



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

**Archaeological monitoring on land behind
Croft Barns, Queen Street, Geddington,
Northamptonshire**

Laying out of stables, turning head and manège

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Laying out of Stables, Turning Head and Equestrian Manège

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Summary

New stables and a related turning head were previously constructed on land behind Croft Barns, Queen Street, Geddington. Archaeological monitoring established that machine-stripping exposed levels no deeper than the base of the topsoil. No archaeology was exposed.

Subsequently, a separate piece of fieldwork monitored the ground-works to build an equestrian manège on the same site. This exposed undated Ridge and furrow plough cultivation, which had been ploughed flat, in so-doing truncating the ridges, on which no archaeological features were present. A later field boundary had been cut across the former earthworks, but this too had been filled in.

Introduction

Full Planning Consent was granted by Kettering Borough Council for first the erection of a stable block on land behind (south of) The Croft and Croft Barns, Geddington, Northamptonshire (NGR: SP 8920 8280; KET/2014/0286), and then subsequently at the same site for the creation of an equestrian manège (KET/2014/0667). Since the site lies within the historic core of Geddington, a condition was applied to each consent in turn for a programme of archaeological fieldwork.

Accordingly a Written Scheme of Investigation was produced in both cases due to the limited nature of the development (without the benefit of a Brief), in order to set out a proposed programme of observation and recording during each of the ground-works for the new stables and related ground-works and the equestrian manège. These works in the end amounted to the stripping of the stable footprint and a discrete turning head for horse-boxes etc at the field gate adjacent to New Road. Subsequently, the second set of works involved monitoring the similar ground-works for setting out the manège. One end of this was built up following removal of topsoil, but with an area of c20m x 15m being further reduced at the southern, slightly higher end.

Croft Barns, Geddington

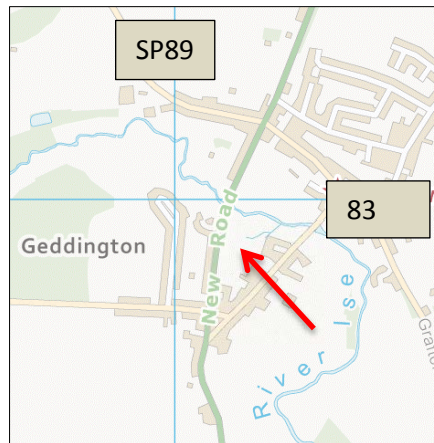


Fig 1: Site location (arrowed); Contains Ordnance Survey data ©Crown Copyright and database right 2015

The site lies to the west of Queen Street, behind Croft Barns, and their original parent-property, The Croft. The land, which slopes markedly away to the west, stretches between Croft Barns and New Road.

Fieldwork

For the stables and turning head, a small 3-ton 360-degree tracked mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless bucket, was deployed to strip the turf and topsoil in both areas. The stable footprint, which was almost rectangular in shape, lies in the south-east corner of the field on the high ridge behind Queen Street properties, while the turning-head lies at the field-gate onto New Road at the extreme west of the field, at the foot of the pronounced slope which characterises the plot.

The manège lies close to (just west of) the stables and was stripped in two operations using a 15-ton 360-degree tracked excavator (later replaced by a 7-ton machine after a mechanical breakdown). The first operation removed turf and topsoil over an area of 40m x 20m, while the second, reduced-dig, concentrated upon the south end only, an area of 20m x 15m.

In both cases the stripping operation was watched throughout by an archaeologist.

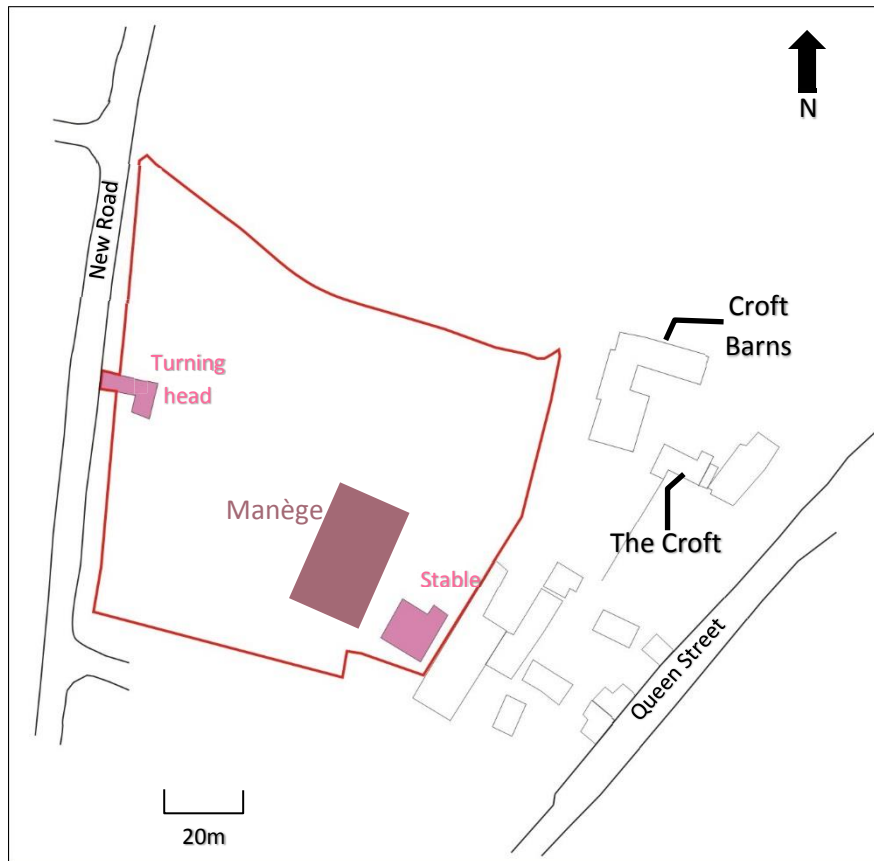


Fig 2: Location of works

Results

The stables and turning head

The stripping of the stables footprint exposed the hardcore of a metalled farm-track aligned north-east to south-west and running behind the Queen Street properties. This was characterised by fragments of brick and tile and occasional fragments of 19th-20th century pottery (not retained) and lay just below the turf and appeared to have been laid directly onto the subsoil, indicating that the topsoil must have been stripped previously to lay it down. It was retained in the base for the new stables for its hardcore content. The track is easily discernible on the 1886 1st edition Ordnance Survey Map (below).

To either side of the track was clean subsoil, only slightly lighter in colour and consistency than the dark brown topsoil. There were no features exposed, nor any artefacts disturbed.

Croft Barns, Geddington



Fig 3: The stable foundation, machine-stripped. Note the hardcore spread, leading towards Croft Barns in the distance; looking north-east.

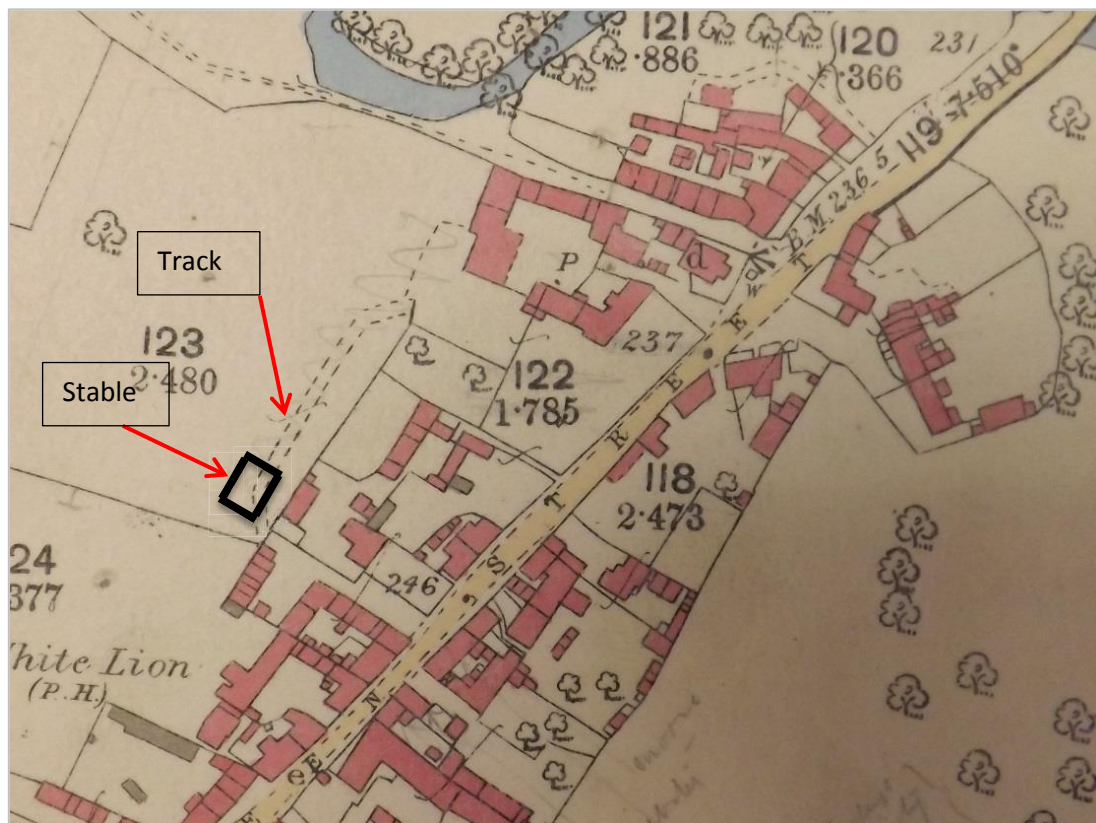


Fig 4: Extract from the 1886 1st edition Ordnance Survey Map; the track and stable location noted

Machine-stripping was extended to a small area adjacent to an existing field-gate off New Road, at the west side of the plot. This work also removed no more than turf and the organic growing medium, the bulk being replaced by inert fill to form a turning head for horse-boxes, large vehicles etc. Again, no archaeology was exposed by the work.



Fig 4: Stripping the turning-head. The new stable location is in the background at the top of the rise (arrowed)

The equestrian manège

The stripping of the topsoil over the larger, full area of the manège (40m x 20m) was carried out with a 15-ton tracked machine and the up-cast stored on site nearby.

The finished surface was inspected for features and finds before further reduction took place over about 40% of the area at the southern end (Figs 6 and 7). The cut and fill approach was to level out the ground for the horse-training and exercise, where the ground naturally slopes away to the north and west.

The initial strip (turf and topsoil) suggested that former ridge and furrow may have been present as parallel lines at the base of the topsoil began to appear, albeit in a very messy palette, as they had been subsequently ploughed flat. A few finds were noted and collected as a guide to what might be expected when the further reduction took place at the south end.



Fig 5: During topsoil-stripping, looking north (see Fig 3, viewed in the same direction)

The secondary machine-strip deepened the first at its southern end, and covered some 20m x 15m, adjacent to the recently-built stables. This confirmed the presence of former ridge and furrow cultivation evidence, although the act of deliberately ploughing them out had truncated the ridges, filled in the furrows and removed any semblance of former earthworks. A straight, east-west boundary ditch had thereafter been dug across their former lines, but this too had been filled in in the recent past.



Fig 6: The reduced dig at the south end of the manège, looking north, exposing the ploughed-out former ridges; soil colours and clear edges had been heavily smeared in their destruction by deliberate cross-ploughing.

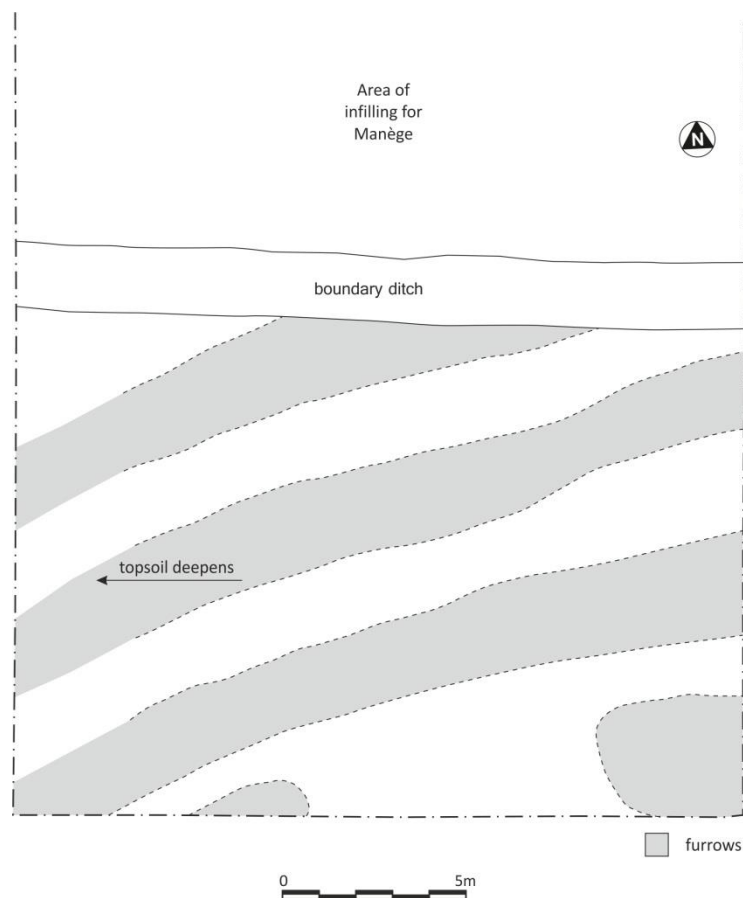


Fig 7: The ploughed-out ridge and furrow remnants on the southern 40% of the manège, as revealed by the reduced dig. The northern 60% was not reduced deeper than topsoil-depth.

The Finds

The following un-stratified material was collected from the base of the topsoil as the ridges and furrows came to light at the end of the initial strip. They have not been retained due to their un-stratified nature.

- Seven flakes of flint, none retouched. While flint is not local, it was noted in the nearby 19th-century trackway (under the stables), so plough-shattered imported nodules seem likely
- Two small body sherds of grey-fabric pottery with weathered out inclusions, possibly Iron Age
- One sherd of medieval pottery, shell-tempered and abraded (probably 13th-15th century Lyveden/Stanion ware: CTS 319/CTS 320)
- Four sherds of 19th-century pottery, inc two 'willow-pattern'
- Two fragments of bottle glass, one blue (rim), the other clear
- Five small fragments of iron slag

Such small quantities are not conclusive for any period but it may be surmised that medieval and later material, where datable, derives from frontages not far away, probably Queen Street. Equally the later material may have been imported with hard-core put down for the track under the stables, and subsequently spread about by cultivation. The two potentially Iron Age sherds, although they lack any context, may suggest there has been late prehistoric occupation in the vicinity, possibly destroyed by first the ridge and furrow cultivation, but then any remnants removed by the destructive cross-ploughing. The slag is typical of tiny quantities found all over north and central Northamptonshire, left over from widespread iron smelting since Roman times. Such tiny amounts do not represent a concentration.

Fragments of modern brick and a piece of clear bottle glass (not collected) show that the east-west boundary ditch, which had been cut across the ploughed-out ridge and furrow (and was therefore relatively recent in its creation) was also modern in its redundancy.

Conclusions

Whilst the fieldwork for both stables and turning head disturbed no pre-19th-century archaeology due to the shallow nature of the stripping, the larger piece of work for the creation of the manège has demonstrated that for some (not closely-dated) part of the medieval or early post-medieval period the site lay in the open fields of Geddington, where it was cultivated using Ridge and Furrow cultivation.

The fact that the furrows were relatively narrow (2-3m) and even might suggest that they were not earthworks created over a very long period, but perhaps relate to a relatively short-lived cultivation-regime.

In preparing the field for its modern uses, these ridge and furrow earthworks had been very effectively ploughed flat, destroying any evidence that there had ever been any archaeological features on the ridges. A few scant finds suggest there may have been occupation nearby, possibly as early as the Iron Age. At any period finds occurrences are in such small amounts that such areas may be considered to have always been marginal to settlement.

A short-lived boundary ditch, dug after the ridge and furrow was ploughed out, also shows some recent subdivision of the land, before infilling and its most recent use for grazing.



IS Heritage, 14 January 2015