

CHISWICK HOUSE CONSERVATORY Burlington Lane Chiswick London W4

London Borough of Hounslow

An archaeological evaluation report

September 2005



MUSEUM OF LONDON Archaeology Service

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London Borough of Hounslow

An archaeological evaluation report

Site Code: CIZ05 National Grid Reference: 521080 177700

Project Manager Author Graphics David Lakin Carrie Cowan Jane Dunn

Museum of London Archaeology Service © Museum of London 2005 Mortimer Wheeler House, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7ED tel 020 7410 2200 fax 020 7410 2201 email molas@molas.org.uk

Summary (non-technical)

This report presents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology Service on the site of Chiswick House Conservatory, Burlington Lane, Chiswick, London W4. The report was commissioned from MoLAS by English Heritage.

The purpose of the evaluation was to further understand the form of the hypocaust heating system in the central and eastern part of the conservatory.

The evaluation has shown that the potential for survival of the hypocaust heating system is high although some truncation had occurred. The best survival was in trench 2 where the flues and encasing walls survived almost intact. The finds from the evaluation consisted of flowerpots and plastic and ?alloy labels but there were no artefacts which could be closely dated. Nevertheless features from the separate phases dating to 1813, 1828 and 1855 were revealed.

Some of the features of trenches 1, 3 and 4 were not interpretable without further investigation. The decision for any further archaeological work rests with English Heritage.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

The site of the Conservatory lies in the grounds of Chiswick House in the London Borough of Hounslow. The site lies to the north-east of Chiswick House and the centre of the Conservatory lies at National Grid reference 521080 177700. The Conservatory is a Grade I listed building and lies within a Registered Park and Garden (Fig 1). Modern ground level on the site lies at 8m OD. The site code was CIZ05.

Iain A McLaren, architect, has been commissioned by English Heritage to carry out analysis of the fabric and documentation of the Conservatory in order to elucidate its form and function and trace its changing configuration and usage. Limited opening up of the fabric in designated areas (evaluation areas/trenches) was proposed for the purposes of completing his research. A *Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological evaluation* on the site (Cowan 2005) was prepared in response to a brief from English Heritage (GLAAS) 2005 *Brief for a Programme of Archaeological Excavation and recording, Chiswick House Conservatory.* This recommended the need for archaeological field evaluation and these works from the basis of the current programme of archaeological work.

The Written Scheme of Investigation defined preliminary trialwork (an archaeological field evaluation) to be carried out on the site. It recommended four evaluation areas trenches to be excavated. These would provide further information on the nature and levels of deposits beneath the modern ground level and if necessary the results of evaluation will be used to inform upon the need for further archaeological investigation.

1.2 Planning and legislative framework

The legislative and planning framework in which the archaeological exercise took place was summarised in the *Written Scheme of Investigation* (Section 1.2).

1.3 Origin and scope of the report

This report was produced by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS). The report has been prepared within the relevant Standard specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 1999).

This indicates that the purpose of field evaluation is to quantify the archaeological resource in order to define a suitable strategy to safeguard any remains that may be effected by proposed development. Such safeguards would normally consist of :

- the preservation *in situ* or management of those remains and/or
- further archaeological investigations prior to development, within a programme of research

1.4 Aims and objectives

The Written Scheme of Investigation lists the following archaeological research objectives:

Was the form of the hypocaust heating system as proposed in the architect Iain A McLaren's plan?

Was the presumed stove pit discovered in the eastern arm of Conservatory connected to a vertical flue alongside the partition wall?

Were the two end pavilions configured with sunken pits for pineapples around the perimeter with a sunken central area as hypothetically reconstructed?

2 Topographical and historical background

2.1 Topography

The geology of the area consists of Pleistocene river terrace gravels overlain by Holocene fluvial sediments. The River Thames lies to the east of the site and runs north–south at this point in Chiswick.

Bollo or Bollar brook enters the parish from Acton, west of Turnham Green, passing under the high road and, by a course no longer visible, into the grounds of Chiswick House. From the 18th century the streams have fed a long ornamental water, created for Chiswick House and drained south-eastward by a conduit to the Thames along the present line of Promenade Approach Road.

2.2 Early history

Previous excavations within the grounds of Chiswick House under sitecode CHG93 revealed prehistoric flints which were recovered from the pre-garden topsoil which overlay natural brickearth, and from cut features, where they were residual; the latter included a core and hammerstone.

The Roman road to Silchester ran to the north of the site along the Chiswick High Road and the medieval village centre of Chiswick was concentrated at Old Chiswick along Chiswick Mall. The settlement grew up immediately east of the church, mentioned in 1181, and away from the river. Church Street there ran northward from the ferry, with a continuation across the open field which lay between the village and the high road to London and Brentford (VCH 1982).

In the late 16th and early 17th centuries the grandest residents lived on the outskirts of the village: the Russells at Corney House to the west, and the Wardours, the earl of Somerset and their successors in a forerunner of Chiswick House, to the north. Up until then the site of the Conservatory had probably lain in open fields.

The site of the conservatory formed part of the estate of Morton House owned by James Douglas, earl of Morton by 1780. In the 18th century this was a mansion of seven bays with a central pediment and was demolished in 1812. The Conservatory was then constructed within the former walled gardens belonging to Morton House.

2.3 Chiswick House and the conservatory

Chiswick House was designed by Richard Boyle, Third Earl of Burlington, in 1725, inspired by the architecture of ancient Rome and 16th century Italy, and completed in 1729. The grounds, designed by Lord Burlington in conjunction with William Kent and Charles Bridgeman encapsulate early 18th century garden design. Features included an obelisk, temple, exedra, amphitheatre, cascade and wilderness, as well as a gateway originally designed by Inigo Jones in 1621 and erected at Chiswick in 1738.

The conservatory was designed by Samuel Ware and was added in 1812–3 by the Sixth Duke of Devonshire. It was originally a productive fruit stove house growing grapes, peaches and pineapples but some became a showhouse for camellias. Camellia culture in the west really began in 1792 when camellias were bought to England from China on the British East India Company ships. The camellias are of significant horticultural interest, being probably the oldest collection in England (Short 1997).

The Duke was a keen plantsman. He had a close association with the Horticultural Society of London, which imported the camellia *Imbricata* from China in 1824. In 1821, he gave the Society (later to become the Royal Horticultural Society) land adjoining Chiswick House and had a door made in the wall of his garden so that his guests could conveniently wander the RHS gardens. The RHS grounds included large glass houses used for what was the Chelsea Flower Show of its day. The RHS moved out in 1903.

In 1828 the camellias were first planted in the Conservatory (McLaren 2005 draft report).

In the summer of 1855 just over 40 years after the Conservatory was completed Thomas Appleby wrote in the magazine The Cottage Gardener that 'there are planted out in the soil a great number of fine bushes of Camellias, well set with buds, Rhododendron arboreum, Magnolias, Acacias, and other Conservatory plants'. In 1887, The Cottage Gardener reported that the plants were still growing strongly. And in 1898, Country Life Illustrated reported on 'the splendid collection' in the 'unique' camellia house (Bridge 2005). The hypocaust heating system installed at Chiswick was commonly employed in early 19th century glass houses but few survive intact today. The conservatory was heated by a system of six coal-fired stoves (or furnaces) located in sheds to the north or back of the glass conservatory. These fed horizontal flues/hypocausts through the partition wall and running across the planting beds to then run along under the windows before returning to the vertical flues rising above each stove to emerge from the ornamental chimneys on top of the division wall. A hypocaust also ran around the central tank under the central dome (McLaren 2005: draft report).

Around 1855, the sixth Duke extensively modernised the conservatory by finally doing away with the stoves and hypocausts and converting to gravity piped hot water heating fed by boilers located in pits at each end of the back sheds. It seems likely that the old hypocaust trenches were adapted to accommodate the new four inch cast-iron heating pipes (McLaren 2005: draft report).

3 The evaluation

3.1 Methodology

The archaeological evaluation was carried out in accordance with the preceding *Written Scheme of Investigation* and the MoLAS *Archaeological Site Manual* (MoL 1994).

Brief Section 5.1 Trench 1 revealed an arched opening for the coal-fired stove located in sheds to the north or back of the glass conservatory. The opening had been bricked up. The bricks from the blocked up arch were removed but it was not possible to ascertain if any remains of the grate(s) survive as a large stone slab had been dumped across the area. This was similar to the slabs making a shelf on the north side of the stone trough.

The trench was extended slightly on the south side to try to ascertain the different phases of the hypocaust flues revealed.

Brief Section 5.2 A concrete path south of hypocaust trench (see *WSI* Fig 3 Sheet 4) was to be removed and any evidence of the hypocaust underneath was to be recorded. The route of the hypocaust probably continued under the path but the concrete may have been a thin overlay covering an original or old stone or gravel path. The path was not removed by contractors and only the vine bed (see trench 4) was excavated.

Paving slabs of the floor of the conservatory over the trenches were removed by contractors, then the trenches were excavated and hand cleaned by MoLAS archaeologists. Plans and profiles were drawn at 1:20. Photographs were taken and levels and trench locations were plotted from the Site Survey *Floor Plan of the Conservatory* dwg 149.

The conservatory is aligned north-east-south-west with the north-west wall of the conservatory forming the spine wall between the glass house and the stove sheds to the back. For the purposes of this report this wall is regarded as the site north wall.

3.2 Results of the evaluation

For trench locations see Fig 2 and see also Appendix 1 for photographs of the features.

Evaluation Trench 1 (Figs 3, 4)		
Location	North side of the conservatory	
Dimensions	2.2m by 1.5m by 1.11m	
Modern ground level/top of slab	7.95m OD	

The earliest deposit within the trench was a rubble layer of red brick and lime mortar fragments and occasional slate fragments. This lay under the base of [3], [4], [7] and [11]. It was excavated down to 6.84m OD and its top was at 7.02–7.16m OD (see S1.2).

On the north side of the conservatory wall was the area of the stove pit which could not be investigated (see above). On the south side of the conservatory wall were two flues [3] and [4] which perhaps were contained within walls [6] and [7] and divided by partition wall [5]. These had an unclear relationship to [8], another wall or flue which may have run under all of the contexts. Most of the southern parts of these features had been truncated, perhaps by the insertion of the camellia planting bed in 1828.

Wall [7] was constructed of bricks measuring 212mm by 98mm by 67mm and was bonded with a random bond with lime mortar. It was situated at a height of 8.01 and its base was at 7.02m OD. It was bonded to the northern conservatory wall but its west side lay beyond the limits of the excavation. To the west of that can be seen part of the foundations of the northern conservatory wall or possibly part of [7].

Wall [6] was constructed of bricks measuring 228mm by 98mm by 68mm and was bonded with a random bond with lime mortar. It was situated at a lower level at 7.61m OD and its base was not reached. It was not bonded to the northern conservatory wall.

Wall [8] was problematic as it was buried underneath flues tiles, the bases of [3] and [4] and thus could not be investigated fully. It did appear to bee another flue as far as could be ascertained and may have been a foundation support for [3] and [4] and contained within walls [7] but its relationship to [6] could not be ascertained without the dismantling of part of [6].

Between [4] and [7] and between [3] and [6] were corresponding voids 50mm wide.

Flue [3] was a brick-built three-sided vertical flue shaft aligned slightly to the east constructed of broken bricks measuring up to 230mm by 97mm by 67mm and was bonded with a random bond with lime mortar. The inside faces were soot-blackened and the back of the shaft was arched or concave but the top was truncated.

Between the burnt floor of the flue to the south and the back of the vertical shaft was a void filled with brown silty clay, only some of which could be removed down to 7.10m OD. This revealed a void into the stove pit on the north side of the conservatory wall at 7.17m OD. The void here was 110mm wide at the base but is obscured on the plan (Figs 3, 4) by the arched overhang.

Similarly there was a void to the west and east of the flue at 7.14m OD but it was not clear how far this ran to the west and east.

The flue base consisted of one very burnt floor brick, noted as soft and red crumbly. The rest of the base was of red ceramic tiles measuring 310mm by 310mm by 30mm but they were broken and disturbed. The north side was truncated. The base of the flue was at 7.18m OD and the top was at 7.75m OD.

Flue [4] was a brick-built three-sided vertical shaft constructed of bricks measuring 230mm by 101mm by 67mm and was bonded with an English bond with lime mortar. The back of the shaft was arched as [3].

The base of this flue consisted of one stone tile but the rest of the base was truncated. The stone tile was 465mm wide by 42mm thick but the length was broken at 440mm. The base of the flue was at 7.20m OD and the top was at 7.75m OD.

As with [3], between the base of the flue and the back of the vertical shaft [4] was a void filled with brown silty clay, only some of which could be removed down to 7.10m OD. This revealed a void into the stove pit on the north side of the conservatory wall at 7.17m OD. The void here is 110mm wide at the base but is obscured on the plan by the arched overhang.

Similarly there was a void to the west and east of the shaft at 7.14m OD but it was not clear how far this ran to the west and east but its west end was blocked by [7] and it did not run through. Its east end also appeared blocked by [5] but it was not possible to be certain without dismantling the flues.

A partition wall [5] was constructed of bricks measuring 224mm by 110mm by 67mm and was bonded with a random bond with lime mortar. It divided [4] on the west from [3] on the east but only the upper part of [3] appeared to be bonded to it but it was not possible to be certain without dismantling the flues. To the south of it was [11] at a lower level and not bonded to or part of [5]. The southern end of [5] appeared to be real and not truncated. Its top was at 7.75m OD and its base was not reached.

It is s likely that all of the features date to the earliest phase of the hypocaust in 1813.

The southern part of wall [7] had been truncated down to 7.20m OD perhaps by the insertion of the camellia planting bed in 1828 and perhaps part of [5] was dismantled and reconstructed as a one brick wide wall of two courses [11] but it was not bonded to [5].

Above the truncated features was perhaps the camellia planting bed consisting of dark brown black clayey silt with lumps of brickearth and light brown clay and occasional stone fragments and red brick and slate up to a height of 7.55m OD. Above this was a mid brown silt garden soil with occasional pebbles up to 7.89m OD. Above were concrete slabs up to a height of 7.95m OD.

Evaluation Trench 2 (Figs 5,6)		
Location	Central dome of the conservatory	
Dimensions	3.40m by 1.10m by 0.33m	
Modern ground level/top of slab	7.93m OD	

Trench 2 was dug in response to *Brief Section 5.4* where an area of paving in the Dome Hypocaust trench shown on Fig 3 Sheets 2 and 3 was to be removed and any archaeological evidence was to be recorded.

Two east–west parallel walls [10] enclosed two hypocaust flues [9]. The walls of both turned a corner to the south and led under the floor. The walls of [10] acted as outer encasing walls retaining the heat.

Wall [10] was constructed of bricks measuring 224mm by 110mm by 62mm and was bonded with a random bond with lime mortar. Within it were two flue chambers [9] but voids had been left between [9] and [10]. Within the voids were broken bricks acting as ?spacers between the walls of [9] and [10]. The voids were only 60mm wide and were excavated down to a maximum of 7.22m OD.

On the northern side of [10] it was not clear as to what the relationship was to the domed room. The flues did not lead through under the floor here, but there were voids under the floor. Two brick supports capped by a large ceramic tile supported the floor. The tile was 420mm wide by 64mm thick but the length could not be measured as it was under the floor.

Furthermore the western end of the north wall was terminated and did not continue father whereas the south wall continued to the west beyond the limits of the excavation trench.

On the south side the conservatory floor was supported directly onto [10] and also two broken slabs of concrete which had been laid over [9] to build up the levels. The top of [10] was at 7.82m OD and its base was not reached.

Flue chambers [9] were constructed of a red ceramic tile base and lid, the tiles measuring 290mm by 290mm by 34mm and the sides consisting of four courses of bricks on edge, the bricks measuring 220mm by 104mm by 68mm. All bricks and tiles were bonded with lime mortar. A corner of the westernmost flue had been destroyed which enabled a description of the interior of the flue. The inside was blackened with soot and filled with brown silty clay and mortar flecks. The corner bricks where the flue turned southwards had been neatly rounded off. The top of [9] was at 7.73m OD and its base was at 7.23m OD.

It is s likely that all of the features date to the earliest phase of the hypocaust in 1813.

Within [9] bricks on edge had been placed in the base of the flue and these were not removed. Both [9] and [10] were covered with loose brown silt and brick rubble as the makeup for the conservatory floor at 7.93m OD.

Finds from the fill around [10] included broken flowerpots stamped with Richard Sankey's name, potmaker of Bulwell, Nottingham.

Evaluation Trench 3 (Figs 7, 8)	
Location	The eastern pinery

Dimensions	2.60m by 0.84m by 0.97m
Modern ground level/top of slab	7.92m OD

Trench 3 was dug in response to *Brief Section 5.3* where an area of paving in the eastern end pavilion (shown in *WSI* on Fig 3 Sheet 4 as Pinery Trench) is to be removed and any archaeological evidence is to be recorded.

In this trench next to the stone kerb was revealed a stone plinth and adjacent to this was a crushed mortar surface [2] or makeup for a better, now vanished, surface at a height of 7.82m OD only 0.10m below the top of the stone plinth. The surface consisted of a compact white crushed mortar with occasional red brick fragments and flecks. This was not removed but a small exploratory hole 0.58 by 0.50m was dug through [2] (S3.1) and underneath the surface was a homogenous layer of red brick rubble, crushed white mortar and mortar lumps and lumps of brickearth and brown clay. It was not a garden soil but was a dump of mixed building debris. It was excavated down 0.87m to 6.95m OD and excavation was halted at this level.

The surface revealed was not expected here and was not removed. No evidence was found of any organic material that would have been associated with the planting of pineapples and it was concluded that none had ever been planted within the area excavated.

To the west of this another brick flue containing two parallel cast iron pipes which were not removed. The top of the flue was at 7.77m OD and the of the pipes was at 7.47m OD. It was filled with cinders and loose silt. This is likely to have been the part of the later hypocaust of 1855 with piped hot water. There was no dating evidence for [2].

Evaluation Trench 4 (Fig 9)		
Location	South side of the conservatory	
Dimensions	1.10m by 0.60m by 0.62m	
Modern ground level/top of slab	7.80m OD	

Trench 4 was dug in response to *Brief Section 5.2* where remains of a vine planting bed immediately under the windows may survive. Trench 4 was dug from the edge of the east–west flue to the southern wall of the conservatory.

The only feature found in trench 4 was the footings or wall foundation of the southern conservatory wall [1]. It was constructed of bricks measuring 224mm by 101mm by 69mm and bonded with lime mortar. It was situated at a height of 7.70m OD and its base was not reached. Within it and appearing to be bonded to it, at least on the western side, was a small brick feature measuring 0.40m by 40m which was dug down to 6.92m OD. A tile on edge 360mm by 36mm thick formed its eastern side (Fig 9). Within it was a pillar of mortared broken bricks up to 7.30m OD which did not appear to be bonded to the square feature and its purpose was unclear. It is likely that the foundation dates to the earliest phase of the conservatory in 1813.

The trench was filled with loose brown silt and mortar with occasional brick fragments. Plastic and ?alloy labels were found. One of these was inscribed 'Hatsu Sakhara' but no Latin names were recorded. The identification of the alloy of the

labels is not yet complete – they could be zinc or lead. No vine planting arch or bed was seen in trench 4.

4 Archaeological potential

4.1 Realisation of original research aims

The Written Scheme of Investigation lists the following archaeological research objectives:

Was the form of the hypocaust heating system as proposed in the architect Iain A McLaren's plan?

Trench 2 revealed two walls [10] enclosing two parallel hypocaust flues [9]. The walls of both turned a corner to the south and led under the conservatory floor. The flues were constructed as McLaren's plan with tiled base and lid and four bricks on edge to form each side. However neither [9] or [10] led into the domed room to the north. There were voids under the floor here and brick supports capped by large ceramic tiles which were not on McLaren's plan. The direction of the hypocaust would therefore appear to have been heading west and east parallel to the conservatory walls. Further work would be needed to ascertain if this was the case.

Was the presumed stove pit discovered in the eastern arm of Conservatory connected to a vertical flue alongside the partition wall?

On the north side of the conservatory wall was the area of the stove pit which could not be investigated (see above). On the south side of the conservatory wall were two vertical flues [3] and [4] which perhaps were contained within walls [6] and [7] and divided by partition wall [5]. These had an unclear relationship to [8], another wall or flue which may have run under all of the contexts. Most of the southern parts of these features had been truncated, perhaps by the insertion of the camellia planting bed in 1828.

Were the two end pavilions configured with sunken pits for pineapples around the perimeter with a sunken central area as hypothetically reconstructed?

The surface of crushed mortar revealed in trench 3 was not expected here and the building debris revealed in the exploratory hole was not what would have been expected for planting pineapples. Pineapples were usually planted in organic material such as manure or tanners' bark with its superior heat-retaining properties, but no trace of either was found in the exploratory hole. It is unlikely, therefore, that the central bay within the end pavilion was used for pineapple bed.

5 Conclusions

The evaluation has shown that the potential for survival of the hypocaust heating system is high although some truncation had occurred in trench 1. The best survival was in trench 2 where the flues and encasing walls survived almost intact. The finds from the evaluation consisted of flowerpots and plastic and ?alloy labels but there were no artefacts which could be closely dated. Nevertheless features from the separate phases dating to 1813, 1828 and 1855 were revealed.

Some of the features of trenches 1, 3 and 4 were not interpretable without further investigation.

The stove pit in the shed could not be examined due to the presence of the stone slab. Any further work in this area should also take into consideration the safety factor of working underneath the large stone troughs as some of their supports have been damaged.

The decision for any further archaeological work rests with English Heritage.

6 Acknowledgements

MoLAS wishes to thank Ian McLaren, Adrian Cook and Chiswick House volunteers.

7 Bibliography

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8 NMR OASIS archaeological report from

8.1 OASIS ID: molas1-9721

Project details

Project name Chiswick House Conservatory

An archaeological field evaluation was carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology Service on the site of Chiswick House Conservatory, Burlington Lane, Chiswick, London W4. The work was commissioned from MoLAS by English Heritage. The conservatory was designed by Samuel Ware and was added in 1812-3 by the Sixth Duke of Devonshire. It was originally a productive fruit stove house growing grapes, peaches and pineapples but some became a showhouse for camellias. The camellias are of significant horticultural interest, being probably the oldest collection in England. The hypocaust heating system Short description of installed at Chiswick was commonly employed in early 19th the project century glass houses but few survive intact today. The conservatory was heated by a system of six coal-fired stoves (or furnaces) located in sheds to the back of the glass conservatory. The purpose of the evaluation was to further understand the form of the hypocaust heating system in the central and eastern part of the conservatory. The evaluation has shown that the potential for survival of the hypocaust heating system is high although some truncation had occurred. The best survival was in trench 2 where the flues and encasing walls survived almost intact. Features from the separate phases of development dating to 1813, 1828 and 1855 were revealed.

Project dates Start: 01-08-2005 End: 04-08-2005

Previous/future Not known / Not known

Any associated project reference CIZ05 - Sitecode codes

Type of project Field evaluation

Site status English Heritage List of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest

Current Land use Other 2 - In use as a building

Monument type	CONSERVATORY Post Medieval
Methods & techniques	'Targeted Trenches'
Development type	Not recorded
Prompt	Conservation/ restoration
Position in the planning process	Not known / Not recorded
Dreiset lesetion	
	England
Site location	GREATER LONDON HOUNSLOW CHISWICK Chiswick House Conservatory, Burlington Lane, W4
Postcode	W4
Study area	0.14 Hectares
National grid reference	TQ 21080 77700 Point
Project creators	
Name of Organisation	MoLAS
Project brief originator	English Heritage/Department of Environment
Project design originator	MoLAS
Project director/manager	David Lakin
Project supervisor	Carrie Cowan
Sponsor or funding body	English Heritage

Project archives

recipient	
Physical Archive ID	CIZ05
Physical Contents	'Ceramics'
Digital Archive recipient	LAARC
Digital Archive ID	CIZ05
Digital Contents	'other'
Paper Archive recipient	LAARC
Paper Archive ID	CIZ05
Paper Contents	'other'
Paper Media available	'Context sheet','Drawing','Photograph','Plan','Report'
Project	
bibliography 1	
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Fig 1 Site location



Fig 2 Plan of site showing location of trenches

R:\Project\houn\1093\fig02



Fig 3 Plan of trench 1 features



Section 1.2

0_____50cm

Fig 4 Sections through trench 1 - S1.1, S1.2



Fig 5 Plan of trench 2 features







Fig 6 Sections through trench 2 - S2.1, S2.2



Fig 7 Plan of trench 3 features



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1m

0

Fig 8 Section through trench 3

W

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Fig 9 Plan of trench 4 features

9 Appendix 1 - Selected views

















