

# Archaeological watching brief at Oak House, Drury Lane Martin Hussingtree

Worcestershire Archaeology  
*for Elmwood Heritage*

June 2021



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# OAK HOUSE, DRURY LANE MARTIN HUSSINGTREE WORCESTERSHIRE

Archaeological watching brief report

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## SITE INFORMATION

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Site name: Oak House, Drury Lane, Martin Hussingtree  
Site code: WSM51944  
Local planning authority: Wychavon District Council  
Planning reference: 20/02306/HP  
Central NGR: SO 88219 60193  
Commissioning client: Elmwood Archaeology  
WA project number: P6075  
WA report number: 2926  
Oasis reference: fieldsec1-421750

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# Archaeological watching brief at Oak House, Drury Lane, Martin Hussingtree, Worcestershire

By Jesse Wheeler

Illustrations by Tim Cornah

## Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021 at Oak House, Drury Lane, Martin Hussingtree (NGR SO 88219 60193). This comprised observation of a single C-shaped trench to accommodate foundations for the construction of an orangery, adjacent to Oak House. The project was commissioned by Elmwood Heritage. Planning permission was granted by Wychavon District Council subject to a programme of archaeological works (planning reference 20/02306/HP).

The archaeological advisor to Wychavon DC considered that the development had the potential to impact upon heritage assets associated with the 16<sup>th</sup> century farmstead of Martin Hall Farm, in which Oak House is situated. A building record and watching brief were considered appropriate mitigation works. This report sets out the results of the watching brief element; the building record was undertaken by Elmwood Heritage.

The watching brief identified two brick walls abutting Oak House which are thought to be part of an east-west extension to the building depicted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey map. Two fills identified within this structure result from the demolition and levelling of this extension after 1903.

## Report

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Background to the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021 at Oak House, Drury Lane, Martin Hussingtree (NGR SO 88219 60193). This comprised observation of a single C-shaped trench to accommodate foundations for the construction of an orangery, adjacent to Oak House. The project was commissioned by Elmwood Heritage.

Planning permission for the construction of the orangery was granted by Wychavon District Council subject to a programme of archaeological works (planning reference 20/02306/HP).

The archaeological advisor to Wychavon District Council, Aidan Smyth, considered that the development had the potential to impact upon heritage assets associated with the 16<sup>th</sup> century farmstead of Martin Hall Farm, in which Oak House is situated and permission was granted subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works. Correspondence with Aidan Smyth confirmed that the creation of a building record and a watching brief to be maintained on groundworks required for the development was appropriate.

The project conforms to a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) and approved by Aidan Smyth. The results of the building record are set out in a separate document by Elmwood Heritage.

This watching brief also conforms to the industry guidelines and standards set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in the *Standard and guidance: for an archaeological watching brief* (CIfA 2014) and the *Standards and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire* (WCC 2010)

#### 1.2 Site location, topography and geology

Oak House is a detached two storey dwelling house, brick construction with a tiled roof and is set within 600 square metres of private domestic curtilage. The excavation area is adjacent to the house at 55m AOD. The site is laid to lawn on level ground, and bounded by residential properties to the north, south and east. Sterling Business Park lies beyond the rear boundaries, which comprise mature trees and hedgerows.

The underlying geology comprises bedrock of Droitwich Halite Member- Sedimentary formation without overlying superficial deposits (BGS 2021).

### 2 Archaeological and historical background

#### 2.1 Introduction

Prior to fieldwork commencing, a search of the Worcestershire HER was completed, covering a search area of 500m around the site. A summary of the results of this research are presented below.

Oak House and the adjacent development site are located within the parish of Martin Hussingtree which derives its name from the words *meretun*, meaning farmstead by the boundary, and *husan treo*, meaning a boundary tree of lands belonging to Husa (Higgins 2011). The parish's position on the very edge of Feckenham Forest (WSM42160), as it was recorded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, means it was an area with easy access to forestry resources, as well as the fertile farmlands in the surrounding area. It is described in the Domesday Book as comprising several manses, split between the larger manors of Martin and Hussingtree who were not joined at this time, which were originally held by Pershore Abbey, but whose ownership was later transferred to Westminster (Page 1924).

As recorded on the HER, the local area is characterised by various instances of ridge and furrow (WSM45911) dating from the medieval period, and a series of farms and outfarms, evidencing the



agricultural and pastoral nature of the area. Historically, the field pattern in this region comprised small, rectilinear fields, however, due to widespread field amalgamation and boundary loss in the later 20th century, the pattern is now more irregular. Settlement is of a dispersed row or clustered form, with wayside cottages and scattered farmsteads along a network of sinuous lanes. There are four listed buildings within the study area and these, along with the undesignated buildings surrounding the excavation site, date primarily from the seventeenth century when the core of Martin Hussingtree and its surrounding farmsteads consolidated into the modern village

Closest to the excavation site lies Martin Hall Farmhouse (WSM08965), 21m to the east. It is a sixteenth century timber and brick detached farmhouse laid out in a multi-yard arrangement with a single main courtyard surrounded by working agricultural buildings forming the core of the farmstead (WSM59594, 51944), and various satellite buildings (WSM58702, 51052) in the wider curtilage.

Hill House Farmhouse (WSM35102), 80m to the north-east of the excavation site, is a Grade II\* listed 17<sup>th</sup> century cruck building with subsequent 18th and 19th century additions. Its footprint comprises house, farm (WSM45238), farmstead range (WSM59595), and various buildings and barns (WSM51051, 58701, 45240, 51051), as well as satellite outfarms (WSM58700, 51050).

Further designated residential buildings are located over 250m away from the site and are not described in this report, however they comprise sixteenth and seventeenth timber framed farmhouses and cottages for the most part and are characteristic of the date and form of the parish of Martin Hussingtree.

In addition to the built environment there are also monument records for a Roman road (WSM30529), a quarry (WSM45237) and a Second World War searchlight battery (WSM274200). The Portable Antiquity Scheme has recorded a medieval brooch and harness pendant (WSM74099, 74100) and a post medieval coin (WSM74108) within the search area. Archaeological investigations have also recovered a Roman coin (WSM72909).

## 2.2 Previous Archaeological Investigations

Archaeological investigations within the search area include desk-based assessments, finds retrieval and building recording. Archaeological features within the region sees Romano-British remains in association with the Roman road, the current A38, and medieval earthworks, such as ridge and furrow. Within the search area there could be potential for below ground archaeological features and deposits from the Roman, medieval and post medieval periods. Finally, a Historic England funded project to identify the potential for Palaeolithic Archaeology in Worcestershire recorded deposits within the search area with potential for archaeology dating back to 189050BC (WSM68340).

## 2.3 Cartographic Analysis

The 1840 Tithe Map of Martin Hussingtree shows the plot now associated with Oak House (indicated as 132) as being part of the Martin Hall Farm curtilage and larger than it appears in the present day. To its north and east are two ponds with a boundary running between them that presumably represents the boundary between the farmsteads of Martin Hall Farm and Hill House Farm, to the north-east. The surrounding farmsteads and their buildings are largely in place at this period, as would be expected for their recorded sixteenth and seventeenth century dates, and the field boundaries are not much changed. The road layout is recognisable at this time, however the track forming the triangular shaped parcel of land to the north of Oak House does not continue into the present day. Likewise, the road to its east, on the opposite site of the, now, A38 has not yet been formed, and the present-day quarry is a lake.

The 1903 Second edition Ordnance Survey Map shows Oak House has been extended with an east-west range, and its northern extension potentially demolished and replaced by a smaller one set square to the rest of the house. It has developed its current rear boundary, although its curtilage remains connected to the Martin Hall Farm to its north-east, and a small structure has been built by the northern pond. The land separated by this change of boundary appears to be in the same

ownership as that forming the current garden of Oak House, however the lack of plot division implies it is associated with Martin Hall Farm. Indeed, it is difficult to determine any plot of land being exclusively owned by Oak House, and this perhaps emphasises its direct association with Martin Hall Farm, as surrounding properties have shared or individual plots identified.

There is some development to the yards and farm buildings of Hill House Farm to the north, but the road and field boundaries remain much the same, with some detail being added to the junction by 'The Green'. The Swan Inn public house is now named, and the series of eight small plots with structures to its west and north have been consolidated in two.

### 3 Project aims

The aims of the watching brief were to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible within the constraints of the Client's groundworks.

### 4 Project methodology

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2021). Fieldwork was undertaken on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

A single C-shaped trench was excavated as the foundation of the orangery. The location of the trench is indicated in Figure 2.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed under constant archaeological supervision using a 360° tracked excavator. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand.

Observation of the trench was undertaken during and after machine excavation. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits, though any less clear may have not been identified. Access to deep trenches was not made for safety reasons.

Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012) and trench and feature locations were tied into scaled plans provided by developer and georeferenced in QGIS.

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was undertaken through structural evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

The project archive is currently held at the offices of Worcestershire Archaeology.

Subject to the agreement of the landowner it is anticipated that it will be deposited at Worcestershire County Museum.

### 5 Archaeological results

#### 5.1 Trench description

The natural substrate (107) comprised a reddish orange sandy clay silt 0.70m below ground surface (bgs) This was in turn overlain by two garden soils- the lowest, a mid-brown silty clay sand (102) 0.40m in thickness, overlain by a dark brownish black silty sand with rubble and nineteenth century domestic waste (101) excavated to 0.40m.

At the northern extent of the excavated area two brick walls were uncovered, cutting the two garden soils, and were excavated to a depth of 0.60-1.00m. These comprised 103 (Plate 1), orientated east-west and abutting Oak House on its eastern edge, and 104 which formed a right angle at the western edge of 103 approximately 2.60m from the exterior wall of Oak House (Plate 2), and ran north beyond the limits of excavation.

In the right angle formed by these two walls and the interior of the structure (Figs 3 and 4), two fills were identified - a dark brown sand (105) 0.20m in thickness, overlying a mid-brown silty clay (106) with rubble inclusions that was excavated to a depth of 0.40m.

This was all in turn overlain by 0.25m of topsoil, formed of dark brown silty sand and garden turf (Figs 5 and 6).

## 5.2 Summary trench description table

Context	Brief description	Max depth (m)	Depth from ground surface (m)	Comments
100	Topsoil	0.25	0.00	Dark brown silty sand with rubble and modern waste
101	Garden soil	0.40	0.25	Dark brownish-black silty sand with rubble and nineteenth century waste
102	Garden soil	>0.40	0.65+	Mid brown silty clay sand with CBM and charcoal fragments
103	Wall foundation	1.00	0.10	East-West aligned brick wall, two courses of header base with four stretcher courses above. Machine made red brick. 22 x 11 x 7cm
104	Wall foundation	1.00	0.10	North-South aligned brick wall, two courses of header base with four stretcher courses above. Machine made red brick. 22 x 11 x 7cm
105	Fill of wall interior	0.20	0.30	Dark brown sand in interior formed by walls 103 and 104
106	Fill of wall interior	0.40	0.70	Mid brown silty clay sand with rubble in interior formed by walls 103 and 104. Below 105
107	Natural	Unexc.	1.60	Reddish orange sandy clay silt
108	Cut of wall	1.00	0.10	Cut of wall 103
109	Cut of wall	1.00	0.10	Cut of wall 104

Table 1: Summary context descriptions

## 6 Discussion and conclusions

The walls identified during the watching brief likely represent the edge of the east-west extension to the property built between 1840 and 1903 and depicted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map. The interior fills likely represent this demolition and levelling phase before the area returned to garden. This feature extends beyond the projected limits of the orangery and remains in-situ, its southern wall being the only part affected by the construction of the orangery.

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. Conditions were suitable to identify the presence or absence of archaeological features.

## 7 Project personnel

The fieldwork was led by Yago Terroba-Souto, PCIfA.

The project was managed by Tom Rogers, MCIfA. The report was produced and collated by Jesse Wheeler ACIfA. Specialist contributions and individual sections of the report are attributed to the relevant authors throughout the text.

## 8 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for the successful conclusion of this project: Shona Robson-Glyde of Elmwood Heritage and Aidan Smyth (Archaeology and Planning Advisor, Wychavon and Malvern District Council).

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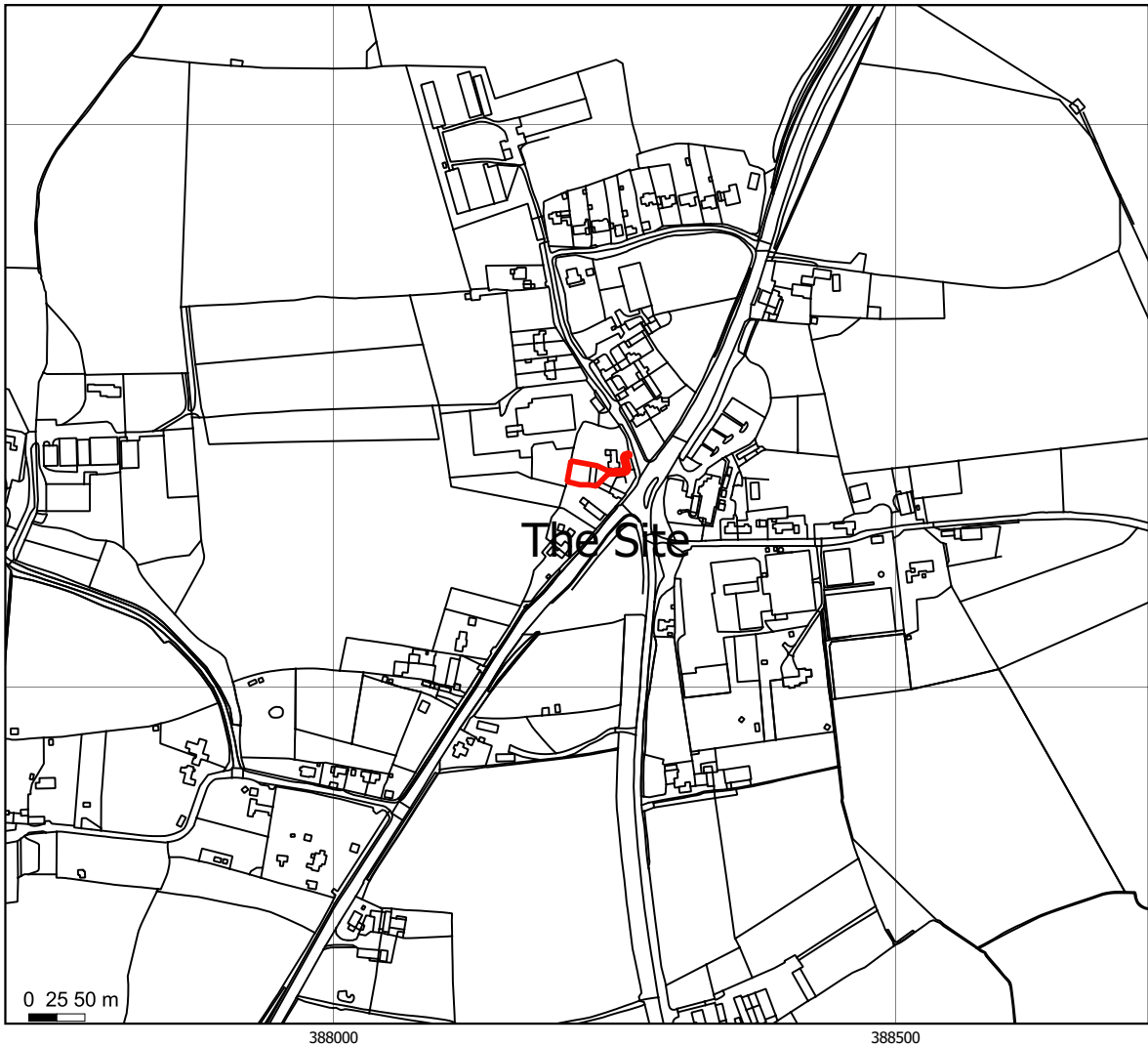
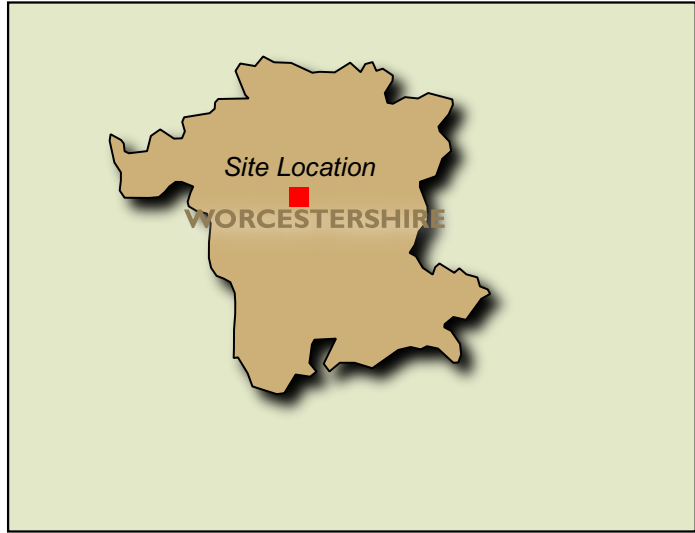
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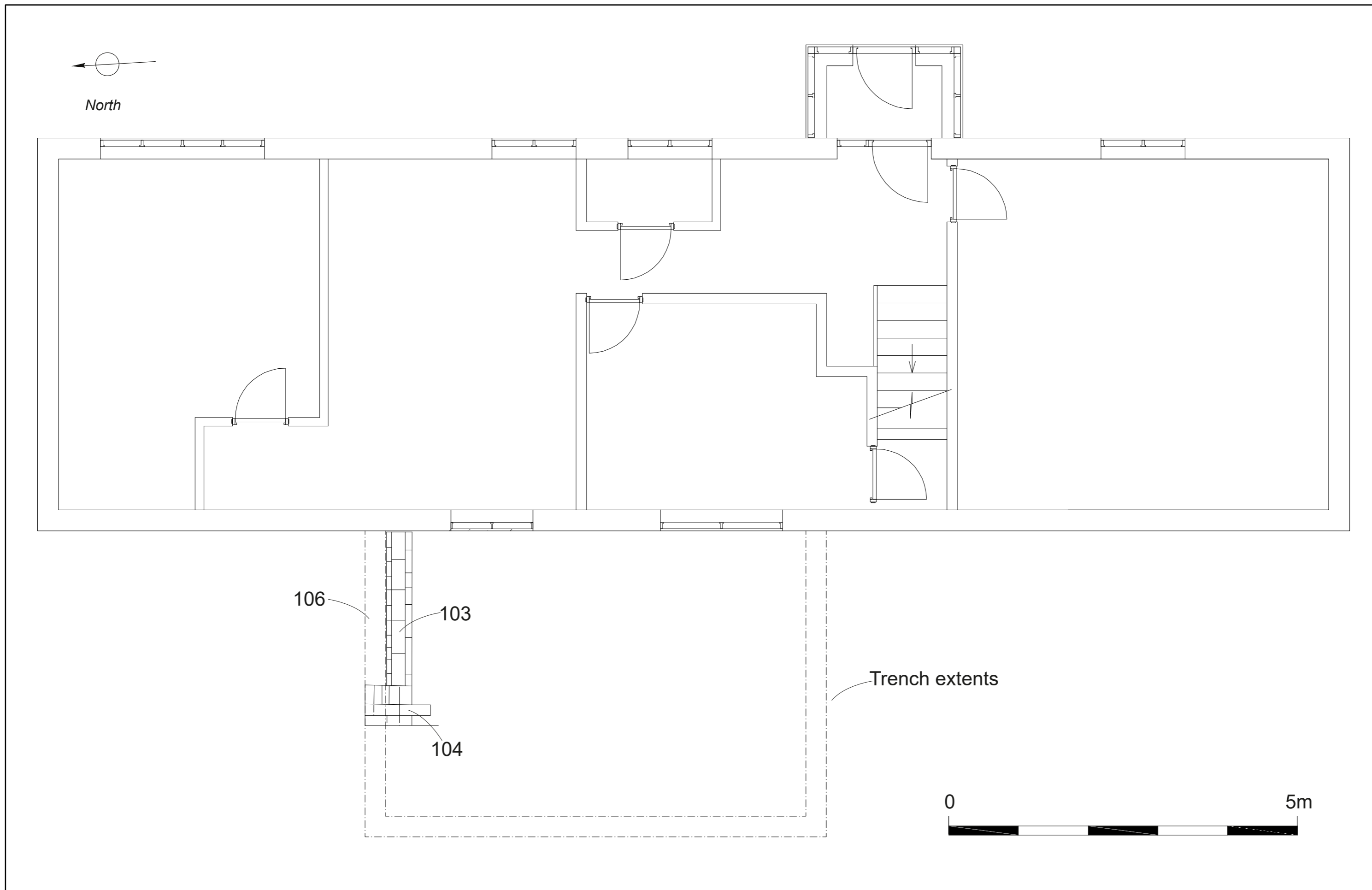
## Figures



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Location of the site

Figure 1



*Location of watching brief trench and features  
(After David Salisbury 119905/02)*

*Figure 2*

## Plates



*Plate 1: Oblique shot of wall (103)*



*Plate 2: Detail of Oak house foundations*





*Plate 3: Junction of brick walls 103 and 104, forming the interior of the demolished 1840-1903 extension*



*Plate 4: South facing section of northmost part of trench- showing interior layers (105) and (106) cut by wall (104)*



*Plate 5: Working shot*



*Plate 6: Completed watching brief area*

## Appendix 1: Summary of project archive

TYPE	DETAILS*
Artefacts and Environmental	None
Paper	Context sheet, Correspondence, Diary (Field progress form), Drawing, Matrices, Photograph, Plan, Report, Section, Survey
Digital	Database, Images raster/digital photography, Spreadsheets, Text

*\*OASIS terminology*

The project archive is currently held at the offices of Worcestershire Archaeology. Subject to the agreement of the landowner it is anticipated that it will be deposited at Worcestershire County Museum.