



A Nissen Hut at Church Lane, Ellington

Historic Building Investigation and Recording

October 2020

Client: Nigel Fovargue

Issue No: 1

OAE Report No: 2459

NGR: TL 15993 71794



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A Nissen Hut at Church Lane, Ellington

Historic Buildings Investigation and Recording

Written by James Fairbairn and Emily Abrehart

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Summary

On the 30th of September 2020, a Level 2 Historic Building Survey was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology East on a Nissen type hut on land adjacent to No. 2 Church Lane Ellington in Cambridgeshire. This type of structure was used for accommodation and storage by the military since the First World War. The hut was constructed of curved corrugated asbestos sheeting which indicates it dated from the Second World War or later. The hut at Ellington shows no evidence of any previous military use. It was erected on the plot adjacent to No. 2 Church Lane, for use as an animal shelter and storage facility.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Nigel Fovargue for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to Leanne Robinson Zeki who monitored the work on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Aileen Connor. The fieldwork was undertaken by James Fairbairn. Thanks also go to the illustrator and editor for their contributions.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology East (OAE) was commissioned by Nigel Fovargue to undertake Historic Investigation and Building Recording at the site of a Nissen hut located on land adjacent to No. 2 Church Lane, Ellington.
- 1.1.2 The proposed development is for the erection of a single dwelling and associated landscaping following demolition of the existing building (Nissen Hut).
- 1.1.3 Once the Nissen Hut building has been demolished a programme of trial trenching comprising 2 x 10m x 1.8m trenches will take place to assess the impact of the proposed building footprint.
- 1.1.4 Archaeological investigation on the site has been required by Huntingdonshire District Planning Authority in condition number 3 to planning application 17/01466/FUL.
- 1.1.5 The work has been carried out in accordance with a Brief issued by the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (CHET) (Robinson Zeki 2020) and WSI issued by OAE (Connor 2020).

1.2 Aims and Objectives

- 1.2.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:
 - i. To investigate and record the Nissen hut that will be removed in the proposed development.
 - ii. To make the record publicly accessible through a report (a public document) and a project archive deposited with a public institution.
 - iii. To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence
 - iv. To disseminate the results through the production of a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the Cambridgeshire HER.

1.3 Location

- 1.3.1 The site lies in the core of the historic village of Ellington, on undeveloped ground off Church Lane. It is situated between No. 2, Church Lane (to the west) and the church yard of All Saints Church (to the east) (Fig. 1).
- 1.3.2 The Grade II listed Mermaid public house (National Heritage List for England ref 1165237, CHER ref DCB2837) lies just to the north-east and although the plot now lies within the curtilage of the Mermaid it is shown as a separate plot on maps prior to 1978.
- 1.3.3 The Nissen hut is located at the south end of the plot, up against the boundary with the church yard to the east (Plate 1).

1.4 Methodology

- 1.4.1 The building recording was undertaken at Level 2, as defined by Historic England in their document Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice.
- 1.4.2 The building recording consists of three main elements: a drawn record, a descriptive, written record and a photographic record.
- 1.4.3 The photographic record was undertaken with a high-quality digital camera and files were stored in Raw and Jpeg formats. A photographic register was produced.
- 1.4.4 Annotated and measured sketches were produced to aid in understanding and interpreting the building in terms of construction, development and use.
- 1.4.5 A written record has been made in order to supplement and support the other two elements of the recording and provides additional descriptive analysis of the building.
- 1.4.6 The recording was entirely undertaken prior to the demolition of the building.

2 BACKGROUND HISTORY

2.1 General Historical Background

- 2.1.1 The Mermaid public house is located to the north-east of the proposed development (Plate 20). It is an early 17th century timber framed and plastered building originally jettied to the street. It has a later 17th century brick extension to the west with a tumbled parapet gable end stack. The rear wing is timber framed and plastered and may be Medieval (RCHM for Huntingdonshire monument no. 15).
- 2.1.2 Immediately to the east of the site lies the graveyard of the parish church of All Saints which is a grade I listed building of mainly 14th and 15th century construction with some 13th century elements (NHLE ref 165216, CHER ref 00767).

2.2 Map Regression

- 2.2.1 OS maps prior to 1978 show a boundary dividing the plot of land on which the Nissen hut is situated, from the land owned by the Mermaid. This boundary appears unchanged on the six-inch OS maps published in 1887, 1902, 1952 and 1958. The 1978 edition does not show the boundary but the Nissen hut itself is shown. However, this does not necessarily mean that the building was not in-situ at Church lane in the 1950s only that it was not included on the maps.

2.3 Nissen huts

- 2.3.1 Nissen huts are part of a family of prefabricated temporary structures for military use. Nissen hut has become a term used to describe multiple types of military hut, especially those with a curved shape (Draper 2017, p.19). Nissen huts were patented in 1916 by their inventor Major Peter Norman Nissen and saw extensive use during the first and second world wars (Draper 2017, p.97-98).
- 2.3.2 The original Nissen huts were constructed from horizontal wooden purlins jointed to steel T-shaped ribs (creating a bow-like frame) secured with hookbolts. The exterior was clad in corrugated metal sheeting running in vertical lines and the ends were made from timber (Draper 2017, p.98).
- 2.3.3 In the early years of WWII, restrictions on the use of steel and timber facilitated a surge of new hut designs making use of alternative materials such as asbestos (Draper 2017, p.202). Nissen huts continued to be used but were now often built with brick, concrete-block or plasterboard ends and used corrugated asbestos sheets instead of metal (Draper 2017, p. 245).

2.4 Asbestos huts

- 2.4.1 New huts designed to be made of asbestos began to appear in the early 1940s. The Curved Asbestos Hut is very similar in appearance to the Nissen and also used prefabricated plasterboard or brick for the ends (Draper 2017, p.234). These were manufactured from 1942 onwards by the Turner Asbestos Co Ltd of Manchester.

3 DESCRIPTION OF BUILDING

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The building is located to the south of the plot and is mostly covered in foliage and vegetation. The south-east side of the building was inaccessible due to its proximity to the boundary of the graveyard and being completely obscured by vegetation (Plates 2 and 3). Internally the building is in disrepair with large cracks and damage to the door and windows.

3.1.2 The building measures 9.8m x 5.5m with a height of 2.75m.

3.1.3 It is constructed from corrugated asbestos sheeting over a steel frame. Nine sheets per side are covered with convex roof sheets to form the distinctive semi-circular shape (Plate 4). The sheets have been fixed in place by steel bolts (Plate 5).

3.2 External description

South-west facing elevation

3.2.1 The south-west elevation is 9.8m in length and consists of nine asbestos sheets secured by metal bolts (Plate 6).

3.2.2 No architectural features were noted on the exterior of the building.

South-east facing elevation

3.2.3 The south-east facing elevation was obscured by vegetation and could not be observed (Plate 7).

North-east facing elevation

3.2.4 The semi-circular north-east facing elevation has a width of 5.5m and a height of 2.75m (Plate 8, Fig. 4). It is made of asbestos sheeting.

3.2.5 There is a wooden stable door in the centre, measuring 2m x 1m, set between two wooden uprights (Plate 9). The door has simple metal strap hinges to the left-hand side (Plates 10 and 11).

3.2.6 Two rectangular windows are located either side of the door, each measures 0.92m wide and 0.75m high. They are constructed of steel with one horizontal glazing bar and are set in a wooden frame. Each has a central pivot mechanism and the window on the right retains some glazing (Plate 12).

3.2.7 A central Louvre vent is located above the doorway (Plate 13).

South-west facing elevation

3.2.8 The south-west facing elevation has a width of 5.5m and a height of 2.75m. It is constructed from asbestos sheeting with three windows centrally placed and separated by wooden uprights (Plate 14). Each window measures 1.5m x 1m and would have contained three panes of glass (Plate 15). They are made of steel and set into a wooden frame.

3.2.9 A single vent is located centrally above the window.

3.3 Internal description

- 3.3.1 Internally the building measures 9.6m x 5.3m and has a height of 2.73m. Vegetation had encroached on the interior, and this made a detailed study difficult (Plate 16). However, it could be seen that the internal space was open plan, with no evidence of former divisions visible. Its recent use has been one of storage, and there are no indications of former use except a small amount of chicken wire covering the lower part of the central window on the south-west facing elevation (Plate 17). This could support the anecdotal evidence that the building was formerly used to house animals.
- 3.3.2 Two openings were present in the roof sheets (Plate 18), which appeared to have been added post construction. These may have been openings for small chimneys, as seen at other huts (Taylor 2009), which have now been removed.
- 3.3.3 The floor consisted of a simple beaten earth (Plate 19). No other signs of floor or floor covering were noted.

4 HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Summary Statement of Significance

4.1.1 The brief issued by the CHET (Robinson Zeki 2020) states that:

The Nissen hut may be considered of archaeological interest, military archaeology being identified within regional and national research frameworks as requiring further work, reflecting recent attrition rates.

4.1.2 The recording of the Nissen hut in Ellington has provided no evidence for its military use, only for domestic use in the post-war years.

4.1.3 There is no definitive evidence that the hut is an actual Nissen hut made by Nissen Building Ltd. From the statistics collected in Draper's analysis of military huts; the dimensions of the building at Ellington are more similar to those given for the Curved Asbestos Hut (Draper 2017, B22). The width of the Curved Asbestos Hut is given as 17ft 9in, the equivalent of 5.4m. The Nissen huts were available in widths of 16ft (4.9m), 24ft (7.3m) and 30ft (9.1m). The lengths of both were around 36ft but this was variable depending on how many corrugated sheets were used (Draper 2017, B51). The Ellington hut measures 5.5m (18ft) wide and 9.8m long (32ft 1in).

4.2 Conclusions

4.2.1 Nissen huts were in use from 1916, but these and other curved military huts were only built from asbestos during the Second World War and beyond. The hut off Church Lane is constructed predominantly of asbestos sheeting suggesting it was originally manufactured during the later years of the second world war or possibly in the post-war years. The Curved Asbestos hut was only manufactured from 1942 onwards.

4.2.2 These buildings were typically used by the military for storage, accommodation and offices. After the war, many of the huts were no longer needed and were often moved and re-purposed for agricultural use. The curved shape of these type of huts made them less desirable for re-use as prefabricated homes (Draper 2017, p.267). There were several military facilities in the vicinity of Ellington including the RAF bases at Alconbury, Brampton and Kimbolton which could have supplied the hut.

4.2.3 Although historic maps show a boundary between the Mermaid pub, to the north-east, and the land on which the Nissen hut is situated, we know from anecdotal evidence provided by the client (Nigel Forvague) that both pieces of land were owned by the pub:

My family tie to the building is that my wife's great grandparents ran the pub in which the land that we have used to belong. Her grandma or great grandparents bought the pub from the brewery. I understand the Nissen Hut was put up after the war as a pig shed/garden store by her Grandma. Her Grandma sold the pub but retained the area of land on which the hut is situated and continued to use it as an allotment.

4.2.4 From historic maps, we can determine that the hut was definitely in-situ on the plot at Church Lane, from at least 1978. The anecdotal evidence from the client suggests it was erected possibly in the 1950s. There is no indication of whether the building was

moved from another location (potentially a military facility) or whether Church lane is it's original location.

APPENDIX A BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Draper, K.L. 2017. *Wartime Huts: The Development, Typology and Identification of Temporary Military Buildings in Britain 1914-1945*. PhD thesis. University of Cambridge.

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Robinson Zeki, L. 2020. *Brief for Archaeological Evaluation: Land adjacent to 2 Church Lane, Ellington*. CHET. Cambridgeshire County Council.

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APPENDIX B OASIS REPORT FORM

Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-405345		
Project Name	A Nissen Hut at Church Lane, Ellington		
Start of Fieldwork	30/09/2020	End of Fieldwork	30/09/2020
Previous Work	No	Future Work	Yes

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	ECB6304	Planning App. No.	17/01466/FUL
HER Number	ECB6304	Related Numbers	

Prompt	NPPF
Development Type	Residential
Place in Planning Process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Techniques used (tick all that apply)

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Annotated sketch | <input type="checkbox"/> Measured Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> Rectified Photography |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dendrochronological survey | <input type="checkbox"/> Photogrammetric Survey | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Survey/Recording of Fabric/Structure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Laser Scanning | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Photographic Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Monument	Period	Object	Period
Nissen hut	Modern (1901 to present)	None	None

Project Location

County	Cambridgeshire	Address (including Postcode) Land adjacent to 2 Church Ln Ellington Huntingdon PE28 OAL
District	Huntingdonshire	
Parish	Ellington	
HER office	Cambridgeshire	
Size of Study Area		
National Grid Ref	TL 15993 71794	

Project Originators

Organisation	Oxford Archaeology East
Project Brief Originator	Leanne Robinson Zeki (CHET)
Project Design Originator	Aileen Connor (OAE)
Project Manager	Aileen Connor (OAE)
Project Supervisor	James Fairbairn (OAE)

Project Archives

	Location	ID
Physical Archive (Finds)	N/A	N/A
Digital Archive	OA East	ECB6304
Paper Archive	Cambridgeshire County Council	ECB6304

Physical Contents	Present?	Digital files associated with Finds	Paperwork associated with Finds
Animal Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ceramics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Remains	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leather	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Metal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stratigraphic		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Survey		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Textiles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Bone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Stone/Lithic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

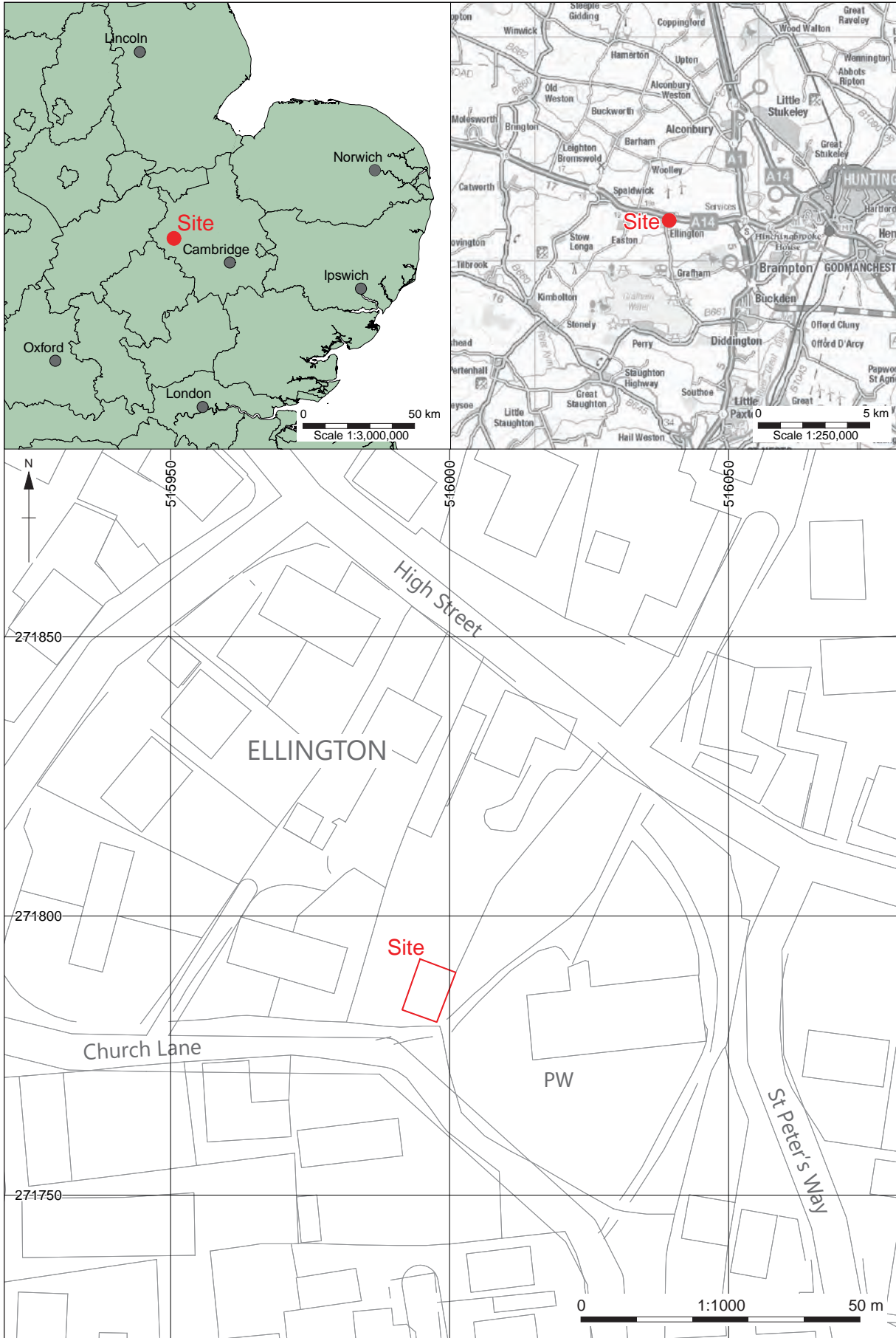
Digital Media

Database	<input type="checkbox"/>
GIS	<input type="checkbox"/>
Geophysics	<input type="checkbox"/>
Images (Digital photos)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Illustrations (Figures/Plates)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Moving Image	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spreadsheets	<input type="checkbox"/>
Survey	<input type="checkbox"/>
Text	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Virtual Reality	<input type="checkbox"/>

Paper Media

Aerial Photos	<input type="checkbox"/>
Context Sheets	<input type="checkbox"/>
Correspondence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drawing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manuscript	<input type="checkbox"/>
Map	<input type="checkbox"/>
Matrices	<input type="checkbox"/>
Microfiche	<input type="checkbox"/>
Miscellaneous	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research/Notes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Photos (negatives/prints/slides)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Plans	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Report	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sections	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Survey	<input type="checkbox"/>

Further Comments



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Figure 1: Site location

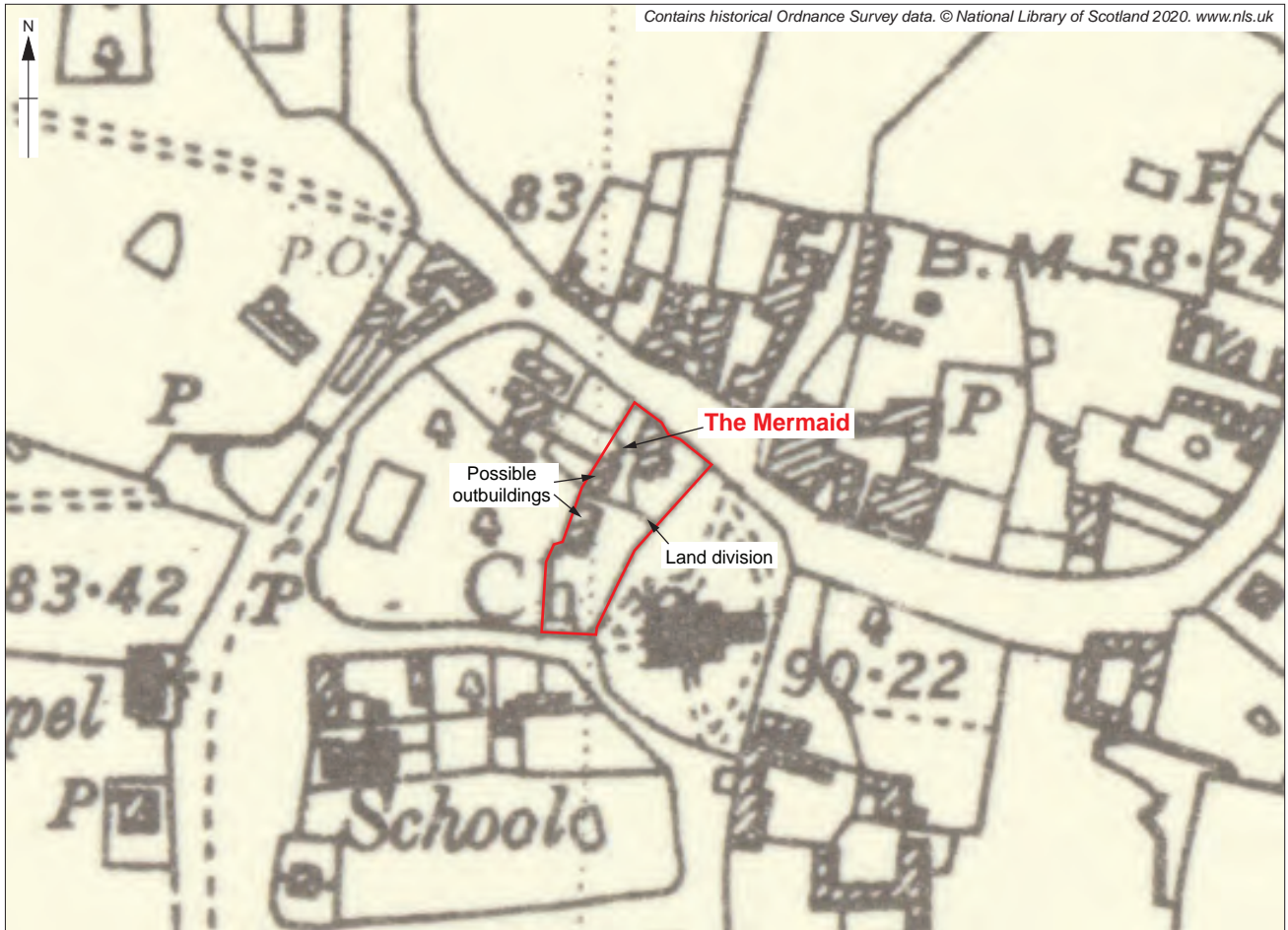


Figure 2: Historic map: Ordnance Survey Map 1952 (not to scale)

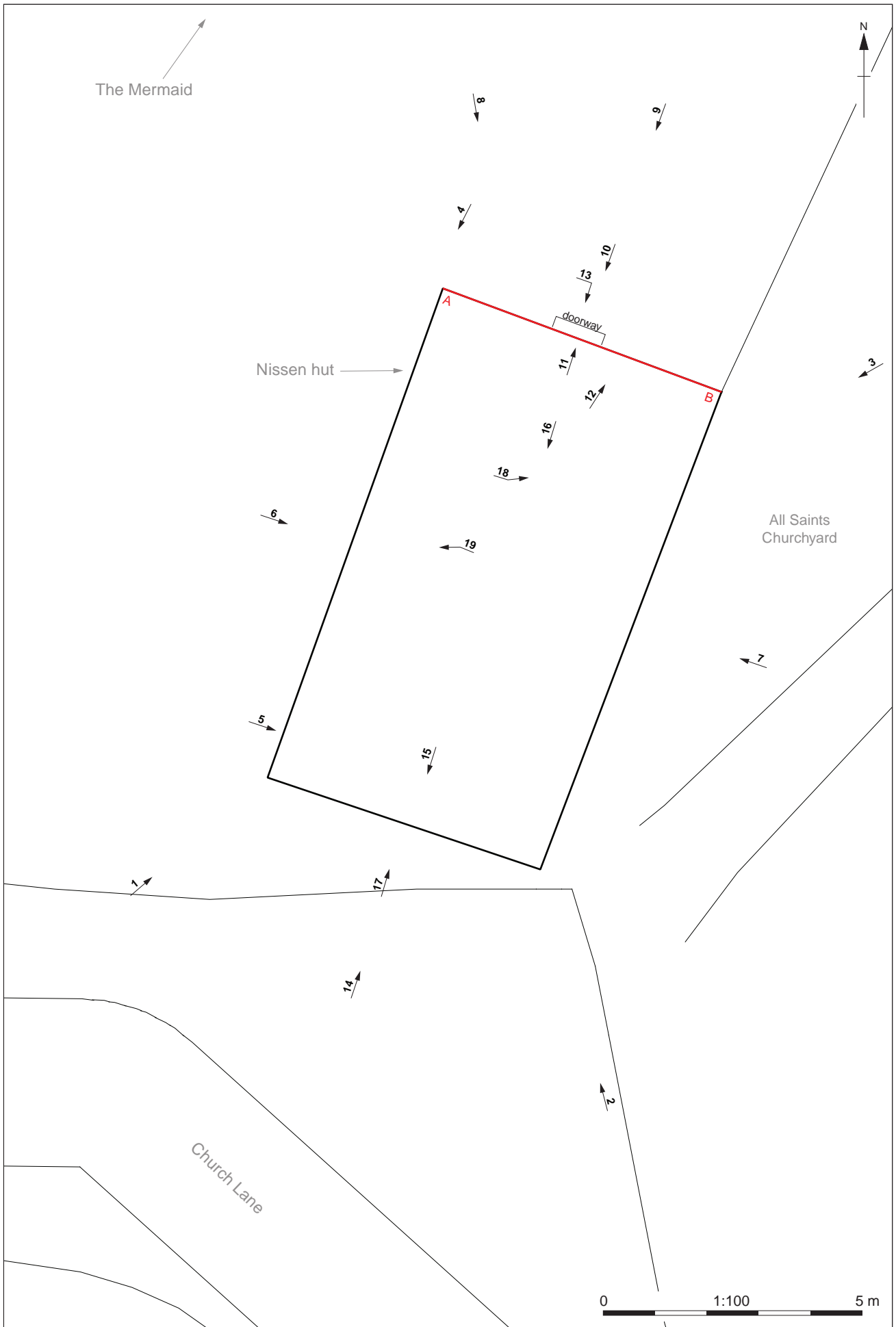
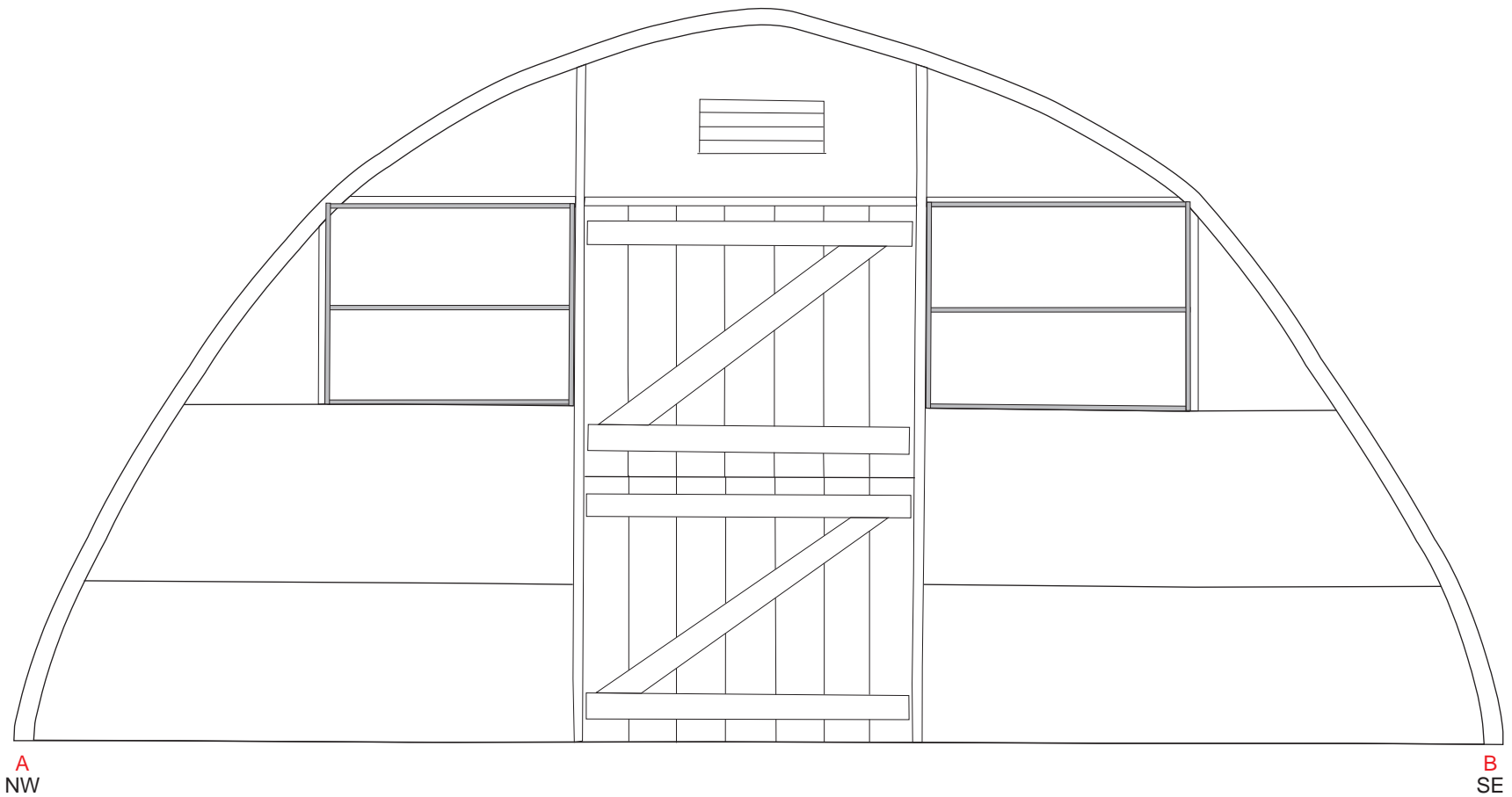


Figure 3: Photograph location plan



0 1:25 1 m

Figure 4: North-east facing elevation viewed from interior



Plate 1: General view of Nissen hut, looking north-east



Plate 2: South-west facing elevation, looking north, showing vegetation cover on the building's south-eastern side



Plate 3: View from All Saints churchyard, looking south-west towards Nissen hut (obscured by vegetation)



Plate 4: Detail of curved asbestos sheeting, looking south-west



Plate 5: Detail of external fixings



Plate 6: North-west facing elevation, looking south-east, showing sheets of corrugated asbestos



Plate 7: South-east facing elevation (obscured by vegetation), looking north-west



Plate 8: North-east facing elevation, looking south



Plate 9: Detail of north-east facing elevation



Plate 11: Detail of door, internal view



Plate 10: Detail of door, external view



Plate 12: Lefthand window on northeast facing elevation, viewed from the interior, showing surviving glazing



Plate 13: Detail of vent above door on the northeast facing elevation



Plate 14: Southwest facing elevation, looking northeast



Plate 15: Southwest facing elevation, viewed from the interior, looking southwest



Plate 16: Internal view, looking southwest



Plate 17: Detail of southwest facing elevation showing chicken wire



Plate 18: Detail of opening in the roof



Plate 19: Internal earthen floor



Plate 20: The Mermaid Public House (photograph provided by Nigel Fovargue)



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