



**Archaeological observation, investigation, recording  
and analysis of land at 9 Townwell Lane,  
Irchester, Northamptonshire  
February and May 2017**

Report No 17/67

Author: Tim Sharman

Illustrator: Joanne Clawley



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**OASIS REPORT FORM**

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>		<b>OASIS No: molanort1-287045</b>	
Project title	Archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis of land at 9 Townwell Lane, Irchester, Northamptonshire February and May 2017		
Short description	Archaeological observation, investigation and recording were carried out by MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology), during groundwork on land at 9 Townwell Lane, Irchester, Northamptonshire. Five ditches, a wall and a spread were encountered across the site in no concentration. One shallow ditch contained a small fragment of undiagnostic shell gritted pottery which on balance is more likely to be Roman in date. An environmental sample from this ditch produced a moderate assemblage of ecofacts including charred bread wheat seeds and a few fish bone fragments. There was an undated ditch and a modern ceramic drain identified in the main excavation area. Three undated probable ditches, one layer of uncertain date, one wall footing of possible 19th century date were revealed within the confines of a service trench.		
Project type	Watching Brief		
Previous work	None		
Current land use	Former garden		
Future work	None		
Monument type and period	Ditches and a wall footing possibly of medieval or post-medieval date		
Significant finds	Pottery, animal bone, charcoal and a fragment of tile.		
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>			
County	Northamptonshire		
Site address	9 Townwell Lane, Irchester, Northamptonshire		
Easting Northing	SP 92702 65904		
Area (sq m/ha)	c 0.15ha		
Height aOD	c 66m aOD		
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>			
Organisation	MOLA		
Project brief originator	Northamptonshire County Council Assistant Archaeological Advisor		
Project Design originator	MOLA		
Director/Supervisor	Tim Sharman (MOLA)		
Project Manager	Mark Strawbridge (MOLA)		
Sponsor or funding body	Mr N Loizou		
<b>PROJECT DATE</b>			
Start date	07/02/2017		
End date	05/05/2017		
<b>ARCHIVES</b>	<b>Location (Accession no.)</b>	<b>Contents</b>	
Physical	<b>ENN 108603</b>	Sherds of pottery, tile, animal bone	
Paper		Watching brief forms, permatrace plans	
Digital		Client report PDF	
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>			
	Unpublished client report		
Title	Archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis of land at 9 Townwell Lane, Irchester, Northamptonshire February and May 2017		
Serial title & volume	17/67		
Author(s)	Tim Sharman		
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# Archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis of land at 9 Townwell Lane, Irchester, Northamptonshire February and May 2017

## **Abstract**

*Archaeological observation, investigation and recording were carried out by MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology), during groundwork on land at 9 Townwell Lane, Irchester, Northamptonshire. Five ditches, a wall and a spread were encountered across the site in no concentration. One shallow ditch contained a small fragment of undiagnostic shell gritted pottery which on balance is more likely to be Roman in date. An environmental sample from this ditch produced a moderate assemblage of ecofacts including charred bread wheat seeds and a few fish bone fragments. There was an undated ditch and a modern ceramic drain identified in the main excavation area. Three undated probable ditches, one layer of uncertain date, one wall footing of possible 19th century date were revealed within the confines of a service trench.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) had been commissioned by Mr N Loizou to carry out a programme of observation, investigation and recording of groundworks on land at 9 Townwell Lane, Irchester, Northamptonshire (NGR SP92702 65904, Fig 1). Planning permission had been received for the construction of one new dwelling and a double detached garage, with associated driveway and services (Planning Application WP/16/00591/FUL).

In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF; DCLG 2012), a programme of archaeological works were undertaken to mitigate the effects of the development on the archaeological resource. Works were undertaken in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (MOLA 2017).

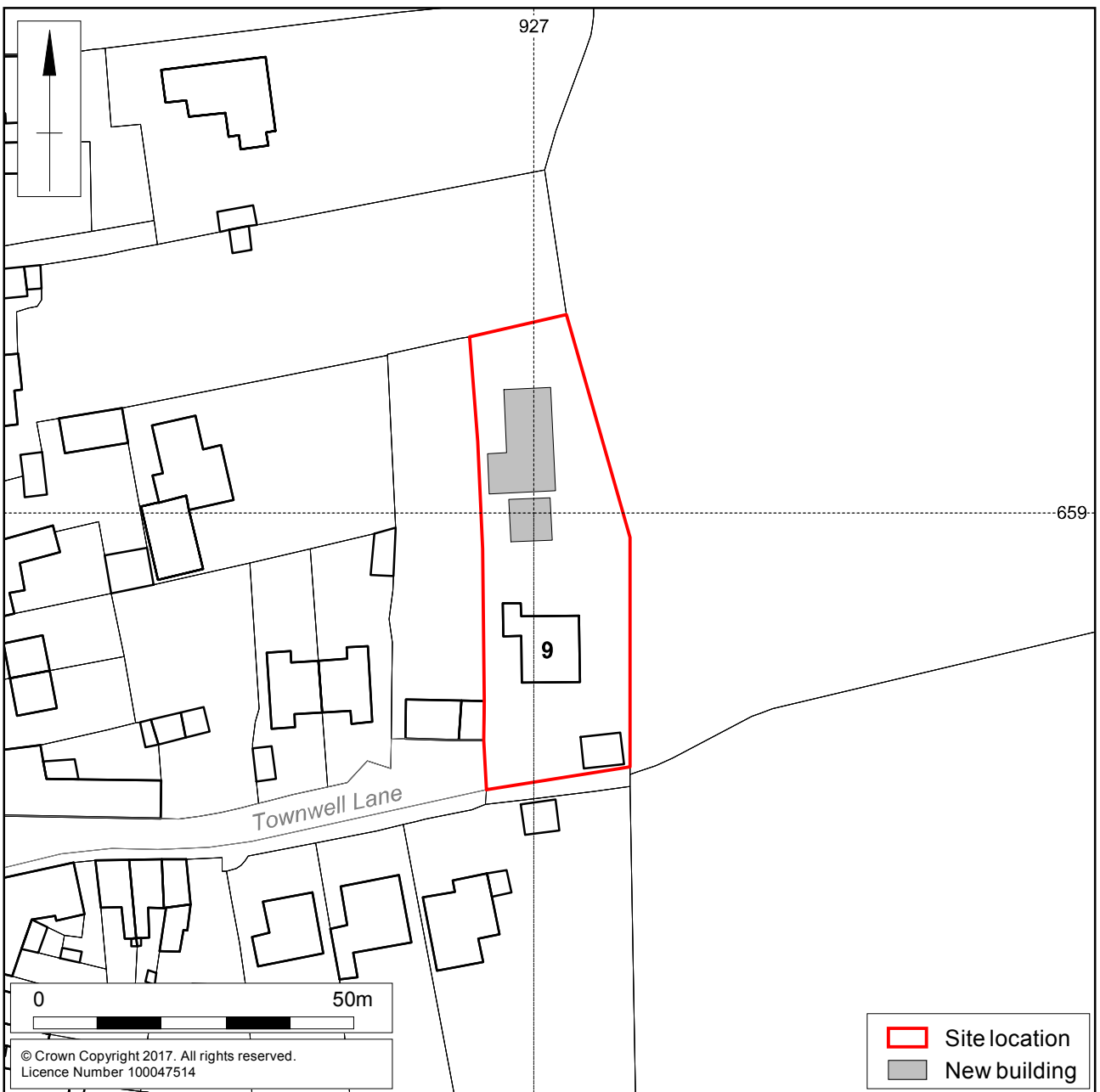
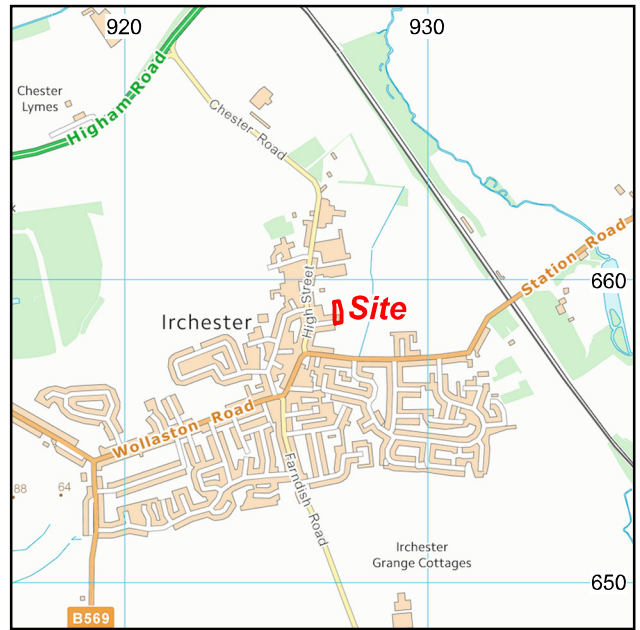
MOLA is a Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) registered organisation. This report has been prepared in accordance with the current best archaeological practice as defined in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance: archaeological watching briefs* (CIfA 2014b) and the Historic England (HE) procedural document *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (HE 2015).

## **2 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Location and geology**

The site lies at the north-eastern edge of the village of Irchester in East Northamptonshire, 3km to the south-east of Wellingborough and c3km south-west of Rushden close to the Bedfordshire border. The River Nene passes the village to the north-west.

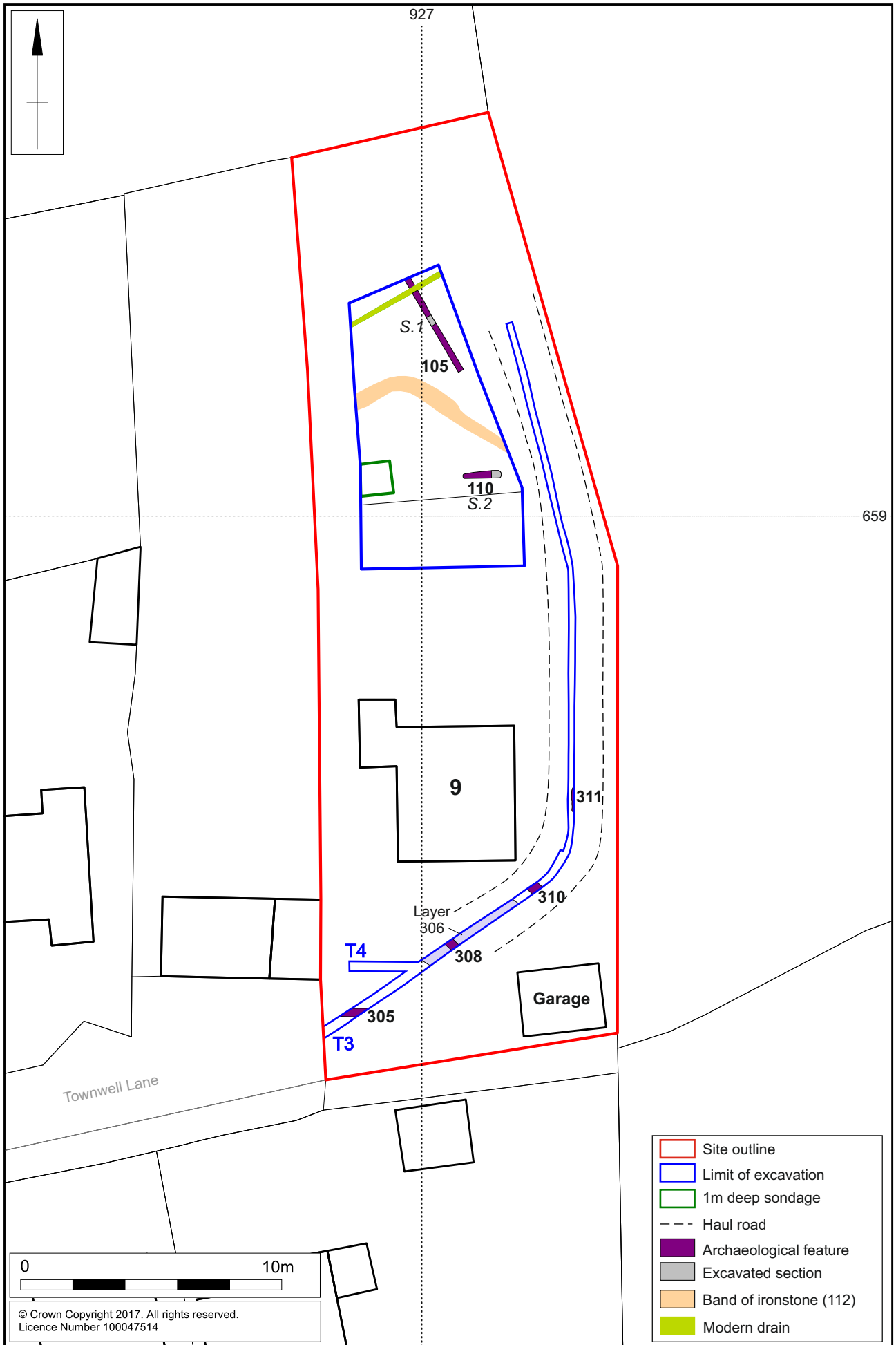
The new dwelling is located to the rear of No. 9 Townwell Lane. The site occupies 0.15ha and is bounded to the east by an arable field. Townwell Lane is to the south, with houses to the north and west.



Scale 1:1000

Site location Fig 1





Scale 1:400

Area of archaeological observation Fig 2

The site lies on land which slopes gently down to the north-east towards a small stream, at c66m above Ordnance Datum (aOD)(Fig 1). The geology within the site comprises a very narrow band of Northampton Sand Formation, edged to the east by Whitby Mudstone Formation and to the west by Stamford Member sandstone (BGS 2017). Soils on the site are likely to be well drained calcareous clayey and fine loamy soils of the Moreton Association (LAT 1983).

## 2.2 Historical and archaeological background

No previous archaeological works have taken place on the site. Around 0.5km to the west of the site lies the Roman town of Irchester. The small walled Roman town of Irchester and its suburbs was occupied between the 1st and early 5th centuries AD, and preceded an Iron Age settlement. In this area were also the remains of the medieval hamlet of Chester on the Water, which was abandoned by the early 18th century. Several other areas of Roman and Iron Age settlement have been identified around the village. Previous works have revealed Iron Age and Roman settlement (Morris 2006; Mason 2006). Roman finds have been recorded in the village itself c300m to the west in School Road (HER 1640/0/0) and to the east of High Street (HER 3149/0/0).

Irchester was recorded as *Yranceaster* as early as 973, and also appears in the Domesday survey of 1086. Around 170m to the west of the site is an extant, possibly 14th century tithe barn. Around 350m to the south-east is the site of the Irchester Manor House. Approximately 170m north-west is the Church of St Katherine, which was built in the late 12th century, with 13th and 14th century additions, and restored in the 19th century. The building is of regular coursed limestone with ironstone and ashlar dressings, the tower is of banded limestone and ironstone ashlar. In 2013, a programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording was undertaken on land adjacent to 66 High Street, situated around 100m north-west of the site (Wolframm-Murray 2013). A shallow medieval gully, dated to the 12th century, ran parallel to the existing boundary wall. The remainder of the plot had been heavily disturbed.

A number of other listed buildings, including the Manor House and Manor Farm Cottage are situated along the High Street c150m to the west. The Ordnance Survey map of 1886 shows that the development area was located in fields to the east of the then village. At that time Nos. 3 and 5 Townwell Lane were the last two plots and were occupied by parallel rows of small structures, possibly with an access track between, aligned north-south. These may have been small houses or workshops. A public house occupied the corner of Townwell Lane and the High Street, as in the present day. The maps show that between 1958 and 1975, the rows of small buildings on the site of No. 5 and 3 were removed, the rear of the plot was shortened, and the building of No. 5 was constructed. Also in this time period, a shorter plot to the east was added which contained the new building of Number 9.

Prior to 2009, it was recorded that a metal detectorist stated that he had recovered Saxon and medieval pottery, a possible late Saxon brooch and some Roman coins in fields to the east of Townwell Lane. A Watching Brief carried out in 2009 on a pipeline around 130m south-east of the present site did not identify any archaeological features or finds (Jones 2009). A recent archaeological evaluation by ULAS in this same general area of the 2009 watching brief identified possible medieval remains which comprised a substantial masonry structure, a pit and ditch containing waste from ironworking (*pers comm* Liz Mordue).

### 3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Objectives

In order to examine the archaeological resource within the proposed development area the main objective of the investigation was to determine and understand the nature, function, and character of an archaeological site in its cultural and environmental setting. Specific objectives were to:

- mitigate the impact of the development through preservation by record;
- establish the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation in the development site;
- establish the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscapes;
- recover artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region;
- recover palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions as an intrinsic part of the investigation.

Specific research objectives were drawn from national and regional research frameworks as relevant depending upon the results of the work (Cooper 2006, updated by Knight *et al* 2012).

#### 3.2 Methodology

All works were conducted in accordance with the procedural documents Historic England's *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (HE 2015), the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance: Archaeological Watching Brief* (ClfA 2014b) and *Code of Conduct* (ClfA 2014a). Methodology follows the Written Scheme of Investigation (MOLA 2017).

The archaeological investigation and recording was undertaken over the area of the new build development and garage, and its services and access routes (Fig 1).

Archaeological mitigation comprised the hand cleaning and investigation of possible features identified after previous soil stripping. A service trench for the new building was monitored by the continuous observation of removal of topsoil, subsoil and overburden within the area, followed by the investigation and recording of any archaeological features that were revealed.

Archaeological deposits encountered were sampled sufficiently to determine their date and character, and recorded using standard MOLA procedures (MOLA 2014).

A sample was taken for environmental analysis from a suitable context following the guidance for sampling (Campbell *et al* 2011). Bulk environmental soil samples are normally taken from appropriately/securely dated sealed archaeological features or deposits for plant-macro fossils, small animal bones and small artefacts.

The observations took place on the 7th of February and 4th-5th May 2017 in generally good weather conditions. The groundwork areas were cleaned sufficiently to enable the identification and definition of archaeological features, where present. Recording followed standard MOLA Northampton 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. The photographic record comprises digital images.

## 4 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

### 4.1 General stratigraphy

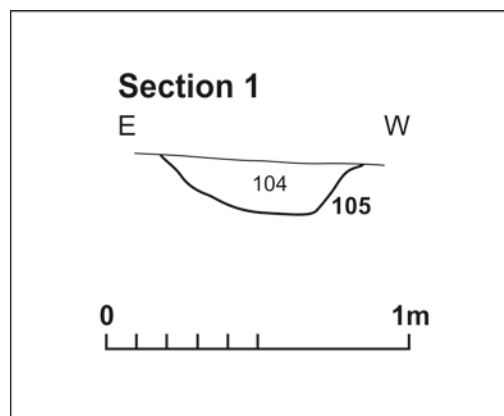
The natural substrate mostly consisted of an orange-brown ironstone (103) which was generally of a rubbly cornbrash in appearance, however in places, a more solid, tabular type of ironstone was noted such as in the base of the previously excavated sondage. A layer of red-brown ironstone (112) was noted running across the site from east to west. This was a natural feature, despite the appearance being very similar to discoloration caused by man-made heating processes.

Overlying the natural substrate was a c0.3m deep layer grey-brown sandy clay subsoil (102) with frequent small ironstone inclusions. The topsoil consisted of a c0.6m deep layer of dark grey-brown sandy loam with frequent small pebble inclusions and modern pottery sherd fragments (not retained). The ground within the service trench had been disturbed by the construction of the extant house and services.

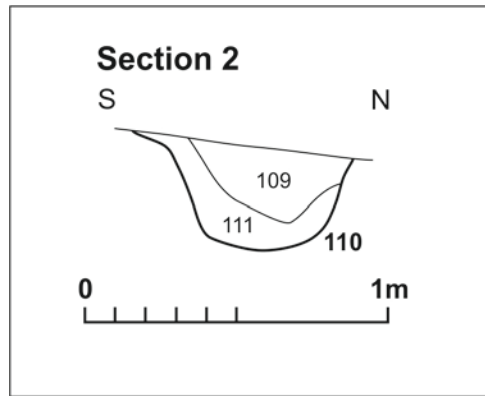
### 4.2 Archaeological features

In the large excavation trench an undated ditch [105] was recorded aligned north-west to south-east (Fig 2). It extended from the northern baulk and after c8m stopped. Ditch [105] was 0.6m wide by 0.2m deep with a U-shaped profile (Figs 3 and 7). At the base of the ditch, a layer of light grey-brown natural clay (108) was noted. The fill of the ditch consisted of a firm, dark yellow-brown clay loam with occasional fragments of ironstone, charcoal and animal bone. Ditch [105] had been cut by modern drain [107].

In the south-eastern part of the excavation trench, a short linear feature, probably a ditch [110] was present (Figs 2, 4 and 6). It was aligned east to west and measured at least 3m long by c 0.7m wide by 0.35m deep. It was filled with two deposits with the primary comprised a sterile dark yellow-brown sandy clay loam (111). This deposit was overlain by dark grey-brown silty clay (109) which contained a small scrap of shell gritted pottery (0.7g) from an environmental sample which although undiagnostic will be either Iron Age, Roman or medieval in date with the Roman date more likely (see Discussion). In an environmental sample from this deposit there were more than 50 charred grains (mostly bread wheat) and a mixture of fragments of animal bone including fish bone and other remains (See Aerts, Section 5.4). A fired clay fragment was recovered at the excavated surface of this ditch as well as three animal bone fragments. Two of the animal bone fragments had carnivore gnawing marks (See Gordon, Section 5.3).



Ditch [105], south facing section Fig 3



Ditch [110], east facing section Fig 4

At the southern end of the service trench along the haul road was an undated ditch [305] aligned north-west to south-east. It was c0.6m wide and had been filled with a yellow-brown sandy clay (304) (Figs 2 and 8).

At a point approximately 7m from the southern end of the service trench, a spread of dark grey-brown silty clay, 8m in width, contained a few pieces of charcoal and occasional small stones (306). This layer was cut by a narrow linear feature [308], possibly a modern service trench, aligned in roughly a north to south direction. The fill (307) consisted of a loose mid brown sand with no inclusions (Fig 2).

About 4m to the north-east of feature [308] was an undated possible linear feature [310] was aligned roughly in a north to south direction. The fill (309) consisted of a firm dark grey-brown silty clay loam with a few limestone inclusions (Fig 2).

Wall footings [311] were recorded c5m to the north-east of feature [310]. The wall consisted of large unmortared, roughly-dressed ironstone blocks (Figs 2 and 9). A quantity of 19th century pottery was recovered from the upcast of the service trench at the point at which it truncated the wall footings and these have been tentatively assigned to the wall. The orientation of the wall was uncertain as the wall had been only partially cut by the service trench.



General view of house plot, looking south Fig 5



Ditch [110], section looking west Fig 6



Ditch [105] cut by drain [107], looking south-west Fig 7



Ditch [305], looking south-east Fig 8



Wall [311] looking east Fig 9

## 5 THE FINDS

### 5.1 Pottery by Tora Hylton

A fragment of shell gritted pottery (0.7g) was found in the soil sample from ditch [110]. It was undiagnostic but is likely to be either Iron Age, Roman or medieval in date.

Seven sherds of post-medieval pottery weighing 0.705kg were recovered from the footings of wall [311]. The assemblage comprises broken sherds of iron-glazed red earthenware from a pancheon. The fabric is hard, buff coloured and is furnished with a thin internally applied black opaque slip. The fragments do not display signs of abrasion, suggesting that they had not been lying around prior to deposition. A 19th century date is suggested.

### 5.2 Ceramic building material by Tora Hylton

There are two fragments of ceramic material weighing 0.041kg (Table 1). The fragments are amorphous and preserve no diagnostic features making identification impossible and dating difficult. A small fragment of fired clay was recovered from fill (109) sited within Ditch [110]. The fabric is grogged, giving a granular appearance and the surface is soapy to touch. The other fragment was recovered from the footing of Wall [311], together with sherds of post-medieval pottery. The fabric is hard fired, it has a dark grey/black core and buff/pink oxidised surfaces, it is post-medieval in date.



Table 1: Fired clay and tile

Context	Feature	Number	Weight (g)	Description
109	Ditch [110]	1	6	Buff coloured grogged/granular fabric, flat surface with pinkish tinge.
311	Footings of wall	1	35	Very hard fired fabric dark grey/black core with orange/pink surfaces.

### 5.3 Animal bone by Becky Gordon

Fill (109) of [110] has a cattle scapula, pig mandible at 2-7 months old and a cattle(?) ulna fragment. The cattle scapula has a recent break. Fine cut marks are located below the spine and on the margo cervicalis. Carnivore gnawing marks are on the cattle scapula and ulna. There was also one large mammal fragment that could not be identified. Fill (104) has an unidentifiable large mammal shaft fragment with a fresh break.

### 5.4 Archaeobotanical evidence by Sander Aerts

A single sample of 10 litres was recovered from context 109, ditch [110] for the analysis of relevant environmental remains. The sample was processed at MOLA Northampton through wet sieving, flotation and dry sieving. Wet sieving was carried out using a siraf tank fitted with a 500 micron mesh and a 500 micron sieve for the flot. A 10mm, 4mm and a 2mm sieve were used for the dry sieving. The dried flots were analysed using a binocular microscope with 10x magnification, whilst the 10-2 millimetre fraction was sorted by eye, sometimes with the aid of a desk magnifier.

#### **Results**

The results from the 10-2 millimetre fraction are shown in Table 2, the results from the flots are shown in Table 3. The find categories and the quantification method are based on the MOLAN environmental processing sheets.

#### **10-2 millimetre sieve**

A single vertebra belonging to an unidentified fish species was observed. The mammal bone assemblage comprises of unidentifiable fragments, apart from a heavily worn sheep or goat premolar. The botanical evidence comes in the form of two pieces of charred nutshell. All the shell in this fraction is of fossil origin, and is often referred to as Devil's toenails (Gryphaea). The pottery is a single sherd of a reduced shell-tempered ware.

#### **Flot**

The flot comprises of charcoal, charred grain kernels (no chaff was observed) and shells. The shell-category is made up of three morphospecies of gastropods, one of which is likely to be *Vertigo* sp. (represented through one individual). The charred grains are prominently represented, and appear to belong mostly, if not exclusively, to the tribe of Triticeae. *Triticum aestivum* (bread wheat) has been identified, but more species or varieties seem to occur.

Table 2: Environmental sample. 10-2 millimetre results

Category	Count	Weight (grams)
Bone, fish	A	<0.1
Bone, mammal	B	9.4
Charcoal	C	6.5
Charred nutshell	A	<0.1
Pottery (shell gritted)	A	0.7
Shell	C	16.5

Key: A = 1-3, B= 4-20, C= 21-50, D = 51+

Table 3: Environmental sample. Flot results

Category	Count	Weight (grams)
Charcoal	C	5.2
Charred grains	D	5.3
Shell	C	0.1

## 6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological work has uncovered six features (a wall and five ditches) and a layer. The remains were fairly sparse and spread across the site in no concentration.

The main interest is a possible Roman shallow ditch in the main excavation area. The dating rests on a small fragment of undiagnostic shell gritted pottery which on balance is more likely to be Roman in date. The pottery sherd could be Iron Age or medieval in date, but either is less likely due to the location of the site and what was also found in the environmental sample.

The site was seemingly outside the medieval village, in an area only occupied since the 1886 1st Ordnance Survey map. Medieval occupation/activity has been found close by, c100m to the south-east (*pers comm* Liz Mordue) and to the north-west (Wolfram-Murray 2013). In the environmental sample from the possible Roman ditch within the site there was a moderate assemblage of ecofacts including charred bread wheat seeds, animal bone and a few fish bone fragments. Fish bones are far more common in Roman rather than Iron Age contexts. The ditch may have been left open for some time as two of the hand collected bone fragments had carnivore teeth marks on them.

The stone wall, found in the service trench, seems to have contained 19th century pottery and a roof tile fragment. All the other features were undated.

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MOLA Northampton

10 June 2017

## APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT INVENTORY

Area	Length, width & alignment			
Site	Trench 1 and 2: c24m long x c12m wide north to south			
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts
101	Layer	Dark-grey brown sandy loam with frequent small stone and modern pot sherd inclusions.	0.5m thick	Modern pot (not retained)
102	Layer	Grey-brown sandy clay with frequent small ironstone inclusions	0.3m thick	-
103	Natural layer	Orange-brown/red-brown ironstone cornbrash. Tabular in places	At least 0.3m thick	-
104	Fill of [105]	Dark yellow-brown clay loam with occasional ironstone fragments	0.2m deep	Animal bone
[105]	Ditch cut	Linear, shallow, u-shaped ditch	At least 8m long by 0.6m wide by 0.2m deep	-
106	Fill of [107]	Light grey-brown clay	At least 10m long by 0.4m wide	Modern ceramic pipe (not retained)
[107]	Drain cut	Modern linear vertical sided drainage trench	At least 10m long by 0.4m wide	-
108	Natural layer	Light grey-brown clay	At least 1m long by at least 0.4m wide	-
109	Fill of [110]	Dark grey-brown silty clay secondary fill with occasional fragments of ironstone and frequent fragments of charcoal and animal bone	3m long by 0.5m wide by 0.2m deep	Pottery, fired clay and animal bone. Charcoal
[110]	Ditch/pit cut	Linear U-shaped pit?	At least 3m long by 0.7m wide by 0.35m deep	-
111	Fill of [110]	Dark yellow-brown, sandy clay loam primary fill	3m long by 0.7m wide by 0.35m deep	-
112	Natural layer	Red-brown ironstone cornbrash	At least 0.3m deep	-

Area	Length, width & alignment			
Site	Trench 3: c65m long x c0.45m wide north to south			
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts
301	Layer	Light grey, crushed concrete	0.3m thick	-
302	Layer	Dark brown sandy clay loam subsoil with frequent small ironstone inclusions	c 0.4m thick	-
303	Layer	Orange-brown ironstone and broken ironstone "brash" natural	At least 0.4m thick	-
304	Fill of [305]	Mottled dark blue-grey and dark yellow-brown sandy clay loam with small-large occasional limestone inclusions	At least 0.7m long by c 0.6m wide	-
[305]	Ditch (?) cut	Linear, possible ditch (?) with unknown profile.	At least 0.7m long by c 0.6m wide	-
306	Layer	Dark grey-brown silty clay with occasional small stones.	At least 8m long. Unknown width and depth	-
307	Fill of [308]	Mid-brown sand	c0.4m wide, unknown depth	-
[308]	Service trench (?) cut	Narrow trench with unknown profile	c0.4m wide, unknown depth	-
309	Fill of [310]	Dark grey-brown silty clay loam with a few limestone inclusions	At least 0.3m deep	
[310]	Feature cut	Shallow possible ditch with gently sloping sides	At least 0.4m deep	-
[311]	Structure	Large unmortared limestone blocks set within a matrix of dark grey brown sandy loam.	c0.4m deep	Tile sherd, 19th century pot



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