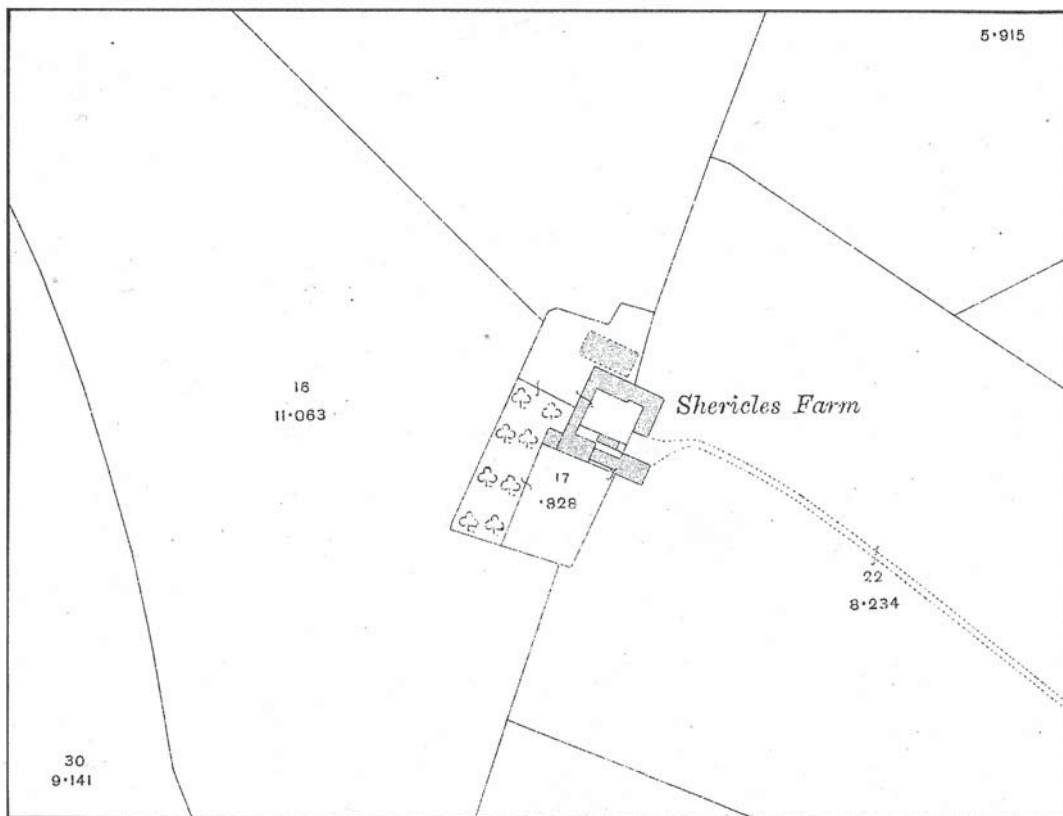


Archaeological Observation at Shericles Farm, Peckleton, Leicestershire



Report 0608

February 2006

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Summary

An archaeological observation of topsoil stripping and ground reduction for a new manège at Shericles Farm, Peckleton, Leicestershire recorded no archaeological finds or features. However, the ground works were insufficiently intrusive to disturb any potential archaeological deposits.

1. Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Hinckley and Bosworth District Council for the construction of a new manège in the garden of Shericles Farm, Kirkby Road, Desford, Leicestershire (Planning application No. 05/01008/COU). Because the site lies within an area of archaeological potential it was a condition of planning permission that the applicant should secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work to be carried out in conjunction with the development.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of archaeological observation of the ground reduction for the new manège, was commissioned from the Warwickshire Museum Field Archaeology Projects Group and carried out in February 2006. This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at Leicestershire County Museums under accession number X.A4.2006, the Warwickshire Museum site code was PS06.

2. Location

2.1 The site is located at national grid reference SK 4677 0272 in the parish of Peckleton, close to the village of Desford (Fig. 1). The land was most recently used as a grassed area forming part of the gardens of Shericles Farm.

2.2 The underlying geology of the area is Anglian glaciofluvial deposits or Anglian Till (BGS 2006).

3. Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 Evidence for prehistoric activity exists around Shericles Farm in the form of cropmarks and findspots (Fig. 1). A casual find of a late Neolithic flint axe was made 700m south of Shericles Farm (MLE 8831), and 800m to the south-east a flint scatter (MLE 9264), included artefacts of likely Mesolithic and late Neolithic dates. Iron Age artefacts (MLE 9263) have also been discovered close by. Approximately 1km to the west and north-west of the site are several pit alignments and a ditch, all of probable Bronze Age/Iron Age date (MLE 3014, 3013, 3017). Immediately to the south-east of Shericles Farm there is cropmark evidence for a rectilinear enclosure of probable Iron Age date (MLE 3032). Romano-British occupation evidence in the area is scant: there is a findspot of Roman pottery (MLE 7927) in the village of Desford, 1km to the north-east.

3.2 Shericles Farm is believed to have been a Leicestershire Moot site during the Anglo-Saxon period. The evidence to support this comes from the place name: Shericles was known as *Sherakehilles* in 1553. In Old English this means 'the hundred Oak' and may have been the meeting place of the men of the Sparkenhoe hundred. It is also possible to derive the meaning 'the shire oak' from the Old

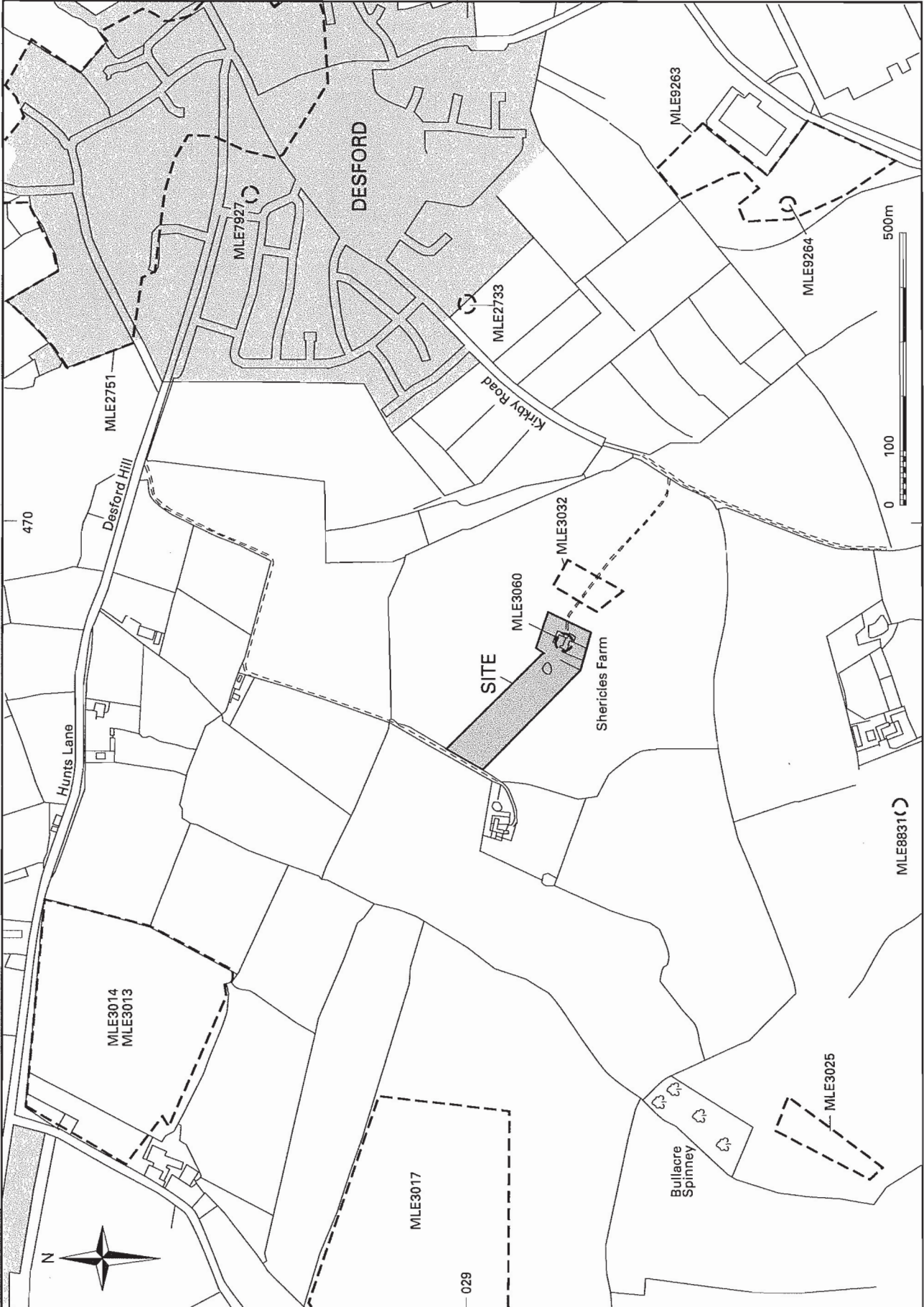


Fig. 1: Site Location

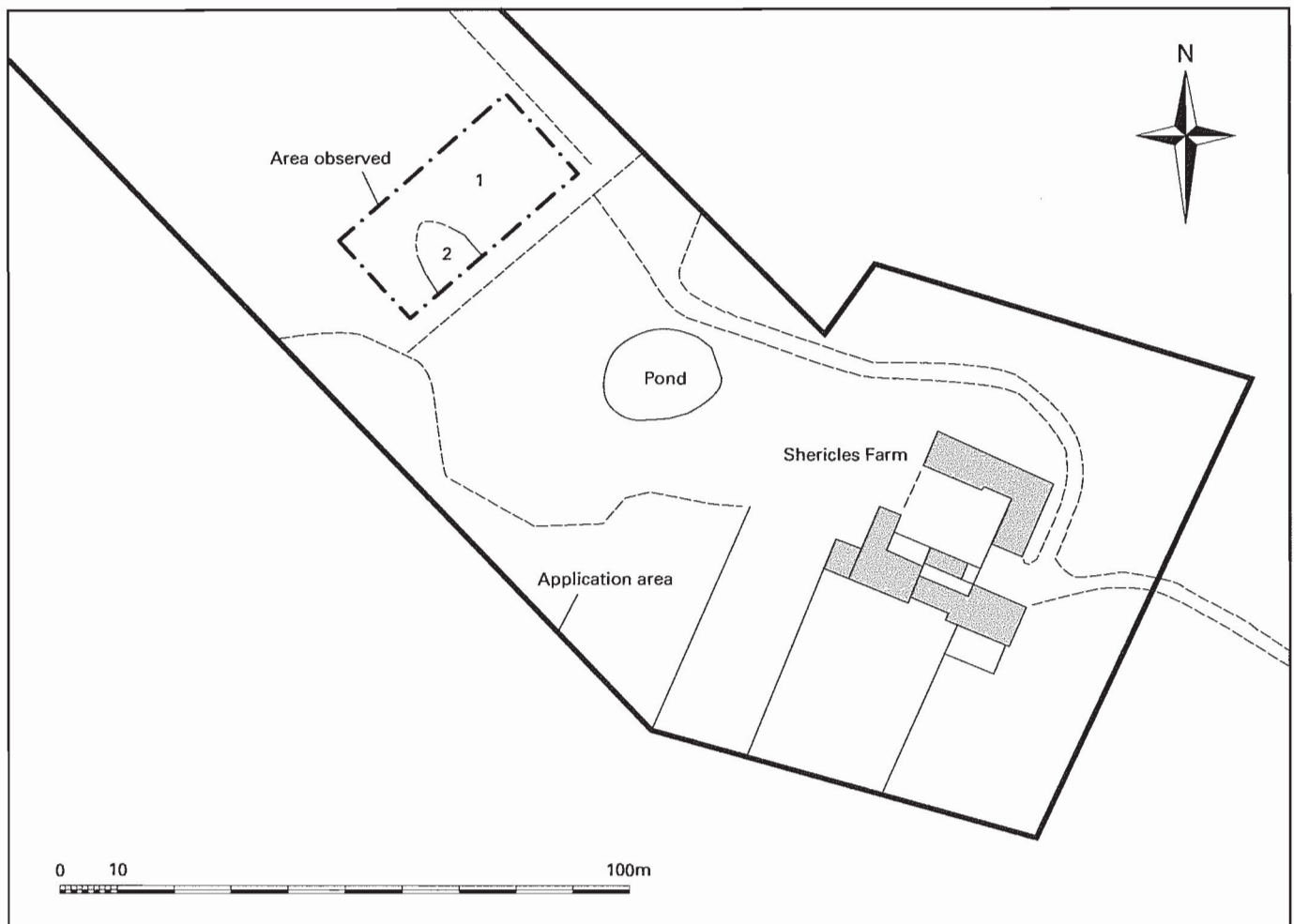


Fig. 2: Area observed

English; the first element of the name *scir* can mean either shire or hundred, it is certainly an administrative district, the next element *ac* is oak (Cox 1972, 19).

3.3 The village of Desford, to the north-east of the site has medieval origins (MLE 2751) and there are a number of grade II listed buildings with the historic core of the village. Shericles Farm falls within the medieval parish of Peckleton. Within Peckleton, 1km to the south-west of the farm, surviving traces of the medieval ridge and furrow field system which would have covered the whole parish have been noted (MLE 3025). Further along Kirkby Road on the outskirts of Desford records show there was a post-medieval windmill (MLE 2733).

3.4 The earliest detailed map evidence for Shericles Farm dates to 1889-90 (Ordnance Survey 1889). The farm is shown as a quadrangle of buildings with a gap on the south-eastern side leading to a central courtyard. Surrounding the farm on three sides are three small fields or garden areas. The second edition Ordnance Survey map of 1899 shows an identical layout. By 1916 the Ordnance Survey (cover) shows an additional building to the north and one small field as an orchard. Today the property is no longer in agricultural use and an additional strip of former agricultural land is now part of the gardens (Fig. 2).



Fig. 3: Stripped area, facing south-west

4. Observation

4.1 The site of the new manège is within an area of the garden which was formerly agricultural land (Fig. 2). It is also adjacent to a large ornamental pond. The owner of Shericles Farm has photographic evidence that the low mounds found in the area are recent landscaping features probably made using spoil from the excavation of the pond.

4.2 A rectangular area of 40mx20m was stripped of grass and levelled using a JCB with a toothless bucket. The maximum depth of soil removed from the landscaped mounds was 0.57m. This was made up of a lower layer of brownish-red sand, gravel and clay containing sandstone fragments (2), most likely to be re-deposited natural. Above this, a layer of brownish-red sandy clay loam topsoil (1) was observed to a depth of 0.30m. This topsoil layer extended across the remainder of the site, although only a depth of 0.10m was removed. Finds from within the topsoil were very modern in nature and support the conclusion that the soil removed had only recently been deposited.

5. Conclusions

5.1 During the ground works carried out at Shericles Farm, no archaeological finds or features were noted. However, topsoil stripping and ground levelling did not penetrate into potential archaeological layers due to the previous dumping of soil in the area.

Acknowledgements

The Warwickshire Museum would like to thank Mr Newell and Ms Concannon for commissioning the work. Work on site was carried out by Caroline Rann, who has also written this report, with illustrations by Candy Stevens. It was checked by Nicholas Palmer.

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