

# HERITAGE NETWORK



*Land to the rear of*

**LEWESFORD HOUSE**

**Upper Tilehouse St., Hitchin, Herts.**

*(HN471)*

*Archaeological Evaluation & Monitoring Report*



# THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD

*Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation*

Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

Land to the rear of  
**LEWESFORD HOUSE**  
Upper Tilehouse Street, Hitchin, Herts.

HN471

## *Archaeological Evaluation & Monitoring Report*

*Prepared on behalf of B A Triner and Sons*

*by*

Geoff Saunders, BA

Report No.291

*June 2005*

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## Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out by Geoff Saunders, David Kaye, and Karin Semmelmann. Illustrations were prepared by Geoff Saunders, and the report was edited by David Hillelson.

The Heritage Network would like to express its thanks to Chris Triner, B A Triner & Sons; and Jonathan Smith, County Archaeology Office, Hertfordshire County Council, for their co-operation and assistance in the execution of this project.

## Summary

<b>Site name and address:</b>	Land to the rear of Lewesford House, Upper Tilehouse Street, Hitchin		
<b>County:</b>	Hertfordshire	<b>District:</b>	North Hertfordshire
<b>Village/town:</b>	Hitchin	<b>Parish:</b>	Hitchin
<b>Planning reference:</b>	1/02/0600	<b>NGR:</b>	TL18104 29000
<b>Client name and address:</b>	B A Triner and Sons, 6a Ampthill Road, Shefford		
<b>Nature of work:</b>	New Dwelling	<b>Present land use:</b>	Garden
<b>Size of affected area:</b>	c.80m <sup>2</sup>	<b>Size of area investigated:</b>	c.80m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Site Code:</b>	HN471	<b>Other reference:</b>	n/a
<b>Organisation:</b>	Heritage Network	<b>Site Director:</b>	David Hillelson
<b>Type of work:</b>	Evaluation	<b>Curating Museum:</b>	NHDC Museums Service
<b>Start of work</b>	21/06/2004	<b>Finish of work</b>	13/04/2005
<b>Related SMR Nos:</b>	n/a	<b>Periods represented:</b>	Prehistoric/Roman/Post-medieval
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b>	n/a		

**Synopsis:** In order to determine the archaeological risk posed by a proposal to construct a new house on land to the rear of Lewesford House, Upper Tilehouse Street, Hitchin, the Heritage Network was commissioned by B A Triner and Sons to undertake a programme of archaeological evaluation. Following the results of the evaluation, the groundworks associated with the development were archaeologically monitored.

For the evaluation stage a single trench was excavated within the footprint of the proposed structure. The trench measured 1.6 x 10m, was 1.3m in depth, and was aligned northeast – southwest. Two features were revealed within the trench, a small boundary ditch of late bronze/early iron age date, and a post medieval rubbish pit.

The monitoring of the footings trenches associated with the development revealed a post medieval boundary or drainage ditch.

# 1. Introduction

**1.1** This report has been prepared on behalf of B A Triner and Sons, as part of the archaeological evaluation of a development site on land to the rear of Lewesford House, Upper Tilehouse Street, Hitchin, Herts. Planning permission for the development (ref.1/02/0600), controlled by the North Hertfordshire District Council, has been granted subject to a standard archaeological condition in accordance with the provisions set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note No.16 (PPG16) on Archaeology and Planning. The scope of the required investigation has been set out in a *Design Brief for Archaeological Evaluation* dated 3 June 2004 prepared by the County Archaeological Office (CAO) of Hertfordshire County Council, acting as adviser to the planning authority. A full specification for the work was contained in the Heritage Network's approved Project design dated June 2004.

**1.2** Following receipt of a summary report detailing the results of the evaluation, the CAO requested the monitoring of the groundworks associated with the development.

**1.3** The site lies within the present garden of Lewesford House, to the south-west of the existing building, centred on NGR TL 18104 29000. The development proposed the construction of a single storey cottage.

**1.4** Lewesford House is a Grade II listed building of 18<sup>th</sup> century date which has been grouped with its neighbours on either side. It is located on the main road leading from the centre of Hitchin to Luton, in an area where there was considered to be potential for the discovery of features, deposits and artefacts dating from the prehistoric period onwards.

**1.5** The aim of the present project has been to identify and record any archaeological features and deposits which were uncovered; and to retrieve artefactual and ecofactual elements to allow the date, character, and significance of the site to be assessed in accordance with the current published regional research agenda (Glazebrook 1997, Brown and Glazebrook 2000), subject to the limitations of reasonable safety and practicality.

**1.6** The present report is intended to set the site in its archaeological and historical context, and complete the requirements of the planning condition.

## 2. Fieldwork

### *TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY*

**2.1** Hitchin lies in the bottom of the valley of the River Hiz, with the land rising on both sides of the river.

**2.2** The site lies at c.75m AOD, on level ground within a landscaped walled garden.

**2.3** The underlying geology consists of firm, dark yellowish brown (10YR 4/6), slightly sandy clay with flints.

### *METHODOLOGY*

**2.4** All work was carried out in accordance with the approved *Project Design*, current health and safety legislation, and guidelines defined by the IFA and ALGAO.

**2.5** The trench was triangulated from known points using fibreglass tape measures.

**2.6** A single trench was opened using a tracked 360° mini-digger fitted with a 1.2m wide toothless bucket, under close archaeological supervision (see Figure 2). Spoil from the machining was inspected for archaeological artefacts. The trench was machined to the first significant archaeological horizon.

**2.7** The trench was cleaned by hand, and all potential archaeological features and deposits were sampled to ascertain their nature, depth, date, and quality of preservation.

**2.8** The archaeological monitoring focussed on the strip footings for the new building.

**2.9** All identified contexts were photographed and recorded using the appropriate pro-forma. Scaled plans and sections were drawn on drafting film at scales of 1:10 and 1:50.

### *RESULTS*

#### *Trench 1* (see Figures 2 & 3)

**2.10** Trench 1 was located inside the footprint of the new building and was aligned north-east – south-west. The trench measured 1.6 x 10m and was 1.30m in depth.

**2.11** The stratigraphy in the trench consisted of a layer of loose, very dark greyish brown (10YR 3/2), silty and sandy clay mixed overburden. Beneath this lay the loose, dark brown (10YR 3/3), silty clay topsoil, which lay over a firm, brown (10YR 4/3), slightly silty clay subsoil. Under this the natural geology of firm, dark yellowish brown (10YR 4/6), slightly sandy clay with flints was reached.

**2.12** One linear feature [01] was observed cut into the natural clay, orientated ENE–WSW across the northeast half of the trench. This feature was 0.42m wide and approximately 0.17m deep, with steep slightly concave sides and a flattish ‘U’ shaped base. The solitary firm, dark yellowish brown (10YR 3/4), sandy clay fill yielded one small rim sherd of flint tempered

pottery from the late bronze/early iron age. The ditch was cut by rubbish pit [03]. The small finds assemblage indicates that this feature likely represents a boundary ditch located away from areas of occupation.

**2.13** A sub-circular rubbish pit [03] was observed cut into the natural clay in the centre of the trench. The full dimensions of the pit are unclear as it ran beneath the northwest limit of the trench, but it had a maximum depth of approximately 0.39m. The pit had steep concave sides and an irregular rounded base. The solitary friable, very dark greyish brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay fill contained several small and abraded sherds of early Romano British pottery and several fragments of 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century peg tile. The abraded nature of the pottery sherds indicate that they are residual within the fill. Several of the tile fragments show signs of having been over fired suggesting that they may represent wasters from the firing of tiles in the vicinity of the site.

#### *Recorded contexts*

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)
01	Cut	Linear cut feature with steep slightly concave sides and flattish 'U' shaped base aligned ENE – WSW. Boundary ditch.	Length: 4.40m+ Width: 0.42m Depth: 0.17m
02	Fill	Firm, dark yellowish brown (10YR 3/4), sandy clay with frequent small sub-angular flints and very occasional charcoal flecks. Fill of [01].	Length: 4.40m+ Width: 0.42m Depth: 0.17m
03	Cut	Sub-circular cut feature with steep concave sides and an irregular rounded base. Pit.	Length: 0.95m+ Width: 0.67m+ Depth: 0.39m
04	Fill	Friable, very dark greyish brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay with small flints. Fill of [03].	Length: 0.95m+ Width: 0.67m+ Depth: 0.39m

#### *Ground Reduction*

**2.14** Ground reduction was undertaken within the footprint of the new building to a depth of approximately 0.5m. This level of reduction was comfortably within the modern overburden on the site and so did not impact on the underlying archaeology.

#### *Footings Trenches and Underpinning Pits*

**2.15** A series of underpinning pits were excavated along the existing garden wall, no archaeology was observed within them. Footings trenches were excavated to a depth of approximately 1.0m along the remaining three sides of the new building.

**2.16** Feature [05] was observed in the NE footing trench at depth of approximately 0.93m below the existing ground surface. The feature, which appeared to be linear in plan, measured approximately 0.6m wide by 0.2m deep and was aligned N – S. The single firm, dark grey, clayey silt fill contained frequent charcoal fragments along with post-medieval tile fragments. This feature is located on the alignment of ditch [01] and appears to have cut through it at this point.

**2.17** Further fragments of tile, some of which was mortared together, as well as animal bone were observed within the trenches.

### *Services*

**2.18** The services trenches were excavated within the modern overburden which covers the site and so did not impact on the underlying archaeology.

**2.19** The services have been linked directly into the surrounding network, so no new soakaways were excavated during the present project.

### *FINDS CONCORDANCE*

Ctxt	Pottery		CBM		An.bone		Slag		Comments
	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	
02	3	1							
04	50	17	755	47	15	7	5	1	
U/S Footings	200	3							*discarded
Total	253	21	755	47	15	7	5	1	

### *ARTEFACTS*

#### *Pottery*

**2.20** A total of 21 pottery sherds, weighing 253g, was recovered from 1 unstratified and 2 stratified contexts during the present investigation. The pottery ranged in date from the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age to the modern period. The bulk of the assemblage consisted of abraded, undiagnostic, bodysherds that are likely to have been residual in later features.

**2.21** The earliest pottery consisted of one small rim sherd of late Bronze Age/early Iron Age flint-tempered ware. The sherd was recovered from context (02), the fill of linear feature [01], suggesting that this feature may have been prehistoric in origin.

**2.22** The largest group by number comprised early Romano-British pottery. The material, which was collected from context (04), the fill of pit [03], comprised small and heavily abraded undiagnostic sherds. Pit [03] also yielded several peg tile fragments of 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century date, this together with the poor condition of the sherds indicates that the Romano-British material is residual within the fill. Although residual, the material does suggest activity within the vicinity of the site at this time.

**2.23** The largest group by weight was collected unstratified from within the footings trenches, the material consists of 3 sherds of 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century date.

#### *Recommendations*

**2.24** As the pottery is largely abraded and undiagnostic, and is mostly residual within later features, no further work is proposed on this assemblage.



***Ceramic Building Material***

**2.25** A total of 47 ceramic building material fragments, weighing 755g, were collected from 1 stratified context during the present investigations. The assemblage consisted of small fragments of post-medieval peg tile, ranging in date from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

**2.26** The entire assemblage was collected from context (04), in pit [03]. Several of the fragments show signs of having been over fired suggesting that they may represent wasters.

**2.27** Further fragments of peg tile of similar date were observed within the footings trenches, these were not collected due to their unstratified nature.

*Recommendations*

**2.28** Post-medieval peg-tile is a common find on urban sites of medieval and post-medieval date. On this basis, and the small size of the assemblage, no further work is proposed on this material.

***Slag***

**2.29** A single small undiagnostic piece of slag, was recovered from context (04), in pit [03].

*Recommendations*

**2.30** Given the small size and undiagnostic nature of this item, no further work is proposed.

***ECOFACTS***

***Animal bone***

**2.31** A total of 7 animal bone fragments, weighing 15g, was collected from 1 stratified contexts. The assemblage consisted of small, mostly undiagnostic, fragments.

*Recommendations*

**2.32** Given the small size and fragmentary nature of this material, no further work is proposed on the assemblage.



### 3. Discussion

**3.1** The evaluation stage of the present project revealed a single ditch, [01], along with a rubbish pit [03]. The monitoring of the construction groundworks revealed an additional ditch [05].

**3.2** Ditch [01], observed crossing the north-east half of the evaluation trench on an ENE – WSW alignment, appears to be a Late Bronze/Early Iron Age boundary ditch. The nature of its profile and the small finds assemblage recovered from the fill indicates that it is probably a field boundary located outside any area of domestic occupation dating to this period.

**3.3** Pit [03], observed in the centre of the evaluation trench and cut through the natural clay, appears to be a post-medieval rubbish pit. The pit contained several fragments of 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century peg tile, some of which show signs of having been over fired suggesting they represent wasters. These fragments suggest the possibility that a tile kiln was operating within the vicinity of the site at this period. Several small and abraded sherds of early Romano-British pottery were also recovered from the pit, and although residual, the sherds suggest activity of this period in the vicinity of the site.

**3.4** The probable ditch [05], observed within the footings trench, appears to be a post-medieval boundary or drainage ditch. Its location crossing the alignment of ditch [01] indicates that it is likely to have cut through the earlier ditch at this point.

#### **Conclusions**

**3.5** The archaeological fieldwork has demonstrated the presence of a boundary feature of prehistoric date within the grounds of Lewesford House. No evidence of significant nearby occupation of this period was recovered.

**3.6** The residual Romano-British pottery recovered from pit [03] suggests activity at this time within the vicinity of the site.

**3.7** The 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century waste tile fragments recovered from pit [03] suggest the possibility that a tile kiln was operating in the vicinity of the site at this time.

**3.8** No evidence for occupation activity on the site pre-dating the 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century was observed during the fieldwork.

#### **CONFIDENCE RATING**

**3.9** During the course of the fieldwork, the conditions were generally acceptable for the identification of potential features and deposits, and for their investigation.

**3.10** There are no other circumstances which would lead to a confidence rating for the present evaluation which is less than High.

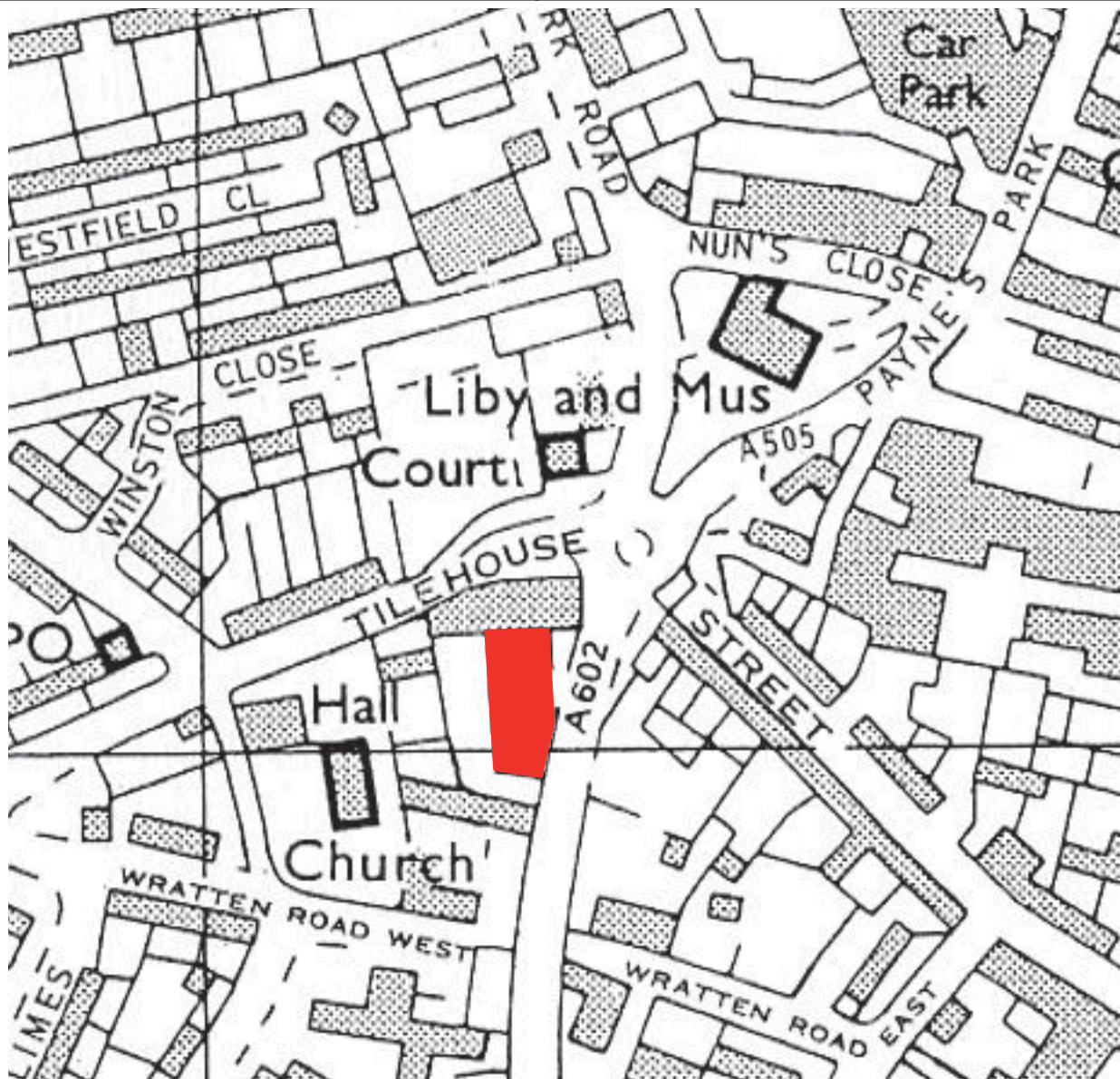
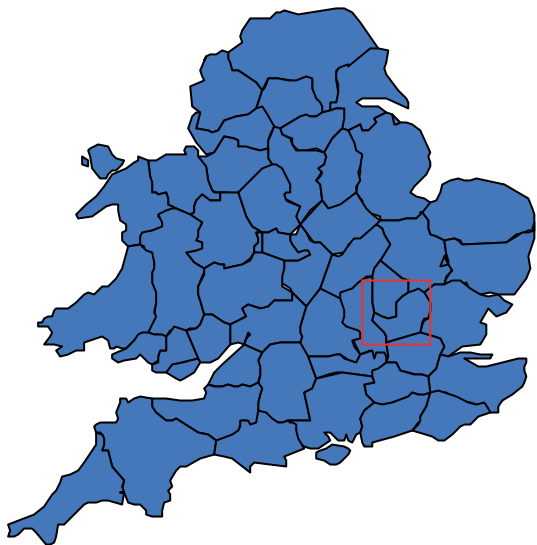
## 4. Bibliography

Hillelson, D. 2004. *Land to the rear of Lewesford House, Upper Tilehouse Street, Hitchin, Herts. Project Design: Archaeological Evaluation*. Heritage Network, June 2004.

Smith, J. 2003, *Design Brief for Archaeological Evaluation, R/o Lewesford House, Up'r Tilehouse St, Hitchin*. Hertfordshire County Council.

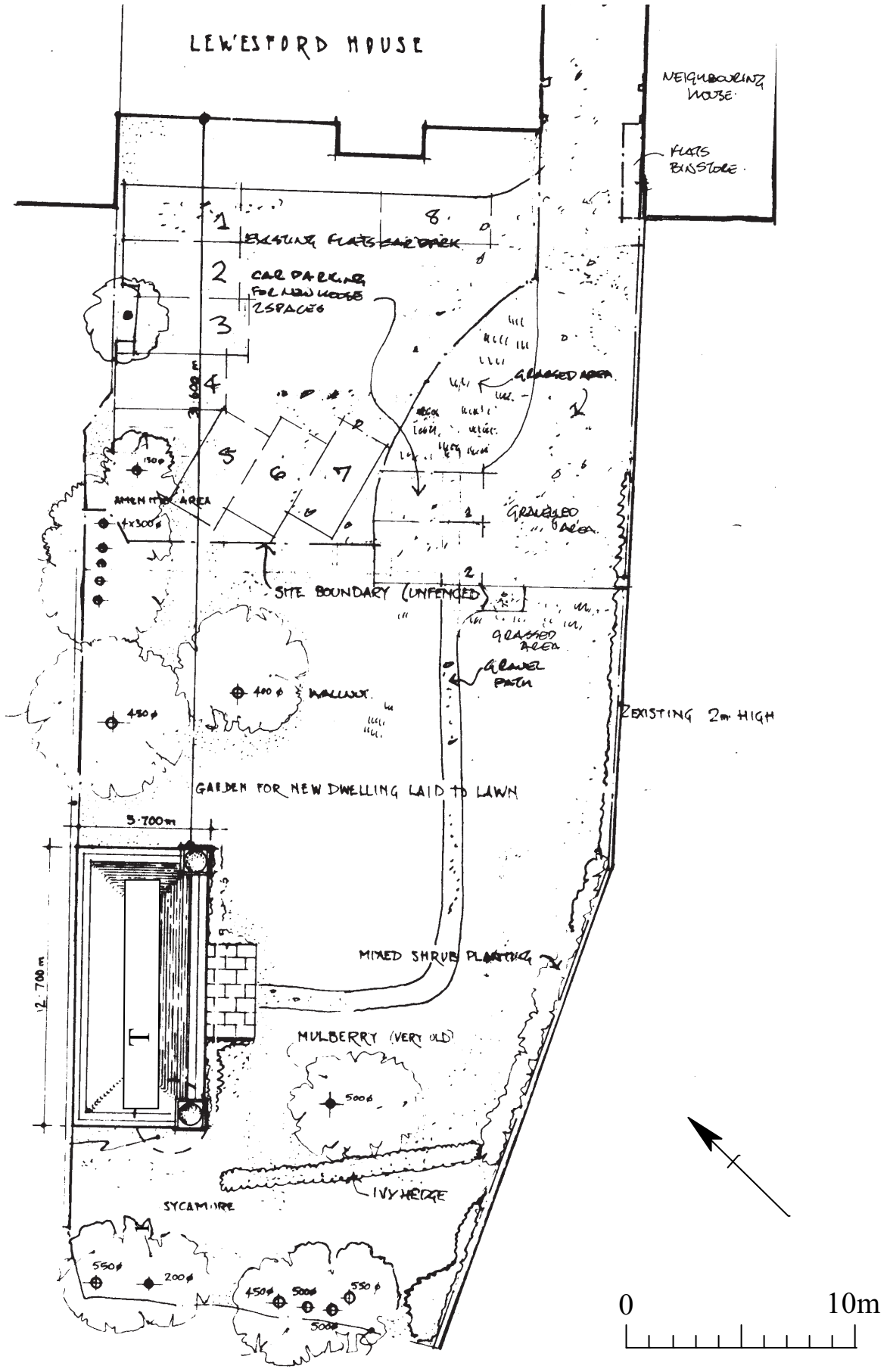
## 5. Illustrations

Figure 1 .....	Site location
Figure 2 .....	Site layout
Figure 3 .....	Footings layout and Trench plan
Figure 4a .....	Trench section
Figure 4b .....	Feature sections



Site Location

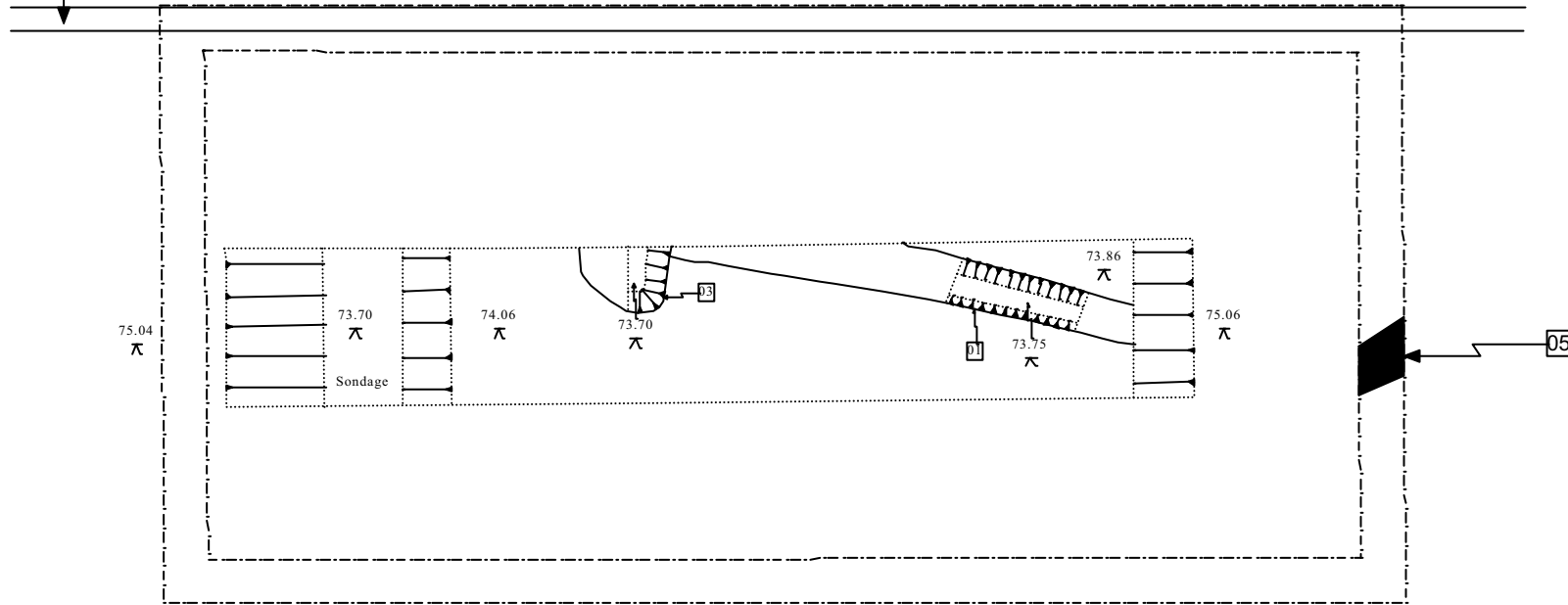
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Site Layout

Scale 1:250  
Figure 2

Existing Wall

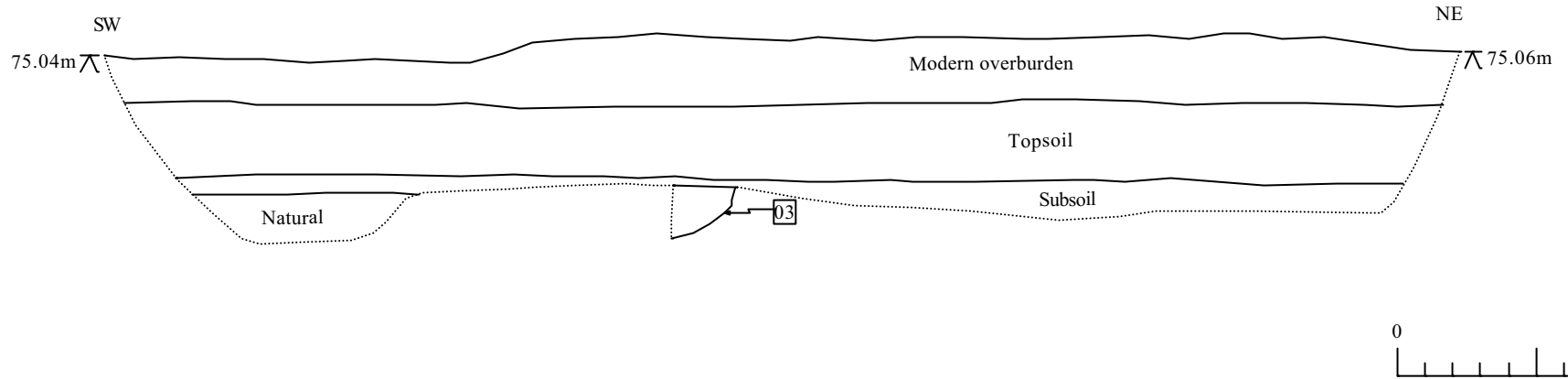


Footings layout & Trench plan

Scale 1:75

Figure 3

*Southeast Facing Section*

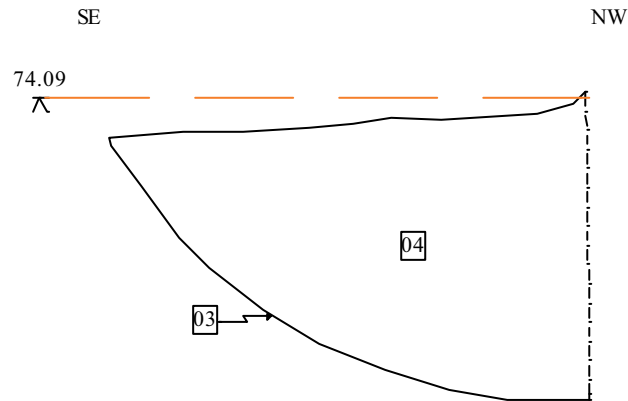


Trench section

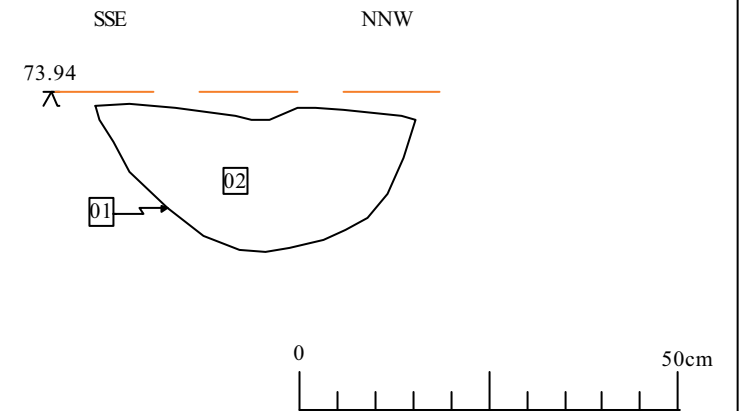
Scale 1:50

Figure 4a

*Northeast facing section through pit [03]*



*East-northeast facing section through linear [01]*



Feature sections

Scale 1:10

Figure 4b