

Watchpact Ltd

**Land at The Hall, Heighton Road, South Heighton,
East Sussex**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

NGR TQ 4500 0280

Planning Application No. LW/95/0744F

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May 2000

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a field evaluation on land at The Hall, Heighton Road, South Heighton, East Sussex on behalf of Watchpact Ltd. The evaluation revealed the remains of a substantial flint and mortar wall foundation, which was interpreted as the west end of St Martin's Church, a building identified from historical maps. The line of the north wall return was also noted and appeared to have been constructed on a chalk platform cut into the natural slope of the hill. A feature interpreted as the foundation pit for a buttress and deposits inside the church area forming a make-up for what would have been the church floor were also recorded as well as robber trench and demolition deposits. A number of postholes to the north of the church were seen and probably relate to a building contemporaneous with the church. A stone baptismal font still in existence at the site was also photographed but no evidence for associated burials was found in the evaluation trenches.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 On 10/11 April 2000, OAU carried out a field evaluation on land at The Hall, Heighton Road, South Heighton, East Sussex on behalf of Watchpact Ltd in respect of a planning application for two residential dwellings (Planning Application No. LW/95/0744F) and a brief set by and a WSI agreed with Dr A G Woodcock, East Sussex County Archaeologist. The development site is situated at NGR TQ 4500 0280 (Figure 1) and is c. 900 m² in area.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies on natural chalk at c. 100 m above OD. The site is situated on a north-facing slope on which the disused village hall currently stands.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The site at The Hall, South Heighton has been identified by the National Archaeological Record and the East Sussex Sites and Monuments Record as the likely site of the St Martins Church, South Heighton. These sources do not specify why this site is thought to be the church site although the SMR entry records that 'two medieval capitals lie in the garden of the Hall, Heighton Road which is adjacent to the site'.
- 1.3.2 In addition to consultation of the SMR an examination of the collection held at the East Sussex Record Office has enabled a summary background of the site to be produced.
- 1.3.3 No engravings or similar illustrations of the church have been located and it has not proved possible to obtain detailed information about the likely date of the church. The parish itself is mentioned in Domesday Book of 1086 but this reference does not

indicate whether the church was extant at this time. The earliest reference to the church, and its holdings, comes from a 1636 Glebe Terrier which indicates that the site contained the Church, a Parsonage House and Barn and a garden. The church is described as lying at the western edge of the site with the House to the east and the Barn, which contained two bays, to the east of this. The garden appears to have lain between the house and the barn.

- 1.3.4 In 1640 the benefice was united with Tarring Neville. It is uncertain what effect this would have had on the day-to-day function of the church, although it would appear unlikely that the church went out of use. A document of 1675 suggests that the Parsonage House had gone by this date.
- 1.3.5 In 1769 the church was struck by lightning and apparently badly damaged (Horsfield 1835). It was decided not to repair or rebuild the church and in 1773 permission was given to use materials from the church to repair Tarring Neville church.
- 1.3.6 Although now disused the church appears to have survived, at least as a ruin, into the 19th century. A map of 1770 shows two structures on the site and Maps of 1827 and 1841 (which are essentially the same survey) show three buildings, the largest of which (lying at the western end of the site and facing the road) is marked as being a church.
- 1.3.7 A 19th century account of the church site describes it as 'nearly gone, one wall only remaining, but there are two or three tombstones still to be recognised. The inside of the church and the cemetery are now used as a garden' (Horsfield 1835).
- 1.3.8 The structure appears to have vanished completely by 1873 (the date of the first Ordnance Survey map) although this, and subsequent Ordnance Survey maps, all describe the site as 'Site of St Martins Church'. In 1893 an Iron Mission Church was constructed on the site in the location of the present Parish Hall, which is of 20th century construction.

Acknowledgements

- 1.3.9 Information from the East Sussex Record Office was kindly researched and supplied by Dr Christopher Whittick.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.
- 2.1.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- 2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.

- 2.1.4 Appraise the likely impact of the development proposals on any archaeology located and suggest ways of reconciling the conservation of the archaeological resource with the development proposals.

- 2.1.5 To make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of two trenches each measuring 16 x 1.6 m (Figure 2). The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds. All archaeological features were planned and where excavated their sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.3 Finds

- 3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and recorded by context.

3.4 Environmental evidence

- 3.4.1 No deposits with significant environmental potential were identified and therefore no environmental samples were taken.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Description of deposits

Trench 1

- 4.1.1 Trench 1 measured 16 x 1.6 m and was orientated east-west. Natural chalk (100) was seen in the base of the trench at a depth of 0.45-0.7 m below the present ground surface. At the western end of the trench and observed in the south facing section for a distance of 3 m was a 0.15 m thick, loose light yellowish brown deposit (101). This deposit was made up of mortar, pea gravel, flints and tile, and overlaid the natural. This was similar in nature to demolition deposits recorded in Trench 2 and was in turn overlain by a dark brown silty clay topsoil (102) up to 0.4 m thick. In most of the trench apart from the north-west corner the topsoil was overlain by a made ground

deposit (103) comprising building materials, tarmac, wood and gravel up to 0.35 m thick. No significant archaeological features were seen.

Trench 2 (Figure 3)

- 4.1.2 Trench 2 measured 16 x 1.6 m and was orientated north-south. The site area is divided roughly in half on an east west line creating upper (southern) and lower (northern) terraces with a steep drop of *ca.* 1.5 m between the two. The trench was excavated across this division at roughly 90° to it and encompassed parts of both the upper and lower terraces.
- 4.1.3 Natural chalk (202) was seen in the base of the trench and was noted to fall away sharply to the north. At the southern end of the trench it was 0.75 m below and at the northern end 0.5 m below present ground surface. In line with the site gateway the chalk was only 0.2 m below the driveway surface.
- 4.1.4 Cut into the chalk at the southern end of the trench was a wall foundation trench (200) 1.25 m in width and observed running for 5 m in a north-west to south-east direction. The cut was 0.5 m deep and filled with a foundation deposit (201) of flint nodules 0.08-0.15 m diameter in a light brown sandy mortar. The foundation of the northern return of this wall took the form of a level platform (204) cut into the chalk slope, which was noted to form an angle significantly less than 90° to the flint and mortar foundation. Immediately to the north of this platform was a neatly cut feature (208) 0.75 x 0.4 m and 0.2 m in depth and containing two angled steps. This was interpreted as the foundation cut for a buttress.
- 4.1.5 To the north of the level platform was a deposit (225) of chalk, flint and sparse tile and mortar 0.25 m thick. This was interpreted as construction debris associated with the building of the structures outlined above. This was overlain by a friable dark brown silty clay (227) 0.1 m thick, which appeared to be a buried topsoil, the upper surface of which may represent the ground level contemporary with the use of the building. A deposit up to 0.5 m thick, comprising lenses of redeposited chalk and gravel (203), was observed at the southern end of the trench. This deposit appears to have leveled the ground within the area of the building; and its upper surface may represent the floor level of the building.
- 4.1.6 The building material has been extensively robbed and no evidence of the floor, buttress or walls themselves was found. However, a robber cut (223) for the northern return wall was identified, and the removal of this wall had led to a slumping of the floor make-up 203. The deposits in the southern part of the trench were generally overlain by a 0.2 m thick demolition deposit (229) comprising tile and a light brown sandy mortar.
- 4.1.7 The northern part of the trench contained a cluster of six post holes, four of which (213, 215, 217, 221) were similar in nature measuring *c.* 0.25 x 0.25 m with a depth of 0.25 m. A further posthole (219) was 0.15 x 0.15 m and 0.1 m in depth, while the last (211) was roughly circular in shape with a diameter of 0.15 m and a depth of 0.35 m.

All of the postholes were filled by light yellowish brown sandy mortar similar to demolition deposit 229.

- 4.1.8 Two modern service trenches were also identified running east west under the area of the entrance driveway. A layer of friable dark brown silty clay topsoil (228) sealed the deposits in the trench.

4.2 Finds

Pottery and Building Material

- 4.2.1 Contexts 101, 205, 218 and 229 produced 1.28 kg (10 pieces) of high fired orange clay roof tile. Traces of mortar indicated that the tiles had probably been used as roof tiles. A date for this material is difficult to postulate. Context 229 also contained 369 g (2 pieces) of 30 mm thick floor tile with a mottled green glaze, which is fairly undiagnostic but could date to the 14th or 15th centuries. A single sherd of glazed red earthenware was also retrieved from context 229 and probably dates to the 17th or 18th centuries. These contexts are interpreted as demolition deposits associated with the abandonment and robbing of the church in the late 18th century.
- 4.2.2 Context 201 produced 49 g (2 pieces) of roof tile similar to those in the demolition contexts although one also demonstrated a peg hole. This context is the foundation for the church wall and although such tile is unlikely to be Saxon or Norman in origin it offers little to aid in dating the original construction of the church.

5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

- 5.1.1 In the southern part of Trench 2 the structural features comprising a substantial flint and mortar foundation, leveled chalk platform, buttress foundation pit and make-up for a floor surface as well as robbing and demolition deposits, leave little doubt that this is the north west corner of St Martins Church when viewed in the light of the historical evidence. The acute angle of the return is intriguing and although the alignment across a relatively narrow trench could be misconstrued the buttress would presumably have been constructed at a right angle to the return wall and therefore confirms the alignment as recorded. An 1827 map of the parish does appear to show the west wall of the church offset from the rest of the building although later maps show the building as a straightforward rectangle. It should be remembered however that the church was by this time little more than a ruin and the exact plan of it may not have been clear. A comparison of site boundaries also indicates that the road line has probably moved to the west and that the church was originally closer to if not right on the edge of the road.
- 5.1.2 The church building has been extensively robbed and none of the main structure was seen. The north wall and buttress, which are unlikely to have had a foundation (unlike the west wall), have been completely removed. Although the approximate level of the church floor can be assumed from the top of the make-up layer 203 the surface itself had been removed.

- 5.1.3 No clear date for the construction of the church could be established, as the finds retrieved were largely undiagnostic.
- 5.1.4 The southern and eastern extent of the church was not determined in the evaluation but combining the location of the north-west corner with map evidence would indicate that the building might extend some 2-3 metres beyond the west end of The Hall building currently standing on the site.
- 5.1.5 A stone font used as an ornament in front of The Hall was recorded by photograph. It is octagonal with corner shafts and capitals and is undecorated. A provisional assessment suggests the style is reminiscent of 13th century fonts although it could be later and as an aid to dating the church cannot be relied on.
- 5.1.6 The two 'Medieval capitals' referred to in the SMR entry were also found and photographed, although one of them appeared to be later in date and had 1843 carved on its upper surface. This may not be a date but if it is then it is unlikely to have come from the church building which was almost completely removed by this time. It could however be a Victorian import to add ornament to the site, which was reported in 1835 to be in use as a garden.
- 5.1.7 No burials were found at the site although a reference to tombstones and a cemetery is made in the documentary evidence. It may be that burials survive to the south and/or east of the Church, but as not even unstratified finds of human bone were made in the topsoil in the northern part of the site it seems unlikely that burials will be found in this area, although this assumption must be viewed with caution.
- 5.1.8 The postholes in the northern part of Trench 2 may well relate to an 'L' shaped building noted on maps in the north-west corner of the site and as these were all filled with demolition material similar to that overlying the church deposits it is presumed that this building passed out of use at a similar time. The fact that this demolition material does not form a general spread in this area, and the overlying topsoil is free of building materials, would argue for a more recent truncation of this part of the site and the importation of new topsoil presumably to form a garden. This may also account for the lack of human bone or burial evidence.
- 5.1.9 The church was constructed on either substantial foundations or chalk platforms, and associated cut features and make-up for its floor were recorded. With this in mind it seems reasonable that despite possibly heavier truncation of the east end by The Hall building the plan of the church and better preserved evidence of its construction and date may survive.

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Date</i>
001								
	100	Layer			Natural chalk			
	101	Layer		0.15	Demolition deposit	Tile	4	?
	102	Layer		0.4	Topsoil			
	103	Layer		0.35	Modern made ground			
002								
	200	Cut			Wall foundation trench			
	201	Structure	1.25	0.5	Wall foundation	Tile	2	?
	202	Layer			Natural chalk			
	203	Layer		0.5	Church floor make-up			
	204	Cut			Wall construction trench			
	205	Fill		0.2	Fill of buttress cut	Tile	3	?
	206	Fill	0.3		Modern service			
	207	Cut			Modern service trench			
	208	Cut			Construction cut for buttress			
	209	Cut			Modern service trench			
	210	Fill	0.5		Modern service			
	211	Cut			Posthole			
	212	Fill		1.15	Posthole fill			
	213	Cut			Posthole			
	214	Fill		0.2	Posthole fill			
	215	Cut			Posthole			
	216	Fill		0.2	Posthole fill			
	217	Cut			Posthole			
	218	Fill		0.25	Posthole fill	Tile	1	?
	219	Cut			Posthole			
	220	Fill		0.1	Posthole fill			
	221	Cut			Posthole			
	222	Fill		0.25	Posthole fill			
	223	Cut			Robber trench			

	224	Fill		0.65	Robber trench backfill			
	225	Layer		0.25	Construction debris			
	226	VOID						
	227	Layer		0.1	Buried topsoil			
	228	Layer		0.6	Topsoil			
	229	Layer		0.2	Demolition layer	Tile/pot	4/1	14 th -18 th century?

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

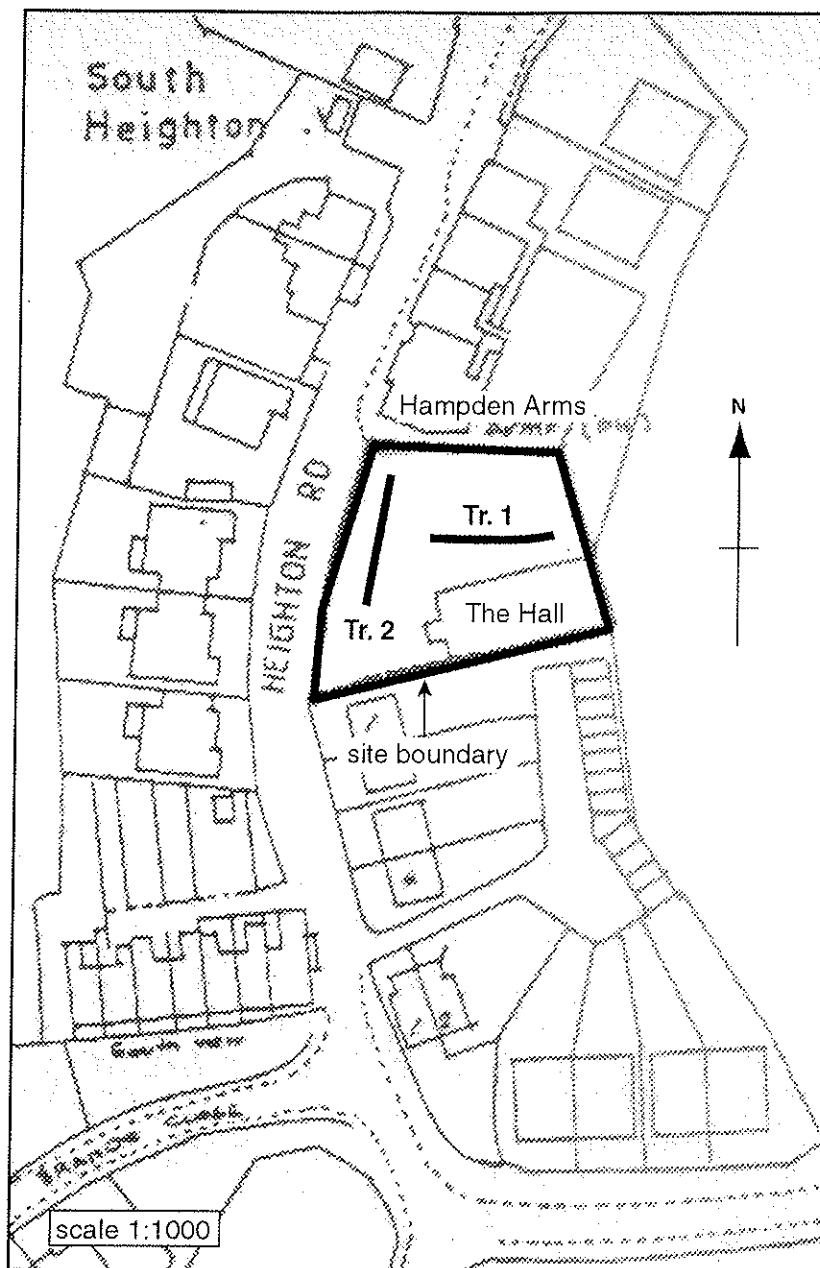
Horsfield, T W 1835 A History of the County of Sussex.

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).



Location of site

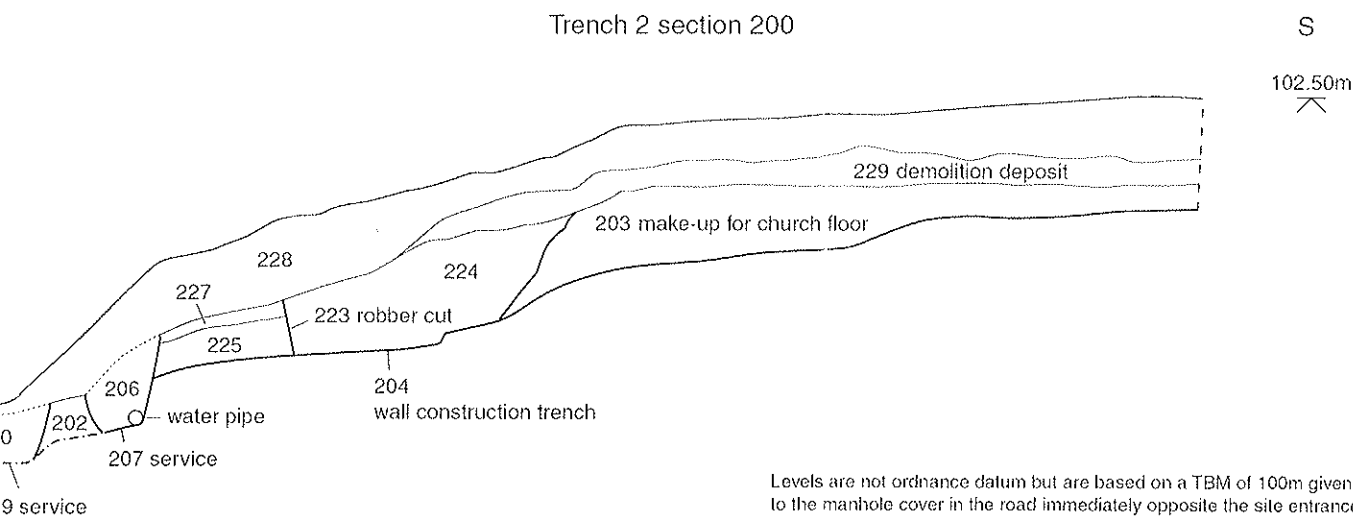
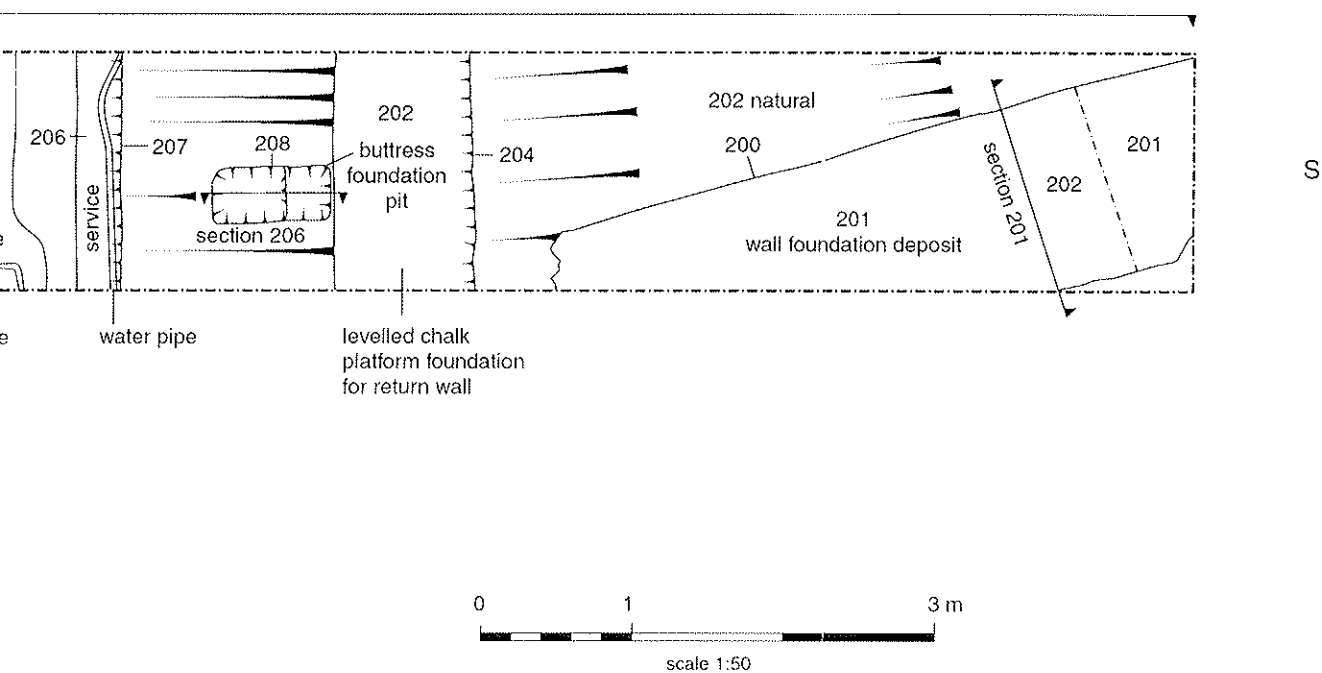
Figure 1



Trench location

Figure 2

section 200



Levels are not ordnance datum but are based on a TBM of 100m given to the manhole cover in the road immediately opposite the site entrance.

d sections

Figure 3

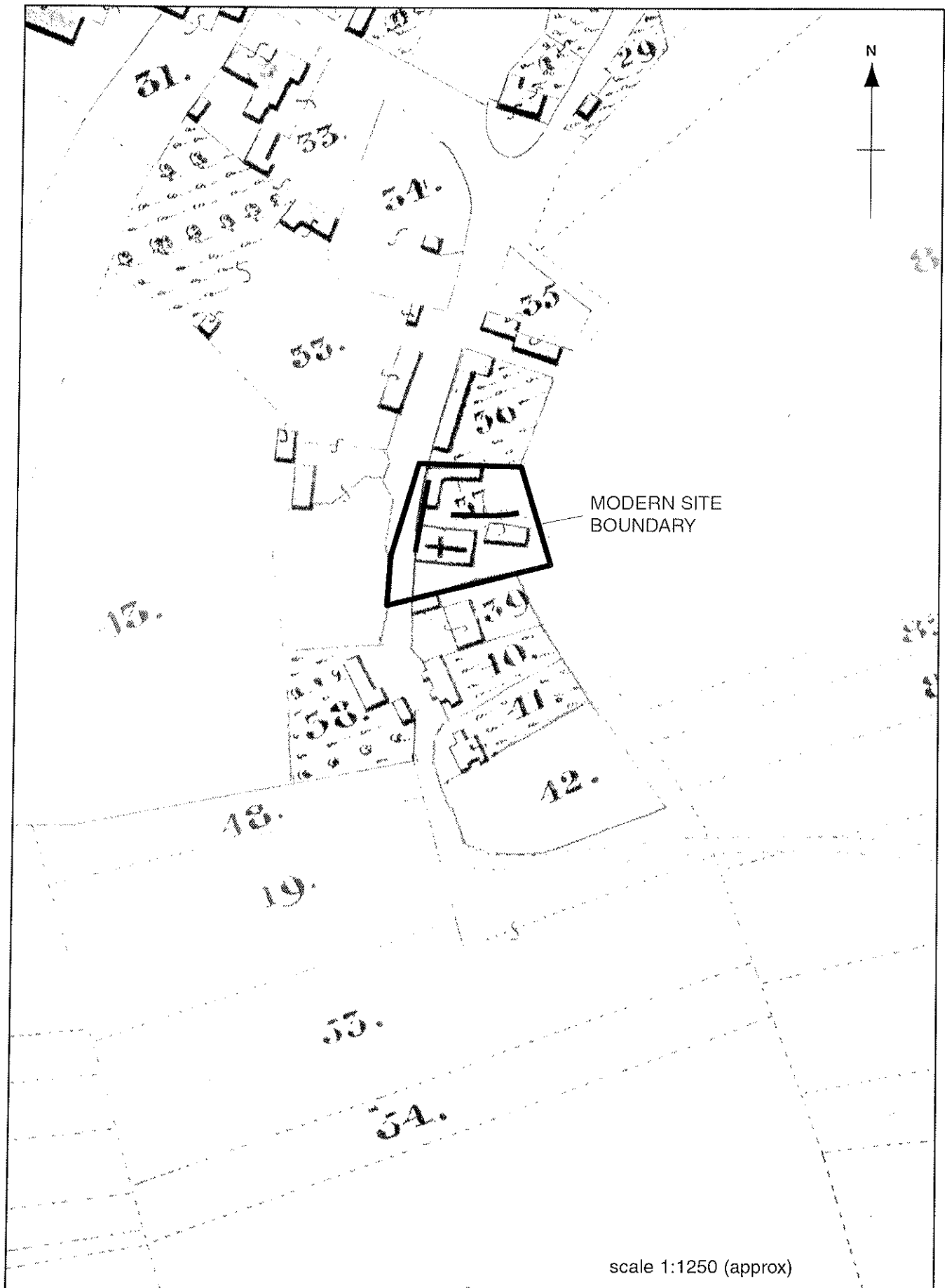


Figure 4



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