

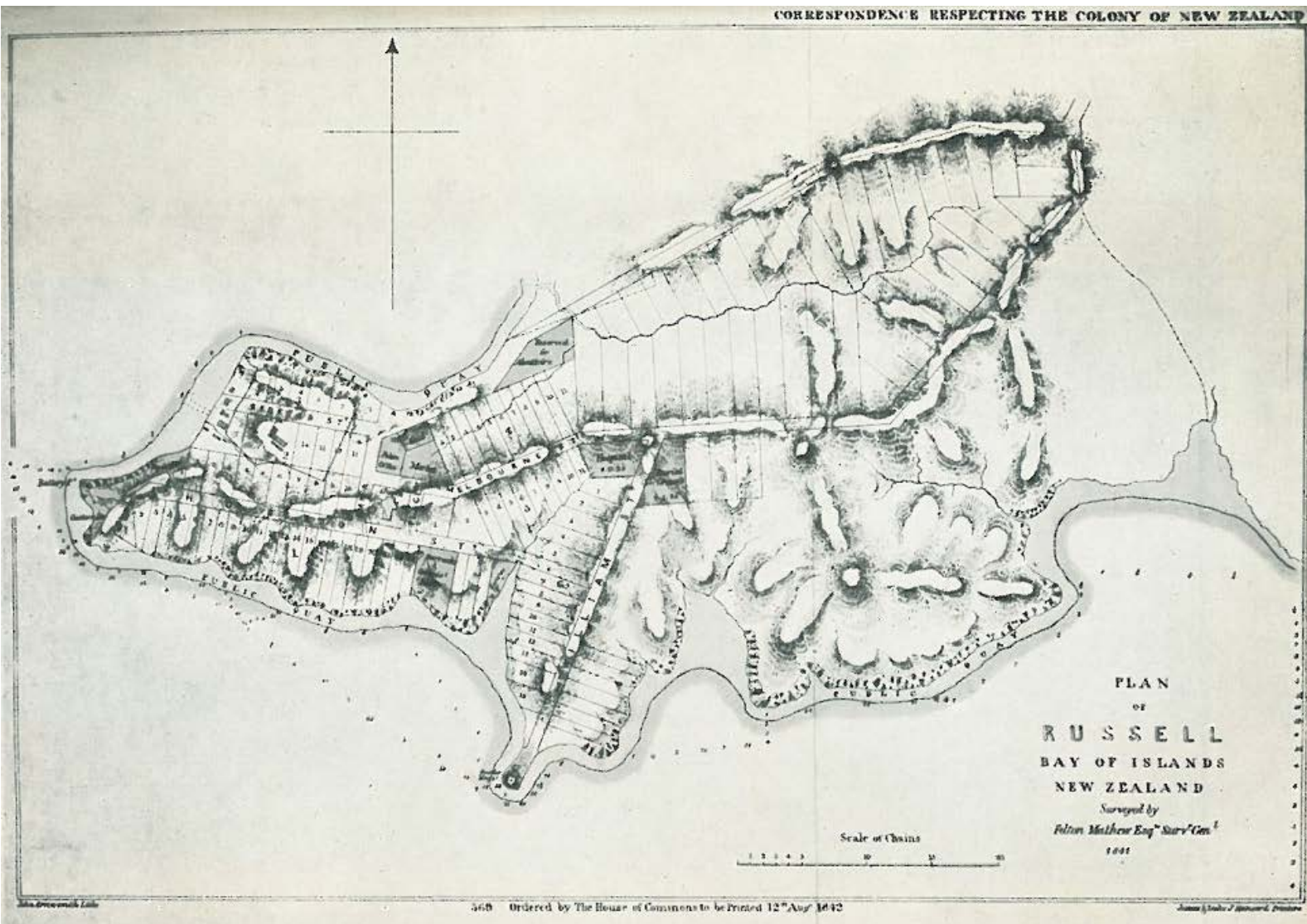
Okiato

The Site of New Zealand's First Capital

Historic Heritage Assessment

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2010



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Okiato: The site of New Zealand's first capital, Bay of Islands: Historic Heritage Assessment

Melina Goddard, DOC, Bay of Islands Area Office
2010

Cover image: Felton Mathews plan of Russell. P.P 1842, 569, Correspondence
Respecting the Colony of New Zealand

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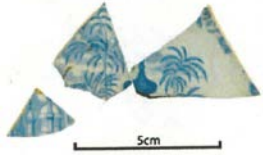
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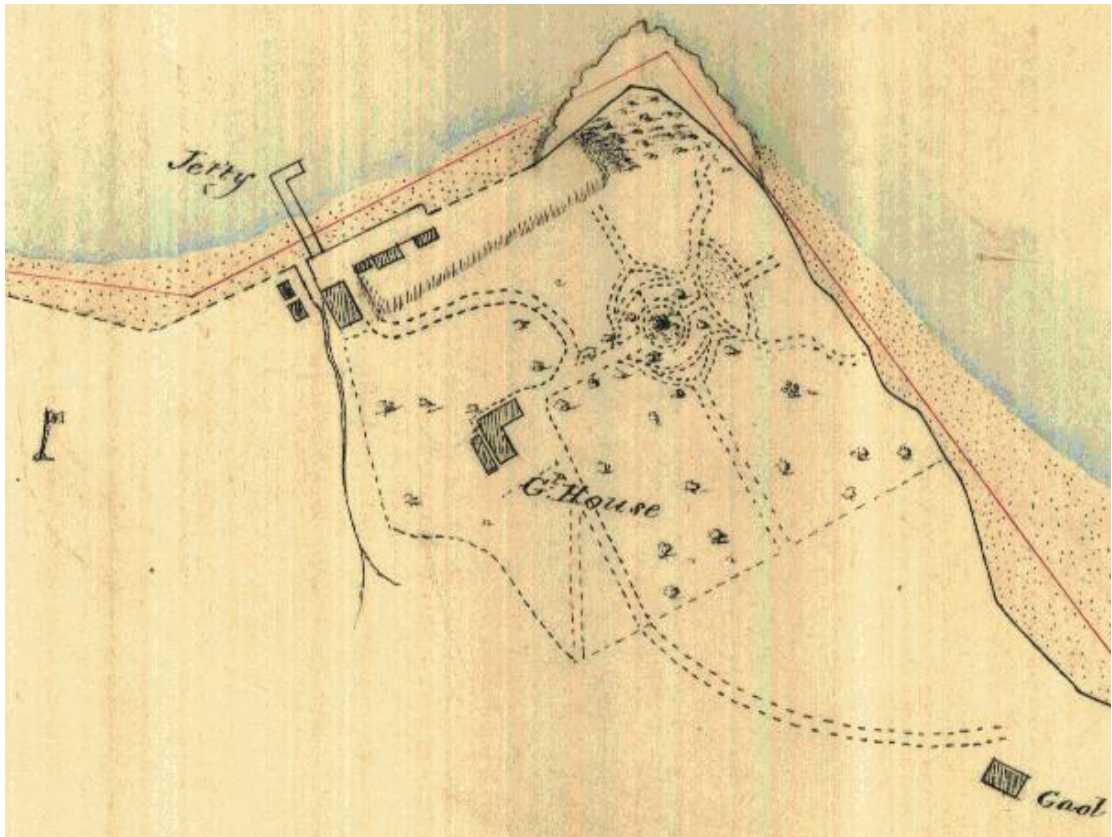


Fig 1: OLC 132 of Okiato. LINZ

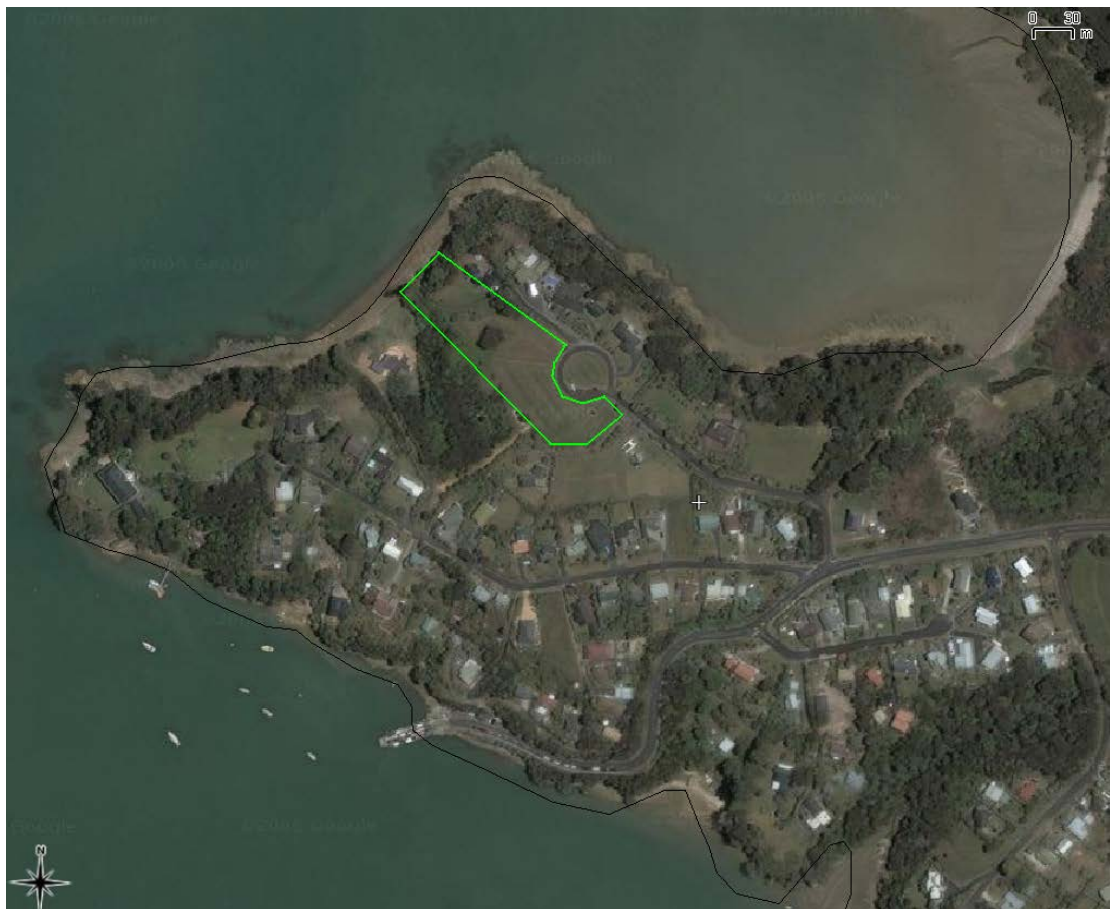


Fig 2: Okiato Historic Reserve today. QGIS

1. SITE OVERVIEW

The site of Okiato in the Bay of Islands was the home of New Zealand's first capital (1840-1841) and is an important site in New Zealand's formational period. The occupation of the site by the government was short lived and in 1842 Hobson moved the new capital to Auckland leaving the police magistrate to occupy Okiato and its buildings. The final fate of Okiato was sealed when, on the night of Sunday the 1st of May 1842, the former government house and its offices were completely destroyed by fire¹. The only visible remnant of the old capital today is the well and further fabric remains are subsurface.

Recorded prehistoric sites at Okiato are limited and evidence for pre-European occupation is likely to have been destroyed throughout the European occupation. The sites that are represented at Okiato are midden located along the beach profiles. Reportedly there was a well-defined pa site located on Tapu point², at the end of the Okiato peninsula. However this has not been identified or recorded in CINZAS.

Land status: *Okiato Historic Reserve*
Administered by *Bay of Islands area office, Kerikeri*
Visitor numbers is *unknown*
Actively managed site number *46*
Site area is *2680 square metres*
Functional location number: *DN-61-200-1004*

HISTORY DESCRIPTION

Before Okiato became the seat of government British merchant trader James Reddy Clendon set it up as a trading post in 1830. Clendon was one of the few traders that had begun setting themselves up in the Bay of Islands. Okiato, Clendon's new property, "*was in a sheltered position with deep water close to the shore, and was admirably suited for a trading enterprise*"³. Clendon built a small jetty there for the convenience of boats, and equipped the place for stores and all the facilities necessary for such a venture, including a stockade for defence⁴.

In 1839, undoubtedly with an eye for business (since 62 American whalers had called at the Bay of Islands that year), Clendon accepted the acting consulship for the United States Government. Although he had been a ship owner prior to this, the appointment established him as the most influential European in the Bay. This influence, and the merits of his establishment, no doubt led to Lieutenant Governor Hobson's decision to purchase the land and buildings of Okiato⁵.



Fig3: Alexander Turnbull Library

When Hobson first landed in the Bay of Islands he had three immediate objectives: the acquisition of sovereignty; the invalidation of all titles to land not derived from the crown; and the selection of a site for a government settlement⁶. It was acting Surveyor-General Felton Mathew who was instructed to select a site in the Bay of Islands that

was suitable for this purpose⁷. In 1840 Mathew reported on the buildings at Clendon's trading Post:

*"There is a very comfortable cottage with suitable outbuildings and an extensive and substantial store, office smiths shop, boat builders shed, the whole of which is in good repair, and would be immediately available for the purposes of the government"*⁸

With the purchase of the Okiato block by the government, plans were drawn up for a new town to be developed on the block, to be named Russell. However that site was never developed as intended and the buildings left there by Clendon formed the nucleus of New Zealand's first capital, only a small amount of buildings having been added. Records show that Major Thomas Banbury, commanding a detachment from the 80th regiment, built a mess house, purchased a wooden building for stores and partially erected barracks⁹. Also a goal (jail) was built near the back of government house.

The future government house was a substantial building with an entrance hall, dining room, study, three major bedrooms, nursery, children's bedrooms, kitchen, scullery, pantry, stable and outhouses¹⁰. The pencilled sketch by Felton Mathew depicts it as a steeply gabled structure with a veranda on the western and the southern sides and a small outhouse at the southeast corner¹¹ (Fig 4).



Fig 4: Government House, old Russell (Okiato), Bay of Islands 6 April 1840. Felton Mathew. *Alexander Turnbull Library*.

That Hobson had never intended Russell to be the permanent seat of government is indicated by correspondence dated 19 October 1840, where he advised the secretary of state for the colonies of his intentions to set up a capital on the Waitemata Harbour, to be called Auckland¹². As his plans became known people soon began to drift away from

the township. Hobson moved permanently to Auckland on the 13th March 1841 and most of his government staff followed¹³.

In May 1842 the former government house was destroyed by fire. During that time official affairs had gradually moved to Kororareka and the name Russell drifted there also¹⁴ Okiato fell into disuse and it was not until 1891 that the government put the property up for sale¹⁵.

FABRIC DESCRIPTION

G.E Schmidt purchased the large portion put up for sale by the government in 1891¹⁶. For several decades after the Schmidt purchase the surface remains of the first capital were still evident. These were recorded by surveyor and noted historian Jack Lee who married into the Schmidt family. Lee identified the location of the former buildings including the foundations of government house¹⁷.

Mr Lee and Mr Schmidt walked every inch of the ground and dug up interesting relics of both Clendon's and Hobson's occupation and Lee made a survey map of all visible traces at Okiato¹⁸ (Fig 9). Other items that were noted by Lee were uniform buttons, coins, china and other household items that had been dumped 100m to the west. The presence of ash throughout the debris suggested the burnt contents of the building¹⁹.

In the 1940's the property was sold and surface features of the old capital were destroyed when the area was disced for farming purposes²⁰. Later part of the land was subdivided, but after much campaigning by the Regional Committee of the Historic Places Trust, 2680 square metres incorporating the site of government house was made a historic reserve to be administered by the Department of Conservation.

In 1988 Joan Maingay, an archaeologist with the Department of Conservation's Northland Conservancy carried out an inspection of the area to assess its archaeological potential and concluded that Okiato point likely still contained archaeological remains²¹. Preliminary test excavations were carried out by Robinson and others in 1992 and positive results from this led to a series of brief archaeological investigations that ran from 1992-1995.

Based on Jack Lee's map of the location of Government house extensive test pitting, probing and a metal detector survey was carried out in an area approximately 80x30m between the well and the beach access track²². Artefacts that were found were household china, pieces of clay pipe, glass fragments and structural material²³. Based upon the distribution of the artefacts uncovered and the 19th century origin of the ceramics, it was concluded that this area was likely to be site of government house²⁴.

The only visible remnant of the Clendon trading station and the Government occupation today is the well, and was part of the investigations by Robinson and others in 1994-1995. It was found to have a maximum depth of 12.7m and had been used as a rubbish dump and so contained a large quantity of artefacts dating from recent times back to the 1820's²⁵. Based upon the findings the well was separated into three different layers and a profile of the well was recorded along with its contents by Robinson (Fig 10).

Preliminary identification of the recovered artefacts from the 1992-1995 investigations confirms the existence of some archaeological evidence associated with Clendon and

Hobson²⁶ (Figs 12-13). However evidence of foundational features of government house was inconclusive. Given that the discing did not extend below the subsoil then, in the area investigated in 1993-1995, foundational features cut into the subsoil should be expected. It was concluded that an alternative use of joints was used that leave no deep subsurface footprint²⁷.

In 2009 the results of a geophysical survey at Okiato by archaeologists Hans Dieter-Badar from Archaeology Solutions Ltd and Andrew Blanshard (DoC historic ranger) led to the conclusion that the foundations of government house and the out buildings did in fact exist but not in the area where the 1993-1995 investigations stated (Fig 15). A Fluxgate Gradiometer was used in this survey that measures small underground magnetic anomalies and both geomorphological changes and human-induced soil changes can be detected. The results show that fabric values of Okiato are predominantly subsurface in the area where government house is located, and also in other areas of the reserve where further occupational remains will undoubtedly be evident.

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

This site represents part of the New Zealand's early formational period. It is connected to people that shaped our early history and influenced how it is today. This site is connected to all New Zealanders and the descendants of the Ngati Manu chiefs Pomare, Kiwikiwi, Wiremu and Hoia, who sold this land to Captain Clendon on 7th December 1830²⁸.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

For sixty odd years after the early explorers Tasman, the French and Captain Cook New Zealand was in nominal independence, "*European ships came where statesmen lagged behind*"²⁹. At the time of the arrival of Hobson to the Bay of Islands in 1840 the situation was one of great unrest. Previously British authority first arrived in New Zealand in the form of James Busby in 1833. His arrival was due in part to a petition made by thirteen chiefs of the Bay of Islands to King William IV for help and protection from the threat of French annexation³⁰. As well as the threat of French takeover there was also the United States whose whaling fleet was extensive and its economic interest considerable. By 1828 British settlers had warned the colonial office in London about France and also the US. The country had been described as a "*political vacuum*" and it was only a matter of time before the great powers would step in to take it over³¹.

In addition there were many "*rogues, riff raff and drifters*" who had settled in the whaling town Kororareka and the wider Bay of Islands; far out numbering Sydney business agents and ship captains. Settlers were attacked and robbed, boats were "borrowed" and general lawlessness prevailed as there was no law enforcement of any kind. Settlers on numerous occasions appealed to British authorities in Sydney for help to establish law and order³². In addition the Maori people were becoming worried as they had started realising that their lands were slipping away from them through the steady arrival of Europeans looking to buy³³.

Busby, settling at Waitangi, was sent by His Majesty to reside among them and investigate all complaints and to "*punish the wrong doers*". However the office of British residency carried little authority and Busby was offered no aid from the nearest governor in New South Wales³⁴.

By 1840 the British government decided, for a multitude of reasons, to put an end to the numerous “minor irritations” caused by the existence of New Zealand, and took steps to acquire for Her Majesty the sovereignty of the country³⁵.

On 29 January 1840 Hobson arrived in the Bay of Islands where he immediately called a public meeting at the church in Kororareka. Here he made the proclamation declaring himself Lieutenant Governor of those parts of New Zealand, which were or might be acquired in sovereignty by Her Majesty and the declaration that all titles to land in New Zealand were invalid unless confirmed by the Crown³⁶. Hobson then began the implementation of the Treaty of Waitangi, the meeting of which was set for the 5th of February. The discussions as a result of the reading of the Treaty continued till the morning of the 6th of February where forty-six head chiefs signed it in the presence of at least 500 of inferior degree³⁷. Hobson had accomplished his first stage of administration. From Waitangi he took the treaty to Waimate and from there to the Hokianga to obtain more signatures³⁸. Hobson’s next task was to decide on a site for the seat of government.



Fig 5: Captain William Hobson
Alexander Turnbull Library

In the first instance the Bay of Islands was not considered to be an eligible spot for the establishment of the capital or a Government settlement. This was based on its geographic position and the “*very rugged and impracticable nature of the surrounds*”³⁹. However given that at the time it was the largest European population in the country and an important port for the English, American and French whaling ships, it was decided that the Government should be established there⁴⁰.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Okiato is significant as the site of New Zealand’s first capital and represents the country’s early formational history. The site’s amenity values are high in terms of potential education through public interpretation, which can be looked at within the context of the historical aspects of the Bay of Islands.

FABRIC SIGNIFICANCE

The only visible remain of the old capital is Clendon’s well, which is important as a tangible representative of the site. The most significant aspect of the fabric of Okiato is subsurface. The early abandoned years of Okiato beginning with the investigations by Jack Lee, the damage likely caused from the discing of the area up to the 1992-1995 excavations indicates the amount of damage to the fabric values of the site. However the locating of the physical remains of the first government house in the 2009 geophysical survey is a highly significant turn of events for the site. Furthermore the potential for other subsurface features is highly likely. For example closer to the shoreline, where the jetty and Clendon’s store was located.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The site represents important stages in New Zealand's early formational history and is tied to other important sites in the Bay of Islands. The site is connected to Captain William Hobson's presence in the Bay and New Zealand, which led to the implementation of the Treaty of Waitangi, which in turn shaped the European and Maori history of New Zealand. This site is highly significant to all New Zealanders, not only as the first capital but also as the representation of the historical events of which it is so strongly connected too. The site has huge potential for extensive public interpretation.

9. MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Site should remain actively managed due to its suburban location and potential for extensive public interpretation.
- Interpretation panel to be fitted onto the well is currently underway however more interpretation of the site is recommended given the information of the site that is available and the site location and view.
- Interpretive techniques to tell the sites story could be further signage at interpretive points across the site and here the view the site offers could be incorporated with wider historical information.
- The use of stones to delineate the location of the first Government House
- Further geophysical survey of the site and particularly foreshore area could aid in further interpretation opportunities

10. MANAGEMENT HISTORY

- May 1842 government house is burnt to the ground
- 1891 the property is purchased by the Schmidt family and the Jack Lee and Mr Schmidt map the survey map of the surface remains (Fig)
- 1940's the site was sold and disced for farming purposes and part of the land was subdivided. Today these areas are the most westerly and easterly portions of the site.
- 1988 Joan Maingay, an archaeologist with the Department of Conservation's Northland Conservancy carried out an inspection of the area to assess its archaeological potential and concluded that Okiato point likely still contained archaeological remains.
- 1989 the remaining land area of Okiato (2680 square metres) was placed under the care of the Department of Conservation.
- 2011 interpretation panel placed onsite

11. MANAGEMENT DOCUMENTATION

- DOCDM- 600713
- Current DOC management file numbers [HHA-01-02-25 NL-1](#), [HHA-01-02-25-01 NLB-1](#), [HHA-01-02-25-02 NLB-1](#), [HHA-01-02-25-03 NLB-1](#), [HHA-01-02-25-04 NLB-1](#), [PAR-01-06-16 NL-1](#), [PAR-01-06-16 NLB-1](#), [SAR-04-14-04-18 NL-1](#)
- Heritage assessment *yes*
- Baseline inspection: Blanshard, A., 2007. Archaeological assessment for Okiato. Department of Conservation, Bay of Islands area office.
- Maingay, J. 1989. The archaeological potential of Okiato. Department of Conservation, Northland Conservancy.
- Robinson, J., 1992. A test excavation at New Zealand's first government house. Department of Conservation, Northland Conservancy.
- Robinson, J., 1995. Recent excavations at the seat of New Zealand's first colonial government: A preliminary report.
- 2009 Geophysical survey of Okiato by Archaeological Solutions LTD and Andrew Blanshard DoC Bay of Islands.

12. SOURCES

Publications (including background reading)

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Secondary

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Felton, M. date The Founding of New Zealand. (Auckland university website)

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Photographic collections

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington New Zealand

Hobson album. "Government House, Russell, Bay of Islands, New Zealand". 6 April
1840. Creator Felton Mathew 1801-1847. E-216-f-165.

"Captain James Reddy Clendon 1800-1872". Artist unknown F-20428-1/2

"Captain William Hobson 1913". Creator James Ingram McDonald 1865-1935. G-826-1

13. ENDNOTE

- ¹ Ross 1946:59
- ² Lee 1998:6
- ³ Lee 1983: 163
- ⁴ Lee 1983: 163
- ⁵ Lee 1983:164
- ⁶ Ross 1946:14
- ⁷ Ross 1946:27
- ⁸ Ross 1946:33
- ⁹ Ross 1946:47
- ¹⁰ Ross 1946:38
- ¹¹ Robinson 1995:1
- ¹² Lee 2006:26
- ¹³ Lee 2006: 26-27
- ¹⁴ ref for this
- ¹⁵ Ross 1946:65
- ¹⁶ Ross 1946:65
- ¹⁷ Harlow 2003:4
- ¹⁸ Ross 1946:67
- ¹⁹ Ross 1946: 47
- ²⁰ Robinson 1995:1
- ²¹ Maingay 1989
- ²² Robinson 1995:2
- ²³ Robinson 1995:3
- ²⁴ Robinson 1995:5
- ²⁵ Robinson 1995:3
- ²⁶ Robinson 1995:5
- ²⁷ Robinson 1995:3
- ²⁸ Ross 1946:34
- ²⁹ Ross 1946:7
- ³⁰ Lee 1983:167-168
- ³¹ King 1992:18
- ³² King 1992:15
- ³³ King 1992:20
- ³⁴ King 1992:16
- ³⁵ Ross 1946:9
- ³⁶ Ross 1946:15
- ³⁷ King 1992:24-25
- ³⁸ King 1992:26
- ³⁹ Ross 1946:27
- ⁴⁰ Ross 1946:27



Fig 6: Location map of Okiato in the Bay of Islands from map toaster



Fig 7: Okiato today facing south east (A. Blanshard)



Fig 8: Okiato today indicating approximate location of the first government house and where the well is situated (A. Blanshard)

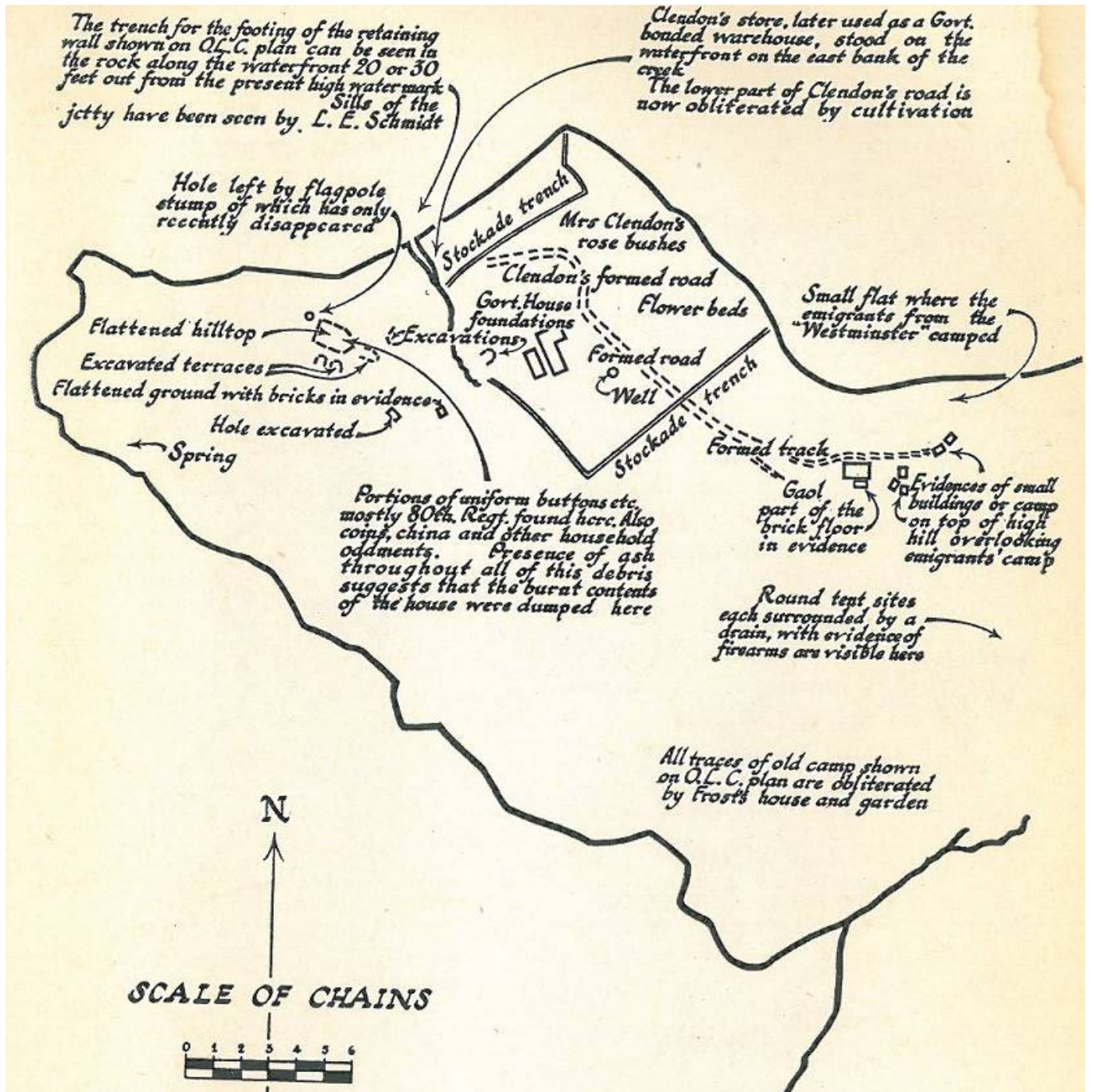


Fig 9: Traces of old Russell visible in 1943 as surveyed by Jack Lee

Well profile:

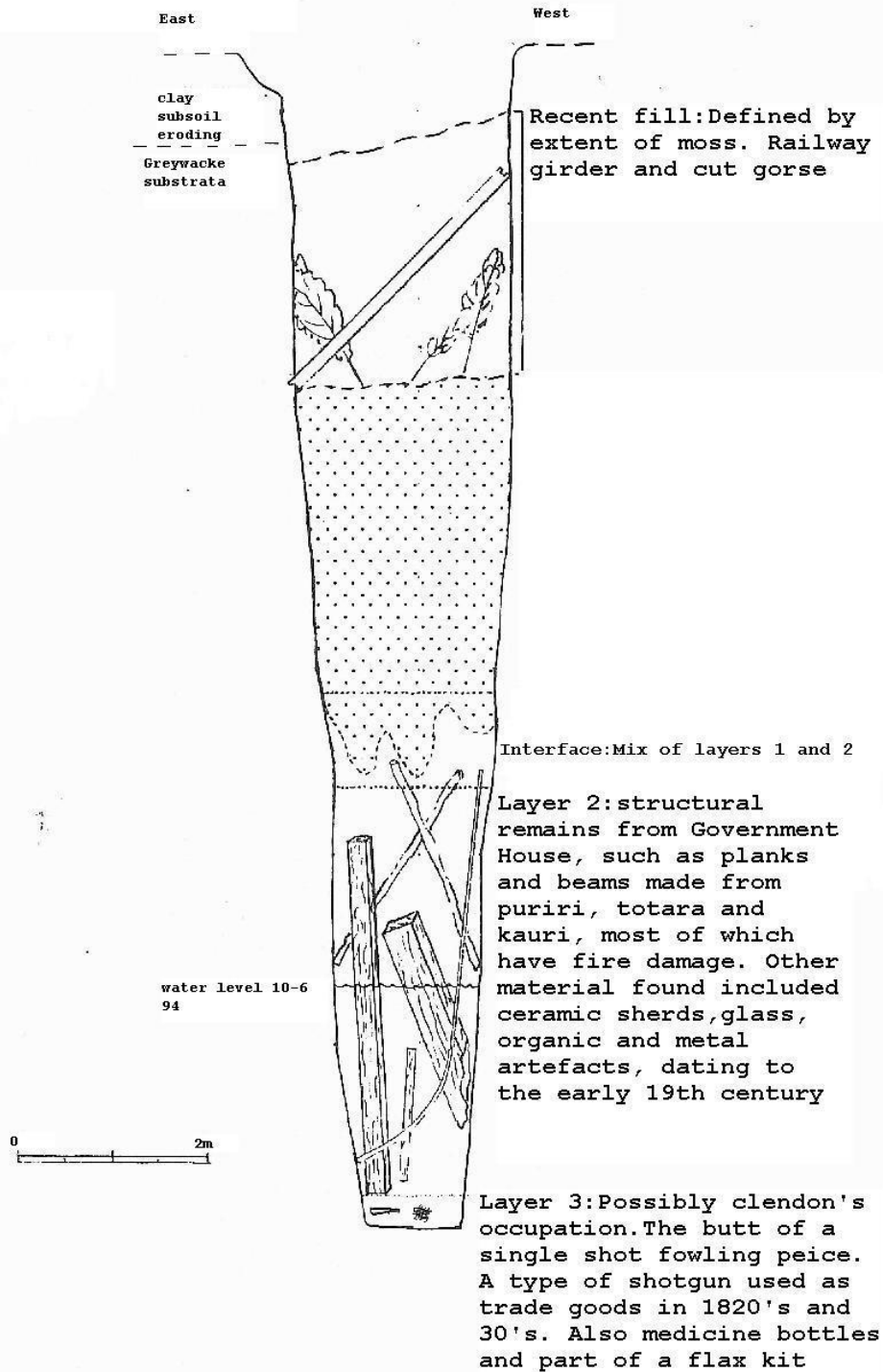


Fig 10: Profile and contents of well as excavated by DoC and Robinson (1995:fig 6)

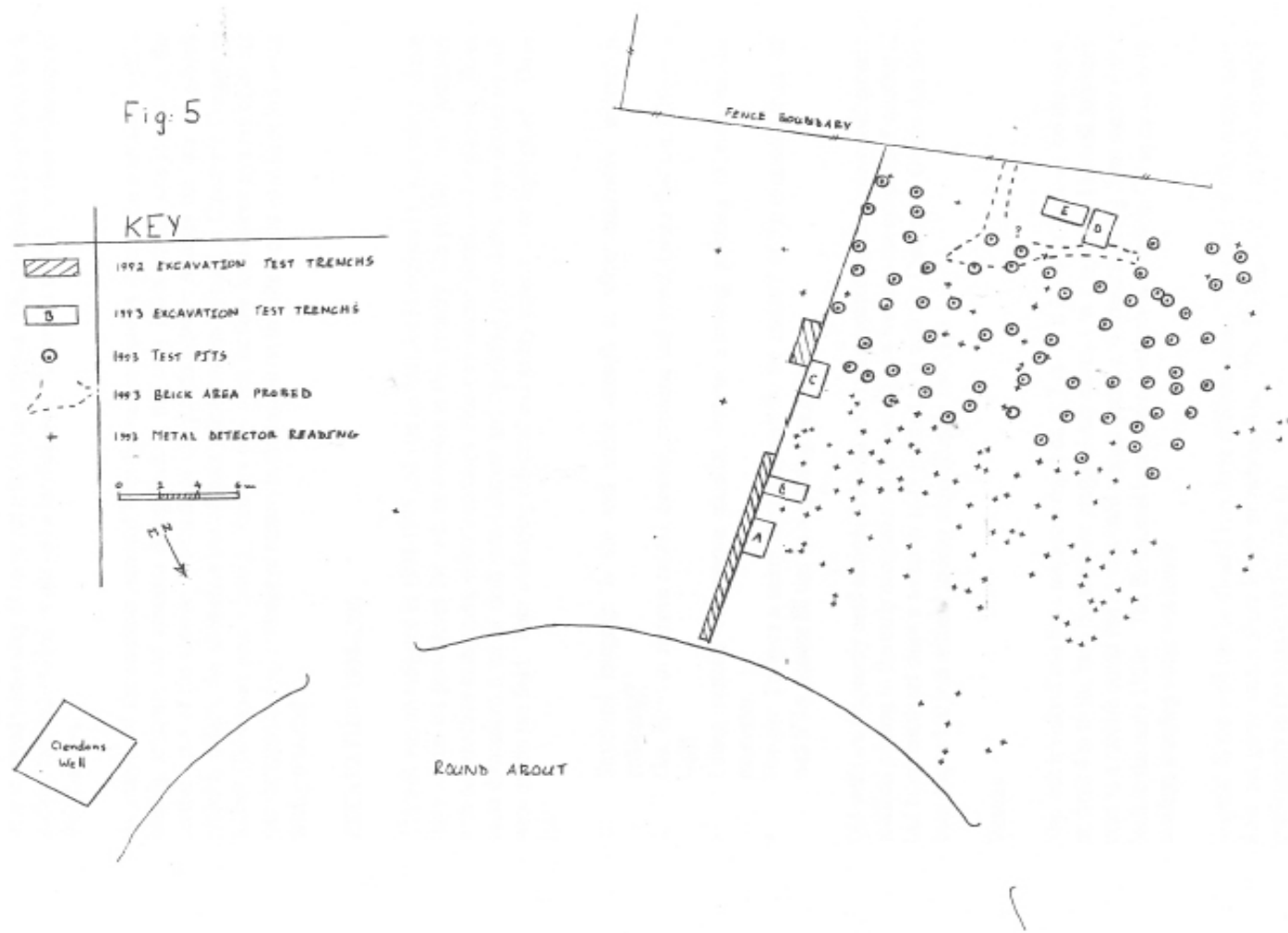
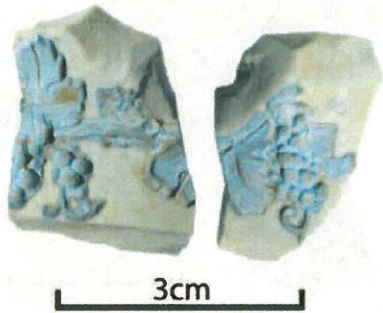


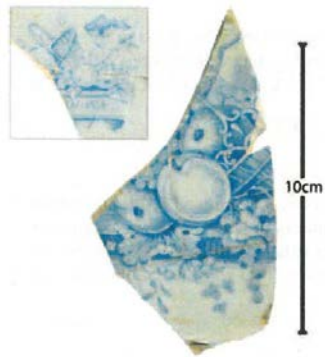
Fig 11: Plan of the investigations undertaken in 1992-1993. Robinson (1995:fig 5).



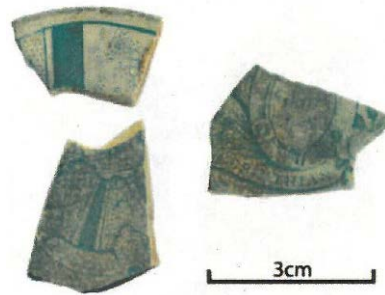
12 a: Semi-vitreous jug, with blue sprigged grapevine decoration



12 b: Palestine pattern plate rim dated to the 1830's.



12 c: Pomona design with Elijah Jones backmark (active 1831-1839)



12 d: Corinthian pattern plate fragments with John Ridgeway backmark (active 1830-1841).



12 e The butt of a fowling shotgun from the bottom of the well fill. This type of gun was used as trade goods in the 1820's and 30's (Robinson 1995:4)

Fig 12: Examples of some of the artefacts from the 1992-1995 investigations and the 1994-1995 well investigations (Ceramic identifications and images from Harris 2009).



Fig 13: Thin fluted hand blown medicine bottle made to lie on its side. Has a cork fragment inside. The bottle is of a type, which used to contain laudanum and opium. From the lowest layer of the well (Robinson 1995:4). Image: *Department of Conservation Bay of Islands*.



Fig 14: Hand blown bottle likely to be for alcohol from the well. Cork fragment inside. Layer not identified. Image: *Department of Conservation Bay of Islands*.

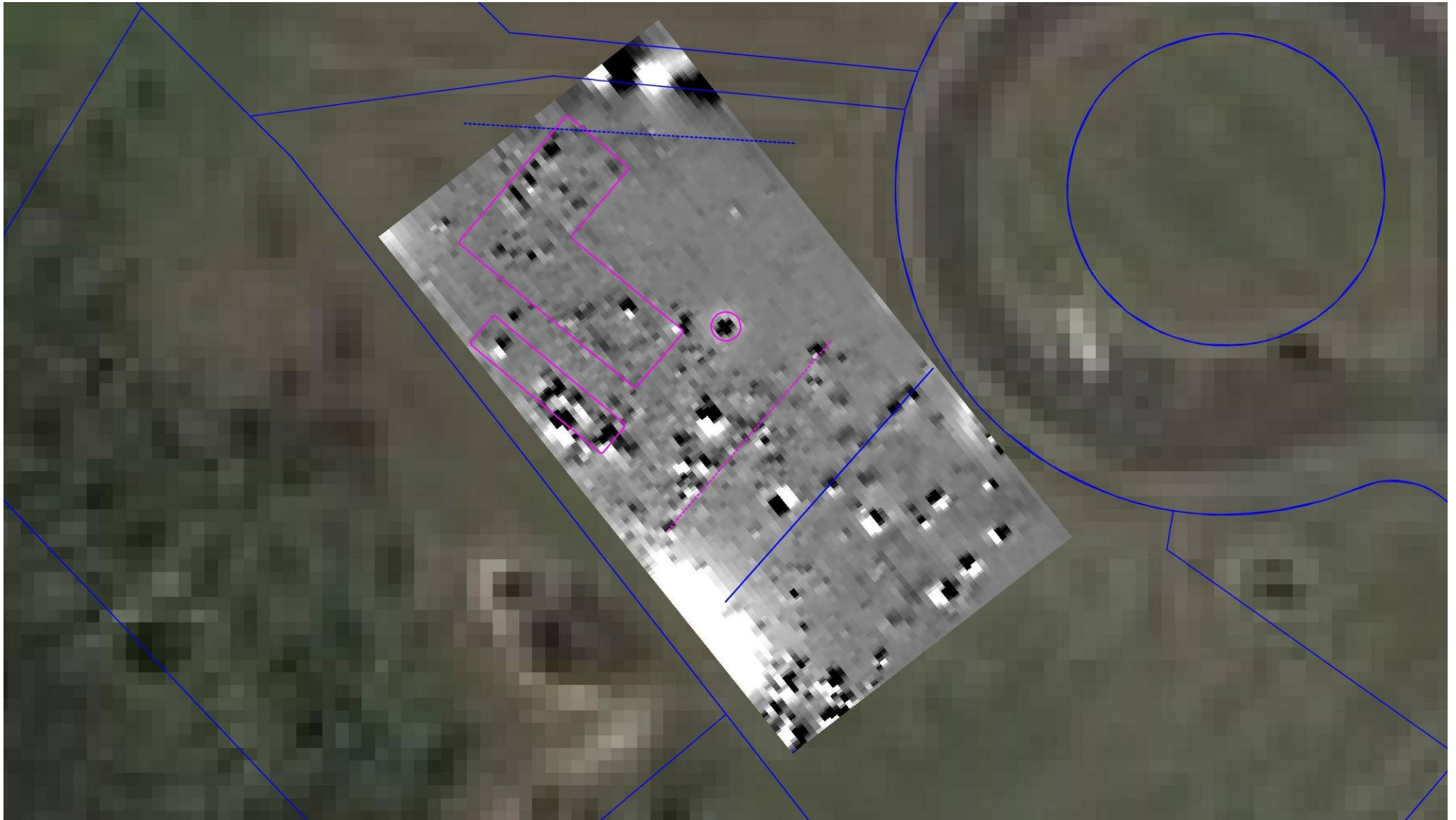


Fig 15: Results of the 2009 geomagnetic survey. The two large pink outlines outline the foundations of the first government house and outbuildings (Archaeology Solutions Ltd).

