

Whitecap Mushroom Farm, Mill Road, Mayland, Essex: an assessment of Heritage Assets



(site centre: TL 918 017)

Commissioned by Strutt & Parker on behalf of Mr Andrew Powl

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1 Summary

A proposed development site at Whitecap Mushroom Farm contains no archaeological sites or finds.

The nearest archaeological or historical sites are two listed buildings and the site of a mill – these are 100m south, 700m east, and 125m south of the site respectively. None will be affected by this proposed development.

However, the site is within a landscape which has clearly been planned in a 'co-axial' (i.e., gridded) pattern. This is strikingly demonstrated by the Mayland to Steeple Road, which turns through a succession of right-angled bends as it negotiates this older landscape. The age of this co-axial landscape is unknown. The recent Historic Environment Character Report suggests an Anglo-Saxon date, but other specialists prefer a Roman date (or even earlier).

So, does the Whitecap Mushroom Farm site have any ancient boundaries? The eastern boundary no longer exists (it is concrete slab along the site access). The Ordnance Survey maps show that the northern and southern site boundaries are not ancient – they did not exist in 1897 (the southern boundary is first shown in 1924, and the northern in 1978). However, the western boundary may be older. It is proposed to retain the tree and shrub growth along the site boundaries, so the potentially ancient western boundary will be preserved.

The complete lack of nearby archaeological excavation or survey means that it is genuinely difficult to assess the archaeological potential of this site. All that can be said is that its western boundary may be ancient.

2 Introduction

2.1 Aim

The aim of this assessment is to catalogue the archaeological remains on and around the proposed development site, to discuss them in their local context, and to determine whether they will cause any constraints on development.

2.2 Methodology

For the purposes of this assessment, a 'search area' has been defined, equating to the area shown on Figure 10. The following resources have been searched for evidence of archaeological sites and finds in the search area:

- The *Essex Historic Environment Record* (EHER). This, the primary source for a survey of this type, is a computerised list of all recorded find-spots of archaeological material in Essex, whether excavated sites or loose finds. It also contains transcriptions of cropmarks taken from extensive air photograph coverage of Essex held by the National Monuments Record (NMR). Most listed buildings have an EHER reference, and a recent addition to EHER is WWII military sites (typically, pill-boxes), and sites which have an industrial archaeology aspect.
- *Essex Place-names* online catalogue. This was searched for place-names of archaeological or historical interest in Mayland. It includes place-names on Tithe maps, thus eliminating the need to research place-names on the original documents
- The *Heritage Gateway*. This national database gives lists of Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs), Listed Parks and gardens, Registered Battlefields, Listed Buildings, and other resources such as Images of England (photographs of listed buildings), and the National Monuments Record of excavations in England and Wales.
- Historic maps and Ordnance Survey coverage
- Relevant reports and publications held by Colchester Archaeological Trust.

Using the information from these sources, a map (Figure 10) has been compiled, and the archaeological sites shown on it are listed below in Section 4

There are no listed battlefields, registered parks or gardens, or Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the Search Area.

Also, and unusually for Essex, there are no recorded archaeological excavations or surveys, archaeological cropmark sites, or Roman roads in the Search Area.

3 The Historic Landscape

The Historic landscape of the area including the Mayland site is covered in *Maldon District Historic Environment Characterisation Project (ECC 2008, pages 50-51)*: as given below. Apart from a tiny parcel of land around Pigeon Dock, the whole of the Search Area is in *Historic Environment Character Area 9 (HECA 9)*.

3.1.9 HECA 9 The Dengie

Summary:

The area comprises the Dengie peninsula, bordered by the Blackwater to the north and the Crouch to the south, together with the area to the south of Maldon town. It is generally low lying, with an open aspect and a gently undulating profile rising to around 50 metres. The geology comprises London Clay with the occasional claygate and head deposits. These soils are not conducive to cropmark formation.

Historic Landscape Character:

The area is characterised by a distinctive co-axial rectilinear field pattern that is of considerable antiquity, and may have its origins in the middle Saxon period, if not before. The field boundaries on the peninsula were historically bordered by elm hedgerows, which were severely affected by Dutch Elm disease, with the loss of standard trees the hedges are now dominated by elm scrub.

Historically, settlement was highly dispersed with isolated farms and moated sites. There are a number of church/hall complexes such as those at Purleigh, North Fambridge Snoreham, Mayland, Althorne and Steeple. In the middle of the twentieth century there was small scale development at North Fambridge probably encouraged due to it being the crossing point of the river. The settlement at Latchingdon was different in character to all others in this area at the time of the first edition Ordnance Survey with settlement comprising ribbon development along The Street and Burnham Road.

Archaeological Character:

The soil-type is not conducive to the formation of cropmarks and only limited archaeological fieldwork has been undertaken in the area, as a consequence the archaeological potential is currently uncertain. The site of the Battle of Maldon (991AD), a registered battlefield, lies within this area. The Battle of Maldon took place on the shores of the River Blackwater where there was a heroic stand by the Anglo-Saxons against the Viking invasion which ended in utter defeat for Brithnoth. The battle's progress is related in a famous Anglo-Saxon poem, only part of which survives. The site of Purleigh Mount has been interpreted as the remains of a Motte and Bailey Castle associated with the anarchy of AD 1135-53. The remains of the branch line from Maldon to South Woodham Ferrers runs through the western part of the area. A well-preserved First World War airfield is located at Stow Maries. The airfield developed from 1914 and continued in use until March 1919. Some twenty individual buildings or groups of buildings survive on the airfield.

4 Archaeological sites and listed buildings close to proposed development site (PDS)

This is a list of all archaeological sites and finds, and other historical sites within the Search Area (i.e., Fig 10)

1 **Mayland Mill Public House**¹

National Grid Reference: TL 9178 0156
Essex Historic Environment Record: 38528
English Heritage *Listed Buildings Online* website reference: 1110877
Distance from Mushroom Farm site: 100m south

Grade II listed range of C18 cottages, now the Mayland Mill Public House. Timber framed, roughcast rendered, roofed with handmade red clay tiles. Five bays facing S, with one internal stack, and one-bay wing to rear of left bay, with external end stack. C20 flat-roofed extensions in rear angle. One storey with attics. Four C20 casements, and four more in gabled dormers. Two C20 doors. Gambrel roofs. Louvred square bell turret on ridge, with shingled pyramidal roof and weathervane. Sign on front wall 'The Mayland Mill 1756'.

2 **Site of windmill south of Mushroom Farm**

NGR: TL 920 016
EHER: 12164
Distance from Mushroom Farm site: 125m south

"Site of windmill". Mill house still stands. One bill for grinding existed *circa* 1890s. No windmill marked on C&A map of 1777 (i.e., Fig 3 below), so the mill is presumably post-1777.

Note: the NGR listed by the online EHER is too far north and east. The site preferred here ('Mill House') is the site located on the EHER search figure kindly provided by ECC.

Sources

Bruce, KJ, unknown, *SMR* (DESC TEXT)
Ordnance Survey, unknown, *OS cards* (RECORD SHEET/FORM)
Chapman and Andre (C&A) (*Map of Essex 1777*)

3 **Lower Farmhouse**

NGR: TL 92505 01711
EHER: 38695
Distance from Mushroom Farm site: 700m east

Two C17 or early C18 cottages, now one Grade II dwelling. Timber-framed, tarred weatherboard clad. Red plain tiled roof outshot at rear. Central red brick chimney stack. Internally the building is virtually unaltered with vertically boarded doors and stairs adjoining chimney stack.

¹ red numbers apply to sites shown on Figure 10.

5 Place names

Essex place names are now listed online on the *Essex Place-names* website, which is hosted by the University of Essex

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/history/esah/essexplacenames/>

The site was searched for Mayland parish place names with possible historical or archaeological interest. Most names are descriptive only (e.g., '5 acres', 'Lower meadow'), but those below are potentially of historical interest.

5.1 Historic Mayland place names within Search Area

None

5.2 Historic Mayland place-names *outside* Search Area

Name: **Pightle² and site of old mill**

Essex Place names ref: 28333

Source: D/CT 237a (Mayland Tithe Survey and Apportionment 1837)

NGR: TQ 935 997

Site of old mill is not on EHER

Name: **Church, Yard (site of)**

EPN: 28443

Source: D/CT 237a (Mayland Tithe 1837)

NGR: TL 925 002

This is St Barnabas Church, 1.6km south of PDS.

Name: **Red hill (Part of)**

EPN: 28281

Source: D/CT 237a (Mayland Tithe 1837)

NGR: TL 930 015

A red hill is part of a late Iron Age (circa 150 BC – AD 43) or Roman (AD 43-430) salt factory. This NGR is some way inland, and presumably incorrect

6 Historic hedges

Given the site's position within a co-axial and possibly ancient landscape, a site walkover focussed on the boundaries. The intention here is not to catalogue the hedges, but merely to offer a few thought based on the walkover.

In other hedge surveys, one would be looking for signs of antiquity in the form of high species count, old coppice stools (and signs of coppicing in general), and ancient ditches and banks - with the important proviso that the growth on a boundary can be younger than the boundary itself (which may have ancient ditches and banks, for instance).

The site's eastern boundary is no longer extant (it is now covered in concrete slab (Plates 1-2 below)

² *pightle* is a small field, but (more specifically) a small field cut out of the corner of a larger field.



Plate 1: view SW to site frontage.



Plate 2: view W to site frontage

The northern and southern site boundaries can be dated by looking at the Ordnance Survey maps. The land now occupied by the Whitecap Mushroom Farm was open land in 1881. Its southern boundary is first shown in 1924 (plate 3 and Fig 6). Its northern boundary is much more recent – it is absent on the 1960 OS, and present in 1978 (Plate 4, Fig 9).



Plate 3: view west along site's southern boundary. This boundary was created between 1897 and 1924. Not historically significant.



Plate 4: view east along site's northern boundary. This boundary was created after 1960. Not historically significant



Plate 5: there is some older growth and a slight bank close to the site's western boundary. This may be a significant (as in, ancient) boundary, but the site is heavily overgrown, and a definitive view is difficult.

7 The archaeology of the Whitecap Mushroom Farm, period-by-period.

Prehistory: Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age

There are no remains of these periods.

Roman period

There are no remains of this period. However, it is possible that the coaxial landscape was laid out in this period. It has been suggested that the gridding-out of such a large area could only have been carried out under the auspices of central government, in other words, as a part of an imperial estate. Such an estate would have a large farm or villa acting as an estate centre, without necessarily having any other smaller villas or farms. There is no obvious estate centre here, in fact there are no Roman villas at all in the Dengie Peninsula. The nearest substantial Roman sites are the Saxon Shore fort at Bradwell (*Othona*), and the small Roman town at Heybridge.



Fig 1: Whitecap Mushroom Farm (red) shown in the context of the coaxial fields, as plotted by Drury and Rodwell (1980). Drury & Rodwell show the landscape as Roman.

Anglo-Saxon period

There are no remains of this period. However, it is possible that the coaxial landscape was laid out in this period (for this view, see Section 3 here).

Medieval remains



Fig 2: extract from map in *Essex in Domesday* (ERO 1990).

Eltenai = Iltny in Mundon. *Stepla 1* = Steeple. *Stepla 2* = Steeple Grange.
Munduna = Mundon. *Lalinge* = Lawling in Latchingdon. *Lacenduna* = Latchingdon Old Hall. *Lachentuna* = Latchingdon Tyle Hall.

There are no medieval remains in the Search Area. However, some background is given by the disposition of Domesday sites (Fig 2 above). The origin of parishes is beyond the scope of this report, but it is curious that there are no Domesday manorial sites in Mayland. As Figure 2 shows, the nearest Domesday manors are in Mundon, Steeple and Latchingdon. This is despite the fact that the existence of St Barnabas

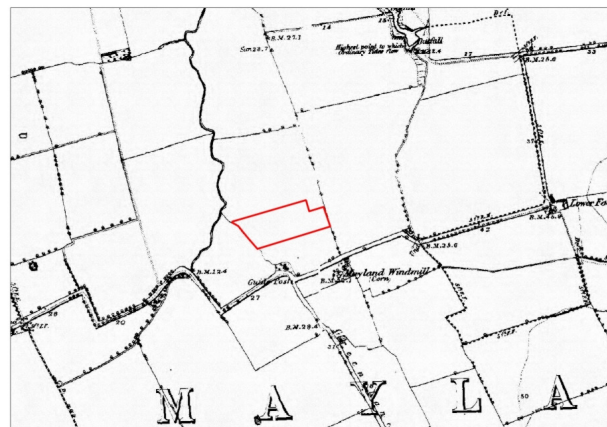
church in Mayland (well to the south of the Search area) shows that there must have been an early medieval site somewhere in the parish, even if it were not immediately adjacent to the church.

Post-medieval remains

For a discussion of this period we are able to draw on map evidence (principally Chapman & André 1777, and the Ordnance Survey).

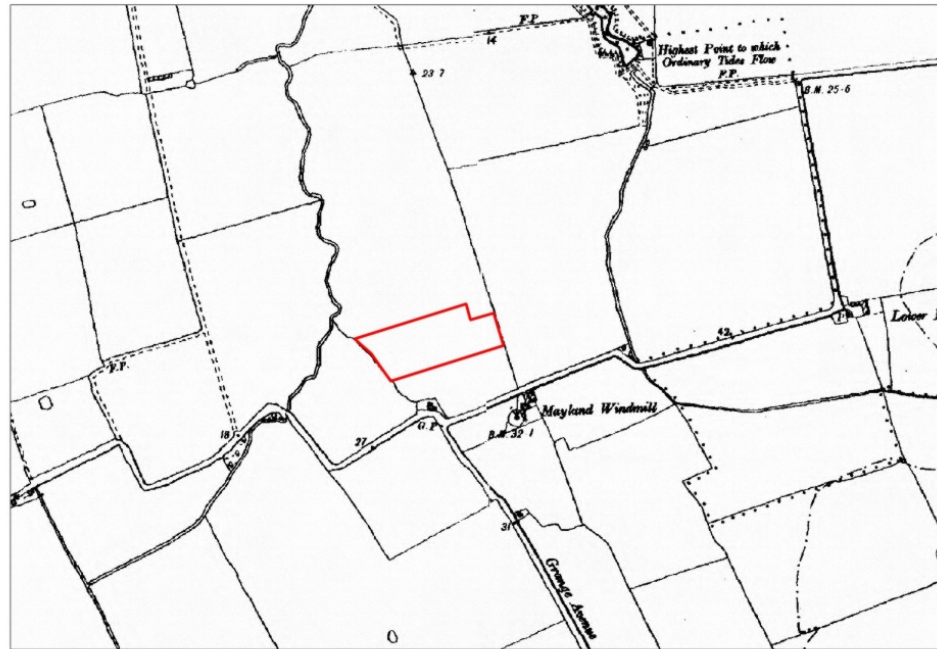


Figure 3: extract from Chapman & Andre Map of Essex 1777. Approximate position of site shown in red. The angular nature of the coaxial landscape is evident in the road layout.



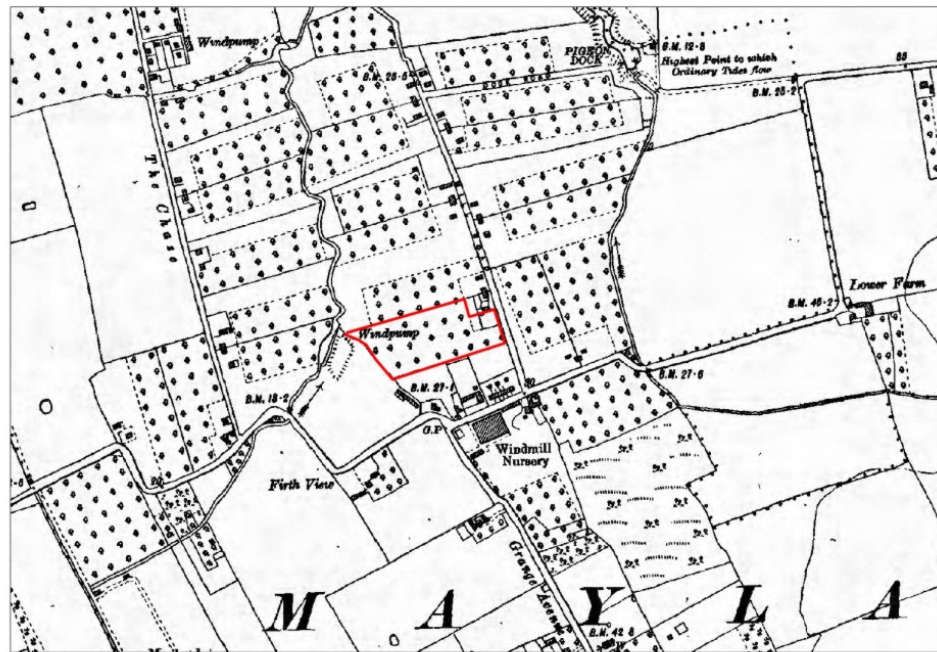
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Figure 4: Ordnance Survey 1st edition (1881) Site marked red. Only the western and eastern site boundaries exist at this time, and the western may simply be a stream rather than a regular ditch/bank.



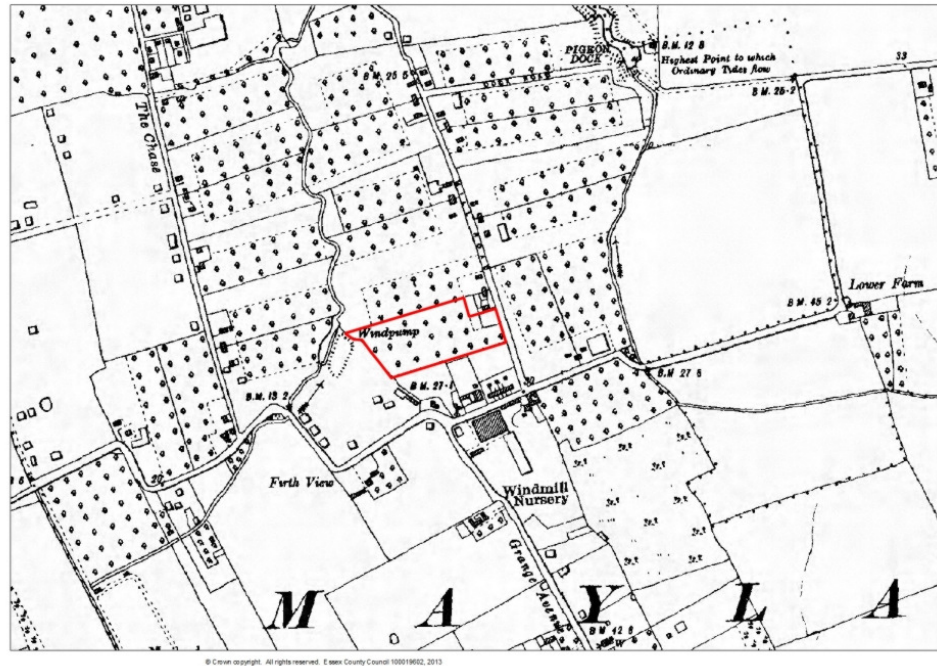
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Figure 5: OS 2nd edition 1897. As in 1881, the northern and southern site boundaries are not shown.



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Figure 6: OS 3rd edition 1924. A major landscape change since 1897 is the establishment of large areas of orchard. The southern site boundary is shown for the first time (but not the northern).

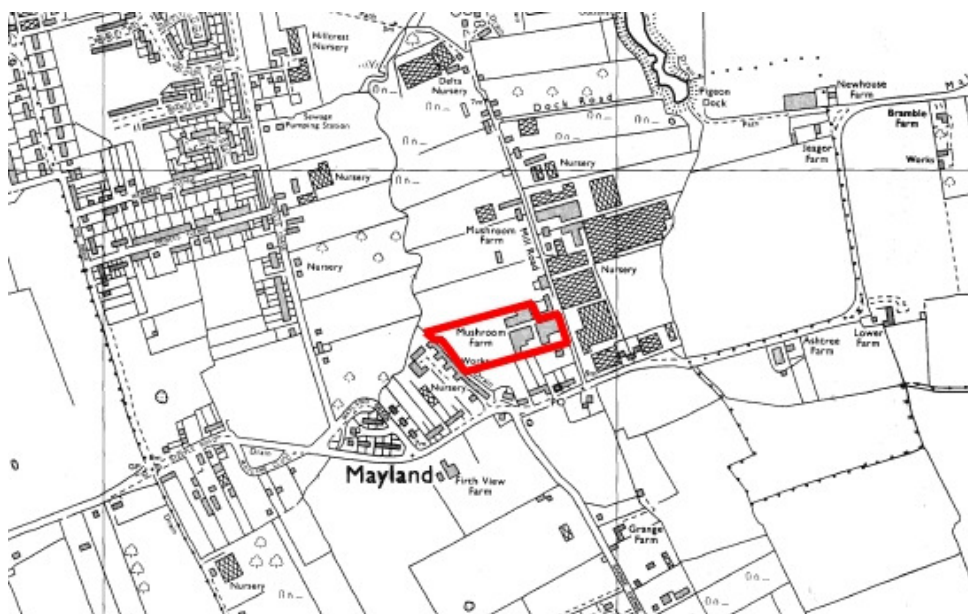


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Figure 7: OS 4th edition 1938. Hardly any change since 1924, except that orchard is no longer shown south of Windmill Nursery.



Figure 8: OS 1960. A few more orchard areas have been lost since 1938.



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Figure 9: OS 1978. Since 1960, a striking loss of orchard, replaced by nurseries in some instances. The site's northern boundary now exists. Two awkward right-angle bends in the roads have been smoothed out.

8 Discussion of heritage issues

This is a curious site – there are no known archaeological remains of any type in the site itself, or within a search area around it. The only 'heritage assets' are two listed buildings and the site of a mill. And yet the site is within an ancient landscape whose origins may lie in the Anglo-Saxon or Roman periods, or even earlier.

The site has definite interest in respect of the planned 'coaxial' landscape, but there is nothing whatever to focus on in the site itself, with the exception of the site's western boundary, which might be ancient in origin (but now perhaps carrying more recent hedge and scrub growth).

In summary, the complete lack of nearby archaeological excavation or survey means that it is genuinely difficult to assess the archaeological potential of this site. All that can be said is that its western boundary may be ancient.

9 References

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|------|---|
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| D/CT 237a | 1837 | Mayland Parish Tithe Survey and Apportionment 1837 |
| Drury, PJ, and
Rodwell, Warwick | 1980 | 'Settlement in the later Iron Age and Roman periods', pages 59-75, in Buckley 1980, especially figure 22. |
| ECC | 2008 | <i>Maldon District Historic Environment Characterisation Project</i> |

*Report researched and written by Howard Brooks BA FSA MIfA,
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name)*



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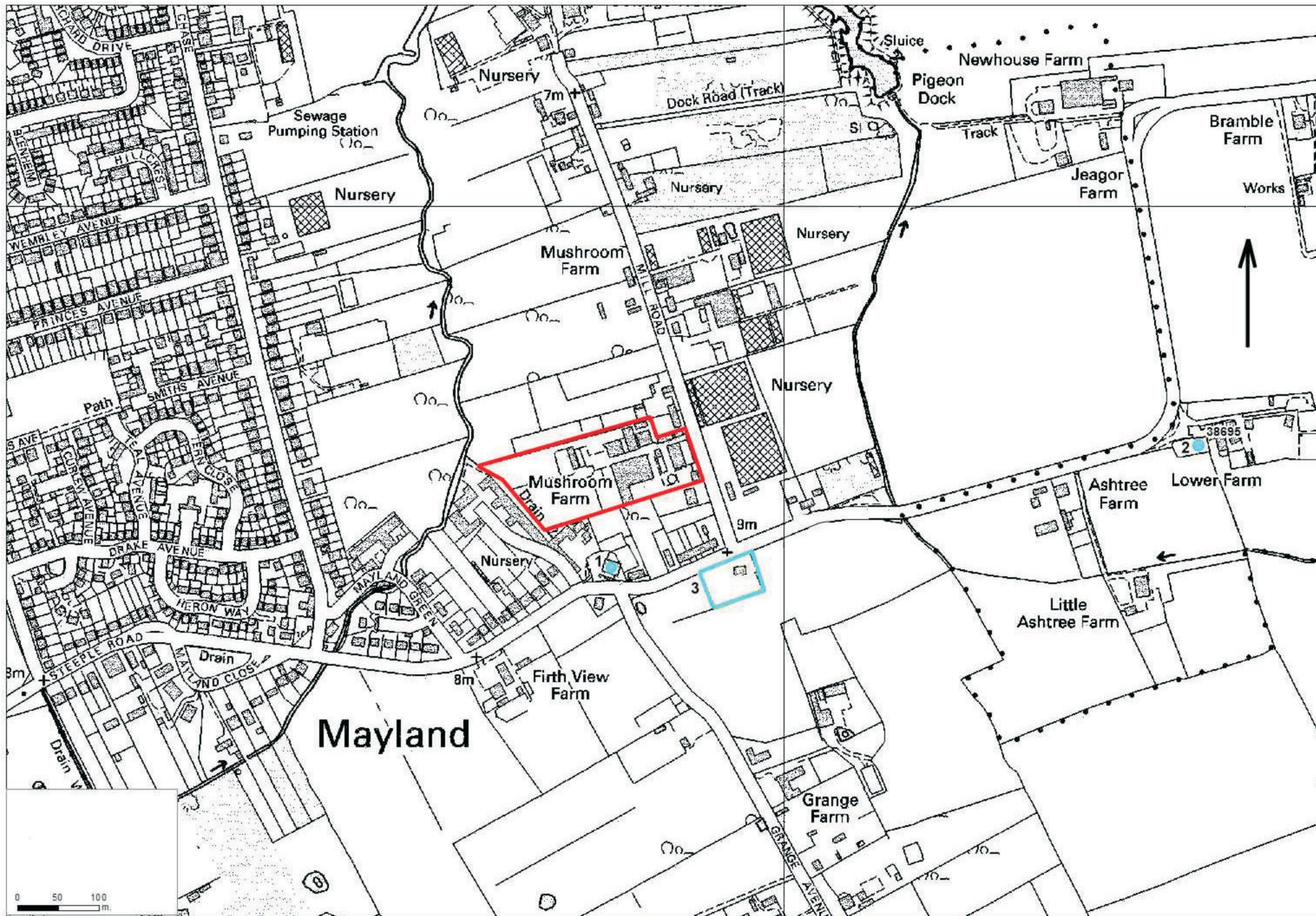


Fig 10 Archaeological and historical sites around Mayland Mushroom Farm (red outline).