

St Modwen Developments

Trentham Gardens

Staffordshire



Historic Building Assessment



Oxford Archaeological Unit
June 2001

St Modwen Developments

TRENTHAM GARDENS, STAFFORDSHIRE

HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT

NGR: SJ 866 409

Planning Application No. 35257

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SUMMARY

In May 2001, the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a rapid assessment of the ground floor/basement of the main house at Trentham Hall, near Stoke-on-Trent (NGR: SJ 866 409). Examination of the single open passage in the western end of the range of structures found that the remaining elements of the ground floor/basement appeared to have been infilled with brick rubble, probably during demolition of the upper storeys of the Hall in 1912. The passage that remained accessible was generally in good condition, with brick walls and vaulted ceilings. Some damage to the vaults was visible in places

TRENTHAM GARDENS, STAFFORDSHIRE HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) has been commissioned by St. Modwen Developments to undertake a field evaluation of Trentham Hall, Park and Gardens (Fig.1), in advance of a proposed programme of rebuilding, renovation and restoration works across the entire estate. The village of Trentham and the entrance to the Park lie about six km south-west of Stoke-on-Trent and 18 km north of Stafford, at NGR SJ 866 409. The River Trent runs down the eastern side of the estate.



Figure 1: Site Location Plan

1.2 **Planning background**

- 1.2.1 An outline planning application for the development (Planning App. No. 35257) was registered with Stafford Borough Council in August 1997. It was decided that insufficient information was available about the possibility of disturbance to the known or potential archaeological resource at the site, and so the Borough Council requested a desk-based assessment of the site (Dix 1998). Based on the results of that assessment, it was decided that a programme of pre-determination archaeological field evaluation would be required, and a brief for the works was set by David Wilkinson of the Archaeology Section of the Borough Council's Development Department in August 2000 (Wilkinson 2000).

1.3 **Historical background**

- 1.3.1 The site has been the subject of a desk-based assessment (Dix 1998) and a topographical history (Banks 1998), the results of which are briefly summarised below.
- 1.3.2. The site of the Hall (Figs 2 and 4) was originally the location of a 12th century Augustinian priory (based around what is now the parish church of St Mary and All Saints), elements of which were possibly incorporated into the first Manor house (first documented in 1599) following the Dissolution in 1537. The Hall was then frequently rebuilt and remodelled, and the Park was later redesigned by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. Finally, in the 1830s, Sir Charles Barry remodelled the Hall and Gardens in the Italianate style, on a palatial scale. The Hall itself was demolished in 1912, but the adjacent buildings, including the Orangery, Sculpture Galleries, western entrance corridors and porte-cochère were left standing (Fig. 4); the basement/ground floor was believed to have survived largely intact.

1.4 **Requirements for work**

- 1.4.1 The brief required evaluation of a number of different proposed developments around the Park: the new pool complex in the courtyard adjacent to the Orangery; the new fishing lake at the south end of Trentham Lake; the restoration of the Italian Gardens to the south of the Hall; and the new Hotel, to be built on the site of the former Hall. The assessment of the Hotel area is to be undertaken in seven stages. This report contains the results of Stage 1.
- 1.4.2 Stage 1 involved assessing the extent of infilling, state of preservation and nature of the ceilings and walls of the ground floor/basement, by gaining access through a number of blocked doorways at the eastern and western ends of the range. The ground floor/basement lies to the south of the church, between the entrance corridors at the west and the Orangery at the east (Figs 3 and 4), and is currently covered by a lawn, with paths and flower beds.



Figure 2: The Trentham Gardens Estate showing proposals for renovation and rebuilding

2 EXTENT OF WORK AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims of Stage 1

- 2.1.1 The assessment was intended to determine the extent to which passages and rooms of the ground floor/basement remained accessible, the extent of the backfilling, and the character, condition and quality of the surviving structures including any roofs/vaults. Whilst not explicitly stated in the brief, it was also intended that the assessment would give an indication of the extent to which Barry's plan (Fig. 3) could be relied on to show the true limits of the buried structures.

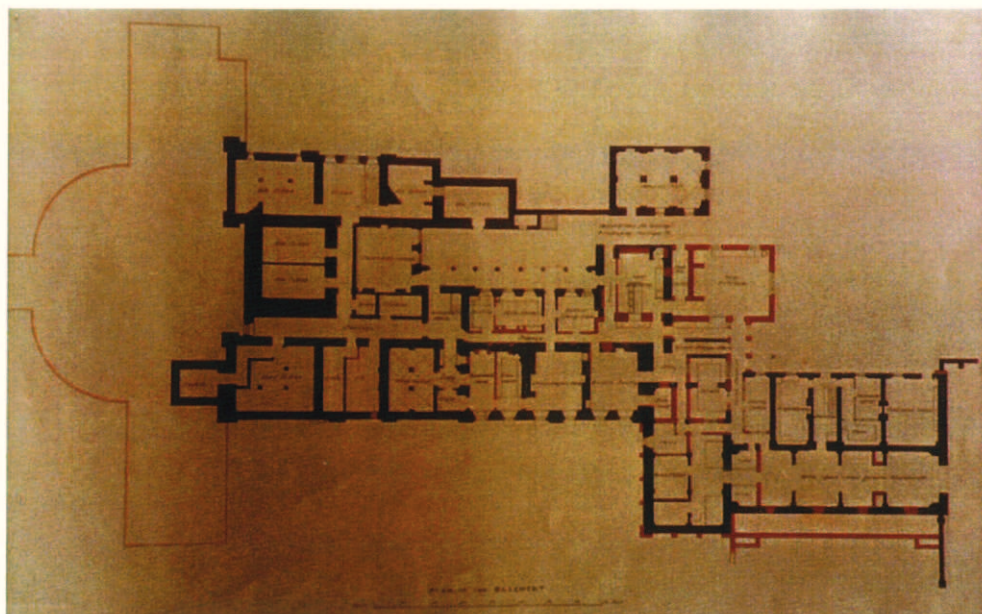


Figure 3: Sir Charles Barry's plan of the existing ground floor (in black) and proposed additions (in red); c.1834-35.

2.2 Survey methodology

- 2.2.1 The works undertaken can be divided into two main phases, Phase 1 (gaining entrance) and Phase 2 (recording).

Gaining entrance

- 2.2.2 Several openings were created through the modern blocking of possible access points (windows or doors) into the ground floor/basement, to detect possible voids beyond them. This work was undertaken using hand tools only, to minimise vibration and therefore possible damage to the surrounding structures. Only modern material was removed or damaged and the quantity of material removed was kept to a minimum. All grills and inspection covers were replaced when works were complete.

Recording

- 2.2.3 The recording consisted of a photographic survey supplemented by descriptive and interpretative recording notes.
- 2.2.4 The photographic record included both general shots, such as wide angle external views and views placing the structures in their context, together with specific details

of features of interest such as arches, vaults, blocking and architectural fixtures and fittings. Each shot, where appropriate, included a photographic scale. The photographs were taken using 35 mm black and white print, and colour print and slide film, and were located on a plan (Appendix A).

- 2.2.5 Plans were prepared of the area which were based on two pre-existing surveys of the area: a site survey and the O.S. base plan of the area. The plans show the locations of the unfilled subterranean passage, or where blocked entrances were investigated. The plans were produced at appropriate scales (generally 1:100).

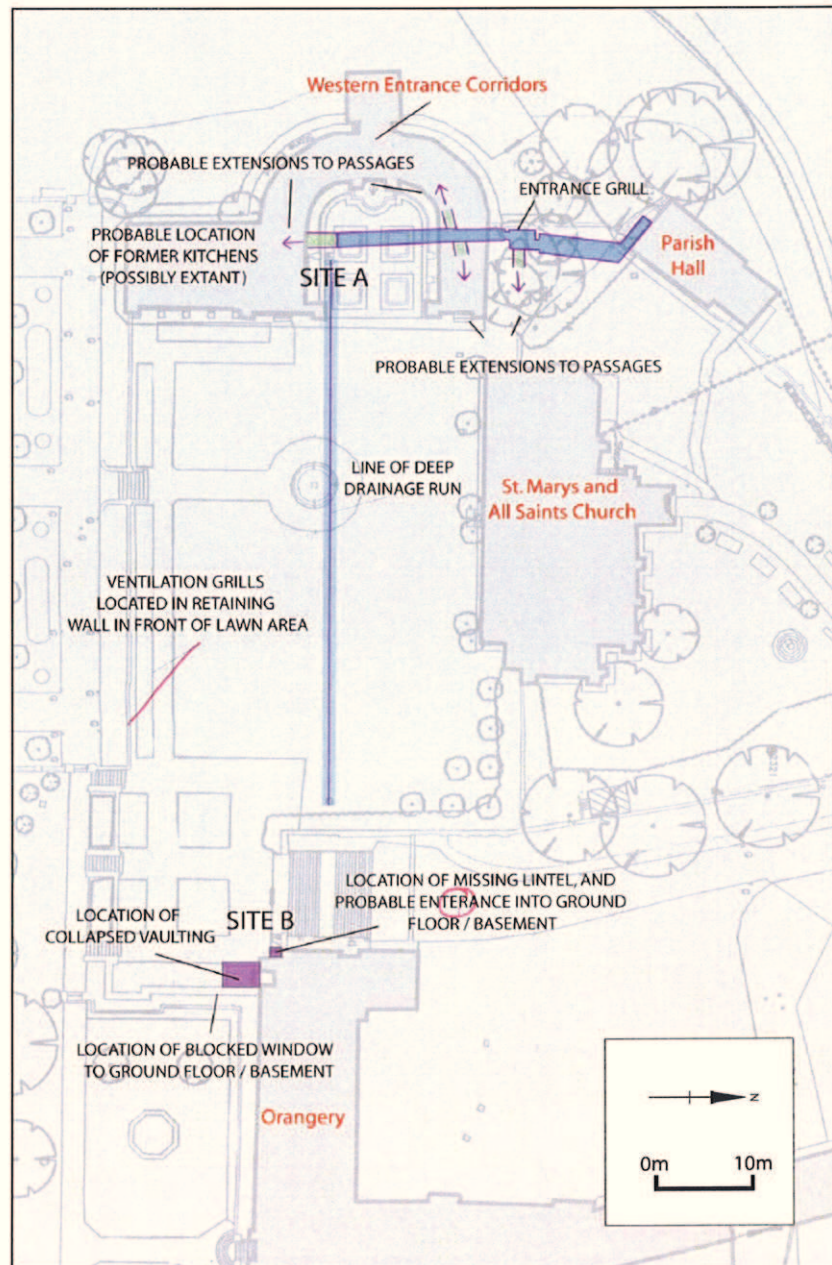


Figure 4:
Locations of Sites A and B and other observed features

3 RESULTS

3.1 Location of areas assessed

3.1.1 The area assessed has been divided into two sites (Fig. 4): Site A includes the extant passages under the entrance corridors to the west of the lawn; Site B includes the blocked entrances to the east of the lawn, beneath and adjacent to the west end of the Orangery.

3.2 Site A

3.2.1 The existence of passages at the western end of the ground floor/basement range had already been highlighted by members of the Trentham Gardens staff, who had in the past explored the area. It was initially intended that access was to be gained through a blocked entrance adjacent to the Parish Hall (Fig. 4), but on further inspection a grill (Plate 1) was found just to the north of the entrance corridors, which provided easier access, and removed the need to destroy the blocking.



Plate 1: Access to Site A; possible light well / shute

3.2.2 The open subterranean passages were found to be in sound condition for as far as they were accessible; the extent of the access is shown on Figure 4. The passages are described below, using the plate numbers as shown on the reference plan (Appendix A).

3.2.3 Plate 2 shows the internal face of the entrance initially proposed for access. Within the vault patches of lighter orange brickwork are visible, including an arch over a breeze block wall. The lighter orange brickwork represents fairly modern repair, and it is therefore clear that the passage was in use until quite recently. The passage at this point is 2.4 m wide and 2.02 m high.



Plate 2: Northern limit of main passage, with blocked doorway

3.2.4 Further to the south, there are three passages which branch off at right angles to the main passage, one running eastwards and an opposed pair, forming a slightly staggered crossing point. The northernmost passage (Plate 3), opposite the grill entrance, is blocked to three quarters of its height by roughly dressed stone blocks and bricks forming a wall; they are obviously reused, probably from elsewhere on the site.

3.2.5 Similar blocking was seen at the entrances to the other side passages. Behind the blocking the passage is almost entirely filled with rubble, with the vaulted brick ceiling being visible for some two metres. At the furthest visible extent of the

vaulting, the roof appears to have collapsed, though the extent of this collapse is not clear.

- 3.2.6 The barrel vault between the passage in Plate 3 and the entrance springs from east to west, the opposite direction to that of the rest of the main passage (Plate 4). There is some evidence of repair to the vault, which is 2.2 m high at this point.



Plate 3: Northernmost side passage

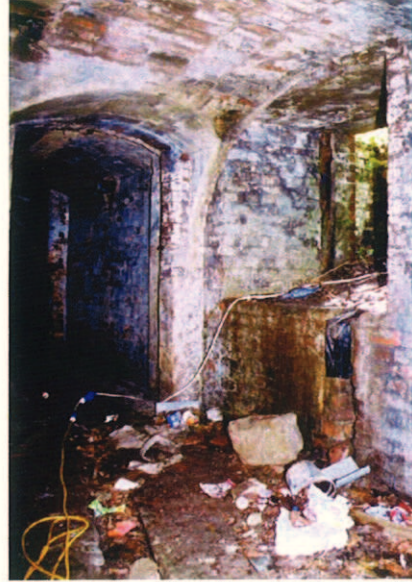


Plate 4: Possible light well / shute, and part of main passage

- 3.2.7 Further south the passage narrows to 1.5 m, but is still 2.2 m high. The high quality brickwork in the passages is still in very good condition (Plate 5).
- 3.2.8 Further south again are the pair of side passages already mentioned (Plate 5). The western passage (Plate 6) has only a small section of dry stone retaining wall intact, and the rubble infill has spilled out into the main passage. The lack of an intact retaining wall and the disturbed infill is almost certainly due to recent excavations by the staff of Trentham Gardens, who remember digging material out some time ago, but giving up after only a short distance. The vaulted ceiling of the passage is intact as far back as is visible, and it can be seen that the passage curves to the south.



Plate 5: The pair of side passages



Plate 6: The western side passage

- 3.2.9 Plate 7 shows the entrance to the opposed side passage, which is almost fully blocked by its dry stone retaining wall, but forms an opening off the main passage with similar dimensions to the one it opposes.
- 3.2.10 To the south of the opposed side passages, the main passage continues for approximately 10 metres, at the same width and height (Plate 8), until blocked by a large pile of earth. External inspection, in the garden within the Western Entrance Corridors revealed an access point for a large and deep drain which has cut into the passage. The concrete rings for the access hole are just visible at the top of the pile of earth in the passage. The line of this drain was traced in the lawn and is shown on Figure 4.



Plate 7: The eastern side passage



Plate 8: The southern limit of the main passage, with pile of earth

- 3.2.11 Having talked to Rob Bailey, a member of the staff at Trentham Gardens for many years, it has become clear that the passages stretched for some way beyond the point now blocked by the drain. Mr Bailey remembers the passages opening out into a kitchen with ranges still intact, and a chimney running up one of the corner pillars in the entrance corridors (note the room underneath the corridors on Fig. 3). It was not possible to confirm the presence of the chimney without access to the roof.
- 3.2.12 Plates 2, 3, 5 and 8 all show a small gully in the floor of the main passage, probably designed for drainage.

3.3 Site B

- 3.3.1 Within the wall which forms the eastern end of the ground floor/basement range, there is a group of three large arches. During investigations it was discovered that all three had been blocked (Plates 9 and 10). Having removed covering vegetation, the arches were investigated further and it was found that the top of the arch was visible from the lawn, on the opposite side of the wall; note the limit of the algae on the blocking in Plate 10, indicating the ground level on the reverse side of the wall. The height of the arch may suggest that it formed the entrance to an open area within the ground floor/basement.



Plate 9: Arch in eastern retaining wall



Plate 10: Close up of arch showing

- 3.3.2 The next group of access points are located at the western end of the Orangery. At ground level a corridor runs east to west along the Orangery, and turns southward at its western end, leading to two blocked entrances: a small one to the west (Plate 11), and the continuation of the corridor to the south (Plate 12). Both of these are blocked using breeze block and they appear to be of similar date and construction.



Plate 11: Smaller blocked entrance at west end of Orangery



Plate 12: Blocked corridor at west end of Orangery

- 3.3.3 During investigations, holes were punched through both breeze block walls and rubble was encountered immediately beyond them. The smaller doorway has no lintel, and the wall (500 mm thick at this point) was only supported by loose rubble - hence the props visible in Plate 11.
- 3.3.4 The character of the vault beyond the larger entrance (Plate 12) was investigated by means of a very limited hand excavation of the gravel surface at ground level adjacent to the south-western end of the Orangery. This revealed that the vault was absent, and presumably had collapsed or been removed for a distance of 2 m south of the building (Rob Bailey remembers a collapse in this area some time ago). The ground floor/basement was filled with rubble.

- 3.3.5 To the immediate south-east of this area of collapse, within the retaining wall forming the western limit of the ground floor/basement, there is a blocked window or access point similar to that shown in Plate 1 (Plate 13). This was cleared of vegetation and a small hole created in the blocking. Since the vault to which it probably gave access had collapsed, it was no surprise that this also revealed rubble.



Plate 13: Blocked window/light well at SW corner of Orangery

- 3.3.6 At the eastern end of the southern retaining wall a pair of vents were noted (Plate 14). One grill was removed and again rubble was revealed, suggesting that the ground floor/basement extends this far south at its eastern end, as suggested by Barry's plan of 1834 (Fig. 3).



Plate 14: Vents in retaining wall at southern limit of the ground floor/basement

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Summary of results and interpretation

- 4.1.1 The assessment which forms Stage 1 of the evaluation of the proposed hotel area successfully established that vaulted passageways exist at the western end of the ground floor/basement range. It would appear that only a single passage remains clear and that the rest of the range of subterranean rooms and corridors has been infilled, although this conclusion may be further supported or challenged by the Stage 2 work (geophysical survey - see below). The walls are generally in a good state of repair.

Some of the vaulted ceilings appear to be in good condition, while others are damaged or collapsed. No evidence of ceilings other than brick vaulting was seen.

4.1.2 Comparison between Figure 3 (Barry's plan of existing and proposed basements in 1834) and Figure 4 (results of the assessment) shows that the historic plan cannot be relied upon to show the full extent of the buried structures, although it seems to be broadly accurate.

4.1.3 The open passageway that was investigated does not appear on Barry's plan (Fig. 3). This may be due to the fact that it was designed as a service corridor; the access point shown in Plate 4 could well have been used as a coal chute, although it may simply be a light well. The drainage gully in the floor certainly implies some form of ancillary structure.

4.2 **Further work**

4.2.1 Stage 2 of the work in the Hotel area is to involve a geophysical survey of the lawn, paths and flower beds which cover the ground floor/basement, in order to establish the full extent of the buried structures, and possibly to predict the nature of the ceilings and the true extent of the infilling. Ultimately it is intended that the ground floor basement will be excavated under archaeological supervision, with a view to incorporating it into the re-build.

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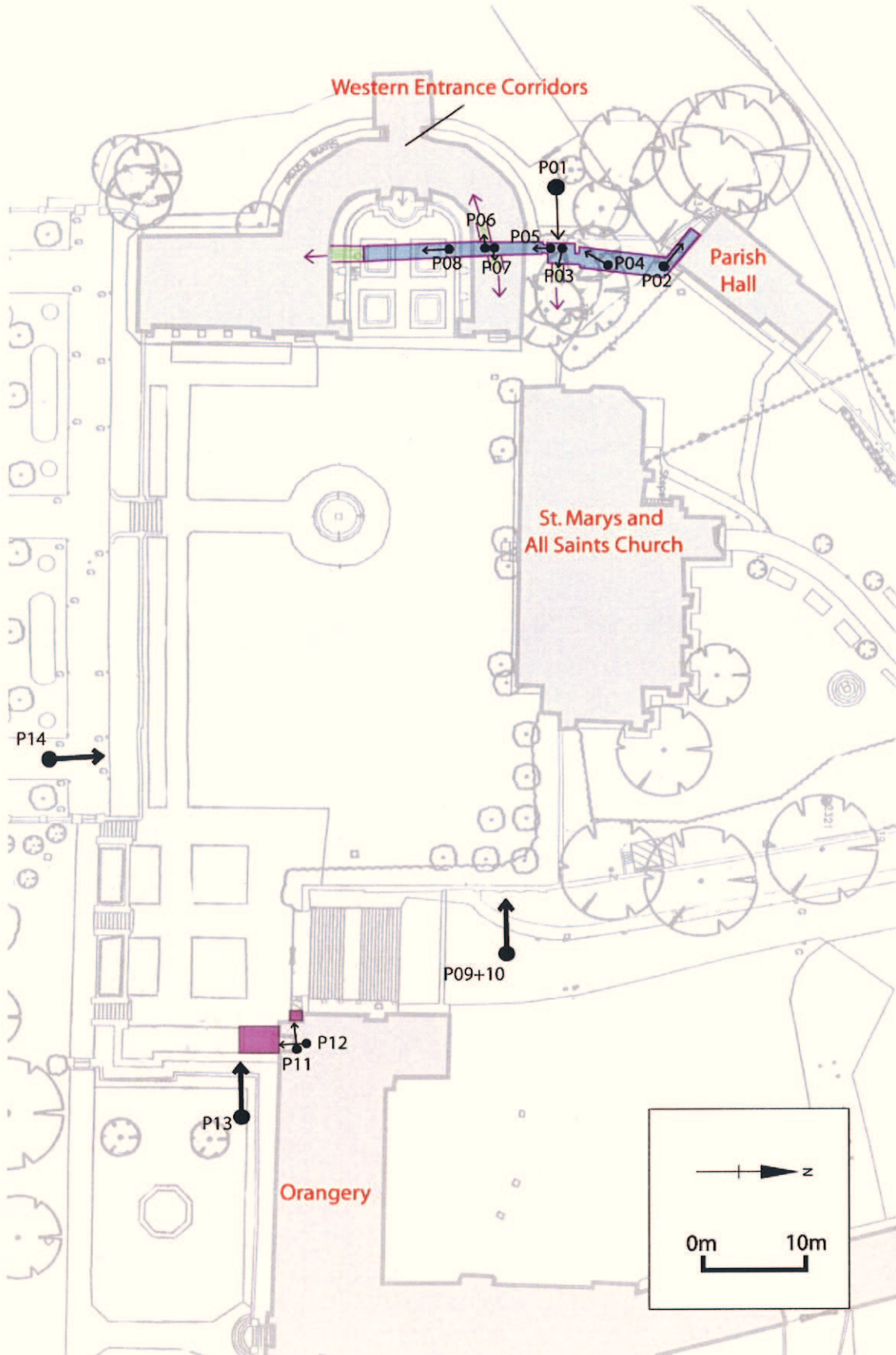
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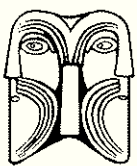
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Wilkinson D, 2000: Brief for an Archaeological Evaluation at Trentham Gardens

Appendix A: Location plan for Plates 1 - 15





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