



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

An Archaeological Evaluation at Coton Farm, Newton, Rugby, Warwickshire

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Summary

A total of over 100m of trial excavation trenches contained no archaeological features or finds, leading to the conclusion that this site at Coton Farm, Newton, Warwickshire was connected to neither the Roman site (Scheduled Monument 1005759) of Tripontium to the east, nor by the medieval site and likely Cistercian (Combe Abbey) Grange of Coton to the west. It lay directly between the two, beyond their individual influences at their different times.

Introduction

It is proposed to redevelop this existing farm at Coton Farm, Newton Lane, Newton, near Rugby, CV23 0EB (NGR: SP 5295 7960; Application no R18/0468). The farm specialises in game-rearing and it is proposed to upgrade and expand the facilities, a program which will involve a considerable area of earth-moving to create new terraces into which will be placed new game-rearing sheds.

Coton Farm lies on a minor road linking Newton with the A5 Watling Street about 0.5km away. More particularly it lies in the immediate hinterland of Tripontium Roman Station, statutorily protected as a Scheduled Monument (1005759 on the National Heritage List, formerly monument WA97). The National Heritage List does not contain an up-to-date description of the monument but since the 1960s and 1970s a Roman bath-house and associated buildings have been excavated there.

Further away to the west, close to Junction 1 of the M6, is the site of the deserted (in this case depopulated) medieval village site (DMV) of Coton, one of a number of settlements in Coventry and Warwickshire which formerly belonged to the Cistercian Abbey of Combe, near Coventry. The Cistercians depopulated their Coton in the 12th -13th centuries to turn it over to become a sheep-farming grange.

In accordance with the state of knowledge of this historic landscape, John Robinson, Planning Archaeologist for Warwickshire County Council (Heritage and Culture Warwickshire), as archaeological advisors to Rugby Borough, advised that archaeological evaluation should take place as a condition of planning permission (Condition 4a/b), with a potential for further work (4c) if the outcome proved the site contains significant remains.

Iain Soden Heritage Services was commissioned by the owners and their agents to carry out a trial-trench field evaluation, which was carried out in accordance with an approved Written Scheme of Investigation on 1 July 2019. Both weather and ground conditions were excellent.

The work was carried out using a 13-ton tracked excavator fitted with a 1.6m-wide toothless ditching bucket. A total of 107 linear metres of trench were dug in four trenches. Up-cast was stored

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temporarily at the side of the trenches and later used to backfill. Recording was carried out by Iain Soden and Joe Prentice.

There were no major constraints on site. Trenches were moved slightly from their original intended layout to take account of the ongoing use of the site for game-rearing, and one (Trench 4) was shortened for a track in use around one end. By contrast Trench 2 was lengthened slightly where space allowed, but with no additional archaeological value to results.

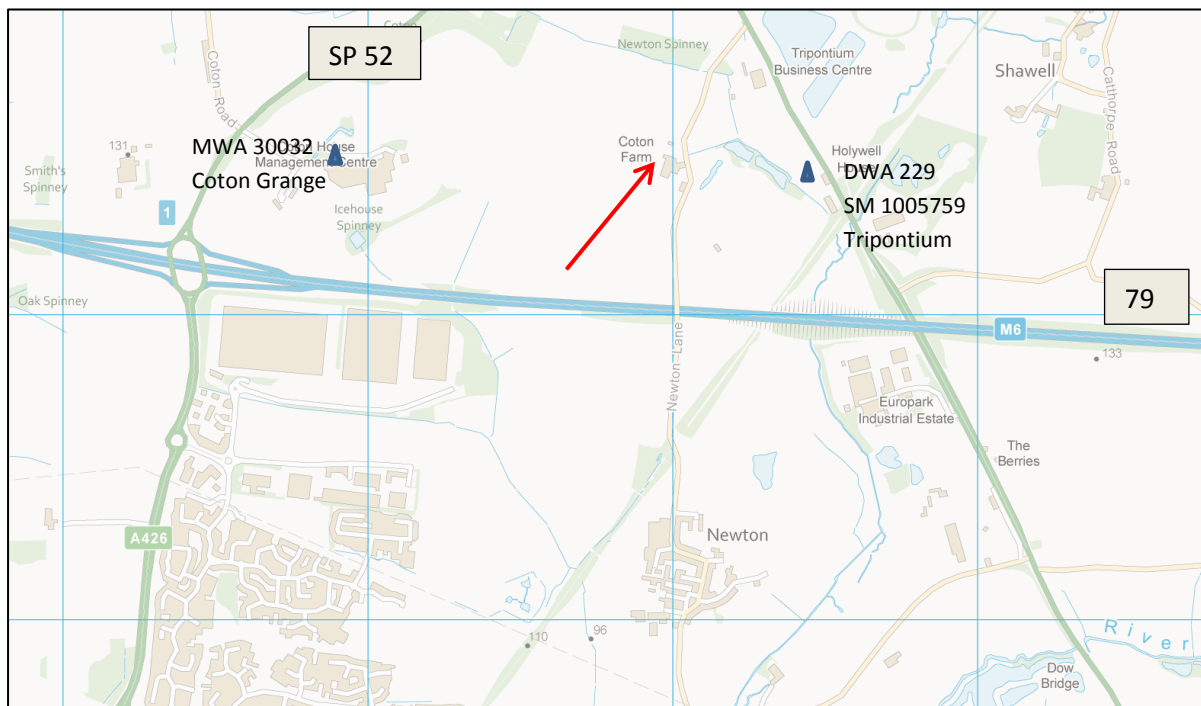


Fig 1: Site location (arrowed). Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database right 2019
Focal HER references are shown

HER Search (Figs 1, 2)

A search of the Warwickshire Historic Environment Record was canvassed to provide closer context to any potential remains found in the Coton Farm evaluation (HER Search no **19/173**).

The HER search noted, quite rightly the individual and separate foci of the Roman Town of Tripontium (Scheduled Monument 1005759 on the National Heritage List, DWA229 the HER designation, at SP 5343 7947). This is the nearest focus of any known archaeology in the area and covers a number of separate interventions since the 19th century, mainly in the 1960s and since, with much of the site having been lost progressively to gravel-digging. Although the scheduled area is quite small, a larger area of interest has been drawn around the monument in the HER. However, this, and all of the finds and interventions recorded from Tripontium lie on the eastern (far) side of Newton Lane, distinct and over the road from Coton Farm and the current application site. The current application has no bearing upon the scheduled area or its immediate setting.

Further afield the HER make extensive note of Coton House, a country house and estate (MWA 5334) which stands on the site of what is likely to have been the moated Coton Grange, a sheep-

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farming grange of Combe Abbey (MWA 30032, also called 'Cotes' Grange from 1291) which may have depopulated an earlier, secular settlement.

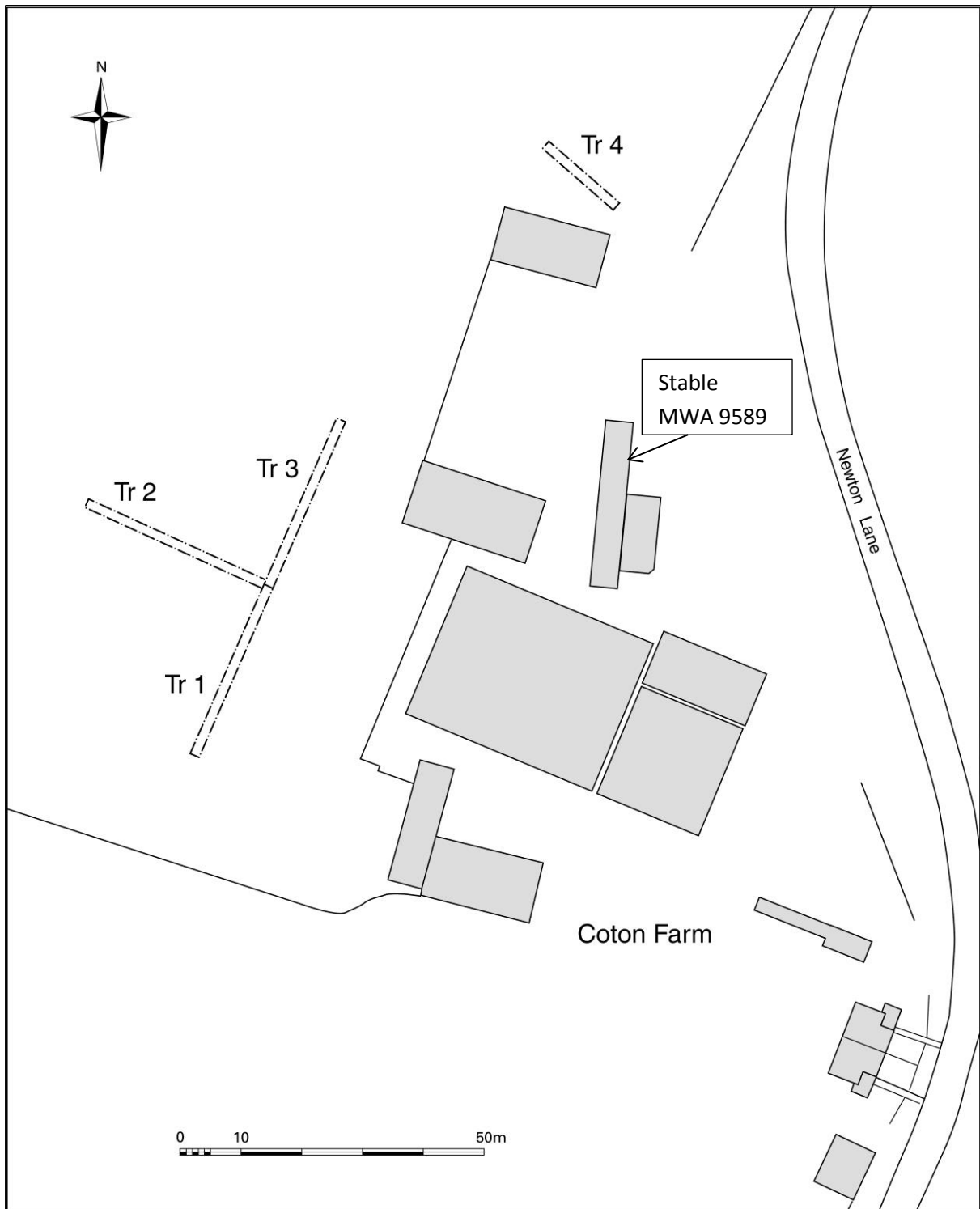


Fig 2: The site of the farm with trench layout (Andy Isham after Roger Coy Partnership). Note the timber stable block noted in the HER (MWA 9589) as of interest.

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Standing next to the application site, and within the buildings-ensemble of the working farm, is a late-19th-century timber stable block of a distinctive character which local lore suggests once stood elsewhere but was dismantled at its original location when the M6 was constructed in the late 1960s. Designated MWA 9589 on the HER, it stands in the centre of the farmyard but is today unused (Fig 2). Consultation of the National Heritage List suggests that it is not statutorily Listed. Although it has been suggested in the HER that it may have been built to a military pattern just before the First World War, its original context has been lost.

Fieldwork and results

Trench 1

This trench measured 30m x 1.6m and was aligned south-west to north-east. It was aligned across the hill to evaluate the gentle slope and higher ground behind and to the north-west of the existing farm.

The machine removed an average of 250-300mm of good topsoil, but without any intervening subsoil it gave way to very stiff, buff-coloured pebbly clay which also contained occasional larger, glacial erratic boulders. There were no archaeological features or finds.



Fig 3: Trench 1, looking north-east towards the ridge; scale in middle-distance 2m

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Trench 2

This trench measured 32m x 1.6m and was slightly longer than had been intended. It was aligned north-west to south-east and was dug to evaluate along the ridge of the area in which the levels are to be reduced. Beneath about 250-300mm of topsoil lay very stiff, buff-coloured pebbly clay natural geology. There were no archaeological features or finds.



Fig 4: Trench 2, looking north-west from junction with Trenches 1 and 3; scale 2m

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Trench 3

The trench measured 30m x 1.6m and was aligned approximately south-west to north-east, continuing and extending the line of Trench 1 across the hill, part of the area in which ground-reduction is proposed.

The machine removed an average of 250-300mm of good topsoil, but without any intervening subsoil it gave way to very stiff, buff-coloured pebbly clay which also contained occasional larger, glacial erratic boulders. A single ceramic land drain was set into the top of the clay, indicating how impermeable this geology is. There were no archaeological features or finds.



Fig 5: Trench 3, looking south-west uphill; scale in middle-distance 2m

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Trench 4

This trench, away from the others but closest to an existing farmyard entrance/exit, was dug to evaluate an area in which a de-watering pond is to be dug, close to a shed which is to be retained in the proposed farm development. It measured 15m x 1.6m and was aligned approximately north-west to south-east. It was shortened by 5m from the intended 20m since the greater length would have impinged on a track in constant use at the time of evaluation.

There was the merest scraping of topsoil hereabouts, mixed with a dump of bark-chippings. Beneath this, and covering half of the trench was a 300mm-thick blinding layer of grey clay containing occasional pieces of modern plastic, glass and tile (not retained). Together these overlay stiff buff clay geology with pebbles, exactly the same as the other trenches. There were no archaeological features and no pre-modern finds.



Fig 6: Trench 4, looking north-west; scale 2m

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Conclusions

This application site, although it lies only a (relatively) short distance from the Scheduled Monument of the Roman small town at Tripontium (Caves Inn), contains no Roman archaeology. It would appear that on its western side Tripontium may have a defineable hinterland which is drawn quite tightly around the known focus on the Watling Street. The site here at Coton Farm appears to have no recognisable links to it.

Nor indeed can the site be linked by any archaeology to the medieval grange of Coton, which once belonged to the Cistercian Abbey at Combe, near Coventry. The fact that the farm to which the application site belongs, has latterly assumed the name Coton, has no significance in this respect.

This site appears to have been open or given over only to agriculture for a very long time. Its relatively thin topsoil suggests that it might have been grazing land for much more of its history than it has been arable. Its unforgiving stiff clay geology may have militated against most arable uses of the land until the modern period and the emergence of the most robust farming equipment.

Appendix

OASIS data

Project Name	Coton Farm, Newton, near Rugby
OASIS ID	358616
Project Type	Trial Trench Evaluation
Originator	Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd
Project Manager	Iain Soden
Previous/future work	No/unknown
Current land use	Fallow (Minimally ploughed) grassland
Development type	Commercial agricultural
Reason for investigation	Planning Condition
National grid reference	SP 5295 7960
Start/end dates of fieldwork	1 July 2019
Archive recipient	Warwickshire Museum
Study area	0.5 ha



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9 July 2019