



Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological watching brief at Castlethorpe Fish Ponds, The Chequers, Castlethorpe Buckinghamshire

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MK HER Event Number: 1283

National Monument Number: 19080



Northamptonshire Archaeology

2 Bolton House

Wootton Hall Park

Northampton NN4 8BE

t. 01604 700493 f. 01604 702822

e. sparry@northamptonshire.gov.uk

w. www.northantsarchaeology.co.uk



Northamptonshire
County Council

Angela Warner

Report 11/111

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STAFF

Project Manager: Anthony Maull Cert Arch

Text: Angela Warner BSc (Hons)

Fieldwork: Angela Warner

Illustrations: Amir Bassir BSc

QUALITY CONTROL

	Print name	Signed	Date
Checked by	Pat Chapman		
Verified by	Anthony Maull		
Approved by	Andy Chapman		

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		MK HER Event Number 1283.	
Project title	Archaeological watching brief at Castlethorpe Fish Ponds, The Chequers, Castlethorpe, Buckinghamshire		
Short description	An archaeological watching brief was carried out during work to expand and refurbish a play area within the earthworks of a Scheduled Monument known as 'The Fish Ponds' in Castlethorpe, Buckinghamshire. The groundworks did not encounter any archaeological features. Remedial work to repair erosion to the earthworks and damage caused by animals was also carried out.		
Project type	Watching Brief		
Site Status	Scheduled Monument No. 19080		
Previous work	None		
Current land use	Play Area		
Future work	Unknown		
Monument type and period	Earthworks, Medieval		
Significant finds	None		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County	Buckinghamshire		
Site address	Land off The Chequers, Castlethorpe, Buckinghamshire		
Post code			
OS co-ordinates	SP 7968 4436		
Area (sq m/ha)	c 0.7ha		
Height aOD	c 78m		
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)		
Project brief originator	Milton Keynes Council		
Project Design originator	NA		
Director/Supervisor	Angela Warner (NA)		
Project Manager	Ant Maul (NA)		
Sponsor or funding body	Milton Keynes Council		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date	03/05/2011		
End date	06/06/2011		
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Contents	
Physical	AYBCM:2011.169		
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BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)		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 watching brief at Castlethorpe Fish Ponds, The Chequers, Castlethorpe, Buckinghamshire, June 2011		
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT
CASTLETHORPE FISH PONDS,
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
JUNE 2011**

Abstract

In May and June 2011, an archaeological watching brief was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology on the Scheduled Monument known as The Fish Ponds at The Chequers in Castlethorpe, Buckinghamshire. The watching brief was carried out as a condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent granted for the refurbishment and expansion of an existing play area within the earthworks south of the railway line. The excavations encountered no archaeological features. The site is currently used as a play area and disturbance from associated groundworks is also present. Remedial work to repair erosion to the earthworks and damage caused by animals was also carried out.

1 INTRODUCTION

In May and June 2011, an archaeological watching brief was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) on the Scheduled Monument known as The Fish Ponds at The Chequers in Castlethorpe, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SP 7968 4436; Fig 1). The work was commissioned by Milton Keynes Council on behalf of Castlethorpe Parish Council and was undertaken as a condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent granted for the refurbishment and expansion of the play area (Fig 2).

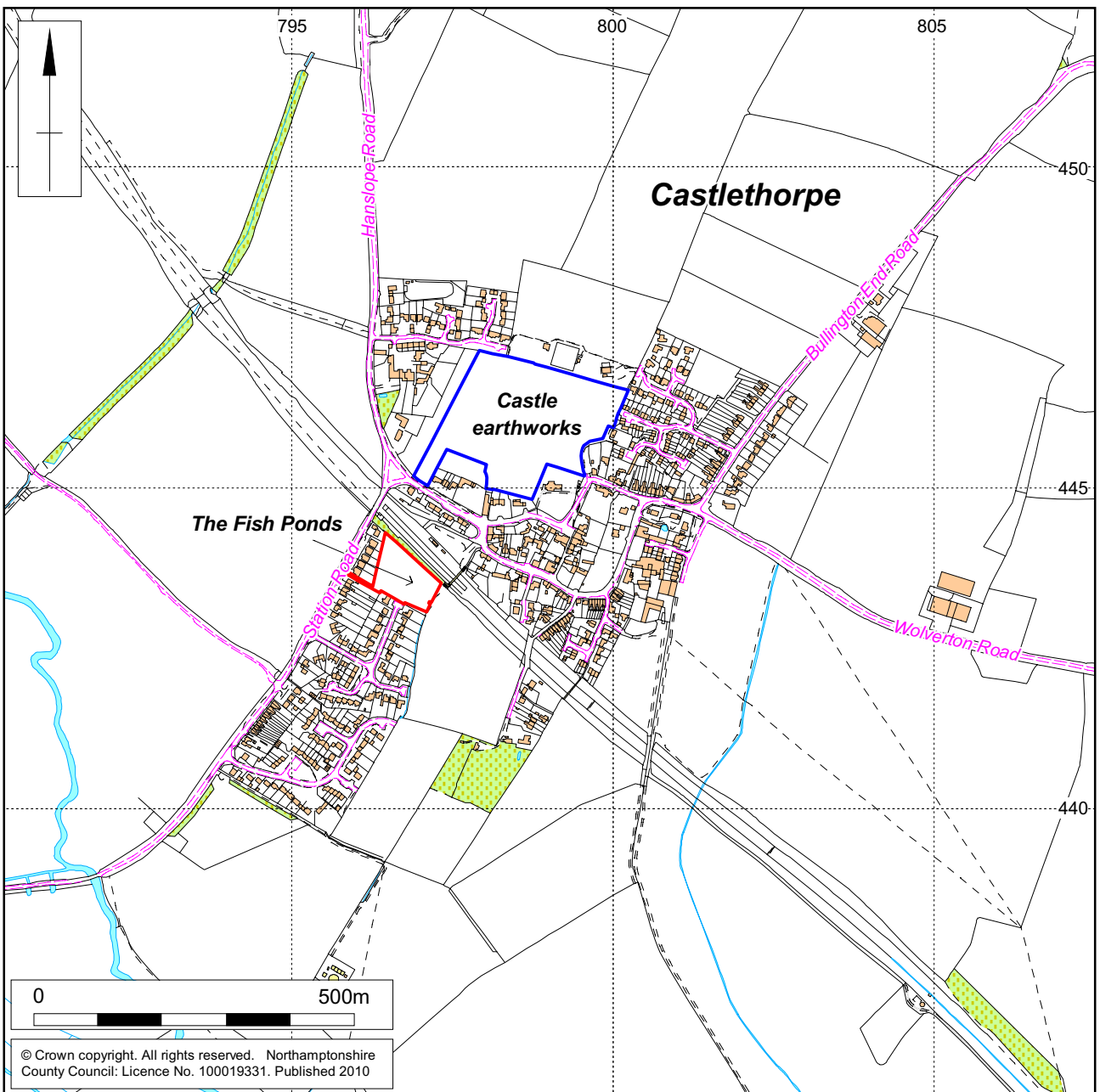
The scope of works was outlined in the Written Scheme of Investigation (NA 2011) issued by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA). The objectives of the watching brief were to seek to recover information where it was encountered and increase the understanding of the monument and place it in the context of the existing corpus of information for the archaeology of Castlethorpe.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

The site is situated on the south side of Castlethorpe at c78m above Ordnance Datum. The site is bounded to the north-east by the railway line, to the north-west and south-west by housing and to the south-east by fields. The land lies on the north-east slope of the Tove Valley, a tributary river that has a confluence with the River Great Ouse c2km to the south of the site.

The play area is situated within Scheduled Monument 19080 and comprises the south-west corner of a series of rectangular earthworks related to Castlethorpe Castle motte and bailey, possible ringwork and associated earthworks (Fig 3). The site is known as 'The Fish Ponds', but the actual purpose of the earthworks has not



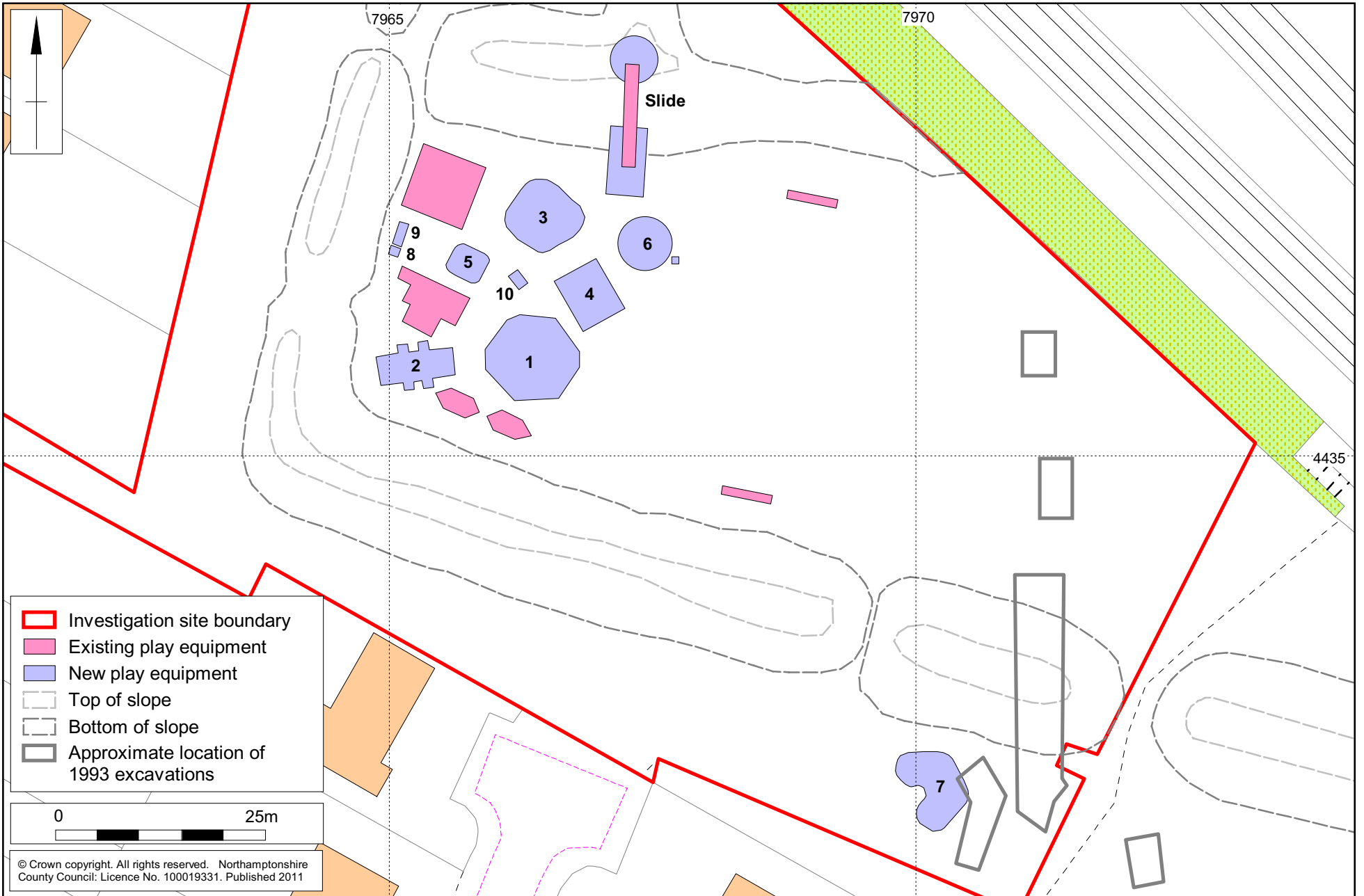
Scale 1:10,000 (A4)

Site Location Fig 1

Scale 1:500

Location of earthworks and play equipment

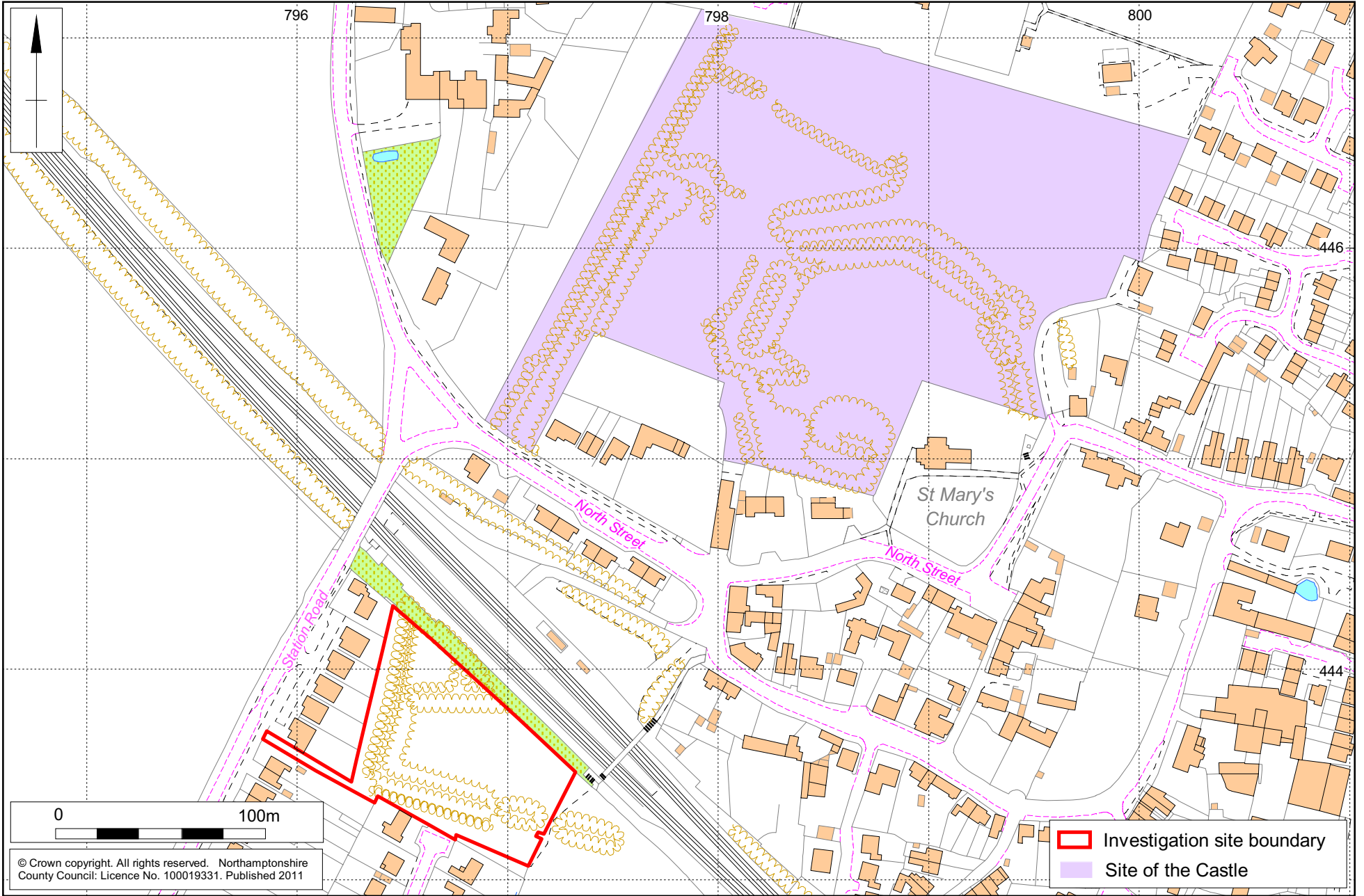
Fig 2



Scale 1:2,500

Castle and Fish Ponds Earthworks

Fig 3



been verified. The play area utilises the existing ground level within the earthwork perimeter and the portion of the east-west bank of the inner earthworks to which a slide was installed in 1977. All work within the boundary was to be undertaken with Scheduled Monument Consent which is a statutory requirement of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (as amended); Section 2: Control of works affecting scheduled monuments.

The Castle earthworks extend over an area of around 10ha. The motte and bailey lies north-west of the church, overlooking the Tove Valley. The earthworks to the south-west of, and substantially curtailed by, the railway line, may have been formerly connected to the linear earthwork on the north side of the railway line, however, their alignments differ which suggests they may be separate works. This rectangular enclosure comprises a bank averaging 16m wide and 2.1m high with an outer ditch 4m wide and 0.4m deep.

The northernmost corner of the site is divided from the area currently used for the play area by a bank aligned approximately east-west. The ground level of this northern corner is approximately two and a half metres higher than the ground level of the play area (Fig 4). From the north-west corner of the play area, the ground slopes very gently towards the south-east, the play area being seemingly level. The northernmost corner is further divided by an inverted T-shaped shallow bank approximately half a metre in height.

The site has been partially destroyed by the railway line, opened in 1838, which cuts through the north-east corner of the site. Figure 5 illustrates the proximity of the railway cutting (beyond the railings) to the surviving earthworks and the area now used as a play area.

The underlying geology comprises Rutland Formation Mudstone, overlain by mid pleistocene diamicton till. A small outcrop of Blisworth Limestone Formation underlies the castle mound to the north east (BGS 2011). The soils have been mapped as comprising the Bishampton 2 Association (572t), consisting of deep fine loamy soils over clayey subsoils (SSEW 1983).



The change of level between the play area and the possible fish ponds Fig 4



The location of the railway line, beyond the railings Fig 5

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

The Castlethorpe Castle earthworks comprises a motte and bailey castle, possibly a re-used ringwork, a second bailey, enclosure and fish ponds. It is believed that the site was fortified by William Maudit in the 12th century. In 1217 the castle was garrisoned against the crown and slighted soon after to prevent it from being used as a military stronghold. In 1292 William Beauchamp was granted a licence to fortify a house and garden at Castlethorpe, although the exact location of the house is not certain (taken from Milton Keynes HER. A full copy of the text appears in the Appendix).

The aforementioned 'T'-shaped earthwork in the northernmost area has been interpreted as the fish ponds, although they may represent the remains of the house of William Beauchamp and the associated walled garden built in 1292 (ibid).

The south-eastern corner of the site was subject to archaeological evaluation in 1993 during work to replace a sewer pipe. The area inside the earthworks uncovered only a small cobbled area and the terminal of a gully. The gully was not dateable, but the cobbled surface contained a single pot sherd dated to the 12th - 13th centuries (Bonner *et al* 1997). The finds within the earthworks structure, through which a trench was excavated, could not pinpoint the dates of the two phases of construction more accurately than the medieval period. Features underneath the embankment and outside of the enclosure indicated earlier medieval ditches which are believed to represent a leat and two drainage ditches to take water away from the castle defences. Two small, undateable pits were also in this vicinity. Further pits and ditches were identified outside of the enclosure.

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of the project was to monitor groundworks associated with the installation of play equipment and establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the area of disturbance.

The fieldwork comprised the continuous monitoring of the excavation of the foundations for the equipment. The depths of the excavations were dependent upon the depth required for the type of equipment.

Thirty-two individual foundations for the new play equipment were excavated to the individual dimensions required, in accordance with the plan approved by English Heritage (simplified in fig 2). All foundations were hand dug and the sections cleaned sufficiently to enable the identification and definition of potential archaeological features (Fig 6). The edges of the safety matting laid around each piece of equipment were buried beneath the surface to a depth of approximately 100mm, the turves being removed by hand and replaced over the matting (Fig 7).

Recording followed standard NA procedures as described in the *Fieldwork Manual* (NA 2006). All works were conducted in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IfA 2010) and *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (IfA 1994, revised 2008). Photography was carried out using 35mm black and white film and colour slides, supplemented with digital images.



Area 1, an example of the stratification Fig 6



Area 2, an example of the safety matting after the edges have been buried Fig 7

4 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

4.1 General stratigraphy

The underlying geology was glacial till, which was encountered between 260mm - 300mm below the modern ground surface in all excavated areas. This occurred as mid brownish-yellow clay mottled with mid blueish grey clay. Inclusions consisted of pieces of chalk up to 50mm in diameter, pieces of flint up to 150mm in diameter and very occasional small pieces of ironstone. Occasionally, a subsoil consisting of an indistinct interface, about 25mm in thickness, occurred between the topsoil and the natural geology. The topsoil was a dark yellowish-brown silty loam with very few inclusions (Fig 6).

4.2 The groundworks and archaeological evidence

Area 1

Pick up Sticks Climbing Frame (Fig 2).

Seven holes measuring 400mm x 400mm x 500mm deep and two holes measuring 300mm x 300mm x 300mm deep. No archaeological finds or features were encountered.

Area 2

Basket Swing (Fig 2).

Four holes measuring 1000mm x 800mm x 800mm deep. The concrete base and remaining reinforcement for a now-removed piece of play equipment was encountered in the north-westernmost hole (Fig 8). No archaeological finds or features were encountered.



Area 2, north-westernmost foundation, including the concrete base of an earlier piece of equipment Fig 8

Area 3

Pendular See Saw (Fig 2).

One hole measuring 1100mm x 1100mm x 1100mm deep. No archaeological finds or features were encountered.

Area 4

Table Tennis Table (Fig 2).

Four holes measuring 400mm x 400mm x 300mm deep. No archaeological finds or features were encountered.

Area 5

Dolphin Springer (Fig 2).

One hole measuring 1600mm x 700mm x 500mm deep. No archaeological finds or features were encountered.

Area 6

Rodeo Board (Fig 2).

One hole measuring 900mm x 900mm x 560mm deep and one hole measuring 400mm x 400mm x 500mm deep. No archaeological finds or features were encountered.

Area 7

Sprawling Bench (Fig 2).

Four holes measuring 1200mm x 400mm x 400mm deep. The natural geology was not reached; the subsoil consisted of a dark brown-orange silty clay with inclusions reflecting the chalk and flint of the natural. No archaeological finds or features were encountered, however modern geotextile and areas of disturbance were encountered which probably reflects the backfill of the excavation of 1993.

Area 8

Litter Bin (Fig 2).

One hole measuring 1000mm x 1000mm x 200mm deep. No archaeological finds or features were encountered.

Area 9

Bench (Fig 2).

Two holes measuring 900mm x 400mm x 300mm deep. The natural geology was not reached; the material immediately below the grass roots consisted of a light orange-brown clayey loam with occasional chalky inclusions which may indicate the earthwork structure, although too little was exposed to enable a satisfactory conclusion. No other archaeological finds or features were encountered.

Area 10

Picnic Table (Fig 2).

Four holes measuring 300mm x 300mm x 300mm deep. No archaeological finds or features were encountered.

4.3 Animal infestation and erosion mitigation work

Excess spoil from the natural geology was used to fill the deeper rabbit holes in the earthworks and covered with imported topsoil (Fig 9). The shallower holes were filled with imported topsoil or with excess turves from the burying of the edges of the grass matting.

None of the rabbit holes in the embankments were observed to be deeper than approximately 130mm. The rabbit and mole holes inside the monument were shallow and therefore back-filled with the original spoil created by the animal.



Rabbit damage to the bank filled with excess natural spoil and imported topsoil Fig 9

One large area of extensive rabbit damage, located within the shallow earthworks to the north-east of the site, was covered with a layer of excess natural spoil and covered with imported topsoil. Figure 10 indicates the location within the easternmost portion of the inverted T-shaped earthwork.



Large area of rabbit damage filled with excess natural spoil and imported topsoil
Fig 10

Excess spoil and imported topsoil was used to cover areas of erosion around the existing slide in the east-west bank (Figs 11 and 12). This was then covered with the safety matting to prevent the spoil being washed away and to prevent further erosion (Fig 13). The edges of the safety matting were buried using the same method as the rest of the site. No archaeological features were encountered: sweet wrappers and glass were present in the topsoil which were contemporary with the installation of the slide in 1977 to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

Figure 14 indicates the locations of the mitigation work.



Erosion around the slide Fig 11



The same erosion covered with excess natural spoil and imported topsoil Fig 12

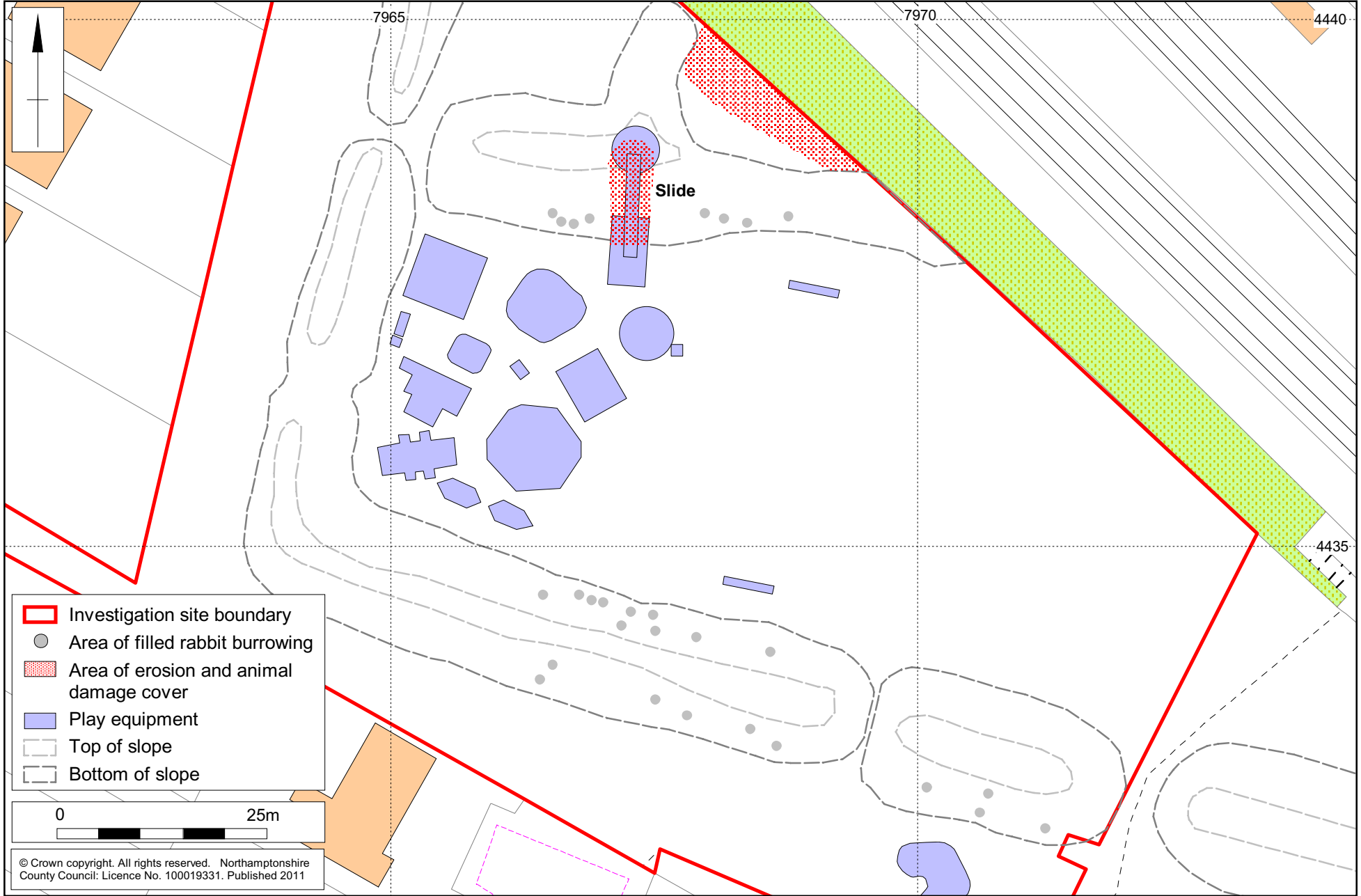


The erosion mitigation works completed by the installation of safety matting Fig 13

Scale 1:500

Location of erosion and animal damage mitigation work

Fig 14



5 DISCUSSION

The excavations of the foundations for the play equipment did not expose any archaeological finds or features.

The topsoil contained only material from the 19th century to the present decade.

The scarcity of finds from the excavation in 1993 led Buckinghamshire County Museum Archaeological Service to conclude that the material used to create the embankments was brought into the area from areas away from settlement activity (Bonner *et al* 1997). The relatively level nature of the natural geological layer beneath the southernmost part of the enclosure may indicate that this was the area that the material was brought in from, obliterating any features which may have predated the earthworks, however, the narrow window of dates for the finds in the topsoil may indicate that the site has been stripped and levelled since the 19th century. It may be speculated that the fact that the railway was built in the 1830s and labour and materials would have been on hand to carry out any levelling work required to create a more useable space within the earthworks, that any features within this area may have been cleared during that time.

No residual pottery was found in the topsoil during this watching brief; however, the area excavated during the refurbishment was relatively small, lowering the odds of finding pottery in an area already proved sparse in the excavations of 1993, and supporting the theory that the area has been subject to levelling.

Outside of the earthworks, in Area 7 (Fig 2), the excavation terminated in the subsoil and so no features were encountered. However, two of the foundation excavations revealed modern geotextile and areas of disturbance which probably indicate the backfill of the excavations in 1993.

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APPENDIX

Full description of Castlethorpe Castle, taken from Milton Keynes HER via www.heritagegateway.org.uk

Full Description:

- 1) Motte & 2 baileys. Outworks W & SW of motte. Remains of rectangular enclosure? Defences consist of bank & ditch, with 2 entrances on W side (b5).
- 2) Ring- work partly scraped into a motte adjoining Church. Earthworks further S & W are probably remodelling after 1292 licence to crenellate (b6).
- 3) Scheduled (b9). (BCC notes)
- 4) The monument which falls into two areas, includes Castlethorpe Castle, a motte and bailey castle with possible re-used ringwork, a second bailey, enclosure and fishponds.

It is believed that the site was fortified by William Maudit some time in the twelfth century and that it served as the stronghold for the barony of Hanslope. In 1217 the castle was garrisoned against the crown and laid siege to by Folkes de Brent (or Breaute?) on behalf of the King. The castle was taken by de Brent and is thought to have been slighted so that it could no longer be used as a military stronghold. Subsequently, in 1292, William Beauchamp obtained a licence from the crown to fortify a house and garden at Castlethorpe and, although the exact location of this house is uncertain, it is thought to have been the vicinity of the earlier castle.

Today Castlethorpe Castle survives as a complicated system of earthworks which extend over an area of some 10 hectares. The motte and bailey itself, the earliest part of the works, lies immediately north-west of the church, occupying a naturally strong strategic position overlooking the valley of the River Tove. The motte lies in the southern quarter of the bailey and has the general appearance of having being disturbed or slighted at some time in the past. It survives as a substantial earthen mound, oval in plan, and with dimensions of 40m WNW by ESE and 27m transversely. Rising 4m from the interior of the bailey on the north side to a narrow summit 8m by 4m, it falls 2.1m on the south side to a platform with dimensions of 7m E to W by 5m N to S. The platform is slightly hollowed to a depth of 0.3m and could represent the foundations cut for a tower, though no surface remains now survive. This hollow may alternatively relate to a second World War gun position that is said to have been dug into the motte. The surrounding bailey is roughly circular in shape with an interior diameter of 100m. It remains well defined and intact throughout most of its extent, with the exception of SE quarter. Here the church and churchyard encroach into the site and have destroyed any surface traces of earthworks. Where the bailey defences do survive as earthworks they are of considerable strength. In the SW they utilise the natural hillside to maximum effect, the bailey scarp, possibly artificially steepened, rising to a height of 6m from the bottom of the outer ditch which is over 6m wide and 2m deep. Around the western quarter, the defences comprise a substantial ditch 18m wide and up to 3.4 m deep on its inner slope, 2.6m on its outer, this is flanked by an outer counterscarp bank up to 1.7m high. Two causewayed entrances cross the ditch in this western area; both are some 4m wide and of similar appearance, and although it is unlikely that both are original, it is impossible from surface inspection to say which is the earlier. The ditch continues around the north of

the enclosure and is of similar proportions, though the outer bank ends 60m east of the northern entrance gap. Towards the eastern end of the ditch a bank 1.7m high surmounts the inner slope of the ditch running for some 50m before ending in the boundary of the churchyard. The interior of the bailey is generally flat, though with discreet surface irregularities which indicate possible building foundations, linear undulations and shallow hollows to the north-east of the bailey represent the remains of a field system and subsidiary buildings.

The considerable strength of the bailey defences in relation to the less impressive motte gives defence emphasis to the bailey. This may indicate an initial earthwork phase with a motte added at a later date.

To the west of the motte and bailey castle, at a distance of some 50m, is a linear earthwork orientated NE to SW, and running for a total length of 220m. This appears to be designed as an outer defence to the main earthworks, creating a second outer bailey. The southern portion of this earthwork comprises a substantial rampart averaging 14m wide and 2.2m high, with an outer ditch along its western side 5m wide and 1.5m deep. For some 60m from its south end the east edge of the rampart has been cut back and revetted to form the western boundary of a sunken garden. The remaining northern 80m ends in a mound which has been interpreted as a barbican mound, designed to protect an entrance which passes through the outer work at this point. The outer ditch of the work continues north beyond the entrance gap, running out after some 70m. A slight bank and scarp links at right angles from this line of ditch to the outer bank of the inner bailey. If the southern end of the rampart also once linked to the inner bailey, suggested by a slight east turning at this end, then it would have formed a rectangular outer enclosure some 200m long by 60m wide. However, the modern road and railway line which cut across this area NW to SE have destroyed any earthwork surface indications which may have existed in this area.

To the SW of the railway line are the fragmentary remains of another earthwork, They comprise a bank averaging 16m wide and 2,1m high with an outer ditch 4m wide and 0,4m deep, It runs for 120m NW to SE before turning north for 80m and appears to represent the south-western corner of a rectangular enclosure, the northern portions of which have been destroyed by the construction of the railway cutting, This may have formerly connected to the linear earthwork on the north side of the railway line. However, their respective alignments differ, suggesting that they are separate works. In the interior of this enclosure, in close proximity to the railway boundary, is a T- shaped section of bank 1m high. This has been interpreted as the remains of two rectangular fish ponds. It is possible that these now fragmentary earthworks represent all that survives of the house and garden constructed by William Beauchamp in 1292 (EH scheduling notes)

History:

1217 - Castle of Robert Maudit sacked and destroyed by Fawkes de Breaute (VCH IV p.349)

1218 - Fawkes de Breaute granted castle and all the lands formerly held by William Maudit (VCH IV p.349)

1292 - William Beauchamp obtained a licence from the crown to fortify a house and garden at Castlethorpe.

1537 - Stone obtained from the castle at Castlethorpe used to build a wall around Henry VIII's new bowling alley at Grafton Regis.

1987 - watching brief of earthworks south of the railway.

1949 - Castle grounds scheduled on 13th June

1991? - The owner of the castle transfers the ownership of the site to the Parish Council as part of planning permission for housing development.

1992 - SAM consent for erection of a fence and gate.

1993 - Area of SAM amended on 22nd November

1994 - SAM consent for interpretive panels, repair of eroded areas and screen planting along the north east boundary

2004 - evaluation revealed a section of the castle moat

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Northamptonshire County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology



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



Northamptonshire
County Council