



Northamptonshire
County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological walkover survey at
Whitfield Wood, Buckinghamshire

January 2009

Accession no: 2009.9



Carol Simmonds
January 2009
Report 09/11

Northamptonshire Archaeology

2 Bolton House
Wootton Hall Park

Northampton NN4 8BE

t. 01604 700493 f. 01604 702822

e. sparry@northamptonshire.gov.uk

w. www.northantsarchaeology.co.uk



Staff

Project Manager Adam Yates BA AlFA
Fieldwork Carol Simmonds BA
Peter Haynes
Text and Illustrations Carol Simmonds

Quality Control

	Print name	Signed	Date
Checked by	Pat Chapman		
Verified by	Adam Yates		
Approved by	Andy Chapman		

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	Archaeological Walkover Survey at Whitfield Wood, Buckinghamshire	
Short description	In January 2009, Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by the Forestry Commission to carry out a walkover survey in Whitfield Wood, Buckinghamshire. A number of features were identified, including an earthwork platform, a former gravel pit, a series of woodland earthworks and drainage ditches.	
Project type	Walkover earthwork survey	
Site status	None	
Previous work	None	
Current Land use	Woodland	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	Woodland boundary, earthworks, ponds; linear earthwork and a square platform	
Significant finds	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Buckinghamshire	
Site address	Whitfield Wood, near Biddlesdon, Buckinghamshire	
Study area	38ha	
OS Easting & Northing	464270 239300	
Height OD	135m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Forestry Commission	
Project Design originator		
Director/Supervisor	Carol Simmonds	
Project Manager	Adam Yates	
Sponsor or funding body	Forestry Commission (Northants Forest District)	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	12/1/09	
End date	14/1/09	
ARCHIVES		
	Location	Content
Physical		
Paper	2009.9	1 half sized archive box of plans and forms
Digital	2009.9	1 CD of digital data including dxf's and photographs
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	Archaeological Walkover Survey at Whitfield Wood, Buckinghamshire	
Serial title & volume	NA report 09/11	
Author(s)	C Simmonds	
Page numbers	23 pages including 13 pages text, 7 figures and 6 plates	
Date	January 2009	

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	OBJECTIVES	1
3	BACKGROUND	2
3.1	Topography and geology	2
3.2	Historical background	2
4	METHODOLOGY	3
5	ASSESSMENT OF GROUND CONDITIONS	4
6	WALKOVER SURVEY RESULTS	4
6.1	Platform	4
6.2	Linear features	5
6.3	Other features	5
6.4	Coppice boundaries	6
6.5	Woodland drainage	6
7	DISCUSSION	7
7.1	Survey results	7
7.2	Recommendations for management and further work	8
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	9

Tables

Table 1: Coppice Enclosure measurements

Figures

Fig 1: Site location; 1:50,000

Fig 2: Historical data; 1:15,000

Fig 3: Detail of the 1810 Ordnance Surveyor's map

Fig 4: Detail of 1st edition Ordnance Survey 1885, Buckinghamshire

Fig 5: Detail of the 1950s edition Ordnance Survey

Fig 6: Survey visibility, 1:5000

Fig 7: Survey results, 1:5000

Plates

Cover: General view of the wood from the north-west

Plate 1: Woodland boundary denoting parochial line between Biddlesdon and Shalstone, looking south

Plate 2: Feature 3, platform, looking east

Plate 3: Feature 3, platform, looking south-west

Plate 4: Feature 1, the earlier woodland bank and ditch

Plate 5: Feature 6, the quarry pit, looking north

Plate 6: Feature 7, woodland pond, looking north-east

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WALKOVER SURVEY
AT WHITFIELD WOOD
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
JANUARY 2009**

Abstract

In January 2009, Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by the Forestry Commission to carry out a walkover survey in Whitfield Wood, Buckinghamshire. A number of features were noted, including an earthwork platform, a former gravel pit, a series of woodland earthworks and drainage ditches.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by the Forestry Commission to undertake a walkover survey encompassing 38ha at Whitfield Wood, Buckinghamshire (Fig 1; site centred on NGR 464270 239300). The site is situated on undulating ground south-east of the village of Biddlesdon.

The woodland is managed by The Forestry Commission and is divided into two stock management compartments and a number of sub-compartments defined by rides, tracks or fencelines.

2 OBJECTIVES

The overall objective, as defined by the Forestry Commission Northamptonshire Forest District, was to aid and inform the Commission's long term management of Northamptonshire Forest District woodlands through a programme of rapid documentary research and field survey. This included the identification of the location, extent, nature, importance and management requirements of visible archaeological and historic remains.

The specific objectives were:

- to provide a survey of all archaeological sites within Whitfield Wood
- to interpret these features within their local, regional and national context
- to accurately map the location and extent of the remains
- to provide recommendations for the future preservation and management of significant remains.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Topography and geology

Whitfield Wood is located to the south of the A43, approximately 2.5km to the south of the Northamptonshire village of Syresham and 1km to the south-east of Biddlesdon, Buckinghamshire (Figs 1 and 2).

The wood is situated on a ridge of ground overlooking the River Great Ouse which rises to the north-west and curves round to the east. A tributary stream of the river lies to the east of wood. The eastern edge of the wood partly defines the parochial boundary between Biddlesdon and Shalstone.

The ground lies at an average height of c 135m aOD overlooking the tributary stream of River Great Ouse.

The geology of the area comprises boulder clays with outcrops of glacial sands and gravel (BGS 1969).

3.2 Historical background

A baseline survey comprising a 2.5km radius area search of the National Monuments Record (NMR) accessed from the Archaeological Data Service and collation of early Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping was undertaken (Figs 2-5).

The early maps comprised the 1810 Ordnance Surveyors map, first edition OS for Buckinghamshire (1885) and a later edition dating from the 1950s (Figs 3-5). Of note was the reduction in size of the wood between 1810 and 1885 and two quarry pits, one within the north-western part of the wood and the other was marked outside the wood to the west. Both quarries are clearly seen on the 1885 and 1950s editions. Located outside of the wood to the south-east was the site of Oldwick Farm, recorded in the Victoria County History as an extra-parochial concern formerly belonging to Luffield Priory (Page 1927).

The area surrounding Whitfield Wood is rich in history, although apart from one site (the quarry) no features are recorded within the wood on the NMR. The earliest recorded archaeology listed on the NMR refers to two ring ditches noted in cropmark data. These were located on high ground (c 135m aOD) to the north of Whitfield Wood, overlooking the location of the rising of the River Great Ouse.

The medieval landscape in the area is extensive, with the heart of Whittlewood Forest one of

the three royal forests in Northamptonshire, and the site of Luffield Abbey to the north-east (Figs 3 and 5). It is feasible that during the 12th and 13th centuries Whitfield may have fallen within Whittlewood Forest prior to disafforestation by Edward I in the late 13th century (Page 2003). Indeed the 1286 perambulation quoted by Page suggests that the boundary of forest law lay to the south. Work undertaken by St John's College Research Centre has resulted in mapping showing the extent of forest law in the country. It suggests that Whittlewood, together with Salcey, Shotover, Rockingham and Bernwood, were combined to create a vast area under Royal jurisdiction called the Forest between the Bridges which stretched from the bridges of Oxford to Stamford.

Biddlesdon Abbey, to the west was founded in 1147 as a Cistercian house. At the Dissolution the land passed first to Lord Wriothesley and then to Sir Robert Peckham (Page 1927). The abbey ruins lay in parkland until the 18th century when Biddlesdon Hall was constructed after the ruins had been levelled (NMR). To the south-west at Evershaw Farm are the earthwork remains of a Deserted Medieval Village.

After the 16th century, the surrounding area was substantially landscaped, not only the area around Biddlesdon Hall but also Stowe Park to the east. Abbey House Farm, formerly Biddlesdon Farm is a farm with buildings of a post-medieval date. A kiln is marked on the 1885 and 1950s OS maps to the west of Abbey House Farm (Figs 4 and 5).

Later recorded activity includes a World War II airfield quadrant tower located within Three Parks Wood to the east.

4 METHODOLOGY

The archaeological walkover survey was undertaken in January 2009 to allow for suitable visibility of the woodland landscape prior to spring and summer growth. Surveying conditions were generally fair, although there were areas of impaired visibility due to heavy undergrowth or impassable ground (Fig 6).

The methodology for the walkover survey followed the general technique developed for the Salcey Forest Survey and other woodland surveys in Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire, Peterborough and Milton Keynes (Hall 1996, 2001; Simco 2003; Simmonds 2006, 2008a, 2008b).

Each section of the woodland, as defined by present ridings, paths or woodland stock management areas, was walked in transects of approximately 50m intervals. Earthworks and other features were sketch plotted and located onto a series of base maps, with an indication

as to preservation and condition. Where possible and where earthworks were identified the full outline was measured and plotted.

A qualitative record of the tree and vegetation cover of each section was made by allocating each section to one of four categories from 'good', 'fair' and 'poor' to 'not surveyed' as where the undergrowth was so thick that walking was impossible (Fig 6).

General photographs of each woodland area and potential features were taken from a variety of directions using a digital camera. A record of photographs taken was entered on a cross-referenced index sheet.

5 ASSESSMENT OF GROUND CONDITIONS

In general, the surveying conditions were fair with mixed surface visibility (Fig 6). An area comprising 14ha was not surveyed due to dense undergrowth. As the Forestry Commission continues to clear and manage the woodland, it is likely that the areas which were not surveyed may be looked at in the future.

6 WALKOVER SURVEY RESULTS

The woodland boundary is defined by a bank and/or ditch, which encloses the entire area (Fig 7; Plate 1). Its overall condition is fair with a well defined ditch. The only area where the ditch was not seen was an overgrown segment along its north-western edge measuring c 105m in length. In places a bank located inside the wood augments the boundary and a slight bank with a modern fence line may be found outside.

A network of rides and tracks divide the wood and are listed where pertinent.

6.1 Platform

There is a square platform (F3) in the south-eastern quadrant of the wood (Fig 7; Plates 2 and 3). It is aligned north-north-east to south-south-west and measures 9m long and wide by 0.4m high. The platform has a clearly defined gradual slope and a flat top. Its eastern boundary has been truncated by the ditch forming the woodland boundary. No other visible earthworks were seen in the adjoining field.

6.2 Linear features

Four linear features were recorded in the woodland (F1-2, F4 and F8; Fig 7).

A bank and ditch aligned east to west was located in the southern part of the wood (F1; Fig 7; Plate 4). The ditch measures 398m long and is between 2m and 6m wide. It has an average depth of 0.4m. The profile varies from a wide gradual sided flat-bottomed ditch in the west to a narrower steeper-sided ditch in the east. There are two banks flanking the ditch, although in the western section the bank is predominantly on the north-eastern side of the ditch. The banks measure 2m wide and up to 0.2m high.

Feature 2 to the north of F1 comprises two parallel ditches aligned east-south-east to west-north-west. Both ditches average 90m long, 8m wide and up to 1.7m deep. They are characterised by steep sloping sides with flat bases.

Feature 4, next to the north-western boundary is a shallow gradual-sided depression aligned south-east to north-west and measures 10m long by 2m wide and 0.3m deep.

Feature 8, approximately 10m to the north-west of F1, is a shallow linear ditch measuring 25m long, 2m wide and up to 0.3m deep.

6.3 Other features

Other features include a substantial quarry pit (F6) and two ponds (F5 and F7).

Feature 6, the site of a quarry pit, is in the north-western quadrant of the wood adjacent to the woodland boundary (Fig 7; Plate 5). It is sub-ovoid in shape and aligned north-west to south-east and measures 25m by 20m and is up to 2.5m deep. The sides of the pit are generally steep although the slope becomes more gradual to the south. The base is rounded, broken by material banked up in steps.

Feature 5 is an oblong-shaped pond with an earthwork bank adjacent to it. It is located in the north-eastern quadrant of the wood aligned south-east to north-west. The pond is 10m long, 2m wide by 0.6m deep. The bank on its north-western side is 10m long, by 1.6m wide and up to 0.3m high with well defined gradual slopes and a rounded top.

Feature 7, a sub-ovoid shaped pond (Fig 7; Plate 6) is located in the north-east quadrant of the wood adjacent to the woodland boundary. It is aligned north to south, approximately 22m long and 11m wide.

6.4 Coppice boundaries

Five coppice bank and ditch earthworks were recorded during the survey, part of an extensive set of coppice enclosures defined by ditches and banks (C1-C5; Fig 7). Unless otherwise stated, the ditch is on the outside of the enclosure with the bank immediately within it. On average the ditches have gradual to steeply-sloped profiles with a sharp break of slope and are between 1.5m and 2.5m wide and up to 0.8m deep. The banks, where they exist, average between 1m and 2m wide and up to 0.4m high. Coppice Enclosures 1 and 2 are in the north-eastern end of the wood. Coppice Enclosures 3-5 are in the south-western part of the wood.

Table 1: Coppice Enclosure measurements

Coppice Enclosure no.	Area enclosed (hectares)	Length (metres)	Width (metres)	Overall condition	Comments
1	5.5	410	160	poor	Bank eroded along much of southern boundary
2	6.8	430	220	good	Well defined bank and ditch
3	9.1	470	250	fair	
4	3.4	250	140	fair	Well defined bank and dual ditch indicating recutting
5	10.4	340	340	fair	Well defined bank and ditch

6.5 Woodland drainage

In places the woodland drainage reflects the natural topography, in particular the ditches in the area of C1 lie at the base of natural slopes. In other areas, the drainage features were cut to allow water to drain into either the woodland or coppice boundaries. A ditch located in the south-western quadrant of the wood was flanked by a bank which is likely to represent upcast of material from the ditch.

7 DISCUSSION

7.1 Survey results

The walkover survey at Whitfield Wood identified at least two phases of woodland coppice and boundary changes, and a number of woodland ponds. No absolute dating for the majority of the features could be achieved apart from the post-medieval quarry (F6) recorded on Ordnance Survey maps.

Whitfield Wood had witnessed fluctuations in its size from at least 1810. On the Ordnance Surveyor's map dated from that year, the wood was an estimated 13ha larger, encompassing what is today Friday's Spinney. Between 1810 and 1885 this northern segment of woodland became a mixture of agricultural land and woodland. Within Whitfield Wood there is evidence for changes in the boundary; for example Feature 1 is probably an earlier woodland pale denoting the southern edge of the wood. Additionally the south-eastern bank and ditch of Coppice 5 suggest a difference in woodland management. Part of the south-eastern boundary of the wood indicated the presence of the parochial boundary between Biddlesdon and Shalstone and any alterations to the layout of the wood would have local importance. Evidence for the place of Whitfield Wood in the 'Forest between the Bridges' is scarce although recent research conducted by St John's College Research Centre, Oxford support the notion of the 'Forest Between the Bridges' comprising Whittlewood, Shotover, Bernwood, Salcey and Rockingham.

Evidence for industrial activity within the wood was indicated by the presence of a quarry pit and a platform. It is a possibility that the platform (Feature 3) may have been a stance for charcoal burning during the post-medieval period. There is evidence from other surveys, including that of Loch Moidart, Scotland, which suggests that platforms or stances were built from excavated material and may have had huts built on them as well as the charcoal pile (Evans 2006). The survey confirmed the indication of quarrying seen on the Ordnance Survey maps, suggesting that the north-western part of the wood lay on glacial sands and gravels. Both features have local importance in terms of industrial activity.

The function and date of linear features is unknown although such as F4 may be a natural depression or hollow. Pond F5 may represent deliberate excavation with upcast placed to one side perhaps as water hollow for woodland animals.

7.2 Recommendations for management and further work

Recommendations for further work comprise a mixture of further earthwork survey, documentary and investigative work. The fact that not all of the woodland was accessible should be borne in mind. If the Forestry Commissions programme of management continues then survey of the areas which were not walked could be undertaken.

Of interest is the platform (Feature 3) which may benefit from more detailed earthwork and geophysical survey to identify any below ground features including walls and areas of burning. However, the stances from Loch Moidart, although similar in size to Feature 3 were roughly circular as opposed to square. There is the suggestion that the platform has been truncated by the ditch defining the woodland boundary. Further documentary and comparative work may elucidate the function of this platform.

The place of Whitfield Wood in the history of Whittlewood Forest and the surrounding monastic and later estates is also of interest. Although it is likely that Whitfield Wood at some point lay within the boundary of forest law, for much of its history it is possible that it was in private hands. The extent to which this happened and the activities which occurred in the wood are at this time unknown. Documentary and investigative work including map regression, examination of estate maps and the files from the Court of Augmentations (the body established to administer the confiscation and distribution of the monastic estates during the Dissolution) may profit from examination. Following further investigative work, access to the wood could be improved with provision for interpretation boards.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

BGS 1969 *Towcester Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) Solid and Drift*, sheet 202, British Geological Survey

Evans, S, 2006 *The Recessed Platforms in the woodland above the shore of Loch Moidart*, Moidart Survey <http://www.moidart.org.uk/datasets/klmplatformsse/klmplatformsse.htm>

Hall, D N, 1996 *Salcey Forest Northamptonshire, Archaeological Investigation Survey*

Hall, D N, 2001 *Ancient Woodland Project Archaeological Survey, Northamptonshire, Peterborough and Milton Keynes Forests Archaeological Interpretation Survey, Part 4*

Page, M, 2003 The extent of Whittlewood Forest and the impact of disafforestation in the later middle ages, *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, **56**, 22-34.

Page, W, 1927 *A History of the County of Buckingham*, Volume **4**, Victoria County History www.british-history.ac.uk

Simco, A, 2003 *Ancient Woodland Project: Archaeology*, Forestry Commission

Simmonds, C, 2006 *Walkover archaeological earthwork survey at Callans Lane Wood*, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire Archaeology Report **06/53**

Simmonds, C, 2008a *Archaeological walkover survey at Pickworth Wood*, Rutland, Northamptonshire Archaeology Report **08/30**

Simmonds, C, 2008b *Archaeological walkover survey at Wardley Wood*, Rutland, Northamptonshire Archaeology Report **08/86**

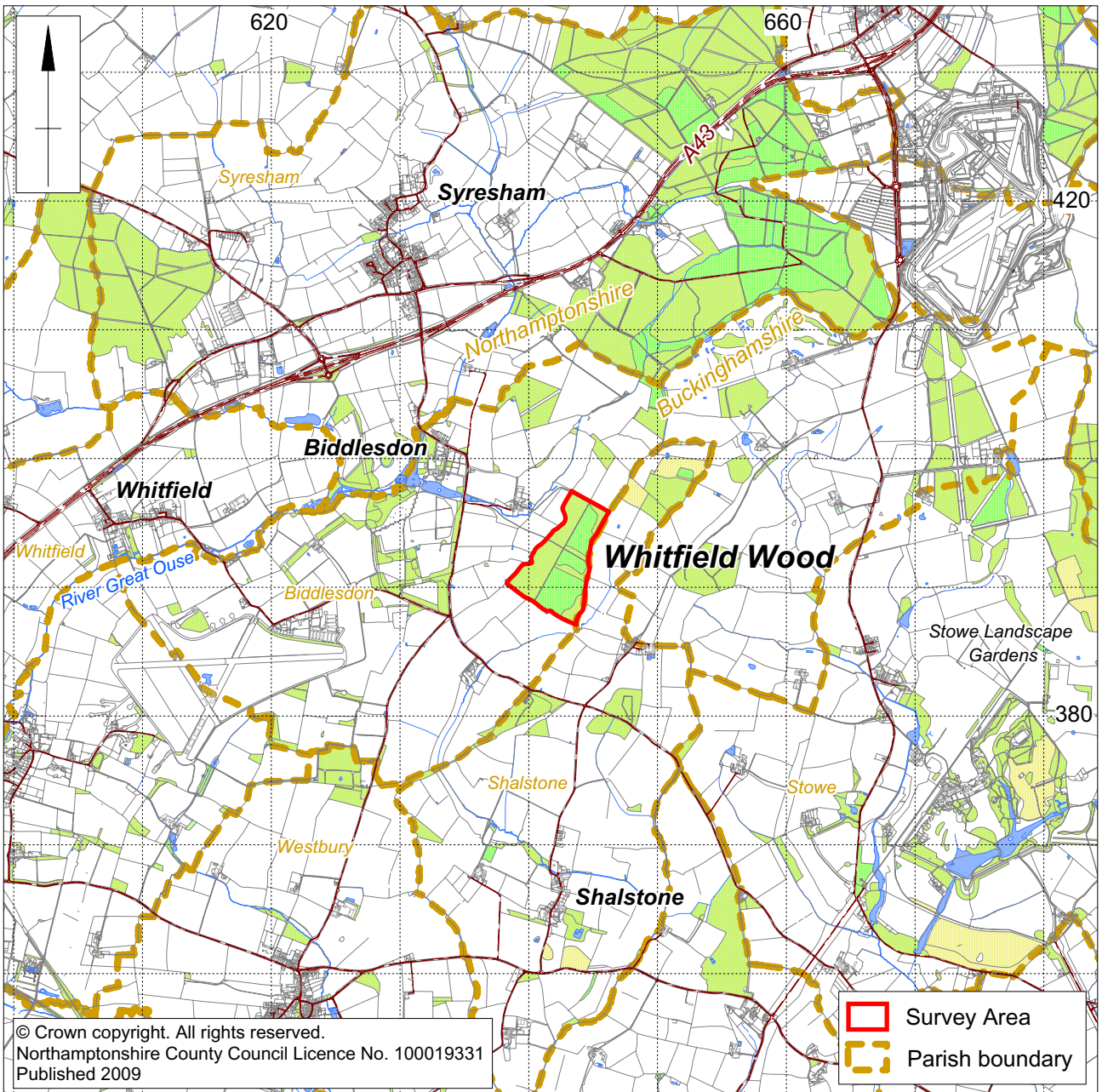
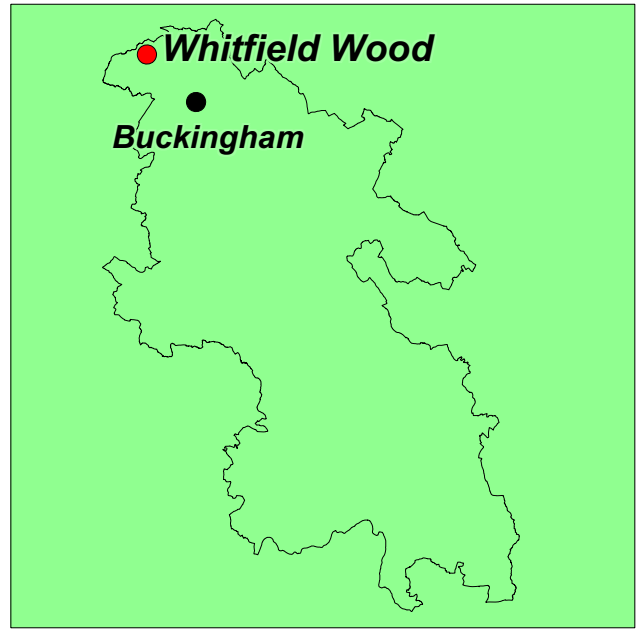
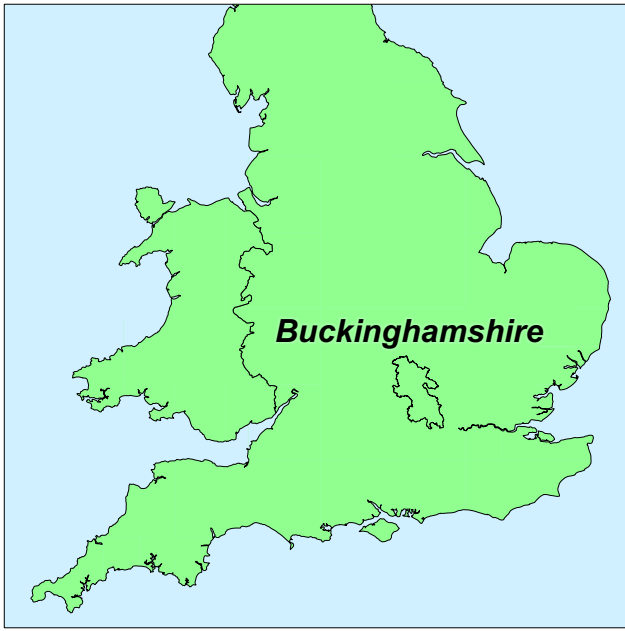
Websites

Archaeological Data Service (National Monuments Record data) www.ads.ahds.ac.uk

St John's College, Research Centre, Oxford <http://info.sjc.ox.ac.uk/forests>

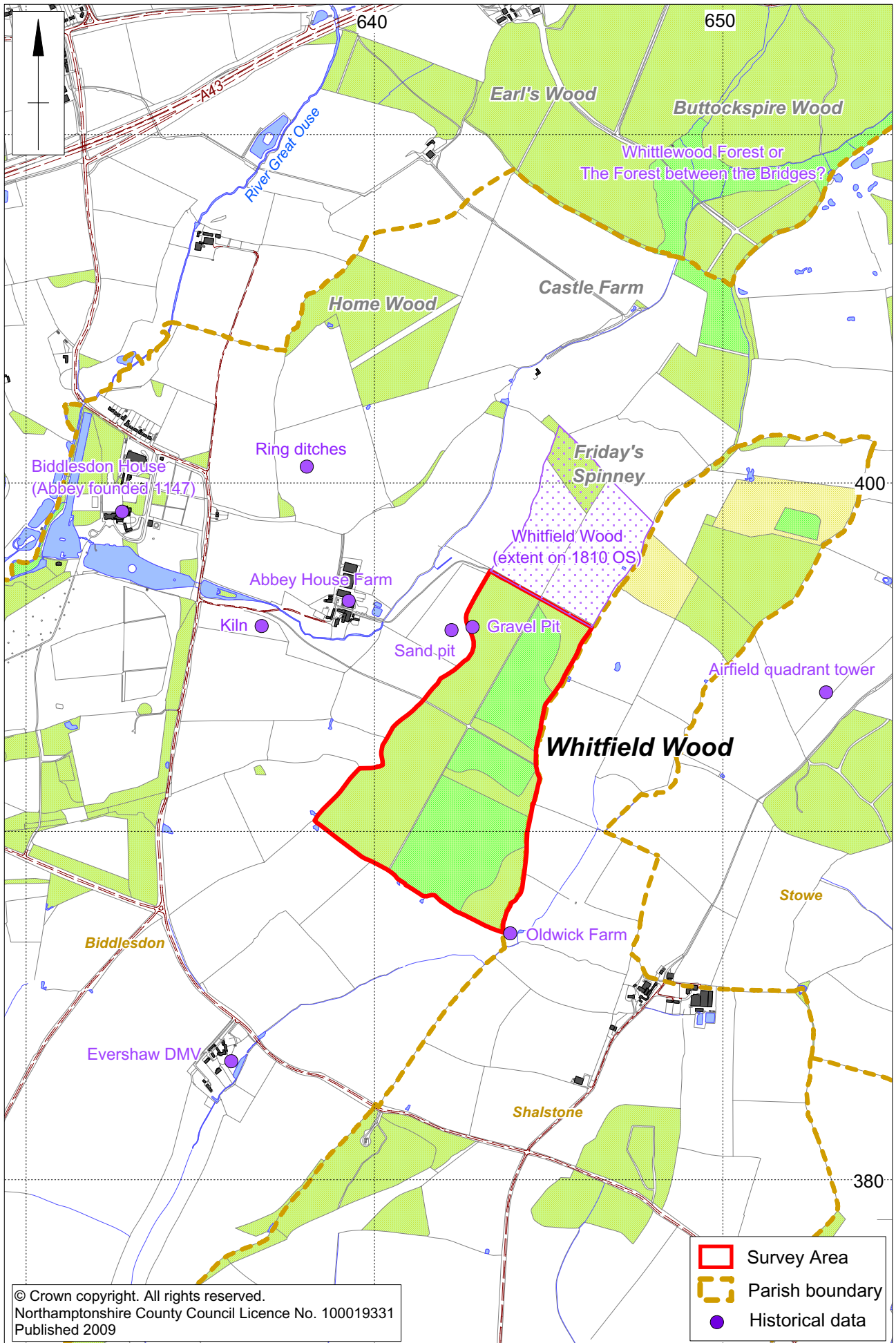
Northamptonshire Archaeology
A service of Northamptonshire County Council

30th January 2009



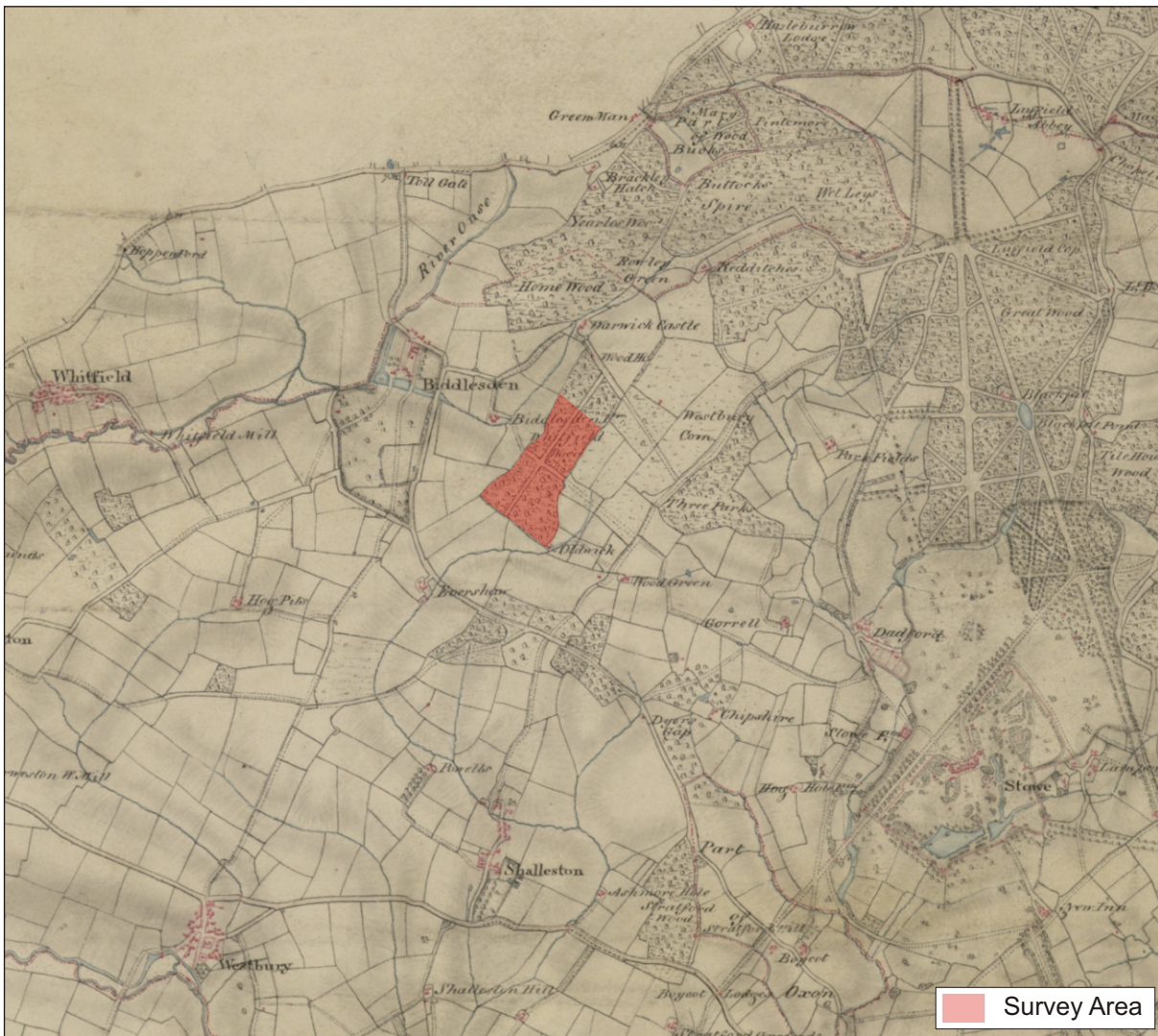
Scale 1:50,000

Site location Fig 1

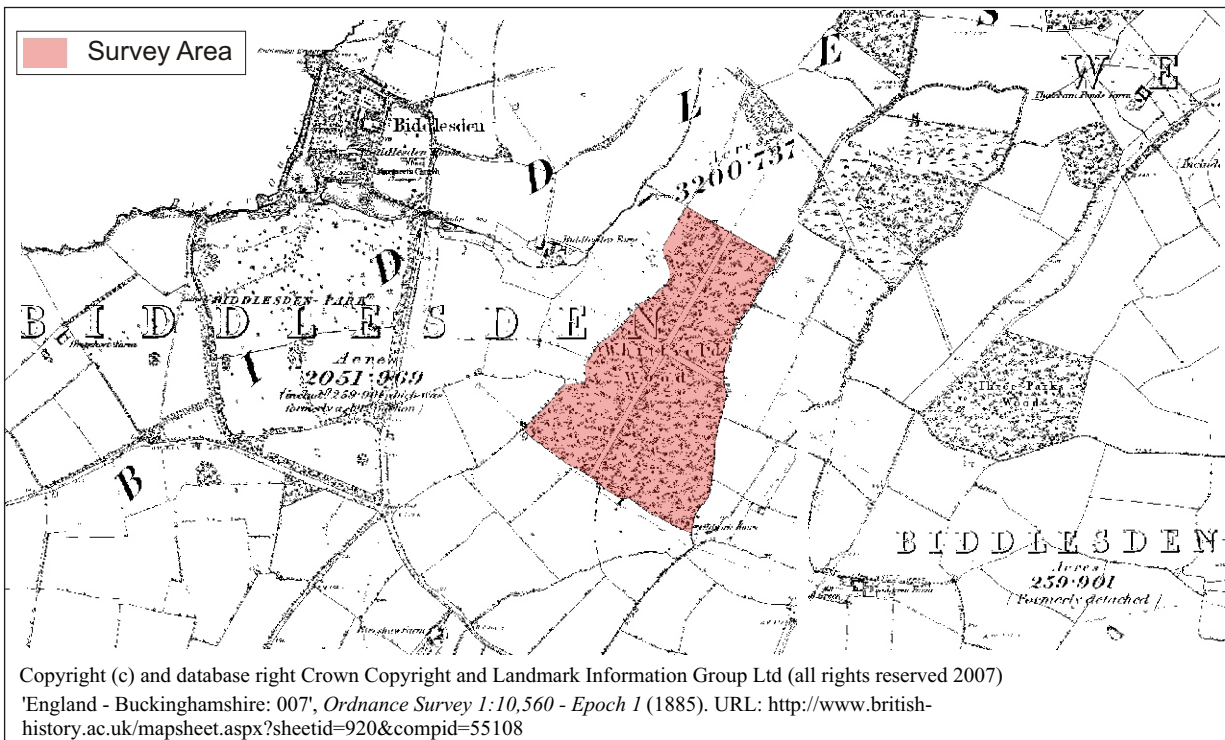


Scale 1:15,000

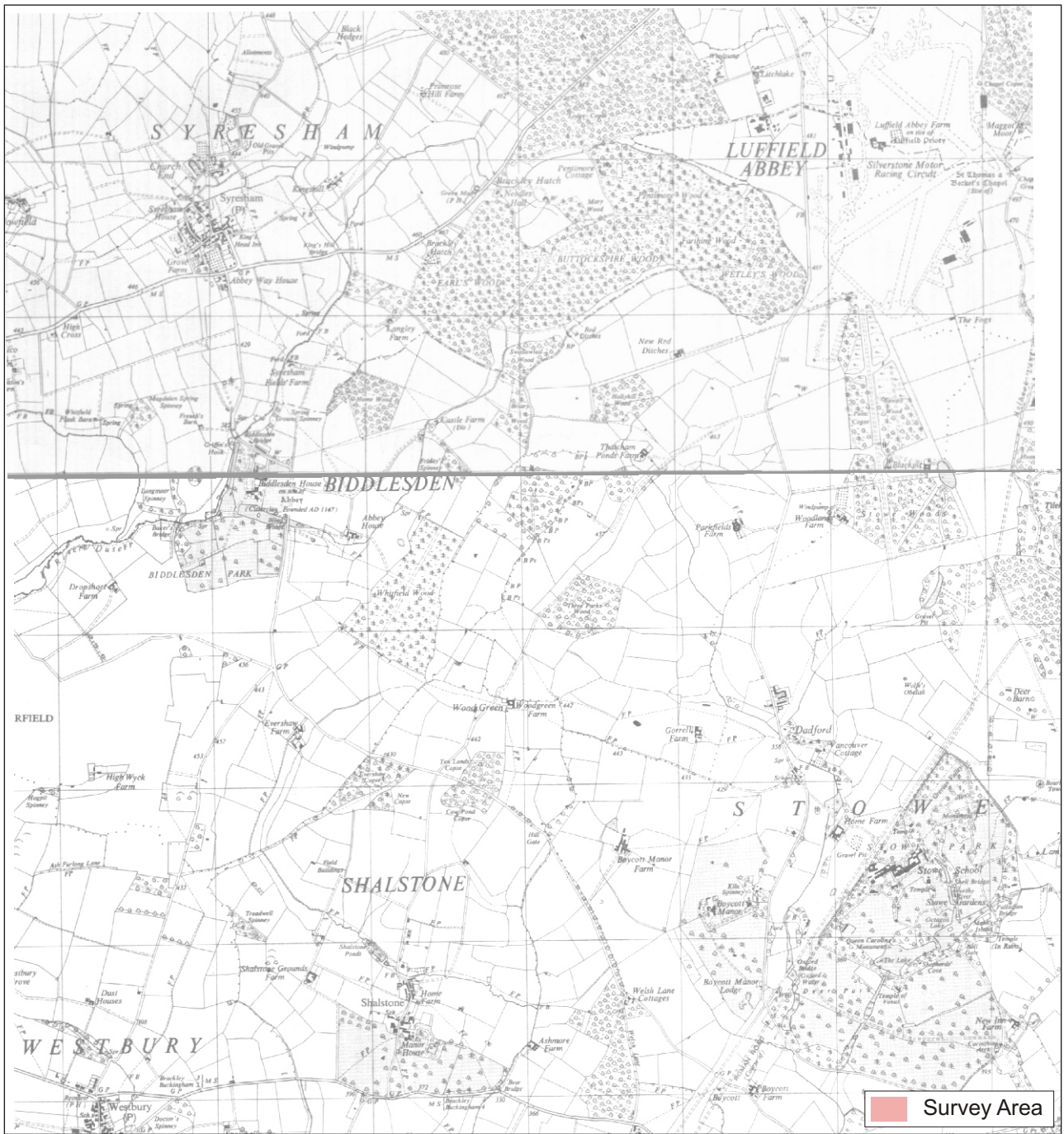
Historical data Fig 2



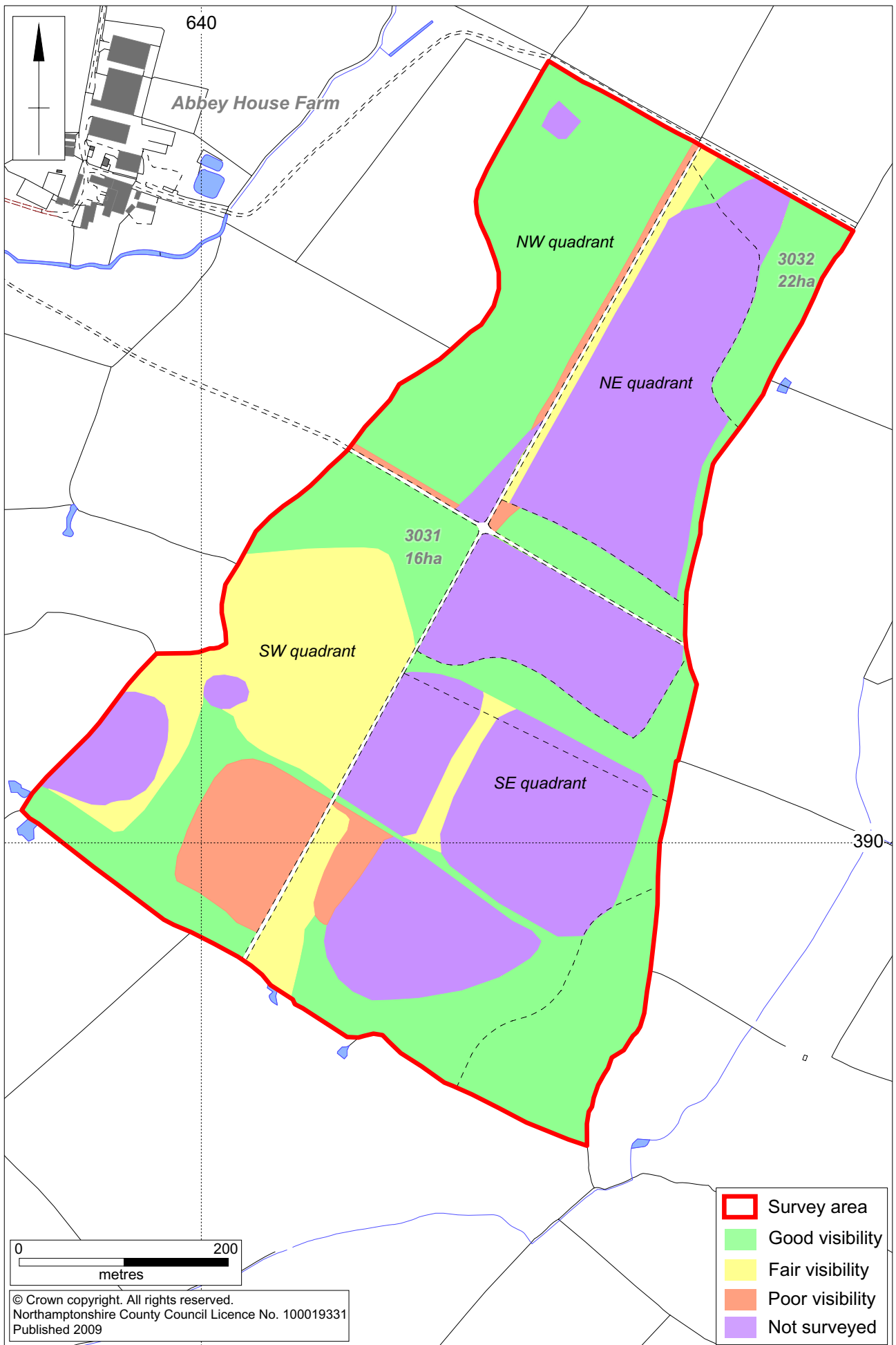
Detail of the 1810 Ordnance Surveyor's map Fig 3



Detail of 1st edition Ordnance Survey 1885, Buckinghamshire Fig 4



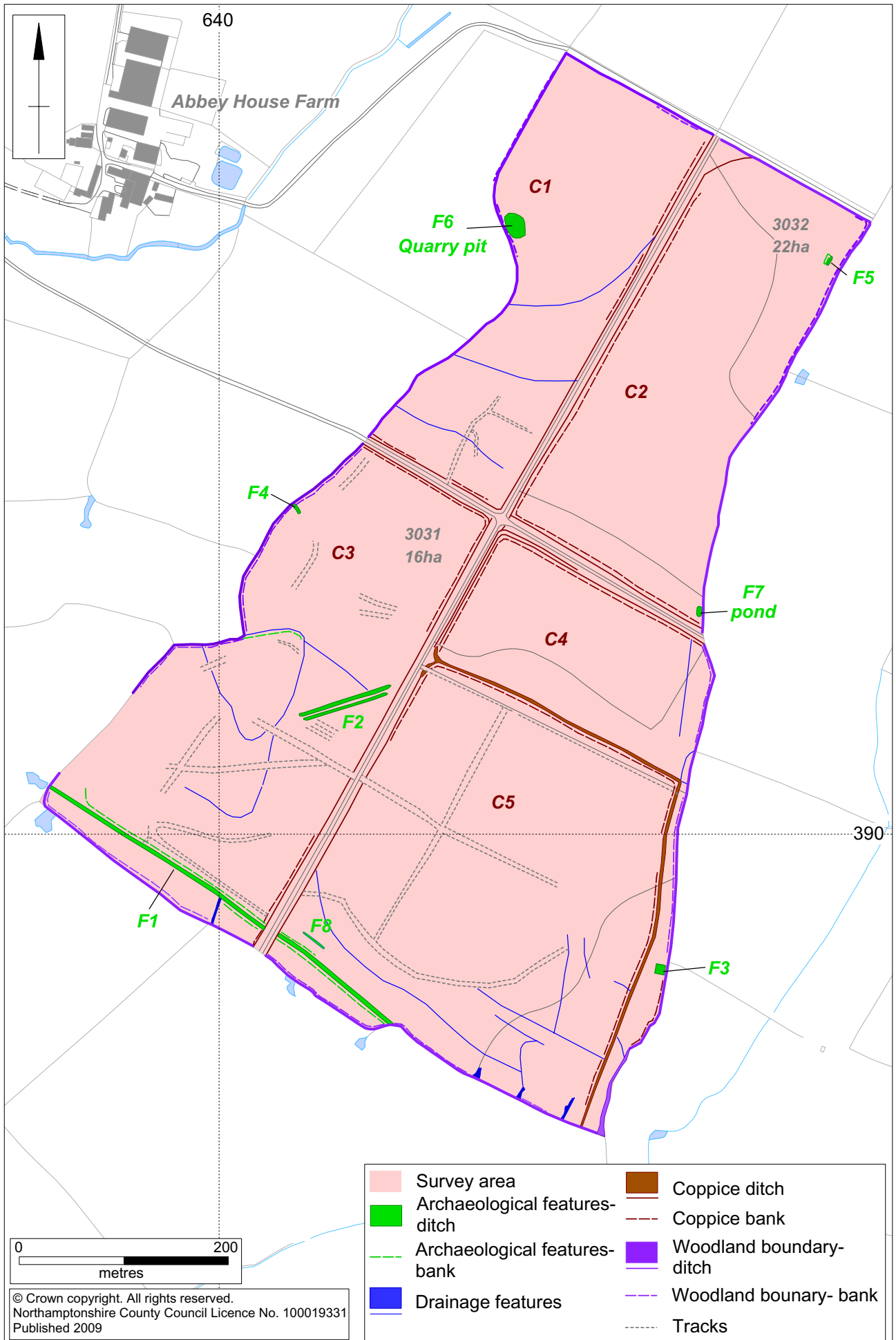
Detail of the 1950s edition Ordnance Survey Fig 5



© Crown copyright. All rights reserved.
 Northamptonshire County Council Licence No. 100019331
 Published 2009

Scale 1:5000

Survey visibility Fig 6



© Crown copyright. All rights reserved.
 Northamptonshire County Council Licence No. 100019331
 Published 2009

Scale 1:5000

Survey results Fig 7



Plate 1: Woodland boundary denoting parochial line between Biddleson and Shalstone, looking south



Plate 2: Feature 3, platform, looking east



Plate 3: Feature 3, platform, looking south-west



Plate 4: Feature 1, the earlier woodland bank and ditch



Plate 5: Feature 6, the quarry pit, looking north



Plate 6: Feature 7, woodland pond, looking north-east