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Archaeological Services



**An Archaeological Evaluation at
MIRA Ltd Six Pack Building,
Higham on the Hill,
Leicestershire (SP 370 965)**

Wayne Jarvis


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**An Archaeological Evaluation at
MIRA Buildings 1 and 3,
Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire
(SP 370 965)**

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For: MIRA Ltd.

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**An Archaeological Evaluation at
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Leicestershire
[NGR: SP 370 965]**

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Summary

An archaeological trial trench evaluation was undertaken in December 2013 on land at MIRA, Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire, by University of Leicester Archaeological Services and on behalf of MIRA Ltd. The fieldwork was undertaken as part of a pre-planning enquiry in response to an application for new buildings and following a desk-based assessment and a geophysical survey in order to assess the potential impact of the development on any archaeological remains as may have been present.

The archaeological evaluation comprised the excavation of five 30m by 1.8m trenches targeting the locations of proposed Buildings 1 and 3. These revealed no definite features of archaeological significance, with only a possible post-hole and a natural shallow scoop feature of uncertain date in one trench. Additionally, medieval plough furrows and modern features were also present. No artefacts were recovered during the work.

The site archive will be deposited with Leicestershire County Council under the accession number X.A1 2014.

Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land at MIRA, Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire. A desk-based assessment (Hunt and Speed 2010) had established that the assessment area was in the vicinity of a number of sites including the Watling Street Roman road.

The Principal Planning Archaeologist (PPA), Historic & Natural Environment Team (HNET), Leicestershire County Council, recommended the need for a phase of archaeological investigation comprising a programme of evaluation trenching. The investigation was required in order to provide an adequate sample of the development area and to assess the likely archaeological impact of the development proposals. The agreed scheme was set out in a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI; ULAS 2013).

The fieldwork specified was intended to provide further indications of the character and extent of any buried archaeological remains in order that the potential impact of the development on such remains might be assessed. Fieldwork was carried out in December 2013 and involved the machine excavation of five trial trenches in order to provide a sample of the development area requested by the Leicestershire County Council Senior Planning Archaeologist as advisor to the planning authority.

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with National Planning Policy Framework Section 12: Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment (DCLG March 2012). All archaeological work followed the Institute for

Archaeologists (IfA) Code of Conduct (2010) and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2008). The *LCC Guidelines and Procedures for Archaeological work Leicestershire and Rutland* (1997) was also adhered to.

Site Location, Geology, Topography, and Description

The site lies within the MIRA Proving ground area, Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire. New buildings are proposed within the north-west area (Figure 1; Clay 2013a; 2013b). The site is within the parish of Higham-on-the-Hill, in the District of Hinckley and Bosworth, Leicestershire, around 5 miles north-west of Hinckley and 5 miles south-east of Atherstone (Figure 1). It is bordered by the A5 (Roman Watling Street) to the south; which is the border with Warwickshire. The dismantled Ashby and Nuneaton Joint Railway runs to the south-east of the site and to the northwest and north-east lie fields and local roads. The British Geological Survey of England and Wales, sheet 169 (Coventry) shows that the underlying geology over most of the site is likely to be Thrussington Till overlain by Dunsmore Gravel and Anker Sand and Gravel to the south, with skerries of siltstone. To the north and north-west of the site lie Wolston Clay and alluvial deposits. The site lies at a height of around 100m above OD, with the high point of the site lying at 104m above OD close to the southern edge. The total area of the MIRA site is around 310 hectares. The current phase of work is for two new buildings, MIRA Buildings 1 and 3 (Clay 2013a; 2013b), part of a larger scheme of four buildings (including the 'Flatpack' and 'Sixpack' buildings) for which planning permission is being sought within the MIRA complex (Figures 1-2). Following the NPPF the planning authority require that evaluation by trial trenching be undertaken in order to ascertain whether any archaeological remains are present and, if so, to ascertain their character and extent.

Archaeological and Historical Background

A desk based assessment has been undertaken for the area (Hunt and Speed 2010) and Heritage statements for Buildings 1 and 3 (Clay 2013a; 2013b). The Leicestershire & Rutland and Warwickshire Historic Environment Record (HER) for the area shows that there are no known archaeological sites in the assessment area itself. However, there are a few archaeological sites in the vicinity of the assessment area most significantly the Watling Street Roman road. The development site is in fact situated in a wide area of archaeological potential as indicated by the HER. Enclosures possibly dating to the Iron Age are located adjacent to the MIRA site (MLE9578) and other prehistoric sites are located nearby (MLE8245, MLE6080 and Warks HER Nos. 4420 & 4501). The southern part of the site lies on the line of the modern A5, the former Watling Street Roman Road (MLE1388) and the Mancetter Roman Road has been projected to run to the north of the site (MLE3019). Roman pottery has been found within the former Lindley parish at the edge of the assessment area (MLE8503) and a large assemblage has been found further to the south (Warks HER No. 7439). Roman coins have also been retrieved from two hoards to the south of the site (Warks HER No. 5141) and near Harper's Hill, around 800m south-east of the site (Warks HER No. 1653). The development area lies within the deserted parish of Rowden (MLE2795) and adjacent to earthworks associated with the abandoned medieval village of Lindley (MLE2792). The area was also the site of the old Lindley Airfield (MLE15973). Fieldwalking and geophysical surveys have also been undertaken within the MIRA site area (Coward 2011, Austrums 2011). The fieldwalking and

geophysical surveys did not locate significant material or anomalies. Two areas that were subject to detailed gradiometry revealed anomalies with possible archaeological origins, while a thin scatter of medieval and post-medieval pottery from the fieldwalking was interpreted as a product of manuring. Recent evaluations adjacent to the line of the Roman road identified Roman activity including structural evidence, and 150m from this further ditches and a pit were identified of probable late Iron Age or Roman date (Thomas 2011).

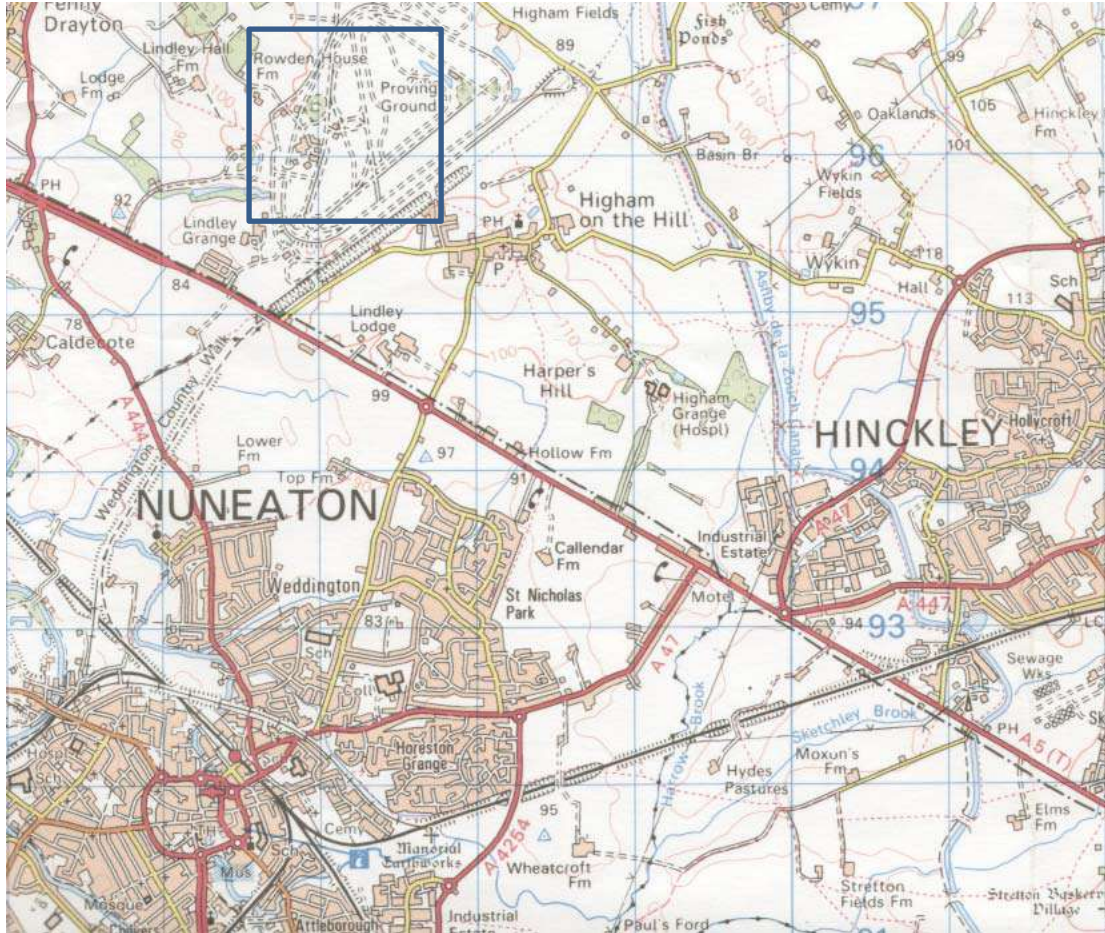


Figure 1: Site Location (Scale 1:50 000)

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Aims and Objectives

The archaeological evaluation had the potential to contribute to the following research aims.

The general aims of the evaluation were as follows:

- To determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological remains within the development site
- To assess vulnerability/sensitivity of any exposed remains
- To provide sufficient information on the archaeological potential of the site to enable the archaeological implications of the proposed development to be assessed

- To assess the impact of previous land use on the site
- To inform a strategy to avoid or mitigate impacts of the proposed development on surviving archaeological remains
- To produce a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the Leicestershire HER.



Figure 2: MIRA Site and development location

The evaluation was undertaken in order to enable reasoned and informed recommendations to be made to the local planning authority and, if appropriate, a suitable mitigation strategy for the proposed development to be formulated.

The design specification conforms to the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (2012). It has been designed in accordance with current best archaeological practice and the appropriate national standards and guidelines including:

- Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage, 1991);
- Model Briefs and Specifications for Archaeological Assessments and Field Evaluations (Association of County Archaeological Officers, 1994);
- *Code of Conduct* (Institute for Archaeologists, 2010);
- Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations (Institute for Archaeologists, 2010);
- Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (Association of Local Government Officers, 2003);

- Guidelines and Procedures for Archaeological work in Leicestershire and Rutland (Leicestershire County Council 1997)

Methodology

Archaeological Trial Trenches

Prior to the commencement of works a Leicestershire County Council Museums Accession Code was obtained and the required archive deposition forms completed. An OASIS online record was initiated and the key fields completed.

Following recommendations from the Planning Authority, a programme of evaluation trenching was undertaken. A 10% sample of each proposed area would be evaluated in the form of a series of 30m trial trenches. Two trenches were sited on the north plot (Building 1 – ‘Haldex’), three on the southern plot (Building 3 – ‘Aston Martin’), and a further two were proposed for a plot to the south (‘Flatpack’ site). The latter two trenches were not excavated due to time constraints, and it is anticipated that additional fieldwork will be required at a future date in order to investigate this southern area, and potentially the Sixpack site farther north.

Topsoil and overburden was removed by a mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching bucket (*c.*1.8m wide), under archaeological supervision. The spoil generated during the evaluation was mounded away from the edges of each trench. Topsoil and subsoil was stored separately. Mechanical excavation ceased at undisturbed natural deposits. A CAT scanning device was used before and throughout machining in order to monitor for the presence of cables and other services, with three of the five trench areas having service runs indicated.

The trenches were recorded at an appropriate scale by measured drawing and photography and were located to Ordnance Survey National Grid. A photographic record, utilising black and white negative film, supplemented by high resolution digital data capture, was maintained during the course of the fieldwork and included:

- The features exposed. General site works were not photographed due to security restrictions.

Upon completion of the evaluation trenching, the excavated trenches were backfilled and loosely compacted.

Results

Table 1 Details of the trenches

Trench No.	Length/Width	Min. Depth (m)	Max Depth (m)	Features	Notes
1	30 x 1.8	0.3	0.55	-	E-W Furrows, E-W service
2	30 x 1.8	0.28	0.45	-	E-W furrows
3	30 x 1.8	0.35	0.45	Y [2] [3]	Undated feats, N-S service
4	30 x 1.8	0.5	0.7	Y [5]	Modern linear feature, E-W furrows, E-W service
5	30 x 1.8	0.4	0.9	Y [7] [9]	Modern linear features, E-W furrows, land drain

Trenches 1-2

These were both in the north-west proposed development area (Building 1).

Both these trenches were negative of finds and features, with only ridge and furrow surviving cutting the natural substratum at the base of both trenches. Trench 1 in the south of the proposed plot also exposed the line of an east-west service at its south end.

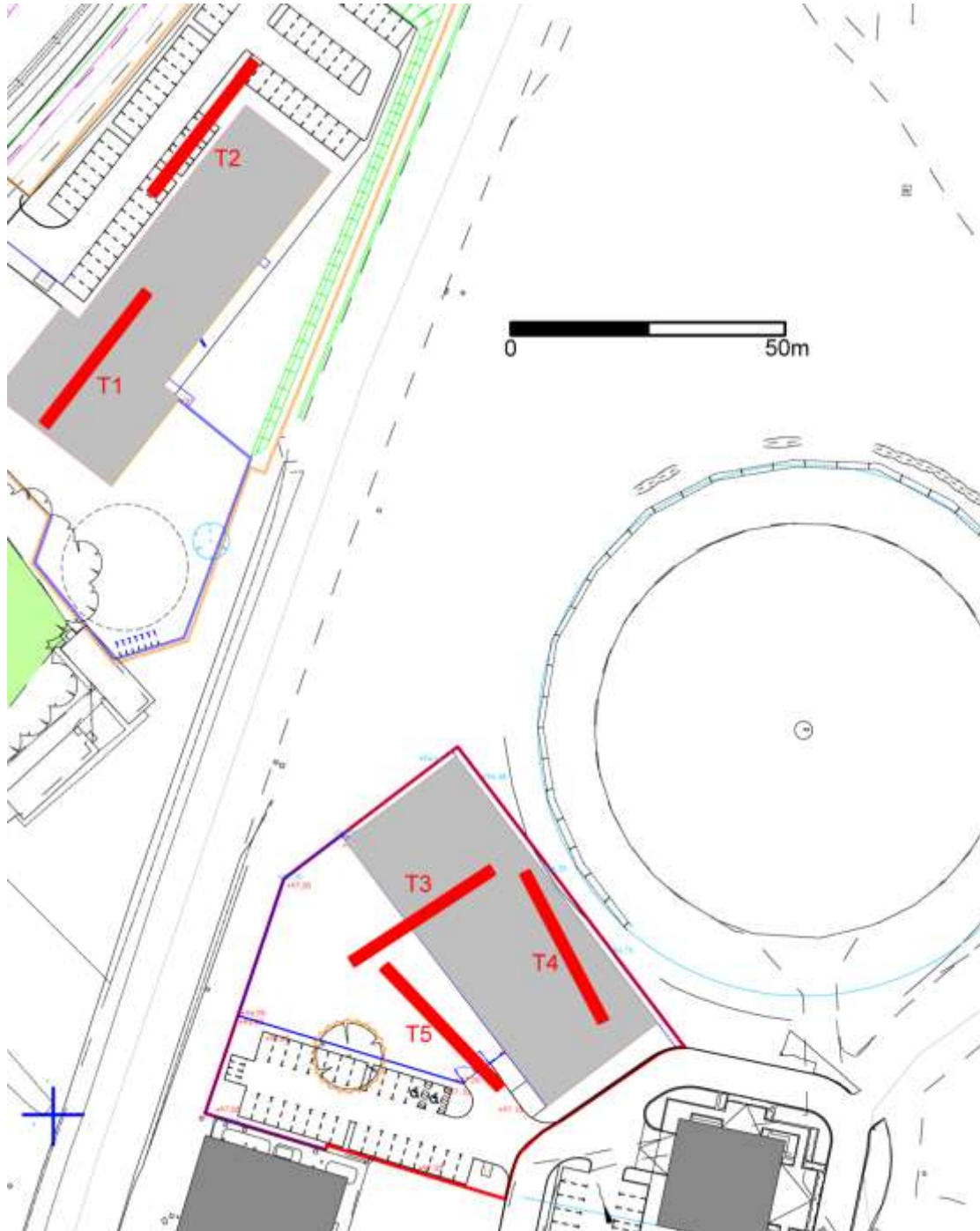


Figure 3: Trench locations in relation to proposed Building 1 (trenches T1-T2) and Building 3 (trenches T3-T5) areas.

Trenches 3-5

Trenches 3-5 were in the south-east proposed development area (Building 3). These trenches showed some evidence for landscaping with made up ground above the original topsoil level, particularly in the south area.

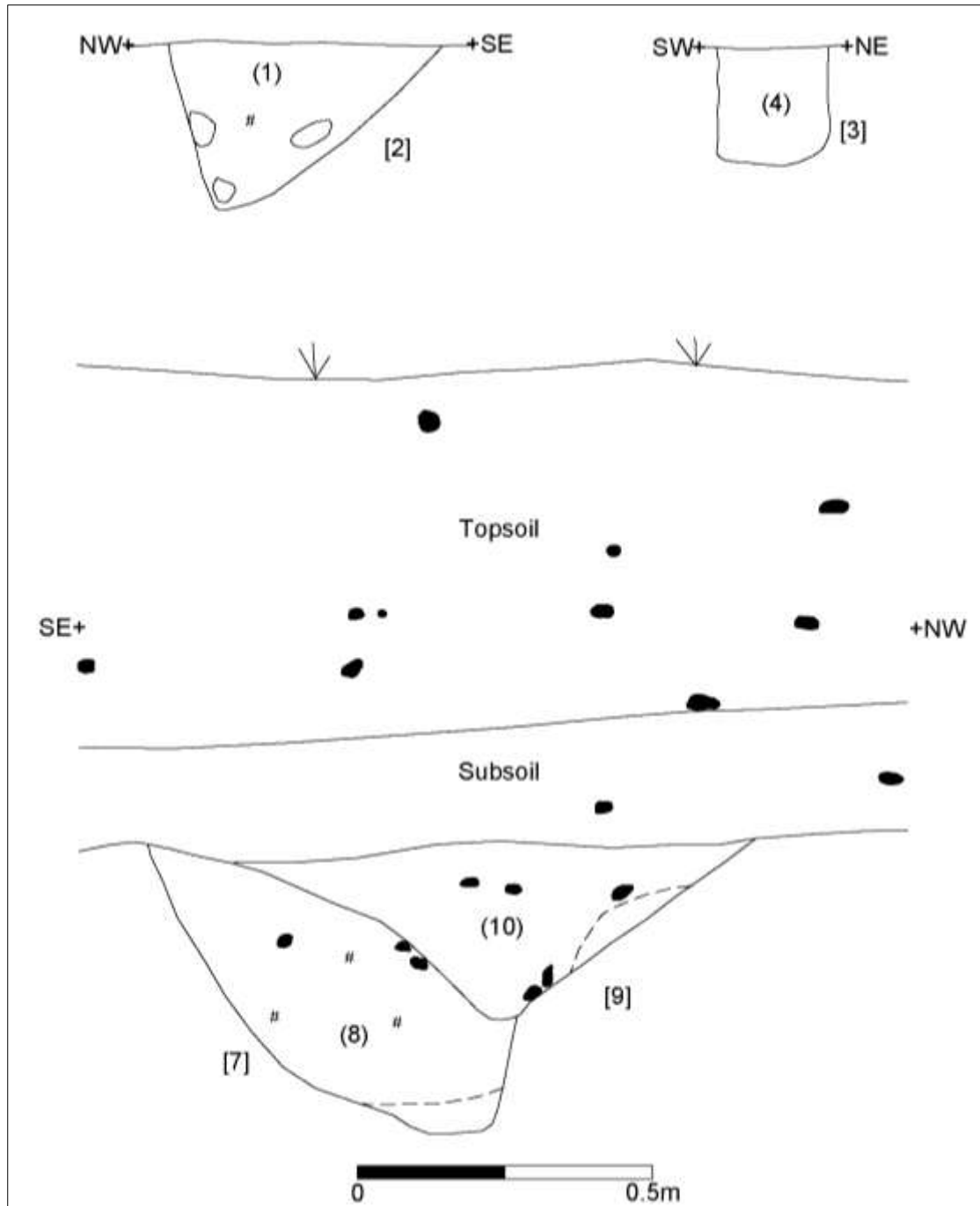


Figure 5: Features in trenches 3 and 5 (sections)

6). To the east was cut [3] fill (4), a probable post-hole, measuring 0.2m in diameter and 0.2m deep, straight sided and with a flat bottom (Figures 4-5, 7). The fill consisted of a mid orange-brown silty-clay with occasional charcoal and fragments of heat cracked stones. Neither of these features produced any dating evidence, and due to the amount of modern disturbance in the site area, it is possible that these are also modern in date.

A north-south electricity service run was also identified at the east end of the trench.

Trench 4

A linear feature running approximately east-west was identified at the south end of the trench, cut [5] fill (6), measuring 0.6m wide and with a depth of 0.3m. The cut had 45 degree sides with a sharp base. Fill (6) was a dark brown silty clay with occasional pebbles. This feature was seen to continue into Trench 5 (see cut [9] fill (10) to the west where it cut a further modern feature, cut [7] fill (8).

A continuation of the Trench 3 north-south service was also identified at the south end of this trench.

Trench 5

The continuation of the east-west ditch cut [5] fill (6) was seen here, as cut [9] fill (10), and upon excavation cut a further linear cut [7] fill (8). Cut [7] was 0.98m wide, 0.49m deep with fill (8) an orangey brown silty clay, the latter producing a sherd of modern china (not retained). The south edge of these intercutting linear features was marked by a land drain. It is possible that this series of linear features represent a boundary line of recent date. Furrows were also identified crossing the trench approximately east-west.



Figure 6: Feature [2] in trench 3



Figure 7: Feature [3] in trench 3

Discussions & Conclusion

The archaeological evaluation at MIRA, Higham on the Hill, provided no definite indications of significant archaeological activity. Two undated features were exposed in Trench 3, a post-hole and a scoop the latter probably being natural in origin. These were both sited in the northern area of the proposed Building 3 plot. The linear feature aligned north-east to south-west crossing Trench 5 may relate to the field boundary visible on earlier OS maps (T. Hawtin pers.comm.). Additionally, evidence for medieval plough furrows was identified in both proposed development areas. Other features were of modern date, some of which were likely associated with the historic airfield.

Archive and Publications

The site archive (X.A1.2014), consisting of paper and photographic records, will be deposited with Leicestershire County Council.

The archive consists of:

- 5 trench recording sheets
- Photographic record indices
- 8 context sheets & context summary sheet
- Drawing index and record sheet
- Permatrace site plans (2 A3)
- Monochrome photo negatives & contact prints
- Digital photographs



Figure 8: Ordnance survey 1st edition maps, sheets XXXV SW and XLII NW, with field boundary possibly relating to the linear feature in Trench 5 arrowed. Original scale 6 inch to 1 mile.

Publication

A version of the excavation summary (see above) will appear in due course in the *Transactions of the Leicestershire and Rutland Archaeological and Historical Society*.

Acknowledgements

Wayne Jarvis of ULAS undertook the archaeological evaluation on behalf of MIRA Ltd, with assistance from Jon Coward, Adam Clapton and Donald Clark. The project was managed by Patrick Clay.

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Oasis Information

Project Name	MIRA, Higham on the Hill
Project Type	Archaeological evaluation
Project Manager	Patrick Clay
Project Supervisor	Wayne Jarvis
Previous/Future work	Development
Current Land Use	Landscaped & grassed
Development Type	Business development
Reason for Investigation	NPPF
Position in the Planning Process	Pre-planning enquiry
Site Co ordinates	NGR SP 370 965
Start/end dates of field work	December 2013
Archive Recipient	Leicestershire Museums Service
Study Area	20,000 sq. m. (total area)

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