



Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological evaluation at the site of proposed
new dwellings, 35 Peterborough Road, Castor



Northamptonshire Archaeology
2 Bolton House
Wootton Hall Park
Northampton NN4 8BE
t. 01604 700493 f. 01604 702822
e. sparry@northamptonshire.gov.uk
w. www.northantsarchaeology.co.uk



**Northamptonshire
County Council**

Joe Prentice
Report 10/90
June 2010



STAFF

Project Manager Anthony Maull Cert Ed
Text Joe Prentice
Roman pottery Tora Hylton
Medieval pottery Iain Soden BA MfA
Ceramic building material Tora Hylton
Environmental evidence Karen Deighton MSc
Fieldwork Joe Prentice and Daniel Nagy MA
Illustration Amir Bassir BSc

QUALITY CONTROL

	Print name	Signature	Date
Checked by	Ian Meadows		
Verified by	Pat Chapman		
Approved by	Steve Parry		

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	Archaeological evaluation at the site of proposed new dwellings, 35 Peterborough Road, Castor	
Short description	Northamptonshire Archaeology undertook a trial trench evaluation on land at 35 Peterborough Road, Castor on behalf the owners, Mr and Mrs Lister, who propose to build a new semi-detached dwelling on the site which lies to c200m to the south of a large Roman building. A ditch and three pits dated to the medieval period were found, and some contained residual Roman pottery and ceramic building material fragments. A similar assemblage of finds was retrieved from subsoil and topsoil. No Roman features were identified.	
Project type	Evaluation (CPR 10)	
Site status	Village centre	
Previous work	Evaluation on the frontage of the same plot	
Current Land use	Former builders yard	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	Medieval	
Significant finds	Roman and medieval pottery	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Cambridgeshire	
Site address	35 Peterborough Road, Castor	
Study area (sq.m or ha)	c25 sq m	
OS Easting & Northing	TL 12450 98340	
Height OD	c 9.5m OD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)	
Project brief originator	Peterborough City Council Archaeological Service	
Project Design originator	Anthony Maull, NA	
Director/Supervisor	Joe Prentice	
Project Manager	Anthony Maull	
Sponsor or funding body	Mr and Mrs J Lister	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date/end date	April 2010	
ARCHIVES		
	Location	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		Pottery, tile, bone,
Paper		Site records, photographic, drawings
Digital		Mapinfo GIS data, photographs
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
	Unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	Archaeological evaluation at the site of proposed new dwellings, 35 Peterborough Road, Castor	
Serial title & volume	Northamptonshire Archaeology Report 10/90	
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT THE SITE OF PROPOSED

NEW DWELLINGS, 35 PETERBOROUGH ROAD, CASTOR

APRIL 2010

ABSTRACT

Northamptonshire Archaeology undertook a trial trench evaluation on land at 35 Peterborough Road, Castor on behalf the owners, Mr and Mrs Lister, who propose to build a new semi-detached dwelling on the site which lies c200m to the south of a large Roman building. A ditch and three pits dated to the medieval period, and some also contained residual Roman pottery and ceramic building material fragments. A similar assemblage of finds was retrieved from subsoil and topsoil. No Roman features were identified.

1 INTRODUCTION

In April 2010 Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) was commissioned by Mr and Mrs Lister to undertake a trial trench evaluation on land at 35 Peterborough Road, Castor (NGR TL 12450 98340, Fig 1). The work was undertaken as required by Peterborough City Council Archaeologist to support a planning application for a development of a new semi-detached residential dwelling.

The evaluation complied with a method statement formulated by Northamptonshire Archaeology (Maull and Clarke 2010) with the fieldwork being undertaken on 19th and 20th April 2010. A single T-shaped trench was excavated across the proposed development area (Fig 2).

A site code, CPR 10 (**Castor, Peterborough Road, 2010**) was allocated to the project.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Historical and archaeological background

The area of Castor is renowned for the density of its archaeological remains that were first recorded by Edmund Artis (Artis 1828). The area of the hill, c 200m to the north, was occupied by a substantial 4th century Roman building identified as potentially the seat of regional government (Mackreth 1984). Elements of the structure have been intermittently examined since the 19th century (Green *et al* 1988, Rollo 1983 and Meadows 1991). Prior to the erection of the substantial Roman building a villa occupied the lower parts of the slopes, but when work on the later building started the villa was abandoned and slighted. The area of the hillside extending to the south of the old Peterborough Road was incorporated in a grandiose symmetrical landscaping scheme. Potential elements of the planting were recovered in the garden of 30 Peterborough Road and an axial track was traced across the area developed by Pearl Assurance for their sports complex (Meadows 2003). Walls and other elements associated with the late Roman building have been traced running southwards down hill but no indications of structures have yet been found to its rear or sides.

In the Saxon period the village became the site of St Kyneburga's nunnery. Evidence for 7th-century activity that might be part of the nunnery has been identified to the rear of Elmlea, north of Castor Church, c1km north of the present study area (Green *et al* 1988).

The evidence largely comprised pits that contained pottery and personal items such as pins and combs.

To the north of the Old Rectory in Samworth Close, the remains of Saxo-Norman activity were identified by excavation in 1972 (Mackreth 1973). A watching brief was carried out in 1983 when a new service run was laid along the present line of the drive of the Old Rectory. This work revealed a stone cist, some human bone and the probable continuation of the middle Saxon ditch identified at Elmlea (Rollo 1983). Observations during rebuilding of the porch on the south side of the Old Rectory revealed a deep horizon of disturbed ground, presumably related to the construction of the existing building.

An appraisal of the records held by the Historic Environment Record has indicated a number of records in close proximity to the current development area. A watching brief was carried out during the construction of extensions to the front and rear of 35 Peterborough Road (Abrams 2000; HER ref 51120). A single, undated pit was found as well as a small stone head thought to have come from a next door modern sculptor. The site of a Roman rectangular building, related to the complex to the north, and thought to have been excavated by Artis in the 1820s, is situated c 50m to the west of the area (HER 51551 and 51552). A further building, on the northern side of Peterborough Road, situated c 50m to the north-west is also thought to have been excavated by Artis (HER 51549 and 51550).

The current application site sits within an area of very high archaeological potential just outside (south of) the boundary of the Scheduled Monument PE (Peterborough) 93, a complex of high status Roman buildings in the centre of Castor. It has the potential to contain important sequences of important archaeological remains spanning the Roman period to the late medieval period, which are known to survive in parts of the village in a good state of preservation.

The site lies adjacent to Peterborough Road to the south of the village church and the underlying geology has been mapped as comprising a mixture of Jurassic limestone and clay.

3 OBJECTIVES

The principal aim of the archaeological evaluation was to quantify the quality and extent of the archaeological resource and inform further decisions regarding the archaeological strategy for the site.

The purpose of the trial trench evaluation was to gather sufficient information to generate a reliable predictive model of the extent, character, date, state of preservation and depth of burial for important archaeological remains within the application area. Specifically this would aim to:

- Establish whether any archaeological deposit existed in the area with particular regard to any which merit preservation *in situ*.
- Identify the date, form and function of any archaeological deposit, together with its extent, depth and quality of preservation.
- Evaluate the likely impact of past land use and possible presence of masking colluvial or alluvial deposits.
- Establish the potential for the survival of environmental evidence.

- Provide sufficient information to construct an archaeological mitigation strategy, dealing with preservation, the recording of archaeological deposits, working practises, timetables and overheads.

4 METHODOLOGY

The brief requested a T-shaped trench, total length 25m (PCCAS 2010), however, the disposition of the plot allowed only a total of 21m long x 1.8m wide to be excavated in agreement with the Peterborough City Council Archaeologist.

Trial excavation proceeded as a single continuous programme of works.

The location of the trench was plotted on the ground and tied into the Ordnance Survey, and all site levels were related to Ordnance Datum.

The topsoil, subsoil and non-structural garden soils and modern overburden were removed under archaeological supervision by mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. Since there were no significant archaeological remains present, the natural substrate was consequently revealed. The excavated area, including all sections, was cleaned by hand sufficiently to enhance the definition of features and deposits.

All features and layers of potential significance were sampled by hand excavation to determine their date and character.

All archaeological deposits and artefacts encountered during the course of excavation were fully recorded in order to characterise and interpret their date and relationships to any features. Recording followed standard Northamptonshire procedures (NA 2006). All archaeological deposits were given individual context numbers and were described on *pro-forma* context sheets, including details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds. All potential archaeological features were excavated, with basal deposits of sectioned features investigated.

The surface of features were cleaned by hand to enhance their definition and planned to scale. The trench section and profiles through features were drawn at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20 as appropriate. All drawings included levels that were related to Ordnance Datum.

Artefacts and ecofacts were collected by hand and retained, receiving appropriate care prior to removal from site (IfA 2008; Walker 1990; Watkinson 1987). Unstratified animal bones and modern material were not collected.

No samples were taken since no deposits within features were identified as having potential for environmental analysis.

Photographs were taken as 35mm monochrome negatives, and colour transparencies in the traditional manner. The photographic record was compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing. Digital photographs supplemented the record for reporting purposes.

The excavated area and spoil heaps were scanned by metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval.

All records compiled during fieldwork will be filed into a comprehensive and fully cross-

referenced site archive.

5 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

5.1 General comments

The natural geology, an orange clay with gravel, was typically observed at depths of 0.70-0.90m below the modern ground surface which lies at a roughly level 9.0m above Ordnance Datum. Subsoil was a dark grey-brown clay loam, and difficult to distinguish clearly from topsoil which comprised a dark brown loam. The area had been previously used as a builders yard, and Ordnance Survey mapping indicates the presence of a building in this part of the plot up until circa 2000 (Abrams 2000) though no evidence now remains and it was not detected in the evaluation. It may be that the building was constructed of timber and had little or no foundations.

The only constraints within the site was that the upright (north-east to south-west) arm of the T-shape had to be shortened by approximately 4m since its northern end impinged on the gateway into the plot; this slight change to the trench length was conveyed to the curator by telephone who agreed that this truncation could be allowed. Additional length could not easily be added to the bar of the T-shape, since that section had been opened first and fencing close to either end precluded the opportunity for the machine to return and lengthen them.

Archaeological features, all medieval, were evenly spread across the trench, with only one lying completely within its confines. The others were therefore only partly observed, but those sections were fully excavated. Modern geotechnical test-pits were also observed.

5.2 The evaluation

The trench comprised a T-shape, the bar of which was aligned along the entire width of the rear (south) wall of the proposed dwelling on a north-west to south-east axis, with the upright arm of the T aligned north-east to south-west lying across the depth of the proposed building (Figs 1, 2 and 3). Beneath a dark brown slightly clay loam topsoil (1) which contained remarkably little in the way of modern debris or finds, a slightly greyer subsoil (2) was revealed. This layer contained pieces of Roman pottery and small fragments of ceramic building material including brick and box-flue and roof tile, with some medieval pottery. No features were identified during the machine stripping and the subsoil was removed until the upper surface of the natural orange clay was revealed.

Roughly in the centre of the arm of the T-shape, and aligned north-west to south-east a ditch was revealed crossing the trench [3] (Figs 3 and 6). Excavation of the fill revealed that the ditch may have been re-cut on the western side where a terminal was dug slightly deeper and wider into the natural clays and gravels. The eastern section was narrower and shallower. If it were re-cut, since in the western section only one cut was visible, that section must be the later of the two, since if it were originally the terminal of a ditch, and the shallower and narrower section had later been cut across the top of it when partially or fully infilled, there would be evidence of this in the section. Apart from the differing widths and depths of the feature there was no discernable difference in the fills of either section. The ditch contained mainly medieval pottery with a single piece of Roman roof tile (tegulae) and some Roman pottery (see below, section 5.4).

At the eastern end of the bar of the T-shape, a steep-sided narrow pit, or possibly the terminal of a ditch was revealed [05], (Figs 3 and 7). Only part of this feature lay within the trench and therefore its full extent is unknown. Towards the upper limit of the feature, but below the level of topsoil, a layer of limestone pieces was observed; all were

undressed and the maximum size was approximately 250mm. They were arranged in a horizontal layer and did not appear to be packing such as might be associated with the infill of a posthole since not only did they lie in a horizontal layer, but most of the individual stones lay flat whereas when used for packing most are placed vertically. The pit or ditch terminal contained just two pieces of medieval pottery from the lower section of fill, beneath the stone.

At the west end of the trench an oval-shaped pit was revealed [10], (Figs 3 and 8). This was a feature cut only slightly into the natural clays with a single fill. The pit contained medieval pottery.

The largest of the medieval features was a roughly circular pit, only half of which lay within the confines of the trench [12], (Figs 3 and 9). It had steep, and in places, slightly undercut sides and an almost flat base. The pit contained two fills. The lower fill (14) contained largely medieval pottery with residual Roman pieces. It also contained an almost complete skeleton of a small dog (see below, section 6). The uppermost (13) a grey/brown clay loam which contained no finds.

Two modern geotechnical test-pits were identified, both had been excavated by Mr Lister in the last few years in order to determine the depth of soils and the level of the natural geology (Fig 3). Neither were further investigated, but both were planned and included on the sections. Three small rectangular modern features were also seen at the junction of the arms of the trench, their purpose is unclear, but they contained modern frogged brickwork (dating at the earliest to the late 19th-century) and they may have been postholes, though their disposition makes this interpretation difficult to understand; they may relate to the building/shed formerly located on the plot. They were similarly not further investigated apart from being added to the trench plan (Fig 3). At the very western end of the trench an area of slightly darker soil was further cleaned having originally been thought to be a feature, but this resolved itself simply as an area of darker natural.

6 THE FINDS

6.1 Roman pottery and ceramic building material by Tora Hylton

Roman pottery

In total there are 15 sherds of Roman pottery with a combined weight of 194g (Table 1). With the exception of a small number of unstratified sherds recovered from topsoil and subsoil deposits overlying the trench, the entire assemblage was recovered from a series of medieval pits (5, 10, 12) and a ditch (3) and therefore residual. The assemblage is dominated by locally produced coarsewares in shell-gritted and greyware fabrics. There are no diagnostically early forms, but the presence of undiagnostic sherds of Lower Nene Valley colour coat, known to have been produced locally and a distinctive shell-gritted rim sherd suggests a mid 2nd to late 4th century date. The rim sherd was recovered from ditch [3], it has a flat-top and a slight internal overhang; stylistically the form display similarities to an example from Harrold, Bedfordshire (Brown 1994), which has been identified as a dog dish or a lid for a flanged bowl and dated to the late 4th century (ibid 1994, fig 40, 366).

Table 1: Catalogue of Roman pottery

Fabric type *	Context											
	1		2		4		6		11		14	
	No/Wt (g)	No/Wt (g)	No/Wt (g)	No/Wt (g)	No/Wt (g)	No/Wt (g)	No/Wt (g)	No/Wt (g)	No/Wt (g)	No/Wt (g)	No/Wt (g)	
Greyware	1	26			2	9					1	37
Shell-gritted (RSG)	-	-	1	11	1	7	2	18	3	30	-	-
Lower Nene Valley Colour coat (LNVCC)	-	-	-	-	2	7	-	-	-	-	1	2
Lower Nene Valley Cream & whitewares (LNVCM)	1	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Misc. Sandyware	1	36	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	3	73	1	11	5	23	1	18	3	30	2	39

* The Nene Valley Research Committee Roman pottery fabric series.

Ceramic building material

A total of 26 fragments of ceramic tile with a combined weight of 1.063kg were recovered (Table 2). In tandem with the pottery all the fragments were residual within medieval deposits and this has resulted in a fragmentary assemblage displaying signs of abrasion. As the area is known to be rich in archaeological remains dating to the Roman period, the assemblage probably represents background scatter.

Examination of the fabrics (by eye) indicates that three main fabric types are represented, although there may be slight variations within each type.

Fabric types

- 1) Shell-tempered fabrics containing abundant crushed fossil shell and fired to a pale buff/orange colour, it has a grey core and it slightly soapy to touch.
- 2) Sandy fabrics with varying quantities of fine-medium sand, which are generally orange in colour, sparse micaceous inclusions. A small amount has a distinct grey core. Hard to touch.
- 3) Similar to 2 but with sparse calcareous inclusions, fired to a orange colour, hard to touch

Most of the assemblage comprises undiagnostic fragments that are difficult to identify with any certainty. However, there are a small number of identifiable fragments which can be divided into two broad functional groups: roofing tile and hypocaust tile. There are five pieces of roof tile, represented by tegulae (3) and imbreces (2); all the examples occur in Fabric 2. Hypocaust tile is represented by three fragments of boxflue tile, recognised because of the presence of combed keying lines. Boxflue tiles occur in fabrics 1, 2 and all examples are furnished with curved combing, which has been executed with a tool furnished with a minimum of 6-8 prongs.

Table 2: Catalogue of Roman tile

Tile type	Context							
	2		4		11		14	
	No	Wt (g)	No	Wt (g)	No	Wt (g)	No	Wt (g)
Roof tile: Tegula	1	24	1	338	1	73	-	-
Roof tile: Imbrex	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	57
Hypocaust tile: Box flue	1	84	-	-	-	-	2	20
Undiagnostic	2	12	7	55	-	-	9	400
Total	4	120	8	393	1	73	13	477

6.2 Medieval pottery by Iain Soden

Twenty-one sherds of late Saxon and medieval pottery were recovered, weighing a total of 158g and deriving from five types or fabrics, as follows (Table 3):

Table 3: Catalogue of medieval pottery

Fabric type	Context					
	2		4		14	
	No	Wt (g)	No	Wt (g)	No	Wt (g)
Stamford ware	3	12	1	2	4	23
Oolitic shellyware	-	-	2	12	7	56
Potterspury ware?	-	-	-	-	1	9
Medieval sandy ware	-	-	-	-	2	8
Developed Stamford ware	-	-	1	15	-	-
Totals	3	12	4	29	14	96

None of the material, which has been matched to published material from The Still, Peterborough (Spoerry and Hinman 1998) and the Northamptonshire Ceramic Type Series, is of particular note, being primarily non-diagnostic body sherds. It does, however, indicate that the features are of Saxo-Norman or early medieval date. With the exception of a single sherd from south-west Northamptonshire, the pottery is relatively local and overall of the period c1050-1200/1250 AD.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

7.1 Animal bone by Karen Deighton

A total of 644 grams of animal bone was collected from a small number of contexts during the course of excavation. This material was analysed to determine the taxa present, state of preservation and its contribution to the understanding of the site.

Identifiable bones were noted. Ageable and measurable bones (after Von Den Driesch 1976) were also noted. Ageable elements included cheek tooth rows, bones where the state of fusion is apparent and neonatal bones.

Preservation was reasonable with low levels of surface abrasion. Fairly high levels of fragmentation were observed in all contexts except pit [12] where fragmentation was low. No evidence for canid gnawing, butchery or burning was noted.

Taxa Present*Table 4: Taxa by context*

Cut/fill	Feature	Cattle	Sheep/ goat	Horse	Dog	Large ungulate	Mussel
02	Subsoil	-	1	-	-	1	-
03/04	ditch	1	1	1	-	-	1
10/11	pit	-	1	-	-	-	-
12/14	pit	-	-	-	1	-	-

An almost complete (phalanges were absent), articulated dog skeleton was present in context (14). This included limb bones, ribs, vertebra, skull and mandibles. All epiphyses were fused and adult dentition was present and just in wear, which suggests an animal of at least 18 months of age (Silver 1969). Excess bone growth was noted on four metatarsals, which suggests an arthritic condition. The fact that the skeleton was almost complete, articulated in the ground and no other bone was recovered from the context suggests deliberate burial.

Ageing and metrical data

The availability of ageing and metrical data was restricted to the dog skeleton. A young adult animal of 450-500mm shoulder height is suggested (Harcourt 1974).

Conclusion

The bone adds little to the understanding of the site due to the paucity of material. All that can be stated with any confidence is that a small range of common domesticates were associated with the site. The heavy fragmentation and taxonomically mixed nature of the bone (with the exception of the dog burial from context 14) suggest its origin to be domestic waste disposal.

8 CONCLUSIONS

Castor and its environs has been known for its important Roman remains since at least the early 19th century, when elements of a substantial and high status building were identified by Edmund Artis c200m to the north.

The present evaluation at 35 Peterborough Road, Castor revealed only limited secondary evidence of medieval occupation in the form of pits and a ditch, with no structural remains, and no direct evidence of Roman activity in the plot. This corresponds well with another evaluation on the same plot carried out in the year 2000 where no Roman features were identified, and only a single, undated pit was recorded. This appears to support the theory that any structures and perhaps related designed landscape features associated with the large Roman building close to the church may have been axially aligned and lie further to the north and west. It also might imply that an area around this more intensively developed and formally maintained area was further surrounded by a broader landscape environment, perhaps akin to the park of a country house estate of the post-medieval period.

Following the end of the Roman occupation and subsequent disrepair of the monumental building, there appears to have been less formally organised development of the area from the late Saxon period into the present day, and it appears that the pits revealed in this evaluation represent holes dug either for the extraction of clays or gravels, or intentionally as refuse pits, though the latter seems unlikely given the limited number of finds. The ditch most likely represents a boundary-marking device between two plots of land while also improving drainage, or might represent the rear of a plot

which otherwise fronted onto the present street to the north.

Residual Roman pottery and some building material is to be expected close to an area known to have contained substantial buildings, as well as pottery production to the south-west. No evidence was found of medieval buildings and the ditch and pits are likely to occupy the rear of a plot.

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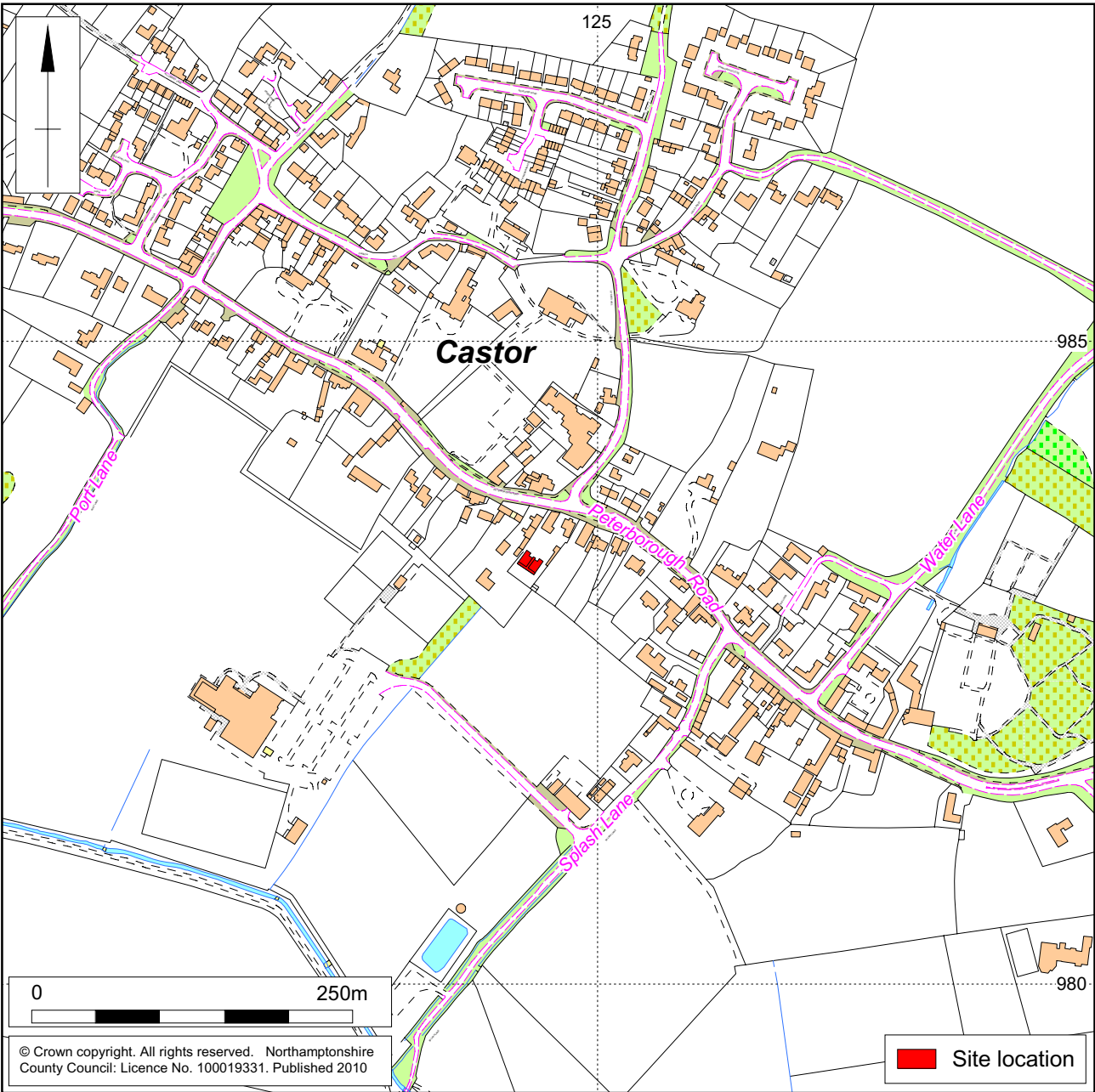
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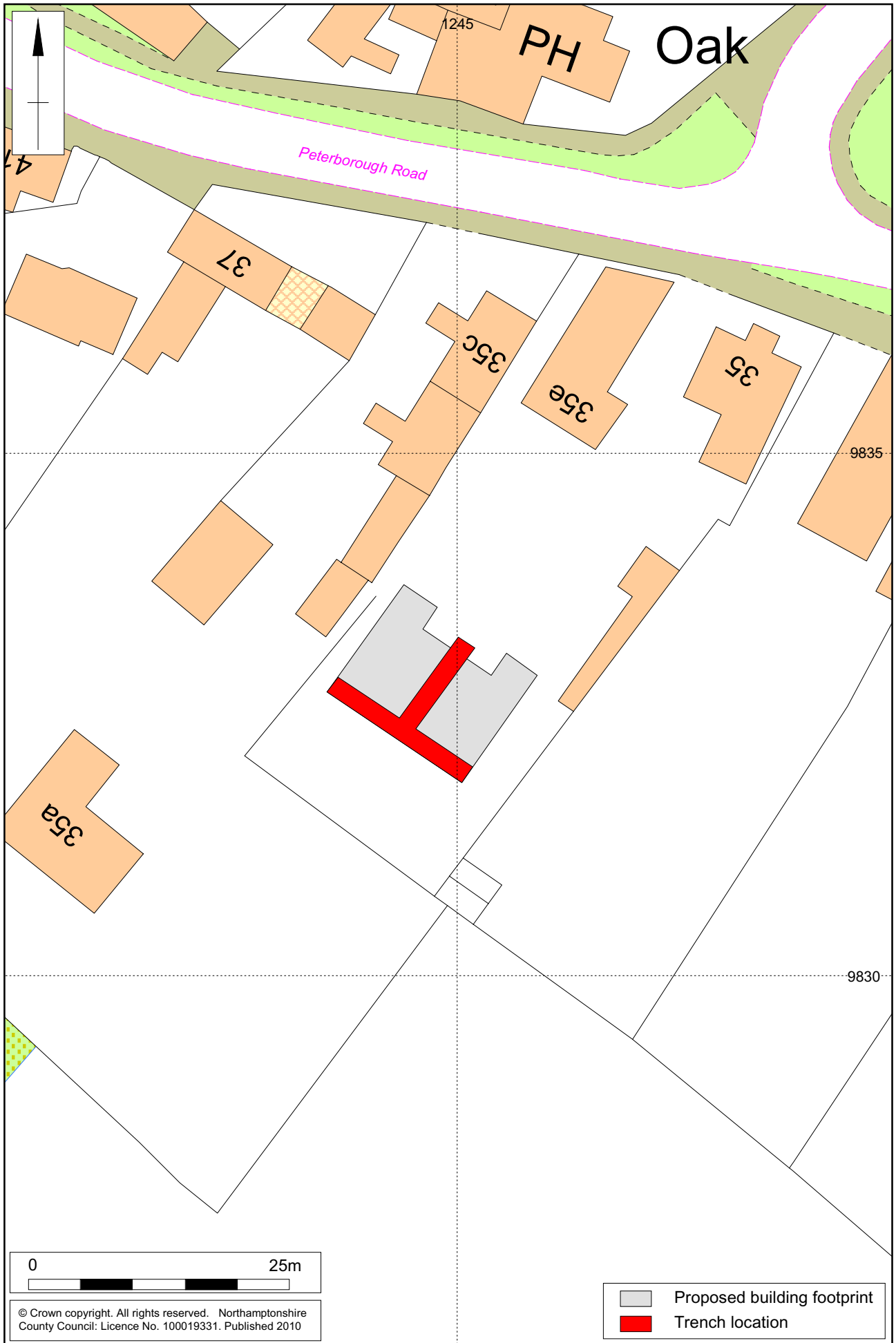
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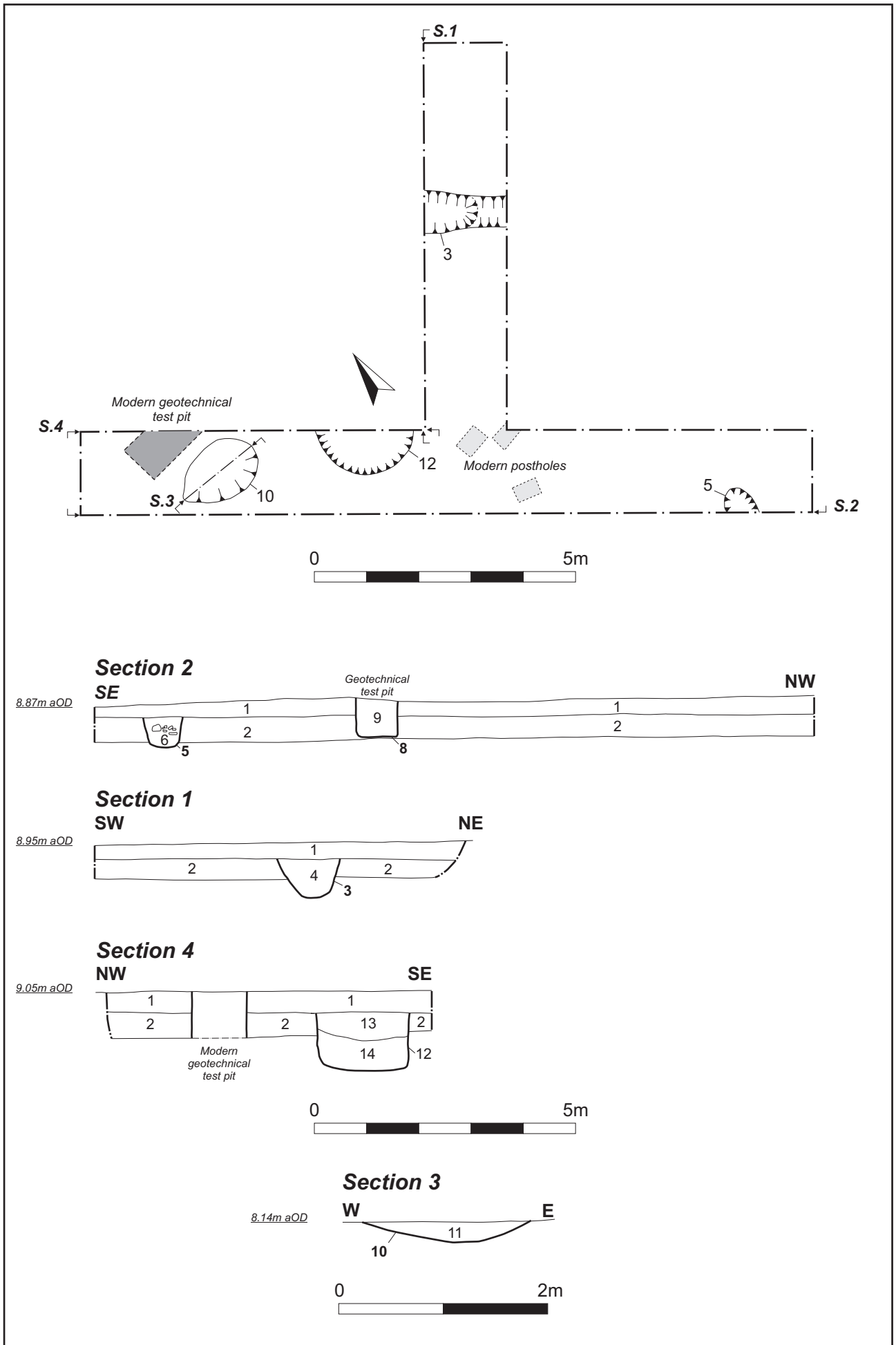
Scale 1:5000

Site Location Fig 1



Scale 1:500

Trench location plan showing the proposed building footprint Fig 2



Scale, plan 1:100, sections 1:100, 1:50

Fig 3



Trench looking south-west Fig 4



Trench looking north-west Fig 5



Ditch (3) looking north-west Fig 6



Pit (5) looking south-west Fig 7



Pit (10) looking north-west Fig 8



Pit (12) looking north-east Fig 9



Northamptonshire County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology



Northamptonshire Archaeology
2 Bolton House
Wootton Hall Park
Northampton NN4 8BE
t. 01604 700493 f. 01604 702822
e. sparry@northamptonshire.gov.uk
w. www.northantsarchaeology.co.uk

