

Dover College

Dover

Report on excavation of three flagpole pits

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Excavations at Dover College, 2018

1. Summary

1.1 Three pits were hand-excavated in the grounds of Dover College to allow the erection of flag poles close to the main entrance, off Effingham Crescent (NGR 631516 141622, centred). Special archaeological interest attached to this location because it occupies a position within Dover's medieval priory complex (St Martin of the Newark, founded in 1131), Scheduled as an Ancient Monument (List Entry No: 1002943; Kent HER ref. TR 34 SW 22).

1.2 The pits were cut on a grassed area of the Close, about 1m back from the concrete road kerb. They were set 1.20–1.30m apart and were carefully positioned to avoid buried power cables known to run across this area. Each pit excavated was 0.80m square and 1.00m deep. A previously unknown north–south aligned chalk wall foundation, apparently connected with the medieval priory complex, was discovered in Pit 3, buried at a depth of about 0.95m below present ground level.

1.3 The excavations produced only a small finds assemblage, much of it later medieval in date, but also present are several pieces of prehistoric material, suggesting habitation on the site long before the priory was established. There are four flint-tempered pot-sherds and another of grog-tempered ware. These could all fit into a broadly Iron Age date-range. Several calcined flints could also be Iron Age, whilst the single prehistoric struck flint recovered is more probably Neolithic or Bronze Age.

2. Introduction

2.1 Since the 1870s Dover College, a private co-educational day and boarding school, has been based within the grounds of Dover's medieval priory, located on the western edge of the historic town (Fig. 1). The College is intending to erect three flagpoles within the school grounds, close to the main entrance, off Effingham Crescent (NGR 631516 141622, centred).

2.2 Falling within the area of the Scheduled Ancient Monument (Dover Priory: List Entry No: 1002943; Kent HER ref. TR 34 SW 22), the potential impact of these new additions has been previously considered in a specially commissioned implications report (Grigsby and Weekes 2018).

2.3 In order to mitigate potential impacts on the archaeological record, hand digging of the flagpole pits by archaeologists was considered to provide an appropriate safeguard to the site, allowing for the cessation of excavations in the event of any intact or significant structural remains being encountered during the works.

2.4 Canterbury Archaeological Trust (CAT) was engaged by Dover College to undertake the excavation work required. The two-man CAT team was supervised by Keith Parfitt, BA, FSA, MifA, manager of CAT's Dover Office, who has undertaken previous fieldwork on the priory site. Three days of fieldwork were conducted on 23, 24 and 28 August, 2018.

2.5 The fieldwork generated a small archive, including 23 recorded contexts, a trench plan, 3 measured sections and 35 digital photographs, together with small collections of finds. All the field records have been checked and indexed; they are currently held by CAT (Dover Office) but will be transferred to a suitable local repository in due course.

3. Archaeological background

3.1 There are effectively four main phases in the evolution of the priory site. These are:

Medieval priory, 1131–1538
Post-medieval farm, 1538–1871
Housing development, 1845–1871
Public school, 1871–2019

3.2 The former importance of the medieval priory at Dover (St Martin of the Newark, founded 1131) is well established (Plumptre 1861; Haines 1930) and this has been reaffirmed in two recent desk assessments (Parfitt 2016; Grigsby and Weekes 2018). The new flagpole excavations in the Close offered some limited opportunity to archaeologically examine an area located within the outer court of the priory, north of the church and the main claustral ranges (Fig. 1, inset & Fig. 2).

3.3 The potential significance of this area can be partially gauged from early maps, plans and illustrations of the site (Grigsby and Weekes 2018). Perhaps most helpful is F.C. Plumptre's plan of 1861 which shows a series of (undated) walls extending northwards from the north side of the Norman Refectory range, towards the flagpole excavation area (Plumptre 1861, pl. III; Fig. 1, inset & Fig. 2). In 1978, excavations along the north side of the Refectory revealed part of an adjoining masonry structure. This had clay floors and measured at least 15 by 7 metres. It perhaps dated to the fourteenth century (Med. Arch. 1979). There is evidence to suggest that the documented head prior's lodging had once adjoined the Refectory (Haines 1930, 125) and some of the remains noted above could have been related to this structure.

3.4 Nineteenth-century plans and a photograph dated 1851 show that the area of the flagpole pits was then open ground lying to the east of two ponds (Figs 6 & 7). It is possible that these originated as monastic fish ponds but they were drained in 1868. Today, the area is grassed lawn, bounded by a tarmac roadway with concrete kerbing (Grigsby and Weekes 2018, fig. 21, A–G).

4. Archaeological excavation

Aims

4.1 The aims of the work were to:-

- a) archaeologically excavate the three pits required in the appropriate locations;
- b) identify any significant remains that should be preserved and alert Historic England (e.g. *in situ* wall foundations, floors and hearths, etc.);
- c) excavate and record details of any stratified deposits encountered that were considered to be of lesser significance and not worthy of preservation (e.g. modern soil deposits, general soil and rubble layers, etc.);
- d) recover any historical artefacts;
- e) prepare a report on the findings of the excavations.

Methodology

4.2 The three separate pits were dug on the grassed area of the Close about 1m back from the concrete road kerb (Figs 2 & 3). They were set 1.20–1.30m apart and were carefully positioned to avoid buried power cables known to run across this area.

4.3 The pits were archaeologically excavated by hand, using spade, pick, shovel, trowel, etc. The soils generally were dry and hard due to prolonged hot summer weather. Spoil from the excavations was regularly and carefully scanned for the presence and collection of artefacts but little of significance was recovered.

4.4 Each excavated pit was 0.80m square and 1.00m deep (Fig.4). The archaeological information revealed was documented in accordance with the conventions set out in Canterbury Archaeological Trust's *Site Recording Manual*. Details of the exposed stratification were noted on standardised context recording sheets, three measured sections, an overall site plan and thirty-five digital photographs.

5. Description of the excavated pits (Pits 1–3)

5.1 Pit 1 (Figs 2–4)

5.1.1 This was the south-easternmost of the three pits excavated. It revealed a succession of soil deposits but no structural remains. At the base was an undisturbed layer of yellow-brown clay with small chalk lumps and occasional flints (Fig. 4; Section 2, Context 107). This was at least 0.20m thick but it produced no datable finds.

5.1.2 Layer 107 was sealed by another undisturbed soil deposit (Section 2, Context 106), between 0.12 and 0.30m thick, which consisted of a yellow-brown loamy clay with much small and medium chalk, occasional flints, occasional pieces of peg-tile and a moderate amount of small West Country roofing slate fragments, together with a few animal bone fragments.

5.1.3 Subsequently, further soil deposits accumulated. These probably represent deliberate dumps and totalled around 0.50m in thickness (Section 2, Contexts 102, 103, 104 & 105). They comprise a series of grey-brown loam and loamy clay layers containing chalk, flint and fragments of later post-medieval brick.

5.1.4 A final layer of fine dark grey-brown loam topsoil, about 0.15m thick (Section 2, Context 101) supported the modern turf of the Close. In addition to items of modern plastic, this layer produced a single residual seventeenth- or eighteenth-century rim sherd from an internally glazed red-ware vessel.

5.2 Pit 2 (Figs 2–4)

5.2.1 This was the central pit. It again revealed a succession of soil deposits but no certain structural remains. At the base was an undisturbed layer of yellow-brown clay containing chalk lumps and a moderate quantity of small to medium sized flints (Fig. 4; Section 3, Context 206). This layer was at least 0.03m thick and produced a few oyster shell fragments (not retained), a single flint-tempered prehistoric potsherd and a small calcined flint. Fairly certainly, this layer represents a continuation of Context 107 in Pit 1 and the finds here suggest that it could be of pre-medieval date (see below).

5.2.2 Resting on the surface of layer 206 was a thin layer of mixed grey loam and dark yellow clay containing medium sized rounded flints (Section 3, Context 205). This possibly represented a rough laid surface around 0.08m thick, but the point cannot be certain. There were no datable finds.

5.2.3 The flint layer (205) was sealed by another thick soil deposit (Section 3, Context 204), whose upper zone had been partially disturbed by tree roots (Context 203). The deposit was between 0.35 and 0.50m thick and consisted of a yellow-brown loamy clay with much small chalk, moderate charcoal specks and occasional flints. This deposit would seem to represent a continuation of layer 106 seen in Pit 1. It yielded a small collection of finds, including eight sherds of pottery, medieval peg-tile, oyster shell, animal bone and a few small fragments of stone (Caen stone and greensand). The pottery is a mixed group comprising four small sherds of medieval sandy ware, including a jug rim, and four earlier pieces, probably of Iron Age date, including a piece of grog-tempered fine-ware with a red slipped outer surface (see below).

5.2.4 Later, another substantial layer of soil was dumped across the area (Section 3, Context 202). This was between 0.35 and 0.47m thick and consisted of a grey loam containing fragments of chalk, flint and peg-tile, together with some animal bone and oyster shell. There were also some nineteenth-century glass and pottery fragments, including a stoneware inkpot and the square base of a small decorated vessel of fine porcelain. This layer would seem to represent a continuation of Contexts 103 and 104 in Pit 1 (see above).

5.2.5 Layer 202 was sealed by an upper layer of fine dark grey-brown loam (Section 3, Context 201) which supported the modern turf of the Close. This topsoil was about 0.15m thick.

5.3 Pit 3 (Figs 2–5)

5.3.1 This was the north-westernmost of the three pits excavated. It revealed a succession of soil deposits, with the remains of a substantial wall foundation in the base. The earliest deposit exposed consisted of an undisturbed layer of light brown-yellow clay containing small chalk lumps and occasional small flints (Fig. 4; Section 1, Context 305). This was at least 0.18m thick and appeared to represent a continuation of Contexts 107 and 206 in the adjacent trenches. It produced no datable finds.

5.3.2 Wall foundation 308 (Figs 4 & 5)

Subsequently cut into the top of layer 305 was a roughly north–south aligned foundation trench (Section 1, F. 310) containing a substantial wall footing (308). This was traced for a distance of 0.95m running diagonally across the pit (Fig. 4). The foundation's full width and depth were not revealed but it was at least 0.60m wide and 0.05m deep. It was constructed from large and medium sized chalk lumps, bonded with a brown clay containing frequent chalk grits and small white mortar fragments (Fig. 5). It is not readily apparent what this foundation represents and the limited extent seen makes interpretation difficult (see below).

5.3.3 On the eastern side of the foundation, what appeared to be an associated construction layer (304) was noted lying on the surface of clay layer 305. This consisted of a 0.05m thick layer of mixed crushed chalk and cream-white gritty mortar. There were no associated finds but fairly certainly this layer was related to the construction of the wall. Along the western side, the deposit had subsequently been cut through by a later robber trench (Section 1, F. 307, see below).

5.3.4 The 0.12m deep trench (F. 307) directly over foundation 308, cutting through Contexts 304 and 305, indicated that the upper levels of the wall had subsequently been robbed away. The light brown clay filling of this robber trench (Context 306) contained much small and medium chalk, occasional patches of cream mortar and a few flints. A single piece of medieval sandy ware pottery and a fragment of peg-tile were also recovered from this fill.

5.3.5 The construction layer (304) and the infilled robber trench (F. 307) were both sealed by a 0.27m thick layer of yellow-brown loamy clay with much small chalk and occasional flints (Section 1, Context 303). This deposit would seem to represent a continuation of layer 204 seen in Pit 2. It produced two oyster shells, a residual prehistoric struck flint, a piece of animal bone and a few small fragments of medieval peg-tile (Table 1).

5.3.6 Later, a 0.50m thick layer of soil was spread across the area (Section 1, Context 302). This consisted of a grey loam containing occasional fragments of chalk and flint, including pea shingle. Apart from a few small fragments of peg-tile (not retained), there were no datable finds. The presence of well-rotted roots indicated that a substantial tree must once have been growing nearby. The layer appears to represent a continuation of Contexts 202 in Pit 2 (see above).

5.3.7 Layer 302 was sealed by an upper layer of fine dark grey-brown loam topsoil (Section 1, Context 301) which supported the modern turf of the Close. This was about 0.15m thick.

6. Finds (Table 1)

6.1 A small, mixed collection of finds was recovered from the excavations (Table 1; none illustrated). The material has been processed according to standard Canterbury Archaeological Trust procedures. It currently remains in the possession of the Trust (Dover Office) but will shortly be transferred to an appropriate local storage facility. Brief notes on the main categories of find are set out below.

6.2 Pottery

6.2.1 The excavations produced a total of seventeen sherds of pottery (188g), from five separate contexts, mostly in Pit 2. The largest amounts of material came from Contexts 202 and 204. This material covers a broad range of dates, including prehistoric (5 sherds), medieval (6 sherds) and post-medieval (6 sherds), of which the prehistoric material was somewhat unexpected.

6.2.2 The prehistoric sherds recovered come from Context 204 (4 sherds) and 206 (1 sherd). These are all small fragments and comprise four plain wall sherds of black flint-tempered ware, perhaps of Bronze Age or Iron Age date, and a single sherd of grey, grog-tempered fine-ware with a maroon-red exterior slip, probably of late Iron Age date.

6.2.3 Given the monastic location of the site, medieval material was relatively scarce, comprising just six, generally small, sherds of hard sandy ware, probably all produced at the Canterbury Tyler Hill kilns during the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Medieval sherds were recovered from Contexts 202 (1), 204 (4) and 306 (1). Amongst the material from Context 204 is the rim from a jug, of probably thirteenth-century date. There is no glazed material.

6.2.4 The six post-medieval sherds include three conjoining fragments forming a near-complete, late nineteenth-century stoneware ink pot - very possibly associated with the early days of Dover College itself. Also worthy of note is the square base of a small decorated (?) vase in a fine white porcelain, with painted decoration.

Context	Pottery	Glass	Peg tile	Oyster	Animal bone	Stone	Struck flint	Calcined flint
101 (topsoil)	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
106 (layer)	-	-	6	-	3	-	-	-
202 (layer)	6	2	2	5	12	2	-	-
204 (layer)	8	-	10	3	12	2	-	4
206 (layer)	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
303 (layer)	-	-	4	2	1	-	1	-
306 (fill)	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Total	17	2	23	10	28	4	1	5

Table 1 Distribution of finds recovered from the excavations

6.3 Glass

Two pieces of broken vessel glass (105g) were recovered from Context 202. These comprise a plain fragment of pale green bottle glass and the thick base of a multi-sided vase or tumbler in clear glass. Both pieces are of late nineteenth- to twentieth-century date.

6.4 Ceramic tile

6.4.1 A small collection of broken peg-tile fragments was recovered. A total of 23 pieces (685g) was collected but these are all fairly small fragments. Two conjoining pieces from Context 202 show two round peg holes, with adhering white mortar on both faces and on one edge. All the pieces are in hard

orange-red, frequently sandy fabrics. A few pieces have been slightly over-fired. All are probably medieval in date.

6.4.2 In addition to peg-tile, small broken pieces of West Country roofing slate (not retained) were noted in Context 106. Such material was being imported into Dover from as early as the twelfth century (Riddler 2006, 313) and may provide evidence for the original roof covering of some of the Priory buildings.

6.5 Oyster shell

Ten oyster shells were recovered from three separate contexts (202, 204 and 303). About half are complete. The purchase of oysters is mentioned in sixteenth-century Priory kitchen accounts (Haines 1930, 423) but some of the specimens recovered in 2018 could be post-Dissolution in date.

6.6 Animal bone

A small collection of 28 miscellaneous fragments of animal bone (126g) was recovered from four separate contexts. Most of the material (24 pieces) came from Contexts 202 and 204 in Pit 2. Amongst this material are several rib fragments and part of a horn core. Most of this material presumably represents mixed kitchen waste.

6.7 Prehistoric flint

A single unpatinated prehistoric struck flint was recovered from Context 303. This is a thick blade-like secondary flake with traces of edge damage/miscellaneous retouch on both long edges. It appears to be a genuine prehistoric flint, rather than the product of medieval flint-knapping to prepare building material.

6.8 Calcined flint

Five calcined flints (253g) were recovered, from Contexts 204 and 206. Although such items are regularly discovered on prehistoric sites, there can be no certainty as to the date of the present finds, none of which appeared to have been burnt *in situ*. At least some could be contemporary with the prehistoric pottery recovered.

6.9 Stone

Four small pieces of unworked stone were retained (419g), all from Pit 2. These include three pieces of ragstone/greensand and a single piece of Caen stone. There was also a squared chalk block from Context 204 (not retained). All are likely to represent building material originally used within the priory structures.

7. Conclusions and interpretation

7.1 The three pits excavated have provided a useful, if limited, opportunity to archaeologically investigate an area located to the north of the priory church and the main claustral ranges of Dover Priory. A previously unknown wall foundation apparently connected with the medieval complex, was discovered.

7.2 None of the 1-metre deep pits excavated located the top of the natural geology and from this it is apparent that there has been a considerable build-up of material in this area. The excavations established something of the sequence of deposits present in the area and indicate that significant archaeological levels, at least 0.50m thick and including structural remains, begin at a depth of about 0.50–0.60m below present ground level (Fig. 4).

Interpretation

7.3 The small size of the excavated pits makes precise interpretation of the exposed deposits difficult and the following notes should be treated as tentative.

7.4 The earliest deposits identified, Contexts 107, 206 & 305, probably represent a single clay layer, buried at a depth of between 0.80 and 0.95m below present ground level. This appears to be a well-stratified archaeological horizon and the prehistoric pot-herd and calcined flint recovered from Context 206, perhaps hint that this deposit is pre-medieval in origin, even if subsequently affected by medieval activity.

7.5 Post-dating the early clay level was the substantial chalk wall footing (Pit 3, 308, see below) and a possible flint surface (Pit 2, 205), both of which are likely to be of broadly medieval date and associated with the priory complex.

7.6 A thick deposit of yellow-brown loamy clay (Contexts 106, 204 & 303) buried at a depth of between 0.50 and 0.60m below present ground level may represent some sort of early levelling layer across this part of the site. Sealing the robbed wall footing 308, the available dating evidence suggests that this belongs to the late medieval or early post-medieval period.

7.7 Subsequently, the entire area was sealed by further soil deposits (Contexts 102, 103, 104, 202 & 302). These represent relatively recent dumps, totalling between 0.45 and 0.50m thick. Fragments of pottery, glass and brick recovered from them indicate that they date to the nineteenth century. It seems most likely that these dump layers represent levelling deposits associated with landscaping of the college grounds, following the infilling of the two ponds which lay in this area until they were drained in 1868 (Fig. 7, see above). Judging by the rotted roots running through the excavated layers, some sizeable trees occupied the area prior to the present ones being planted.

7.8 A final layer of modern topsoil and turf (Contexts 101, 201 & 301) supports the present well-maintained and regularly used college Close.

7.9 *Wall 308*

The short section of partially robbed wall footing discovered in Pit 3 clearly relates to a substantial wall, fairly certainly of medieval date and previously unknown. Whether it formed part of building or a boundary wall is unclear. Positioning the wall on a plan of the priory (Fig. 2), it does not appear to form part of any previously recorded structure. It could form an extension of the walls previously recorded to the north of the Refectory but no longer visible.

The depth at which the footing was discovered (at about 0.95m below ground level) is a reflection of the fact that its upper levels had been previously robbed but is also due to the subsequent building up of the ground-level here in relatively recent times (see above).

Perhaps the most obvious historical context for the robbing of this wall would be in the immediate post-Dissolution period when there is some record of dismantling works on the site (Haines 1930, 114–5). The discovery of this previously unknown wall and adjacent stratified deposits indicates that the area of the priory's outer court still has good archaeological potential and any significant future excavations in this area should be carefully monitored.

7.10 *Evidence for prehistoric activity*

The finds from the excavations include several pieces of prehistoric material, raising the distinct possibility that there was pre-medieval habitation on the site, long before the priory was established. Accordingly, a potential fifth phase of site activity may now be added to the list given above (text section **3.1**). There are four flint-tempered pot-herds and another of grog-tempered ware. These could all fit into a broadly Iron Age date-range. Several calcined flints could also be Iron Age, whilst a single struck flint (Context 303) is more likely to be Neolithic or Bronze Age.

7.11 Further work

No further study of the recorded information is presently warranted but the results of this relatively minor intervention reaffirm the presence of below-ground medieval building remains on the college site together with potential evidence of prehistoric habitation.

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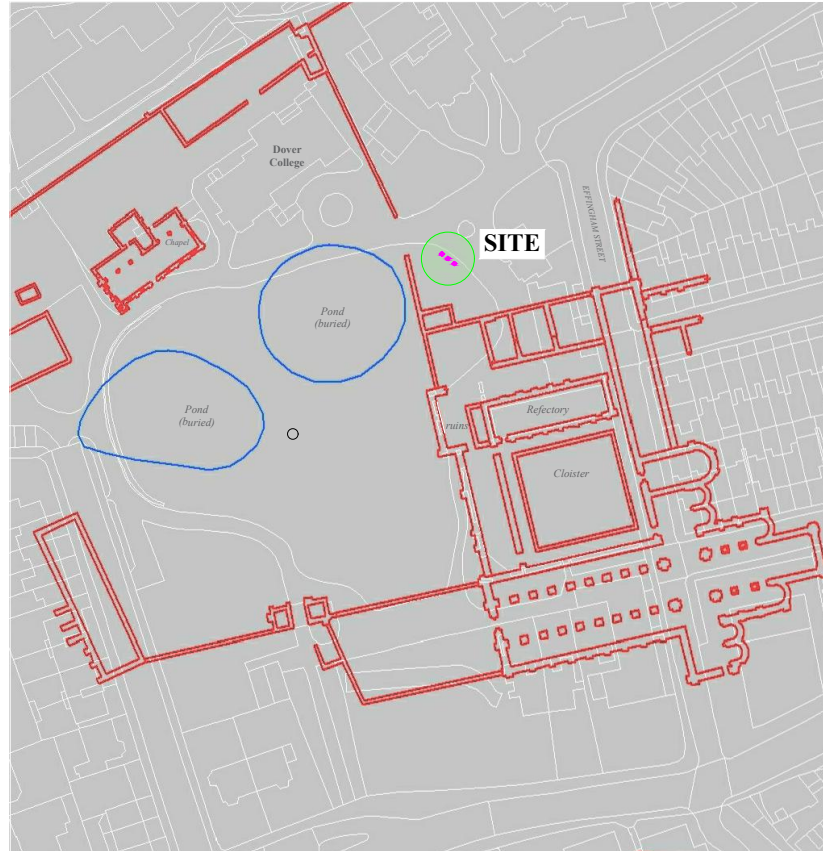
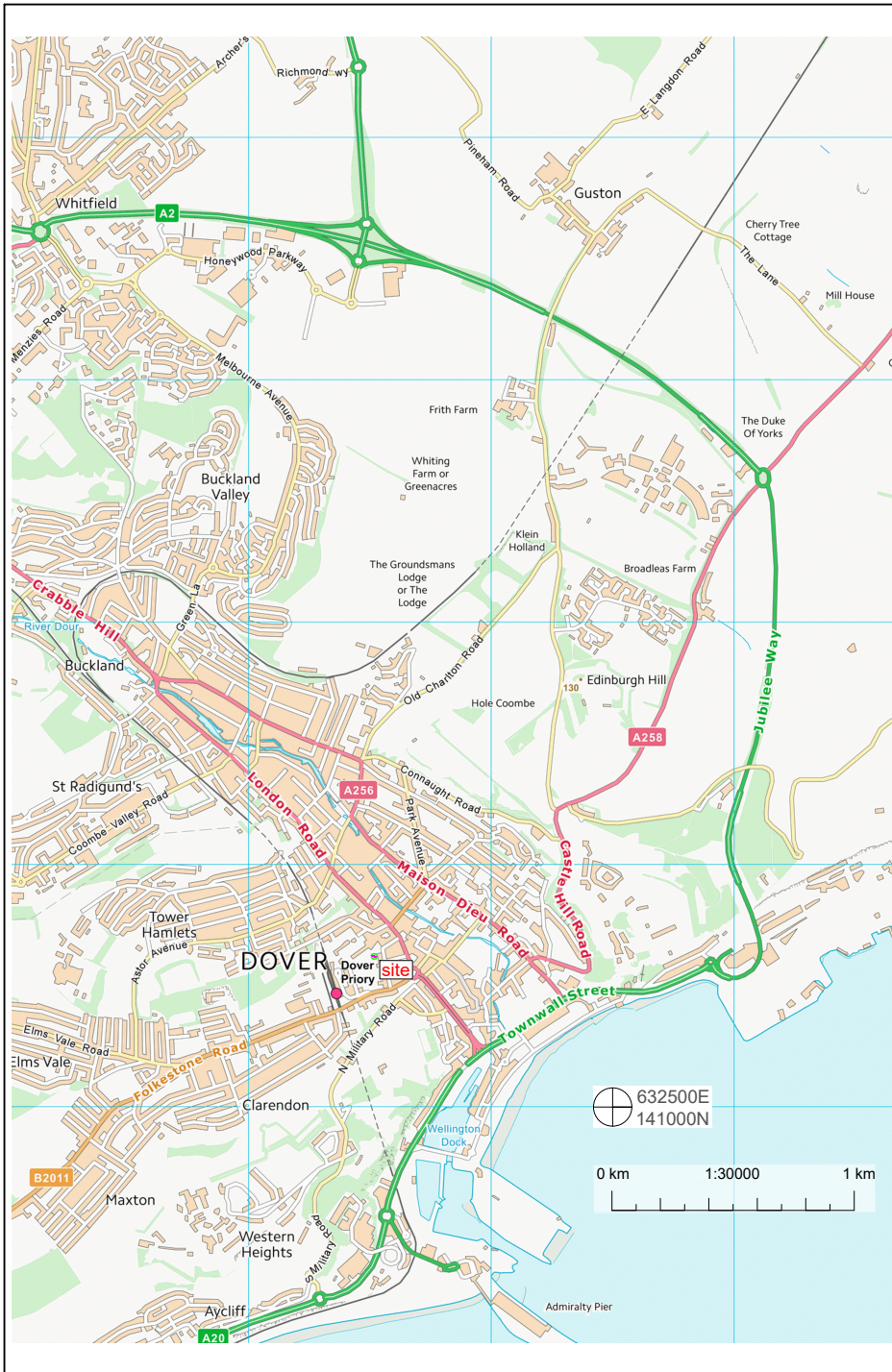
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Ordnance Survey map with Priory, based on Haines 1930



Notes:
 *Do not scale from drawing
 *Location of Priory is *estimated*
 and NOT definitive position of
 buildings (based on Haines 1930)



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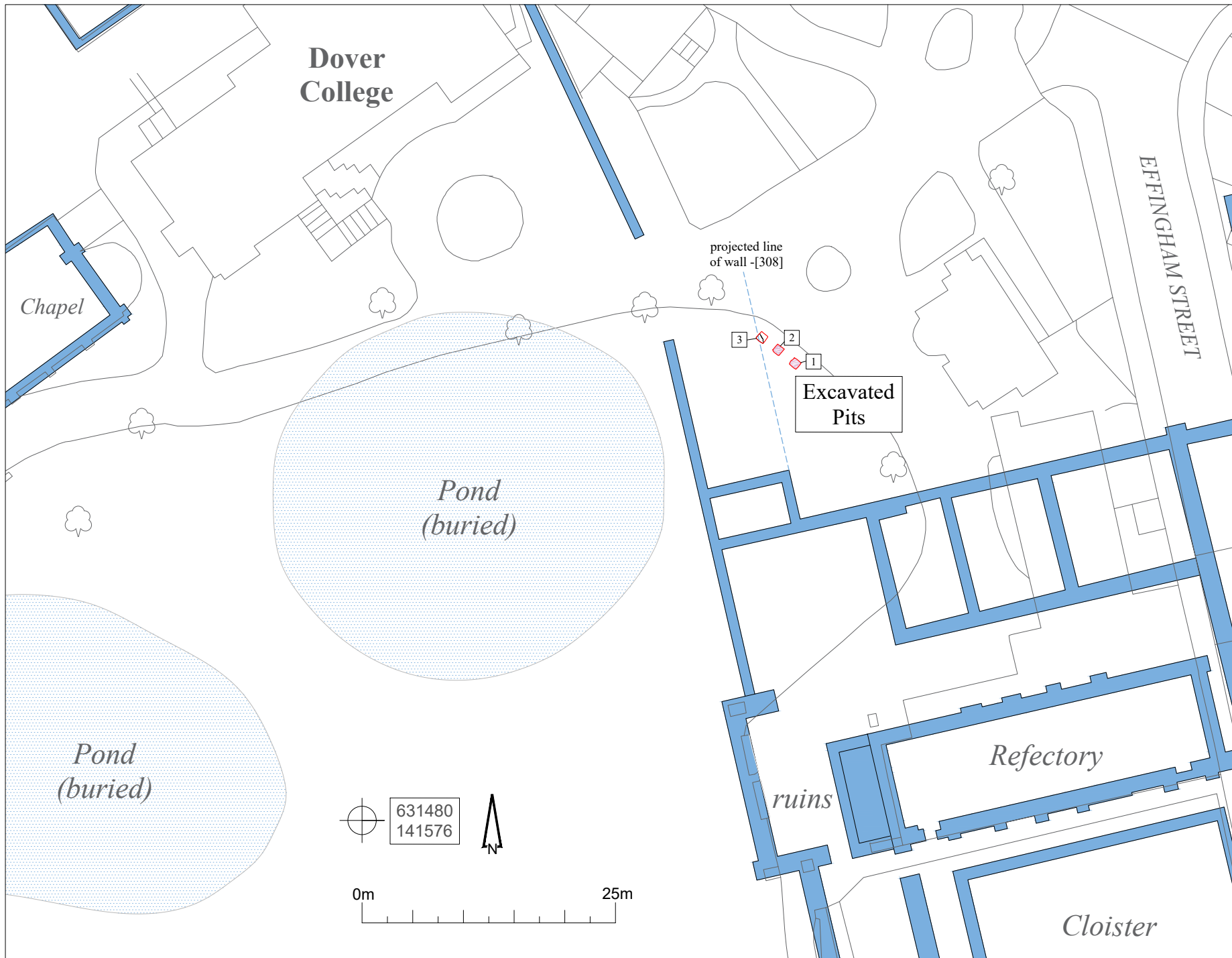
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Fig.1 Map showing general location of Dover Priory. Inset shows position of investigated site in relation to the medieval monastic complex

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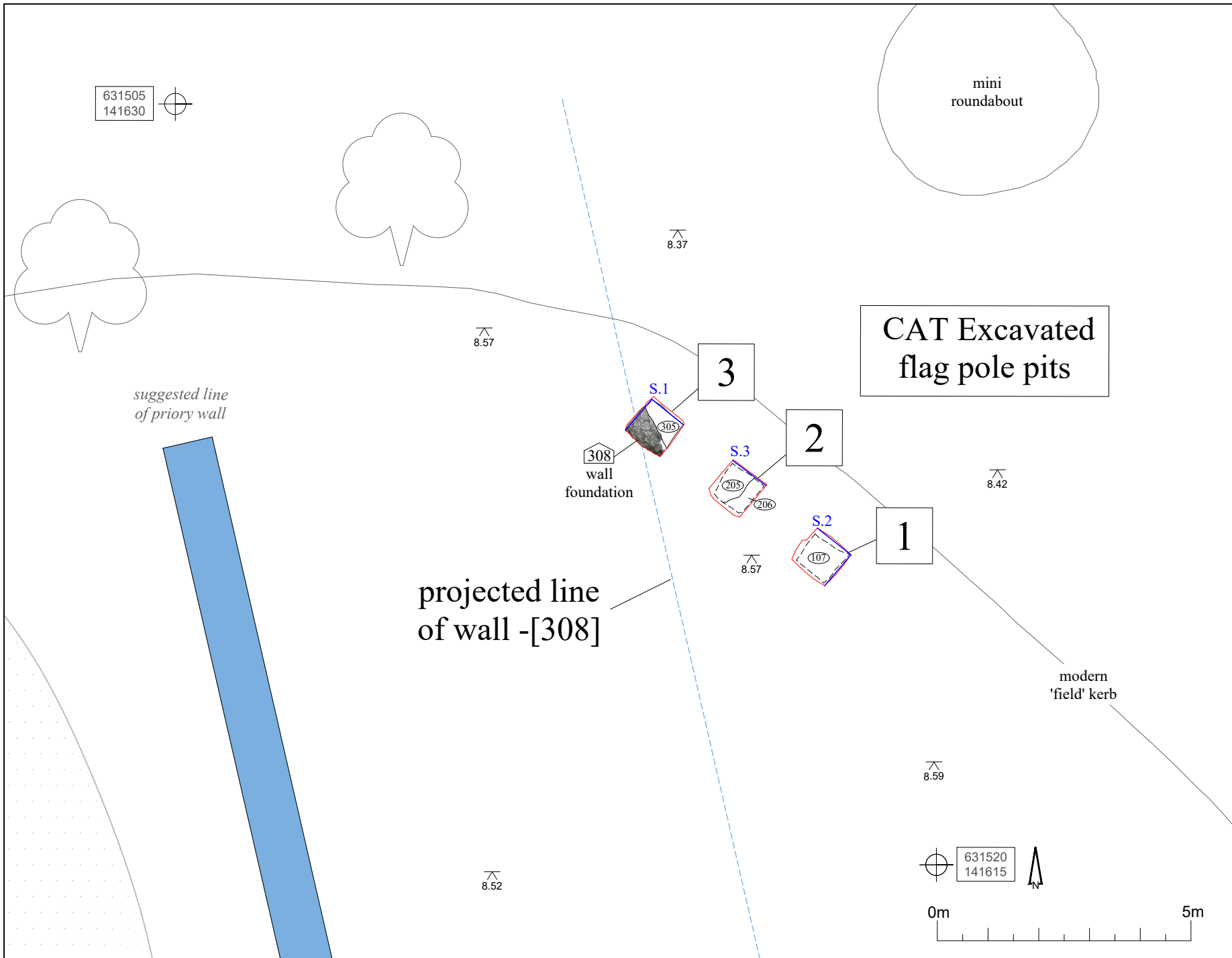


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Fig.2 Plan showing position of excavated pits in relation to modern features, the Norman refectory and other recorded medieval structures (based on Haines 1930)



Notes:
 *Do not scale from drawing
 *Location of Priory is *estimated*
 and NOT definitive position of
 buildings (based on Haines 1930)

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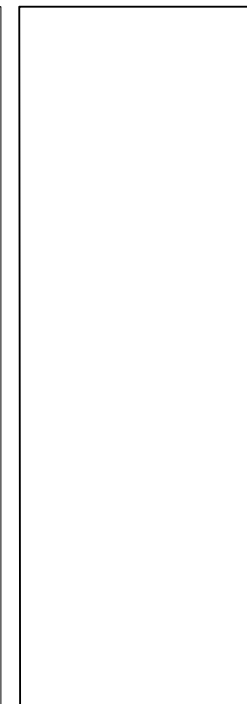
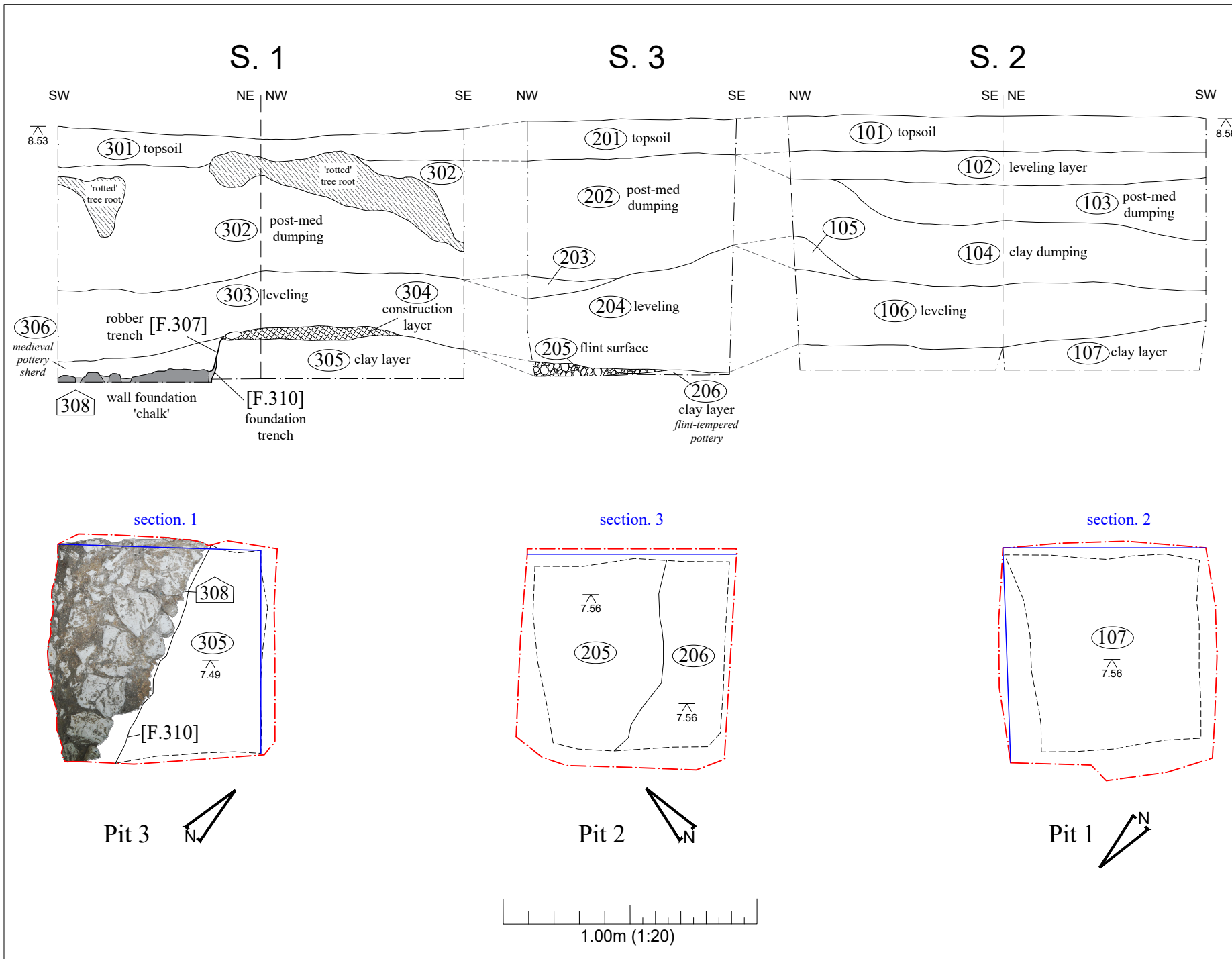
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Fig.3 Detail plan showing position of excavated pits and line of the buried Wall 308

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PROJECT NAME Dover College, Flag Poles	
PROJECT CODE DCFP-EX-18	
SITE ADDRESS Dover College Effingham Street Dover	
DRAWN BY P-S.A	SCALE(S) 1:20 @ A4
DATE 07-03-2019	LAST REVISION ---
CHECKED ---	
REF/DRG NO.	

Fig.4 Plan and sections through recorded deposits in excavated pits



Wall 308 in base of Pit 3. Scale 50cm



Wall 308 covered prior to backfilling



Protective soil added prior to pouring concrete

Fig. 5 Pit 3 showing measures carried out to protect Wall 308



Fig. 6 Detailed plan of the priory site taken from the Dover Borough Board of Health map dated 1851

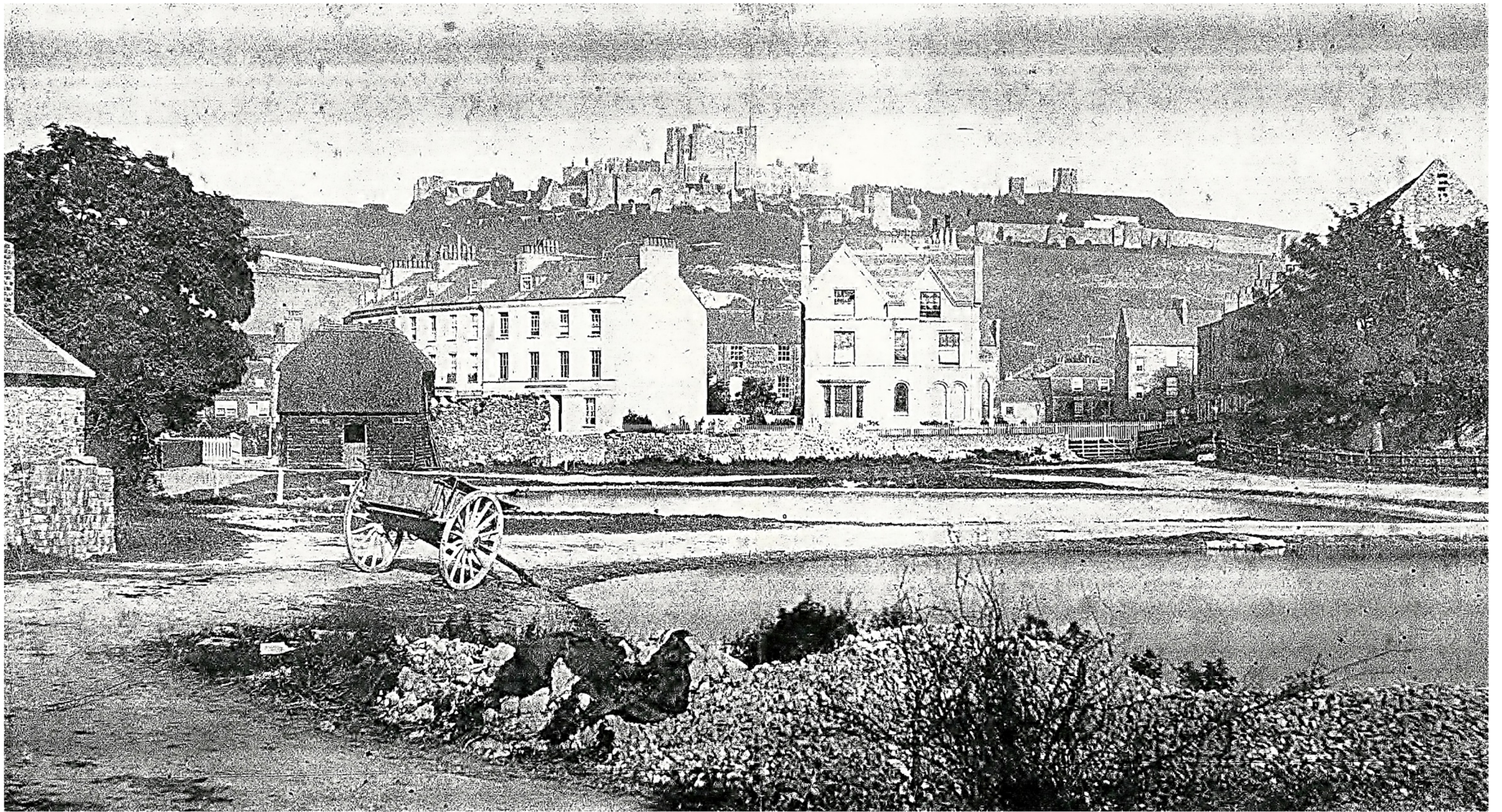


Fig. 7 Photograph of 1851 across the outer court before the ponds were drained in 1868, looking east

Kent County Council HER summary form

Site Name: Dover College		
Site Address: Dover College, Effingham Crescent, Dover		
<p>Summary: One of three hand dug pits cut in the College grounds, within the area of the medieval priory of St Martin of the Newark, founded in 1131 (Scheduled), revealed a previously unknown north–south aligned chalk wall foundation, buried at a depth of about 0.95m below present ground level. This was apparently connected with the priory complex.</p> <p>Overall, the excavations produced only a small finds assemblage, much of it later medieval in date, but also present are several pieces of prehistoric material, suggesting habitation on the site long before the priory was established. There are four flint-tempered pot-sherds and another of grog-tempered ware. These could all fit into a broadly Iron Age date-range. Several calcined flints could also be Iron Age, whilst the single prehistoric struck flint recovered is more probably Neolithic or Bronze Age.</p>		
District/Unitary: Dover	Parish: Dover	
Period(s): Prehistoric (finds only); medieval (finds and wall footing); post-medieval (finds and soil deposits)		
NGR (centre of site: 8 figures): 631516 141622, centred (NB if large or linear site give multiple NGRs)		
Type of Archaeological work (delete):		
Evaluation	Watching Brief	Field Walking
Documentary study	Building recording	Earthwork survey
Excavation	Geophysical survey	Field survey
Geoarchaeological investigation		
Date of recording: August 2018		
Unit undertaking recording: Canterbury Archaeological Trust		
Geology: Head (clay)		
Title and Author of accompanying report: <i>Excavation of three flagpole pits at Dover College, August 2018</i> by Keith Parfitt		
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: (begin with earliest period first, add NGRs where appropriate)</p> <p>A previously unknown chalk wall foundation, buried at a depth of about 0.95m below present ground level, probably relates to the priory complex. A small quantity of prehistoric finds suggests earlier activity in the area.</p>		
Location of archive/finds: Canterbury Archaeological Trust (Dover office)		
Contact at Unit: Keith Parfitt	Date: 26 March 2019	