

Canterbury Christ Church University, North Holmes Road Wall

Watching brief report

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ABSTRACT

On 8 and 9 June 2016, Canterbury Archaeological Trust undertook an archaeological watching brief during repair work to a length of boundary wall running along the southern side of North Holmes Road, Canterbury. The repair work was undertaken by Coombs (Canterbury) Ltd on behalf of Canterbury Christ Church University.

The monitored work involved the cutting of two pits, each 0.8m by 0.8m square and 1m deep, for the insertion of buttress foundations on the southern side of the standing wall. The standing wall is thought to lie along the line of the boundary wall of St Augustine's Abbey, a Scheduled Ancient Monument which lies west and south of the study area. A continuous watching brief was maintained during the cutting of the foundation pits.

Natural ground overlain by subsoil was revealed towards the base of each of the pits. Overlying the subsoil was a mortar, chalk and flint deposit which appeared to have been laid as levelling material, preparing the ground for the construction of a wall. The lowest wall remains may not have formed part of the original fourteenth-century abbey boundary wall, but perhaps part of a later rebuild. The standing wall, of probable early modern date, lay directly upon these remains.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 8 and 9 June 2016, Canterbury Archaeological Trust undertook an archaeological watching brief during repair work to a length of standing boundary wall running along the southern side of North Holmes Road, Canterbury. The work was necessitated by the partial collapse of the boundary wall during a period of severe weather. The repair work was undertaken by Coombs (Canterbury) Ltd on behalf of Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU). The monitored work involved the cutting of two pits, each 0.8m by 0.8m square and 1m deep, for the insertion of buttress foundations on the southern side of the standing wall.
- 1.2 The archaeological watching brief was undertaken according to a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Rosanne Cummings, Archaeological Officer, Canterbury City Council.

2. LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 The site where the watching brief was conducted (centred at NGR 615672 157929; Fig. 1) is located east of Canterbury, on the southern side of North Holmes Road. North Holmes Road bounds the northern side of the CCCU campus. The Scheduled Ancient Monument of St Augustine's Abbey lies to the south and west.
- 2.2 The pits were cut into a grassed area, gently sloping down from north to south, which lies between the standing boundary wall and a pathway flanking the northern side of the Sports Laboratory.
- 2.3 The boundary wall in this area of the campus is constructed with a core of flint and ashlar rubble, bonded with pale brown mortar, faced with flintwork and brick. Flints form the main facing material, whilst bricks form vertical and horizontal banding, and cap the structure (Plates 1, 2).
- 2.4 The underlying solid geology of the PDA is recorded as comprising Thanet Formation – Sand, Silt and Clay, sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 56 to 59 million years ago in the Palaeogene Period (British Geological Survey, Geology of Britain viewer <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html> accessed 06/04/2016). Superficial deposits of Head – Clay and Silt are recorded, deposits formed up to 3 million years ago in the Quaternary Period.

3. OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 The general objective of the watching brief work, as described in the Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Canterbury City Council, was:

to contribute to heritage knowledge of the area through the recording of any archaeological remains exposed as a result of excavations in connection with the groundworks.

- 3.2 It was further noted that:

Particular attention will be made to the character, height below ground level, condition, date and significance of the deposits.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 All archaeological work was undertaken according to the Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Canterbury City Council. It was carried out in accordance with the accepted professional standards set out in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (2014). Canterbury Archaeological Trust is a Registered Organisation with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists and conforms to their by-laws, standards and policy statements.
- 4.2 The watching brief was conducted during repair work to a length of the standing boundary wall running along North Holmes Road, work which was necessitated by the collapse of a section of the wall during a period of severe weather.
- 4.3 A continual watching brief presence was maintained by an archaeologist from Canterbury Archaeological Trust during the cutting of two foundation pits on the southern side of the standing wall remains (Fig. 2). The pits were cut to insert buttresses to support the repaired length of wall. Each pit was 0.8m by 0.8m in plan and up to 1m deep, and was cut with straight sides and a flat base. The pits were hand cut by operatives working for Coombs (Canterbury) Ltd.
- 4.4 Archaeological recording of the cut foundation pits was subsequently undertaken by the attendant archaeologist. The remains encountered were recorded on Canterbury Archaeological Trust *pro forma* watching brief recording sheets. Measured plan and section drawings were compiled and a photographic record was maintained using digital format. The complete archive relating to the excavation is currently held by Canterbury Archaeological Trust at 92a Broad Street, Canterbury, CT1 2LU.

5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The work was undertaken within the Canterbury Area of Archaeological Importance designated under section 35 of the Ancient Monument and Areas Act 1979 (revised 1983). It also forms part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site encompassing Christ Church Priory (Canterbury Cathedral), St Augustine's Abbey and St Martin's Church. The Scheduled Ancient Monument of St Augustine's Abbey (SAM listing no 1016844) lies to the south and west.
- 5.2 The boundary wall lies within an area of archaeological significance. Prehistoric flintwork of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic date has been found during archaeological investigations conducted in the CCCU campus at North Holmes Road between 1983 and 2007 (Hicks 2015, 15), whilst a Neolithic polished flint axe has been discovered in North Holmes Road (TR157579; Canterbury City Council UAD Monument Record MKE4523). Evidence of Bronze Age settlement has been found west of the study area comprising pits, post-holes and ditches containing Bronze Age pottery (Hicks 2015, 15–16).
- 5.3 There is limited evidence of Iron Age activity within the vicinity of the study area, comprising a gold Gallo-Belgic Morini coin (dated c 55 BC), found in 1967 in the

garden of 2 College Road, just off North Holmes Road (HER TR 15 NE 34), together with a few Iron Age sherds and a coin of Cunobelin, dated *c* AD 10–40, recovered from university excavations (Hicks 2015, 8, 16).

- 5.4 The study area lies *c* 200m north of the line of a Roman road leading from Canterbury (*Durovernum Cantiacorum*) to Richborough (*Rutupiae*). The spur from a second road, running from Queningate in the city wall and possibly meeting with the Richborough road beyond St Pancras Church, perhaps lay to the south-west (Hutcheson 1993, 7). Cemeteries are known to have flanked the Roman roads, though there is no evidence for Roman burials this far distant from their line. A Roman water conduit crosses the university campus, *c* 180 to the west of the study area, taking water from springs on St Martin's Hill into the town (Hicks 2015, 114).
- 5.5 During the medieval period, the study area formed part of the precincts of St Augustine's Abbey, bounded along the line of the present North Holmes Road by a ditch. Lengths of the ditch have been uncovered during excavation work in the campus (Hicks 2015) and during watching brief work conducted during the erection of a new boiler house, *c* 50m to the north-west of the present study area (Wilson 2013).
- 5.6 An abbey boundary wall was erected in 1320, over which a monk, Peter of Dene, effected his escape from the abbey in 1330. The standing wall within the study area is thought to run along the line of the fourteenth-century boundary wall. Sections of the original wall have been revealed during the insertion of a dark fibre route around the campus (Hicks 2012).
- 5.7 The western side of the CCCU campus contained kilns, a barn and service buildings of the abbey (Hicks 2015). The eastern side, within which the study area lies, formed gardens, vineyards and orchards. The ground was divided by ditches and cut by pits, as seen during excavations in the western side of the campus (Hicks 2015).
- 5.8 The abbey was dissolved in 1538. In 1539, buildings around the inner court were converted to form a royal palace for the king, Henry VIII, ensuring their survival whilst other structures were demolished. Features and deposits associated with demolition following the Dissolution have been identified within the campus (Hicks 2015).
- 5.9 Over the following centuries, the abbey and its grounds passed through a succession of private hands. The study area perhaps formed part of an area of broadly open land during this time, occupied structures primarily lying further to the south.
- 5.10 In the 1790s, the abbey estate started to be broken up (Sparks 1985, 325; 2015, 164). A plot along Longport was sold in 1791 for the building of a hospital, whilst another further east became the site of a new county gaol and a sessions house, which opened in 1808. A teacher training college, Christ Church College, opened in 1963.

6. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

Pit 1

(Figs 2–3, Plates 1–6)

- 6.1 Natural ground, comprising a head deposit of clay and silt (brickearth) (4) was seen at the lower levels of Pit 1, lying at a depth of 0.34m below the ground surface. Overlying the brickearth was a deposit of mid grey-brown silty clay subsoil (3) containing occasional small flint pebble inclusions. The subsoil was up to 0.24m thick. Overlying the subsoil was a deposit of very loose, buff coloured coarse mortar containing chalk and flint fragments (2), up to 0.20m thick, which petered out as the deposit extended southwards. The mortar deposit had probably been laid as levelling material, preparing the ground for the construction of a wall. Overlying mortar (2) were wall remnants comprising chalk and flint rubble bonded with fine orange-brown mortar (5) standing to a height of 0.33m, apparently forming the footings of an earlier boundary wall.
- 6.2 Built upon the wall remains (5) was the boundary wall which stands today (not numbered), formed with a core of flint and ashlar rubble, bonded with pale brown mortar, faced with flintwork and brick. Flints form the main facing material, whilst bricks form vertical and horizontal banding, and cap the structure. Abutting the southern face of the wall was a deposit of topsoil and turf (1), up to 0.16m thick, forming the current ground surface.

Pit 2

(Figs 2–3, Plates 7–8)

- 6.3 An identical sequence of deposits to that in Pit 1 was observed in Pit 2. Natural brickearth (4) was seen at the base of the pit, overlain by a subsoil deposit of mid grey-brown silty clay subsoil (3) containing occasional small flint pebble inclusions, up to 0.19m thick. A deposit of very loose, buff coloured coarse mortar containing chalk and flint fragments (2), up to 0.16m thick, lay above, dipping down and petering out to the south. Overlying the mortar deposit were wall remnants of chalk and flint rubble bonded with fine orange-brown mortar (5), only partly revealed because a later deposit (topsoil (1)) was left partially intact.
- 6.4 Built directly upon the earlier wall remains (5) was the boundary wall which stands today (not numbered), as described above. Abutting the southern face of the standing wall was modern topsoil and turf (1), some of which had been left *in situ* against the wall face, so obscuring some of the earlier remains.

7. FINDS

- 7.1 No finds were recovered during the course of the watching brief.

8. CONFIDENCE ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 The archaeological watching brief was continuous during the course of the groundwork and was conducted under good weather conditions. The watching brief is

considered to have satisfactorily determined the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the cut pits.

9. SUMMARY

- 9.1 The archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the cutting of two pits associated with the formation of buttresses designed to strengthen a length of rebuilt boundary wall. The boundary wall is thought to lie along the line of the boundary wall erected in 1320 to border the north precincts of St Augustine's abbey.
- 9.2 The pits were cut to a depth of 1m, revealing natural ground (4). Overlying natural was a deposit of subsoil (3) which displayed no evidence of occupation activity. Above the subsoil was a deposit of loose mortar, chalk and flint (2) which was probably laid as levelling material prior to the construction of a wall. The overlying wall was represented by chalk and flint rubble bonded with orange-brown mortar (5). The remains could have formed part of the original fourteenth-century boundary wall, although they were different to those observed previously during work associated with the insertion of dark fibre cabling in 2012 (Plate 9). The remains revealed in 2012 were offset from the original wall, and more substantial. Those revealed during the current period of work perhaps instead represented a later, post-fourteenth-century, rebuild.
- 9.3 Overlying the wall remains (5) was the current standing boundary wall, probably of early modern date. It was abutted to the south by a modern topsoil and turf horizon.
- 9.4 The watching brief work has demonstrated that the present boundary wall stands upon earlier wall remains.

10. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- 10.1 Thanks are extended to Coombs (Canterbury) Ltd for commissioning and funding the work. The fieldwork was undertaken by Adrian Murphy.

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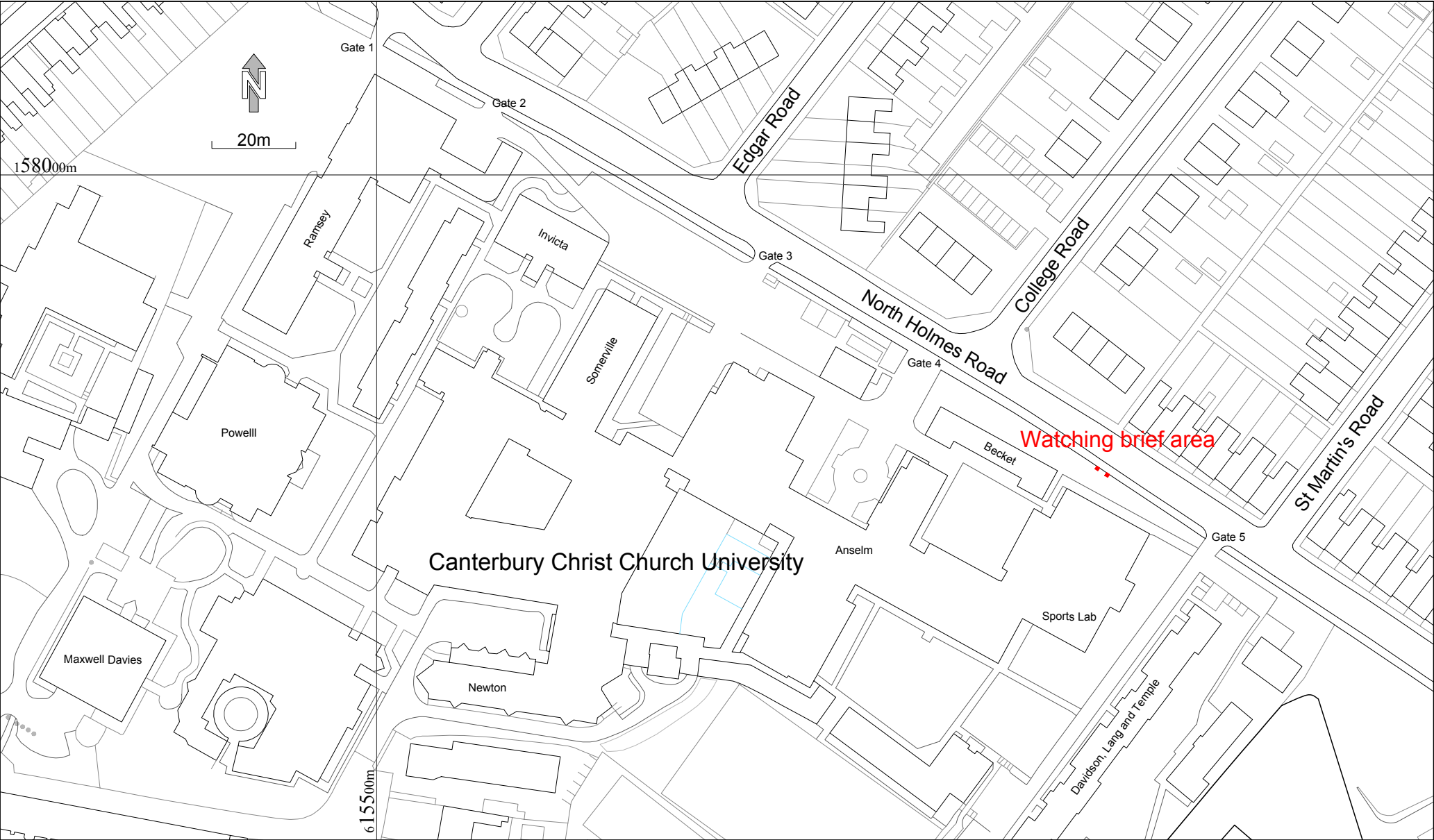
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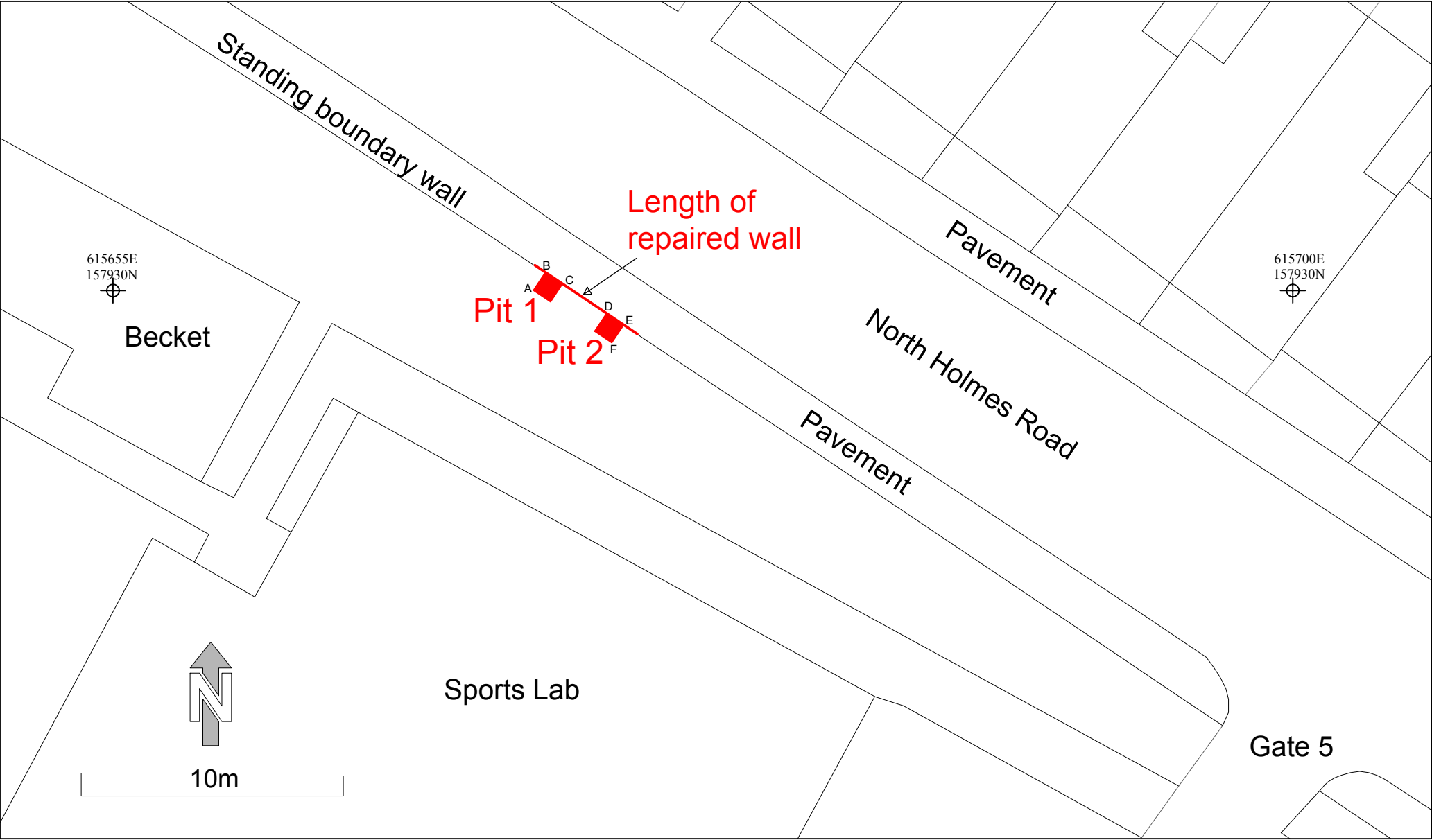
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	PROJECT CODE CCCU-NHRW WB16	REF/DRG NO. CCCU-NHRW WB16 - Figure 1	

Figure 1. Site location plan.

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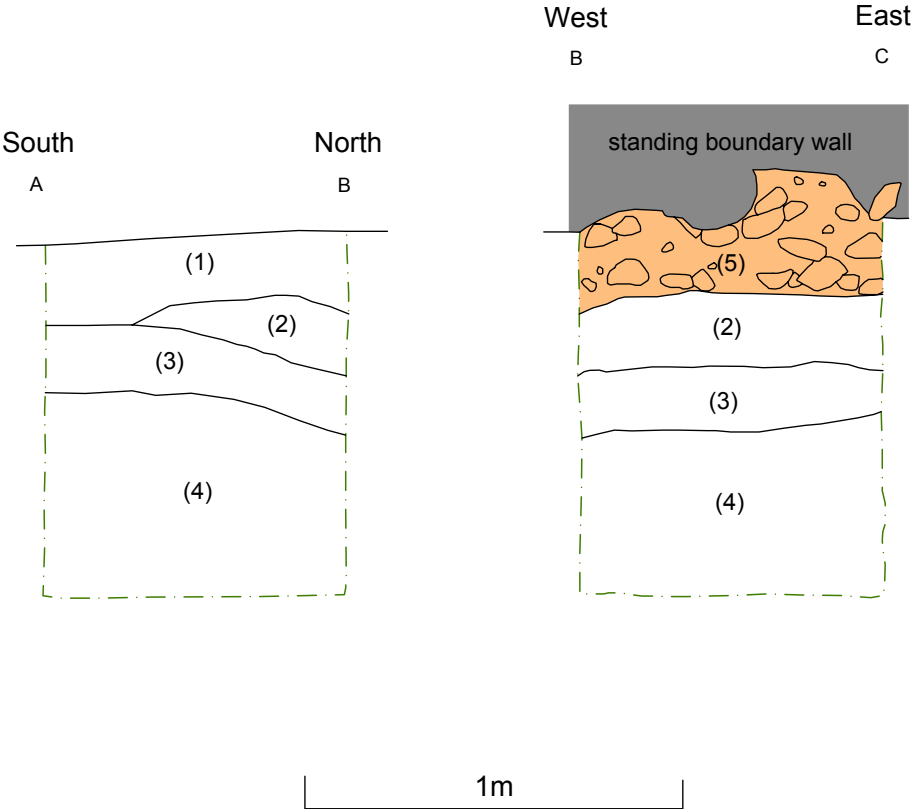


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Figure 2. Pit location plan.

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Pit 1



Pit 2

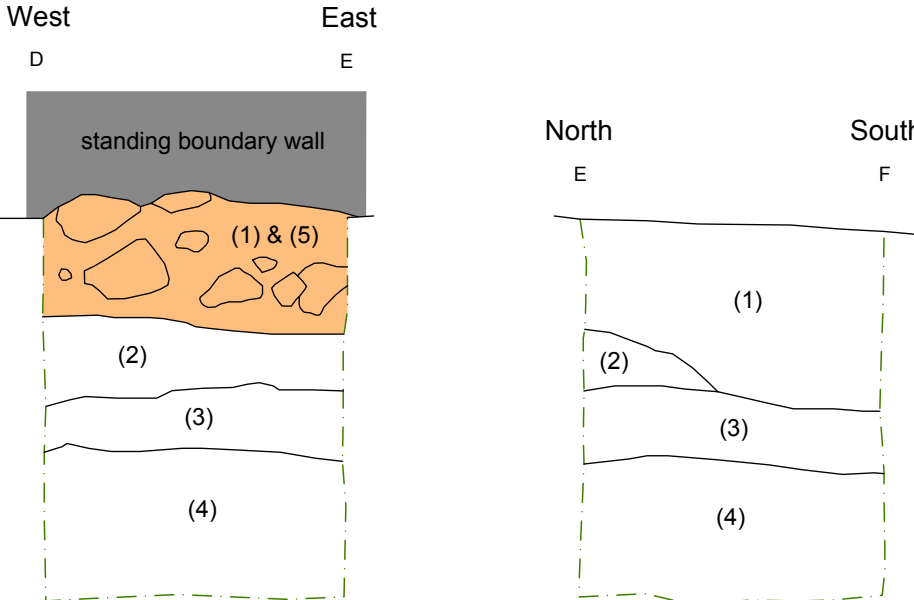


Figure 3. Profile of remains.



Plate 1. The standing boundary wall along North Holmes Road, looking north-east. The south facing of the wall collapsed during recent stormy weather.



Plate 2. The standing boundary wall along North Holmes Road, looking south-west.



Plate 3. Pit 1 during excavation, looking south-east.



Plate 4. Pit 1 after excavation, looking north-east.
Scale 0.5m



Plate 5. Pit 1 looking north-east, showing detail of wall remains lying upon mortar, chalk and flint deposit (2). Scale 0.5m.



Plate 6. Deposits revealed in Pit 1, looking north-west.



Plate 7. Pit 2 looking north-west.



Plate 8. Pit 2 looking north-east showing detail of early wall remains, partly obscured by remnants of deposit (1), overlying mortar, chalk and flint deposit (2). Scale 0.5m.



Plate 9. Early boundary wall next to CCCU Gate 1, lying below the current standing wall, revealed by work associated with the dark fibre scheme in 2012, looking north-east. Scale 1m.