

**THE MANOR, CHURCH ROAD, MEPPERSHALL,
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
AND FIELD RECORDING**

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Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete an assessment as possible, within the terms of the specification. All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.

The archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Julian Watters. This report has been prepared by Reuben Thorpe.

*Albion Archaeology
St Mary's Church
St Mary's Street
Bedford, MK42 0AS
☎: 01234 294003
Fax: 01234 294008
E-mail: office@albion-arch.com
Website: www.albion-arch.com*

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Structure of this report

This document reports on a watching brief conducted by Albion Archaeology at The Manor, Church Lane, Meppershall, Bedfordshire. It is comprised of four sections including the figures. Section one provides background information on the project and details the circumstances in which it was undertaken. Sections two and three outline the methodologies and results of the project. All figures are bound at the back of this report.

Metadata statement

This document and figures have been compiled on an IBM compatible computer in MS Word 97 running on a Windows XP operating system. They reside on the Albion Archaeology Network at:
O:/Projects/CRM_938/Project_Management/Reports/CRM_938_13
and
O:/Projects/CRM_938/Project_Management/Reports/CRM_Figures
respectively.



Non-Technical Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Albion Archaeology during the construction of an extension and associated services at The Manor, Meppershall, in August 2003.

The Manor stands to the east of the extant remains of a Norman Motte and Bailey Castle 'The Hills' and to the west of St Mary's Church at around 86m OD on land overlooking the valley of the River Hit. The underlying geology consists of calcareous gley soils of the Hanslope Association, the predominant material consisting of chalky boulder clay..

Previous archaeological work to the north and the south of the Manor, undertaken by Albion Archaeology in 1998 demonstrated the existence of medieval 'occupation'. The Manor itself is a listed building and given the probable presence of archaeological deposits adjacent to the Manor the County Archaeological Officer advised that an archaeological watching brief was required.

Archaeological deposits and structures relating to the establishment of the building and its building plot were observed and recorded.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Planning Background*

Mid Bedfordshire District Council granted planning permission (01/1872/FUL) for the erection of two two-storey extensions to the front (western) elevation at The Manor, Church Road, Meppershall, Bedfordshire (Figure 1). A condition, attached to this permission, required the implementation of a scheme of archaeological investigation as a consequence of development.

1.2 *Site Location and Description*

The development (Figure 1) is within an area of known archaeological sensitivity and is centred on NGR TL 1341/3590. The Manor House, a listed building, dating from the 17th century, lies between the Norman Church of St Mary's and 'The Hills', a series of medieval earthworks consisting of a motte and two baileys. The earthwork, representing a Norman Castle, is a scheduled ancient monument (SAM 20417) thought to date to the reign of King Stephen and was besieged by him in 1138 during the siege of Bedford.

The site lies at the south-western edge of Meppershall at a height of 86m OD on land overlooking the valley of the River Hit. The underlying geology consists of calcareous gley soils of the Hanslope Association, the predominant material consisting of chalky boulder clay.

1.3 *Archaeological Background*

The 17th century Manor House, though a listed building in its own right, lies outside the scheduled area. An archaeological watching brief, undertaken to the north and south of the Manor in 1998 (Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service 114) revealed possible evidence of occupation. It was thought likely, given the juxtaposition of the manor between the Norman castle and Norman Church, that archaeological deposits associated with medieval activity in this area may have extend into the development area.

1.4 *Aims and Objectives*

As development within the application may have impacted on any extant archaeological remains, it was a requirement of the planning consent that this impact be mitigated. In general, the aims of archaeological observation and recording exercise were to establish:

- the location, extent, nature and date of any archaeological features or deposits;
- the integrity, state of preservation and wider context of any archaeological features or deposits.

If archaeological deposits/structures were demonstrated to be present, the following procedures were to be adopted:

- the systematic recovery of artefacts to assist and augment the development of a regional type series;
- the recovery of palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions.



2. METHODS

2.1 Methodological Standards

As part of Albion Archaeology's commitment to current best practice the following standards have been adhered to throughout this project:

- Institute of Field Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for Watching Briefs*.
- Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual for Archaeological Fieldwork and the Analysis of Fieldwork Records*.
- Institute of Field Archaeologist's *Code of Conduct*.
- English Heritage's *Management of Archaeological Projects* (1991).

2.2 Sequence of Recording and Methods

The archaeological watching brief was conducted between the 5th August and the 15th August 2003 and involved a total of six site visits, which are tabulated below (see Figure 2).

<i>Visit N^o</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Reason</i>
1	05/08/03	Observation and recording of cutting of Footing 1
2	06/08/03	<i>ibid.</i>
3	07/08/03	Observation and recording of cutting of Footing 2
4	11/08/03	Recording of Footing 2 and levelling down interior to Footing 1
5	13/08/03	Recording of levelling down interior to Footing 2
6	15/08/03	Observation of cutting of drains from Footings 1 and 2

Table 1. *Sequence of Monitoring and Archaeological Works Undertaken*

It was agreed between Albion Archaeology and the client that archaeological monitoring would be undertaken in accordance with the construction timescale, during the excavation of foundation trenches and service trenches for the two extensions.

Monitoring took the form of physical observation of the operation of the mechanical excavator. The nature and provenance of any revealed material culture or deposits of an apparent or actual archaeological nature was established. Recording was completed on standard, pro-forma, Albion Archaeology Watching Brief Visit Record Sheets. Where necessary and where archaeological deposits were demonstrated to exist, these were augmented by measured drawings and detailed photographs. In the absence of archaeological deposits measured sketches of soil profiles and the location and dimensions of the interventions were compiled. A representative selection of finds was retained, where and if encountered, to aid the construction of a relative dating framework, to physically date the deposit from which they had been retrieved and provide information on site formation processes and patterns of residuality.



3. RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

Two extensions were constructed on the western face of the current dwelling (Figure 2). The more southerly of the two, Footing 1, abutted both the original build of the 17th century manor and a more modern extension. Footing 2 lay to the north of Footing 1, against the western face of the dwelling. No archaeological deposits or structures were encountered during the monitoring of Footing 1, other than the putative construction horizon of either the 17th century build or of the later extension. A wall and associated construction horizons were observed and recorded during the monitoring of Footing 2. No archaeological deposits or structures were observed during the cutting of the foul and surface water drains to the extensions.

Details of all the recorded contexts can be found in Appendix 1. In the following narrative, context numbers representing single actions of construction, use, or disuse, are enclosed in parenthesis with square brackets e.g. [107] representing events associated with the cutting away of pre-existing strata. Layers and fills of cuts (actions associated with deposition rather than truncation) are enclosed in rounded brackets e.g. (108).

3.2 Monitoring of Footing 1

Monitoring of the excavation of this footing occurred on the 5th, 6th and 11th August 2003. Visits 1 and 2 monitored the machine excavation of the foundation trench of the extension, while visit 3 monitored the reduction of the interior of Footing 1 to 0.3m below contemporary ground surface.

3.2.1 Soil Profile and Stratigraphy

As Footing 1 abutted both the original 17th century build and a later (?20th century) extension, it was hoped that details of the original construction sequence and that of the later addition would be observed. This, indeed, appeared to be the case with evidence for the later modification of the building seen in superposition over the horizontally truncated remains of initial construction.

In summary, a re-deposited layer of mixed building debris and clay (109) (Figure 3) overlay both the construction horizons of a modern drain, [107] / (108) and the putative construction cut and horizon of construction [103] / (104) of the Manor itself. Both of these features were cut into a putative subsoil deposit (100), comprised of mixed and dirty clay, which overlay a further soil horizon of yellow clay (101).

The levelling down of the interior of Footing 1 (Figure 3) confirmed in plan the sequence observed in the sections of the foundation trench. Recording in this area ceased on the 11th August. No finds were present.

3.3 Monitoring of Footing 2

Monitoring of the excavation of this footing occurred on the 7th, 11th and 13th of August. The two initial visits monitored the machine excavation of the footing



foundation trench while the later visit monitored the reduction of the levels internal to Footing 2.

3.3.1 Soil Profile and Stratigraphy

This footing abutted the original 17th century build at the north-western corner of the dwelling. Surprisingly, a sequence of archaeological features was discovered which stratigraphically pre-dated the 17th century build, while some features are interpreted as possibly being contemporary with the 17th century build.

A brick wall and its foundation [119] made of machine made bricks laid as stretchers in 'English Cross' bond stood to a total of three courses high and was associated with a rough external surface comprising brick rubble fragments (109) (Figure 4). To the north, layer (109) overlay a north-south aligned foundation which returned to the east at its northern and southern end to run beneath the revealed house foundations. This wall [117/122/123] was constructed of dressed, limestone and greensand blocks between 0.3m x 0.2m x 0.2m and 0.10m x 0.10m x 0.10m in size. It survived to five courses, 0.5m high. The wall courses appear to have been a random mixture of headers and stretchers in a matrix of sticky binding clay and weak lime mortar, charcoal-rich in places, which lay within a wide construction cut [116/124].

To the south of [117] and also directly beneath the insertion/construction cut for the building [114] lay the remnants of a horizontally truncated pit [112] and a possible ditch [110], which appear to have been open and in use at the same time. Both features were filled with a sticky silty clay with frequent small stone inclusions (113 and 111) respectively. No finds were present.

3.4 Monitoring of Service Trench

Monitoring of the machine excavation of a foul water service trench, extending from Footings 1 and 2 to the existing drive (Figure 2), to the south of the pond to the north of the dwelling, was undertaken on the 15th August 2003. No archaeological deposits or structures were observed and no finds were present.

The completion of the observation of this service trench marked the end of the archaeological watching brief. Further observation was not possible as the remaining section of the drain was to be bored beneath the drive towards the pond.



4. SYNTHESIS

4.1 *Introduction*

The archaeological watching brief at The Manor, Meppershall has demonstrated that archaeological deposits and structures do survive on site which relate both to the construction of the house and to elements which stratigraphically pre-date the construction of the building.

4.2 *Significance of Results*

Of the three areas investigated only one, Footing 2, demonstrated the preservation of any archaeological levels. It would appear that walls, [117, 122, 123] relate to the original build of the Manor and possibly represent, along with foundation trenches [116, 124] and their infilling (118, 125, 126), the construction of a chimney back or a small wing on the north-western side of the manor building. Earlier features from Footing 2 include a possible pit [112] and linear ?gully [110]. While it is possible that the latter formed part of a ditch, possibly associated with laying and marking out the land prior to the construction of the manor building the function and date of possible pit [112] are unknown. It may be the case that walls [117, 122] represent a garderobe or latrine shaft and that pit [112] represents an associated cleaning pit. However, evidence for cess, associated with the use of these features, was absent.

No finds were observed or collected during any of the archaeological observation works.



5. APPENDICES



Trench: 1

Max Dimensions: Length: 15.00 m. Width: 1.00 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.3 m. Max: 1.7 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: SP1342535895

Reason: Construction of southernmost extension to dwelling. (Footing 1)

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
100	Subsoil	Plastic mid grey brown silty clay	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
101	Natural Interface	Plastic yellow clay Horizon between subsoil and natural clay	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
102	Natural	Plastic blue grey clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
103	Foundation trench	Linear NW-SE dimensions: max breadth 0.5m, max depth 0.4m, max length 0.6m Cut of foundation trench for wall of existing building	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
104	Backfill	Firm mid grey brown silty clay Backfill of foundation trench [103], very similar to subsoil (101)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
105	Foundation trench	Linear NW-SE dimensions: max breadth 0.5m, max depth 0.4m, max length 0.6m Foundation trench for middle wing of manor house, similar to [103]	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
106	Backfill	Firm mid grey brown silty clay Backfill of foundation trench [104]	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
107	Land drain	Linear NW-SE dimensions: max breadth 0.55m, max depth 0.5m, min length 4.m Cut of pre-existing drain	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
108	Backfill	Crushed asphalt and breezeblock backfill of of drain cut [107]	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
109	Make up layer	Firm mid grey brown silty clay frequent medium ceramic building material Make up layer of subsoil and building rubble, for patio	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 2

Max Dimensions: Length: 15.00 m. Width: 1.00 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.3 m. Max: 1.7 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: SP1342035903

Reason: Construction of northernmost extension to dwelling. (Footing 2)

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
110	Ditch	Linear NW-SE profile: 45 degrees dimensions: min breadth 0.65m, min depth 0.7m, min length 0.7m Linear running roughly parallel to house, relationship with [112] is unclear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
111	Backfill	Plastic mid grey brown silty clay frequent medium stones, frequent small stones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
112	Pit	Linear N-S profile: 45 degrees dimensions: max breadth 1.9m, max depth 0.93m, min length 0.7m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
113	Backfill	Plastic mid grey brown silty clay moderate medium ceramic building material, moderate medium stones, moderate small stones Upper backfill of pit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
121	Backfill	Orange sandy gravel Lower backfill of pit [112]	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
114	Foundation trench	Linear profile: 45 degrees dimensions: max breadth 0.45m, max depth 0.2m, min length 0.7m Foundation trench for existing house	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
115	Wall	Wall of mortared sandstone blocks. Foundations of existing building	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
116	Foundation trench	Linear N-S profile: near vertical base: flat dimensions: max breadth 3.m, max depth 0.8m, min length 1.m Foundation cut for wall (117)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
118	Backfill	Plastic mid grey brown silty clay frequent small-large ceramic building material, moderate medium stones, moderate small stones backfill of foundation trench [116]	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
117	Wall	Wall of 70% greensand stone and 10% limestone blocks, rough finish and coursing. Probably part of building, predating northernmost bay of house, and is incorporated into footings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
119	Wall	Modern brick wall which joined house to outbuilding, later demolished. Built over remains of stone wall (117)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
120	Wall	Single course of bricks, footing for existing building	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
122	Wall	Surviving foundation of chimney stack, probably later addition to existing building.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
123	Layer	Firm grey clay frequent flecks charcoal Destruction layer, probably related to C20th fire	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
124	Foundation trench	Linear NW-SE dimensions: max breadth 3.m, max length 3.1m cut of foundation trench for wall (116)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
125	Backfill	Plastic mid grey brown silty clay frequent small-medium ceramic building material, moderate medium stones, moderate small stones demolition rubble from wall and backfill of foundation trench [124]	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
126	Layer	Loose mid grey brown silty gravel Possible waste deposit associated with chimney	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

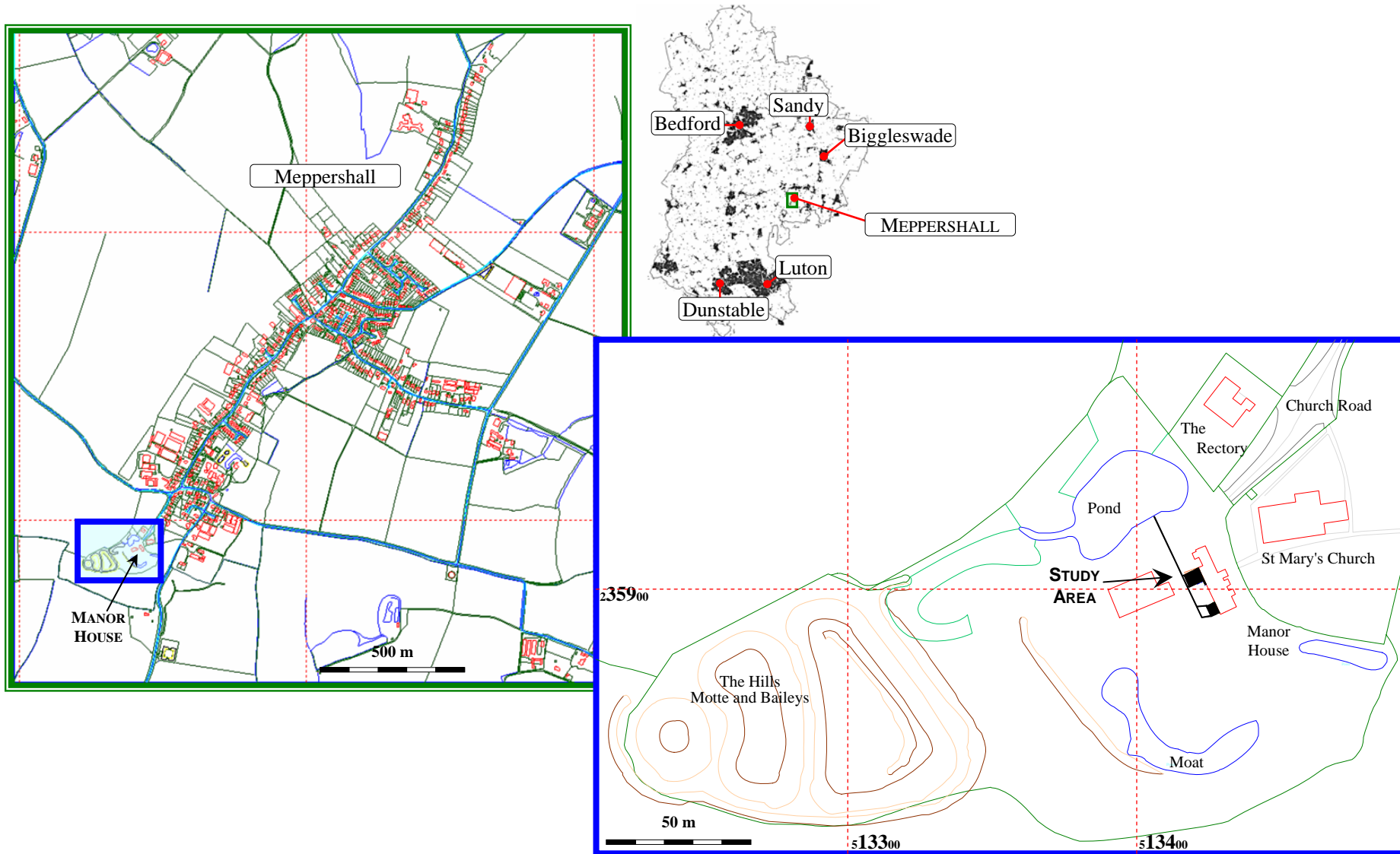


Figure 1: Location plan showing Study Area

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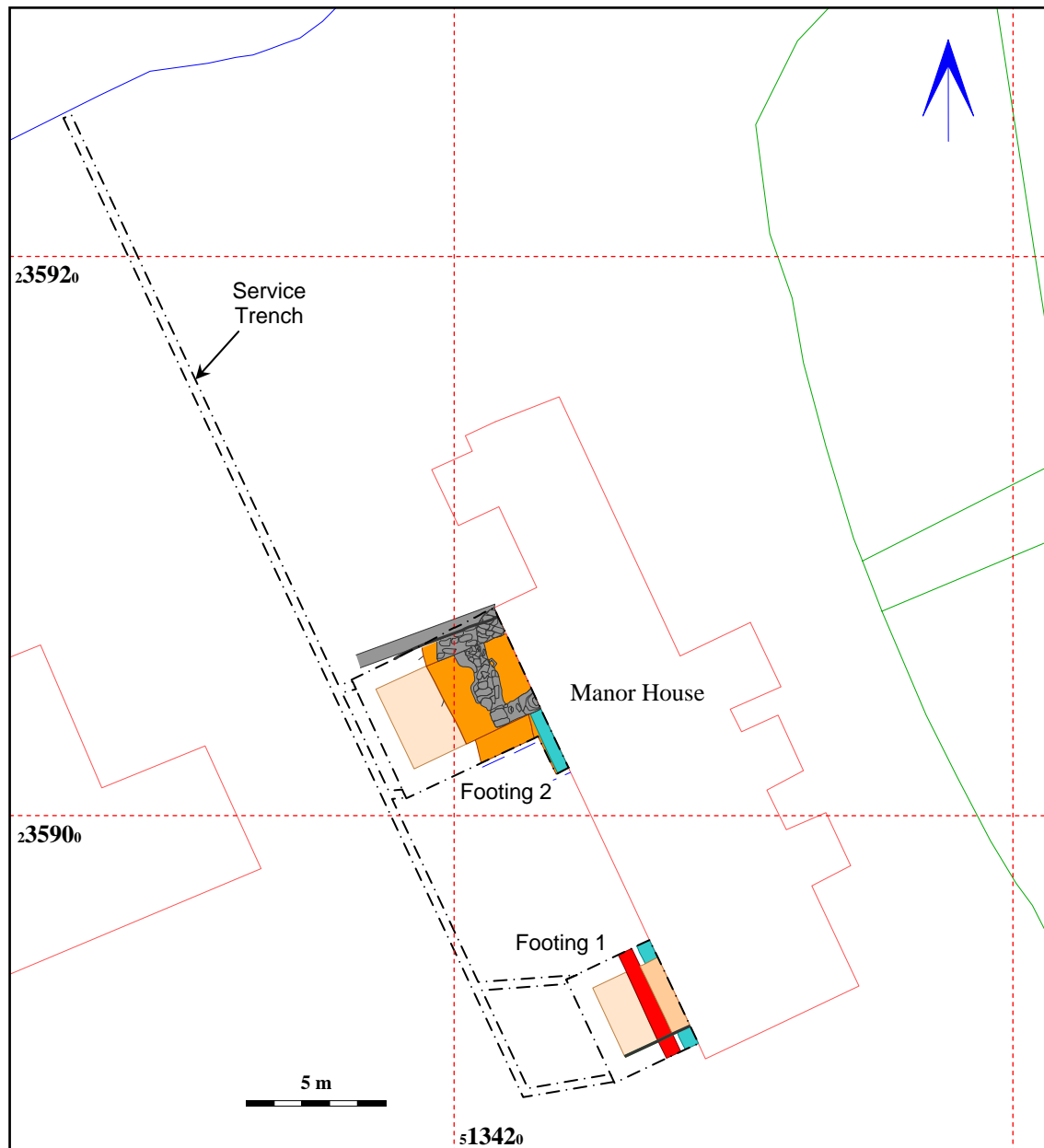
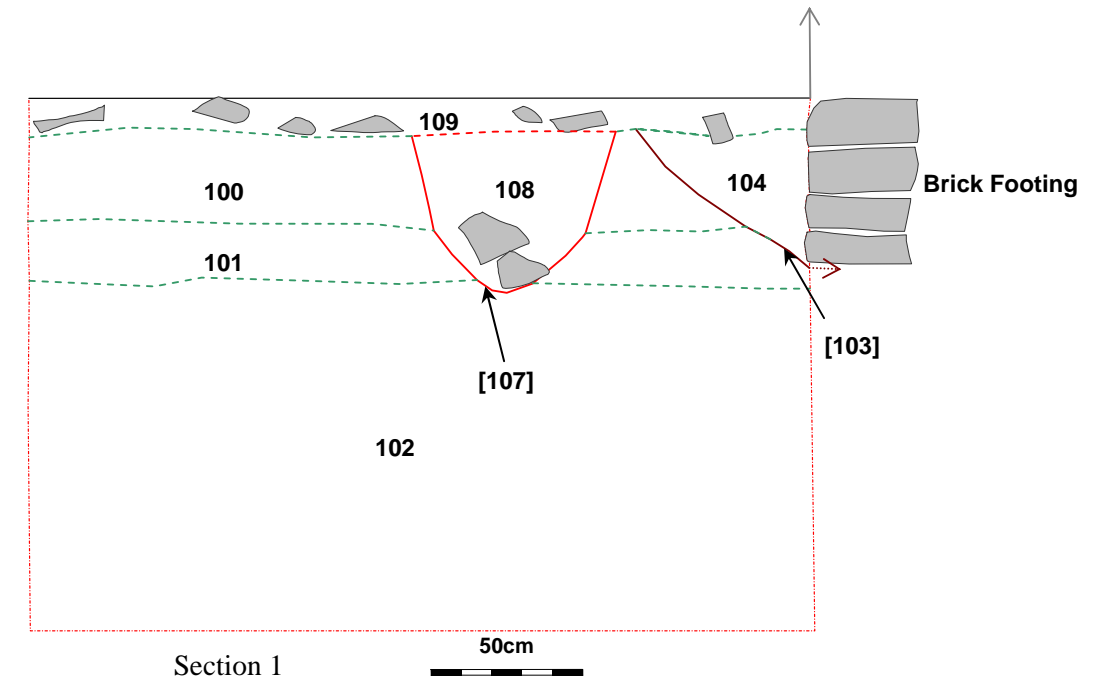
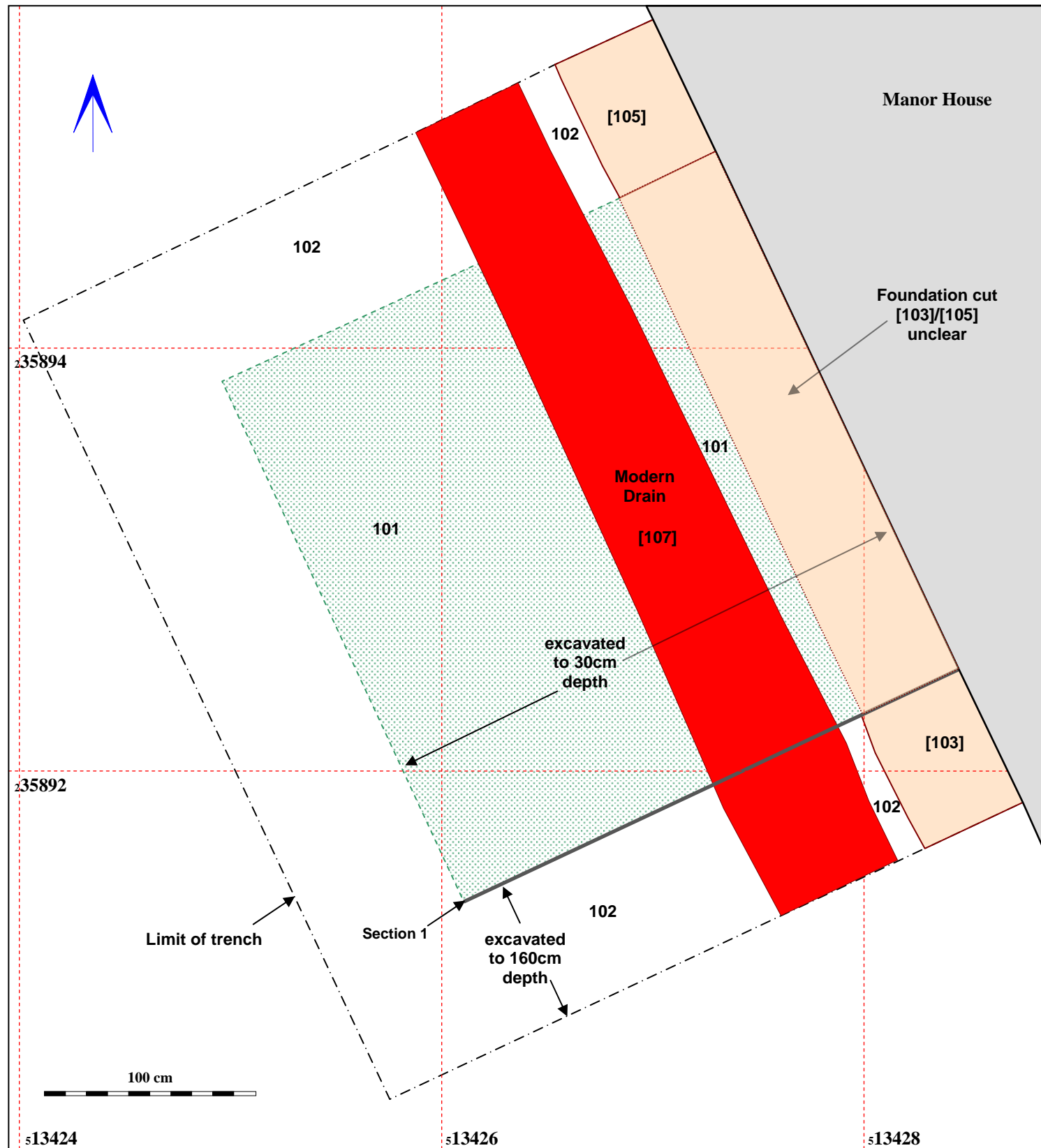


Figure 2: Location of trenches

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Photograph showing drain [107] and foundation cut [103] (scale 1m)

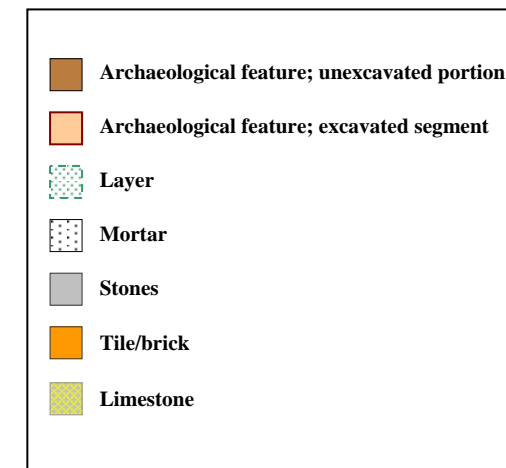
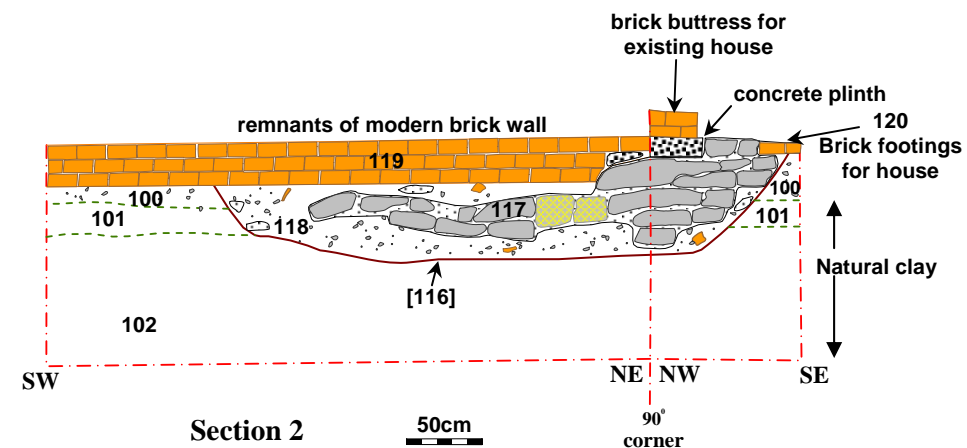
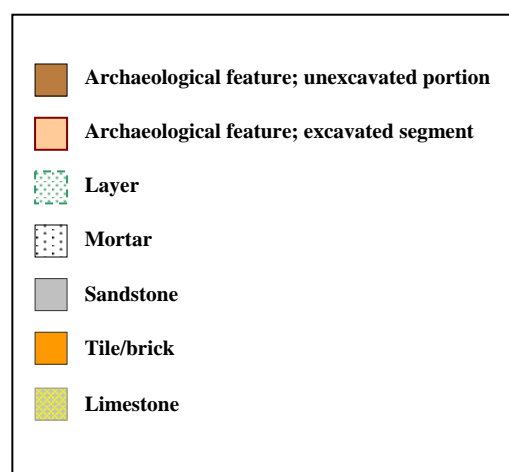
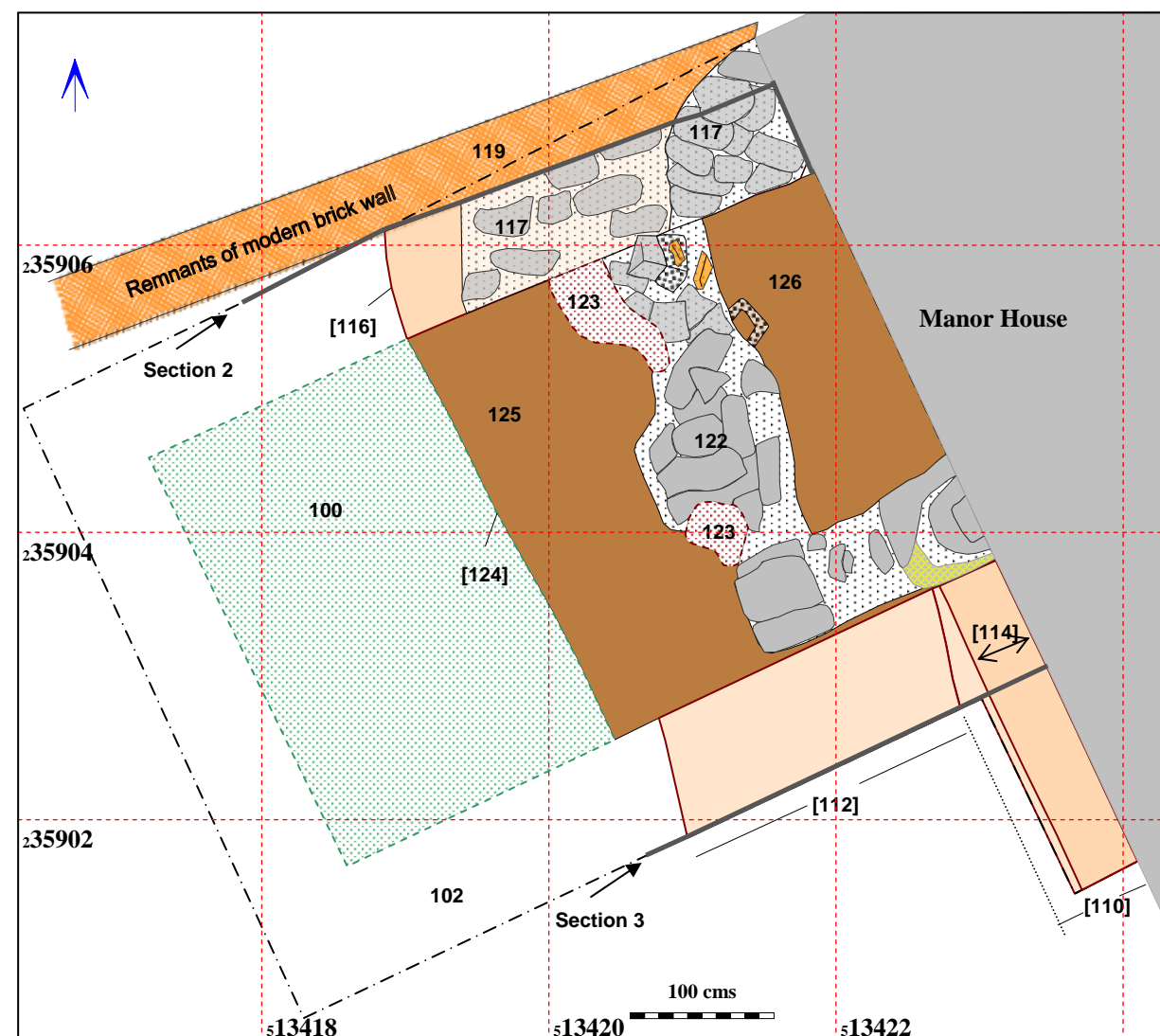


Figure 3:
Plan and section of Footing 1



Photograph showing cut [116] and walls 117 and 119 (scale 1m)

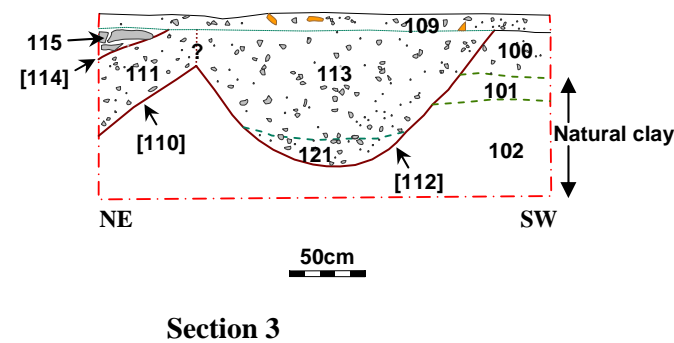


Figure 4: Plan and sections of Footing 2