



# Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological recording of  
a former outbuilding at Ufton Court  
Ufton Nervet, Berkshire



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**Northamptonshire  
County Council**



Iain Soden  
Report 10/80  
May 2010

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## **QUALITY CONTROL**

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**OASIS REPORT FORM**

PROJECT DETAILS	
Project title	Archaeological recording of a former outbuilding at Ufton Court, Ufton Nervet, Berkshire
Short description	Archaeological recording of the brick foundations of the majority of an outbuilding at Ufton Court showed that it had grown piecemeal as a lean-to off an earlier boundary wall from c1843 and was later subdivided into four rooms, each subsequently furnished with a WC. When these were no longer needed, they were filled with rubbish. None of this was evident before exposure.
Project type	Excavation and recording
Previous work	None
Future work	None
Monument type and period	Listed Building –Grade I (Ufton Court-medieval/16th century and later). Subject listed by curtilage
PROJECT LOCATION	
County	West Berkshire
Site address	Ufton Court, Ufton Nervet
Easting	SU 6297
Northing	6697
Area ha/ sq m	125 sq m
PROJECT CREATORS	
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology
Project brief originator	Rodney Melville and Partners
Project Design originator	
Director/Supervisor	Iain Soden
Project Manager	Iain Soden
Sponsor or funding body	Ufton Court
PROJECT DATE	
Start date	April 2010
End date	April 2010
BIBLIOGRAPHY	
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING OF  
A FORMER OUTBUILDING  
AT UFTON COURT, UFTON NERFET, BERKSHIRE  
APRIL 2010**

*Abstract*

*Archaeological recording of the brick foundations of the majority of an outbuilding at Ufton Court showed that it had grown piecemeal as a lean-to off an earlier boundary wall from c 1843 and was later subdivided into four rooms, each subsequently furnished with a WC. When these were no longer needed, they were filled with rubbish. None of this was evident before exposure.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Rodney Melville and Partners are acting on behalf of Englefield Estate Trust Corporation Ltd in repairing and rebuilding the majority of an outbuilding which was in serious disrepair and adjudged by structural engineers to be unsafe. This comprised a single-storey element adjacent to one of two storeys, which survives. Following dismantling of the unsafe, single-storey, elements of the superstructure, it was realised that a newly exposed foundation layout seemed to differ considerably from the former dilapidated remains above-ground.

It was established therefore by Rodney Melville and Partners that the foundations should be archaeologically explored and their origins and development better understood before works proceeded to construct the replacement building. Accordingly Northamptonshire Archaeology were commissioned to record the exposed layout and investigate the remains to record their extent, character, date and, if possible, interpret their former use or uses.

Ufton Court is a Grade I listed manor house dating back to the 16th century on an earlier manorial site (Fig 1). Today it lies within an extensive palimpsest of planned landscapes and former formal gardens. It is currently used as a residential and outward-bound centre for youngsters. Other buildings of the ensemble are listed by curtilage, including the subject of the current report, which lies at a short distance to the south of the main Ufton Court ranges at NGR SU 6297 6697 (Fig 2). It lies at 87m above Ordnance Datum on the southern edge of the buildings ensemble, overlooking a natural slope which sweeps down to a wooded valley and a row of former fishponds.

This report relates to the programme in April 2010, to investigate the recently exposed foundations, during which Northamptonshire Archaeology was granted full access to the site and afforded the benefit of a small 360-degree excavator fitted with a toothless bucket to clean the building footprint of fallen debris. In the absence of a written brief and specification the scope of the works were undertaken to broadly equate to records which might otherwise be generated by a Level 2/3 building recording record as set down in the English Heritage procedural document *Understanding Historic Buildings: a guide to good practice* (2006). An archive has been created, consisting of this report, copies of historic maps supplied by the site owners and the finds retrieved from the site. A photographic archive was created comprising 61 full colour digital images, 22 colour prints and 36 of black and white negatives with associated prints. These will be deposited with Ufton Court via Rodney Melville and Partners, Architects. A copy of the

report will be deposited with the National Monuments Record, Swindon and with the Berkshire Historic Environment Record. It is hoped that the archive, including finds, will be deposited with Ufton Court, where its educational value may best be appreciated, given the current purpose of the property.

#### **Property status**

The property of Ufton Court is Listed Grade I. Its description can be found on [www.imagesofengland.org.uk](http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk). Since the building remains, which are the subject of this report, lay below one only listed by reason of its superstructure being within the curtilage, nothing relevant to these remains appears on the listing description.

## **2 RESEARCH FROM HISTORIC MAPS**

A series of eight historic maps dating between 1761 and 1912 was consulted by staff at Ufton Court and photocopies provided to Northamptonshire Archaeology prior to work beginning. These clearly show that the building in question did not exist up to 1838, before its first depiction on the fifth in the series, the 1843 estate Tithe Map. It was then depicted in succeeding maps of 1855, 1875 and 1912, but in each case in insufficient detail to demonstrate anything other than its existence. For this reason none is represented here.

## **3 METHODOLOGY**

On arrival the footprint of the building was cleared of rubble and soil using a 5-ton, rubber-tracked 360-degree mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, and working under archaeological control. Once this had exposed the foundations sufficiently, work proceeded to further uncover and clean them by hand, a process which also established the presence of and characterised sub-surface remains which had not been seen at the surface. A scale plan was drawn and sectional elevations drawn of its length to include buried features. It was comprehensively photographed digitally and using colour print and black and white print, the last for archive purposes, together these produced a total of 119 images.

Although strictly comprising only below-ground investigation, and therefore not usually covered by 'buildings recording', the standard of below-ground recording adopted equates to Level 2/3 as defined by English Heritage in their procedural document '*Recording historic buildings: a descriptive specification*' (2006).

## **4 RESULTS**

### **4.1 The original layout (Fig 3)**

In the first instance the building was added to the east side of a freestanding brick garden wall. The butt joint where this addition took place could still be seen at foundation level at the south end (Figs 3, 4). The new building measured 13.9m x 3.1m

(45ft 6in x 10ft) internally and was apparently undivided. It may have been slightly longer but a surviving building which was added to the north end in the early 20th century has obscured the north wall. Four courses survived of the two new walls of the building – the east and the south – and stood over an internal offset foundation. The bricks were a standardised 250mm x 110mm x 60mm (9 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 4 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 2 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches) and were laid on bed in lime-mortar in alternate courses of headers and stretchers (Dutch Bond). The material between the walls was simply the pre-existing topsoil which had been much churned up by later works.

#### 4.2 New rooms (Fig 3)

At some point the long range of the first phase was subdivided by the insertion of at least three partition walls (a fourth could be inferred within an adjacent building), each two bricks thick, again of the standard size (above) seen in the outer walls. Each dividing wall was butt-jointed onto the outer foundations at the east side. These created four rooms, here known as Rooms 1, 2, 3 and 4. Some attempt was made to make each room the same size, with only slight variation. Each was c3.5m long x 3.1m wide (11ft 6in x 10ft). Room 1 at the north end had been partly obscured by the addition of the adjacent building in the early 20th century; 2.4m of it was visible. The interior sub-floor was raised in each room by the deposition of a layer of broken roof tile on top of the old topsoil (Fig 5). On top of this had accumulated or been laid a mix of topsoil and rubble.

No doorways or window embrasures were evident in the foundations. However, given subsequent alterations it seems likely that the door into the buildings lay on the east side, facing the main ranges of Ufton Court, while a window may have stood either on the west, or on the east, or both.

#### 4.3 The soil pits (Fig 3)

In a second alteration, in the corner of each of the four rooms was placed a WC over a soil pit. In each case they made a butt-joint with the room-dividing walls to which they were added symmetrically (Fig 6). Thus these new soil pits were side by side in pairs, each of which was served by a brick-lined drain downslope, perhaps towards the nearby woods. The course of the drains more than just half a metre from the building foundations is not known.

Each of the pits in both pairs measured 1.2m x 1.2m (c4ft) and survived to almost 1m deep in the centre (c3ft). They were divided from their neighbour by a brick wall and the brick base of each was set out in such a way as to form a concave base on an angle to drain into a square collecting culvert which led into a drain run-off to the south. The pits serving Rooms 1 and 2 had been damaged. Although their overall dimensions were recovered and some of their fill survived, those serving Rooms 3 and 4 were used to provide reliable measurements.

The pits in their last incarnation had been blocked off from the drains just beyond their brick lining. A brick blocking wall had been inserted, probably from above, outside the building, rather than from inside the pits which may have been part fouled and unpleasant. The pits had then been allowed to infill or been deliberately in-filled and floored over. There had been no indicators in the superstructure that they lay there. The fills of the pits contained numerous finds, including primary deposits of pottery and food-bone. These assemblages were hand-collected for subsequent analysis.

#### 4.4 The pottery (Fig 7)

by Iain Soden

An assemblage of pottery was recovered from each of the fills of the four brick-lined soil pits, in particular that in the corner of Room 4. Some was reconstructible, but much was very broken up.

While each was initially separated out by soil-pit, the material was very similar and no real difference was apparent. The material is not atypical of working-class table and kitchen wares of the late 18th and 19th centuries. The vessels represented comprised:

Earthenware plates including a blue shell-edged pearlware example of c1780 (top left in Fig 7), cups, saucers, ointment pots (middle right Fig 7) and marmalade jars (centre left Fig 7), a Jackfield-type ginger gar (middle foreground Fig 7), a stoneware ink-well (left foreground Fig 7), two stoneware blacking bottles (middle background Fig 7), a treacle-glazed earthenware jar (right background Fig 7), and a mocha ware chamber pot of c1830-50 (left middle ground). Of particular note was a small ointment pot with an underglaze blue transfer label (far left foreground):

Poor Mans Friend

Price ¼ (a farthing)

Prepared only by

Beach and Barnicott

SUCCESSORS TO THE LATE

Dr Roberts

Bridport

An example of this pot can be found on the Science Museum, London website and is dated 1860-1885 (many thanks to Pat Chapman for bringing this to attention). Dr Roberts' recipe for this cureall is said to still exist, kept by Bridport Museum, Dorset. Dr Roberts himself created his concoction in about 1790 and died in 1834. The ointment was apparently still available until late last century.

#### 4.5 Animal bone

by Karen Deighton

Within the soil pits in Rooms 3 and 4 was found a small assemblage of food-bone, weighing 121g. These have been identified to species as follows:

Soil pit in Room 3

Adult rabbit skull

Soil pit in Room 4

1 sheep/goat scapula

1 partial rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) skeleton

5 juvenile rabbit long bones

Partial juvenile Corvid (crow family).

3 adult Corvid long bones

The remains are predominantly wild taxa (rabbit, crow family) but their occurrence in this deposit is deliberate. Certainly the sheep and probably the rabbit were for consumption, although the member of the crow family is more debatable, although crow pie was not uncommon in the 19th century.

#### 4.6 Other finds

In addition to pottery and animal bone some individual finds were recovered from the soil pits serving Rooms 3 and 4. These comprised an iron ploughshare and two small 19th-century shirt buttons. One button lay on each of the bases of the soil-pits in Rooms 3 and 4.

### 5 CONCLUSIONS

This simple rectangular building was constructed sometime just prior to 1843 off an existing garden boundary. There is no evidence of any earlier building on the site. It is not known how soon after c1843 the new building was then altered, but within the 19th century it was subdivided into (probably) four rooms. For access these probably faced the main buildings of Ufton Court, but may have enjoyed a western prospect too. Their initial purpose is not clear. Each room was subsequently provided with a brick-lined soil pit or earth-closet, each linked to a dedicated drainage system. By this time each room in the building was probably given over to estate-workers.

Thereafter a change in use or other change in the needs of the estate allowed the soil-pits to be made redundant and their drains were blocked up, the pits themselves being filled up one last time, probably with a mixture of toilet waste and domestic rubbish. They were then lost from view. Their existence was not suspected until rediscovered by Rodney Melville and Partners, leading to the present investigation.

Although a small assemblage, the nature of the animal bone recovered from the pits may be significant, in that rabbits (as food) and crows (as vermin) are two species commonly and correctly associated with the jobs of gamekeepers and their staff. It is suggested that Room 4 may have been given over in the last quarter of the 19th century to one of the estate's game-keeping staff. The absence of any fireplaces means it is unlikely these rooms comprised accommodation.

It is suggested that the former superstructure bore little relation to the three-phase remains which underlay it. This earlier building in all its three phases, probably stood from c1843 to soon after 1900. The soil pits were probably filled in around 1880, the pottery represented therein dating to the period c1780-1880. The date of the building

which replaced that of c1843 is unclear, but it seems not to have been much later than 1900 since the footprint was again occupied in the mapping of 1912. The adjacent bothy and cellar are also notable in helping date the two phases as they overlay and obscured the end of the former Room 1. Thus the original building was gone by the time these were constructed.

From its recent structurally unsafe state the building now being replaced appears not to have been constructed or altered with the same workmanship which was used in constructing and altering its predecessor. This is probably in keeping with the dwindling funds available to gentrified and former manorial homes in the 20th century and which had to make do with decreasing staffs and increased running-costs.

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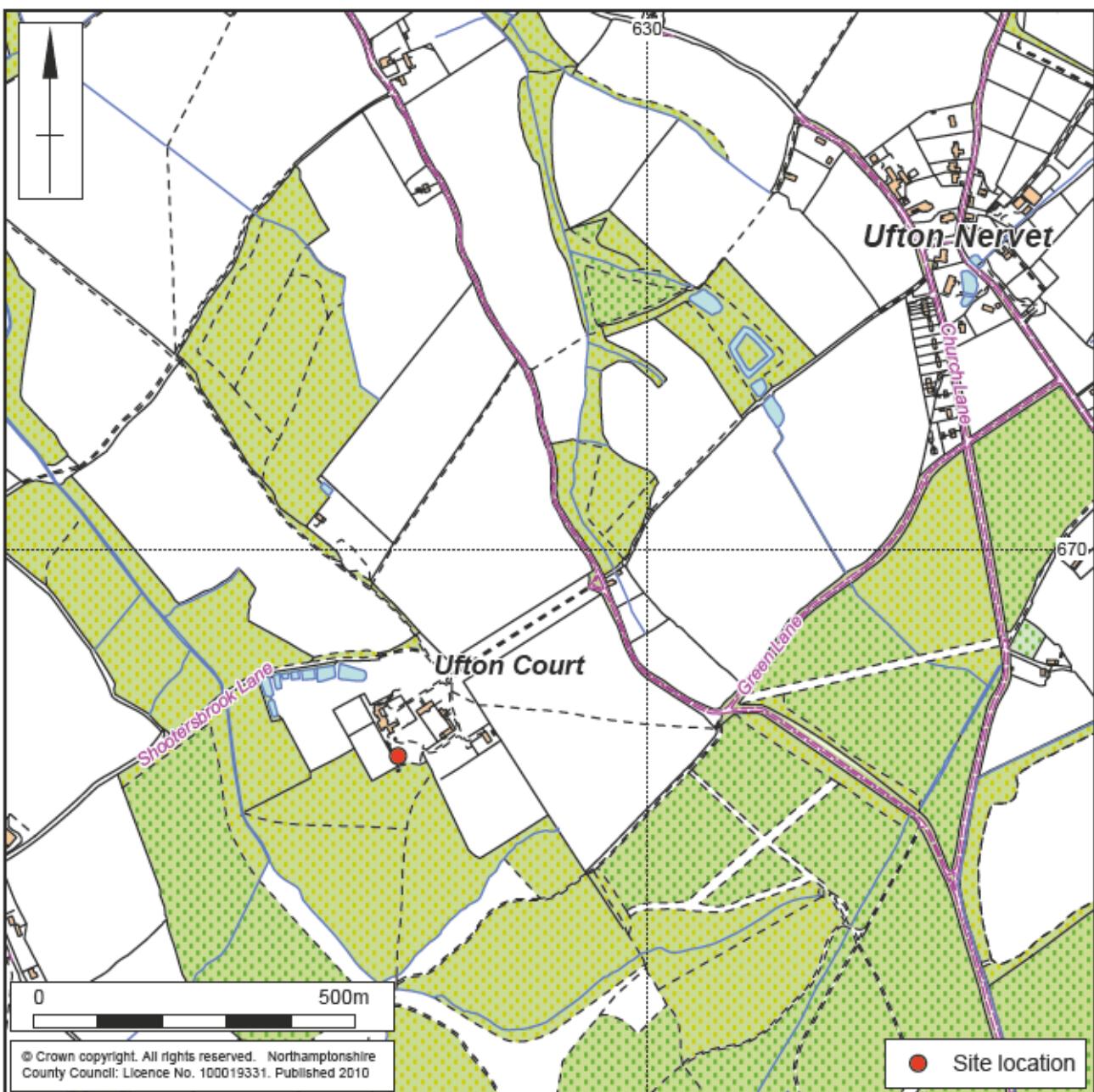
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Scale 1:10,000

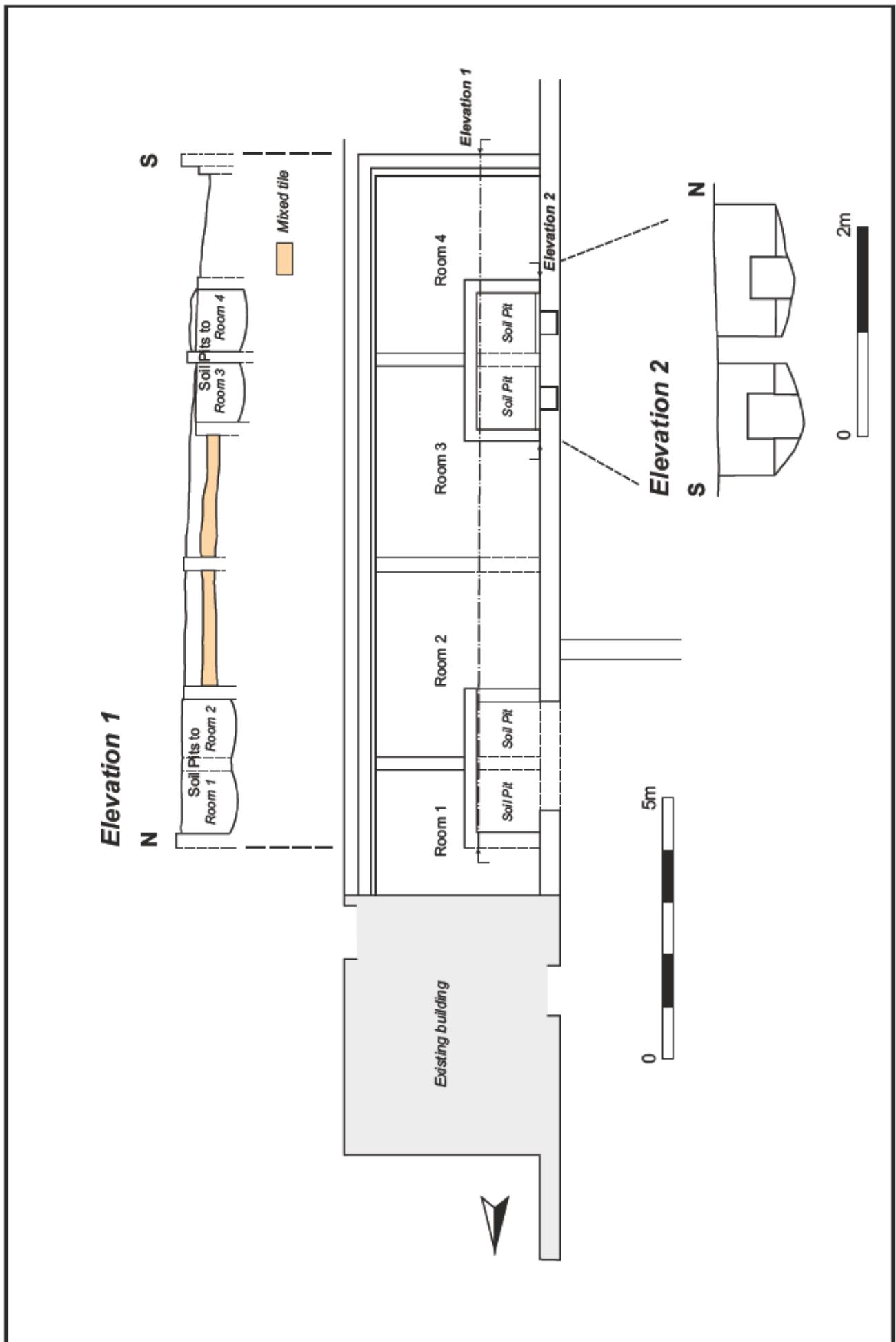
Site Location Fig 1

Scale 1:1000 (A4)

Plan of Ufton Court showing the excavation area

Fig 2





Scale 1:100 and 1:50 (A4)

General site plan showing elevations Fig 3



Butt joint of building with former garden wall at south end Fig 4



Tile layer introduced when creating the individual rooms Fig 5



The soil pits serving Rooms 3 and 4, dividing wall removed

Fig 6



The reconstructed assemblage of pottery from the soil pits

Fig 7



Northamptonshire County Council

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