
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
ON LAND AT THE OLD HALL,
ASHWELL,
RUTLAND
(ATOH07)
*PHASE 5***

**Work Undertaken For
Ancaster Properties Limited**

June 2008

Report Compiled by
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
PROJECT
SERVICES**



Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Plates

1.	SUMMARY	1
2.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.1	DEFINITION OF A WATCHING BRIEF.....	1
2.2	PLANNING BACKGROUND.....	1
2.3	TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY	1
2.4	ARCHAEOLOGICAL SETTING	1
3.	AIMS	2
4.	METHODS	2
5.	RESULTS	2
6.	DISCUSSION	2
7.	CONCLUSION	2
8.	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
9.	PERSONNEL	3
10.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	3
11.	ABBREVIATIONS	3

Appendices

1. Context descriptions
2. Glossary
3. The Archive

List of Figures

- Figure 1 General location plan
- Figure 2 Site location plan
- Figure 3 Plan of the development showing section locations
- Figure 4 Sections of Tree Pits 55 to 65

List of Plates

- Plate 1 View across the site
- Plate 2 Tree Pit 55 showing the general sequence of deposits
- Plate 3 Tree Pit 60
- Plate 4 Tree Pit 65

1. SUMMARY

A watching brief was undertaken during groundworks at The Old Hall, Ashwell, Rutland. The watching brief monitored the excavation of 11 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. Previous monitoring was in an area of the earthworks thought to be the remains of garden terraces.

The watching brief revealed a sequence of subsoil and topsoil deposits with no archaeological features or finds recorded. It is possible that this area had an agricultural function for an extended period.

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.

Previous phases of work have been undertaken since 16th April 2007. This fifth phase of work was undertaken on the 30th April 2008.

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 230m northeast of the village centre as defined by the parish church of St Mary at National Grid Reference SK 8671 1292 (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 1989, 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).

Previous investigations at the site revealed cut features and variable depths of subsoil that probably relate to archaeological remains. In particular, one of these remains may be garden terracing or similar earthworks (Mellor 2007; Cope-Faulkner 2007). Recently an undated possible well was identified in a foundation trench for a new wall (Wood 2008).

3. AIMS

The requirements of the watching brief, as detailed in the specification (Appendix 1), were to locate and record archaeological deposits and, if present, to determine their date, function and origin.

4. METHODS

Eleven tree pits (Nos. 55 to 65) were excavated by machine to depths of *c.* 0.65m below the current ground level. Where possible, the sides of the trenches were cleaned and rendered vertical and selected deposits were excavated further to retrieve artefactual material and to determine their function. 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. The numbers in brackets are the context numbers assigned in the field.

Two deposits were encountered during this phase of the watching brief. These comprised a subsoil layer of reddish brown silty clay (55001, 56001, 57001, 58001, 59001, 60001, 61001, 62001, 63001, 64001 and 65001) and the current topsoil of brown clayey silt (55000, 56000, 57000, 58000, 59000, 60000, 61000, 62000, 63000, 64000 and 65000). Topsoil deposits measured between 0.5m and 0.57m thick.

6. DISCUSSION

The depth of the tree pits rarely exceeded 0.65m and thus only subsoil and topsoil deposits were encountered.

Compared to the previously recorded Tree Pits, there are no dumped deposits or features associated with the medieval village or garden remains of the hall. It is likely that the area investigated in this phase was peripheral to the gardens and village or that such features lie at depth. Moreover, the depth and even thickness of the topsoil suggests this area had an extended period of agricultural usage.

No artefacts were retrieved during the investigation.

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.

However, only subsoil and topsoil deposits were encountered with no archaeological remains present. No finds were retrieved. It seems likely that this area has had an agricultural function for a considerable period

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 Gary Taylor who edited this report along with Tom Lane. Dave Start kindly allowed access to the library maintained by Heritage Lincolnshire.

9. PERSONNEL

Project Coordinator: Gary Taylor
Site Supervisor: Vicky Mellor
Photographic reproduction: Sue Unsworth
Illustration: Paul Cope-Faulkner
Post-excavation analysis: Paul Cope-Faulkner

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11. ABBREVIATIONS

APS Archaeological Project Services
BGS British Geological Survey
IFA Institute of Field Archaeologists

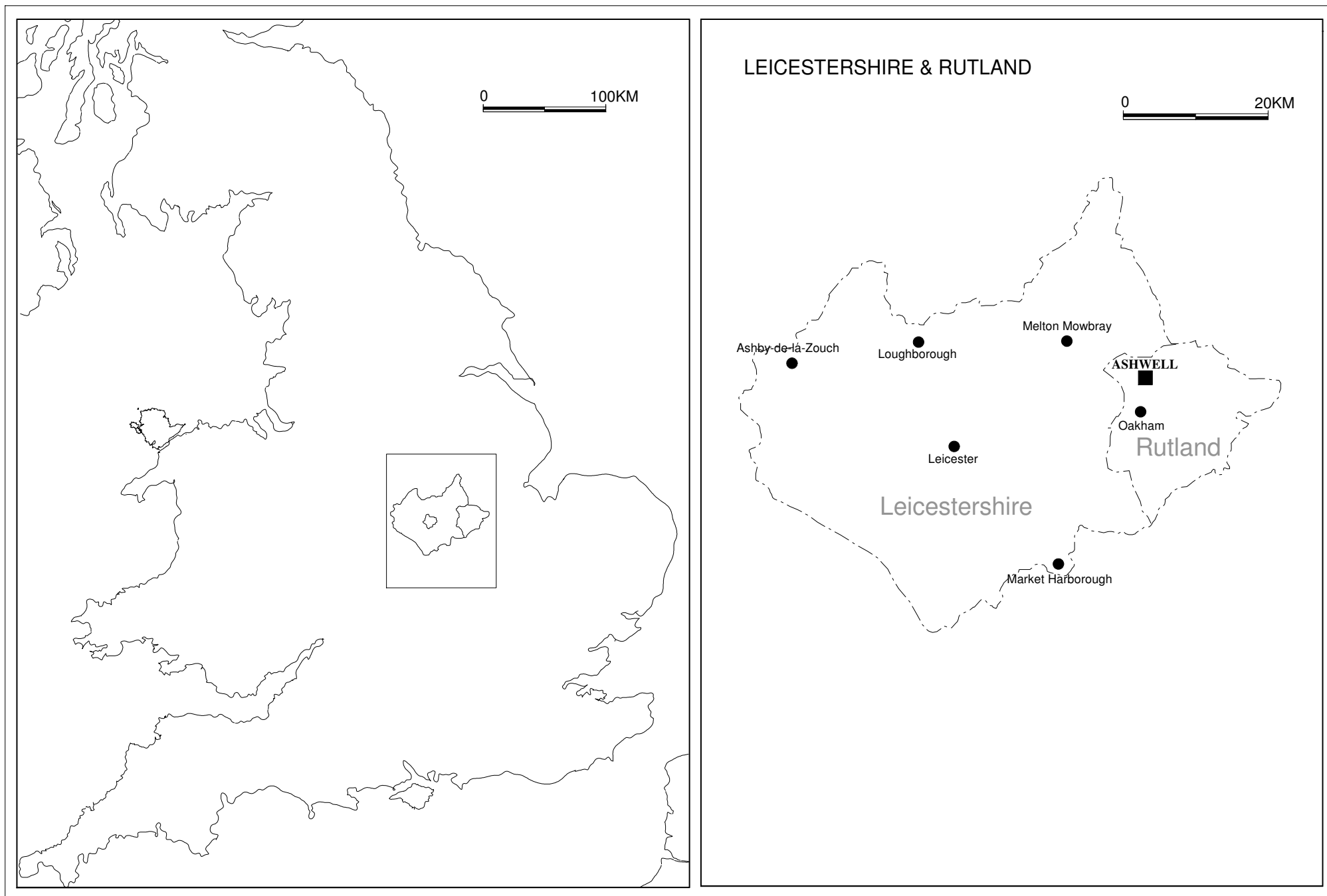


Figure 1 - General location plan

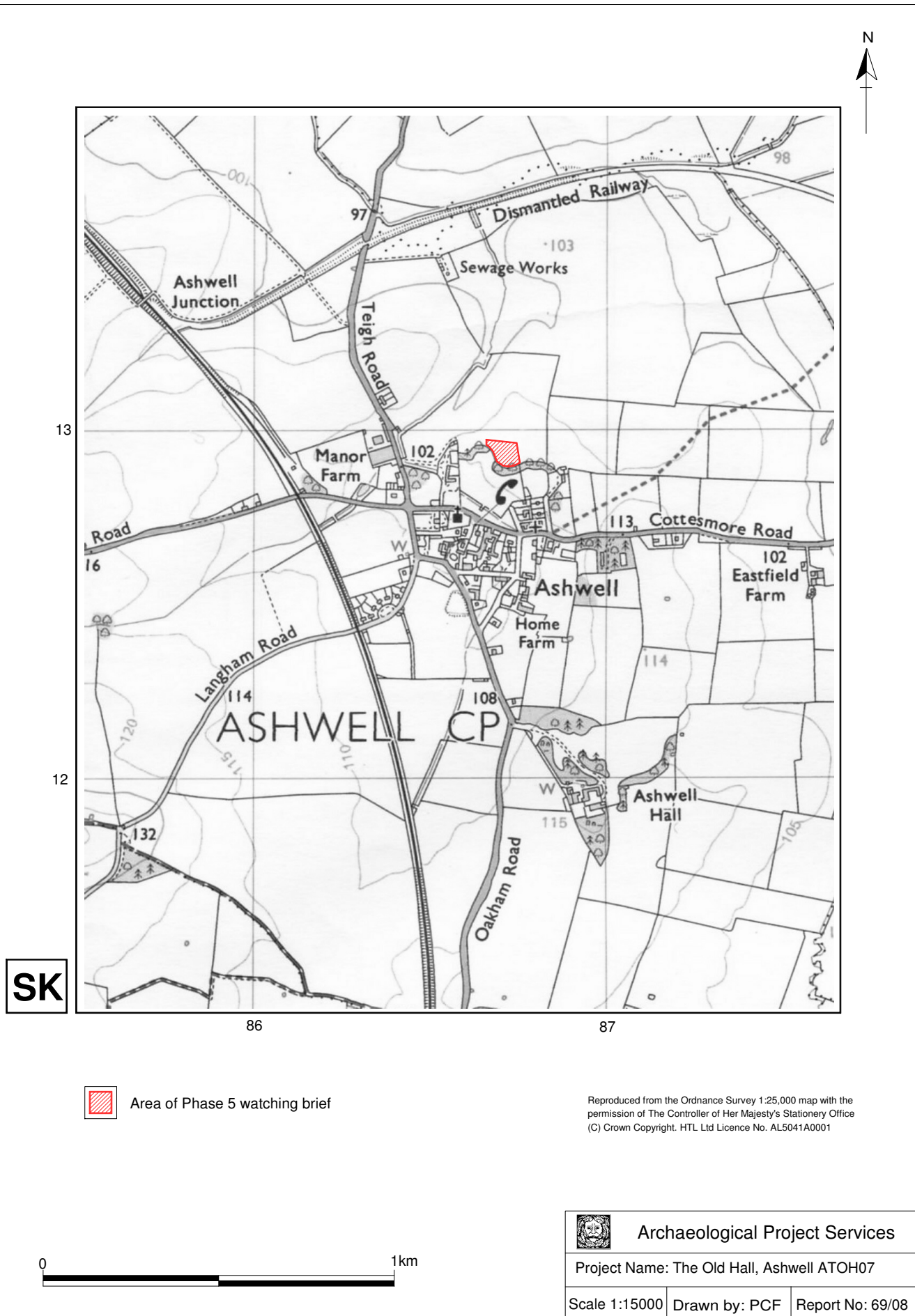


Figure 2 - Site location plan

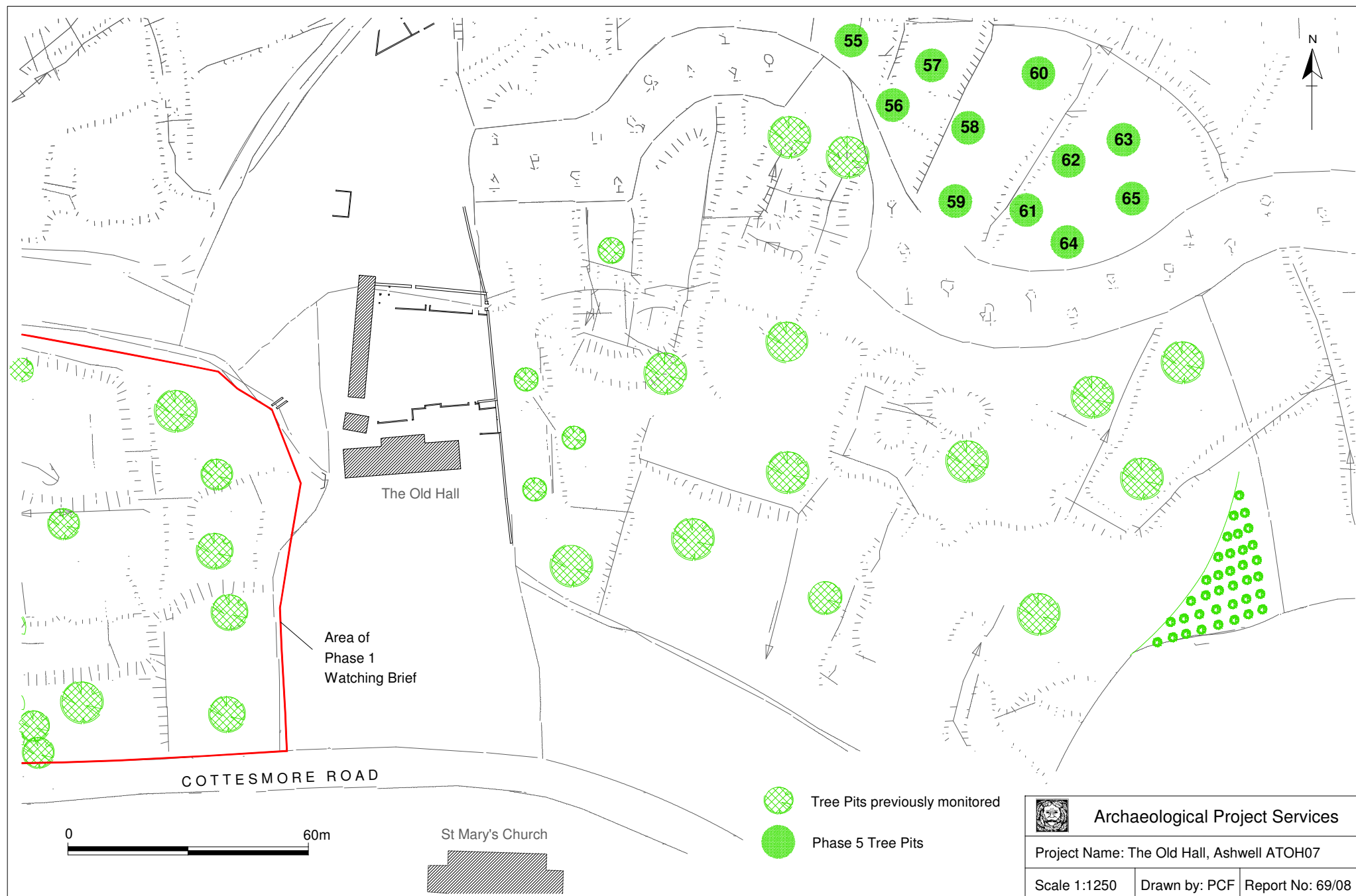


Figure 3 - Plan showing location of Tree Pits

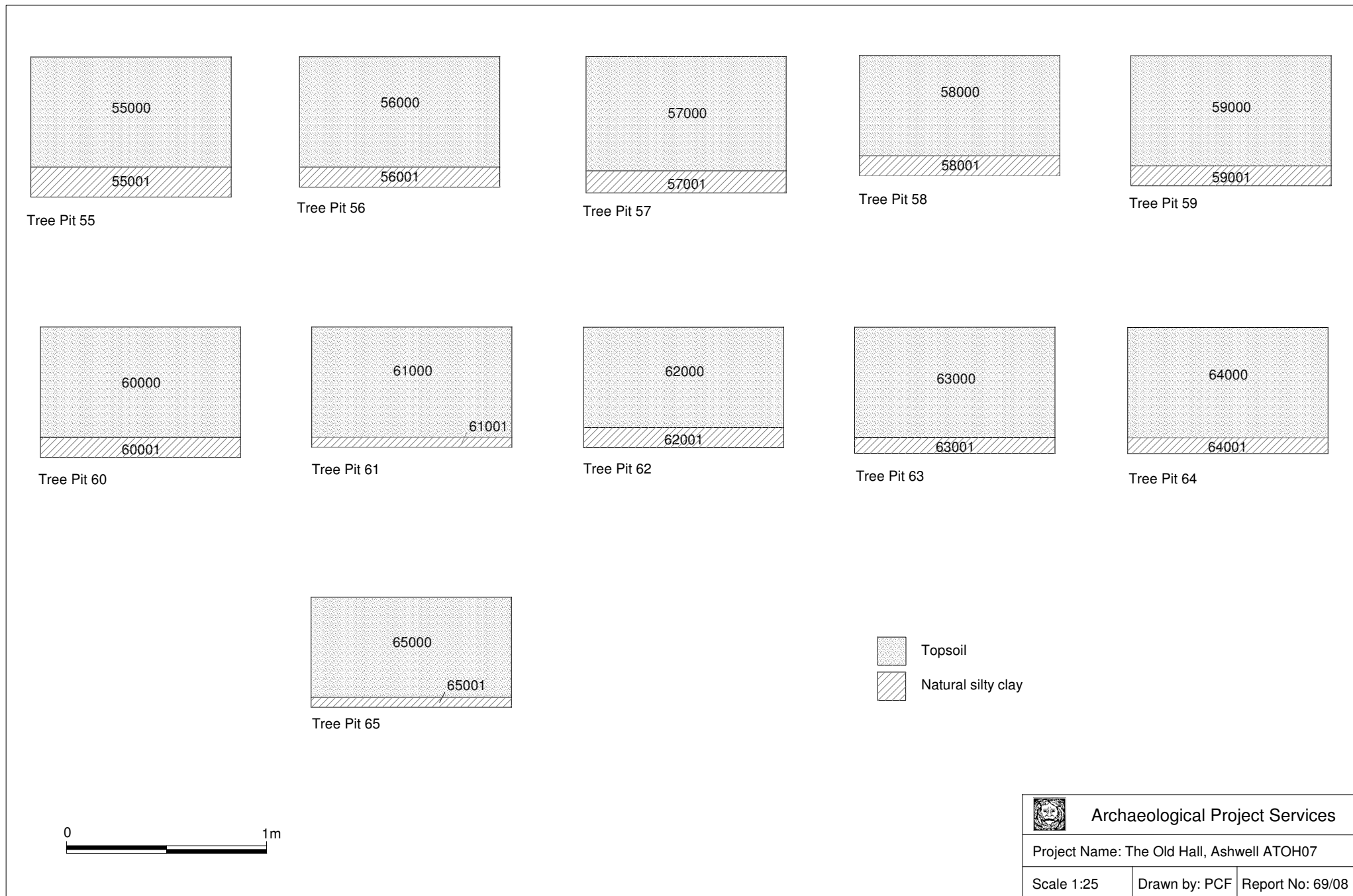


Figure 4 - Sections of Tree Pits 55 to 65



Plate 1 – View across the site, looking south



Plate 2 – Tree Pit 55 showing the general sequence of deposits



Plate 3 – Tree Pit 60



Plate 4 – Tree Pit 65

Appendix 1

CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Nos.	Description	Interpretation
55000, 56000, 57000, 58000, 59000, 60000, 61000, 62000, 63000, 64000 and 65000	Soft mid to dark brown clayey silt	Topsoil
55001, 56001, 57001, 58001, 59001, 60001, 61001, 62001, 63001, 64001 and 65001	Soft to firm mid to light reddish brown silty clay	Subsoil

Appendix 2

GLOSSARY

Context	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 interpretations of the context (the context sheet) is created and placed in the site archive. Context numbers are identified within the report text by brackets, <i>e.g.</i> (004).
Dumped deposits	These are deposits, often laid down intentionally, that raise a land surface. They may be the result of casual waste disposal or may be deliberate attempts to raise the ground surface.
Layer	A layer is a term to describe an accumulation of soil or other material that is not contained within a cut.
Medieval	The Middle Ages, dating from approximately AD 1066-1500.
Natural	Undisturbed deposit(s) of soil or rock which have accumulated without the influence of human activity.
Post-medieval	The period following the Middle Ages, dating from approximately AD 1500-1800.

Appendix 3

THE ARCHIVE

The archive from the Phase 5 investigation consists of:

11	Trench record sheets
1	Photographic record sheet
1	Daywork record sheet

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, along with the archive of previous and future investigations at The Old Hall, Ashwell, is:

Rutland County Museum
Catmose Street
Oakham
Rutland
LE15 6HW

Accession Number:

OAKRM: 2007.55

Archaeological Project Services Site Code:

ATOH 07

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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