

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF AT
WITLEY COURT,
GREAT WITLEY,
WORCESTERSHIRE

Stephen Potten, supplemented by Laura Templeton

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

17th May 2006
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Worcestershire County Council

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Project 2909
Report 1436
WSM 35066

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Background information

<i>Client</i>	English Heritage
<i>Site address</i>	Witley Court, Great Witley, Worcestershire WR6 6JT
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SO 7695 6494 (centred)
<i>Sites and Monuments Record reference</i>	WSM 35066
<i>Scheduled monument consent</i>	Cert No. S750, dated 11 th April 2006
<i>Project parameters</i>	IFA 1999

Witley Court, Great Witley, Worcestershire, is a Grade II* listed building and a scheduled ancient monument (SAM No. 306). Its gardens and parkland are entered in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens as Grade II*. An archaeological watching brief was required to monitor the installation of a number of public information panels that were to be placed within the bounds of the scheduled monument. Ten panels required the excavation of postholes; two were wall mounted (Fig 2). A second visit was required to observe re-cuts of postholes for two panels – nos. 00 and 10 following concrete failure.

Topography and geology

Witley court is situated between the villages of Great and Little Witley about 12km north-west of Worcester (Fig 1). The surrounding countryside is wooded and the Shrawley Brook, which has been dammed to form an artificial lake, runs just north of the house. The underlying bedrock is Lower Triassic sandstone (reddish brown in colour) and Middle Triassic Mudstone. These are overlain by permeable, well-drained, non-calcareous reddish brown soils (British Geological Survey 1990; Soil Survey of England and Wales 1986).

Previous archaeological work on the site

Witley Court, its gardens and deerpark have been the subject of previous study and investigation. The HER records several building recording and landscape survey projects (HAS 87, 1990; HAS 92, 1990; HAS 172, 1993; HAS 214, 1994; HAS 215, 1994; MAS 001, 1995; HAS 232, 1995; HAS 271, 1996; HAS 275, 1996; HAS 350, 1998; HAS 506, 2001; HAS 507, 2001). Limited archaeological excavation has been undertaken within the main building (HAS 350, 1998; HAS 354, 1998). A larger scale archaeological excavation was undertaken by Nottingham University within the East Parterre in 1996 (pers. comm., Anthony Fleming, Inspector of Ancient Monuments). Nottingham University also carried out an excavation within the stable block during the 1990s (pers. comm., Deborah Overton, Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service (WHEAS)). There has also been recent archaeological investigation of the stairs leading to the East Parterre by Oxford Archaeology. At the time of writing, reports for the Nottingham University and Oxford Archaeology excavations have not been submitted to the HER.

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 watching brief
 Dates of fieldwork

CAS 1995
 4th-5th May 2006 (and 4 October
 2006 by Laura Templeton

Excavation methods

Twelve postholes were excavated for the erection of ten public information panels within the area of the scheduled ancient monument (Fig 2). In general, these holes were 0.20m in diameter and 0.40m in depth. All holes were hand-excavated by the contractors (Rivermeade Signs). Archaeological observation was undertaken during and after excavation and exposed surfaces and sections were cleaned by hand, allowing well-differentiated archaeological deposits to be observed and recorded. All deposits and structures were recorded according to the Archaeological Service's fieldwork manual (CAS 1995).

Access to and visibility of deposits and structures

All locations where panels were to be erected were freely accessible. Visibility of deposits was limited to what could be observed in postholes approximately 0.20m wide and 0.40m deep.

The areas re-cut (for reinstatement of the panels which were unstable) were larger than the original postholes, but only taken to the top of the previously set concrete – therefore not cutting any deeper than previous observations and no additional significant information was added.

Panel 11 had been moved from its original position near panel 12 to a new position on the same alignment as panel 10. This was done prior to the second visit and therefore no observations were made by WHEAS. Its new position is marked on Fig 2 (revised).

Statement of confidence

The access to, and visibility of, deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved but with the following *caveat*. The small width and depth of the excavated postholes limit the interpretative potential of the data retrieved and allow for only tentative conclusions to be drawn. In particular, the extents of deposits observed in plan and section cannot be accurately determined.

Deposit descriptions

PANEL 00 : 'Welcome to Witley Court' (southern posthole) : 0.23m x 0.24m x 0.35m (depth)
 re-cut posthole 0.30m x 0.30m x 0.25m (depth)

Context	Description	Interpretation	Finds analysis	Depth (OD or below ground level)
001	Mid reddish brown silty sand; occasional medium CBM; rare small-medium rounded stone.	Topsoil / Made ground.	CBM (?17 th -18 th century)	0.00m - 0.35m b.g.l. Ground level = 85.24m OD

PANEL 00 : 'Welcome to Witley Court' (northern posthole) : 0.20m x 0.21m x 0.35m (depth)
re-cut post hole 0.32m x 0.25m x 0.20m (depth)

Context	Description	Interpretation	Finds analysis	Depth (OD or below ground level)
041	Mid reddish brown silty sand; occasional medium CBM; rare small-medium rounded stones.	Topsoil / Made ground. Same as 001.	CBM (?17 th -18 th century) (4.10.2006) Ceramic land drain.	0.00m – 0.35m b.g.l. Ground level = 85.24m OD

PANEL 10 : 'The south façade' (posthole for panel) : 0.20m x 0.20m x 0.38m (depth)

Context	Description	Interpretation	Finds analysis	Depth (OD or below ground level)
101	Mid brown silty sand (fine grained); occasional small rounded and sub-angular stones; occasional small-large CBM; occasional lenses of reddish sand; rare small charcoal fragments.	Topsoil / Made ground.	Post-medieval roof tile.	0.00m – 0.22m b.g.l. Ground level = 87.95m OD
102	Mid orangey-brown silty sand (very little silt; predominantly fine grained sand); occasional small-large sub-angular stones.	Subsoil / Made ground.		0.22m - >0.38m

PANEL 10: 'The south façade' (sondage 20) : 0.24m x 0.32m x 0.42n (depth)

Context	Description	Interpretation	Finds analysis	Depth (OD or below ground level)
201	Mid brown silty sand (high sand content); occasional small rounded stones.	Topsoil / Made ground.		0.00m – 0.09m b.g.l. Ground level = 87.95m OD
202	Mid orangey brown silty sand mixed with topsoil (201) (high sand content); occasional small-medium mortar; occasional small-large CBM; occasional small rounded stones.	Demolition horizon for earlier structure?	Post-medieval roof tile.	0.09m – 0.18m b.g.l.
203	Mid brown silty sand mixed with 202; moderate small rounded stones; moderate large angular	Made ground.		0.18m – 0.42m

	stones.			
204	Brick and mortar wall running E-W with a return running N-S. Bricks: 0.23m x 0.11m x 0.07m. Mortar: light pinkish white.	Brick retaining wall, possibly related to earlier garden terrace?		0.14m b.g.l.

PANEL 11 : ‘The glory of the garden’ : 0.25m x 0.25m x 0.40m (depth)
moved to new location (see Fig 2(revised))

Context	Description	Interpretation	Depth (OD or below ground level)
111	Mid reddish brown silty sand; moderate small-large CBM; occasional small-large rounded and sub-angular stones; rare medium mortar.	Made ground (garden terrace).	0.00m - >0.40m b.g.l. Ground level = 86.01m OD

PANEL 12 : ‘The fountains’ : 0.25m x 0.26m x 0.41m (depth)
re-cut posthole 0.45m x 0.45m x 0.30m (depth)

Context	Description	Interpretation	Finds analysis	Depth (OD or below ground level)
121	Mid reddish brown silty sand; moderate small-large rounded and sub-angular stones; moderate small-large CBM; rare small mortar.	Made ground (garden terrace).	Post-medieval tile (possibly floor tile).	0.00m - >0.41m b.g.l. Ground level = 86.04m OD

PANEL 13 : 'The conservatory' : 0.40m x 0.38m x 0.44 m (depth)

Context	Description	Interpretation	Finds analysis	Depth (OD or below ground level)
131	Mid brown silty sand; rare small CBM.	Topsoil		0.00m – 0.20m b.g.l. Ground level = 86.15m OD
132	Mid brown silty sand; abundant small-large CBM; abundant small-large mortar; moderate flecks-small lumps charcoal; rare medium slate; rare small-medium limestone; rare Fe (nail).	Demolition debris from earlier structure.	Flowerpot sherd (?18 th -19 th century); post-medieval roof tile; Fe nail (?19 th century); slate (?19 th century); fragments of worked limestone.	0.20m – 0.30m b.g.l.
133	Cut; circular in plan. Depth: >0.51m. Cuts 134.	Stakehole		
134	Pale yellow mortar with moderate, small-medium lenses of ash and charcoal; occasional medium-large CBM.	Demolition debris from earlier structure.	Brick fragments (?later 17 th -18 th century). Hand-made bricks, some with traces of lime-wash. Pinkish lime mortar which matches colour of brick fabric.	0.24m – 0.31m b.g.l.
135	Mid brown silty sand; moderate large CBM; moderate small-large mortar; moderate flecks-small lumps charcoal.	Demolition debris from earlier structure.	Brick fragments (?later 17 th -18 th century). Hand-made bricks, some with traces of lime-wash. Pinkish lime mortar which matches colour of brick fabric.	0.31m – 0.44m b.g.l.
136	Light pinkish brown sand and mid reddish brown sandstone.	Natural? Possibly same as 143.		0.44m b.g.l.

PANEL 14 : 'The winter garden' : 0.30m x 0.30m x 0.45m (depth)

Context	Description	Interpretation	Findings analysis	Depth (OD or below ground level)
141	Mid-dark brown silty sand; occasional small rounded stones; topped with bark chippings.	Modern topsoil for flowerbed.		0.00m – 0.20m b.g.l. Ground level = 86.62m OD
142	Topsoil (141) mixed with pinkish red sand; occasional flecks-small lumps charcoal; occasional flecks-small lumps CBM; rare large angular stones; rare, medium glass fragments (modern).	Modern subsoil for flowerbed.	Modern glass (19 th -20 th century).	0.20m – 0.45m b.g.l.
143	Mid pinkish red sand (fine grained).	Natural? Possibly same as 136.		0.45m b.g.l.

PANEL 15 : 'Looking back' : 0.42m x 0.44m x 0.43m (depth)

Context	Description	Interpretation	Depth (OD or below ground level)
151	Mid reddish brown silty sand; rare small rounded stones; rare flecks-small lumps orange fired clay; rare flecks charcoal.	Topsoil / Made ground.	0.00m - 0.43m b.g.l. Ground level = 81.51m OD

PANEL 16 : 'The east parterre' : 0.25m x 0.28m x 0.32m (depth)

Context	Description	Interpretation	Depth (OD or below ground level)
161	Mid reddish brown silty sand; rare small-medium sub-angular stones; rare small lumps orange fired clay.	Topsoil / Made ground.	0.00m – 0.32m b.g.l. Ground level = 84.58m OD
162	Mid yellowish brown sandstone.	Natural bedrock.	0.32m b.g.l.

PANEL 17 : 'The front pool' : 0.22m x 0.23m x 0.038m (depth)

Context	Description	Interpretation	Finds analysis	Depth (OD or below ground level)
171	Mid brown silty sand; occasional small stones.	Topsoil / Made ground.	Post-medieval CBM.	0.00m – 0.19m b.g.l. Ground level = 83.56m OD
172	Topsoil (171) mixed with greenish grey gravels; rare small-medium CBM.	Subsoil / Made ground. Possibly a lens of material within 171.		0.19m – 0.38m b.g.l.

PANEL 30 : 'The north portico' : 0.40m x 0.40m x 0.24m (depth)

Context	Description	Interpretation	Finds analysis	Depth (OD or below ground level)
301	Modern tarmac and gravels.	Driveway surface.		0.00m – 0.03m b.g.l. Ground level = 88.33m OD
302	Mid purplish brown mixture of silty sand and gravels.	Made ground.		0.03m – c.0.12m b.g.l.
303	Light purplish brown silty sand; occasional flecks-small lumps charcoal; occasional small-medium CBM; occasional small-large mortar.	Re-deposited material / Made ground.	Post-medieval CBM.	0.12m b.g.l.

KEY: CBM = Ceramic building material; b.g.l. = below ground level.

Discussion

Natural deposits (panels 13, 14 and 16)

Natural Triassic sandstone was encountered at the base of the posthole cut for panel 16 at a depth of 0.32m below current ground level (84.26m OD; context 162). Similar natural bedrock, though somewhat redder and more elevated, was observed approximately 75m to the west of Panel 16, below the steps leading from the house to the East Parterre (the top of the steps being at a height of

circa 87.94m OD).¹ This accords well with observations that Witley Court was constructed on a natural sandstone eminence that slopes downhill beneath the East Parterre from west to east.

A sterile, pinkish red sand was observed at the bases of the postholes cut for panels 13 and 14 at depths of 85.71m OD and 86.17m OD respectively (contexts 136 and 143). In the former case, this sand was associated with a solid lump of natural sandstone. Both may represent natural deposits or a sterile sandy layer lying just above the natural bedrock.

18th and 19th century landscaping (panels 10, 11, 12, 15, 16)

The gardens to the east and south of the house at Witley Court were extensively landscaped during the 18th and 19th centuries (White 2003; Lockett 1997, 267-270; English Heritage, n.d.). This involved the elevation of the gardens from the level of the surrounding countryside, the construction of terraces (particularly to the south) and the creation of level lawns and pathways. Most of the deposits observed within the gardens revealed a mid reddish brown silty sand which is interpreted as material brought in for this landscaping at various times during the development of the gardens. No artefactual evidence was retrieved that could accurately narrow the dating range for individual areas of the garden.

18th and 19th century structural features (panel 00; panel 13; sondage 20)

Posthole 00 (adjacent to the entrance kiosk) yielded brick fragments of possible 17th or 18th century date but the identification is tentative and based on a small sample. A drawing of 1770 depicts service blocks in this location which were built sometime after 1732; the bricks may pertain to these buildings which were demolished in the early 19th century (White 2003, 20-22, 30).

The hole cut for panel 13, to the south of the conservatory, revealed a sequence of structural debris beginning at 0.20m below current ground level (85.95m OD) and with a depth of 0.24m (contexts 132, 134 and 135). These deposits included CBM, mortar, slate, worked limestone fragments, charcoal and ash. The debris appears to be re-deposited material (rather than an *in situ* demolition horizon) for two reasons. First, the artefacts are indicative of a relatively broad date range: the bricks are of late 17th or 18th century date while the slate and iron nail are probably 19th century (pers. comm., Derek Hurst and Angus Crawford, WHEAS). Second, the formation sequence is suggestive of re-deposition: contexts 135 and 134 were pierced by a stakehole (context 133) after being laid down and before being sealed by further structural debris (context 132). The re-deposition may be associated with the construction of the present conservatory between 1854 and 1860.

The presence of structural debris in combination with evidence for burning (charcoal and ash) is interesting. It seems unlikely that the deposits relate to the fire of 1937 which left Witley Court in ruins: no 20th century material was recovered and the fire largely affected the central and eastern parts of the building (White 2003, 29). Early estate and farm buildings existed in the vicinity of the conservatory and are depicted on a late 17th century drawing of Witley Court (pers. comm., Anthony Fleming; White 2003, 18). These could provide a source for the bricks. The presence of worked limestone fragments, however, suggests grander structures and the finds are perhaps most suggestive of 19th century buildings. Some of the debris may therefore pertain to an early 19th century conservatory designed by John Nash and sited just to the north of the present one, the charcoal and ash being associated with its heating system or cultivation (White 2003, 22). An unusual sherd of decorated flowerpot, possibly of 18th-19th century date, was also retrieved from context 132 and could derive from this conservatory (pers. comm., Derek Hurst, WHEAS).

When excavating the posthole for panel 10 on the terrace of the south façade, a brick and mortar wall was encountered (context 204; Fig 3; Plates 1-3). The hole for panel 10 was therefore moved approximately 0.80m to the west to avoid further damage to the structure and the original hole recorded (sondage 20). The brick wall was aligned east-west and appeared to continue to the west

¹ At the time of the watching brief these steps were under refurbishment and, having had masonry removed, the underlying bedrock was exposed.

along the line of the present terrace. A return aligned north-south was visible in the west-facing section of the sondage. The wall had been partially demolished (the uppermost layer was mortar rather than brick and it was sealed by a destruction horizon (context 202)). It was not possible to remove any of the bricks for further investigation without causing damage to the monument.

A late 17th century illustration depicts walled garden compartments immediately to the south of the south front (White 2003, 18, 30). These gardens, however, are likely to have been swept away by later developments and the size of the bricks used in the wall observed in sondage 20 are more indicative of the late 18th or 19th centuries (English Heritage n.d., Appendix B; pers. comm., Derek Hurst, WHEAS). Documents which shed light on the early 19th century re-modelling of the house and gardens by John Nash and G S Repton also indicate narrow formal gardens below the south front (White 2003, 23 (1843 illustration of Witley); English Heritage n.d., Appendix B, figs 11 & 12 (Nash and Repton's designs for Witley Court); English Heritage n.d., fig 3 (map, c.1830)). The walls observed in sondage 20 could pertain to this earlier garden arrangement: they may, for example, relate to an earlier terrace structure, flowerbed or pathway. Equally, however, they may represent the original revetment for the present terrace constructed between 1854 and 1860.

Modern deposits (panels 00, 14 and 30)

The deposits recorded in postholes 14 (in a flower bed), 17 (adjacent to a modern path) and 30 (on the driveway) all appeared indicative of modern landscaping on the site.

Wall mounted panels (panels 5 and 9)

Panel 5 ('The Great Stairs') was mounted on an area of modern masonry and rendering, avoiding any damage to the monument. The holes to attach panel 9 ('The Red Rooms') to the wall of the building were drilled through re-pointed mortar to minimise damage to the monument.

Conclusions

Most of the excavated holes observed and recorded during the watching brief shed more light on the nature of deposits in the formal gardens and on the process of landscaping. In addition, the watching brief has identified two important areas of structural remains close to the present house. First, demolition debris possibly relating to an earlier conservatory to the south-west of the main building (panel 13). Second, a brick and mortar wall on the terrace in front of the south façade which may represent an early garden arrangement or terrace structure (sondage 20). The latter has the potential significantly to increase our understanding of the history of the gardens. It may benefit from non-intrusive geophysical survey in the future to elucidate its full extent and form.

No new deposits were observed during the re-setting of panels 00 and 12.

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 English Heritage at Witley Court, Great Witley, Worcestershire WR6 6JT, a scheduled ancient monument (NGR ref SO7695 6494; WSM 35066; SAM No. 306). The watching brief was required to monitor the installation of a number of public information panels that were to be placed within the bounds of the scheduled monument. Ten panels required the excavation of postholes and two were wall mounted

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Archive

Trench record sheets AS41	12
Fieldwork progress records AS2	2
Photographic records AS3	1
Digital photographs	92
Abbreviated context records AS40	3
Drawings	2
Boxes of finds	None retained

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum
Hartlebury Castle, Hartlebury
Near Kidderminster
Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
01299 250416

telephone

Acknowledgements

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Derek Hurst managed this project; Stephen Potten undertook the fieldwork and report preparation. I am grateful to Angus Crawford and Derek Hurst, both of WHEAS, for their assistance with the finds analysis.

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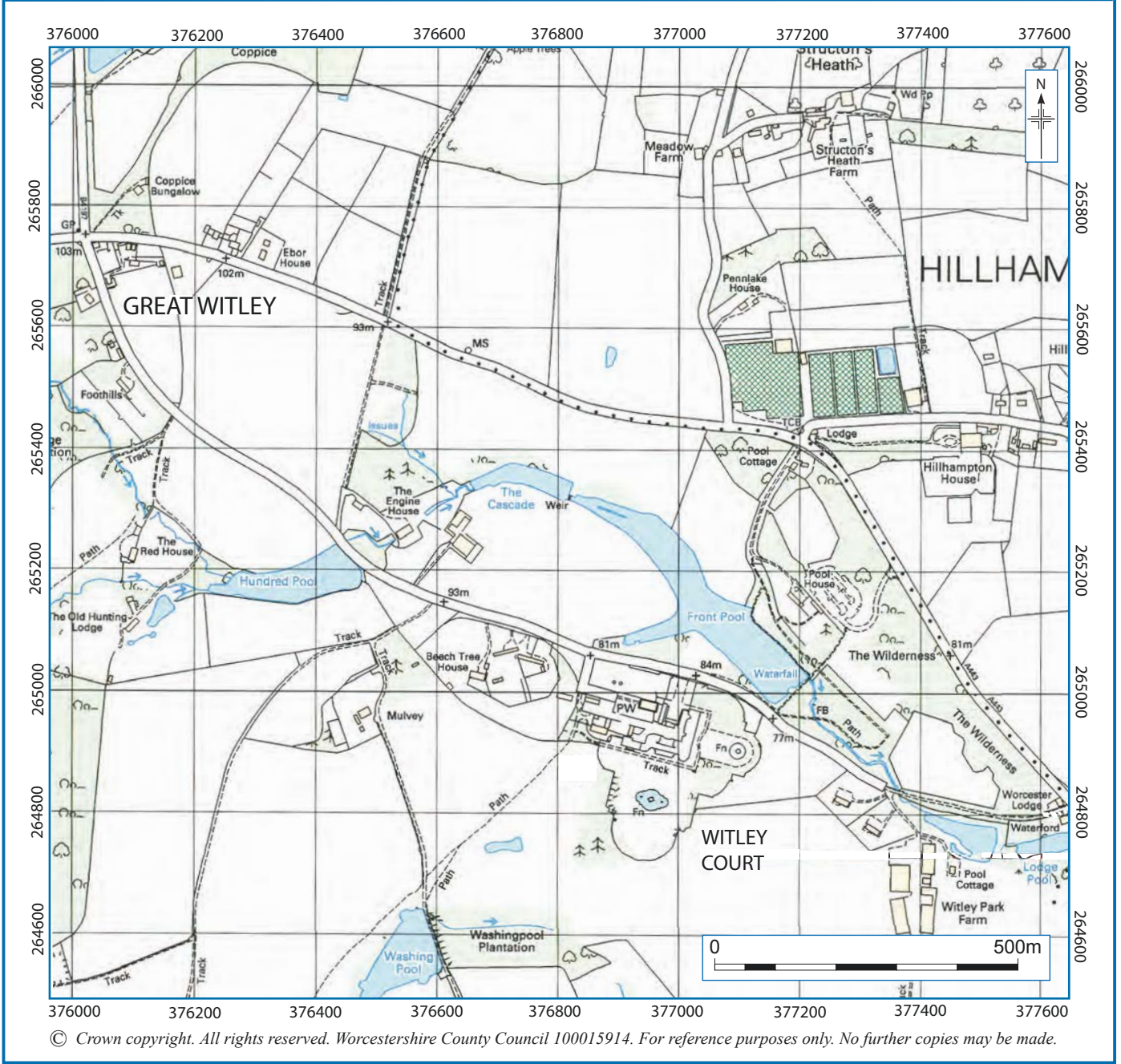
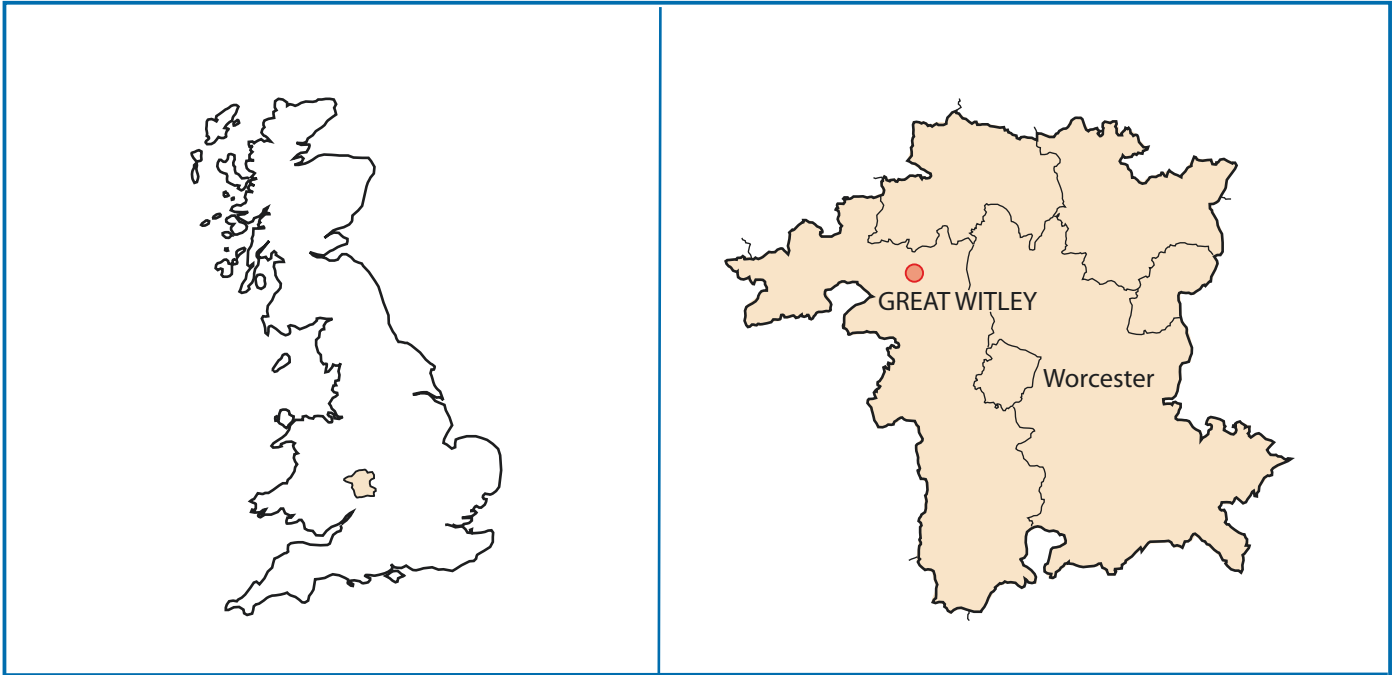
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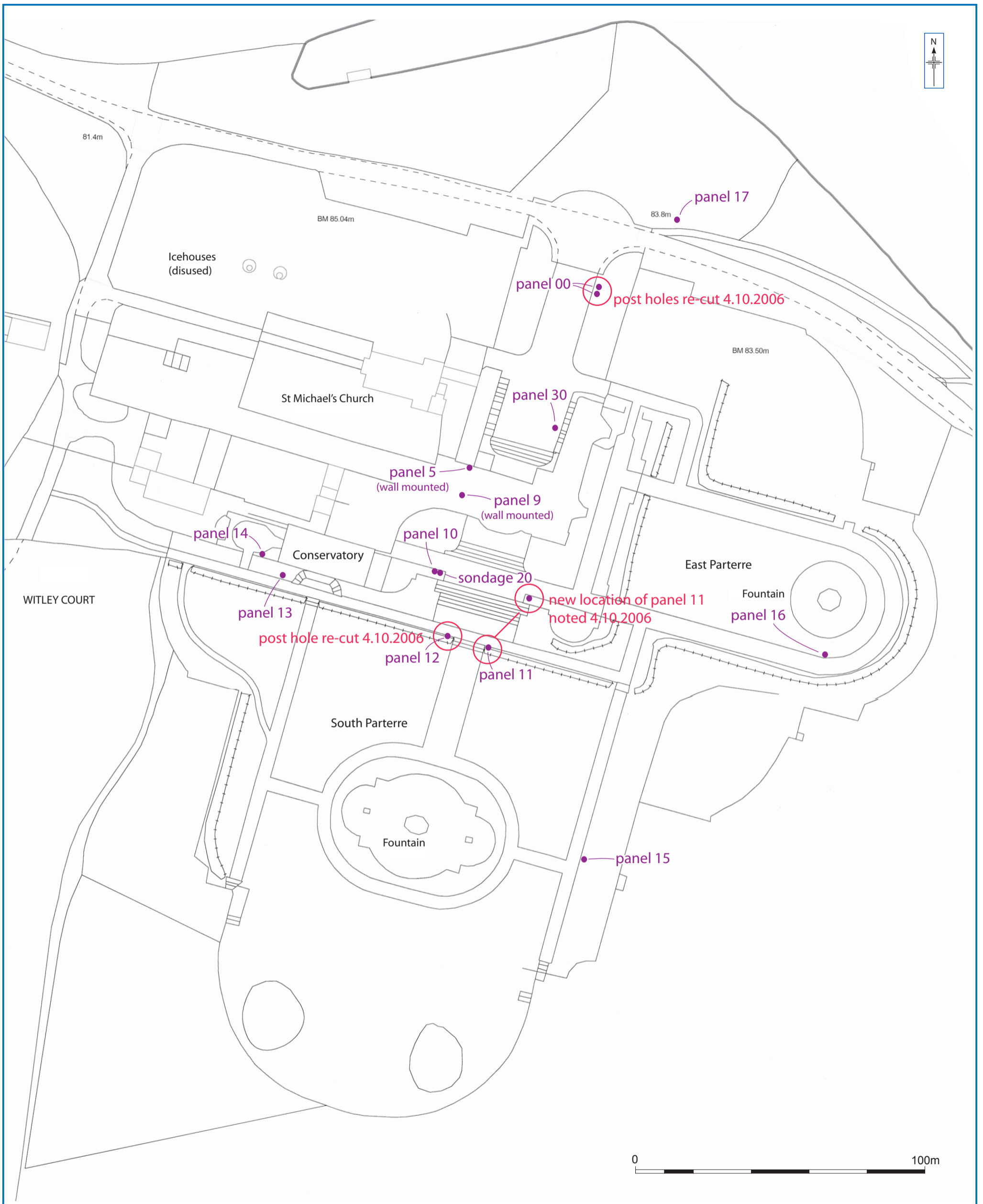
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Location of Witley Court

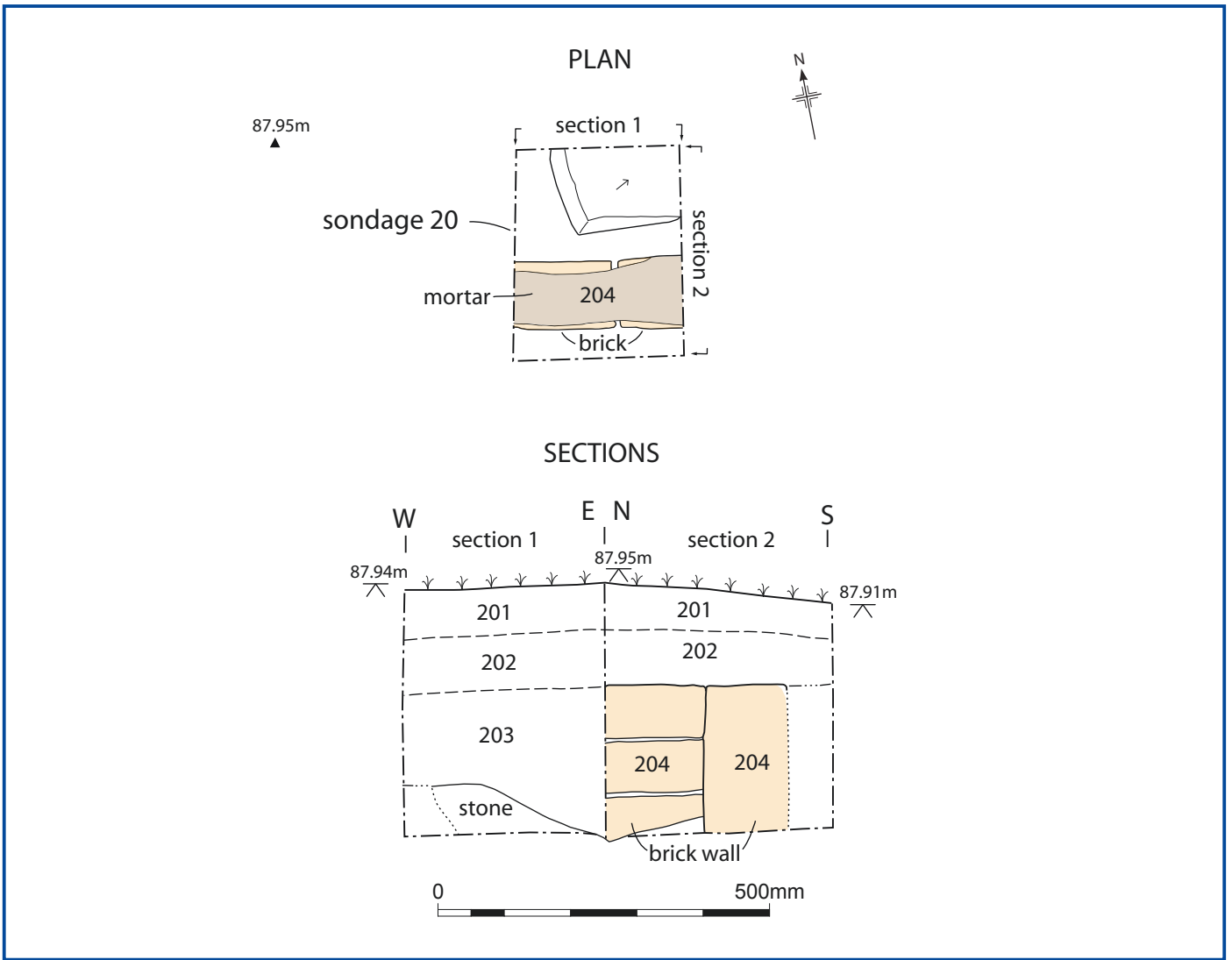
Figure 1



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Location of panels

Figure 2 (revised)



Plan and sections of Sondage 20, showing brick and mortar wall 204

Figure 3



Sondage 20, showing brick wall 204

Plate 1



Sondage 20; south-facing section

Plate 2



Sondage 20; east-facing section showing wall return running north-south

Plate 3