



Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Trial Trench Evaluation at Downham Road, Wickford Essex



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Northamptonshire
County Council

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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT

PROJECT		OASIS No: 139379	
Project name	Archaeological trial trench evaluation at Downham Road, Wickford, Essex		
Short description (250 words maximum)	Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by Gladedale Estates Ltd. to conduct an archaeological evaluation at Downham Road, Wickford, Essex prior to a proposed residential development on the site. Twelve trenches were excavated. Most trenches were excavated as planned though a few were shortened or re-positioned to accommodate public footpaths running through the site or to avoid newt fencing recently erected around the perimeter.		
Project type (eg DBA, evaluation etc)	Evaluation		
Site status (none, NT, SAM etc)	None		
Previous work (SMR numbers etc)	None		
Current Land use	Pasture, Public Footpaths		
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	Unknown		
Monument type/ period	None		
Significant finds (artefact type and period)	None		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County	Essex		
Site address (including postcode)	Downham Road, Wickford		
Study area (sq.m or ha)	1080 sq m		
OS Easting & Northing (use grid sq. letter code)	TQ 741 948		
Height OD	21m max 17m min aOD		
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)		
Project brief originator	Historic Environment Consultant, ECC		
Project Design originator	NA		
Director/Supervisor	Chris Chinnock		
Project Manager	Ian Meadows		
Sponsor or funding body	Gladedale Estates Limited		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date	20/11/12		
End date	23/11/12		
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)	
Physical	NA		
Paper	Southend Museum (SOUMS:A2010.5)	Site file	
Digital	Southend Museum (SOUMS:A2010.5)	Mapinfo plans, Word report	
BIBLIOGRAPHY			
Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)			
Title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation at Downham Road, Wickford, Essex		
Serial title & volume	12/217		
Author(s)	Chris Chinnock		
Page numbers			
Date			

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCH EVALUATION AT
DOWNHAM ROAD, WICKFORD, ESSEX
NOVEMBER 2012**

Abstract

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by Gladedale Estates Ltd. to conduct an archaeological evaluation at Downham Road, Wickford, Essex, prior to a proposed residential development on the site. Twelve trenches were excavated to an agreed plan. Though a few were slightly re-positioned to accommodate public footpaths running through the site or to avoid new fencing recently erected around the perimeter. No archaeological features were observed, although modern plough scarring and root disturbance was noted.

1 INTRODUCTION

In November 2012, Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) was commissioned by Gladedale Estates Ltd. to conduct an archaeological evaluation at Downham Road, Wickford, Essex (NGR TQ 741 948). Planning permission has been granted for residential development on the site (Planning No. 11/01378/FUL) comprising the erection of 68 dwellings.

The site lies within an area of potential archaeological interest and sensitivity due to its close proximity to the moated Berne Hall immediately to the south of the site. Consequently a programme of archaeological evaluation within the area of the proposed development was required. The requirements were outlined in a brief issued by Historic Environment Consultant, Essex County Council (ECC 2012) and the Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by NA (2012).

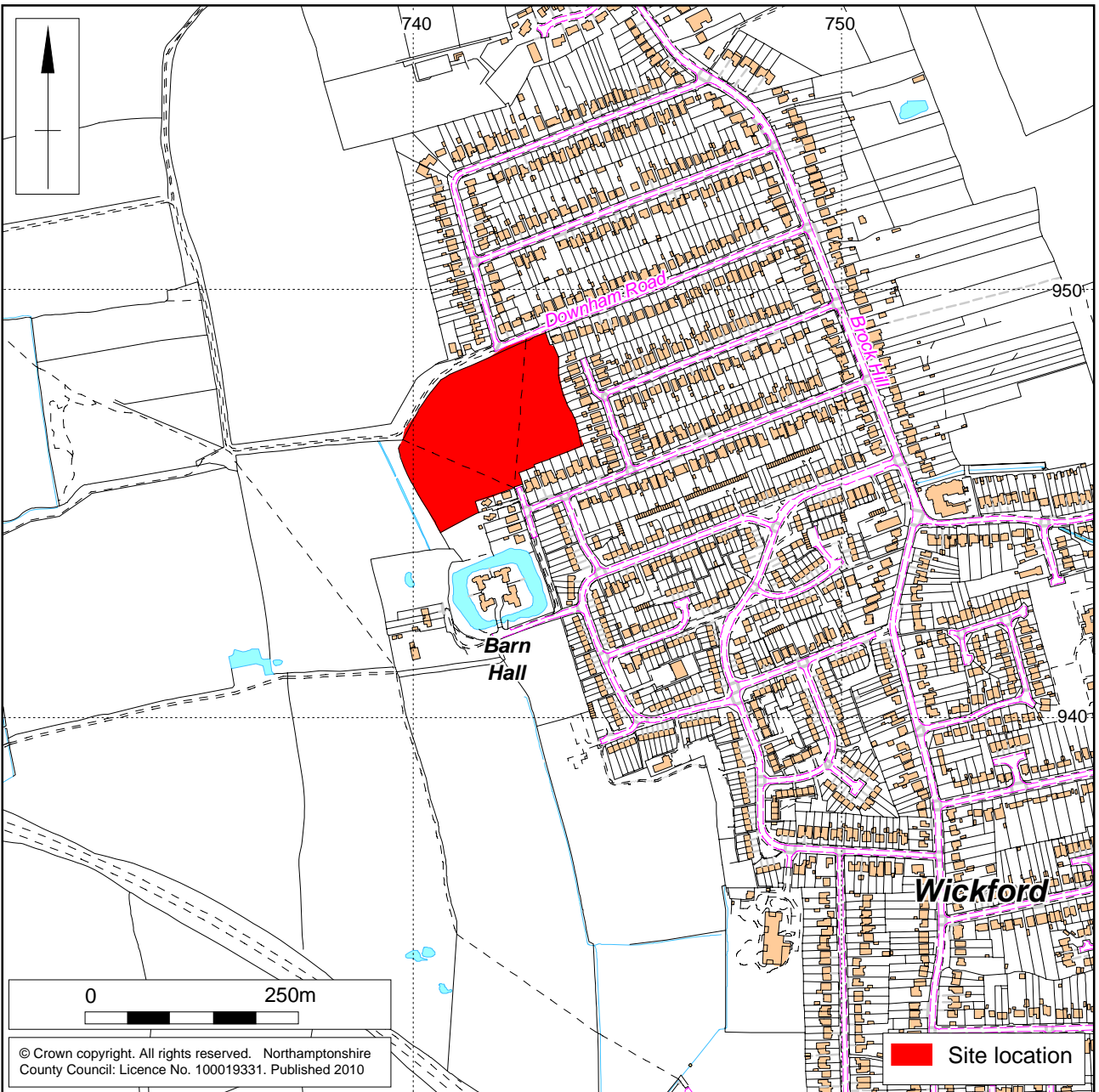
2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The evaluation of the site was designed to provide information that will allow for the effective targeting of further investigation of the site, if required, prior to or during the early phases of its development.

The following information was required to allow the development of a strategy for further investigation of the site:

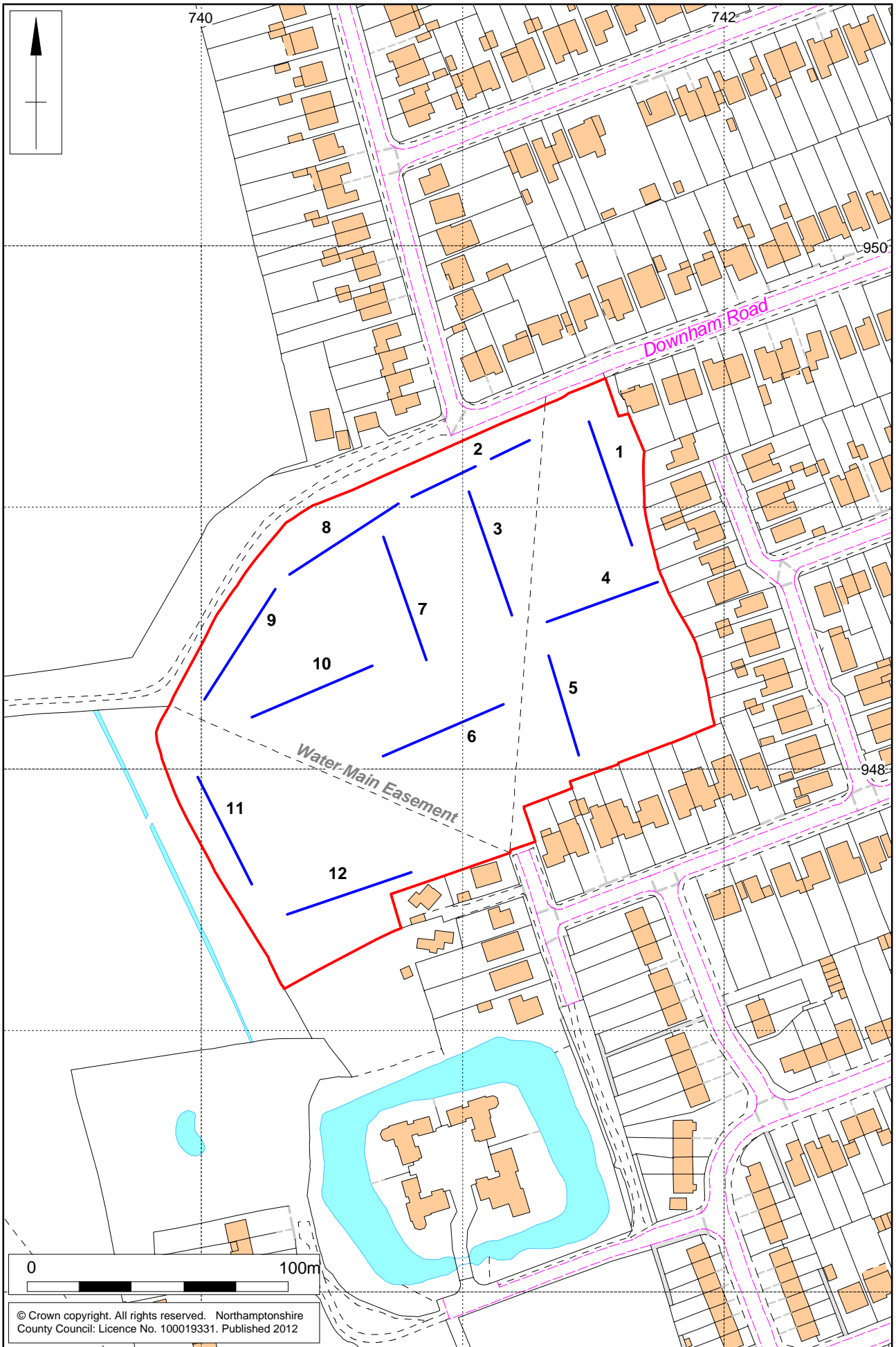
- *The location, extent, nature, and date of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present;*

- *The integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present.*



Scale 1:7500 (A4)

Site location Fig 1



Scale 1:2000 (A4)

Trench location plan Fig 2

The evaluation was carried following the guidelines suggested by the *IfA*'s standards and guidance for archaeological field evaluation (IfA 2008), and the Northamptonshire Archaeology Fieldwork Manual (NA 2011).

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Topography and geology

Wickford lies just over 39km NE of London, in the south of Essex. It currently lies in the Basildon District and was originally part of the parish of Downham. The development area had previously been used for agriculture with two public footpaths running north east and south west from the central southern edge of the field. The site is bounded by existing residential estates to the south, east and to the north east with open fields to the west and north-west. It lies at approximately 21m – 17m aOD. The underlying geology is mapped as London Clay Formation, clay, silt and sand. (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html?location=wickford>). The soils have been mapped as Windsor Soil Association described as slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged clay soils (SSEW 1983). During excavation and subsequent back filling the site suffered from extensive flooding across due to the heavy clay soils and possible presence of a spring.



The site, looking south east. Fig 3

3.2 Historical and archaeological background

Downham is not mentioned in the Domesday Book. The earliest documentary evidence of Berne Hall is in 1232, when it was referred to as *Bernehal'* in the Feet of Fines for the county. The property is further mentioned at regular intervals through the medieval and early post-medieval period, its name variously *Berhal*, *Baronhall* or *Bernehall*.

Essex Record Office holds a *Schedule of deeds and writings relating to the estates of the Right Honorable John Earl Brownlow* (ERO: T/B123). It details documents held in the Lincolnshire Archives, mostly listing his estates in Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and surrounding counties. It also mentions Barn Hall, including an Abstract of Title for 1769 and the particulars and conditions of sale of the manor of Barn Hall in 1838. In 1848, Whites Directory of Essex states that the parish of Downham is split into three manors, one of which being *Berne Hall, formerly held by the Baynings*.

The 15th or 16th Century half-timbered hall, which stood on the moat platform, was recorded as being in poor condition in 1953 and was subsequently demolished in the 1960s.

The area to the east of the site was developed through the 20th century; map evidence shows that the area was laid out for housing by at least 1936 (Ordnance Survey) and development continued until the latter part of the 20th century.

4 EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

The twelve trenches were excavated using a 20 Tonne mechanical excavator fitted with a 2m-wide toothless ditching bucket. All trenches, where possible, were excavated to their full 50m. There were exceptions to allow for recently installed new fencing, public footpaths and farmers tracks. The topsoil and subsoil were removed under archaeological direction to reveal 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 excavated area was cleaned sufficiently to define any features, none were present. The excavated area and spoil heaps were scanned with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval.

All archaeological deposits encountered during the course of the excavation were fully recorded, following standard NA procedures (NA 2011). All deposits were given a separate context number 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. Unstratified animal bones and modern material were not retained.

The location of the trenches were surveyed and related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. A full photographic record comprising both 35mm black and white negatives and colour transparencies was maintained, supplemented with digital images. The field data from the evaluation has been compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing.

The evaluation conformed to the Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (revised Oct 2008). All stages of the project were undertaken in accordance with English Heritage, *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE) (EH 2006). The evaluation was carried out in

accordance with the brief issued by the Northamptonshire County Council (NCC 2012) and the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA 2012).

All trenches were backfilled with their up-cast, lightly compacted by the mechanical digger.

5 EVALUATION RESULTS

All trenches were excavated in the agreed location though five of the trenches were slightly shifted at one end or shortened to accommodate frequently used footpaths or new fencing around the perimeter of the field. The trenches affected by these changes can be seen on the trench plan (Fig 2) and in the table of trench dimensions (Table 1). No archaeology was observed in any of the excavated trenches.

6 DISCUSSION

No archaeological features were uncovered in any of the excavated trenches. Any potential archaeological features, related to the moated Berne Hall or any Roman or Iron Age activity suggested by the HER data (Walker 2012) either did not extend into the proposed area for development or have been destroyed by more recent farming activity. If there is a natural spring in the immediate vicinity which seems likely given the accounts of heavy year round flooding by local residents, then settlement in any period would seem unlikely without extensive drainage systems to manage the high groundwater.

Table 1: Trench Dimensions

Trench No.	Length (m)	Width (m)	Topsoil (01)	Subsoil (02)	Natural (03)
1	50	1.8	0.13	0.22	0.12
2	50	1.8	0.16	0.10	0.16
3	50	1.8	0.30	0.06	0.15
4	45	1.8	0.13	0.10	0.27
5	46	1.8	0.34	0.09	0.12
6	50	1.8	0.29	-	0.27
7	50	1.8	0.26	0.10	0.13
8	50	1.8	0.07	0.31	0.07
9	50	1.8	0.27	-	0.16
10	50	1.8	0.16	0.10	0.12
11	46	1.8	0.19	0.06	0.19
12	50	1.8	0.16	0.17	0.19

BIBLIOGRAPHY

EH 2006 *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers Guide*, English Heritage

IfA 2008 *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation*, Institute for Archaeologists

NA 2011 *Archaeological Fieldwork Manual*, Northamptonshire Archaeology

NA 2012 *Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Field Evaluation of land at Downham Road, Wickford, Essex*, Northamptonshire Archaeology

ECC 2012 *Brief for the archaeological field evaluation at land South of Downham Road, Downham Road, Wickford*, Essex County Council

SSEW 1983 *Soils of England and Wales*, Sheet 3, Soil Survey of England and Wales 1:250,000

WEBSITES

www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/home.html



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