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WATCHING BRIEFS ON THE CONSTRUCTION WORKS FOR THE

A 564 (T) DERBY SOUTHERN BYPASS

1995

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THE WATCHING BRIEF AT GREAT PICKLES, SHARDLOW, FOR THE CONSTRUCTION WORKS ON THE DERBY SOUTHERN BY-PASS.

BACKGROUND

The area of study was situated in the fields to the south of the Grove hospital, Shardlow. The desktop assessment for the Derby Southern By-pass (Challis 1993), noted from aerial photographs the presence of various cropmarks within the vicinity, some of which appeared to run in the direction of the specific area of interest. These cropmarks remain undated, but from their form are presumed to represent settlements typical of the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. No cropmarks had been discernible on the available aerial photographs within the field of the watching brief (1427); this may be due to variations in the subsoils or crops when the aerial photographs were taken making this area inconducive to cropmark formation. No archaeological activity had previously been recorded in this field.

The excavation of a large storm-drain through field 1427, as part of the Derby Southern By-pass scheme of work, presented the chance to investigate the potential for features adjacent to the known cropmarks. Any information on their form, state of preservation and date would help to clarify the nature and extent of the settlement within field 9532.

METHOD

The sides of the storm-drain were inspected and all features of archaeological potential evident within the section trowelled clean. These were photographed, drawn at a scale of 1:20 and their position recorded in respect to the nearest chain number.

RESULTS

Four features of archaeological note were recorded. Three were in the section of the large storm-drain (0001, 0002, 0004) while one (0003) was present in the section of a parallel small drainage ditch to the north. Three of the ditches (0001-3) were sealed by a sub-ploughsoil layer containing medieval pottery, and are therefore earlier than this. Two also contained burnt stone (0001-2), and one a significant quantity of charcoal (0002), but no other datable artefacts. An unabraded sherd of green glazed medieval pottery was recovered from the base of ditch 0004, allowing a medieval date to be attributed.

A flint knife was recovered from the probable medieval ploughsoil.

Towards the eastern half of field 1427 there had been a considerable amount of disturbance. The area appears to have been waterlogged or boggy ground until quite recently when it was covered and levelled off by a large amount of redeposited material upto 0.6m thick.

CONCLUSION

The watching brief appeared to confirm that the ditches of the settlement represented by cropmarks did extend into field 1427. Furthermore, although many of these ditches are likely to be Iron Age or Romano-British in origin, it is also evident that some are possibly attributable to the medieval period.

Lee Elliott, November 1995

THE WATCHING BRIEF AROUND WEIGH LANE, ASTON UPON TRENT, FOR THE CONSTRUCTION WORKS ON THE DERBY SOUTHERN BYPASS

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the watching brief was to establish whether the Aston Cursus, or any associated features, occurred here. The precise location of the northern end of the cursus is not known, but it must occur somewhere between Weigh Lane and the area of the 1994 excavations some 150m to the east where it was proved to be absent. If the plan of the northern end of the cursus is like that at its southern end, it will be closed by a cross ditch. Such a ditch could run across the area of this watching brief. The terminals of cursus are also the locations of other activities e.g. timber circles, long and round barrows, so other features associated with the cursus might be expected.

AREA OF WATCHING BRIEF

This program of work centred on the segment of land lying on either side of the lane running from Aston lane to Weigh Cottage (SK334299), situated to the east of Aston-upon-Trent. This included a rectangular stretch on the east side, 56m in length and up to 14m wide, and on the west side a triangular piece of land some 100m in length which from a width of 10.5m tapered into the present line of Aston Lane. This area (11) was topsoiled by a 360° excavator with 1.5m ditching bucket under archaeological supervision in September 1995.

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The area east of chain 722 was built up to form the base of a flyover. Hence, there was no topsoil disturbance here, and any cursus features should remain undisturbed except for any compaction which may ensue.

In due course, when the services are put down Weigh Lane, a further watching brief should be conducted, to try to establish whether the cursus ditch actually crosses the lane.

RESULTS

The main results of the watching brief were to demonstrate :

- 1) that the area to either side of Weigh Lane had suffered considerable disturbance, perhaps associated with the recorded tramway from the Astonhill plasterpits to the wharf on the canal (1st ed. 6" O.S. 1885).
- 2) the soil under the topsoil was thick and masked archaeological deposits. The thickness of this masking soil means that features could be present, but were not visible at the level stripped. Any such features will be buried by the road construction.
- 3) no ditches, or other features, which could be identified with the cursus were recognised.
- 4) one ditch was located, but it ran roughly parallel to the cursus, and the artefacts from its upper filling suggest an Iron Age/Romano-British date.

Lee Elliott and Daryl Garton, November 1995.