



**A programme of Archaeological Observation  
Investigation and Recording on land at  
Castle House, Marefair  
Northampton  
October 2014**

Report No. 14/244

Author: David J Leigh





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**OASIS REPORT FORM**

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>		<b>OASIS No. molanort1-202679</b>
Project name	A programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording on land at Castle House, Marefair, Northampton	
Short description	A programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording was undertaken by MOLA (formerly Northamptonshire Archaeology), on behalf of Northamptonshire County Council in October 2014 during demolition works comprising excavation and removal of column foundations on land at Castle House, Marefair, Northampton. A disturbed stratigraphy was recorded throughout the demolition, no archaeological deposits or artefacts were observed.	
Project type	watching brief	
Site status	none	
Previous work	excavations in 1977 (Williams 1979)	
Current Land use	former commercial	
Future work	possible	
Monument type/ period	formerly Saxon and medieval	
Significant finds	none	
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address	Castle House, Marefair, Northampton	
Study area (sq metres)	c900sqm	
OS Easting & Northing	SP 74944 60809	
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>		
Organisation	MOLA Northampton	
Project brief originator	Lesley-Ann Mather, Northamptonshire County Council Planning	
Project Design originator	MOLA Northampton	
Director/Supervisor	David J Leigh and Anthony Maull (MOLA)	
Project Manager	Adam Yates (MOLA)	
Sponsor or funding body	Northamptonshire County Council	
<b>PROJECT DATE</b>		
Start date	October 2014	
End date	October 2014	
<b>ARCHIVES</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)</b>
Physical	MOLA Northampton archive store ENN107664	None
Paper		Record forms (14) Photographic record sheets (1) Black and white photographs (10) Digital photographs (25)
Digital		Report text and figures
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (MOLA report)	
Title	A programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording on land at Castle House, Marefair, Northampton	
Serial title & volume	MOLA Northampton report 14/244	
Author	David J Leigh	
Date	December 2014	

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# **A programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording on land at Castle House, Marefair, Northampton October 2014**

## *Abstract*

*A programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording was undertaken by MOLA Northampton on behalf Northamptonshire County Council during demolition works comprising excavation and removal of column foundations on land at Castle House, Marefair, Northampton. A disturbed stratigraphy was recorded throughout the demolition, no archaeological deposits or artefacts were observed.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

A programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording was undertaken by MOLA (formerly Northamptonshire Archaeology) in October 2014 during demolition works comprising excavation and removal of column foundations on land at Castle House, Marefair, Northampton (NGR SP 74944 60809; Figs 1-4). The work was undertaken on behalf of Northamptonshire County Council and was carried out following a Brief for a programme of archaeological investigation by the Archaeological Planning Advisor at Northamptonshire County Council (Mather 2014a), and adhering to a Written Scheme of Investigation produced by MOLA (Muldowney 2014).

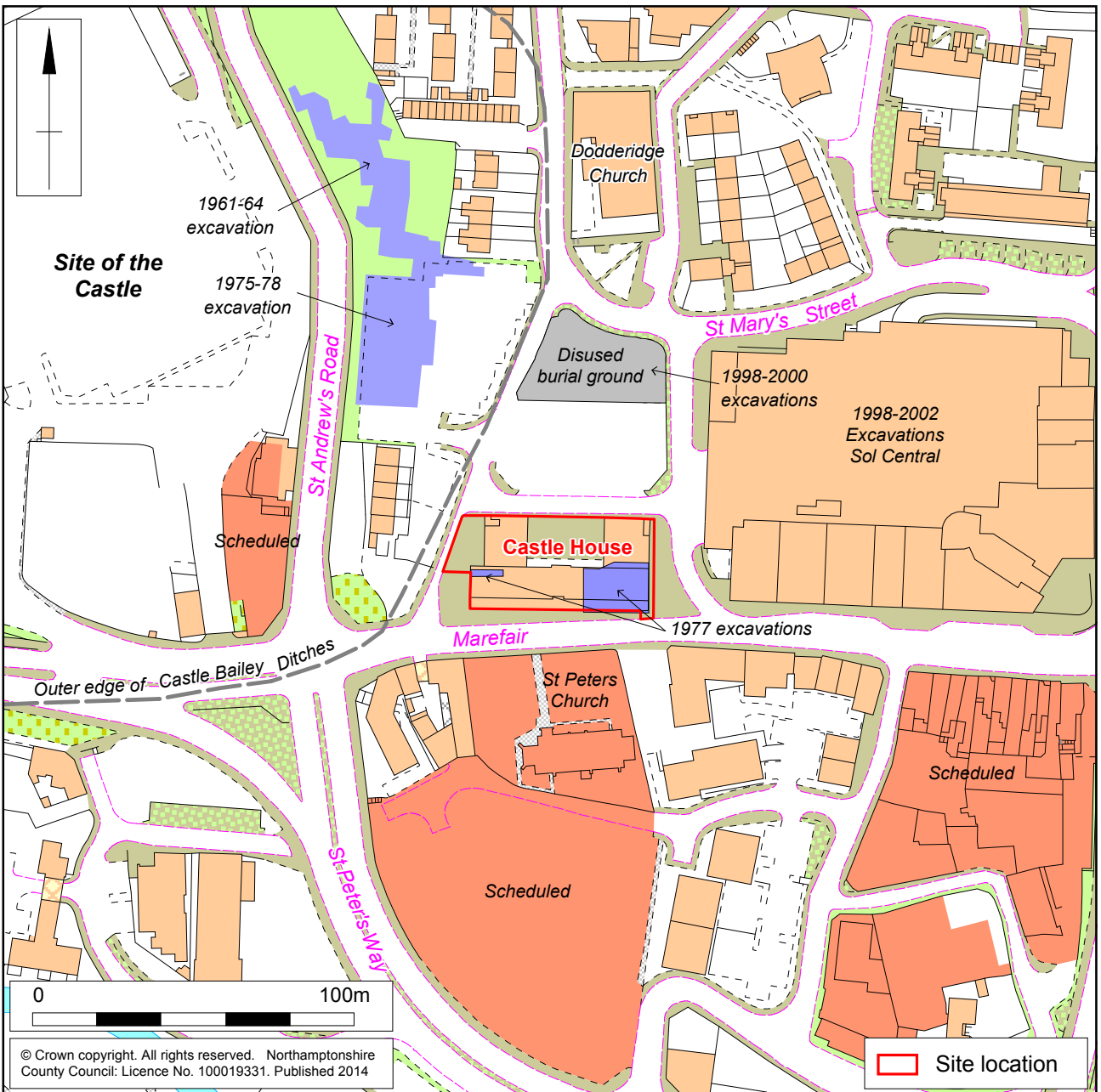
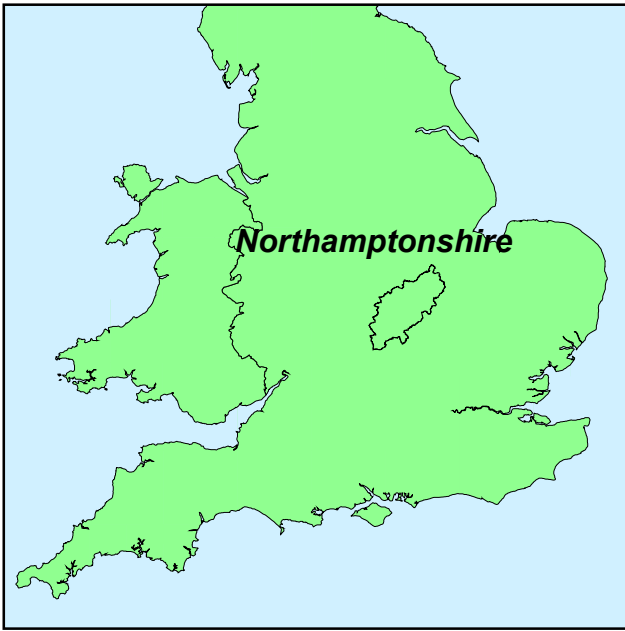
The work was required under the present National Planning Policy Framework (DCLG2012) and was undertaken with respect to the procedural document *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (EH 2009), along with the appropriate national standards and guidelines, as recommended by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA 2008a-b).

## **2 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Location and topography**

The site lies within Northampton on the north side of Marefair, which extends between Black Lion Hill and Gold Street, immediately west of the town centre. The site lies upon the upper slopes of the river valley terrace and lies within a natural loop of the River Nene. The ground slopes down sharply to the south and west from c75-65m above Ordnance Datum, towards the flood plain.

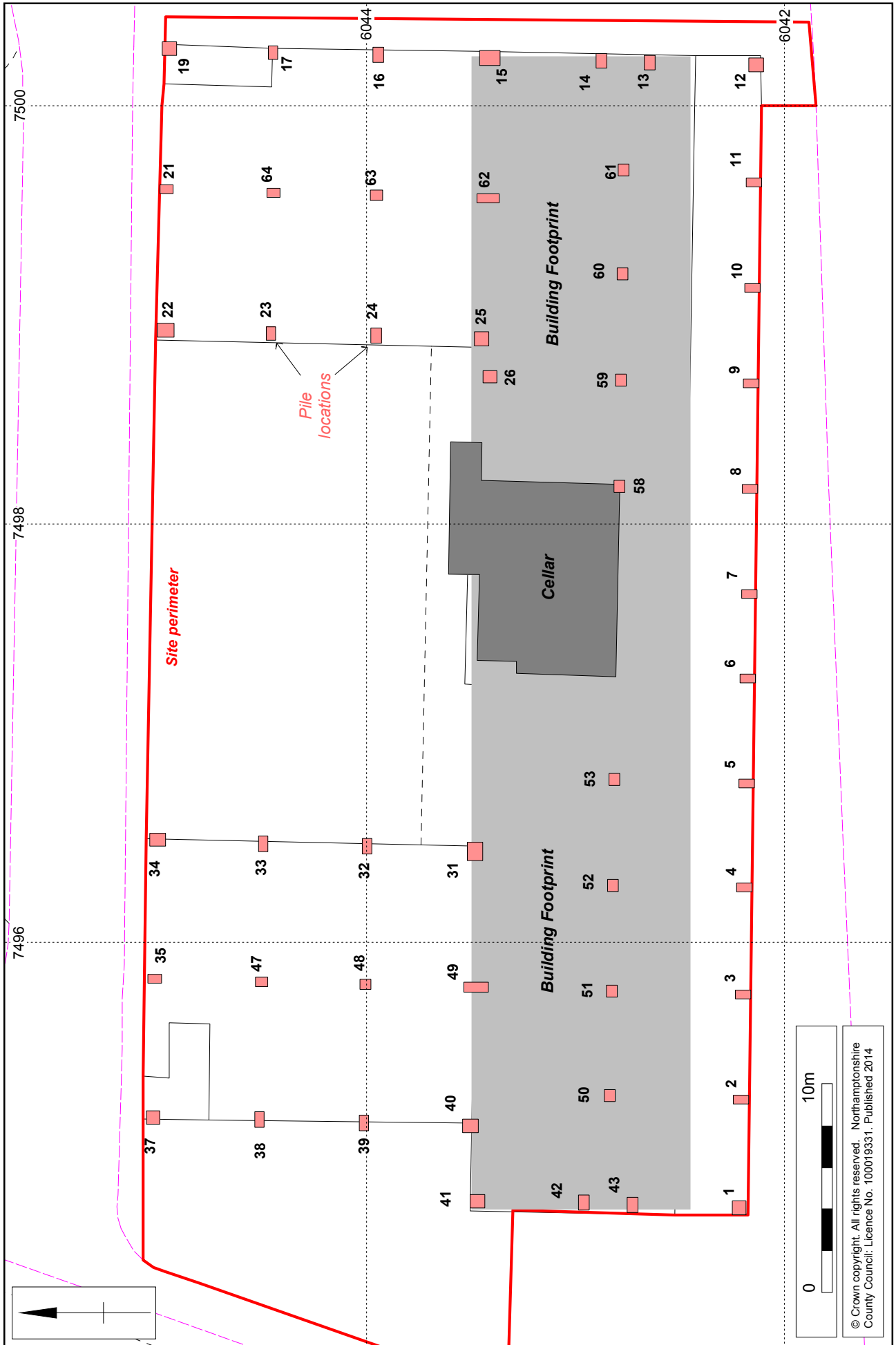
The underlying solid geology has been mapped by the British Geological survey as comprising Northampton Sand Formation and Ironstone (BGS 2009, Geindex <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex>).



Scale 1:2000

Site location Fig 1





Scale 1:250

Castle House foundation plan Fig 2

## 2.2 Historical background

The investigation area lies within an area of archaeological interest and within the historic core of Northampton (HER1160). Remains dating from the early prehistoric and post-Roman periods have been identified during previous archaeological investigations undertaken nearby.

The site of Northampton Castle (HER1160/268) lies immediately to the west, whilst the predicted line of Northampton's Saxon defences follow the lower contour of the hillside within the curve of the river (HER1160/2). A Saxon palace complex and deeply stratified urban archaeological remains were identified and excavated on the slopes of the valley to the south of Marefair.

Previous archaeological excavations in the Saxon and medieval town have taken place at Chalk Lane, to the north-west (Williams & Shaw 1981); on Black Lion Hill to the south-west (Shaw 1985); on St Peters Street (Williams 1979); at the Saxon palace complex (Williams *et al* 1985) and prior to construction of Sol Central, adjacent to the east (Miller *et al* 2006). Further archaeological investigation was also carried out immediately behind Castle House in the east side Chalk Lane car park at the time of the Sol Central development that confirmed the presence of a disused burial ground belonging to the former Dodderidge Church.

In the late 1970s an excavation was undertaken by the Northampton Development Corporation in the south-east part of the present site towards Quart Pot Lane. The excavations recorded remains dating from the prehistoric, Saxon, medieval and post-medieval periods (Williams 1979). Since then, the site had been occupied by Castle House, which has been demolished during this current work.



General view of the investigation area Fig 3



One of the column foundations after removal Fig 4

### 3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The aims of the archaeological investigation contribute to regional research objectives (Knight *et al* 2012), by providing data for the following:

- Observe the groundwork for the demolition, excavation and removal of column foundations and to record all archaeological deposits uncovered;
- Determine the date, character, state of preservation and depth of any archaeological deposits observed and to retrieve all datable artefacts;
- Create a permanent archive and record of the archaeological information collected during the course of the fieldwork and analysis.

A photographic record in both black and white negative and digital format was kept. The written record used MOLA *pro-forma* sheets (MOLA 2014). The programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording was carried out in accordance with the *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008a).

The fieldwork was undertaken in October 2014 during groundworks for the demolition and for the excavation and removal of column foundations. The groundworks were carried out using 360° mechanical excavators fitted with concrete breakers and then removed with a toothed bucket. Archaeological attendance adhered to the Health & Safety requirements of the principal contractor, which meant no entry to the base of excavation.





The groundworks in progress, looking east Fig 5

#### 4 THE RECORDED EVIDENCE

Archaeological observation was undertaken during the excavation and removal of the column foundations. Each column measured up to 2.10m square and was of concrete construction, formed *in-situ*.

Within the southern half of the former building footprint there were areas of deep cellarage from Castle House. In this area the natural substratum was encountered c3.0-4.0m below the street level and comprised Northampton Sand, reddish-brown in colour containing pockets of ironstone. Overlying this was modern overburden, comprising greyish-brown loamy sand mixed with reddish-brown hogging.

In the northern half of the site the natural substratum was encountered c2.5-4.0m below the street level. Overlying this was light brown loamy clay, which in turn was overlain by dark greyish-brown loam, c1.0m thick, containing occasional flecks of charcoal. Above this was yellow-reddish brown hogging, up to 1.1m thick.

The surface concrete paving slabs were 50mm thick. No archaeological deposits or artefacts were found.

## 5 THE SITE ARCHIVE

The project has generated a small archive comprising:

Records	Number
Watching brief forms	14
Photographic record sheets	1
Black and white photographs	10
Digital photographs	25

The archive will be held at the MOLA Northampton office. The project archive will be consolidated and prepared for deposition in accordance with the *Northamptonshire Archaeological Archives Standards* (Mather 2014b).



The groundworks in progress, looking west Fig 6



## 6 CONCLUSIONS

The natural substratum was extremely truncated within the footprint of the former building, specifically where basements and pile foundations had been present. Overlying soils comprised modern made up ground.

The stratum indicated that the area of investigation has been subject to considerable modern disturbance. This most likely occurred during the construction of Castle House, although it is worth noting that even prior to the construction of Castle House, Williams (1979) notes that the western part of the site had already been much disturbed.

The nature of the overburden and lack of any residual archaeological artefacts indicates that it is likely that the area was reduced to allow construction of the foundations, following which imported soils and hogging were laid to build up the ground to formation level.

There were limitations on the effectiveness of the archaeological investigation, since the archaeological contractor was unable to enter many of the deeper excavations owing to the safety requirements. However, all works were observed and no archaeological material was seen in either the excavations themselves or the spoil generated therefrom. Given the depth of the former foundations, compared with the thickness and depth of the excavated evidence in 1977 (Williams 1979), it is likely that much of any remains that existed prior to Castle House being built were removed by its subsequent construction.



The stratigraphic sequence in the northern half of the investigation area Fig 7

Despite the damage within the building footprint, there is still a strong likelihood that remains survive outside of its construction, outside the areas observed during the present works. Good preservation is known to the north of Castle House (Miller *et al* 2006), and this may extend all the way into the courtyard behind the former building. Preservation along the Marefair frontage is likely to be varied, with a certain amount of truncation from the Castle House portico and buried services, however, it is possible that some remains will be preserved as small islands between the modern interventions.

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