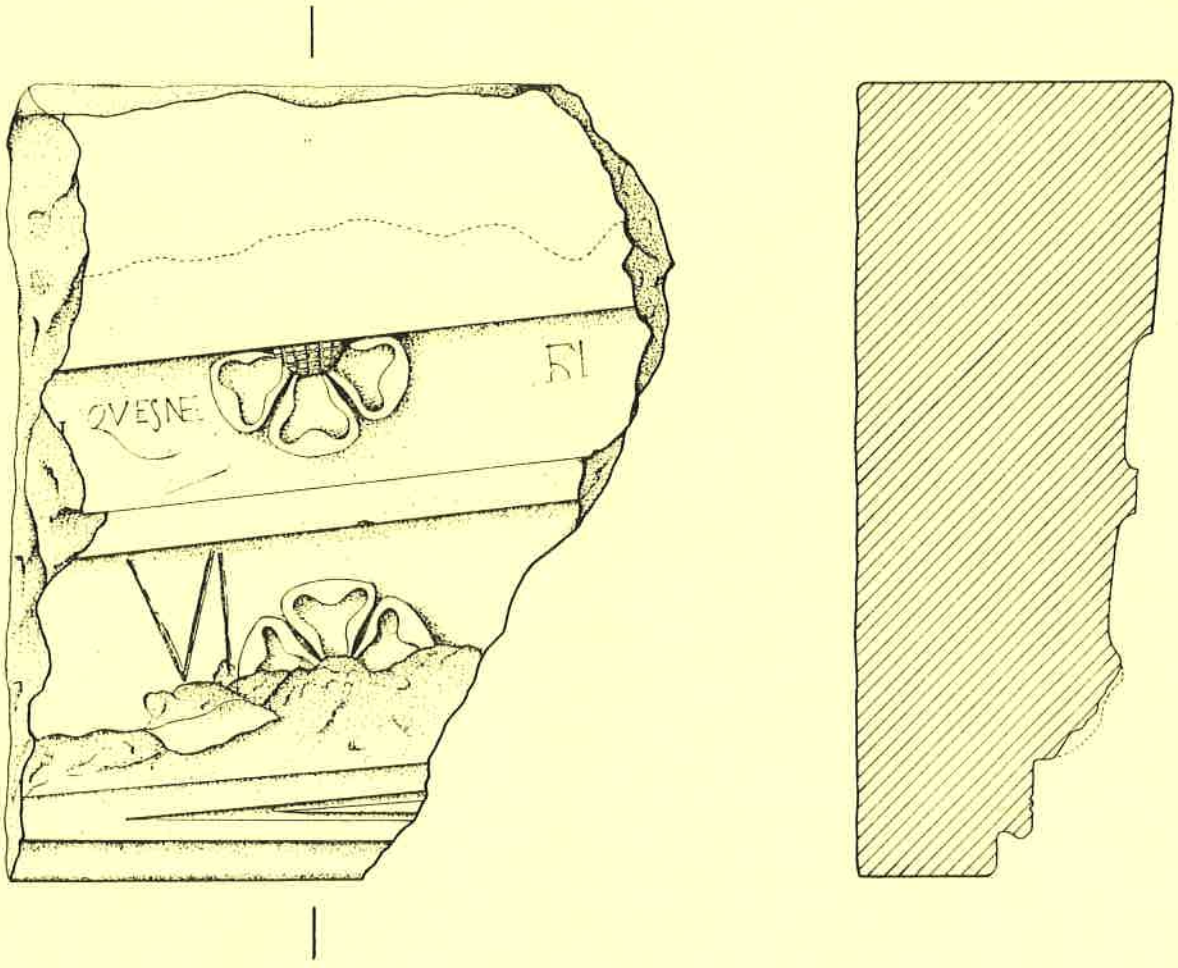
The National Trust
(Thames and Chilterns Region)

Osterley Park, Isleworth, Middlesex.

Notes on watching briefs during construction work, Stable blocks, January-March 1994.



Oxford Archaeological Unit
November 1994

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Summary

A series of watching briefs maintained during construction and tree planting work during January - March 1994 in the vicinity of the stable blocks at Osterley Park House, Isleworth, Middlesex, revealed the remains of 17th/18th century drainage systems servicing the stables and brewhouse along with brickwork footings for a substantial water tower known to have been in existence up until the late 19th century. A number of 16th century architectural fragments were recovered from the excavated tree pits. Although the results of the watching briefs do not provide answers to specific questions on the development of the stable blocks, they form part of a growing body of detailed records of recent interventions on the building.

1 Introduction

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by The National Trust (Thames and Chilterns Region) to undertake a series of watching briefs at Osterley Park House stable blocks during construction work for the creation of new visitor facilities (toilet block and shop). Ground levelling and the excavation of foundation trenches for the new toilet block in the east stable yard were monitored (3.1 below) as was the digging of an electricity cable trench across the main stable courtyard (3.2 below). A watching brief was maintained during the excavation of three pits for the planting of horse chestnut trees between the stable block and the main house (3.3 below). Additional observations were made during the excavation of foundation trenches for a new equipment store located in the walled kitchen garden to the north of the stable block (3.4 below). Architectural recording of the coach house in the east wing of the stables prior to conversion to a shop has been the subject of a separate report.

2 Background

2.1 The stable blocks at Osterley Park have been the subject of a previous investigation by OAU as a part of an assessment commissioned by The National Trust in July 1991. The stables appear to be all of one build, and it is probable that the date of construction is contemporary with that of the main house (*c.*1570) though this has been questioned. Several stages of later alterations are evident and these are summarised in the previous OAU appraisal (1991).

2.2 A review of historic plans and maps of the stable blocks gives rise to a number of

questions regarding their former extent and layout. These are summarised below.

2.2.1 The 1638 'Survey of the Hundred of Isleworth' by Moses Glover (original held in the collection of the Duke of Northumberland at Syon House) depicts a southern range to the stables forming a fully enclosed rectangular courtyard (see fig. 1). It should be borne in mind that this plan is only a part of a much larger survey of Middlesex and, as such, no great accuracy for small detail need be assumed. The relevant extract of this survey is reproduced in the V&A Museum guidebook to Osterley Park House (1985).

2.2.2 Rocque's 'Survey of London and country near ten miles around' of 1741-45 shows the three extant ranges of the stable blocks with no enclosing southern range. However, an additional range is depicted aligned north-east/south-west and abutting the south-east end of the extant east wing (see fig. 2).

2.2.3 The Heston Award plan B enclosure map of 1818 depicts the stable block as it stands at present with north range and the two projecting wings. It should also be noted that at this date, the curving garden wall abutting the east wing and enclosing the east stable yard is in existence (see fig. 3).

2.2.4 A more detailed plan of 1879 showing drainage for the stables and the main house again shows the curving garden wall (Osterley Volume V: Grounds, held at V&A Picture Library). Other features relevant to the current building programme shown on this plan include decorative garden features (oval lawn & ?shrubbery) and a water tower abutting the south-east gable end of the west wing of the stable block (see fig. 4). Deposits assigned to these features have previously been encountered in the excavation of tree pits in March 1991 (Angus Wainwright, Notes on watching briefs at Osterley, 1991-1992).

2.3 It is evident from 2.2.1-2.2.4 above that the detailed development of the layout of the stable blocks at Osterley is by no means clear. Groundwork in the east stable yard and main stable courtyard therefore have potential for enhancing the known history of the buildings, in particular relating to the possible existence of an additional stable range (see 2.2.1 & 2, above).

3 Observations

3.1 *Area A, East Stable Yard*

3.1.1 The site was visited on two occasions during January 1994 while construction work was in progress. Due to inclement weather conditions it was not possible for the contractors to excavate the full extent of the foundation trenches at a single time and to leave them open for inspection. Instead, a staged programme of partial excavation of the foundation trenches followed by immediate infilling with concrete was necessary. Although this method of excavation was not ideal for archaeological monitoring of the work, regular contact between OAU and the contractors on site

over the period of excavation ensured as close control as was feasible under very difficult conditions.

3.1.2 The southern corner of the development area bounded by the east wall of the east wing and the curving garden wall was identified as the area of maximum potential for remains relating to any former range extending south-west from the extant stable buildings (see 2.2.2, plus fig. 2). This area was, unfortunately also the area of maximum ground disturbance. Removal of a former modern toilet block and its associated foundations reduced the ground level to a sufficient extent for the purposes of the current building programme. The foundations for this toilet block and numerous modern and victorian service pipes had effectively destroyed any archaeological deposits that may have existed in this area.

3.1.3 A small area (max. dimensions: 2.1m x 1.2m) of brick paving was encountered adjacent to the garden wall c.7.5m east of the east wing of the stable block and at a depth of *c*.0.12m below current ground level (see fig. 5). The paving comprised both complete and partial bricks and was of an uneven and well weathered appearance suggesting an exterior surface rather than an internal floor. The long axes of the complete bricks (dimensions: 0.23 x 0.1 x 0.06m) were laid parallel to the garden wall which the surface abutted. The surface is therefore either contemporary with or post dates the existing garden wall which is first depicted in the enclosure map of 1818 (see fig. 3). The bricks used in the paved area are of a similar size to those in the original east wing wall and are distinct from those in the garden wall which have dimensions of 0.20 x 0.06m. The surface is possibly a former east stable yard utilising bricks reused from the original east wing at a time when minor alterations were in progress.

3.1.4 No further archaeological deposits were encountered within the limits of the excavated foundation trenches.

3.2 *Area B, Service Trench, Main Stable Courtyard*

3.2.1 A trench was dug across the mouth of the stable block in March 1994 to facilitate the laying of electricity cables to service the new visitor facilities located in the coach house (east wing) and the east stable yard. The trench was *c*.0.90m wide x 1.0m deep. The excavation was undertaken by a Community Action team under the supervision of the National Trust. An archaeological watching brief was maintained throughout the excavation of the trench.

3.2.2 At the western end of the service trench, south of the gable wall of the west wing, substantial wall foundations were exposed (see fig.6) which correspond to walls depicted in the drainage plan of 1879 (fig.4) and tie in with footings recorded by Angus Wainwright during previous watching briefs (1992). The footings represent the remains of an octagonally based water tower extant until at least the later 19th century. Truncated by the laying of the current tarmac yard surface, the footings comprise three courses of wall 0.61m wide built up from a series of five offsets each

one course deep forming a spread foundation with a maximum width of 1.40m. The fourth offset was more substantial to the exterior of the structure. Two related walls of similar construction were located projecting from the gable end of the west wing at angles of 45° and 135° respectively forming two sides of an octagonal structure. Contained within these walls was a circular wall 0.24m wide and extending the full 1.0m depth of the trench in nine courses. To the west, these footings were cut by the insertion of a series of six modern plastic service pipes (0.11m diam.) backfilled with clean sand and capped with concrete. The brick was of a uniform orange/red colouration and dimensions were 0.22 x 0.10 x 0.07m throughout. Built from the eastern of the exposed tower walls was a 'blocking' wall which curved on a line which, projected, would appear to link up with the south-east corner of the west wing. This wall only survived to one course and was built from the level of the first spreader offset.

3.2.3 Immediately north-east of the water tower foundations was a small area of cobbling directly below the present tarmac surface and overlying the construction trench for the water tower wall. The cobble sets appeared to be laid perpendicular to the water tower wall and represents a former yard surface, contemporary with the water tower. The full extent of the cobbling was not seen due to disturbance to the north east by services (see 3.2.4).

3.2.4 The area north-east of the water tower foundations was heavily disturbed by the laying of a series of services. At least one of these services (ceramic drain) is shown on the drainage plan of 1879. The service pipes run parallel with the east wall of the west wing at a distance of *c.*1.5m to the north-east.

3.2.5 Within the central area of the service trench the top of a brick built vaulted drainage culvert was partially exposed at the base of the excavation. Further investigation of this drain was not undertaken within this trench though observation strongly suggested that it was the same feature as 1/A and 3/A exposed in the tree-pits to the S (see 3.3.2 and 3.3.4 below). Comparative levels on the culvert at the three exposed sections confirmed that it drained away from the stable blocks.

3.2.6 Excavation at the eastern end of the main service trench revealed a series of stratified deposits. Immediately below 0.05m of modern tarmac, a series of gravel and chalk rubble make-up layers to a maximum of 0.36m thick were encountered. These layers were cut to the west by the construction trench for a modern ceramic drain running north-south across the trench. At a depth of 0.82m below modern ground level a laid ?surface/linear feature of brick construction was exposed in the south section only of the trench. The brickwork extended westwards for some 2m from a point 1.90m west of the east wing wall. The bricks did not extend into the excavated trench though probing of the section revealed a second lower course of bricks set back from the upper course. The construction of this feature was not suggestive of a wall and given the partial exposure within the trench, interpretation is rather problematical. Given the nature of the deposits exposed within the tree pits to the south, it is perhaps reasonable to argue that the brickwork may represent the edge of a drainage culvert running near parallel to and slightly south of the excavated trench. Such a

supposition could be verified by future excavation in the stable yard should the opportunity arise. A dumped layer of roughly hewn green sandstone rubble was encountered against the west wall of the east wing of the stable blocks at a depth of 0.70m from modern ground level. The function of this deposit was unclear.

Survival of deposits at this end of the trench would appear to be markedly higher than in the central area of the courtyard where much disturbance has occurred through planting of trees over an extended period of time (NT Gardens Survey 1980, 14).

3.3 *Tree pits between stables and main house*

3.3.1 A series of three pits *c*.2.3m in diameter and *c*.1.5m deep were excavated between the stable block and the main house for the planting of horse chestnut trees. The digging of these pits was again undertaken by a Community Action team under the supervision of the National Trust. An archaeological watching brief was maintained throughout the excavation of the pits. The descriptions below summarise the archaeological features exposed in each pit, layer records are given in appendix A.

3.3.2 *Tree Pit 1 (see fig. 7)*

Dimensions: 2.3m diam. x c.1.80m deep (maximum)

Two interconnecting brick-built drains were exposed within the pit at a depth of some 1.24-1.45m below modern ground surface. Drain 1/A was aligned approximately NW-SE draining away from the western stair turret of the stable block (location of the brewhouse). Of brick construction, its internal dimensions were 0.4m (h) x 0.48m (w) and its top was vaulted from a height of 0.24m above base. The brick employed in its construction was of av. size 0.235 x 0.11 x 0.06m and the top of the drain was at a level of 1.24m below modern ground surface. Drain 1/A is the same feature as the drain exposed within the main service trench and drain 3/A exposed in tree pit 3 (see 3.3.3 below). Drain 1/B was partly exposed within the trench and was aligned approximately south-west/north-east. Its internal dimensions were 0.24m (h) x 0.17m (w). The drain walls were again of brick construction (av. size: 0.22 x 0.10 x 0.07m) rising to three courses. Drain 1/B differed from 1/A however, in that its capping comprised various re-used architectural fragments: these included an inverted limestone stair treader and two sculpted greenstone blocks (see fig. 10). Decorative motifs employed on these blocks were Tudor Rose and strapwork stylistically 16th - 17th century. The nature of the stone and high quality preservation of the sculpture, in the Tudor Rose fragment especially, suggest an original internal as opposed to external usage. The divergent angle of mouldings at the base of the Tudor Rose fragment suggests a possible original function of a doorway or fireplace surround, while the strapwork fragment probably formed part of a decorative frieze. Drains 1/A and 1/B were noted to be inter-connecting. Both were partially dismantled and recorded prior to planting and backfilling. The architectural fragments were salvaged and have since been returned to the National Trust at Osterley Park House.

3.3.3 *Tree Pit 2 (see fig. 8)*

Dimensions: 2.3m diam. x c.1.70m deep (maximum)

A brick built drain 2/A ran across the pit aligned approximately N-S at a depth of -0.69m below ground surface. To the southern side of the pit, the drain curved eastwards though it had been disturbed at this point by lead piping and as a result of extensive root action (see fig. 8). The drain had internal dimensions of 0.26m (w) x 0.27m (h) with straight sides of three courses and a vaulted top from a height of 0.23m above base. The brick size was av. 0.22 x 0.14 x 0.07m. Drain 2/A was recorded and dismantled prior to planting and backfilling. Drain 2/A in turn cut a large brick built structure (2/B) to the east. This structure comprised a ?square or rectangular brick base atop which was constructed a solid brick built platform surviving to three courses in height. The face of the platform exposed within the trench was set at an angle of 45° to the rectangular base suggesting a possible octagonal plan. Unfortunately, the partial exposure of this structure within the excavated tree-pit does not allow for full interpretation of its nature and extent, though the possibility exists that it may represent some form of decorative garden feature located near centrally within the mouth of the stable yard. Structure 2/B was left *in situ* prior to planting and backfilling of the pit.

3.3.4 *Tree Pit 3 (see fig. 9)*

Dimensions: 2.3m diam. x c.1.60m deep (maximum)

At a level of -0.42 m from yard surface, a straight brick built wall comprising only one course was encountered running across the tree-pit on a NE-SW alignment. This feature was in isolation and no related deposits were identified. Its function is unclear. At a level of -1.40m a brick built drain 3/A was exposed running NW-SE and was seen to be the same feature as drain 1/A and the brick drain exposed in the main service trench. Comparative levels at the three exposed sections of the feature confirmed that it drained away from the stable blocks. The construction trench for the laying of drain 3/A was clearly discernible to the W and rubble infill of this trench formed the fill of much of the tree-pit. At the SE of the tree-pit, drain 3/A was seen to run below a small section of curving (?circular) wall (structure 3/B) extending beyond the excavated pit to both S and E (see fig. 9). This footing survived to a maximum of two courses. Again, due to limited exposure within the excavated pit, interpretation was not possible. Features 3/A and 3/B were left *in situ* prior to planting and backfilling of the pit.

3.4 *The walled kitchen garden* (see fig. 11)

3.4.1 Following a site meeting attended by Julian Munby of OAU on 2nd March 1994, a brief survey was undertaken of footings for a former greenhouse built against the east wall of the walled garden to the north of the stable block in advance of the excavation of foundation trenches for a new equipment store.

3.4.2 The footings represent the remains of a building 5.8m x *c.*16m against the east wall of the walled garden to the north of the existing boiler house. Around the exterior of the building runs a brick built channel for warm air ducting (fragments of pipe survive *in situ* in places) which runs to the boiler house though it is not connected to the present boiler. A second ducting channel runs up the interior of the building. At the northern end of the building the exterior ducting channel appears to divert westwards, so the possibility exists of another greenhouse or related building to the west of the exposed footings. The walls, footings and ducting channels survive in places to a depth of 4 or 5 courses. The two east-west walls appear to abut the main garden wall which suggests that the greenhouse was a later addition. It was noted that changes in height of the garden wall appear to relate to the presence of buildings built against it (in the case of the standing boiler house and the exposed footings) and for this reason it seems reasonable to suppose that another building existed to the north of the exposed footings where a further rise in wall height was noted.

3.4.3 During the excavation of the foundation trenches it was confirmed that a further greenhouse or related building existed to the west of the exposed footings (as was suggested by the diversion of the ducting channel at the north western limit of the greenhouse), brick built footings being exposed in the southern foundation trench section. The full western extent of these additional footings was not exposed within the excavated trench.

4 Discussion and Conclusions

4.1 As is evident from section 3 above, interpretation of features with any degree of certainty is not feasible due to the limited exposure of the deposits, an inevitable result of the small scale of investigations.

The series of deposits at the east end of the main service trench (3.2.6 above) would appear to indicate an increased instance of survival in that area and any future interventions in this part of the stable yard may prove fruitful in clarifying the nature of the features partly exposed in the main service trench.

4.2 The series of hard features and deposits described in 3.3 above appear to represent a former drainage layout to the stable blocks, probably dating to the late 17th or 18th centuries. The discovery of (?)16th century architectural fragments used in the capping of drain 1/B is of particular interest, these possibly originating in the main house, being re-used at a time of internal renovation, though not necessarily at the Adam stage.

4.3 The uncovering of the greenhouse footings (3.4 above) in the walled kitchen garden serves to highlight gaps in our understanding of the development of this part of the stable grounds. Further interventions should be monitored closely to clarify the layout and development of this area which is not well documented.

Appendix A

Layer records for tree pits 1-3

Tree pit 1

LAYER	DESCRIPTION	DEPTH
1	Modern tarmac yard surface	0.06m
2	Concrete make-up layer	0.10m
3	Dk grey compacted silty loam with brick rubble and flint inclusions.	0.22m
4	Fairly compact mid orange/brown silty clay 15% gravel inclusions.	0.20m
5	Mid grey/brown silty loam 15-20% small gravel inclusions.	0.22m
6	Compacted light-mid brown gritty sand/gravel ?surface.	0.08m
7	Pale-mid grey slightly clayey silt with extensive orange/brown staining.	0.55m
8	Mid brown sand and gravel mottled grey/green.	to base

Tree pit 2

LAYER	DESCRIPTION	DEPTH
1	Modern tarmac yard surface.	0.065m
2	Orange gritty sand and gravel make-up.	0.02m
3	Grey gritty gravel ?surface/make-up.	0.04m
4	Dk grey compacted silty loam with brick rubble and flint inclusions.	0.17m
5	Fairly compact mid orange/brown silty clay 15% gravel inclusions.	0.11m
6	Brick and mortar rubble spread.	0.10m
7	Mid grey/brown silty loam 15-20% small gravel inclusions.	0.13m
8	Tile and brick spread.	0.05 - 0.06m

LAYER	DESCRIPTION	DEPTH
9	Compacted light - mid brown gritty sand/gravel ?surface.	0.05m
10	Pale-mid grey slightly clayey silt extensive orange/brown staining.	0.53m
11	Mottled pale brown/grey-green sand.	to base

Tree pit 3

LAYER	DESCRIPTION	DEPTH
1	Modern tarmac yard surface.	0.06m
2	Orange gritty sand and gravel compacted make-up layer.	0.06m
3	Grey compacted hoggin ?surface/make-up.	0.06m
4	Mid grey silty loam 20-25% gravel inclusions.	0.15m
5	Compacted light-mid brown gritty sand and gravel.	0.07m
6	Mid-dark grey compacted silty clay with brick rubble and tile inclusions.	0.20m
7	Mid grey silty clay 35-40% gravel inclusions.	0.17m
8	Mid grey silty sand, mottled orange with clear sand lenses showing in section.	to base

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November 1994

Appendix B

List of Sources

Published Sources

Hardy J and Tomlin M 1985. *Osterley Park House, National Trust guide book.*

Harris E 1994. *Osterley Park House, National Trust guide book.*

Unpublished Sources

Munby JT (OAU) 1991. *Osterley Park Stables: An architectural appraisal for the National Trust.*

The National Trust 1980. *Gardens Survey of Osterley Park.*

Wainwright A 1992. *Notes on watching briefs at Osterley 1991-1992.*

Cartographic Sources

'Survey of the Hundred of Isleworth', Moses Glover (1638).

'Survey of London and country near ten miles around' John Rocque (1741-45).

Heston Award plan B enclosure map (1818).

Plan of drainage for Osterley House and stables (1879).

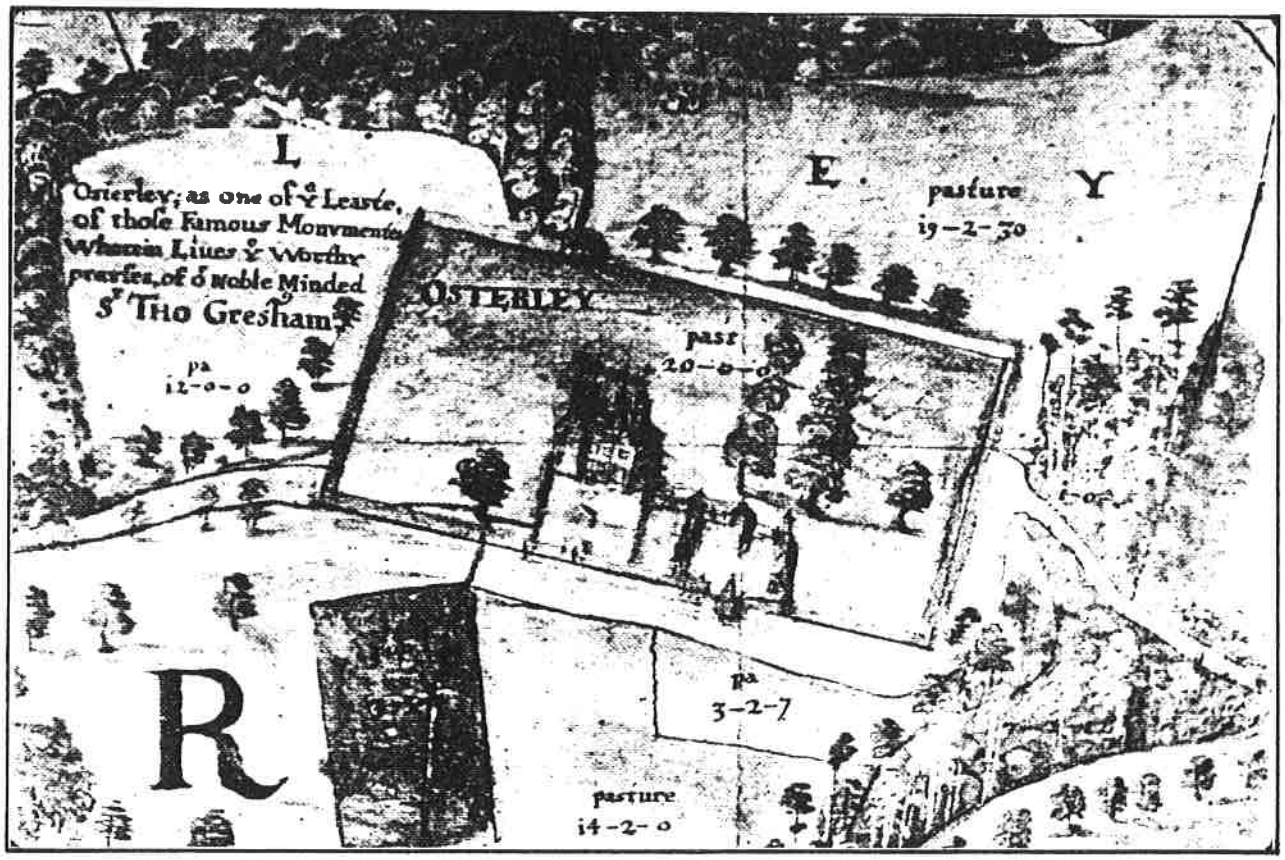


Fig. 1: 'Survey of the Hundred of Isleworth' by Moses Glover (1638).

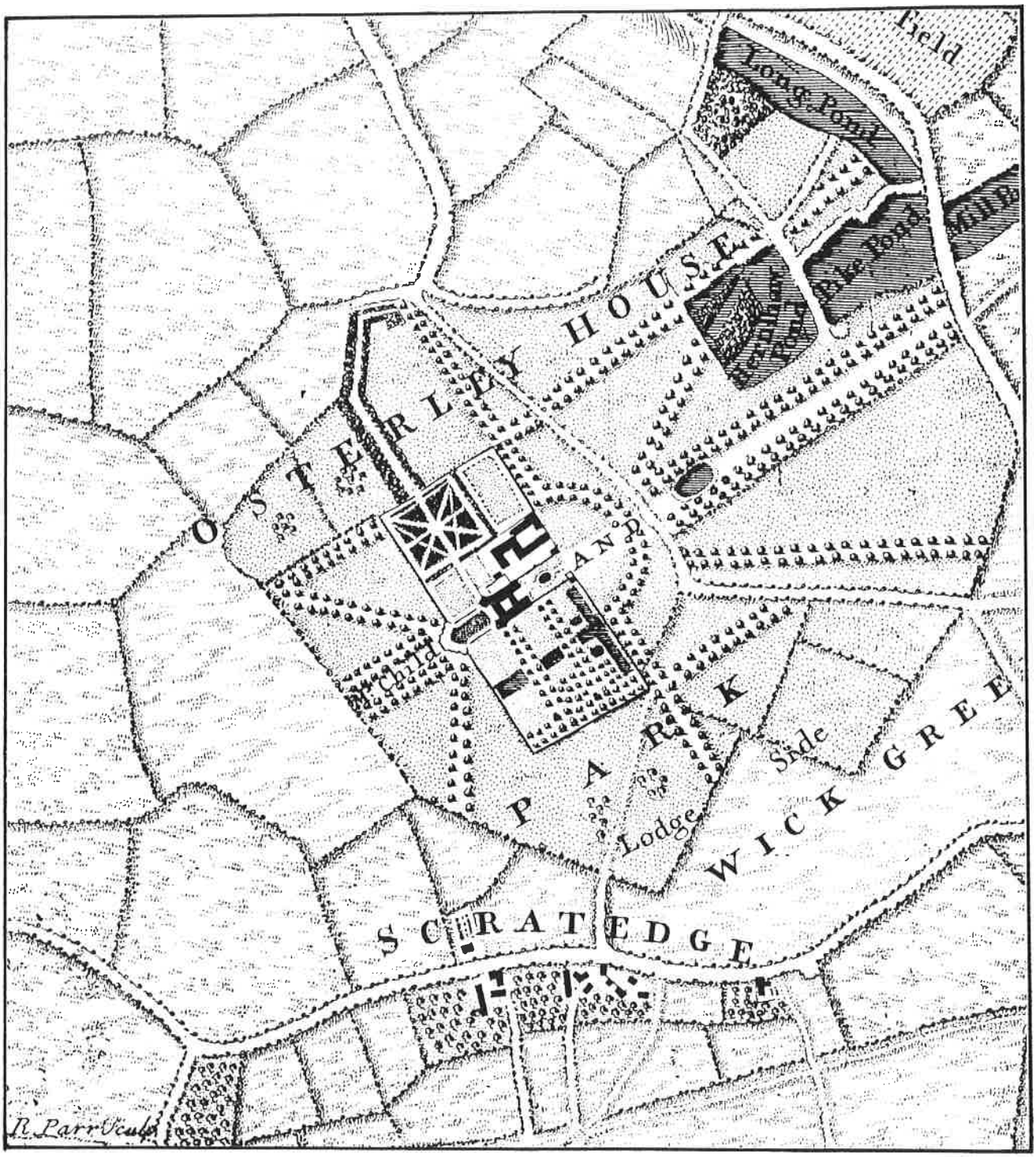


Fig. 2: 'Survey of London and country near ten miles around' by John Roque (1746).

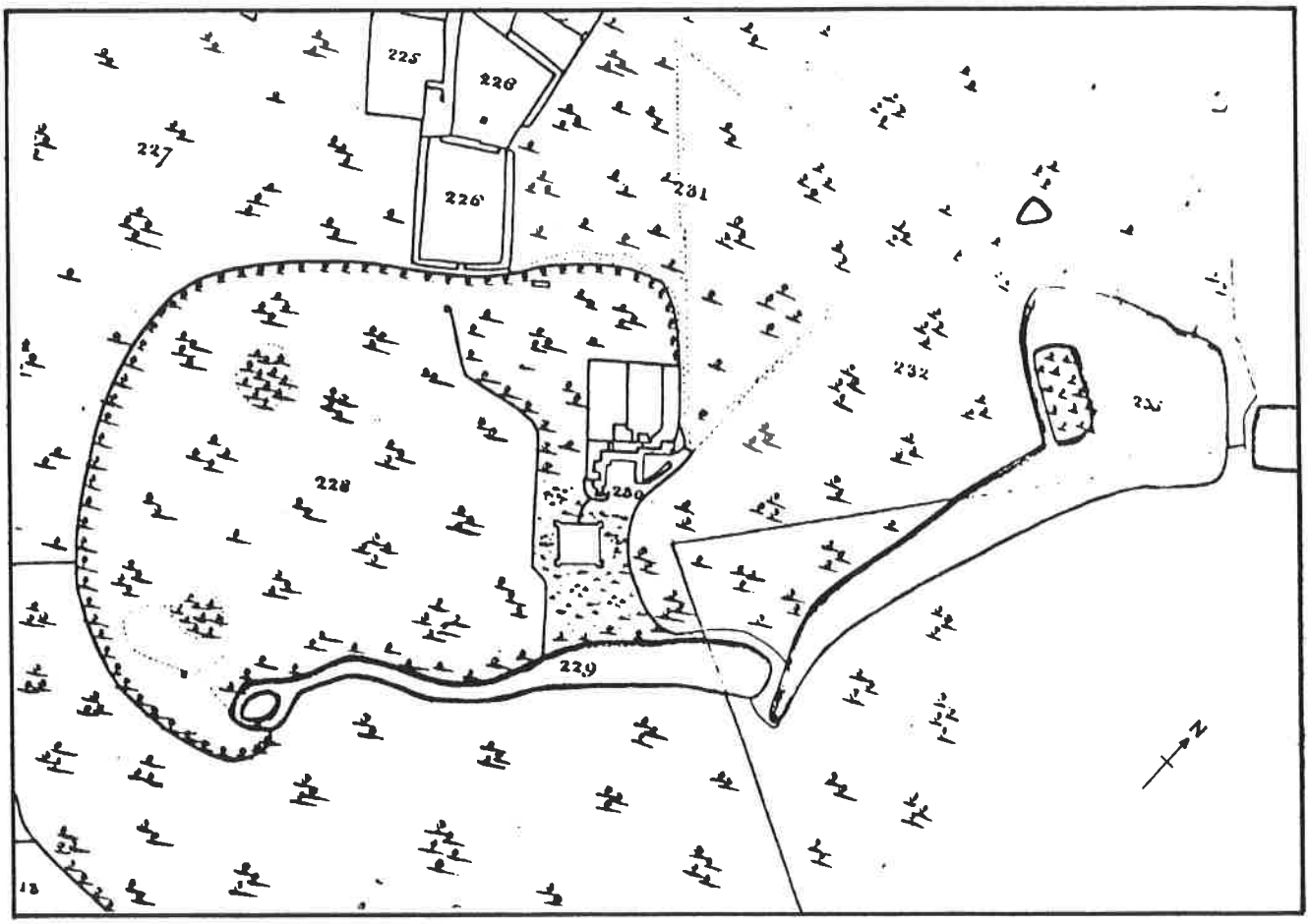


Fig. 3: Heston Award plan B enclosure map (1818).

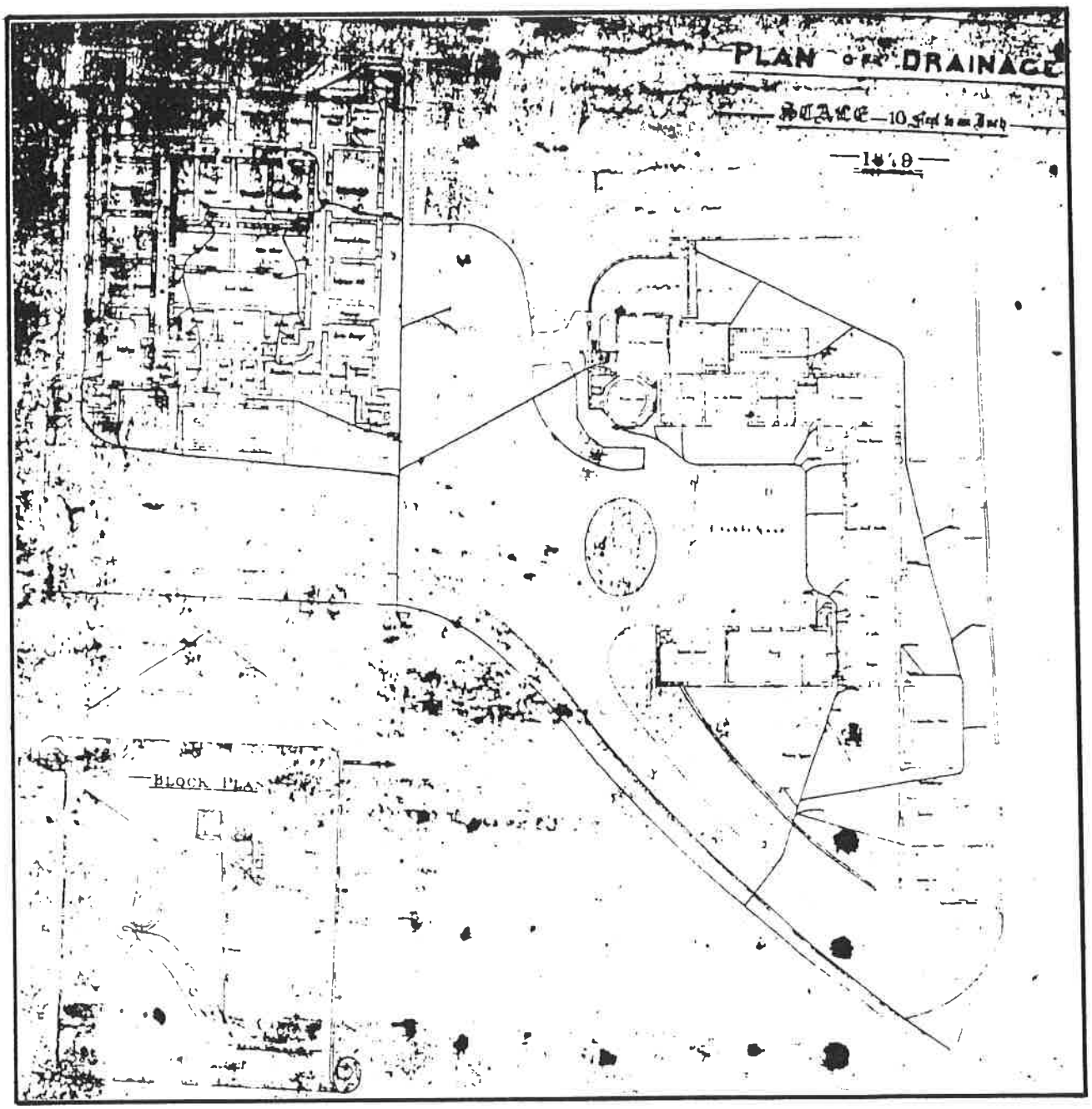


Fig. 4: Plan of drainage for Osterley House and Stable Yard (1879).

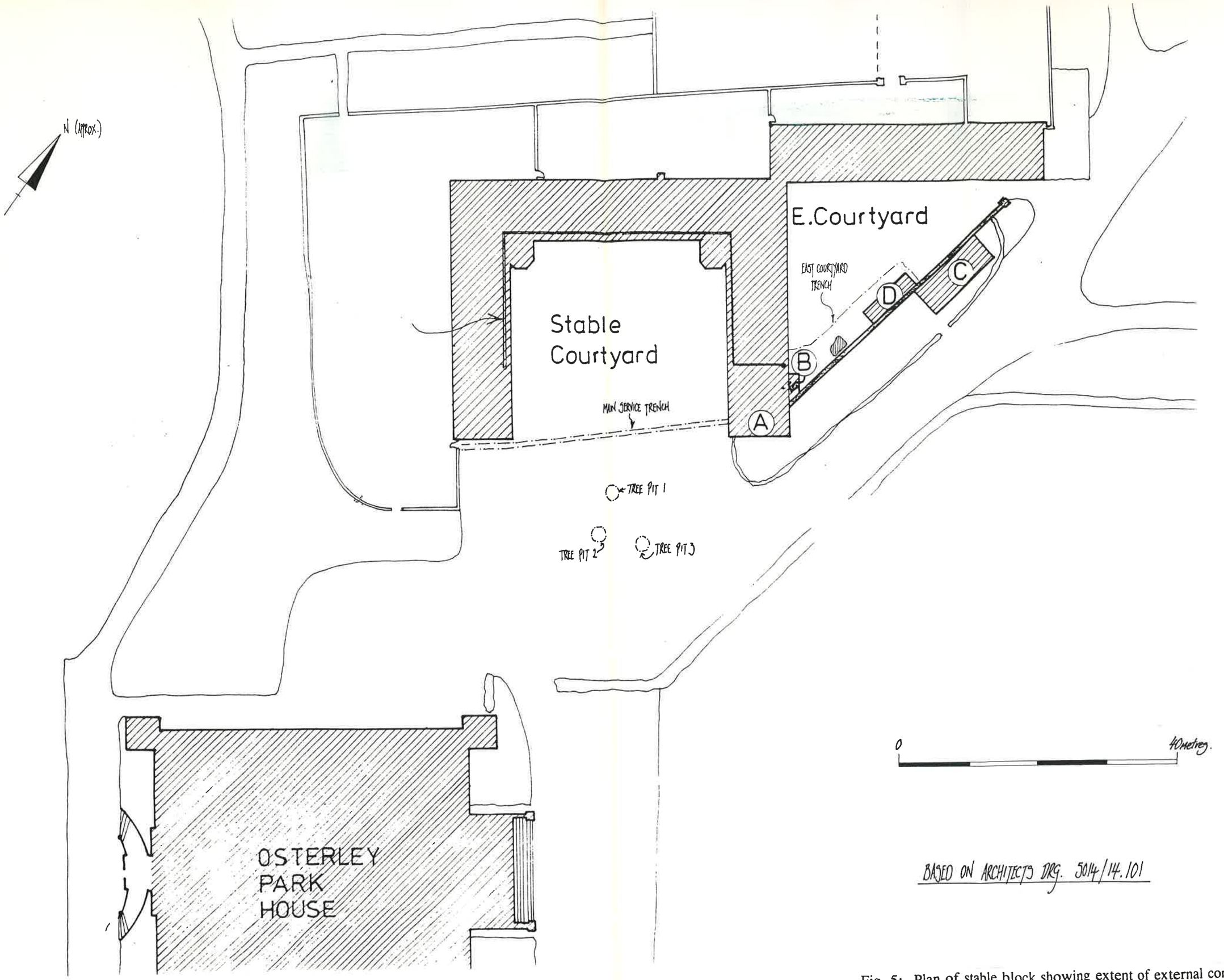


Fig. 5: Plan of stable block showing extent of external construction work.

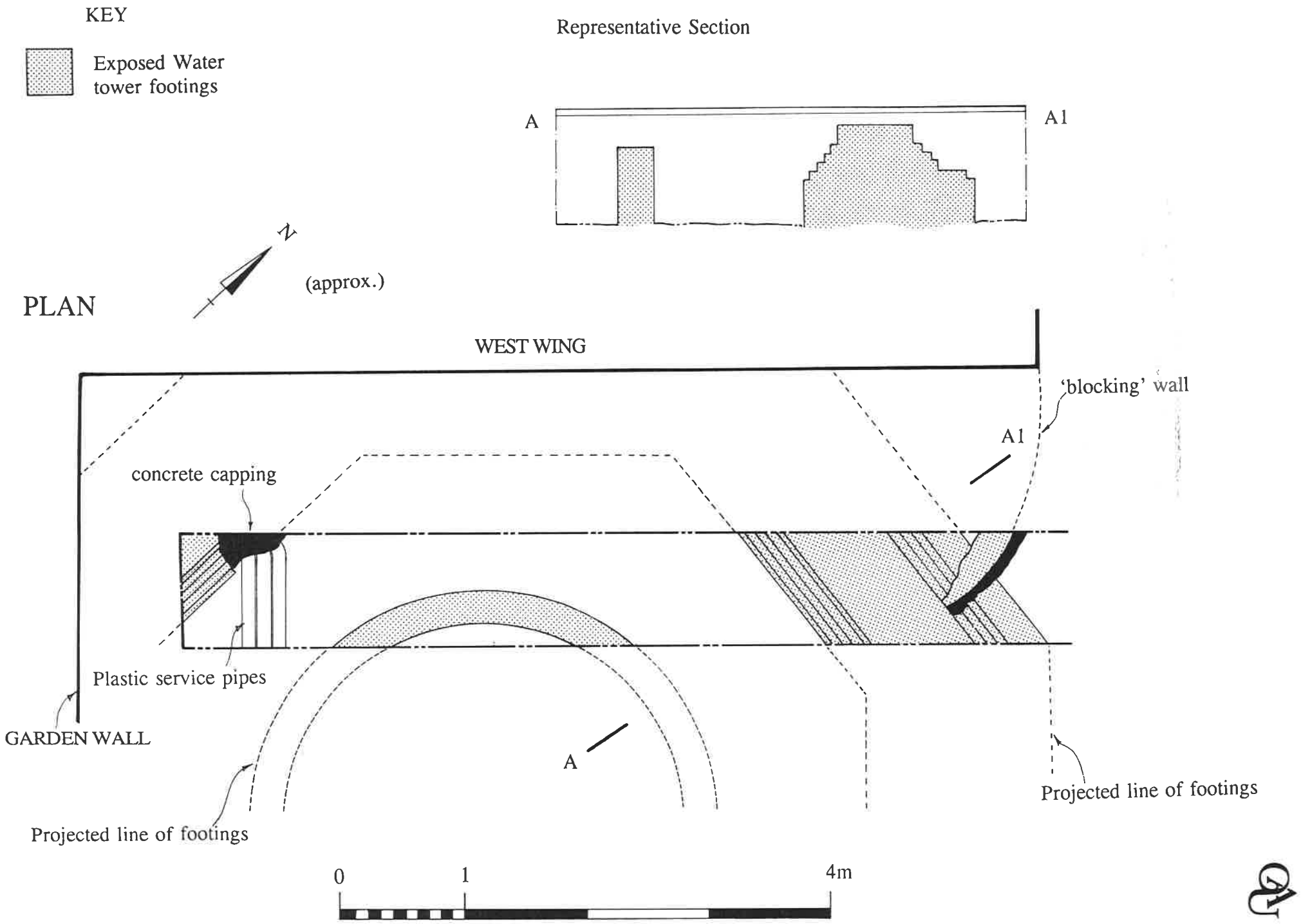


Fig. 6: Plan and representative section of exposed water tower footings.

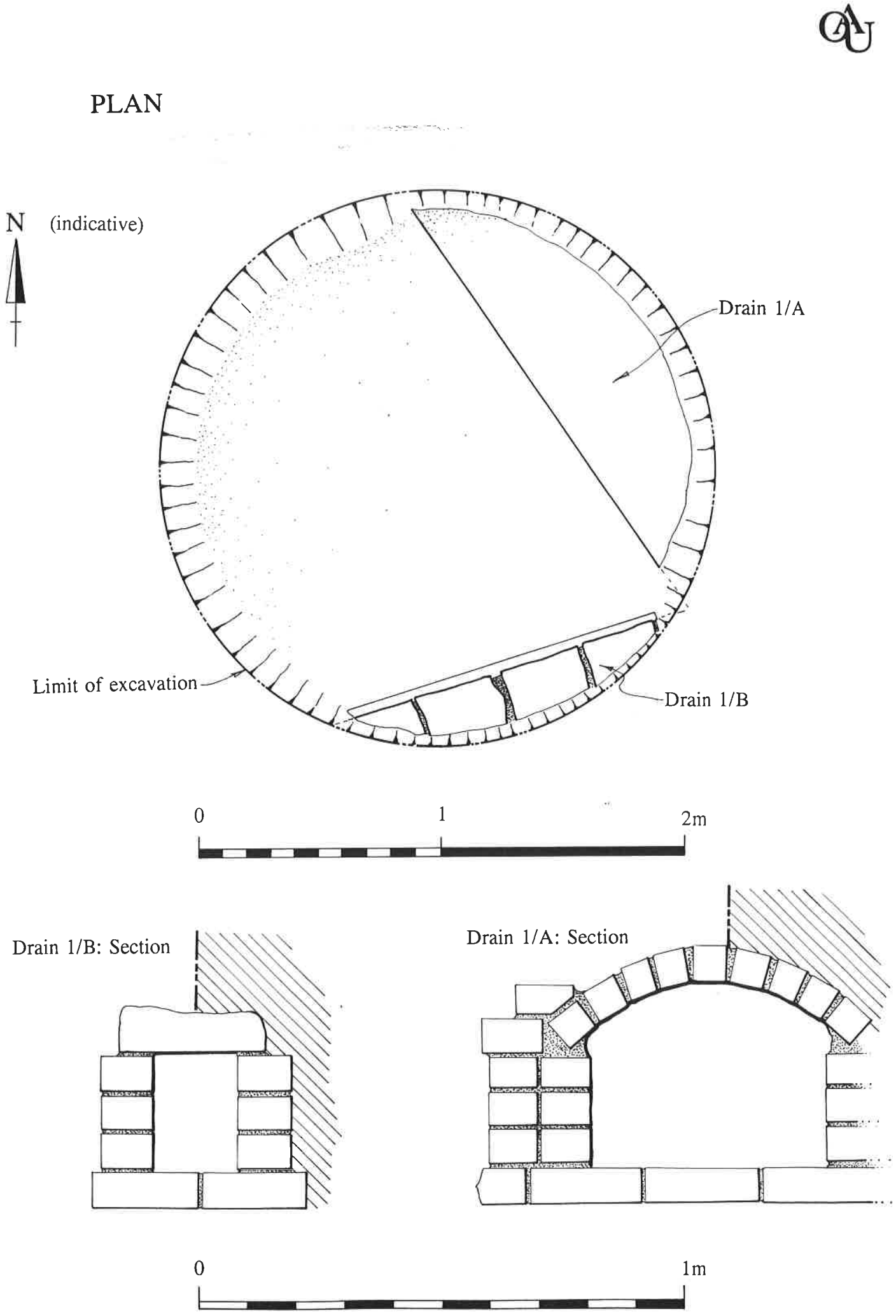
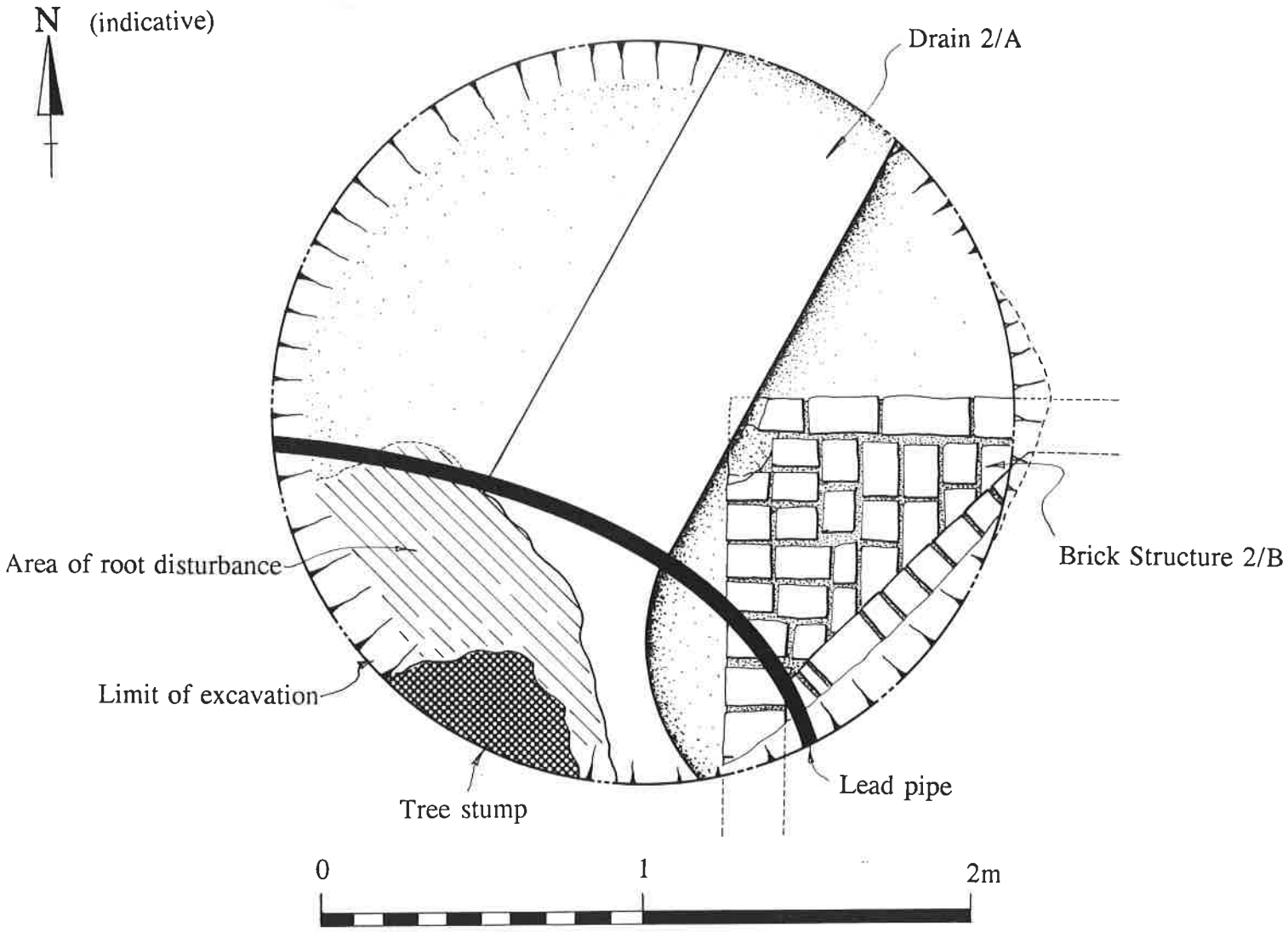


Fig. 7: Tree Pit 1: Plan and comparative drain sections.

PLAN



Drain 2/A: Section

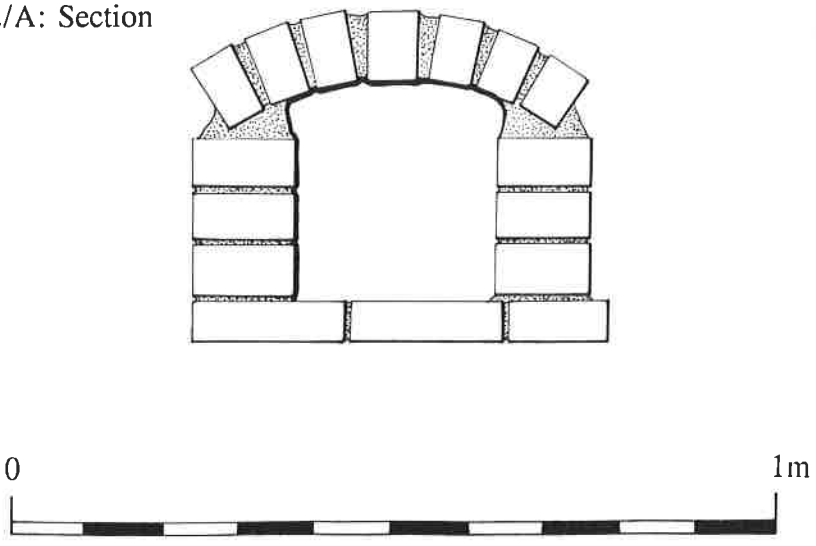


Fig. 8: Tree pit 2: Plan and drain section.

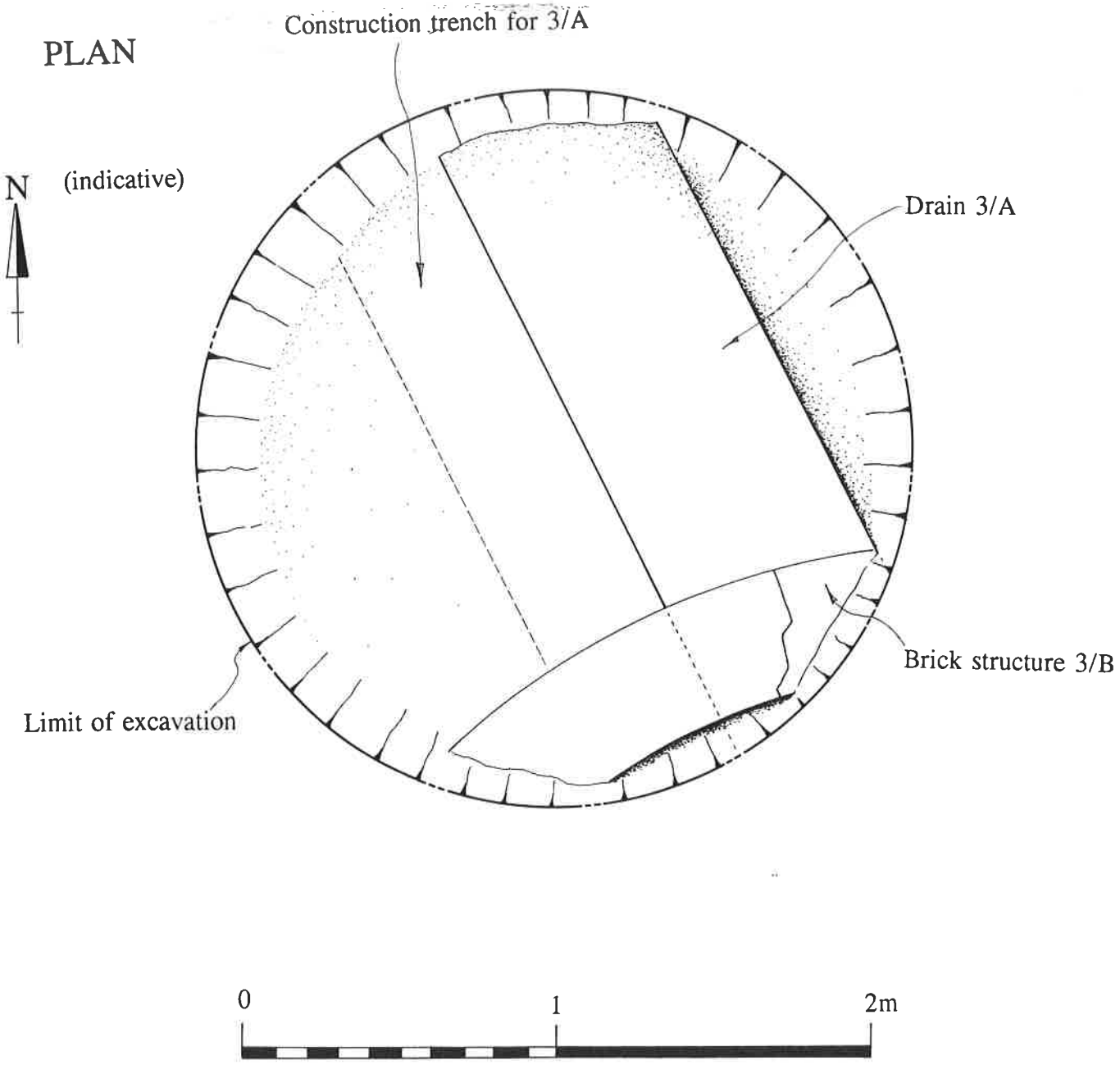


Fig. 9: Tree pit 3: Plan.

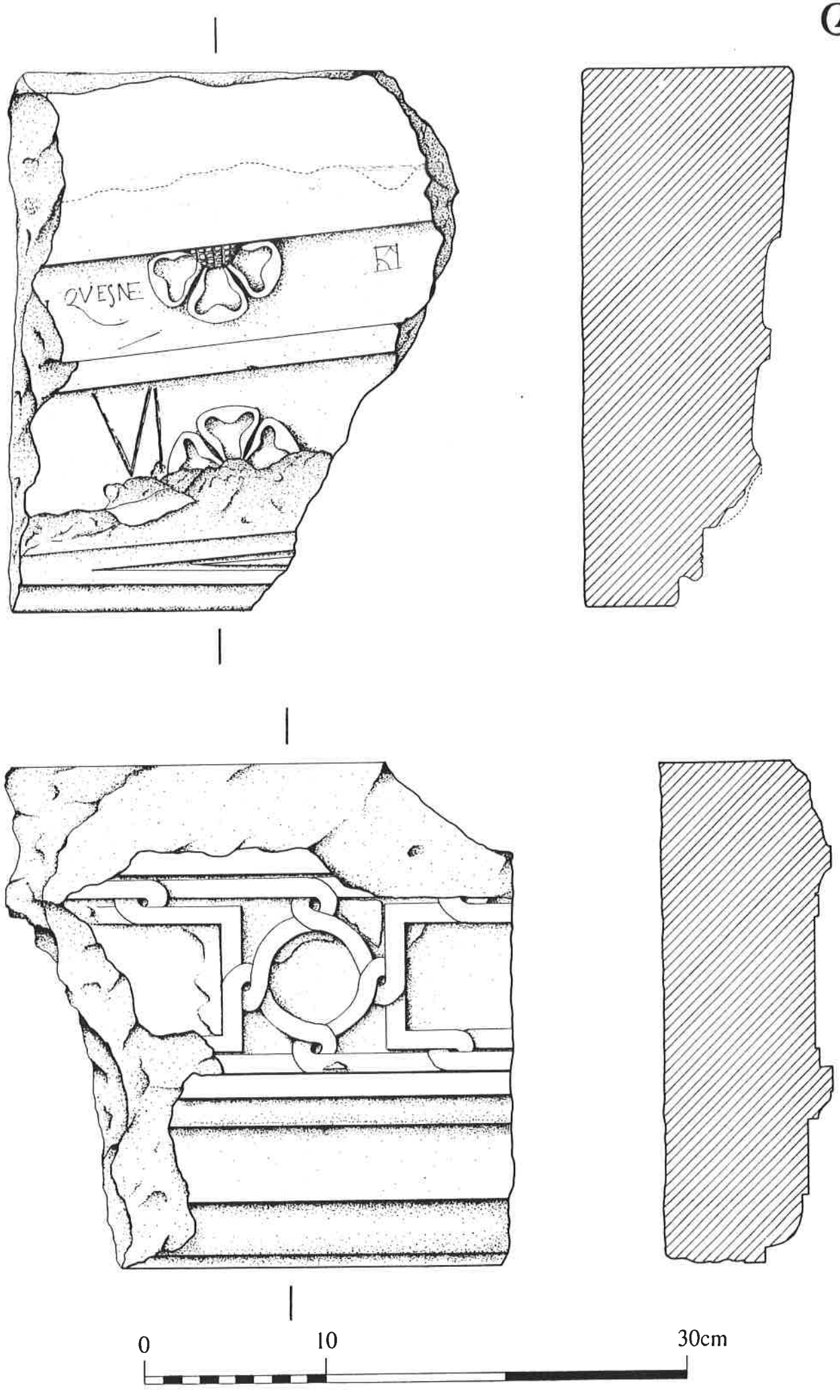


Fig. 10: Details of architectural fragments (capstones to drain 1/B).

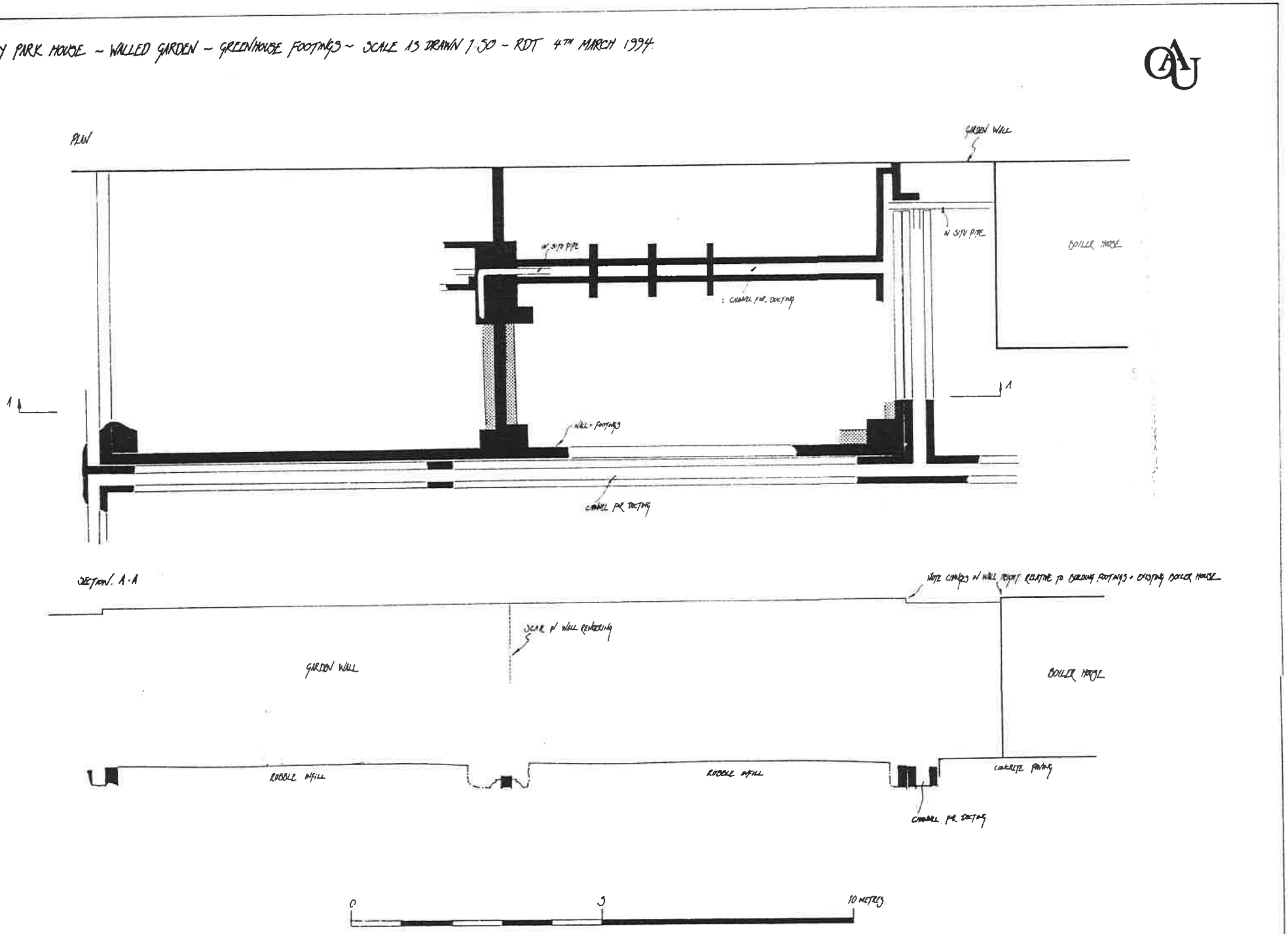


Fig. 11: Plan of exposed greenhouse footings.

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