



Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Trial Trench Evaluation at Mears Ashby Hall, Mears Ashby Northamptonshire



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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		OASIS No: 139681
Project name	Archaeological trial trench evaluation at Mears Ashby Hall, Mears Ashby, Northamptonshire	
Short description (250 words maximum)	Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by Mr Hilton to conduct an archaeological evaluation at Mears Ashby Hall, Mears Ashby, Northamptonshire prior to a proposed residential development on the site. Two trenches were excavated. The trenches could not be placed within the footprint of the building due to felled and upstanding trees in the area, as well as sewer services. As a result the trenches were excavated as near as possible to the south-west. No archaeological features were observed.	
Project type (eg DBA, evaluation etc)	Evaluation	
Site status (none, NT, SAM etc)	None	
Previous work (SMR numbers etc)	None	
Current Land use	Landscaped grounds associated with the hall.	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	None	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address (including postcode)	Mears Ashby Hall, Wilby Road, Mears Ashby, Northamptonshire NN6 0DY	
Study area (sq.m or ha)	680 sq m	
OS Easting & Northing (use grid sq. letter code)	SP 83862 66438	
Height OD	103m aOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)	
Project brief originator	Assistant Archaeological Advisor, NCC	
Project Design originator	NA	
Director/Supervisor	Chris Chinnock	
Project Manager	Mark Holmes	
Sponsor or funding body	Mr Clive Hilton	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	17/12/12	
End date	17/12/12	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical	N/A	
Paper	Northamptonshire Archaeology (MASH12)	Site file
Digital	Northamptonshire Archaeology (MASH12)	Mapinfo plans, Word report
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)		
Title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation at Mears Ashby Hall, Mears Ashby, Northamptonshire	
Serial title & volume	12/218	
Author(s)	Chris Chinnock	
Page numbers		
Date		

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APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT INVENTORY

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCH EVALUATION AT
MEARS ASHBY HALL, MEARS ASHBY, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
DECEMBER 2012**

Abstract

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by Mr Hilton to conduct an archaeological evaluation at Mears Ashby Hall, Mears Ashby, Northamptonshire, prior to a proposed residential development on the site. Two trenches were excavated. The trenches could not be placed within the footprint of the building due to felled and upstanding trees in the area, as well as sewer services. As a result the trenches were excavated as near as possible to the south-west. No archaeological features were observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

In December 2012, Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) was commissioned by Mr Hilton to conduct an archaeological evaluation at Mears Ashby Hall, Mears Ashby, Northamptonshire (NGR SP 83862 66438) (Fig 1). Planning permission is pending for the residential development comprising of one dwelling.

The site lies within an area of potential archaeological interest and sensitivity as it is within the grounds of Mears Ashby Hall which lies immediately to the east. Consequently a programme of archaeological evaluation within the area of the proposed development was required. The requirements were outlined in a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by NA (2012).

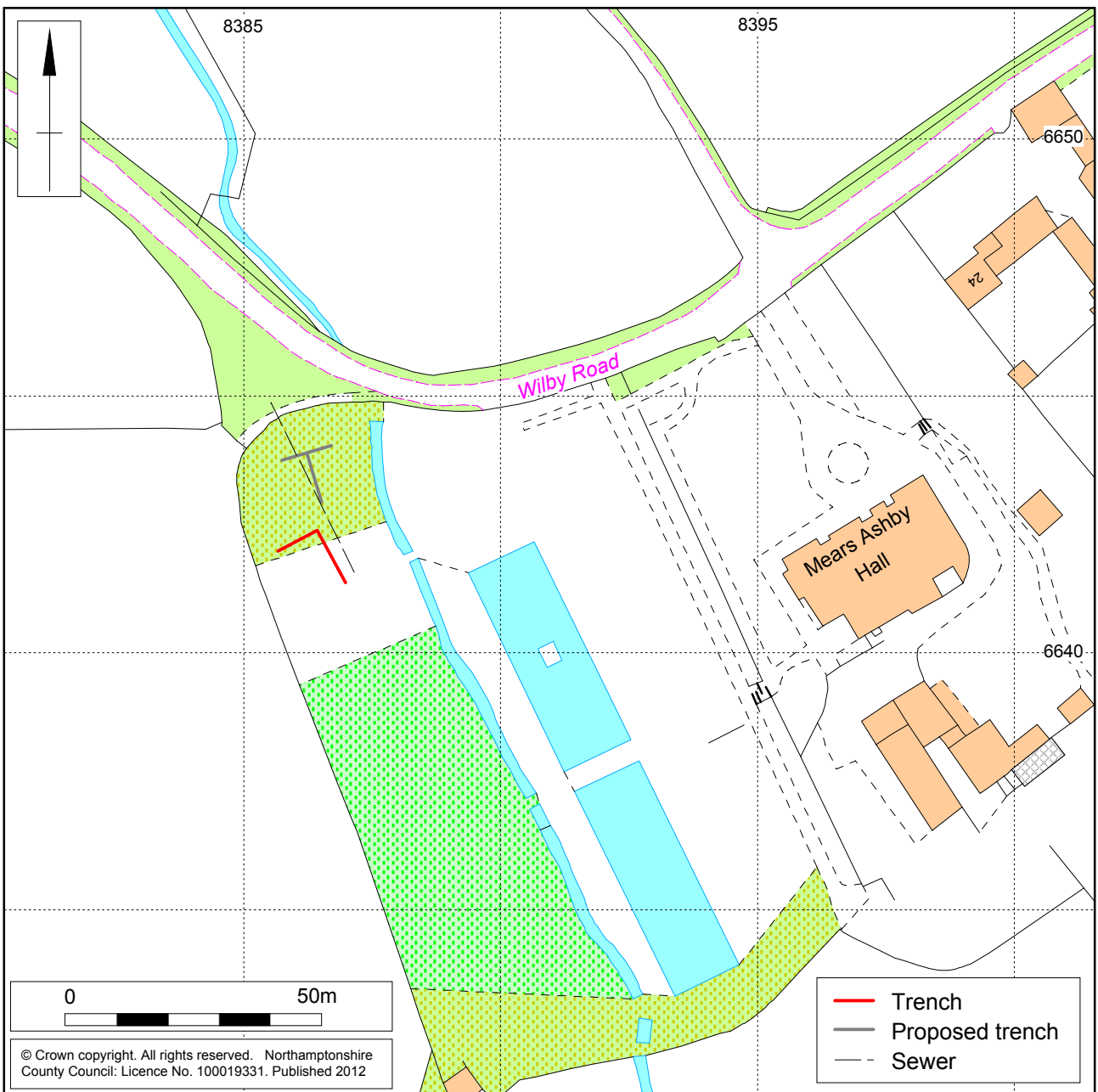
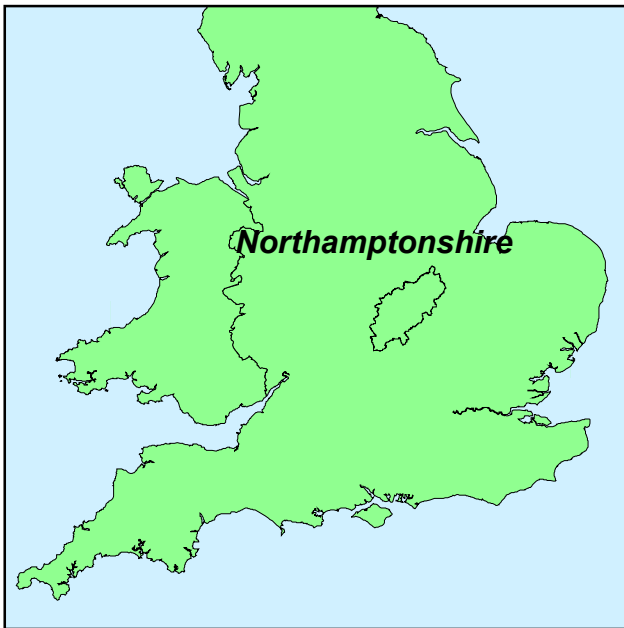
2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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.*

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).



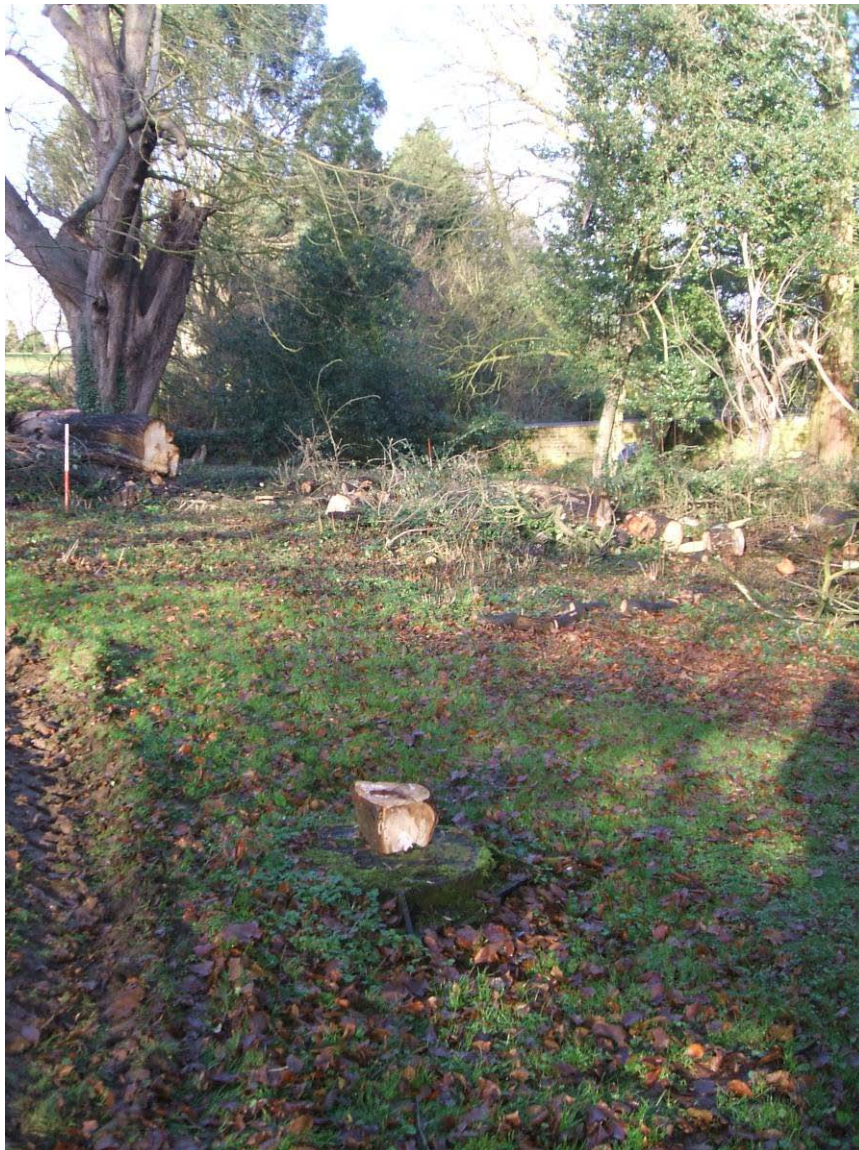
Scale 1:1250

Site location Fig 1

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Topography and geology

Mears Ashby lies 10.5km north-east of Northampton, in central Northamptonshire. It is situated in the Wellinborough District and is part of the parish of Mears Ashby. The development area had previously been landscaped gardens and wooded areas associated with the hall. The site is bounded by the main Wilby road to the north, by agricultural land to the west and further estate grounds to the east and south. It lies at approximately 103m aOD. The underlying geology is mapped as Whitby Mudstone Formation, mud, silt and sand (www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/home.html).



The site, looking north Fig 2

3.2 Historical and archaeological background

Mears Ashby was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1066 as Asbi, part of the Hamfordshoe Hundred in the county of Northamptonshire. Later the place name progressed through its history from Essebi in 1166, North Esseby in 1220 to Mares Assheby in 1578.

The area for development currently lies within the grounds of Mears Ashby Hall. This Jacobean style E-shaped hall dates to 1637 though it has a large Tudor wing added in 1859-60 (Pevsner 1961) by A. Salvin for the H.M Stockdale. It is possible that the area for development has always been part of the land associated with the hall, though it has been noted that the hall gardens were 'extended and enlarged' in 1854, also by H.M. Stockdale (RCHM(E) 1979). The 1880 edition of the Ordnance Survey map shows that the area was, at that point, part of the gardens and wooded. The 1810 Ordnance Survey provisional map seems to suggest that the boundaries were the same as they were in 1880 though there had clearly been cosmetic changes to the gardens.

It has been suggested that medieval frontages had been demolished along the Wilby Road, immediately to the north of the site, in order to provide a better setting for the hall. The result is an unobstructed view of the 12th Century church. Nearby Historic Environment Records (HER: 1995/0/4, 1995/0/6) show rectangular platforms, probably for medieval buildings, in the field north of the hall. There is also a record for a medieval hollow way to the north of the hall and this possibly relates to the wide ditch following the western boundary of Mears Ashby Hall gardens (HER: 1995/0/5). This was called the 'Saltway' in 1577.

Field walking and aerial photography have revealed many prehistoric enclosures, particularly to the north and west of the village on the Northampton Sands. Finds of Greyware and Samian pottery suggest significant settlements in the area (RCHM(E) 1979). Common land was enclosed by Act of Parliament in 1777 and ridge and furrow can be seen upstanding or as cropmarks in many of the fields adjacent to the hall grounds.

4 EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

The two trenches were excavated using a JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.6m-wide toothless ditching bucket. Trench 1 was 9.0m long by 1.6m wide. Trench 2 was 12.0m long by 1.6m wide. 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. 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 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

The original location for the proposed trenches had to be changed due to a number of felled and upstanding trees still present in the area. There was also a foul sewer aligned roughly north-south through the middle of the development area. These obstacles resulted in the two trenches being moved to the south-west so as to achieve maximum coverage, as close to the original proposed location as possible. The amended locations can be seen on the trench plan (Fig 2). Clay overburden, presumably backfill from the laying of the sewer was present in both trenches. No archaeology was observed in either of the excavated trenches (Figs 4-6).



Trench 1, looking east Fig 3



Trench 2, looking south Fig 4



Trench 1, looking north Fig 5

6 DISCUSSION

No archaeological features were uncovered in either of the excavated trenches. Any potential archaeological features either related to Mears Ashby Hall or any previous Roman or Iron Age activity suggested by the Historic Environment Records and aerial photography did not extend into the proposed area for development or have subsequently been erased by landscaping within the grounds of the hall. Since at least 1880, the area has been wooded. During excavation extensive root disturbance across the whole area was encountered, penetrating much deeper than the natural substrate. Any ephemeral archaeological features or ridge and furrow would most certainly have been destroyed by root action.

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WEBSITES

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

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1	Length, width & alignment 9.0m x 1.6m W-E		Surface Height 95.78m aOD	Depth & Height of Natural 0.68m 95.10m aOD
Context	Context Type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
101	Topsoil	Friable mid grey-brown silty clay. Significant root intrusion.	0.30m thick	
102	Subsoil	Friable mid brown-orange clay-sand. Significant root disturbance.	0.20m thick	
103	Natural	Mid brown-orange, mudstone/ironstone with clay sand.	0.15m thick	

Trench 2	Length, width & alignment 12.0m x 1.6m N-S		Surface Height 94.65m aOD	Depth & Height of Natural 0.54m 94.11m aOD
Context	Context Type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
201	Topsoil	Friable mid grey-brown silty clay. Significant root intrusion.	0.05m-0.15m thick	
202	Subsoil	Friable mid brown-orange clay-sand. Significant root disturbance.	0.15m thick	
203	Natural	Light grey-yellow firm clay.	0.12m thick	
204	Overburden	Dark grey-blue clay, disturbance from digging of sewer.	0.2m-0.25m thick	



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