



# **Ashton Hall Garden Centre, Ashton Hall, Ashton with Stodday, Lancashire**

## **Archaeological Watching Brief**



**Oxford Archaeology North**

January 2005

**John Moore and Partners  
Architects Ltd**

Issue No: 2004-05/328

OAN Job No: L9436

NGR: SD 4612 5742

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## SUMMARY

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A watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2004 at Ashton Hall Garden Centre, Ashton Hall, Ashton With Stodday, Lancashire (centred on SD 4612 5742), during the excavation of the foundations for the new retail space and the remodelling of the existing overflow car park. The work was commissioned by John Moore and Partners Architects Ltd, following a condition for the works attached to planning permission, based on a brief from Lancashire County Archaeology Service (LCAS).

The excavation of the foundation trenches and the scraping of the overflow car park only uncovered features and deposits relating to the use of the area as a walled garden in the nineteenth century, and its subsequent use as a garden centre, which carries on to the present day. The archaeology encountered, whilst of interest, is of local significance only and no recommendations were made for further archaeological assessment of the site.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank Michael Brennan of John Moore and Partners Architects Ltd for commissioning the project, and John Osbourne for his assistance on site.

The watching brief was undertaken by Pete Schofield, Hannah Gajos, Martin Sowerby and Matthew Town and the report was written by Matthew Town. The drawings were compiled by Emma Carter. The project was managed by Alan Lupton, who also edited the report.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 John Moore and Partners Architects Ltd obtained planning permission to extend and modernise the facilities at Ashton Hall Garden Centre, Ashton Hall, Ashton with Stodday, Lancashire (Fig 1), and as part of the consent a condition was attached to carry out a permanent presence watching brief on the works, based on a brief from Lancashire County Archaeology Service (*Appendix 1*). A possibility existed that archaeological remains relating to the fourteenth century Ashton Hall, a Grade I listed building, could exist on the site, but little was known of their extent or preservation.
- 1.1.2 John Moore and Partners Architects Ltd commissioned Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) to undertake a programme of archaeological works during the excavation of the foundations for the new retail space and during the remodelling of the existing overflow car park (centred on SD 4612 5742; Fig 2). The works comprised a permanent presence archaeological watching brief during all groundworks at the site which could impinge on archaeological deposits.
- 1.1.3 The watching brief was carried out between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2004. The results of the watching brief are presented in this report.

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

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### INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 The work undertaken complied with current legislation and accepted best practice, including the Code of Conduct and the relevant professional standards of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA).

### 2.2 WATCHING BRIEF

2.2.1 The programme of field observation recorded the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological features observed during all groundworks for the new development. Any finds recovered were returned to OA North for analysis and a photographic record in colour slide and monochrome formats was compiled.

2.2.2 The ground-works were undertaken using a mechanical excavator fitted with a 0.6m toothed bucket and close liaison between OA North staff and the site contractors was maintained.

### 2.3 ARCHIVE

2.3.1 A full archive of the work undertaken has been produced to a professional standard in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 1991). The archive will be deposited in the County Record Office in Preston, and a copy of the report will be forwarded to the Lancashire Sites and Monuments Record.

### 2.4 REPORT

2.4.1 This report sets out the background to the project and incorporates a method statement, a background history of the site, the results, and a discussion of the significance of the results.



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## 3. BACKGROUND

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### 3.1 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 3.1.1 Ashton Hall Garden Centre is sited within the grounds of Ashton Hall, Ashton with Stodday, Lancashire (Fig 1), approximately three miles south of Lancaster off the main A588 road between Lancaster and Cockerham.
- 3.1.2 The township of Ashton with Stodday occupies the east side of the Lune estuary from the Conder north to Aldcliffe. The topography of the area comprises an undulating pastoral landscape, which lies for the most part between 15m and 30m above sea-level, and is varied by depressions through which small brooks run south or west to the rivers. The land around the development area is mostly wooded (Anon nd, Countryside Commission 1998).
- 3.1.3 The underlying geology of the general area of the river Lune comprises an extensive glacial till plain, formed mainly of gravel with a clay subsoil. The solid geology consists of Carboniferous, Namurian grey siltstones and mudstones (Anon nd, Countryside Commission 1998).

### 3.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.2.1 The following historical background presents an outline summary of the known archaeological resource within the study area.
- 3.2.2 **Prehistoric:** sites of the early prehistoric period are extremely rare in north Lancashire, although they have been identified in coastal areas and to some extent in the moorlands to the west (Middleton *et al* 1995). Typically these sites are represented by surface flint scatters. The nature of the evidence is erratic, but it is clear that by the Neolithic period settlements were more permanent and well established, with woodland clearance becoming widespread; there was also a degree of continuation of areas occupied from the early Prehistoric period during the Neolithic (*ibid*). Several sites of probable Bronze Age date have been identified within north Lancashire, typically consisting of single stray finds such as axe hammers. No prehistoric finds are recorded within the area, though isolated finds of polished Neolithic stone axes and bronze flat axes dated to the Bronze Age have occurred on Thurnham Moss to the south (*ibid*). As with the earlier prehistoric periods, this gives an unclear picture of the scale of activity in the area at this time. No Iron Age remains have been identified, which is in keeping with the general lack of archaeological deposits from this period in North Lancashire.
- 3.2.3 **Roman:** Roman activity is equally poorly represented within the area. A large collection of hoarded Roman stone sculptures was discovered in the eighteenth century near Carr Lane Bridge, possibly associated with an earthwork suggestive of a substantial Roman roadside

mausoleum (Shotter 2004), and two statuettes of Mars, possibly votive offerings, were discovered in Cockersand Moss in the early eighteenth century (Middleton *et al* 1995); the finds are, however, some distance from the study area. For the most part, finds and excavations have tended to concentrate around the forts at Lancaster, Ribchester and Kirkham, and their associated civilian settlements, with only a few stray finds identified in any proximity to the study area (*ibid*). The recent work on the Romano-British farmstead at Barker House Farm provides some insight into rural settlement of this period (OA North 2004).

- 3.2.4 **Early Medieval:** the immediate post-Roman period is not at all well represented within the area, which is typical for the majority of Lancashire (RM Newman 1996). The decline of Roman administration led to the development of several small British kingdoms, each vying for power. These in turn were subsumed by the rapidly expanding Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria during the seventh century. Its collapse in the ninth century left a power vacuum, which was in part filled by colonists of Scandinavian origin (*ibid*). The name Ashton derives from the Old English *Aesctun* meaning ‘ash town’, whilst Stodday comes from the Old English *Stodhaga* meaning ‘stud enclosure’ (Ekwall 1922). The potential for early medieval remains to exist within the area is difficult to quantify, but the evidence would suggest it is unlikely to be on a major scale.
- 3.2.5 **Later Medieval:** in the years before the Norman Conquest, the greater part of the lands in the area was held as part of the Lordship of Earl Tostig, before being split into smaller territories. There is little archaeological evidence for the medieval period in rural Lancashire, however, and detailed study has yet to begin (R Newman 1996).
- 3.2.6 After the conquest in 1066, William I gave the lands of Lancashire to Roger de Poitou, who built a castle at Lancaster. In the Domesday Book of 1086, Ashton with Stodday was one of the three manors held by Cliber, Machern and Gilemichael, and appears to have been assessed as two ploughlands (Farrer and Brownbill 1914). In 1102, Roger was stripped of his lands for his part in a rebellion by Robert Bellême against Henry I (Kenyon 1991). Henry then gave the Lancashire estates to Stephen, Count of Boulogne (later to be King Stephen), sometime between 1114 and 1116 (*ibid*). The area later formed part of the lordship held by the Lancaster family, being held by knight’s service.
- 3.2.7 During the reign of Henry II (1154-1189), William de Lancaster I granted half a ploughland at Ashton to Gilbert de Ashton to hold by the service of half a mark a year. He also granted twelve pence a year from the mill at Stodday to the monks of Lancaster on their consent to him having a chapel at Ashton (Farrer and Brownbill 1914); this mill became a snuff mill in the post-medieval period, and is now disused.

- 3.2.8 The family name Stodday is recorded in a number of thirteenth century documents; Hugh son of Bernard, Gilbert, Roger and William de Stodargh were benefactors of Cockersand Abbey, which was founded in 1184 when William de Lancaster I, his wife Gundreda and their son William II gave land to Hugh de Garth, a hermit, who established a hospital there (Farrer and Brownbill 1914, Middleton *et al* 1995). The abbey received a considerable number of benefactions within the area; Lancaster Priory also had granges at Ashton and at Grisehead (Farrer and Brownbill 1914).
- 3.2.9 In the fourteenth century, the manor was held in moieties by the Gynes family, the heirs of Bellew, the Lawrence family and others (Anon nd). After being split up in 1514, the whole area was re-united in the second half of the sixteenth century by Gilbert Gerard and his descendants, the Gerards of Bromley, and the Dukes of Hamilton (Anon nd). Ashton Hall became one of the family's principal seats.
- 3.2.10 A medieval pele tower of late fourteenth century date forms part of the south wing of the building, possibly built by Edward Lawrence, one of the more financially successful members of this local family (Emery 1996). The tower was probably constructed in isolation, being an example of tower-built house with a turret at each angle set diagonally to the main structure (Anon nd). Tower-houses often had a surrounding 'barmekin', an enclosure which could contain stables, barns, outbuildings, detached kitchens and animal folds. Lancashire South of Sands has approximately a dozen surviving tower-houses and Solar Towers, of which Ashton Hall is the most complete (Emery 1996). The tower is built of irregular red sandstone blocks with gritstone quoins, and stands complete externally, though on one side a nineteenth century mansion has been added, which now forms the main part of the hall (*ibid*). The tower is of three storeys and of oblong shape, with diagonally projecting turrets at four angles, of square build and containing four storeys. The windows of the main block are of late sixteenth century date at ground level and late eighteenth century date above (*ibid*). The entrance to the tower on the north side no longer survives, having been obliterated by the mansion which replaced a Jacobean block; it has been suggested that any medieval buildings on the site would have been located on the north side of the tower, and would have been of wood (Anon nd). The doorways are of fourteenth century date, and date the tower (Emery 1996). On the western side is a walled courtyard originally entered through a Jacobean archway with coupled Tuscan columns, but were subsequently removed during construction of the mansion; the block and arch may date to the time of a recorded visit by James I in 1617 (Robinson 1991). A tithe barn was recorded prior to redevelopment at Ashton Hall by LUAU in 2000, probably of eighteenth century date and later converted to a saw-mill (LUAU 2000).
- 3.2.11 **Post-medieval:** on the death of the tenth Duke of Hamilton in 1853, the hall was sold to the Starkies of Huntroyde (Robinson 1991). The

modern hall was rebuilt by William Le Gendre Starkie in a castellated gothic style in 1856, in grey stone and 'to his own design' (Robinson 1991, 153). Views of the hall prior to this date show the main wing to have been of two storeys over a basement, with the principal basement on the north side facing what was known as the 'green court' (Anon nd). In 1884 the house was acquired by James Williamson, the first and last Lord Ashton; Williamson is known as the Lancaster linoleum millionaire, and funded the construction of the Town Hall, Victoria Monument and the Ashton Memorial in Lancaster (Robinson 1991). The Hall was bought in 1932 by William Pye and leased to the Lancaster Golf Club, who still occupy the building; the park was at that time converted to a golf course (Robinson 1991).

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## 4. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

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### 4.1 THE GARDEN CENTRE EXTENSION

- 4.1.1 A series of initial site visits on 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> September 2004 was undertaken during preliminary clearance of modern demolition rubble from the site by the contractors. The proposed footprint of the new building extended from the north-east corner of the current garden centre, and a point 2.7m south of the existing eastern door-way, eastwards for a distance of 43.4m, with a building width of 16m. The demolition rubble was approximately 0.6m in depth, and was removed off the top of a concrete cap, which made further monitoring ineffective. The cap appears to correspond to the floor of a green-house shown on existing plans, and presumably extended out beyond its walls to form a concrete yard-space adjacent to it. The plans also show the position of a building on the north side of the building footprint, running east/west and shown with four rooms. This appeared to be a nineteenth century brick-built construction, as a number of wall-lines and a possible cellar were identified during the initial scrape; the concrete cap appeared to abut this building. The building is presumably an out-building, possibly a green-house, and relates to the use of the space as a walled garden in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The cap was left *in situ* during the groundworks, to aid the stability of the new structure.
- 4.1.2 A further visit was made on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2004, where the excavation of seven foundation trenches for concrete piles was undertaken along the southern edge of the new building (numbered 1-7 from west to east; Fig 3). In summary, the foundation trenches identified a series of modern drains, running east/west and north/south, as well as a service trench and a possible cobbled surface adjacent to the present garden centre, apparently disturbed by the concrete cap. The results appear to confirm the use of the area as a garden, with drainage to aid ground conditions; the cobbled surface presumably relates to an early surface, most likely to be of nineteenth or twentieth century date. The service trench relates to the modern garden centre. The results of these excavations are summarised by in the back of this report (*Appendix 2*), and show a soil profile consistent with modern overburden, overlying garden soils, overlying the natural subsoil.
- 4.1.3 The excavation for the piles on the northern and eastern sides of the new development were not monitored; this was due to the concrete piles being set at ground level rather than excavated into the underlying deposits, rendering any further monitoring ineffective.

### 4.2 THE CAR PARK

- 4.2.1 A visit was undertaken on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2004, to monitor the removal of topsoil within the overflow car park, to enable an adequate base to be laid. The remains of a footpath were observed, running along the northern edge of the car park, formerly part of the walled garden and still retaining its perimeter

wall (Fig 2). The footpath, measuring 1.6m in width, ran east/west along this wall, and turned southwards at both ends to follow the western and eastern walls of the walled garden for a short distance. The footpath survived as a thin layer of well-packed sub-rounded gravels and cobbling, set in a mid yellowish brown sandy matrix. Both sides of the footpath had been kerbed with medium-sized sandstone kerb-stones, placed end to end and averaging 0.25m by 0.10m. The kerbing only survived in the central section of the path, the other stones having been deliberately removed as robber trenches were identified along the edges of the footpath, filled with garden soil. The footpath obviously related to the walled garden and was therefore of nineteenth century date; the path was probably destroyed around the time of the conversion of the area to an overflow car park. No other archaeology was observed.

### **4.3 FINDS**

4.3.1 No finds were uncovered during the ground-works for the new development.

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## 5. CONCLUSIONS

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### 5.1 DISCUSSION

- 5.1.1 The excavation of the foundation trenches and the scraping of the overflow car park only uncovered features and deposits relating to the use of the area as a walled garden in the nineteenth century, and its subsequent use as a garden centre, which carries on to the present day.
- 5.1.2 The archaeology encountered, whilst of interest, is of local significance only and no recommendations were made for further archaeological assessment of the site.

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## APPENDIX 1: PROJECT BRIEF

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## APPENDIX 2: RESULTS TABLE

FOUNDATION TRENCH	DIMENSIONS (M) (L x W x DEPTH)	DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF STRATIGRAPHY	ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS
1	1.7 x 1.3 x 0.95	The first 0.1m of the trench was occupied by the concrete capping; this overlay 0.14m of mixed stone packing. Beneath this was 0.3m of orangey brown clayey silt with no inclusions, which in turn overlay 0.38m of reddish brown silty clay with occasional small to medium stones.	Two ceramic drains; cobbled surface
2	1.6 x 1.25 x 1.09	The first 0.1m of the trench was occupied by the concrete capping; this overlay 0.14m of mixed stone packing. Beneath this was 0.3m of mid brown clayey silt, containing frequent small brick and mortar fragments. This in turn overlay 0.52m of yellowish orange sandy clay, with occasional medium-sized rounded stones.	Ceramic drain
3	1.3 x 1.3 x 1.14	The first 0.1m of the trench was occupied by the concrete capping; this overlay 0.09m of mixed stone packing representing cobbling. Beneath this was 0.49m of brownish orange gritty clayey silt, containing frequent small brick and mortar fragments. This in turn overlay 0.19m of grey mottled silty sand, which overlay 0.23m orange mottled clayey sand.	Ceramic drain; cobbling
4	1.35 x 1.15 x 0.95	The first 0.1m of the trench was occupied by the concrete capping; this overlay 0.14m of mixed stone packing. Beneath this was 0.33m of brownish orange gritty clayey silt, containing frequent small brick and mortar fragments. This in turn overlay 0.35m of mixed grey, yellow and orange sandy clay, with occasional medium-sized rounded stones.	Two ceramic drains

FOUNDATION TRENCH	DIMENSIONS (M) (L x W x DEPTH)	DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF STRATIGRAPHY	ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS
5	1.35 x 1.1 x 0.8	The first 0.08m of the trench was occupied by the concrete capping; this overlay 0.30m of orangey brown gritty clayey silt, containing frequent small coal, brick and mortar fragments. This in turn overlay 0.20m of grey and orange mottled clayey sand, which overlay 0.19m of mixed orange, yellow and grey mottled sandy clay; both deposits contained small- to medium-sized rounded stones.	Ceramic drain
6	1.4 x 1.4 x 0.88	The first 0.03m of the trench was occupied by a mixed stone packing. Beneath this was 0.32m of mixed brownish orange gritty clayey silt, containing frequent small slate, brick and mortar fragments. This in turn overlay 0.24m of mixed orangey brown sandy silt, which overlay 0.24m mixed orange yellow and grey sandy clay; both deposits contained small- to medium-sized rounded stones.	Two ceramic drains
7	0.95 x 0.91 x 0.9	The first 0.05m of the trench was occupied by a mixed stone packing and a shallow modern grey gravel surface. Beneath this was 0.58m of mid brown clayey silt, containing rare medium-sized rounded and sub-rounded stones. This in turn overlay 0.25m of mixed orangey brown silty sand, containing small- to medium-sized rounded stones.	Service trench

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

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### **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1: Location Map

Figure 2: Location Plan of Works

Figure 3: Detailed Plan of Foundation Trenches



based upon the Ordnance Survey 1:10000  
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Figure 1: Location map



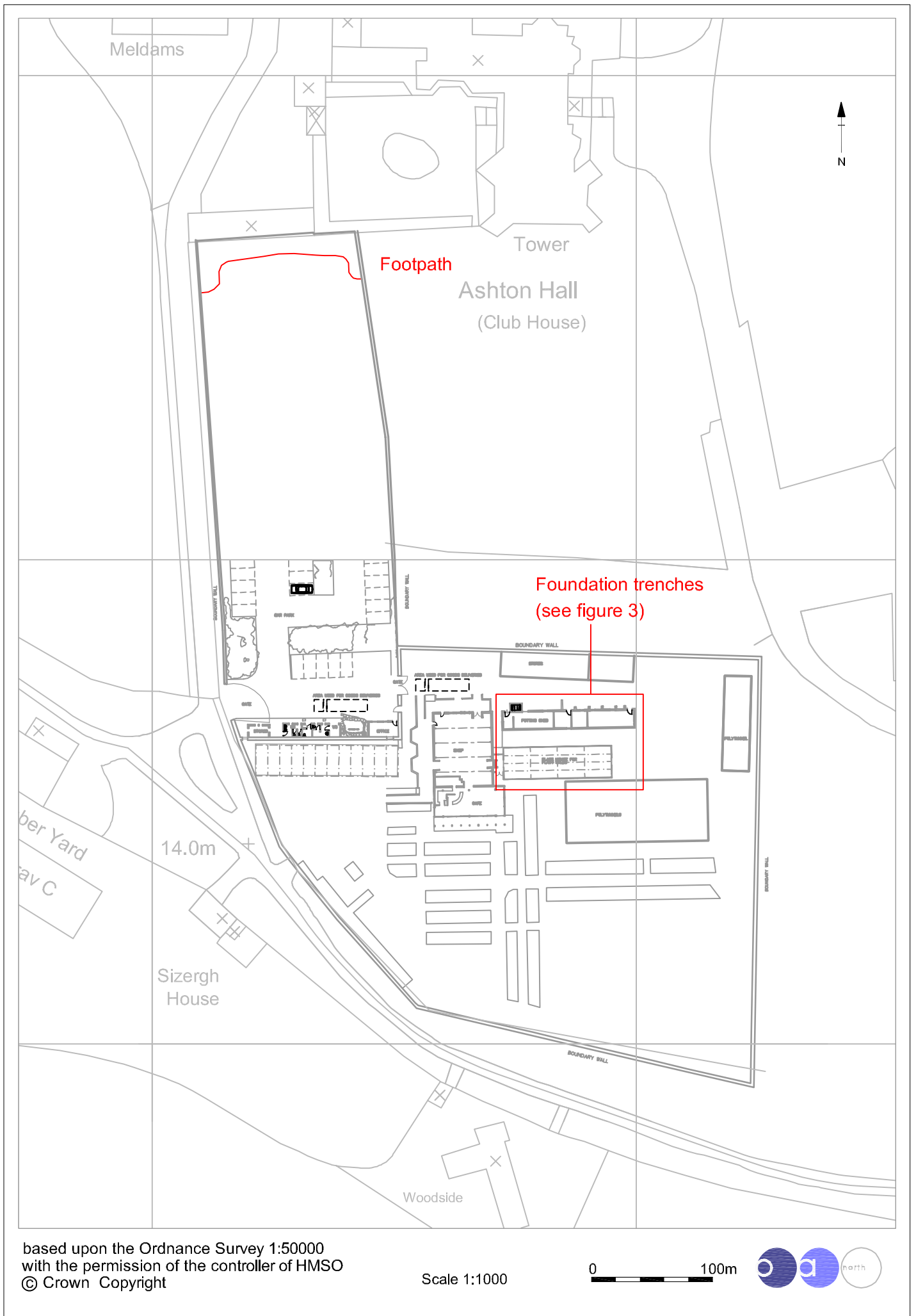


Figure 2: Location plan of works



Figure 3: Detailed plan of foundation trenches