Archaeological evaluation of land at Yew Tree Farm, Launton, Oxfordshire

December 2013

Report No. 14/65

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Illustrator: Amir Bassir

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NGR: SP 6093 2285

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS	OASIS No: MOLA NORT1-174890
Project title	Archaeological evaluation of land at Yew Tree Farm, Launton, Oxfordshire December 2013
Short description	Northamptonshire Archaeology (now trading as MOLA), undertook a trial trench evaluation on land at Yew Tree Farm, Launton. Ditches were observed in four of the excavated trenches, unfortunately flooding precluded further investigation.
Project type	Evaluation
Previous work	Geophysical Survey (NA 2013)
Future work	Unknown
Current land use	Pasture
Monument type and period	Undated ditches
PROJECT LOCATION	
County	Oxfordshire
Site address	Yew Tree Farm, Launton
NGR	SP 6093 2285
Area	1.3ha
Height	65m aOD
PROJECT CREATORS	
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology
Project brief originator	Planning Archaeologist, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC)
Project design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology
Director/Supervisor	Tim Upson-Smith
Project Manager	Jim Brown
Sponsor or funding body	CgMs Consulting
PROJECT DATE	
Start date	December 2013
End date	December 2013
BIBLIOGRAPHY	
Title	Archaeological evaluation of land at Yew Tree Farm, Launton, Oxfordshire December 2013
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Contents

Figures

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF LAND AT

YEW TREE FARM, LAUNTON, OXFORDSHIRE

DECEMBER 2013

Abstract

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1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) now trading as MOLA was commissioned by CgMs Consulting, acting on behalf of their clients, to undertake a trial trench evaluation, on land at Yew Tree Farm, Launton, Oxfordshire NGR SP 6093 2285 (Fig 1). The work was undertaken in accordance with the brief issued by the Planning Archaeologist, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) (Oram 2012) and the approved Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2013).

The underlying geology comprises Peterborough Member Mudstone (http://mapapps2.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/home.html). The site is currently pasture and is level ground at *c*66m above Ordnance Datum. The site is bounded to the north-east and south-west by housing, to the north-west by open fields and to the south-east by farm buildings.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Launton is situated on the slopes of a broad tributary valley, east of Bicester, which feeds the River Ray to the south-east. The valley incline is gradual and the area is at an elevation of *c*65m above Ordnance Datum and fairly flat. The application area comprises a narrow rectangular block of land located to the rear (north-west) of Yew Tree Farm and bounded to the north-east and south-west by modern housing developments of Blenheim Drive and Sycamore Road (Figs 1 and 2). The current area is sub-divided into smaller plots, which are a mixture of pasture and scrub adjacent to the farm yard.

The area around Launton, including the eastern fringes of Bicester, has produced little evidence for early prehistoric occupation, but is known to contain several sites of Iron Age and Romano-British date. The Oxfordshire HER records one such site *c*500m west of the site (Dawson 2011, fig 2), and another has been excavated further to the south, at Bicester Park (Westgarth and Carlyle 2008). There is a slight potential for remains of similar date to occur within the proposed development area.

The site lies within the historic core of Launton, and forms the back plot (or croft) of Yew Tree Farm, it may contain the remains of outbuildings, yard surfaces and other features of archaeological interest (Dawson 2011, 13-14). The farm has potential for medieval origins, although the earliest secure evidence for Yew Tree Farm dates from the early 17th century (Dawson 2011, 13-14, 26).

Geophysical survey recorded weak anomalies of uncertain archaeological significance (Walford 2012). The features comprised two linear positive (ditch) type features as well as areas of magnetic disturbance.

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of the archaeological evaluation was to establish the presence or absence of any archaeological remains within the development, and to understand this within its cultural and environmental setting, specifically to:

- establish the location, extent, nature, function, character and date of any archaeological remains;
- recover artefacts to assist in the assessment of the development and to provide information to expand the archaeological data within the region;
- recover palaeo-environmental remains where they are encountered.

Trial trenches were established in the locations agreed with the OCC Planning Archaeologist and CgMs Consulting (Fig 2). The ten trenches were 20m long by 1.6m wide.

The trial trenches were accurately laid out using electronic survey methods (Leica System 1200 GPS) such that individual trenches will have an accuracy of ±100mm, tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid.

A discretionary scope was agreed for Northamptonshire Archaeology to adjust trench positions to avoid obstructions or causing unnecessary damage to trackways.

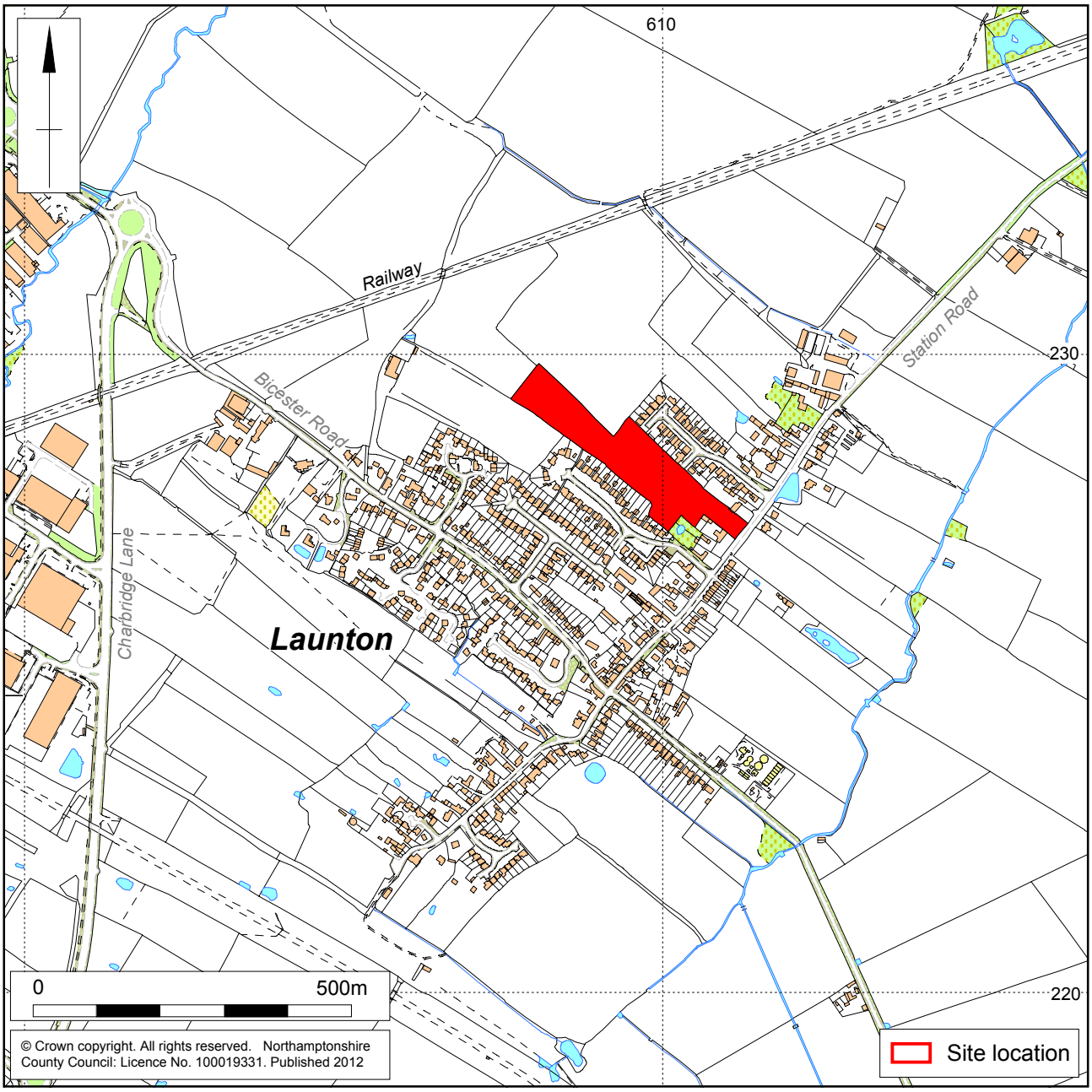
Machine excavation was under the direction of a suitably experienced archaeologist. Trenches were excavated by machine using a toothless ditching bucket to reveal archaeological remains or, where these are absent, undisturbed natural horizons.

Machine excavation removed topsoil, subsoil, modern levelling layers and alluvium to the surface of the natural substrate. The spoil from the trenches was stacked beside the trench at a minimum of 1.0m distance from the edge to avoid collapse. Topsoil was stacked on one side, separately from subsoil and other sub-surface alluvial material, which was stacked opposite.

All trenches and spoil heaps were scanned with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval. Each trench was cleaned where possible, sufficiently to enhance the definition of features, unless it was certain that no archaeological remains were present.

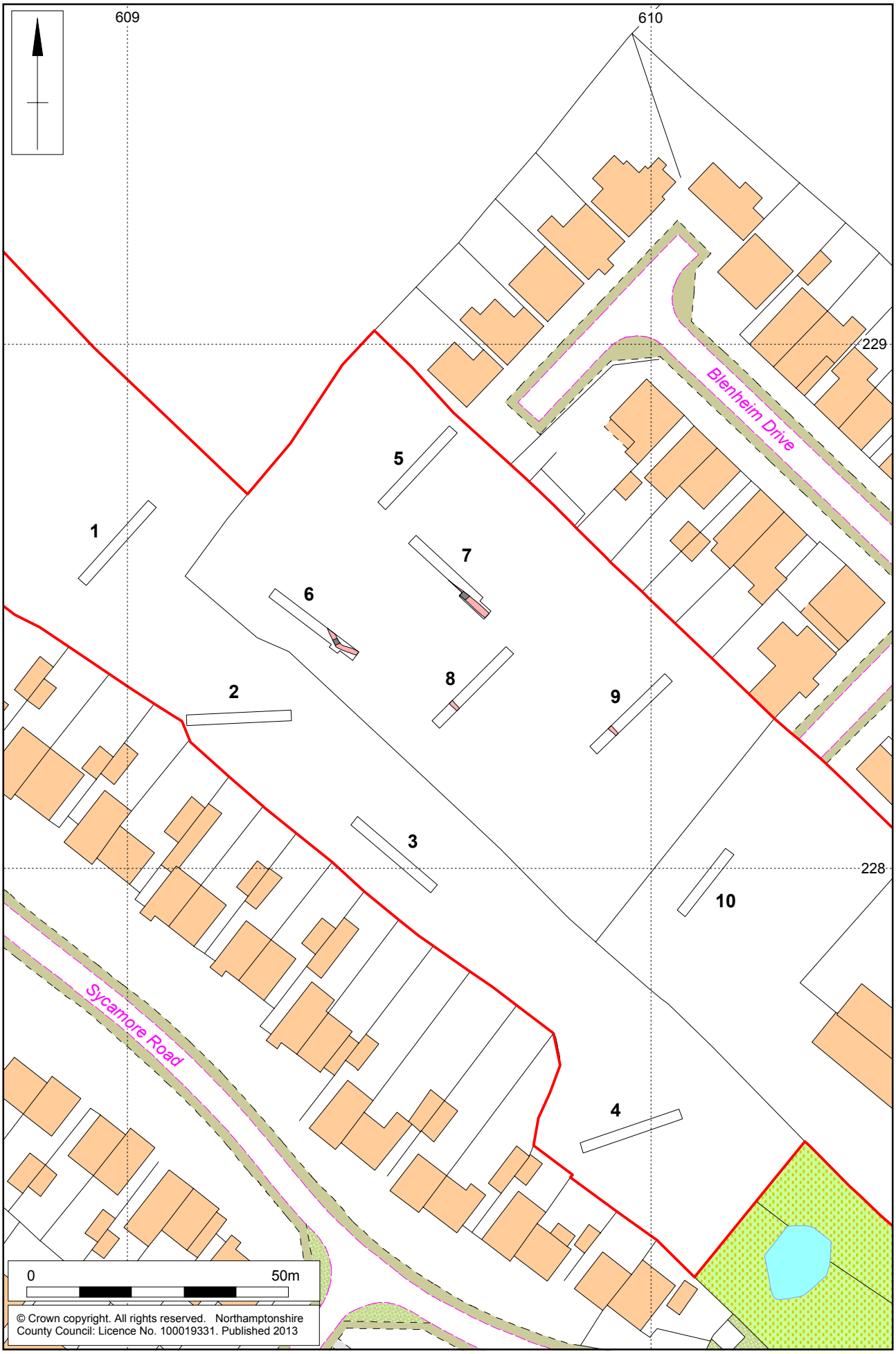
All archaeological deposits and artefacts encountered during the course of evaluation were recorded. Recording followed standard Northamptonshire Archaeology procedures (NA 2011).

Digital photographs formed the principal photographic record for report purposes.



Scale 1:10,000

Site Location Fig 1



Scale 1:1000 (A3)

The excavated trenches showing archaeological features Fig 2

4 EVALUATION RESULTS

Trenches 2 and 4 were rotated to avoid site constraints, Trench 10 was abandoned due to excessive water filling the trench during its excavation.

The underlying geological clay was encountered at 0.50m below the modern ground surface, comprising solid mottled mid orange, brownish blue clay. The overlying subsoil was mid grey-brown loamy clay and the topsoil was dark brown clay loam.

Ditches were observed, cutting the natural, in four of the trenches, Trenches 6-9 (Fig 2). It is likely that the ditches observed in Trenches 8 and 9 are continuations of the ditches in Trenches 6 and 7. The ditches are aligned north-west to south-east and are broadly parallel, however, the southern of the two ditches in Trench 6 deviated slightly from this alignment (Figs 2-4).

Sections were excavated through the ditches in Trenches 6 and 7 where the ditches were found to be 0.70m wide by 0.18m deep with shallow rounded bases. The excavated sections and the trenches rapidly filled with water making further investigation impossible (Fig 4).

No artefacts were recovered from the excavated ditch sections so it was not possible to date the ditches although they were sealed by the subsoil.

The ditch in Trench 6, looking north-west Fig 3

The excavated ditch section Trench 6, looking South Fig 4

The ditch in Trench 7, looking north-west Fig 5

Trench 6, filled with water, looking north-west Fig 6

Trench 7, filled with water, looking north-west Fig 7

5 SUMMARY

The evaluation demonstrated the presence of two ditches, however, due to flooding of the trenches it was not possible to investigate further. No artefacts or dating evidence for the ditches was recovered. It is considered likely that the ditches are former field boundaries that have silted up, but are of unknown date.

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