



**CCC AFU Report Number 908**

## **Post-medieval Landscaping at Morston Hall, Morston, Norfolk**

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**An Evaluation**

Mo Muldowney

October 2006

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## **An Evaluation**

Mo Muldowney

With contributions by Paul Middleton  
and Carole Fletcher BA

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## **Summary**

Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit was commissioned by Morston Hall Limited to undertake an evaluation in the grounds of Morston Hall, Morston, Norfolk. The work took place on the 10th and 11th September 2006.

The evaluation was required to establish the presence (or otherwise) of formal pathways or other garden features indicated on the 1838 Tithe Map. Two trenches were excavated by machine within the footprint of the proposed development area near the south-west corner of the garden.

A single deposit was identified in both trenches. It was probably a levelling layer, perhaps relating to the re-building of Morston Hall in the late 18th and 19th centuries. No other archaeological features were present.

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# Drawing Conventions

Sections	Plans
Limit of Excavation	Limit of Excavation
Cut	Deposit - Conjectured
Cut-Conjectured	Natural Features
Deposit Horizon	Sondages/Machine Strip
Deposit Horizon - Conjectured	Intrusion/Truncation
Intrusion/Truncation	Illustrated Section  S.14
Top Surface/Top of Natural	Archaeological Deposit
Break in Section/ Limit of Section Drawing	Excavated Slot
Natural Deposit	Cut Number <b>118</b>
Cut Number	Sample Number
Deposit Number 117	
Ordnance Datum $\frac{18.45m}{\lambda}$ OD	
Inclusions	

## **1 Introduction**

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Andrew Hutcheson of the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA) (20060103PF), supplemented by a Specification prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 - Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by NLA, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by CCC AFU and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

## **2 Geology and Topography**

The site overlies sands and gravels (Geological Survey of Great Britain, 1964) and is located within the grounds of Morston Hall on a slightly sloping area, currently a lawn with trees, shrubs, hedges and flowerbeds. The trenches are located near the south-west corner of the garden at a height of approximately 7.40m OD.

## **3 Archaeological and Historical Background**

### **3.1 Prehistoric**

Stray prehistoric finds have been made in the area, for example a barbed and tanged arrowhead (MNF 33379), but there is little direct settlement evidence in the vicinity. A cropmark of a ring ditch (MNF40550) has been interpreted as a Bronze Age barrow, but its associated field system is thought to be late Iron Age/Romano-British.

### **3.2 Roman**

Roman finds include pottery (MNF6126, 18229), and a coin (MNF30456). More Roman coins formed part of a multi-period finds scatter identified by metal detecting (MNF46924). It also included Saxon and medieval material.



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Figure 1: Location of trenches (black) with the development area outlined (red)

### 3.3 Medieval

Metal detecting has also recovered a very fine medieval seal (MNF30457) near Friary Farm, Blakeney and two medieval keys (MNF 46926) were found 650m to the north-east of Morston Hall itself.

Morston Hall (MNF13116) was built c. 1640, though little of the original building remains. The main building was re-built in the Georgian period with a wing added in the 19th century. The tithe map of 1840 shows an interesting garden layout.

Further cropmark evidence (MNF46300) revealed post-medieval field boundaries.

## 4 Methodology

The objective of this evaluation was to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed development area, paying particular attention to the historical layout of the gardens of Morston Hall within the development area.

Due to restrictions imposed by the presence of flowerbeds, fences and mature trees and shrubs that form part of the existing gardens of Morston Hall, the proposed trench layout was altered. Instead of one 'L'-shaped trench, two trenches were excavated, A and B (see below) (Fig. 2). Both were located, as far as was reasonably practical, within the footprint of the proposed development. The total length of these trenches was 18m and their width 1.7m, giving a total of 30.6m<sup>2</sup>.

Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a tracked 1.5 ton mini-excavator using a toothless ditching bucket. Stripping was done in a controlled manner, allowing closer inspection of the topsoil and subsoil deposits, increasing the possibility of observing any 'garden features' such as those identified on the 1840 Tithe Map.

Hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those that were obviously modern.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using CCC AFU's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

No environmental samples were taken.



Site conditions were generally good, with the exception of the restrictions imposed by the vegetation. The ground was soft and moist and the weather overcast but dry and bright for the time of year.

## 5 Results

As both trenches contained the same sequence of deposits and as all numbers have been equated, the results of this evaluation are discussed as a whole, rather than on a trench-by-trench basis. Trench measurements are presented in Table 1, below.

Both Trench A and B were located near the south-west corner of the gardens of Morston Hall, parallel with each other on an approximate east to west alignment (Fig. 1 and 2). Mature trees and shrubs and an east to west aligned flowerbed constituted considerable restrictions and the trenches were therefore located on the north side of the development area.

The natural deposit in both trenches was 3=6, mid yellowish orange flint gravels with a loose consistency. It was not excavated and contained no finds. Overlying 3=6 was 7=8, mid orange brown silty sand (Fig. 3, Section 2). It was the only archaeological deposit encountered and formed a thick layer of subsoil-like material that covered a minimum area of 19.63m<sup>2</sup>. It measured 0.30m deep and extended beyond the edge of excavation to the north, south and east for an unknown distance. A sherd of handmade pottery was recovered.

Subsoil 2=5 was dark brownish orange silty sand, which measured up to 0.20m thick. It contained pottery, brick/tile fragments, animal bone and half a horseshoe (SF1).

The latest deposit in the sequence was topsoil 1=4. It was dark brown silty sand and measured 0.32m deep (Fig. 3, Sections 1 and 3). Finds recovered included brick/tile fragments, sawn animal bone and a clay tobacco pipe fragment.

Trench	Length (m)	Width (m)	Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	Overall depth (m)	Level: top of trench (mOD)	Level: base of trench (mOD)
<b>A</b>	9.6	1.7	16.32	0.54	7.70	7.26
<b>A (south arm)</b>	3	1.7	5.1	0.54	7.66	7.20
<b>B</b>	5.4	1.7	9.18	0.46	7.63	7.25
<b>Total</b>	18	5.1	30.6	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 1: Trench measurements including Ordnance Datum levels

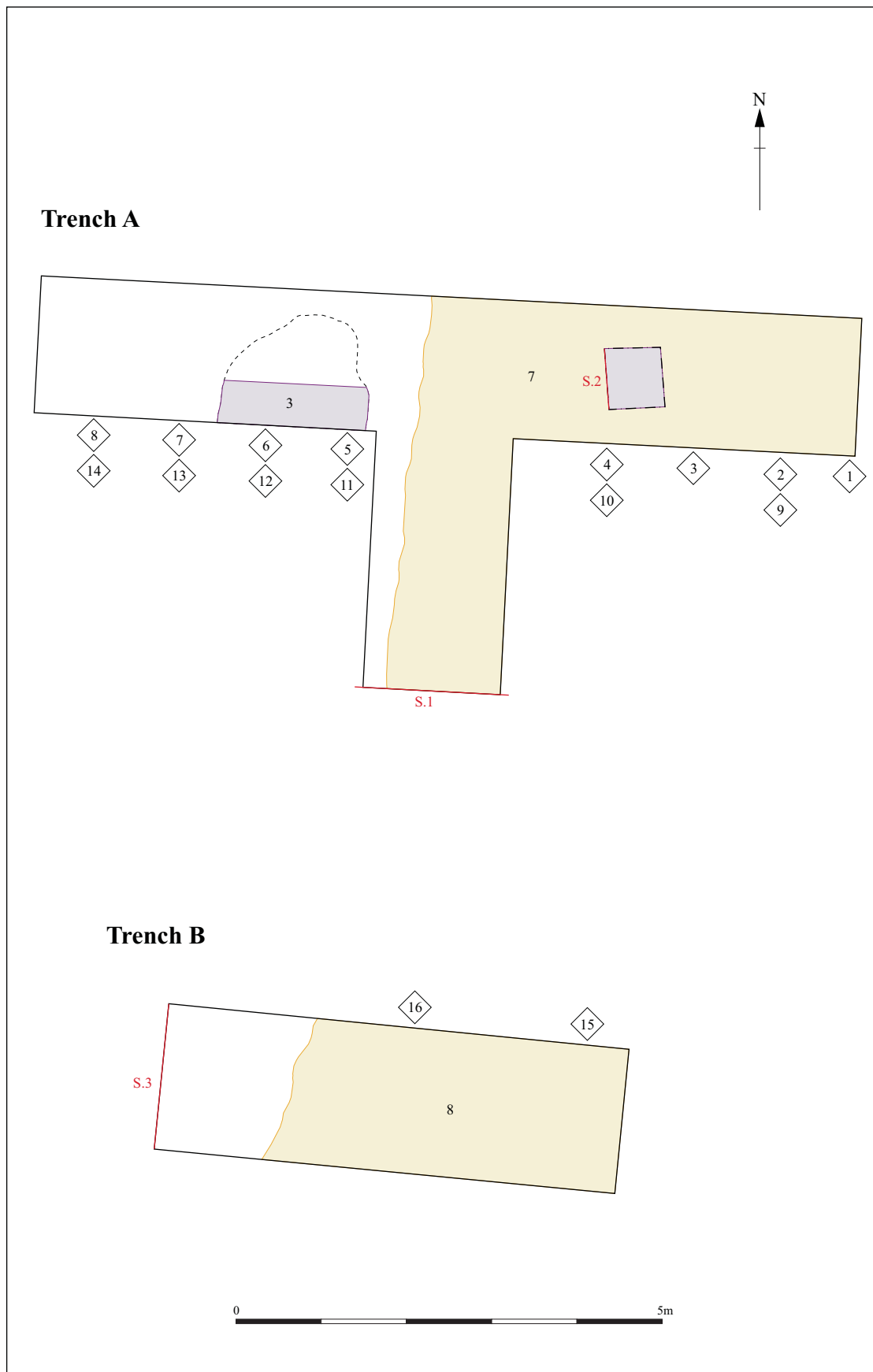


Figure 2: Trench plans

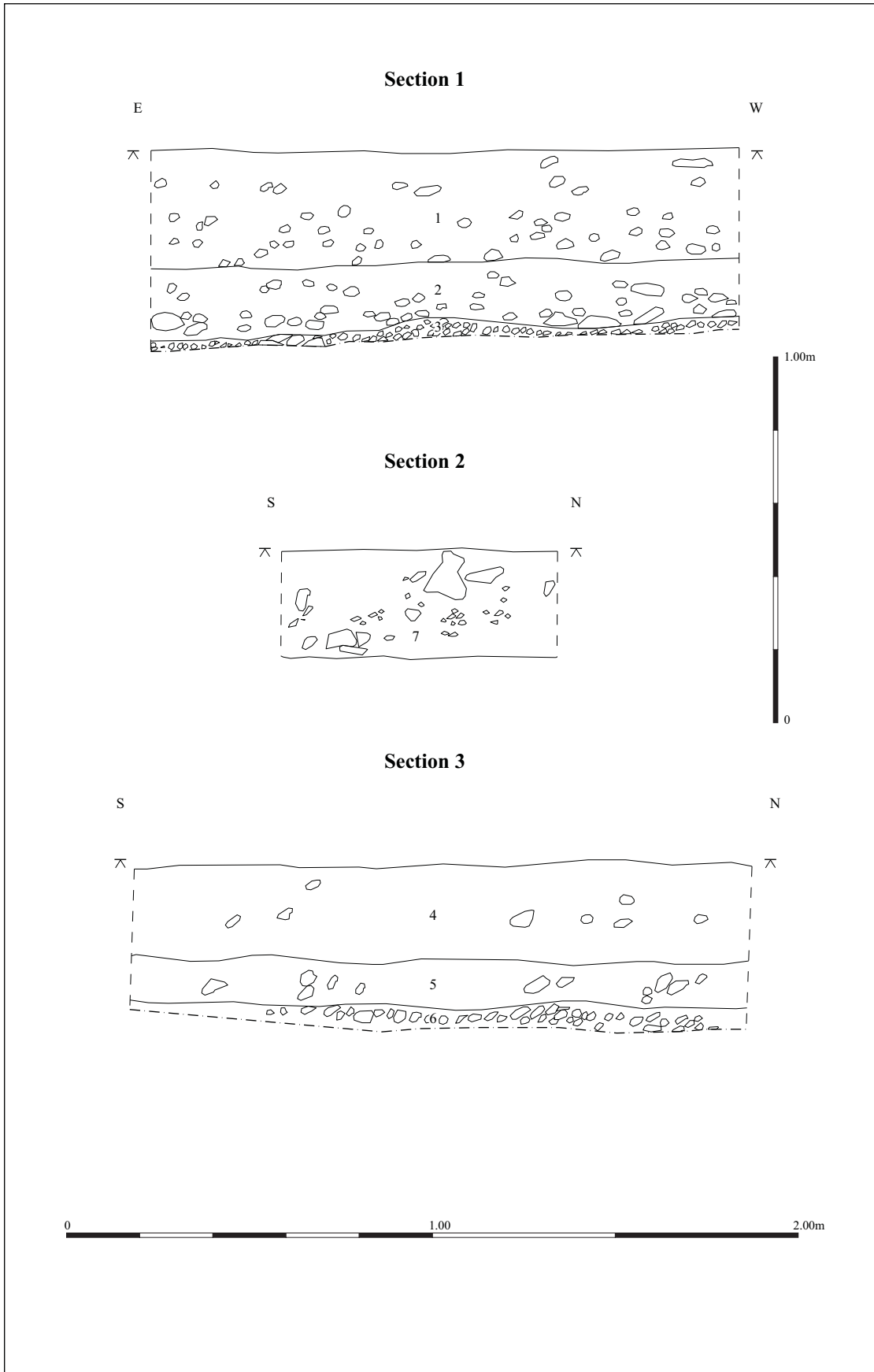


Figure 3: Section drawings



Figure 4: Tithe map extract

## 6 Discussion

This evaluation sought to determine the presence and extent of formal pathways and other garden features, indicated on the 1838 Tithe map extract, within the grounds of Morston Hall. No traces of this garden layout were identified, but a single deposit (7=8) was observed overlying the natural flint gravels (3=6). This deposit of subsoil-like material appears to have been a levelling layer, raising the slope of the natural gravels, which fall gently away to the east. (Observations in the east half of the gardens show that the ground level is slightly lower than the west half.)

The CBM and pottery assemblage from both the subsoil and topsoil layers (Appendix 1 and 2) strongly suggest that this levelling dates to the 18th and/or 19th centuries. The presence of late Iron Age or Iron Age/Roman transitional pottery in the levelling layer is misleading. It is residual and most likely to have derived from nearby. Indeed, possible Iron Age activity is recorded in cropmarks a few hundred metres south-west from Morston Hall (MNF40550).

## 7 Conclusions

The results of this evaluation show that there was no evidence for formal pathways in the northern part of the development area but that there was evidence for levelling of the ground surface. Pottery and other building material recovered suggest the activity dates to the late 18th/19th century when it is recorded that Morston Hall was rebuilt and had a wing added. This may also have been when the formal garden was laid, although no direct evidence was found during this evaluation.

Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

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## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Morston Hall Ltd who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. James Drummond-Murray managed the project and work was carried out with the assistance of David Brown. Chris Faine assisted with the identification of the faunal remains.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Andrew Hutcheson.

## Bibliography

Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales)	1964	<i>South Lincolnshire and North Norfolk, Drift Edition, Sheet 12 1/4inch to 1 mile</i>
Drummond-Murray, J.	2006	<i>Specification for Archaeological Evaluation at Morston Hall, Norfolk</i>
Hutcheson, A.	2006	<i>Brief for Archaeological Evaluation by Trial Trenching at Proposed Development at Morston Hall, Morston, Norfolk</i>

## **Appendix 1: Pottery Assessment**

By Carole Fletcher

### **1 Methodology**

The basic guidance in MAP2 has been adhered to (English Heritage 1991). In addition the MPRG documents *Guidance for the processing and publication of medieval pottery from excavations* (Blake and Davey, 1983) and *A guide to the classification of medieval ceramic forms* (MPRG, 1998) act as a standard.

Spot dating was carried out using the CCC AFU's in-house system based on that used at the Museum of London. Fabric classification has been carried out for all previously described types. All sherds have been counted classified, and weighed.

All the pottery has been spot dated on a context-by-context basis; this information was entered directly onto a quantification database (Access 2000), which allows for the appending of further data.

CCC AFU curates the pottery and archive until formal deposition.

### **2 The Assemblage**

The fieldwork generated five sherds (0.078kg) of pottery from three contexts. This material consists of two moderately abraded sherds of Late Iron Age or Iron Age/Roman transitional pottery from context 7. The remaining sherds are unabraded fragments from one or more 18th or 19th century Terracotta plant pots and a single decorated sherd of 18th or 19th century Nottinghamshire or Derbyshire stoneware.

No conclusions can be drawn from such a small assemblage, however the presence of two sherds of residual prehistoric pottery when non-was expected is intriguing.

No preservation bias has been recognised and no long-term storage problems are likely. The assemblage therefore offers no potential for further study unless further excavation is undertaken.

## **Bibliography**

- Blake, H., and Davey, P. 1983 *Guidelines for the Processing and Publications of Medieval Pottery from Excavations*, Directorate of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings Occas. Pap. 5
- English Heritage 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects (MAP2)*
- Medieval Pottery Research Group 1998 *A Guide to the Classification of Medieval Ceramic Forms*, Medieval Pottery Research Group Occas. Pap. 1



## **Appendix 2: Ceramic Building Material Assessment**

By Carole Fletcher

### **1 Methodology**

The basic guidance in MAP2 has been adhered to (English Heritage 1991). In addition the *Archaeological Ceramic Building Materials Group (ACBMG) Draft: Minimum Standards for the Recovery, Analysis and Publication of Ceramic Building Material* act as a standard.

All sherds have been counted classified, and weighed.

All the ceramic building material (CBM) has been counted classified, and weighed on a context-by-context basis; this information was entered directly onto a quantification database (Access 2000), which allows for the appending of further data.

CCC AFU curates the CBM and associated archive until formal deposition.

### **2 The Assemblage**

The fieldwork generated 13 sherds (0.078kg) of brick or tile from five contexts. This material consists of from 1 two fragments of soft sandy red brick, two tile fragments in a similar fabric but harder fired and a third brick fragment in a hard rough pink fabric more reminiscent of modern bricks.

Context 2 contains approximately half of a well-fired handmade, buff coloured, un-frogged brick. Frogged bricks first appear during the late 18th century. The remainder of the fragments from this context include a sherd from a ridge tile and 2 roof tile fragments all in a red sandy fabric all are relatively small and abraded.

Context 4 contains three brick fragments, one in a soft red sandy fabric with some yellow streaking, the second fragment is dark pink in colour and the third a small fragment in a hard fired red fabric similar to those fragments in context 2.

Context 5 contains a single fragment of tile in a red smooth micaceous fabric.

The assemblage is small and with the exception of the partial un-frogged brick has no easily datable material. The dating of the assemblage therefore rests on this and is broadly mid to late 18th

century. The assemblage therefore offers little potential for further study unless further excavation is undertaken.

No preservation bias has been recognised and no long-term storage problems are likely.

## **Bibliography**

- |                                     |      |  |
|-------------------------------------|------|--|
| Ceramic Building<br>Materials Group |      | Draft: Minimum Standards for the Recovery,<br>Analysis and Publication of Ceramic Building<br>Material |
| English Heritage                    | 1991 | <i>Management of Archaeological Projects (MAP2)</i>  |

## Appendix 3: Animal Bone and Shell Assessment

By Mo Muldowney and Chris Faine

### 1 Animal Bone

Context	Species	Weight (kg)
001	Horse ( <i>Equus</i> )	0.142
002	Pig ( <i>Sus</i> )	0.055
005	Cattle ( <i>Bos</i> )	0.029

Table 2: Animal bone

The horse bone in context 001 was a fragment of the distal end of a humerus. It was sawn cleanly at right angles near the distal end, probably in order to extract marrow.

Context 002 contained a fragment of pig tibia. It showed no evidence of butchery and little wear and tear. It is likely that this fragment derived from domestic waste.

In contrast the cattle metacarpel from context 005 was rough in appearance. It is possible that it is a residual find, perhaps derived from elsewhere in the landscape.

### 2 Shell

One fragment of oyster shell was recovered from context 001 and weighed 0.007 kg. This may also have derived from domestic waste or an ornamental garden feature, for example, a fountain or pathway.



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