



**Archaeological excavation
Straight Furlong, Harborough Road
Desborough, Northamptonshire
April 2014**

Site Code: DHR 14

Report No. 14/119

Author: Jim Burke

Illustrator: James Ladocha



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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		OASIS No: molanort1-180408	
Project title	Archaeological excavations, Straight Furlong, Harborough Road, Desborough, Northamptonshire		
Short description (250 words maximum)	An archaeological excavation was undertaken by MOLA Northampton (formally Northamptonshire Archaeology) at Harborough Road, Desborough, Northamptonshire prior to the proposed development on the site. The mitigation area targeted potential archaeology identified in trial trench evaluation. A ditch system may have been part of a larger enclosure and the presence of a sherd of Roman pottery indicates that it was of Roman or later date. There were also furrows of a former medieval to post-medieval field system and post-medieval field drains on the same alignment.		
Project type	Excavation		
Previous work	Trial Trenching, Geophysical survey		
Current land use	Arable		
Future work	-		
Monument type and period	Possible Saxon cemetery, exact location unknown		
Significant finds	None		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County	Northamptonshire		
Site address	Straight Furlong, Harborough Road, Desborough.		
NGR	SP 797 840		
Area (sq m/ha)	Approx 0.7ha		
Height aOD	148m		
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation	MOLA Northampton		
Project brief originator	County Archaeological Advisor Northamptonshire County Council		
Project Design originator	NA		
Director/Supervisor	Jim Burke		
Project Manager	Adam Yates		
Sponsor or funding body	Bellway Homes Ltd		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date	11/01/2014		
End date	11/04/2014		
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Contents	
Physical	DHR 14	None	
Paper		Site records	
Digital		Client report PDF	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report		
Title	Archaeological Mitigation works, Straight Furlong, Harborough Road, Desborough, Northamptonshire		
Serial title & volume	14/119		
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AT
STRAIGHT FURLONG, HARBOROUGH ROAD
DESBOROUGH, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
APRIL 2014**

Abstract

An archaeological excavation was undertaken by MOLA Northampton (formally Northamptonshire Archaeology) at Harborough Road, Desborough, Northamptonshire prior to the proposed development on the site. The mitigation area targeted potential archaeology identified in trial trench evaluation. A ditch system may have been part of a larger enclosure and the presence of a sherd of Roman pottery indicates that it was of Roman or later date. There were also furrows of a former medieval to post-medieval field system and post-medieval field drains on the same alignment

1 INTRODUCTION

In April 2014, an archaeological excavation was carried out by MOLA on land at Harborough Road, Desborough, Northamptonshire (NGR: 479700 284000; Fig 1). The work was commissioned by Bellway Homes and was undertaken to mitigate the impact of development of the land for residential use.

The scope of works was outlined in the brief issued by the Northamptonshire County Council County Archaeological Advisor (NCC 2012) and detailed in the written scheme of investigation prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA 2013). The works were undertaken according to the following guidelines: Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (2010) and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2008), and English Heritage's *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (2006).

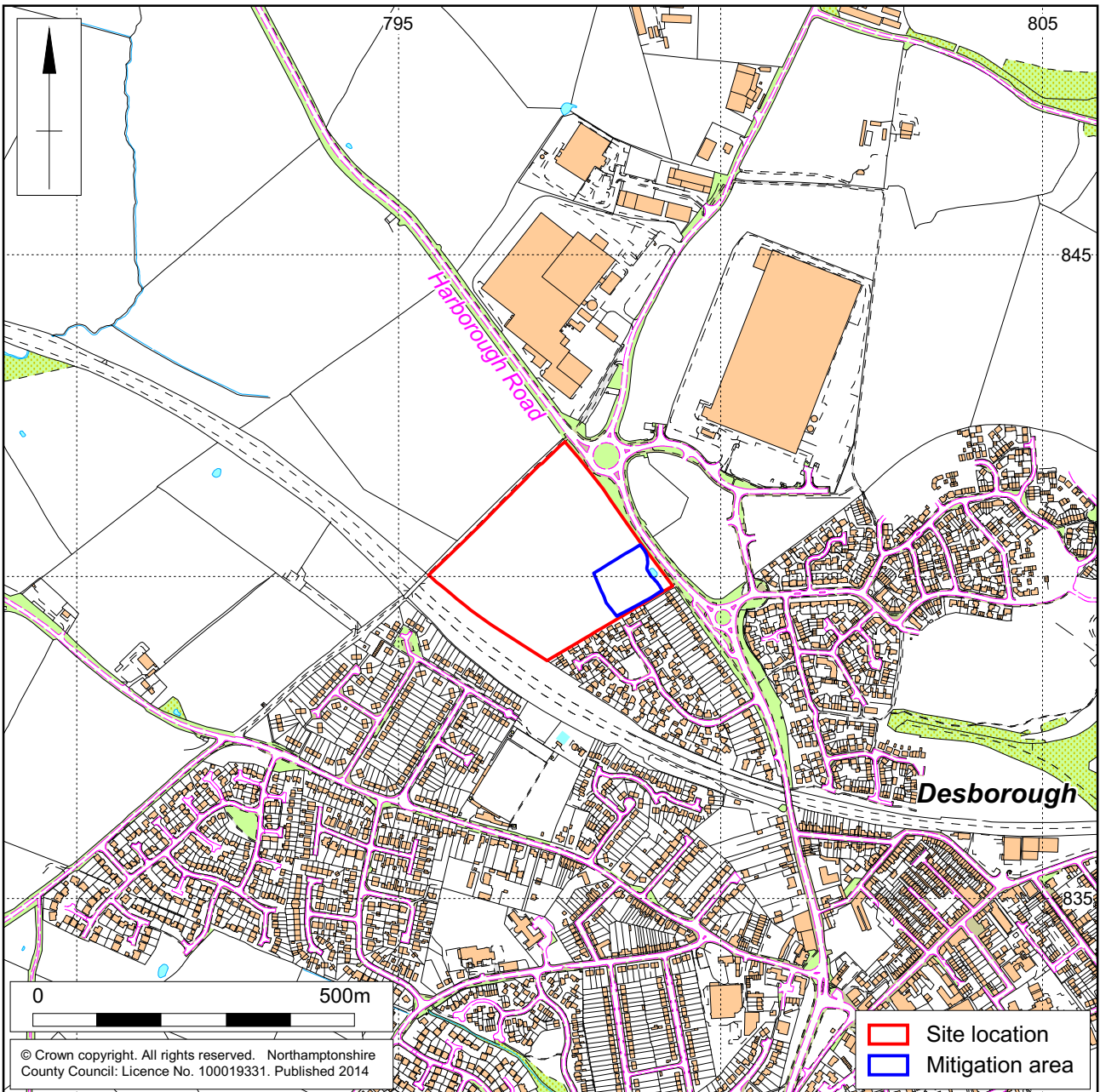
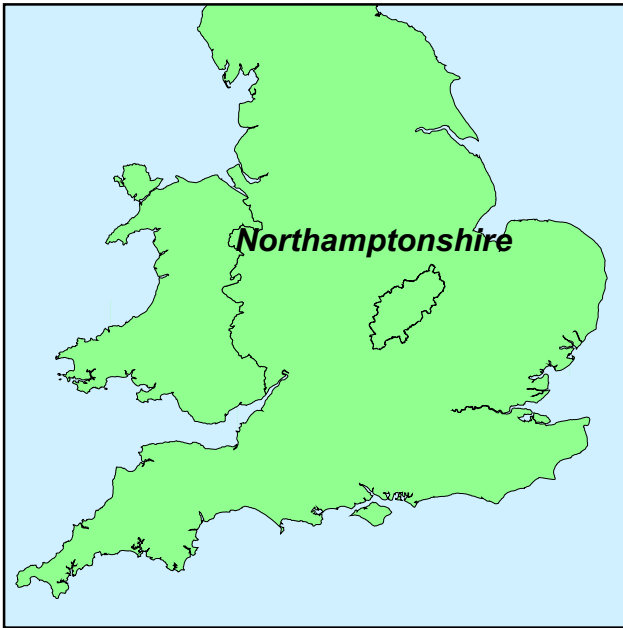
2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the work was to determine and understand the nature, function and character of the archaeological site in its cultural and environmental setting.

The specific aims of the investigation were to:

- Identify the location, extent, nature, and date of any archaeological features or deposits present;
- Determine the integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits present.

Specific research objectives, if relevant, would be drawn from national and regional research frameworks documents (English Heritage 1991, Knight *et al* 2012) as relevant depending upon the results of the evaluation.



Scale 1:10,000

Site location Fig 1

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Topography and geology

The site lies on the north-western edge of the town of Desborough, north of the River Ise which forms the southern boundary of the parish. The study area itself is bounded to the north-east by the Harborough Road onto which it fronts directly, whilst to the south-west it is bounded by the Midland Railway, housing to the south and fields to the north. The site lies at a height of 148m aOD on ground sloping down to the south-west. The underlying geology comprises Northampton Sand and Upper Lias Clay.

3.2 Historical and archaeological background

A desk-based assessment was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology (Leigh 2008). A number of prehistoric finds have been made in the vicinity of the site. These include Bronze Age burials and Iron Age and Romano-British settlement. The most notable find is the Desborough Mirror, which is of Iron Age date and is decorated in the *La Tene III* style, a style of Celtic Art first identified at a site on the northern side of Lake Neuchâtel in Switzerland and dates from the 5th to the 1st centuries BC.

A gold necklace of Anglo-Saxon date which was discovered in a grave off Paddock Lane. Both of these artefacts are now on display in the British Museum. An Anglo-Saxon cemetery is thought to have been located somewhere in the vicinity of the site, but its exact whereabouts is unknown.

Desborough is first mentioned in the *Domesday Book* of 1086 where it is referred to as *Dereburg* meaning place of judgement. In the post-medieval period, after 1750AD, Desborough developed a thriving textile trade with a particular emphasis on weaving. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries Desborough has been subject to extensive quarrying, all of which has been to the south and east of the study area.

A geophysical survey of the site (Walker 2010) did not identify any archaeological remains, although anomalies related to medieval ridge and furrow cultivation were present across the site. Subsequent field evaluation identified three shallow gullies and a possible pit or ditch terminal, all of which were undated. All the features were aligned in the same direction as the ridge and furrow which could indicate they are associated with the previous agriculture (Jones 2012).

4 EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

Monitoring of the programme of fieldwork was carried out by the Archaeological Advisor Northamptonshire County Council (NCC). All parties were informed of the commencement and progress of works.

The area of the mitigation works covered a rectangular part of the eastern corner of the site and measuring approximately 0.7ha (Fig 2). This is focussed on the features identified by the trial trenching and the most likely location of the Saxon cemetery

The works was located using a Leica System 1200 GPS operating to an accuracy of +/- 0.05m to Ordnance Survey National Grid and Datum.

The mitigation area was excavated by a tracked 360-degree mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under continuous archaeological supervision

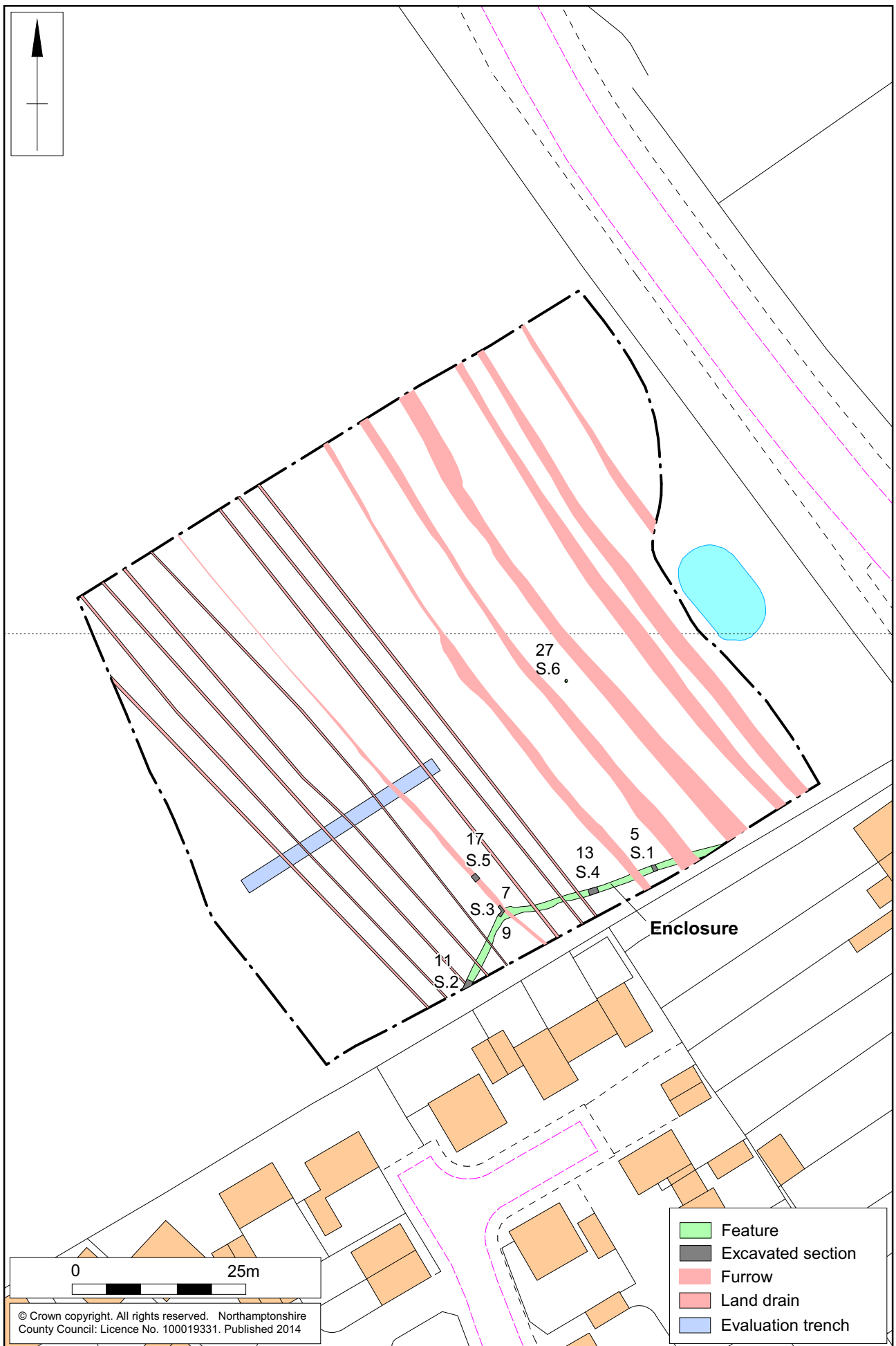
and was excavated to the first archaeological remains or, where these are absent, the upper interface of geological deposits. Topsoil and subsoil were removed separately and stored on the outer limits of the excavated area.

All deposits were given individual context numbers and recording followed standard MOLA procedures (MOLA 2014). Deposits were described on pro-forma context sheets to include details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds.

A photographic record was kept of the excavation, comprising black and white negatives with supporting digital photographs. The field data were compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing.

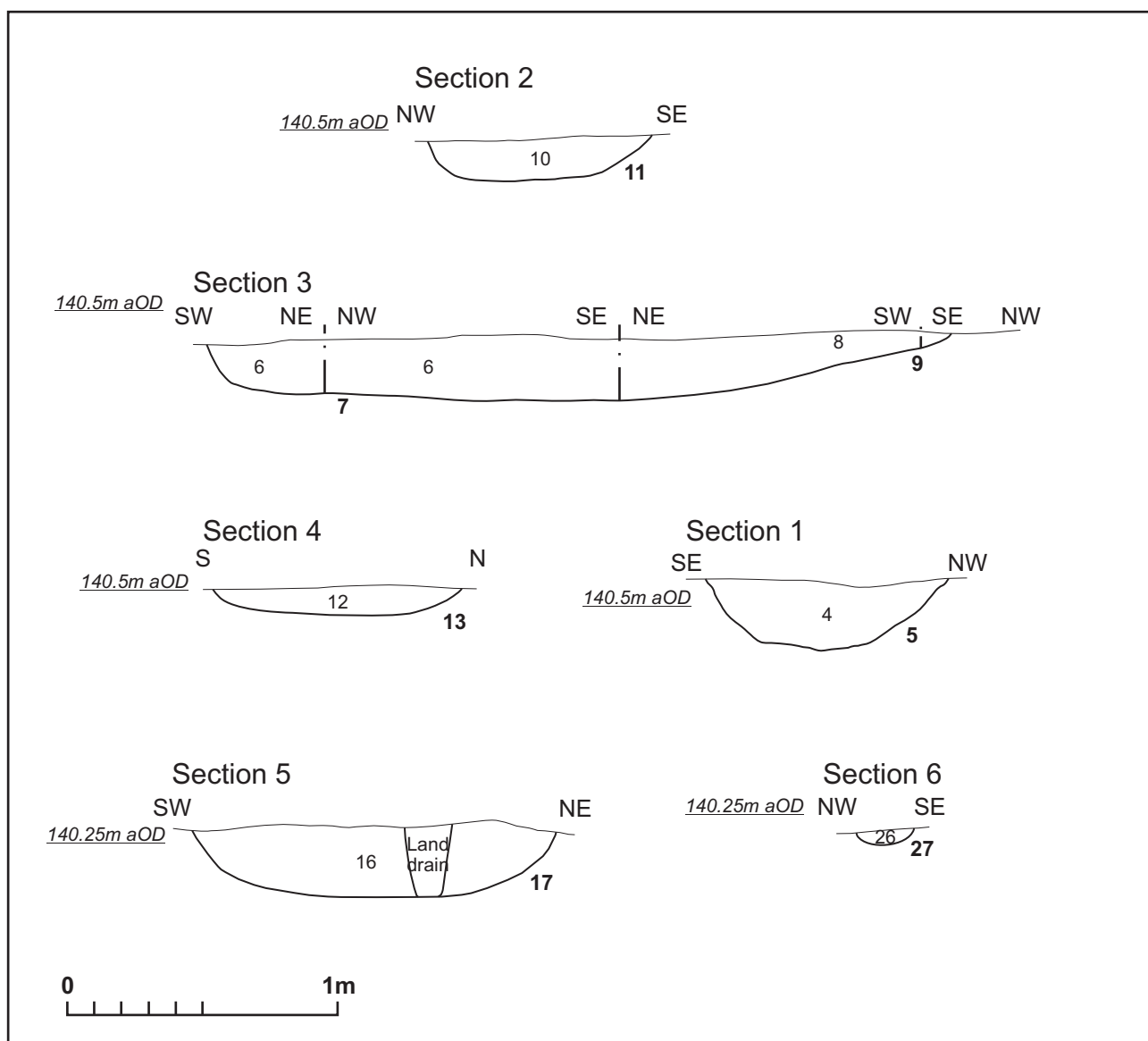
The excavated area and spoil heaps were scanned with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval.

No provision was made for the reinstatement of the site.



Scale 1: 750

Mitigation area Fig 2



5 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

The mitigation area was roughly square measuring 84m north-west to south-east by 76m south-west to north-east, and covered an area of 0.7ha.

The average depth of the overburden within the mitigation area was 0.55m onto grey silt clay natural, overlain with light brown chalky clay subsoil to a depth of 0.25m. The topsoil was up to 0.32m deep and consisted of a dark brown clay loam.

The features encountered in the mitigation area comprised, a corner of a possible enclosure, a single isolated posthole, and possible remains of gullies or rutting (Fig 2).

Adjacent to the southern boundary of the site there was a ditch [5] (Figs, 4 and 3, section 1, 2, 3 and 4) that might be the corner of an enclosure, it was 0.89m wide by 0.24m deep with gradual sloping sides and a flattish base, the single fill (4) light orange-grey silty clay; from which a single sherd of pottery dating from the Romano-British period was recovered from the fill.



Ditch [5], looking north-west

Fig 4

The corner of the possible enclosure ditch [9], was cut by furrow [7] aligned in a north-west to south-east direction (Fig 5 and fig 3, section 3). The fills of both features, (6) and (8), were indistinguishable.

No relationship could be determined, this area was prone to flooding and standing water,



Furrow [7] and ditch [9], looking south-east

Fig 5

The furrow [17] (Fig 6 and Fig 3 section 5) was sampled close to the ditch, within the cut of the furrow was a cut of a land drain.



Furrow [17], looking north-west

Fig 6

An isolated shallow posthole [27] (Fig 3, section 6) was 0.29m wide by 0.06m deep with a fill (26) of mid red-orange silty sandy clay. There were no finds, and there were no associated features.

Ridge and furrow and land drainage were noted across the site, and aligned north-west to south-east, pottery, brick and tile were recovered from the furrows and date from c15th century to the modern date. The majority of the circular clay land drains were aligned in a similar direction.

6 THE FINDS

6.1 Roman pottery by Tora Hylton

A single sherd of Roman pottery in a sandy greyware fabric was recovered from ditch [5]. The sherd weighs 32g, it is extremely abraded and appears to be the lower part (base-angle) of a large storage jar; it has a grey core and oxidised surfaces and probably dates to the c 2nd century AD.

6.2 Medieval and post-medieval pottery by Tora Hylton

Seventeen sherds with a total weight of 0.418kg were recovered from surviving furrow deposits. The assemblage comprises an abraded and mixed group of domestic wares dating from the 14th century onwards. Chronologically the earliest datable sherd is an abraded bodysherd of Lyveden/Stanion D-Ware (CTS 322) which dates to c 1400-1500. Later diagnostic sherds include flatware item in Underglaze Transfer Printed ware (CTS 416) dating to the late 18th century, a Mocha ware bowl (CTS 432) dating to the early 19th century and a range of iron glazed red earthenware (CTS 226) vessels of c 19th century date.

Table 1: Quantification of medieval and post-medieval pottery

Fabric Type (Northamptonshire CTS No)	No	Weight (g)
Pottery from furrows		
Medieval pottery		
Lyveden Stanion D-Ware c1400-1500 (CTS 322)	1	18
Post-medieval		
Midland Purple c 1450-1600 (CTS 403)	2	114
Blackware c 1550-1700 (CTS 411)	1	19
Underglaze Transfer Printed c late 18th century (CTS 416)	1	8
Iron Glazed Earthenware c 18th-19th centuries (CTS 426)	9	212
Mocha Ware c 1820-40 (CTS 432)	1	17
Unglazed Earthenware 19th century (CTS 414)	1	25
Red Earthenware (flower pot) Modern	1	5
Total	17	418

6.3 Small finds by Tora Hylton

One fragment of copper alloy sheet was recovered from the enclosure ditch [5]. The piece is rectangular in shape (21 x 19mm). Three of the edges are damaged and one has a filleted-edge for strengthening the perimeter. The fragment is too small to determine the diameter, but it may represent an item of post-medieval flatware.

6.4 Ceramic building materials by Pat Chapman

One sherd of roof tile, weighing 50g, is 11mm thick and machine-made from hard fine purple-brown clay from the furrows. The last three letters of the manufacturer's name survive. . . LEY, which is not enough to identify the tile maker. A sherd, weighing 30g and 10mm thick, is made from hard fine silty orange-brown clay from the furrows. It is curved and the internal diameter would be no more than 50mm. This is most likely a fragment from a field drain or possibly a pantile, the former is more likely.

These sherds are 19th or early 20th century in date.

7 DISCUSSION

The mitigation works confirmed the results of the trial trench evaluation and geophysical survey showing furrow aligned across the mitigation area in a north-west by south-east direction.

The possible enclosure ditch on the southern edge of the site produced a single sherd of pottery from the Romano-British period. This represents the northern extent of what may be a more extensive Roman site to the south, with the exception of a single posthole, no other features were present.

The small quantity of artifactual material indicates that the nature of the Roman activity was at a low intensity, or that the remains lie at the periphery of an area of activity, located away from any central focus.

No evidence was present for the postulated Saxon cemetery.

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MOLA
4 June 2014

