



Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological observation, investigation and
recording at The Masonic Hall, Northampton Road
Towcester, Northamptonshire
March-April 2012



Northamptonshire Archaeology

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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM 126867

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	Archaeological observation, investigation and recording at the Masonic Hall, Northampton Road, Towcester, Northamptonshire, March-April 2012	
Short description	Northamptonshire Archaeology undertook observation, investigation and recording at the Masonic Hall, Northampton Road, Towcester, Northamptonshire in March and April 2012. The work was carried out during the excavation of new wall footings for an extension to the hall. A layer of possible Roman date was uncovered in places, but the excavations were largely characterised by a thick post-medieval make-up layer overlain by modern deposits relating to the land use prior to the start of works.	
Project type	Archaeological observation, investigation and recording	
Site status	None	
Previous work	Archaeological watching brief 1997 (Morris and Parry 1997)	
Current land use	Demolished building and car park	
Future work	None	
Monument type/ period	Roman and post-medieval	
Significant finds	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address	Masonic Hall, Northampton Road, Towcester	
Study area	316 sq m	
OS Easting & Northing	SP 6922 4890	
Height aOD	c89.6m above Ordnance Datum	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Liz Mordue, Northamptonshire County Council	
Project Design originator	Jim Brown, Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	James Ladocha, Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project Manager	Jim Brown, Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Sponsor or funding body	Tuckley Chester Design Ltd	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	19/03/12	
End date	11/04/12	
ARCHIVES	Location:	Content
Physical	Northamptonshire Archaeology archive store	1 small archive box
Paper		Site monitoring sheets, permatrace plans & sections, site registers, photographic archive, background documents
Digital		Client PDF report
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Title	Archaeological observation, investigation and recording at the Masonic Hall, Northampton Road, Towcester, Northamptonshire, March-April 2012	
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION, INVESTIGATION AND RECORDING AT
THE MASONIC HALL, NORTHAMPTON ROAD, TOWCESTER
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

March - April 2012

Abstract

Northamptonshire Archaeology undertook observation, investigation and recording at the Masonic Hall, Northampton Road, Towcester, Northamptonshire in March and April 2012. The work was carried out during the excavation of new wall footings for an extension to the hall. A layer of possible Roman date was uncovered in places, but the excavations were largely characterised by a thick post-medieval make-up layer overlain by modern deposits relating to the land use prior to the start of works.

1 INTRODUCTION

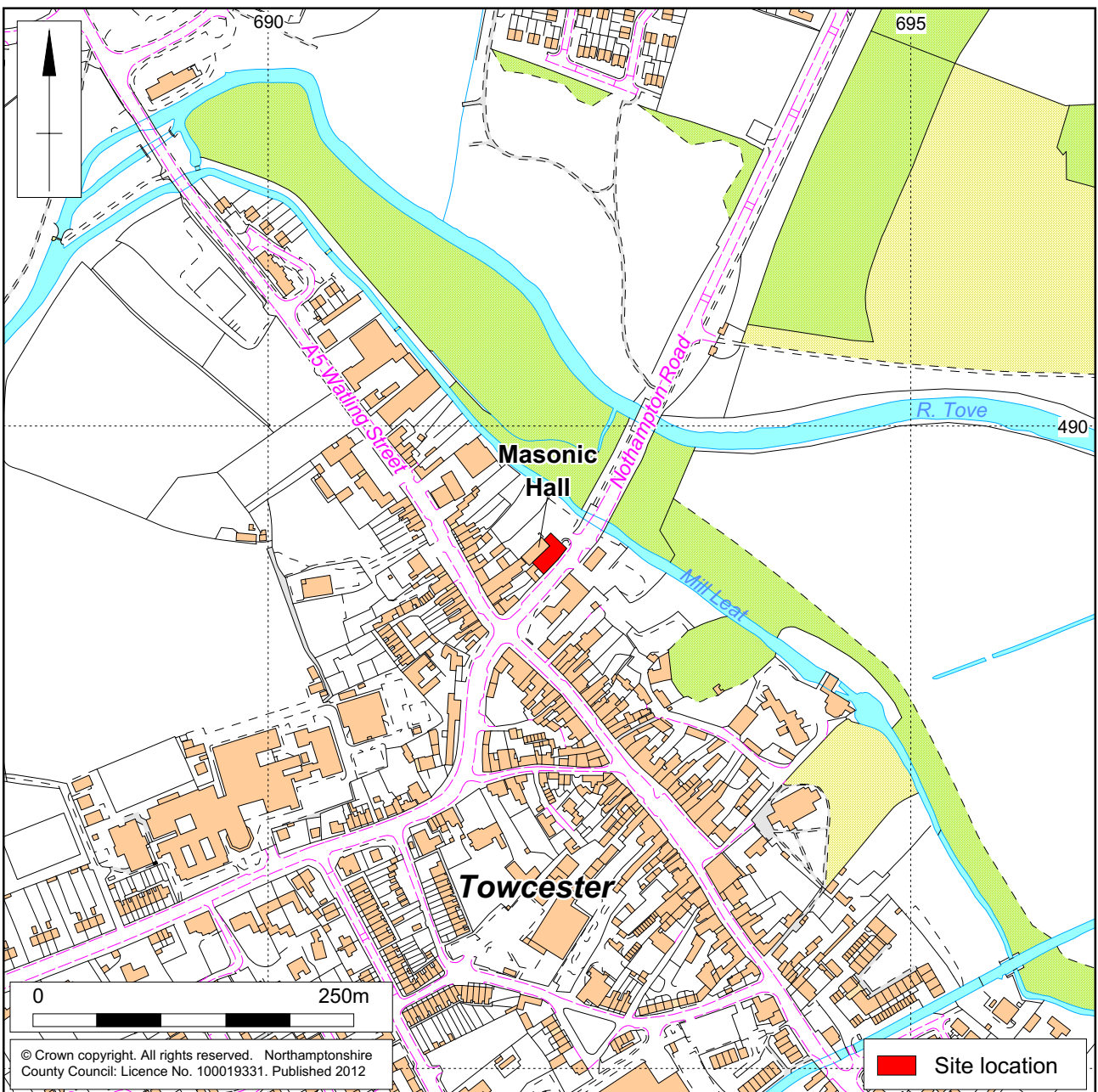
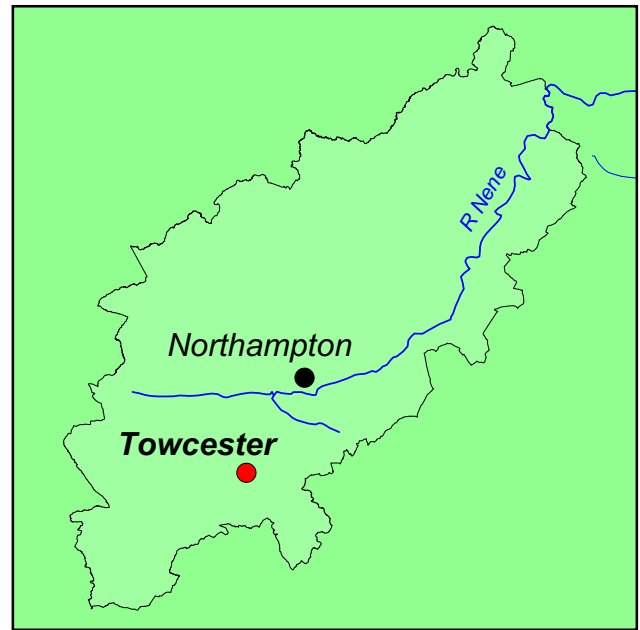
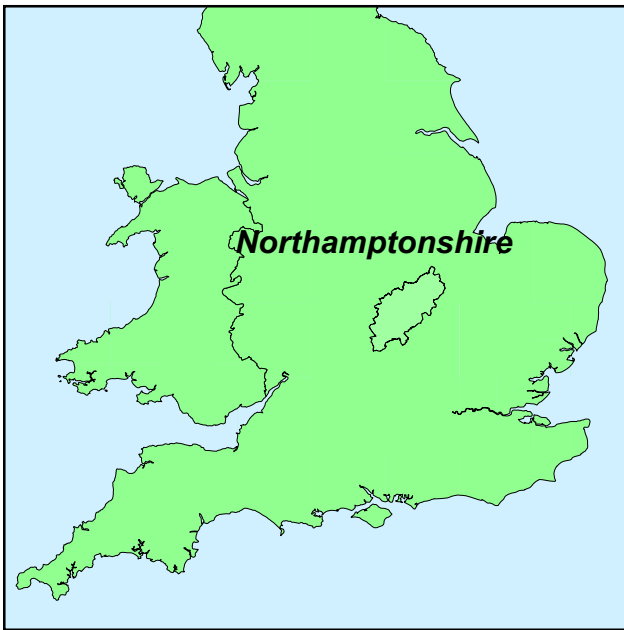
Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by Tuckley Chester Design Ltd to conduct archaeological observation, investigation and recording as part of building works to extend the Masonic Hall at Northampton Road, Towcester, Northamptonshire (Fig 1; NGR SP 6922 4890). The works involved the part demolition of a single storey office accommodation (Tove Court), carried out prior to the start of the work, and subsequent ground preparations with the excavation of new wall footings. The work was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation produced by Northamptonshire Archaeology (Brown 2011) to meet the requirements of the local authority brief, issued by Northamptonshire County Council (Mordue 2011).

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Archaeological background

A pre-Roman settlement existed in the sharply angled bend of the River Tove on the north-east side of the town. Remains of this settlement typified by dark “Belgic” style pottery were identified during excavations near Bury Mount (Audouy 1984, 25). It is likely that the town may have begun as a *Vicus*, a small civilian settlement, and became a point in need of defence when it became a focus for Roman political and economic activity. It has been suggested that it was the stage for significant disturbances which were part of widespread conflagrations in the area during second part of the 2nd century AD (Woodfield 1995, 140-143). The burgeoning Roman town of *Lactodurum* (Towcester) was located on the Watling Street (A5), a major Roman military route built between London and the legionary fortress at Wroxeter, near Shrewsbury. It may have been used as a staging post during periods of military activity and a likely target for localised insurrection.

There is a significant lack of published work for the archaeology of the town in all post-Roman periods. Although a large number of sites have been investigated in the town and its hinterland over the last 30 years, only recent work at Bury Mount (145m to the south-east) has begun to elucidate on the nature of Saxon, Norman and later medieval settlement (Brown and Soden 2008). Far from their being ignored by archaeologists, in most extensive excavations in the town, medieval horizons have been largely absent. Consequently medieval Towcester is poorly understood.



Scale 1:5,000

Site location Fig 1

Although residual late Saxon and medieval pottery has been found, previous enquiry has concentrated on pure speculation as to the form of the documented Saxon refortification of the town as a Saxon *burh* (Audouy 1984, 27).

A wall of possible late medieval date was identified at Meeting Lane during an evaluation, but on the whole evidence has suggested that most medieval activity had been confined to a limited area along the Watling Street frontage (Steadman and Shaw 1991, 7-8, 10; Atkins and Woodfield 1999, 32). This view was supported by the evaluation at 163-165 Watling Street where, despite a reasonable assemblage of residual medieval pottery, only one pit was identified to that period (Prentice 2001, 13). This fragmentary picture of evidence has been mirrored elsewhere with some consistency.

The town history becomes increasingly easier to identify into the present as the dearth of evidence is replaced with a greater number of post-medieval finds and records. Most prominent amongst these is the interest in the town's role during the English Civil War (1642-9) when it was garrisoned for the Royalists. Although the vernacular buildings are rather less well represented, several attempts have been made to identify points at which the town was specifically fortified during the Civil War. This includes evidence from the former cinema site, Sponne School and the former filling station, currently Harley Davidson motors (Jackson 1983; Audouy 1984; Woodfield 1992).

A watching brief was carried out previously on the Masonic Hall site when the Tove Court extension was built in 1997. A number of layered deposits were recorded dating from the first to third centuries with a wall and pit found at the same level but otherwise undated. These were sealed by a make-up layer, between 1.0m and 1.5m thick, which contained small amounts of late medieval pottery and may have been introduced to raise the area out of the floodplain (Morris and Parry 1997).

Furthermore, archaeological work was conducted in the Masonic Yard on the north side of the existing hall in 1991 (Jackson and Morris 1991, 24-25). Archaeological remains were identified that provided a chronological sequence of activity from the late 1st century AD through to the 17th century. These included Roman timber buildings, later replaced in stone, and part of the Roman defensive ditch.

2.2 Topography and geology

The site is situated on the north-east side of Towcester town centre at c89.6m above Ordnance Datum. The land lies on the west terrace of the River Tove, and is bound to the south-east by Northampton Road. The geology of the valley is mapped by the British Geological Survey as alluvium (British Geological Survey Sheet 202, 1969). However, excavation has demonstrated that it is overlain in part by River Terrace Gravels which form a low plateau on the flood plain.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the work was to identify any archaeological remains that may be revealed by the development and then determine and understand the nature, function and character of such remains in their cultural and environmental setting. The objectives were established in pursuit of national and regional research agendas (EH 1991; Cooper 2006 and Knight *et al*, 2012).

The specific objectives of archaeological observation, investigation and recording, as determined by the Brief (Mordue 2011), were to supply the following information for the purposes of advising the planning decision:

- the location, extent, nature and date of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present,
- establish the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscape,
- recover artefacts to assist in the development of artefactual type series studies within the region,
- recover palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions as an intrinsic part of the investigation.

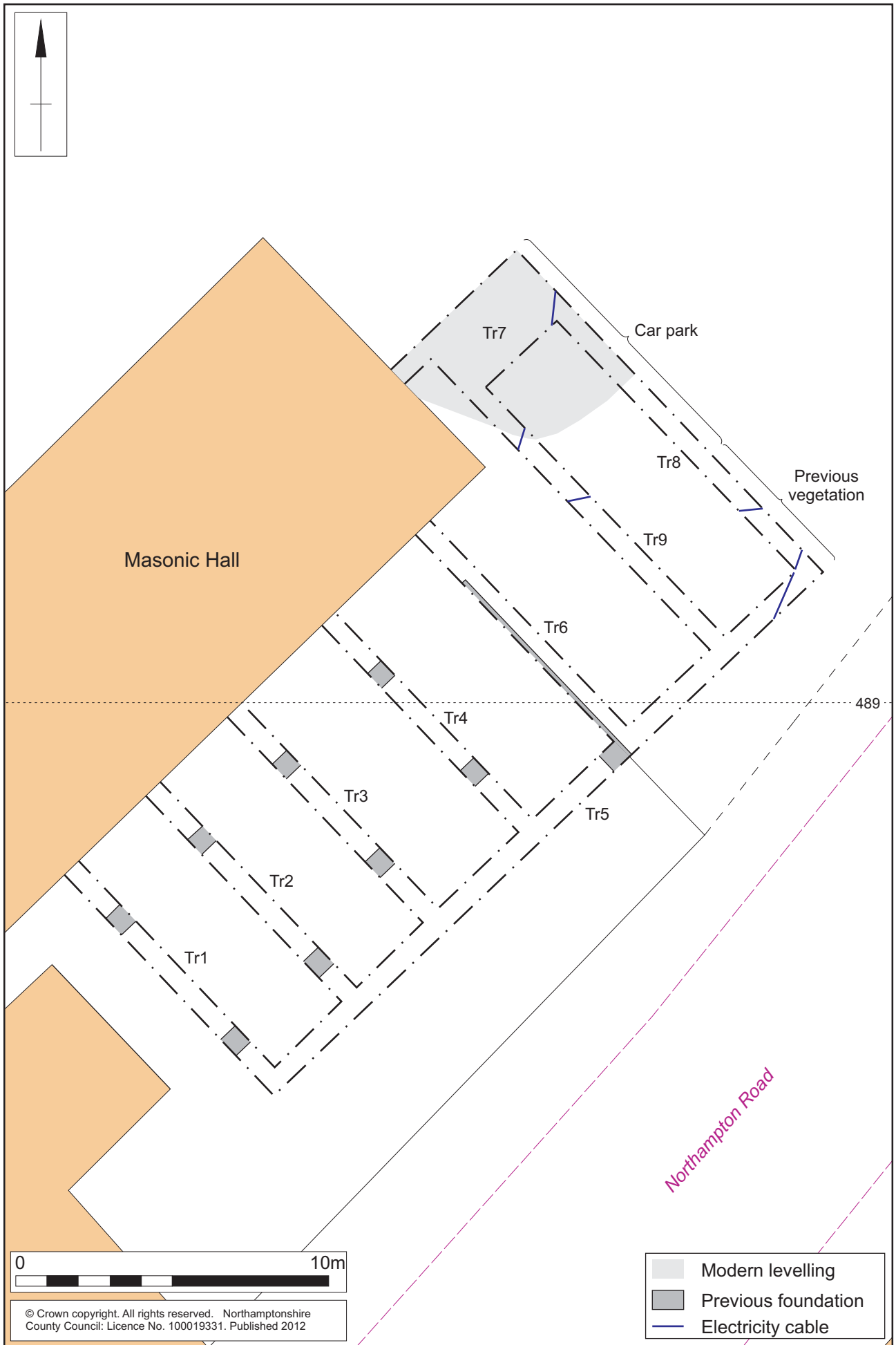
If archaeological remains were encountered they were to be investigated and recorded with specific reference to the previous excavation of the site (Jackson and Morris 1991). However, in light of the overall lack of archaeological features it was not possible to expand on this earlier work.

4 METHODOLOGY

The part demolition of the single storey office accommodation, Tove Court, took place prior to the start of archaeological observation, investigation and recording. Its foundations were not removed. The subsequent works then took place within the area of this demolished building and the adjacent car park (Fig 2). The area was levelled, which involved the removal of the tarmac from the car park area, as well as paths, and the stripping of some topsoil from a previous area of vegetation between Northampton Road and the car park. The foundation trenches were then excavated from this level. All excavations were conducted using a mechanical excavator with a 0.7m, or occasionally 0.4m, wide bucket. The foundation trenches were 0.75m wide and on average 1.0m deep. Where the trenches crossed the previous Tove Court foundations, these were exposed on either side and removed using a hydraulic breaker. The exception to this was when the previous foundations ran parallel to a trench and protruded into it by 150mm. In this case, the foundation was left *in situ* and a 0.4m bucket was used to excavate along the side of the foundation. Due to space constraints on site, two trenches in the north of the site had to be dug as one with an area excavated, 2.25m by 4m, to the average depth. Site visits were conducted during the excavation of all the foundation trenches.

Potential archaeological features and deposits were cleaned using a trowel within the confines of the excavation. All recording on site followed standard Northamptonshire Archaeology recording methods (NA 2011). A full photographic record comprising both 35mm monochrome negatives and colour transparencies was maintained, supplementing digital photographs which form the principal photographic record for the purpose of this report. A 1:50 scale plan was drawn showing the excavated foundation trenches in relation to the current Masonic Hall. This was annotated with reference to the *pro-forma* record sheets.

The archaeological investigation was undertaken in accordance with current best archaeological practice as defined in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standards and Guidance* (IfA 2008), *Code of Conduct* (IfA 2010) and the procedural documents of English Heritage (EH 1991; 2009).



Scale 1:150 (A4)

Foundation trench location Fig 2

5 OBSERVATION, INVESTIGATION AND RECORDING

The natural substrate was not encountered within the excavations. The earliest deposit encountered was mid greyish yellow-brown silty clay with occasional sandy inclusions, at least 150mm thick. This was uncovered in the north-west of trench 4, and areas of trenches 7 and 8, and was only seen when the foundation trenches were slightly deeper (Fig 3). It was therefore likely that this layer was consistent beneath the site but the boundary between it and the overlying layer probably undulated at a little over 1m deep. Within trench 4 this layer contained 13 sherds of Roman pottery dating to the 2nd – 4th centuries AD. This layer was most likely the same as layer (4) seen in the 1997 watching brief (Morris and Parry 1997). Overlying this was a thick layer of dark greyish-brown silty clay with occasional charcoal inclusions, this ranged in thickness from 0.6m to greater than 1.0m. This make-up layer was seen in all the foundation trenches and contained a mix of post-medieval finds and residual Roman pottery. A number of the Roman sherds found within trenches 7 and 8 may have come from the underlying layer. It was likely that the post-medieval make-up layer was the same as layer (2) in the previous watching brief, in which it was concluded to have been introduced to raise the area out of the floodplain (Morris and Parry 1997). This layer was cut by the concrete and breeze block foundations of the demolished building and by two electricity cables (Fig 4).



Trench 7 section, looking north-east Fig 3



Trench 1 section showing previous foundation, looking south-west Fig 4

In trench 7, and the north of trenches 8 and 9, the post-medieval make-up layer was overlain by dark grey silty clay with patches of yellowish sandy clay, up to 200mm thick (Fig 2). This contained frequent modern pottery and glass, occasional plastic and a bent crowbar, which were not retained. The layer was probably deposited when the Masonic Hall was built, as a levelling layer. This was overlain by the car park surface which was pinkish Type 1 hardcore, 200mm thick, under 150mm of tarmac (Fig 3). The car park surface continued beyond the modern levelling where it directly overlaid the post-medieval make-up layer (Fig 2).

In the south-east of trenches 8 and 9, and the north-east of trench 5, between the car park and Northampton Road, the post-medieval make-up layer was overlain by modern material (Fig 2). This was mid yellowish-brown sandy clay with frequent brick, tile, plastic and charcoal, 150mm thick. This was overlain by dark greyish-brown loamy clay topsoil. The area was heavily root disturbed and the post-medieval make-up layer contained some intrusive fragments of brick, tile and mortar via bioturbation.

Within the area of the demolished building the post-medieval make-up layer was overlain by Type 1 hardcore and orange sand. Furthermore, a tarmac footpath with mixed silty clay and a rubble stone base ran around the edge of the Masonic Hall.

6 THE FINDS By Tora Hylton

6.1 Roman pottery

Twenty-three sherds of Roman pottery with a combined weight of 737g were recovered from trenches 3-4 and 7-8. The majority (13 sherds) were located within greyish-yellow silty clay visible in the base of the north-west of trench 4. The remainder were from the overlying dark grey silty clay. There are no diagnostically early sherds, the fabrics and forms suggest a 2nd to 4th century date. The assemblage is represented by locally produced coarsewares, regional wares and imported wares. There are few diagnostic sherds, but these include, a Type C51 flanged bowl copying a Dragendorff Type 38 hemispherical bowl in red colour-coated Oxford ware (Young 1977, fig 59), which dates to c240-290; a BB1 type bowl with a linear motif (arcs), which dates to the 2nd-4th centuries (cf Brown *et al* 1983, fig 19, 18). Other forms include a necked jar in soft pink grog (cf Marney 1989, fig 27, 9) dating from the late 3rd to 4th centuries and fragments from a pedestal beaker in colour-coated ware and a shallow bowl in greyware.

Imported wares are represented by three miniscule fragments of Samian, including a fragment of a footring and two body sherds, one with vestige of mould-decoration.

Table 1: Roman pottery quantification

Roman fabric type	Trench 3 No/Wg (g)		Trench 4 No/Wg (g)		Trench 5 No/Wg (g)		Trench 7 No/Wg (g)		Trench 8 No/Wg (g)	
Greyware	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	20	-	-
Grog-tempered ware	2	88	-	-	-	-	1	22	3	145
Oxford Ware	-	-	1	22	-	-	-	-	-	-
Samian	-	-	3	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Shell-gritted	-	-			-	-	-	-	1	2
BB 1 Type Ware	-	-	3	43	-	-	-	-		
Soft Pink Grog	-	-	2	32	-	-	-	-		
Colour-coated wares	-	-	3	342	-	-	-	-	1	5
Misc Sandy Wares	-	-	1	4	1	10	-	-	-	-
Total	2	88	13	445	1	10	2	42	5	152

6.2 Post-medieval pottery

There are 13 post-medieval sherds with a combined weight of 130g. Pottery was recovered from trenches 1, 2, 5 and 8. The assemblage ranges in date from the 17th to the 20th centuries and comprises mainly small undiagnostic pieces, recovered from dark greyish-brown silty clay which characterised the majority of the excavation. Diagnostic forms include a pantheon in Iron Glazed red earthenware (CTS F426) which dates to the late 18th/19th centuries and part of a stoneware ginger beer bottle marked with 'BEER' and 'ORTHAMPTO' beneath and identical to another example underglaze transfer printed with 'Howard & Son, Ginger Brewed Beer Northampton (Cox 1977, page 29).

Table 2: Post-medieval pottery quantification

Post-medieval pottery (CTS fabric)	Trench 1 No/Wg (g)		Trench 2 No/Wg (g)		Trench 5 No/Wg (g)		Trench 8 No/Wg (g)	
Underglazed transfer printed (CTS 416)	-	-	1	11	3	8	-	-
Nottingham Stoneware (CTS 417)	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Iron-glazed coarsewares (CTS 426)	2	53	-	-	-	-	-	-
Local stoneware	1	24	-	-	-	-	1	4
Glazed earthenware	1	11	-	-	-	-	1	9
Unglazed earthenware (flowerpot)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Utilitarian whiteware	1	5	1	1	-	-	-	-
Total	6	97	2	12	3	8	2	13

6.3 Post-medieval finds

There are five stem fragments from clay tobacco-pipes and four sherds of window glass. The stem fragments were recovered from trenches 5, 7 and 8, they measure up to 84mm in length and the small size of the bore (4/64th and 5/64th) suggests that they date from the late 18th -19th centuries.

The fragments of glass were recovered from Trench 8, they have a greenish tinge and join together to form a piece measuring c58 by 50 mm in size. The piece has one straight edge which furnished with a marked shadow, indicating that the glass fragments are part of a quarry and that the decaying window lead had been *in situ* for some time prior to deposition.

7 DISCUSSION

Archaeological observation, investigation and recording identified a layer of possible Roman date; however, this was rarely uncovered due to the relatively shallow depth of the foundation trenches. The excavation was largely characterised by a thick post-medieval layer that may have been introduced to lift the area out of the flood plain. Both of these layers are reflected in the earlier watching brief on the construction of the now demolished area of Tove Court (Morris and Parry 1997). However, the current excavations did not have the depth required to uncover the possible Roman features and layers that may be related to those revealed in the excavations to the north (Jackson and Morris 1991, 24-25).

The post-medieval layer was overlain, and cut by, modern deposits and foundations related to the construction of the Masonic Hall, Tove Court and the surrounding environs.

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