



Northamptonshire County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological evaluation

of land at

The Orchard, Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh

North Somerset

June 2009



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July 2009

Report 09/083

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Northamptonshire
County Council



**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY
July 2009**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF LAND AT
THE ORCHARD, LEIGH COURT, ABBOTS LEIGH
NORTH SOMERSET
JUNE 2009**

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QUALITY CONTROL

	Print name	Signed	Date
Checked by	Pat Chapman		
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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	Archaeological evaluation on land at The Orchard, Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, Somerset	
Short description (250 words maximum)	Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out an archaeological trial trench evaluation on land proposed for redevelopment at The Orchard, Abbots Leigh, Bristol. The evaluation comprised the hand excavation of four trenches and followed previous desk-based and geophysical surveys. The desk-based assessment and the proximity to the former Hall led to the suggestion that this parcel may contain elements of a Tudor or later garden. The trenches found only isolated undated garden features cut into a thick limestone make-up layer, probably contemporary with the erection of the Tudor hall, overlain by a thick imported soil. This later soil was probably part of a remodelling associated with the erection of the new hall in the nineteenth century.	
Project type (eg DBA, evaluation etc)	Trial trench evaluation	
Site status (none, NT, SAM etc)	None	
Previous work (SMR numbers etc)	Yes	
Current Land use	Garden	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)		
Monument type/ period		
Significant finds (artefact type and period)		
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	North Somerset	
Site address (including postcode)	The Orchard, Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, North Somerset	
Study area (sq.m or ha)	0.36ha	
OS Easting & Northing (use grid sq. letter code)	ST 540 743	
Height OD		
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	N/A	
Project Design originator	Ian Meadows	
Director/Supervisor	Ian Meadows	
Project Manager	Ian Meadows	
Sponsor or funding body	Freeways Trust	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	1 st June 2009	
End date	19 th June 2009	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		
Paper		
Digital		
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)		
Title	Archaeological evaluation on land at The Orchard, Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, Somerset	
Serial title & volume	Northamptonshire Archaeology Reports 09/83	
Author(s)	Ian Meadows	
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION ON LAND AT THE ORCHARD,
LEIGH COURT, ABBOTS LEIGH, SOMERSET
JUNE 2009**

Abstract

Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out an archaeological trial trench evaluation on land proposed for redevelopment at The Orchard, Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, Bristol. The evaluation comprised the hand excavation of four trenches and followed previous desk-based and geophysical surveys. The desk-based assessment and the proximity to the former Hall led to the suggestion that this parcel may contain elements of a Tudor or later garden. The trenches found only isolated undated garden features cut into a thick limestone make-up layer, probably contemporary with the erection of the Tudor hall, overlain by a thick layer of imported soil. This later soil was probably part of a remodelling associated with the erection of the new hall in the nineteenth century.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Northamptonshire Archaeology were commissioned by David Beresford-Smith on behalf of The Freeways Trust to carry out an archaeological evaluation at The Orchard, Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh (Fig 1, centred on NGR ST 540 743). The evaluation was in connection with a planning application to redevelop the site currently occupied by a single bungalow into a new single-storey care home.

There was reason to suppose the site was part of a formal garden arrangement associated with the Tudor and later house that was replaced by a new house some 400m away to the northeast in 1814. Previous work included a desk-based assessment (Watkins 2008) and a geophysical survey (Sabin and Donaldson 2008). The current land use is as a garden, most of which is laid to lawn but until recent clearances it had been wooded with a variety of trees including some mature examples.

1.2 The study area

The study area comprised the relatively level garden around a recent bungalow, The Orchard. There was a recent stone garden wall along the east side composed of pieces of limestone of varying sizes, including isolated obviously re-used fragments. At the south-east corner there was a brick-built tower/gazebo, constructed of coarse

handmade bricks rendered with cement, this structure was mirrored by a second, ruined example in the south-west corner of the garden.

The south-west end of the garden is dominated by the rectangular stone-lined pond on a low terrace, to the south-west of which is a flat berm with the ground beyond rising in a further bank, this area was retained on its south-western side by a roughly mortared stone wall. The form of the pond was similar to the raised Tudor canals popular in gardens, and it was suggested in the desk-based assessment that the turrets may overlie earlier examples and that the study area might therefore contain part of a Tudor garden.

The garden was revetted by a stone wall along its south-west and north-west sides, where the ground dropped approximately 2m down the hill, and it is probable that a substantial degree of make-up had been necessary to level the enclosed garden area.

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology, described in a written scheme of investigation (NA 2009) and agreed with Vince Russett, the Planning Archaeologist for North Somerset Council, was that excavation trenches would target specific geophysical anomalies. In total five trenches were proposed but in the event only four were excavated (Fig 2). The fifth would have examined an anomaly which was evident, on surface examination, to have been produced by the removal of a large tree. Three trenches measured 4m x 1m and a further example was 2m x 2m, all were hand excavated.

Trench 1 was 4m long and 1m wide and ran north-east to south-west across a geophysical anomaly, numbered 1 in the geophysical survey report, and interpreted as a possible wall or wall collapse (Sabin and Donaldson 2008).

Trench 2 was 4m long and 1m wide and ran north-east to south-west across the line of a putative wall between a concrete slab and the geophysical anomaly numbered 5, where it may survive as a robber trench.

Trench 3 was 4m long and 1m wide and ran north-west to south-east so that it crossed a geophysical anomaly, numbered 3, and part of one of the areas numbered 4. Anomaly 3 was identified as a possible cut feature, perhaps a flowerbed or drain.

Trench 4 was to be approximately 4m long and 1m wide and was located to test whether an anomaly was a grubbed-out tree or an architectural feature. However, on the ground it was evident that this was a grubbed-out tree, and the removal of a tree at that location was recalled by the occupants of the bungalow. The trench was therefore not excavated.

Trench 5 was 2m square, and was excavated in an area which produced no anomalies in the western half of the garden; it was excavated to ascertain if no readings equated to no remains.

The topsoil/turf was removed and stacked on one side of the trenches whilst the remaining excavation upcast was stacked on the other.

3 THE RESULTS

3.1 Trench 1

This trench was positioned to intercept the line of the possible pond bank retaining wall (Plates 1-3). At a depth of 0.7m there was a layer of loosely compacted limestone [107], which had presumably formed a surface or sub-base for loose gravel (Fig 3, Trench 1; Fig 4, Section 2). Excavation stopped on this horizon so its thickness is unknown. It was cut at its south-western end by an irregular, partially exposed pit [109], at least 0.2m in diameter and 0.14m deep. This pit contained a firm reddish-brown sandy clay [108] which contained pottery of medieval date. From its form and stratigraphic position it was interpreted as a possible planting hole from an earlier garden layout.

The limestone horizon [107] was overlain by firm reddish-brown sandy clay [103], up to 0.4m thick, containing pottery and brick along with limestone chippings (Fig 4, Section 2). Occasional lumps of coal ash were also present, presumably from domestic fires. Within this soil layer a lens of darker material [104] may have been the relic of a planting bed in front of the retaining wall. This material had a maximum thickness of about 0.1m.

At the north-eastern end of the trench a rubble layer [105] overlay the soil [103]. This rubble horizon thickened to a maximum of 0.3m at the north-east end of the trench.

It comprised irregular limestone pieces, up to a maximum size of 0.2 x 0.1 x 0.2m, some of which showed signs of scorching. None of the stones showed any signs of dressing and the deposit was quite loose. It is suggested that it could be a dump of material derived from the slighting of the retaining wall [106].

The north-east face of the retaining wall [106] was abutted by rubble layer [102], which could have been the fill of a foundation cut. The deposit comprised stone and mortar and extended 0.75m from the face of the wall, it was 0.3m deep, nearly the full surviving height of the wall (Fig 4, Sections 1 and 2).

Part of the top truncated upper surface and north-east face of the stone wall [106] were exposed, it had a maximum surviving height of 0.5m (Plate 3). It comprised an irregularly-coursed wall incorporating roughly-squared blocks 0.3m x 0.2m and thinner smaller pieces, 0.35m x 0.05m, set in strong cement. Some of the stones showed signs of scorching and may have been re-used from elsewhere. The wall had presumably been originally constructed to form a low revetment to the face of the raised plot containing the pond.

Sealing all of the above horizons was the present garden soil which comprised humic grey-brown loamy topsoil [101] containing isolated pebbles and limestone chips.

3.2 Trench 2

This trench was positioned a short distance from the bottom of the slope to the pond. It was excavated to explore the possible presence of rubble collapse or demolition material from the postulated retaining wall and to explore the presence or absence of a robber trench. At 0.25m deep, a layer of limestone [204] containing hardly any soil, extended across the entire length of the trench (Plate 4); what matrix was present comprised clean reddish clay (Fig 3, Trench 2; Fig 4, Section 6). The deposit had a thickness in excess of 0.3m, the limit of excavation of a 1m-long sondage at the north-eastern end of the trench. The stones ranged in size from 0.07 x 0.07 x 0.05m up to 0.3 x 0.2 x 0.2m.

The stones appeared to form a compacted surface, such as a courtyard or roadway, and the upper surface of many of the stones were rounded, the stones lower down in the horizon had a more sub-angular form, further supporting this premise. The

deposit was free of any inclusions, even charcoal. Local variations within the deposit might reflect discrete dumps of material which, when considered with the cleanness of the deposit, might suggest it was imported and deposited as dug, none of the pieces displayed any signs of scorching. Within the sondage there was an unexcavated deposit of limestone pieces [205] within an orangey slightly clay matrix, which might simply be a local variation of the general layer [204].

Overlying the rubble surface at the south-west end of the trench was a 0.1m thick deposit of loose stones [203] extending for 1.5m, thinning to the north-east. The stones ranged from small fragments up to pieces 0.15 x 0.15 x 0.10m in size. The deposit was perhaps either from the construction of the pond bank revetting wall or from its subsequent slighting. As no direct stratigraphic link with the wall was present any interpretation is supposition.

Sealing the stone spread [203] and for much of the trench directly overlying the limestone surface [204], was a mid grey-brown clay loam, 0.16m thick, containing many limestone fragments along with coal ash fragments [202]. This horizon was probably a recent garden soil and differed from the upper garden soil [201] only by containing lower humic content and more stones. The upper garden soil [201] was humic and heavily root-disturbed, 0.13m thick. It contained occasional limestone chips and pieces of coal ash, presumably from domestic fires, which has been incorporated into the soil.

3.3 Trench 3

This trench was sited to cross a linear anomaly identified in the geophysical survey. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.5m, at which point an irregular and uneven limestone horizon was encountered [305] (Fig 3, Trench 3). The upper surfaces of the stones were generally rounded and sub-angular, possibly reflecting some degree of wear. The stones were very tightly set together and had presumably originally constituted some surface or a sub base for one (Plate 5). This deposit was not further excavated.

Sealing the surface [305] was a reddish-brown clay loam garden soil [303], 0.2m thick, containing charcoal and ash flecks. There were also two discrete dumps of ash within the deposit, which had been dumped at the same time (Fig 4, Section 5). This soil was probably an imported garden soil spread over the limestone horizon in order

to make planting possible. It may relate to the re-landscaping of this part of the park at the time of the erection of the new hall in the early nineteenth century.

Cut into this garden soil was a flat-bottomed steep sided trench [306] 1.1m wide and 0.2m deep, filled with a homogeneous gritty reddish clay loam [304]. This feature was probably a flowerbed and equates to a linear anomaly identified in the geophysical survey.

Sealing these deposits there was a mixed horizon of dark grey-brown topsoil and reddish brown subsoil [302], 0.1m thick, which was probably the base of the cultivation of the modern garden soil [301], which was a dark grey-brown humic layer almost entirely stone free, 0.2m thick.

3.4 Trench 5

Trench 5 was positioned in an area of no geophysical anomalies and measured 2m x 2m. The trench was divided into quadrants with the opposing quarters excavated (Plate 6). Between 0.4m and 0.9m deep an uneven limestone horizon [511] was encountered comprising small stones up to a maximum of 0.2m across (Fig 3, Trench 5). This layer formed a trough on the western side of the trench and a shallow bowl on the eastern side. The basal infill of the trough comprised a thin, 0.07m thick, clean gravel deposit [507] comprising small angular and sub angular grit up to 10mm across (Fig 4, Sections 3 and 4). It was uncertain whether this was a deliberate addition in the hollow or if it reflected a gravel horizon higher up (now absent) through which the hollow had been dug.

Overlying the gravel layer was a mid brown clay loam [504], up to 0.4m thick, which contained localised dumps of limestone, much of which showed signs of scorching, and a 0.15m thick lens of darker grey-brown clay loam [505] which contained charcoal flecks and small grits. It is possible this trough-shaped feature was part of a planting hole with the lens of darker soil part of a soil enhancement, such as manure. The limestone may derive from a dump of material filling a void left by the removal of a plant.

Extending 0.2m out from the eastern limit of excavation, a linear spread of stone [508] within a cut [509] may be the part of a path or a drain within the garden. The stones comprised limestone both as irregular lumps and flatter pieces, up to 0.15m across, with grits and a noticeable number of feldspathic crystals along with

fragments of coal ash; this spread of material could be traced for 0.7m from the limit of excavation.

Sealing these deposits was a reddish-brown clay loam [503] containing isolated small limestone, pebbles and charcoal flecks. There was a slight degree of vertical sorting with marginally more inclusions occurring in the lower part of the 0.2m thick deposit; the deposit also included an amount of terracotta plant pot (sample retained). It was a very homogeneous deposit and was probably an imported garden soil. Sealing this material were a lower [502] and upper topsoil [501], the difference between them was the absence of inclusions in the upper topsoil whilst the lower included pebbles, grits and bits of coal ash.

4 THE FINDS

4.1 The pottery by Iain Soden

A total of 38 sherds were recovered in nine fabrics or types from nine contexts. The assemblage breaks down by context, type and sherd as seen in Table 1, below.

Discussion

Although two contexts [108] and [203] appear to be possibly medieval on the basis of their pottery, all the sherds from [108] are small and very abraded. It is likely that they are residual and that the context is much later. Context [203] also produced a piece of seventeenth to nineteenth-century clay tobacco-pipe stem, indicating the residuality of the medieval pottery.

It is likely therefore, that none of the deposits excavated predates the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, with the majority being of the nineteenth century and predominantly horticultural, since the unglazed redwares which dominate are in fact from standard 'modern' flower pots of the type still made today.

Table 1: Quantification of pottery by context, type and sherd count and weight (g)

Type	context /date	103	108	201	203	301	302	303	505	508
Unglazed redware	19th century	8/48g				8/181g	8/101g	2/36g		
Quartzite gritted coarseware	Medieval		1/3g							
Sandy coarseware	Medieval		2/10g							
Glazed red earthenware	Early post-medieval			3/20g						
Glazed, transfer-printed earthenware	19th century			1/8g						
Ham Green-type ware	Medieval				1/40g			1/6g		
Gritty coarseware	Medieval							1/5g		
Glazed pancheon	19th century								1/75g	
Manganese mottled ware	c1680-1740									1/19g
Context date		19th century	Med'l	19th century	Med'l*	19th century	19th century	19th century	19th century	18th century

4.2 Other finds

In addition to the pottery, reported above, occasional fragments of nineteenth-century bottle glass, a single fragment of clay tobacco-pipe stem and an unidentifiable lead object were also found.

5 DISCUSSION

The manor of Leigh belonged to St Augustine's Abbey and remained its property until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1530. The manor was granted in 1542 to the Bishop of Bristol until his death in 1585 when the manor passed to the Norton Family. Sir George Norton erected a new house in the Tudor style; it is unclear if any of the earlier structures were incorporated in this. This house was occupied until the late eighteenth century, it was unoccupied by 1800, and in 1811 the estate was sold to Philip John Miles who demolished the remains of the original manor house and commissioned the erection of the new house 400m to the northeast.

The possibility of the present study area containing elements of a Tudor garden had largely been based upon the association of the plot with the location of the hall. This

relationship is shown on a map of 1806 commissioned by the Trenchard family as a survey and valuation of the manor of Abbots Leigh, and by that time the pond and gazebos are shown as being present with access presumably via the current road alongside the study area. The desk-based assessment added to this interpretation by identifying the raised pond, a characteristic of some Tudor gardens, and the Gazebo structures as perhaps having earlier antecedents. The evaluation trenches therefore had to determine if there was any evidence for a surviving Tudor garden and identify the character of the anomalies picked up by geophysical survey.

The geophysics was found overall to be a good indicator of sub-surface features. Trench 1 did identify a retaining wall facing the raised terrace containing the pond, Trench 2 did identify a spread of rubble that might represent a demolition spread from the slighting of that wall, Trench 3 did pick up the linear anomaly, which was a recent flowerbed, and there were no significant features in Trench 5. Trench 4 was not excavated, as has been stated above, because surface examination confirmed there had once been a large tree at that spot and the anomaly was in accord with the removal of a large tree root ball.

The flowerbed can be identified stratigraphically occurring after the importing of soil and before the erection of the present bungalow, which appears to overlie its northern end. The bed lies centrally within the plot, parallel with the enclosing walls and intercepting the pond half way along its length.

Consideration of the site, bearing in mind that it was probably the main approach to the original hall raised a series of interesting problems. It is normal that the approach to lesser great houses is such that the front façade is fully in view to gain maximum impact, clearly the use of a road that by passes this plot is therefore unlikely to be the original access. If, therefore, the approach to the hall crossed the study area then, assuming the south-west wall was contemporary, some sort of gateway through it might reasonably be expected. Examination of the outer face of the wall in an area currently used for growing Bonzai trees did indeed produce evidence for one definite and one probable joggle joint (Plates 7 and 8) such as might occur when quoining has been removed and a gap infilled with further masonry. The distance between the two joggles was of the order of 5.5m, sufficient to afford access for most carriages and the location was at approximately the mid point in the wall's length.

The second issue relates to the pond. Whilst such features are characteristic of some Tudor gardens this example, if an original garden feature, would lie across the access route to the hall, suggested by the possible infilled gateway. In the absence of any other obvious access to the hall, and the evident absence of a bridge, the pond clearly must belong to a later phase of garden, perhaps after the old hall was abandoned in the late eighteenth century, or at least after the access had been re positioned.

In none of the trenches was there evidence for formal planting and only a single possible plant hole was identified in Trench 1 along with a further example in Trench 5. The unifying aspect was that a limestone horizon or possible surface was encountered. In the Grimm painting of the house in 1788 a looped carriageway or wide path is shown approaching the house and in a slightly earlier watercolour dating from 1770 the form of this way can be seen as near circular in front of the house (British Library Ktop XXXVIII item 12-A). The track is shown with grass both within the loop and around the outside.

Whilst it is possible that some of the limestone surfaces found represent elements of this paved way, it is perhaps most probable that the limestone represent a deliberate and large-scale dumping of clean as-raised material to create a level platform associated with the original erection of a new house in 1585; coincidentally quarries are recorded in the HER within 300m of the site (41312 and 41026). This large expanse of clean limestone could have created a courtyard sub-base, no surviving elements of the uppermost surface, which may have been gravel, were recognised. The visible rounding of stones of the surface, when contrasted with stones from within the horizon, would suggest a degree of attrition and wear which would not occur if the upper surface were paved. At least in its original form, this area is unlikely to have been planted in any way. As fashion changed it was probably softened and by the late eighteenth century the planting of grass is shown on the paintings. If this is the case then the area in front of the house forming a largely clear, level and open vista would be in keeping with the norm for post-medieval country houses, where the initial approach was to place the house in the forefront whilst the gardens were more private and were placed either to the rear or the side.

The date of the individual plant holes is unclear, but they do not appear to form part of a large-scale or extensive planting and they cannot be shown to be contemporary. None of the trenches contained a surviving buried soil from the eighteenth century

grass, and overlying the limestone horizon in each trench there was a dump of soil, which frequently contained plant pot sherds. This dumping of material perhaps relates to a major remodelling of the estate, possibly concurrent with the building of the new hall, which was occupied by 1814. There would have been a need to import material in order to create a medium suitable for planting, the thickness of the limestone would hamper both plant growth and would make its removal particularly onerous as well as undesirable as that would also restore the natural slope of the ground to the west and the Severn.

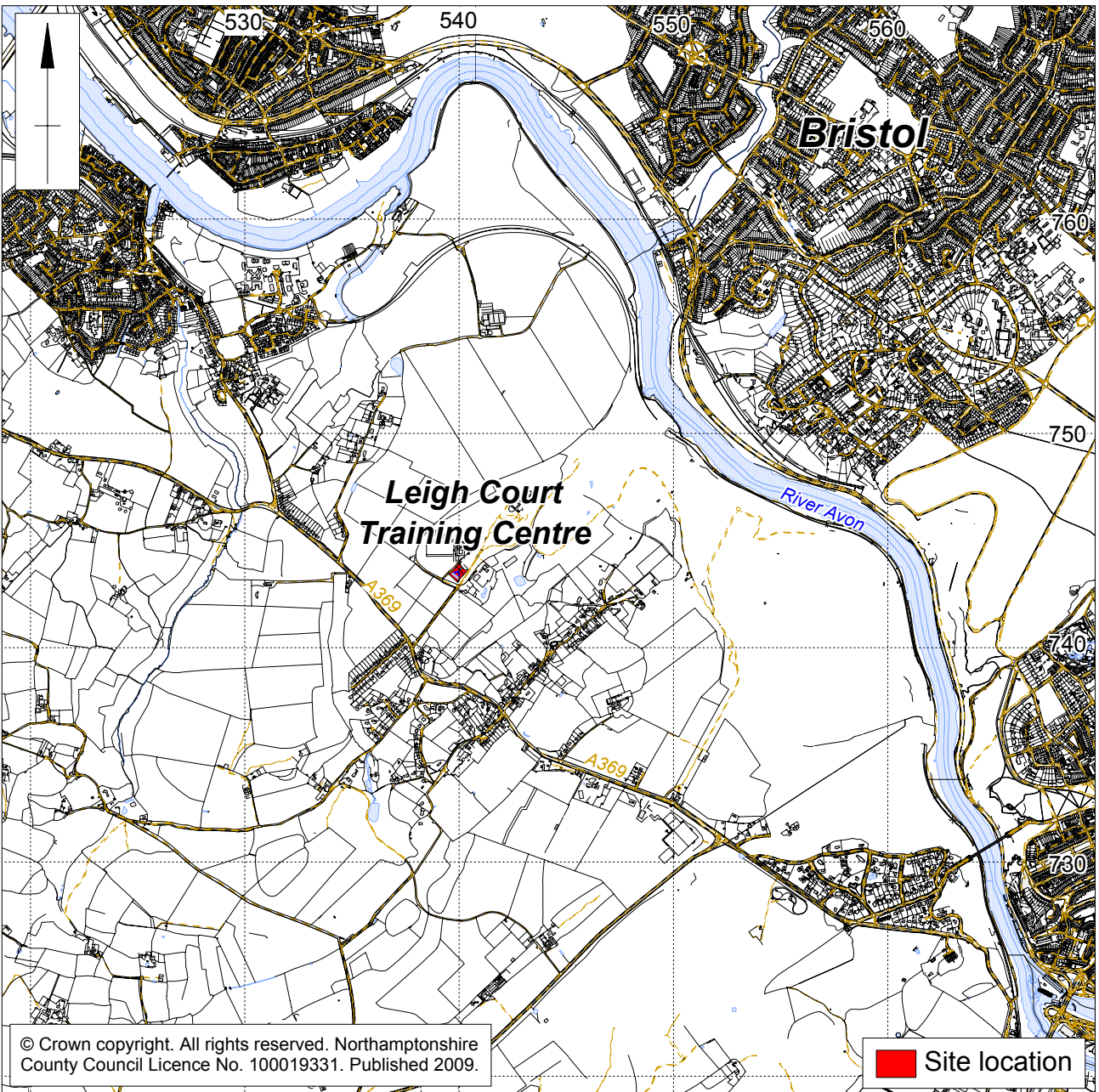
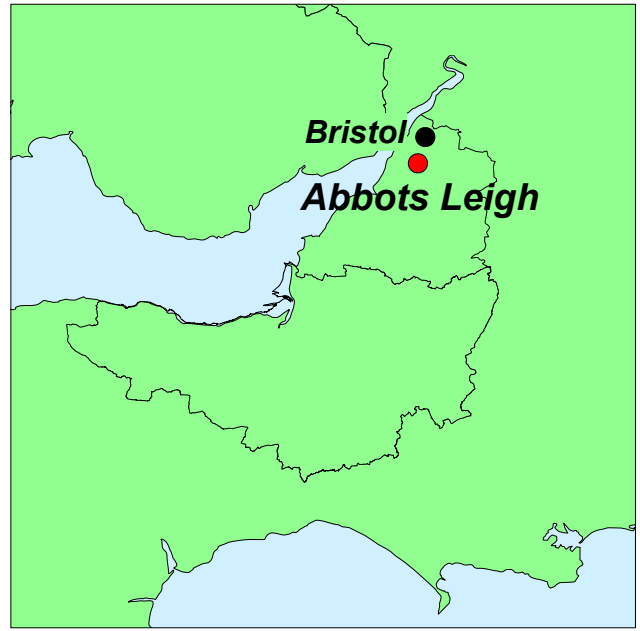
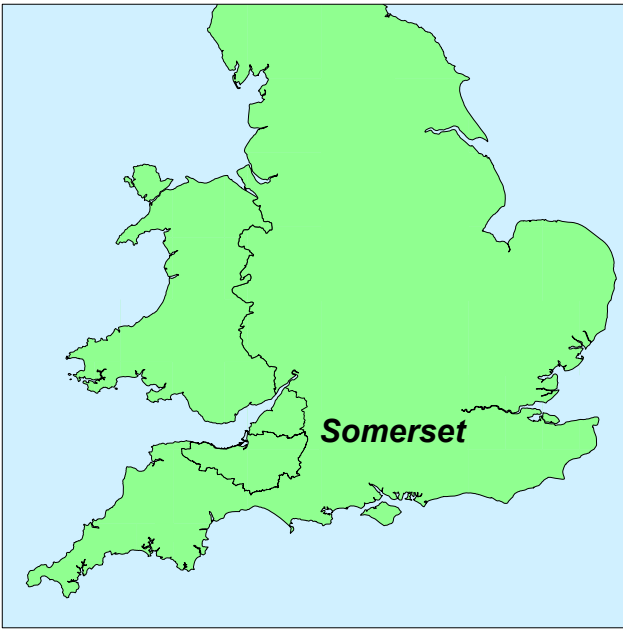
On balance, therefore, it can be seen that the present study area contained a levelled and clear entrance court in front of the house and that isolated plants would appear to have been inserted at various stages into the limestone. The canal and gazebos are clearly not contemporary with this stage and must relate to a time when the access to the house was not across this court, therefore a period after the Grimm painting of 1788, which clearly depicts the access carriageway. That both elements are depicted on the 1806 survey would seem anomalous, as the house is known to be unoccupied by 1800 and was demolished by 1814, unless they represent a stage of garden works in the final decade of the eighteenth century.

Bibliography

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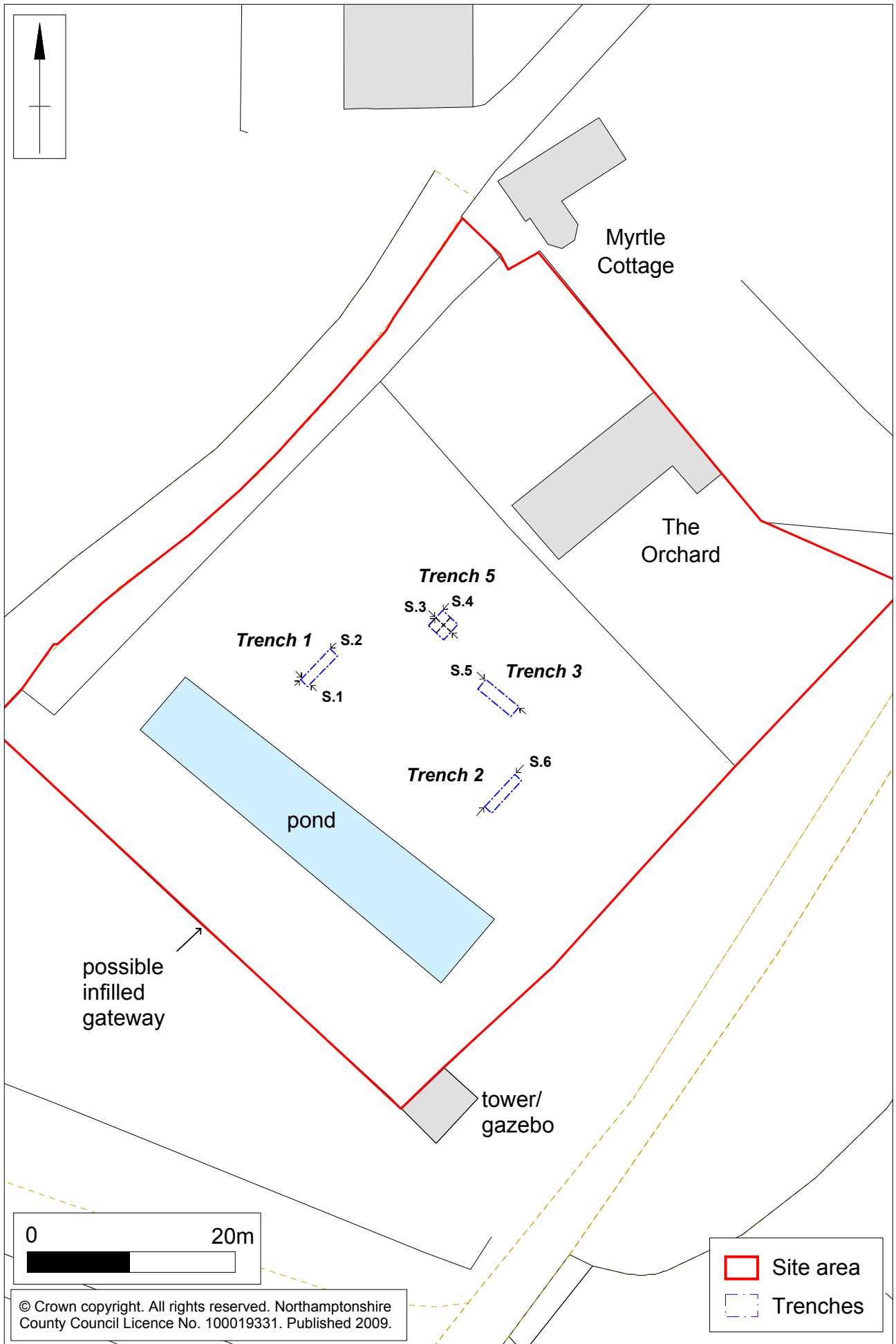
Sabin, D, and Donaldson, K, 2008 *Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, North Somerset; Earth Resistance survey and magnetometry*

Watkins, K, 2008 *An archaeological assessment of a proposed development site at Freeways Trust Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, North Somerset*



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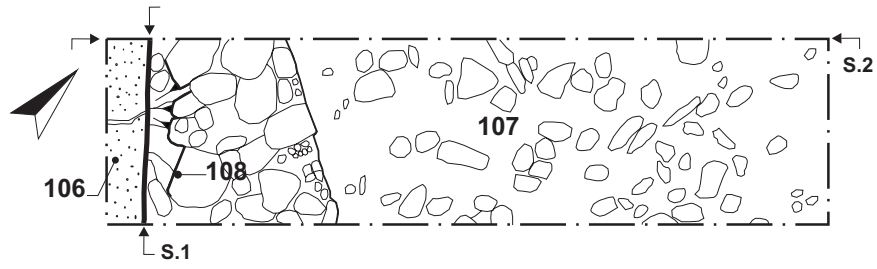
Site location Fig 1



Scale 1:500

Trench location Fig 2

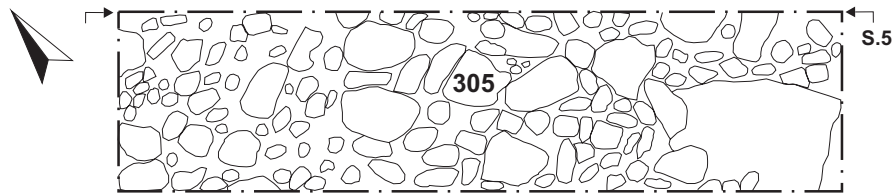
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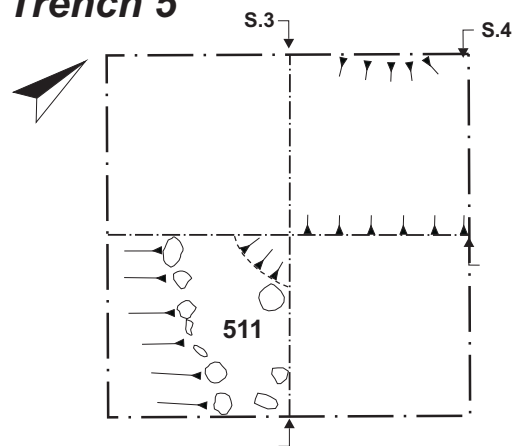
Trench 2



Trench 3

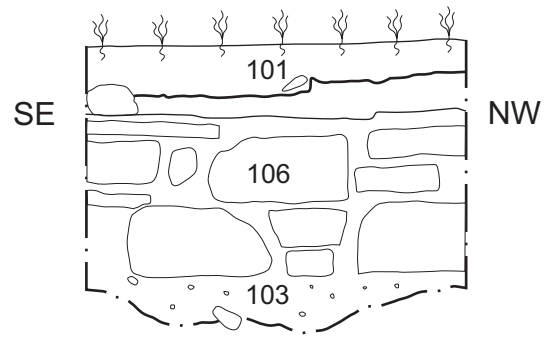


Trench 5

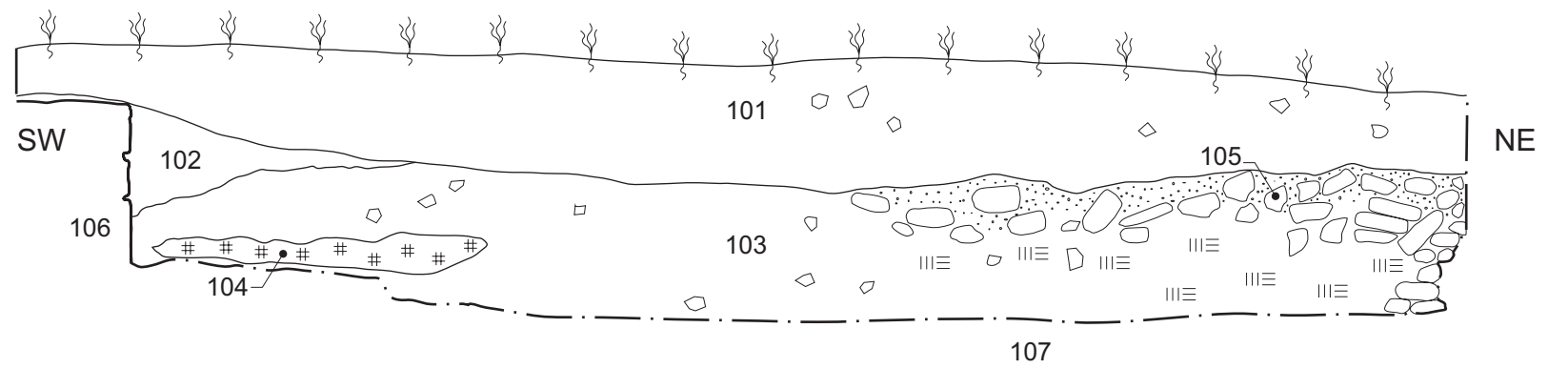


Trenches 1,2,3 & 5 Fig 3

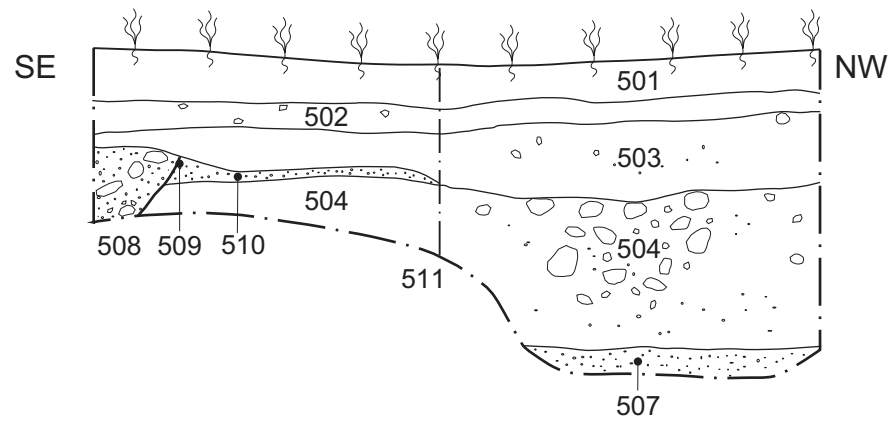
Section 1: Trench 1



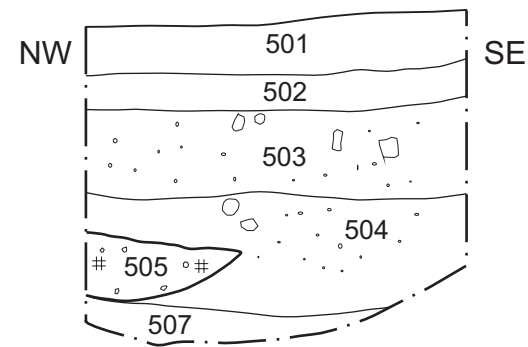
Section 2: Trench 1



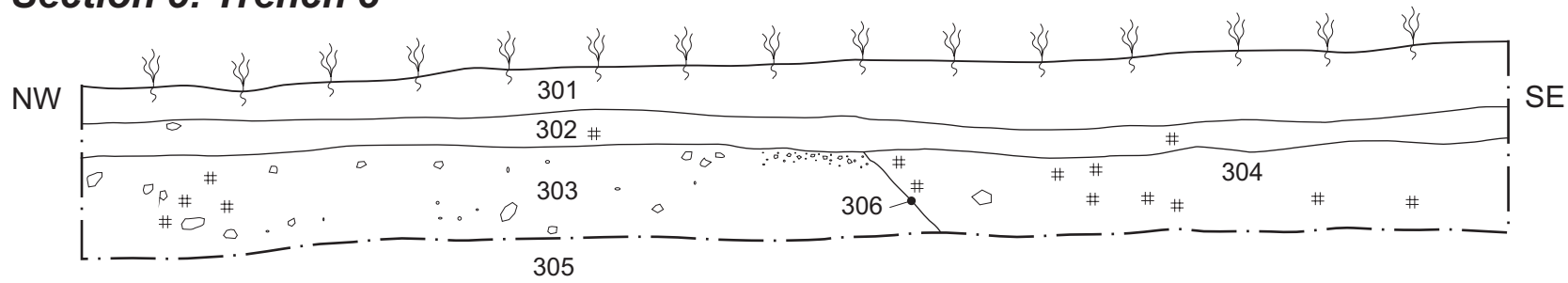
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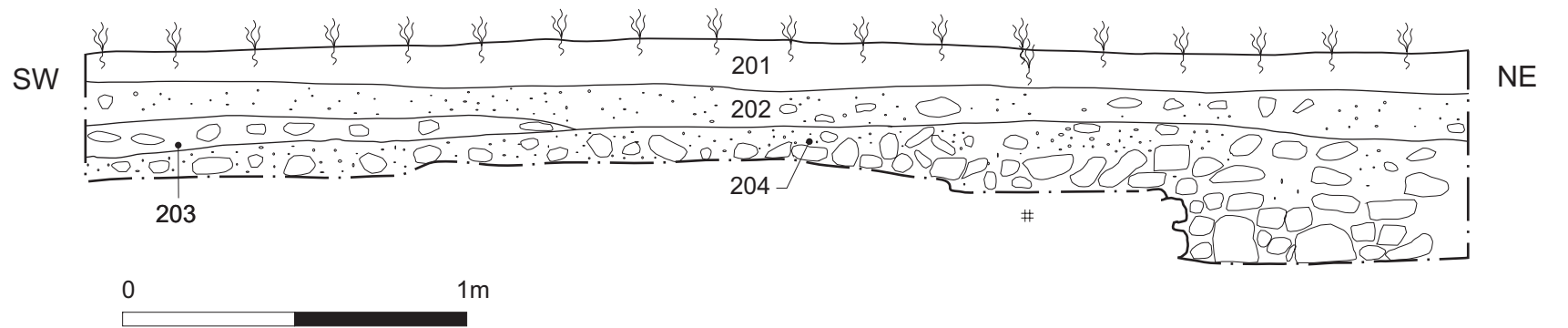
Section 4: Trench 5



Section 5: Trench 3



Section 6: Trench 2



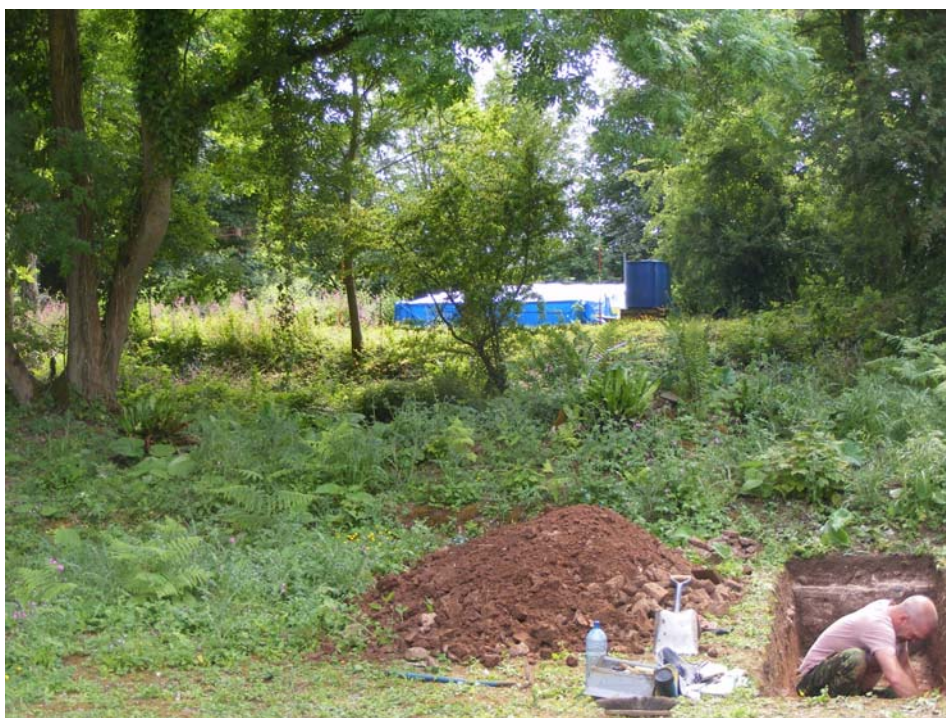


Plate 1: Excavation of trench 1 in progress, looking south-west, with the pond bank behind



Plate 2: Trench 1, showing wall [106] (foreground) and limestone [107], looking north-east



Plate 3: Trench 1, showing exposed face of wall [106]



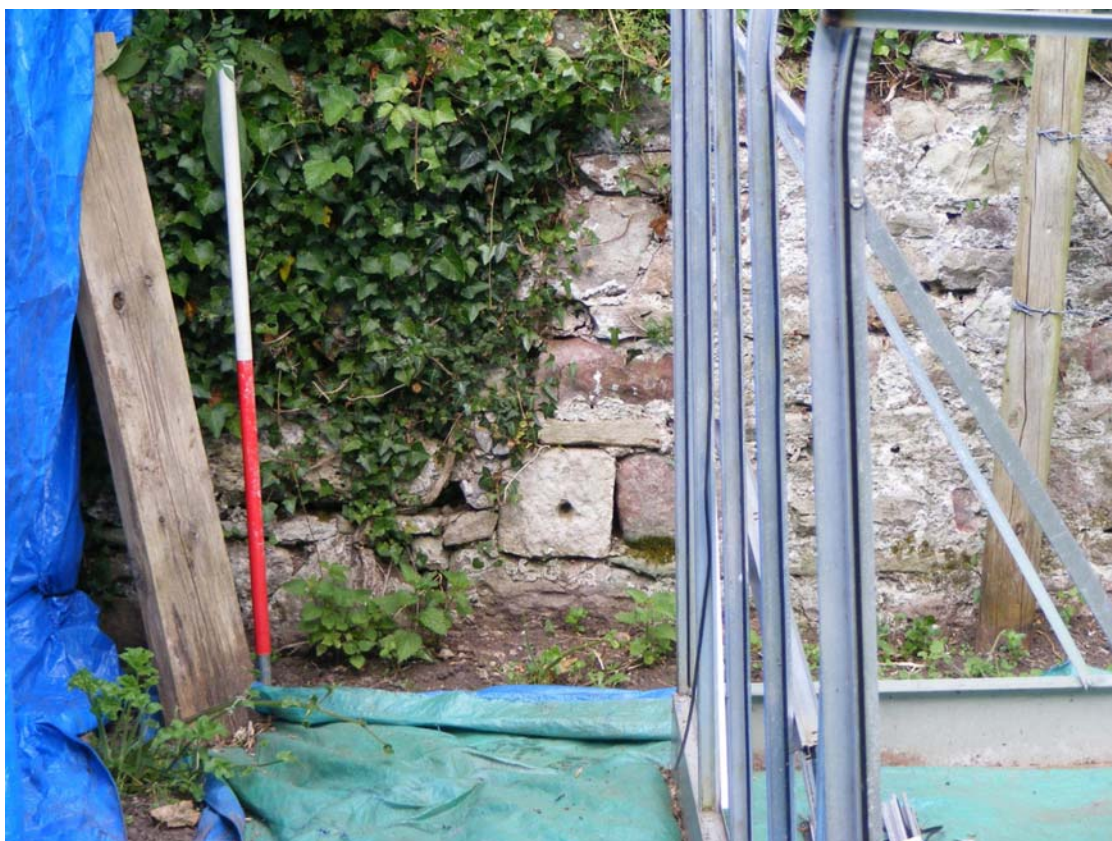
Plate 4: Trench 2 showing limestone 204, looking north-east



Plate 5: Trench 3, showing dense limestone [305]



Plate 6: Trench 5, showing excavated quadrants, looking north-east



Plates 7 and 8: Showing possible joggle joints perhaps derived from the removed of quoins at the infilling of a gateway at the centre of the south-western wall





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