

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING
BRIEF AT
ABBERTON HALL,
ABBERTON LANE,
ABBERTON,
WORCESTERSHIRE.

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Contents

Part 1 Project summary	1
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Part 2 Detailed report

1. Background	3
1.1 Reasons for the project	3
1.2 Project parameters	3
1.3 Aims	3
2. Methods	3
2.1 Documentary search	3
2.2 Fieldwork methodology	3
2.2.1 Fieldwork strategy	3
2.2.2 Structural analysis	4
2.3 Artefact methodology, by Victoria Bryant and Dennis Williams	4
2.3.1 Artefact recovery policy	4
2.3.2 Method of analysis	4
2.4 Animal bone methodology, by Emma Hancox	4
2.5 Environmental archaeology methodology, by Andrew Mann	4
2.5.1 Sampling policy	4
2.5.2 Method of analysis	5
2.6 The methods in retrospect	5
3. Topographical and archaeological context	5
4. Results	7
4.1 Structural analysis	7
4.1.1 Phase 1 Natural deposits	7
4.1.2 Phase 2 Iron Age deposits	7
4.1.3 Phase 2 Medieval deposits	7
4.1.4 Phase 3 Post-medieval deposits	7
4.1.5 Modern deposits	8
4.2 Artefact analysis, by Victoria Bryant and Dennis Williams	8
4.2.1 Assessment	8
4.2.2 Discussion	9
4.3 Animal bone analysis, by Emma Hancox	11
4.3.1 Context and Phasing	11
4.3.2 Assessment	11
4.3.3 Preservation	11
4.3.4 Range and Variety	12
4.4 Environmental analysis, by Andrew Mann	12
5. Conclusions and significance	13
5.1 Medieval	13
5.2 Post-medieval	13
5.3 Artefactual material, by Victoria Bryant and Dennis Williams	14
5.4 Animal bone, by Emma Hancox	14
5.5 Environmental material, by Andrew Mann	14
6. Publication summary	15
7. Acknowledgements	15
8. Personnel	15
9. Bibliography	15

Figures

1	Site location plan
2	Tithe Map 1842
3	Trench plan: initial strip
4	Trench plan: final depth of excavation
5	Sections

Archaeological Watching Brief at Abberton Hall, Abberton Lane, Abberton, Worcestershire

Tom Vaughan

**With contributions by Victoria Bryant, Emma Hancox, Andrew
Mann and Dennis Williams**

Part 1 Project summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Abberton Hall, Abberton Lane, Abberton, near Pershore, Worcestershire (NGR: SO 9946 5337). It was undertaken on behalf of Mr and Mrs John Sansom, who intend to develop the site with a swimming pool for which a planning application has been submitted. The project aimed to determine if any significant archaeological site was present and if so to indicate its date, nature and location.

The area monitored lay to the east of present manor house, covering approximately 236m², which was excavated in two spits.

Two associated small sub-oval 14th century pits were identified at the base of the site, although their function was not determined. The area appeared to have been scoured of soils to the level of the natural clay between the late 16th-early 18th centuries. A thick cess-like layer then built up, conjectured to be the result of horse or cattle corralling. This was cut by a number of pits and ditches, containing a small quantity of residual medieval pottery. Two ditches were recorded which appear to have fed into the pond (the relict of the medieval moat) to the north. One may be an antecedent or continuation of the ditch or boundary recorded on the 1842 tithe map. In the 18th century the area was consolidated with a layer of cobbles. This was patched with building rubble and clay in the 19th century, after which a soil horizon was allowed to develop, probably as a cultivated garden associated with greenhouses erected in the late 19th-early 20th century.

A small assemblage of residual pottery was recovered from later layers and features, including a single Iron Age body sherd, two residual late Saxon sherds (10th-early 11th century) and a number of medieval sherds (generally 12th-early 14th century).

Part 2 Detailed report

1. Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Abberton Hall, Abberton Lane, Abberton, near Pershore, Worcestershire (NGR: SO 9946 5337; Fig 1), on behalf of Mr and Mrs John Sansom. The client intends to develop the site with an indoor swimming pool with associated changing rooms and has submitted a planning application to Wychavon District Council (reference W/05/1433), who considers that a site of archaeological interest may be affected (WSM 29166).

1.2 Project parameters

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IFA 1999).

The project also conforms to a brief prepared by the Planning Advisory Section of Worcestershire County Council (HEAS 2007a) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced by the Service (HEAS 2007b).

1.3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were 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 Worcestershire Historic Environment Record (HER). In addition to the sources listed in the bibliography the following were also consulted:

Cartographic sources

- 1842, Abberton Tithe Map, WCRO: BA 1572 r 760/2 (transcribed by D Guyatt, 2002)
- 1st edition Ordnance Survey, 1888, 6":1 mile, Worcestershire sheet XXXV-SW
- 1905, Map of Abberton Hall from Estate Sale particulars by Ludlow and Briscoe (Ager 2006)

The following sources were not considered relevant to this project; aerial photographs.

2.2 Fieldwork methodology

2.2.1 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by the Service (HEAS 2007b).

Fieldwork was undertaken between 25th and 28th June 2007. The site reference number and site code is WSM 37312.

Observation of the excavated area was undertaken during and after machine excavation, using a 360° tracked excavator, employing a smooth-bladed ditching bucket. Mechanical excavation was undertaken in two spits, covering a total area of approximately 236m² (Fig 1; Plates 1, 2 and 8). 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).

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, by Victoria Bryant and Dennis Williams**

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). This in principal determines that all finds, of whatever date, must be collected. However, in this case only a sample of later material was collected from the spoil during machining. All other artefacts were recovered from stratified deposits.

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* date produced for each stratified context.

The pottery and ceramic building material 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; Hurst 1994).

2.4 **Animal bone methodology, by Emma Hancox**

A small assemblage consisting of a single box of hand collected animal bone was recovered from the watching brief at Abberton Hall. The material was collected during machining. No bone was recovered from the environmental sample (Section 2.5 below).

2.5 **Environmental archaeology methodology, by Andrew Mann**

2.5.1 **Sampling policy**

The environmental sampling strategy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995, appendix 4). A single sample of 20 litres was taken from context (113), from within a pit of medieval date (context 112).

2.5.2 Method of analysis

The sample was processed by flotation using a Siraf tank. The flot was collected on a 300µm sieve and the residue retained on a 1mm mesh. This allows for the recovery of items such as small animal bones, molluscs and seeds.

The residue was fully sorted by eye and the abundance of each category of environmental remains estimated. The flots were scanned using a low power EMT stereo light microscope and plant remains identified using modern reference collections maintained by the Service, and seed identification manual (Beijerinck 1947). Nomenclature for the plant remains follows the Flora of the British Isles, 3rd edition (Stace 2001).

A magnet was also used to test for the presence of hammerscale, none was found.

2.6 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

Abberton Hall is situated on the south-east side of the modern village of Abberton, adjacent to the church of St Eadburga. The development site is located to the east of the hall, and butts a modern garage block. The village lies within a large rural parish, to the south of the main Worcester to Alcester, A422 road, on slightly elevated ground at a height of approximately 64m AOD, overlooking the Whitsunn Brook to the south, which feeds into the Piddle Brook and subsequently the River Avon, north of Pershore.

The village is situated on the edge of three different soil types, so it is unclear which one predominates. To the north-east the soils belong to the Whimple 3 Soil Association (572f), comprising reddish fine loamy or fine silty over clayey soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging, some similar clay soils on brows, slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged fine loamy and fine silty over clayey soils on lower slopes, over drift, Permo-Triassic and Carboniferous reddish mudstone; to the south-east the soils belong to the Worcester Soil Association (431) comprising slowly permeable non-calcareous and calcareous reddish clayey soils over mudstone, associated with similar non-calcareous fine loamy over clayey soils, over Permo-Triassic mudstone; and to the west the soils belong to the Evesham 2 Soil Association (411b), comprising slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils, some slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged non-calcareous clayey and fine loamy or fine silty over clayey soils, over Jurassic and Cretaceous clay (Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983).

Abberton has been recorded under a number of variations throughout the last thousand years: *Eadbrihtincgtun*, in 972; *Edbretintune*, *Edbritone*, *Edbrythone* and *Edbryton*, in the Domesday Survey of 1086; *Eadbrithtona*, c 1086; *Edbricton*, c 1215; *Edbristone*, in 1275; *Eadburiton*, in 1283, *Ebrightone* and *Ebrihton*, in 1291 and 1305; *Adbrighton* and *Adbryton*, in 1297, 1341 and 1377; *Abburton*, in 1535; and *Abryton* in 1544. It is considered to derive from the Old English personal name, meaning 'Eadbeorht's Farm' (Mawer and Stenton 1927, 184).

The estate of Abberton is documented as being given to the Abbey of Pershore in a 10th century charter (Hooke 1990, 190-1). Abberton is thought to be a shrunken medieval village, although the date of the partial desertion is unknown (WSM 29166). Traces of the medieval agricultural practice of strip field farming are extant on all sides of the village, in the form of cropmarks of ridge and furrow identified through aerial photography (WSM 02403, 03001-4, 03094, 03097, 15574 and 34318).

The present manor house, known as Abberton Hall, is an early 17th century timber framed building, although it was encased in brick in the last decades of the 19th century. Some early elements remain visible, such as the stone chimneystack, dated 1619 (WSM 00468). The stables to the south-west are also of 17th century date (WSM 03041). A small sub-oval pond to the north-west of the hall represents the only surviving section of a medieval moat (WSM 03038), conjectured to have surrounded the building in the medieval period when the manorial grange was controlled by Pershore Abbey (VCH IV, 4-6; Brooks and Pevsner 2007, 103).

The 1842 tithe map (Fig 2) details the layout of the buildings and grounds surrounding the hall:

19	Hall, offices, lawns and pleasure garden
20	Lawn with stables
21	Kitchen Garden
22	Orchard and paddock

The present development area spans the boundary between the orchard and paddock (22), extending to the south into the lawn (20), to the east of the pleasure garden (19), which surrounded the house.

In the late 19th or early 20th century, the owner Reverend Robert James Baker erected two green houses to the north east of the hall. It is unclear when these were removed. In the last decade a long brick range housing a garage and games room was built over their position, extending across the north side of the present development site. In 2004 the moat/pond was restored. Finally, in 2005, the stable block was converted for residential use (Ager 2006). Unfortunately these developments were not archaeologically monitored.

In 1924, the hall was described as being situated ‘...high in a fine park, with views over the Bredon Hills and Vale of Evesham’ (VCH IV, 4). The park appears to have been created in the 19th century, probably during the ownership by the Sheldon family, rather than William Laslett who bought the estate in 1840. The park contained an avenue, which has gradually gone out of use. About 1937 a garden loggia was decorated with frescos by Benjamin Gibbon, which has been argued to be unique in the county. Unfortunately it has not survived into the present day, nor is its exact location known (WSM 29038; Ager 2006).

The church of St Eadburga (or St Edburga) is in early 14th century style, although is in fact a late 19th century structure, having been rebuilt in 1881-2 by WJ Hopkins, for the then owner of the hall, William Laslett. The previous church was described in 1851 by Noake as at least 600 years old, small and without features of interest (WSM 01063; VCH IV, 6; Brooks and Pevsner 2007, 102).

A number of timber framed 17th century buildings exist within the village, including the thatched Providence Cottage (WSM 03039), Home Farm (WSM 03040) and a thatched barn (WSM 03510).

A number of cropmarks have been identified to the east of the village, including a 15m² square enclosure (WSM 03001) of unknown date; two irregular ring ditches associated with a rectangular enclosure of possible early Iron Age date (WSM 09812); a substantial rectilinear enclosure with rounded corners and an opening to the south-east (WSM 09813), conjectured to be Iron Age or Romano-British; a series of possible enclosures, tracks and field boundaries of early Iron Age date (WSM 10050); a further undated enclosure (WSM 03003); late prehistoric or Romano-British linear features (WSM 03003); and a Bronze Age barrow cemetery (WSM 03004; From Mann 2007).

A project of monitoring and recording of utilities trenches within fields to the east of the village was undertaken by the Service in early 2007 (WSM 34768; Mann 2007). Although the site encompassed, and was close to, a number of the enclosures described above, no archaeological deposits were identified and only occasional late medieval to modern artefacts were retrieved from the plough soil, interpreted as waste deposited during manuring. The lack of pottery specifically from rectangular enclosure WSM 09813 was conjectured to indicate that it is of prehistoric rather than Roman date.

4. Results

4.1 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Figs 3-5. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

4.1.1 Phase 1 Natural deposits

The natural matrix comprised red Mercian Mudstone (124; also known as Keuper Marl), below a band of yellowish grey silty clay, 102 (Plates 8-13). It was overlain by a soil sequence of silty clay and clayey silt horizons, 101 and 102, although these had been disturbed and scoured off in places, 103.

4.1.2 Phase 2 Iron Age deposits

Although no features or deposits of this date were identified, a single residual sherd of Iron Age pottery was recovered from a ditch, 114/136, of post-medieval date.

4.1.3 Phase 2 Medieval deposits

Two adjacent small sub-oval pits were recorded within the eastern half of the excavated area, 134 and 138 (Plate 9). Although unexcavated they contained comparable fills. A single sherd of 12th-early 14th century pottery sherds were retrieved from the surface of the former, along with a residual late Saxon pottery sherd. A residual late Saxon sherd was also recovered from post-medieval ditch 114/136.

4.1.4 Phase 3 Post-medieval deposits

A large wide oval pit, 122, was revealed toward the west side of the excavation area, cut into the natural matrix 102 and 124. Although unexcavated, late 16th-early 18th century pottery was retrieved from the upper fill. It was sealed by layers 119 and 120 and had been truncated by modern test pit 116.

The soils across the excavation area were stripped off, down (into) the natural, 102, with undulating cut 103.

A thick layer of green clay, 121, was observed across the east side of the excavation area, overlying the natural matrix, 102. It had been disturbed by a number of cut features, 114, 130 and 141. Unfortunately no finds were recovered from the layer, although it was sealed by the grey layer 104, with 16th century material, below cobbled surface, 118. It portrayed the consistency of cess, but was not sampled for analysis (Plate 12).

Layer 119 across the south-east half of the site, and 120 across the north-west half appear to be contemporary, along with 104, although the later contained 16th century material, while the former contained 18th century material (Plate 1).

A narrow north-south aligned ditch, 106, was recorded along the full length of the west side of the site, continuing into the baulk at either edge (Plate 6). The fill contained 16th-17th century pottery. It was cut into layer 119/120, truncated a pit or ditch terminus, 110 (Plate 7), and possible root activity 108, both of which continued into the western baulk; and was sealed by 18th century cobbled surface 118.

The medieval pits described in Section 4.1.2 above were cut by a linear ditch, 114/136, aligned north-north-west to south-south-east with a terminus to the south-east (Plate 9). The fill, which was similar to the pits, contained 12th-14th century pottery along with residual Iron Age and Late Saxon material. However the ditch also overlies layers 104/121 and 119, which contained 18th century material, indicating that the medieval material was also residual and the feature is in fact of post-medieval date.

A single moderate sized, sub-oval pit, 112, was recorded within the southern half of the site (Plate 5). It was sealed by the subsoil, 101, was cut into layer 119, and contained two sherds of 14th century pottery, which may be residual (as layer 119 contained 18th century material).

Ditch 130, pits 126, 128 and 132 were cut into layer 121 and/or natural 102 and were sealed by make up layer 125 for cobbles 118 and redeposited clay 143 (Plates 11-13). They may be regarded as roughly contemporary. Although none of these features contained dateable material, although can be dated to between the 16th and 18th/19th centuries.

Make up layer 125, below the rough cobbled surface 118, may be the same as subsoil 101 to the south. The former contained 17th/18th century debris and was associated with dump deposit, 105, with 19th century material & redeposited clay layer, 143, adjacent (Plates 2 and 3).

4.1.5 **Modern deposits**

A group of small postholes were noted toward the north-east corner of the site (Plate 4). They appeared to be of modern origin from the loose, soily fill, but were apparently sealed by 18th century cobbles 118. Unfortunately, due to the time pressures of the project, they were not recorded further so their function and relationships are unclear.

A single posthole, 141, was recorded within the northern baulk of the excavation area, portraying a sharp profile and pointed base. It was sealed by the topsoil, 101, but cut as deep as the natural, 102. It may be associated with, and contemporary with the postholes described above.

An L-shaped vertical sided test pit was recorded in the middle of the site, 116 (Plate 5). It was observed from the upper horizons, dug into the natural matrix. This is a modern test-pit, probably dug to obtain geotechnical information as part of the present development.

4.2 **Artefact analysis, by Victoria Bryant and Dennis Williams**

The artefactual assemblage recovered is summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

4.2.1 **Assessment**

An assemblage totalling 193 artefacts weighing 24.795kg was retrieved from the site during excavation. The assemblage ranged from the Iron Age to the post-medieval period, with no evidence of any modern material (see Table 1).

The pottery finds consisted of 55 sherds weighing 2,521g, which comprised 28% of the assemblage by count. The other finds mainly consisted of fragments of building material (brick, mortar, stone and tile), although some pieces of shell, slag and a clay pipe stem were

also retrieved. The level of preservation was generally fair, with the majority of sherds displaying only moderate levels of abrasion.

Material	Total	Weight (g)
Brick	14	3721
Ceramic building material (unident.)	24	241
Clay pipe	1	2
Coal	1	1
Mortar	1	4
Roman pottery	1	2
Medieval pottery	19	243
Post-medieval pottery	35	2276
Shell	3	3
Slag	8	1302
Stone	14	12046
Tile	72	4954

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

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

Eleven stratified contexts yielded pottery that could be dated. All the pottery dated from the medieval and post-medieval periods, except for a small sherd of Iron Age date that appeared to be residual in context (115) and two small Late Saxon sherds, which were residual within contexts (115) and (135).

Although building material accounted for a substantial part of the assemblage, most of this was fragmentary. Complete dimensions were not measurable for any of the brick finds, thus limiting their usefulness, in terms of establishing date ranges as a function of variation of production sizes over time. Roof and floor tile sherds were similarly incomplete, but some of these (in contexts 101, 104, 107, 118, 119 and 123) were datable, by their fabrics, to the medieval and post medieval periods, with an overall date range from the 13th to 18th centuries.

Miscellaneous finds were all undiagnostic. The slag find in context 119 was very dense, suggesting it was waste from an inefficient iron smelting process, whereas the slag from context 105 much less dense, and highly vitrified, as would be expected for furnace ash; the latter had probably been used as building aggregate.

4.2.2 Discussion

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

Fabric	Fabric common name	Total	Weight
9	Mudstone tempered ware; Group D	1	2
55	Worcester-type unglazed ware	12	112
57.1	Cotswolds unglazed ware	2	31
69	Oxidized glazed Malvernian ware	5	100
77	Midlands yellow ware	2	25
78	Post-medieval red wares	28	837
91	Post-medieval buff wares	3	83
100	Miscellaneous post-medieval wares	2	231

Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by fabric type

Iron Age pottery

One small sherd of Iron Age mudstone tempered ware (fabric 9) was recovered from an early post-medieval context (115). The production centre of this type pottery is thought to have been in the Martley area, to the west of Worcester. The sherd itself was undiagnostic and could have dated to any time between the 5th century BC and the mid 1st century AD (Morris 1982). No Iron Age pottery has previously been identified in Abberton, but 600m to the west of Abberton Hall there has been cropmark evidence of ring ditches and enclosures (WSM03001, WSM03004, WSM09812, WSM09813). The find of Iron Age pottery confirms the presence of prehistoric settlement in this area.

Late Saxon pottery

No late Saxon deposits were identified during the watching brief, but two sherds from late Saxon cooking pots dating to the 10th to early 11th centuries were residual in contexts (115 and 135). Both were Cotswolds unglazed ware (fabric 57.1). This fabric is part of a tradition of limestone-tempered wares produced in the Cotswold region but with limited distribution in Worcestershire (Bryant 2004, 308-309). Worcestershire was virtually aceramic in the Late Saxon period and the use of pottery seemed to be limited to urban or ecclesiastical sites (Bryant 2004, 330-331). The find of pottery from this date at the centre of the estate may confirm the ecclesiastical connections in the Late Saxon Period.

Medieval to early post-medieval pottery

Only 17 sherds of medieval to early post-medieval pottery were recovered. The majority (12 sherds) were from locally made cooking pots (Worcester-type sandy unglazed ware, fabric 55) dating to the late 12th to early 14th century. This type of pottery is a very common find on medieval sites in Worcestershire. The other 5 sherds were from vessels made in the Hanley Swan area from the 14th to 16th centuries (Oxidised glazed Malvernian ware, fabric 69).

These pottery finds indicate terminus post quem dates in the 14th century, for contexts 113, 115, 135 and 137.

Post-medieval pottery

Of the 35 sherds of post-medieval pottery recovered, 28 were identified as red wares (fabric 78), and two as buff wares (fabric 91), which may be generally dated to the late 17th to 18th centuries. Among the red ware sherds was the distinctive base of a tyg (context 107), which probably dated from the 17th century. The other red ware sherds were unremarkable, in that they were not large enough to provide more precise date estimates, based on forms. The buff wares, from contexts 118 and 119, were tentatively identified as being from the base and rim of pancheons.

Other evidence of post-medieval activity, within the date range of the 16th to 18th centuries, was provided by two sherds of Midlands yellow ware, which were found in contexts 118 and 119. The fabric types of two other post-medieval sherds could not be established, so these were grouped as miscellaneous.

On the basis of these pottery finds, the following contexts have been allocated terminus post quem dates: 101, 19th century; 104, 16th century; 105, 19th century; 107, 17th century, 118 and 119, 18th century; and 123, 18th century.

Ceramic building materials

Brick and tile fragments constituted 57% of the assemblage, by count. In isolation, most of the tile fragments could only be broadly dated, by their fabrics, to the late medieval to post-medieval periods. However, two substantial pieces of floor tile from context 104, bearing greenish-black glazes, were identifiable as being medieval, with a date range from the 14th to 16th centuries.

The brick fabrics were undiagnostic, and could potentially be from any date ranges within the medieval or post-medieval periods. The thickness of brick found in subsoil 101 (dated as 17th to 19th century, by pottery) is in good agreement with the dimensions expected for bricks produced during the late 18th century, i.e. during the years before the introduction of the Brick Tax in 1784. A further fragment of brick found in 101 could not be matched to any of the dimensions commonly used during medieval or post-medieval periods, and was therefore regarded as undiagnostic for the purposes of dating this context. Poor matching with known brick production sizes was also the case for material recovered from context 118, so this was not used as a source of dating evidence.

4.3 **Animal bone analysis, by Emma Hancox**

4.3.1 **Context and Phasing**

Animal bone was found in 14 contexts, 12 of which contained countable elements and/or 'non-countables' such as horncores. The contexts consisted of the fills of discreet features and were dated to the 12th to the 19th centuries, with the majority of the assemblage dating to the 16th to 19th century. The pottery assessment showed some residual pottery in many contexts and this is likely to occur with bone as well.

4.3.2 **Assessment**

The faunal assemblage was recorded on the standard Birmingham University Zooarchaeological Unit recording form, which follows a modified version of a system used by Davis (Davis 1992; Albarella and Davis 1994). This involves considering certain elements as countable e.g. distal femur, whilst also noting the presence of non-countables such as horncores, antlers, evidence of butchery or pathology and any unusual species. Measurable bones and teeth were noted. Only lower teeth of known position are considered measurable, bone measurements mostly follow von den Driesch (1976). Mandibles are considered ageable when at least two teeth are present with recordable wear stages. No attempt was made to distinguish between sheep and goat at this stage, or between horse and donkey. As it is such a small assemblage, all the contexts were examined in detail and non-countable elements also identified where possible in the 'comments' box of the table.

4.3.3 **Preservation**

Overall the preservation was poor/fair. Most of the bones had good cortical integrity with little exfoliation of the outer layers, however, much of the assemblage was fragmented, meaning that only three of the bones/teeth were measurable.

4.3.4 **Range and Variety**

Cattle, sheep/goat, horse/donkey, and deer were identified. Cattle were the most frequently observed species, 65% of the countable assemblage, followed by sheep/goat. Butchery in the form of both cut and chop marks was noted in four contexts. Gnawing (probably canid) was identified in three contexts. No burning or pathology was noted with the exception of a cattle metacarpal that exhibited slight splaying of the condyles. Splaying can be associated with the animal having been attached to the plough, however, the splaying here was very slight and may not be associated with this. No ageable mandibles were present, and only three bones were stratified and measurable. Only two unfused bones was recorded (a deer metatarsal in 104 and an ovid tibia in 119).

The faunal material is probably domestic in origin given the reasonably large percentage of high meat yield bones and the presence of both cut and chop marks on a number of bones, although the assemblage is too small to draw any reliable conclusions. The very high ratio of cattle bones to other species and the lack of juvenile bones and smaller species are probably due to the collection bias.

4.4 **Environmental analysis, by Andrew Mann**

The environmental evidence recovered is summarised in Tables 3 and 4. The sample contained frequent charred cereal crop remains and weeds seeds. The majority of the identifiable grains were from free-threshing wheat (*Triticum* sp), in association with oat (*Avena* sp), and occasional rye (*Secale cereale*) and barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) grains. A large proportion of grains were heavily warped and pitted and further quantification would undoubtedly result in a large proportion of these being assigned to an intermediate category. The lack of chaff within this sample makes it difficult to identify the wheat species present although they are characteristic of both bread wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) and club wheat (*Triticum aestivo-compactum*). The paucity of chaff also makes it impossible to distinguish between cultivated (*Avena sativa*) and wild (*Avena fatua*) oat.

These remains are representative of cleaned, almost fully processed crop as no chaff (rachis fragments/glumes) are present within the remains. The small weed seeds present within the assemblage are likely to have grown with the cereal crops. Stinking mayweed (*Anthemis cotula*) is prevalent on heavy clay soils, suggesting the crop may have been grown on this type of soil. Stinging mayweed and nettle (*Urtica dioica*) are also indicative of nitrogen rich soils and the presence of cleavers (*Gallium aparine*) may suggest this chard grain assemblage was from a winter-sown crop.

Context	Sample	Large mammal	Charcoal	Charred plant	Sample volume	Volume Processed	Residue assessed	Flot assessed
113	1	occ	occ	frq	20 Ltrs	20 Ltrs	1 Ltr	0.1 Ltrs

Table 3: summary of environmental remains

Latin name	Family	Common name	Habitat	113
<i>Triticum</i> sp (free-threshing) grain	Poaceae	free-threshing wheat	F	++++
<i>Hordeum vulgare</i> grain	Poaceae	barley	F	+
<i>Secale cereale</i> grain	Poaceae	rye	F	+
Cereal sp indet grain	Poaceae	cereal	F	++++
<i>Avena</i> sp grain	Poaceae	oat	AF	++
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Urticaceae	common nettle	ABD	+
<i>Chenopodium album</i>	Chenopodiaceae	fat hen	AB	+
<i>Rumex</i> sp	Polygonaceae	dock	ABCD	+
<i>Vicia sativa</i>	Fabaceae	common vetch	AB	+
<i>Vicia sativa</i> ssp nigra	Fabaceae	common vetch	AB	+
<i>Vicia</i> sp	Fabaceae	vetch	ABD	+
<i>Galium aparine</i>	Rubiaceae	cleavers/goosefoot	ABC	+
<i>Anthemis cotula</i>	Asteraceae	stinking chamomile	AB	+

Table 4: Charred plant remains

Habitat	Quantity
A= cultivated ground	+ = 1 - 10
B= disturbed ground	++ = 11- 50
C= woodlands, hedgerows, scrub etc	+++ = 51 -100
D = grasslands, meadows and heathland	++++ = 101+
E = aquatic/wet habitats	
F = cultivar	

Key for table 4

5. Conclusions and significance

5.1 Medieval

The two late Saxon/early medieval sherds were residual and retrieved from later deposits.

Only two securely dated medieval features were identified: two adjacent sub-oval pits of 14th century date, but unknown function, within the south-east quarter. No other medieval features, structures or layers were identified.

The rest of the small assemblage of medieval to early post-medieval material was recovered from later features and layers.

5.2 Post-medieval

The site appears to have been scoured of topsoil and subsoil down (into) the level of the natural clay in the early post-medieval period. The thick cess-like layer directly overlying the natural was cut by features with 14th century material and sealed by layers containing 16th century material. However a pit lower in the stratigraphic sequence contained late 16th-early 18th century pottery, so the scouring may have taken place at any point over this period. The scouring of soils and subsequent build up of a thick cess-like layer is conjectured to be the result of the area being intensively used by cattle or horses, with the animals churning up the surface. Unfortunately it was not sampled for analysis.

It is unclear what was the function of the majority of the pits and ditches, although the deep north-north-west to south-south-east linear, 114/136, of possible 18th century date, is of interest, as it does not conform to the general pattern of north-south and east-west boundaries

within the vicinity. It may represent a drainage ditch, feeding into the pond (the relict of the medieval moat, WSM 03038).

North-south ditch 106, of probable 16th-17th century date may be an antecedent or continuation of the ditch or boundary noted on the 1842 tithe map, which also feeds into the pond (Fig 2).

The site was consolidated with a layer of cobbles laid down in the 18th century, which appears to have remained uncovered through into the 19th century, when it has patched with a dump of building rubble and redeposited clay. This surface was subsequently not maintained and a topsoil/subsoil horizon allowed to develop, probably as a cultivated garden soil, from the 19th century through to the present day. The series of postholes probably relate to garden features from this period. The site appears to have been largely unaffected by the construction due north of greenhouses in the late 19th or early 20th century although the brick garage range, built in the last decade, will have substantial foundations.

5.3 **Artefactual material, by Victoria Bryant and Dennis Williams**

The finds discussed here represent only those ‘rescued’ during the excavation of the deposits by mechanical digger. If it had been possible to excavate the deposits by hand it is probable that a much wider range of artefacts would have been recovered. Despite this, the finds do indicate that the site of Abberton Hall is important to our understanding of the archaeology of the area. Any further works in the area need to take account of this.

5.4 **Animal bone, by Emma Hancox**

The animal bone assemblage is very small, with no age-able mandibles and only 36 stratified countable elements, of which only three can be measured. It also came from a widely dated set of contexts and with many of them probably containing residual bones. It is therefore felt that no further work is required on the faunal material.

5.5 **Environmental material, by Andrew Mann**

This sample from the post-medieval pit is likely to represent the piecemeal deposition of charred grain, resulting from domestic processing. Although large-scale storage and processing was likely to have taken place at such a site the numbers of grains recovered from this feature are insufficient to suggest that this assemblage represents a burnt storage deposit. The lack of chaff remains means it is also unlikely these represent fuel waste from a corn drier/oven or fodder.

This assemblage is not uncommon for this period within Worcestershire and the poor preservation of much of the assemblages does not lend itself to further analysis. However if further works are undertaken at this site this sample has illustrated the potential of the area to produce charred environmental remains.

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 and Mrs John Sansom, at Abberton Hall, Abberton Lane, Abberton, near Pershore, Worcestershire (NGR: SO 9946 5337; WSM 37312). The area monitored lay to the east of present manor house, covering approximately 236m², which was excavated in two spits. Two associated small sub-oval 14th century pits were identified at the base of the site, although their function was not determined. The area appeared to have been scoured of soils to the level of the natural clay between the late 16th-early 18th century. A thick cess-like layer then built up, conjectured to be the result of horse or cattle corralling. This was cut by a number of pits and ditches, containing a small quantity of residual medieval pottery. Two ditches were recorded which appear to have fed into the pond (the relict of the medieval moat) to the north. One may be an antecedent or continuation of the ditch or boundary recorded on the 1842 tithe map. In the 18th century the area was consolidated with a layer of cobbles. This was patched with building rubble and clay in the 19th century, after which a soil horizon was allowed to develop, probably as a cultivated garden associated with greenhouses erected in the late 19th-early 20th century. A small assemblage of residual pottery was recovered from later layers and features, including a single Iron Age body sherd, two residual late Saxon sherds (10th-early 11th century) and a number of medieval sherds (generally 12th-early 14th century).

7. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Mr and Mrs John Sansom, Shirley Mathews and Mike Glyde (Worcestershire County Council Historic Environment Planning Advisor).

8. **Personnel**

The report was written by Tom Vaughan, from the field records made by Adam Lee. Finds analysis was by Victoria Bryant and Dennis Williams, animal bone analysis by Emma Hancox, environmental analysis by Andrew Mann and illustration by Carolyn Hunt.

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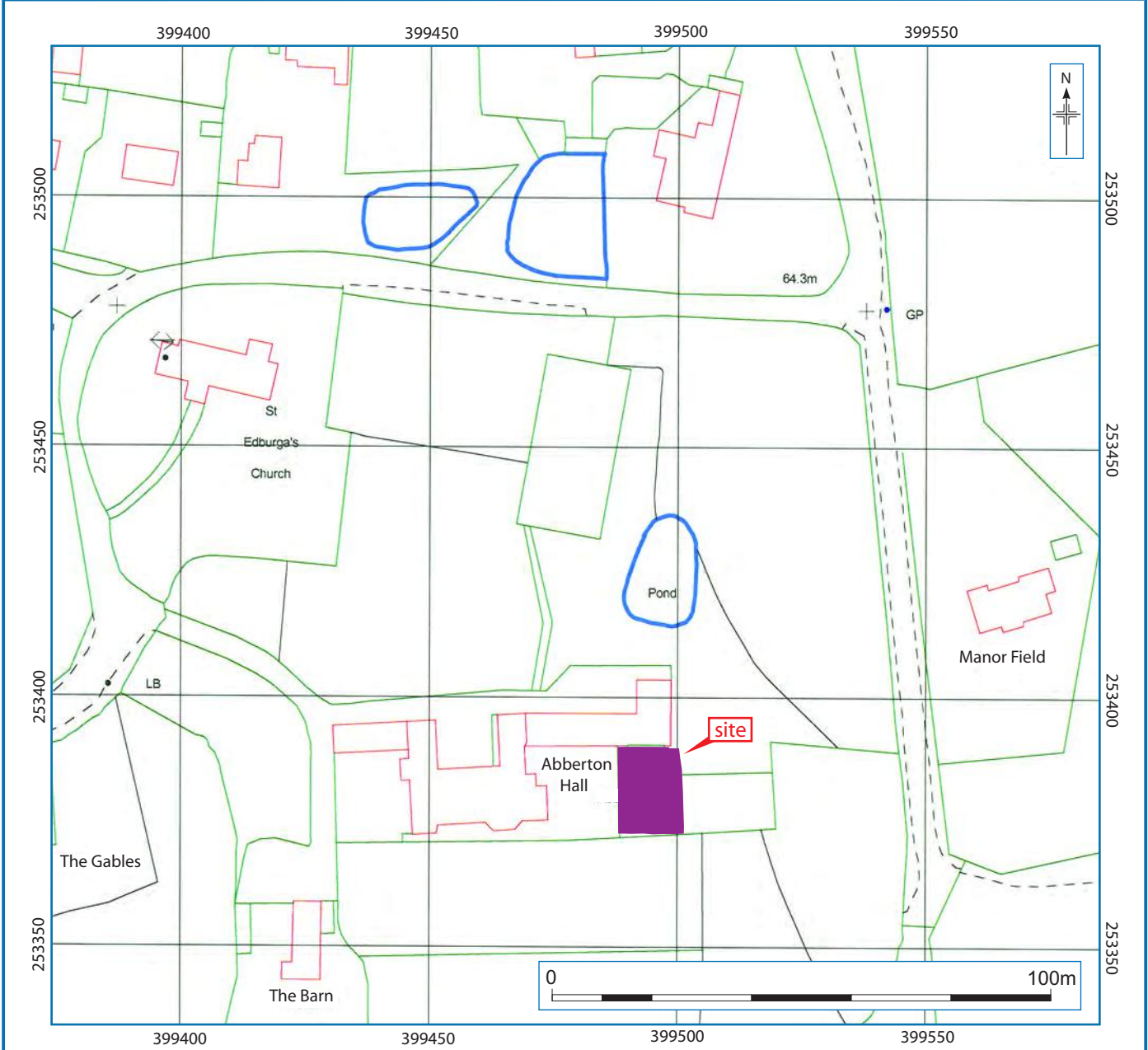
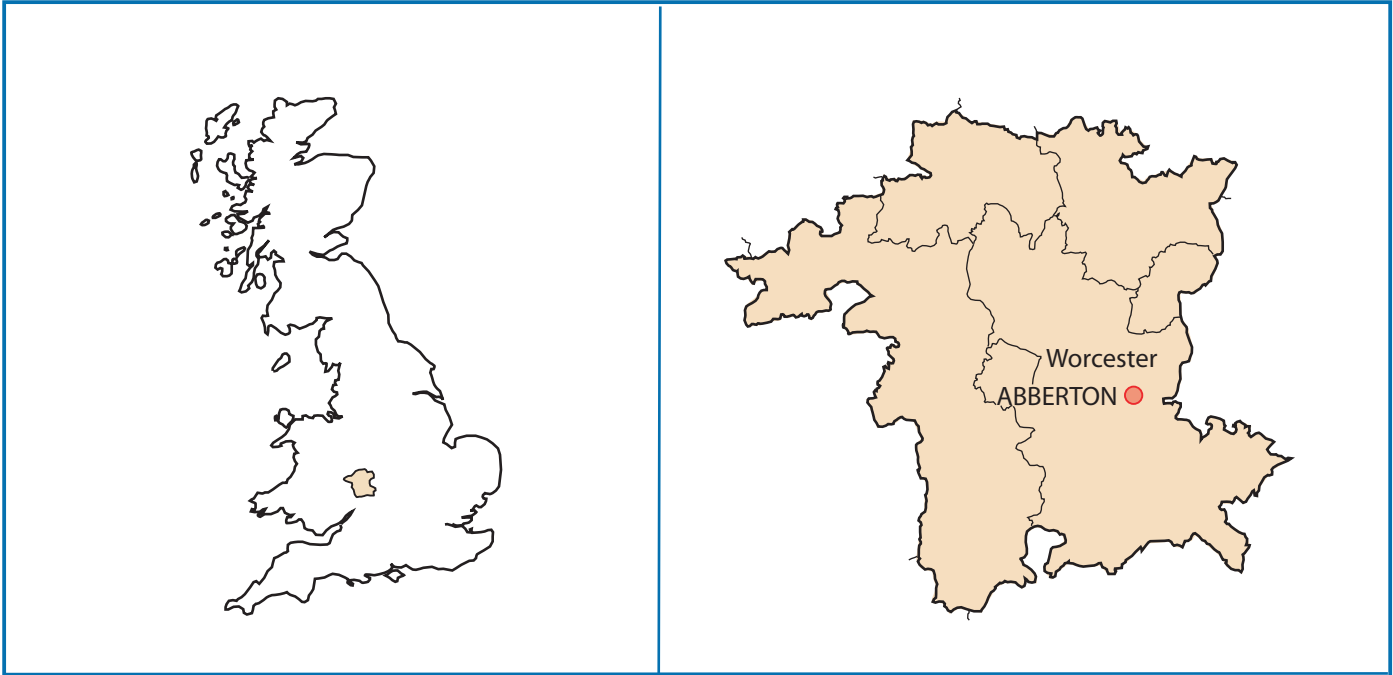
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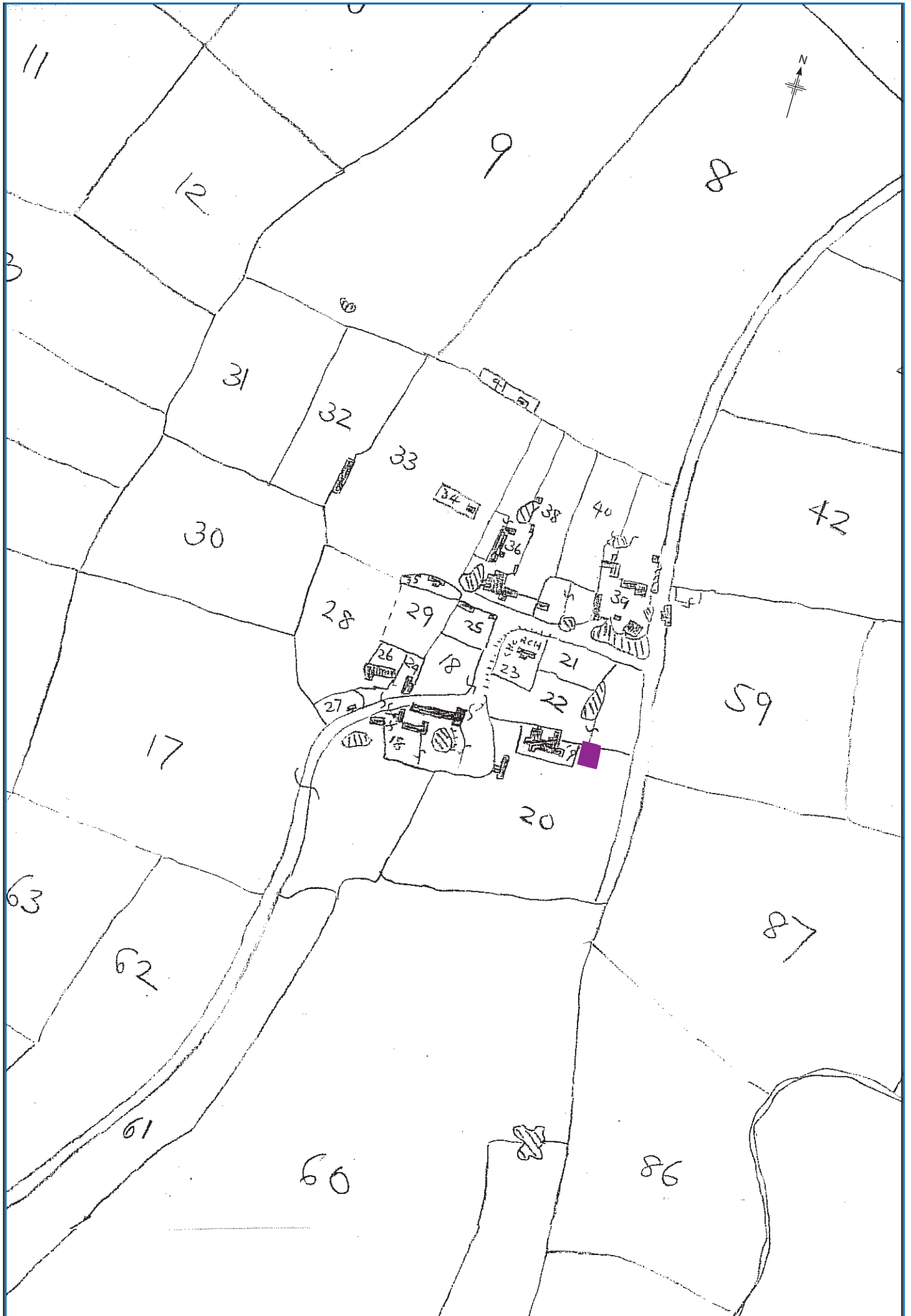
Figures



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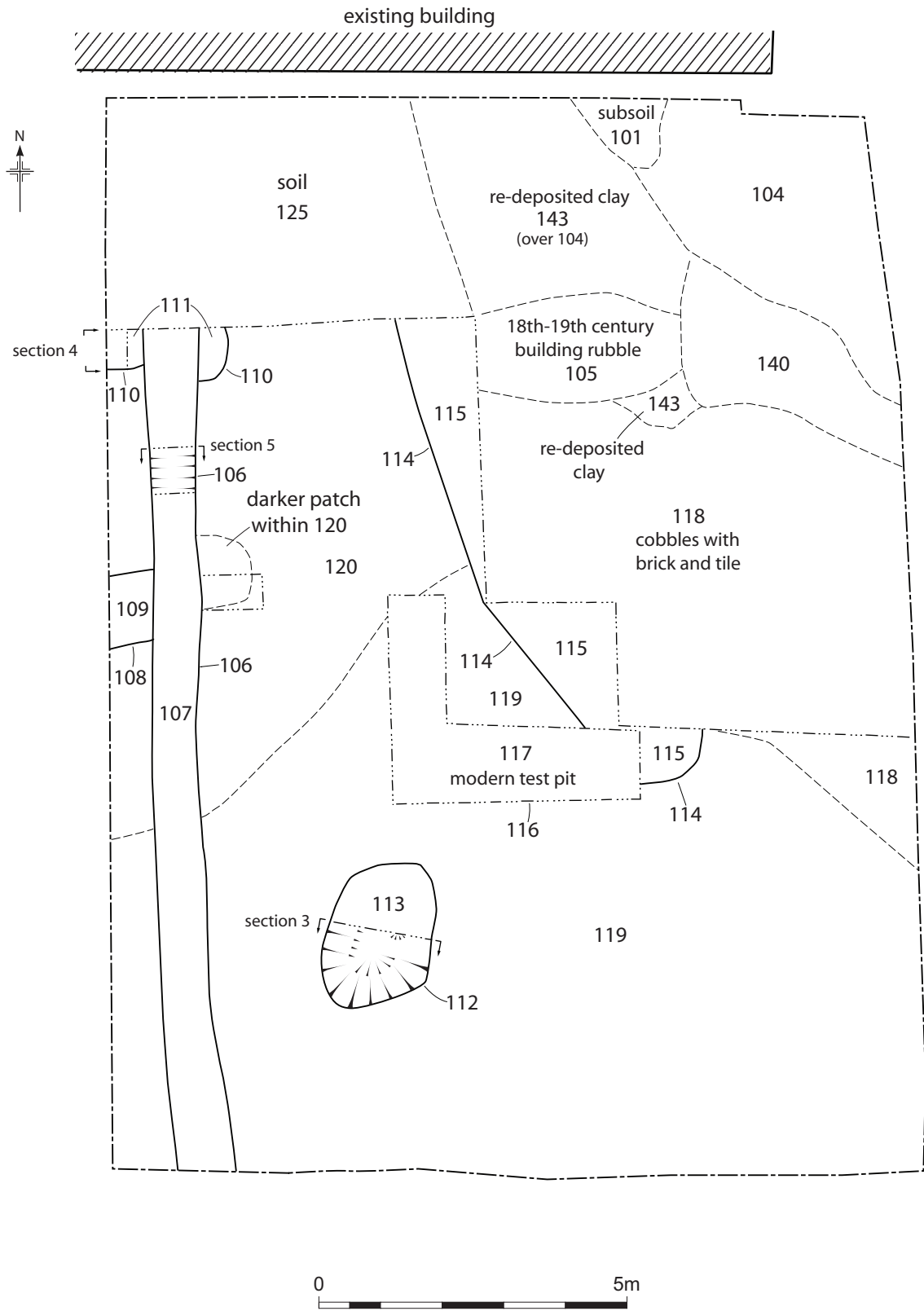
Location of the site.

Figure 1



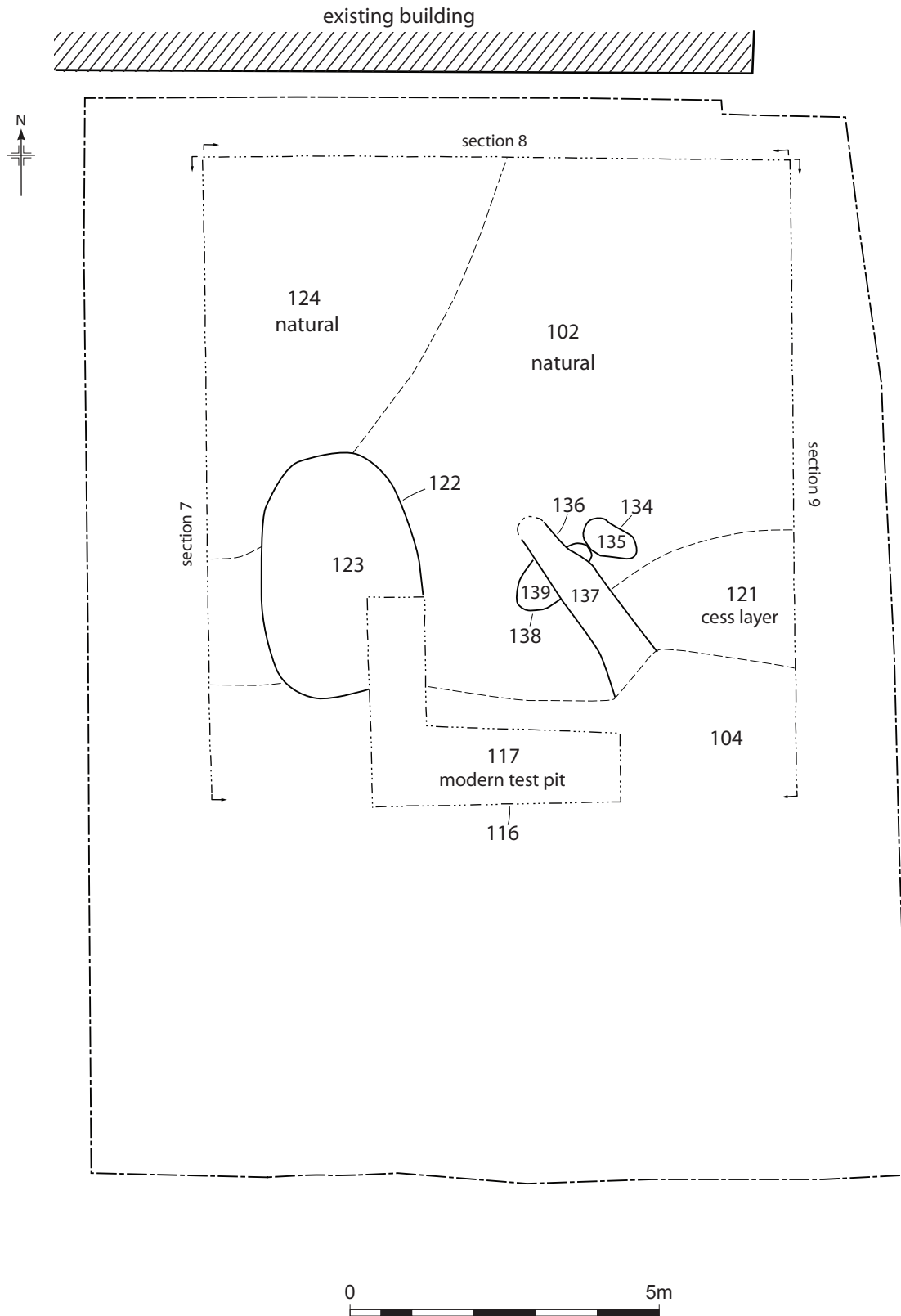
Extract from Tithe Map, 1842.

Figure 2



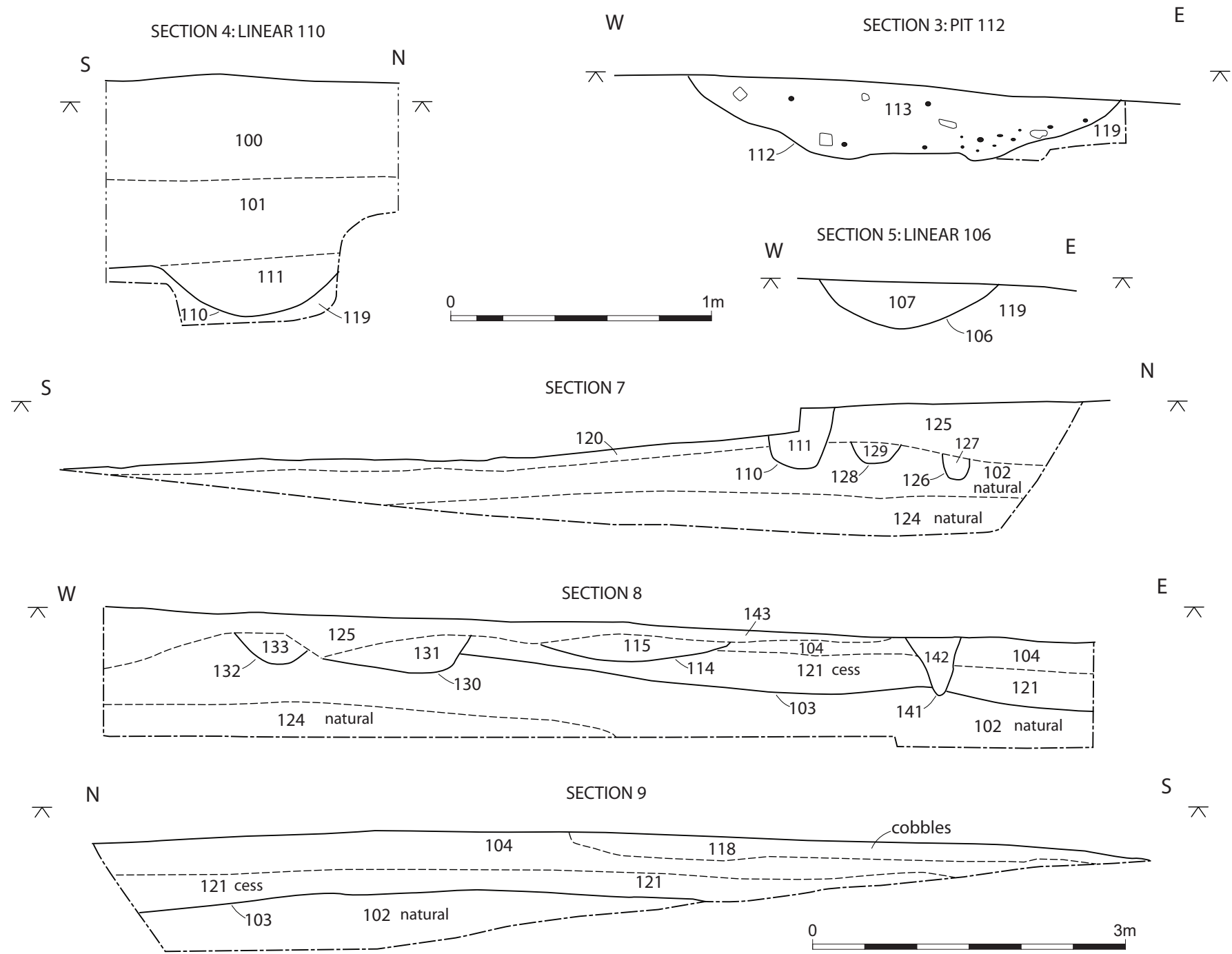
Trench plan: initial strip

Figure 3



Trench plan: final depth of excavation

Figure 4



Sections

Figure 5

Plates



Plate 1, General view north of the site after excavation of initial spit



Plate 2, General view north-west of the site after excavation of initial spit



Plate 3, View east of cobbled surface, 118, toward the north-east corner of the site



Plate 4, View north of modern postholes toward the north-east corner of the site



Plate 5, View north of pit, 112, half sectioned, with modern test pit, 116, to rear



Plate 6, View north of section through linear, 106



Plate 7, View west of section through linear, 110, and west baulk



Plate 8, View south-west of excavation of lower level in progress



Plate 9, View east of pits, 134 and 138, truncated by linear 136, at base of excavation



Plate 10, General view south-west of western baulk



Plate 11, Close up view west of north end of western section



Plate 12, View east of east section with green cess layer, 121



Plate 13, General view north of north baulk and full depth of excavation

Appendix 1 Context descriptions

Maximum dimensions: Length: 17.60m Width: 13.40m Depth: 0.65-1.95m

Orientation: north-south

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Topsoil	Dark brown clayey silt; frequent root activity, stones, brick and tile.	0.00-0.42m
101	Subsoil	Mid brownish grey and greyish brown slightly silty clay; compact and cohesive; occasional small-large rounded pebbles; 17 th -19 th century pot; diffuse boundary with 100 above. Overlies 120 and 140. Same as make up layer 125?	0.37-0.73m
102	Natural	Light yellowish grey silty clay; compact. Overlies 124.	1.08m +
103	Cut	Irregular flattish cut. Filled by 104 and 121. Cuts 102. Represents deliberate scouring of soils down to natural?	0.75-1.50m
104	Fill/layer	Firm mid grey clay silt; occasional small to medium rounded stones. 16 th century pot. 14 th -16 th century tile. Fill of 103. Overlies 121. Below 118 and 143. Cut by 114 and 141. Same as 119 and 120?	c 0.75-1.25m
105	Dump deposit	18 th -19 th century building rubble. Contemporary with 111, 118, 140 and 143. Overlies 115 and 125.	
106	Ditch	Shallow break of slope, concave sides curving to concave base. Aligned north-south. Sides slightly diffuse. 0.64m wide; >11m long. Filled by 107. Cuts 109, 111 and 119, possibly also cut through 101 subsoil? Post-medieval.	<0.73-0.94m
107	Fill	Light greyish brown slightly silty clay; occasional medium sub-rounded cobbles, very few charcoal flecks, tile, fe frags, glass slag, 17 th century pottery, tobacco pipe, bone & oyster shell. Very compact and cohesive. Naturally silted single fill of 106.	<0.73-0.94m
108	Root activity?	Aligned approx. WSW/ENE. Visible in plan during machining but not in section. c 2.60m x c 1m. Filled by 109. Within 120? Possible root activity or deeper topsoil patch?	c 0.60-0.75m
109	Fill	Mid brownish grey slightly silty clay; frequent large roots, occasional charcoal flecks and small pebbles. Fill of 108. Cut by 106. Within 120? Cuts 119.	c 0.60-0.75m
110	Ditch/pit	Shallow break of slope, concave sides curving to flattish concave base. Aligned east-west. Full extent of north side not observed. >0.70m wide, >2.05m long. Filled by 111.	0.66-1.40m
111	Fill	Dark brown grey slightly silty clay. Compact and cohesive. Very few charcoal flecks; 1 bone frag. Naturally silted single fill of 110. Cut by 106. Contemporary with 105, 118, 140 and 143. Cuts 125 and 102.	0.66-1.40m
112	Pit	Sub-oval plan, aligned north-south. Generally shallow break of slope, shallow concave sides curving to slightly irregular sub-concave shallow base. Slightly diffuse edges. Filled by 113. Below 101. Cuts 119. Domestic refuse pit?	
113	Fill	Mid greyish brown clay. Mixed deposit – frequent patches of charcoal flecks, red burnt clay/daub, occasional small sub-angular lias frags & small pebbles, degraded bone, pottery. Moderately compact and cohesive. Late 12 th - early 14 th century pot. Single deliberate fill of 112. Below 101.	

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
114	Ditch?	Very shallow break of slope. Shallow concave sides and wide concave base. Aligned NNW-SSE. Filled by 115. Cuts 104, 119, 120 and 121. Cut by 116. Same as 136. Below 125 and 143.	0.85-1.15m
115	Fill	Dark green grey silt clay. Occasional charcoal flecks. Residual Iron Age and late Saxon pot. Late 12 th - early 14 th century pot. Fill of 114. Below 105, 118, 111 and 143. Same as 137.	0.85-1.15m
116	Modern trench	Modern machine cut trench. Sharp break of slope, vertical sides. Base not observed. Filled by 117. Cuts 102, 115, 119, 120 and 123.	0.00-1.40m +
117	Fill	Mixed orangey red clay with patches of dark brown soil. Deliberate backfill of 116.	0.00-1.40m +
118	Surface	Cobbles with occasional brick and tile frags. 16 th -18 th century pot. Overlies 104, 115 and 125. Below 101. Contemporary with 105, 111, 140 and 143.	0.75-1.05m
119	Layer	Firm mid brown grey clay silt; moderate small to large rounded stones; moderate fragments of CBM; moderate root disturbance. Deposit appeared over south-east half of area. 16 th -18 th century pot. Cut by 106, 112, 114, 116. Same as 104 and 120?	
120	Layer	Firm light-mid brown grey clay silt; moderate small to medium rounded stones; high level of root disturbance. Deposit appeared over north-west half of site. Contains 109. Below 125. Cut by 106, 108, 110, 114, 116. Same as 104 and 119?	<1.05-1.40m
121	Layer	Firm mid grey green clay silt; occasional small to medium rounded stones. Below 104. Possible (animal) cess layer.	0.77-1.50m
122	Pit	Large sub-oval pit. Filled by 123. Cuts 102 and 124. Unexcavated.	<1.60m +
123	Fill	Firm mid grey brown clay silt; moderate small to large rounded stones; occasional large lumps of building stone and stone tiles; occasional large CBM fragments. 18 th century pot. Fill of 122. Cut by 116.	<1.60m +
124	Natural	Red clay – Keuper Marl – Mercian Mudstone. Below 102.	c 1.60m +
125	Layer	Make up layer. Below 143. Over 107, 127, 129, 131 and 133. Same as subsoil 101?	c 0.70-1.25m
126	Pit	Sharp break of slope, steep sides curving to concave base. Filled by 127. Below 125. Cuts 102.	1.20-1.55m
127	Fill	Dark black brown silty clay. Compact and cohesive. Charcoal flecks. Fill of 126. Below 125.	1.20-1.55m
128	Pit	Moderately sharp break of slope curving to shallow concave base. Filled by 129. Below 125. Cuts 102.	c 1.12-1.30m
129	Fill	Mid brown grey silt clay. Compact and cohesive. Fill of 128.	c 1.12-1.30m
130	Ditch	East side: sharp break of slope, side at c 60° to horizontal; West side: imperceptible break of slope, side <15° to horizontal curving to east side. Aligned north-south. Filled by 131. Below 125. Cuts 102 and 121.	c 0.75-1.14m
131	Fill	Dark green grey silt clay. Occasional charcoal flecks. Fill of 130.	c 0.75-1.14m
132	Pit	Moderate break of slope, shallow concave sides curving to concave base. Filled by 133. Cuts 102. East side truncated. Below 125.	c 0.75-1.05m

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
133	Fill	Dark green grey silty clay. Occasional charcoal flecks. Fill of 132.	c 0.75-1.05m
134	Pit	Small sub-oval pit. Aligned north-west to south-east. Filled by 135. Adjacent to 138.	<1.45m +
135	Fill	Dark grey silt clay. Occasional charcoal flecks. Residual late Saxon pot. Late 12 th - early 14 th century pot. Compact. Fill of 134.	<1.45m +
136	Ditch	Cut of linear ditch running NW-SE. The NW end of the linear was truncated by the excavation of the swimming pool. This feature was not excavated, as it is below the impact level of the development, pottery was recovered from the top of the feature. Filled by 137. Same as 114. Cuts 102, 104, 121 and 139.	<1.15m +
137	Fill	Dark grey silty clay. Occasional charcoal flecks. Compact. Late 12 th - early 14 th century pot. Fill of 136. Same as 115.	<1.15m +
138	Pit	Sub-oval pit. Aligned north-east to south-west. Filled by 139. Cut by 114/136. Adjacent to 134. Cuts 102.	<1.45m +
139	Fill	Mid grey silty clay. Compact and cohesive. Fill of 138.	<1.45m +
140	Layer	Firm mid brown clay silt; moderate small to medium rounded stones. Below 101. Contemporary with 105, 111, 118 and 143. Overlies 104.	
141	Posthole	Sharp break of slope. Sides at c 75° to horizontal, to sharp pointed base. Modern. Filled by 142. Cuts 102, 104 and 121. One of a number of un-recorded postholes to north-east corner of site?	<0.80-1.30m
142	Fill	Firm dark black clay silt; deposit is mixed and patchy. It would appear to be the backfill of a modern posthole. Single deliberate fill of 141. Sealed by 100.	<0.80-1.30m
143	Dump deposit	Redeposited red clay, as 124. Overlies 104 and 125. Below 101. Contemporary with 105, 111, 118 and 140.	<0.62-0.85m

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive

The archive consists of:

- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 55 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 2 Context number catalogues AS5
- 1 Matrix sheets AS7
- 1 Sample records AS17
- 8 Abbreviated context records AS40
- 1 Trench record sheets AS41
- 4 Permatrace sheets of scale drawings
- 6 Boxes of finds
- 1 Computer disk

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum
Hartlebury Castle
Hartlebury
Near Kidderminster
Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
Tel Hartlebury (01299) 250416

Appendix 3 Summary of data for Worcestershire HER

Summary of the artefactual assemblage

Date	Artefact type	Total	Weight (g)	Specialist report?	Important research assemblage?
Iron Age : 5 th century BC to mid 1 st century AD	Pottery	1	2	Y	N
Late Saxon 10 th to early 11 th century	Pottery	2	31	Y	N
Medieval to early post-medieval: late 12 th to 16 th century	Pottery	17	212	Y	N
Post-medieval: 17 th to 18 th century	Pottery	34	1170	Y	N
Post-medieval: 16 th to 18 th century	Ceramic building materials (brick and tile)	110	8916	N	N

Summary of the environmental assemblage

Methods of retrieval	Yes/No
Hand retrieval	NO
Bulk sample	YES
Spot sample	NO
Auger	NO
Monolith	NO
Observed	NO

Type	Preservation	Date (note 1)	Specialist report? Y/N (note 2)	Key assemblage? Y/N (note 3)
Bone – amphibian	Not decayed Desiccation Charring Mineralisation Anaerobic/anoxic - waterlogged Anaerobic/anoxic - not waterlogged			
Bone – bird				
Bone – fish				
Bone - human				
Bone – large mammal				
Bone – small mammal				
Coprolite				
Environmental deposit – ash				
Environmental deposit – peat				
Environmental deposit – phosphate				
Environmental deposit – soil				
Environmental deposit - turf				
Feathers				
Food remains				
Hair – human				
Hair – large mammal				
Hair – small mammal				
Horn/antler – large mammal				
Horn/antler – small mammal				
Insect remains				
Invertebrate remains				
Other micro-fauna				
Parasites				
Plant remains – diatoms				
Plant remains – fibre				
Plant remains – macrofossils	Charred	Medieval	Y	N
Plant remains – pollen				
Plant remains – wood				
Shell – egg				
Shell – mollusc				
Skin – amphibian				
Skin – fish				
Skin – human				
Skin – large mammal				
Skin – small mammal				
Skin – reptile				
Teeth – human				
Teeth – large mammal				
Teeth – small mammal				
Teeth – reptile				

Notes

1.1. In some cases the date will be "Undated". In most cases, especially if there is not a specialist report, the information entered in the *Date* field will be a general period such as Neolithic, Roman, medieval etc (see below for a list of periods used in the Worcestershire HER). Very broad date ranges such as *late Medieval to Post-medieval* are acceptable for artefacts that can be hard to date for example roof tiles. If you have more specific dates, such as *13th to 14th century*, please use these instead. Specific date ranges that cross general period boundaries can also be used, for example *15th to 17th century*.

Period	From	To
Palaeolithic	500000 BC	10001 BC
Mesolithic	10000 BC	4001 BC
Neolithic	4000 BC	2351 BC
Bronze Age	2350 BC	801 BC
Iron Age	800 BC	42 AD
Roman	43	409
Post-Roman	410	1065
Medieval	1066	1539
Post-medieval	1540	1900
Modern	1901	2050

Period Specific	From	To
Lower Paleolithic	500000 BC	150001
Middle Palaeolithic	150000	40001
Upper Palaeolithic	40000	10001
Early Mesolithic	10000	7001
Late Mesolithic	7000	4001
Early Neolithic	4000	3501
Middle Neolithic	3500	2701
Late Neolithic	2700	2351
Early Bronze Age	2350	1601
Middle Bronze Age	1600	1001
Late Bronze Age	1000	801
Early Iron Age	800	401
Middle Iron Age	400	101
Late Iron Age	100 BC	42 AD
Roman 1st century AD	43	100
2nd century	101	200
3rd century	201	300
4th century	301	400
Roman 5th century	401	410
Post roman	411	849
Pre conquest	850	1065
Late 11th century	1066	1100
12th century	1101	1200
13th century	1201	1300
14th century	1301	1400
15th century	1401	1500
16th century	1501	1600
17th century	1601	1700
18th century	1701	1800
19th century	1801	1900
20th century	1901	2000
21st century	2001	

2.2. Not all evaluations of small excavation assemblages have specialist reports on all classes of objects. An identification (eg clay pipe) and a quantification is not a specialist report. A short discussion or a more detailed record identifying types and dates is a specialist report. This field is designed to point researchers to reports where they will find out more than merely the presence or absence of material of a particular type and date.

3.3. This field should be used with care. It is designed to point researchers to reports where they will be able to locate the most important assemblages for any given material for any given period. Most assemblages will not, on their own, be key assemblages.
