

Archaeological Excavation at land off Acresford Road, Donisthorpe, Leicestershire

NGR: SK 31133 13620

Author: Donald Clark



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For: Bellway Homes East Midlands

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Archaeological excavation at land off Acresford Road, Donisthorpe, Leicestershire

Donald Clark

Summary

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) carried out an Archaeological Excavation on an area of land off Acresford Road, Donisthorpe, Leicestershire (NGR: SK 31133 13620) prior to construction of a residential development. The archaeological fieldwork was intended to mitigate against any damage to potential archaeological remains. A geophysical survey (Cranford Forensic Institute for Pre Construct Archaeology 2014) and trial trenching (Pre Construct Archaeology 2014) had indicated the possibility of archaeological deposits and the Senior Planning Archaeologist required an open area excavation of the proposed site.

The excavation revealed the remains of two phases of Romano-British enclosures. The earliest phase, $1^{st}/2^{nd}$ century, comprised a network of gullies and the later phase, $3^{rd}/4^{th}$ century, comprised of a series of enclosures and a metalled trackway. An assemblage of stratified pottery plus a single fragment from a Roman rotary quern were recovered and environmental samples were taken.

A record of the archaeological excavation will be held by Leicestershire Museums Services under the Accession Number X.A125.2017.

Introduction

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) undertook an open area archaeological excavation in two phases between the 2nd November 2017 and the 7th March 2018. The fieldwork was carried out on behalf of Bellway Homes and followed a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI; Thomas 2017) which had been produced by ULAS and addressed the requirements of the County Planning Archaeologist as advisor to North West Leicestershire District Council. The WSI provided details of the aims, objectives and methodologies to be adopted during the course of the work. The definition of an Archaeological Excavation taken from the *Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Standards and Guidance: for archaeological excavations* (2014) is controlled, intrusive fieldwork with defined research objectives which examines, records and interprets archaeological deposits, features and structures and, as appropriate, retrieves artefacts, ecofacts and other remains within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater. The records made and objects gathered during fieldwork are studied and the results of that study published in detail appropriate to the project design by the Planning Authority in accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Section 12: Enhancing and Conserving the Historic Environment).

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Code of Conduct* (2014) and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation* (2014).

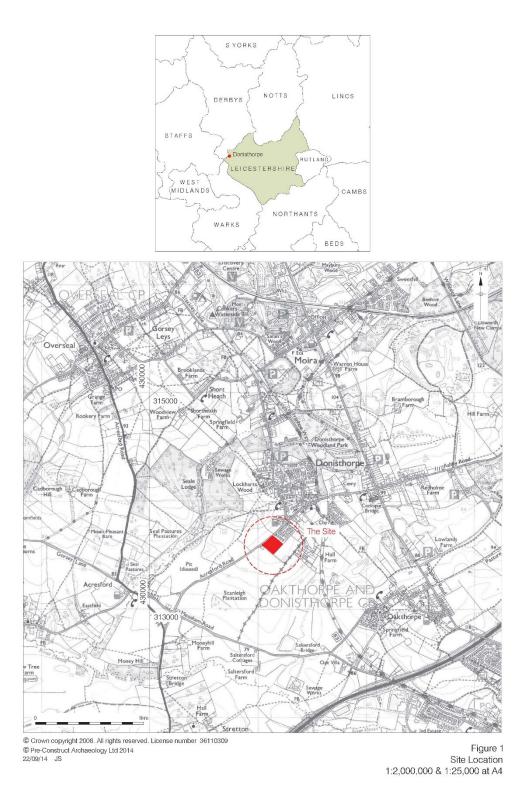


Figure 1: Location of site within Leicestershire

Site location and Geology

Donisthorpe is a small village in North West Leicestershire, located approximately 5 km southwest of Ashby de la Zouch and 11 km west of Coalville. The proposed development site lies

on pasture land at the south west tip of the village, to the south east of Acresford Road, SK 31133 13620 (Fig 1).

The development site is generally flat, with a gentle north west to south east slope. It is bound to the north east by properties fronting onto Talbot Place, to the south east by another field and to the south west by a track leading south east from Acresford Road. The ground level at the centre of the site is recorded at c.107.50m aOD.

The British Geological Survey of Great Britain characterised the sites solid geology as belonging to the Moira Formation – Breccia; sedimentary bedrock formed during the Triassic and Permian periods. The natural geological horizon identified during the site evaluation consisted of mixed sand, gravely sand and clay.

Archaeological and Historical Background

A desk-based assessment has been undertaken which documents the known records for archaeological and historical activity upon the site (Taylor 2014). The assessment identified a number of undated, but possibly prehistoric, earthworks to the south east of the site. The placename Donisthorpe is of Saxon origin and the description of the settlement in the Domesday Survey of 1086 suggests that a settlement existed by the late Saxon period, although no finds or records of activity from this date were recorded in the DBA. Donisthorpe is mentioned twice in the Domesday Survey and the village is mentioned in documentary sources dating to the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries. Map evidence shows that the development site is located to the south-west of the main area of settlement. As a consequence it was concluded that whilst potential evidence for settlement may be low, remains of agricultural activity associated with the village may be high.

A geophysical survey of the development area identified two possible rectangular enclosures with a trackway running between them (Masters 2014). Anomalies possibly relating to two ring ditches were detected within the north-western enclosure, although it was thought possible that they could also reflect variations in the underlying geology. A series of isolated individual anomalies was also detected, including a possible pit within the south-eastern enclosure. The survey also highlighted the presence of ridge and furrow across the majority of the site. The field adjoining to the east has also been subject to a geophysical survey (Allen Archaeology 2016) and this shows that the area concentrated upon within this document is part of a larger network of enclosures (Fig.4).

A subsequent trial trench evaluation helped confirm the survey results, identifying a series of enclosure ditches of Romano-British date, with associated discrete features indicative of settlement activity. Pottery and environmental evidence was associated with these features. In addition, the northern end of the site contained a series of post-medieval pits and ditches, associated with 17th-18th century pottery, close to the boundary with Acresford Road.

The geophysical survey and consequent evaluation of the development area and the eastern adjacent field (Fig. 4) reveal evidence of a large scale coaxial field system centred on a large open area. Two trackways can be identified, one approx. east to west uncovered and examined during excavation, the other orientated approx. north to south is visible in the adjacent field (Fig. 4).

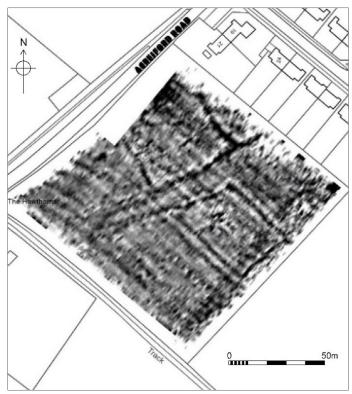


Figure 2: Geophysical survey of the development area

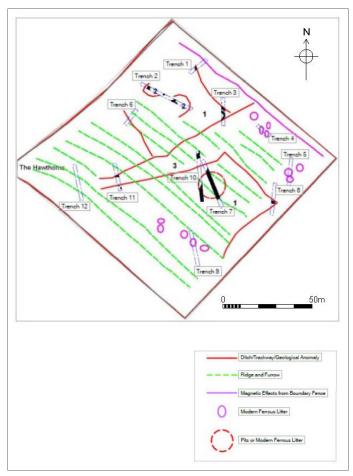


Figure 3: Position of evaluation trenches across development area and interpretation of geophysical survey

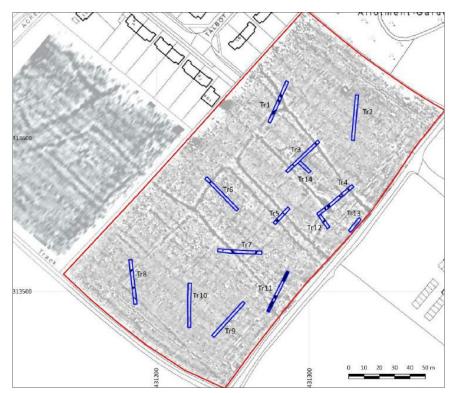


Figure 4: Geophysical survey of adjacent field with position of evaluation trenches. Current development area to the left of image.

Open area excavation

Methodology

All work followed the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Code of Conduct* (2014) and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavations* (2014).

Archaeological supervision of topsoil and subsoil stripping was carried out across the proposed development area with the overburden being removed by mechanical excavators fitted with flat-bladed ditching buckets. The stripping continued until the archaeological level or undisturbed natural level were reached. The archaeological deposits were hand cleaned, planned using GPS and tied to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Archaeological features were sample excavated by hand to establish the stratigraphic and chronological sequence and to recover artefactual and environmental evidence. The survey plan was supplemented as necessary with hand drawn plans and sections of excavated features, typically at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20. Digital photographs of each section and of the site in general were taken and a paper record was produced. All excavation and recording was undertaken in accordance with ULAS procedures. A sampling strategy and methodology was advised by ULAS's Environmental Specialist.

Results

The dark greyish-brown topsoil and mid-brown silty sand subsoil were removed in level spits across the sites to expose the natural substrata and archaeological features. The area had been heavily ploughed over the centuries with evidence of ridge and furrow revealed by the geophysics visible in section in the baulk at the edge of the excavation. The ploughing meant

that during the stripping the ground level was reduced by between 0.40m and 1.05m across the site, which is consistent with the evaluation. The natural substrata was a mix of reddish-brown compacted sand with black flecks, pinkish-red clay and bands of soft yellow sand.

Following the stripping, the initial results indicated that, as with the evaluation, the geophysical survey had identified most of the archaeological features with more discrete features observed during the strip.

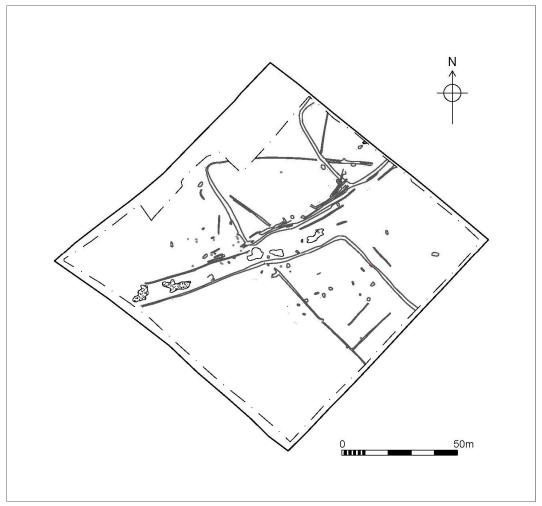


Figure 5: Plan of archaeological features across the development area following stripping

The excavated area (Fig. 5) revealed a series of ditches, gullies and pits. Gullies in the north of the site are aligned differently to the majority of the features and these are believed to date from the 1st/2nd century. The majority of the linear features form enclosures and a trackway which runs into a large open area in the east of the area. The site plan has been divided into smaller areas below to allow more detailed examination of the site.

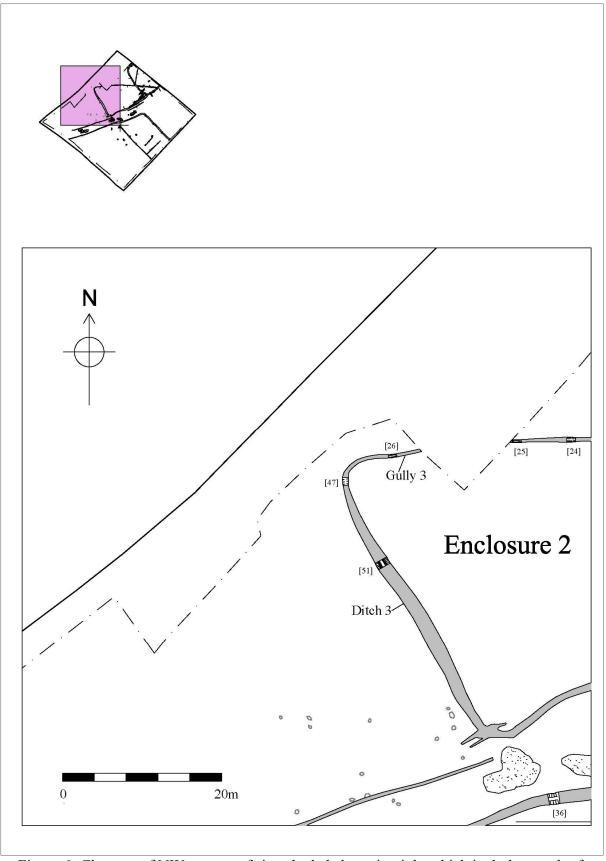


Figure 6: Close up of NW quarter of site, shaded above in pink, which includes much of Enclosure 2

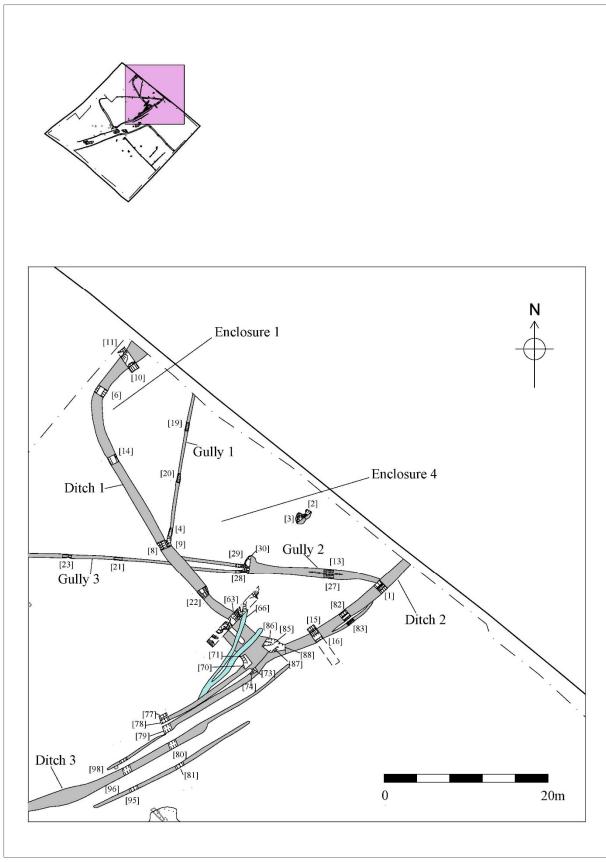


Figure 7: Close up of NE quarter of site, shaded above in pink, which includes Enclosures 1 and 4

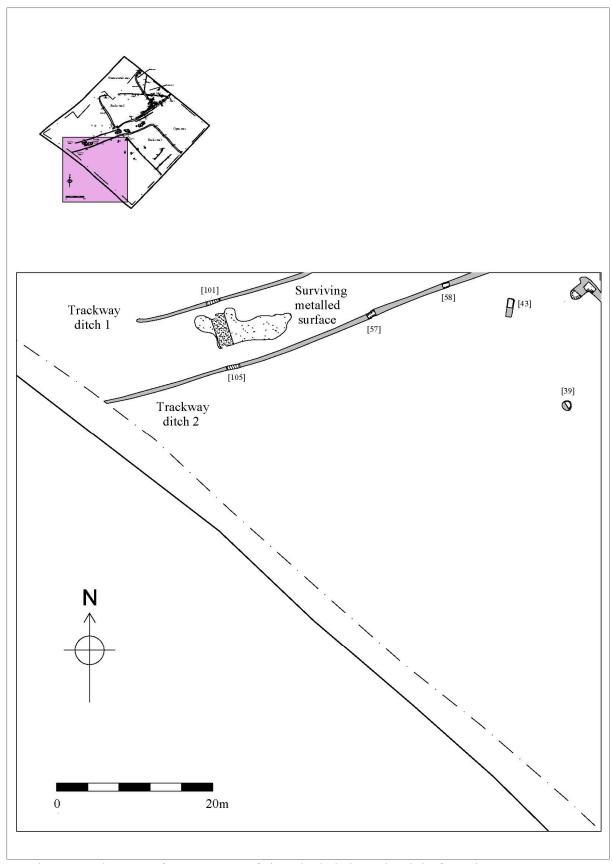


Figure 8: Close up of SW quarter of site, shaded above in pink, featuring western most section of trackway

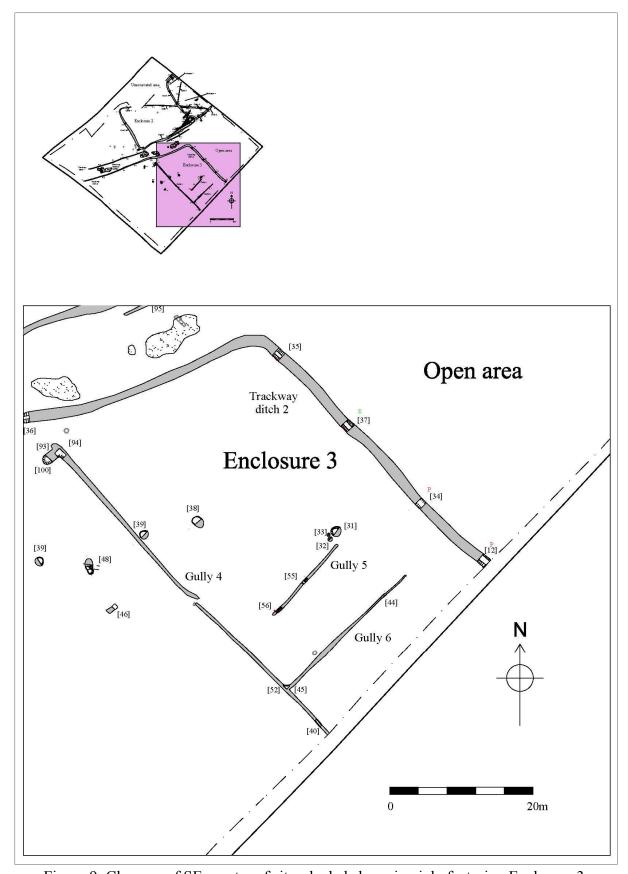


Figure 9: Close up of SE quarter of site, shaded above in pink, featuring Enclosure 3

Phase 1 (Romano-British 1st/2nd Century)

Towards the northern extent of the site three linear features were clearly arranged on different alignment to the other linear features on the site. Surviving as shallow and narrow gullies they formed the earliest phase of a coaxial field system. (Fig. 10)

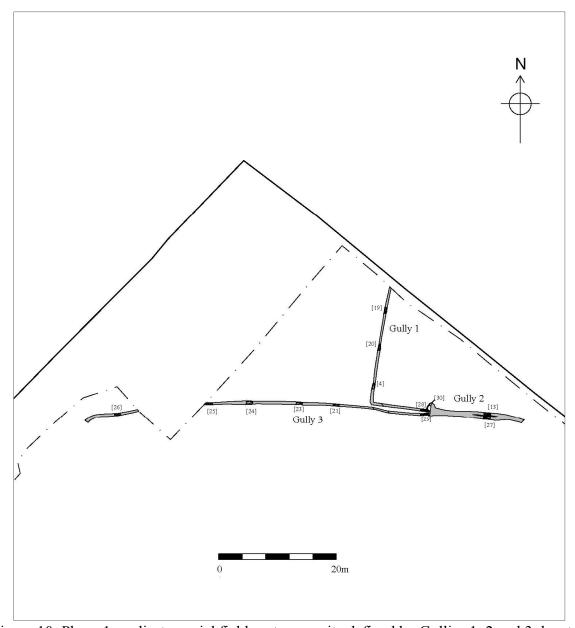


Figure 10: Phase 1, earliest coaxial field system on site defined by Gullies 1, 2 and 3, located at the N of the site

Gully 1 ran for approx. 19.35m from the NE edge of excavation directly S where it met Gully 2 at right angles, although the point where the two gullies met had been truncated by the later phase Ditch 1. The surviving depth of Gully 1 ranged between 0.20m and 0.34m and the width ranged between 0.40m and 0.47m. Sections [4], [19] and [20] (Fig. 9) were hand excavated but no dating evidence was recovered. The corresponding fills of each cut, (506), (518) and (519), comprised of a mid-reddish brown silty sand with occasional small and medium angular stone inclusions. The fills were in whole formed by natural events, including silting and collapse, and were sterile.

Gully 2 ran E-W and measured 25.5m in length. It was truncated at its most easterly point by the later phase Ditch 2 and at its most westerly point by Ditch 1. The surviving depth of Gully 2 ranged between 0.14m and 0.30m and the width ranged between 0.30m and 0.51m. Sections [13] and [28] (Fig. 13) were hand excavated but no dating evidence was recovered. The corresponding fills of each cut, (513) and (527), comprised of a mid-reddish brown silty sand with occasional small and medium angular stone inclusions. The fills were in whole formed by natural events, including silting and collapse, and were sterile.

Gully 3 ran for approx. 74m E-W parallel with Gully 2, but whereas Gully 2 joins Gully 1 to create an enclosure, Gully 3 continues west where it is truncated by Ditch 3. The surviving depth of Gully 3 ranged between 0.12m and 0.25m and the width ranged between 0.34m and 0.65m. Gully 3 sections [21], [23], [24], [25], [26] (Fig. 16) and [27] and [28] (Fig. 13) were hand excavated but no dating evidence was recovered. The corresponding fills of each cut, (520), (521), (522), (523), (524), (525), (526) and (527), comprised of a mid-reddish brown silty sand with occasional small angular stone inclusions. The fills in whole were formed by natural events, including silting and collapse, and were sterile.

The similarity in form and orientation of Gullies 1, 2 and 3 suggest they were contemporary and evidence of truncation suggests they are earlier than Ditches 1 and 2, but cannot be securely dated due to lack of artefacts. It is also possible that they formed Enclosure 4, but this cannot be proved in such a small area. The natural ground in the area comprised of a compacted sand which softened when wet, and it would seem likely that without proper management any feature would silt up. It is probable therefore that Phase 1 went out of use, possibly deliberately, prior to a re-organisation of the landscape and a change in orientation of the later enclosures.

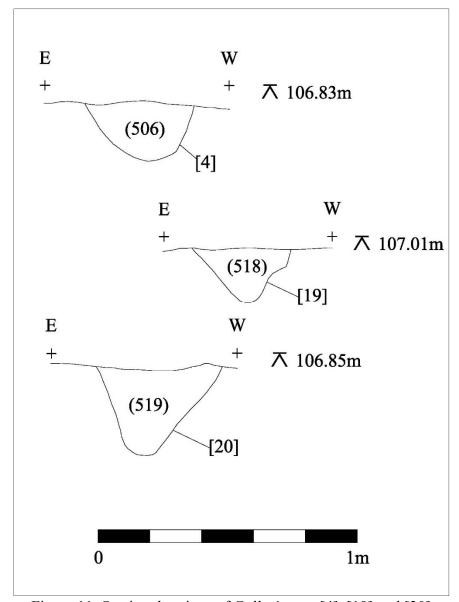


Figure 11: Section drawings of Gully 1, cuts [4], [19] and [20]

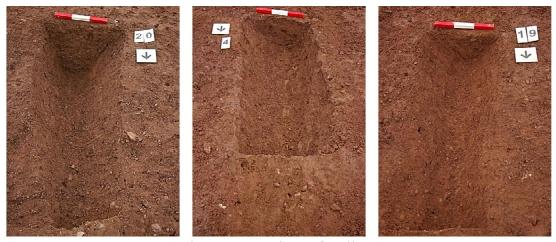


Figure 12: Sections of Gully 1

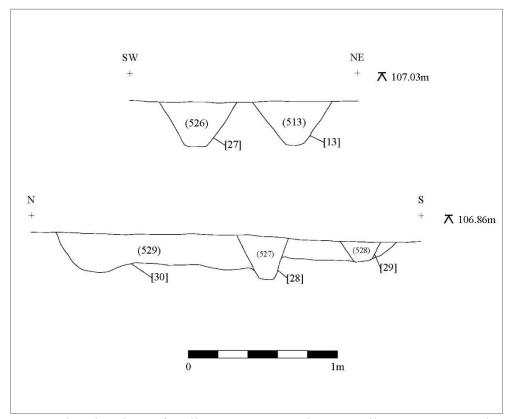


Figure 13: Section drawings of Gully 2, cuts [13] and [28], Gully 3, cuts [27] and [29] and pit/tree bowl, cut [30]



Figure 14: Section of Gully 2, cut [13] and Gully 3, cut 27 looking W

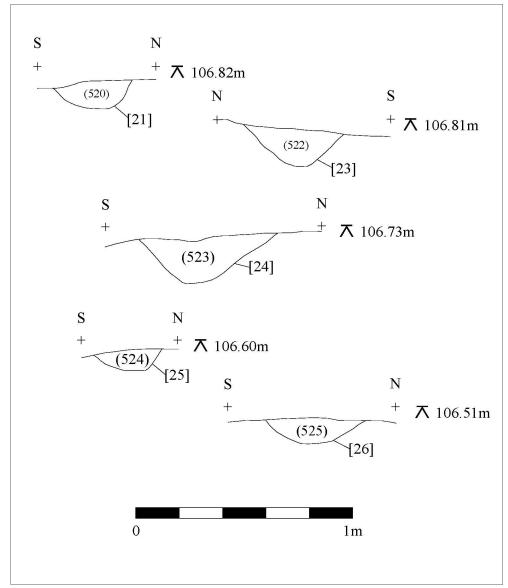


Figure 15: Section drawings of Gully 3, cuts [21], [23], [24], [25] and [26]

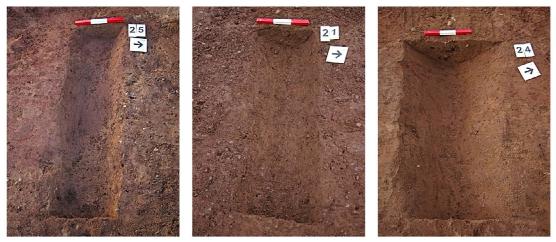


Figure 16: Sections of Gully 3

Phase 2 (Romano-British 3rd/4th Century)

The development area, once stripped, proved consistent with the geophysics and the survival of the features and how they relate are detailed below.

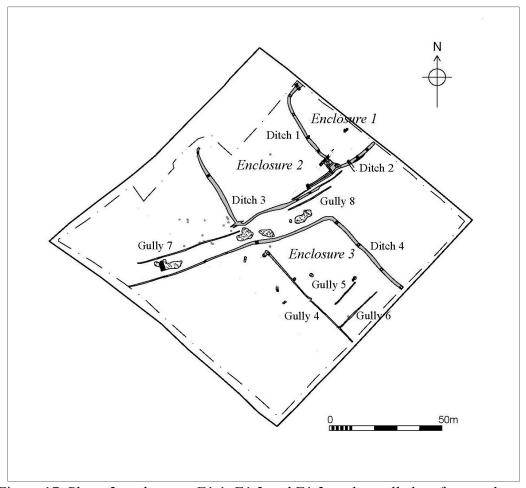


Figure 17: Phase 2 enclosures, E1.1, E1.2 and E1.3, and metalled surface trackway

The ditches and gullies

Ditch 1 ran south-west for approx. 9m from the north-east edge of excavation before curving to the south-east for a further 37m before joining Ditch 2 in an area, best described as a junction, where a series of truncating gullies and recuts of the ditch converge. The surviving depth of Ditch 1 ranged between 0.40m and 0.64m and the width ranged between 0.98m and 1.25m. Sections [6], [8], [10], [14], [22] (Fig. 7), [63] and [86] were hand excavated and included pottery. The pottery comprised of a rim sherd from a mid-3rd century/4th century bowl in cut [10] and a base sherd from a 3rd century+ jar and rim sherd from a late 3rd/4th century bowl in cut [22]. The corresponding fills of each cut, fills (508), (515), (510), (517), (521), (580) and (603), comprised of a mid-reddish brown silty sand with occasional small and medium angular stone inclusions. The fills were in whole formed by natural events, including silting and collapse, and were sterile. Adjacent to cut [63] a possible pit was seen in section, it was badly truncated and could not readily be identified in plan. The fill (564) consisted of a mid-yellow brown silty sand and included a fragment from a rotary quern.

Ditch 2 ran south-west for approx. 20m from the north-east edge of the excavation before joining Ditch 1 at the junction. The surviving depth of Ditch 2 ranged between 0.62m and 0.78m and the width ranged between 1.10m and 1.40m. Sections [1], [82], [88] (Fig. 8) and [15] were hand excavated and included pottery. The pottery comprised of a rim sherd from a late 3rd/4th century mortarium, a base sherd from a 2nd century+ jar and a body sherd from a 2nd century+ jar or bowl. The corresponding fills of each cut, (500), (606), (578) and (605), comprised of a mid-reddish brown silty sand with occasional small and medium angular stone inclusions. The fills were in whole formed by natural events, including silting and collapse, and were sterile.

The natural ground in the area consisted of a compacted sand which softened when wet, and it would seem likely that without proper management the ditch would have silted up relatively quickly.

Ditches 1 and 2 may in fact be the same continuous curvilinear feature but disturbance in the junction area disguised this, it is also likely they formed Enclosure 1, with an area of approximately 605 square metres revealed by the excavation. The full extent of this enclosure is lost beneath the houses and gardens of Talbot Place.

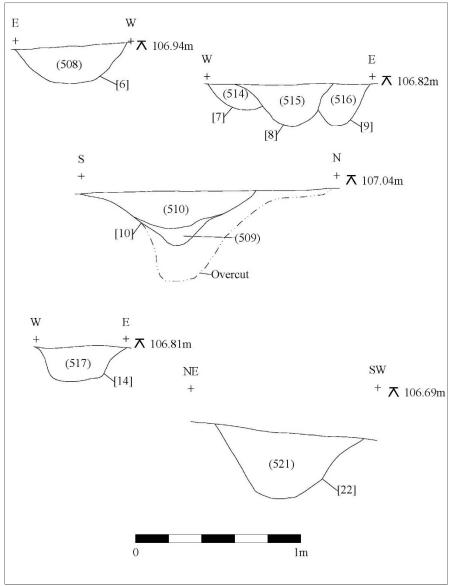


Figure 18: Section drawings of Ditch 1, cuts [6], [8], [10], [14] and [22]. Cut [7] possible earlier phase of ditch, cut [9] possibly Gully 1



Figure 19: Sections of Ditch 1

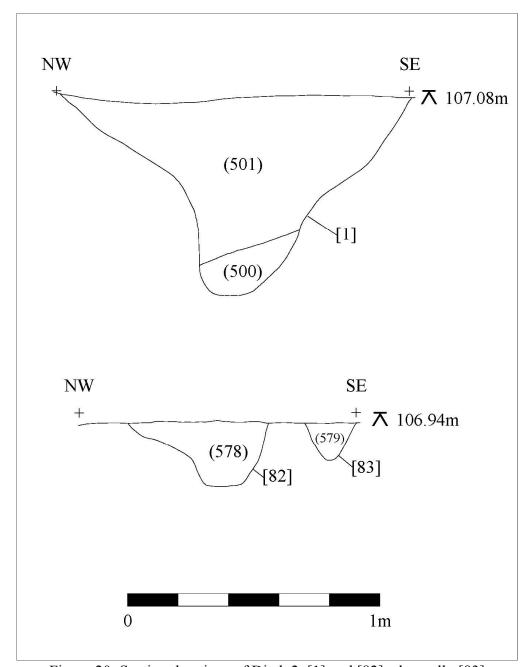


Figure 20: Section drawings of Ditch 2, [1] and [82], also gully [83]



Figure 21: Section of Ditch 2, cut [1], looking north-east

Ditch 3 ran south-west for approx. 52m from its intersection with Ditch 2, before curving to the north-west for a further 38m. The surviving depth of Ditch 3 ranged between 0.18m and 0.45m and the width ranged between 0.78m and 1.72m. Sections [47], [51], [80], and [96] were hand excavated but no dating evidence was recovered. The corresponding fills of each cut, (546), (547), (569) and (595), comprised of a mid-reddish brown silty sand with occasional small and medium angular stone inclusions. The fills were in whole formed by natural events, including silting and collapse, and were sterile.

Ditch 3 along with Ditch 1 seemed to form Enclosure 2, with an area of 1532 square metres surviving within the development area.

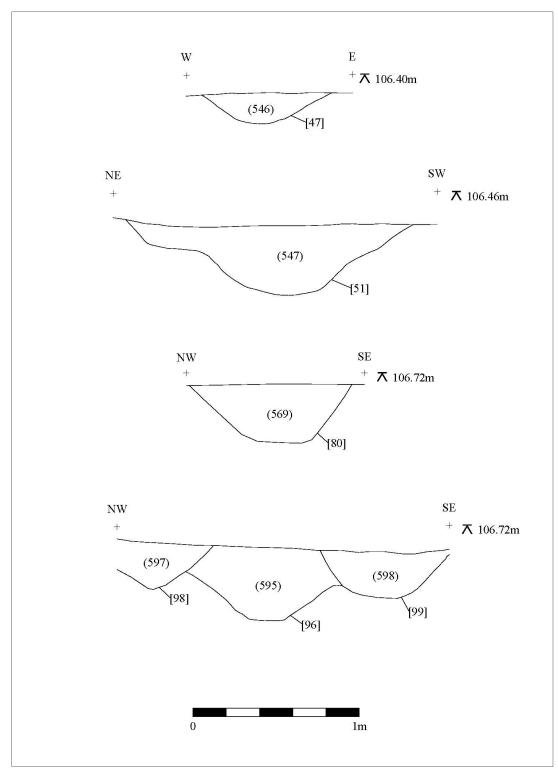


Figure 22: Section drawings of Ditch 3, cuts [47], [51], [80] and [96]



Figure 23: Sections of Ditch 3

Ditch 4 was a 140m long continuous feature which ran approx. 95m from the south-west edge of the excavation eastwards before turning south-east for a further approx. 45m into the south-east edge of the excavation. The surviving depth of Ditch 4 ranged between 0.14m and 0.70m and the width ranged between 0.50m and 1.56m. The 95m section of ditch formed the southern extent of a metalled trackway, while the 45m section formed the south-west boundary of a large open area, of which approx. 2017 square metres was revealed during excavation.

Sections [12], [34], [35], [36], [37], [58] (Fig. 39) and [105], were hand excavated and included pottery. The pottery comprised of two base sherds from a 2nd century + jar in cut [12], seven rim and body sherds from 2nd/3rd century jars and a rim sherd from a late 3rd/4th century mortarium in [34] and two body sherds from a 2nd century+ jar or bowl in cut [36].

The corresponding fills of each cut, (512), (533), (539), (540), (533), (557) and (558), comprised of a reddish-brown silty sand with occasional small stone inclusions. The fills were mainly sterile and formed by silting and collapse, apart from fill (533) which comprised a light greyish-brown silty sand containing organic material, of which environmental samples were taken for analysis. The evaluation had highlighted organic material within this area of the ditch and the sample taken during the excavation process added to the information. The sample contained a high density of charred plant remains. Spelt wheat glume bases and barley rachis internodes were the dominant plant remains identified. Rachis is generally removed during the earlier stages of crop processing for consumption (e.g. threshing) whilst glume bases and wild seeds are normally removed during the later stages of processing (e.g. fine sieving). The sample therefore, represented a mixed deposit of early and late processing waste along with food spillage that was deposited in the ditch. (Santer 2018).

Ditch 4 survived poorly in the west of the development area but gradually became more robust as it is followed east, it can then be identified by geophysics and evaluation continuing further

east within the adjacent field. It is likely that Ditch 4 and Gully 4 formed an enclosure, E1.3, with an area of 1540 square metres surviving within development area. Gullies 5 and 6 seemed to be forming sub-enclosures.

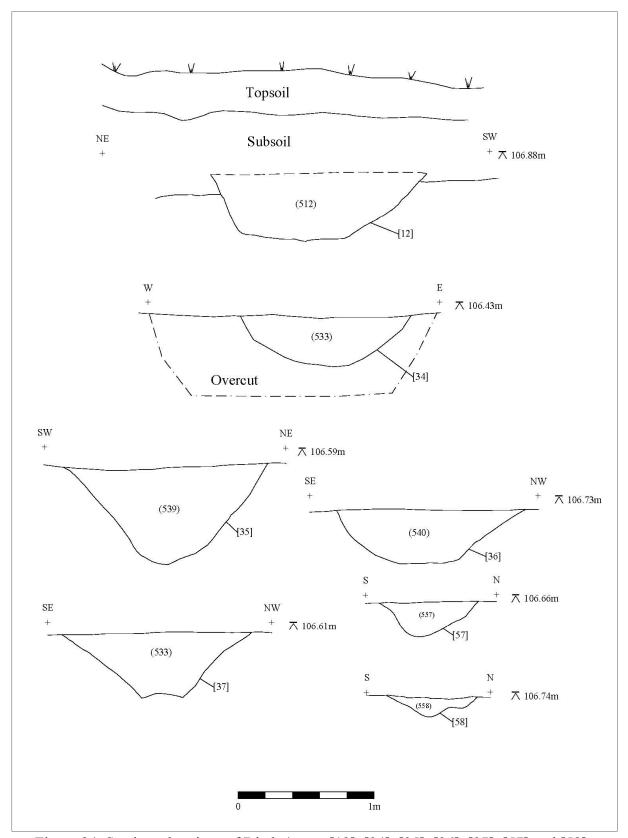


Figure 24: Sections drawings of Ditch 4, cuts [12], [34], [35], [36], [37], [57] and [58]



Figure 25: Sections of Ditch 4

Gully 4 ran 56m from the south-east edge of excavation heading north-west where it terminated to form an entrance into an enclosure or sub-divided field. The surviving depth of Gully 4 ranged between 0.14m and 0.50m and the width ranged between 0.43m and 1.40m. The gully was hand excavated at cut [40] close to its south-east extreme, cut [100] at the terminus and at [52] where the gully was intersected by Gully 6 [45] and also at [93] and [94] close to the terminus. The corresponding fills of each cut, (534), (599), (545), (589) and (590), comprised of a reddish brown silty sand with occasional small angular stone inclusions. The fills as a whole were sterile and formed by silting and collapse.

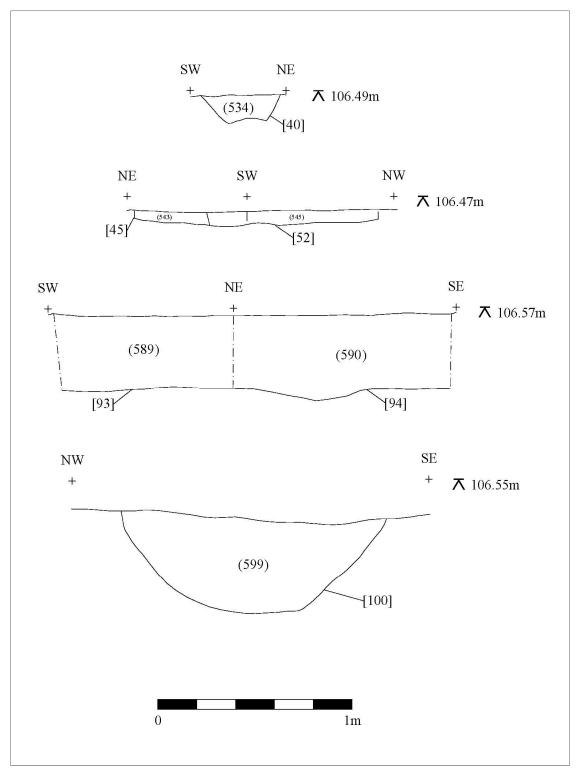


Figure 26: Section drawings of Gully 4, cuts [40], [52] where it intersects Gully 6 at cut [45], [93], [94] and terminus [100]

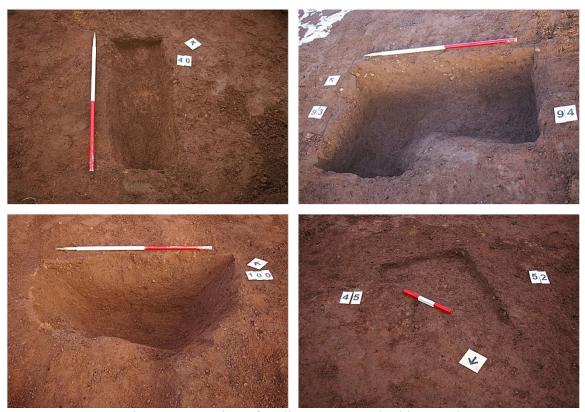


Figure 27: Section of Gully 4, cut [40], looking north

Gully 5 was orientated north-east to south-west running for approx. 13.5m and was situated within the area created by Ditch 4 and Gully 4. The surviving depth of Gully 5 ranged between 0.06m and 0.09m and the width ranged between 0.44m and 0.45m. The gully possibly formed part of further sub-division within this area. It was perpendicular to Gully 4 and parallel with Gully 6, which is located 11m to the south-east. Sections [55] and [56] were hand excavated (Fig. 53) but no dating evidence was recovered. The corresponding fills of each cut, (555) and (556), comprised of a reddish brown silty sand with occasional small stone inclusions. The fills were in whole formed by natural events, including silting and collapse, and were sterile.

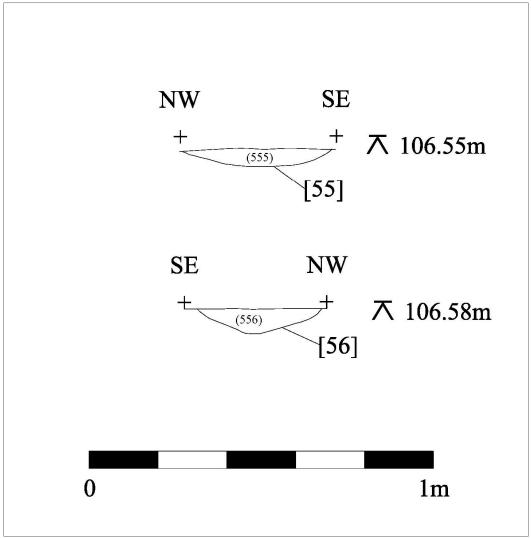


Figure 28: Section drawings of Gully 5, cuts [55] and [56]

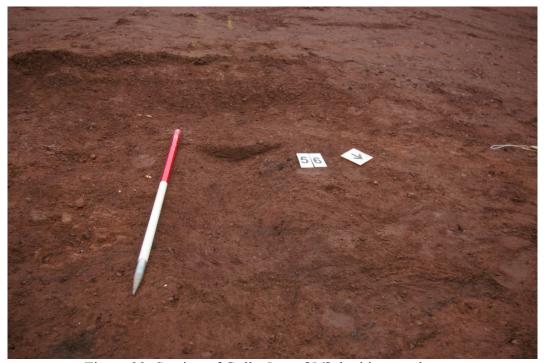


Figure 29: Section of Gully 5, cut [56], looking south-west

Gully 6 was orientated north-east to south-west running for approx. 23m and was situated within the area created by Ditch 4 and Gully 4, possibly forming part of sub-division. The surviving depth of Gully 6 ranged between 0.07m and 0.10m and the width ranged between 0.40m and 0.45m. It was right angled to Gully 4 and parallel with Gully 5, which was located 11m to the north-east. Sections [44] and [45] (Fig. 56) were hand excavated but no dating evidence was recovered. The corresponding fills of each cut, (542) and (543), comprised of a reddish brown silty sand with occasional small stone inclusions. The fills were in whole formed by natural events, including silting and collapse, and were sterile.

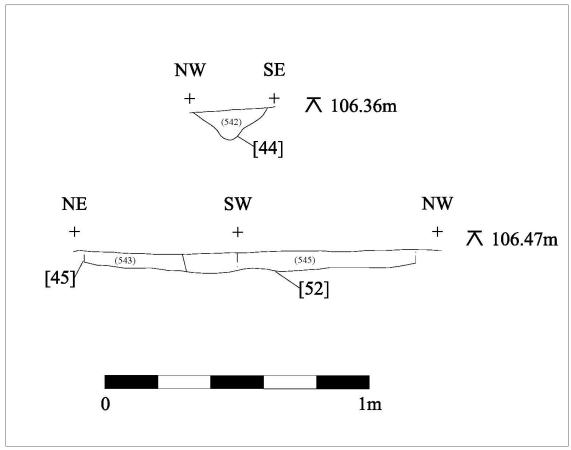


Figure 30: Section drawings of Gully 6, cut [44] and cut [45] At intersection with Gully 4 cut [52]

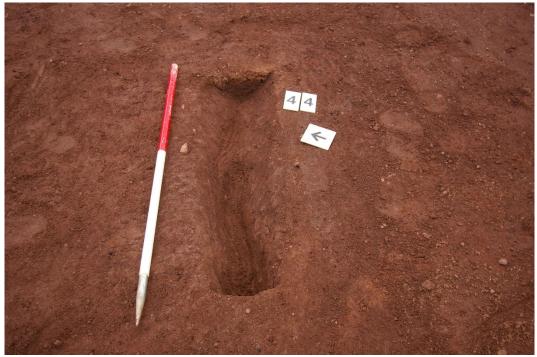


Figure 31: Section of Gully 6, cut [44], looking NE

Gully 7 was orientated approximately east-west and ran parallel with the western portion of Ditch 4 for approx. 47.50m. The surviving depth of the gully was 0.15m and the width was 0.45m. Section [101] was hand excavated as part of the investigation of the trackway (see below) but no dating evidence was recovered. The corresponding fill (542) comprised of a reddish brown silty sand with occasional small stone inclusions. The fill was in whole formed by natural events, including silting and collapse, and was sterile.



Figure 32: Section of Gully 7, cut [101] looking east

Gully 8 was orientated approximately east-west and ran parallel with the eastern portion of Ditch 3 for approx. 21.60m. The surviving depth of the gully was 0.15m and the width was 0.46m. A section was hand excavated but not fully recorded due to weather conditions.

Metalled surface

Running approximately E-W across the site and surviving in patches was a compact metalled surface (102), (103), (104) and (106). The surviving patches measured 102 square metres in total with the largest surviving patch 35 square metres. The surface consisted of tightly packed

medium and small rounded pebbles and was bordered either side by a ditch or gully to create a metalled trackway (Fig.60). The surface survived best on what would have been the ridges of the medieval field system and was lost in the furrows, but enough survived to give a good representation of the nature of the trackway surface.

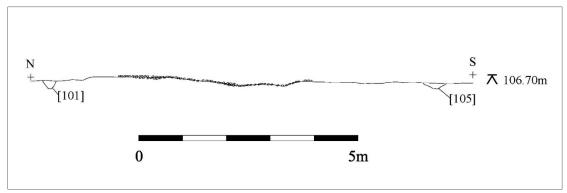


Figure 33: Profile of trackway bordered by Gully 7 cut [101] and Ditch 4 cut [105]

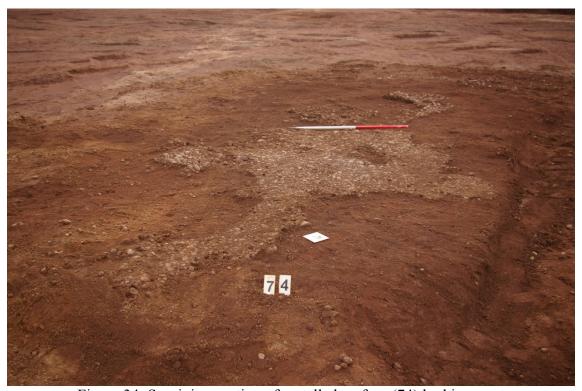


Figure 34: Surviving portion of metalled surface (74) looking west



Figure 35: Metalled surface (102) looking north-east

The pits

Several pits were located around the site, unfortunately most of them have provided no dating evidence but pit [2] situated at the northern end of the site provided pottery from the $2^{nd}/3^{rd}$ century.

Pit [2] situated at the northern end of the development area was sub-circular in plan with a width of 1.30m and depth of 0.40m. Two fills were identified, the primary fill (502), comprised of a red-brown sand with small stone inclusions and the secondary fill (503) a similar red-brown silty sand. Pottery in the form of base sherds from a 2nd century+ jar, a body sherd from a 3rd century+ jar and a base sherd from a 3rd century+ jar were recovered from primary fill (502).

Pit [3] was situated adjacent to pit [2] and to the north-east, it was sub-circular in plan with a width of 1.30m and depth of 0.40m. Two fills were identified, the primary fill (504), a redbrown sand with small stone inclusions, and (505) a similar red-brown silty sand.

Pits [31], [32] and [33] were grouped closely together at the north end of Gully 5

Pit [31] was the largest, sub-circular in plan with irregular vertical sides and a flat base, diameter of 1.52m and depth of 0.80m. The fill (530) was a dark grey sandy silt. No finds were recovered.

Pit [32] was circular in plan with moderately sloping sides and a concave base, diameter 0.62m and depth of 0.22m. The fill (531) was a dark yellow sand. This may have been a natural feature.

Pit [33] was circular in plan with steep sloping sides and a concave base, diameter 0.42m and depth of 0.12m. The fill (532) was a dark yellow sand. This may have been a natural feature. Pit [38] was very similar to pit [31], sub-circular in plan with irregular vertical sides and a flat base, diameter of 1.30m and depth of 0.90m. Three fills were identified, the primary fill (537) was a light brown silty sand caused by early corrosion of the pit walls, secondary fill (536) was dark reddish-brown silty sand and the final upper fill (535) a mid-brown sandy silt. No finds were recovered.

Pit [39] was very similar to pits [31] and [38], sub-circular in plan with irregular vertical sides and a flat base, diameter of 1.15m and depth of 0.89m. The fill (538) was a dark grey sandy silt. No finds were recovered.

Pit [43] was rectangular in plan with straight vertical sides and a flat base, length of 2.38m, width of 0.69m and depth of 0.47m. The fill (541) was a dark greyish-brown silty sand. No finds were recovered. When initially uncovered during the stripping process it was thought that this pit may have been a north-south aligned grave, but there was no evidence recovered from the fill to verify this.

Pit [46] was sub-oval in plan with irregular vertical sides and a flat base, length of 1.53m, width of 0.60m and depth of 0.37m. The fill (544) was a reddish-brown with a hint of grey silty sand. No finds were recovered.

Pit [48] was truncated by a possible gully but was very similar to pit [46], sub-circular in plan with irregular vertical sides and a flat base, diameter of 1.23m and depth of 0.44m. Three fills were identified, (530) was a dark grey sandy silt. No finds were recovered.

Unfortunately these pits cannot be securely dated and no conclusive evidence for their use was recovered, pits [31], [38] and [39], are similar in size and shape and may be contemporary, but there is a lack of evidence to support this theory.

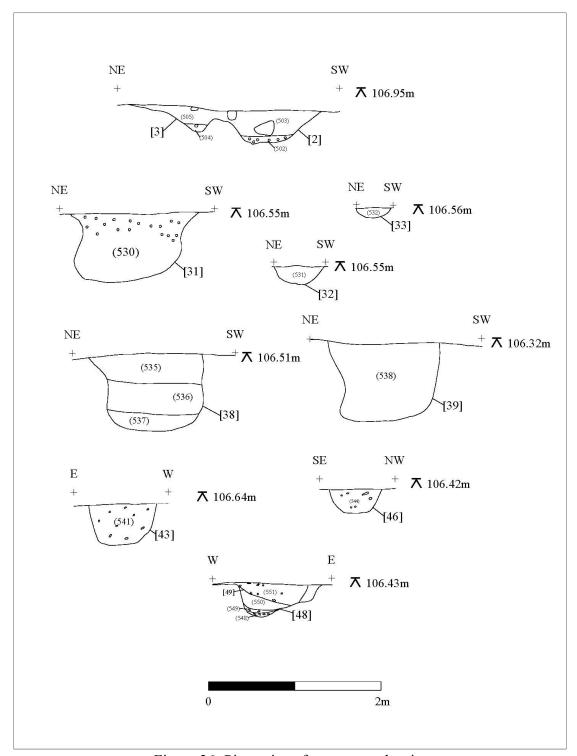


Figure 36: Pit sections from across the site

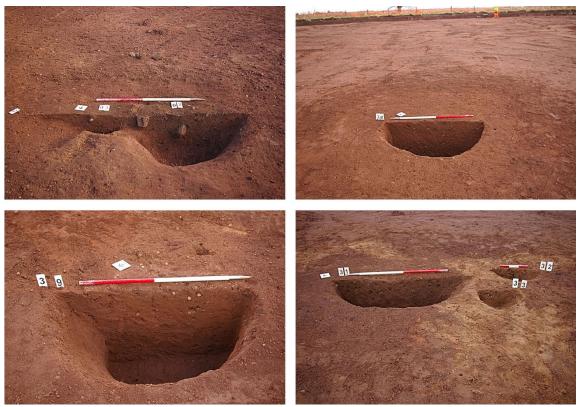


Figure 37: Sections of pits

Phase 3

Although the site mainly contained archaeological remains from the Romano-British period, two gullies and one pit have been identified as from the later Post Medieval period. This is based on one sherd of pottery and these features could easily be older. These features were grouped close together in the northern area of the site and were clearly seen at the time of excavation to cut through the earlier features. Unfortunately due to adverse weather conditions and the poor survival of the features they were not hand excavated individually but the pit [62] and one of the gullies [107] were recorded as part of a series of ditches and gullies.

Given the discovery of similarly dated features in the evaluation it may be that these gullies represent the spread of 17th/18th century activity on the periphery of the village. Alternatively the pottery may be intrusive and the features may have been associated with the earlier phases of activity. Unfortunately the evidence is inconclusive.

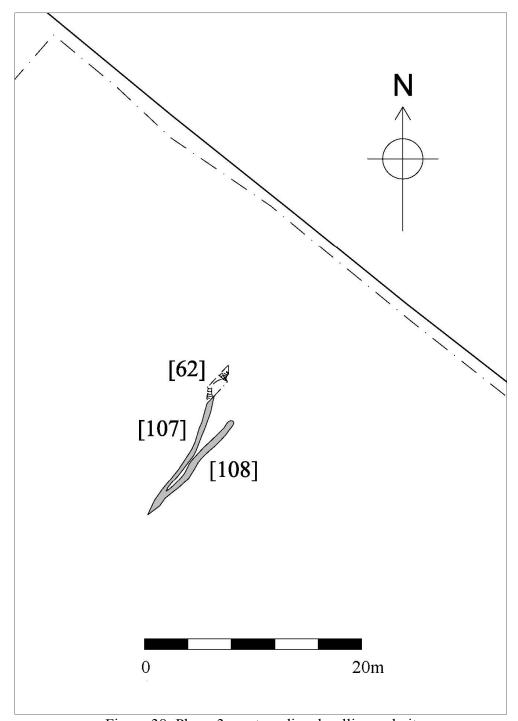


Figure 38: Phase 3, post medieval gullies and pit

Gully [107]

Orientated approximately N-S, gully [107] survived in length by 12.75m and was 0.51m wide. The fill (607) was a grey brown silty sand with occasional small pebble inclusions. The gully clearly was more recent than Ditch 1 which it cut through and has been regarded as contemporary with pit [62].

Gully [108]

Orientated approximately NE-SW, gully [108] survived in length by 10.75m and was 0.54m wide. The fill (608) was a grey brown silty sand with occasional small pebble inclusions. The

gully clearly was more recent than Ditch 1 which it cut through and has been regarded as contemporary with pit [62].

Pit [62]

Identified within a series of gullies and ditches, pit [62] was sub-circular in plan with a width of 0.80m and a depth of 0.30m. The fill (565) was a dark grey brown silty sand which contained one sherd of post-medieval pottery. It was not clear what the pit may have been used for.

Discussion

The archaeological excavation revealed fairly well preserved archaeological remains within the development area. The remains of two phases of Roman field system formed the bulk of the remains, which yielded a moderate assemblage of 2nd to 4th century pottery, but due to the acidity of the soil little in the way of animal bone or plant remains survived. A fragment from a rotary quern, used domestically on a daily basis to process grain into flour, the general condition of the pottery and the discovery of food spillage and crop processing waste suggest that a related Romano-British settlement existed nearby. A small amount of possible post-medieval archaeology also survived.

The earliest activity on the site Phase 1 which consisted of a 'ladder' or 'clothesline' style of field system attributed to the 1st/2nd century. The surviving archaeology was limited to three shallow gullies in a small area in the north of the development area and although no dating evidence was recovered from these features, the style of the field system is consistent with two sites excavated within Leicestershire. Phase 3 from Stretton Road, Great Glen (Albion Archaeology 2015) and Seagrave Road, Sileby (Albion Archaeology 2011), both of which are in the form of 'ladder' or 'clothesline' field systems, although both on a larger scale. Great Glen Phase 3 dated to mid-2nd/3rd century and Sileby dated between 1st and 4th centuries.

The features of Phase 1 appear to have silted up naturally prior to the remodelling of the landscape which survives archaeologically as Phase 2. This suggests an interval where the land may have gone out of use before a larger scale field network was arranged. This second field system was arranged on a different axis to Phase 1 and the surviving archaeological features were more robust and contained dating material for the 3rd/4th century. The types and condition of the pottery recovered suggests that it is likely that a farmstead or small settlement was nearby although no evidence of structures was seen to survive within the area. Phase 2 consisted of a trackway with surviving patches of metalled surfacing and a series of enclosures. The trackway led into a large open area, and it is possible this area was used for the management of livestock. Recuts of the gully on the northern edge of the trackway suggest a long term use of the area and there was evidence of repair to the trackway surface. A similar site with a trackway and stock enclosures has recently been excavated at Great Bowden, Leicestershire (Clapton ULAS, 2018) although dated earlier. A better example may again be at Stretton Road, Great Glen where remodelling of the landscape, recorded as Phase 4, reflects the change of axis, dating and more robust features seen in Donisthorpe Phase 2. Excavations at Lockington (Thomas, TLAHS 2013) also revealed the management of features with continual re-cutting of trackway ditches from the late Iron-Age and throughout the Roman period.

The site in local context

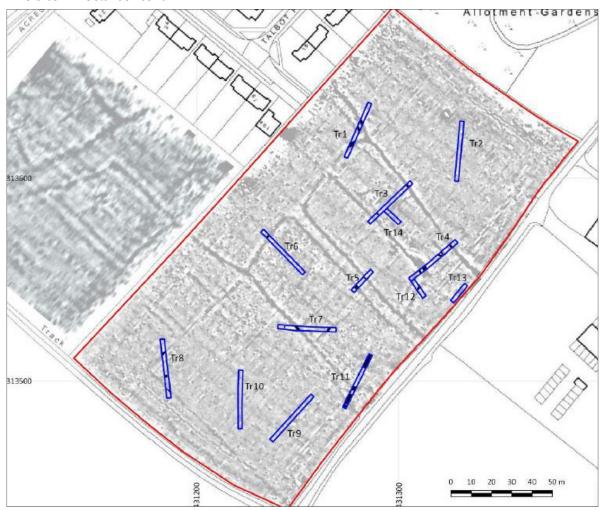


Figure 39: Geophysical survey and position of trial trenches from adjacent field

In the immediate vicinity of the development area, the field adjacent to the east has been subject to a geophysical survey (Pre Construct Archaeology) and trial trench evaluation (Allen Archaeology) (Fig. 39). The survey and trenching revealed a similar pattern to the archaeology from Phase 2 and it seems clear that the two areas form part of a much larger field system. From what can be observed it appears that a series of enclosures were arranged around a large open area where at least two trackways converge. Excavated sites nearby at Normanton le Heath (Thorpe and Sharman 1994) (Fig. 40) and Appleby Magna (Clarke 2000) reveal Romano-British activity in the rural extreme of Leicestershire. The excavation of Area 2 at Normanton Le Heath revealed a possible trackway of similar width with associated enclosures. Evaluation trenching at Appleby Magna revealed evidence of agricultural land use and structural remains, possibly a 4th century Romano-British farmstead. It can be speculated that North West Leicestershire saw widespread rural activity during the Romano-British period although actual excavated sites are minimal. A distribution map of Roman rural settlements in *The Archaeology* of the East Midlands (Ed. N. Cooper 2006) highlighted only one settlement within the surrounding area, at Normanton le Heath. Donisthorpe is a rural village and the low amount of development there and in the surrounding area has limited the amount of archaeological investigation and study.

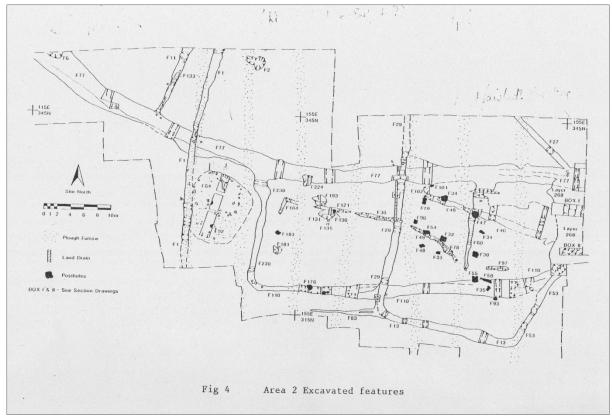


Figure 40: Field system, Alton Grange, Normanton le Heath (Thorpe and Sharman 1994)

The site in wider context

A collaborative study *The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain* (Ch. 5, A. Smith) discusses *The Central Belt* as the largest area within Romano-Britain and the site at Donisthorpe shares similarities in its character with several sites in this wider area. Knobbs Farm, Earith (Evans 2013b) the plan of this site bears many similarities to the development area, with enclosures formed around a trackway and with continual occupation throughout the Roman period. At Langdale Hale, Earith (Evans 2013b) a similar field system was seen with the addition of remodelling from a 'ladder' style field system to larger enclosures positioned around a trackway.

Conclusion

The result of the excavation is consistent with the geophysical survey and evaluation which identified the main features of Phase 2 and their date and extent across the development area. The features from Phase 1 were more discrete and only full excavation uncovered them. The pottery assemblage suggests activity on the site from the early 2nd century and continuing into the 4th century. The surviving archaeology provides evidence of two distinct phases of field system during this period, Phase 1 only evident in shallow gullies whereas Phase 2 survives with trackway, enclosures, gullies and pits. The excavation will add to the growing collection of information concerning the development of Romano-British field systems within this area of Leicestershire, and the wider ranging 'central belt' across Roman Britain.

The Finds

The Roman Pottery

Elizabeth Johnson

Assemblage Size and Condition

The excavations produced an assemblage comprising 75 sherds of Roman pottery weighing 1.157kg with an EVEs value of 1.2. The average sherd weight of 15.4g suggests good levels of preservation overall, though some surfaces are abraded and the shell from the shell-tempered ware has leached. In addition, one sherd (55g) of Post-Medieval earthenware was recovered from a pit [62] (565).

Methodology

The pottery was examined in hand specimen using a binocular microscope at x15 magnification and classified using the Leicestershire fabric series for Roman pottery as summarised below (Pollard 1994), with reference to the National Roman Fabric Reference Collection (Tomber and Dore 1998).

Fabric	Description
BB1 (DOR BB1)	Black Burnished ware
CG1	Calcite gritted (shell) tempered wares
DS (DER CO)	Derbyshire ware
GW3, 5, 6	Fine, medium and coarse grey sandy wares
MO4 (MAH WH)	Mancetter-Hartshill mortaria

Table 1: Summarised Roman pottery fabric series.

Quantification was by sherd count, weight (grams) and estimated vessel equivalents (EVEs based on rim values). Vessel forms were assigned where diagnostic sherds allowed, using the Leicestershire Museums form series and other published typologies. The dataset was recorded and analysed within an Excel workbook, which comprises the archive record.

Stratified Features

The northern half of the excavation area revealed the most features, comprising a series of ditches, pits, a gully and a trackway area.

Along the northern edge of the excavation area lay a ditch and two pits. Six sherds (93g) of pottery were recovered from Ditch [1] (501), comprising two grey ware jars and a mortarium from the Mancetter-Hartshill industry. The grey wares are not closely datable, however the mortarium is a reeded hammerhead form, which can be dated to the late 3rd-4th century (Rollo 1994, fig.12.22, 19-20). Pit [2] (502) produced 34 sherds (223g) of pottery, representing three vessels. Most of the sherds (32, 188g) belong to a single shell-tempered ware jar, dated to the 2nd century onwards in the absence of a rim to assist with refining the date. The sherds are vesicular with very little shell surviving; most likely a result of the burial conditions rather than re-deposition of the material, as many of the sherds are of a good size. The other two vessels comprise an East Midlands Burnished type grey ware jar and a Derbyshire ware jar base. Both these vessels place the group into at least the 3rd century (Todd 1968; Leary 2001). Late Roman material was also recovered from Pit [11] (511), comprising two sherds (105g) from a bead and flanged grey ware bowl dating from the mid-3rd to 4th century (Pollard 1986, 5).

To the south of these features, lay a Ditch, [22] (521), aligned north-west to south-east. Four sherds (75g) of pottery were recovered comprising a Black Burnished ware bead and flanged bowl and a Derbyshire ware jar base. The Black Burnished ware would not date before *c*.AD270, placing it towards the later 3rd or even 4th century (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991, 109-110). One sherd (27g) of pottery was recovered from the terminal end of this ditch, [85] (572). The vessel is a grey ware jar dating from the 2nd century onwards.

South of Ditch [22], a pit, [62] (565), produced one sherd (55g) of post-medieval earthenware. No other finds were recovered from this feature. A single sherd of Roman pottery, weighing only 4g, was retrieved from Gully [66] (583). The sherd is from a grey ware jar or bowl and is not closely datable; therefore a date from the 2nd century onwards is all that can be given.

An east-west ditch [70] (587), revealed three sherds (30g) of pottery comprising a mortarium from Mancetter-Hartshill and two grey ware jars. The grey ware is undiagnostic however, the mortarium is a hammerhead form with traces of orange paint on the flange, indicating a late 3rd-4th century date (Rollo 1994, fig.12.19, 19-20).

Close to Ditch [70] was a trackway area [78] (567) and [79] (568). Two grey ware jars (nine sherds, 213g) were recovered from [78] (567), both had abraded surfaces though the sherd sizes were very good. Unfortunately, the material consists of plain grey ware body sherds which can only be dated from the 2nd century onwards. The three sherds (73g) of pottery from [79] (568) are the same, representing three separate grey ware jars, one of which has incised wavy line decoration, dating from the 2nd century onwards.

In the southern half of the excavation area, pottery was recovered from two ditches. Ditch [12] (512) produced two sherds (56g) from an undiagnostic grey ware jar base. The surfaces are abraded and a date from the 2nd century onwards is all that can be given. Eight sherds (242g) of pottery were recovered from Ditch [34] (533) comprising a mortarium and four grey ware vessels. The mortarium is a hammerhead form from Mancetter-Hartshill, dating to the late 3rd-4th century (Rollo 1994, 19-20). The grey wares consist of two narrow-mouthed jars with rounded out-curved rims, a jar or bowl base and an East Midlands Burnished type ware jar with a zone of incised wavy line decoration between two girth grooves. Most of the grey wares are not closely datable, however, East Midlands Burnished wares date to the 3rd and 4th centuries (Todd 1968). Finally, two small, joining sherds (6g) from a grey ware jar or bowl, were recovered from Ditch [36] (540) in this area. As with most of the other grey wares, the material is undiagnostic, dating from the 2nd century onwards.

Discussion

The assemblage is small and many of the grey wares are not closely datable. However, the material is in good condition overall and there is little to suggest much disturbance. Where there is clearly datable pottery, a late Roman date from the middle of the 3rd century and into the 4th century is indicated. All three mortaria are mid-late 3rd to 4th century hammerhead forms from the Mancetter-Hartshill industry, and the Black Burnished ware bowl dates to the later 3rd or 4th century. The datable grey wares comprise a bead and flanged bowl and East Midlands Burnished wares, again dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries. In this respect, it is reasonable to surmise the undiagnostic grey wares also date to at least the 3rd century, as apart from a few exceptions such as the introduction of late burnished wares, the grey ware repertoire is often conservative with little change from the middle of the 2nd century through to the 4th century. The presence of Derbyshire ware is most likely a result of the site's proximity to the Derbyshire border. Derbyshire ware was produced from the middle of the 2nd century through

to the 4th century, and during the 3rd century it became as ubiquitous as grey ware in the local area (Leary 2001). Outside of its immediate production area, it generally occurs in features dated from the 3rd century onwards. The character of the assemblage indicates some form of domestic farmstead type activity in the area, but perhaps not directly at this site. It may well be an occupation site is located close by, associated with the features uncovered during these excavations.

Summarised Pottery Catalogue

				Ves			Wgt	Diam		
Cut	Cont	Fabric	Form	part	Type	Shds	(g)	(cm)	EVEs	Dating
1	501	MO4	Mortarium	Rim	hammer-	3	38	24	0.075	late3rd-
					head					4thC
1	501	GW5	Jar	Base		1	52			2ndC+
1	501	GW5	Jar/bowl	Body		2	3			2ndC+
2	502	GW5	Jar	Body		1	14			3rdC+
2	502	CG1	Jar	Base		32	188			2ndC+
2	502	DS	Jar	Base		1	21			3rdC+
11	511	GW5	Bowl	Rim	bead/	2	105	20	0.2	mid3rd-
					flange					4thC
12	512	GW5	Jar	Base		2	56			2ndC+
22	521	BB1	Bowl	Rim	bead/	2	53	11	0.35	late3rd-
					flange					4thC
22	521	DS	Jar	Base		2	22			3rdC+
34	533	MO4	Mortarium	Rim	hammer-	1	35	23	0.06	late3rd-
					head					4thC
34	533	GW5	Jar	Rim		1	16	11	0.16	2ndC+
34	533	GW5	Jar	Rim		4	143	14	0.325	2ndC+
34	533	GW5	Jar	Body		1	26			3rdC+
34	533	GW6	Jar/bowl	Base		1	22			2ndC+
36	540	GW5	Jar/bowl	Body		2	6			2ndC+
78	567	GW5	Jar	Body		4	161			2ndC+
78	567	GW5	Jar	Body		5	52			2ndC+
79	568	GW5	Jar	Body		2	64			2ndC+
79	568	GW3	Jar	Body		1	9			2ndC+
85	572	GW5	Jar	Body		1	27			2ndC+
66	583	GW5	Jar/bowl	Body		1	4			2ndC+
70	587	MO4	Mortarium	Rim	hammer-	1	18	24	0.03	late3rd-
					head					4thC
70	587	GW5	Jar	Body		1	21		_	2ndC+
70	587	GW6	Jar/bowl	Body		1	1			2ndC+
62	565	EA				1	55			Post-Med.

The Rotary Quern

From pit [61] fill (564) a fragment from the edge of the upper stone of a Roman rotary quern manufactured from the Millstone Grit of Derbyshire. Grinding surface is smooth and concave, whilst the edge is embellished with vertical tooling marks. Diameter 380mm based on 13% of the circumference surviving. Thickness 60mm. Hand-rotated flat querns of this type were used to process grain into flour for the production of bread within the household on a daily basis.

The Animal Bone

Joseph Bartholomew

Fragmentary remains of a single cattle tooth (six fragments weighing 10g) from (588). The fact that only tooth fragments have survived indicates a very acidic burial environment and that much of the assemblage has been lost through decay. The material has been retained in the archive.

The Worked Stone

Nicholas J. Cooper

A single fragment (1.255kg) from the circumference of upper stone of rotary quern in Millstone Grit was recovered from cut [68] fill (584). Lower surface worn and concave. External edge with vertical tooling marks. Diameter 400mm. The fragment has been retained in the archive.

Environmental

Adam Santer

Introduction

During an archaeological excavation at Donisthorpe, Leicestershire a bulk soil sample was taken and processed for the analysis of charred plant remains. The sample came from the fill (533) of a late 3rd to 4th century Roman ditch [34]. The analysis of the charred plant remains recovered from this sample is presented here, together with a discussion of what this can potentially tell us about past diet, crop husbandry strategies and environment at the site. *Methodology*

The sample consisted of a dark reddish brown sandy clay and was processed in a York tank using a 0.5mm mesh with flotation into a 0.3mm sieve. The flotation fraction (flot) was sorted for plant remains and other artefacts under an x10-40 stereo microscope. Plant remains were identified by comparison to modern reference material available at ULAS and their names follow Stace (1991). The residue was not sorted.

Results

Composition

The sample contained a high density of charred plant remains (196.5 items per litre). A mixed deposit of cereal grains, chaff and wild seeds was found; chaff being the most dominant (see table 1). The majority of the cereal grains were either too fragmentary or poorly preserved to be identified to species. Each category of plant remains will now be discussed in more detail.

Grains

A total of fifty-nine cereal grains were found in the sample. Ten specimens were identified as spelt wheat (*Triticum spelta* L.). These varied morphologically; two being very rounded and the remainder being elongated. It was also possible to identify seven grains as glume wheat (*Triticum* spp.) and one specimen as barley (*Hordeum vulgare L.*). The remaining forty-one cereal grains were too poorly preserved to be identified to species.

Chaff

Wheat glume bases predominated in the assemblage representing 87.4% of the chaff present. It was possible to identify a hundred and ninety-four glume bases as spelt wheat and thirteen spikelets as spelt wheat. Seven hundred and eighty-one fragmentary glume bases were also present and a hundred and one spikelet fragments which could not be identified beyond wheat.

Barley rachis was present in smaller numbers, one hundred and forty-nine barley rachis internodes were identified. However, this is of a high density compared to other roman sites. An attempt was made to identify whether or not the barley rachis was from two or six-rowed barley (see Charles et al 2010) but none of the specimens had a sufficient amount of glume attached in order to distinguish this.

In regards to other chaff, a basal rachis internode that could not be identified to species was also present and a straw culm node.

Wild seeds

The wild seeds found amongst the assemblage commonly grew in cultivated fields; such as goosefoots (*Chenopodium* sp.), large grasses (Poaceae), knotweed (*Polygonum* sp.), dock (*Rumex* sp.), and scentless mayweed (*Tripleurospermum inodorum* (L.) Schultz-Bip.).

Table 1: The charred plant remains found in the sample

Sample	1	
Context	533	
Cut	34	
Feature type	Late 3rd-4th c. Roman	
Date	Ditch	
Grain		
Hordeum vulgare L.	1	Barley
Triticum spelta L.	10	Spelt wheat
Triticum sp.	7	Glume wheat
Indeterminate cereal	41	Indeterminate cereal
Chaff		
Indeterminate basal rachis internode	7	Indeterminate basal rachis internode
Hordeum vulgare L. rachis internode	149	Barley rachis internode
Triticum spelta L. glume base	194	Spelt wheat glume base
Triticum spelta L. spikelet	13	Spelt wheat spikelet
Triticum sp. glume base fragment	781	Glume base fragment
Triticum sp. spikelet fragment	101	Spikelet fragment
Straw culm node	1	Straw culm node
Wild seeds		
Chenopodium sp.	7	Goosefoots
Poaceae (large)	38	Large grass
Polygonum sp.	4	Knotweed
Rumex sp.	1	Dock
Tripleurospermum inodorum (L.) Schultz-Bip.	21	Scentless mayweed
Total	1376	
Soil volume (L)	7	
% Analysed	100%	
Items per litre	196.5	

A note on charcoal

A small amount of charcoal measuring over 2mm in diameter was found in the sample. These specimens may be suitable for radiocarbon analysis.

Discussion/conclusion

A bulk soil sample was taken from a late 3rd to 4th century Roman ditch excavated at Donisthorpe, Leicestershire and then analysed. The sample contained a high density of charred plant remains. Spelt wheat glume bases and barley rachis internodes and were the dominant plant remains identified.

Rachis is generally removed during the earlier stages of crop processing for consumption (e.g. threshing) whilst glume bases and wild seeds are normally removed during the later stages of processing (e.g. fine sieving). The sample therefore, represents a mixed deposit of early and late processing waste along with food spillage that was deposited in the ditch.

The results fit in with previous excavation that was carried out at the site, trial trenching revealed a similar range of specimens (i.e. spelt wheat chaff, barley rachis) in four ditches albeit in much smaller quantities (Fryer 2014).

A comparison can be drawn from a site in Carsington, Derbyshire, at which a high density of spelt wheat chaff was found in late 3rd-4th century Roman layer (Monckton 1997; cited in Monckton 2003). The remains were interpreted as crop processing waste (*ibid*). It is difficult however to draw more precise comparisons with Donisthorpe due to the unusually high amount of barley rachis found there.

If further work is to be carried out at Donisthorpe, a sampling strategy should focus on a range of features (pits, ditches and gullies etc.) so that the site can be interpreted more broadly.

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Oasis

	Oasis No	universi1-355456		
	Project Name	Archaeological excavation at land off Acresford		
		Road, Donisthorpe, Leicestershire		
PROJECT	Start/end dates of	02/11/2017 - 07/03/2018		
DETAILS	field work			
	Previous/Future	Trial trenching / unknown		
	Work			
	Project Type	Excavation		

	Site Status	None				
	Current Land Use		Pasture			
	Monument		Metalled trackway and associated ditches			
	Type/Period					
	Significant	Ceramics/ Roman 2 ^{nd - 4th} Century				
	Finds/Period					
	Development Type	Residential development				
	Reason for	National Planning Policy Framework				
	Investigation	·				
	Planning Authority	North West Leicestershire District Council				
	Position in the	Outline planning permission granted				
	Planning Process	_				
	Planning Ref.	14/00802/OUT				
	Site Address/Postcode	Acresford Road, Donisthorpe, Leicestershire				
PROJECT	Study Area	1.33 hectares				
LOCATION	Site Coordinates	SK 31133 13620				
	Height OD	107.50m				
	Organisation		University of Leicester Archaeological Services			
	Project Brief	Local Authority Archaeologist				
	Originator					
	Project Design	John Thomas				
PROJECT	Originator	x 1. m				
CREATORS	Project Manager	John Thomas				
	Project	Donald Clark				
	Director/Supervisor	D 1 /D 11 II				
	Sponsor/Funding Body	Developer/Bellway Homes				
	Douy	Physical	Digital	Paper		
	Recipient	Leicestershire	Leicestershire	Leicestershire		
	Тоброно	Museums	Museums	Museums		
PROJECT	ID (Acc. No.)	X.A125.2017	X.A125.2017	X.A125.2017		
ARCHIVE	Contents	Pottery	Digital	Context sheets		
		,	photography	Drawings		
			Miscellaneous	Miscellaneous		
			Report	Report		
	Type	Grey Literature				
	Title	Archaeological excavation at land off Acresfo				
		Road, Donisthorpe, Leicestershire				
PROJECT	Author	Donald Clark				
BIBLIOGRAP	Other bibliographic	Report number 2018-156				
HY	details					
11.1	Date	2018				
	Publisher/Place	University of Leicester, Leicester				
	Description	Pdf_A4				

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