



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

Archaeological monitoring of a new drainage outfall at Delapré Abbey, Northampton, 2018-19

Joe Prentice and Iain Soden

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incorporating standing contributions by Steve Critchley and Martin Marix Evans

Summary

Observations and metal-detecting on a new water drainage outfall to the north-west of Delapré Abbey disturbed no structural remains nor any evidence related to the site of the 1460 Battlefield of Northampton. Additionally, there were no finds of medieval pottery which might relate to the nearby Abbey or artefacts of any period suggestive of anything but casual losses during the Roman and post-medieval periods.

Introduction

A new water drainage pipe was laid for Northampton Borough Council in the open parkland to the north of the entrance driveway from London Road, Northampton to Delapré Abbey, across a portion of the Registered Battlefield of Northampton (Fig 1).

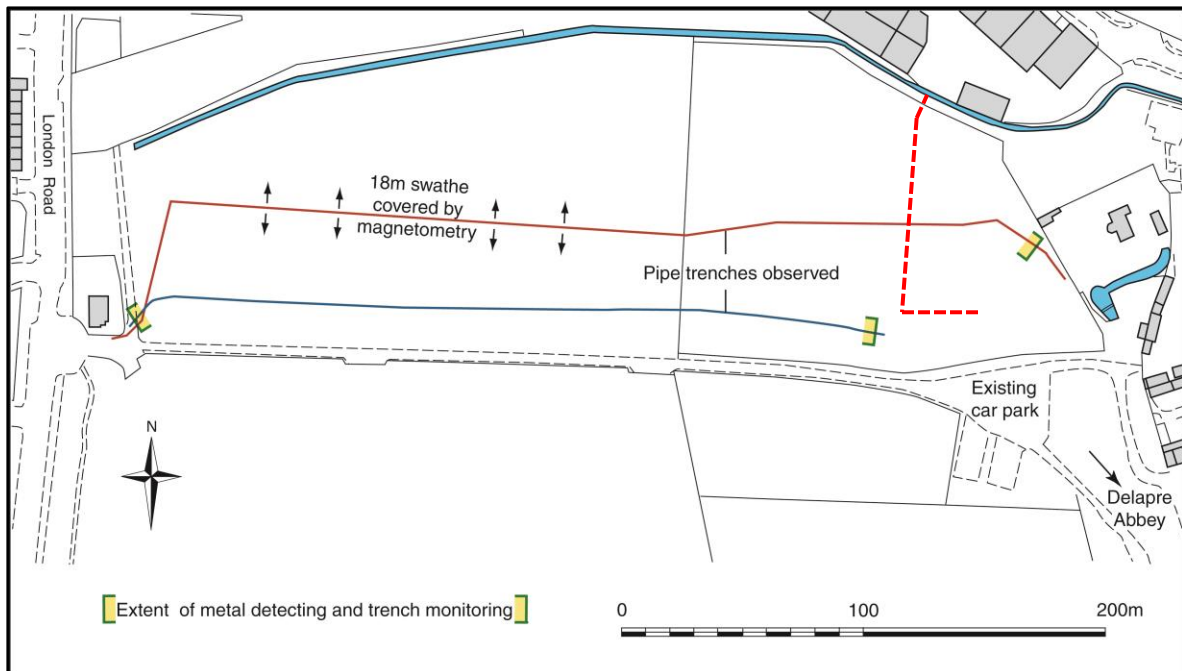


Fig 1: Site location showing the new trench schematically (red dashes) with previous new services already monitored in 2016-17 (Andy Isham)

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That water pipe was necessary due to the failure of an existing stone-built culvert which is located a few metres to the east and which has caused significant flooding to the area, part of which is now occupied by an overspill car-park constructed in 2017 (Fig 2).

The work was accompanied by archaeological observations which were made within a framework of agreed fieldwork approved by Lesley-Ann Mather for Northamptonshire County Council, as archaeological advisor to Northampton Borough Council at Delapré Abbey and by Andy Hammon for Historic England with oversight of the Registered Battlefield.

The northern end (the outlet into the stream) lies at NGR: SP 75829 59291 and the southern end (situated roughly between the two arms which connect with inspection pits) at NGR: SP 75837 59174.

The archaeological fieldwork was carried out by Iain Soden Heritage Services between December 2018 and 7 February 2019, primarily by Joe Prentice with additional attendance by Tom Soden and Iain Soden. Steve Critchley carried out extensive metal-detecting both before (December 2018) and during excavation (January-February 2019).

The following reiterates from the foregoing service-main works of 2016 the understanding of the geology of the site and the battlefield context.

Geology by *Steve Critchley*

'The solid geology is composed of mudstones that belong to the Whitby Mudstones Formation part of the Lias Group of Lower Jurassic age. However, within the area of interest these beds are overlain in part by superficial deposits of fluvio-glacial sands and gravels belonging to the Nene Valley Formation of Mid- to Late Pleistocene age.

In common with most lower hill slopes in the Nene valley the gravels are obscured in part with a mixture of periglacial solifluxion and general recent colluvium/alluvium deposits plus a measure of agriculturally-derived hill wash. (British Geological Survey. 1980 Sheet 185 Northampton, Solid and Drift Geology, 1:50000).'

The battlefield-context by *Martin Marix Evans*

'The Battle of Northampton took place on 10 July 1460. The force commanded by King Henry VI took up position near the abbey but was defeated by the attacking Yorkist army. The event was of substantial importance in the civil wars now known as the Wars of the Roses. In terms of military history the battle is notable because it involved the establishment of a fortified camp and the deployment and use of artillery; the earliest examples in the British Isles.

The evidence available is limited to archival narratives, landscape analysis and a single cannon ball discovered in the last decade (Ingram, M., 2015 *The Battle of Northampton 1460*, 94). The written sources are summarized in the Conservation Management Plan, paragraphs 4.12 and 4.13 (LUC, with Glenn Foard and Tracey Partida, June 2014 *The site of the Battle of Northampton, 1460*). The Yorkist

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positions and the battlefield itself were delineated by English Heritage in the Register of Historic Battlefields (1995). The general location of the Lancastrian defensive enclave is broadly agreed to have been adjacent to the modern line of woodland known as 'The Rookery' which ends some 300m south of the electricity main trench.

The orientation of the Lancastrian line is shown as running east/west by English Heritage/Historic England, but more recent investigations of both written sources and the historic landscape suggest that the defences were actually on a north/south line with the western frontage corresponding to the north-flowing stream defining the western edge of The Rookery. This stream was directed through a culvert running at right angles to the modern approach to the abbey from London Road beneath which it runs. A full description of the defensive site as it is currently understood is given in Ingram, op. cit. 77 - 81 and a map is shown at p92. A detailed discussion of source narratives is given at p122 and following. A map at p19, fig 5.3, in LUC, Foard and Partida, op.cit. gives contemporary landscape detail.

The employment of cannon gives rise to the problem of access to the site for heavy wheeled conveyances; the guns themselves and their attendant ammunition carts. No evidence of a 15th century road or causeway was revealed by the mains trench, but the possibility of making such a discovery should be kept in mind in relation to any future works, together with the recovery of associated articles such as harness furniture, coinage and personal possessions.

The recent rediscovery in 2015 of a much-scarred cannon ball identified as coming from the 1460 battle, originally recovered from nearby Eagle Drive, is testament to the distances such missiles can and did travel, either hitting their target or skidding and bouncing (unpredictably) until their momentum ceases naturally. Thus even 'quiet' parts of the battlefield can produce unexpected evidence.'

This was borne in mind during the current 2018-19 works, to which was also added the possibility that an existing (and much-broken) Victorian culvert may have washed finds down from higher ground to the south, while long-term landscaping of the ground around the driveway may have moved finds into and around the locality.

Fieldwork

The course of the new pipe was aligned predominantly north-south from the stream located along the north side of the present park boundary (the outlet, see Fig 2). Towards the southern end the new pipe connected with a new inspection pit before dividing into two; one section diverting south-east to connect with the existing culvert's inspection pit, the second aligned east-west before turning back to the south to connect with a further inspection pit. The whole route lies across an area of open parkland north of the access road from London Road to Delapré Abbey with the northern section lying within a narrow shelter-belt of trees which screen the park from the modern Business Park located on the north side of the stream. The combined route of the various sections of new drainage covers approximately 150 metres (Fig 2).

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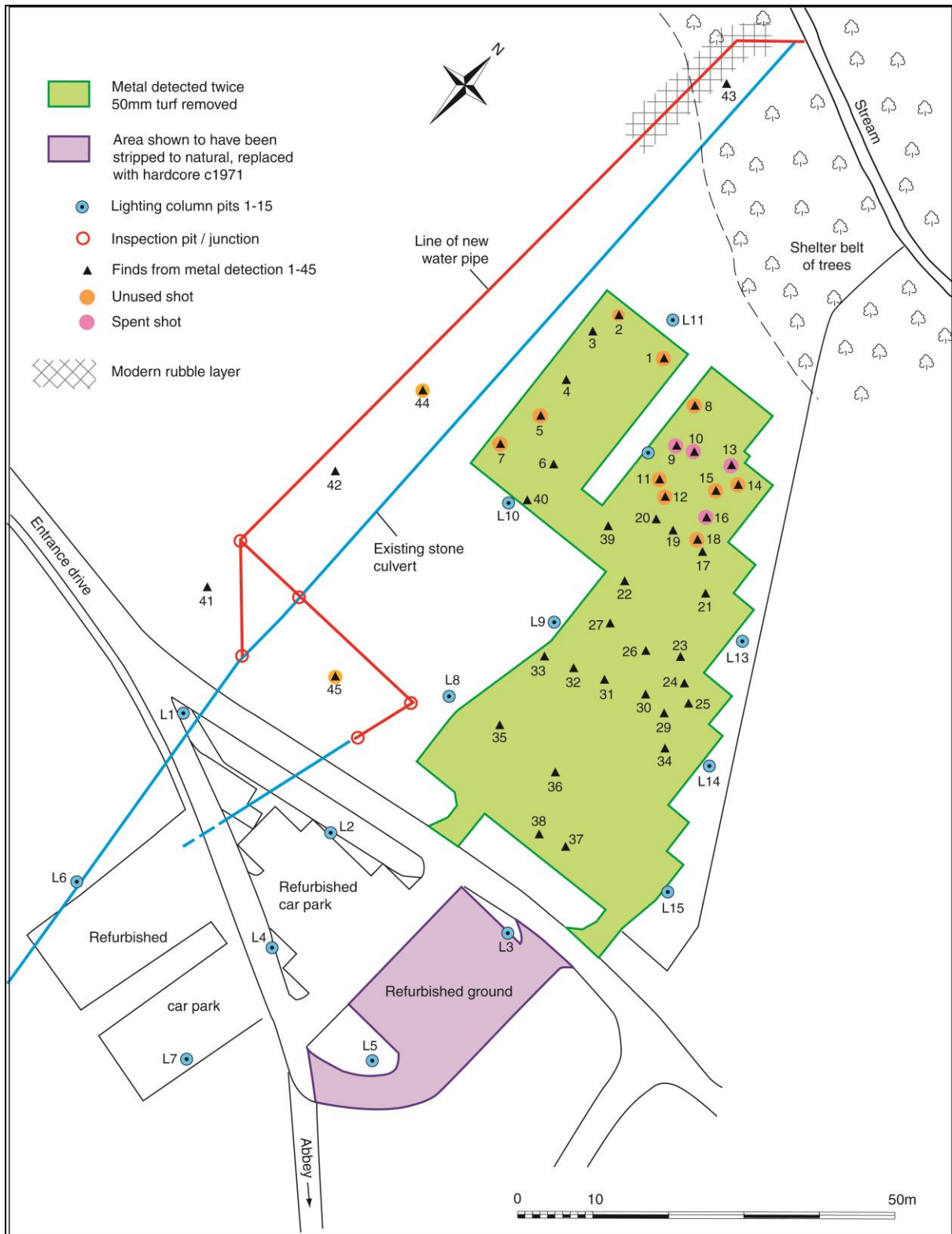


Fig 2: The route of the new drainage pipe (in red, old culverts in blue), relative to the 2017 new car park and other landscape features. Metal-detected finds shown (note nos 41-45). (Andy Isham).

The entire length of the new trench was excavated by a tracked mechanical excavator which operated from a continuous temporary trackway of protective interlinked decking laid to minimise soil rutting and disturbance, which would otherwise be made worse by winter ground conditions

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and the failure of the existing culvert. The entire length was excavated using a toothless 0.9m wide bucket.



Fig 3: The trenching underway showing the temporary trackway laid to prevent rutting, looking south.

Work commenced at the northern end of the line of the new pipe run since it was imperative that the level of the outlet into the stream there should provide from the outset the lowest point along the line of the new installation.

The trench commenced adjacent to the outlet of the old, stone, culvert which at the time of the observations was still functioning, although not fully (Fig 4).



Fig 4: The north end of the new drain run trench (right) and the old stone culvert outlet (left), looking south-west. 1m scale bar.

The depth of the trench at this point was approximately 1m and comprised a shallow topsoil which must represent imported soil since much of the layer beneath contained quantities of late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century machine-made red brick such as had been observed previously during 2015-16 excavations at the Abbey. Mixed into this modern deposit was an almost complete Aucissa copper alloy brooch (found by metal detecting of up-cast spoil) dating to the 1st century AD (see below, Finds). This brick-laced rubble layer extended south for approximately 22m from the stream (see Fig 2).

Due to the wetness of the soil, sections of new trench were excavated daily and then the new drainage pipe laid within it to prevent the likelihood of overnight trench collapse. As can be seen from the accompanying photographs, within a short period after excavation, each section of new trench began to fill with ground water (see Fig 5). Thus, each day a relatively short section was observed and recorded with all up-cast spoil being metal detected.



Fig 5: The new trench with installed new water pipe and backfilled section, looking north. 1m scale bar.

The soil profile changed little along the entire length of the pipe trench, a relatively thin topsoil (c.0mm-300mm) lay above alluvium (c.300mm-1.2m) which in turn overlay river terrace gravels (> 1.2m). A recently-laid gas supply pipe was observed within the bottom of the trench, its route having been previously observed in 2016. Further to the south a defunct metal gas pipe was observed and further south still, a newly laid electricity supply comprising two parallel cables set beneath warning boards, their installation route having also been previously observed.

Apart from these modern service trench cuts, not a single earth-cut archaeological feature was present in the trench, nor were there any structural remains.

Towards the southern limit of the new water pipe trench an inspection pit comprising pre-cast concrete rings was installed in order that a short section of pipe aligned south-east could be connected to an existing manhole serving the stone culvert (Figs 2 and 6).



Fig 6: The inspection pit at the south end of the primary north-south new water pipe run, looking east. The short south-east section (arrowed) has been fitted which connects with an existing stone culvert manhole. Looking east.

The short south-east aligned section of new pipe trench revealed the same stratigraphic soil profile but no archaeological features or finds. Close to the existing manhole which served the stone culvert the soil had been previously disturbed for the installation of the chamber at that point.

After the installation of the inspection pit, a second east-west aligned length was dug from the east side (see Fig 6). That, too, revealed no archaeological features until reaching the point where the new trench cut across the line of the existing stone culvert (see Figs 2 and 7). The stone culvert was revealed to be entirely blocked by silts and debris and comprised two parallel ironstone walls capped by narrow slabs of the same stone (Fig 7).



Fig 7: The stone culvert, looking north. 1m scale bar.

As in other sections of the new trench, as soon as it was excavated, the base filled with water indicating the high water-table and poor drainage. A further inspection pit was added at this point with new drainage pipes inserted into the ends of the stone culvert on either side.

The east-west section of trench continued to its eastern termination to the east of the line of the stone culvert before returning in a south-westerly direction for a connection with another inspection pit before turning south-west to connect with an existing section of another culvert (see Figs 2 and 8).



Fig 8: The eastern end of the east-west section of new pipe trench, looking east. 1m scale bar.

Much of the south-west aligned section had been previously affected by groundworks and the upper levels were much disturbed.

Metal-detecting

The metal detector used was a XP GMP of French manufacture and was operated in all metal modes. Ground conditions were variable, but background soil mineralisation was not an issue therefore target pinpointing was unaffected.

As previously on the electricity main, the location of the site and the public use of the area, inevitably ensured a high proportion of modern metallic waste in the form of aluminium drinks cans, ring pulls and foil wrappers. Additionally, the use of gang mowers on the grassland ensured a liberal distribution of aluminium drinks can fragments.

Soil conditions throughout were wet. The up-cast reflected the underlying geology along the length of the new trench with an area of modern rubble levelling lying at the northern end close to the stream.

The line of the new water pipe was detected in December 2018 before commencement of excavation works and two coins were recovered. Both were dated to the early twentieth-century (see below, table of finds for details). Three further finds were recovered during the trenching, all

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from the up-cast or stacked spoil since it was not possible to detect within the trench during excavation for safety reasons. The finds were numbered concurrently with those previously recovered during the survey of the nearby car park area in 2017 (see Fig 2).

Number	Description
41	King George V half penny, dated 1914
42	King Edward VII penny, dated 1906
43	Aucissa type copper alloy Romano-British bow brooch, 50mm length. 1 st century AD
44	Lead musket ball, 12mm dia, unspent. Early-mid C19th
45	Lead musket ball, 12mm dia, unspent. Early-mid C19th

The two coins are likely to be casual losses from park-goers and are likely to post-date the years of their minting by some way (pre-decimal coins often stayed in circulation for many decades). The two musket balls are equally likely to be casual losses from park users, though perhaps in this instance more probably Abbey family or staff members before the opening of the parkland to the wider public. That neither musket ball appears to have been used, or at least not to have hit a hard target, might indicate something of the efficiency of the guns of the period as well as the competence of the gun user.

The Romano-British bow brooch was residual in a modern, disturbed layer (Fig 9). Complete, apart from the catch-pin and spring, the brooch retains traces of rows of dot-decoration along the raised spine of the bow and a tiny knob terminal to the catch plate. The two loops which would have held the spring of the pin remain intact, although the pin itself has been lost.



Fig 9: The Aucissa-type Romano-British bow brooch. Scale in cms.

Previously, Roman activity has been uncovered in the area close to the Abbey and within the wider park landscape so it is probable that this find has not travelled far, though this cannot be certain.

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This type of brooch is common and found across wide areas of the Roman empire (Hattat, R, 1989 *A visual Catalogue of Richard Hattat's Ancient Brooches*, fig 176).

Only two fragments of pottery were recovered from the whole exercise; a small (<20mm) piece of 18th-century tin-glazed earthenware with traces of cobalt blue decoration and a single piece of a coarsely made, black-glazed 19th-century bowl, perhaps a piece of kitchen-ware. Neither was retained.

The five small-finds represent almost two thousand years of human activity on the site, though none can be related to either the battle of Northampton or, directly, to the occupation of the Abbey since its conversion to a house following the Dissolution of the nearby Cluniac nunnery. Such a relative dearth of finds across a single sweep suggests this area has for that length of time been as far from habitation foci as it is today. The Romano-British bow brooch is clearly an introduced find but may relate broadly to other Roman finds within the wider landscape. The two musket balls indicate no more than shooting, either for sport or for the table. The coins most likely fell unknown and unnoticed from the pockets of visitors to the park. All appear to be casual losses without a physical concentration and are entirely in keeping with the many more finds found during the car park metal-detecting of 2017.

Site Restoration

Owing to the sensitivity of the site as part of a registered battlefield equal care was required of the pipeline contractors in restoring the site after their works were completed. A final visit verified the neatness of their operation in backfilling the trench and making-good the excavation works.



Fig 10: A final visit verified the neatness of the site made-good; within days of removing the protective tracking, the grass was already recovering its colour. Looking south.

Conclusions

The neatly excavated pipe trench allowed close observation of the soils and the sides of the trench along the entire length and the most noticeable feature was the distinct lack of evidence of human activity throughout. Not a single cut feature was present nor were there any indications of structural remains, either *in situ* or as demolition rubble apart from the single spread of late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century brickwork noted at the northern end close to the stream.

Furthermore, the almost total lack of pottery and the very noticeable absence of other domestic finds suggest little activity and certainly no spreading of domestic waste for manuring. The reason for this may be that historically, as now, the area has suffered from waterlogging or flooding and therefore unsuitable for anything other than pasture or, latterly, parkland. The area of levelling at the northern end of the pipe-trench close to the stream may indicate a deliberate attempt to raise the ground level there in an effort to reduce such waterlogging. It appears that the present shelter belt of trees may also respect the broad limits of this dump of material.

There were no finds or features that indicate the presence of any activity associated with the Battle of Northampton and no artefact concentrations were present.

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Appendix

OASIS data

Project Name	Delapré Abbey drainage outfall
OASIS ID	iainsode1-344134
Project Type	Watching Brief
Originator	Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd
Project Manager	Iain Soden
Previous/future work	No
Current land use	Public Open Space
Development type	Services
Reason for investigation	Planning condition
National grid reference	SP 75837 59174.
Start/end dates of fieldwork	17 December 2018 - 7 February 2019
Archive recipient	Northampton Museum
Study area	750 sq m



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

1 March 2019