

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING
BRIEF AT
WICHENFORD COURT,
WICHENFORD,
WORCESTERSHIRE

Simon Sworn

With a contribution by Alan Jacobs

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Project 2888
Report 1423
WSM 35071

Archaeological watching brief at Wichenford Court, Wichenford, Worcestershire

Simon Sworn

Background information

<i>Client</i>	Mr Adam Barwell
<i>Site address</i>	Wichenford Court, Wichenford, Worcestershire, WR6 6XY
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SO 7878 5983
<i>Historic Environment Record reference</i>	WSM 35071
<i>Planning authority</i>	Malvern Hills District Council
<i>reference</i>	MH/05/1195
<i>Brief</i>	HEAS 2006a
<i>Project design</i>	HEAS 2006b
<i>Project parameters</i>	IFA 1999

Previous archaeological work on the site

Although there have been no previous archaeological investigations undertaken on site, information contained within the Historic Environment Record indicates that there is the potential for deposits from the Roman period through to the post-medieval.

Wichenford Court lies a quarter of a mile to the southeast of the village. The original court, once home to the Washbourne family was one of the largest mansions in the county, which also included its own moat and drawbridge (WSM 03401). The present house dates from the 15th century, although it was extensively rebuilt in 1712. By 1866 only part of the building remained, used as a farmhouse (VCH III, 561). The earlier moat with corner bastions is depicted on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey one-inch map of 1828, although by 1885 only narrow sections of the north and east arms remained (WSM 28935, Fig 5). No doubt the court had gardens too and a formal garden was re-established in the 20th century.

The solid geology is Mercian Mudstone also known as Keuper Marl and the soils are fine loamy silts over clays (Ragg *et al* 1984).

Previous archaeological work on associated sites

No archaeological excavations have taken place within the immediate vicinity of Wichenford Court, although Roman coins dating from the time of Victorinus (AD 268-270/1) and Constans (AD 337-350) have been found nearby (VCH III, 562).

A fieldwalking survey, carried out 1 mile to the west of Wichenford Court, located a number of flint artifacts from the late Mesolithic to the later Neolithic/Early Bronze Age. Pottery was also recovered relating to occupation from the Roman, medieval and post-medieval periods (Bryant 2004).

Aims

The aim of the watching brief was to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible.

Methods

General specification for fieldwork	CAS 1995
Sources consulted	HER
	Sources cited by the HER
	1 st edition Ordnance Survey Map 1885
Dates of fieldwork	22 nd February - 24 th March 2006
Area of site	c 28.20m ² Fig 2
Dimensions of excavated areas observed	Trench 1 length 16.75m width 0.60m depth 1.40m (max)
	Trench 2 length 23m width 1.80m (max) depth 0.95m (max)

Access to or visibility of deposits

Observation of the excavated areas was undertaken during and after the machine excavation of two foundation trenches. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits, although any less clear may have not been identified. Selected areas were cleaned by hand.

Statement of confidence

Access to, and visibility of, deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

Results

Table 1: Deposit description

Context	Type Colour Texture	Description	Date	Interpretation	Depth (below ground level)
101	Brick wall	2 courses wide and 7 courses deep remaining when observed (bricks 220 x 100 x 90mm), bonded with white cement.	Modern	Partially demolished wall to southern extension of main building. Sat on concrete footing 102	0-0.50m
102	Solid grey concrete	Concrete with occasional reused sandstone blocks	Modern	Footing for wall 101	0.50-0.65m
103	Mid-dark brown moderately compact silty clay	Frequent brick, concrete and charcoal inclusions	Modern	Mixed garden soil	0.09-0.86m
104	Light brown/yellow moderately compact silty clay	Very occasional small charcoal flecks		Natural	0.05-1.10m+
105	East-west brick wall	2 courses wide and 6 courses deep remaining when observed (bricks 240 x 90 x 80mm), bonded with white cement and mortar.	Modern	External brick wall with concrete footing	0-0.53m
106	North-south brick wall	2/3 courses wide and 4 courses deep (bricks 230 x 110 x 50mm), bonded with white/yellow mortar.	17 th century	Brick wall	0.28-0.52m
107	Concrete		Modern	Levelling layer	0-0.06m
108	Sand	Loose yellow/orange 'building' sand	Modern	Levelling/make-up layer	0.07-0.22m
109	Stone surface	Flagstones	Modern	External surface	0-0.15m
110	Concrete	Poured concrete slab	Modern	Floor of demolished extension to south of present building	0-0.10m
111	Firm blue/grey silty clay	Higher frequency of sandy red clay below 1.40m deep		Natural	0.28-1.40m+
112	Dark grey sub-angular gravels	Silty sand matrix	Modern	Present ground surface	0-0.05m
113	Grey sub-angular gravels	Light blue/grey silty sand matrix	Modern	Make-up for present ground surface	0.05-0.07m
114	Light grey silty sand	Frequent brick, tile and sandstone rubble	Post-medieval/Modern	Made ground/dumped material	0.05-0.14m
115	Sandstones	Roughly hewn blocks, c400 x 200 x 200mm. Fill of 117	Post-medieval/modern	Possible wall structure, though unclear.	0.05-0.25m
116	Firm dark grey/brown silty clay	Frequent charcoal flecks, occasional sandstone fragments. Fill of 117	Post-medieval/modern	Fill of pit (?) cut	0.05-0.30m
117	Partially exposed cut	Only visible in section. Steep, concave sides with flat base. Filled by 115 and 116	Post-medieval/modern	Undefined cut	0.05-0.30m

Artefact analysis by Alan Jacobs

Artefact recovery policy

All artefacts from the area of salvage recording were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended).

Method of analysis

All hand-retrieved finds were examined and a primary record was made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated and a *terminus post quem* date produced for each stratified context.

Pottery was examined under x20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the Service (Hurst and Rees 1992).

Artefactual analysis

The pottery assemblage retrieved from the excavated area consisted of five sherds of pottery weighing 41g, fragments of tile, brick, mortar and iron. The group came from two stratified contexts and could be dated from the post-medieval to the modern period (Table 2). The level of preservation was generally good with the majority of sherds displaying low levels of abrasion.

All sherds have been grouped and quantified according to fabric type (Table 2). A total of two diagnostic form sherds were present, other sherds were dated by fabric type to the general period or production span. Where mentioned, all specific fabrics are referenced to the county type series (Hurst 1992; Hurst and Rees 1992).

Table 2: Quantification of the assemblage

Context	Material	Type	Total	Weight
103	Brick	Post-medieval-modern	4	245
103	Pottery	post-medieval (fabric 78)	1	13
106	Brick	Post-medieval (17 th century)	3	5430
114	Brick	Post-medieval-modern	7	74
114	Iron	Nail	1	19
114	Mortar	Post-medieval-modern	1	28
114	Pottery	Post-medieval (fabric 78 & 91)	2	28
114	Tile	Post-medieval	5	132
116	Brick/tile	Post-medieval-modern	1	59
116	Mortar	Post-medieval-modern	2	1
116	Pottery	Post-medieval (fabric 91)	3	13
116	Tile	Post-medieval	1	12

Only six fragments of post-medieval pottery were recovered, two sherds of red sandy ware (Fabric 78) one in the form of a small hollow ware vessel (context 114), dating to the 17th-18th century, and another a small fragment of a pancheon or flat ware form (context 103) of 18th century date. The only other fabric represented consisted of four sherds of post-medieval buff ware (Fabric 91). Two distinct forms were definable, that of a slip glazed platter or pie dish with combed decoration (context 114), and another example with trail decoration (context 116). Both forms were clearly of 18th century date.

In addition post-medieval brick samples were recovered (context 106), these included fragments of a complete brick two and a quarter inches thick, which dates this form to the 17th-early 18th century. An earlier example of a rubbed brick of only two inches thickness was also recovered, this was rounded at one end and could possibly date to the late 16th century but is most likely to be of 17th century date. Also a number of fragments of post-medieval or modern brick were recovered

(contexts 114 and 116), as well as fragments of post-medieval tile. Samples of lime mortar were recovered that date from before 1850. A single square sectioned handmade iron nail was recovered, this could not be more closely dated.

Significance

In conclusion the small quantity of finds makes this assemblage of very limited archaeological interest. The recovery of early bricks of 17th century date is significant from this area of the county, and included an unusual rubbed brick of possibly even earlier dating. This is likely to have been re-used in the later structure. The other finds recovered most probably represent very residual material of 18th century date.

Discussion

Observations were undertaken during and after the excavation of two machine-dug foundation trenches to the south of the present dwelling (Fig 3). The trench closest to the existing building (Trench 1) was located so that it butted up against the existing footing for the now demolished earlier extension to the south of the main building. Most of the main structural deposits relate directly to this extension: the brick walls and concrete foundations (101, 102 and 105), the internal concrete slab (110) and the exterior hard standing to the west (109), with its associated make-up layers (107 and 108).

The external wall (105) and its associated concrete footing was not removed completely, though in a small area near to the present building the underlying concrete footing was removed to establish its structural integrity with a view to incorporating this into the new extension. Below this concrete footing a small section of brick structure (106) was revealed. This brick structure appeared to be the extant remains of a north-south aligned wall. The structure was two-three courses wide and four courses deep. The brick dimensions indicated a date range of the 17th–18th century, though an earlier example of a late 16th–early 17th brick had also been included. Though only partially exposed, this brick structure appeared to be the remains of a foundation of a wall that was aligned with the western wall of the present building, though extending further southwards.

A layer of mixed ‘garden soil’ (103) was also revealed in this trench, although this would appear to be either modern or contains modern disturbance as the deposits contained fragments of concrete and post-medieval/modern brick, although the pottery recovered was of 18th century date.

The present gravel yard surface and the garden surface were seen to be directly overlying the natural deposits (111) throughout the majority of Trench 2. A number of services cut into the natural matrix towards the middle of the trench, linking the main building and the numerous outbuildings. In the southwest corner of the trench a small feature (cut 117) was observed and was mainly visible in the southern section (Fig 4, section 2:). This small, probable pit, feature contained a number of roughly hewn sandstone blocks, although they appeared not to be part of an *in situ* structure. The main fill of this feature contained firm dark grey/brown silty clay (116). The pottery suggested a 17th–18th century date, although a number of brick fragments of post-medieval/modern date were also found within the deposit. This feature was overlain by a thin deposit (114) of light grey silty sand, which contained frequent post-medieval/modern brick, tile and sandstone rubble. It is considered to be a thin spread of demolition material or make-up for the present exterior yard surface.

The underlying natural deposits were observed in both trenches and consisted of firm blue/grey silty clay (111), which was overlain by light brown/yellow moderately compact silty clay (104). The upper deposit contained few small fragments of charcoal, though it appeared that these were the result of natural activity rather than human disturbance.

Conclusions

Documentary, cartographic and topographic evidence suggests activity at Wichenford Court since at least the medieval period. However no evidence for this was revealed during the investigation.

The excavations for the two foundation trenches mainly revealed areas of modern disturbance related to the construction of the now demolished modern brick extension to the south of the main building, plus associated exterior surfaces and existing services.

The partially exposed wall structure in Trench 1 was the earliest identifiable activity noted during the project. The date range of the bricks within this structure would suggest that this wall was possibly constructed during extensive alterations undertaken in 1712.

The limited nature of the works and their location adjacent to the present house, which has undergone substantial alteration in the modern period, may be the main reason for the paucity of early deposits. The laying out of the modern formal garden coupled with alterations and extensions to the building, particularly in the 20th century, will have had a detrimental effect on earlier archaeological remains. Thus the lack of deposits predating the post-medieval and the observation of the undisturbed natural clays suggests that either later activity has entirely removed all trace of earlier activity, or simply that there were no major structures or deep features to the rear of the present building in the medieval period.

Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service 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.

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Mr A. Barwell at Wichenford Court, Wichenford, Worcestershire (NGR ref SO 7878 5983; HER ref WSM 35071). Excavations for two foundation trenches revealed mainly areas of modern disturbance that relate to the construction of a now demolished brick extension to the south of the main building, with associated exterior surfaces and existing services. Close to the rear of the present building a small and partially exposed brick wall was observed, aligned north–south, which appears to be a continuation of the present west wall of the main building. The brick dimensions indicate a possible construction date of late 17th–early 18th century, which suggests that the wall may be associated with major refurbishments documented in 1712. Otherwise only modern features were observed elsewhere. It is unclear if this lack of earlier structures, deposits and artefacts is due to the limited nature of the groundworks and modern truncation, or truly reflects a lack of activity to the south of the present house prior to the post-medieval period.

Archive

Fieldwork progress records AS2	1
Photographic register AS3	1
Digital photographs	65
Abbreviated context records AS40	17
Drawing register AS4	1
Drawings	7
Boxes of finds	1

The project archive is intended to be placed at: Worcestershire County Museum
 Hartlebury Castle, Hartlebury
 Near Kidderminster
 Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
 01299 250416

Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Mr Adam Barwell (Wichenford Court), Mr Julian Westcott (Paul Westcott Homes) and Mr Mike Glyde (Historic Environment Planning Advisor, Worcestershire County Council).

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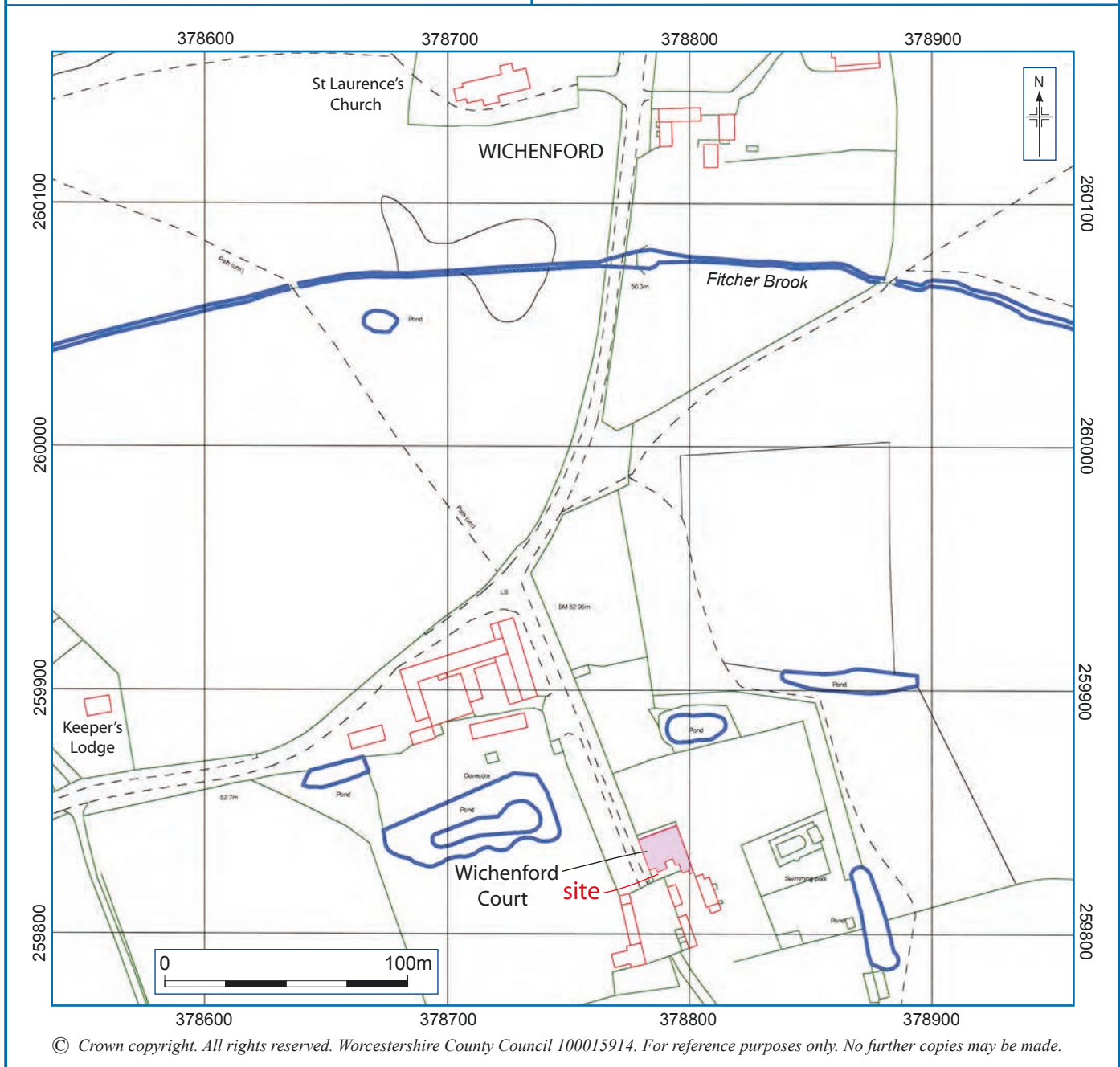
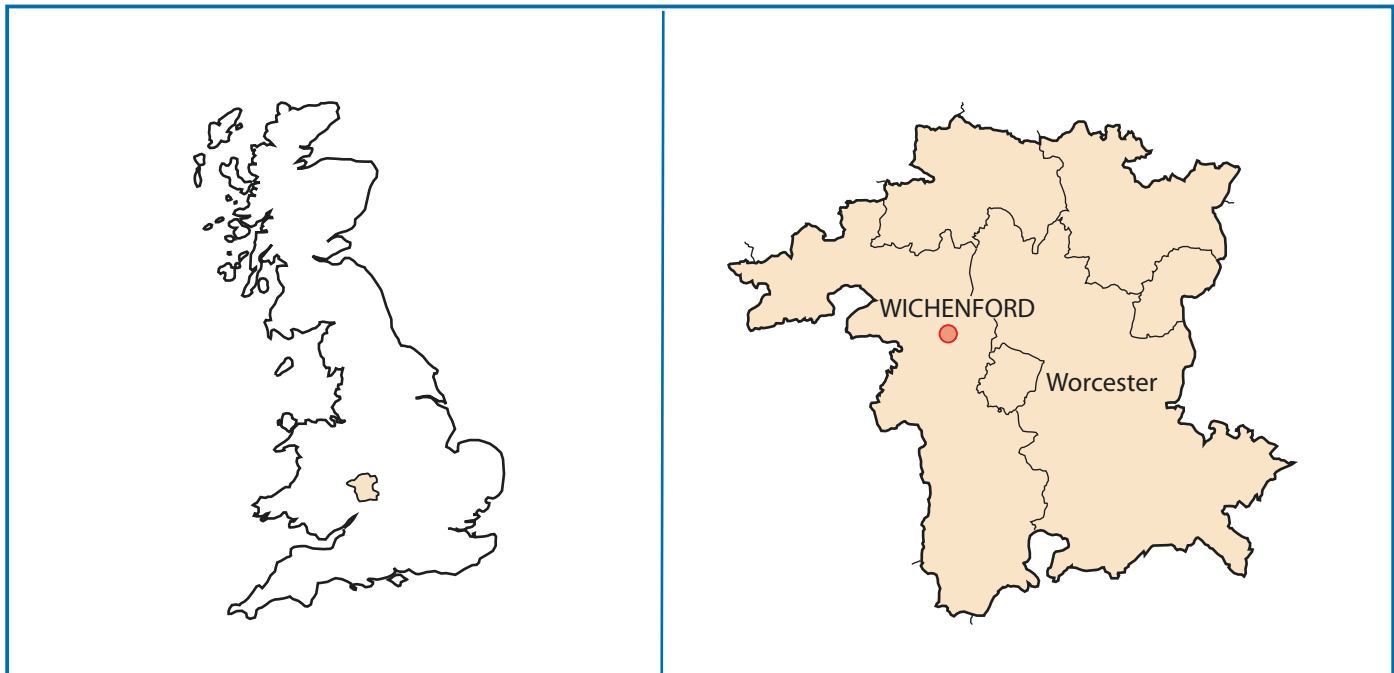
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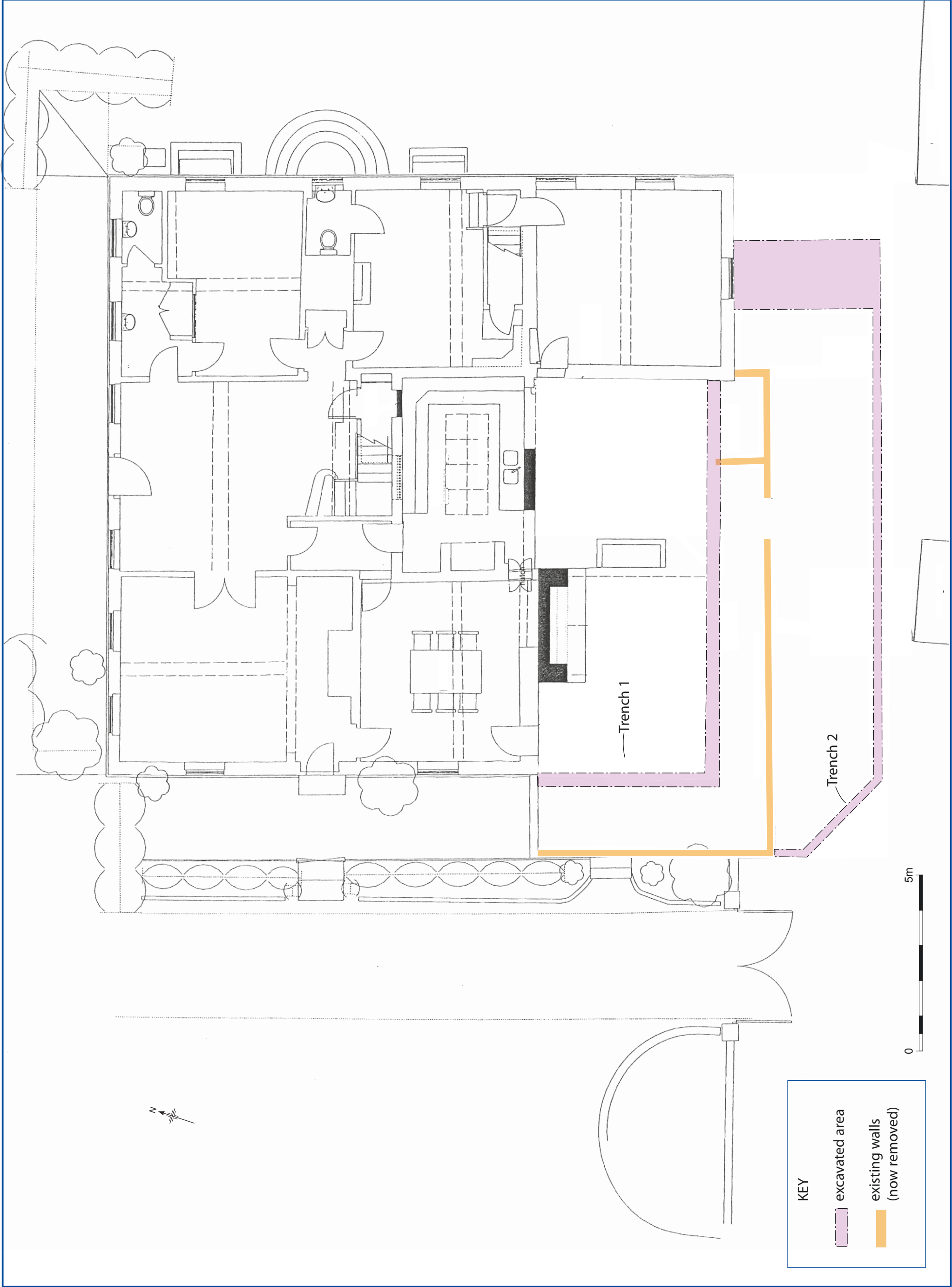
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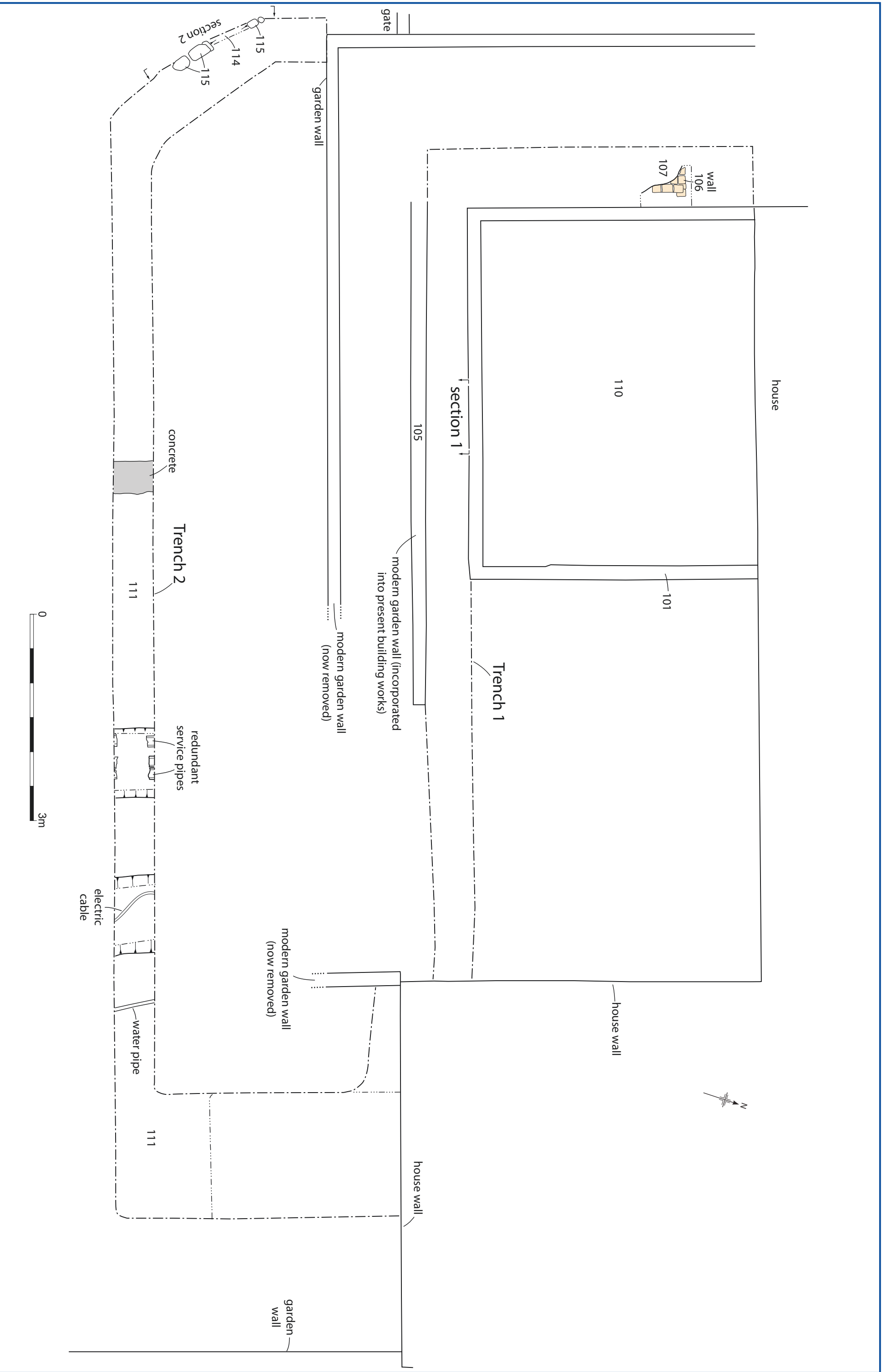
Location of the site.

Figure 1



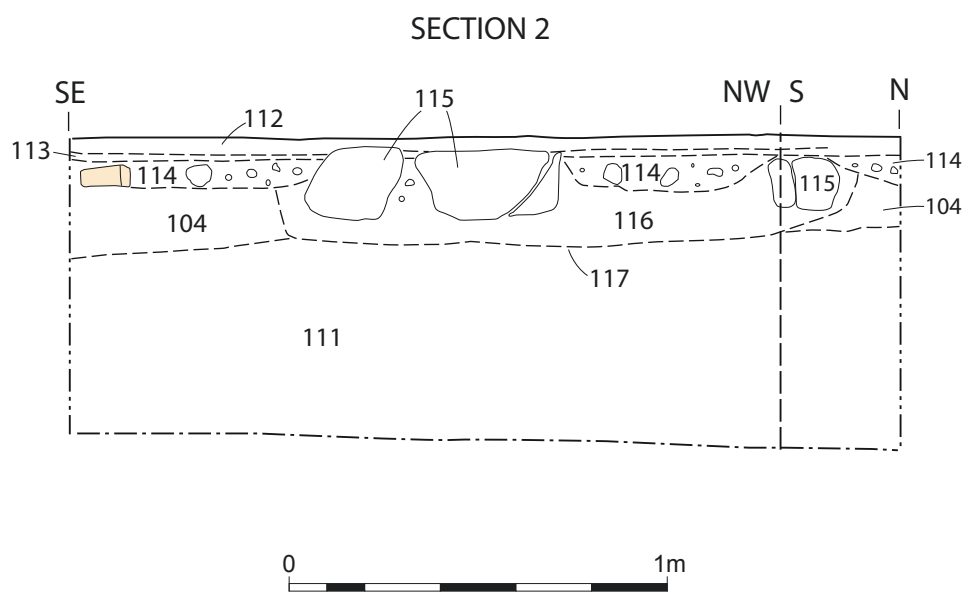
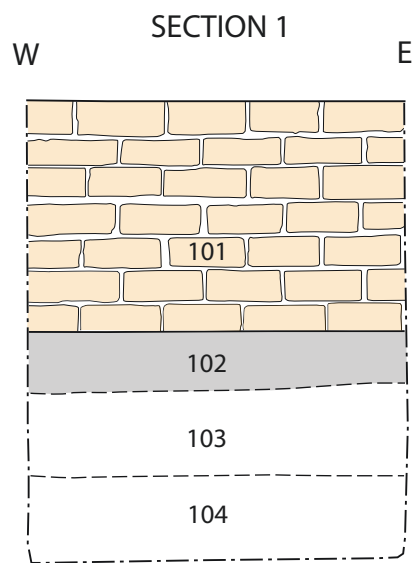
Plan of trenches (based upon Nick Carrol dwg no 0513/06)

Figure 2



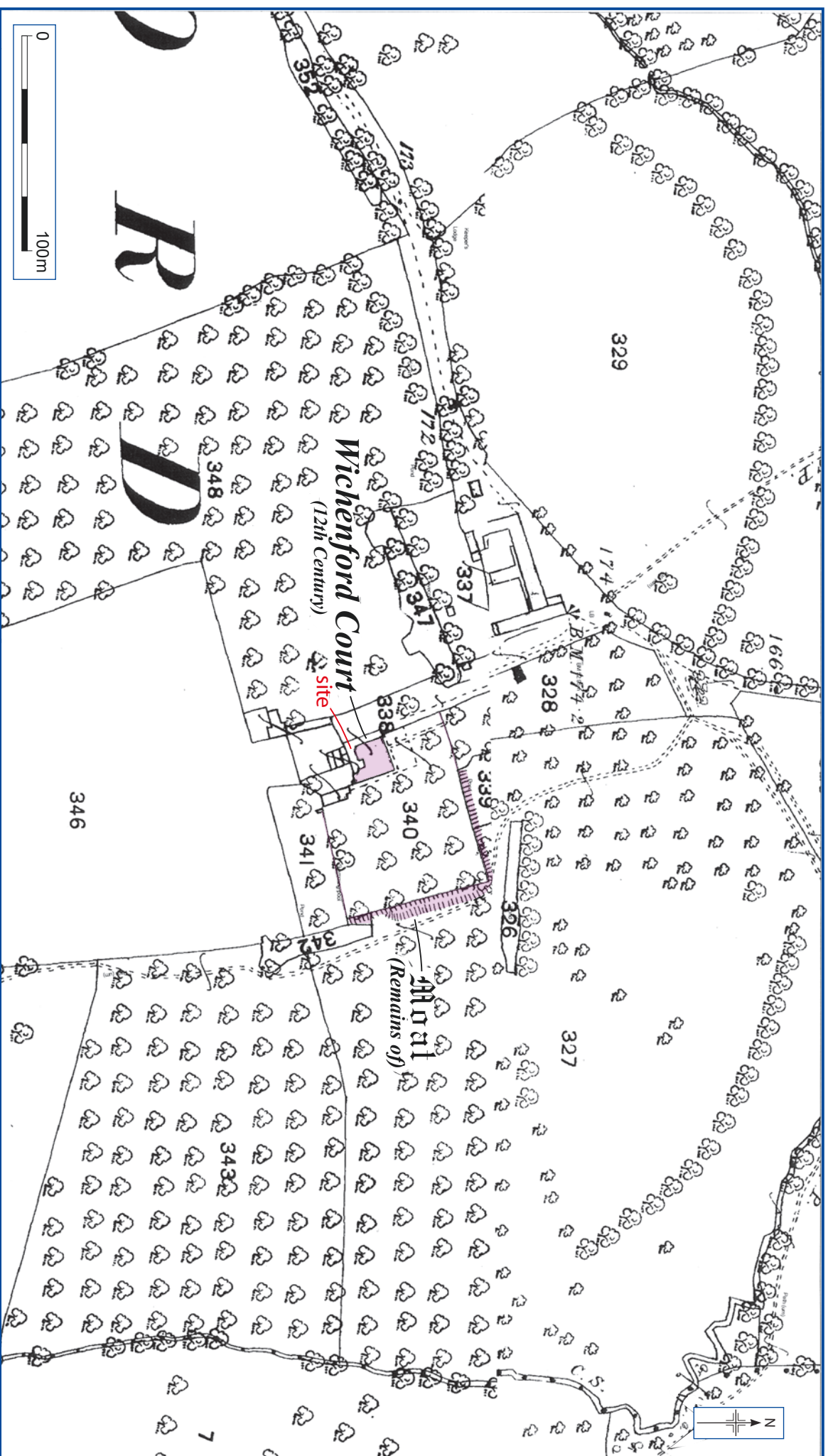
Detail of trenches

Figure 3



Sections

Figure 4



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Extract from 1st Edition Ordnance Survey (1885)

Figure 5



Plate 1: General view of rear of main building, facing north - east



Plate 2: General view of Trench 1, facing east



Plate 3: General view of Trench 2, facing west



Plate 4: Sandstone blocks within feature 117, facing south - west



Plate 5: Extant remains of 17th century wall 106, facing north