Archaeological observation and recording of a test pit on land west of Back Lane, associated with the Castle Donington Relief Road Leicestershire August 2018

Report No. 18/107

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Illustrator: Olly Dindol

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Site Code: X.A92.2018
NGR: 443976 328044

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Post-medieval/modern pottery:	Tora Hylton

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS	**Oasis No. molanort-327516**	
Project title	Test pitting on land west of Back Lane, associated with the Castle Donington Relief Road, Leicestershire	
MOLA monitored the excavation of a test pit on land west of Back Lane, Castle Donington, Leicestershire in order to confirm the presence/absence of a possible palaeochannel previously recorded in Trench 17 during the evaluation carried out by MOLA in 2017. On excavation of the test pit and analysis of historic maps it was ascertained that there was an infilled post-medieval boundary ditch in the location of the putative palaeochannel. Sherds of 19th and 20th-century pottery were also recovered from the ditch.		
Project type	Excavation	
Site Status	None	
Previous work	Trial trenching	
Current land use	Construction compound	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type and period	Post-medieval field boundary	
Significant finds	19th/20th-century pottery	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Leicestershire	
Site address	land west of Back Lane, Castle Donington	
Postcode	DE74	
OS co-ordinates	443976 328044	
Area (sq m/ha)	Test pit, 7.0m by 4.8m	
Height aOD	34m aOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	MOLA	
Project brief originator	-	
Project Design originator	-	
Director/Supervisor	Carol Simmonds	
Project Manager	Liz Muldowney	
Sponsor or funding body	CgMs Heritage on behalf of Miller Homes	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	14/8/18	
End date	14/8/18	
ARCHIVES	**Location**	**Contents**
Physical	X.A92.2018 Leicester Museums	19th-20th-century pottery
Paper		Site records
Digital		PDF of report, survey data, digital photographs
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (MOLA report)	
Title	Archaeological observation and recording of a test pit on land west of Back Lane, associated with the Castle Donington Relief Road, Leicestershire, August 2018	
Serial title & volume	18/107	
Author(s)	Carol Simmonds	
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Date	04/09/2018	

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Abstract

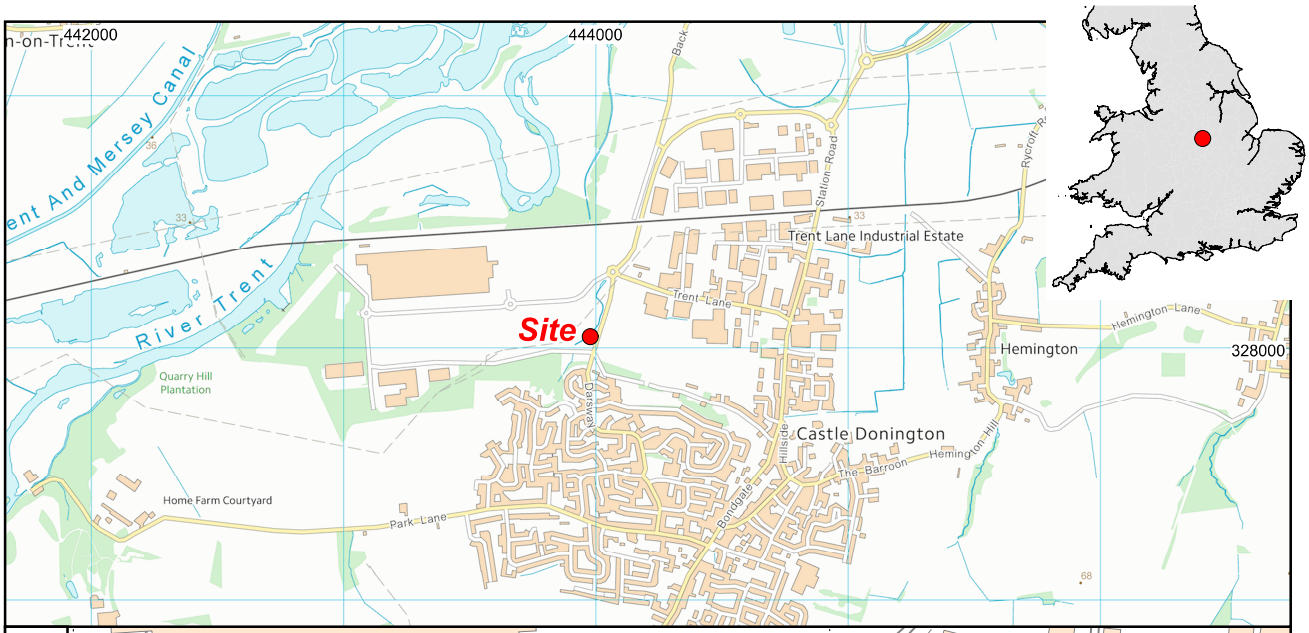
MOLA monitored the excavation of a test pit on land west of Back Lane, Castle Donington, Leicestershire in order to confirm the presence/absence of a possible palaeochannel previously recorded in Trench 17 during the evaluation carried out by MOLA in 2017. On excavation of the test pit and analysis of historic maps it was ascertained that there was an infilled post-medieval boundary ditch in the location of the putative palaeochannel. Sherds of 19th and 20th-century pottery were also recovered from the ditch.

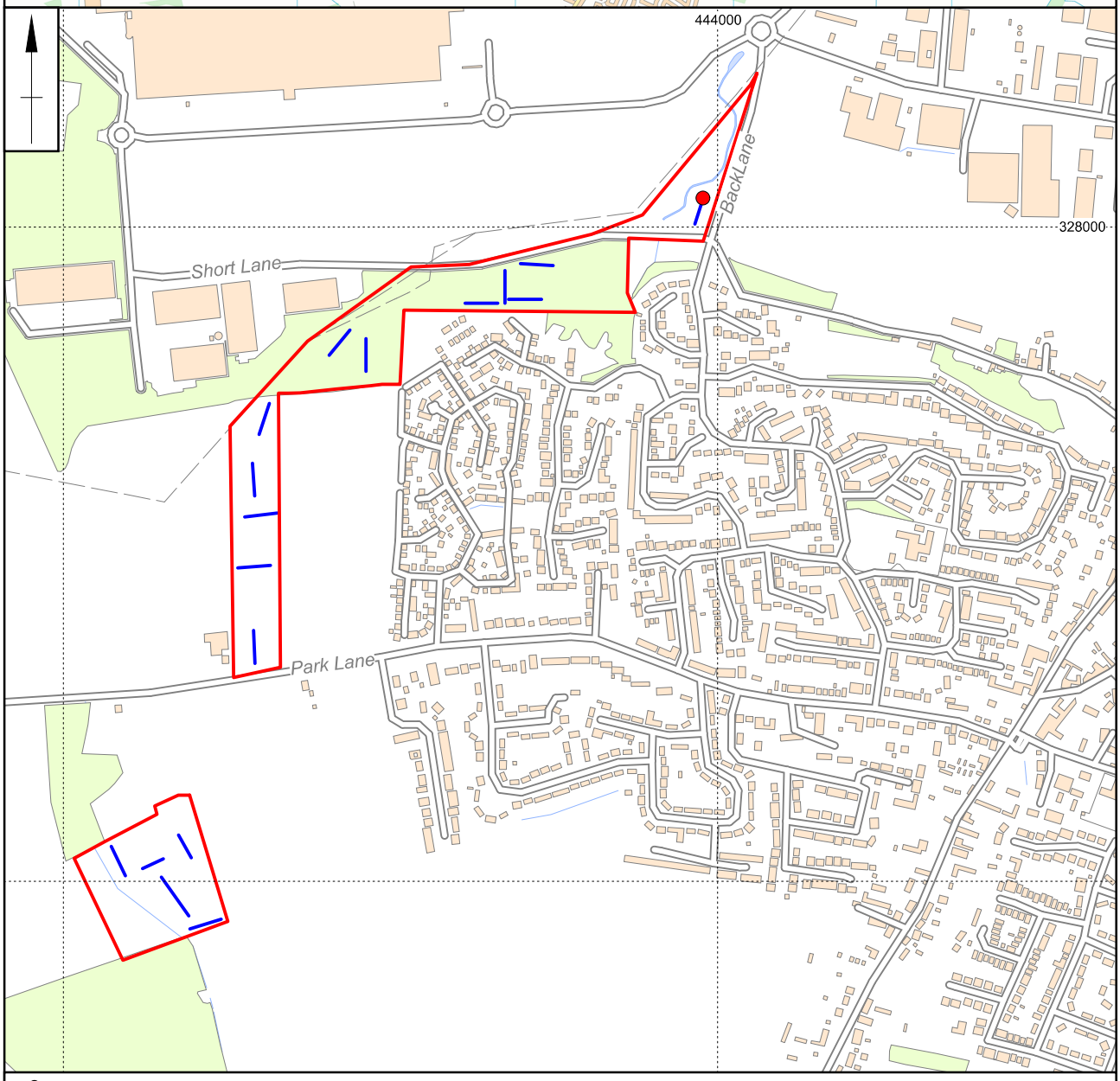
1 INTRODUCTION

MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) was commissioned by CgMs Heritage to conduct an archaeological observation and recording of a test pit on ground previously evaluated, west of Back Lane, Castle Donington, Leicestershire (NGR: 443976 328044) (Figs 1 and 2). The site was located on the northern end of the Castle Donington Relief Road at the point of a proposed new roundabout.

The site had been subject to archaeological evaluation by trial trenching in 2017 which suggested that made ground and buried soils overlay a feature interpreted as a possible palaeochannel (Kidd 2017).

The Principal Archaeologist for Leicestershire County Council (LCC) had requested that prior to the construction of the roundabout a test pit should be excavated at the location of Trench 17. The intention was to test the presence/absence of a palaeochannel and if present to appropriately sample and investigate its nature. The works were undertaken following discussions between LCC and CgMs Heritage.





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OS OpenData contains Ordnance Survey data
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MOLA evaluations 2014 & 2017

Site location

Test pit location

Scale 1:10000

Site location Fig 1

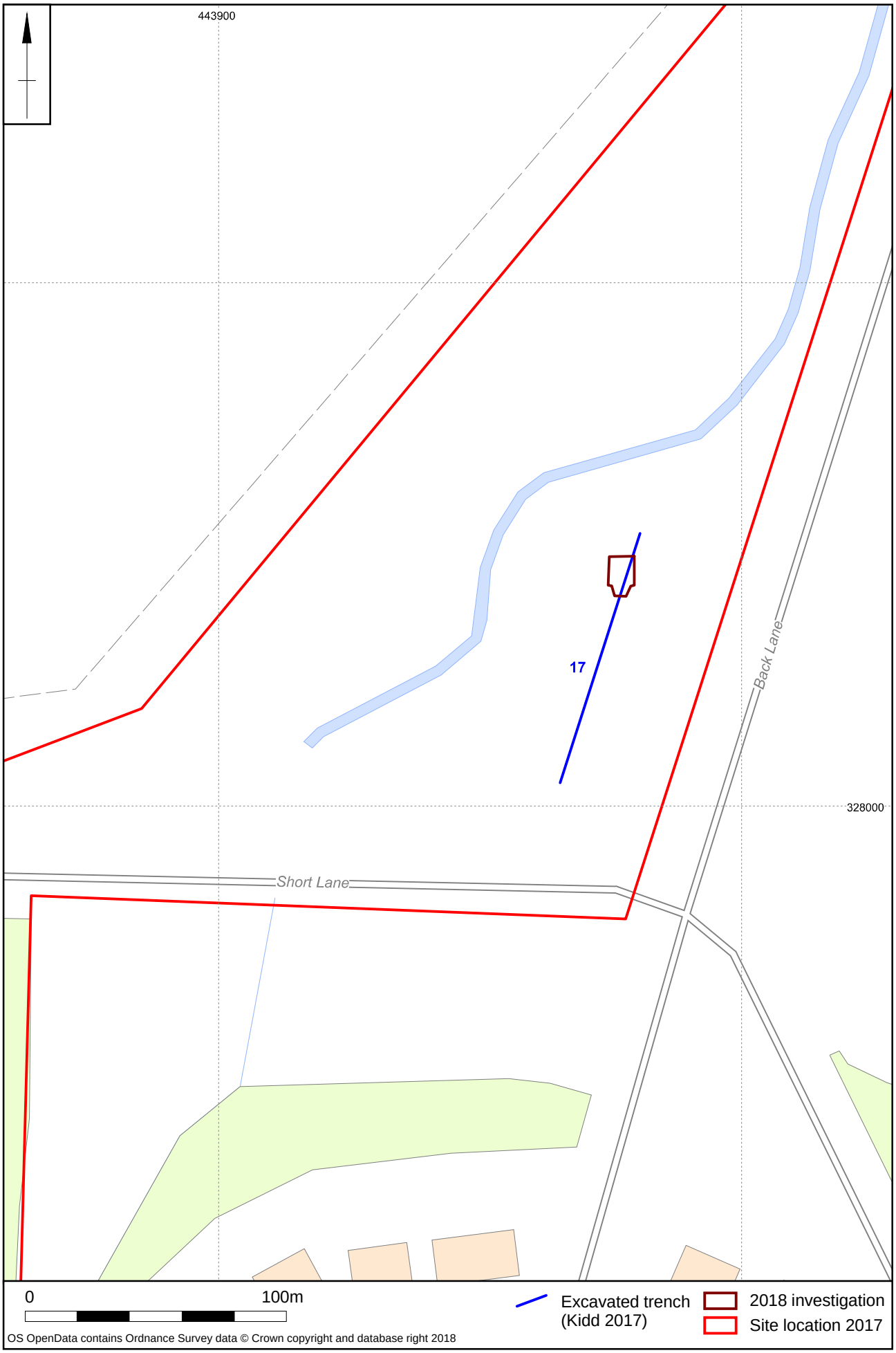

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Fig 2

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

The site comprised an area of made ground, bounded by Short Lane and industrial units to the north, by industrial units to the west, by new residential development to the south and by Back Lane/Darsway and further residential housing to the east.

During the evaluation the block within which Trench 17 was sited comprised an area of scrub at an average height of 35m aOD. In August 2018 the area had been clearly stripped of topsoil/scrub and surfacing material had been laid outside the site compound. The average height of the ground surface in 2018 was 34.0m aOD contrasting with 34.5m aOD recorded in the evaluation.

The underlying geology had been mapped as comprising of Morridge Formation (Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone) in the north-east part of the site and a mix of Moira Formation and Bromsgrove Sandstone Formation in the southern half of site (BGS 2017).

2.2 Archaeological and historical background

The following is abridged from the 2017 evaluation report (Kidd 2017) and incorporates data from other evaluations and excavations in the area.

Prehistoric

Prehistoric activity included Neolithic flint work and early Bronze Age pottery, including a beaker, associated with gullies, ditches, pits and postholes (Coward 2003). Other activity, including Neolithic pits, a Bronze Age ring ditch with associated pits and postholes possibly representing a mortuary enclosure and a Bronze Age cremation cemetery including collared urn burials were identified just to the south of the northern site during evaluation and excavation works by ULAS (Coward 2010; Kipling 2014).

Iron Age and Roman

Iron Age and Roman settlement activity was identified in close proximity to the site were thought to represent a transitional late Iron Age to Romano-British settlement set within a larger field system (Kipling 2014). A pit alignment of probable late Bronze Age to early Iron Age date was also identified. An Iron Age pit and gullies were found in an evaluation to the north of the southern site (Flavell 2010).

Anglo-Saxon and medieval

Anglo-Saxon activity has been identified in the vicinity of the northern site by the previous ULAS evaluations (Coward 2003 and 2010) and included pits and ditches which were associated with a quantity of pottery. At Willow Farm to the north-east of the northern area, two Anglo-Saxon halls and a sunken-featured building have been excavated (Taylor 2014).

The medieval and post-medieval core of Castle Donington is thought to abut the eastern edge of the northern site but to not fall within it (Taylor 2014). The earthwork remains of a castle are located c1km to the east of the development site (SAM 17096) with the castle being located on a ridge overlooking a crossing point on the River Trent. The castle was built by Eustace Fitzjohn in the 12th-13th century and was demolished in 1216 under the orders of King John, though later references suggest it was subsequently rebuilt.

Previous archaeological works

An Environmental Statement submitted with the planning application in 2009 with an addendum in 2012 and a separate desk-based assessment (Flitcroft 2015) assessed the archaeological potential of the overall development area. Evaluation trenching was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) to the south and south-west of the northern site (Coward 2003 and 2010); this was followed by an excavation by ULAS on the area immediately to the south of the northern site, which is now occupied by new and ongoing residential development (Kipling 2014). Trenching and Geophysical survey on land to the north of the southern site was undertaken by Northamptonshire archaeology (Flavell 2010) and ArchaeoPhysica (2009) respectively. Further evaluation, which forms the first phase of the current works were undertaken by MOLA (Taylor 2014).

Summary of the 2017 archaeological evaluation

In 2017 MOLA undertook further archaeological evaluation across the development area (Kidd 2017). The evaluation encompassed two areas, although only the northern area is referred to here. The earliest probable feature comprised a palaeochannel and area of deposited alluvium in the vicinity of an extant stream (Trench 17, Kidd 2017). This was overlain with deposits of more recent date that may have related to the landscaping of the site following the demolition of the Castle Donington power station just to the north.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The overarching aim and objective was to determine the nature and character of the feature, thought to be a palaeochannel, at the northern end of Trench 17 (Kidd 2017).

The general aims of the investigation of the site 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. The samples would comprise pollen cores;
- To produce a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the Leicestershire HER.

4 METHODOLOGY

The test pit had been laid out by the principal contractor (Chasetowns) following communications from CgMs Heritage and Miller Homes. The fieldwork took place 14th August 2018; the principal contractor supplied a 360 degree mechanical excavator fitted with a flat ditching bucket.

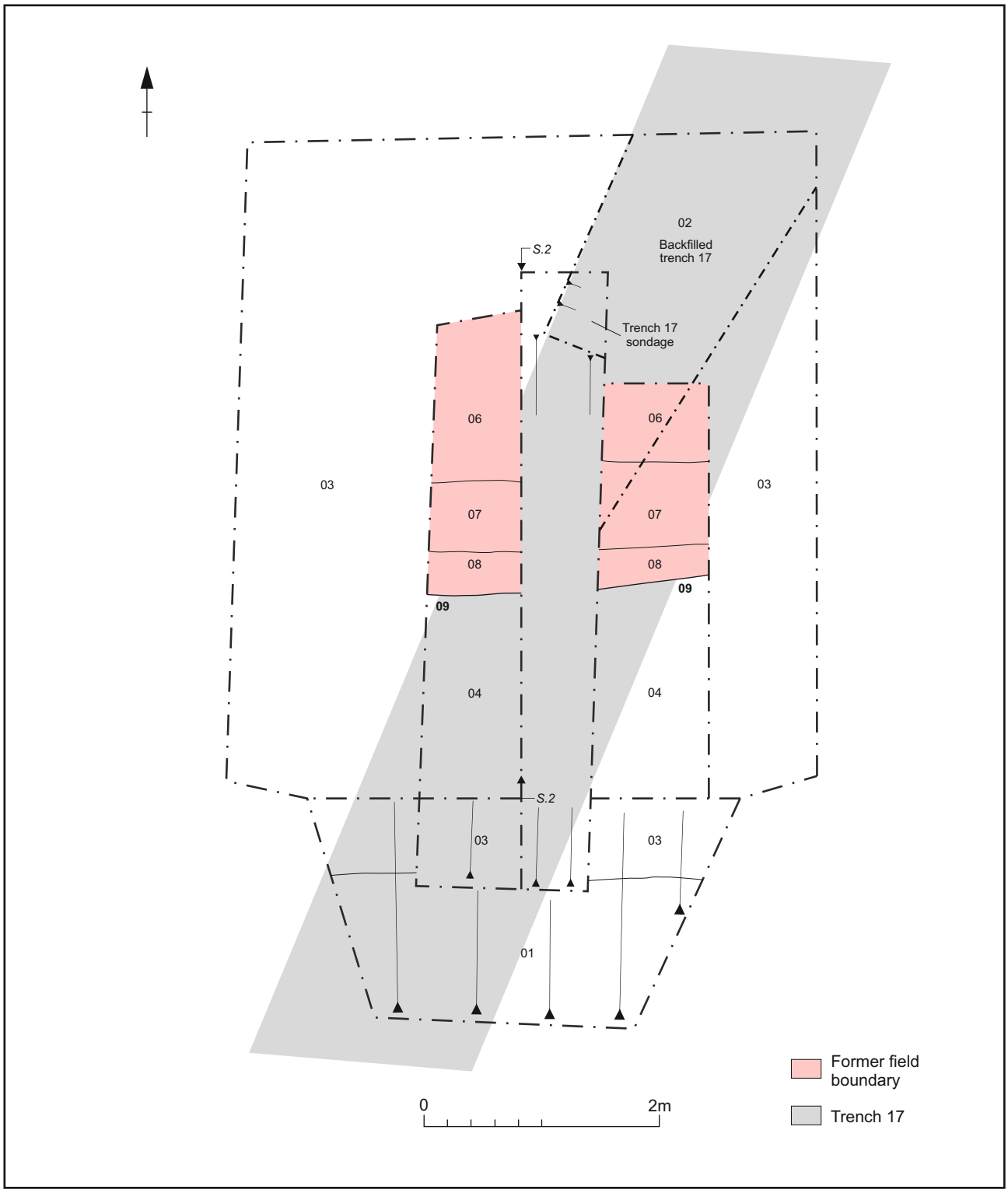
It became apparent that the original specification to machine a 6m long by 2m wide test pit was insufficient and would have been unsafe. The trench was enlarged to 7.0m long (north to south) by 4.8m wide. A stepped sondage, 2.3m wide, was positioned at the centre and was stepped again to allow safe access and egress. The full depth of the trench was 1.60m (Fig 3).

The location of the test pit and features were surveyed and related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid using Leica Viva GPS survey equipment using SMARTNET real-time corrections, operating to a 3D tolerance of ± 0.05m. The test pit was also planned at scale 1:50 and sections were drawn at 1:20. A full photographic record comprising digital images was taken. The record was fully cross referenced and indexed.

The test pit was cleaned sufficiently to define any features. All archaeological deposits were fully recorded, following standard MOLA procedures (MOLA 2014). All deposits were given a separate context number. They were described on pro-forma context sheets to include details of the context, its relationships and interpretation.

The evaluation conformed to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists *Code for Conduct* (CIfA 2014a) and the *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching brief* (CIfA 2014b). 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 evaluation was carried out in accordance within the county guidelines (LCC 1997).

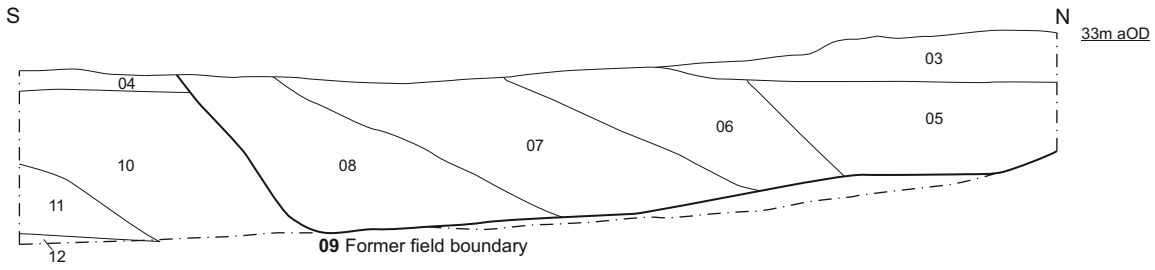
The fieldwork was undertaken by Carol Simmonds, Project Officer and Sander Aerts, post-excavation supervisor and a palaeo-environmentalist. It was the intention that if suitable palaeo-channel deposits been found samples would be taken.



Scale 1:50

Fig 3

Section 2



Feature 09, looking west

5 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

5.1 General stratigraphy

A full Context Inventory is presented in the Appendix and the general stratigraphic sequence is represented in Section 2 (Fig 4) and illustrated further in Figure 8.

At the base of the test pit were undisturbed natural soils ((10), (11) and (12)), a sequence of orange and grey silty clays, totalling 0.50m thick. Sealing it was a buried subsoil (4) a compact orange sandy clay, 0.10m thick.

5.2 The post-medieval field boundary

At the northern end of the test pit and cutting buried subsoil layer (4), was a ditch [9] (Figs 3 and 4). This was aligned east to west, 2.90m wide and 0.50m deep with a gradual sloping southern edge and uneven base. The fills ((5), (6), (7) and (8)) of the ditch generally comprised grey and orange silty clays, or in the case of fill (5) a grey-brown silty clay. Sherds of pottery, dated to 19th and 20th century, derived from fill (6) indicating that the ditch ceased to be used by the 20th century.

5.3 Modern deposits

Sealing the top of the ditch was a layer (3) of compact dark grey-brown sandy clay, 0.16m thick. This likely formed the truncated remnants of the buried topsoil in trench 17. Overlying this was a layer (1) of very loose dark blue-brown sand with crushed tarmac, 0.60m thick.

At the northern end of the test pit, the position of the backfilled Trench 17 could clearly be seen (2) (Fig 9).

5.4 The pottery by Tora Hylton

Two sherds of post-medieval pottery with a combined weight of 70gms were recovered from the fill (6) of a ditch [9]. The assemblage includes kitchen and tablewares and the fabric types represented suggest a late 19th- 20th-century date. Sherds included a rim sherd from a glazed red earthenware pancheon (bowl) with white internal slip measuring c320mm in diameter and a rim sherd from a ?tea cup in a whiteware fabric decorated with a purple transfer printed motif set just below the rim.

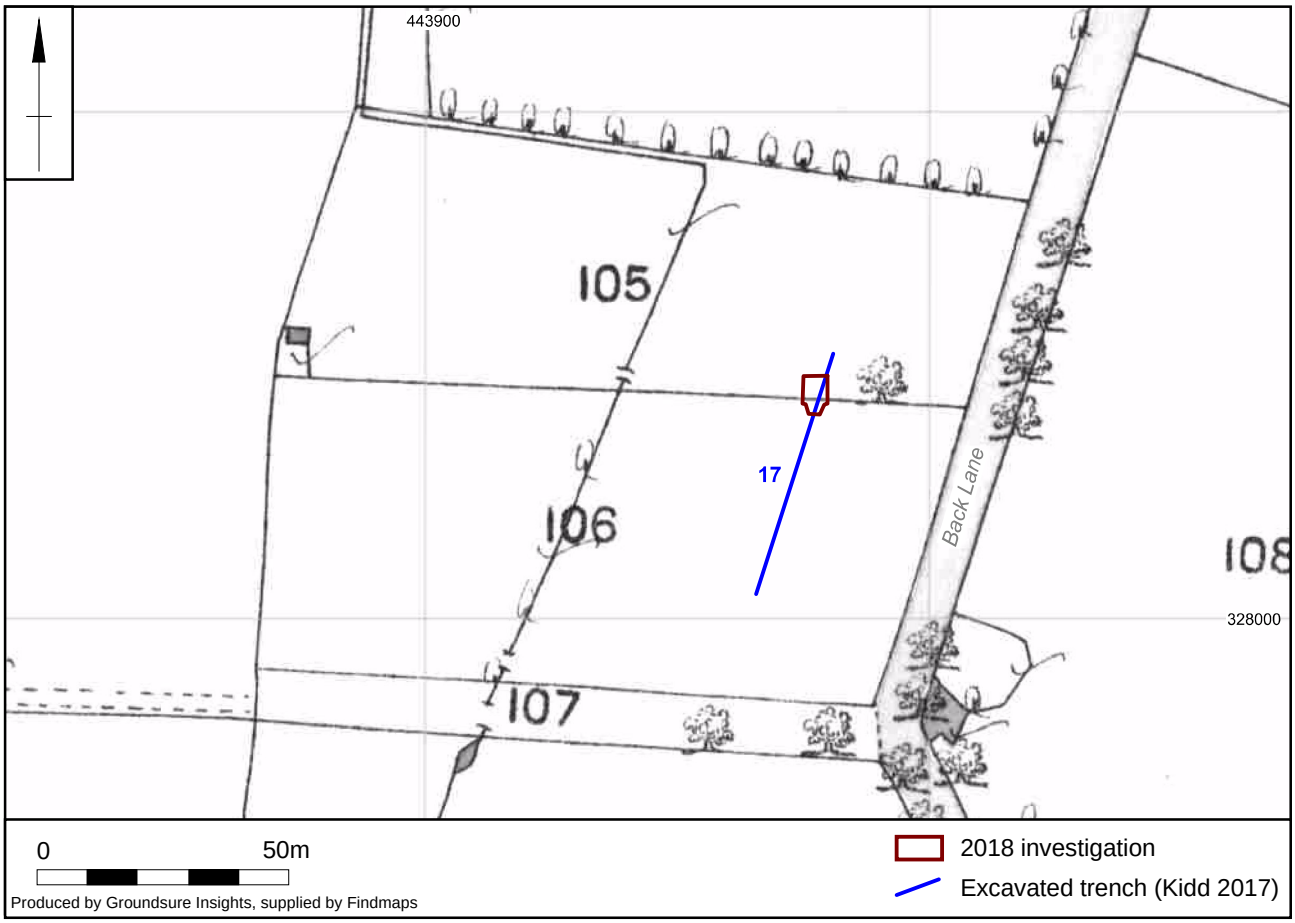
FABRIC TYPE	CONTEXT NUMBER	
	06	
Post-medieval Pottery	**Sherd count**	**Weight (g)**
Glazed red earthenware (19th-20th century)	1	60
Utilitarian Whiteware (19th-20th century)	1	10
Total	**2**	**70**

6 DISCUSSION

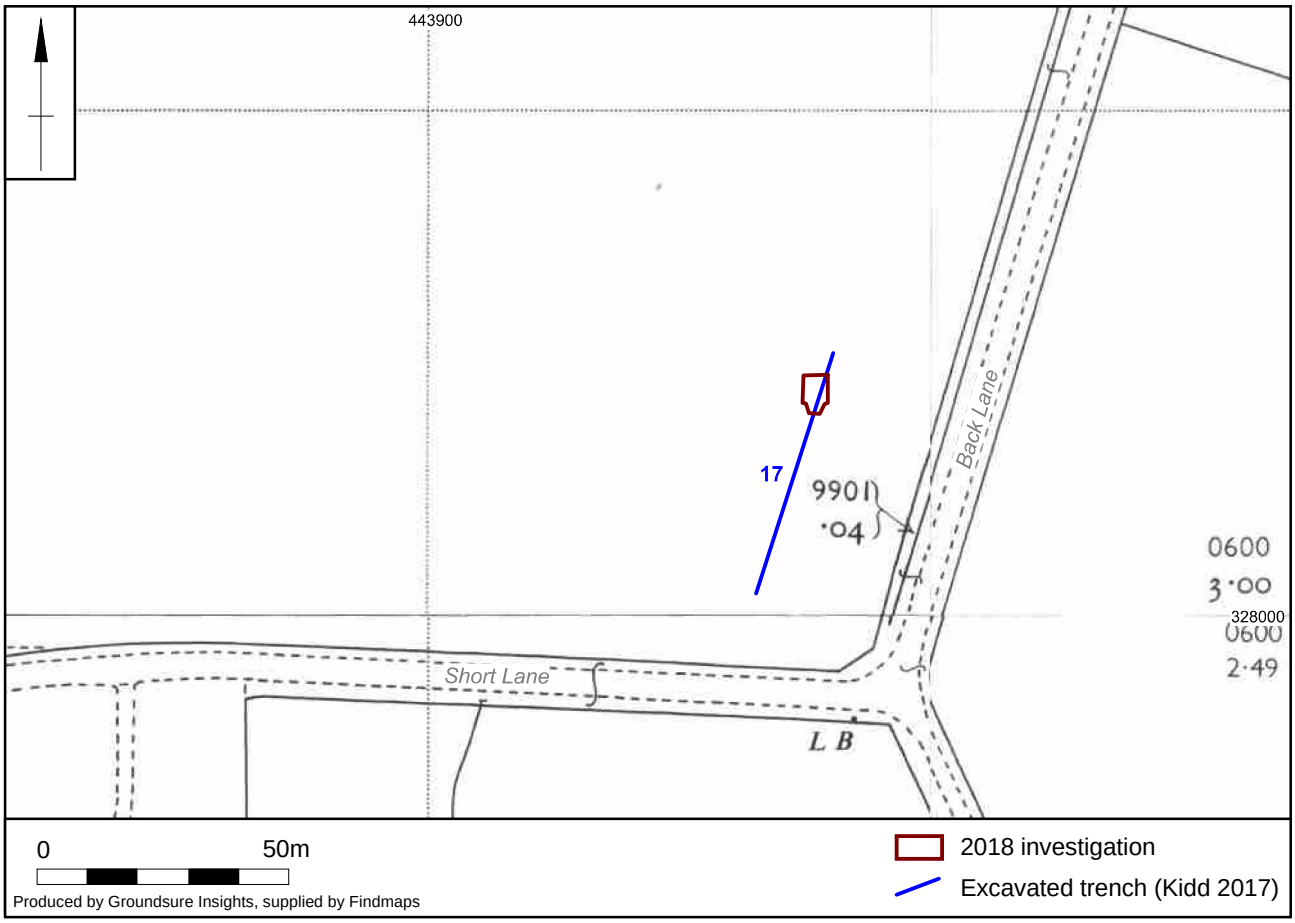
The feature in Trench 17 was identified during trial trenching as the possible remains of an undated palaeochannel (Kidd 2017). The test pit excavated in August 2018 has shown that there is no palaeochannel present although alluvial deposits are present. The immediate landscape is on low lying land in the Trent valley and there is a stream *c*20m to the west of the trench which forms a field boundary. Given the local topography it is therefore unsurprising that alluvium is present, as the area may have been prone to flooding.

The test pit has shown that what was tentatively identified as a palaeochannel in the trenching was in fact the remnants of a post-medieval field boundary, partially infilled over time by weathering before being later deliberately backfilled. Analysis of historic maps has shown that there was a field boundary in this location from 1882 (Fig 5), and present until 1923; gone by 1961 (Fig 6).

The evaluation (Kidd 2017) concluded that the elevation of the field had been enhanced. Deposits of charcoal and ash rich deposits which contained modern brick, tile and metal, collectively 0.75m thick, were likely to be derived from former industrial buildings which had stood to the west and south-west of Trench 17. These deposits were not present in the 2018 test pit, and on site conversations with the contractors indicate that prior to their compound being set up, they had graded c0.50m off the area and laid a tarmac/ gravel surface (deposit (1)), which probably removed these industrial deposits.



Scale 1:1500 1882 Ordnance Survey map Fig 5



Scale 1:1500 1961 Ordnance Survey map Fig 6

General view of the test pit, looking north Fig 7

The east facing section of the test pit, looking west Fig 8

The remnants of Trench 17 sondage (right hand side), looking north Fig 9

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MOLA Northampton

04 September 2018

APPENDIX: CONTEXT INVENTORY

NGR			**Surface height**	**Depth & height of natural**
443976 328044			**33.74m aOD**	**0.84m & 32.90m aOD**
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts/Samples***
1	Made ground	Very loose dark blue-brown sand with crushed tarmac, occasional small to medium stones and pockets of medium yellow-grey sand.	0.60m thick	-
2	Backfilled TT17 (Kidd 2017)	Loose chunks of topsoil/made ground. Comprising dark brown slightly clay sand	0.40m thick	-
3	Buried topsoil	Compact dark grey-brown sandy clay	0.16m thick	-
4	Buried subsoil	Compact orange sandy clay	1.7m (N-S) 2.40m (E-W) 0.10m thick	-
5	Upper fill Ditch 09	Compact grey-brown silty clay, heavily root disturbed	1.0m (N-S) 0.30m thick	-
6	Fill of Ditch 09	Compact brown-orange silty clay, some root disturbance	0.80m (N-S) 0.38m thick	Pottery 19th/20th C) Glass
7	Fill of Ditch 09	Very mixed but firm mottled grey and mi orange silty clay, root disturbance and rare small sub angular pebbles.	0.80m (N-S) 0.40m thick	-
8	Fill of Ditch 09	Friable, mottled mid orange silty clay with grey sand mottling, root disturbance and rare small pebbles	1.10m (N-S) 0.50m thick	-
9	Ditch Former field boundary	Linear, east to west, S edge and base visible. Gradual sloping side and uneven, eroded base.	2.90m wide (N-S) 0.50m deep	-
10	Layer natural	Firm, mottled light grey and orange silty clay. Rare manganese flecks, small rare sub-rounded stones	1.80m (N-S) 0.18m to 0.50m thick	-

11	Layer natural	Friable, mottled mid orange and grey silty clay, rare chalk flecks, rare charcoal flecks.	1.30m (N-S) 0.23m thick	-
12	Layer natural	Firm, bright light grey, mottled yellow sandy clay with occasional fragments of medium sub angular stone and rare charcoal	1.30m (N-S) 0.08m thick min	-

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