

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-
BASED ASSESSMENT
AT
GREAT BARR PARK, GREAT
BARR, WALSALL

Richard Bradley & Jane Patton

Illustrations by Richard Bradley & Carolyn Hunt



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Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment at Great Barr Park

Richard Bradley and Jane Patton

Summary

A desk-based assessment was undertaken to detail the historic and archaeological landscape context for Great Barr Park, Great Barr, Walsall. It was carried out on behalf of Mr Mike Kalam of Lapworth Architects (the Client) in response to a brief (the Brief) prepared by Mike Shaw, Walsall Council Archaeological Advisor.

Great Barr Park is a Grade II registered park that surrounds Great Barr Hall, a Grade II* listed building. At present, these are on the Heritage at Risk Register maintained by English Heritage due to the poor condition and vulnerability of both.

Proposals for restoration of the hall and park are currently under discussion and additionally, planning permission is being sought for areas of residential development within the park area. This report is intended to provide the necessary historic and landscape contextual information for consideration in relation to all of these proposals for the future of the parkland. It details and assesses the nature, importance, extent and significance of the heritage assets (and potential heritage assets) that could be affected by any restorative or development work in the park.

A number of previous projects have been undertaken within the park area, the most extensive and comprehensive of which was the seminal work undertaken by the de Bois landscape survey group between January and August 1985. As a result, this assessment acts as a process of validation and update, with the historical context of Great Barr and the current state of the features within the landscape park evaluated and assessed to provide an analysis of the current condition of the surviving features.

Finally, the assessment outlines the potential for restoration of the landscape and considers the potential impact of any development proposals that are under discussion for planning permission. It also offers some recommendations that may mitigate the impact of possible development in the park.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

A desk-based assessment was undertaken to detail the historic and archaeological landscape context for Great Barr Park, Great Barr, Walsall, centred on National Grid kilometre square SP0595. It was carried out on behalf of Mr Mike Kalam of Lapworth Architects (the Client) in response to a brief (the Brief) prepared by Mike Shaw, Walsall Council Archaeological Advisor in October 2012. Proposals for restoration of the hall and park are currently under discussion and additionally, planning permission is being sought for areas of residential development within the park area. This report is intended to provide the necessary historic and landscape contextual information for consideration in relation to all of these proposals for the future of the parkland (WA 2012, 1). It does not provide an archaeological assessment of the surviving hall building itself, which is a separate concern.

Great Barr Park is a Grade II registered park (Black Country SMR 3952; English Heritage List Entry 1001202) that surrounds Great Barr Hall, a Grade II* listed building (Black Country SMR 15099; English Heritage List Entry 1076395). These are currently on English Heritage's Heritage at Risk Register due to the poor condition and vulnerability of both. As such, the park is a known heritage asset, and it also incorporates other designated, undesignated and potential heritage assets within the wider park area, the significance of which may be affected by any development or restoration work that is to take place. The park occupies the southern part of the Great Barr Conservation Area, first designated in 1986 and extended in 1996.

The project conforms to a brief prepared by Mike Shaw, Walsall Council Archaeological Advisor (Shaw 2012) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (WA 2012).

The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance for archaeological desk-based assessment* (IfA 2008).

1.2 Planning background

Present government planning policy is contained within the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012). This is supplemented by detailed guidance which had related to earlier government policy but which is at least partially still relevant to the present policy (DCLG/DCMS/EH 2010).

In the case of this project, as proposals regarding planning permission are currently under discussion, specific impact assessments for individual potential development sites have not been presented. Rather, a more general view of the potential issues that may arise from development in certain areas of the park has been discussed.

2 Aims

As specified by the Brief (Shaw 2012), the overall aims of this project are:

- To provide an up to date baseline study of Great Barr Park detailing its history and mapping its major features through time
- To gather and map archaeological and historical data relating to the earlier history of the area
- To make all of this data available to input into strategies for managing, conserving, enhancing and interpreting the historic parkland

In addition to these overall aims for the assessment of the landscape park, there are a number of specific requirements for this project (Shaw 2012). These include:

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- To establish links with local researchers to discuss their work and enable additional relevant material to be incorporated into the report
 - To examine both local and national aerial photographic coverage of the park
 - To analyse LiDAR data for the area
 - To compile a GIS of all the map data and provide raw data in this format

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The assessment was undertaken by Richard Bradley BA; MA, who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2008 and has been practicing archaeology since 2005. Additional specialist input was provided by Jane Patton Dip LA, a Chartered Landscape Architect who has been practicing landscape architecture since 1974. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers BA; Msc. Illustrations were prepared by Richard Bradley and Carolyn Hunt.

3.2 Documentary research

All relevant information on the history of the site and past land-use was collected and assessed. Records of known archaeological sites and monuments were obtained from the Black Country Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), as well as a number of reports relating to previous work undertaken within the park area (e.g. Foundations Archaeology 2006, Patrick 2002). Historic maps, photographs and published sources were consulted at Walsall Local History Centre during a visit on 27th November 2012. Other additional sources (e.g. de Bois 1985, Cotswold Wildlife 2012, Acorn Tree Consultants 2012) were provided by Mike Shaw (Walsall Council Archaeological Advisor) and Mike Kalam (Lapworth Architects) on request. Peter Allen, a local researcher with extensive knowledge of the estate, provided help and assistance with research information.

3.3 List of sources consulted

Cartographic sources

- 1611/12 John Speed 'Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine'
- 1775 W. Yates 'Map of the County of Stafford'
- 1798 W. Yates 'The County of Stafford'
- 1798 'A plan of... part of the present and propos'd carriage and foot roads... from Great Barr to Barr Beacon...'
- 1830 G. Weddall 'Estate Plan of Great Barr'
- 1845 'Plan of the Parish of Great Barr in the County of Stafford'
- 1886 Ordnance Survey, 1st edition 1:2,500 (25")
- 1890 Ordnance Survey, 1:10,560 (6")
- 1903 Ordnance Survey, 1st revision 1:2,500 (25")
- 1904 Ordnance Survey, 1:10,560 (6")
- 1918 Ordnance Survey, 2nd revision 1:2,500 (25")
- 1921 Ordnance Survey, 1:10,560 (6")

- 1937 Ordnance Survey, 3rd revision 1:2,500 (25")
- 1938 Ordnance Survey, 1:10,560 (6")
- 1955 Ordnance Survey, 1:10,560 (6")
- 1982 National Grid 1:10000
- 1991 National Grid 1:10000
- 2007 Walsall Council Great Barr Conservation Area plan
- Google Maps Accessed: 20th November 2012

Photographs and drawings

Many photographs and drawings relating to Great Barr Park are in existence, but most focus on the hall itself. Only those that showed landscape features when observed are listed here.

- 1945 vertical aerial photograph of the southern part of the park, Google Earth historical image
- 1962 oblique aerial photograph across the northern part of the park WLHC ref. 3732/y
- c. 1913 photo across upper lake to Great Barr Hall WLHC ref. 3300/w
- View of gardens and Great Barr Hall WLHC ref. 1601/2
- 20th C 'View from St. Margaret's Hospital' WLHC ref. 8493/y
- c. 1980's photo of 'The lake at Great Barr Hall' WLHC ref. 6724/w
- 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2011 Google Earth aerial images of the site
- 'Sketch of Great Barr Park Estate, 19th century' WLHCref. 11804/x
- 'Sketch of Great Barr Park Estate, 19th century' WLHCref. 11805/x

LiDAR data

- Environment Agency 1m LiDAR composite data DTM jpeg tile SP0396
- Environment Agency 1m LiDAR composite data DTM jpeg tile SP0495
- Environment Agency 1m LiDAR composite data DTM jpeg tile SP0496
- Environment Agency 1m LiDAR composite data DTM jpeg tile SP0594
- Environment Agency 1m LiDAR composite data DTM jpeg tile SP0595
- Environment Agency 1m LiDAR composite data DTM jpeg tile SP0596

Documentary sources

- Acorn Tree Consultants 2012 *Great Barr Hall Tree and Woodland Report*
- Allen, P 1988 'History at the Crossroads: The Future of Great Barr Hall', in *The Birmingham Historian Spring/Summer 1988*, available online at (<http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/greatbarrhall/gbh.htm>)

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- Allen, P 2006 *The Mary Scott Blueprint: Proposals for the regeneration of Great Barr Hall Estate, the 'favourite place of meeting' of the Lunar Society of Birmingham*, Birmingham
 - BGS (British Geological Survey) 1996 Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) Solid and Drift sheet, **158**, 1:50,000
 - Cotswold Wildlife Surveys 2012 *Ecological Survey of Great Barr Park, Great Barr, Birmingham, B43*
 - DCLG 2012 *National Planning Policy Framework*, Department for Communities and Local Government
 - DCLG/DCMS/EH 2010 *PPS5 Planning for the historic environment: historic environment planning practice guide*, Department for Communities and Local Government/Department for Culture, Media and Sport/English Heritage
 - de Bois Landscape Survey Group 1985 *Great Barr Park: A Survey of the Landscape*
 - English Heritage, 2007 *Understanding the Archaeology of Landscape*, English Heritage
 - English Heritage 2010 *The Register of Parks and Gardens*, English Heritage
 - English Heritage 2011 *The Setting of Heritage Assets*, English Heritage
 - English Heritage 2012 *Heritage at Risk Register 2012*, English Heritage
 - Foundations Archaeology 2006 *St Margaret's Hospital, Great Barr Park, Walsall; Archaeological Evaluation*, Report No. 506
 - Gould, J 1980 'Settlement and Farming in the Parish of Aldridge (West Midlands) prior the 1650', in *Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. 20, 41-56
 - Hunt, J 2011 'The medieval period', in Watt, S (ed.) *The Archaeology of the West Midlands: A Framework for Research*, Oxford, 173-209
 - IfA 2008 *Standard and guidance for archaeological desk-based assessment*, Institute for Archaeologists
 - Larkham, P J 1982 'Moated Sites in Staffordshire', in *Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. 24, 8-65
 - Mills, A.D 1998 *A Dictionary of English Place-Names*, Oxford
 - Patrick, C 2002 *An archaeological watching brief at The Duckery, Great Barr, West Midlands 2001*, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, Project No. 774
 - Ragg, J M, Beard, G R, George, H, Heaven, F W, Hollis, J M, Jones, R J A, Palmer, R C, Reeve, M J, Robson, J D, and Whitfield, W A D, 1984 *Soils and their use in midland and western England*, Soil Survey of England and Wales, **12**
 - Shaw, M 2012 *Brief for desk-based assessment and field evaluation at Great Barr Park, Great Barr, Walsall*, Black Country Archaeologist, Wolverhampton City Council, unpublished document dated 12th October 2012
 - Shaw, S 1801 *The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire volume II part I*, London
 - Shaw, S 1991 *Great Barr Hall and Estate: archaeological assessment of existing documentary and field evidence*
 - Symes, M and Haynes, S 2010 *Enville, Hagley, The Leasowes: Three Great Eighteenth Century Gardens*, Bristol
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- Worcestershire Archaeology 2012 *Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological desk-based assessment at Great Barr Park, Great Barr, Walsall, Worcestershire* Archaeology, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished document dated 8th November 2012, P3976
- Williscroft, B 2009 *Brief for Building Assessment and Recording of Keepers Cottage, 160 Queslett Road, Great Barr*, Conservation Officer, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, unpublished document dated 6th November 2009

3.4 Other methods

A site visit was undertaken on the 19th of November 2012, with permission from Lapworth Architects. This entailed a rapid walkover assessment of the visibility and condition of the landscape and archaeological features within the registered park area, as well as a vehicular inspection of the surrounding urbanised landscape now bounding the park in order to assess current encroachment. Relict carriage ways and garden walks were explored and known historic viewpoints and vistas were checked for visibility, with a photographic record maintained throughout (see plates 1 to 28). A few areas within the woodland could not be surveyed thoroughly due to heavy tree and scrub cover limiting accessibility, but fortunately these areas were limited.

A GIS was set up for the project using ArcMap 10 GIS software. This enabled data from different sources to be analysed and interpreted in both a spatial and chronological context. HER information, LiDAR data, historic Ordnance Survey and modern mapping have been used alongside data and plans from previous surveys and field observations to create specific shape files detailing landscape features relating to the registered park, other archaeological features within the park area and the features mapped during previous survey work (de Bois 1985). Figures 1 to 8 illustrate this part of the project.

4 Study area

4.1 Location and size

The study area is confined to the registered area of Great Barr Park itself, not including Great Barr Hall (Fig. 1). It is located close to junction 7 of the M6, around 4.5km south-east of the centre of Walsall and covers an area approximately 1.1km² in size on the edge of the Birmingham/West Bromwich/Walsall conurbation. The main area is currently bordered, as well as truncated, by the M6 and Queslett road in the south, the A34 with associated development in the west, Chapel Lane in the North and 1960/70's and 21st century housing estates to the east. A spur of the registered park exists in the north-west of the area across Chapel Lane where Merrion's Wood, a Local Nature Reserve managed by Walsall Council, is located. This is bounded by modern housing and Great Barr Golf Club. South of the M6, a further Local Nature Reserve managed by Sandwell Council incorporates a parcel of Holly Wood.

4.2 Topography, geology and soils

The middle part of the park, particularly the area around Great Bar Hall and the ornamental lakes, is situated in a bowl-like valley running north to south and following the line of the former watercourse that once existed in this area. The western half of the main area of the park is mostly open parkland with scattered groups of established trees and rises moderately steeply from the Handsworth Drive side of the lakes at around 130m AOD up to about 160m AOD by the M6 and Chapel Lane. The eastern part of the area is characterised by well-developed woodland blocks and from the edge of the lakes also rises from around 130m AOD up the valley slopes to a height of 170m AOD in the north-east corner, heading towards the location of the Old Hall. The north-west spur of the registered area around Merrion's Wood and the Walsall Approach driveway occupies a plateau of land at about 150m AOD.

Geologically, as the park is of considerable size, it is situated across a number of differing formations. The solid bedrock geology covering much of the area is sandstone with siltstone and mudstone conglomerates of the Enville Member formation, although in the southern section of the park, next to the M6, this becomes the sandstone conglomerates of the Kidderminster formation with a small spur of Hopwas Breccia formation interbedded breccia and sandstone (BGS 1996). The superficial drift geology only demonstrates a difference to this bedrock geology in the region of the watercourse running through the valley into the ornamental lakes, where clay, sand and gravel alluvial deposits are encountered (BGS 1996).

The geology is overlain in the northern part of the park by moderately porous reddish fine loamy over clayey soils of the Brockhurst 1 association (Ragg *et al.* 1984, 116-118). South of Sutton's Bridge, covering the rest of the park, the soil is the permeable and well-drained coarse loamy brown earth of the Wick 1 association (Ragg *et al.* 1984, 323-326).

4.3 Historic land-use and development of the landscape park

When considering the evolution of the landscape at Great Barr it is fortunate that there is much documentary evidence for each phase of development already in existence. In 1985 a survey of Great Barr Park was carried out by de Bois Landscape Survey Group (see below) which sets out in detail all the known evidence for this evolution and makes further historical research a redundant exercise. The present survey is therefore a process of validation and update, with the historical context of Great Barr here set out using much of the de Bois evidence but in relation to the current situation.

The medieval period

The name Great Barr has Celtic origins in reference to a great hill-top or summit (Gould 1980, 47; Mills 1998, 26) and from Domesday until 1125, when it was disafforested and became part of Sutton Chase, Great Barr was included in the Royal Forest of Cannock (de Bois 1985). After about 1200 the township of Great Barr was part of the parish of Aldridge, with a chapel and manor house on the site of Chapel Farm, and by 1335 a deer park had been established for the use of this manor that covered the area now taken up by the golf course and land further north (Gould 1980 47-50; de Bois 1985). The character and form of this park is visible on 19th century mapping and elements of its shape are still retained today. The land to the south of this that later became Great Barr Park is likely to have remained mainly as rough wasteland, although some must have been at least partially cleared and cultivated because a moated medieval farm site dates from this time. The moat is still largely intact, albeit very overgrown, and appears to have remained undisturbed since the de Bois survey in 1985. There is map evidence for a later medieval or early post-medieval mill site in the southern part of the park, though the exact date of this is not clear.

Seventeenth century development

At the time of the Civil War the Lord of the Manor of Great Barr and Aldridge was Edward Stamford, a Royalist, whose land was thereafter sequestered. Following this, the Scott family were the controlling family in Great Barr and subsequently responsible for the development of the site. The seat of the Scott family was Old Hall (also known as High House) which is still part of The Old Hall Farm to the north of Great Barr Park. Nether-house Farm, which later became the site of Great Barr Hall, was established around 1650 by Richard Scott as a subsidiary farm to the principal Scott residence. By the time of his death in 1675 he had created a substantial farm house with some 120 acres of worked fields (de Bois 1985).

First phase of eighteenth century development

During the eighteenth century the Scotts at Nether-house Farm made substantial improvements to their property. John Scott (1685 – 1755) started the transformation that, by 1760, resulted in the farm house being described as a “Handsome and Commodious Dwelling-house” in Aris’s Birmingham Gazette (de Bois 1985). During this period society was much preoccupied by philosophical concepts of landscape design as opposed to natural landscapes, the result of which was the development of the Picturesque Movement. This important pillar of garden and landscape design still resonates today. The thinking behind this Movement started in the mid seventeenth century but by the time that John Scott was making improvements to his property, the debate was flourishing. John Scott’s eldest surviving son, William, was a contemporary of William Shenstone, the illustrious poet and gardener who lived less than 8 miles away at the Leasowes. Shenstone became distantly related by marriage to the Scott family and would have known Great Barr from frequent visits to his brother who was rector of Aldridge and the chapel-of-ease at Barr (de Bois 1985). During William Scott’s twenties, in 1742, Stephen Switzer, the celebrated garden designer and writer, coined the term “ferme ornée” to describe the much discussed fusion of practical land management and aesthetic taste (Symes and Haynes 2010, 41). This was at once taken up by others, initially at Woburn by Philip Southcote and then shortly after at the Leasowes by William Shenstone who started to “ornament” the farm that he inherited in 1743. By 1744, John Scott had also started to improve his own landscape by creating new gardens, setting out walks and drives (many still present today), and by substantial new plantings, both around the house and further afield. It seems inconceivable that William Shenstone, who knew and was related to the family, would not have advised on at least some of this work. He was a committed self-publicist with a nationally renowned estate at the Leasowes and was extremely generous with his gardening advice, his influence being acknowledged at some of the most significant parks and gardens of the period. The works that were likely to have been carried out during the period when Shenstone may have advised were all carried out during or just after 1744 and are summarised here (after de Bois 1985):

- North end of Coxit Hill planted as a nursery
- South end of the High Wood planted as a nursery
- Great Meadow created
- Gilbert’s Wood planted as a nursery
- North end of the High Wood planted as a nursery
- Garden laid out behind Nether-house Farm
- Alcove built on Flower Garden site
- Walled Garden built
- First cascade built
- Botanic Garden laid out
- Creation of Big Pool
- Firs planted on Barr Beacon
- Planting along the Sheep-path to Old Hall

The design of these improvements is reminiscent of Shenstone’s style and there is a nineteenth century tradition that Shenstone was involved in their creation. Stebbing Shaw (1801, 106) describes views in the park that command ‘a truly Shenstonian scene’ but it remains only circumstantial evidence that supports Shentone’s involvement, with no documentary evidence having been discovered. Conclusive proof would elevate the historical importance of Great Barr to parallel some of the most influential landscapes in the country.

Second phase of eighteenth century development

William Scott's son, Joseph was born in 1752 but tragedy soon struck the family when William died the following year, followed shortly by his father in 1755. The child was taken by his mother to live with her family at Great Haywood and Nether-house Farm was let out. In 1777 Joseph married his cousin Margaret Whitby and brought her back to Nether-house Farm which he had reclaimed from lease. Thereafter, he determined to improve the property to a standard that would complement his aspirations in society (he was created a baronet in 1806). His wealth was not unlimited however, and he seems to have spent several fortunes during his lifetime (de Bois 1985).

Work started immediately after his marriage when, in 1777 the old Nether-house was improved by being re-faced in the newly fashionable Strawberry Hill Gothic style. It is now considered one of the earliest surviving examples of Gothic Revival architecture and is likened to Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill at Twickenham, the flagship of the movement which was to sweep the country for the next century and a half. From thereafter the house was referred to as Great Barr Hall. At the same time the stable block was built, also in the Strawberry Hill Gothic style, but landscape improvements consisted mainly of extending the garden behind the hall and building a rabbit-warren in the walled garden. There is no longer any trace of this warren visible in the extensive undergrowth. The ambitious refurbishments to the house and estate must have been very costly and by 1781 the estate had been reduced to about 70 acres. Notwithstanding the obvious financial difficulties which forced the advertising of the property to let, Joseph Scott continued to spend money on beautifying his landscape and managed to re-acquire land to bring the acreage back up to 120 acres. He set out the Walk (to enter the park from Queslett in the south-east) and the linear Fox's plantation that ran alongside it. The plantation appears to have been named after Charles James Fox, the politician, who was much admired by Joseph Scott and who may have visited Great Barr in 1784 or 1785. This landscaping work stopped in 1785 when imminent financial ruin forced the Scotts to leave the country, and the property was leased to Samuel Galton Jnr. in 1786 (de Bois 1985).

The Galtons were a Quaker family, Samuel Galton being a prominent Birmingham banker and gun-maker. They were also leading lights of the Lunar Society that met regularly at Great Barr Hall. This illustrious West Midlands society was an unofficial group of the most intellectually capable men of their time. They included luminaries such as Matthew Boulton, James Watt, Joseph Priestley, Erasmus Darwin and Josiah Wedgwood and probably did more to advance the Industrial Revolution and thus the wealth of the nation than any other group.

During the Galton's tenure little was carried out in the nature of landscape improvements, although in 1793 there is record (without any detail) of Joseph Scott having spent the substantial sum of £1,000.00 on the land.

The Scotts returned to England after about 5 years and went to live in Kingswinford where Margaret Scott's mother lived. Their nearest neighbour amongst the gentry at Kingswinford was Edward Foley who was distantly related through marriage and was a co-heir, with Joseph Scott's mother-in-law, to estates in Great Barr. The Foleys were ardent Foxites and also keen garden improvers. Edward Foley was employing the celebrated landscape gardener Humphry Repton at that time and had introduced him to the architect John Nash in 1790. They met again at Stoke Edith, Edward Foley's Herefordshire estate, in 1792 and subsequently set up a mutually successful business partnership. It is likely that Joseph Scott may have met Repton or Nash at this time and because of this connection decided to employ them in the future.

During his time at Kingswinford, a timely inheritance allowed Joseph Scott to enlarge the estate at Great Barr by securing additional peripheral land, including Merrions Wood. As soon as he was able he terminated the Galton lease and moved back to Great Barr Hall in 1797.

Third phase of eighteenth century development

Having regained occupancy of Great Barr Hall, Joseph Scott was impatient to start on more improvements and Repton and Nash were called in immediately to advise on the park. Substantial works, based on sketches and advice provided by Repton, were commenced without delay. However, without a Red Book or any legacy of drawings, it is impossible to definitely attribute all these landscape elements directly to Repton. Joseph Scott himself had strong ideas about garden design and had introduced changes, such as the rabbit warren, before then without any professional advice. He had also continued with improvements in the style of William Shenstone. Various benches and minor walks were set out and a copy of one of Shenstone's urns with his inscription to the deceased Mary Dolman was installed at the north end of Fox's Plantation, opposite the Walled Garden. Mary Dolman was second cousin to Mrs Scott and fifth cousin to Shenstone (Shaw 1801, 105). Nevertheless, the huge litany of other new works all carried the imprint of Repton's style and it would have been unlikely that he was employed only to be ignored. Even today, the landscape bears many of the characteristics of a Repton design. Those elements created between 1797 and 1801 that can be considered to be Repton influenced or designed are set out below in chronological order (after de Bois 1985):

- The Belt planted
- Walsall (or Merrion's) Lodge built
- Walsall Approach laid out
- Road from Chapel to Old Hall moved
- Most of Fir Avenue to Old Hall felled and remainder bulked up with new planting
- Enclosure of Barr Beacon
- Flower Garden laid out
- Old Handsworth Approach laid out
- Various groups of trees planted in the park
- Beeches planted around the Chapel
- Upper Lake built
- Cascade constructed
- Dam below Big Pool built
- High Wood doubled in size
- Mixed plantations north of High Wood planted
- Chapel fields acquired by Joseph Scott
- Sunken fences on northern boundary installed
- Chapel Lodge built
- Queslett Lodge built
- Walk through the southern half of High Wood laid out
- Queslett Approach with associated planting laid out
- Sunken fence south of Queslett Approach excavated
- Parkland plantings carried out, especially west of the lakes
- Walks west of the lakes laid out
- East side of Fox's plantation planted

- Spur of woodland east of the Flower Garden planted
- Duckery dug and planted
- Walk through the northern half of High Wood laid out

Later, around 1810, the Horse Chestnut Avenue from Merrions Wood was planted.

These substantial works would have resulted in a landscape that was reminiscent of other Repton designs. The Hall was situated part way down the slope of a linear valley, embosomed in woodland and sheltered by the hillside behind. The valley sides were accentuated by the peripheral belts of trees planted along their upper summits that would have enclosed and sheltered the landscape. The carriage drive approaches were suitably long, but not circuitous, relying on subtle changes of direction or elevation to give surprise and wonder as various vistas were unfolded. Topographical features within the park were emphasised by groups of tree planting that were also used to draw the eye to a particular view. Clever use was made of the middle distance views with the sunken fences or ha-has allowing specific uninterrupted long distance views across the landscape, often bringing in the “borrowed landscape” from beyond. The valley floor was laid out with lakes and cascades and gravelled woodland walks allowed easy access to them. The circular walk from the Hall around the lake could be cut short by crossing picturesque rustic footbridges at various places. Exotic planting was carried out in the wooded areas around the lakes, which would have been open in character with little of the native shrub understorey. Much of this is still present today. Close to the house rather more formal gardens were laid out.

Work by Humphry Repton’s partner, John Nash, is more elusive. He provided designs for a Gothic gate by the Chapel and there were several features within the Hall that were in his style. Similarly he may have had some influence in the design of other features, such as the lodges that were built around 1800, before his collaboration with Repton was dissolved. However, nothing definitely attributable to him survives.

Nineteenth century development

Joseph Scott’s energetic final phase of development came to an end soon after 1800 with the improvements made by Repton. He died in 1828 and his son, Sir Edward Dolman Scott, like his great-grandfather, had a more cautious approach, waiting until the 1840’s to carry out his own changes. He concentrated on the gardens immediately around the Hall, laying out the terracing that still survives today, a zig-zag drive to the Flower Garden, the ha-ha on its southern side and new planting on the west side of the Upper Lake. He also extensively remodelled the hall and built Sutton’s Bridge and Approach. It is likely that he was also responsible for building Handsworth Lodge and Approach.

Sir Edward Scott died in 1851, the same year that his son Sir Francis Scott met the celebrated architect Gilbert Scott. By 1854 Gilbert Scott had embarked on a range of improvements at Great Barr that he continued until Sir Francis Scott’s untimely death in 1863. The works started with rebuilding the Walsall and Queslett Lodges as matching buildings. Two years later Chapel Lodge was also rebuilt and two new lodges, Beacon Lodge and Avenue Lodge were constructed. Park Farm was also built the same year and the Farm Approach laid out. The Chapel that still survives adjoining the Hall had been built by 1863, although it was never consecrated and was used as a billiards room. This is one of the finest of Gilbert Scott’s surviving buildings at Great Barr. In the park and gardens he was responsible for the Boat Houses, the post-bridge and the Summer House in the French Garden as well as work on the park wall and planting improvements to the more formal gardens and a doubling in size of the parkland woods. Sir Gilbert Scott (he was later knighted) was the most influential Victorian architect, particularly noted for his work on public and ecclesiastical buildings. The only parkland buildings he designed were at Great Barr, no doubt as a favour to his friend, Sir Francis Scott. The work that can be attributed to Sir Gilbert Scott’s time at Great Barr is set out below in chronological order (de Bois 1985):

- Walsall (or Merrion's) Lodge rebuilt
- Queslett Lodge rebuilt
- Holly Wood extended and new drives added
- Handsworth Approach planted
- Plantings added to Queslett Approach
- High Wood extended to north and west
- Older woods replanted
- Tree planting in the park
- Spur of woodland east of Flower Garden felled
- Duckery drained
- Avenue Lodge built
- Chapel Lodge rebuilt
- Park Farm built
- Beacon Lodge built
- Farm Approach laid out
- Maze planted
- Chapel/billiard room added to the Hall
- Boat House built
- Wooden post-bridge built
- Gardens refurbished
- Summer House rebuilt
- Boat House on Big Pool rebuilt
- Pets cemetery established
- Park wall commenced

After Sir Francis Scott's death in 1863 his wife continued to finish some of the work that was already in hand. The park wall was completed, a drive was put in from Queslett Lodge to the Flower Garden, Keeper's Cottage was built and an accompanying drive put in to link it to Park Farm. The estate had been put into trust for Sir Francis Scott's children, but both sons died before his wife and with her death in 1909, the involvement of the Scott family with Great Barr ceased.

The twentieth century

In 1911 the estate was sold to West Bromwich Poor Law Union which was concerned with the care of orphaned and abandoned children. Thereafter it was developed as St. Margaret's Hospital, an asylum for the mentally handicapped. The Birmingham architect, Gerald McMichael designed a series of attractive well-spaced wards but left most of the park untouched, making extensive use of the existing woodlands and drives to complement his layout (de Bois 1985). In 2008 the hospital buildings were demolished and replaced with a modern housing estate.

The decline of the Hall and Chapel/billiard room started after the Second World War but escalated after 1978 when the building was no longer used as the administration centre. The following

extracts from work by the local historian Peter Allen (1988; 2006) detail the decline of Great Barr Hall and Park during the latter part of the twentieth century:

"Late 1950s - Clock-tower, stable and coach block and servants' wing all demolished. A new pathology department and outside toilet were grafted onto the old building.

Late 1960s - The twinned oriel windows on the principal façade were replaced by unmatched metal casement windows.

January 1974 - Birmingham Regional Health Authority apply to Staffordshire County Council for permission to demolish the Hall. The building was saved through a vigorous campaign by conservation groups.

June 1975 - Walsall Health Authority almost accede to a request from the local education authority to use the hospital lakes for boating purposes. The scheme was dropped after concerted opposition from nature conservationists.

July 1978 - The Hall is vacated by the last of the administrative staff.

New Year's Day 1981 – The 'chapel' attached to the Hall was totally gutted by arsonists. Old records dating back to Poor Law days are destroyed.

July 1982 – A large section of banisters and handrail was removed from the famous flying staircase by vandals.

August 1982 – A serious attempt by arsonists to set the Hall alight. It was only saved by the prompt action of security staff. Following this the Hall was finally boarded up.

April 1984 - Walsall Health Authority applies for planning permission to demolish the nearby summerhouse and clear the French garden site. A campaign by interested groups resulted in the applications being refused.

February 1989 – Great Barr Hall and 156 acres of lakes, woods and farmland, the historic core of the old estate, are conveyed to David Worth, a Birmingham financier and property developer. To stem the Dry Rot outbreak virtually all plasterwork and woodwork were stripped from the ailing building. Mr Worth later ran into financial difficulties and this portion of the estate ended up in the hands of the Official Receiver, where it remained for over a decade. During this time the dereliction continued apace.

July 2001 – Parts of the barrel-vaulted cellars had collapsed due to vandalism.

March 2003 – Damage caused to the Gothic 'chapel' by someone attempting to remove finely carved stonework from around one of the windows. As a result extensive areas of intricate polychrome brickwork have collapsed."

4.4 Previous archaeological work in the park

A number of projects have been undertaken within the park area containing an archaeological element and as this assessment is intended to provide an updated baseline study of the park it is worth noting the coverage and results of this earlier work.

The most extensive of these projects was the seminal work undertaken by the de Bois landscape survey group between January and August 1985 (de Bois 1985). It was centred upon the site of St. Margaret's Hospital, but was entirely comprehensive in its outlook and covered the majority of the currently registered area of the park. Detailed within the work was the full history and ecology of the park, the position and age of trees, the primary reference sources, all maps and illustrations relating to the early history of the park and any archaeological features surveyed within the landscape. These archaeological features were planned onto a base map using theodolite, plane table and chain on highly detailed scale drawings (see figs. 9 to 12). All of this was recorded in the most meticulous and exhaustive fashion, providing an indispensable reference for all subsequent research and any future plans for the park.

A further project focused upon the park was commissioned in 1991 by John Cunnington Architects (Shaw 1991). This work, undertaken by Sarah Shaw, was an archaeological assessment of existing documentary and field evidence for the hall and estate. Unfortunately, it has not been

possible to locate this document for use in this assessment, so it is not known how much it added to the knowledge gained from the de Bois survey.

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken in early 2001 in the woodland known as 'The Duckery', located at the northern edge of the registered park area and within the presumed vicinity of the medieval centre of Great Barr (Patrick 2002). The work was entirely negative, with no archaeological features, deposits or artefacts recovered.

The former site of St Margaret's Hospital, located to the east of the currently registered area, was subject to archaeological evaluation in 2006 in advance of housing construction on this land (Foundations Archaeology 2006). This involved the excavation and recording of four 30m machine dug trenches and did not reveal any significant archaeological deposits, but did suggest that the construction of the hospital had resulted in the clearing of the ground down to natural geology. As a result of the project, this area has recently been removed from within the boundary of the registered park area (Shaw 2012).

To the south of the site, at the position of the former Birmingham Approach drive through the estate, previously existed the recently demolished late 19th century 'Keeper's Cottage'. A brief for building recording was written in 2009 (Williscroft 2009), but it is not known whether this work was undertaken or if so, what the results of this work were.

4.5 Current land-use

Great Barr Park exists as a remnant of greenery within a valley corridor of urban development, with encroachment of housing that has somewhat reduced the original extent of the parkland landscape. Whilst both the north-western spur and southern parcel of the registered park area, containing Merrion's Wood with the Walsall Avenue and Holly Wood respectively, are managed and maintained as part of the Local Nature Reserves, the rest of the park area is currently fenced off and inaccessible to the public. A lack of maintenance in recent times has left parts of the ornamental lakes silted up and the surrounding park overgrown with extensive degradation of the original woodland features through the establishment of invasive species. Buildings associated with the hospital built on the east of the park are now derelict and, in some cases, recently demolished (plate 13). A number of lodges marking picturesque entrance avenues to the estate are still in existence as residential properties, though many have been subsumed by urban expansion (plates 18 and 20). The garden structures and ornamental features within the park itself are derelict and in some cases vandalised, including Great Barr Hall itself, with English Heritage recognising on the Heritage at Risk Register that the park and hall are highly vulnerable to a further decline in condition and present extensive significant problems (English Heritage 2012; plate 12).

5 Heritage assets

5.1 Designated heritage assets

The area of this assessment is defined by the boundary of the Grade II Registered Great Barr Park, which, as such, is a designated heritage asset (Black Country SMR 3952; English Heritage List Entry 1001202). It was first registered in 1986 under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 due to its special historic interest. This is based principally upon its intactness as a park, the design interest in the work of Humphry Repton, John Nash, Gilbert Scott and William Shenstone within the landscape, and the group value through contemporary association with Great Barr Hall, for which it provides the setting. The hall (with chapel) is itself a Grade II* listed building, built from 1777 onwards on the site of Nether-house Farm (Black Country SMR 15099; English Heritage List Entry 1076395). It was first listed in 1971 due to its architectural and design interest, as well as its historical associations.

Further designated heritage assets within the area of the park include other individual listed buildings. Handsworth Lodge, located at the southern entrance to the park and marking the start of

an important approach, is a Grade II late 18th century gothic building, first listed in 1971 (Black Country SMR 1527; English Heritage List Entry 1077125). Similarly, Walsall (or Merrion's) Lodge is a Grade II brick and sandstone building dated to 1854 and attributed to George Gilbert Scott, located at the end of the north-west approach to the park (Black Country SMR 1535; English Heritage List Entry 1076383). It was first listed in 1985.

The majority of Great Barr Park is within the boundary of the Great Barr Conservation Area (DBL 936), first designated by Walsall Council in 1986 and extended in 1996. It was recognised for the special architectural and historic interest of the area and any amendments to buildings or demolition work within this area requires specific consideration and approval.

5.2 Undesignated heritage assets

As the landscape park covers a large area there are a significant number of undesignated heritage assets known within the assessment area and recorded on the Black Country Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) and Birmingham City Historic Environment Record (MBM). These include both earlier archaeological features and features associated with the development of the landscape park and most relate to medieval and post-medieval activity within this landscape.

In the northern part of the registered area are three main areas of semi-natural woodland, Merrion's Wood (SMR 4502), The Duckery (SMR 4506) and High Wood (SMR 4509), all of which were incorporated into the design of the Great Barr Park and developed through plantation schemes at varying stages. The original character and form of these wooded areas is still in existence, although Merrion's Wood is the only one that remains managed and maintained. North of High Wood is a field reported as the site of possible brickworks, being recorded as Brick Field on 18th century mapping (SMR 6384).

Also in the northern part of the park, where the parkland meets the boundary of St Margaret's Church and Chapel Lane, there are a cluster of heritage assets associated with the early medieval settlement site of Great Barr (SMR 5830) that all extend into the registered area. These include a possible farmhouse site of post-medieval date (SMR 13073) and a collection of earlier roadways that were altered during park landscaping works post-1798 (SMR 13074; 13075; 13076). These may be of the same period as Skip Lane which borders the registered park at its north-west extremity, a route way recognised as one of the oldest roads in the area due to the number of species in the boundary hedges (SMR 10327).

North of Chapel Lane, and marking where the Walsall Avenue meets the lane, is Avenue Lodge, a red brick building probably by George Gilbert Scott and dated to around 1856. This is not listed with statutory protection like the other lodges on the site and, although mapped on the Black Country Sites and Monuments Record GIS shapefile, has no SMR reference number.

At the western edge of the park is a partially infilled medieval moated site, possibly a post-medieval farmhouse complex, the northern part of which survives in the form of an L-shaped water filled depression with remains of a retaining bank (SMR 2689; plate 15). Just outside the western edge of the registered area is a findspot of 12th to 15th century medieval pottery (SMR 2892) which has the potential to be associated with earlier occupation in the vicinity of the moated site.

In close proximity to Great Barr Hall is the site of the walled kitchen garden, constructed in the 1740s and laid out by John Scott (plate 26). Within this is a later rabbit warren, added into the garden around 1777 (SMR 6385). In the vicinity of Sutton's Bridge, which crosses the north end of the upper lake on the approach to the house, is the site of the first cascade (SMR 6380). The location of this cascade is not entirely clear on the Black Country Sites and Monuments Record, but the site visit during this assessment did locate some potential remains of this structure (plate 9).

To the south-west of the main hall and across the upper lake is the semi-natural wooded area known as Gilbert's Wood (SMR 4507), probably planted or enlarged in the mid-18th century by

John Scott (de Bois 1985). A little to the south but still in this vicinity is the possible site of a late-18th century Ice House (SMR 6133), recorded from memories but for which no physical evidence is recorded, and some earthworks relating to the disposal of 19th century rubbish in large pits (SMR 6379).

South of the lower lake, or Big Pool as it is known, is the site of a former mill with associated pool known to be in existence in 1715 (SMR 6378). The mill is recorded on the Yates 1798 map and referred to as 'Barr Mill' in 1817, whilst the pool is still clear on the 1830 estate plan and the 1840 tithe map, though is not on the 1886 first edition ordnance survey map. Until very recently, to the south-east of this on the Queslett Road, existed Keeper's Cottage (SMR 13800), a former gatehouse entrance to the park dated to the late 19th century.

5.3 Potential heritage assets

As visible features within the park landscape, the registered area gives coverage to the carriage drives, scenic walks, plantations, lakes, gardens, bridges and water features that are not referenced or designated independently as heritage assets. However, as these all have potential archaeological and historical interest, they may require designation or record as specific independent heritage assets in the future.

There is little evidence of archaeological activity in the area of the park before the historic period, with the exception of a poorly located findspot for a prehistoric stone hammer which is reported from the vicinity of St Margaret's Hospital (SMR 2601). A single find such as this suggests activity of a transitory nature rather than areas of occupational activity and as such, the potential for heritage assets of prehistoric date is considered to be low.

It is thought that Great Barr remained relatively uninhabited through the Roman and Saxon periods (Gould 1980, 47; de Bois 1985), though an isolated Roman breastplate was supposedly found south of Queslett Road in 1935 (MBM 801) and there is anecdotal evidence of Roman coins being found in the park (though not located) in the 1940's. A find of a reported 11th century Viking spearhead associated with a mound just outside the south-west corner of the park by Holly Wood occurred in 1954 (SMR 2627). The mound was levelled and showed no evidence of antiquity, with no finds recovered, and in the absence of any other evidence the potential for Roman and Saxon heritage assets in the park area is also considered to be low.

The proximity of medieval settlement activity to the registered park would suggest that there is significant potential for buried heritage assets of this date to exist within the area, particularly when it is considered in relation to the presence of the moated site in the park itself. The location of the original medieval settlement at Great Barr is not entirely clear, but is thought to be centred on St Margaret's Church and Chapel Farm just north of the park area and is known to exist from reference in the Domesday Survey (SMR 5830; Patrick 2002). The known early roads that transected this part of the landscape around the church, alongside the presence of extensive areas of medieval ridge and furrow field systems and a probable medieval deer park outside the northern border of the area, are indicative of widespread medieval rural activity in the landscape. Additionally, the later medieval settlement of Snails Green (SMR 6359) is thought to be located just to the south-west of the park alongside the Walsall-Birmingham road and there is evidence of a moated site at Shustoke Farm (SMR 3168), around 250m north-west of Merrion's Wood (Larkham 1982). A 14th century coin was also reported to have been found east of the park by the new supermarket site on Queslett Road (MBM 1035). It would therefore be expected that medieval deposits associated with rural settlement once existed in the area of the park, particularly ridge and furrow field systems and small enclosures, but that visible remains of these have been lost when landscaping relating to the design of the park took place in the 18th and 19th centuries. The LiDAR data certainly indicates that at least one field in the registered area, south of Skip Lane and north of Merrion's Wood, contains buried evidence of ridge and furrow and there exists the potential for more across the area of the park. Supporting this hypothesis is the presence of prominent bank features possibly relating to medieval field systems identified in High Wood during previous survey work in the park (de Bois 1985).

Whilst not entirely accurately located, the known presence of the mill and pool site (SMR 6378) in the southern corner of the park has the potential to indicate the presence of early post-medieval remains relating to the activity in this area. These would perhaps be in the form of a mill leat or out-buildings associated with the mill structure, although the extent of park landscaping in this part of the site may have removed much of the traces of any elements such as these.

6 Assessment of the significance of heritage assets

6.1 Designated assets

6.1.1 Conservation Area

Conservation Areas are recognised for their special architectural or historic interest and it is desirable to preserve or enhance the character of these areas. The park covers approximately one-fifth of the Great Barr Conservation Area, an important district designation which falls on the borders of three local planning authorities and exists as an open green space recognised for its special architectural and historic interest. Any amendments to buildings, demolition or new development within the area would require specific consideration and approval from the local planning authorities as they could potentially affect the historic character and appearance of the area, or detract from the importance of this asset. As the park and hall are currently in a considerable state of dilapidation and thus do little to enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, restoration work within the landscape park will make a significant positive contribution to preserving and enhancing the historic significance of the designated area. Potentially, restoration may also act as a catalyst for further heritage-led improvements across the Conservation Area as a whole.

6.1.2 Registered park

The inclusion of Great Barr Park on the English Heritage Register of historic parks and gardens reflects the national importance of the site and the separate designated and undesignated heritage assets within it. Only a fraction of the nation's designed historic parks and gardens are considered sufficiently influential to merit inclusion.

Great Barr Park is a gentry landscape reflecting the developing tastes, social aspirations and wealth that typically emerged from the Industrial Revolution. It is especially important to the cultural heritage of Birmingham as it has links to some of its most important historical figures, such as the members of the Lunar Society. The designed landscape that survives is remarkably intact and one can readily see the style and influence of William Shenstone and Humphry Repton. The architectural quality of the surviving buildings is also impressive, most being attributable to Sir Gilbert Scott.

English Heritage recognises that the significance of a heritage asset is not purely physical through its presence and historical fabric but also its setting. In this regard, setting is considered to be the surroundings from which an 'asset can be experienced or that can be experienced from or with the asset' (English Heritage 2011, 4). This setting, or elements of it, can make a positive, negative or neutral impact upon the asset and is not solely based on visual or aesthetic considerations, also incorporating environmental factors (eg noise, dust and vibration), spatial associations and the understanding of the historic relationship between places (English Heritage 2011, 5).

Restorative works within the park landscape as an entity have the potential to enhance the setting of the park and the other heritage assets associated with it. Re-establishing the designed and managed landscape could positively affect the importance of this asset, particularly if completed alongside a sympathetic restoration of the associated Great Barr Hall. The visual and environmental impacts will be beneficial, plus the spatial and historic associations between landscape features would be enhanced.

Obtrusive or insensitive development work in the park has the potential to negatively impact upon the setting of this heritage asset in a number of ways. Additional buildings located in unsuitable positions may irrecoverably alter vistas and thus visually impact upon experience of the asset, both from internal and external viewpoints. The possibility of increased traffic and a larger environmental footprint could be noticeable and detract from the significance of the asset. Inappropriately considered development may also have a detrimental impact upon the spatial and historic associations between the designed landscape features that form the historical significance of the park as a designated asset.

Recommendations for potential methods of mitigation that may be required in relation to enabling development undertaken alongside restoration of the park are outlined further in section 7 below.

6.1.3 Listed buildings

As a Grade II* listed building, the most significant asset of this type in the park is Great Barr Hall itself, recognised for its architectural and historical interest. It is currently in an extremely dilapidated state and, as a result, has been included on the English Heritage Monuments at Risk Register for a number of years. Restoration of the park should enhance the setting of this asset through its spatial and historical association and potentially invigorate its significance as a heritage asset for the local community. Additional positive effects could also include improved local employment opportunities associated with the hall in the short, medium and long term. Sensitively positioned development proposals should not directly affect the visual setting of the hall, but could, through alteration of its landscape setting, have a detrimental effect on its spatial relationship with the rest of the park. This is also the case for the Grade II listed lodges, Handsworth Lodge and Merrion's Lodge. Development will not have a direct visual or environmental impact on either of these sites but, if inappropriately considered, may detract from their spatial association to the park landscape. Again, any restorative works in the park have the potential to enhance the setting of these assets through reintroduction of their original spatial and historical relationships to landscape park features.

6.2 Undesignated assets

6.2.1 Sites of archaeological interest

Nature of the archaeological interest

The archaeological interest in the area of Great Barr Park is focused upon heritage assets of the medieval and post-medieval periods, with little evidence for earlier activity. Much of this is associated with the development and design of the 18th and 19th century landscape park discussed above, although buried deposits related to earlier medieval occupational activity noted within the vicinity of the site have the potential to be in existence. The post-medieval features are largely well documented and recorded due to the quality of written and mapping evidence concerning the park and earlier research work undertaken to plan and record the park landscape (e.g. de Bois 1985). The local historic environment records for visible or mapped medieval heritage assets are fairly extensive, but there is still much potential for a better understanding to be gained of buried archaeological deposits of this period within the park area.

The setting of the landscape park is significant. Whilst building work associated with the 20th century hospital and the encroachment of urban development has affected the historic extent and completeness of the park, much of the integrity of the landscape and the features within it is still maintained. The spatial and historic relationship between all of the remaining undesignated heritage assets within the registered park is integral to the appreciation of the park landscape as a whole.

Relative importance of the archaeological interest

The park is a nationally significant heritage asset and is recognised as such through its designation as a Grade II Registered Park. This ensures that the undesignated individual heritage assets within it are also recognised to be of importance, particularly when considered as a group of features that are spatially and historically linked as part of a designed landscape. The current overgrown and dilapidated state of many of these features does not detract from their archaeological importance to the landscape as a whole.

Any archaeological remains associated with the moated site in the western part of the park have the potential to be of significance. Moated sites are viewed as a characteristic site type of the west midlands region and are often highly visible, a feature which has led to many being designated as Scheduled Monuments. As such, this moated site is of regional and possible national significance. Few, however, have been studied or had the opportunity to be excavated within the context of their wider landscape setting (Hunt 2011, 196-7). In this instance, any restoration or development works in this area have the potential to rectify this research anomaly.

Physical extent of the archaeological interest

The main archaeological interest in this study area is with the heritage assets within the post-medieval landscape park as a whole and as a result is extensive. The physical, visual and environmental landscape setting of all of these features would be vulnerable to the impact of any development work. The density of buried archaeological deposits of the medieval period could be expected to be moderately high in the northern part of the site, though there is little certainty as to the depth or presence of these other than the visible remains of the moated site. Landscaping associated with the design of the park may have ensured little survival, and previous archaeological work at The Duckery at the north of the park did not reveal any features of archaeological significance (Patrick 2002). However, the known presence of medieval bank features in High Wood would suggest that similar feature types could be expected in other areas of woodland around the park and any restorative works carried out should be wary of the potential to cause damage to extant features such as these.

6.3 Current condition of the park and buildings

The almost total abandonment of the landscape since the 1980s has ensured that whilst the current state of the park is one of dilapidation, there has been little damage or degradation of the landscape park features. The entry description in the English Heritage Register (List Entry 1001202) is divided into categories of interest which provide a useful basis for an analysis of the condition of the surviving features here.

Entrances and Approaches

The formal entrance from Walsall (or Merrion's) Lodge, together with Walsall Approach carriage drive, was constructed in 1797 as part of Huphrey Repton's improvements (plate 20). This drive is now a footpath running for about a kilometre through Merrion's Wood from the modern A34 Birmingham Road then due east to Chapel Lane (plate 21). At the western, A34, end Walsall Lodge and its accompanying iron gate piers survive. The lodge was rebuilt by Sir Gilbert Scott in 1854. At the Chapel Lane end the 1856 Avenue Lodge and gate piers, again attributed to Sir Gilbert Scott, also survive. Merrion's Wood is now a Local Nature Reserve and managed primarily for its wildlife interest. During the years since its acquisition in 1796 it has been replanted several times and the varied age range of trees reflects this, with a number of oak probably dating to the original planting. In addition, a number of historically inappropriate tree species have been planted in recent years.

Opposite Avenue Lodge, on the southern side of Chapel Lane, is the start of Sutton's Approach. Chapel Lodge once existed here but was demolished in the 1950s (Allen 2006, 18). This approach leads south-east to the Hall and crosses the water features via Sutton's Bridge at the point where the stream leads into the Upper Lake. Sutton's Approach has been planted in the later twentieth century with an avenue of horse-chestnut trees that unfortunately have bleeding canker. A raised bund of rubble and soil has also been deposited in recent years along both sides of the drive. Due to these bunds, and the diseased trees, Sutton Approach appears the most derelict and abandoned of the surviving approaches (plate 22).

The Handsworth Approach came through ornamental woodland along the western side of the lakes (plate 17). This drive was set out by Repton and is still surviving substantially intact but has been curtailed by the motorway embankment that effectively cuts off Holly Wood at the south-western tip of the landscaped park. The old Handsworth Approach was abandoned in favour of this route. The Handsworth Lodge on the A4041 Queslett Road still survives as a Grade II listed building, apparently in good order.

A less important route skirts the east side of the lakes leading from the Hall down to a modern lodge at the entrance to the defunct Birmingham Approach. This was never more than a path or track.

All the other drives or approaches have been subsumed by modern development.

Principal Building

Great Barr Hall and its adjoining chapel/billiard room are still partially standing, albeit very dilapidated. A fire has effectively destroyed the roof and upper storeys of the Hall and the roof of the chapel. Substantial damage has occurred to the standing walls and vandalism has damaged what remains. The ruins remain unprotected from the elements although some protection from further vandalism has been afforded by the security fence that has now been erected around them (plates 12 and 23).

Gardens and Pleasure Grounds

The paved terrace and steps leading from the Hall to the formal lawns (originally the Great Meadow) are still surviving intact, although very overgrown with grass (plate 25).

The formal lawns and beds leading down to the Upper Lake from the paved terrace are now scrubbed over and difficult to access. Most definition of terracing between lawns has been lost.

The site of the Flower Garden is very overgrown, inaccessible from the park, and no longer part of the Registered Area.

Park

Merrion's Wood, in the north-western arm of the park, remains relatively intact. Its present management for the benefit of wildlife does not enable an informed understanding of its design or a future sympathetic and historically appropriate restoration. This is also the case with the remains of Holly Wood in the southern area of the park.

Upper Lake is still an open body of water but is substantially silted up, especially at its northern end near Sutton's Bridge (plate 7). However, the original line of the banks can be clearly made out. The stream leading into the lake is also overgrown and silted up with one of the three arches of Sutton's Bridge completely choked and the other two partially blocked (plate 10). Sutton's Bridge has been recently restored but has unfortunately been subjected to vandalism. Some of the stone finials have been toppled but appear to be lying undamaged in the stream bed (plate 11). Stone work in the bank of the stream, a short distance north of the bridge, may mark the location of the

first cascade (plate 9). The shape of the channel here indicates that there may also have been a silt pond in this location which is likely to have accompanied the cascade.

A dam and weir separates the Upper Lake from the Lower Lake (or Big Pool). There were originally substantial stepping stones across this dam. These have been lost and replaced by a row of much smaller concrete blocks. The cascaded toothed weir appears likely to be the original structure (plate 6).

Big Pool is still a substantial lake but has also narrowed, due to silting of banks. Again, the original line of the banks can be clearly seen.

The Boat houses and footbridges associated with both lakes have gone but the locations of the boathouses can still be seen as embayments in the banks (plate 8).

The picturesque walk through ornamented woodland along the western side of the Upper Lake is still passable although overgrown. The line of yew trees that once marked this path is still substantially present, although overgrown. They would originally have been kept trimmed to size. At the end of this walk, where it turns to take the footbridge (now gone) across the lake, the yew avenue is punctuated by a pair of oaks and behind a pair of beech trees, all contemporary with the layout of the paths (plate 19).

Gilbert's Wood still exists as shown on historical maps. However, it is now substantially planted with silver birch with few trees remaining from pre-twentieth century, and extends to the woodland on the edge of the lake which was not the case when it was designed.

The western part of the park is substantially intact with the site of the medieval moated farm house and pond undisturbed since the de Bois survey in 1985, albeit more overgrown. The site of one of Repton's tree groups, shown on historical maps, is still marked by trees today, although they are likely to be younger than the original planting (plate 16). The park has been used to take a hay crop but is being managed minimally so that it appears to be in poor condition.

The eastern side of Big Pool still has some mature woodland along its length but it is overshadowed by the modern housing that has been built across the eastern part of the park.

The original hospital buildings in the north-east of the site have been demolished and partially cleared but the area is still littered with debris and rubble (plate 13).

The park boundary wall, constructed in the mid-19th century, only survives in any substantial form along the edge of Chapel Lane (plate 28).

Kitchen Garden

The walled garden is now totally overgrown (plate 26). There are no traces of internal paths or of the rabbit warren. Garden buildings such as potting sheds have partially collapsed and there are only footings and dwarf walls left on the site of the glasshouses. The walls are in very variable states with some areas almost completely collapsed and some still reasonably intact. A stepped stone feature that may have been a fernery is still intact against the internal face of the south wall, facing north (plate 27).

Mill Pool

The site of the medieval mill pool can still be seen as a deep depression to the south of the Lower Lake. The sinuous water course that left the southern end of Lower Lake in the same vicinity has now entirely silted up but its course can be traced in places between the numerous etiolated trees that have sprung up on the boggy land.

Views

Additionally, the de Bois survey (1985) identified a number of principal views which have been re-visited and assessed using the identification key on plan 12 of their survey:

Views 1, 2 and 3 from the First, Second and Third seats are no longer open. A representative view was taken from the top of the bank alongside the modern access road leading down to the Hall. This looks across the derelict site next to the Hall but is then obscured by trees growing in what had been the formal gardens (plate 24).

View 4 from the fourth seat and view 5 from the fifth seat were lost to the hospital development.

View 6 from Fox's plantation has been lost to modern development.

View 7 from Walsall Lodge to Dudley is still partially open although much changed by modern development.

View 8 (two views) from Gilberts Wood, or thereabouts, are still relatively unchanged, although tree planting and loss may have altered the channelling of views (plate 3).

Views identified by de Bois from High Wood looking north to Old Hall are still substantially unchanged.

There is a fine view from the Merrions Wood footpath looking east towards the church (plate 21).

There are still uninterrupted views in places across the parkland ha-has.

Fine views across the lakes are still possible from the overgrown walks along their margins (plates 4 and 5).

There are a number of fine views from the elevated parkland, looking both north and south.

7 Potential restoration and development in the park

The assessment has detailed the history, current use and condition of Great Barr Park, as well as assessing the extent and significance of the heritage assets within it. This section outlines the potential for restoration of the landscape and considers the impact of any development proposals that may be under discussion for planning permission. It also offers some recommendations regarding the impact of possible enabling development in the park and the mitigation that may be required as a result of this.

Restoration Potential

The eastern parts of the park and gardens have generally been lost under new development. Whilst the vestiges of the original design have been lost here, the area of buildings that had been used for the male section of the St Margaret's hospital remains undeveloped. It is, however outside of the developer's ownership and currently heavily contaminated with rubble debris. The gardens in front of the Hall, the walled garden (also outside the developers' ownership), the landscape relating to the lakes, the lakes themselves and most of the parkland to the west remain. There has been loss of individual garden structures like the boathouses, the foot bridges and Chapel Lodge, and the southern tip of the designed landscape has been compromised by the motorway embankment, but otherwise the landscape has survived remarkably intact.

Much of this is suffering from poor maintenance and lack of care. In the parkland this is manifest in derelict trees and poor quality rough grass that is only cut annually for hay. Elsewhere the landscape is overgrown with scrub, rampant rhododendron, self-sown trees, suckers and introduced aliens such as Japanese knotweed. The lakes and streams are silted up to varying degrees but the weir and dam appear to be sound. The dereliction is therefore widespread but

superficial and it is evident that the design remains intact underneath. With some sensitivity, it could be reinstated.

If proposals for restoration are carried out it is recommended that the park as a whole, as defined on the register maintained by English Heritage is treated as a single entity. Other than the area once occupied by St Margaret's hospital buildings, the various parts of the surviving landscape are inextricably linked one to another. It could, of course, be restored in phases and different parts would require quite different restoration treatment and subsequent management. However, if the landscape is divided into different entities the perception may arise that they are independent of each other. This might lead to a belief that some areas could be developed without undue impact on the rest. Development or abandonment of one part may have a significant negative impact upon the physical setting of the remainder.

The park as an amenity asset

The location, size, survival and aesthetics of the park landscape all offer great restoration potential for use as an amenity asset. It is fortunate that it has managed to survive in the midst of a heavily urbanised area and remained as an extraordinarily valuable landscape resource. One of the most distinctive elements of this landscape is the contrast between the elevated, open landscape in the western part of the park and the heavily enclosed landscape along the valley bottom that the lakes and woodland occupy. Almost all the dramatic long views are from this higher and rather wild landscape. If this is left to nature, as it has been for decades, plant growth and weather will ensure that it will scrub over and lose its aesthetic. The sequence of Google Earth aerial photographs show that even in the past ten years, large amounts of landscape definition have been lost to through plant and tree coverage. The more abandoned the landscape appears, the less value it holds for the community around it, vandalism becomes embedded and the whole cycle becomes a spiral of destruction and degradation, as illustrated by Sutton's Bridge and the Hall itself.

The Great Barr Park landscape is demonstrably important in many aspects; its history, cultural and intellectual influences and aesthetic appeal are all of significance. Its potential amenity value merits sensitive and appropriate restoration as a well-used open space, which will be less susceptible to vandalism and that offers recreational opportunities for the local population whilst maintaining its original landscape design.

The potential impact of any proposed development

An enabling development has been proposed which could generate sufficient income to restore the park as closely as possible to its appearance in the 1840s. This proposal would, however, require development within the park itself. Development within the park would, by its very nature, be intrusive. Insensitive development could potentially affect the spatial and historical setting of the park through alteration of the original design, resulting in a fragmented and aesthetically distorted landscape. However, the impact of development would be reduced if treated sensitively and the negative effects of such development would have to be balanced against significant potential benefits to the park as a whole.

Ideally, development should be confined to sites already affected by previous intrusive development, for example the former male buildings of the St Margaret's Hospital site. This area could be screened from the rest of the landscape and would become contiguous with the recently constructed housing estates on the eastern half of the site. However, this land is not held by the current owners of the main body of the park. Other potential sites might include the area of parkland to the south of the motorway which has been cut off from the remainder.

Development on elevated land, if positioned inappropriately, would break the ridge line, interrupt views and be physically intrusive. It could also undermine the spatial association of the open park in relation to the rest of the landscape and compromise the underlying design. To reduce these

potential detrimental effects upon the park setting it is recommended that construction is located in areas of least visual impact and in the vicinity of previous urban expansion rather than in open areas of the parkland.

Aside from the effect on the setting of the main park, any building work taking place in the north-western part of the site in particular could potentially have an impact upon the setting and survival of the heritage assets associated with medieval activity in this area. An archaeological evaluation to establish the presence, nature and extent of any deposits would be recommended as an initial mitigation strategy in this instance due to the high potential for medieval activity related to the moated site. Further works could be required as a result of this, though these will not necessarily prevent development.

Similarly, any works taking place in the southern part of the park, close to the end of 'Big Pool', may impact upon later medieval and early post-medieval deposits associated with the mill site. An archaeological evaluation would again be recommended in this area as a way of attempting to locate the mill site and test for the survival of deposits from this period.

Overall, it is suggested that restoration work is focused upon reinvigoration of the original landscape design, rather than an introduction of new vistas or features, and that if enabling development does take place it is located on sites of least negative visual impact upon the setting of the park or in areas already affected by previous intrusive development.

A number of other potential areas for housing development have been considered by the client and an area on the west side of the ornamental lakes has been deemed the least visually intrusive area. With the current overgrown nature of the woodland here, development along the lakes would not be visible from Great Barr Hall.

In a companion scheme to any development that may take place here, restoration of the original form of the woodlands along the west of the lakes has the potential to enhance the significance of the park and improve its setting. For instance, and as mentioned above, Gilbert's Wood was historically separate from the wooded areas along the lakes, which is no longer the case.

8 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

A desk-based assessment was undertaken to detail the historic and archaeological landscape context for Great Barr Park, Great Barr, Walsall. It was carried out on behalf of Mr Mike Kalam of Lapworth Architects (the Client) in response to a brief (the Brief) prepared by Mike Shaw, Walsall Council Archaeological Advisor.

Great Barr Park is a Grade II registered park that surrounds Great Barr Hall, a Grade II listed building. At present, these are on the Heritage at Risk Register maintained by English Heritage due to the poor condition and vulnerability of both.*

Proposals for restoration of the hall and park are currently under discussion and additionally, planning permission is being sought for areas of residential development within the park area. This report is intended to provide the necessary historic and landscape contextual information for consideration in relation to all of these proposals for the future of the parkland. It details and assesses the nature, importance, extent and significance of the heritage assets (and potential heritage assets) that could be affected by any restorative or development work in the park.

A number of previous projects have been undertaken within the park area, the most extensive and comprehensive of which was the seminal work undertaken by the de Bois landscape survey group

between January and August 1985. As a result, this assessment acts as a process of validation and update, with the historical context of Great Barr and the current state of the features within the landscape park evaluated and assessed to provide an analysis of the current condition of the surviving features.

Finally, the assessment outlines the potential for restoration of the landscape and considers the potential impact of any development proposals that are under discussion for planning permission. It also offers some recommendations that may mitigate the impact of possible development in the park.

9 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project: Mike Kalam (Lapworth Architects), Mike Shaw (Walsall Council Archaeological Advisor) and Peter Allen (local researcher).

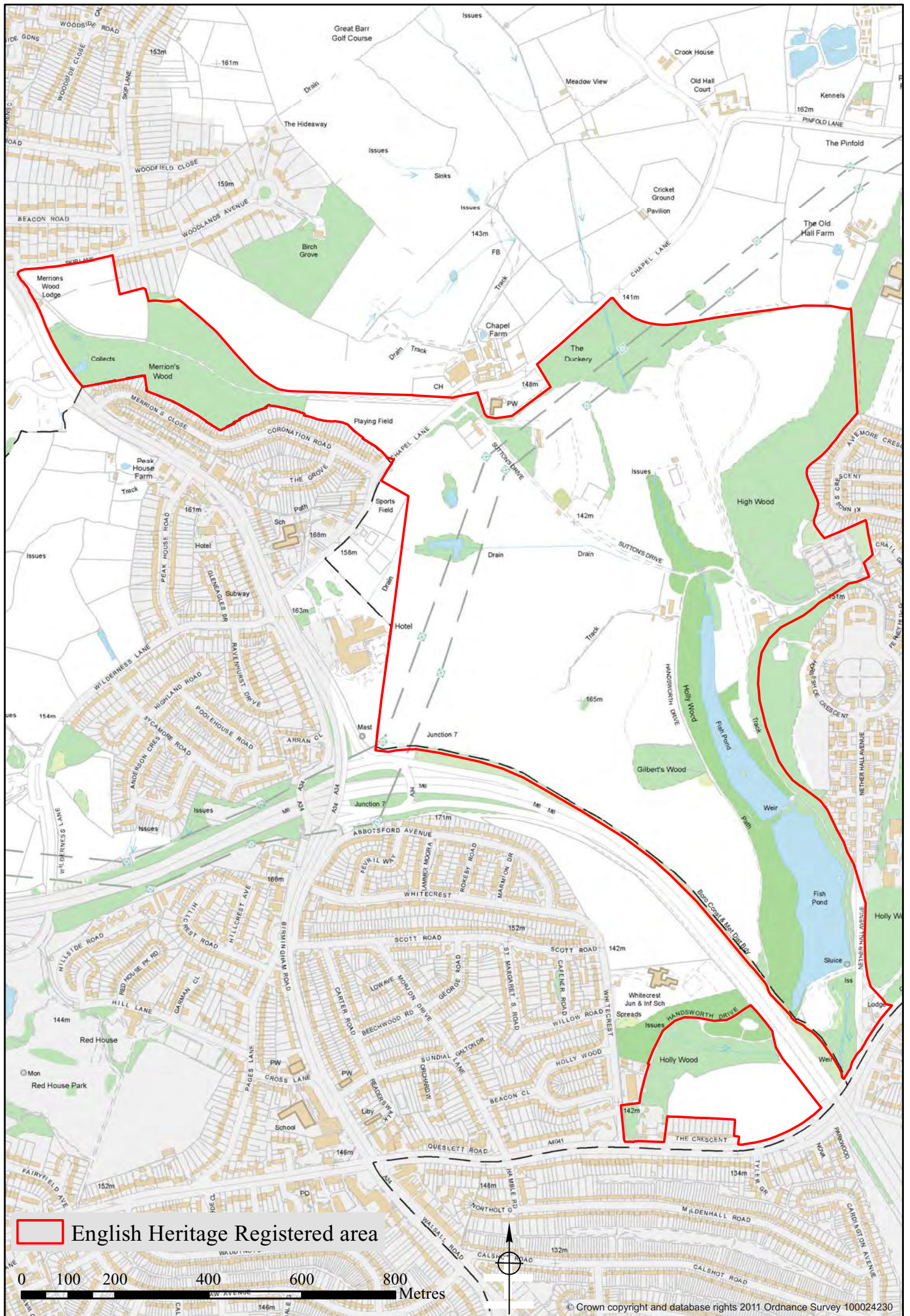


Figure 1: Registered Area of Park on modern map

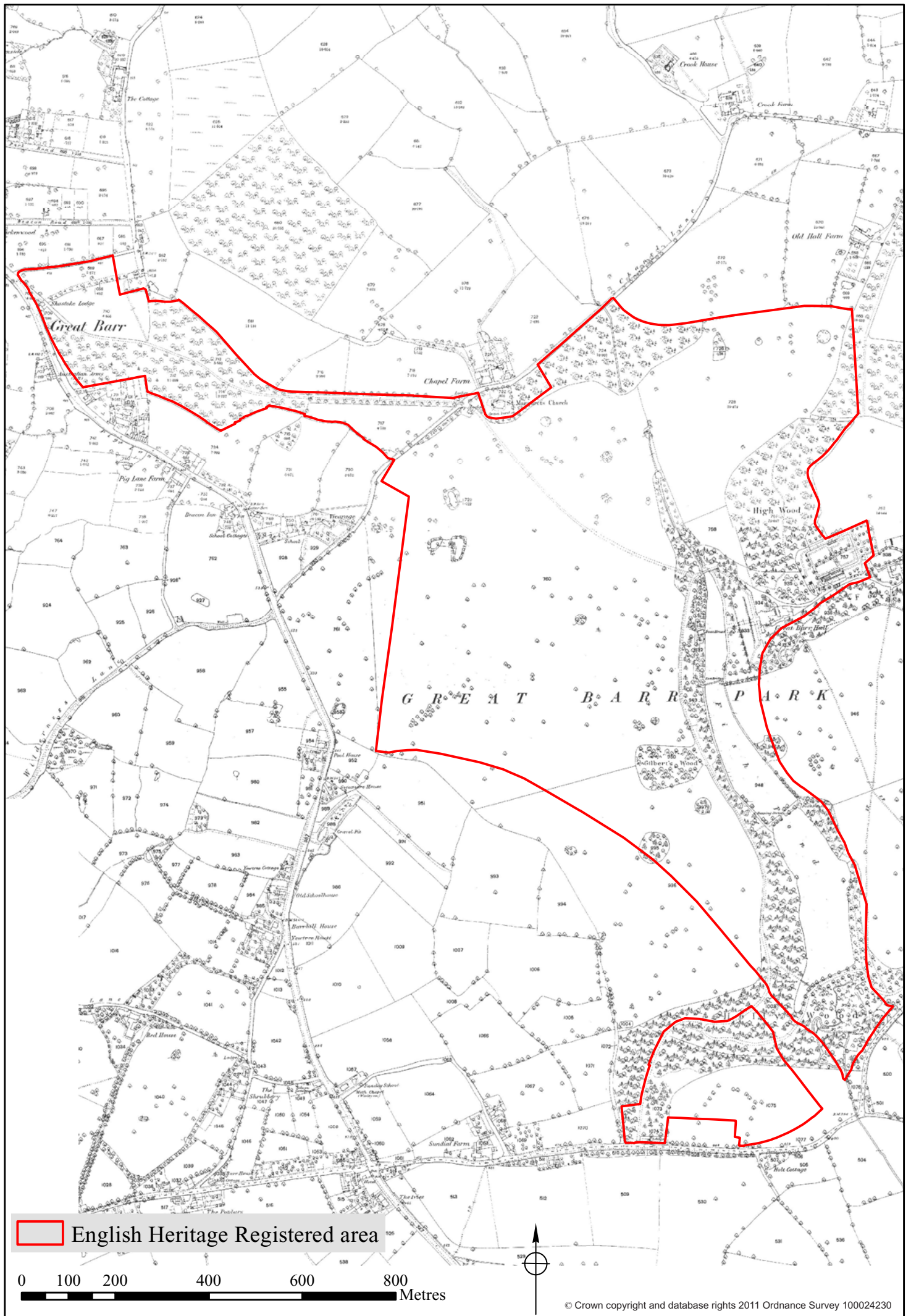


Figure 2: Registered Area of Park on 1886 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition

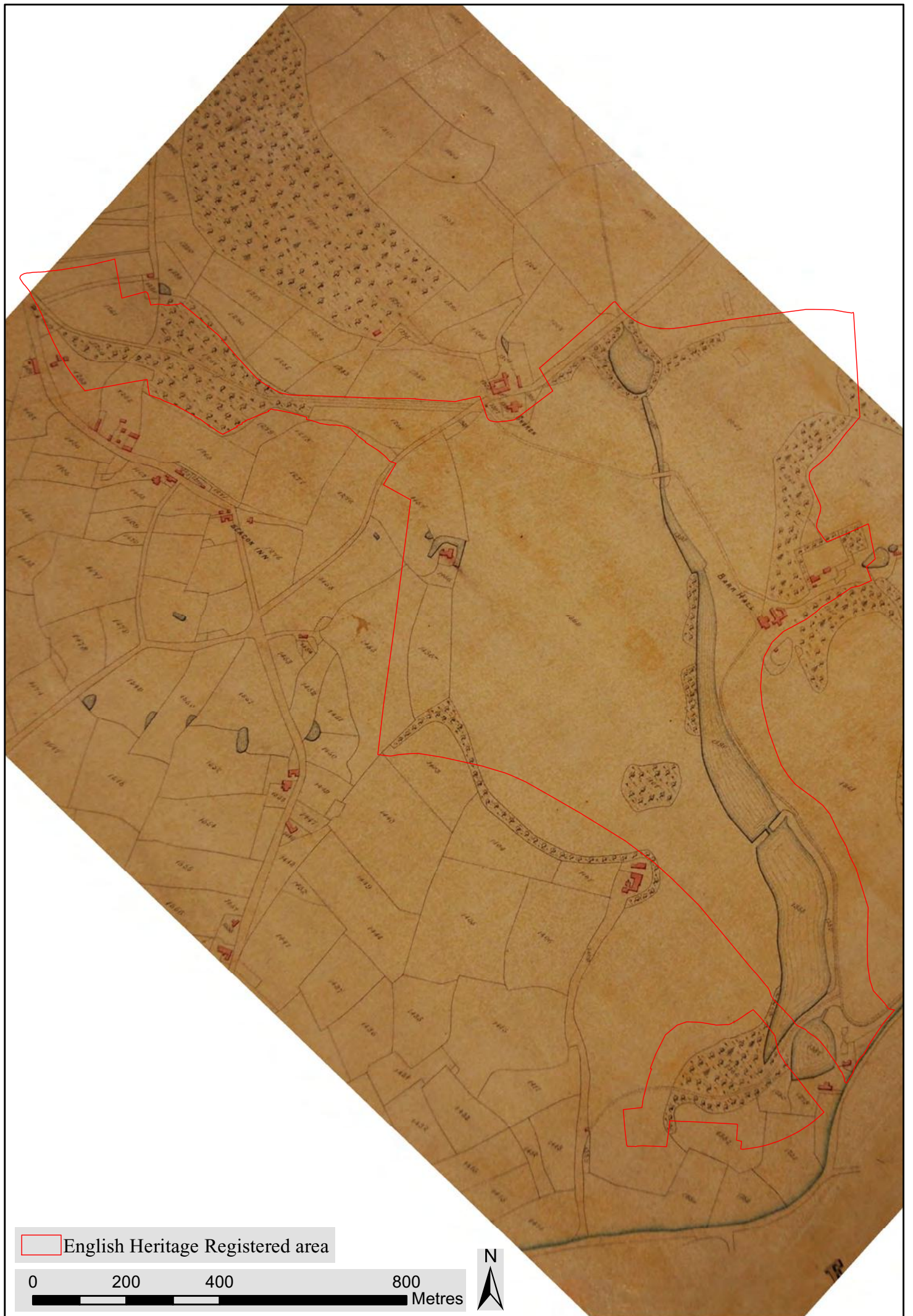


Figure 3: Registered Area of Park on extract from 1845 Great Barr Parish map



Figure 4: Approximate location of Registered Area of Park on extract from Yates' 1798 map

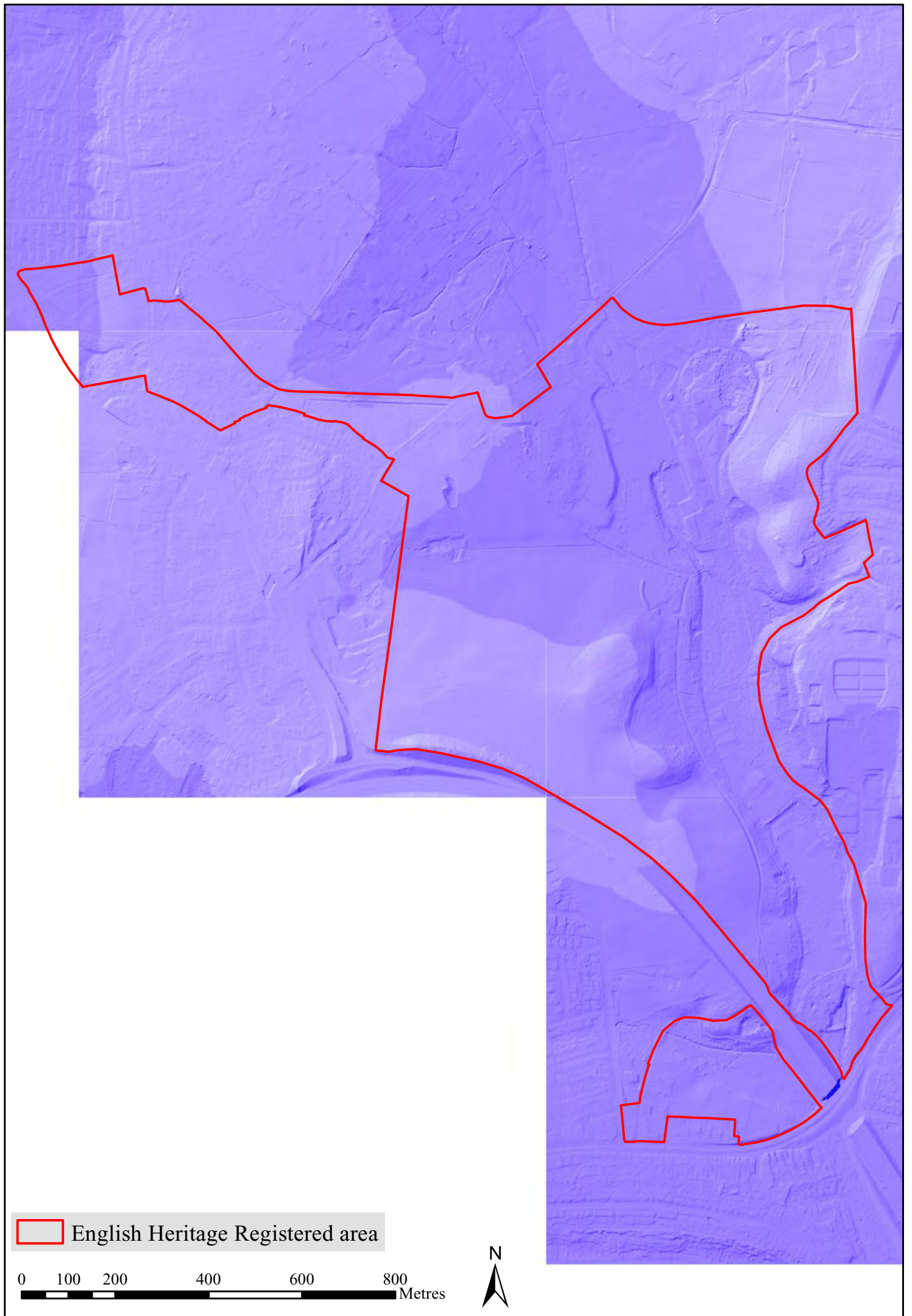


Figure 5: Registered Area of Park with LiDAR base

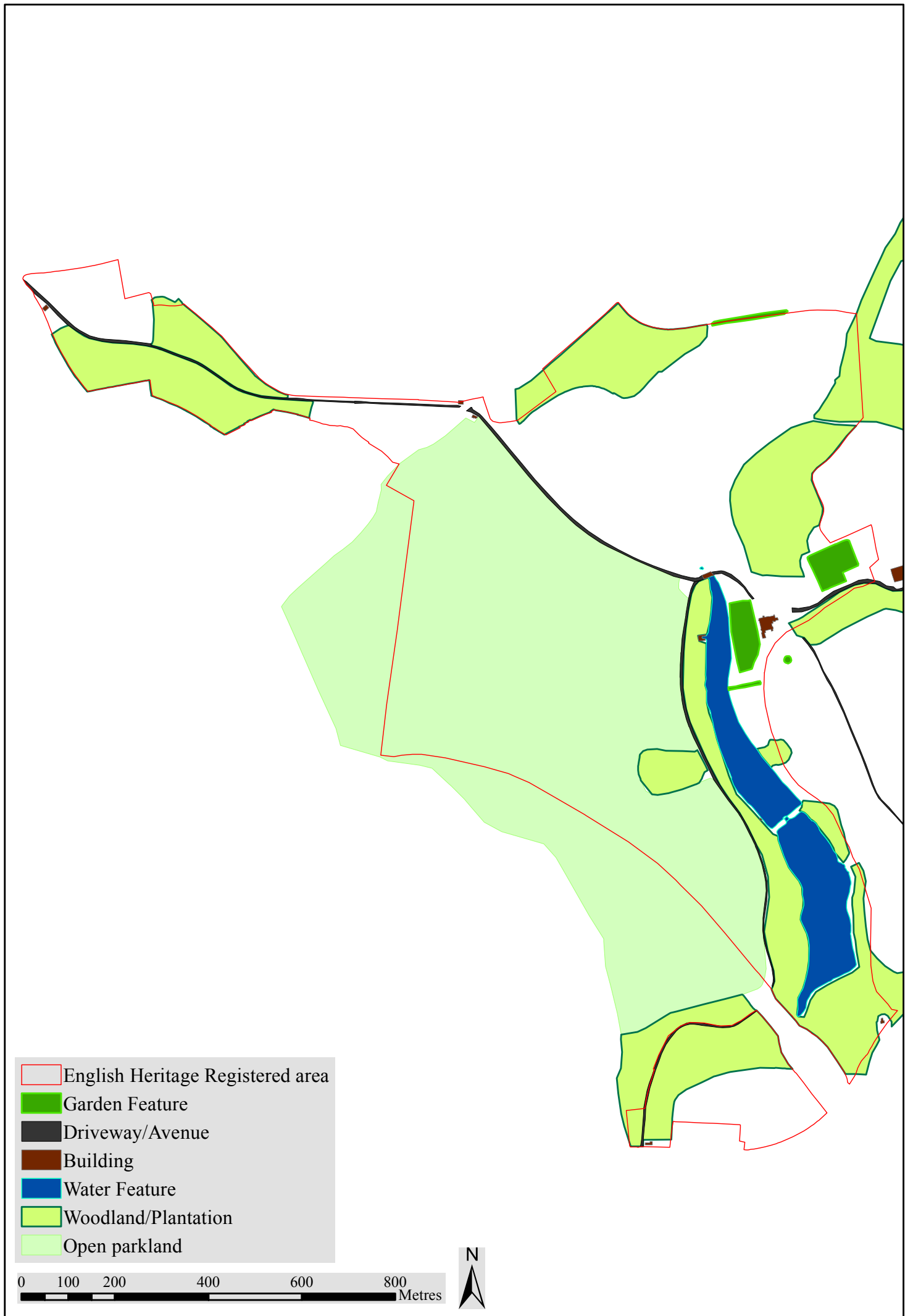


Figure 6: Main park features

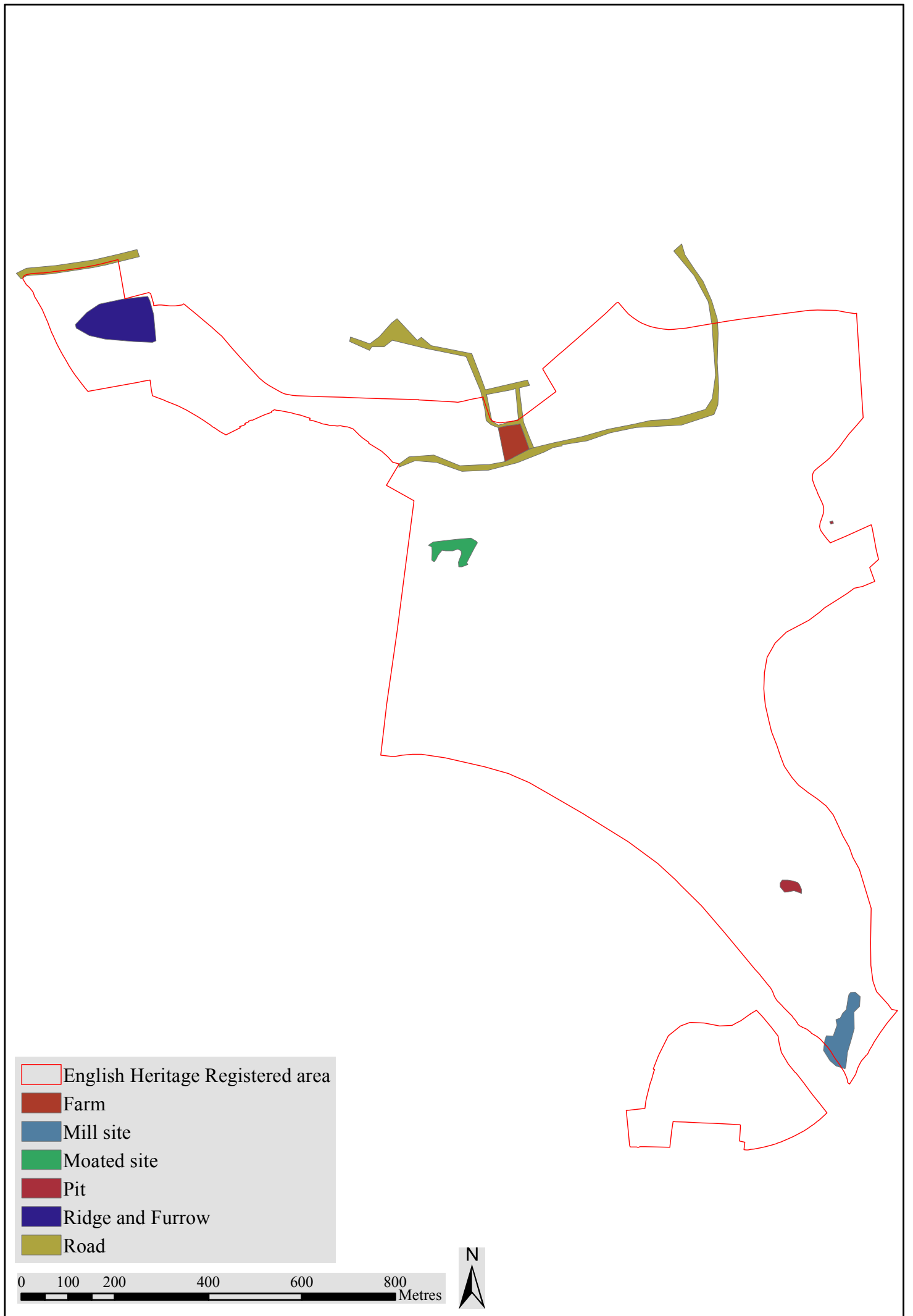


Figure 7: Other archaeological features

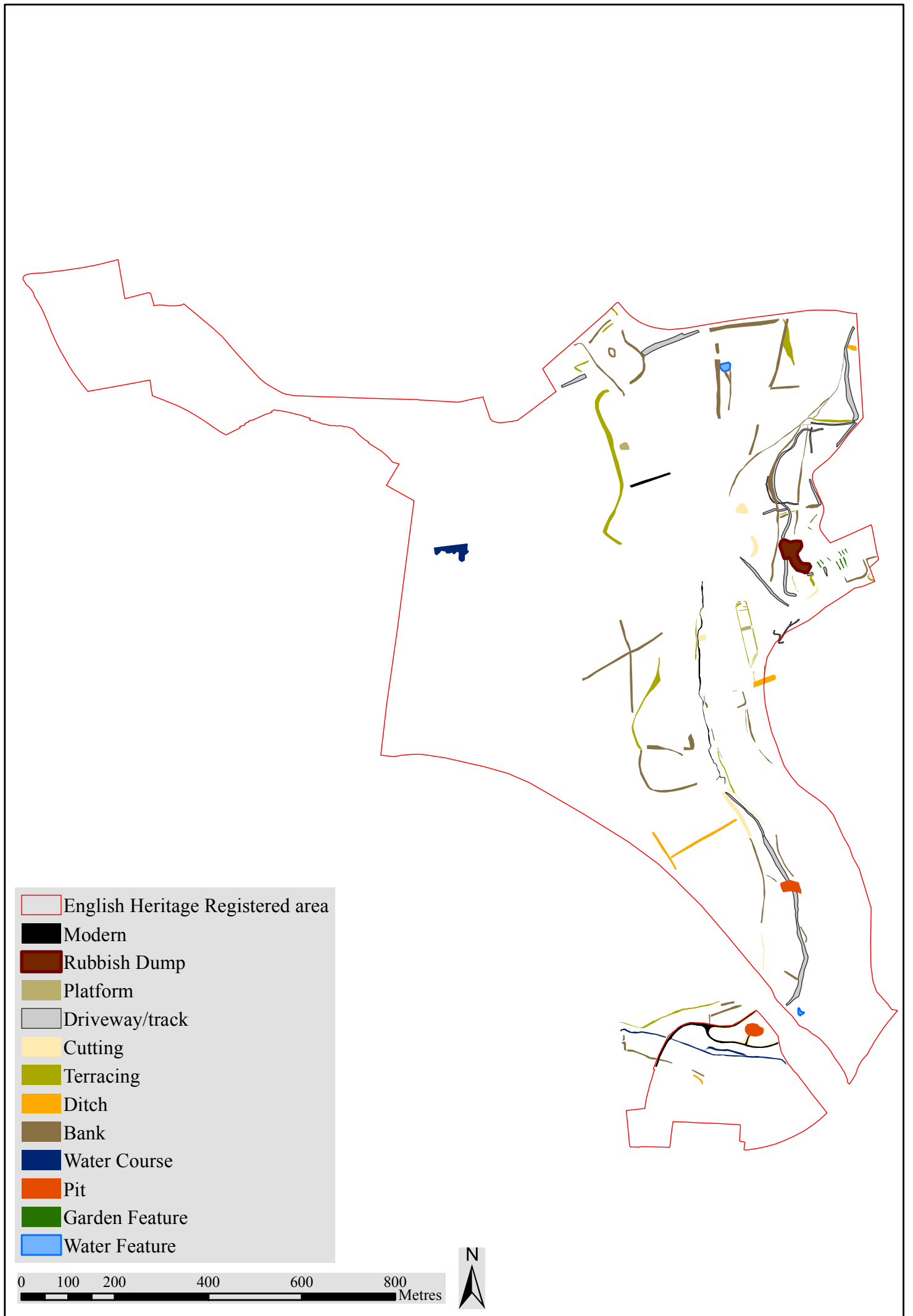


Figure 8: Archaeological features surveyed in 1985

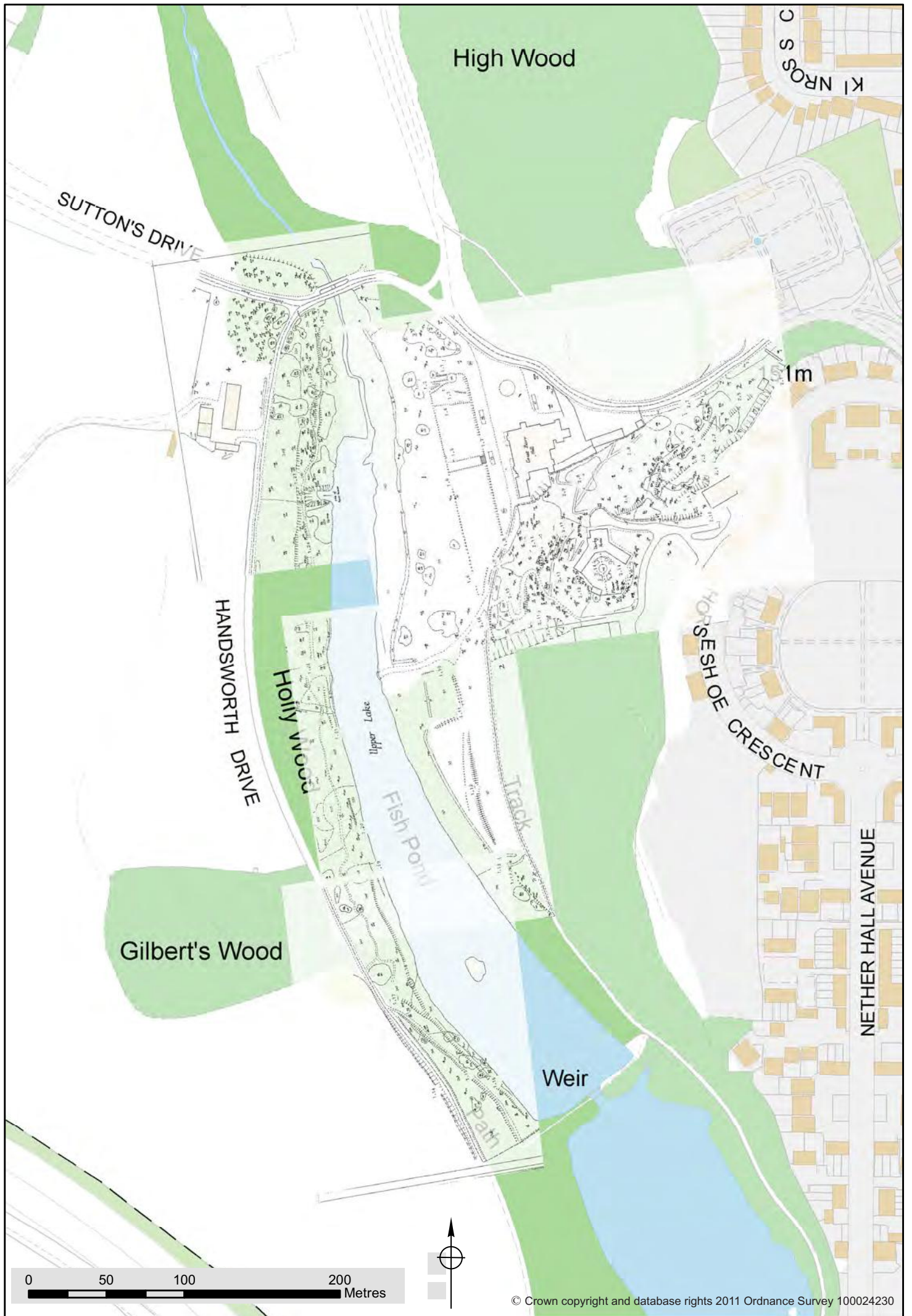


Figure 9: Plans of features in compartments 1 and 2 from 1985 de Bois survey

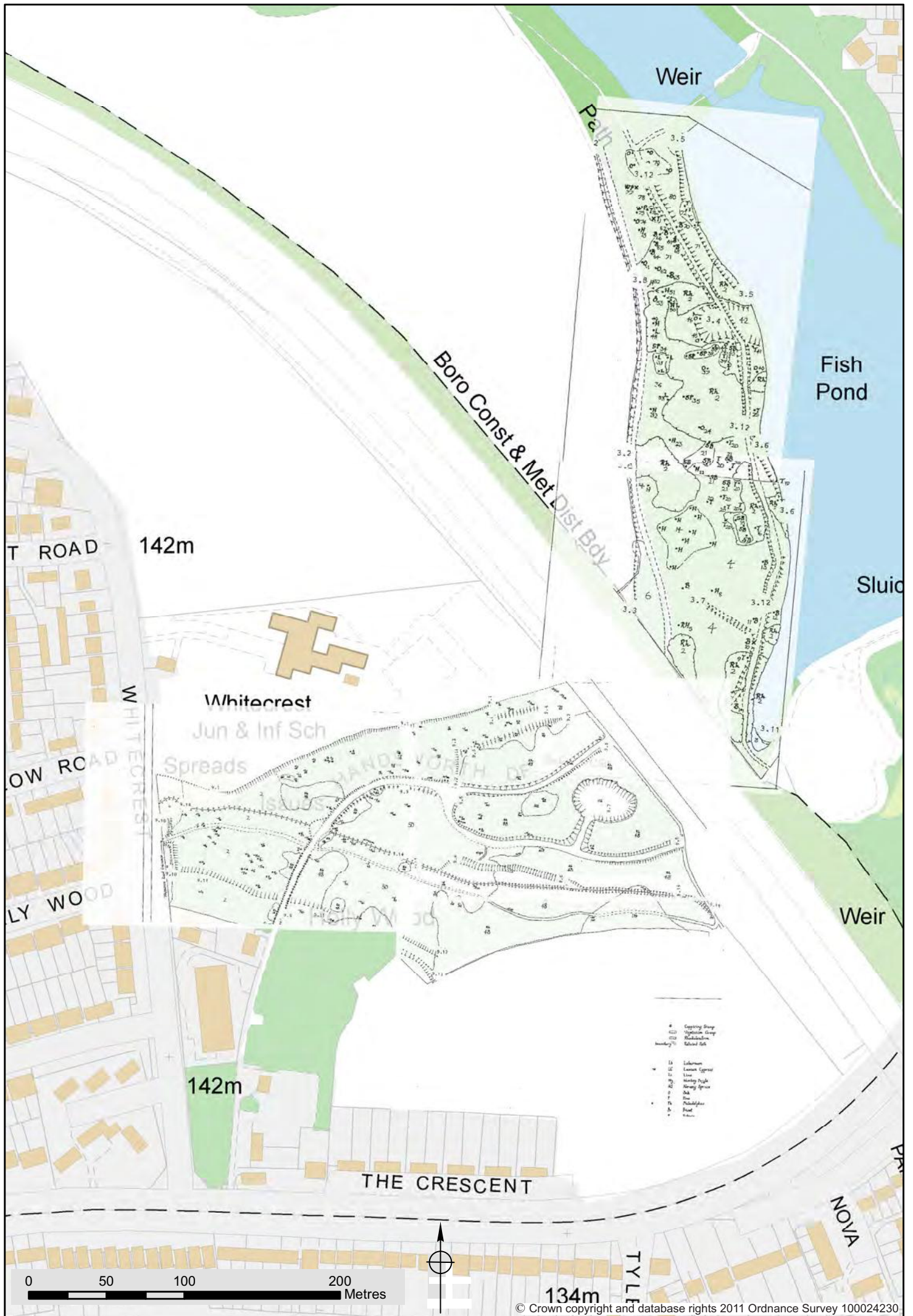


Figure 10: Plans of features in compartments 3 and 9 from 1985 de Bois survey

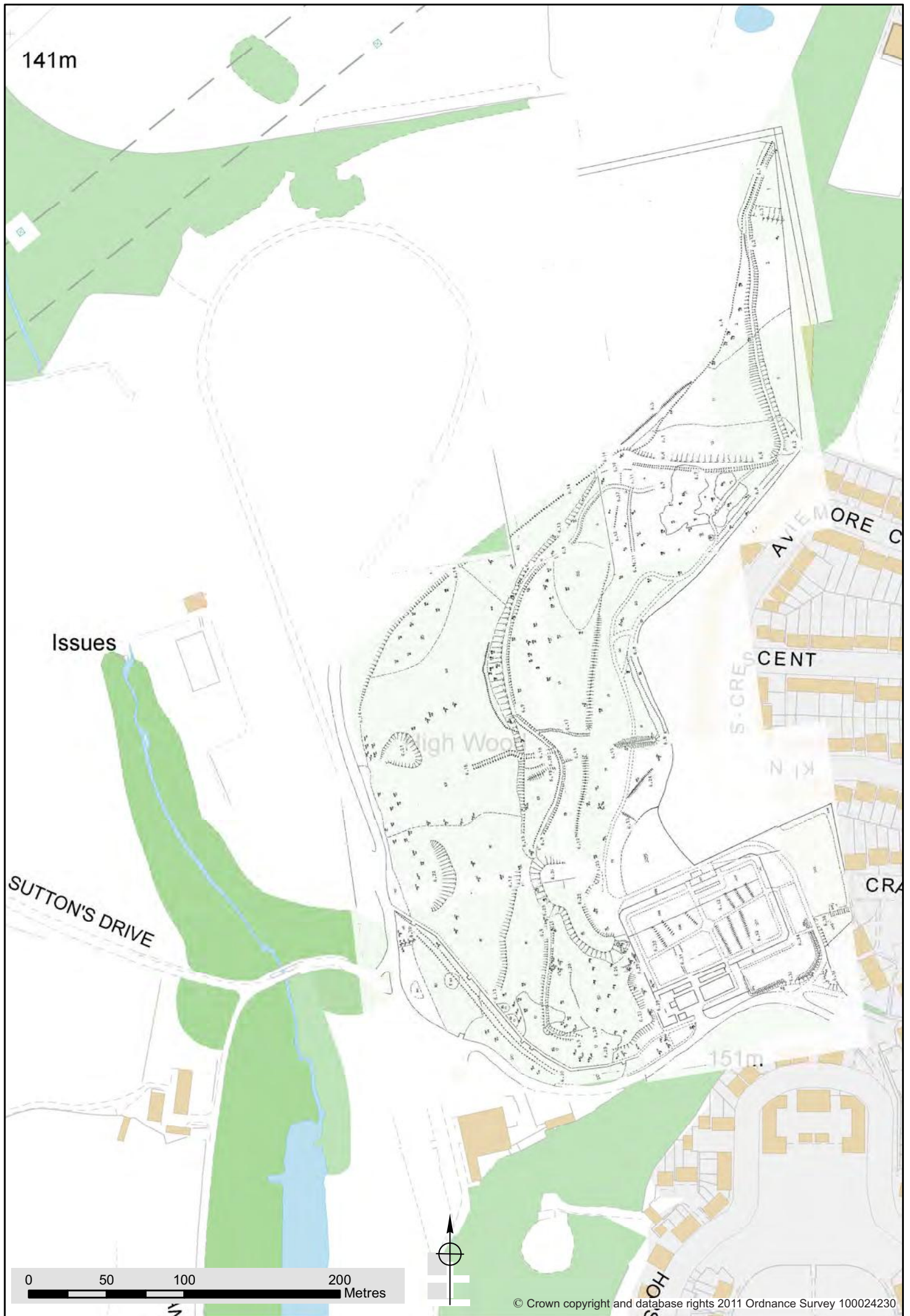


Figure 11: Plans of features in compartment 6 from 1985 de Bois survey

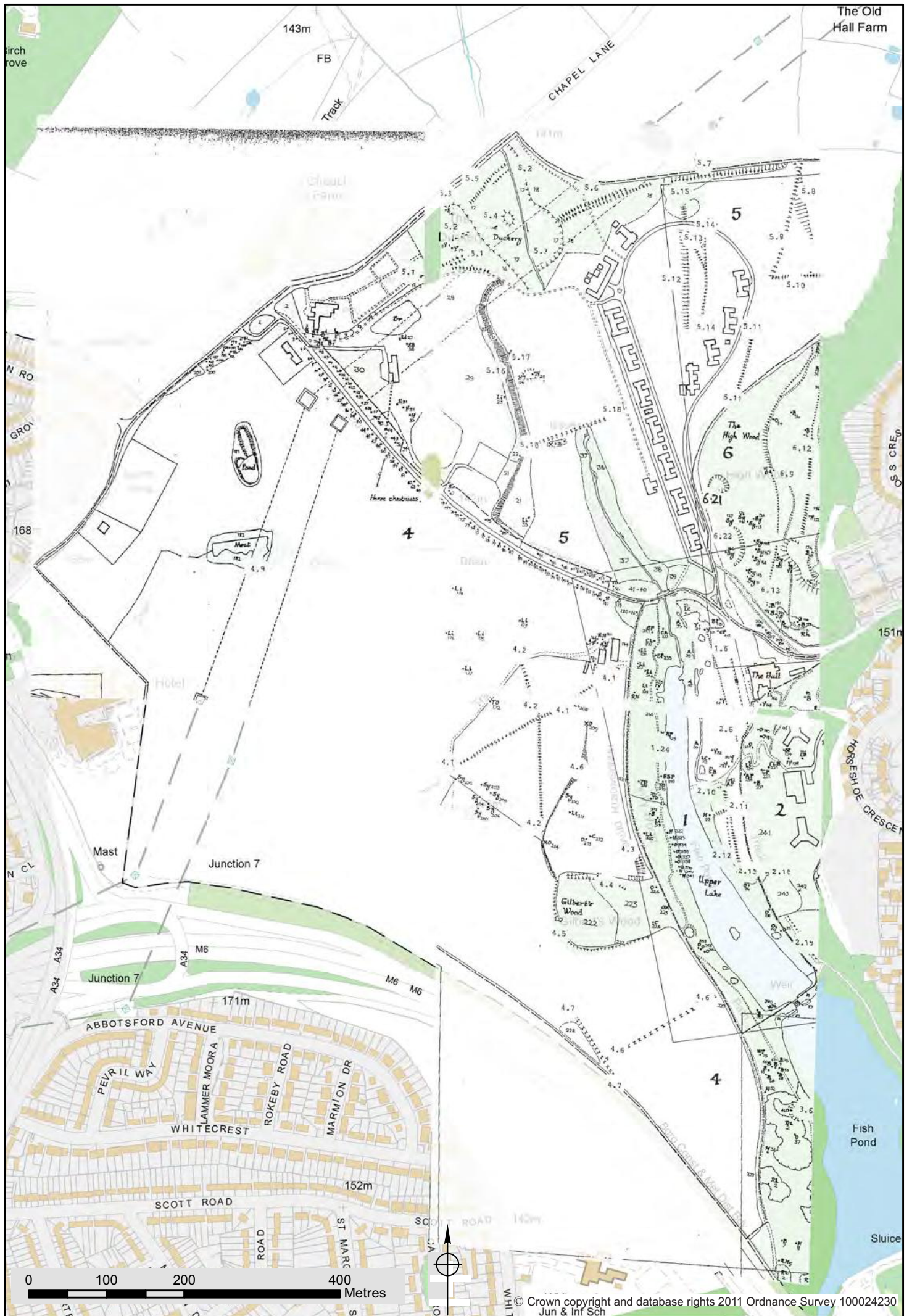


Figure 12: Plans of features in compartments 4 and 5 from 1985 de Bois survey

Plates



Plate 1: *Great Barr Park viewed from the west*



Plate 2: *The open parkland north of Gilbert's Wood*



Plate 3: *Viewpoint 8 – the view from Gilbert's Wood*



Plate 4: *View facing north across upper lake from site of weir*



Plate 5: *View of 'Big Pool' facing north*



Plate 6: *The weir between the upper and lower lakes*



Plate 7: The silted up northern end of the upper lake



Plate 8: Embayment area of 1863 boat house, west side of upper lake



Plate 9: *Site of possible first cascade, north of Sutton's Bridge*



Plate 10: *Current condition of Sutton's Bridge*



Plate 11: *Vandalised pediment knocked off Sutton's Bridge*



Plate 12: *Current condition of Great Barr Hall*



Plate 13: *Demolition rubble on the site of former hospital buildings*



Plate 14: *Open parkland south of moated site*



Plate 15: *Current remains of moated site*



Plate 16: *Possible remains of one of Repton's tree clumps*



Plate 17: *Handsworth Drive facing south*



Plate 18: *Handsworth Lodge*



Plate 19: *Beech trees marking end of walk along upper lake*



Plate 20: *Merrion's Lodge*



Plate 21: *View east along Walsall Approach towards church*



Plate 22: *Current condition of Sutton's Drive*



Plate 23: *Security around Great Barr Hall*



Plate 24: *Viewpoints 1, 2, and 3 representative view*



Plate 25: *Condition of steps onto garden terrace by hall*



Plate 26: *View of walled kitchen garden from south-west corner*



Plate 27: *Terracing in kitchen garden, a possible fernery*



Plate 28: *Remains of park boundary wall on Chapel Lane*
