

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
ON LAND AT THE OLD HALL,  
ASHWELL,  
RUTLAND  
(ATOH07)  
*PHASE 3***

**Work Undertaken For  
Ancaster Properties Limited**

December 2007

Report Compiled by  
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT SERVICES**



APS Report No. **149/07**



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## 1. SUMMARY

*A watching brief was undertaken during groundworks at The Old Hall, Ashwell, Rutland. The watching brief monitored the excavation of 36 tree planting pits.*

*The monitoring was required as the site lay within the area of a scheduled monument comprising the remains of a medieval settlement, watermill, millponds and gardens. The groundworks monitored during Phase 3 were adjacent to an area of the earthworks thought to be the remains of garden terraces, along the line of the present eastern boundary.*

*The watching brief identified a sequence of natural, subsoil and topsoil deposits across the site. Variations in the subsoil thickness may indicate the presence of a feature and also implies truncation occurring at the site. No artefacts were retrieved during the watching brief.*

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Definition of a Watching Brief

An archaeological watching brief is defined as “*a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed.*” (IFA 1999).

### 2.2 Planning Background

Archaeological Project Services was commissioned by Ancaster Properties Limited to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks on land at The Old Hall, Ashwell, Rutland.

The groundworks impacted on part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument (County No

30263) and required scheduled monument consent. Consent was granted by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport based on the advice of English Heritage.

The first phase of the watching brief was carried out between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April 2007 and has previously been reported on (Mellor 2007). The second phase was undertaken on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2007 and has been reported on (Cope-Faulkner 2007). The third phase was carried out on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2007 and is the subject of this report (Figs. 2 and 3).

### 2.3 Topography and Geology

Ashwell is located 5km north of Oakham and 12km southeast of Melton Mowbray in the county of Rutland (Fig. 1).

The site lies 130m north of the village centre as defined by the parish church of St Mary at National Grid Reference SK 865 138 (Fig. 2). The site is on the north side of Cottesmore Road at a height of c. 105m OD on the north-facing slope of a minor valley.

Soils at the west of the area are of the Wickham 2 Association, fine silty over clayey soils and clayey soils, with ferritic brown earths of the Banbury Association to the east (Hodge *et al.* 1984). These soils are developed over the junction of the Jurassic Middle Lias Marlstone Rock bed and silts and clays (BGS 1978).

### 2.4 Archaeological Setting

Ashwell is first mentioned in the Domesday Survey of c.1086. Referred to as *Exewelle* the name derives from the Old English and means ‘ash stream’ (Ekwall 1974, 16). At the time of the Domesday Survey the land was held by Earl Hugh and contained 16 acres of meadow (Thorn 1980).

Extant remains of the medieval period comprise the church of St Mary, the

earliest elements of which date to *c.* 1200 (Pevsner 1992, 452).

The watching brief lies within an area of earthwork remains comprising medieval settlement, water mill, mill ponds and gardens at the Old Hall, this area being designated a scheduled monument (No 30263). The remains also include house platforms, hollow ways and trackways and agricultural enclosures. Further to the north is an extensive area of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation.

The neo-Elizabethan mansion of Ashwell Hall was built in 1879. The hall is of stone with a large gabled stable court and bell spire at the back. (Pevsner 1992, 453).

### 3. AIMS

The requirements of the watching brief were to locate and record archaeological deposits and, if present, to determine their date, function and origin.

### 4. METHODS

Tree planting pits were excavated by machine to depths required by the programme of planting. Following excavation, the sides of the trenches were examined for archaeological deposits. Thirty-six tree pits were excavated, none of which contained obvious archaeological remains. A representative sample of these pits was recorded as Trenches 50, 51, 52 and 53 (Fig. 3).

Each deposit was allocated a unique reference number (context number) with an individual written description. A list of all contexts and their descriptions appears as Appendix 1. A photographic record was compiled and sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10. Recording was undertaken according to standard Archaeological Project Services practice.

Following excavation the records were checked and a stratigraphic matrix produced. Phasing was assigned based on the nature of the deposits and recognisable relationships between them.

## 5. RESULTS

Archaeological contexts are listed below and described in trench order. The numbers in brackets are the context numbers assigned in the field. Trench and context numbers are continued from prior phases.

### Trench 50 (Figs. 4 and 5, Plate 2)

The earliest deposit uncovered within Trench 50 was (032), a firm/plastic yellow brown clay. This was the natural horizon and was sealed by subsoil deposit (031), a friable brown grey sandy, clayey silt with occasional cobbles and small rounded pebbles, 0.32m thick. Topsoil deposit, (030), a friable dark grey sandy clayey silty with moderate inclusions of irregularly shaped stones, 0.15m thick, sealed the area.

### Trench 51 (Figs. 4 and 5, Plate 3)

The natural horizon encountered within Trench 51 was (035), a firm/plastic yellow brown clay. A possible subsoil (034), a friable grey brown sandy clay with moderate-small irregular stones, 0.54m thick, sealed (035). Overlying the area was topsoil (033), a friable dark grey sandy clayey silt with moderate-small stones and occasional large flat stones, 0.2m thick.

### Trench 52 (Figs. 4 and 5, Plate 4)

The earliest deposit in Trench 52 was (039), a light yellow stone. This was identified as being the upper level of the underlying solid geology, in this case limestone bedrock. Overlying this deposit was (038), a firm/plastic yellow brown clay, 0.3m thick, also forming part of the

natural deposits in this area. Sealing (038) was (037), a subsoil composed of friable brown grey sandy clayey silt with frequent small-moderate stones, 0.35m thick. Topsoil (036), a friable dark grey sandy clayey silt with moderate inclusions of small stones, 0.2m thick, sealed the area.

### **Trench 53** (Figs. 4 and 5, Plate 5)

The earliest deposit encountered within Trench 53 was (041), an indurate light grey brown deposit composed of fractured irregular limestone, greater than 0.95m thick, representing the natural geology. Above this was a topsoil deposit (040), a friable dark grey sandy clayey silt with occasional irregular stone fragments, 0.15m thick.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

Natural deposits of clays, silts and limestone represent the upper weathered surface of the underlying geology.

Subsoil deposits were encountered in the majority of the Tree Pits. The variation within the subsoil is probably a reflection of the underlying parent material. Subsoil was notably thicker in Trench 51 which may indicate the position of a feature. However, in Trench 53, subsoil was not encountered and implies that this had been truncated, perhaps as part of the garden landscaping.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

A watching brief was undertaken during groundworks on land at The Old Hall, Ashwell, as the site lay within a scheduled area of earthworks.

The watching brief identified a sequence of natural, subsoil and topsoil deposits across the monitored area. No definite archaeological remains were encountered during the course of this watching brief.

However, localised variations in the depth, and the absence of subsoil, may imply the presence of features that the tree-planting pits were too small to clearly define. No artefacts were encountered during the watching brief.

## **8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Archaeological Project Services wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Mr S Bocock of Ancaster Properties Limited for commissioning the fieldwork and post-excavation analysis. The work was coordinated by Mark Williams. Gary Taylor and Tom Lane edited this report. Dave Start kindly allowed access to the library maintained by Heritage Lincolnshire.

## **9. PERSONNEL**

Project Coordinator: Mark Williams  
 Site Supervisor: Robert Garland  
 Photographic reproduction: Katie Murphy  
 Illustration: Paul Cope-Faulkner, Vicky Mellor, Katie Murphy  
 Post-excavation analysis: Katie Murphy

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## **11. ABBREVIATIONS**

APS Archaeological Project Services

BGS British Geological Survey

IFA Institute of Field Archaeologists



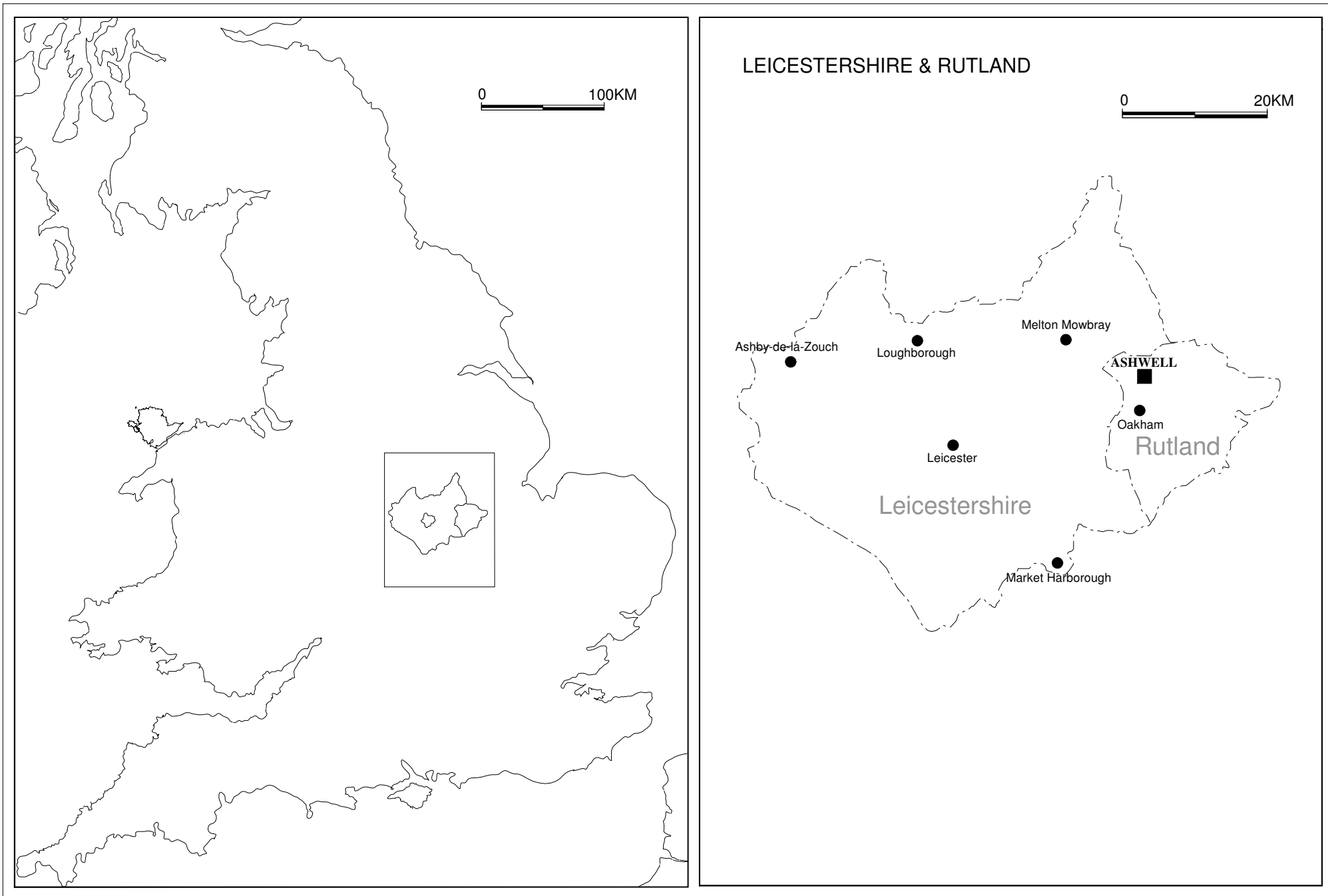



Figure 1 - General location plan





SK

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 map with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (C) Crown Copyright. HTL Ltd Licence No. AL5041A0001

 Monitored areas, Phases 1, 2 & 3

0 1km




Archaeological Project Services

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Scale 1:20,000

Report No: 149/07

Figure 2 - Site location plan



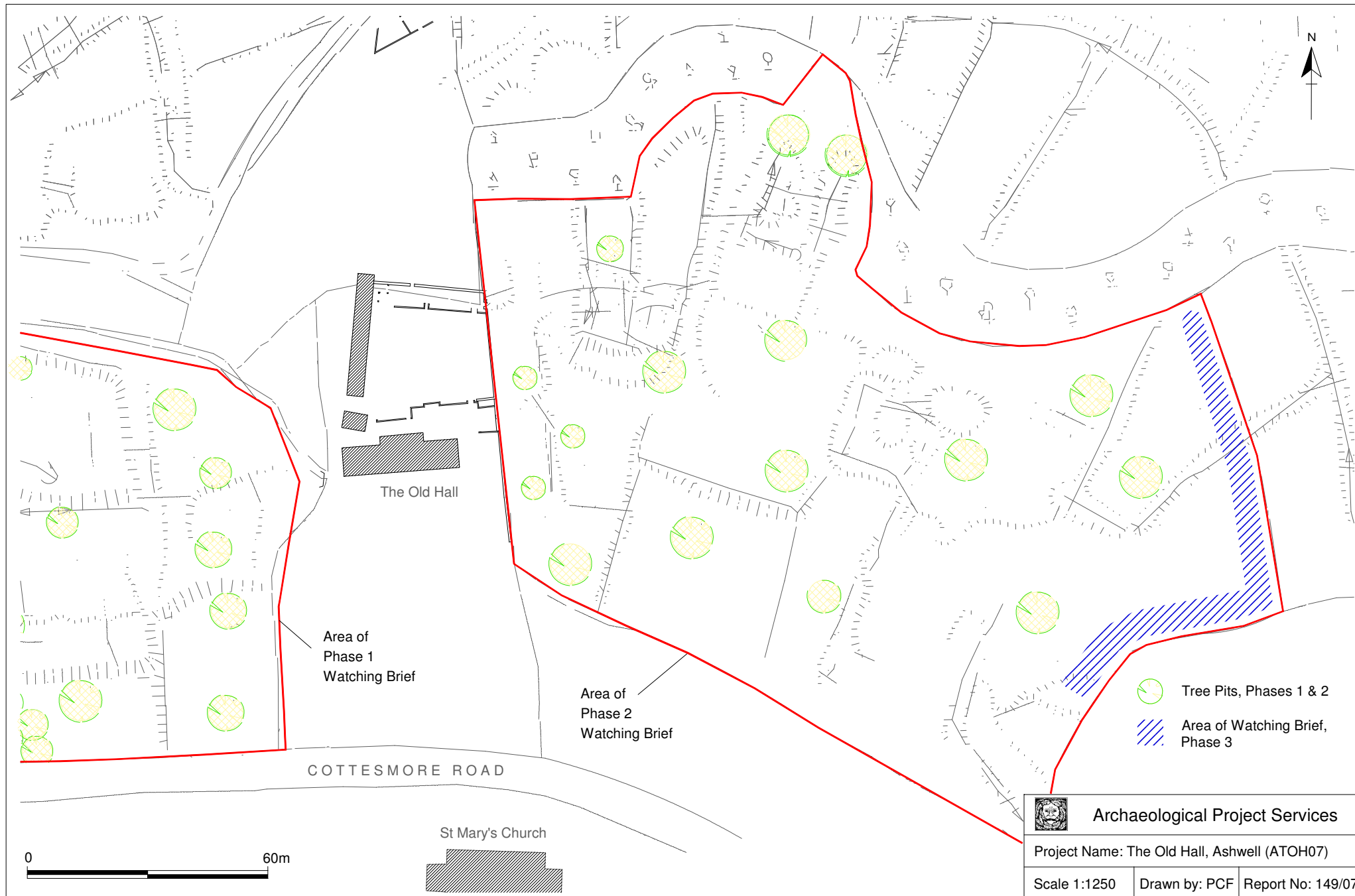
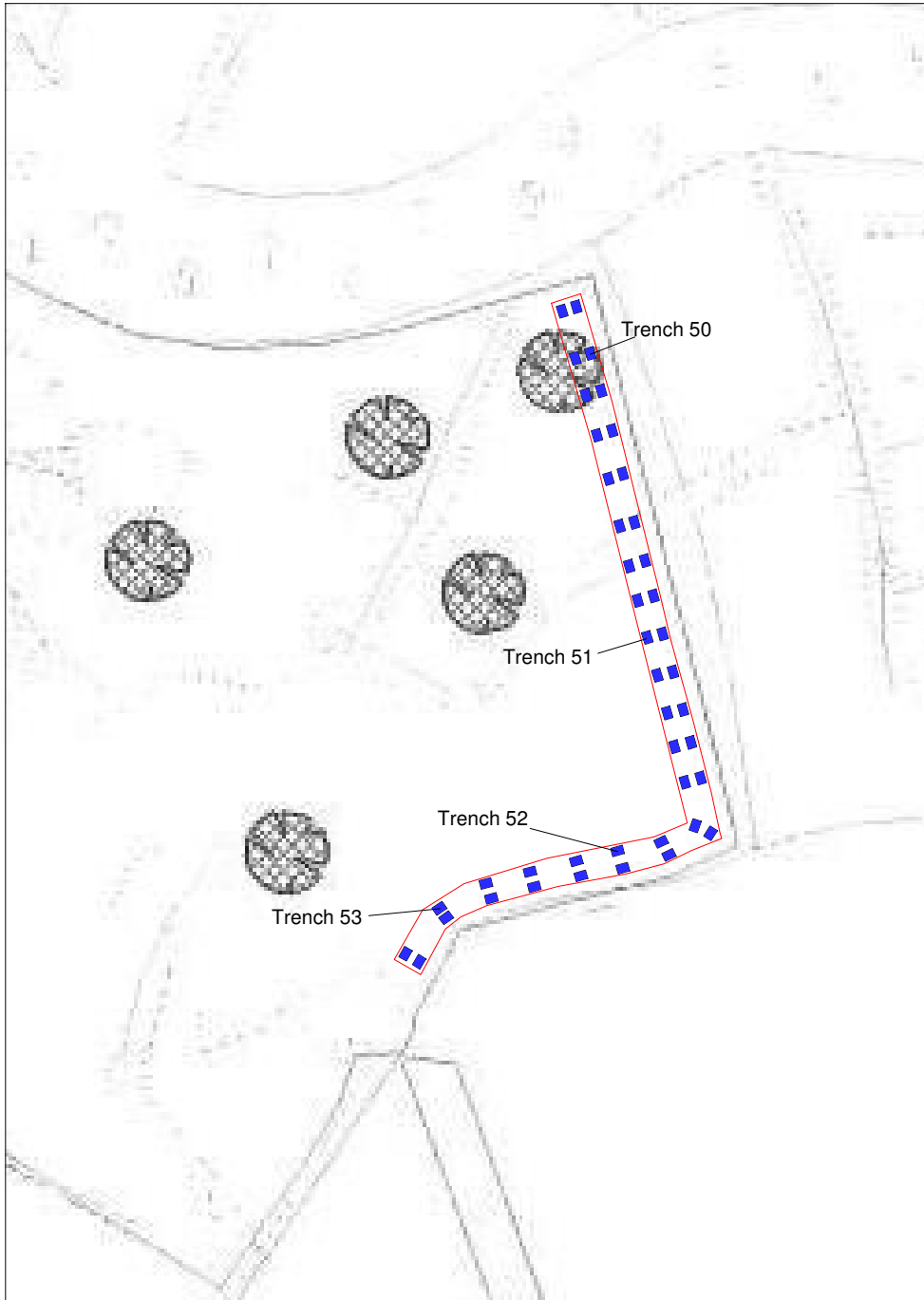


Figure 3 - Plan showing monitored areas





- Boundary of Watching Brief (Phase 3)
- Tree Pits

0 50m



Archaeological Project Services

Project Name: The Old Hall, Ashwell (ATOH07)

Scale 1:1000

Drawn by: KM

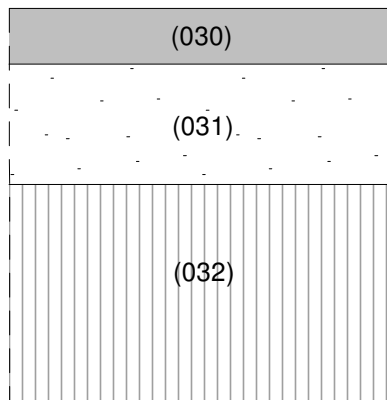
Report No: 149/07

Figure 4 Location of tree pits and recorded trenches

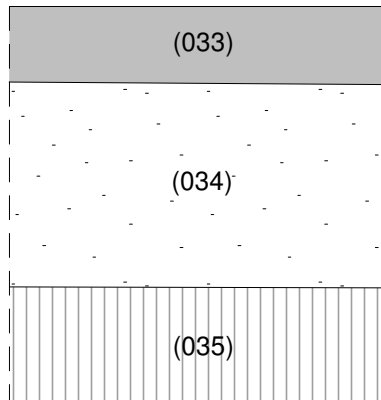




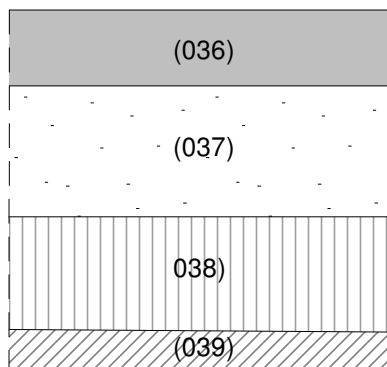
### Trench 50



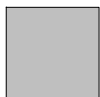
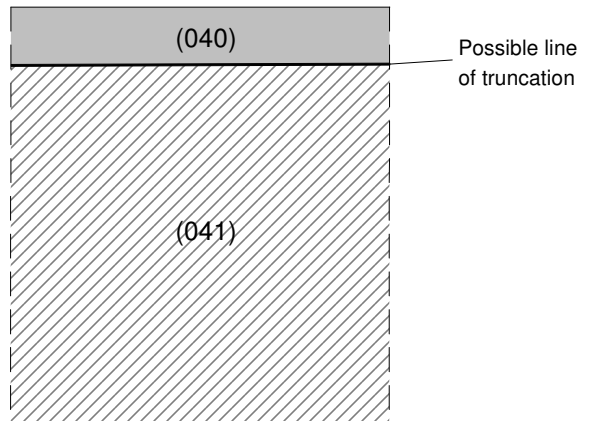
### Trench 51



### Trench 52



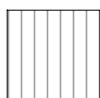
### Trench 53



Topsoil deposits



Subsoil deposits



Natural clay



Limestone brash



Archaeological Project Services

Project Name: The Old Hall, Ashwell (ATOH07)

Scale 1:20

Drawn by: KM

Report No: 149/07

Figure 5 Representative Sections





Plate 1 General site view,  
looking East



Plate 2 Trench 50, looking  
East



Plate 3 Trench 51, looking  
East



Plate 4 Trench 52, looking SSE



Plate 5 Trench 53, looking North

## Appendix 1

### CONTEXT SUMMARY

Context	Description	Interpretation
030	Friable, dark grey, sandy clayey silt with moderate-small irregular stone inclusions, 0.15m thick	Topsoil
031	Friable brown grey sandy clayey silt with occasional cobbles and small rounded pebbles, 0.32m thick	Subsoil
032	Firm/plastic yellow brown clay	Natural clay
033	Friable, dark grey sandy clayey silt with moderate-small irregular stones and occasional large flat stones, 0.2m thick	Topsoil
034	Friable, brown grey sandy clayey silt with frequent small, irregular stones, 0.54m thick	Subsoil
035	Firm/plastic yellow brown clay	Natural clay
036	Friable dark grey sandy clayey silt with moderate small irregular stones, 0.2m thick	Topsoil
037	Friable brown grey sandy clayey silt with frequent small flat/irregular stones, 0.35m thick	Subsoil
038	Firm/plastic yellow brown clayey silt, 0.3m thick	Natural/subsoil
039	Light yellow natural stone	Bedrock
040	Friable dark grey sandy clayey silt with occasional irregular stone fragments, 0.15m thick	Topsoil
041	Hard but friable, grey brown pieces of irregular, flat limestone	Limestone brash

## Appendix 2

### GLOSSARY

<b>Context</b>	An archaeological context represents a distinct archaeological event or process. For example, the action of digging a pit creates a context (the cut) as does the process of its subsequent backfill (the fill). Each context encountered during an archaeological investigation is allocated a unique number by the archaeologist and a record sheet detailing the description and interpretation of the context (the context sheet) is created and placed in the site archive. Context numbers are identified within the report text by brackets, e.g. [004].
<b>Domesday Survey</b>	A survey of property ownership in England compiled on the instruction of William I for taxation purposes in 1086 AD.
<b>Layer</b>	A layer is a term used to describe an accumulation of soil or other material that is not contained within a cut.
<b>Medieval</b>	The Middle Ages, dating from approximately AD 1066-1500.
<b>Natural</b>	Undisturbed deposit(s) of soil or rock which have accumulated without the influence of human activity
<b>Post-medieval</b>	The period following the Middle Ages, dating from approximately AD 1500-1800.
<b>Ridge and Furrow</b>	The remains of arable cultivation consisting of raised rounded strips separated by furrows. It is characteristic of open field agriculture.

## Appendix 3

### THE ARCHIVE

The archive consists of:

- 12 Context records
- 1 Context record sheet
- 1 Section record sheet
- 1 Sheets containing scale drawings
- 1 Photographic record sheet
- 1 Daily record sheet
- 1 Stratigraphic matrix

All primary records are currently kept at:

Archaeological Project Services  
The Old School  
Cameron Street  
Heckington  
Sleaford  
Lincolnshire  
NG34 9RW

The ultimate destination of the project archive is:

Rutland County Museum  
Catmose Street  
Oakham  
Rutland  
LE15 6HW

Archaeological Project Services Site Code:

ATOH07 (Phase 3)

Accession Number:

OAKRM:2007.55

The discussion and comments provided in this report are based on the archaeology revealed during the site investigations. Other archaeological finds and features may exist on the development site but away from the areas exposed during the course of this fieldwork. *Archaeological Project Services* cannot confirm that those areas unexposed are free from archaeology nor that any archaeology present there is of a similar character to that revealed during the current investigation.

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