

Archaeological trial trench evaluation Towcester South, Phase 1 Northamptonshire March 2017

Report No. 17/48

Event No: ENN108689

Author: Paul Clements

Illustrator: Olly Dindol



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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS	OASIS molanort1- 307	7729		
Project title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation, Towcester South, Phase 1, Northamptonshire, March 2017			
Short description	In March 2017 an archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out by MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) for CgMs Consulting on land at Towcester South, Phase 1 development. The works identified pits and ditches most likely associated with the late Iron Age to early Roman settlement identified by geophysical survey and trial trench evaluation on the ridge to the south-east of the development.			
Project type	Trial trench evaluation			
Previous work	Geophysical Surveys (I	Butler 2007, Walford 2012), Field walking		
Current land use	Arable			
Future work	Unknown			
Monument type	Iron Age to early Roma	n ditch and undated ditches and pits		
and period	non rigo to ourly rionia	in alteri and andated alterioe and pite.		
Significant finds				
PROJECT LOCATION				
County	Northamptonshire			
Site address	Towcester South			
Easting Northing	SP 7040 4761			
Area (sq m/ha)	54 sqm			
Height aOD	c 125m aOD			
PROJECT CREATORS				
Organisation	MOLA			
Project brief originator	South Northants District Council			
Project Design originator				
Director/Supervisor	Paul Clements (MOLA)			
Project Managers	Adam Yates (MOLA) P	aul Clark (Cgivis)		
Sponsor or lunding body				
PROJECT DATE				
Start date	29/03/2017			
End date	30/03/2017			
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Contents		
Physical				
Paper	ENN108689	Site records (1 archive box)		
Digital	Northampton temporary store	Client report PDF. Survey Data, Photographs		
BIBLIOGRAPHY				
Title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation, Towcester South, Phase 1, Northamptonshire, March 2017			
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Contents

1	INTRODUCTION		
2	BACKGR	OUND	1
	2.1 Lo	cation and geology	1
	2.2 Hi	storical and archaeological background	1
3	AIMS AN	D OBJECTIVES	3
4	METHOD	OLOGY	3
5	THE EXC	AVATED EVIDENCE	6
	5.1 Ge	eneral stratigraphy	6
	5.2 Th	e archaeological features	6
6	THE POT	TERY by Andy Chapman	9
7	PLANT M	ACROFOSSILS by Adam Yates	9
8	DISCUSS	ION	10
	BIBLIOG	RAPHY	11

APPENDIX: CONTEXT INDEX

Figures

Front cover: General view of Trench 12, facing north-east Fig 1: Site location and excavated trench 1:10,000 Fig 2: Excavated trench and geophysics Fig 3: Trench 12 plan Fig 4: Ditches [1221] and [1219], looking east Fig 5: Ditch [1213], looking north-east Fig 6: Ditches [1216] and [1219], looking south-west Fig 7: Ditches [1209] and [1225], looking south-west Fig 8: Ditch [1225], looking south-west Fig 9: Pit [1207], looking north-east

Archaeological trial trench evaluation Towcester South, Phase 1 Northamptonshire March 2017

Abstract

In March 2017 an archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out by MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) for CgMs Consulting on land at Towcester South, Phase 1 development. The works identified pits and ditches most likely associated with the late Iron Age to early Roman settlement identified by geophysical survey and trial trench evaluation on the ridge to the south-east of the development.

1 INTRODUCTION

In March 2017 MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) was commissioned by CgMs Consulting to undertake a trial trench evaluation in advance of housing development on land at the Towcester South, Phase 1 development, Northamptonshire (NGR: SP 7040 4761; Fig 1). The site forms part of a wider development area which has been granted outline planning permission (S/2007/0374/OUTWNS).

The trench was positioned to the north of an earlier phase of trial trench evaluation (James and Ellis 2013) to target a linear and a circular geophysical anomalies and to identify if further mitigation works are required.

The scope of works was outlined and detailed in the Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by CgMs (2016).

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location and geology

The development site is located on the south-eastern edge of Towcester (NGR SP 7040 4761) (Figure 1). The site is located in a shallow valley in the southern part of the Phase 1 development. It is bounded to the north-east by a major Roman road, Watling Street (the modern A5 trunk road), and arable fields to the south-east with the rest of the area lying within the Phase 1 development area.

The underlying geology is recorded as mudstone of the Rutland Formation and areas of limestone and ironstone of the Northampton Sand Formation overlain by superficial deposits of diamicton (formerly boulder clay) of the Oadby Member group (BGS 2017). Soils across the site are recorded as loamy and clayey soils (Landis 2017).

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

The following historical background is taken from the Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by CgMs (2016).

The route of Watling Street Roman road is believed to run beneath the A5 trunk road, although its level of preservation within the site is currently unknown. Given that the line of this road has subsequently been utilised as a turnpike road and the modern A5, the Roman road is likely to have suffered severe truncation.



Scale 1:10000

Site location and excavated trench Fig 1

By the late Saxon period Towcester was the centre of a royal estate and this administrative function persisted into the medieval period when it served as head of the Towcester Hundred. The study site appears to have been at some distance from settlement during this period.

The 1814 Ordnance Survey Preliminary Drawing shows the site largely as it is today, formed from a number of fields.

Fieldwalking across the application area identified a background scatter of Prehistoric lithics across much of the area surveyed. These were predominantly Neolithic to Bronze Age although a Mesolithic component was also identified. A geophysical survey covering all of the Towcester South development area identified an Iron Age to Roman farmstead (Butler 2007, Walford 2012). Subsequent trial trench evaluation identified the area to be a farmstead continually occupied from the 1st century BC to the 2nd century AD (James and Ellis 2013).

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the investigation was to determine and understand the nature, function and character of the archaeological site in its cultural and environmental setting.

The aims of the evaluation were to:

- To record any archaeological remains and to identify whether they constitute an area of archaeological interest
- To produce a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the Northamptonshire HER.

4 METHODOLOGY

A single trench was excavated in accordance with a WSI prepared by CgMs and approved by South Northants District Council. The trench was position to transect an anomaly identified by geophysical survey (Fig 2). A total area of 54m² was excavated. The trench was positioned using a Leica Viva RTK GPS.

A 16 ton 360 mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.80m wide toothless ditching bucket was used to remove overburden to archaeological levels or the natural substrate, whichever was encountered first. The trench was cleaned sufficiently to enable the identification and definition of archaeological features. Archaeological deposits were examined by hand excavation to determine their nature. 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. A photographic record was compiled using digital images supplemented by 35mm black and white film.

All works were conducted in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (ClfA 2014a) and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (ClfA 2014b) and the Historic England procedural document, *Management of Field Projects in the Historic Environment* (HE 2015).







5 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

5.1 General stratigraphy

The trench location is shown in Figure 1 and an inventory of contexts is provided in the Appendix.

The underlying geology was encountered at an average of 0.50m below the modern ground surface. It comprised mid to light brown-grey sandy clay with patches of fragmented limestone. This was overlain by dark orange-brown clay loam colluvium 0.05-0.15m thick. The subsoil was 0.20-0.30m thick mid brown clay loam. The topsoil, a dark grey-brown loam, had an average depth of 0.25m along the trench.

5.2 The archaeological features

The targeted linear and circular geophysical anomalies were identified in the trench as a group of ditches and segmented ditch terminals.

Ditch [1221], 0.55m wide and 0.08m deep, had a bowl-shaped profile. Natural silting, comprising light grey brown silty clay (1220), filled the ditch (Fig 4). After silting up, the ditch was re-establised with a larger V-shaped ditch [1219], 0.85m wide and 0.30m deep. Erosional material from the edge of ditch, a light grey-brown silty clay mixed with small angular limestones pieces (1218), lined the base and was overlain by mid grey-brown silty clay (1217).



Ditches [1221] and [1219], looking east Fig 4

South-east of the ditches were two possible opposing ditch terminals or pits, [1213] and [1216]. [1213], 1.25m wide and 0.50m deep, had a U-shaped profile with eroded upper edges. It was filled with three distinct phases of natural silting, including erosion debris of limestone (1211) (Fig 5).



Ditch [1213], looking north-east Fig 5



Ditches [1216] and [1219], looking south-west Fig 6

Ditch terminal [1216] was 1.10m wide and 0.42m deep, with a bowl-shaped profile. Two erosional deposits, (1222) and (1223), accrued in the base before burnt material (1215) was purposely deposited. It then silted up with naturally accumulated dark redbrown silty clay (1214) (Fig 6).

To the north and south of the group of features were two parallel ditches, [1209] and [1225], aligned north-east to south-west and c10m apart (Figs 7 and 8). Both ditches were *c*.1.00m wide and 0.35m deep, with bowl-shaped profiles. Naturally accumulated silting deposits, mid-grey brown silty clay, filled both ditches. A small fragment of late Iron Age to early Roman pottery was recovered from the fill of ditch [1225].



Ditch [1209], looking south-west Fig 7



Ditch [1225], looking south-west Fig 8

Towards the south-eastern end of the trench was pit [1207], 1.40m wide and 0.55m deep. It had an irregular profile: the southern edge cut at a 45° angle and the northern edge was steep and convex. The pit naturally filled overtime in two distinct phases of silting (1205) and (1206) (Fig 9).



Pit [1207], looking north-east Fig 9

6 THE FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

6.1 **The Pottery** by Andy Chapman

The fill (1224) of ditch [1225] produced a single plain body sherd, weighing 2g. The fabric contains small pellets of grog, up to 1mm diameter, and the sherd has a dark grey core and an orange brown surface.

The fabric and colour is appropriate for the late Iron Age/early Roman period, late 1st century BC to mid/late 1st century AD.

6.2 Plant Macrofossils by Adam Yates

A 40I bulk soil sample was collected from ditch fill (1215). This was bulk floated by MOLA and the flot was collected in a 300 micron mesh sieve.

Charred remains comprised two small (<2g) fragments of charcoal. Given the paucity of the remains no further assessment was undertaken.

7 DISCUSSION

The trial trench identified the targeted anomalies indicated by the geophysical survey. These comprised a linear feature and a circular feature. Additional pits and ditches were also identified; these may not have been detected by the geophysical survey due to their discrete fills or the lack of differentiation between the fills and the surrounding natural deposits.

A re-cut ditch and two possible pits or ditch terminals correspond with a linear anomaly. Terminal [1216] contained a burnt deposit and it is likely that this is the feature detected by the geophysical survey.

Parallel features [1209] and [1225] probably relate to the circular anomaly. These appear to be archaeological in origin, and may represent a ring ditch. The sherd of pottery recovered from ditch [1225] dates from the late Iron Age to early Roman period, making the feature contemporary with the Iron Age to Roman farmstead on the ridge just to the south-east.

In general the fills of the features were sterile silting deposits overlain by colluvium. It is likely that this made some of the features undiscernible from the background geology; suggesting why these features were not detected by the geophysical survey. Furrows detected by the survey are on a similar north-eastern alignment to the two parallel ditches [1209] and [1225].

The trenching has shown that more features are present in the area than indicated by the geophysical survey. The full extent of features in this part of the development is uncertain.

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MOLA 10 May 2017

APPENDIX: CONTEXT INDEX

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height	Depth & height of natural
12	30m x 1.80m NW-SE	SP 88564 25667	124.82m aOD	124.32m aOD
Context	Context type Feature & type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
1201	Topsoil	Dark grey-brown loam.	0.25m thick	-
1202	Subsoil	Mid brown clay loam	0.20m thick	-
1203	Colluvium	dark orange-brown clay loam.	0.10m thick	-
1204	Natural	mid to light brown-grey sandy-clay with patches of fragmented limestone.	-	-
1205	Fill	Dark red-brown silty clay.	1.45m wide 0.30m thick	-
1206	Fill	Grey-brown silty clay.	0.80m wide 0.20m thick	-
1207	Pit	Irregular cut pit.	1.45m wide 0.50m deep	-
1208	Fill	Dark grey-brown silty clay.	1.10m wide 0.35m thick	-
1209	Ditch	NE-SW aligned bowl- shaped ditch.	1.10m wide 0.35m deep	-
1210	Fill	Dark grey-brown silty clay.	1.20m wide 0.20m thick	-
1211	Fill	Mid grey-brown silty clay, small limestone pieces.	0.70m wide 0.10m thick	-
1212	Fill	Mid grey silty clay.	0.70m wide 0.40m thick	-
1213	Pit/Terminal	Rounded pit/ditch terminal.	1.20m wide 0.50m deep	-
1214	Fill	Dark red-brown silty clay.	1.00m wide 0.35m thick	-
1215	Fill	Black silty clay, containing charcoal.	0.90m wide 0.10m thick	Sample 1
1216	Pit/Terminal	Bowl-shaped, pit/ditch terminal.	1.05m wide 0.40m deep	-
1217	Fill	Mid grey-brown silty clay.	0.90m wide 0.20m deep	

1218	Fill	Light grey-brown silty clay. Frequent small limestone pieces.	0.65m wide 0.10m thick	-
1219	Ditch	E-W aligned ditch.	0.90m wide 0.30m deep	-
1220	Fill	Light grey-brown silty clay.	0.60m wide 0.10m thick	-
1221	Ditch	E-W aligned ditch.	0.60m wide 0.10m deep	-
1222	Fill	Light grey-brown silty clay.	0.45m wide 0.08m thick	-
1223	Fill	Light grey-brown silty clay.	0.40m wide 0.10m thick	-
1224	Fill	Dark grey-brown silty clay.	1.00m wide 0.35m thick	Late Iron Age to early Roman pottery
1225	Ditch	NE-SW aligned bowl- shaped ditch.	1.00m wide 0.35m deep	-

