

## Preliminary report on the archaeological investigation of a Romano-British farmstead at Great Glen, Leicestershire

*Over the last 3 months Albion Archaeology has undertaken archaeological investigations, overseen by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Miller Homes Limited (East Midlands), in advance of housing development on the outskirts of Great Glen, c. 6 miles south of Leicester. The investigations have been completed to the satisfaction of Leicestershire County Council's Planning Archaeologists. This report presents a preliminary summary of results to co-incide with an open week when the site can be visited (within normal office hours) by members of the public and local schools.*



*Earthmoving under archaeological supervision exposing Roman ditches (dark linear soil marks) which divided the farmstead up into a series of small enclosures (the small yellow dots are archaeologists!)*

### BACKGROUND

Miller Homes (East Midlands) were granted planning permission for residential development on the outskirts of Great Glen. A planning condition required that the Romano-British farmstead on the site should be archaeologically investigated before the start of construction.

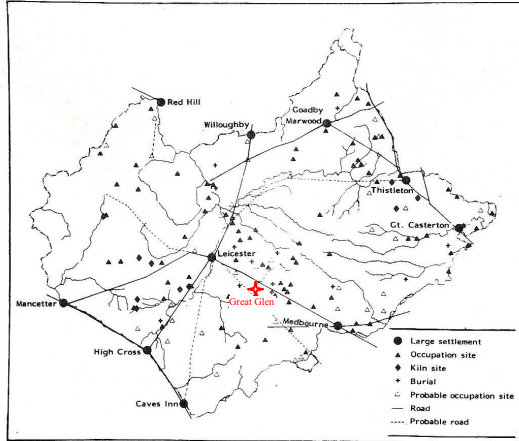
The farmstead had been located by archaeological evaluation (geophysical survey and trenching), undertaken in advance of the planning application. It was

not well preserved, e.g. no upstanding remains because of medieval and later ploughing.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Although the farmstead was only discovered in 2010, there are several other known Roman sites in the Great Glen area. For example pottery (including samian), tesserae, and tile (including box flue) have been found near the recreation ground. It has been suggested that these indicate the

presence of a high-status building. Approximately 1km to the north-west, Roman remains were also found during building work at Leicester Grammar School.



Roman Leicestershire (from Liddle 1982)

Other than Leicester (tribal capital of the *Coritani*) the nearest substantial known Roman settlement is at Medbourne which is located 14km to the SE along and adjacent to the Gartree Road. The latter preserves the line of the Roman road from Leicester to Godmanchester (and ultimately Colchester) and passes within a mile of the site. It is one of those classic Roman roads that survive in the landscape as straight lengths of modern road, track, path and hedgerows. In addition, it is sometimes suggested that the A6 to the west of Great Glen is on the line of a Roman road.

## THE RESULTS



On-going archaeological investigations

## Origins and development

The finds recovered during the investigations suggest that the farmstead originated in the early 2nd century AD. No Iron Age precursor was identified within the development area. Although broadly rectangular, the layout of the farmstead changed on at least three occasions. The reasons for this are unclear but may be to do with changes in ownership. Although the farmstead continued to be occupied until at least the middle of the 4th century AD, there is no evidence for any activity in the Saxon period.



An archaeologist recording a Roman pit

## Extent and layout

The farmstead covered more than 2ha, extending beyond the development area to the north. It comprised broadly rectangular enclosures defined by ditches. Originally, these would have featured adjacent banks and hedges. They were not for defence but formed effective barriers for livestock (just like on farms today).



Investigation of Roman boundary ditch (the dark soil mark)

### Buildings

Evidence for five roundhouses and one possible rectangular building survived in the form of intermittent, curving gullies. Rectangular buildings were introduced around the time of the Roman conquest but roundhouses, which originated in prehistory, continued to be constructed by some people throughout the Roman period. It is uncertain if this was because they disliked the new building type (and its association with the Roman conquest), could not afford the new design or simply preferred the buildings they were used to.



*The roundhouses may have looked a bit like this*

A number of areas of cobbling survived. They are likely to be yards or working areas associated with the work carried out on the farmstead.



*One of the cobbled surfaces within the farmstead*

### Agriculture

Like the majority of the population of Roman Britain the occupants of the settlement were farmers. The presence of quernstones and a possible millstone fragment attests to crop processing.

A large quantity of animal bone (45kg) was recovered, dominated by cattle and sheep. These, along with charred plant remains of cereal grains, will be examined by experts from Leicester University. Their analysis will provide more details on animal husbandry and the arable regime of the farmstead.



*Charred seeds may not look very interesting but they will reveal a lot about the economy of the farmstead*

### Finds

A large quantity of pottery (over 25kg) was recovered from the farmstead. Most of it was locally made coarse ware (grey ware and shelly), including much from the Nene Valley. A small quantity of regional imports were present, including fine wares from Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire, along with samian from Gaul.



Some of the pottery found during the investigations

Metal objects from the farmstead comprise 20 coins and single fragments from a brooch, fitting/mount and a stylus. The latter indicates that at least one of the occupants of the farmstead was literate. Unfortunately all the metal finds were in poor condition and will require expert analysis and conservation before they reveal more information.



Selection of coins, brooch and fitting

### WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The work on site has been completed to the satisfaction of Leicestershire County Council's Planning Archaeologists.

However, although the fieldwork is complete, this is only the beginning of archaeological process. All the records and finds need to be catalogued and computerised before they are analysed by different specialists in universities and museums across the country. Ultimately an article summarising the results will be submitted to the county journal, *Transactions of The Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*. With the landowner's permission the finds will be deposited with the Leicestershire Museum Archaeology Collections.

### MILLER HOMES DEVELOPMENT

The new Miller Homes housing development has provided an opportunity to examine a 2000-year old Leicestershire farmstead. Very few such sites have been examined in the county. When analysed and published it will provide a useful comparison with evidence from Roman Leicester and similar sites elsewhere in the country.

Anyone moving into the new homes off Stretton Road will have the knowledge that they are the first people to live on the site since the farmstead was abandoned towards the end of the Roman period.

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