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ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Results of an Archaeological Watching Brief
during the removal of Overburden during October 1994/5
at Girton Quarry on behalf of Tarmac Roadstone.

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University Park,
Nottingham NG7 2RD
November 1995

SMR:

E8959

L11231

L11232

L11235

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SUMMARY

- * Under a Section 52 Agreement with Tarmac Roadstone Ltd. Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust undertook a watching brief at the gravel extraction site just North of Girton, Nottinghamshire during October 1995.
- * The removal of topsoil and overburden by site machinery was accompanied by regular archaeological monitoring for exposures of archaeological material, palaeochannels or organic horizons.
- * The Watching Brief resulted in the recovery of a number of artefacts and the recording of a number of features.
- * Zones of early human occupation and activity in or around the area were identified, particularly from the Late Neolithic period (c.2,500 BC) through to the Romano - British period.

INTRODUCTION

Under a Section 52 agreement with Tarmac Roadstone Ltd. the Trust has been undertaking a watching brief at the gravel extraction site just North of Girton, Nottinghamshire. The section 52 required that the quarry sections would be recorded where these show any archaeological activity or where old water courses could be discerned; that samples should be taken from any deposits with a potential for information about the past environment and that any bog oaks should be sampled for dendrochronology.

At the first visit to the site it was recognised that the sediments exposed in the East - West quarry face included a water course, which, because it was infilled with peat, also had great potential for study of the past environment. This exposure has been recorded at several locations throughout the quarry, and samples taken for palaeoenvironmental analysis and radiocarbon dating at two points. The first was primarily for the investigation of the local environment, the second where debris from a probable Bronze Age burnt mound had interleaved with the organic sediments in the channel for investigation of the immediate activities around the burnt mound. Settlement features probably associated with the burnt mound have also been recovered on the Eastern perimeter of the quarry and for some distance along the edge of the relict water course from the burnt mound. A second water course, also containing burnt pebbles scattered through its infill, was recorded in part of the quarry. Fieldwalking of the fields prior to quarrying has recovered Neolithic flintwork and Roman pottery on the ploughsoil surface, but no features recorded during the watching brief can be securely identified to these periods. A mammoths tusk and tooth have also been recovered from the gravels.

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METHOD OF WORKING

An area of overburden 280m x 40m had recently been stripped of topsoil. A 360 degree excavator was in use throughout the period of the watching brief to remove the overburden in strips, working along the long East - West edge of the section. The overburden was being removed to the North of the site to restore previous workings.

The topsoiled surface and the exposed section were examined for any exposures of archaeological material, palaeochannels or organic horizons; any such

features were recorded. The site foreman was consulted regularly for any relevant information of archaeological import.

STRATIGRAPHY

The depth of the overburden being removed varied from 2m at the Western end of the section to 3m at the Eastern end. The general stratigraphy of the overburden may be summarised as follows:-

<i>Stratigraphic Units</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Ploughsoil	
Mottled sandy clay	Alluvial deposit, only present at Western end of section
Mottled loamy sand (1016)	Basal remnant of the natural soil profile or older ploughsoil
Banded sands	Fluvial Deposits
Sands and gravels	Glacial deposits

RESULTS

The topsoiled area was walked over in a zigzag fashion, the exposed surface had weathered to reveal a noticeable concentration of artefacts towards the centre of the area under study. An area of some 50m x 30m, encompassing the concentration was walked in 2m spaced transects with all flint and pottery recorded, collected and sketch plotted on a 1:200 plan, any fire cracked pebbles were recorded but not collected. The finds comprised a number of pottery sherds, provisionally dated to the Romano - British period, and worked flint of later Neolithic or Bronze Age character (APPENDIX 1).

At the Eastern end of the section removal of the overburden revealed the palaeochannel studied previously. A highly organic dark grey/brown to black silty clay some 0.30m deep lay 0.60m below the topsoil. The Eastern periphery of the channel is characterised by a deposit 0.20m deep of grey stained loamy sand with a peaty content, this layer contained a small number of fire cracked pebbles. The full extent of the palaeochannel was obscured by the presence of the later drain and hedgeline. A drawn record was made of the Eastern 20m of the channel, the disturbance by the drain was recorded

photographically. The position of the channel was recorded photographically on each visit. The drain is of single brick construction 0.80m in diameter. It is likely that the location of the drain and pond are linked to the presence of the palaeochannel.

A number of features were identified on the section, these were recorded photographically and where possible drawn. At the Western end of the section, was a small ditch or gully cut through layers of mid grey loamy sand into the sands below. The base to the feature lay 0.90m below the topsoiled ground surface. The fill consisted of a mid - dark grey sandy clay, with some sandy streaks.

A shallow, flat bottomed, pit or gully cut into the sands and covered by a layer of mid grey loamy sand was located at the Western end of the section near to feature. The fill consisted of mid - dark grey loamy sand with an offset patch of grey sandy clay near the base. Excavation into the section revealed evidence of charcoal flecks and a pottery sherd similar to those found on the surface exposed during topsoil stripping.

On the Eastern periphery of, and cutting the palaeochannel, was a symmetrical ditch - like feature. It had an upper fill of light grey loamy sand, containing two finds; a fire cracked pebble, and a flint flake. The lower fill consisted of successive thin layers of dark grey clay and light sand in a distinctive swirl pattern indicative of sporadic flooding. As the lowest channel infill to the North is of a Bronze Age date, this feature must be later.

A flat bottomed, assymetrical ditch was cut into the light sands of the central portion of the section. The fill consisted primarily of light sands similar to the natural sands, interspersed with organic layers with preserved wood fragments. The three fragments of wood recovered have been identified by Dr C. R. Salisbury as oak (2) and birch.

A V - shaped symmetrical ditch cutting the palaeochannel may be a continuation of that noted above, with similar dimensions and relationship to the palaeochannel, although the fill is simpler in its characteristics.

COMMENT

The quantity of Romano-British sherds recovered from the base of the stripped ploughsoil indicates a previously unrecorded focus of activity. The inclusion of a mortaria sherd (bowls with grits for grinding and pounding food), suggests some form of settlement. No features were recorded within this area, though any present would have been obscured in plan by the remnant basal soil or older ploughsoil present.

The recovery of flintwork also suggests some activity, though the fieldwalking suggests that the focus of activity was probably further to the North. Two of the pieces were typical of the Later Neolithic or Bronze Age (c.2,500 - 1500 BC) and the others could belong with these.

At least one feature was ancient in that it was below the mid grey loamy sand, interpreted as a remnant basal soil or older ploughsoil. It contained an abraded sherd, possibly Romano - British, but which could be residual.

The record of the palaeochannel will complement those made previously, and will enable an interpretation of the form and character of the channel as it has changed along the quarried area. The recovery of burnt stones from its fill suggests that burnt mound activities may have continued south along the channel some 150m beyond the last positive record of these activities.

Doug Gilbert and Daryl Garton, November 1995.

*is the pit
in Doc 167?*

APPENDIX 1: ARTEFACT CATALOGUE FROM OCTOBER 1995 WATCHING BRIEF

FIND CODE	MATERIAL	OBJECT	PERIOD	FLINT	COMMENT
CLA	RBP	RIM	RB	-	MORTARIA
CLB	MEP	BOD	ME	-	-
CLC	FLI	-	PR	FLAKE	SCRAPER?
CLD	MEP	BOD	ME	-	-
CLE	FLI	-	PR	FLAKE	SCRAPER ON THERMAL FLAKE
CLF	MEP	BOD	ME	-	-
CLG	MEP	BOD	ME	-	-
CLH	RBP	BOD	RB	-	-
CLI	RBP?	BOD	RB?	-	-
CLJ	FLI	-	PR	FLAKE	BLADE
CLK	MEP	BOD	ME	-	-
CLL	FLI	-	PR	FLAKE	BURNT
CLM	RBP	RIM	RB	-	-
CLN	RBP	BOD	RB	-	ABRADED
CLO	RBP	BOD	RB	-	-
CLP	FLI	-	PR	CORE	-
CLQ	RBP?	BOD	RB?	-	-
CLR	RBP?	BOD	RB?	-	-
CLS	FLI	-	PR	PLOUGH BASHED FRAGMENT	-
CLT	FLI	-	PR	FLAKE	KNIFE FRAG
CLU	FLI	-	PR	FLAKE	-
CLV	RBP	RIM	RB	-	-
CLW	RBP?	BOD	RB?	-	-
CLX	MET	-	-	-	LEAD
CLY	MEP	BOD	ME	-	-
CLZ	RBP	BOD	RB	-	-
CMA	GLA	-	PM?	-	BOTTLE GLASS
CMB	RBP	BOD	RB	-	ABRADED
CMC	FLI	-	PR	FLAKE	-

Roman pottery identifications confirmed by Ruth Leary.

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