

**MEDIEVAL HAMLET OF LITTLECOTE
STEWKLEY, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

Archaeological Watching Brief

**NETWORK ARCHAEOLOGY LTD
for
DUNTON DEVELOPMENTS LTD**

**Report 248
July 2000**

1. SUMMARY

A layer of clay, containing cobbles and gravels was found during the installation of a sewage treatment plant at Littlecote Farm, Dunton. The material is thought to be a spread of surplus spoil resulting from the excavation of foundation trenches during the construction of the adjacent barns, in the nineteenth century. The layer also appears to serve as make-up for a gravel surface, the date of which is uncertain.

2. INTRODUCTION

The medieval hamlet of Littlecote is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) lying near Dunton to the south west of Stewkley in Buckinghamshire (Figure 1). Redevelopment, by Dunton Developments Ltd, of buildings at Littlecote Farm, necessitated the installation of a sewage treatment plant within the area of the SAM (Figure 3a). As a condition of scheduled monument consent (ref: HSD9/2/4331pt1), an archaeological watching brief took place on the 21st March 2000, and the results of this work are the basis of this report.

Proposed sewage treatment plant

This involved the installation of a septic tank and associated piping. The impact of this design was a deep hole (L 5m, W 4m, D c.3m) and a trench (L 4m, W 0.5m, D 0.75m) (figure 3a).

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The medieval settlement of Littlecote (centred at SP 83152414), occupies a west facing spur, approximately 2.5km to the south west of Stewkley, in Buckinghamshire (Figure 1). The monument is represented by well-preserved earthworks, covering about 13ha, and includes a broad holloway, irregular enclosures (containing building platforms), chapel earthworks, a series of open fields, and a flight of ?Medieval fishponds (Figure 2). Such nucleated village remains are typical of other Medieval rural settlements in the South Midlands.

The location of the Medieval manor house is unknown, but its successor, a 17th century mansion, stood until 1804, when it was demolished for the current farmhouse, a Grade II Listed Building.

Documents relating to the manor and hamlet of Littlecote trace the settlement's origins from the Domesday survey of 1086 to its demise in the early 16th century. They also provide an insight into the lives and economy of the local Medieval inhabitants. The Domesday survey records that 'Litecota' was a 'vill' in the parish of Stewkley. The Chapel of St Giles, founded by Hugh de Dunster around 1266, served both the manor and the hamlet's inhabitants, until its demolition in the 16th century.

Economic advantages of sheep rearing in the later Medieval period caused rural depopulation, and the demise of many villages and hamlets in the local region. Enclosure of land for sheep pasture, in 1494 and 1507 displaced at least 84 people from Littlecote (English Heritage, file reference: AA 60442/1).

4. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the archaeological watching brief were to:

- provide a permanent-presence monitoring of all ground disturbing activities;
- gather sufficient information to establish the presence or absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains, and
- produce an archive and a report that addresses the above.

5. PROCEDURES

Archaeological Monitoring and Recording

The pit and trenches were excavated using a 360° tracked excavator fitted with a toothless ditching blade. The sides of the trenches were cleaned by hand, and inspected for archaeological remains. The excavated spoil was checked for artefacts.

Where archaeological deposits were observed, they were photographed, drawn at an appropriate scale and proforma record sheets completed. In addition to the project code (LIT 00, each archaeological deposit was assigned a unique context number from 001 to 007.

The architects plan was checked for accuracy. Retained artefacts were cleaned, marked, catalogued and assessed by appropriate specialists.

Standards

All work has been undertaken in line with the Institute of Field Archaeologists'

- *Code of Conduct* (1997);
- *Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology* (1997);
- *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (1994), and
- *Draft Standard and Guidance for Finds Work* (2000).

The management of the project is in accordance with the methods and practice described in '*Management of Archaeological Projects*', second edition (English Heritage, 1991).

6. RESULTS

Surface Topography

The ground sloped moderately down to the west towards a metalled lane to the west of the farm.

Sub-surface Stratigraphy

No cut archaeological features were observed, although a series of archaeological deposits (Figure 3) were found to overlie the natural geological layers:

Table of archaeological and geological deposits

Context	Context type	Description	Depth	Interpretation	Date
001	layer	frequent angular/sub-angular frags. of modern roof tile, in a mid pink grey, loose, slightly loamy sand, with frequent flint grits and gravels	up to 0.22m	dump of roof tile resulting from reroofing of adjacent barn	modern
002	layer	frequent flint gravels, flint pebbles, limestone gravels, in a mid yellow grey, very sandy clay loam, with and occ. brick frags. ?Same as 003.	0.2m	dump of gravels providing hardstanding at entrance to field, but also could be a dumped fill within a shallow scoop	unknown
003	layer	frequent flint gravels, flint pebbles, limestone gravels, in a mid yellow grey, compact, loamy sand (to very sandy clay loam) ?Same as 002	0.12 - 0.15m	dump of gravels providing hardstanding at entrance to field	unknown
004	layer	dark grey brown, soft, slightly loamy silt with no inclusions	0.01-0.02m	accumulation of runoff silt from ground slope	?modern
005	layer	mix of mid yellow grey sandy clay loam, and mid grey brown clay loam soils, containing flint pebbles, flint cobbles and occ. flint boulders, limestone gravels, patches of redeposited natural sandy clay and sand, and occ. charcoal flecks	0.24 - 0.3m	dumped soils, probably resulting from previous redevelopment of the site (eg. construction of adjacent barns)	17th-19th century
006	layer	mid orange brown sandy clay, overlying pale yellow white sandy clay, overlying mid brown orange clayey sand and gravel, grading down to mid brown orange gritty sand	c.1.5m	glacial sand & gravel	-
007	layer	mid steel grey blue, stiff, silty clay	depth unknown	Gault Formation	-

Artefacts

(Analysis by Alan Vince)

Pottery

A single sherd, weighing 10g was recovered from context 005. The sherd comes from a type of green glazed bowl made between the 17th and 19th centuries.

Tile

Two fragments of unglazed tile, weighing 20g were recovered from context 005. They date to between the 17th and 19th centuries.

7. DISCUSSION

The most significant deposit is spread 005 (Figure 3). Its mixed appearance indicates that it is the combined product of at least two deposits. The high density of stones does not occur naturally at the site, and implies the importation and/or gathering of possible building material, while patches of redeposited clay, could originate from the excavation of the underlying clay substrate.

The general lack of domestic material (eg. pottery and bone) shows that the deposit is not directly occupation related. The layer most probably represents a dump of waste or surplus spoil which may result from the excavation of foundation trenches during the construction of the adjacent barn, or could have been deliberately spread out to improve drainage at the entrance to the adjacent field. Additionally, the layer might have been make-up for gravel layer 002/003.

Dating

The only dating evidence for the layer (005) is a single piece of pottery and two fragments of tile, which were made at some point in the 17th to 19th centuries. This dating accords with the known periods of redevelopment of the site. It is most likely that the layer (005) dates to the most recent period of redevelopment when the current farmhouse and outbuildings were constructed, in the early nineteenth century.

8. STATEMENT OF INDEMNITY

Every effort has been taken in the preparation and submission of this report in order to provide as complete an assessment as possible within the terms of the brief, and all statements and opinions are offered in good faith. Network Archaeology Ltd cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by any third party, or for any loss or other consequences arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this report and any supplementary papers, howsoever such facts and opinions may have been derived, or as a result of unknown and undiscovered sites of artefacts.

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Network Archaeology Ltd would like to thank:

- Adrian Hoy Adrian C. Hoy Architectural and Planning Consultants
- Gerry Friel English Heritage

10. REFERENCES

English Heritage, Medieval Hamlet of Littelcote, unpublished Inspectors Report; file reference: AA 60442/1

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Figure 1
missing

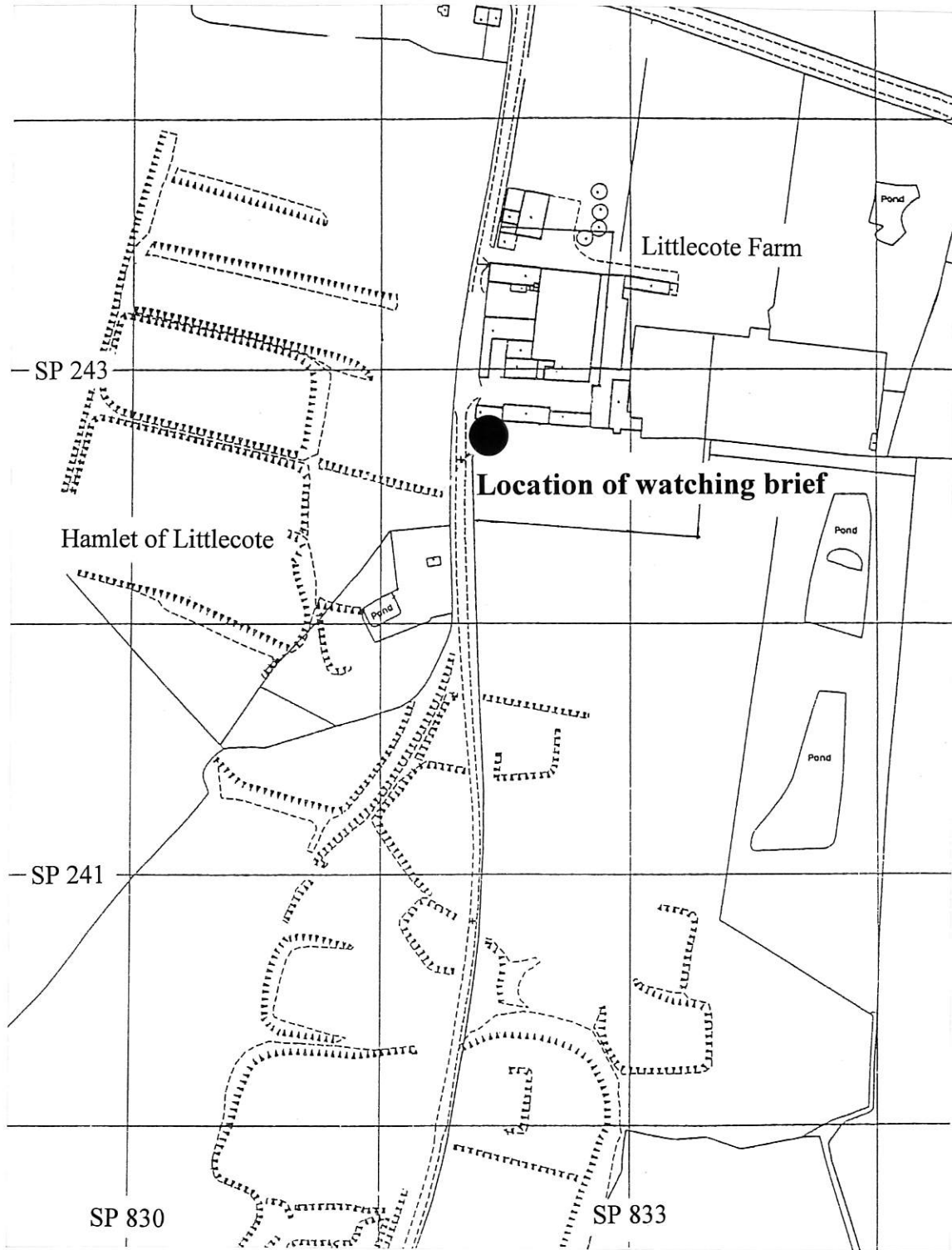


Figure 2: Location of watching brief at Littlecote

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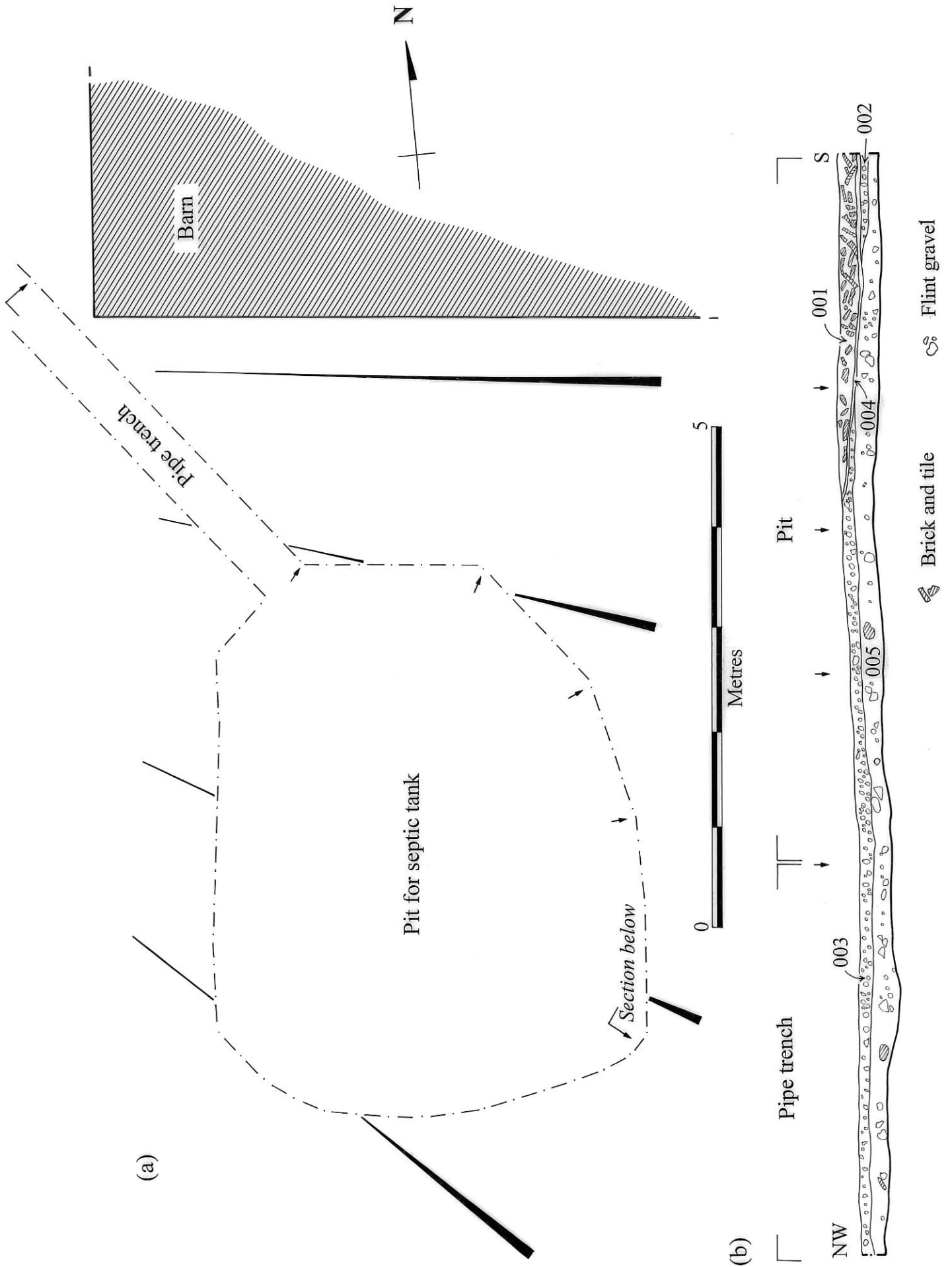


Figure 3: (a) Plan of pit for septic tank (b) Section of northeast side of pit and pipe trench