Archaeological excavation on land at Stoke Road, Ashton Northamptonshire April 2014

Report No 14/148

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Illustrator: Amir Bassir

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Site Code: ASR14
NGR: SP 7632 4994

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS	**Oasis No: Molanort1-190347**	
Project title	Archaeological Excavation on land at Stoke Road, Ashton, Northamptonshire April 2014	
Short description	In April 2014, an archaeological excavation was carried out by MOLA, on land at Stoke Road, Ashton, Northamptonshire. The works identified a ditch dating to the late 1st century AD as well as a ditch dating between the 11th and 14th centuries, contemporary with the moated manor to the north. Part of a recently backfilled post-medieval pond was present in the north-east of the excavation area. The site produced a small pottery assemblage.	
Project type	Excavation	
Previous work	trial trench evaluation	
Current land use	Garages and scrubland	
Future work	None	
Monument type and period	Roman, medieval and post-medieval	
Significant finds	Pottery	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address	Stoke Road, Ashton	
Easting Northing	SP 7632 4994	
Area (sq m/ha)	0.015 ha	
Height aOD	85mAOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	MOLA Northampton	
Project brief originator	NCC	
Project Design originator	MOLA Northampton	
Director/Supervisor	Jason Clarke (MOLA)	
Project Manager	Liz Muldowney (MOLA)	
Sponsor or funding body	David Coles Architects	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	28/4/2014	
End date	1/5/2014	
ARCHIVES	**Location (Accession no.)**	**Contents**
Physical	ASR14	Pottery
Paper		Site records (1 archive box)
Digital		Client report PDF. Survey Data, Photographs
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Title	Archaeological Excavation on land at Stoke Road, Ashton, Northamptonshire April 2014	
Serial title & volume	14/148	
Author(s)	Jason Clarke	
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Abstract

In April 2014, an archaeological excavation was carried out by MOLA, on land at Stoke Road, Ashton, Northamptonshire. The works identified a ditch dating to the late 1st century AD as well as a ditch dating between the 11th and 14th centuries, contemporary with the moated manor to the north. Part of a recently backfilled post-medieval pond was present in the north-east of the excavation area. The site produced a small pottery assemblage.

1 INTRODUCTION

In April 2014, an archaeological excavation was carried out by MOLA, on land at Stoke Road, Ashton, Northamptonshire (NGR: SP 7632 4994 Fig 1). The work was commissioned by David Coles Architects on behalf of Grand Union Housing Group, and was undertaken in compliance with a condition attached to planning permission for the proposed residential development of the land (S/2013/1458/FUL).

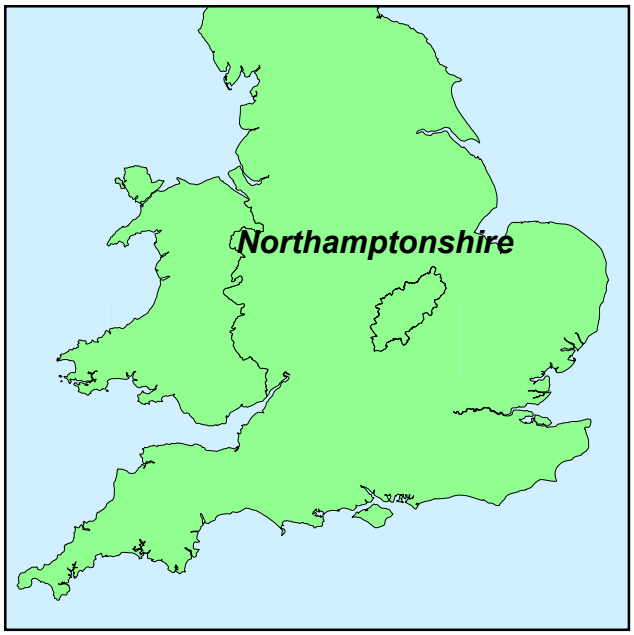
The scope of works was outlined and detailed in the Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by MOLA (MOLA 2014) and was approved by Northamptonshire County Council on behalf of the local planning authority.

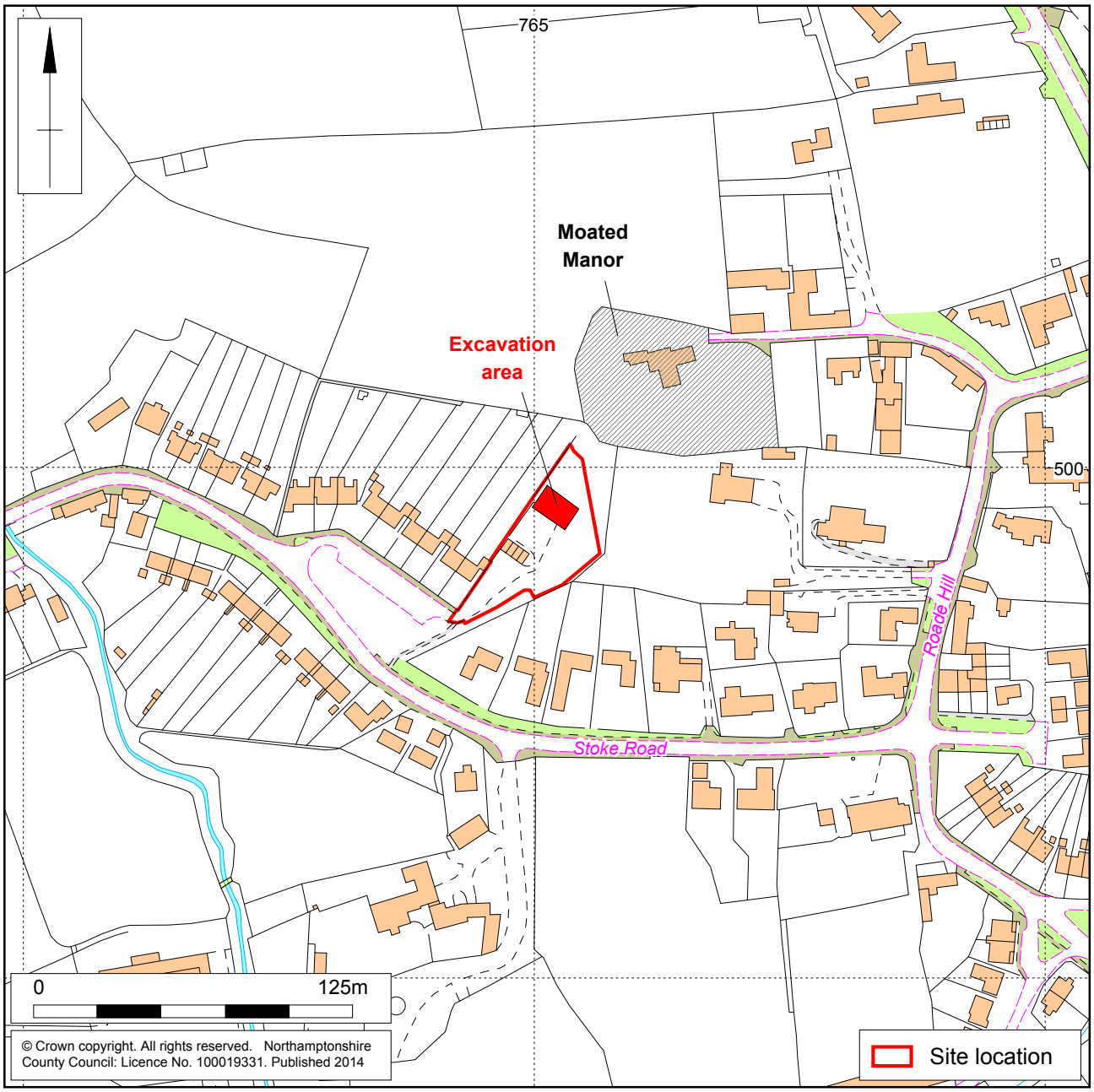
2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location and geology

The development area lies on the north-eastern side of Stoke Road, south-west of the Manor and west of the Rectory and church. The development area is currently occupied by a small number of garages and is partly concreted over. It is bordered by residential properties.

Topographically the site slopes down from north-east to south-west and is at a height of 85m aOD. The geological mapping for the area indicated that the site was on Whitby Formation mudstone (BGS- http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/). However, examination of water table cores during the evaluation revealed that the site was on Upper Lias clay with overlying superficial deposits of glacial till





Scale 1:2500

Site location Fig 1

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

There are few records for archaeological remains within the village of Ashton, however, this is likely to be a result of a general absence of modern development within the village rather than a true reflection of their potential survival.

Prehistoric and Romano-British
There are no known prehistoric finds or settlement locations known within the village. Three Romano-British coins, one dating from Vespasian's reign in the 1st century AD were recovered in about 1948 from near the site of the moated manor (RCHME 1982).

The trial trench evaluation carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology in October 2013 identified an extensive Romano-British soil horizon believed to fill a series of possible pits in the northern part of the site centred on development Plots 3 and 4 (Muldowney 2013).

Medieval
The moated manor lies immediately to the north of the development area, and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (1010809). The moat, which has been damaged on the southern side, encloses an oval island on which stands the current manor house. The majority of moated sites within England date from the middle of the 13th century to the middle of the 14th century AD. However, the oval shape of the Ashton moat indicates that it may be of early medieval date. The current manor house dates from the 17th century date. A number of small archaeological interventions have been carried out within the moated site (NA1994, NA 1997 and NA1998).

Post-medieval
A map of 1768, held by the National Records Office, shows two ponds to the south of the moat (RCHME 1982). One pond continued the line of the southern arm of the moat and the other was approximately 70m to the south of the moat. The southernmost pond would now be within the garden of a property fronting on to Stoke Road.

3 OBJECTIVES

The aims of the archaeological mitigation were to preserve the archaeological evidence by record and to attempt a reconstruction of the history and use of the site.

The general aims of the investigation were to:

- Establish the date, nature and extent of the activity or occupation on the development site;
- Recover artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region;
- Recover palaeo-environmental remains to determine past local environmental conditions.

Specific research objectives were drawn from national and regional research frameworks documents (English Heritage 1991a and Knight *et al* 2012):

Roman 6.5.4.6 Examination of the nature of daily life within Romano-British rural settlements from evidence for processing agricultural products as well as their form and consumption levels.

4 METHODOLOGY

The area was excavated in accordance with a specification for a programme of archaeological excavation works prepared by MOLA (2014), and approved by Liz Mordue, Northamptonshire County Council Assistant Planning Archaeologist (Fig 2).

A 360^{o} tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a 2m wide ditching bucket was used to remove overburden to archaeological levels or the natural substrate, whichever was encountered first. The areas were cleaned sufficiently to enable the identification and definition of archaeological features. A hand-drawn plan of all archaeological features was made at scale 1:100 and was related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Archaeological deposits were examined by hand excavation to determine their nature. Recording followed standard procedures as described in the *Fieldwork Manual* (MOLA 2014). Deposits were described on *pro-forma* sheets to include measured and descriptive details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds. Context sheets were cross-referenced to scale plans, section drawings and photographs. Photography was with 35mm black and white film, supplemented with digital images. Sections were drawn at scale 1:10 or 1:20, as appropriate and related to Ordnance Survey datum. Spoil heaps and features were scanned with a metal detector to maximise the recovery of metal objects.

All works were conducted in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IfA 2014) and *Standard and guidance for archaeological excavation* (IfA 2008).

5 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

5.1 General stratigraphy

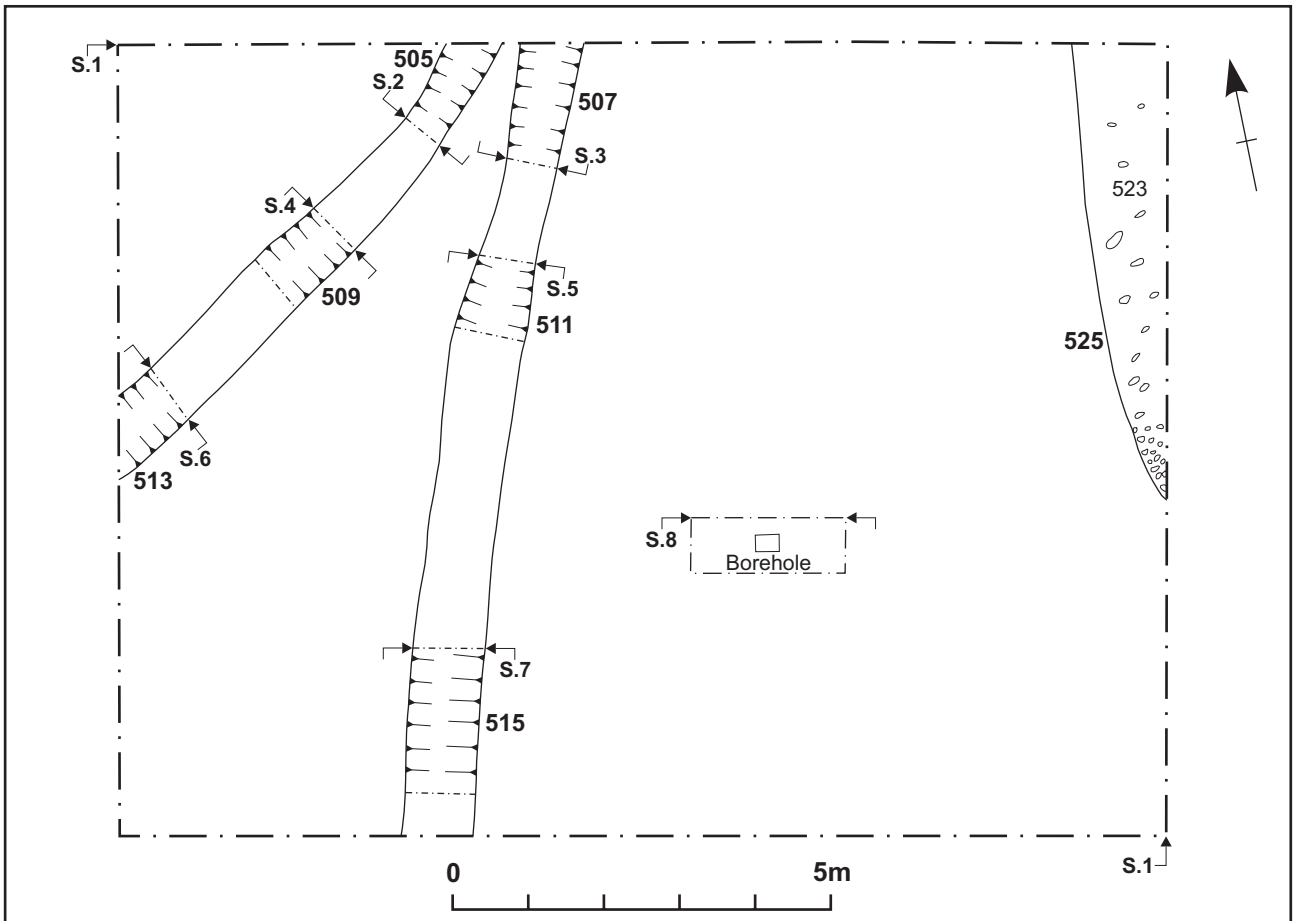
The underlying geology of tills and clay was encountered between 0.2-0.5m below the modern ground surface. This occurred as a mid yellow-brown silty clay with occasional angular to sub-angular pebbles and chalk fragments. The subsoil was light grey-brown sandy clay and the topsoil was mid greyish-brown sandy clay, both soils contained occasional ironstone and flint pebbles.

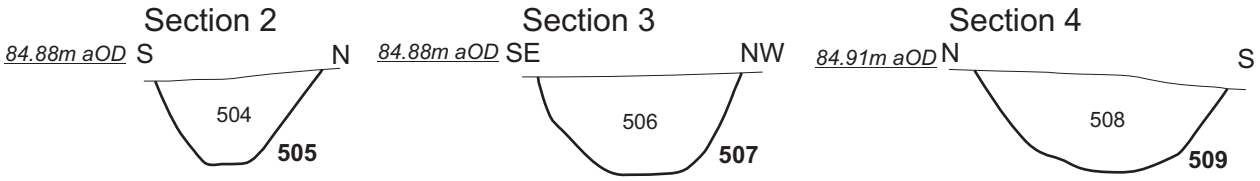
A sequence of layers and ditches were identified occupying a south facing slope (Fig 2). All archaeological deposits were highly disturbed by tree and plant roots and modern construction and landscape activities. Full context descriptions area included in Appendix 1.

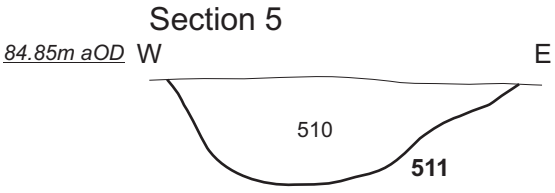
5.2 Roman activity

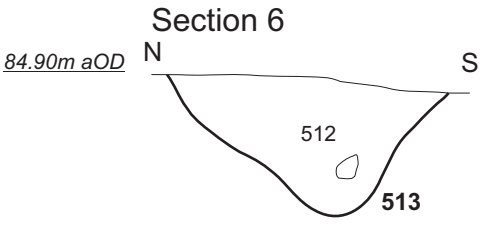
Pit or terminating gully 519
Pit or terminating gully 519 was cut by a ditch 507/511/515. It had a U-shaped profile, 0.50m wide and 0.25m deep, and was filled mid brown-grey silty clay with moderate amounts of small snail shells (518). The pit or gully was identified in the section of the northern excavation limit (Fig 4) and overlain by a layer (521).

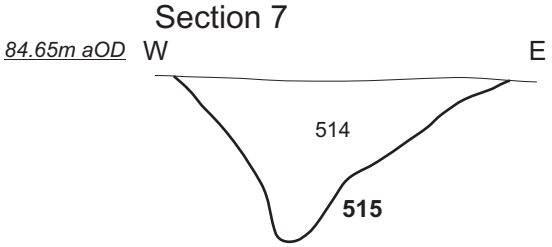
Layer (521/516)
This layer was a dark black-grey silty clay, 0.26m thick becoming 0.42m thick down slope (Fig 2, Section 8 and Fig 4), with moderate snail shell inclusions that extended across the excavated area. This deposit was recorded within evaluation Trench 1 where it contained late 1st to 2nd century AD pottery. No datable material was recovered from the layer during the excavation.

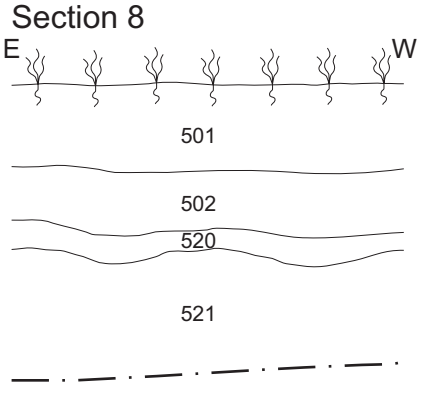












Scale 1:100 (plan) & 1:25 (sections) Excavation area, plan and sections Fig 2

The deposit continued south, down the slope for 7m, where it was truncated by modern construction activity. The layer sealed pit/gully terminal 519 and was cut by ditch 507/511/515 (Fig 3).

Ditch 507/511/515
This ditch, aligned north to south had a U-shaped profile, changing to a V-shape towards the south of the excavation area (Fig 2, Sections 3, 5 and 7). It was between 0.70 and 1.20m wide and 0.35 and 0.55m deep and filled with orange mottled light grey silty clay with moderate snail shells. Roman pottery of the late 1st century AD was recovered from one of the three excavated segments.

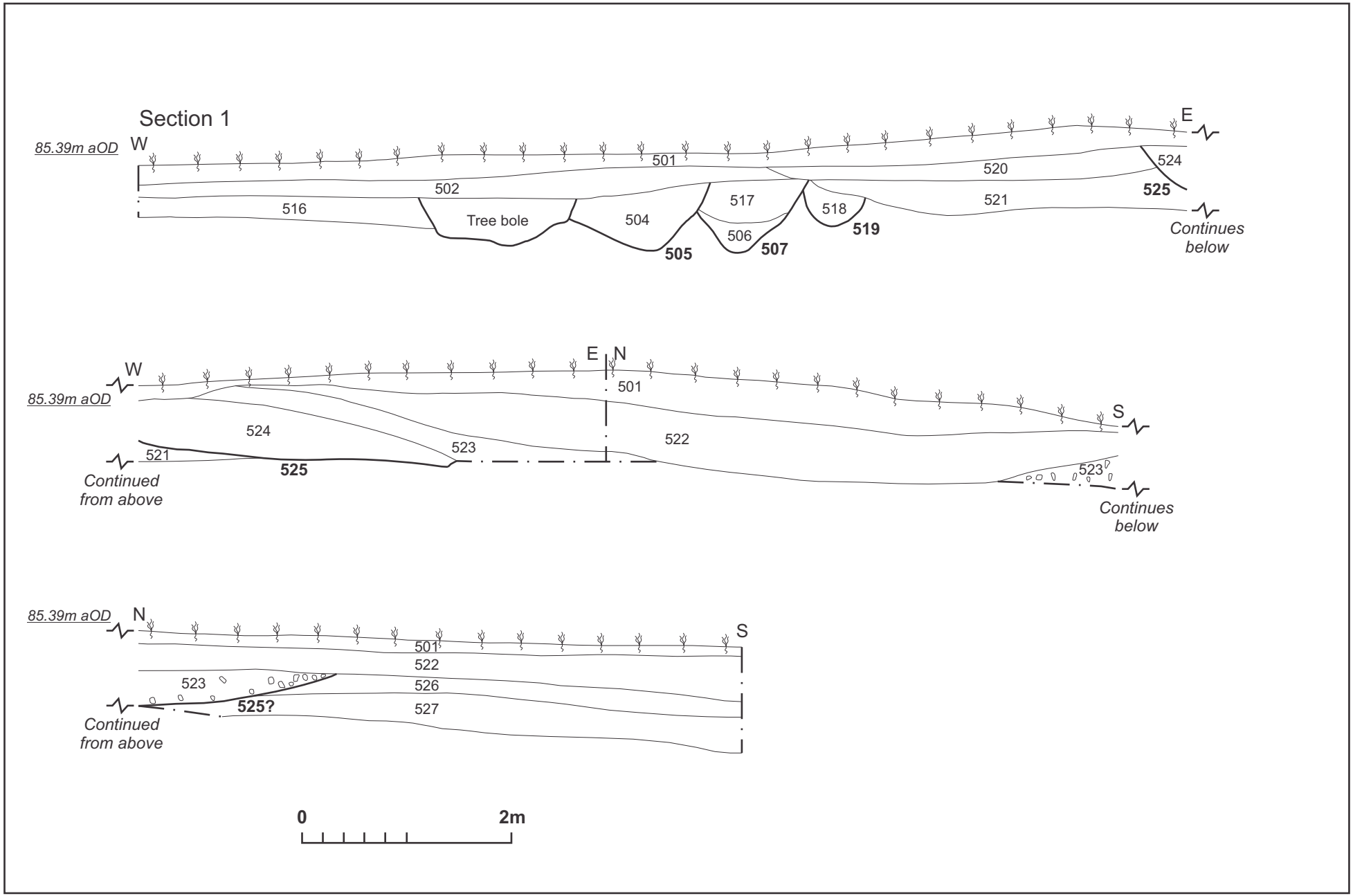
Section showing gully/pit 519, Roman ditch 507, medieval ditch 505, looking north Fig 3

5.3 Medieval activity

Ditch 505/509/513
This ditch was aligned north-east to south-west and had a U-shaped profile, 0.55-0.90m wide and 0.30-0.45m deep, and was filled with dark brown-grey silty clay with moderate snail shells present (Fig 2, Section 2, 4 and 6). The ditch contained three sherds of 11th to 14th-century pottery as well as four sherds of abraded, residual, 2nd-century Roman pottery. The ditch was cut through the layer (521/516) and truncated by a tree throw (Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 1).

5.4 Post-medieval

Pond 525
At the east of the excavation area was part of a backfilled post-medieval pond (Fig 4). It was sub-circular shaped with a shallow U-shaped profile and was cut through a redeposited clay layer (520). It was backfilled with mid orange-brown re-deposited clay (524) overlain by mid black-grey silty clay (523), which contained frequent angular limestone inclusions along with modern material, including, copper cable, factory-made brick, plastic and food wrappers. It was overlain by a final capping fill of mid grey-brown clay (522), which extended south, beyond the limits of the excavation area. The pond was sealed by the reworked and recently deposited topsoil layer (501).



Scale 1:50

Section 1: showing features and deposits at the north and east of the excavation area

Fig 4

6 THE FINDS

6.1 Roman pottery by Tora Hylton

Seven small sherds of Shell-gritted ware pottery were recovered from the excavation. Three sherds were recovered from the fill (514), of ditch 515, two of these are partially decorated with horizontal rilling on their external surfaces, perhaps suggesting a late 1st century AD date. Four sherds were recovered from the fill (508), of ditch 509. The only diagnostic piece is a rim fragment from a necked jar with a simple outcurved rim, a form dating from around the. 2nd century AD. The shell-gritted wares are most certainly sourced from a group of kilns sited just 2km south-west of the village of Harrold and excavated by Anthony Brown (1994).

6.2 Medieval pottery by Tora Hylton

Three sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the fill (512) of ditch 513. The sherds join together to form a large undiagnostic bodysherd in Calcareous Ironstone Coarseware (CTS 316*), an early medieval fabric dating to ?AD1100-?1400 (pers comm. Paul Blinkhorn).

Table 1: Pottery quantification

Fill/Cut	**508/509**		**512/513**		**514/515**	
	Sherds	Weight (g)	Sherds	Weight (g)	Sherds	Weight (g)
Roman Pottery						
Shell-gritted ware (HAR SH)	4	12	-	-	3	9
Medieval pottery	-	-	-	-		-
Calcareous Ironstone Coarseware ?AD1100-?1400 (CTS 316*)	-	-	3	70	-	-
Total	**4**	**12**	**3**	**70**	**3**	**9**

* Northamptonshire Anglo-Saxon and Medieval County Type Series

6.3 Medieval roof tile by Pat Chapman

This one sherd of flat plain roof tile, weighing 155g, is 12mm thick. It is made from hard fine sandy clay with occasional small ironstone inclusions and an orange-brown surface over a black core. The tile is medieval in date and could have been made at Potterspury, about 5 miles south of Ashton, which had a pottery industry that also produced roof tile from the mid-13th to 15th centuries.

7 CHARRED PLANT REMAINS by Val Fryer

7.1 Introduction and method statement

The samples were bulk floated by MOLA and the flots were collected in a 300 micron mesh sieve. The dried flots were scanned under a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x 16 and the plant macrofossils and other remains noted are listed in Table 2. Nomenclature within the table follows Stace (1997) for the plant macrofossils and Kerney and Cameron (1979) and Macan (1977) for the mollusc shells. Both charred and de-watered plant remains were recorded, with the latter being denoted within the table by a lower case ‘w’ suffix. Modern roots and seeds were also recorded.

7.2 Results

Plant macrofossils are generally scarce within the assemblages. Sample 1, from medieval ditch segment 509, contains a very low density of charred material including a wheat (*Triticum* sp.) grain, glumed wheat chaff and a bread wheat (*T. aestivum/compactum*) type rachis node. Sample 2, from Roman ditch segment 511, contains a single, charred rivet wheat (*T. turgidum*) rachis node. The latter assemblage also includes de-watered hawthorn (*Crataegus* sp.) fruits/fruits stones, bramble (*Rubus* sect. *Glandulosus*) 'pips' and elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) seeds, although it is currently unclear whether these are contemporary with the feature fill or later contaminants. Charcoal/charred wood fragments are present within both assemblages, with the highest density occurring within ditch segment 509. Other plant macrofossils are scarce, and the only other material recorded is a small number of small mammal/amphibian bones from sample 1.

Shells of common terrestrial and marsh/freshwater molluscs are common or abundant within both assemblages. Most specimens are bleached, abraded and fragmentary, probably indicating that they may be contemporary within the features, although a small number do retain some surface coloration and may be intrusive. All four of Evans (1972) ecological groups of terrestrial molluscs are represented with shells of both woodland/shade loving species and open country species occurring most frequently. It would, therefore, appear most likely that the Roman ditch was situated within an open grassland habitat, although the feature itself was probably well shaded and damp at its base, with accumulations of moist leaf litter. Grassland conditions are also indicated by the assemblage from the medieval ditch, although here, the ditch appears to have been far less overgrown but almost certainly damp or seasonally water filled.

7.3 Conclusions

In summary, the assessment of these assemblages highlights a compositional paradox in that chaff of glumed wheat (the production of which had almost certainly ceased by the end of the Saxon period) is present within the medieval ditch fill, whilst a rivet wheat type rachis node, rarely seen in contexts pre-dating the Norman conquest, is present within the Roman ditch. It would appear, therefore, most likely that both features have suffered some degree of post-depositional disturbance resulting in anachronistic assemblages. The composition of the mollusc assemblages does suggest that slight habitat changes and/or changes in land use did occur, but exactly when is unknown.

Table 2: Charred plant macrofossils

Sample No.	**1**	**2**
Context No.	**508**	**510**
Feature No.	**509**	**511**
Section	**4**	**5**
Date	**Medieval**	**Roman**
Cereals		
Triticum sp. (grain)	x	-
(glume base)	x	-
(spikelet base)	x	-
T. aestivum/compactum type (rachis node)	x	-
T. turgidum type (rachis node)	-	X
Cereal indet. (grain)	x	-
Herbs		
Fabaceae indet.	xcffg	-
Tree/shrub macrofossils		
Crataegus sp.	-	xxw
Rubus sect. *Glandulosus* Wimmer & Grab	xw	xw
Sambucus nigra L.	-	xw
Other plant macrofossils		
Charcoal <2mm	xxxx	x
Charcoal >2mm	x	x
Waterlogged root/stem	-	xx
Indet. fruit/fruit stone frags.	-	xw
Indet. seeds	-	xw
Other remains		
Small mammal/amphibian bones	x	-
Molluscs		
Woodland/shade loving species		
Acanthinula aculeata	x	x
Acicula fusca	-	x
Aegopinella sp.	-	x
Carychium sp.	xx	xxxx
Clausilia sp.	x	x
Discus rotundatus	x	xx
Ena sp.	-	x
Macrogastra rolphii	-	xcf
Oxychilus sp.	x	x
Pomatius elegans	-	x
Punctum pygmaeum	x	xx
Trichia striolata	-	xcf
Vitrea sp.	-	xx
Zonitidae indet.	x	xx
Open country species		
Helicella itala	x	x

Helicidae indet.	x	-
Pupilla muscorum	x	xxx
Vallonia sp.	xx	xxx
V. costata	x	xx
V. excentrica	-	x
Vertigo pygmaea	x	xxx
Catholic species		
Cochlicopa sp.	x	xxx
Nesovitrea hammonis	x	xx
Trichia hispida group	xxx	xxx
Marsh/freshwater species		
Bithynia sp.	x	-
Gyraulus albus	xcf	-
Lymnaea sp.	x	x
Pisidium sp.	xxfg	x
Succinea sp.	-	xx
Vertigo angustior	-	xx
Other		
Limacid plate	-	x
Sample volume (litres)	**40**	**40**
Volume of flot (litres)	**0.3**	**<0.1**
% flot sorted	**50%**	**100%**

Key to Table

x = 1 – 10 specimens xx = 11 – 50 specimens xxx = 51 – 100 specimens xxxx = 100+ specimens
cf = compare fg = fragment w = de-watered

8 DISCUSSION

The archaeological excavation at Stoke Road, Ashton generally confirmed the results of the trial trench evaluation with the evidence for Romano-British activity. It also identified use in the medieval period and further post-medieval or modern ponds.

8.1 Roman

Roman activity on the side dated from the late 1st century to the early 2nd century AD with the presence of a ditch and a possible pit or gully as well as an extensive and relatively thick buried soil. The features were located on a south facing slope, with environmental evidence suggesting they were within an area of open grassland subject to damp conditions. A relative lack of charred macrofossils recovered from the fill of the ditch suggests it was probably part of a field system located away from settlement and may have either gone out of use or had an established hedgerow during the 2nd century AD.

The extensive soil layer sealed an earlier Roman gully but was earlier than the ditch. Its derivation is uncertain, however, abraded 1st to 2nd century AD pottery was recovered from the layer during the evaluation as well as significant quantities of snail shells suggests that it was seasonally wet and may have been a midden type deposit.

These Romano-British features are not indicative of intensive activity and are insufficient to contribute meaningfully to Romano-British research objectives. However, they are the first real evidence for a Roman presence in Ashton. It is possible that this was the extension of activity to the north in the area of the later moated manor where a small number of 1st century AD coins were recovered in the middle of the 20th century.

8.2 Medieval

The medieval ditch, dating from between the 12th and the 14th century, was the only evidence for activity of this period within the development area.

A medieval moated manor lies immediately to the north of the excavation area. The ditch is likely to be contemporary with it and may have functioned as an overflow drain to the moat as the molluscs and macrofossils recovered suggests that it was seasonally water filled.

8.3 Post-medieval

The post-medieval pond appears to have been backfilled recently (late 20th-century) and was possibly part of one of the ponds recorded on the 1768 map, similar to the pond in Trench 2 found during the evaluation.

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MOLA
September 2014

APPENDIX : SUMMARY OF CONTEXTS

Context	*Context type*	*Description*	*Dimensions*	*Artefacts/Samples*
501	Topsoil	Dark greyish-brown friable silty clay; frequent brick, tile, concrete and plastic debris	0.14m thick	
502	Subsoil	Mid yellowy-grey silty clay	0.20m thick	
503	Natural	Light greyish-yellow silty clay		
504	Fill of [505]	Soft mid grey silty clay	0.28m deep 0.55m wide	
505	Drainage ditch	Linear U-shaped profile ditch running E-W filled by (504)	0.28m deep 0.55m wide	
506	Fill of [507]	Firm light grey silty clay, occasional root disturbance	0.35m deep 0.70m wide	
507	Ditch	Linear U- shaped profile running N-S with a rounded base running alongside [505]	0.35m deep 0.70m wide	
508	Fill of [509]	Firm dark grey silty clay with occasional small angular chalk and sandstone	0.33m deep 0.84m wide	Pottery Sample 1, 40L
509	Drainage ditch	Linear U-shaped profile slightly curved and uneven running E-W	0.33m deep 0.84m wide	
510	Fill of [511]	Firm light grey silty clay with some root disturbance and occasional shell	0.35m deep 1.20m wide	Sample 2, 40L
511	Ditch	Linear U-shaped profile, with a flat even base running E-W	0.35m deep 1.20 wide	
512	Fill of [513]	Medium dark grey silty clay with occasional angular chalk and sandstone	0.46m deep 0.53m wide	
513	Drainage ditch	Linear U-shaped profile a curved and uneven base. Running E-W	0.46m deep 0.53m wide	
514	Fill of [515]	Firm light grey silty clay with orange mottling. Occasional shell	0.55m deep 1.10m wide	Pottery
515	Ditch	Linear V-shaped profile with a narrow flat base. running E-W	0.55m deep 1.10m wide	
516	Layer	Friable dark blackish-grey silty clay, with occasional sub angular stones and frequent snail shell- same as (521)	0.24m deep 2.00m wide, as observed	
517	Fill of [507]	Compact mid brown silty clay with occasional sub angular stone and heavy organic root disturbance	0.28m deep 1.05m wide	
518	Fill of [519]	Compact mid brownish-grey silty clay with occasional small stones and small snail shell. Heavy organic root disturbance	0.25m deep 0.50m wide	

519	Small pit/ gully terminal	Largely truncated by [507]. Concave sides with a concave base observed below truncation.	0.25m deep 0.50m wide	
520	Layer	Hard mid grey brown clay with occasional small stones. Moderate organic root disturbance. Overlays deposit (521), possibly associated with (522) and is cut by post-medieval pond/quarry pit	0.20m deep 3.00m wide	
521	Layer	Compact dark black grey silty clay with occasional small stones and frequent snail shell moderate organic root disturbance. Possibly same as (517)	0.26m deep 3.20m wide	
522	Layer/fill of [525]	Hard mid grey-brown clay with occasional small stones. Final capping for [525] post-medieval pond/quarry pit	0.50-0.22m deep 13.00m wide	
523	Fill of [525]	Friable mid black-grey silty clay with moderate limestone fragments <110mm	0.20m deep 7.00m wide	
524	Fill of [525]	Hard to compacted dark black-brown silty clay with occasional sub angular stone. Primary fill of [525]	0.50m deep 2.00m wide	
525	Post-medieval pond or quarry pit	Sub circular in plan with a sharp break of slope and concave sides. Base was not exposed	7.00m diameter 1.00m deep	
526	Layer	Friable dark black-brown sandy silt with occasional sub angular stones. Former topsoil buried below (522)	0.20m deep 4.00m wide	
527	Layer	Compact light black brown sandy clay with occasional sub angular stones. Former subsoil	0.35m deep 8.00m wide	

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