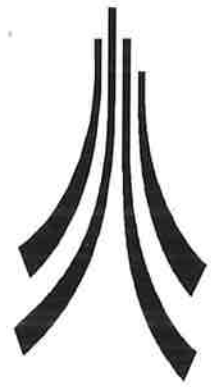


**LANCASTER**  
UNIVERSITY  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
UNIT



July 1998

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**PLATTS HALL**  
**NORTHWICH**  
**Cheshire**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

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Commissioned by: P J Livesey Group Ltd

PRN: 2045

Platts Hall  
Northwich  
Cheshire

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Archaeological Evaluation

Report no 1997-98/(096)/AUA~~7801~~  
7801

Checked by Project Manager.
..... Date
Passed for submission to client.
..... Date

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Storey Institute  
Meeting House Lane  
Lancaster  
LA1 1TH

July 1998

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The evaluation was undertaken by Richard Heawood and Graham Suggett, the finds being examined by Christine Howard-Davis. The report was written by Richard Heawood and was edited by Jamie Quartermaine (Project Manager) and Rachel Newman (Deputy Director). The project was managed by Jamie Quartermaine.

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## SUMMARY

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In April and July 1998 Lancaster University Archaeological Unit carried out an archaeological evaluation at Platts Hall, Lostock Gralam, Cheshire (NGR SJ 682744), on behalf of P J Livesey Developments Ltd. The evaluation was part of a comprehensive programme of recording of Platts Hall, which was a seventeenth century timber framed building with nineteenth century additions to the east, designed to accompany the dismantling of the structure, and the movement of materials from the west wing for re-erection at nearby Bostock Hall.

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken after the demolition of the structure, and was confined to the footprint of the west wing, which contained substantial remains of a timber-framed house which has a dated timber plaque of 1655 (LUAU 1998). However, documentary evidence has shown that there was a building on the site in 1631, prior to the construction date of the extant structure, and the evaluation was therefore intended to demonstrate whether there was evidence for an earlier building surviving below ground.

The evaluation was undertaken in two phases, the first examining the footprint of the West Wing, and the second phase involved the excavation of a trench within the nineteenth century East Wing to investigate the potential for an earlier structure surviving in this locality.

As part of the first phase three trenches were excavated, by a combination of machine and manual techniques, within the footprint of the West Wing, although one trench was extended across the north wall and another across the west wall. The evaluation trenching established that the stratigraphy has been extensively truncated, at some stage prior to the construction of the concrete floor of the West Wing, which was probably laid in this century. Because of the truncation only the deepest features, cut into natural subsoil, have survived and only two of these were identified from the evaluation trenching. One of these, a small pit [101] from Trench A, contained a single sherd of abraded late medieval pottery (fourteenth to sixteenth century date). The features clearly pre-date the timber wing but were not necessarily elements of an earlier structure.

The second phase of evaluation involved the excavation of a single trench predominantly through the north-west room of the East Wing. This showed that the archaeological stratigraphy was also severely truncated but that there was better survival than in the adjacent West Wing. The trench identified the foundations of present nineteenth century building as well as relict elements of an earlier hearth. Within the interior of the room was a single post-hole and a natural tree bole; the latter clearly pre-dated the existing structure but the post-hole was undated.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 1.1.1 In May and July 1998 Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU) carried out an archaeological evaluation at Platts Hall, Lostock Gralam, Cheshire, on behalf of P J Livesey Developments Ltd. The site lies within the Brunner Mond Lostock Gralam chemical works. The evaluation was part of a comprehensive programme of recording of Platts Hall, which was designed to accompany the dismantling of the structure and the movement of materials from the West Wing for re-erection at nearby Bostock Hall. The background to the project and details of the building survey have been presented in the fabric survey interim report (LUAU 1998).
- 1.1.2 The archaeological evaluation was undertaken after the demolition of the structure, and was initially confined to the footprint of the West Wing (*Section 2*), which had contained substantial remains of a timber-framed house thought to date to 1655 (*Section 1.2*). However, after the initial phase of evaluation a further trench (D) was excavated in July 1998 to evaluate the sub-surface deposits within the extent of the nineteenth century East Wing.

### 1.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.2.1 Platts Hall was known prior to this century as Overstreet Farm; its name derives from its position overlooking Watling Street (Dodgson 1970, 191). It is first recorded in 1631 or rather in an incomplete 1672 copy of a document of that date (Mere Box 1/1/3/no.64). A later source (Mere 1/3/81) makes it clear that this document provided for Mary Holford to receive Overstreet Farm for a 21 year lease, presumably to come into effect on the death of her husband.
- 1.2.2 In 1663 Overstreet Farm appears to have been leased by the Holfords to Peter Venables. In the same year it was leased back to Robert Holford for three months as part of an exchange of lands (Mere Box 1/1/parcel 3/no.80). However, two years later in 1665, Venables purchased the farm for £550 from Robert Holford (Mere 1/2/no. 79). Mary Holford, now a widow, still retained rights in a 21 year lease, but in the following year Venables bought out the lease for £200 (Mere Box 1/3/no.81). Peter Venables held the farm at his death in 1679 or 1680 (Mere Box 1/2/no.132 and CRO will and inventory (Appendix III)). The Holford and Venables families were local gentleman farmers of some wealth.
- 1.2.3 The later history of the farm is obscure. Sometime after 1680 it appears to have been acquired by the Brooke family of Mere, either by purchase or marriage. It is known that they were actively expanding their estates by purchase in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the Mere estate records are fragmentary and apart from deeds few documents predating the nineteenth century survive. The farm was leased from at least 1810 to sometime in the 1860s to members of the Kinsey family: in the mid nineteenth century they were farming c113 acres compared to c41 acres in 1811. The farm, shortly after 1885, appears to have been sold to ICI and the farmland was developed for a chemical plant.

### 1.3 SURVEY BACKGROUND

- 1.3.1 The West Wing of Platts Hall was a timber-framed structure (23.5m x 12m) on a north/south main axis. It had a three bay plan with its principal entrance latterly on the west front giving

access to the centre bay. A wing was added to the east side of the west wing in the nineteenth century. Part of a timber wattle and daub wall remained as the west wall of the room to the east of the little parlour (CRO WS 1680), independent of the wall structure of the Hall and pre-dating the east wall of the West Wing. This would suggest that at the time of construction of the West Wing, there was a room against its east side. This room could potentially be the kitchen referred to in the 1680 inventory (CRO WS 1680), but the presence of an extant inglenook, incorporated within the east wall of the West Wing, would suggest that it was a hall rather than a kitchen (W J Smith pers comm).

- 1.3.2 The principal entrance was clearly a later insertion within the existing frame of the western elevation. The original external entrance was probably set within the east elevation of the former hall that was on the site of the present nineteenth century East Wing. The presence of the two substantial chimney stacks on the western elevation further confirmed that the principal facade was intended to be on the eastern side of the building. It is probable that the reversal of the orientation of the building occurred when the nineteenth century East Wing was constructed. The dated lintel timber, latterly on the north elevation, would have been shifted from over the principal east door of the former hall to its final location at this time.
- 1.3.3 Immediately prior to dismantling, the West Wing of Platts Hall retained the appearance of a timber-framed structure, with brick infill visible between the structural timbers. It was directly adjoined at the northern end of the east wall by the nineteenth century East Wing, which was of brick construction. A later room occupied the area between the south end of the West Wing and the East Wing.



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## 2. METHODOLOGY

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### 2.1 METHODS STATEMENT

- 2.1.1 The evaluation was undertaken at the request of P J Livesey Developments Ltd in order to assess the requirement for a mitigation excavation within the area of the timber-framed West Wing and to evaluate the sub-surface survival within the extent of the nineteenth century wing. It was carried in two phases, the first being undertaken in May 1998 within the extent of the West Wing and the second involved the excavation of an additional trench within the extent of the nineteenth century East Wing. The first phase was carried out in accordance with a methods statement submitted by LUAU (*Appendix 1*) which required the excavation of two 4m x 1m trenches within the extent of the West Wing. The second phase was undertaken in accordance with a project design submitted by LUAU (*Appendix 2*), following discussion with David Hayes of Vale Royal Borough Council.
- 2.1.2 **Phase 1:** it was originally intended to extend the trenches to the west of the footprint of the West Wing in order to establish the potential for early structures west of the timber wing. In the event the Brunner Mond Safety Department declared that it would not be possible to excavate to the west of the building because of the presence of live sub-surface services including a water main leading to a fire hydrant. Excavation was thus confined to the footprint of the West Wing during the first phase, with the exception of small, hand dug trenches across the line of the north and west walls.
- 2.1.3 The large tracked mechanical excavator provided for the excavation of the evaluation trenches necessitated the use of a six foot bucket, and hence the trenches dug were *c* 2m wide. A third trench was excavated in addition to the two prescribed within the methods statement, when the second trench was found to be devoid of archaeological features.
- 2.1.4 When access was gained to the site, much of the plinth of the timber-framed building, together with a concrete surface laid beneath the house, had already been removed by mechanical excavator. Very occasional small fragments of this concrete surface remained along the line of the west wall, and it could be seen that the concrete below the southern room, the Great Parlour (LUAU 1998, 3.1.1), had lain *c* 0.42m below the level of the concrete in the northern rooms, in effect forming a sunken floor. The removal of the concrete had caused some limited disturbance to the deposit below, involving the compaction of the ground and the introduction of some rubble. It was through this machine disturbance that the evaluation trenches were dug. No other man-made deposits were removed by machine, and hence, although the area evaluated was larger than anticipated, this did not involve any disturbance of archaeological deposits.
- 2.1.5 The recording of Trench A was undertaken rapidly as the machine used to excavate it had become stuck in mud to the north of it, and needed to free itself and exit via the backfilled trench. The passage of the machine will have caused some additional disturbance to the west of the trench.
- 2.1.6 **Phase 2:** Trench D was excavated largely within the footprint of the nineteenth century East Wing of Platts Hall, but it also extended across the wall line into the West Wing. Its position was chosen in part to allow investigation of the west wall of the East Wing / the east wall of the West Wing, and of the adjacent staircase base and fireplace. The lines of the north, south, and east walls of the north-west room of the East Wing also lay within the trench. However, despite its positioning in the location of these known features, the primary objective behind the excavation of the trench was to assess whether evidence remained for a structure pre-

dating the 1655 West Wing (*Appendix 2*). The survival of a wattle and daub wall immediately east of the West Wing had been highlighted by the survey of the standing building, suggesting that an earlier building (section 1.3.1) had pre-dated the West Wing, and had been located immediately to the east.

## 2.2 TRENCHING METHODOLOGY

- 2.2.1 Excavation of the evaluation trenches was carried out during the first phase using a large tracked mechanical excavator with a six foot toothless ditching bucket, and during the second phase using a JCB mechanical excavator with a five foot toothless ditching bucket. The trenches were generally *c* 2m wide. They ranged in length from *c* 3m - 8m. Mechanical excavation was followed by manual cleaning and excavation for the purposes of examining archaeological detail, all excavation was carried out stratigraphically, whether by machine or by hand. Excavation was undertaken to the depth of the natural subsoils.
- 2.2.2 **Recording methodology:** the recording methods employed by LUAU accord with those recommended by English Heritage's Central Archaeology Service (CAS). The trenches and archaeological features within them were recorded using standard LUAU pro forma recording sheets, and plans and sections were drawn on drafting film at scales of 1:20 and 1:10 respectively (summary context details are presented in *Appendix 2*). A photographic record was maintained and any finds recovered were bagged and recorded by context.
- 2.2.3 The position of each trench was recorded by manual survey techniques with respect to the footprint of the building. This information was then superimposed onto the ground plan of the building within a CAD system (Figs 2 and 3).

## 2.3 ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full archive of the trial trenching programme has been produced to a professional standard in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 1991). The archive will be deposited with the County Museums Service and a copy of the report will be given to the County SMR. A copy of the report will also be available for deposition with the National Monuments Record in Swindon.

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## 3. RESULTS

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 Summary results of the evaluation trenching are presented below. More detailed context descriptions are presented in *Appendix 3* and the features are graphically shown in Figures 2, 3 and 4.

### 3.2 TRENCH A

3.2.1 Trench A measured 3.3m x 1.85m. It was excavated through *c* 0.11m of machine disturbance, at the southern end of the footprint of the West Wing, to the surface of the natural boulder clay which lay below, at a height of 98.71m (local datum). A single archaeological feature was identified, located at the west end of the trench. It was excavated and found to be a shallow ovoid scoop or truncated pit [101] with dimensions of 0.53m x >0.36m x 0.14m deep. It had gently sloping sides and a slightly rounded base, and extended beyond the limit of excavation to the west. The single fill [100] was composed of dark reddish grey clayey sand with occasional charcoal flecks and small pebbles. A single sherd of late medieval pottery was recovered from this fill (*Section 3.4*).

3.2.2 The eastern end of the trench was subsequently excavated *c*0.3m into the boulder clay, to determine whether it might be redeposited, but it was found to be clean and undisturbed. It was composed of dark brownish red clayey sand, with occasional to moderate medium and large pebbles.

3.2.3 A fragment of broken concrete, lying immediately to the west of the trench, suggested that the surface of the concrete here lay *c* 0.42m below the level of the concrete floor found to the north. As the concrete to the north had been laid over boulder clay, this suggests that the natural subsoil to the south of the wing had been truncated by up to 0.42m prior to the laying of the slab.

### 3.3 TRENCH B

3.3.1 Trench B was excavated below the central cell of the West Wing. It measured 3.65m x 1.98m, and was cut through *c* 0.09m of machine-disturbed material to the surface of the boulder clay at 99.20m (local datum). No archaeological features were present at this level, and the trench was excavated down for a further 0.38m to ensure that the boulder clay here was undisturbed and had not been redeposited.

### 3.4 TRENCH C

3.4.1 Trench C was opened below the northern cell of the wing, parallel to the line of the north wall. It measured 4.40m x 1.85m, with small hand-dug extensions to allow investigation of the line of the north and west walls of the wing. It was excavated through a maximum of 0.20m of machine-disturbed material to the surface of the boulder clay, found here between 99.12m and 99.26m (local datum), sloping down slightly from east to west.

3.4.2 A single archaeological feature was revealed which was a large ovoid cut, [104], located immediately south of the line of the north wall of the wing. It extended beyond the limit of excavation to the west, and had dimensions of >2.42m x 1.26m. A sample quadrant was

excavated, and the feature was found to be 0.81m deep. It had concave sides, steep at the top and then more gradual, before steepening again towards the base, which was flat where observed. No finds were recovered to aid dating. The shape in plan and profile appear to suggest that this was a pit rather than a ditch terminal. The single, homogeneous fill was composed of reddish brown clayey sand with occasional small and medium stones and charcoal flecks; it resembled the boulder clay through which the feature was cut. The pit had no structural function and it was not possible to establish if it post-dated the construction of the west wing.

- 3.4.3 Small hand-dug extensions to the trench were excavated across the line of the north and west walls of the wing. No trace of a plinth had survived the demolition process, and demolition debris lay immediately over the natural boulder clay.
- 3.4.4 A modern drain or sewer was found in a vertical sided cut (*c* 0.21m deep) immediately beyond the line of the north wall of the building. Immediately beyond this a line of foundations was identified consisting of two skins of modern frogged bricks which are thought to relate to the low wall, with iron fence above, which formerly surrounded the building.
- 3.4.5 A lead pipe was found immediately beyond the west wall of the Hall, and roughly parallel with it. Beyond this lay partly broken concrete, but no further excavation was possible here for health and safety reasons (*Section 2.2.1*).

### **3.5 TRENCH D**

- 3.5.1 Trench D was roughly cruciform in shape, and measured 7.85m east/west x 6.00m north/south. It was excavated by mechanical excavator through a depth of *c* 0.25m of roadstone and recent demolition debris, below which a concrete slab was revealed; this contrasted with the earlier phase of evaluation of the West Wing, where the concrete slab had been removed during the demolition process. A large proportion of the concrete was removed using the excavator so that the evaluation could proceed. The survival of the concrete slab slowed down excavation, but meant that the deposits below had been better protected from the demolition process than those below the West Wing.
- 3.5.2 The concrete slab was 0.19m thick and may have been laid within the nineteenth century East Wing during alterations in the 1920s (W J Smith, pers comm). The foundations of the north, east, and south walls of the north-west room of the wing were revealed immediately adjacent to the slab. The north wall foundation [118] was constructed primarily of brick, but a large block of red sandstone measuring >400mm x 300mm x 300mm had been incorporated within the foundation. It probably represents a stone re-used from an earlier plinth elsewhere on the site. A skin of concrete, towards the exterior of the foundation, appeared to be contemporary with the brickwork. Sheets of slate had been applied vertically to the concrete to form an external damp proof course, and the foundation trench had been backfilled with loose brick rubble, which continued beyond the northern limit of excavation. The foundation had been laid directly onto naturally deposited boulder clay in the base of the construction cut, which was *c*0.13m below the internal floor level. The base of the wall foundation thus lay at a level slightly higher than that of the base of the concrete slab and the wall foundation retained the upper part of the concrete slab.
- 3.5.3 At the east end of the north-west room of the East Wing, the concrete slab was retained by a brick wall which was a single skin thick and two courses deep [116]. Further concrete had

covered the area of the passageway and room beyond, but only traces had survived the demolition process here. Below the brick wall and partially sealed by the concrete slab, was a wider foundation [117], which was not excavated, but appeared to have been built of hand-made bricks which had probably been re-used. These were laid as headers across the width of the foundation. The bricks measured *c* 255mm x 120mm x 60mm, a size corresponding closely with the dimensions of the original bricks used to infill the timber frame of the West Wing, but they were bonded with what appeared to be a slightly pinkish hard cement mortar.

- 3.5.4 Towards the south of the room, the concrete slab had been truncated during demolition, but a brick foundation still survived on the line of the south wall [120]. It was composed of factory-made bricks a single skin thick, which were faced with concrete on the northern side. This foundation was not excavated. To the south of the foundation a further concrete slab was present, which was 0.38m lower than that to the north. It is unclear whether this was a sunken floor relating to the twentieth century dining room built in this area, or whether it was derived from the earlier courtyard situated there.
- 3.5.5 The western arm of the trench extended across the location of a fireplace recorded during the building survey. This fireplace had been inserted into the east wall of the West Wing and straddled the wall. During excavation, the uppermost deposit recorded in this area was a thin layer of concrete which appeared to have been laid to set modern tiles, occasional fragments of which remained. This concrete covered the eastern part of the fireplace footprint as recorded during survey, including the base of the flue.
- 3.5.6 Below this concrete on the eastern side, a rubble deposit of medium fragments of brick and soft pale brown mortar *c* 0.10m thick was recorded [108]. This sealed a square brick-lined pit, with internal measurements of *c* 0.44m east/west x >0.28m north /south x 0.43m deep. The fill of the feature [109] was sample excavated and consisted of dark grey ash and sand with frequent small and medium fragments of coke, cinder, and charcoal, and lenses of fine shale. The brick lining [110] was not excavated, but was found to be four courses of brick deep, the bricks were machine made, having dimensions of *c* 240mm x 120mm x 60mm. Bricks of two distinct fabrics had been used, one orange to red in colour, the other a darker purplish red. The brick lining to the south and west of the feature appeared to be two skins thick at the surface. Without further excavation it was impossible to assess whether the full depth of the lining was of two skins here, or if the outer bricks were merely packing towards the top of the cut. The base of the pit was not lined, and was formed by the underlying natural boulder clay. The feature extended beyond the limit of excavation to the north and its full extent in this direction was not determined. To the east, the brick lining was partially sealed by the main concrete slab laid in the north-west room of the East Wing. However, the western edge of the concrete slab appeared to respect the central aperture of the feature.
- 3.5.7 To the west, within the footprint of the West Wing, a carefully laid surface of hand made brick was revealed [106] partially sealed below the thin deposit of concrete described above. It continued to the north and west beyond the limit of excavation, and its extent in these directions was not established. Where complete, the bricks had dimensions of *c* 250mm x 120mm x 60mm.
- 3.5.8 It was not possible to establish a stratigraphic relationship between these two brick features, but they may have been contemporary. However, they appeared to have been separated by a single line of bricks aligned north / south, the top of which was *c* 0.05m higher than the brick surface. Given the extent of demolition, and without further excavation, it was unclear

whether this was part of surface [106], or part of a structure which had separated [106] from the brick-lined feature [110] to the east.

- 3.5.9 A large subrectangular block of sandstone was recorded *c* 1m to the south of the brick surfaces, aligned north/south. It measured *c*850mm x 400mm x 120mm and was set onto the natural boulder clay subsoil; it may represent part of a stone plinth, perhaps surviving *in situ*. Three small angular fragments of sandstone *c* 0.75m to the north may represent parts of a further sandstone block fractured during the demolition process. The sandstone block and fragments were sealed directly by recent demolition rubble.
- 3.5.10 Towards the centre of the trench, two further features were excavated after the concrete floor slab was lifted. One was a probable post hole [113], which was subcircular in plan and had relatively steep convex edges and a flat base; it was *c* 0.40m in diameter and 0.36m deep. It was filled by clean reddish brown sandy clay silt with occasional small rounded pebbles. The second feature lay *c*1.25m to the east, but may have been a tree bole of natural origin. It extended beyond the northern limit of excavation, but appeared to be a relatively amorphous shape in plan, measuring 1.46m x 0.76m x 0.30m deep. The sides were shallow and irregular, and the base was uneven. The feature was again filled with clean reddish brown sandy clay silt with occasional rounded pebbles.
- 3.5.11 Elsewhere, a naturally deposited sandy boulder clay subsoil was found directly below the concrete slab; its surface was between 99.15m and 99.02m (local datum) depending on the extent of truncation. This contained occasional small and medium fragments of charcoal. A sondage was excavated through the deposit towards the south of the trench to a depth of *c*98.74m (local datum). This indicated that the deposit became progressively cleaner with depth, and had not been redeposited.

### 3.6 FINDS

- 3.6.1 **West Wing:** only one sherd of pottery was recovered, from fill [100]/cut [101]. This was a heavily abraded body sherd in a hard red fabric with sand temper, and showed traces of green glaze on the internal surfaces. It is of late medieval date, from between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries AD. The very abraded surfaces reflect that it has been subject to significant erosion prior to its final deposition, and may suggest that it was formerly deposited as night soil and has therefore been subject to plough damage. As such it does not provide a reliable date for the feature, which may have been cut some considerable time after the vessel was produced.
- 3.6.2 **East Wing:** the only finds from Trench D came from the fill of the former ash box [119] and comprised three small fragments of bone, one burnt, and five small fragments of iron, including three nails heads, as well as a shred of brown paper which was perhaps wall paper.

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## 4. DISCUSSION

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### 4.1 WEST WING

- 4.1.1 The removal of the concrete slab beneath the west wing caused some disturbance to the ground below, but no evidence was found for any intervening deposit between the concrete and natural boulder clay. The concrete is thought to have been laid directly onto the boulder clay and, below the southern room of the wing, the concrete is thought to have been laid within a cut, which may have truncated the boulder clay by as much as 0.42m. The concrete was very hard, suggesting that it may have been laid in the twentieth century rather than the late nineteenth century.
- 4.1.2 Of the remains uncovered, only two cut features, [101] and [104], were not clearly modern in date; both had been sealed by the concrete slab, but were probably much earlier in origin. As the original floor of the building had not survived to the present it is not possible to establish if these pits were cut through the floor of the hall; however, there is a possibility that these cut features pre-date the seventeenth century hall. Cut [101] to the south-west of the wing contained a single sherd of abraded pottery of late medieval date. This feature may have been truncated by over 0.4m, so it may originally have been a relatively deep post-hole or pit; its precise function is unknown.
- 4.1.3 Cut [104], revealed in the north-west corner of the building's footprint, was a much more substantial feature and continued beyond the limit of excavation to the west. Its shape and profile suggested a pit rather than a ditch terminal, and its single homogeneous fill, similar to but greyer than the boulder clay through which it was cut, also suggests deliberate infill. The function of this cut remains unknown, but the lack of lining or finds, absence of discolouration of the cut, and the profile, suggest that this may have been a quarry pit rather than a well, rubbish pit, or cess pit.

### 4.2 NINETEENTH CENTURY EAST WING

- 4.2.1 The excavation of Trench D showed that the impact of the recent dismantling of Platts Hall had been markedly less severe within the footprint of the East Wing than further west. This meant that within Trench D concrete floors had survived intact, and had served to protect the remains below from recent disturbance. Wall foundations relating to the East Wing were found in several locations. However, the main objective of the trenching was to determine whether remains pre-dating the West Wing might survive here, and so, whilst the foundations of the later East Wing were recorded, they were either excavated by machine or left *in situ*.
- 4.2.2 The brick foundations of the north, east, and south walls of the north-west room of the East Wing were revealed. In addition, a large sandstone block was recorded aligned along the division between the East and West wings. It was probably part of an early sandstone plinth, which may have survived *in situ*. It appeared to be located immediately between the line of the east wall of the West Wing, and the position of the older wattle and daub wall which survived from an earlier building to form the west wall of the East Wing. It is thus unclear as to which of these two walls the block related.
- 4.2.3 Evidence was also revealed for the brick fireplace known to have been inserted into the timber-framed east wall of the West Wing. The brick surface at the west end of the trench was most probably a brick hearth area for the Little Parlour at the north of the West Wing. The

bricks appeared to be hand-made, and the feature, though undated, may relate to the earliest fireplace inserted into the Little Parlour. The bricks may formerly have been covered by stone slabs.

- 4.2.4 It is clear that the brick-lined feature to the east was an ash box. It was located to the east of the fireplace structure recorded during the building survey and was blocked by mortar and brick rubble, both suggesting that it was part of an earlier fireplace. However, its position, c 0.4m east of the line of the wall of the west wing, suggests that it related to the north-west room of the East Wing rather than to the Little Parlour and may have been in use during the early twentieth century. This is suggested because the interior edge of the lining on the west side was on the same alignment as a rectangular aperture in the concrete slab. The slab itself was most probably inserted during alterations in the 1920's (W J Smith, pers comm). If these two fireplace structures related to different rooms, it is possible that the central line of bricks aligned north/south was the base of a brick wall dividing the two fireplaces.
- 4.2.5 All the features discussed above appear to post-date or be contemporary with the West Wing of Platts Hall. The only potentially earlier remains recorded were two cut features truncating the boulder clay below the concrete slab, but both were undated. It is probable that one was a post-hole and the other a tree bole, and that they pre-date the present build of the East Wing.



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## 5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPACT

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### 5.1 WEST WING

- 5.1.1 The evaluation trenching examined a substantial proportion (35%) of the area within the footprint of the West Wing but, because of truncation of the archaeological stratigraphy, it was only able to demonstrate a low density of surviving archaeological remains (of late medieval or post-medieval date). It has also shown that considerable truncation of the ground surface has occurred at or before the laying of a concrete slab within the West Wing. Truncation has also resulted from the excavation of service trenches immediately beyond the northern and western walls of the structure, and more recently some further disturbance has been caused by the demolition of the building. It is probable, therefore, that only the deepest archaeological features survive through to the present day and these have been found to be of only localised extent. The absence of surviving remains relating to an earlier structure on the site of the West Wing, however, does not imply that no earlier building existed.

### 5.2 EAST WING

- 5.2.1 There is a markedly better survival of archaeological stratigraphy within the East Wing by comparison with the adjacent West Wing. This is in part because the laying of the sunken floor of the southern part of the West Wing had caused considerable truncation of archaeological deposits and because the removal of the slab in the area of the West Wing had caused some disturbance to the underlying stratigraphy. Despite this better survival in the East Wing, the archaeological deposits were nevertheless truncated and the survival of archaeological features away from the edges of the rooms was for the most part limited to negative features cut into the natural subsoil. There was some survival of features potentially contemporary with the West Wing, but no evidence for an earlier structure was identified. Trench D covered over 72% of the area of the north-west room of the East wing, which is the part with the greatest potential for pre-West Wing remains. Consequently it is considered that any further evaluation or excavation has only a small potential for recovering significant early deposits or structures.

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## 6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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### 6.1 PRIMARY SOURCES

CRO (Cheshire Record Office), EDT 247/1-2 tithe apportionment and map

CRO (Cheshire Record Office), WS 1680, will and inventory of Peter Venables

Mere: Manchester University John Rylands Library, Mere estate records (Langford Brooke family)

Ordnance Survey First edition 1": 1 mile sheet, 80 SE

Ordnance Survey maps 25" maps 34/6: First edition (1877), Second edition (1898) and third edition (1910)

### 6.2 SECONDARY SOURCES

Brunskill, R W, 1994 *Timber building in Britain*, London

Fielding, A, 1998 *Timber Framed Buildings in the Salt-Working areas of Cheshire*, Vernacular Architecture Group, Newsletter **34**

Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU), 1998 Platts Hall, Cheshire; Interim Fabric Survey Report, unpubl rep

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## APPENDIX 1

### PHASE 1 EVALUATION METHODS STATEMENT

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#### TRENCHING METHODOLOGY

A limited programme of trial excavations will be undertaken to establish the nature, extent, chronology, and preservation of any archaeological deposits encountered. This will involve the excavation of two trenches across the foundations of the external walls and within the interior of the building. The excavation will in places be excavated to the depth of the natural sub-soils and will serve to establish the depth and complexity of the sub-structure stratigraphy. This element is invaluable in order to assess those parts, within the area of the building, where there is a potential for archaeological deposits to survive and will provide an opportunity to assess if further recording is necessary.

Two 4m x 1m trial trenches will be excavated within the area of the West Wing. The precise locations of the trenches would be determined in discussions with the client and Principal Archaeologist (Cheshire County Council) at the outset of the project. The excavation will establish if the present surface is built up ground and at what depth in-situ archaeological deposits are identified. The trenches will not be excavated to a depth greater than 1.25m, the maximum safe depth for unshored excavations.

**Methodology:** To maximise the speed and efficiency of the operation the removal of overburden will be undertaken by machine (with a 3 foot toothless ditching bucket), although in areas where ephemeral remains are encountered elements may be hand dug.

All trenches will be excavated in a stratigraphical manner, whether by machine or by hand. Trenches will be accurately located with regard to surrounding features, by use of a total station survey instrument.

**Recording:** All information identified in the course of the site works will be recorded stratigraphically, with sufficient pictorial record (plans, sections and both black and white and colour photographs) to identify and illustrate individual features. Primary records will be available for inspection at all times.

Results of the field investigation will be recorded using a system, adapted from that used by Central Archaeology Service of English Heritage. The archive will include both a photographic record and accurate large scale plans and sections at an appropriate scale (1:50, 1:20, and 1:10). All artefacts and ecofacts will be recorded using the same system, and will be handled and stored according to standard practice (following current Institute of Field Archaeologists guidelines) in order to minimise deterioration. Samples will be collected for technological, pedological, palaeoenvironmental and chronological analysis as appropriate, but it is only intended to process such material for assessment at this stage. LUAU employs artefact and palaeoecology specialists with considerable expertise in the investigation, excavation and finds management of sites of all periods and types, who are readily available for consultation.

#### EVALUATION REPORT

**Archive:** The results of the fieldwork will form the basis of a full archive to professional standards, in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (*The Management of Archaeological Projects, 2nd edition, 1991*). The project archive represents the collation and indexing of all the data and material gathered during the course of the project. It will include summary processing and analysis of all features, finds, or palaeoenvironmental data recovered during fieldwork. The deposition of a properly ordered and indexed project archive in an appropriate repository is considered an essential and integral element of all archaeological projects by the IFA in that organisation's code of conduct. LUAU conforms to best practice in the preparation of project archives for long-term storage. The expense of preparing such an archive is part of the project cost, but only represents a very small proportion of the total. This archive can be provided in the English Heritage Central Archaeology Service format, both as a printed document and on computer disks as ASCII files, and a synthesis (in the form of the index to the archive and the report) will be included in the Cheshire Sites and Monuments Record. LUAU practice is to deposit the original record archive of projects (paper, magnetic and plastic media) with the appropriate County Record Office (Chester).

**Evaluation Report:** One bound and one unbound copy of a written synthetic report will be submitted to the Client, and a further copy submitted to the Principal Archaeologist Cheshire County Archaeologist. The report will include a copy of

this project design, and indications of any agreed departure from that design. It will present, summarise, and interpret the results of the programme detailed above and will include a full index of archaeological features identified in the course of the project, with an assessment of the overall stratigraphy, together with appropriate illustrations, including detailed plans and sections indicating the locations of archaeological features. Any finds recovered from the excavations will be assessed with reference to other local material and any particular or unusual features of the assemblage will be highlighted and the potential of the site for palaeoenvironmental analysis will be considered. The report will also include a complete bibliography of sources from which data has been derived, and a list of further sources identified during the programme of work, but not examined in detail.

An assessment and statement of the actual and potential archaeological significance of the site within the broader context of regional and national archaeological priorities will be made. Illustrative material will include a location map, section drawings, early pictorial representations of the hall and plans if appropriate; it can be tailored to the specific requests of the client (eg particular scales etc), subject to discussion.

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APPENDIX 2  
PHASE 2 EVALUATION PROJECT DESIGN

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Lancaster  
University  
Archaeological  
Unit

**June 1998**

**PLATTS HALL  
LOSTOCK GRALAM, CHESHIRE  
PHASE 2 EVALUATION**

**Proposals**

The following project design is offered in response to a verbal brief by David Hayes of Vale Royal district Council and at the request of P.J.Livesey (Developments) Ltd for an evaluation within the nineteenth century Wing of Platts Hall, Lostock Gralam, nr Northwich Cheshire, following its dismantling.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 PJ Livesey (Developments) Ltd have requested that an archaeological evaluation trench be excavated within the nineteenth century (east) wing of Platts Hall, Lostock Gralam, nr Northwich, Cheshire, to be undertaken following its dismantling. This is in accordance with a verbal brief from David Hayes of Vale Royal District Council. The archaeological work is undertaken in conjunction with a programme of dismantling, removal and relocation of the building.
- 1.2 Platts Hall is a grade II listed building. The oak timber frame, dated to the mid seventeenth century, is all that remains of the hall range. It is of two storeys and three bays, which differ in length, and is largely brick nogged. The hall range appears to have been replaced in the nineteenth century by a two storey brick building. Structural features remaining from the seventeenth century include chamfered beams, panelling, a staircase and beam inscription *1655 XH*.
- 1.3 The proposed trenching follows on from an earlier evaluation within the adjacent West Wing which revealed that the archaeological stratigraphy had been truncated at an earlier stage of the buildings life and that the surviving archaeology was limited to negative features cut into natural.
- 1.4 Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU) has considerable experience of the archaeological excavation of sites and monuments of all periods, having undertaken a great number of small and large projects during the past 15 years. LUAU has particular experience in the recording and analysis of standing ancient monuments and historic buildings. Of most relevance, in 1994 and 1995 an extensive programme of detailed excavation was undertaken at Old Abbey Farm, Risley following its dismantling. This was a grade II listed farmhouse situated upon a small moated platform incorporating both timber and stone elements of later medieval origin and seventeenth century alterations.
- 1.5 Projects have been undertaken to fulfil the different requirements of various clients and planning authorities, and to very rigorous timetables. LUAU has the professional expertise and resources to undertake the project detailed below to a high level of quality and efficiency.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The fabric survey (LUAU forthcoming) has demonstrated that the principal facade of the seventeenth century hall was formerly on the east side of the hall, and it has been conjectured that there may have been a kitchen or hall immediately to the east of the West Wing and therefore within the footprint of the nineteenth century wing. The primary objective of the programme is to evaluate the below ground survival within the area of the former nineteenth century wing of Platts Hall and to assess if there is any evidence for a structure in this locale that may pre-date the 1655 West Wing. The aims are as follows
- Evaluation by the excavation of a single trench through the northern part of the nineteenth century wing.
  - to record the archaeological deposits within the proposed study area by means of an evaluation trench, as far as health and safety considerations will allow.
  - to define the character and condition of the archaeological deposits in this part of the hall complex, to investigate the development of the building and to establish if there were any earlier structures, prior to the construction of the present hall.
  - to confirm, if possible, the function and date of the remains.
- 2.2 The programme will investigate and record the presence of artefacts from all periods revealed during the works programme.

## 3. TRENCHING METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 A limited programme of trial excavations will be undertaken to establish the nature, extent, chronology, and preservation of any archaeological deposits encountered. This will involve the excavation of a single trench through the northern part of the nineteenth century wing and will extend across the foundations of the external walls. The excavation will in places be excavated to the depth of the natural sub-soils and will serve to establish the depth and complexity of the sub-structure stratigraphy. This element is invaluable in order to

assess those parts, within the area of the building, where there is a potential for archaeological deposits to survive and will provide an opportunity to assess if further recording is necessary.

- 3.2 The single trial trench will be 7.5m long and will be 1.8m wide, a dog-leg will be excavated to the north of the primary trench to evaluate the northern wall of the nineteenth century wing and a further dog-leg will be excavated to the south to examine the southern wall. The precise location is shown on the attached map. The excavation will establish if the present surface is built up ground and at what depth in-situ archaeological deposits are identified. The trenches will not be excavated to a depth greater than 1.25m, the maximum safe depth for unshored excavations.

### 3.3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.3.1 To maximise the speed and efficiency of the operation the removal of overburden will be undertaken by a tracked 360° machine (with a 1.8m toothless ditching bucket), although in areas where ephemeral remains are encountered elements may be hand dug. All trenches will be excavated in a stratigraphical manner, whether by machine or by hand. Trenches will be accurately located with regard to surrounding features, by use of a total station survey instrument.
- 3.3.2 **Recording:** All information identified in the course of the site works will be recorded stratigraphically, with sufficient pictorial record (plans, sections and both black and white and colour photographs) to identify and illustrate individual features.
- 3.3.3 Results of the field investigation will be recorded using a system, adapted from that used by Central Archaeology Service of English Heritage. The archive will include both a photographic record and accurate large scale plans and sections at an appropriate scale (1:50, 1:20, and 1:10). All artefacts and ecofacts will be recorded using the same system, and will be handled and stored according to standard practice (following current Institute of Field Archaeologists guidelines) in order to minimise deterioration. Samples will be collected for technological, pedological, palaeoenvironmental and chronological analysis as appropriate, but it is only intended to process such material for assessment at this stage. LUAU employs artefact and palaeoecology specialists with considerable expertise in the investigation, excavation and finds management of sites of all periods and types, who are readily available for consultation.

### 3.4 EVALUATION REPORT

- 3.4.1 **Archive:** The results of the fieldwork will form the basis of a full archive to professional standards, in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (*The Management of Archaeological Projects, 2nd edition, 1991*). The project archive represents the collation and indexing of all the data and material gathered during the course of the project. It will include summary processing and analysis of all features, finds, or palaeoenvironmental data recovered during fieldwork. The deposition of a properly ordered and indexed project archive in an appropriate repository is considered an essential and integral element of all archaeological projects by the IFA in that organisation's code of conduct. This archive can be provided in the English Heritage Central Archaeology Service format, both as a printed document and on computer disks as ASCII files, and a synthesis (in the form of the index to the archive and the report) will be included in the Cheshire Sites and Monuments Record.
- 3.4.2 **Evaluation Report:** The results of the evaluation will be incorporated within the report of the earlier phase of evaluation. One bound and one unbound copy of this report will be submitted to the Client, and a further copy submitted to Vale Royal District Council. The report will include a copy of this project design, and indications of any agreed departure from that design. It will present, summarise, and interpret the results of the programme detailed above and will include a full index of archaeological features identified in the course of the project, with an assessment of the overall stratigraphy, together with appropriate illustrations, including detailed plans and sections as appropriate. Any finds recovered from the excavations will be assessed with reference to other local material; the potential of the site for palaeoenvironmental analysis will be considered. The report will also include a complete bibliography of sources from which data has been derived, and a list of further sources identified during the programme of work, but not examined in detail.
- 3.4.3 An assessment and statement of the actual and potential archaeological significance of the site within the broader context of regional and national archaeological priorities will be made. Illustrative material will include a location map, section drawings and plans if appropriate; it can be tailored to the specific requests of the client (eg particular scales etc), subject to discussion.

### 3.4 OTHER MATTERS

- 3.4.1 **Health and Safety:** full regard will, of course, be given to all constraints (services) during the excavation, as well as to all Health and Safety considerations. The Unit Health and Safety Statement conforms to all the provisions of the SCAUM (Standing Conference of Unit Managers) Health and Safety manual, as well as the Lancaster University Health and Safety Statement. Risk assessments are undertaken as a matter of course for all projects, and will anticipate the potential hazards arising from the excavation. The Unit Safety Policy Statement will be provided to the client, if required. The location of services will be investigated from the statutory services and, as a matter of course, a U-Scan device is used prior to the commencement of excavation. It is noted that live electricity cables are potentially present within the trench and the precise positions of any cables will be established from Brunner Mond. It is understood that the maximum depth of excavation will be to 1250mm and there will be no requirements for the use of shoring.
- 3.4.2 **Insurance:** the insurance in respect of claims for personal injury to or the death of any person under a contract of service with the Unit and arising in the course of such person's employment shall comply with the employers' liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969 and any statutory orders made there under. For all other claims to cover the liability of LUAU in respect of personal injury or damage to property by negligence of LUAU or any of its employees, there applies the insurance cover of £1m for any one occurrence or series of occurrences arising out of one event.
- 3.4.3 **Access:** it is assumed that all access will be arranged by P J Liveseys. During excavation, all public access routes will be maintained, and the area of excavation will be fenced to meet current health and safety requirements.
- 3.4.4 **Working Hours:** excavation will be undertaken on the basis of a five day week, within daylight hours only.
- 3.4.5 **Reinstatement:** the costs do not incorporate allowance for backfilling the site.
- 3.4.6 **Project Monitoring:** a monitoring meeting will be established with the client and a representative of Vale Royal District Council in the course of the evaluation. LUAU will inform Vale Royal District Council and the Client of all significant developments and recommendations as required, and any potential departures from the agreed programme will be discussed and agreed with them prior to implementation.
- 3.4.7 **Archive Deposition:** The full archive will be deposited with the Cheshire Museum Service within six months of completion of the project.

## 4. WORK TIMETABLE

- 4.1 The evaluation is provisionally scheduled for commencing on 13th July 1998.

### 4.2 PROJECT TIMETABLING

The internal project timetable is approximately as follows:

- |           |                                |                |
|-----------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>i</i>  | <i>Evaluation Trenching</i>    | <i>2 days</i>  |
| <i>ii</i> | <i>Reporting and Archiving</i> | <i>2 weeks</i> |

## 5. RESOURCES AND PROGRAMMING

- 5.1 The following resource base will be necessary to achieve the evaluation as detailed above. The basic costs assume that no shoring will be required.
- 5.2 The project will be under the management of **Jamie Quartermaine, BA Hons** (Unit Project Manager). The project will be directed by **Richard Heawood, BA** (Project Officer). **Christine Howard-Davis** (Project Officer) would undertake the necessary finds analysis.



### APPENDIX 3 CONTEXT INDEX

The following significant contexts were recorded.

<b>Context</b>	<b>Trench No.</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
100	A	Fill of shallow scoop/pit [101]. It consisted of dark reddish grey clayey sand which was very similar to the underlying natural subsoil. It incorporated occasional flecks of charcoal.
101	A	A shallow scoop/pit filled by [100]. It had an ovoid plan and gently sloping sides. The base was very gently rounded. It measured 0.53m x >0.36m x 0.14m deep.
102	A,B,C	Natural subsoil, consisting of boulder clay with a clayey sand texture. It contained medium to large pebbles (max diam 400mm). It lay immediately below the concrete pad.
103	C	Fill of ?pit [104]. It consisted of a mid brown clayey silty sand matrix with occasional small pebbles and occasional flecks of charcoal.
104	C	An ovoid-shaped cut feature filled by [103]. It extended beyond the western limit of Trench C. It had a sharply defined top break of slope and concave sides, steep at the top, with an overall gradient of c 1:1. The base was almost flat. It measured >2.42m x 1.26m x 0.81m deep.
105	A,B,C	Overburden overlying natural subsoil within building footprint. A very mixed deposit of dark grey clayey sandy silt, with moderate medium fragments of brick and concrete. Probably formed during recent demolition, and very compacted by the movement of heavy machinery.
106	D	Brick structure, ?hearth.
107	D	Construction cut for [106].
108	D	Deposit of loose mortar and brick rubble overlying [109]and [110].
109	D	Fill of [111]. Dark grey ash with occasional fragments of coke, cinder, and charcoal.
110	D	Brick lining of [111].
111	D	Cut of ash box.
112	D	Fill of possible post hole [114]. It was a reddish brown sandy clay silt with occasional small pebbles.
113	D	A small subcircular cut feature, interpreted as a post hole.
114	D	Fill of possible tree bole [115]. It was a reddish brown sandy clay silt with occasional small pebbles

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115	D	A large amorphous cut feature, interpreted as a tree bole.
116	D	Brick wall, on the line of the east wall of the north-west room.
117	D	Brick foundation below. [116]
118	D	Brick / sandstone wall foundation. (north wall of East Wing)
119	D	Construction cut for [118].
120	D	Brick wall forming the south wall of the central corridor, which was formerly the south wall of the East Wing.
121	D	Rubble backfill within [119].

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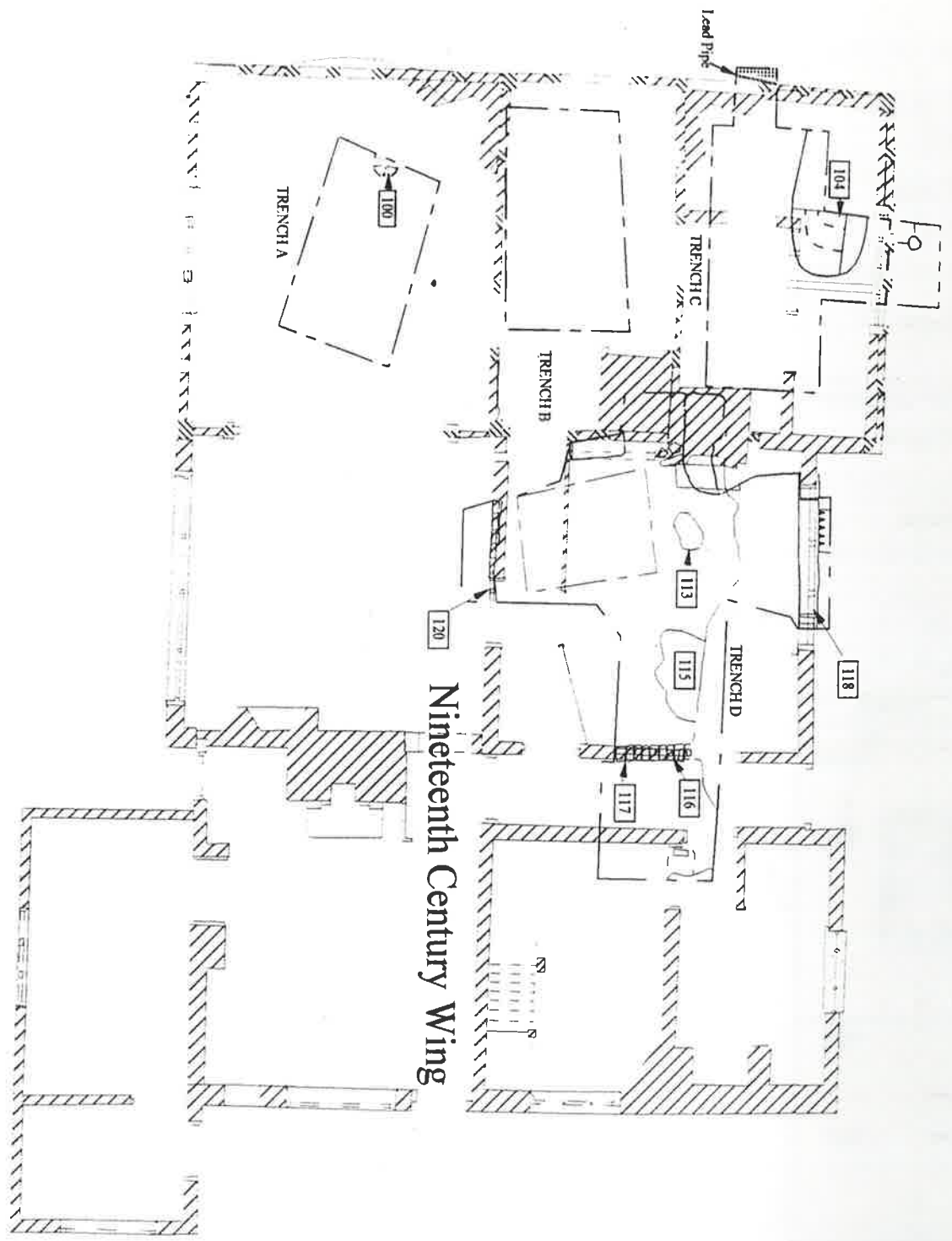
## ILLUSTRATIONS

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- Fig 1 Location plan
- Fig 2 Trench location plan
- Fig 3 Trench plan - West
- Fig 4 Western end of Trench D
- Fig 5 Photograph of hearth area at western end of Trench D



# West Wing



# Nineteenth Century Wing

PLATT'S HALL  
SURVEY  
NORTHWICH,  
CHESHIRE

ELEVATION:  
TRENCH LOCATION  
PLAN

COMMISSIONED & FUNDED BY:  
PILIVERSEY (DEVELOPMENTS) LTD

FIGURE 2



DRAWN BY: NC, R, CW & AS  
DATE: 09/98

KEY

[1014] Plan of trench  
Content number

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

STOREY INSTITUTE  
MEETING HOUSE LANE  
LANCASTER  
LA1 1TP

TEL 01534 848666

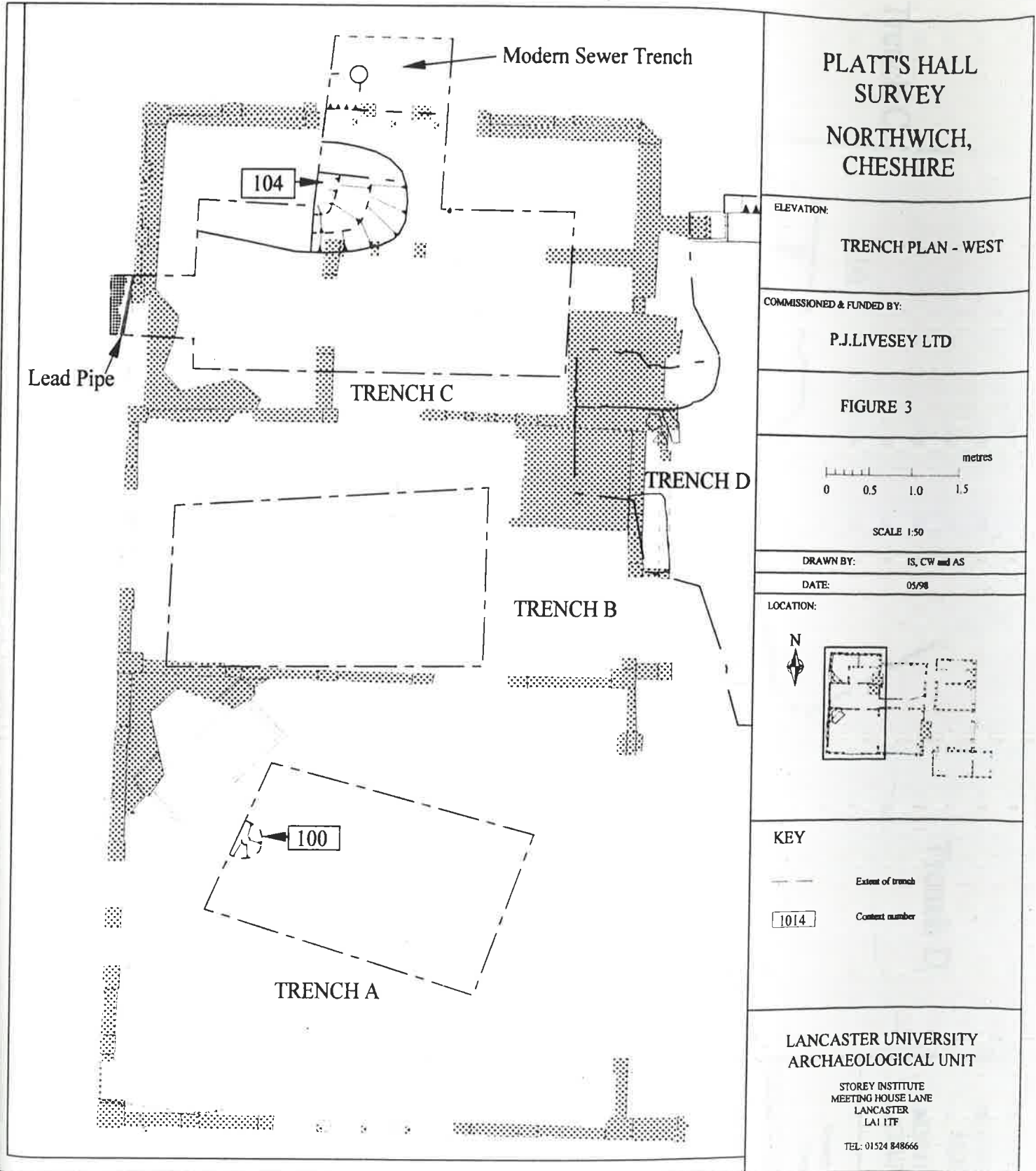
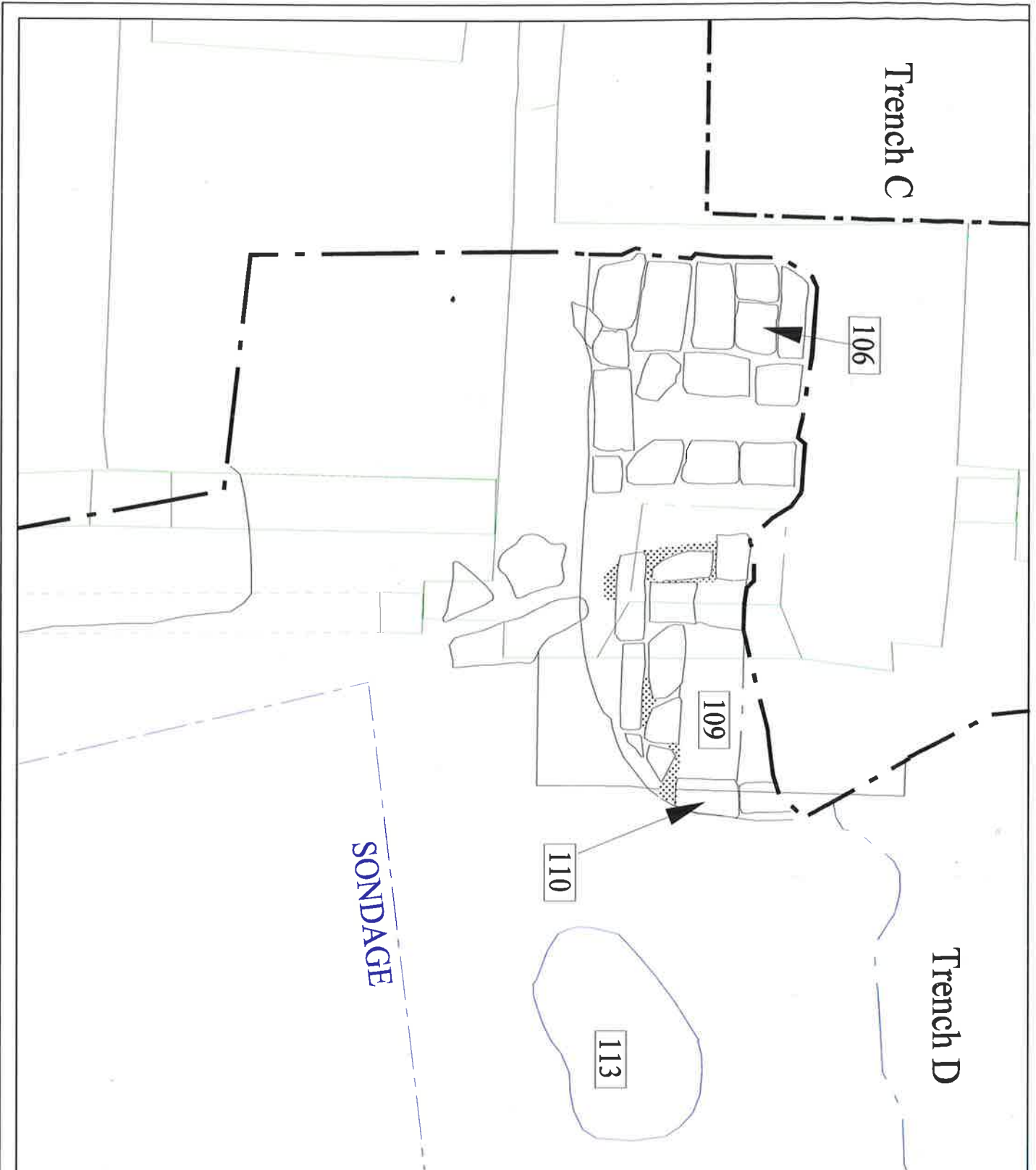


Fig 3 Trench Plan - West

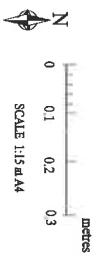


PLATT'S HALL  
SURVEY  
NORTHWICH,  
CHESHIRE

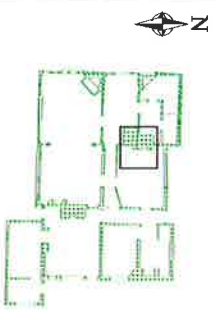
Western End of  
Trench D

COMMISSIONED AND FUNDED BY:  
P J JAYSEY (DEVELOPMENTS) LTD

FIGURE 4



DRAWN BY: NC and JQ  
DATE: 07/98



- KEY
-  Extent of trench
  -  Context number
  -  Structural Plan

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT  
STONEY INSTITUTE  
MEETING HOUSE LANE  
LANCASTER  
LA1 1YF  
TEL: 01524 848665

Fig 4 Western End of Trench D



Fig 5 Photograph of hearth area at western end of Trench D



Fig 6 General view of Trench D from East