Trial trench evaluation of land at Sun Yard, Watling Street Towcester, Northamptonshire July 2015

Report No. 15/135

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Event code: ENN 107923

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS	**OASIS No: molanort1-218999**	
Project title	Trial trench evaluation of land at Sun Yard, Watling Street, Towcester, Northamptonshire July 2015	
Short description	MOLA Northampton carried out an archaeological trial trench evaluation at Sun Yard, Watling Street, Towcester. Evidence of possible post-medieval horn working was found beneath the remains of modern building debris, which extended across the whole site.	
Project type	trial trench evaluation	
Site status	none	
Previous work	none	
Current land use	garden	
Future work	unknown	
Monument type/period	post-medieval/modern	
Significant finds	cattle horns	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address	Sun Yard, Watling Street, Towcester	
Postcode	n/a	
OS co-ordinates	SP 6958 4848	
Area	0.0036 ha	
Height aOD	*c*86m aOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	MOLA Northampton	
Project Brief	Liz Mordue, Northamptonshire County Council Planning	
Project Design	Jim Brown, MOLA	
Director/Supervisor	Adam Meadows, MOLA	
Project Manager	Jim Brown, MOLA	
Sponsor	Mr Brian Loughran	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	6 July 2015	
End date	6 July 2015	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content
Physical	MOLA Northampton Archive Store ENN107923	pottery, clay tobacco-pipes, animal bone, glass and metal finds
Paper		site records, background data, photographs, one section on permatrace
Digital		survey data, digital report, digital photographs
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (MOLA report)	
Title	Trial trench evaluation of land at Sun Yard, Watling Street, Towcester, Northamptonshire July 2015	
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Author(s)	Adam Meadows	
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Abstract

MOLA Northampton carried out an archaeological trial trench evaluation at Sun Yard, Watling Street, Towcester. Evidence of possible post-medieval horn working was found beneath the remains of modern building debris, which extended across the whole site.

1 INTRODUCTION

MOLA was commissioned by Tuckley Chester Design, on behalf of Mr Brian Loughran, to undertake archaeological field evaluation on the proposed development site at Sun Yard, Watling Street, Towcester, Northamptonshire (Fig 1; NGR SP 6958 4848). The works were required by South Northamptonshire Council in response to a forthcoming planning application for residential development and associated infrastructure (S/2014/1947/FUL), in line with *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012).

The aim of the evaluation was to ensure that any archaeological remains present within the development area were appropriately investigated and recorded prior to construction, and to identify the necessity of any future archaeological mitigation. The archaeological investigation and recording was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by MOLA and approved by Northamptonshire County Council's Assistant Archaeological Advisor prior to work commencing (MOLA 2015).

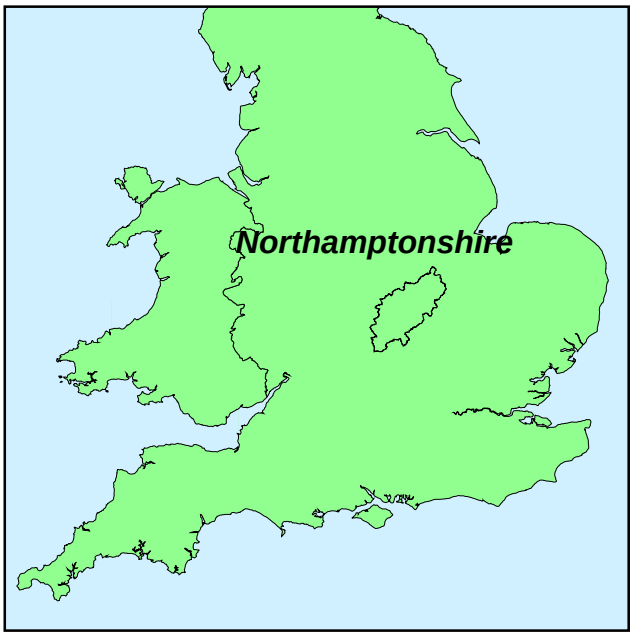
All works followed the guidelines suggested by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologist's *Code of Conduct* and *Standard and guidance for field evaluation* (CIfA 2014a-b), and the MOLA Northampton fieldwork manual (MOLA 2014). All stages of the project were undertaken in accordance with Historic England's, *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (HE 2015). The fieldwork was completed on the 6 July 2015 and was monitored by the Assistant Archaeological Advisor for Northamptonshire County Council.

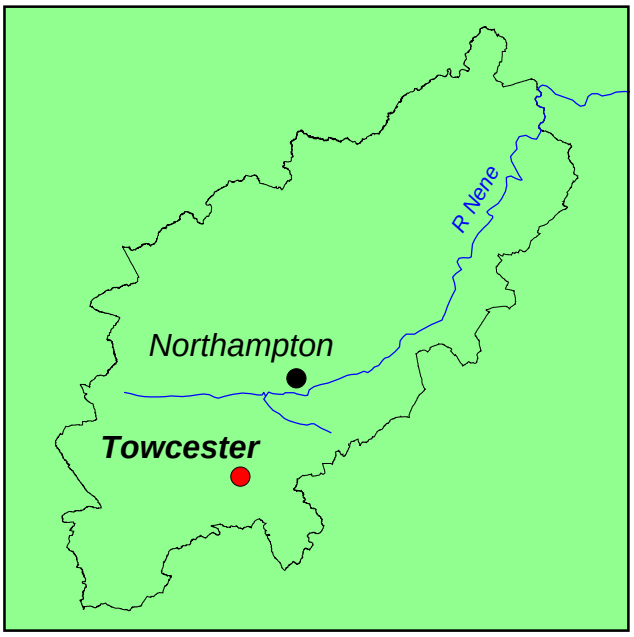
2 BACKGROUND

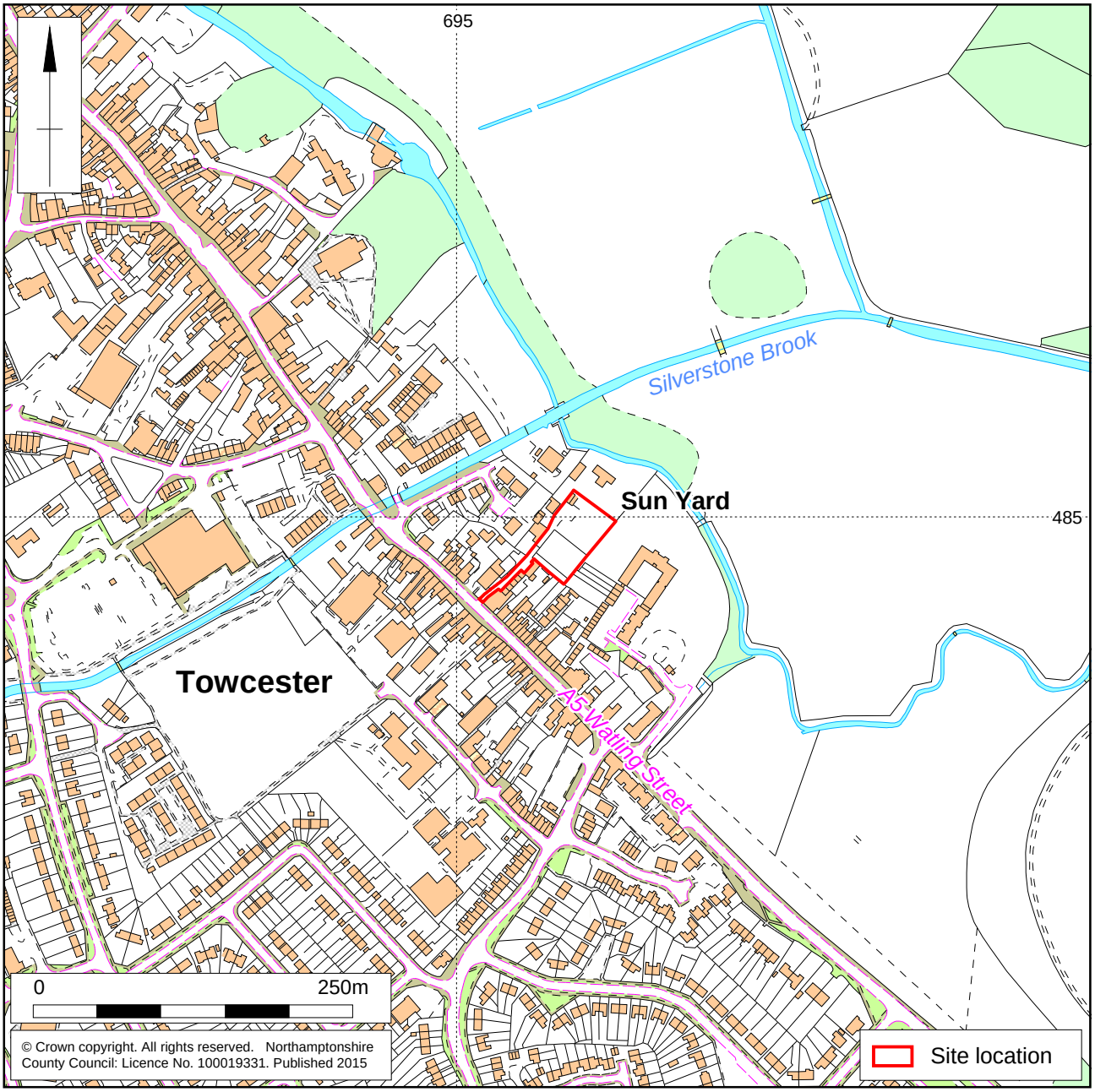
2.1 Location, Topography and geology

The site consists of two plots within Sun Yard located behind the *Monk and Tipster* public house, formally known as the *Sun Inn*. The plots are encompassed and separated by a brick wall with the exception of a wooden fence at the northern boundary. The surrounding area is occupied by residential houses with road access leading from the south-west.

The development area is topographically level measuring *c*86m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The soils are of Fladbury 1 association, which comprise stoneless clayey soils that are calcareous in places and subject to variable groundwater (LAT 1983, 813b). The underlying geology is recorded as Whitby Mudstone formation overlain by alluvium to the north and river terrace deposits to the south (BGS 2015).







Scale 1:5,000

Site location Fig 1

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

A Heritage Statement was prepared for the development area by MOLA within the Written Scheme of Investigation (MOLA 2015), and the following summary is drawn from this report, as well as from a preliminary search of Northamptonshire's Historic Environment Record (HER), for an area of 1km from the proposed development site.

Prehistoric

There is no known prehistoric activity within the development area. Possible late Bronze Age to early Iron Age activity is present located *c*85m south of the site where a pottery vessel was found (HER 8155/0/0).

Roman

The Roman town of *Lactodorum* (HER 276) centres on Watling Street and is arguably the precursor to the modern day town of Towcester. The study area is located outside of the Roman town defences to the south-east, near to what is proposed to be a Roman cemetery (HER 726/3). This has yielded a number of inhumations and Roman artefacts that include coins and pottery (HER 726/3/1-3; RCHME 1981, 156). Further inhumations have been unearthed outside this area, *c*200m to the east and *c*182m to the west, which are thought to also originate from the Roman occupation.

Roman ditches are located *c*150m south-west of Watling Street and also *c*215-250m to the north-west (HER 726/0/159, 169). This latter feature was associated with the discovery of a Roman road surface and other accompanying features (HER 726/0/156, 170-1). The area also contained evidence of defensive structures that would have surrounded the Roman town, including the possible location for the south gate, *c*200m to the north-west, at the Watling Street and Richmond Road junction (HER 726/4/4-5, 12).

Saxon and medieval

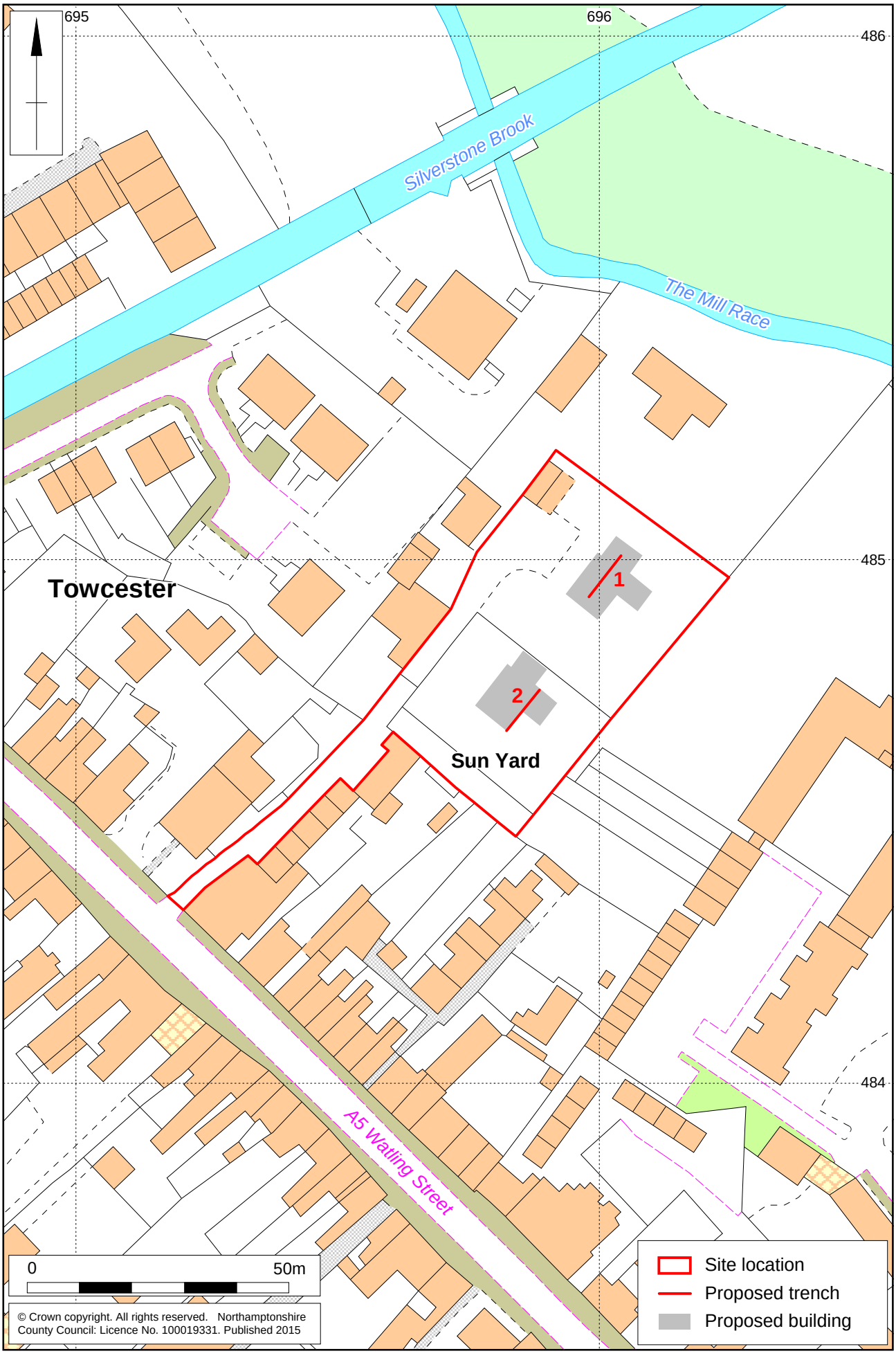
The study area has no known Saxon remains despite the presence of a Saxon cross located in the churchyard of St Lawrence's church, *c*250m north of the site (HER 727/4/3).

The medieval Nether Manor is thought to be located south of the development area, straddling Watling Street, south-east of the current town centre (HER 727/33). A section of medieval road was discovered, *c*117-122m to the south-east, with the probable location of the manor bakehouse just beyond (HER 727/0/14, 727/33/3).

Post-medieval and modern

The 1884 Ordinance Survey map indicates that the two fields within the development area and Paddock House are part of an old orchard. The existing boundaries of the site have, however, remained the same on historic maps with modern developments taking place to the north and south.

Towcester has several Listed Buildings located near the study area. The nearest is located to the south-west of the site and is a pub named the *Monk and Tipster*. This building fronts onto the road where Sun Lane joins Watling Street. This was constructed in 1650 and was formally known as the *Sun Inn* and then the *Watling Well* before taking its current name (HER 727/20/1). An archaeological watching brief has previously been carried out, along with a standing building recording, in regards to this property (Event no. ENN100552-3). The building next to this is the Towcester Baptist Chapel, built in 1877, which was recorded by architectural study and a small trial trench evaluation (Event no. ENN103964, ENN101503-4, ENN18375).



Scale 1: 1000

Proposed trenches Fig 2

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the archaeological evaluation was to understand the nature, function and character of the site in its cultural and environmental setting, specifically to:

- identify, investigate and record all archaeological deposits, exposed during the new development and any associated groundworks;
- determine and record the date, extent, character, state of preservation and depth of burial of any archaeological deposits;
- recover artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region;
- recover palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions;
- create a permanent archive and record of the archaeological information collected during the course of the fieldwork and analysis.

Specific research objectives have been drawn from national and regional research frameworks documents (EH 1991, 1997; Cooper 2006; Knight *et al* 2012), and are focussed on the following research areas:

Iron Age

- Settlement and landscape
- Field systems and major linear boundaries
- Ritual and structured deposition and religion
- The agricultural economy and landscape
- Finds, crafts, industry and exchange
- Social relations and society

Roman

- Rural settlement patterns and landscapes
- The agricultural economy
- Artefacts: production, distribution and social identity
- Ritual and religion

4 METHODOLOGY

Two trenches were located within the footprints of the two proposed buildings (Fig 2). The trenches were each 10m long and 1.2m wide, positioned using a Leica Viva RTK GPS operating to an accuracy of +/-0.05m to Ordnance Survey National Grid and Datum. The trenches were excavated by machine using a smooth-edged toothless bucket down to the surface of archaeological features or deposits, or where these were absent, to the upper interface of natural geological horizon. Archaeological features were further defined by hand excavation.

All archaeological features were given a separate context number. Deposits were described on *pro-forma* trench sheets to include details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds (MOLA 2014). The trenches and spoil heaps were scanned with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval.

All archaeological deposits and artefacts encountered during the course of excavation were fully recorded. Recording will follow standard MOLA Northampton procedures (MOLA 2014). All archaeological features, deposits and events (cuts or recuts for example) were given a separate context number. Deposits were described on *pro-forma* context sheets to include details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds. Sections or profiles through features and areas of complex stratigraphy were drawn at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20 as appropriate. All levels were related to Ordnance Datum and recorded for sections and site plans. Plans were prepared at scales 1:50 and annotated with sections, context numbers, levels and any other relevant information.

A photographic record was maintained using 35mm monochrome film supplemented by digital photography with a minimum resolution of 10x megapixels. Photographs of the overall site were taken prior to, and during, excavation and following backfill.

5 EVALUATION EVIDENCE

5.1 Overview

Only trench 1 reached the natural geology, trench 2 reached a depth of 1.4m and was halted on grounds of Health and Safety. This trench was also shortened to 8.6m to create a step to allow safe access into the trench.

5.2 Trench 1

Trench 1 was located in the north-eastern field, aligned north-east to south-west. The natural geology comprised light orange-brown clay, 105, with occasional chert inclusions at 0.70-0.75m deep. This was overlain by orange-brown silty clay subsoil, 104, 0.22-0.23m thick. Over this lay a 0.25-0.27m thickness of blackish-brown silty loam topsoil, 103, with chert inclusions and one fragment of white glazed modern pottery. This topsoil was buried beneath a 0.08-0.10m thick layer of rubble, 102, made up of gravel, crushed concrete and some plastics among other waste. The landowner stated that the ground here was covered in rubble when he first bought it and so this is likely what remains. The top layer was heavily root disturbed blackish-grey silty clay, 101, 0.14-0.16m thick. This was probably imported soil for landscaping works carried out by the landowner.

5.3 Trench 2

Trench 2 was located in the south-western field and was also aligned north-east to south-west. The trench reached a depth of 1.4m, the depth at this point being the limit of safe working practice. The general soil profile of this trench represented a large pit cut into a sequence of layers that suggested fairly intrusive post-medieval activities (Fig 3).

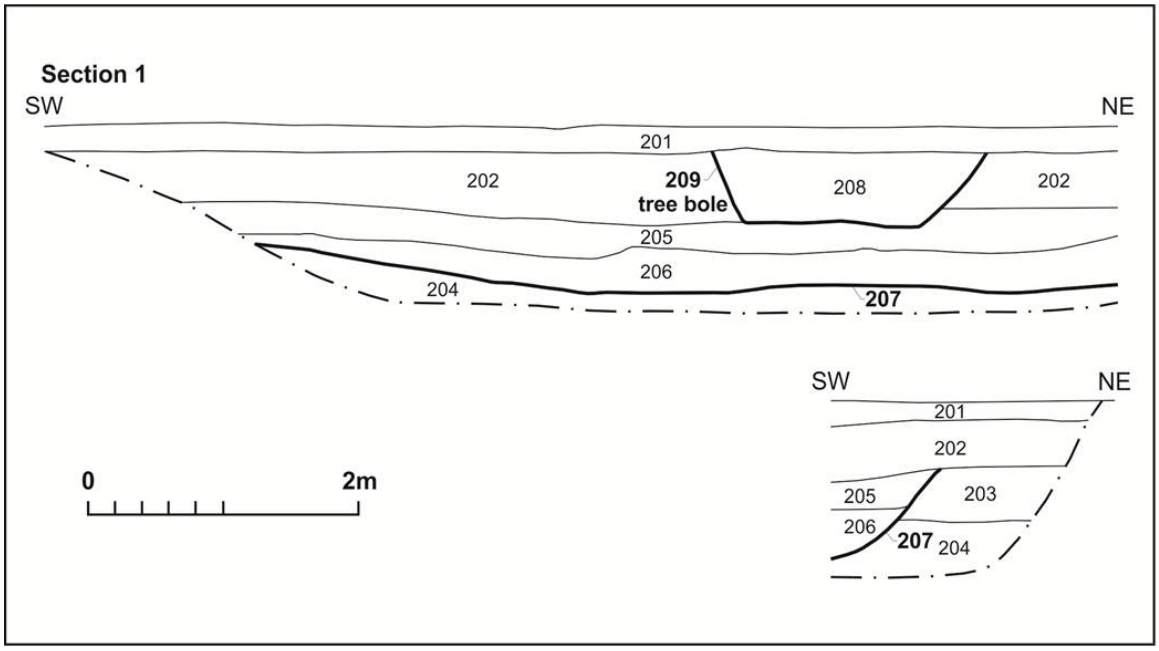
At the base of the feature lay dark orange-brown clay, 204, that contained no finds but was characterised by dark gritty speckles that may suggest that this layer shared an interface with the natural. Overlying this there was a layer of dark grey silty clay, 203, which contained flecks of charcoal and some post-medieval pottery.

A large pit, 207, cut into these layers and was truncated by later landscaping works. There were two surviving deposits within the feature. The basal layer was grey silty clay, 206, containing frequent charcoal flecks. This layer was overlain dirty brownish-orange gritty sand, 205, which contained a large dump of post-medieval material that included pottery, a couple of oyster shells, a copper-alloy nail and 41 individual cattle horn cores, a sample of which was retained. Whilst the layer of fill was fairly consistent in texture, its

form appeared to show a series of lenses that may represent sequential tip lines in quick succession with the main concentration of cattle horn to the south-west end.

A greyish-brown layer of mixed rubble and clay, 202, lay above this that contained fragments of brick, concrete, modern tile, plastics and polystyrene. The landowner noted this is what remained of the dumped materials on the site when he bought the land. Cut into this was a tree hollow, 209, the fill of which was bioturbated dark greyish-brown silty clay, 208, with some rubble inclusions and large roots *in situ*. This is probably the result of grinding out a former tree stump my machine.

A thin layer of greyish-brown topsoil, 201, with rounded chert inclusions and some modern detritus lay at the surface.



Section of Trench 2, with pit 207 Fig 3

6 THE FINDS

6.1 Pottery by Tora Hylton

Ten sherds of post-medieval pottery with a combined weight of 78g were recovered from deposits in trenches 1 and 2 (Table 1). The assemblage comprises standard post-medieval fabric types dating from the late 17th-20th centuries. Most of the assemblage is in fairly good condition, although some sherds do show signs of abrasion. Where possible the sherds have been classified according to the Northamptonshire County Ceramic Type Series (Blinkhorn 1996).

Chronologically the earliest fabric types were recovered from deposits 203 and 205, in trench 2, which include; a tankard in Manganese mottled glazed ware (fabric 413) which dates to *c*1680-1760, an 18th-century bowl in Nottingham stoneware (fabric 417), and a Creamware bowl (fabric 415) dating to *c*1740-1820. Later wares are represented by a 20th-century cup in utilitarian white ware and a porcelain base fragment furnished with the manufacturing mark for Grafton ware, which was manufactured by Alfred Bailey

Jones & Sons (Ltd), who traded from 1900 until 1972 and was based at the Grafton Works, Longton, Stoke on Trent.

Table 1: Quantification of post-medieval pottery

Fabric type	Deposit									
	103 buried topsoil		203 layer		205 fill of pit 207		208 fill of tree hole 209		U/S	
	No/Wt (g)		No/Wt (g)		No/Wt (g)		No/Wt (g)		No/Wt (g)	
Salt glazed stoneware (*c*1720-1780)	-	-	1	2.3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Manganese mottled ware (*c*1680-1740)	-	-	-	-	1	6.1	-	-	-	-
Nottingham stoneware (1700-1800)	-	-	-	-	1	10.3	-	-	-	-
Misc. stoneware (1700-1800)	-	-	-	-	1	15.5	-	-	-	-
Glazed red earthenware (late 17th/18th centuries)	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.9	-	-
Creamware (1740s-1820s)	-	-	-	-	1	6.2	-	-	-	-
Porcelain (18th century)	-	-	-	-	1	5.4	1	17.6	-	-
Utilitarian whiteware (19th-20th centuries)	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	10.4
Totals	**1**	**2**	**1**	**2.3**	**5**	**43.5**	**2**	**19.5**	**1**	**10.4**

6.2 Clay tobacco-pipes by Jim Brown

There are two clay tobacco-pipe stem fragments from fill 205 of pit 207. One fragment is 53mm long with a bore that is 5/64's of an inch; the other fragment is 32mm long with a bore that is 7/64's of an inch. Changes in manufacturing technique and the use of finer wire to make the bore ensured that later pipe stems had much finer bores. These stems date to the late 19th century.

6.3 Other finds by Tora Hylton

The other finds include a copper-alloy nail and two pieces of glass. The nail was recovered from the upper layer 205 of pit 207, together with a base sherd from a cylindrical wine bottle in green glass dating to the late 18th to early 19th centuries. The nail is 32mm long, it has a flat sub-circular head and a square-sectioned shank tapered to a point. In addition, a clear glass phial was recovered from the topsoil.

7 ANIMAL BONE by Rebecca Gordon

There was a total of 2.19kg of animal bone from Sun Yard, which was recorded to species and assessed to determine the state of preservation, butchery and ageing at death. Bones were identified with the aid the MOLA Northampton reference collection and Schmid (1972). Measurements were taken on horn cores following Sykes and Symmon (2007).

The bones were in good condition, displaying very little surface abrasion. Butchery

evidence was recorded on five specimens that comprised cut and chop marks. There was no evidence of burning. A total of 15 fragments were recorded from fill 205 of pit 207 (Table 2). All but one fragment could be identified to species, most of these derived from cattle. Two bones were identified as sheep/goat and three were identified as dog. Six cattle remains were represented by horn cores, two of which were complete and were identified as medium-horned breeds. There were also examples of skinning marks on one of the skulls. A collection of horn cores could represent primary butchery or indicate industrial activity for craftwork or hide processing. Ageing data was recorded for cattle, sheep/goat and dog, which showed that the bones of these animals were fully fused.

Table 2: Number of hand-collected specimens

Deposit/feature	Cattle *Bos taurus*	Sheep/goat *Ovis/Capra*	Dog *Canis familiaris*	Unidentifiable large mammal	Total
205 / pit 207	9	2	3	1	**15**

The condition of the assemblage and the nature of the bones suggest that there is potential for further analysis of the faunal remains within the pit, but the 18th century date of these remains places them of low significance. The majority of the animal remains could be identified and could provide reasonable measurement data of the horn cores and the discovery of additional faunal remains would help confirm the domestic or industrial nature of their deposition.

8 CONCLUSION

Both trenches contained evidence of modern building debris under a layer of imported topsoil. Evidence of post-medieval activity was uncovered within trench 2 where a large pit, 207, was excavated containing multiple phases of tipping. Finds from this feature included 41 cattle horn core with butchery marks suggesting that the animals had been skinned. This may indicate the presence of a nearby butcher or industrial activities in the 18th century that include hide or horn-working.

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MOLA Northampton
29 July 2015

APPENDIX: CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench No	**Length, width & alignment**	**NGR**	**Surface height (aOD)**	**Depth of natural**
1	**10m x 1.2m, NE-SW**	**69609 48497**	**86m**	**0.70 – 0.75m**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
101	topsoil	mid grey-black silt-clay	0.14 – 0.16m deep	–
102	rubble layer	layer of modern crushed brick, stone and tile.	0.08 – 0.10m deep	–
103	buried topsoil	dark brown-black loam with chert inclusions	0.25 – 0.27m deep	–
104	subsoil	brown-orange silt-clay,	0.22 – 0.23m deep	–
105	natural	light brown-orange clay, occasional small-medium chert inclusions	–	–

Trench 1 overview, looking south-west Fig 4

Trench No	**Length, width & alignment**	**NGR**	**Surface height (aOD)**	**Depth of natural**
2	**10m x 1.2m, NE-SW**	**69602 48487**	**86**	–
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/ Samples***
201	topsoil	mid grey-brown silty loam	0.19 – 0.21m deep	–
202	rubble layer	greyish-brown, filled with tile, brick and plastics	0.32 – 0.51m deep	modern brick, concrete and plastics
203	fill layer	dark grey silty clay, interspersed charcoal flecks	0.49 – 0.51m deep	glazed post-medieval pot
204	fill layer	dark orange-brown clay, appears to have grey smudges and a gritty feel	0.40 – 0.42m deep	–
205	upper fill of pit [207]	orange coloured, dirty gritty sand	0.28 – 0.25m deep	glazed post-med pot, clay pipe, glass, oyster shells and 41 cow horns
206	lower fill of pit [207]	grey silty clay, with charcoal flecks and chert inclusions	0.15 – 0.40m deep	–
207	Pit	partial profile of large pit cut filled with post-medieval artefacts	–	glazed post-medieval pot
208	fill of treebowl	mixed up layer of dark grey-brown silty clay. biturbated mix of material including roots and modern materials similar to that of layer 202	0.50 – 0.52m deep 2.02m wide	–
209	Tree hollow	shallow flat bottomed u shape cut with a well-defined northern boundary and a diffuse appearance to the southern edge	–	–

Trench 2 overview, looking south-west Fig 5

Trench 2 overview, looking south Fig 6

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