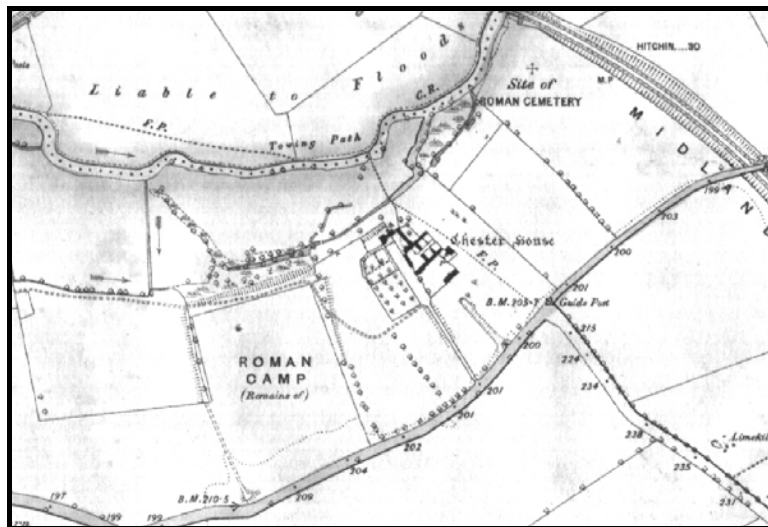




## Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Evaluation of  
Main Access at  
Chester House Farm (Module 6)  
Irchester  
Northamptonshire



Tim Upson-Smith

March 2005

Report 05/058

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CHESTER HOUSE FARM MODULE 6

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**OASIS REPORT FORM**

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>		
Project name	Archaeological Evaluation of main access at Chester House Farm (module 6) Irchester Northamptonshire	
Short description (250 words maximum)	An evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology on the access road to Chester House Farm in March 2005. The evaluation demonstrated that the original surface of the road does survive in places, albeit damaged by later surfaces, at between 0.1m to 0.3m below the present road surface. Three burials were also noted in three of the test pits.	
Project type (e.g. DBA, field evaluation etc)	Trial Trenching	
Site Status (none, NT, SAM etc)	None	
Previous work (reference to organisation or SMR numbers etc)	DBA, Fieldwalking and geophysical survey	
Current land use	Access road	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	Unknown	
Monument type/period	Post Medieval	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)		
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address (including postcode)	Chester House Farm Irchester, Northamptonshire	
Study area (sq.m or ha)		
OS Easting & Northings (use grid square numbers)	491780	
Northing	266720	
Height OD	55m OD	
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	NCC Historic Environment Team	
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Tim Upson Smith	
Project Manager	Adam Yates	
Sponsor or funding body	Northamptonshire County Council	
<b>PROJECT DATE</b>		
Start date	March 2005	
End date	March 2005	
<b>ARCHIVES</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone etc)</b>
Physical		
Paper		
Digital		
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>		
	unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title		
Serial title & volume	05/58	
Author(s)	Tim Upson-Smith	
Page numbers	9	
Date	31 March 2005	

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF  
MAIN ACCESS AT  
CHESTER HOUSE FARM (MODULE 6)  
IRCHESTER  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE  
REPORT 05/58**

*Abstract*

*An evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology on the access road to Chester House Farm in March 2005. The evaluation demonstrated that the original surface of the road does survive in places, at between 0.1m to 0.3m below the present road surface, albeit damaged by later surfaces. Three burials were also noted in three of the test pits. GPR survey indicated possible archaeological disturbance and a putative ditch.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Northamptonshire Archaeology were commissioned by Northamptonshire County Council to undertake an archaeological evaluation of the main access at Chester House Farm, Irchester, Northamptonshire (centred on NGR SP 9178 6672, Fig 1). The evaluation comprised a series of test pits at intervals along the full length of the main access road.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

Chester House Farm was acquired by Northamptonshire County Council in 2004. The Built & Natural Environment service has commissioned a series of specialist conservation investigations intended to underpin the long term sustainable management of the holding. In particular the results will be used to inform compilation of a comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for Chester Farm.

The acquisition was secured through one of the River Nene Regional Park's 'Tangible Projects' with funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The farm has been caught in a spiral of decline having lost its associated farm lands with the strategic development of the adjoining urban areas and the need for associated employment, highway improvements and gravel extraction. Phased development of the site as a heritage park will help to make Chester Farm publicly accessible as an educational, leisure and recreational facility and safeguard the long term future of the site, which comprises a Scheduled Ancient Monument with a walled Roman Town and Deserted Medieval Village and a Grade II star listed former manor house, parkland and associated listed farm buildings. This will in turn benefit local communities and visitors to the area both as a tourist attraction, and as a feature of the developing regional park.

An overarching Conservation Investigation Framework Brief has been prepared by NCC Built and Natural Environment Team (Cadman 2005a), which sets out the programme of works. This comprises nine separate modules:

Module 1: Survey of current farm land use & condition, services, flood risk

Module 2: Desktop study–historical development; physiographic statement; fieldwork & finds gazetteers & bibliography

Module 3: Building recording–general

Module 4: Building recording –glasshouse

Module 5: Archaeological survey–earthworks, geophysical & condition

Module 6: Archaeological evaluation of main access

Module 7: Tree & hedgerow survey

Module 8: Wildlife/nature conservation survey/biodiversity/earth heritage statement

Module 9: Rights of way repair & maintenance

The extent of each of these modules is set out in a series of design briefs prepared by NCC Built and Natural Environment Team.

### **3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The overall objectives of the investigation are set out in the Conservation Investigation Framework Brief as follows:

- The objective of Module 6 is to contribute to a comprehensive description and better understanding of the site through a programme of archaeological evaluation of both the current and a proposed new section of the Chester House access, utilising documentary sources allied to evaluation fieldwork. It is anticipated that the existing Chester Farm access will serve as a future service entrance to the site. However, highway considerations require that rather than using the existing junction with the dual carriageway, the drive may be extended to run south-east for approximately 85 metres, just inside the site boundary and its line of trees, to a new gated access point adjoining the east side of Chester Lymes.
- Results will be used to inform and develop a strategy for maintaining/enhancing immediate and longer term site access.
- Results will also contribute to the compilation of a comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for Chester Farm.
- The specific objective is to identify nature, depth of burial and general condition of the historic treatment of the Chester House access drive between the entrance from the dual carriageway through to and including the parking/turning area outside Chester House (a distance of approximately 275m).
- Strategy to involve rapid desk-based survey (utilising work done as part of Module 2, historical development) followed by a programme of rapid fieldwork.
- This will involve trial trenching. Some follow-up geophysics survey may also be necessary.

#### 4 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Desk based study has been undertaken as part of Module 2.

Prior to excavation a ground penetrating radar (GPR) survey was conducted. The GPR was carried out utilising a GSSI SIR-2000 system with 400MHz antenna, suitable for detecting shallow anomalies, attached to an odometer wheel to record position. The data was collected in a single 140m transect along the centre of the roadway, north-west to south-east.

The evaluation comprised the excavation by JCB 3cx-type machine of ten test pits. All the pits were 1.7m wide (the width of a standard JCB bucket). The lengths of the test pits varied due to logistics.

The test pits were placed so as to minimise disruption to traffic along the access road and disturbance to the trees on the southern tree-lined part of the access. The trees do not have Tree Protection Orders on them although they were treated in such a way as to assume that they did.

#### 5 RESULTS

Seven 1.6m square test pits (4-10) were excavated in the verge along the southern tree-lined part of the access road (Fig 2). Three of the pits 8, 9 and 10 exposed human burials at a depth 0.8m. These were not excavated and were reburied.

Test pits 1, 2, 3, 6 and 9 were excavated specifically to look at the historic make up of the access road.

**Test pit 1** was excavated in the turning circle in front of the farm house. The test pit measured 1.6m by 5m and was excavated to a depth of 0.4m. Beneath the modern tarmac



layer there was a layer of hardcore which was laid directly onto a fragmentary laid surface comprising irregular ironstone and limestone paving with the stones averaging 0.3m by 0.2m by 0.05m. This layer was exposed at 0.3m below the level of the tarmac.

**Test pit 2** was excavated 20m to the south of test pit 1 and measured 1.6m by 2.5m and was 0.3m deep. Below the modern layer of tarmac there was a hardcore layer, which was laid over a fragmentary laid surface consisting of irregular limestone paving of the same dimensions as those exposed in test pit 1.

**Test pit 3** was excavated approximately in the middle of the access road and measured 1.6m by 2.5m and was 0.6m deep. Beneath the layer of modern tarmac there was a layer of hardcore, beneath which was mid brown grey clay subsoil. No evidence of an earlier surface was exposed in this test pit. This may be explained by the fact that the road has undergone several phases of repairs and patches over the years, which may have removed parts of the original surface.

**Test pits 4 and 5** were excavated in the verge of the track and did not contain any evidence of the road surface.

**Test pit 6** was excavated in the verge and was then extended to expose the original road surface. The pit measured 1.6m by 1.6m and was 0.10m deep. Immediately below the modern layer of hardcore there was a loose layer of hardcore laid over a very compact laid surface consisting of small to medium irregular limestone fragments in a sandy clay bed.

**Test pits 7 and 8** were excavated in the verge and did not contain any evidence of a previous road surface. Test pit 8 exposed a human burial which was subsequently reburied. The burial was cut into natural at 0.75m below the present ground surface. The burial was aligned north-west to south-east. A single fragment of Roman pottery was recovered from the upper grave fill.

**Test pit 9** was excavated in the same way as test pit 6 and exposed the same surface. The part of the test pit which was excavated on the verge exposed a human burial which was subsequently reburied. The burial was cut into natural at 0.75m below the present ground

surface. The burial was aligned north-south. Five sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from the upper grave fill.

**Test pit 10** was excavated in the verge and did not contain any evidence of the former road surface. It did however contain a human burial which was subsequently reburied. The burial was cut into natural at 0.75m below the present ground surface. The burial was aligned north-south.

Following processing, the GPR data displayed a number of anomalies caused by the uneven surface of the track. Despite this and the high degree of signal attenuation caused by the clayey subsoil (as revealed in the test pits on site) several anomalies have been identified from the data. Two hyperboles indicating disturbance have been detected at a depth of 0.5m-0.6m in the 5m flanking Trench 10. A possible ditch was located adjacent to the north of Trench 9 at a depth of up to 0.6m, possibly a continuation from a ditch in the field to the west. Further processing of the data will take place prior to full reporting.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Of the ten test pits which were excavated four contained fragmentary remains of the access road surface. These were preserved at between 0.1m and 0.3m below the present tarmac road surface and consisted of irregular limestone and ironstone paving on the length of access road adjacent to the house. Elsewhere the road comprised a compact surface of small to medium limestone fragments set in a sandy clay bed.

Three burials discovered alongside the access road towards the south may indicate the presence of a possible cemetery of unknown date. GPR hyperboles adjacent to Trench 10 may indicate further grave cuts. Trenches 8 and 10 were 29m apart and if the burials are related it would indicate that the cemetery covers a quite extensive area.

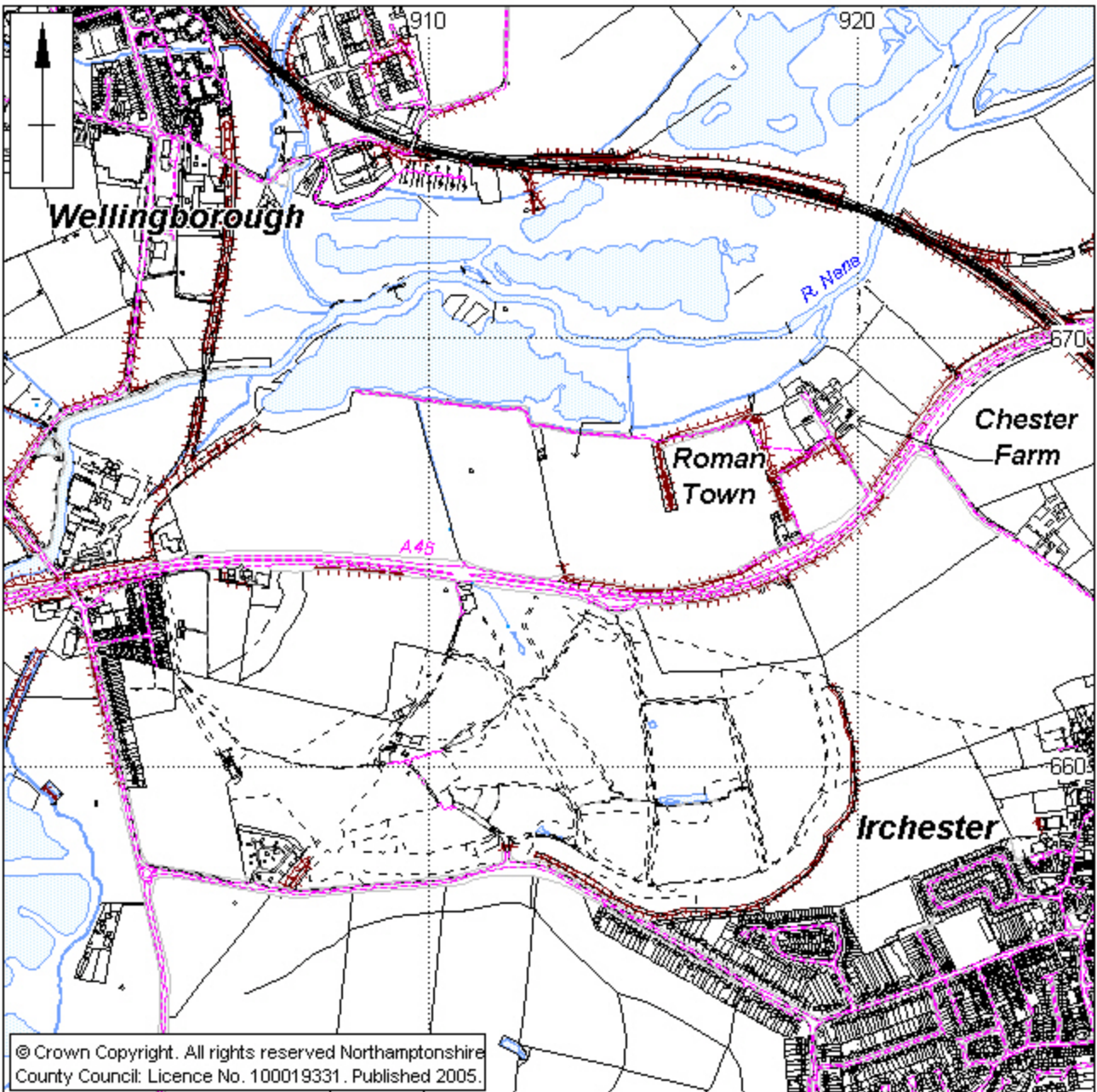
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31 March 2005

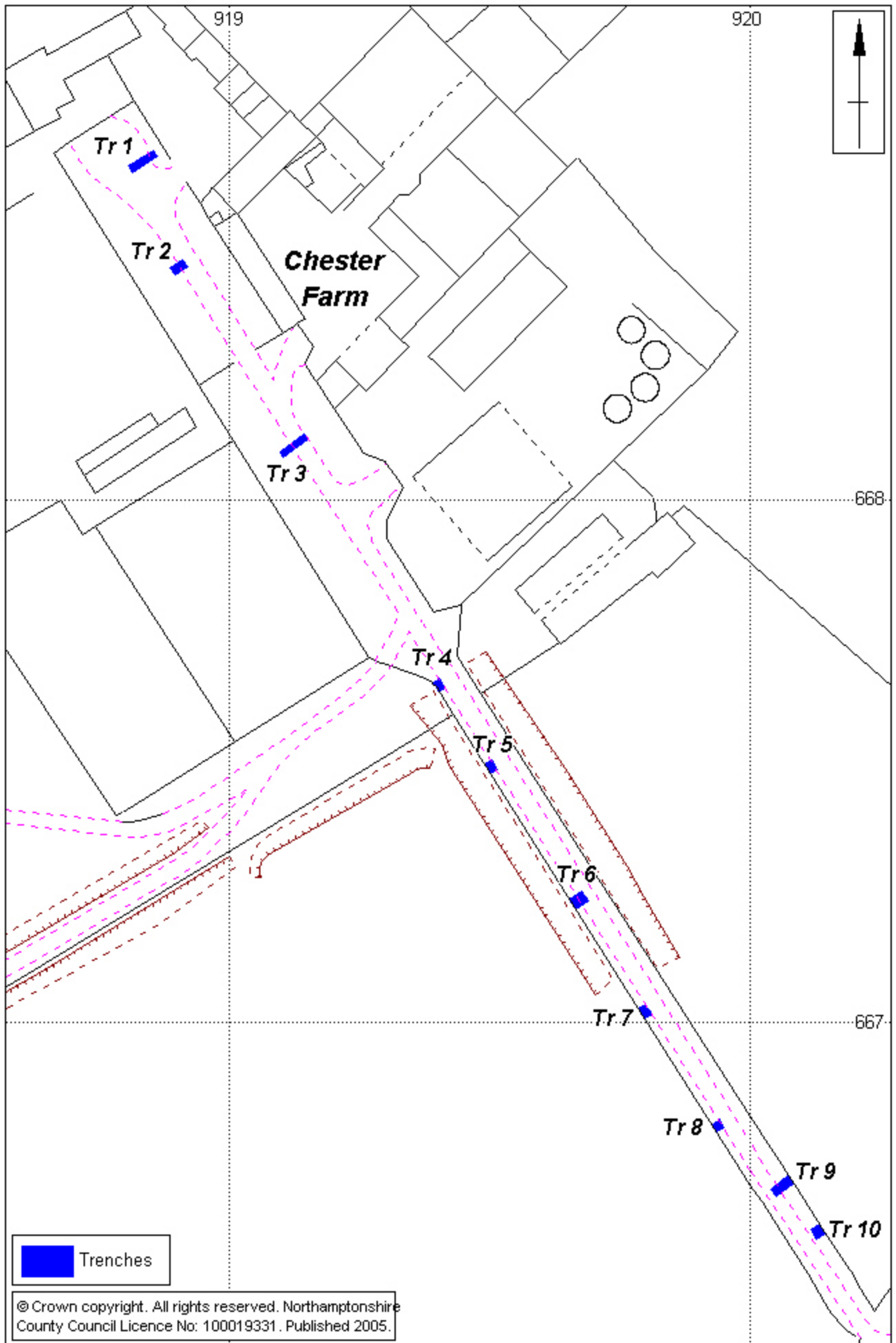


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Site Location

Scale 1:15,000

Fig. 1



Test Pit location

Scale 1:1000

Fig. 2