Archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis of land on the Fosse Way at Syston, Leicestershire
March 2015 and January-March 2016

Report No 16/66

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Site Code: X.A111.2014
NGR: SK6208 1244, SK6210 1251

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS	**OASIS No: molanort1-**	
Project title	Archaeological observation, investigation, analysis and recording of land on the Fosse Way at Syston, Leicestershire March 2015 and January-March 2016	
Short description	An archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis was carried out by MOLA Northampton, during work to replace two culverts on The Fosse Way at Syston, Leicestershire. A possible agger and two possible former roadside ditches of unknown date, and several layers of modern made ground were observed.	
Project type	Watching Brief	
Previous work	Test pit excavation; September 2014	
Current land use	Road	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type and period	Post-medieval and modern	
Significant finds	Pottery: post-medieval and modern. Brick: post-medieval Timber posts: early modern	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Leicestershire	
Site address	Fosseway, Syston	
Easting Northing	SK 6208 1244, SK 6210 1251	
Area (sq m/ha)	250 sq m	
Height aOD	50m aOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	MOLA Northampton	
Project brief originator	The Archaeological Advisor, Leicestershire County Council	
Project Design originator	MOLA Northampton	
Director/Supervisor	Ben Kidd and Tim Sharman (MOLA Northampton)	
Project Manager	Anthony Maull (MOLA Northampton)	
Sponsor or funding body	Leicestershire County Council, Highways	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	10/03/2015	
End date	11/03/2016	
ARCHIVES	**Location (Accession no.)**	**Contents**
Physical	X.A111.2014	Pottery sherds, brick fragment
Paper		Watching brief forms, permatrace plans
Digital		Client report PDF
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Unpublished client report	
Title	Archaeological observation, investigation, analysis and recording of land on the Fosse Way at Syston, Leicestershire March 2015 and January-March 2016	
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Archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis of land on the Fosse Way at Syston, Leicestershire March 2015 and January-March 2016

Abstract

An archaeological observation, investigation, recording and analysis was carried out by MOLA Northampton, during work to replace two culverts on the Fosse Way at Syston, Leicestershire. A possible agger and two possible former roadside ditches of unknown date, and several layers of modern made ground were observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

MOLA Northampton had been commissioned by Leicestershire County Council, to carry out a programme of observation, investigation, recording, analysis and publication on groundworks associated with the replacement of flood culverts 2a and 3 on the Fosse Way at Syston, Leicestershire (NGR SK 6210 1251 and SK 6208 1244; Fig 1).

The archaeological monitoring works were to ensure that any archaeological remains within the area of the groundworks were appropriately located, defined, characterised, and recorded. Works were undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching brief* (CIfA 2014a), and to the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (DCLG 2012).

MOLA is a Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) registered organisation. This report has been prepared in accordance with the current best archaeological practice as defined in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance: for archaeological watching briefs* (CIfA 2014a) and the Historic England (HE) procedural document *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (HE 2015). The work complied with a written Scheme of Investigation by MOLA (2015) in response to a brief issued by the Senior Archaeological Officer, Leicestershire County Council (LCC 2014)

2 BACKGROUND

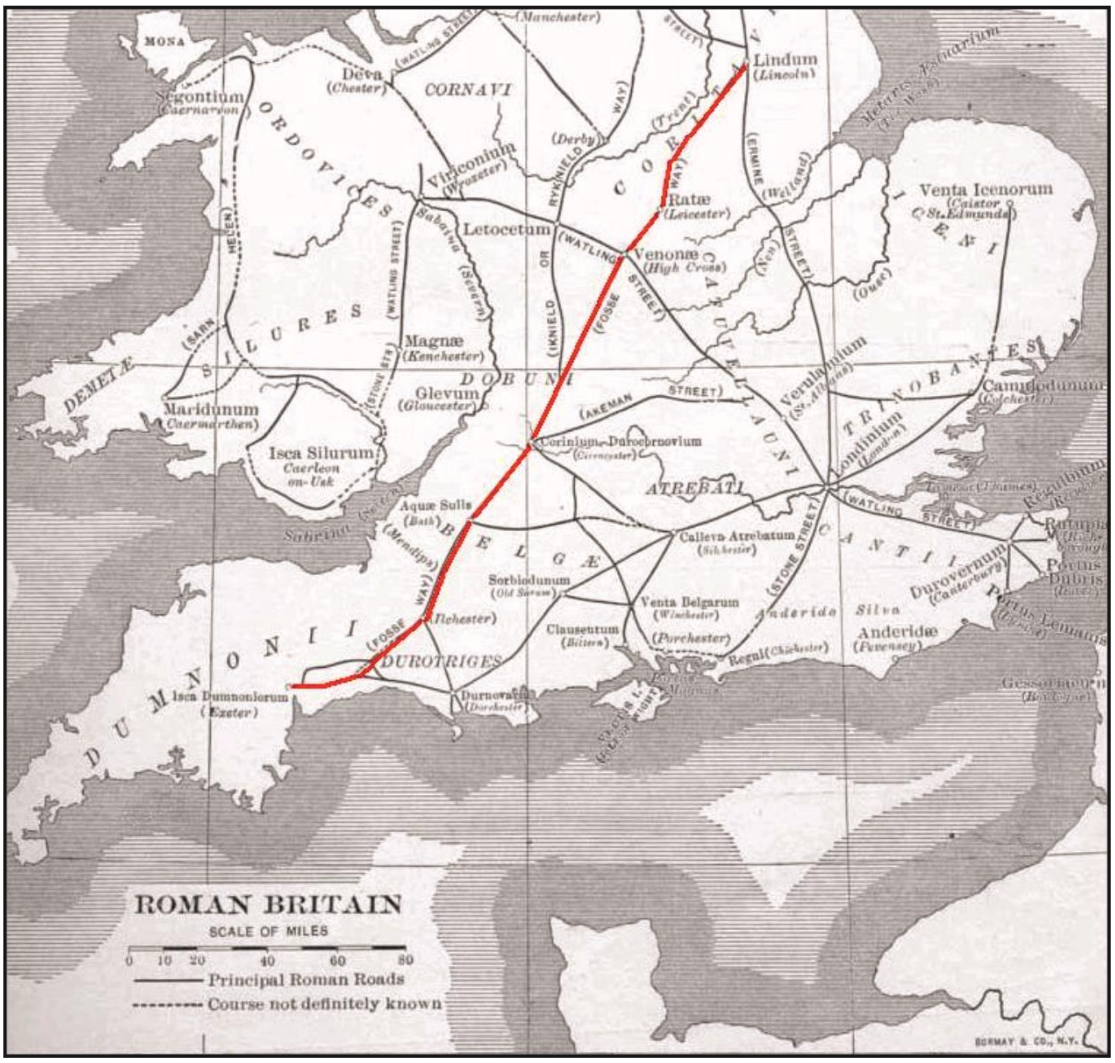
2.1 Location and topography

Syston is a village on the north outskirts of Leicester and south-west of Melton Mowbray (Fig 1). Culverts 2a and 3 lie 420m and 480m south respectively of Lewin's Bridge, north of Syston near the River Wreake. The development area, subject to archaeological mitigation, comprises the existing culvert structures underlying the Fosse Way road.

The site lies at just over 50m aOD. The bedrock geology comprises Triassic Mudstone of the Branscombe Mudstone Formation, overlain by Post-glacial alluvium (BGS 2014).

Scale 1:1000

Site location, culvert and test pit location Fig 1



Route of the Fosse Way Fig 2

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

The survey site lies within an area of significant archaeological interest, located on the line of the former Fosse Way Roman Road (MLE1380). The route connected *Ratae Corieltauvorum* (Leicester) and Lindum Colonia (Lincoln) to the north-east and *Corinium* (Cirencester) and *Isca Dumnoniorum* (Exeter) to the south-west (Fig 2). By the mid-1st-century the road may have been the west frontier of the province. The road is likely to have had a prehistoric trackway precursor but in the Roman period would have comprised a gravel/cobbled surface on a causeway or 'agger' with drainage ditches either side. At Culvert 3 the Fosse Way is thought to cross a small tributary of the River Wreake and will have been either bridged or forded at this point. This crossing point may have caused the character and composition of the road to change.

Stray finds from the surrounding area comprise a Saxon loomweight and pottery (MLE19929) found in an unspecified location to the west of Lewin's Bridge.

On the site in 2014, observation work carried out during the excavation of a test pit within the road verge to the south of Culvert 2a (Figs 1 and 3, sections 1 and 2),

revealed a succession of build-up layers relating to the modern road. No archaeological finds or features were observed (Kidd 2014).

In the vicinity, previous archaeological investigation carried out to the north-west of the site identified a burnt mound of probable Bronze Age date as well as ditches and features of middle to late-Saxon date (MLE9587 and 9586). Other investigations and a geophysical survey were largely unproductive (SLE2723).

There is at present no evidence for medieval activity.

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Objectives

In order to examine the archaeological resource within the proposed development area the main objective of the investigation was to determine and understand the nature, function, and character of an archaeological site in its cultural and environmental setting. More specifically, the work has:

- Identified, investigated and recorded all archaeological deposits exposed during the excavation of the house footprint and access road, plus associated below groundworks;
- Determined and recorded the date, extent, character, state of preservation and depth of burial of any archaeological deposits;
- Created a permanent archive and record of the archaeological information collected during the course of the fieldwork and analysis.

3.2 Methodology

All works were conducted in accordance with the procedural documents Historic England's *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (HE 2015), the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance: Archaeological Watching Brief* (CIfA 2014a) and *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2014b). Where appropriate the research frameworks were borne in mind (Cooper 2006, Knight *et al* 2012).

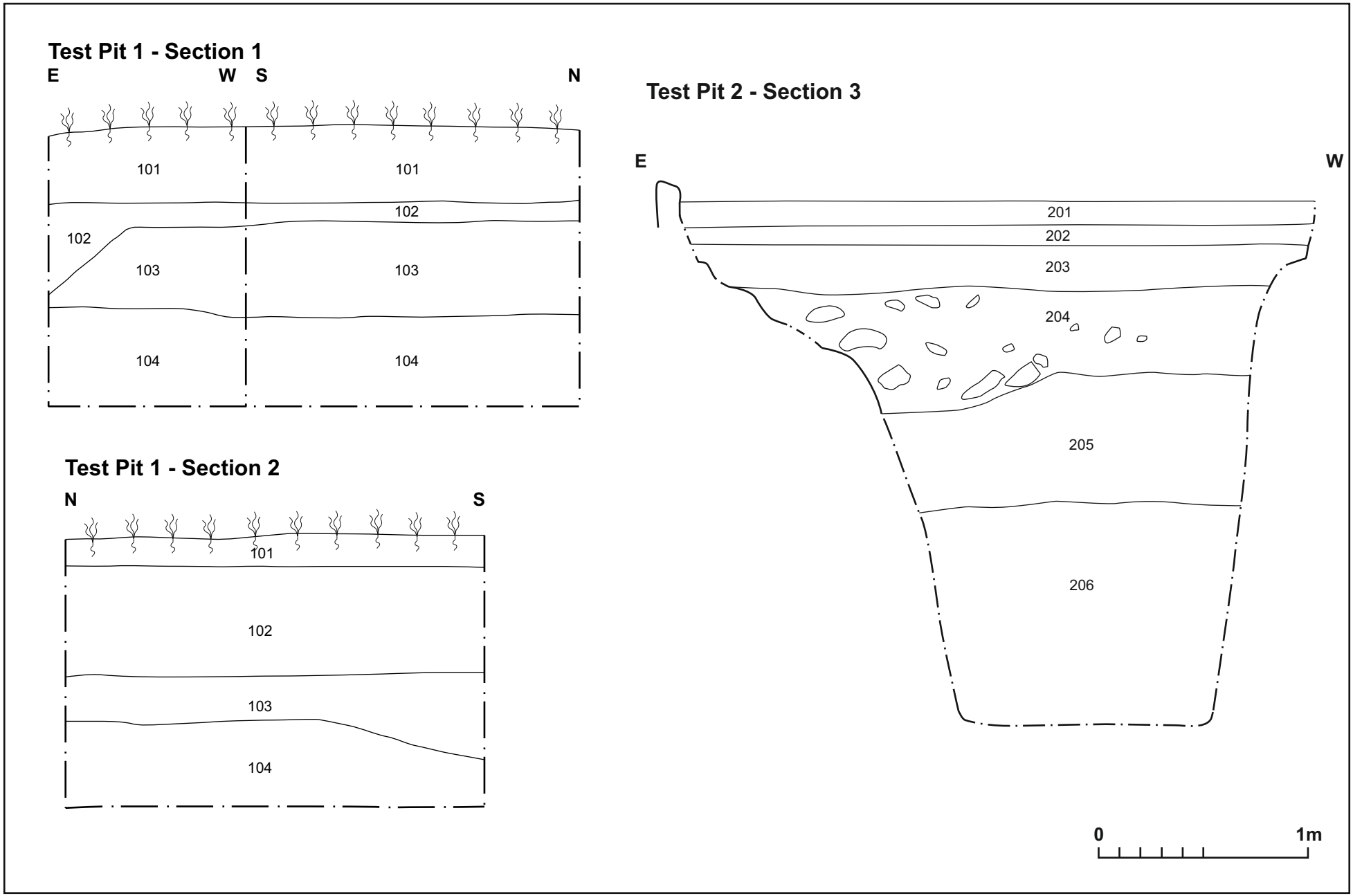
The groundwork areas were cleaned sufficiently to enable the identification and definition of archaeological features, where present.

The observation work took place on one day during March 2015 and eight days between January and March 2016 in variable weather conditions.

Recording followed standard MOLA Northampton procedures as described in the *Fieldwork Manual* (MOLA 2014). Deposits were described on *pro-forma* sheets to include measured and descriptive details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds. The photographic record comprised digital images and 35mm black and white film.

On 10 March 2015, the observation area comprised a small test pit (TP 2), 3.1m long by 0.7m wide by 2.5m deep (Figs 1,3) excavated within the road corridor just to the north of the northernmost drainage culvert (Culvert 2a). The test pit was excavated using a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a *c*0.7m bladed bucket.

In January and March 2016, the observation areas comprised the sites of the existing culverts (Culverts 2a and 3) which had been demolished within two rectangular trenches formed by the insertion of steel shuttering. The trenches were 14m long by



Scale 1:25

Test pits 1 and 2, sections 1-3 Fig 3

7m wide by *c* 2.5m deep and spanned the entire width of the modern road corridor 7m wide and 15m long by 6m wide respectively (Figs 1, 5-9). Following the removal of the concrete bases of the culverts, the interiors of the trenches were excavated to formation level using large and mini 360° mechanical excavators fitted with a 1.5m or a 1m bladed bucket respectively, under archaeological supervision.

On 11 March 2016, following the removal of a *c*1m diameter temporary pipe, the observation area comprised a trench which had been cut across the modern carriageway just to the south of culvert 3 and was *c*8m long by 1.6m wide by *c*1.5m deep. The trench (Figs 1,11,12) had originally been excavated without archaeological supervision, for the insertion of a temporary flood diversion pipe, prior to the demolition of the original flood relief culverts (Culverts 2a and 3).

4 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

4.1 Test pit 2 (TP 2)

Test pit 2 (Section 3 and Figs 1, 3, 4) was excavated to a depth of *c*2.5m where the natural substrate, consisting of a layer of grey alluvial clay (206) at least 1m deep was encountered.

Overlying (206) was a 0.5m thick layer of compacted grey brown silty clay (205), above which was a *c*0.5m deep layer of dark grey-brown silty loam with numerous fragments of modern bricks, fire bricks and small to large fragments of blast furnace slag and clinker (204) which appeared to be the foundation layer for the overlying layers of modern road material.

Above (204), a 0.15m thick layer of concrete (203) was noted, which was overlain by a 0.1m layer of tarmac sub-base (102). The tarmac surface (201) of the road carriageway was 0.1m thick.

No archaeological features were noted within the test pit.

Test pit 1 (Figs 1, 3) was excavated in 2014 and forms the basis for a separate report (Kidd 2014).

Test Pit 2, section showing modern road build-up (204), looking south Fig 4

4.2 The northern culvert (Culvert 2a)

Due to difficult and potentially unsafe working conditions, it was not possible to carry out observation work within the trench. Consequently, all observation work took place from just outside the trench.

Following the removal of the remains of the original culvert at a depth of *c*1.9m below the level of the modern carriageway, a further *c*0.4m was machined to formation level on the floor of the trench. Layers of potentially undisturbed material up to *c*0.7m deep were also machined from the sides of the trench.

The natural substrate consisted of mid-grey alluvial clay (401) and was observed within the western half of the trench floor, at a depth of *c*2m below the surface of the modern road surface. In the eastern half of the trench floor a layer of orange-brown clay and gravel (402) was observed (Fig 5). It is uncertain whether or not this layer is part of the natural substrate or whether it represents a layer of build-up material; in appearance, it is very similar to a layer observed in the Culvert 3 trench which may have been part of an agger (see below).

A small sondage (Fig 6) measuring 1m long by 1m wide by *c*0.8m deep was machine excavated in approximately the mid-point of the trench floor. At the base of the sondage was a layer of dark grey silty clay (405) at least 0.1m deep, this was overlain by a *c*0.2m deep layer of mid-brown sandy clay (404), which was overlain by a *c*0.2m deep layer of blue-grey clay (403), overlying this was a 0.3m deep layer of grey alluvial clay (401), seen throughout the western half of the trench floor.

4.3 The southern culvert (Culvert 3)

As with the northern culvert (Culvert 2a), due to difficult and potentially unsafe working conditions, it was not possible to carry out observation work within the trench. Consequently, all observation work, took place from just outside the trench.

Following the removal of the remains of the original culvert at *c*1.9m below the level of the modern carriageway, a further *c* 0.4m was machined to formation level on the floor of the trench. Layers of potentially undisturbed material up to *c*0.7m deep were also machined from the sides of the trench.

A *c*7.0m wide layer, (301), was observed in the central part of the northern and southern sections of the culvert trench, at *c*1.0m to *c*2.0m below the modern road surface down to the formation level; comprising mid orange-brown clay containing some gravel and occasional large fragments of stone. It is possible that this layer is the natural substrate within this trench; alternatively however, the layer could be materials deposited in order to build up the road. Layer (301) appeared to have a slightly raised profile towards the centre of the section, with it sloping off to the east and west of the trench, where layers of dark grey silty-clay were observed (302, 303). This had the appearance and form of an agger, with adjacent roadside ditches; however, no dating was recovered (Figs 1, 7, 8).

Northern culvert (Culvert 2a), looking east Fig 5

Northern culvert (Culvert 2a), sondage in trench floor, looking north Fig 6

Southern culvert (Culvert 3), possible agger in section, looking north-west Fig 7

Southern culvert (Culvert 3), timber posts in section, looking south Fig 8

Southern culvert (Culvert 3), timber posts (close up), looking south Fig 9

Timber posts recovered from the southern culvert trench (Culvert 3) Fig 10

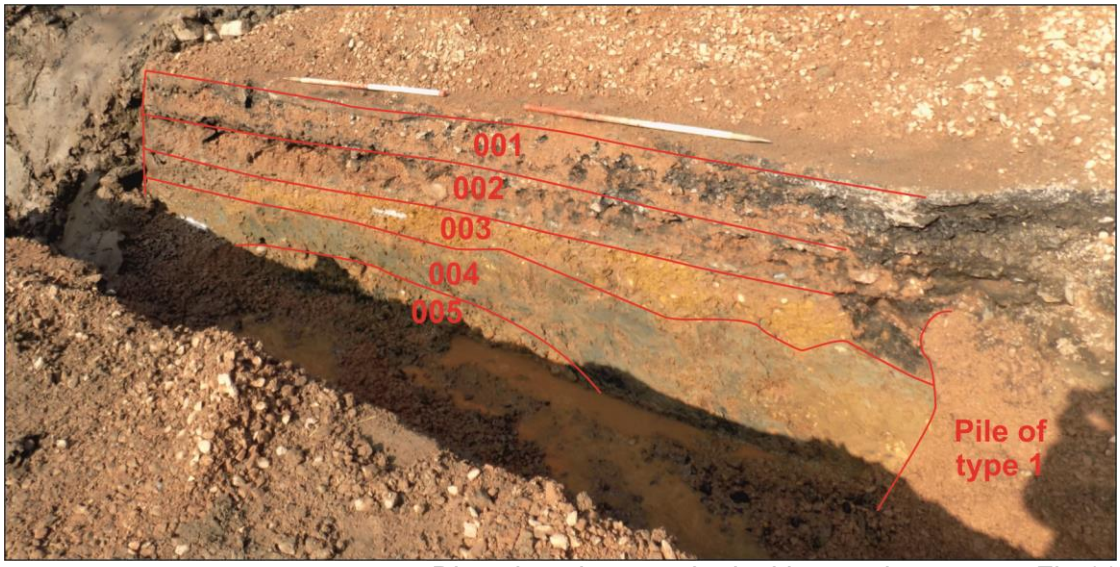
A series of vertical timber posts consisting of *c* 1m long timbers, all with the bark still in place and sharpened to a point at one end, were observed mostly still *in situ* close to the north section of the trench, though several were observed across the width of the trench (Figs 8, 9). They appeared to have been driven into the layer of orange-brown clay and gravel (301); several of the timbers were retained for analysis (Fig 10 and 13).

4.4 The diversion pipe trench

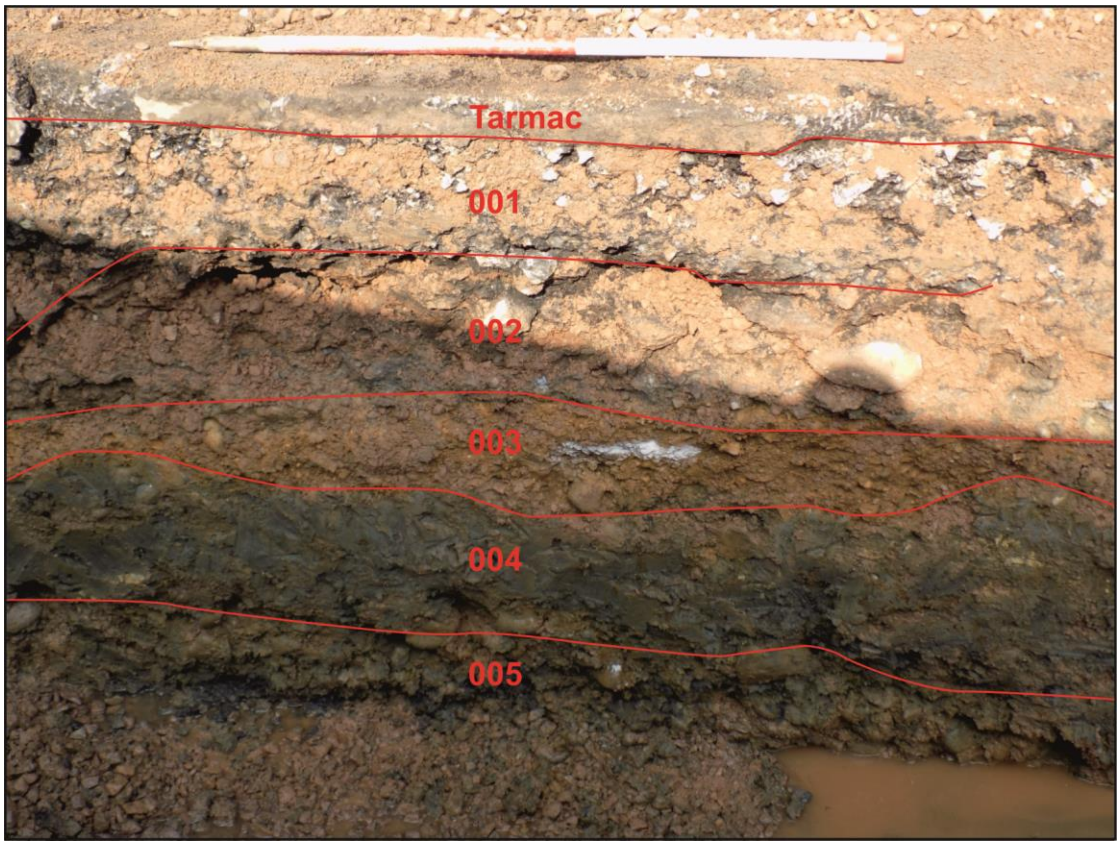
Following the removal of the temporary diversion pipe, it was noted that the floor of the trench was *c*1.5m below the surface of modern road carriageway. The natural substrate did not appear to be present on the trench floor, a closer examination of the floor was not possible due to the ingress of water and modern road aggregates into the trench, however, it was possible to examine the stratigraphy in the south facing section of the trench (Figs 11,12).

At a depth of *c*1.4m a layer of compacted orange-brown clay and river gravel, of unknown thickness (005), was noted (Figs 12, 13). This layer appeared broadly similar to the layers of mid orange-brown clay and gravel of a possible agger observed in the two culvert trenches (Culverts 2a, 3). Overlying (005) was layer (004), a 0.4m thick layer of blue-grey clay, within which a fragment of post-medieval brick was recovered. Above (004) several layers of made ground relating to the existing road were identified (001, 002, 003)

At the western end of the pipe trench some sherds of possibly post-medieval pottery were recovered from the lower fill of the existing roadside ditch.



Diversion pipe trench, looking north-west Fig 11



Diversion pipe trench, close up, looking north Fig 12

5 THE FINDS

5.1 **The pottery** by Tora Hylton

Three sherds of pottery with a combined weight of 315g were recovered from the west side of a diversion pipe sited *c* 4.5m west of the southernmost culvert (Culvert 3). The assemblage includes garden and kitchen wares dating to the 17th and early 18th centuries; they are in a good condition and display little sign of abrasion. Of interest is the presence of a rim sherd from a horticultural flower pot. The rim is everted with a wide groove and cordon below, it measures *c*290mm (internal measurement) to 340mm (external measurement) in diameter, the average size for a horticultural vessel of the date. Typologically the form can be paralleled by a 17th century example from Kirby Hall, Northamptonshire (Dix *et al* 1995, Illus 42, 2). The fabric is sand tempered with relatively large quartz inclusions, making it rough to touch and it has been fired to a dull orange colour.
The other sherds include an internally glazed undiagnostic bodysherd in red earthenware and a tin glazed earthenware handle.

5.2 **The brick fragment** by Pat Chapman

A brick fragment, 62mm (2½ inches) thick, weighing 220g, comes from fill (4) by the diversion pipe. It is mould made with hard fine sandy orange clay. The underside is quite rough, but the upper side has been well smoothed and a deliberate groove has been cut diagonally across the face. There is a trace of very hard white lime mortar still adhering to the upper surface. This brick is most likely to be of 18th to 19th century date.

5.3 **The timber posts** by Andy Chapman

During the watching brief a total of eight wooden posts were observed *in situ* (Figs 8 and 9), and four posts were recovered for further examination.

The recovered examples are all roundwood posts, 110-150mm diameter, possibly of birch, judging by the bark. Each post had been sharpened to a point at one end, leaving a series of flat facets from 150mm to 250mm long. The length of these flat facets suggests that they were not hand cut with an axe of adze, and they were most probably cut with a powered saw (Fig 14), which would imply that the posts are of relatively modern date (Figs 10 and 13). The lack of mineralisation of the wood may also support this interpretation.

As Richard Clarke, the Principal Archaeologist for Leicestershire County Council was in agreement with this interpretation, the posts have not been retained, although a dried wood sample from a single post has been retained in the site archive.

Example of timber post Fig 13

Example of sharpened point Fig 14

6 DISCUSSION

During the observation works a possible agger, two roadside ditches and several layers of made ground were recorded.

The observation works took place during the removal and replacement of pre-existing culverts of 20th century date, with the majority of the culvert trenches having previously been heavily disturbed by prior construction; with only the extreme sections, edges and base of the trenches yielding any 'un-disturbed' ground. Two test pits were also excavated to investigate the area prior to any culvert removal, both test pits only recorded made ground layers of likely modern date, presumably in order to build up the modern surface of the road.

Timber posts were recovered from the southern culvert trench and were found driven into layer (301), they were not observed in the northern culvert, pipe diversion trench or either test pit. Due to the timber posts being an early modern inclusion into the road; their location only within the southern culvert suggests that they were associated with the earlier culverts, perhaps to assist with stabilising the culvert/ground.

A fairly substantial layer of mid orange-brown mixed clay with occasional stones (301) was observed in the southern culvert (Fig 1) and appeared in the section to have a slightly raised profile to a height of *c*1m from the base of the trench at formation level; with it sloping down to the eastern and western edges of the trench, where layers of blue-grey clays were observed with a width of *c*3-4m (Fig 8). These possible ditches along with the profile of the material in section are indicative of a possible 'agger' with roadside ditches. The possible agger was observed as a very much reduced structure within the northern culvert and was only partially visible within the pipe diversion trench, though this was perhaps due to this trench having not been excavated to the same depths as the culverts; evidence for the agger was not observed in either test pit.

No dating was recovered from either the 'agger' or the ditches, meaning dating it is difficult and pure guesswork; however, inferences can be made, the present Fosse Way at Syston follows the route of the original Fosse Way, the Roman road between Exeter (*Isca Dumnoniorum*) and Lincoln (*Lindum Colonia*) and it is possible that the 'agger' was part of this structure. Though no Roman road 'structure' was encountered in any trench, indicating either severe truncation or the 'agger' is of a later date; more likely the 'agger' observed is a post-medieval road/turnpike which overlies or truncates the Roman road. Although no Roman remains were uncovered within the observation works, it remains a possibility that they may exist in some form below the formation level.

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MOLA Northampton
12 April 2016

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench	**Length, width & alignment**			
Diversion pipe	**8m long x 1.7m wide east to west**			
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts***
001	Layer	Tarmac (including sub-base)	0.25m thick	-
002	Layer	Compacted layer of stone and concrete (foundations for tarmac)	0.25m thick	-
003	Layer	Compacted layer of yellow-brown sand with small to large fragments of gravel	0.25m thick	-
004	Layer	Blue-grey clay	*c* 0.5m thick	Brick fragment
005	Layer	Compacted layer of small to large gravel with some blue-grey clay	At least 0.3m thick	-
006	Layer	Layer of dark grey silty clay within the western roadside ditch, to the west of the diversion pipe trench	Unknown	Three post-medieval pot sherds

Trench	**Length, width & alignment**			
Test pit 1	**1m long x 2m wide north to south**			
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts***
101	Topsoil	Firm dark brown mixed silty clay with rare charcoal inclusions and infrequent small stone inclusions	0.30m thick	-
102	Layer	Firm mid brown deposited silty- clay with small infrequent stone, red brick frag and charcoal inclusions.	0.40m thick	Modern waste i.e. Red brick frag
103	Layer	Firm black deposited silty clay with small-medium moderate stone inclusions.	0.45m thick	Brick, glass, 'clinker',

		Modern Industrial waste present.		metal wire
104	Layer	Firm/solid, deposited stone and mid brown silt layer. Modern material present.	0.50m thick	Brick, glass, 'clinker'
105	Layer/Natural?	Firm mid blue-grey clay	-	-

Trench	**Length, width & alignment**			
Test pit 2	**3m long x *2.5* m wide east to west**			
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts***
201	Layer	Tarmac	0.1m thick	-
202	Layer	Tarmac sub-base	0.1m thick	-
203	Layer	Concrete	0.15m thick	-
204	Layer	Foundation layer for modern road build-up. Loose dark grey-brown silty loam with small to large fragments of modern fire brick, brick and furnace slag	*c* 0.6m thick	-
205	Layer/Natural ?	Compact grey-brown silty clay	*c* 0.5m thick	-
206	Layer/ Natural?	Grey alluvial clay	*c* 1m thick	-

Trench	**Length, width & alignment**			
South Culvert (3)	**15m long x 6m wide east to west**			
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts***
301	Layer	Orange-brown clay and gravel with some large fragments of stone. Timber posts have been driven into this layer	At least 0.3m thick	Timber posts
302	Layer/fill?	Dark grey silty clay, possibly associated with the eastern roadside ditch	At least 0.3m thick	-
303	Layer/fill?	Dark grey silty clay, possibly associated with the western roadside ditch	At least 0.3m thick	-

Trench	**Length, width & alignment**			
North Culvert (2a)	**14m long x 7m wide east to west**			
Context	***Context type***	***Description***	***Dimensions***	***Artefacts***
401	Layer	Mid-grey alluvial clay	*c* 0.3m thick	-
402	Layer	Orange-brown clay and gravel, possibly associated with the Roman Fosse way	At least 0.3m thick	-
403	Layer	Blue-grey clay	*c* 0.2m thick	-
404	Layer	Mid-brown sandy clay	*c* 0.2m thick	-
405	Layer	Dark grey silty clay	At least 0.1m thick	-

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