

The National Trust

Hill View Farm, Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire.

*NGR SP 5775 5040*

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Oxford Archaeological Unit

June 1999

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Date: *19/7/1999*

Oxford Archaeological Unit

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## *Summary*

*In April 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Hill View Farm, Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire (NGR SP 5775 5040). No archaeological features were seen; modern finds were noted but not retained.*

### **1 Introduction**

The development proposal comprised the excavation of a new drain run, French drain and water main as a part of works to convert an old poultry farm and ancillary buildings into accommodation for the National Trust's gardener.

The watching brief was commissioned by the National Trust. It was undertaken in consultation with English Heritage as the site lay within the boundary of the Scheduled Ancient Monument (National Monument No. 13643).

### **2 Background (Fig 1)**

Canons Ashby derives its name from the 12<sup>th</sup>-century priory of Augustinian canons, whose medieval church still survives in truncated form 100m to the south of the present house, and immediately to the north-west of the development site. After the Dissolution the church and the rest of the priory estate passed to the Cope family, and through marriage to the Drydens, who remained at Canons Ashby thereafter. The core of the present house was built in the 1550s, and probably incorporated parts of an earlier farm on the site. The H-shaped red-brick house of the 1550s consisted of a great hall range, built with a kitchen at one end and a tower at the other. The house was extended in the 1590s, when the courtyard was enclosed for the first time. The last major alterations to Canons Ashby were made in 1708-1710 when the southern front was almost entirely faced in stone. The gardens were also given their present appearance at around this time, with descending terraces, flights of stairs and stone walls set with vases. In 1980 the house, gardens and church passed into the care of the National Trust.

The village of Canons Ashby has almost completely disappeared, but its area is outlined by ridge-and-furrow. A flat-topped motte which stands in the deer park is thought to represent the precursor of the manor house built by the Copes, who were granted the site in 1538.

Since the Dissolution the Copes and the Drydens have been responsible both for the upkeep of St Mary's Church and for appointing and paying the incumbent. In the last fifty years the building had fallen into disuse and decay and was boarded up, due to increasing vandalism. A major programme of restoration was begun in 1981 by the National Trust, with large-scale repairs to the roof and to the stonework being undertaken throughout the building. A redundant quarry at Stow-Nine-Churches was reopened especially for this purpose. The church today consists only of the two westernmost bays of the original medieval nave, the remainder having been demolished by the Copes and the Drydens in order to build their respective houses in the latter half of the sixteenth century. The original nave of five bays with the chancel beyond gave the building a total length of 217 feet, fully four times the length of the

present building. Excavation in 1828 established foundations running more than 100 feet east of the present building (Steane 1974); the south-west corner of the cloister has also been uncovered. Also the moat, enclosure banks and ponds lie to the south-east and partly survive, despite substantial recent agricultural disturbance.

The development site lies to the south-east of St Mary's Church, within the boundary of the Scheduled Ancient Monument. It is marked as "Hill View" on all OS maps.

### **3 Aims**

The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

### **4 Methodology**

The invasive groundworks on site were undertaken in three main phases: the excavation of a new drain run to the gardener's cottage; the excavation of a French drain adjacent to the north cottage wall and the excavation of a new water main within the trench for the existing main. Excavation was by JCB supplemented by occasional hand-digging.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil description utilises standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

### **5 Results (Fig 2)**

New Farmyard Drainage.

46 m of drainage trench were excavated by JCB, resulting in a trench 0.50 m wide and up to 0.60 m in depth. This was the maximum depth at the east end, the trench shallowing to 0.30 m depth at the west end. The natural comprised a reddish-brown stone in a sandy matrix. This was sealed by a rather mixed mid brown soil up to 0.28 m thick which in turn was sealed by a dark gray topsoil 0.22 m thick. No archaeological features were present and very little cultural material was seen in the excavated spoil; those few pieces seen proved to be modern.

French Drain.

Excavations for the French Drain, to the same dimensions as those for the farmyard drainage, exposed the same deposits in an identical sequence. No archaeological features were present and again very little cultural material was seen in the excavated spoil.

New Water Main.

This excavation took place entirely within a pre-existing cut for the existing water main, which was being located, removed and replaced. This excavation measured 0.35 m wide by 0.60 m in depth. The deposits seen consisted of a heavily disturbed mid brown silty clay subsoil, 0.50 m thick, sealed by 0.10 m of topsoil. No archaeological features were present, and finds were limited to brick and unworked stone fragments in the subsoil and topsoil.

## **6 Finds**

A small quantity of modern finds were noted during the course of the watching brief, but were not retained.

## **7 Environmental results**

Due to the absence of any archaeology, no environmental soil samples were taken.

## **8 Discussion**

No archaeology of any significance was located during the course of the watching brief; this is probably a reflection both of the limited scope of the excavations and some slight disturbance related to recent use of the site as a farmyard.

## **References.**

Steane J 1974 *The Northamptonshire Landscape* Hodder and Stoughton.

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992).

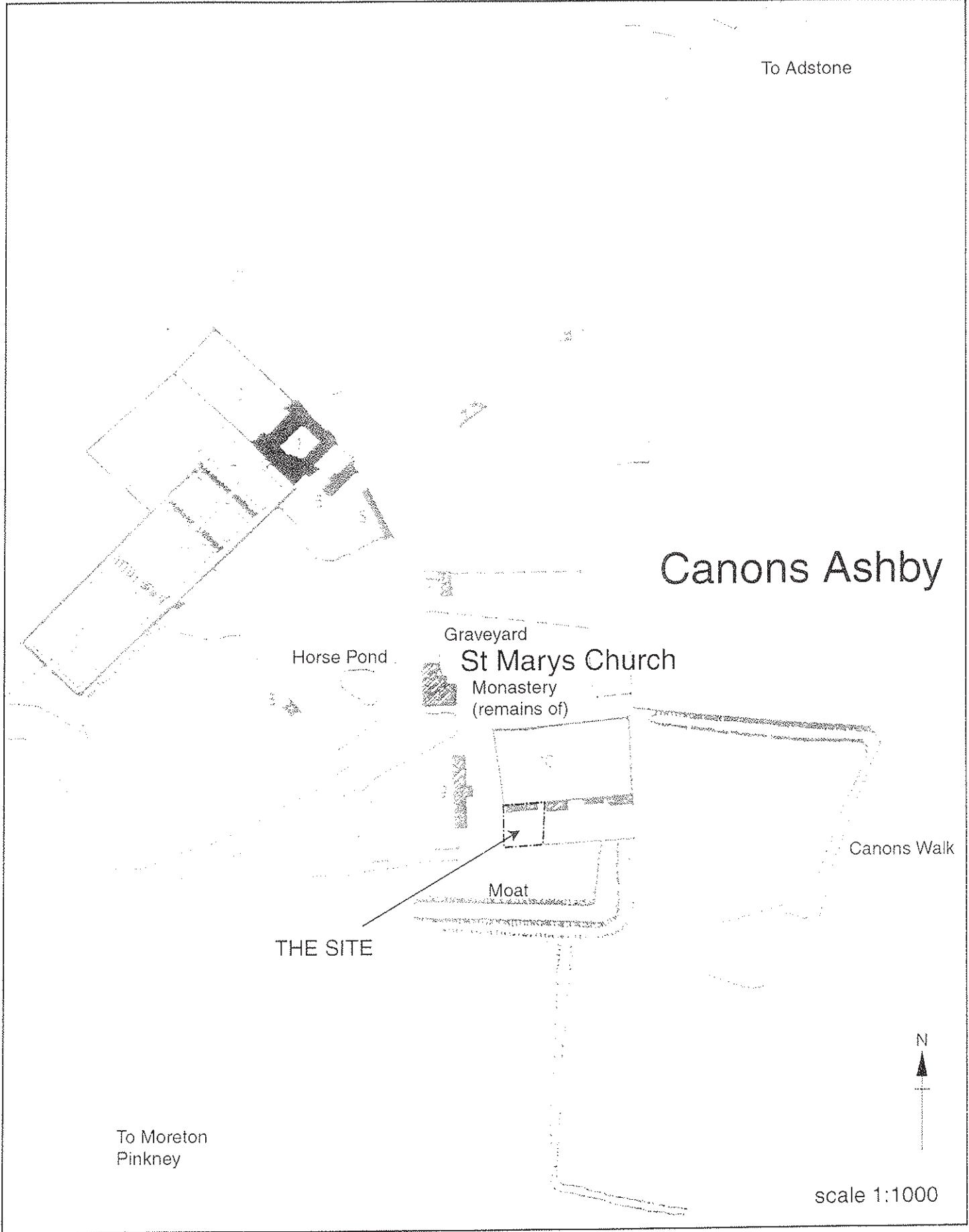


figure 1: site location

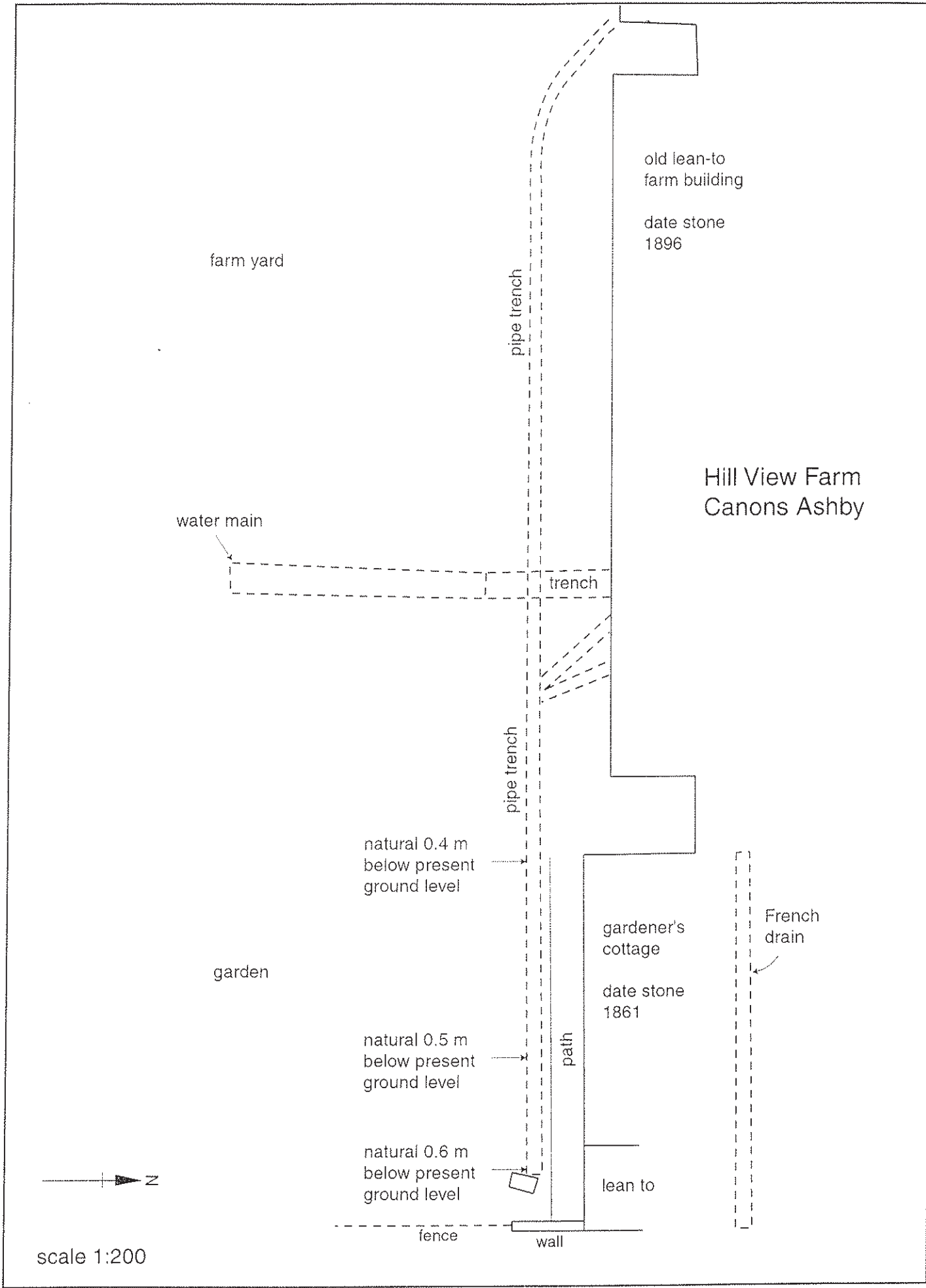


figure 2: site plan



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