



Northamptonshire
County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Excavation on land off
Windsor Street
Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire
July 2007



Mark Patenall

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Report 07/134

Northamptonshire Archaeology

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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	Excavation on land off Windsor Street Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire	
<p>Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by the Levitt Partnership to undertake an excavation on land off Windsor Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, prior to residential and commercial development</p> <p>The excavation revealed a large medieval boundary ditch aligned east-west, which had been maintained by re-cutting on at least three occasions. Internal plot divisions were suggested by a handful of postholes and shallow gullies. The boundaries were not recorded upon the historic ordnance survey maps, and had disappeared by the nineteenth century, when small scale sand quarrying took place.</p> <p>Pottery recovered included one sherd of residual Roman pottery, a single Saxon sherd from the large ditched boundary, a small amount of medieval and post-medieval sherds. The later quarry pits contained a small amount of residual Iron Age, medieval and post-medieval pottery.</p>		
Project type (eg DBA, evaluation etc)	Excavation, watching brief	
Site status (none, NT, SAM etc)	Urban development	
Previous work (SMR numbers etc)	Trial trenching, Northamptonshire Archaeology 2007	
Current Land use	Building clearance	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	Watching brief, final phase	
Monument type/ period	Medieval/post-medieval plot boundaries	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Leicestershire	
Site address (including postcode)	Windsor House, Windsor Street	
Study area (sq.m or ha)	Approx 15000 sq m	
OS Easting & Northing (use grid sq. numbers)	4753 3192	
Height OD	77m OD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Leicestershire County Council Historic and Natural Environment Team	
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Mark Patenall	
Project Manager	Iain Soden	
Sponsor or funding body	Levitt Partnership	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	July 2007	
End date	December 2007	
ARCHIVES		
	Location (X. A75. 2007)	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical	1b/w film, 1colour film	Pottery, bone, slag
Paper	1 file, 3 section sheets 1plan sheet	
Digital	Photos	
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	Excavation on land off Windsor Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire	
Serial title & volume	07/134	
Author(s)	Mark Patenall	
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EXCAVATION ON LAND OFF WINDSOR STREET

MELTON MOWBRAY, LEICESTERSHIRE

JULY 2007

Abstract

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by the Levitt Partnership to undertake an excavation on land off Windsor Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, prior to residential and commercial development.

The excavation revealed a large medieval boundary ditch aligned east-west, which had been maintained by re-cutting on at least three occasions. Internal plot divisions were suggested by a handful of postholes and shallow gullies. The boundaries were not recorded upon the historic ordnance survey maps, and had disappeared by the nineteenth century, when small scale sand quarrying took place.

Pottery recovered included one sherd of residual Roman pottery, a single Saxon sherd from the large ditched boundary, a small amount of medieval and post-medieval sherds. The later quarry pits contained a small amount of residual Iron Age, medieval and post-medieval pottery.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by the Levitt Partnership to undertake an excavation on land off Windsor Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, prior to residential and commercial development (NGR: SK 753 192, Fig 1). The site occupies an area of 0.1275 ha. The general objective of the evaluation was to identify any evidence for the survival of buried archaeological remains that may be threatened by development of the site and to determine the depth of burial, character, date, extent and state of preservation of any such remains.

2 BACKGROUND

The development site lies within the historic centre of Melton Mowbray, on the corner of Windsor Street and King Street. The First Edition Ordnance Survey map of Melton Mowbray, dated 1886, shows the site was largely undeveloped, except for a building in the central to southern side. The site appears to have remained unchanged into the mid twentieth-century when a General Post Office was constructed. The post office was recently demolished and cleared in preparation for the proposed development. A c 3m deep cellar from the post office building occupied the central part of the Windsor Street frontage.

An archaeological evaluation to the east side of the site which was carried out in advance of the construction of the police station, revealed Iron Age, Saxon, medieval and post-medieval ditches, gullies and pits (MLE15937 and 15938). On the corner of Windsor Street and King Street to the west of the site an evaluation identified occupation that included two ditches dated to the first century AD and two other Romano-British gullies (MLE 3947). Four late medieval pits represent later activity (MLE 3945). To the south, on land off Sherrard Street an evaluation and a subsequent excavation revealed evidence of Saxo-Norman (MLE 9481), medieval (MLE 9482) and post-medieval occupation (MLE 9483) (Leicestershire County Council 2007 (LCC 2007)).

Observations show that modern, Victorian and late medieval buildings lie close to existing pavement levels and for this reason it was thought likely that significant archaeology could survive within a short distance of the surface. The regular redevelopment of frontages (as indicated by the variety of dates of frontage buildings) suggests that reuse of the plot may have led to truncation of earlier deposits and structures.

The site was on generally level ground at *c* 77m aOD. The geology of the area is predominantly glacio-fluvial sand and gravels, with glacio-lacustrine deposits on the southern area of the site (British Geological Survey of England and Wales, Melton, Sheet 142).

3 METHODOLOGY

Excavation conformed to the requirements of the Leicestershire County Council (LCC 2007) written brief and an agreed specification prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (Soden 2007).

Machine excavation removed the modern overburden consisting of tarmac surface and a make-up/levelling layer of modern building debris. In addition homogeneous soils were removed (under archaeological supervision) by machine using a flat bladed ditching bucket. The area was excavated to the level of the natural sub-soil or the exposure of significant archaeological deposits, at which point hand-excavation was undertaken.

The excavation area was cleaned by hand and the archaeological deposits were recorded using written pro-forma sheets, scale drawings and photography. Sections at 1:10 and 1:20 and plans at 1:50 were drawn and levelled to Ordnance Datum.

4 THE EXCAVATION RESULTS

The area excavated measured 16m east to west by 25m north to south (0.04ha). Natural geology was a mixture of sandy gravel, clays and sand revealed at 0.5m to 1m below ground level. Cut through this was a wide boundary ditch which had been re-cut at least three times; a group of pits and postholes and a large quarry pit.

4.1 Boundary ditch

At the south of the site was a large boundary ditch [465] aligned east to west, which had been re-cut at least three times, [461, 458 & 453] (Fig 3 Section 15; Fig 4 Plate 1).

The earliest of the sequence of ditches [465] was V-shaped and measured at least 2.2m wide and 1.6m deep. Its fills (462, 463, and 464) consisted of generally light to mid grey sandy silt with occasional reddish brown sandy patches. No finds were present in these fills. The ditch had been recut on its northern edge by [461], which measured 1.1m wide by 0.45m deep. The primary fill of [461], (460) consisted of light grey silty sand with occasional stone. Above this was fill (459) orange-brown sand. No finds were present in any of these fills. Ditch [461] was re-cut on the same alignment by ditch [458], which had a concave profile and measured 2.8m wide by 1.2m deep. It contained four fills (457, 456, 455, 454), consisting of a light to mid grey silty sand with occasional stones and patches of orange brown sand. Sandy fill (456) was more dominant on the northern edge of the ditch and probably represents wash from the natural surface. One possible Iron Age sherd of pottery (residual) and bone fragments were recovered from fill (455). The latest re-cut of the boundary was ditch [453], which was V-shaped and measured 2.45m wide by 1.0m

deep. It contained three fills (452, 451, and 450) which were light to mid grey to orange brown silty sand with occasional stones. Fill (452) contained one residual sherd of Saxon pottery.

4.2 Other gullies and ditches

To the north of and partially cut into the large boundary ditch was an undated gully [449] (Fig 2). The gully was aligned north-west by southeast and measured 6.25m long, 0.40m wide and was 0.5m deep. It contained one fill (448), of mid grey to orange brown silty sand with occasional stones.

To the south of the main boundary ditch was ditch [444], (Fig 3 Section 14). It was aligned north-west by south-east and had an uneven V-shaped profile measuring 0.90m wide by 0.40m deep. The primary fill (443), consisted of mid to dark brown silty sand with occasional stones and charcoal flecks. A partial cut was observed in the edge of excavation which was heavily truncated by a modern pipe trench. No finds were present in this feature.

4.3 Pit group

Located immediately south of the boundary ditch were a group of four pits. Three of which were inter-cutting.

The earliest pit [436] (Fig 3 Section 9) was at least 0.85m wide by 0.55m deep with vertical sides and a flat base. The primary fill (435) consisted of dark grey brown slightly sandy silt with occasional charcoal flecks and stones. Animal bone fragments were recovered from this fill.

Pit [436] was cut by pit [432] which was oval with rounded uneven sides and a concave base (Fig 3 Section 9). It measured 1.2m long by 1.0m wide and 0.3m deep. The primary fill (431), consisted of a light grey brown to orange brown sandy silt with occasional stones and contained three Iron Age pottery sherds.

The southern edge of pit [432] was cut by pit [434/447], which was sub-circular with curved sides and concave base, measuring at least 0.42m wide by 0.62m deep (Fig 3 Section 9 & 14). The fills consisted of dark brown to grey sandy clay with occasional stones, charcoal flecks, animal bone fragments, glass and pottery sherds (433, 445, 446).

Pit [439] (Fig 3, Section 12), was probably circular with near vertical sides and measured at least 2.80m wide and 0.52m deep. Its base was not reached due to the unstable nature of the edge of excavation. The pit contained fills (438, 437) of dark grey brown slightly silty sandy clay with occasional stones. Animal bone was recovered from fill (438).

4.4 Postholes and gullies

A group of four postholes and a stakehole were located in the north-west corner of the site. Three postholes [404, 406, 408] were aligned north to south and another [412] was 2m to the east of [408]. They range from 0.25m to 0.45m diameter and 0.08m to 0.11m deep. They were all filled with redeposited natural sandy gravel, which mirrored the natural on this part of the site. The trial trench evaluation revealed one posthole [203], which probably belonged to this group (Morris 2007, [203] fig 3).

Gully [415] was aligned north to south and measured 0.70m wide by 0.37m deep and had a U-shaped profile. It was situated between postholes [203] and [412] and was sealed by the demolition/make up layer (401). This contained a fill (414) which consisted of mid to dark grey silty sand with moderate gravel inclusion. No finds were present in this fill.

4.5 Victorian quarrying

In the north-east corner of the site there was a large quarry pit [420]/[430]. It measured at least 9.0m long by 5.5m wide and 1.1m deep, with steep sides and a gradual sloping uneven base (Plate 2). This feature was recorded in the evaluation (Morris 2007, [303] fig 3) although due to the constraints of the trench it was interpreted as the cut of a ditch.

The range of fills consisted of dark grey clays to mid brown silt and sandy gravels, measuring 0.10m to 0.55m deep (416-419, 425-429). Bone and medieval and post-medieval pottery were recovered from fills (417, 418, 419), with one (426) containing medieval and post-medieval pottery, animal bone and some lumpy concretions plus one residual Roman Samian sherd. The mixed nature of the fills suggests they were formed by a combination of deliberate backfilling together with natural accumulation from the quarry sides.

The upper fill of the quarry was cut by a small pit [424]. This was circular in plan with a U-shaped profile and measured 0.82m in diameter and 0.45m deep. This feature contained fill (423) dark brown to grey silty sand with moderate stones and charcoal flecks.

5 THE WATCHING BRIEF

A watching brief was maintained during the construction phase of the development including the excavation of the new foundation trenches (Plate 3).

The objectives of the watching brief were as described in Section 3 (above). More specifically, its purpose was record any surviving archaeology within the area of the development, to the south of the excavation area.

No archaeological features were found during the watching brief. Extensive modern disturbance was revealed closest to the boundary wall(s) where modern material extended to the base of the trench.

The natural red sand was found at 0.6m below the ground surface. Above this was modern overburden containing fragments of brick, concrete and corroded metal.

A modern drain was located along the eastern side of the foundations (Plate 4).

6 FINDS

6.1 Pottery

Iron Age pottery by Andy Chapman

Four sherds of pottery, weighing 165g, were recovered from two contexts.

Three sherds from a single hand-built vessel came from context (431), the fill of pit [436]. These are in a hard sandy fabric containing frequent small inclusions of sub-angular quartz. The core and interior is grey to grey-black, while the outer surface is oxidised to a brown or orange-brown. There are two joining sherds for a flat base, 130mm in diameter, and a 9mm thick body sherd. The body to within 8mm of the base has been decorated with deeply incised semi-regular scoring. These are incised slightly off the vertical and on the body sherd intersecting scored lines form a lozenge that has been filled with finer scoring. This vessel is a scored ware jar of typical middle Iron Age form, and a broad fourth/third to first century BC date may be suggested. The regularity of the scoring may suggest that it is of late Iron Age date.

A single sherd from the angle of a flat-based, hand-built vessel comes from context (455), the fill of ditch [458]. The core is light grey, with uniform orange, oxidised internal and external surfaces. The fabric contains numerous small voids from lost inclusions. This sherd is difficult to categorise, but it may be a coarseware bowl or jar dating to the late Pre-Roman Iron Age or the early Roman period, perhaps broadly early to mid first century AD.

Roman and later pottery by Iain Soden

A total of 45 sherds of Roman and later pottery were recovered, weighing 1063 grammes in seventeen fabrics or types, from six contexts. They denote some sparse occupation nearby, potentially over 2000 years, although most derive from mixed deposits of post-medieval origin, earlier material being almost entirely residual. Only context (446) is consistent enough to appear to be a contemporary deposit containing material of only one period (eighteenth century). While the evaluation suggested a peak of activity nearby in the post-medieval period, this confirms it. There is nothing to indicate the exact nature of occupation other than to state that it appears to be of general domestic type. The numbers of sherds present suggest the occupation is far from intense at any period.

The sherds were weighed by type and context and related where possible to the most recent published type series for Leicestershire (Davies and Sawday 2000, 166). Each context is ascribed a *terminus post quem* based upon the latest pottery type deposited within it. The pottery is not felt to have further significance.

The types present were as follows:

Table 1: Pottery by context, number of sherds and weight in grammes

Context/ type	Pottery Class	Date range	417 No/wt	418 No/wt	419 No/wt	426 No/wt	445 No/wt	446 No/wt	452 No/wt	Total
Samian	-	1st-2nd century				1/1				1/1
Early-mid Saxon	SX	400- 800							1/24	1/24
Stamford B	ST1	11th century	1/16	1/2						2/18
St Neots- type	SN	1000- 1200	1/15							1/15

Context/ type	Pottery Class	Date range	417 No/wt	418 No/wt	419 No/wt	426 No/wt	445 No/wt	446 No/wt	452 No/wt	Total
Chilvers Coton A	CC1	1250- 1300	3/15	3/29	1/5	1/1				8/50
Chilvers Coton C	CC2	1300- 1500	1/15		1/18					2/33
Potterspury- type	?SP	1250- 1500	1/5							1/5
Midland Purple	MP	1450- 1650		1/16						1/16
Late med coarseware	?OS	1500- 1600	3/26			1/16				4/42
Late med glazed ware	?MS	1500- 1600				1/16				1/16
Midland Black	EA6	1650- 1750		2/119				1/7		3/126
Midland Yellow	MY	1550- 1700				1/48				1/48
Glazed red earthenware	?EA1/2	1550- 1650	2/14	2/16		1/22	1/10			6/62
Tin-glazed earthenware	EA11	1650- 1750					1/21			1/21
Manganese- glazed earthenware	EA3	1690- 1740					1/54	5/26		6/80
White salt- glazed stoneware	SW4	1720- 1780						2/76		2/76
Pancheon	(EA6)	1800- 1900	2/281				2/149			4/430
Context TPQ			1800	1650	1250	1550	1800	1720	400	45/1063

6.2 Slag and iron concretions by Andy Chapman

A single large fragment of ironworking slag, weighing 386g, was recovered from context (417), the fill of [420]. This piece retains a partial smooth outer surface from where it had been in contact with the base and side of small circular furnace or hearth. The piece stands 90mm high and the upper surface has a fluid appearance.

Multiple fragments of iron concretions were recovered from context (426), the fill of [430]. Many of the pieces are fragments, but the more complete examples show that they have all come from similar objects, some five or six in total. These are cylindrical, 90-115mm in diameter and standing 70-110mm high, weighing 650-700g. At the centre of each there would appear to have been a wooden rod of circular section and consistently 16-17mm in diameter. In all cases the wood has been replaced by iron minerals, and the central rod has become embedded in a cylinder of concreted iron minerals and natural pebbles. These concretions would presumably have formed when the rods driven into an iron-rich waterlogged mud, and must have taken a considerable time to develop.

6.3 Animal bone by Karen Deighton

A total of 1.14kg of animal bone was collected from a range of contexts. In order to gain some idea of the animal economy of the site, this material was analysed using standard zooarchaeological methods.

Results

Preservation

Fragmentation was fairly heavy, no complete bones were recorded. This was largely the result of old breaks, as only 8.5% were fresh breaks. As evidence for butchery was low (4% of bone) this is most likely due to trampling or compaction in the soil. Generally the surfaces of the bones were slightly abraded which was probably the result of soil action. No evidence of burning was present, suggesting that this was not a preferred method of waste disposal. Twenty-three percent of the bones showed evidence of *canid* gnawing.

The assemblage is dominated by sheep/goat, followed by cattle. The species present and the percentages of each seem fairly typical of those found within a medieval and post-medieval town.

Table 2: Animal bone by species

Species/ common name	Number of identifications	Percentage (%)
<i>Ovicaprid</i> (sheep/goat)	31	66
<i>Bos</i> (cattle)	15	32
<i>Canis</i> (dog)	1	2

Ageing

Little ageing data was available. Tooth eruption and wear analysis of an *ovicaprid* mandible suggested an age at death of 1-2 years.

Conclusion

Due to the small amount of data available little could be ascertained of the animal economy of the site beyond the fact that two major domesticates (cattle and sheep) were disposed here.

7 CONCLUSION

The excavation confirmed the presence of the large ditched property boundary that was found in the evaluation (Morris 2007), together with a small number of pits, postholes and gullies. The north to south aligned ditch, suggested by the evaluation, was found to be the edge of a very large quarry pit in the north-east corner of the site.

The large boundary ditch was maintained over a considerable period of time, and had been re-cut on the same alignment on at least three occasions. After each episode of silting the new cut moved the ditch gradually northwards, with the ditch becoming smaller each time. The boundary was probably first defined in the late-Saxon or medieval period and it had disappeared by the eighteenth or early nineteenth century; as it is not recorded on the surviving historic maps. The ditch appears to have acted as a boundary between smaller plots of land to the north, fronting onto King Street and longer plots to the south, fronting onto Sherrard Street. (A similar arrangement of short and long plots is still visible within the block of properties to the east of site, defined by King Street, Nottingham Street and Market Place). The lack of finds recovered from the ditch may indicate active maintenance of the boundary; for instance periodic cleaning out and restriction of dumping waste into the ditch, as there is little evidence for deliberate backfilling. There was no evidence for standing water within the ditch; this reflects the geology on this part of the site, which is sand and drains quickly.

The smaller undated ditch found in the southern part of the site, may be part of a plot boundary or internal subdivision aligned north-west by south-east. The cluster of postholes and the gully in the north-west corner of the site did not appear to be substantial enough or arranged in such a way as to suggest a building (extending beyond the edges of the excavation). These are more likely to be part of a fence-line or internal plot division.

The group of pits on the south side of the site appear to have been for sand extraction. Two pits contained datable material. The Iron Age sherds recovered were probably residual and the pits were most likely of nineteenth-century date. They appear to have been deliberately backfilled after the extraction process. The very large quarry pit in the north-east corner of the site was also probably for the extraction of sand. Its fills indicate a combination of deliberate backfilling together with natural accumulation from the quarry sides. The pottery recovered from them suggests quarrying took place in the nineteenth century.

The site had been heavily truncated by modern services. The widening of the road and pavements at the site entrance (compared to elsewhere along the street) might suggest that the historic frontage lies at least partly under the modern footpath.

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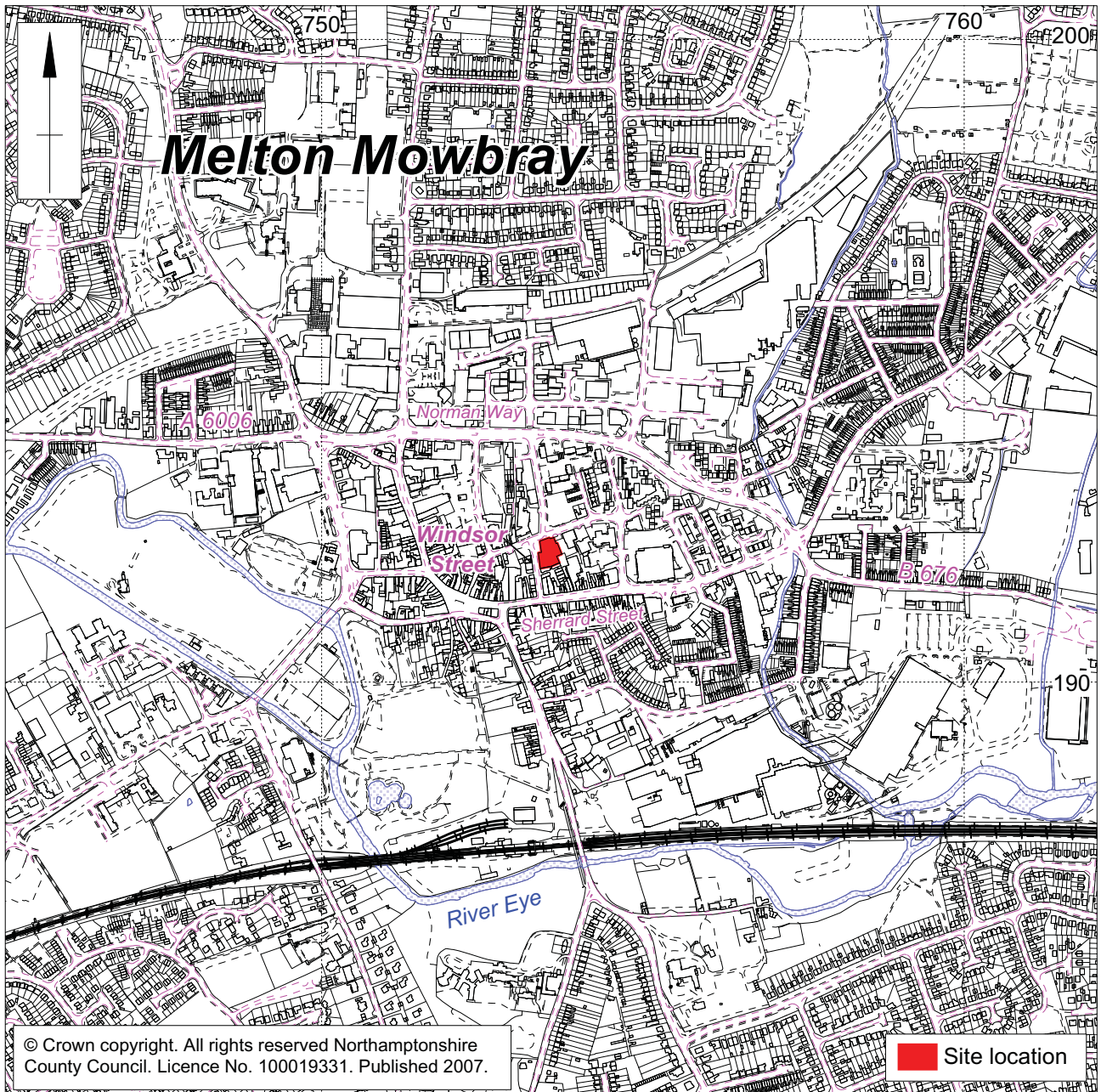
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Northamptonshire Archaeology

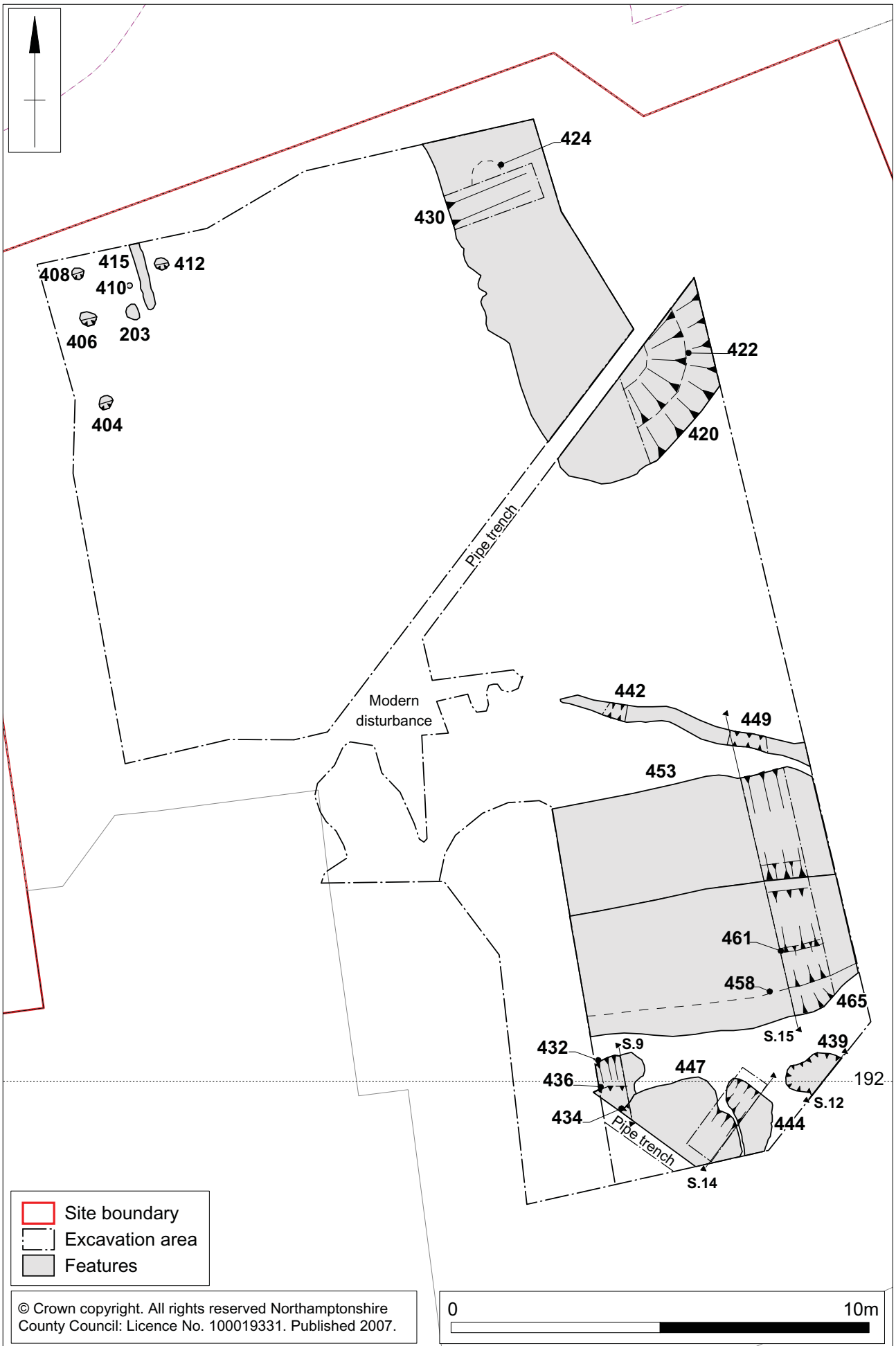
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Scale 1:10,000

Site location Fig 1



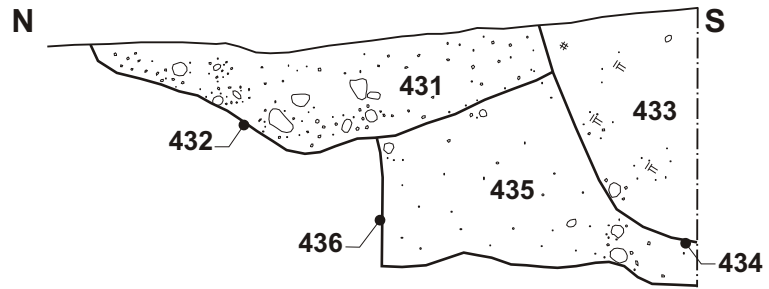
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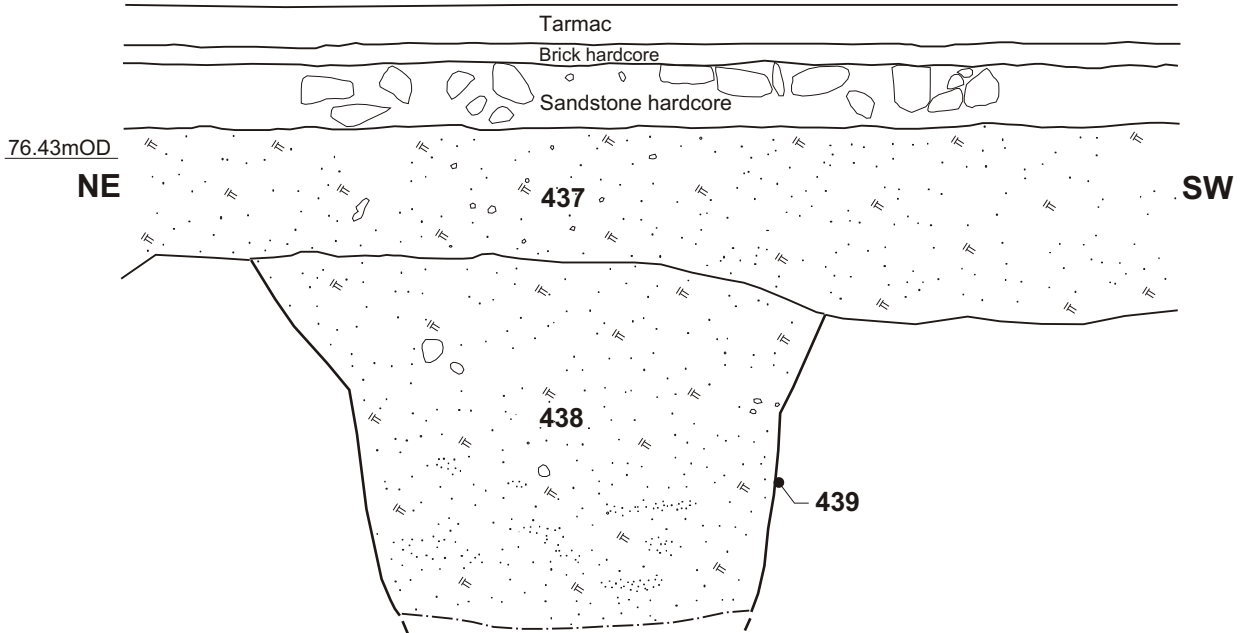
General site plan Fig 2

Section 9 - Pits [432], [434] and [436]

75.98mOD

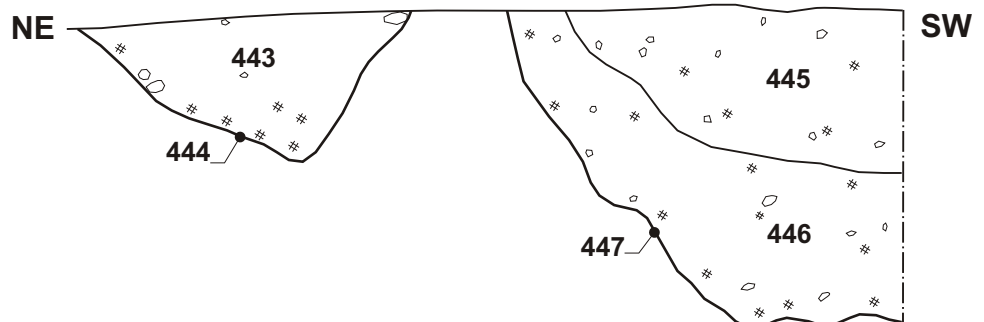


Section 12 - Pit [439]



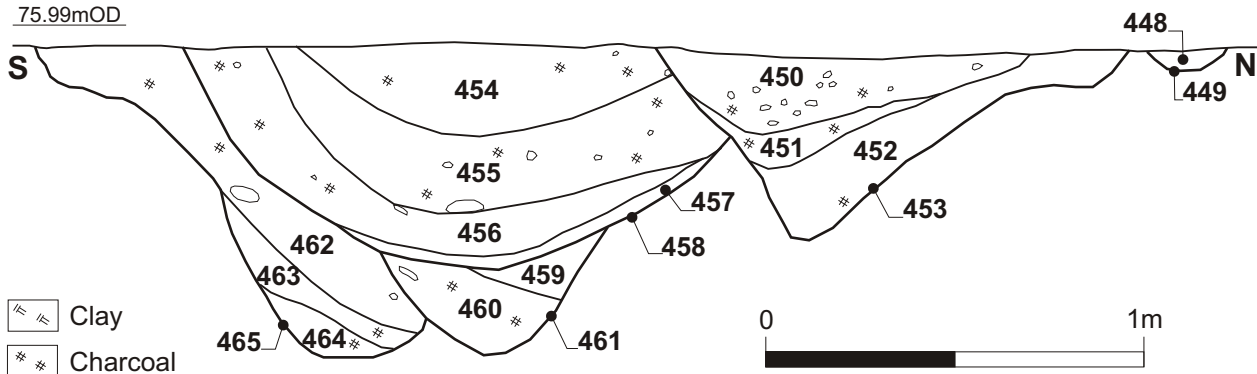
Section 14 - Pits [444] and [447]

75.88mOD



Section 15 - Boundary ditch [465], [461], [458], [453] and [449]

75.99mOD



Sections of boundary ditch and pits [432], [434], [436], [439], [444] and [447] Fig 3



Plate 1: Boundary ditch [465] [461] [458] [453] looking south west



Plate 2: Quarry pit [420] looking east Plate 2: Quarry pit [420] looking east



Plate 3: Foundation trench, view of natural and modern deposits, looking west



Plate 4: Modern field drain revealed in foundation trench