

# Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Watching Brief  
at  
The Corinthian Arch  
Stowe Landscape Gardens, Buckinghamshire  
August 2006



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October 2006

Report 06/127

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**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**OCTOBER 2006**

***NGR SP 6805 3630***

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
AT  
THE CORINTHIAN ARCH  
STOWE LANDSCAPE GARDENS  
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

**JULY – AUGUST 2006**

**06/127**

## THE CORINTHIAN ARCH, STOWE LANDSCAPE GARDENS

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### *QUALITY CONTROL*

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Approved by	A Chapman		

# THE CORINTHIAN ARCH, STOWE LANDSCAPE GARDENS

## **OASIS REPORT FORM**

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>		
Project title	Archaeological watching brief at Corinthian Arch, Stowe Landscape Gardens, Buckinghamshire	
Short description (250 words maximum)	Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Corinthian Arch, Stowe Landscape Gardens, Buckinghamshire. The work was undertaken during ground reduction to re-instate gates to the arch to their original position and widen the Queen's Drive to its original width. During the groundworks, the footings of miliary columns were revealed. A brick-lined well and two wooden posts were observed during the stripping of the topsoil.	
Project type (e.g. desk-based, field evaluation etc)	Watching brief	
Previous work (reference to organisation or SMR numbers etc)	Archaeological Evaluation	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	Ongoing landscaping by the National Trust	
Monument type And period	Post-medieval	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)		
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>		
County	Buckinghamshire	
Site address (including postcode)	Corinthian Arch, Stowe Landscape Gardens	
Easting (use numerical 100km grid square no.)	46771	
Northing	23688	
Height OD	c 121mOD	
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>		
Organisation	The National Trust	
Project brief originator	Gary Marshall, The National Trust	
Project Design originator	Gary Marshall, The National Trust	
Director/Supervisor	Anthony Maull, Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project Manager	Anthony Maull, Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Sponsor or funding body	The National Trust	
<b>PROJECT DATE</b>		
Start date	24 <sup>th</sup> July 2006	
End date	10 <sup>th</sup> August 2006	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		
Paper		
Digital		
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>		
Title	Archaeological Watching Brief at The Corinthian Arch, Stowe Landscape Gardens, Buckinghamshire	
Serial title & volume	06/127	
Author(s)	Anne Foard-Colby	
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Date	October 2006	

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# ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

## THE CORINTHIAN ARCH

## STOWE LANDSCAPE GARDENS

## BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

JULY - AUGUST 2006

### ABSTRACT

*Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Corinthian Arch, Stowe Landscape Gardens, Buckinghamshire. The work was undertaken during ground reduction to re-instate gates to the arch to their original position and widen the Queen's Drive to its original width. During the groundworks, the footings of military columns were revealed. A brick lined well and two wooden posts were observed during the stripping of the topsoil.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

As part of its ongoing programme of restoration of monuments within the estate at Stowe Landscape Gardens, Buckinghamshire, the National Trust has undertaken the repair and restoration of the Corinthian Arch (NGR SP 6805 3630; National Trust SMR no. 150340; Fig 1). As part of the same programme of works the Trust has undertaken the restoration of the landscape setting around the structure, reinstating the original width of a road called the 'Queen's Drive' and restoring the gates and railings beneath the arch to their original construction height (Plates 7 & 8).

In July 2004 and November 2005, Northamptonshire Archaeology undertook trial excavations which revealed clear evidence for the original ground surface either side of the 19th century brick-built wing walls (NA 2004 & 2005). Evidence relating to the original full width of the road surface to the south of the arch and the buried remains of the road to the north were also revealed, together with the stone plinths of the gates within the arch, which were dismantled and removed for restoration in 2004.

The recent watching brief undertook to record the last stage of the restoration of the gates, including topsoil stripping and reduction of ground under and around the arch, the wing walls and military columns (Fig 2).

### 2 BACKGROUND

The Corinthian Arch was built between 1765 and 1767 to designs by Thomas Pitt, later Lord Camelford (National Trust 1997). He was a cousin to Earl Temple and was a gifted amateur architect who had previously designed a number of buildings and went on to design other structures both at Stowe and elsewhere.

Though principally a spectacular eye-catcher designed to frame the view from the south front of the mansion, the Corinthian Arch also served to provide accommodation in the form of two four-storey dwellings. These are not immediately obvious as both the north and south sides of the building contain no windows, preserving the appearance of a triumphal arch with two pairs of attached columns. On the north side these columns are in the round, on the south side they are square pilasters. On both sides they sit beneath an entablature and frieze topped by a balustrade.

The drive leading into the park, the Grand Avenue, passes through the arch, though this route was not built until 1774. It approaches Stowe from the south between two double avenues of trees, following a direct route from Buckingham (Bevington 1989). After passing through the arch the drive crosses what was then known as ‘Smallbrook Hill’, turns west and crosses the park towards Paper Mill Spinney, before joining with the Oxford Avenue. Though this drive appears to have been planned by Earl Temple, it was probably laid out by the Marquis of Buckingham (1779-1813). He also added the military columns to the south side of the arch after Temple’s death in 1780 (Marshall 2003).

The 1st Duke of Buckingham (1813-1839) seems to have been unhappy about the sharp left turn the drive took after passing through the arch when entering the park. To correct this he built a new road, later known as the Queen’s Drive, that lessened the sharp bend of the previous route. This road has now been grassed over but it can still be observed as a parch mark during periods of dry weather. This is the route that the National Trust has undertaken to restore.

### 3 FIELDWORK

The watching brief undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology was carried out in three visits during the period 24<sup>th</sup> July to 31<sup>st</sup> July to observe the ground reduction in preparation for the re-installation of the gates to the Corinthian Arch (Fig 2). The topsoil stripping and excavation were carried out by the National Trust using a mini digger fitted with a toothless bucket.

### **Visit on 24/7/06**

Approximately 0 – 0.2m of ground was reduced at the base of the arch area and revealed the backfilled 2005 trial trench 1085, road surfaces, concrete spreads and various service runs. The ground level was reduced to the base of the lowest course forming the dressed stone plinth; the previous backfilled trial trench 1086 was also revealed. Road surfaces (1086/12) and the latest road surface (1086/11) were generally removed. To the east and west of the road the ground was reduced to a horizon of mid to dark brown silty clay equivalent to the made ground observed in the 2004 and 2005 trial trenches (1006/2) and (10007/5) and (1086/16) (NA 2004 & 2005).

### **Visit on 28/7/06**

A substantial metalled surface (Figs 2/3) comprising tightly compacted limestone accreted gravel was observed on the western side of the arch area at the same level as the lowest dressed stone and may represent a working surface contemporary with the arch build or part of a repair to Queen's Drive.

A well [2] was uncovered approximately 2.5m to the western side of the arch building. It was brick-lined with individual bricks measuring up to 0.23m long by 0.11m wide by 0.06m thick and had a circular shaft measuring up to 1.2m in diameter with stepped corbelling leading to a squared opening. The interior of the brick face was lined with a hard mortar or concrete screed to help retain the water which was observed at a depth of 2.3 metres. The well shaft was constructed within a roughly square cut measuring up to 1.8m square. A modern cover was built over the opening of the well (Plates 3 & 4).

Other observable features included a number of square to sub-square shaped manhole covers/drains measuring up to 0.8-1m in diameter interlinked by a number of ceramic water pipes, one of which fed into the well (Plate 1).

Remains of two timber fence posts [4] were observed to the north-west corner of the arch (Plate 2).

### **Visit on 10/8/06**

Foundations of the military columns were revealed (Figs 2 & 3, Plates 5 & 6) during the stripping of soil for drainage around the base of the wing walls. Between 0.2m – 0.5m of soil was removed to enable limestone chippings to be laid next to the foundations for efficient drainage of surface water and to enhance the wing walls against the grass surface after re-seeding.



The original width of the Queen's Drive was also re-instated, as observed in trench 1005/2 (NA 2004) which generally corresponds to the width of the arch span.

*Table 1: Context data*

Context No.	Feature Type	Description
(1)	Layer	Topsoil
[2]	Wall	Well
(3)	Layer	Metalled surface of Queen's Drive
[4]	Posts	Wooden posts
[5]	Wall	Foundations of SW miliary columns

#### 4 DISCUSSION

The archaeological trial trenching and watching brief, conducted during the 2004 – 2006 groundworks, has been successful in uncovering the full width of the Queen's Drive from south of the Corinthian Arch as shown on the Ordnance Survey Map of 1880 and to reveal the original level of where the gates stood. The drive has now been re-instated to its former width.

During the excavation of soil from around the wing walls for the laying of limestone chippings, the foundations of the south-west miliary column were observed and recorded.

The topsoil stripping also revealed a 20th century, brick-lined well to the west of the Corinthian Arch, which may be contemporary with its use as accommodation. Two wooden fence posts were revealed situated to the north-west of the arch.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

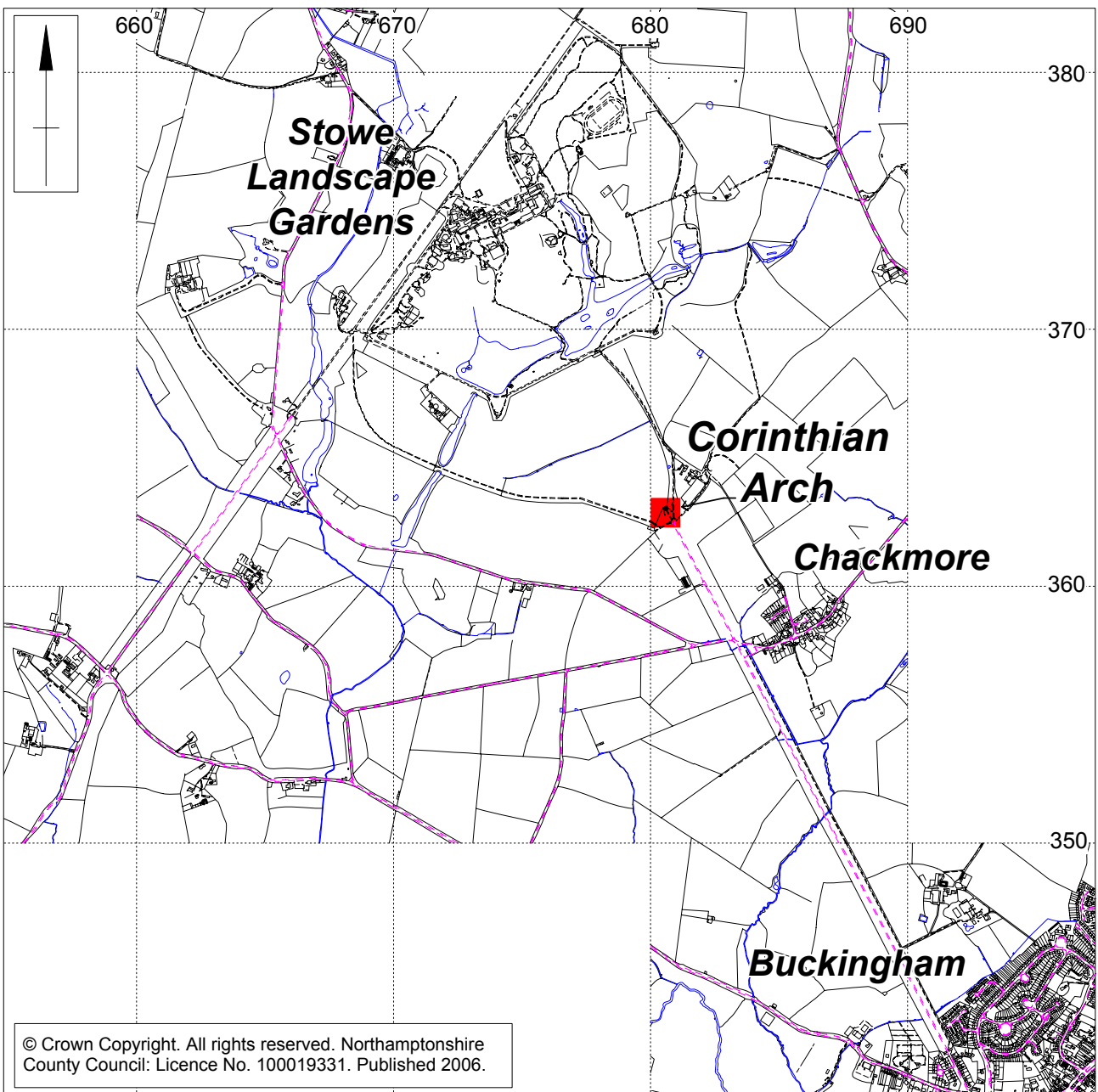
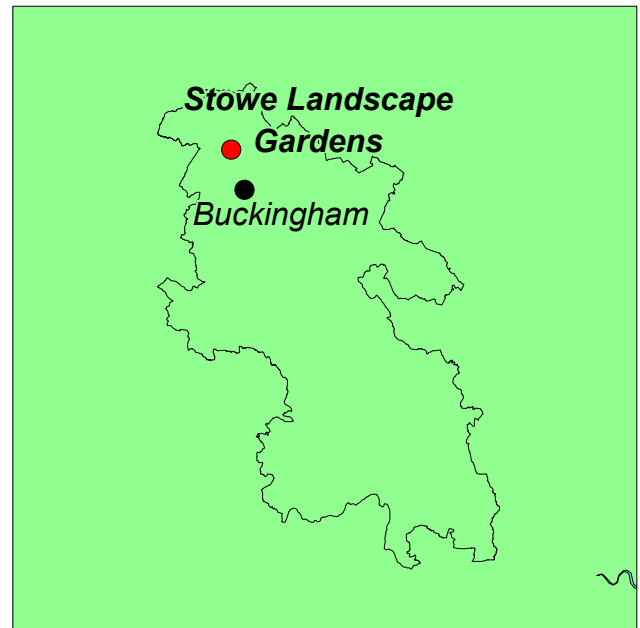
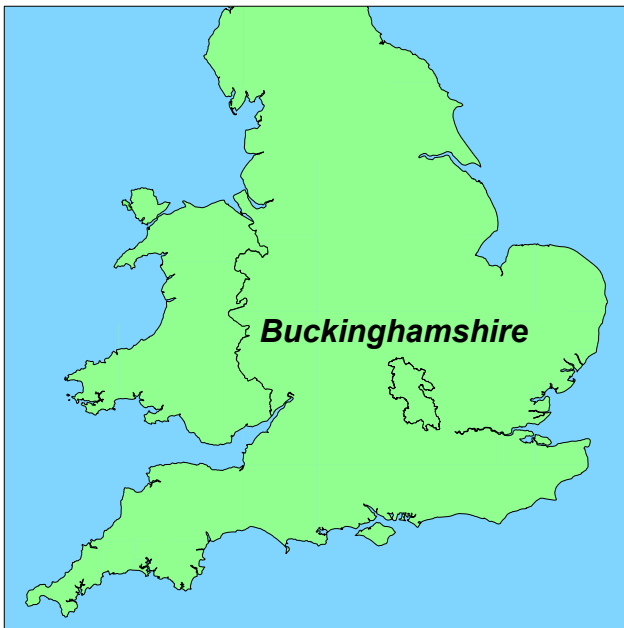
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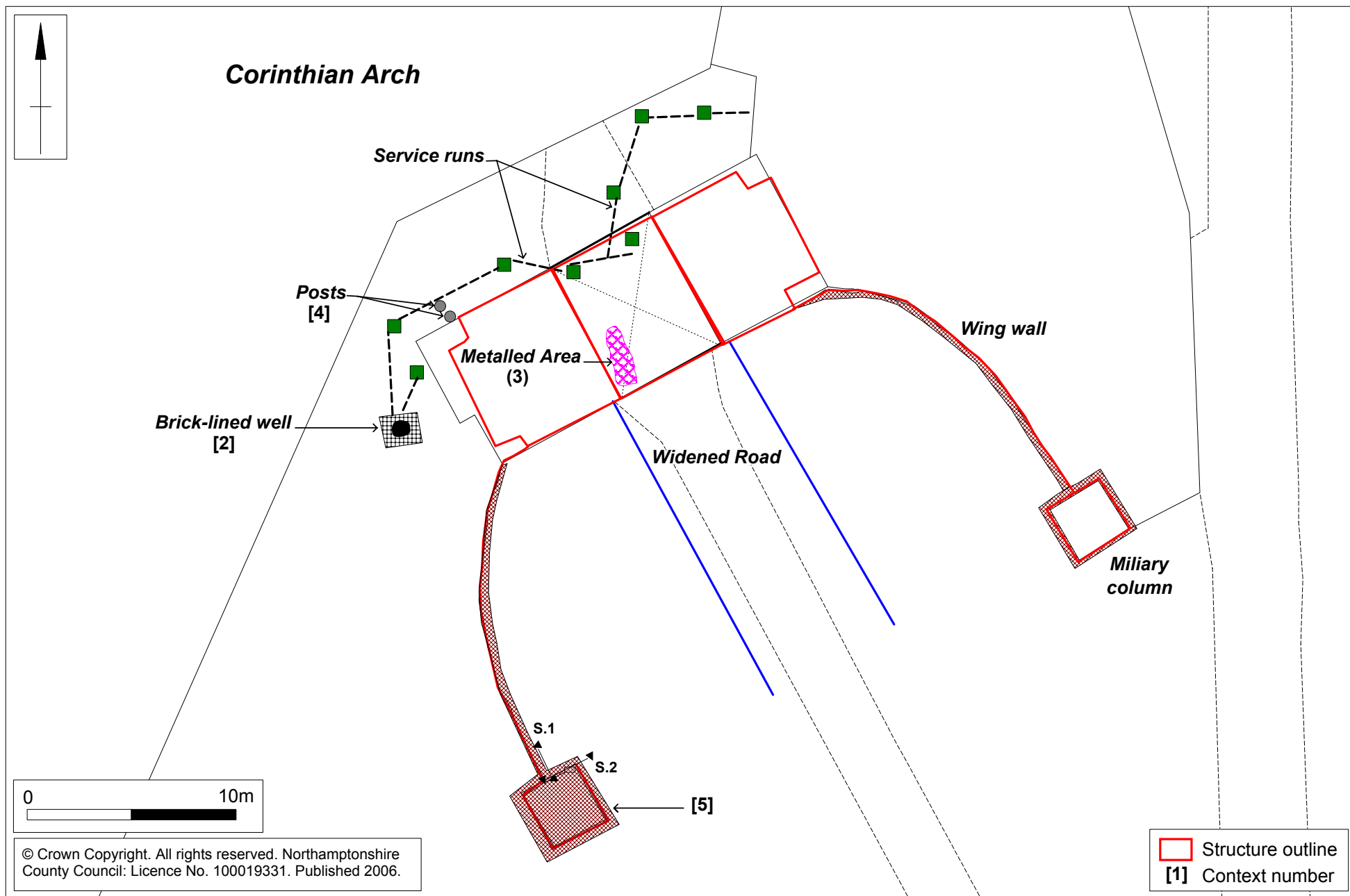
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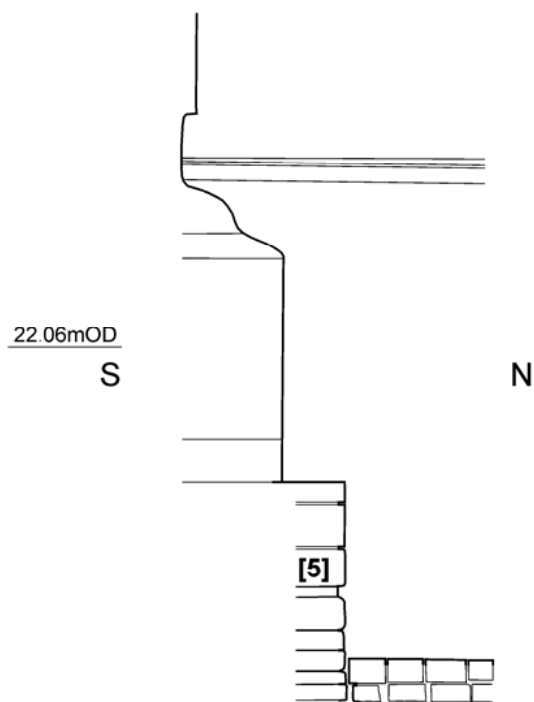


Scale 1:25,000

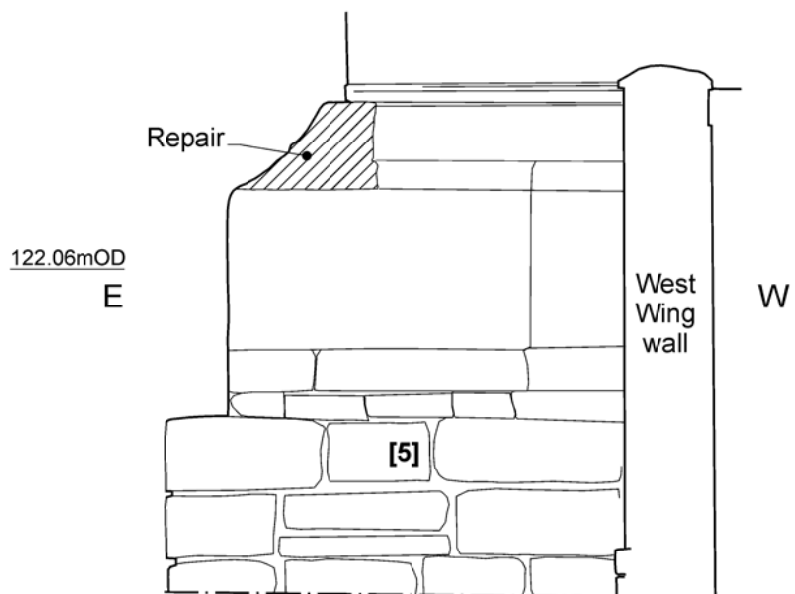
Site location Fig 1



### Section 1



### Section 2



Military column, wall sections 1 and 2 Fig 3



Plate 1: Service runs under arch, looking south-east



Plate 2: Timber post, looking east





Plate 3: Brick-lined well



Plate 4: Brick-lined well with modern cover & Stowe school in background, looking north-west





Plate 5: Military column, showing wall sections 1 & 2, looking south



Plate 6: South-west military column, looking south-west





Plate 7: Corinthian Arch with new gates



Plate 8: New gates to the Corinthian Arch