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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
ON LAND AT THE OLD HALL,  
ASHWELL,  
RUTLAND  
(ATOH07)  
*PHASE 9***

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**Work Undertaken For  
Ancaster Properties Limited**

July 2009

Report Compiled by  
Paul Cope-Faulkner BA (Hons) AIFA

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APS Report No. **61/09**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
PROJECT  
SERVICES**





# Quality Control

Archaeological Watching Brief

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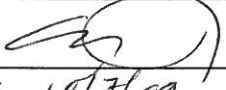
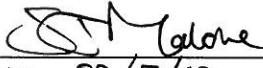
The Old Hall

Ashwell, Rutland

ATOH 07

(Phase 9)

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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 25 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 recent deposits. Undated dumped layers vary in thickness and are suggestive of infilled features, perhaps relating to garden terraces. 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 watching brief monitored the excavation of 25 new pits for trees.

Groundworks for tree planting 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 16<sup>th</sup> April 2007. This ninth phase of work was undertaken on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 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 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> 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 were to locate and record archaeological deposits and, if present, to determine their date, function and origin.

### 4. METHODS

Twenty-five tree planting pits (Nos. 109 to 133) were excavated by machine to depths of no more than 0.8m 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 representative 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 clayey silt with limestone (160), grey and yellowish brown clay (163) and limestone (170). Natural deposits were not recorded in Pits 109 and 126.

### Phase 2 Undated deposits

Dumped deposits of yellowish brown (166) and yellow limestone (169), measuring between 0.15m and 0.35m thick were recorded in Pits 126 and 127 (Fig. 4, Sections 50 and 51).

Subsoil was evident within all the recorded pits with the exception of Pit 127. It comprised brown clayey silt (157, 159,



162, 165 and 167) and measured between 90mm and 0.45m thick.

### Phase 3 Modern deposits

Sealing all the Pits was a topsoil which consisted of brown clayey silt (156, 158, 161 and 164) and brown sandy silt (168).

Overlying the topsoil in Pit 109 was a levelling deposit of brown clayey silt (155) that measured 0.58m thick (Fig. 4, Section 47).

## 6. DISCUSSION

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

Undated deposits (Phase 2) comprise two dumped deposits and subsoil layers that lack artefactual material. Variations in the thickness of these deposits suggests they may represent infilling of features 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 or creation of landscaped terraces.

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 dated to the medieval period, although dumped deposits may represent the infilling of features of this period or perhaps later

garden landscaping. 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 Steve Malone. Dave Start kindly allowed access to the library maintained by Heritage Lincolnshire.

## 9. PERSONNEL

Project Coordinator: Gary Taylor  
 Site Supervisor: Bob Garland  
 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

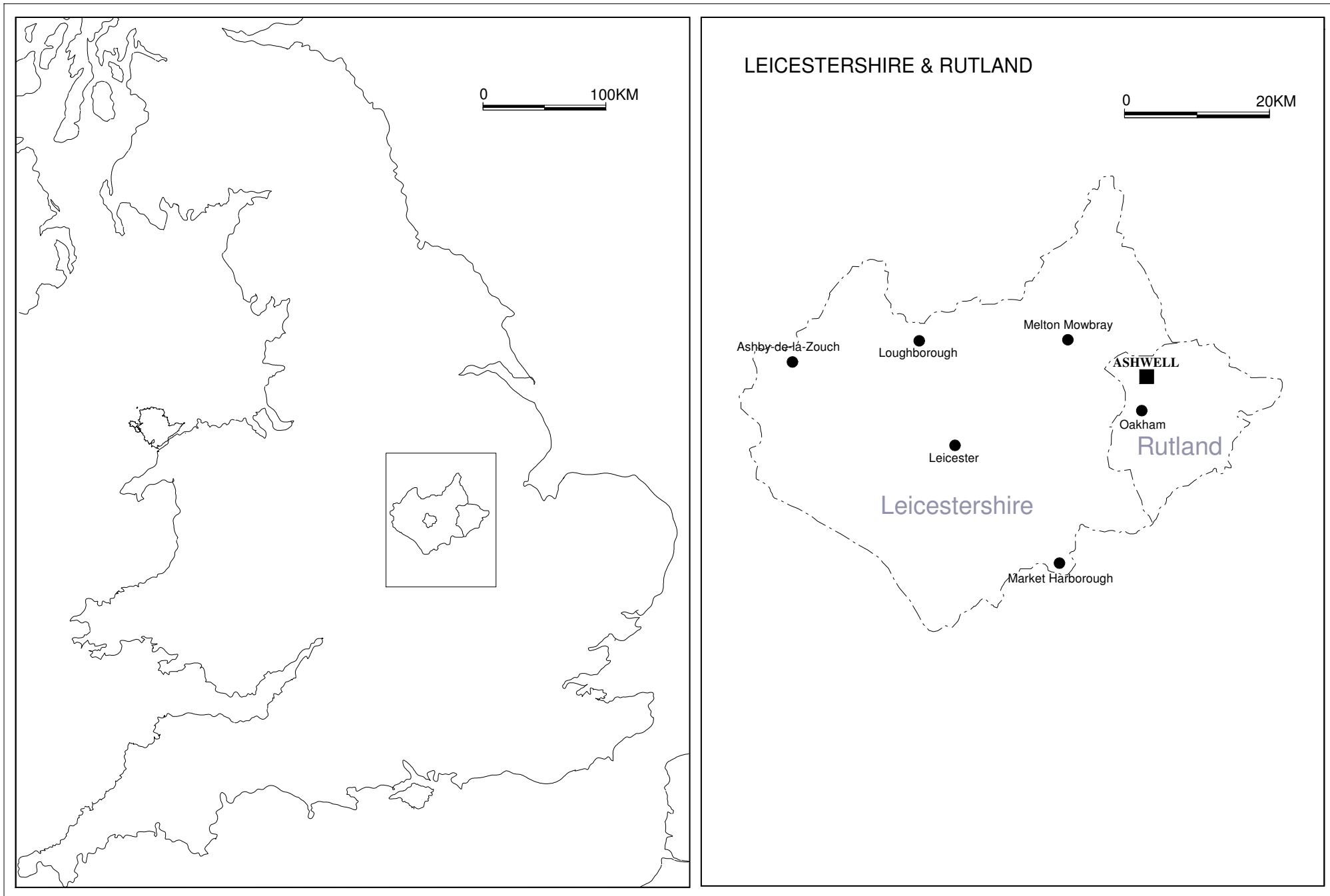
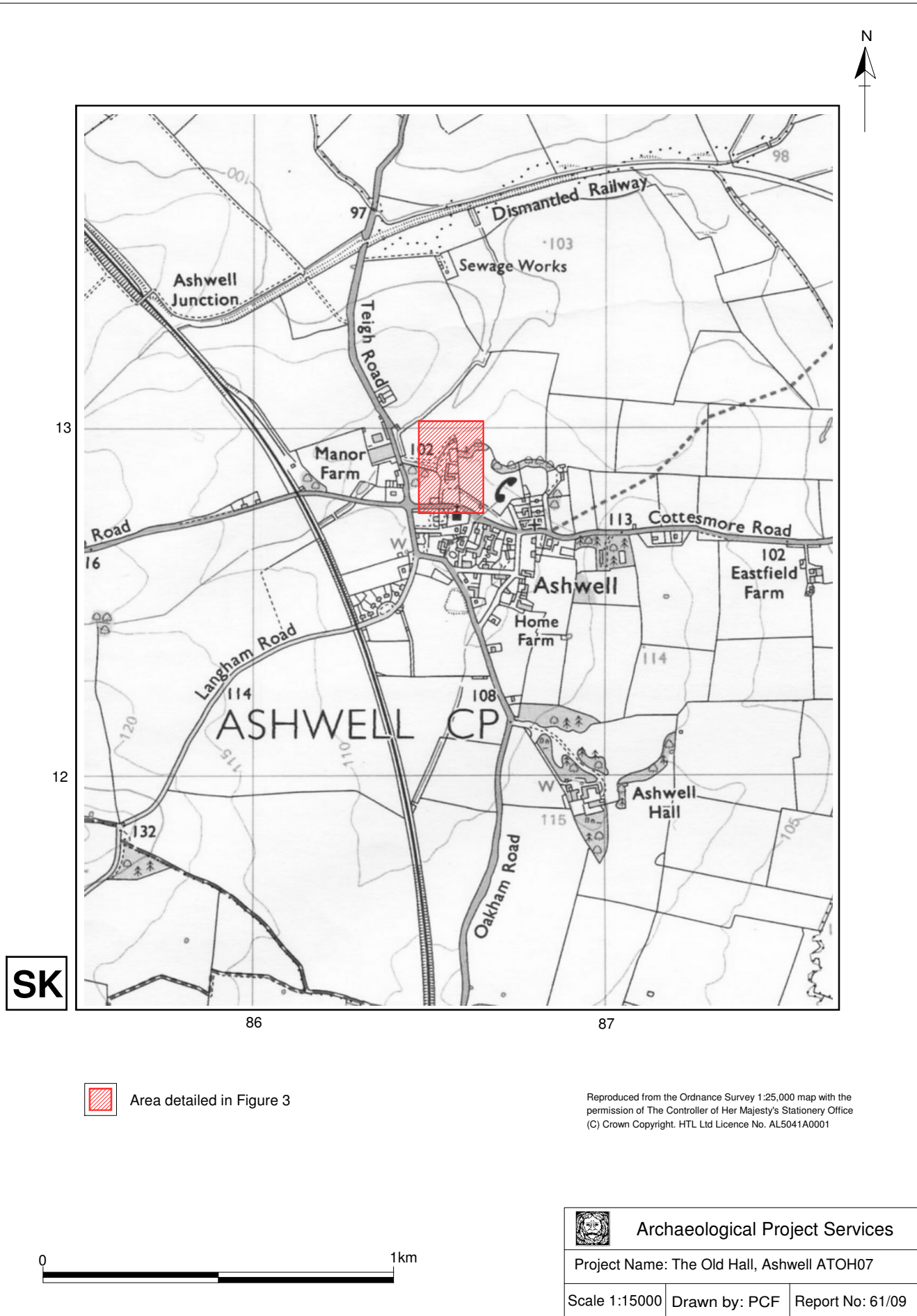



Figure 1 - General location plan

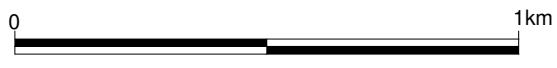




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 Area detailed in Figure 3

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Project Name: The Old Hall, Ashwell ATOH07		
Scale 1:15000	Drawn by: PCF	Report No: 61/09

Figure 2 - Site location plan



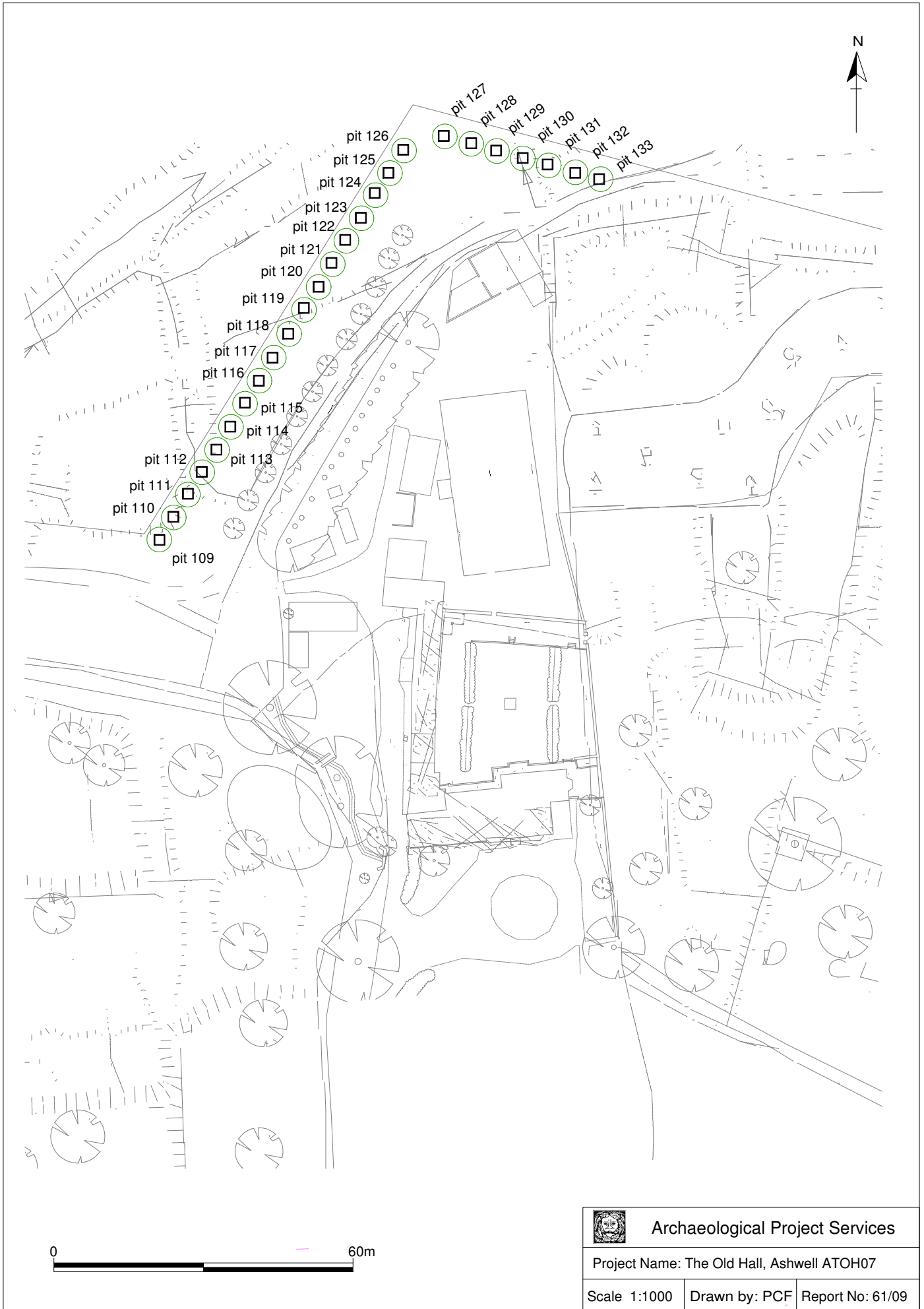
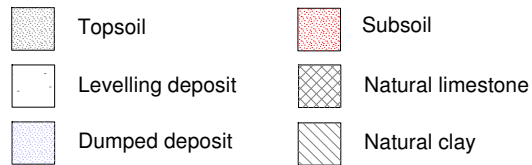
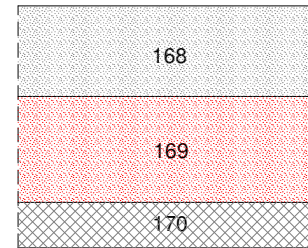
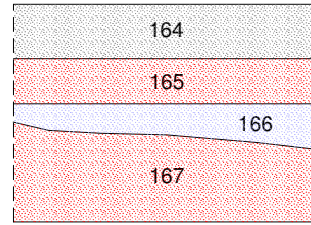
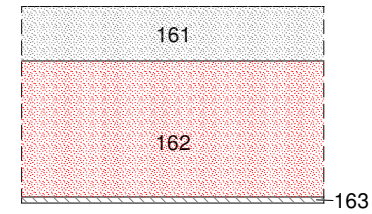
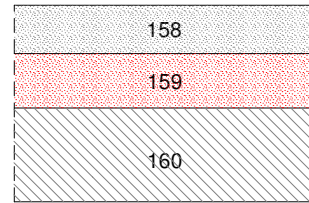
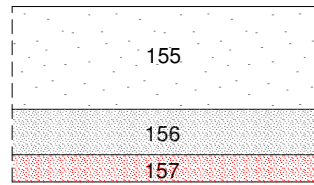


Figure 3 - Plan showing location of recorded tree pits








		
Archaeological Project Services		
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Scale 1:25	Drawn by: PCF	Report No: 61/09

Figure 4 - Sections 47 to 51





Plate 1 – General view of the southern area of works, looking north



Plate 2 – General view of the eastern area of works, looking east



Plate 3 – Tree Pit 114, looking northwest



Plate 4 – Tree Pit 119, looking northwest



Plate 5 – Tree Pit 126, looking northwest



Plate 6 – Tree Pit 127, looking east

## Appendix 1

### CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

No.	Pit	Description	Interpretation
155	109	Friable mid brown, with yellowish brown patches, clayey silt, 0.58m thick	Levelling deposit
156	109	Friable dark brown clayey silt, 0.15m thick	Topsoil
157	109	Friable light brown clayey silt, >90mm thick	Subsoil
158	114	Friable light brown clayey silt, 0.16m thick	Topsoil
159	114	Friable light brown clayey silt, 0.18m thick	Subsoil
160	114	Friable light yellowish brown clayey silt with limestone, >0.31m thick	Natural deposit
161	119	Friable light brown clayey silt, 0.18m thick	Topsoil
162	119	Friable light brown clayey silt (0.45m thick	Subsoil
163	119	Friable mottled light grey and yellowish brown clay, >10mm thick	Natural deposit
164	126	Friable mid to dark brown clayey silt with gravel, 0.18m thick	Topsoil
165	126	Friable brown clayey silt, 0.15m thick	Subsoil
166	126	Friable mid yellowish brown limestone fragments, 0.15m thick	Dumped deposit
167	126	Friable mid brown clayey silt, >0.34m thick	Subsoil
168	127	Friable mid brown sandy silt, 0.3m thick	Topsoil
169	127	Loose mid yellow limestone fragments, 0.35m thick	Dumped deposits
170	127	Firm mid yellowish brown limestone, >0.15m thick	Natural deposit

## **Appendix 2**

### **GLOSSARY**

<b>Alluvium</b>	Deposits laid down by water. Marine alluvium is deposited by the sea, and fresh water alluvium is laid down by rivers and in lakes.
<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>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.

## Appendix 3

### THE ARCHIVE

The archive consists of:

5	Trench Record Sheets
1	Photographic record sheet
1	Section 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

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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