Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological trial trench evaluation on land at Overstone Leys, Overstone, Northamptonshire Phase 1

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS	OASIS No: molanort1-246409	
Project name	Overstone Leys, Overstone, Northampton	
Short description	In August 2010, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology on behalf of CgMs Consulting Ltd on land at Overstone Leys, Overstone, Northamptonshire. The development area, comprising 109ha of land, to the north-east of Northampton has been subject to a desk-based assessment and a geophysical survey. This report provides the results for the first phase of evaluation trenching on *c*6.4ha of land within the development area. Twenty-six trenches, each 25m long by 1.60m wide, were excavated. The only archaeological features were revealed in trench five, which had two gullies and a pit, none of which could be dated. A tiny fragment of possible Roman tile was found in the topsoil in trench 20.	
Project type	Evaluation	
Site status	None	
Previous work	Desk-based assessment (Dicks and Chadwick 2009) and Geophysical Survey (Butler 2009)	
Current Land use	Arable	
Future work	unknown	
Monument type/ period	unknown	
Significant finds	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address	Overstone Leys, Northampton	
Study area	*c*6.4ha	
OS Easting & Northing	479649 266070	
Height OD	103m OD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	CgMs (Dicks 2010)	
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Christopher Jones	
Project Manager	Mark Holmes	
Sponsor or funding body	CgMs Consulting	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	17/08/2010	
End date	23/08/2010	
ARCHIVES	**Location**	**Content**
Physical	-	None
Paper	OLN10	Evaluation pro forma sheets, context sheets, colour slides, black and white contact prints, digital photographs, plans and section drawing
Digital	OLN10	Report text and figures
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
ON LAND AT OVERSTONE LEYS, OVERSTONE
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
AUGUST 2010

Abstract

In August 2010, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology on behalf of CgMs Consulting Ltd on land at Overstone Leys, Overstone, Northamptonshire. The development area, comprising 109ha of land to the north-east of Northampton, has been subject to a desk-based assessment and a geophysical survey. This report provides the results for the first phase of evaluation trenching on c6.4ha of land within the development area. Twenty-six trenches, each 25m long by 1.60m wide, were excavated. The only archaeological features were revealed in trench five, which had two gullies and a pit, none of which could be dated. A tiny fragment of possible Roman tile came from the topsoil in trench 20.

1 INTRODUCTION

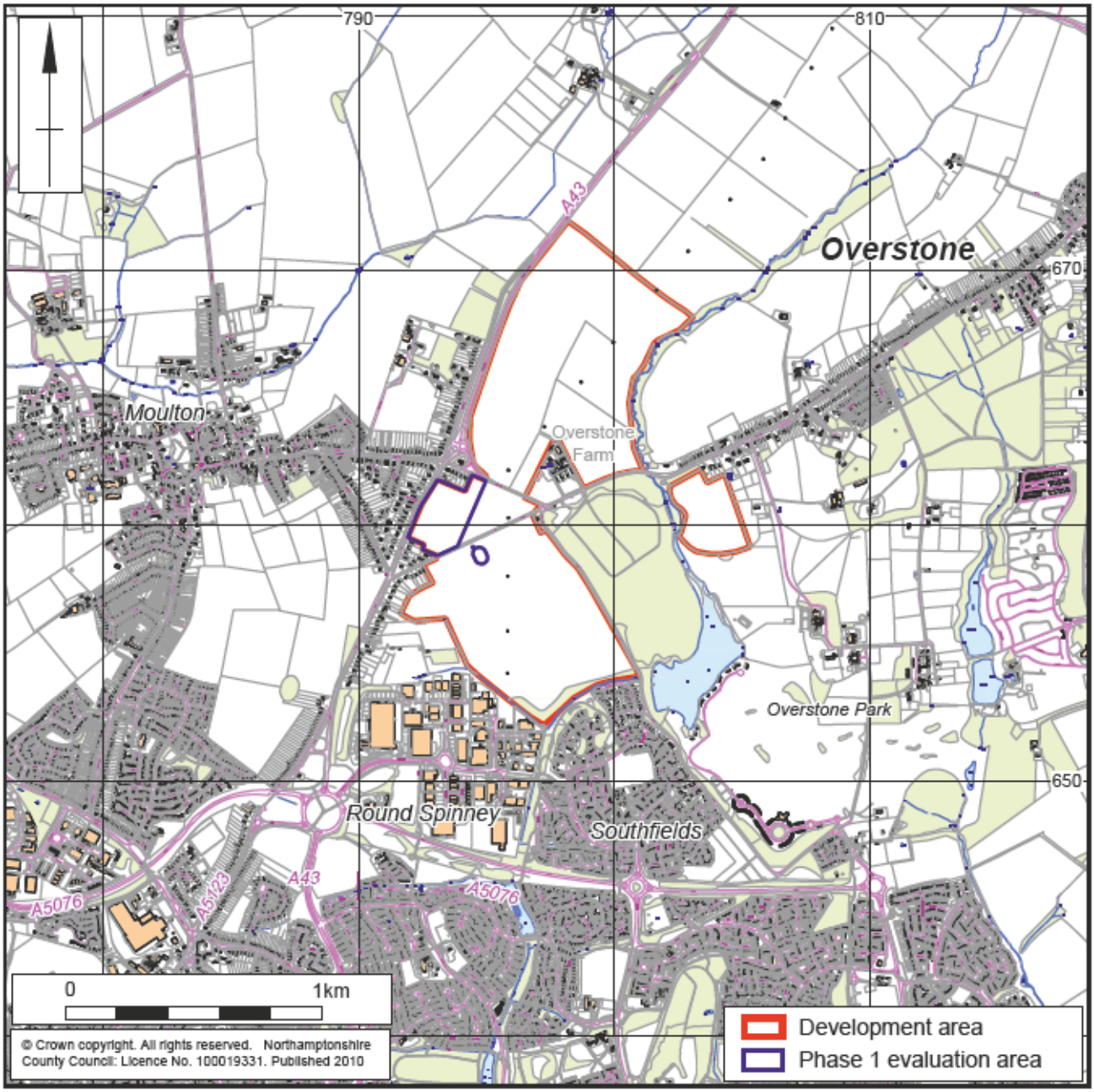
Barratt Strategic are preparing an Outline application for the construction of residential homes on land at Overstone Leys, Overstone, Northamptonshire (SP 796 660; Fig 1). The programme of archaeological investigation, as outlined in the Specification issued by CgMs Consulting, involved the excavation of twenty six trenches across part of the development area (Phase 1 evaluation). Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) was commissioned by CgMs Consulting, acting on behalf of Barratt Strategic, to undertake the archaeological trial excavation, the results of which are presented in this report.

This tranche of works follows a Desk-Based Assessment (Dicks and Chadwick 2009) and detailed geophysical magnetometer survey (Butler 2009). Both studies identified areas of archaeological potential within the wider development area. However, the geophysical survey recorded remnants of ridge and furrow cultivation and linear anomalies within the evaluation area.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location, topography and geology

The site lies to the north-east of the town of Northampton, near the villages of Moulton and Overstone (Fig 1). It is bounded to the west by the A43 trunk road between Northampton and Kettering and to the east by open fields and the boundary of Overstone Park. The parcel of land is an irregular-shaped area approximately 109ha in extent, a total of *c*103ha, and a detached portion of 6.8ha to the east.



Scale 1:25,000

Site location Fig 1

The eastern and southern margins of the development area are defined by small but deeply incised streams which drain towards the south (Butler 2009). The ground rises above these towards a terrace standing at about 95-105m aOD. This is overlooked by a flat-topped ridge, about 115m aOD, which occupies the north-western part of the area. Two steep, southward draining, dry valleys occur near the southern end of the area. A third valley in the same area contains a small spring-fed stream, the headwaters of which flow through an underground channel or culvert.

The Phase 1 evaluation area encompasses a triangular piece of arable land encompassing *c*6.4ha in the centre of the development area (Fig 2). It is bounded by two minor roads to the north and south, both of which converge on Overstone Gate (the entrance to Overstone Park). A smaller area in the field to the south was also incorporated in the evaluation.

The evaluation area at the start of works Fig 2

The underlying geology is classed as Northamptonshire Sands and Ironstone, with small areas of Upper Lias Clays and Lower Estuariane Series deposits (BGS 1980 Sheet 185).

2.2 Archaeological background

The outline development area has been examined by Desk-Based Assessment (Dicks and Chadwick 2009) which collated Historic Environment Record (HER) data and cartographic sources. The development area has also been subject to a geophysical survey (Butler 2009). The following archaeological background is taken from both sources. Archaeological records suggest extensive remains from prehistoric times until the post-medieval period.

The earliest known remains are a presumed Neolithic monument adjacent to Overstone Farm and a number of ploughed-out Bronze Age barrows. The possible Neolithic monument comprises a pair of concentric, semi-circular anomalies (Butler 2009). These were recorded in the geophysical survey but lie outside the Phase 1 evaluation area (Fig 3). There are a number of recorded instances of prehistoric finds, including worked flint in the HER.

Roman remains have been discovered within the development area and in the immediate vicinity. Indeed the geophysical survey supports the idea of settlement within the southern part of the site, although it is difficult to apportion a date. In the southern part of the development area Roman settlement, dated to the 2nd – 4th

centuries AD, was identified from pottery, roof tiles, iron slag, and coins. Further south, cropmarks indicate more evidence of settlement. North-east of the survey area a third possible Roman site has been identified. At Thorplands Farm (now Round Spinney) structures dating from the 2nd century AD were succeeded by 3rd-century AD circular buildings with stone foundations and a courtyard (Hunter and Mynard 1977). At Boothville, 500m south-west of the survey area, a Roman villa has been identified from the discovery of a tessellated pavement, flue tiles, painted plaster and other Roman artefacts.

In the 18th century the development area is shown as a number of small-sized fields, which increased in size over time. By the time the 1880s Ordnance Survey map was produced, the fields were more regular and rectangular in shape. The evaluation area, located between two roads, remains similar in size from 1763 (the Drury estate map) to the present day. In 1763 it is referred to as Moulton Close. The modern A43 trunk road is shown as a route way in the 18th century following a similar course to the present.

Overstone Park, although not a registered park and garden, is considered by the Northamptonshire Historic Landscape Character Assessment as being of historic importance (Dicks and Chadwick 2009). It defines much of the eastern boundary of the site and comprises landscaped parkland and lakes. The early maps show much of the present parkland as enclosed fields and then from 1810 the parkland is shown abutting the development area.

By the 1980s the outer limits of Northampton had begun to encroach on the southern area of the site with the new developments of Round Spinney and Southfields.

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Objectives

The aims of the archaeological evaluation are specified in the Written Scheme of Investigation.

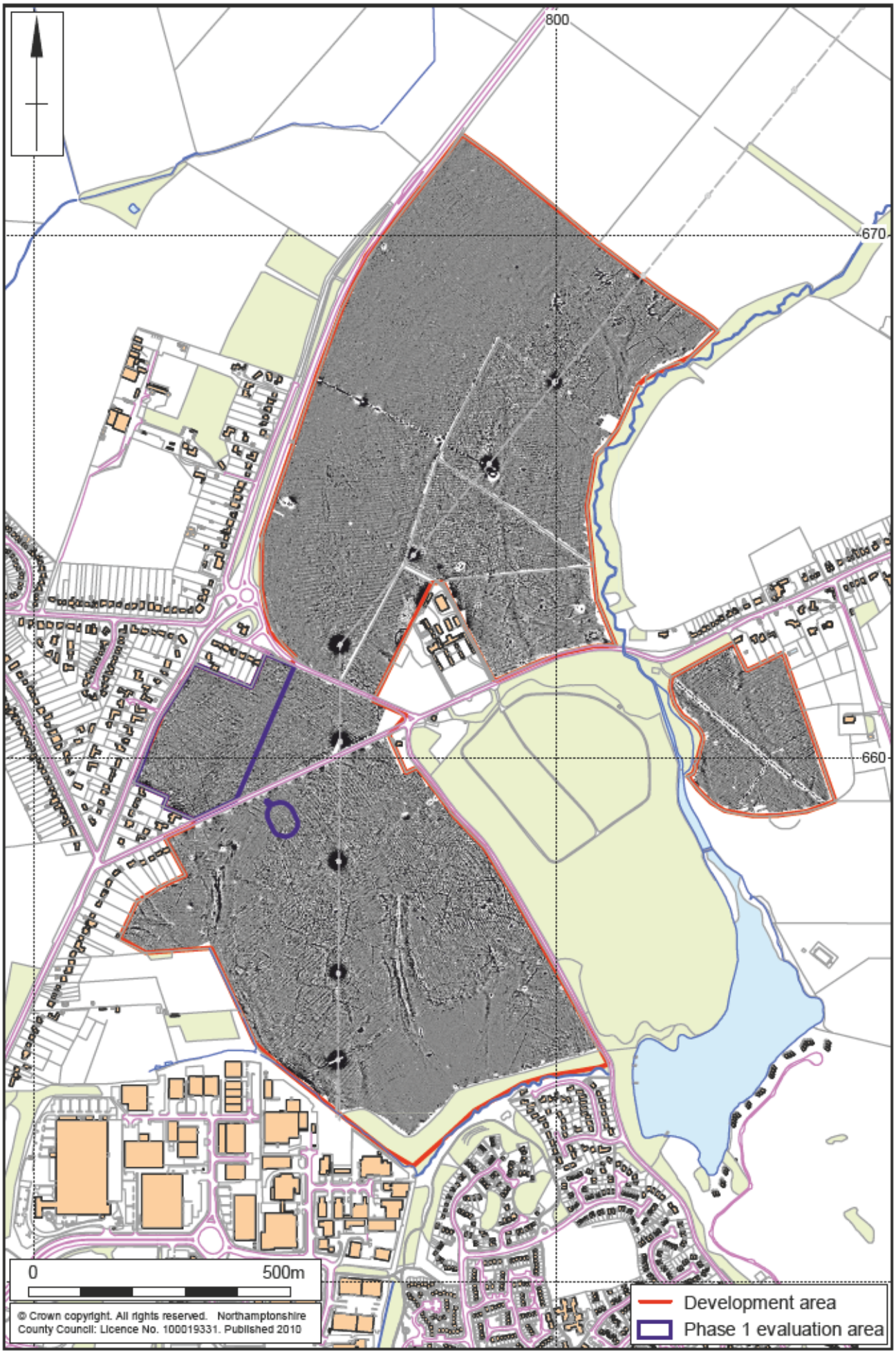
General aims comprised the following:

- To determine, as far as reasonably practicable, the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains
- To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features encountered.

Site specific aims included the following:

- To clarify the impact of medieval, post-medieval and modern ploughing and hence assess the degree of archaeological survival of buried deposits
- To clarify the extent, date, character, condition and significance of the linear anomalies identified during the geophysical survey
- To determine the presence or absence of prehistoric flint within topsoil and subsoil horizons
- To determine the presence or absence of late prehistoric, Iron Age and Roman settlement remains
- To establish the potential for significant environmental deposits
- To establish the potential for archaeological remains.

Specific research objectives were to be based on the research frameworks set out in Cooper (2006).



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Geophysical survey results Fig 3

3.2 Methodology

The works were conducted in accordance with the specification (Dicks 2010), *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 1994, revised 2008) and the *Code of Conduct* of the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA 1985, revised). The work was monitored by the County Archaeological Advisor to Northamptonshire County Council

Twenty-six trenches, each 25m long by 1.60m wide, were machine-excavated using a toothless ditching bucket. The trenches were positioned in accordance with the trench location plan approved by CgMs Consulting and the County Archaeological Advisor to Northamptonshire and have been related to Ordnance Survey National Grid (Fig 4). On completion of archaeological recording the trenches were backfilled. There was no requirement for specialist re-instatement.

The topsoil, subsoil and non-structural post-medieval and later deposits were removed to reveal archaeological remains or where absent to the natural. The topsoil was stacked separately from the subsoil and other deposits. The trenches were cleaned sufficiently to enable the identification of any features.

All deposits encountered during the course of the excavation were given a separate context number and fully recorded. Recording followed standard Northamptonshire Archaeology procedures. Deposits were described on pro-forma context sheets to include details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds.

The trenches were planned at a scale of 1:50. Sections of the sequence of deposits in each trench were drawn at a scale of 1:10 and related to Ordnance Datum. The excavated area and spoil heaps were scanned visually and with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval. As part of the evaluation, a programme of for every 50m of trenching, 40 litres of topsoil and 10 litres of subsoil (where present) was sieved by hand using a 10mm mesh.

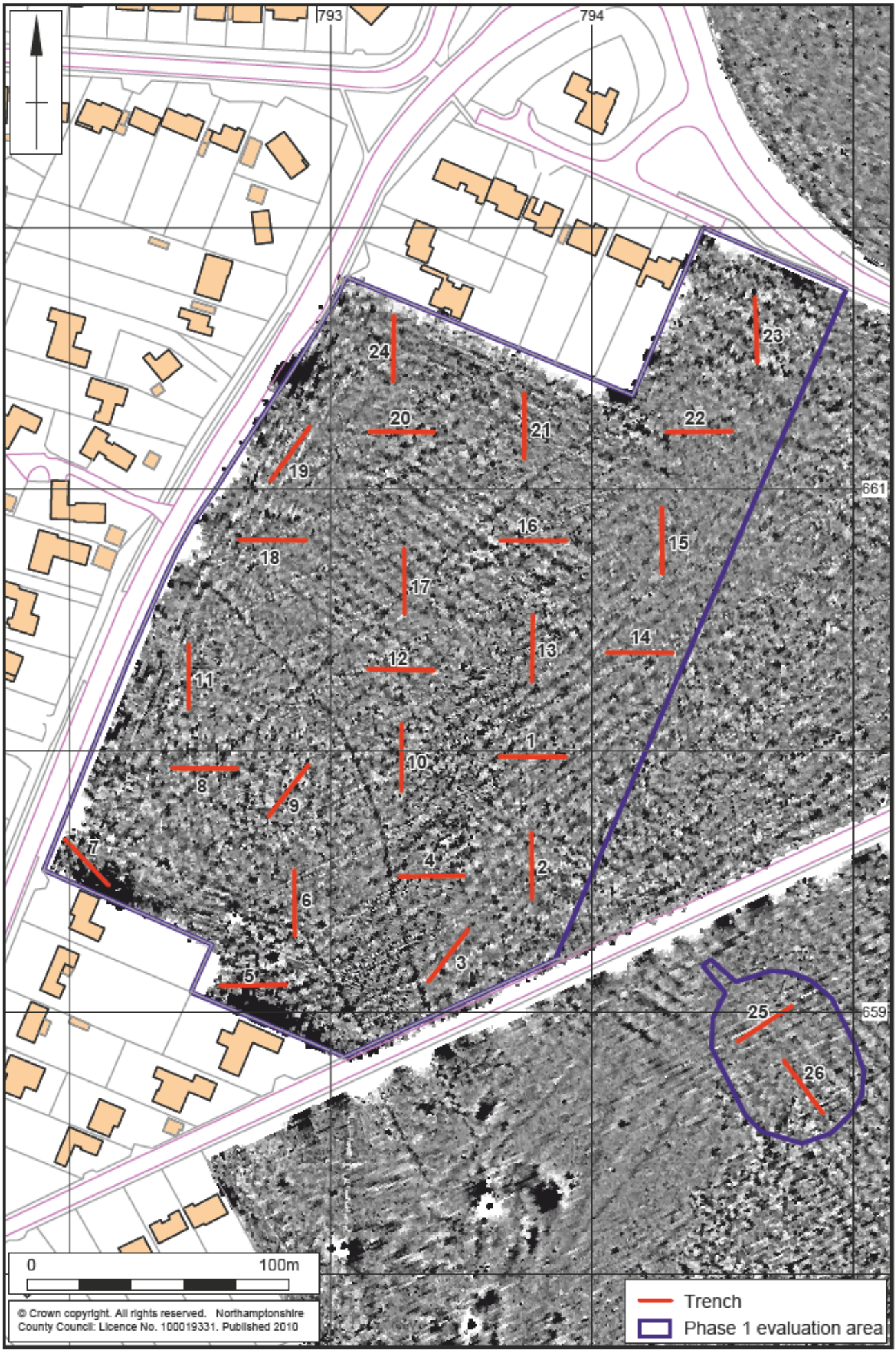
A full photographic record comprising both 35mm black and white negatives and colour transparencies was maintained, supplemented with digital images. The field data was compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

4.1 General comments

The trenches were typically aligned north to south or east to west, although six lay at oblique angles (trenches 3, 7, 9, 19, 25 and 26). They were positioned to provide a full coverage of the development area, and to provide more detailed coverage where the geophysical survey had identified any possible archaeological features (Fig 4).

Apart from trench 5, all of the trenches were devoid of archaeological deposits. The trenches positioned across the geophysical anomalies were sterile, with the anomalies reflecting changes in the natural soils. A number of these anomalies were seen during evaluation and were excavated by hand to ascertain their nature (such as trench 6, context [604]).



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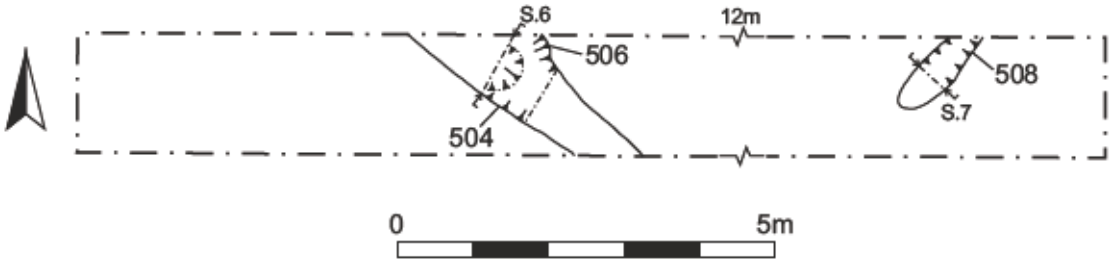
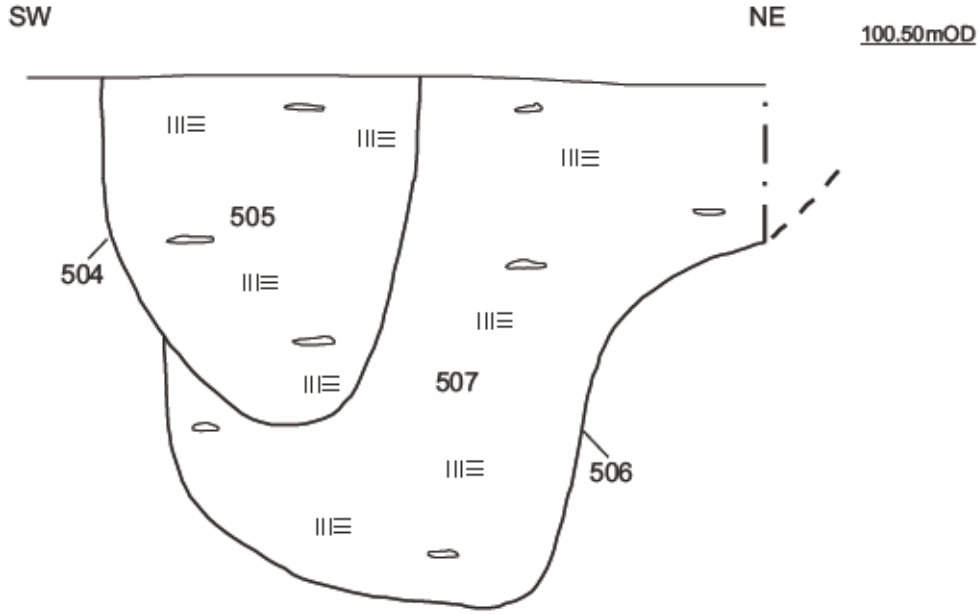
Trench Location Fig 4

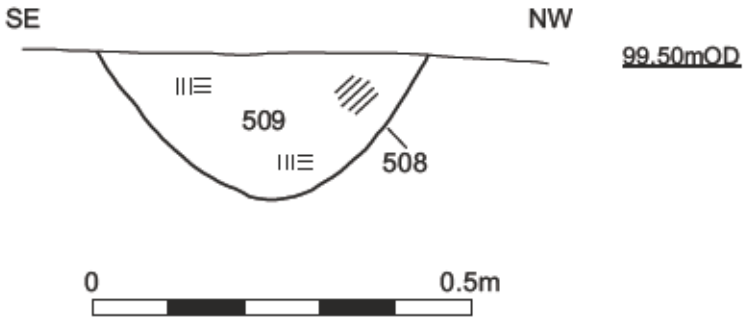
Trench 5 Plan



Section 6



Section 7



clay

burnt ironstone

Trench 5 Plan with Sections 6 & 7 Fig 5

The underlying geology found within all of the trenches comprised Northampton Sands and Ironstones observed at 0.3m below ground level. Overlying this was a subsoil present in the southern part of the evaluation area. This was up to 0.11m thick, comprising mid orange-brown clay loam, with an intermittent sand fraction dependant upon the underlying natural. The topsoil was a grey-brown humic loam, up to 0.25m thick. Few inclusions were noted in either the subsoil or the topsoil.

4.2 Trench 5

Trench 5 was the only trench to contain archaeological features. The features located in the centre and the eastern end of the trench comprised two gullies and a pit (Fig 5). No artefacts were recovered from any of the features.

At the eastern end of the trench was a terminal of a gully [508] aligned north-east to south-west (Fig 6). It had a 'U'-shaped profile and measured 1.8m long by 0.44m and up to 0.19m deep (Fig 5, Section 7). It was filled by a single deposit of mid brown sandy clay with ironstone inclusions (509). The gully cut the natural and was sealed by subsoil (502).

View of Gully [508], looking south-west Fig 6

Approximately 16m to the west of gully [508] was an oval pit [506] aligned south-west to north-east (Fig 7; Fig 5; Section 6). It measured 0.9m long by 0.8m wide and up to 0.7m deep. The pit had near vertical sides although the north-eastern edge was stepped. It was filled by a single fill (507) of firm light orange-brown sandy clay with few small ironstone fragments.

Gully [504] cutting pit [506], looking north-west Fig 7

The fill of pit [5006] had been cut on its south-western edge by a gully [504] (Fig 6; Fig 5; Section 6). Aligned north-west to south-east it was 0.42m wide and up to 0.46m deep with a steep sided 'U'-shaped profile. It was filled by a firm mid orange-brown sandy clay with few ironstone fragments (505) and had the same stratigraphic sequence as [508]. The gully was overlain by subsoil (502).

5 FINDS

One small fragment of possible Roman tile (T Hylton pers comm), weighing 1g came from the topsoil of trench 20. A heavy patinated natural flint was found, but not collected in the same topsoil. A few fragments of undiagnostic animal bone were noted in the topsoil of trench 10, and discarded.

6 DISCUSSION

Although the trenching showed no major archaeology in the phase 1 evaluation area, the geophysical survey of the wider development area revealed a wealth of prehistoric features that form part of a landscape dating from the Neolithic through to the Roman period.

The veracity of the geophysical survey has been substantially proved by the trenching and it can therefore be asserted with confidence that there is no substantial archaeology within the Phase 1 evaluation area. Instead the linear anomalies seen in the geophysical survey may either reflect changes in natural soils. The lack of any finds from the topsoil sieving undertaken as part of the evaluation supports the theory that no occupation is present within the evaluation area.

The north-east to south-west aligned linear positive anomaly tested by trenches 1, 8 and 17 may, on reflection, represent a former beaten track contained within the plough soil horizon. Features identified as ridge and furrow ploughing may reflect plough-scars, possibly of modern origin. The high positive anomalies intersected by Trenches 1 and 7 were magnetic halo effects from the adjacent housing.

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Appendix 1: Context list

Trench	Context	Type	Brief description
1	101	Layer	Topsoil: 0.26m thick
	102	Layer	Subsoil: 0.11m thick
	103	Layer	Natural
2	201	Layer	Topsoil: 0.26m thick
	202	Layer	Subsoil: 0.14m thick
	203	Layer	Natural
	204	Cut	Animal/tree
	205	Fill	Fill of 204
3	301	Layer	Topsoil: 0.20m thick
	302	Layer	Subsoil: 0.13m thick
	303	Layer	Natural
4	401	Layer	Topsoil: 0.26m thick
	402	Layer	Subsoil: 0.07m thick
	403	Layer	Natural
5	501	Layer	Topsoil: 0.26m thick
	502	Layer	Subsoil: 0.11m thick
	503	Layer	Natural
	504	Cut	Cut of gully
	505	Fill	Fill of 504
	506	Cut	Cut of pit
	507	Fill	Fill of 506
	508	Cut	Cut of gully
	509	Fill	Fill of 508
6	601	Layer	Topsoil: 0.26m thick
	602	Layer	Subsoil: 0.09m thick
	603	Layer	Natural
	604	Cut	Natural feature
	605	Fill	Fill of 604
	606	Cut	Natural feature
	607	Fill	Fill of 606
7	701	Layer	Topsoil: 0.23m thick
	702	Layer	Subsoil: 0.13m thick
	703	Layer	Natural
8	801	Layer	Topsoil: 0.25m thick
	802	Layer	Not allocated
	803	Layer	Natural
9	901	Layer	Topsoil: 0.26m thick
	902	Layer	Subsoil: 0.15m thick
	903	Layer	Natural
10	1001	Layer	Topsoil: 0.27m thick, fragments of animal bone, disgarded
	1002	Layer	Not allocated
	1003	Layer	Natural
11	1101	Layer	Topsoil: 0.28m thick
	1102	Layer	Not allocated
	1103	Layer	Natural
12	1201	Layer	Topsoil: 0.26m thick
	1202	Layer	Not allocated
	1203	Layer	Natural
13	1301	Layer	Topsoil: 0.27m thick
	1302	Layer	Not allocated
	1303	Layer	Natural
14	1401	Layer	Topsoil: 0.24m thick
	1402	Layer	Not allocated
	1403	Layer	Natural

Trench	Context	Type	Brief description
15	1501	Layer	Topsoil: 0.26m thick
	1502	Layer	Not allocated
	1503	Layer	Natural
16	1601	Layer	Topsoil: 0.27m thick
	1602	Layer	Not allocated
	1603	Layer	Natural
17	1701	Layer	Topsoil: 0.30m thick
	1702	Layer	Not allocated
	1703	Layer	Natural
18	1801	Layer	Topsoil: 0.26m thick
	1802	Layer	Not allocated
	1803	Layer	Natural
19	1901	Layer	Topsoil: 0.32m thick
	1902	Layer	Not allocated
	1903	Layer	Natural
20	2001	Layer	Topsoil: 0.28m thick, natural flint discarded, fragment of Roman tile
	2002	Layer	Not allocated
	2003	Layer	Natural
21	2101	Layer	Topsoil: 0.28m thick
	2102	Layer	Not allocated
	2103	Layer	Natural
22	2201	Layer	Topsoil: 0.26m thick
	2202	Layer	Not allocated
	2203	Layer	Natural
23	2301	Layer	Topsoil: 0.26m thick
	2302	Layer	Not allocated
	2303	Layer	Natural
24	2401	Layer	Topsoil: 0.30m thick
	2402	Layer	Not allocated
	2403	Layer	Natural
25	2501	Layer	Topsoil: 0.38m thick
	2502	Layer	Subsoil: 024m thick
	2503	Layer	Natural
26	2601	Layer	Topsoil: 0.30m thick
	2602	Layer	Subsoil: 0.18m thick
	2603	Layer	Natural

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