
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
ON LAND AT THE OLD HALL,
ASHWELL,
RUTLAND
(ATOH07)
*PHASE 7***

**Work Undertaken For
Ancaster Properties Limited**

January 2009

Report Compiled by
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National Grid Reference: SK 8671 1292
Museum Accession No: OAKRM: 2007.55
OASIS Record No: archaeo11-53948

APS Report No. **3/09**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
PROJECT
SERVICES**



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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 12 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 natural, undated and topsoil deposits. An undated dumped layer suggests that a large feature was infilled and another dumped layer may be associated with garden landscaping. No finds were retrieved from the investigation.

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 watching brief monitored the excavation of 12 new pits for trees.

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 seventh phase of work was undertaken on the 13th January 2009.

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). Recent investigations monitoring the construction of a garage to the east of the site revealed medieval ditches and possible pits (Parker 2008). Further investigation suggested that one of these pits was probably a well which had been backfilled in the 12th to 14th century (Taylor 2008). Medieval pottery was moderately abundant within the ditches suggesting the proximity of settlement of the period.

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

Twelve tree planting pits (Nos. 77 to 88) were excavated by machine to depths of c. 1m below the current ground level. Where possible, the sides of the pits 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

Following post-excavation analysis three phases were identified;

Phase 1	Natural Deposits
Phase 2	Undated Deposits
Phase 3	Modern Deposits

Archaeological contexts are listed below and described. The numbers in brackets are the context numbers assigned in the field.

Phase 1 Natural deposits

Natural deposits comprise yellowish brown limestone (100) along with sandy clays (102, 103, 105 and 107) and clay (104). Natural deposits were encountered in all the tree pits apart from Pit 79.

Phase 2 Undated deposits

The earliest deposit encountered in Pit 79 was a dumped layer of brown sandy clay with limestone (101). This measured in excess of 0.6m thick (Fig. 4, Section 27).

Dumped deposits of brown limestone (106) overlay natural in Pits 87 and 88 and measured up to 0.35m thick (Fig. 4, Sections 33 and 34).

Evident within the remainder of the tree pits was a subsoil comprising greyish brown sandy silt (099) which measured up to 0.3m in thickness.

Phase 3 Modern deposits

Overlying the subsoil (099) and dumped deposit (106) was the present topsoil. This consisted of a 0.2m thick layer of greyish brown silt (098).

6. DISCUSSION

Natural deposits (Phase 1) comprise limestone, clay and sandy clays of the underlying solid geology.

Undated deposits (Phase 2) comprise two dumped deposits that lack artefactual material. A dumped deposit encountered in Pit 79 was of a thickness that suggests it was deliberately infilling a feature and perhaps dates to when the gardens were landscaped in the post-medieval period. Similarly the remaining dumped layers may be the upcast from the excavation of garden features.

No finds were retrieved from this investigation.

7. CONCLUSION

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at The Old Hall, Ashwell, as the site is considered archaeologically sensitive as it lies within the area of a scheduled monument comprising the remains of a medieval settlement.

However, no remains were encountered that could be securely medieval in date, although dumped deposits may represent the infilling of large features of this period or perhaps later garden landscaping. These dumped deposits are located in specific areas where earthworks have been recorded. Moreover, Pit 79 occurs at the

location of one of the earthwork terraces and Pits 87 and 88 occur in another area of earthworks, perhaps a hollow-way (Fig. 3). Otherwise, natural, subsoil and topsoil layers were encountered. No finds were retrieved from 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 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: Jim Robertson
 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

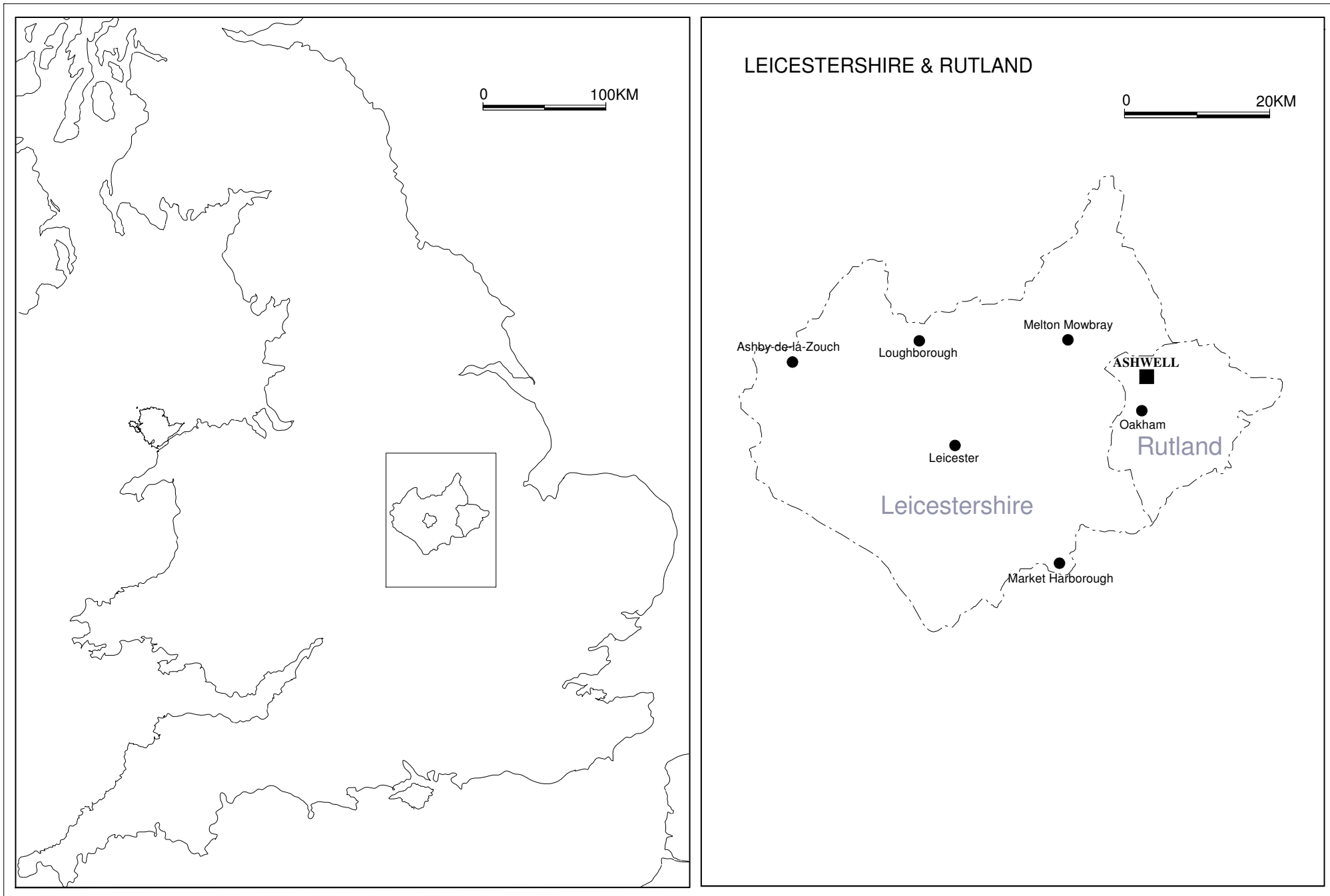
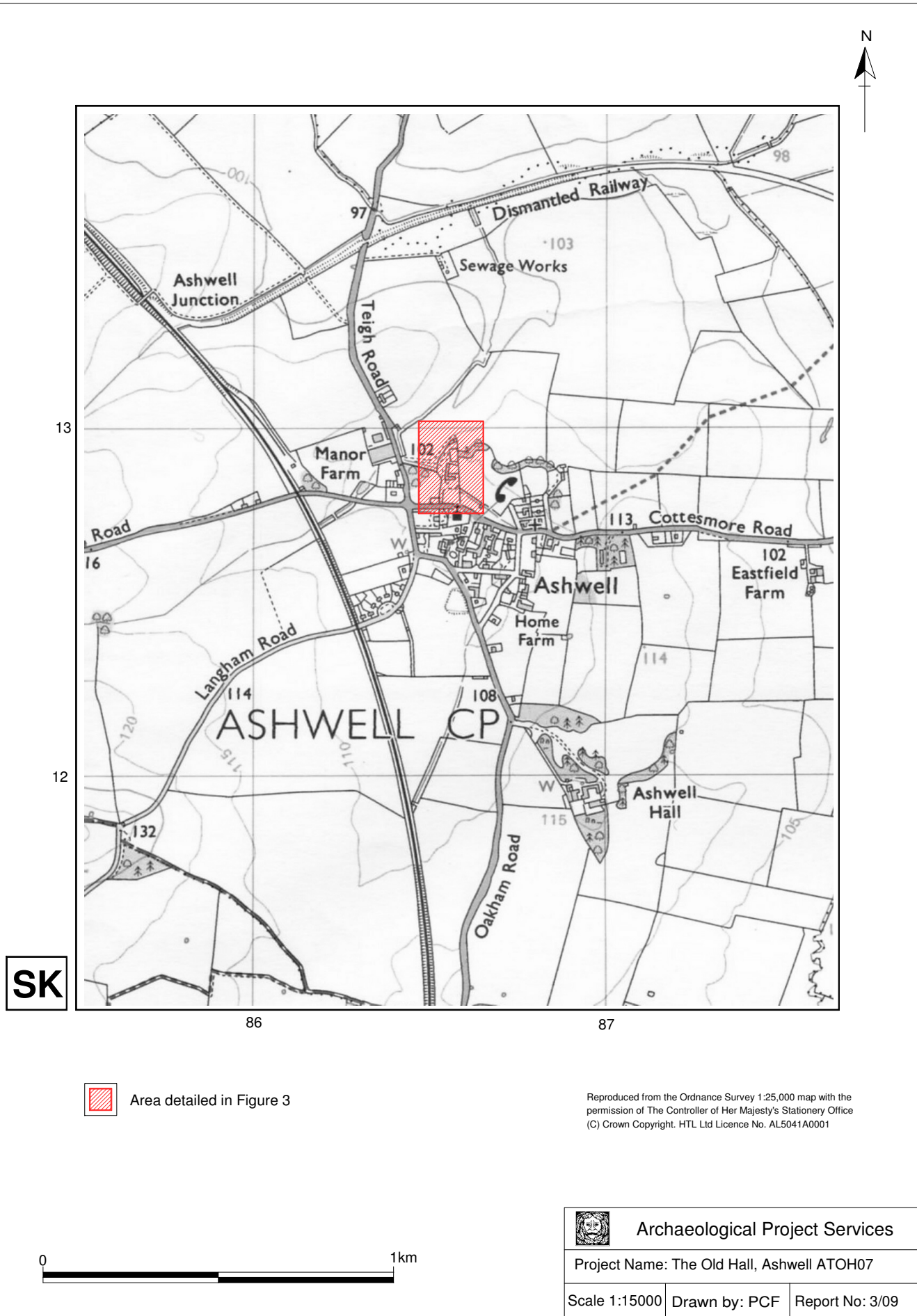



Figure 1 - General location plan



 Area detailed in Figure 3

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Project Name: The Old Hall, Ashwell ATOH07		
Scale 1:15000	Drawn by: PCF	Report No: 3/09

Figure 2 - Site location plan



Figure 3 - Plan showing location of recorded tree pits

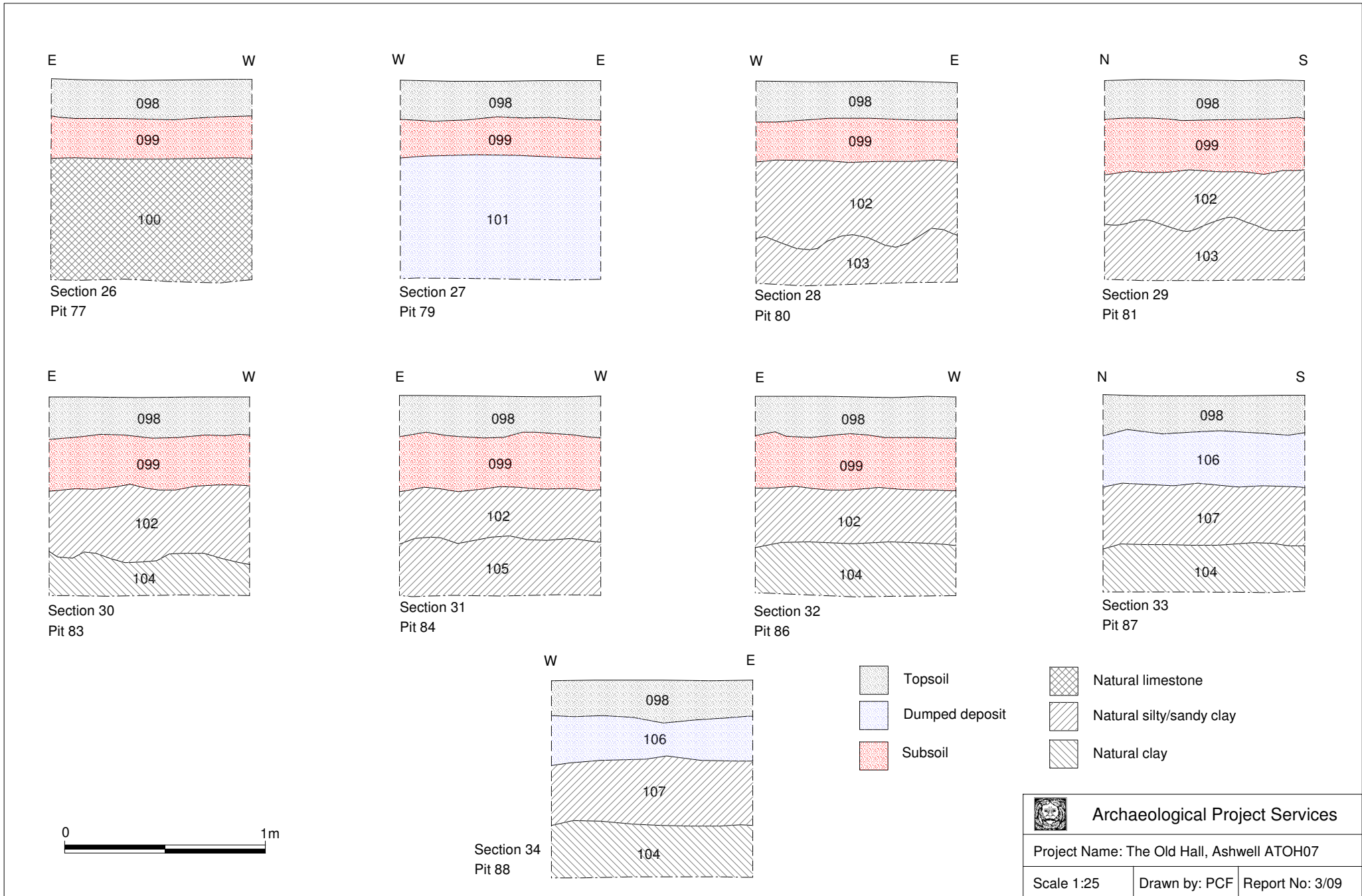


Figure 4 - Sections 26 to 34



Plate 1 – General view of the area of works, looking northeast



Plate 2 – Tree Pit 77



Plate 3 – Tree Pit 79



Plate 4 – Tree Pit 80



Plate 5 – Tree Pit 81



Plate 6 – Tree Pit 83



Plate 7 – Tree Pit 86



Plate 8 – Tree Pit 87



Plate 9 – Tree Pit 88

Appendix 1

CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

No.	Pit	Description	Interpretation
098	77-88	Loose dark greyish brown silt with moderate small gravel, 0.2m thick	Topsoil
099	77-86, 88	Friable mid greyish brown sandy silt, 0.2m – 0.3m thick	Subsoil
100	77	Firm mid yellowish brown limestone	Natural deposit
101	79	Firm light brown sandy clay with frequent limestone	Dumped deposit
102	80-86	Firm mid reddish brown sandy clay, 0.25m thick	Natural deposit
103	80-81	Soft mid bluish grey sandy clay, >0.2m thick	Natural deposit
104	83	Firm mid bluish grey clay, >0.2m thick	Natural deposit
105	84	Soft light greenish brown sandy clay, >0.25m thick	Natural deposit
106	87	Firm mid brown limestone, 0.35m thick	Dumped deposit
107	88	Firm mid reddish brown silty clay	Natural deposit

Appendix 2

GLOSSARY

Alluvium	Deposits laid down by water. Marine alluvium is deposited by the sea, and fresh water alluvium is laid down by rivers and in lakes.
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 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].
Layer	A layer is a term used 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 consists of:

10	Context records
1	Photographic record sheet
1	Section record sheet
1	Daily record sheet
1	Sheet of scale drawings
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

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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