

Non-Indigenous Archaeological Testing Results

Combewood, North Penrith



Report to
Landcom

October 2012

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Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

A building site within the old Combewood property was archaeologically tested to determine if there was evidence that it was a stable or whether it predated Combewood house.

RESULTS

The results of the archaeological investigation combined with evidence from the current owner of Combewood indicate that the building was a stable constructed at the same time as the main house c1890. There is no evidence that it predates Combewood house. Apart from the brick footings, sections of which have been removed previously, no deposits of artefacts relating to the use of the building were found. Apart from the brick footings, the site is regarded as having a low level of research potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Due to the site's limited research potential, no further archaeological testing is regarded as being necessary.
2. As the site will be impacted by the proposed wetlands and will be removed, the bricks should be offered to the owners of Combewood.
3. The removal of the brickwork should be carried out under archaeological supervision to record any additional aspect of the building's layout or use.

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Non-Indigenous Archaeological Testing Results Combewood, North Penrith

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

Casey & Lowe Pty Ltd prepared an archaeological assessment of the North Penrith lands examining the potential for historic-period remains.¹ The archaeological assessment identified two late nineteenth-century properties within the development area – Combewood and Thornton Hall.

The project area is being developed in stages and has been listed as a State Significant Site. Landcom is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement for a Development Application to facilitate Infrastructure and Subdivision, including site preparation and roads. The site at the rear of Combewood is located in an area that will be landscaped into wetlands. Combewood to the north is listed by the National Trust, and the house and property is a heritage item on the Penrith LEP 1991. This property which is accessed via Coreen Avenue is outside the North Penrith lands area. The stables site is within the North Penrith lands development area and is owned by Landcom.

Testing was undertaken at Combewood on 10 October, 2012. During this testing three trenches were excavated by machine in the vicinity of brick footings believed to belong to a late 19th-century stables and coach house to the rear of the main house (Fig. 1.1, 1.2). The testing confirmed the existence of brick foundations, although no significant artefactual resource was found. Sections of the site were found to have been severely impacted upon, with brick footings removed and foundations exposed by informal archaeological investigations (believed to have been undertaken by a local historical society), both recently and in the past. There was also the possibility that a metal detector had been used on the site, as small potholes had been dug within and around the foundations.

1.2 Combewood

The site in question is located to the south of the extant 1890s Combewood house and is believed to contain the remains of a stables building. Recent disturbance of the site had revealed substantial brick footings (Fig. 1.5 – Fig. 1.8). These remains were not visible when the site was assessed in 2010 although some loose bricks had been noticed. The bricks are handmade sandstock bricks with a diamond frog (i.e. typically nineteenth century in date) and the alignment of the footings are of a rectangular building as seen in the 1943 aerial photograph (Fig. 1.2). It is believed that the remains have been exposed as part of a local historical society's training program. The site will be impacted by the development of a wetland in the area to the south of Combewood (Fig. 1.3).

¹ Casey & Lowe Pty Ltd, *North Penrith Lands, Non-Indigenous Archaeology, Assessment Report*, Report prepared for Landcom, October 2010.



Figure 1.1: Location of the site circled in red. Source: Google maps.

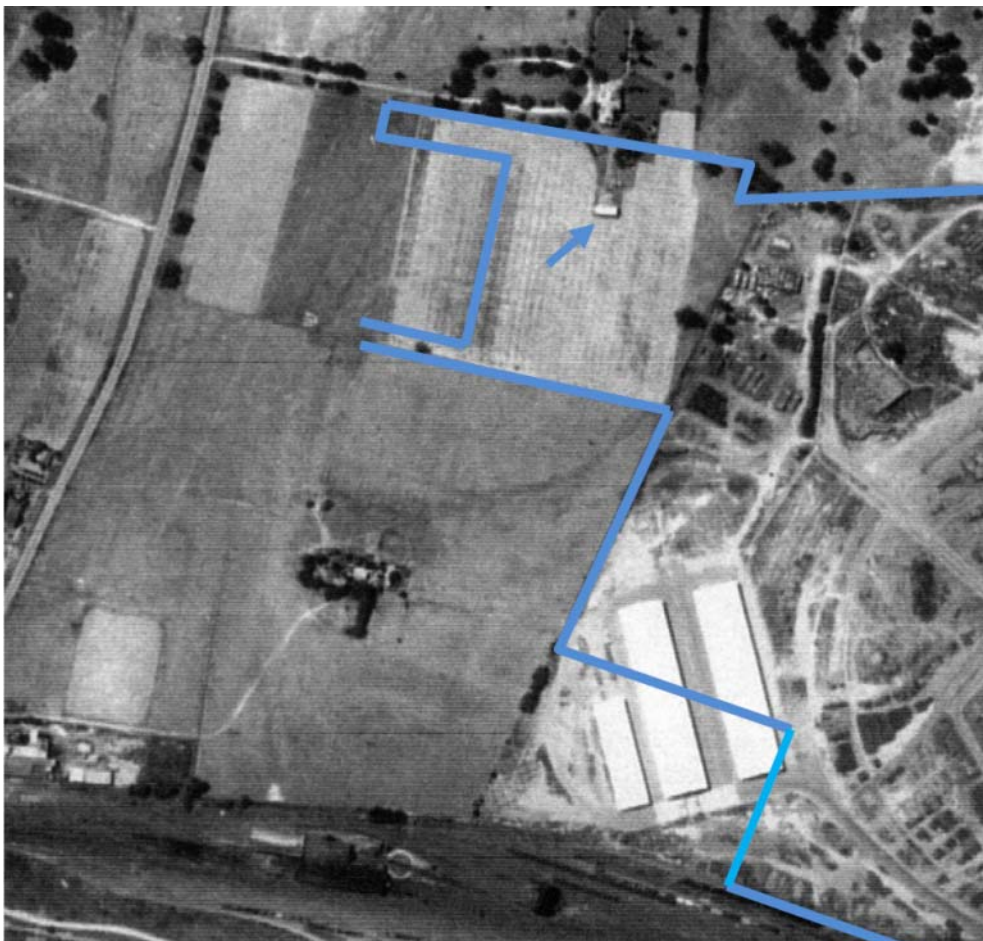


Figure 1.2: Detail of 1943 aerial photograph showing the location of the brick building (arrowed).

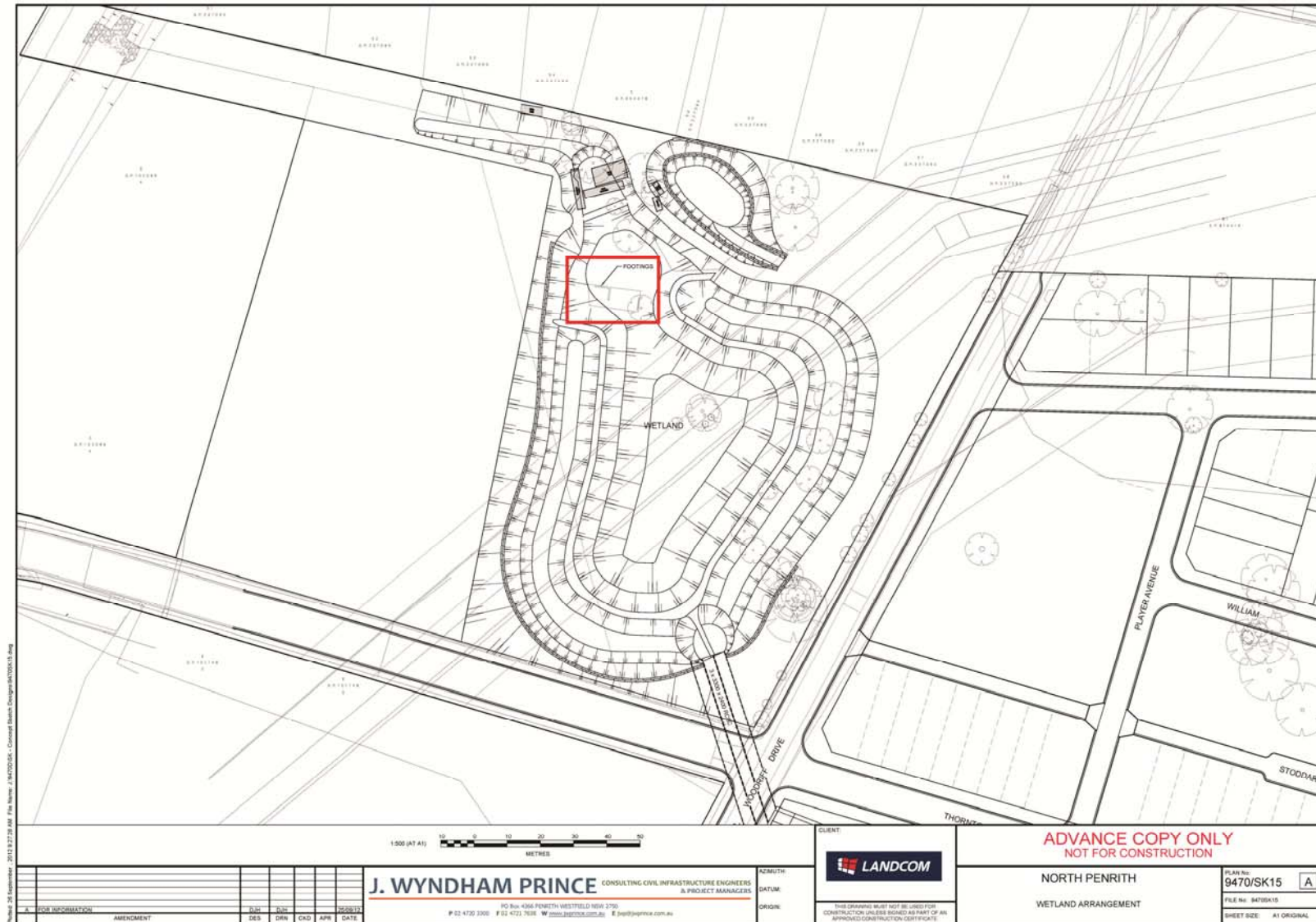


Figure 1.3: The proposed wetlands, with the site location highlighted in red.

1.3 Research Design

The focus of the archaeological investigation was to determine the nature of the remains of the rectangular building and to determine whether other buildings had been present in the vicinity. A particular goal was to determine whether the rectangular building was a stable, as suggested, or whether there was any evidence that it was an earlier farm building, perhaps pre-dating the 1890s Combewood. While the brickwork in urban areas would point to a mid-century date, the country location means that construction methods and styles were retained longer. The results of the testing will be used to reassess the heritage significance of the site in accordance with the requirements of the Environmental Impact Statement.

An additional aim of the investigation was to answer relevant research questions identified in the Methodology for the archaeological testing of the site.² Relevant questions to be addressed were:

- What evidence is there for the use of the rectangular building?
- Is there evidence for it predating the 1890s Combewood?
- Is there evidence for additional buildings in the vicinity or features such as rubbishpits?
- Is there artefactual evidence in the form of underfloor deposits?

1.4 Testing Methodology

Three shallow test trenches were excavated within and around the site by mechanical excavator. The trenches were then cleaned by hand, any artefacts recovered and the remains recorded by plan and photography. The grass and topsoil in the surrounding area was also partially cleared to establish if other buildings were present in the vicinity. The work was directed by Tony Lowe, Casey & Lowe Pty Ltd with assistance from two historical archaeologists from Casey & Lowe, Mike Hincks and Jenny Winnett. At the end of the recording, soil was replaced into the trenches. Robert Stanton Excavations provided mechanical expertise.

² Casey & Lowe Pty Ltd, *Methodology for the Testing of European Remains, Combewood and Thornton Hall – North Penrith*, Report to Landcom, September 2012.



Figure 1.4: Location of trenches. Source: Google.

1.5 Report Authorship

This report has been prepared by Jenny Winnett, using historical research prepared by Casey & Lowe in 2010.³ The photographs used in this report were taken by the field crew and during an earlier site inspection on 3 September 2012. The report was reviewed by Tony Lowe, Director, Casey & Lowe Pty Ltd. Comments on a draft were received from Landcom.



Figure 1.5: Sections of recently removed brick foundations. C&L 2012.



Figure 1.6: Informal archaeological work had left deep trenches throughout the site, and removed potential archaeological evidence and artefacts. C&L 2012.

³ Casey & Lowe Pty Ltd, *North Penrith Lands, Non-Indigenous Archaeology, Assessment Report*, Report prepared for Landcom, October 2010.



Figure 1.7: Site showing recent disturbance, 6 September 2012.



Figure 1.8: Site looking east showing line of robbed out (southern) wall footing, 6 September 2012.

1.6 Acknowledgements

Bugrahan Guner, Landcom

Michael Williams, Landcom

Mrs Margarite Scott, Combewood

2.0 Detailed Description of Archaeological Test Trenches

2.1 Overview

The testing program was undertaken on 10 October, 2012. A total of three test trenches were excavated, one of which circled the footprint of the building to determine whether additional structures were located in the vicinity (Figure 2.1).

The test trenches were placed in locations that would obtain the maximum information with the least disturbance to the site. Two trenches were located within footprint of the building, to identify the location of the southernmost walls and determine if any artefactual remains could be uncovered. One of these trenches was extended to the west to investigate two deep depressions. A final long test trench was located around the outer perimeter of the building's footprint, to determine whether any additional structures were located in its vicinity.

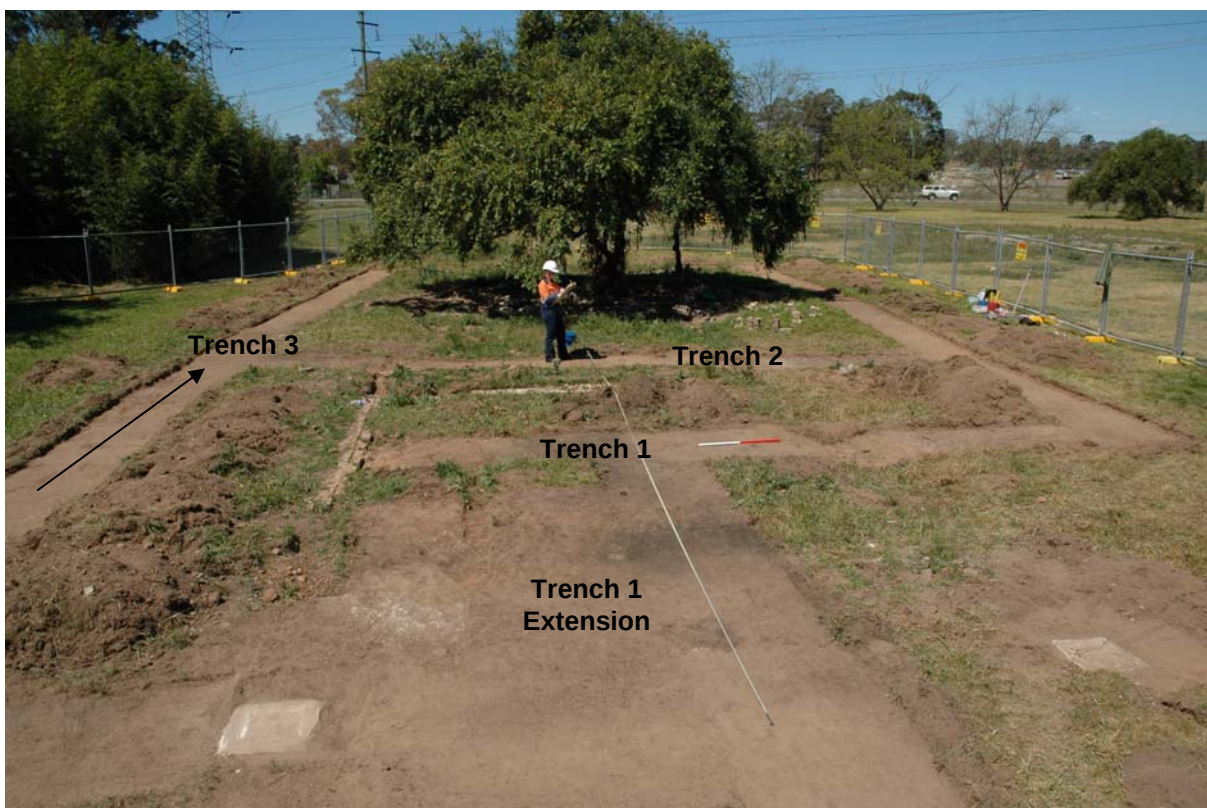


Figure 2.1: Location of the three test trenches, looking east. C&L 2012.

2.2 Test Trench results

Trench Profile Description

The landscape consisted of Cumberland plain open eucalyptus woodland with a largely grassy understorey. The soil is quaternary fine-grained sandy clay loams derived from Wianamatta Shale parent material and currently supports exotic pasture grasses. The A1 horizon is shallow, and represented the ploughzone. This was bleached with little visible mineral content. The A2 horizon is tightly compacted with a visible iron content. The trenches were excavated to a depth of approximately 50mm before A2 was reached.

Depth (mm)	Description	Interpretation
0 - 50	Brown sandy clay loam.	Topsoil/Ploughzone
70	Pale brown compact sandy loam.	Natural

Trench 1

This trench was oriented north-south and located in the westernmost part of the former building. The trench included the modern disturbance along the northernmost footing. Dark silty staining was located in the central part of the trench. The southernmost end of the trench contained a robbed-out wall trench representing what had been the southern wall of the structure (Figure 2.2). A dark patch of soil containing mortar oriented east-west was located to the south of the trench, which may have been the remains of the base of a pathway along the side of the building.

Trench 1 was extended to the west to include two concrete pads and two depressions located 4m from the building footprint. A western wall was not located, suggesting the building was open at this end. The depressions did not contain archaeological material but appeared to be modern features.



Figure 2.2: The southern robbed-out wall trench in the south of Trench 1, looking north. Scale 1m. C&L 2012.

Trench 2

This trench was located in the easternmost part of the former building footprint and contained a deep modern trench (disturbance) where the northernmost wall of the structure would have been. The robbed-out wall trench and mortar-rich soil (base of pathway?) on the outside of the wall-line was also present in this trench.

Trench 3

This trench was extended around the outer perimeter of the former building footprint, and was designed to pick up any additions to the building, or additional building remains. No archaeological remains were identified within this trench.

The Building

The footings were exposed (by previous informal excavation) to five stepped courses. The width of the footing is reduced by 100mm (50mm on each side) with each successive course. The top course of the easternmost wall remnant (Fig. 2.3) has been constructed of two rows of bricks laid head-to-head. These have been bonded with a coarse-grained but homogenous hard lime mortar. The sandstock bricks measure 230mm x 111mm x 74mm and have a diamond frog in the centre on the non-strike face. The frog measures 100mm in length and 54 mm in width. The bricks have been made from well-mixed clays with small black impurities.



Figure 2.3: The easternmost wall footing adjacent to the olive tree, looking north. C&L 2012.

Bricks within the central dividing footing were not all standard in size (Fig. 2.5). Some of the bricks in the arrangement had been broken to fit the patterning required by the stepped nature of the footing.

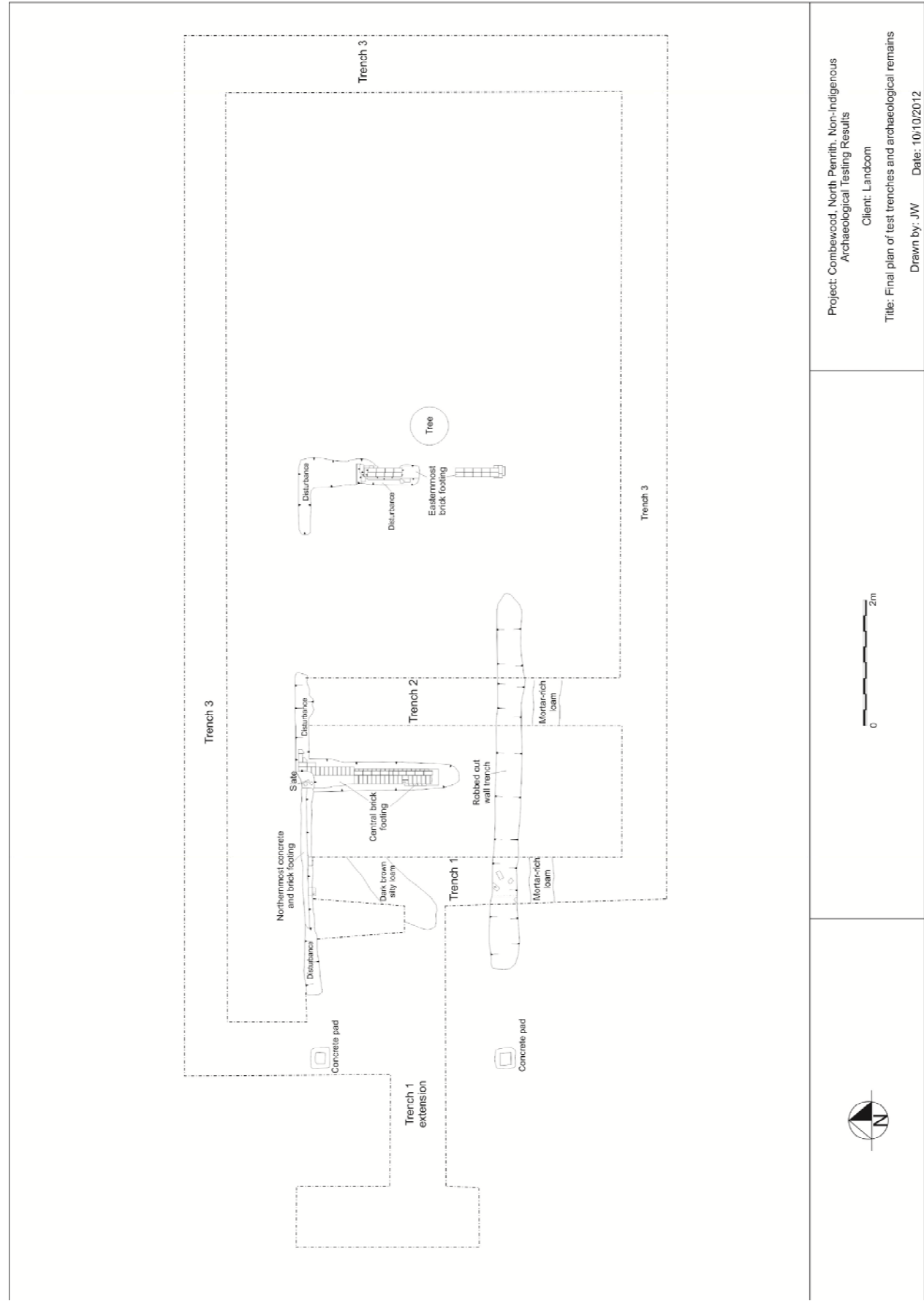


Figure 2.4: Plan of the remains and trenches.



Figure 2.5: The northern end of the central dividing wall, showing the head-to-head formation with the start of a return to the east (the northernmost footing). Looking west. Scale 1m. C&L 2012.

The northernmost footing is different from the others. The only remaining segment consists of 2 stepped brick pads within a concrete footing (Figure 2.6). The concrete is coarse-grained, poorly mixed and littered heavily with pebble aggregate. The upper surface of the concrete contains the impression of either a single row of bricks or a timber. The concrete footing is 350mm wide and has been poured directly into the cut. Whatever was laid on the concrete was placed there when the concrete was still wet. The brick pads have been set at an interval of 710mm.



Figure 2.6: The mixed concrete footing with two stepped brick pads. Scale 1m. C&L2012.

The southernmost wall of the building had been removed, leaving a backfilled trench (Figure 2.7). This trench measured 500mm in width and approximately 270mm in depth. It was poorly defined as it has been backfilled with redeposited local sandy clay loam (highly compacted, fine-grained, pale brown with some yellow content). The fill within the wall trench contained small pieces of degraded sandstone and displaced whole and partial bricks exhibiting the same characteristics as bricks found elsewhere on the site. The wall cut had a gentle break of top slope, with steep, near-vertical sides to a sharp break of base slope to a relatively flat base.



Figure 2.7: The partially excavated robbed-wall cut for the southernmost wall of the structure. Scale 1m. Looking west.

The western half of the structure was divided into two spaces. The largest part measured 5.9m by 5.6m and is delineated by the robbed-wall cut in the south, and the remaining brick and concrete footing. The smaller part measured 5.6m by 2.4m and was delineated by two concrete pads on the western side (Fig. 2.8). This probably represented a part of the structure that was able to be open on three sides. The concrete pads measured 480mm x 460mm with a square impression measuring 300mm x 260mm (Figure 2.9). These would have supported brick or timber columns.

The eastern part of the structure constituted a space measuring 8.5m by 5.6m. This was defined by the robbed-wall trench in the south and the remaining brick footings.



Figure 2.8: The two concrete pads (arrowed). C&L 2012.



Figure 2.9: Detail of one of the concrete pads showing the square impression of a column base. Scale 1m. C&L 2012.

3.0 Results and Recommendations

3.1 Summary of Results

Test Trench 1 and 2 contained remains of the building in the form of brick and concrete foundations, brick and concrete pads, and linear trenches where brick footing had been removed in the past. Dark staining in the centre of the westernmost part of the building, in conjunction with the interpretation that this end of the building would have been open (no western wall identified in the vicinity of the concrete pads) supports the suggestion that this building was used as a stable or coach house. The differences in mortar and construction would indicate that the eastern end of the building was built later than the western half.

The brick in the northernmost wall foundation were probably in the location of the hayloft, visible on a photograph and painting of the building supplied by the current owner of Combewood, Mrs Margarite Scott (Figure 3.1, 3.2). Mrs Scott indicated that she had known the building as a child, knew its internal layout and confirmed that it had been used as a stable, grooms quarters, and hayloft.

Very few artefacts were recovered from the building, none of which were diagnostic. Dating was therefore based on the bricks and mortar, which supports the information supplied to the archaeologists from the current owner of the property, that the building was constructed in the late 19th century.



Figure 3.1: Photograph of the building under investigation prior to its demolition in the 1960s. Courtesy of Mrs Margarite Scott, Combewood.



Figure 3.2: Painting of the stables looking from house. Courtesy of Mrs Margarite Scott, Combewood.

3.2 Response to Research Questions

The limited nature of the archaeological resource, the compromised state of the remains due to past excavations, and the lack of artefacts, means that the site has limited research potential.

- *What evidence is there for the use of the rectangular building?*

The archaeology, when considered in conjunction with the photograph and painting (Figure 3.1, 3.2), would suggest that the structure was indeed used as a stable or coach house dating to the 1890s.

- *Is there evidence for it predating the 1890s Combewood?*

There is no evidence for this. The bricks, mortar and artefacts recovered can all date to this period or later.

- *Is there evidence for additional buildings in the vicinity or features such as rubbish pits?*

There was no evidence of additional features.

- *Is there artefactual evidence in the form of underfloor deposits?*

There was no evidence of underfloor deposits at the site.

3.3 Recommendations

1. Due to the site's limited research potential, no further archaeological testing is regarded as being necessary.
2. As the site will be impacted by the proposed wetlands and will be removed, the bricks should be offered to the owners of Combewood.
3. The removal of the brickwork should be carried out under archaeological supervision to record any additional aspect of the building's layout or use.