



# Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

## An Archaeological Evaluation on land adjacent to Home Farm, Whittlebury

Iain Soden BA MCIfA



## **An Archaeological Evaluation on land adjacent to Home Farm, Whittlebury**

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### **Summary**

Evaluation of a plot adjacent to Home Farm, Church Way, Whittlebury shows that there is some localised potential for the survival of probable Iron Age archaeology. While one area of the site has been shown to contain buried features cut into the natural geology, another area appears to be devoid of remains, while a third has been quarried away between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It presents a resource which is sparse, denuded in part, and may be peripheral to the occupation focus suggested by nearby geophysical survey between 2000 and 2003.

### **Introduction**

Planning consent is sought from South Northamptonshire Council for the construction of a detached house with garage on land adjacent to Home Farm, Church Way, Whittlebury, Northamptonshire (NGR: SP 6891 4430). Since the site lies in a well-researched and unusually well test-pitted village and parish, the area's archaeological potential is already well attested, but on a plot-by-plot basis, as yet unrealised.

The site was the subject of a previous Planning Application in December 2006 (S/2006/1661/P), which eventually led to the issue of an archaeological brief from Northamptonshire County Council, dated 30 July 2010, for Archaeological Evaluation at the site. This application subsequently lapsed; however the development is once more proposed.

In accordance with the known potential and the time-lapsed brief, an approach was made to the Assistant Archaeological Advisor at Northamptonshire County Council, Liz Mordue, as a preliminary to preparation of the planning application case. She agreed to receive a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for the current evaluation from Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd, representing the applicant, A Clarkson, and his agent, Roger Coy Partnership Ltd on archaeological issues.

Evaluation was carried out by Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd in accordance with the WSI on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> and Monday 13<sup>th</sup> April 2015, in perfect weather and ground conditions and was monitored by Liz Mordue for Northamptonshire County Council.

### **Background**

Whittlebury is one of a number of local parishes which lie on either side of the Buckinghamshire-Northamptonshire boundary which between 2000 and 2003 were the subject of widespread archaeological and historical research, including small-scale fieldwork by way of shovel test-pitting.

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It was backed by the Medieval Settlement Research Group (MSRG Annual Report **16**, 15-25) and led by Leicester University ([www.le.ac.uk/el/whittlewood/index.htm](http://www.le.ac.uk/el/whittlewood/index.htm)). The work identified evidence of multi-period occupation of the landscape, even within the village, and helped identify the hitherto-unknown Whittlebury Iron Age Hillfort at the northern edge of the village. It has added weight to the importance of the landscape in the Iron Age and some see it as lending credence to the areas' candidacy as the site of the last stand of the rebel Queen Boudicca against the Roman occupation in 61AD, as yet an unproven suggestion, but one backed up by at least one prominent battlefield historian of good repute.

The fieldwork in the village, engendered by the Whittlewood Project, although minimal, included some intervention in private gardens along Church Way (kept secret by the project to preserve owners' home addresses). Artefacts of Iron Age, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Medieval and Post-Medieval indicate the extreme longevity and relative continuity of settlement in what became the current village. More recent work on Church Way has confirmed the widespread (although sparse) nature of Iron Age remains in the village (Soden 2012).

In the medieval period the site lay within the core of the village, which is shown on a map of 1608 (NRO) which also indicates that the wider plot may have been built upon at the time. There is little known of the medieval village and the RCHME (1982, 167-70), concentrates upon earthwork and landscape remains around the parish, beyond the village core.

Comparison of maps from 1884 (1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS), shows that the site has been an open paddock for some time, the previous house depicted on the 1608 map having been lost.

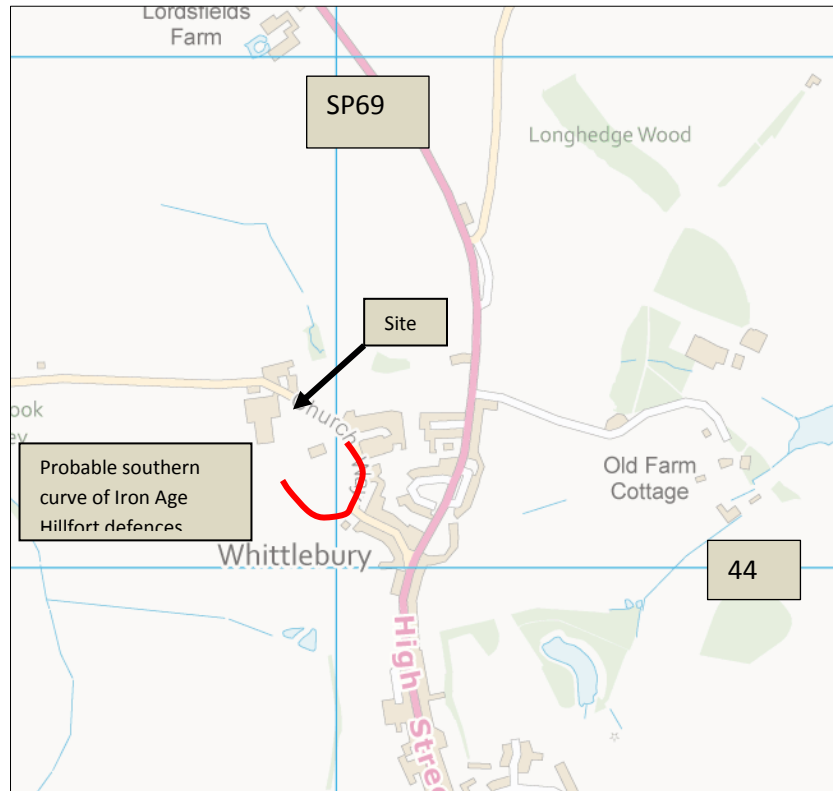


Fig 1: Site location, in relation to the Iron Age Hillfort defences. Contains Ordnance Survey data. ©Crown Copyright and database right 2015

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There is a possibility following geophysical survey published by the Whittlewood Project, that the site may lie within, or in close proximity to the Iron Age Hillfort at Whittlebury. Remains suspected from aerial photographs have been confirmed by magnetometry adjacent to the churchyard, c150-200m south of Home Farm. There is currently no idea as to the northern extent of the Hillfort.

It serves to present an extract of the 1608 map of the Whittlewood Forest since this shows the farm and the site, relative to the long-lived course of Church Way. It is possible that at this date, earthworks from the Hillfort may have been visible in the landscape, both along the roadside and in the field south and south-west of the church.



Fig 2: Extract of the 1608 map of Whittlewood Forest, showing the curve of what is now known to be the Hillfort (Church way); the site is starred (approximate), and appears to suggest a house stood to the south of the application plot, whereas today Home Farmhouse lies to the west.

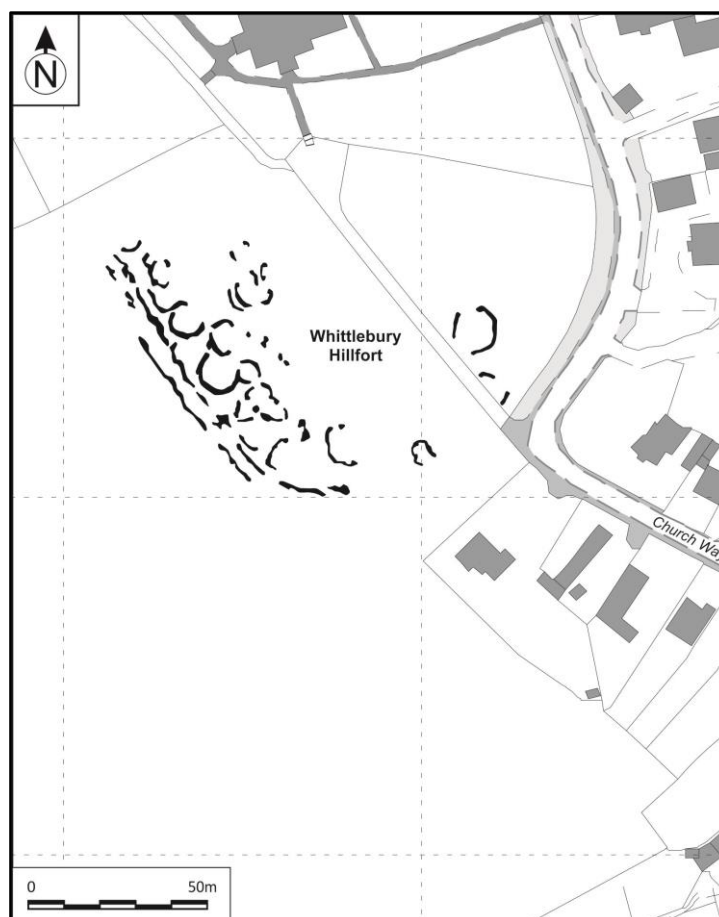


Fig 3: Demonstrated occupation remains within the former Iron Age Hill Fort, indicated some way south of the site and delineating the fort interior; Church Way may indicate the line of either the opposite defensive bank or ditch (After Jones and Page (2006)).

### Fieldwork

In the current evaluation, three trenches were machine-dug under archaeological control with the aid of a small tracked mechanical excavator. Each nominally measured 10m long and was 1.6m wide. Excavation proceeded to uncover the uppermost significant archaeological horizon or the natural substrate, whichever was the higher. Thereafter, excavation and cleaning was by hand.

Individual contexts were given individual consecutive numbers and described on pro-forma context cards. Trenches were drawn in plan at 1:50 scale and appropriate sections at 1:20 scale. Photography was by both digital images in Colour for reporting purposes and Black and White negative film with accompanying contact sheets for archive purposes. The trenches were triangulated and plotted against an existing survey of the site, using conventional measuring tapes.

In the event, Trench 1 contained no archaeology whilst Trench 2 exposed a post-medieval quarry over almost its entire length. Only Trench 3 contained archaeology, comprising a gully, cut by a pit of probable Iron Age date, and which contained much burnt material.

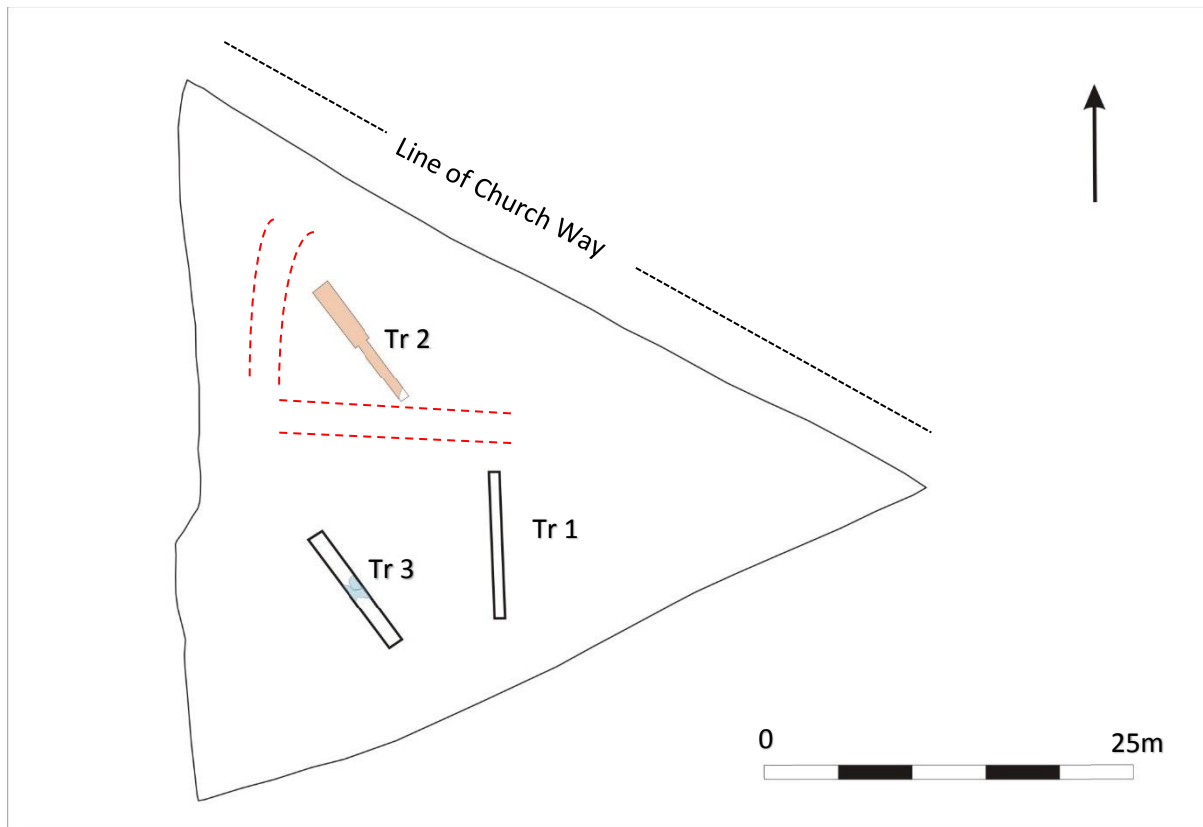


Fig 4: The location of the evaluation trenches on the plot (Charlotte Walker). The red dashed lines denote the approximate lines of former stone-founded garden paths

## Results

### *Trench 1*

Aligned north-to-south, this trench measured 11m long x 1.6m wide and contained no archaeology (Fig 4). The dark brownish-grey slightly stony topsoil (1) was some 300mm thick and directly overlay hard sandy-clay with gravel and limestone pebbles (natural geology-2).

The trench was moved approximately 2m south of its original intended location to avoid the part-buried remains of a former stoned path with concrete kerbs, which runs across the site east-to-west and was part of a former (pre-1970) garden layout noted in the turf by the present owner (see Fig 4). This was confirmed by the excavation and is noted as containing a depth of concrete hard-core which may have modified the surface of the natural geology.

### *Trench 2*

Aligned north-west to south-east, this trench measured c10m x 1.6m, deliberately narrowed to 1m over some of its length, when the contents became fully understood (Figs 4 and 8).

Under some 300mm of stony topsoil (1), lay a thick layer of slightly stonier silty soil, containing also small quantities of pebbles, limestone chips, brick fragments, roof tile and pottery (4). This layer was tested to a depth of a further 1m, by both machine bucket and, at its deepest, by a hand-dug



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sondage. Its base may have been reached at c1.3m below the modern ground surface (although this is not certain).

The pottery from within (down to and including the sondage) dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Cistercian Ware) to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century (standard horticultural flower pot rim) and suggests that the deposit is a backfilled gravel-quarry.

Machine excavation was extended south-east at 1m wide to seek the edge of this feature (3), which once identified (orange sandy clay with gravel) was curtailed.

Like Trench 1, this trench was moved a couple of metres from what was originally intended (south-east in this case), in order to avoid a stoned-up pathway related to a former (pre-1970) garden layout. This path is depicted in Fig 4.



Fig 5: Trench 2, quarry fill; scale 1m. The quarry edge is arrowed. A hand-dug sondage at the box indicated showed the base to be at least a further 300mm down



### *Trench 3*

Trench 3 measured 10m long and 1.6m wide (Figs 4 and 8). It cut through the hard topsoil (1) to reveal the natural geology beneath (2). At about the mid-point of the trench lay a 700mm-wide gully aligned roughly east-west (7). It had a gently-sloped U-shaped profile and was barely 150-200mm deep where sectioned. 1.8m of its length lay in the trench and it extended beyond the trench in both directions. Its fill (8) was a buff/ochre sandy clay with a few pieces of flinty gravel. It produced a few scraps of animal bone.

Cutting through the north edge of the gully was a shallow, straight-sided and flat-bottomed, probably sub-circular pit (5), with a likely diameter of c1.2m and a surviving depth of c350mm. Its fill (6) was a dark grey soil with an admixture of a little gravel and pebbles, but with a large proportion of pinkish-red burnt sand and black ashy soil. Some pebbles were shattered and reddened all over. The fill produced a very few poorly-preserved body sherds of shell-tempered Iron Age pottery with a black fabric.



Fig 6: Gully 7 and pit 5, pre-excavation; scale 1m



Fig 7: Gully 7 and pit 5, after sampling; scale 1m

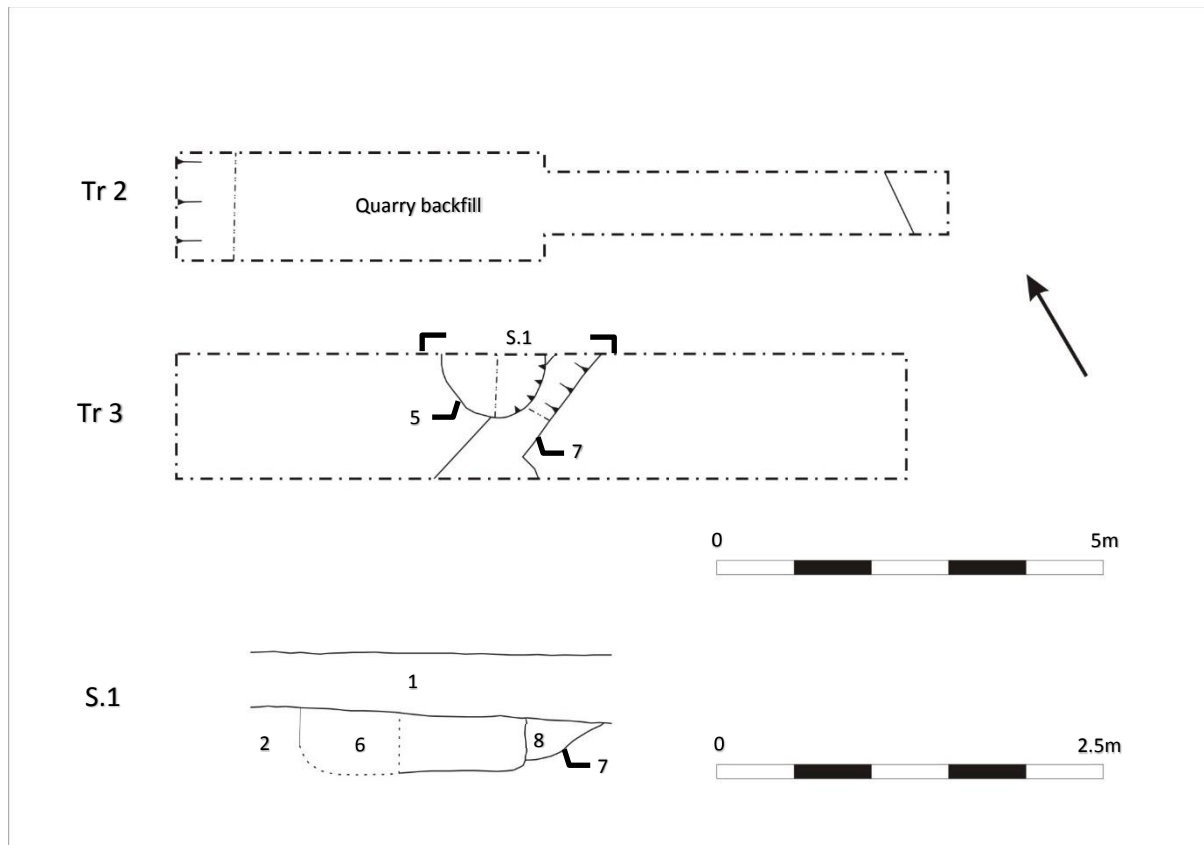


Fig 8: The trenches and archaeological features

### Conclusions

Three evaluation trenches have shown that surviving buried archaeology across the plot is probably relatively dispersed and discontinuous. This is due in part to gardening activities, but also because there is evidence for post-medieval gravel quarrying between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Such quarrying may be related to the house depicted on the plot in 1608 but gone by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

What archaeology does survive, demonstrably in the south-western third of the site, comprises cut features of probable Iron Age date, probably related to the adjacent Iron Age Hill Fort.

It is not clear from the evaluation whether the site lies inside or outside the Hill fort, although its very proximity leaves the question as academic: such remains are here for probably no other reason than the presence of this notable topographic and social focus.

### Bibliography

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IS Heritage, 8 May 2015

## Land adjacent to Home Farm, Whittlebury

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### Appendix 1: OASIS data

Project Name	Land adjacent to Home Far, Whittlebury
OASIS ID	Iainsode1-227990
Project Type	Evaluation
Originator	Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd
Project Manager	Iain Soden
Previous/future work	Unknown
Current land use	Garden
Development type	Single house
Reason for investigation	NPPF
National grid reference	SP 6891 4430
Start/end dates of fieldwork	April 2015-May 2015
Archive recipient	-
Study area	0.13ha