



Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological building recording at the Potting Sheds, Ashton Wold, Northamptonshire February 2012



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PROJECT DETAILS	
Project title	Archaeological building recording at The Potting Sheds, Ashton Wold, Northamptonshire
Short description	Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out a buildings recording action at the Potting Sheds and associated walled garden at Ashton Wold, Northamptonshire to record the sheds prior to their restoration and conversion to holiday lets. The survey recorded the current condition of the buildings and walled garden and was able to assign former functions to some of the rooms in the Potting Shed range.
Project type	Building recording, Level III
Previous work	Unknown
Future work	unknown
Monument type and period	Kitchen garden 1900
PROJECT LOCATION	
County	Northamptonshire
Site address	Aston Wold
Grid Ref	TL 0795 8804
Height	
Area	0.8ha
PROJECT CREATORS	
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology
Project brief originator	Northamptonshire County Council Archaeological Advisor
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology
Director/Supervisor	Tim Upson-Smith BA, PGDip
Project Manager	Iain Soden
Sponsor or funding body	David Jackson Architectural Services
PROJECT DATE	
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Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY	1
3	HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	3
4	BUILDING ASSESSMENT	3
	4.1 The Potting Sheds	3
	4.2 The Walled Garden	17
5	DISCUSSION	24
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	25

Figures

Cover: View looking south-west showing the Potting Shed range

Fig 1: Site location

Fig 2: Ashton Wold walled kitchen gardens showing the recorded areas

Fig 3: Plan, elevation and section of the Potting Sheds

Fig 4: Generator in Room 1

Fig 5: Room 2, mess room fireplace

Fig 6: Room 5, workshop

Fig 7: Room 6, fireplace

Fig 8: Room 6, built-in cupboard

Fig 9: Room 6, Foster and Pearson letterhead

Fig 10: Room 7, wall-mounted tool hooks

Fig 11: Room 7, plant pot storage shelves and ladder

Fig 12: Room 8, The Potting Shed, showing zinc-topped work benches

Fig 13: Room 8, The Potting Shed, showing tool hooks on the east wall

Fig 14: Room 8, modern graffiti on door to greenhouse

Fig 15: Room 9, the cart shed

Fig 16: Room 9, post and curved braces

Fig 17: Room 10, the garage doors

Fig 18: Room 10, the garage room

Fig 19: Panelling in Room 11

Fig 20: Two-leaf, stable type door, Room 12

Fig 21: Room 12 interior, showing bull-nosed bricks in the openings

Fig 22: Cordoned fruit tree on south wall of the garden (note the scythe left hanging behind it)

Fig 23: The entrance in the west wall

Fig 24: The swimming pool

Fig 25: The boiler house

Fig 26: The three freestanding surviving greenhouses

Fig 27: Detail of cast iron window opening mechanism

Fig 28: Door latch detail

Fig 29: Lean-to greenhouse interior

Fig 30: Heating pipe, valve detail

Fig 31: Sundial column

Fig 32: The dial and gnomon

Fig 33: Main greenhouse prior to demolition (image courtesy of David Jackson Architectural Services)

Fig 34: Area of main greenhouse with fig trees to the right, and door to Potting Shed

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BUILDING RECORDING AT THE POTTING SHEDS, ASHTON WOLD, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Abstract

Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out a buildings recording action at the Potting Sheds and associated walled garden at Ashton Wold, Northamptonshire to record the sheds prior to their restoration and conversion to holiday lets. The survey recorded the current condition of the buildings and walled garden and was able to assign former functions to some of the rooms in the Potting Shed range.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) were commissioned by David Jackson Architectural Services Ltd to undertake archaeological buildings recording on the Potting Sheds at Ashton Wold, Ashton, Northamptonshire, (NGR: TL 0795 8804; Fig 1).

The work was carried out in response to a planning condition for the proposed conversion of The Potting Sheds, Ashton Wold, Northamptonshire to residential use (consent EN/10/00788/LBC).

2 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

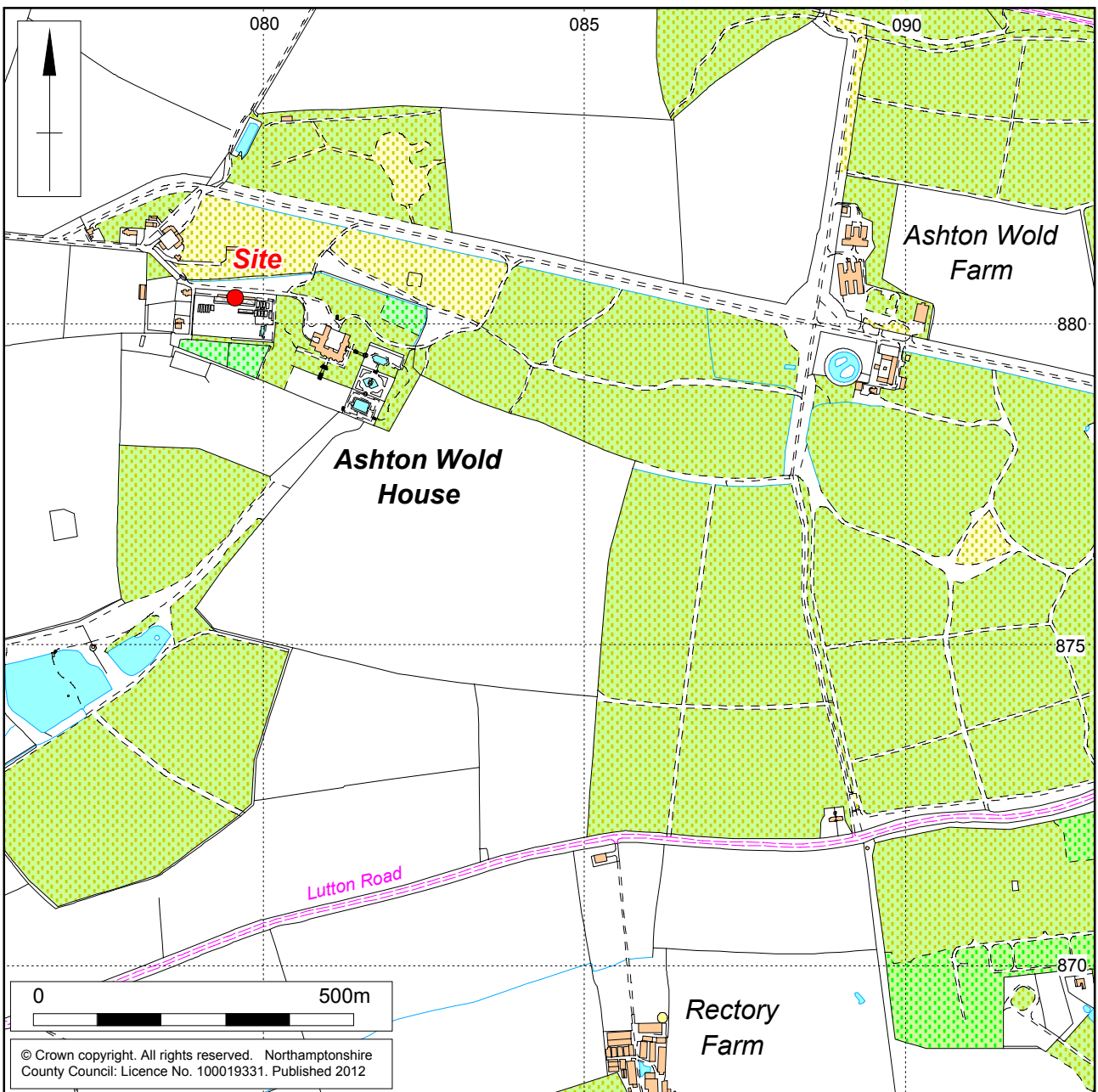
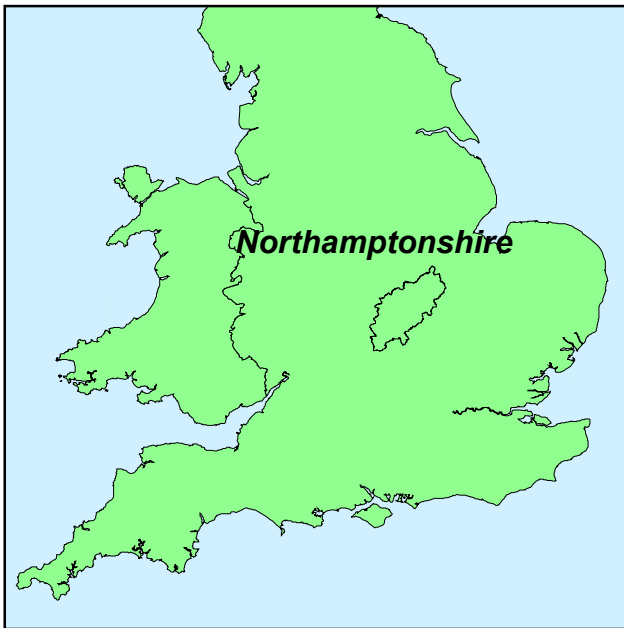
The principal objective of the building recording brief as set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), (NA 2011) was to record and understand the nature, function and character of existing buildings and to place them in their historic, cultural and environmental setting. The level of recording was specified as Level 3 – a descriptive record (English Heritage 2006, 14).

The specific aims of the building recording project were to:

- compile a descriptive record of the building at English Heritage's Level 3 before conversion of the building takes place;
- provide a detailed understanding of the nature of the building, and to provide the historical context, development and significance of the building group.

A site visit was made on Wednesday, 29 February 2012. All principal exterior elevations were photographed. The interiors were photographically recorded to include structural details that may be lost during alterations or moved to alternative locations within the building.

A representative plan and cross section of the building was drawn. Fixtures and fittings that related to the buildings' use were recorded, and former uses of the individual buildings were postulated where sufficient evidence remained to do so. In addition a photographic survey of the adjacent walled garden was also undertaken.



Scale 1:10,000

Site location Fig 1

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A comprehensive desk-based assessment setting the Ashton Wold estate and its elements into context has previously been prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (Walker 2011).

4 BUILDING ASSESSMENT

The buildings were visited on 29 February 2012 to carry out the survey of the buildings (Fig 2).

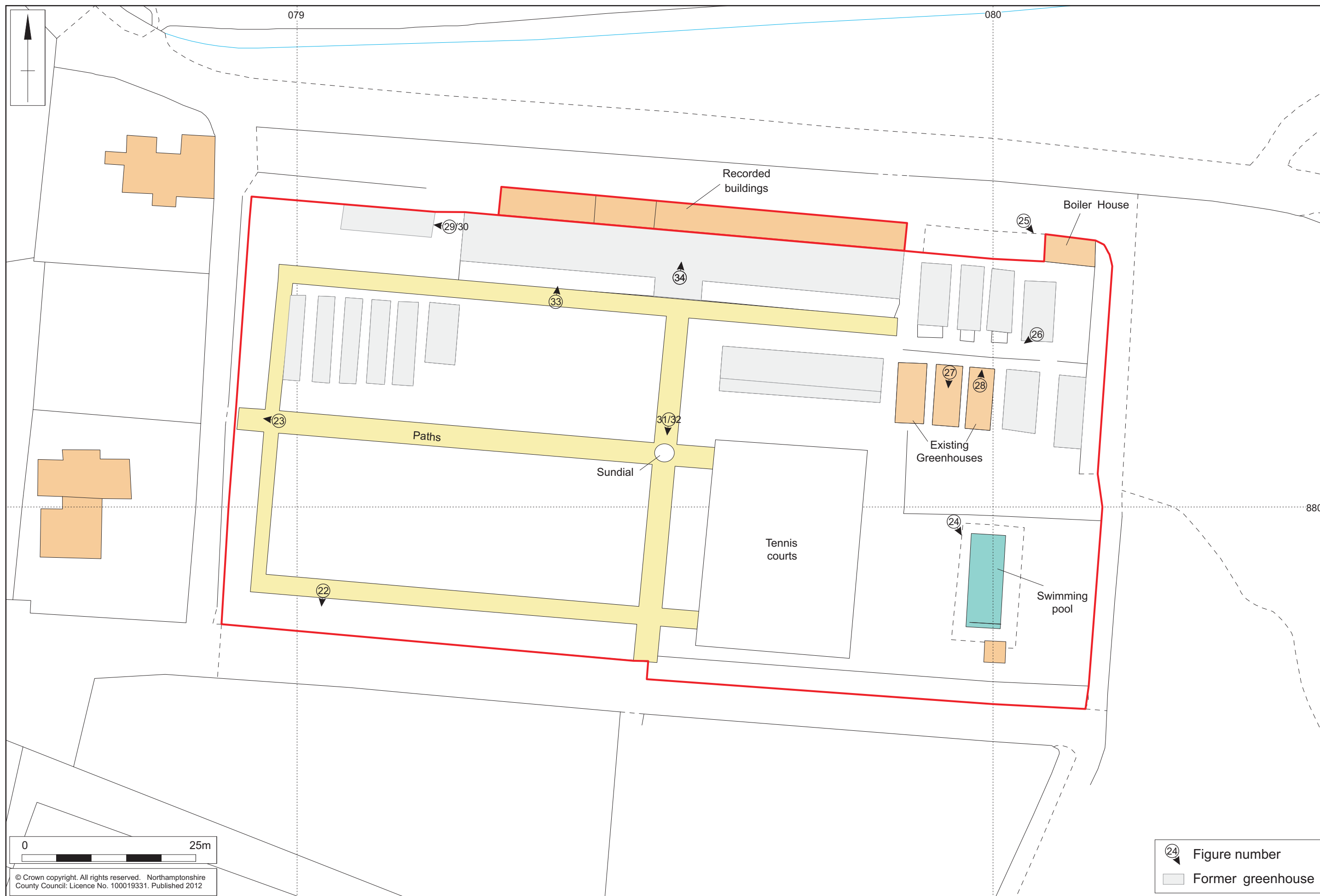
4.1 The Potting Sheds

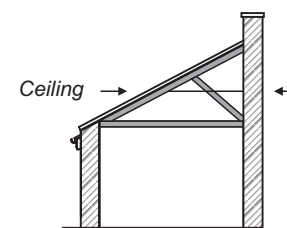
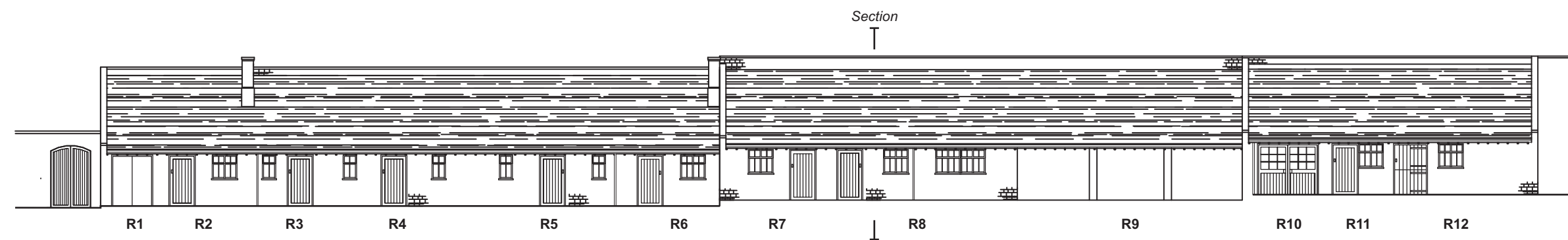
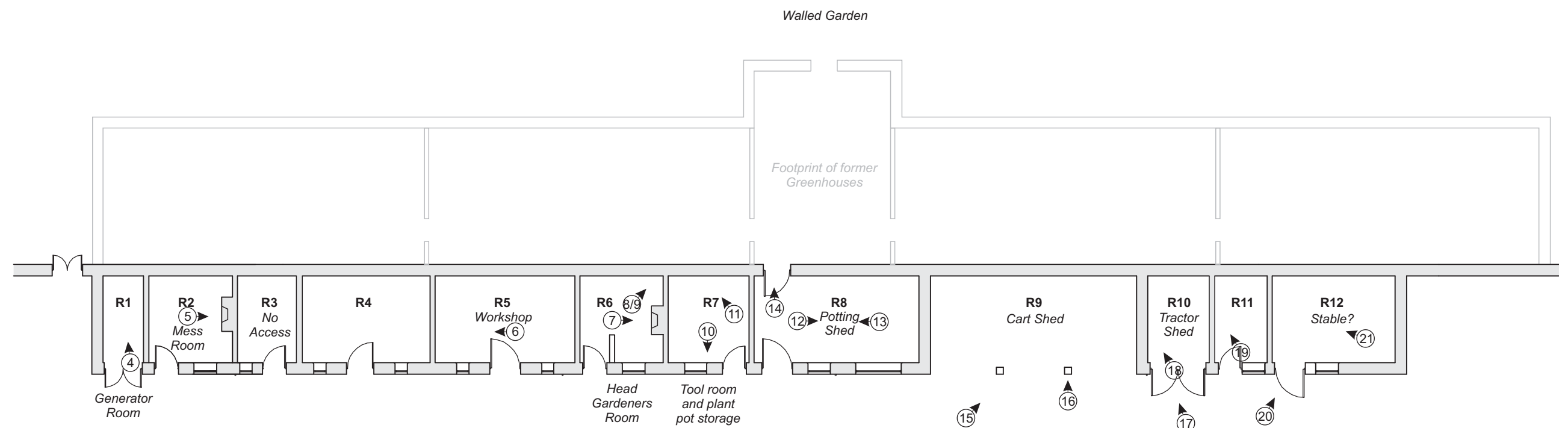
The range of buildings on the outside of the north wall of the walled garden have been collectively known as The Potting Sheds. However, only one room in this range is *the* Potting Shed, the other rooms served other functions within the life of the walled garden. Where it has been possible from the surviving evidence, functions for the rooms have been assigned (Fig 3). There was no access to Room 3.

The rooms are numbered 1 to 12 from east to west and will be described in this order. All of the rooms open out onto the track on the north side of the walled garden, with only Room 8, the potting shed, also opening into the former greenhouses through the garden wall. There is no internal access between the rooms, again emphasising the different functions of the rooms.

The range of buildings is one build with the walled garden. The buildings and the garden wall are all constructed in coursed rock-faced limestone, and the roofs tiled with Collyweston limestone. The guttering on the potting shed range has been replaced with modern UPVC as have the downpipes.

All of the rooms, unless otherwise noted, have internally lime washed brick walls, the floors are laid brick and the ceilings lath and plaster. The doors are ledged and braced and the windows are wooden casement type with the number of lights varying from 4 to 16. The rooms retain Bakelite light switches. The decorative scheme follows that of the estate with the doors and internal woodwork in a light turquoise blue, the window frames externally are white.





Room 1

This room, which measures 3.83m deep by 1.84m wide, houses a 'modern' Perkins diesel generator and has the switchboard for the electrical supply for the potting shed range (Fig 4).



Generator in Room 1

Fig 4

Room 2

This room, which measures 3.83m deep by 3.21m wide, was and still serves as the mess room for the gardeners. Within the reduced fireplace opening there is a small wood burning stove (Fig 5), either side of which stand 1950s style kitchen cupboards in the alcoves. The cupboard on the right hand side has a sink top.



Room 5, mess room fireplace

Fig 5

Room 3

No access was gained to this room, which currently stores the decorative iron work for the now demolished greenhouses, which formerly stood on the inside of the walled garden.

Room 4

This room, which measures 3.83m deep by 5.5m wide, was being used as a storage room and contained large quantities of wood and general items. There was shelving on the back wall which may have related to a storage function for the garden, although clear access was not possible to confirm this.

Room 5

This room, measuring internally 3.83m deep by 6.12m wide, is in use as a workshop with benches on the north, west and south sides and shelving on the east wall. (Fig 6).



Room 5, workshop

Fig 6

Room 6

This was the Head Gardener's Office, measuring 3.25m deep by 3.64m wide, although it has now become a general storeroom. The floor is oak block parquet in a herringbone pattern with a doormat well in the threshold. The walls are yellow painted plaster. Together with the mess room, this is the only other room to have a fireplace, this one having a white painted cast iron surround (Fig 7).



Room 6, fireplace

Fig 7

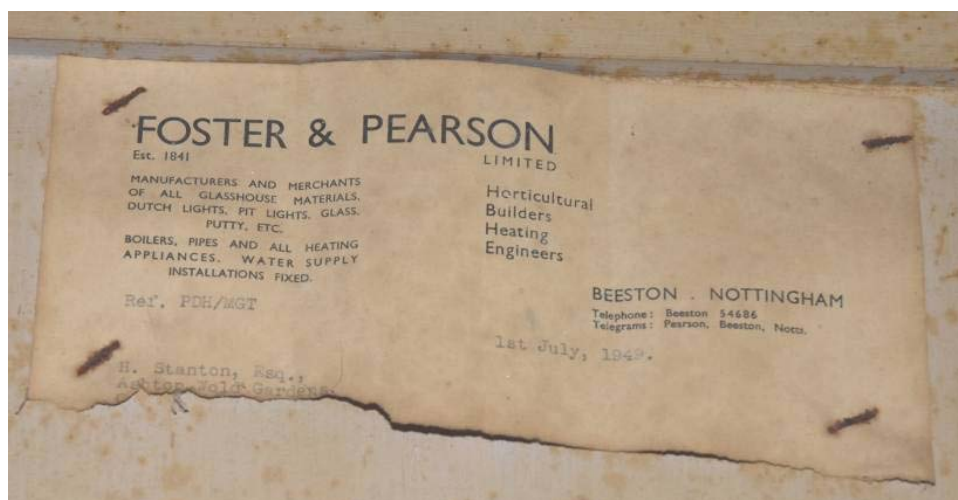
On the south wall of the room there is a built-in run of floor to ceiling cupboards, 0.58m deep, with drawers below, for the storage of seeds and chemicals etc, some of which date from the latter years of the garden's life in the 1980s (Fig 8).



Room 6, built-in cupboard

Fig 8

On the inside of one of the cupboard doors is a letterhead of Foster and Pearson Ltd, dated 1st July 1949 (Fig 9).



Room 6, Foster and Pearson letterhead

Fig 9

This company built the complete range of greenhouses at the walled garden including the boiler house system (See Section 4.2).

Room 7

This was originally the tool storage room, measuring 3.83m deep by 3.66m wide. The 'cow horn' style hooks for these are still extant on the north, east and west walls (Fig 10).



Room 7, wall mounted tool hooks

Fig 10

The back wall of the room has shelving containing terracotta plant pots of varying sizes (Fig 11). There is a small hatch in the ceiling of this room to access the loft space.



Room 7, plant pot storage shelves and ladder

Fig 11

Room 8

This is actually *the* Potting Shed, 3.83m deep by 7.41m wide, and it has a zinc-topped work bench on three sides (Fig 12).



Room 8, The Potting Shed, showing zinc-topped work bench

Fig 12

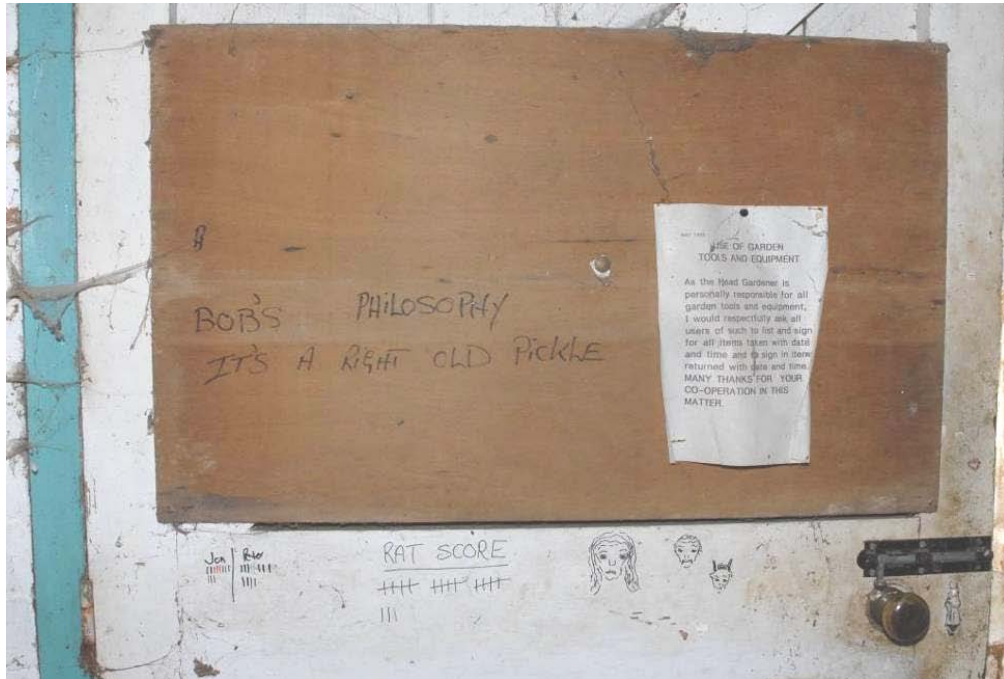
There are tool hooks on the east wall of the Potting Shed (Fig 13). On the south wall there is a modern shadow board for hand tools, allowing for easy identification of missing tools (Fig 12).



Room 8, The Potting Shed, showing tool hooks on the east wall

Fig 13

On the door from the potting shed into the former greenhouse there is some graffiti, including a tally of rats killed by the more recent staff at the garden (Fig 14).



Room 8, Modern graffiti on door to greenhouse

Fig 14

Room 9

This is an open-fronted three-bay cart shed, measuring 3.92m deep by 9.10m wide, with an open loft space above (Fig 15). The internal walls are as the external walls, in coursed rock-faced limestone.



Room 9, the cart shed

Fig 15

The three bays are separated by wooden posts, with a curved brace either side to support the wall plate (Fig 16).



Room 9, post and curved braces

Fig 16

Room 10

This room, which measures 3.83m deep by 2.68m wide, has double doors with nine glass panels in the top of each, across the width of the room (Fig 17).



Room 10, the garage doors

Fig 17

The floor is red quarry tiles, with an inspection pit, and the ceiling is pine tongue and groove. Around the three sides of the room there are hooks, possibly for the storage of ladders (Fig 18).

The room appears to have originally been for a motor vehicle. Although 1900 is an early date for a motor vehicle, it is not impossible. The room at the time of the survey housed a grey Massey Ferguson TE 35 of mid 1950s vintage.



Room 10, the garage room

Fig 18

Room 11

This room, which measures 3.83m deep by 2.30m wide, has a bench on two sides and the eastern wall has tongue and groove wooden panelling (Fig 19). There is no evidence for the original function of this room.



Panelling in Room 11

Fig 19

Room 12

This room, which measures 3.83m deep by 5.33m wide, has a split stable style door (Fig 20). There are bull-nosed bricks around the door and windows, (Fig 21), and there is a drainage channel in the square brick floor, suggesting that this room may have originally been intended as a stable. However, there is no further internal evidence of partitions for stalls or hay mangers and the like.

At the time of the survey there was shelving around three sides of the room which was clearly secondary to the room as it had been chocked in places to sit level on the uneven floor (Fig 21).



Two-leaf stable-type door, Room 12

Fig 20



Room 12 interior, showing bull-nosed bricks in the openings

Fig 21

4.2 The Walled Garden

The walled garden itself was not the part of the original survey but a photographic record was made of the surviving structures to put the Potting Shed complex into context (Fig 2). The garden itself is split into quarters, boarded in part by cordoned fruit trees, the beds overgrown. Around the inside of the wall are tensioned wires for the training of cordoned fruit trees (Fig 22). There are three principal entrances into the walled garden for the family to use: in the middle of the east, south and west walls. These have iron gates and stone arches (Fig 23).



Cordoned fruit tree on south wall of the garden
(note the scythe left hanging behind it) Fig 22



The entrance in the west wall

Fig 23

The south-east quadrant of the garden had a tennis court and outdoor swimming pool added, both of which were very overgrown at the time of the survey (Fig 24).



The swimming pool

Fig 24

The boiler house

The former boiler house is located on the north-east corner of the walled garden and was in very poor condition, the roof having been removed or collapsed (Fig 25). The boiler, a 'Beeston Robin Hood Colonial' was at basement level and was accessed via an iron spiral stair. The boiler was installed by Foster and Pearson and examples of similar boilers can be seen in a sales catalogue of 1909 on the company's web page (<http://www.fosterandpearson.co.uk/assets/content/files/jamesonBook.pdf>).



The boiler house

Fig 25

The greenhouses

Three freestanding greenhouses survive within the walled garden (Figs 26, 27 and 28). They are all the same, made by Foster and Pearson, to a design which is still available. The company is no longer based in Beeston but has been revived in Sussex and still makes greenhouses to the same patterns as it did from its foundation in 1841.



The three freestanding, surviving greenhouses

Fig 26



Detail of cast iron window opening mechanism

Fig 27



Door latch detail

Fig 28

A small lean-to greenhouse survives on the inside of the north wall of the garden although in a very overgrown state (Figs 2, 29 and 30).



Lean-to greenhouse interior

Fig 29

This greenhouse had cast iron pipes for heating at floor level, with a valve (Fig 30), to open.



Heating pipe, valve detail

Fig 30

A sundial mounted on an octagonal stone column (Fig 31) survives in the central crossing point of the paths within the garden. The dial is bronze and retains its gnomon (Fig 32).



Sundial column

Fig 31



The dial and gnomon

Fig 32

The main greenhouses (Figs 2 and 33) which backed onto the Potting Shed wall had been demolished as they were in a dangerous state.



Main greenhouse prior to demolition (image courtesy of
David Jackson Architectural Services) Fig 33

All that remains of the main greenhouses is a scar on the inside of the north wall of the garden, with its single doorway opening through into the potting shed. To the east of this door are two fig trees, survivors from a time when this part of the greenhouse was heated (Fig 34).



Area of main greenhouse with fig trees to the right, and door to Potting Shed Fig 34

Further freestanding greenhouses were located in the northern half of the walled garden which have also been demolished (Fig 2).

5 DISCUSSION

The survey recorded the Potting Sheds prior to their proposed conversion to holiday lets. It was possible to ascertain the original functions of a number of the rooms from the surviving evidence, but not all. The garden itself was not the principal focus of the survey, but contained some details of its former life, with many examples of cordoned trees surviving. The south-east quadrant of the garden had had a swimming pool and tennis court built in it, underlining the decline of the kitchen gardens.

The survey also demonstrated that although the new Ashton Wold estate had been designed by Hackvale and built in 1900, the kitchen garden had been entirely fitted out by Foster and Pearson Horticultural Engineers of Beeston, Nottingham, including the boiler, heating system and greenhouses.

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