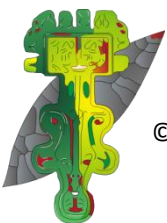


2011

Results of an Archaeological Watching Brief
West Gardens, Dyrham Park, Dyrham, South Gloucestershire, SN14 8ER



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Absolute Archaeology

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Ref: AArc 43/11/WB

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Note

Whereas Absolute Archaeology have taken all care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

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General chronological table

Period	Date	Information
Prehistoric	800000 – 43 AD	Generalised period from the earliest human activity in Britain (Happisburgh) to the conquest of Britain by Claudius.
Palaeolithic	800000 - 10000 BC	Mobile groups, ephemeral habitation evidence, stone tool technology. Material evidence found predominantly in caves. Earliest evidence for hominins in Britain is at Happisburgh and Pakefield in Norfolk dating to the Early Pleistocene c.800,000 BP.
Mesolithic	10000 – 4000 BC	Period of major transformation in the European environment and landscape after the end of the last Ice Age. Mobile hunter-gatherer communities, sophisticated tool technology and some semi-permanent settlement, particularly along the east coast of England and in Ireland.
Neolithic	4000 – 2350 BC	Emergence of monumental architecture, such as long barrows and causewayed enclosures. Movement towards more complex society and sedentary lifestyles.
Bronze Age	2350 – 800 BC	Introduction of Bronze, construction of barrows/tumuli for the dead in the early stages replaced by a lack of monuments and the preponderance toward hoard deposition.
Iron Age	800 BC– 43 AD	Introduction of Iron and the return of monumental architecture in the form of hillforts, tribal boundaries and the introduction of coinage.
Romano-British	43-410 AD	Romano-British period including the emergence of villas and Roman infrastructure.

Anglo-Saxon	410 – 1066 AD	Post-Roman period including Saxon invasions and the arrival of Christianity.
Medieval	1066 – 1650 AD	Medieval period in Britain including Tudor activity, with arbitrary cut off point of 1650 AD.
Post-Medieval	1650 – 1900 AD	Period of rapid industrial development and changes to the English landscape.
Modern	1900 – 1950 AD	Including WWI, WWII and Cold War archaeology.

**West Garden, Dyrham Park House
Dyrham Park, Dyrham
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**Results of an
Archaeological Watching Brief
in the West Gardens**

**On Behalf of
The National Trust**

**By
Absolute Archaeology**

NGR 374151 175763

Site Code AARC 43

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25th May 2011

Summary

During February 2011, Absolute Archaeology was commissioned by the National Trust to carry out an archaeological watching brief in the West Gardens of Dyrham House. The excavation of 180 metres of trenching, to replace an existing leaking copper pipe (running from the Stable block along the edge of the West Garden lawns and down to the West gate), was monitored throughout by archaeologists from Absolute Archaeology. The monitoring was required to ascertain whether any archaeological features were present along the line of the cut trench.

The watching brief, carried out over a five day intermittent period, recognised two areas of archaeology dating to the Romano-British and 17th century periods. Also of note was the diversity in geology from the area of Dyrham House to Upper Street, to the west of the gardens.

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Maps

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Abbreviations

aOD

Above Ordnance Datum; used to express a given height above mean sea level.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out during the monitoring of trenching for the laying of a new water pipe in the West Gardens of Dyrham House. The monitoring was commissioned by Mr Dale Dennehy, on behalf of the National Trust and was carried out by Absolute Archaeology in February 2011. The work was commissioned to assess the potential for undisturbed archaeological layers in the vicinity of an existing water pipe, and does not represent a response to any planning condition.

The line of the trench ran on a gentle NNE-SSW slope, dropping 2m from the House to Upper Street, Dyrham (to the west of the gardens). The area of trenching is located on the eastern and northern edges of the 'Short West Lawns', below the Parish Church of St Peter and along the northern edge of the 'Long West Lawn'.

2. GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY and HYDROLOGY

The site lies within a natural amphitheatre, with the escarpments geology being made up of the Fullers earth sequence. At the lower level, where the house and gardens are situated, the geology changes into what is known as the junction between the Middle Lias 'Dyrham silts' and Upper Lias 'Midford sands' (British Regional Geology Map 265; Green 1992, 98-103). Several natural springs emerge from the Middle Jurassic layers at the point where Dyrham house now stands.

The site is located across the gardens to the west of the main house, ranging from NGR ST 74151 75763 (Stable Block) to ST 7398 7581 (West Gate), at the junction with Upper Street, Dyrham.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL/HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The protective nature of the surrounding hillsides and the spring sources combine to give an ideal position for settlement. Indeed recent excavations alongside the main lake produced evidence of Late Iron Age and Romano British activity/deposits as the result of the watching brief during the construction of the serpentine pathway (Martin 2008, 3; Martin 2008, 5). The settlement of Dyrham is mentioned in the Domesday survey of AD 1086, with the earliest reference for an estate dating from the middle of the 13th century. Records detail substantial redevelopment of the property from the middle of the 15th century. Dyrham House is primarily late 17th century in date.

The elaborate gardens illustrated by Johannes Kip and published in AD 1712 depict the layout created for William Blathwayt, between 1691 and 1704. This shows extensive terracing which would almost certainly have destroyed (in areas) any earlier archaeological features. A 1790's colour wash suggests substantial levelling throughout the late 17th and early 18th century landscaping. The positive side to this landscaping (banked material) is that it may also cover and preserves features. However, monitoring of the pipe trenching confirmed that landscaping along the 'Long West Lawn' is likely to have truncated any archaeological evidence.

Dyrham is reputed to be the location of the AD 577 battle, fought between the West Saxons and Britons at Deorham, where three British kings (Coinmail, Condidan and Farinmail) were killed: "*Here Cuthwine and Ceawlin fought against the Britons, and they killed 3 kings, Coinmail and Condidan and Farinmail, in the place which is called [Deorham]; and took 3 cities: Gloucester and Cirencester and Bath*" (Swanton 2000, 18).

This extract from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle suggests that Dyrham may have been an important strategic place during the interim Romano-British-Early Saxon period. In AD 972 King Edgar granted privileges and restoration of land at Dyrham (Sawyer 1968, 250).

4. PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK AT DYRHAM

Previous archaeological work comprised a geophysical survey of the West Garden lawns (Hanks and Papworth 1997). Martin Papworth excavated a series of evaluation trenches, targeting areas of 18th century garden features, in 2001 and 2002.

Archaeological monitoring during the reconstruction of the gardens to the west of the stables and house was carried out by AC archaeology in 2005-6 (Whelan and Hawkes 2006). Cobbled yard surfaces and pathways were uncovered, with areas showing evidence of wheel ruts. The results of Whelan and Hawkes' monitoring suggests that Kip's illustration of AD 1712 may have included a certain amount of artistic licence, in that no decorative pitched stone arrangements were found during the archaeological monitoring.

Archaeological monitoring undertaken by AC archaeology during the construction of the Serpentine pathway in 2007 exposed areas of differential soils to the north bank of the lower pond. Investigation and partial excavation revealed a Late Iron Age/Romano British ditch (Context 33) in Area 'C', and a spread of Romano-British demolition material (collapsed building stone) which included tufa, ceramic building tile, mortar and pottery, in Area 'A'. These features (Area

'A') were in turn cut by an 18th century water culvert and the construction cut for a dry stone wall (probably the wall depicted in the Kip engraving of 1712). Another 18th century water culvert was located in Area 'B'. Further archaeological monitoring recorded dry stone wall foundations (Context 36) adjacent to the nut walk and a border retaining wall (Context 35) just NE of the lower pond. These both appeared to be post-Medieval in date (Martin 2008, 6; Fig 4).

Five test pits (Contexts 110-114) were excavated in 2007 prior to the planting of the yew and privet hedges in the upper west gardens. These revealed areas of pitched limestone cobbling, similar to those found by Whelan and Hawkes in 2005-6 (Martin 2008, 6; Fig 4).

Two test pits were excavated in 2008, prior to the construction of a *Clairvoyee*, above the water cascade in the West Gardens. A Victorian rockery was revealed in Test Pit 1 (Martin and Driscoll 2008) and a horizontal layer of large undressed limestone slabs was recorded in Test Pit 2 (Martin and Driscoll 2008). The laying of the slabs was interpreted as potentially representing pre 16th century activity (Martin and Driscoll 2008, 6).

5. METHODOLOGY

The excavation of 180 metres of trench was carried out using a mini 360 degree digger with a 300mm wide grading bucket. The depth of the trench ranged from 600mm to 700mm. The hand cleaning of features was carried out where necessary.

All recording was carried out using Absolute Archaeology's recording system, which includes written, drawn and photographic records.

The archive has been prepared using the site code AArc43.

6. RESULTS

6.1. Introduction

Though the slit trench was continuous, it was thought appropriate to divide the trenching into three areas (see Fig 2):

- **Trench/Area 1.** From the Stable block to the SE corner of the Short West Lawn, measuring approximately 8 metres and from the SE to the NE corners of the Short West Lawn and measuring approximately 24 metres.

- **Trench/Area 2.** From the NE corner of the Short West Lawn to the NE corner of the Long West Lawn and measuring approximately 30 metres.
- **Trench/Area 3.** From the NE corner of the Long West Lawn to the West Gate and measuring approximately 118 metres.

The course of the excavation mainly followed the service trench cut for the existing copper pipe, meaning that only the sections of the excavation could be viewed for traces of archaeological activity.

6.2. Detailed Description

6.2.1. Trench/Area 1

Trench/Area 1 revealed three archaeological features. A culvert [107] measuring 250mm in width x 450mm in depth, was identified running north-south (see Fig. 4). The drain comprised limestone uprights and was capped by rough limestone slabs, measuring <600mm in width. The feature almost certainly represents a drain away for this area of Dyrham house (see photo 2). The culvert was located 1.9m south of the NW corner of the Stable Block and approximately 700mm west of the building (NGR ST 74151 75763). A gap in the capping stones had been made to insert the copper water pipe, in this area of the trench.

Two other features were located 3.5m north of the SE corner of the Short West Lawn (see photo 3), and were measured at 6.3m along the trench. The features were visible in the east facing section only, and it was clear that they had been cut obliquely during the primary and secondary pipe trenching. This resulted in a distorted view of the width of the features, giving them the appearance of being wider than they actually may be.

The features were sealed by 100mm of topsoil turfline (100), overlaying the partially truncated 17th century cobblestone surface (105). The cobblestones were measured to a depth of 250mm in places and were still pitched in areas where modern landscaping had not removed the material. The archaeological features appear to represent a linear [104] and a robbed out structure of an undetermined nature (101) and [102]. The orientation of these two features is speculation, though the linear is likely to be on a NNW-SSE or NNE-SSW alignment. Due to the limitations of the excavation, it was not possible to record the accurate shape or dimensions of the potential linear feature, which was not excavated at this time. The feature was filled by a dark greyish brown (10YR 3/2), soft silty clay (103). Finds recovered from the fill comprise ceramic sherds, animal bone, brick fragments, mortar and one *Fe* object (unidentified). Occasional flecks of charcoal

were noted throughout (c. 3%). The ditch measured 3.5m (oblique width) in section and was almost certainly truncated during the 17th century landscaping of the garden (see Fig. 3).

Potential construction cut [102] appeared to cut the fill of linear [104], indicating that the feature is stratigraphically later. The deposit filling the cut was heavily disturbed, leaving no obvious trace of the original backfill of the construction trench. The material noted comprised building demolition identified as abundant (c. 20%) crushed lime mortar and larger mortar fragments measuring <200mm, with a moderate amount of CBM (Ceramic Building Material) fragments contained within the backfill. The remainder of the fill comprised a light yellowish brown, soft silty clay (10YR 4/3). The feature appears to have also been heavily truncated and was measured at an oblique width of 2.8m.

Finds from the fill (103) of the ditch are Romano-British in date. Lack of diagnostic finds (pottery etc) from the demolition deposit (101) is problematic, though the feature can be said to predate the 17th century and a Romano-British date cannot be ruled out. The brick fragments found from the demolition layer (101) whilst not diagnostic, could be said to date to the Romano-British period, but may also relate to a later phase of activity.

6.2.2. Trench/Area 2

Trench/Area 2 revealed no archaeological deposits, layers or features. It was clear that the area had been reduced by terracing in the late 17th century, down on to Lower Jurassic Midford sands /Dyrham silts (BGS Sheet 265). Any surviving archaeology would most likely have been removed as a result of this landscaping.

6.2.3. Trench/Area 3

Trench/Area 3 revealed a pathway (401) dating to the 20th century, following the alignment of the Long West Lawn and visible in section for 41m.

Once again no earlier archaeological deposits, layers or features were identified in this area. The geology was noted to change abruptly from Lower Jurassic Midford sands /Dyrham silts to thick blue compacted Lias clays (BGS 265). The change was recorded 55m west of the boundary separating the short and long west lawns.

6.3. FINDS

Altogether there were 23 finds from 2 contexts. The finds were recorded as follows:

AREA	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	WEIGHT	DATE
TRENCH/AREA2	101	2 LARGE PIECES OF RED BRICK	950g	ROMANO-BRITISH?
TRENCH/AREA2	101	WHITE MORTAR	29g	ROMANO-BRITISH?
TRENCH/AREA2	101	2 CARBONIFEROUS SANDSTONE TILES	1218g	ROMANO-BRITISH?
TRENCH/AREA2	103	2 PIECES OF RED BRICK	124g	ROMANO-BRITISH
TRENCH/AREA2	103	5 SHERDS OF ROMANO-BRITISH POTTERY	38g	ROMANO-BRITISH
TRENCH/AREA2	103	6 ANIMAL BONES	12g	ROMANO-BRITISH
TRENCH/AREA2	103	1 IRON (Fe) OBJECT	305g	ROMANO-BRITISH
TRENCH/AREA2	103	4 PIECES OF MORTAR	5g	ROMANO-BRITISH

No specialist interpretation of the finds has been commissioned at this stage. The finds will be added to the private collection held at Dyrham Park and Gardens, to enable the National Trust specialists to assess the collection as a whole.

7. COMMENTS

Although the majority of the groundwork exposed areas of previously disturbed material, the decision to carry out a watching brief has resulted in the discovery of archaeological features close to the main house, raising the potential for further archaeology to be preserved on the site.

The watching brief has provided further evidence for Romano- British activity in the vicinity of Dyrham Park and Gardens. Romano-British features found during landscaping on the northern slopes above the lake (Martin 2008, 3; Martin 2008, 5; Figs 2-3), and possibly the layer exposed above the cascade in Test Pit 2 (Martin and Driscoll 2008: 6; Fig 4), could be related to the recent Romano-British findings in and around the Short West Lawn. In conclusion, the probability of a major Romano-British settlement close to, or on the site of, Dyrham House is extremely high. Sadly, the landscaping of the northern side of the West Gardens, carried out during the 17th century, is likely to have resulted in the destruction/truncation of any potential remaining features.

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9. FIGURES

Figure 1 Location of Project Site, Dyrham West Garden (Not to Scale)

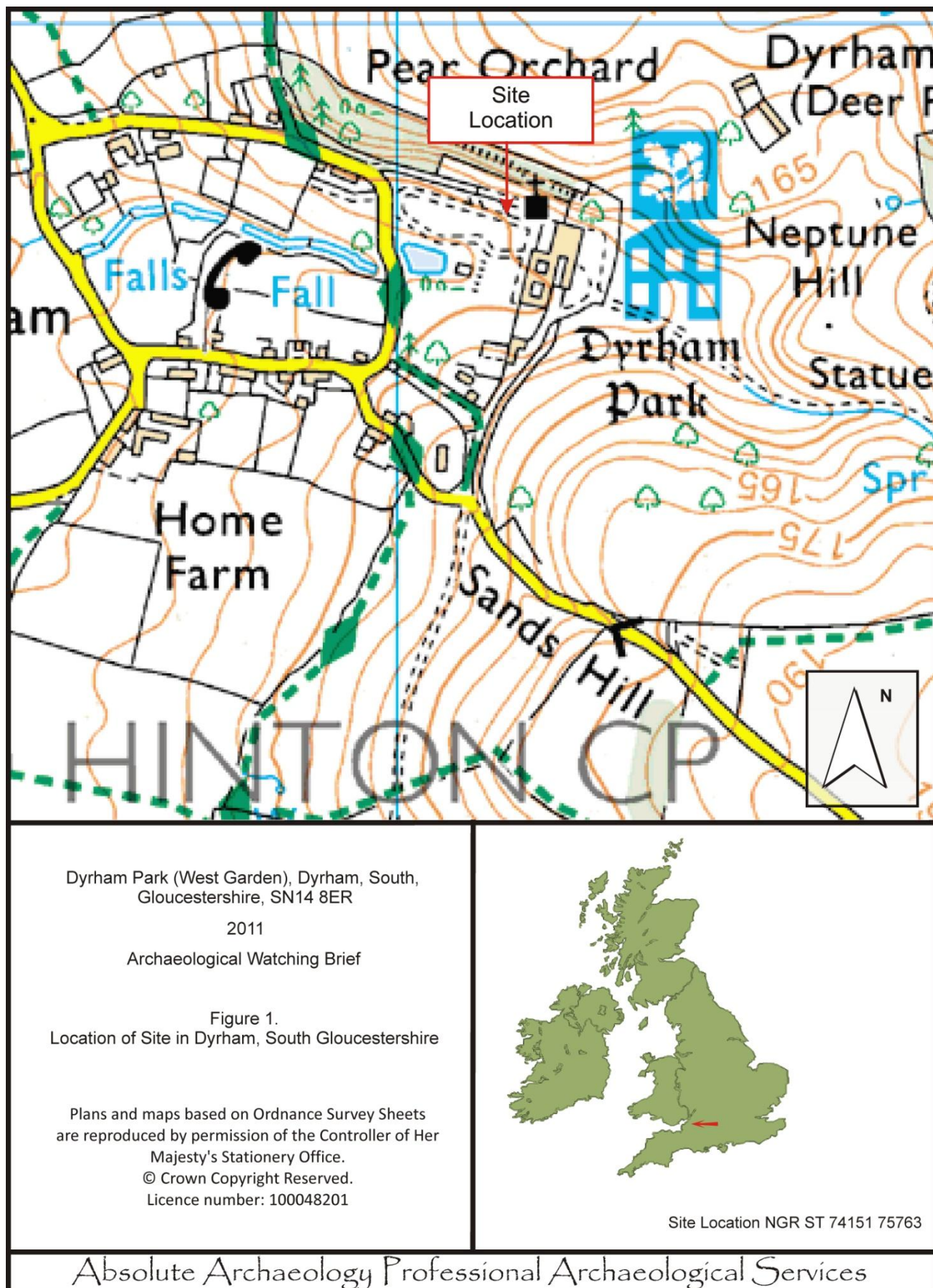


Figure 2 Plan of Project Site (Scale 1:800)

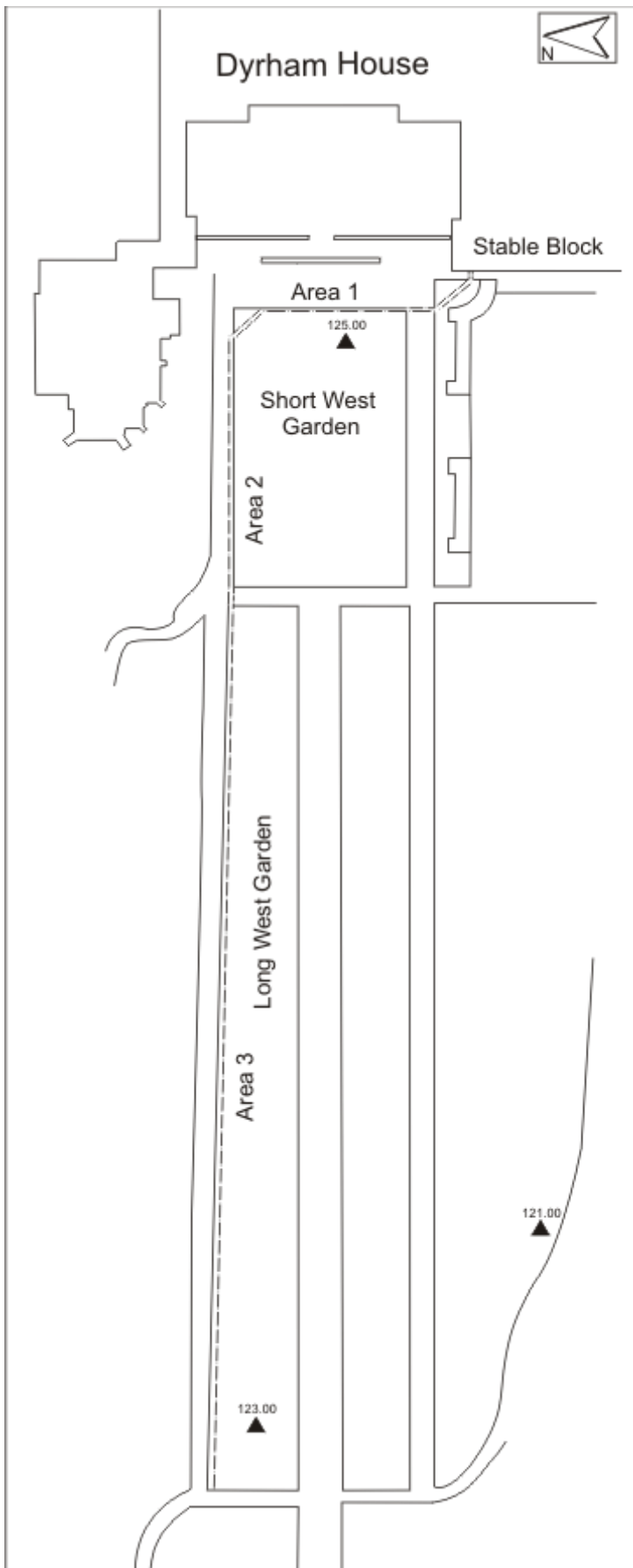


Figure 3 East Facing Section One

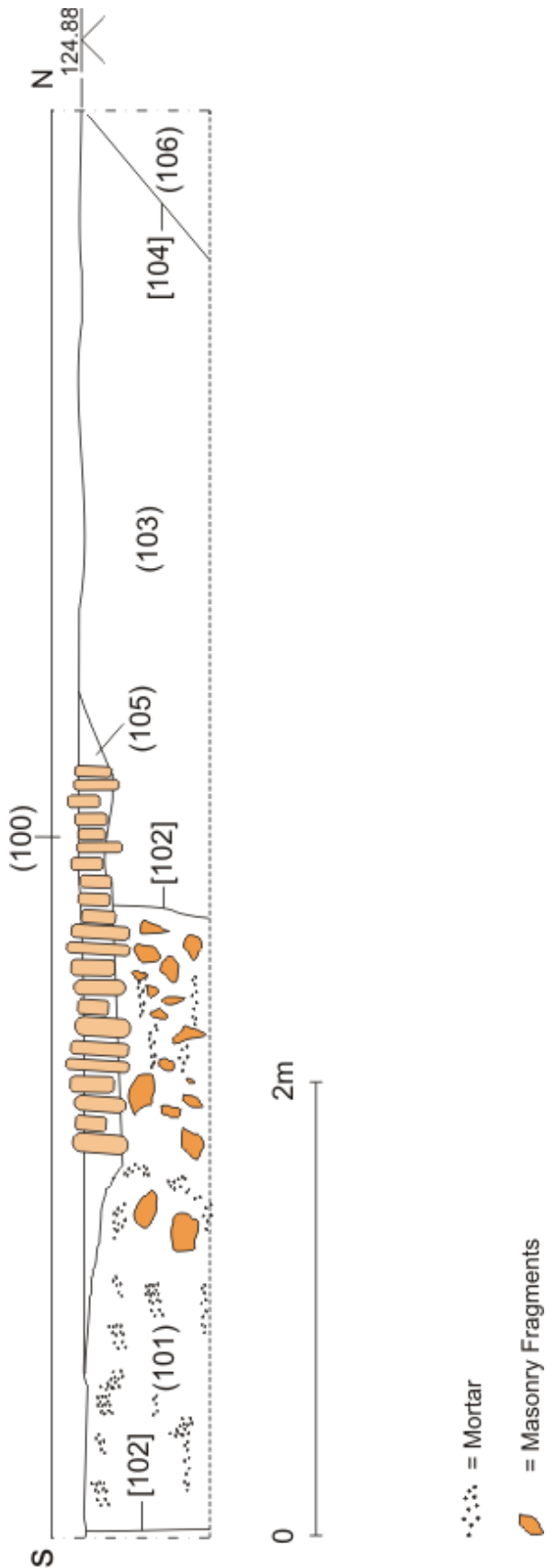
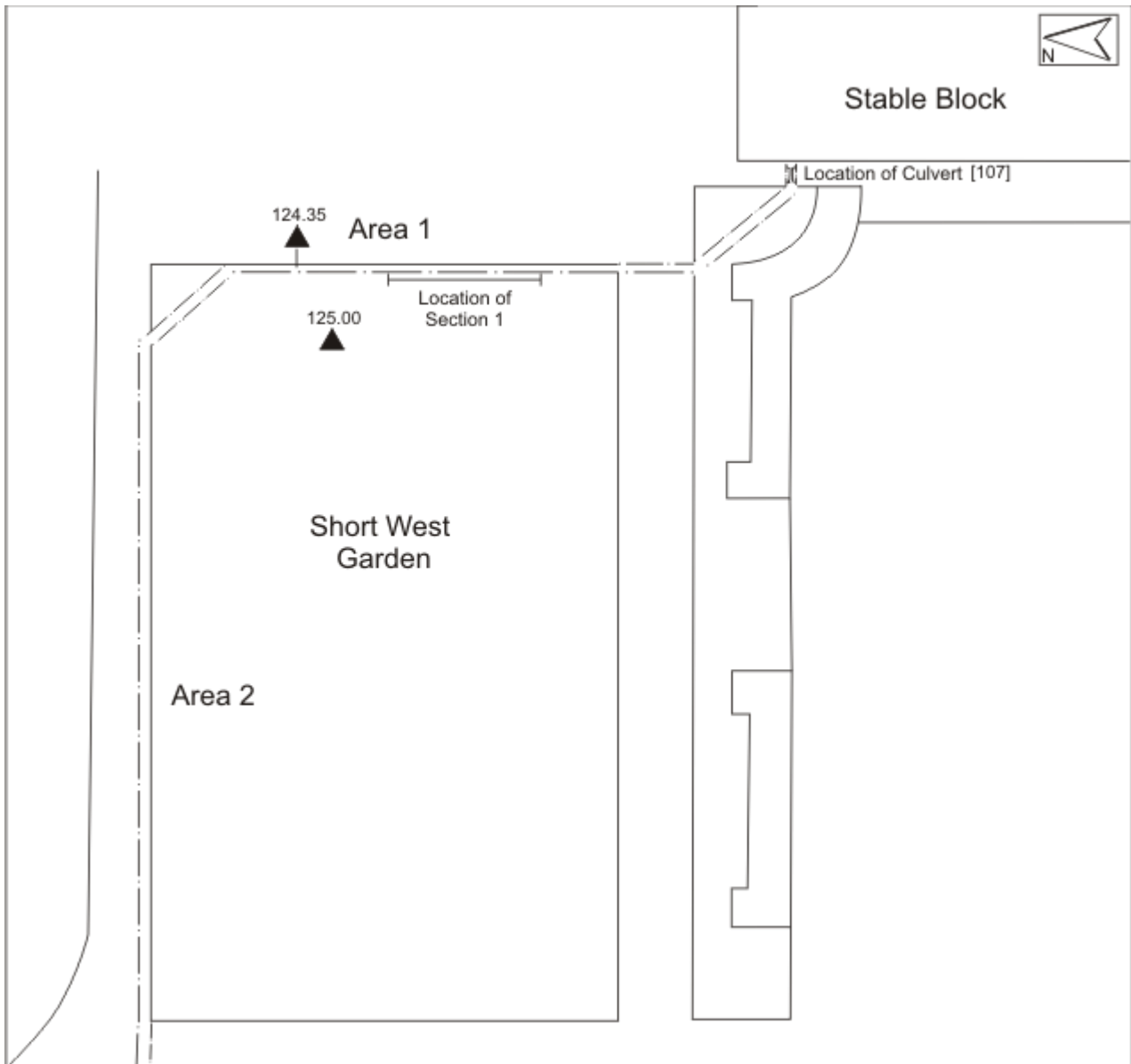


Figure 4 Detail Showing Location of Section One (Scale 1:300)



10. PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1: Area/Trench 1



Photo 2: Culvert [107] from Area 1 (Scales 1 x 500mm & 1 x 300mm)



Photo 3: Ditch and Fill with Romano-British material (Scales 1 x 1m & 1 x 500mm)

