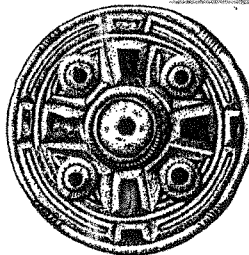


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Archaeological Field Unit

Archaeology at Hinchingsbrooke School, Huntingdon (TL227716).

S.N. Kemp

1998

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. B 37

Commissioned By Cambridgeshire County Council

Archaeology at Hinchingsbrooke School, Huntingdon (TL227716)

Following the discovery of wall foundations during construction works at Hinchingsbrooke School the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council was contracted to undertake a watching brief within the development. The main requirement of this work was to record a single wall which lay on the southeastern side of the proposed Pepy's building and a brick culvert within the courtyard adjacent to Hinchingsbrooke House (Fig. 1).

A small evaluation had been carried out within the limits of the proposed Pepy's building and no archaeology had been found (Hatton 1998). However, when the area was entirely opened the foundations of a brick wall was found to run along the southeastern boundary of the site within a strip of land proposed for a retaining wall. The remains of the wall ran almost parallel with the existing yew hedge and was probably one of the earlier garden features associated with Hinchingsbrooke House. The site was visited twice, on the 10th and 11th of June 1998, in order to undertake basic recordings of the nature and alignment of the wall.

The remnants of the old wall lay below the lawn at a depth of 0.10m and consisted of 0.25m of chalk rubble and mortar overlying a 0.40m wide wall. The wall consisted of worked limestone blocks, some of which were ornamental and used as facing material, whilst seventeenth/eighteenth century brick formed the core of the wall. The above deposits and associated cuts indicate that the wall had been largely robbed out during demolition. The original foundation trench for the wall and the later robber trench both cut through garden soils or terracing.

On the 6th August 1998 a nineteenth century culvert was discovered within a trench being excavated for a gas mains which ran through the courtyard northwest of Hinchingsbrooke House (Fig.1). The structure was 0.55m high and 0.55m wide made up of two types of brick. The red bricks were a standard 0.24x0.11x0.8, whilst the yellow were 0.22x0.10x0.05. The culvert runs from the existing school buildings which cut across the alignment of the culvert, to the seventeenth century buildings. The culvert was directed towards metal drain pipes set against the reception building. These drains appear to have been cast in 1894 according to the water chute into which the roof guttering leads.

Up to 1.00m of made ground surrounded the culvert. No cut for the culvert trench could be found. However, elsewhere within the gas mains trench up to 0.50m of made ground overlies the remnants of a nineteenth century wall and thereby at least 0.50m of the stratigraphy predates the nineteenth century. No finds were recovered from any of these deposits.

Conclusion.

The location and form of the wall suggests that it is the remnants of a garden wall. The absence of any specific dating material other than reused limestone and brick means that it is difficult to provide details about the landscape context of the wall without detailed cartographic and historical research. The now mature yew hedge follows the same orientation and is probably a direct replacement of this earlier wall or of an alignment preserved in the earthworks. It is possible that the wall was removed at a time when the formal gardens around the house gave way to the existing landscape design which may have occurred in the eighteenth century. The early historical documents for the house and estate held by the British Museum and Huntingdon Record Office may clarify this issue.

The worked and ornamental limestone was obviously part of a prestigious building which lay close by and was subsequently robbed for its building material. Such a building is likely to have been part of the Benedictine nunnery which preceded Hinchingsbrooke House.

Within the school courtyard adjacent to the House's historic core a nineteenth century culvert was recognised and recorded. Given the proximity of this gas main to the Hinchingsbrooke House it is surprising that no archaeological investigations had been required. If further ground disturbance was to occur in this area the presence of archaeological deposits which predate the nineteenth century within the courtyard would support the need for investigations to define the date and nature of these deposits.

Bibliography

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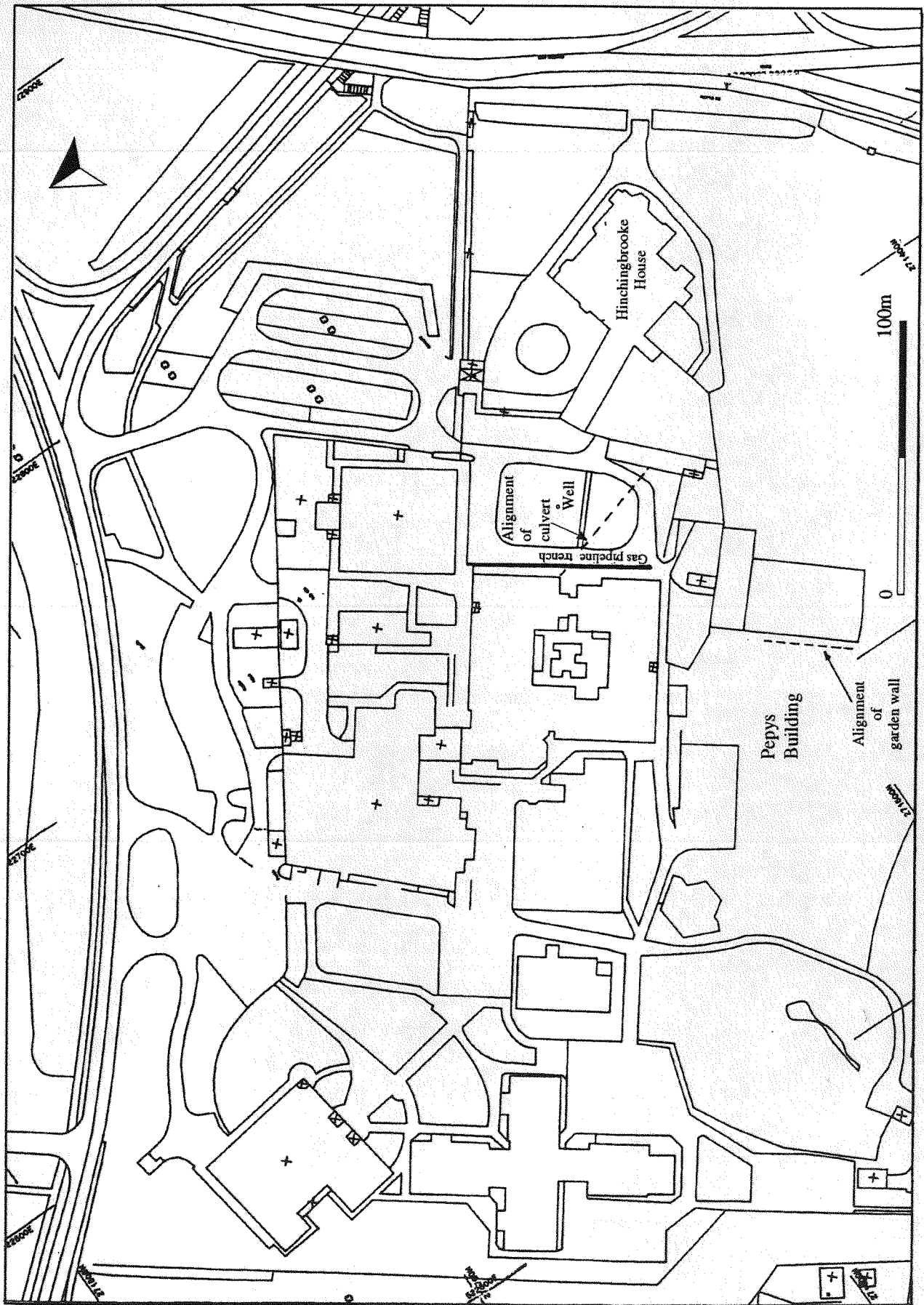


Figure 1 Location plan



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