

**An Archaeological  
Watching Brief at Manor  
Farm, Halesowen Abbey,  
Halesowen, West  
Midlands**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
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**An Archaeological Watching Brief at Manor Farm,  
Halesowen Abbey, Halesowen, West Midlands**

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# **An Archaeological Watching Brief at Manor Farm, Halesowen Abbey, Halesowen, West Midlands**

## **Summary**

*In April 2003 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit carried out a watching brief during the installation of a new drainage system around a 19<sup>th</sup>-century farmhouse at Manor Farm within the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Halesowen Abbey, Halesowen, West Midlands (NGR SO 97678283). The work was commissioned by Mr C. Tudor of Manor Farm. Traces of two post-medieval walls, probably the foundations of 19th-century garden features, were uncovered during the excavation of the drainage trench, as well as the profile of an east-west aligned bank, over which the house was built, and which may have formed the southern boundary of the Abbey's inner precinct. In addition, twelve pieces of redeposited architectural stonework, mostly of 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup>-century date, were recovered.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

In April 2003 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) carried out a watching brief during the installation of a new drainage system around the 19<sup>th</sup>-century farmhouse at Manor Farm, Halesowen Abbey, West Midlands. The site is part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument (National Monument No. 21568), and the archaeological work was a condition of scheduled ancient monument consent (HAD 9/2/4802). It was carried out according to a written scheme of investigation prepared by BUFAU (BUFAU 2003, Appendix 1), and followed the requirements for watching briefs set down by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 1999).

## **2.0 Site location and general description**

Halesowen Abbey, a Premonstratensian foundation, lies 1km to the south east of Halesowen in the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley, on the western outskirts of Birmingham (NGR SO 97678283, Fig. 1). The abbey is one of the best-preserved monastic sites in the West Midlands, with important archaeological remains surviving both above and below ground.

These remains now form part of Manor Farm, and are situated on a spur of south-facing land drained by tributaries of the River Stour. The surface geology consists of sandstone and grey clays with thin seams of coal and Spirorbis limestone, while there are areas of alluvial deposits along the stream courses to the south and west of the abbey (Geology Survey 1" Sheet 168). An area which includes almost all the earthworks connected with the abbey has been designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument (National Monument Number 21568), and the standing remains of the abbey are Guardianship monuments (Fig. 2).

Manor farmhouse, for which the drainage trenches were excavated, is situated on a terrace south of the inner precinct of the abbey, as defined by the standing remains of the frater wall, and north of a mill stream and pond situated in a shallow but relatively steep-sided valley 20m to the south of the farmhouse. Extensive and well-preserved complexes of dams, ponds and leats are visible as earthworks to the north and south of the abbey (Fig. 3).

### **3.0 Objectives**

To obtain a record of significant surviving remains and to record their levels, extent and character as defined by the written scheme of investigation (BUFAU 2003, Appendix 1).

### **4.0 Method**

The drainage trenches were excavated by machine under constant archaeological supervision generally to depths of 0.7m and 0.9m (Fig 4), apart from where the drainage cut across the precinct bank (F04, Plate 1), and the archaeological remains recorded mainly by photographs (colour print, monochrome and digital).

### **5.0 Background**

Manor Farmhouse was built in the 1860s, to the design of the Birmingham architect Yeoville Thomason (1826-1901), replacing an 18<sup>th</sup>-century house that may have incorporated medieval masonry and that was probably situated slightly more to the south (Hislop and Litherland 2003). Geophysical prospection in the 1980s tentatively raised the possibility that another large building was situated to the west of the present farmhouse (Marsden 1986, Fig. 4, I). It has also been claimed that during the construction of the present house traces of sandstone foundations belonging to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century farmhouse and possibly to an earlier abbey building were uncovered (Holliday 1871, 54). If so, then this putative monastic building is most likely to have functioned as either a mill or an abbot's lodging, both building types that are readily adaptable to post-Dissolution uses.

### **6.0 Results**

No archaeological layers or cut features were encountered during the groundwork apart from two truncated walls (F02 and F03) which were uncovered during machining, one (F02) on the east side of the house, on a north-south alignment, and the other (F03) on the north side, orientated east-west. Both these features proved to be post-medieval in date. F02 had a 19<sup>th</sup>-century red brick at its base, whereas a piece of post-medieval tile was amongst the mortar of F03. It is likely that these foundations were the remains of 19<sup>th</sup>-century garden features.

The only other archaeological feature was the east-west aligned bank, across which the house was built, and which falls away to the stream in the valley to the south. It was recorded on either side of the house as F01 (east) and F04 (west), and was found to be composed of several distinct layers, the lowest of which was exposed to a depth of 1m, and which consisted of yellow clay and stone. Above this were 0.5m of greyish brown silty clay containing charcoal and bone(104), 0.3m of red sand and stone fragments (103), 0.4m of light brown sandy clay with stone fragments and bone (102), and on the top 0.7m (101) of brown sandy clay containing stone fragments, charcoal and bone (Plate 1). This bank presumably marked the southern boundary of the inner precinct of the abbey, although it may also have constituted the edge of the adjacent millpond.

Apart from these features the trenches were cut through made ground comprising brown sandy loam with lenses of yellow and light brown clay mixed with post-medieval demolition debris (brick, tile, slate, mortar fragments etc). In addition there was a notable dump of medieval worked stone, used to level the ground to the east of the farmhouse (see Section 7.0, below). The made-up ground to the south of the house was particularly recent, and associated with levelling works behind the newly constructed flood defences here.

A small group of redeposited medieval finds was recovered from the trenches, including three sherds of pottery, three fragments of floor tiles, and a bone handle with an iron fitting. Post-medieval finds included one sherd of pottery, two clay pipe fragments and a decorative copper alloy hook. All these items, however, came from made up ground.

## **7.0 The worked stone**

Twelve pieces of worked stone, mostly of 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup>-century date, were recovered during the watching brief. Two of these (ST01 and ST04) were surface finds whereas the rest were recovered from the excavations. Most of the latter came from the east side of the house, and appeared to have been dumped deliberately as part of a ground levelling operation connected with the construction of the house. On a subsequent visit to the site, in order to study the worked stone more closely, three of the stones (ST03, ST08 and ST09) could no longer be located, and one of the most important pieces (ST01) had been slightly damaged.

### **ST01 (Plate 2)**

A fragment of an architectural fixture, such as a screen, bearing blind tracery. Late 14<sup>th</sup> or early 15<sup>th</sup> century. The tracery pattern is rectilinear in character, comprising a central ogee quatrefoil with a pair of small trefoil-headed panels to each side, all these divisions having sunken spandrels. This fragment appears to have been part of the uppermost section of the fixture, and the tops of four cusped arches can be discerned at the bottom of the stone. 85cm long x 35cm high.

### **ST02 (Plate 3)**

Section of a tri-lobed shaft. 13<sup>th</sup> century. One end is drilled to accommodate an iron tie, which survives (Plate 4). The shaft was free-standing and may have come from an open arcade, perhaps a cloister arcade (but see Stone 6 below). 46cm long with 8.5cm diameter lobes.

### **ST03 (Not illustrated)**

Coping stone. Medieval. Wide chamfer to either side of the upper face.

### **ST04 (Plate 5)**

A practice piece? 13<sup>th</sup> century. Conical shape with flat top and base. A series of 15 ribs protrudes from it; these are mostly rolls though one appears to have a (very eroded) fillet. A superficial interpretation of this piece might suggest that it crowned

a column, being the lowest member of an umbrella vault. The pattern of ribs, however, is not consistent or coherent. There are various degrees of prominence and variation in the widths of the gaps between the ribs. On the bottom of the stone is a number of keying grooves. 38cm high with *c.*39cm dia. base and *c.* 50cm dia. top.

**ST05** (Plate 6)

Part of the sculpture of an animal, probably a lion. 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century. Only the hind quarters of the beast survive. It is in a crouching position with the lower parts of the rear legs horizontal. The tail curls round behind the left leg. The best parallels are with the lions that are often found at the feet of later medieval sepulchral effigies. Both sides of the piece have been sculpted to an equal standard, as though they were both intended to be on view, but the end of the original block has been retained, the rear of which has what seems to be a centrally placed vertical setting out line (Plate 7). This seems to militate against the idea that the lion occupied a position on the top of a tomb. Another curious aspect of this end block is that the upper part has been cut back on each side to form a necked protrusion with the resemblance of a handle. It is possible that this is an unfinished piece and that the 'handle' was fashioned by the sculptor to assist manoeuvrability while work was in progress. 45cm long, 28cm high, 23 cm wide.

**ST06** (Plate 8)

Another section of a tri-lobed shaft. 13<sup>th</sup>-century. This piece is limewashed, suggesting that it came from the interior of a building, so it may have ornamented a wall arcade. 49cm long with 8.5cm diameter lobes.

**ST07** (Plate 9)

A section of double convex quarter round-moulded tabling. Probably 14<sup>th</sup> century. The moulding is situated between two dressed faces of the stone, and there are three other squared faces, but the rear of the stone, which would have faced towards the rubble core, was left undressed. The stone could have formed part of either a horizontal string decorating an offset, or the jamb of an opening. One of the exposed faces adjacent to the moulding was dressed with parallel diagonal striations. 18cm high, 28cm long, 24cm wide.

**ST08** (Not illustrated)

Springer of a door arch. Probably late 12<sup>th</sup>/early13<sup>th</sup> century. Chamfered and rebated on the inner side, with hood mould on the outer side.

**ST09** (Not illustrated)

Possible arch shoulder. Possibly late medieval. Rectangular block arching at one end, possibly the shoulder of a nearly flat arch (3 or 4-centred?). Very roughly dressed, and probably reused.

### **ST10** (Plate 10)

Section of a roll and fillet-moulded shaft, probably part of a door jamb. 13<sup>th</sup>-century. 19cm high, 22cm long, 14cm wide.

### **ST11** (Plate 11)

Coping stone. Half roll-moulded lip, with the face beneath it splaying outwards. Possibly from a plinth. 25cm high, 45cm long, 21cm wide.

### **ST12** (Not illustrated)

Internal quoin? Medieval. Two adjacent dressed splayed faces with bedding faces top and bottom. Possibly an internal quoin between two obliquely angled planes, as in a polygonal building. 32cm high, 39cm long, 20cm wide.

## **8.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

Although no evidence for medieval buildings was discovered during the watching brief, the recovery of a number of recognisable high quality pieces of worked stone has highlighted a more general issue regarding the loose masonry that is to be found in abundance within the abbey grounds. Our knowledge of the buildings that made up Halesowen Abbey is limited, and a systematic study of the worked stone would enhance our understanding of the monastery's architectural character. Yet there appears to be no policy on the conservation of this resource, which, as BUFAU has discovered in the cases of ST01, ST03, ST08 and ST09, is extremely vulnerable to loss and damage. Of particular interest is ST04, which makes little sense as an architectural component, and which may have been a practice piece worked by apprentice masons. If so, it is an extremely rare if not unique artefact. ST05 may also have something to tell us about medieval sculpting practices. At the very least, steps should be taken to remove these pieces, as well as the damaged ST01, to a secure place. The formulation of a policy on the other stonework would also be advisable.

## **9.0 Acknowledgements**

The watching brief was carried out by Richard Cherrington, and the worked stone studied by Malcolm Hislop. Steve Litherland managed the project for BUFAU and also edited this report. Annette Hancocks examined the finds. The work was monitored by Peter Boland of Dudley Metropolitan Council acting on behalf of English Heritage.

## **10.0 References**

BUFAU 2003 *Halesowen Abbey, Dudley, West Midlands: a written scheme of investigation for a watching brief on groundwork for the installation of a new drainage system for the Victorian farmhouse.*

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Holliday, J. R. 1871 'Hales Owen Abbey', *Trans Birmingham and Midland Institute* 2, 49-72.

IFA 1999 *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief.*

Marsden, A. P. 1986 *Halesowen Abbey: an Historical and Archaeological Assessment* (BUFAU Report No. 7).

## **Appendix 1**

### **Halesowen Abbey, Dudley, West Midlands:**

#### **A written scheme of investigation for a watching brief on groundwork for the installation of a new drainage system for the Victorian farmhouse**

##### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The following document sets out an archaeological response to the proposed installation of a new drainage system for the Victorian farmhouse at Manor Farm, Halesowen Abbey, Dudley, West Midlands. The scheme of work is set out on drawing number MD/CT/934/3R1, and was granted scheduled ancient monument consent (HSD 9/2/4802) on February 17<sup>th</sup> 2003, subject to the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with this written scheme of investigation to be approved by the Secretary of State as advised by English Heritage. It seeks to identify those elements of the development proposals that may impact upon archaeological features and deposits and proposes an appropriate archaeological strategy, in this case an intensive archaeological watching brief, in mitigation of these effects.

##### **1.1 General Description and Location**

Halesowen Abbey, a Premonstratensian foundation, lies 1km to the south east of Halesowen in the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley, on the western outskirts of Birmingham (NGR SO 97678283). The abbey is one of the best-preserved monastic sites in the West Midlands, with important archaeological remains surviving both above and below ground. These remains now form part of Manor Farm, and are situated on a spur of south-facing land drained by tributaries of the River Stour. The surface geology consists of sandstone and grey clays with thin seams of coal and Spirorbis limestone, while there are areas of alluvial deposits along the stream courses to the south and west of the abbey (Geology Survey 1" Sheet 168).

The proposed drainage scheme is for the Victorian farmhouse called Manor Farm. This is situated on a terrace between the southern perimeter of the inner precinct of the abbey as defined by the standing remains of the frater wall and a mill pond and stream situated in a shallow, but relatively steep-sided valley 20m to the south of the farmhouse (Fig. 1). Extensive, and well-preserved, complexes of dams, ponds and leats are visible as earthworks to the north and south of the abbey.

##### **1.2 Current Statutory Designations**

An area which includes almost all the earthworks connected with the abbey has been designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument (National Monument Number 21568), and portions of the standing remains of the abbey are Guardianship monuments.

##### **1.3 Principal Conservation Objectives**

The principal conservation objectives are

- *to manage the archaeological resource*  
Halesowen Abbey remains important today due to the existence of archaeological features both above ground and below ground. These are vulnerable to damage and must be appropriately managed.

- *to further research the archaeology of the site*  
Further research is necessary to allow a better understanding of the history of the Abbey and its place within, and impact upon, the surrounding landscape and communities.

## **2.0 PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION**

The following summary is based upon a forthcoming BAR report by Stephen Litherland and Derek Moscrop. This is the most up to date statement concerning research into the history and development of Halesowen Abbey and is based upon building recording of the historic fabric of the abbey, geophysical and landscape survey, and documentary research carried out between 1987 and 1995.

### **2.1 The Documentary Evidence**

Apart from scattered references in Crown documents, the main documentary sources for the abbey are the Court Rolls of the manor of Hales, 1270-1307 (Amphlett 1930; Wilson 1933), the register of Richard Redmant, Abbot of Shap, 1459-1505 (Gasquet 1904-6) and various charters and other documents which survived in the Hagley Muniments and are now mainly to be found in Birmingham Reference Library. The abbey's cartulary, however, has been lost (Colvin 1951, 380). A full account of the historical and documentary background to the site can be found in Litherland and Moscrop (Forthcoming).

### **2.2 Topographic and Archaeological Survey**

The plan of the abbey has been principally recovered by excavation. Holliday conducted the first recorded excavations at Halesowen Abbey in 1870 (Holliday 1871). Although most of the records of his work have since been lost, a manuscript plan of the abbey, including the positions of the foundations traced from excavation and two *in situ* portions of tile floor, is in Birmingham Reference Library (BRL 353137). Holliday's plan of the abbey church and main claustral buildings was enhanced by further work on the site by Brakspear in 1906 (Clapham 1923, pl. facing p. 252), and by Somers from 1928 to 1930 (Somers and Somers 1932, 4-10). Further excavation by Somers in 1938, during the widening of Manor Lane to the west of the church, found wall foundations and a cobbled track which may have been part of the outer gatehouse of the abbey (Somers 1938, 82). The Duke of Rutland conducted minor excavations on the site between 1925-28 and 1934-40 in search of medieval floor tiles. The exact location of this work is unknown, apart from a reference and photograph of his 1938 excavation of the Chapter House (Somers 1938, 82). A short note on a watching brief on the supposed site of the Guest House is also not accurately located (Wilson and Hurst 1971, 141). There are two major descriptions of the abbey ruins (Holliday 1871a; VCH 1906, ii, 137-9). An historical and archaeological assessment of the abbey was commissioned by Dudley Borough Council in 1986 (Marsden 1986a). Illustrations of Halesowen Abbey since the 18th century are listed by Marsden (1986b, 89).

Halesowen Abbey has also been the focus of research work on the abbey precinct, on the wider landscape surrounding the abbey complex and on its dependent granges undertaken as student projects both at the Unit and at the University (including Evans 2003; Kincey 2003; Marsden 1986; Moscrop 1993a, 1993b; and Millard 1994).

### **2.3 Building Survey**

A programme of building recording has been undertaken mainly on behalf of English Heritage. This work has focused upon the surviving abbey buildings that are under Guardianship within the former Manor Farm complex. The infirmary building and the west frater wall have been recorded in detail by BUFAU and consolidated by English Heritage. In addition, a stone-by-stone record has been made of the south frater wall, the cart shed to the west of the frater and readily accessible areas of exposed stonework in the long barn. The aims of the survey were to establish the character, history, dating, and archaeological development of each surviving structure. The survey generated an archive of drawings and detailed reports (Ferris 1987 and 1990, Litherland and Hislop, forthcoming) to be lodged with English Heritage's Historic Properties Midlands section and the National Monuments Record of the RCHME. Copies of the reports are held by Dudley Borough Council and the West Midlands SMR. The later farm buildings were also studied by students of the Field Archaeology Unit's Diploma in Practical Archaeology in 1990 and 1995 (Learmonth and Heath 1995). These comprised part of a barn, a brick-built stock house, a small brick-built stable, but not the Victorian farmhouse. Recording of these structures consisted of a photographic record and descriptive text.

## **3.0 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **Research and Current Understanding of the Site**

Halesowen Abbey has been the focus of archaeological work for over one hundred years, and the main abbey structures including the church and chapter house have been fairly extensively excavated. However, the loss of material from previous excavations has resulted in only a small archive surviving, and finds are limited to a large collection of tile stored or on display in local and national museums. It is, then, of great importance to understand and preserve what archaeological deposits remain on the site. It is also anticipated that new information arising from the proposed development could be used to improve interpretative facilities for visitors to the site.

## **4.0 SPECIFIC RESPONSES**

### **4.1 Background**

The Manor Farmhouse was built in the 1860s as part of a general rationalisation of the farm. Thomas Green was the tenant farmer at this time and the farmhouse replaced an 18<sup>th</sup> century one that is depicted on an illustration by David Parkes of 1799 that appears to incorporate medieval masonry (Fig.2). The Parkes illustration shows the building close to the bank of a pond and so it may have been situated slightly further south than the present day farmhouse and this would appear to concur with the Lapal Tithe Map of 1841. Geophysical prospection by Marsden in the 1980s tentatively raised the possibility that another large building was situated downslope and to the

west of the modern day farmhouse. In a footnote to his paper on Halesowen Abbey Holliday noted that the Victorian farmhouse was supposedly designed by the Birmingham architect Yeoville Thomason (1826-1901) and that during building works traces of sandstone foundations belonging to the earlier farmhouse and possibly an earlier abbey building were uncovered. However, the veracity of these statements cannot be automatically taken for granted (Holliday 1871, 54). The most likely functions of these putative monastic buildings are as a mill and an abbot's lodging - both building types that are more readily adaptable to post-dissolution uses (Fig.3).

Given the location it may be envisaged that the proposed drainage scheme will have a negative impact upon the below-ground archaeology. The information outlined above indicates that monastic structures may be located in the vicinity of the present day farmhouse, although this cannot be determined with absolute certainty, also accurate information about the anticipated depth of significant archaeological deposits is not available because the excavations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries did not record this. Therefore, it has been proposed that an intensive archaeological watching brief be carried out in mitigation of this impact. Close liaison will be maintained at all times between English Heritage, groundwork contractors and the archaeological advisor. The intensive watching brief will involve the monitoring by machine clearance of the drainage system by an appropriately qualified field archaeologist/s with the provision to halt this mechanical excavation work and fully clean and record any significant archaeological features or deposits encountered. Monitoring will be carried out by Mr Peter Boland of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council acting on behalf of English Heritage. Where drainage runs across particularly sensitive areas, i.e. wall or intact ground surfaces, it will be necessary to excavate these archaeologically after removal of modern superficial deposits by machine.

The drainage scheme in the immediate vicinity of the house may reveal evidence for the earlier foundations noted by Holliday. South of the surviving frater wall evidence of former groundsurfaces may be anticipated while the drainage runs to the south and west of the farmhouse should reveal evidence for the monastic ground levels and the extent of the pond as well as the possible mill structure depicted in Parkes drawing of 1799.

#### **4.2 Aims**

The objective of the archaeological work is to obtain a record of significant surviving remains and to record their levels, extent, date and character.

#### **4.3 Method**

A watching brief will be maintained during groundworks, with recording of archaeological remains before their re-covering. All archaeological features and deposits will be recorded by means of pre-printed pro-formas for contexts and features, scale plans and sections, and colour slide and monochrome or digital photography. Where appropriate samples for environmental analysis will be taken from well-sealed, datable deposits. Sufficient time must be allowed by the general contractor for an appropriate level of archaeological recording to be undertaken.

#### **4.3 Staffing**

The Project Manager will be Steve Litherland (BA, MA). The fieldwork will be carried out by an experienced archaeologist/s, dependant upon the discovery and nature of significant archaeological features and deposits.

Specialist staff will be, where appropriate:

Stephanie Ratkai - medieval and post-medieval pottery.

#### **4.4 Report**

The results of the archaeological monitoring will be described in an illustrated report which will contain the following:

- (a) Description of the archaeological background.
- (b) Method.
- (c) A narrative description of the results and discussion of the evidence, set in their local and regional context, supported by appropriate plans and sections, including the locations of each intervention.
- (d) Summary of the finds and environmental evidence.

The results will be related to historic maps. The written report will be made publicly accessible, as part of the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record within six months of completion. A summary report will be submitted for inclusion in *West Midlands Archaeology* and the appropriate period journals.

#### **4.5 Archive**

The site archive will be prepared according to the guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the Management of Archaeology Projects. Subject to permission from the client and following consultation with English Heritage suitable arrangements will have to be made for the storarage and curation of the archive, including any finds recovered from the site.

#### **4.6 Timetable**

An archaeological watching brief will be maintained throughout the below-ground works. A precise timetable is not available at present, but the work is not likely to take more than three or four days.

#### **4.7 General**

All project staff will adhere to the Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

The project will follow the requirements set down in the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994).

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

The strategy outlined above puts the emphasis on preservation *in-situ* of all below-ground deposits, whilst maintaining the on-going research programme of the abbey through an intensive watching brief of machine clearance. This development offers an opportunity to assess the survival and character of archaeological deposits through

the minimalisation of ground disturbance, proper archaeological excavation and recording and preservation by record.

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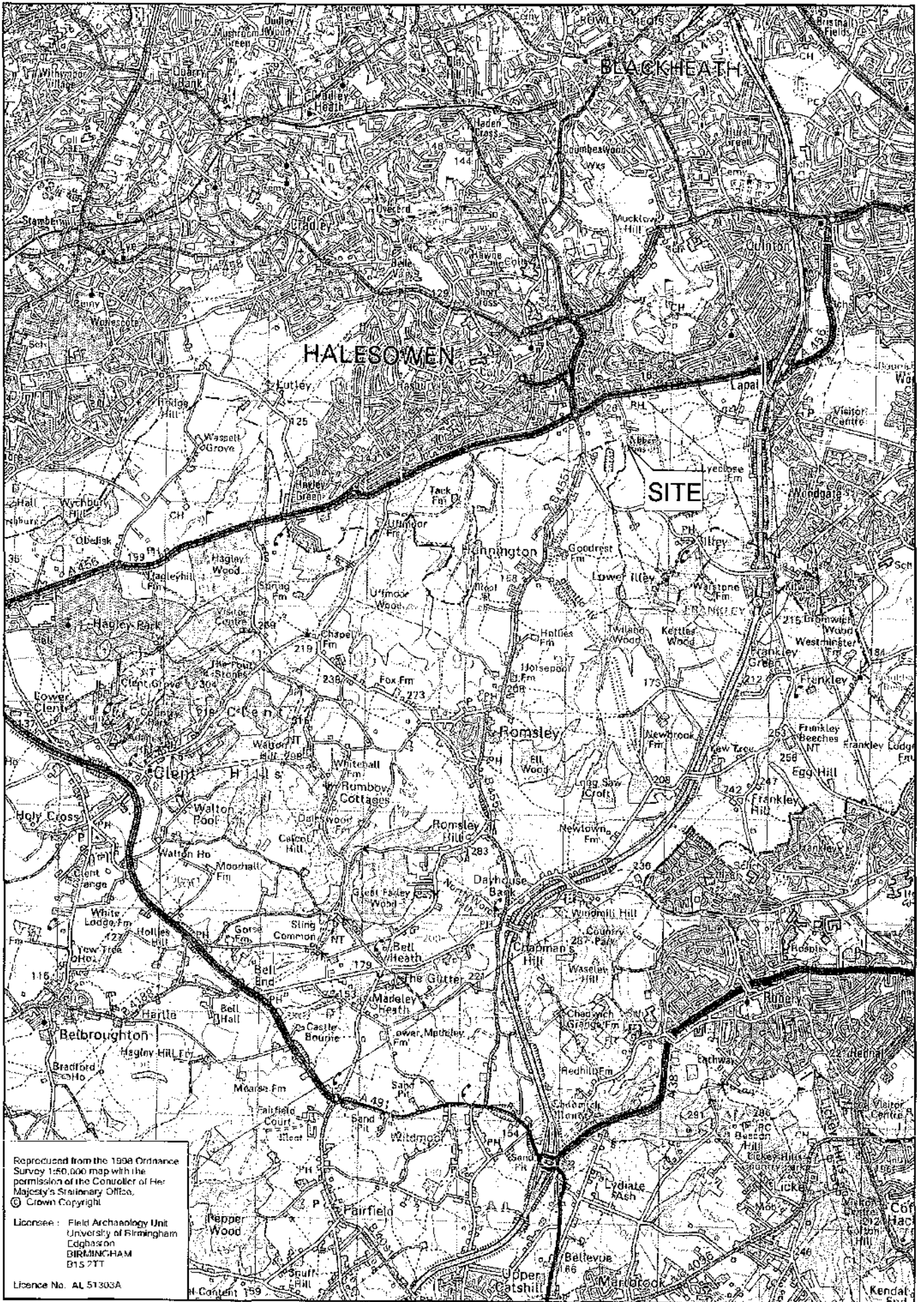
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*Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
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Fig.1

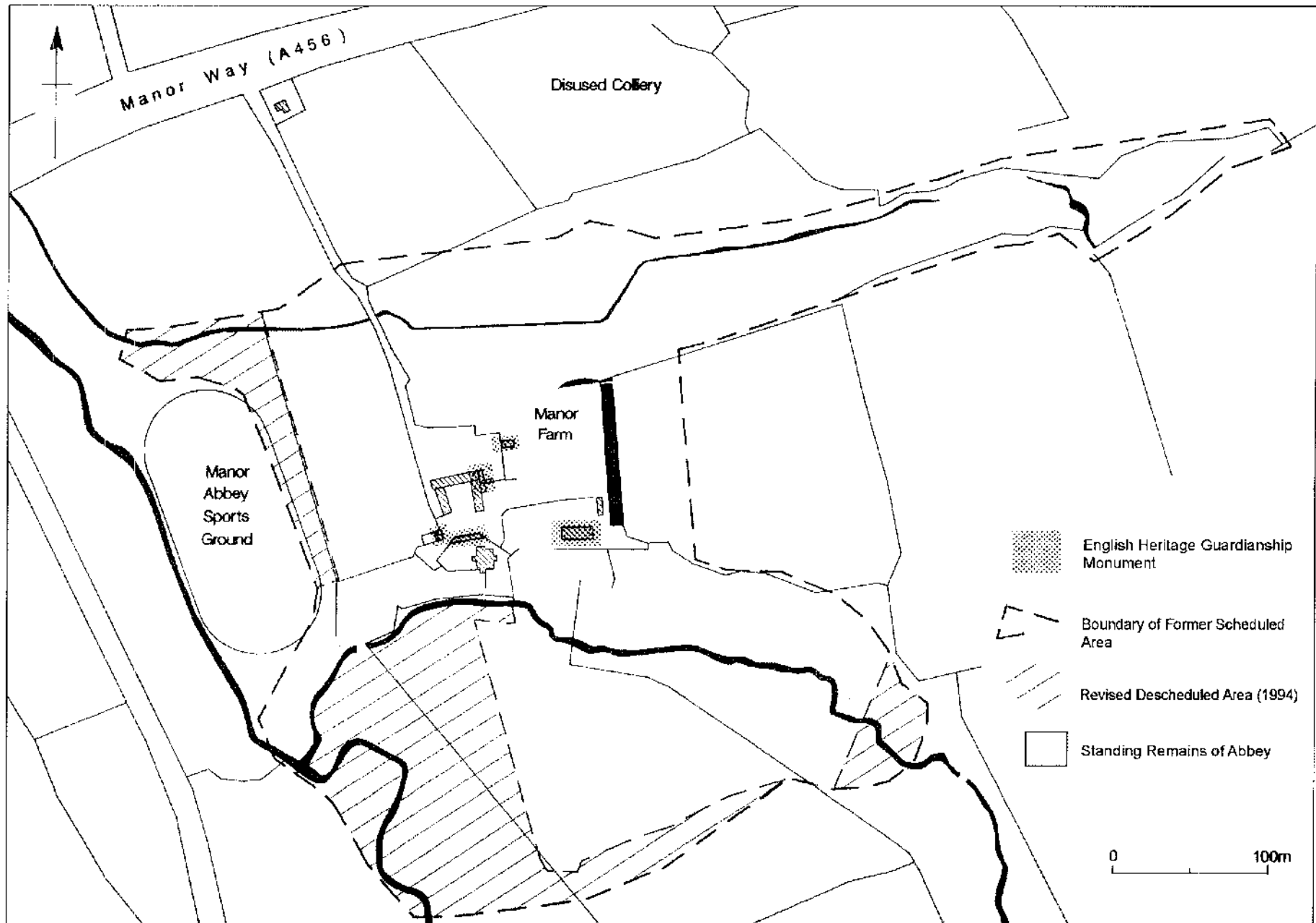


Fig.2

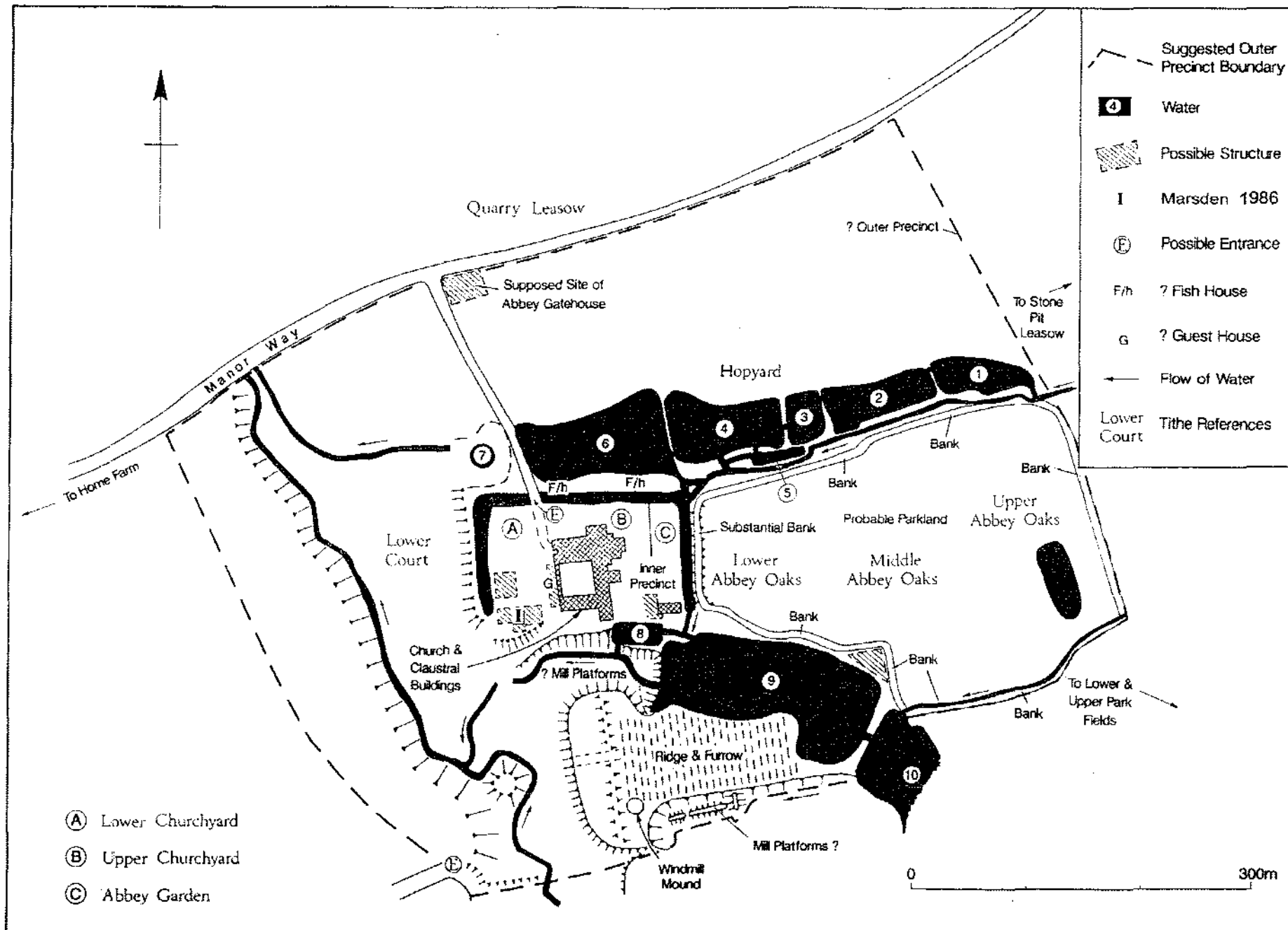


Fig.3

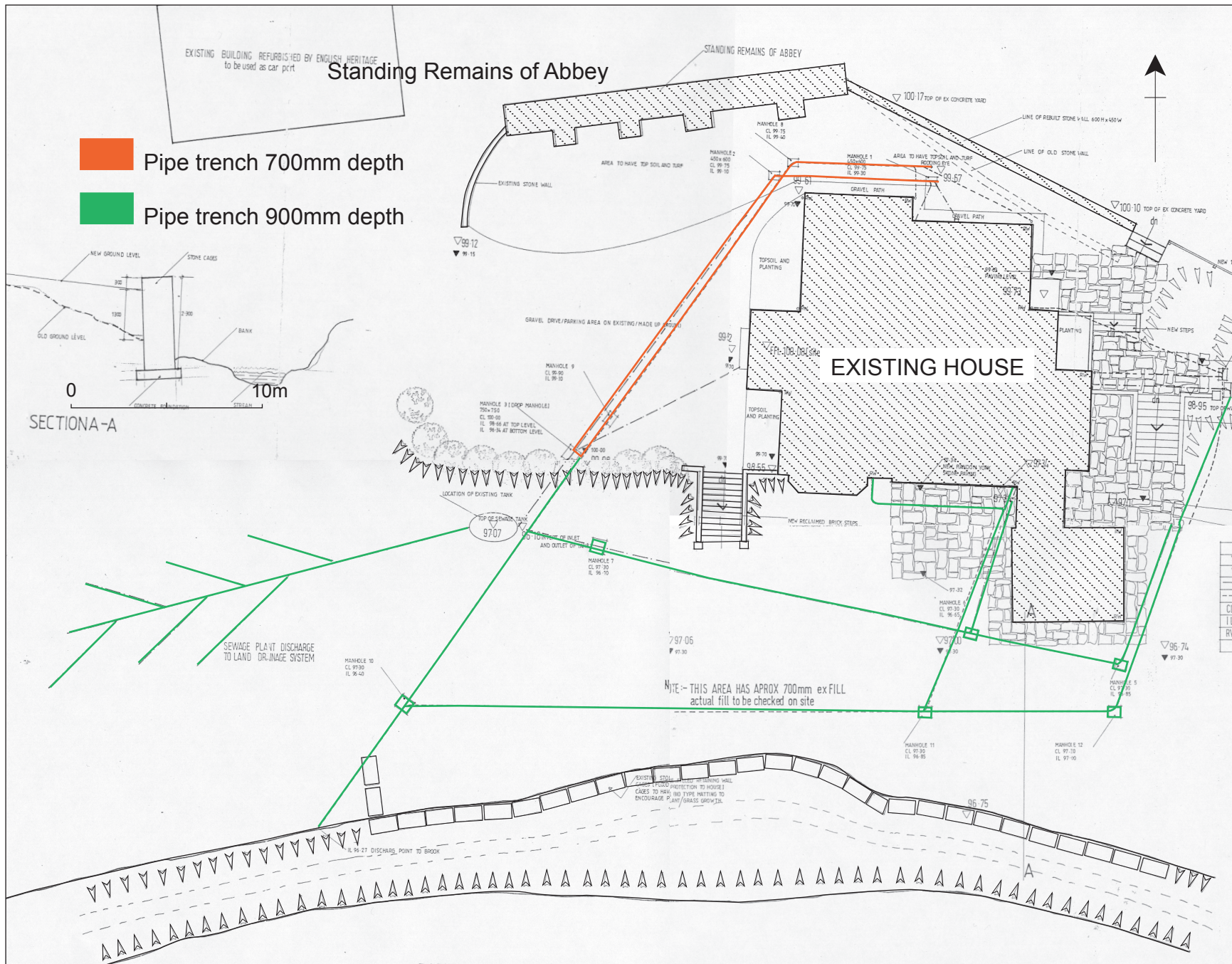


Fig.4

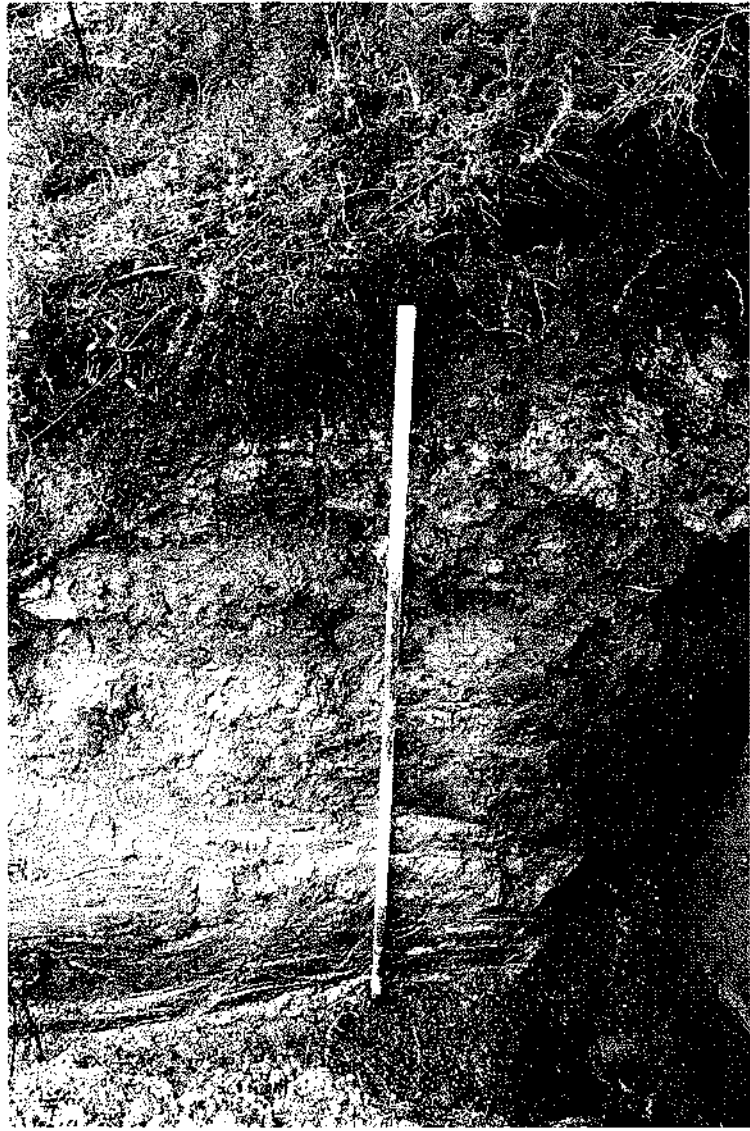


Plate 1

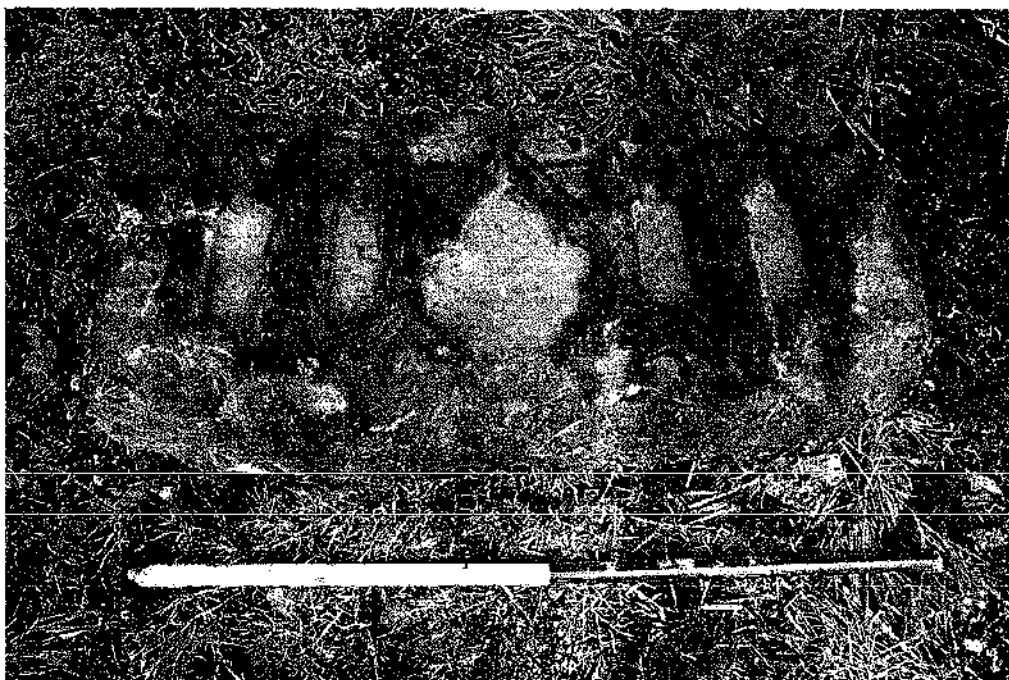


Plate 2



Plate 3

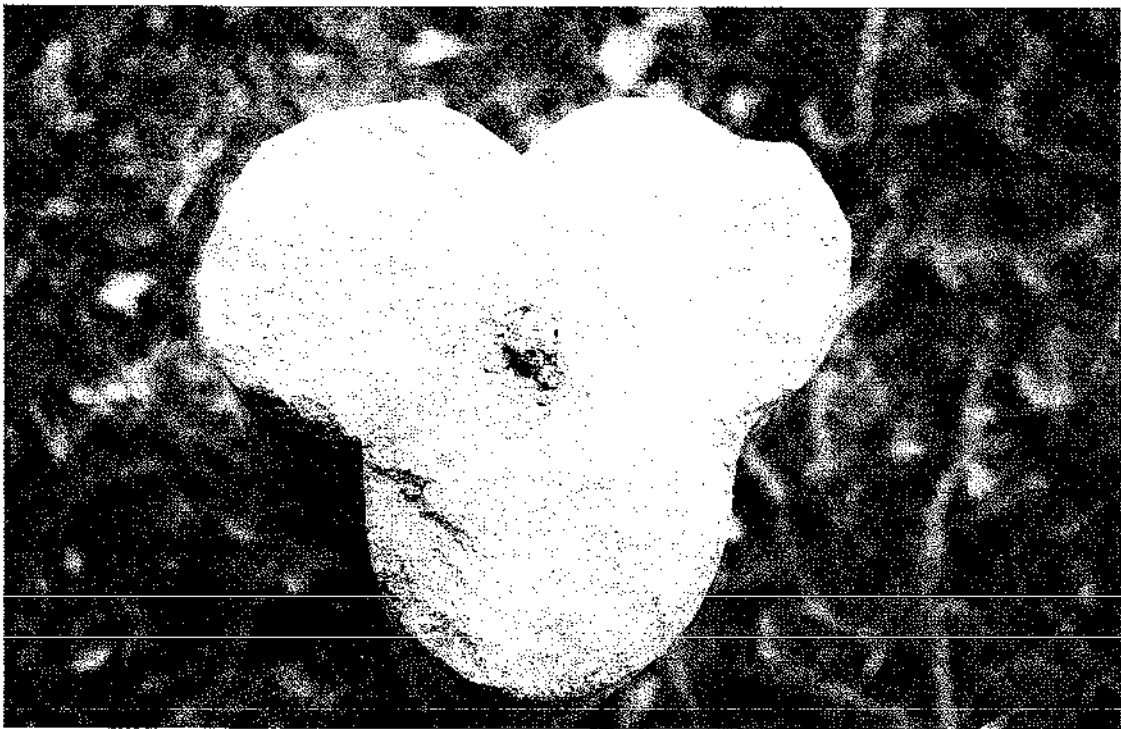


Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



Plate 7

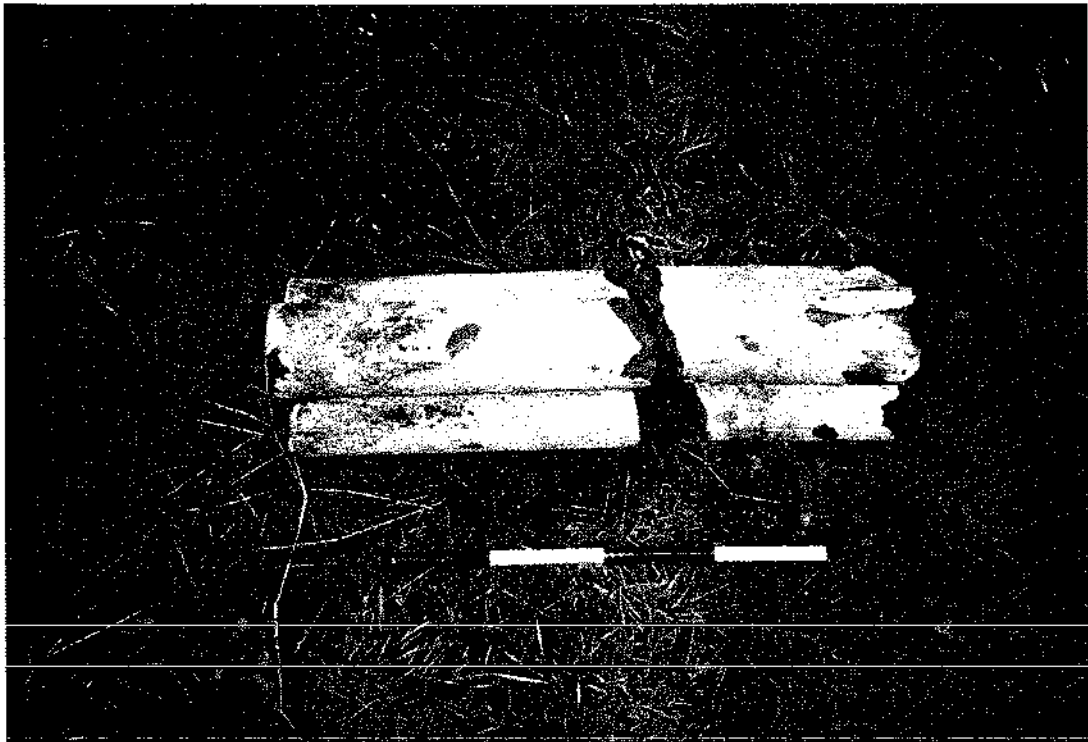


Plate 8



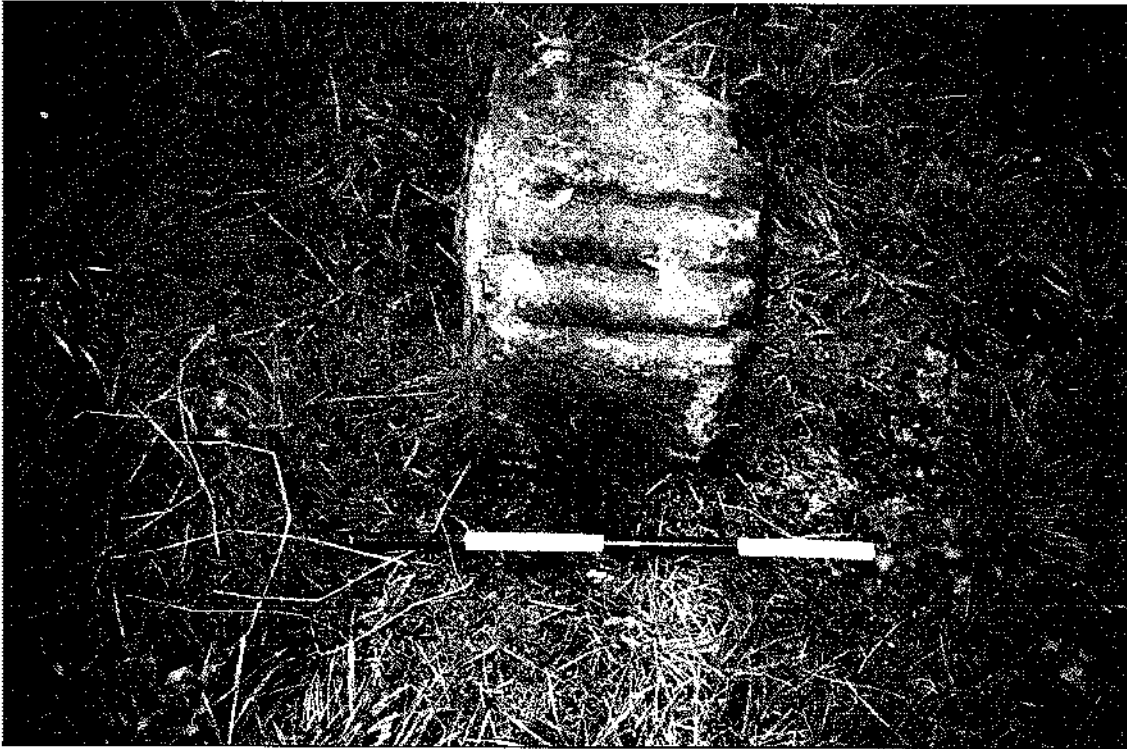


Plate 9



Plate 10



Plate 11

