

**Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording,
Analysis and Publication (OIRAP) at 7 Main Street,
Ashley, Northamptonshire, LE16 8HF**

NGR: SP 79345 91031

Robbie Mabbett



Site Name: 7 Main Street, Ashley, Northamptonshire, LE16 8HF

Grid Ref: SP 79345 91031

Author: Robbie Mabbett

Client: Mr J. Ward, Walter Ward Country Homes Ltd.

Planning Authority: North Northamptonshire Council

Planning Ref: NK/2022/0477

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Cover photo: Sheep from neighbouring field observing the site and a picturesque shot of St Mary the Virgin's Church

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	Start/end dates	23 rd March – 19 th April 2023		
	Previous/Future Work	No		
	Project Type	Watching brief		
	Site Status			
	Current Land Use	Bungalow and associated gardens		
	Monument Type/Period	none		
	Significant Finds/Period	none		
	Reason for Investigation	Planning regulation		
	Position in the Planning Process	Condition		
Planning Ref.	NK/2022/0477			
PROJECT LOCATION	County	Northamptonshire		
	Site Address/Postcode	7, Main Street, Ashley, Northamptonshire, LE16 8HF		
	Study Area			
	Site Coordinates	SP 79345 91031		
	Height OD	84m OD		
PROJECT CREATORS	Organisation	University of Leicester Archaeological Services		
	Project Brief Originator	N/A		
	Project Design Originator	University of Leicester Archaeological Services		
	Project Manager	Vicki Score		
	Project Director/Supervisor	Robbie Mabbett		
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Contents

Summary	4
Introduction.....	4
Location, Topography & Geology	4
Historical and Archaeological Background	5
Aims and Objectives	7
Research Objectives.....	7
Methodology	7
Results.....	10
The Pottery.....	15
The Animal Bone.....	16
The Charred Plant Remains	16
Discussion and Conclusions	18
Archive and Publication.....	19
Acknowledgements.....	19
Bibliography	19
Appendix 1: Context List.....	21

Figures

Figure 1: Location of site within the UK, County and locally.....	5
Figure 2: 1st edition OS map (1885) of Ashley Village.	6
Figure 3: Site monitoring, looking south	8
Figure 4: Detailed location plan showing site location highlighted red and proposals (bottom) (provided by client).....	9
Figure 5: Stripping the northern to central area of the site, looking south	10
Figure 6: Aftermath of the demolished bungalow and garden, looking north-east	11
Figure 7: West facing section of eastern trench in garden store area, looking east.	11
Figure 8: Machine excavating the north-south trench of garden store, looking north-east	12
Figure 9: Finished foundations of the garden store, looking south-east.....	12
Figure 10: Finished foundations of the garage area, looking southwest.....	13
Figure 11: Location of pit 001	14
Figure 12: Plan shot of animal pit [001], looking west.....	14
Figure 13: Finished foundations of the house, looking northwest.....	15
Figure 14: Final shot, with all archaeological work completed, looking north-west ..	18

Tables

Table 1: Timetable of work.....	8
Table 2: The medieval pottery by fabric, sherd count and weight.....	15
Table 3: Charred plant remains from sample 1. Key: + = 0-10 items (rare), ++ = 11-50 items (common).	17

An Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording, Analysis and Publication (OIRAP) at 7 Main Street, Ashley, Northamptonshire, LE16 8HF.

Robbie Mabbett

Summary

This report details the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) in the grounds of 7 Main Street, Ashley, Northamptonshire, LE16 8HF. The work was undertaken between 23rd March – 19th April 2023 on behalf of Jerry Ward, Walter Ward Country Homes Ltd, in advance of the Demolition of Existing Dwelling and Construction of Replacement Dwelling.

The site, 41m x 46m was stripped down to the natural substrata in three areas for the purposes of archaeological investigation. A single archaeological feature, a pit containing an animal burial, was identified and excavated during the scheme of work. No other archaeological features were identified.

The archive will be deposited with Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre under the event number ENN111025.

Introduction

In accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Section 16 Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment, (MHCLG 2021) this document forms the report for archaeological attendance and recording (watching brief) at 7 Main Street, Ashley, Northamptonshire, LE16 8HF.

The work was carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on behalf of Walter Ward Country Homes Ltd.

Planning Permission has been granted for the Demolition of Existing Dwelling and Construction of Replacement Dwelling (Planning Ref: NK/2022/0477), and associated services and the permission includes a condition for archaeological work. Due to the archaeological potential, the Planning Archaeologist for North Northamptonshire as advisor to North Northamptonshire County Council has requested archaeological attendance for inspection and recording (watching brief) during any groundworks for the proposed development in order to record any archaeological remains that may be present and mitigate the impacts of the scheme.

Location, Topography & Geology

7 Main Street lies in the historic village of Ashley next to the Church of St Mary the Virgin (Figure 1). The site was developed in the 20th century and currently contains a bungalow and associated gardens. The site is accessed from the north side of Main Street and lies at a height of approximately 84m OD on the first terrace above the Welland Valley.

The British Geological Survey identifies the bedrock geology of the area as Whitby Mudstone formation and Dryham formation mudstone and siltstone bedrock to the south of the River Welland. (<https://www.bgs.ac.uk/map-viewers/geology-of-britainviewer/>).

The Soilscape website indicates that the soils will be slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage (Soilscape 8: <http://www.landis.org.uk/soilscales/>).



Figure 1: Location of site within the UK, County and locally.

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Historical and Archaeological Background

A Heritage Statement was undertaken for the site in 2021 summarising the historical background of the area (Heritage Archaeology 2021).

The place name Ashley is from Old English and relates to an Ash tree wood or clearing. Ashley is first documented in the Domesday Book of AD 1086, this records the manor as being held by Countess Judith (a niece of William I) and Robert de Bucy. The entry notes that 'Northmann held it' which suggests that there was a pre-existing settlement, possibly Anglo-Scandinavian, at Ashley prior to the Norman Conquest of 1066. The early medieval village appears to have been focused around the area of the now shrunken settlement remains surviving as earthworks to the north of Green Lane and south of Main Street (400m southeast of the proposed development site). This area forms an oval enclosure with a stream, a tributary of the river Welland, forming its northern boundary.

The grassland of the Welland Valley has been favoured grazing land throughout the historic period, and it is likely to have been an attractive environment for settlement during the prehistoric period. To the north-west of the village, between Ashley and Weston by Welland, is the site of a large Iron Age and Romano-British settlement. Excavations at the site during the 1960s identified a Roman villa.

A Heritage Statement accompanied the planning request. This identified Ashley as an historic village within the Welland Valley, predominately unchanged in essence from the medieval period, with the Church at the centre. The site is adjacent to the burial ground for the Church of St Mary the Virgin (Grade I Listed and dating from the 13th century) and lies just outside of the Village Conservation Area.



Figure 2: 1st edition OS map (1885) of Ashley Village.

The fields to the north of the site comprise the original medieval open fields of the village and contain the remnants of ridge and furrow (MNN111678, MNN132784) and are also identified as post-medieval enclosure (the open fields of Ashley were enclosed by Acts of Parliament in 1807). Further post-medieval enclosures lie to the south of Main Street (MNN111731, MNN111732).

The Ashley Enclosure Map (1807) shows what appears to be a courtyard farmstead on the site. The land belonged to Sir John Palmer, baronet and within the same holding as the Manor House to the east. Sir John Palmer, 5th Baronet was a politician, whose main residence was East Carlton Hall. By the 1st edition OS map (1885) the buildings have gone, and the site comprises fields until the late 20th century. The current bungalow appears on the 1990 OS map (Heritage Archaeology 2021).

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of the investigation is to provide evidence to understand the nature, date, function, and character of the archaeological remains present and to mitigate the impact of the development using preservation by record.

The main objectives of the archaeological work were defined as follows:

- To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.
- To characterise the extent, date range, character, condition and significance of any archaeological deposits to be affected by the ground works. To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of any archaeological deposits and features encountered.
- To excavate and record archaeological deposits uncovered during the work.
- To recover artefacts and ecofacts to aid in the dating and interpretation of any archaeological deposits and features encountered.
- To advance understanding of the heritage assets and establish the relationship of any remains within the wider landscape.
- To produce an archive and report of any results.

Research Objectives

The site has the potential to add to research objectives mainly from the Medieval period, identified within *The East Midlands Historic Environment Research Framework* <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/researchframeworks/eastmidlands/wiki/>.

The excavation results have the potential to contribute to knowledge on medieval rural settlement, landscape and society. Specific research questions that might be relevant include:

Medieval

- 6C Review the evidence for developing settlement hierarchies.
- 7E Investigate the morphology of rural settlements.
- 7 F Investigate development structure and landholdings of manorial estate centres.
- 7I Investigate development of the open-field system and woodland management.

Methodology

All work followed the procedures set out in the approved *Written Scheme of Investigation* (WSI) for the project (ULAS 2022).

All work was carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (updated 2020) and adhered to their *Code of Conduct* (updated 2021). The event number **ENN111025** was used to identify all records and artefacts.

Fieldwork was carried out by ULAS between the 23/3/2023 and 19/4/2023 and was followed by post-excitation and reporting.

Table 1: Timetable of work

Date	Site Staff	Times	Description
23/3/23	RM	8:00 - 14:20	Sitework
17/4/23	RM	8:00 - 11:30	Sitework
18/4/23	RM	8:00 - 15:50	Report
19/4/23	RM	8:30 - 12:30	Sitework
			Post-Excavation



Figure 3: Site monitoring, looking south

The watching brief involved the observation of the engineering works for the scheme by an experienced professional archaeologist. Excavation was carried out by the client's contractor, using machines provided by the contractor. The excavator used was a digger, one 3 tonne machine fitted with a 0.6m spiked blade and a 360-machine using a 1.8m ditching bucket, and a 0.6m slat bladed bucket. Spoil was removed from the excavation area and stored using a dumper (Figure 3).

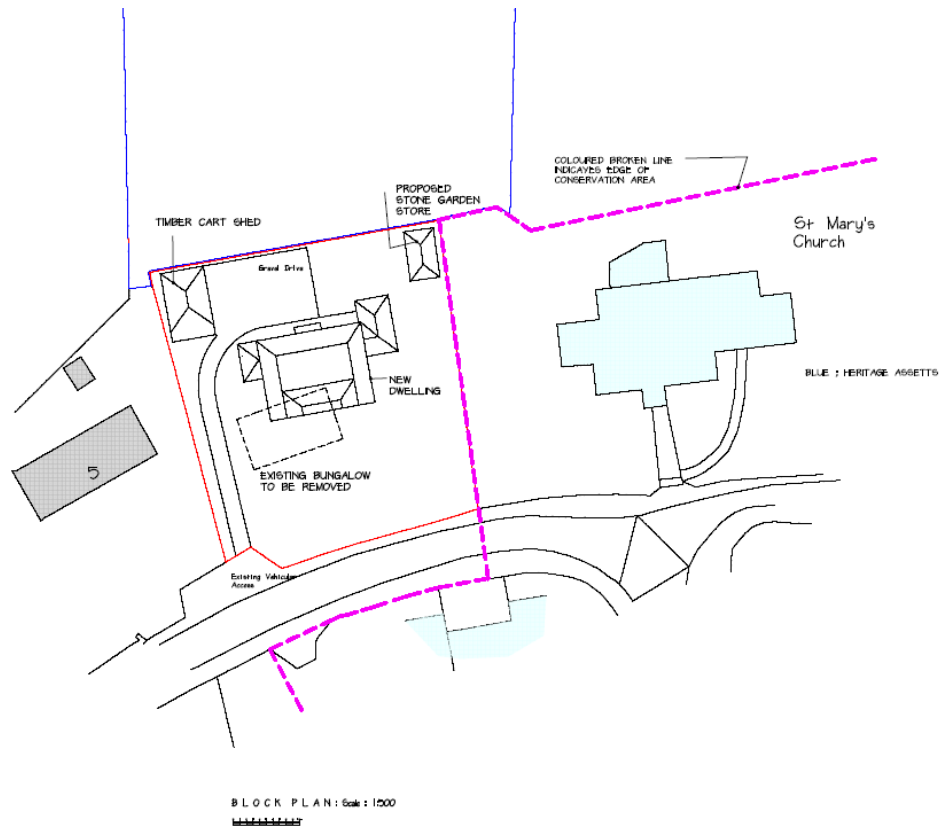
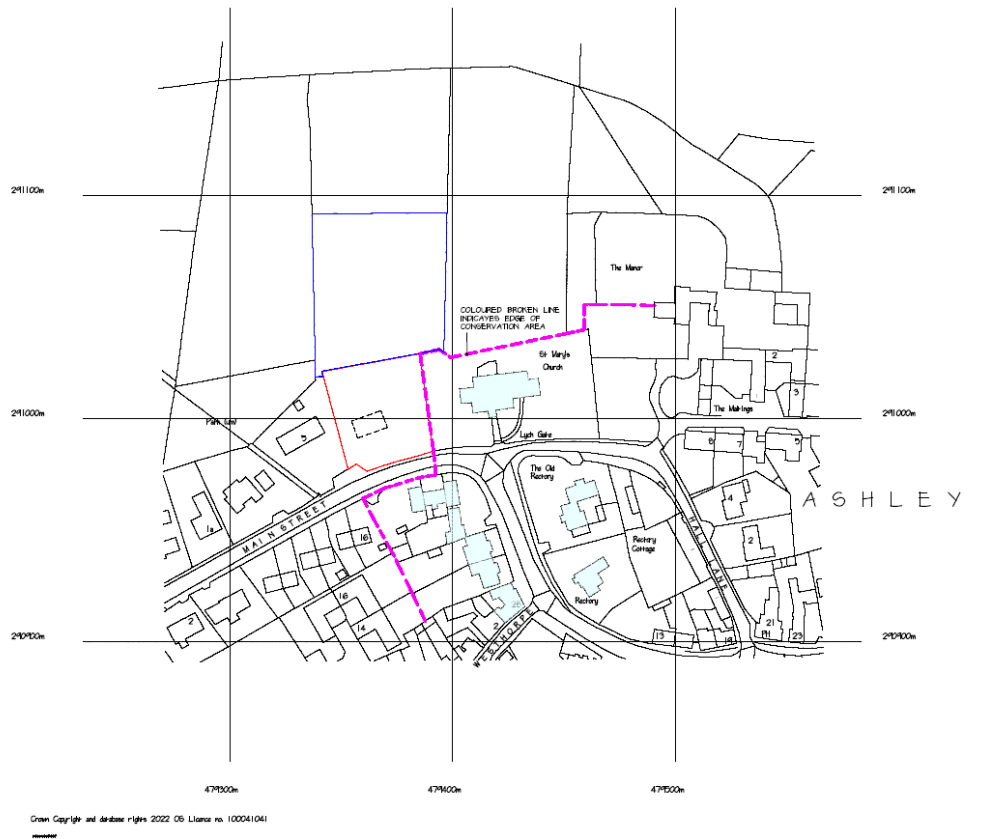


Figure 4: Detailed location plan showing site location highlighted red and proposals (bottom) (provided by client)

Monitoring

Internal monitoring procedures were undertaken with the project manager, to ensure that project targets were met, and professional standards maintained. No monitoring visits were undertaken, but photos and descriptions of the results were shared with Planning archaeologist during the work.



Figure 5: Stripping the northern to central area of the site, looking south

Results

Three areas were observed: the garden store, the garage & driveway and the house. Representative section drawings of the soil stratigraphy were recorded from several areas across site, including the foundations of the house, shed and stripped driveway/garage.

The site was stripped to the natural substratum which comprised a mid-brownish orange clay with fragments of sandstone, Whitby and Dryham mudstone at an approximate depth of 0.44m. Throughout most of the site, the soil sequence consisted of a mid-greyish brown silty clay subsoil with roots and the topsoil being primarily of garden soil, dark brown in colour with roots and typical garden waste (Figure 7).



Figure 6: Aftermath of the demolished bungalow and garden, looking north-east



Figure 7: West facing section of eastern trench in garden store area, looking east.



Figure 8: Machine excavating the north-south trench of garden store, looking north-east

In the north-east corner of the site, the planned area for the garden store, an area approximately 5m x 8.4m, was stripped to an approximate depth of 0.20m. The foundations were excavated ranging from 0.55m – 1m in depth (Figure 8 and Figure 9). Whilst there was potential for human remains appearing close to the churchyard wall, no archaeological features or finds were identified in this area.



Figure 9: Finished foundations of the garden store, looking south-east

The north-western corner of the site, an area approximately 6.3m x 10.9m. The foundations of the garage were excavated at an approximate depth of 1.15m -1.3m (Figure 10). No archaeological features were identified.



Figure 10: Finished foundations of the garage area, looking southwest

The northern to central part of the site was stripped for the proposed driveway. The soils were deeper on the western side of the area, which suggests the area had been terraced in the past. In the central, northern area, a circular pit [001] had concave moderate sides, with a u-shaped base (Figure 11 and Figure 12). It was 0.75m wide and a length of 1.36m. The fill (002) was a dark greyish brown silty clay, with infrequent rounded stones. Fifty percent of the pit was hand-excavated and revealed to contain the remains of an animal burial, a young horse. Two sherds of medieval pottery and a small assemblage of other bone, chicken and rodent elements, were also recovered from the pit fill. The charred plant remains recovered from the sample were low in number but included wheat and barley as well as stinking camomile and brassica seeds.

The central to southern area of the site, where the house would be, was stripped and revealed no archaeology. This is the area where the 20th century bungalow had been located and therefore there was significant modern disturbance. The foundations for the house were dug to an approximate depth between 1.05m -1.30m (Figure 13).

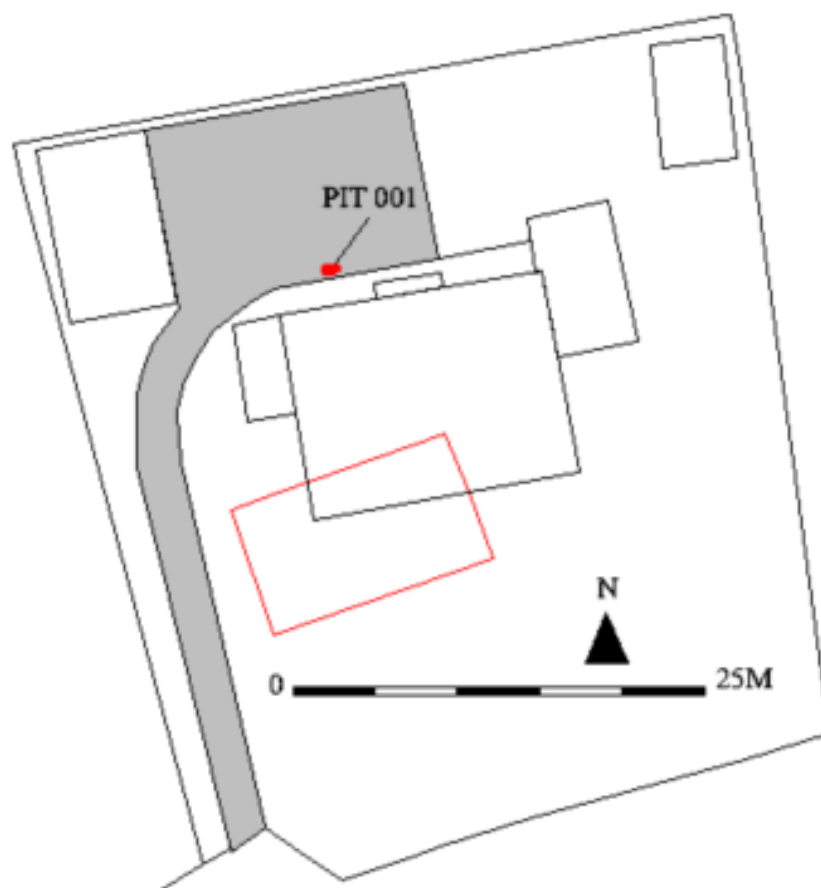


Figure 11: Location of pit 001



Figure 12: Plan shot of animal pit [001], looking west.



Figure 13: Finished foundations of the house, looking northwest.

The Pottery

Alice Forward

Two sherds of medieval pottery weighing 10g in total were recovered from pit [001] during the observation of construction work at Ashley, Northamptonshire. The pottery has been recorded in line with the *Standards* (Barclay et al 2016), the CIfA Specialist Reporting Toolkit and the fabrics in accordance with the Northamptonshire fabric series (Blinkhorn 2010).

Table 2: The medieval pottery by fabric, sherd count and weight

Context	No sherds	Weight (g)	Fabric Code	Fabric name	Date range
002	1	7	CTS 320	Lyveden/Stanion B (LYB)	1100 - 1400
002	1	3	CTS 330	Shelly Coarseware	1100 - 1400

The two sherds are typical Northamptonshire medieval fabrics and contemporary with one another. The sherd of LYB has heavy carbonised residue on the external surface but a very small splash of glaze on the internal surface.

Both sherds are very small and highly abraded and are residual within the pit fill which is clearly later in date due to the size of the horse buried within (see report below).

No further work is recommended.

The Animal Bone

William Johnson

Data collection, analysis and report completed on 02/05/2023

Introduction

During observation of construction work at Ashley, Northamptonshire, a small pit [1] containing a dense concentration of animal bone was uncovered (figure 1). The pit was 50% excavated by hand and a bulk soil sample taken for analysis of the bone. The pit was found to contain the remains of a young equid. Pottery recovered from the fill of the pit suggested a medieval date.

Methodology

Identification to element and taxa was attempted on all fragments through comparison to reference material housed at the University of Leicester Archaeological Services. Associated and joining fragments were grouped together and recorded as individual specimens. Surface condition of the bone was scored following Harland *et al* (2003). Ageing of equids by dental eruption followed Levine (1982) and identification of equid species was attempted on permanent cheek teeth following Johnstone (2004). Withers heights were calculated using the multiplication factors in May (1985).

Discussion

The carcass position within the ground clearly demonstrates dismemberment although no evidence of butchery was observed on any of the bones. The burial of the young animal likely represents the disposal of a casualty of a working animal. The calculated withers height is relatively high for medieval horses, only just falling within the range observed in the analysis of 475 medieval (AD1350-1500) specimens from across England (Ameen *et al.* 2021) and well above the average. It is much more similar to those observed in post-medieval (1500-1650) specimens, especially as the horse in question was not yet fully skeletally mature. Combined with the good condition of the bone, this might suggest a later date for the burial.

The Charred Plant Remains

Rachel Small

Introduction

During a watching brief at Ashley, Northamptonshire a small pit [001] was excavated that contained the skeleton of a young equid likely dating to the post-medieval period. A soil sample was taken from the pit fill to ensure the recovery of small bone, other artefacts and plant remains. This report presents the assessment of the plant remains recovered. Other artefacts are addressed in their relevant specialist reports.

Methodology

Following Campbell *et al.* (2011), the soil sample was processed in a York tank using a 0.5mm mesh with flotation into a 0.3mm sieve. The flotation fraction (flot) and heavy residue were air dried. The flot was sorted for plant remains and other artefacts under an x10-60 stereo microscope. The heavy residue was passed through 4mm and 2mm sieves and the fractions greater than 2mm in size were sorted by eye for finds. Plant remains were identified by comparison to reference material held at ULAS. Plant names follow Stace (2019) and counts followed a minimum numbers approach (Charles *et al.* 2009). The flot and extracted finds are to be submitted to the local museum as part of the site archive.

Results

A small number of charred plant remains were recovered from the flot (Table 2). This included grains of free-threshing wheat (*Triticum* spp.) and barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.). A fragment of a cultivated legume was present, but it was not possible to identify this to species as it was abraded. Seeds from stinking chamomile (*Anthemis cotula* L.), cleavers (*Galium aparine* L.), docks (*Rumex* sp.) and plants of the cabbage family (Brassicaceae) were identified. Charcoal flecks were present in the flot but none of the fragments were greater than 4mm. Modern rootlets were common.

Table 3: Charred plant remains from sample 1. Key: + = 0-10 items (rare), ++ = 11-50 items (common).

Sample	1	
Context	2	
Context description	Soil around horse bones	
Date	Post-med	
Volume (L)	6	
Grain		
<i>Triticum</i> sp. free-threshing	3	Wheat, free-threshing
<i>Hordeum vulgare</i> L.	3	Barley
Indeterminate cereal	1	Indeterminate cereal
Legumes		
Vicia/Lathyrus	1	Vetches/Peas
Seeds		
<i>Anthemis cotula</i> L.	1	Stinking chamomile
Brassicaceae	2	Cabbage family
<i>Galium aparine</i> L.	1	Cleavers
<i>Rumex</i> sp.	2	Docks
Total items	14	
Items per litre	2.3	
Other remains		
Charcoal flecks	+	
Animal bone	+	
Pottery	+	
Modern rootlets	++	

Discussion

Overall, the preservation of the charred plant remains was good, but they were recovered in low densities. The remains are suggestive of refuse from preparation and consumption of cereals and legumes that was incorporated into the backfill of the pit. The backfill likely represents redeposited material as medieval pottery was present. No further work is recommended on the material detailed in this report.

Discussion and Conclusions

The proposed development at 7 Main Street, Ashley had the potential to uncover surviving archaeological remains, particularly from the medieval/post-medieval period due to the site's location, historical background of the village and proximity to the medieval settlements. In particular the site is adjacent to the burial ground for the medieval Church of St Mary the Virgin and the potential for the presence of human remains on the site was high. No human burials were subsequently found during this scheme of work.

The natural substrate was noticeably truncated, as the subsoil was visibly a shallow layer. It is therefore likely that the site had been levelled in advance of the construction of the early and now demolished bungalow.

A single pit containing the remains of a near-complete animal was found in the central-southern part of the site. The burial is likely to be a young horse. Whilst the pottery found within the pit was medieval in date, the size of the horse clearly indicated that the burial was post-medieval in date and therefore the pottery is residual in this context.



Figure 14: Final shot, with all archaeological work completed, looking north-west

Archive and Publication

The archive for the project will be deposited with Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre in line with their guidance (Donelly-Symes 2021) and in accordance with national standards (Brown 2011 and ClfA 2020b) under the event number ENN111025. It consists of the following:

- 1 Unbound copy of this report (2022-22) and electronic copy (pdf_A).
- 2 Photographic record sheets
- 1 DVD of 54 digital photographs
- 1 Permatrace sheet with drawings
- 2 Contact sheet of digital photos
- 1 box containing all finds including CPRs

A summary of this report will appear in due course in the Transactions the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society.

The online OASIS data entry has been completed detailing the results of the project and will be digitally accessible through The Archaeological Data Services (<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/>).

Acknowledgements

ULAS would like to thank the client, Jerry Ward, of Walter Ward Country Homes Ltd for the work and Dan Robbins for the help during the project. The fieldwork and post-excavation were undertaken by Robbie Mabbett, William Johnson (Animal Bones), Alice Forward (Pottery), Samuel Hay and Rachel Small (Plant Remains). Project managed by Vicki Score for ULAS. The plant machinery was provided by Harborough Hires and operated by Dan Robbins.

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Appendix 1: Context List

Context	Type	Description	Finds
001	Cut	Sub-circular pit cut	
002	Fill	Fill of Pit [001]	Animal bone and sherds of pottery
003	Layer	Topsoil	
004	Layer	Subsoil	
005	Layer	Natural	



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