

MANOR COURT, NETTLEHAM
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
REPORT

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Planning ref. M/02/P/0157

Report prepared for John Dixon Developments Ltd.

by

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Summary

- An archaeological watching brief took place during the groundworks for a residential development on land at Manor Court, Nettleham, Lincolnshire.
- The brief specifically addressed an area of raised ground on the south side of the development footprint.
- Some deposits of potential archaeological significance were identified, and these included a buried topsoil, and alluvial layers deposited in the base of a pool, possibly dating to the Saxon period.

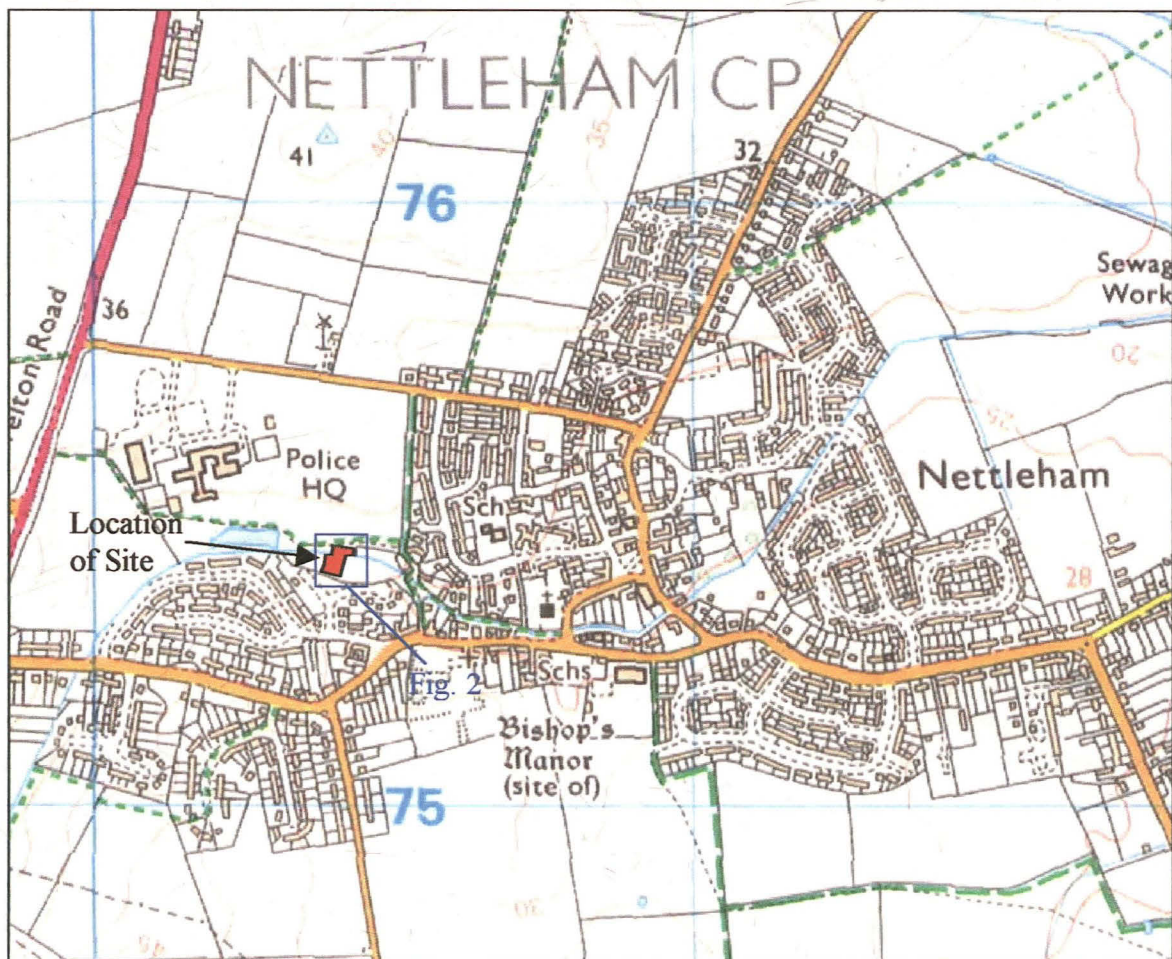


Fig. 1: Site location. Area highlighted in red is the development plot, the blue square is that seen in fig. 2. (Scale 1:12500; OS copyright ref AL 515 21 A0001)

1.0 Introduction

An archaeological watching brief took place during topsoil stripping and the excavation of footing trenches for a single houseplot on land off Manor Court, Nettleham, Lincolnshire (National Grid Reference TF 0043 7538). John Dixon Developments Ltd. commissioned the work to fulfil a condition attached to a planning permission (Ref. M/02/P/0157).

This report documents the results of the archaeological watching brief that was undertaken on 24th February, 27th March, and 8th May 2003. It has been prepared to meet the requirements of current local guidelines (*Lincolnshire Archaeological Handbook: A Manual of Archaeological Practice, 1998*); and a formal project specification prepared by this company. This approach complies with the recommendations of *Archaeology & Planning: Planning Policy Guidance Note 16*, (Department of the Environment, 1990), *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage, 1991), and *Standards and guidance for archaeological watching briefs*, (IFA, 1999).

Copies of this report will be deposited with the commissioning body, the Built Environment Officer for Lincolnshire County Council, the County Sites and Monuments Record, and West Lindsey District Council. A short text will be submitted to the editor of the county journal, *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*; and this will feature as a short note in due course. Reports will also be deposited at the City and County Museum, Lincoln, accompanied with an ordered project archive.

2.0 Location and Description (Figs 1 & 2)

Nettleham is in the administrative district of West Lindsey, approximately 4.5km north-east of Lincoln centre, 4.2km north-north-east of Dunholme. It is situated on relatively low ground to the east of the Lincoln Edge, at approximately 27m OD.

The site of the development was previously an area of waste ground at the north-west end of the village. It is an irregular unit of approximately 21450m², and the central national grid reference is TF 00450 75375. To its north is Nettleham Beck, which meanders through the village from north-east to south-west. To its south is Manor Court, with modern detached housing beyond. The western boundary is a young hedge and fence, with hedging also forming part of the eastern boundary.

The solid geology over which the site rests is Middle Jurassic Lincolnshire Limestone, with Rutland Mudstone and Sandstone to the south-west (BGS 1999). There are no known drift deposits in this area.

3.0 Planning Background

Full planning permission was granted for the erection of three dwellings and an access road at Manor Court, Nettleham. The permission was granted subject to the undertaking of an archaeological recording brief on all groundworks in the area of an

earthwork bank on the south side of the site: identified in an archaeological desk-based assessment by M Allen (Allen, 2002).

4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The earliest recorded artefact in the vicinity of the site is a Neolithic polished stone axe, found less than 100m to the north-east. An unfinished flint arrowhead, a late Neolithic or early Bronze Age triangular flint arrowhead, and a scatter of Bronze Age flints including an arrowhead and a scraper have been found within 400m, while a late Bronze Age palstave axe head was found in 1909, more than 700m to the east of the site.

Two Iron Age sites have been recorded within 1km of the development area. An archaeological watching brief at 9 Sudbrooke Lane revealed a series of ditches, believed to be of Iron Age date, but containing Roman pottery and tile. An extensive Iron Age multiple-ditched boundary, comprising three ditches with banks between, was sample excavated approximately 700m to the west of the site, alongside Riseholme Lane. The predominance of Late Iron Age pottery (2nd and 1st centuries BC) suggests that there was a settlement nearby. (Although the place-name *Nettleton* is derived from Old English – ‘the homestead, estate where nettles grow’ – it implies the presence of a much earlier settlement, as nettles typically colonise abandoned areas of human habitation.)

The village lies close to two Roman roads: Ermine Street, 2.9km to the west, and the Roman coast road, now the A158, c.1.6km to the south. In 1961 a stone inscription was found in the garden of 13 Willowfield Avenue, 750m east of the site. It reads ‘DEO MARTI RIGO/NEMETI ET NVMINI/BVS AVGVSTORVM/Q. NERAT. PROXSI/MVS ARCVMDDESVO/DONAVIT’, ‘To the God Mars Rigonemetis and the Divine Emperors, Quitus Neratius Proxsimus has given this arch at his own cost’, which, with the remnants of stone walls, and associated Roman pottery from the vicinity, indicates the presence of a place of worship.

Surface scatters and isolated artefacts of Romano-British date, including pottery, a bronze finger ring, a penannular brooch, and an unidentifiable Roman coin has been recorded within the village.

Finds of Saxon date are relatively common locally, and pagan Saxon pottery was recovered during the construction of the Lincolnshire Police HQ, less than 100m to the north, while late Saxon (9th – 11th century) loom weights were found in the general area in 1955. An unknown quantity of Saxon beads are reported from a rear garden at Greetwell Lane, c.350m to the south of the site, and a fragment of a possible Saxon annular brooch was found approximately 700m to the north-east.

During Saxon times, it has been suggested that the Beck overflowed its banks and formed a large pool, which is presumed to have lain within the site confines; a recent test pit survey exposed a silt deposit c.0.7m deep beneath an alluvial topsoil.

Although All Saints parish church was substantially rebuilt in 1891, it incorporates remnants of 13th century construction, and its grounds contain the remains of a

medieval cross base and a 14th century stone coffin. It lies approximately 300m ESE of the site.

Approximately 250m to the south of the site are the remains of the Bishop's manor of Nettleham (Scheduled Ancient Monument No. 22749), now visible only as a series of mounds. The Earl of Mercia built the first manor at the beginning of the 11th century, but the surviving earthworks probably represent a subsequent late 11th century structure. Immediately to the south of the Bishop's manor house, a medieval French jeton (inscribed metal counter) and green glazed pottery of 14th century date have been found. Slightly further afield (less than 300m to the north-east of the site), a 15th century bronze pilgrim badge of St Barbara was recovered from a garden in North Street. North of the village are the recorded remains of ridge and furrow cropmarks from medieval strip ploughing.

Many of the stone-built cottages around the village green and High Street date from the 16th - 19th centuries and are listed buildings, while the village school, approximately 500m to the south-east of the site, occupies the site of a post-medieval windmill.

5.0 Methodology

Three visits were made to the site: on 24.2.2003, when an entrance was made onto the site; on 27.3.2003, when topsoil stripping took place in the area of the earthwork bank and on 8.5.2003, when foundation trenches were cut for the house and garage of plot 1. This work was undertaken with a variety of excavators: a 360° excavator with a flat ditching bucket was used for topsoil stripping, while the foundation trenches for plot 1 were excavated with a JCB excavator employing a 0.65m wide flat-bladed bucket. The foundation trenches were generally 0.7m wide and a maximum of 1.7m deep. This work was monitored continuously to ensure that any archaeological features exposed were identified and recorded.

The archaeological fieldwork entailed the cleaning by hand of all exposed surfaces, followed by a thorough inspection. All archaeological deposits identified by this method were subjected to limited excavation to assess their nature/dimensions and to attempt to recover datable materials. These investigations resulted in the production of written descriptions of each layer on standard watching brief context recording sheets. Colour photographs and scale drawings complement these accounts.

6.0 Results (Figs 2, 3, 4)

The modern topsoil consisted of loose grey-brown clayey silt containing occasional small angular limestone fragments and rare brick fragments (001). This material covered the whole area to a depth of 0.25-0.3m. In the area of the access, this material stripped onto a firm light/mid-grey brown sandy silt containing frequent angular limestone fragments and rubble (002), which in turn sealed a layer of light/mid-yellow firm sandy clay (003) - a layer of recent debris from which an iron bar and a fertiliser bag were recovered.

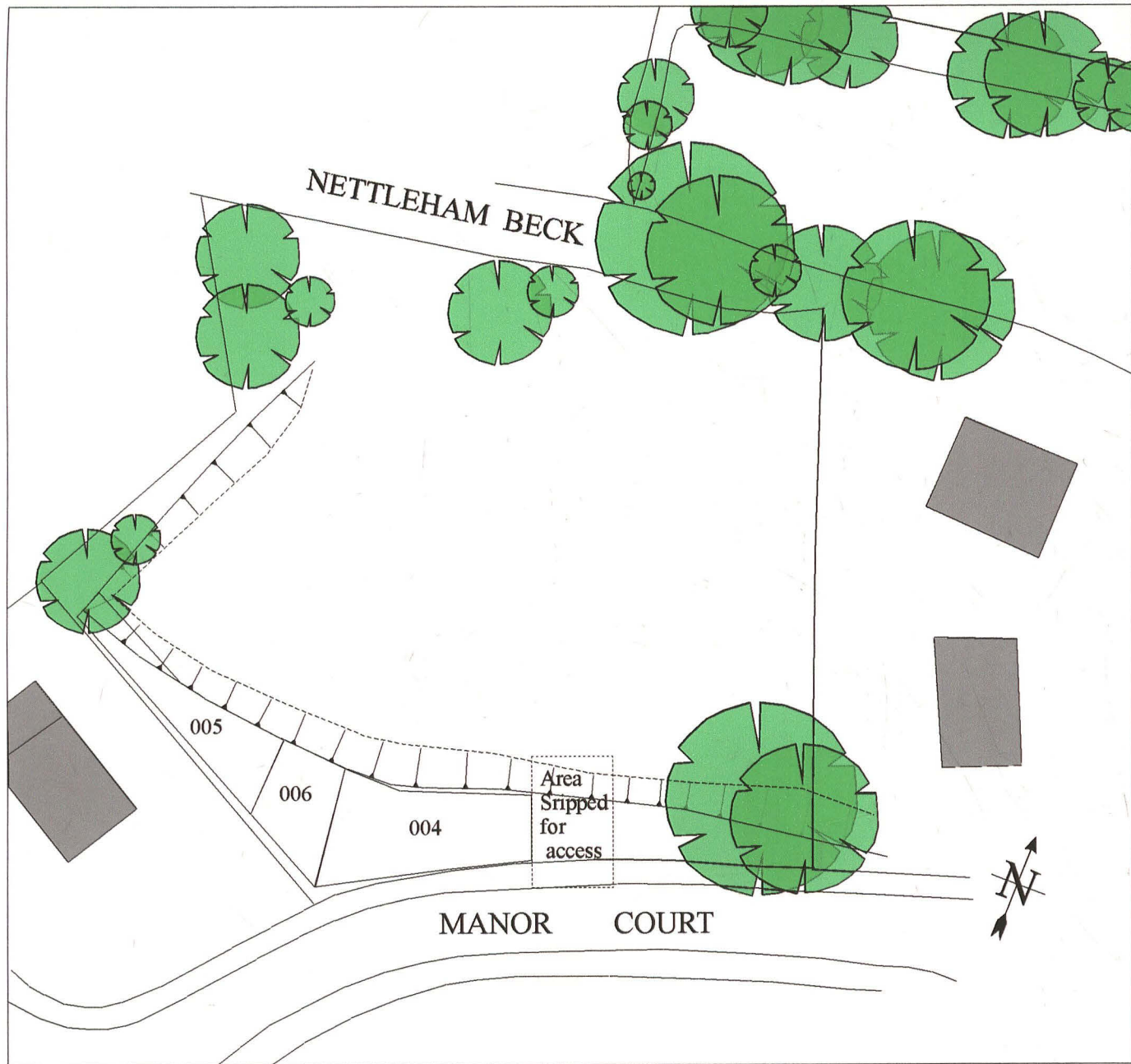


Fig. 2a: Plan of the development area showing the two areas topsoil stripped. Scale 1:500

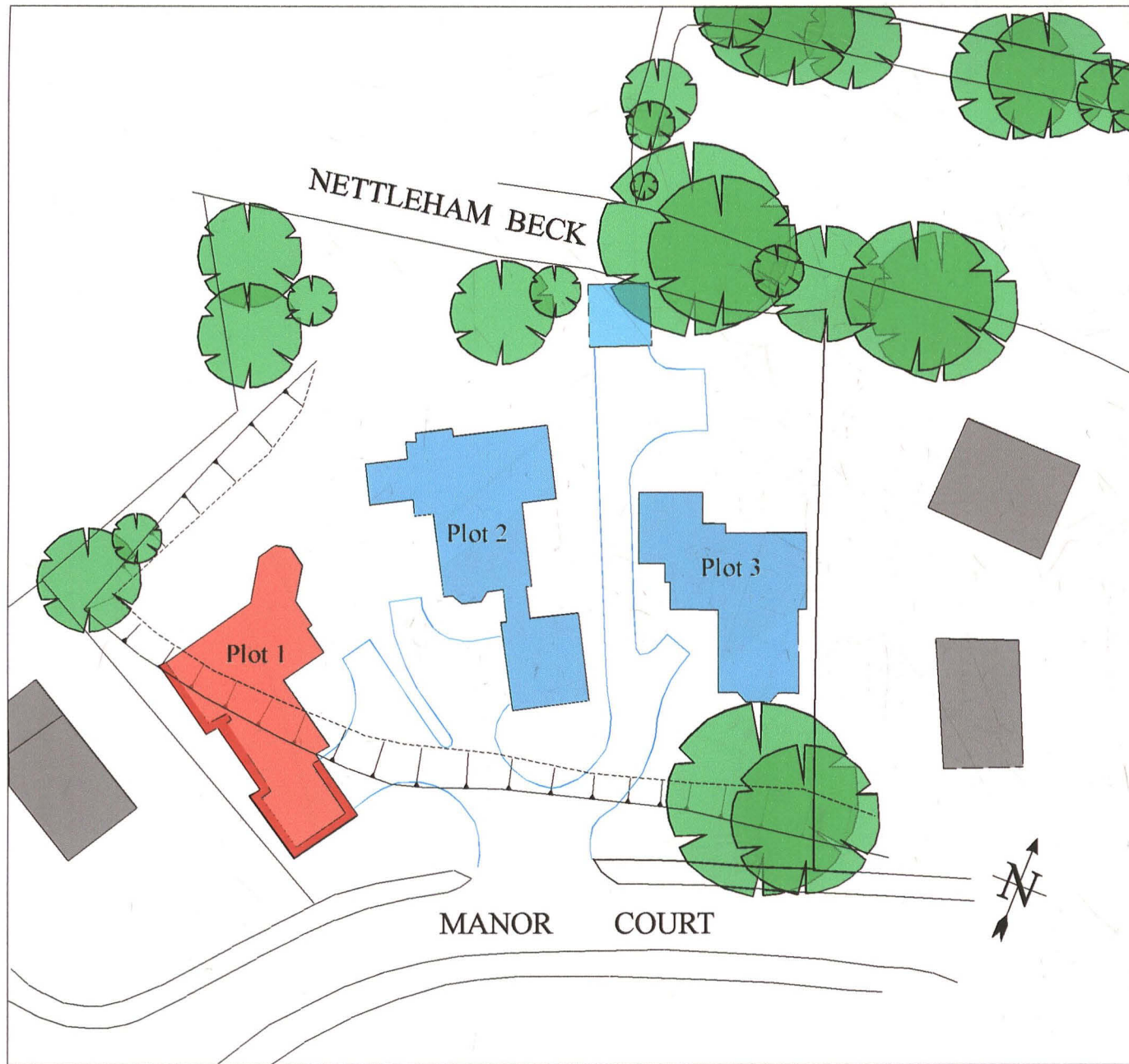


Fig. 2b: Plan of the development area showing the position of the houseplots, with the monitored plot in red and the monitored foundation trench bold. Scale 1:500

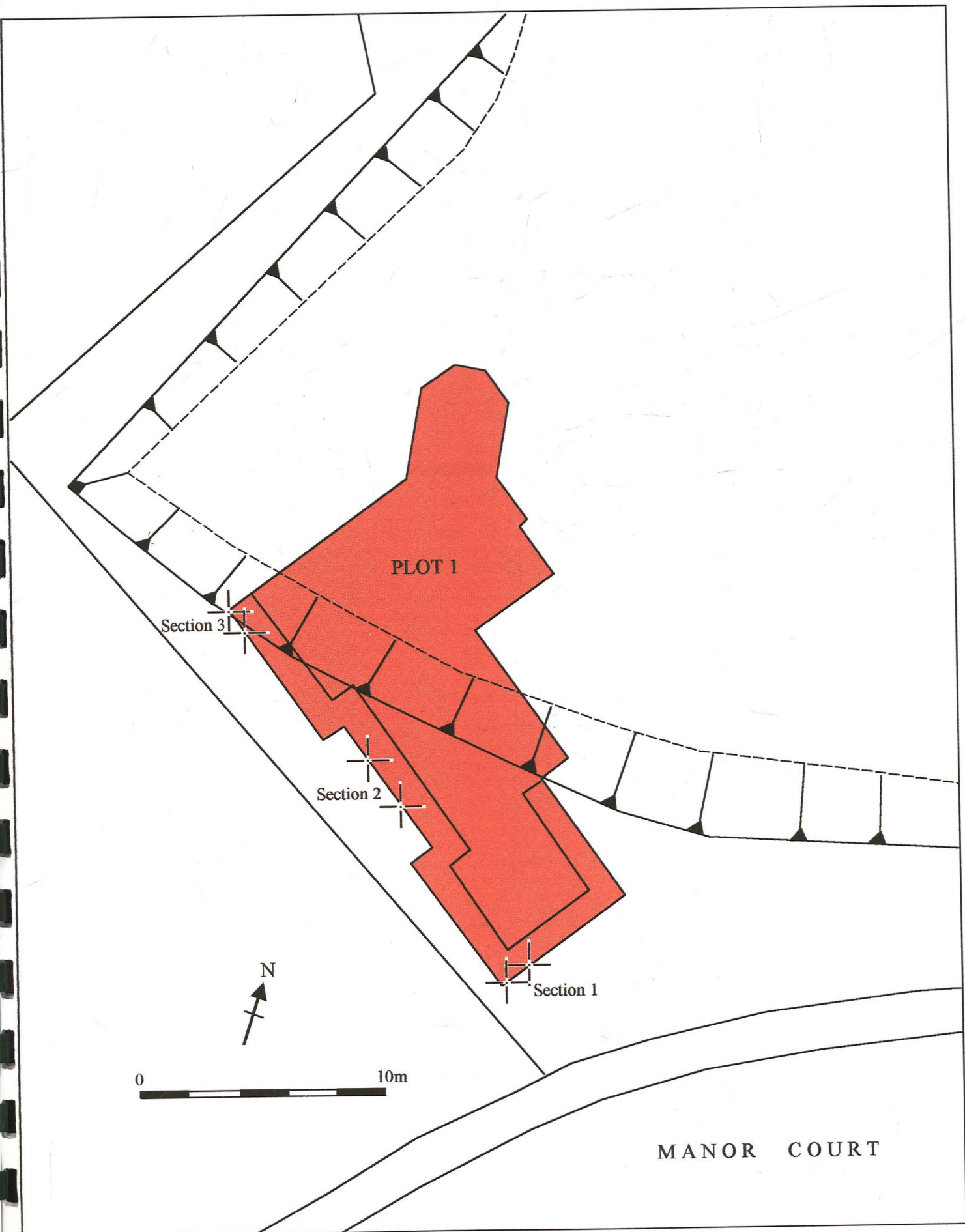


Fig. 3: Plan showing the footprint of plot 1, the foundation trench monitored, and the position of the recorded sections (fig. 4). Scale 1: 200

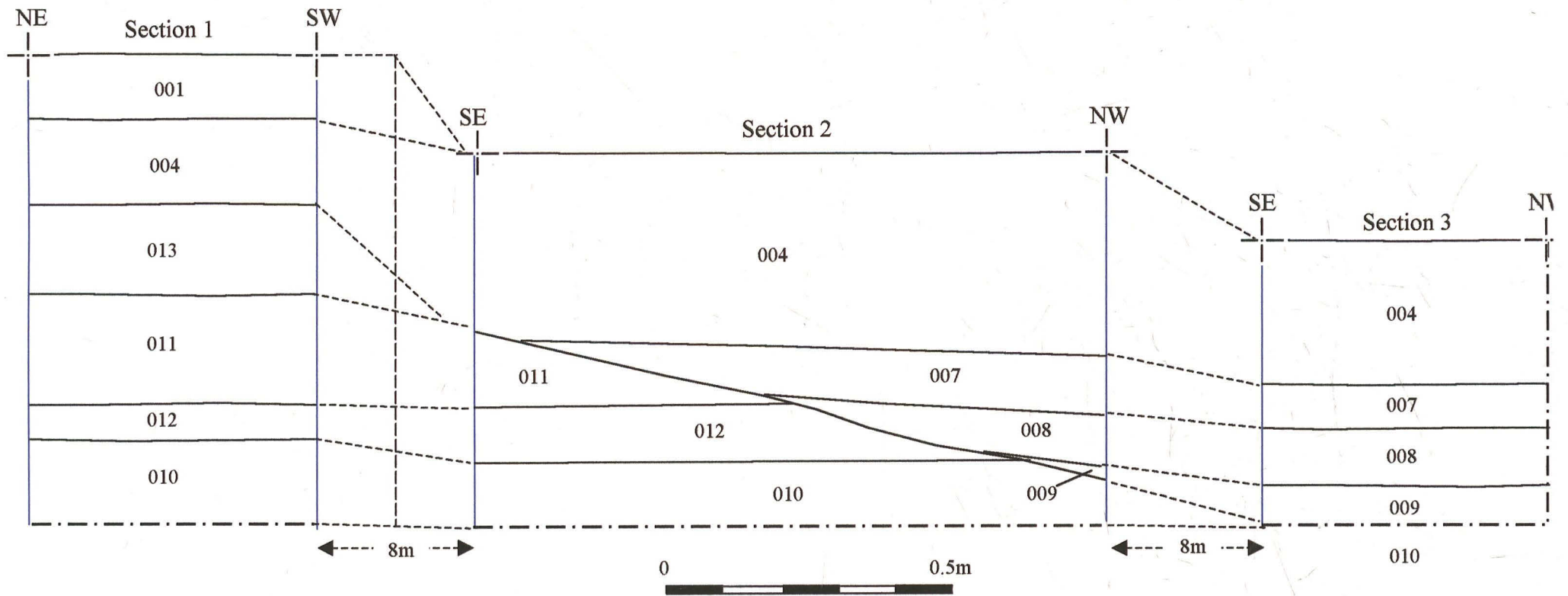


Fig. 4: Interpreted Northeast facing section through plot 1, incorporating the three representative sections 1-3 (as solid lines). Scale of individual sections 1:20.

When the topsoil was stripped over the remainder of the raised ground area, it revealed three distinct contexts. In the southern part of the area was a mid grey sandy clay which contained frequent limestone, brick and tile rubble including some concrete rubble - 004. Within this material a fragment of window mullion was noted, and the developer recognised the rubble as the remains of two barns which had stood on the raised ground to the south of Manor Court prior to redevelopment. In the southwest corner of the area, a concentration of limestone brash was seen (006), this proved later to be redeposited within the modern rubble 004. At the north end of the area the topsoil stripped onto a dark grey sandy clay subsoil - 005.

When footing trenches were excavated for plot 1, the sequence of deposition was established. Subsoil 005 was found to be a thin layer which sealed rubble 004, and, as mentioned above, the concentration of limestone brash, 006, proved to be redeposited within this rubble layer.

At the southern end of plot 1, the modern overburden 004 sealed a buried topsoil, 013, which was 0.25m thick and sealed a series of natural limestone-derived layers. Uppermost of these was a layer of natural weathered limestone 011, which was over a layer of mixed grey sand and limestone, 012. Below 012 was a mid yellowish brown boulder clay, a natural deposit seen at the base of the entire foundation footprint (010).

In the centre of the houseplot the sequence changed, and a series of alluvial deposits were exposed, sealed beneath the modern overburden 004, but lying above the natural limestone derived layers. The uppermost of these layers was a dark brown silty peat layer (007) which in turn sealed a blue-veined, mid grey clay which contained occasional small limestone fragments, charcoal flecks and rare extremely small (undiagnostic) animal bone fragments. Sealed below 008, was a clean dark grey fine silt deposit - 009. Below 009, boulder clay 010 was again present. It is possible that these layers occupied a shallow cut, although it seems more likely that they were deposited within a shallow depression.

7.0 Discussion and conclusions

Some deposits of potential archaeological significance were exposed by the watching brief. It now appears likely that the raised ground at the southern side of the site is part of the natural topography. It appears very likely that a pool once occupied the lower ground, and this is supported by the occurrence of alluvial deposits in the area. The possibility that this pool dried out is supported by the presence of peat in the upper part of the sequence.

The presence of the modern overburden 004, especially in the northern part of the area, suggests that this material was deposited at the edge of the scarp, perhaps as a conscious attempt to reclaim or improve land that was a naturally boggy area, although it seems more likely that the low ground provided an expedient dumping area for unwanted demolition debris.

The watching brief appears to support the suggestion that there was a pool (discussed in the preceding desk-based assessment). However, as no datable finds were

recovered from the alluvial deposits (with animal bone fragments being too small for diagnosis), it is impossible to suggest a date for this feature.

8.0 Effectiveness of Methodology

The methodology employed allowed the presence/absence, the extent and nature of the high ground on the southern side of the development to be ascertained, although further investigation of the lower ground may have better established the significance of the alluvial layers encountered at the northern end of the foundation trench.

9.0 Acknowledgements

Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) would like to thank John Dixon Developments Ltd. for this commission and the assistance provided by himself and his groundworkers during the course of the watching brief.

10.0 Bibliography

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Appendix 1: Colour Plates



Plate 1 (left): General view of the site during machining, looking north-west.



Plate 2 (right): General view of the site during topsoil stripping, looking north-west.

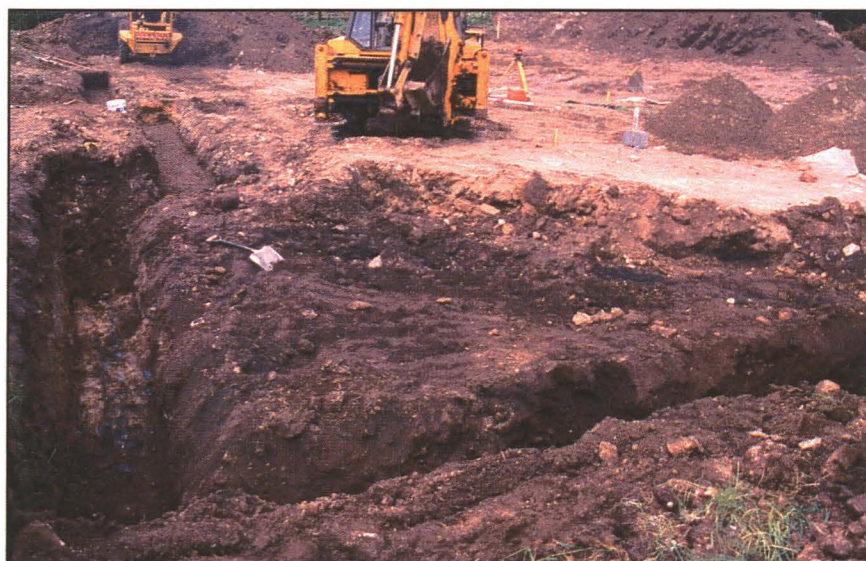


Plate 3 (left): The foundation trench for plot 1, looking North.

Plate 4 (right): Post excavation view of Section 1, at the south end of the plot 1, looking south.

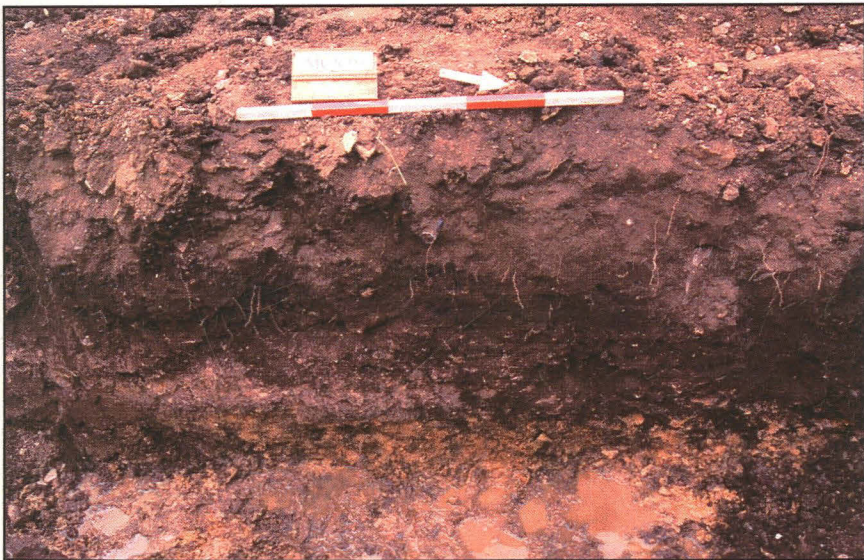
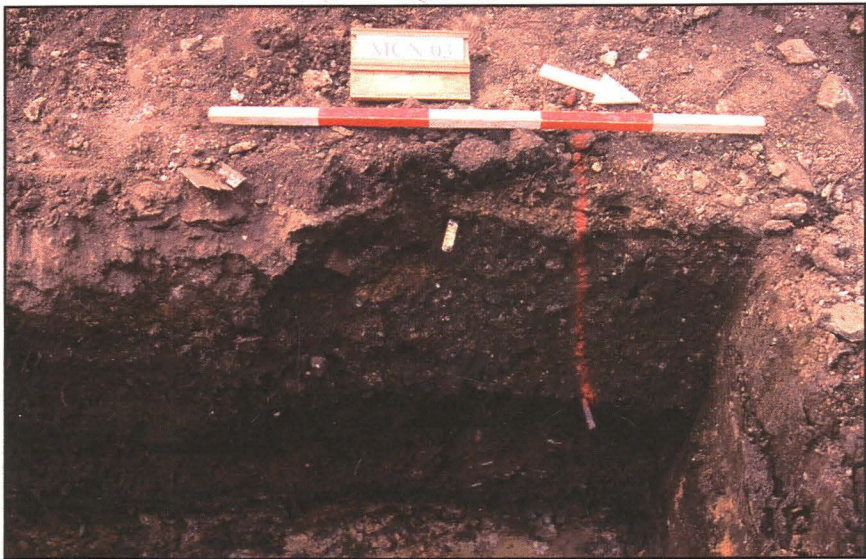


Plate 5 (left): Post excavation view of section 2, looking south-west.

Plate 6 (right): Post excavation view of section 3, at the north end of plot 1, looking south-west.



Appendix 2: Context Summary

Context	Description
001	Modern Topsoil
002	Light/mid grey-brown sandy silt below 001 in site access
003	Light/mid yellow sandy clay below 002
004	Mid grey sandy clay and rubble – recent overburden
005	Dark grey sandy clay subsoil
006	Redeposited limestone brash – part of 004
007	Dark brown silty peat at north end of foundation trench
008	Blue veined mid-grey clay below 007
009	Clean dark grey fine silt below 008
010	Mid yellowish brown boulder clay - natural
011	Weathered limestone - natural
012	Mixed grey sand and limestone below 011
013	Buried Topsoil, below 004 on south side of site.