ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT:

OVERFLOW CARPARK AT LITTLE MORETON HALL, CONGELTON, CHESHIRE

Planning Application: 10/1652C
NGR: SJ 83124 58944
Oasis Reference: allenarc1-103364
AAL Site Code: LIMH11

Report prepared for

The National Trust

By
Allen Archaeology Limited
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The Authority on Archaeological Planning Services

REGISTERED ORGANISATION IfA

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Document Control

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Cover image: The site prior to the groundworks, with Little Moreton Hall in the background. Looking east-south-east

Executive Summary

- Allen Archaeology Limited was commissioned by the National Trust to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Little Moreton Hall in Cheshire. The investigations were undertaken during groundworks associated with the resurfacing and addition of new surface water drainage within the existing overflow carpark at the property.

- The area of investigation lies to the west of Little Moreton Hall, a Grade I listed building and Scheduled Monument (Scheduled Monument Reference 13472).

- The watching brief involved the monitoring of the drainage excavations and a limited area of topsoil stripping at the carpark entrance. The groundworks exposed a series of naturally occurring deposits below a thick topsoil.

- At least two phases of land drainage were exposed, with the earliest likely to be of late 18th to mid 19th century. The latter is therefore likely to be of late 19th to early 20th century date.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Allen Archaeology Limited (hereafter AAL) was commissioned by the National Trust to carry out an archaeological watching brief at Little Moreton Hall, near Congleton in Cheshire, as a condition of planning consent for works at the existing overflow car park.

1.2 The site works and reporting conform to current national guidelines, as set out in the Institute for Archaeologists '*Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs'* (IFA 1994, revised 2001 and 2008), an invitation to tender for the works document (Lund 2011), and a specification prepared by AAL (AAL 2011).

1.3 The archive will be submitted to the National Trust following completion of the report.

2.0 Site Location and Description

2.1 Little Moreton Hall is situated in the county of Cheshire, approximately 5.6 km south-west of Congleton. The proposed site comprises a broadly square area measuring c.60m x 60m to the west of the property, immediately north of the existing main carpark and east of the A34 road. The site centres on NGR SJ 83124 58944 and lies to the west of the Scheduled area of the hall.

2.2 The local geology consists of superficial Glacial Lake Deposits overlying a solid geology of Mercia Mudstone (British Geological Survey 1990).

3.0 Planning Background

3.1 An application for planning consent for '*The Resurfacing of the Existing Overflow Car Park'* was submitted in August 2009 and refused in March 2010 (Planning Reference 09/2634C). The application was subsequently re-submitted with amendments for '*Re-surfacing of Existing Overflow Car Park Including Provision of Surface Water*' in April 2010 (Planning Reference 10/1652C). Permission was granted subject to conditions, including the undertaking of an archaeological scheme of works by a suitably competent archaeologist. The scheme of works comprised the monitoring of all groundworks for the scheme, and the recording of any archaeological remains exposed, effectively 'preserving the archaeology by record'. This approach is consistent with the guidelines that are set out in Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5) (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010).

4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

4.1 The site lies to the west of the moated enclosure of Little Moreton Hall, which is a Grade I listed building and Scheduled Monument (Scheduled Monument Reference 13472). The 'Moreton' place name is probably of Anglo-Saxon origin, meaning 'farm at the marsh', suggesting pre-Conquest activity in the area.

4.2 The Moretons of Little Moreton Hall are documented from the early 13th century with a marriage licence of 1216 between Lettice de Moreton and Sir Gralam de Lostock. A variety of further surviving sources including legal documents refer to the Moreton family during the 'high' and 'later' medieval periods. It is believed that the Morton family in all probability occupied the moated enclosure that houses the suite of buildings that are visible today (Wilson 1985). The existing moated enclosure was probably constructed in the 13th or 14th century to enclose an earlier house, of which there is no trace.

4.3 The earliest components of the existing building date to the early 16th century, with later additions in 1546, 1559, 1560-2 and 1610. The orchard, to the west of the house, has been in existence since at least the 17th century. The northern part of the orchard is occupied by a mound of uncertain date, although it is believed to have been constructed in the 16th or 17th century.

4.4 A geophysical survey of the site was undertaken in 2009, comprising both gradiometry and resistivity (AAL and Grid Nine Geophysics 2009). The gradiometer survey was of little interest, although the resistivity survey identified a possible east – west track and a possible revetment associated with the prospect mound, as well as several modern services. Subsequent test pitting exposed evidence for potential medieval timber structures, sealed beneath post-medieval demolition material (AAL 2009).

4.5 An archaeological watching brief was undertaken in 2010 during the repair works for an existing drain and a new grease trap (AAL 2010). The majority of the groundworks uncovered previous 20th century activities associated with drainage trenches and an inspection pit.

5.0 Methodology

5.1 The monitoring of the groundworks was carried out by the author on Wednesday 8th and Thursday 9th of June 2011.

5.2 The groundworks comprised excavations for drainage trenches and a limited area of topsoil removal at the entrance to the overspill carpark. This was undertaken by a tracked excavator with toothless bucket and was monitored at all times. All exposed plan and section surfaces were examined for any archaeological features and deposits in order to determine the stratigraphic sequence. Context information was recorded for each individual deposit on standard AAL context record sheets, and sections showing deposits were drawn at a scale of 1:20, and located on a base plan. A photographic record was maintained throughout the works, with selected digital shots included as an appendix to this report (see Appendix 1).

5.3 Each deposit, layer or cut was allocated a unique identifier (context number), and accorded a written description, a summary of these are included in Appendix 2. Two digit numbers within square brackets reflect cut features (e.g. drain [04]).

6.0 Results

6.1 Stripping at site entrance (Figure 2)

6.1.1 The stripping at the site entrance did not extend below the topsoil. Topsoil 01 consisted of a loose to friable, dark brown loamy silt with abundant plant matter. This deposit was continuous across the site and it contained eighteen early modern to modern pottery fragments, three glass fragments and three glass bottles of modern date, as well as a corroded penny dating to the reign of George VI (r.1936 – 1952). Following discussions with the North-West Region Archaeologist for the National Trust this material was discarded.

6.2 Drainage Trench (Figures 2 and 3)

6.2.1 The drainage excavations showed topsoil 01 was c.0.7m thick across the overspill carpark area. This sealed a dark orangey brown silt 02 which extended across the excavated area and sealed layer 03. Deposit 03 comprised a layer of moderately compact light yellowish grey to very light grey silt. The excavations did not extend below this naturally formed deposit (See Figure 3.1).

6.2.2 At the east end of the drainage excavations a broad steep sided cut over 1.2m deep was exposed, [10]. This ran parallel with the adjacent field boundary and was identified as a modern drain that was connected to an existing surface water inspection chamber. The cut was backfilled with a mixed deposit, 11, which was an amalgamation of layers 01, 02 and 03. This backfill was sealed by a redeposited topsoil 12 (See Figure 3.2).

6.2.3 To the west the main east to west run of drainage cut a north – south aligned cut [04]. The feature was steep sided with a concave base, however the upper part of the cut was not discernable as it was backfilled with redeposited topsoil 06, in the base of which was a 0.1m diameter ceramic land drain (See Figure 3.3).

6.2.4 Further to the west the drainage trench cut a north-west to south-east aligned cut [05] at an oblique angle. This land drain was also steep sided and backfilled with a redeposited topsoil, 07 in the base of which was another 0.1m diameter ceramic land drain (See Figures 3.4 and 3.5).

6.2.5 Towards the centre of the site the machine excavated trench truncated a further land drain cut running north to south. Drain [08] was moderate steep sided with a flattened base, and this too contained a redeposited topsoil fill, 09. The ceramic drain within the cut was horseshoe-shaped in profile, suggesting it was earlier in date than the others exposed during the works (See Figure 3.6).

7.0 Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 The watching brief exposed a thick layer of topsoil which produced material of early modern to modern date, overlying naturally formed silts.

7.2 These deposits had been periodically disturbed by attempts to improve the drainage of the site. The earliest drainage works are likely to date to around the late 18th to mid 19th century due to the presence of a ceramic horseshoe-shaped drain within cut [08] with the word 'drain' stamped on it prior to firing. Such stamps were used to exempt drainage furniture from the Brick Tax which was in force between 1784 and 1850 (Brunskill 2009).

7.3 A series of circular land drains noted during the groundworks, cuts [04] and [05] are likely to reflect a later phase of drainage across the area, likely to be of late 19th or early 20th century date.

7.4 A cut exposed at the east end of the site, [10], was part of the existing surface water drainage system for the property.

8.0 Effectiveness of Methodology

8.1 The watching brief methodology was appropriate to the scale and nature of the groundworks. It has identified early modern to modern drainage on the site, indicating that the current programme of works has had a negligible impact on the archaeological resource.

9.0 Acknowledgements

9.1 Allen Archaeology would like to thank the National Trust for this commission, particularly Jamie Lund, the North-West Region Archaeologist and John Evans, Building Surveyor for the National Trust. Thanks are also extended to the contractors who undertook the groundworks for their cooperation during the watching brief.

10.0 References

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Appendix 1: Colour Plates

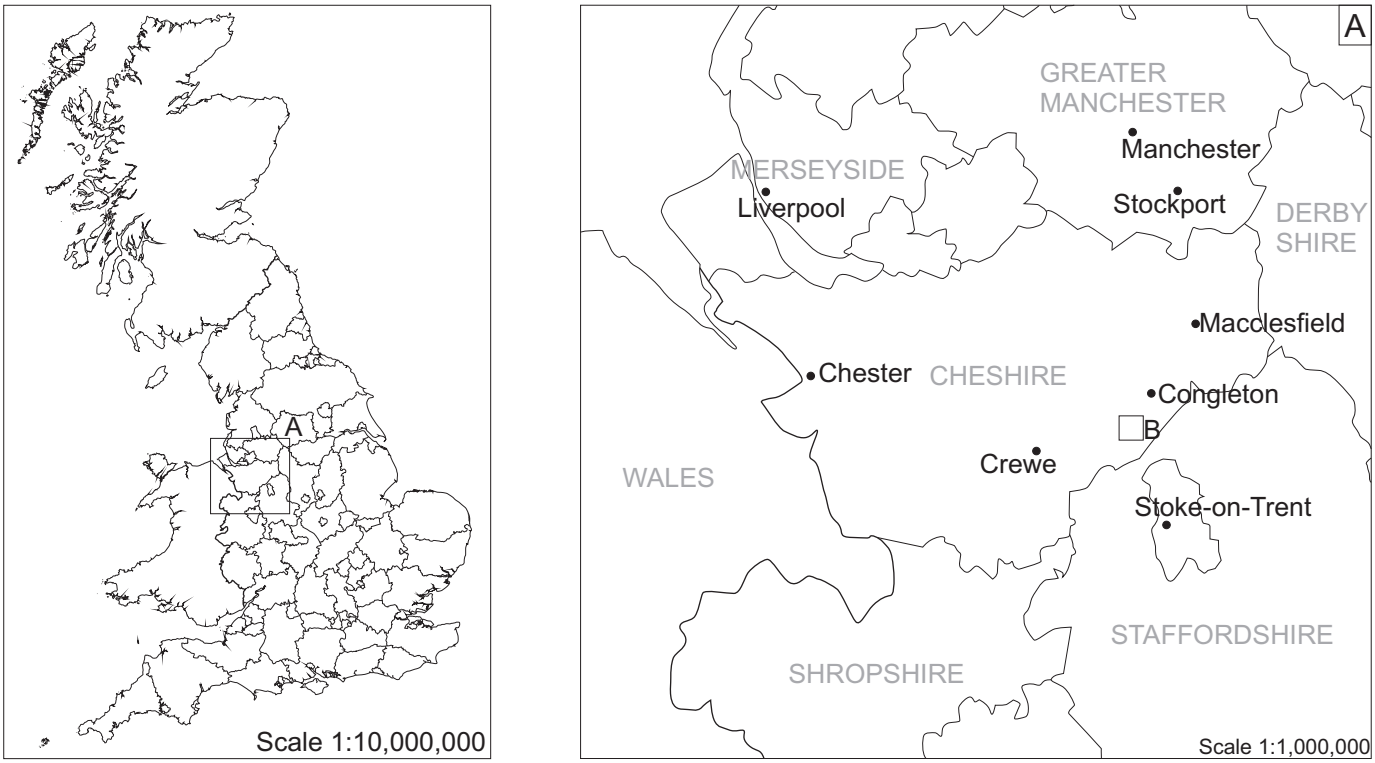
Plate 1: General shot across the groundworks looking south-east from the north-west corner of the site

Plate 2: North-north-east facing section of drainage trench showing drain [08]. Looking south-south-west

Plate 3: Soil stripping at site entrance, looking north

Appendix 2: Context Summary List

Context No.	Type	Description	Interpretation
01	Layer	Loose to friable dark brown loamy silt with abundant plant matter. Seals 02	Topsoil
02	Layer	Friable dark orangey brown sandy silt with occasional small stones. Sealed by 01, seals 03	Subsoil
03	Layer	Moderately compact light yellowish grey to very light grey silt with occasional stone and gravel. Sealed by 02	Natural drift geology
04	Cut	North – south aligned linear cut, narrow steep sided with a concave base. Cuts 01, filled by 06	Land drain
05	Layer	North-west to south-east aligned linear with narrow steep sides Cuts 01, filled by 07	Land drain
06	Fill	Loose to friable dark brown loamy silt with abundant plant matter and 0.1m diameter ceramic drain pipe in the base. Fill of [04]	Backfill of [04] with ceramic drain pipe
07	Fill	Loose to friable dark brown loamy silt with abundant plant matter and 0.1m diameter ceramic drain pipe in the base. Fill of [05]	Backfill of [05] with ceramic drain pipe
08	Cut	North – south aligned linear cut with narrow steep sides and a flattened base. Cuts 01, filled by 09	Land drain
09	Fill	Loose to friable dark brown loamy silt with abundant plant matter and a stamped 'horse shoe' ceramic drain pipe in the base. Fill of 09	Redeposited topsoil backfill of [08] with earlier design of ceramic drain pipe
10	Cut	North – south aligned linear cut with broad steep sides, curving gradually towards unexcavated base. Cuts 01, filled by 11	Cut of active surface water drain forming an earlier part of the current drainage scheme
11	Fill	Moderate to friable mixed deposit of dark brown loamy silt, dark orangey brown sandy silt and light grey silt. Fill of 10	Backfill over functional surface water drain [10]
12	Layer	Loose to friable dark brown loamy silt with abundant plant matter. Seals 11	Topsoil backfilled over 11 within cut [10]



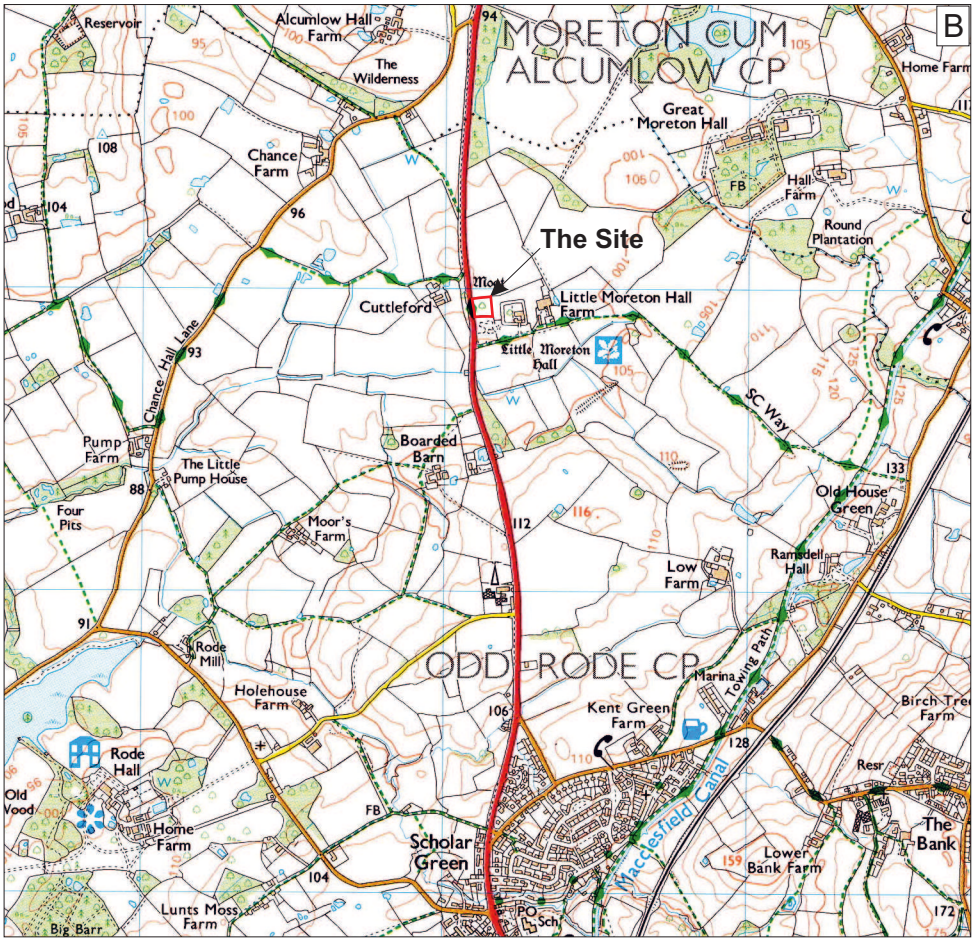


Figure 1: Site location at scale 1:25,000, with site outlined in red

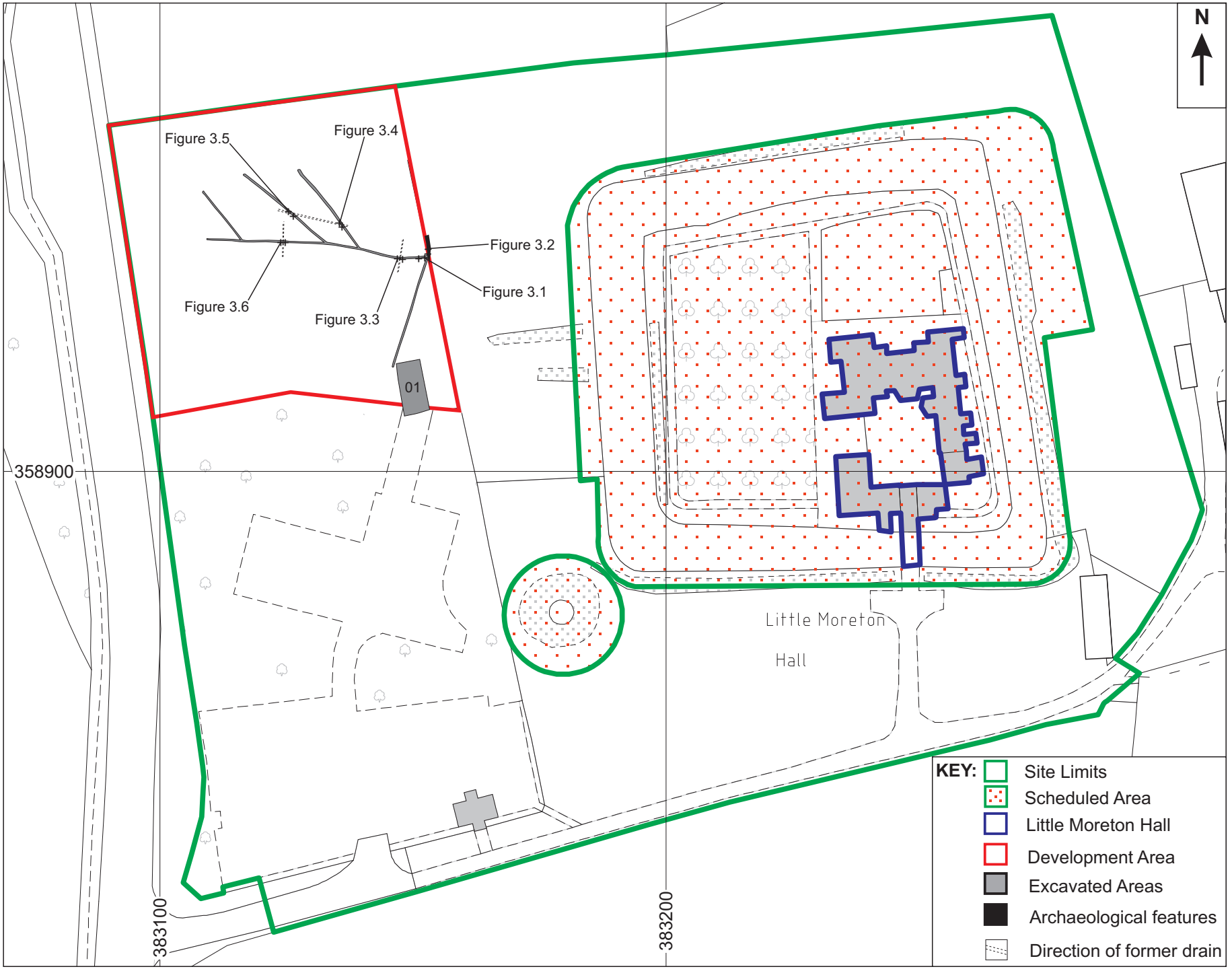


Figure 2: Site location plan at scale 1:1000, with sections shown on Figure 3

Figure 3.1: North Facing Section

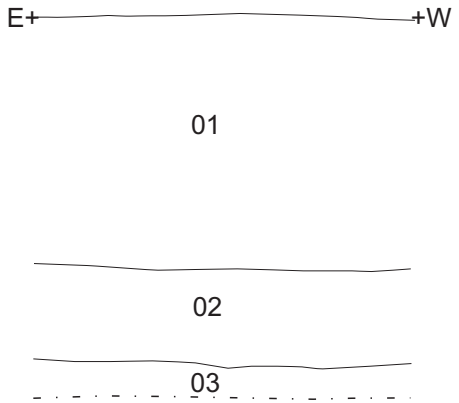


Figure 3.2: East-South-East Facing Section

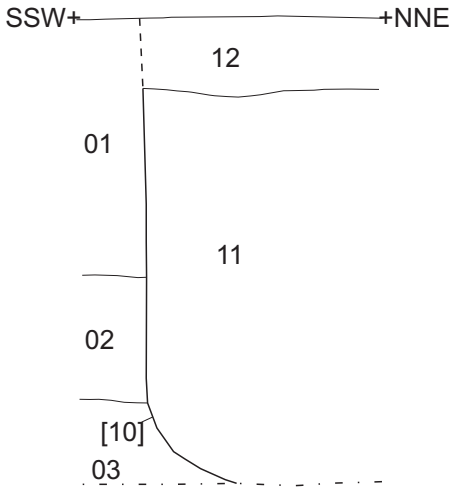


Figure 3.3: North Facing Section

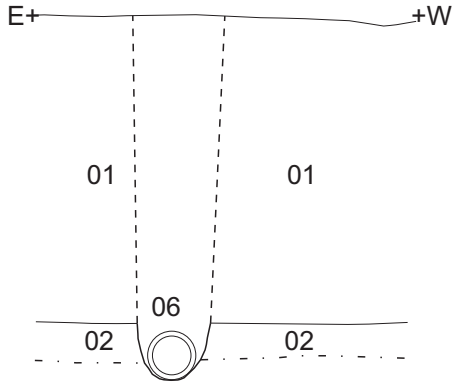


Figure 3.4: North-East Facing Section

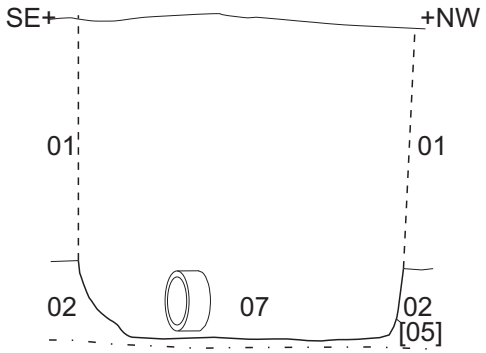
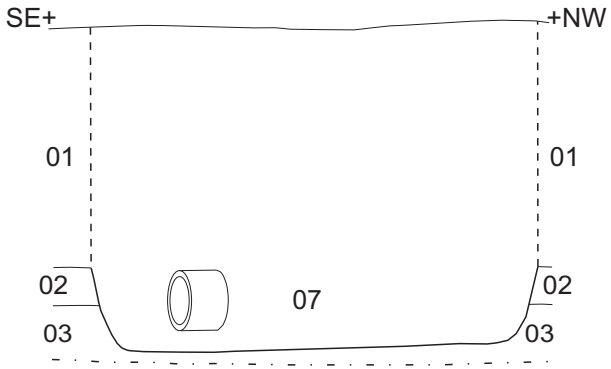


Figure 3.5: North-East Facing Section



Scale 1:20

Figure 3.6: North Facing Section

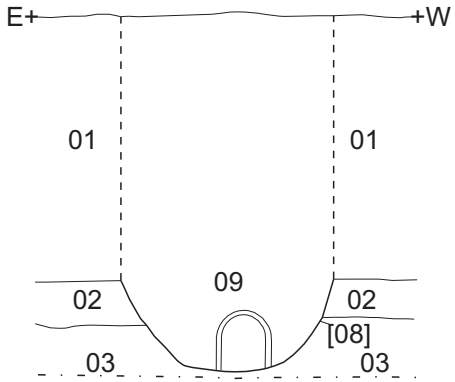


Figure 3: Sections at scale 1:20 and located on Figure 2

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