



# Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

## Archaeological evaluation at the site of a new community centre, St Crispin's, Northampton

Iain Soden BA MCIfA

Email: [iain@isheritage.co.uk](mailto:iain@isheritage.co.uk)

Tel: 07742 901760

Website: [www.isheritage.co.uk](http://www.isheritage.co.uk)



## An archaeological evaluation at the site of a new Community Centre, St Crispin's, Northampton

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### Summary

An archaeological evaluation on the site of a new community centre for the St Crispin's Area of Northampton found no evidence of pre-modern occupation, but rather one half of the site had been previously stripped and used for dumping of materials, before remediation, while the other had been substantially reduced in height before being flattened out. The site was previously open grassland.

### Introduction

Northampton Borough Council is having a new community centre built on land adjacent to St Crispin's Drive in an arc on its south and west and Frank Large Walk on its east, Northampton (NGR: SP 7150 6105). To the north lie open playing fields which were formerly attached to St Crispin's Hospital.

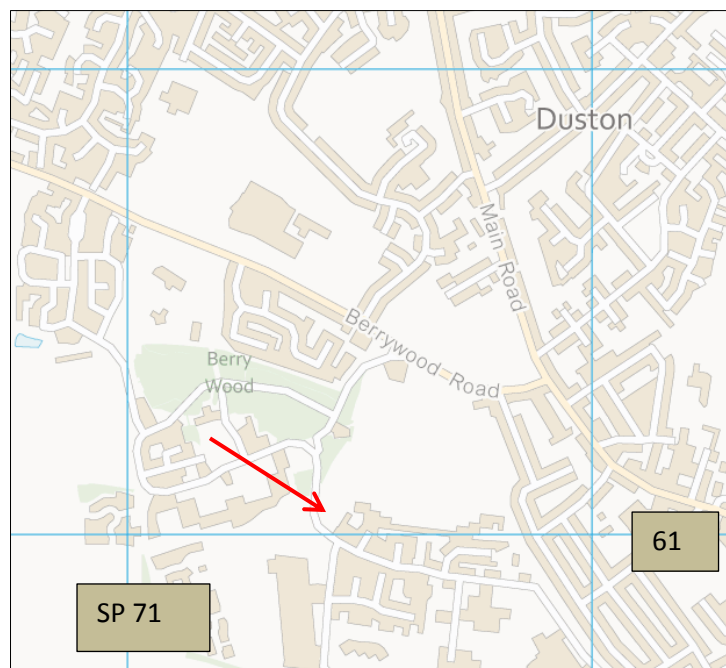


Fig 1: Site location (arrowed). Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database right 2016

# St Crispin's Community Centre

## Fieldwork

A 14-ton tracked machine was deployed, fitted with a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket. Five trenches were dug, totalling 190 metres. They were placed in areas to be disturbed by both the new community centre building (the north half of the site), the access road to that building (across the middle of the site), and the car park area to serve that building (the southern half of the site). The trench lengths and locations were pre-agreed with the Northamptonshire County Council Principal Archaeological Advisor before work began. On site however, one trench (Trench 5) was moved and had to be shortened slightly in order to avoid children's playground apparatus which stood on the site and which were linked by a part-buried plastic cellular mesh, measuring some 20m x 20m.

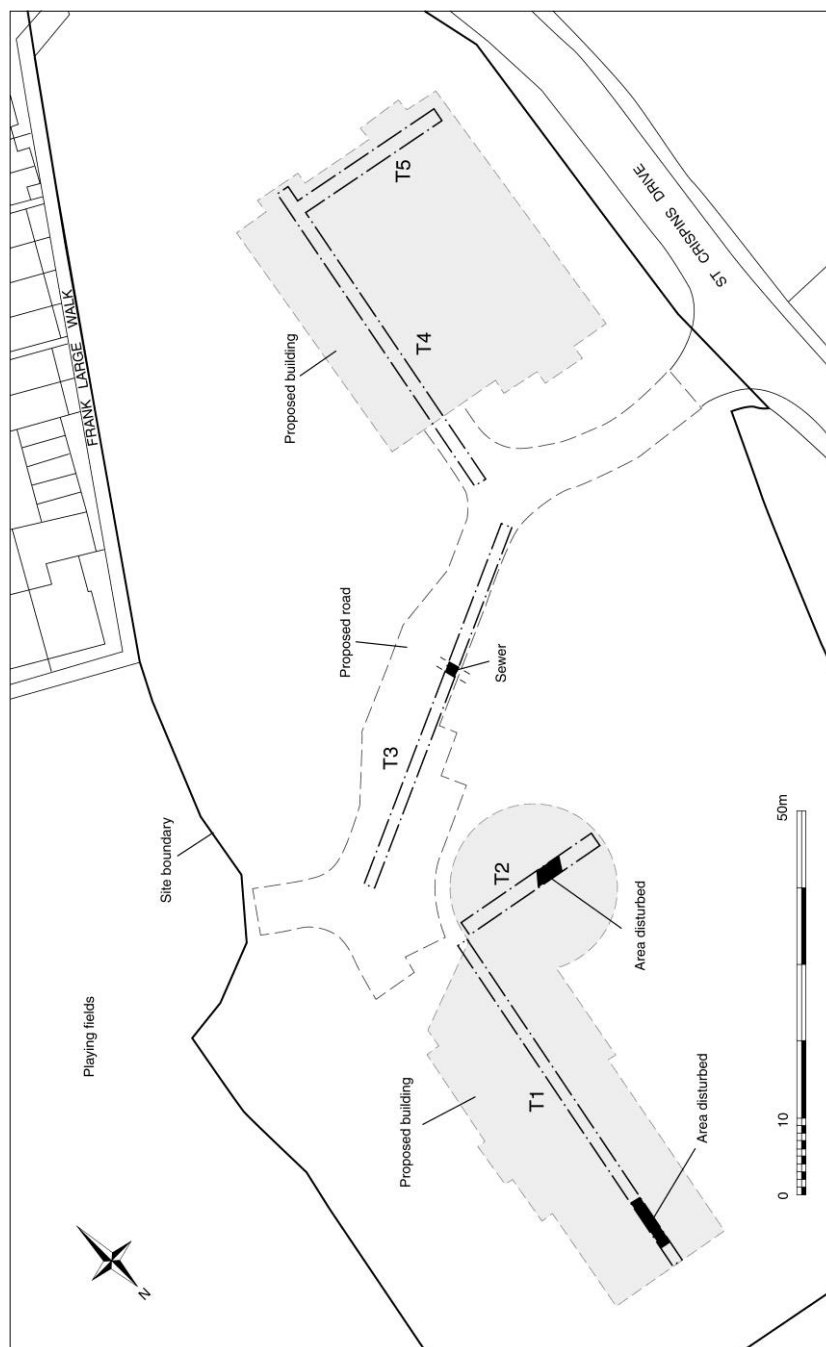


Fig 2: Trench locations (Andy Isham after Jeakins Weir). Note direction of north.

## *Trench 1*

Trench 1 measured 50m long x 1.8m wide and was aligned north-south along the long-axis of the proposed community centre building.

It cut through an average of 400mm of turf and topsoil which lay directly over natural clayey sand. There was no other stratigraphy present.

However, close to the north end of the trench lay a 4m-wide swathe of deep, machine-cut modern disturbance, which had been backfilled apparently entirely with topsoil and old turf. This was not bottomed but is more than 2.85m deep (Fig 5). The fill still contained much organic material and reeked of decomposing vegetable matter as well as plastic and builder's debris. It had been sealed with a dump of sand.

There was no pre-modern archaeology present.

The clean, even horizon between the natural geology and the topsoil suggests that the ground has been previously stripped and re-made.



Fig 3: Trench 1, looking north from midpoint;  
scales 2m and 1m



Fig 4: Trench 1, looking south from midpoint;  
scales 2m and 1m





Fig 5: Massive modern disturbance at north end of Trench 1, looking east; scales 2m and 1m

### *Trench 2*

Trench 2 measured 20m x 1.8m and was aligned east-west across the rotunda of the new proposed community centre building. Here the topsoil and turf were as little as 200mm thick but again they directly overlay natural clayey sand. There was an area of modern disturbance across the trench, containing brick and concrete fragments (Fig 6).

There was no pre-modern archaeology present. The clean, even horizon between the natural geology and the topsoil suggests that the ground has been previously stripped and re-made.



Fig 6: Trench 2, looking east, with modern disturbance; scales 2m and 1m

### *Trench 3*

Trench 3 measured 50m x 1.8m and was aligned north-east to south-west along the line of the proposed new access road on the site. Here, as in Trench 2, the topsoil and turf were very thin and for most of the south-western end there was a hard compacted layer of modern brick crush just below the turf (Fig 7). This area seems to have previously been used for storing building rubble, or may have been used as a haul road. The topsoiling and turfing/seeding seems to have constituted remediation. They and the crush directly overlay natural clayey sand, forming a flat, even, very artificial.

There was no pre-modern archaeology present. The clean, even horizon between the natural geology and the topsoil suggests that the ground has been previously stripped and re-made.



Fig 7: Trench 3, looking north-east, haul-road crush in foreground; scales 2m and 1m

### *Trench 4*

Trench 4 measured 50m x 1.8m and was aligned north-south along the proposed area for building the new car park.

Here the topsoil was very thin indeed, sometimes as thin as 100mm including turf, and it overlay partly the same clayey sand encountered elsewhere, and partly lias clays which were unusually close to the surface. Within the clay was a truncated ceramic land drain of the type used in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Ordinarily such land drains lie some 750mm -1m below the ground surface and



this startlingly shallow occurrence suggests that the land has been reduced at this southern end of the site. Certainly the sweep of St Crispin's Drive, together with a nearby sewer manhole, both stand about a metre above the surrounding grass.

There was a spread of concrete crush at the northern end of the trench. The trench contained no pre-modern archaeology.



Fig 8: Trench 4, looking south, concrete crush in foreground, Trench 5 at top right; scales 2m and 1m

### *Trench 5*

Trench 5 measured 20m x 1.8m and was placed at right angles to Trench 4 in order to avoid a children's playground and the large ground-anchored, rubberised plastic mesh mat on which it was constructed.

As in Trench 4 the mere scattering of turf and topsoil overlay patches of exposed lias clays, indicating that the ground hereabouts had been previously reduced before being re-made.

There was no pre-modern archaeology present.





Fig 9: Trench 5, looking east; scales 2m and 1m

### Conclusions

No archaeology was present on this site, but there was widespread evidence of modern disturbance to the site.

The northern half of the site had been built up in the recent past and contained a modern haul road, probably for nearby building works. Not all the materials stored here had been removed at the end of works. There was also some very deep disturbance, probably of the same period. A thin layer of topsoil had been put back very neatly after remediation, producing a clean, even interface between topsoil and the natural clayey sand geology.

The southern end appears to have been reduced in a widespread arc by as much as a metre, which can be seen in the height of *St Crispin's Drive* to the west and south, and the height of a sewer manhole adjacent to *Frank Large Walk* to the east. Trench 4 in particular shows that this reduction has exposed underlying heavy clays in part. The modern topsoil comprises only the barest scattering, just enough to support grass and to ensure the ground is not boggy.

# St Crispin's Community Centre

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## Appendix

### *OASIS data*

Project Name	St Crispin's Community Centre, Northampton
OASIS ID	Iainsode1-252851
Project Type	Evaluation
Originator	Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd
Project Manager	Iain Soden
Previous/future work	No
Current land use	Public open space
Development type	Community centre
Reason for investigation	Planning Condition
National grid reference	SP 7150 6105
Start/end dates of fieldwork	17 May 2016
Archive recipient	Northamptonshire Archive
Study area	3000 sq m



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

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