Northamptonshire County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological test pit evaluation

and watching brief at

Quarrendon Leas, Aylesbury

Buckinghamshire

January to April 2009

Jim Burke and Yvonne Wolframm-Murray

September 2009

Report 09/17

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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	Quarrendon Leas, Aylesbury	
Short description	A total of seventeen test pits were hand-excavated to determine the character and extent of modern disturbance and deposit accumulation on the moated area. The test pit excavation was followed by a watching brief during the construction of a footpath across the scheduled monument. The investigation revealed a brick drain and yard and track surfaces associated with Church Farm, which formerly occupied the site until its demolition in the late 20th century, and a range of demolition deposits and made ground. No deposits predating the 19th century were encountered.	
Project type	Test pit evaluation and watching brief	
Previous work	Unknown	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type and period	Medieval and post-medieval Scheduled Ancient Monument	
Significant finds	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Buckinghamshire	
Site address	Quarrendon Leas, Aylesbury	
Study area	*c* 3.2ha	
NGR	48023 21585	
Height OD	*c* 74m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Buckinghamshire County Council Archaeological Service	
Project Design originator	Jacobs Engineering UK Ltd	
Director/Supervisor	Jim Burke and Yvonne Wolframm-Murray	
Project Manager	Joe Prentice	
Sponsor or funding body	Buckinghamshire County Council	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	20-01-09	
End date	10-04-09	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		None
Paper		1 large archive box
Digital		Photographs
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	Archaeological Test Pit Evaluation and watching brief at Quarrendon Leas, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire	
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL TEST PIT EVALUATION AND WATCHING BRIEF AT QUARRENDON LEAS, AYLESBURY BUCKINGHAMSHIRE JANUARY TO APRIL 2009

Abstract
Between January and April 2009, Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out an archaeological investigation on the site of scheduled medieval earthworks at Quarrendon Leas, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. The work was commissioned by Jacobs Engineering UK Ltd on behalf of their client, Buckinghamshire County Council. A total of seventeen test pits were hand-excavated to determine the character and extent of modern disturbance and deposit accumulation on the moated area. The test pit excavation was followed by a watching brief during the construction of a footpath across the scheduled monument. The investigation revealed a brick drain and yard and track surfaces associated with Church Farm, which formerly occupied the site until its demolition in the late 20th century, and a range of demolition deposits and made ground. No deposits predating the 19th century were encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

Between January and April 2009, an archaeological investigation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) on the site of scheduled medieval earthworks at Quarrendon Leas, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire (site centred on NGR: SP 8023 1585; Fig 1). The work, which comprised the excavation of seventeen hand-dug test pits followed by a watching brief during the construction of a path, was commissioned by Jacobs Engineering UK Ltd (Jacobs) on behalf of their client, Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC). The purpose of the archaeological investigation was to establish the character and extent of modern deposit accumulation on the Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 12004). Scheduled Monument Consent for the investigation was arranged by Alexander Kidd, County Archaeologist, Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Services (BCAS), on behalf of BCC (Scheduled Monument Consent ref: HSD 9/2/10760).

The test pits were excavated in January 2009 and the watching brief was undertaken between the end of March and the end of April of the same year. The footpath was designed and built to improve public access to the scheduled monument. The county accession number for the site is: AYBCM: 2009.23.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

The site of Quarrendon Leas lies *c* 2km to the north-west of Aylesbury town centre, immediately to the north of the suburb of Quarrendon, between the A413 and A41 (Fig 1). There are two areas of earthworks, centred at SP 8023 1584 and SP 7970 1585, situated on a gentle south facing slope between the confluence of the River Thame and one of its tributaries, at *c* 74m above OD (Fig 2). The land is currently under pasture.

The underlying geology comprises alluvial clay, silt and sand over Kimmeridge Clay and Ampthill Clay (www.bgs.ac.uk). The soils on the site belong to the Denchworth (712b) Soil Association and comprise slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged clayey or fine loamy over clayey soil (SSEW 1983).

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

The earthworks are the remains of a medieval, poly-focal village, which was probably abandoned by the end of the 15th century, and a rabbit warren (Fig 2). It has long been considered that the latter were Civil War earthworks associated with the Battle of Aylesbury in 1642, but they have recently been reinterpreted as a rabbit warren, comprising a complex of pillow mounds and related features, that probably date to the 16th century and form part of the estate of the Lee family (Everson 2001). The SAM listing describes the site as follows:

'The village sites are considered to represent a single medieval settlement …The less substantial of the two village sites lies to the west of the now ruined Church Farm and comprises house platforms and a track-way running east-west across the field (under pasture). To the west of the field is a large flat area divided by a broad street, which may be a penning area with a droveway. To the east is the second village site (SP80511583) … This site was probably depopulated by 1485.

The earthworks of streets and houses are clear and represent a nucleated village covering some 25 acres, currently under permanent pasture. The pattern of streets and crofts can be seen to radiate from a central pond and mill while the sunken main street can be clearly seen, ascending the hill from the manor in the west.

Villages were key components of medieval rural life. Well-preserved deserted villages, such as these at Quarrendon, are archaeologically important because the medieval remains have not been disturbed or damaged by later settlement. The monument is therefore important not only as a result of its good state of preservation but also because of the information it contains for more general settlement studies.

The manor house of the Lee family is thought to have been located within the surviving moated enclosure, although no direct archaeological evidence of this has been found so far. The still partly water-filled moat is an important feature of the site. The manor house site is of key significance as the focal point of the formal garden and park layout, and the foundations of the farmhouse that occupied part of the site remains as a point of reference'.

The site appears on the Ordnance Survey series from the First Edition (1880) onwards. A detail from the Ordnance Survey map of 1899 is shown in Figure 3. These show a farm, Church Farm, occupying the area of the current investigation. The Ordnance Survey map of 1974-77 shows the buildings to be present, though with no modifications such as silage storage areas which are known to have existed. By the time of the 1981 edition the site is shown to be completely clear of any buildings. The ruins of St Peter's Chapel and the former fish ponds are situated north-west of the site.

3 METHODOLOGY

All the works were undertaken in accordance with the specification provided by Jacobs (2009) and complied with the Institute for Archaeologists' (IfA) *Code of Conduct* (IfA 1985, revised 2008), *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (IfA 1994, revised 2008) and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief* (IfA 1994, revised 2008).

The test pits were marked out by Paul Adams (Jacobs), and the work was monitored by Paul Adams and Alexander Kidd, County Archaeologist. The excavation areas were checked for buried services using a CAT scanner and the excavation of the test pits was continuously supervised by an archaeologist. All trenches were excavated by hand using a fork to break up the hardcore, and a spade to remove the loose, with final hand cleaning by trowel. Recording followed standard NA procedures (NA 2006).

There was no Ordnance Datum benchmark close to the site, so a temporary benchmark was established on the upper surface of a large block of masonry that was located at or near the south-west corner of the former church building (see back cover). This can be related to Ordnance Datum at a later date if required.

The footpath was constructed by the contractor commissioned by Jacobs. The groundwork was carried out with a mini-digger, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, operating under archaeological supervision. The resulting soil and rubble was taken away by a dumper. Some debris contained asbestos corrugated roofing material that had been identified in the risk assessment. The footpath construction was carried out in three stages and photographs were taken before, during and after the excavation of the farm track. The excavated dimensions of the new footpath measured approximately 2.2m wide and 0.2m deep.

4 THE TEST PITS

4.1 Introduction

The test pits were targeted on a roughly rectangular moated area to the south-east of St Peter's Chapel. Initially, eighteen test pits were proposed, but due to waterlogged ground one test pit (Test Pit 3) had to be dropped from the scheme. The location of the test pits is shown in Figure 4. The test pits were excavated to the upper level of archaeological deposits or subsoil, whichever was encountered first. All the test pits were entirely hand-excavated, with the exception of Test Pit 8 that required a mechanical breaker to break through the concrete base of a silage area. At the surface, the test pits measured approximately 1m square. The results of the test pitting are presented in Section 4.2 below and include a description of the deposits encountered and their thickness and depth below modern ground level.

4.2 Test pit results

Test Pit 1 (Fig 5)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark brown silty clay loam.	Topsoil	0.21	0-0.21
Mid greyish brown silty clay.	Layer	0.05	0.21-0.26
Dark brown silty clay containing fragments of rubble, including brick and tile, and a small amount of animal bone.	Layer	0.15	0.26-0.41
Mottled blue/orange silty clay with sandy inclusions.	Fill of moat?	0.09+	0.41-0.50+

Test Pit 2 (Figs 5 and 6)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark brown silty clay loam.	Topsoil	0.08	0-0.08
Mixed rubble, largely comprising brick fragments (up to 70mm), lime-mortar and fragments of roofing asbestos.	Ramp	0.18	0.08-0.26
Grey/brown silty clay	Layer	0.12	0.26-0.38
Mottled blue/orange silty clay with sandy inclusions.	Fill of moat?	0.09+	0.38-0.47+

Test Pit 4 (Fig 5 and 7)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark brown silty clay loam.	Topsoil	0.04	0-0.04
Mixed rubble, largely comprising brick fragments (up to 70mm), scrap metal, lime-mortar and fragments of roofing asbestos.	Ramp	0.22	0.04-0.26
Dark brown silt, up to 0.25m thick, containing fragments of brick and tile	Buried soil	0.25+	0.26-0.51+

Test Pit 5 (Fig 8)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark brown silty clay loam.	Topsoil	0.08	0-0.08
Compacted, mixed rubble, largely comprising brick fragments (up to 70mm), lime-mortar and fragments of roofing asbestos.	Ramp	0.50	0.08-0.58
Sandy gravel with limestone and chalk inclusions	Layer	0.03	0.58-0.61
Dark grey silty clay	Fill of moat?	0.19+	0.61-0.80+

Test Pit 6 (Fig 8)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark brown silty clay loam.	Topsoil	0.03	0-0.03
Compacted, mixed rubble largely comprising brick fragments (up to 70mm), lime-mortar and fragments of roofing asbestos.	Ramp	0.18	0.03-0.21
Grey/brown silty clay with chalk fragments.	Bank?	0.28+	0.21-0.49+

Test Pit 7 (Fig 8)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark brown silty clay loam containing demolition rubble, varying in size from 40-150mm.	Topsoil	0.05	0-0.05
Sandstone rubble with brick and tile.	Demolition layer	0.20	0.05-0.25
Mid grey clay containing fragments of charred wood and charcoal mixed in with the clay.	Subsoil?	0.07+	0.25-0.32+

Test Pit 8 (Fig 10)

This test pit was partly excavated using a mechanical breaker and was cut through the concrete base of a silage area.

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Concrete over rubble hardcore and slag.	Topsoil	0.46	0-0.46
Two parallel lines of un-mortared stone and brick, to retain slag.	Made ground	-	0.43
Grey clay with rubble pressed into its upper surface.	Subsoil	-	0.46+

Test Pit 9 (Fig 9)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dried slurry over chalky white clay.	Layer	0.07	0-0.07
Compacted cobble surface, cobbles of fairly consistent size, 100mm in length interspersed with smaller oval cobbles 40mm–80mm.	Yard surface	0.15	0.07-0.22
Blue/grey clay with fragments of sand and chalk	Subsoil	0.07+	0.22-0.29+

Test Pit 10 (Figs 9 and 11)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark brown silty clay loam.	Topsoil	0.05	0-0.05
Dump of clay, brick and tile.	Demolition layer	0.20	0.05-0.25
Rubble containing mortar, brick, tile and roofing asbestos.	Demolition layer	0.23	0.25-0.48
Mortared brick drain comprising two parallel rows of red brick, two courses deep over a brick base, capped with tile and brick, much of which was missing (Fig 11). The bricks were 220mm x 90mm x 70mm deep (8¾ x 3½ x 2½ inches), bonded with lime mortar. The sizes of the bricks suggest a late 18th or 19th century date, and the drain almost certainly relates to the former farm buildings.	Brick drain	-	0.30

Test Pit 11 (Fig 12)

This test pit was moved further in from the edge of the moat due to badger activity and was clear of areas of modern disturbance.

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark brown silty clay loam.	Topsoil	0.10	0-0.10
Silty grey clay with chalk flecks.	Subsoil?	0.20+	0.10-0.30+

Test Pit 12 (Fig 12)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark brown silty clay loam.	Topsoil	0.09	0-0.09
Brick, tile, roofing asbestos, mortar, tin and binding twine mixed with grey/brown sandy clay.	Demolition layer	0.15	0.09-0.24
Dark brown silty organic clay containing binding twine, tin and fragments of wood with nails.	Layer	0.07+	0.24-0.31+

Test Pit 13 (Fig 12)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark brown silty loam with brick, tile, asbestos, clay tobacco pipe stems, blue and white domestic china and fragments of mortar. None of the finds were retained as they were too fragmentary to provide a closer date than mid-19th century. They most likely represent the dumping of domestic rubbish from the farm into the moat.	Soil and refuse	0.54+	0-0.54+

Test Pit 14 (Fig 12)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark clay loam with small pieces of brick, tile and industrial slag or clinker	Ramp	0.22	0-0.22
Compact layer of mortar and brick	Bridge foundation	0.07+	0.22-0.29+

Test Pit 15 (Fig 13)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark brown silty clay loam and rubble	Topsoil	0.09	0-0.09
Compact later of rubble filled comprising brick, mortar, roof and modern wall tiles, asbestos, fragments of ceramic sinks, reinforced concrete, plastic drainage pipes, plastic bags, tin cans, cast iron and hardcore.		0.31	0.09-0.40
Mid-grey clay	Natural?	-	0.40+

Test Pit 16 (Fig 13)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark brown silty clay loam. Fragments of red brick and tile	Topsoil	0.24	0-0.24
Chalky grey clay	Subsoil	-	0.24+

Test Pit 17 (Fig 13)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark brown silty clay loam, containing modern rubble, tile, brick, asbestos and plastic	Topsoil	0.26	0-0.26
Grey clay subsoil with inclusions of charcoal and decomposed organic roots which indicate the former presence of trees or shrubs	Subsoil	0.03+	0.26-0.29+

Test Pit 18 (Fig 13)

Description	Type	Thickness (m)	Depth (m)
Dark brown silty clay loam, containing asbestos and brick fragments.	Topsoil	0.14	0-0.14
Clay with charcoal flecks	Redeposited subsoil?	0.15+	0.14-0.29+

5 THE WATCHING BRIEF

The footpath was constructed along the route of an existing farm track that passed through the scheduled monument, thereby minimising any potential disturbance to underlying archaeology (Figs 14 to 17). The extent of the deposits encountered during the watching brief is shown in Figure 14. The farm track had been built up with rubble over a substantial time, a necessity due to the boggy nature of the surrounding land. The rubble largely consisted of brick, probably from demolished buildings, roofing materials (including corrugated asbestos) and stone hardcore. It is not clear if the trackway was laid at one time or over a period of years, though the latter is more likely with various areas being added to as and when wet, boggy or rutted patches occurred. As the footpath was only excavated to a depth of 200mm, the construction of the footpath did not affect the underlying undisturbed ground significantly.

In the vicinity of the gates and for the northern spur of the footpath, the path was diverted from the farm track (Figs 18 and 19), thus impacting undisturbed ground. Due to the shallow excavations, only the topsoil was removed and only rarely was the underlying subsoil exposed. No archaeological features or artefacts were recovered from these areas. On the occasions where the construction of the footpath went below the build up of the farm track a firm, dark greyish brown silty clay soil was noted, which had occasional small- to medium-sized rounded pebbles with moderate amounts of debris and rubble pushed into it.

During the groundworks for the footpath no significant archaeological remains were uncovered, although there were two points of interest. Firstly, a possible earlier phase of the farm track was encountered, comprising a compact layer, between 30mm and 50mm thick, of small- to medium-sized pebbles, beneath a hard, dark greyish brown silty clay layer of soil (Fig 20). However, no finds were recovered and the possible pebble surface remains undated. Secondly, on the northern spur the remains of a hedgerow could be seen, occurring as a strip of shallow, irregular tree throws, some of which had been burnt (Fig 21). A number of iron objects, 19th-century pottery sherds and animal bones were recovered from close-by, presumably representing objects thrown into the hedge. Additionally, it was possible to match the line of the tree throws with a row of trees still *in situ* to the east.

6 DISCUSSION

The majority of the deposits encountered during the excavation and monitoring of the test pits were levelling layers and deposits of demolition debris associated with the farm buildings and yard surfaces that once occupied the site. No building foundations associated with Church Farm were encountered, although a brick drain in Test Pit 10 probably served the farm.

Evidence for a former bridge or moat crossing was located on the western side of the site where a kerb probably indicates the southern edge of that crossing. On the eastern side of the site, where there was formerly a moat, now infilled, rubble indicates the presence of two diverging trackways shown on the 1899 Ordnance Survey map.

Some of the material used in levelling has been imported on to the site from other industrial areas, perhaps utilising material from railway tracks; the remainder is standard re-used building material such as brick and stone with modern material, including corrugated asbestos.

The test pits suggest that the interior of the moated area has had some modern disturbance caused by the laying of large areas of concrete for silage bases. These have hardcore foundations which are likely to have damaged earlier buried features. None of the test pits were located directly above the former buildings so their character and extent of preservation is unknown. Dumps of modern debris are located across the site, either connected with trackways or in some cases along the edge of the remaining moat. It is not clear how much debris has been deposited in the moat since it was not possible to excavate there due to standing water.

No finds were uncovered which pre-date the 19th century apart from the bricks in the drain which may date to the late 18th century; however, this cannot be certain since it may have been constructed using re-claimed bricks. The date of the former Church Farm is not known at present.

During the watching brief no archaeologically significant remains were uncovered and, as with the test pitting, no finds pre-dating the 19th century were found. As the new footpath predominantly followed the existing farm track and the excavation depth was kept to a depth of only 200mm, no substantial disturbance was made to the undisturbed soil or the scheduled monument.

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Maps

SSEW 1983 *Soils of Eastern England*, Sheet **4**, Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1:250,000

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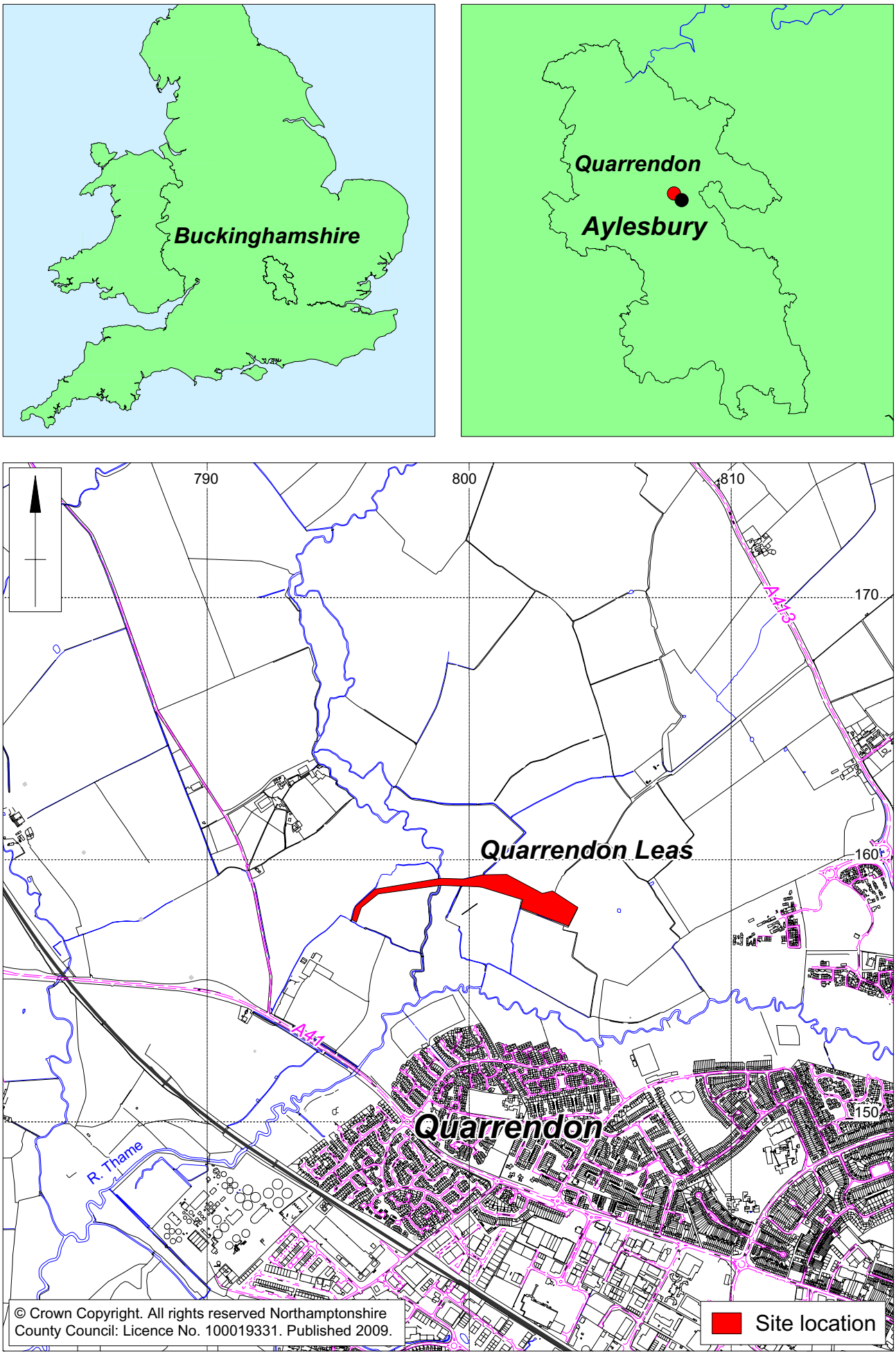
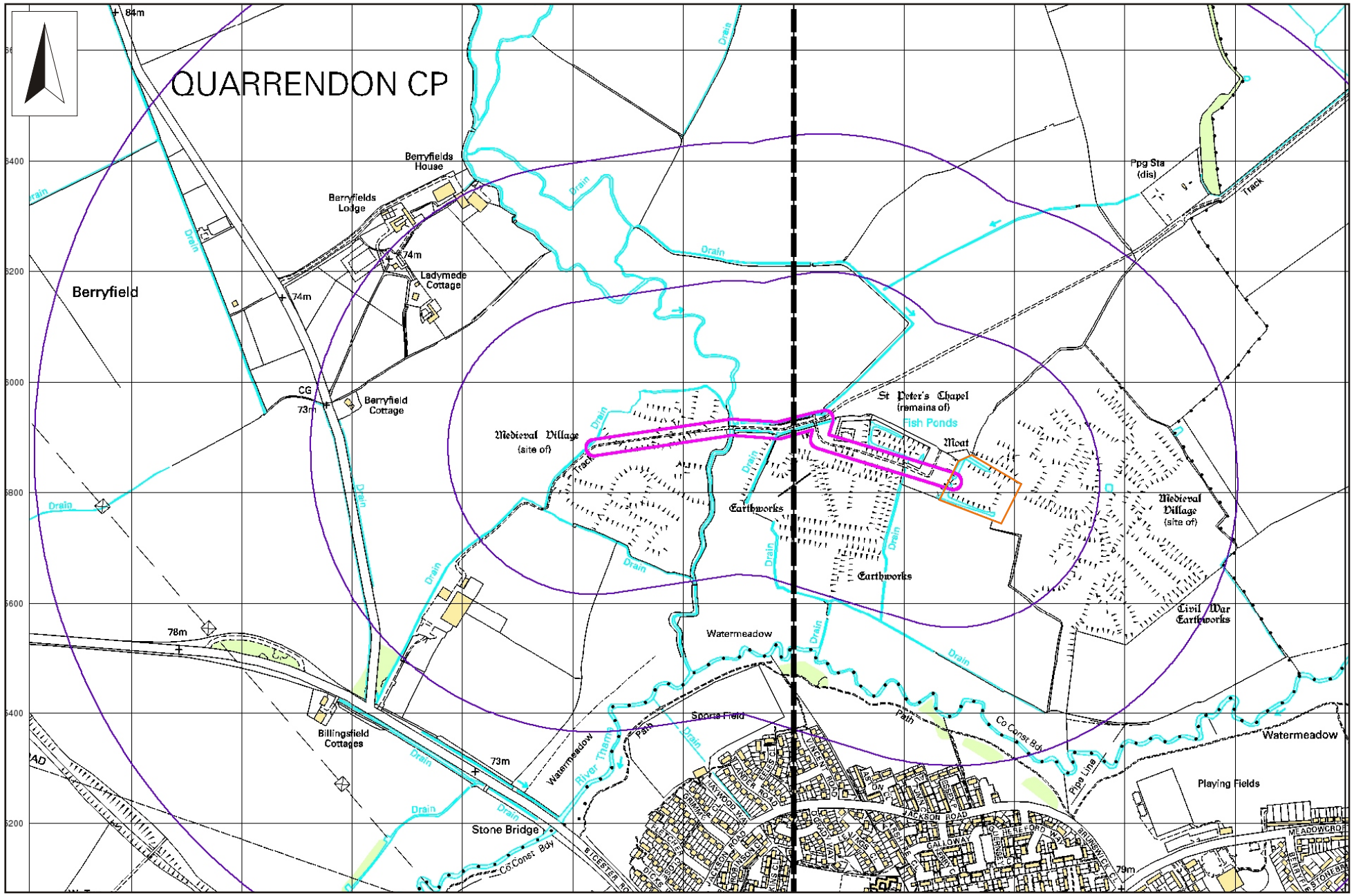
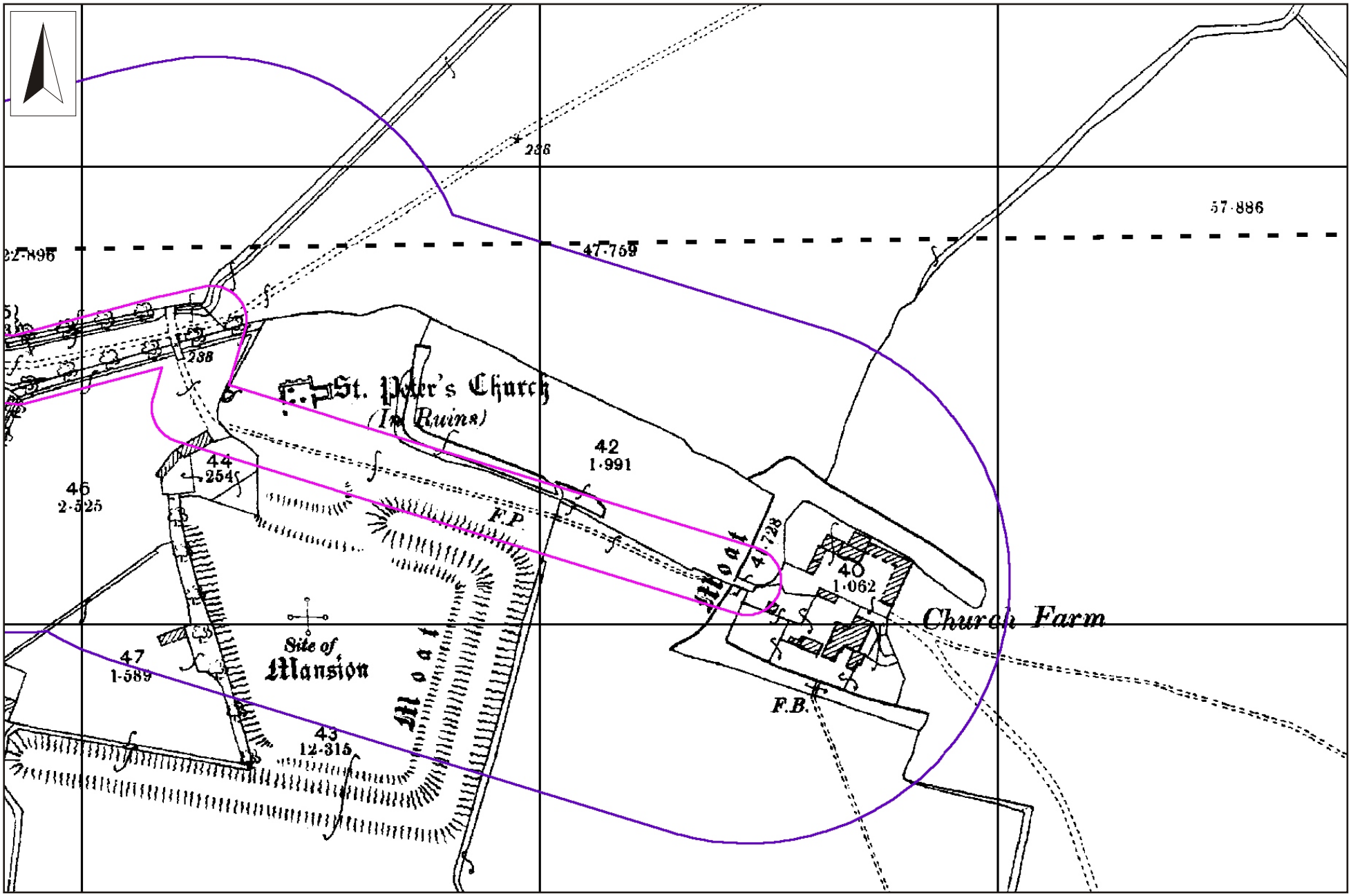


Scale 1:20,000

Site location Fig 1



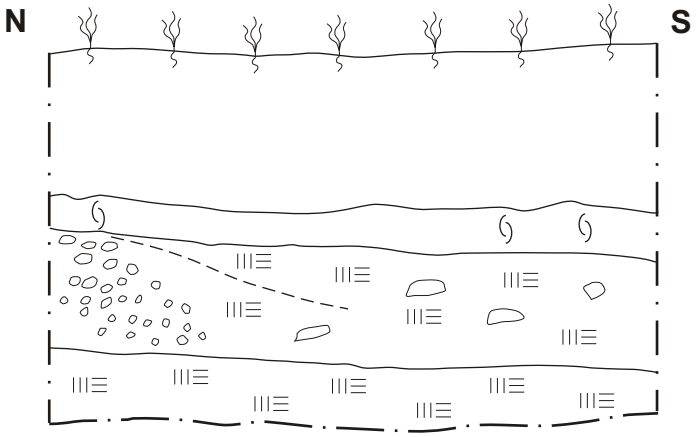
Earthworks plan of Quarrendon Leas 2008 Fig 2



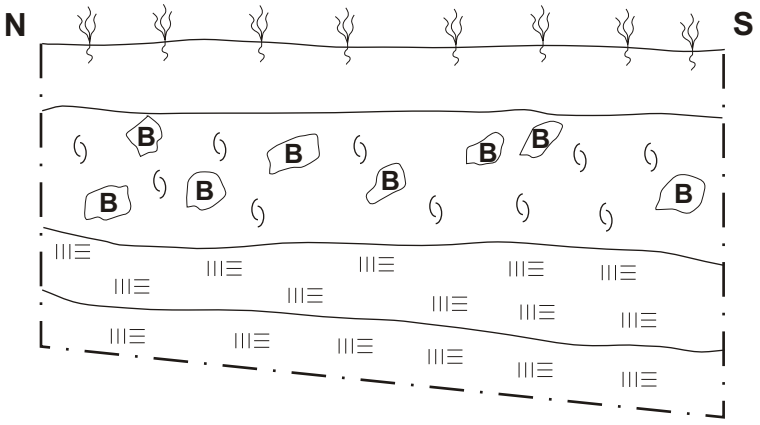
Detail from Ordnance Survey Map 1899 Fig 3

Location of Test Pits Fig 4

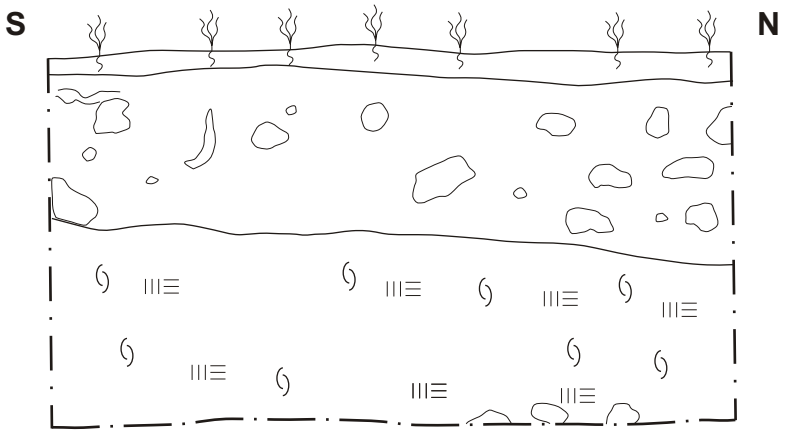
Test Pit 1



Test Pit 2



Test Pit 4



B brick

silt

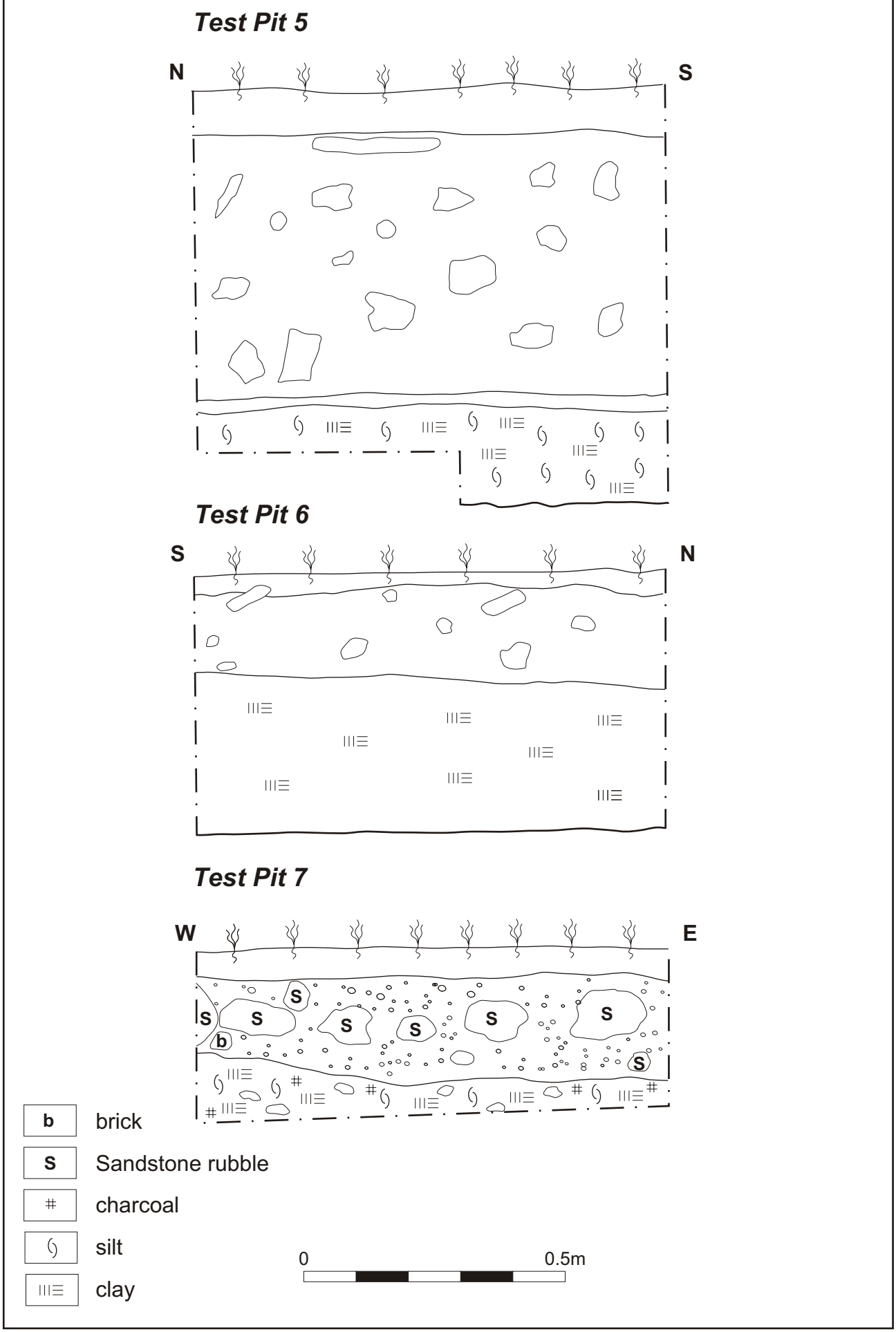
clay

0 0.5m

Test Pits 1,2 and 4 Fig 5

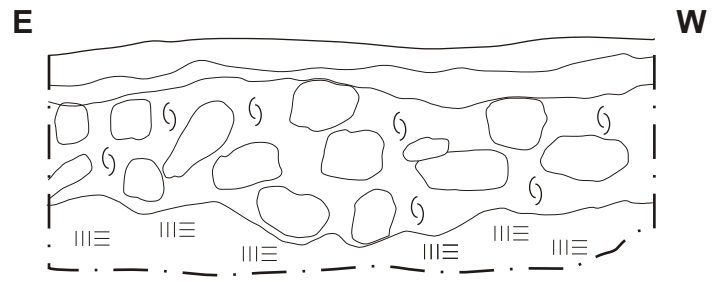
Fig 6: Test Pit 2, facing north

Fig 7: Test Pit 4, facing west

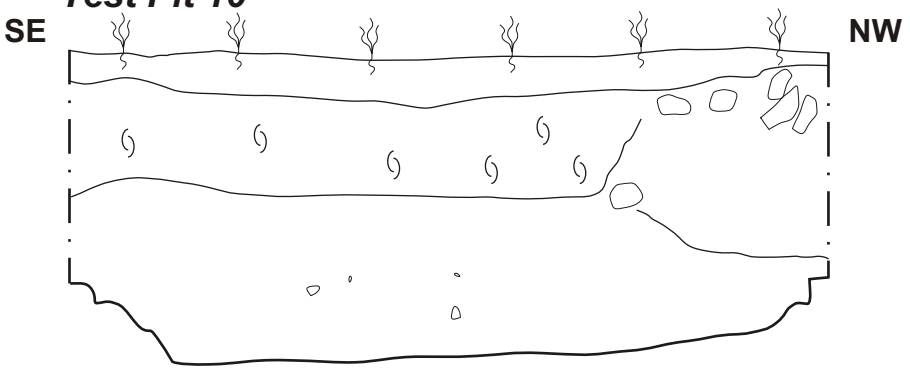


Test pits 5, 6 and 7 Fig 8

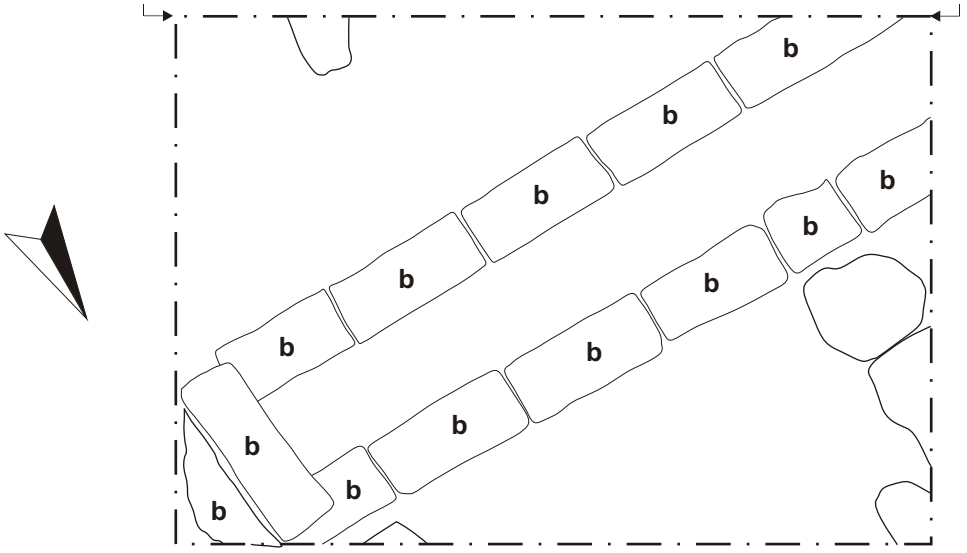
Test Pit 9



Test Pit 10



Plan of Test Pit 10



b brick

silt

clay

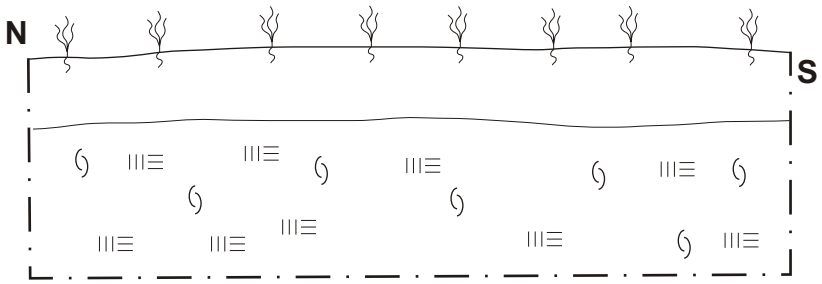
0 0.5m

Test Pits 9 and 10 Fig 9

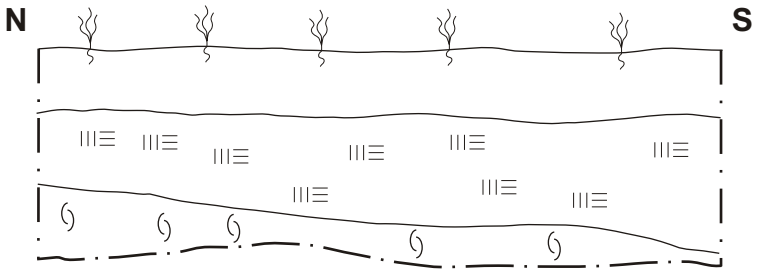
Fig 10: Test Pit 8, plan view

Fig 11: Brick drain in Test Pit 10, facing north

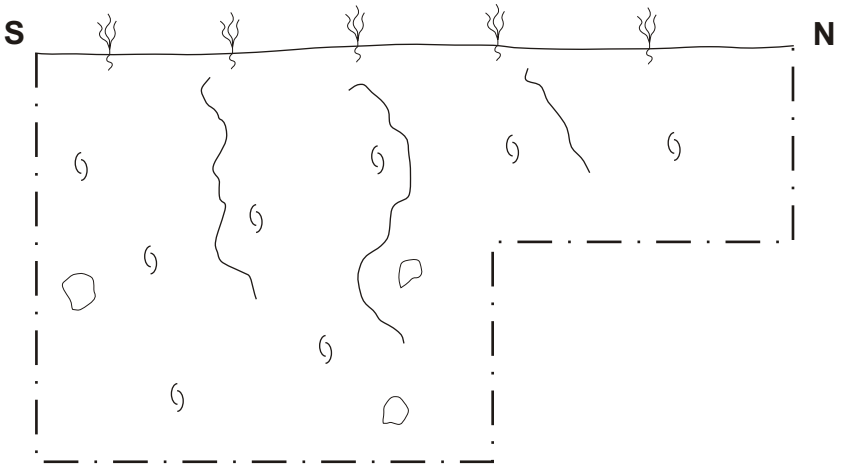
Test Pit 11



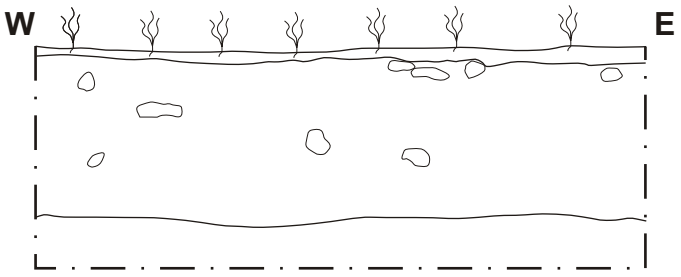
Test Pit 12



Test Pit 13



Test Pit 14



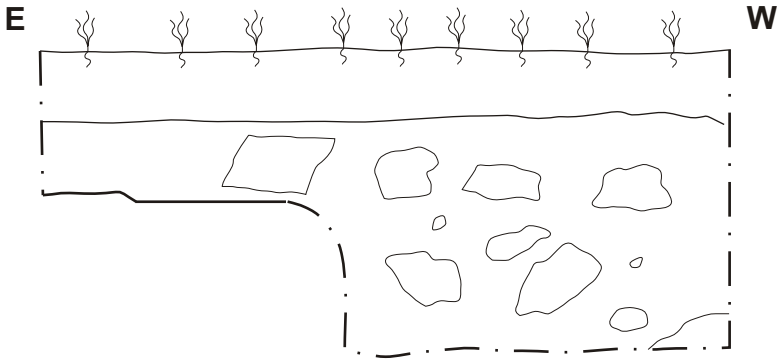
Silt

Clay

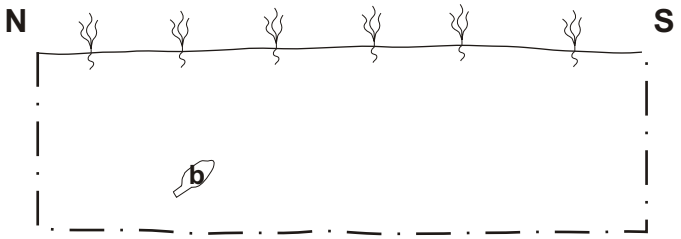
0 0.5m

Test Pits 11, 12, 13 and 14 Fig 12

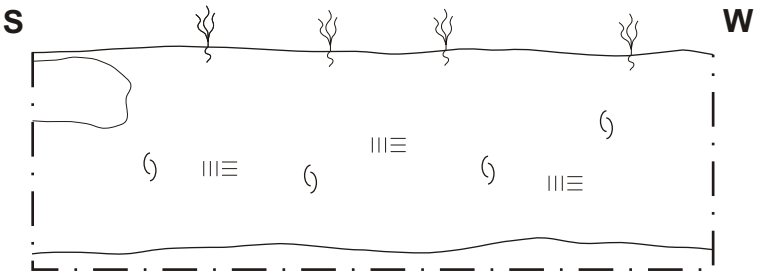
Test Pit 15



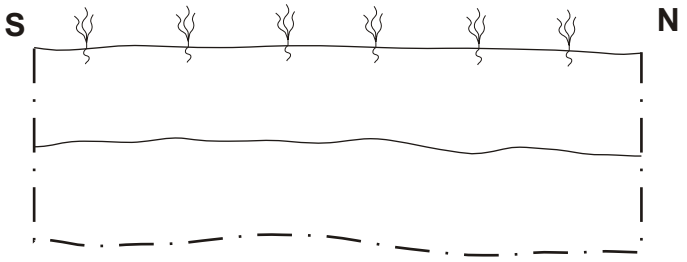
Test Pit 16

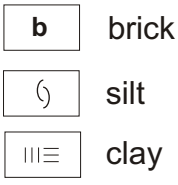


Test Pit 17

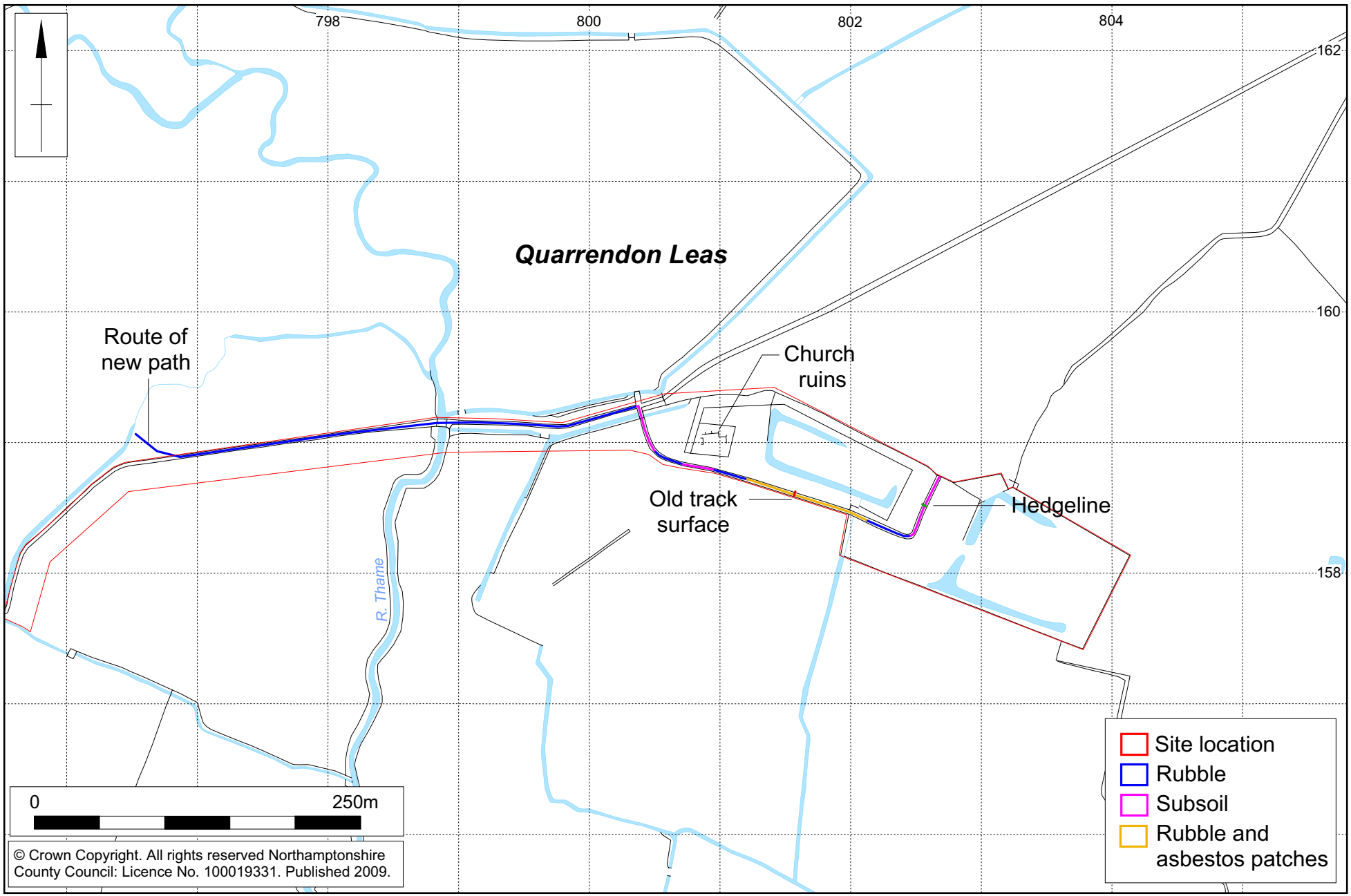


Test Pit 18





Test Pits 15, 16, 17 and 18 Fig 13



Plan of footpath and area covered by watching brief Fig 14

Fig 15: General view of footpath under construction

Fig 16: Farm track rubble exposed

Fig 17: Partially completed footpath

Fig 18: General view of the footpath northern spur

Fig 19: Diversion of footpath around a gate

Fig 20: Possible older surface of farm track

Fig 21: Old hedge line

Northamptonshire County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Remains of St Peter's Church, Quarrendon, facing north-east
(TBM on stone in foreground)

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