University of Leicester

Archaeological Services

Archaeological investigations at Mill Farm, Slawston Road, Medbourne, Leicestershire (SP 7885 9330)

Leon Hunt

ULAS Report No 2013-073

Archaeological investigations at Mill Farm, Slawston Road, Medbourne, Leicestershire (SP 7885 9330)

Leon Hunt

for:
Philips Farm
Planning Application No. 12/00818/FUL

Checked by

Signed: 

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18th June 2013

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An archaeological field evaluation at Mill Farm, Slawston Road, Medbourne, Leicestershire (SP 7885 9330)

Leon Hunt

Summary

Archaeological investigations were carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) at Mill Farm, Slawston Road, Medbourne in advance of the proposed construction of a new dwelling, garage and reed bed sewage treatment plant at the site, currently part of an pasture field.

The site lies in an area very rich in archaeological finds. A Roman small town lies around 500m south of the site, which was the subject of a Time Team 'Big Dig' in 2005. Results from this work located settlement evidence and a number of Roman and Anglo-Saxon burials, which showed that the town was in use from the 4th century into the 5th century continuing into the Anglo-Saxon period.

The initial evaluation consisted of four 10m x 1.8m trenches located over the footprints of the two new buildings, the reed bed area and potential access track.

Three of the trenches were negative for archaeological features, but in Trench 02, located over the footprint of the proposed dwelling was a 1.4m wide linear feature, most likely an enclosure ditch associated with agricultural activity around the Roman town. The evaluation was followed by controlled stripping and excavation of the area of the new building to record the rest of the ditch where it was affected by the groundworks.

A large number of pottery sherds, dating largely from the 4th century were located within the fill of the ditch, along with many animal bones, suggesting domestic waste dumped within the enclosure ditch.

Metal detectoring across the site located several dozen Roman coins, mostly datable to the later 4th century.

The findings of the evaluation confirm the dates of the Roman settlement in this area and also broadly correspond with the results of a recent Geophysical survey of the site.

Introduction

Archaeological investigations were carried out on land at Mill Farm, Slawston Road, Medbourne, Leicestershire (NGR: SP 7885 9330). The work was commissioned by Philips Farm and was carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) in advance of a proposed new development at the site, which consists of the erection of a new dwelling and detached garage.

The site currently consists of part of a large agricultural field and lies under pasture.

This archaeological work is in accordance with NPPF Section 12: Enhancing and Conserving the Historic Environment. The evaluation was required as a condition of the planning consent for the new buildings and was followed by supervision of the

groundworks as a mitigation strategy to record the archaeology identified in the evaluation.

Location and Geology

The site lies on farm land on the northern part of a sub-rectangular field to the direct south of the agricultural buildings associated with Mill Farm, which lies on the southern side of Slawson Road, around 1 mile west of the centre of Medbourne, Leicestershire (Figures 1 & 2).

The field falls to the south from about 90m aOD to around 70m aOD, but the site itself is on flat land in an area known locally as 'The Seeds'. The site covers 0.05 hectares.

The British Geological Survey website indicates that the underlying geology is likely to consist of Whitby Mudstone overlain by Oadby Member Diamicton.

Figure 1: Site Location

Historical & Archaeological Background

The Leicestershire and Rutland Historic Environment Record (HER) shows that the application site lies within a landscape known to be rich in archaeological remains. The site is located within the extent of a Roman small town to the west of Medbourne, the existence of which has been known since the 17th century (HER ref: **MLE2004)** The line of the Roman Gartree Road lies nearby, although its exact location is unknown.

Very dense scatters of Roman pottery and building material surrounded by patches of further heavy scatters denoted the limits of the town. Geophysical survey in 2005 recorded an area of activity, which led to further work. In 2005 as part of Time Team's 'Big Dig', ULAS helped to supervise trenching on the site, which revealed Roman and Saxon remains, including a number of burials. Evidence for these excavations showed that the area was occupied from the 1st century through to the 4th century and continued into the Anglo-Saxon period (**MLE16670**, **MLE16672**, **MLE16671** and **MLE2037**) (Priest 2005).

The site is also close to known Bronze Age round barrow sites.

The proposed development site does not appear to have been developed previously and as such any archaeological remains may survive relatively undisturbed. Consequently, there was a likelihood that buried archaeological remains will be affected by the development.

Geophysical survey of the area around the site (Figures 3 & 4) has shown that there is high potential for archaeological remains to continue into the proposed development area. The results appear to show linear and curvilinear features, most likely relating to enclosure ditches although there is also potential that some of the features represent roundhouses.

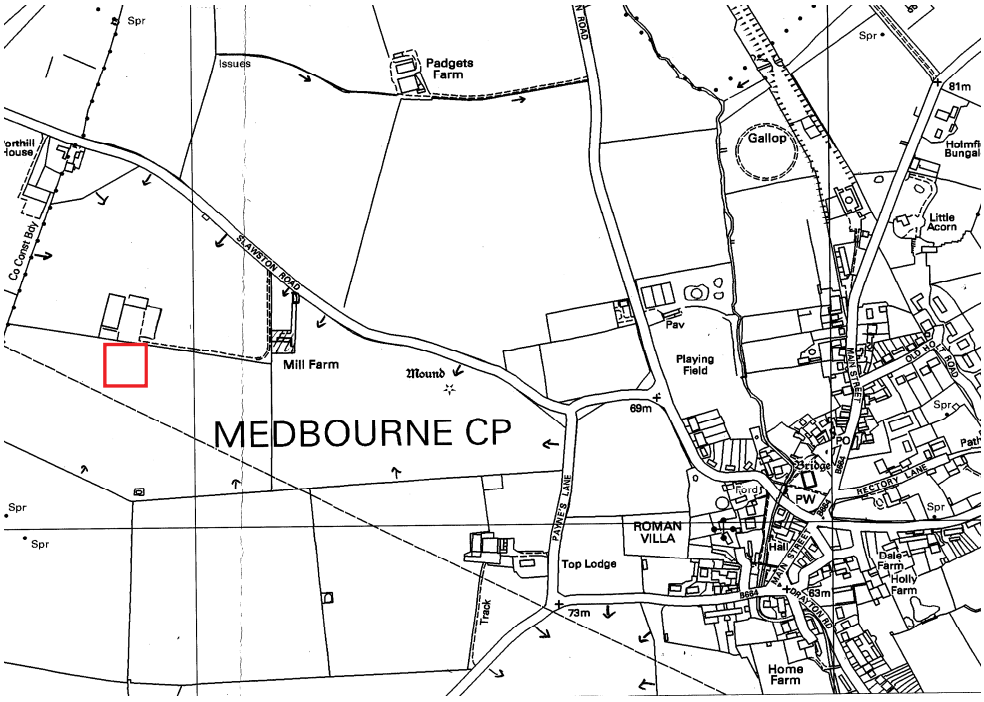

Figure 2: Location of proposed development site. Scale 1: 10 000. Provided by developer

Archaeological Objectives

The main objectives of the archaeological work were:

- To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.
- To identify the nature and date of the features identified on the geophysical survey.
- To establish the character, extent and date range for any archaeological deposits to be affected by the proposed ground works.
- To record any archaeological deposits to be affected by the ground-works
- To produce an archive and report of any results.

Within the stated project objectives, the principal aim of the evaluation was to establish the nature, extent, date, depth, significance and state of preservation of archaeological deposits on the site in order to determine the potential impact upon them from the proposed development.

Methodology

All work followed the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) *Code of Conduct* (2012) in accordance with their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2010) and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (2008). The archaeological work followed the *Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for archaeological work* prepared by ULAS.

Trenching

A total of three 10m x 1.8m trenches were to be excavated covering the footprints of the two proposed buildings, with a further trench to cover an area to be possibly used as reed bed for sewage treatment. A fourth trench was later recommended to cover the area where the access into the site will be situated, although the final placing of the access was unclear and the trench therefore does not correspond with the original development plan (see Figures 3 & 4).

The trenches were excavated by a large tracked excavator fitted with a ditching bucket. They were excavated to the top of archaeological layers or the natural sub-stratum, whichever was the highest in the sequence.

Metal Detecting

Metal detecting was carried out by Ken Wallace. The spoil heaps were spread out by machine and were scanned by a metal detector to retrieve metallic artefacts. The trenches and features were detected following stripping and during excavation.

Watching brief

The subsequent mitigation involved the supervision of overburden removal from the area and the excavation of the foundation trenches by an experienced professional archaeologist during the works (Plate 5).

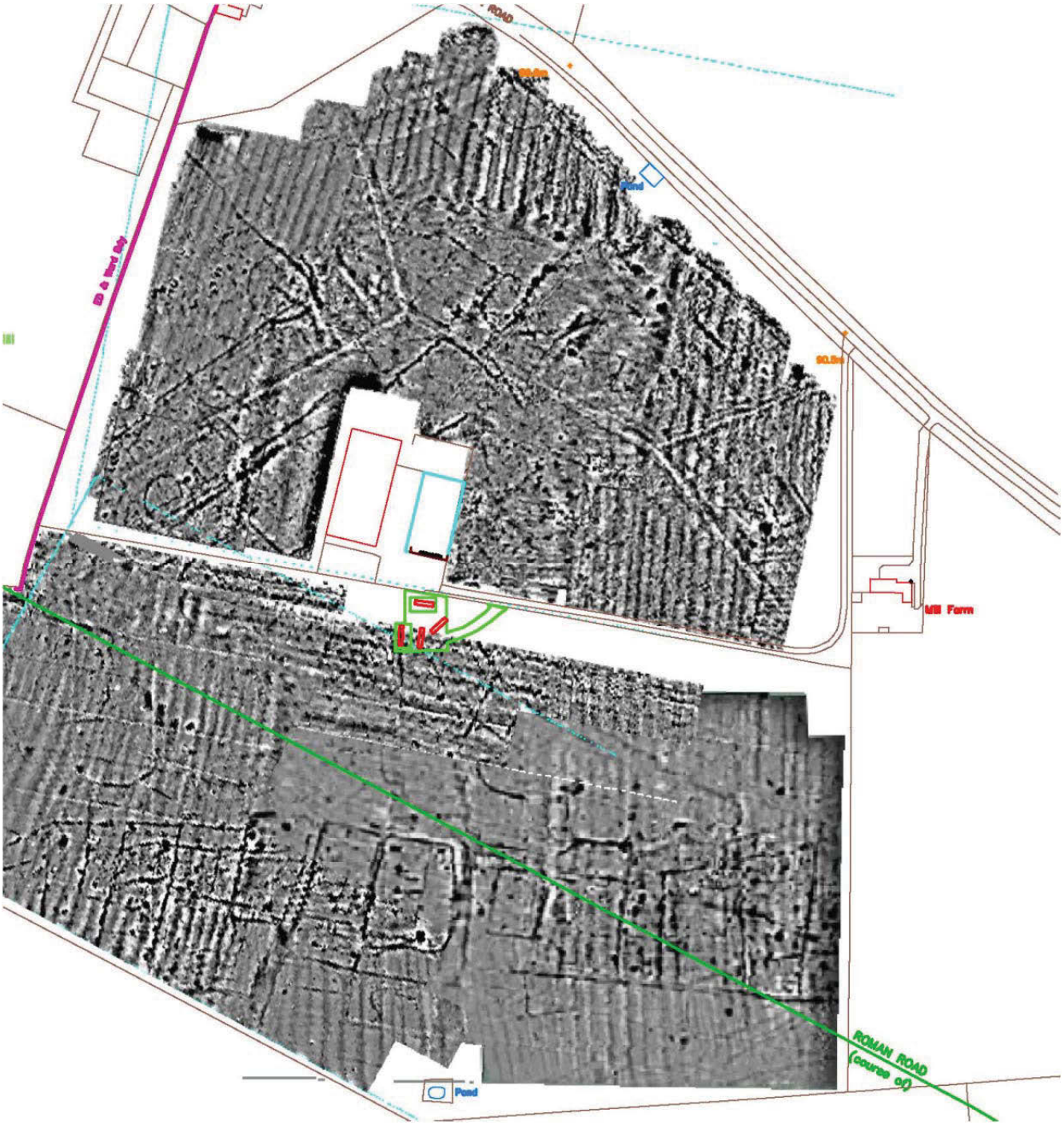

Figure 3: Plan of proposed development (Green outline) and evaluation trenches (red), on overlay of geophysical survey results.

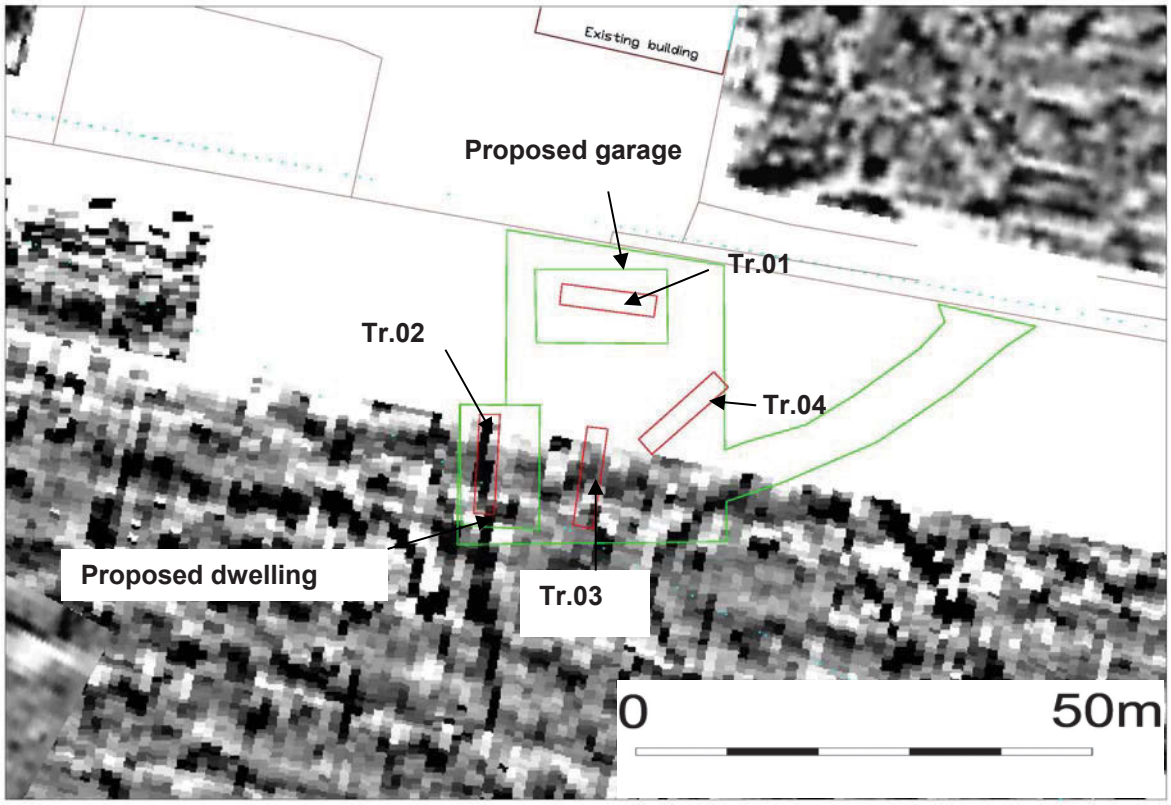

Figure 4: Detail of trench plan, showing Geophysical anomaly passing through Trench 02.

Results

Throughout the excavations the soil sequence consisted of a light yellowish-brown friable clayey-silt with occasional pebbles directly overlying the natural sub-stratum of mixed light brownish-yellow or orange-brown silty clay with stones.

Although the soil directly under the turf was somewhat crumblier and drier than the rest of the topsoil, there was no obvious horizon that could be identified as subsoil.

A number of Roman coins and a lead weight were recovered from the topsoil around the trenches during the excavation. These cannot be attributed to any particular trench. Several more coins, a lead die and a weight were discovered from the topsoil of Trench 02 (see below). All these artefacts, with few exceptions were dated to the second half of the 4th century (Appendix 2).

Trench 01

Length: 10m		**Width:** 1.8m		**Orientation:** E-W		
Interval	**E 0m**	**2m**	**4m**	**6m**	**8m**	**10m W**
Topsoil Depth	0.40m	0.45m	0.46m	0.42m	0.42m	0.48m
Subsoil Depth	-	-	-	-	-	-
Top of natural	0.40m	0.45m	0.46m	0.42m	0.42m	0.48m
Base of trench	0.40m	0.53m	0.46m	0.50m	0.50m	0.50m

No archaeological features were identified within this trench (Plate 1).

Plate 1: Post excavation shot of Trench 01, looking east

Trench 02

Length: 10m		**Width:** 1.8m		**Orientation:** N-S		
Interval	**N 0m**	**2m**	**4m**	**6m**	**8m**	**10m S**
Topsoil Depth	0.51m	0.46m	0.52m	0.52m	0.60m	0.50m
Subsoil Depth	-	-	-	-	-	-
Top of natural	0.51m	0.46m	0.52m	0.52m	0.60m	0.55m
Base of trench	0.60m	0.56m	0.63m	0.60m	0.70m	0.60m

Plate 2: Post excavation shot of Trench 02, looking north

A ditch was seen running the whole length of the trench, on a slightly different alignment to the trench (aligned more NW-SE). The ditch [1] was around 1.4m wide, broadening out towards the centre of the trench and then narrowing again. The profile towards the northern end of the trench was very shallow sided with a deeper section in the middle of the ditch, so that the feature resembled a deep gully with narrow flattish sides. This section was around 0.25m deep (Figure 5, Plates 2 and 3).

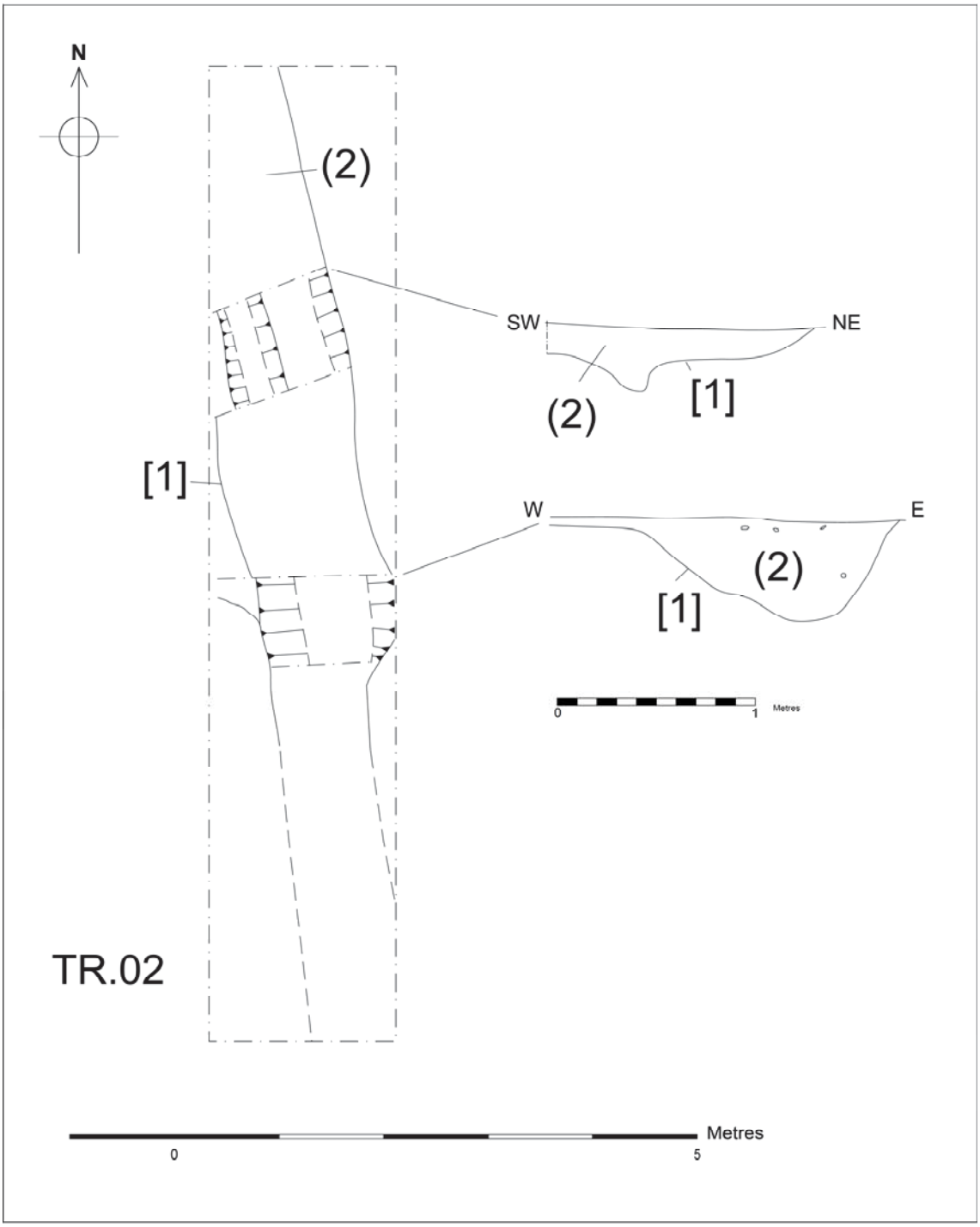

Figure 5: Post excavation plan and sections of ditch [1], (2) Trench 02

Towards the southern end of the trench the feature was steep sided with a flattish uneven base. Here the feature was 0.50m deep.

The fill consisted of a sterile yellowish brown clayey silt with frequent small and medium stones, mainly in the upper layers of the fill.

A large amount of animal bone, mainly cattle bones with some sheep, pig and horse along with 21 sherds of Romano-British pottery were retrieved from the fill (2). The pottery included several sherds of Nene Valley ware, Grey Ware and Harrold Sheely ware, plus a sherd of Oxford Colour Coated ware. There were also two fragments of Romano-British tile (see Appendices I & III).

Several metal finds were retrieved from the spoil heaps associated with Trench 02, including 6 copper-alloy coins of Roman date, a lead die (possibly Roman) and 3 fragments of lead waste (see Appendix II).

Plate 3: South facing section (southern section) of feature [1],(2), Trench 02, looking north

Trench 03

Length: 10m		**Width:** 1.8m		**Orientation:** N-S		
Interval	**S 0m**	**2m**	**4m**	**6m**	**8m**	**10m N**
Topsoil Depth	0.54m	0.55m	0.40m	0.36m	0.46m	0.49m
Subsoil Depth	-	-	-	-	-	-
Top of natural	0.34m	0.55m	0.40m	0.36m	0.46m	0.49m
Base of trench	0.54m	0.455	0.50m	0.44m	0.50m	0.49m

No archaeological features were identified within this trench

Trench 04

Length: 10m		**Width:** 1.8m		**Orientation:** NE-SW		
Interval	**NE 0m**	**2m**	**4m**	**6m**	**8m**	**10m SW**
Topsoil Depth	0.45m	0.35m	0.48m	0.45m	0.48m	0.50m
Subsoil Depth	-	-	-	-	-	-
Top of natural	0.45m	0.35m	0.48m	0.45m	0.48m	0.51m
Base of trench	0.45m	0.46m	0.48m	0.50m	0.68m	0.75m

No archaeological features were identified within this trench (Plate 4).

Plate 4: Work in progress on Trench 04, looking north-east

Controlled excavation of groundworks

Following the evaluations a mitigation strategy to record the identified archaeology was carried out. This comprised the stripping and excavation of the foundation trenches under archaeological control and supervision by an experienced archaeologist. This work was carried out on 22 May 2013 during the excavation of the proposed dwelling's foundations and other groundworks.

Plate 5: Work in progress during the watching-brief, looking north

In the northern foundation the ditch [1] found in Trench 02 was observed in section to be very shallow (*c.*0.23m deep) but in the southern foundation it was much deeper (*c.*0.44m) and appeared to divide into two parallel ditches. Unfortunately, the fills were too diffuse to distinguish between features in section but the westernmost ditch continued across the site as ditch [1] whilst the easternmost ditch appeared to terminate at its northern end in the southern foundation trench. A single Roman coin was recovered from fill (2) in the southern footing providing a late Roman date.

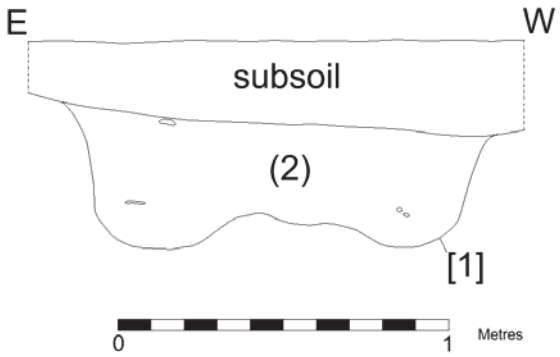

Figure 6: North facing section across ditch [1] (2), seen during watching brief

Plate 6: North facing section (in southern foundation trench) of feature [1] (2), looking south

Conclusion

The evaluation at Mill Farm, Medbourne included the excavation of four 10m x 1.8m trenches across the footprints of the proposed buildings, the neighbouring reed bed and the potential access road followed by controlled archaeological supervision of the foundation trenches.

Three of the trenches were shown to be negative for archaeological features. One trench, Trench 02, located on the footprint of the new dwelling contained one medium sized ditch feature [1].

The silty fill of the ditch (2) contained a particularly large and varied amount of 3rd and 4th century pottery and a 4th century coin along with a large amount of animal bone and lead waste. A large assemblage of domestic rubbish like this is indicative that the settlement appears to extend into this area, although the form of the ditch would suggest an outlying agricultural field system associated with the town to the south.

The line of the ditch appears to follow the line of an anomaly identified on the Geophysical survey carried out prior to the evaluation (see Figure 4).

The coins located in the spoil of Trench 02 appear to support the 4th century date for the ditch and the datable finds assemblage as a whole supports the 4th-5th century date for the small town as exemplified by the dating evidence from the excavations of 2005.

Acknowledgments

ULAS would like to thank Charles Bromwich for the work. Leon Hunt would like to thank Charles Bromwich and Ben and Sam of Skinner Bros. for their help and co-operation during the work.

Thanks are also due to Thomas Barker of Tolethorpe for the survey work and to Ken Wallace for the metal detector work.

The work was carried out by Leon Hunt, James Patrick and Mathew Morris for ULAS and the project was managed by Vicki Score.

Publication

Since 2004 ULAS has reported the results of all archaeological work through the *Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations* (OASIS) database held by the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York.

A summary of the work will also be submitted for publication in a suitable regional archaeological journal in due course.

OASIS data entry

Project Name	Mill Farm, Slawston Rd, Medbourne
Project Type	Evaluation
Project Manager	Vicki Score
Project Supervisor	Leon Hunt
Previous/Future work	None
Current Land Use	Pasture
Development Type	Agricultural dwelling & garage
Reason for Investigation	NPPF
Position in the Planning Process	Planning condition
Site Co ordinates	SP 7885 9330
Start/end dates of field work	31-04-2013
Archive Recipient	Leicestershire Museums
Study Area	0.05ha

Archive

The archive for the work will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums with accession number X.A52.2013 and consists of the following:

1 Unbound copy of this report (Report No. 2013-073)

4 trench recording sheets

1 Context record

1 Context Sheet

1 Drawing Record

1 Watching Brief Record

1 A3 sheets of permatrace containing primary scale drawings

1 CD digital photographs

1 Contact sheet of digital photographs

1 Set of Contact sheets of B&W photographs

1 Set B&W negatives

References

IfA, 2008 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*.

IfA, 2010 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation*

IfA, 2012 *Code of Conduct*

Priest, V. 2005 *Archaeological Investigations North West of Medbourne, Leicestershire NGR SP 790 934* (ULAS Report No. 2007-089)

ULAS, 2013 *Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for archaeological work*

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03-05-2013

Appendix I: The Roman Pottery and Ceramic Building Material

Elizabeth Johnson

Assemblage Size and Condition

A stratified assemblage comprising 21 sherds of Roman period pottery weighing 453g was retrieved from excavations carried out as part of an archaeological evaluation. In addition, three fragments of ceramic building material weighing 233g were also recovered. The average pottery sherd weight of 21.6g suggests good levels of preservation.

Methodology

The material was classified using the Leicestershire Fabric Series (Pollard 1994) and quantified by sherd count and weight as shown in the catalogue below. Vessel forms were also assigned where diagnostic sherds allowed using published typologies.

Pottery Catalogue

Context	Fabric	FabSp	Form	Ves part	Sherds	Weight (g)	Dating
2	Oxford CC	C13	Bowl	Rim	1	37	4thC
2	Nene Valley CC	C2NV	Dish	Base	1	14	4thC
2	Nene Valley CC	C3NV	Dish	Base	1	17	4thC
2	Nene Valley CC	C2NV	Jar	Rim	1	16	late3rd-4thC
2	Nene Valley CC	C2NV	Dish/bowl	Base	1	9	4thC
2	Nene Valley CC	C2NV	Beaker	Body	1	27	3rdC+
2	Nene Valley CC	C2NV	Dish	Base	1	26	4thC
2	Harrold Shelly	CG1B	Jar	Rim	2	13	early 4thC+
2	Harrold Shelly	CG1B	Jar	Rim	1	16	early 4thC+
2	Oxidised ware	OW2	Jar	Rim	4	104	3rdC+
2	Grey ware	GW5	Jar	Rim	3	42	2ndC+
2	Grey ware	GW5	Jar	Base	2	110	3rdC+
2	Grey ware	GW5	Jar	Body	2	22	2ndC+

Discussion

All the material was retrieved from a single context (2) within Trench 2. The Oxfordshire colour-coated ware flanged bowl is a common form imitating the samian Drag.38 flanged bowl. This was produced from the middle of the 3rd century until the end of the Roman period, and in Leicestershire examples tend to date to the 4th century (Young 1977, 133). Nene Valley colour-coated wares are common in

Leicestershire, particularly the eastern part of the county due to its proximity to the Nene Valley industry. The forms present here comprise dishes, a jar and possibly a bowl along with one beaker sherd. These represent the later suite of colour-coated ware products dating to the later 3rd and 4th centuries (Howe *et al* 1980; Perrin 1999, 101-106). The two shelly ware jars are consistent with Harrold shell-tempered wares produced in the South Midlands. These products are not common in Leicestershire before the later 3rd century, and the two rim forms present here can be dated to the early 4th century (Brown 1994, 63). The remaining pottery comprises grey and oxidised ware jars that are most likely local in origin. One of the grey ware jars is highly fired and burnished comparable to East Midlands Burnished type wares dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries (Todd 1968). The three fragments of ceramic building material are not identifiable to tile type and could be either *pedalis* or *tegula* fragments.

The presence of Oxfordshire colour-coated ware, Harrold shell-tempered ware and later Nene Valley colour-coated wares clearly provides a 4th century date for this group of material. Although only 21 sherds were recovered, they are in good condition and to find regional imports from Oxfordshire and Bedfordshire alongside Nene Valley wares, demonstrates trading links and good access to markets where such products could be acquired. The presence of ceramic building material could indicate a stone built building with a tiled floor and/or roof, which, along with the quality of the pottery, could suggest a household of some status in the area.

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Todd, M., 1968: The Commoner Late Roman Coarse wares of the East Midlands. *Antiquaries Journal* **48**: 192-209.

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Appendix II: Late Roman Coins and Small Finds

Nicholas J. Cooper and Richard Buckley

Coins

Metal detecting by Ken Wallace during the evaluation yielded a total of 35 copper alloy coins from the topsoil all dated to the 4th-century with the exception of one 3rd century coin and are all small denomination issues. Al of the coins are unstratified from metaldetecting the topsoil except for one coin from the fill of the ditch.

Catalogue

Location	Number	Description	Date (AD)
Unstratified	21	Various illegible coins	Mid-late 4th century
Unstratified	1	Radiate	2nd ½ of the 3rd century
Unstratified	1	House of Valentinian ? SEVERITAS REIPUBLICAE	4th century
Unstratified	1	House of Valentinian	Mid-late 4th century
Unstratified	2	House of Valentinian	2nd ½ of the 4th century
Unstratified	1	House of Valentinian ? VICTORIAE DD AVGG Q NN	Late 4th century
Unstratified	1	Irregular VRBS ROMA, Wolf and twins	330-5
Unstratified	1	House of Constantine GLORIA EXERCITVS, 1 standard	335-339
Unstratified	1	House of Valentinian FEL TEMP REPARATIO	346-50
Unstratified	2	House of Valentinian FEL TEMP REPARATIO, Hut	346-50
Unstratified	1	House of Valentinian FEL TEMP REPARATIO, Fallen Horseman	346-50
Unstratified	1	Irregular ? FEL TEMP REPARATIO,	4th century
Ditch [2] (1)	1	Irregular FEL TEMP REPARATIO, Fallen Horseman	4th century

The coins support the later 4th century dating suggested by the pottery from the ditch and add to the evidence for the later 4th to early 5th century evidence for the Roman small town gained from the nearby cemetery excavation in 2005.

Other metal finds

Metal detecting also found six small amorphous fragments of lead droplet waste, weighing 12g, resulting from small-scale lead working, potentially of Roman date.

A lead die and a lead weight were also discovered, which appear to be Roman in date.

Appendix III: The Animal Bones

Jennifer Browning

Introduction and Methods

Animal bones recovered by hand during the evaluation were rapidly scanned to assess preservation and variety and therefore provide an indication of the faunal potential, should the site progress to excavation. The bones were recovered from two sections excavated through a ditch, contexts [001], (002), which was located to the north of the main area of Roman settlement at Medbourne. Analysis of the associated pottery indicates that the assemblage is tightly dated to the 4th century AD and contains examples of tablewares suggesting a household of some significance (Elizabeth Johnson *pers. comm.*)

The Assemblage

Fifty-two animal bone fragments were recovered from a single feature; ditch [001]; (002). The surface of the fragments was quite abraded in places but it was still possible to examine them for the presence of butchery marks and other modifications. The fragments are generally quite large and for the most part were readily identifiable. The majority of bones belonged to cattle and included elements from the skull and mandible, scapula, humeri, pelvis and metapodials. Gnawing and butchery marks were noted on several bones. Sheep (and/or possibly goat) were represented by three elements from the feet. The presence of horse and pig were indicated by a tooth and tibia respectively. There was no evidence for juvenile animals in the sample.

Discussion

While a larger sample would be needed to provide useful information on exploitation of animal resources at the site, this is still a sizeable assemblage from a single feature and suggests that the ditch could have been used for the disposal of waste from the settlement. Although there is some surface abrasion, the general condition of the assemblage and the large size of the fragments indicate that bone preservation at the site is good. This brief examination confirms the presence of the main domestic animals, cattle, sheep and pig, as well as horse. The distribution of anatomical elements of cattle tentatively suggests the presence of both primary slaughter and butchery waste. Should any further excavation take place, the recovery of a larger bone assemblage would be highly desirable, as more evidence is needed to investigate the status and economy of Roman small towns in the region (Monckton 2006, 276).

Table 1: Basic catalogue of material

Context	Preservation	Taxa	Element	Comments
002	fair	cattle	skull	5 x fragments including part of horncore and frontal. Non-metric trait occipital perforation noted.
002	fair	cattle	pelvis	ilium
002	fair	horse	tooth	lower cheek tooth
002	good	cattle	humerus	Distal articulation (fused) with butchery marks and gnawing.
002	fair	cattle	mandible	No teeth in situ - post mortem loss. Butchery mark.
002	fair	cattle	metatarsal	Complete and measureable
002	fair	cattle	metatarsal	Distal articulation (fused)
002	fair	cattle	humerus	2 x fragments from distal articulation
002	fair	cattle	molar	Lower third molar
002	fair	cattle	molar	Upper m1 and m2
002	fair	cattle	ulna	Fragment
002	fair	Sheep/goat	metacarpal	Proximal articulation and shaft
002	fair	Sheep/goat	phalanx 1	Fragmentary
002	fair	Sheep/goat	metatarsal	Shaft only.
002	fair	pig	tibia	Shaft only
002	poor	cattle	scapula	glenoid cavity and neck
002	fair	cattle	mandible	2 fragments of body
002	fair	cattle	mandible	condyle and coronoid process. Butchery mark.
002	fair	large mammal	thoracic vertebra	Spinous process
002	fair	large mammal	rib	Fragments x 2
002	fair	large mammal	shaft fragment	18 x fragments

Reference

Monckton, A., 2006. Environmental Archaeology in the East Midlands, in N. Cooper (ed.) *The Archaeology of the East Midlands* Leicester Archaeological Monograph 13, 259-286

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