

Cambridge Archaeology Field Group



The Parterre Garden, Wimpole Hall

Cambridgeshire

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ECB 7124

CAFG code WHE2023

Excavation project for the National Trust requested by

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Eastern Region Archaeologist.

July 20th to July 25th 2023



Summary

Excavation on the parterre north of Wimpole Hall of five small trenches by members of CAFG confirmed the position of the red brick walls of Thomas Chicheley's 1650s garden. The walls had been demolished and truncated probably during the construction of gardens for Lord Radnor in the 1690s. A deeper, earlier, feature was excavated in the south west corner of the parterre the fill of which contained 17thc pottery, oyster shell, bones and ceramic roof tiles. The latter was perhaps from demolition of the earlier moated manor house.

This report is DRAFT with hand drawing of plans and sections, none of the finds have been submitted to experts. It is expected that further work in 2024 will increase the nature of the evidence for the gardens and earlier activity on the area of the parterre.

Contents

Acknowledgements

The committee and members of Cambridge Archaeology Field Group are very grateful for the permission and support given by the National Trust for this excavation. Especially we thank Angus Wainwright, NT Regional Archaeologist, for his encouragement and advice. From Wimpole we thank Tom Fradd, Head Gardener, for facilitating access and Sophie Newton and Hilary Wilson for providing support for which we are very grateful.

The committee is also very grateful for all those CAFG members and National Trust volunteers who put in so many working hours during and after the excavation.

Introduction

In 1638 Thomas Chicheley, then owner of Wimpole Hall, commissioned a map of his estate from Benjamin Hare. This is the first detailed map of the landscape at Wimpole. Shortly after this he commenced building his new house, a red brick double pile innovative plan with parallel ranges connected by a block containing two staircases, a new design for a rural mansion. This forms the core, central part, of the current Hall. At the same time, he reorganised the use of the Wimpole landscape from a typical medieval pattern of furlong strips and small hamlets into an estate of seven farms each of about 120 acres. With the coming of the Civil War Thomas suffered under the Commonwealth administration, being a royalist supporter, but presumably paid his fines and regained his property. There are no records of how he designed the area around his new house but he must have demolished the moated manor house shown on the Hare map and filled in the moat.



Figure 1 Part Hare 1638 – north to top

After the restoration of Charles II in 1661, Thomas was in favour with the crown and gained a knighthood but by 1686 his financial position had deteriorated and he was forced to sell to Sir John Cutler. Sir John's daughter inherited the property in 1693 by which time she had married Charles Robartes, Earl of Radnor. Radnor further enlarged the house and garden, including redesigning the garden with a large fountain. Records show he spent upwards of £20,000, a lot of money at that time.

The next representation of Wimpole Hall is an engraving, by Kip and Kniff, published in 1707 which reflects the massive changes either made or planned by the new owner Lord Radnor. Further evidence of what Radnor had built may be shown in the 1721 plan by Charles Bridgeman. It seems all evidence of Chicheley's garden were erased and there are no extant records of what it had looked like.

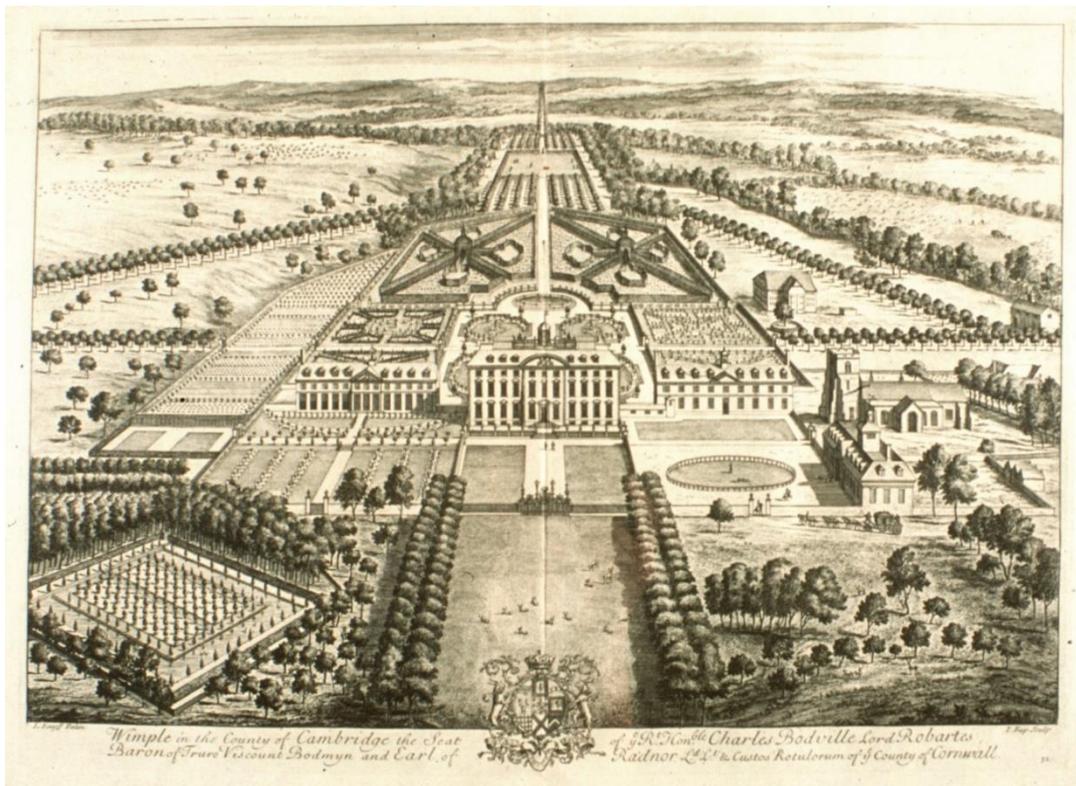


Figure 2 Kip and Knyff 1707

The drawing above, by Kip and Knyff in 1707 shows a large formal garden to the north of the house in the centre of which is a fountain long since removed in later re-designs of the gardens and the Park. It seems most likely that Philip Yorke, the owner in the 1740's, demolished the fountain. Within the area immediately behind the house are four features of apparent sub-circular shape. The survey by Charles Bridgeman in 1721 shows these as rectangles with apsidal ends north and south.

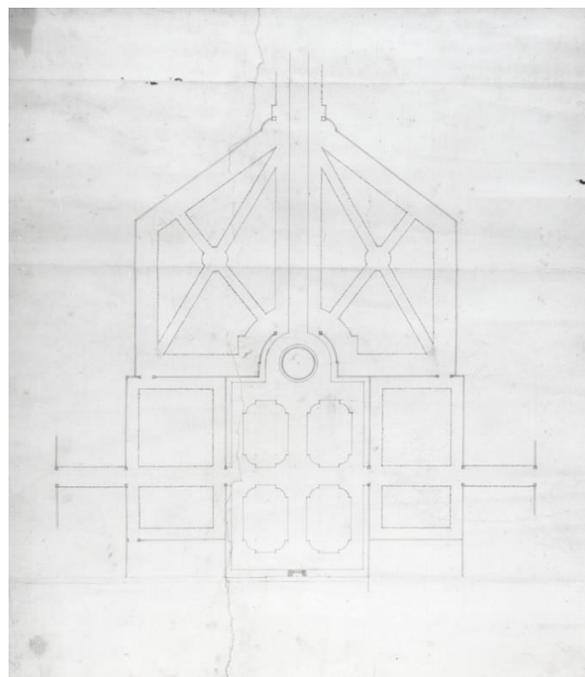


Figure 3 Charles Bridgeman Survey of the garden 1721

It is these phases of change that are represented in the excavations undertaken by Cambridge Archaeology Field Group (CAFG) both in this work of 2023 and in previous years in the Park just

north of the present garden boundary. The invasion of box blight in the hedges of the current parterre plus the cost of maintaining the hedges and beds has caused the National Trust to reconsider the design of this area.

Three main objectives were identified for 2023, first to trace the walls of Thomas Chicheley's garden, some evidence for which had been found in the Park (see below); secondly to look for evidence of the moat or medieval manor house and thirdly to establish the depth of top soil over intact archaeology. The last was to guide the new landscaping of the parterre area.

Previous archaeological excavations

Previous archaeological excavation by CAFG (unpublished) in the area of the Park immediately north of the parterre garden produced evidence of an extensive series of garden walls and the wall of the large fountain created for Lord Radnor.

Trenches were excavated each year from 2005 to 2009, for a week in July, the location of these trenches being guided by the results of a previous magnetometry survey done in 2004-2006 by Peter Morris, one-time CAFG member.

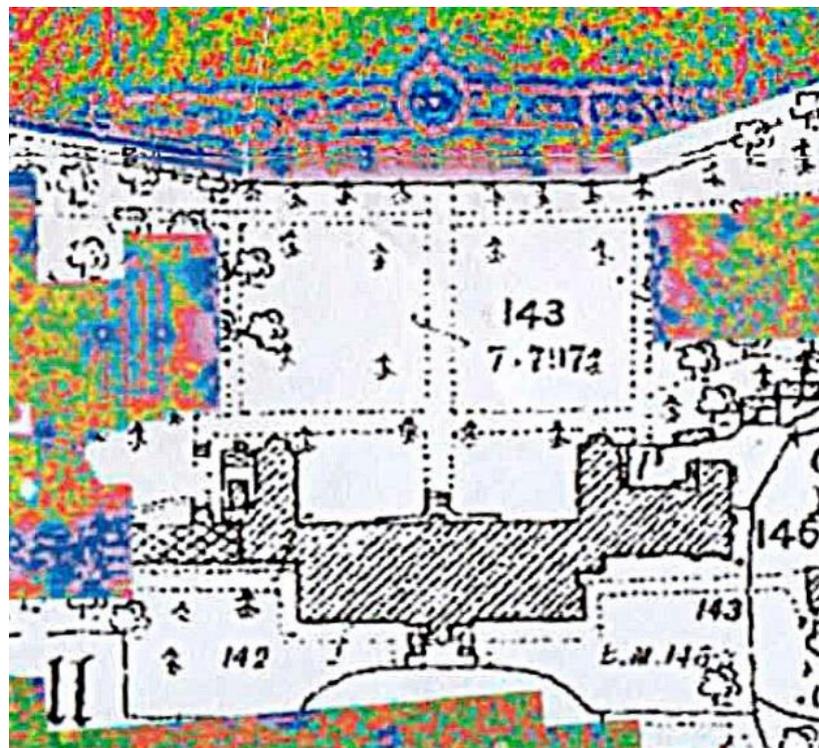


Figure 4 Magnetometry survey by Peter Morris for CAFG

The features, pink colours, seen north of the current parterre garden wall show a circular structure which excavation has shown to be the brick base of the fountain installed for Lord Radnor in the 1690s. This had clearly cut through and demolished the earlier walls of what is believed to be Thomas Chicheley's garden. The illustration below shows the features recovered in the trial trenches excavated 2005 to 2009. Red colours are the walls of Thomas Chicheley's garden and green the fountain installed for Lord Radnor with its associated drain going west and then south. Blue is the drain modification installed when the fountain was demolished and brown are features containing only medieval pottery.

The illustration above shows the features recovered in the trial trenches excavated 2005 to 2009. Red colours are the walls of Thomas Chicheley's garden and green the fountain installed for Lord Radnor with its associated drain going west and then south. Blue is the drain modification installed when the fountain was demolished and brown are features containing only medieval pottery.

The position of all these trenches was established in relation to a north/south base line running from the centre of the central doors on the north side of the Hall through the metal stop of the gates from the parterre to the Park. This axis would seem to have been used from the time of Chicheley's buildings to the present time. Two sections of the walls from Chicheley's garden clearly ran south into the parterre garden, one was 30m west of the central base line and the other 30m east of that line. It may be relevant that 30.5m equals 100 feet. The western wall was a very substantial structure c0.75m wide with a deep foundation whereas the eastern wall was a relatively shallow structure of a brick and a half wide.

A trial trench was excavated by CAFG in 2001 in the Park, 44.5m north of the central stop of the garden gate on the axial line. Within this trench a c 6m wide ditch was found at 48.5m on the axis, the ditch tended from north west to south east. It contained exclusively medieval pottery. This is likely to be the arm of the moat shown on Hare's map of 1638.

An attempt has been made to position the image from the Hare map overlying a LiDAR image.



Figure 6 Hare map overlying LiDAR image

This plot suggests the moat of the manor house may be under the western part of the parterre. The position of the arm of the moat that extends into the Park, as shown above, suggests that in order for the part seen on the centre axis in the 2001 trench to correspond then the whole of the moat complex should be moved a few meters to the west.

Method

A 10m square grid was laid out across the whole of the parterre and part of the lawn to the west. Starting from a point 50m south of the metal stop of the garden gate (thus making the metal stop 170/150 and this latter point 170/100) a base peg was placed 70m west of the central north south line described above. The position of this peg was labelled 100east/100north, ie. the zero/zero point of the grid.

Each of the five 3m by 2m trenches was then placed in this grid as shown below. The grid references are the measured corners at the commencement of excavation. As excavation continued some trenches did not maintain vertical sides so will be slightly smaller at the plan level. Each trench has a drawn plan and in some all four sections were drawn.

Site code	Trench No.	Site grid references			
		SW corner	SE corner	NE corner	NW corner
WHE2023	2000	197/105	200/105	Extended see below	197/107
WHE2023	2000 Extension		201/106	201/107	
WHE2023	3000	199/135	202/135	202/137	199/137
WHE2023	4000	138/135	141/135	141/137	138/137
WHE2023	5000	138/105	141/105	141/107	138/107
WHE2023	6000	155/116	157/116	157/119	155/119
WHE2023	7000	Just south of 4000 but discontinued			

The trenches were laid out over the parterres after the removal of box hedging. Parts of trenches were cut into grass and part into the garden beds – these were treated as separate contexts in case the horticultural digging had been different under or in these surfaces. In the event not difference of an archaeological nature were observed.

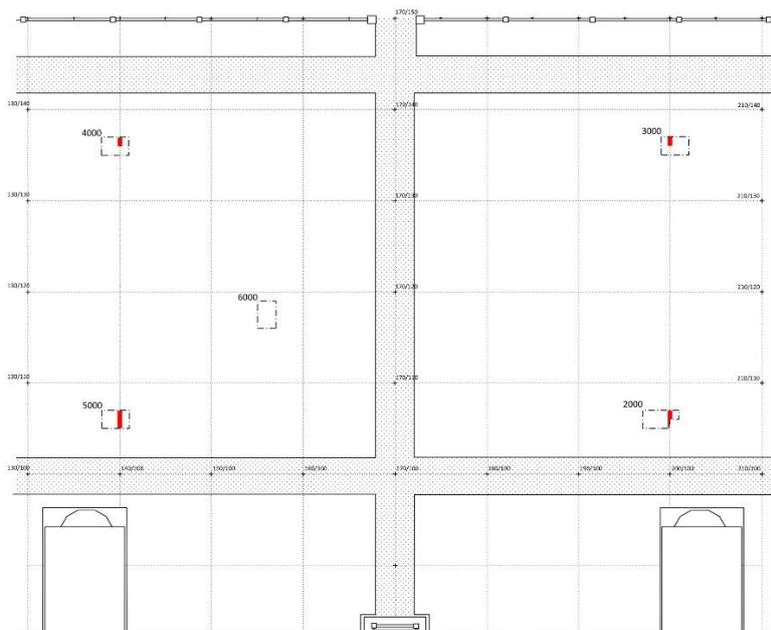


Figure 7 Plan of trench positions 2023

All excavation was done by hand, mainly with a trowel, with a team of 3 to 4 people working in each trench. Excavators were both members of CAFG and National Trust volunteers who have been working on the Wimpole HART scheme – a scheme to record the state of field monuments on the estate. The excavator’s level of experience was very varied but at least one member of each team had suitable previous practice. Recording was by the method normally used by CAFG – each layer, fill, cut and structure was given a context number and described on a standard context sheet. The context numbers were constructed from the Trench number – the first context in Trench 2000 was therefore numbered 2001 second context 2002. A ring binder was supplied to each trench with a supply of blank forms. Each trench will be described individually and this will be followed by an interpretive section.

Results

Trench 2000

The trench was laid out with the south west corner at 197/105 and south east corner at 200/105 – it became apparent, with excavation of trench 3000, that the possible line of the wall of Thomas Chicheley's garden would be under the eastern side of the trench 2000. The trench was extended to the east to 201/106 and 201/107, a further 1m.

The turf and garden soil contexts [2001] and [2002] were removed across the trench along with [2003] to a depth of c0.3m. Below these contexts was a significant depth of a grey clay with some brick and stone [2004] - only in the south west corner was it cut [2018] by a deposit of a hard yellowish silty and sandy context [2005] and [2006].

Sealed below [2004] at c0.5m depth, in the south east corner of the trench was brown, silty clay with a little brick rubble [2007], possibly an earlier flower bed soil. The orientation of this context was not aligned with later or earlier features being to the east of a cut running south west to north east (198.2/105 to 200/107. Removal of [2007] revealed a layer of brick and mortar rubble part of the same deposit as [2008], which extended westward across the width of the trench to 198.2/105.

At this point a decision was made to extend the trench in the north east by 1.0m square as defined above. The further excavation of this square and [2008] allowed the further tracing of the possible earlier flower bed [2013/17] and exposure of the residual evidence of the Chicheley garden wall – an undisturbed clay base with a few bricks [2020] still in place. This had been sealed with a thin layer of grey clay with [2009] above.

At the western end of the trench and west of the brick and mortar rubble [2008] was a difficult to define grey clay layer with some brick and mortar rubble [2009], likely to be further remains of demolition. Further to the west again was a relatively clean layer of light grey clay [2014], with a further very thin layer of brick rubble in the north west corner [2010]. Also present was a yellow fine gravel against the western end of the trench [2005], together with an apparently sub-circular feature [2018] containing brown soil [2006], first seen when [2004] was exposed

This trench did show the north south line of Thomas Chicheley's garden wall on the 200 grid line. It consisted of a platform of grey clay, probably the top of natural, on which a few bricks were still present but otherwise the structure had been demolished. After its demolition there seems to have been a cultivation bed, with edge tending south west to north east over the wall. The gravel contexts at the western end of the trench did not seem to be related to other alignments but only a small area was exposed. The whole trench contained a significant layer [2004] of about 0.3m thickness sealing the wall and raising the ground level.



Figure 8 Trench 2000 west facing face



Figure 9 Trench 2000 North facing and south facing faces

Trench 3000

As with trench 2000 this trench, 3000, was positioned on the expected line of the eastern, north south, wall of Thomas Chicheley's garden. The southwest corner of the trench at 199/135, extending 3m east and 2 m north.

The 3x2m trench was laid out across both turf path [3005] [3006] and parterre top soil [3001] [3002]– these were removed separately. Below these layers was a grey brown silty layer with some brick rubble [3007] [3008] and [3009]. Below [3007] was a firm grey silty clay [3013] and below [3008] a similar grey silty clay [3014]. All these layers below the top soil and turf are probably material brought in to level up the site after demolition of the underlying wall and rubble.

In the north east corner under [3009] was a single layer of cobbling [3012] which extended 0.6m south and 0.78m west – possibly the base of a garden feature post-dating the demolition of the wall of Chicheley's garden. Underlying [3012] was a number of stacked ceramic tiles [3020]. The area to the south and west of this with [3022] and [3021] seemed not to have been disturbed by Chicheley's wall but it was not clear if the wall foundation cut or was cut by the grey clay of [3022].

Removal of [3013] and [3014] exposed an area of brick rubble in the north western part of the trench [3016] and on its southern edge it had been cut by a curving feature [3017] containing [3019], rubble and domestic waste over [3018], clay packing.

Beneath the rubble of [3016] was level platform [3023] of grey clay approximately 0.9m wide running north south but also cut by the curved feature [3017]. This platform would appear to be the base for Chicheley's garden wall.

The feature that cut through the line of the demolished Chicheley wall [3017] seems to be partly sealed with a grey clay [3024], with cut [3026] containing soil and brick [3025], [3027] below. These cuts and fill must post date the Chicheley wall and may belong to the re-design for Lord Radnor in the 1690s.



Figure 12 Trench 3000 vertical



Figure 13 Trench 3000 east facing section



Figure 14 Trench 3000 north facing section

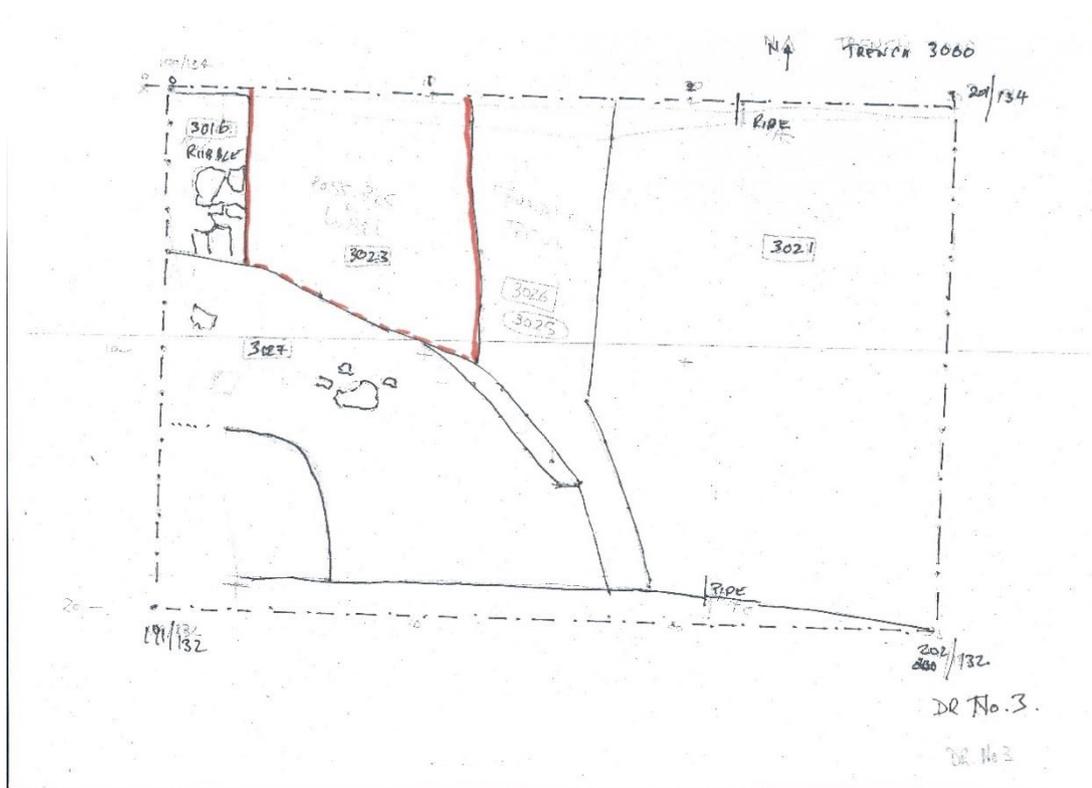


Figure 15 Trench 3000 plan draft

Trench 4000

This 3x2m trench laid out with the south west corner at 138/135 was positioned to straddle the expected line of the north south western wall of Thomas Chicheley's garden. This red brick wall was observed in 2008 in trenches G08 and I08 and seems to align with the north west corner of the Library.

Contexts [4001] and [4002] consisted of turf and top soil and when removed exposed [4004] a layer of grey clayey soil with broken brick and tile. Removal of [4004] exposed the top of a structure – a red brick wall [4005] running north south in the expected position for Chicheley's garden wall. The brick wall [4005] had what appeared to be a foundation trench [4008] over [4011] on its western side, and to the west of this was context [4007], a grey clay which was not further excavated – the black plastic water irrigation pipe passed through this context. An augur hole through [4007] showed a total depth from the ground surface of 0.83m with a thin layer of possible charcoal/cinder on top of the natural grey clay at that depth. To the east of the wall and partly overlaying the brick context [4006], grey clay with yellow mortar sealed context [4010] a layer of light brown soil with significant amounts of broken red brick. Below [4010] on the north was a flat area of grey [4013] probably natural clay [4013] which may originally have had an east west wall on it as there seemed to be a truncated end on the east side of the north south wall [4005]. The western face of the red brick wall [4005] had been finished and pointed with a small step outward 0.5m below the current ground surface – suggesting that the ground surface had been 0.5m lower than at present.

The brick wall [4005] had been cut by a curving feature down to 0.8m from the current surface but below this the foundation of the north south wall continued in a southerly direction as a mortar spread [4012]. This cut over and to the east of the wall line contained fills [4009/11], perhaps belonging to the alterations made for Lord Radnor in the 1690s.



Figure 18 Trench 4000 south facing section



Figure 19 Trench 4000 north facing section



Figure 20 Trench 4000 west facing section

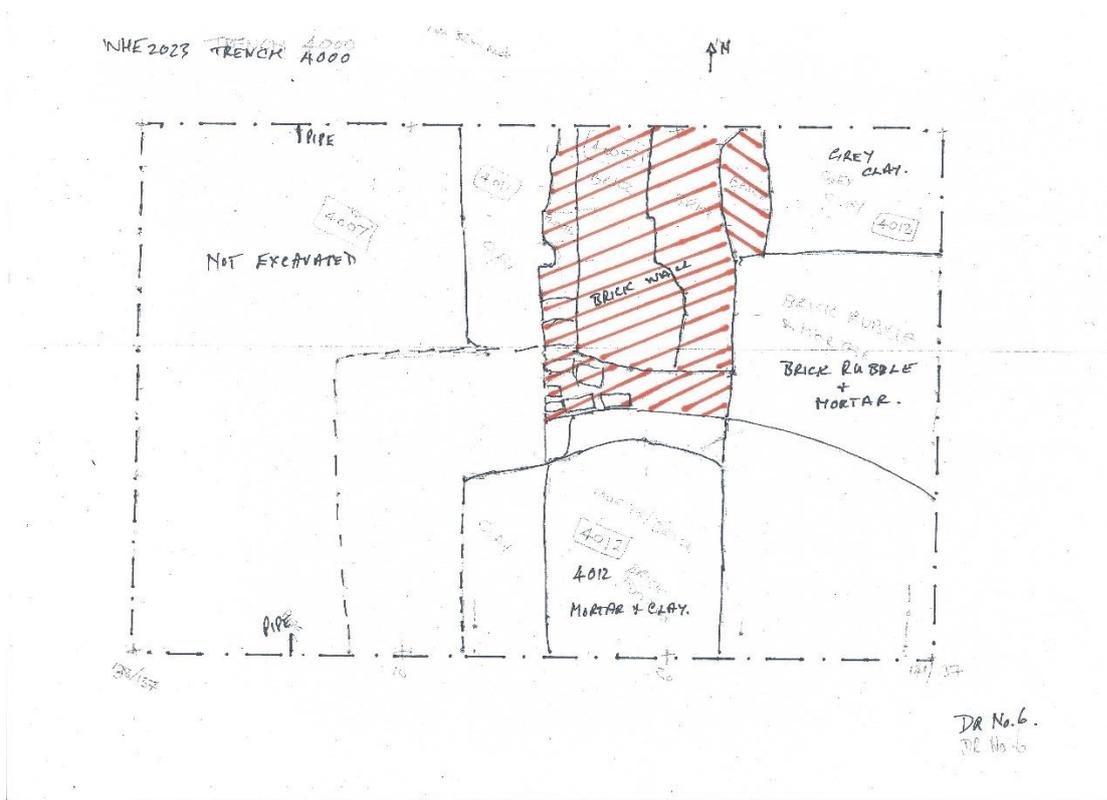


Figure 21 Trench 4000 plan draft

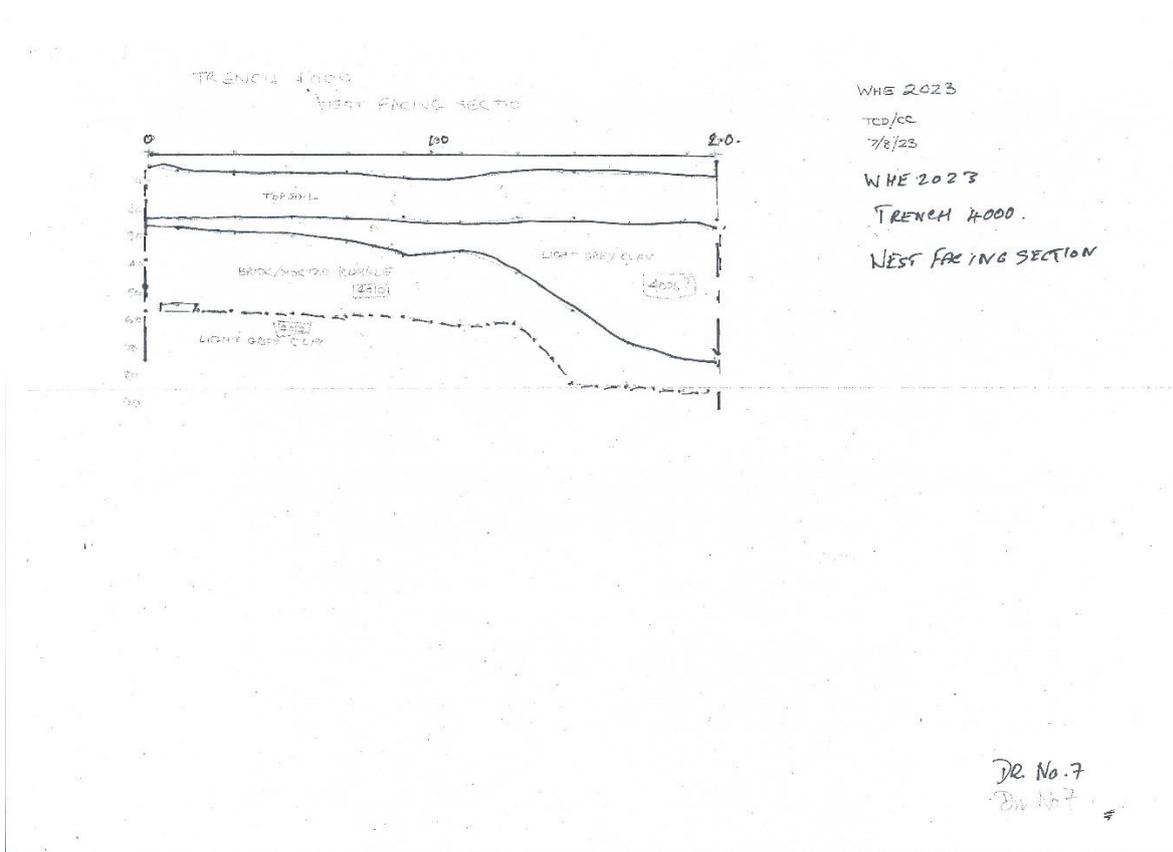


Figure 22 Trench 4000 west facing section draft

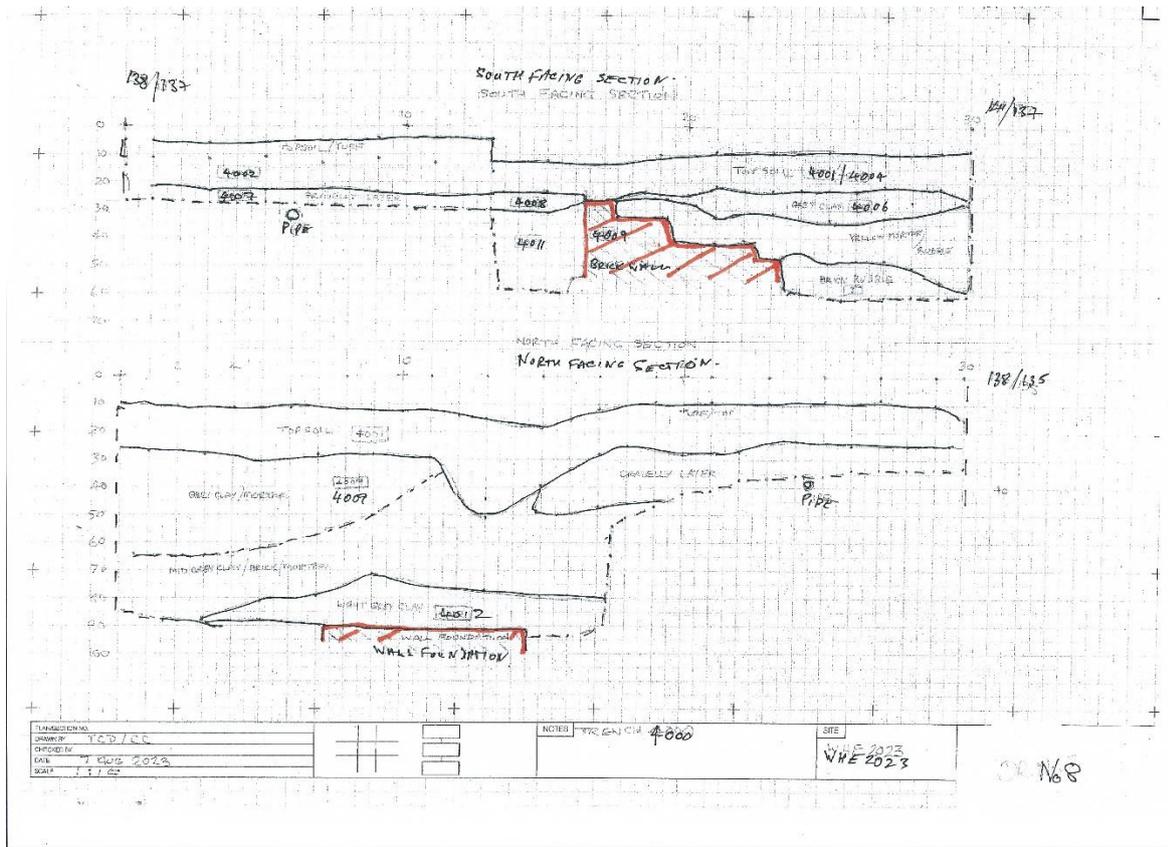


Figure 23 Trench 4000 north and south facing sections draft

Trench 5000

As with trench 4000, 5000 was aligned to straddle the western north south wall of Chicheley’s garden. The south west corner of the 3x2m trench was at 138/105.

As in other trenches the turf and top soil were removed, [5001] and [5003], to expose [5004] a layer of soil, grey clay and brick fragments. Below this layer [5005] showed brick rubble and mortar on the eastern side getting wider to the north and a further compacted area of mortar in the north west corner, with further brick and tile underneath [2008]; the remainder of the layer being a grey/blue clay. Removal of this layer exposed the top of a red brick wall [5007], with a dark soil [5006] to the west. Removal of the layer over the wall showed it to be 0.84m wide with a grey clay to the east. Below [5006] was a layer of brown clayey soil with some brick and mortar fragments [5007]. In both the north east and north west corners areas of about 1x1m and 0.8x1m were left unexcavated to provide access into the trench. Below [5009] in the south west corner, the contents of what might be the moat or pit were excavated [5010]. This latter sloped west with a fill of dark black soil containing pottery, bone, oyster shell and tile.



Figure 24 Trench 5000 east facing section



Figure 25 Trench 5000 north facing section

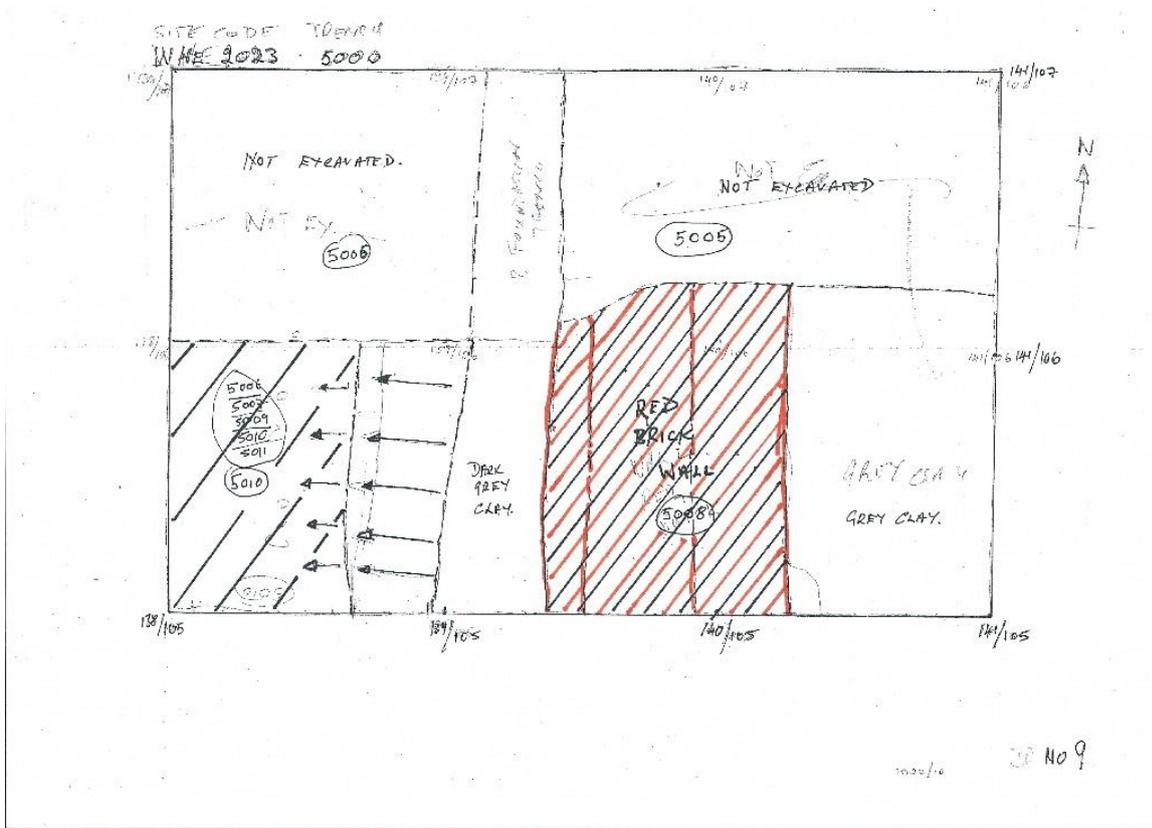


Figure 26 Trench 5000 plan draft

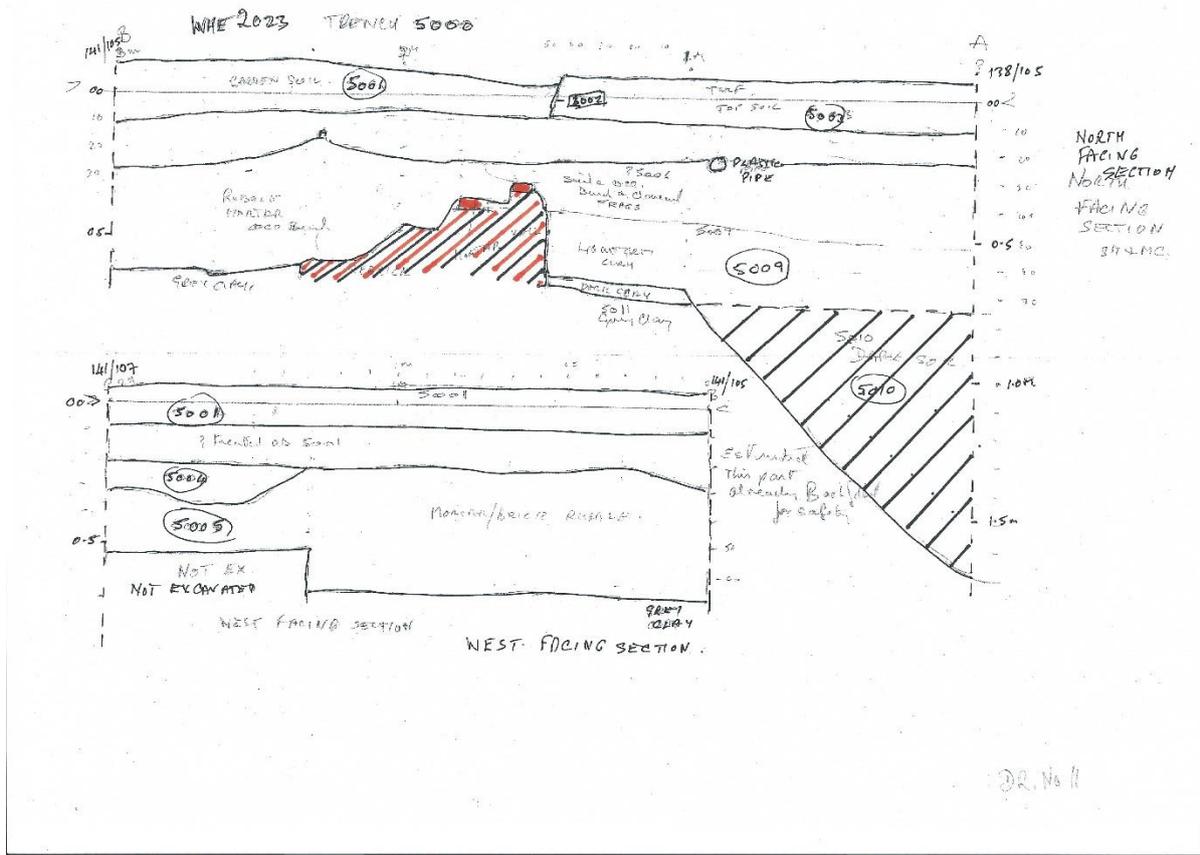


Figure 27 Trench 5000 north and west facing sections draft

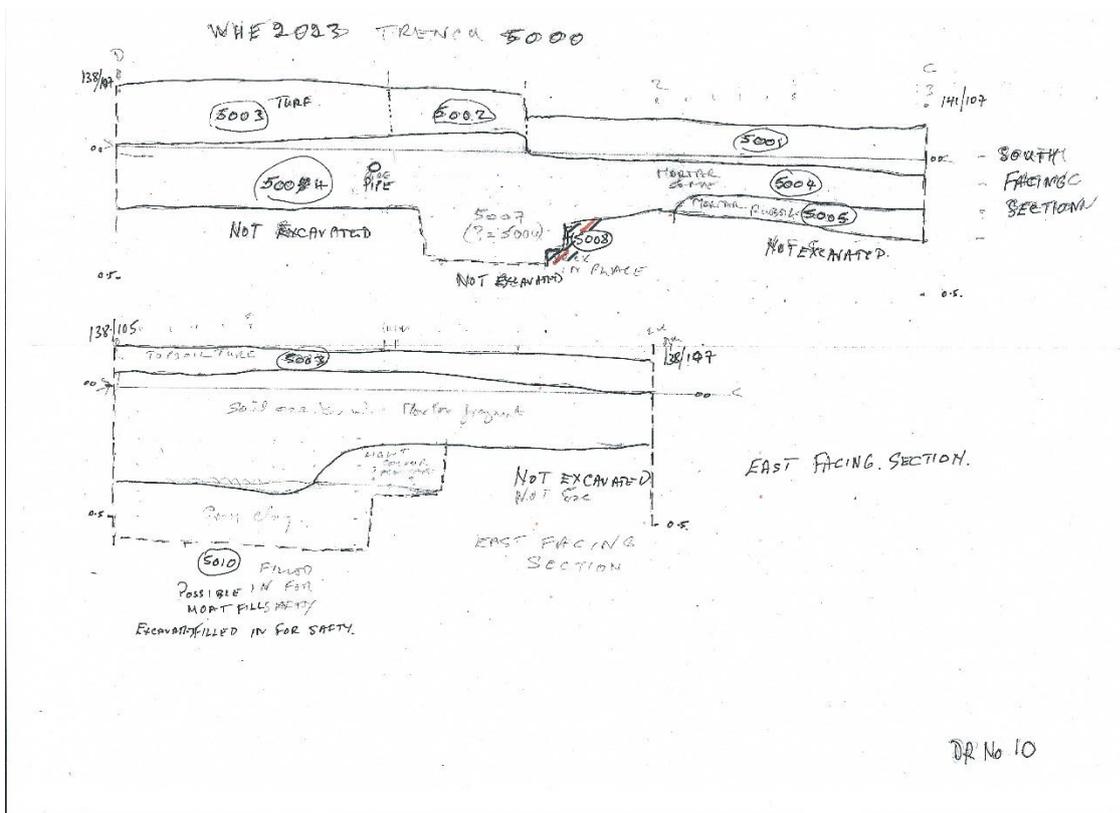


Figure 28 Trench 5000 south and east facing sections draft

Trench 6000

Trench 6000 was placed near the middle of the parterre (south west corner at 155/116) to test the disturbed soil depth. In the event it had a brick-built drain running east west across it.

The top soil [6001] was removed and the underlying layers were excavated down to a depth of c0.3m where the top of the red brick drain was exposed [6007]. Constructed of bricks of 18thc date the drain had no mortar but was well built with vertical sides of three bricks and bricks on edge for the top. An augur hole in the south west corner found dark grey clay with a more yellow clay below at 0.96m – probably all part of the natural geology.



Figure 29 Trench 6000 north facing plan/section daft

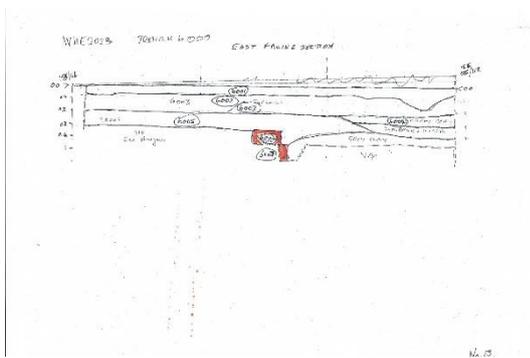


Figure 30 east facing section draft

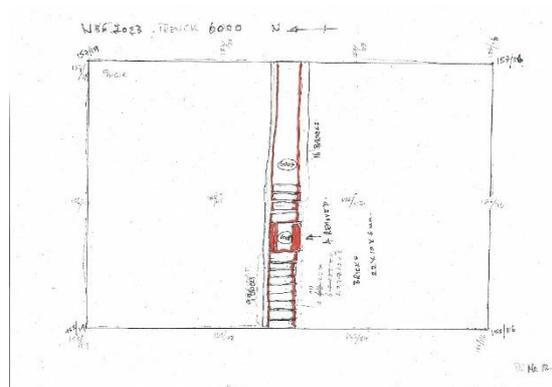


Figure 31 Trench 6000 plan draft

Interpretation

Trenches 2000, 3000, 4000 and 5000 all had evidence of the red brick walls thought to be part of the garden belonging to Thomas Chicheley's building of the Hall in the 1640s. The results of CAFG geophysics shown in Figure 4 above plus the evidence of the brick walls in previous excavations in the Park (Figure 5) had shown north south walls entering the parterre garden. The evidence from the 2023 trenches has shown that these walls do extend under the parterre. There is symmetry to the walls in that they are 30.3m (100ft) either side of the centre line through the Hall and the gate stop used in laying out the excavation grid. In addition, the walls appear to align on the north west side of the eastern wing and the north east side of the library wing. As neither wing would have been present when Thomas Chicheley built his house it is possible that the wall or buildings could be present under the current north projecting wings. The eastern wall seen in trenches 2000 and 3000 had been destroyed down to its base but the western walls in trenches 4000 and 5000 still had substantial brickwork in place. The brickwork in these is c 0.9m wide suggesting a wall of some height. The part of the wall seen in trench 4000 had been finished and pointed on its western side, but not on its east, in addition there appeared to be a clay base of a possible wall going east.

The evidence for Chicheley's wall in the two northern trenches, 3000 and 4000, showed clear evidence of truncation by a later feature. The Chicheley walls were cut by curving features which



Figure 32 Trench CEF09 year 2009

may relate to the garden as recorded by Charles Bridgeman in a drawing of 1721 (Figure 3). In his drawing the position of the circular fountain basin installed for Lord Radnor is shown and to the south are four possible 'plats' or garden beds. On each side are probable north south walls which are interrupted by the east west avenue or vista. It is possible these walls were still those built by Chicheley in which case the garden beds cannot be the features cutting Chicheley's walls seen in the 2023 excavation – perhaps geophysics could help clarify the sequence?

The drain seen in trench 6000 may be one of a pair running either side of an east west avenue or vista but a brief trial did not locate another drain. This drain was very similar in construction to one excavated in the Park in 2009 (Figure 32).

Trench 5000, in addition to the brick walls of Chicheley's garden, also produced evidence of a deeper fill [5010] to the west of the wall and seemingly predating the construction of the wall. The fill of this feature contained a large quantity of bone (draft report awaited), shell (oyster) and ceramic roof tile, with one piece of a glazed floor tile along with pottery some of 16/17th century date. This feature could be interpreted as the edge of the moat shown on the Hare map of 1638. With only a short section exposed it is not possible to be sure as to where on Hare's map this is – the figure below is a possible solution but it would be expected that the apparent gate house on the moat would line up with the roadway north of the church. Later geophysics and attempts at overlaying the Hare moat

over the current landscape have not resolved this question. Further excavating in July 2024 will be, in part, directed at this issue.

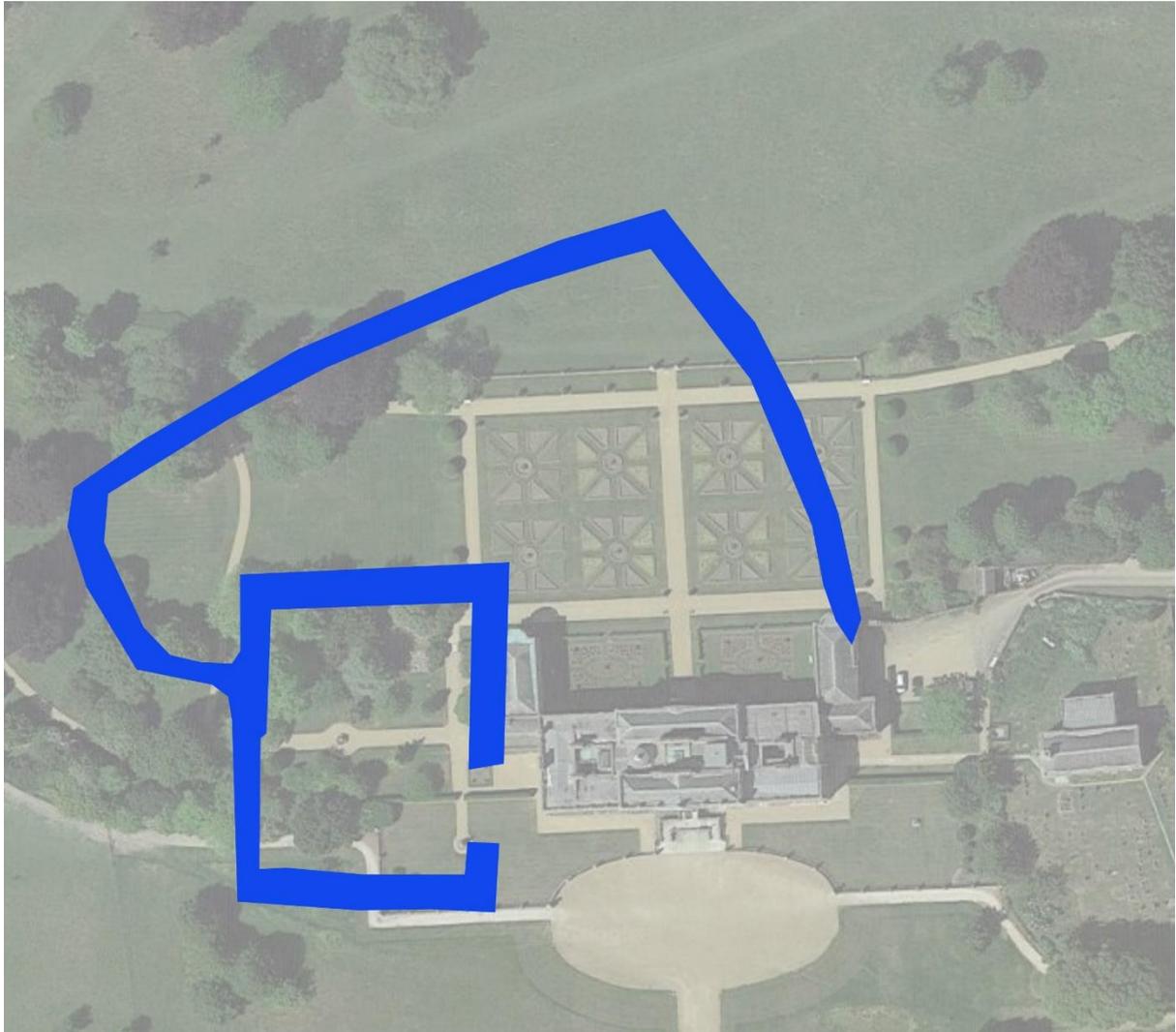


Figure 33 Hare map over current landscape

Finds

Prior to any excavation all areas of the parterre where there was bare soil were walked to recover any artefacts. Each flower bed had an OS grid reference determined. Of the 37 areas examined 31 had some fragments or larger pieces of brick, 12 contained pieces of bone, 31 contained sherds of plant pots and 21 had between 1 and 5 sherds of domestic pottery – some medieval some post-medieval. One struck flint was recovered. These finds, widespread across the parterre, would seem to represent the accumulated debris of garden activities.

Trench 2000

The contexts above [2004] contained many sherds of red plant pots, context [2004] which sealed the slight feature of the wall had one sherd of earlier glazed red earthenware. The contexts below were largely free of 19/20th century pot but most contained brick, tile, glass with some bones and metal.

Trenches 3000 and 4000

Most contexts contained pottery, both plant pots and some medieval sherds, plus bone, shell coal, brick and tile. There was no clear datable division in the stratigraphy.

Trench 5000

The finds from contexts [5001] to [5007] were similar in range to those found in the three trenches described above. Contexts [5009], a brownish clay, and especially [5010], a dark clayey soil contained considerable amount of medieval and early modern pottery along with ceramic tiles, bivalve shells and bones cow, sheep, pig, fish and birds.



