Northamptonshire County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

An archaeological Watching Brief

at Harpers Brook, Islip

Northamptonshire

October 2006

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Report 06/183

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***OASIS* REPORT FORM**

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	Harpers Brook, Islip, Northamptonshire	
Short description (250 words maximum)	Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out a watching brief during the excavation of a trench for electric cabling on land beside Harpers Brook, Islip. A single trench totalling 240m long, 0.3m wide and 1.1m deep was excavated under archaeological supervision. There was evidence that the land surface had been extensively modified during gravel extraction in the 1960s and 1970s. No archaeological remains were present.	
Project type	Archaeological Watching Brief	
Previous work		
Future work	No	
Monument typeand period	None	
Significant finds	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address	Main Street, Allexton	
Easting	499500	
Northing	280200	
Height OD	28.89 AOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator		
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Danny McAree MA MBA PG Dip PIFA	
Project Manager	Iain Soden BA MIFA	
Sponsor or funding body	Central Networks	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	October 2006	
End date	October 2006	
ARCHIVES	**Location**	**Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)**
Physical		
Paper		1 Plans and 10 sections, 20 each of Colour Slide and B/W photographs, 1 Contact Print.
Digital		Digital copy of report and Figures

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT HARPER'S BROOK, ISLIP,

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

OCTOBER 2006

Abstract

Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out a watching brief during the excavation of a trench for electric cabling on land to the east of Harper's Brook, Islip. The trench was 240m long, 0.3m wide and 1.1m deep. There was evidence that the land surface had been extensively modified during gravel extraction in the 1960s and 1970s. No archaeological remains were present.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Archaeological investigation comprising a watching brief during the excavation of a trench for the laying of underground electricity cable was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology on behalf of Central Networks (formally East Midlands Electricity), on land alongside Harper's Brook, Islip (NGR: SP 995 802).

The work was undertaken in response to an application by Central Networks and approved by East Northamptonshire District Council to replace existing underground low voltage cable with a high voltage underground cable. The works complied with a condition for archaeological attendance and investigation as required by the East Northamptonshire District Council and the specification prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (McAree 2006).

The purpose of the watching brief was to identify and record archaeological deposits exposed during the works.

1.2 Location and Topography

The proposed works were located in Henslow Meadow, to the east of Harper's Brook, about 1.5km to the north of the village of Islip, at the end of the field track that forms a continuation of Ridge Road (Figs 1 and 2).

The site lies at 28.98m AOD and rises slightly to the north and west.

The underlying geology has been mapped by the British Geological Survey of Great Britain as comprising Lias clay overlain by first river terrace sands and gravels.

1.3 Historical and Archaeological Background

The proposed works are located to the north of Islip and in an area of high archaeological potential. The Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record (HER) showed that the cable trench would cut through part of an historic landscape that has produced evidence of occupation and activity from the Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman periods (SMR 1896, 2431-2).

The area immediately east and south of the proposed works were subject of excavation

between 1965-71 when extensive evidence of Neolithic and Bronze Age burial mounds, an enclosed Iron Age occupation site with evidence of houses and buildings, together with pits and boundaries spanning the Neolithic to Roman period were uncovered. To the south and east, evidence for a Roman road and the remains of timber posts from a bridge across the River Nene were uncovered, together with remnants of a medieval road (Jackson, 1976 and 1977).

The site of an extensive Iron Age enclosure excavated between 1969-71 was located in the Henslow Meadow to the north and east of Harper's Brook at its junction with the extension of Ridge Road (Fig 2). It was possible that the works would uncover further evidence of this early occupation of the site.

2 METHODOLOGY

A single trench was required to lay in new underground cable across Henslow Meadow from the east side of the foot bridge across Harper's Brook to the field junction to the north and east of Henslow Meadow (Fig 2, Plate 1-2).

The trench was excavated 0.3m wide and 1.1m deep. The excavation of the trench was supervised by an archaeologist; this included the supervision of overburden, topsoil and subsoil stripping to a maximum of 1.1m. The trench was excavated using a 5 ton mini excavator equipped with a 300mm toothless excavating bucket.

Topsoil, subsoil and overburden were removed until archaeologically sensitive deposits, natural horizons or the required depth for the cable trench was reached.

All deposits were examined sufficiently to identify their nature. Context details are included in the trench descriptions and in a context list at Appendix A. Recording was supplemented by a 1:100 plan of the trench locations and section drawings (at a scale of 1:20) of 1m sections at 10m intervals along the length of the trenches or across discrete features as appropriate. A photographic record in black and white, colour slides and digital images of the trenches was completed.

3 RESULTS

3.1 The trench

The trench was excavated immediately east of the footbridge across Harper's Brook. The existing high voltage cable had been deep bored under the brook and angled up to within 1m of the modern ground surface at about 10m east of the footbridge where it had been jointed onto low voltage cable. The low voltage cable curved to the north before angling north-east across the centre of Henslow Meadow to an overground electricity pole on the boundary of the field to the north-east (Fig 2).

In accord with the requirements of East Northamptonshire District Council, the new cable trench was excavated north along the side of Harper's Brook before curving north and east to the field boundary immediately south of the overground electric pole and cable in the adjoining field (Fig 2, Plate 1-2). Open jointing chambers up to 2m long, 1.5m wide and 1.3m deep were excavated at each end of the trench to allow connection to the high voltage cables at either end of the new section of cable.

The natural was varied across the site. Immediately adjacent to the footbridge, at 1.7m below the modern ground, the natural was a dark blue/grey sandy clay (01) mottled with flecks of red/brown or yellow/grey silt clay and occasional pockets of coarse sand or gravel.

It was moist, very soft, sticky and plastic. Further north it was replaced by yellow/brown coarse gritty sand and gravel (10) banded with yellow/grey, yellow/brown and blue/grey stiff,

sticky sandy clay (11).

The natural was sealed below a layer of red/brown glacial sandy clay (12) sub soil mottled with flecks, fragments and small ribbons of red/brown blending to grey/brown or grey/yellow stiff, sticky silt clay. The depth of the sub soil varied between 250mm-300mm along the length of the trench.

At about 40m north of the footbridge, these layers were cut by a near vertical cut [08] aligned east-west across the trench and exposed only in section 1.1m deep.

It was filled with a layer of brown and red/brown sandy clay (09) containing frequent fragments of ironstone/limestone up to 200mm mixed with abundant yellow/brown sand and coarse gravel. About 25m south, this was cut by the low voltage cable trench [15], 0.4m wide and 1.1m deep, sloping to 1.9m deep at the south end of the excavation. It was backfilled with the mixed re-deposited upcast (14) from the excavation.

At the south of the trench, the sub soil had been truncated and built up with layers of re-deposited sub soil and excavation waste from the gravel workings (Plate 3). Overlaying the natural (01) was a layer of mixed yellow/brown and red/brown sandy clay (02) containing irregular fragments of ironstone /limestone up to 200mm and pockets and lenses of yellow/brown coarse gritty sand and gravel. This was 200mm-250mm deep where seen in section. Sealing this was a layer of mixed red/brown sandy and silt clays (03) containing lenses and pockets of yellow/brown coarse gritty sand and gravel, fragments of ironstone and limestone up to 200mm and occasional fragments of broken earthenware field drain, modern brick and cement mortar. This layer varied 400mm-800mm where exposed in section.

Above this was a layer of yellow/brown and red/brown coarse gritty sand and gravel (04) containing fragments of ironstone/limestone up to 300mm and occasional fragments of field drain, modern brick and cement mortar. This layer was deepest to the east and showed clear evidence of being deliberately tipped, tapering from 400mm-450mm to 250mm to the west. It was partially overlain to the east and south by a layer of brown and red/brown mixed sandy and silt clays (05) containing frequent fragments of ironstone/limestone up to 300mm with lenses and pockets of yellow/brown coarse gritty sand and gravel. This was 600mm deep to the east and tapered to 200mm in the west. There was a fragment of broken bottle glass in this fill that dates to the mid 20th century.

Partially overlaying (05) and sealing the west end of (04) was a layer of brown mixed sandy clay (06) containing lenses of red/yellow and yellow/brown silt clay, frequent ironstone and limestone fragments up to 200mm and lenses of coarse gritty sand and gravel. There were occasional fragments of modern brick and broken field drain.

The land rises from 28.89m AOD at the footbridge to 31.23m AOD at the north-east of the site. The spring line lies at about 30.7m and is located at about 180m to the north and east of the bridge (Fig 2).

It is marked by a change in surface vegetation from meadow grasses to rushes and mosses (Plate 1-2). The area immediately south of the spring line was defined by the stiff clay natural (11) that extended some 20m to the south. The area of the spring line was located over sand and gravel that held vast quantities of water that flooded the excavation as soon as the clay barrier to the south had been breached.

Extending across the whole of the site was a layer of dark brown sandy clay loam topsoil (07) containing occasional fragments of ironstone and limestone up to 40mm, gritty sand and coarse gravel. It varied in thickness from 600mm deep over the south of the site to 100mm further to the north.

4 CONCLUSION

It is clear that there has been substantial truncation and modification of the ground surface in

Henslow Meadow. The extensive lakes to the south and east mark the location of the gravel extraction pits excavated between 1965 and 1971. A substantial area of the remaining Henslow Meadow had been stripped and excavated as part of the original archaeological intervention between 1969 –71 (Fig 2).

In the vicinity of the footbridge, all of the subsoil and natural had been removed to a depth of 1.7m and built up with dumps of quarry waste and re-deposited subsoil. A capping of top soil up to 0.6m deep had then been laid over this part of the site and extended along the east bank of Harper's Brook to the north and south of the bridge forming a distinct 'step' in the bank visible in the differentiated erosion of the older original bank and the modern raised land surface (Plate 3-4).

The modern build up extended at least 60m to the north where it tapered out and the modern ground surface dipped to the north and east. Another 45m to the north, a distinct cut was observed cutting across the cable trench from the north-west to south-east. It is most probable that this marks the western edge to the 1969-1971 archaeological excavation of the Iron Age enclosure (Fig 2). This had been backfilled with a dump of quarry waste and redposited clay sand and gravel that tapered out 12m to the north-east. Further north, there was no evidence for any substantial topsoil, nor any evidence for the ridge and furrow observed during the 1969-71 excavations where furrows were recorded up to 600mm deep (Jackson, 1976 & 1977).

The current excavation cut across the northern part of the area of archaeological excavations recorded in 1969-71 (Fig 2). Those excavations required the stripping of the original soil surface down to natural sub soil to expose the archaeology. The features exposed in the soil were then excavated. From the soil profile observed during this excavation, it would appear that the area adjacent to the west of the excavation had been covered with the spoil from the excavation. Further north and east, the exposed surface had been left as excavated and the modern topsoil has developed on that surface. The topsoil was generally less that 50mm and never exceeded 100mm deep and was only slightly darker and more organic than the underlying sub soil over much of the northern part of the cable trench.

No features were observed in the excavation of the cable trench other than the disturbed and made ground around the bridge and the single cut mark of the excavation trench.

It is highly likely that much of the remaining Henslow Meadow was stripped of topsoil during the period of sand and gravel extraction. Certainly local residents remembered substantial earth bunds on the edge of Henslow Meadow when gravel extraction was in progress. Once extraction was complete, the site was modified to create a number of lakes with raised levees or causeways creating different sized lakes and access ways for visitors.

The Harper's Brook was straightened to form a new boundary along the west of the area. This created a small pond from the cut off arc of the stream at the north of the field (Fig 1-2, Plate 4). The raising of the banks of the brook by dumping spoil and topsoil probably occurred at this time.

The absence of any evidence of the medieval ridge and furrow cultivation recorded in 1969-71, or of any stray finds from earlier activity or manuring spreads indicates extensive modification of the original soil surfaces across the site. There was no evidence for disturbed or truncated archaeology in any part of the excavated trench.

As no archaeological features were observed, only site and trench location plans are included with this report, the remaining drawings are retained in archive.

5 ARCHIVE

Table 1: Summary of site records

	Contexts	Plans	Sections	Photos	Slides	Digital
Trench 1	**12**	**1**	**14**	**20**	**20**	**48**

A single plan marks the location of the trench (Fig 2). All finds were retained from the excavations.

All records and materials will be compiled in a structured archive in accordance with the guidelines of Appendix 3 in the English Heritage procedural document, Management of Archaeological Projects (1991).

An Activity and Source Submission Form will be sent to the Northamptonshire HER.

A copy of the monitoring report will be deposited at the Northamptonshire County Council Heritage Service, Northampton.

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Northamptonshire Archaeology

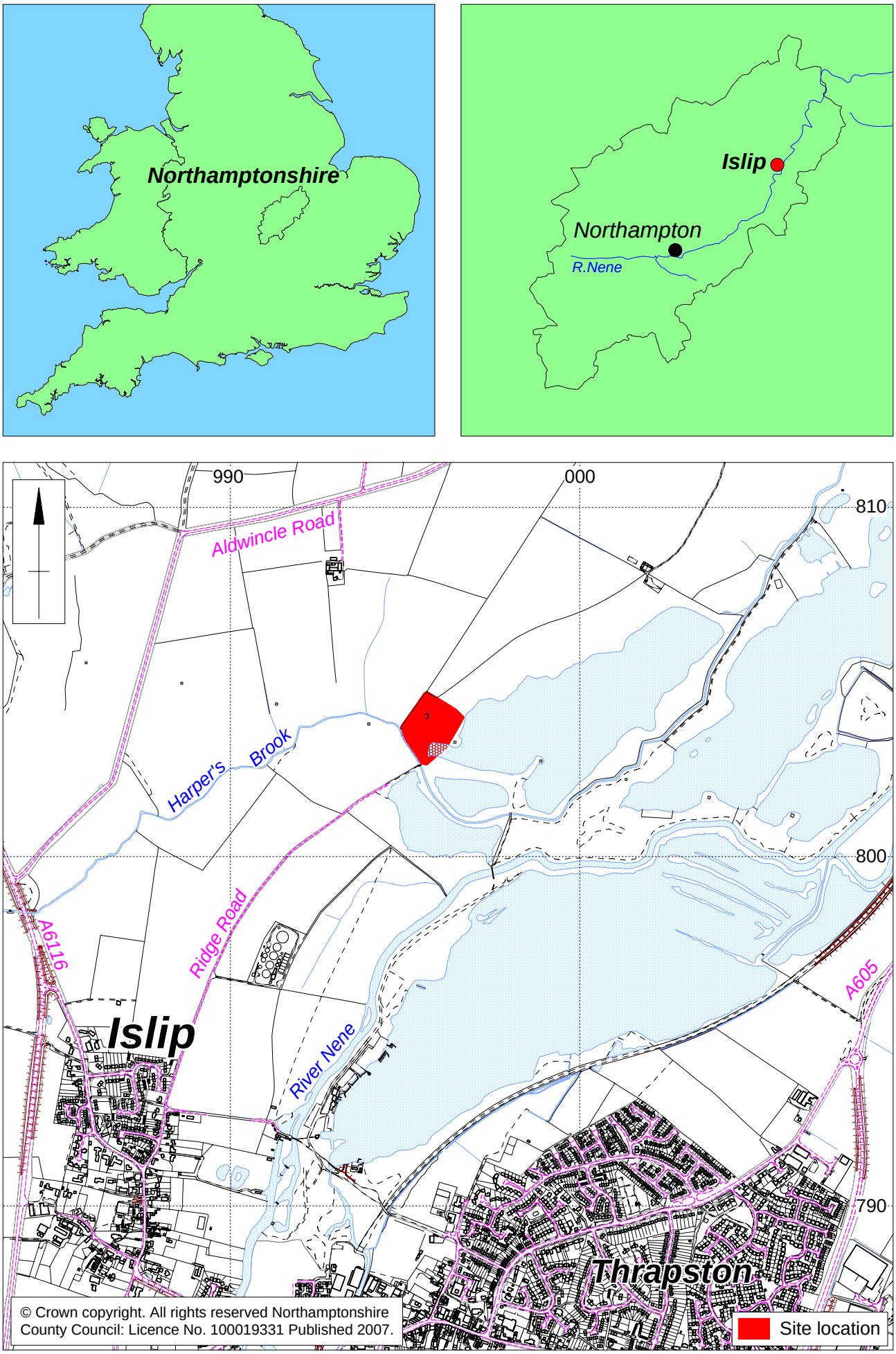
A service of Northamptonshire County Council January 2007

APPENDIX A

CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

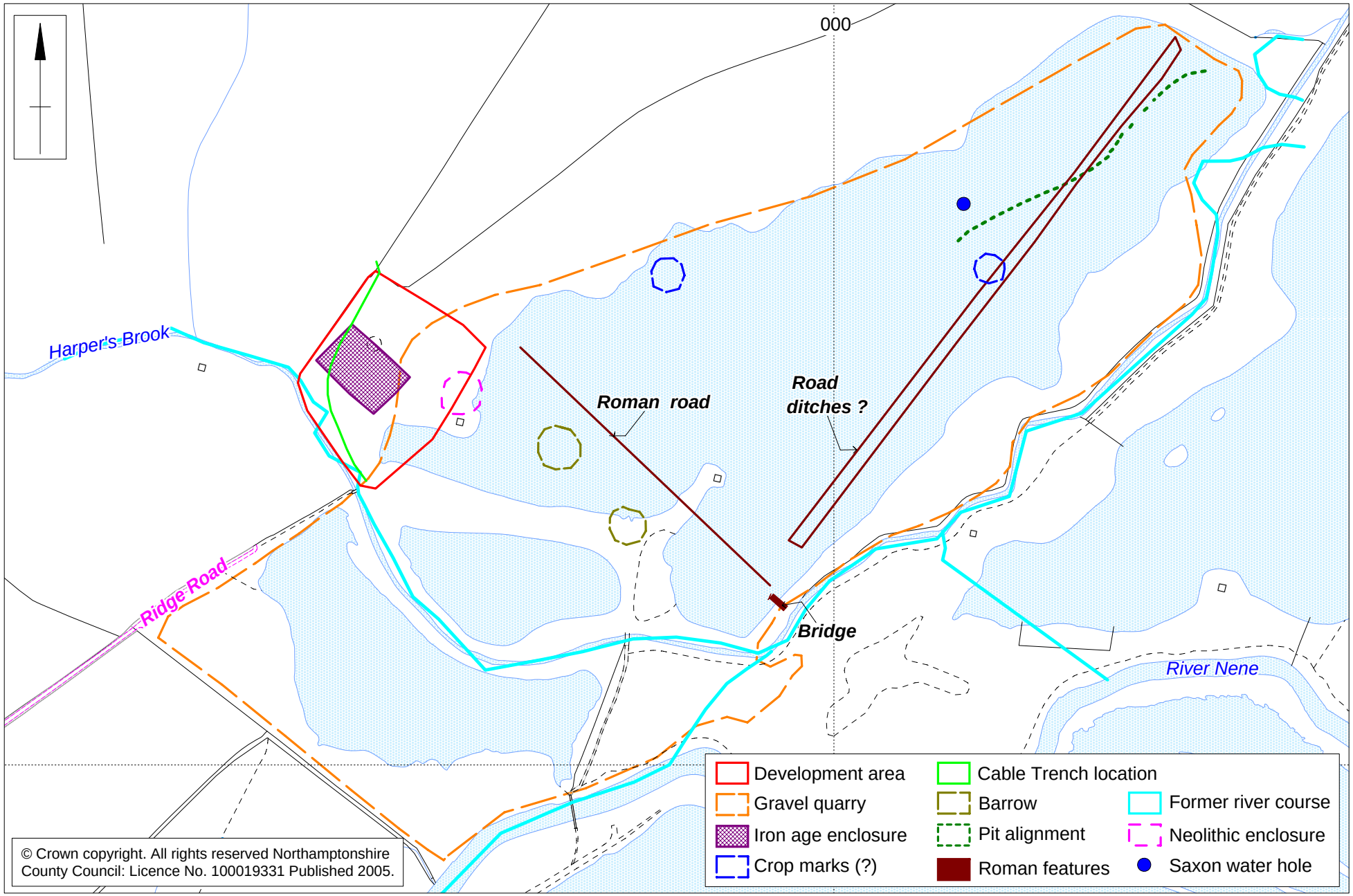
CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
Trench 1	(246m long, 0.3m wide, 1.1m deep)	
01	Grey/blue sandy silt clay mottled with flecks of red/brown or yellow/grey silt clay and occasional pockets of coarse sand or gravel. Moist, very soft, sticky and plastic.	Natural
02	Mixed yellow/brown and red/brown sandy clay containing irregular fragments of ironstone /limestone up to 200mm and pockets and lenses of yellow/brown coarse gritty sand and gravel. 200mm-250mm deep in section.	Dump of quarry waste and re-deposited upcast from sand and gravel extraction
03	Mixed red/brown sandy and silt clays containing lenses and pockets of yellow/brown coarse gritty sand and gravel, fragments of ironstone and limestone up to 200mm. Occasional fragments of field drain, modern brick and cement mortar. Depth varied between 400mm-800mm section.	Dump of quarry waste and re-deposited upcast from sand and gravel extraction
04	Yellow/brown and red/brown coarse gritty sand and gravel. Contains fragments of ironstone or limestone up to 300mm. Occasional fragments of field drain, modern brick and cement mortar. Deepest to the east and showed clear evidence of being deliberately tipped, tapering from 400mm-450mm to 250mm to the west.	Dump of quarry waste and re-deposited upcast from sand and gravel extraction
05	Brown and red/brown mixed sandy and silt clays. Contains frequent fragments of ironstone/limestone up to 300mm. Lenses and pockets of yellow/brown coarse gritty sand and gravel. 600mm deep to the east and tapered to 200mm in the west.	Dump of quarry waste and re-deposited upcast from sand and gravel extraction
06	Brown mixed sandy clay. Contains lenses of red/yellow and yellow/brown silt clay. Frequent ironstone and limestone fragments up to 200mm. Lenses of coarse gritty sand and gravel. Occasional fragments of modern brick and broken field drain.	Dump of quarry waste and re-deposited upcast from sand and gravel extraction
07	Dark brown sandy clay. Contains fragments of ironstone and limestone up to 40mm. Gritty sand and coarse gravel. Depth varies from 600mm at south to 100mm to north of excavations.	Topsoil

CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
08	Cut of ditch. Aligned north-west to south-east. Steeply sloping side (80°) Only one side identified in section. Width and depth not known.	Probable edge of archaeological excavation in 1969-1971.
09	Brown-red/brown sandy clay. Frequent fragments of limestone/ironstone up to 200mm, frequent coarse yellow sand and gravel.	Fill of [08] Dump of quarry waste and re-deposited upcast from sand and gravel extraction.
10	Yellow/brown coarse gritty sand and gravel.	Natural
11	Yellow/grey, yellow/brown and blue/grey stiff, sticky sandy clay.	Natural
12	Red/brown blending to grey/brown clay streaked with yellow and blue grey sandy clay and stiff sticky silt clay	Natural



Scale 1:15,000

Site location Fig 1



Cable trench location Fig 2

Plate 1
Henslow Meadow looking north to field junction and overground electric supply
(Concealed behind large tree)

Plate 2
Henslow Meadow showing alignment of cable trench, looking north-east
(Note erosion of made ground along edge of Harper's Brook in foreground)

Plate 3
Made ground adjacent to foot bridge, looking east

Plate 4
Harper's Brook looking north, showing the new channel and the made ground filling the old channel