



Northamptonshire
County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Geophysical Survey and Archaeological
Excavation on land off the Bedford Road

Little Houghton

Northamptonshire

May 2008



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May 2008

Report 08/81

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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	Geophysical Survey and Archaeological Excavation on land off the Bedford Road, Little Houghton, Northamptonshire	
Short description	Northamptonshire Archaeology conducted geophysical survey followed by archaeological excavation on land off the 'Old' Bedford Road, Little Houghton, Northampton. The geophysical survey was not greatly informative, although the data may represent ditches. Two trenches were excavated, one of which revealed a curvilinear gully and three ditches of late Iron Age, early 1st century AD, date and a Roman ditch of probable late 1st-century date. Dominating both trenches were three large Victorian rubbish pits, from which substantial sized sherds of 18th- century Chinese export porcelain were retained.	
Project type	Geophysical survey and trial trenching	
Site status	Grass pasture	
Previous work	Desk Based Assessment (Dawson 2006)	
Current Land use	Animal pasture	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	Unknown	
Significant finds	Late Iron Age and Roman pottery	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address	Bedford Road, Little Houghton, Northamptonshire	
Study area	Approx 0.13ha	
OS Easting & Northing	480400 259600	
Height OD	81m OD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	CgMs Consulting (Dawson 2006)	
Project Design originator	CgMs Consulting (Dawson 2006)	
Director/Supervisor	Stephen Morris	
Project Manager	Mike Dawson (CgMs) Anthony Maul (NA)	
Sponsor or funding body		
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	1st May 2008	
End date	2nd May 2008	
ARCHIVES		
	Location	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical	1 box (all finds)	Pottery, brick/tile, glass, animal bone
Paper	1 file, plan/section sheet x2	
Digital		
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Title	Geophysical Survey and Archaeological excavation on land at Bedford Road, Little Houghton, Northamptonshire	
Serial title & volume	08/81	
Author(s)	Steve Morris and John Walford	
Page numbers	13	
Date	May 2008	

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GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION
ON LAND OFF THE BEDFORD ROAD,
LITTLE HOUGHTON, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Abstract

Northamptonshire Archaeology conducted geophysical survey and trial trenching on land off the 'Old' Bedford Road, Little Houghton, Northamptonshire. The geophysical survey was not greatly informative, although a series of possible linear ditches and a number of pits were suggested within the central part of the site. Two trenches were excavated, one of which revealed a curvilinear gully and three ditches dated to the late Iron Age, early 1st-century AD and a Roman ditch of probable later 1st-century date. Dominating both trenches were three large Victorian rubbish pits, which contained a substantial amount of domestic waste, including several large sherds of 18th-century Chinese export porcelain.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by CgMs Consulting to undertake a geophysical survey and archaeological trial evaluation on land off the 'Old' Bedford Road, Little Houghton, Northamptonshire, (NGR: SP 804 596, Fig 1) prior to residential development. The general objective of the excavation was to assess the development area for the presence of buried archaeological remains.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

The development site is situated on pastureland, immediately to the west of the historic core of the village of Little Houghton at approximately 81m aOD. It occupies a roughly rectangular area of c 0.13ha, north of the 'Old' Bedford Road (Frontispiece). To the north the ground rises artificially to the platform of a known moated enclosure and at the west side the site is bounded by a modern drive leading to a 20th-century residence at the north-west corner. To the east the site is bounded by the cemetery of Saint Mary's church and a private residence.

The geology of the site comprises Northamptonshire Sand (Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 185: Northampton).

2.2 Archaeological evidence

The archaeological background of the development site and the wider area is detailed in a desk-based assessment carried out by CgMs Consulting (Dawson 2006).

In summary, there is little evidence for early prehistoric activity in the locality of the site, but Palaeolithic flint artefacts and Bronze Age material has been recovered from within the parish of Little Houghton. Cropmarks in the vicinity of the development site suggest the possible survival of evidence from the Iron Age and Roman periods. Roman ceramic finds have also been recorded to the west of the area, with the identification of possible Romano-British settlements to the east of the village with associated pottery kilns producing mortaria and large storage jars in the 3rd-century (Johnston 1969).

The place name evidence indicates that the village may have originated in the middle to late Saxon period. Potentially, the greatest influence upon the site was the large medieval moated site directly on the northern edge of the development area. The earthworks comprise a raised sub-rectangular platform, with a steep bank on its western and northern sides. Part of the southern side has been truncated by the extension of the church cemetery. The 19th-century field name 'South Hall Piece' suggests the earthworks are possibly the remains of a medieval moated manor. An excavation in 1957 revealed a deep moat with the remains of a medieval structure, probably dating to the 13th century (Bailey 1959).

The 1st edition of the Ordnance Survey map of the late 19th century shows the site to be an enclosed field. The site appears to have remained unchanged until the encroachment of the church cemetery and modern buildings in the 20th century.

3 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aims

The general aims of the evaluation were set out in the archaeological desk-based assessment prepared by CgMs Consulting (Dawson 2006) and were as follows:

To assess the potential of archaeological remains within the proposal area

To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality, date and depth of any archaeological remains present

To make an assessment and evaluation of the potential significance of any archaeology and to examine whether it might be the subject of further evaluation or mitigation.

To make an assessment of whether the archaeological evidence, or potential evidence would provide a constraint to development to make available the results of the investigation.

3.2 Methodology

Geophysical survey

Two methods of geophysical survey were undertaken recording variations of electrical resistance and magnetic field strength across the site. A common site grid, divided into 30m squares, was used for both surveys. This grid was set out manually using tape measure and an optical square. All fieldwork was performed in accordance with the guidelines issued by English Heritage (1995) and by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (Gaffney, Gater and Ovendon 2002).

The earth resistance survey was performed with a Geoscan RM15 resistance meter, in twin probe configuration, with a mobile probe spacing of 50cm. The probes were inserted at 1m intervals along traverses spaced 1m apart, and readings were taken to a precision of 0.1 Ω .

The magnetic survey was performed with a Bartington Grad601-2 vertical component fluxgate gradiometer. This instrument was carried at a brisk but steady pace through each grid, collecting data along 1m spaced traverse lines. Measurements, to a precision of 0.1 nanotesla, were automatically triggered every 0.25m along the traverses.

The data was viewed and processed using 'Geoplot'3.00u software. Striping in the magnetic data was removed using the 'Zero Mean Traverse' function.

The processed data is presented in this report in the form of greyscale plots which have been scaled, rotated and resampled (georectified) for display against the Ordnance Survey base mapping (Figs 2 and 3). Interpretation plots have been overlaid onto the greyscales (Figs 2 and 3).

Trial trenching

Following the geophysical survey, two trenches (Trench 1 and 2) were excavated within the proposed development area. Trench 1 was 14m in length and aligned north-east to south-west, approximately parallel to the Bedford Road. Trench 2 was 13m long, aligned northwest to south-east in the northern part of the development area. The trenches were stripped to the level of archaeology using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket.

Hand excavation conformed to the requirements set out in the IFA's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Excavations* (IFA 1994, revised 2001). The trenches were located by triangulation survey. Overburden was removed by mechanical excavator under constant archaeological supervision. The trenches were sufficiently cleaned by hand in order to

determine the nature of deposits present. Archaeological deposits were hand excavated and fully recorded by written, drawn and photographic records. Sections and plans were drawn at appropriate scales and levelled to Ordnance Datum. Deep features were excavated to a sufficient depth to mitigate the impact of the development.

4 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

4.1 Earth resistance (Fig 2)

The earth resistance data demonstrated the presence of amorphous areas of high and low resistance across the survey area. In the north part of the site a high resistance anomaly coincided with the edge of the moated earthwork platform, suggesting a structure containing either stone or well compacted sediment in its make up. It is possible that part of the surrounding low resistance may relate to the infilled moat, although this is not clear from the data. The remaining high and low anomalies across the remainder of the site are of undiagnostic form and their possible significance only became apparent in the light of the trial trenching results (Section 5, below).

4.2 Gradiometer (Fig 3)

The gradiometer survey was largely uninformative. The data contains a few indistinct linear anomalies, which might possibly represent ditches, and an area of intense magnetic noise at the northern edge of the survey area, probably indicating a concentration of ferrous debris. Other magnetic anomalies around the edges of the survey area are probably magnetic halos from fences and other adjacent structures.

5 EXCAVATION

The results of the geophysical survey did not define any anomalies with palpable archaeological potential so the two trenches in consultation with CgMs Consulting, were positioned over the footprint of the proposed buildings where the greatest impact on any archaeology would occur.

The geology in both trenches was blocky fragmented ironstone (112) and (207), was levelled at c81m aOD and was overlain by c0.20m of subsoil (102)/(202) and c0.10m of topsoil (101)/(201).

5.1 Trench 1 (Fig 4)

Cutting the natural and possibly the earliest feature in the trench, was a slightly curving gully [103] located at the southwest end. It was shallow up 0.50m wide and 0.17m deep (Fig 4, section 1). The fill (104) was a dark greyish brown sandy loam that contained six sherds of late Iron Age pottery, dated to the early 1st-century AD, comprising oxidised/shelly fabrics, which included a body sherd with comb decoration. The fill was cut by ditch [105]

Ditch [113] was the earliest of a series of three ditches aligned approximately north-west to south-east. The ditch was shallow, 0.9m wide and 0.3m deep, with a brown sandy loam fill (114) including a moderate number of small ironstone chips, but contained no dating material (Fig 4, section 2, Plate 1). Ditch [113] was cut on its west side by ditch [105].

Ditch [105] was a broad shallow feature 2.0m wide and 0.35m deep (Fig 5, section 2, Plate 1). The fill (106) of dark brown sandy loam contained eight sherds of Iron Age pottery, likely to date to the early part of the 1st century AD. The pottery was mainly shelly ware and included a flat base and a rim sherd with a beaded rim.

Cutting ditch [105], was ditch [107] the latest of the three linear features, with a U-shaped profile, 0.75m wide and up to 0.50m deep (Fig 4, section 2, Plate 1). The brown sandy loam fill (108) had frequent small ironstone chips and, similar to the other ditches, it contained four sherds of late Iron Age oxidised pottery from the early 1st century AD, which included a flat base, a body sherd from a larger jar with a scored surface and the rim and neck of a Gallo-Belgic corrugated-neck bowl, in a sandy fabric.

A small amount of heavily fragmented animal bone was recovered from gully fill (104) and ditch fills (106 and (108), but little information can be derived due to their poor condition, except for the identification of part of a cattle tooth from context (108).

To the east of the three late Iron Age ditches, was a broad, flat based ditch [115], 1m wide and 0.20m deep (Fig 4, section 2). It had a dark sandy fill (116), containing a moderate number of grit/gravel inclusions and a few small chips of ironstone. Four sherds of Roman greyware pottery came from two vessels dating to the later 1st to 2nd-centuries. One vessel was the base of a thick-walled storage jar.

All the significant archaeological remains were located in the western end of trench 1, which corresponded with one of the high resistance areas, identified in the geophysical survey.

The eastern part of the trench was occupied by a large pit [109]. This was greater than 6m wide and over 1m deep, possibly with a flat base, cut into the natural ironstone. The pit had at least two fills, an ash deposit (111), overlaid by a loam soil (110). The ash deposit was composed of mixed dark grey and black gritty/gravelly cinders and possibly formed a conical

heap 0.75m in height. The ash detritus included a frequent amount of 19th-century domestic waste, which included building debris of brick, tile and mortar, broken household products including stone ware bottles, glazed earthenware pottery, glass bottles and kitchen waste of animal bones and oyster shells. Included amongst the recovered finds were several large fragments of fine decorated 18th-century Chinese export porcelain. Only a sample of the finds were retained. A residual late Iron Age pottery base of the 1st century AD was also retrieved. The overlying layer (110) of loam soil was at least 0.60m deep and contained 19th-century waste similar to that from the ash deposit.

5.2 Trench 2 (Fig 4)

Trench 2 contained two substantial pits [203] and [205], respectively over 4m and 8m wide. They were excavated to a depth of 0.6m below the subsoil, where excavation was halted. The fills (204)(206) were sandy loam deposits containing 19th-century refuse similar to that from pit [109] in trench 1, but also a single sherd of residual Iron Age pottery came from fill (206). Not all the finds were retained.

The pits in both trenches would appear to be ‘Victorian’ rubbish dumps, although it is unclear whether the pits were initially excavated for that purpose, or if the material was dumped into pits that had been previously excavated for the extraction of ironstone for building material.

The geophysical survey results that displayed areas of lower resistance correspond with the pits which, could be tentatively identified as quarry pits. Hence it may be suggested that the resistance data is providing a proxy indicator of bedrock depth, with the high resistance showing where the original bedrock surface survives and the low resistance where it has been removed by quarrying.

6 THE FINDS

6.1 Iron Age and Roman pottery by Andy Chapman

A small assemblage of 24 sherds, weighing 525g, is of Iron Age and Roman date. The majority of the material is from ditches and pits in trench 1 together with a single context in Trench 2 (Table 1).

A jar in a shelly ware, with an everted, overhanging rim with shallow fingertip impressions, from context (206), can only be broadly dated to the Iron Age. Similarly, a small group from context (106), including a flat base and a shelly ware rim sherd with a beaded rim decorated with oblique fingernail impressions, is of broad Iron Age date, although the bead rim may suggest the late Iron Age.

A small group from context (104) is dominated by oxidised fabrics and includes an oxidised body sherd with comb decoration, suggesting that it belongs to the late pre-Roman Iron Age, the first half of the 1st century AD. A base with an incipient footring, in a fabric that contains grog, from context (110), residual in the 'Victorian rubbish tip' may be of the same date. Another small group from context (108) contains a flat base, a body sherd from a larger jar in an oxidised ware with a scored surface and the rim and neck of a corrugated-neck bowl, in an oxidised sandy fabric. The corrugated-neck bowl is a classic Gallo-Belgic form, dating the group securely to the first half of the 1st century AD.

A single context, (116), contains joining sherds from two wheel-thrown grey-ware jars, one thin-walled and the other the base of a thick-walled storage jar. These vessels are of Roman date, the later 1st century AD or later.

Table 1: Iron Age and Roman pottery

Context/ Feature	sherds	Weight (g)	Comments	Date
104/ 103 gully	6	25	Mainly oxidised & shelly 1 comb decorated sherd	1st century AD
106/ 105 ditch	8	15	Mainly shelly 1 base 1 fingernail decorated bead rim	Iron Age, perhaps late Iron Age
108/ 107 ditch	4	120	All oxidised Flat base Scored body, Corrugated necked bowl	Late pre-Roman Iron Age
110/ 109 pit	1	70	Footring base, grog	Late pre-Roman Iron Age
116/ 115 ditch	4	290	Greyware jar Greyware storage jar	Romano-British
206/ 205 pit	1	45	Shelly, everted rim, fingertip decoration	Iron Age

6.2 Post-medieval pottery by S Morris and J Prentice

The post-medieval pottery was almost entirely recovered from the three pits [109], [203] and [205], numbering 46 sherds, with two sherds from the subsoil (102). Not all the pottery was retained. The pottery vessels recovered included glazed kitchen or storage earthenwares, stoneware bottles, dated from the 17th to 19th-century, although the majority were likely to be from the 19th century.

There were a moderate number of table wares, which included 18th to 19th century utilitarian white wares and underglazed transfer printed earthenwares. Several pieces of 18th to 19th-century porcelain were also recovered, including at least two fine 18th-century Chinese

export serving plates, for the western market. The plates measured approximately 450mm in diameter and both had cobalt blue decoration depicting Chinese landscapes, one with a Chinese lady and the other with two peacocks (Plate 2).

Table 2: Post-medieval pottery

Context/Feature	sherds	Comments	Date
102 subsoil	1	Glazed earthenware	17th to 19th-centuries
	1	Nottingham stoneware	18th to 19th-centuries
110/109 pit	3	Stoneware Drink bottle	17th to 19th-centuries
	4	Glazed earthenware	17th to 19th-centuries
	2	Utilitarian white wares	18th to 19th centuries
	1	Earthenware Flower pot	19th century
111/109 pit	12	Chinese export porcelain Two charger plates	18th century
	7	Porcelain Plate/bowl	18th to 19th-centuries
	1	Stoneware Hot water bottle	17th to 19th-centuries
	4	Underglazed transfer print water jug	19th century
204/203 pit	1	Glazed earthenware	17th to 19th-centuries
	1	Stoneware	17th to 19th-centuries
	3	Utilitarian white wares	18th to 19th-centuries
206/205 pit	1	Glazed earthenware	17th to 19th-centuries
	2	Porcelain	18th to 19th-centuries
	3	Utilitarian white wares	18th to 19th-centuries
	1	Earthenware Flower pot	19th century

6.2 Ceramic building material by Pat Chapman

This small assemblage comprises five tile sherds, weighing 578g, and eleven brick fragments, weighing 549g.

The tile sherds, from contexts (110), (204) and (206), fills of Victorian rubbish pits [109], [203] and [205] are 15-18mm thick and made with a surface. These sherds are from medieval/post-medieval roof tiles, possibly valley tiles.

There are the fragments of at least five different bricks by fabric, from subsoil (102), (204) and (206), fills of pits [203] and [205]. They are handmade and indifferently mixed, surviving as very irregular pieces. Four of the bricks are made from a hard slightly sandy dark reddish brown with a dark grey reduced core, except for one which is pale orange brown with a core.

The only measurable dimension is one width of 75mm. These bricks could be from the 17th to early 19th centuries.

6.3 Other finds by Tora Hylton

Recovered from context (111), pit [109] was a fragment of glass top and a small piece of 19th-century clay tobacco-pipe. A glass bottle retrieved from pit fill (204), is a squat, thin walled vessel, with a wide aperture, 90mm high and 50mm in diameter. The cut-glass top with multiple pointed petal decoration on its upper surface may have belonged to a scent bottle. Both finds are 19th-century in date.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

7.1 Animal bone by Karen Deighton

A total of 37g of animal bone was collected from three contexts (104) of gully (103), (106) and (108) of ditches [105] and [107] by hand during the course of excavation. This material was examined to determine the state of preservation, the species present and any potential contribution to the understanding of the site.

Preservation was poor with heavy fragmentation and abraded bone surfaces. Canid gnawing was noted on bone fragments from context (104).

Species present

Unfortunately material from contexts (104) and (106) could not be identified due to heavy fragmentation. A fragment of cattle (*Bos*) maxillary molar was observed in context (108), along with further unidentified bone.

Conclusion

Little can be said of the animal economy of the site, other than cattle were present, due to the poor preservation and paucity of material. For the same reasons the assemblage has very little potential for further work.

8 DISCUSSION

The evaluation was successful in recovering archaeological evidence dating from the late Iron Age and early Roman period and the 18th to 19th century. The earliest activity was defined by a sinuous gully and three linear ditches within the western part of Trench 1 all dated from the late Iron Age to the first half of the 1st century AD. The curvilinear gully may have formed part of a roundhouse ring ditch. The linear ditches appear to form a boundary that was reaffirmed on at least two occasions.

Roman activity was represented by a single ditch lying approximately one metre to the east of the Iron Age ditches, and dated to the later part of the 1st century AD or later. Although it has shifted slightly, it appears to suggest continuity of the 'boundary' into the early Roman period.

The moderate amount of pottery recovered from the Iron Age and Roman features and the fairly good condition of the assemblage indicate it was possibly derived from nearby, suggesting there may be a settlement in the immediate vicinity.

The 19th-century activity defined by three large Victorian rubbish pits clearly extends outside the limit of excavation. The possibility of other 'rubbish' pits within the development area is also suggested by areas of low resistance from the geophysical survey which indicated that they may extend north to the backfilled moat and south to the street frontage. It is possible the pits were originally excavated to quarry ironstone to be used in some of the surrounding village buildings. As these pits were not less than a metre deep from the present ground level they would have undoubtedly removed any evidence of earlier activity in the area

The possible survival of further archaeological activity in the western part of the site cannot be excluded, with the results of geophysical survey displaying an area of high resistance, an indicator of possible surviving landscape. Correspondingly, there may also be survival of archaeology in the eastern part of the site and to a limited degree between the 'rubbish' pits.

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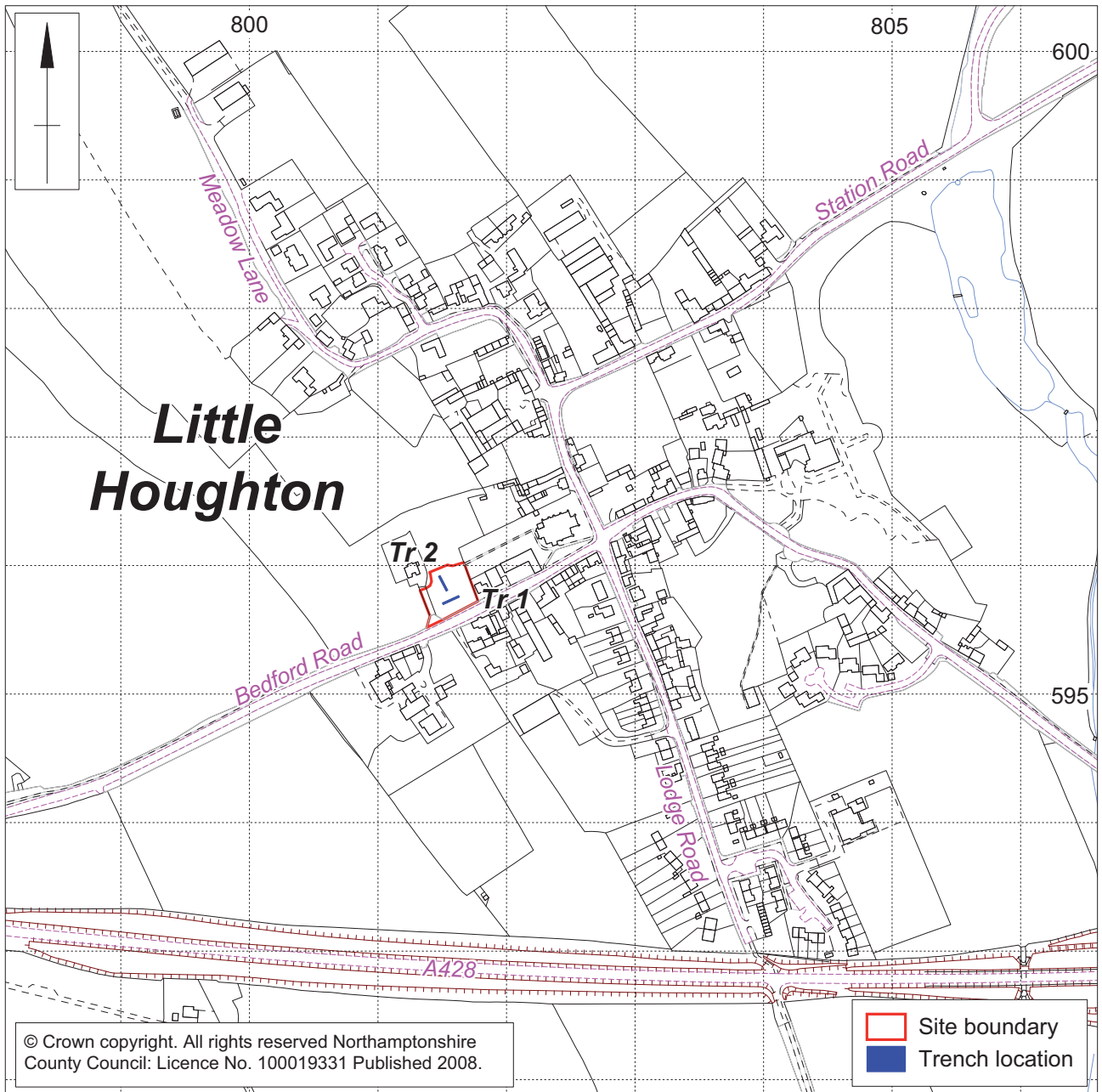
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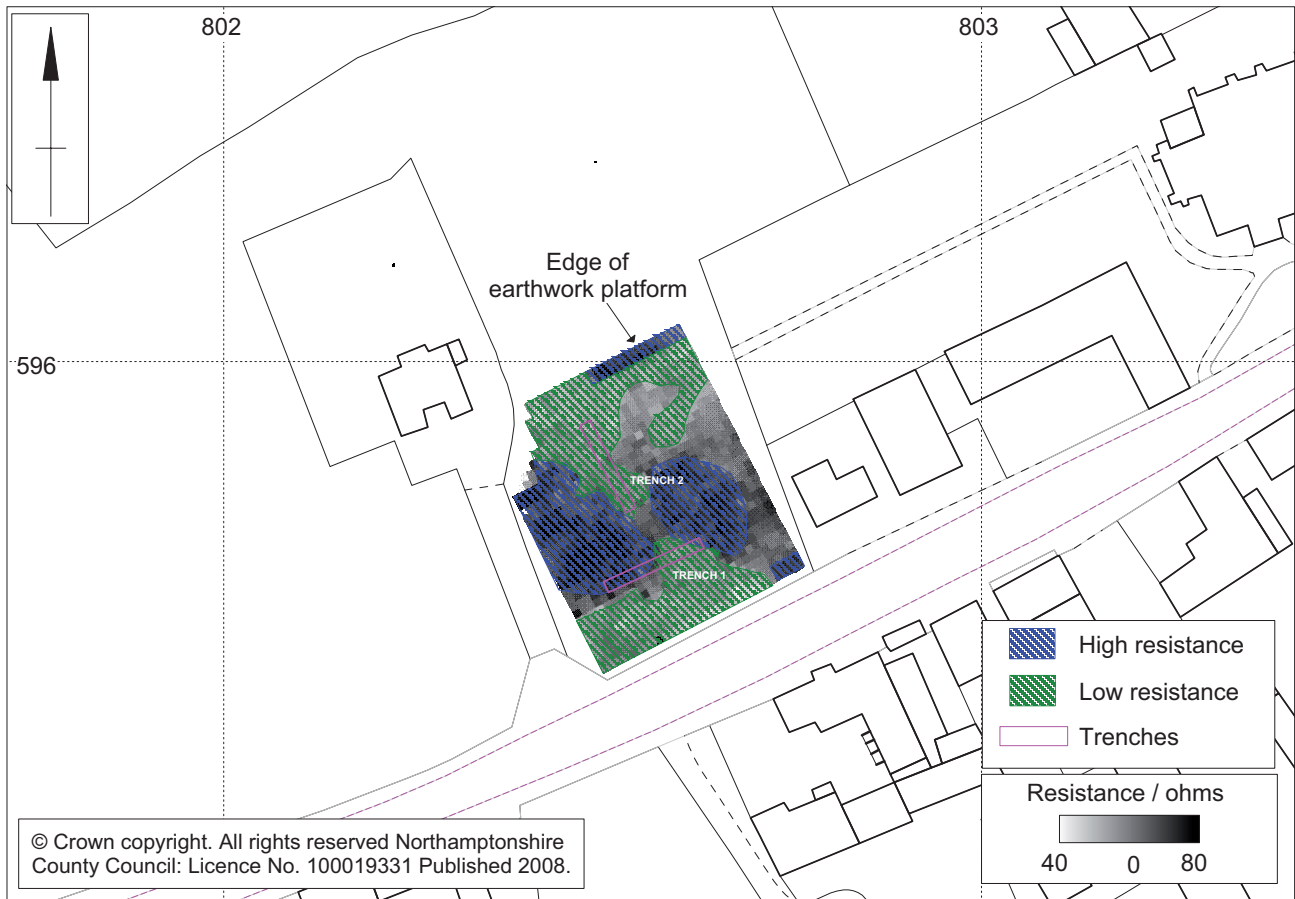
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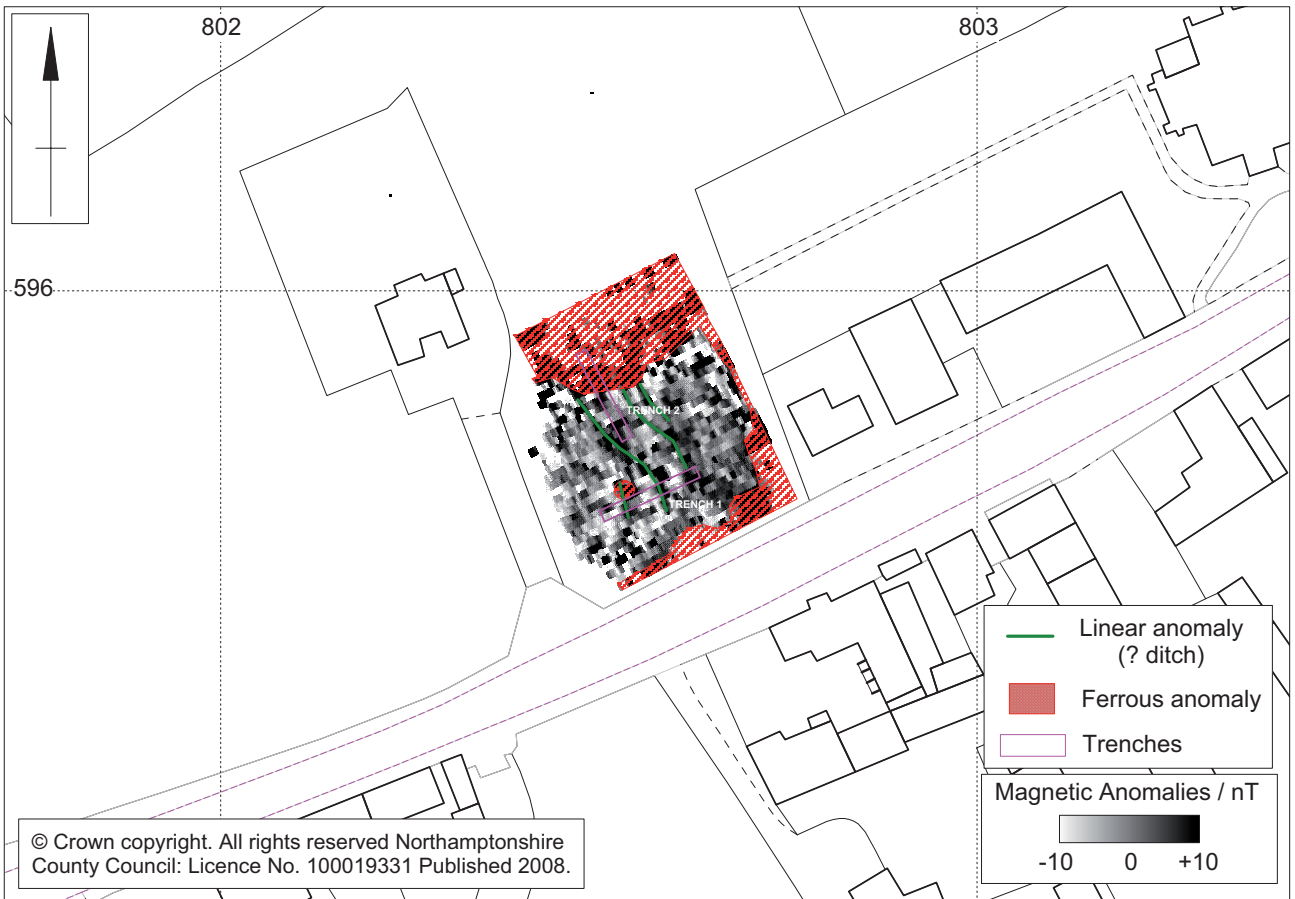
Scale 1:5000

Site location Fig 1



Scale 1:1000

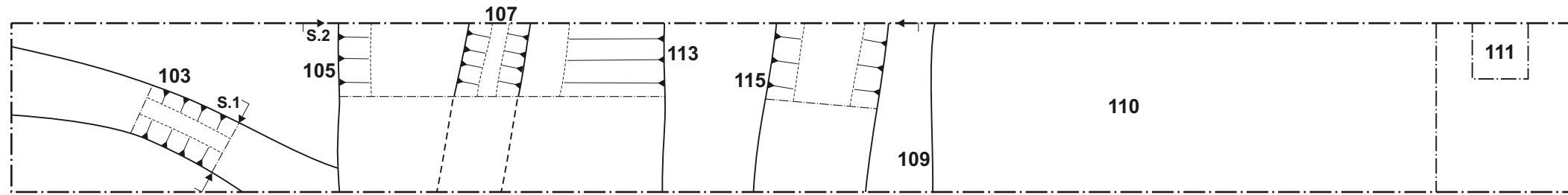
Resistance Survey Results (above) and Interpretation (below) Fig 2



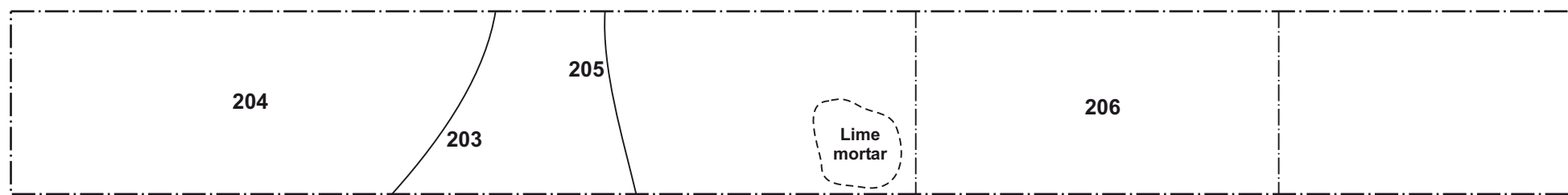
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Gradiometer Survey Results (above) and Interpretation (below) Fig 3

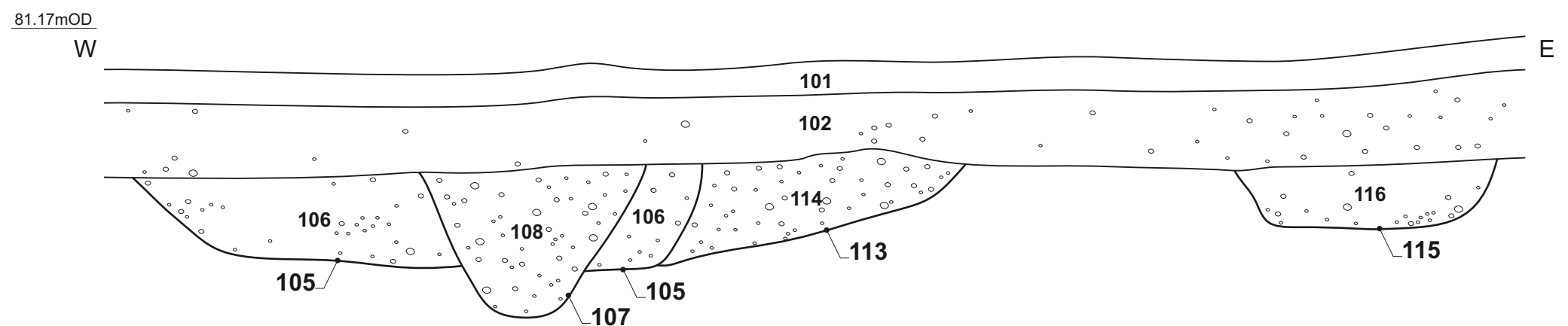
Trench 1



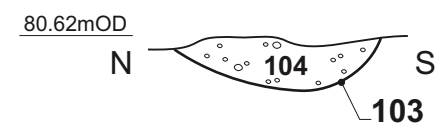
Trench 2



Section 2 - Trench 1



Section 1 - Trench 1



Plans of trenches 1 & 2, and sections, trench 1 Fig 4



Plate 1: Iron Age ditch [113] and ditch re-cuts [105]/[107], facing north-west



Plate 2: Eighteenth-century Chinese export plate, recovered from ‘Victorian rubbish pit’ [109]. (Scale 200mm)