



Northamptonshire Archaeology

The excavation of Romano-British features on land at
Nene Business Park, Irthlingborough,
Northamptonshire
June 2010 – December 2011



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

Michael Dawson
& David J Leigh

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STAFF

Project Manager CgMs	Michael Dawson, Mphil, FSA, MIfA
Project Manager NA	Steve Parry BA MA MIfA FSA
Text	Michael Dawson & David J. Leigh BA Hons
Fieldwork	David J. Leigh
	David Haynes
	Rob Smith
	Sam Pamment BA, MA
GPS software manipulation	Adam Yates BA MIfA
Metal detector survey	Steve Critchely BSc MSc
Metal artefact analysis	Tora Hylton
Iron Age pottery and fired clay	Andy Chapman BSc, MIfA, FSA
Illustrations	Amir Bassir BSc
Project archive	Theodora Anastasiadou-Leigh BA MA (Bham) MA (York)

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	The excavation of Iron Age and Romano-British features on land at Nene Business Park, Irthlingborough, Northamptonshire	
Short description	An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology on behalf of CgMs Consulting Limited acting for their client Eastern Range Limited during groundworks for a new business development on land at Nene Business Park, Irthlingborough. In the south-western corner of the site pits and ditches associated with Iron Age pottery were recorded, whilst a wall foundation of probable Romano-British date was recorded in the north-eastern corner of the site.	
Project type	Watching brief and contingency excavation	
Site status	Land adjacent to Scheduled Monument	
Previous work	Desk-based assessment (Dawson 2009), Watching brief (Dawson & Leigh 2010) Trial trench evaluation (Dawson & Leigh 2011)	
Current Land use	Development Site	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	Iron Age - Romano-British	
Significant finds		
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address	Nene Business Park, Irthlingborough, Northamptonshire	
Study area (sq.m or ha)		
OS Easting & Northing	SP 955 710	
Height OD	c49m aOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	CgMs & Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Northamptonshire County Council	
Project Design originator	Michael Dawson CgMs Consulting	
Director/Supervisor	David J. Leigh, Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project Manager	Michael Dawson CgMs Consulting	
Sponsor or funding body	CgMs Consulting	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	June 2010	
End date	December 2011	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical	Northamptonshire Archaeology	2 finds boxes containing pottery and 1 fragment of fired clay, Metal artefacts 1 small box
Paper	Northamptonshire Archaeology	Watching brief forms (34) Context forms (18) Plan and section sheets (4) Colour slides (34) black and white contact prints (34) Digital photographs (140)
Digital	Ditto	Report text and figures

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**THE EXCAVATION OF
IRON AGE AND ROMANO-BRITISH FEATURES
ON LAND AT NENE BUSINESS PARK, IRTHLINGBOROUGH
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
JUNE 2010 – DECEMBER 2011**

Abstract

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology on behalf of CgMs Consulting acting for their clients Eastern Range Limited between June 2010 and December 2011 during groundworks for a new business development on land at Nene Business Park, Irthlingborough. The work comprised observation of topsoil and subsoil stripping across the site down to formation levels along with the excavation of two balancing ponds and service trenches.

In the south-western corner of the site, adjacent to a Scheduled Monument, pits and ditches associated with Iron Age pottery were recorded. Whilst in the north-eastern corner a wall foundation of probable Romano-British date was recorded close to the Scheduled Monument of Crow Hill. Throughout the remainder of the site undisturbed soils were recorded.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Consent to construct a new business development on land at Nene Business Park, Irthlingborough, Northamptonshire (NGR: SP 955 710; Figs 1, 2 and 3; Plate 1) was granted by east Northants District Council (10/01947/FUL). This report concerns the archaeological watching brief undertaken during groundworks for the new development as specified .

As a condition of the planning consent, no development could take place within the application area until the applicant had secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which had been approved by the district Planning Authority. The written scheme of investigation (WSI) was prepared by Mike Dawson of CgMs Consulting in November 2009 (Dawson 2009).

The Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was submitted on 20 January 2011 to Northamptonshire County Council and adheres to the English Heritage procedural document, appendix 2, *Management of Archaeological Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (EH 2005). The watching brief was undertaken between June 2010 and December 2011, following the notification of commencement of works to, and with the agreement of, Northamptonshire County Council. The work was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology on behalf of CgMs Consulting acting for their client Eastern Range Limited.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

The development area is situated on the eastern edge of the town of Irthlingborough. As part of the present application an archaeological desk-based assessment was carried out (Dawson 2009) in order to assess the archaeological potential of the development area. This concluded that the development area lies within an area of archaeological interest. Immediately to the south of Marsh Lane a Bronze-Age burial

beneath a low mound (Chapman 2003, NHER 1765/0/03) was recorded during the construction of a new car-park at the Rushden and Diamonds football ground.

Directly adjacent to the development area are two Scheduled Ancient Monuments (Fig 2). The site of Crow Hill (NHR 1780) lies immediately on the northern boundary of the site, this was subject to archaeological investigation as part of a larger landscape survey (Parry 2006). Crow Hill is the site of a hillfort encompassing an area approximately 3ha and dates from the early to middle Iron-Age with evidence of continuous occupation through to the early-middle Saxon period. The original defences are thought to have comprised a rampart and single defensive ditch. During the first century AD the defences were enhanced with the addition of a palisade trench and the probable re-cutting of the main ditch. The continued occupation of the site into the Romano-British period is evidenced by a late Romano-British roundhouse and extensive surface scatters. Evidence of early-middle Saxon occupation of the site was identified in a subsequent re-cutting of the main ditch the presence of a large timber structure.

A second smaller Scheduled Monument containing an area of Iron-age settlement lies approximately 400m to the south (NHER 5258) of Crow Hill.

The first recorded reference to Irthlingborough is in AD780 where it is referred to as a village called *Yrtlingaburg*. It is then recorded as *Edinburne* in the Domesday Book of 1086 subsequently becoming *Hyrtlingberi* in 1137. From the medieval period up to the present the available evidence suggests that the site has been in agricultural use. Previous archaeological investigation in the development area has comprised of a desk-based assessment (Dawson 2009) and a watching brief carried out during preliminary groundworks (Dawson & Leigh 2010) both undertaken as part of the current application.

As a result of accidental soil stripping within the boundary of the Scheduled Monument of Crow Hill, a test-pit evaluation (Dawson & Leigh 2011) was carried out in order to assess the impact on any archaeological deposits which may have been present. No archaeological deposits were present within the evaluation area.

Topographically the site is situated on the north side of Marsh Lane and is located on ground rising steadily to the north-west which forms the north bank of the River Nene. The underlying geology, mapped by the British Geological Survey of Great Britain, comprises Boulder Clay and Limestone outcropping as cornbrash.

2.2 Environmental and cultural setting

The development area is situated on the eastern edge of the town of Irthlingborough. Up to the present development the area was made up of former arable land with scrub vegetation and small trees and shrubs.

The development area is situated on the eastern edge of Irthlingborough on the north bank of the River Nene, approximately 27km east of Northampton.

2.3 Objectives

The principle objective of the watching brief was to determine and understand the nature, function and character of any significant archaeological evidence and subsequently to put the site in its cultural and environmental setting.

The specific aims of the project have been to:

- Determine whether any significant archaeology is present in the development area;
- Determine the date and character of any evidence at the site;

- Having obtained a chronological sequence for human activity on the site to place it within its regional context;
- Create a permanent archive and record of the archaeological information collected during the course of the fieldwork and post-excavation analysis.

The national framework for research is set out by English Heritage (1997). The Research Aims set out in these documents provided the context for the analysis of results from the watching brief.

3.0 THE RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

3.1 Introduction

The watching brief comprised the observation of topsoil and subsoil stripping and the excavation of two balancing ponds (Plate 2) and service trenches for the new development. The excavations were carried out using various 360° mechanical excavators fitted with a combination of both toothed and toothless buckets. A photographic record in both black and white negative and colour slide was kept, along with supplementary photographs in digital format. The written record used Northamptonshire Archaeology pro-forma record sheets. The watching brief was carried out in accordance with the IfA Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching briefs (2008) and the Code of Conduct of the Institute for Archaeologists (1985, revised 2000).

The watching brief recorded a number of archaeological features within the investigation area (Fig 2).

3.2 Contextual evidence

The archaeological evidence

The site was stripped of topsoil and subsoil to reveal the natural substratum. This comprised Northampton Sand and Ironstone with areas of compact grey-blue Boulder clay encountered on average 0.40m below present ground level. Cut into this in the south-west corner of the site were a number of archaeological features (Fig 3; Plate 3). These comprised two small ditches or gullies along with three shallow pits. In the north-east corner of the site, the foundations of a stone wall were recorded. The features were cleaned by hand and planned on hand drawn plans supplemented by a GPS survey of the excavated features. All the features were sectioned, and a photographic record was kept in colour transparency and black and white negative supplemented by photographs in digital format.

The ditches

Ditch [1004] (Fig 4; Plate 4) entered the site from the north-west and ran approximately 6.5m south-east into an area of modern disturbance. The sides were cut at an angle of approximately 45° falling to a flattened base. It measured 0.80m wide by 0.40m deep. The fill (1005) comprised grey-brown silt loam, from which a quantity of Iron Age pottery and a single fragment of burnt clay was recovered. Evidence of degraded animal bone was noted within the deposit.

Approximately 20m to the north-east, a second small ditch [1010] entered the site from the north set on a north-west south-east alignment. This extended for 1.5m terminating in a butt-end. The sides were vertically cut falling to a concave base. It measured 0.90m wide by 0.20m deep. The fill (1011) comprised mid brown silt loam, containing occasional irregular stones and evidence of degraded animal bone.

The pits

Three pits [1006], [1008] and [1012] roughly circular in shape were recorded. From pit [1006] a quantity of Iron Age pottery was recovered.

Pit [1006] (Fig 4; Plate 5) lay adjacent to ditch [1004] on the northern side of the ditch system. It measured 1.0m in diameter with sloping sides falling to a flattened base and a maximum depth of 0.12m. It was filled with grey-brown silt loam (1007) containing a quantity of Iron Age pottery.

Pit [1008] was circular in plan and measured 0.80m in diameter by 0.12m in depth. It had almost vertically cut sides and a flattened base and was filled with grey-green compact clay (1009) containing limestone fragments and occasional irregular stones.

Lying approximately 75m to the north-east was pit [1012]. This measured 0.60m in diameter with a maximum depth of 0.05m. It had irregularly cut sides falling to a flattened base and was filled with dark grey-brown silt loam (1013), containing occasional irregular stones and small charcoal flecks.

The wall foundation

On the northern eastern corner of the site directly against the eastern boundary of the site, the foundation of a wall [1014] (Fig 3; Plate 6) was recorded cut into the natural substratum. This was 0.50m wide and measured approximately 13m in length. It was of dry stone construction surviving as a single course of un-worked limestone fragments. No artefacts were present from within the construction, however, a single iron nail was recovered from the subsoil immediately sealing it.

3.3 The Iron Age pottery and fired clay by Andy Chapman

A group of 30 sherds, weighing 400g, was recovered from the fill (1005) of a ditch [1006], and a further four sherds, weighing 40g, came from the fill (1007) of a nearby pit, [1008]. The average sherd weight is 14g, reflecting the presence of several large well-preserved sherds.

Almost the entire assemblage comprises sherds, 8-10mm thick, from hand-built vessels in fabrics containing dense quantities of crushed shell, measuring 1-4mm. They have grey cores but the rough surfaces range from buff through orange-brown to dark grey. Fill (1005) also contains three sherds with smoothed surfaces in fabrics containing only sparse crushed shell. One of these is a uniform grey-black throughout, probably coming from a globular bowl form. There is also a single small sherd from fill (1007) that is black throughout, and this has a burnished surface. Fills (1005) and (1007) also each contain a single sherd in a sandy fabric, with the sherd from fill (1007) coming from a small globular vessel with a smoothed surface.

The majority of the assemblage appears to come from small vessels, with the material from fill (1005) coming from at least seven vessels, while the four sherds from fill (1007) are from four separate vessels. The two rim sherds from fill (1005) are both from small rounded bowls, with simple rounded but sharply everted rims. They could be from the same vessel, although there is a marked difference in colour. Fill (1005) also contains a single sherd of scored ware. The single rim sherd from fill (1007) is rounded with a deep finger impression.

This assemblage can be broadly dated to the middle/late Iron Age, 4th to 1st centuries BC. However, the presence of a few sherds probably from better-finished globular bowls, uniformly black throughout and with smoothed to burnished surfaces, suggests the group probably dates to the later part of the period, perhaps only the 1st century BC, although an origin in the 2nd century BC cannot be excluded.

3.4 The iron nail by Tora Hylton

A single iron nail, partially covered in corrosion deposits was recovered from a subsoil deposit sealing wall [1014]. The nail is hand forged with a tapered square-sectioned shank and a small flat sub-circular head. Although incomplete, the tip of the shank is missing, it measures c.38mm in length. Nails from insecure deposits are difficult to date with any certainty; if this nail is Roman, then typologically it represents a Manning Type 1b (1985, fig 32).

3.5 Discussion

Two ditches were recorded one of which [1004] can be identified as belonging to a linear feature extending south-eastwards out of the area of the adjacent Scheduled Monument identified from aerial photography. To the north-west of this another ditch and three pits were also recorded which were not identified previously.

Dating evidence recovered from the excavation of the ditches and pits would suggest that activity in this area dates from the middle to late Iron Age, and perhaps specifically the 1st century BC, and this corresponds with the Scheduled Monument lying immediately adjacent.

No dating evidence was present for the limestone wall foundation, however, a possible Roman nail was recovered from the subsoil immediately sealing it.

Archaeological investigations undertaken approximately 30m to the west of the wall foundation (Parry 2006) identified evidence of roundhouses of probable Romano-British date lying outside the defences of the hillfort on the eastern slope. Fieldwalking undertaken during investigations also identified a probable shift in settlement focus with concentrations of early-late Roman pottery recovered from this area. It is possible, although cannot be currently proven that the wall foundation is contemporary with this phase of occupation.

The watching brief and contingency excavation undertaken at Nene Business Park has provided further evidence for the nature and extent of Iron Age to Romano-British activity in the area of Crow Hill.

4.0 THE ARCHIVE

The watching brief and excavation has generated an archive of photographs, paperwork and artefacts, which will be held at Northamptonshire Archaeology until such time as a suitable depository has been appointed.

RECORD	NUMBER
Watching brief forms	34
Context forms	18
Find boxes containing pottery and fired clay	2
Plan and section sheets	4
Metal artefacts	1 small box
Black and white contact prints	34
Colour slides	34
Digital photographs	140

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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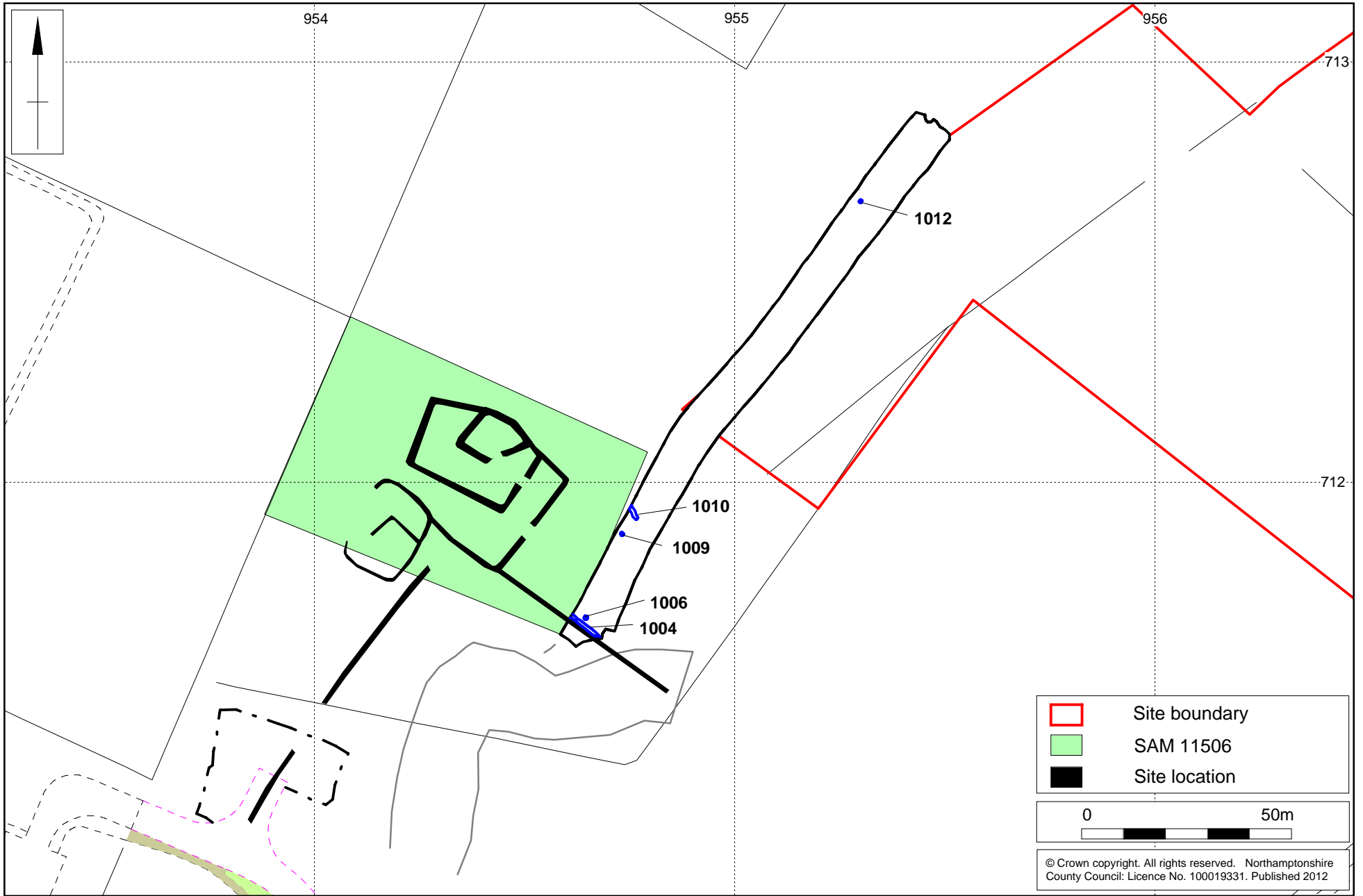
English Heritage 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects*

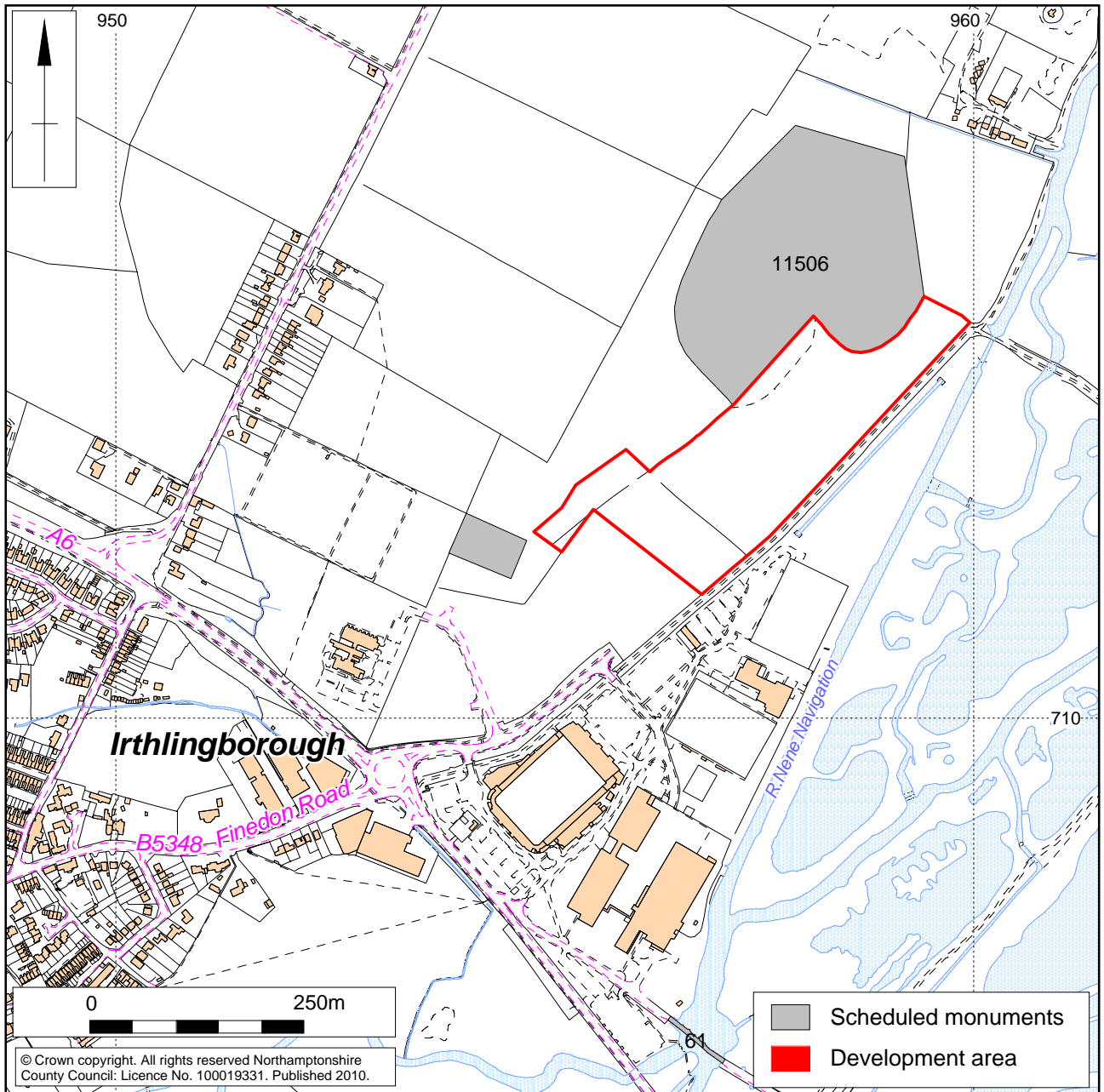
IfA 2008 *Standards and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*, Institute for Archaeologists

Parry, S, 2006, *Raunds Area Survey, An archaeological study of the landscape of Raunds, Northamptonshire 1985-94*, Oxbow Books

Scale 1:1250 (A4)

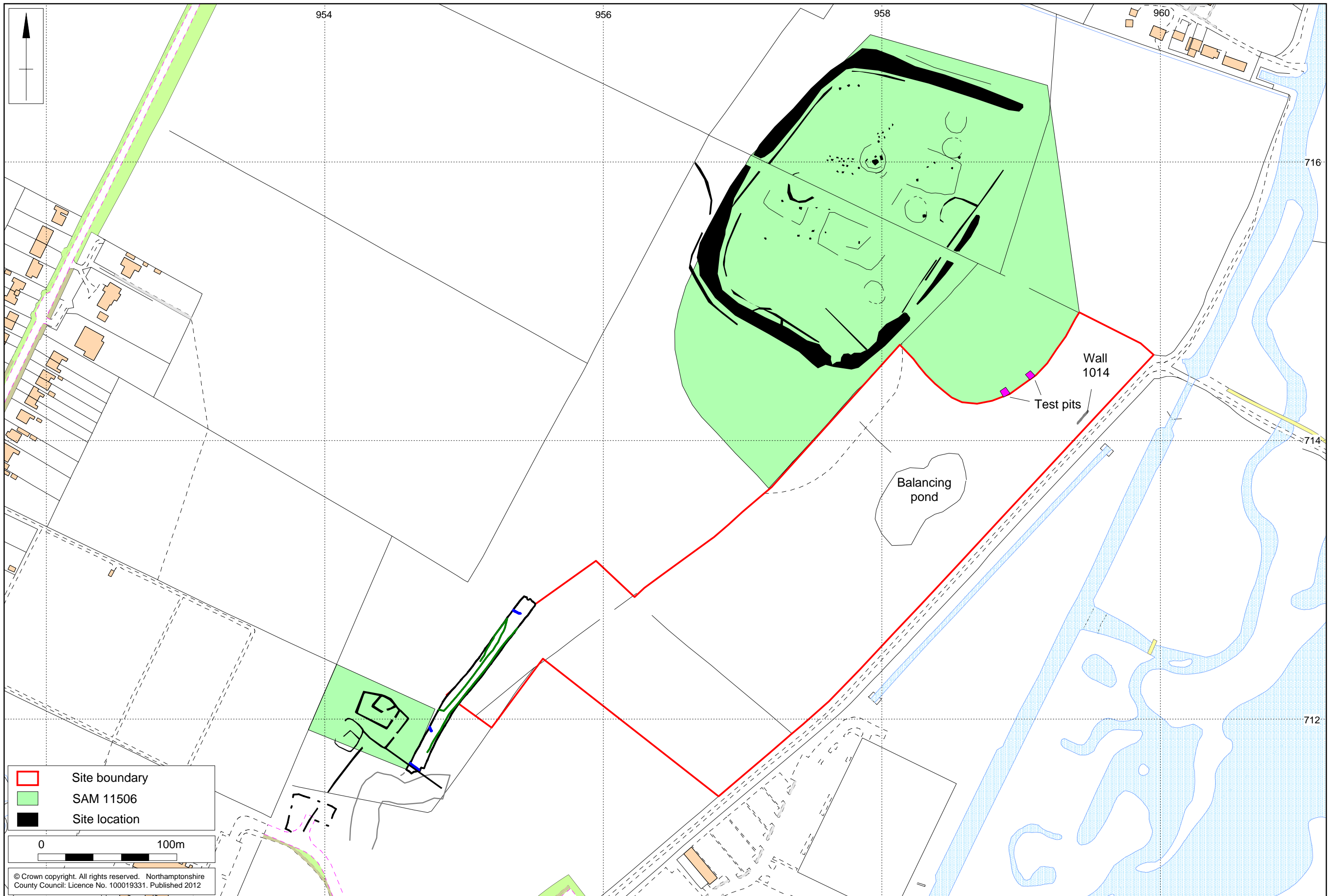
Excavated features Fig 3





Scale 1:7,500

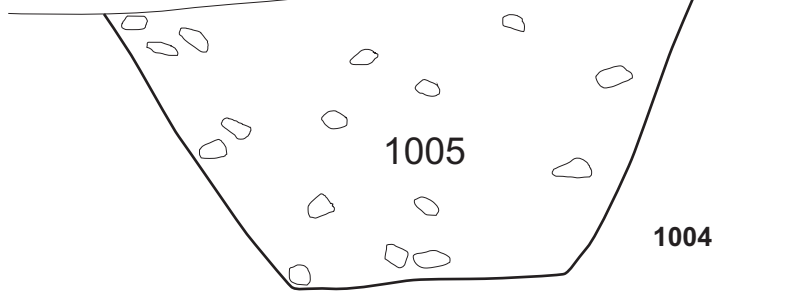
Location of the development area Fig 1



Scale 1:2500 (A3)

The area of archaeological observation, archaeological features and Scheduled Monument information Fig 2

Ditch 1004



Pit 1006

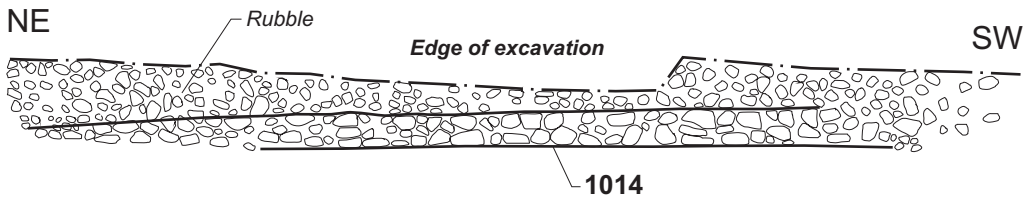
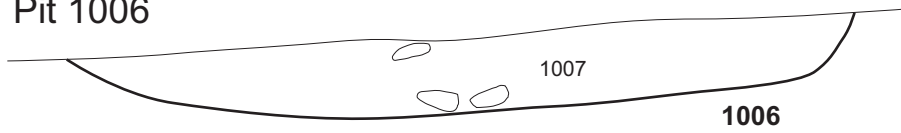




Plate 1: General view of the site during groundworks



Plate 2: General view of one of the balancing ponds, viewed to the north-east



Plate 3: General view of the features in the south-west corner of the site



Plate 4: Ditch [1004]



Plate 5: Pit [1006]



Plate 6: The limestone wall foundation, viewed to the south



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