



**Archaeological observation, investigation, recording
and analysis at 27 Richmond Road
Towcester, Northamptonshire
July 2014**

Planning reference: S/2013/0154/TCA

Report No. 14/149

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Illustrators: James Ladocha
and Amir Bassir



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Other finds: Tora Hylton

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		Oasis No. molanort1- 186494	
Project title	Archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis at 27 Richmond Road, Towcester, Northamptonshire, July 2014		
Short description	A programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording was undertaken in advance of the construction of a new house on land adjacent to 27 Richmond Road, Towcester, Northamptonshire. A cobbled surface was observed, likely forming part of a Roman road dating to between the late 1st and 3rd centuries AD, linking up to the Alchester Road. The relationship of the road to a ditch 3m to the south is unknown.		
Project type	Watching brief		
Site Status	None		
Previous work	Amateur trial trench evaluation (unpublished)		
Current land use	Garden		
Future work	None		
Monument type/period	Roman road and ditch		
Significant finds	Roman pottery, tile, glass		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County	Northamptonshire		
Site address	27 Richmond Road, Towcester		
Post code	NN12 6EX		
OS co-ordinates	SP 69177 48559		
Area (sq m/ha)	135m ²		
Height aOD	90m		
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation	MOLA Northampton		
Project brief originator	Liz Mordue (NCC)		
Project Design originator	MOLA Northampton		
Director/Supervisor	Simon Markus		
Project Manager	Anthony Maull		
Sponsor or funding body	DJC Associates		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date	17/07/2014		
End date	22/07/2014		
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Contents	
Physical	TRR 14	Pottery, glass, tile, slate pencil, lead shot	
Paper	MOLA Northampton office	Site records (1 small archive box)	
Digital		Client report PDF	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (MOLA report)		
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Archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis at 27 Richmond Road Towcester, Northamptonshire July 2014

Abstract

A programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording was undertaken in advance of the construction of a new house on land adjacent to 27 Richmond Road, Towcester, Northamptonshire. A cobbled surface was observed, likely forming part of a Roman road dating to between the late 1st and 3rd centuries AD, linking up to Alchester Road. The relationship of the road to a ditch 3m to the south is unknown.

1 INTRODUCTION

MOLA was commissioned by DJC Associates to provide archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis on land adjacent to 27 Richmond Road, Towcester, Northamptonshire (Fig 1; NGR 469177 248559). The work was carried out in advance of development of the site.

The excavation followed an approved *Written Scheme of Investigation* prepared by MOLA Northampton (Leigh 2014) following a request for archaeological observation and investigation required by the Assistant Archaeological Advisor, Northamptonshire County Council in a brief for archaeological work (Mordue 2014). It adhered to the procedural document *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* and *MoRPHE* (EH 2009).

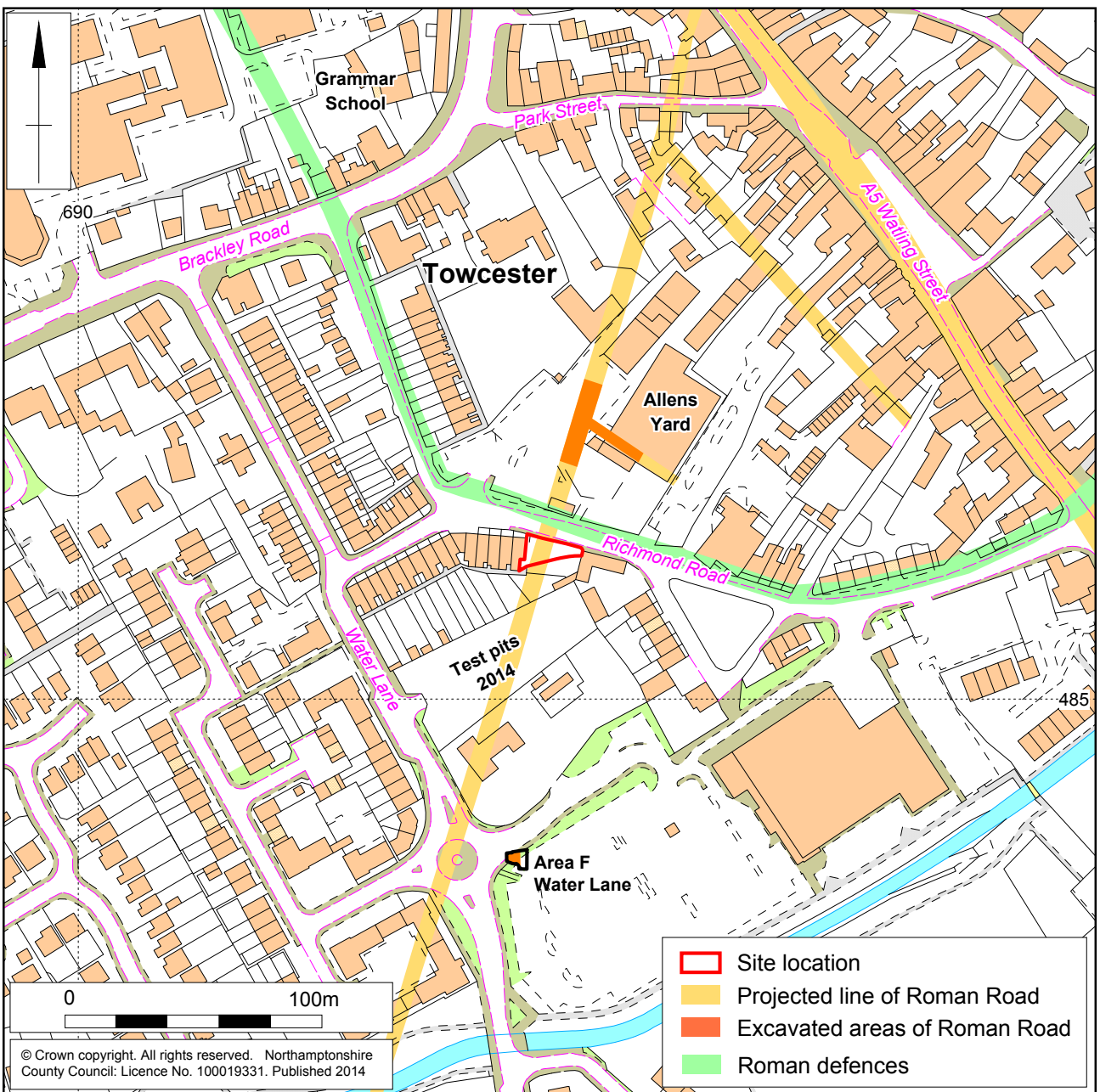
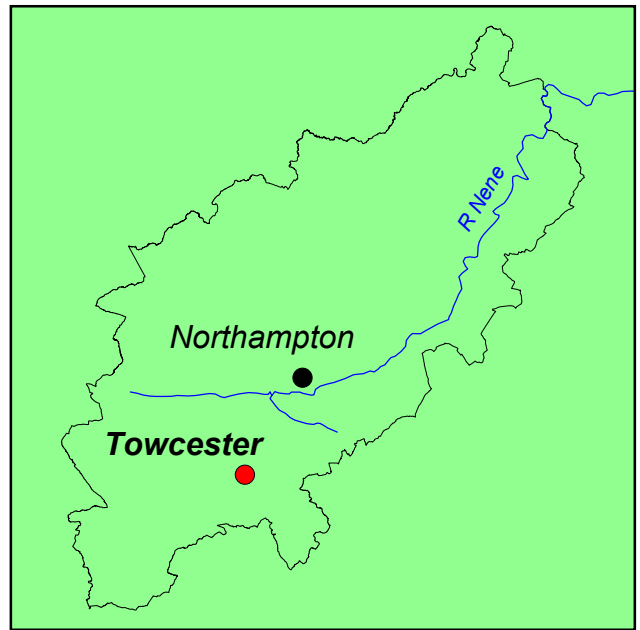
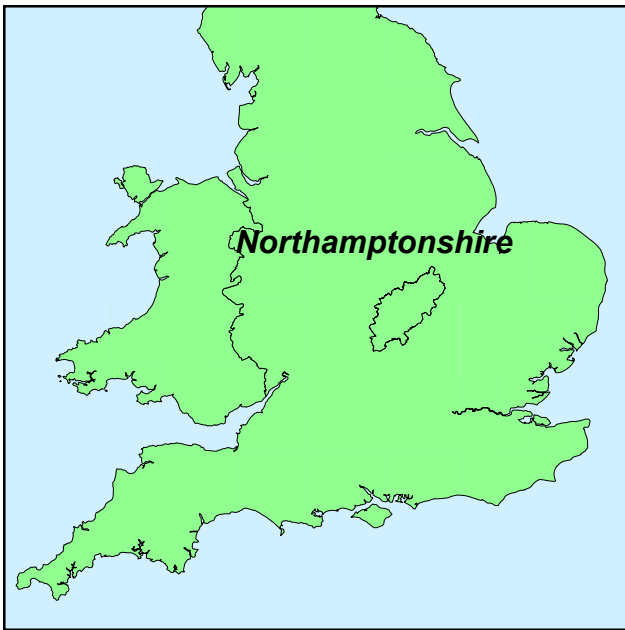
This report has been prepared in accordance with current best archaeological practice as defined in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008) and the *Code of Conduct* (IfA 2014). Work was carried out in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (DCLG 2012).

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

Towcester is located approximately 16km south-west of Northampton, on the major Roman road of Watling Street, the modern A5. The site lies on level ground at an approximate height of 90m aOD, bounded to the north by Richmond Road, to the east and west by buildings and to the south by garden space. The work covers an area of approximately 58.8m².

The underlying geology has been mapped by the British Geological Survey as comprising Whitby Mudstone Formation (BGS Geindex)



Scale 1: 2,500

Site location Fig 1

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

The site lies on the boundary of the Roman town of *Lactodurum* and its medieval successor. A pre-Roman settlement existed in the sharply angled bend of the River Tove on the north-east side of the town (Brown and Soden 2008). The Roman town of *Lactodurum* (Towcester, HER726) was sited on the Watling Street (A5), a major Roman military route built between London and the legionary fortress at Wroxeter, near Shrewsbury. Brackley Road also has Roman antecedents and a gate into *Lactodurum* may have stood near Park Lane. The line of the Roman wall and defensive ditch has been located to the north of Brackley Road (Brown and Alexander 1982) and the southern defences lay along Richmond Road (Atkins and Woodfield 1999, Upson-Smith 2004). The projected line between these locations would suggest that the ditch may lie beneath Queens Road, with the wall and rampart to the east as previously described by Woodfield (1992).

The Alchester Road has been identified in previous excavations at 9-13 Park Street, Allen's Yard, and an area outside the confines of the Roman town to the south (Lambrick 1980; Parry and Woodfield 1985; Brown and Woodfield 1983). Within the town, Alchester Road has been mapped between 3.2m and 5.5m wide, with various phases of associated roadside ditches. Further south, approximately 620m of the road has been mapped in the area of its intersection with Fleet Marston Road, with a surface around 7-8m wide, and 15m between its associated ditches. Excavations at Allen's Yard also identified side roads with associated structures.

Excavations at Water Lane in 1998 by Northamptonshire Archaeology uncovered a short section of road, 6m long by 0.5m wide and aligned north-east to south-west, toward the Water Lane road boundary (Thompson and Chapman 2013). It was thought that due to the camber of the surface that the road could have been around 9m wide. Pottery was recovered from the surface dating this part of the road to late 1st or early 2nd centuries. The road was not seen in test pits observed during a watching brief in 2014 on land between Richmond Road and Water Lane just south of the development area (Wolframm-Murray 2014). However, the pits were narrow and widely-spaced so the negative results cannot be regarded as conclusive.

In the medieval period, Towcester was a small town containing a motte and bailey castle (Bury Mount, HER727/3) which in recent years has been the subject of extensive excavation (Brown and Soden 2008). The site lies within an area of the medieval tenement rows of Park Lane (Taylor *et al* 2002; HER727/48). On the whole, evidence has suggested that most medieval activity had been confined to the Watling Street frontage (Steadman and Shaw 1991, 7-8, 10; Atkins and Woodfield 1999, 32; Prentice 2001, 13).

During the English Civil War (1642-9) Towcester was garrisoned and fortified for the Royalists. This is thought to have included some minor reworking of the former defences.

Excavations undertaken within the development area in 1983 (Fig 2) uncovered cobbled surfaces, one dated to the 17th or 18th century, and a series of ditches. This work was never published and available records are limited to a plan of the excavated trench and photographs.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In order to examine the archaeological resource within the proposed development area the objectives of the investigation were to:

- Identify, investigate and record all archaeological deposits exposed during the construction of the new extension and any associated groundworks;
- Determine and record the date, extent, character, state of preservation and depth of burial of any archaeological deposits;
- Recover any artefacts that may assist in the development of pottery type series within the region;
- Establish the relationship of any archaeological deposits within the wider contemporary landscape;
- Create a permanent archive and record of the archaeological information collected during the course of the fieldwork and analysis.

4 METHODOLOGY

All works were conducted in accordance with the procedural documents *The Management of Archaeological Projects* issued by English Heritage (1991), *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (EH 2006), the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief* (2008) and *Code of Conduct* (IfA 2014) . Where appropriate the research frameworks were borne in mind (English Heritage 1991 and Knight *et al* 2012).

Within the development area the topsoil and, where applicable, non-structural post-medieval and later deposits were removed by a mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, to reveal significant archaeological remains or, where these were absent, the natural substrate (Fig 2).

Archaeological features were plotted on plans at a scale of 1:50. Sections or profiles through features and areas of complex stratigraphy were drawn at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20 as appropriate. All levels were related to Ordnance Datum.

The character, composition and general depositional sequence of the site stratification was recorded on *pro-forma* sheets, with a unique context number being allocated to each distinct deposit and feature. All recording followed the guidelines detailed in the MOLA Northampton *Archaeological fieldwork manual* (2014).

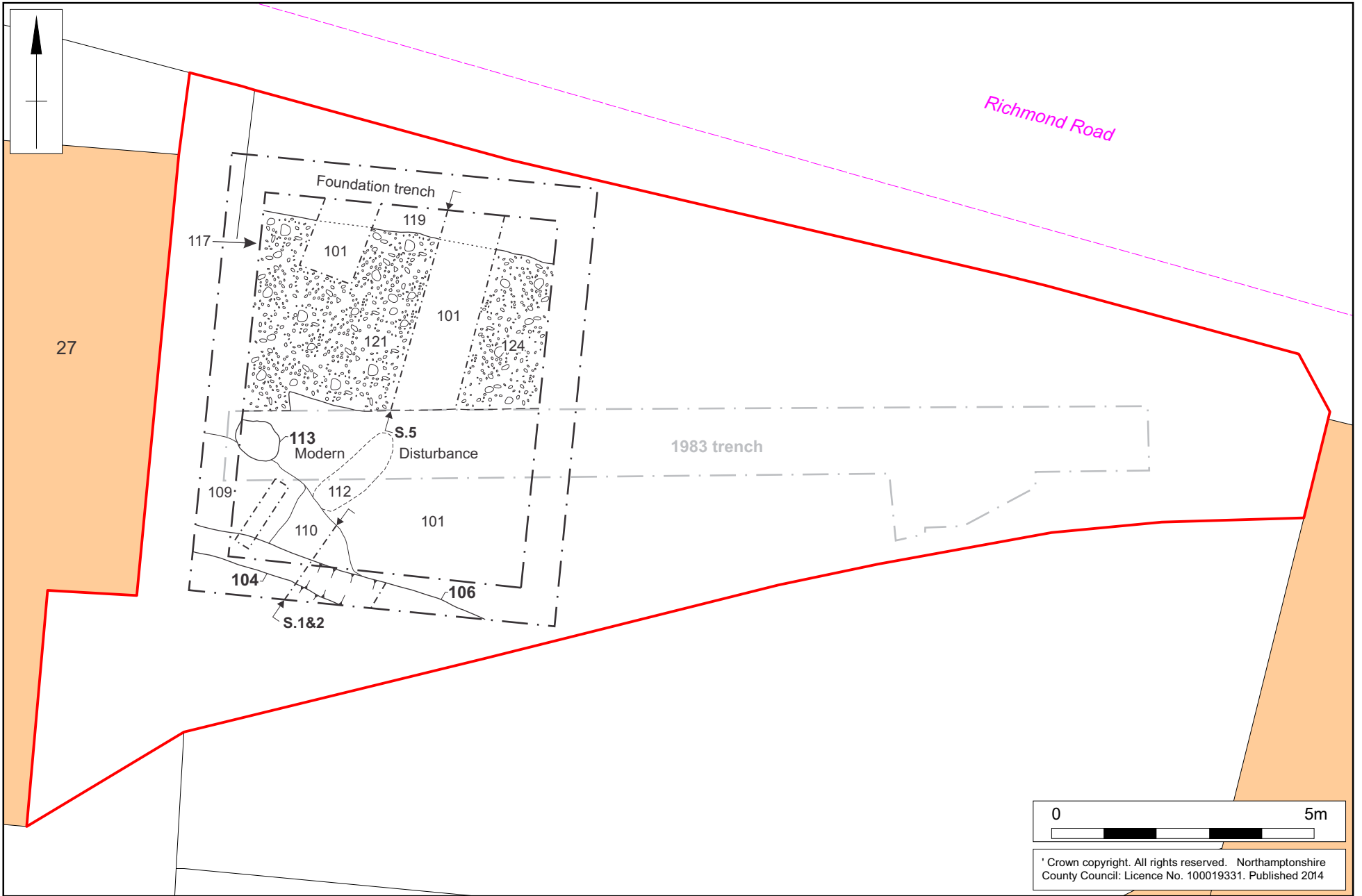
A full photographic record comprising both 35mm black and white negatives and digital images was maintained.

All records were compiled during fieldwork into a comprehensive and fully cross-referenced site archive. All records and materials will be compiled in a structured archive in accordance with the guidelines of Appendix 3 in the English Heritage procedural document, *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (1991).

Scale 1:100 (A4)

Area of excavation with location of 1983 trench

Fig 2

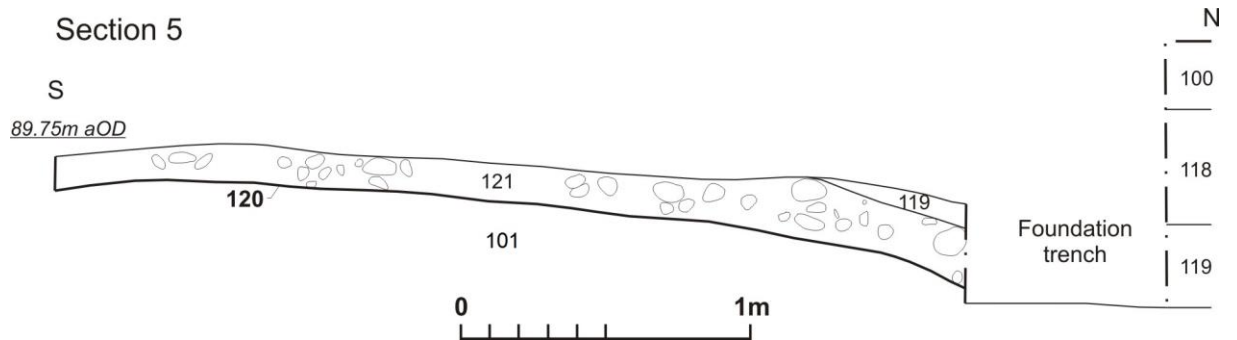


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5 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The natural substratum (101) was orange sandy clay with <1% gravels. Below the topsoil was a layer (118) of dark brown clay loam with <1% gravels, 0.40m thick. The topsoil (100) was dark brown-grey clay-loam, with 1-2% gravel inclusions.

The road make-up (117/121/124) consisted of mixed rounded and sub-rounded gravels and cobbles up to 200mm in diameter, in a matrix of orange-brown silty clay, creating an interface (120) where pressed into the natural clay (Figs 3 and 4). It is likely that much of the road make-up above had been lost. How far this road material extended to the south is unclear due to modern disturbance. Roman pottery, oyster shell, floor tile and glass were recovered from the road, with the greatest concentration of finds in the north-west corner (117). Overlying the road make-up to the north was a layer (119) of brown-grey silty clay with <1% gravels



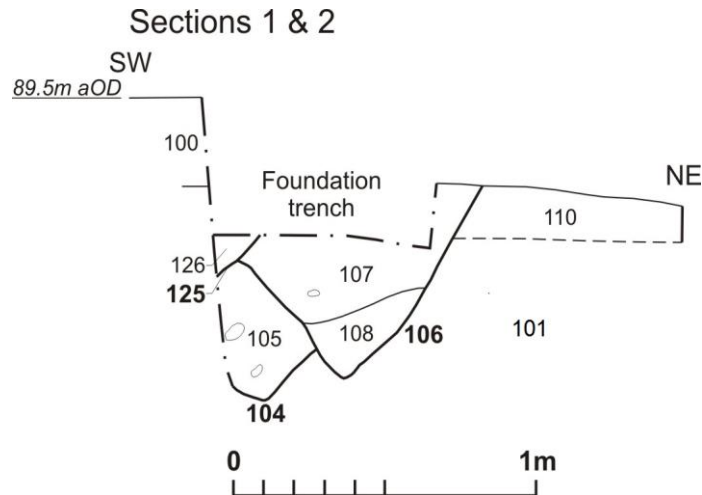
Section through Roman road (121) Fig 3



Remains of Roman road (121/124), looking west-north-west Fig 4

To the south of the surviving road material was a linear ditch, aligned north-west to south-east, with two phases of recutting (Figs 2 and 5). The U-shaped ditch [104], 0.30m wide and up to 0.42m deep, had a fill (105) of dark grey-brown silty clay with 2-3% small gravels. The first recut, V-shaped ditch [106], 0.73m wide and up to 0.46m deep, had a primary fill (108) of dark grey silty clay with 1% small gravels and containing Roman pottery, burnt clay and animal bone. This was overlain by fill (107)

of mid yellow-grey clay with <1% small gravels. This was cut by a final ditch [125], with only the uppermost northern edge within the area of excavation and a fill (126) of mid grey clay with <1% small gravel inclusions.



Ditches [104], [106] and [125] Fig 5

In the south-west corner of the excavation, and cut by ditches [106/125], were two layers (109) of mid orange-grey silty clay, and (110) of light yellow-grey clay, up to 0.13m deep, which were interpreted as slight variations in the natural substrate (101).

In the centre of the excavation area was a small layer (112) of mid grey silty clay with a moderate amount of small-medium gravels. A flint fragment was recovered from this. It is unclear whether this was related to the Roman road material due to the level of disturbance in this area.

A modern pit [113] lay towards the centre of excavation, but was mostly machined away to reveal the Roman deposits. The fill (114) of mid grey clay with 10% small gravels contained modern brick and tile, none of which was retained. At the base of this pit, and pressed firmly into the natural substrate, was a large block of limestone (115). This measured 0.46m wide, 0.47m long and 0.21m, with an irregular profile.



Block of limestone (115) (Scale 0.5m) Fig 6

The level of limescale build up on its upper edges would indicate an exposed surface so it would have been above ground at some point and later buried. This is a lump of glacial erratic limestone, and though uncommon, is not unprecedented in this type of natural substrate (pers comm I Meadows).

6 THE FINDS

6.1 Roman pottery by Tora Hylton

The watching brief produced 44 sherds of pottery (Table 1) with a combined weight of 403g, recovered from four individual deposits (108), (117), (121) and (124). With the exception of one unstratified sherd, the entire assemblage was recovered from mixed deposits associated with the Roman oad. The overall condition of the pottery is relatively poor, many of the sherds are small and this is reflected in a mean sherd weight of 10.9g. Where possible the fabrics have been coded according to the National Roman fabric reference codes (Tomber and Dore 1998).

There are no diagnostically early sherds and the fabrics and forms that are represented suggest a late 1st to 2nd/3rd century AD date. The assemblage includes local coarsewares and regional finewares and imported wares. Although there are few diagnostic sherds, those represented include a fragment from a flagon handle and a neck (different vessels) in Verulamium Region Whiteware and dating to the late 1st/2nd century AD. Other forms include necked jars in greyware fabrics and a body sherd from a poppyhead beaker dating to the c 2nd century AD.

There are 25 sherds of Samian which have been imported from the continent (Fig 7). Identifiable forms include fragments from two Dragendorff Type 37 hemispherical bowls, each with vestiges of ovolo decoration and dating to c 70AD-late 2nd century (Webster 1996, fig 32) and a Dragendorff Type 33 conical cup with a footstand which dates to the mid/late 2nd century (Webster 1996, fig 30).

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Context	108 / 106		117		121		124		u/s	
	Ditch		Road make-up							
Fabric Type (NRRF code)	No	Wt (g)	No	Wt (g)	No	Wt (g)	No	Wt (g)	No	Wt (g)
Greyware	1	3	-	-	1	5	5	2	1	8
Misc Sandy oxidised wares	2	6	-	-	1	18	4	98	-	-
Verulamium Region Whiteware (VER WH)	-	-	-	-	1	9	3	40	-	-
Samian	1	2	3	37	-	-	21	147	-	-
Total	4	11	3	37	3	32	33	315	1	8



Rim sherd of Samian Dragendorff Type 37 hemispherical bowl with ovolo decoration, from Roman road make-up (117) (scale 10mm) Fig 7

6.2 Ceramic building material by Pat Chapman

Ten sherds of Roman tile, weighing 582g, came from the Roman road surface, the roadside ditch and the topsoil (Table 2).

There are two diagnostic sherds. A floor tile, 37mm thick, made from hard fine silty orange sandy fabric with a thin black core and grey-brown surfaces, comes from road make-up (124). A *tegula* roof tile from the topsoil (100), made with hard fine sandy orange-brown fabric with occasional tiny gravel, has a body 20mm thick and a flange 50mm tall and 20mm wide.

A body sherd, 16mm thick from fill (108) of Roman ditch [106], and five fragments are made with a hard fine silty orange fabric. One sherd from the road make-up (124) is made with a pinkish-brown fabric with small grog inclusions. The sherd from road make-up (121) is sub-rounded and has also been overfired. It has a mainly grey body and the interior is red-brown with buff streaks and more likely to be fired clay rather than tile.

These are a scatter of fragments derived from the Roman town.

Table 2: Summary of Roman tile

Fill / feature / type	No	Wt (g)	Description
100 topsoil	1	145	Tegula
108 /106 / ditch	3	25	Body sherds
116 road make-up	1	20	Body sherd
121 road make-up	1	12	Body sherd or fired clay
124 road make-up	4	380	Floor tile (4 joining); 3 body sherds
Totals	10	582	

6.3 Oyster shell by Simon Markus

Three fragments of oyster shell, weighing 23g, were recovered from the road make-up (124) and fill (108) of ditch [106], presumably brought in from the coast as a food source for the inhabitants of the town. They will be discarded.

6.4 Glass by Tora Hylton

Five fragments of Roman glass were recovered from the Roman road make-up (117) and (121). These include four base sherds and an amorphous partially melted fragment of blue/green glass. The base fragments are yellow-green in colour, and available dimensions suggest that it would have measured c 80mm in diameter. The base is concave and there is a constriction just above the base edge, stylistically it represents an open base ring, a form which is found on a jugs and jars dating to the 1st/2nd centuries AD (Price and Cottam 1998, 25).

6.5 Post-medieval finds by Tora Hylton

Two objects of post-medieval date were recovered from topsoil (100), part of a slate pencil and a lead shot. The shot, a spherical ball measuring 11mm in diameter, has a possible impact mark and its size suggests that it would have been for use with a pistol.

7 DISCUSSION

The excavation was expected to uncover remains of the Alchester Roman Road, which runs approximately north-north-east to south-south-west. As the truncated remains of a Roman road in this investigation lies directly in line with the road excavated at Allens Yard to the north, it probably does relate to the Alchester Road.

It is unclear how the ditch, aligned east to west in the southern part of the excavation related to the Roman road, as the road had been lost to later disturbance in this area. Evidence of occupation has been recorded in the area pre-dating Alchester Road and the town defences, so it is possible that the ditch related to the earlier occupation overlain by the Alchester Road.

Relating the results of the 1983 excavations to the results of this study was difficult due to the level of disturbance on the site and lack of information on these early excavations. None of the cut features were revealed beneath the Roman road and so it is unclear what the features on the east side of the earlier excavations relate to. The only comparison which can be drawn is the location of cobbled deposits in approximately the same location as in this excavation.

Further areas of cobbles, identified as natural in 1983, may relate to the cobbled surface identified within the stripped area, however, it is difficult to be sure.

The large block of limestone is a naturally occurring glacial erratic, uncommon, but not unprecedented, in the area. Its location close to the possible junction between Alchester Road and a side road may indicate it was a road marker, but this is impossible to prove.

The road located in the excavations at Water Lane in 1998 was not directly in line with the projected Alchester Road, however, a slight change to a more southerly direction would put the road in line with the Water Lane excavated road and the present bridge, and therefore a possible early river crossing. Further work in the area of the test pits, east of Water Lane, would likely provide the evidence required to definitively locate the route of the Alchester road.

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APPENDIX: CONTEXT TABLES

Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
100	Topsoil	Dark brown-grey clay-loam with 1-2% small gravels	D: up to 0.30m	SF1 & 5
101	Natural	Mid orange-brown clay with 1-2% flint and quartzite gravels	--	--
102	Ditch	General number for ditches [104] and [106]	W: 0.85m D: 0.52m	--
103	Fill of 102	General number for fills (105), (107) and (108)	W: 0.85m D: 0.52m	--
104	Ditch	Linear U-shaped ditch, aligned east – west. Cut by ditches [106] and [125]	W: 0.30m D: 0.42m	--
105	Fill of 104	Dark grey-brown silty clay with 2-3% small gravels.	W: 0.30m D: 0.42m	Animal bone
106	Ditch	Linear V-shaped ditch, aligned east – west. Cuts ditch [104], cut by ditch [125]	W: 0.73m D: 0.46m	--
107	Fill of 106	Mid yellow-grey clay with <1% small gravels. Redeposited natural	W: 0.73m D: 0.29m	--
108	Fill of 106	Dark grey silty clay with 1% small gravels	W: 0.40m D: 0.28m	--
109	Layer	Mid orange and grey silty clay with <1% small gravels	D: 0.08m	--
110	Natural	Light yellow-grey clay with <1% small gravels	D: 0.13m	--
111	Layer	Mid grey silty clay with 40-50% small-medium gravels.	D: 0.02m	--
112	Layer	Mid grey silty clay with 25-30% small-medium gravels.	D: 0.02m	SF2
113	Modern pit	Oval pit with brick and slate tile inclusions. Cut above (115)	W: 0.50m L: 0.65m	Brick, slate tile (not retained)
114	Fill of 113	Mid grey clay with 10% small gravels	W: 0.50m L: 0.65m	
115	Stone	Large block of limestone, possibly roughly worked. Out of character for natural inclusion	W: 0.46m L: 0.47m D: 0.21m	--
116	Layer	Group number for Roman road including (117), (121) and (124)	--	SF3
117	Layer	North-west area of Roman road with a high concentration of finds. Cobbles, up to 200mm in diameter, pressed into natural clay	--	Pottery, glass, shell SF4
118	Layer	Dark brown clay-loam with 1% small gravels	D: 0.40m	--
119	Silting layer	Mid grey silty clay with <1% small gravels	W: 0.54m D: 0.28m	--

Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
120	Interface	Interface formed between Roman road make-up (121) and natural (101) caused by pressure applied to cobbles, pushing them into natural	--	--
121	Roman road make-up	Cobbles, up to 200mm in diameter, pressed into natural clay	W: 3.14m D: 0.22m	Pottery, tile, SF6
122	Silting layer	Mid grey silty clay with <1% small gravels	W: 0.32m D: 0.11m	
123	Interface	Interface formed between Roman road make-up (124) and natural (101) caused by pressure applied to cobbles, pushing them into natural	--	--
124	Roman road make-up	Cobbles, up to 200mm in diameter, pressed into natural clay	W: 1.70m D: 0.21m	Pottery, tile, shell
125	Ditch	Linear ditch. Only visible at limit of excavation. Cuts ditch [106]	W: 0.15m D: 0.12m	--
126	Fill of 125	Mid grey clay with <1% small gravels	W: 0.15m D: 0.12m	--



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