Northamptonshire County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Evaluation at

Fineshade Wood

Northamptonshire

February 2007

Carol Simmonds

March 2007

Report 07/33

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QUALITY CONTROL

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Checked by	Pat Chapman		
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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	Archaeological Evaluation at Fineshade Wood, Northamptonshire	
Short description	Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation on a 9.4ha parcel of land at Fineshade Wood, Northamptonshire. Five trenches were opened. Natural Jurassic limestone was exposed beneath the topsoil, although trench 4 had two layers of colluvium overlying the natural. Four undated archaeological features were investigated, including two linear gullies, a possible gully terminal and a probable pit/tree throw hole. Slag was retrieved from topsoil around trench 2.	
Project type	Field Evaluation (Site Code: FSW07)	
Previous work	In 2006 GSB Prospection Ltd undertook a geophysical survey within the study area and identified several magnetic anomalies.	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type and period		
Significant finds	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address	Fineshade Wood, near Corby NN17 3BB	
Easting Northing	SP 978 987	
Area Ha	9.4ha	
Height OD	50m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Forestry Commission, England	
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Carol Simmonds	
Project Manager	Adam Yates	
Sponsor or funding body	Forestry Commission, England	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	February 2007	
End date	March 2007	
ARCHIVES	**Location**	**Content**
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Paper	Site code: FSW07	
Digital		
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Title	Archaeological Evaluation at Fineshade Wood, Northamptonshire	
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Contents

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT

FINESHADE WOOD, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

FEBRUARY 2007

ABSTRACT

Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation on a 9.4ha parcel of land at Fineshade Wood, Northamptonshire. Five trenches were opened. Natural Jurassic limestone was exposed beneath the topsoil, although trench 4 had two layers of colluvium overlying the natural. Four undated archaeological features were investigated, including two linear gullies, a possible gully terminal and a probable pit/tree throw hole. Slag was retrieved from topsoil around trench 2.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Forestry Commission commissioned Northamptonshire Archaeology to undertake an evaluation to determine whether archaeological remains exist within the ancient woodland holding of Northamptonshire Forest District. The area under scrutiny lies within a 9.4ha parcel of land within Fineshade Wood, to the north-west of King's Cliffe (Fig 1, centred on NGR SP 977 986).

Previous archaeological work on the site comprises a geophysical survey undertaken by GSB Prospection Ltd in 2006 (GSB 2006). This identified several high and low magnetic responses and areas of potential ferrous material.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The study area covers approximately 9.4ha of land road in Fineshade Wood, to the east of the A43 trunk. The current landuse for the area is woodland planted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Plate 1). It is bound to the north-west by a stream and to the south-west by a disused railway.

The topography lies at an average height of 50m above Ordnance datum. The geology is oolitic shelly limestone of the Lower Lincolnshire Limestone of the Middle Jurassic age.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Fineshade Wood forms part of the wider landscape of the Rockingham Forest and lies within an area of archaeological potential (Fig 2). The potential largely relates to evidence for ironworking from the Iron Age to the post-medieval period. This is likely due to the abundance of good quality iron ores and woodland for fuel occurring in close proximity (Simco 2003). Fineshade lies within an area of Northamptonshire and Rockingham Forest known for its association with the iron working industry (NA 1998). A general survey of early iron smelting in the Rockingham Forest area identified several smelting furnaces and slag piles in the vicinity of Fineshade Abbey (Bellamy, Jackson and Johnston 2001). Work at Fineshade Abbey kitchen garden identified furnaces dating from the early Saxon period (NA 2005).

The medieval evidence relates to the site of Fineshade Abbey, an Augustinian Priory, founded in AD 1199 and dissolved in 1536. The abbey was apparently built on the site of

an earthwork motte and bailey castle. In 1546 the abbey site was bought by Sir Robert Kirkham who converted it into a country residence. The house was largely demolished in 1956 (www.ahds.ads.ac.uk). It is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM number 124).

Previous archaeological work within the immediate study area was a geophysical survey comprising magnetic susceptibility and gradiometer survey carried out in 2006 by GSB Prospection Ltd. The magnetic susceptibility survey identified two areas of potential industrial activity and several isolated anomalies. Three areas of detailed gradiometer survey were undertaken over possible anomalies (GSB 2006).

The current trial trenching work had the specific aims of defining:

- The presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area, with regards to the results of the geophysical survey.
- To establish whether remains associated with iron smelting were present within the development area.

4 METHODOLOGY

The locations of all trenches were plotted on the ground by GPS surveying equipment (with a tolerance of generally +/- *c.* 1.0 m) and related to Ordnance Survey

Five trenches with a total length of 95m were excavated to target geophysical anomalies. Trenches 1 and 2 were located in the locale of GSB's Area 1 and trenches 3-5 were located to the south in Area 2 (Fig 3, Plate 2). Trenches 2-4 were 20m in length, trench 5 was reduced to 15m and trench 1 remained at 20m in length, but was split into two to work around the base of a tree trunk and the root bowl. All trenches were excavated using a mechanical digger fitted with a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket under continuous archaeological supervision. Mechanical excavation proceeded as far as the first significant archaeological layer or in its absence as far as the surface of the natural limestone.

All archaeological deposits and artefacts encountered during the course of excavation were fully recorded. Recording followed standard Northamptonshire procedures. All archaeological deposits were given individual context numbers and were described on pro-forma context sheets, including details of the context, relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds. All potential archaeological features were excavated. The excavated area and spoil heaps were scanned by metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval.

The trenches were planned at a scale of 1:50. Sections or profiles through features and areas of complex stratigraphy were drawn at a scale of 1:10. All levels were related to Ordnance Datum. A full photographic record comprising 35mm monochrome negatives and colour transparencies, as well as digital photographs was maintained. The field data was compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing.

Once excavated and recorded the trenches were backfilled (Plate 3). This entailed simple re-instatement using the upcast from the trenches which were then levelled/flattened and compacted by a wheeled machine.

All works were carried out in accordance with IFA *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (IFA 1999) and *Standard for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003). Procedures complied with Northamptonshire County Council's Health and Safety policy and Northamptonshire Archaeology's Health and Safety at Work Guidelines (NA 2003).

5 RESULTS OF FIELDWORK

Archaeological remains were found in trenches 2 and 3 (Plate 4) cutting the natural limestone and trench 4 had two layers of colluvium (hillwash) overlying the natural (Fig 4, section 4; Plates 5 and 8). No archaeological remains were recorded in the remaining trenches. The metal detecting survey identified that the topsoil and feature fills had a strong presence of ferrous and ironstone debris within. Trenches 1 and 5 had a topsoil layer that was 0.20m thick overlying natural pale yellow brown bedded oolitic limestone.

Trench 2

There were two parallel north to south aligned linear gullies [205] and [209] cutting the natural (203). Gully [205] measured up to 1.80m long by 1.2m wide by 0.15m deep with a fill of firm yellowish brown sandy silt with limestone gravel (204). The gully was poorly defined and was sealed by subsoil (202) (Fig 4, section 1).

Gully [209] measured up to 1.8m long by 0.83m wide by 0.4m deep with three fills silting or tipping from the east (Figure 4, section 6; Plate 6). Fill (208) was a primary silting fill of loose whitish yellow sand and was 0.25m thick. Fill (207) was a secondary fill of hard mid greyish blue clay with 15% ironstone and slag content and was 0.15m thick. The upper fill (207) was a 0.30m thick firm mid yellowish-orange sandy clay with 2% limestone fragments. The gully was well defined and was sealed by subsoil (202). During the metal detecting survey a fragment of tap slag, was recovered from the topsoil (201) which possibly indicates smelting activity in the area.

Trench 3

A gully terminal [305] and a pit or tree-throw hole [307] cut into natural limestone (303) and sealed by subsoil (302). Gully [305] measured up to 1.6m long by 0.9m wide by 0.15m deep and was filled by a friable yellowish brown and grey sandy silt with limestone gravel (304). The gully was poorly defined. The pit or tree throw [307] measured 1.5m long by 0.8m wide by 0.15m deep and was filled by a firm yellowish brown clay with orange flecking sandy silt (306). The feature was poorly defined (Fig 4, section 3; Plate 7).

Trench 4

Two layers of colluvium (403 and 404) were identified in the trench overlying the natural limestone (405), which sloped west to east. The earliest layer of colluvium (404) was only identified in a 2m long sondage at the eastern end of the trench. It was a friable mid orange sandy silt with charcoal flecking and measured 0.33m thick. This was sealed by (403), a firm mid brownish orange sandy clay with charcoal flecking measuring up to 0.28m thick. This was subsequently sealed by subsoil (402) and topsoil (401), both 0.25m thick. The two layers of colluvium reflect weathering of the landscape.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The geophysical survey highlighted areas of possible ironworking although there were the caveats that the anomalies might be related to a current campfire further to the north-east in addition to modern debris on the surface.

The archaeological evaluation was successful in locating three gullies within the study area, though all were undated and there was no correlation with the anomalies identified in the geophysical survey. It is likely that the gullies identified were peripheral features associated with industrial activity, given the high concentration of ferrous and sand ironstone debris in their fills and the surrounding top soils identified during the metal detecting survey.

As no definitive evidence for iron smelting in the form of kilns or furnaces was found within any of the excavated trenches, it is possible that the valley between the two geophysical survey areas was used as a runoff for any iron smelting works in the area.

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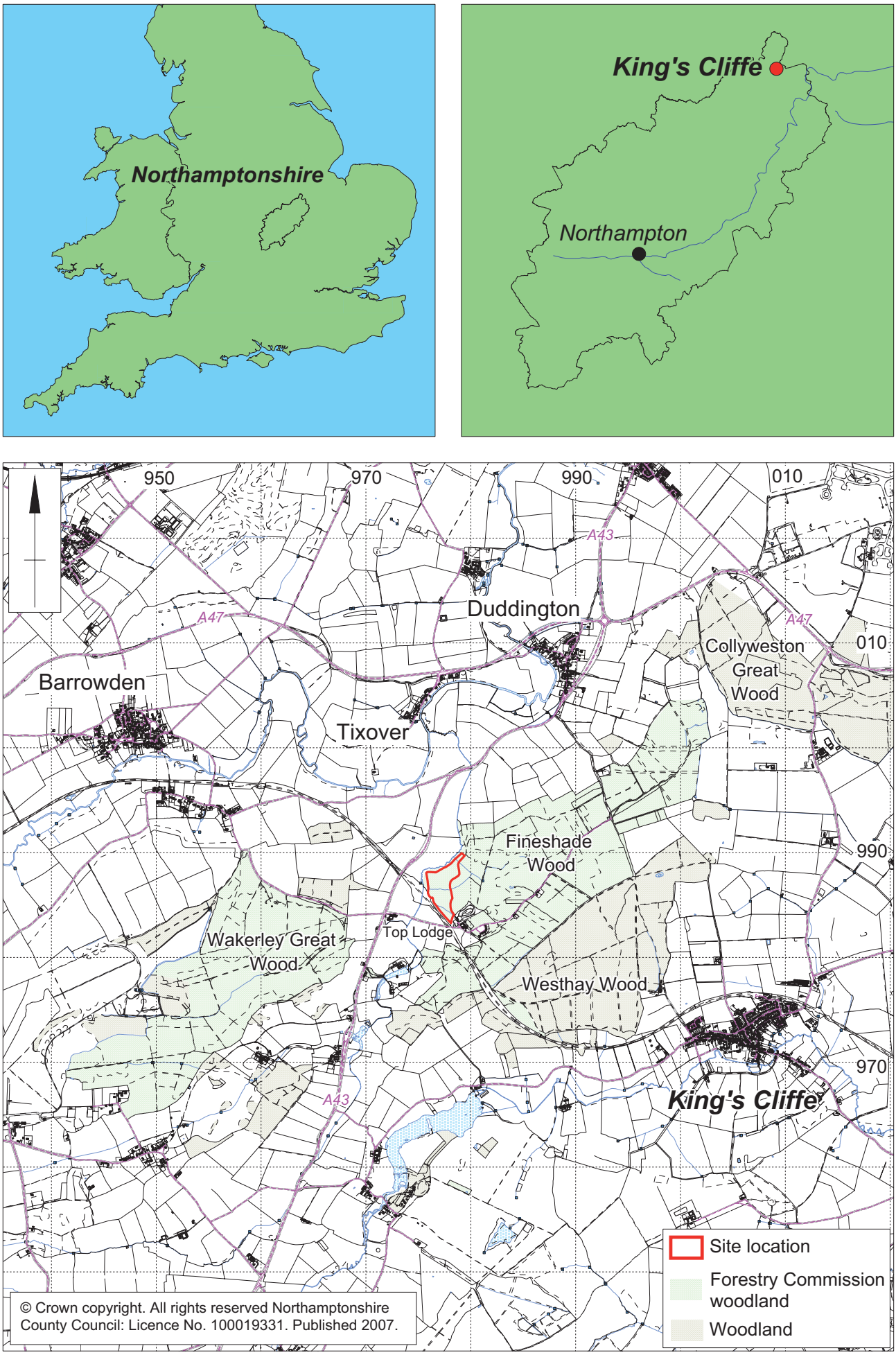
Northamptonshire Archaeology
Northamptonshire County Council March 2007

A1: SITE DATA

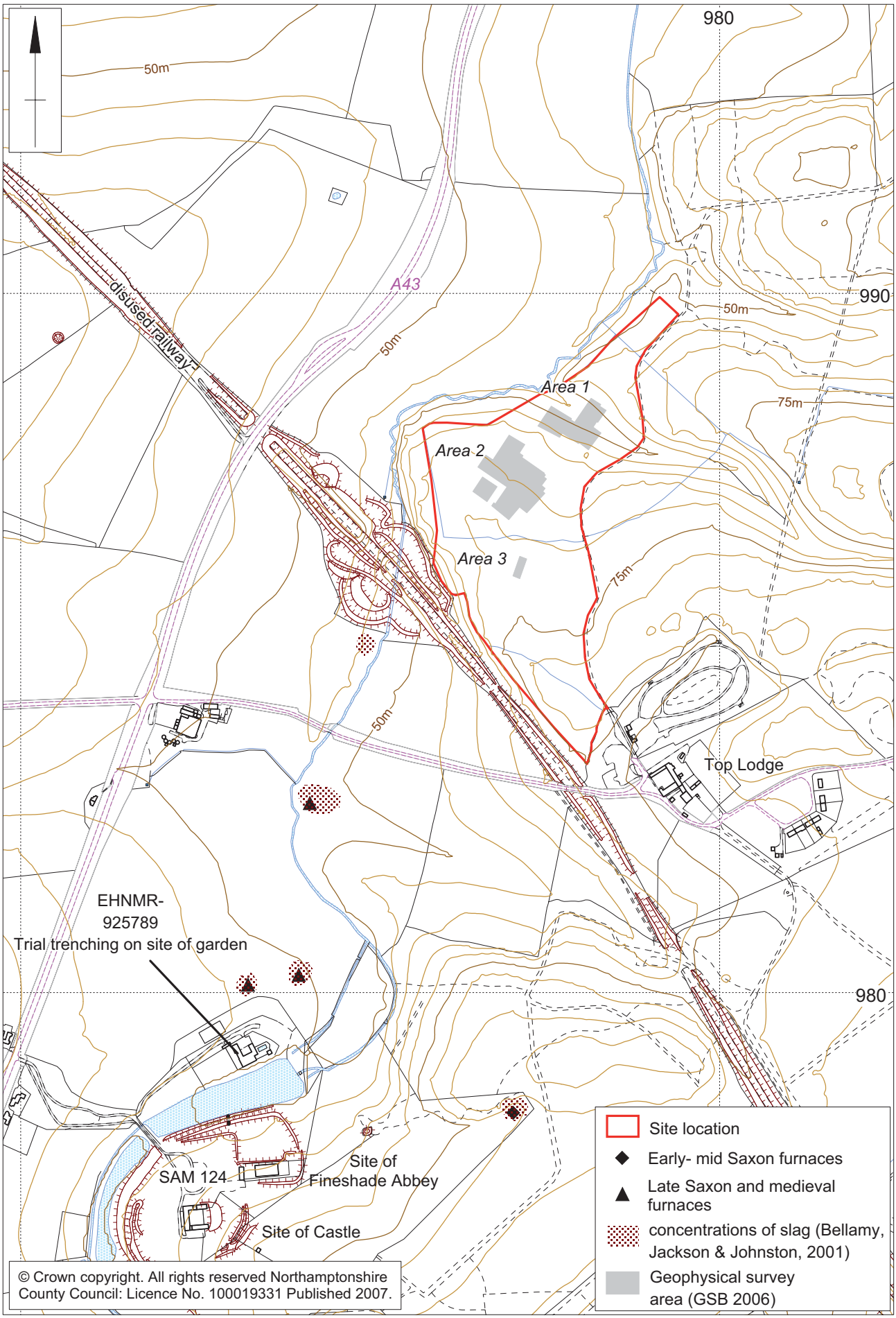
Trench No	Context	Deposit Type	Description	Artefact types
1	101	Topsoil	Loose dark blackish brown clayey loam, 2% small limestone fragments, charcoal and slag waste. 0.2m thick	
	102	Natural	Planed limestone	
	103	Natural	Fragmented limestone gravel	
2	201	Topsoil	As 101, 0.2m thick	Slag
	202	Subsoil	Firm mid yellowish brown clay with limestone fragments. 10m long and 0.1m thick	
	203	Natural	Fragmented limestone	
	204	Fill of 205	Firm yellowish brown sandy silt with limestone gravel, sealed by subsoil, 0.15m thick	
	205	Cut of Gully	Linear shallow cut with gradual concave sides and rounded, irregular base, 1.8m long 1.2m wide 0.15m deep	
	206	Tertiary Fill of 209	Firm mid yellowish-orange sandy clay, with 2% limestone fragments, 0.30m thick	
	207	Secondary Fill of 209	Hard mid greyish blue clay with 15% ironstone and slag content, 0.15m thick	
	208	Primary Fill of 209	Loose whitish yellow sand, 0.25m thick	
	209	Cut of Gully	Linear gully with sharp break of slopes, steep convex sloping sides and flat, regular base, 1.8m long 0.83m wide and 0.4m deep	
3	301	Topsoil	As 101, 0.2m thick	
	302	Subsoil	As 202, 0.16m thick	
	303	Natural	Fragmented limestone	
	304	Fill of 305	Friable yellowish brown and grey sandy silt with limestone gravel. Indistinct boundaries	
	305	Cut of Gully	Terminal butt end of gully with gradual concave sides and a rounded, irregular base, 1.6m long, 0.9m wide and 0.15m deep	
	306	Fill of 307	Firm yellowish brown and orange flecking sandy silt with evidence of burning , 0.15m thick	
	307	Cut of Pit/Tree throw	Sub-ovoid pit or tree throw with gradual concave sides and rounded, irregular base, 1.5m long, 0.8m wide and 0.15m deep	
4	401	Topsoil	As 101, 0.25m thick	

Trench No	Context	Deposit Type	Description	Artefact types
	402	Subsoil	As 202, 0.25m thick	
	403	Colluvium	Firm mid brownish orange sandy clay with charcoal flecking, 15.5m long, 1.8m wide and 0.28m thick	
	404	Colluvium	Friable mid orange sandy silt with charcoal flecking, 2m long, 1.8m wide and 0.33m thick	
	405	Natural	Fragmented limestone	
5	501	Topsoil	As 101, 0.2m thick	
	502	Natural	Fragmented limestone	



Scale 1:50,000

Location of Fineshade Wood Fig 1



Scale 1:7,500

Topography and previous archaeological works Fig 2

Scale 1:750

977

978

988

Tr 1

Tr 2

S.1

209

205

S.6

S.4

Tr 4

Tr 5

Tr 3

S.3

307

305

0 10 20

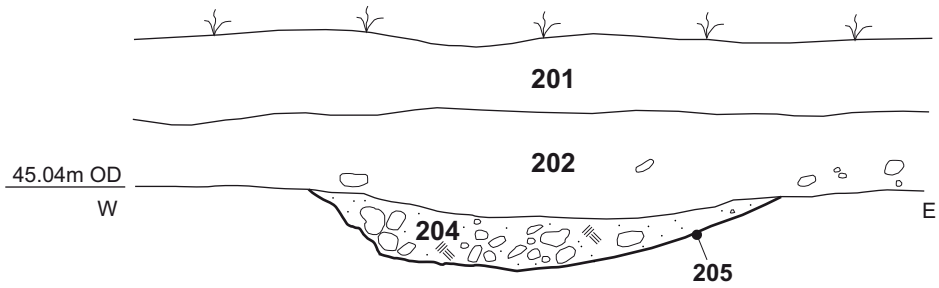
metres

features

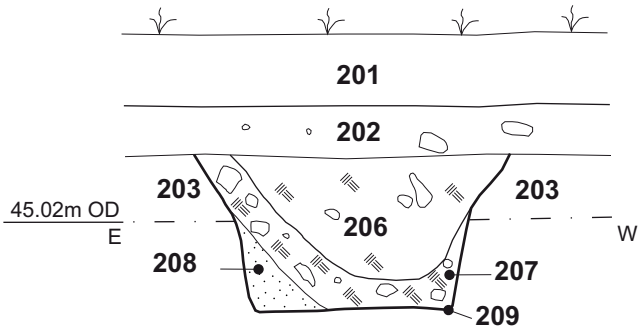
Excavated sections

Trench locations and features Fig 3

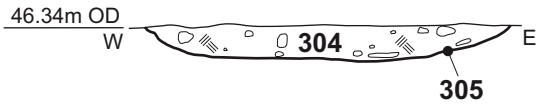
Section 1- Trench 2



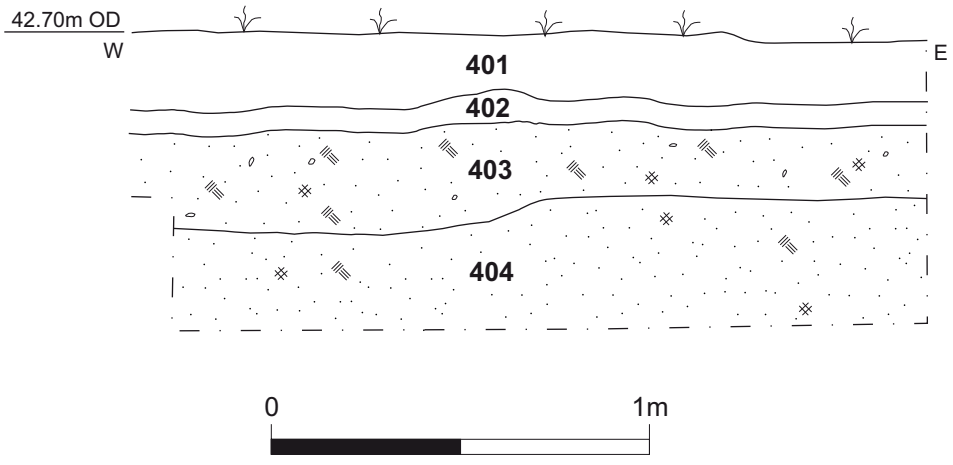
Section 6- Trench 2



Section 3- Trench 3



Section 4- Trench 4



Sections 1, 3, 4 and 6 Fig 4

Plate 1: Pre-excavation, looking north-west

Plate 2: General view of trenches 3-5, looking west

Plate 3: Trench 4 re-instated, looking north

Plate 4: General view of trench 3, looking east

Plate 5: General view of trench 4, looking west

Plate 6: Trench 2, gully [209] section 6, looking south

Plate 7: Trench 3, pit [307], section 2, looking north-west

Plate 8: Trench 4, section 4, looking north