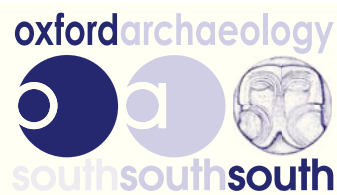


Four Ashes Hall
Cold Bath House
Enville
Staffordshire



**Historic Building
Investigation and Recording**



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Four Ashes Hall Bath House, Staffordshire

Historic Building Recording and Investigation

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Four Ashes Hall Bath House, Enville, Staffordshire

Summary

Four Ashes Hall is a country house in Enville, near Stourbridge which is believed to have been constructed in the second half of the 17th century and which has undergone a number of phases of expansion or alteration since then. Within the grounds to the west of the house is a distinct linear area of woodland, surrounded by open fields, and within this, immediately adjacent to a pond, are the remains of a ruined building which would have formed a cold bath house. The wooded area was planted in the later 18th century and it has a system of ponds feeding each other together with a simple circular path which extends around the edge of the woodland. Historical maps label this as the 'Bath Walk' and clearly it was intended as a part of the pleasure gardens of Four Ashes Hall where one could take a relaxing walk within the woods together with a bracing, therapeutic cold bath.

The bath house building is a single storied structure and although only half of it remains standing it would have had a simple rectangular plan with two rooms. The larger room to the south has now been almost entirely lost and little survives above ground but excavation works have been undertaken in the current project to reveal the main cold bath itself which located was in this area. The cold bath was a substantial brick-lined pool (2.6 m x 1.3 m by 2 m deep), and adjacent to it was a raised platform where one would presumably have got changed together with a fireplace where the bather could have warmed themselves after leaving the water. The smaller room has two much smaller pools, connected to each other and to the adjacent pond.

Evidence identified in the current work suggests that the southern half of the building has undergone significant alteration and both the current cold bath and fireplace are almost certainly secondary additions. Indeed it may be that the entire southern half was a secondary addition and that the northern half was originally a free-standing, square-plan building. If this is the case it may be that the northern half was not originally a cold bath house and had another function, possibly as a simple changing room for bathers to swim in the adjacent pond. It has previously been reported that the building was constructed in c.1790 and the nature of the surviving structure would support this belief. The southern half with the cold bath itself would probably have been a relatively early addition, probably constructed in the first quarter of the 19th century.

Cold baths and detached cold bath houses were constructed in significant numbers at country houses, particularly in the 18th century and principally for reasons of maintaining good health. Immersing oneself in cold water was believed to be effective in strengthening the constitution or combating ailments and it followed similar contemporary health trends for coastal bathing or taking spa waters.

The cold bath house at Four Ashes Hall has been recorded in the current work and relates to an ongoing project to restore the adjacent system of ponds. This project is largely funded by Natural England through a Higher Level Stewardship Agreement and it is anticipated that this will include either consolidation or restoration works to the bath house. The recording was partly commissioned due to the possibility of the structure being de-stabilised by the nearby dredging works but also so that understanding of the nature of building could be enhanced and that this could help inform the preparation of proposals for the building.





1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 In March 2012 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a programme of historic building investigation and recording on the remains of a former bath house in the grounds of Four Ashes Hall in Enville, near Stourbridge, Staffordshire. The work relates to the possible conservation or reconstruction of the bath house as part of a wider programme of landscape works currently being undertaken at the site largely funded by Natural England through a Higher Level Stewardship Agreement. The wider works include dredging and re-establishing a series of pools to the west of the house and it is being managed by Patrick McIlroy of PJM Associates. The recording was particularly commissioned as an emergency measure taken due to the perilous condition of the remaining structure and the fear that it might be destabilised and collapse during works to dredge an immediately adjacent pool.

1.1.2 Only the northern part of the former building remains today as a roofed structure, albeit in a very poor condition. Footings and other features remain from the rest of the building and it is understood that the main walls and roof from this area were demolished in relatively recent years (probably late 20th century).

1.2 Aims and objectives

1.1.1 The principal aims of the current work have been:

- to enhance understanding of the nature of the structure;
- to help inform the potential reconstruction of the building and to ensure that it is undertaken as accurately as possible;
- to record for posterity the building prior to its alteration (or potential collapse), in terms of its construction, history, development, alteration and use.
- to make the record publicly accessible through a report (a public document) and a project archive deposited with a public institution.
- To make outline recommendations for further study and analysis
- to provide the basis for a management plan of the structure

1.2.1 Although one of the main aims of the recording was to assist the reconstruction of the building in the event of a collapse it wasn't intended to be a total brick-by-brick survey. In addition parts of the building remained buried during the investigation so the work was not comprehensive.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 The project included two distinct elements: firstly the recording of the visible, above ground features and secondly the excavation and recording of some buried elements. The excavation work was targeted and it was not intended to expose all surviving elements.

1.3.2 The initial recording was undertaken on 9 March 2012 and included the creation of appropriate scaled drawings, a photographic survey (black and white prints and digital) and descriptive notes. The drawings included a plan, a long section and a cross section to show the main structure of the building. A further visit was undertaken on 16 March after further dredging of the adjacent pool and exposure of the previously buried pool in the demolished section of bath house. Further excavation of the pool was undertaken on the same day under archaeological supervision and the exposed features were recorded.



2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Four Ashes Hall

- 2.1.1 As the bath house is an entirely separate structure some distance from Four Ashes Hall it is not necessary to provide a detailed analysis of the history of the main house. However, it would be appropriate to include a short summary to better understand the context of the bath house. Much of the information here is taken from the Four Ashes Hall website which appears to have been written by the family with information taken directly from the uncatalogued archive stored in the house.
- 2.1.2 The earliest parts of the house are believed to date from the second half of the 17th century and to have been constructed by Henry Wollaston. Around the 1760 a large stable block was constructed by Thomas Amphlett who had gathered a considerable fortune from trading activities with the East India Company. This stable block is now listed Grade II* and together with the attached threshing barns it is on a much grander scale than the Grade II listed house. Plans were drawn up in this period to reconstruct the house to match the new stables but in 1763 Thomas Amphlett was murdered in India and the new house was not constructed.
- 2.1.3 Various service buildings including a laundry block and a courtyard outside the kitchen were built in this period and in 1830 the library was added to the house. In the second half of the 19th century further substantial alterations were undertaken including a new three storey wing. Much of the 20th century was a period of slow decline for the Four Ashes estate with limited maintenance and fewer staff in the kitchen and large stable block. In 1993 the estate was inherited by Martin Thompson and in 1997 it was passed on by his son Stephen Thompson with the intention of gradually restoring the house, outbuildings and gardens.
- 2.1.4 *Evidence relating to the bath house***
- 2.1.5 The Four Ashes Hall website reports that between 1760 and 1800 a series of formal spring-fed pools were established, possibly using former brick pits, and in the same period a cold bath house (the subject of the current study) was constructed. Between 1807 and 1838 the bath walk is said to have been created from extensive planting of trees within a field known as Cow Leasowe.
- 2.1.6 The maps used in the development of the website have not been seen in the current study but four historic Ordnance Survey maps have been consulted to provide further historical information relating to the site. Each of these maps, dating from 1882, 1903, 1923 and 1961, shows a broadly similar arrangement to each other with a distinct rectangular plan wooded area c.170 m to the west of the house, containing five main connected pools or ponds. A simple network of paths extend around the ponds and each map appears to show a similar sized rectangular plan building at the north-western corner of the largest pond at the centre of the woodland. This is the location of the bath house. The three later maps label the wooded area as the *Bath Walk*. The first edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey map has been included in this report at Figure 2.
- 2.1.7 *Other evidence***
- 2.1.8 Discussions with Nikola Thompson of Four Ashes Hall have provided valuable evidence relating to the bath house. Mrs Thompson's understanding has always been that the bath house was constructed in the 1790s and that there was a fireplace in the southern half which was not often used. She also believes that there was a chain or set of chains which one could hold onto while they lowered themselves into the bath house pool.



- 2.1.9 It is also interesting to note that Nikola Thompson has confirmed that there is a very large collection of unsorted historical material relating to Four Ashes Hall at the house. There are said to be 'boxes and boxes' of this documentary material and presumably it includes numerous letters, account books, deeds, maps, photographs etc, some of which will relate to the bath house. The task of examining this archive for information on the bath house is beyond the scope of the current project but it is still well worth knowing that the material exists and that there is potential for finding out more about the site in the future.
- 2.1.10 At an appropriate time Mrs Thompson intends to organise this material, possibly with guidance or help from the local museums/archive service and to allow some form of public access to the archive.
- 2.1.11 Another very important source of information relating to the historic form of the building is a photograph of the bath house before demolition of the southern half of the structure, which has been supplied to OA via PJM Associates (see Fig 6). Further description of the photograph is included below.

2.2 Bath houses and plunge pools in 18th/19th century Britain

- 2.2.1 The information contained below is taken almost entirely from the article *Taking the Plunge: 18th-century bath houses and plunge pools* by Clare Hickman.
- 2.2.2 Cold bath houses appear to have been a type of structure which was common in large and medium sized country estates, particularly in the 18th century. Their primary function was as a therapeutic aid to good health and followed similar beliefs in the beneficial effects of coastal bathing and spa waters.
- 2.2.3 Although they were sometimes located within the main house bath houses were also often sited, as at Four Ashes, in separate detached buildings some way from the house and set a specified walk around the estate grounds which was seen as part of the therapeutic experience.
- 2.2.4 Theorists espoused the belief that regularly plunging into a pool of cold water could both combat ailments or existing conditions while also being of more general health benefit through strengthening ones constitution.
- 2.2.5 The belief in the benefits of cold bathing appear to have originated in the later 17th century with known examples and treatises from the 1690s. In 1703 the philosopher John Locke wrote in his tract *Some thoughts on Education* that 'every one is now full of the miracles done by cold baths on decay'd and weak constitutions, for the recovery of health and strength'. The construction of cold baths continued through the 18th century and apparently well into the first half of the 19th century when a number of articles on the benefits of cold bathing were published.
- 2.2.6 Although the principal purpose of cold bath houses was usually their perceived health benefits they were no doubt often also partly constructed for their aesthetic contribution to designed landscapes. Landscape gardens of the 18th century made full artistic use of structures such as bridges or garden seats which had a practical purpose as well as structures such as grottos and follies which had little purpose other than aesthetics.
- 2.2.7 The bath house at Four Ashes is a more modest structure but at Stourhead the cold bath is within a grotto and that at Corsham Court was originally designed by Lancelot Brown. The use of cold baths had probably all but disappeared by the earlier 20th century (probably frequently much earlier) and most bath houses were demolished or the baths infilled. A small number are listed today but there are generally relatively few which survive.



2.2.8 **Bradshaw House, Congleton**

- 2.2.9 One interesting example which does survive is that at Bradshaw House in Congleton and this is a structure with distinct similarities to the Four Ashes Hall structure. This was also hip-roofed and brick built with two main rooms between which there is no internal connection. The pool is c.2.75 m² in plan by 1.8 m deep and there is a set of stone steps down into it. The pool was fed by pipes from a nearby spring or stream and the upper room has a fireplace and two large windows.
- 2.2.10 It is believed the structure was probably built in the 1820s and it has recently been restored by the Congleton Building Preservation Trust with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Further information on the building can be found on the group's website (<http://congletonbpt.wordpress.com/>)

3 DESCRIPTION

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 As referred to above only the northern section of the former bath house at Four Ashes Hall survives as an intact roofed structure although the footprint of the rest of the building has been exposed and excavated in the current project. The former building would have been a single storey tall and with a simple rectangular plan, 7.5 m long by 3.8 m wide housing two broadly square plan rooms. The slightly smaller room to the north (3.6 m long) forms the surviving part of the building while the slightly longer room (3.9 m long) would have formed the southern part of the structure although only features at or below ground level survive within this area.

3.2 Surviving structure

- 3.2.1 The surviving part of the former bath house is a single storey brick structure with a tile covered roof which is hipped at the north end. It appears to have been a simple, utilitarian building without architectural embellishment and its condition is now very poor with a number of substantial structural cracks. There is a door in the east wall and a bricked up former window in the north wall, each of which are below simple single brick segmental arches, and there are two stepped bricks at the eaves. The brickwork is laid in an unusual and inconsistent bond, (close to *Flemish stretcher bond* as defined by Brunskill and Clifton-Taylor), and the character of the bricks would suggest a date of construction from the later 18th or early 19th century.
- 3.2.2 The south wall of the surviving block is now external, due to the collapse or demolition of the southern part of the building (described further below) while the open-faced west wall faces directly onto the adjacent pool. At the northern end the timber lintel which creates the wide opening in this side of the building is supported by a 60 cm long pier which extends around the north-west corner of the building. The primary arrangement survives in this area with a curved bullnose brick jamb whereas at the southern end the jamb has collapsed and it is only possible to speculate as to the original arrangement. The east-to-west wall which forms the southern end of the building survives intact and at its west end it retains the fragmentary remains of a former projecting pier which would have supported the southern end of the lintel. This projection is now only half a brick deep and although the end of the lintel appears to be perched precariously on top of this the weight is actually taken by an adjacent inserted acro-prop. Clearly there would originally have been a pier to support this end of the lintel and presumably it would have been of a similar length to that at the north end, again with a bullnose jamb. It is not known if there would originally have been some form of screen or doors within this large opening.



- 3.2.3 The west side of the building faces directly onto the adjacent pond and the de-watering/dredging works have exposed part of the retaining wall below floor level (see Plate 5). This has confirmed that the west wall continues down at least 8 brick courses below the floor. At its centre is an opening to allow water into the pits within this part of the building, which is covered by a secondary metal grille with very thin horizontal slits. The top of this wall, at floor level has largely been lost.

3.3 Internal description

- 3.3.1 **Walls:** The surviving internal part of the bath house comprises a single room (c.3.2 m²) with unplastered brick walls containing traces of paint/limewash and laid in an inconsistent bond. Access into the room is through a rough vertical-board door in the east wall with a shallow arch top. Two clear straight joints are visible in the north wall from the blocked former window also visible externally but it is also interesting to note that there are similar straight joints in the south wall (now obscured externally) suggesting that there was formerly a central window in this wall too.
- 3.3.2 **Floor and pits:** The floor is now largely of earth, the previous (probably tiled) floor surface having been removed. The principal feature of interest in the room are a pair of aligned pits, within the floor and towards the centre of the room. The eastern pit is 83 cm long by 53 cm wide and its base is c.88 cm below the former floor level. The northern, eastern and southern walls of the pit are rendered, together with the base, but the western wall is a single skin brick wall dividing this pit from the adjacent pit (detailed further below). At the start of the current project Pit 1 was largely filled with liquid slurry/detritus but this has been largely cleared out and towards the base were a series of ex-situ square floor tiles. It is more likely that these tiles were from the main room and were dumped in the hole rather than being having formed a surface on the base of the pit itself. A feature of interest in the pit is the end of a small pipe (c.5 cm diameter) in the north wall c.15 cm above the base of the pit. This pipe appears to extend in a north-easterly direction away from the pit and bath house and it is probably lined to the former pump house in this area.
- 3.3.3 The western pit is slightly larger (83 cm²) than the immediately adjacent eastern pit and it is divided from it by a single skin brick wall where the bricks are carefully laid with a number of vertical gaps between bricks to allow water to flow between the pits. The northern and southern walls of this pit were again rendered but the pit was substantially filled with shingle/gravel quite different to the slurry/detritus in the east pit. A quantity of the gravel was removed to expose the pit to a depth of c.80 cm but the excavation did not reach the base of the pit and it appears that it is deeper (probably considerably deeper) than the eastern pit. It may be that the shingle was dumped in the western pit similarly to the different materials dumped in the east pit but the distinct and consistent nature of the fill suggests that the gravel was probably part of a filtration system to remove impurities and to allow relatively clean water into the east pit.



- 3.3.4 At the western end of the west pit the fragmentary remains of a grille survive formed from thin, vertically set iron bars and beyond this is a channel (c.48 cm wide) which extends through to an opening in the west wall of the building. The grille has largely corroded away but the remains survive of two vertical timber posts within recesses against the northern and southern walls of the pit. The horizontal upper member of the grille has now been lost so each of the vertical rods are essentially independent from each other. The channel to the west of the grille is now infilled with detritus and it is uncovered but it is very likely that it would originally have been covered. A stone lintel survives toward the eastern end and close to this is a further grille close to the edge of the building. This grille is intact but is a secondary addition and is formed from a iron board with very thin horizontal slits. This grille was clearly intended to stop as many twigs or loose items as possible from entering the pit.
- 3.3.5 **Roof:** The roof structure is entirely exposed, including the undersides of tiles and battens, and appears to be largely primary, consistent with a later 18th or early 19th century date. The north end is hipped while the southern end adjoins the full height brick wall which was originally internal but which now forms the end of the surviving building. The main members are of elm and comprise common rafters (c.9 cm tall x 7 cm wide) which rest on a wall plate (12 x 20 cm) at the top of each wall and are supported by tall hip ridges (22 x 6 cm). At their heads the two hip ridges meet at a block immediately to the north of the first full set of rafters.
- 3.3.6 There is a single purlin to each of the three slopes and the rafters are slightly notched to pass over them. There is no ridge piece and the main members are nailed together (eg purlins to hip ridges).
- 3.3.7 The roof is strengthened at the north-east and north-west corners by timber braces (15 cm²) resting on top of the wall plates and set at an angle between the two walls. There is a small notch in the top of the northern and eastern wall plates at the point where the corner brace adjoins and it is interesting to note that there is a similar notch in the upper face of the eastern wall plate, towards the south-eastern corner of the building. There is no corner brace here because the roof is not hipped and adjoins the full height brick wall. There is also similar evidence at the south-western corner where there is a bolt hole in the underside of the western wall plate similar to an in-situ bolt at the point where the north-western corner brace adjoins the western wall plate. With this side of the building being open-fronted the arrangement is slightly different to that of the other walls and there is no notch in the upper face of the wall plate.
- 3.3.8 The bolt hole towards the south-west and the notch towards the south-east suggest that there were corner braces at this end of the room and that this area may originally have been a free-standing, square plan structure with a pyramidal roof, to which the southern room (now lost) was a secondary addition. This is supported by the straight joints referred to above suggesting that there was formerly a window in the surviving south wall as well as by other evidence (detailed below) suggesting that the features in the southern half of the building (now demolished) were secondary.
- 3.3.9 However, there is no clear evidence in the roof structure above the wall plates to suggest that this was once a pyramidal structure on a square plan building: the pairs of rafters in the southern half of the room appear primary and extend up to the ridge. Similarly the purlins in the east and west slope continue to the south wall, which they would not have done had the roof originally been pyramidal.
- 3.3.10 The evidence is therefore somewhat contradictory with the roof structure, which appears essentially original, suggesting that the northern room was always part of a longer,



rectangular plan building while other evidence suggesting that it was originally free-standing and presumably with a pyramidal roof. On balance it is probably more likely that the roof structure was reconstructed above wall plate level and that this was originally a smaller square plan building.

3.4 Former southern half of bath house

- 3.4.1 As detailed elsewhere the southern half of the bath house was demolished, probably in the last quarter of the 20th century, and at the start of the current investigation the only features visible were a short stretch of footings extending south from the surviving building, and formerly internal features against the south wall of the standing structure.
- 3.4.2 **Features in north wall:** The south face of the wall between the rooms is rendered although the line of a former ceiling is visible c.6 brick courses above the eaves level. Above this line the gable of the wall is of bare brick.
- 3.4.3 The main visible feature in the wall is a projecting chimney stack which covers the eastern half of the wall together with a fireplace set between the walls at the north-eastern corner of the room. The fireplace has largely collapsed and it is obscured by vegetation but part of the flue has been exposed linking with the chimney. The flue is lined and it is interesting to note that there is relatively little evidence of smoke blackening. This could suggest that this was perhaps not a fireplace but all the other evidence implies that it was a fireplace and it is far more likely that it was just relatively infrequently used. The fireplace would simply have been intended to warm bathers who had just used the adjacent cold bath (detailed further below) rather than any system of warming the water.
- 3.4.4 It is also interesting to note that the chimney breast overlies the blocked former opening, the straight joints of which are visible in the south wall of the surviving room. As the southern side of the wall is rendered the joints are not visible on this face but the fact that the chimney breast abuts the former opening means that the fireplace and chimney must be a secondary addition.
- 3.4.5 Another interesting feature of note in the south face of the wall between the rooms is a series of empty joist sockets towards the base of the wall. There are c.5 narrow sockets and it may be that they supported a small platform over the north end of the pool (detailed below).
- 3.4.6 **Cold Bath Pool:** The former southern room would have had a broadly square plan and while the eastern half would have been a raised platform adjacent to the fireplace and forming a small changing area, the western half was the location of the substantial cold bath pool itself. This pool has been infilled for many years but it has been emptied and the interior almost entirely exposed in the current project. The pool is 2.6 m long by 1.3 m wide and c.2 m deep. The walls of the pool are lined in red brick and the base is laid with square red tiles, similar to those removed from the pit in the northern room. The lower half of each of the walls has a white encrustation and at the southern end there is a simple set of brick steps which allowed access into the water. The stairs comprise 6 risers and they wind around to the north towards the base.
- 3.4.7 The south and west external walls, facing the large adjacent, pond are 35 cm wide but the north wall is just a single skin thick and it is constructed against the main wall of the surviving building. These two walls appear to be entirely structurally independent from each other and this suggests very strongly that the pool was a secondary insertion, being built as an addition to the pre-existing building. The east wall of the pool is a retaining structure, supporting the platform/changing area but the surface of this part of the building has not been exposed in the current project.



- 3.4.8 At the north-eastern and south-eastern corners of the pool there are vertical stakes fixed to the walls by iron clamps. These stakes are now heavily corroded, particularly at the tops and bottoms and their purpose is not clear. A small drain with a grille cover was partially uncovered towards the north-eastern corner of the floor of the pool but water rapidly re-filled the base of the pool and it was not possible to examine this closely.
- 3.4.9 It is unfortunate that little more than surface footings survive from the east wall of the southern room because this would have provided valuable evidence of whether there is a distinction in the brickwork between the two parts of the wall and whether the northern room was originally a free-standing square plan structure as speculated above. The old photograph probably taken in the later 20th century appears to show the east wall of the southern room as an entirely continuous brick wall from the surviving doorway to the south-eastern corner of the building and with no clear evidence of a structural break between the rooms. However, if there was a structural break then this would have been towards the rear of the photograph and even though it is not visible in the image it is quite possible that there was one.
- 3.4.10 The photograph shows that in the south wall there was a doorway (door not in-situ) and to the west of this a window with simple soldier course course. The window frame was in-situ but it appears the glazing had been lost and it was largely boarded over. The photograph also appears to suggest that there were no windows in the west wall and that the internal face of this wall was rendered. The open doorway in the photograph allows some limited visibility into the southern room and it appears that the pool had by this time been infilled.
- 3.4.11 Mrs Nikola Thompson has reported that she has been told that there were formerly a number of chains which hung from the ceiling and which could be used to guide oneself down into the pool.
- 3.4.12 A number of items of interest were retrieved from the fill which was removed from in or around the main pool. This included an iron window frame with four horizontal lights which could have been primary to this building. It also included several chains including one which was fixed to a timber post, an L-shaped iron bracket with bolts in-situ, an iron bar, a series of boards with bevelled edges and a number of long timbers with mortices (possibly from a door frame).

4 OUTLINE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The current project is principally intended to provide an archive record of the building and a better understanding of its historic form. However, it is anticipated that the information contained within it will help feed into a possible future management plan and therefore it would be appropriate to include some outline management recommendations or suggestions for further work.
- 4.1.2 The building is an unusual structure and its interest would certainly justify attempts to either consolidate the existing structure or ideally reconstruct the lost part of the building. A restored cold bath house would have considerable interpretative potential and it is a type of building which could capture people's imagination in a different way to the more architecturally impressive house and stable block. It mirrors contemporary health fads and allows people of today to relate to their predecessors.
- 4.1.3 Any reconstruction should aim to to be as historically accurate as possible and all relevant information which would help in this aim should be considered in forming the



proposals. The current work, particularly the exposure of the main cold bath pool, has started the process of understanding the structure and the site retains considerable potential for uncovering further remains. Various parts of the southern half of the building remained buried in the project (footings and the eastern 'platform' adjacent to the fireplace) or obscured by vegetation. These areas should be carefully exposed and recorded to further understanding of these areas.

- 4.1.4 Further intrusive investigation should be made with the aim of more fully understanding the water system at the site. Did the pipe in the small eastern pit connect with the pump house? How did the pump house relate to the cold bath house? If the pump house was formerly an ice house when was it converted? How did the drain at the bottom of the main pool operate?
- 4.1.5 Further examination should also be made of the items retrieved from the fill removed from the main pool in the current works. This includes chains, an iron window frame and various timber fragments. It should be possible to identify if some of these fragments were part of the roof or formed a door/window frame.
- 4.1.6 Understanding of the form of the southern half of the building is greatly helped by the photograph taken before the demolition of the structure. This clearly shows the form of the southern and eastern elevations and it suggests that the internal walls were plastered/rendered. The plaster on the external face of the wall which historically divided the two rooms also shows the height of this plaster and the fact that there would have been a ceiling. This room would have been of a higher status than the unplastered northern room.
- 4.1.7 As detailed elsewhere there is understood to be a large quantity of documentary material on Four Ashes Hall and it is likely that some of this would relate to the Cold Bath House. There may be plans, maps, photographs, accounts, bills etc that can shed further light on the structure and ideally this should be researched prior to the reconstruction of the building. However, if there are boxes and boxes of uncatalogued material it might be unrealistic to hope to examine it rapidly and that might be a longer term objective. This may be particularly true considering the urgent need to consolidate the existing structure and the possibility that funding is currently available but which would not be available following a lengthy investigation of the archive.
- 4.1.8 It is perhaps fortunate that the key elements of the building (the main cold bath pool and smaller pits) survive relatively intact within the floor while the building itself, half of which has been lost, would have been a relatively utilitarian shed. Therefore the loss of half the building is not as great as it would be elsewhere and its slightly speculative reconstruction to enclose the surviving pool/pits is justified.
- 4.1.9 If it is not proposed to reconstruct the southern half of the bath house or if funding would not be available for this in the short term then the main pool and other surface features should be re-buried to protect them.
- 4.1.10 It would be wise for contact to be made with the volunteers group who have restored the Bradshaw House Cold Bath House in Congleton, Cheshire to discuss their works and to examine this bath house for parallels to Four Ashes. As detailed above this bath house appears to have been broadly contemporary with the one at Four Ashes and of a similar scale.



5 CONCLUSION AND ANALYSIS

- 5.1.1 The cold bath house at Four Ashes Hall is a very interesting type of structure which was clearly common in the estates of large and medium sized houses in the 18th century but which almost certainly do not survive in large numbers today. It would have been intended to act as an aid to health and well-being based on the contemporary belief in the therapeutic benefits of regular submersion in cold water. The brisk walk from the house through the wooded grounds was also clearly meant to be part of beneficial experience.
- 5.1.2 It is clearly unfortunate that a substantial part of the building no longer survives but the current project has considerably enhanced our understanding of the structure, its original form and historic use. Although half of the building has been lost there is sufficient information on the structure to allow the reconstruction of the building with a reasonable level of authenticity.
- 5.1.3 Although cold bath houses appear to have sometimes been impressive structures constructed as important landscape features the structure at Four Ashes is a simpler, rectangular plan brick building with minimal decoration or architectural pretension. The current work has identified evidence which suggests that the northern half of the building may originally have been a free-standing, square-plan structure and that the southern half, including the main cold bath itself, was a secondary addition.
- 5.1.4 The current investigation supports the understanding held within the family that at least the surviving part of the building was constructed in the 1790s. By the first edition OS map of 1882 the building had a rectangular plan so clearly by that date the southern half of the building had been constructed and it may be that the possible southern extension was added in the first half of the 19th century. From the relatively limited information available on cold bath houses it appears that an earlier 19th century date would be more likely than one from the later 19th century and it may be that it was constructed sometime between 1808 and 1838, the period when the wooded bath walk around the bath house, is understood to have been established (Four Ashes Hall website). It is interesting to note the similarities between the structure at Four Ashes Hall and the cold bath at Bradshaw House in Congleton which is believed to have been constructed in the 1820s.
- 5.1.5 It is understood that the system of spring fed ponds which the cold bath house is adjacent to were established in the 18th century so almost certainly the possible original square-plan building was originally built as a pool side structure and its function would have been related to the water. However, it may be that rather than being a cold bath house it was a small changing room for pool bathers or other similar function.
- 5.1.6 The function or operations of the two small pits within the northern room are something of a mystery but it appears to be clear that water was intended to flow into them from the adjacent pond and that water was allowed to pass from one pit to the next. The gravel in the one pit appears to have been deliberately placed and could have acted as a filtration system to allow relatively clear water into the eastern pit. It has been suggested that this small pit was for children but this seems unlikely although it is known that cold bathing was felt to be beneficial to children as well as to adults

Jonathan Gill

May 2012



APPENDIX A. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Published Sources

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Hickman C *Garden History* 'Taking the Plunge: 18th-century bath houses and plunge pools' 2010

Maps

Ordnance Survey 25 inch:1 mile (1882)

Ordnance Survey 25 inch: 1 mile (1903)

Ordnance Survey 25 inch:1 mile (1923)

Ordnance Survey 1:2500 (1961)

Web sites

Four Ashes Hall website: <http://www.four-ashes-hall.com/>

<http://congletonbpt.wordpress.com/history-of-the-bath-house-and-garden/>



APPENDIX B. LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Four Ashes Hall and attached service range
SO 78 NE
1576-/7/10005
GV II

Small Country House with attached service range to north-west. Mid C19, incorporating the core of an C18, or earlier house. Red brick, some formerly rendered and lined out, or painted, with stone dressings, coped gables with moulded kneelers, diagonally-set ridge and gable stacks with deeply-corbelled caps and slated and tiled roofs. L-plan house, with attached service range to the north-west enclosing small courtyard. Entrance front to north-east, with gable to left end, with 2 tall blind arches. North-east wing of 2 storeys with attics, and of 6 bays, the 3 bays to the right set back. Wide shallow pointed arch to left end with ashlar surround, with doorway set back within it. Shouldered head to door, with rectangular overlight composed of 2 ogee-headed lights. Flanking the doorway are tall ogee-headed lights. 2 ground floor, and 3 first floor 3-light mullioned and transomed windows within ashlar frames, and below string courses, that to the first floor stepped above the window heads. Attic windows set within steeply-gabled dormers of 2 and 3 lights. Set-back 3 bays with 2 and 3 light mullioned and transomed windows, and 2 2-light gabled dormers. South-east elevation to garden dominated by 2 wide 2 storey bay windows of 4-lights, with tall mullions and undivided sash windows. Gabled heads to bays with small attic lights. Set back double pile range of 2 bays to left end, with wide central gable. Tall glazing bar sash to centre ground floor, below hood mould. Doorway to right with gabled overlight. First floor with 2, 6 over 6 pane sashes with 4 centred arched heads below hood moulds. Small attic light to gable. Asymmetrical gables, each with a first floor sash, and tall sash to ground floor of rear gable. Tall wall at north-west corner, a remnant of a conservatory links house to ornamental bantam house with lean-to roof and, on courtyard side to north-east rear wall with ramped ends, three 6-panel doors, 2 single lights with diagonal glazing, and above, 5 diamond shaped ventilators of openwork brickwork. On north-west side of courtyard and attached to rear of north-east range, service range of 2 storeys, comprised of a 3-bay laundry with a hipped roof, and a set-back 2-bay pantry and game larder. Enclosed by these buildings is a stepped 3-bay C18 building with a dutch gable at the junction of the taller and lower parts. Interior; South-east range contains formal rooms, with wide hall corridor leading to staircase lit by a venetian window. Tall ceilinged rooms to garden elevation with moulded cornice work, panelled reveals and sunken shutters. 6-panelled doors with architrave surrounds, and moulded skirtings. Moulded surrounds to hearths, one of crinoidal limestone. Fitted furniture to library. North-east range with kitchen hearths, and servants quarters. Service range with original fittings. A mid C19 small country house with unaltered interiors and a complete range of service buildings.

Listing NGR: SO7989287746

ENVILLE FOUR ASHES
South Staffordshire
1576- /7/10004 Stable Court at Four Ashes Hall
GV II*

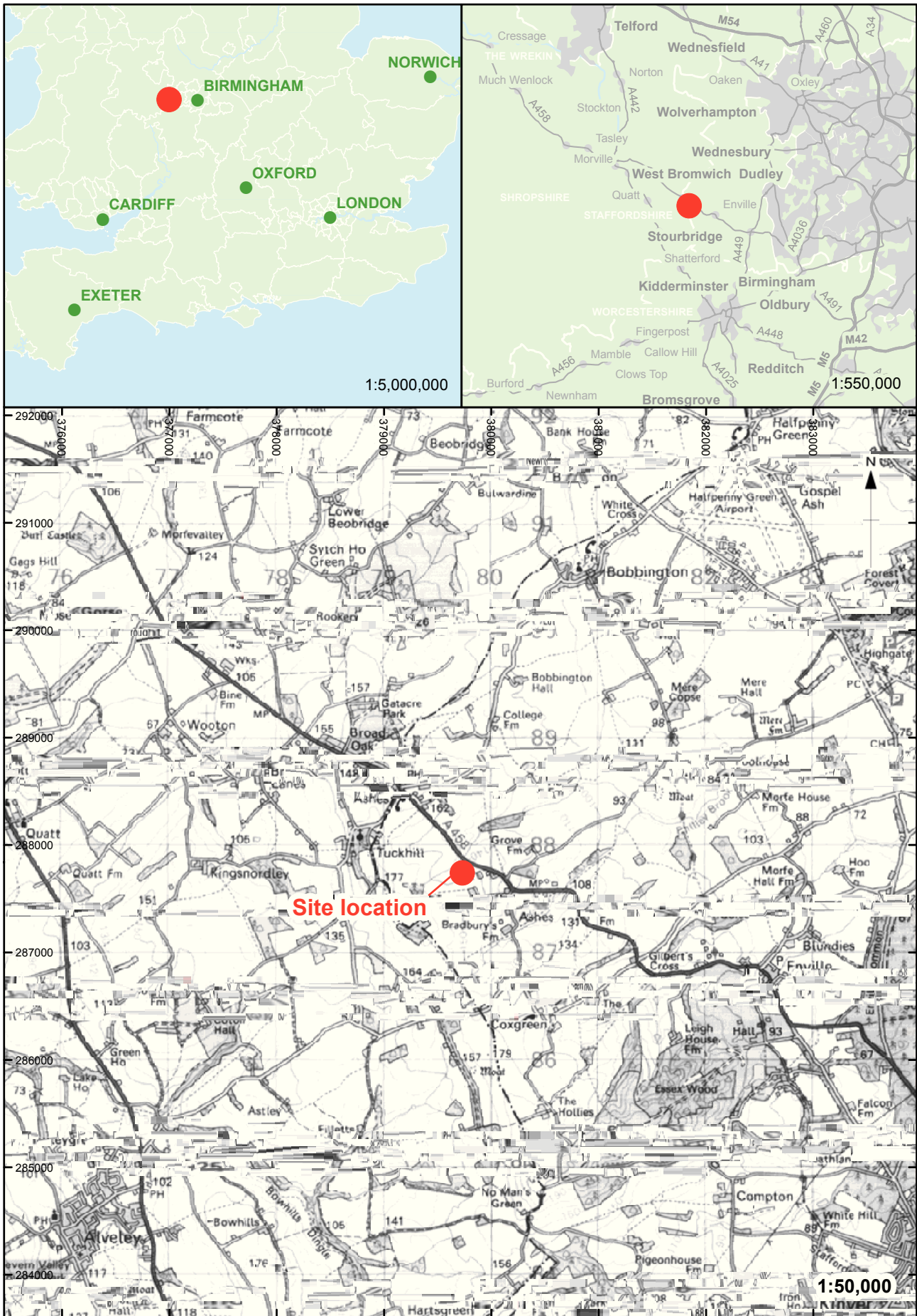
SO 78 NE
Date listed 6 May 1994

Stable Court, incorporating extensive farm outbuilding ranges. Mid to late C18, with C20 alterations. Red brick rising from a shallow ashlar plinth with gauged brick detailing and ashlar dressings, moulded eaves and parapet cornice, coped gables and plain tile and welsh slate roof coverings. Courtyard plan, with stable front intended as the architectural focus within the same vista as Four Ashes Hall (q.v.). South-east elevation; 2 storeys, 11 bays; the central part of 7 bays, with advanced 2-bay ends with hipped roofs behind shallow parapets. Roof structure to left end partially collapsed. Central entry bay, with wide semi-circular arched entry to flanking



stables and central harness room via recessed doorway. Gauged brickwork to arch, with ashlar impost band and keyblock. Above cornice band, a shallow gabled front to crossroof which carries an octagonal lantern with lead-covered dome and semi-circular headed lights. Flanking the entrance are 3-bay blind arcades, with semi-circular windows with intersecting glazing bars to arch heads serving stables. Above are rectangular windows with intersecting bars below gauged brick wedge lintels. Advanced ends with 2 ground floor arches and 2 first floor windows to hipped ends. Inner cheek walls with 2 first floor windows above inserted C20 garage doors. North-east range with blocked tall segmental-arched double doorway to left end. To the right are 4 lower arched cart doorways with boarded doors, and a taller arched doorway giving access to the courtyard entry passage. Further right are 2 tiers of circular openwork brick vents, 3 vents per tier, and a third tall doorway serving a threshing bay with boarded doors and a threshold. Further 2 tiers of vents, and gable at right end with 2 tiers of vents and apex pierced by diamond vents. North-west wall with tiered vents and one double doorway. South-west elevation with access way into courtyard, single storey range to left, 2 storey range to right. Similar detail to courtyard inner walls, together with arcaded single storey hovel to south-west side and to part of north-east range. Interiors include unaltered stalls to stable range, boarded doors and thresholds to threshing bay, and asymmetrical roof trusses to roof with single purlin and double purlin construction on opposed slopes with queen posts, collar and tie beams and diagonal braces all of substantial scantling. An ambitious and well-executed design to create an integrated range of outbuildings incorporating stabling and firm building functions.

Listing NGR: SO7998087738



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Figure 1: Site location

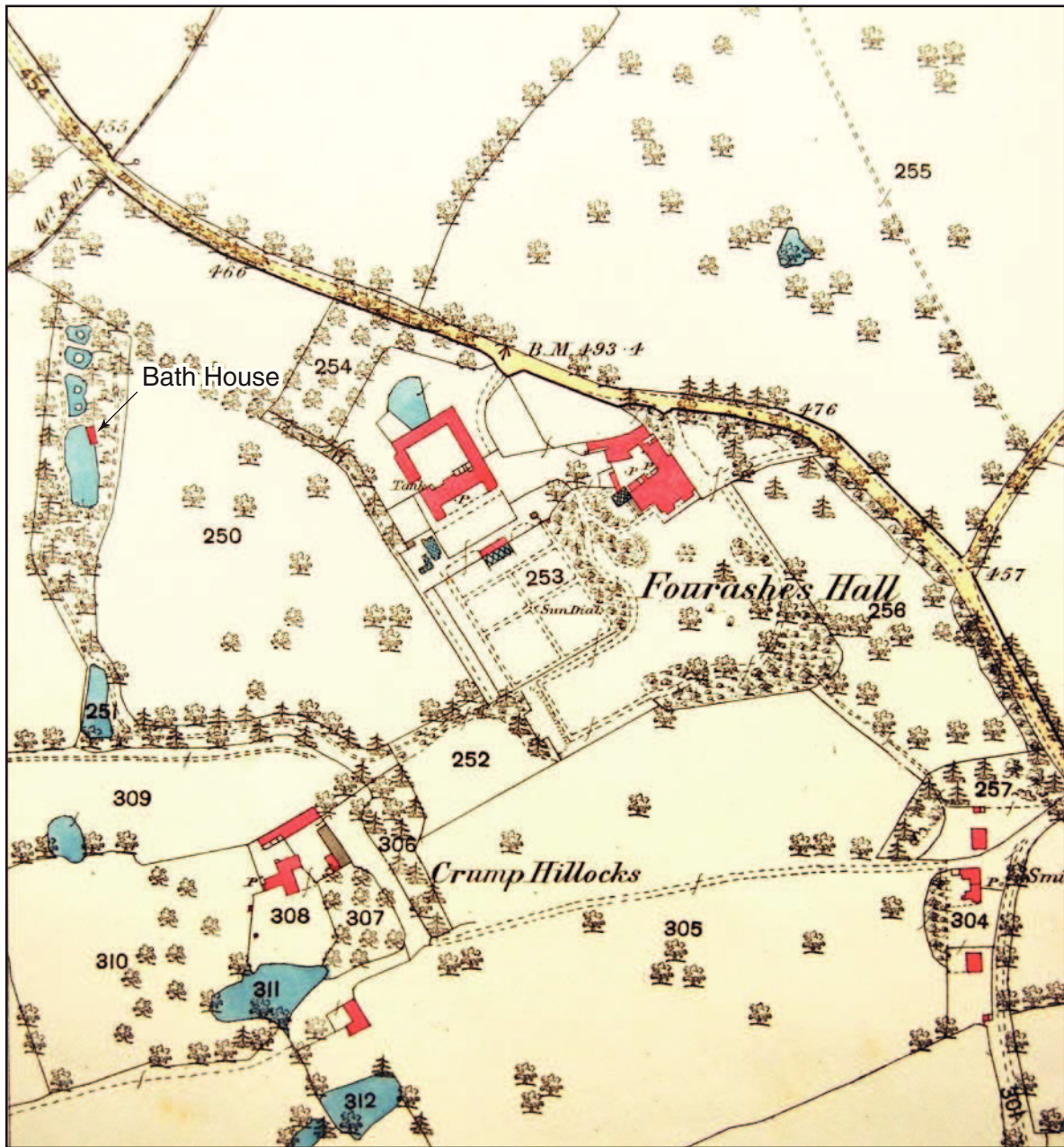


Figure 2: 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map (1882)

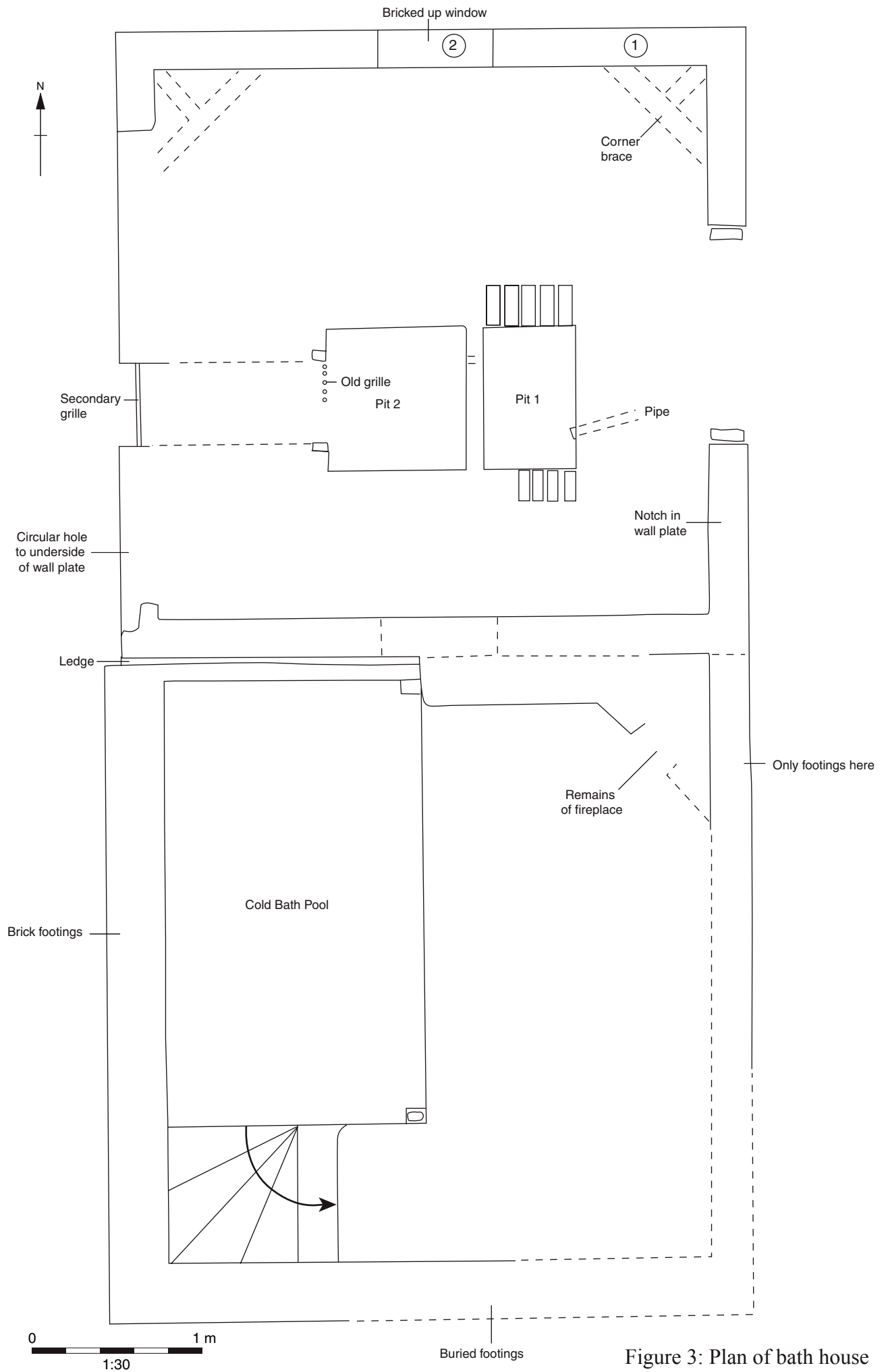


Figure 3: Plan of bath house

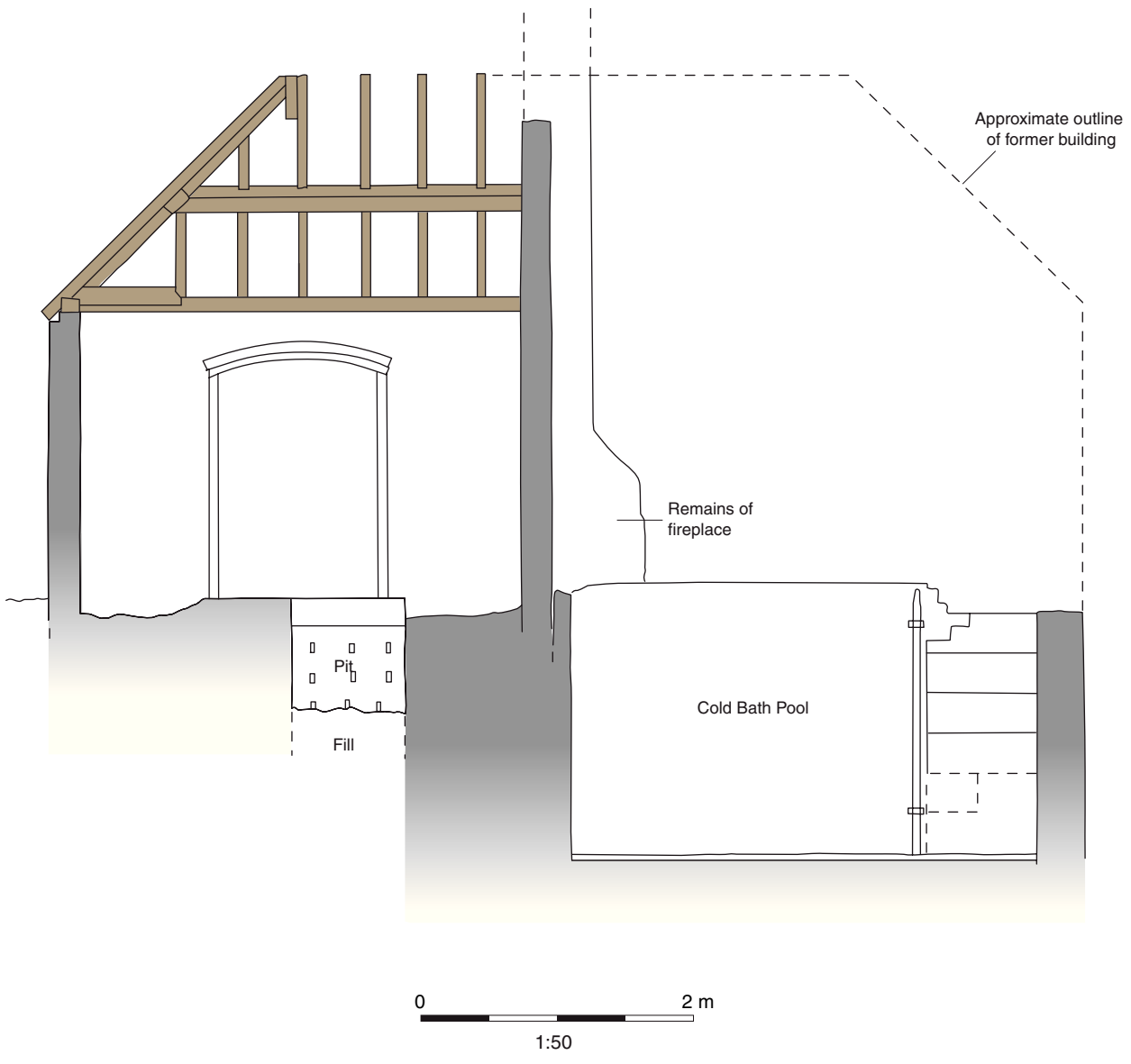


Figure 4: Cross section looking east

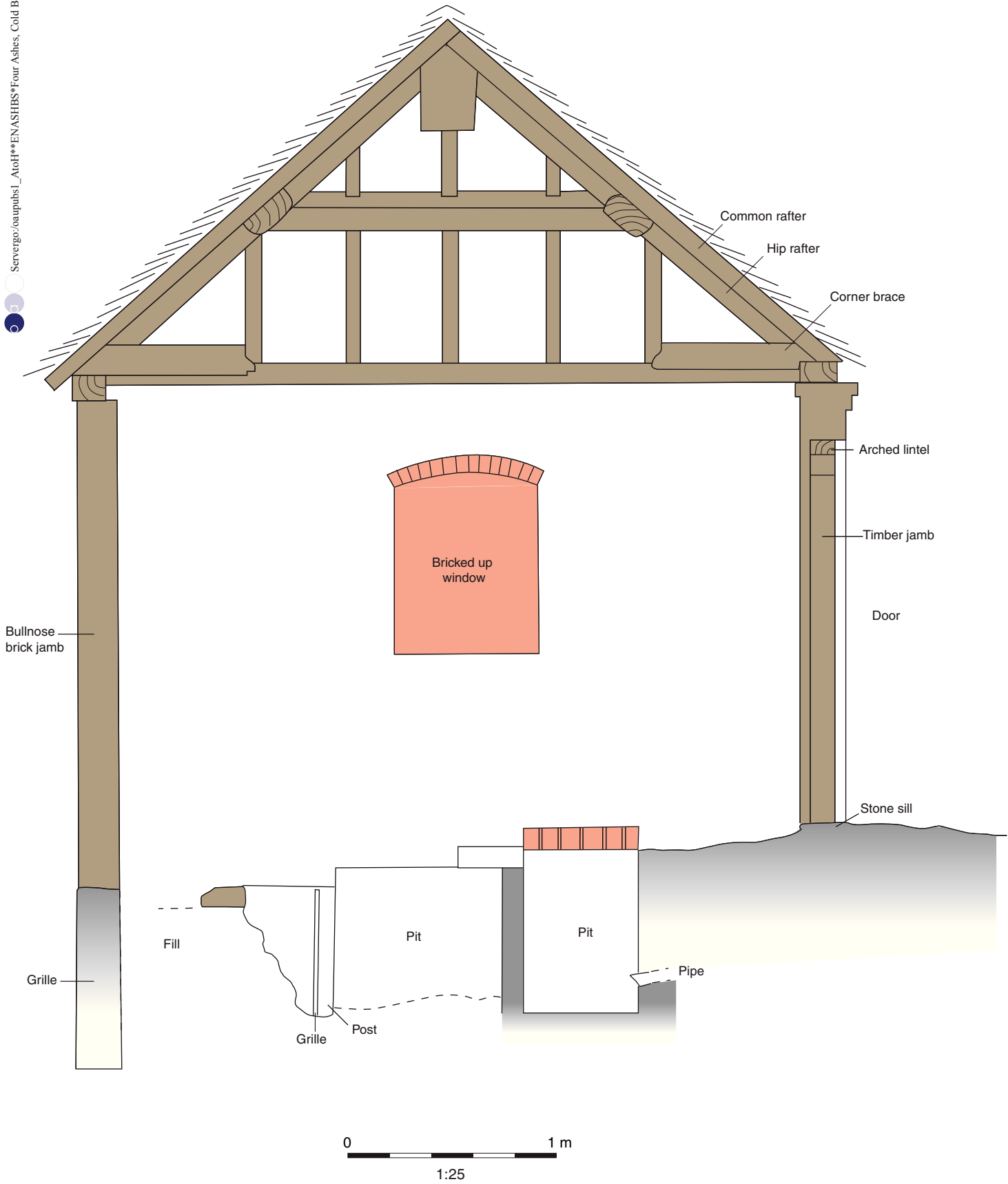


Figure 5: Cross section looking north



Figure 6: Photograph of bath house prior to its partial demolition



vation of surviving part of bath house



Plate 2: General view of bath house from north-east



Plate 3: North elevation of bath house



Plate 4: Bath House from north-west during clearance



pit in bath house with pipe towards base



Plate 22: Iron window frame excavated from pool fill.



Plate 23: Chain and fittings from pool fill



Plate 24: Various timbers from former building excavated from fill



house from west during clearance works



Plate 6: View from south-west



south end of surviving part of bath house



Plate 8: Junction between two parts of bath house



Former bath house after removal of infill



Plate 10: Steps into main pool



Plate 11: Main pool



Plate 12: Roof within bath house looking south-west



South wall in surviving part of bath house



Plate 14: East side of surviving part of bath house



Roof within surviving part of bath house



Plate 16: Door into bath house



Plate 17: Bullnose jamb at north-western corner of bath house



Plate 18: Small pits within bath house



Plate 19: Small pits within bath house



Plate 20: Pits in floor of bath house



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