

**FORMER WOODFIELD RESIDENTIAL HOME
RECTORY LANE
STEVENAGE
HERTFORDSHIRE**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING



**Essex County Council
Field Archaeology Unit**

JULY 2011

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

Prepared By: Trevor Ennis	Signature:
Position: Project Officer	Date:
Approved By: Adrian Scruby	Signature:
Position: Project Manager	Date:

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As part of our desire to provide a quality service, we would welcome any comments you may have on the content or the presentation of this report. Please contact the Archaeological Fieldwork Manager, at the

Field Archaeology Unit,
Fairfield Court, Fairfield Road, Braintree, Essex CM7 3YQ.
fieldarch@essexcc.gov.uk
Tel: 01376 331470
Fax: 01376 331428

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FORMER WOODFIELD RESIDENTIAL HOME

RECTORY LANE

STEVENAGE

HERTFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

Client: CgMs Consulting

NGR TL 23410 26250

HER Request No.: 109/11

Oasis No.: essexcou1-104935

Dates of Fieldwork: 24th – 25th, 27th & 31st May, 2nd & 6th June 2011

SUMMARY

Archaeological monitoring was carried out at the site of the former Woodfield Residential Home, Rectory Lane, Stevenage, during residential development.

A previous desk-based assessment concluded that a property known as Nycholls occupied the site by the mid 16th century, while the recently demolished Woodfields was constructed between 1750 and 1834 and is likely to be the predecessor to the Grade II listed Old Rectory, which lies further to the east along Rectory Lane. An archaeological evaluation undertaken in April 2009 uncovered remains dating from the mid-12th to mid-14th centuries onwards, including a possible pond.

Although the development took place in an area of some archaeological potential it is clear from the monitoring works that with the exception of the main sewer works at the front of the site and an area encompassing part of plot 5 and the northern end of the access road the groundworks were not of sufficient depth to reach the archaeological horizon. Where deeper works were undertaken at the front of the site in excess of 2m of modern made ground was encountered, suggesting that significant disturbance has occurred in some areas.

No archaeological features pre-dating the late Post-Medieval/ Modern period were revealed, with the only identified features comprising three intercutting former plot or boundary ditches, the fills of which contained a variety of modern material including brick, slate and tile.

Consequently, it appears that the current development works have had little impact upon the archaeological record, with any remains that are present effectively preserved in situ beneath the new houses.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological monitoring undertaken during groundworks associated with residential development on the site of the former Woodfield Residential Home, Rectory Lane, Stevenage, Herts. The fieldwork was carried out by the Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) on behalf of CgMs Consulting for Beechwood Homes, in accordance with an archaeological brief prepared by the Historic Environment Unit of Hertfordshire County Council (HCC CHEU 2011) and a written scheme of investigation prepared by ECC FAU (2011).

The site archive will be deposited in Stevenage Museum. A digital version of this report will be submitted, along with a project summary, to the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/project/oasis>).

2.0 BACKGROUND (Fig. 1)

2.1 Topography and Geology

Rectory Lane is located some 750m to the north-west of the centre of Stevenage Old Town and 2.5km north of Stevenage New Town (NGR TL 23410 26250 - Fig. 1). The site is an irregular shape and is bounded to the north, east and west by residential properties and to the south by Rectory Lane. The Woodfield Residential Home buildings currently occupy the north-western corner of the site, the north-eastern corner is laid to grass and the southern boundary is lined with mature trees. The remainder of the site comprises a sweeping drive.

The bedrock geology comprises Holywell Nodular Chalk Formation and New Pit Chalk Formation overlain by Lowestoft Formation Diamicton – chalky till and outwash sands and gravels, silts and clays. The site lies at approximately 104m AOD on land between the River Beane Valley to the east and the Ashbrook to the west.

2.2 Reasons for the Project

A planning application for the construction of six detached, and two semi-detached, residential dwellings and associated infrastructure at Woodfield Residential Home, Rectory Lane, Stevenage was submitted to Stevenage Borough Council in 2010 (2/10/0170/FP). As the site is located within an area of some archaeological potential an archaeological condition was placed on planning consent by the Borough Council, based on advice provided by HCC HEU in accordance with Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment, requiring that programme of archaeological works be undertaken during development in order to mitigate any impact upon the archaeological record.

2.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

The following archaeological background uses information from the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HHER).

A previous archaeological desk-based assessment of the development area indicated that a property known as Nycholls occupied the site by the mid 16th century (HHER 11657). This included a dwelling with barn, three closes and an orchard. Cartographic research undertaken as part of the aforementioned project concluded that the present building occupying the site was constructed between 1750 and 1834 and is likely to be the predecessor to the Grade II listed Old Rectory (HHER 10563), which lies further to the east along Rectory Lane and is probably the original reason for the street name. These served the grade I listed 12th century St Nicholas church in Rectory Lane (HHER 11657). An archaeological evaluation of the site, undertaken in April 2009, revealed archaeological features dating from the mid-12th to mid-14th centuries onwards including a possible pond.

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 General aims

The main aim of the archaeological work was to investigate and record any surviving archaeological remains threatened by the development.

Specific attention was to be paid to:

- any mid to late medieval (12th – 14th century) archaeological remains;
- any archaeological remains relating to the 16th-century use of the site, and the property known as Nycholls.

3.2 Research objectives

In the event that significant archaeological remains were encountered this report would have aimed to place the results in context with the research objectives laid out in *Research and Archaeology: a Framework for the Eastern Counties, 2. research agenda and strategy* (Brown and Glazebrook 2000). As no features of any significance were identified the project will not contribute to any of the research agendas.

4.0 METHOD

Archaeological monitoring was undertaken during groundworks associated with the residential development of the site, including the monitoring of topsoil stripping and the reduction of ground levels for the individual house plots, stripping/ excavation of a spine road running roughly north-south across the development and the excavation of sewer and drain runs. As the development was piled, as opposed to using strip foundations, ground reduction was generally quite shallow, with the sewer trench offering the only real opportunity to inspect observe the site strata at depth.

All work was carried out in accordance with IfA (Institute for Archaeologists) by-laws and guidelines and complied with Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (Gurney 2003). Standard ECC FAU excavation, artefact collection and recording methodologies were employed throughout.

5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS (Figs 1 – 2, Plates 1 - 4)

Monitoring of plots 1, 2 and 7, at the front of the site, revealed only modern made ground, with approximately 300mm of material removed prior to laying down a pile-mat of crushed hardcore. In plot 1 in particular the area was very heavily disturbed by services.

A large part of plot 3 had been previously been disturbed by the construction of a swimming pool, which was backfilled and levelled as part of the current works (Plate 1). The remainder of the plot was reduced by approximately 250mm, revealing only modern made ground.

Stripping of plot 4 again encountered only modern made ground, with no archaeological features or finds noted other than modern ceramic building material.

In plot 5 undisturbed natural in the form of a yellow-brown chalky till was encountered across the northern half of the plot (Plate 2). Three intercutting ditches (1, 3 & 5) of similar size extended across the northern part of the plot, running into the access road (Fig. 2, Plate 3). Ditch 1, running southwest to northeast, was 1.6m wide and contained a single fill (2) that produced pieces of modern ceramic drain pipe, coal fragments and roof and floor tile. Cutting ditch 1 was ditch 3, running roughly east-west and apparently superseding the earlier feature. Again containing a single fill (3), this feature also produced Post-Medieval/ Modern material including coal, brick and mortar fragments. Meandering or almost zig-zagging east to west was ditch 5, which cut ditch 3. As with the previous two ditches, this feature also

contained a single fill (6) that produced Post-Medieval and Modern material including large amounts of slate roof tile fragments, brick and tile.

In plot 6 only the topsoil was removed, revealing a subsoil deposit, prior to the raising of ground levels across the plot.

Monitoring of the north-south orientated access road revealed only modern made ground, service runs and areas of brick rubble, with the exception of the northern of the road where three Post-Medieval/ Modern ditches were seen extending roughly east – west across the road terminal from plot 5 (described above). One of the earlier, backfilled evaluation trenches was noted in the roadway excavation but the road was not excavated to sufficient depth to reach the base of the trench, indicating that groundworks in this area had not penetrated to the archaeological horizon

The southern section of the main sewer run, excavated down the centre of the access road, revealed approximately 2m of modern made ground comprising a dark grey-brown topsoil containing modern ceramic building material, overlying redeposited natural clay again containing fragments of CBM. Moving away from the Rectory Lane frontage the sewer became progressively shallower, at 0.7m deep by 0.4m wide in the central and northern part of the site where only made ground was encountered (Plate 4).

6.0 FINDS REPORT

No finds other than material deriving from demonstrably modern features or unstratified Post-medieval/ Modern brick and tile were noted during the recording works. None of the material has been retained.

7.0 DISCUSSION

With the exception of the three intercutting ditches of comparatively late/ modern date identified at the northern end of the site, in plot 5 and the adjacent section of access road, no features or finds of archaeological interest were noted during the monitoring works. The ditches most likely represent former property boundaries or sub-divisions

8.0 ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS

Although the development took place in an area of some archaeological potential, with previous evaluation works having identified remains of 12th to 14th century date within the plot, it is clear that with the exception of the main sewer works at the front of the site and an area encompassing part of plot 5 and the northern end of the access road the groundworks were not of sufficient depth to reach the archaeological horizon. Where deeper works were undertaken at the front of the site in excess of 2m of modern made ground was encountered, suggesting that significant disturbance has occurred in some areas. The only clearly definable features seen were the three late Post-Medieval/ Modern ditches recorded at the northern end of the site, which are of little archaeological value. Consequently, it appears that the current development works have had little impact upon the archaeological record, with any remains that are present effectively preserved in situ beneath the new houses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The investigation was commissioned by CgMs Consulting. The archaeological monitoring was undertaken by Ellen Heppell and Mark Germany of the ECC Field Archaeology Unit. Illustration was by Andrew Lewsey. The project was managed by Adrian Scruby of ECC FAU and monitored by Andy Instone of HCC CHEU on behalf of Stevenage Borough Council and Matthew Smith of CgMs Consulting on behalf of Beechwood Homes.

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| Institute for
Archaeologists | 2001 | <i>Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation</i>
(revised) |

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT DATA

All dimensions given in metres

Context	Type	Description	Period
1	Cut	Ditch – 1.6m wide by 8m+ long	PM/ Mod
2	Fill	Fill of ditch 1 – dark grey-brown silt clay	PM/ Mod
3	Cut	Ditch – 1.5m wide by 10m+ long	PM/ Mod
4	Fill	Fill of ditch 3 – brown-grey silt clay	PM/ Mod
5	Cut	Ditch – 1.6m wide by 16m+ long	PM/ Mod
6	Fill	Fill of ditch 5 – dark grey silt clay	PM/ Mod

APPENDIX 2: CONTENTS OF ARCHIVE

SITE NAME: The Former Woodfield Residential Home, Rectory Lane, Stevenage, Herts
HHER Request No: 109/11

Index to Archive:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 HCC CHEU Design Brief
- 1.2 ECC FAU WSI

2. Research Archive

- 2.1 Client Report
- 2.2 Finds Reports

3. Site Archive

- 3.1 Context Record Register
- 3.2 Context Records (1 to 6)
- 3.3 Plan Register
- 3.4 Section Register
- 3.5 3 A4 plan/section sheet
- 3.6 Trench location plan
- 3.7 Photographic Registers
- 3.8 Site Photographic Record (1 set of Black & White prints, 1 Set of digital images on disk)
- 3.9 Miscellaneous notes/plans

Not in File

N/A

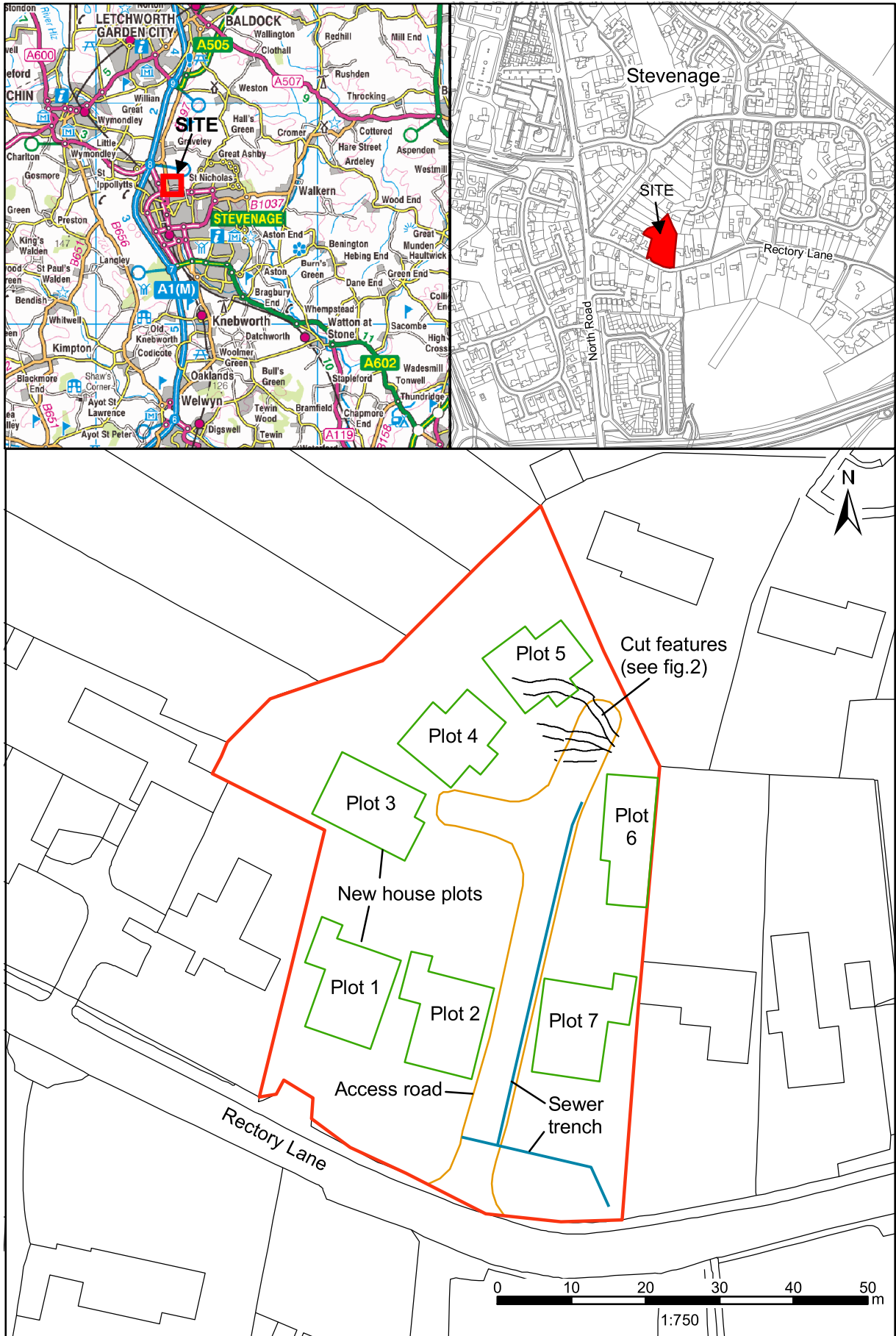
Finds

No finds retained

APPENDIX 3: HER SUMMARY SHEET

HER SUMMARY SHEET

Site name/Address: Former Woodfield Residential Home, Rectory Lane, Stevenage, Herts	
Parishes: Stevenage	District: Stevenage Borough Council
NGR: TL 23410 26250	HER Request No.: 109/11
Type of Work: Archaeological Monitoring	Site Director/Group: Ellen Heppell/ Mark Germany, ECC Field Archaeology Unit
Dates of Work: 24th – 25th, 27th & 31st May, 02nd & 06th June 2011	Size of Area Investigated: 3720sqm
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: Stevenage	Funding source: Client
Further Seasons Anticipated?: No	Related HER Nos.: 11657
Final Report: HAH note	Oasis No.: essexcou1-104935
Periods Represented: Post-medieval/ Modern	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:	
<p>Archaeological monitoring was carried out at the site of the former Woodfield Residential Home, Rectory Lane, Stevenage, during residential development.</p> <p>A previous desk-based assessment concluded that a property known as Nycholls occupied the site by the mid 16th century, while the recently demolished Woodfields was constructed between 1750 and 1834 and is likely to be the predecessor to the Grade II listed Old Rectory, which lies further to the east along Rectory Lane. An archaeological evaluation undertaken in April 2009 uncovered remains dating from the mid-12th to mid-14th centuries onwards, including a possible pond.</p> <p>Although the development took place in an area of some archaeological potential it is clear from the monitoring works that with the exception of the main sewer works at the front of the site and an area encompassing part of plot 5 and the northern end of the access road the groundworks were not of sufficient depth to reach the archaeological horizon. Where deeper works were undertaken at the front of the site in excess of 2m of modern made ground was encountered, suggesting that significant disturbance has occurred in some areas.</p> <p>No archaeological features pre-dating the late Post-Medieval/ Modern period were revealed, with the only identified features comprising three intercutting former plot or boundary ditches, the fills of which contained a variety of modern material including brick, slate and tile.</p> <p>Consequently, it appears that the current development works have had little impact upon the archaeological record, with any remains that are present effectively preserved in situ beneath the new houses.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports:- Hillelson, David, & Kaye, David. 2007. 'Woodfield', Rectory Lane, Stevenage, Herts: desk-based archaeological assessment and historic building impact assessment.	
Author of Summary: A. Scruby	Date of Summary: July 2011



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Fig.1. Location of monitored areas

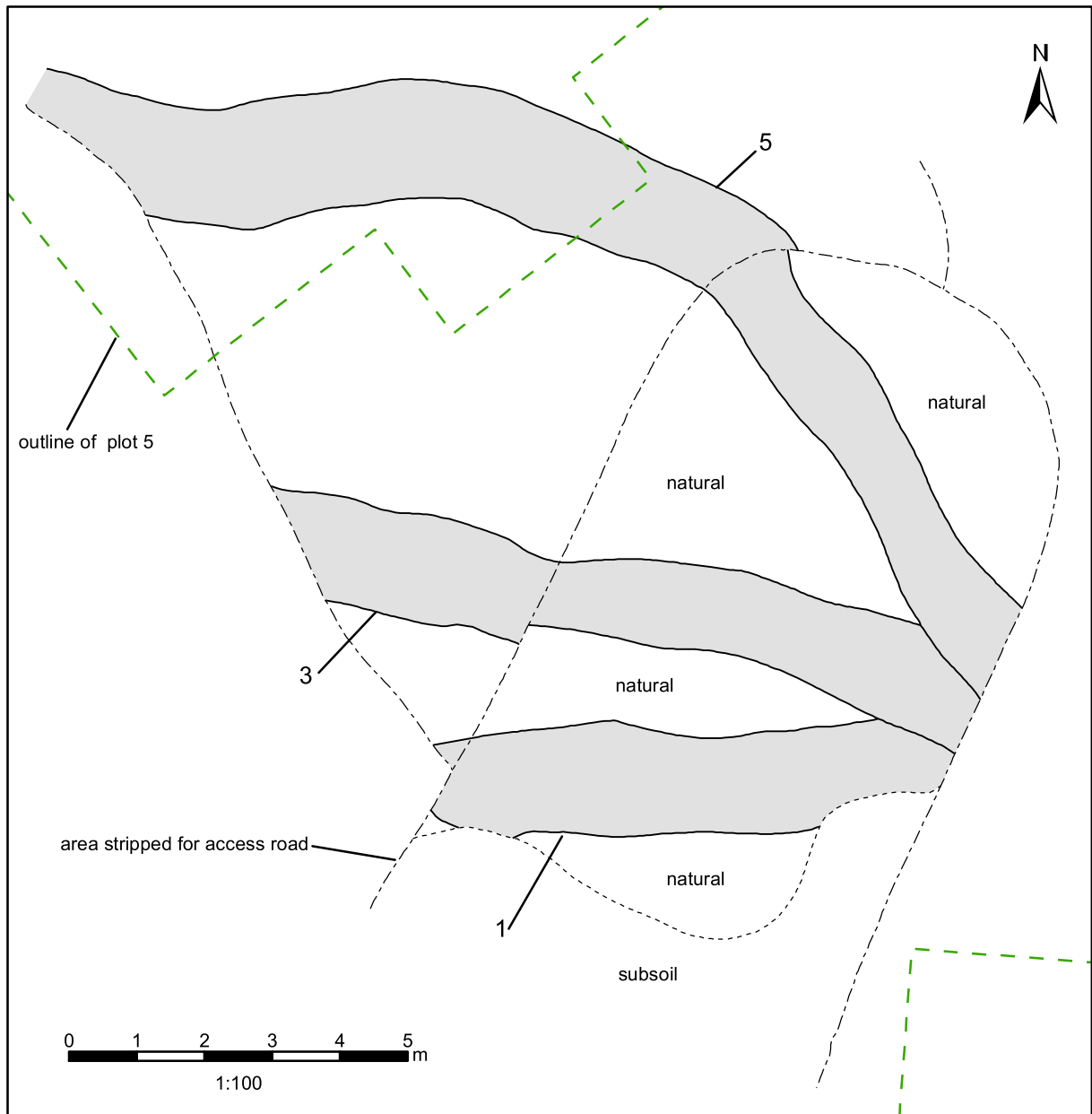


Fig.2. Features at north end of access road



Plate 1: Plot 3 – former swimming pool

Plate 2: Plot 5 and access road strip





Plate 3: Plot 5 and access road showing ditches 3 and 5 (curving)

Plate 4: General view of sewer/ drain works

