



# Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

**Archaeological observation and monitoring for new  
greenhouse foundations at Canons Ashby House,  
Northamptonshire, August 2016**

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## Archaeological observation and monitoring for new greenhouse foundations at Canons Ashby House, Northamptonshire, August 2016

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### Summary

Observation of foundation-digging within the gardens of Canons Ashby House exposed no stratified archaeology. A single residual architectural fragment probably derives from the nearby Augustinian Priory site.

### Introduction

Full Planning Consent was granted by Daventry District Council to National Trust for construction of a new glasshouse and potting shed, with new paths and scheduled monument consent (SMC) on garden land at Canons Ashby House, Banbury Road, Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire, NN11 3SD (NGR: SP 578 507; Fig 1. SMC reference S00132544; Application no: DA/2016/0154, 26 April 2016). A Planning Condition (5) was applied to the works. The site lies on the curve (western side) of the unnumbered country road which passes through the hamlet from Adstone in the east, to Moreton Pinkney in the South. It is adjacent to National Trust Tea Rooms which serve the site and on the opposite side of the road to the former Augustinian Priory.

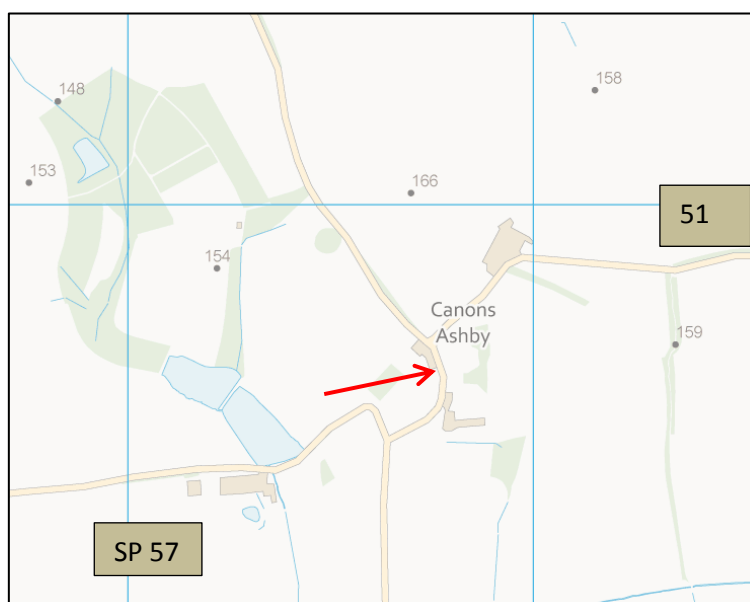


Fig 1: Site location (arrowed).

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Since the site lies within a Scheduled Monument of Canons Ashby [The remains of a medieval monastery, castle, settlement and fields, post-medieval houses, gardens and park, and a series of five dams, Northamptonshire, (SM 13643; HA 1015534)] the work necessarily carried a need for Scheduled Monument Consent, as indicated by the Dept of Culture Media and Sport, as advised by Historic England. Consent was forthcoming, dated 28 April 2016, but with archaeological conditions.

In accordance with this, a Written Scheme of Investigation was produced to cover the limited nature of the development, in order to set out a proposed programme of observation and recording during ground-works for the glasshouse, with concomitant reporting and archiving. The document was dated 18 July 2016 and approved by National Trust's Regional Archaeologist and Northamptonshire County Council's Assistant Archaeological Advisor.

The site of the gardens of Canons Ashby House probably lies over an area within and adjacent to the Shrunken Medieval Village which forms the greater part of the above mentioned Scheduled Monument. More specifically, the area is close to the site of the medieval Augustinian Priory of The Blessed Virgin, of which some of the former church remains as the Parish Church. The archaeology of the settlement and Priory are set out in RCHME (1981, 34-7).

The objectives of the fieldwork were as follows:

- To monitor groundworks in order to protect from inadvertent disturbance any significant archaeological remains which may lie beneath the proposed glasshouse, potting shed and paths, in their cultural and environmental setting
- To keep under review the depths of disturbance required, in order to obviate any need, where possible, to disturb significant archaeology
- To record the extent, nature and date of any archaeological features or deposits that may be necessarily exposed during the ground-works programme.
- To preserve by record archaeological features or deposits exposed which cannot be retained and report on them.

Following the work on the foundations of the greenhouse, which showed the thickness of modern, disturbed topsoil, the need for any further fieldwork and monitoring was curtailed by National Trust.

## **Fieldwork**

The new greenhouse was a direct replacement for a pre-existing poly-tunnel, which had been recently taken down. However, the two greenhouses did not share the same footprint. The polytunnel had lain parallel with the roadside wall, whereas the new one was set out at an angle to that wall to avoid damaging a mature holly hedge (Fig 2).

Work took place with the knowledge of a mains electricity cable somewhere on the site, but with little idea of exactly where it lay or of its depth. It was detected using a buried cable detector and excavation works proceeded around it by hand and with care; it was uncovered during machine-work (Fig 3).

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Fig 2: Setting out the building relative to the holly hedge and the roadside wall beyond (right)

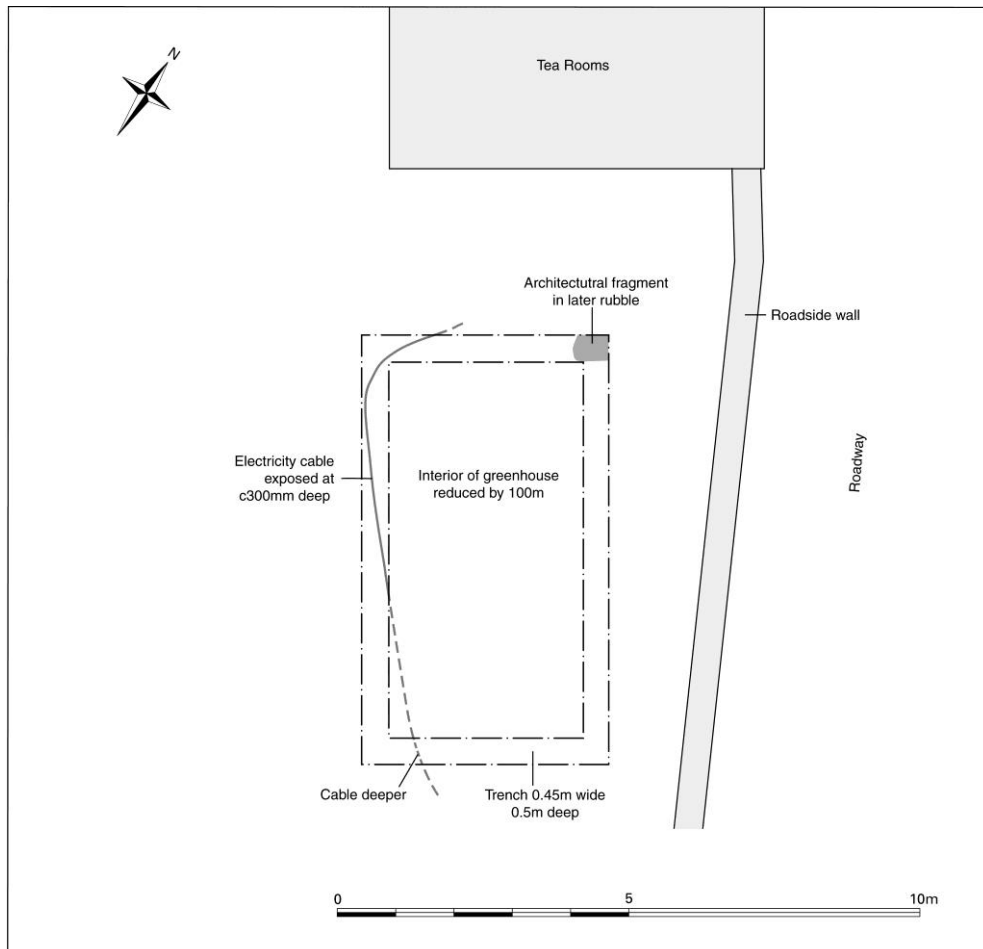


Fig 3: Plan of area reduced with trench and live mains cable

A 3-ton machine was used to dig the foundation trench, which was 0.45m wide and 0.5m deep, using a toothless 300mm-wide bucket under archaeological scrutiny. The trench formed a rectangle

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to the size of the proposed greenhouse, but before the circuit was completed, the entire interior was also reduced by 100mm for the thickness of the new floor and sub-base to be laid in due course.

The entire depth to 500mm comprised dark brown compacted very well-drained topsoil, lightening slightly with occasional pebbles and becoming more compact to the base, where it met natural ironstone geology abruptly and evenly. There was no subsoil or intervening layers present.



Fig 4: View of the area, looking north; scales 2m (horizontal) and 1m (vertical)

There were no archaeological features visible in the trench sides or in the narrow base of the trench, but for an amorphous dump of modern brick, tile and smashed drainage pipe rubble in the north-east corner of the area, only half-buried in topsoil and clearly a recent deposit. This dump included a very damaged (and clearly residual) architectural fragment, possibly from an arch and probably medieval in origin from the nearby Augustinian Priory (Fig 5). This was set aside and labelled for retention or discard by National Trust, as appropriate. Since it has no monastic or immediately Dissolution-related context, it is of very limited value.



Fig 5: Un-stratified architectural fragment; scale 30cm

### Conclusions

No pre-modern archaeology was exposed or disturbed by the foundation works. In fact conversations with the Canons Ashby House Gardener ascertained that the area had in the recent past been double-dug, which accounted for the clean, almost stone-free topsoil all the way down to the natural ironstone geology at c500mm below modern ground level.

Part of the area had also been disturbed to insert a modern electricity cable and its subsequent repair. For some of its length this coincided with the front wall foundation-trench of the new greenhouse.

The single residual architectural fragment probably derives from the nearby Augustinian Priory, dissolved in 1539. It was, however, mixed in with modern brick and other building-rubble and has thus been moved more than once and has no connection with a Dissolution- or demolition-context.

In this case the absence of stratified archaeology is partly related to the low-impact nature of the works designed to leave only a minimal footprint on the monument. Little of the ironstone natural was exposed and the work was in an area of previous double-digging. Thus, whilst any impact on buried archaeology of the Scheduled Monument may be seen to be minimal or non-existent, so too has the work been able to add nothing to our understanding of that monument, or to address any key historic environment questions discussed in Cooper (2006) and Knight *et al* (2012).

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## Bibliography

Cooper N, 2006 *The archaeology of the East Midlands: an archaeological resource assessment and research agenda*; Leicester Archaeology Monograph **13**

Knight D, Vyner B, and Allen C, 2012 *East Midlands Heritage: an updated research agenda and strategy for the historic environment of the East Midlands*, Nottingham University/English Heritage

RCHME 1981 *An inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Northampton; III: Archaeological sites in North-West Northamptonshire*, Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

## Appendix

*OASIS data*

Project Name	Canons Ashby Greenhouse
OASIS ID	iainsode1-262857
Project Type	Watching Brief
Originator	Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd
Project Manager	Iain Soden
Previous/future work	No
Current land use	Garden
Development type	Horticultural building
Reason for investigation	Condition of SMC
National grid reference	SP 5780 5070
Start/end dates of fieldwork	17 August 2016
Archive recipient	Northamptonshire Archive
Study area	c30 sq m



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

26 September 2016