

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
During Groundworks for
Stapleford Station,
Stapleford, Melton Mowbray,
Leicestershire
(SK 813 183)**

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**For: Evans and Crawley
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<p>Checked by Project Manager</p> <p>Signed:Date:</p> <p>Name:</p>
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An Archaeological Watching Brief During Groundworks For Stapleford Station, Stapleford, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire (NGR SK813 183)

Summary

A watching brief was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) during the excavation of foundation trenches for a new miniature railway station at Stapleford Park, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire (NGR SK813 183). Archaeological remains revealed during the work included stone building foundations, apparently demolished during the 17th or 18th century, medieval pits of the 14th century and late medieval/early post medieval features including a ditch and several pits. The remains are thought to relate to the deserted medieval village of Stapleford, given the close proximity of the site to the surviving earthwork remains. A range of finds was associated with the archaeological features including pottery, animal bone, glass and brick. The archive will be held by Leicestershire County Council Museums under the Accession number X.A186.2005 .

Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) during groundworks for a new railway station at Stapleford Park miniature railway, Stapleford, near Melton Mowbray (NGR SK813 183 – Figure 1). The work involved archaeological observation during the excavation of footings for the new station building.

The new development consists of a small building (approximately 11.9m x 3.7m), located approximately 250m to the north of Stapleford Hall. The development site is situated within an area of high archaeological potential, on the southern edge of the visible earthwork remains of the former medieval village of Stapleford (Leicestershire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) Reference Number MLE3706 – Figure 2).

The work was undertaken on 19th of September 2005.

Topography and Geology

The present-day hamlet of Stapleford is situated approximately 8km to the west of Melton Mowbray, in the parish of Freeby. Stapleford Park lies on the western edge of the modern hamlet, to the south of the River Eye.

The site of the railway station development is located on the southern edge of parkland, in an area of medieval village earthworks, at a height of approximately 85m O.D. and centred on NGR SK813 183. The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of England and Wales, Sheet 142 for Melton Mowbray, indicates that the underlying geology of the site consists of sand and gravels.

Aims and Methods

The aim of the watching brief was to establish the presence or otherwise, of archaeological deposits within the development area, and the effect any development would have on such deposits.

The groundworks consisted of the excavation of footings for the new railway station building to the formation depth (approximately 1.2m below ground surface level).

The footings were excavated using a JCB mechanical excavator equipped with a 0.5m wide toothed ditching bucket. All excavation work was carried out under constant archaeological observation and followed the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*.

Results (Figure 3)

Natural sandy gravel was revealed in all areas of the foundation excavations. In the western half of the site the natural gravel was revealed approximately 0.40m beneath modern ground level. The depth of natural increased further to the east (to approximately 1m below ground level) suggesting that the area had been levelled out at some point.

A range of archaeological features was revealed during the excavation of the station wall footings, suggesting the area was the scene of reasonably high levels of activity in the past. The majority of the remains were revealed during the excavation of the southern wall footing (Plate 2).

At the eastern end of the southern footing a probable ditch was revealed (Context 1). The ditch was recorded in the foundation sections and was also seen to cut through the natural gravel of the trench base. The feature was oriented north-south and had a rounded butt-end at its northern limit. Fragments of 17th and early 18th century pottery were recovered from the fill of Context 1, providing a likely date for its infilling. In addition to the pottery, fragments of animal bone and wall plaster were found. To the west, a circular pit or ditch terminal was located (Context 2) which contained an iron fitting and Victorian bottle base. The upper levels of both this feature and the ditch had been obscured by a thick layer of orange gravelly clay (Context 9), presumably part of later landscaping of the area. No datable finds were recovered from this layer.

A thin spread of greyish brown silty clay was revealed to the west of pit/ditch 2. This layer (Context 4) was observed across the eastern half of the area and contained animal bone and pottery dating to the 17th century.

Further west, a possible wall footing comprised loosely packed cobbles and ironstone fragments in a greyish brown sandy silty clay bonding (Context 7). This was not observed on the northern side of the area. The possible wall footing had truncated a shallow, stone packed feature, possibly a pit (Context 3), which contained later 13th century pottery. The greyish brown fill of 3 was similar to that of a similarly shaped, but undated feature to the west (Context 10), which may have been contemporary.

At the western end of the area the corner of a substantial building was revealed in the base of the trench (Plates 3 and 4). The building was represented by mortared ironstone footings approximately 1.20m wide (Context 8). Above the surviving wall remnants, a robber trench (Context 6), was filled with a loose mix of stone, mortar and plaster fragments. A broken brick from within the robber trench indicated that stone from the former building had been removed during the 17th or 18th century. On the northern side of the area a circular pit (Context 5) contained pottery dating to the 15th or 16th centuries and had been truncated by the wall and robber trench.

Overlying all of the deposits described above was a thin layer of dark greyish brown silty clay, which in turn, was covered by a gravel surface layer.

Conclusion

As expected, given the close proximity of the development area to surviving medieval earthworks, archaeological remains were revealed during the excavations.

The earliest evidence for archaeological activity was represented by a possible pit dating to the later 13th century. This had a noticeably lighter coloured fill to much of the other archaeological features revealed. An undated feature with a similar fill may also be contemporary and may also represent a pit. To the north of these features a further pit indicated activity from the later 15th or 16th centuries.

The majority of the evidence indicated activity in the 17th and 18th centuries. A substantial building was represented on the western side of the area by mortared stone-wall footings forming a right-angled corner. Evidently the majority of this buildings superstructure had been removed during the 17th or 18th century as indicated by the dating evidence from the associated robber trench. It was also evident however that the surviving wall footings had truncated the 15th/16th century pit, therefore providing an indication that the building had been built in the later medieval or early post medieval period.

Less substantial wall footings and a ditch to the east of the building remains indicated further, possibly associated, activity. Quantities of wall plaster within the fill of the ditch may have been deposited during the demolition of the building. It was also noticeable that a similar alignment was adopted by the ditch and both wall footings suggesting that they respected a common boundary system or nearby road alignment.

It seems likely that the majority of the archaeological remains revealed relates to the former medieval village of Stapleford. The broad 17th/18th century date for the demolition/robbing of the stone building and the infilling of the ditch concurs with the suspected clearance date for the village to make way for parkland (Hartley 1987, 14, Hoskins 1957, 33).

Archive

The archive consists of site notes, sketch-plans, finds and digital photographs and will be held by Leicestershire County Council Museums under the Accession number X.A186.2005.

Acknowledgements

Thanks must be extended to Mr. Stuart Sharp and his team for their co-operation and interest during the work. The watching brief was undertaken by the author, The pottery and other finds were recorded by Debbie Sawday and the project was managed by Richard Buckley.

Bibliography

Hartley, R. R. 1987 *The Medieval Earthworks of North-East Leicestershire*. Leicestershire Museums, Art Galleries and Records Service Archaeological Reports Series.

Hoskins, W. G. 1957 *Leicestershire: An Illustrated Essay on the History of the Landscape*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

APPENDIX: The medieval and later pottery and miscellaneous finds from a watching brief at Stapleford Park, Leicestershire. D. Sawday

The pottery, six sherds, weighing forty six grams, was examined under a binocular microscope and catalogued with reference to the ULAS fabric series (Davies and Sawday 1999). One sherd, a green glazed Nottingham ware from context (3) was later thirteenth century in date. Another sherd, from context 5, in a Cistercian or Midland Blackware, dated from the later fifteenth century into the early post medieval period. The remaining post medieval earthenwares are not closely dated (Eagan 1992) but they and the brick may date from between the mid to later seventeenth to the early eighteenth century.

The presence of Nottingham is of note as the author has already recorded Nottingham wares found during previous archaeological work in the vicinity of the deserted medieval village of Stapleford. These finds may also relate to the village, which was destroyed in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries (Hartley 1987, 14).

Bibliography

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Eagan, G., 1992. 'Marks on butterpots' in D. Gaimster and M. Redknap (eds.) *Everyday and Exotic Pottery from Europe. Studies in honour of John Hurst*, 97-100. Oxford

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Site/Parish: Stapleford Park, Freeby, Leics. Accession No/ Doc Ref:2005/Stapleford 3.doc Material: pot & miscellaneous finds Site Type: on edge of dmV	Submitter: J. Thomas Identifier: D. Sawday Date of Id: 29.09.05 Method of Recovery: watching brief
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Context	Fabric/ware	Sherd nos.	Weight grams	Comments
POTTERY				
1 – ditch fill	EA1 – Earthenware 1	1	25	Jar or butter pot rim – mid to later 17 th (Eagan 1992).
1	EA7 - Slipware	2	15	White bodied, press moulded slipware dish with pie crust rim – early 18 th C., or possibly slightly later
3 – stony feature	NO3 – Green Glazed Nottingham ware	1	3	Later 13 th C.
4 – thin band	EA2 – Earthenware 2	1	2	Brown glazed, probably 17 th C. +
5 – pit 'B'	CW2/MB – Cistercian ware2/Midland Blackware	1	1	Later 15 th to mid 16 th C. +
CERAMIC BUILDING MATERIAL		Fragments		
6 – robber trench	EA - Earthenware	1		Brick – 60 x 110 mm (4 ¼ x 2 3/8”) 17 th – 18 th C. N. Finn pers. comm..
MISC.				
1	Animal Bone	4		
1	Wall plaster	3		
2 – butt end	Glass	1		Bottle glass base, Victorian
2	Iron	1		
4	Animal Bone	1		

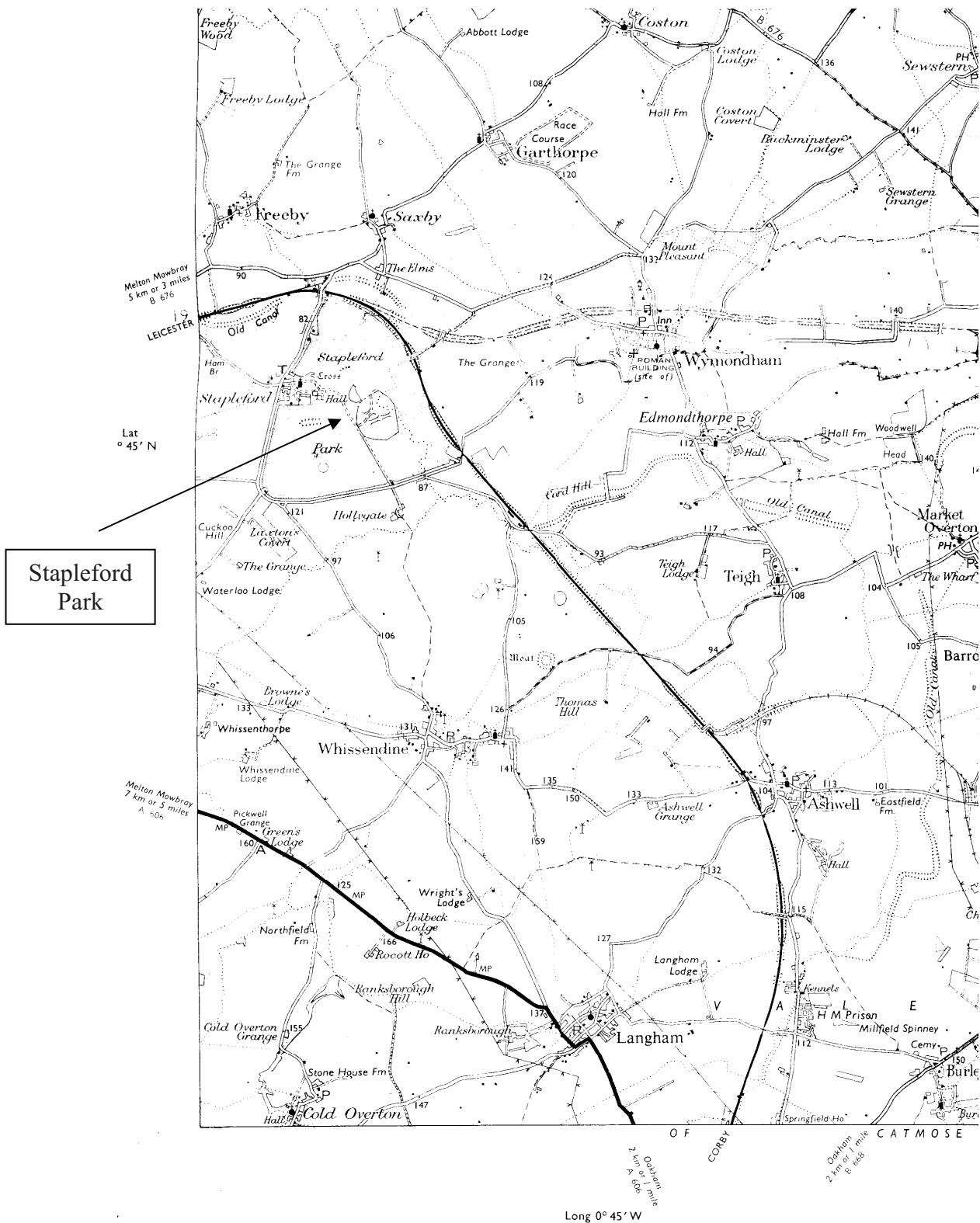


Figure 1: Location Map Scale 1:50000 © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved.
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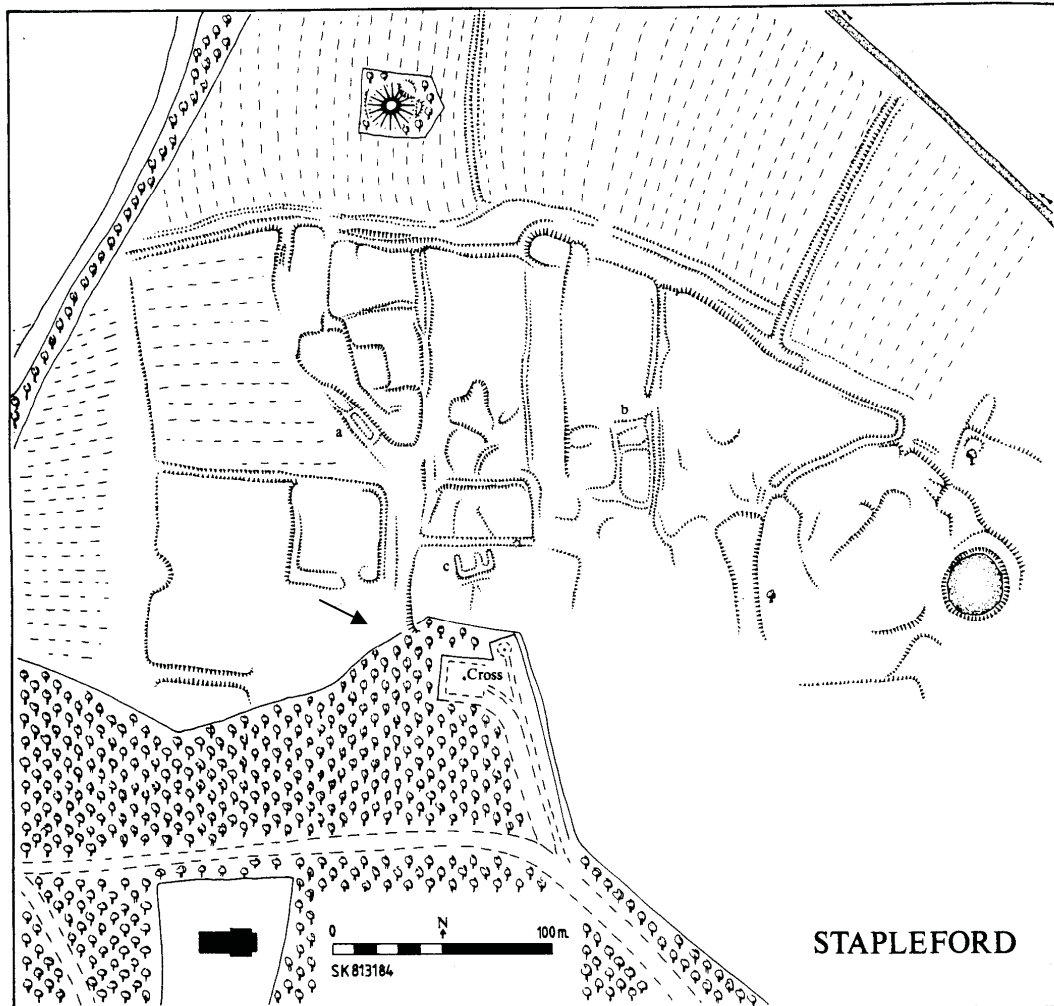


Figure 2 Approximate Location (arrowed) of the Development Area in Relation to Known Deserted Medieval Village Earthwork Remains (after Hartley, R. F. 1987 Fig.40)

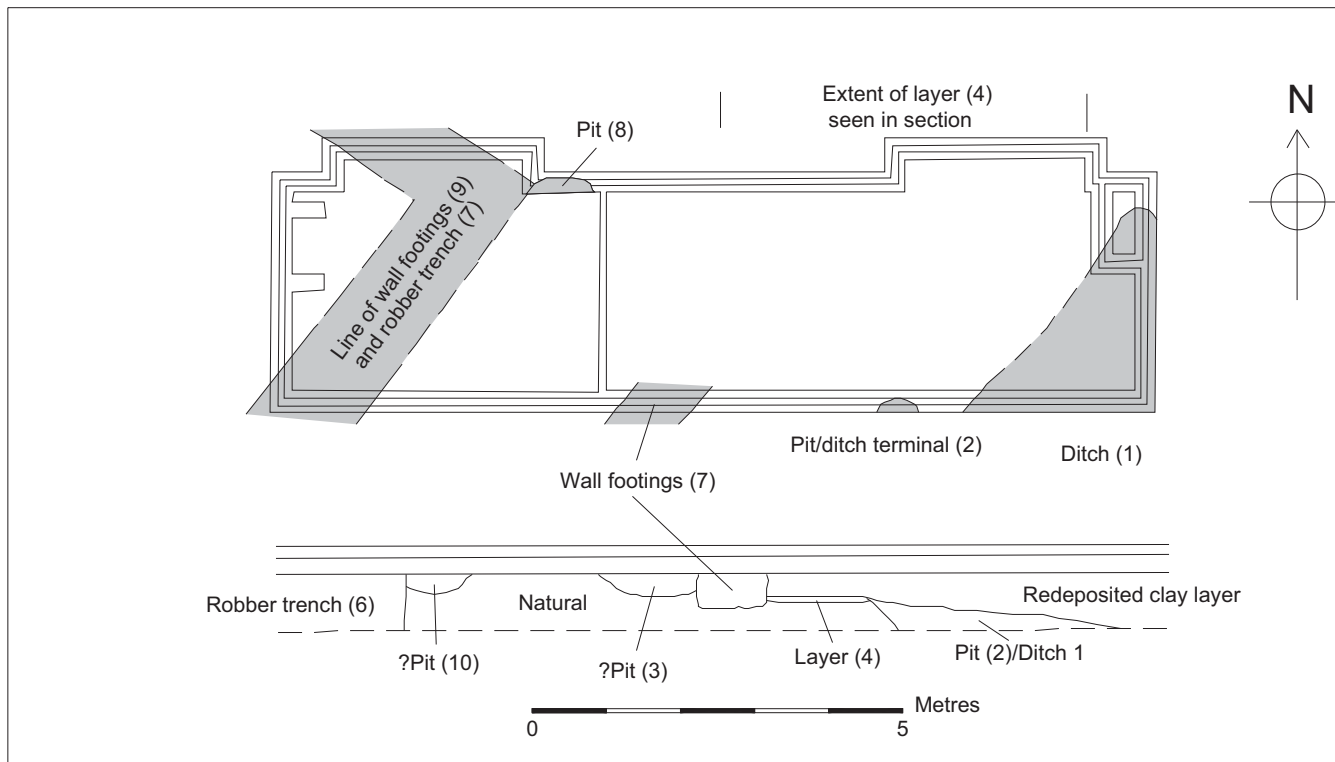


Figure 3 Plan and Section Drawing of the Development Area Showing Location of Archaeological Features



Plate 1 General view of the development area



Plate 2 Archaeological remains revealed in the southern part of the development area (showing as darker areas against the orange natural – 1m Scale)



Plate 3 Robber Trench (6) Revealed in Trench Section (1m Scale)



Plate 4 Wall Footings (9) Revealed in Northern Trench Base (1m Scale)