

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological evaluation of land to the rear of High Street, Meppershall Bedfordshire April 2012



Northamptonshire Archaeology

2 Bolton House Wootton Hall Park Northampton NN4 8BE t. 01604 700493 f. 01604 702822 e. <u>sparry@northamptonshire.gov.uk</u> w. <u>www.northantsarchaeology.co.uk</u>

> Northamptonshire County Council



Jason Clarke Report 12/80 April 2012 LUTNM.2012.20

UI UI	/ 0 1
Project Manager:	Adam Yates BA MIfA
Text:	Jason Clarke BSc MA AlfA
Fieldwork:	Jason Clarke Pete Townend BA Sam Egan BA Simon Markus BA
Geology	Steve Critchley MSc
Finds	Tora Hylton
Illustrations	James Ladocha BA

STAFF

QUALITY CONTOL

	Print name	Signed	Date
Checked by	Pat Chapman	PC	
Verified by	Adam Yates	AU	
Approved by	Andy Chapman	AC	

OASIS REPORT FORM 124377

PROJECT DETAILS				
Project title	Archaeological evalua Meppershall, Bedfords	tion of land to the rear of High Street, hire, April 2012		
Short description	In March 2012, an archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology, on behalf of Bloor Homes Ltd, on land to the rear of the High Street, Meppershall, Bedfordshire. No pre-modern archaeological features or finds were present within the development area. A ditch in Trench 5, was a post-medieval field boundary backfilled in the late 20th century.			
Project type	Trial trench evaluation			
Previous work	None			
Current land use	Recreational and Arab	e		
Future work	Unknown			
Monument type	None			
and period				
Significant finds	None			
PROJECT LOCATION				
County	Bedfordshire			
Site address	High Street, Meppershall			
OS Grid ref	TL 13950 36870			
Area (sq m/ha)	6.7 hectres			
Height aOD PROJECT CREATORS	70mAOD			
	Northonotonobing Arch			
Organisation Project brief originator	Northamptonshire Arch Central Bedfordshire C			
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Arch			
Director/Supervisor	Jason Clarke (NA)			
Project Manager	Adam Yates (NA)			
Sponsor or funding body	Bloor Homes Ltd			
PROJECT DATE				
Start date	16/04//2012			
End date	20/04/2012			
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Contents		
Physical	LUTNM.2012.20	CU object, glass, plastic		
Paper		Site records (1 archive box)		
Digital	Client report PDF. Survey Data, Photographs			
BIBLIOGRAPHY				
Title	Archaeological evaluation of Land to the rear of High Street, Meppershall, Bedfordshire, April 2012			
Serial title & volume	12/80			
Author(s)	Jason Clarke			
Page numbers	9 text,3 figs			
Date	April 2012			

Contents

1	INTR	ODUCTION	1
2	BAC	GROUND	1
	2.1	Location and geology	1
	2.2	Historical and archaeological background	4
3	МЕТ	HODOLOGY	6
4	THE	EXCAVATED EVIDENCE	7
	4.1	General stratigraphy	7
	4.2	The trial trenches	7
5	COP	PER ALLOY OBJECT	7
6	DISC	USSION	8
	BIBL	OGRAPHY	9
	APPE	ENDIX: SUMMARY OF CONTEXTS	

Figures

Front cover: General view of the excavation area, looking south-east

- Fig 1: Site location
- Fig 2: Trench location, showing modern archaeological feature, 504

Fig 3: Ditch [504], showing ceramic land drain in its base

Back cover: Trench 14 backfilled

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF LAND TO THE REAR OF HIGH STREET, MEPPERSHALL BEFORDFORDSHIRE

APRIL 2012

Abstract

In April 2012, an archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology, on behalf of Bloor Homes Ltd on land to the rear of High Street, Meppershall, Bedfordshire. No pre-modern archaeological features or finds were present within the development area. A ditch in Trench 5 was a postmedieval field boundary backfilled in the late 20th century.

1 INTRODUCTION

In April 2012, an archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) on land to the rear of the High Street (NGR: TL 13950 36870; Fig 1). The work was commissioned by Bloor Homes Ltd, and was undertaken to inform a forthcoming planning application for proposed residential development, community centre, sports facilities and extension to the existing burial ground. The works were undertaken in accordance with paragraph 129 of the National Planning Policy Framework (DCLG 2012) and the checklist for works in Central Bedfordshire.

The scope of works was outlined and detailed in the Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA 2012). The objectives of the evaluation were to determine the presence of any archaeological features or deposits within the application area and to date and characterise their extent, depth of burial and state of preservation.

2 BACKGROUND

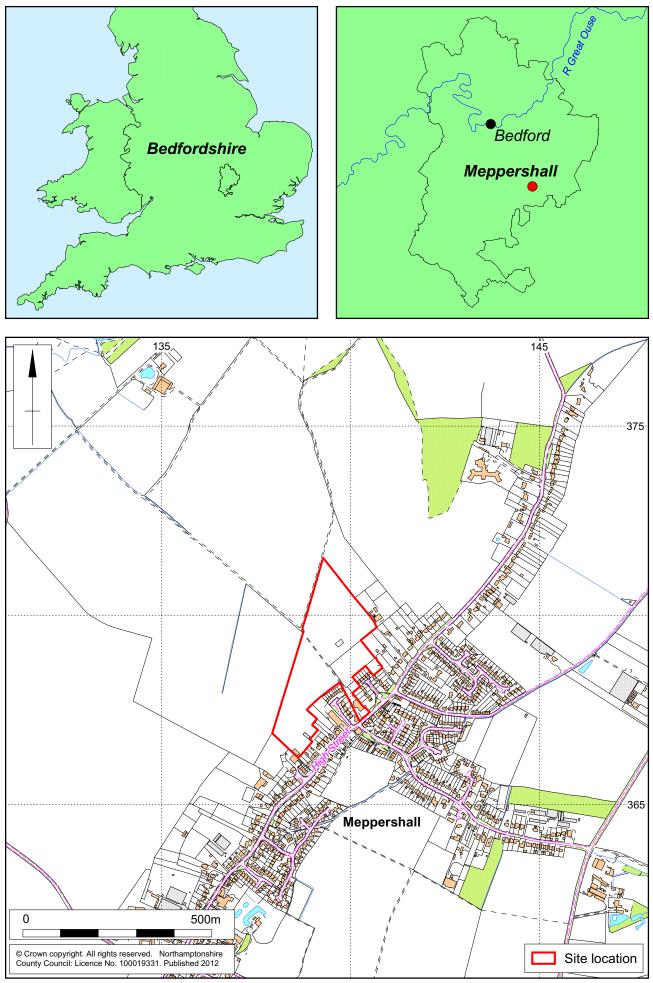
2.1 Location and geology

Location

The site occupies a triangular area of land, approximately 6.7ha in extent on the north side of Meppershall Bedfordshire, centred on NGR TL 13950 36870. The site is bounded by open fields to the north and east with buildings along High Street to the south. Current land use comprises an arable field to the west of the site, grassland to the north and recreation facilities and the current Hall to the south.

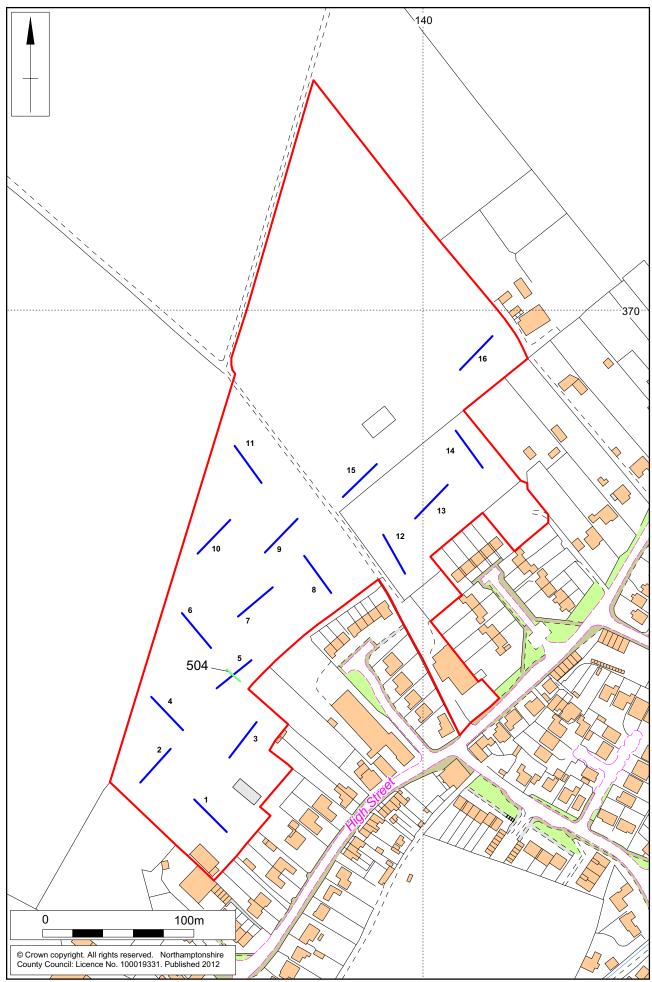
Geology by Steve Critchley

The evaluation area is underlain by mudstones, weathering to sticky dark grey clays, belonging to the Lower Cretaceous Gault Formation overlain in part by glacial tills and glaciofluvial gravels belonging to the Quaternary Lowestoft Formation. The tills which are chalk rich, were deposited during the mid Pleistocene Stage Anglian Glaciation and were seen to be locally decalcified in some evaluation trenches with a limited development of periglacial ground ice features such as ice cracks infills. The latter were often blurred by subsequent weathering and cultivation. Fine sands and fine gravels were exposed in the trenches nearest to the Three Corner Nursery derived from up slope weathering of glaciofluvial gravel deposits located under the current village. Colluvuim deposits were noted on the lower slope towards the south western portion of the site derived from periglacial weathering of the tills added to be agriculturally derived hill wash



Scale 1:10,000

Site Location Fig 1



2.2 Historical and archaeological background

The development area lies partly within the boundary of the historic core of Meppershall village, but no further monuments are recorded within the site. A number of archaeological interventions have taken place on land surrounding the site. An evaluation and subsequent excavation was undertaken on land to the east of the High Street by Archaeological Services and Consultancy (Event no EBD683 and EBD616; Wilson and Zeepvat 2010). The investigation found Roman remains relating to agricultural activities. Evaluation of land to the rear of 83-85 High Street by Heritage Network Ltd found evidence of medieval activity dating from the 10th century onward (Fig 2; Event no EBD410; Saunders 2005). On the west side of the High Street a possible post-medieval ice store has been found (EBD682). An evaluation of land to the east of the village was undertaken along the route of the Shillington Upton End Sewer Line (EBD165). No archaeological remains were recorded close to the village.

Early prehistoric

There is little evidence of activity in the vicinity for this period.

Iron Age/Roman

Finds of Roman pottery and coins to the east of the High Street prompted an evaluation and subsequent excavation prior to development of the land (HER 16317 and 16318). The site is thought to have developed from the late 1st century until the late 4th century, although there was limited evidence of activity dating to the Iron Age (King and Wilson 2001; Wilson 2002; Wilson and Zeepvat 2010). A number of ditches, pits and postholes were recorded, as well as part of an enclosure ditch. There was no direct evidence of settlement, however, and it was proposed by the authors that this may have been located on the slightly higher ground to the south and east of the site.

Roman pottery and coins have also been found to the west of the High Street (HER 16164).

Saxon/medieval

At the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086AD Meppershall parish was assessed partly under Bedfordshire and partly under Hertfordshire: there were 3 hides in Bedfordshire and 3 hides 1 virgate in Hertfordshire. It contained 4 manors; Meppershall, Ploehanger, St Thomas' Chapel Manor and Woodhall (Page 1908). Lewin Cilt, a thegn of King Edward, had held the Mepershall manor in the time of Edward the Confessor, and in 1086 it was in the possession of Gilbert son of Salaman. The next reference to Meppershall occurs in the reign of Henry II, when Robert son of William de Meppershall presented the advowson of the church of Meppershall to the priory of Lenton. The manor continued for nearly three hundred years in the possession of the Meppershalls, who derived their family name from it, passing, who held it until at least 1493. Two archaeological watching briefs at the Manor were undertaken by Bedfordshire County Archaeological Services (EBD401) and Albion Archaeology (EBD21). Both interventions noted archaeological remains comprising structures and deposits.

Evaluation of land on the west side of the High Street found evidence of medieval activity including boundary ditches, a possible trackway and a possible springhead dating from the 10th century onwards (Saunders 2005). The trackway may have dated to the 14th to 16th centuries. Later features included a pit, a clunch surface and a wall.

At the southern end of Meppershall is the site of 'The Hills', a motte and bailey castle which was besieged by King Stephen in 1138. This monument is scheduled (SM20417, HER369) and comprises earthwork a motte earth mound with a double outer bailey. A later moated site (HER 371) and a church lie immediately to the north.

The remains of a homestead moat partially survive at the south end of the village (HER 371). It now encloses a late 18th-century house, formerly a rectory, now known as Monks Pool (HER 5760; Listed Building 3/65). A series of four fishponds were associated with the moat, although today only the earthworks of two survive (HER 5490). A dovecote also existed on the site (HER 5491).

Nuns Wood, 300m to the north-east of the development area, is ancient woodland, possibly forming the remains of woods recorded in Domesday and later belonging to Chicksands Priory (HER 5453). A track from Shefford Road to Nun Wood is shown on 19th-century maps (HER 5465). To the west of the wood is an area of rectilinear cropmarks, probably denoting medieval close boundaries. They are partly defined by substantial ponds. The cropmarks may therefore indicate an area of medieval settlement (HER 5224).

Post-medieval/modern

In 1651 the manor of Meppershall was held by Richard Emery and there after by various relatives and trustees. In 1744 it was in the possession of Henry and Elizabeth Birrell and Thomas and Charlotte Fulwood, who combined to sell the manor to Bartlett Mason. In 1805 Thomas Poynter was in possession and in 1854 the manor was in the hands of the trustees of Mrs. Barbara Kane and Mrs. Pen Woodburn.

Adjacent to the southern boundary of the site is Fowler's Farmhouse, a late 16thcentury house, which has been almost entirely encased in 19th-century brick (HER 5761; Listed Building 3/63). A mid 17th-century house is situated further south (HER 5762; Listed Building 346/3/10008). There are further historic buildings of note within the village which are not listed, these include The Sugar Loaf Public House (HER 16310). A small square brick structure was discovered in the garden of 62 High Street and which may have been an ice-house (HER 16164).

A semi-circular cropmark, indicating a possible ditch, was observed just to the west of the development area (Fig 2; HER 385). Maps dating to the 19th century show a field boundary in the same location.

A number of sand and gravel pits have been recorded on 19th-century maps (Fig 2; HER 2477, 2972). A blacksmith in Meppershall is referred to from 1602 to 1898 (HER 5483). Otherwise the Ordnance Survey maps of 1883 and 1901 show the area as open fields (<u>http://www.old-maps.co.uk/maps.html</u>).

3 METHODOLOGY

Sixteen trial trenches were excavated in accordance with a trench plan prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology and approved by the Archaeology Team at Central Bedfordshire Council (Fig 2). Trenches were targeted to examine the principal area of impact of the proposed development.

The trenches measured 30m long by 1.6m wide and the total area excavated was 960m². Trenches 4 and 5 were repositioned to avoid overhead electricity cables, whilst Trenches 12 and 15 were repositioned to avoid playground apparatus. Trenches were positioned using a Leica system 1200 GPS.

A JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket was used to remove overburden to archaeological levels or the natural substrate, whichever was encountered first. The trenches were cleaned sufficiently to enable the identification and definition of archaeological features. A hand-drawn plan of all archaeological features was made at scale 1:50 or 1:100 and was related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Archaeological deposits were examined by hand excavation to determine their nature. Recording followed standard NA procedures as described in the *Fieldwork Manual* (NA 2011). Deposits were described on *pro-forma* sheets to include measured and descriptive details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds. Context sheets were cross-referenced to scale plans, section drawings and photographs. Photography was with 35mm black and white film and colour slides, supplemented with digital images. Sections were drawn at scale 1:10 or 1:20, as appropriate and related to Ordnance Survey datum. Spoil heaps and features were scanned with a metal detector to maximise the recovery of metal objects.

All works were conducted in accordance with *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003), the Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (IfA 2008b) and *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (EH 2006).

4 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

4.1 General stratigraphy

The underlying geology of mudstones and clay, was encountered between 0.2-0.5m below the modern ground surface. This occurred as light-mid orange or brownish-yellow sandy clay with occasional angular to sub-angular pebbles and chalk. The subsoil was mid grey-brown silty clay and the topsoil was mid greyish-brown sandy clay, both soils contained occasional chalk and flint pebbles.

4.2 The trial trenches

The trench locations are shown in Figure 2 and an inventory of contexts is provided in the Appendix. The topsoil had an average depth of 0.30m and subsoil of 0.10m.

No features were present in Trenches 1-4 and 6-16. A copper alloy object was recovered by metal detecting from topsoil (501) in Trench 5.

Trench 5 (Fig 2)

Ditch [504]

In the middle of Trench 5 was ditch [504], aligned north to south, 1.20m wide and 0.46m deep with a V-shaped profile (Figs 2 and 3). It was filled with mid grey-brown silty clay (503), which contained part of a plastic bag and window glass dating from the late 20th century (retained). At the base of the ditch was a ceramic land drain.



Fig 3: Ditch [504], showing ceramic land drain in its base

5 **COPPER ALLOY OBJECT** by Tora Hylton

Part of a corroded copper alloy object, with a worn ?quartz setting was recovered from topsoil. The object, most probably an item of jewellery, comprises two circular cabochon (Dia: 8mm) set back to back within a copper alloy mount. The mount is incomplete, a thin flange protrudes from the base of the cabochon, but most of it missing, making identification difficult. The vestige of the mount that survives is decorated with a pellet motif. On one side, the plate thickens slightly and appears to bifurcate, possibly part of a loop for suspension. The presence of two settings back to back, indicate that the item was intended to be viewed from both sides, this suggests that it may represent part of a necklace or an earring. This piece does not appear to date any earlier than the post-medieval period.

6 DISCUSSION

The trial trenching recovered no pre-modern archaeological features or finds within the development area. A ditch in Trench 5 corresponds to a field boundary present on the 1883 ordnance survey map which continued until the 1983 map, going out of use sometime before 1992 (www.old-maps.co.uk). A ceramic land drain was present in the base of the ditch. The remains of a plastic bag and window glass within the backfill of the ditch confirm the ordnance survey maps in indicating that it was backfilled in the late 20th century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brown, N, and Glazebrook, J, (eds) 2000 *Research and Archaeology, A Framework for the Eastern Counties: 2, Research Agenda and Strategy,* East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper, **8**

EH 2006 *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)*, English Heritage

Glazebrook, J, 1997 Research and Archaeology, A Framework for the Eastern Counties: 1, Resource Assessment, East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Paper, **3**

Gurney, D, 2003 *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England,* East Anglian Archaeology, Occasional Paper, **14**

IfA 1994, (revised 2008) *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation*, Institute for Archaeologists

IfA 2010 Code of Conduct, Institute for Archaeologists

King, N, and Wilson, N, 2001 *An archaeological evaluation of Land at Meppershall, Bedfordshire,* Archaeological Services & Consultancy, Report, **ASC:LMB01/2a**

Medlycott, M, 2011 Research and Archaeology Revisited: A Revised Framework for the East of England, East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers, **24**

NA 2011 Archaeological Fieldwork Manual, Northamptonshire Archaeology

NA 2012 Land at High Street, Meppershall, Bedfordshire, Written Scheme of Investigation for Trial Trench Evaluation Allotted Site H174 Policy HA25, Northamptonshire Archaeology

Oake, M, et al 2007 Bedfordshire Archaeology, Research and Archaeology: Resource Assessment, Research Agenda and Strategy, Bedfordshire Archaeology Monograph, **9**

Page, W, 1908 *Parishes: Meppershall, A History of the County of Bedford*: Volume 2, 288-293, <u>http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=62650</u> Date accessed: 01 March 2012

Saunders, G, 2005 83-85 *High Street, Meppershall, Beds, Archaeological Evaluation Report*, Heritage Network report, **286**

UKIC 1998 First Aid for Finds, United Kingdom Institute for Conservation

Wilson N, 2002 Archaeological excavation: Land off the High Street, Meppershall, Bedfordshire, Archaeological Services & Consultancy

Wilson, N, and Zeepvat, B, 2010 *A Romano-British site at Meppershall: investigations, 2001/2002*, Bedfordshire Archaeol J, **25**, 347-374

Websites

BGS 2009 http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/home.html British Geological Survey website

Maps

www.old-maps.co.uk

Northamptonshire Archaeology a service of Northamptonshire County Council

30 April 2011

APPENDIX: Context Index

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
1	30m x 2.0m NW to SE	1387 3665	70.70m aOD	69.99m aOD
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/
	Feature & type			Samples
101	Topsoil	Dark brown silty clay	0.23m thick	
102	Subsoil	Mid orange-brown silty clay	0.20m thick	
103	Natural	Dark orange-brown clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
2	30m x 2.0m NE to SW	1383 3670	67.11m aOD	66.58aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
201	Topsoil	Dark brown silty clay	0.25m thick	
202	Natural	Dark grey-brown clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
3	30m x 2.0m NE to SW	1383 3670	68.59m aOD	68.26m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
301	Topsoil	Dark brown silty clay	0.27m thick	
302	Natural	Mid brown-grey clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
4	50m x 2.0m N to S	1384 3672	67.43m aOD	67.05m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
401	Topsoil	Dark brown silty clay	0.40m thick	
402	Natural	Mid grey-brown clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
5	30m x 2.0m NE to SW	1388 2676	67.95m aOD	67.58m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
501	Topsoil	Dark grey-brown silty clay	0.30m thick	
502	Natural	Mid brown-grey sandy clay		
503	Fill	Mid grey-brown silty clay		
504	Cut of ditch	N-S aligned V-shaped, filled by (503)	1.20m wide and 0.46m deep	Ceramic land drain in base of ditch, plastic bag, window glass

MEPPERSHALL TRIAL TRENCHING

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
6	30m x 2.0m NW to SE	1384 2367	69.71m aOD	68.37m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
601	Topsoil	Mid grey-brown sandy clay	0.30m thick	
602	Natural	Light grey-orange clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
7	30m x 2.0m NE to SW	1390 3681	68.55m aOD	68.24m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
701	Topsoil	Mid grey-brown sandy clay	0.25m thick	
702	Natural	Mid orange-brown clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
8	30m x 2.0m NW to SE	1392 3683	68.77m aOD	68.46m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
801	Topsoil	Mid grey-brown sandy clay	0.31m thick	
802	Natural	Mid orange-brown clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
9	30m x 2.0m NE to SW	1391 3686	69.51m aOD	69.18m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
901	Topsoil	Mid grey-brown sandy clay	0.30m thick	
902	Natural	Mid brown-red clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
10	30m x 2.0m NE to SW	1387 3686	70.43m aOD	70.06m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
1001	Topsoil	Mid grey-brown sandy clay	0.31m thick	
1002	Natural	Mid brown-red clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
11	30m x 2.0m NE to SW	1387 3691	70.93m aOD	70.65m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
1101	Topsoil	Mid grey-brown sandy clay	0.27m thick	
1102	Natural	Mid brown-red clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
12	30m x 2.0m NW to SE	1397 3685	68.83m aOD	68.41m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
1201	Topsoil	Mid grey-brown sandy clay	0.30m thick	
1202	Natural	Mid red-brown clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
13	30m x 2.0m NE to SW	1399 3686	69.33m aOD	68.99m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
1301	Topsoil	Mid grey-brown sandy clay	0.31m thick	
1302	Natural	Mid orange-brown clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
14	30m x 2.0m NW to SE	1402 3692	69.96m aOD	69.43m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
1401	Topsoil	Mid grey-brown sandy clay	0.33m thick	
1402	Natural	Mid brown-red clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
15	30m x 2.0m NE to SW	1369 3689	70.18m aOD	69.65m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
1501	Topsoil	Mid grey-brown silty clay	0.43m thick	
1502	Natural	Mid red-brown clay		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
16	30m x 2.0m NE to SW	1404 3698	71.04m aOD	70.79m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
1601	Topsoil	Mid grey-brown sandy clay	0.29m thick	
1602	Natural	Mid brown-red clay		



Northamptonshire County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology



Northamptonshire Archaeology 2 Bolton House Wootton Hall Park Northampton NN4 8BE t. 01604 700493 f. 01604 702822 e. <u>sparry@northamptonshire.gov.uk</u> w. <u>www.northantsarchaeology.co.uk</u>





Northamptonshire County Council