

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**A FURTHER ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF AT HANWELL CASTLE,
HANWELL, OXFORDSHIRE**

SP 4363 4360

On behalf of

Central Networks

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REPORT FOR Central Networks
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Summary

A watching brief was carried out by John Moore Heritage Services during groundworks at Hanwell Castle involving the excavation of an electricity cable trench. A previous watching brief was undertaken during restoration of both the southern (JMHS 2008) and northern (JMHS 2009) sections of the western boundary wall, during which the original boundary wall was located as was a pentice leading to the church. During rebuilding for the northern part of the western boundary wall (08/002357/F) foundations for an earlier building and external yard surface were recorded.

Two walls and a floor surface thought to belong to this building were uncovered within the electricity cable trench and limited interpretations have been made.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

Hanwell Castle is located to the south-east of Main Street and north-east of St Peter's Church, Hanwell (NGR SP 4363 4360). The underlying geology is Jurassic Marlstone Rock Bed. The previously rebuilt wall forms the western boundary of the garden; it forms a south-western corner of the garden with a second wall that borders the Church. The land on the exterior is significantly higher than the level of the garden.

1.2 Planning Background

Cherwell District Council granted planning permission for the rebuilding of part of the west boundary wall along the line of the original wall. Due to archaeological and historical importance of the site a condition was attached to the permission requiring a watching brief to be maintained during the course of building operations or construction works on the site. It was also agreed to undertake archaeological monitoring during the excavation of new electricity cable trenches. This was in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan policies.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Hanwell Castle is a former great house of which only the south-west tower and south range remain of a 2-storey house built round a courtyard with the main entrance on the west. It was begun *c.* 1489 for William Cope, cofferer to Henry VII. It was mostly demolished in the 18th century (<http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk>).

The part of the wall to be rebuilt is to the south of the 17th century gate piers. The land slopes down to the west. A watercolour by George Clark of Scaldwell (1835-1845) shows that the slope to the west was clear of vegetation in the 19th century. The wall apparently stepped up to the gatepiers and continued in a straight line out towards the church. A drawing of 1905 by E. L. Giggs shows the gatepiers with some kind of blocking between them and the wall on either side is stepped down.

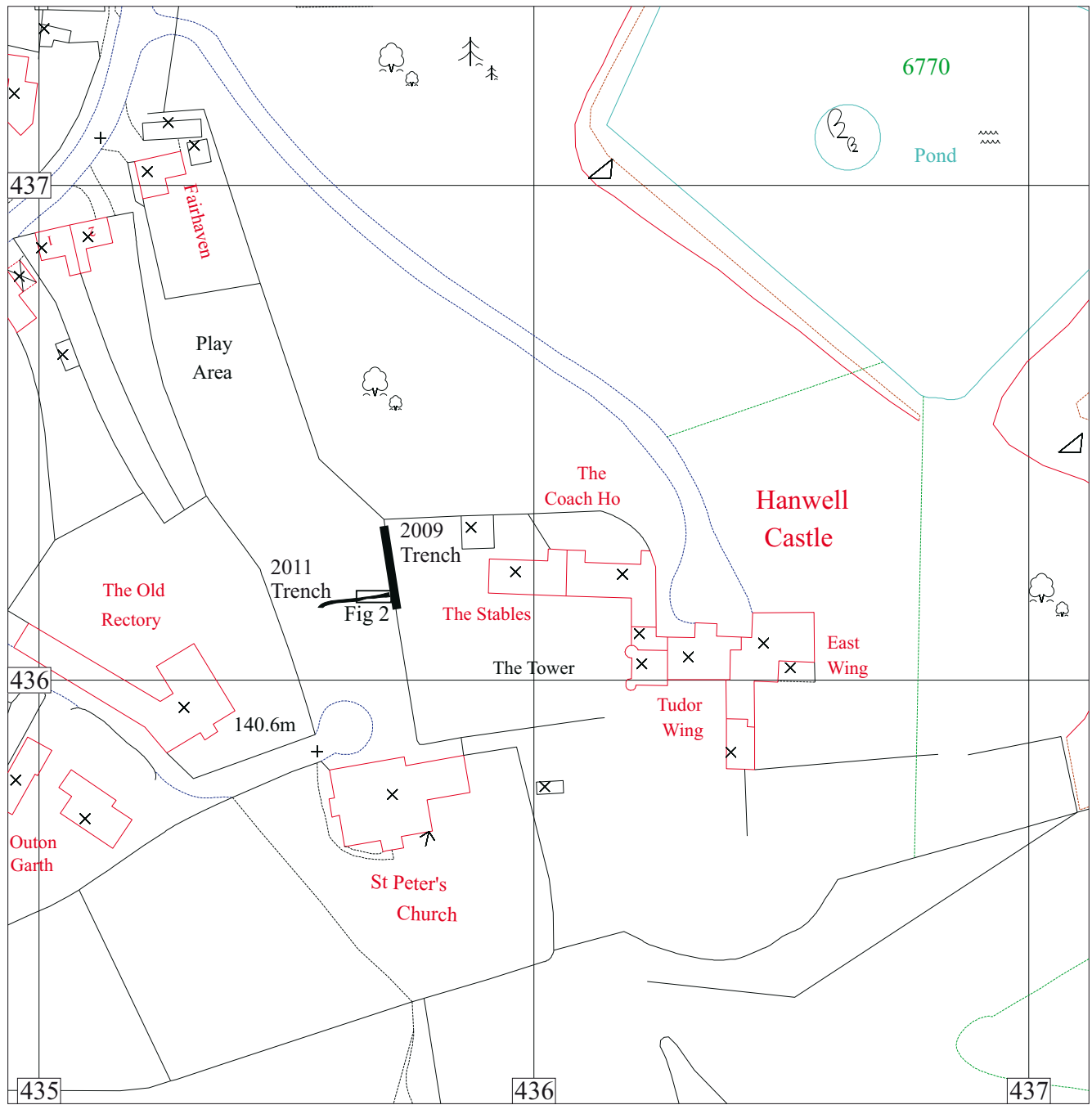


Figure 1. Site Location

An undated, but apparently 19th century, plan in the Bodleian library (G A Oxon b 91(2) entitled 'Enlarged plan of the village of Hanwell' shows a straight line below a scarped bank to the west of the Castle between the Castle and the Rectory. There is also a rectangular building on the corner and along the same straight boundary to the north of the church. This is internal to the Castle boundary. The same is shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey 25 inches to the mile, 1882 along with the gatepiers (Steane undated).

There are remains of steps between the piers and the house, which suggest that there was not a drive to the house from this side. The wall to the north of the gatepiers seems to be coeval with it and has a well fashioned plinth course with a chamfered offset, also an ashlar wall with limestone coping intact. The wall to the south of the gatepiers, along with the building mentioned above, collapsed or was taken down in the 20th century. Lumps of stone were littered on the surface of the bank and more worked stone was piled behind the shrubbery prior to work commencing. The wall footing and the foundations of the rectangular building were considered likely to remain buried beneath the superimposed bank (*ibid*).

John Moore Heritage Services have undertaken two watching briefs during rebuilding of the western boundary wall. The first watching brief was undertaken during rebuilding of the southern part of the western boundary wall, during which the original boundary wall was located as was a pentice leading to the church (JMHS 2008). During rebuilding for the northern part of the western boundary wall (08/002357/F) foundations for the original building were located along with an earlier building and external yard surface (JMHS 2009).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

A Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared by John Moore Heritage Services, for the second part of the wall rebuilding, and this was re-used for this watching brief. The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

2.1 Project Objectives

- To identify and record any archaeological and historic remains exposed during the course of building operations or construction works on the site.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS). Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist visited the work on appropriate occasions during the course of the groundwork, which involved the hand and machine excavation of the area for the new electricity cable.

Some trenching within the garden of Hanwell House was done without any archaeological monitoring but the sensitive area with the previously discovered building was archaeologically monitored.

4 RESULTS (Figures 2 & 3)

All features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material. A general description of the feature fills is given.

The natural geological deposit in the area was a yellowish grey marlstone rock bed, but excavations were not deep enough to encounter this deposit. At the eastern end of the trench the earliest recorded deposit was friable mottled light white yellow silty clay (1005). The nature of this deposit suggested that it may have formed the sub base for a stone floor. One flat stone was seen on the uppermost surface of (1005) which may have been the only surviving part of the *in situ* stone floor.

Cut through or butting up against (1005) was a 0.40m wide construction cut [1003] for a north-south wall, composed of irregular shaped stone blocks (1004) (<20-100mm) bonded by a silty clay mortar.

On the western side of wall (1004) was light yellowish brown clay silt (1002), thought to be a made ground layer or remains of a 'yard' surface between the two walls.

Cut into or butting up against (1002) was 0.70m wide construction cut [1006], filled by irregular sized stone blocks (1007) (<20-150mm) bonded by a degraded lime mortar.

Overlying both walls (1004) & (1007) was *c.* 0.20m thick mottled greyish brown silty clay subsoil with red burnt patches (1001). The latest deposit was *c.* 0.30m thick dark greyish brown topsoil (1000).

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of the results is considered to be good. With excellent cooperation from the ground workers sufficient time was enabled to investigate and record the archaeological features to required standards.

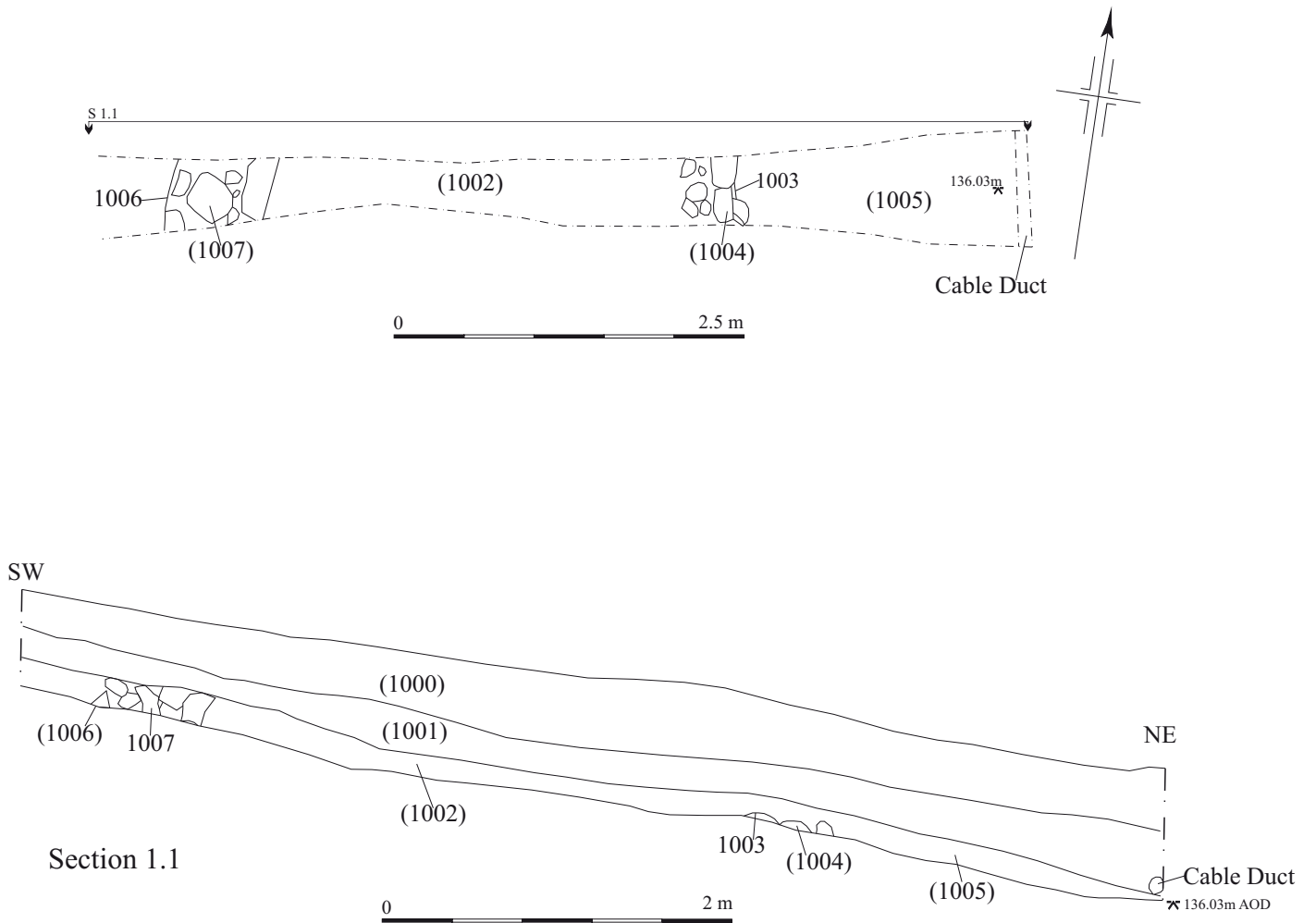


Figure 2. Plan and section

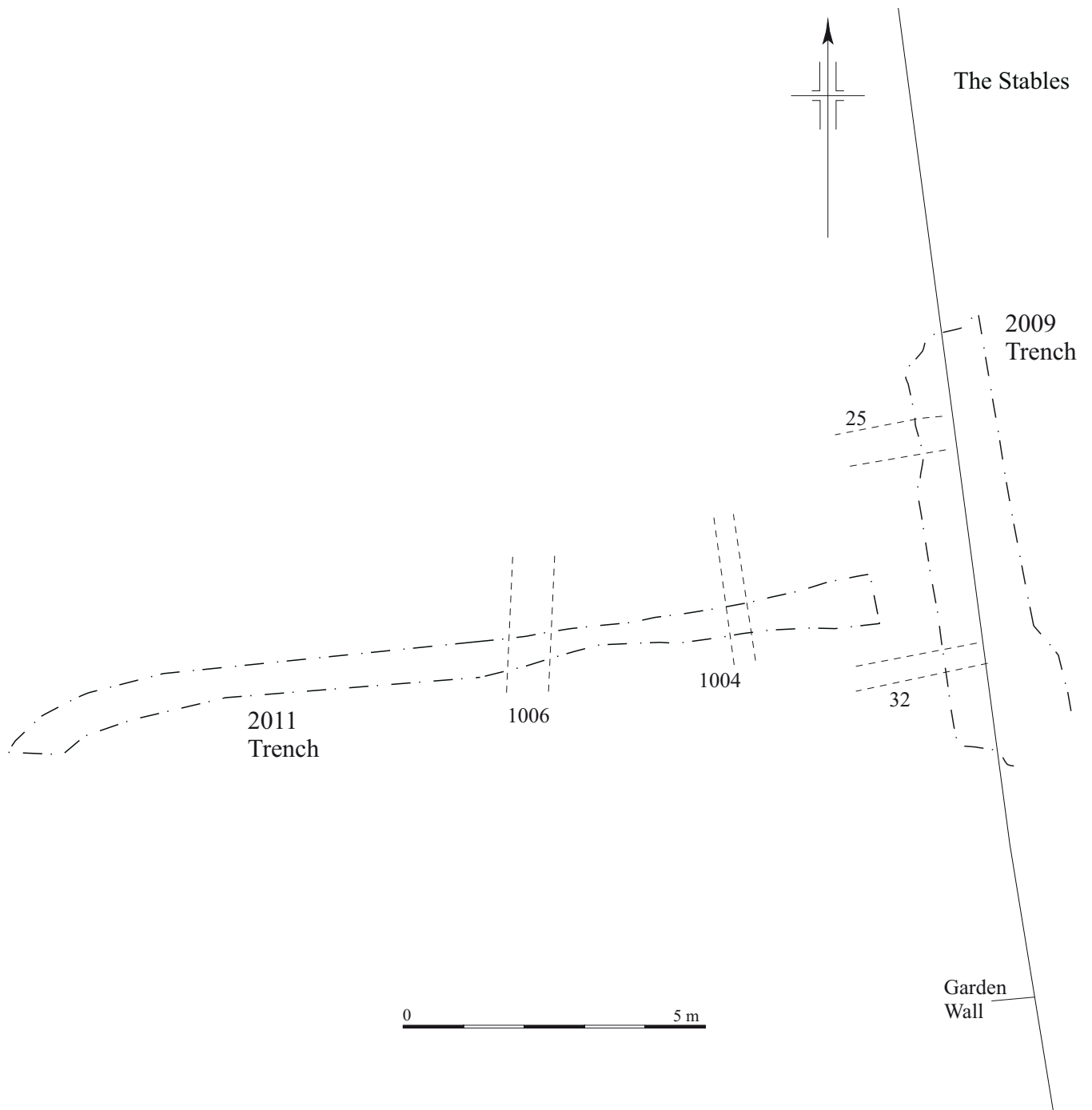


Figure 3. Wall Projections

5 FINDS

There were no finds recovered during the excavations.

6 DISCUSSION

The early building identified during the watching brief on the northern part of the western boundary wall replacement scheme (JMHS 2009) was further investigated during the excavation of the new electricity cable trench. One east-west aligned wall (25) and stone floor surface (22) were recorded during the 2009 watching brief and one other possible east west aligned wall was postulated (32) (JMHS 2009) (see Fig 3).

The walls uncovered within the electricity duct trench were orientated north-south and probably formed part of the same building or building complex which occupied this area. As there were no finds, dating of the building is still only hypothesised, but it is likely to have been constructed sometime before the 17th century AD gate piers. The walls were not constructed on a level platform and can be seen to occupy a sloping ground, which may indicate why the building went out of use. Alternatively the larger most western wall (1007) may have been a boundary wall defining the building plot. It was wider and well constructed with a definite bonding agent and on a slightly different alignment to the rest of the walls picked up within the 2009 trench (see Fig 3), which further indicates that perhaps wall (1007) was a previous boundary wall. Deposit (1002) may have formed a basic 'yard' type surface between the boundary wall and the back wall of the structure (wall 1004).

Subsequent levelling and terracing over this area has damaged the remains of this building considerably. Wall (1004) was probably associated with the walls discovered in 2009 and would have formed a small square building perhaps used as a store or grounds keepers cottage. The associated floor surface (1005) may have once provided bedding for flat stone slabs.

The watching brief was successful in establishing the diameter of the building as either 3.5m or 6.5m depending on whether wall (1007) was part of the structure. The reason for this building going out of use is still unknown but the unlevel ground it occupies may have been a reason for its demolition. The building would have probably been associated with walls (15) & (16) which formed a gateway discovered during the restoration of the southern section of the boundary wall (JMHS 2008).

A confidence rating is high that the best possible results were achieved, but it must be stressed that due to the 'keyhole' nature of the excavations only limited hypothesis can be applied.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper record

The project brief
Written scheme of investigation
The project report

The primary site record

Physical record

Finds

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to the County Museums' Store.



Figure 3: General view of Electricity Cable Trench looking west

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