

**Land at
Robertsbridge Abbey,
Redlands Lane,
Salehurst,
Robertsbridge,
East Sussex**

Negative Watching Brief Report

Project Code: RAR-EV-14
Planning Ref: n/a
NGR: 575481 123890

Report No: 2014/166
Archive No: 3459

December 2014

Document Record

This report has been issued and amended as follows:

Version	Prepared by	Position	Date	Approved by
01	Adrian Gollop	Project Officer	12/12/2014	

Conditions of Release

This document has been prepared for the titled project, or named part thereof, and should not be relied on or used for any other project without an independent check being carried out as to its suitability and prior written authority of Canterbury Archaeological Trust Ltd being obtained. Canterbury Archaeological Trust Ltd accepts no responsibility or liability for this document to any party other than the person by whom it was commissioned. This document has been produced for the purpose of assessment and evaluation only. To the extent that this report is based on information supplied by other parties, Canterbury Archaeological Trust Ltd accepts no liability for any loss or damage suffered by the client, whether contractual or otherwise, stemming from any conclusions based on data supplied by parties other than Canterbury Archaeological Trust Ltd and used by Canterbury Archaeological Trust Ltd in preparing this report. This report must not be altered, truncated, préciséd or added to except by way of addendum and/or errata authorized and executed by Canterbury Archaeological Trust Ltd.

All rights including translation, reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of Canterbury Archaeological Trust Limited

LIST OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction and background	3
2	Site location, topography and geology	3
3	Archaeological and historical background	4
4	Objectives and methodologies	5
5	Results	7
6	Summary	8
	Bibliography	9

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: General site location plan

Figure 2: Plan showing location of pit for the new treatment plan and trenches for new inlet and outflow pipes.

LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1: Pit for new treatment plant. No scale.

Plate 2: Deepest section of the service trench for the new outfall pipe. Scale 1m

Plate 3: Existing outfall pipe as exposed in the northerly explorative test-pit. Scale 1m.

Plate 4: Trench for the new outfall pipe (in place) as viewed from the south. No scale

Summary

On 1 December 2014, the Canterbury Archaeological Trust (CAT) undertook an archaeological watching brief monitoring groundwork during the installation of a new sewage system at Robertsbridge Abbey a Cistercian monastery founded in 1178 and dissolved in 1538, is currently a Scheduled Ancient Monument (English Heritage List Entry No. 1221354). The work was commissioned by Mrs. CM and Prof. PN Leigh whom currently reside at 'The Abbey' house, originally the monastic inner guest house or Abbot's house. The proposed new sewage system is located in a field immediately to the north of 'The Abbey', between it and the monastic fishponds.

CAT had previously undertaken a test pit evaluation, but no significant archaeological remains were identified. There was no evidence for features or deposits that could be directly related to the medieval abbey, or any other medieval activities. However evidence of a cultivated soil horizon suggested that the area has been used as agricultural land for some significant time. A large linear feature was identified which was considered to be associated with the existing sewerage system.

No significant archaeological remains or deposits were identified during the monitoring of the groundwork. There was no evidence for prehistoric, Romano-British, or medieval activity through archaeological deposits or cut features predating the establishment of the abbey, its development or postdating its dissolution. The large linear feature identified during the evaluation was shown to not represent the cut for the existing outfall pipe. This was not further investigated but late nineteenth- and/or twentieth-century bricks retrieved during the evaluation phase, and its alignment, suggests it is related to an earlier phase of activity associated the existing foul tank and its drainage.

1 Introduction and background

- 1.1 On 1 December 2014 the Canterbury Archaeological Trust (CAT) undertook an archaeological monitoring and recording watching brief during ground works associated installation of a new sewage system at Robertsbridge Abbey, East Sussex.
- 1.2 The work was commissioned by Mrs. CM and Prof. PN Leigh (The Abbey, Redlands Lane, Salehurst, Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5NB Tel: 01580 880452).
- 1.3 The area of the proposed development (PDA) is to the rear (north) of a residential property 'The Abbey' which falls within the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Robertsbridge Abbey (English Heritage List Entry No. 1221354), and as such scheduled monument consent for the works was required under the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act.
- 1.4 An archaeological impact assessment and mitigation statement for the proposed development had previously been prepared (Martin and Martin 2014), which outlined the options available for the proposed new sewage system and the impact each would have on any archaeological resource. The preferred option (option 2) for the proposed development comprises the installation of a below ground sewage treatment plant and the removal of the existing foul tank. The new treatment plant is to be linked to an existing section of drainage trench which will require the excavation of a new trench c37m in length along the line of the existing trench.
- 1.5 An earlier archaeological test pit evaluation had undertaken by CAT (Gollop 2014) to assess the potential impact of the proposed development on any buried archaeological resource that may be present. This found no evidence for significant structures or deposits associated with the medieval abbey. However evidence of a cultivated soil horizon suggested that the area has been used as agricultural land for some significant time. A large linear feature was identified which was considered to be associated with the existing sewerage system.
- 1.6 The archaeological watching brief was conducted in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared by CAT (Wilson 2014), and agreed with the English Heritage Inspector / Asst Inspector of Ancient Monuments (SE Office Guildford).

2 Site location, topography and geology

- 2.1 The PDA (Fig. 1) is centrally located on national grid reference (NGR) 575481 123890 within the precincts of Robertsbridge Abbey, and comprises an open field to the north of the current residential property 'The Abbey' and to the south of the monastic fishponds. The field is currently utilised as pasture land. The existing foul tank is located directly to the north-east of 'The Abbey', approximately 5m from the property wall. An existing

- outfall pipe enters a culvert associated with the monastic fishponds approximately 70m directly to the north of the existing foul tank. It remains unclear whether this outfall pipe is directly connected to the foul tank as a survey in 2012 of the tank, failed to identify a connection (Martin and Martin 2014, 1).
- 2.2 The field in which the PDA is located, although flat along its southern edge, slopes markedly down towards the north in the direction of the River Rother which is located less than 150m to the north of 'The Abbey'. The current ground levels vary between c. +6 and 10m OD, and follow the contours of the River Rother valley.
 - 2.3 The British Geological Survey (1980, sheet 304 Tenderden, Solid and Drift edition) shows the PDA as lying on the Cretaceous Ashdown beds formation, which comprises interbedded sandstone and siltstone sedimentary bedrock and forms the solid geology. The centre of the abbey grounds (including 'The Abbey', the surviving ruins of the refectory southern range, and the former site of the abbey church) appear to be sited on an outcrop of bedrock which forms a very slight promontory mapped as being surrounded to the north, east and west by (Pleistocene or later) Alluvium; a drift deposit which follows the line of the River Rother flood plain. During the evaluation the Ashdown Beds were present across the PDA, with overlying alluvium tentatively identified on the higher ground to the south only, here it had been reworked by later horticultural or agricultural activity (Gollop 2014, 10).

3 Archaeological and historical background

- 3.1 The WSI identifies the site as in an area of known archaeological potential (CAT 2014, 2) within the precincts of Robertsbridge Abbey an Archaeological Notification Area and a Scheduled Ancient Monument (English Heritage List Entry No. 1221354, National Monuments Record NMR TQ 72 SE 1 and East Sussex Historic Environment Record MES2300).
- 3.2 Robertsbridge Abbey represents the remains of a Cistercian monastery which was founded in 1178 and dissolved in 1538. Until recently these remains had been incorporated into the Abbey Farm complex, parts of which are now private residencies. Surviving elements of the monastery include the ruins of the Abbey Frater or Refectory (NMR TQ 72 SE 92) currently a Grade II listed building (English Heritage Building ID: 416167). The present 'Abbey House' formed part of the former monastic inner guesthouse (3.3, below). Available evidence suggests that PDA lies in an area that would have been open ground within the inner precinct, the southernmost area being the approach to the abbey church (Martin & Martin 2014, 3–4). To the west the remains of a bridge have been identified which formed part of the approach to the abbey. There are no visible remains of the church, but its outline plan has been mapped through crop marks identified in aerial photographs in through a detailed resistivity scan (ibid, 3; see Figure 1) along with the presumed western boundary of the cemetery to the east of the PDA.
- 3.3 The 'Abbey House' is a Grade I listed building (English Heritage Building ID; 412929, NMR TQ 72 SE 93). Referred to as the former 'Abbot's House' it is identified as the inner guest house by Martin and Martin (2014) and until recently it was known as the Abbey Farmhouse. The English Heritage listings suggest the Abbots House would have been the last of the monastic buildings to have been built, by c1250. The original range built from stone with a tiled roof, includes a thirteenth-century undercroft (NMR TQ 72

- SE 90). The building was altered in the sixteenth century and in the seventeenth century when a weather-boarded T-wing was added on the south side; further alterations were again undertaken in the early nineteenth century.
- 3.4 To the south west of the ‘Abbey House’ is the former thirteenth century warming house, which was converted to an oast house, granary and cart shed in the nineteenth century and is now a Grade II listed building (English Heritage Building ID: 416167, NMR TQ 72 SE 92).
 - 3.5 The WSI includes an overview of known archaeological investigations, observations, find-spots and other discoveries within the site’s immediate vicinity (Wilson 2014, 2–3) included here as 3.6–3.9.
 - 3.6 Approximately 300m to the south-west of the PDA, a series of cropmarks are recorded. Possibly associated with the abbey, or perhaps post-medieval in date, the features appear to represent rectilinear enclosures and a droveway (ESHER MES8677).
 - 3.7 In Lordship Wood, situated approximately 500m south-east of the PDA, a section of bank has been recorded which may represent part of a medieval park pale (MES3893).
 - 3.8 Situated c250m south-east of the PDA, at Robertsbridge Abbey Farm, lies the site of a post-medieval iron-working forge (MNR TQ 72 SE 6) with associated ponds, leats and potential charcoal burning sites (NMR TQ 72 SE 55). This industrial complex is a key site representing the Wealden iron industry and was in operation between 1541 and 1801 (MES 3826).
 - 3.9 The site of a kiln (NMR TQ 72 SE 91) was recorded approximately 150m south of the PDA. This structure is thought to be the remains of a malt-drying kiln probably dating to the sixteenth century. A post-Dissolution survey carried out in 1567 recorded a number of buildings in the outer ward of the abbey including a malting house and a brewhouse (MES22277).
 - 3.10 The earliest available maps indicate that the area of the PDA has been an open field, utilised for agricultural purposes, from the late eighteenth century onwards. Martin and Martin (2014, 4–5) suggest that this area has always been open ground within the precinct, citing the manorial survey of 1567 which indicates that the abbey’s service area would have been to the west within the outer court.

4 Objectives and methodologies

Aims and objectives

- 4.1 The archaeological investigation was undertaken in accordance with those methods outlined in the WSI (Wilson 2014), and in accordance with methods of practice outlined by the Institute for Archaeologists (1999).
- 4.2 The principal objective of the archaeological watching brief is to mitigate impacts of development through the recording of any archaeological remains exposed during the course of the development. Particular attention will be made to character, depth below ground level, condition, date and significance of deposits.

- 4.3 The opportunity was also be taken during the course of the watching brief to:
1. Ensure that any features and deposits exposed during the project are excavated, sampled and recorded to an acceptable professional standard.
 2. Ensure that any significant artefactual and/or ecofactual evidence is recorded to an acceptable standard.
 3. Undertake, if necessary, a program of palaeoenvironmental work to establish the significance of any identified features and deposits.
 4. Place and assess any archaeology revealed within the context of other recent archaeological investigations in the immediate area and/or within the setting of the local landscape and topography.
 5. To provide information useful when determining any future decisions that may affect the development of the site.

- 4.4 Specific aims and objectives defined in the specifications (CAT 2014, 3–4) were:
1. Is there any evidence for activity within the area of the PDA that pre-date the establishment of the Abbey?
 2. If so, does such activity relate to settlement or more transient occupation of the area?
 3. How does and such activity relate to the wider historic landscape?
 4. Does evidence survive of structures, features or deposits associated with the development of the Abbey?
 5. If present, how does this evidence relate to the monastic complex?
 6. Does evidence survive within the PDA for post-dissolution structures or activities?

Methods

- 4.4 Archaeological monitoring was undertaken during ground works within the PDA where development could lead to permanent loss of the buried archaeology. This comprised the mechanical excavation of a large pit for the new below ground sewage treatment plant. From the new treatment plant two service trenches were excavated connecting it to the existing outfall pipe and the inlet pipe from the residential property ‘The Abbey’. Prior to the cutting of the new service trenches, three explorative test-pits were excavated to locate the position of the existing inlet and outflow pipes leading to and from the existing foul tank. Their positions have been digitally plotted using AutoCAD and located to a digital Ordnance Survey tile (Fig 2; reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO © Crown Copyright 2001. All rights reserved. License No. AL100021009).

- 4.5 The pit for the new treatment plant was excavated using a fourteen tonne back-acting mechanical excavator initially fitted with a 1m wide toothless ditching bucket, under

- close archaeological supervision. All undifferentiated topsoil, made ground, and modern overburden was removed in spits of *c.*100mm thickness. Any underlying ploughsoil and disturbed subsoil was then removed in *c.*50mm spits until either the first significant archaeological horizon or natural subsoil was encountered. Once the natural bedrock was encountered this was excavated with a 0.75m wide toothed bucket. The service trenches, and explorative test pits, were excavated with a 0.30m wide toothless bucket, again under close archaeological supervision.
- 4.6 Any archaeological features and deposits were excavated by hand, in stratigraphic order where possible, to determine extent, form, character and date. Recording of all contexts was undertaken using standard CAT pro-forma sheets. Plans of all excavated deposits were made at a scale of 1:20 and sections were recorded at a scale of 1:10. Photographic coverage employed colour digital images and colour print formats. Where identified, all artefacts were retrieved from stratified archaeological contexts. Retrieval of finds from non-stratified deposits was carried out on an opportunistic basis.
- 4.7 Recording of all contexts was undertaken using standard CAT pro-forma sheets following the conventions set out in the CAT site recording manual (CAT 1996). Plans of all excavated deposits were made at a scale of 1:20 and sections were recorded at a scale of 1:10. Photographic coverage employed colour digital images and colour print formats. Where identified, all artefacts were retrieved from stratified archaeological contexts. Retrieval of finds from non-stratified deposits was carried out on an opportunistic basis.
- 4.8 The site archive, including all the project records and cultural material produced by the project, is to be prepared in accordance with the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation guidelines for the preparation of archives for long term storage (UKIC 1990). A site code (RAR WB 14) was provided by CAT, and all records can be referenced from this code.

5 Results

New treatment plant

- 5.1 The pit for the new treatment plant (Plate 1) measured roughly 2.5m in diameter, and 3m deep, it was located in the area of a previous evaluation test pit 1, approximately 2.50m to the west of the existing foul tank.
- 5.2 The natural subsoil was exposed in the at depth of 0.58 – 0.62m below the present ground level. This comprised moderately compact mid to light dull yellowy brown very slightly sandy silty clay. Interpreted as part of the Ashdown beds it contained moderate quantities of small-sized (*c.* 0.01–0.06m) angular fragments of sandstone with very occasional fragments of limestone, iron stone and flecks/staining of orange/red and black/brown iron/manganese mineral panning. With depth the bedrock became more compacted and was formed by laminated layers of bedrock primarily of sandstone
- 5.3 No cut archaeological features, were identified in the base of the test pit.
- 5.4 The natural bedrock was sealed by a build-up of soft to moderately compacted mid yellowish brown clayish silt with occasional small-sized rounded and sub-rounded flints (0.005–0.02m), very occasional small angular fragments of sandstone (up to 0.06m) and

moderate flecks/staining of orange/red and black/brown iron/manganese mineral panning. It extended along the complete area of the trench, and was between 0.14 and 0.18m thick. This deposit had been previously identified in the evaluation as a naturally formed water lain soil horizon, such as an alluvium later reworked by later horticultural or agricultural activities such as tilling or ploughing. This was overlain a thin 'plough pan' horizon (upto 0.08m thick) containing moderate to frequent small- to mid-sized fragments (up to 0.12m) of late medieval or early post-medieval 'nibbed' roofing tile resulting from continued re-working of the overlying soils by agricultural and/or horticultural activities. The remainder of the pit was occupied by a ploughsoil horizon sealed by a build-up of made ground comprising associated the construction of the nearby foul tank, overlain by topsoil.

Explorative test pits

- 5.5 Two explorative test pits, measuring c.2m in length and 0.30m wide, were excavated to the north of the existing foul tank to locate the existing outfall pipe. This was located in both at a depth of 0.40m below the present ground level. This comprised a 4 inch ceramic pipe constructed of 2 feet sections, the cut for which had been backfilled with loose small rounded flint pebbles. This had been originally partly exposed during the evaluation work and thought to have been a field drain; it is c. 0.75 – 1.25m to the east of the original projected line for the outfall pipe (Fig 1). No archaeological remains were identified although the upper surface of a large linear feature was present but further investigated. This was seen during the evaluation work and thought to be a drainage trench leading from the existing foul tank.
- 5.6 The third explorative test pit was to the south of the existing foul tank, this measure 0.70m in length, the inlet pipe was identified at a shallow depth of 0.30m below the present ground level.

Service trench for the new inlet pipe

- 5.7 This trench was cut from the inlet pipe leading to the existing foul tank and was c 4m in length, 0.30m wide, with a depth between 0.45m and 0.68m. Due to the presence of leaking sewage this trench could not be inspected, but the majority of this trench was cut through the made ground and upcast associated the construction of the nearby foul tank.

Service trench for the new outfall pipe

- 5.8 This trench was cut from the pit for the new treatment plant towards the existing outflow pipe identified in the northerly of the explorative test pits. This covered a distance of 31m, the trench was 0.30m wide and varied in depth from 0.75m at the treatment plant to 0.50m at proposed junction with the existing outfall pipe.
- 5.9 No cut archaeological features or deposits were identified in this trench. A generalized sequence comprised the same as seen during the excavation of the pit for the treatment works (above 5.4) although the depth at which the natural bedrock was exposed shallowed to c. 0.28 – 0.34m within 3m of the pit; the overlying alluvium was not present beyond this point.

6 Summary

- 6.1 No significant archaeological remains or deposits were identified during the monitoring of the groundwork. There was no evidence for prehistoric, Romano-British, or medieval

- activity through archaeological deposits or cut features predating the establishment of the abbey. Neither was there any evidence for features or deposits associated with the development of the abbey or post dating its dissolution.
- 6.2 The only archaeological deposits were cultivated horticultural or agricultural soils which attest to the area's use as agricultural land from at least the late medieval/early post-medieval period through to the present day.
- 6.3 The large linear feature identified during the evaluation was shown to not represent the cut for the existing outfall pipe. This was not further investigated but late nineteenth- and/or twentieth-century bricks retrieved during the evaluation phase, and its alignment, suggests it is related to an earlier phase of activity associated the existing foul tank and its drainage.

Bibliography

British Geological Survey, 1990, *1:50,000, Sheet 304, Tenderden*

Canterbury Archaeological Trust, 1996, *Site Recording Manual*; CAT unpublished document

English Heritage (http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx)

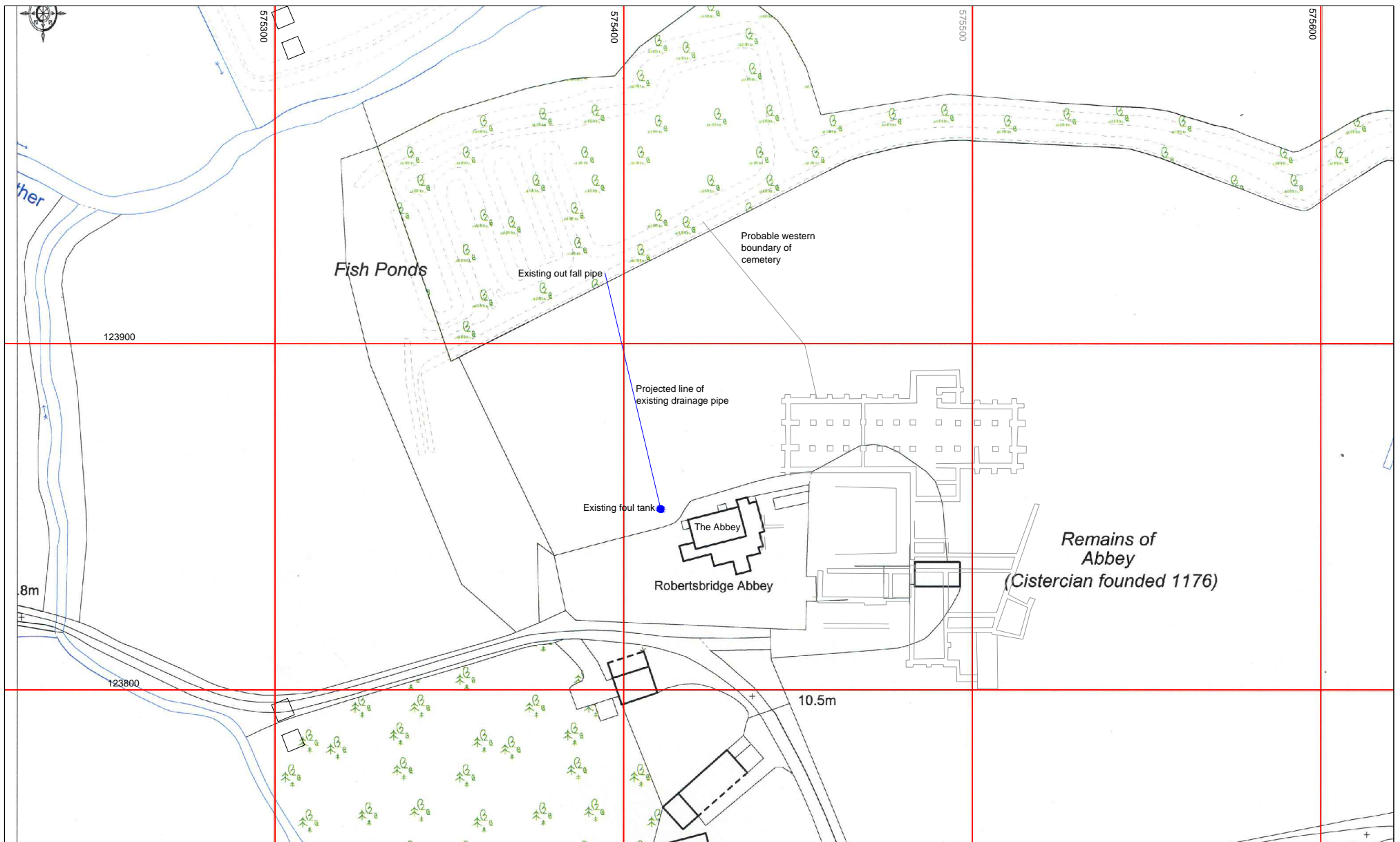
Gollop, A., 2014, *Land at Robertsbridge Abbey, East Sussex; Archaeological Evaluation Report*; CAT unpublished document

Institute for Archaeologists, 1999, *Standards and guidance for an archaeological field evaluation*, Manchester.

Martin, D. & Martin, B. 2014, *The Abbey, Robertsbridge, East Sussex. Archaeological Impact Assessment and Mitigation Statement* unpublished document

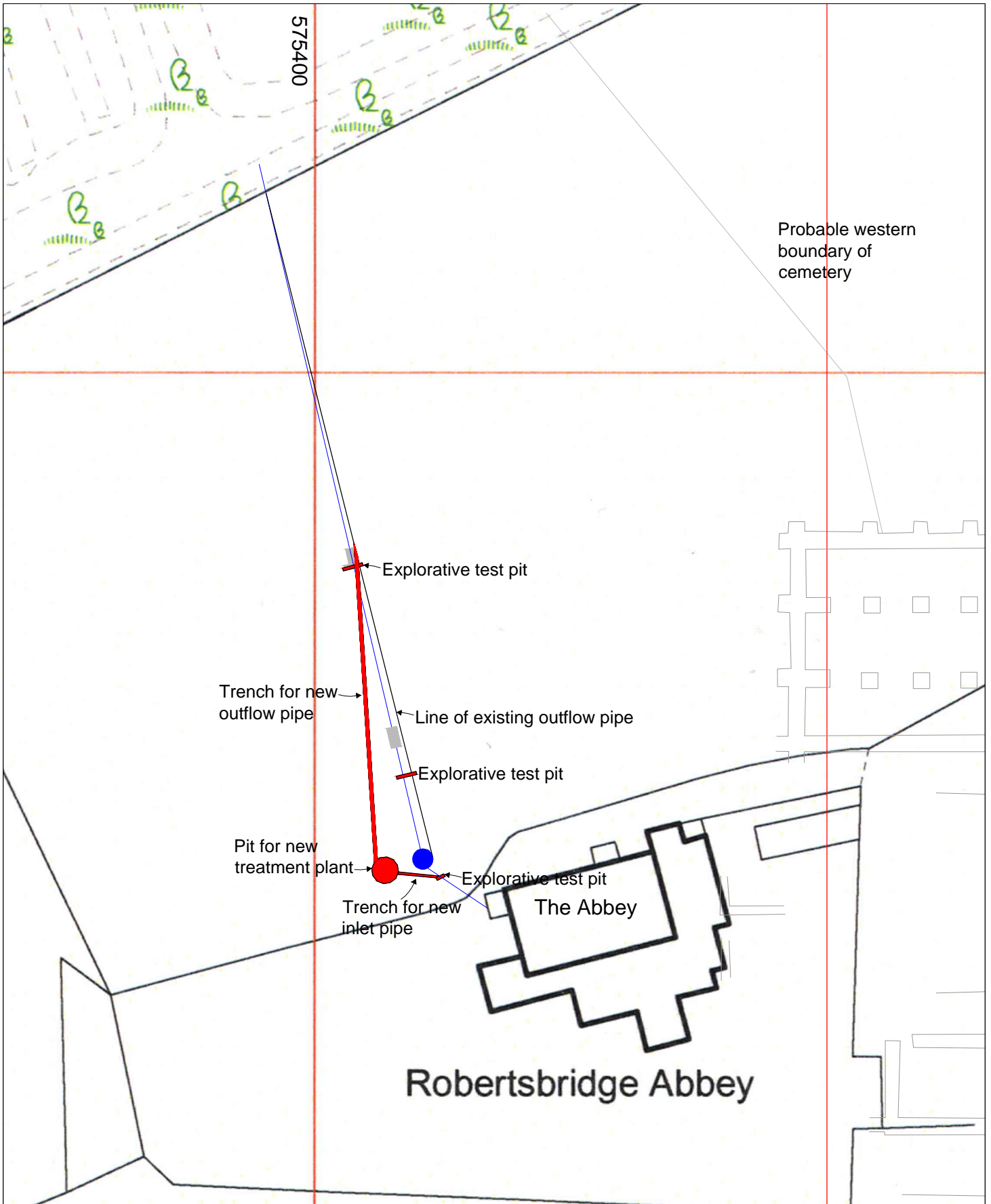
United Kingdom Institute for Conservation, 1990, *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long term storage*, Manchester.

Wilson, T., 2014, *Written Scheme of Investigation for a Programme of Archaeological Monitoring and Recording of Land at Robertsbridge Abbey, East Sussex*; CAT unpublished document



CANTERBURY ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST LTD. <small>A REGISTERED CHARITY</small> <small>92a Broad Street, Canterbury Kent, CT1 2LU Tel 01227 462062 Fax 01227 784724 Email admin@canterburytrust.co.uk</small>	PROJECT NAME	DRAWN BY	SCALE(S)
	PROJECT CODE	DATE	LAST REVISION
	SITE ADDRESS	CHECKED	
		REF/DRG NO.	
	Robertsbridge Abbey, Robertsbridge		JEH/AGG
	RAR-WB-14		12.12.14
	Robertsbridge Abbey Redlands Lane Robertsbridge East Sussex		---
	N/Sites Active/Project Managers/Jon Rady/Robertsbridge Abbey, Robertsbridge/Watching BriefReport/Fig 1		

Figure 1: General site location plan
Shows position of the Abbey church and postulated western edge of the cemetery (after Martin and Martin 2014)



CANTERBURY ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST LTD. <small>A REGISTERED CHARITY</small> <small>92a Broad Street, Canterbury Kent, CT1 2LU Tel 01227 462062 Fax 01227 784724 Email admin@canterburytrust.co.uk</small>	PROJECT NAME	Robertsbridge Abbey, Robertsbridge	DRAWN BY	AGG	SCALE(S)	1:500
	PROJECT CODE	RAR-EV-14	DATE	12.12.14	LAST REVISION	---
	SITE ADDRESS	Robertsbridge Abbey Redlands Lane Robertsbridge East Sussex	CHECKED	---	REF/DRG NO.	N/Sites Active/Project Managers/Jon Rady/Robertsbridge Abbey, Robertsbridge/Watching Brief/Report/Fig 2

Figure 2: Plan showing revised position of the existing outflow and location of pit for new treatment plant, new service trenches and test pits

Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright 2004. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100021009



Plate 1: Pit for new treatment plant. No scale



Plate 2: Deepest section of the service trench for the new outfall pipe. Scale 1m.



Plate 3: Existing outfall pipe as exposed in the northerly explorative test-pit. Scale 1m.



Plate 4: Trench for the new outfall pipe (in place) as viewed from the south. No scale.