

**EARTHWORK AND METAL-DETECTING SURVEYS
AT LAND ADJACENT TO SPRING CROFT, CHURCH STREET,
SIBBERTOFT, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

DECEMBER 2001

PLANNING APPLICATION DA98/0340

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An application has been made to Daventry District Council for outline planning permission for residential development on 0.54ha of pasture land adjacent to Spring Croft, Church Street, Sibbertoft, Northamptonshire (Planning Application DA98/0340, NGR SP 680 825, Fig 1).
- 1.2 The Historic Environment Team (Northamptonshire Heritage), Northamptonshire County Council, advised that an archaeological evaluation, comprising desk-based study and geophysical, earthwork and metal-detecting surveys, should be undertaken, and specified the scope of this study in an Archaeological Evaluation Brief dated 10/6/98.
- 1.3 Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants to undertake the earthwork and metal-detecting surveys, and this report presents the results of these two studies. The work was carried out according to a Project Specification, dated 27 November 2001, approved by Myk Flitcroft, Archaeological Planning Officer, Historic Environment Team (Northamptonshire Heritage).

2 EARTHWORK SURVEY

2.1 Methodology

- 2.1.1 A detailed earthwork survey was carried out using a Topcon GTS 303 electronic total station with automatic data logging using a Psion 3 Organiser. The data has been processed using the computer program IntSurveyor 2, and is related to the National Grid and Ordnance Survey datum.
- 2.1.2 The methodology comprised plotting the site boundaries, to provide a link to Ordnance Survey base maps, plotting the top edges of all identified scarps, and the bottom edges, when these could be clearly defined. Spot height data was derived from the plotting of the site boundaries and the earthwork scarps, with additional spot heights taken across the intervening areas at a maximum point separation of 5.0m.

2.1.3 The spot height data were related to an indicative spot height of 166.4m on the road to the immediate south of the site, but they are not directly related to an Ordnance Survey benchmark. The individual levels therefore have a relative accuracy of +/- 0.01m, but an absolute accuracy of +/- 0.10m.

2.1.4 The survey of identified scarps was plotted on a modern Ordnance Survey base map, and a conventional, hachured earthwork survey based on this record has been produced digitally (Fig 2). In addition, a contour survey at 0.25m intervals has been computed from the survey spot height data.

2.2 Results

2.2.1 In general terms, the ground level falls from a high point at 168.9m OD in the north-eastern corner of the survey area to a low point at 164.4m OD in the southern-eastern corner, a fall of 4.5m. The detail of the topography is, however, quite complicated.

2.2.2 Two features dominate the western part of the site. To the north there is an extensive hollow, 25m long by 17m wide and up to 0.80m deep in relation to the uphill slope to its east (Fig 2; a, former pond?). The bottom of this feature was soft and boggy at the time of the survey, and it is likely that it holds standing water during prolonged wet spells. It appears to be a silted up pond, most probably standing on the spring that now emerges at a constructed spring head on the southern margin of the hollow (b, spring). The present spring is flanked on three sides by a brick surround, while to the south there is a steep grassy slope running down to a concrete hardstanding. A raised kerb separates this from the lined rectangular sump or trough where the spring emerges. It is assumed that the water is carried away by a below ground pipe running towards the south-western corner of the site, but no trace is evident on the surface.

2.2.3 To the south-east there is a second extensive hollow (c), c.18m in diameter and 0.60m deep with respect to the sunken area to its north and 1.20m deep with respect to the platform to its east. This too was soft and boggy at the time of the survey, but if it was once a spring point or pond there has been no active water flow of some years. Two broad linear channels lead towards this sunken area. One runs north-south along the contours (d), but with a slight fall from north to south. It is up to 8.0m wide and 0.5m deep, but becomes narrower and shallower to the north, perhaps as a result of silting or backfilling. This feature is depicted on the Royal Commission survey (RCHM 1981, 173, fig 131). It appears to extend the line of a property boundary further to the north, and so may have been merely a boundary ditch, although it may also have carried

spring or surface water to the hollow to the south. A less distinct and narrower channel (e), runs directly downslope into the north-eastern corner of the sunken area. It is 4.0-5.0m wide and up to 0.25m deep, and may be a former watercourse feeding into the main hollow.

2.2.4 At the meeting point of features (d) and (e), at the northern margin of the eastern hollow, there is a brick-lined well shaft, now capped with a concrete slab. Local information indicates that water from this well was used until quite recently.

2.2.5 The north-eastern corner of the site comprises quite steep sloping ground. There is one standing fruit tree, probably an apple or pear tree, and the stump of a second tree, suggesting that there was formerly a small orchard in this area. At the south-western corner of the eastern hollow (c), there are two shallow, linear ditches running to the west and south-west (g). They are both *c.* 0.20m deep, and if hollow (c) was formerly a pond they may be former outflow channels.

2.2.6 To the east of the hollow (c) there is a sub-square platform, measuring *c*10m (f). This is the feature most likely to represent a house platform. However, given the adjacent presence of the sunken hollow, as a possible pond, it is also possible that the mound comprises upcast material from periodic cleaning of the pond, or even deliberate embankment to prevent flooding onto the adjacent road.

2.2.7 The area (h) between the two possible former ponds (a) and (c) also forms a square “platform”, with its northern edge defined by a well marked scarp. This too could be a product of either former building or upcast from the adjacent hollows/ponds (a) and (c).

3 METAL-DETECTING SURVEY

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 A detailed metal-detecting survey, using a Laser Scout with VLF motion discriminator, was carried out across the entire study area. The detector was set to exclude ferrous metals. Specialist advice and assistance was provided by Steve Critchley, an independent metal-detectorist.

3.1.2 Five metre wide transects aligned east-west were set out across the site, and the full width of each transect was scanned. The full area of the site was therefore covered.

3.1.3 At the time of the survey the site was under rough pasture, with tussocks of grass and dead weed stems. The ground conditions were therefore not conducive to the systematic detection of all

smaller, non-ferrous objects. In the north-western corner of the site there was a dense stand of brambles.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 No non-ferrous objects were located.

3.2.2 While the instrument was set to exclude ferrous objects, the only items detected were larger ferrous objects. Miscellaneous objects evidently of relatively recent origin and relating to agricultural or similar usage, and not to any former settlement, included horseshoes, chain and sheet metal. They were concentrated around the gateway at the south-eastern corner of the site and in the former pond (a), where they appear to represent casual loss and deliberate dumping. These objects were not retained, and their locations were not accurately plotted.

3.2.3 Two ferrous objects were plotted and retained from the north-eastern area (Fig 2, find 1 and find 2). These are both the iron rings from shoe pattens, which can be broadly dated to the 17th-19th centuries.

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The earthwork survey indicates that the prominent earthworks on the western part of the site comprise a former spring feed pond and a more recently constructed spring head. A similar hollow to the east may also have been a former spring feed pond, with possible feeder channels to the north and north-east and outflow channels to the south-west. At least some of the former water flow may have been redirected to the brick-lined well on the northern margin of the former pond. This is now capped and disused. It may be noted that the Ordnance Survey define the area to the immediate west of the site as "Source of River Welland" (Fig 1).

4.2 Raised platforms on the southern part of the site may possibly be former house platforms, but it is also possible that they might be related to the springs. The metal detecting revealed a pattern of casual discard and loss of larger ferrous objects of post-medieval date. While no non-ferrous objects were recovered, it must be noted that the rough grass meant that ground conditions were far from ideal for metal detecting.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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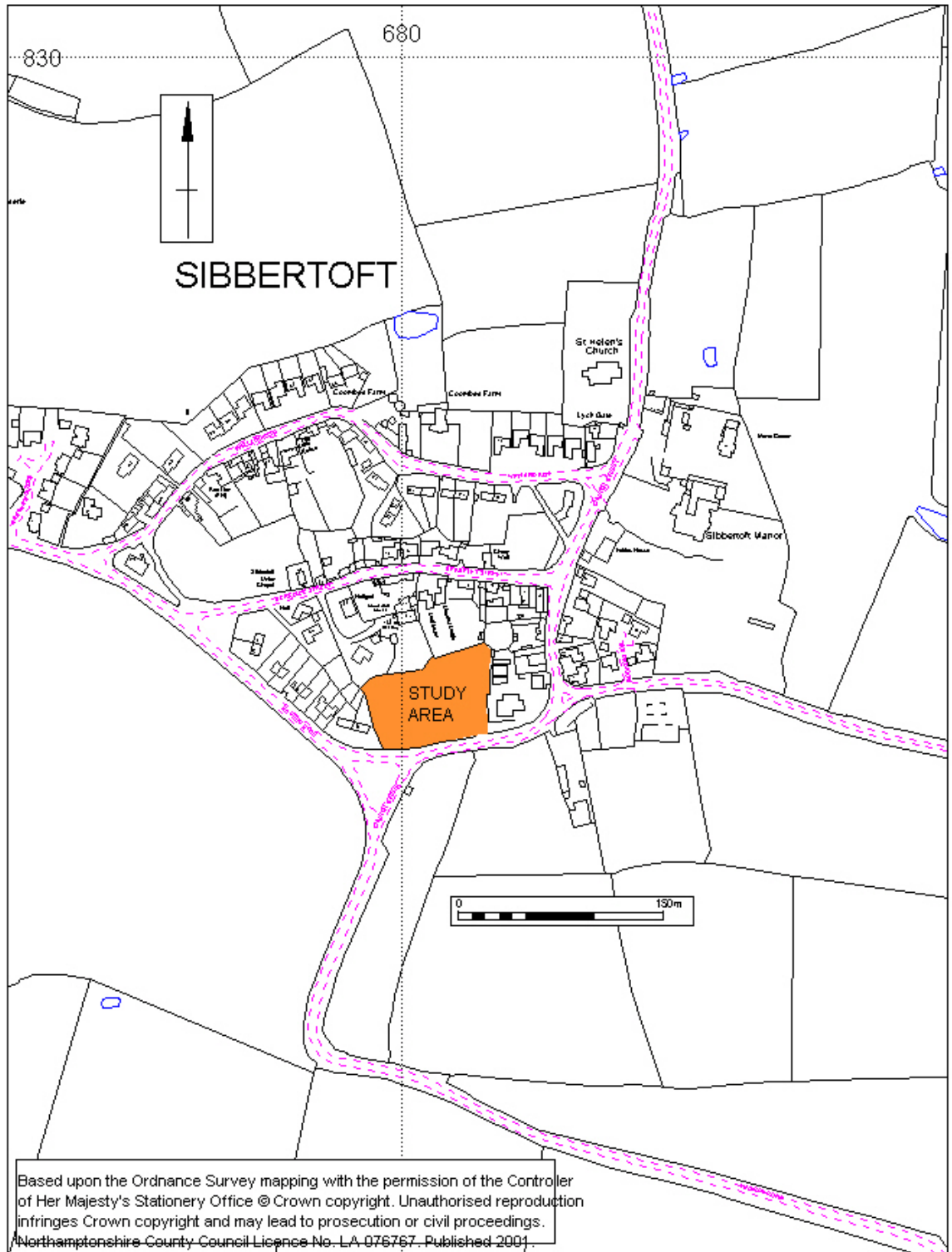


Fig 1: Site location

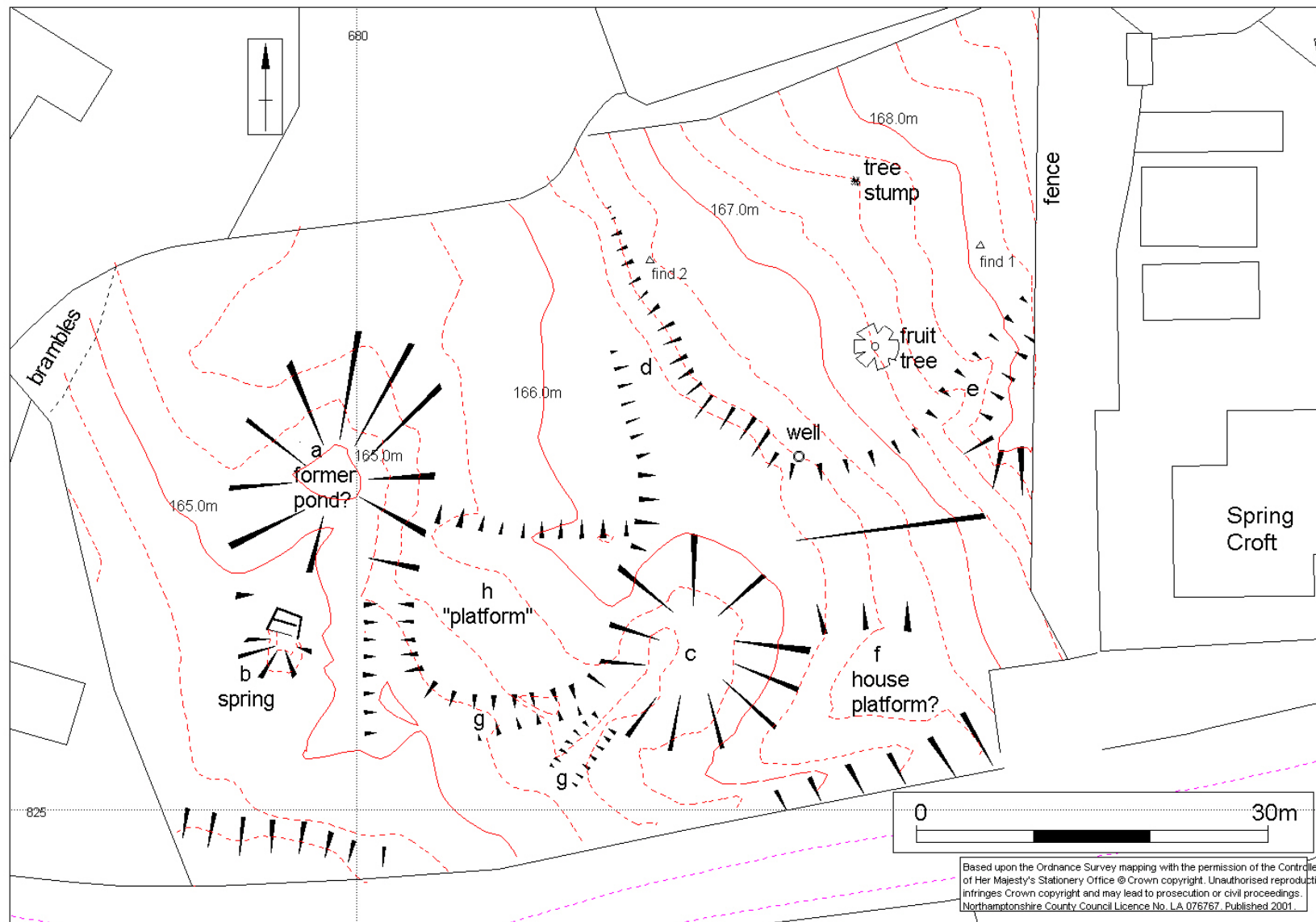


Fig 2: Sibbertoft, Spring Croft: earthworks