

**STOKES HALL, ALTHORNE, ESSEX
HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING
AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING**



Essex County Council

Field Archaeology Unit

February 2007

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AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

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As part of our desire to provide a quality service, we would welcome any comments you may have on the content or the presentation of this report.

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Front cover: Stokes Hall viewed from the north-west, taken from a Christmas card design by David Lloyd, 1997.

STOKES HALL, ALTHORNE, ESSEX
HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING
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MONITORING

Client: McLaren Construction

FAU Project No.: 1620

NGR: TQ 918 980

OASIS No. essexcou1-24243

Planning Ref.: FUL/MAL/05/01307

Dates of Fieldwork: February & August 2006

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A programme of low-level building recording was undertaken by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) prior to the demolition of Stokes Hall, an early 19th century mansion house overlooking the River Crouch. Subsequent groundworks for the replacement structure were monitored for archaeological deposits. The work was funded by the developer, McLaren Construction, and carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation produced by ECC FAU and approved by Essex County Council Historic Environment Management team (ECC HEM), who also monitored the work.

Copies of the report will be supplied to ECC HEM and the Essex Historic Environment Record (HER) at County Hall, Chelmsford. The archive will be deposited with the Essex Records Office (ERO).

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Site location and description (fig.1)

Stokes Hall lies in the south-east of Althorne parish, located in the south of the county in the Maldon district, 5km north-west of Burnham-on-Crouch. The hall is accessed by its own trackway off Burnham Road. Otherwise the landscape is uninhabited farm/grassland, with the house occupying a high point; providing good views of over the Crouch and its marshy hinterland.

The house sits within a large plot, with lawns to the south and orchard and paddock to the north, where the main façade is located. A pond to the east of the house may have once have been a fishpond to an earlier moated house, until now not formally identified as such. One arm of the moat extends away from the pond as a wide ditch, whilst a long section of moat survives bordering the south. Elsewhere the moat has been filled-in.

The house has been empty for only a short period of time and has not been allowed to deteriorate. The east wing most recently functioned as offices. One of the wings, demolished before the survey was undertaken, was latterly used/rented as a flat, but was originally a service wing.

2.2 Planning background

Consent was granted by Maldon District Council for a planning application for the demolition of Stokes Hall and erection of a large new dwelling over the original footprint (FUL/MAL/05/01307). Following demolition of the two service wings, an archaeological condition was placed on the works by ECC HEM in respect of the historical importance of the house and the perceived archaeological potential of the area. The requirement was based on advice given in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning (DOE 1990).

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The work was required to investigate and record the house in its present condition before demolition and to monitor the groundworks for the new structure. Groundworks included digging a new access road across the moat, a large basement and foundation trenches and service runs.

A low-level RCHME level 2 was required of the house including description, discussion and photographs.

4.0 DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

Demolition had already started by the time the programme of recording works had started. Both wings had been removed as well as the portico on the main elevation. Internally, the stairs, fireplaces and most of the stud walls had been removed.

However, the spatial layout of the rooms was evident and where possible the function of each room was assessed. A range of interesting fixtures and fittings were recorded and architectural

descriptions were made along with sketch plans of the main floor levels, included in the report as figs. 6 and 7. Access was afforded to the roofspace and trusses analysed. The basement was flooded and therefore not entered.

A series of photographs (colour medium format, digital and 35mm monochrome prints) were taken to record the buildings internally and externally. Specific shots were taken of areas of important architectural detail, fixtures and fittings. A representative selection is reproduced at the back of the report as plates 1-16. The remainder can be found in the archive.

The Essex Historic Environment Record (HER) was used to place the site within its archaeological context. Cartographic and documentary sources were consulted at the Essex Records Office (ERO), Chelmsford, to understand the historical development of the Stokes Hall estate and the hall.

Groundworks associated with the development were monitored in order to identify and record any buried archaeological deposits or features relating to the origins and development of the site. The results are presented in section 7.0.

5.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (figs. 2-5)

Several areas of archaeological interest surround the site, largely dating to the prehistoric period. One such example is a group of 3 ring ditches recorded as cropmarks 300m to the east (EHER 11369). To the west a utilised flint flake was found (EHER 11373) and to the south along Althorne Creek there is evidence for Bronze Age occupation. A wooden structure (EHER 13681), radiocarbon dated to 2800 +/- 70 BP, survives on the edge of what appeared to be an area of high ground along the creek. Post-medieval activity can also be seen with the survival of a potential stone structure visible near the low water mark at the edge of the creek (EHER 13711). Cartographic evidence also suggests some significance of a nearby monument known as Round Hill to the south (ECC FAU 2006). Although not recorded in the HER, Stokes Hall was clearly once a moated site and extensive parts survive as ditches and earthworks.

According to Morant's History of Essex (1768) the manor of Stoke Hall was formed during the reign of Edward I (1272-1307) by 'Edmunde de Stok'. This is a good date as it ties in with the fashion of moat-building in the 13th-century. The moat would have surrounded the original manor house, which at this stage is likely to have been a timber-framed aisled (?) open hall house, unlikely to have left any substantive evidence in the archaeological record.

The land was rented to Richard de Gravesend and later to Alphonse de Vere, son of Robert, 6th Earl of Oxford, in the 14th-century. At the beginning of the 16th-century (1508) the estate was owned by the Darcy family and later (1574) by the Harrys.

The earliest known map, produced by Chapman and Andre in 1777, shows the house in the centre of an enclosure with the pond to the north-west. The house is in a similar position as it is today, but facing the Creek, with two ranges extending to the rear (fig. 2) probably around a yard. Small outbuildings are located in the vicinity, possibly associated with a farmstead. Although crudely drawn and difficult to pick out detail, this may represent the original manor house structure.

Moving into the 19th-century, the Althorne tithe map (1839, fig. 3) provides important information on ownership and land use and shows the hall in greater detail. In fact, the hall has been rebuilt with side wings and an L-shaped range to the west, representing a yard and stables, according to the tithe award (D/CT 4A). In 1839 the estate is owned by Richard Gardner, who also owned Stokes Hall Farm to the south (plot 156), but had residence at the hall. In all, Gardner had 330 acres of arable and marsh land, including 18 acres of grazing land (D/CT 4A). Both this map and the succeeding estate map of 1854 (fig. 4) exaggerate the extent to which the wings are recessed from the main core of the building, especially the north façade. Maps from 1839 onwards indicate the line of the moat to the south of the house.

A portico has been added to the north side of the house by the time of the first edition OS map of 1872-3 (fig.5). It is likely that the new roof formed part of the same improvement works. A tree-lined carriageway sweeps around the pond to the main north side of the house and there is a second gatehouse at the entrance in addition to that on the corner of the main road entrance. It is possible that the stable block has been rebuilt with a porch facing the pond to the west (fig. 5).

In the 20th-century the east wing was rebuilt as offices and the hall was refurbished in Georgian style. This may have come after a period of disuse, though this is not known. The west wing is believed to have been rented out.

6.0 BUILDING DESCRIPTION: THE HALL:

6.1 General description

The house is brick-built on a west to east alignment and symmetrical oblong plan form 10 x 15.5m with service wings either side, each measuring 5.2 x 9m. It is built on four levels, including a (flooded) basement and roofspace, divided into three bays. The exterior is stuccoed with fine rusticated lines to convey the feeling of stone. The whole is painted in a reserved pale yellow colour with white-painted woodwork and dressings. The roof is tiled and gabled either side with a

low 30° pitch and chimneys set either side of the apex in pairs, hinting at a survival from an earlier double pile roof. The eaves project on pairs of carved consoles to accommodate the later roof span. The chimneys are plain. Small oblong attic lights are site at the apex at each end. At the time of the survey, barring the obvious effects to the house through demolition of the side wings and stripping of the interiors, the structure was in extremely good condition, well-maintained and water-tight externally and nicely painted and decorated inside, with many ornate fixtures and fittings. Elevations are austere, yet distinctive, and each has its own character in terms of the hierarchy of the house.

Bricks used in the construction are dark red handmade bricks, commonly measuring c.220 x 100x 60-65mm (8⁵/₈ x 4 x 2³/₈ inches), laid in English bond in a hard lime mortar. Size and crease marks give a provenance to the late 18th to early 19th-centuries, which supports the map evidence for the hall's construction.

Hedges are cut and there is granite paving around the house. A driveway has been added to the south side of the house, making this the principle elevation in the modern period. Although demolished, the 19th-century stable range had already been replaced in the modern period by a fletton brick-built (probable) garage, but the foundations to the rear may belong to an earlier structural phase.

6.2 Main (north) elevation

Removal of the portico has severely altered the appearance of the main façade, but, as some compensation, its removal provides a glimpse of the way in which it was constructed.

The main entrance is set centrally to the front, with low steps leading to a paved area that lines this side of the house. The 19th-century portico and front door have been removed, and the scar to the former pilasters and entablature are clearly visible, as are the mortice holes that fixed the structure to the wall (plates 1 & 2). After dismantling, the portico was put to one side and recorded photographically during the survey (plate 3). It was noted that the timber columns at the front of the feature were fluted and had stucco bases to add weight. They stood in line with the wall pilasters, two each side of the entrance. Mortice holes indicate their positions in the paving.

Fenestration is fairly orderly (and follows Palladian proportions of the square and a third and double square), comprising low 16-light folding windows on the ground floor and 8-pane central-opening casements on the first floor, plus a small off-centre fixed light for the landing. Ground floor windows are inserted into the beaded skirting that wraps itself around the main block and wings,

but changes to a plainly-moulded skirting away from the more important north façade. Unlike the rear elevation, the window dressings are plain.

The box at the front (plate 1) provided ventilation to the cellar and a means of bringing foodstuffs in for storage. Tall square timber pilasters stand either end of the front with Greek motifs and a zoomorphic head carved into the top (plate 4).

6.3 Secondary (south) elevation

The ordering of the windows and door is similar to the main façade, but with more variety, style and embellishment (plate 5). Proportions are not as good this side. The rear entrance is placed slightly off-centre within its own door case. Either side are diminishing square columns, a moulded lintel and carved brackets supporting a flat, lead-lined canopy. Set above the door is a fanlight, a typical aspect of Georgian architecture. Windows on this side are mainly 16-pane vertically sliding hung sash windows with thin glazing bars (1 inch) and horns, suggesting a post-1830s/40s date, with flat plastered heads and keystones. French windows light the eastern room, which again are centrally-opening like the windows on the main façade. Next to it, the narrow top-vented window seems slightly out of place (plate 5).

6.4 Service wings

Although demolished, some idea of the form and function of the side wings was gained from their remains (plates 1 & 5). The two wings were built contemporary with the main house, and set on two levels. They were probably constructed as servant accommodation and utility rooms (wash house, etc). The outbuilding next to the west wing on the cover picture has a distinct utilitarian appearance, with its skylight and water pump outside the door. Part of its 6 inch red tile floor was seen beside the rubble that largely occupied this area during the survey. On the other side of the outbuilding was a walled terraced garden.

The west wing (plate 1) is authentic and contemporary with the main house. The scar to a queen post strut roof truss can be seen in plate 1, as well as various doorways into the house, one of which, above the arched doorway on the ground floor (in plate 1) is sealed from the main house.

Despite its old-fashioned appearance on the front cover, the east wing (plate 5) has clearly been rebuilt in the modern period. Probably when the whole house was 'restored', though exactly when this was is difficult to say without more evidence. The walls have been constructed one brick skin thick, with a breezeblock skin behind and plastered over on the inside. The bricks are bonded in cement and are a mixture of reds and yellow stocks, some of which may well have been reused from the original east wing.

6.5 Internal descriptions

Both floors had been stripped ready for demolition. By the time of the survey, internal stud walls had been removed and holes punched through the lath and plaster ceilings. Stairs had been taken out and all doors and fireplaces (except a modern mock Tudor fireplace) removed, presumably for reclamation.

There are three bays, each 5m wide with a c.4m central bay. The floor plan is common to both levels. Each floor level is divided into six rooms, which are numbered on floor plans figs. 6 and 7 for ease of reference. The top floor is further divided by an axial corridor linking the stair landing to the four bedrooms and bathroom.

The house is well-decorated inside, as it is on the outside. There is moulded detailing around the windows and at formal entry points between the reception areas on the ground floor, that appear to be original. However, some of the Georgian-style features; certainly some doors and window fixtures have modern fixtures, which have been swapped with original ones. Parquet floors dominate the ground floor and there are bare boards on first floor level. A single brick spinal wall separates the front and back of the ground floor. Otherwise all other internal partitions are created from 10 x 13cm-wide primary-braced studs, which have been knocked through in preparation for demolition.

6.5.1 Ground floor and basement

The main entry points are located centrally along the long sides. Doorways link to the west, the probable kitchen wing, though any evidence for a cooking range has been blocked and decorated over. A single doorway gains entry to the east wing.

The large folding windows in rooms 1 (plate 6) and 3 on the main elevation and the French windows in room 4 (plate 7) have some modern fixtures, but are probably original. Shutters have been removed from the end cases that once folded into the gaps beneath the Greek-style carved wooden frames (plate 7). Classical fluted door cases mark the major entry points between rooms 3 and 4 that formerly housed double doors (plate 8). Some neat naturalistic carving festoons the alcoves either side of the fireplace in room 4 (plate 7). However, there are some fittings that bring the authenticity of these features into doubt. The dentilled cornice in rooms 1 and 6 are definitely false. To illustrate this, the cornice in room 1 (plate 6) is fitted over the wallpaper!

Various cupboards and shelving units are utilitarian in aspect and show no Georgian embellishment, yet are attractive in their simple design (plate 9, left). Other fixtures include a beaded skirting.

Where part of the ceiling has been removed, the dividing wall between rooms 4 and 5 exhibits an earlier, reused, wall plate (23 x 17cm-wide) housing an empty pegged mortice; an entirely different form of construction. This was the only recycled timber recorded, yet in appearance it is contemporary with the rest. Perhaps it was originally a wall plate refitted as a primary joist during the early stages of construction.

The basement that lies beneath Room 1 has recently been used as a workshop but is now flooded. It shows no remarkable characteristics and was recorded photographically only (see archive).

6.5.2 First floor and roofspace

Each of the four bedrooms is laid out with cupboard space at the back (fig. 6). Inside are basic shelving and hand-carved clothes hooks of a style common in domestic and utilitarian scenarios throughout the 19th-century (plate 12). Plates 10-12 show the general condition of the first floor.

Floorboards are 9"-wide and appear to be in oak. The casement and sash windows have some modern fixtures, such as mild steel handles, which suggest they are later replacements, although apart from these they seem authentic 19th-century.

A short dogleg stair leads from the rear of room 10 up into the roofspace, where some of the more interesting discoveries were made.

The present pitched roof is clearly built over an earlier double pile roof and brick parapet. The outer roof has been removed but the two middle sections of the original roof retained to support the newer roof. To construct the roof, wall plates were laid on top of the parapet and new rafters laid onto the old roof. Because the aim of the new roof was to hide the parapet, the roof was laid on a lower pitch to overhang the eaves, hence the consoles. Once in position, the outer rafters were sawn off (plate 13), leaving the inner ones to support the new roof (plate 14). This explains the flimsy nature of the roof, which is essentially propped up by randomly-placed wooden posts nailed to either ridge plate or rafter (plate 14). Purlins run along the base of the roof, connected to low collars nailed to the inner pitches of the original build. The construction of the original roof is more robust: of collar purlin type. Some of the wooden batons remain (plate 12).

Bricks used for the parapet are identical to those in the house and west /wing and show a common build.

7.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

Two areas, the access road and new basement, were monitored during groundworks for the new house and their locations are shown in fig.8. An interesting underground brick chamber was discovered outside the western wing of the former house, though its position was difficult to locate exactly amid the demolition site. Unfortunately, flooding, soft soil and rubble made conditions hazardous and close inspection of the chamber could not be made. No other features or deposits of archaeological importance were found.

7.1 Access road

A new access route was cut through the meadow to the north-west of the house to replace the existing south-west access, which is to become a new kitchen garden. Topsoil to a depth of 0.30m was machine-excavated as far as the new circular driveway and then filled with demolition rubble from the old house as bedding for the new surface. An undisturbed hard clay gravel subsoil was exposed immediately beneath topsoil. No archaeological finds or deposits were exposed.

7.2 Basement excavation

A large area approximately 22 x 22m was reduced underneath and around the former hall to accommodate a new basement for the new house. Formation level to the dig was deep, to approximately 5m into the clay natural. The north side of the dig was cut vertical and fenced off, while the other three sides were battered back by 3m for safety reasons.

An underground brick-built chamber, measuring approximately 4 x 6m, was discovered in the north-west corner of the excavation, close to the former west wing. It lay directly beneath a tarmac surface (plates 15 & 16). Either side was a layer of dark grey modern clay made ground laid for the tarmac. The chamber was ovoid in shape with a domed roof that had collapsed on the south side. The feature was built in red frogged bricks and yellow stock bricks laid within a very sandy lime mortar. The inner walls were lined in plaster inside the structure was filled with water and rubble. It post-dates the hall, and is more likely to have been built in the later part of the 19th-century, perhaps when general improvements were made to the house. The south end of the arch had been partly blocked to form a square opening, either side of two inserted (cemented) brick piers, not bonded into the main brickwork, with an iron joint spanning the width (plate 16). This was probably a repair made after the southern section, which is very disturbed, collapsed in the modern period. Away to the south, the suggestion of a brick drainage channel was observed, but was badly-disturbed.

The position of the feature close to the west wing suggests a service use. No fixtures or fixings were seen inside and the walls inside were plastered. It is too near to ground level to be an ice house and no entrance was apparent. The likely function was perhaps as it does now, to hold water. The front cover picture shows a hand pump outside the entrance to the outbuildings and the chamber is near by, even if its position is approximate. Perhaps it was a rainwater well for household use. It is worth remembering that water level is very low on the site.

8.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Stokes Hall stands on a prominent position overlooking the River Crouch. The present hall stands within a moated enclosure to a probable late 13th-century timber-framed hall, about which very little is known. As such, it has high archaeological potential, although no evidence for the medieval house was discovered during monitoring of groundworks on the site. It is likely that the shallow footings for the earlier house were removed to make way for the present house, which was built in the late 18th or early 19th-century (1777-1839). Such a house was built in the domestic Georgian style as a pedimented double pile house, with good proportions and a symmetrical plan form. A range of outbuildings was attached to the west wing (stables, etc.).

In the mid to late 19th-century (1854-1872), a Neo-Georgian portico was added on the main (north) elevation and a single pitch roof built over the existing one, thus hiding the parapet. Both features were presumably part of a modernisation phase, to keep up with the latest fashions. Though quite why a portico was not added from the start is not known. At the same time, it is possible that the whole exterior was brought up to date, with new fenestration (horned sash windows, folding windows, and French windows) more in keeping with the times. The interior was probably updated too. The underground chamber was probably built during this phase.

In the 20th-century the stables were demolished and a garage built. A new drive changed the focus to the south elevation. It is possible there was a period of abandonment, for in the latter part of the last century, the whole house was refurbished and the east wing completely rebuilt. The house was 'restored'/modernised in the Classical style; sometimes, like the cornice in Room 1, quite crudely.

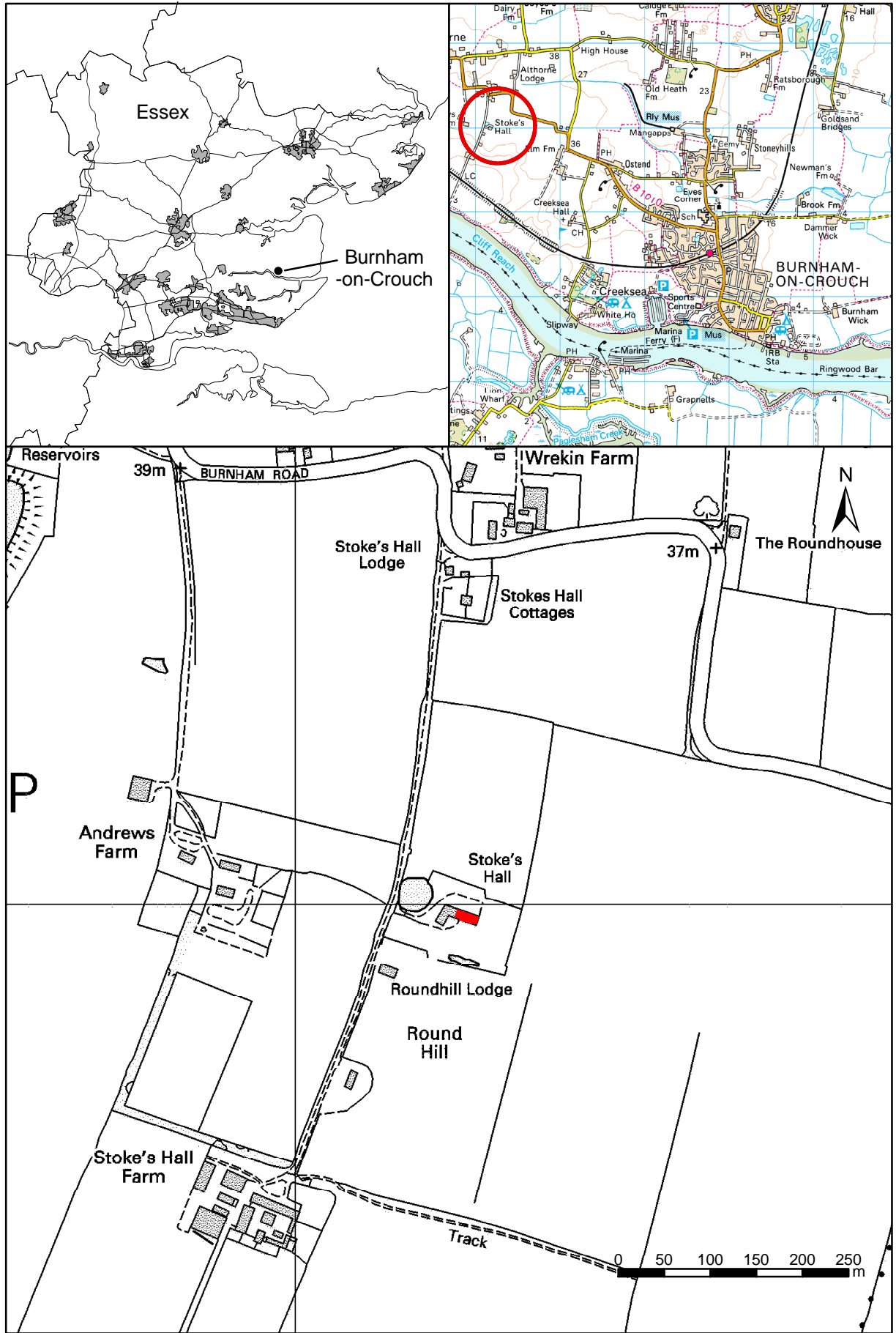
In all, Stokes Hall is an interesting late 18th- or early 19th-century structure of reasonable architectural merit and typical of medium-sized Georgian houses across the Essex countryside, built for the rich professional middle classes of the day. It stands on high ground overlooking the River Crouch along with several other prestigious houses of similar date (Althorne Hall, Cricksea Hall, etc.).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The survey was undertaken by ECC FAU on behalf of the developers, McLaren Construction. Thanks are due to the architect, Chris Mew, for providing site drawings for use in the report and to staff at the Essex Records Office for their assistance. The project was monitored on behalf of ECC HEM and the LPA by Pat Connell.

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Fig.1. Location plan

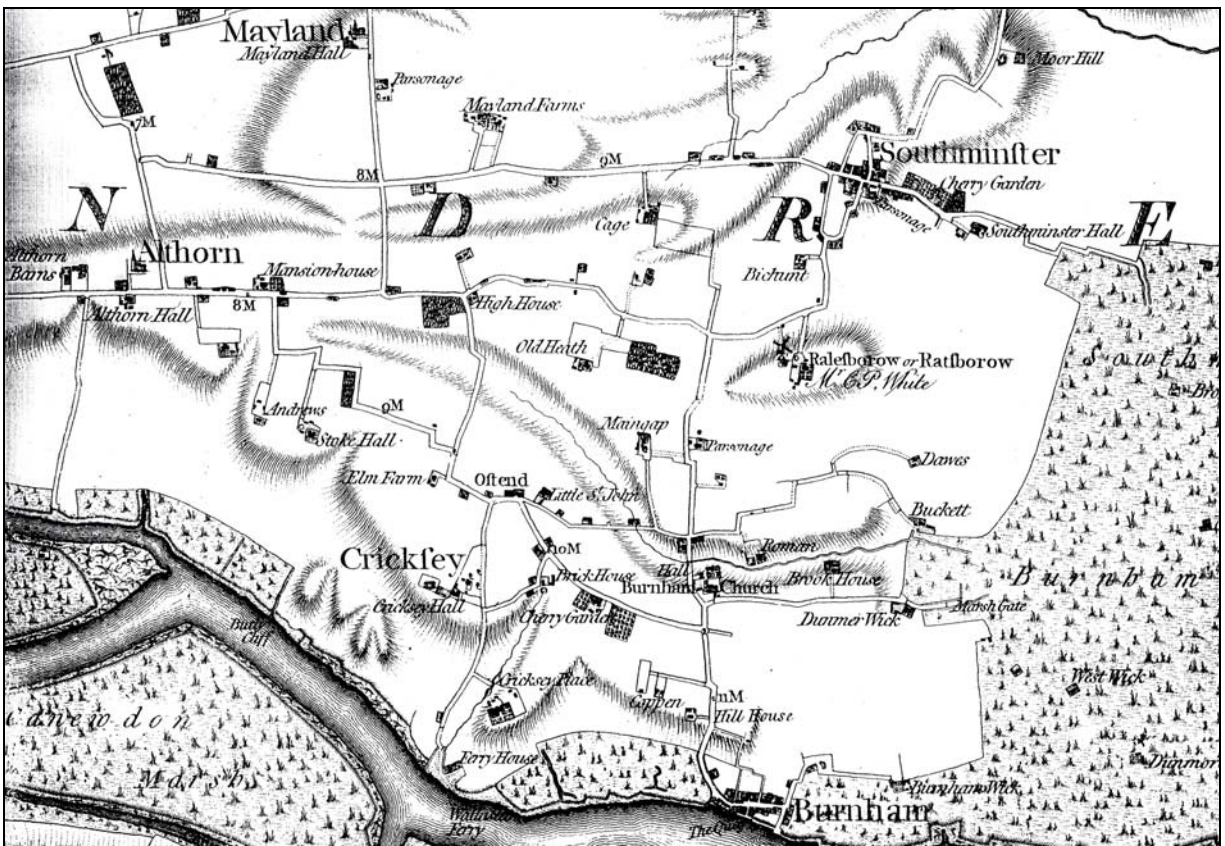


Fig. 2 Chapman and Andre map of Essex, 1777 (plate 17)



Fig. 3 Althorne tithe map, 1839 (D/CT 4A)

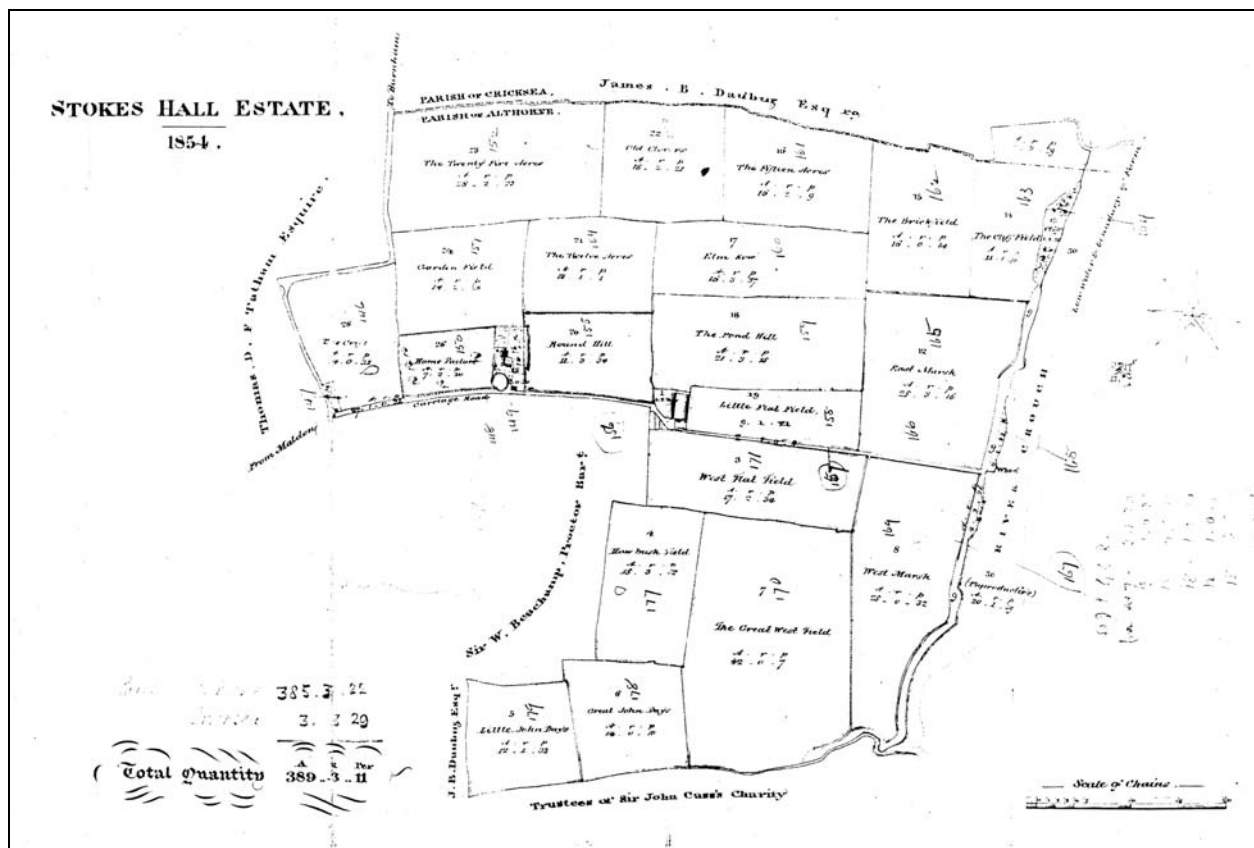


Fig. 4 Map of Stokes Hall estate, 1854 (T/M 370/1)

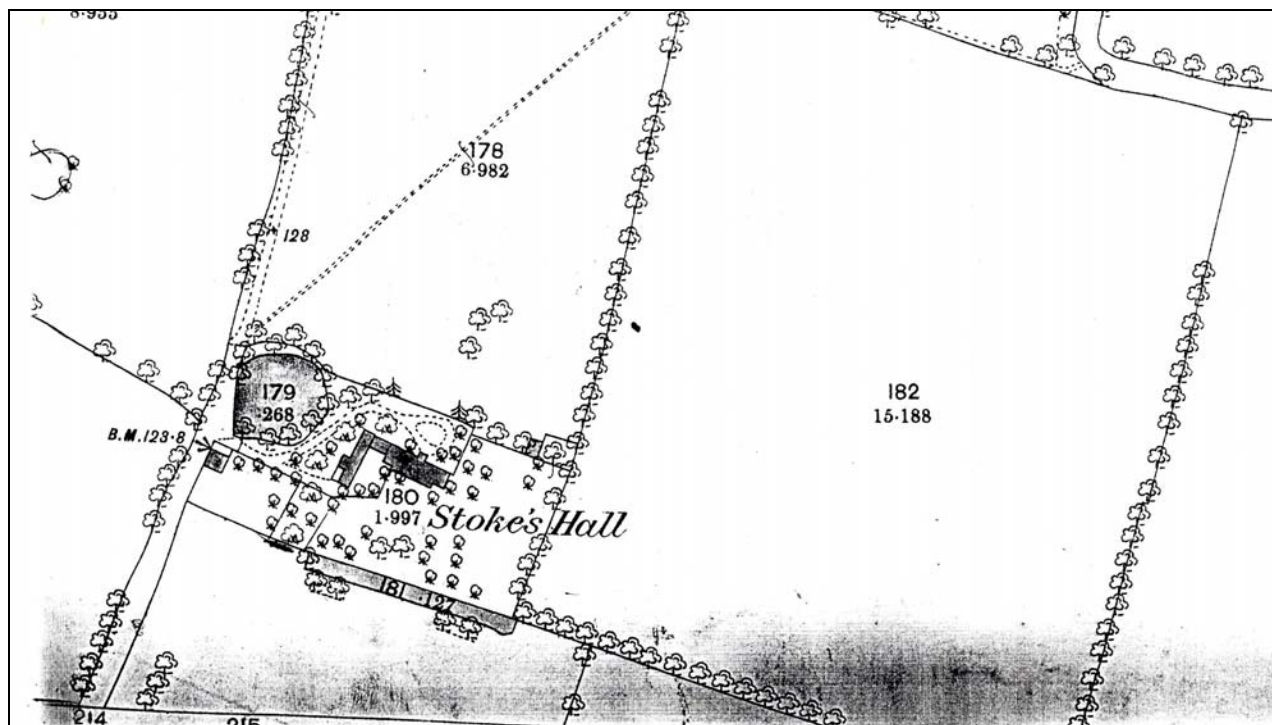


Fig. 5 First edition 25" OS map, surveyed 1872-73 (sheet 62)

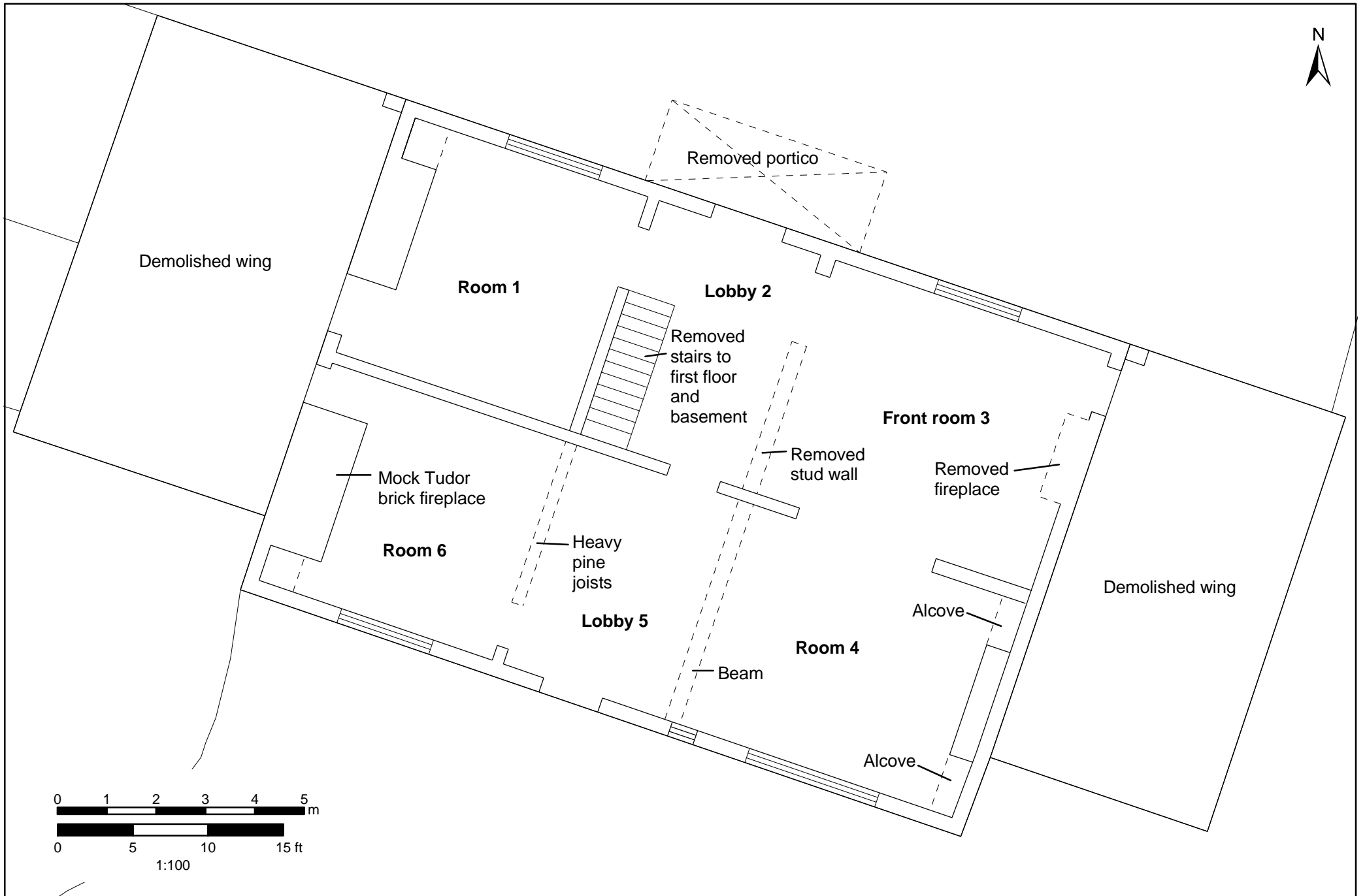


Fig.6. Approximate ground floor plan

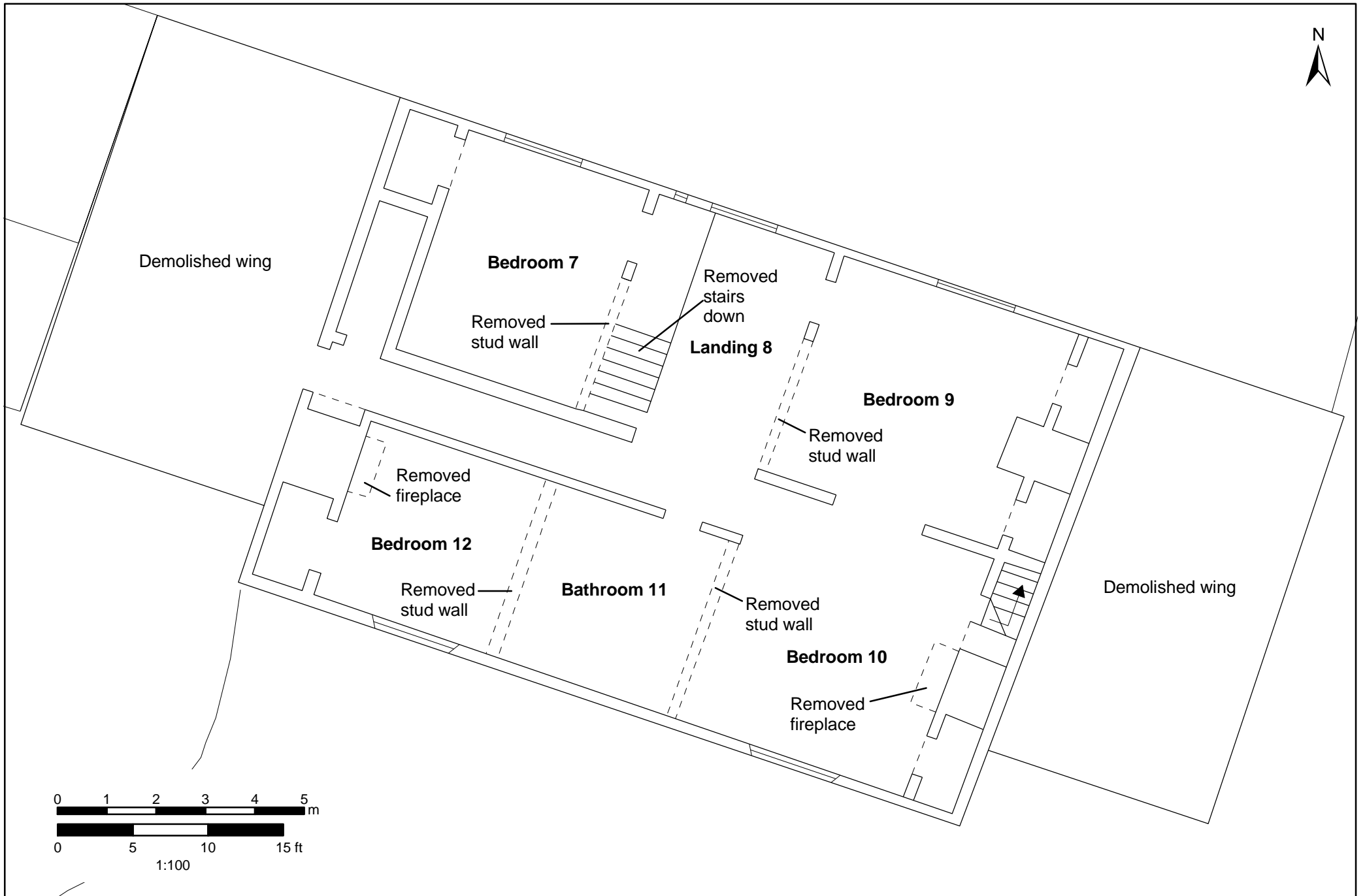
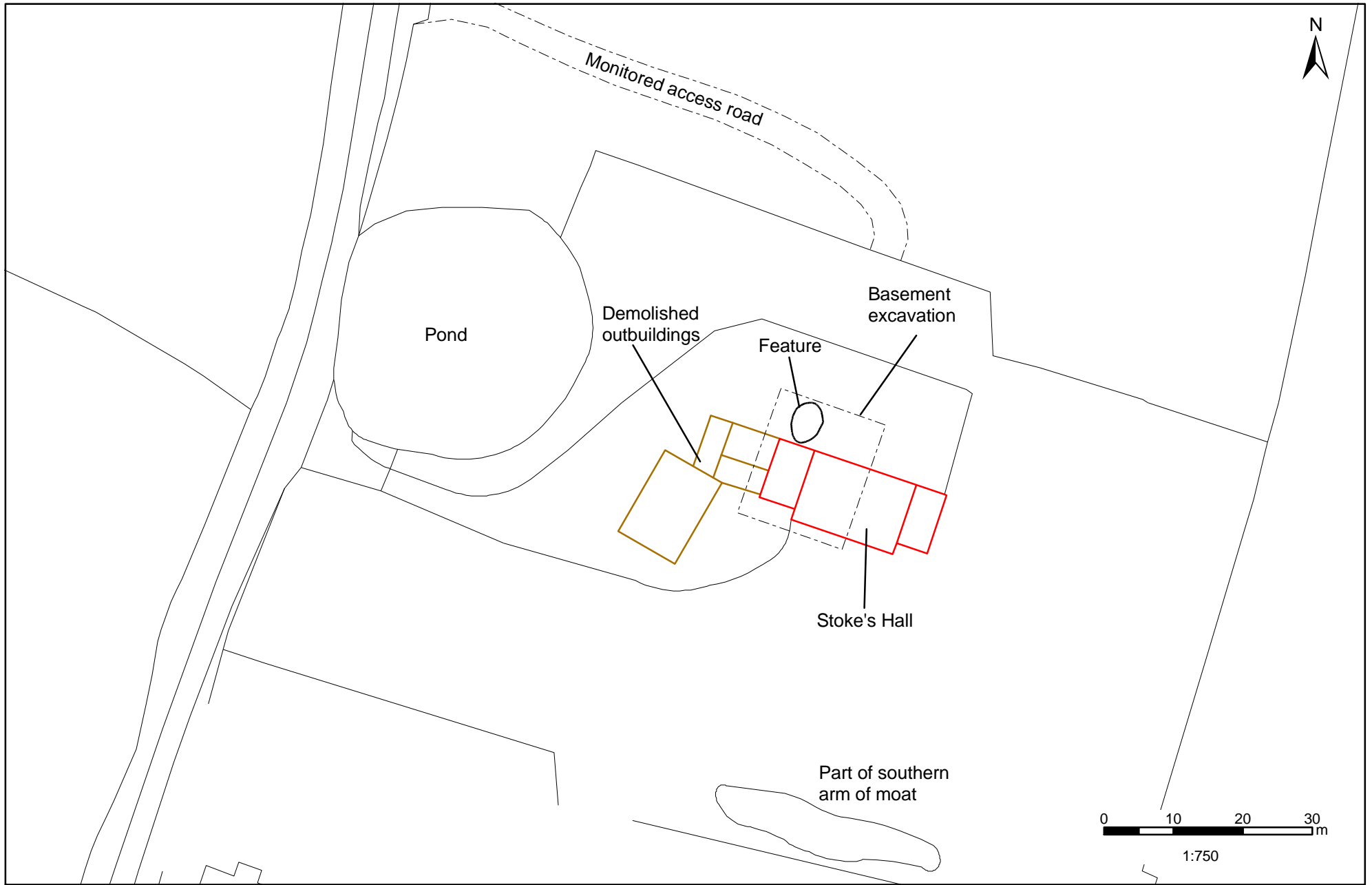


Fig.7. Approximate first floor plan



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Fig.8. Areas of archaeological monitoring



Plate 1 Main (north) elevation and demolished west wing



Plate 2 Scar of removed portico on main elevation



Plate 3 Removed portico



Plate 4 Pilaster carving on main elevation



Plate 5 South elevation and demolished east wing



Plate 6 Room 1 at front of house

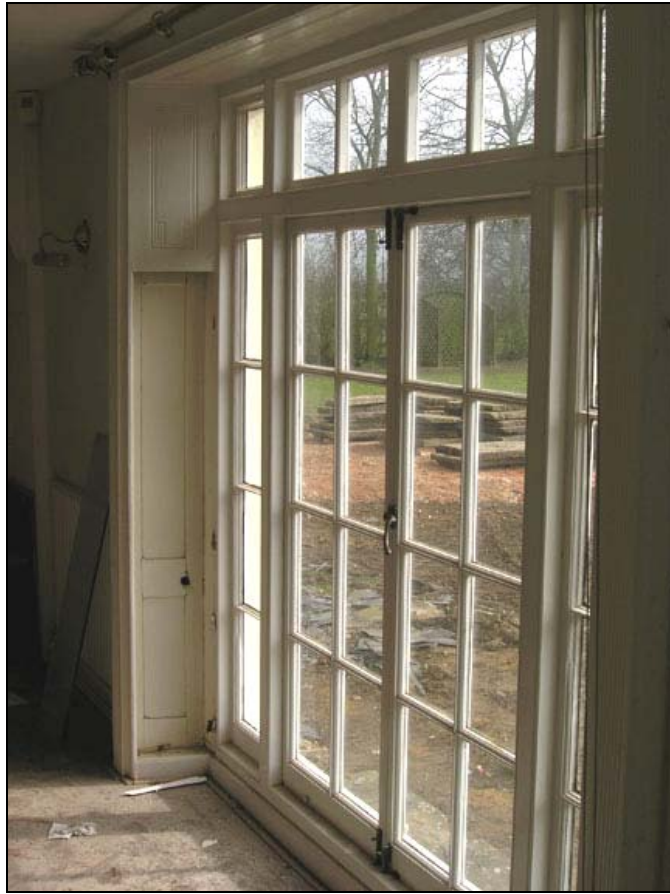


Plate 7 Detail of French windows and shutter casing in room 4



Plate 8 View from room 3 into room 4



Plate 9 View from room 6 to room 4



Plate 10 View from bedroom 10 to bedroom 12



Plate 11 View from bedroom 7 to bedroom 9



Plate 12 Carved wooden cupboard hooks in bedroom 7



Plate 13 Parapet seen inside roofspace, with sawn-through original rafters



Plate 14 View inside roofspace toward west



Plate 15 Underground brick chamber with roof intact



Plate 16 Underground brick chamber after roof removed

Appendix 1: Contents of Archive

- 1.** Introduction
 - 1.1 WSI for building recording
 - 1.2 Brief for works for archaeological monitoring

- 2.** Research Archive
 - 2.1 Copy of report; pdf-formatted

- 3.** Site Archive
 - 3.1 Photographic record & register
 - 3.2 Site notes & drawings
 - 3.3 Architects drawings

Appendix 2: Essex HER Summary Sheet

Site Name/Address: Stokes Hall, Althorne, Essex	
Parish: Althorne	District: Maldon
NGR: TQ 920 978	Site Code: N/A
Type of Work: Building recording & archaeological monitoring	Site Director/Group: A. Letch ECC FAU
Dates of Work: February & August 2006	Size of Area Investigated: c.500m ²
Curating Museum: N/A	Funding Source: McLaren Construction
Further Work Anticipated? None	Related EHER Nos.: 11369, 11373, 13681 & 13711
Final Report: Summary in EAH	
Periods Represented: Late 18th to 20th centuries	
<p>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</p> <p>A low-level RCHME level 2 record was carried out by ECC FAU during demolition works to Stokes Hall, Althorne. By the time the survey had started, the two side wings and outbuilding ranges had been demolished and the interiors largely gutted. Subsequent archaeological monitoring was carried out on the new basement and access road.</p> <p>Stokes Hall has origins in the medieval period. A presumed 13th-century hall, which stood within a moated enclosure, was replaced, it is believed in the late 18th- or early 19th-century by a formal, Georgian-style house with double pile roof. This was remodelled in the middle part of the 19th-century by adding a portico on the main north faced and building a new, single pile roof. In the late 20th-century the east wing was rebuilt and the house refurbished, whilst retaining much of its Georgian appearance.</p> <p>Following demolition of the hall, excavations for the new northern access route and basement were observed in order to investigate earlier occupational evidence on the site. The results were largely negative with the exception of an ovoid underground tank beside the west wing/outbuilding area that was probably a Victorian rainwater well added to the house.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports: None	
Author of Summary: A. R. Letch	Date of Summary: 26th February 2006