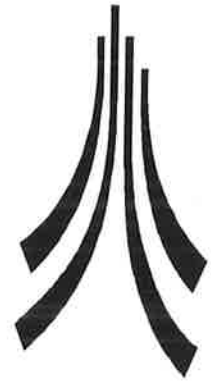


**LANCASTER**  
UNIVERSITY  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
UNIT



May 1998

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**PLATTS HALL,  
LOSTOCK GRALAM  
CHESHIRE**

**Archaeological Evaluation Interim Report**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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- 1.1 In April 1998 Lancaster University Archaeological Unit 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).
  
- 1.2 The archaeological evaluation was undertaken after the demolition of the structure, and was confined to the footprint of the west wing (*Section 2*). The west wing contained substantial remains of a timber framed house thought to date to 1655 (LUAU 1998, 3.5.3, 4.3). 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 intended to demonstrate whether evidence for an earlier building survives below ground. The watching brief demonstrated that the principal facade of the building was reversed probably during the nineteenth century and consequently the original facade was on the eastern face of the west wing. The rear of the building would have been to the west of this wing and it has been postulated that an earlier building, or an early extension to the building could have extended in this direction prior to the reversal of the principal facades. In particular an inventory (CRO WS 1680) of 1680 lists a kitchen, which was not represented within the surviving seventeenth century house and which may have been located to the rear (west) of this wing.

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

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- 2.1 The evaluation was carried out in accordance with the trenching methodology supplied to the client. Initial consultations with the Brunner Mond safety department indicated that excavation west of the footprint of Platts Hall was not permitted because of the presence of sub-surface services, including a water main leading to a fire hydrant. Excavation was thus confined to the footprint of the west wing, with the exception of small, hand dug trenches across the line of the north and west walls. Excavation of the evaluation trenches was carried out using a large mechanical excavator which necessitated the use of a 6 foot bucket, and hence the trenches dug were *c* 2m wide. They ranged in length from *c* 3m - 4m. A third trench was excavated in addition to the two prescribed within the evaluation proposal, when the second trench was found to be devoid of archaeological features.
- 2.2 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 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* 0.42 below the level of the concrete in the northern rooms, in effect forming a sunken floor which had been excavated below ground level. 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.
- 2.3 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 A. The passage of the machine will have caused some additional disturbance to the west of the trench.

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### 3. RESULTS

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#### 3.1 TRENCH A

- 3.1.1 Trench A measured 3.3m x 1.85m. It was excavated through *c* 0.11m of machine disturbance, at the southern end of the west wing footprint 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, in a hard red fabric with sand temper, and showed traces of green glaze.
- 3.1.2 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.
- 3.1.3 A fragment of broken concrete lying immediately to the west of the trench suggested that the surface of the concrete here lay *c* 0.42 m 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 to the south of the wing had been truncated by up to 0.42m prior to the laying of the slab.

#### 3.2 TRENCH B

- 3.2.1 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.

#### 3.3 TRENCH C

- 3.3.1 Trench C was opened parallel to the northern wall of the Hall. 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 west wing. It was excavated through a maximum of 0.20m of machine disturbed material to the surface of the boulder clay, found here at 99.12m and 99.26m (local datum).

- 3.3.2 A single archaeological feature was revealed which was a large ovoid cut feature [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. 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.
- 3.3.3 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.
- 3.3.4 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.
- 3.3.5 A lead pipe was found immediately beyond the west wall of the Hall, and roughly parallel with it. Beyond this lay partly broken concrete and no further excavation was possible here.

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## 4. DISCUSSION

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- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 Of the remains uncovered, only two cut features were not clearly modern in date; both have been sealed by the concrete slab, but were probably much earlier in origin. As the original floor of the building has not survived to the present it is not possible to establish if these pits were cut through the floor of the hall and there is therefore the possibility that these cut features predate the seventeenth century hall. The cut [101] to the south west of the wing contained a single sherd of abraded pottery which is presently provisionally thought to be late medieval in date (this has yet to be examined by a finds specialist). This feature may have been truncated by >0.4m, so it may originally have been a relatively deep posthole or pit; its function is unknown.
- 4.3 Cut [104], revealed in the north-west corner of the building 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. It contained a single homogenous fill, similar to but greyer than the boulder clay through which it was cut. 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.

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## 5. CONCLUSIONS

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- 5.1 The evaluation has demonstrated the presence of a low density of archaeological remains surviving below the footprint of the west wing of Platts Hall, which are probably late medieval or post medieval in 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 a small amount of 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. The absence of remains relating to an earlier structure on the site of the west wing, however, does not imply that no earlier building existed.



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## 6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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### 6.1 PRIMARY SOURCES

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

CRO (Cheshire Record Office) will & inventory of Peter Venables Ref WS 1680

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### 6.2 SECONDARY SOURCES

Fielding, A 1998 *Timber Framed Buildings in the Salt-Working areas of Cheshire*, Vernacular Architecture Group, Newsletter No 34

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

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

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

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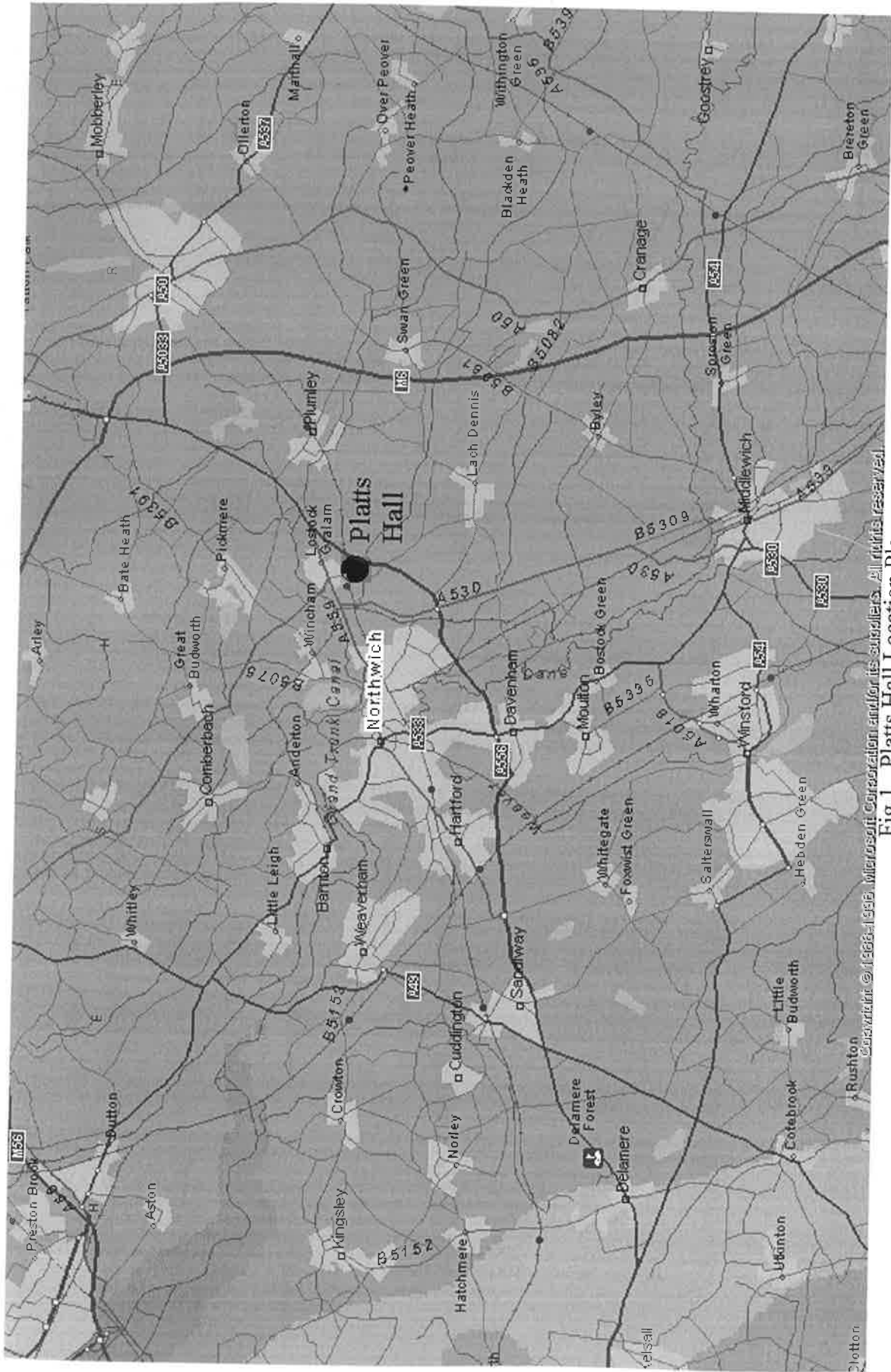


Fig 1 Platts Hall Location Plan

PLATT'S HALL  
SURVEY  
NORTHWICH,  
CHESHIRE

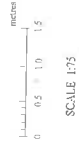
ELEVATION:

TRENCH LOCATION  
PLAN

COMMISSIONED & FUNDED BY:

P J L J I V E S E Y L T D .

FIGURE 2



DRAWN BY: NC, IS, CW & AS

DATE: 05/98

LOCATION:



KEY

--- Extent of trench  
[1014] Contact number

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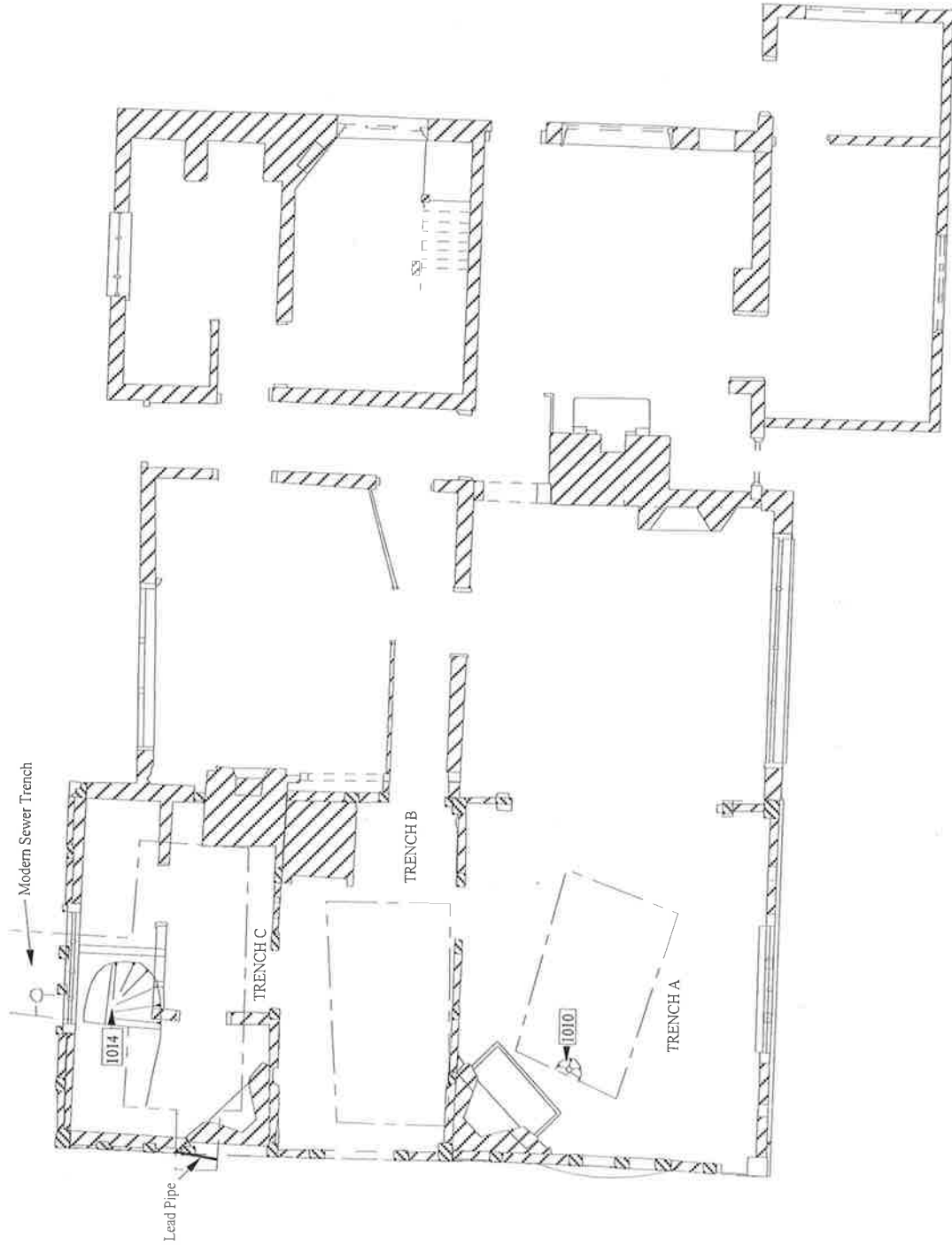


Fig 2 Trench Location Plan

