

Devon County Council Historic Environment Record

Civil Parish & District: Northam, Torridge	National Grid Reference SS 4333 2749	Number:
Subject: strip, map and record in advance of construction of 16 dwellings		Photo attached? No
Planning Application no: 1/0870/2009/FULM	Recipient museum: Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon	
OASIS ID: Southwes/-84234	Museum Accession no: NCMS 2007.6	
Contractor's reference number/code: NKC10	Dates fieldwork undertaken: 23 rd September – 11 th October 2010.	
<p>Description of works.</p> <p>Archaeological monitoring and recording was undertaken by South West Archaeology at the request of Chichester Homes Ltd (the Client) in advance of the construction of sixteen dwellings at Kenwith Castle Residential Home. This work was carried by L. Bray and S. Walls between 23rd September and 29th November 2010 in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) approved by Devon County Historic Environment Service (DCHES).</p> <p>Bedrock on the site consists of the Carboniferous mudstones and siltstones of the Bideford Formation while the soil is a brown earth of the Denbigh 2 Association.</p> <p>The area of the development was situated in the bottom of a valley, approximately 100m to the east of the main building of Kenwith Castle Residential Home, and sloped gently up towards the east although the slope became steeper in its north-eastern corner. Along the northern edge of the site the slope increased abruptly suggesting an artificially created bank. An area of approximately 6500m² was stripped of topsoil using a mechanical excavator equipped with a 1.8m toothless grading bucket under strict archaeological supervision. During stripping it became apparent that significant truncation had occurred towards the northern edge of the site which also showed signs of disturbance. This was possibly due to activity during Phase 1 of the development and it was decided, in consultation with DCHES, that monitoring of stripping on this part of the site was not necessary.</p> <p>Topsoil varied from 0.4 to 0.7m in thickness and consisted of three layers. The upper layer (001) was a dark brown humic loam up to 0.2m thick containing abundant small (<=30mm) stone inclusions; the middle layer (002) consisted of a mid-brown homogenous, friable silty clay up to 0.3m thick containing frequent small (<= 20mm) stone inclusions and the lower horizon (003) was a firm, homogenous grey-brown silty clay up to 0.2m thick. Overall the natural subsoil consisted of a mottled orange-brown silty clay but varied across the site, becoming stoney in the east and turning to sticky orange or grey clay in the centre and along the southern edge of the site.</p> <p>The most significant archaeological feature identified consisted of a linear cut around 2m wide orientated north-east to south-west (context [173]) (fig. 1). It had a concave profile approximately 0.3m deep and was filled with a homogenous, compact orange and grey mottled silty clay containing occasional flecks of charcoal (fig. 2). This feature yielded a sherd of post medieval pottery and its location corresponded with that of a field boundary shown on the tithe maps which marked the boundary between Northam and Abbotsham parishes.</p> <p>Also exposed were numerous field drains. These consisted of mostly straight, vertically-sided linear cuts, 0.3-0.4m wide, which were packed with loose, poorly-sorted, angular fragments of stone ranging up to 0.3m in size which were often covered in a layer of re-deposited natural subsoil suggesting rapid infill of the cuts with the material excavated from them. Frequently, the stoney fills of the ditches also contained a loose fill of sticky, homogenous grey-brown clay in the interstices between the stones presumably deposited by water flowing through them. Sherds of pottery recovered from the drains were uniformly post medieval in date but the relationships between the features permitted at least four phases to be identified (fig.1). The first two phases respected the location of the field/parish boundary described above and are thus probably contemporary with it. Relatively few features could be certainly assigned to the earliest phase, which consisted of drains orientated in a broadly north-east to south-west direction. To the east of [173], the second phase comprised a series of sub-parallel features orientated approximately north-west to south-east, while, to the west, the features assigned to this phase had a variety of orientations and may not be contemporary, though all still respect [173]. In the third phase a coherent system of parallel, evenly spaced drains orientated north-east to south-west was dug, suggesting a concerted, organized drainage programme. Significantly, these features cut through [173], suggesting that by the time they were established, this boundary had gone out of use and been removed. Finally, the fourth phase is represented by a single drain, cutting those of the third phase and orientated north-west to south-east.</p> <p>It seems likely that, prior to the insertion of drainage, the site was an area of wet ground in the bottom of a valley. Its description on the 1841 Abbotsham tithe map as 'lawn' suggests some improvement and it is likely that the first two phases of drainage relate to this period. The third, more systematic programme of drainage, must post-date 1841 as the field boundary ([173]) had been removed by the time of its installation. The late 19th century saw much alteration at Kenwith Castle with construction work on the house and the establishment of a new, improved approach from the south. It seems most likely that the third drainage phase is contemporary with this, while the fourth phase was probably an addition of adjustment made shortly afterwards.</p>		

An assemblage of 107 sherds of pottery weighing 2.027kg was recovered from the topsoil during stripping. This was dominated by North Devon coarsewares (85 sherds) which included nine sherds of probably medieval date, six of North Devon sgraffito and 14 of North Devon yellow slipware. The unstratified assemblage also included a range of finewares which included Bristol/Staffordshire yellow slipware (10 sherds), English porcelain (1 sherd), Nottingham white slipware (1 sherd), Staffordshire slipware (1 sherd) and tin-glazed ware (1 sherd). Some of this material (e.g. the tin-glazed ware) dates as early as the mid-17th century, perhaps indicating a degree of high status occupation in the vicinity at this time. The stratified assemblage was derived mostly from the field drains and consists of 27 sherds weighing 0.443kg. It was composed of North Devon coarsewares and white refined earthenwares, dating to the 18th century onwards and was derived largely from the field drains on the site. The single exception was a post-medieval tankard base of North Devon calcareous ware which was recovered from the fill (174) of the field boundary [173]. An unstratified assemblage of non-ceramic finds was also recovered and included 5 sherds of 18th century bottle glass, 3 worked flints, including a blade fragment with possible retouch, and 10 fragments of clay pipe, one bowl sherd being of early 18th century date.

A plan as well as any other relevant drawings must be attached showing the location and extent of site, areas investigated and features exposed.

Recorder: L. S. Bray

Date sent to HER: 17th March 2011

Please email completed form to: archaeol@devon.gov.uk or post to County Archaeology Service, Environment Directorate, Matford Lane Offices, County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter EX2 4QW. Information recorded on this form will be added to the Historic Environment Record, and made available to all researchers.

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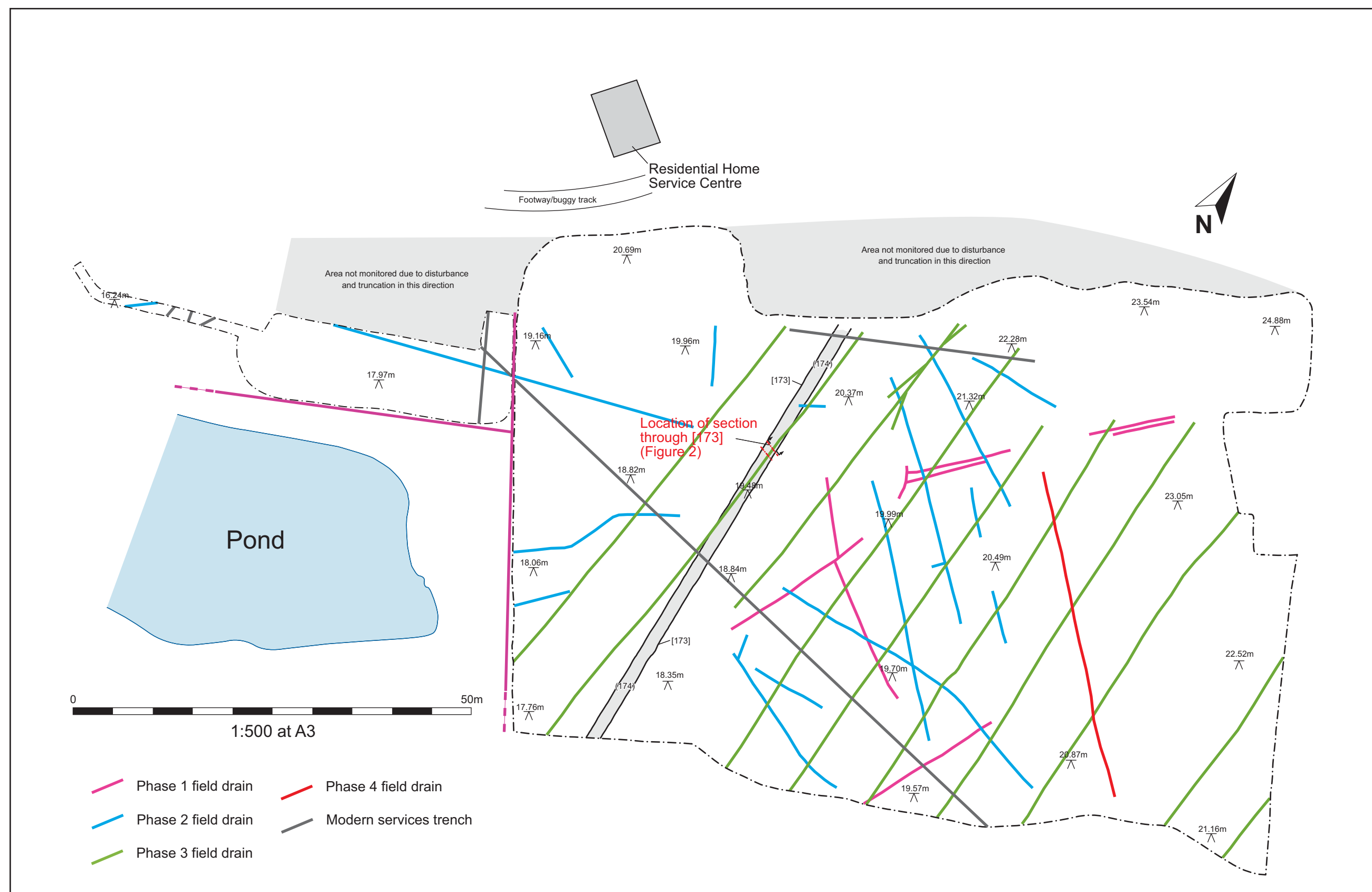


Figure 1: Post-excavation site plan.

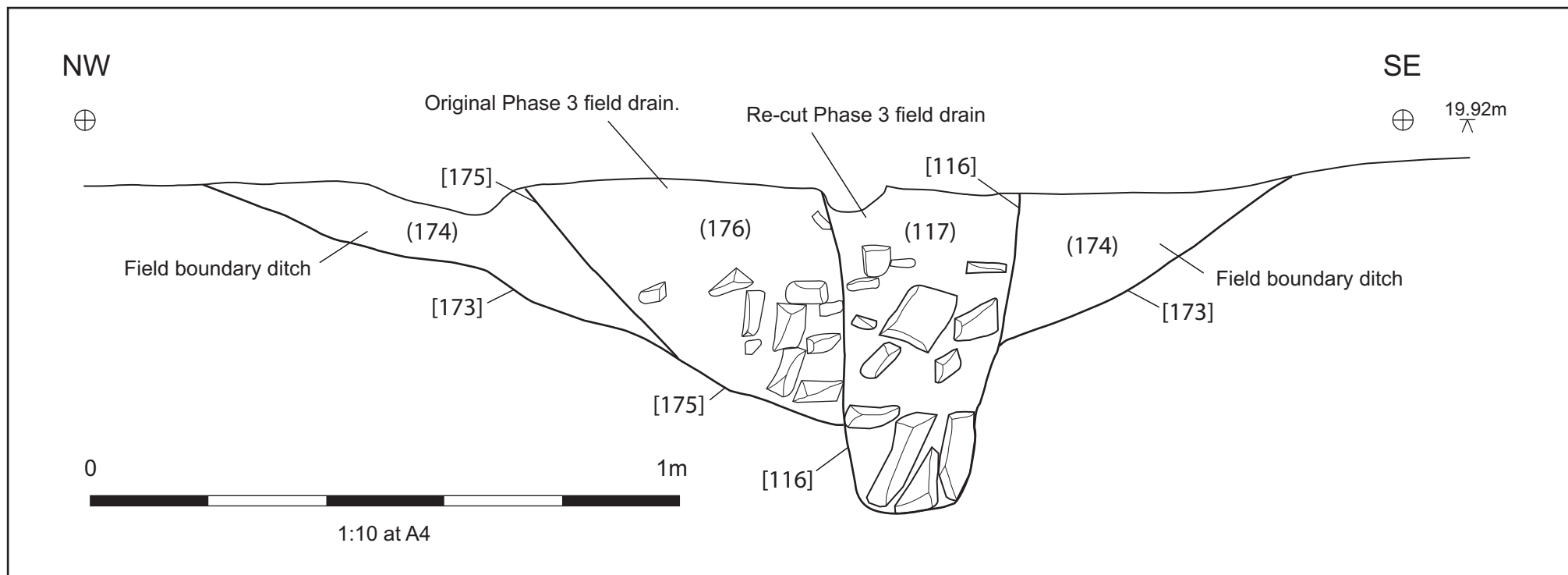


Figure 2: South-east facing section through [173] at point where it is cut by a Phase 3 field drain.