
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT
ON LAND AT ASHTON ROAD,
Oundle,
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
(OUAR12)**

**Work Undertaken For
John Martin and Associates on behalf of
Persimmon Homes East Midlands**

July 2012

Report Compiled by
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National Grid Reference: TL 0407 8781



Report No: **56/12**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
PROJECT
SERVICES**



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Oundle, Northamptonshire
(OUAR12)**

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1. SUMMARY

A programme of desk-based assessment was undertaken to determine the archaeological potential of a site located on Ashton Road, Oundle, Northamptonshire. The site comprises an area of approximately 4.71 hectares located on the west side of the A605. The site is uncultivated at present.

The assessment has shown that several remains of prehistoric date have been identified within the immediate area, with artefact evidence, suggestive of settlement of the Iron Age and Roman period in the same vicinity.

Evidence of Saxon and medieval settlement has been recorded on the fringe of the Study Area where it overlaps with the historic town centre, whilst evidence of later agricultural and industrial practices is prevalent across the Study Area.

The study suggests that there is potential for remains of Iron Age and Roman date in the area of the site with later field boundaries and quarry pits previously recorded within The Site itself.

Geophysical survey may be an effective means of further investigation and trial trenching would be suitable should further archaeological evaluation be required.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Definition of Desk-Based Assessment

An archaeological desk-based assessment is defined by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) as an 'assessment of the known or potential archaeological resource within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater. It consists of a collation of existing written, graphic, photographic and electronic information in order to identify the likely

character, extent, quality and worth of the known or potential archaeological resource in a local, regional, national or international context as appropriate' (IfA 1999).

2.2 Background

Archaeological Project Services was commissioned by John Martin and Associates, on behalf of Persimmon Homes East Midlands, to undertake a desk-based assessment of a plot of land located to the south of Ashton Road and to the west of the A605, Oundle Northamptonshire. The work was undertaken in accordance with IfA standards and guidelines.

2.3 Site Location

Oundle lies approximately 20km northeast of Kettering and 10 km north of Thrapston in the northeast of Northamptonshire (Fig. 1). Occupying an area of 4.71ha, the site is located on the southeastern side of Oundle, immediately to the west of the A605, which bypasses the town. The site is centred on grid reference TL 0407 8781 (Fig. 2).

2.4 Topography and Geology

Oundle is located on the west bank of the River Nene with the site located in a headland created by a bend in the river. As an urban area, soils have not been classified by the Soil Survey of Great Britain. However on the basis of nearby deposits, local soils are likely to be of the Sutton 1 Association, typically well drained calcareous loamy soils developing on river terrace gravel (Hodge *et al.* 1984, 314) above a solid geology of Great Oolite Limestone (GSGB 1951).

3. AIMS

For clarity, the area of proposed development is called 'The Site' and the

500m radius surrounding the site and the land at the southeast extending to the River Nene is called the 'Study Area'. The purpose of the desk-based assessment is to obtain information about the known and potential archaeological resource of The Site and the Study Area, as well as identifying any heritage constraints, both statutory and advisory.

4. METHODS

The research undertaken in the compilation of this document included a search of records held by the Northamptonshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) to locate all known archaeological sites and find spots occurring within a 500m radius (hereafter referred to as the Study Area) centred upon the proposed development site. The remainder of the land to the southeast enclosed by a loop of the River Nene was also included in the search area (Fig 2). A range of relevant archaeological books and journals were also consulted, together with unpublished reports for archaeological work carried out within the limits of the search area.

A search was made at the Northamptonshire Record Office for historic maps – in particular, tithe, enclosure and early Ordnance Survey maps - depicting the area. A detailed list of the sources consulted is given in the bibliography.

Information obtained from the above sources was supplemented by a walk-over survey of the proposed site to assess current ground conditions and land-use patterns, and to identify any surface finds or features, such as earthworks, that may indicate the presence of archaeological remains. The site inspection was carried out on 25th July 2012.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Historical Evidence

Oundle is first mentioned in an account of St. Wilfrid by his chantor, Eddi, in c. AD 715. Referred to as *Undolum* the name is derived from a tribal name added to the Old English for 'undivided' or 'that has no share' (Ekwall 1989, xiv and 353). Bede also refers to *Inundalum* and variations such as *Undulana mægð* and the Domesday Survey of 1086 calls the town *Undele*. Oundle survives as one of the few British place-names in Northamptonshire (Greenall 1979, 23).

The first mentions of Oundle are associated with Bishop Wilfrid (later canonised) and recorded by Bede (Sherley-Price trans. 1977, 305) and in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (Swanton 1997, 41). Bishop Wilfrid is recorded as having died at Oundle in AD 709, although Bede claims he died at his monastery in the region of Oundle (Sherley-Price trans. 1977, 312). There is no present indication of the site of this monastery although it is mentioned that a group of noble exiles with an armed force had burned down the monastery early in the 8th century (Campbell 1982, 56). However, Oundle probably remained an ecclesiastical centre, despite invasion by the Danish armies, as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records the death of Archbishop Wulfstan who was subsequently buried at Oundle in AD 957 (Swanton 1997, 113).

In AD 963, Oundle was given by St. Æthelwold to the nearby monastery of St. Peter (at Peterborough), along with the Eight Hundreds, a market and toll (Swanton 1997, 116). At the time of the Domesday Survey of 1086, the land was still in the possession of Peterborough Abbey and consisted of a mill, the market along with 23 villagers, 50 acres of meadow and income from 250 eels (Thorn and Thorn 1979).

Documentary evidence suggests that Oundle was the final resting place of St. Cett and a chapel dedicated to the saint is believed to lie southwest of the town. During the medieval period all the subsidiary fees in Oundle were held of the Abbot of Peterborough's Burystede Manor. The manor is well recorded and is mentioned in Domesday, in 1125 and again in the late 13th early 14th centuries when it possessed a dovecote. In 1565 the manor comprised a hall, stable and malthouse and lay on the east side of Bury Street, to the north of the vicarage. This vicarage was created under a licence granted by the Abbot of Peterborough in 1477 (Foard, nd).

Two plagues are known to have occurred in Oundle in 1545 and again in 1666 (VCH 1970, 87).

Founded in 1556, the Free Grammar School replaces or combined with, an earlier school dating from the later 15th century. Oundle school and Laxton Grammar School were originally one foundation but were separated in 1876 (Pevsner 2002)

Undoubtedly, some of the importance of Oundle is due to its position above a meander of the River Nene. This is reflected by a number of acts of Parliament made in 1713 and 1724 to make the river navigable between Peterborough and Northampton (Greenall 1979, 95)

At the time of Inclosure the field within which the site is located was owned by John Smith Junior. John Smith was an 'ale and porter brewer' listed in several trade directories of the mid 19th century (Kelly and Co. 1854, 471), with the brewery continuing in his name long after his death. During the 19th century he purchased the Rectory together with the title of Lord of the Rectory Manor (Osborn and Parker 1994, 87).

5.2 Cartographic Evidence

A study was made of available maps produced from the late eighteenth century onwards. The earliest map consulted (Thomas Eyre's map of Northamptonshire) dated 1779 shows little in the way of detail. There is an outline of the town of Oundle, whilst the fringes, including the site location, appear to be rural (Figure 3).

The Inclosure map of 1810 shows the site prior to later subdivision. The area of the site is located within a larger field mostly under the ownership of John Smith Junior. Along the northern edge of the field, within the Site, are several smaller strips of land or allotments. The fields between what are now Ashton Road to the north and Herne Road to the south are all labelled as St. Scythe field.

By 1885 when the first OS map is produced, the LNWR has been opened and bisects the field formerly owned by Smith. The original large field has been split into four smaller fields, with the small strips of land subsumed into the northwestern field. The Site covers the northeastern field, with Ashton Road and the railway creating the north and east boundary and the south and west being formed by newly created field boundaries.

The 1901 map shows that the field had remained as a single plot; however there is a gravel pit present in the southwestern corner of the field. The field appears to be the same size as the site exists at present.

5.3 Archaeological Data (Appendix 1 and Figures 7 – 10)

SMR Data

The following period-by-period outline of the known archaeology, within the Study Area is summarised from information obtained from the Northamptonshire HER. Information has been mapped onto Figures

7 – 10 and numbered as shown in Appendix 1.

Prehistoric and Bronze Age (Figure 7)

There are several prehistoric or Bronze Age sites noted on the SMR within the search area. Immediately to the northeast of the site, to the east of the A605, photographic mapping suggests several clustered features including a series of ditches and enclosures, pits, a possible building along with a round barrow or burial site (Map Refs. 16,17,49-52 and 107)

To the southeast of the site is a spread of 'possible prehistoric activity' identified from aerial photographs (Map Refs. 19, 39, 40,150,153,154). The features include two possible round barrows and a track, the latter extending south from the cropmarks northeast of the site, to a further group of cropmarks c.650m to the south of the site. Several circular cropmarks and a ditch have been interpreted as a barrow cemetery (Map Refs. 33-38 and 68).

To the west of the site is a potential prehistoric paleochannel (Map ref. 127) identified during archaeological evaluation.

Roman (Figure 8)

To the east of the site, in the same location as many of the Prehistoric cropmarks is a potential Romano-British building identified from finds and a cropmark during a larger fieldwalking survey of the area. The occurrence of red tile and building stone has led to suggestions of the site as a Roman villa (Map Refs. 14, 56, 66, 108, 109).

An archaeological evaluation to the west of the site revealed a ditch containing several sherds of a locally produced Romano-British pottery (Map Refs. 129,134).

Late Saxon and Medieval (Figure 9)

Although there are no extant remains, documentary evidence suggests that there was an 11th century chapel to St.Scythe on a small hill less than 300m to the west of the site (Map Ref. 29).

Further to the southwest is an individual findspot of a miniature ceramic plate recovered by a metal detectorist (Map Ref 113)

A larger concentration of medieval features exists to the north west of the site on the fringe of the search area, where it meets the edge of the town centre. This includes the survival of medieval tenements identified during an urban survey (Map Refs. 26, 27 and 28).

Two archaeological interventions also recorded medieval activity in this area. One recorded features of 11/12th century and 13th century dates (Map Refs. 20, 115 and 117) whilst the other excavation revealed Saxo-Norman pottery, a potential medieval building and a possible medieval metal working site (Figure 9, Map Refs. 139 – 145, 149).

Evidence of agricultural activity is recorded to the north, south and west of the site in the form of field boundaries and ridge and furrow (Map Refs. 22, 45-47, 55, 118, 128, 130, 132, 133, and 151).

Post-medieval and modern (Figure 10)

Evidence of post-medieval and modern occupation is prolific and can be observed across much of the Study Area.

A potential post-medieval field boundary observed on aerial photography is present running north-south within The Site itself (Map Ref. 48). The only other HER entry relevant to The Site is an extraction pit or quarry observed during field survey (Map Ref. 102). Immediately to the west of the

site are several other quarrying and industrial sites identified both through survey and from aerial photography (Map Refs. 44, 119, 120, 124). Further quarrying sites are also recorded to the north (Map Refs. 12 and 123). Industrial activity is also present to the northeast around the area of Ashton Mill (Map Refs. 24, 30, 63, 105). The London and North Western railway ran to the immediate east of the site (Map Ref. 5), and is now the location of the A605.

The majority of the remaining entries relate to Listed Buildings (covered in the following section) or buildings highlighted in extensive surveys of the town or local area. These all lie to the northwest of the site, many situated on the edge of the historical core of the town (Map Refs. 1-4, 6-9, 11, 57, 58, 60-62, 64, 65, 67).

Other SMR entries within the study area relate to archaeological features, such as pits, ditches or gullies, identified during archaeological intervention or observed on aerial photographs (Map Refs. 43, 116, 122, 135, 146-148)

Undated (No figure)

There are a number of undated HER entries within the study area. Several entries relate to undated buildings of which the entries are scant, but these are all located northwest of the site, on the fringe of the study area, at the edge of the historic town core (Table Nos. 72-98).

Other examples of undated activity are evident at the far southeast and to the northwest of the site and include undated features observed during excavations, boundary ditches, and undated natural features (Table Nos. 18, 41, 54, 71, 121, 125, 126, 137, 138 and 152). Further examples of industrial activity lie to the north and south of the site (Table Nos. 53, 99-104).

Elements of the cropmark complexes mentioned earlier – ditches, enclosures etc. – are also listed as undated but probably relate to later prehistoric or Roman occupation here.

Listed Buildings within the Study Area (Appendix 1, Figure 10)

There are nine Listed Buildings within the Study Area and these are briefly described below. The majority of these are located to the northwest of the site, where the edge of the study area overlaps with the fringes of the historic core of Oundle. All the buildings located within that group are Grade II listed. The one other remaining building, Ashton Mill, is on the northeast fringe of the study area and is Grade II* listed.

Of those to the northwest of the site, Nos 2 & 3 St. Osyth's Lane (Map Ref. 160) are 17th century two-storey buildings in coursed rubble, altered in the 19th century to include a small shop front. On the same road, No 4 and The Angel Public House were constructed in the 18th century in coursed stone; these were also altered in the 19th century with an additional 2 storey extension.

No 21, the former Anchor Inn (Map Ref. 162), bears a date stone of 1637 in the gable. It is a very low building of 2 storeys in coursed rubble with a slate roof. It has a later 18th century two storey hipped bay in ashlar.

Jericho in the Market Place (Map Ref. 157) was originally a single 16th century house of two storeys. This was later divided into two properties and extended. The property has undergone modern alterations that include a 2 storey extension.

The 18th century stone boundary wall and gateway of Bramston House (Map Ref. 163) is listed and falls within the study

area, the house too is listed, but falls outside of the area.

No 4 East Road (Map Ref. 158) consists of two distinct adjoining houses. The first is a low 2 storey coursed rubble building constructed in the early 18th century. The second is a very high building of two storeys with an adjoining barn. No 6 East Road is adjoining and is a late 17th/early 18th century building of roughly coursed rubble.

The garden wall, doorway and gazebo of No 16 North Street (Map Ref. 159) all date from c. 1700. The gazebo is two-storey with a pointed roof and ball finial with an external staircase to the 1st floor.

Ashton Mill (Map Ref. 155) was a water-powered corn mill of late 18th century/early 19th century date, that incorporated some surviving fabric from an earlier mill. It was extended c.1900 and was adapted to form an electricity generating and water pumping station for the Ashton Estate at the behest of Lord Rothschild. Constructed of orange brick and coursed limestone, the original rectangular plan straddled the water supply channel leading from the River Nene.

5.4 Site Inspection (Figure 11, Plates 1 - 4)

A walk-over survey was undertaken on 25th July 2012. Access to the site is along an overgrown grass and gravel track that appears to be a public right of way. The eastern end of the track is accessed by a padlocked gate from the busy A605, while at the western end there are padlocked posts restricting access to vehicles. The western end has only a narrow footpath with up to 2m of vegetation either side, at least some of which has been purposefully landscaped and planted and which may hinder access for plant.

The site is bounded, to the north, east and

south by a wooden post and barbed wire fence, with a new wide entrance gate on the northern boundary. To the west a high wooden fence separates the site from the rear of the properties on the modern estate, the exception being the southwest corner which would potentially need fencing. A strong mature tree line bounds the majority of the site.

At the northern corner of the field is a fenced Anglian Water access point/compound, which appears to service the modern estate to the northwest. Although manholes attest to the presence of underground services on the track leading from Ashton Road, none of these appear to enter the site.

The site appears to have previously been under cultivation, but at present, low sparse vegetation and weeds cover parts of the field, and there is a notable presence of rabbits, with widespread areas of burrowing from which two pieces of pottery of Roman and medieval date were retrieved.

The ground within the site is undulating, rising to form a mound to the east. A hollow/lower area appears to extend from the northern corner of the site extending in a curvilinear fashion to the southern boundary. The ground rises sharply again in the southwestern corner of the site. It is unclear whether this 'raised' area is due to the construction of the LNWR line, which is now perpetuated by the route of the A605 immediately to the east of the site, or if the hollow was the location of the former gravel pit or quarry, noted on historic maps.

6. CONSTRAINTS

6.1 Heritage Constraints

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in The Site or Study Area.

6.2 Other Constraints

There are no obvious services present on the site, although there is a small inspection/access compound bordering the northern corner of the site.

Access to the field is along a track that appears to be a public right of way, the eastern end has a padlocked gate, with padlocked post barriers preventing vehicular access to the west.

7. DISCUSSION

There are several probable prehistoric remains recorded on the HER within the Study Area, mainly consisting of aerial photographic interpretation of cropmark evidence. A concentration of these cropmarks are located immediately east of the site and there are further cropworks sites to the south, stretching to the southern fringe of the study area. Such cropmark sites may be widespread on the river terrace gravel.

The area immediately to the east of the site also contains Iron Age and Roman finds, with roof tile, pottery and stonework suggesting that there may be a Roman villa located within 200m of the site. An evaluation to the west of the site also revealed features containing 1st and 2nd century AD Romano-British pottery.

The Late Saxon and medieval period is represented mainly by a concentration of agricultural features and buildings on the fringe of the Study Area where it encompasses the edge of the historic town core. Archaeological interventions produced evidence of Saxo-Norman occupation along with a potential medieval building and possible medieval metal working site.

Evidence of post-medieval and modern settlement includes Listed and other structures in Oundle. There are also

several quarrying sites, attested to both through field survey and aerial photographs. Cartographic evidence suggests the presence of a quarry pit within the site. A number of locations reflect the agricultural nature of the fringes of Oundle, where ridge and furrow or field boundaries are recorded.

The only HER entries that relate directly to The Site are a possible post-medieval field boundary, noted from aerial photographic evidence (Figure 10 Map Ref. 48), and an undated quarry pit (Map Ref. 102).

Cartographic evidence indicates that the site has mostly had an agricultural function since at least the late 18th century, with the addition of some limited extractive industry in the 19th century.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The data collated as part of this assessment identified records dating from the prehistoric to post-medieval periods within the Study Area. Concentrations of cropmarks immediately to the east of the site, which continue further to the south, suggest prehistoric activity in the vicinity of the site. The same area has evidence of Roman activity, with the potential for an occupation site or villa. Further Roman activity has been noted to the west of the site, the recovery of artefacts from these sites possibly suggest widespread settlement in the vicinity in this period.

Saxo-Norman and medieval occupation is mostly limited to the fringes of the historic core of Oundle at the north-eastern edge of the Study Area. Post-medieval and modern activity in the vicinity of the site mostly relates to the industrial and agricultural utilisation of the outskirts of Oundle.

Although the site has previously been ploughed it is, at present, unsuitable for fieldwalking due to the presence of patchy

vegetation and the general condition of the field. Geophysical survey may be a more suitable option to assess the potential of any archaeology present within the site. Trial trench evaluation could be appropriately employed should further assessment of the site be required.

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeological Project Services would like to acknowledge the assistance of Martin Bagshaw of John Martin and Associates who commissioned this report on behalf of Persimmon Homes East Midlands. The work was coordinated by Steve Malone who edited this report along with Tom Lane. Thanks are due to the staff of Northamptonshire Sites and Monuments Record and the Archive Records Office.

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11. ABBREVIATIONS

GSGB Geological Survey of Great Britain

HER Historic Environment Record

IfA Institute for Archaeologists

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT ON LAND AT ASHTON ROAD, OUNDLE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

NRO Northamptonshire Record
 Office

OS Ordnance Survey