



Northamptonshire County Council

# Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological strip, map and sample

exercise on land at

Home Farm, Highfield Lane

St Albans, Hertfordshire

July 2009



Mark Holmes

August 2009

Report 09/111

## Northamptonshire Archaeology

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**QUALITY CONTROL**

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**OASIS REPORT FORM**

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>		
Project title	Archaeological strip, map and sample exercise at Home Farm, Highfield Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire	
Short description	An archaeological strip, map and sample exercise was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology on land proposed for housing at Home Farm, Highfield Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire. The work was carried out on behalf of Taylor Wimpey North Thames in July 2009. The excavation revealed the footings of early to mid 20th century farm structures interpreted as pig sties and a related yard area. The former structures, demolished sometime between 1978 and 1985, were part of the still extant Home Farm which had its origins in the 1920s as a hospital farm for the nearby Hill End mental asylum.	
Project type	Archaeological strip, map and sample	
Previous work	Archaeological desk based assessment by CgMs (2005) Archaeological evaluation by Foundations Archaeology (2006).	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type and period	Farm buildings 20th century	
Significant finds		
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>		
County	Hertfordshire	
Site address	Home Farm, Highfield Lane, St Albans	
Easting & Northing	TL 1760 0615	
Study Area	c 500 sq m	
Height OD	86m	
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>		
Organisation	CgMs Consulting	
Project brief originator		
Project Design originator	Rob Bourn (CgMs Consulting)	
Director/Supervisor	Mark Holmes	
Project Manager	Iain Soden	
Sponsor or funding body	Taylor Wimpey North Thames	
<b>PROJECT DATE</b>		
Start date	20/07/09	
End date	24/07/09	
<b>ARCHIVES</b>	Location	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical	Not Applicable	
Paper	Verulamium Museum	Context sheets & records, B&W photographs, colour slides
Digital	Verulamium Museum	Photographs
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	Archaeological strip, map and sample exercise at Home Farm, Highfield Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire, July 2009	
Serial title & volume	Northamptonshire Archaeology Report 09/111	
Author(s)	Mark Holmes	
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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL STRIP, MAP AND SAMPLE EXERCISE**  
**ON LAND AT HOME FARM, HIGHFIELD LANE,**  
**ST ALBANS, HERTFORDSHIRE**  
**JULY 2009**

*Abstract*

*An archaeological strip, map and sample exercise was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology on land proposed for housing at Home Farm, Highfield Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire. The work was carried out on behalf of Taylor Wimpey North Thames in July 2009. The excavation revealed the footings of early to mid 20th century farm structures interpreted as pig sties and a related yard area. The former structures, demolished sometime between 1978 and 1985, were part of the still extant Home Farm which had its origins in the 1920s as a hospital farm for the nearby Hill End mental asylum.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Northamptonshire Archaeology were commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Taylor Wimpey North Thames to undertake an archaeological strip, map and sample exercise on land in the southern part of Home Farm, Highfield Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire (NGR TL 1760 0615; Fig 1).

The work was undertaken in order to discharge a planning condition which required the implementation of a programme of archaeological work prior to the commencement of housing development at the site.

The archaeological works were carried out in accordance with a specification produced by CgMs Consulting and agreed with the St Albans Museum Archaeologist (CgMs 2009). They comprised the excavation of an area c 500m<sup>2</sup> adjacent to standing farm buildings. The excavation took place between 20 and 25 July 2009.

### **1.2 Location and topography**

Home Farm is located on the south-west outskirts of St Albans, 500m north-west of Tyttenhanger Green. Highfield Lane forms its south-western boundary, whilst playing fields and farm land surround it on its northern and southern sides. The sites of the former Cell Barnes and Hill End hospitals (both now housing estates) lie 150m to the west and 600m to the north, respectively (Fig 1).

At the time of the excavation the farm buildings that make up Home Farm were still standing but were derelict and vandalised. The site of the excavation comprised an area of overgrown land immediately adjacent to the south-eastern side of the courtyard farm buildings attached to the main farmhouse (Fig 2).

The underlying geology comprises chalk overlain by glacial Boulder Clay. The site is relatively level set at about 86m aOD.

## 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

CgMs Consulting undertook a desk-based study of the area in 2005 (CgMs 2005). This concluded that prior to the 20th century, no development had taken place at the site and that the archaeological potential for the site was low in all periods save for the Iron Age, which had a low to moderate potential, and the Roman period, which had a good archaeological potential due to the presence of a Roman road and other activity in the environs of the site.

Home Farm itself first appears on the Ordnance Survey map of 1924. On this the map, the area of excavation is depicted as a series of bays and covered structures set around three sides of a courtyard (CgMs 2005, fig 7). Subsequent historic Ordnance Survey maps show minor developments and changes to the site through to 1978. However, by the time of the 1984 map the structures have been demolished and the site largely resembles that of the present day (*op cit*, figs 8 – 11).

A trial trench evaluation was undertaken by Foundations Archaeology in 2006 across the whole of the development area (Foundations Archaeology 2006). This revealed that much of the site had been subject to levelling when the farm was built in the early 20th century. No archaeological finds or features were encountered anywhere across the site save for the foundations of former farm buildings in the southern part of the development area. It was these foundations that were targeted by the strip, map and sample exercise.

Home Farm was a farm hospital associated with the Hill End mental asylum. Hill End hospital was built in 1897 and first occupied in 1899 ([www.countyasylums.com](http://www.countyasylums.com)). As with many of the asylums of this period the hospital was, and remained for many years, a self-sufficient community. It eventually had a total of five hospital farms and its own train station. It is not clear whether Home Farm was linked to Hill End hospital itself or the more recent Cell Barnes hospital, which was situated immediately over the road and was opened in 1933, effectively as an expansion to the Hill End asylum.

The Hill End hospital farms were closed in 1958 (Booty n d) and that of Cell Barnes in 1965 (Highfield Park Trust n d). This was presumably as part of the national policy to close hospital farms that followed a memorandum from the Minister of Health in 1954 (Rivett n d). In its last period of activity Home Farm was used as part of Oakland College's agricultural school.

## 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL STRIP MAP AND SAMPLE EXERCISE

### 3.1 Methodology

An area approximately 20m by 25m was stripped of a soil and rubble demolition layer, up to 260mm deep, using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket operating under constant archaeological supervision. All features revealed were then cleaned sufficiently by hand to identify their nature. Recording was by Northamptonshire Archaeology pro-forma context sheets, supplemented by drawing plans at scales of 1:50. A photographic record in black and white, colour slides and digital images of the site and its features was completed. All levels taken during the works were related to the Ordnance Survey Datum and the excavations themselves were tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid using tapes.

The purpose of the exercise was to record the foundations of previous farm buildings known to have been on the site. As such, these remains were exposed but no exploration was undertaken beneath them.

### 3.2 Summary of results

The natural geology across the site comprised a compacted yellowish-brown Boulder Clay into which all the archaeological features were cut. This was covered by a demolition layer comprising brick bats, concrete and other modern detritus set in a light brown clayey sand matrix. The demolition layer covered the whole site save in the north-west corner where a concrete slab had been laid down, presumably as hard standing.

The excavation revealed the remains of brick farm buildings arranged around three sides of a courtyard. The buildings were interpreted as a piggery based upon their size, form and layout.

#### ***Pre-piggery features***

Underlying all later construction was the natural yellowish brown boulder clay (8). No surviving subsoil was present and the height of the natural would suggest that it had been levelled prior to the construction of the later piggery.

Cut into the natural in the north-east of the site was a square posthole [9] with straight sides and a flat base measuring 0.16m x 0.14m and 0.07m deep (Figs 3 and 4). It contained a concrete post-pipe, making the original post size 0.11m x 0.08m. It was infilled with the overlying make-up layers from the piggery floor (7). Another four small sub-circular cuts spaced roughly equidistantly were laid out in a north-west to south-east orientated line. These were more amorphous shallow cuts, which contained no concrete but may have been the remnants of post settings. The features may represent a pre-building fence line or are possibly connected with the construction of the piggery itself.

Also cut into the natural and overlain by the later floor levels, were indentations which were possibly tooth marks from a mechanical excavator, presumably used when preparing the ground for the original development.

#### ***The piggery***

The north-eastern side of the structure comprised a double row of six rectangular bays, formed by a series of brick foundation walls (Fig 5). The sixth bay continued beyond south-eastern edge of the excavation. The bays are thought to be individual pigsties and pens. The walls were constructed from red frogged bricks marked "Hicks Gardener & Co" and laid in Flemish bond with a light yellow sandy mortar (Figs 6 and 7). The bays each measured 3.05m (10') by 2.75m (9') internally, save for the larger bays in the northern corner which were 4.88m (16') by 2.75m (9').

The foundations cut through the underlying clay natural but there was no indication of a construction cut, suggesting that the bricks had been laid in precisely cut trenches.

The north-eastern, outer side, of the range was defined by a concrete path (Fig 3, 3) made up of large paving slabs each measuring 2.77m x 1.22m x 0.05m and set upon a crushed brick bedding material (Fig 8). The path ran towards a door in the main farm building but was not centrally aligned with it.



On the south-western side of the range, the junctions between each sty were defined by foundations set in a chevron shape. This may have formed an entrance into each bay.

The north-western range appeared generally identical in plan to north-eastern range, although the rear of the bays, adjacent to the standing farm building, lay beyond the edge of excavation (Fig 9). Two of the sties had a second row of bricks added internally along their southern side but the purpose of this was unclear (Fig 10). The floor levels of the two northern sties of the north-western range had been removed or affected by modern disturbance (18).

Only one sty was uncovered on the south-western side of the piggery [22], as it appeared that further bays along this side of the piggery had been truncated by modern disturbance (23). The single cell appeared to have been significantly altered as the south-western brick foundation had been replaced by concrete. This may have been associated with the disturbance affecting the remaining part of this range.

Within all the bays were the remnants of underlying make-up layers and floor surfaces (Fig 11). The make-up layers comprised a compacted layer of crushed red brick 0.12m thick (7). Within the larger northern bay, this layer also included a large quantity of broken slate roof tiles. This was overlain by a compacted greyish-yellow sandy mortar, 0.11m thick, containing very frequent small stones and occasional brick fragments (6)(20). On top of this were the remains of a probable floor surface comprising very compact crushed brick set in a hard white mortar (5) (Fig 12). This survived sporadically throughout the north-eastern range but was better preserved in the north-western range (Fig 13). In places, more modern concrete was present suggesting later patching of the surfaces. The one sty in the south-western side of the piggery [22] contained the vestiges of a tiled floor (24).

Between the edge of the bays and the courtyard was a gap 1.30m wide which would have formed a pathway in front of the pigsties. The remnants of a dark grey concrete surface [25] survived leading from the standing building in the western corner of the site, but elsewhere this had been removed and only the underlying crushed red brick makeup survived. The remnants of the path surface appeared to overlay the foundations of the south-western sty [22] indicating that the surviving path was at least later than this part of the structure.

### ***The courtyard***

The yard enclosed by the pigsties was defined by edging formed from moulded concrete kerbing which included a channel that would have acted as a gully (Fig 14). The channels fed into drain holes set in the centre of each side of the yard [12][26] (Fig 15). The kerbing sat on a bed of concrete (11) which presumably overlay a soakaway or possibly a deeper lying drain (Fig 12). The kerbing only survived in the western half of the site but the underlying concrete survived throughout.

Adjacent and parallel to the concrete bedding on the eastern side of the courtyard was a shallow cut [34], 0.45m wide, containing a brown sandy clay soil (35). Within the cut were remnants of metal pipes set both horizontally and vertically at relatively regular intervals along the length of the courtyard edge (Fig 16). At first it was thought that these provided a water supply system but none of the pipes appeared connected and it was not possible to ascertain how they would have originally operated or whether they were actually *in situ*.

The yard surface itself comprised the same crushed brick makeup layer seen elsewhere on site (7) overlain by compacted chalk and tarmac (16) (Fig 17). A brick-

lined well [15] had been set into the yard. This was 2.60m in diameter and comprised an inner two courses of blue engineering bricks surrounded by an outer course of red brick. A small stone slab was set into one side. The well had been backfilled with bricks and other demolition debris (Fig 18).

To the south-east of the well was a line of five concrete piles or foundation pads [27]. A sixth pad lay immediately adjacent to the most north-easterly of the line. Each pad was c 0.56m by 0.50m and each had the remnants of metal reinforcing bars in the top. The pads presumably formed the base of a structure such as a Dutch barn which would have extended out beyond the limits of excavation to the south-east. The line of the pads coincided with a boundary shown on the earlier Ordnance Survey maps, although no buildings were indicated in this location, possibly indicating that it was a relatively short-lived feature.

### ***Later features***

The foundations of the piggery had been disturbed in a number of locations by later activity. An electricity service trench ran north-west to south-east across the site, cutting through both the courtyard make-up and the piggery foundations [14]. Another linear cut was present just inside the western wall of the north-eastern range [10]. This was filled with yellowish-brown clayey sand. It cut through floor surfaces and the chevron entrance foundations but only extended half way along the range and appeared to stop at one of the walls, possibly suggesting that it was a foundation trench from a later structure rather than a service trench.

A post-pit [28] had been dug through the entrance of the northernmost sty in the north-west range (Fig 19). This feature had a diameter of 0.35m and was 0.35m deep. It had steep sides and an uneven base and had been cut partially through the brick foundations. It was filled with brick and other demolition debris but did not appear to relate to any other features.

The entire southern corner of the site appeared to have been affected by modern disturbance. The area was covered with demolition debris and the foundations of the south-western range appeared to have been severely truncated. However, due to the presence of possible contamination, this area was not explored further.

## **4 DISCUSSION**

The level nature of the ground, the absence of subsoil and the presence of possible machine bucket marks in the natural geology indicated that the site had been truncated as part of the construction of the farm buildings and there was no indication on the site of any pre 20th-century archaeological features or activity. Unsurprisingly, considering the agricultural nature of the buildings, no pottery or other domestic finds were recovered although the overburden did contain large quantities of demolition debris.

The piggery buildings themselves appear to have been of a single phase of construction, however, the exact dating of the buildings is a little hard to establish. The earliest Ordnance Survey map to show the piggery (1924), shows the individual sties but does not indicate the larger bay in the northern corner. The 1937 map shows some minor layout changes also does not indicate the larger bay. It is only on the 1965 map that current layout is shown. This may simply be an error in the depiction but it may suggest that the piggery belongs to this latter period and was a remodelling of the earlier building. The presence of crushed brick and roofing tiles in the make-up layers of the piggery may support this.

Possibly set against this is the use of the Hicks and Gardener bricks. Hicks and Gardener were Fletton brickmakers. They were established in 1882 and became 'Hicks and Gardener Co.' in 1891. They changed their name to 'Hicks & Co. Ltd in 1911' and went public in 1927 as 'Hicks & Co. (Fletton)' before being controlled by the London Brick Company soon after (Cambridgeshire County Record Office, 4196/4235/4 [n d]). The use of 'Gardener' on the bricks may suggest an early date for their origin (although obviously not necessarily for the construction of the piggery itself). It is perhaps interesting to note that the Hicks and Gardener bricks were used despite Hill End having its own brickworks set up in 1923 (the St Albans Brickworks later to become the Hill End brickworks in 1926) which produced the bricks to build the main hospital buildings (Perrins 1981).

The layout of the piggery can be deduced from the remaining standing buildings. Struts evident on the standing wall at the north-west of the site indicate a covered area would have run behind the pigsties (Fig 20). The rear bay of the piggery would also have been covered and a roof line visible on the standing building would indicate a sloping tiled roof was used (Fig 21). Scars in the wall show where the front brick wall had joined the standing building and this demonstrated that the sty wall was about 0.85m high.

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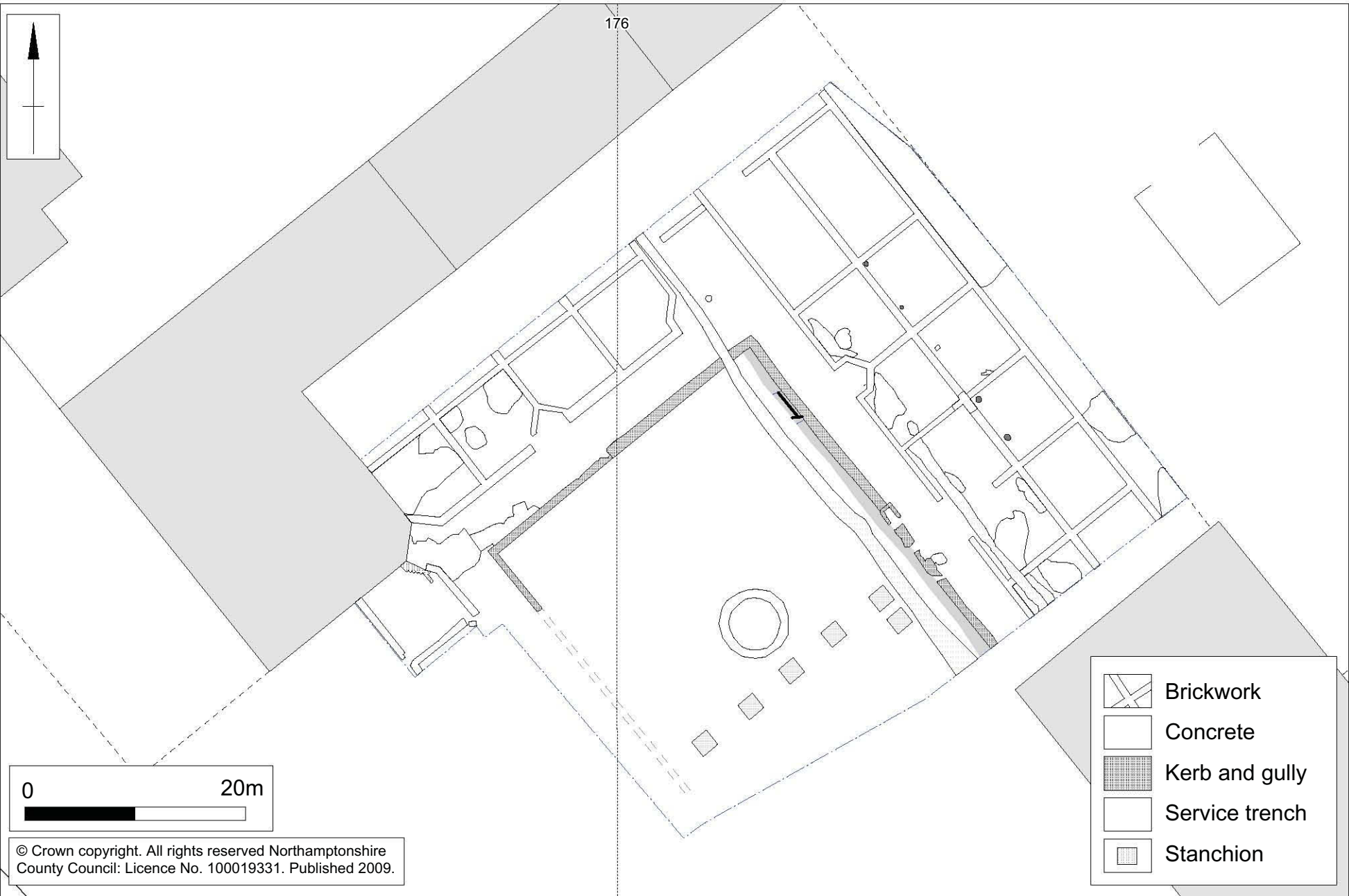


Scale 1:2000

Site location Fig 1



-  Brickwork
-  Concrete
-  Kerb and gully
-  Service trench
-  Stanchion



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Scale 1:200

Area of Excavation Fig 2

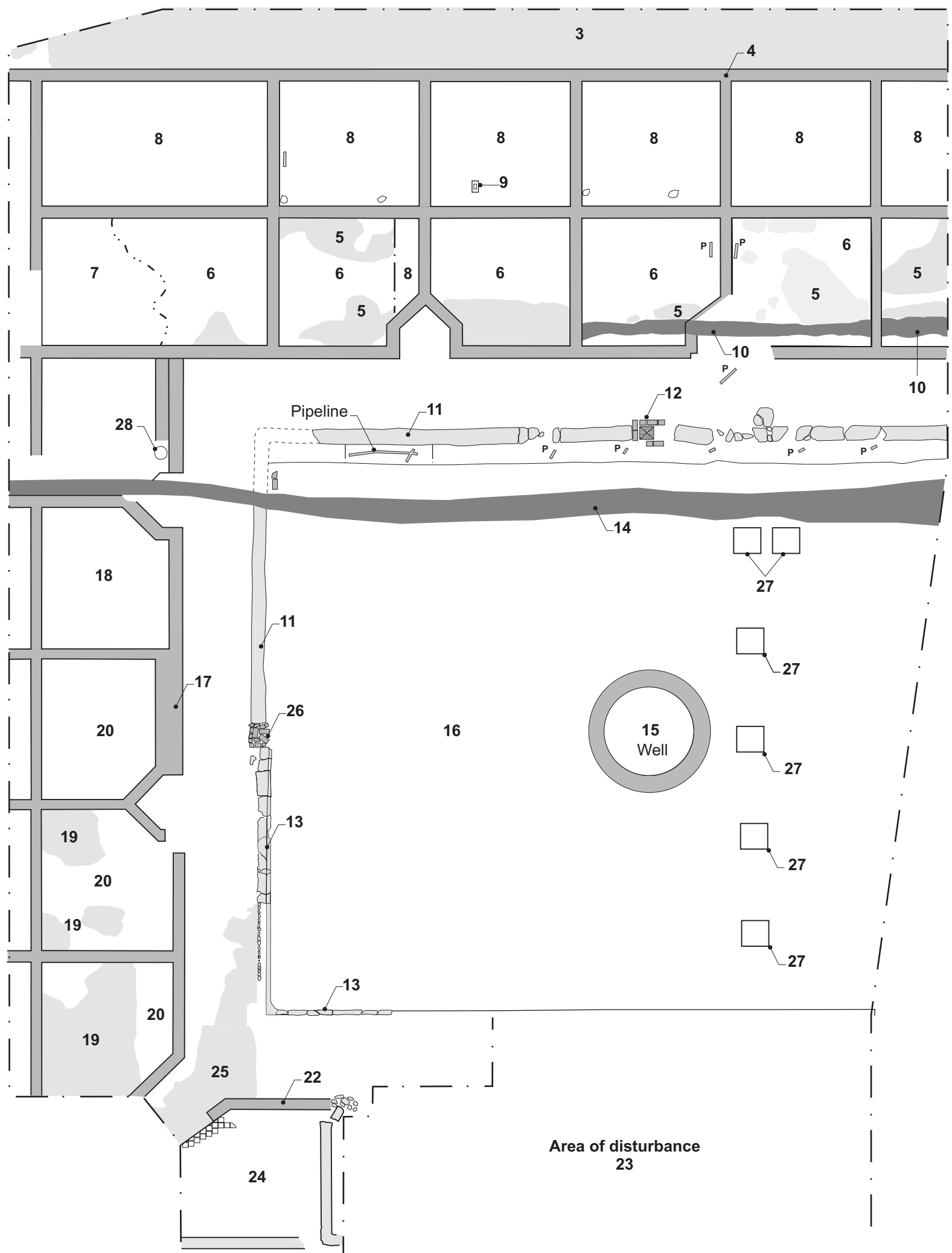




Fig 4 Pre-piggery posthole [9]



Fig 5 North-eastern range [4], looking north-west





Fig 6 Brick used in construction throughout the piggery



Fig 7 Shaped bricks used in the chevron-shaped sty entrance





Fig 8 Path (3), looking north-west



Fig 9 North-western range [17], looking south-west





Fig 10 Additional brick foundations within sty in range [17], looking north-west



Fig 11 Section through floor make-up layers (6) and (7)





Fig 12 Remains of concrete floor level (5) in north-east range [4] looking south- west. Drain [12] and concrete bedding [11] can be seen at the top of the photograph immediately above robbed out path [25].



Fig 13 Concrete floor level (19) running in north-west range [17]. Path [25] is shown in the corner of the photograph, leading to building entrance





Fig 14 Path [25] and concrete kerb and gully [13], looking south-west



Fig 15 Drain [12], set into the concrete bedding [11] on the south-east side of the courtyard, looking north-west





Fig 16 Metal pipes in trench [34] adjacent to concrete bedding [11], looking north east



Fig 17 Yard surface (16) and well [15], looking north east





Fig 18 Brick-lined well [15], looking west



Fig 19 Post pit [28] in corner of sty in north-west range [17], looking north-west





Fig 20 Standing farm building, looking north



Fig 21 Standing farm buildings showing wall scars, remains of whitewash and former roof line



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