ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT THE OLD HALL, ASHWELL, RUTLAND

(ATOH 07)

PHASE 8

Work Undertaken For
Ancaster Properties Ltd

July 2009

Report Compiled by
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Report No: **55/09**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT SERVICES

Quality Control
Archaeological Watching Brief
(Phase 8)
at
The Old Hall,
Ashwell, Rutland
(ATOH 07)

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Checked by Project Manager	Approved by Project Manager
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Date: 13/7/09	Date: 29/9/09

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Plates

1. SUMMARY

A watching brief was undertaken during groundworks at The Old Hall, Ashwell, Rutland. The watching brief monitored the excavation of 20 tree planting pits.

The monitoring was required due to the site's location within the area of a scheduled monument comprising the remains of a medieval settlement, watermill, millponds and gardens.

Recent investigation at the site to the east of where the current work took place revealed medieval remains including ditches, pits and a possible well. Medieval pottery was moderately abundant within the ditches suggesting the proximity of settlement of the period.

However, no medieval remains were uncovered, rather, the watching brief revealed a sequence of subsoil and topsoil buried beneath modern overburden associated with current groundworks at the site. The single feature observed during the investigation was a possible pit which was cut through the subsoil and contained a fragment of brick, probably dating to the 18th century. The only other deposits of note were two deposits of made ground which could possibly be post-medieval in date.

2. INTRODUCTION

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

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 maybe disturbed or destroyed."* (IFA 1999).

2.2 Planning Background

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 April 2007. This eighth phase of work was undertaken on the 18th of March 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 west 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.

Investigation of tree planting pits to the east of the site (Failes 2008) uncovered evidence of a medieval dumped deposit within a large feature, possibly a former quarry pit. A watching brief on tree planting pits to the north-east of the site (Cope-Faulkner 2009) revealed dumped deposits which may represent the infilling of large medieval features or perhaps later garden landscaping.

3. AIMS

The aim of the archaeological investigation was to ensure that any archaeological features exposed during the groundworks were recorded and, if present, their date, function and origin determined.

4. METHODS

Twenty tree planting pits (Nos. 66-85) were excavated by machine to depths of *c*. 0.70m 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 5 phases were identified;

Phase 1	Natural deposits
Phase 2	Undated deposits
Phase 3	Post-medieval deposits
Phase 4	Post-medieval or later deposits

Phase 5 Recent deposits

Archaeological contexts are listed below and described. The numbers in brackets are the context numbers assigned in the field. Note that Tree Pits 81 and 82 were not drawn or assigned their own context numbers due to the fact they had the same profile and contained the same deposits as Tree Pit 80. This is also the case with Tree Pits 74 and 73 which were the same as Tree Pit 72, Tree Pit 84 which was the same as Tree Pit 83 and Tree Pit 71 which was identical to Tree Pit 70.

Phase 1 Natural deposits

The earliest deposit encountered during the investigation occurred in Tree Pit 85 and consisted of firm light yellow naturally deposited clay (148), at least 80mm thick (Fig 7, Section 44) (Plate 8).

Phase 2 Undated deposits

Buried subsoil deposits occurred across the whole of the site and were observed in all tree pits (Figs 5-7, Sections 35-46, Plates 2-9). In Tree Pits 66, 76 and 77 the former subsoil deposit was a mid brown sandy silty clay with occasional gravel, assigned context numbers (112), (116) and (120) respectively. This deposit ranged in thickness from at least 40mm to 0.30m. In Tree Pit 78 the subsoil consisted of a firm mid yellowish brown clay (123), at least 0.14m thick. In Tree Pits 67 and 68 the buried subsoil was a mid to light yellowish brown sandy clay (126)/(129). In Tree Pits 69, 70/71, 72/73/74, 75, 79, 80/81/82, 83/84 and 85 the buried subsoil consisted of firm mid to light greyish yellowish brown sandy clay, with a maximum thickness of 0.30m. This deposit was assigned context numbers (132), (141), (151), (154), (135), (138), (144) and (147).

Phase 3 Post-medieval deposits

Cut into subsoil deposit (112) in Tree Pit 66 (Fig 5, Section 35; Fig. 8) (Plate 2) was a partially exposed sub-circular feature at least 0.60m in diameter, with straight and steep sides [111]. This was filled with a firm dark greyish yellowish brown sandy clay (110), at least 0.31m thick, containing frequent charcoal and ceramic building material (CBM) flecks. A fragment of probable 18th century brick was recovered from this deposit.

Phase 4 Post-medieval or later deposits

In Tree Pit 77, subsoil deposit (120) was sealed by a 0.22m thick layer of firm to loose, grey and black speckled charcoal, sand and stone (119) (Fig 5, Section 36) (Plate 3), with frequent CBM flecks and cinders. This same deposit occurred in Tree Pit 76 as deposit (115). Overlying (119) was a layer of moderately compact mid brownish yellow stone rubble (118), 0.22m thick, which again was also seen in Tree Pit 76 where it was recorded as (114).

Phase 5 Recent deposits

In all tree pits (with the exception of Tree Pits 76, 77, 75 and 85) subsoil deposits were overlain by a buried topsoil (Figs 5-7, Sections 35, 37-43 and 45) (Plates 2, 4-7) consisting of firm, mid to dark greyish brown sandy clay, often with occasional charcoal flecks and occasional pebbles (109), (122), (128), (131), (134), (137), (125), (140), (143) and (150). In Tree Pits 69 and 78 this topsoil deposit (131), (122) was disturbed and contained frequent charcoal flecks, pebbles, brick and CBM fragments. Cinders were also recorded in deposit (131).

In Tree Pit 75, subsoil layer (154) was overlain by a 0.22m thick, firm, light brown sandy clay (153) deposit with occasional stones (Fig 7, Section 46) (Plate 9). This deposit was in turn sealed by a 0.34m thick layer of mid to dark sandy clay (152) containing occasional stones. Both of these deposits were clearly modern and associated with current

groundworks at the site.

In Tree Pit 76 and 77, dumped deposit (114)/(118) was sealed by a 0.20m thick, firm mid greyish brown sandy clay (113)/(117) containing frequent medium size pebbles and occasional organic material (Fig 5, Section 36) (Plate 3). This layer was also modern and associated with the current works at the site.

This same deposit overlay subsoil deposit (147) in Tree Pit 85 where it was 0.10m thick and assigned context number (146) (Fig 7, Section 44) (Plate 8).

Overburden deposit (117)/(146) was recorded in all other tree pits across the site (with the exception of Tree Pits 72, 75 and 66) sealing former topsoil deposits (122), (128), (131), (134), (137), (140), (124) and (143) (Figs 5-7, Sections 37-43) (Plates 4-7), where it was assigned context numbers (121), (127), (130), (133), (136), (139), (125) and (142).

In Tree Pit 66, the 0.16m thick buried topsoil layer (109) was overlain by a loose deposit of mid yellowish brown modern stone rubble (108) (Fig 5, Section 35) (Plate 2).

In Tree Pit 72, buried topsoil layer (150) was sealed by a 0.62m thick deposit of loose to firm mid brown sand gravel and clay (149) with frequent stones and occasional charcoal flecks (Fig 7, Section 45). This layer also constituted modern overburden.

The most recent deposit recorded at the site was an 80mm thick layer of loose dark grey sand (145) which overlay the modern overburden (146) in Tree Pit 85 (Fig 7, Section 44) (Plate 8).

6. DISCUSSION

The earliest deposit recorded on site was observed in Tree Pit 85 and represents the underlying natural geology of the area.

In all cases other than the above, the earliest deposits observed stratigraphically were subsoil deposits. In Tree Pit 66 a possible pit which contained a fragment of post-medieval tile, probably dating to the 18th century, was cut into the subsoil.

In a few cases (Tree pits 76, 77, 75 and 85) these subsoil layers were overlain by deposits of made up ground. In Tree Pits 75 and 85 these deposits of made ground were clearly modern. However, the dumped deposit seen in Tree Pits 77 and 76 remains undated and could conceivably be post-medieval in date, as could the layer of stony rubble above it.

Across the majority of the site, subsoil deposits were overlain by buried topsoil deposits, some of which had been disturbed. The topsoil deposits were buried by modern overburden associated with the current works at the site.

7. CONCLUSION

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at The Old Hall, Ashwell, in order to monitor groundworks associated with the planting of 20 new trees. The site is considered archaeologically sensitive as it lies within the area of a scheduled monument comprising the remains of a medieval settlement, watermill, millponds and gardens.

The investigation, for the most part, revealed a sequence of natural clay, subsoils and topsoils buried beneath modern overburden associated with the current groundworks at the site. No medieval features were revealed, though isolated post-medieval remains were encountered.

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 Supervisors:
Finds processing: Denise Buckley
Photographic reproduction: Sue Unsworth
Illustration: Andrew Failes
Post-excavation analysis: Andrew Failes

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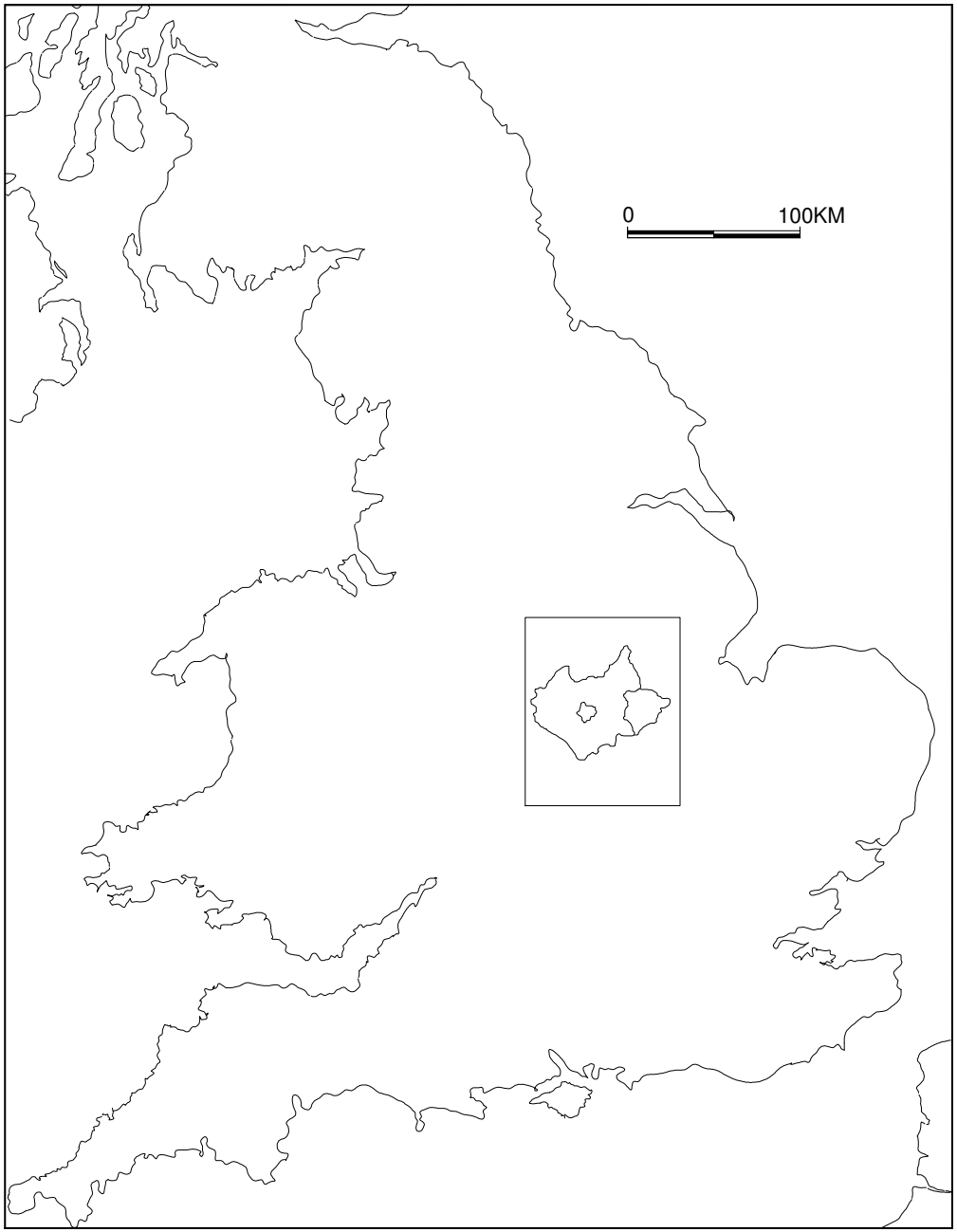
11. ABBREVIATIONS

APS Archaeological Project Services

CBM Ceramic Building Material

GSGB Geological Survey of Great Britain

IFA Institute of Field Archaeologists



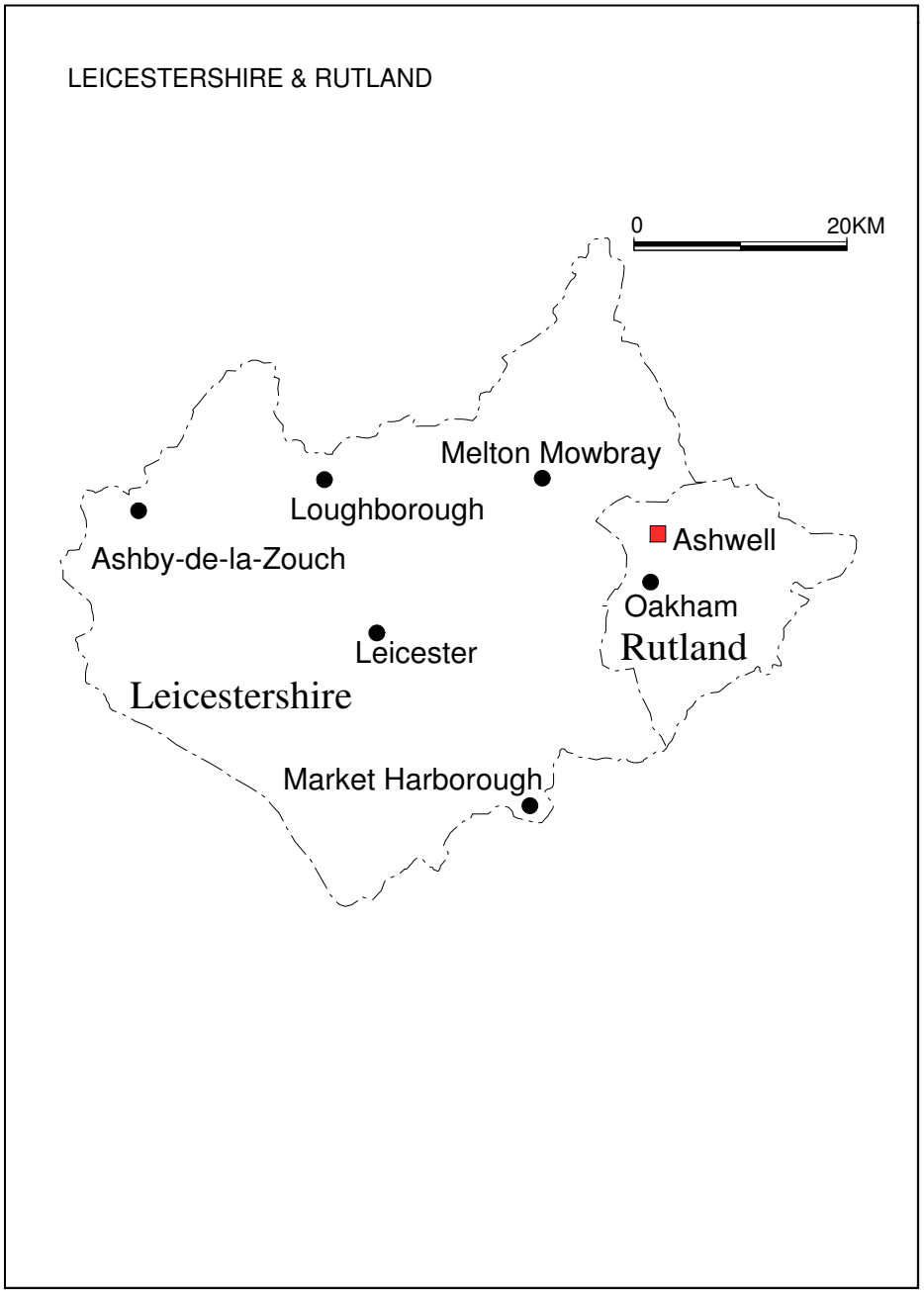


Figure 1 General Location Plan

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Site Location

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Archaeological Project Services

Project Name: Ashwell, The Old Hall ATOH08

Scale 1:20,000 | Report No: 55/09

Figure 2 Site Location Map

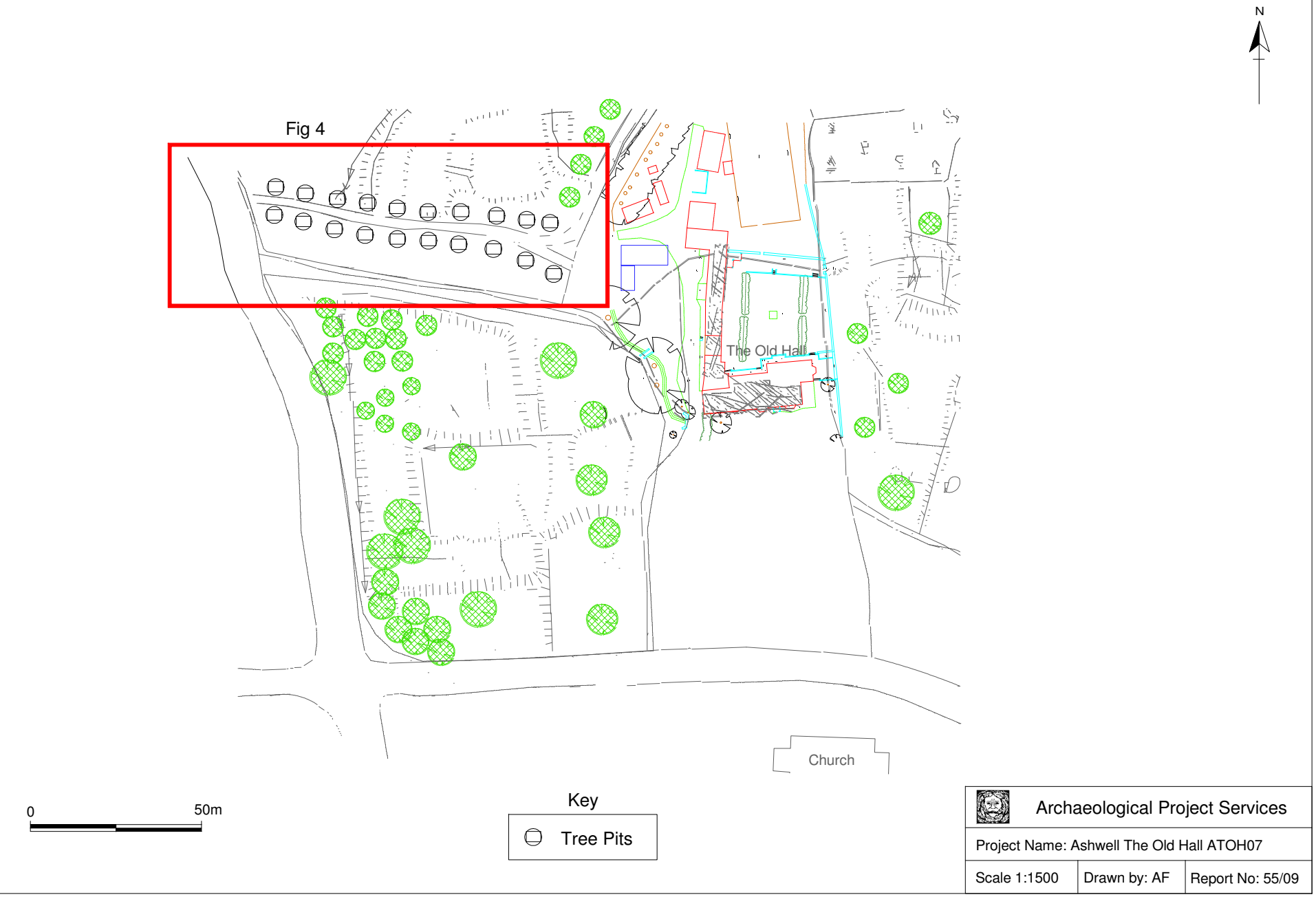


Figure 3 - Site location plan

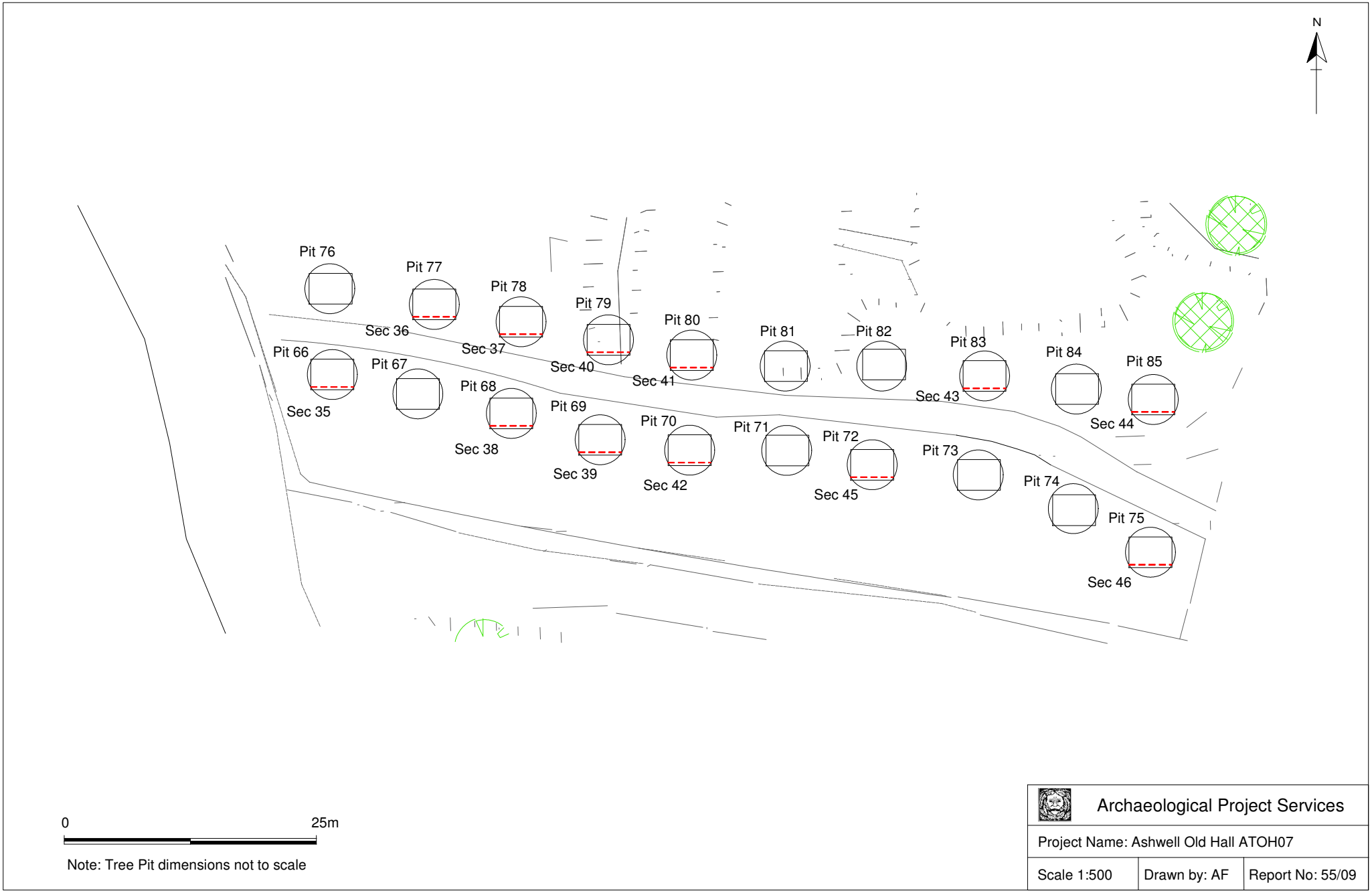


Figure 4 - Tree Pit and Section locations

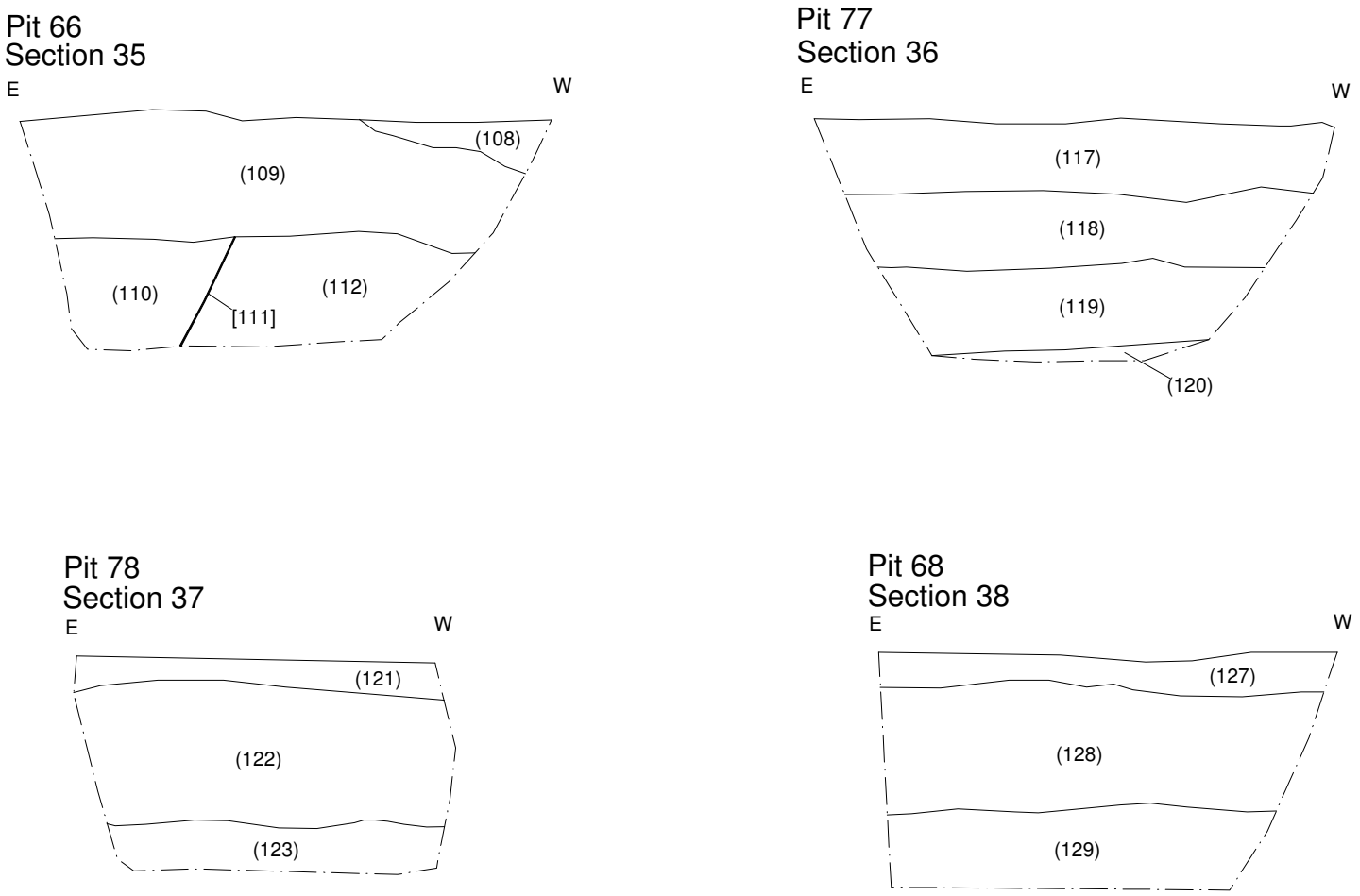


Figure 5 - Sections 35, 36, 37 and 38

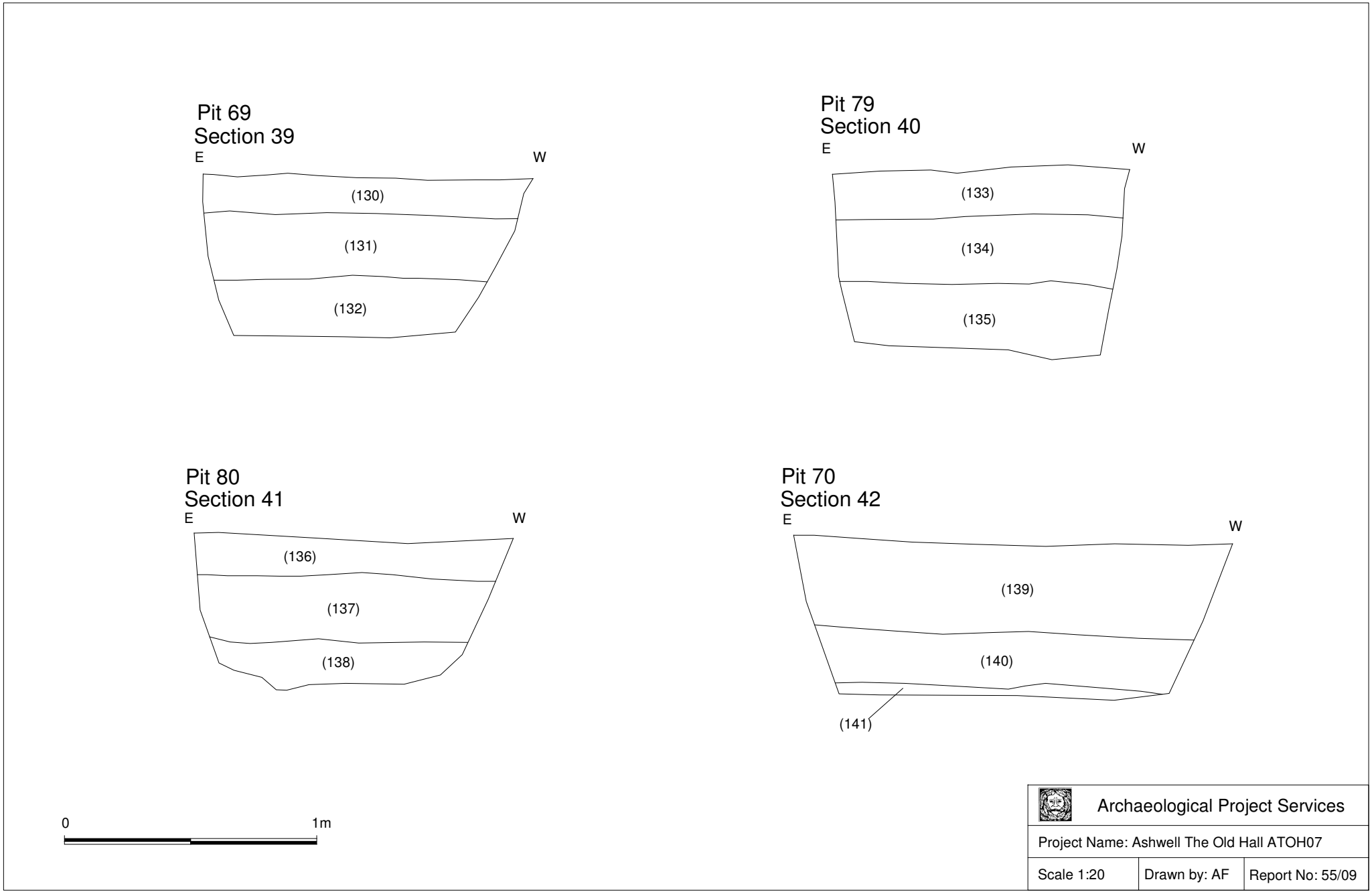
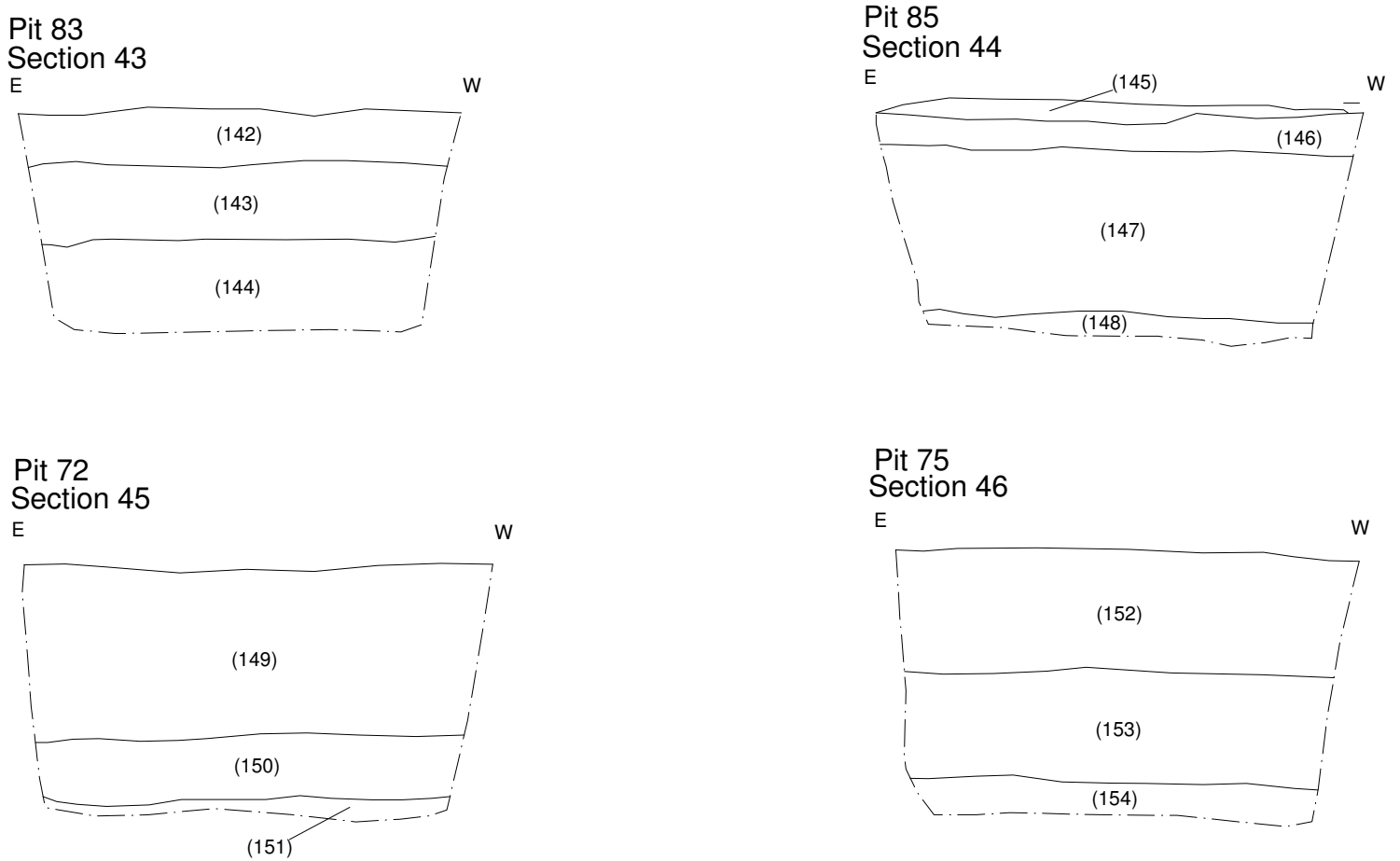


Figure 6 - Sections 39, 40, 41 and 42



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Project Name: Ashwell The Old Hall ATOH07		
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Figure 7 - Sections 43, 44, 45 and 46

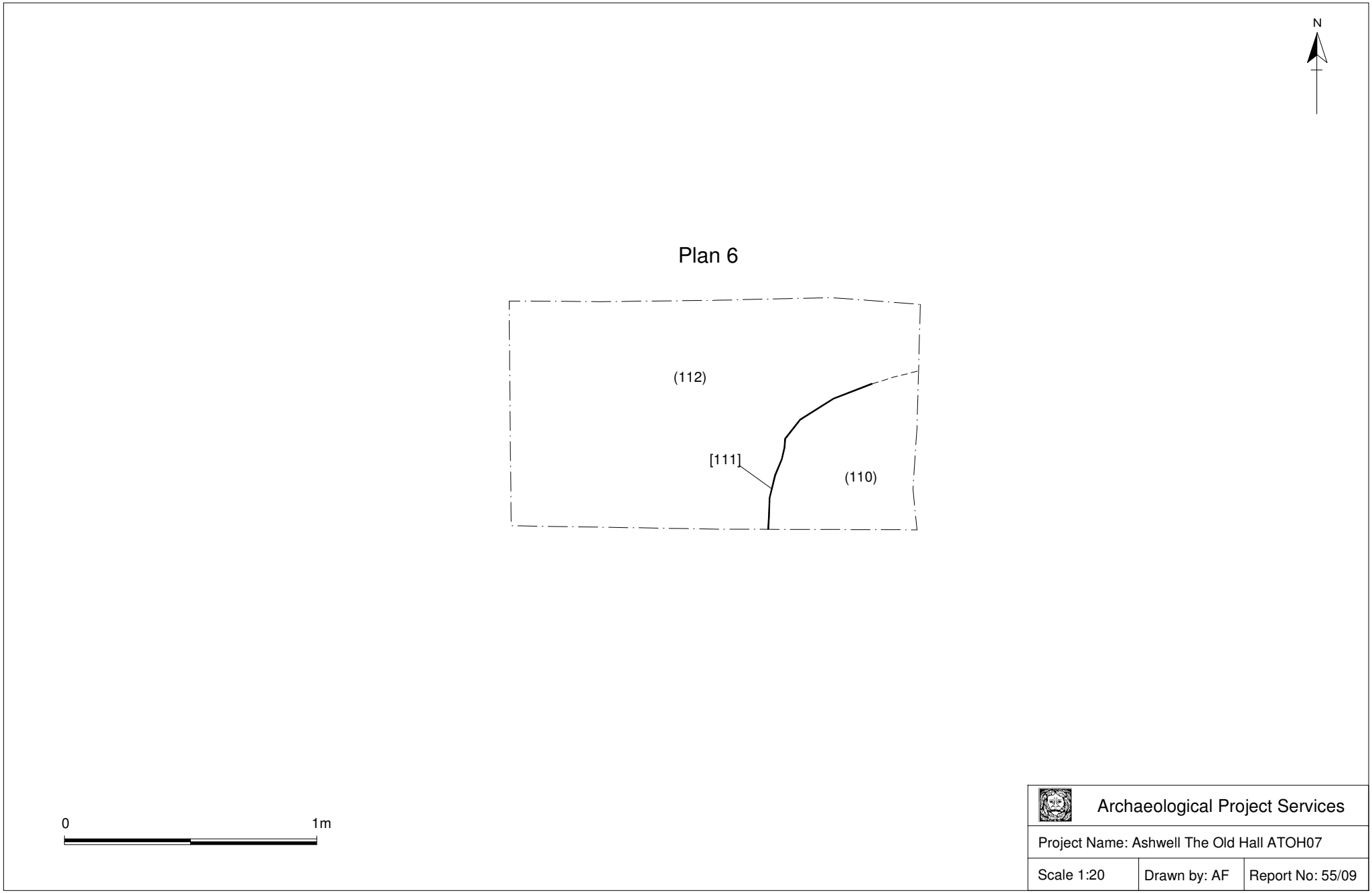

Figure 8 - Plan of Tree Pit 66

Plate 1 – General working view looking east

Plate 2 – Tree Pit 66, Section 35, showing feature [111]

Plate 3 – Tree Pit 77, Section 36

Plate 4 – Tree Pit 68, Section 38

Plate 5 – Tree Pit 69, Section 39

Plate 6 – Tree Pit 70, Section 42

Plate 7 – Tree Pit 83, Section 43

Plate 8 – Tree Pit 85, Section 44

Plate 9 – Tree Pit 75, Section 46

Appendix 1

CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Context No.	Tree Pit	Description	Interpretation
108	66	Loose mid yellowish brown stone rubble, 0.16m thick	Modern made up ground
109	66	Firm dark greyish brown sandy silty clay with frequent charcoal flecks, 0.34m thick	Topsoil
110	66	Firm dark greyish yellowish brown sandy clay with frequent charcoal and CBM flecks	Fill of [111]
111	66	Sun-circular cut at least 0.60m in diameter with straight and steep sides	Pit cut
112	66	Firm mid yellowish brown sandy silty clay with occasional small stones, 0.30m thick	Subsoil
113	76	Same as (117)	Modern overburden
114	76	Same as (118)	Made up ground
115	76	Same as (119)	Dumped deposit
116	76	Same as (120)	Subsoil
117	77	Firm mid greyish brown sandy clay with frequent mid size pebbles and occasional organic material, 0.20m thick	Modern overburden
118	77	Moderately compact mid brownish yellow stone rubble, 0.22m thick	Made up ground
119	77	Firm to loose grey and black speckled mix of charcoal sand and stone with frequent CBM flecks and cinders, 0.22m thick	Dumped deposit
120	77	Firm mid yellowish brown sandy silty clay at least 40mm thick	Subsoil
121	78	Same as (117)	Modern overburden
122	78	Firm mid greyish brown sandy clay with grey patches and frequent stones, charcoal and CBM flecks, 0.40m thick	Disturbed buried topsoil
123	78	Firm mid yellowish brown clay, 0.14m thick	Subsoil
124	67	Same as (117)	Modern overburden
125	67	Same as (128)	Buried topsoil
126	67	Same as (129)	Subsoil
127	68	Same as (117)	Modern overburden
128	68	Firm mid greyish brown sandy clay with occasional pebbles, 0.36m thick	Buried topsoil
129	68	Firm mid to light yellowish brown sandy clay at least 0.22m thick	Subsoil
130	69	Same as (117)	Modern overburden
131	69	Firm dark greyish brown clay and rubble with frequent brick fragments, charcoal flecks and cinders, 0.27m thick	Disturbed buried topsoil
132	69	Same as (129)	Subsoil
133	79	Same as (117)	Modern overburden

134	79	Firm mid greyish brown sandy clay, 0.28m thick	Buried topsoil layer
135	79	Same as (129)	Subsoil
136	80	Same as (117)	Modern overburden
137	80	Firm dark greyish brown slightly sandy clay with occasional charcoal and CBM flecks, 0.25m thick	Buried topsoil
138	80	Same as (129)	Subsoil
139	70	Same as (117)	Modern overburden
140	70	Same as (134)	Buried topsoil layer
141	70	Same as (129)	Subsoil
142	83	Same as (117)	Modern overburden
143	83	Same as (134) with occasional charcoal flecks, 0.22m thick	Buried topsoil
144	83	Same as (138)	Subsoil
145	85	Loose dark grey sand, 50mm thick	Modern made up ground
146	85	Loose mid yellowish greyish brown rubble and hardcore, 0.12m thick	Modern made up ground
147	85	Firm mid yellowish greyish brown sandy clay, 0.50m thick	Subsoil layer
148	85	Firm light yellow clay, at least 80mm thick	Natural
149	72	Loose to firm mid brown sand, gravel and clay, 0.62m thick with frequent stones, wood and occasional charcoal	Modern overburden
150	72	Same as (140)	Buried topsoil
151	72	Same as (141)	Subsoil
152	75	Firm mid dark brown sandy clay with occasional stones, 0.34m thick	Modern overburden
153	75	Firm light brown sandy clay with occasional stones, 0.32m thick	Modern overburden
154	75	Same as (151)	Former subsoil

Abbreviations
CBM Ceramic Building Material (brick/tile)

Appendix 2

THE FINDS

CERAMIC BUILDING MATERIAL

By Anne Boyle and Ross Kendall

Introduction

All the material was recorded at archive level in accordance with the guidelines laid out by the ACBMG (2001). A single fragment of brick weighing 210 grams was recovered from the site.

Methodology

The material was laid out and viewed in context order. Fragments were counted and weighed within each context. The ceramic building material was examined visually and using x20 magnification. This information was then added to an Access database. An archive list of the ceramic building material is included in Table 1.

Results

Table 1, Ceramic Building Material Archive

Cxt	Cname	Full Name	Fabric	NoF	W (g)	Description	Date
110	BRK	Brick	Oxidised sandy + fe	1	210	Sand bedded; 55mm thick; mortar; flake	18th?

Provenance

The fragment of brick was recovered from the fill (110) of pit cut [111].

Potential

No further work is required on this assemblage and it is suitable for discard.

Summary

One piece of probable 18th century brick was recovered from the watching brief at the site.

SPOT DATING

The dating in Table 2 is based on the evidence provided by the finds detailed above.

Table 2, Spot dates

Cxt	Date	Comments
110	18th?	Date on a single fragment of CBM

ABBREVIATIONS

ACBMG	Archaeological Ceramic Building Materials Group
CBM	Ceramic Building Material
CXT	Context
NoF	Number of Fragments
NoS	Number of sherds
NoV	Number of vessels
W (g)	Weight (grams)

REFERENCES

~ 2001, *Draft Minimum Standards for the Recovery, Analysis and Publication of Ceramic Building Material*, third version [internet]. Available from <http://www.geocities.com/acbmg1/CBMGDE3.htm>

Appendix 3

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 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].
Cut	A cut refers to the physical action of digging a posthole, pit, ditch, foundation trench, etc. Once the fills of these features are removed during an archaeological investigation the original 'cut' is therefore exposed and subsequently recorded.
Domesday Survey	A survey of property ownership in England compiled on the instruction of William I for taxation purposes in 1086 AD.
Fill	Once a feature has been dug it begins to silt up (either slowly or rapidly) or it can be back-filled manually. The soil(s) that become contained by the 'cut' are referred to as its fill(s).
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
Old English	The language used by the Saxon (q.v.) occupants of Britain.
Post-medieval	The period following the Middle Ages, dating from approximately AD 1500-1800.

Appendix 4

THE ARCHIVE

The archive consists of:

47	Context records
1	Photographic record sheet
1	Section record sheet
1	Plan record sheet
1	Daily record sheet
4	Sheets of scale drawings
1	Stratigraphic matrix
1	Bag of finds

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.