

***A Watching Brief at  
Hockleton Farm  
Shropshire, 2010***

by  
H R Hannaford



**Archaeology Service**



Shropshire  
Council

**A WATCHING BRIEF AT  
HOCKLETON FARM, SHROPSHIRE, 2010**

by  
H R HANNAFORD MIFA

A Report for  
Mr and Mrs Lewis,  
Hockleton Farm

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**Archaeology Service**  
Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury, SY1 2AQ  
Tel: 01743 255353 Fax: 01743 255355  
Email: [archaeology@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:archaeology@shropshire.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.shropshire.gov.uk/archaeology.nsf](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/archaeology.nsf)

## CONTENTS

	Page No
<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3 THE WATCHING BRIEF</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4 REFERENCES</b>	<b>6</b>

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: The location of the new track and drain

Figure 2: Location of the principal archaeological features seen in the watching brief

Figure 3: Plan view of the excavation for the new track, showing the area of the medieval pits north of the castle bailey, scale 1:50

## PHOTOS

Photo 1: The excavation for the new track, looking east

Photo 2: Medieval features (60 & 66) revealed to the north of the bailey

Photo 3: The former track (69) and holloway, looking north

Photo 4: Excavating the french drain alongside the new track

## SUMMARY

*In May 2010 a new farm track was created around the edge of a motte and bailey castle at Hockleton Farm, Chirbury, Shropshire. The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, had previously carried out an archaeological field evaluation of the site. The evaluation comprised a geophysical survey and the excavation of a number of trial trenches on the line of the proposed new track. The geophysical survey identified a number of below-ground features both within the and beyond the visible castle earthworks. The trial trenching identified a number of features in a trench to the northeast of the bailey, one of which produced medieval pottery of 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> century date from a charcoal rich deposit which gave a radiocarbon date of between 1290AD and 1420 AD. The construction of the new track was accompanied by an archaeological watching brief by the Archaeology Service. The watching brief recorded further details of the pit sampled in the evaluation, and located the remains of a former trackway which ran along the western side of the bailey. No other significant archaeological features or deposits were recorded.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** Hockleton Farm, near, Chirbury is situated in southwest Shropshire, about 25km southwest of the centre of Shrewsbury (NGR SO 2744 9995). The farm lies on the southeast side of the B4386 Shrewsbury to Montgomery road. In a field adjacent to the farm on its southeast side are the remains of a motte and bailey castle. The motte and bailey castle is a scheduled Ancient Monument (No. 19927, "Motte and bailey castle 80m south east of Hockleton Farm").

**1.2** The castle comprises a well defined 'motte' approximately 25m in diameter at its base and 4m high. On the northern side of the motte lie the earthwork remains of a roughly triangular shaped bailey with maximum dimensions of 40m E-W by 30m N-S, and defined on its northern and western side by a 2m high scarp. A 6m wide gap on the northern side is thought to represent the original entrance to the bailey. The motte and bailey are presumed to be surrounded by an approximately 4m wide ditch. When in use, a timber tower is likely to have stood on the top of the motte, whilst domestic buildings and stables would have been located within the bailey

**1.3** The present occupiers of the farm have implemented a Management Plan to protect the motte and bailey castle under a Higher Level Stewardship Agreement. The Management Plan required the upgrading of an existing farm track on a new alignment in order to reduced vehicle erosion to the monument. A program of earthwork repairs to the castle was then to be undertaken. The upgraded track was to be 4 m wide, increasing to 6m at the corners/gateways and was to run for approximately 250m around the northwest, northeast, and southeast sides of the monument. The track would consist of a graded stone surface laid in a 'trough' excavated to the top of the sub-soil (approx. average depth 0.2m) and lined with a Teram geotextile membrane. A French drain was also to be constructed in the base of the trough.

**1.4** Because of the archaeological significance of the site, it was considered necessary to undertake a programme of archaeological work to accompany the construction of the track and the earthwork repairs. Phase 1 of this programme comprised a pre-works archaeological site assessment, which consisted of a geophysical survey of the castle and its immediate environs, and trial excavation on the alignment of the upgraded farm track. A brief for this assessment was produced by the Shropshire Council Historic Environment Countryside Advisor (Wigley, 2009). The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council was commissioned to carry out the Phase 1 pre-works site assessment and this was carried out in March 2010 (Hannaford 2010, Sabin and Donaldson 2010).

**1.5** On the basis of the results of Phase 1, Phase 2 of the programme of archaeological work was agreed and comprised a watching brief on the groundworks for the creation of the new track. This work was carried out in May 2010.

**1.6** The aim of the Phase 2 watching brief was to preserve by record any archaeological remains encountered during the groundworks for the upgrading of the track.

## **2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

**2.1** A settlement may have been established at Hockleton in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century, as the Saxon kingdom of Mercia expanded westwards. The settlement is recorded as *Elchitun* in the Domesday Survey of 1086, although it had been 'waste' at the time of the Conquest in 1066. The castle at Hockleton forms part of a larger group of five motte and bailey castles in the area around Chirbury which are likely to have been established in the late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century. The castles were certainly in existence by 1225, when Henry III commanded that their defences be refortified during a period of increased tension with Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, Prince of Gwynedd. However, the motte and bailey at Hockleton is likely to have fallen out of use by the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. (Wigley, 2009a)

**2.2** An assessment of the material held within the Shropshire HER was made as part of the preparation of the Management Plan for the monument. This revealed that the aerial photograph plots produced by the RCHME as part of the Marches Upland Mapping Project suggest that a second, larger outer enclosure may be situated beyond the bailey. Aerial photographic evidence indicates a substantial curved bank on the north-western side of the castle, set back from but running parallel to the hedge. To the north, a well defined hollow way runs through the entrance into the bailey. Examination of historic edition of the Ordnance Survey map indicates that this feature was used as a farm track in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and is now followed by the line of a public footpath. A small area of narrow ridge and furrow between these two features probably represents post-medieval ploughing. (Wigley, 2009a)

**2.3** To the southeast of the castle, much of the remaining area of the field is covered by an extensive tract of broad ridge and furrow of probable medieval date. Aerial photographs suggest that this respects the castle earthworks, providing important stratigraphic information about the castle and surrounding medieval land use. (Wigley, 2009a)

**2.4** The Phase 1 evaluation demonstrated the potential and actual survival of below-ground medieval features within the study area. These features may be associated with the motte and bailey castle or with associated settlement at Hockleton. The geophysical survey in particular identified below ground anomalies that are likely to form part of the structure of the motte and bailey castle. It also identified features outside the castle bailey on the line of the track, which when tested by the trial excavation, proved to be of medieval date. Specifically, a pit and linear geophysical anomalies located 18m to the north of the bailey proved to be man-made features. When sampled, these produced 3 conjoining sherds of medieval pottery of 12<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> century date and charcoal in the pit fill gave a radiocarbon date of mid to late 14<sup>th</sup> century.

### **3 THE WATCHING BRIEF**

The new track ran around the northern eastern and southern sides of the area of the motte and bailey castle (see Fig. 1). A strip of topsoil c. 4m wide by 0.2m deep was removed by machine to form the bed for the new track. The excavated surface was covered with a layer of membrane and the excavation filled with stone chippings to the original ground level. A drain 0.2m wide was then excavated along the inner edge of the new track. Along the southern and eastern arm of the track the drain was cut to a depth of 0.5m; alongside the northern arm it was 0.8m deep. The drain was backfilled with stone chippings.

Along the northern arm of the track the topsoil comprised a greyish brown humic silty loam (Table 1; 51). Immediately by the gate at the northwestern corner of the field the removal of the topsoil revealed the shale bedrock. The bedrock here lay beneath a natural subsoil of buff clay and gravel (54). Along the northern arm of the track the topsoil lay over a deposit of greyish–brown silt (55), presumably colluvium from the hillside to the south. At the northern corner of the site this was cut by a former pond (57) which had been filled with a deposit of loam and rubble (56).

Along the eastern arm of the track on the hillside the topsoil lay over a natural subsoil of a yellowish brown silty clay (58). The excavation revealed the outline of the earlier evaluation trench, and revealed again the irregular-shaped feature (Hannaford, 2010, Figure 2b; 20) that had been cut into the natural. The re-excavation of this area showed that this feature comprised two components – the main pit (Figures 2 & 3; 60) filled with a charcoal-rich silt (59) and a linear cut (66) filled with a similar charcoal rich silt (65). A patch of grey silt (64) partially overlay the western side of these features. A smaller circular feature (68) also filled with a charcoal rich silt (67) cut the natural to the south of the larger pit. The definition of these features in the eastern half of the trackway was obscured by topsoil which (due to the sloping ground) was not fully removed here by the excavation for the new track. These features and the relationship between some of them was obscured further by a number of more recent stone-filled field drains which cut across these deposits.

Where the new track passed around the southeastern side of the bailey, it crossed the line of a low earthwork hollow and bank, marking the line of a former ditch (Figure 2; 61) which ran southwest to northeast to the south of the castle. The hollow was 2m wide by 0.1m deep with a spread bank less than 0.1m high on its southern side. The fill of the ditch was seen to comprise a dark greyish brown silty loam flecked with brick fragments. The ditch continued through the modern field boundary into the sloping ground on the east side of the field.

At the western end of the southern arm of the new track, the excavations revealed a former track (Figure 2; 69). The track surface comprised a mixture of pebbles and cobbles with a few fragments of post-medieval brick. The track will have continued to the north through a pronounced holloway on the western side of the motte and bailey. The eastern side of the track was bordered by a hollow (72) about 3m wide filled with a dark grey silty loam (71), cut into the natural shale bedrock (70). The new track also cut across the line of a low spread bank (73), possibly a former headland associated with ridge furrow ploughing earthworks to the south of the study area. This bank was made up of soil indistinguishable from the topsoil along the rest of this arm of the trench.

No further archaeological features or deposits were recorded during the watching brief.

*A Watching Brief at Hockleton Farm, Shropshire, 2010*

<b>Context</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Colour and texture</b>	<b> Finds (count/weight)</b>
(10)51	Layer	Greyish brown; humic silty loam	Pottery (18 <sup>th</sup> -19thC), 2/28g; iron object (modern)
(10)52	Fill	Dark grey; silt	
(10)53	Cut		
(10)54	Layer	Yellowish brown; silty clay	
(10)55	Layer	Greyish brown; silt	Pottery (medieval), 2/11g
(10)56	Fill	Dark grey; humic loam and rubble	
(10)57	Former pond		
(10)58	Layer	Yellowish brown; silty clay	
(10)59	Fill	Dark grey; silty loam	
(10)60	Pit/ditch		
(10)61	Fill	Dark greyish brown; silty loam	
(10)62	Ditch		
(10)63	Layer	Greyish brown; silty loam	
(10)64	Layer	Dark greyish brown; silty loam	
(10)65	Fill	Very dark grey; silt	
(10)66	Cut		
(10)67	Fill	Dark greyish brown; sandy silt	
(10)68	Pit		
(10)69	Surface	Dark greyish brown; pebbles and cobbles in silty loam	
(10)70	Layer	Brown; shale bedrock	
(10)71	Fill	Dark greyish brown; silty loam	
(10)72	Hollow		
(10)73	Bank	Greyish brown; humic silty loam	

Table 1: Context summary

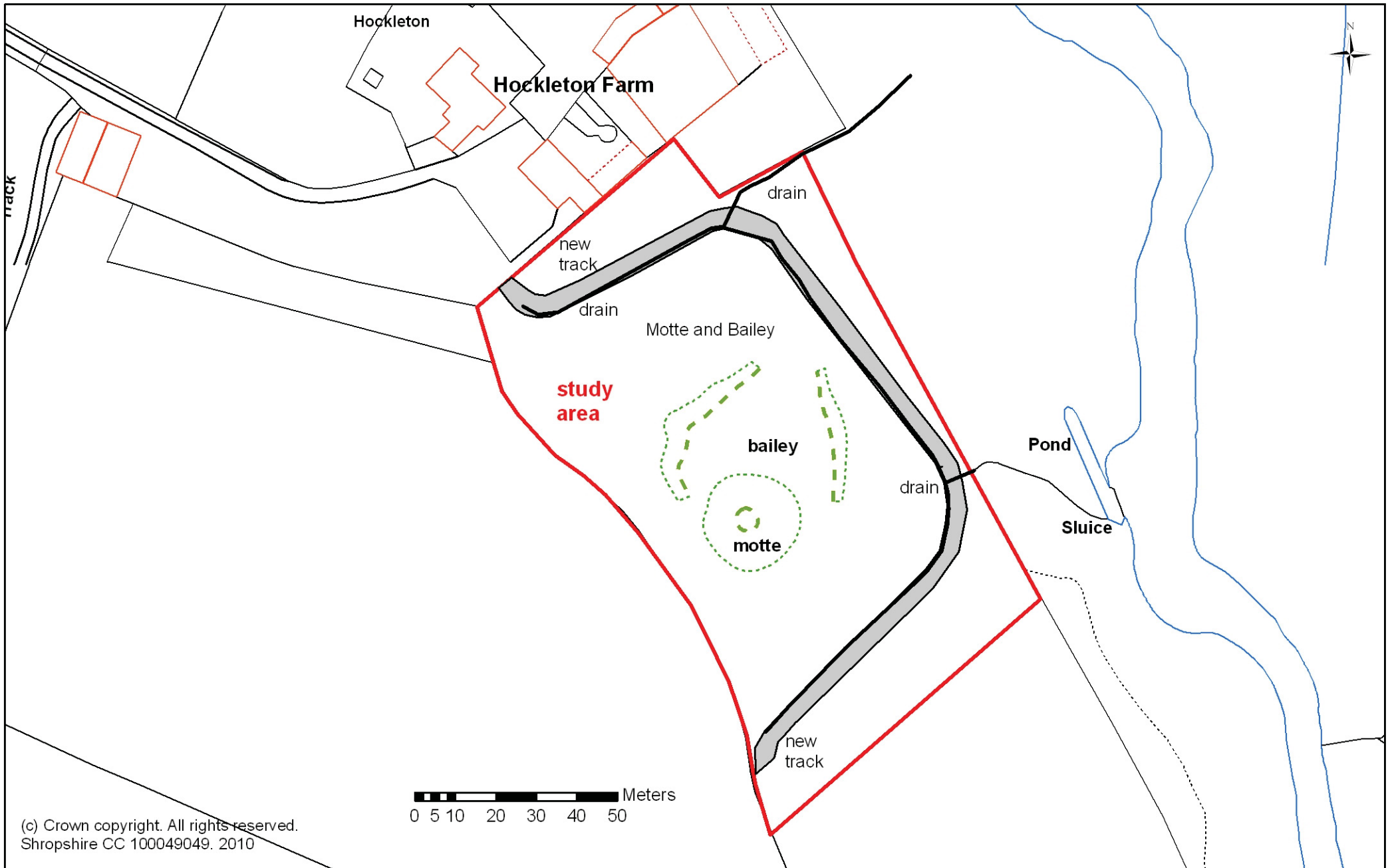
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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ASSC</b>	Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council
<b>CBA</b>	Council for British Archaeology
<b>HER</b>	Historic Environment Record, Shropshire Council
<b>OS</b>	Ordnance Survey
<b>PRO</b>	Public Record Office
<b>SA</b>	Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
<b>SUERC</b>	Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre
<b> TSAHS</b>	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society
<b>TSAS</b>	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society



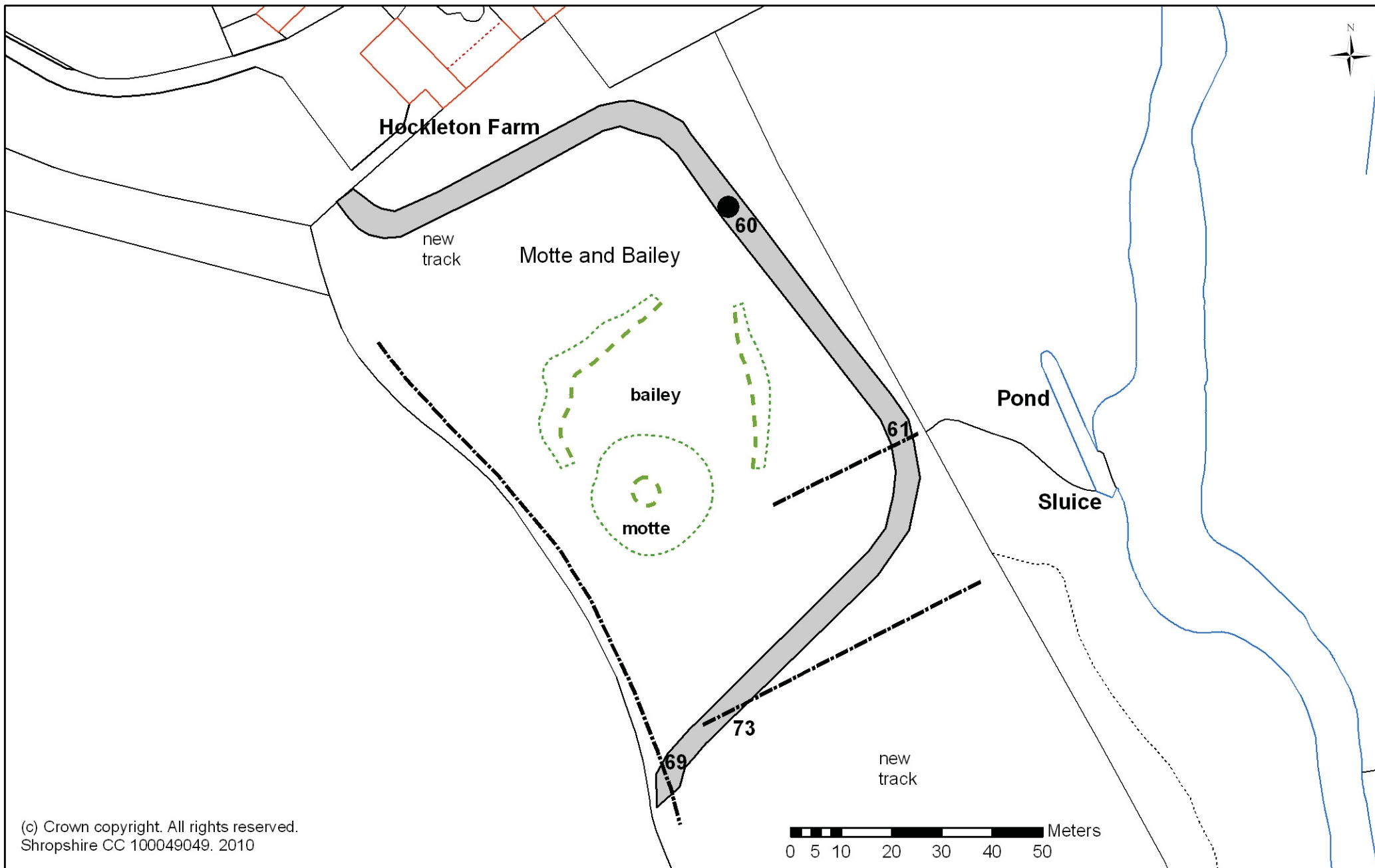


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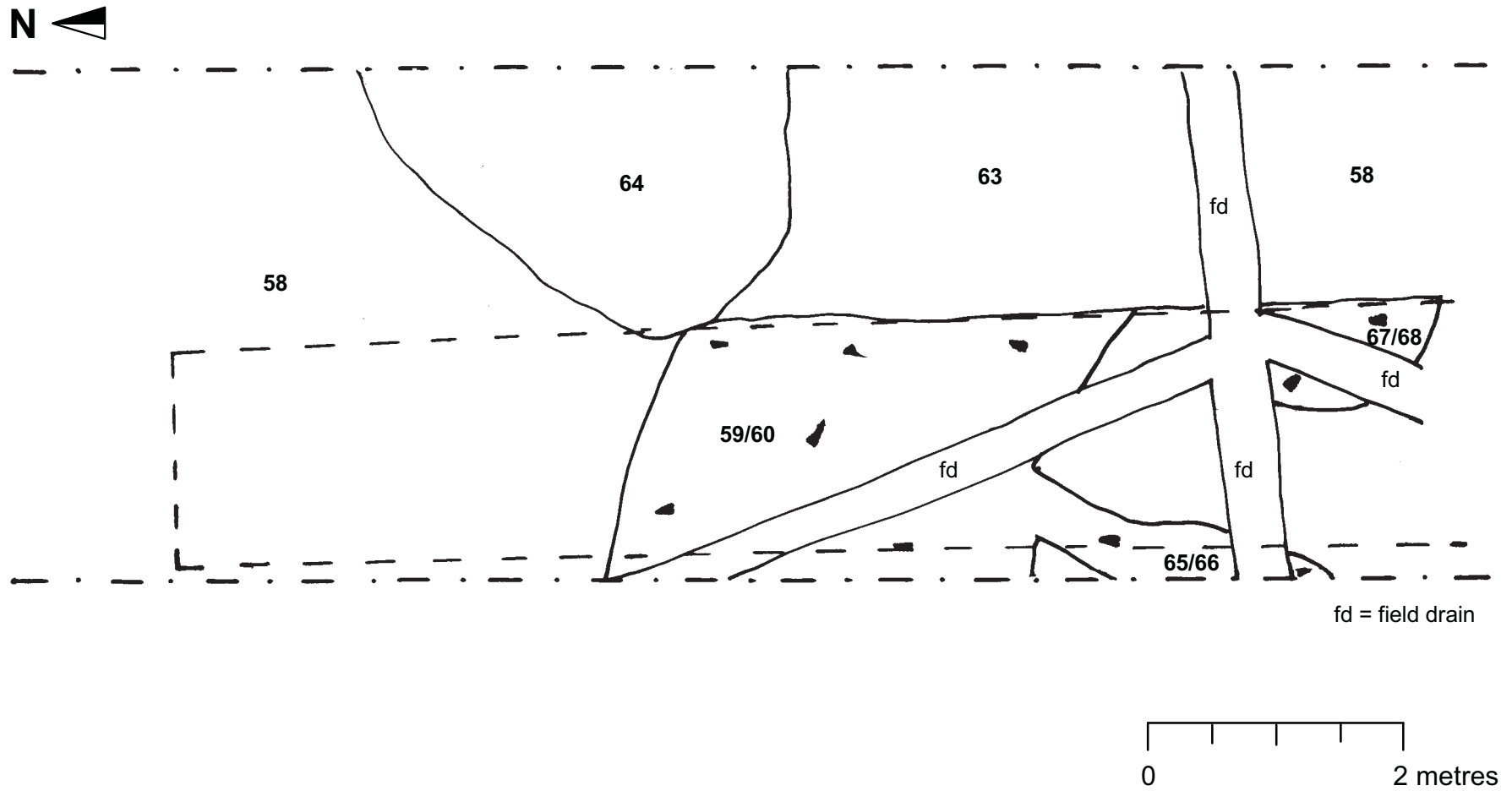


Hockleton Motte 2010  
Figure 1: Location of the new track and drain

**Archaeology Service**  
Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates,  
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY1 2AQ  
Scale: 1:1,245



Hockleton Motte 2010  
 Figure 2: Location of the principal archaeological features  
 seen in the watching brief



HOCKLETON MOTTE 2010

Figure 3: Plan view of the excavation for the new track, showing the area of the medieval pits north of the castle bailey, scale 1:50

*A Watching Brief at Hockleton Farm, Shropshire, 2010*



Photo 1: The excavation for the new track, looking east



Photo 2: Medieval features (60 & 66) revealed to the north of the bailey



Photo 3: The former track (69) and holloway, looking north



Photo 4: Excavating the french drain alongside the new track