



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

Delapré Abbey Electricity Main 2016

Delapré Abbey Interim Report:

Investigation of the line of a new electricity main within the Battlefield of Northampton, at Delapré Abbey, February-March 2016

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with contributions by Steve Critchley, Martin Marix-Evans and Ian Meadows

Summary

Observations and metal-detecting on a new electricity main supplying Delapré Abbey have found remains related to nearby 2nd-3rd century AD Roman occupation, but provided scant information on the 1460 Battlefield of Northampton.

Introduction

A new electricity main was laid close to and almost parallel with the existing main from London Road, Northampton to Delapré Abbey, across a portion of the Registered Battlefield of Northampton (1460).

The work was accompanied by archaeological observations which were made within a framework of agreed fieldwork, previously set out in a Written Scheme of Investigation issued by Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd and approved by Lesley-Ann Mather for Northamptonshire County Council, as archaeological advisors to Northampton Borough Council at Delapré Abbey.

Both the old and new course of the electricity mains lie a few metres north of the avenue of mature trees which fringe the access road from London Road to Delapré Abbey. The course follows a line of some 320 metres, from Delapré Abbey Gate Lodge (NN4 8AJ) at NGR: SP 75490 59218 at the west end to the course of a stream and culverted drain at SP 75815 59192 at the east.

The location of the trench will be marked on a plan in the eventual report on all works at Delapré Abbey 2014-16.

This interim report is intended to assess the significance of the results and also to address the efficacy of the fieldwork methodology adopted within the context of the ongoing management and conservation of the historic battlefield landscape.

The fieldwork was carried out by Iain Soden, Joe Prentice and Barbara Evans Rees. Steve Critchley carried out the metal-detecting. A battlefield-overview was provided by Martin Marix Evans.

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Geology by Steve Critchley

The solid geology is composed of mudstones that belong to the Whitby Mudstones Formation part of the Lias Group of Lower Jurassic age. However within the area of interest these beds are overlain in part by superficial deposits of fluvio-glacial sands and gravels belonging to the Nene Valley Formation of Mid- to Late Pleistocene age.

In common with most lower hill slopes in the Nene valley the gravels are obscured in part with a mixture of periglacial solifluxion and general recent colluvium/alluvium deposits plus a measure of agriculturally-derived hill wash. (*British Geological Survey. 1980 Sheet 185 Northampton, Solid and Drift Geology, 1:50000*).



Steve Critchley metal-detecting in the pre-excavation phase at c10m, close to Delapr  Lodge

The battlefield-context

By Martin Marix Evans

The Battle of Northampton took place on 10 July 1460. The force commanded by King Henry VI took up position near the abbey but was defeated by the attacking Yorkist army. The event was of substantial importance in the civil wars now known as the Wars of the Roses. In terms of military history the battle is notable because it involved the establishment of a fortified camp and the deployment and use of artillery; the earliest examples in the British Isles.

The evidence available is limited to archival narratives, landscape analysis and a single cannon ball discovered in the last decade (Ingram, M., 2015 *The Battle of Northampton 1460*, 94). The written sources are summarized in the Conservation Management Plan, paragraphs 4.12 and 4.13 (LUC, with Glenn Foard and Tracey Partida, June 2014 *The site of the Battle of Northampton, 1460*). The Yorkist positions and the battlefield itself were delineated by English Heritage in the *Register of Historic*

Battlefields (1995). The general location of the Lancastrian defensive enclave is broadly agreed to have been adjacent to the modern line of woodland known as 'The Rookery' which ends some 300m south of the electricity main trench.

The orientation of the Lancastrian line is shown as running east/west by English Heritage/Historic England, but more recent investigations of both written sources and the historic landscape suggest that the defences were actually on a north/south line with the western frontage corresponding to the north-flowing stream defining the western edge of The Rookery. This stream was directed through a culvert running at right angles to the modern approach to the abbey from London Road beneath which it runs. A full description of the defensive site as it is currently understood is given in Ingram, *op. cit.* 77 - 81 and a map is shown at p92. A detailed discussion of source narratives is given at p122 and following. A map at p19, fig 5.3, in LUC, Foard and Partida, *op.cit.* gives contemporary landscape detail.

The employment of cannon gives rise to the problem of access to the site for heavy wheeled conveyances; the guns themselves and their attendant ammunition carts. No evidence of a 15th century road or causeway was revealed by the mains trench, but the possibility of making such a discovery should be kept in mind in relation to any future works, together with the recovery of associated articles such as harness furniture, coinage and personal possessions.

The recent rediscovery in 2015 of a much-scarred cannon ball identified as coming from the 1460 battle, originally recovered from nearby Eagle Drive, is testament to the distances such missiles can and did travel, either hitting their target or skidding and bouncing (unpredictably) until their momentum ceases naturally. Thus even 'quiet' parts of the battlefield can produce unexpected evidence.

Fieldwork Methodology

Metal detection formed the basis of the work, around which was fitted simple visual archaeological observation of the mechanical excavation of the electricity main trench over a distance of c320m and in total with a walking width of c4m (1280 sq m).

The line of the main and/or the up-cast from the mechanically-dug mains trench was detected three times. These passes took place at three specific junctures:

1. Before any earthmoving
2. After trench digging (Here metal Heras fencing interfered with metal-detector readings along one side of the stacked spoil, necessitating a third pass) [trench 850mm-1m deep x 400mm wide]
3. After backfilling

Modern material was not retained.



The mains trench at about 150m looking west towards Delapré Lodge; spoil set discretely aside for metal detecting

Metal-detecting methodology by Steve Critchley

The metal detector used was a XP GMP of French manufacture and was operated in all metal modes. Ground conditions were variable, but background soil mineralisation was not an issue therefore target pinpointing was unaffected.

As expected the location of the site and the public use of the area, inevitably ensured a high proportion of modern metallic waste in the form of aluminium drinks cans, ring pulls, foil wrappers and modern low value coin losses. Additionally the use of gang mowers on the grassland ensured a liberal distribution of aluminium drinks can fragments in all areas. A great deal of time was spent removing this material during the pre-excavation survey in order to be able to locate deeper, potentially older targets. When clear areas were established older pre-decimal coinage began to appear dating back to late 19th and the early 20th centuries at depths of between 5 and 15 cm.

Later searches of the trench line spoil was hampered by interference from the enclosing safety fencing and some areas of spoil were not searchable. Targets were few as the topsoil layers had been buried under sterile natural layers. However when this material was infilled into the trench the inevitable mixing of formerly stratified material produced a mixture of metallic finds from can fragments to a Roman bronze coin in the same horizon.

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Soil conditions were good with a soft sandy pebbly loam to the western end of the pipeline moving into areas of clayey substrate eastwards from about the midpoint of the line. These changes reflected the underlying geology.



The mains service trench at about 50m looking east from Delapré Lodge; scale 1m

Roman finds by Ian Meadows

A local context may be provided for Roman archaeology since there are a variety of finds from the area in Hardingstone and Wootton parishes, but recently and very close by, a series of Roman pottery kilns from adjacent to Delapré Park were published (Woodfield, P, 2010 *The Delapré Kiln Field, Northamptonshire Archaeology* **36**, 97-112). In addition, and most recently in January 2016 a dispersed Roman cremation group was excavated within the courtyard of Delapré Abbey itself (currently in post-excavation). This appears to comprise wares totally unrelated to the published kilns and Roman ceramics specialists currently feel they may be continental imports (work continues).

All Roman remains found were as follows:

30m Copper alloy coin 15mm diameter, almost certainly a 'Barbarous copy' based upon the irregular flan form and poor definition of the reverse face. The flan edge also has a couple of 'flat' areas where it is possible irregularities had been filed flat. The obverse bears a distinct third century bearded and radiate bust, facing right. Part of the legend is visible IMP TE[indicating the original issue that had been copied was of Tetricus I (270-3). The reverse was by comparison very low relief, perhaps suggesting the coin was a cast copy. A centrally

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positioned standing figure could be seen but no defining detail or legend fragment could be seen.

- 125m A body sherd (40x30mm) of Nene Valley grey ware slight abrasion to the edges.
- 128m A body sherd (30x15mm) of Nene Valley grey ware both surfaces of which are pitted from weathering and the broken edges were slightly abraded
- 180m A body sherd (24x16mm) of Nene Valley grey ware, the broken edges were slightly abraded.
- 200-300m A collection of fourteen sherds most of which were not diagnostic to specific vessel form, only a single rim sherd from a small grey ware flanged bowl of second century date and a sherd from the shoulder of a 'globular' grog tempered jar, also second century, were identifiable.

The assemblage contained six grey ware sherds (including the flanged bowl rim) the largest of which was 30 x 20mm, all with one exception had crisp edges indicating they had not been present within an active plough soil where their edges would have been subject to abrasion. The remaining sherds were from medium to thin walled vessels, no thick shell tempered jar sherds were present, and comprised a variety of self-coloured wares. This absence of any colour coated sherds which start to appear in the later second century possibly indicates a date range up to the second century is likely. Most of these sherds, which ranged up to 35 x 30mm in size down to 12 x 15mm, also had quite angular breaks and showed little or no signs of the 'smoothing' that occurs in the plough soil suggesting these sherds were derived from buried feature infills.

Discussion

The finds are typical of a background of Roman activity. The sherd size and angularity indicates they are unlikely to be derived from agricultural manuring scatters, where sherd size would normally be smaller and more abraded. The absence of later fabrics such as colour coated wares may indicate the activity was largely second century in date. The third century coin is a common low value coin find, perhaps spread through manuring. That it was also a barbarous copy may mean that whilst acceptable in circulation it was recognised as an irregular issue.

Later finds

All Post-Roman remains found were as follows:

- 27m An amorphous piece of iron with corrosion products, probably agricultural
- 70m Squashed medieval/post medieval Ae thimble
- 100m Copper alloy handle 60mm long from a small utensil; post-medieval
- 138m Ae medieval/post-medieval thimble

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179m A .303in cartridge (blank, which was emptied of powder- 1940s). Delapré Abbey was garrisoned by troops during the Second World War. This was standard ammunition for Lee Enfield rifles and would have been used in exercises.

200m Post med pottery sherd (1 sherd Midland Blackware, c1680-1740)

210m A halfpenny (1900) of Victoria (1837-1901)

247m A halfpenny (1903) of Edward VII (1901-10)

Discussion

These eight finds represent the 1,600 years since any Roman occupation. By comparison they suggest that there is nothing of any significance on the site and indeed point to no specific period during which the land was either occupied or utilised for anything other than agriculture or access. All appear to be casual losses without a physical concentration.

Conclusions

While in a deep and narrow service trench no archaeological features were observed, the largely un-abraded nature of the few sherds found of Roman pottery suggest there may be relatively undisturbed archaeological contexts nearby. In date they may be of 2nd – 3rd century. The nearest known Roman archaeology comprises pottery kilns alongside the current main road and a probable dispersed cremation-burial at Delapré Abbey itself.

No evidence has come to light of any artefact concentrations after that date and the land may simply have been agricultural, fallow or parkland for 1,600 years.

The metal-detecting was a successful exercise in itself, just for artefact retrieval, but the metallic finds have corroborated the discovery of non-metal Roman material and enabled identification of a likely concentration of Roman activity.

Had metal-detecting been carried out without a visual search for other material, evidence for Roman occupation would not have been compelling and any Roman metal items might have been seen simply as casual losses.

There has been no evidence found for activities surrounding the Battle of Northampton. Given that other periods are fully represented, this absence is probably a reflection of the ground locally being unaffected by the battle or its manoeuvres. While arrows and more especially cannon balls can travel great distances, the nature of fieldwork often dictates the likelihood of discovering such artefacts. Therefore service trenches, by their nature narrow and minimised to preserve the battlefield, are not ideal in any search.

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Appendix

OASIS data

Project Name	Delapre Abbey Electricity Main 2016
OASIS ID	Iainsode1-247121
Project Type	Observation and Survey
Originator	Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd
Project Manager	Iain Soden
Previous/future work	No
Current land use	Amenity Parkland
Development type	Utilities/Services
Reason for investigation	Planning condition
National grid reference	SP 75490 59218 (W) to SP 75815 59192 (E)
Start/end dates of fieldwork	February-March 2016
Archive recipient	Northamptonshire Archive
Study area	c1200 sq m



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