



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

**A programme of geotechnical boreholes at Canons Ashby House,
December 2018, with depth-data key to land management
around the house.**

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Summary

Four Window Samples around Canons Ashby House provide a picture of consistent thicknesses of overburden above natural geology, generally reflective of the layout of the gardens. Other depth data elsewhere around the complex has been brought to bear to provide a consistent picture of a protective recent and modern overburden which lies above any sensitive archaeology in this Scheduled Ancient Monument. It is hoped this will be of value in future management of the resource.

Introduction

A series of four Window Sample boreholes were dug on 5 December 2018 for The National Trust around the principal buildings of Canons Ashby House, Banbury Road, Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire, NN11 3SD (NGR: SP 58620 50878; Fig 1). These are designed to inform repairs proposed to the floor of the Great Hall of Canons Ashby House.

Since the site lies within a Scheduled Monument of Canons Ashby [The remains of a medieval monastery, castle, settlement and fields, post-medieval houses, gardens and park, and a series of five dams, Northamptonshire, (SM 13643; HA 1015534)] the work necessarily carries a need for Scheduled Monument Consent, as indicated by the Dept of Culture Media and Sport, as advised by Historic England. Consent was forthcoming (Ref S00191165), dated 21 May 2018, but with archaeological conditions (3.ii, vii, and viii).

In accordance with this, a Written Scheme of Investigation was produced and approved, dated 13 July 2018 to set out a proposed programme of observation and recording during the works of boring, with concomitant reporting and archiving.

The fieldwork was carried out under a heavy overcast with occasional light rain.

The current report provides the results of the Window Samples. However, in addition, it ventures to add further depth-data in a wider area, to place a summary of land management-related information about parts of the Scheduled Monument into a single volume.

Canons Ashby House – 2018 boreholes and other depth data

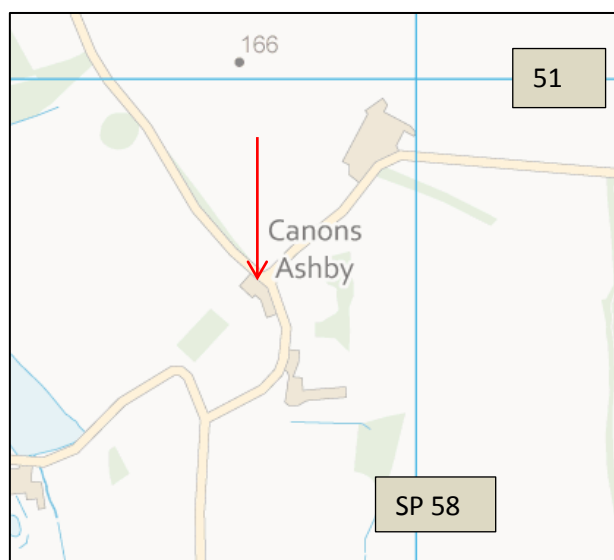


Fig 1: Site location (arrowed). Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database right 2018

The boreholes

The boreholes (or more properly Window Samples) were hand-dug to a depth of 1.2m, upon which further depth was achieved by mechanical coring, with samples collected in a removable rigid plastic sleeve.

- **WS1** *In grass verge of Preston Capes Road, adjacent to East corner of house*

0-500mm Turf and Topsoil

500mm-1.35m Ironstone rich layer with pieces of tile (possibly old road-sub-base or builder's material close to the house)

1.35m Natural geology (clay)

- **WS2** *Path in principal garden south of the great cedar of Lebanon canopy*

0-500mm Washed gravel top and pebbles in sandy matrix, sub-base to current garden path

500mm-1.0m Black, loamy topsoil with few inclusions (long-lived growing medium –old topsoil)

1.0m – 1.2m Pebbles and gravel in grey sandy matrix (drainage layer to create garden)

1.2m Natural geology (clay)

- **WS3** *Path in principal garden west of house, close to southern arbour.*

0-450mm Washed gravel top and pebbles in sandy matrix, sub-base to current garden path

450mm-1.0m Black, loamy topsoil with few inclusions (long-lived growing medium –old topsoil)

Canons Ashby House – 2018 boreholes and other depth data

- 1.0m-1.4m Gravel and occasional pebble in brownish grey sand matrix (drainage layer to create garden)
- 1.4m Natural geology (weathered Northampton Sand with Ironstone)
- *WS4* Located directly adjacent to East wing of house in Green Court.
- 0-300mm Turf and poorly sorted topsoil with grit and roots.
- 300mm-1.3m Poor topsoil mixed with ironstone fragments, occasional tile fragments, getting stonier at depth (builder's rubble layer close to house)
- 1.3m Natural geology (weathered Northampton Sand with Ironstone)

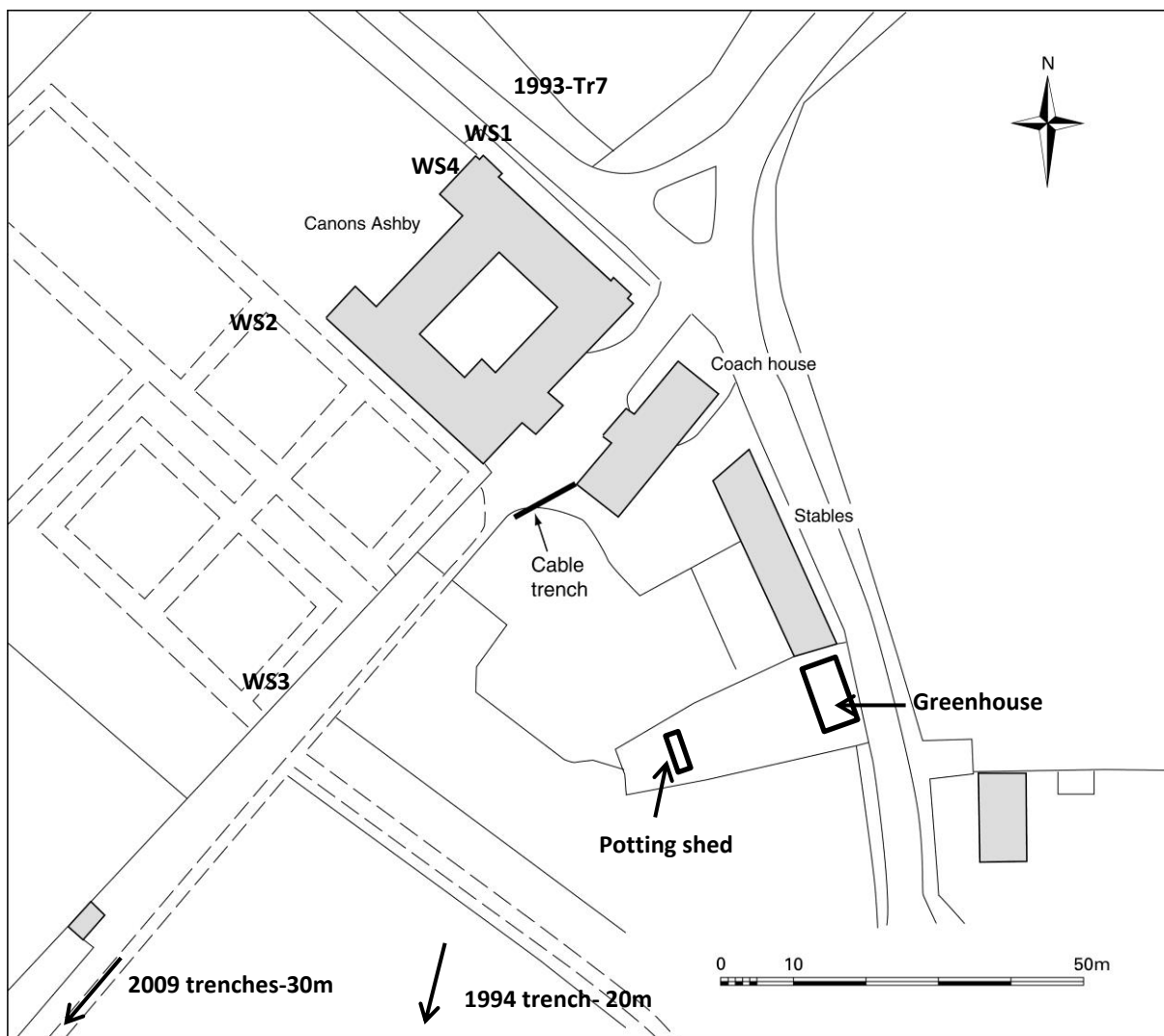


Fig 2: Locations of the four Window Samples (WS1-4) plus other, unrelated origins of depth-data around the building complex



Fig 3: The Window Samples were hand-dug to a depth of 1.2m. Here WS2 is shown.



Fig 4: Mechanical coring of the Window samples, the core retained in a removeable plastic sleeve from 1.2m downwards. Here WS1 is shown.

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Similarly-derived data

Since 1993 there have been a number of small interventions which have produced depth-data of potential value in the future management of the Scheduled Monument, concentrated where the immediate house-complex stands. Many were overseen by the present author. General locations are shown on Fig 2.

- In 1993 a series of seven evaluation trenches was dug along the Preston Capes Road's northern verge, in relation to the insertion of a new water main. Although the service-line itself was to be flow-moled (drilled through without a continuous surface trench), at regular intervals a pit had to be dug to locate the existing pipe. Trench 7 lay closest to Canons Ashby House, and found the existing pipe was 1m below the current ground surface. Natural geology lay at 0.5m (Soden 1993).
- In 1994 a single evaluation trench was dug for an extension of the visitor car park. There was no archaeology uncovered, and the depth of the overburden, comprising a succession of cultivation soils, was a minimum of 550mm (Audouy 1994).
- In 2009 five evaluation trenches were dug in relation to the extension of the car park. These confirmed the presence of merely 0.35-0.9m of former cultivation soils above the natural geology. The 1994 and 2009 works together concluded this area was marginal to the House, monastery and DMV foci of the Scheduled Monument. (Warner and Soden 2009).
- In 2016 monitoring of the foundation trench for construction of a new Greenhouse showed that the horticultural topsoil was some 700mm thick (Soden 2018)
- In 2017 monitoring of a machine-dug trench for the introduction of a new cable serving visitor facilities in the former stable. The trench noted that the tarmac lay over 500mm of modern type 1 stone, which had been laid on a geotextile membrane. (Soden 2017)
- In 2018 monitoring of a new water supply pipe to an extension on the east side of the garden potting shed showed that the horticultural soil was up to 700mm thick, and mostly about 500mm in thickness. (Soden 2018)

Canons Ashby House – 2018 boreholes and other depth data

Conclusions

The four Window Samples/boreholes of 2018 indicate that in the upper terrace of the immediate gardens south and west of Canons Ashby House, there lies a consistent thickness of either long-lived garden soils or equivalent make-up to a depth of c1m. This represents an archaeologically unstratified layer, protecting any significant archaeology beneath.

Works to the Preston Capes Road in 1993 (Tr 7 the closest) show that, when compared with the 2018 Window Sample 1 (WS1), there is a consistent build-up of topsoil on the verges, but that imported ironstone material may represent old road-makeup put down before the modern tarmac. The thickness of protective (archaeologically non-significant) material totals around 1m in the road verges, where road-side ditches and their regular scouring are probably involved.

East of Canons Ashby House, in an area which has been much altered to provide public-focussed benefits in terms of the tourist-site, there lies a protective layer of at least 500mm of un-stratified or modern material over any significant archaeology.

Further south and south-east east of Canons Ashby House, trial-trench evaluations in 1994 and 2009 show that the car park and its surroundings constitute long-lived cultivation land, with protective plough-soils no less than 0.35m thick over natural geology, and up to 0.9m thick. An absence of any archaeology suggests that some way beyond the existing building complex, the land to the south was formerly marginal to any of the foci of the Scheduled Monument.

Bibliography

Audouy M F, 1994 *Archaeological evaluation in the visitors' car park, Canons Ashby, June 1994*

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Soden I, 2017 *Archaeological monitoring of cable-trench digging at Canons Ashby House, Northamptonshire, November 2017*

Soden I, 2018 *Archaeological observation and monitoring for new greenhouse foundations and new water pipe at Canons Ashby House, Northamptonshire, August 2016 and November 2018*

Warner A and Soden I, 2009 *Archaeological evaluation of the car park, Canons Ashby, Northants, June 2009*. Northants Archaeology report 09/67

Canons Ashby House – 2018 boreholes and other depth data

Appendix

OASIS data

Project Name	Canons Ashby House – 2018 boreholes
OASIS ID	Iainsode1-336635
Project Type	Research
Originator	Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd
Project Manager	Rachael Hall
Previous/future work	No
Current land use	Gardens and public open space
Development type	Repairs
Reason for investigation	Scheduled Monument Consent
National grid reference	SP 58620 50878
Start/end dates of fieldwork	5 December 2018
Archive recipient	Northamptonshire Archive
Study area	1ha



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12 December 2018