

Land west of

Strawfield House

Hillmorton Lane, Yelvertoft, Northamptonshire

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Strawfield House

Hillmorton Lane, Yelvertoft, Northamptonshire, NN6 6LN.

Programme of archaeological work comprising earthwork survey and field evaluation.

NGR: *SP 59238 75589*

Site code: *yelv22*

HER ref: *enn110734*

OASIS ID: *110archa1-510674*

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12th November 2022

NOT FOR PLANNING

one ten archaeology

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Front cover; view of the ridge and furrow earthworks from the north.

SUMMARY

A programme of archaeological work comprising an earthwork survey and field evaluation was carried out at land west of Strawfield House, Hillmorton Lane, Yelvertoft, Northamptonshire during October 2022. Although small in scope, the investigative trenching revealed no evidence of earlier occupation within the proposed development area below the extant medieval and/or post-medieval ridge and furrow cultivation earthworks. The negative results of the investigation suggested that the development site lies outside areas of prehistoric and Roman occupation recorded elsewhere in the outlying land surrounding Yelvertoft. The lack of residual finds from the excavation related to these periods supported this hypothesis. In view of the results, it is unlikely that the development of the site will have no impact on deposits pre-dating the ridge and furrow earthworks.

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Fig. 1: Site location circled in red.



Fig. 2: Area of study outlined in red.

INTRODUCTION

Location and scope of works

This document details the results of a programme of archaeological work comprising an earthwork survey and field evaluation at land to the west of Strawfield House, Hillmorton Lane, Yelvertoft, Northamptonshire, NN6 6LN during 24th and 25th October 2022 at the request of the owners Whiterock Homes Ltd. A planning application (*Planning ref. WND/2022/0946*) had been granted for the development of the site comprising the construction of nine dwellings and ancillary parking and garages, landscaping, sustainable drainage system and access to highway. The permission, in accordance with NPPF was conditional on the completion of Programme of Archaeological Work comprising an earthwork survey followed by field investigation (trial trenching) the results of which would, if necessary, inform a mitigation strategy for further archaeological work on site prior to or during the commencement of development.

The site is located on the western edge of the settlement of Yelvertoft and north of Hillmorton Lane. The area contains well preserved earthwork remains of ridge and furrow agriculture indicative of the pre-Enclosure open field system.

In terms of any below ground archaeology, the presence of ridge and furrow does indicate that the fields were in agricultural use in the medieval period and therefore other remains of this date were not anticipated. However, there was potential for remains of earlier periods to be present underlying the ridge and furrow. This potential was mitigated by a condition for a programme of archaeological work comprising initially of an earthwork Survey (Level 1; Historic England, 2017) to record the earthworks prior to their loss followed by an evaluation in the form of investigative trenching to determine the presence or absence, extent, date, character, condition and significance of any remains and the likely impact of the development upon them. If archaeological remains are identified that would be damaged or destroyed by the development and they cannot be preserved in-situ then the investigation would be followed by a defined programme of archaeological excavation and/or a watching brief to record the remains prior to their loss.

Geology and topography

Yelvertoft is a village and civil parish in West Northamptonshire unitary authority in the county of Northamptonshire. The parish, covering just over 900 hectares, occupies a narrow strip of land which widens at the east end. Its west boundary is formed by Watling Street. It lies on undulating land between 95m and 145m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) and except in the extreme west of the parish where Lower Lias Clay is exposed most of the area is covered by Boulder Clay. At the time of the 2001 census, the parish's population was 821 people, reducing to 764 at the 2011 Census. Yelvertoft's main thoroughfare, called High Street, is approximately three quarters of a mile long, from the Parish Church of All Saints to the Village Hall. This linear street follows the course of an ancient Portway known as Salters Way.

The proposed development site lies about half a kilometre to the northeast of the centre of Yelverton north of Hillmorton Lane and on the edge of previous modern development where the size of the village has been increased. The development comprises an area of approx. 4,860m² situated at approximately 115m AOD. The Geological Survey of Great Britain indicates that the underlying geology comprises Lower Lias, mainly mudstone with a few very thin limestones (BGS, 1990).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record (HER) was consulted comprising a 1km radial search area centred on the site. Significant aspects of the data are outlined below.

Prehistoric activity within the search area is evidenced by a surface scatter of flints ([mnn5399](#)) found in 1988 on a low mound in the corner of the field approx. 750m to the north of the site. Cropmarks interpreted as a possible prehistoric enclosure ditch ([mnn473/0/2](#)) and possible boundary ditch ([mnn473/0/1](#)) have been identified from aerial photography in a field 800m to the south of the site.

Geophysical survey has previously identified a probable Late Iron Age/Roman settlement ([mnn3719/1](#)) northeast of Crick Lodge, approx. 900m to the southwest of the site. The results consisted of two broadly parallel linear boundaries at least 550m long and a series of ditched enclosures which appear to

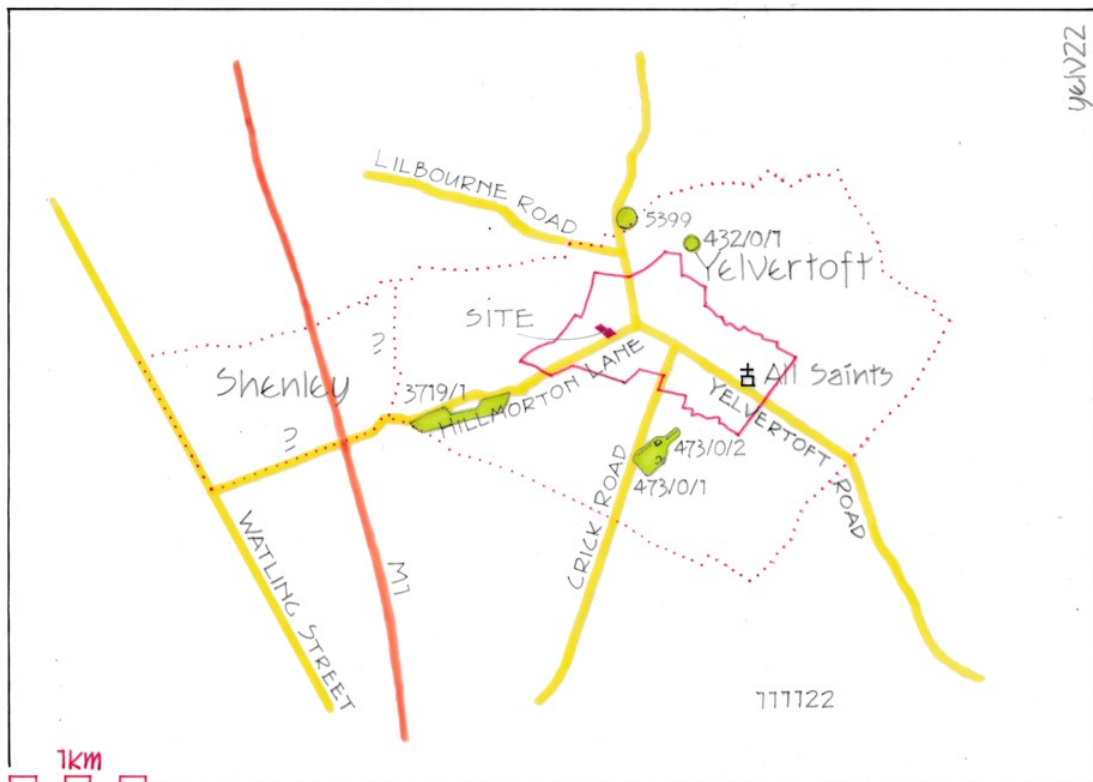


Fig. 3: Yelverton medieval landscape, also showing possible settlement of Shenley and earlier sites of prehistoric and Romano-British activity shown in green.

be associated with the boundaries. The boundaries appear to terminate at both the eastern and western ends of the surveyed area. A series of rectilinear and curvilinear ditched enclosures could be associated with the boundary ditches.

Further Roman activity is also recorded about 800m to the northeast of the development site and 400m north of the village is the site of a possible Romano-British Settlement ([mnn432/0/1](#)). The record is based on a large quantity of Roman pottery, mainly grey ware, was found from the area in 1976.

In Domesday (1086), where a priest was mentioned, Yelvertoft was recorded as having 30 households in 1086, indicating a substantial settlement in the preceding Anglo-Saxon period. In 1086 the manor contained 8 acres of meadow.

The village's name means 'curtilage of Geldfrith'. Old English 'cot', 'cotu', 'cottage(s)' may have been the original generic.

Yelvertoft has maintained a more independent, rural character compared to other villages in the region, such as Crick, because no major transport routes pass through it.

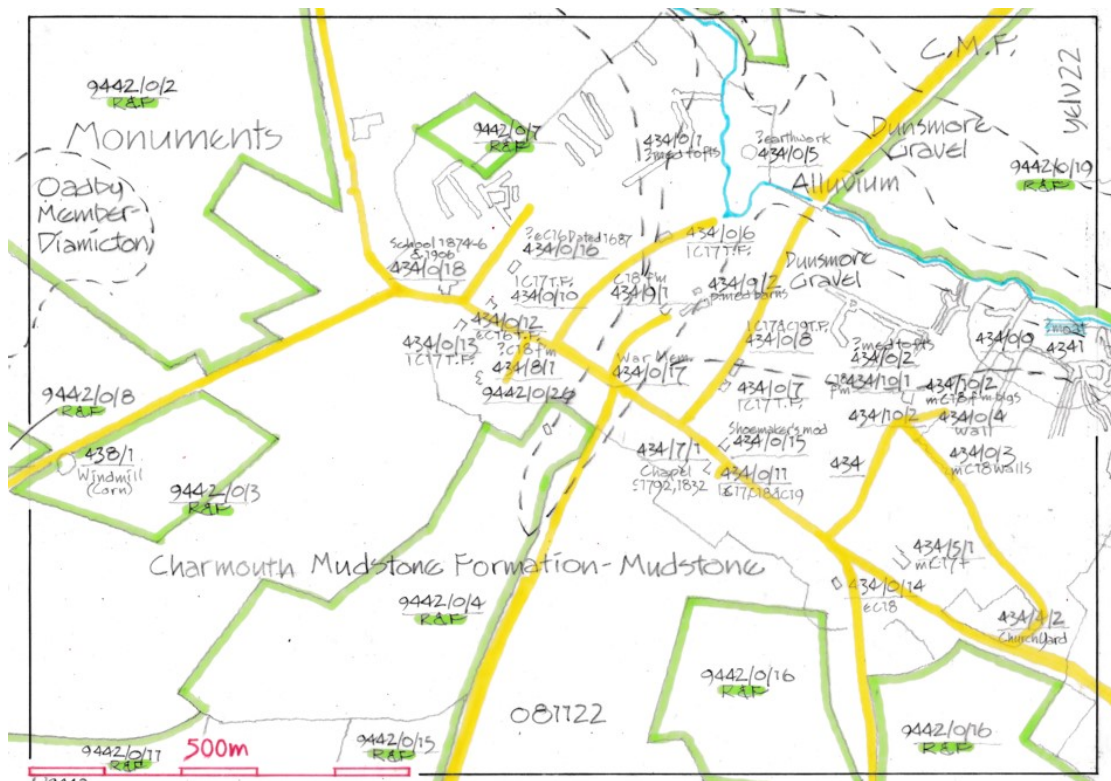


Fig. 4: Sketch plan showing monuments with extant ridge and furrow shown in green.

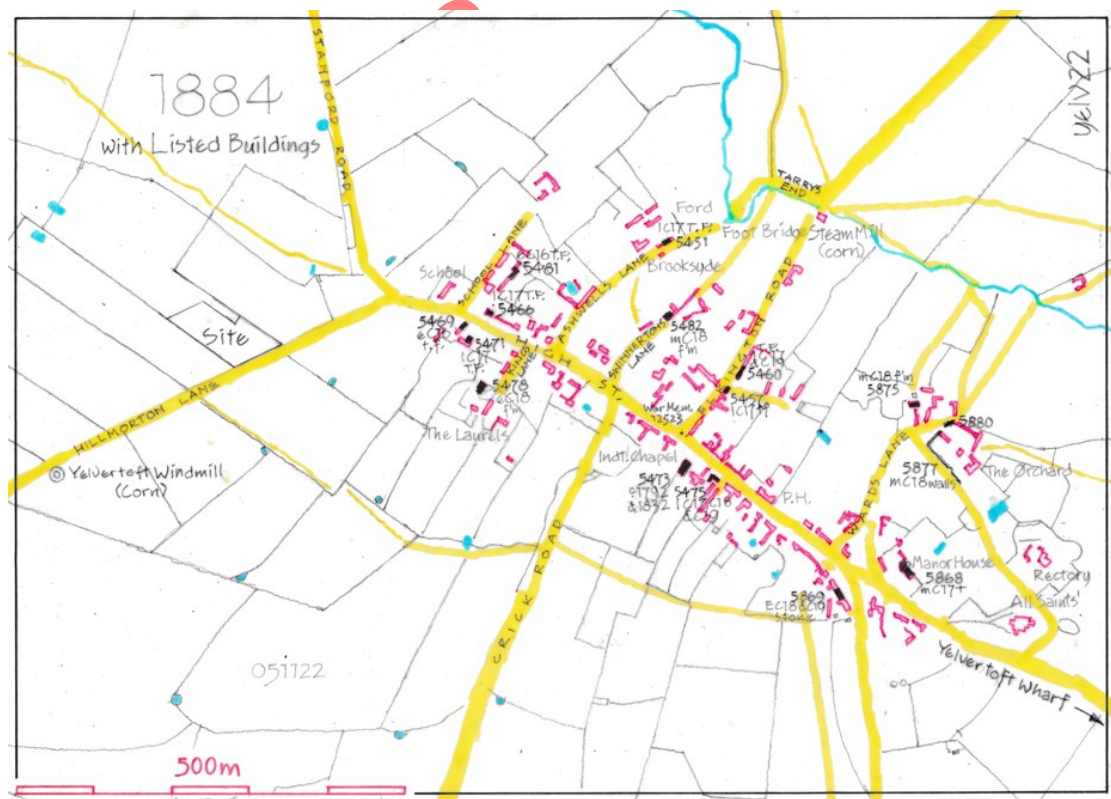


Fig. 5: Sketch plan showing historic environment 1884, with listed buildings.

The common fields of the parish were enclosed by an Act of Parliament of 1776; no Enclosure Map survives. Ridge-and-furrow earthworks within these fields exists on the ground or can be traced on air photographs over most of the parish so that the pattern is almost totally recoverable. It is arranged in end-on or interlocked furlongs, many of reversed-S form. Within the medieval landscape are trackways leading through the fields from Yelvertoft to Elkington (RCHME, 1981).

The ridge and furrow present within the development site represents a small portion of a much larger block of ridge and furrow which extends to the north and west. A desk-top review of satellite imagery indicated that a large amount of ridge and furrow survives on land around Yelvertoft, across much land to the west, south, and north-east of the settlement. This includes extant earthworks that are close to the historic settlement core, including ridge and furrow which lies to the east, and south (beyond High Street) of the C13 Church of All Saints at the eastern edge of the village.

Before modern development Yelvertoft was a village consisting of little more than a single High Street with the church detached from it to the southeast and with small extensions along lanes to the northeast at either end of the main street. It is possible that the earthworks recorded to the northwest might in part be the remains of an earlier shrunken medieval village (*mnn434*) close to the stream which gradually moved or was deliberately re-sited some distance away on top of the earlier common fields.

The remains fall into two distinct parts. The larger and more complex area lies at the end of Wards Lane, north of the church and consists of a series of embanked and ditched closes, some with traces of ridge-and-furrow within them; a hollow-way up to 2m. deep passes between the closes towards the stream. Close to the stream is a large raised rectangular area, surrounded by a broad ditch 1.50m. deep. Its interior has been ploughed but it is probably a moated manor house site for the area is known as Hall Close. Immediately southeast of this assumed manor house is an area of disturbed ground beyond which a narrow channel runs southeast from the southeast ditch of the moat. The channel is probably a leat for a water mill which perhaps stood in the disturbed area.

Further northwest are some less well-preserved earthworks, now largely destroyed by modern housing. They consist of numerous small embanked or ditched closes, on either side of School Lane and its extension to the northwest. They may represent former house-sites but this is uncertain.

The western projection of the parish may relate to an undocumented settlement of Shenley. An unlocated deserted medieval settlement possibly lay

somewhere in the west part of the parish, on clay. There is no documentary record of any settlement here so no name is known, though it may possibly have been Shenley, the name given to the modern farm in the area, nor is there any cartographic evidence of a settlement here.

The suggestion of a lost hamlet is merely based on the shape of the parish of Yelvertoft itself. The long narrow west projection, lying against Watling Street, is similar in appearance to that part of Norton parish where the deserted village of Muscott is located, to Brockhall parish and to Whilton parish. This indicates that the west part of Yelvertoft parish may also once have been a discrete land unit. Moreover, the line of villages situated just east of Watling Street and set back from it, extending from Lilbourne in the north through Crick, Watford, Whilton, Muscott, Brockhall and Flore, is broken at this point in Yelvertoft parish and this is another indication of a lost settlement. Ridge-and-furrow can be traced over almost all the parish, much of it still surviving on the ground. In only two places is there a complete absence of ridge-and-furrow, either of which might be the site of the assumed Shenley.

METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH AIMS

Earthwork survey

Prior to the investigative trenching, a Level 1 survey was carried out on the ridge and furrow earthworks in accordance with guidelines outlined in *Understanding the Archaeology of Landscapes* (Historic England 2017).

Level 1 is mainly a visual record, supplemented by the minimum of information needed to identify the archaeological site's location, possible date and type (Case Study 1). This is the least complex record and will typically be undertaken when the aim is to provide essential core information to agreed standards, including structured indexes of the location, period, condition and type of the monument that, typically, would result from rapid field investigation. This would be accompanied by a simplified cartographic record, often at 1:10,000, of the location and extent of the site. There should be basic consultation of easily available related information sets: these may include field surveys, records of buildings, archives, aerial and ground photography, geophysical survey, fieldwalking, excavation records and other local sources.

Evaluation

The objectives of the field investigation were to determine the date, character, quality, survival and extent of the archaeological deposits within the application area likely to be threatened by the proposed development in order that an informed decision on their importance in a local, regional and national context can be made. This information will clarify whether any remains should be considered for preservation in situ or form the basis of a mitigation strategy.

The national research context is provided by English Heritage (1991 and 1997) and regionally by Cooper (2006), supplemented by Knight, Vyner & Allen (2012).

Research Objective 7E: Investigate the morphology of rural settlements. The East Midlands preserves evidence of a complex landscape, including zones dominated by a hierarchy of nucleated villages, hamlets and farmsteads (Knight, Vyner & Allen, 2012).

In general, the aims of the investigation included:

- i) establishing the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation on the development site.
- ii) recovering artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region.
- iii) recovering palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions.

Specific aims of the investigation included:

- iv) attempting to date the ridge & furrow through the discovery of dateable finds.
- v) assessing the potential for surviving archaeological remains pre-dating the ridge & furrow earthworks.

Sample size and scope of fieldwork

The evaluation comprised four trenches each approx. 30m long and 1.50m wide and located to provide an appropriate sample of the development site. trenches 2 and 4 were to provide an accurate sample record of the ridge and furrow earthworks.

Fieldwork methods and recording

The archaeological field work and post-excavation was carried out in accordance with standards and guidance for archaeological field evaluations produced by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA, 2020). All deposits were excavated removing the overburden under close archaeological supervision and investigated for archaeological features. Plans and sample sections of the trenches were made and recorded during excavation.

RESULTS: GENERAL

Soil and ground conditions

Conditions were generally dry during the excavation, the soil layers showing some moisture retention. Excavation was relatively smooth throughout the trench being made through alternate layers comprising of topsoil and an underlying subsoil, leaving a clean and visible surface within the natural substrate, a stiff clay.

Reliability of field investigation

There was no evidence of previous truncation of the underlying deposits within all four trenches, the underlying deposits remaining intact.

Distribution of archaeological deposits

No significant archaeological deposits were revealed during the investigation, instead a sequence of stratified soil layers indicate little human activity other than that associated with agricultural practices.

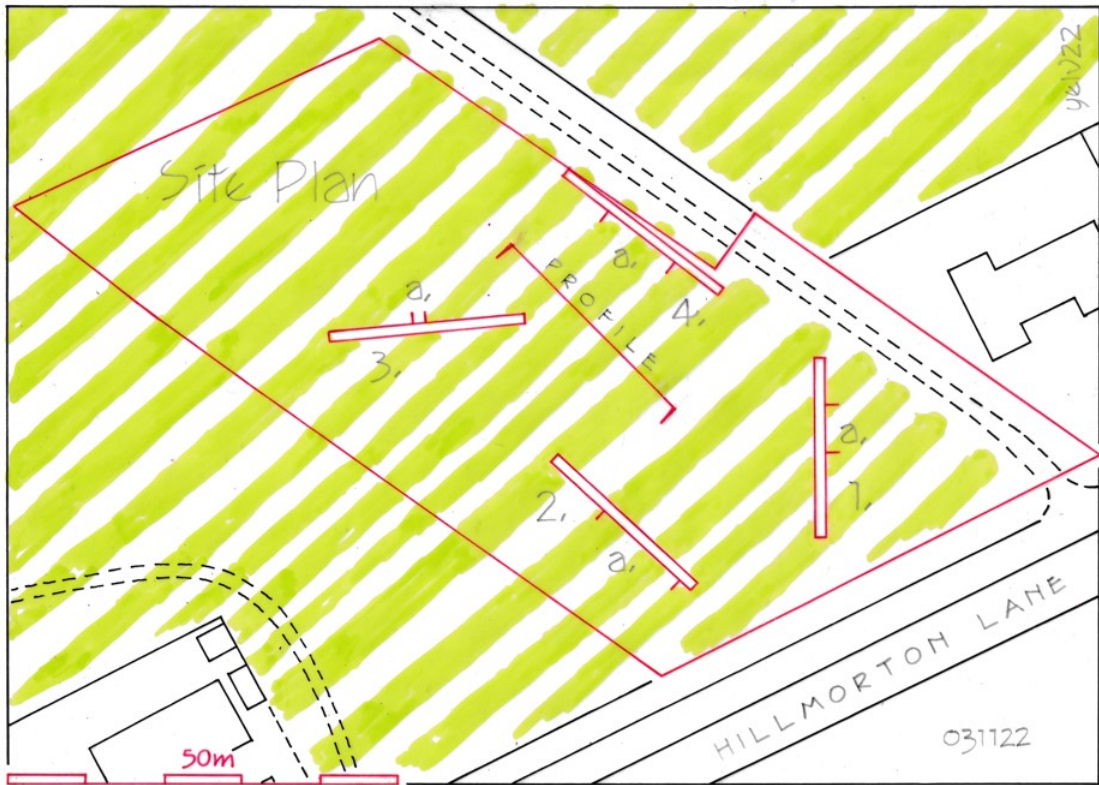


Fig. 3: Site plan; thick vegetation in furrows shown in green.

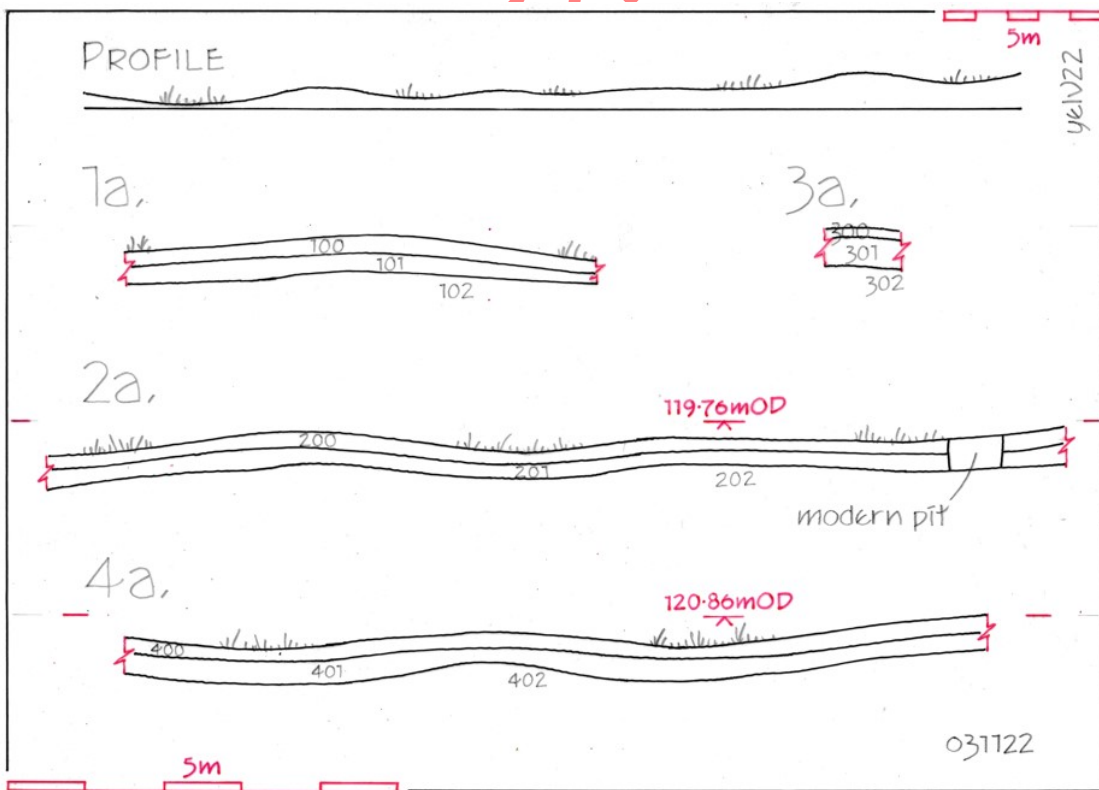


Fig. 4: Profile and sections.

Presentation of results

The results of the excavation (below) are described from the earliest to the latest deposits. Trenches were attributed context numbers with a numerical value equivalent to the number of the trench.

RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

Trenches 1-4

The surface of the natural clay substrate (context 102, 202, 302 & 402) comprised a stiff light yellowish-brown stiff clay was exposed throughout the length of all four trenches trench at a height varying between of about 120.40m AOD in the northwest falling to about 119.36m AOD in the southeast. No archaeological deposits or cut features were observed overlying or within the surface of the clay within all of the trenches. The clay was overlain throughout the development site by an undulating deposit of silty-clay (101, 201, 301 & 401) ranging in thickness from 0.20-0.40m and interpreted as a relict subsoil associated with the former cultivation of the site as evidenced by the extant ridge and furrow earthworks. Some pottery finds of post-medieval date were recovered from this soil layer, but on the whole, finds were sparse. This was in turn sealed by a 0.1-0.20m thick deposit of modern topsoil (100, 200, 300 & 400) consisting of a dark greyish-brown, clayey-silt.

FINDS

Finds (see Plate 13), all of which were retrieved from the relict cultivation soil (101, 201, 301 & 401) comprised four sherds of brown glazed pottery of C17/18 date, two small fragments of roof tile, one with a nib and possibly Roman or medieval and the other probably later. There was also a small piece of clay pipe stem and a highly corroded unidentified iron object, probably a fragment of an agricultural tool.

Environmental data

None of the deposits exposed during the excavation proved suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling.

DISCUSSION

The HER shows us that the development site lies to the southwest of the historic medieval settlement core of Yelvertoft in the cultivated agricultural hinterland that surrounds the village and which is characterised by extensive fields of extant ridge and furrow earthworks. Earlier periods of activity related to prehistoric and Roman occupation evidenced by aerial photographs and the retrieval of artefacts lie within the outlying land surrounding the town to the north, south and west.

The Heritage Note prepared in 2021 provided an initial assessment of the ridge and furrow and showed that these earthworks were present across the whole of the site being readily observable. It described how a comprehensive study of ridge and furrow earthworks in the East Midlands was completed in 2001 by Northamptonshire County Council and English Heritage which considered earthworks across the region, identifying those townships where the earthworks are of greatest heritage significance. The study also established the principle that it is the whole of the earthwork system within any given township which is the heritage asset, rather than individual fields of earthworks. It found that none of the earthworks within the site or the wider Yelvertoft parish are Scheduled Monuments (designated heritage assets) and although Yelvertoft lies within the study area of 'Turning the Plough' (Hall, 2001) it was not identified as a Priority Township (the most significant areas identified by the study). It concluded that the earthworks within Yelvertoft township are a non-designated heritage asset of lower significance.

During the site visit made in 2021 as part of the Heritage note, the extant ridge and furrow earthworks remained across most of the site. Some degradation of the earthworks was previously shown to have occurred in the eastern part of the site where the access point off Hillmorton Lane lies and it was also noted during the recent earthwork survey, the subject of this report, that the earthworks were further degraded by a ditch and hedge marking the western boundary of the site, a boundary probably resulting from the C18 enclosures.

The earthworks run on a broadly north-east to south-west alignment, and measure c.6.4m across (from mid-furrow to mid-furrow). This width tends to suggest a later rather than earlier date. However, in plan the earthworks have a slight reverse-S in shape, which is more suggestive of an early date. On balance, a medieval date is possible, although some reworking in the post-medieval period cannot be ruled out. Although the earthworks within site are reasonably well preserved, there is evidence of at least some truncation/disturbance of the earthworks, particularly in the east of the site, but also along its western edge. The ridge and furrow earthworks within the site are also remote from the historic settlement core, and separated from it by intervening, modern development.

Excavation comprised a five percent sample of the development site. The principal strategy of the investigation was to identify the presence or otherwise of archaeological deposits pre-dating the ridge and furrow earthworks and there was clear evidence from the HER of prehistoric and Romano-British occupation in the outlying land surrounding Yelvertoft. It also provided an opportunity to further characterise and date the earthworks through the retrieval of dateable artefacts.

The results of the investigation were negative and there was little in the way of residual artefacts from the subsoil and topsoil deposits to indicate activity within the site pre-dating the medieval/post-medieval periods. The profile of the ridge and furrow earthworks varied, although the furrows were consistently interspaced, the ridges differed in height some being higher than others, a characteristic more than likely associated with erosion. Finds were sparse, a handful of residual pottery sherds, mostly post-medieval and a fragment of clay pipe stem represented the entire assemblage recovered from the excavation. The results suggested little human activity within site before the medieval period when the site was probably first cultivated.

Summary of results

Although small in scope, the investigation revealed no evidence of earlier occupation within the proposed development area, instead a sequence of deposits characteristic of the ridge and furrow earthworks reflected continuous cultivation from the medieval and/or post-medieval periods and prolonged open rural environment little historic human activity within the site. the lack of residual finds from the excavation supports this hypothesis.

Significance

The negative result of the investigation suggests that the development site lies outside areas of prehistoric and Roman occupation recorded elsewhere in the outlying land surrounding Yelvertoft. The lack of residual finds from the excavation related to these periods supports this hypothesis.

Impact of development

The results of the investigation suggest that the development of the site comprising the construction of nine dwellings and ancillary parking and garages, landscaping, sustainable drainage system and access to highway will have no impact on deposits pre-dating the medieval/post-medieval ridge and furrow earthworks.

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Archive Location

A digital (pdf) copy of the report (referenced with OASIS) will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service.

PLATES



Plate 1: Ridge and furrow earthworks, view northwest



Plate 2: Ridge and furrow earthworks, view south



Plate 3: Ridge and furrow earthworks, view southwest



Plate 4: detail of ridge, view southwest



Plate 5: trench 1, view south



Plate 6: section 1a



Plate 7: trench 2, view northwest



Plate 8: section 2a, view northwest



Plate 9: trench 3, view east



Plate 10: section 3a



Plate 11: trench 4, view southwest



Plate 12: section 4a, view northwest



Plate 13: Finds from (101, 201, 301 & 401)