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County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

An archaeological evaluation at Ursula
Taylor Lower School, Clapham
Bedfordshire

December 2007

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January 2008

Report 07/197

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**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY
JANUARY 2008**

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AT
URSULA TAYLOR LOWER SCHOOL
CLAPHAM, BEDFORDSHIRE
DECEMBER 2007**

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QUALITY CONTROL

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Checked by	Pat Chapman		
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(Front page illustration: Trench 2, looking east, showing pits [209] and [205])

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	An archaeological evaluation at Ursula Taylor Lower School, Clapham, Bedfordshire	
Short description (250 words maximum)	<i>An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology adjacent to the Ursula Taylor Lower School, Clapham, Bedfordshire prior to the proposed construction of an extension to the school. Two trial trenches were excavated within the area of the proposed extension. Three pits were partially uncovered containing pottery and tile dating to the medieval and early post-medieval periods. The pits may be related to the manorial complex to the north of the site, excavated during the 1970s.</i>	
Project type	Trial trench evaluation	
Previous work (reference to organisation or SMR numbers etc)	None	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	Unknown	
Monument type and period	Medieval pits	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Bedfordshire	
Site address	Ursula Taylor Lower School, Clapham, Bedfordshire	
OS NGR	TL 0336 5244	
Area	131m ²	
Height aOD	c 35m	
Land use	School playing field	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Bedfordshire County Council	
Project Design originator	Anthony Maull, Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Anthony Maull, Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project Manager	Anthony Maull, Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Sponsor or funding body	Porter Consulting and Management Services Ltd	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	10th December 2007	
End date	11th December 2007	
ARCHIVES	Location	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Accession no. BEDFM2006.749		
Physical		
Digital		
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)		
Title	An archaeological evaluation at Ursula Taylor Lower School, Clapham, Bedfordshire	
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(Courtesy of David Marks)

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
AT URSULA TAYLOR LOWER SCHOOL
CLAPHAM
BEDFORDSHIRE
DECEMBER 2007**

Accession No. BEDFM 2007. 663

Abstract

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology adjacent to the Ursula Taylor Lower School, Clapham, Bedfordshire prior to the proposed construction of an extension to the school. Two trial trenches were excavated within the area of the proposed extension. Three pits were partially uncovered containing pottery and tile dating to the medieval and early post-medieval periods. The pits may be related to a manorial complex to the north of the site, excavated during the 1970s.

1 INTRODUCTION

In December 2007, an archaeological evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) adjacent to the Ursula Taylor Lower School, Clapham, Bedfordshire (TL 0336 5244; Fig 1). The work was commissioned by Porter Consulting and Management Services Limited, who will be submitting a planning application for a school building at Ursula Taylor Lower School.

The site lies within the historic core of the settlement of Clapham so, following consultation with the Bedfordshire County Council Heritage and Environment Section (BCCHES), it was agreed that there should be an archaeological assessment in order to mitigate against the impact of the development on buried archaeological remains. This is in accordance with *Planning Policy Guidance: Archaeology and Planning (PPG16)*, section 30.

The evaluation was carried out to the requirements of the brief for archaeological field evaluation issued by BCCHES (2007) and the specification prepared by NA (2007).

The specific aims of the project were to:

- Establish the location, extent, nature, and date of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present

- Establish the integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present.

The national framework for research is set out by English Heritage (EH 1997). The broad research frameworks for the eastern counties of England are set out by Brown and Glazebrook (2000); this does not as yet include Bedfordshire, although it is envisaged it will be included in future revisions. A research framework for Bedfordshire currently exists in draft form (Oake in prep). This report complies with the framework for archaeological reports set out in Appendix 7 of *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (EH 1991).

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

The proposed development site, which covers an area of approximately 131m² and lies at approximately 35m above Ordnance Datum, is situated on level ground adjacent to, and to the east of, the main school buildings at the Ursula Taylor School, Clapham, Bedfordshire (Plate 3). The school is situated in the eastern part of the modern village, although it is located within the core of the historic settlement, just to the west of the church. The High Street lies to the south of the school, to the north is Church Farm. The school is situated on an area of higher ground within the flood plain of the River Great Ouse, which lies to the south of the site.

The village lies c3km north-west of Bedford and adjacent to the small hamlet of Clapham Green.

The underlying geology is Boulder Clay (BGS 1996). The soils are of the Biggleswade soil association, comprising gleyed brown earth over river gravels (SSEW 1983).

2.2 Historical and archaeological background (Fig 2)

A study of sites listed in the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) was undertaken. A number of known sites in the vicinity date from the prehistoric to modern periods.

The proposed school building at Ursula Taylor School is situated within the historic medieval core of Clapham. An excavation undertaken to the north of the site by P Tilson for the Bedford Archaeological society in the 1970s revealed the extensive remains of a former

medieval manor house (HER 3879; unpublished). An aerial photograph of the excavations shows the remains of a number of buildings, exhibiting at least two phases (Plate 3). The present excavation is located adjacent to the top right-hand corner of the school buildings. This was followed by an excavation in 1987 by Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service (BCAS) during an earlier extension to the school which identified activity dating from the Mesolithic to medieval period, with a preponderance for late Iron Age activity characterized by the creation of a series of stock pens or small rectangular fields (HER 15607). Further evaluation work was also undertaken to the NW of the school during 1997 by BCAS which also identified Iron Age to medieval activity, including an Iron Age enclosure, Saxo-Norman occupation and a medieval trackway (HER 16471).

Table 1: HER sites in the vicinity of Ursula Taylor Lower School

HER NO	NGR (TL)	DESCRIPTION
321	0352 5261	Find spot of Iron Age pottery, Beds Arch J8
561	0192 5213	Series of cropmarks located SW of Clapham, south of the River Great Ouse in Bromham parish showing linear ditches, enclosures and ring ditch
610	023 531	Find spot of Palaeolithic Axe
851	0345 5245	Clapham Church of St Thomas comprising Saxon tower with late 13 th century nave and chancel with remainder heavily rebuilt/alterd in 1816
975	027 523	Site of rescue excavation undertaken by P Tilson during 1968-1972 prior to gravel extraction in Bromham parish south of the River Great Ouse. Recovered evidence for Iron Age and Roman settlement activity defined by traces of circular huts, ditches, pits, kilns, postholes and burials, Beds Arch J6 1971, 84
1199	022 523	Site of Domesday watermill situated immediately south of River Great Ouse, now lost
1318	025 539	Approximate location of Roman lead coffin found in 1853 associated with ceramic vessel, Simco 1984, 100 (Not illus)
1432	0350 5240	Site of Woodlands manor located east of Green Lane. Late 19 th century house
1580	0330 5235	Circa 16-17 th timber framed building, "site of former Horse and Groom"
2522	0380 5280	Series of medieval earthworks visible on 1 st edition Ordnance Survey 25" map within Clapham Green
3879	0330 5245	Site of Clapham Manor. Excavations conducted by P Tilson for the Bedfordshire Archaeological Society during 1973-1975 revealed extensive remains of earlier manor house
9827	022 530	Site of Belgic cremation found during gravel extraction visible on 25" Ordnance Survey map north of Oakley Road
10144	023 523	Series of cropmarks located ¾ mile NNE described as ring ditch, but probably not archaeological
10531	035 521	Find spot of medieval pottery 13 th century
14761	027 523	Site of Danish harbour which seems to have existed south of the River Great Ouse and largely destroyed by gravel extraction
14966	028 527	Find spot of bronze shovel discovered in allotment
15607	0335 5245	Excavation undertaken by Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service in 1987 prior to an extension of Ursula Taylor Lower School. The excavation identified activity ranging from the Mesolithic through to the medieval period and included ditches, pits, remnants of a round house and postholes

HER NO	NGR (TL)	DESCRIPTION
15864	0305 5210	Find spot of Roman ring within Bromham parish, south of the River Great Ouse
15968	0426 5214 0420 5215	Find spots of Iron Age coins (Gallo-Belgic Gold Statters), located east of Helens wood, Clapham (Not illus)
16119	0355 5240	Human remains found in ground at Woodlands
16153	035 526	Flint scatter found during fieldwalking
16471	034 528	Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service (BCAS) undertook an archaeological evaluation comprising fieldwalking, trial trenching and geophysical survey in 1997 to the NW of Clapham church and north of Ursula Taylor Lower School. Evaluation identified activity dating from the Iron Age to medieval period, including an Iron Age enclosure, Saxo-Norman occupation and a medieval trackway. BCAS report 1997/11
16472	034 049	Site of post-medieval farmhouse located to the north of Ursula Taylor Lower school
16587	0298 5212	Cropmark of prehistoric ring ditch located within Bromham parish, south of the River Great Ouse
17067	035 524	Area of medieval settlement core of Clapham (Area of archaeological sensitivity).
17068	036 528	Area of medieval settlement, core of Clapham Green (Area of archaeological sensitivity).

Further sites are known in the wider area around Ursula Taylor Lower School, Clapham.

The early prehistoric period is attested by a Palaeolithic Axe (HER 610), three Mesolithic pits found during excavation work conducted at the school and a flint scatter found during fieldwalking to the north of the school (HER 16153).

Several cropmarks have been mapped from aerial photographs, in areas to the west (HER 561, 10144) and south (HER 16587) of the proposed development area. The cropmarks relate to ring ditches, enclosures and settlement activity dating to the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman periods.

Evidence for the Iron Age and Roman periods is well represented, especially within the immediate confines of the school (HER 15607 and HER 16471) and its surrounding area (HER 975). The latter excavation identified settlement activity including remnants of round houses, kilns, ditches, pits and postholes. Other finds include a number of Iron Age pottery (HER 321) coins (HER 15968), a Belgic cremation (HER 9827), a Roman lead coffin (HER 1318) and a Roman ring (HER 15864).

Ursula Taylor school is situated within the former grounds of the medieval manor house (HER 3879) excavated during the 1970s (see above) situated adjacent to the Church of St Thomas (HER 851), which comprises a Saxon tower and late 13th century nave and chancel. The manor house and church are located close to the historic medieval core of Clapham (HER 17067) and south-west of the historic core of Clapham Green (HER 17068). Further evidence

for the medieval period is attested by a series of earthworks, (HER 2522) situated within the central area of Clapham Green, a Danish harbour to the south of the River Great Ouse (HER 14761), a find spot of medieval pottery to the south (HER 10531) and a former watermill mentioned in the Domesday Book (HER 1199). A number of post-medieval and 19th century buildings and other sites have also been listed in the area.

3 EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

The two trenches were excavated using a JCB-type mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket. Trench 1 measured 7.5m² and Trench 2 measured 6m² (Fig 3). The topsoil and subsoil stacked separately at the side of the trenches were removed under archaeological supervision to reveal the natural substrate. The topsoil and subsoil. All procedures complied with Northamptonshire County Council Health and Safety provisions and Northamptonshire Archaeology Health and Safety at Work Guidelines.

The area was cleaned sufficiently to define the exposed features, and the features were then sampled to determine their date and character. The trenches and spoil heaps were scanned with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval.

All archaeological deposits were fully recorded, following standard NA procedures. The archaeological features and deposits were given separate context numbers in a sequence continuing from those allocated during the evaluation. They were described on *pro-forma* context sheets to include details of the context, its relationships and interpretation. Artefacts were collected by hand and retained, receiving appropriate care prior to removal from site (Watkinson and Neal 1998). Unstratified animal bones and modern material were not retained.

The trenches were planned at a scale of 1:20 and related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. The sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20, and related to Ordnance Datum. A full photographic record comprising both 35mm black and white negatives and colour transparencies was maintained, supplemented with digital images. The field data has been compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing.

Monitoring of the programme of fieldwork was carried out by BCCHES. All works were conducted in accordance with the *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (1994, revised 2001) and the *Code of Conduct* of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1985, revised 2006). In addition, all works complied with the guidelines detailed in *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003).

4 EXCAVATION RESULTS

The natural substrate was glacial till (Boulder Clay), a mid orange brown clay with orange brown sand lenses. It occurred at approximately 0.7-1.0m below ground level. Modern services were observed in both trenches and both truncated the archaeological features to some degree.

4.1 The medieval pits

A large, shallow pit was found in Trench 1. It measured at least 4.00m long, 1.43m wide and 0.21m deep with a flat base (Fig 4, [105] Plate 1). The fill was composed of compact yellow brown silty clay containing frequent mortar fragments, pitched limestone and roofing tile. Pottery from the pit dated to the 15th or 16th centuries.

The pit was sealed by possible subsoil or made ground comprising compacted mid grey brown silty clay containing limestone fragments, cobbles and occasional roofing tile (104). Above this layer was a layer of compacted mid-dark grey brown silty clay containing occasional stones (103). It was up to 0.30m thick and appeared to be buried topsoil. The topsoil was sealed by a layer of made ground, c0.22m thick, which was made up of builders sand, gravel and house bricks in a mid brown clay matrix (102). The ground surface was a loosely compacted turf with underlying mid grey brown silty clay (101).

There were two pits in Trench 2 (Fig 5, Plate 2). The easternmost pit measured at least 1.34m long, 1.30m wide and 0.44m deep with fairly steep sides leading gradually onto a probable curved base, although the small size of the section made it difficult to ascertain whether the base had been reached (Fig 5, [205]). The primary fill of the pit was a fairly compact mid orange brown silty clay with patches of orange brown clay and sand, representing the initial silting of the pit after excavation. A sherd of shelly ware dating to the 12th to 14th centuries, bone and ceramic tile dating to the 13th to 16th centuries were found in this layer. The secondary fill of the pit was a compact mid orange brown silty clay with occasional flint pebbles. Sealing the secondary fill was a single course of tightly packed limestone fragments, probably laid as a consolidation layer.

The western pit appeared to be more substantial than the first two, measuring at least 2.14m long, 1.30m wide and at least 0.80m deep, although the base was not reached (Fig 5, [209], Plate 2). The sides of the pit sloped down at approximately 45°. The lowest excavated fill of the pit was moderately compact orange brown clay with patches of clay (213). Finds from this layer included ceramic tile and bone. The nature of the fill was very similar to the primary fill in pit [205] suggesting it may represent the initial silting of the pit after it was excavated.

Above this fill was loosely compacted grey brown clay silt with occasional small flint nodules (212). Layer (211) comprised loosely compacted grey brown clay silt with occasional limestone fragments and tile. Bone found in this layer was stained consistent with having been waterlogged at some point, although the fills in the pit did not appear to have been. This may indicate that the bone was redeposited from another location. The uppermost layer (210) was a yellow brown clay silt containing small to medium limestone fragments.

5 FINDS

5.1 Ceramic building material by Pat Chapman

Roof tile

This assemblage of 19 sherds of ceramic roof tile, weighing 1792g, comes from contexts (104) and (106), (208), (210) and (211). The two basic fabrics comprise mainly a coarse sandy clay in red, red brown or orange, with a few made from a fine to slightly coarse silty clay in buff to buff pink. There are generally some fine and occasionally larger calcareous inclusions.

There are a few diagnostic features. The tiles are 10-15mm thick except for one which is 18mm thick; a small fragment from fill (208), the primary fill of pit [205], has a dark green glaze and could be from a ridge tile; a sherd from context (210), the upper fill of pit [209], has part of a peghole surviving, 12mm in diameter, and the base of a tile from context (211), a fill of pit [209], measures 165mm wide. One sherd from the fill of pit [105], has a pantile-‘S’ curve but with crude small flanges along the two surviving edges.

These are fragments of medieval roof tiles, datable from the 13th/14th centuries to the 16th century, with the possible exception of a sherd from pit [105] which could be a pantile and therefore of 16th-century date onwards, however, it is crudely made and the shape may be just coincidental.

Table 2: Quantification of ceramic tile

Context/feature	No.	Weight (g)
Layer 104	2	201
106/105	3	584
208/205	6	217
210/209	5	264
211/209	3	526
Totals	19	1792

Brick

There are two fragments of handmade medieval bricks, weighing 612g, from layer (104) and pit [105]. They are both made from fine silty clay, fired to pink with creamy streaks. The fragment from (104) has an intermittent black core and is 43mm (1,5/8 inches) thick, while the fragment from [105] is 56mm (2¾ inches) thick, with a 34mm long inclusion of reddened stone and mortar adhering to the top and bottom. They are probably of 14th to 15th-century date.

5.2 Pottery by Iain Soden

Four sherds of medieval and post-medieval pottery were recovered, as follows:

One rim and neck sherd from a Raeren-ware drinking vessel of the late 15th or early 16th century, Bedfordshire County Type series no P23, Context (106), single fill of pit [105].

One undiagnostic body-sherd of medieval coarse shelly ware vessel of the 12th to 14th century. Context 208, primary fill of pit [205].

Two sherds (one base and one damaged body) from a green-glazed late medieval bowl. The surviving sherd is 95% glazed internally, but for the uppermost corner, suggesting the internal glaze covered only the inner base. It probably dates to the 14th century, Context 210, upper fill of pit [209].

With such a small assemblage it is impossible to gauge its significance for the wider area since the three or four vessels represented cover a period of possibly 400 years. However, none of the sherds is abraded so have not been moved around much following initial deposition. Therefore all may be useful (relatively) close dating for the contexts from which they derive. In such small numbers they cannot be suggestive of very intensive occupation.

5.3 Animal bone by Karen Deighton

A total of 300g of animal bone were collected by hand from medieval pits during the course of excavation. The material was analysed using standard zooarchaeological methods with reference to the following Schmid (1972), Silver (1969), and Binford (1981).

Results

Fragmentation was fairly heavy with all long bones broken into cylinders. Surface condition was reasonable although bones from context (211), pit [209] had staining consistent with waterlogging. No evidence of butchery or burning was noted. Canid gnawing was noted on three bone fragments.

Table 3: Animal bone taxa by context

Cut/fill	Bos(cattle)	Sus(pig)	Large ungulate	Total
106/105	1			1
208/205			1	1
210/209	1			1
211/209	1	1		2
Total	3	1	1	5

The texture and morphology of the cattle bone from 106 suggests it to be that of a juvenile animal.

Conclusion

The small number of bones recovered precludes any discussion of the animal economy of the site other than to say two major domesticates (cattle and pig) were associated with it. The mixed nature of the species and bone elements present could lead to the tentative statement that the material represents domestic rubbish.

6 DISCUSSION

Three medieval pits, probably used as refuse pits, were recorded during the evaluation. Due to the relative scarcity of finds from the pits and the broad date range of the few pieces of pottery, little else can be deduced regarding the period they were in use and their function. However, given the proximity of the manorial range approximately 20m to the north-west it is possible that they are related. A further large rubbish pit was partially excavated during the excavations in 1987 to the west and it is possible that they all form part of a large group.

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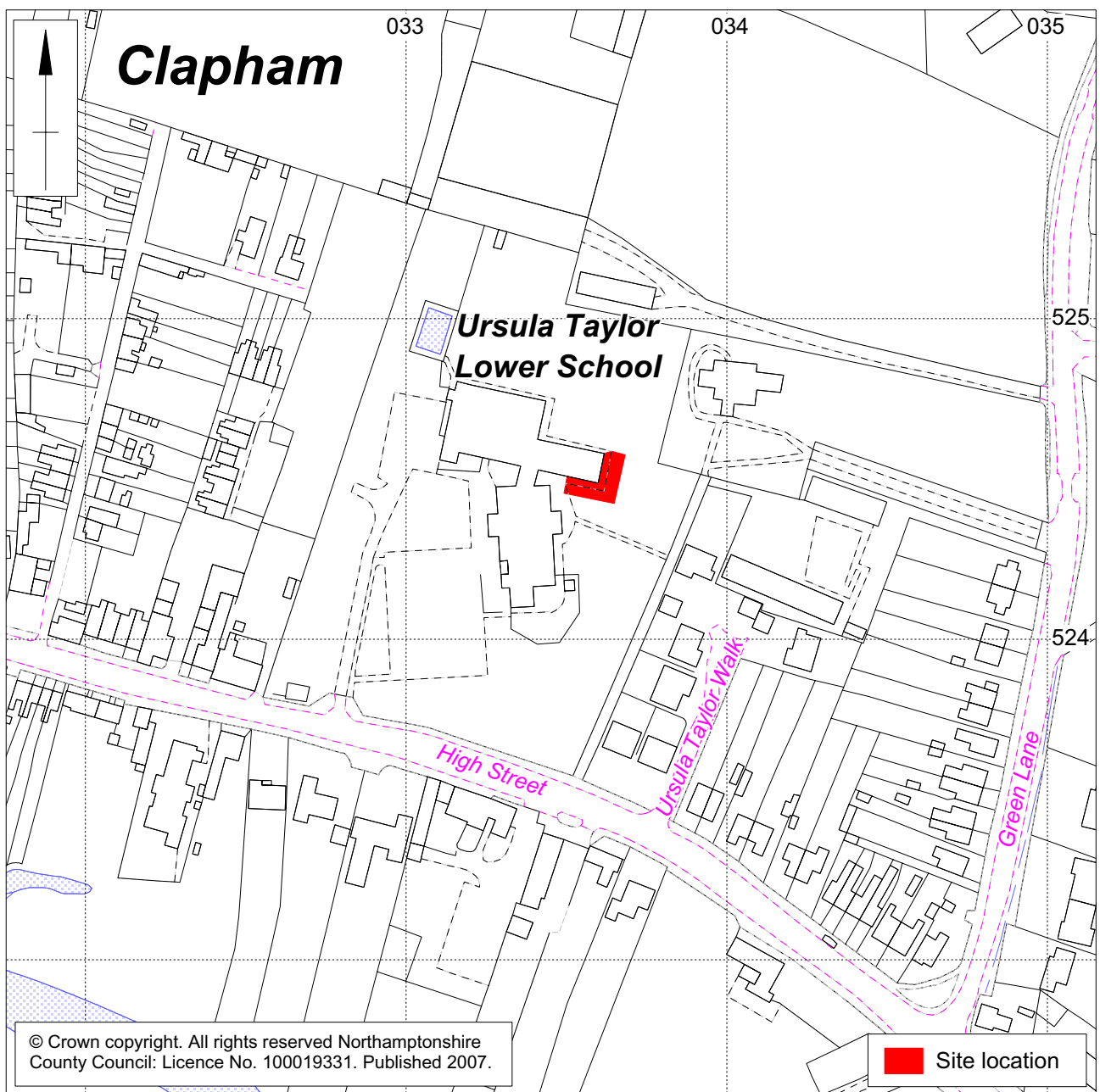
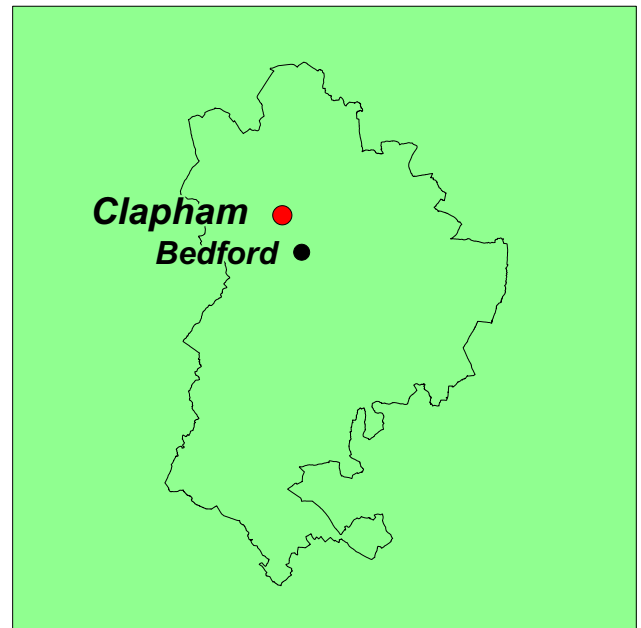
Maps

SSEW 1983 *Soils of Eastern England, Sheet 4*, 1:250,000, Soil Survey of England and Wales

APPENDIX 1: Context list

Context	Deposit Type	Depth	Description
101	Topsoil	0.45m	Loosely compacted turf line and underlying mid grey brown silty clay with occasional small pebbles/pea grit. Very clear boundary with made ground layer below
102	Made ground (modern)	0.22m	Moderately loosely compacted layer comprising builders sand, gravel in a mid brown matrix containing house bricks.
103	Buried former topsoil	0.30m	Compacted mid-dark grey brown silty clay containing occasional small angular to rounded pebbles
104	Layer	-	Compacted mid grey brown silty clay containing limestone fragments, irregular shaped cobbles/stones and occasional roof-tile fragments
105	Cut of shallow pit	0.22m	Cut of large pit of unknown dimensions but measuring at least 4m N-S by 1.6m E-W. Very shallow with a flat base
106	Fill of [105]		Compacted yellow brown silty clay containing frequent mortar flecks/fragments with pitched limestone/roofing tile and occasional irregular shaped stone
107	Natural	-	Firm to compacted mid orange brown clay interspersed orange brown sand lenses
201	Topsoil	0.26m	Same as [101]
202	Made ground	0.20m	Same as [102]
203	Buried former topsoil	0.30m	Same as [103]
204	Layer	-	Same as [104]
205	Cut of pit	-	Cut of large pit located within eastern side of Trench 2. Measured at least 1.65m E-W by 1.6m N-S. Gradual to steep-sided with flat-concave base
206	Uppermost fill of [205]	-	Very compacted single course of small to medium limestone fragments, measuring up to 0.04m thick. Possible consolidation layer of the pit
207	Fill of [205]	0.20m	Compacted mid orange brown silty clay with occasional small flint pebbles and very rare charcoal flecks
208	Primary fill of [205]	0.30m	Moderately compacted mid orange brown with flecks/fragments of orange brown clay/sand deriving from natural erosion
209	Cut of pit	-	Cut of a large pit of unknown dimensions, measuring at least 2.1m E-W by 1.6m N-S. Section placed through its eastern side revealed a very steep-sided cut with a depth of at least 0.80m
210	Uppermost fill of [209]	-	Loose to moderately compacted yellow brown clay silt containing small to medium limestone fragments, particularly to the centre of the fill
211	Fill of [209]	-	Loosely compacted grey brown clay silt with occasional limestone fragments, tile and occasional water-rolled pebble
212	Fill of [209]	-	Loosely compacted grey brown clay silt with occasional small flint gravel and water-rolled pebble

213	Fill of [209]	-	Moderately compacted orange brown clay with fragments of clay deriving from weathering of the surrounding natural, suggesting that the pit is bottoming out. Contained occasional medieval/post-medieval tile fragments
214	Cut of modern drain	-	Linear Feature WNW-ESE with steep sides, not bottomed
215	Fill of [214]		Plastic pipe encompassed by fine gravel overlaid by a mixed yellow/brown clay matrix
216	Layer	-	Same as [107]



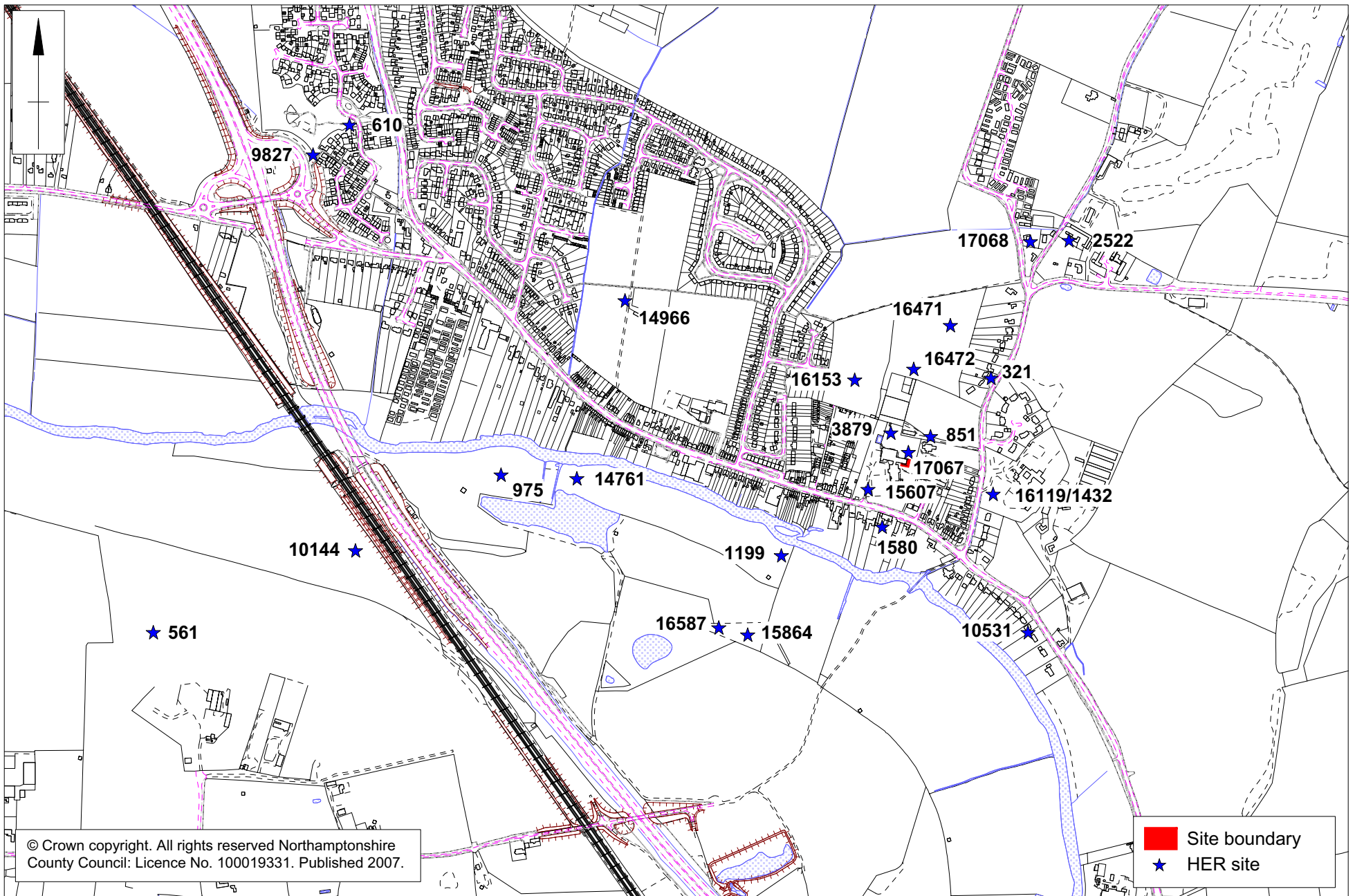
Scale 1:2000

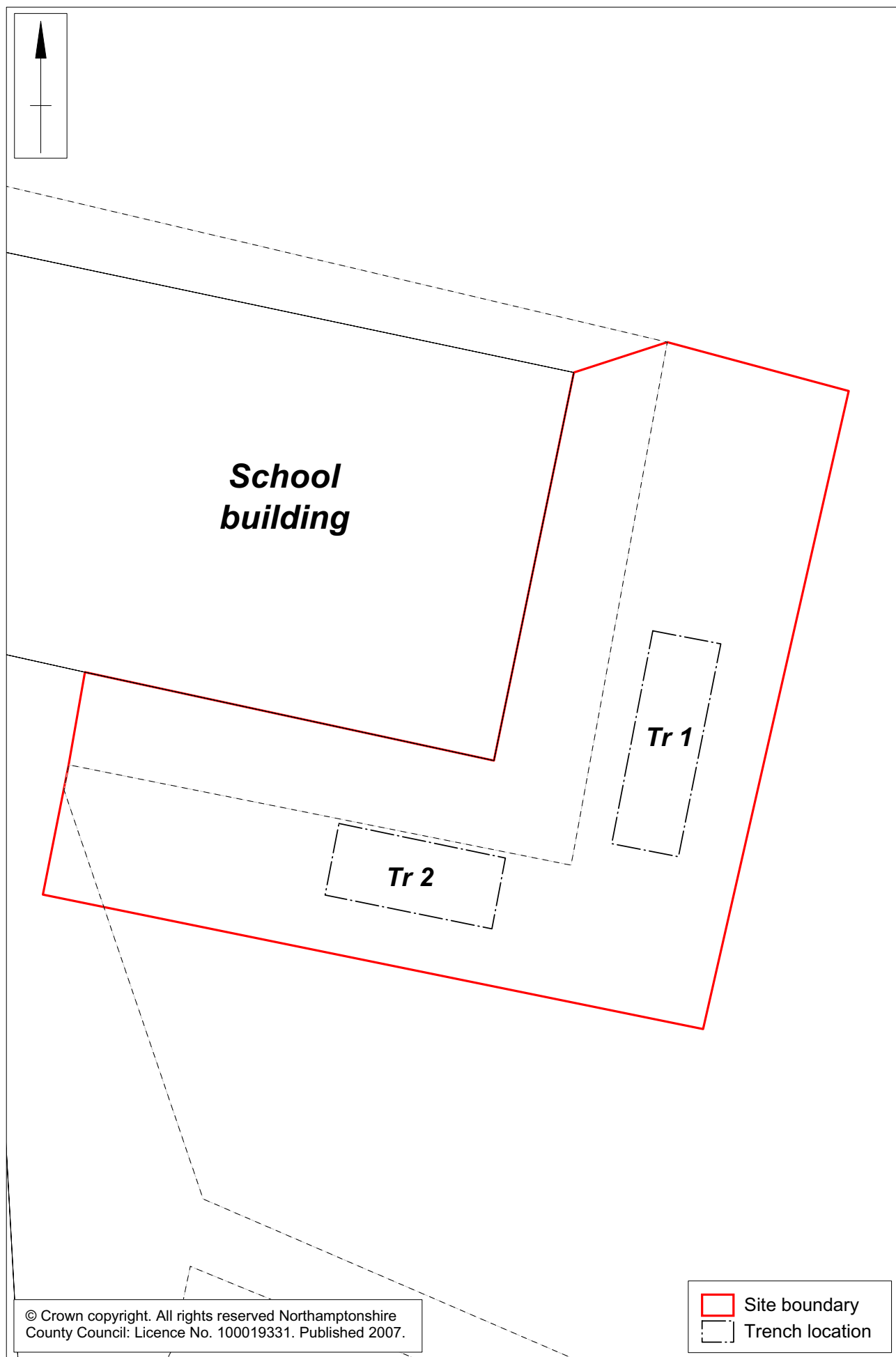
Site location

Fig 1

Scale 1:10,000

Historic Environment Record sites Fig 2

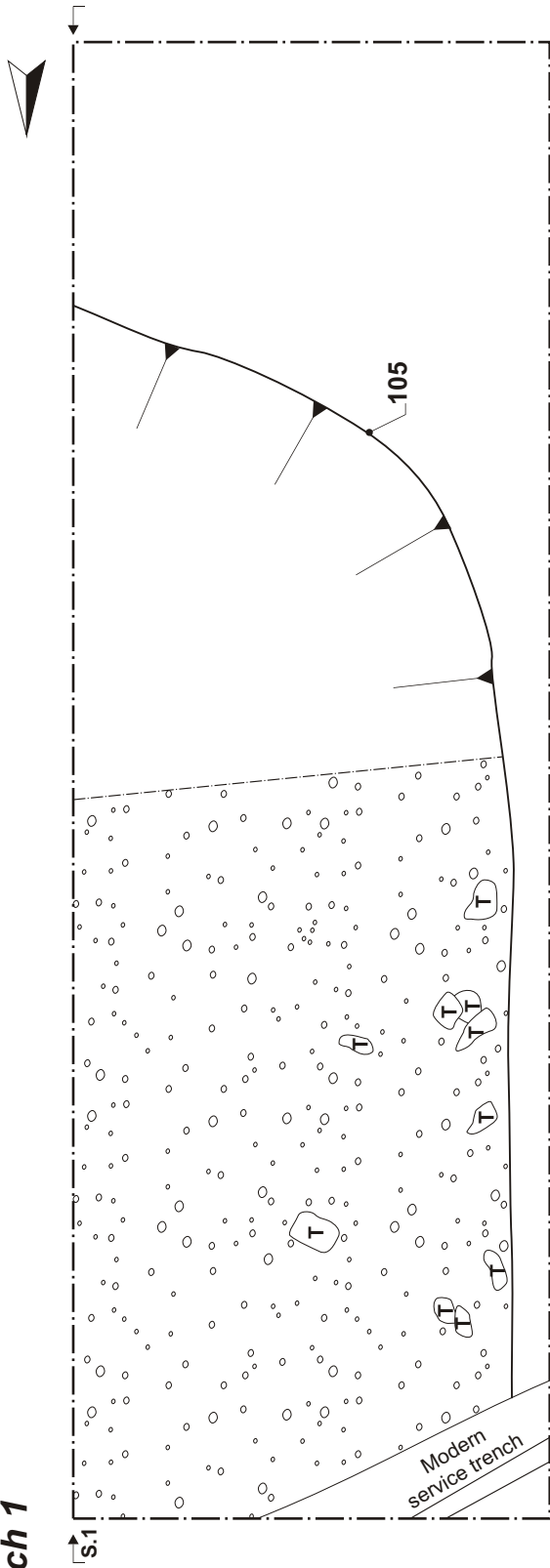




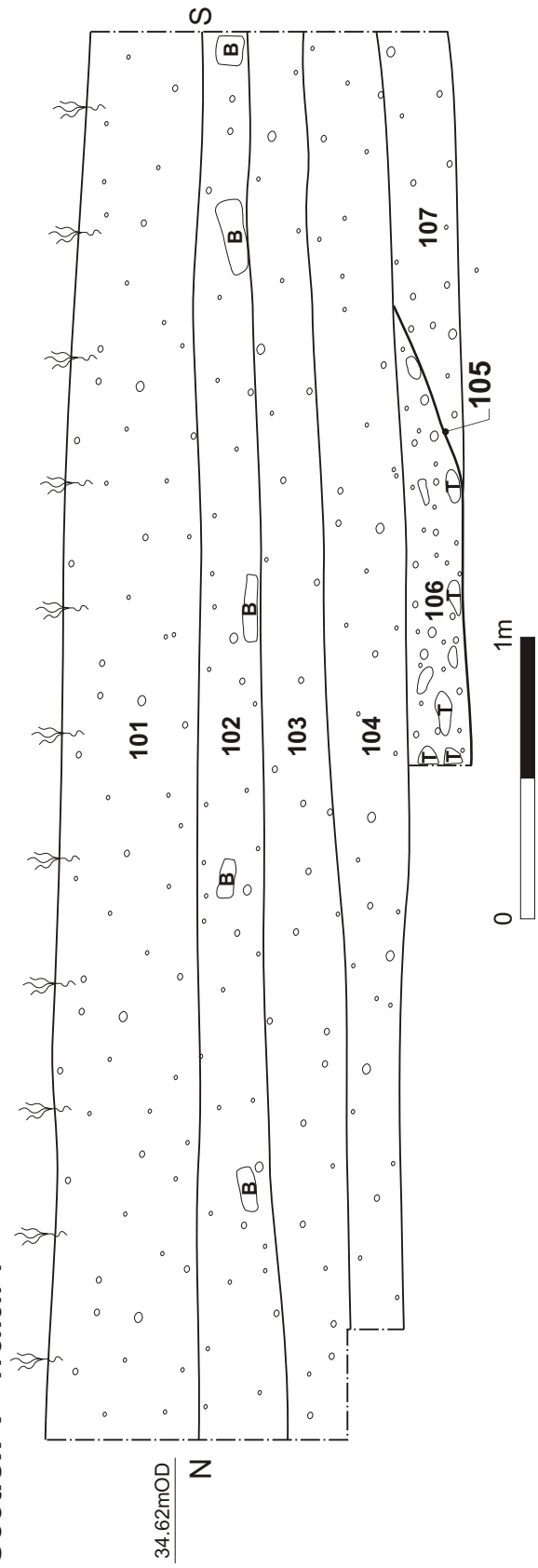
Scale 1:125

Trench locations Fig 3

Trench 1

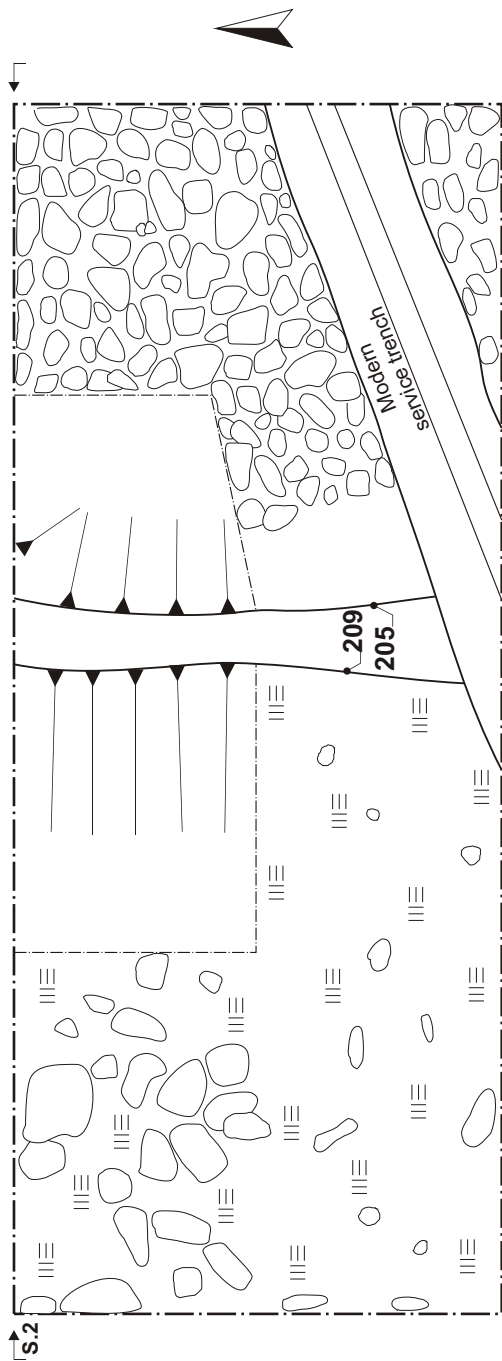


Section 1 - Trench 1

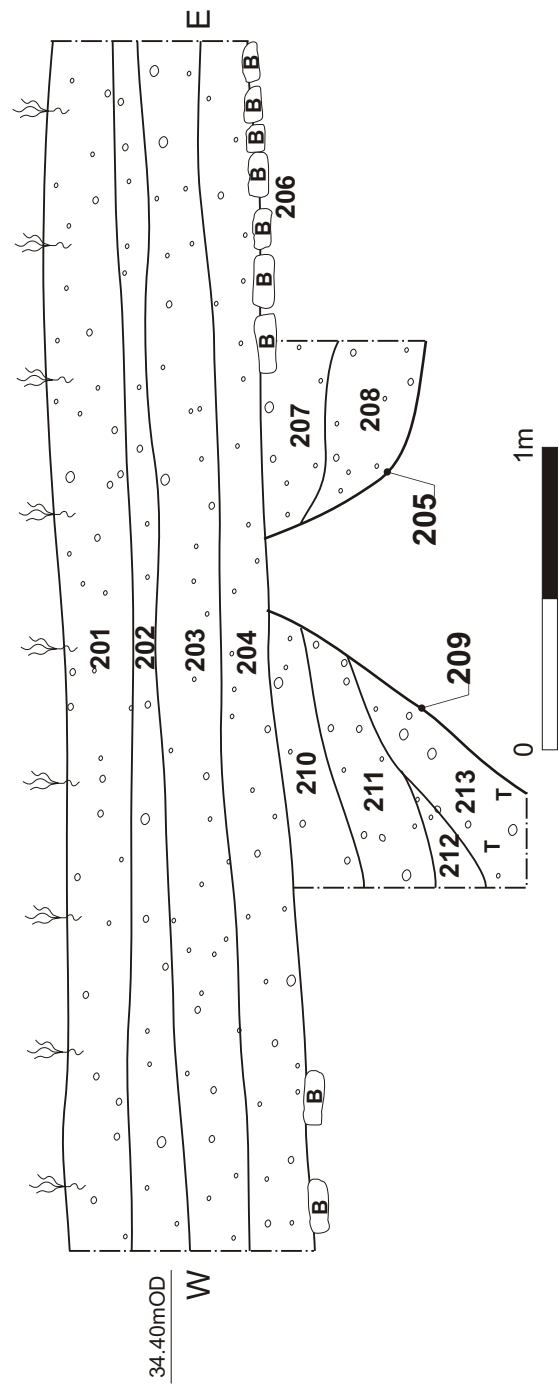


Plan and section of Trench 1 Fig 4

Trench 2



Section 2 - Trench 2



Plan and section of Trench 2 Fig 5



Plate 1: Trench 1, looking north, showing pit [105] in the foreground



Plate 2: Trench 2, looking north, showing pits [209] and [205]

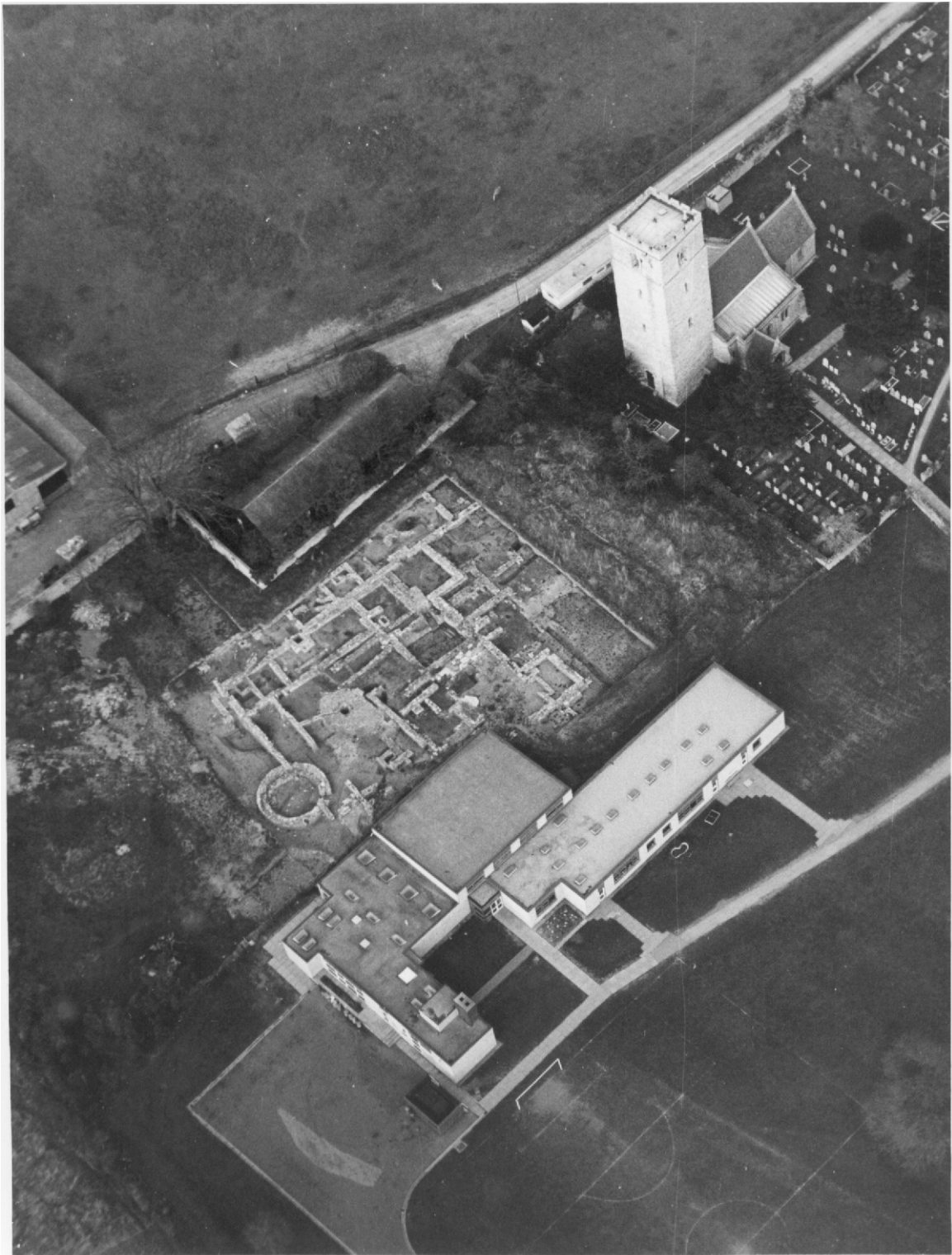


Plate 3: Aerial photograph showing the excavation of Clapham manor house (Courtesy of David marks)