



Fig. 2: two Roman quarry pits excavated in Trench 1

Trenches 7 and 8 established that fragments of the mill buildings, with an associated mill race and sluices, survived in the centre of the site. The remains of buildings and the revetments lining the mill race and channels spanned the period from the late 15th to the late 19th centuries. The mill remained in use until the mid-18th century when it was converted into a water pumping station by the noted engineer John Smeaton.⁴ These uses of the site, from the late 15th century onwards, are covered by an article for *Post-Medieval Archaeology*.

Because there was considerable redevelopment and landscaping associated with water management, to which the site was subject in the post-medieval period, earlier archaeological material was often severely truncated and fragmentary. Despite this, the excavations yielded important evidence of Roman and Saxo-Norman date which contributes to our understanding of the development of Stratford.

Natural topography

The site is situated on the gravels of the Thames flood plain, which in Stratford are part of the Taplow Terrace formation. The top of the gravel was recorded at heights between 0.57m OD in Trench 5 and 1.08–1.79m OD in the other trenches (although gravels were

not exposed in Trenches 2 and 6–10).

It is likely that much of the gravel had been truncated, or even completely eroded, by the development of the Bow Back Rivers. The substantial deposits of alluvial silts, clays and bands of sand encountered across the site (generally at 1.49–2.47m OD, though higher in Trench 6) were typical of riverine and estuarine deposition. Such waterlain deposits develop slowly and their formation at this site certainly extended back to the Roman period. In Trench 4, a riverlain deposit was dated by radiocarbon analysis to 100 BC–AD 70 (95% probability).⁵ Although naturally formed, river deposits can contain artefacts and, in Trench 10, an alluvial layer contained ceramic building material dated to AD 50–400.

The waterlogged plant remains recovered from the alluvium were characteristic of a mixed habitat, with areas of clean flowing water, as well as higher, drier land and intermediate zones; there was no obvious archaeobotanical evidence of human activity in this sample.

The Roman period

The line of the Roman road from London to Colchester, one of the most important in the province, ran c. 300m to the north of the site. Consequently, during the Roman period, the site,

though rural, marshy and c. 5.5km from the built-up area of *Londinium*, was not *per se* remote.

In Trench 1, a narrow, linear feature, aligned north-west to south-east and running across the whole length of the trench (Fig. 2), was filled with soft light brownish grey silty clay. It represents a ditch or other, similar drainage feature. It was in turn truncated by two large quarry pits, the smaller of which measured 6.60m by 3.70m in plan and had removed the north-western end of the drainage channel. The base of the feature was not reached because of flooding, but its upper fill contained exclusively Roman pottery.

The second quarry pit, c. 4.50m to the south-east and 12.20m by 6.70m in plan, contained three fills. The organic nature of the two lower, silty deposits suggest that the pit was not backfilled after abandonment, but silted up gradually before the final deliberate backfilling. Radiocarbon analysis dated the primary fill to 160 BC–AD 60 (95% probability)⁶ and the final backfill to 10 BC–AD 140 (95% probability).⁷ The wild plant species present in the samples taken from the quarry pit fills indicated flowing streams and swampy wetlands, with some drier areas nearby.

An early Saxon structure

A series of eleven, small rounded posts, nine of which formed an 'L'-shape with a curved corner, were recorded at the north end of Trench 10 (Fig. 3). The stakes were mostly oak, roundwood and c. 60–100mm diameter, and driven into the riverine silts at fairly even intervals of 0.50–0.65m. However, at least one stake was willow or poplar, and some of the timbers were radially-cleft from larger logs. Two were 1/16th split sections measuring c. 80mm by 20mm which had been taken from an oak log c. 200mm in diameter, whilst a third was a truncated 1/8th cleft section c. 105mm by 48mm. Faint axe stop-marks surviving on the tips of some of the stakes were probably left by the narrow blade of a Mortimer Wheeler Type 1 general-purpose Saxon woodman's axe. One cleft stake provided a C¹⁴ date of AD 410–650 (95% probability).⁸

The stake alignment is likely to form the remains of part of a building or