

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION REPORT

MIDDLETON HALL, MENDHAM

MDM 103



L. Everett

Field Team
Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service

© January 2005
SCCAS REPORT No. 2004/142
OASIS ID No. 5727

Lucy Robinson, County Director of Environment and Transport
Endeavour House, Russell Road, Ipswich, IP1 2BX
Tel. (01473) 264384



Suffolk County Council

Environment and Transport

Summary

Mendham, Middleton Hall (TM/28698354; MDM 103) Documentary evidence and a geophysical survey suggested the presence of buildings to the west, and possibly to the south of the existing Middleton Hall. A series of small evaluation trenches were opened in locations targeted onto likely structural features located by the geophysical survey. No evidence of footings was located in any trench, however, a substantial quantity of brick and tile fragments were present in a shallow subsoil layer present over much of the site. These finds ranged in date from the 15th to 18th century and may be the result of demolition of, or alterations to buildings. The precise nature of any such activity remains uncertain.

(Linzi Everett, S.C.C.A.S., for Mr. M. Allen; report no. 2004/142)

1. Introduction

The site is located on a gentle north-facing slope at 20m OD of a side valley, east of, and feeding into, the Waveney (Fig.1). At the base of the slope is Sconch Beck, a tributary of the Waveney, and the line of the Mendham/Homersfield parish boundary, at that point. The natural subsoil comprises boulder clay with sandy clay outcrops. The existing house comprises a timber framed southern range of c.16th century origin with the addition of an 18th century northern range. The study area lay within the present gardens of, and immediately west and south of Middleton Hall where cartographic and documentary evidence suggests the possible former presence of buildings. The area south of the house is believed to have been the location of an agricultural building and possibly the remains of an Elizabethan pleasure garden whilst it is suggested that another house once stood west of the present Middleton Hall. A geophysical survey of the site was carried out by Archaeological Services University of Durham (ASUD). Their results suggested that footings from quite substantial buildings survived within the garden, probably relating to more than one phase.

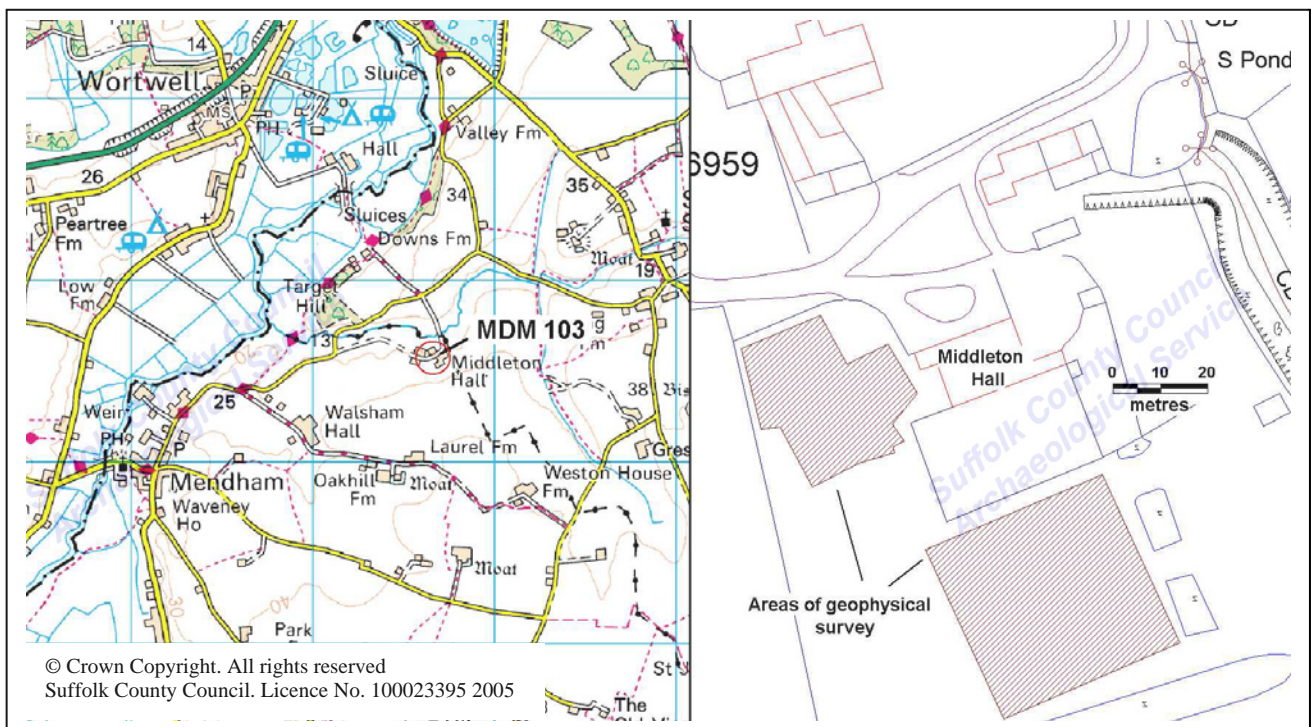


Figure 1: Site location

The second phase of work was a series of trenches opened in various locations to sample and record any archaeological deposits present (Fig.2). This fieldwork was conducted during September 2004 by the Field Team of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service (SCCAS). Archaeological work on the site was commissioned by the owner of Middleton Hall, Mr. M. Allen.

2. Fieldwork Methodology

Trenches were excavated by a mechanical mini-digger equipped with a toothless ditching bucket. Soil was removed under the supervision of an archaeologist to the depth of the natural subsoil. Both the upcast spoil and the machined surfaces were examined visually, and subjected to a metal detector survey, to recover artefactual evidence. A total of 25.8m of trench was opened and observed in various locations chosen to investigate anomalies identified by the geophysical. Where features were revealed by machining, they were cleaned manually for definition and each allocated 'observed phenomena' numbers within a unique continuous numbering system under the SMR code MDM 103 (Appendix I). Features were then partially excavated in order to recover dating evidence as well as to observe their form and possibly determine any function. Plans were drawn at 1:10 on site to record the features (Fig. 3), and excavated sections were drawn at 1:10 (Fig. 4). Features were also recorded photographically, using a digital camera, to form a part of the site archive. The evaluation archive will be deposited in the County SMR at Shire Hall, Bury St Edmunds.

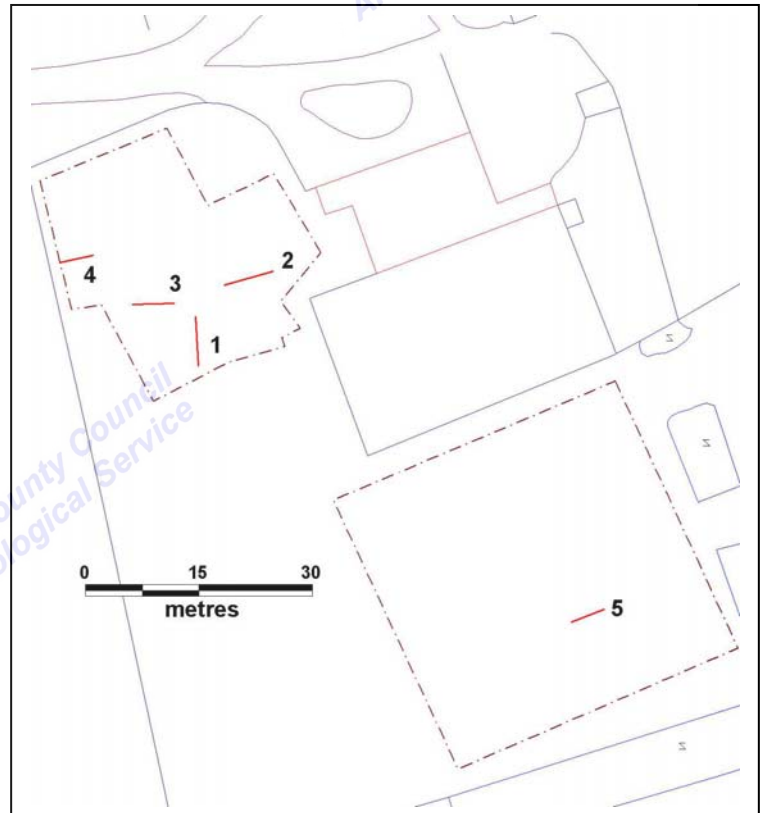


Figure 2: Trench locations within areas subjected to geophysical survey

3. Fieldwork Results

Four trenches were opened to the west of the existing house in locations where results of the geophysical survey were interpreted as the remains of wall footings for buildings. The results from each trench are summarised below and the excavated trench plans illustrated as Figure 3.

Trench	Orientation	Depth	Length	Topsoil description	Features
1	N-S	110mm	5.3m	Dark brown clay loam, occasional brick and tile (0001)	0002; 0004; 0006
2	NE-SW	210mm	6.9m	Dark brown clay loam, occasional brick and tile (0014)	0015; 0017
3	E-W	220mm	5.3m	Dark brown silty clay loam (0010). Richer than 0001 and 0014, possibly imported	0008; 0011
4	ENE-WSW	160mm	3.8m	Dark brown silty clay loam (0012). Richer than 0001 and 0014, possibly imported	0013
5	NE-SW	1.2m+	4.5m	Dark brown clay loam (0020)	

Archaeological levels were sealed beneath 150mm-400mm of topsoil.

Three features were recorded in Trench 1:

0002 was an east to west aligned ditch 500mm wide and 140mm deep. It was filled by 0003, a dark brown clay with lumps of chalk and charcoal, from which animal bone, oyster shell and ceramic building materials (CBM) were recovered. The ditch was shallow but deepened at the centre where the base was also 'lined' with quite large flints and chalk lumps. A grey, ashy lens was present within 0003.

0004 was a small, possible pit or post-hole. It was shallow, and roughly circular in plan, although it continued beyond the edge of the trench, and measured 300mm in diameter and 65mm deep. Its fill, 0005, was a dark brown sticky clay, flecked with chalk.

0006 was a shallow, possibly natural depression, the sides of which were not well defined. It was filled by 0007, a soft, sticky brown clay, from which animal bone and CBM were recovered.

Two features were recorded in Trench 2:

0015 was a shallow north to south ditch, 900mm wide and 130mm deep and with a rounded base. It was filled by 0016, a dry, compact clay with frequent chalk, stone and CBM inclusions

0017 was a shallow feature, only partially revealed in the western end of Trench 2. It was 55mm deep and appeared to be a linear depression, orientated approximately NNW to SSE. It was filled by 0018, a dry, compact clay with frequent chalk and CBM inclusions.

The trench section showed a thin, ashy layer between topsoil and subsoil over a distance of c.1.5m above and to the west of 0015. This is most likely to represent discarded ash or the remains of a bonfire.

Two features were recorded in Trench 3:

0008 was a north to south aligned ditch, 1.2m wide and 140mm deep, with a very flat base. It was filled by 0009, a compact yellowish grey clay with frequent chalk flecks, lumps and CBM fragments. It was sealed by 0011.

0011 was a layer present throughout Trench 3, between 40mm and 60mm thick, overlying the natural subsoil and ditch 0008. It comprised stone, CBM and chalk in a

compact clay matrix and could represent some kind of yard surface or merely a layer of material associated with construction or demolition.

One feature was recorded in Trench 4:

0013 was a layer of compact clay, similar in appearance and characteristics to 0011 but with fewer stones. It was also only present in the eastern end of the trench.

Trench 5 was excavated to the south of Middleton Hall, targeting a possible wall detected during the geophysical survey. Below the topsoil was a homogenous mid brown sandy clay which was almost stoneless and contained no archaeological deposits. This trench was excavated to a depth of around 1.2m, at which point a cleaner, yellowish clay sand had been reached but still no archaeological evidence or disturbance of any kind had been observed.

4. The Finds

by Dave Gill, SCCAS

Finds were collected from five contexts in three evaluation trenches. They were washed, marked and identified by members of the SCCAS Field Team.

Pottery

Four sherds of glazed earthenware were recovered from topsoil layer 0014, which are no earlier than 16th -17th century.

Ceramic building material

Samples of CBM were collected from contexts 0003, 0007, 0009, 0014 and 0016. There were three brick types represented, all in red firing clays and there were no complete examples. The bulk of the fragments from 0009 and 0016 were in a coarse, poorly mixed, fabric with fairly large flint, grog and chalk inclusions. There were straw impressions on the surfaces and over fired examples from 0009. The bricks measured 4-4¼”x 2-2¼” and dated to the late 15th/early 16th century. One fragment from 0016 was better made in a relatively fine sandy fabric with large pieces of grog. The brick had a moulded chamfer suggesting it was part of an architectural feature, it measured 2½” thick and consistent with a 17th/18th century date. There was a small fragment of another shaped brick, with a similar fabric in 0003. This had what appeared to be a rounded face and had traces of a red pigment on its surface.

The two fragments from 0014 were in a fine sandy fabric tempered grog, these were 2” thick and probably date to the 15th century.

All of the contexts produce small fragments of tile these were all plain peg tiles in a red-firing fabric. Many pieces had a white, hard lime mortar adhering to them but otherwise cannot be dated closer than to the post-medieval period.

Biological evidence

Animal bone was recovered from 0003 and 0016. These comprised incomplete examples of bones from medium-sized mammals (?sheep). Bone from 0007 was identified as from chickens.

Oyster shells were also found within 0003.

Metal objects

A fragment of a handmade iron door hinge (late 15th / 16th (?)) and a copper/alloy dressmaking pin were recovered from 0003.

5. Discussion

The archaeological evidence within the evaluation trenches did not support the interpretation of the geophysical survey results. Features likely to be some of those interpreted as probable walls were located, but were not structural in any way and are more likely to represent former garden features. Whilst it is possible that landscaping of the garden in relatively recent history could have damaged surviving archaeological deposits, one would expect foundations of any substantial building which once occupied the site to leave some physical trace of their presence.

The quantity of ceramic building material observed during excavation, both unstratified and within features or general layers, does suggest waste material associated with construction, or perhaps more likely, demolition of a building or buildings. Two shaped brick fragments from 0003 and 0016 suggested decorative brickwork of 17th–18th century date, but from the archaeological evidence, it is not possible to discuss the origins of these, or any other CBM from the site, with any certainty.

No finds from the site could be dated any earlier than the 15th century, but the assemblage included a range of finds from 15th to 18th century date. The earliest finds recovered may just pre-date the southern range of Middleton Hall, but are most likely to be contemporary with it.

References

Hale, D., 2004, *Land at Middleton Hall, Mendham, Suffolk: Geophysical Surveys* ASUD Report No. 1067

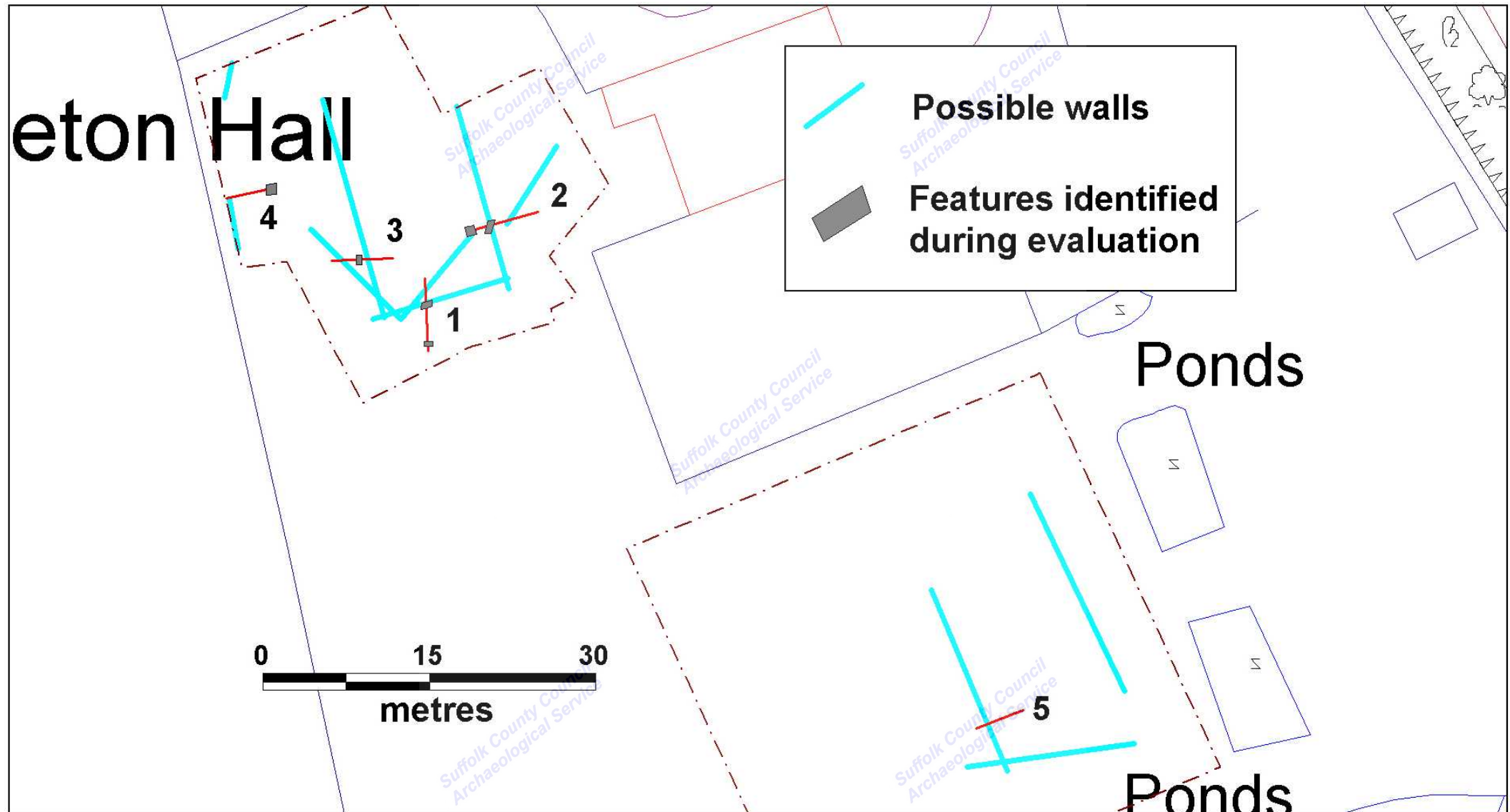


Figure 5: Location of features in evaluation trenches and possible walls located by geophysical survey

Appendix I

OpNo	Context	GridSq	Identifier	Description
0001		Tr.1	Topsoil	Topsoil in Tr.1 - Dark brown clay with occasional tile and chalk.
0002	0002	Tr.1	Ditch cut	E-W aligned ditch cut at S end of Trench 1. Filled with animal bone, oyster shell etc. Open 'U' shape section.
0003	0002	Tr.1	Ditch fill	Fill similar to topsoil. Dark brown clay, charcoal lumps and flecks throughout. Chalk lumps throughout. Large lumps of chalk towards base.
0004	0004	Tr.1	Posthole cut	V. small possible post hole towards N end of Tr. 1. Circular & shallow. Sides not very even so possibly not a feature at all.
0005	0004	Tr.1	Posthole fill	Filled by 0005 - Dark brown clay with occasional chalk flecks throughout
0006		Tr.1	Feature cut	Shallow, ill-defined depression, possibly natural or 'trodden'
0007		Tr.1	Feature fill	Area of soft ground- sticky clay, animal bone recovered
0008	0008	Tr. 3	Ditch cut	Wide, shallow open 'U' shape ditch. Possible footing trench dug wider during excavation
0009	0008	Tr. 3	Ditch fill	Brick & chalk debris throughout fill. Filled by solid yellow grey clay with chalk flecks. Very compacted
0010		Tr. 3	Topsoil	Topsoil in Tr.3. Rich dark brown silty clay, possibly imported as richer than other topsoil in this area
0011		Tr. 3	Surface	Possible surface within Tr. 3. Compacted stone and clay with chalk lumps throughout. Seen almost throughout trench
0012		Tr. 4	Topsoil	Topsoil in Tr. 4 - Similar to Tr.3. See 0010
0013		Tr. 4	Surface	Surface in Tr. 4 - Similar to 0011 in Tr.3 but fewer stones. Compacted, and with some chalk
0014		Tr. 2	Topsoil	Topsoil in Tr. 2 - Same as Tr. 1 - 0001
0015		Tr. 2	?Ditch cut	Possible N-S ditch. Rounded base, gradual sloping sides. Path?
0016		Tr. 2	?Ditch fill	Dry compact clay, packed with chalk and CBM

0017		Tr. 2	Feature cut	Not fully exposed but possibly linear NNW-SSE. Very shallow, possibly worn/trodden
0018		Tr. 2	Feature fill	Dry, compact clay, packed with stones, chalk and CBM. Path?
0019		Tr. 2	Subsoil	Mid brown silty clay, occasional tile and chalk fragments.
0020		Tr. 5	Topsoil	Dark brown clay loam
0021		Tr. 5	Subsoil	Mid-pale brown clay sand, homogenous and sterile, stoneless