

Marlbrook Hall Farm Meriden Warwickshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeology

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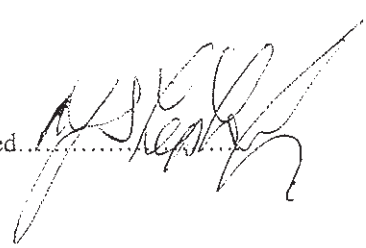
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Date: 18th October 2002

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**Marlbrook Hall Farm, Harvest Hill Lane
Meriden, Warwickshire**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Cover Plate: Marlbrook Hall Farm with work in progress

SUMMARY

In June 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Marlbrook Hall Farm, Harvest Hill Lane, Meriden, Warwickshire (NGR SP 26471 84140). The work was commissioned by Cassidy Developments in advance of the construction of a new extension on the south side of the hall with associated services. The site is located within a medieval moated site that comprises a water filled moat, a 16th-18th century post-medieval standing building and earthworks thought to be associated with earlier structures on the site. Marlbrook Hall Farm (SMR No. 240- SI424) is an early post-medieval manor house consisting of an outbuilding of the original medieval hall complex that has now mostly gone.

The watching brief followed an evaluation of the site by OA in May 2002. The current phase of work has revealed the full extent of a wall foundation exposed in the previous evaluation immediately south of Marlbrook Hall Farm. It is now understood that the wall formed part of a demolished room on the south side of the building and which fronted onto the east arm of the moat. Probable garden terraces on the site and other earthwork features relating to the arrangement of the medieval moat were observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In June 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Marlbrook Hall Farm, Harvest Hill Lane, Meriden, Warwickshire (Fig. 1). The archaeological investigation comprised firstly an evaluation of the site of a new extension, which was undertaken by OA in May 2002 (OA 2002), and a follow-on watching brief during excavations for foundation trenches and new services.
- 1.1.2 The work was commissioned by Cassidy Developments in respect of a planning application for a new extension with ancillary services for the hall that is located within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 30010).
- 1.1.3 Scheduled Monument Consent was granted by English Heritage for the work subject to a programme of archaeological mitigation in accordance with a project brief prepared by the Planning Archaeologist for Warwickshire County Council (Warwickshire Museum 2002).
- 1.1.4 OA operated under a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA 2002).

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is situated on gradually sloping ground towards the south. The underlying geology is Keresley Member overlain by glacial and post-glacial deposits of sands, gravels and clays (BGS 169, 1994). The site lies approximately 175 m above OD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared from the Archaeological Evaluation for the project (OA 2002) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The site is located within a medieval moated site that comprises a water filled moat, a post-medieval standing building and earthworks thought to be associated with earlier structures on the site. The present Marlbrook Hall Farm building (SMR No. 240- SI424) is an early post-medieval house incorporating an outbuilding of the original medieval hall that has now gone from the site.
- 1.3.3 The current house is in good condition, of 16th-18th century in date, and constructed in red brick with flush casement windows. It consists of two storeys with a tiled roof. The north-east part of the house is of timber frame and thin brick construction and appears to be an addition to the original outbuilding of the medieval hall. A rectangular moat (SMR No. 3131-SI585) encloses a large area to the north and west of the house and is complete apart from a small part of the eastern arm, which was filled in when an addition to the present house was built.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The area of the new extension was reduced by 0.15–0.2 m and levelled. The foundations were marked out and excavated with a mini excavator using a 0.55 m bucket to a depth of 0.8 m. After the extension was built and the house was underpinned, the service trenches for the foul and storm drains were excavated. This was carried out with a mini excavator using both 0.5 m and 0.3 m wide ditching buckets (Fig. 2).
- 2.2.2 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992). Context numbers continued on from the sequence for the evaluation of the site.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

The new extension

- 3.1.1 The works comprised an extension measuring 5 m x 6 m. The foundation trenches were 0.6 m wide and 0.9 m, except that for the south-east wall, which was up to 0.9 m wider to accommodate a new chimney.
- 3.1.2 The remains of two wall foundations were revealed in the course of the excavations. The walls abutted the south wall of the present farm building but had been truncated just below present ground level. Wall 13 was 0.42 m wide and was built in a foundation trench (12), which had vertical sides and flat base. The foundation trench cut the natural (15) and was filled by dark reddish brown silty clay (14). The wall had a sandy clay bond (Figs 3 & 6, section 1). The wall was abutted by the remains of a cobbled surface (10), which was traced in places during excavations for services to the west (Fig. 3).
- 3.1.3 Wall 20 (Fig 3 and Fig. 6 section 2) was constructed of rough sandstone blocks and had a rubble core with worked ashlar forming the south-east face. It was constructed in a foundation trench (19) that cut the natural (15) and was backfilled with clay and stone rubble.
- 3.1.4 The wall (20) presumably once formed a room/building with wall 13. Wall 20 had a dual function as it also acted as a revetment to the side of the moat (19) that once passed along the south-east side of this room. A tentative date for the demolition of the room is suggested by the recovery of pottery of 18th century date from a deposit of grey clay between wall 20 and the south-east corner wall (22) of the present farm building. The walls (13 and 20) were sealed by layer of modern overburden (Fig. 6, section 2).
- 3.1.5 A series of layers filling the moat were recorded abutting wall 20. Layer 18 was a primary fill of the moat formed by slow silting in the feature. This deposit was sampled for environmental remains (see below). Overlying this was a compact dark yellow-brown silty clay (17), beneath a compact dark reddish silty clay (16) (Fig. 6, section 2).

Service Trenches - evidence for a cobbled surface the original moat

- 3.1.6 The service trenches were excavated around the north-west, north-east and south-east sides of the house (Figs 2 & 3). The service trenches were generally 0.4-0.5 m deep and revealed the natural covered by a cultivated soil (25), overlain by a 0.2 m thick layer of very dark grey-brown silty clay (26), comprising disturbed topsoil and demolition material (Fig. 6, section 4).
- 3.1.7 West of the foundation trenches for the new extension, the remains of the cobbled surface (10) seen abutting wall 13 were exposed. The cobbles overlay a deposit of dark brown silty clay with sandstone fragments (24) filling a soft spot in the natural (Fig. 3 section 3). The extent of the cobbling was traced approximately in plan.
- 3.1.8 Where the service trench crossed the line of moat on the north-east side of the house, the edges of the moat were revealed. The north-west edge of the moat (27) was observed cutting the natural (15), containing fills of dark brown silty clay (28 & 29)

(Figs 3 & 6, section 5). The south-east edge of the moat was traced to the point where it had been removed by a modern soakaway (Fig. 3).

- 3.1.9 The evidence of wall 20 and the sections of the service trenches reveal that the moat clearly passed beneath the south room of the present house, which by definition is a later addition to the farm building as it was constructed over the infilled moat. This room has a basement beneath, which is known from previous below-ground building works, and which was built into the moat fills (David Cassidy, *pers comm*).

Other Observations

- 3.1.10 It was also noted during the watching brief that after extensive clearing of undergrowth within the moated site, the remains of three terraces stepping down from the south to the north were observed. Also observed was a change in alignment of the present moat at the north of the site, and a scarp that may have formed an original west edge of the original moat. These features are discussed below (section 4).

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 A number of finds were recovered from two contexts and are listed below.

Context 18 1 x Cattle Astrogalus (right) - animal bone

3 x Fragments of roof tile - post-medieval

1 x Fragment of plaster - undated

3 x Fragments of window glass - post-medieval

Context 23 1 x Unidentified fragment of long bone from a mammal eg cattle or horse with butchered knife marks.

4 x sherds of pottery: 3 pieces of Stafford Buff Bodied Slipware and a piece of brown slipware. Dated late 17th to early 18th century.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 A single soil sample, from the fill of the moat (fill 18), was retrieved during the watching brief for the assessment of environmental indicators. 1kg of sediment was floated onto a 200µm mesh for the recovery of waterlogged plant remains. The flot sample was scanned by Dr Mark Robinson of the University Museum under a low power binocular microscope.

Results

- 3.3.2 The flot contained abundant, moderate to poorly preserved, leaf debris, predominantly from broadleaf evergreens. Preliminary identifications included the species *cf. Buxus*, which is typical of medieval and post-medieval ornamental gardens. Seeds were rare, although *Ranunculus cf. repens* (Creeping buttercup) and *Ranunculus sceleratus* were noted. The presence of the latter suggests exposed mud on the edge of water.

- 3.3.3 Beetle remains were also identified. These included, *Tipnus unicolor* generally associated with human habitation, as well as the ground beetles *Harpalus sp.*, *Pterostichus madidus*, *Stenus sp.* and *Ceutorhynchus erysimi*. *C. erysimi* feeds on weeds of the cabbage family. Cases of Tichoptera (Cadiss fly) were also present indicating aquatic conditions.

Discussion

- 3.3.4 Waterlogged plant remains are preserved in the sample. The assemblage indicates an ornamental garden may have been situated adjacent to the moat, with abundant broadleaf evergreen trees/shrubs suppressing herbaceous vegetation. The beetle evidence suggests human habitation close by, however, there is no indication of sewage debris that is often associated with moats.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 On-site observations and the results from the observations from the watching brief have added some new information to the development of this site. Three broad phases of activity have been identified, though none are closely dateable.

Phase 1

- 4.1.2 Observations of extant earthworks north of the house suggest that the moat was originally smaller and rectangular in shape, with the north-east arm extending SSE to curve around the south-east side of the site (Fig. 4, Phase 1).
- 4.1.3 The original layout of the buildings of Marlbrook Hall Farm in its early post-medieval incarnation appears therefore to have been a rectangular building situated in the north-east corner of a much reduced moat than is evident today.
- 4.1.4 The archaeological evidence from the demolished room or building where the new extension is to be built indicated that the moat once extended fully along the length of the house, presumably joining the western arm of the moat
- 4.1.5 Environmental evidence from the moat fills indicates that an ornamental garden may have been situated within the limit of the moat, with abundant broadleaf evergreen trees/shrubs and herbaceous vegetation. Terraces and other earthwork features may be testimony to this phase of the site, datable broadly the 16th-17th centuries (Fig. 4, Phase 1).

Phase 2

- 4.1.6 A second phase of activity dates from the late 17th to the early 18th century when the south room/building was demolished and the moat was filled in to afford new access to the south side of the building. A basement and first floor room was then constructed over the infilled part of the moat where it once passed alongside the house. The moat was extended from its original NE corner, as suggested by the unusual 'dog-leg' arrangement, to form a broad arc returning possibly to extend up to the newly built basement (Fig. 4, Phase 2).

Phase 3

- 4.1.7 The third phase appears to be in the mid-19th century with the infilling of the moat against the north-east side of the building, presumably for access or to prevent water damage to the basement (Fig. 5, phase 3).
- 4.1.8 The final phase is the current work being carried out (Fig. 5, Phase 4) with the extension being built of the site of the demolished room.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth/Height</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>
10	Layer	0.18 - 20 m			Cobbled Surface	
11					NOT USED	
12	Cut	0.4 m	0.5 m	5.9 m	Foundation trench	
13	Structure	0.4 m	0.44 m	5.9 m	Wall	
14	Fill				Fill between wall and cut	
15	Natural					
16	Layer	0.4 - 6 m			Fill of moat	
17	Layer	0.2 - 3 m			Fill of moat	
18	Layer	0.3 m			Fill of moat	
19	Cut	1.2 m	1.3 m	5.5 m	Northwest side of moat	
20	Structure	1.1 m	1 m	5.5 m	Wall	
21	Fill				Fill between wall and cut	
22	Structure				South west wall of Hall	
23	Fill				Fill in core of wall 22	
24	Fill	0.3 m	3.4 m	5.5 m	Fill of Natural depression	
25	Layer					
26	Layer					
27	Cut	0.5 m	8.6 m	0.5 m	Moat	
28	Fill				Fill of moat	
29	Fill				Fill of moat	

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales), Sheet 169, Coventry, 1:50,000 Series, (Solid and Drift Edition, 1994)

OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

OA 2002 *Marlbrook Hill Farm, Harvest Hill Lane, Meriden Written Scheme of Investigation*

OA 2002 *Marlbrook Hill Farm, Harvest Hill Lane. Archaeological Evaluation Report*

Warwickshire Museum 2002 *Brief for archaeological work: evaluation of proposed extension site and archaeological mitigation of proposed service runs and septic tank construction Marlbrook Hill Farm, Harvest Lane, Meriden, Warwickshire*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Marlbrook Hall Farm, Harvest Hill Lane, Meriden, Warwickshire

Site code: MEMH 02

Grid reference: NGR SP 26471 84140

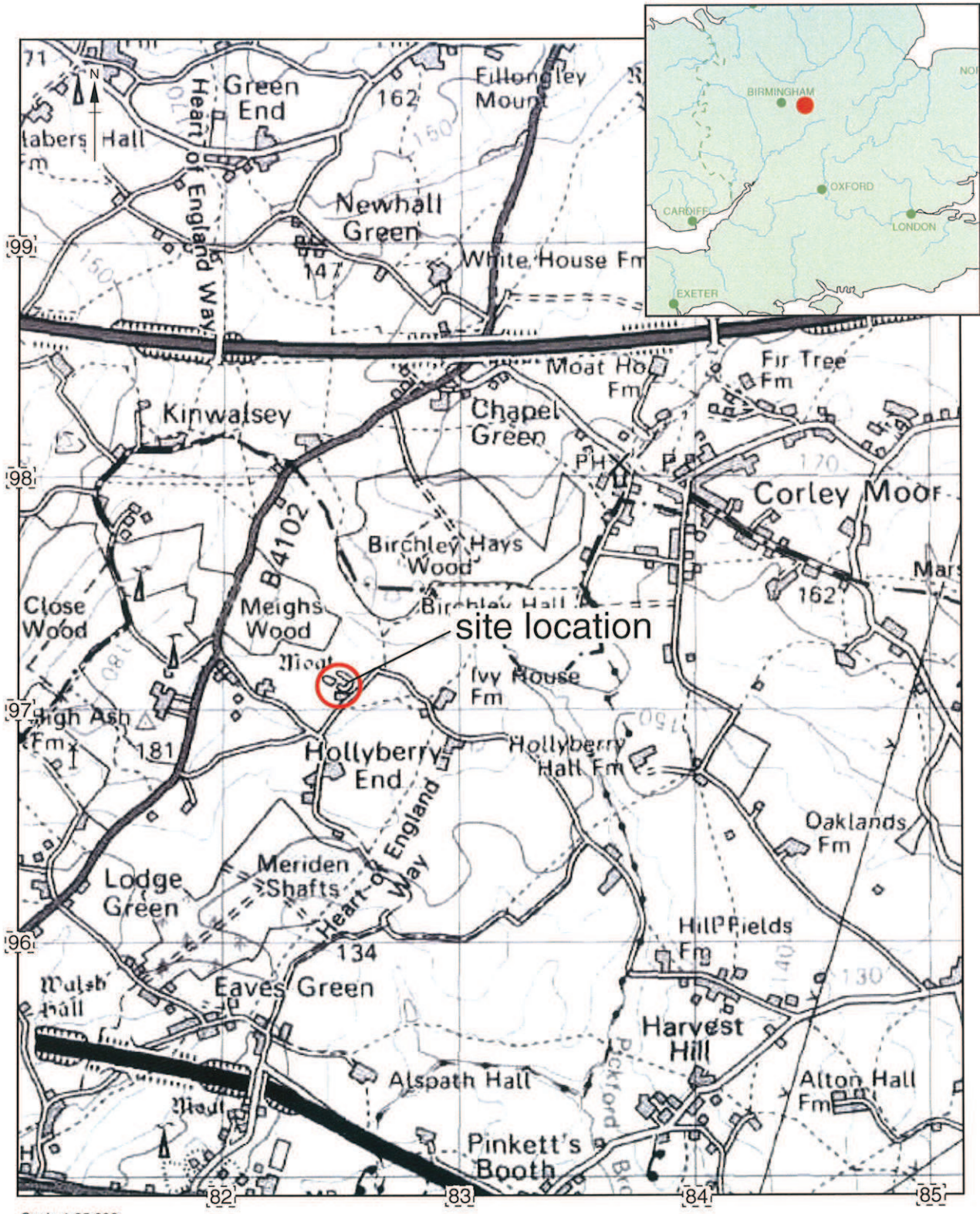
Type of watching brief: Foundations for construction of new extension and sun room. Also the excavation of new service trenches.

Date and duration of project: A total of three visits from 6/6/2002 to 17/9/2002.

Area of site: 7.5 m x 5.5 m and approximately 75 m of trenches around the house.

Summary of results: The watching brief revealed a number of phases and alterations to the hall from the 17th century onwards, including infilling of part of the moat, extensions to the moat, demolition and construction of rooms of the hall and environmental and visual evidence for formal landscaped gardens.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Warwickshire Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: T/1072



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

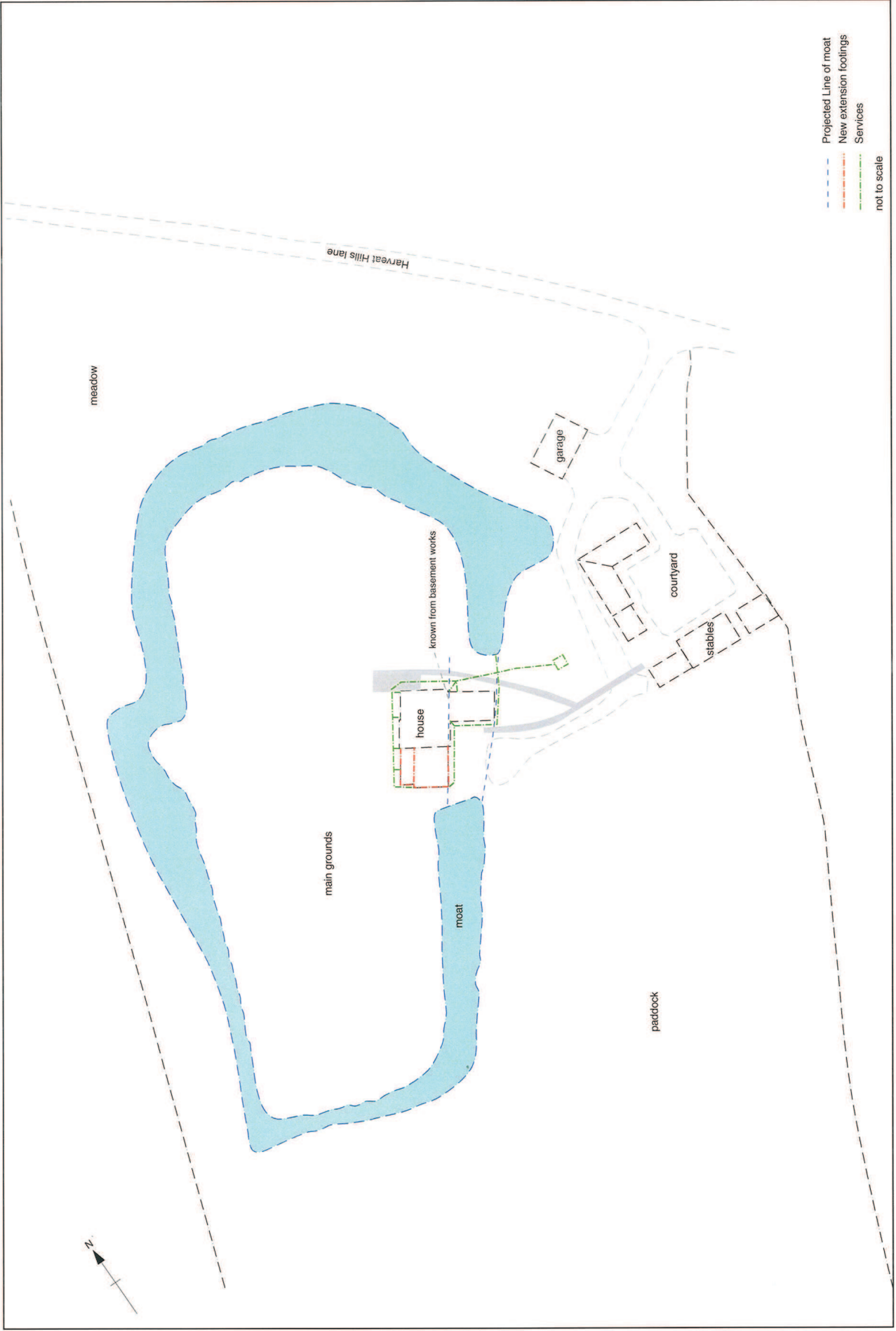


Figure 2 : Detailed Site Location

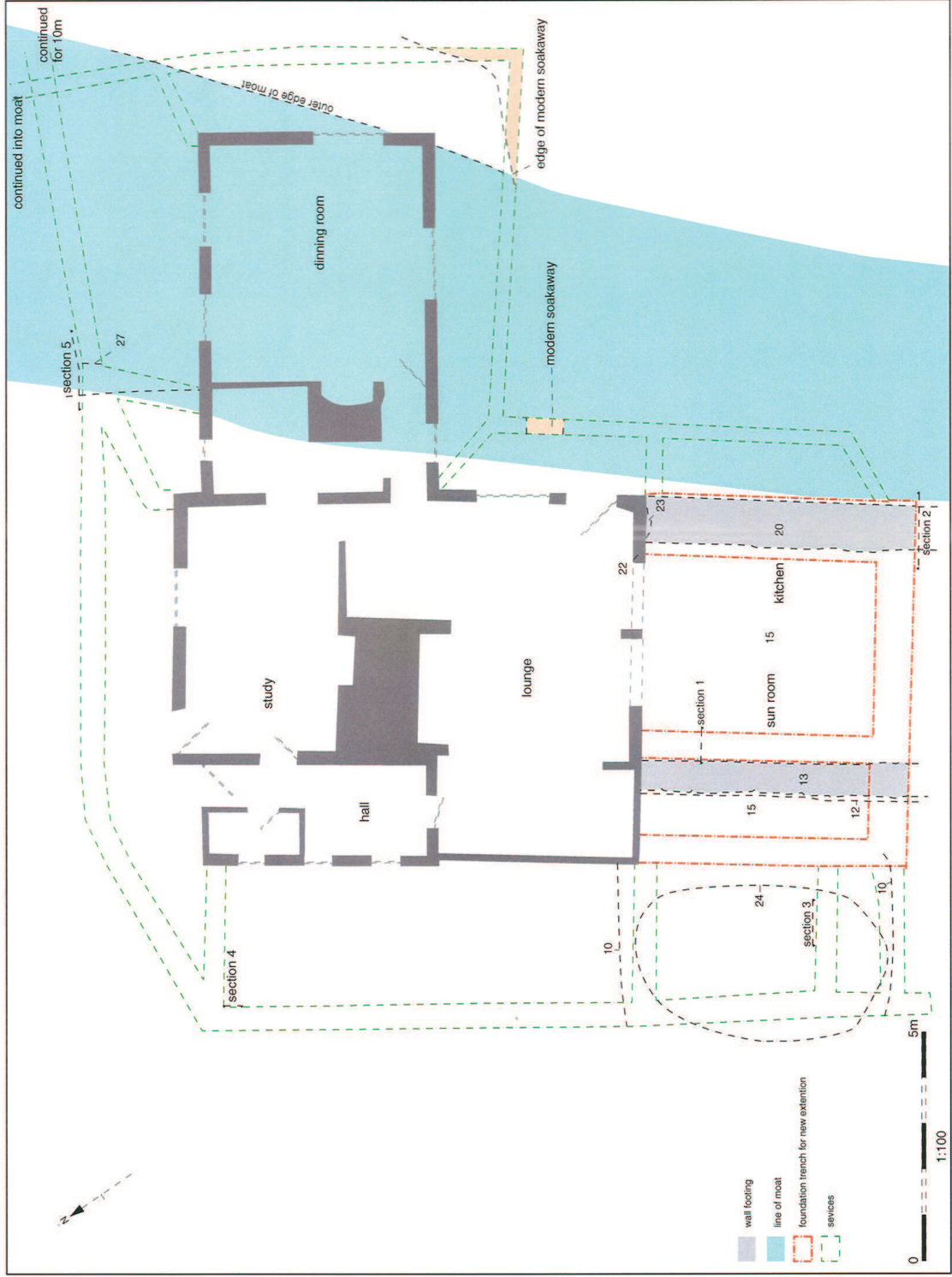


Figure 3 : Site Plan and Location of Sections

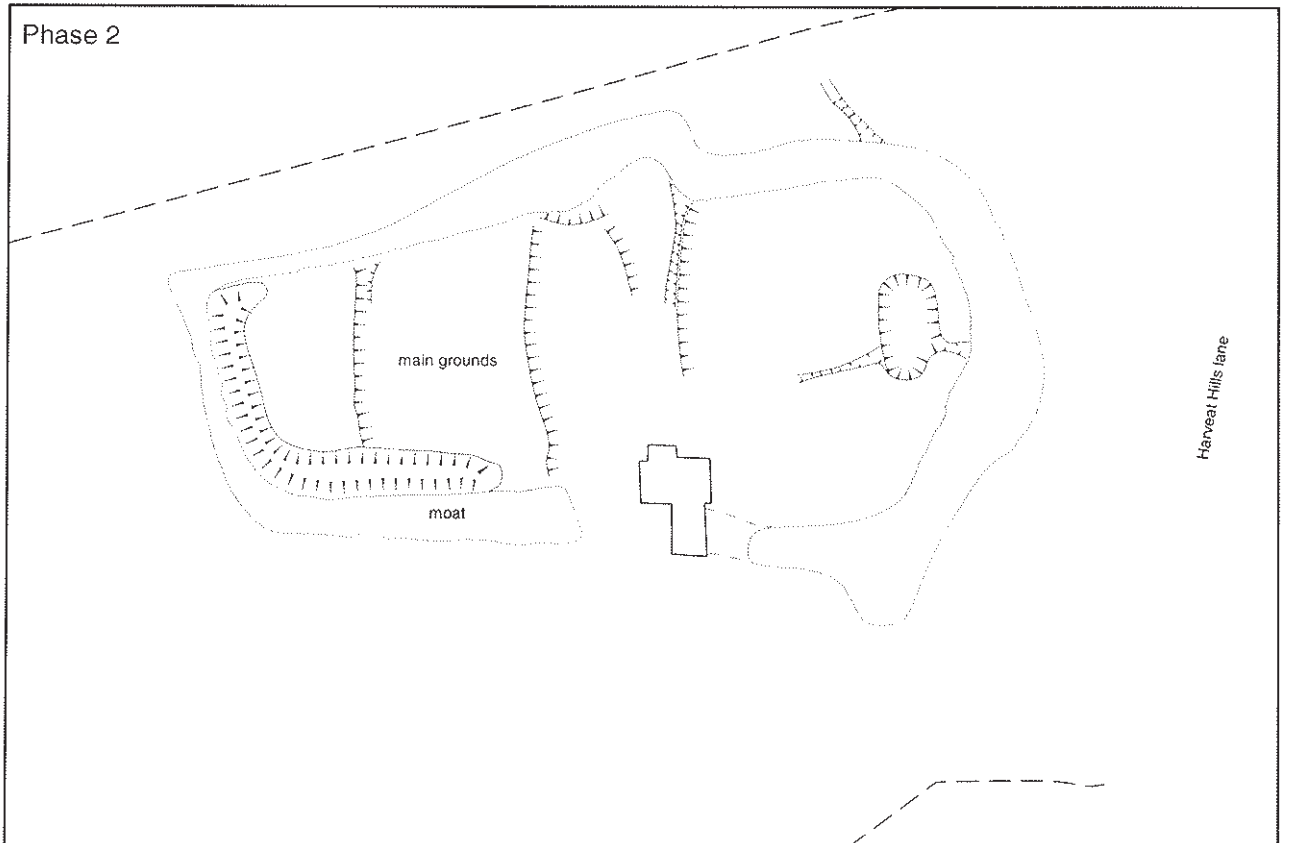
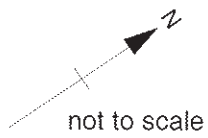
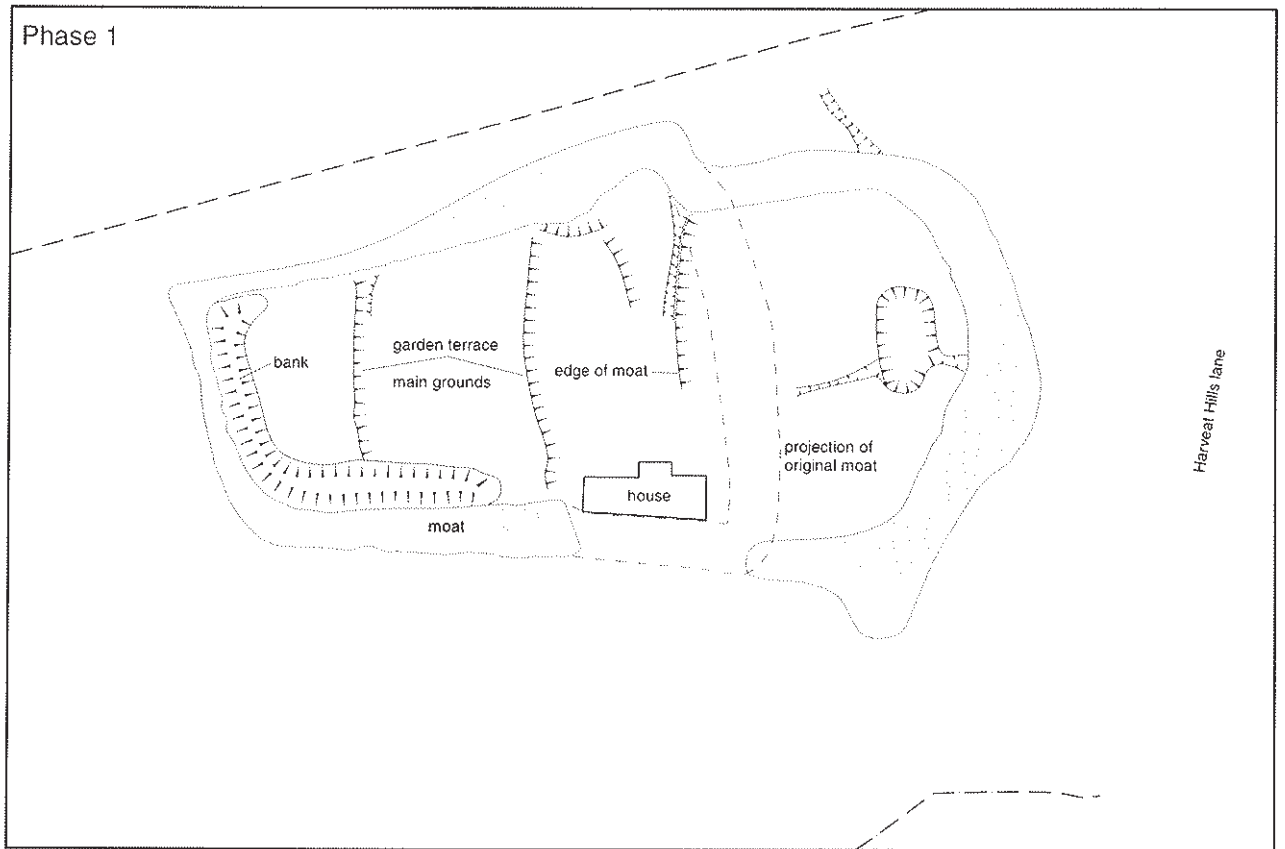


Figure 4 : Phase 1 and 2

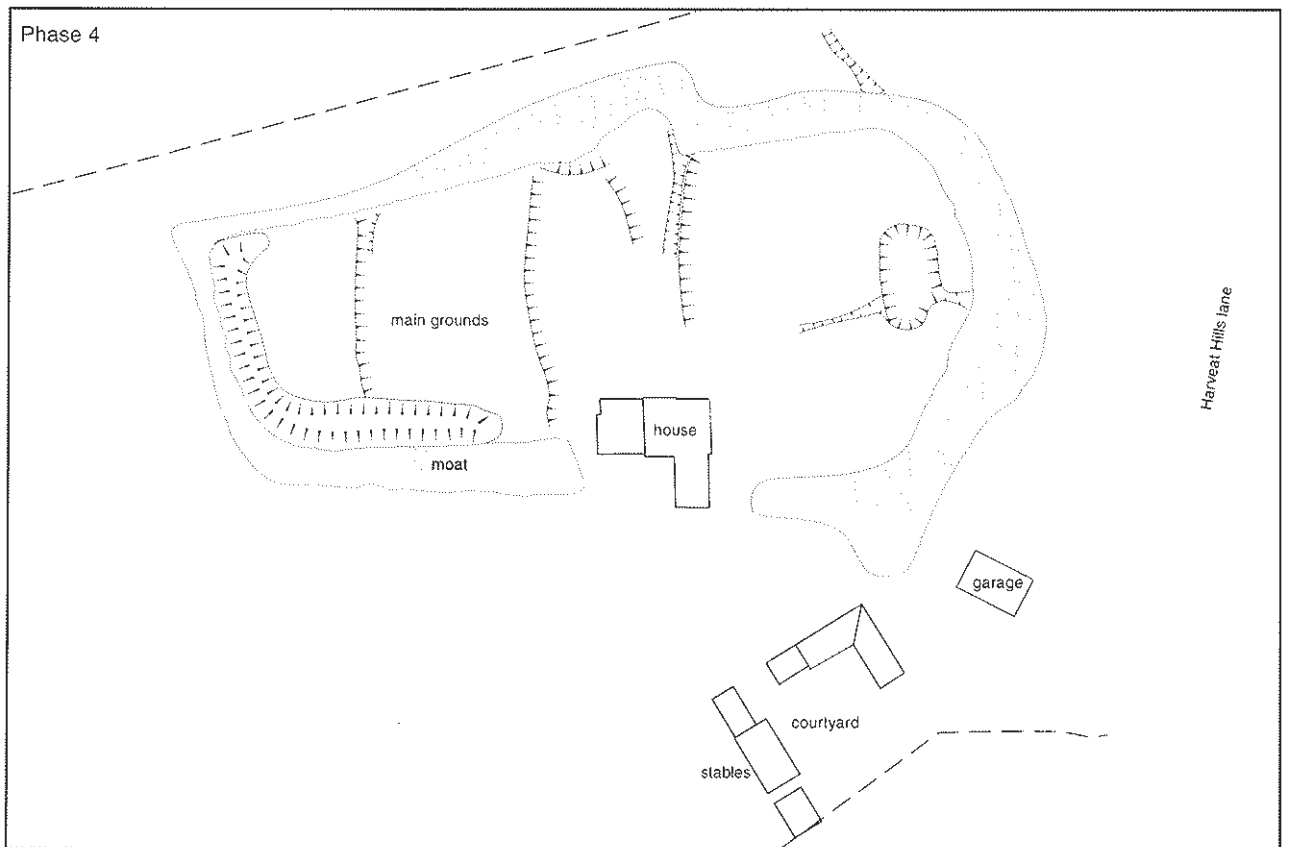
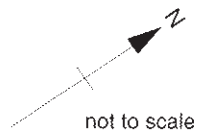
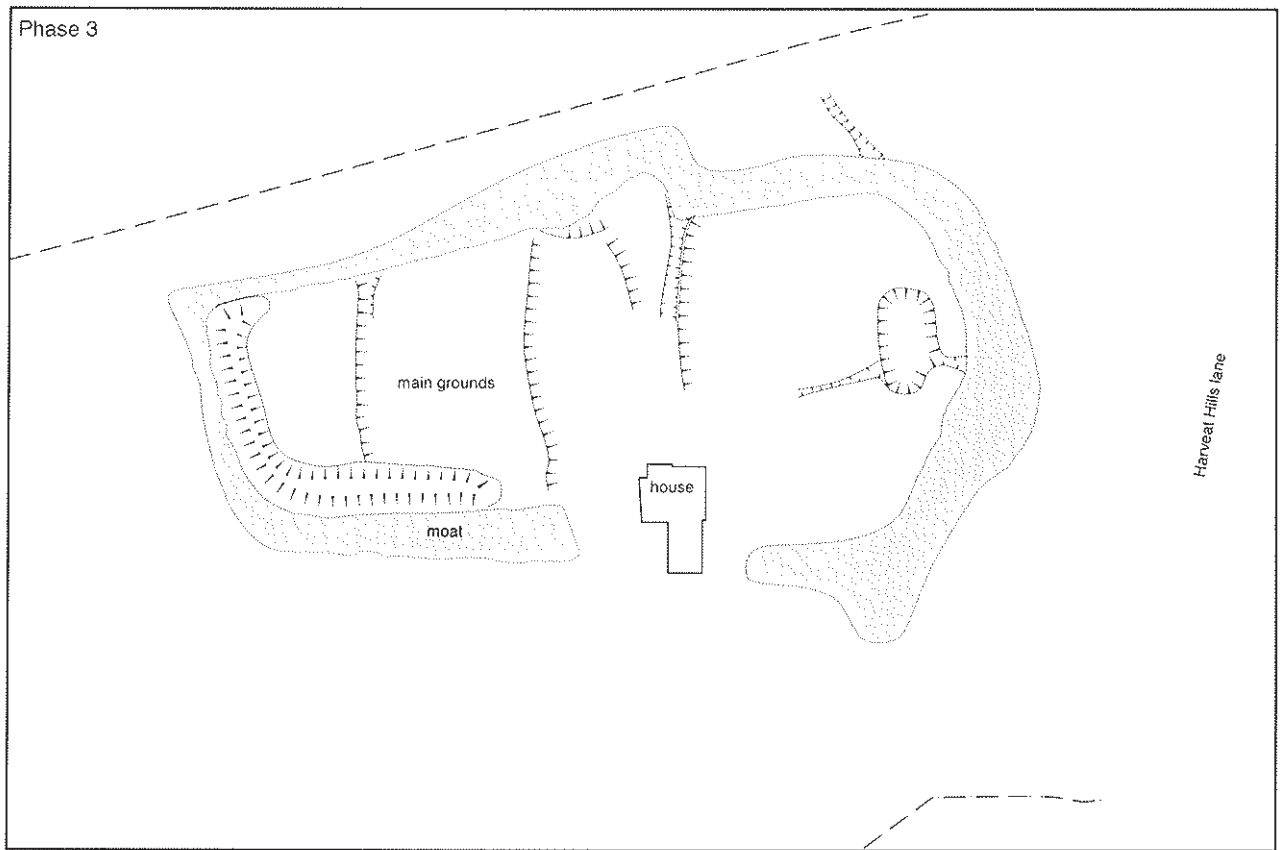


Figure 5 : Phases 3 and 4

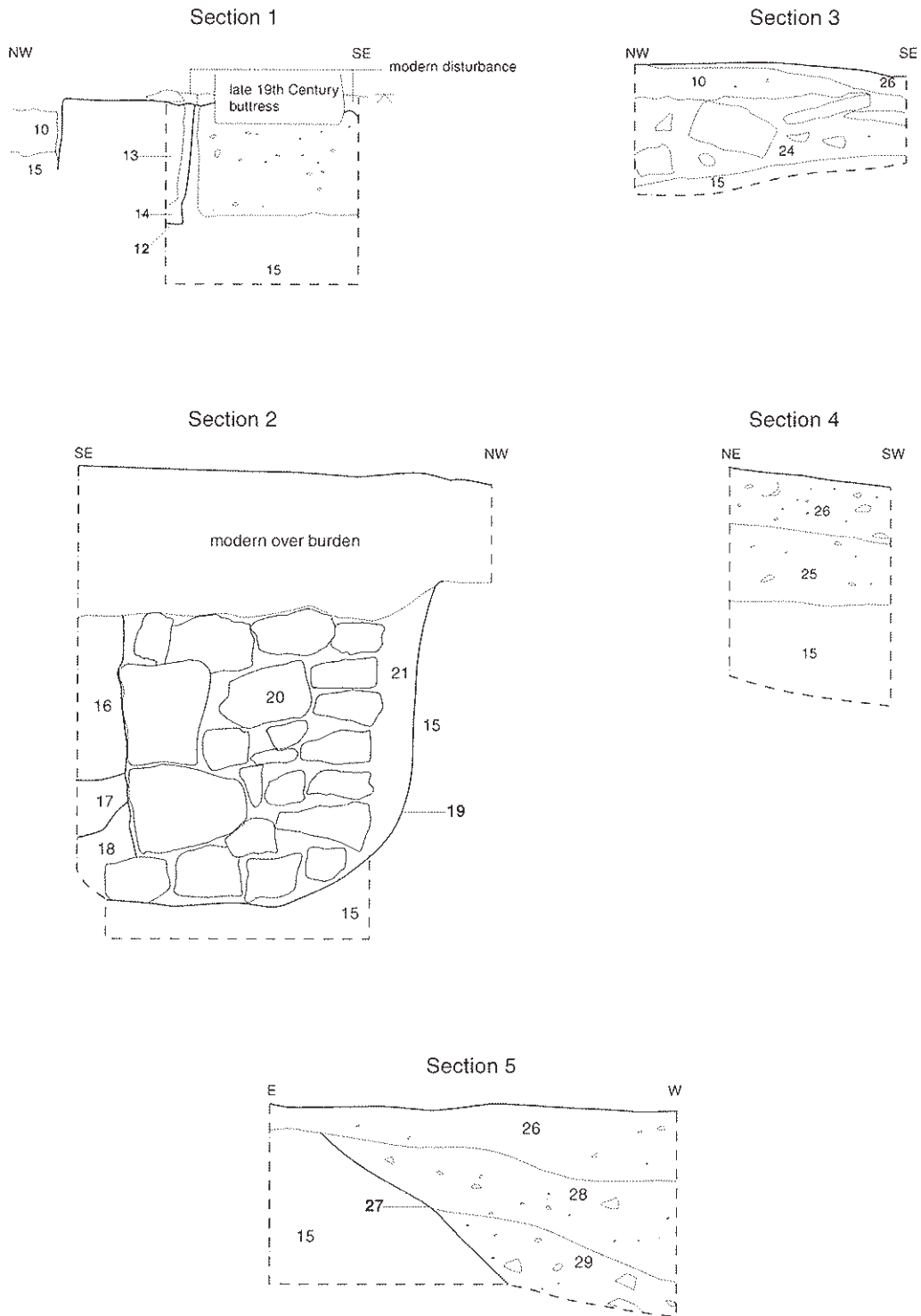


Figure 6 : Sections



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