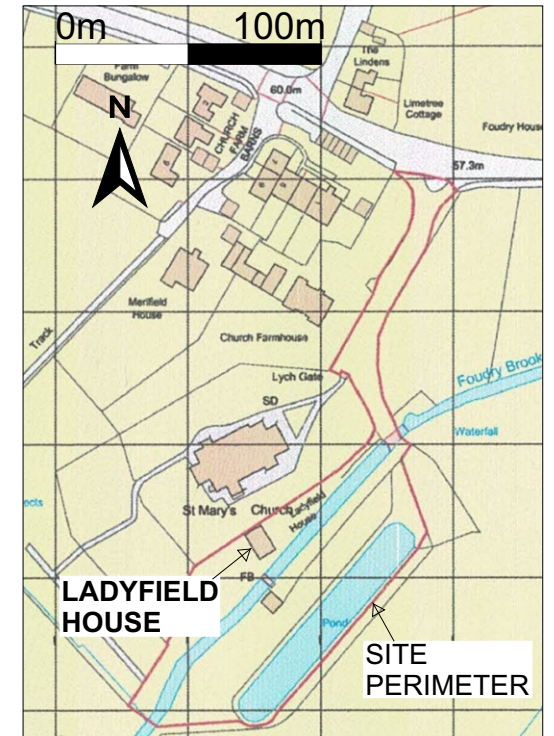
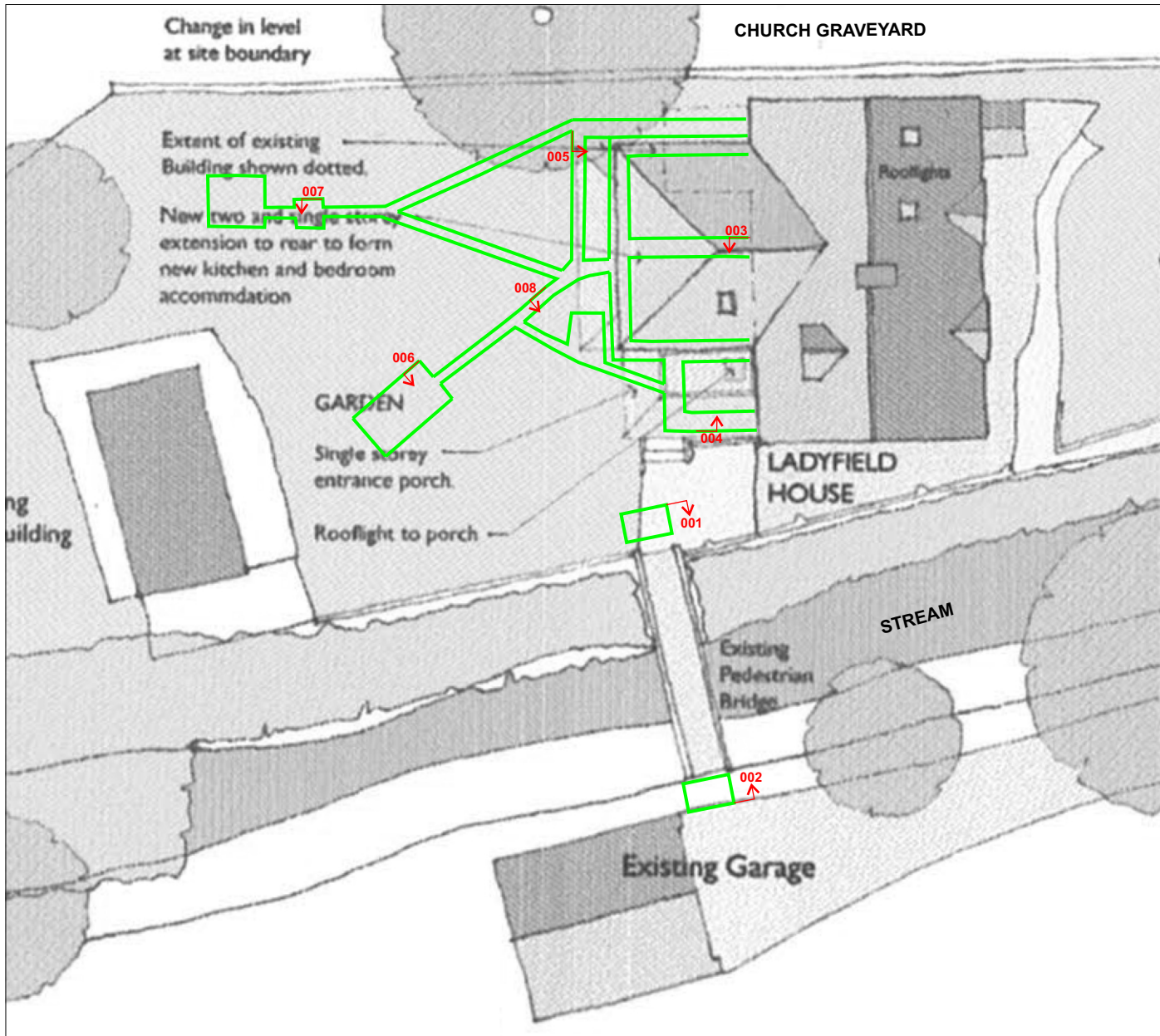
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 Ordnance Survey Licence 100015722

**Site Code: LHM20**

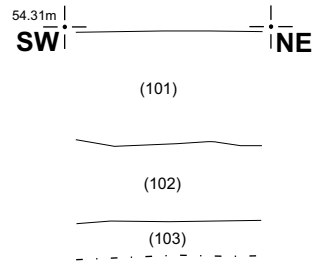
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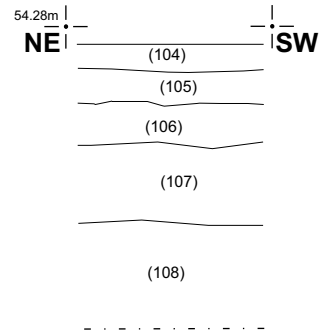
**FIGURE 1: Site Location**



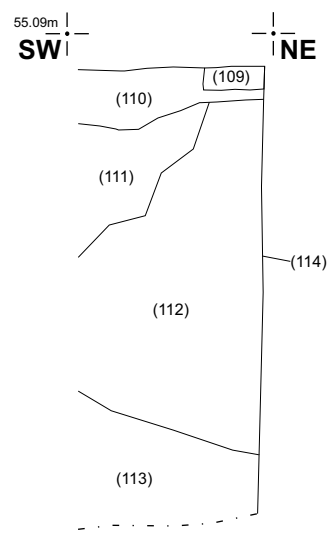
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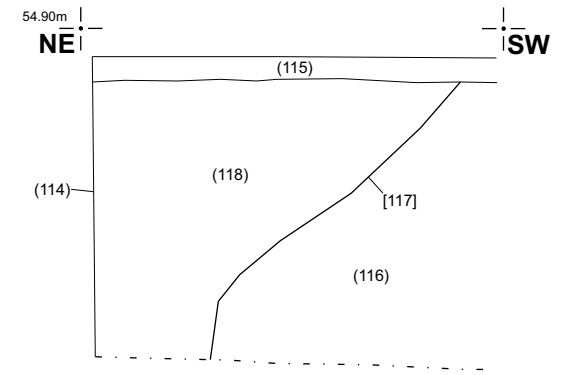
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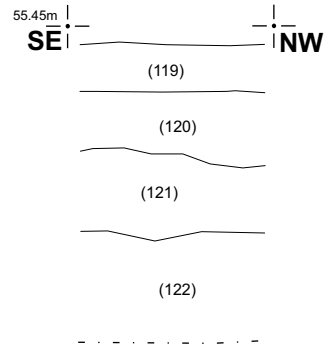
**SEC 003: SOUTHEAST FACING**



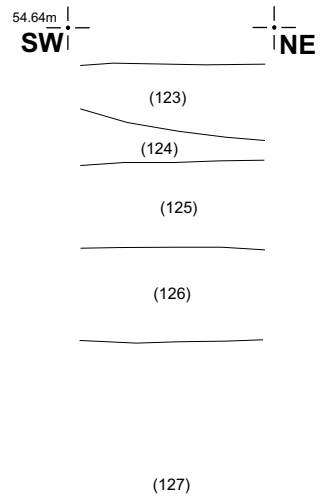
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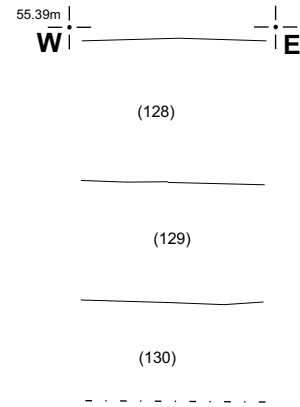
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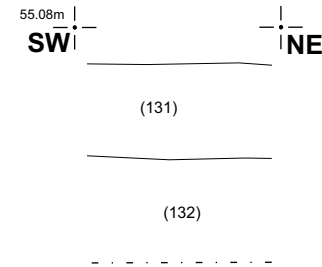
**SEC 006: SOUTHEAST FACING**



**SEC 007: SOUTH FACING**



**SEC 008: SOUTHEAST FACING**



**Site Code: LHM20**  
**Accession Code: NEBYM:2020.22**



**FIGURE 3: Recorded Representative Sections**





PHOTOGRAPH 1: SECTION 001



PHOTOGRAPH 2: SECTION 002



PHOTOGRAPH 3: SECTION 003



PHOTOGRAPH 4: SECTION 004



PHOTOGRAPH 5: SECTION 005



PHOTOGRAPH 6: SECTION 006



PHOTOGRAPH 7: SECTION 007

SECTION 8: NO PHOTOGRAPH

Site Code: LHM20  
Accession Code: NEBYM: 2020.22

**FIGURE 4: Section Photographs**