

ROMANO-BRITISH RURAL OCCUPATION AT THE CATTHORPE INTERCHANGE, M1 JUNCTION 19, LEICESTERSHIRE

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Archaeological investigation undertaken between November 2013 and February 2014, at the Catthorpe Interchange, M1 Junction 19, Leicestershire, revealed evidence for two phases of Roman activity. A series of quarry pits was followed by two enclosures, droveways and field boundary ditches, indicating the presence of a probable agricultural complex. A moderate assemblage of Roman pottery was recovered, with more closely datable forms suggesting a Middle Roman date for the assemblage as a whole. Extensive medieval ridge-and-furrow agriculture had truncated much of the earlier archaeological evidence.

INTRODUCTION

Between November 2013 and February 2014, Cotswold Archaeology (CA) undertook a programme of archaeological mitigation for the Highways Agency at the Catthorpe Interchange, Junction 19 of the M1 Motorway, Leicestershire (site centred on NGR: 456021 278863; Fig. 1). The work, undertaken ahead of upgrades to the motorway junction and local road network, consisted of a strip, map and sample excavation (with which this paper is concerned), a trial trench evaluation (CA 2015a), a watching brief and an earthwork survey. The surrounding landscape is comprised mainly of arable and pasture fields between the villages of Swinford and Catthorpe, Leicestershire (Fig. 1). The area of excavation lies at approximately 115m AOD, with the ground level dropping away to the south. The underlying geology for this area is dominated by the Blue Lias Clay and Charmouth Mudstone Formation, formed in the Jurassic and Triassic Periods (BGS 2017). The superficial geology along the northern and eastern boundary of the site consists of glacial till, with some evidence for river terrace deposits to the south.

A detailed record of the excavation, including full specialist finds reports, is contained within a post-excavation assessment (CA 2016, report no. 15077) and typescript report (CA 2017, report no. 17144) available online via the CA website (<http://www.reports.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/>). This paper represents a summary of that report.

RESULTS

The earliest evidence for human activity on the site was represented by an assemblage of residual Mesolithic and Neolithic worked flint found in later features. This

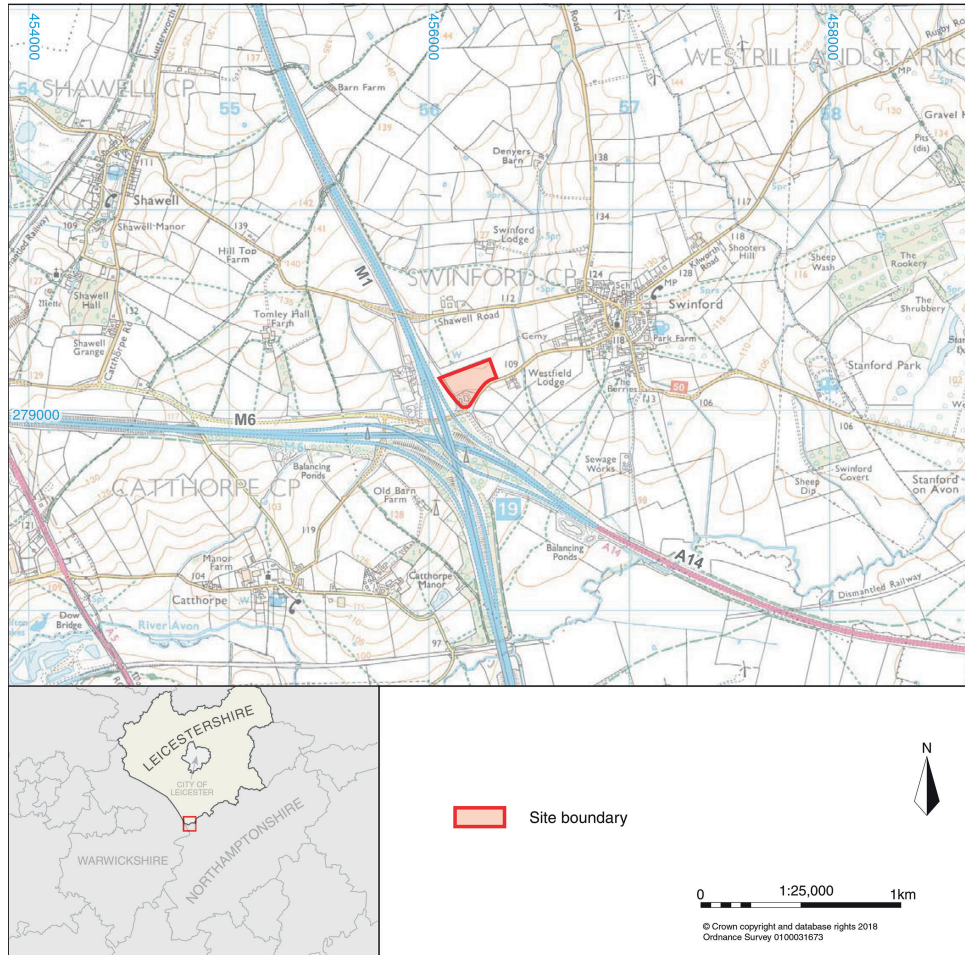


Fig. 1. Site Location plan (1:25,000).

was followed by two phases of Roman occupation dating from the second–third centuries AD.

The initial phase of Romano-British occupation (Middle Roman I) was characterised by five clusters of intercutting quarry pits in the north-western corner of the site (Fig. 2). The pits were generally sub-circular in shape with concave sides, and measured 0.5–5.8m in diameter and 0.25–1m deep. Most of the pottery recovered from the pits could only be assigned a broad Roman date; however, a single sherd dating to between the mid-second and mid-third century AD was recovered from the primary fill of one of the pits. It is possible that this quarry pit dates to some point earlier than AD 250, or that this sherd is residual. Evidence for the excavation and backfilling of different quarry pits in sequence suggests that this activity was undertaken over an extended period. A number of smaller pits, uncovered to the west of the quarry pits, may represent some small-scale prospecting for quarrying activities.

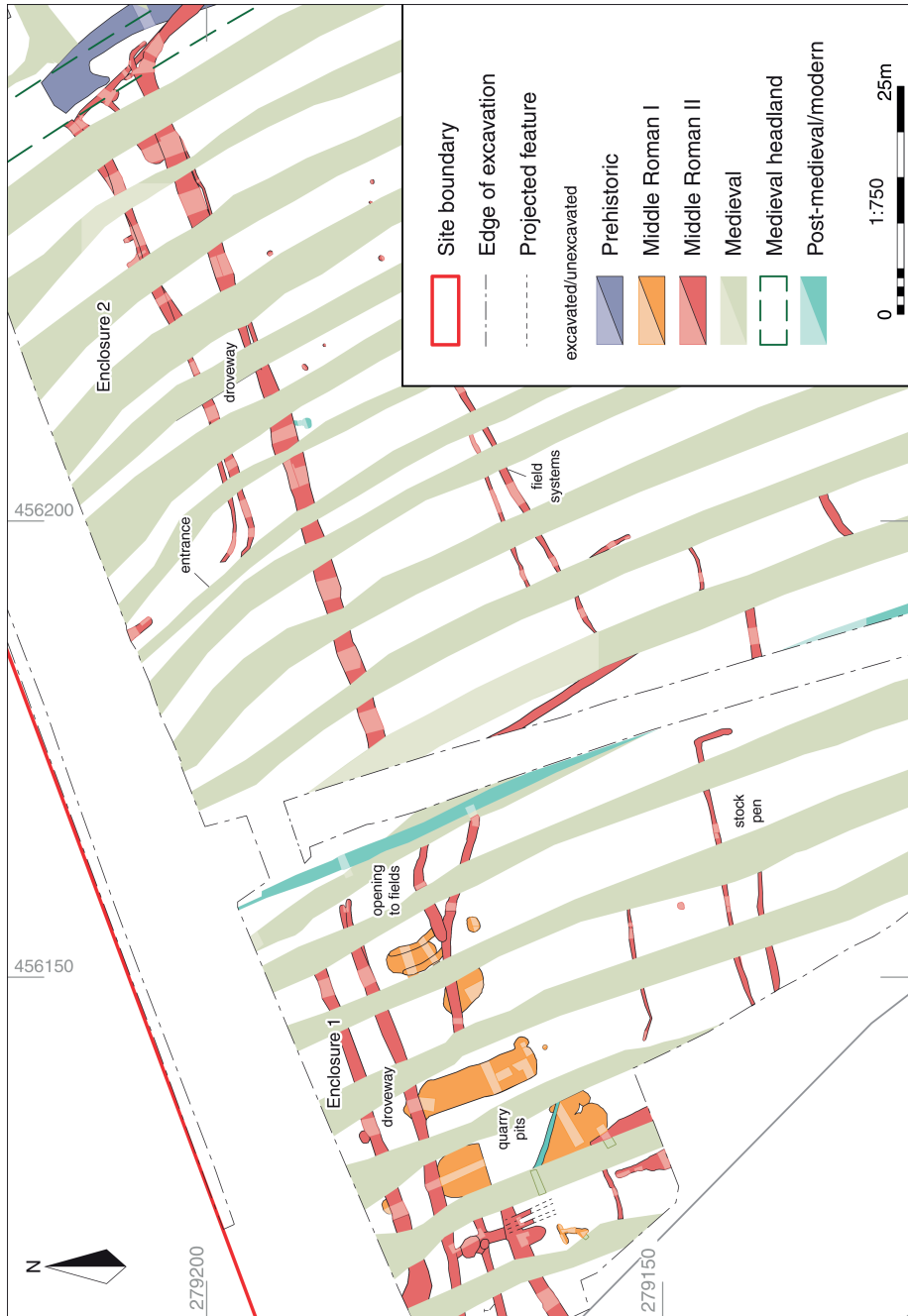


Fig. 2. Site plan (1:750).

Following the backfilling of the quarry pits, the site was reused for agriculture (Middle Roman II). This activity comprised the construction of two enclosures (1 and 2), a number of droveways, a field system and/or possible stock enclosures. Many of the ditches had been subject to a number of recuts, indicating that erosion by animals or inundation of the site meant that regular attention was required to maintain integrity of the boundaries.

Enclosure 1, measuring 39m and at least 9m wide, was located along the northern limit of the excavation area (Fig. 2). The enclosure ditch consisted of an initial ditch and a later recut. A single sherd of pottery, broadly dating to the Roman period, was recovered from the initial ditch, while pottery dating to between the second and third century AD was recovered from the recut ditch. Enclosure 2 uncovered *c.*30m to the east of Enclosure 1, measured 54m long and at least 16.5m wide. The two enclosures were similarly aligned and extended to the north beyond the excavation area, suggesting that they were contemporary. A gap at the south-western corner of Enclosure 2, *c.*12m in width, may represent an entranceway. Nine sherds of pottery dating from the second to fourth centuries AD were recovered from the ditch terminus of Enclosure 2, including a piece of Mancetter-Hartshill mortaria.

A probable droveway ditch was located to the south of each of the enclosures. The ditch to the south of Enclosure 1 measured *c.*53m long and 0.25m deep, and was constructed to leave a gap of 3.8m between itself and Enclosure 1. This gap created a route along which livestock could move and be controlled. Two sherds of pottery of a broad Roman date were recovered from the initial ditch cut. A similar droveway ditch was established 3.3m to the south of Enclosure 2. This ditch measured 0.6–0.8m wide and 0.2–0.35m deep, and continued to the north-east for 100m before turning south and continuing for a further 76m. Due to the area investigated it is difficult to ascertain the relationship between the droveways for each enclosure; however, the 7m offset between the ditches may represent an entrance way that channelled stock from the enclosures into fields to the south.

A possible field system and/or series of stock enclosures were uncovered to the south of Enclosures 1 and 2. Limited dating evidence, plant material or animal bone was recovered from the site, due to poor preservation (CA 2016), and consequently it is difficult to determine whether these features represent arable and/or pastoral farming activities. A moderate assemblage of Roman pottery was recovered from one of the field boundary ditches, which includes three sherds of Mancetter-Hartshill mortaria. One sherd of mortaria displays part of a maker's stamp, with the border and initial 'S' a best fit for part of a stamp of Sarrius dating to *c.*AD 135–70. Two sherds of pottery were recovered from a second field boundary ditch south of Enclosure 2, including a painted rim sherd of Mancetter-Hartshill mortarium dating to the third century AD. Two curvilinear features, located to the south of Enclosure 2, may represent part of a single circular structure or a small enclosure for corralling stock.

Medieval ridge-and-furrow-cultivation, represented by a number of north-west/south-east aligned furrows, was present across the entire area of excavation. These features, dated by a single sherd of thirteenth- to fourteenth-century pottery, caused heavy truncation to earlier archaeological features.

FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

Artefactual material recovered from the excavations included pottery, worked flint, metalwork, glass, ceramic building material, fired/burnt clay and industrial waste. A high proportion was residual or intrusive finds. The largest group was represented by Roman pottery, including mortaria. The assemblage was of predominantly local manufacture, with only three sherds of Gaulish samian and five of mortaria of Mancetter-Hartshill potteries in Warwickshire. Biological material included charcoal, charred plant macrofossil and faunal remains.

DISCUSSION

The archaeological excavation revealed two phases of Roman occupation (second to third centuries AD), comprising a series of quarry pits and later agricultural activities. The quarry pits were excavated and backfilled in sequence, suggesting that this activity was undertaken over an extended period. The underlying superficial geology (glacial till, river terrace deposits) implies that the quarry pits were excavated for gravel and/or clay extraction, perhaps for use in activities such as road construction/maintenance or pottery manufacture. Although the nearest Roman road to the site is Watling Street, constructed in the first century AD and located *c.* 1–2 km to the south-west, it is possible that the pits were used to extract gravel for the construction of local roads, or as a source of material for local pottery kilns. Unfortunately, there is currently no supporting evidence for either of these activities in the immediate area.

Following the abandonment/backfilling of the quarry pits, the agricultural re-use of the site consisted of the construction of two stock enclosures, a series of droveways and field boundary ditches. Only a small part of each enclosure was revealed and consequently it is difficult to determine their exact function, although the lack of evidence found for habitation indicates that they may have been used as stock enclosures. The majority of the pottery recovered from the enclosure ditches could be assigned only a broad Roman date; however, a small assemblage recovered from the ditch terminus of Enclosure 2 tentatively indicates a construction date from the mid-second century AD onwards. Enclosures 1 and 2 were each bounded to the south by ditches forming a droveway. Although the exact development of these droveways is uncertain (due to later truncation), they appear to have flanked the southern edge of the two stock enclosures and may have been utilised to funnel livestock from these areas into fields to the south. The droveway that flanked Enclosure 2 may also have connected the western entrance of the enclosure to open areas to the south-east.

The limited evidence for occupation within the site, including scant pottery evidence and an absence of domestic refuse (e.g. butchered animal bone, crop processing waste) indicates that the area was utilised for pastoral farming in the Middle Roman period. It should be noted that truncation from medieval ridge-and-furrow cultivation may have removed any possible shallow settlement features, such as post-holes, floors or beam slots. Recent analysis of rural sites in the Trent Valley suggests that simple enclosure sites dominated this area in the first century AD, but were replaced by more complex farmsteads by the third and fourth centuries AD

(Smith *et al.* 2016, 152–3). Although based on limited evidence, it may be that the stock enclosures formed part of a larger complex settlement/farmstead in the second to third century AD, which lay beyond the extents of the excavation area. This interpretation may go some way to explain the, albeit limited, presence of regional forms of pottery, such as the Mancetter-Hartshill mortarium, in an area where there is currently no evidence for habitation.

A number of Roman field systems and farmsteads have been identified in the area surrounding the site, and suggest a predominantly rural landscape throughout this period. A sequence of Late Iron Age and Early Roman rural farmsteads was uncovered 2km to the north-east of the site at Swinford Windfarm (Morris 2011), whilst geophysical survey and trial trenching further to the north, east of Lutterworth Golf course, revealed enclosures that produced pottery of a late second century date (Richardson 2014). Further to the north-west, investigations at Moorbarns Lane, Lutterworth revealed another enclosure of possible second century date (Rouse 2013), while field boundaries and a possible farmstead dating to between the late first to fourth centuries AD were uncovered at the Night Owl truck stop, located c.2km to the south-west of Junction 19 (CA 2015b). Fieldwalking over the area of a possible Roman enclosure, identified from cropmark evidence 1km south-west of the site, revealed a scatter of Roman pottery, though subsequent interventions failed to locate the enclosure ditches (Coward 2005). The roadside settlement of *Tripontium*, located c.1.5km to the west of the site, represents the nearest contemporary major Roman settlement. *Tripontium* was located along Watling Street, which led north to *Ratae Corieltavorum* (modern Leicester). The agricultural activities uncovered at the site, as well as those present in the surrounding area, possibly formed part of the wider rural hinterland of the Roman town.

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