

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING
BRIEF AT
COOKHILL PRIORY, COOKHILL,
WORCESTERSHIRE
SAM 256

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With a contribution by Angus Crawford

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

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Report 1138
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Archaeological watching brief at Cookhill Priory, Cookhill, Worcestershire

James Goad

With a contribution by Angus Crawford

Part 1 Project summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Cookhill Priory, Cookhill, Worcestershire (NGR SO 40537 25733). It was undertaken on behalf of Mr Linton Connell, who intended a redevelopment of property around the existing manor house, for which a planning application was submitted. The project aimed to determine the extent of the significant archaeology on the site and if so to indicate what its location, date and nature were.

The project succeeded in locating a number of archaeological layers and features in the area around the manor house, including pits, a possible ditch and a medieval posthole. The layers were not very archaeologically significant, mostly being the result of landscaping in the post-medieval period. The pits (and possible ditch) were of more significance, although none of them were securely dated to the medieval period, unlike the posthole, which dated to the 13th or early 14th century. The results of the dating are consistent with the medieval date for the priory, which was first recorded as existing in the 12th century, with the buildings being a private residence through much of the post-medieval period. The pitting indicates probable domestic activity associated with the running of the priory.

Part 2 Detailed report

1. Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Cookhill Priory (NGR SO 405375 257330), Cookhill, Worcestershire (Fig 1), on behalf of Mr Linton Connell. The client intended a programme of demolition and redevelopment in the area around the manor house, and submitted a planning application to Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS reference HSD 9/2/4730PT3) due to the fact that the site has been designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 0256). 'Scheduling' is shorthand for the process through which nationally important sites and monuments are given legal protection by being placed on a list, or 'schedule'. English Heritage identifies sites in England, which should be placed on the schedule by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The current legislation, the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, supports a formal system of Scheduled Monument Consent for any work to a designated monument (EnglishHeritage.org.uk).

The medieval origins of the site, reflected partially in the upstanding medieval chapel and the earthworks and fishponds of the same period present on the site have necessitated scheduling as a method of preserving the site from development that will impact negatively on any significant archaeology.

1.2 Project parameters

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IFA 1999). The project takes into account the terms of the scheduled monument consent.

1.3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were based on the scheduled monument consent – to locate archaeological deposits and determine, if present, their extent, state of preservation, date, type, vulnerability and documentation.

2. Methods

2.1 Documentary search

Prior to fieldwork commencing a search was made of the Historic Environment Record (HER) Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). In addition the following sources were also consulted:

Cartographic sources

- 1885 Ordnance Survey map 1:2500

Documentary sources

- County histories (VCH III).
- Hunt and Jackson *More about Inkberrow*

2.2 **Fieldwork methodology**

2.2.1 **Fieldwork strategy**

Fieldwork was undertaken between 23rd May 2002 and 11th March 2005. The site reference number and site code is WSM 31687.

A variety of groundworks took place within the grounds of the priory, including trenching for utilities, trenching for new construction, re-grading for replacement of old surfaces and the establishment of a new turning circle on the west side of the house. A trench of limited depth was also excavated in order to construct the new turning circle to the west side of the house. The location of the trenches are indicated in Figure 2.

Deposits were mainly excavated using a JCB 3CX wheeled excavator, using a toothed or flat ditching bucket as appropriate. Excavation was carried out under archaeological supervision. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995). On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

2.2.2 **Structural analysis**

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

2.3 **Artefact methodology**

2.3.1 **Artefact recovery policy**

All artefacts from the area of salvage recording were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended).

2.3.2 **Method of analysis**

All hand-retrieved finds were examined and a primary record was made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated and a *terminus post quem* produced for each stratified context.

Pottery was examined under x20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst and Rees 1992).

2.4 **Environmental archaeology**

2.4.1 **Sampling policy**

The contexts excavated were thought to be of limited significance and therefore not worthy of environmental assessment.

2.5 **The methods in retrospect**

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

3. **Topographical and archaeological context**

The site is located to the north-west of the junction between the A442 (Worcester to Stratford road) and the A441 (Evesham Road). The site lies just to the west of the county border with Warwickshire, which is roughly along the line of the Evesham Road. The land slopes quite steeply downwards from the road, the house itself being located on an area of ground that appears slightly terraced into the hillside.

The entire area of the manor and the grounds include two different soil types. The house itself and the land immediately surrounding it lie on soil of the Arrow series. The rest of the house precinct is on soil of the Salop series.

Surrounding the house are a series of earthworks, perimeter banks and fishponds. The precinct bank stretches away to the north-west and is indicated by a bank and ditch. At the eastern side of the area, inside a wood adjacent to the road, is a large system of linear earthworks, centred around a moated mound. Excavations were carried out around 1967 to the mound (WSM 03261) revealing the foundations of a post mill, the site originally having been thought to have comprised a motte and bailey castle.

At the southern end of the site is located a very large fishpond (WSM 03264) and to the west of this, some 70m from the house, is the remnants of a moat (WSM 03262) which is more likely to be a series of ponds. At a right angle to the moat lie what are believed to be several fish stewponds (WSM 03265, WSM 03264, WSM 03263). A further fishpond lies to the north-west of the house (WSM 03263) along with the medieval precinct wall (WSM 03266).

The Cistercian nunnery of Cookhill seems to have been founded in the later years of the 12th century, but, as there seems to be no existing foundation charter, exactly when remains a mystery. Claims that the nunnery was founded by Isabell, Countess of Warwick, in 1260 are inaccurate, although she may have been a descendant of the original founder and have financed the continuance of the Order. The priory was mentioned at various times in historical documents from the 13th and 15th centuries. Many of them address the poverty of the nuns in what seems to have been a very small nunnery numbering no more than eight or nine people (VCH III).

The exact layout of the medieval priory is not known, the surviving chapel at the north end of the present house being the only upstanding remnant of the medieval period. There aren't any descriptions from the documentary evidence which throws light on the appearance of the priory, but a brief description of the accommodation within the nuns' quarters describes the nuns as sleeping in open dorms but by the 16th century the cells were probably proper little rooms (Hunt and Jackson 1976, 18).

The number of nuns based here seems to have been quite small. The pension list of 1540 showed the number of nuns at the Dissolution as seven, including the prioress. It is possible the numbers had never been greater than this (VCH III, 158). It was usual for pensions to be proportionate to the value of the establishment, so it is mildly surprising that their poverty seems so marked by the Dissolution, as they owned land in Inkberrow, (perhaps Priory Piece), land at Woodley, Warks, land and a mill at Campden and land elsewhere (Hunt and Jackson 1976, 18).

The greater part of the buildings of Cookhill Priory seem to have been demolished after the Dissolution when the site of the monastery was granted to Nicholas Fortescue in 1542. The only visible above ground remnant of the original medieval buildings seems to be the chapel, now situated on the north side of the present house. However other masonry remains are concentrated in later buildings (SAMR, 1987). When Nicholas Fortescue acquired the property a new house was erected, which incorporated portions of the original establishment, and seems to have enclosed a courtyard, open to the north. The eastern range of the present house is flush with the walls of the chapel, which it adjoins, and which dates, in part, from the 15th century. A Captain John Fortescue demolished the remaining parts of the original

Priory in 1763 when a new hall and drawing room were built on the west side of the eastern range. In 1783 the chapel was rebuilt by the same owner, and a new addition made by which the west front of Nicholas Fortescue's original house had been almost entirely hidden (VCH III, 420).

The most recent addition to the main body of the house was made by John Fortescue in the 1760's. His addition is two stories in height, of red brick with stone dressings, and is designed in a simple and dignified style (VCH III, 420). The present house therefore consists of the Georgian and Tudor phases of the house existing back-to-back with their northern sides flush against the southern wall of the chapel. More modern extensions exist on the south-east corner of the Tudor section of the house.

An historic building survey (WSM 32518) was undertaken on the farm buildings just to the north of the house where the conversions were planned. The buildings were found to contain several phases of construction and alterations, the earliest of which dated to the 17th century with the latest dating to the 20th century. Groundworks were also carried out revealing earlier floor surfaces within the existing buildings. No archaeological features or deposits relating to the medieval priory were found (Deeks 2004).

4. Results

4.1 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Figures 2 and 3. The artefacts recovered are presented in Tables 1-3.

4.1.1 Natural deposits

Natural deposits were visible in one area of the site only; the area around the new garage (Figure 2). Trenching there exposed red natural sand.

4.1.2 Medieval deposits

There was only one feature on the site positively identified as belonging to the medieval period. Posthole 113 (Figure 2; Plate 6) was located in the area of the new garage constructed just to the south-east of the house. It was located just to the west of a post-medieval feature (106). The posthole contained two fills, 111 and 112. The bottom fill 112 was securely dated to the 13th or 14th centuries by pottery sherds. The feature also seems to have been cut into at a later date by a small pit or second posthole (context 110) which dates to the 18th century.

Other features were located in the groundworks which could have been medieval, although no artefacts were recovered to support a date. Two of these features were located in the trench just to the south of a modern barn (to the south-west of the converted stable block; Figure 2). Both features were probably pits, though the limitations of the excavations made interpretation of form difficult. Pit 416 was a light grey, shallow sided feature visible in one of the east-west pipe trenches connecting to the septic tank trench (Figure 2; Plate 8). No material of any sort was recovered from the fill and the layers it cut through appeared to be natural sands and clays. The second "pit" was context 423 and which appeared in the section of the septic pit trench (Figure 2; Plate 9). This feature was only recorded from a distance as health and safety considerations made hand cleaning impossible, thus further information about the feature wasn't recovered.

4.1.3 Post-medieval deposits

Most of the layers and features revealed during the groundworks were post-medieval in date. The area had been subject to a great deal of landscaping during period of alteration to the

house, and this was reflected in the variety of disturbance and demolition material found within many of the service trenches and re-graded areas.

Only a single feature of this date was actually identified and excavated, that being a pit or ditch to the south-east corner of the main house, just a few metres from the medieval posthole identified in the same phase of work. The feature had evidently become a rubbish dump, despite a potentially different original purpose. The waste seems to have been domestic, in keeping with the nature of the manor house settlement.

The area on the east and north-east side of the house was re-graded with removal of the concrete surface and re-surfacing. The removal of the concrete revealed the remnants of what appeared to be a cobbled surface, although this was only visible in small portions of the area.

4.2 **Artefact analysis, by Angus Crawford**

The artefactual assemblage recovered is summarised in Tables 1-3.

The pottery assemblage retrieved from the excavated area consisted of 13 sherds of pottery weighing 135g, 20 fragments of roof tile, 10 fragments of brick, 6 pieces of Blue-Lias stone, 2 pieces of animal bone, a button, a partial hammer head and a fragment of unidentified metal. The group came from eleven stratified contexts and could be dated from the medieval to modern period (see Table 1). The level of preservation was generally good with the majority of sherds displaying only low levels of abrasion.

All sherds have been grouped and quantified according to fabric type (see Table 2). A total of two diagnostic form sherds were present and could be dated accordingly, the remaining sherds were datable by fabric type only to the general period or production span. Where mentioned, all specific forms are referenced to the type series within the report for Deansway, Worcester (Dalwood and Edwards 2004).

4.2.1 **Discussion of the pottery**

The discussion below is a summary of the finds and associated location or contexts by period. Where possible, *terminus post quem* dates have been allocated and the importance of individual finds commented upon as necessary.

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

Context	Material	Type	Total	Weight (g)
100	Metal	Unidentified	1	7
101	Iron	Hammer	1	540
103	Bone	Animal	1	1
103	Brick	Modern	1	358
103	Stone	Lias	1	8
103	Tile	Roof	5	200
105	Iron	Button	1	1
105	Iron	Nail	1	1
107	Brick	Post-medieval	9	1746
107	Roof	Tile	3	221
108	Stone	Lias	5	1428
110	Pottery	Post-medieval	1	3
111	Pottery	Medieval	2	40
112	Bone	Animal	1	15
112	Pot	Medieval	10	92
115	Roof	Tile	12	1488
404	Mortar	Modern	1	1408

Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by fabric

Context	Fabric number	Fabric name	Total Sherds	Weight (g)
110	82	Tin glazed ware	1	3
112	55	Worcester-type unglazed ware	9	88
112	64.2	Glazed sandy white ware	2	35
112	69	Oxidized glazed Malvernian ware	1	9

Table 3: Summary of the assemblage

Date range	Material	Total	Weight (g)	Specialist report?	Important research assemblage?
N/A	Bone	2	16	N	N
N/A	Iron	2	2	N	N
N/A	Metal	1	7	N	N
N/A	Stone	6	1436	N	N
Medieval to post-medieval	Roof	20	1909	N	N
Medieval	Pottery	9	88	Y	N
Medieval	Pottery	2	35	Y	N
Post-medieval	Brick	9	1746	Y	N
Post-medieval	Pottery	1	3	Y	N
Modern	Iron	1	540	N	N
Medieval	Pottery	1	9	Y	N
Modern	Brick	1	358	N	N
Modern	Mortar	1	1408	N	N

Medieval

Of the thirteen sherds of pottery examined, twelve were of medieval date and recovered from a single context (112). All were of regional fabrics which included nine sherds of Worcester-type unglazed ware (late 11th to early 15th century), two sherds of glazed sandy white ware (13th to early 14th century) and a single sherd of oxidized glazed Malvernian ware (13th to 17th century). Within the Worcester-type unglazed ware two partial cooking pot rims were identified, partially sooted, that could be more precisely dated to a 13th century date of manufacture. While oxidized glazed Malvernian ware has an upper date of 17th century, in comparison to the rest of the assemblage, it is most likely representative of the earliest date for the fabric (13th century).

Twenty fragments of roof tile, due to their small size and condition, could only be broadly identified as dating from the 13th to 18th century.

Post-medieval

A single sherd of tin glazed ware was the only post-medieval pottery recovered and dated to the 18th century (context 110).

Nine fragments of brick were also identified as post-medieval predating the introduction of the brick tax in 1784.

In addition to the finds discussed above, the area around the new garage produced a piece of masonry just under half a metre in length (Plate 10). The stone was roughly rectangular in shape and had a v-shaped central groove running down the middle of one side, with the other side having the alphabet carved out in entirety. The stone was actually in two pieces, with a large irregular piece of industrial waste attached to the bottom of the larger piece. The stone has been cut at a right angle at one end. The stone itself would seem to be a rather light grey limestone. It's possible that the stone is a "sample" or a demonstration of lettering. A client could compare and contrast examples of lettering work on a variety of stones. Alternatively this stone is a practice piece. A trainee stonemason might have used this stone to practice carving lettering. The v-shaped indent in the back of the stone and the right-angled cut to one end would seem to be further examples of practice. This piece would most likely be Victorian in date (Jacobs pers comm.)

4.2.2 **Significance**

While the majority of the finds indicate general rubbish discard three contexts could be dated by *terminus post quem*. Contexts 107 and 108 were post-medieval in date while the primary posthole fill (context 112) is of 13th or early 14th century date.

5. **Synthesis**

5.1 **Medieval**

This period is represented by small finds assemblage and one securely dated feature, although there seems to be evidence of further pitting to the north of the manor house for which dating evidence wasn't available. The posthole dated to the 13th to 14th centuries, a time when the priory would have been populated by probably less than a dozen nuns. A lack of associated features in this area makes it very hard to develop any idea of what sort of structure this posthole represented. Perhaps it was merely part of a fence line separating areas outside the house. However, the existence of this feature proves that medieval archaeology does exist on this site. The groundworks were perhaps not extensive enough, or in most cases deep enough, to reveal more features from the same period.

The evidence for pitting just to the north of the house can't conclusively be associated with this period due to a lack of dating evidence.

5.2 **Post-medieval**

The evidence for remains from this period was wide-ranging. Most of the deposits of this period took the form of layers, which generally reflected various episodes of landscaping. Only one feature was securely dated to this period, however. The pit or ditch terminus 106 had reflected an episode of disuse in the 18th century. The general building material and waste within the feature probably indicated a period of building or demolition associated with the house.

The small trench excavated by the garden wall on the south side of the house revealed a layer of what looked like demolition rubble. Although this layer wasn't dated it seems as though it belonged to a period of post-Dissolution demolition.

The bulk of the evidence of activity can be attributed to this period. Domestic and farming activity is reflected in the features found and supported by the results from the historic building survey on the outbuildings (Deeks 2004).

5.3 **Research frameworks**

The results of this watching brief will inform the local, regional and national research cycles. Being a Scheduled Ancient Monument the work on this site will be of particular relevance to the West Midlands Research Framework, English Heritage's "Exploring Our Past" initiative (1993) as well as the Society for Medieval Archaeology (1987, 12).

6. **Publication summary**

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Mr Linton Connell at Cookhill Priory, Cookhill, Worcestershire (NGR 40537 25733; WSM 31687). The watching brief covered an extensive area of groundworks surrounding the manor house. Many layers of material were found, mainly redeposited material dating to the post-medieval periods. These were probably landscaping episodes or periods of deposition occurring during the time the house was a private residence. A number of archaeological features were located during the groundworks, mostly probably pits, though none were positively identified as such. Although one at the south-eastern corner of the house was dated to the 18th century some others just north of the house could have been of an earlier date. A single posthole was dated to the medieval period in the area of the new garage. As this feature was found in isolation there was limited opportunity for interpretation of what form of structure this could have taken. Whatever structure did exist in this area seems to have been re-used, as the post hole was partly truncated by another of post-medieval date. The range and dating of the activity around the manor is reflected in the range of dates reflected in the priory itself, from the medieval through to the modern.

7. **The archive**

The archive consists of:

12	Fieldwork progress records AS2
5	Photographic records AS3
4	Colour transparency film
1	Black and white photographic films
10	Abbreviated context records AS40
8	Scale drawings

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum

Hartlebury Castle

Hartlebury

Near Kidderminster

Worcestershire DY11 7XZ

Tel Hartlebury (01299) 250416

8. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Linton Connell, the DCMS and English Heritage.

9. **Personnel**

The report preparation was led by James Goad. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Hal Dalwood. Fieldwork was led by James Goad, Darren Miller and Simon Woodiwiss, with finds analysis by Angus Crawford and illustration by Carolyn Hunt.

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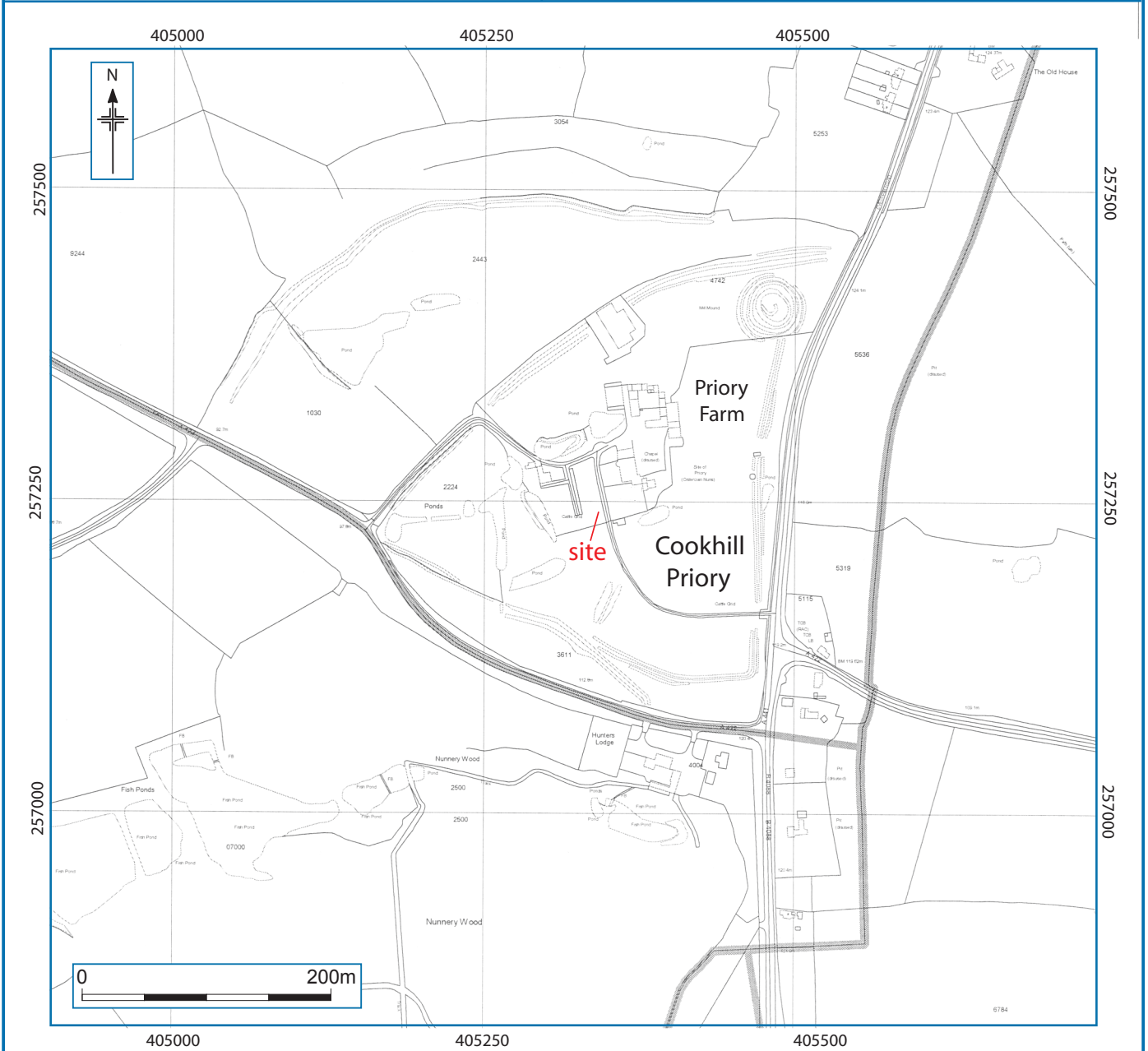
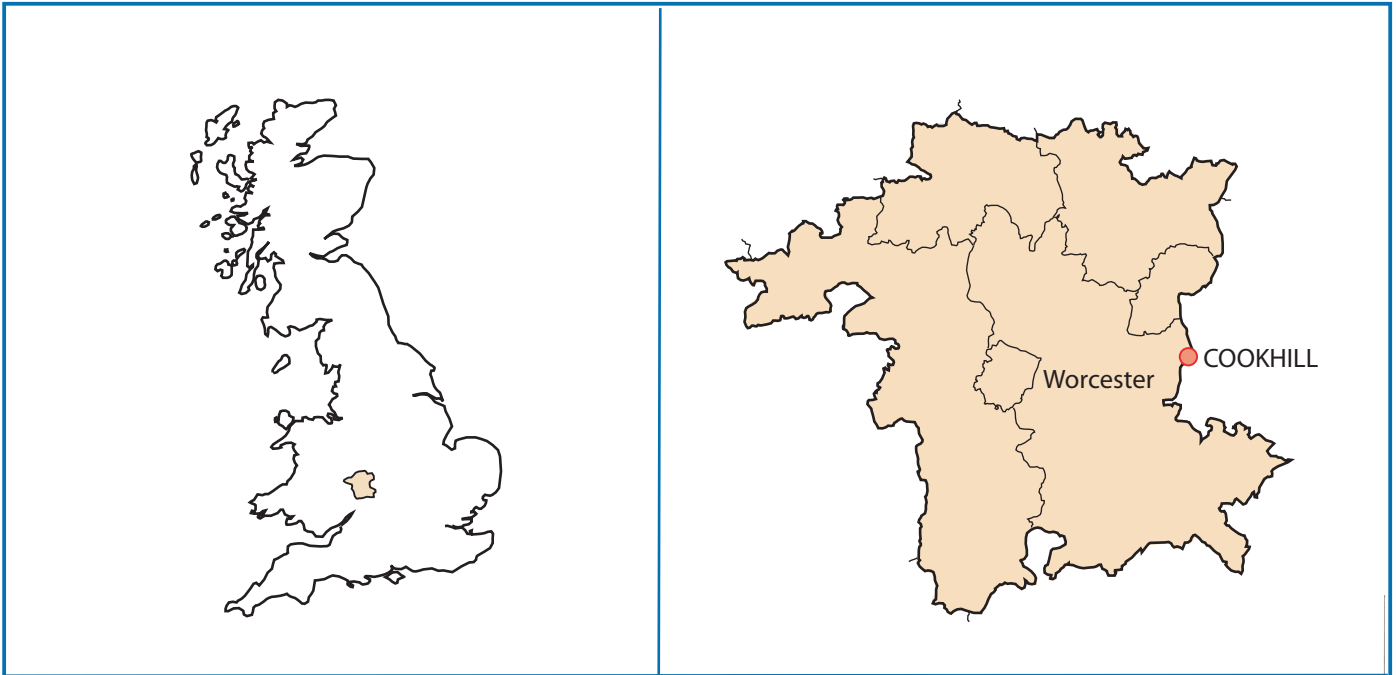
11. **Abbreviations**

DCMS Department for Culture, Media and Sport

SMR Sites and Monuments Record.

WCRO Worcestershire County Records Office.

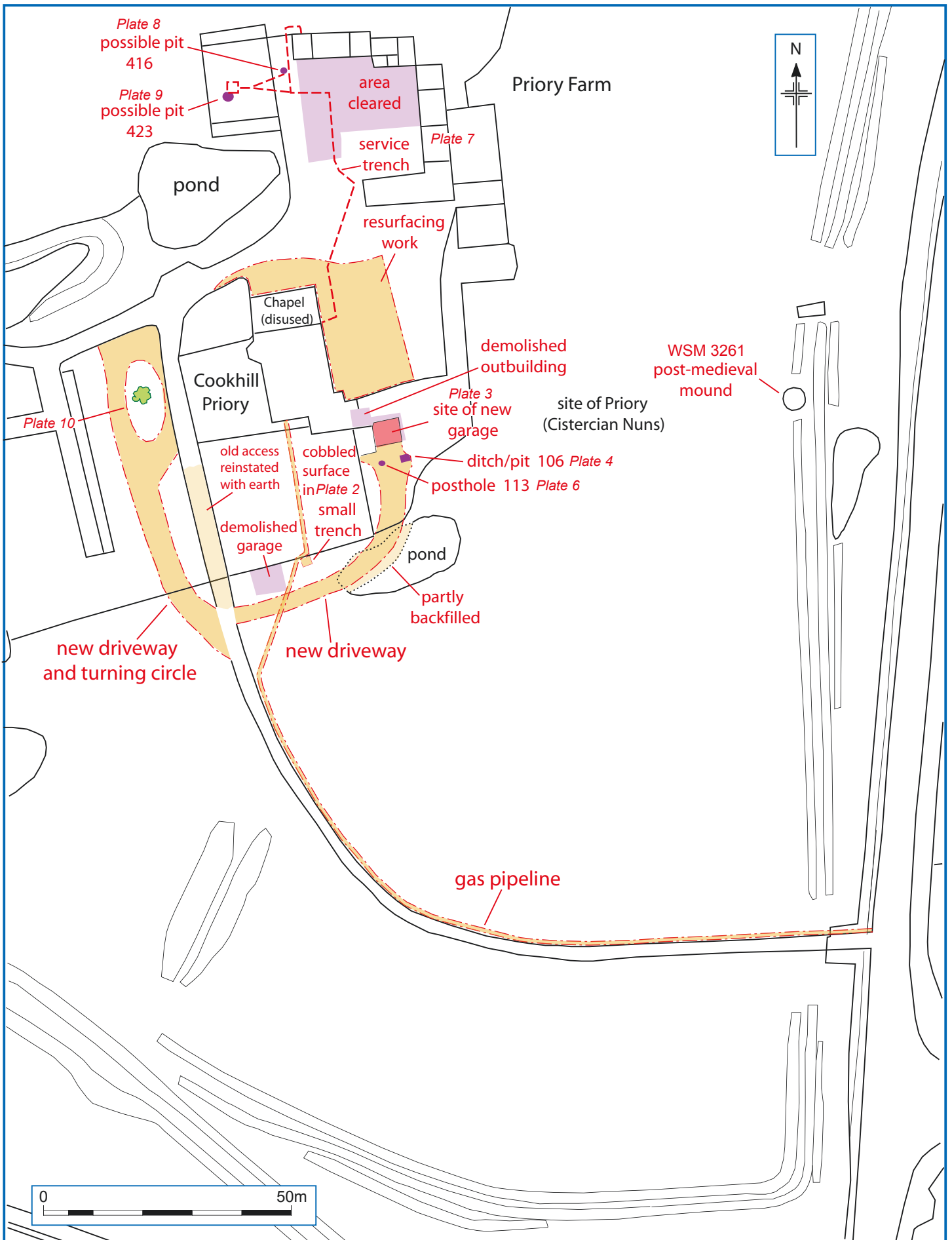
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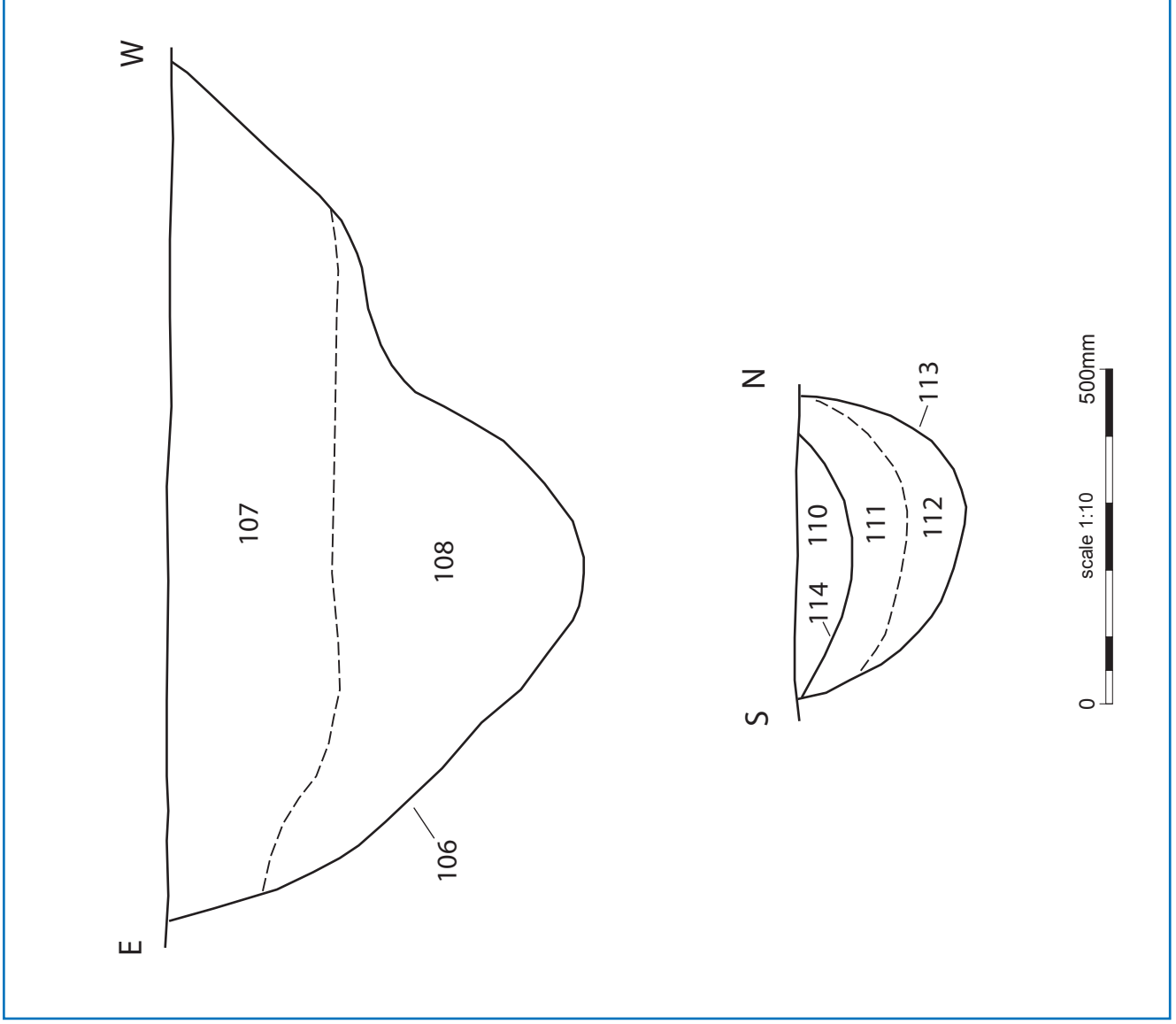
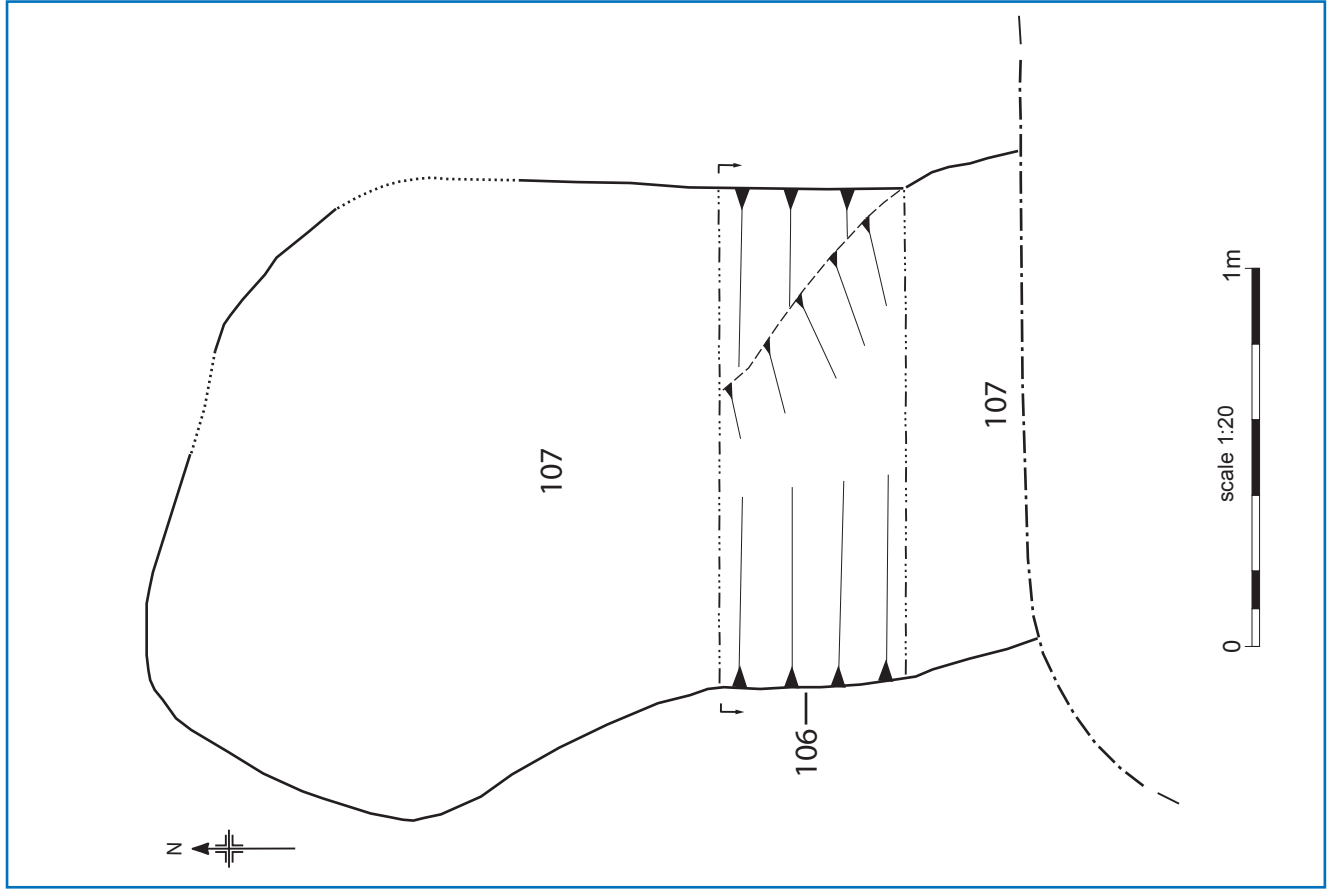
Location of the site.

Figure 1



Trench location plan

Figure 2



Plan and section of feature 106 and section of feature 113

Figure 3



Plate 1: Gas pipeline trench from Evesham Road entrance



Plate 2: Small trench by garden wall. Note building rubble at base of trench



Plate 3: Trenching for new garage, looking southeast



Plate 4: Post-medieval pit in area just to the south of the new garage



Plate 5: Medieval post hole in area adjacent to new garage



Plate 6: View north along service trench



Plate 7: Pit 416 in area of service trench near to septic tank trench



Plate 8: Feature visible in section of septic tank trench



Plate 9: Machining of the new turning circle



Plate 10: The "alphabet" stone
