

Colwyn, Foulkes and Partners

East Wing, Lavendon Grange, Olney, Buckinghamshire

NGR SP 9025 5365

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

S.A.M. No. 19064

Oxford Archaeological Unit

January 2001

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Summary

In January 2001 Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Lavendon Grange, Olney, Buckinghamshire (SP 9025 5365). A north-south aligned, rubble filled ditch and evidence for a possible 17th-century garden feature were recorded during the watching brief.

Introduction

Scheduled Monument Consent has been granted by English Heritage for the construction of an extension to the East Wing of Lavendon Grange, which is a Grade II listed building. The grounds upon which the extension is to be built form part of a scheduled monument (SAM 19064). The extension comprises two storeys with an accompanying terrace, driveway, garage and associated services. Due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological deposits, provision was made for an archaeological watching brief during the groundworks for the new extension.

The site is located to the west of the village of Lavendon (Fig.1) at c70 m OD, the underlying geology is Oxford clay / Boulder clay.

2 Background

The development site is located in an area of potential archaeological significance as it is on or near the site of Lavendon Abbey, which was founded in 1154-58 by John de Bidun, then sheriff of Buckinghamshire. The foundation of Premonstratensian Abbeys in England were predominantly supported by the minor nobility, and Lavendon Abbey was the only Premonstratensian Abbey in Buckinghamshire.

The Abbey was dissolved in 1536 and today very little survives to indicate either its exact location or size and layout. The Victoria County History of Buckinghamshire states that 'some fragments of the moat surrounding the site exist to the west of the village, and foundations have been discovered to the west of them' (VCH, Bucks, IV, p.379). An English Heritage Inspectors report of 1992 (ref. AA 62990/1) states that the 'exact position of the abbey buildings, including the church, is uncertain', and that only fishponds and traces of a field system remain. The present site of the Grange is thought likely to be situated on the Abbey buildings. The Grange itself was originally built c1625, probably with re-used stone from the Abbey (RCHM(E) 1913 - Historical Monuments of Buckinghamshire), and consisted of what is now the West Wing and the Brewhouse. The Grange was subsequently extensively modified and added to, with the South Wing being built late in the 18th/early 19th century, and the East Wing itself being built in 1911.

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

4 Methodology

The watching brief was undertaken by means of separate inspection visits; with the exception of the archaeological features observed, all digging was undertaken by mechanical excavator.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil description utilised standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results (*Figs 2,3 and 4*)

The existing site comprised a bank which sloped at approximately 20° from the top of the bank to the base of the east wall of the east wing - a drop of approximately 1 m (*Figs 2 and 3*).

The bank had presumably been created during the construction of the East Wing in 1911, when the natural east-west slope of the site appears to have been levelled. As a result, the deposits overlying the natural varied greatly in depth from east to west, and the natural clay (4) was encountered at a depth of c0.15 m to the west of the site and c0.40 m to the east (*Fig. 3*).

The general stratigraphic sequence revealed consisted of 0.1 m - 0.2 m of topsoil (7) overlying a mixed deposit of silty clay and stone fragments (5) which varied in depth from a maximum of 0.2 m to the east of the excavated area, and 0.05 m to the west.

Prior to the excavation of the strip foundation trenches for the new extension, the bank within the development area had to be levelled. This involved the excavation of the topsoil and underlying deposit and a significant incursion into the clay natural. At the eastern extent of the excavated area and sealed by deposit 5, a north-south aligned ditch (1) was observed (see *Fig 4.1*). This had two distinct fills, the lower of which (2) was a mid-grey brown silty clay with c5% stone inclusions. The upper fill (3) was a mid-grey silty clay, which had between 10% and 70% stone blocks (no larger than 0.30 m x 0.20 m x 0.10 m), the majority being towards the base of the deposit (*Fig. 4*). The ditch was initially thought to be a wall footing, given the large quantities of stone observed, but during recording it became apparent that none of the stone was worked or mortared, and no coursing was visible. The two sections which were excavated across the feature (*Fig. 4*) confirmed that the concentration of stone was considerably greater towards the bottom of the feature, and that the profile of the feature suggested a ditch cut rather than a construction cut for a wall.

In addition to the stone within the fills of the ditch, a single course of bricks (6), aligned east-west, truncated the upper fill (3) of the ditch and appeared to be flanked by a single course of stonework (*Fig. 2*). The brickwork is almost certainly seventeenth century in date and may be associated with the construction of the present Grange in 1625-6 by Robert Eccleston. A small quantity of ceramic building material (CBM) - including a number of floor tiles - was also recovered from the top of the upper ditch fill (3), most of which were located at the interface between the upper fill

and the overlying layer (5) - suggesting that they post-date the ditch and are contemporary with the brickwork (6).

6 Finds

A limited assemblage of finds was recovered during the watching brief.

The hand made CBM recovered from the upper limit of the top fill of the ditch - and from the overlying deposit (5) - was almost certainly contemporary with the 17th-century brickwork which truncates the ditch.

One sherd of possible medieval pottery - of indeterminate date - was recovered from the upper fill (3) of the ditch, as was a stone roof tile with a drilled hole. Although this does not give a secure date for the ditch, it does suggest that the stone recorded within the fills may have originated from a medieval context.

7 Environmental results

None of the archaeological deposits revealed were considered to have potential for environmental analysis.

8 Discussion

Given the limited nature of the development a clear interpretation of the features observed is difficult. Little dating evidence was recovered, other than the brickwork which truncated the upper fill of the ditch and the tenuous evidence from the upper fill (3) of the ditch.

The bricks and floor tiles are 17th century in date, and may have formed part of a path leading to the Grange building. This can be no more than conjectural as the extent of the brickwork was not revealed, and that which was had been truncated during groundwork for the construction of the East Wing in 1911.

Although no secure date could be attributed to the ditch - other than that it was truncated by the seventeenth century brickwork and contained medieval material within the upper fill - a number of possible interpretations as to its function are suggested below:

Given the high concentration of stone, particularly within the lower fill, it is feasible that the ditch was originally excavated as a foundation for a dry stone wall which has subsequently collapsed and/or been robbed, which would account for the lower concentration of stone in the upper fill(s), and the spread of stone throughout the overlying deposit (5).

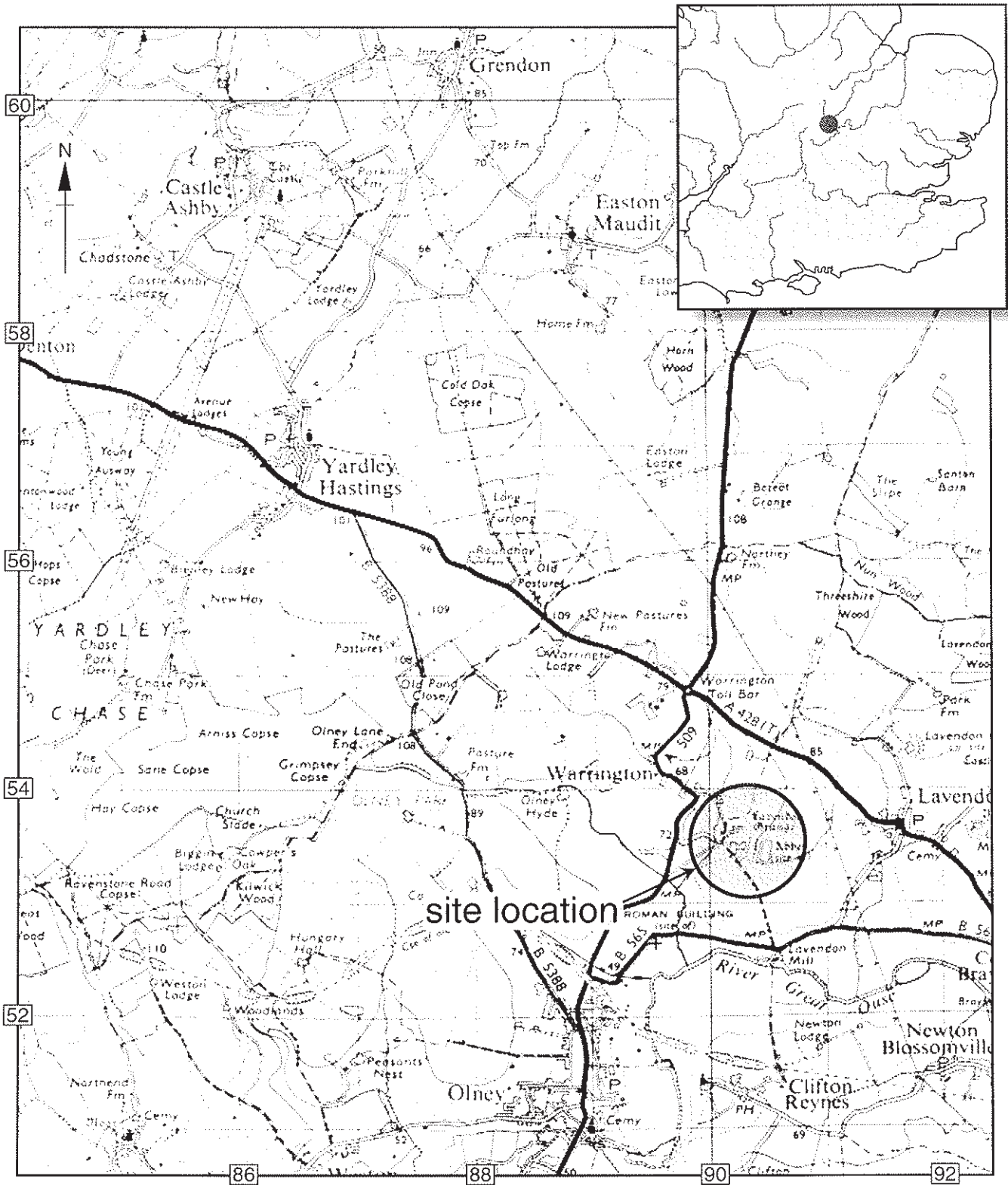
Alternatively, it is possible that the stone within the ditch was used to facilitate drainage. Despite the fact that the alignment of the ditch does not support this hypothesis - as the topography slopes from east to west and the ditch runs from north to south - it is possible that the ditch drained into the fishpond adjacent to the development site.

It is also possible that the ditch has been backfilled during the construction of the original Grange in c1625. As suggested above, the Grange may well have been constructed using material from the Abbey buildings, and it is feasible that the less suitable stone was discarded, perhaps filling a ditch which no longer served any function. It is possible that this ditch represents the north-south return of the existing east-west aligned ditch which runs into the fishpond to the east of the site (Fig. 5), Possibly forming part of an enclosure/moat around the existing fishponds and/or associated earthworks.

References.

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).

Victoria County History of Buckinghamshire, Vol. IV, 1927, London.



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Figure 1: Site location

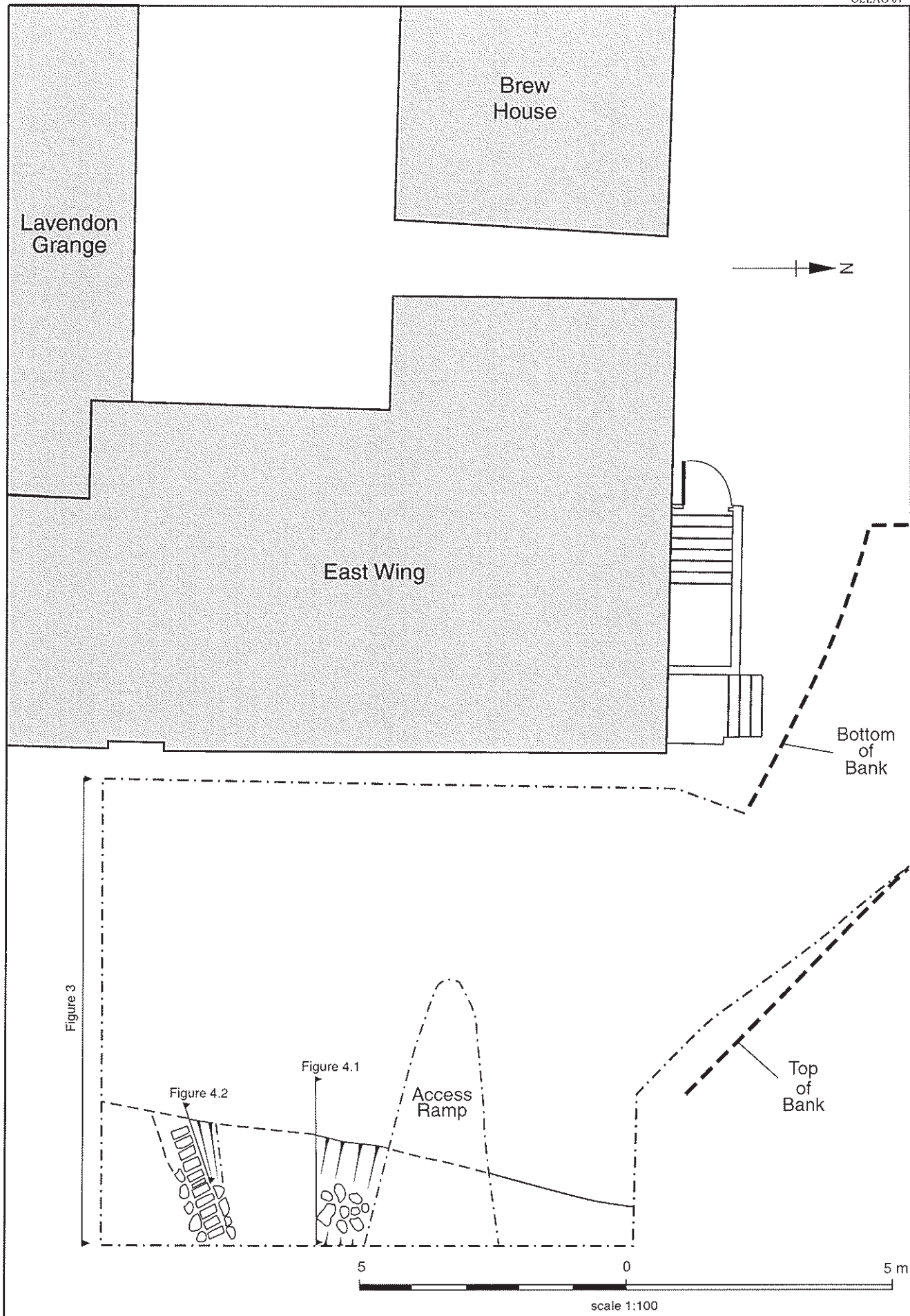


Figure 2: Site plan

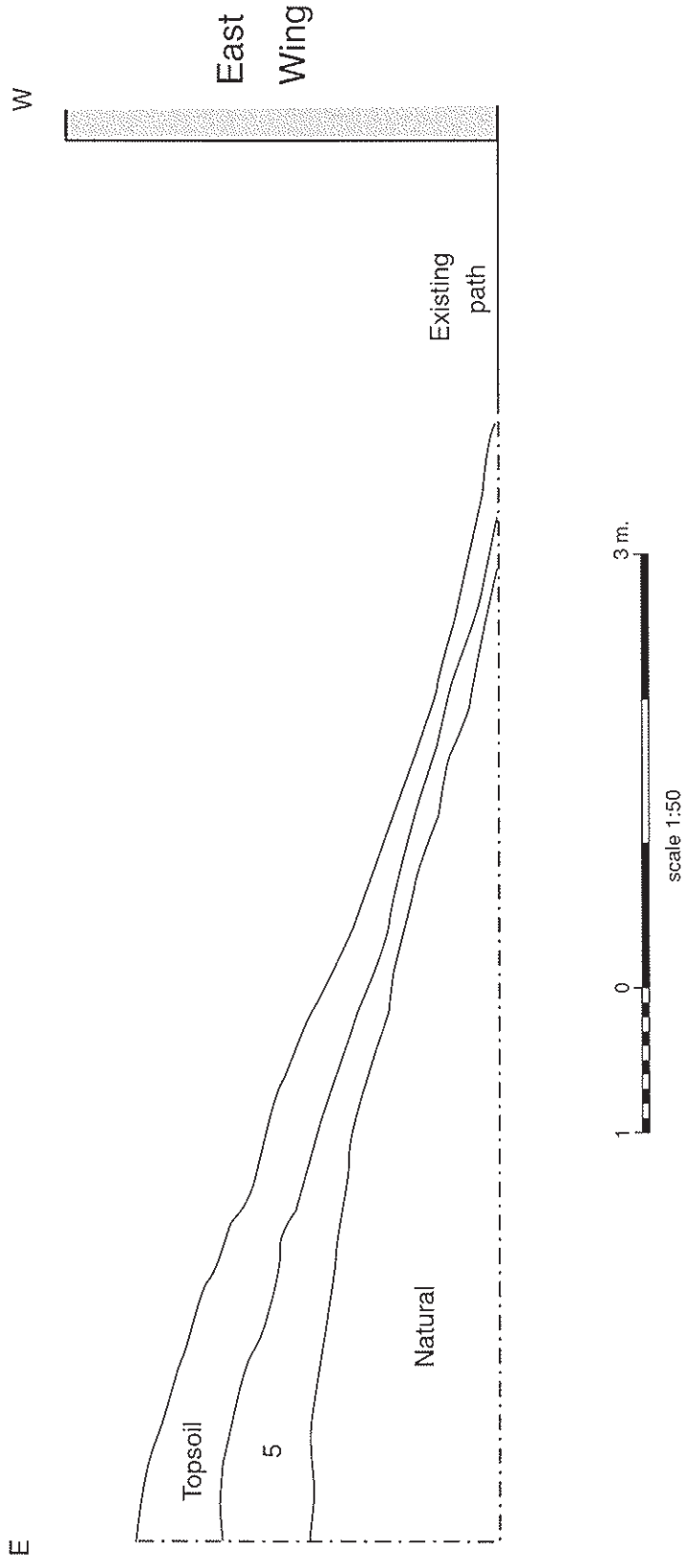


Figure 3: Section through bank

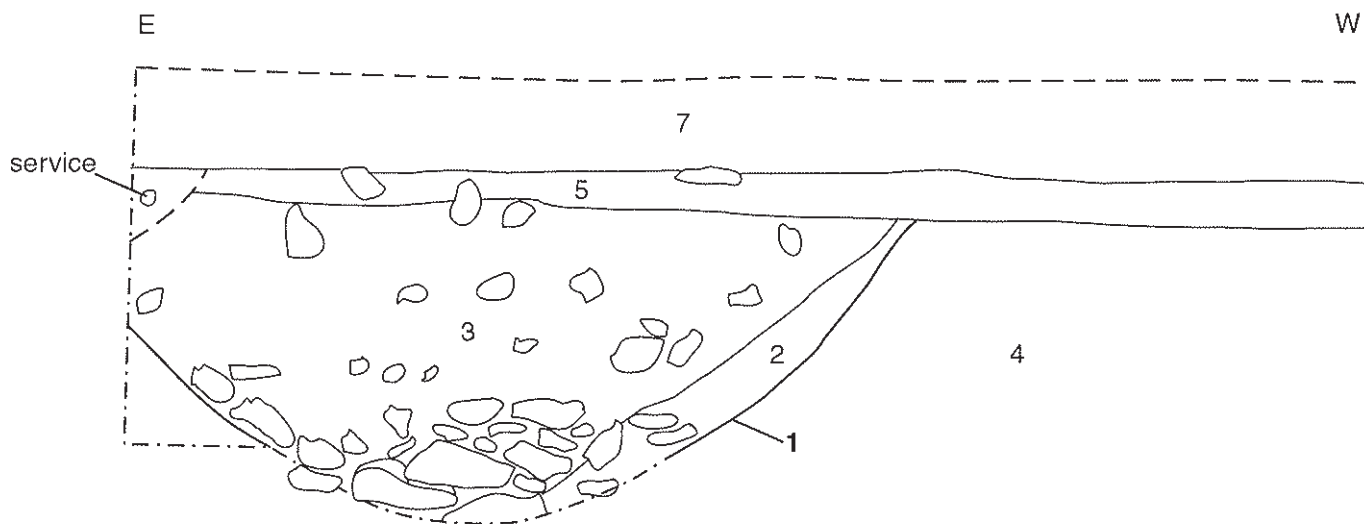


Figure 4.1: Section through ditch

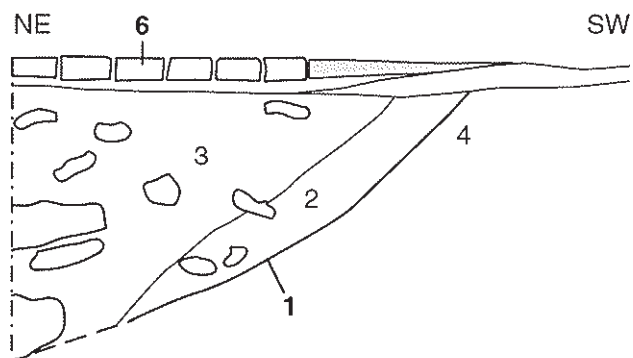
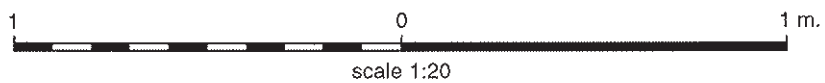


Figure 4.2: Section through ditch and brickwork



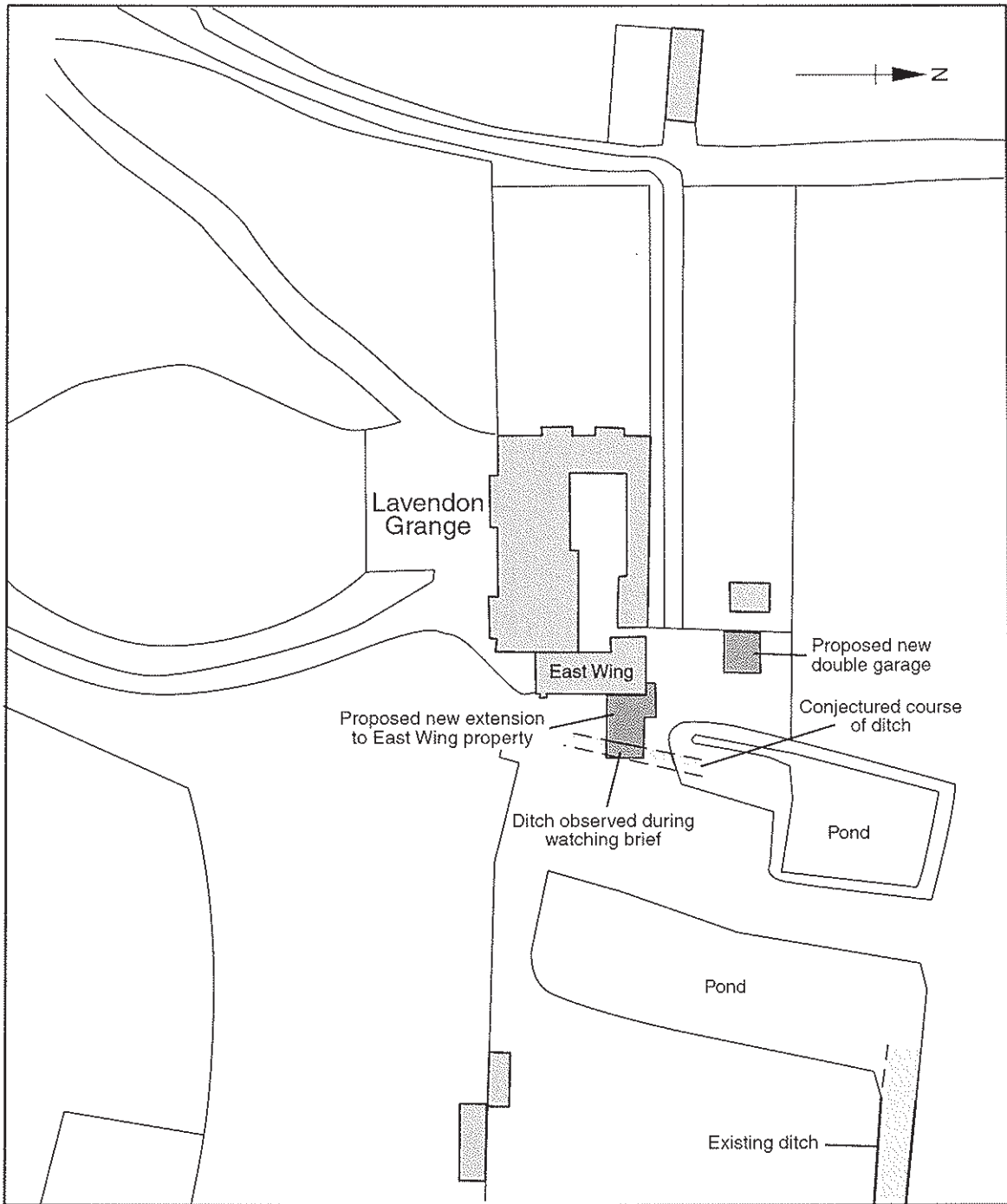


Figure 5: Development area and ditch in relation to existing features



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