



**Northamptonshire
County Council**

Northamptonshire Archaeology

**An archaeological watching brief
at Canons Ashby House, Canons Ashby**

Northamptonshire

November 2004 – April 2005



David Leigh

March 2007

07/019

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QUALITY CONTROL

	Print name	Signed	Date
Checked by	Steve Parry		
Verified by	Andy Mudd		
Approved by	Andy Chapman		

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	An Archaeological Watching Brief at Canons Ashby House, Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire	
Short description	An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during ground-works connected with the laying of a new drainage system at Canons Ashby house, Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire, along with a new security cable for the Shepherd Boy statue that is located within the gardens. A truncated natural substratum was revealed throughout the ground-works. A single architectural fragment of 16 th /17 th date was recovered from un-stratified deposits. No archaeological deposits were revealed.	
Project type	Watching brief	
Site status	Grade 1 Listed Building	
Previous work	Archaeological watching brief during repair works (Oxford Archaeology)	
Current Land use	National Trust property	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	16 th century manor house	
Significant finds		
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address	Canons Ashby House, Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire NN11 3SD	
Study area		
OS Easting & Northing	4577 2505	
Height OD		
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	National Trust, East Midlands Region	
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	David J. Leigh	
Project Manager	Steve Parry	
Sponsor or funding body	The National Trust, East Midlands Region	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	November 2004	
End date	March 2005	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		
Paper		Watching brief forms (14) Colour slides (59) Black and white contact prints (58) Digital photographs (9)
Digital	Ditto	Report text and figures

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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
AT CANONS ASHBY HOUSE, CANONS ASHBY,
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
NOVEMBER 2004 - APRIL 2005**

Abstract

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology during ground-works connected with the laying of a new drainage system at Canons Ashby House, Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire, along with a new security cable for the Shepherd Boy statue that is located within the gardens. A truncated natural substratum was revealed throughout the ground-works. A single architectural fragment of 16th/17th century date was recovered from unstratified deposits. No archaeological deposits were revealed.

1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology between November 2004 and April 2005 during ground-works connected with the construction of a new drainage system at Canons Ashby House, Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire, (NGR: SP 577 505: Fig 1; Plate 1), along with the laying of a new security cable for the Shepherd Boy statue that stands within the gardens (Plates 1 & 4). The work was carried out on behalf of The National Trust, East Midlands Region and was undertaken following an approved specification for an archaeological watching brief produced by Northamptonshire Archaeology on the 18th October 2004.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location and Topography

The development area is located within the village of Canons Ashby approximately 13 miles south-west of Northampton. The underlying archaeology has been mapped by the British Geological Survey of Great Britain as comprising Jurassic and Cretaceous Clay.

2.2 Historical Background

The development area is located within the village of Canons Ashby, within an area of archaeological interest. To the south-east of Canons Ashby House is located the church of St Mary (Plate 3), which incorporates aspects of the 12th century Augustinian priory from which Canons Ashby takes its name. The Augustinian priory was founded in the years between 1147 and 1151, lasting until 1537 when it was dissolved.

Immediately to the north of Canons Ashby House lie the earthwork remains of the medieval village of Canons Ashby, the first record of which was in the Domesday Book. The village of

Canons Ashby is recorded as being of significant size until 1489 when the prior of Canons Ashby turned part of the village over to pasture. From this point the village continued to shrink until, according to documentary evidence, only three farm houses and two or three lodges were left at around 1720.

The present Canons Ashby House was built by the Dryden family and dates from the mid 16th century. It is thought to stand on the site of an earlier house that was constructed of buildings of the earlier priory. Within the gardens stands a lead statue known as The Shepherd Boy, this is of 18th-century date and is attributed to Jan Van Nost, who was a prolific producer of lead sculptures.

Canons Ashby House and gardens are presently in the care of The National trust.

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the watching brief were to:

- ◆ Observe and record all archaeological deposits, uncovered during the ground-works for the new drainage system and the security cable.
- ◆ Determine and record the date, extent, character, state of preservation and depth of any archaeological deposits.

The ground-works comprised the excavation of trenches for the new drainage system along with a further trench for the laying of a new security cable (Fig 2; Plates 2, 5 & 6) for an alarm system to protect The Shepherd Boy statue. All the ground-works were undertaken under archaeological supervision and were carried out using hand tools. 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 sheets. The watching brief was carried out in accordance with the standards and guidelines for an archaeological watching brief (IFA 2001).

4 THE RECORDED EVIDENCE

4.1 The drainage trenches (Fig 2)

The drainage trenches were excavated to a maximum depth of 1m with a width of up to 0.5m. The drainage trenches were excavated along two sides of the building, the first ran from the southern corner of the house westwards to the western corner and then from this point ran north to the northern corner, with two short drains runs terminating either side of the original main door.

From the southern corner to the western corner the pipe trench followed the line of another relatively modern pipe trench. The stratigraphic sequence along this section comprised, red/brown sand and gravel, pipe trench fill, mixed with grey/brown silt loam containing occasional fragments of modern ceramic building material and limestone fragments. Overlying this was grey/brown silt loam topsoil, up to 0.25m thick containing fragments of modern ceramic building material along with occasional rounded stones.

From the western corner to the north corner (Plates 5 & 6) the stratigraphic sequence comprised, red/brown fragmented natural ironstone encountered at a depth of 0.98m, overlain by grey/brown silt loam subsoil, up to 0.70m thick, containing occasional small fragments, less than 0.06m, of limestone and occasional rounded stones. This was sealed by a grey/black topsoil/turf layer, up to 0.28m thick. Mid way, for approximately 15m and corresponding with the position of the original entrance, the stratigraphic sequence differed. Here the stratigraphic sequence comprised, red/brown fragmented natural ironstone encountered at a depth of 1.10m, overlain by grey/brown silt loam subsoil, up to 0.45m thick, containing occasional small fragments, less than 0.06m, of limestone and occasional rounded stones. This was cut by a layer of disturbed material, up to 0.25m thick, comprising mixed gravels and fragments of modern ceramic building material. A single architectural limestone fragment was recovered from this deposit. Sealing this was a grey/black topsoil/turf layer, up to 0.28m thick.

4.2 The cable trench (Fig 2)

A single trench was excavated from the eastern corner of the house, and ran northwards along the grass verge, adjacent to the road, outside the garden wall of Canons Ashby House, to the end of the garden wall parallel with The Shepherd Boy statue. At this point it continued westwards through the wall into the garden to the statue.

The stratigraphic sequence along the trench adjacent to the road, comprised, natural red/brown fragmented ironstone encountered at a depth of 0.60m. This was overlain by a disturbed layer, up to 0.49m thick, containing numerous fragments of granite chippings and irregular stones, within a matrix of grey/brown silt clay loam. Sealing this was a grey/black topsoil/turf layer, up to 0.11m thick.

The length of the trench that was within the garden revealed a stratigraphic sequence comprising, grey/brown silt loam subsoil, up to 0.32m thick, containing occasional rounded stones and very occasional small fragments of modern ceramic building material. This was sealed by a grey/black silt loam topsoil/turf layer, up to 0.28m thick, containing occasional rounded stones.

4.3 THE ARCHITECTURAL FRAGMENT by Iain Soden

A single piece of worked Jurassic limestone was recovered, measuring 86mm x 60mm. It is heavily fossiliferous, containing visibly complete bivalves. The piece takes the form of a small classicising volute, with a rather eccentric spiral, the sides of which curve independently. It is carved in the round and thus is designed to be seen from either side. This factor alone suggests it derives from a set of stone strapwork, most probably from a balustrade or open-work decorative stone panel, probably of Elizabethan or Jacobean date (1558-1625). Such terminals form easily-broken parts of decorative stonework.

5 THE SITE ARCHIVE

The site archive comprises:

RECORD	NUMBER
Watching brief forms	14
Colour slides	59
Black and white contacts and negatives	58
Digital photographs	9

7 CONCLUSIONS

The results of the watching brief demonstrate that in those areas subject to archaeological observation, truncation of the natural substratum has taken place. This may be as a result of activity connected with the construction of the house and the laying out of the driveways and gardens, along with prolonged horticultural activity within the gardens themselves.

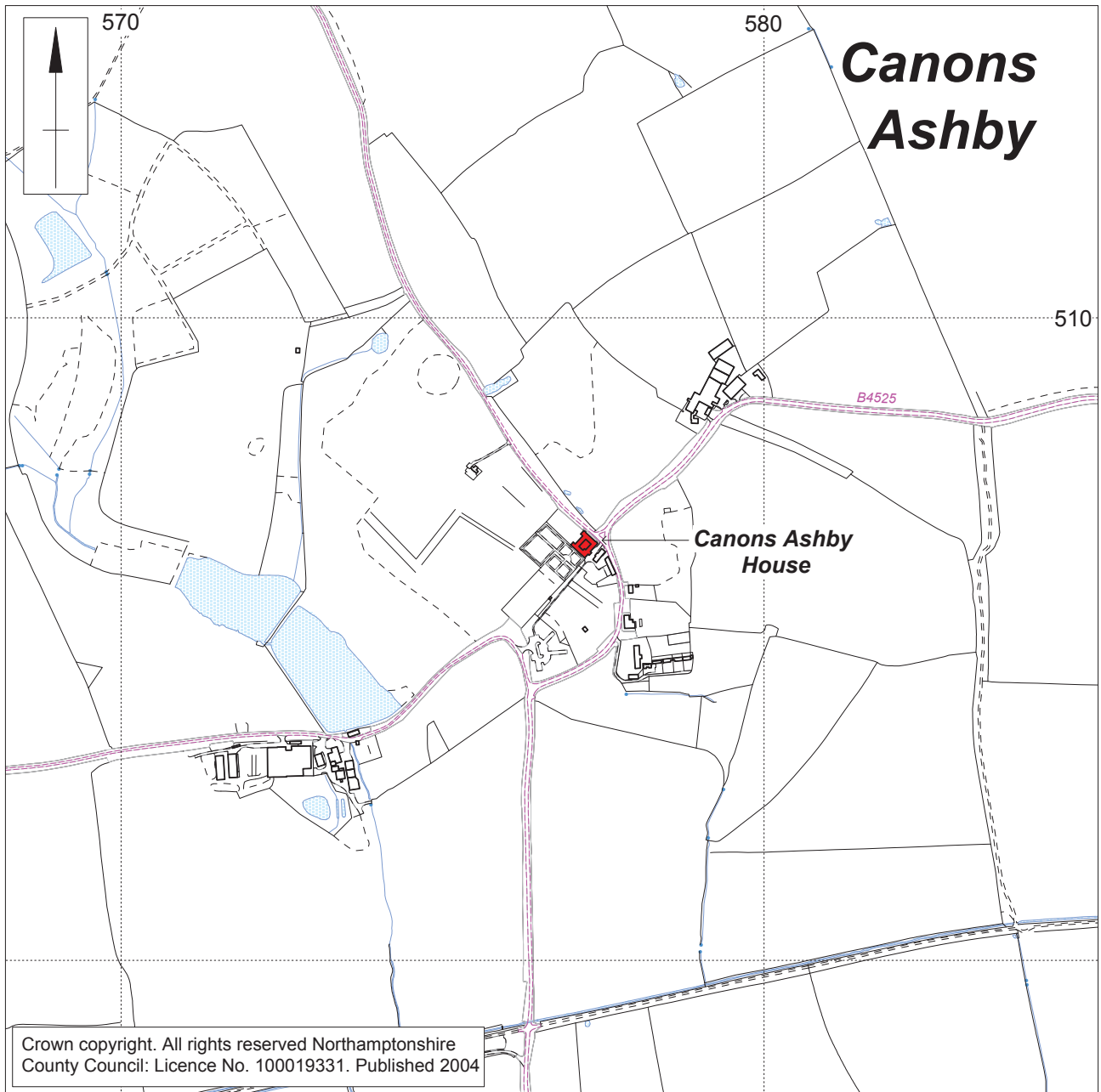
The watching brief produced a single architectural fragment. This was recovered from unstratified deposits and is datable to the 16th or 17th century.

Whilst a truncated substratum was revealed during the course of the watching brief, it cannot be assumed that undisturbed deposits are not present within the gardens of Canons Ashby House.

The watching brief was carried out in favourable conditions and the results are considered to be reliable.

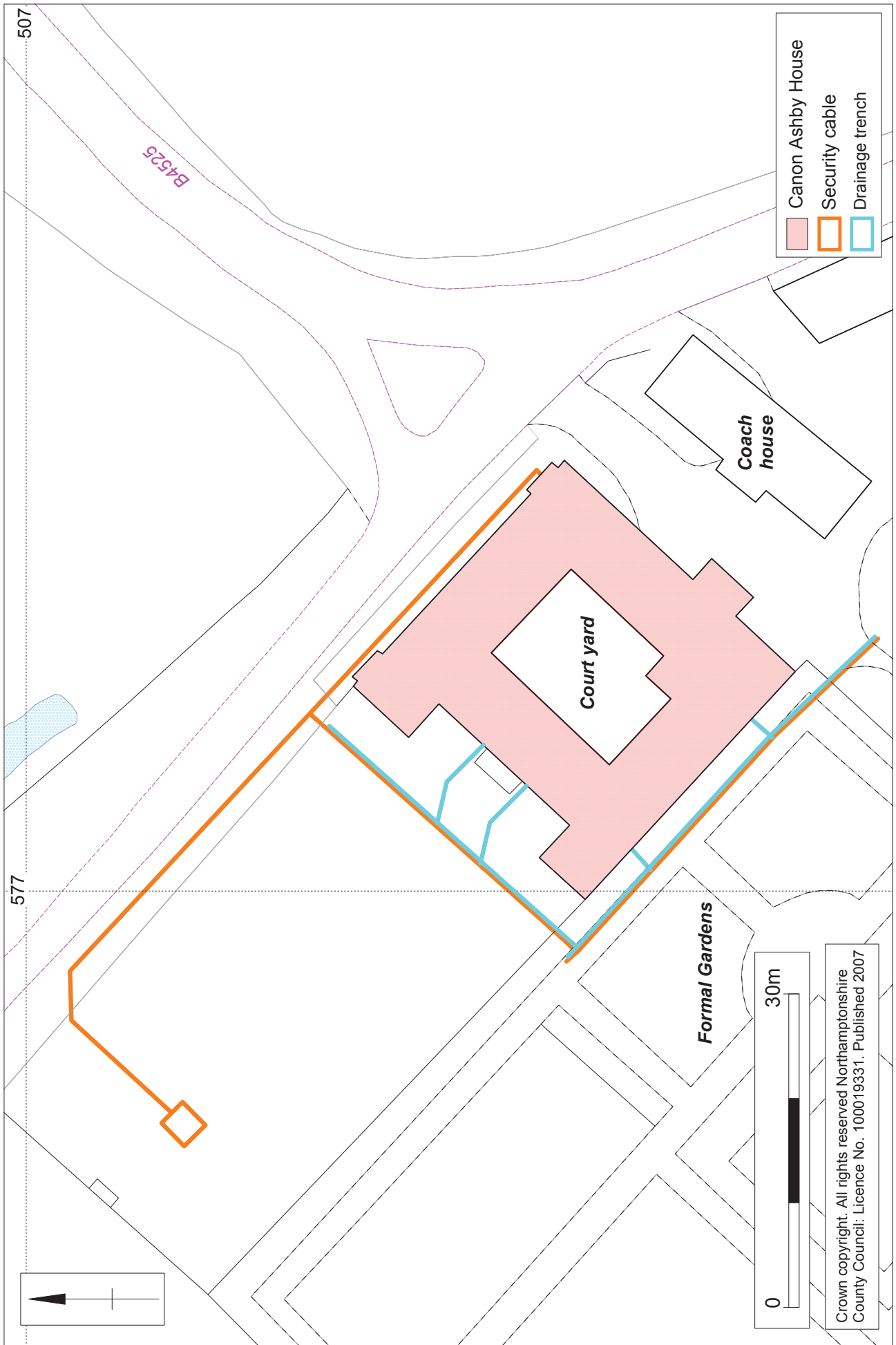
BIBLIOGRAPHY

IFA 2001 *Standards and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*, Institute of Field Archaeologists



Scale 1:10,000

Site location Fig 1



Scale 1:500

Site plan Fig 2



Plate 1: Canons Ashby House, with The Shepherd Boy in the foreground



Plate 2: Canons Ashby House, viewed from the west with the ground-works in progress



Plate 3: The Church of St Mary, view to the east from the gardens of Canons Ashby House



Plate 4: The Shepherd Boy statue by Jan Van Nost, in the gardens of Canons Ashby House



Plate 5: General view of the ground-works in the northern garden of Canons Ashby House



Plate 6: The stratigraphic sequence within the north garden