

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT THREE LOCKS GOLF COURSE, NEAR GREAT BRICKHILL, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, 1992

CARRIE M. HEARNE
Wessex Archaeology

An evaluation survey was undertaken at Three Locks golf course in the valley of the River Ouzel. Archaeological features were recorded in seven of the ten trenches excavated. One of the trenches also revealed part of a cobbled surface and two courses of masonry walling. Most of the deposits/features encountered appear to be of Romano-British date. Pottery from the site is dated late first to fourth century; the greater part of the collection is of mid to late second century AD. More than one period of Romano-British occupation is likely to be represented on the site, although its exact nature and function cannot be gauged from the evaluation alone. The existence of the site appears to support the evidence for dense occupation of the Ouzel valley during the Roman period.

Introduction

The evaluation area covered 0.97 ha and comprised the site of a proposed extension to an artificial lake on the Three Locks golf course (under construction at the time of the survey). The course lies adjacent to Partridge House, approximately 2 km to the south-west of Great Brickhill (Fig. 1A). The existing lake is centred on SP 89102880.

The site lies close to the River Ouzel on terrace gravels. The topography of the site is flat overall – minor undulations and mounds are the result of recent earthmoving associated with the construction of the golf course. It was formerly arable land.

The project archive (WA Ref. W481) comprises two files and two boxes of finds. The paper archive has been deposited in the Buckinghamshire County Museum (Reference CAS 1659). The finds have been retained by the landowner for display at the Three Locks Golf Club.

Romano-British activity is the best-known

element of the local archaeological landscape and is focused on the small town Magiovinium (Dropshort Farm, c. 3 km north of Three Locks), which developed from the first-century AD auxiliary fort there. The density of Romano-British occupation within the Ouzel Valley is well known, although current evidence mostly relates to the area north of Magiovinium (Zeevat *et al.* 1987, 8).

In 1973, approximately 20 sherds of Romano-British pottery were recovered associated with a 'scatter of stone' and 'black soil' in the central area of the field (Bucks Co. Museum – SMR Ref. No. 1659). The sherds included an Oxford-ware mortarium rim. In 1990 finds were made in the area of the existing lake by metal detectorists and included 45 Roman coins ranging in date from the early second to the mid third century AD. Two possible ditches were also recorded in the area at this time and produced other Roman finds.

The general strategy for the evaluation was formulated by the County Archaeological Officer. The aim of the evaluation was to

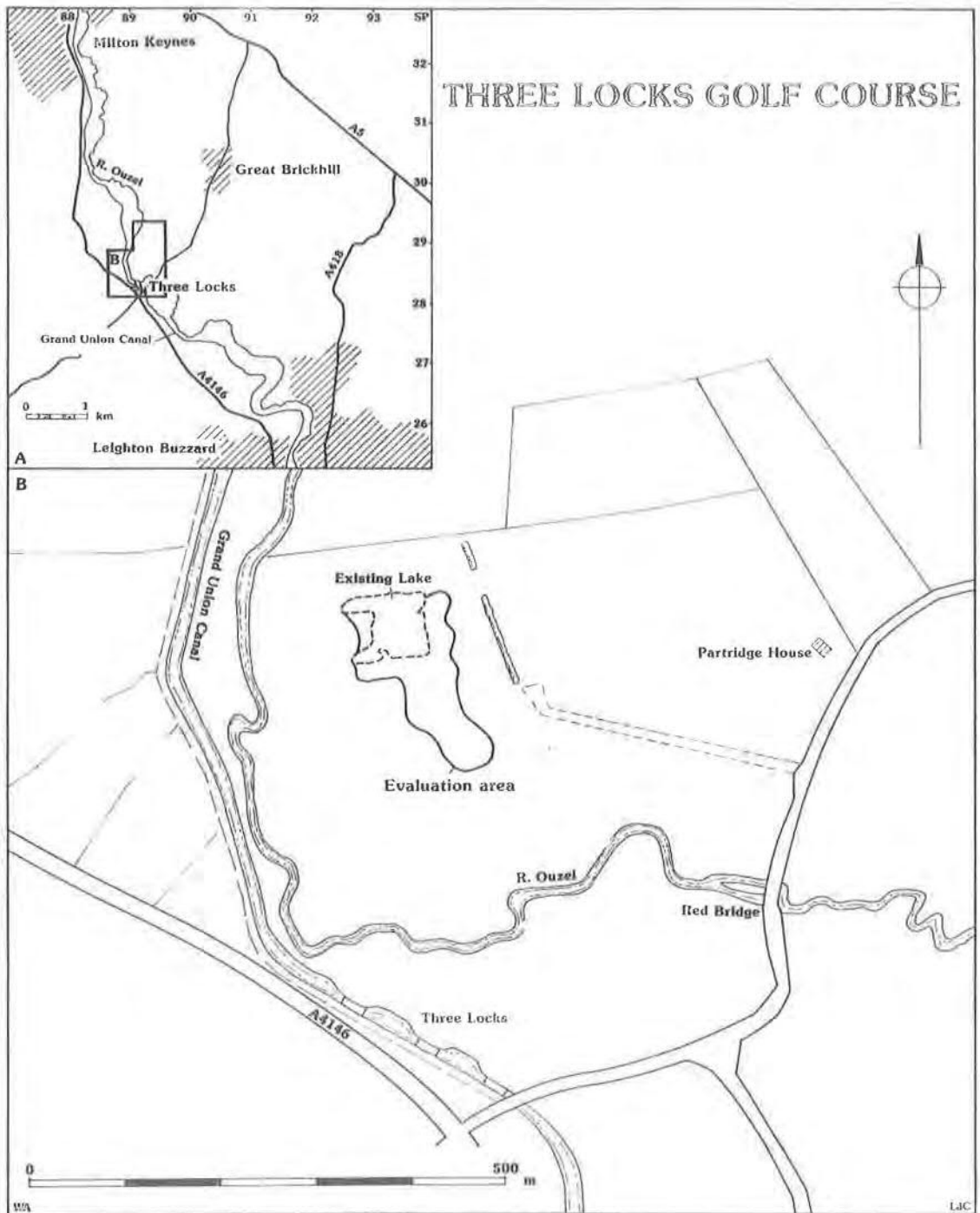


Fig. 1: Location of the Evaluation at Three Locks, Great Brickhill

THREE LOCKS GOLF COURSE

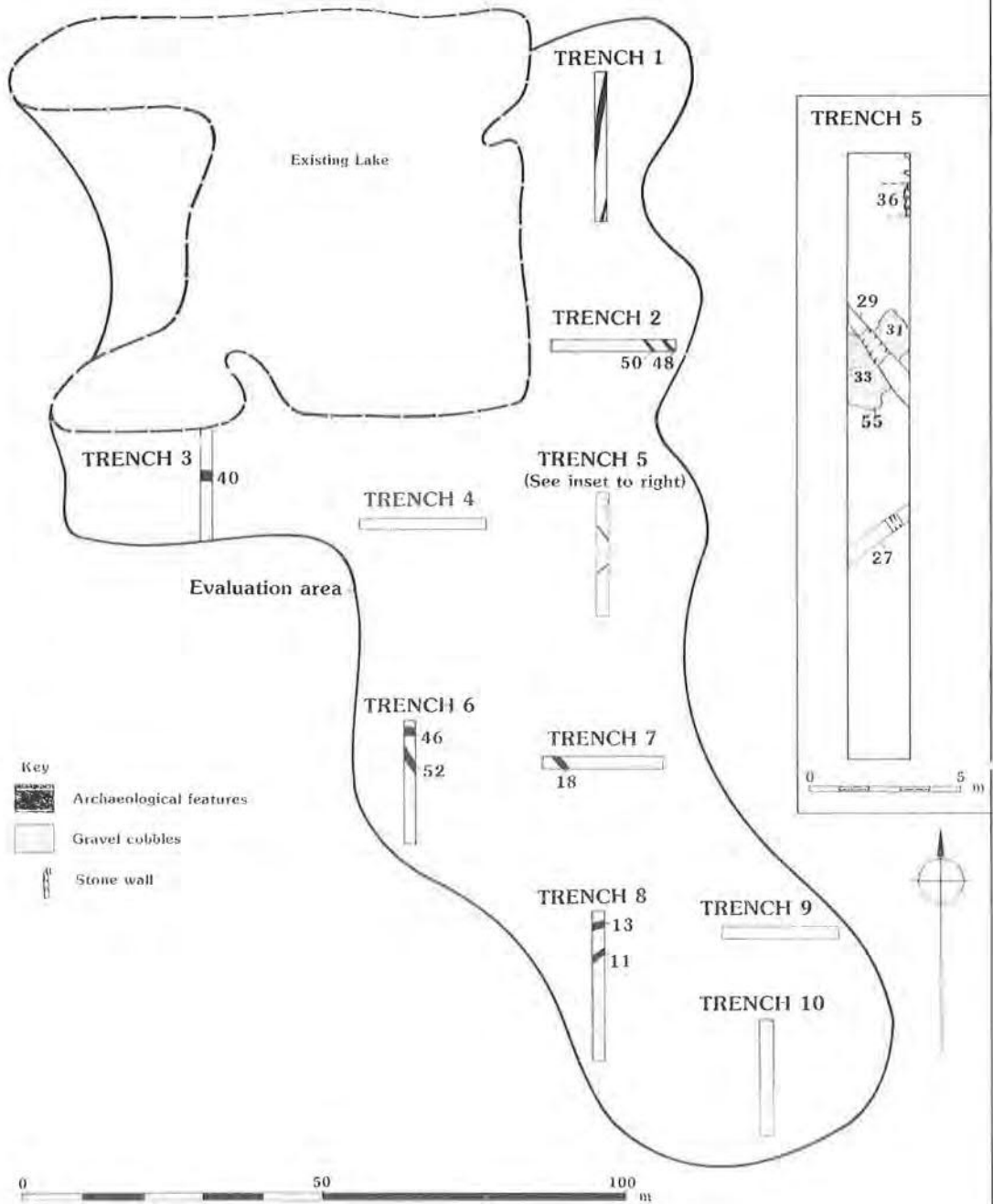


Fig. 2: Trench location showing archaeological features

establish the extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the evaluation area. The method adopted by Wessex Archaeology involved ten trial trenches, each 2 m wide, aligned north-south and east-west across the site (Fig. 2). These sampled 4.6% of the evaluation area. Topsoil and subsoil were removed by machine down to the underlying clays and/or gravels. The strategy allowed for the initial cleaning and recording of all exposed features and deposits followed by partial manual excavation where possible. It also allowed for the possibility of limited bulk sampling for artefactual and environmental material if sealed or well-dated deposits or horizons were encountered.

Results

The location of the archaeological features recorded in the trial trenches is shown in Fig. 2. Full records of the soil profiles and all of archaeological deposits and features are held in the archive and summarised in the full evaluation report (Wessex Archaeology 1992, Report W481). The paragraphs below merely characterise the features in general terms.

Archaeological features (excluding the modern linear features observed in trench 1), were recorded in six of the ten trenches. Waterlogging in trenches 6, 7 and 8 meant that the features observed could not be fully examined: partial excavation of features 46 and 52 (trench 6) was possible but the features observed in trenches 7 and 8 could only be recorded in plan.

Trenches 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8

The linear (and presumed linear) features recorded in trenches 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8 included some seen in plan (features 13, 18, 40, 46, 48, 50) and some that were only visible in the trench sections (features 11 and 52). They ranged in width from 0.6 m to 2.0 m. The shallowest depth recorded was 0.05 m (feature 50). The deepest feature (ditch 46) was excavated to a depth of 0.63 m before waterlogging prevented further excavation. The fills of the features varied: they generally consisted of dark grey or brown sandy/silty clays but feature 40 (trench 3) contained a large proportion of gravel.

Finds were recovered from trench 3 (64 g animal bone from feature 40) and trench 6 (207g Roman pottery and 318 g animal bone from feature 46).

Trench 5

Trench 5 revealed a concentration of features (see Fig. 2, inset) and included *in situ* stratified deposits.

Wall footing 36 lay at the north end of the trench and was aligned east-west. It was recorded in the east section of the trench (Plate 1). The wall footing had been constructed on the natural gravel surface – no construction trench was visible – and survived as two courses of ferruginous sandstone slabs, up to 0.26m long, with a single larger squared block at the southern edge.

Hollow 55 was initially defined as an irregular spread of dark grey-brown sandy clay. Manual cleaning, however, revealed a discrete area of dense cobbling (contexts 31 and 33) which filled it. The cobbled surface was itself cut by a linear feature, ditch/gully 29, aligned NW-SE (Plate 2). This feature measured 0.5m wide and 0.2m deep and became both shallower and narrower towards the north-west. The fill comprised a dark grey sandy clay and contained quantities of charcoal. The cobbled surface was fully recorded in plan and left *in situ*.

Ditch/gully 27 was aligned SW-NE across the trench and lay to the south of the cobbled surface. It measured 0.4m wide and 0.3m deep and was filled with dark grey-brown fine sandy loam. Bottle glass and tile indicate a modern date for this feature.

Finds

by Elaine L. Morris

Pottery

A total of 63 sherds of Roman pottery (689 g), the majority ranging in date from the second to third century AD, was recovered from trenches 5 and 6. The earliest material consists of a single small sherd of Southern Gaulish samian, probably from a Drag. 18/31 dish, dated late first to second century AD. This was recovered from wall 36 in trench 5.



Plate 1: Trench 5 – view of wall footing 36 (scale 0.5 m)



Plate 2: Trench 5 – view of gully 29 and cobbled surface looking south-east (scale 1.0 m)

About half of the pottery is datable to the mid to late second century AD. The range of fabrics and forms is similar, if not identical, to material recovered from the Milton Keynes sites (Marney 1989). These include several storage jars in shell-tempered fabric (Milton Keynes fabric 1), wide-mouthed, cordoned bowls in the common clay-pellet, 'grogged' fabric (MK fabric 2), Black-Burnished ware bowls (BB1), a variety of sandy greywares (SGW), and finewares. The finewares include fine orange-ware vessels (MK fabric 41), Nene Valley colour-coated beakers and an orange fabric, colour-coated, indented beaker. This range of second-century material was recovered from ditch/gully 29, from cleaning above the cobbled surface in trench 5 and from cleaning the section of the presumed linear feature 52 in trench 6.

Later Roman pottery was recovered from cleaning above the cobbled surface in trench 5. This consists of a shouldered bowl, dated to the third century AD and a wide-mouthed vessel with a tight, hooked rim, both in clay pellet fabric (MK2), two different dropped-flange bowls, one of which is in Black-Burnished Ware (BB1), and various sandy greywares and pale orange finewares. As a group, this component of the assemblage could be dated to the mid to late third century AD. In addition, a large rim from a hooked-rim cup form (Oswald and Pryce 1920, pl. LV, 13), which is in a very micaceous Central Gaulish fabric (?Lezoux) and dates from the late first to mid-third century, was recovered from above the cobbled surface in trench 5.

The latest pottery was recovered from the presumed linear feature 46 in trench 6, and is tentatively identified as a sherd of Oxford red-fabric mortaria on account of the micaceous fabric and range of trituration grits. This sherd may be dated to the late third to fourth century AD.

Generally the pottery is in very good condition with a large mean sherd size, whether from above the cobbled surface or from sub-soil features. The only exceptions are the colour-coated wares which have lost most of

their surfaces owing to the soft-firing and fine nature of these wares.

Other Finds

Small amounts of ceramic building material (CBM), ironwork, fired clay and glass were also found. The only finds diagnostically of Romano-British date are two fragments (222g) of thick tile recovered from ditch 29 and from cleaning above the cobbled surface in trench 5. Two iron nails and small fragments of fired clay could also be Romano-British.

Animal Bones

by Clive Gamble (University of Southampton)

A total of 680g (47 fragments) of animal bone was recovered from stratified deposits in trenches 3, 5 and 6. Overall the bone was fragmented but well preserved. Cattle is the main species identified among the collection (29 pieces) and is represented by skull (with horn core), teeth, scapula, humerus, tibia, metacarpal, phalange and possible vertebrae. Other large mammals are represented by rib fragments and possible horse vertebrae. Smaller ungulates identified among the collection are represented by a few teeth fragments from sheep/goat and unidentified rib fragments. Nine pieces of bone were unidentifiable to species.

Evidence of butchery was present on several of the bones. Cut and chop marks were recorded on rib fragments and the cow scapula displayed chop marks. The treatment of the collection with regard to butchery techniques is typical of other Romano-British collections, especially with regard to the chop marks on the cow scapula.

Environmental Material

by M. J. Allen and S. Wyles

Processing of a single bulk sample from the fill of ditch/gully 29 produced relatively large quantities of plant macrofossils, particularly grain (mainly wheat) and chaff fragments (spikelets, rachis and glume bases etc). Weed seeds were also noted. Identifiable-sized fragments of charcoal were also present.

Discussion

The work at Three Locks was an evaluation and interpretation of its results is of necessity tentative.

It cannot be conclusively proved that all of the archaeological features and deposits observed in the trial trenches are of Roman date. The regular linear features in trench 1 certainly appear to be post-Medieval or modern. Gully 27 in trench 5 is also interpreted as of recent origin in view of the collection of modern finds recovered from it. For the remaining features, those in trenches 3, 5, and 6 may be assigned a Roman date with some confidence whereas those in trenches 2, 7 and 8 remain undated. The balance of evidence suggests that the undated features are also likely to be of Roman date.

Within the areas examined, trench 5 clearly represents the area of most intensive activity and, in addition, is the most informative for determining the range of deposits likely to be associated with the site. The cobbled surface and the wall footing indicate that the site contains not merely subsoil features but also stratified deposits, including structural elements. Parts of the site at least may be well-preserved, having survived the effects of ploughing across the area. The condition of the pottery also supports this view.

The date range provided by the ceramic assemblage is late first to fourth century AD. There are indications that the mid to late second century AD is the main period of occupation and/or the period of most intensive occupation on the site. The limited stratigraphic evidence in trench 5 suggests that more than one period of Romano-British occupation is represented.

It is reasonable to suggest that the site is, at least partly, agricultural. Some (or all) of the linear features may be associated with field systems and the plant macrofossils indicate

crop processing on or near the site. The wall footing and probable cobbled floor/yard surface may represent agricultural buildings and/or working areas but could conceivably be domestic.

A number of rural Romano-British sites have been identified in the Ouzel valley. Some are on the site of native Late Iron Age settlements but there is also evidence for new occupation sites appearing throughout the second century AD, which appears to be the period of most intensive Romano-British occupation in Milton Keynes and its environs (Zcepvat *et al.* 1987, 9). The lack of Iron Age material recovered from the evaluation may be noted but should not be taken as firm evidence that the site does not have pre-Roman origins.

Overall, the discovery of Romano-British remains is not surprising given the location of the site and the previous finds made. The range and nature of deposits/features encountered suggests that part of the site at least may be relatively well-preserved.

Acknowledgements

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