



# Northamptonshire Archaeology

## Archaeological evaluation on land off Gray's Close, Paulerspury Northamptonshire



### **Northamptonshire Archaeology**

2 Bolton House  
Wootton Hall Park  
Northampton NN4 8BE  
t. 01604 700493 f. 01604 702822  
e. [sparry@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:sparry@northamptonshire.gov.uk)  
w. [www.northantsarchaeology.co.uk](http://www.northantsarchaeology.co.uk)



**Northamptonshire  
County Council**

Charlotte Walker

Report 10/187

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**STAFF**

Project manager: Anthony Maull Cert Ed  
Text: Charlotte Walker BSc AlfA  
Fieldwork: Christopher Jones, Peter Haynes  
Medieval pottery: Paul Blinkhorn BTech  
Animal bone: Karen Deighton MSc  
Charred plant remains: Karen Deighton  
Illustrations: Charlotte Walker

**QUALITY CONTROL**

	Print name	Signed	Date
Checked by	Pat Chapman		
Verified by	Anthony Maull		
Approved by	Andy Chapman		

**OASIS REPORT FORM 86083**

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>		
Project name	Archaeological evaluation on land off Gray's Close, Paulerspury, Northamptonshire	
Short description	Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by South Northamptonshire Council to undertake an archaeological trial trench excavation of land off Gray's Close, Paulerspury, Northamptonshire. There were three medieval ditches dating from the 11th to the mid-late 13th centuries. The ditches may relate to former property boundaries for buildings fronting onto Gray's Lane, which have been destroyed by modern development. The ditches were demonstrably earlier than a series of denuded ridge and furrow earthworks present on site, which probably date to the 14th century. The land probably went out of cultivation at some time in the 15th century when the land around the village was enclosed.	
Project type	Evaluation	
Site status	None	
Previous work	None	
Current Land use	Pasture	
Future work	Development for residential purposes	
Monument type/ period	Medieval ditches	
Significant finds		
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address	Land at Gray's Close, Paulerspury	
OS Easting & Northing	SP 7250 4565	
Area (ha or sq m)	0.43ha	
Height OD	c 120m aOD	
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)	
Project brief originator	Assistant Planning Archaeologist, Northamptonshire County Council	
Project Design originator	NA	
Director/Supervisor	Christopher Jones	
Project Manager	Anthony Maull	
Sponsor or funding body	South Northamptonshire Council	
<b>PROJECT DATE</b>		
Start date	November 2010	
End date	November 2010	
<b>ARCHIVES</b>	<b>Location (Accession no.)</b>	<b>Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)</b>
Physical		Pottery Bone
Paper	As above	Evaluation pro forma sheets, context sheets, colour slides, black and white contact prints, digital photographs, plans and section drawings
Digital	As above	Report text and figures

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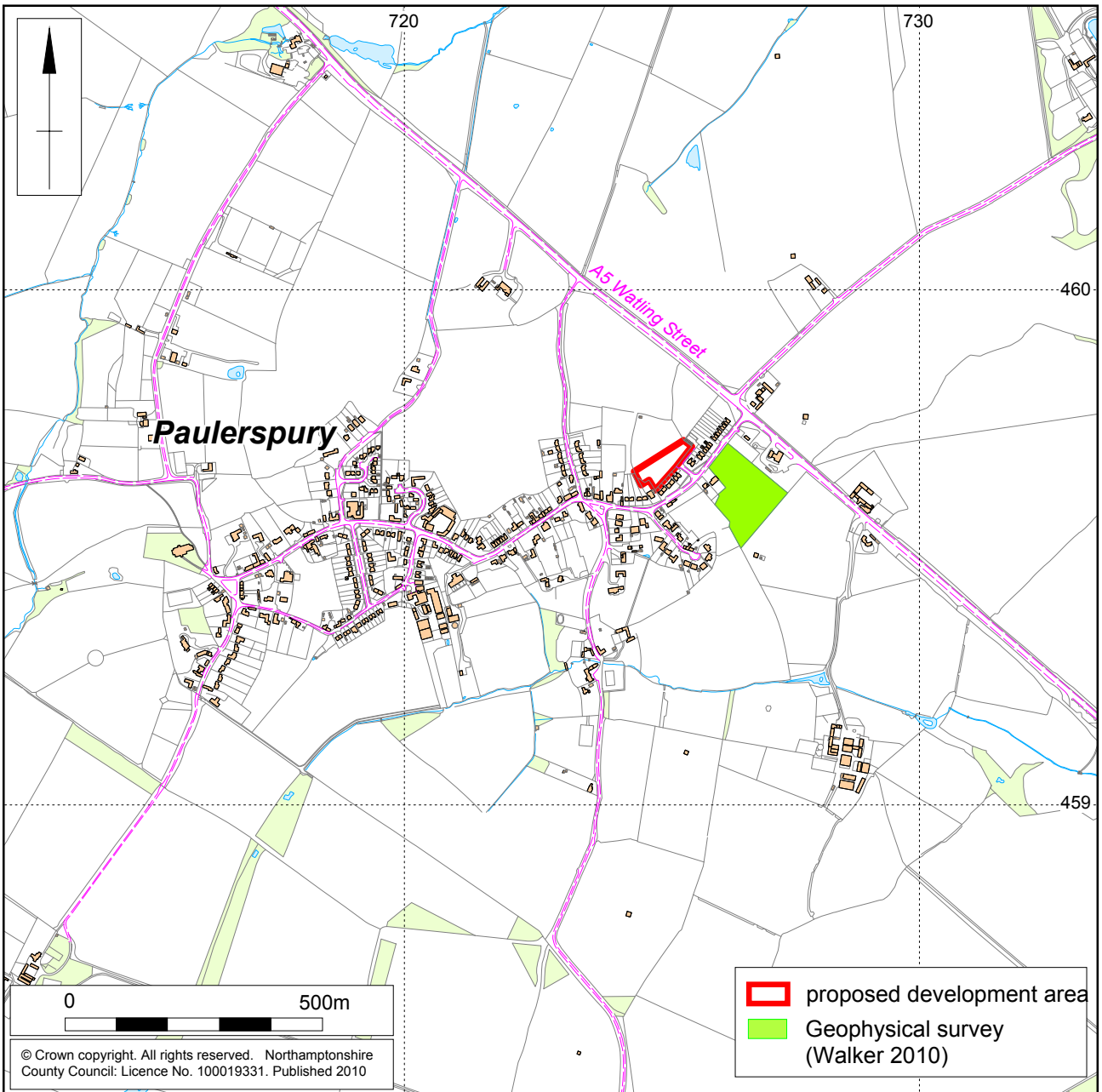
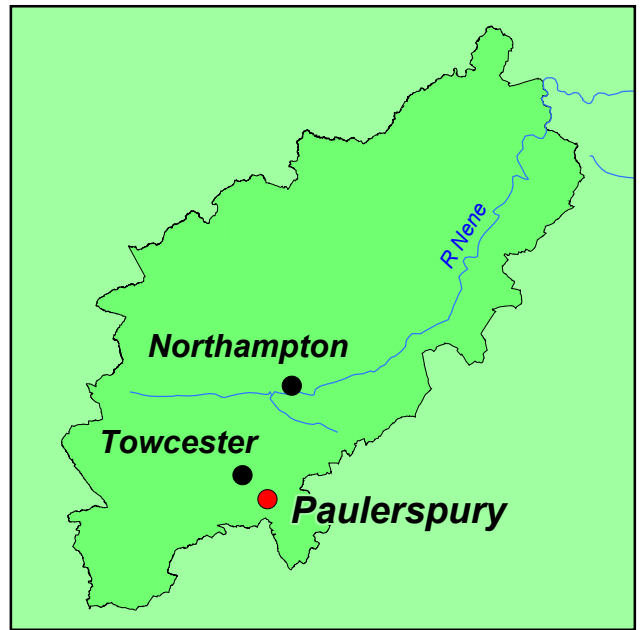
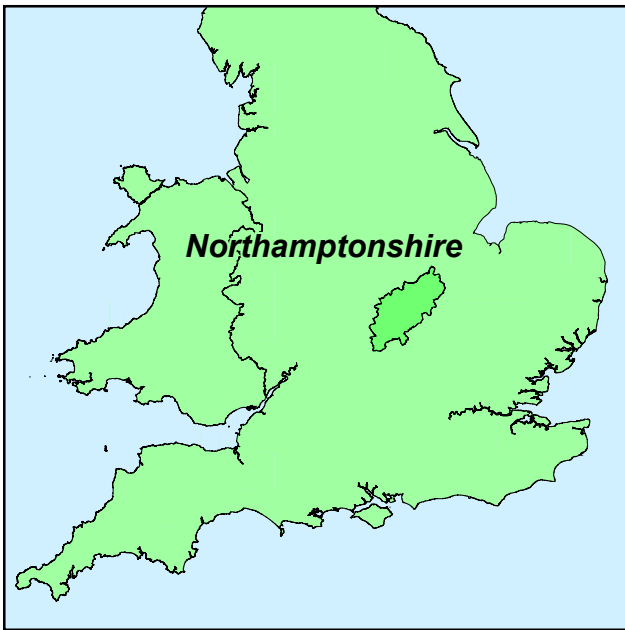
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Scale 1:12,500

Site location Fig 1

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION  
ON LAND OFF GRAYS CLOSE  
PAULERSPURY, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE  
NOVEMBER 2010**

**Abstract**

*Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by South Northamptonshire Council to undertake an archaeological trial trench excavation of land off Gray's Close, Paulerspury, Northamptonshire.*

*There were three medieval ditches, dating from the 11th to the mid-late 13th centuries. The ditches may relate to former property boundaries for buildings fronting onto Gray's Lane, which have been destroyed by modern development. The ditches were demonstrably earlier than a series of denuded ridge and furrow earthworks present on site, which probably date to the 14th century. The land probably went out of cultivation at some time in the 15th century when the land around the village was enclosed.*

**1 INTRODUCTION**

South Northamptonshire Council intend to submit a planning application for the construction of residential homes on land off Grays Close, Paulerspury, Northamptonshire (NGR SP 7250 4565; Fig 1).

The programme of archaeological investigation, as outlined in the WSI (NA 2010) issued by Northamptonshire Archaeology in response to a brief provided by the Assistant Planning Archaeologist for Northamptonshire County Council (NCC 2010), involved the excavation of five trenches across the development area. Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) was commissioned by South Northamptonshire Council, to undertake the archaeological trial excavation, the results of which are presented in this report.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the WSI (NA 2010) and *Management of Archaeological Projects* (EH 1991, appendix 4: assessment report specification), *The MoRPHE Project Managers' Guide* (EH 2006) and the appropriate national standards and guidelines, as recommended by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA).

**2 BACKGROUND**

**2.1 Location, topography and geology**

The site lies on the north-eastern side of the village of Paulerspury, Northamptonshire, c300m west of the A5 Watling Street and 4km south-east of Towcester. It lies east of Tews End and north of Plumpton End. It is bounded to the west, south and east by residential properties and to the north by open fields (Fig 2). The entire parcel of land is situated on level ground and is approximately 0.43ha in extent. The underlying geology is Upper Estuarine clays and Great Oolite Limestone overlain by Boulder Clays (CgMs 2010).



The site prior to excavation, looking south-west Fig 2

## 2.2 Archaeological and historical background

There are few known archaeological features or artefacts in the vicinity of the site, although it can be argued that this is more a reflection of a lack of investigation than anything else. The following is taken from a desk-based assessment by CgMs Consulting for a separate site to the south of Grays' Lane (Flitcroft 2010). A single Mesolithic tool has been found in the village, but there is no other evidence of early prehistoric activity in the vicinity. However, a number of later prehistoric, Iron Age sites are known to the north-west and south of the parish.

The development area lies close to the major Roman road, Watling Street, which is largely followed by the A5, and is located 4km south-west of the Roman town of Towcester (*Lactodorum*). At least five separate areas of Roman settlement have been identified within the parish including two sites containing stone buildings. A possible location of the final mid 1st century battle of the Boudiccan revolt is also thought to lie at Cuttle Mill, c1.1km to the north-west. Closer to the site a Roman coin was found c250m to the south.

Although there is little in the way of Saxon evidence within the parish, a possible Saxon cemetery has been identified at Pury End some 1.7km west of the present site.

The Northamptonshire County Historic Environment Record (NHER) also records the discovery of an Anglo-Saxon pennanular brooch dated to the c6th century close to the A5 and east of the current site.

Paulerspury is first mentioned in the Domesday Book although it has Saxon origins (Hall 1974). The settlement pattern of Paulerspury cannot easily be classified since it had more than one main plan element and settlements of this type are defined as polyfocal (Lewis *et al* 1997). The parish included the hamlet of Heathencote and Paulerspury itself was

divided into Plumpton End, Tews End, Church End and Pury End, although Pury End is detached from the other three. Plumpton is discussed by Bridges and Baker as a separate hamlet and, although it is mentioned by 1211, there is no evidence that it ever had an independent field system (ibid). Paulerspury was one of nine 'out-towns' of Whittlewood and as such its residents were entitled to common of pasture from the period 23 April until 25 September each year and only cattle and horses were commonable (Jones and Page 2006). This use of the common pasture was traditionally claimed as recompense for the unhindered access deer were allowed to their own land.

Although Paulerspury had three fields until enclosure in 1819, the draft inclosure map of the same year shows areas of ancient inclosure adjacent to the village and the development site lies within these. This inclosure is thought to date from the 15th century when a decrease in population released pressure on ploughland (Hall 1974). The NHER shows the presence of denuded medieval ridge and furrow earthworks on the site relating to cultivation of the land prior to inclosure. The earthworks are aligned north to south curving gently to the south-east in the southern part of the field (RCHME 1982, 111-117). On the land to the south-east of the site, fronting Grays Lane, there were formerly at least two house-sites separated from the ridge and furrow by a ditch; these have now been destroyed by modern housing.

Geophysical survey, undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology on a field to the south of Gray's Lane, revealed three linear features that may be former ditches, as well as faint traces of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation (Walker 2010).

### **3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Objectives**

The general objectives of the overall evaluation were set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation (NA 2010):

- To establish the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation on the development site
- To recover artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region
- To recover palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions

Other aims comprised:

- To define any potential constraints for further archaeological fieldwork including areas of disturbance, service locations etc
- To inform research and conservation issues including the need for further fieldwork or preservation *in situ*.

Specific research objectives will be based on the research frameworks set out in Cooper (ed) (2006). The following broad themes may be addressed:



**Roman** (Taylor 2006)

- Chronology
- The late Iron Age landscape and the strategy and consequences of conquest
- Rural settlement, landscape and society
- Artefact production, exchange and consumption
- Ritual, religion and identity

**Medieval and post-medieval** (Lewis 2006)

- Chronology
- Rural settlement, dispersed settlement elements and development
- Fields, survival, dating and origins.

**3.2 Methodology**

The works were conducted in accordance with the WSI (NA 2010), *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA1994, revised 2008) and the *Code of Conduct of the Institute for Archaeologists* (IfA1985, revised 2010).

Five trenches, of which three measured 10m (Trenches 2, 3 and 4) and two 20m (Trenches 1 and 5), were machine-excavated using a 2m wide toothless ditching bucket. The trenches were positioned in accordance with the trench location plan approved by Assistant Archaeological Advisor to Northamptonshire County Council, although Trench 1 was shifted slightly to the west to avoid a water pipe, and have been related to Ordnance Survey National Grid (Fig 3). The work was monitored by the Assistant Archaeological Advisor.

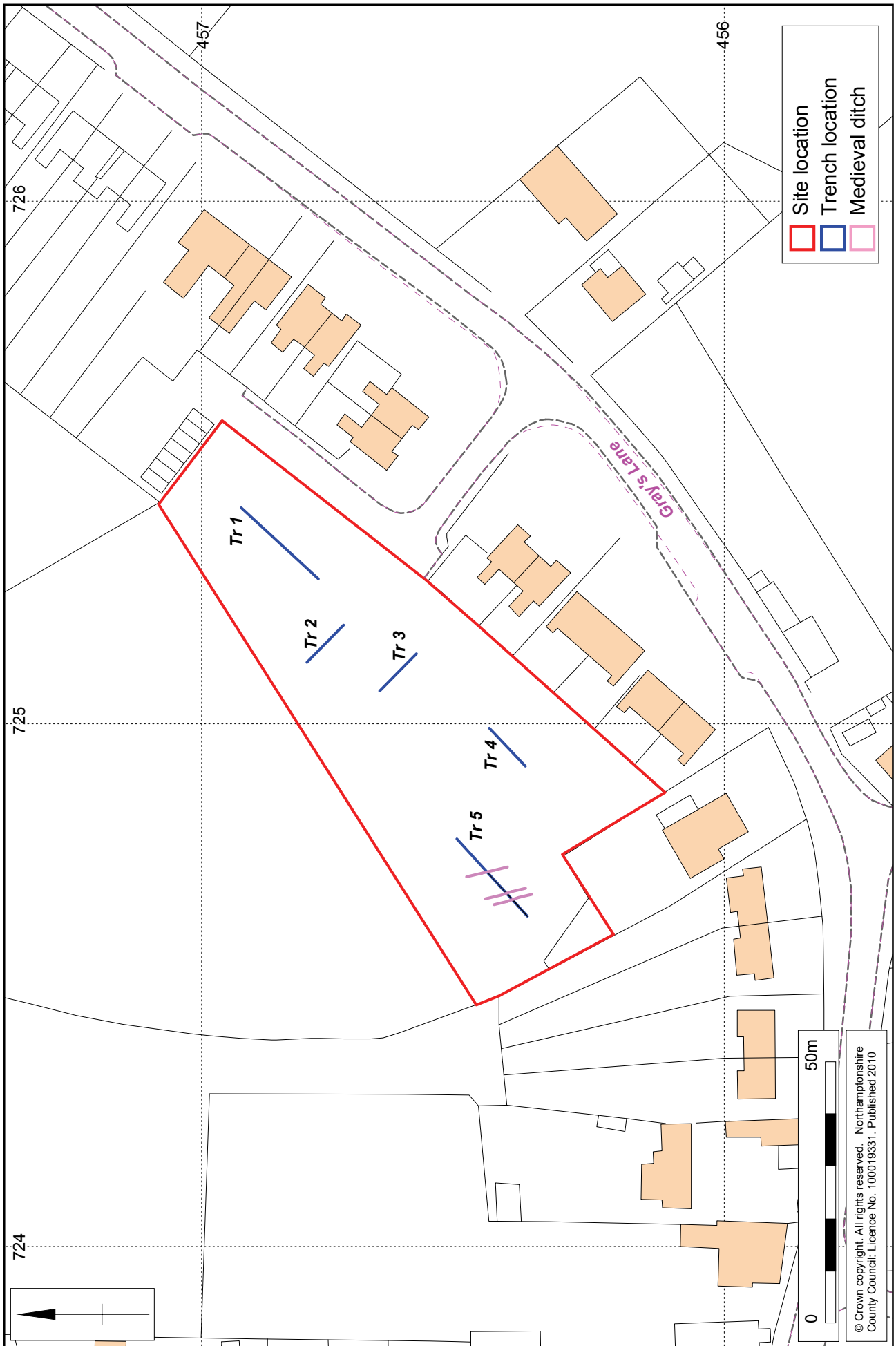
The topsoil, subsoil and non-structural post-medieval and later deposits were removed to reveal archaeological remains or where absent the natural. The topsoil was stacked separately from the subsoil and other deposits. The trenches were cleaned sufficiently to enable the identification of any features.

All deposits encountered during the course of the excavation were given a separate context number and fully recorded. Recording followed standard Northamptonshire Archaeology procedures. Deposits were described on pro-forma context sheets to include details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds. A brief summary of the contexts can be seen in Appendix 1.

The trenches were planned at a scale of 1:50. Sections of the sequence of deposits in each trench were drawn at a scale of 1:10 and related to Ordnance Datum. Archaeological artefacts were recovered from the surface and excavated deposits. Deposits suitable for environmental assessment were encountered and sampled. The excavated area and spoil heaps were scanned visually and with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval.

A full photographic record comprising both 35mm black and white negatives and colour transparencies was maintained, supplemented with digital images. On completion of archaeological recording the trenches were backfilled. There was no requirement for specialist re-instatement.

The field data was compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing.



1:1000

Trench layout plan Fig 3

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#### 4 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The trenches were positioned to provide full coverage of the area, based on a 3% sample of the total area. There were no archaeological features in Trenches 1 to 4. In all five trenches the clay natural was overlain by subsoil up to 0.29m thick, comprising firm, mid brown clay. The topsoil was a friable mid brown silty loam, up to 0.45m thick. Few inclusions were noted in either the subsoil or the topsoil.

In Trench 5, there were three parallel north-east to south-west aligned ditches [504], [506] and [508] (Fig 6). Ditch [504] was 1.45m wide and 0.35m deep with steeply sloping sides and a wide flat base (Fig 7, section 2). The fill was composed of firm light grey silty clay with large amounts of charcoal. A single sherd of St Neots Ware pottery dated to the 11th century.



Ditch [504], looking north-west Fig 4

Ditch [506] was 0.60m wide and 0.30m deep and had a wide U-shaped profile (Figs 5 and 7, section 1). The fill comprised friable mid-dark blue grey clay silt with occasional small stones and moderate charcoal flecks. A single sherd of pottery is dated to the 12th century.

The ditch was truncated on its western edge by ditch [508], which was 1.98m wide and 0.70m deep, with fairly steep edges and a wide flat base (Figs 5 and 7, section 1). The primary fill of the ditch was friable dark black-grey clay silt with occasional small stones and charcoal flecks (511). The uneven deposition of the fill suggests it was derived from the south-western side of the ditch. The secondary fill was firm light brown-yellow clay with occasional small stones and chalky inclusions. The uppermost fill of the ditch was friable dark grey-brown silty clay. Eleven sherds of pottery from the fill dated to the mid

13th century, suggesting it was finally backfilled at around this time. It was probably excavated at around the same time as the previous two ditches.

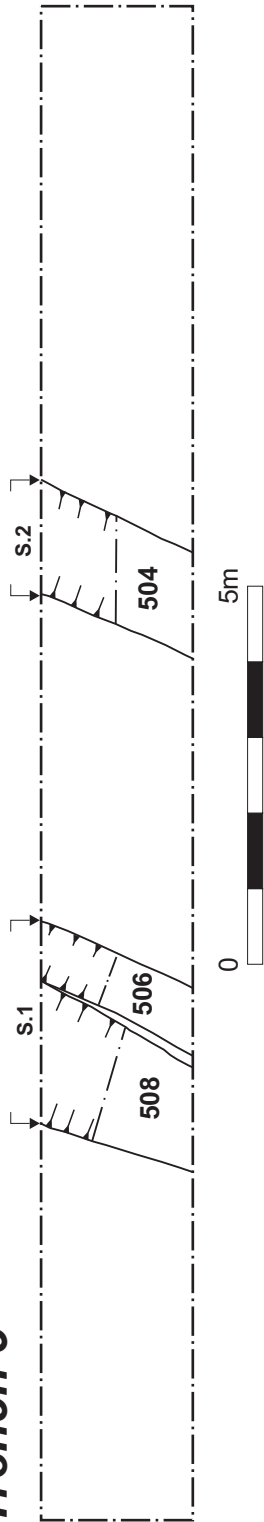
The ditches were sealed by the subsoil and were demonstrably earlier than the ridge and furrow earthworks, which appeared to be cut through the topsoil only; there was no evidence that they had cut through the subsoil.



Trench 5, ditches 506 and 508, looking north-west Fig 5

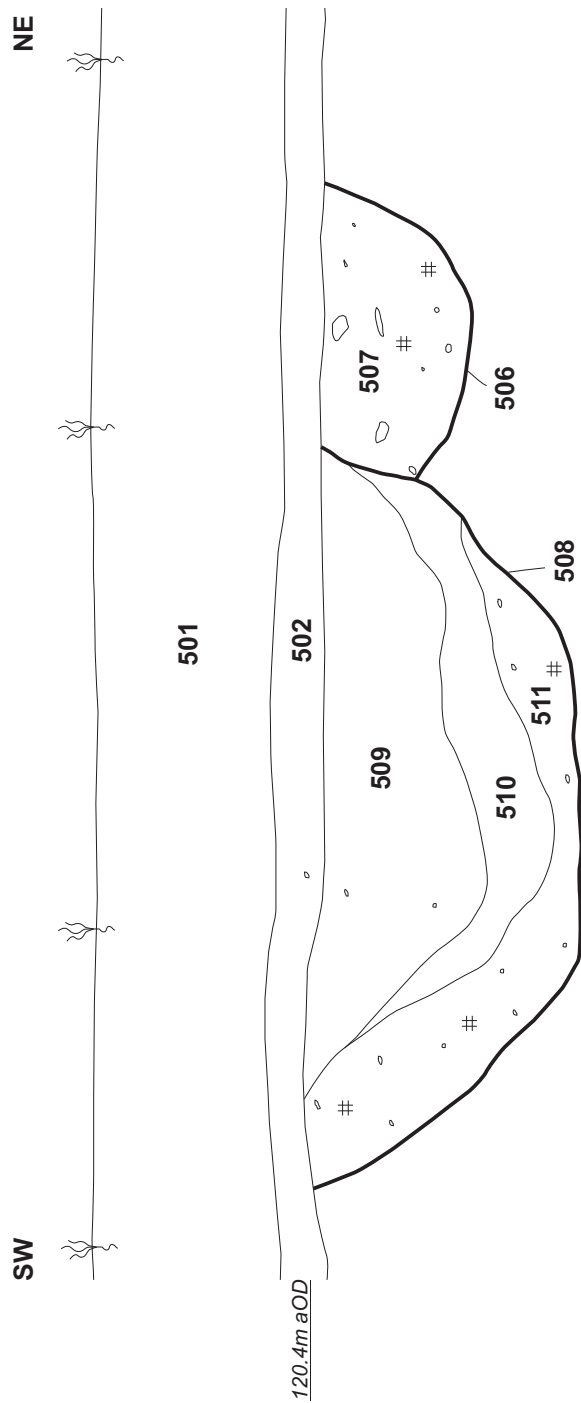
The ditches may have been boundaries for properties that fronted onto Gray's Lane, possibly those that were formerly present as earthworks. It appears that this land was then taken into cultivation probably by the late 13th century.

# Trench 5

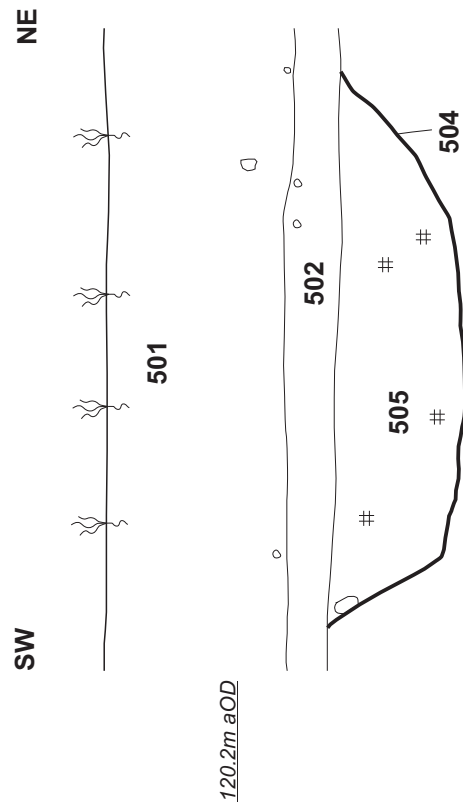


Trench 5, looking north-east

**Section 1, Trench 5**



**Section 2, Trench 5**



# charcoal



## 5 THE MEDIEVAL POTTERY by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 14 sherds with a total weight of 75g. It was quantified using the chronology and coding system of the Northamptonshire County Ceramic Type-Series (CTS), as follows:

- F200: T1 (2) type St Neots Ware, AD1000-1200. 1 sherd, 11g.  
 F303: Sandy Coarseware, AD1100-1400. 4 sherds, 10g.  
 F330: Shelly Coarseware, AD1100-1400. 4 sherds, 20g.  
 F329: Potterspurty Ware, AD1275-1600. 4 sherds, 34g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The range of fabric types is typical of this area of the county, and indicates that there was activity at the site from the 11th-mid/late 13th or early 14th centuries. The entire assemblage comprised bodysherds apart from a single jug rim in F330 from context [509]. Such vessels are usually 12th-13th century in date.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Context	Feature	F200		F330		F303		F329		Date
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
505	Ditch [504]	1	11							11thC
507	Ditch [506]			1	2					12thC
509	Ditch [508]			3	18	4	10	4	34	M13thC
<b>Total</b>		1	11	4	20	4	10	4	34	

## 6 THE FAUNAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

### 6.1 Animal bone by Karen Deighton

A total of 241 grams of animal bone was collected by hand from two contexts during the course of excavation. Identifications and observations were made as follows:

**Context 505:** An unfused cattle femur which showed evidence of canid gnawing around the proximal epiphysis and knife marks consistent with filleting along the anterior distal shaft.

**Context 509:** A fragment of sheep/goat/roe deer pubis bone (pelvis) with evidence of canid gnawing at the proximal end.

In conclusion the bone adds little to the understanding of the site other than to say cattle were possibly utilised there.

### 6.2 Charred plant remains by Karen Deighton

A total of three samples were collected by hand from a range of contexts during the course of excavation. This material was processed and assessed to determine the presence, preservation and nature of any ecofacts and to inform on further sampling strategies.

The samples were processed using a modified siraf tank fitted with a 250micron mesh and flot sieve. The resulting flots and residues were dried. The flots were then sorted with the aid of a stereoscopic microscope (10x magnification) and residues were scanned. Any charred plant remains were identified with the aid of the author's small reference collection and Jacomet 1996. Mollusc identifications were made with the aid of Glöer and Meier-Brook (2003) and Kerney and Cameron (1994).

### Results

Preservation was solely by charring, fragmentation was low and surface abrasion was moderate.

### Taxonomic distribution

Table 2: Ecofacts by context

Cut/fill	504/505	508/509	506/507
Sample	1	2	3
Feature type	ditch	ditch	ditch
Date	Medieval	Medieval	Medieval
Volume (litres)	40	40	40
Charcoal	50	50	50
Breadwheat ( <i>T.aestivum</i> )		2	12
Naked barley ( <i>H.vulgare</i> var <i>nudum</i> )		1	11
Wheat/barley ( <i>Triticum</i> / <i>Hordeum</i> )			45
Cereal	3	3	41
Pulse			2
Speedwell( <i>Veronica</i> sp)			1
indet			1
Molluscs			
<i>Cochlicopa lubricella</i>			2
<i>Discus rotundatus</i>		1	
<i>Vallonia</i> sp		2	1
Indeterminate		9	3

### Discussion

The small amount of charred cereal grains and weed seeds suggests the samples to represent background deposition; that is material washed or blown into features from activities taking place elsewhere. The presence of naked barley and breadwheat are expected for the medieval period. Identifiable molluscs are too few in number to provide any reliable information regarding the palaeoenvironment.

### Potential

Well preserved and identifiable ecofacts were recovered from all samples, their presence and reasonable level of preservation suggests that further sampling should not be ruled out should any further excavation take place. The fact that well-preserved identifiable ecofacts are present indicates that further sampling of suitable contexts could result in the recovery of material that could aid in the understanding of the site.

## 7 DISCUSSION

The trial trenching at Paulerspury has succeeded in identifying an area of medieval activity towards the western edge of the development area. Although not in themselves indicative of settlement activity, the ditches may have been associated with medieval settlement directly to the south, defined by earthwork evidence which was visible prior to modern development along Gray's Lane. The ditches may have been in use from the



11th century until the late 13th century, when pressure for increased ploughland in the township forced the residents to encroach on former closes.

By the 15th century the population had contracted and such large areas of ploughland were not required. Many of these areas of former ploughland adjacent to the village homesteads and farms were subsequently enclosed during this period and the ridge and furrow earthworks were preserved in the landscape.

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**Appendix 1: Context inventory**

<b>Trench</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Context type Feature &amp; type</b>	<b>Description/ dimensions</b>	<b>Artefacts/ Samples</b>
1	101	Topsoil	Friable mid brown silty loam, quite sterile, very occasional small stones 0.30m thick	—
	102	Subsoil	Firm, mid brown clay, occasional small pebbles and charcoal flecks 0.23-0.29m thick	—
	103	Natural	Firm, mid-light yellow-brown-orange clay, occasional chalk inclusions	—
2	201	Topsoil	Same as [101] 0.28-0.45m thick	—
	202	Subsoil	Same as [102] 0.15m thick	—
	203	Natural	Same as [103]	—
3	301	Topsoil	Same as [101] 0.24-0.33m thick	—
	302	Subsoil	Same as [102] 0.12-0.20m thick	—
	303	Natural	Same as [103]	—
4	401	Topsoil	Same as [101] 0.35m thick	—
	402	Subsoil	Same as [102] 0.24m thick	—
	403	Natural	Same as [103]	—
5	501	Topsoil	Same as [101] 0.30-0.45m thick	—
	502	Subsoil	Same as [102] 0.12-0.20m thick	—
	503	Natural	Same as [103]	—
	504	Ditch Fill 505	Steeply sloping sides and a wide, flat base 1.45m wide and 0.35m deep	—
	505	Fill Ditch [505]	Firm light grey silty clay with 20% charcoal flecks and occasional flint and stone chips	Medieval pot, animal bone Sample 1

<b>Trench</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Context type Feature &amp; type</b>	<b>Description/ dimensions</b>	<b>Artefacts/ Samples</b>
	506	Ditch Fill 507	Wide U-shape, cut to west by ditch [508] 0.60m wide and 0.30m deep	—
	507	Fill Ditch [506]	Friable mid-dark blue-grey clay silt with occasional small stones, moderate charcoal flecks	Medieval pot Sample 3
	508	Ditch Fill 509, 510, 511	Steeply sloping sides and a wide, flat base 1.98m wide and 0.70m deep	—
	509	Fill (upper) Ditch [508]	Friable dark grey-brown silty clay with rare small stones and charcoal flecks 0.42m thick	Medieval pottery Sample 2
	510	Fill (secondary) Ditch [508]	Firm light brown-yellow clay with occasional small stones and chalky inclusions 0.20m thick	—
	511	Fill (primary) Ditch [508]	Friable dark black-grey clay silt with occasional small stones and charcoal flecks 0.08m thick	—



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2 Bolton House  
Wootton Hall Park  
Northampton NN4 8BE

t. 01604 700493 f. 01604 702822

e. [sparry@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:sparry@northamptonshire.gov.uk)

w. [www.northantsarchaeology.co.uk](http://www.northantsarchaeology.co.uk)



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