



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

**Archaeological observation and recording on
land opposite 33 Easton Lane, Bozeat,
Northamptonshire, April 2014**

1 May 2014

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Summary

Archaeological observation and recording accompanied ground-works for the erection of a house opposite 33 Easton Lane, Bozeat, on a formerly overgrown car park. No significant archaeology was present and the plot may have been pasture or scrubland for centuries. There was evidence of possible post-medieval crop-processing nearby, but such activity lacks any apparent landscape-focus. The previous car park had reduced the ground levels on an earlier occasion.

Background

Full Planning Consent was granted by Wellingborough Council to Seagrave Developments Ltd for the erection of a new house at land opposite 33 Easton Lane, Bozeat, Northamptonshire, NN29 7NN following demolition of a former factory and the removal of its car park. New car park surfaces will also be laid where the former factory car park stood, as set out in Planning Application WP/2014/0001.

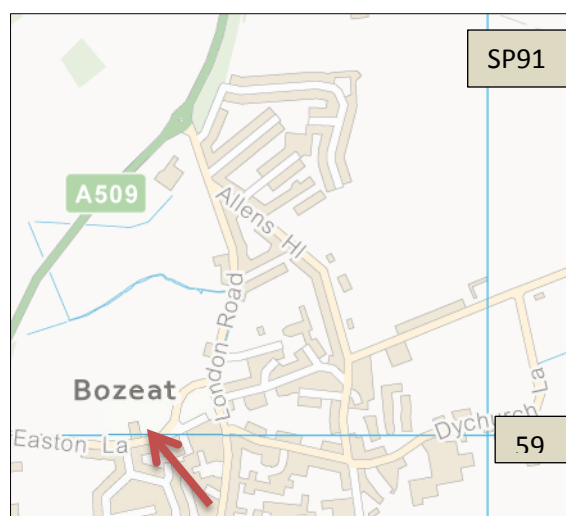


Fig 1: Site location (arrowed). Contains Ordnance Survey data
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The site lies on the northern frontage of Easton Lane (the road to Easton Maudit, west of Bozeat village) at NGR: SP9030 5900; Fig 1). To the east of the site lies scrubland fringing the modern road which links with London Road, while to the west lies a telecommunications station in grassed grounds. Directly on the north lies a 19th-20th century cemetery. The site appears to be on the very edge of the medieval village of Bozeat. It rests upon limestone and stands at 83.0m above Ordnance Datum.

Land opposite 33 Easton Lane, Bozeat

Archaeological observation was carried out for Seagrave Developments Ltd by Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd, in accordance with a previously-agreed Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), dated 18 February 2014. Fieldwork took place on 24 April 2014.



Fig 2: The site after the car park had been removed but before the house foundations were dug; looking north-west, telecom building beyond

Fieldwork and results

Following the clearance of dense brambles and other undergrowth, the former granite/stone car-park surface which had previously characterised the site was stripped off with a mechanical excavator, reducing the site levels down to the subsoil in places or deeper topsoil where a 10m-high, 15m-across wild cherry tree was cut down and removed; the house footprint was then marked out. The strip foundations were then dug using a 600mm-wide toothless bucket. These were reduced by up to 1.3m, well into the fractured limestone natural geology. An archaeological presence was maintained throughout.



Fig 3: The site reduced and with the foundation trenches dug; looking north, cemetery planting beyond

Patches of topsoil were very few, being interleaved with the fragments of granite which derived from the former car park. In one area at the east of the house footprint the car park surface included a dump of modern brick and limestone (Fig 4), which looked simply like a variation in the former car park make-up. It was seen to contain 20th-century tile and pottery (not retained).

Both of these dumps and any intermingled vestiges of old topsoil overlay a consistently homogenous light brown subsoil, up to 800mm thick, but containing (for the most part) only limestone fragments. It was devoid of finds.

At one part of the site, close to the southern side (the roadside boundary) lay a thin spread of black ash (Fig 4). Out of this carbon-enriched deposit had sprouted and grown the huge wild-cherry which was recently felled. The ash contained fragments of brick, which in this area, is unlikely to predate the 18th century.

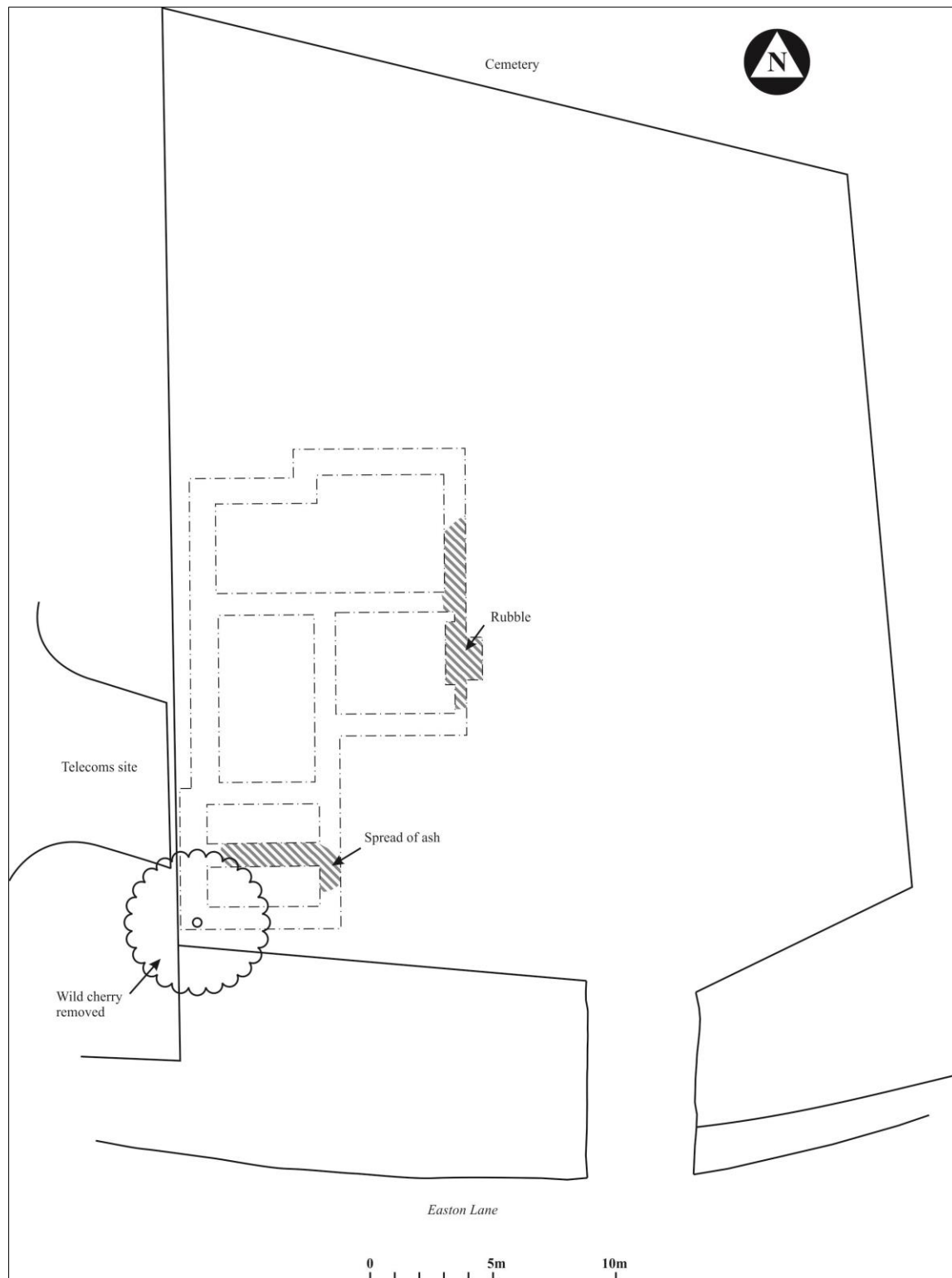


Fig 4: Plan of the site with house foundations layout.



Fig 5: The ash deposit, here much infested with the fibrous roots of the nearby felled wild cherry tree; scale 1m

A sample totalling about 10 litres was taken of the ash (as much as could be scraped out from amongst roots and within the foundation trench), which was found to contain numerous charred and very damaged seed-grains from bread-wheat. A sub-sample of these were later extracted carefully by hand and retained in the archive for future potential study, in the event that new, nearby sites may provide a better context than this site possesses.

In places, the subsoil appeared to be as thick above, as it was below the ash, although the disturbance by the tree and by its removal reduced the clarity of the recording the closer to the tree the ash lay. However, at the base of the subsoil the natural limestone's very flat surface was featureless throughout. It was viewed in plan during machining and later also the sections were inspected, revealing no features, layers or any sign of previous occupation or archaeological activity.



Fig 6: Typical section following cleaning. Note here the 800mm thickness of the subsoil; scale 1m

Conclusions

It seems likely that this plot has never been occupied, but rather has been either pasture or perhaps managed woodland, the soils accumulating naturally. In one place the extremely homogenous subsoil was as thick above the post-medieval ash as it was below it, suggesting that land-use of the plot was consistent (and potentially un-used) for a long period, perhaps from the Inclosure of the village (1798) onwards. Existing research shows that widespread medieval and later dis-use of land occurred, with agricultural contraction marked by the 17th century (RCHME 1979, 5).

The dump of ash close to the roadside boundary is likely to be waste burnt after being left-over from agricultural processing in the vicinity. So close to the roadside hedge, it is not clear where the dump might have originated, possibly another plot altogether. The presence of brick fragments might suggest that the material later burnt was shovelled up from a slightly worn-out threshing floor. Since brick locally is unlikely to date earlier than the 18th century (limestone is ubiquitous hereabouts), such a floor might be very much later. There is also a possibility that the ash with bread-wheat represents the raking out of a nearby bread-oven. However, no evidence for such an oven was present.

The site appears to be marginal to the village, neither occupied nor apparently ploughed. This is valuable information in itself, perhaps contributing to the regional agenda set out by Cooper (2006) and Knight et al (2012), in that unused or disused land is itself evidence of settlement morphology (suggested by RCHME (1979, 5), but may not be the whole story, since the creation of the previous factory car park had removed the topsoil, and with it an unknown volume of the sub-soil horizon.

Bibliography

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