A programme of archaeological observation investigation, recording and analysis at Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire November 2015

Report No: 15/215

Scheduled Monument Heritage List number: 1015534
Registered Park and Garden Heritage List number: 1000488
Planning application: DA/2015/0888

Author: Claire Finn
Illustrations: Claire Finn

Project Manager: Anthony Maull
Site Code: TBC
NGR: SP 57517 508056

MOLA
Bolton House
Wootton Hall Park
Northampton
NN4 8BN 01604 809800
www.mola.org.uk
sparry@mola.org.uk

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MOLA
Bolton House
Wootton Hall Park
Northampton
NN4 8BN

01604 809800
www.mola.org.uk
sparry@mola.org.uk

STAFF

Project Manager:	Anthony Maull Cert Arch
Text and Illustrations:	Claire Finn BA MA PhD
Fieldwork and site photographs:	Tim Sharman BA

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS	**OASIS No: molanort1-232755**	
Project title	A programme of archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis at Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire, November 2015	
Short description	MOLA Northampton undertook a programme of archaeological observation at Canons Ashby House, Northamptonshire, during works for the replacement of a sewage treatment tank. Excavations revealed a 19th-century ceramic land drain along with a modern overflow pipe, and a layer of modern build-up. A possible footings trench may have been observed below the original tank position. One piece of iron fencing spike was found.	
Project type	Observation, investigation, recording and analysis (Watching brief)	
Previous work	None known	
Current land use	Sewage treatment plant	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type and period	Grade I listed House and Priory, Grade II* listed registered park and garden, Grade II historic wall	
Significant finds	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address	Canons Ashby House, Canons Ashby	
Easting Northing	SP 57517 50805	
Area (sq m/ha)	*c*24m^2	
Height aOD	152m aOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	MOLA Northampton	
Project brief originator	The National Trust	
Project Design originator	Claire Finn (MOLA)	
Director/Supervisor	Tim Sharman (MOLA)	
Project Manager	Anthony Maull (MOLA)	
Sponsor or funding body	The National Trust	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	24th November 2015	
End date	25th November 2015	
ARCHIVES	**Location (Accession no.)**	**Contents**
Physical	MOLA Northampton Archive Store Acc no: TBC	None
Paper		Watching brief forms
Digital		Client report PDF
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Unpublished client report	
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ABSTRACT

MOLA Northampton undertook a programme of archaeological observation at Canons Ashby House, Northamptonshire, during works for the replacement of a sewage treatment tank. Excavations revealed a 19th-century ceramic land drain along with a modern overflow pipe, and a layer of modern build-up. A possible footings trench may have been observed below the original tank position. One piece of iron fencing spike was found.

1 INTRODUCTION

MOLA was commissioned by the National Trust to undertake a programme of archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis on land at Canons Ashby House, Northamptonshire (SP 57517 50805, Fig 1). This was undertaken to fulfil a condition on the planning permissions for work relating to the replacement of a sewage treatment plant tank to the north of the car park with another tank in the same location (Planning Ref: DA/2015/0888).

The observation works were undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (MOLA 2015) which was approved by Northamptonshire County Council and the National Trust prior to the commencement of fieldwork. The work mitigated the construction impacts on the potential archaeological resource within the approved scheme of works.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location, topography and geology

Canons Ashby parish occupies some 750 hectares of land, sloping south between 180m and 130m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The parish is bounded to the south and east by a small tributary of the River Cherwell to the west. The village is named after a monastic foundation, of which only the church survives (RCHME 1981).

Canons Ashby House is a Grade I listed Elizabethan manor located in the village of Canons Ashby, 17.7 km south of Daventry in Northamptonshire. The house is currently under the stewardship of the National Trust. The area of observation, the existing sewage treatment plant, is located near the main visitor car park at Canons Ashby House, in a hollow at the edge of a narrow tree belt outside the formal gardens (Fig 2). It is separated from the gardens by a historic brick wall. The treatment plant serves Canons Ashby House, including flats and offices, the tea room and toilets.

The area of the sewage works is situated to the north of the car park, at the bottom of a short section of slope within the treeline. The topography rises from the area of observation at 152m aOD to 155m aOD at the top of the higher tree-covered ground across the pathway to the east. The bedrock geology at the area of the sewage works is Whitby Mudstone Formation, on the border of a band of Northampton Sand Formation sandstone, limestone and ironstone to the east. The soil type in this area is

Denchworth association; slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged clayey soils with similar fine loamy over clayey soils.

2.2 Historical background

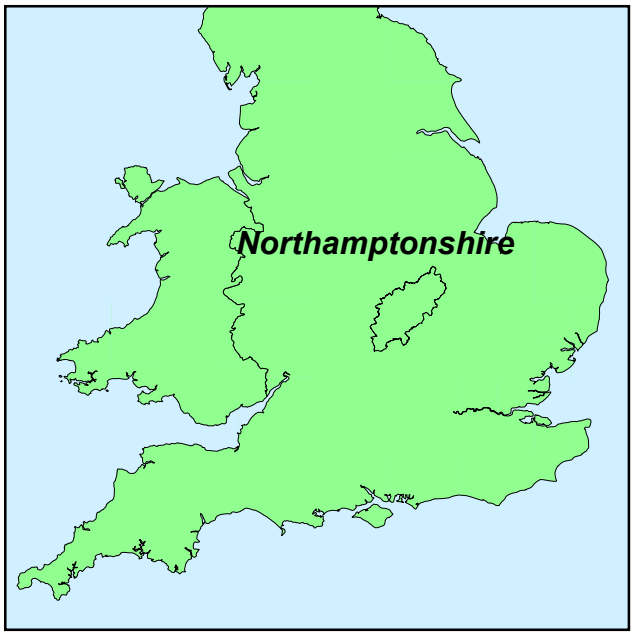
Little to no evidence of prehistoric, Roman or Saxon material has been recovered from the area.

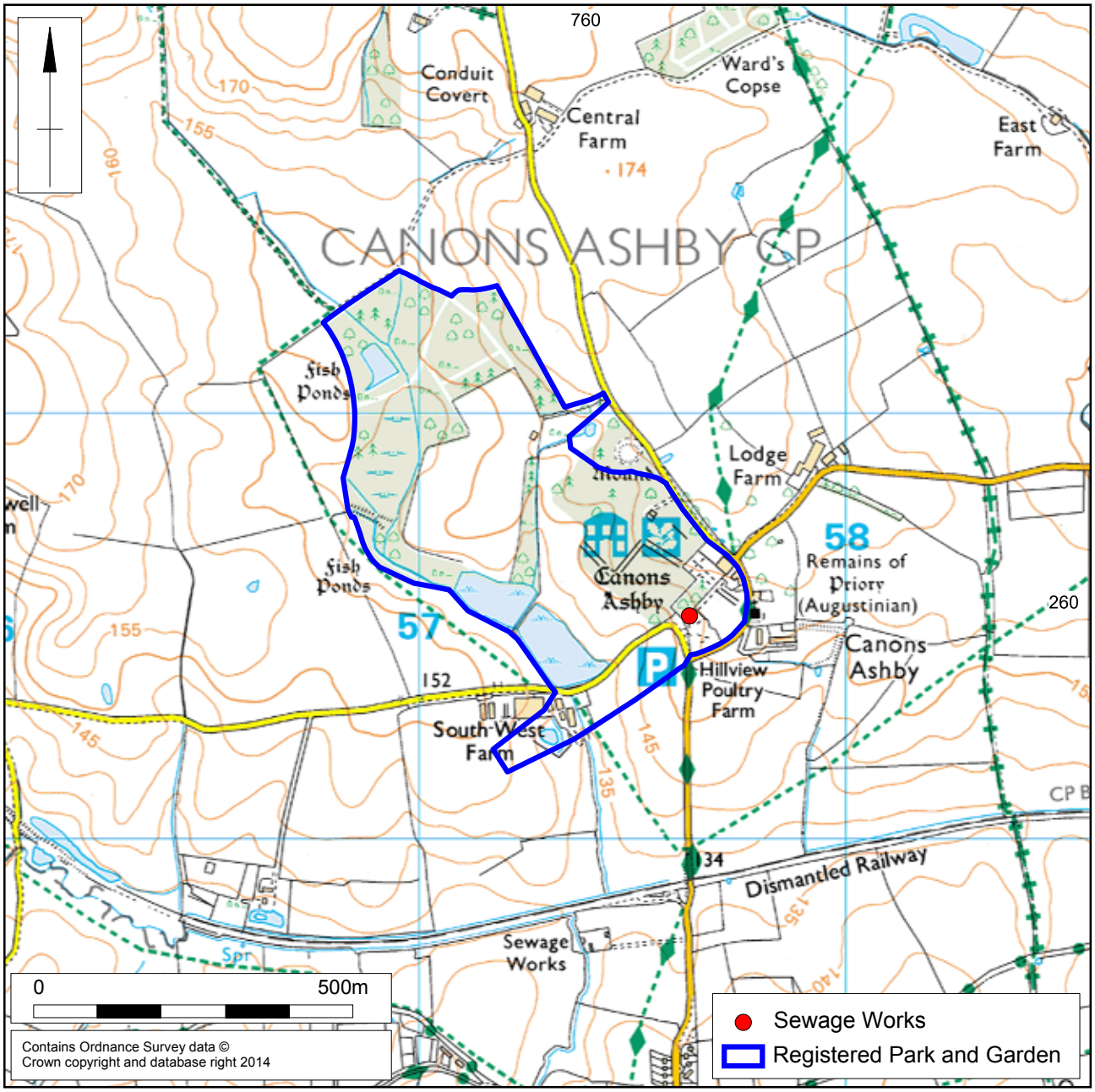
The village of Canons Ashby was recorded in the 1086 Domesday Survey with a population of 16 (RCHME 1981). In *c*1150 the Augustinian priory was founded at the south end of the village (NHER 600/3), and the village began to increase in size. This was particularly noticeable during the 14th century: in 1301 there were 18 taxpayers, and in 1316, the village was mentioned in the *Nomina Villarum*. By 1343 there were 41 houses, and by 1377, there were 82 taxpayers. However, the prosperity was not to last as the expansion was achieved at the expense of arable land. In 1489 the prior of Canons Ashby enclosed 100 acres of land, converting it to pasture. Three years later, 24 people were evicted. The village was deserted in the 16th century; by 1535 only nine tenants paid rent to the priory (RCHME 1981). The remains of the deserted medieval village lie immediately to the north of Canons Ashby House as extensive earthworks located throughout the present park, although their survival is variable. Recent geophysical surveys have investigated the below-ground archaeological remains in the area of the priory (Evershed 2014a) and to the south of the village (Evershed 2014b).

On the dissolution of the priory in 1537, the manor house and estate passed to Sir Francis Bryan and then to Sir John Cope (RCHME 1981). His daughter, Elizabeth, married John Dryden in 1551 and, following the purchase of Wylken's Farm on the opposite side of the road from the old priory site, the family built the original Canons Ashby House. The house and associated parkland (NHER 1266) was expanded and developed by subsequent generations of the family. The latest and most extensive phase of alterations took place in the early 18th century.

The estate declined during the 20th century, suffering from the social and economic changes after the 1st and 2nd World Wars. This pattern was repeated at numerous similar large country houses that had required large numbers of servants to maintain both the house and gardens. The house, gardens, priory and grounds were given to the National Trust by the Dryden family in 1981. Between 1994 and 1996, the Trust acquired a cottage, an area of meadow and the site of the former fishponds. The below-ground remains of the medieval monastery, castle, settlement and fields; post-medieval houses, gardens and park; and a series of five dams, together with the upstanding remains of the Norwell, are protected as a Scheduled Monument (1015534). The sewage treatment plant lies just outside this area. Canons Ashby House and the Priory are each Grade I Listed Buildings. Other buildings are listed Grade II* or Grade II, including the historic wall near the sewage works. The historic park and garden are Grade II* in the Historic England Registered Parks and Gardens (1000488); the sewage treatment plant lies within the area of the registered park. The site is also contained within the Canons Ashby Conservation Area.

A conservation management plan for the parkland was produced in 2013 (Cookson and Tickner). This characterised various areas of the parkland, and identified a number of sites within the park requiring further investigation and analysis to enhance the understanding of the property and its landscape. The sewage treatment plant falls within Area 4, Sehego Fields; an area having historically been an enclosed field adjacent to the gardens. The tree belt on the north-west side of the car park is relatively recent.





Scale 1:15,000

Site location Fig 1

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of the archaeological works was to determine and understand the nature, function and character of any archaeological remains within their cultural and environmental setting. The works were carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (CIfA 2014a), and *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2014b), the Historic England guidance document *MoRPHE* (HE 2015), and in line with regional research frameworks (Cooper 2006, Knight, Vyner and Allen 2012).

The objectives of the work were set out as follows:

- To identify, investigate and record all archaeological features and deposits exposed during the excavation of the former septic tank and in the footprint of the new septic tank;
- to determine and record the date, extent, character, state of preservation and depth of burial of any archaeological deposits;
- to recover any artefacts that may assist in the development of pottery type series within the region;
- to establish the relationship of any archaeological deposits within the wider contemporary landscape, and;
- to create a permanent archive and record of the archaeological information collected during the course of fieldwork and analysis.

3.1 Methodology

After the removal of the former septic tank, the excavation works took place under constant archaeological supervision to the archaeological horizon. This included the mechanical removal of the concrete footings of the old tank (Fig 2), and the extension of the trench to the west to allow space for the siting of the new tank (Fig 3). The archaeological remains present were then fully examined, excavated and recorded. The stripped areas were hand cleaned as required to produce a sketch plan.

Removing the concrete footing, looking east Fig 2

The excavation of the tank trench extension, looking south Fig 3

Site view showing the site after the removal of the tank and concrete, looking south-west Fig 4

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION

4.1 General stratigraphy

The natural geology of the site was observed to be grey clay. The removal of the overburden showed that that it comprised a *c*0.70m deep make-up layer of compacted clay and chalk (Fig 5). This was overlain by very thin organic topsoil with a high density of plant roots.

South-east-facing balk showing natural clay and chalky-clay make-up layer, looking north-west Fig 5

4.2 Features

At the south-west end of the trench, on the north side, a possible footing trench was observed. This feature was aligned east-west, and cut into the natural clay *c*1.0m below the ground surface (Fig 6). As it only partially appeared within the trench, the nature of this feature could not fully be defined, and it may have only been the lower edge of the make-up layer.

Also at this end of the trench was a 19th-century ceramic land drain, aligned east-west. It lay *c*1.20m below the ground surface (Fig 7).

Possible footings trench, looking north-west Fig 6

Ceramic land drain, looking south-west Fig 7

At the same end of the trench, a modern pipe, presumably part of the sewage works infrastructure, was shown to cut into the natural clay. The pipe trench was straight-sided, and was filled with large deposits of crushed limestone gravel. This gravel was found to be spread throughout the area of the former tank. The pipe lay at *c*1.0m below the ground surface (see Figs 4-5).

5 THE FINDS

An iron fencing spike was found in the chalky-clay make-up layer at the south end of the trench. It measured 10mm wide by *c*0.55m long. It was of modern date and was not retained (Fig 8).

No other archaeological finds were made.

Iron fence spike Fig 8

6 DISCUSSION

Very few archaeological features were observed during the sewage improvement works at Canons Ashby House. Features comprised a 19th-century ceramic field drain and a possible footings trench, although this latter feature may just be the lower edge of the make-up layer. A modern waste pipe, laid in a bed of crushed limestone gravel, was also observed.

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MOLA Northampton

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MOLA
Bolton House
Wootton Hall Park
Northampton
NN4 8BN
01604 809800
www.mola.org.uk
sparry@mola.org.uk