



Northamptonshire
County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Watching Brief

at Houghton house

Bedfordshire

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Tim Upson-Smith

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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



STAFF

Project Manager: Anthony Maull Cert Arch
Fieldwork: Anthony Maull
Text: Tim Upson-Smith BA PGDip
Finds: Tim Upson-Smith
Illustrations: Jacqueline Harding HND BA

QUALITY CONTROL

	Print name	Signed	Date
Verified by	Anthony Maull		
Checked by	Pat Chapman		
Approved by	Andy Chapman		

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT HOUGHTON HOUSE

BEDFORDSHIRE

OCTOBER 2006

Abstract

A watching brief was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology during the excavation of postholes for four new information panels at Houghton House, Bedfordshire. Apart from the footings of an internal wall, no archaeological features were seen during the watching brief.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology were commissioned by English Heritage to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of postholes for four new information panels at Houghton House, Bedfordshire in October 2006 (NGR TL 0409 3971, Fig 1). The work was carried out in accordance with the *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979* (as amended) Section 2.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

Houghton House is situated upon the plateau of the Greensand ridge situated on a north facing slope to the west of Houghton Park farm. The site is located on the boundary between the Lower Greensand and Amptill clay (<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/index.htm>).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Houghton House was built in 1615, in a mixture of Jacobean and Classical styles, as a hunting lodge for the Countess of Pembroke. The ground floors of two Italianate loggias survive, possibly the work of Inigo Jones. In 1783 the estate was purchased by the Duke of Bedford, whose son the Marquis of Tavistock lived there. After his death the house was left unoccupied and was later partially dismantled to leave the shell of a 17th-century mansion with magnificent views.

Houghton House has recently undergone a scheme of significant conservation work which finished at the end of July 2006, and a new interpretation scheme was part of this work (<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/conProperty.27>)

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

A watching brief was carried out as a single visit to view the hand excavation of the postholes for four new information panels (panels two to five, panel one was already in existence on the site) (Fig 2).

Panel two was located within the great hall of the house. Two holes measuring 0.24m in diameter by 0.56m deep were excavated into stiff yellow brown clay natural, which was overlain by 0.14m deep layer of brick crush and limestone fragments in a yellow brown clay matrix.

Panel three was located within the entrance hall of the house adjacent to an east west dividing wall. Two holes measuring 0.24m in diameter by 0.56m deep were excavated. The excavation was stopped at this depth as the mortar footings of the adjacent wall were encountered. The footings were overlain by a 0.4m deep layer of brick and tile crush, containing several sherds of pottery, glass fragments, an iron object and a fragment of clay pipe.

Panel four was located within the grassed area on the northern side of the house in an area historically known as the North Court. Two holes measuring 0.24m in diameter by 0.6m deep were excavated into a layer of stiff pale yellow clay natural which was overlain by a 0.39m deep layer brown silty loam topsoil.

Panel five was located within the grassed area on the western side of the house in an area historically known as the West Court. Two holes measuring 0.24m in diameter by 0.6m deep were excavated into a layer of stiff pale yellow clay natural which was overlain by a 0.3m deep layer brown silty loam topsoil.

Apart from the foundations of the north-south aligned wall at the base of the postholes for panel three, no archaeological features were noted during the course of the watching brief.

5 **THE FINDS** by *Tim Upson-Smith*

All of the finds were recovered from the panel three watching brief.

Pottery

Twenty-three sherds of pottery weighing 285g were recovered. These comprised two sherds of a glazed earthenware panchion dating to between the 17th and 19th centuries, three sherds of plain white bone china, six sherds of underglaze transfer print willow pattern earthenware, five sherds of plain white glazed earthenware, one sherd of lustreware, five sherds of buff glazed earthenware mixing bowl and one sherd of a white glazed earthenware, with blue underglaze transfer, hair cream lid. All of the pottery, with the possible exception of the panchion, dates to the late 19th or early 20th century.

Glass

There were five pieces of glass weighing 68g. These comprised two fragments of fine clear vessel glass, one fragment of green bottle glass, one fragment of clear bottle glass and one fragment of an egg-ended bottle or 'bowler', with the word 'water' in raised letters. This design of bottle was patented in the early 1800s but remained in use until the 1920s (Cox 1977). Like the pottery, the glass dates to the late 19th or early 20th century.

Clay pipe

Enough of a single fragment of a clay pipe bowl survived to show that it had an oak leaf design at the front, which is a common motif for pipes dating to the period 1825-70.

Other finds

One piece of heavily corroded iron work is 115mm in length by a maximum of 52mm wide tapering to a point. The object is likely to be a vine tie.

6 **CONCLUSION**

Apart from the foundations of the north-south aligned wall at the base of the postholes for panel three, no archaeological features were noted during the course of the watching brief. The excavated post holes only exposed the natural clay overlain by garden soils or in the case of those within the house overlain by brick crush make up layers. The finds from the brick crush layer indicate that this material was deposited in the late 19th or early 20th centuries.

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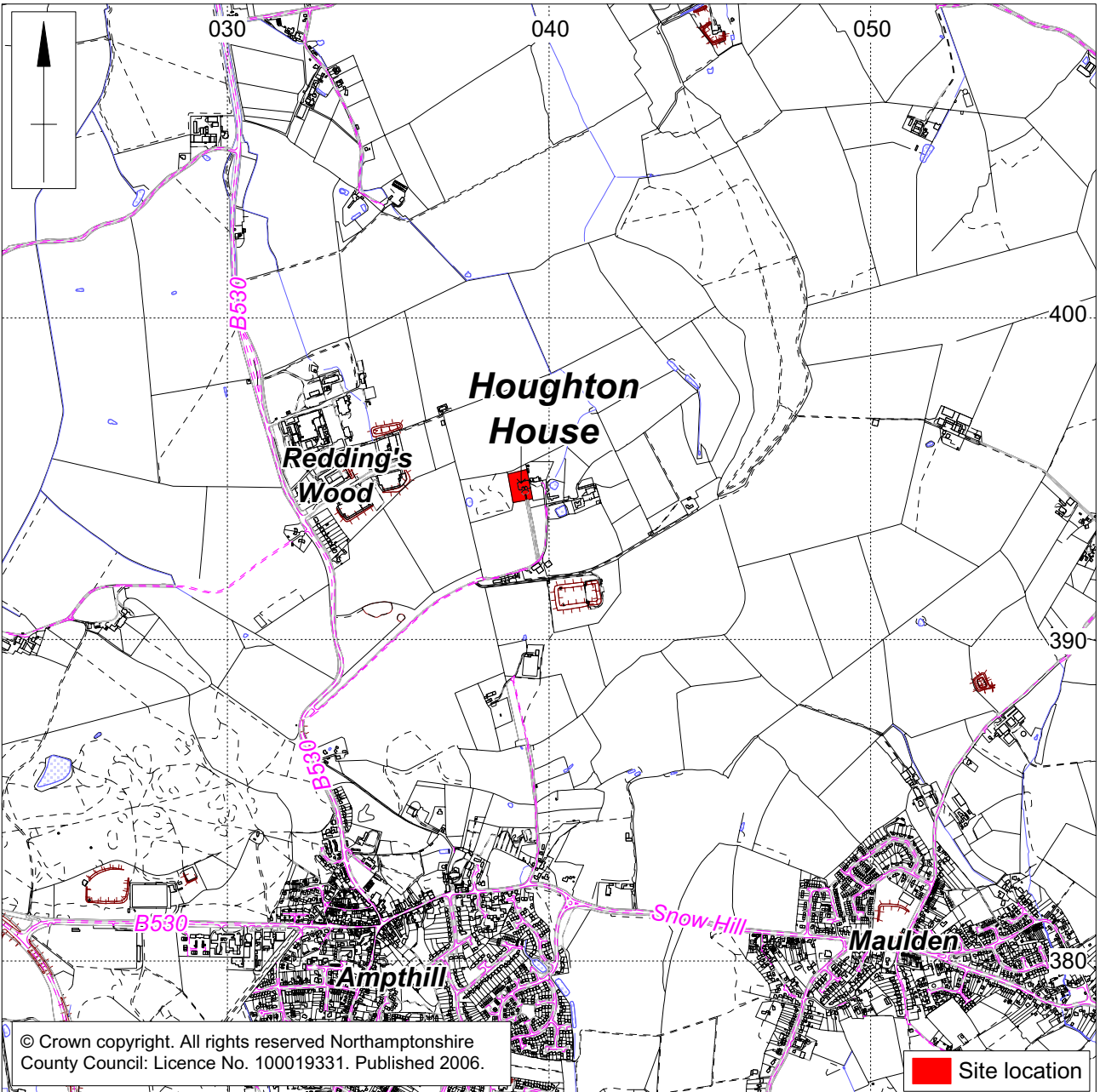
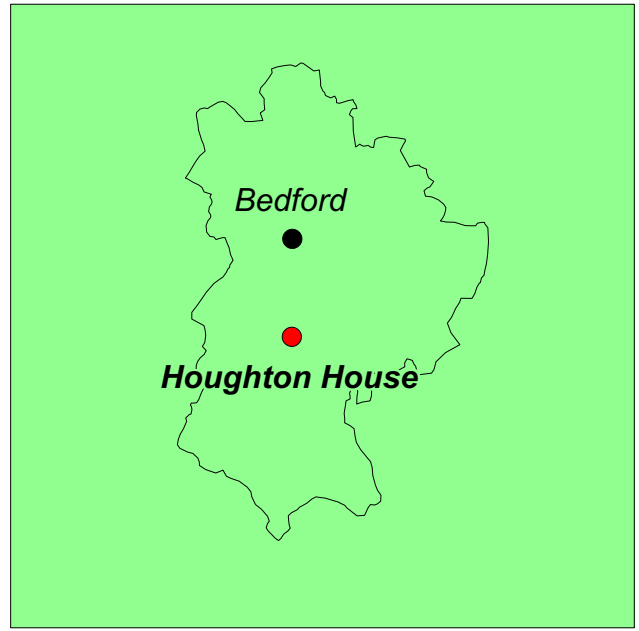
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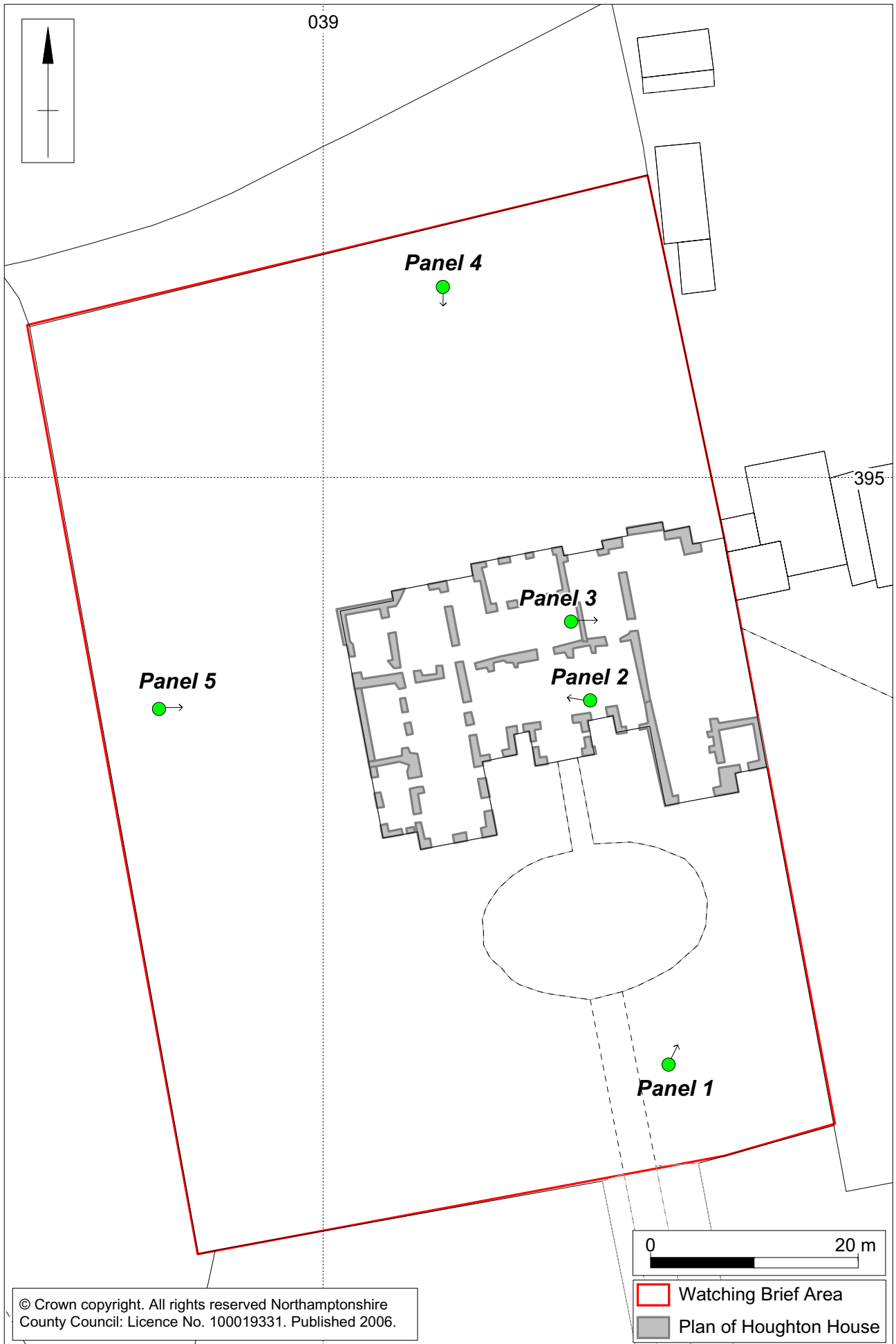
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Scale 1:20,000

Site location Fig 1



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Scale: 1:500

Plan showing Panel location at Houghton House Fig 2