

HERITAGE NETWORK



LETCHWORTH HALL HOTEL
Letchworth, Herts

HN520

Archaeological Monitoring Report



THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD

Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation

Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

LETCWORTH HALL HOTEL

Letchworth, Herts.

HN520

Archaeological Monitoring Report

Prepared on behalf of Letchworth Hall Hotel

by

David Kaye, BA PIFA

Report no.320

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Contents

	Summary	Page i
Section 1	Introduction	Page 1
Section 2	Fieldwork	Page 2
Section 3	Discussion & Conclusion.....	Page 5
Section 4	Schedule of Site Visits.....	Page 6
Section 5	Bibliography	Page 6
Section 6	Illustrations and Plates	following Page 6

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out by David Kaye and Geoff Saunders under the supervision of Chris Turner. The report text and illustrations were prepared by David Kaye. The report was edited by David Hillelson.

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Summary

Site name and address:	Letchworth Hall Hotel, Letchworth Lane, Letchworth, SG6 3NP		
County:	Hertfordshire	District:	North Herts.
Village/town:	Letchworth	Parish:	Letchworth
Planning reference:	04/01325/1	NGR:	TL 2161 3065
Client name and address:	Letchworth Hall Hotel, as above		
Nature of work:	Replacement Building	Previous use:	Hotel suite and car park
Size of affected area:	818m ²	Size of area investigated:	818m ²
Site Code:	HN520	Other reference:	n/a
Organisation:	Heritage Network	Site Director:	David Hillelson
Type of work:	Monitoring	Finds location/Museum:	N. Herts Museums
Start of work	07/03/05	Finish of work	6/4/05
Related SMR Nos:	n/a	Periods represented:	Post Medieval, Victorian
Previous reports:	<i>Letchworth Hall Hotel, Letchworth</i> Heritage Network. Report No. 185 <i>Letchworth Hall Hotel, Letchworth</i> Heritage Network. Report No. 223		

Summary of fieldwork results:

As the result of an archaeological condition on the planning permission for the construction of a replacement building at Letchworth Hall Hotel, Letchworth, Herts, the Heritage Network was commissioned by the owners to monitor the groundworks.

The present project formed a third stage of works at Letchworth Hall Hotel, following the construction of a new leisure centre in 2002/3 and an extension to join up with the Alington Suite in 2003. Much of the present study area lies within the footprint of the former Alington Suite, which was constructed on a heavily landscaped site.

The principal feature revealed during the programme of groundworks was a large brick built Victorian fresh water cistern measuring 5.8m in diameter and 3.1m in depth. There were also two brick cess tanks, some wall footings and a floor surface, which are all likely to be contemporary. A short length of mid 18th wall was also seen.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared on behalf of *Letchworth Hall Hotel Ltd* as part of a programme of archaeological monitoring of development groundworks located in the grounds of Letchworth Hall Hotel, Letchworth, Herts. The planning permission for the development (ref. 04/01325/1 LB), granted by the North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC), was subject to a standard condition which required the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which had been approved by the planning authority. The condition has been met by following the provisions set out in the *Design Brief for Archaeological Monitoring and Recording* prepared by the County Archaeology Office (CAO) of Hertfordshire County Council, acting as advisers to the planning authority. The work followed the specification set out in the Heritage Network's approved Project Design dated December 2001.

1.2 The first phase of the development involved the construction of a new health and fitness centre incorporating a swimming pool, together with a new access road and car park. The second phase consisted of the construction of a building to link the leisure centre with the existing Alington Suite of the hotel. The results of the monitoring of groundworks on these phases have been previously reported (Heritage Network report nos. 185, March 2003 & 223, February 2004). The present phase required the demolition of the Alington Suite and construction of a three-storey block covering the footprint of the Alington Suite and a portion of the existing car park.

1.3 The site is located in a documented historic landscape that includes recorded sites of prehistoric, Roman and medieval date. It forms part of Archaeological Area 90 (AA90) in the District Local Plan (No.2, July 1993), which defines the medieval and post-medieval village of Letchworth. The site may form the centre of the pre-Norman manor of Letchworth, and the present Letchworth Hall incorporates structural evidence that dates to the 15th century. St Mary's Church, which lies just outside the hotel grounds to the north, is 12th century in date.

1.4 The aim of the monitoring programme has been to identify and record any archaeological features and deposits which may have been uncovered, and to retrieve artefactual and ecofactual elements which would allow the date, character, and significance of the site to be assessed in accordance with current regional research agenda (Brown and Glazebrook, 2000), and subject to the limitations of reasonable safety and practicality.

2. Fieldwork

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

2.1 The site lies on land sloping to the southwest, between the 75 and 80m contours (Figure 1). The development area covers approximately 818m², which was formerly occupied by the Alington Suite and part of the hotel car park.

2.2 The observed stratigraphy consists of 0.8m of undifferentiated dark greyish brown (10YR 4/2) silty clay topsoil overlying 0.5m of dark yellowish brown (10YR 4/4) silty clay and sand subsoil. The underlying natural geology is yellowish brown (10YR 5/8) sand.

METHODOLOGY

2.3 The timetable for the fieldwork followed the client's groundwork schedule. A number of site visits were made to supervise the excavation of the footings and drainage trenches and a soakaway.

2.4 The machining was undertaken using a tracked digger fitted with a 1.8m wide toothless bucket for the ground reduction, and with a 600mm toothed bucket for the footings trenches and pads.

2.5 Spoil from the various stages of the groundwork was inspected for archaeological artefacts.

2.6 The project has been carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Design Brief, and with the Heritage Network's approved Project Design.

MONITORING AND RECORDING

Ground reduction

2.7 An area of approximately 280m², immediately adjacent to the Phase 2 link building and within the footprint of the Alington Suite, was reduced by approximately 1.4m through concrete and levelling aggregate. The natural geology was reached and reduced by a minimum of a further 0.1m (Figure 2).

2.8 No archaeology was observed in this area.

2.9 The remaining area of approximately 538m² was reduced by 0.6m through the made-up ground associated with the Alington Suite. During this process a number of structures were exposed including a large brick built tank, two cess tanks, a number of wall fragments and a floor surface (Figure 2).

2.10 The large cistern measured 5.8m in diameter and was approximately 3.1m deep and was situated in the proposed location of four column pads. It was constructed of brick with cement mortar, two courses thick with three 0.65m square, stone capped piers situated equidistant around

its perimeter. Set into the top of the piers were the remains of trefoil cement settings, each supporting three metal uprights that appear to have formed a superstructure to the tank. The floor was 0.5m thick and consisted of three courses of brick underlying two courses of tile. Below the floor level the walls were 0.4m thicker and stepped into the body of the cistern. These wall footings were built directly onto a layer of grey clay that extended a further 0.3m into the body of the tank and was 0.15m thick. The whole of the inside of the structure appears to have been coated in a bitumen-like substance (Figure 3).

2.11 There was no construction cut visible for this feature and the brickwork on the exterior appears not to have been pointed, unlike the interior. This would suggest that the wall had been built abutting the immediate geology.

2.12 Inside the tank there was evidence of a metal collar that once lined the bottom of the wall to a height of 0.75m from the base. It was constructed a series of ferrous metal plates held together with 12mm rivets and secured to the wall with a ring of 6mm metal rivets or studs approximately 10cm below the rim. There was no evidence that this collar extended to line the base of the tank.

2.13 There was a severed 0.09m diameter cast iron pipe offset to the northern edge of the tank coming up through the floor. It was orientated approximately northwest-southeast towards the hotel. There was evidence that this pipe had been leaking for some time as the surrounding sand had turned a greenish black to a depth of approximately 0.3m. This layer was present across the whole of the base of the tank. However, there was no evidence that the effects of the leak had extended beyond the confines of footings wall.

2.14 Three smaller pipes came into the tank at a higher level, one on the west side, one on the south west side and one on the east side of the tank. They were approximately 0.05m in diameter but too inaccessible to record precisely. It is possible that they were connected to the down pipes from the guttering of the nearby buildings thereby collecting rainwater from the roofs.

Footings trenches and column pads

2.15 The footings consisted of a combination of 600mm strip trenches joining column pads of various sizes and a number freestanding column pads. The depth of the trenches and pads varied from 1.1m to 2.5m. There was also a lift base which was dug to over 2m in depth mainly through made up ground.

2.16 Two cess tanks were exposed in pads C and E (Figure 3). Tank 1 was 1.6m in diameter and approximately 2m deep. It was domed and brick built with a cement mortar bonding and a cement render lining. Tank 2 was of identical construction though slightly larger, measuring 1.9m in diameter and 3m in depth. There was also a 0.1m diameter ceramic pipe running northwest from this tank towards some footings exposed between pads B and C.

2.17 The footings were four courses deep and two courses wide, formed of lightly frogged bricks with a cement mortar. There was also a floor surface associated with it, formed of compacted hardcore that was bounded by the longer wall and a shorter, perpendicular one.

Another similarly constructed length of wall 0.8m long was exposed running parallel to this feature 2.8m away to the north of Trench D.

2.18 Two further fragments of brickwork were located in Pad A and in Pad C. The latter was of a single course wide by five courses deep and appeared to be of the same construction as the larger fragments between Pads B and C. However, as there was no visible cut associated with this fragment and it was situated in a make up layer so it is possible that it had been replaced.

2.19 The wall fragment found in Pad A appears to form the corner of a structure. It was at least two courses wide and eight courses deep made of unfrosted, probably hand made, red brick bonded with a lime mortar.

Drainage Trenches

2.20 The drainage trenches were excavated with a JCB but were at a depth that did not breach the make-up layer.

3. Discussion & Conclusion

3.1 The present study area appears to have undergone a considerable amount of landscaping with a terrace being cut into the sloping ground to form a level base for the construction of the modern hotel buildings. Up to 1.5m of ground reduction may have taken place with subsequent makeup layers having been added directly on top of the natural sand. Consequently only deep cut and structural archaeological features would have survived in this area.

3.2 The archaeology is concentrated in the northeast quadrant of the present development area. The vast majority of it appears to be Victorian in date though the wall fragment in Pad A is probably mid 18th century (Figure 4). Due to the small size of the fragment it not possible to say what the original structure was.

3.3 The large cistern was probably intended to collect rainwater with inlet pipes at the top and an outlet pipe at the bottom. The piers may have supported a roof structure or formed part of a float mechanism to indicate the water level within. The function of the metal collar at the base of the tank is unclear though conceivably it may have formed part of a filtration system. This was a substantial structure possibly designed to provide water for the gardens and stables. It was capable of holding an estimated 15,000 gallons of water. Although not well documented, similar structures are know to exist at Wimpole Hall in Cambridgeshire and Kew Gardens, Surrey.

3.4 The two cess tanks are probably later additions to the estate and appear to be associated with the structure between Pads B and C. The smaller tank was capable of holding over a thousand gallons and the larger one, over two thousand.

3.5 The structure between Pads B and C may have been a garden out-building or perhaps part of a stable block. This would also account for the necessity to build relatively large cess tanks capable of dealing with the potential volumes produced by keeping livestock. They may have been designed to store slurry from the stables, the liquor being drawn off as fertiliser for the gardens.

3.6 The 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map shows what appears to be the cistern within a walled enclosure, probably a garden. To the north and northwest is what may be stables, feed stores and cart sheds. The outlet pipe was orientated towards these buildings.

Conclusion

3.7 Despite the development's location in a documented historic landscape with recorded sites dating to prehistoric, Roman and medieval dates, no archaeological features were observed associated with these periods.

3.8 Most of the features appear to be Victorian or modern, the exception being the small wall fragment near pad A which is probably post-medieval.

Confidence Rating

3.9 The conditions were generally acceptable for the identification of potential features and deposits, and for their investigation. There were no circumstances that would lead to a confidence rating for the work that was less than High.

4. Schedule of Site Visits

Date	Staff	Hours	Comments
7/03/05	GIS	1	Briefing on plan of works
10/03/05	GIS	2	Inspect ground reduction
11/03/05	GIS	7	Inspect ground reduction and demolition
14/03/05	DGK	3	Record large tank
17/03/05	DGK	2	Inspect footings trenches
	DGK	1	Inspect lift base
23/03/05	DGK	3	Inspect footings trenches
29/03/05	DGK	4	Inspect footings trenches
30/03/05	DGK	2	Inspect base of large tank
31/03/05	DGK	3	Inspect footings trenches
1/04/05	DGK	2	Inspect footings trenches
4/04/05	DGK	6	Inspect footings trenches
5/04/05	DGK	1	Inspect footings trenches
6/04/05	GIS	1	View photographs of corner footings

5. Bibliography

Hillelson, D. 2001. *Letchworth Hall Hotel, Letchworth, Herts: Archaeological Project Design*. The Heritage Network

Semmelmann, K. 2003. *Letchworth Hall Hotel, Letchworth, Herts*. Report No. 185. The Heritage Network

Semmelmann, K. 2004. *Letchworth Hall Hotel, Letchworth, Herts*. Report No. 223. The Heritage Network

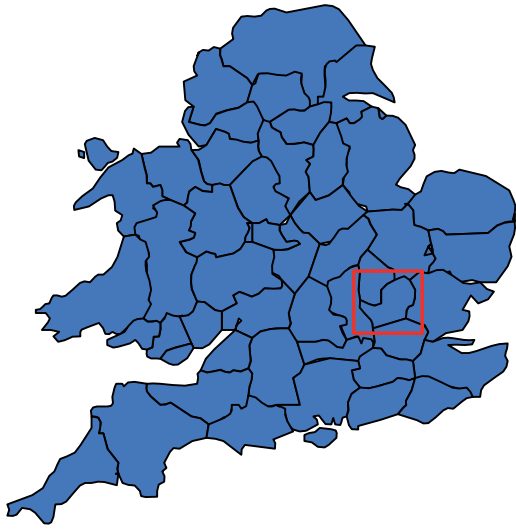
6. Illustrations and Plates

Figure 1	Site Location
Figure 2	Site Layout
Figure 3	Detail of Features
Figure 4	Features in relation to the 1898 map
Plate 1a	General view of tank facing south
Plate 1b	Top of pier
Plate 2a	Rust line left by collar
Plate 2b	Close up of fastenings for collar

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





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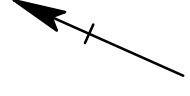
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Figure 1

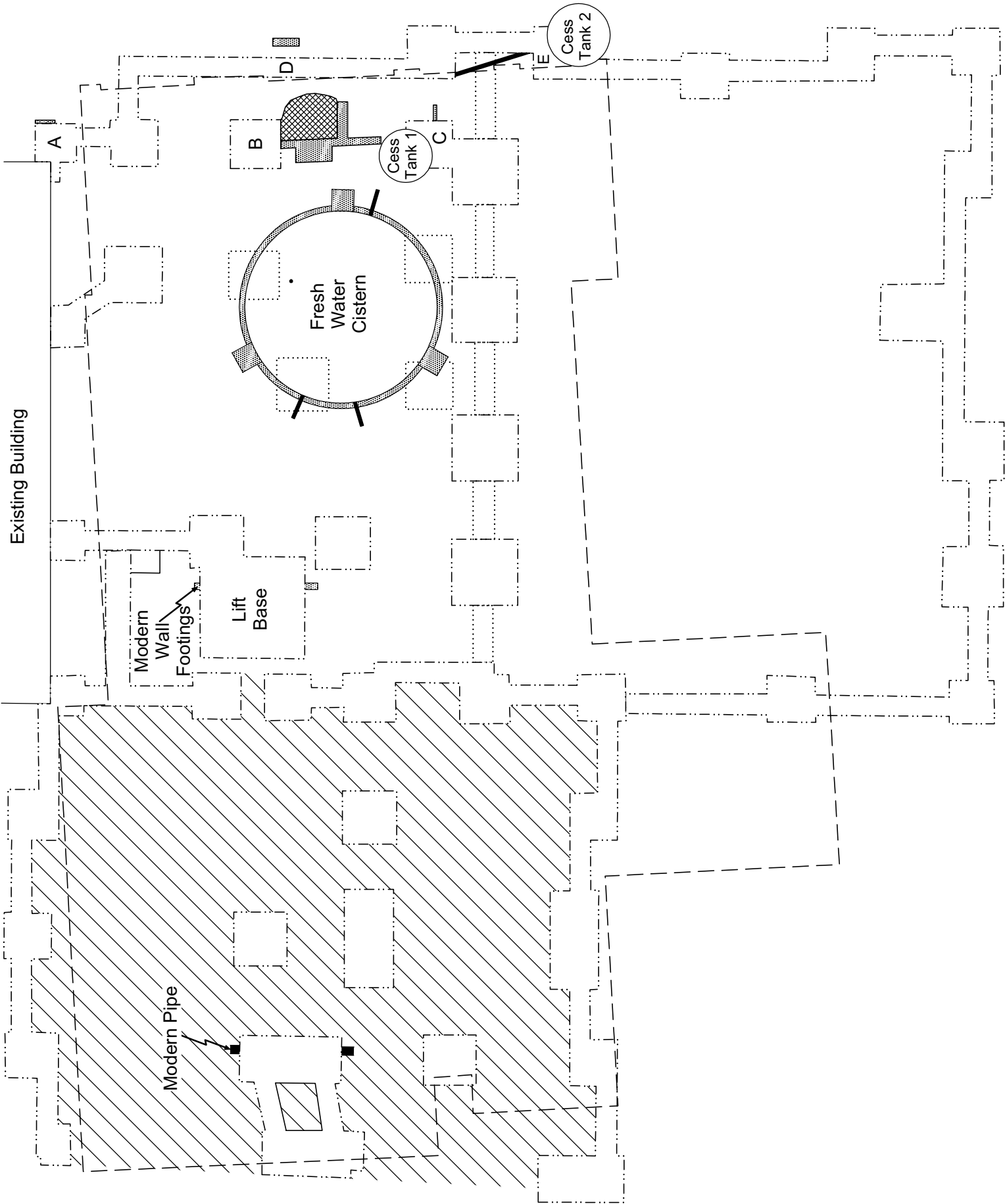
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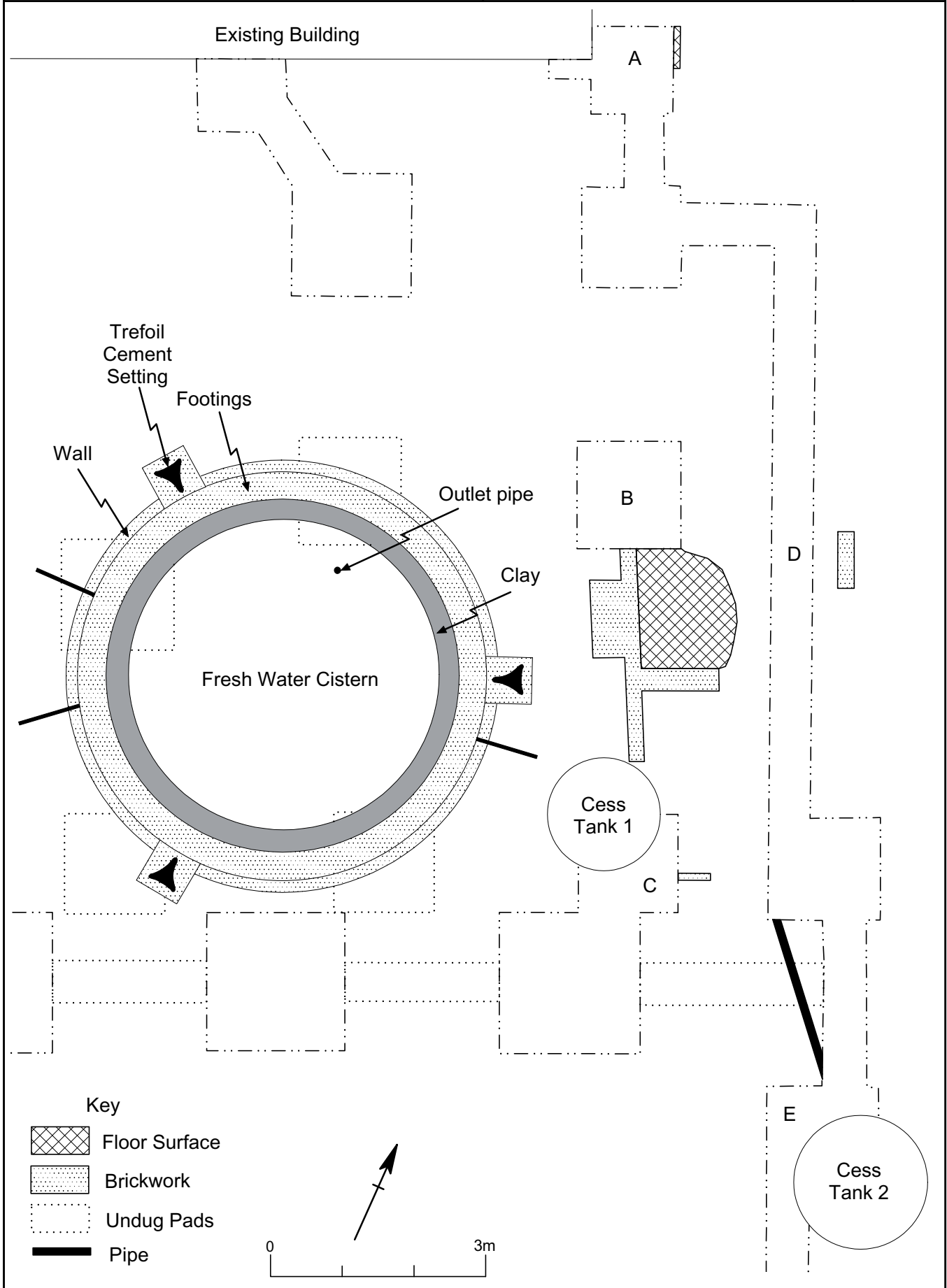
-  Floor Surface
-  Brickwork
-  Undug Pads
-  Reduced Area
-  Pipe
-  Outline of Alington Suite



Scale 1:200

Figure 2

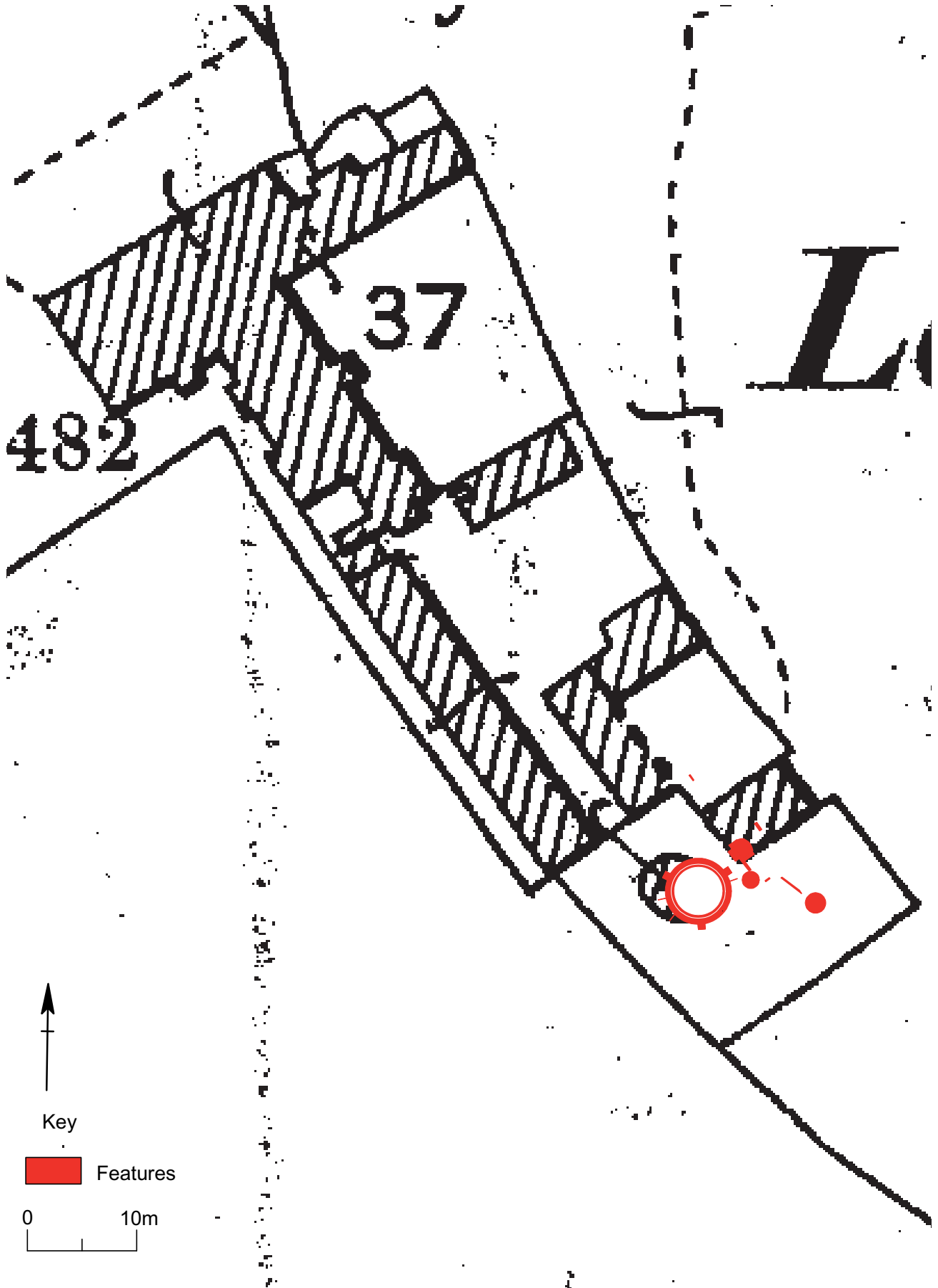




Detail of Features

Scale 1:75

Figure 3



Features in relation to 1898 map
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Scale 1:500
Figure 4



Plate 1a: General view of tank facing south



Plate 1b: Top of pier



Plate 2a: Rust line left by iron collar



Plate 2b: Close up of fastenings for collar