



**An Archaeological Watching Brief
At Butt Close, Riverside Road, Sysonby,
Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire**

NGR: SK 7397 1907

Wayne Jarvis



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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by the University Of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) at Butt Close, Riverside Road, Sysonby, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire on the 13th of November 2017. The watching brief took place during groundworks in preparation for a new stable block and hay barn which will be built against the western edge of Riverside Road in the field known as Butt Close. The site is adjacent to earthworks thought to be archery butts of medieval or later date. A metallated trackway was identified during the works. This can be identified on the 19th century Ordnance Survey map as a track which led across to the church of St. Mary from Riverside Road and beyond. No further archaeological deposits were encountered.

The report and archive will be deposited with Leicestershire County Council under Accession Number X.A139.2017.

Introduction

In accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Section 12 *Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment* this document forms the report for an archaeological watching brief. Planning permission has been granted under application 17/0718/FUL for the construction of a new stable block and hay barn on the site. Due to the proximity of the site to other archaeological remains a request was made by the Senior Planning Archaeologist, Leicestershire County Council as advisor to the Planning Authority (Melton District Council) for a programme consisting of an archaeological watching brief during the groundworks for the proposed new stables.

Site Location, Topography and Geology

The site lies just west of Riverside Road, Sysonby, north-east of the churchyard of the church of St. Mary, and north of an area recently developed at Riverside Cottage/Farm (Figure 1-Figure 2). The current site comprises a pocket of land c.240m² for a hay barn and stables adjacent to the east boundary of a larger field known as Butt Close. The field is currently under pasture. The site slopes down to the south, and east to the valley of the River Eye. The site lies at a height of c.75m aOD.

The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain indicates that the underlying bedrock geology of the application area is likely to consist of Lias Mudstone. The superficial deposits are river deposited alluvium and Quaternary Head and river gravels (Bytham channel) <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html> (accessed 15th July 2014).

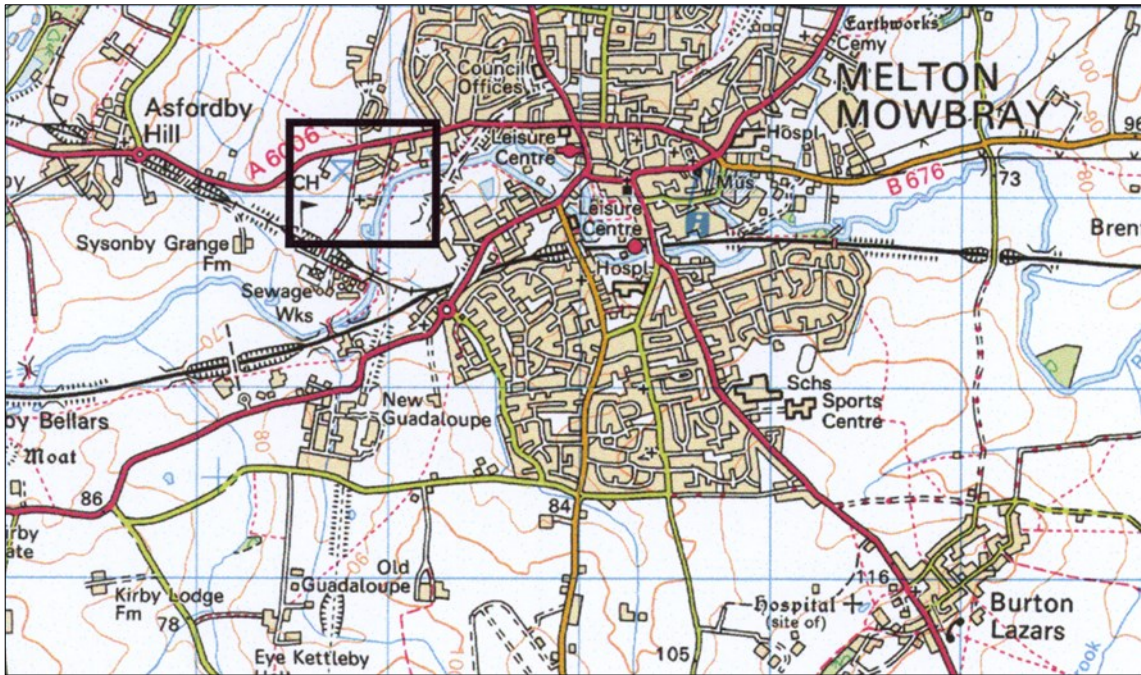


Figure 1: Sysonby location.

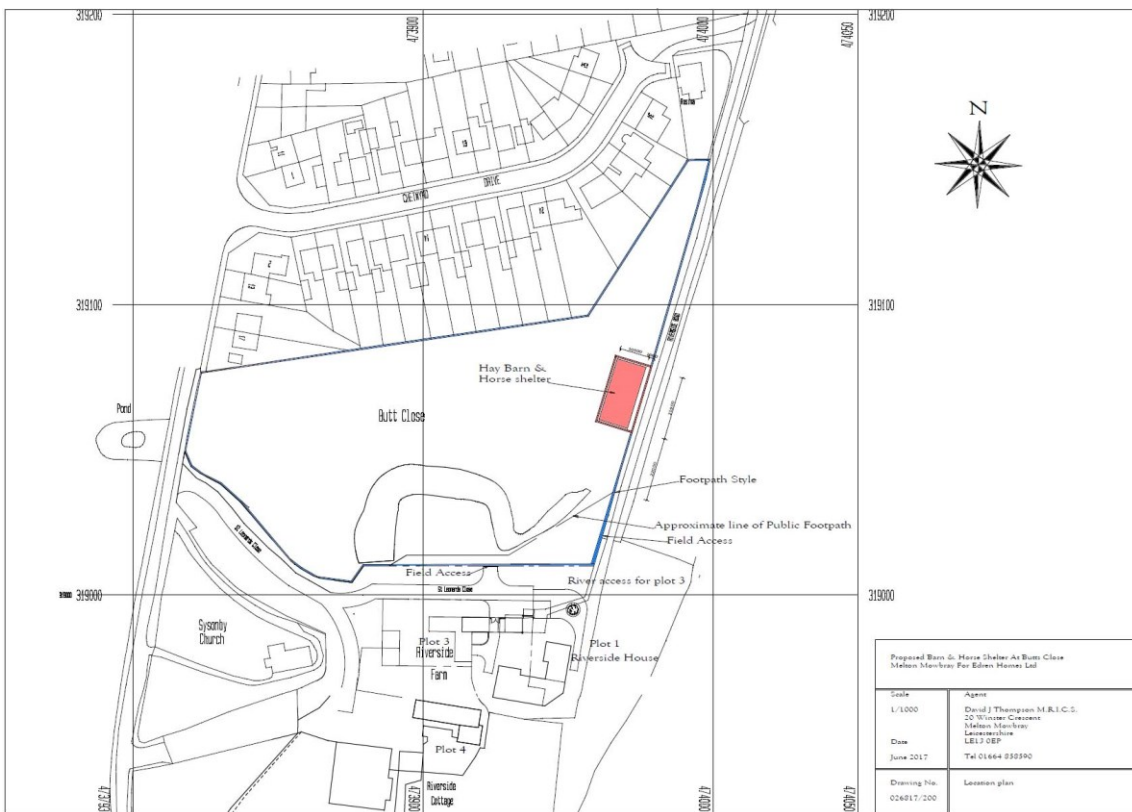


Figure 2: Plan of the proposed area and environs.

Archaeological and Historical Background

The proposed development area is within an area rich in archaeological data included in the Historic Environment record (HER; Richards 2008). The application area is within the area of the deserted medieval village of Sysonby (HER Ref: MLE3963). Other recorded remains within the application area include a knife, part of a shield and a spear (MLE3961), suggesting an Anglo-Saxon burial of at least one male, the site of medieval archery butts (MLE3966; MLE3972), the possible location of a medieval manor house (MLE3967) and medieval/post-medieval formal gardens (MLE3969). The HER record including other records of remains in the vicinity is as follows:

Prehistoric

Prehistoric evidence is limited to Neolithic or Bronze Age cores which were recovered near the river to the south of the proposed development area by Melton Fieldworkers (MLE7589).

Romano-British

Limited evidence of Romano-British occupation in form of pottery sherds (MLE3976) has been recovered to the south of the proposed development area. More significantly the corner of a sandstone Roman coffin was found during a watching brief to the north west of the proposed development area (MLE3975), suggesting possible Romano-British funerary activity.

Anglo-Saxon

Evidence of earlier settlement activity from the Anglo Saxon period has also been recorded within the proposed development area. Most notable of these is a knife, part of a shield and a spear (MLE3961), suggesting the burial of at least one male within or near the graveyard of Saint Mary's. Further evidence of potential Anglo Saxon settlement is provided by a number of pottery sherds and a copper tag recovered to the south of the proposed development area (MLE3977).

Medieval and Later

The application area is within the area of the deserted medieval village of Sysonby (HER Ref: MLE3963). The village is recorded in the Domesday Book and was still in existence in 1795 (Nichols 1795), although much reduced and consisting of the Hall House and several cottages. It is assumed that part of this settlement may be present within the proposed development area. Nichols mentions the Hall House (MLE3967), possibly meaning the medieval manor house, the exact location of which is uncertain, although likely to be near the church. The house recorded on the 1842 tithe map is likely to have been built on or near the site of this earlier hall. The buildings were subjected to a detailed survey as part of the recent development work on the area to the south at Riverside Cottage/Farm (ibid., Clarke 2014).

A mound (MLE3972) was recorded to the north of the proposed development area, in an area known as Butts Meadow (adjacent to Asfordby Road). Now partially destroyed, it does not appear on the tithe Map of 1842. The current proposals are within a field identified as Butt Close (MLE3966), these being presumably the site of the medieval or later archery butts. Normally the butts would comprise a level flat area, up to 200 metres frequently containing a number of flat-topped earthen target mounds, arranged in pairs. The mounds may be surrounded by a shallow ditch from which the soil to build the mound

was excavated. The Butts survive as visible earthworks to the west of the proposed site. Additionally, a potentially related north-east to south-west earthwork crosses just west of the site (Figure 3 and Figure 4 **Error! Reference source not found. Error! Reference source not found.**). The 1884 map shows this earthwork and also a trackway running parallel to it. The track ran north-east from the church of St. Mary (see below) across Butt Close field and through the proposed site to meet Riverside Road. The remains of this trackway were identified during the watching brief (Figure 6-Figure 9). To the south-west of the site area is a large rectangular cutting into the hillside, which also shows on the 1884 Ordnance Survey map (Figure 5). These earthworks have not been subjected to detailed survey.

To the south of the proposed development area there is a possible moated site (MLE3968), rectangular in plan and still holding water. Although of unknown origin, it is likely to be medieval in date and is shown as part of the formal gardens (MLE3969) on the 1845 map.

Immediately to the west of Riverside Farm the Church of Saint Mary survives (MLE3962), presumably the chapelry of Melton called ‘sulteneby’ in 1220. The church consists of an ironstone built nave and chancel in one and was extensively restored in 1892. A number of medieval pottery sherds have been recovered from ‘near’ the church, including 13th-14th Century coarse wares as well as some 17th-18th Century pottery. Further sherds of medieval pottery have been recovered to the south of the proposed development area (MLE3978).

Two phases of evaluation work were carried out on the area to the south (Jarvis 2014, 2015). This work identified medieval remains comprising ditches, gullies, pits, cobbled surfaces and ephemeral ironstone structures. A range of artefacts were recovered including pottery dating from the 10th or 11th centuries into the 13th or 14th centuries.



Figure 3: The site area prior to groundworks, looking south towards Riverside Farm. The front (north) edge of the site is staked out, marked with triangles. The north-east to south-west earthwork is visible just beyond the plot, to the west (arrowed).



Figure 4: The site area prior to groundworks, looking east towards Melton Mowbray. Earthworks are visible beyond in the foreground. The plot (staked out, triangle markers) is in front of the contractors.



Figure 5: The area just to the south within Butt Close, looking west. The church of St. Mary is in the background. Adjacent to the tractor the large rectangular cutting into the hillside is clear, and was shown on the 1884 Ordnance Survey map.

Objectives

Within the stated objectives of the ULAS Written Scheme of Investigation (ULAS 2017) for a *Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological work: Land at Butt Close, Riverside Road, Sysonby, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire* (hereafter the WSI) the purpose of the work is to:

- To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.

- 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 establish the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscape and to advance understanding of the heritage assets.
- To recover artefacts and ecofacts to compare with other assemblages and results.
- To produce an archive and report of any results.

Within the stated project aims, the principal objective of the recording is to establish the nature, extent, date, depth, and significance of the heritage assets within their local and regional context.

Methodology

All work followed the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Code of Conduct* (2014a) and adhered to their *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (2014b).

Work adhered to the ULAS WSI throughout the watching brief. The area within the limit of the proposed new building was stripped by the client with a 360° excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The methodology involved a topsoil strip, then reduction of the north-west half of the plot and infill of the south-east area ('cut and fill'). Subsoil was also removed where present to expose the underlying natural.

Results

The area measured 22m (north-south) by 11m, and was adjacent to the fence line onto Riverside Road (Figure 6). Topsoil was initially stripped over the area with a depth of 0.25m – 0.3m. This was a dark loamy sandy clay. A dark grey stony clay subsoil was also removed to reveal the underlying natural, a stony orange clay. The subsoil was up to 0.15m deep. At a level of 0.35m down from current ground level a clear metallised surface was observed. The surface crossed the south-east area of the site area. The surface was not wholly visible in plan but was at least 2m wide, and ran in a north-east to south-west direction across this area (distance 9m; Figure 7-Figure 8). The surface was little more than one course, surviving perhaps up to 0.1m thick. The metallising consisted of rounded quartzite cobbles up to 0.1m across, set into the clay subsoil. Within the matrix two fragments of ceramic building material were recovered. These are high-fired and of modern manufacture, and were therefore not retained. The surface can be identified as the trackway shown on the 1884 Ordnance Survey map and still marked on the 1930 edition. From the mapping, this track ran from here south-westwards to the church of St. Mary. To the north-east the track crossed another track (now Riverside Road) then continued alongside the River Eye.

Several tree root holes were observed, rotted out relatively recently (Figure 9), these probably being part of the landscaping that is known to have been carried out in the mid-nineteenth century (Richards 2008, p.6-7). No archaeological features were observed cutting natural, and no other features or deposits were present within the area of the development area. Once natural was observed across the site area, the 'cut and fill' was not observed; this was due to involve the removal from the north-west half of the stripped

area of up to 0.5m of the natural clay, with that being reused to make the ground level up in the south-east area.

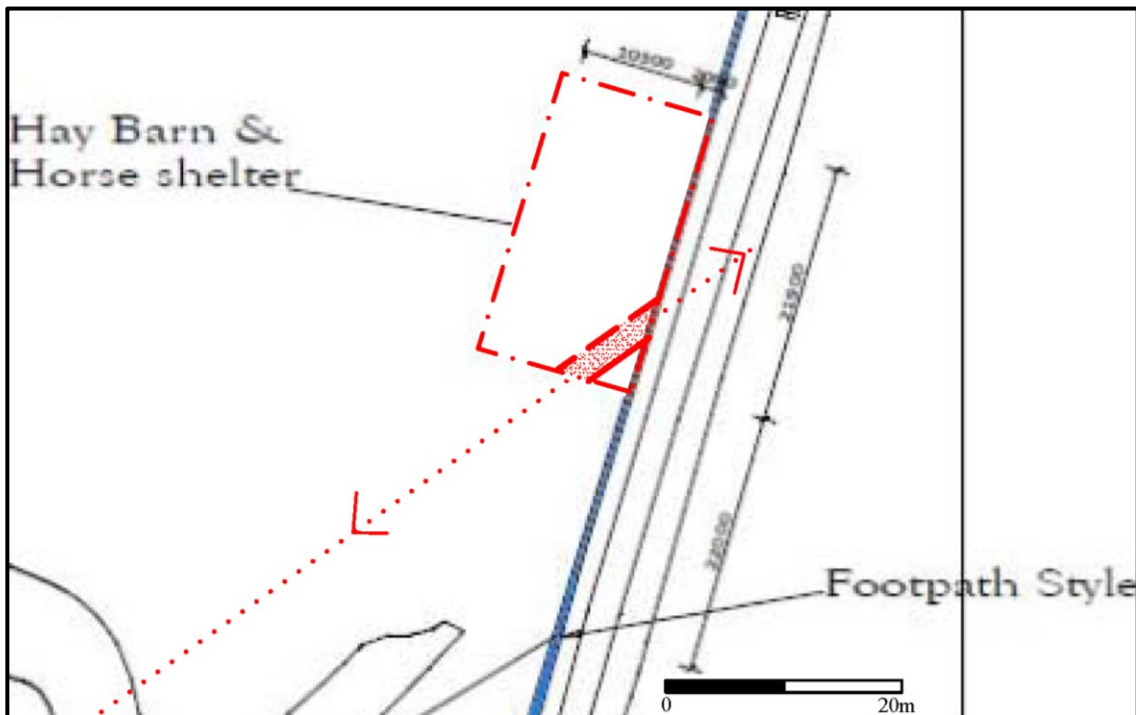


Figure 6: Site plan (detail) showing trackway.



Figure 7: Metalling observed in the south-east of the plot. The ranging rod (1m) indicates the direction of the track, and the church of St. Mary is in the background...



Figure 8: ...Metalling observed (detail).



Figure 9: Site strip, looking north-east. The metalling can be seen (right) and in the foreground one of the tree root holes (brown earth).

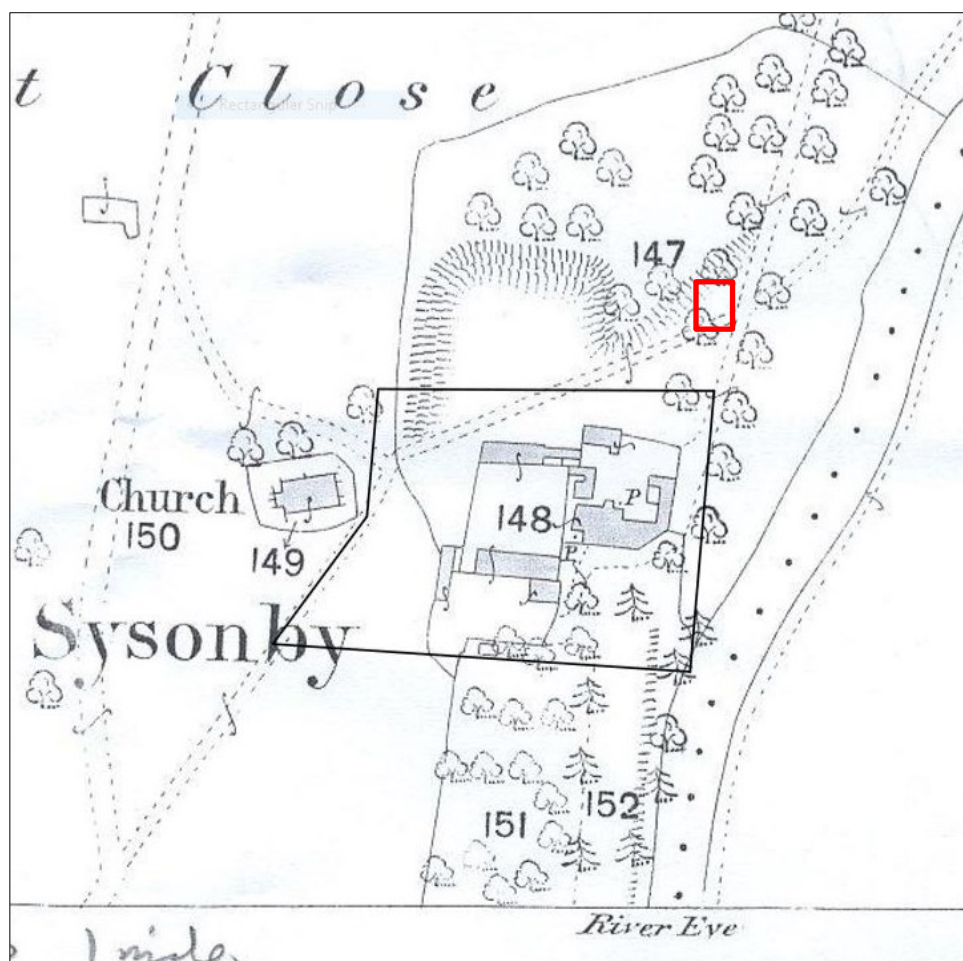


Figure 10: First edition Ordnance Survey map (1884), showing the trackway, the landscaping works and large earthworks in the site environs (after Richards 2008).

Discussion and Conclusion

The archaeological watching brief carried out at Butt Close, Riverside Road, Sysonby identified a historic trackway surviving below topsoil level. A trackway on this line is shown as early as the 1884 Ordnance Survey and survived as late as 1930 if not later, and ran between the church of St Mary and Riverside Road and beyond. Some modern material in the track make up confirms this date. Several tree root holes of historic date may relate to landscaping carried out during the 19th century. No other archaeological features or material were encountered during the watching brief.

Archive

The archive consists of:

This report,

1 ULAS pro-forma watching brief record sheet,

13 digital photographs (CD and Contact Prints)

Publication

A summary of the work will be submitted for publication in the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* in due course. A record of the project will also be submitted to the OASIS project. OASIS is an online index to archaeological grey literature.

Bibliography

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Appendix 1 OASIS Information

PROJECT DETAILS	Oasis No	universi1-301207		
	Project Name	Watching Brief at Butt Close, Riverside Road, Sysonby, Leicestershire		
	Start/end dates of field work	13/11/2017		
	Previous/Future Work	No		
	Project Type	Watching brief		
	Site Status	None		
	Current Land Use	Pasture		
	Monument Type/Period	None/none		
	Significant Finds/Period	None / None		
	Development Type	Stables		
	Reason for Investigation	NPPF		
	Position in the Planning Process	Planning condition		
	Planning Ref.	17/00718/FUL		
PROJECT LOCATION	Site Address/Postcode	Butt Close, Riverside Road, Sysonby, Melton Mowbray, LE13 0JF		
	Study Area	240m ²		
	Site Coordinates	SK 7397 1907		
	Height OD	75m OD		
PROJECT CREATORS	Organisation	ULAS		
	Project Brief Originator	District Planning Authority (Melton DC)		
	Project Design Originator	ULAS		
	Project Manager	M Beamish		
	Project Director/Supervisor	W Jarvis		
	Sponsor/Funding Body	Developer / Edren Homes Ltd		
PROJECT ARCHIVE		Physical	Digital	Paper
	Recipient	NA	LCCMusService	LCCMusService
	ID (Acc. No.)		X.A139.2017	X.A139.2017
	Contents		Photos	Records Field Notes
PROJECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	Type	Grey Literature (unpublished)		
	Title	An Archaeological Watching Brief At Butt Close, Riverside Road, Sysonby, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire		
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