Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Investigation at Acorn Pre-School, School Lane, Shefford, Bedfordshire June 2010 Accession No. BEDFM: 2010.31

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Report 10/118

June 2010

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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	Archaeological investigation at Acorn Pre-School, School Lane, Shefford, Bedfordshire, June 2010	
Short description	An archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology on land at Shefford Lower School, Shefford, Bedfordshire, in response to the submission of a planning application for the proposed extension to the existing pre-school building. The evaluation revealed a Roman ditch, a pit and a furrow.	
Project type	Excavation	
Previous work	Evaluation August and November 2007	
Current land use	Playing field	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type and period	None	
Significant finds	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Bedfordshire	
Site address	Shefford Lower School	
Easting Northing	TL 1380 3865	
Area (sq m/ha)	64sqm	
Height aOD	45.49m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)	
Project brief originator	Central Bedfordshire Council	
Project Design originator	NA	
Director/Supervisor	Nathan Flavell (NA)	
Project Manager	Antony Walsh (NA)	
Sponsor or funding body	Central Bedfordshire Council	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	01/06/2010	
End date	04/06/2010	
ARCHIVES	**Location (Accession no.)**	**Contents**
Physical	BEDFM:2010.31	Pottery, Tile
Paper		Site records (1 small archive box)
Digital		Client report PDF
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	Archaeological investigation at Acorn Pre-School, School Lane, Shefford, Bedfordshire, June 2010	
Serial title & volume	10/118	
Author(s)	Nathan Flavell	
Page numbers	13	
Date	2010	

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION AT ACORN PRE-SCHOOL, SCHOOL LANE SHEFFORD, BEDFORDSHIRE JUNE 2010 ACCESSION NO. BEDFM: 2010.31

Abstract

An archaeological excavation was carried out in June 2010 by Northamptonshire Archaeology on land at Shefford Lower School, Shefford, Bedfordshire out in response to the submission of a planning application for the proposed extension to the existing pre-school building. The evaluation revealed an early Roman ditch, small pit and a furrow.

1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out in June 2010 by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) at Acorn Pre-School, Shefford, Bedfordshire (NGR: TL 1380 3865; Fig 1). The work was commissioned by PCMS Planning for Central Bedfordshire Council and was undertaken to inform a planning application for the proposed extension of the existing pre-school building.

The scope of works was outlined in the brief (Oake 2010) issued by Central Bedfordshire Council and detailed in the written scheme of investigation prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA 2010).

2 BACKGROUND

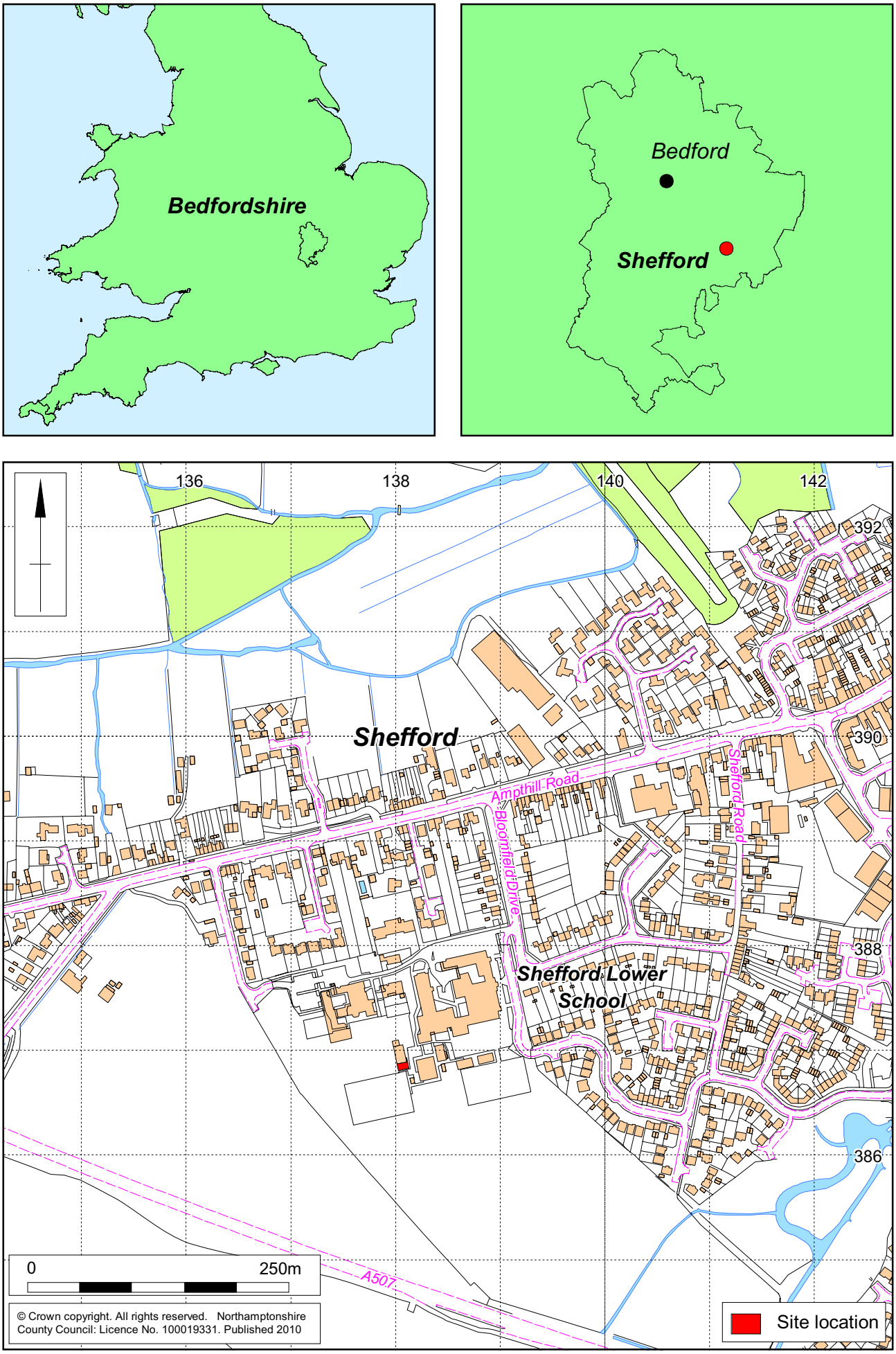
2.1 Topography and geology

The proposed development site is situated on level ground in the south-east corner of a playing field adjacent to the Acorn Pre-School building at Shefford Lower School, Shefford, Bedfordshire. The site is located close to the western margins of the town, between the A507 and Ampthill Road, on the north-facing slope of an east to west ridge that lies between the River Flit to the north and a small tributary stream to the south. The site covers an area of 64m² and lies at approximately 45m aOD.

The underlying geology is Lower Greensand with superficial deposits of Boulder clay; alluvium and gravel deposited by the River Flit occur to the north of Ampthill Road (BGS 1996). The soils are of the Evesham 3 (411c) soil association, comprising slowly permeable calcareous clayey and fine loamy over clayey soils (SSEW 1983).

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

A study of sites listed in the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record was undertaken for the evaluation (Carlyle 2007 and Walker 2007). A number of known sites in the vicinity date from the prehistoric to modern periods, although sites dating



Scale 1:5,000

Site Location Fig 1

to the Roman period dominate. The archaeological work carried out around Shefford Lower School has been given a single group number (HER 379).

The proposed development site is situated within an archaeologically sensitive area which has been subject to archaeological investigation since the early 19th century, when Thomas Inskip, a local antiquarian, found a Roman cremation cemetery in the area now occupied by Shefford Lower and Middle Schools. The finds included a wide range of artefacts, including high quality pottery, glass vessels and coins. Subsequent investigations identified a rectangular stone building, initially described as a temple (Fig 2). During the building of the school in 1940s, the 'temple' was re-interpreted as a probable villa building with a hypocaust (Simco 1984). Between 1993 and 2005 the area has been subject to various archaeological investigations (Albion 2001, 2003 and 2005; Archaeological Solutions 2003; BCAS 1993, 2000a, b and c).

To the north of the current excavation area a 2nd-century aisled building was partially excavated by Albion Archaeology in 2003 (Fig 2; Luke *et al* 2003). It was at least 11m wide and 18m long, although the full length of the building was not excavated. A substantial ditch to the west of the building may have defined a large enclosure around it. This ditch was subsequently observed to the south of the open area excavations during further evaluation and small excavations undertaken in 2003 and 2004 (Fig 2; Luke *et al* 2005). The ditch measured 2.00m wide and 0.55m deep and contained large amounts of pottery, ceramic building material, painted wall plaster and roof tile. It is thought that the ditch may have originated before the conquest, with the Roman buildings later utilising the enclosure it defined.

Evaluations in the surrounding area and subsequent excavation have also identified activity ranging from the Iron Age through to the medieval period (Albion 2005). Several Roman roads have also been listed in the area (HER 717, 5342 and 10480) in the Viatores' Roman Roads in the South-East Midlands (1964), although these are presently unproven.

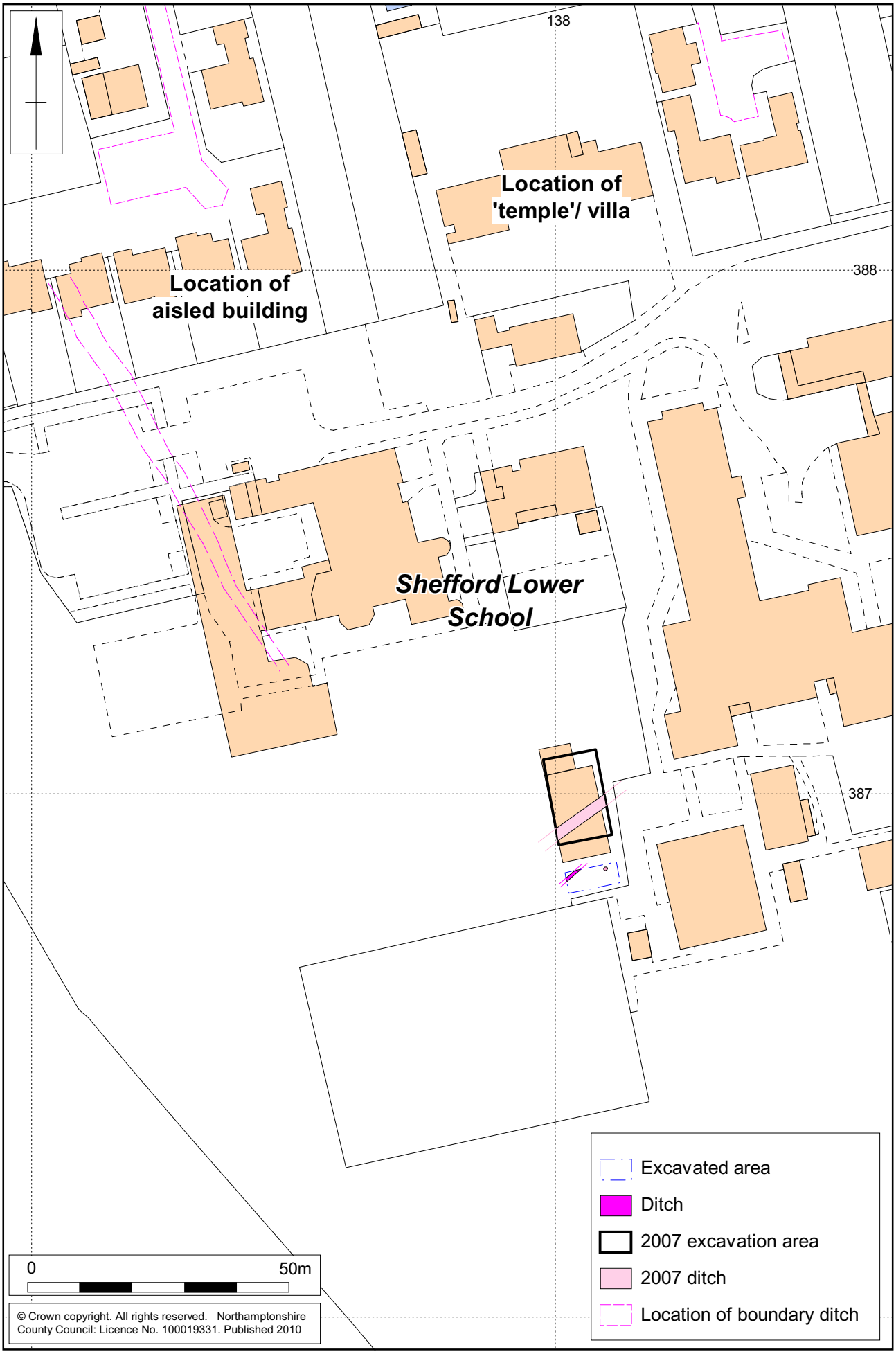
Previous work carried out in 2007 at the school (Carlyle 2007 and Walker 2007) revealed the presence of a Romano-British ditch (EBD150/151) on a north-east to south-west alignment. The ditch fills contained a small quantity of Roman tile and an opaque blue glass globule, possibly a fragment of decoration from a 1st century AD glass vessel.

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Objectives

The specific objectives of the project were to:

- establish the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation within the development area;
- establish the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscapes;
- recover artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region.



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Location of trench and previous excavation Fig 2

3.2 Methodology

The footprint of the proposed area was excavated using a JCB-type mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket. The excavation area measured 10m by 4m. The topsoil and subsoil were removed under archaeological supervision to reveal the natural substrate. The topsoil and subsoil were stacked separately at the side of the excavated area. All procedures complied with Northamptonshire County Council Health and Safety provisions and Northamptonshire Archaeology Health and Safety at Work Guidelines.

The area was cleaned sufficiently to define the exposed features, and the features were then excavated by hand to determine their date and character. All archaeological deposits were fully recorded, following standard NA procedures. The archaeological features and deposits were given separate context numbers in a sequence continuing from those allocated during the evaluation. They were described on pro-forma context sheets to include details of the context, its relationships and interpretation. Artefacts and ecofacts were collected by hand and retained, receiving appropriate care prior to removal from site (Watkinson and Neal 1998). Unstratified animal bones and modern material were not retained.

The site was planned at a scale of 1:20 and the location of the trench was surveyed and related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Sections or profiles through features were drawn at a scale of 1:10, and related to Ordnance Datum. A full photographic record comprising both 35mm black and white negatives and colour transparencies was maintained, supplemented with digital images. The field data, including that from the evaluation, has been compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing.

Monitoring of the programme of fieldwork was carried out by BCCHES. All works were conducted in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (IfA 1994, revised 2008) and the *Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists* (1985, revised 2010). In addition, all works complied with the guidelines detailed in *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003).

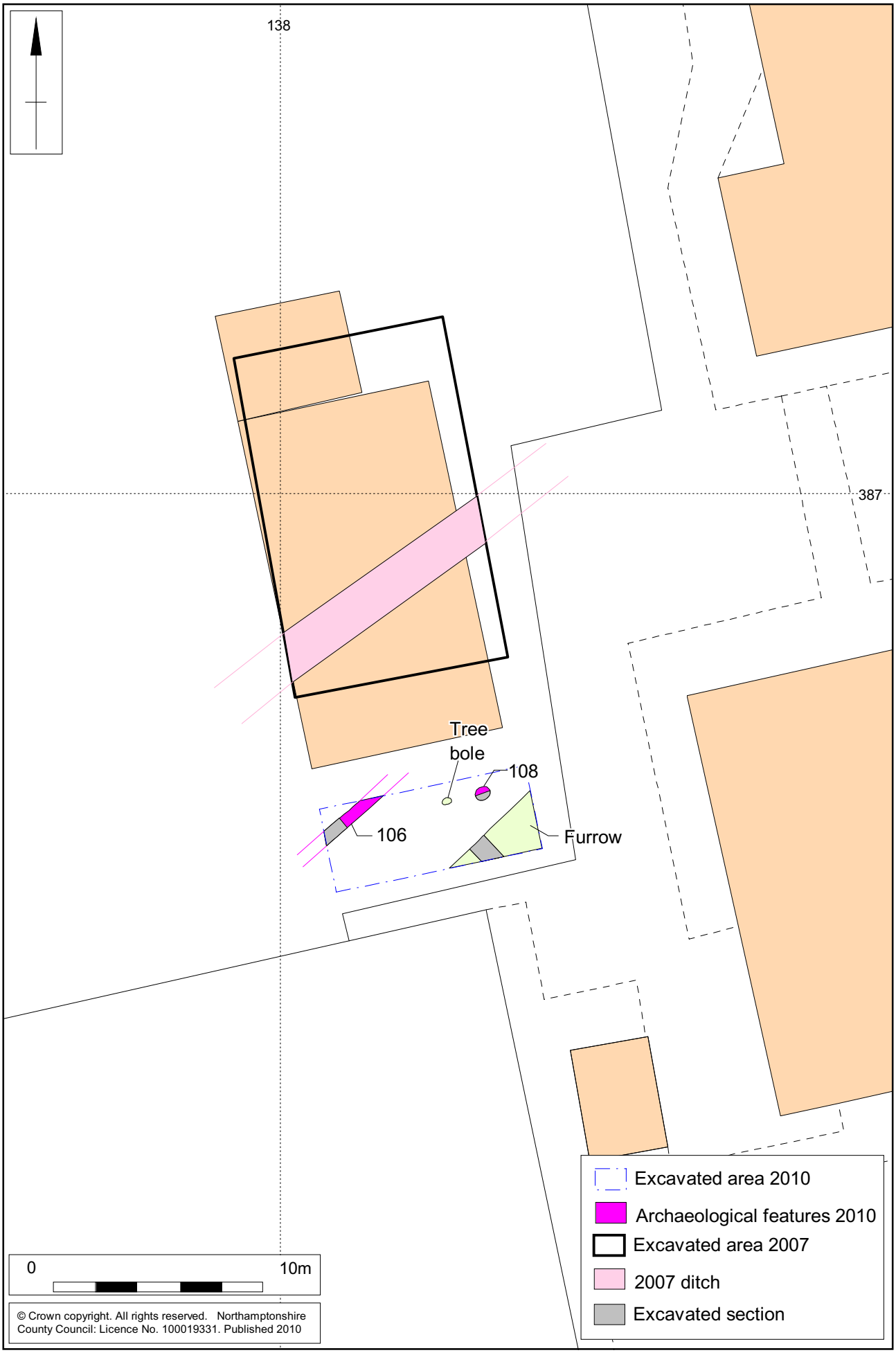
4 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

4.1 General stratigraphy

The natural substrate (103) was glacial till (Boulder Clay), a light to mid brownish-yellow clay with light greyish-blue veins, containing shattered flint nodules and chalk flecks. It occurred at approximately 0.5m below ground level. Slight differentiations in the natural were noticed across the site, patches of a more orange sandy-clay

4.2 The archaeological evidence

A ditch, [106], crossed the north-west corner of the area on a north-east to south-west alignment and cut the natural, (Figs 3 and 4). The ditch measured 0.62m wide by 0.37m deep and had a steep U-shaped profile with slight splaying. The lower fill (105) was a firm light grey-brown silty clay with chalk flecks with a small quantity of animal bone. The upper fill (104) was a mid grey-brown silty clay with large angular flints and chalk flecking containing a single pottery sherd and Roman roof tile.



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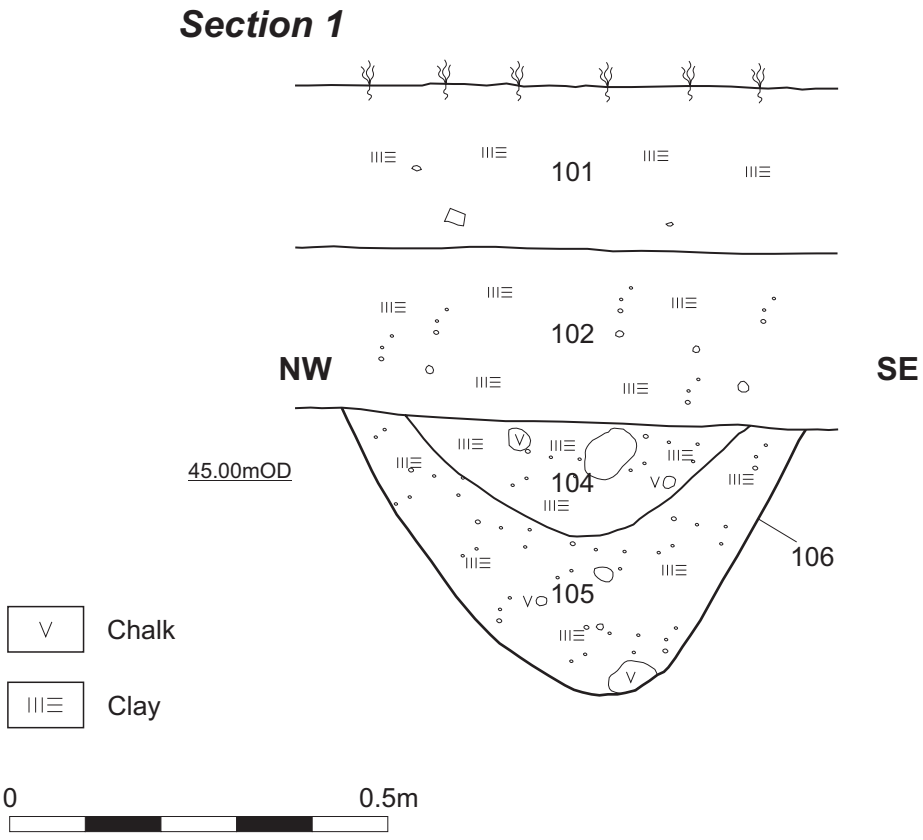
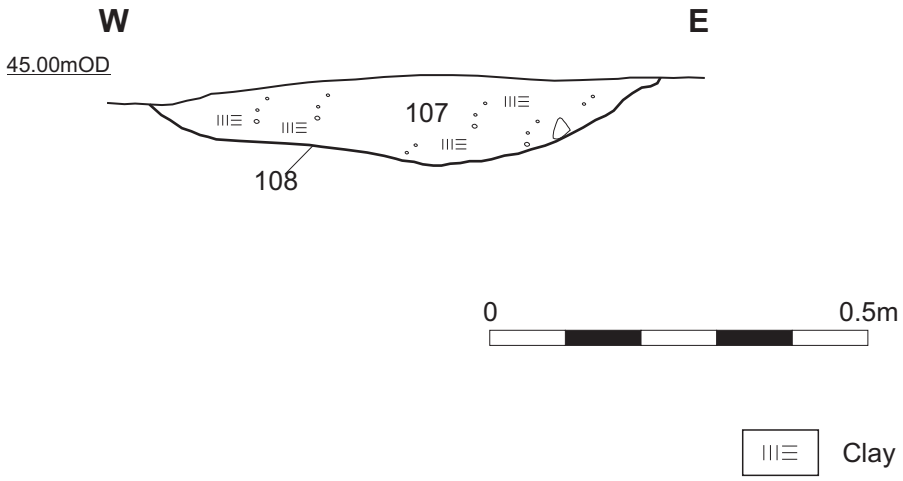
General site plan Fig 3



Ditch [106], section and view looking north-east Fig 4

Section 2



Pit [108], section and view looking north Fig 5

At the opposite south-east corner of the area was a furrow [110], aligned north-east to south-west. It measured at least 2m wide and was 0.2m deep. It was filled with a firm mid-brown sandy clay with infrequent flint and stone inclusions. It was on the same alignment, and so probably part of the same open field system as was found in the 2007 excavation.

A small undated pit [108], was the only other feature encountered (Fig 5). It had a diameter of 0.65m, with a depth of 0.1m. It was filled with (107) grey-brown silty clay with occasional flint inclusions. There was no artefactual evidence for this feature.

All three archaeological features were sealed by the subsoil (102), a mid brown-orange sandy clay with chalk inclusions which was 0.18m thick. The topsoil (101) was 0.28m thick, comprised of dark brown sandy loam with many stone and brick/tile fragments.

5 THE FINDS

5.1 **Pottery** by Andy Chapman

There is a single small sherd, measuring 20mm by 16mm, from the upper fill (104) of a ditch [106]. It appears to be from a wheel-thrown vessel, 5mm thick, in a fabric containing fine inclusions of both quartz and a black mineral. It has a dark grey core and dark brown surfaces. The associated tile indicates that this is most likely to be of Roman date, but the fabric has not been specifically identifies.

5.2 **Roman ceramic tile** by Pat Chapman

Four tile sherds, weighing 436g, come from the upper fill (104) of ditch [106]. There are two joining sherds, 18mm thick, made from slightly coarse sandy clay with tiny grog and occasional larger flint inclusions. These are part of an *imbrex* roof tile with quite a broad curve. The other sherd comes from a flue tile, *c* 18mm thick, scored with a remnant deep broad comb design and made from a fine hard brown clay.

The largest sherd is between 12-20mm thick and made from fine pale orange sandy clay with occasional tiny grog inclusions. There is what initially appeared to be the remnant of a nib, associated with medieval flat roof tiles. However, the groove normally seen at the base of a *tegula* flange is present and the fabric is also more typically Roman. Therefore, the sherd is from the corner of a roof tile where the flange has been sliced back flat with the body for 40mm, with just a fragment of flange left.

5.3 **Thimble** by Tora Hylton

Part of a thimble was recovered from topsoil deposits overlying Trench 1 (101). The thimble is incomplete and badly damaged; it appears to be part of a light duty thimble, manufactured from thin copper alloy sheeting. The indentations are small, hand punched and form concentric circles, the small size of the holes suggests that the thimble would have been used with narrow gauge needles and hence used for fine work. The crown of the thimble is bare and free from indentations , a feature observed on thimbles dating from the 14th century to c.1650 (Holmes 1988, 3).

5.4 **Animal bone** by Karen Deighton

A total of 375g of animal bone was recovered by hand from a single context, the primary fill (105) of ditch [106] during the course of excavation. The material was heavily fragmented as a result of old breaks and bone surfaces were abraded. Only a single bone exhibited any evidence of canid gnawing and no evidence for butchery or burning were noted. The material consisted of the following: a cattle humerus shaft and pelvic fragments, a pig upper molar, a sheep/goat tibia shaft, ulna fragment and upper molar and a large ungulate rib and vertebra fragments. Unfortunately due to the paucity of material and its poor condition little can be added to the understanding of the function or economy of the site from a study of the animal bones.

6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological evaluation identified three features within the development area. The only dated feature was the ditch [106]. This appears to be part of a separate field system to that uncovered in the 2007 excavation, and is probably not directly related to the Roman complex of buildings.

A residual fragment of Roman box-flu tile was recovered form the upper fill (104) of the ditch [106]. The lack of domestic artefacts suggests the extent of the Roman occupation does not carry on immediately south of the boundary ditch excavated in 2007.

The furrow in the south-east of the excavation area is part of a ridge and furrow field system showing that the site was cultivated during the medieval and post-medieval periods.

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7 APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT DATA

Trench	Context	Type	Description	Dimensions /thickness (m)	Artefact type
1	101	Topsoil	Dark brown sandy loam with stone and chalk inclusions	0.28m thick	Thimble
	102	Subsoil	Mid brow-orange sandy clay with chalk inclusions	0.18m thick	
	103	Natural	Yellow-orange clay till with chalk and flint inclusions		
	104	Fill of ditch	Mid grey-brown silty clay with flint and chalk inclusions	0.15m thick	Pot/tile
	105	Fill of ditch	Light grey-brown silty clay with chalk inclusions	0.37m thick	Bone
	106	Cut of ditch	Linear NE-SW aligned U-shaped	0.62m wide	
	107	Fill of pit	Grey-brown silty clay	0.1m thick	
	108	Cut of pit	Shallow circular pit	0.65m diameter	
	109	Fill of furrow	Mid brown sandy clay with stone and flint inclusions	0.2m thick	
	110	Cut of furrow	Linear NE-SW	2m wide	

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