



Northamptonshire
County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

An archaeological watching brief at

Sutton House, Hackney

January 2009



Paul Mason

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Report 09/15

Northamptonshire Archaeology

2 Bolton House
Wootton Hall Park
Northampton NN4 8BE

t. 01604 700493 f. 01604 702822

e. sparry@northamptonshire.gov.uk

w. www.northantsarchaeology.co.uk



STAFF

Project Manager Joe Prentice

Text Paul Mason BA AifA

Building Materials Pat Chapman BA CMS AifA

Fieldwork Paul Mason

Illustration Richard Watts

QUALITY CONTROL

	Print name	Signature	Date
Checked by	Pat Chapman		
Verified by	Joe Prentice		
Approved by	Andy Chapman		

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	BACKGROUND	2
2.1	Historical and archaeological background	2
2.2	Topography and geology	3
3	AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	3
4	METHODOLOGY	3
5	RESULTS	4
5.1	Wall fabric	4
5.2	Stratigraphy	6
6	THE FINDS	7
6.1	The building material by Pat Chapman	7
7	CONCLUSION	9
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	10

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of contexts

Figures

Fig 1: Site location

Fig 2: Site plan

Fig 3: Section 1: wall elevation

Fig 4: Sections 2-4: stratigraphic sequences

Plates

Cover: Sutton House frontage

Plate 1: Site looking north

Plate 2: Test pit 1, looking west

Plate 3: Test pit 2, looking west

Plate 4: Test pit 3, looking west

Plate 5: Test pit 4, looking west

Plate 6: Test pit 5, looking west

Plate 7: Test pit 6, looking west

Plate 8: Test pit 7, looking west

Plate 9: Test pit 8, looking west

Plate 10: Test pit 9, looking west

Plate 11: Re-pointing in 18th (?) century wall [3]

Plate 12: Upstanding fabric of 19th (?) century wall [2]

Plate 13: Early bricks used in exterior of Sutton House's western chimney breast

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	An archaeological watching brief at Sutton House, Hackney	
Short description	At the request of the National Trust, Northamptonshire Archaeology conducted a watching brief at Sutton House, Hackney prior to the reconstruction of a boundary wall. This work exposed the remnants of an earlier wall which had been recorded during a trial trench evaluation of the site conducted by MoLAS (2007). It was suggested that this earlier fabric may relate to a building known as the Tanhouse which was documented in the 15th century and appears on a map of the 18th century. Fabric indicative of three phases of construction was recorded during the course of the watching brief; however, the provenance of the earliest wall remains ambiguous; an 18th century date is suggested by the bricks used in its construction.	
Project type	Watching brief	
Site status	Urban	
Previous work	MOLAS 2007	
Current Land use	Demolition site/yard	
Future work	Not known	
Monument type/ period	Late medieval/post-medieval	
Significant finds	n/a	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Greater London	
Site address	Sutton House, Hackney, London E9	
Study area	360 sq m	
OS Easting & Northing	535259 185092	
Height OD	c 15.5mOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)	
Project brief originator	The National Trust, Thames and Solent Region	
Project Design originator	NA	
Director/Supervisor	Paul Mason	
Project Manager	Joe Prentice	
Sponsor or funding body	The National Trust	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	21/1/09	
End date	22/1/09	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		
Paper		
Digital		
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Unpublished client report (NA report)		
Title	An Archaeological Watching Brief at Sutton House, Hackney	
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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT SUTTON HOUSE,
HACKNEY**

ABSTRACT

At the request of the National Trust, Northamptonshire Archaeology conducted a watching brief at Sutton House, Hackney prior to the reconstruction of a boundary wall. This work exposed the remnants of an earlier wall which had been recorded during a trial trench evaluation of the site conducted by MoLAS (2007). It was suggested that this earlier fabric may relate to a building known as the Tanhouse which was documented in the 15th century and appears on a map of the 18th century.

Fabric indicative of three phases of construction was recorded during the course of the watching brief; however, the provenance of the earliest wall remains ambiguous; an 18th century date is suggested by the bricks used in its construction.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by the National Trust (Thames and Solent Region) to undertake a watching brief at Sutton House, Hackney, London (NGR 535259 185092, Fig 1). The site lies within the grounds of an historic house, dating from the Tudor period, where a new boundary wall will be built over the denuded remains of earlier walls. These were identified during a trial trench evaluation conducted by MoLAS (2007) and as result of this work, it was suggested that the earliest fabric might be related to a 15th-century structure known as the Tanhouse which once stood to the west of Sutton House.

The watching brief involved the inspection of brickwork and stratigraphy exposed in a hand-dug trench excavated along the eastern face of the former boundary wall. As a result, three phases of wall fabric were identified though none were unequivocally related to late medieval/early post-medieval Tanhouse complex. The watching brief was undertaken between 21st and 22nd January 2009.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Historical and archaeological background

Sutton House

Sutton House was built in 1535 as a country retreat by Sir Ralph Sadleir, a courtier of Henry VIII (www.nationaltrust.org.uk). He sold the house, then known as Bryk Place, to a family of wool merchants in 1550 with whom it remained for some 80 years before being acquired by a silk merchant and eventually becoming a ladies' boarding school. It was altered in the 16th and 18th centuries, resulting in a three storey structure with projecting wings (www.imagesofengland.org.uk) and split into two separate dwellings in c 1750 which were inhabited by various tenants including Huguenot refugees from France (www.theheritage-trail.co.uk). At the end of the 19th century the houses were rejoined to form the St John's Church Institute. It was acquired by the National Trust in 1938 after a period of dereliction and later restored.

The Tanhouse

The Tanhouse lay to the west of Sutton House which it predated by some 40 years. It was described in a late 15th century document as, 'formerly a tannehouse but now a dwelling house' and set in an acre of garden. It was sold to Ralph Sadleir in 1537 and eventually passed to one of the country's richest commoners, Thomas Sutton in 1605. It is through this association that Bryk Place eventually became known as Sutton House. An 18th-century plan depicts it as a substantial timber-framed house (Belcher *et al* 2004, 14) which was later converted into three residences before being demolished in 1806 when Sutton Place was constructed. Its precise location was subsequently forgotten (ibid, 15).

Previous Excavations

MoLAS 1990

An archaeological excavation to the west and south of the extant Sutton House buildings located a substantial north-south aligned wall lying close to

the eastern wall of the property. It was assumed to be part of the Tanhouse complex and was subsequently built over (ibid, 34-35; Fig 3.20).

MoLAS 2007

A single trial trench positioned to the west of Sutton House located a brick wall which may have been part of the Tanhouse complex. A series of pits and layers were found in association, the earliest being interpreted as a possible medieval ploughsoil (MoLAS 2007).

2.2 Topography and geology

The site comprises a dog legged parcel of land lying to the immediate west of Sutton House (360 sqm). It is bounded by the rear gardens of Sutton Place properties to the north and west, a boundary wall dividing Sutton House from St John and St James primary school to the south and the house itself to the east.

It was formerly occupied by the premises and yard of a car breaker; the buildings themselves were demolished prior to the start of the watching brief leaving only concrete floor slabs intact. The remaining part of the site was soft landscaped and lies at *c* 15.5mOD.

The geology of the site is mapped as London Clay overlain by River Terrace deposits (www.bgs.ac.uk).

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

A brief prepared by the National Trust (Marshall 2009) defines the purpose of the watching brief as follows:

To ensure that any evidence (relating to the building known as ‘Tan House’) revealed by the proposed works is fully recorded and interpreted.

4 METHODOLOGY

A site visit was made after ground workers had excavated a hand dug trench

at intervals along the east facing elevation of the wall remnants, in effect creating a series of nine test pits (TP1-9), each measuring *c* 1m x 0.35m x *c* 0.60m (Fig 2; Plates 1-10). The wall fabric and stratigraphic sequences exposed in the faces of the pits were cleaned by hand and records were made on standard Northamptonshire Archaeology pro-forma watching brief forms and context sheets. A plan of the exposed area and features was made at a scale of 1:100, a continuous section of the wall drawn at 1:20 and associated stratigraphy at 1:10. A photographic record was maintained in colour slide, monochrome print and digital formats.

All fieldwork was carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) '*Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief*' (2001). The works were conducted in accordance with the Health and Safety Policy of Northamptonshire County Council.

The project has been designated the site code SH09.

5 RESULTS

Three separate phases of brick wall fabric were observed and recorded during the watching brief together with stratigraphic sequences where soil baulks remained abutting the walls.

5.1 Wall fabric

The earliest wall [3] had previously been recorded during the evaluation of the site and subsequently identified a possible remnant of the complex of buildings known as the Tanhouse (MoLAS 2007, 9). The top of this wall lay at 15.36-15.46mOD and comprised four, even courses of irregular brickwork bonded with a loose off-white lime mortar (Fig 3, Section 1; Plates 2-10). The individual bricks were handmade and date to the 18th century. They measured 228 x 100 x 60mm (9 x 3 ⁵/₈ x 2³/₈ inches) and were lain over a footing of 'headers' [15] that projected *c* 0.06m from the face of the wall at 14.96-15.08mOD (this footing was only visible at the base of TPs 6-9 which were deeper than those to the south; see Plate 10; the MoLAS trial trench showed this footing to be four courses deep (MoLAS 2007, fig 5)).

Along its length, localised patches of the wall had been re-pointed with a mid-grey to charcoal grey mortar (Plate 11).

The wall was strengthened by slightly-built brick buttresses [6], [8], [10] that were spaced at regular intervals of *c* 3.8m (22 feet 4 inches) centre to centre. These were visible in TPs 1,4,6 (Fig 3, Section 1; Plates 2, 5 and 7). They were *c* 0.40m wide and projected from the face of the wall by only a brick's width (100mm). Based upon the observed spacing another buttress was probably obscured by the soil baulk left in between TPs 8 and 9. This conjecture would leave a gap of *c* 1m between this and another, northernmost buttress [12] which corresponded with the position of a small recess [14] between the upper and second course of both the wall and the buttress that bore traces of timber (Fig 3, Section 1; Plate 10). This may be related to the position of a former aperture in the wall, perhaps a sill or step for a gateway or window. Perhaps co-incidentally, an aperture appears in roughly the same location in the reconstructed plan of the Tanhouse by Mike Gray that is reproduced in the MoLAS evaluation report (2007, fig 9). Alternatively, the timber could simply have been used to level up prior to the construction of the second phase of walling (see below). A larger recess [13], measuring 0.12m deep was observed in the upper course of the wall in TP8 (Fig 3, Section 1; Plate 9); its function remains unknown.

A second wall [2] was bonded to the top of the earlier with a thick application of very hard off-white lime mortar. At the southern end of the site, beyond the area investigated by the test pits, this wall stood to a height of *c* 1m (to *c* 16.50mOD; Plate 12). Where observed within the pits themselves it had been reduced to only two or three courses (surviving on average to only *c* 15.60m OD). It was constructed from bricks measuring 215 x 100 x 60mm (8½ x 3 ⅝ x 2⅜ inches), laid in even, but irregular, courses over a single course of 'headers'. It was bonded with a medium hard yellow mortar.

This wall was also supported by buttresses, [4], [5], [7], [9] and [11], which were built directly over the buttresses for the earlier wall. Their proportions were also similar and the narrow gap postulated at the northern end of the wall was also maintained - suggesting that this 'new' construction was

designed as a direct copy of the original. The presence of corresponding buttresses on the west face of the wall was suggested by a right angled return observed in the brickwork of the buttress revealed in TP4. A similar arrangement was present to the north where the trial trench exposed the wall's west face (MoLAS 2007, fig 6).

In TPs 1-3 the face of wall [2] was flush with the underlying fabric (Plates 2-4); to the north, in TPs 4-9 (Plates 5-10), it overhung it by up to 0.06m; perhaps the result of subsidence.

The final phase of wall [1] only survived at the northern end of the site (Fig 4, Section 1; Plates 7-10). Here a course of headers (the occasional quarry tile was also present) was overlain by bricks measuring 218 x 114 x 65mm (8½ x 4 x 2½ inches) laid in a Flemish bond with a very distinct hard, bright orange mortar. The bricks were machine manufactured and date to the early 20th century. It was noted that an upstanding section of wall to the north of TP9, which forms a boundary between Sutton Place gardens, was similarly constructed.

5.2 Stratigraphy

Three separate sequences of stratigraphy were visible in the test pits (Fig 4, Sections 2-4). In the southernmost (TP1; Fig 4, Section 2) the earliest deposit was a dark brown sandy loam (18), perhaps a former garden/topsoil, which accumulated against the fabric of the wall [3]. This was overlain by a c 0.20m thick deposit of loam (17) which contained fragments of salt glaze pipe. This layer was heavily contaminated with petro-chemicals – presumably deriving from the former car breakers yard. This was overlain with dark brown sandy loam (16) containing frequent wood chips and glass fragments. This sequence of deposits continued northwards for c 4.5m to be observed in TP4.

In TP5 (Fig 4, Section 3) the earliest layer was the same as that to the south; a dark brown sandy loam (22). This contained a single fragment of clay pipe stem which, on the basis of its bore diameter, dates to the 19th century (Tim Upson-Smith, *pers comm*). This layer was overlain with a deposit of broken brick and lumps of mortar (21) lying up to 0.22m thick which probably

represents the demolition of the earliest wall [3]. Overlying this was a dark grey brown loam (20) containing frequent lumps of charcoal – perhaps a garden soil. The uppermost layer was a loose mid-grey loam (19) containing modern building material.

This sequence was present in the rest of the test pits except in TP 8 (Fig 4, Section 4) which was cut through a mid grey brown loam (23) flecked with brick and mortar fragments which might be the backfill of the MoLAS evaluation trench. It was also noted that at the base of this and the neighbouring test pits, a compacted layer (24) was level with the top of the footing. This may be the backfill of the construction trench noted during the previous evaluation (MoLAS 2007, 9), or perhaps a former ground surface that had built up over it.

6 THE FINDS

6.1 The building material by Pat Chapman

The bricks

Four bricks were taken from the wall for an example of each phase.

The two earliest bricks come from wall [3] and are handmade. The almost complete but broken brick is 228 x 100 x 60mm (9 x 3 ⁵/₈ x 2 ³/₈ inches). It is made from coarse sand with frequent small grit up to 2mm long, and occasional larger stones up to 12mm long and slightly overfired to vesicular dark red purple with a light purple surface. The bottom is covered with white mortar. The top has a proto frog 30-40mm wide and up to *c* 5mm deep, starting about 60mm in from one end and *c* 30mm from the other, but partially obscured by mortar. The frog is a feature that began to appear from the late 17th century onwards as a slight depression (Harley 1974, 80, 85). One stretcher has a diagonal groove from a bottom corner stopping short of the further top end. This mark is a skintling, which is caused by stacking bricks to dry in a herringbone fashion. The diagonal skintling is typical of the 18th century, though not exclusively.

The incomplete brick is 100mm wide by 60mm thick (4 x 2 ³/₈ inches). It is

made from a slightly friable coarse sand with frequent small grit up to 2mm long, and occasional larger debris up to 12mm long and one sub-angular pebble over 30mm long, and overfired to a vesicular bright red orange. There are slight crease marks along the stretchers, caused either by the clay dragging against the side of the mould when deposited, or the excess clay from a previous brick left in the mould and not bonding properly with the next brick (Campbell and Saint 2002, 178). The bottom is flat and smooth, while the top has a proto frog, 40mm wide *c* 2mm deep, starting about 60mm in from the header end.

The brick from wall [2] is 215 x 100 x 60mm (8½ x 3 ⅝ x 2⅜ inches). It is hard and overfired to a cindery dark purple. The fabric contains occasional gravel up to 8mm seen where part of one stretcher is missing. Mortar covers the top and bottom and part of one header thus obscuring any features such as a frog or maker's mark.

The most recent brick comes from wall [1], and measures 218 x 114 x 65mm (8½ x 4 x 2½ inches). It is machine-made from moderately fine clay fired to orange red. The frog is mostly covered in mortar, but can be seen to have sharp corners. This is probably a Fletton brick dating to the first half of the 20th century.

The earliest bricks are datable to the 18th century and the most recent brick was made in the 20th century, so the brick from wall [2] was probably made in the late 18th to 19th centuries unless it was reused.

Mortar

Black mortar was found with the bricks in the earliest phase of the wall (wall [3]). This particular mortar is a feature associated with high status buildings from the 18th century onwards to contrast with the red brick and was expensive and time consuming in applying (www.newforest.gov.uk/media/adobe/pointing.pdf accessed 29/1/2009). Its presence here near the bottom of an ordinary wall is an unexplained anomaly (Joe Prentice *pers comm*).

7 CONCLUSION

As a result of the watching brief the remnants of three successive walls were recorded along the boundary between Sutton House and the gardens of Sutton Place together with sections of the abutting stratigraphy.

The provenance of the earliest wall remains unclear. Based upon the reconstructed plan of the Tanhouse (Mike Grey in MoLAS 2007, fig 9) it would seem that it occupies roughly the correct position and alignment to be considered as the easternmost wall of the Tanhouse complex. Furthermore, the postulated timber threshold/sill located in TP9 also loosely corresponds with the location of an aperture shown in the plan. The MoLAS evaluation trench did not recover evidence for a wall further to the west, where it is shown on the reconstruction, thus adding credence to this hypothesis. These observations, however, are reliant on the accuracy of the reconstruction; they also contradict the evidence provided by an excavation undertaken in the early 1990s which places the easternmost walls of the Tanhouse complex further to the east, within a metre or so of the west wall of Sutton House (Belcher *et al* 2004, 34-35; fig 3.20).

Further indications that the wall is not related to the Tanhouse are offered by the size of the bricks used in its construction which probably date to the 18th century. The early bricks used in the fabric of Sutton House, where observed in the patched-up west chimney breast (Plate 13) were a different fabric and much slighter measuring 220mm x 90mm x 40mm (8½ x 3½ x 1½ inches). Further doubt is introduced by the quality of the wall's construction, including its irregular bond and poor quality mortar; neither seems in keeping with a respectable dwelling such as the Tanhouse. The patchy, poorly executed re-pointing in a dark grey mortar is incongruous in this respect as it is usually employed on buildings of reasonable status – but in a far more carefully applied manner. Perhaps it was used opportunistically as a 'left-over' from another building. Neither does the slight size of the buttresses, and their correspondence with the positions of the later property boundary wall, convince. Finally, no finds pre-dating the 19th century were retrieved from the soils that had accumulated against the

face of the wall.

In conclusion, the available evidence would seem to favour an 18th century date for the wall; or even an early 19th century date if the bricks were re-used. Rather than being a remnant of the Tanhouse, it may have defined the western boundary for the grounds of Sutton House when Sutton Place was created in the first decade of the 19th century. The evidence unfortunately remains ambiguous. It is clear, however, that three campaigns of wall building were executed along the same building line between the 18th and early 20th centuries.

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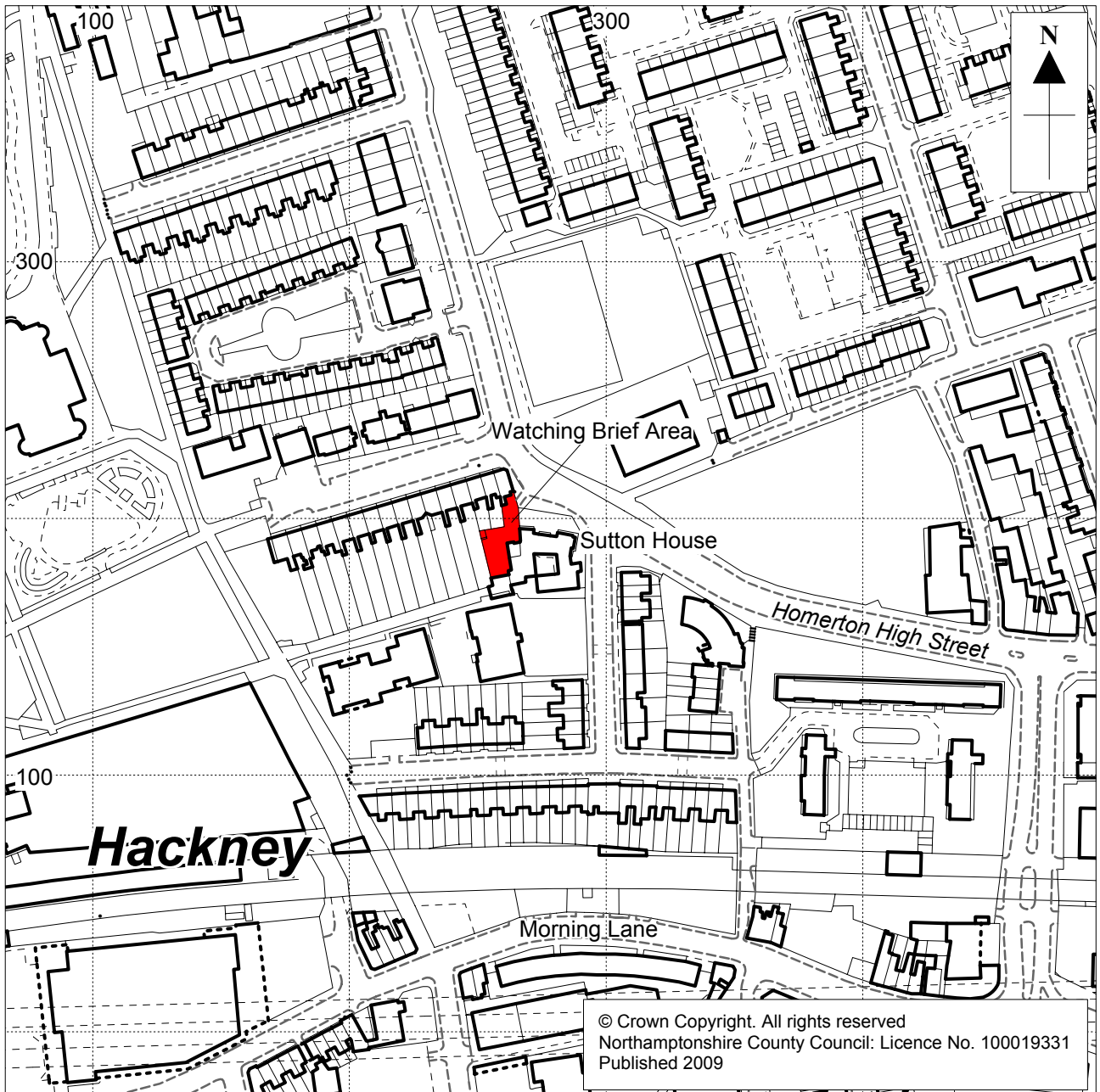
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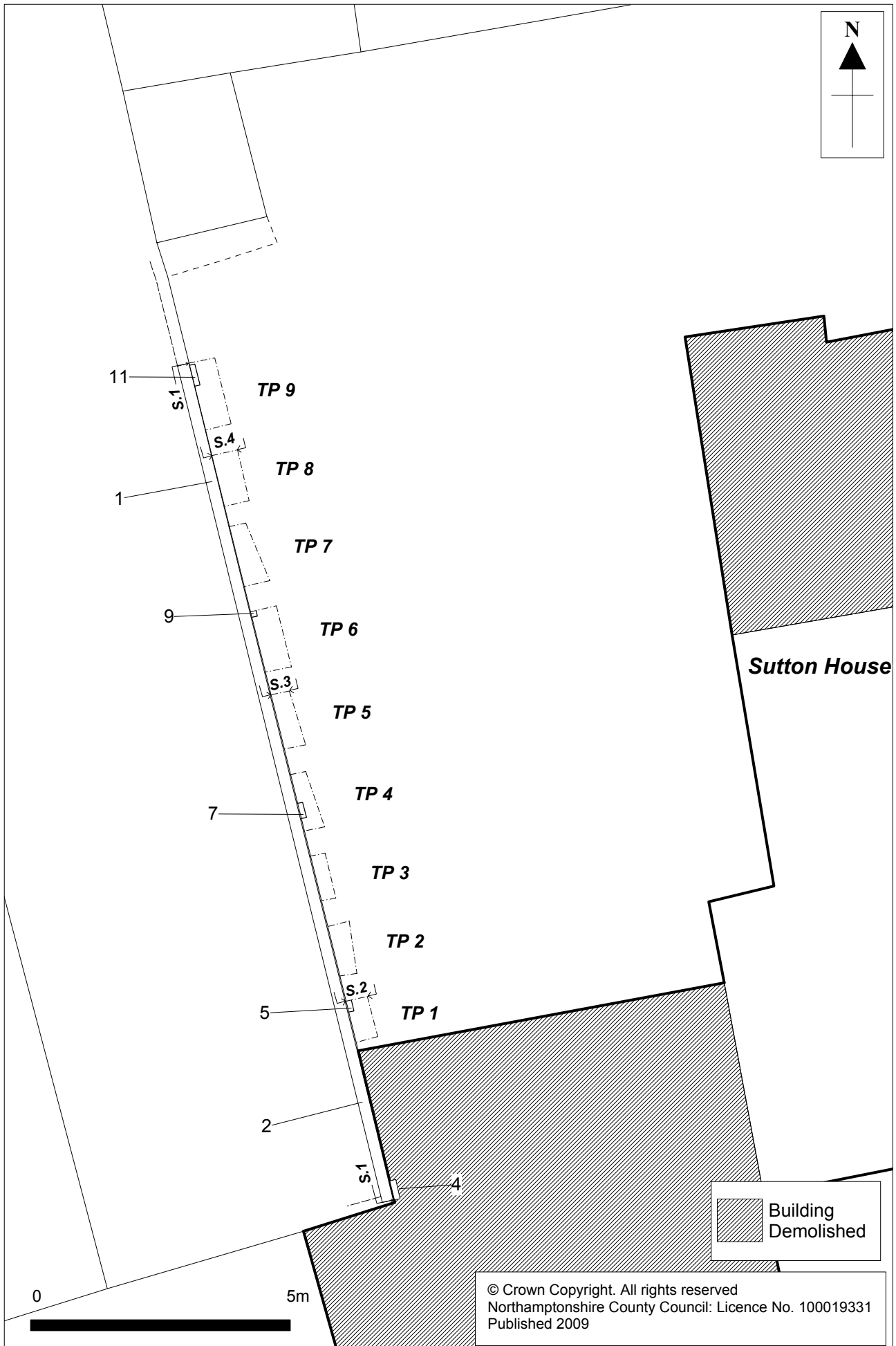
Appendix 1: List of contexts

Context	Description
1	Modern brick wall
2	19th (?) century brick wall
3	18th (?) century brick wall
4	Buttress to wall [2]
5	Buttress to wall [2]
6	Buttress to wall [3]
7	Buttress to wall [2]
8	Buttress to wall [3]
9	Buttress to wall [2]
10	Buttress to wall [3]
11	Buttress to wall [2]
12	Buttress to wall [3]
13	Recess in wall [3]
14	Timber lined recess in wall [3]
15	Brick footing for wall [3]
16	Layer
17	Layer
18	Layer
19	Layer
20	Layer
21	Layer
22	Layer
23	Layer
24	Layer



Scale 1:2500

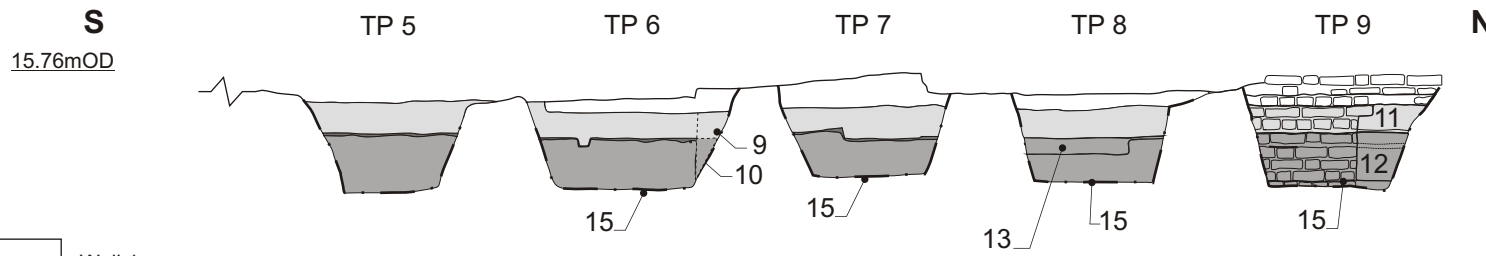
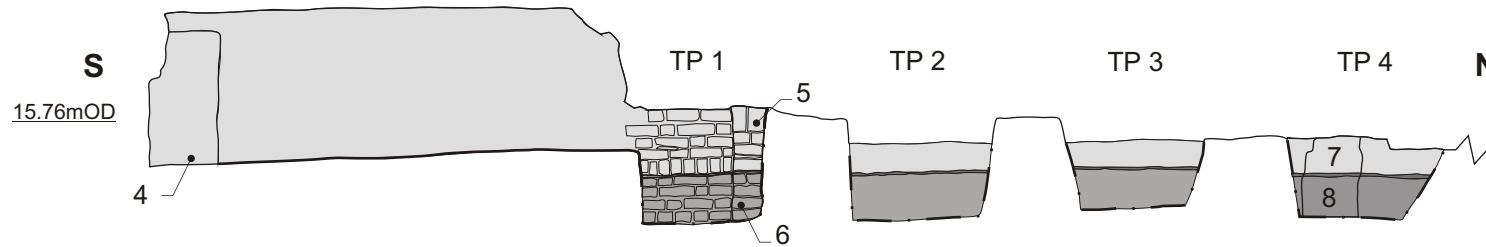
Site Location Fig 1



Scale 1:100

Site plan Fig 2

Section 1

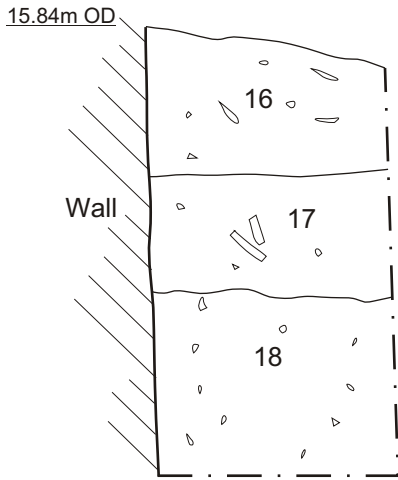


- Wall 1
- Wall 2
- Wall 3

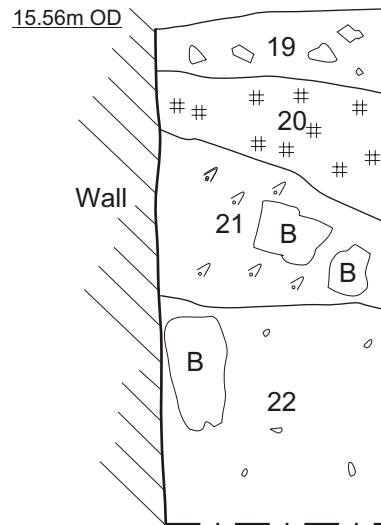


Section 1: Wall elevation Fig 3

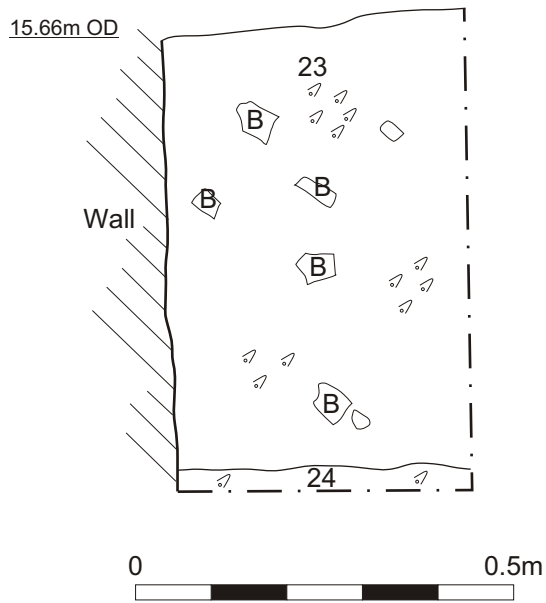
Section 2



Section 3



Section 4






-  Mortar
-  Brick
-  Charcoal



Plate 1: Site looking north



Plate 2: Test pit 1, looking west



Plate 3: Test pit 2, looking west



Plate 4: Test pit 3, looking west



Plate 5: Test pit 4, looking west



Plate 6: Test pit 5, looking west



Plate 7: Test pit 6, looking west



Plate 8: Test pit 7, looking west



Plate 9: Test pit 8, looking west



Plate 10: Test pit 9, looking west



Plate 11: Re-pointing in 18th (?) century wall [3]



Plate 12: Upstanding fabric of 19th (?) century wall [2]



Plate 13: Early bricks used in exterior of Sutton House's western chimney breast