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Archaeological Services

**Topographic Earthwork Survey
for land east of Forest Road, Huncote, Leicestershire**

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Gavin Speed




ULAS Report No 2016-129

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**A Topographic Earthwork for Land
east of Forest Road, Huncote,
Leicestershire
(SP 5193 9784)**

Gavin Speed

For: Westleigh Developments Ltd.

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(front cover: GPS surveying in field, ridge and furrow visible)

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An Archaeological Earthwork Survey on land at Forest Road, Huncote, Leicestershire.

Gavin Speed

Summary

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) carried out an archaeological investigation on land east of Forest Road, Huncote, Leicestershire. A topographic survey of an area of ridge and furrow earthworks was undertaken to fulfil a condition of planning permission. The survey confirmed that the earthworks are in a good state of preservation. Two sets of ridge and furrows were surveyed and cover an area of approximately three hectares. The site archive will be held by Leicestershire Museums Service, under accession number XA.101.2016.

1. Introduction

The application area contains known earthworks of ridge and furrow, and a topographic survey of the remains (which would be destroyed by any redevelopment), was requested by Leicestershire County Council (Masters 2016, 13, 9).

In accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Section 12 (Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment) this document is a report on the results of the archaeological earthwork survey that took place on 30th August 2016.

2. Site Description, Topography and Geology

The assessment area is located to the north of Huncote village, which lies on the south-west of Leicester, 9 km from Leicester city centre, in the district of Blaby (Figure 1). The proposed development area currently consists of two pasture fields located outside Huncote's medieval village core east of Forest Road (Figure 2). The entire Site covers c.3.3ha. The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain (Solid and Drift Geology, Sheet 155) indicates that the underlying geology of this area consists of glacial drift (boulder clay) with under- and overlying sands and gravels. The site lies at a height of c.87m O.D. on relatively flat land.

3. Historical and Archaeological Background

The Historic Environment Record (HER) for Leicestershire and Rutland indicates that there are no known archaeological sites within the development area itself or within the immediate area.

3.1 Historical Background (from Courtney and Clay 2012)

Huncote was a hamlet and chapelry of Narborough in the high Middle Ages and until the 19th century (Nichols 4i, 813-4). Both Huncote and Narborough lay within the bounds of Leicester Forest (Fox and Russell 1948). However, only Huncote is mentioned in Domesday

Book. In 1263 Narborough is recorded as having 16 virgates but 24 in 1296. It is possible, therefore, that Narborough grew in importance due to clearance of woodland within Leicester Forest. In 1279, Huncote had 28 virgates. Narborough's four fields were enclosed by act of Parliament in 1752 but the date of enclosure of Huncote's fields is uncertain although probably earlier (Nichols 4i, 813-4 and 826). Nearly all of Huncote township was covered by ridge and furrow in the late 1940s, although it has now been largely levelled (Hartley 1989,77). Unfortunately, Huncote appears to be poorly documented and little is known of its open field system.

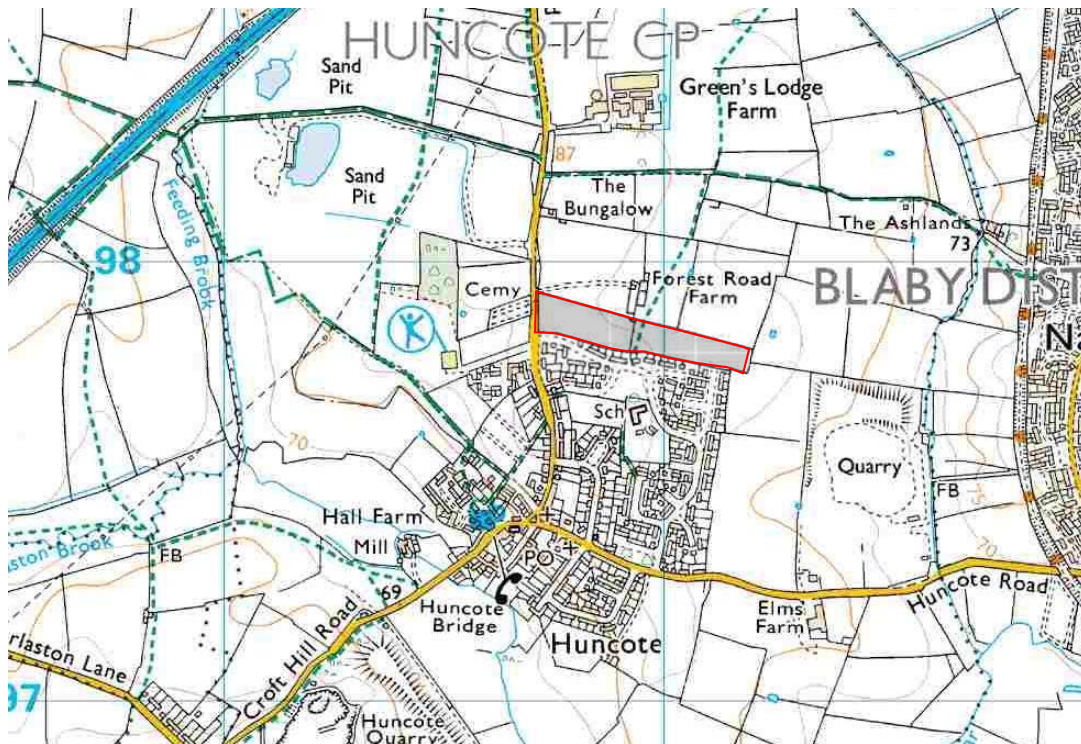


Figure 1: Site location

Reproduced from the Landranger Leicester area 1:25000 map by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown Copyright 1996. All rights reserved. Licence number AL 100029495

3.2 Archaeological Background

The Site has already been subject to a desk-based assessment (Browning 2011), trial-trench evaluation (Richards 2011), a geophysical survey (Haddrell & Biggs 2011), and an Assessment of significance of the Ridge and furrow (Clay and Courtney 2012).

The desk-based assessment established that ridge and furrow earthworks are present within the application area. The site is located within a landscape rich in high status archaeological finds including an Iron Age lynch pin, an early Bronze Age axe hammer, and a series of medieval coins. It is also close to archaeological sites belonging to a variety of periods, both within and to the north of Huncote. Finds of Roman material to the north-east of the site may be evidence of Roman settlement while Iron Age activity is known to the north-west. Finds from the vicinity date from the Palaeolithic to the medieval period and include Roman settlements and evidence for possible Iron Age burials. From the medieval period the land appears to have been used first for agriculture and later as pasture, with the field

boundaries remaining unchanged since at least the 1840s. It has been noted that some of the best preserved ridge and furrow field systems in the country can be found in the East Midlands and they represent a nationally important resource, although diminished through modern cultivation (Lewis 2006, 207).

The geophysical survey conducted in May 2011 located ridge and furrow over the majority of the Site (Haddrell & Biggs 2011, 2). The subsequent 13 trench evaluation in November 2011 revealed no archaeological finds or deposits (Richards 2011, 1).

An assessment of the surviving ridge and furrow earthworks in 2012, concluded that the remains are of local significance but not sufficient to warrant their preservation (Courtney and Clay 2012).

4. Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the survey was to accurately record the visible ridge and furrow that could be destroyed by redevelopment, and to place the earthworks in their wider surroundings, and to produce a report showing the results.

5. Methodology

Photographs were taken of the earthworks prior to work being carried out. The earthwork survey was undertaken using a Topcon Hyper V Global Positioning System (dGPS). This can provide resolution to an accuracy of 10mm. The changes in level of all the earthworks and sections across the earthworks were recorded. The ridge and furrows were recorded as a topographical survey using a survey grade Differential Global Positioning System (dGPS) manufactured by Topcon to record appropriate points across the earthworks. The tops and bases of earthwork features were recorded to provide a plan. Spot heights across areas without earthworks or where there are large gaps between points were also recorded. Profiles were recorded across the full length of the area illustrating the vertical and horizontal differences in the ground surface. The location of any profiles will be marked on the plan. The survey is referenced to the Ordnance Survey National Grid (OSGB1936) and Ordnance Datum. The results will be used to produce a topographical plan of the area sufficient to see the extent, height and survival of the earthworks. Point and vector topographic data were edited in ARCGIS and AUTOCAD. A surface model was created for display (Figure 6). The survey was undertaken following guidance from Historic England (2015) and RCHME (1999).



Figure 2: View along the western field, looking east



Figure 3: View along the eastern field, looking east



Figure 4: View across the ridge and furrow towards Springfield Farm, looking north

6. Results

The GPS survey has confirmed that the earthworks are in a good state of preservation. The well-preserved ridge and furrow earthworks, represent the upstanding remains of medieval and post-medieval agricultural cultivation. Ridge and Furrow earthworks are a characteristic feature of the Leicestershire landscape and are a diminishing resource.

Well-preserved ridge and furrow earthworks are in evidence, running approximately north-west to south-west across the two fields (Figure 5). The evaluation trenches from 2011 (Richards 2011) are still visible in the fields

In the west field, eight ridges and furrows survived, which ran for *c.*210m in length, and were spaced at roughly 7-8m intervals. The ridges were more pronounced in the west field. In the east field the ridge and furrows were less pronounced, with five sets of ridges and furrows, which ran for a *c.*250m in length, and were also spaced at roughly 7-8m intervals. The system is mostly straight, with a slight curve at the west-end of the west field. This curve may have occurred at the headland at the west-end of the field close to the road.

The survey area is divided by a field boundary, this is a relatively recent addition, and the ridge and furrows in the two fields show that this would have been a single larger field prior to enclosure in the 19th century. A public footpath runs north-south immediately east of the field boundary. The surviving example of ridge and furrow is only a small remnant of what was once an extensive field system. It is now isolated from its context in the wider pattern of both ridging and in the former common field system of the township, now enclosed.

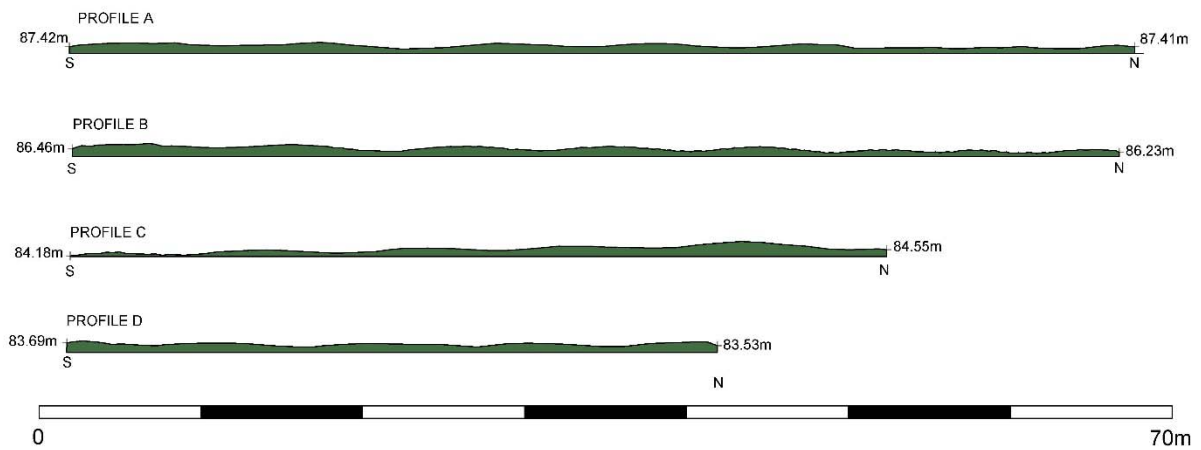
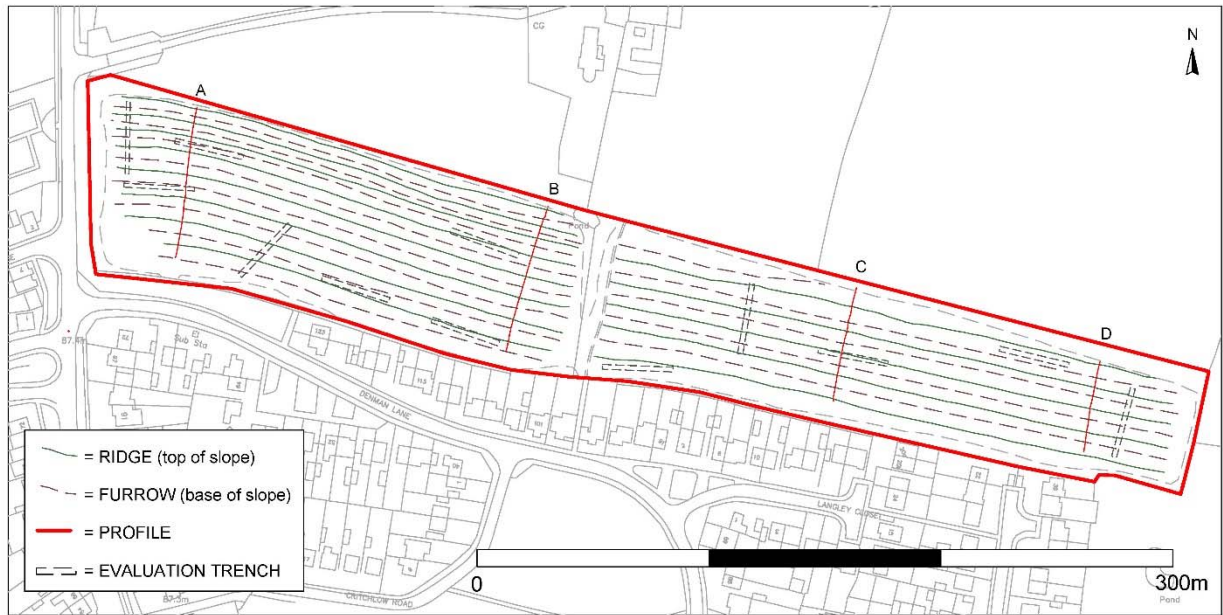


Figure 5: Plan and profiles showing ridge and furrow earthworks.
(base map provided by client)

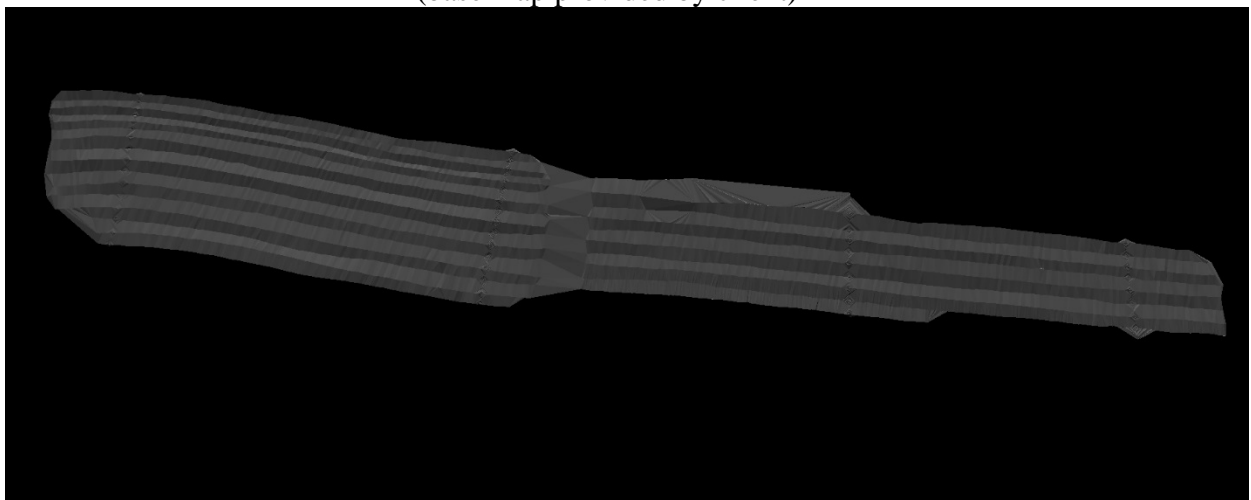


Figure 6: Digital terrain model, looking north



Figure 7: Satellite image showing the ridge and furrow in the application area and fields to the north (Map data: Google, DigitalGlobe)



Figure 8: View of ridge and furrow in west field, looking west



Figure 9: View of ridge and furrow in east field, looking west

7. Discussion

Ridge and Furrow earthworks represent the upstanding remains of medieval and post-medieval agricultural cultivation. They were formed within the cultivation strips of medieval Open Fields, and several studies have been made (Hall 1982, 1998; Astill 1988; Anderton and Went 2002). The earliest ridge and furrow cultivation dates to the 10th century (Anderton and Went 2002, 52). They reached their maximum extent with the population rise of the 13th century.

Medieval villages or townships within the Open Field system were surrounded by two or three substantial fields of cultivated land which could be several kilometres across. The ridges, interpreted as intentionally created free-draining seed beds, with the furrows acting as open drains (Hall 1998), were created by ploughing in a clockwise spiral with a plough constantly throwing soil to the right, over many years. Later medieval ploughs were reversible and threw soil in both directions. The vertical difference between furrow and ridge may have been up to one metre in height (Hall 1982, 6) when at their maximum. The fields of a system were usually cultivated on a three year rotation comprising cereals, legumes, and a fallow year. In the fallow year, the ridges were slightly lowered by ploughing in an anticlockwise direction, to prevent infertile subsoil being ploughed up from the furrows the following year (Hall 1998, 1).

The East Midlands was a classic common field landscape in the Middle Ages and has particularly good survival of ridge and furrow. This reflects the move to sheep farming in the century after the Black Death followed by a concentration on livestock production in many parishes, particularly on poorer soils, which continued to the present day. Ridge and furrow

is most common in the Midlands, and these are viewed as “nationally significant heritage assets” (Catchpole and Priest 2012, 7). In a recent wide study a significant amount of ridge and furrow earthworks were shown to have been lost or badly damaged in recent years (*ibid*, 7), and so recording their form in detail prior to redevelopment or removal of the earthworks is of vital importance.

Leicestershire still had extensive surviving areas of ridge and furrow in the late 1940s when the RAF undertook vertical air surveys. This extent has been plotted by Leicestershire County Council and published for many areas by Fred Hartley in a series of volumes on the county’s earthworks. Huncote is included in the volume on central Leicestershire (Hartley 1989, 77, see also

Figure 10). LiDAR data shows more details of the immediate surrounding fields (Figure 11).

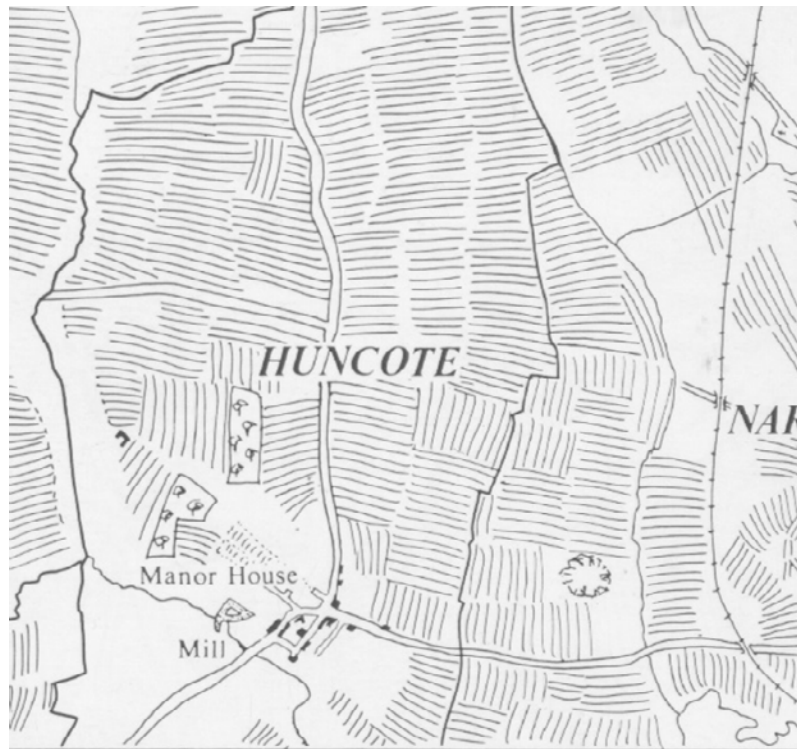


Figure 10: Ridge and furrows in surrounding area of Huncote (after Hartley 1989, 77)



Figure 11: LiDAR data showing ridge and furrow in the Site and surrounding fields

9. Conclusion

The remains of surviving earthwork ridge and furrow on land east of Forest Road, Huncote, Leicestershire have been recorded by GPS Survey. Ridge and Furrow earthworks represent the upstanding remains of medieval and post-medieval agricultural cultivation.

Ridge and furrow are viewed as “nationally significant heritage assets” (Catchpole and Priest 2012, 7), and so recording their form prior to removal of the earthworks is of vital importance. The ridge and furrow earthworks recorded are a relatively clear example of medieval and post medieval strip cultivation. The detailed topographic survey adds extra research value to earlier studies in the area (Catchpole and Priest 2012, Hartley 1987).

10. Archive

The site archive will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums Service, under accession number XA.101.2016.

The archive contains:

- CD containing digital photographs and report
- Survey data
- Unbound copy of this report
- Thumbnail print of digital photographs

The report is listed on the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) held by the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York. Available at: <http://oasis.ac.uk>, record ID: universi1-261463.

ID	OASIS entry summary universi1- 261463
Project Name	Land to the east of Forest Road, Huncote, Leicestershire, Leicestershire
Summary	The survey confirmed that the earthworks are in a good state of preservation. Two sets of ridge and furrows were surveyed and cover an area of approximately 3.3 hectares.
Project Type	Earthwork survey
Project Manager	Patrick Clay
Project Supervisor	Gavin Speed
Previous/Future work	Previous: DBA, geophysics, evaluation Future: unknown
Current Land Use	Field
Development Type	Residential
Reason for Investigation	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Section 12
Position in the Planning Process	Condition
Site Coordinates	SP 5193 9784
Start/end dates of field work	30/08/2016
Archive Recipient	Leicestershire Museums Service
Study Area	3.2ha
Associated project reference codes	Project ID: XA.101.2016 OASIS ID: universi1-261463

11. Publication

A summary of the work will be submitted for publication in the local archaeological journal *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* in due course. The report has been added to the Archaeology Data Service’s (ADS) Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) database held by the University of York.

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13. Acknowledgements

The earthwork survey was undertaken out by Gavin Speed. Patrick Clay managed the project. Teresa Hawtin (Senior Planning Archaeologist of Leicestershire County Council) recommend the work on behalf of the planning authority.

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