

233 Watling Street West Towcester Northamptonshire

Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording, Analysis &
Publication



for:
Olivia & Charlie Green

CA Project: MK0341
CA Report: MK0341_2
Event No: ENN110012

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233 Watling Street West, Towcester, Northampton

Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording, Analysis &
Publication

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SUMMARY

Project name:	233 Watling Street West, Towcester
Location:	Towcester, Northamptonshire
NGR:	469145, 248859
Type:	Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording, Analysis & Publication
Date:	4/11/2020
Planning reference:	S/2020/1283/FUL
Location of Archive:	Milton Keynes
Event Number:	ENN110012

In November 2020, Cotswold Archaeology carried out programme of archaeological observation, investigation, recording, analysis and publication (hereafter 'archaeological observation') during groundworks associated with a rear extension to No. 233 Watling Street, Towcester, Northamptonshire.

No. 233 is located within the Roman and Medieval core of Towcester and of particular relevance are the discovery of inhumation burials of likely Roman date in the grounds of Windsor House, located to the rear of the property.

No features or deposits of archaeological interest were observed and no artefactual material pre-dating the modern period was recovered, with only Early Modern deposits likely associated with the construction of the existing house observed. The absence of archaeological deposits may indicate that archaeological remains associated with the Roman and Medieval settlement of Towcester were either not exposed by the development groundworks, which affected a relatively small area, or have been removed by previous development on the site, including the construction of the exiting property.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. In November 2020, Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out programme of archaeological observation, investigation, recording, analysis and publication (hereafter 'archaeological observation') at No. 233 Watling Street West, Towcester, Northamptonshire, NN12 6DD, in connection with the construction of a rear extension to the property. The work was undertaken on behalf of Olivia & Charlie Green.
- 1.2. South Northamptonshire Council (SNC) has granted planning permission for a rear extension to No. 233 (planning ref: S/2020/1283/FUL). Condition 4 of this planning permission requires the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with an approved WSI.
- 1.3. The scope of the programme of works was defined by the Assistant Archaeological Advisor, Northamptonshire County Council (AAANCC - Liz Mordue) in their capacity as archaeological advisor to South Northamptonshire Council (SNC), and undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by CA (2020) and approved by the AAANCC.
- 1.4. The archaeological observation was also undertaken in line with the *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2020), *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) PPN 3: Archaeological Excavation* (Historic England 2015) and *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers' Guide* (Historic England 2015).

The site

- 1.5. No. 233 is located on the west side of Watling Street West, fronting onto the pavement/ road, immediately to the east, and bounded by residential properties to the north and south, with domestic gardens to the west and Windsor House beyond (centred at NGR: 469145, 248859; Fig. 1).
- 1.6. The British Geological Survey record the site as lying on the Whitby Mudstone Formation. No superficial deposits are recorded as being present although Alluvium associated with the River Tove is recorded to the north and east, and diamicton of the Oadby Member to the west (BGS 2020).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Settlement is recorded at Towcester from the Iron Age onwards, with a probable hiatus in the Early Saxon period. The settlement focus is located on a low rise, largely on Upper Lias clay, with a small area of river gravel on the southern boundary of the settlement, within a loop formed by the confluence of the River Tove to the north and west with the Silverstone Brook to the south. The choice of the site seemingly determined to a large degree by the availability of a river crossing.
- 2.2. Prehistoric origins for the settlement at Towcester are indicated suggested by finds of residual Iron Age pottery, largely confined to the east of the present town in the area between the line later taken by Watling Street and the floodplain of the River Tove. A cemetery, containing at least seven inhumation burials associated with Late Iron Age/Early Roman material, possibly defined by a boundary ditch containing ceramic material of Late Iron Age tradition were also recorded to the northeast of the site, in the area of Bury Mount (CA 2020).
- 2.3. A major Roman settlement was established at Towcester, becoming an important small town known as *Lactodorum*. Watling Street and immediately neighbouring areas appear to have been laid out in the third quarter of the first century AD, possibly designed to intersect with a pre-existing Late Iron Age focus of settlement located on and immediately to the west of the floodplain of the Tove.
- 2.4. Significant parts of the core area were well established by the later first century AD and occupation covered all the identified suburbs by the mid-late second century AD. During the late first to early second century routes between Watling Street and other emerging centres such as Brackley/Evenley, Alchester, Irchester and/or Duston were formalised and additional buildings constructed close to their frontages. Close to the core of the town, the later first century saw the development of a number of important religious buildings alongside other substantial buildings of uncertain function but potentially including a mansion or bath house. During the course of the second century in particular the construction of stone founded buildings, including shops, workshops and houses, took place along the road frontages.
- 2.5. Located astride Watling Street between the major settlement at Whilton Lodge (Bannaventa) to the north west and Fenny Stratford (Magiovinium) to the south

east, Towcester was, along with Irchester and Water Newton (Durobrivae) one of the largest and most significant small towns in Northamptonshire. Lying on both a key strategic route through the province and at a junction with roads to a number of other small towns in the region, Towcester acted as a local craft, commercial and religious centre that probably also played a role as a focus of local administration and taxation (Taylor et al, 2006).

2.6. Of particular relevance to the current site is the discovery of human remains in the grounds of Windsor House, which is located to the rear of the site. Human remains were uncovered in 1993 during the excavation of foundation trenches for garage. Five skeletons were identified, comprising three adult males, one adult female and one child of approximately 2 years old. At least two of the individuals were aligned east-west. The condition of the surviving teeth was taken to suggest the burials were of at least medieval origin but may be Roman in date. However, Roman tradition would generally not permit burials within a town or village and the presence of the inhumations within the 2nd century defended enclosure may suggest a post-Roman date. Fragments of human skull and mandible were subsequently found during the construction of a picket fence in front of Windsor House, in January 1994, while further skeletons were found in November 1998, in association with a single sherd of Nene Valley Colour Coat ware, whilst undertaking construction work to the rear of Windsor House.

2.7. Most recently, in 2018, archaeological monitoring of an area of shallow ground reduction in the rear garden of Windsor House identified a single disarticulated fragment of human bone and a single sherd of Roman pottery, recovered from modern/ previously disturbed deposits (Summerfield-Hill, C. 2018).

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1. The general objectives of the archaeological observation were:

- to monitor the development groundworks, and to identify, investigate and record any significant buried archaeological deposits/features thus revealed;
- at the conclusion of the project, to produce an integrated project archive and a report setting out the watching brief results and the archaeological conclusions that can be drawn from the recorded data.

3.2. Specific objectives for the work comprised:

-
- establishing the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation in the development site;
 - establishing the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscapes;
 - recovering artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region;
 - recovering palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions as an intrinsic part of the investigation.

3.3. In the event that significant archaeological remains had been identified then as part of the analysis and publication process reference would have been made to appropriate regional research objectives and themes where possible to place the remains within their local and regional context. However, the absence of any archaeological remains means that the results of the investigation will not contribute to any research framework objectives.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. The works comprised the observation by a competent archaeologist of all intrusive groundworks associated with the proposed development likely to expose, damage or destroy any archaeological remains that were present. These principally comprised the machine excavation of foundation trenches for the extension (Fig. 2).

4.2. Records were maintained in accordance with *CA Technical Manual 1: Fieldwork Recording Manual*.

4.3. Deposits were assessed for their palaeoenvironmental potential in accordance with *CA Technical Manual 2: The Taking and Processing of Environmental and Other Samples from Archaeological Sites*. No deposits were identified that required sampling.

4.4. CA will make arrangements with the Northampton Archaeological Resource Centre (NARC) for the deposition of the project archive. The archives will be prepared and deposited in accordance with the *Northamptonshire Archaeological Archives Standards* (Donnelly-Symes 2020) and the *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives* (October 2020).

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- 4.5. A summary of information from this project, as set out in Appendix D will be entered onto the OASIS online database of archaeological projects in Britain.

5. RESULTS

- 5.1. This section provides an overview of the results. Detailed summaries of the recorded contexts are given in Appendix A.
- 5.2. The consented extension is located in an existing yard area to the rear of the property (Fig 3). The natural geological substrate (103), consisting of an orange-yellow silt clay was revealed at an average depth of 0.8m below present ground level (bpgl). This was overlain by a layer of mid grey blue silt clay (101) averaging 0.6m thick that was in sealed in turn by a 0.2 to 0.4m thick brick yard surface comprised of 0.2m thick blue-grey brick (100), laid flat, on the north side of the yard (Fig 4) and areas of 0.4m thick red brick, lain on edge, to the south.
- 5.3. A brick-built drain (102) linking to a probable cistern was partially exposed in the northwest side of the foundation trench, the feature probably originally being used to store/ collect rainwater off the yard area or adjacent roofs. Constructed in red brick, bonded with a hard cementitious mortar, an insufficient amount of the feature was exposed to say more about its overall size or function (Fig 4).
- 5.4. No features or deposits of archaeological interest were observed and no artefactual material pre-dating the modern period was recovered.

6. THE FINDS & ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

- 6.1. Despite the proximity to the known areas of archaeological survival no finds, including any residual material, were recovered from site and no deposits of environmental interest were identified.

7. DISCUSSION

- 7.1. Despite the archaeological potential of the application area (see *Archaeological background*, above), the watching brief identified no archaeological remains within the area of observed groundworks. The absence of archaeological deposits may indicate that archaeological remains associated with the Roman and Medieval settlement of Towcester were either not exposed by the development groundworks, which affected a relatively small area, or have been removed by previous development on the site, including the construction of the exiting property.

8. CA PROJECT TEAM

- 8.1. Fieldwork was undertaken by Eilidh Barr. This report was written by Eilidh Barr. The report illustrations were prepared by Ryan Wilson. The project archive has been compiled by Matthew Lee and prepared for deposition by Hazel O'Neil. The project was managed for CA by Adrian Scruby.

9. REFERENCES

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(HE) Historic England 2008, *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MORPHE): Project Planning Note 3: Excavation*.

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Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. 2019. *National Planning Policy Framework*

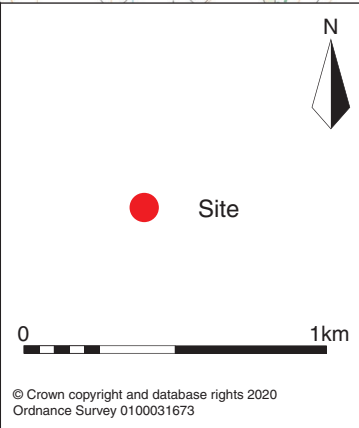
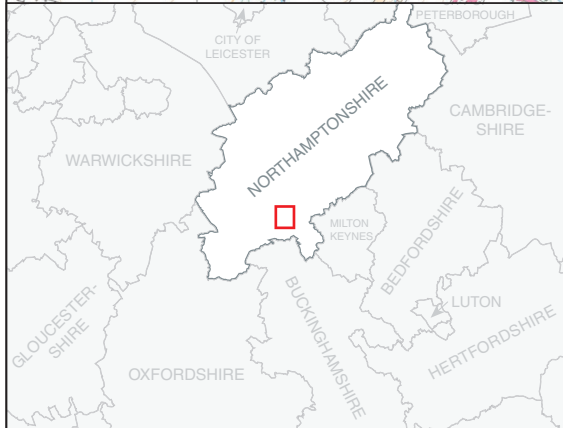
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APPENDIX A: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Area	Context No.	Type	Fill of	Interpretation	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth/thickness (m)	Spot-date
1	100	Layer		brick	Orange-red and mid blue grey, forming yard surface	10	-	0.4 and 0.2	Early Mod
1	101	Layer		Made ground	Mid grey blue, silty clay	10	-	0.6	
1	102	Structure		Drain or culvert	Brick-built drain or culvert partially exposed in trench face	1.8>	-	-	Early Mod
1	103	Layer		Natural	Orange-yellow silt clay	10>	-	-	

APPENDIX B: OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	233 Watling Street West, Towcester	
Short description	<p>In November 2020, Cotswold Archaeology carried out programme of archaeological observation, investigation, recording, analysis and publication (hereafter 'archaeological observation') during groundworks associated with a rear extension to No. 233 Watling Street, Towcester, Northamptonshire.</p> <p>No. 233 is located within the Roman and Medieval core of Towcester and of particular relevance are the discovery of inhumation burials of likely Roman date in the grounds of Windsor House, located to the rear of the property.</p> <p>No features or deposits of archaeological interest were observed and no artefactual material pre-dating the modern period was recovered. The absence of archaeological deposits may indicate that archaeological remains associated with the Roman and Medieval settlement of Towcester were either not exposed by the development groundworks, which affected a relatively small area, or have been removed by previous development on the site, including the construction of the existing property.</p>	
Project dates	03/11/2020	
Project type	Archaeological observation, investigation, recording, analysis and publication (Watching Brief)	
Previous work	None	
Future work	No	
PROJECT LOCATION		
Site location	233 Watling Street, West, Towcester, Northants	
Study area (m ² /ha)	50m ²	
Site co-ordinates	469145, 248859	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Name of organisation	Cotswold Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Northamptonshire County Council	
Project design (WSI) originator	Cotswold Archaeology	
Project Manager	Adrian Scruby	
Project Supervisor	Eilidh Barr	
MONUMENT TYPE	None	
SIGNIFICANT FINDS	None	
PROJECT ARCHIVES	Intended final location of archive (museum/Accession no.)	Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical	None	N/A
Paper	NARC	Context register & sheets. Photo register
Digital	ADS	Digital photos, report
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Cotswold Archaeology 2020. <i>233 Watling Street West, Towcester, Northamptonshire. Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording, Analysis & Publication.</i> CA report No. MK0341_1		






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PROJECT TITLE
 233 Watling Street West, Towcester,
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FIGURE TITLE
 Site location plan
DRAWN BY RW **PROJECT NO.** MK0341 **FIGURE NO.**
CHECKED BY DJB **DATE** 11/11/2020 **1**
APPROVED BY EB **SCALE@A4** 1:25,000

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-  Site boundary
-  Monitored groundworks

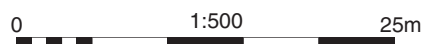
PROJECT TITLE

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FIGURE TITLE

The site, showing location of
groundworks

DRAWN BY	RW	PROJECT NO.	MK0341	FIGURE NO.
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Site pre-excitation



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FIGURE TITLE

Photograph

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Trench mid-excavation showing piped access to water tank, looking north-west



One-metre deep section, looking north-east (1m scale)



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FIGURE TITLE

Trench photographs

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