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Modern living in an historic environment

An Archaeological Evaluation at Hill Farm, Mears Ashby, Northamptonshire

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation comprising 70m of trial trenching found no evidence that the site immediately west of the core of Hill Farm had ever been occupied prior to the post-medieval modern barns and related structures, which still stand. It appears to have previously been paddocks or other agricultural land throughout.

Introduction and Background

Planning consent has been granted by Wellingborough Council for the demolition of existing structures, the conversion of listed barns, and the construction of several new dwellings, all within the enclosure of Hill Farm, 6 Wilby Way, Mears Ashby, Northamptonshire, NN6 0DX (NGR: SP 837 664; WP/14/00830/FUL; Fig 1). The site lies along the frontage of Wilby Way and the north-south main road to Earls Barton and is close to the site of the medieval manor house, close to which earthworks and other evidence of the early village has been noted.

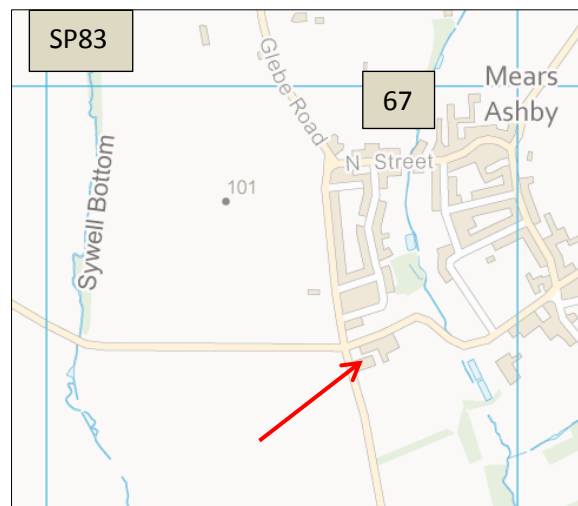


Fig 1: Site location (arrowed). Contains Ordnance Survey data
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A condition (8) has been applied to the Planning Consent for an evaluation strategy for better appreciating and characterising the archaeology of the site before development takes place.

The fieldwork which is the subject of this report comprised an agreed programme of trial trenching strategy, including trench-lengths, set out in a foregoing Written Scheme of Investigation, approved

Hill Farm, Mears Ashby

by Liz Mordue, Northamptonshire County Council's Assistant Archaeological Advisor to Wellingborough Council.

The present document has been prepared by Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd who carried out the fieldwork on 12 October 2015 in near-perfect weather and ground conditions.

Mears Ashby is a medieval village, perhaps with older origins. In the area considerable prehistoric remains and cropmarks have been recorded which attest a very long history of local occupation. During the medieval period the village was also called Ashby Mares or Esseby Mares when it had varied interests, including monastic, when the advowson and the estate of the rectory was held by Coventry Charterhouse [Carthusian] (1392-1539) out of wider manorial interests already held there by St Andrew's Priory, Northampton [Cluniac] (RCHME 1979, 107-9; Soden 1995).

The site has supported at least its current older buildings since before 1885 (1st edition OS). They may be much earlier and some medieval or later occupation was expected, subject to the damage often caused by the growth and success of 20th century farms. The outer farmyard is dominated by two very large conjoined equipment barns comprising steel frames and corrugated sheet covering.

Partida, Hall and Foard (2013 -Maps 47M, 47EM) shows the site within the medieval village but on its very southern edge, as it remains today.

Fieldwork

Five trenches were machine-dug under archaeological control, using a JCB-type excavator fitted with a 1.6m-wide toothless ditching blade (Fig 2).

The trenches totalled 70m in length. One trench was changed from an example of 10m x 1.6m to a box c3m square in order to achieve a similar evaluation area to that agreed, while avoiding two live electricity cables which a recent survey had found aligned east-west across the farmyard.

Trenches were placed in order to combine:

- Areas proposed for new buildings
- Areas outside the existing farm buildings and with no apparent modern disturbance

These areas were thought to hold the best chance of surviving buried archaeology but which might be directly affected by the construction proposals.

The trench layout was as follows:

Hill Farm, Mears Ashby

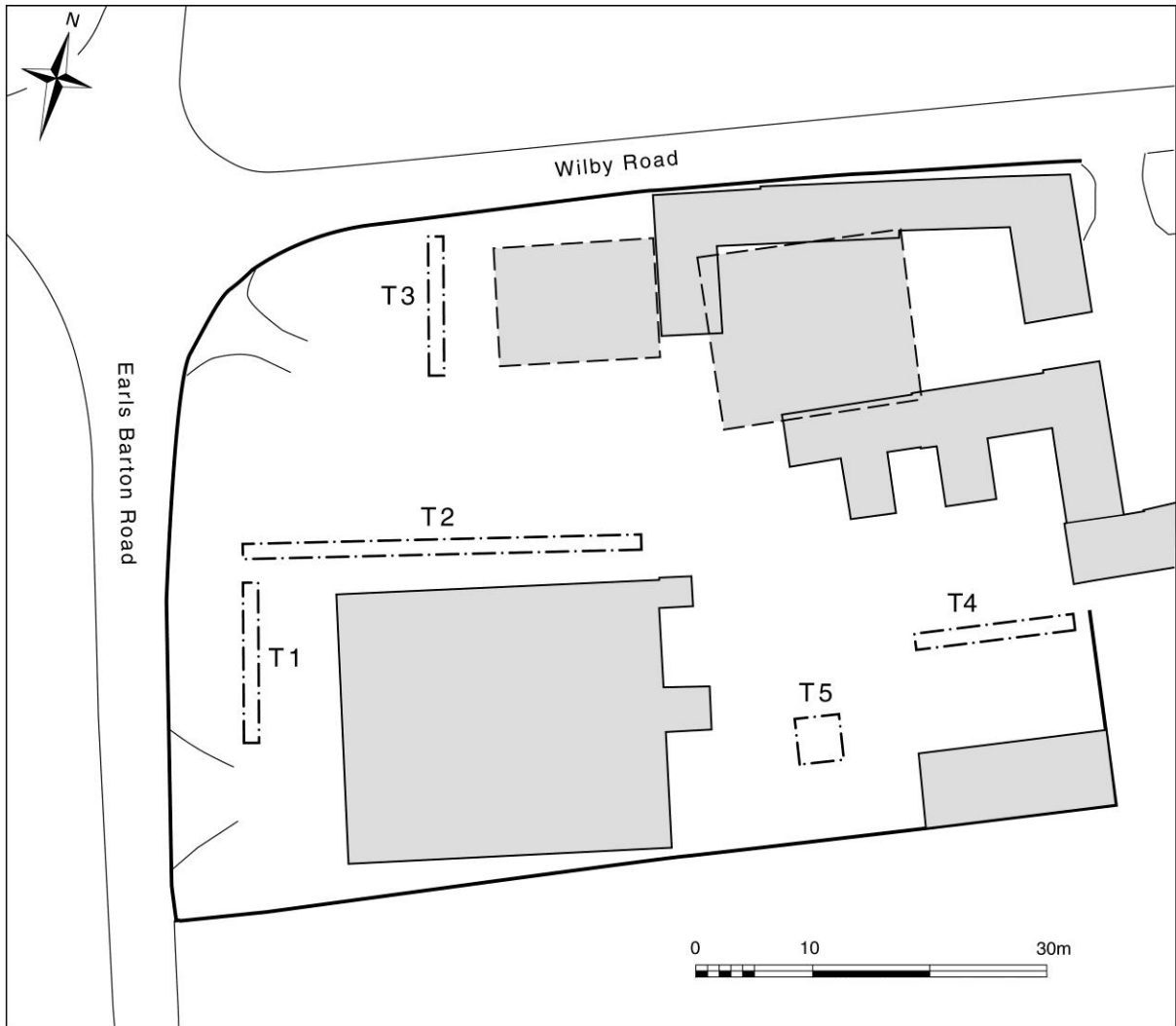


Fig 2: Trench layout, with main buildings (Andy Isham)

Hill Farm, Mears Ashby

Results

None of the five trenches contained any features or finds of any date. The stratification comprised 300mm of topsoil, often rubble-strewn, over patchy thin subsoil (c50-100mm thick, where present), with natural ironstone geology beneath. The following views illustrate the absence of archaeology.



Fig 3: Trench 1, 10m x 1.6m, looking north;
scale 2m



Fig 5: Trench 3, 10m x 1.6m, looking north;
scale 2m



Fig 4: Trench 2, 30m x 1.6m, looking east;
scale (in the distance) 2m



Fig 6: Trench 4, 10m x 1.6m, looking east;
scale 2m



Fig 7: Trench 5, changed from a 10m x 1.6m trench to a 3m x 3m box to avoid live services. Looking north; Scale 2m

Conclusions

Evaluation has shown that in all areas chosen for trenching, the natural substrate was undisturbed by the current farmyard. However there was no archaeology of any sort present.

The site has not to have been utilised previously, but before the current farmyard expansion has constituted either paddock or used for a low level of agriculture. There was no evidence of previous ploughing.

Bibliography

Partida T, Hall D, and Foard G, 2013, *An atlas of Northamptonshire: the medieval and early modern landscape*, Oxbow Books

RCHME 1979, *An inventory of the historical monuments in the county of Northampton, II: Archaeological sites in central Northamptonshire*, 107-9

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