

Watching Brief at 2 Clothall Road, Baldock; 11/12 June 1987

The site at 2 Clothall Road, Baldock, was formerly a private garden adjoining a modern property which has now been split up for development into new plots for the building of two properties. The topsoil was stripped from the site by mechanical excavator on the morning of 10th June 1987, and the footings for the south-eastern house were dug during the afternoon by the same machine, using a ditching-bucket; those for the north-western property were dug on 11th June.

Because of the probability of archaeological activity on the site, a rapid survey of any features which might be exposed in the trenches was undertaken on 11th June in extremely bad weather conditions by KJM and IM. Because of the rapidity of work by the contractors on site, the features seen in the south-eastern trench had to be recorded during a heavy downpour of rain before the arrival of concrete for the footings during the early afternoon. A well [F8] was also completely filled with concrete at the same time. Nevertheless, all visible features were located in plan and sketched in profile; in addition, the bases of features were levelled, where this was felt to be appropriate and/or practical. Work in the footings trenches of the north-western house was much easier, although the depth of some of the trenches was too great to allow descent for exact recording.

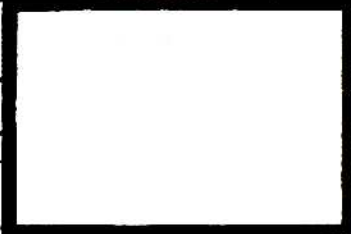
Some 0,15m of topsoil appeared to have been stripped on average, although to the south-west, towards the road, more had been removed. There was still between 0,1m and 0,2m of overburden over those archaeological features whose tops could be seen. In most cases the fill(s) of these features consisted of a mid brown/mid yellowish brown fill; that of F11 was noticeably organic and dark, while that of F7 was a darker and more reddish brown. The principal fill of F17 was overlain by redeposited chalk, forming a layer of 0,1m to 0,2m in thickness.

The natural over most of the site consisted of chalk. In some places the chalk had weathered considerably, and there were a number of periglacial fissures which had filled with a yellow/red sand; F16 and the southern part of F13 were cut into a large pocket of this sand (perhaps the fill of a solution hollow?). The remainder of the features were cut into chalk; little or nothing survived of the features above the level of this chalk.

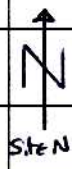
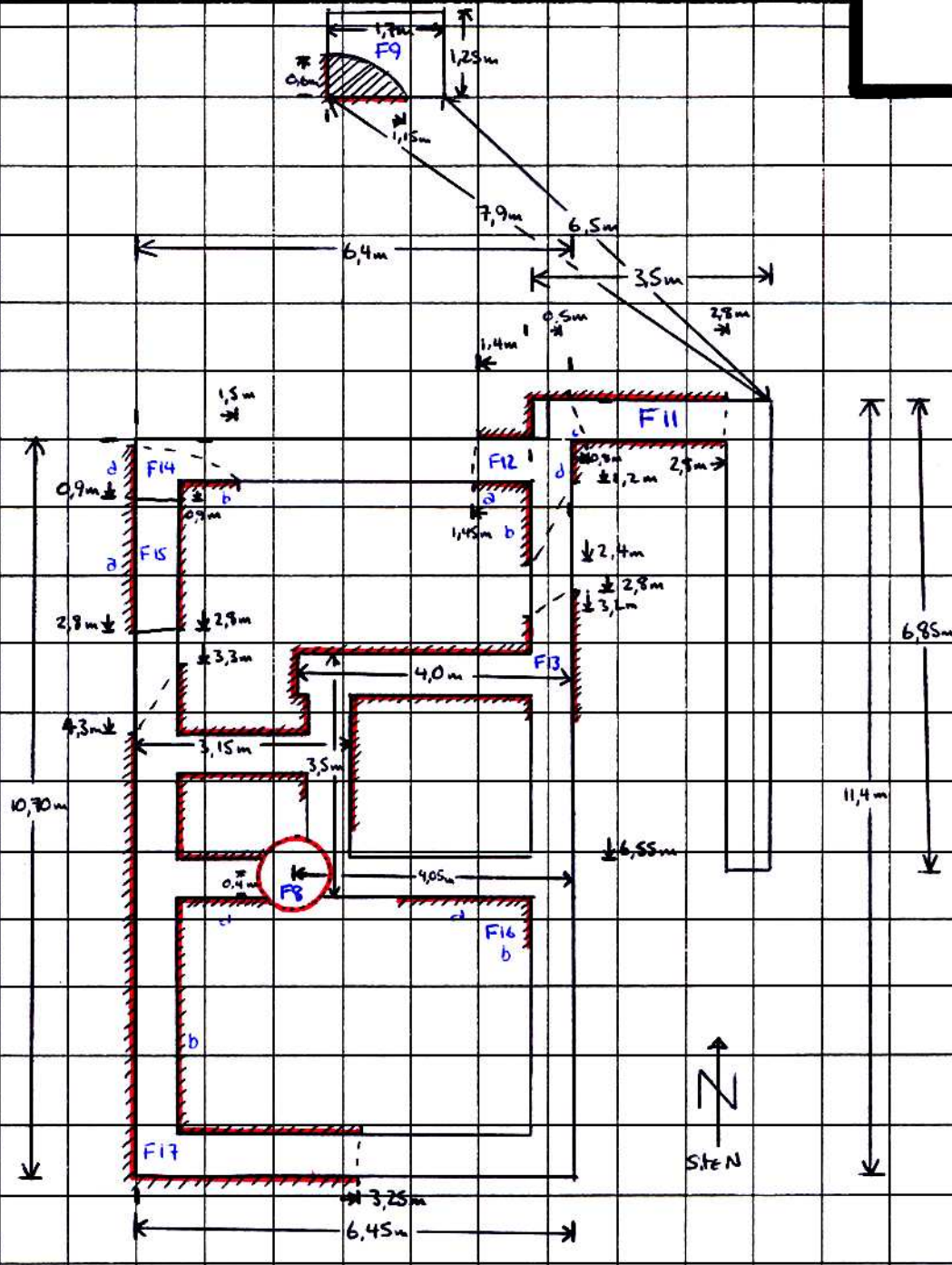
To the north-eastern end of the south-eastern house two(?) large hollows in the chalk were identified [F4 and F10]. The fills of these were homogeneous, arguing that they were perhaps quarry pits for chalk; F17 seemed similar, the redeposited chalk perhaps being an attempt to consolidate the surface after back-filling. Romano-British potsherds and tile as well as animal bone and an oyster shell were recovered from the main fill of this feature.

Two wells were identified; F8 was still open to water-level [plumbed by the contractors and stated to be 15' (i.e. 4,4m) from the surface; there was 1' (i.e. 0,3m) of water below this] and was brick-lined with what appeared to be 19th-century bricks to approximately half its total depth, after which it was cut into chalk without revetment; F9 was entirely backfilled, and was cut vertically into the chalk bedrock with no trace of a weathering cone.

All the remaining features appeared to be pits, although the profiles of F1 and F2 suggest that they may be gullies with butt ends truncated by the trenches. The organic fill of F11 may indicate a domestic origin for this pit, while the high proportion of animal bone in F15 [including a pig scapula, ox vertebra and (?)sheep long-bones] almost certainly points to domestic rubbish. This latter feature is cut by F14, a smaller pit. F7 was full of modern building materials (mostly tile with a smaller amount of brick).



NHDC MUSUEMS ARCHAEOLOGY SKETCH SHEET



Notes
Location of features in north eastern footings trenches
and soakaway dug 11 June 1987

Scale 1:100
Signature KJN
Date 15.6.87
Checked