Northamptonshire County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

An archaeological evaluation of

Saffron Road car park

Higham Ferrers

Northamptonshire

Stephen Morris

February 2006

Report 06/17

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QUALITY CONTROL

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***OASIS* REPORT FORM**

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	Archaeological Evaluation (Trial Trenching), Saffron Road, Higham Ferrers	
Short description (250 words maximum)	An archaeological trial trench evaluation was undertaken in 2006 on the site of Saffron Road car park, Higham Ferrers, prior to the development of a new doctor's surgery. The remnant of a single possible medieval pit was discovered towards the Saffron Road frontage, which contained four sherds of 12th century pottery. No evidence was found for the buildings shown to occupy parts of the site on a map of 1591. The construction of a coal yard in the 19th century and later clearance for the current car park appeared to have truncated earlier archaeology. The coal yard consisted of a reinforced concrete surface, which covered the west side of the site, with layered deposits of coal dust to the east and a recent limestone surface.	
Project type	Trial trench evaluation	
Previous work	Archaeological desk-based assessment NA 2005	
Future work	None	
Monument type and period	Medieval settlement, post-medieval settlement.	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)	Four sherds of medieval pottery	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address (including postcode)	Car park, Saffron Road, Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire NN10 8ED	
Easting (use numeric 100km grid square no.)	49598	
Northing	26856	
Height OD	70m OD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Northamptonshire County Council Environment Team	
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Steve Morris	
Project Manager	Tony Walsh for Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Sponsor or funding body	Neil Nibblet Associates Ltd	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	9th January 2006	
End date	12th January 2006	
ARCHIVES		Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical	Pottery, tile	1 box
Paper	Contexts, registers Plans, sections	1 file 2 plan / section sheets
Digital	Report, illustrations	

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AN ARCHAEOLGICAL EVALUATION OF SAFFRON ROAD CAR PARK HIGHAM FERRERS, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JANUARY 2006

ABSTRACT

An archaeological trial trench evaluation was undertaken on the site of Saffron Road car park, Higham Ferrers, prior to the development of a new doctor's surgery. The remnant of a single possible medieval pit was discovered towards the Saffron Road frontage, which contained four sherds of 12th century pottery. No evidence was found for the buildings shown to occupy parts of the site on a map of 1591. The construction of a coal yard in the 19th century and later clearance for the current car park appeared to have truncated earlier archaeology. The coal yard consisted of a reinforced concrete surface, which covered the west side of the site, with layered deposits of coal dust to the east and a recent limestone surface.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by Neil Nibblet Associates Ltd, to undertake archaeological evaluation on land occupied by a car park between Saffron Road and College Street, Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire in support of a planning application for the development of a new doctor's surgery, planning application reference: EN/05/00165/FUL (sp 9598 6856 Fig1).

The scope of work was set out in a brief issued by Myk Flitctroft, Historic Environment Team of Northamptonshire County Council's, Built and Natural Environment Team, (NCCBNET). The work was carried out in January 2006 in accordance with a project design produced by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA 2005).

1.1 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The site is presently used as a public car park. The site is generally level at *c* 70m above Ordnance Datum. Residential and commercial properties occupy the areas to the north and south with the entrance from Saffron Road to the west.

The underlying geology is Northampton Sand with Ironstone and Great Oolite Limestone with clay of the Upper Estuarine Series, the site possibly lying across the geological boundaries (BGS 1989).

2 BACKGROUND

The archaeological significance and potential of the site has been investigated as part of the Extensive Urban Survey Higham Ferrers by G Foard and J Ballinger in 2000 and was summarised in a desk-based assessment for the proposed doctor's surgery by P Chapman during 2005, report No 05/049. The desk-based assessment suggested that although throughout the medieval period the principal street frontage was aligned to College Street, the site may have been encompassed by several small plots and lanes, possibly associated with the functions of the markets located to the south. However, during the post-medieval period, development within the site would seem to have comprised a number of tenements fronting onto College Street, with ancillary buildings occupying the northern and southern parts of the site. The earliest map of the site is dated 1591 (NRO map 4661) which is transcribed (Fig 2).

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the archaeological evaluation as stated in the Project Design was to examine those areas directly affected by the proposed development, both from construction of the new surgery building and its associated services and any resurfacing of the existing carpark.

Specifically it was proposed that this include:

- A single 25m long trench located through the central part of the site, where the northern 'arm' of the new surgery and pharmacy overlies structures and a lane of predicted medieval date mapped from the earliest map of the area dated to 1591.
- A single 20m long east-west aligned trench located in the central southern part of the site, where the northern 'arm' of the new surgery and pharmacy overlies structures and a lane of predicted medieval date mapped from the earliest map of the area dated to 1591.
- Evaluation of the depth of modern material currently present in other parts of the car park and the degree of truncation of earlier deposits through a series of test pits/small trenches.
- Evaluation of the depth of modern material currently over the remainder of the site, and in discussion with the architects to take into account development proposals, and current site conditions.

Further objectives of the work as stated in the Brief (NCCHET 2005) were:

- To determine the extent to which the current application site contains archaeological remains that can address issues identified in the Extensive Urban Survey for Higham Ferrers.
- To investigate and record appropriately any such remains identified.
- To create a suitably organised archive of the project data to ensure the "preservation by record" of all archaeological remains affected by the development.

3.2 Methodology

A total of two trenches and four test pits were excavated, numbered 1 to 6 (Fig 3). Trench 1 and 2 were 20m in length, located over the proposed footprint of the surgery and targeted on features shown on the 1591 map (Fig 2). Trench 1 was shortened by 5m due to the presence of sleeping policeman and kerbs. Two 5m long test pits (3 and 4) were placed to the north of trenches 1 and 2 within the footprint of the proposed building. Two similar sized test pits (5 and 6) were located towards the Saffron Road frontage, also targeted on features on the 1591 map.

Trenches 1 and 2 and test pits 3, 4 and 6 were aligned east-west, so as to avoid any damage to the existing drainage, kerbs and speed bumps. Test pit 5 was aligned north-south. Features within each trench were numbered using the trench number as a prefix.

The car park tarmac surface and reinforced concrete were removed by a JCB excavator fitted with a breaker and toothless ditching bucket. The underlying make-up layers and overburden were then removed under archaeological supervision. In all trenches mechanical excavation proceeded as far as the surface of the natural substrate or the first significant archaeological horizons.

All potential archaeological features were examined by hand excavation. Standard Northamptonshire Archaeology recording procedures were employed (NA 2004).

4 EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

4.1 General

The undisturbed natural geology, a weathered limestone with patches of clay was revealed in the trenches and test pits at a depth of between 0.45-0.65 m.

Archaeological features were encountered in two of the test pits excavated. A possible medieval pit was identified in test pit 6 and a modern metalled surface was found in test pit 4.

4.2 Test Pit 6 (Figs 2, 4, section 2)

Cut into the natural geology at the south-west corner of test pit 6 was the very truncated remnant of a possible medieval pit [607]. Orientated north-east to south-west the 'pit' extended to the north-west beyond the edge of excavation. It survived as an irregular edge sloping to an uneven base and was at least 1.4m wide and 0.30m to 0.50m deep.

The primary fill (608) was dark yellowish gritty clay with sub-rounded limestone chips and pebbles, 0.15m thick. Four pottery sherds were recovered, comprising two sherds of shelly coarseware and two sherds of Lyvden/Stanion ware. Both fabrics date to the late 12th century. The fill also included two fragments of animal bone, one from a sheep/goat and the other undiagnostic.

Fill (608) was overlaid by fill (605) mixed mottled yellowish clay, which contained a moderate small sub-angular limestone chips and grit, 0.35m thick. Fill (605) appeared to be disturbed, possibly indicating deliberate back-filling and levelling, however, there was also disturbance (606) due to root action and/or the infilling of an animal burrow.

Above (605) was (604) mixed/disturbed dark grey/green loamy clay, containing small limestone chips, gravel and grit and including the occasional brick or tile fragment, 0.10m to 0.25m thick.

Layer (604) was sealed by levelling layer (603) that consisted of limestone with occasional brick and tile fragments, in a mixed gritty/gravely yellow sand and grey clay matrix, up to 0.20m thick. This layer was overlaid by reinforced concrete (602), 0.18m thick and car park tarmac surface (601), 0.05m to 0.12m thick.

Feature [607] may have been the truncated remnant of either a large pit or ditch, however, it may also be the product of the natural landscape dropping away to the north-west. The area to the east had probably been landscaped and re-levelled.

4.3 Test Pit 4 (Figs 2, 4, section 1)

Throughout test pit 4 was a metalled surface (404) that had been laid directly upon the underlying natural limestone, to create a level area or track. The surface consisted of very compacted sub-rounded limestone fragments up to 50mm in size, with occasional rounded pebbles and small fragments of brick. The surface was, 0.12m to 0.30m thick.

Overlying the limestone surface was a hard packed layer (403) of dark grey/black gritty coal dust, containing brick and limestone fragments. The layer was generally level, but was of varying thickness where brick and limestone debris occurred, between 0.03m to 0.14m thick. Layer (403) was sealed by the levelling layer (402) for the present tarmac, which consisted of brick and limestone within a sandy, gritty matrix, up to 0.27m thick. Above this was the tarmac car park surface (401), 0.10m to 0.13m thick.

The coal dust deposit (403) is a compressed layer of material that probably derives from the coal yard that occupied the site in the twentieth century. The limestone surface (404) although used as part of the coal yard may be the remains of an earlier 19th century yard surface.

4.4 Trench 1 and 2, Test Pits 3 and 5 (Fig 2)

No archaeological features were recovered from these trenches. Above the natural limestone were a series of modern make-up and levelling layers, 0.10m to 0.45m thick, which contained brick, tile and ceramic drain fragments..

Overlying the make-up layers at the west ends of trenches 1 and 2 and in test pits 5 and 6 was a reinforced concrete surface, which probably covered the west side of the car park, up to the Saffron Road frontage. The east edge of the concrete surface appears to transverse north-south across the car park. In trench 2 the remnant of a concrete ramp led to the east on to the lower make-up layer, with a fall of 0.30m to 0.40m.

Extending from the edge of the concrete at the east end of trench 2 and through test pits 3 and 5 the lower made ground was overlain by a series of compacted layers of coal dust and grit, which formed a level surface 0.10m to 0.15m thick.

Above these coal dust layers was a later layer of brick and limestone 0.15 to 0.30m thick whose upper boundary was level with the concrete surface. A fragment of 19th/20th century blue transfer decorated pottery was recovered from this layer in test pit 3. Above both the limestone layer and the concrete was the present car park surface comprising a tarmac 0.05m to 0.20m thick.

The reinforced concrete surface and the coal dust deposits are probably the remains of the "Co-op" coal yard located here in the twentieth century.

5 THE FINDS

5.1 **The Medieval pottery** by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 4 sherds (26g), recovered from a single feature, (608), which probably dates to the second half of the 12th century.

The pottery type consists of two sherds of Shelly Coarseware (F330), dated between AD 1100-1400 and two sherds of Lyveden/Stanion 'A' ware (F319), dated from AD1150-1400, using the chronology and coding system of the Northamptonshire County Ceramic Type-Series (CTS).

5.2 **19th/20th century pottery** by Iain Soden

Two sherds (7g) of blue transfer decorated pottery were recovered from the most recent make-up layer in trench 3, which probably date to 19th/20th century

5.3 **Animal bone** by Karen Dieghton

The two fragments of animal bone came from a single context (608) the primary fill of a possible pit, that may be dated by the pottery recovered to the late 12th century. One fragment (5g) was probably of a sheep/goat. The other fragment (11g) could not be identified.

Preservation of the animal bone was poor, with moderate surface abrasion. Fragmentation was result of old breaks, with no evidence of butchery or pathology.

6 DISCUSSION

The earliest evidence recovered by the evaluation was the possible medieval pit in test pit 4, located towards the Saffron Road frontage. It is unclear whether the feature was a ditch, pit or a product of the slope of the underlying natural landscape towards Saffron Road. The pottery recovered was dateable to the late 12th century, and consisted of a small number of sherds of fabrics very commonly used in domestic vessels. The presence of such pottery is consistent with the position of the site at the centre of medieval Higham Ferrers.

No evidence was found for the survival of the buildings and open spaces (yards and paths) shown on the Map of 1591. Such negative evidence, when considered with the disturbed nature of the possible earlier pit and the extensive areas of later made up ground indicates that the development site has experienced truncation and re-levelling during the 19th or 20th centuries.

The limestone surface located in trench 4 was recent in date and was probably related to the 19th or 20th century occupation of the College Street frontage.

The concrete surface and the coal deposits are clear evidence that the Co-operative Society coal depot was present during the 20th century and it may be that the truncation of the earlier archaeological deposits occurred during the construction of the depot.

The development area appears to be barren of any significant archaeological remains, with the only evidence for archaeological activity located towards the Saffron Road frontage, beyond the proposed development.

The concrete surface appears to have formed the hard standing area for vehicles, with a fence line along its east edge (a single modern posthole was present in the section of trench 2). The concrete ramp led into the coal storage area, where coal debris accumulated and was compacted to form an ad hoc working surface. This was subsequently sealed by the tarmac of the car park.

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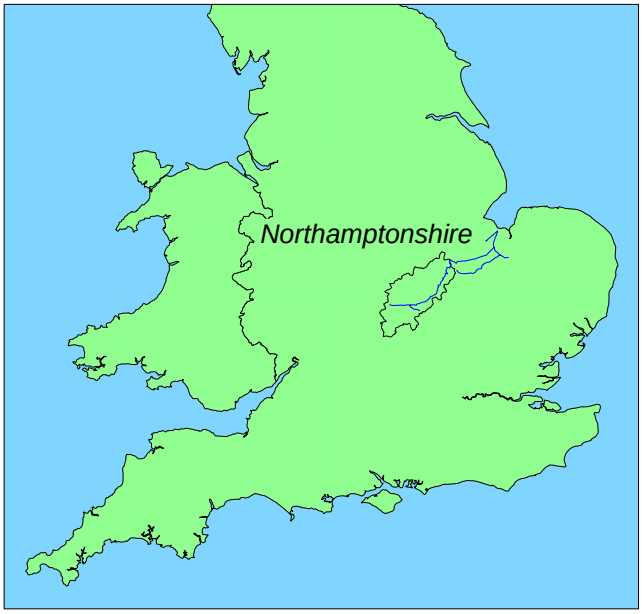
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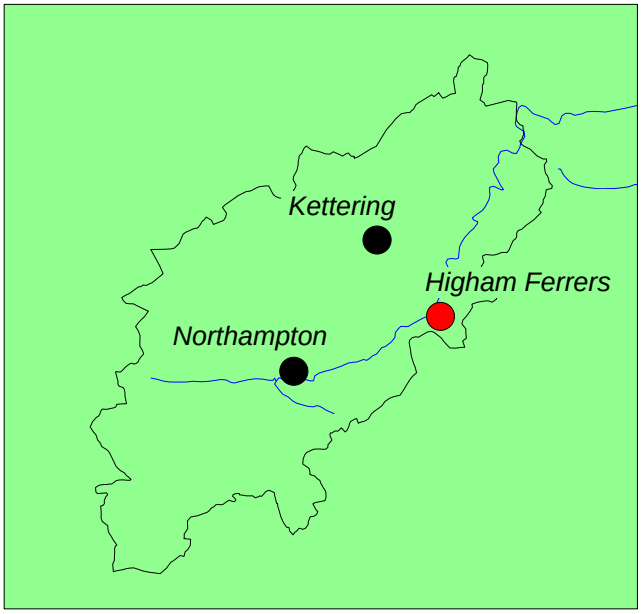
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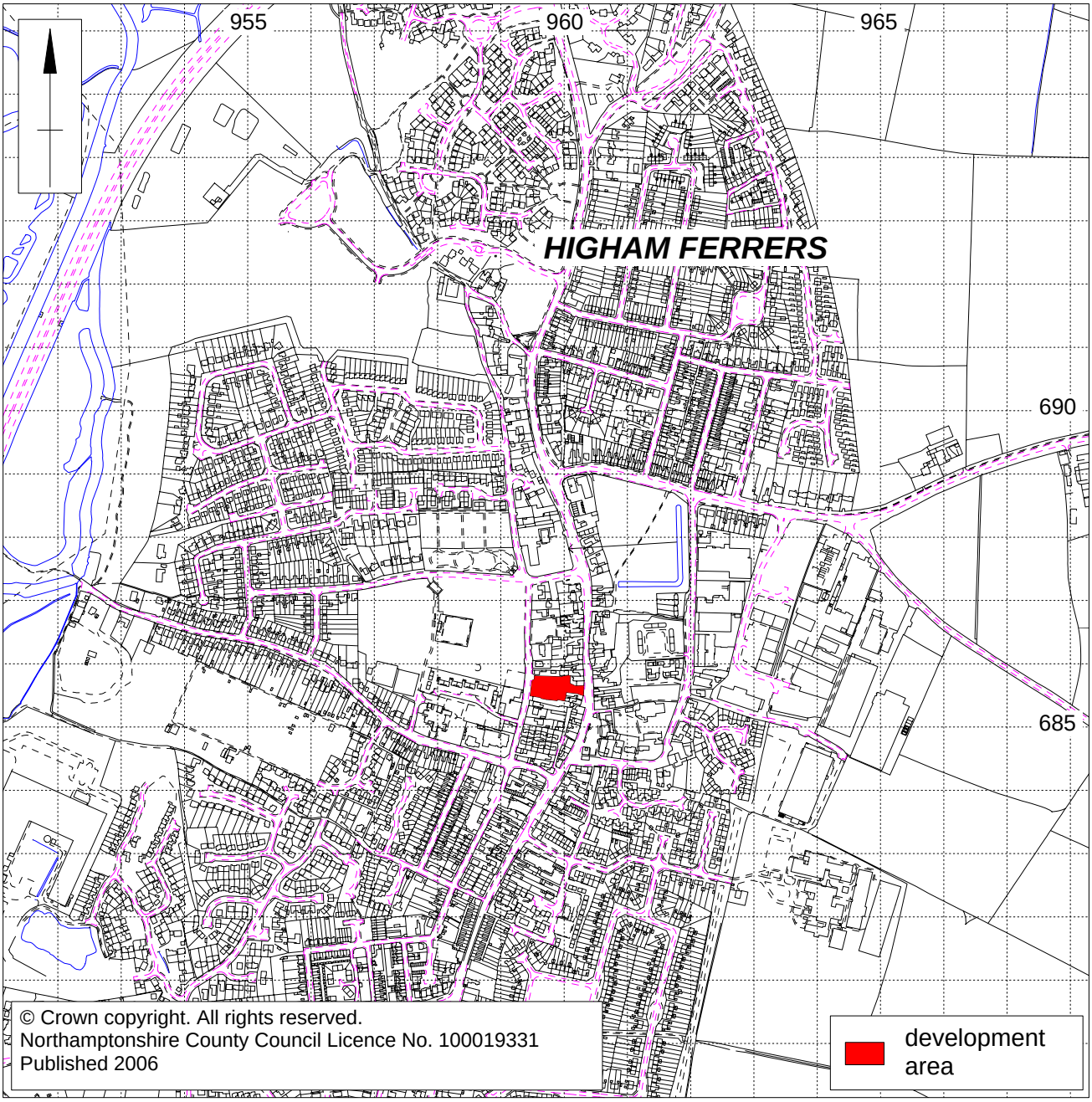
955
960
965
HIGHAM FERRERS
690
685
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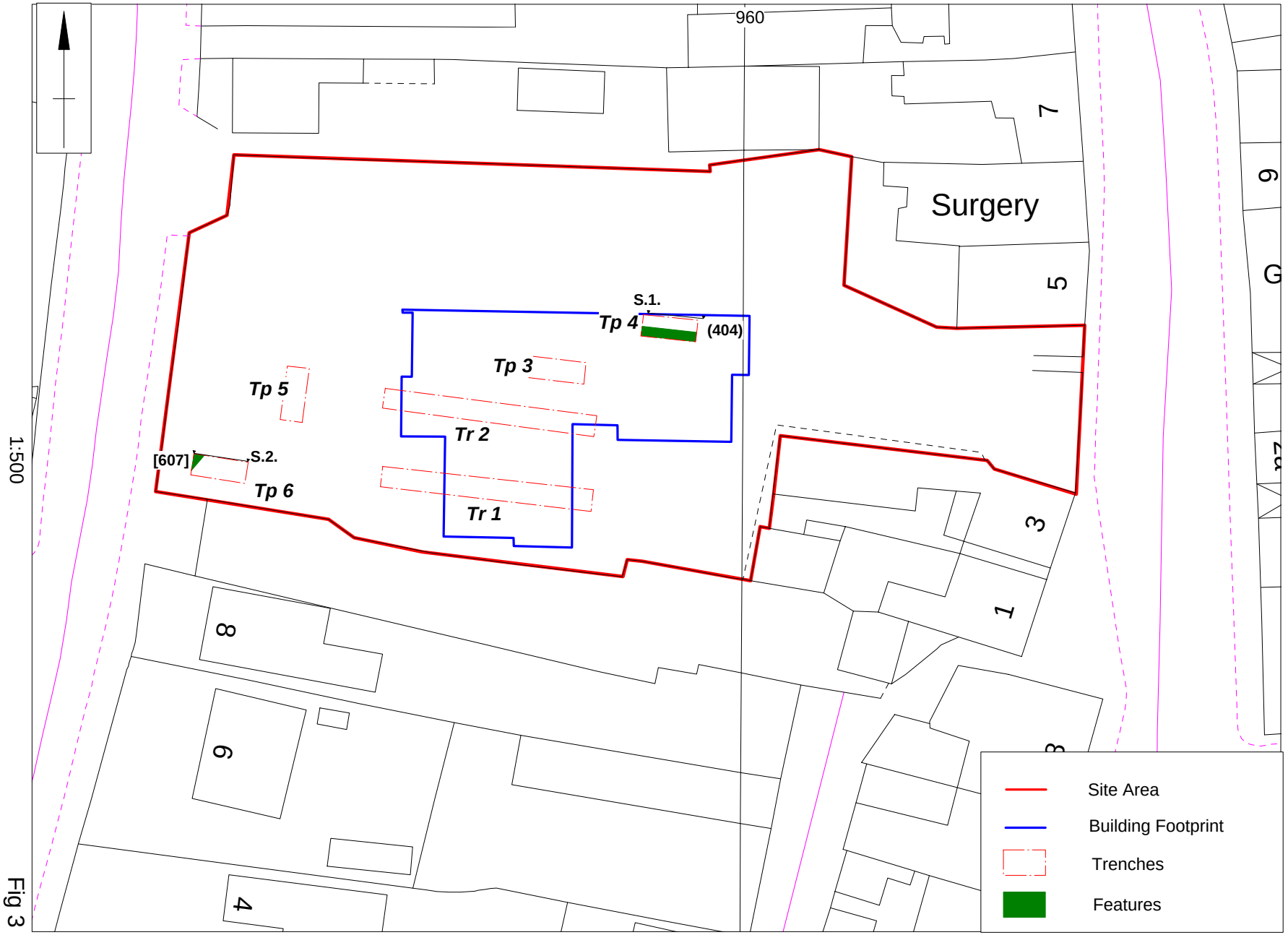
development area

Fig. 1

1:500

Fig 2

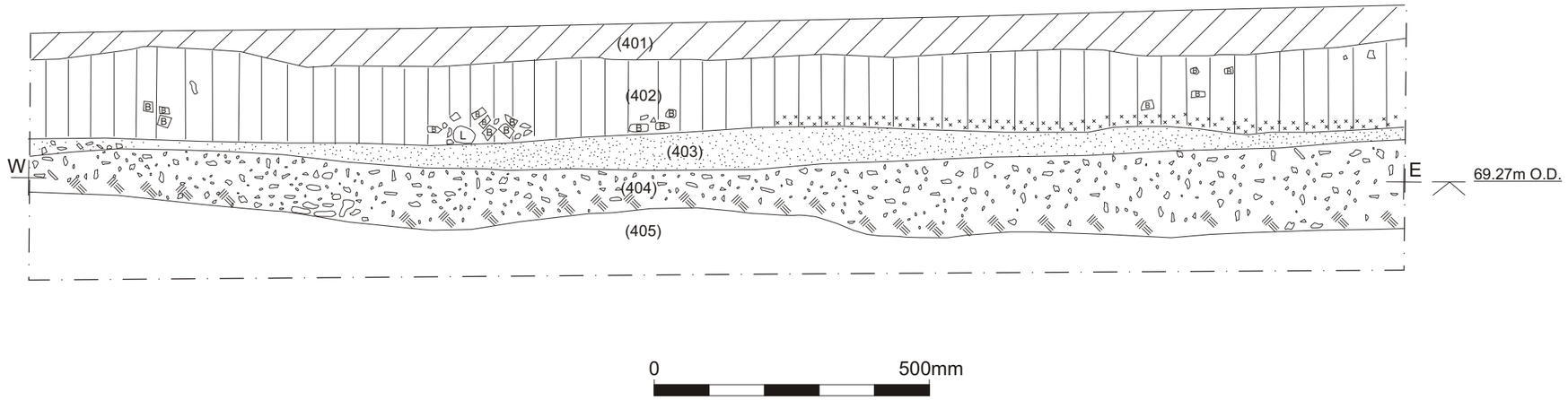

960
Surgery
7
6
5
3
1
8
6
4
S.1.
Tp 4
(404)
Tp 3
Tp 5
Tr 2
[607]
S.2.
Tp 6
Tr 1
Site Area
Building Footprint
Trenches
Features

1:500

Fig 3

Higham Ferrers, Saffron Road 2

Section 1
Trench 4



Section 2
Trench 6

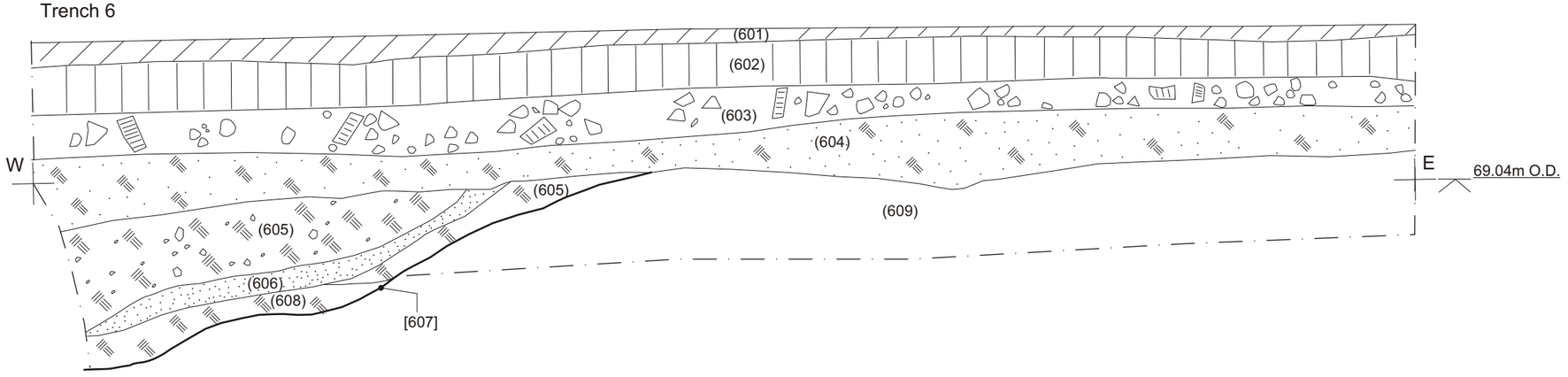


Fig 4