

RAUMS (NM)

STANWICK, NORTHANTS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

MARCH 1989

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STANWICK: LAND UPSTREAM FROM PLANT TO A6

Background Information

An archaeological assessment of the area was undertaken in February/March 1989 by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on behalf of Amey Roadstone Corporation to provide information for a proposed planning application for gravel extraction over an area of c.86 ha. The subsoil varies with alluvium (immediately post-glacial and late Saxon/early Medieval), gravel islands and solifluction and hillwash deposits all found within the area (Fig 1).

Archaeological Background

A large scale archaeological project in the parishes of Raunds and Irthlingborough has been carried out over the past few years by Northamptonshire C C Archaeology Unit and the Central Excavation Unit.

A group of Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age ceremonial monuments has been excavated along the valley bottom. It has been shown that colonisation of the heavier soils on the clayland occurred between the Early Iron Age and the Late Iron Age. Settlements of the Roman period were located close to those of their Iron Age predecessors. The Stanwick villa and its settlement just north of the proposed application area overlies a series of Iron Age enclosures and houses (English Heritage: The Raunds Area Project. A Reassessment of the Research Design. January 1989).

Within the proposed application area two ring ditches are known from aerial photographs (Fig 12,J,K).

Fieldwalking

A fieldwalking exercise carried out by NCC indicated possible late Iron Age/early Romano-British occupation at C and possible Roman occupation at A, G, H and north-east of F. A quite high density of flint was apparent along the south-eastern edge of the application area. This is the boundary of the lower valley slope and the floodplain. A more even spread of flintwork was observed across the area south of the lake.

Geophysical

A sample area of about half a hectare in Area A was surveyed with a Geoscan fluxgate gradiometer. The results are not yet available.

Strategy

Gravel islands, slightly elevated above the floodplain, but blanketed by alluvium were first identified from bore hole information. These are known to be the favoured location for prehistoric ceremonial monuments. At least 2% of the area of these islands were excavated. Similarly a 2% sample was excavated where fieldwalking indicated areas of activity.

In total 90 trenches varying in length from 4m to 42m were excavated by a 360° excavator using an 8 foot trough bucket.

Trenches 1-6, 22, Area A, (Fig 4)

These trenches covered an area of Roman settlement and adjacent field systems or series of paddocks.

At the southern end of Trench 5 corners of walls (5-8) were exposed with a doorway through 5 and 6. No associated floors were found. The modern ploughsoil, 0.30m thick, directly overlies these walls. At the northern end of Trench 5 a large rubble spread partly sealed a cornbrash floor. A wall, within the rubble survived for a height of 0.25m above the floor. Two gullies, 10 and 11, cut into a destruction spread appear to post-date the buildings. Pre-dating the stone buildings was a length of curving ditch, partly underlying wall 8. This was seen when a small part of the destruction spread and ground surface associated with the building was removed.

Further down the slope, Trench 4 contained evidence of further stone buildings. A wall 6, possibly of a circular building, pre-dates a series of gullies 10, 11, pits 5, 9, 12, 14, and a ditch 13. At the north end of Trench 4 an area of stonework could be interpreted either as a path or a ploughed out wall footing. This lies at the foot of the higher area partly underlying the edge of the alluvial deposit.

Trench 3 again contained a length of curving wall 12, possibly for a circular building. The top of this footing lies 0.38m below modern ground surface (MGS). Associated floors were not found although the building had been cut down into the natural subsoil. The rubble/masonry feature 10 showed through the top of a destruction level and was not investigated further. Ditches 5, 6, 9, gully 4 and pits 7 and 8 lie on the north slope of the high area. The ditches and gully may belong to paddocks or be the beginning of a field system associated with the buildings. Further ditches, in Trench 1, orientated NW-SE may belong to this system (Fig 3). Alluvium overlay the ditches in Trench 1.

Trench 6 lay on the south-west side of the high area. Several ditches and gullies were covered by up to 0.50m of hillwash and the 0.30 thick modern ploughsoil. Ditches 6, 7 and a recut ditch 9, 10 contained limestone blocks and Roman pottery and are seen as being associated with the buildings further north and eastwards. From gully 12 several pieces of worked flint were recovered and this with gully 13 may represent a prehistoric element to the archaeology. Post hole 8 was undated. A human burial was located in the surviving upper fills of ditch or ditch/pit complex 6.

No archaeological evidence was encountered in Trench 22.

Trench 23, Area B

Trench 23 contained a 2.70m wide road constructed of limestone pieces. Running NE/SW it appears to follow the edge of the lower valley slope. It may be of Roman date. The buildings in Areas A and F may lie alongside this road. Modern ploughing is damaging the road at this point.

Trenches 24-26, 28-30, 37, 38, Area C (Fig 5)

The subsoil in this part of the site, and extending further north-eastwards, is a sandy silty clay derived from solifluction that has infilled a lower area between two slightly higher gravel islands. There has also been a certain amount of hillwash of a similar material that has buried the archaeology. There is no discernable ground surface associated with the features found.

Late Iron Age/Early Romano-British ditches and pits were found in this area. Trench 24 contained an area of rubble 5 and the large recut ditch 4 contained limestone rubble in its upper fill. Further ditches were located in Trench 26, while a pit and a post hole were found in Trench 29. What is possibly a series of thin floors survived in the top of an earlier gully in Trench 38.

The surface finds from fieldwalking at this point suggest that they derive from material washed down the slope from the other side of the present road. The archaeology here is too deep to have been disturbed by modern ploughing.

No archaeology or finds from the overburden were encountered in Trenches 25, 28, 30 and 37.

Trenches 7-13, 19, 20 Area D (Fig 3)

Trench 10 was located on a small gravel island while the other trenches were arranged to sample a further higher gravel area.

No archaeology or finds were recovered from Trenches 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12. One burnt tree throw hole in Trench 7 indicated land clearance; it preceded alluviation but is otherwise undated.

The ditches in this area (Fig 3) are undated although the parallel ditches in Trench 19 may be a pair for a Bronze Age field system. They were sealed by alluvium and cut a probable old ground surface.

Trenches 21 and 27 Area D

A low mound in this part of the field indicated the possibility of a barrow. A turf mound standing at least 0.40m high (at the south-west end of trench 21) above an old ground surface partly covered the small enclosing ditch 14. This ditch was c.1m wide and 0.35m deep. A possible inner ditch was located c.2m away. An earlier tree throw hole made interpretation difficult. Turf had been removed from the surrounding area to build the turf mound. The centre of the present mound lies 6m south-west of the south-west end of Trench 21. Two cremations were found external to the outer ditch and 7-9m away from it. (These were left in situ.) One cremation is contained in a pot which has had the top truncated by later ploughing. They are cut into the old ground surface. The edge of the mound appears to have been ploughed and later alluvium partly overlies this ploughsoil. The barrow is located on the western edge of a gravel island.

Trenches 14, 15, 32-36

Trench 36 was located on the edge of a gravel island that extended east and south-eastwards. No archaeology was found.

Trenches 14, 15, 32-35 were excavated on material derived from solifluction, under alluvium, and again no archaeology existed. A prehistoric ground surface was not discernable.

Trenches 16-18, 31 Area E

A circular enclosure cutting through an old ground surface and sealed by alluvium was located here. Two overlapping terminals in Trench 16 and a possible terminal in Trench 31 indicated a segmented monument. Recutting was seen in the machine-cut section in Trench 31 and the terminals in Trench 16 indicate at least one recut. There was no evidence for a surviving bank and the immediate collapse of trench sides prevented the examination of the ditch fills. No dating evidence was recovered but the nature of the feature suggests a Prehistoric date.

Trenches 81-83, 85-88 Area L (Fig 10)

Old ground surfaces (OGS) lying under 0.15-0.55 of alluvium were investigated in all trenches except for Trench 88 where an OGS was not identified. Although tree throw holes were found in most trenches there was no evidence of deliberate land clearance. An undated ploughsoil overlying the OGS was identified in Trench 83 and ploughing of part of the alluvium was observed in Trench 85.

Trench 86 revealed prehistoric settlement evidence. Cut into a surviving old ground surface and sealed by c.0.55m of alluvial deposits were a number of post holes and pits (Fig 10). The features were filled with a similar material to the OGS and it was felt that more features were present than those identified. One flint core from the OGS and two flint flakes from post-hole 9 and pit 10 were recovered.

Trenches 65-67, 71-78 Area F (Fig 8)

Remains of footings of a stone building in Trench 72 lay 0.50m below MGS. Pits and post holes were found close to the building. Elsewhere a series of paddocks were revealed in Trenches 73, 76, 74 (Fig 8). Evidence of more than one phase is shown by ditch 72/7 cutting through the corner of an enclosure 72/6 and pit 72/8. The archaeology is only 0.30-0.50m below MGS.

Trenches 66 and 67 indicate a hollow existed in the Roman period, later infilled by hillwash. Two gullies 67/7, 10, a pit and the edge of another feature are buried under 1.50-1.80m of overburden. A bank 67/8 remains standing 0.35m high on the east side of gully 67/7.

Trenches 68-70

A ring-ditch c.22m in diameter, known from aerial photographs, was located in Trench 70 on a gravel island. Internal to the ditch was the OGS buried under c 0.15m of mound material. A flint scraper was recovered from the ditch fill. Further westwards in Trench 69 was a large ditch c.3.50m wide and 1.20m deep. This was buried under c.1m of overburden. A slight curve to the ditch

indicated a large circular enclosure with a possible OGS surviving internally. This monument was built on a lower gravel terrace that on which the barrow in Trench 70 is built on.

Trench 45 Area J

This trench located the double concentric ditched ring ditch known from aerial photographs. The inner ditch 45/3 was 1.6m wide and 0.80m deep. The outer ditch 45/4 was 9.5m away from the inner ditch. This was only 0.80m wide and 0.30m deep. A post hole 45/5 was cut just on the outside of the ditch.

Trench 49, 50, 52 Area G (Fig 6)

Roman buildings and enclosures are centred on these trenches. Trench 50 contained footings for at least two stone buildings.

Walls 7 and 8 formed a corner with two courses of surviving stonework. Two succeeding internal floors were located. Rubble spread 12 at the east end of the trench indicated a further wall lying just outside the trench. Modern ploughing is disturbing these walls.

The building indicated by footings 14 survives only one course high. It is buried by up to 1m of overburden caused by the earlier gravel extraction and landscaping. Further stonework 20 was seen protruding through the subsoil at the western end of the trench.

A pit or butt end of a ditch was seen on the edge of Trench 49. Recut ditches 3 and 4 may form the corner of an enclosure, just to the east of Trench 52, with associated ditches 6.

Trenches 60, 41 Area G (Figs 3, 6)

Trench 60 exposed the corner of another rectangular stone building under c.0.50m of overburden. A large amount of occupation debris, pottery, tile, bone, nails and iron objects were located within the building. A ditch, probably for enclosures associated with the building was located, running NE/SW in trench 41.

Trenches 53, 57, 58, 59, 79, 80 Area H

A relict stream course was located in these trenches. Trenches 57, 58, 59, and 80 had a large quantity of closely packed limestone blocks set into the top of the stream course.

Trench 55 Area H (Fig 9)

Trench 55 partly cut through an area of dumped material perhaps associated with the railway. Ditches 5-7 at the southern end of the trench were buried under c.1.25m of overburden. Collapse of the trench sides prevented the drawing of a detailed plan. At the north end of the trench footings for a Roman stone building were revealed. A large amount of limestone and tile rubble 10 overlaid a cobbled area and obscured a suspected south return wall for wall 11. Wall 11 survived for two courses above offset footings. Two sets of floor layers were found internal to the building.

Trenches 61-64 Area I (Fig 11)

Trench 61 contained a series of ditches 12, 14, 15 running north-south and are associated with a curving gully 8. Five post-holes 10, 11, 13, 16, 17, and a pit 9 were also found. The relic stream channel was located in Trenches 61 and 64 while a ditch 6 and gully 7 were found in Trench 63.

Other Trenches

Trenches not mentioned above did not contain any archaeology

Flintwork

Flintwork was conspicuous by its absence especially in Area C and to the north-east of Area F.

Romano-British Finds

The areas of Romano-British occupation produced considerable quantities of 2nd to 4th century pottery - notably shell-gritted wares (two standard boxes were collected). The Late Iron Age area C produced only three sherds. Other finds included two worn 4th century coins - one from the floor of a building in Trench 50.

Summary

Twelve areas of archaeological interest were located within the proposed application area. Several of these lie outside or partly outside the proposed extraction area but landscaping or plant movement may cause damage to features under a shallow overburden.

Area A

A spur c.140 x 60m is covered by stone buildings of the Roman period. There are associated enclosures immediately to the south-west and north and a possible field system extending to the north edge of the proposed application area.

Area B

A road of possible Roman date appears to follow the lower valley slopes. Buildings in Areas A and F are probably built alongside the road.

Area C

Late Iron Age/Early Romano-British settlement extends from here eastwards under the present road. Stone buildings are indicated by rubble spreads and rubble in the ditch fills. There are enclosure ditches, pits and post holes present.

Area D

A prehistoric field system of possible Bronze Age date covers a gravel island. On the west edge of the island is a barrow, 20-25m in diameter standing at least 0.40m above an old ground surface. Two cremations were found external to the barrow.

Area E

A segmented enclosure, c.40m in diameter, of possible Neolithic or early Iron Age date was found on another gravel island.

Area F

Stone buildings and enclosures of the Roman period are probably located at a road junction. It is postulated that a road leaves the valley side road (see Area B) and runs across the valley bottom to a river crossing at Area H.

Area G

Further stone buildings of the Roman period with associated paddocks are located here, ? adjacent to a road.

Area H

A river crossing with a contemporary Roman building to the west. There are enclosures to the south of the building.

Area I

Further enclosures of the Roman period lie to the west of the old stream course. Occupation in the form of post holes and pits is present.

Area J

A double concentric ring-ditch of c.40m in diameter is located on a gravel island.

Area K

A small barrow of c.22m in diameter again is located on a gravel island. On a gravel terrace to the west is a large ditched enclosure of probable prehistoric date.

Area L

A small area of prehistoric occupation was found to the west of a present stream. Pits and postholes were found associated with a contemporary ground surface.

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APPENDIX 1

GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

A sample area of about half a hectare was surveyed with a Geoscan fluxgate gradiometer by the Clark Consultancy. The area selected was in Area A where machine trenching had revealed stone walling and ditches.

The results of magnetometry indicate a series of enclosures (fig 14). Their orientation suggests that they extend back from the probable road line under the present road (see Area B, pp 3 & 6). These enclosures may predate the buildings revealed in the excavation of Trenches 3 - 5 (fig 13). One enclosure ditch would underlie the probable circular building 12 in Trench 3, another would predate a similar building 6 in the south end of Trench 4. The possible wall indicated by the geophysical survey is probably the wall and associated destruction rubble 13 in Trench 5. The lack of any indication for other walls suggest that any remains are slight. Excavation confirms that in some cases only wall footings remain.

Various pits and one or two hearths or kilns are indicated by the survey.

Magnetic susceptibility measurements showed high readings within the heavily worked roadside strip, falling away noticeably 10m outside it. Magnetometer scanning over the rest of the field showed little sign that the activity extended much along the road on either side of the survey area. In view of the high susceptibility of the soil, the weak signals given by many ditches indicate that these must be very slight. The high susceptibility also suggests that much burning took place on the site, possibly associated with industrial pursuits.