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LEICESTER

Archaeological Services

**An Archaeological Evaluation of proposed
Buildings NW07 and NW08 at
MIRA Ltd., Higham on the Hill,
Leicestershire
NGR: SP 36821 96192**

Donald Clark



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An Archaeological evaluation of proposed buildings

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MIRA Ltd., Higham on the Hill,

Leicestershire

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An Archaeological Evaluation of land at MIRA Ltd., Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire SP 36821 96192

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Summary

An archaeological field evaluation by trial trenching was carried out on land at the proposed NA07 and NA08 buildings, MIRA Technology Park, Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire (SP 36821 96192) by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) between 25th-27th April 2017. Work was undertaken for MIRA Ltd. in order to establish the nature, extent, date and significance of any archaeological deposits which may be present. An earlier ULAS evaluation (Thomas 2011) partly uncovered two brick and concrete structures, probably associated with the former airfield and the trenching was designed to establish the extent of the structures in order that an assessment may be made of the impact of any proposed development on the buried remains. Fourteen 30m x 1.6m trenches were excavated within the proposed development area, sampling c.5% of the area of the planned buildings. Slight traces of medieval ridge and furrow and modern field drains were recorded and the brick and concrete structures were exposed.

The project archive will be held by Leicestershire Museum Service under the accession number X.A23.2016.

Introduction

In April 2017 University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) carried out an archaeological evaluation of land at the proposed NA07 and NA08 buildings, MIRA Technology Park, Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire (SP 36821 96192). The work was undertaken for MIRA Ltd. in order to establish the nature, extent, date and significance of any archaeological deposits which might be present, in order that an assessment may be made of the impact of any proposed development on the buried remains.

The work constitutes a pre-planning application inquiry, carried out in accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Section 12: Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment (DCLG 2012). Work was carried out on the advice of the Senior Planning Archaeologist for Leicestershire County Council acting in their capacity as archaeological advisor to the local planning authority, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, who requested that any planning application be accompanied by information regarding the archaeological potential of the proposed development area.

Archaeological fieldwork took place between 25th and 27th April 2017 and this report presents the final results of the archaeological investigation.

Site location, Geology and Topography

The MIRA Technology Park lies in the parish of Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire, approximately 5 miles north-west of Hinckley. The Technology Park is bordered by the A5 (Watling Street) to the south, which is the border with Warwickshire. The dismantled Ashby and Nuneaton Joint Railway runs to the south-east of the site and to the north-west and north-east lie fields and local roads.

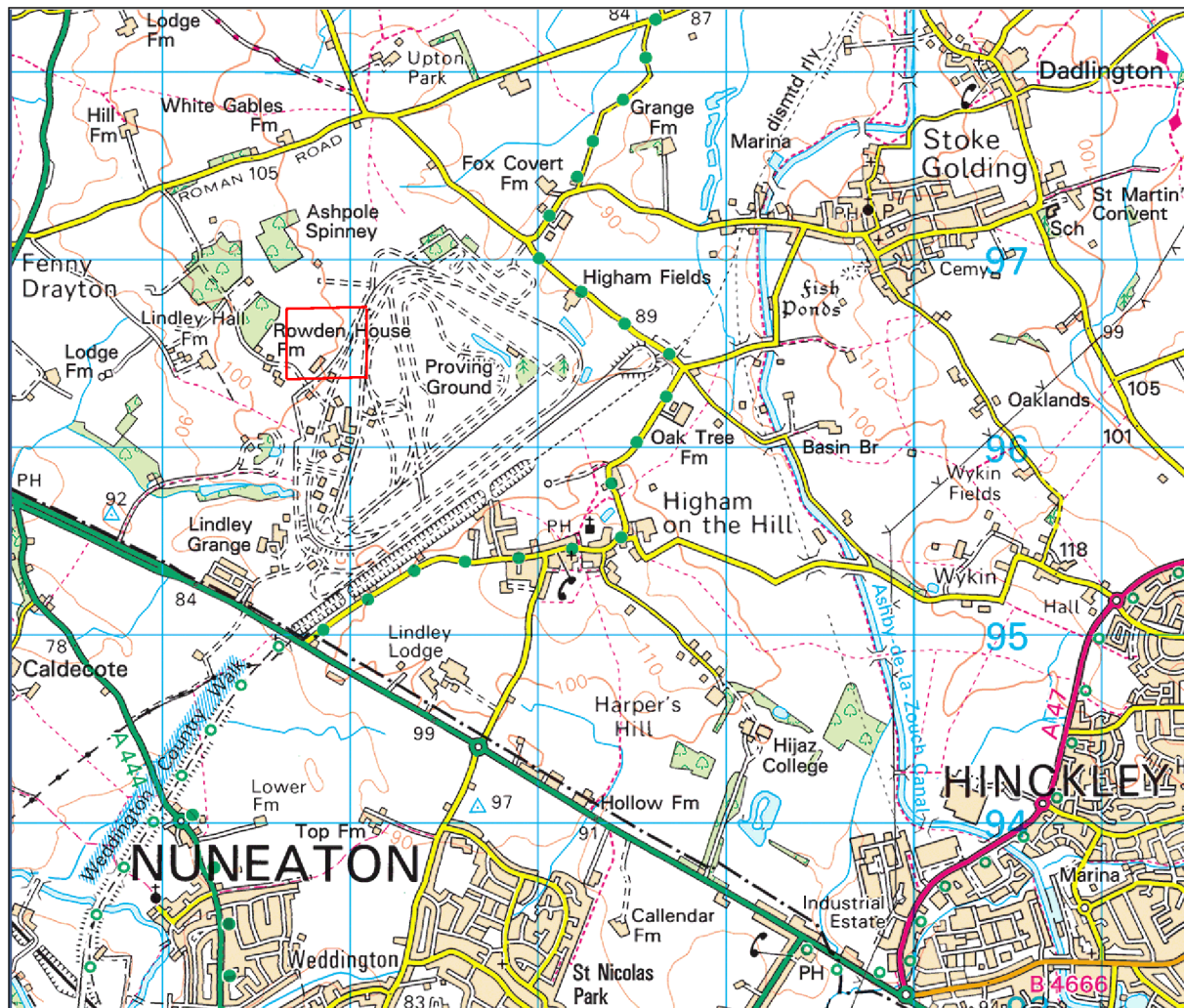


Figure 1: Site location

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The proposed development area lies on the north-west side of the Technology Park, centred on SP 36821 96192. It lies within a pasture field west of the MIRA testing circuit. Fieldwalking and geophysical survey in the fields immediately to the west located a few medieval and one prehistoric artefact and identified some geophysical anomalies of possible archaeological origin (Coward 2011; Austrums 2011). Trial trenching in the area of the proposed building has located evidence of brick built structures which are probably associated with the former airfield (Thomas 2011, 19-20; Fig.5) although the southern part of the application area was negative (Flavell 2016).

The British Geological Survey of Great Britain shows that the underlying geology is predominately superficial deposits of Pleistocene diamicton of the Thrussington Member) overlying bedrock deposits of Triassic mudstone belonging to the Mercia Mudstone Group (BGS OpenGeoscience).

Topographically, the site is flat at c.97.5m aOD (above Ordnance Datum



Figure 2: Location of trial trenches where brick foundations were located (from Thomas 2011)



Figure 3: Plan of proposed development

Archaeological and Historical Background

The parish of Higham-on-the-Hill contains the village of Higham plus the two deserted hamlets of Lindley and Rowden. The assessment area lies across all three areas, with the main race track covering the whole of what was once Rowden.

The name Higham is Anglo-Saxon in origin and simply means ‘the high farm or enclosure’ (Mills 2003), situated as it is on the highest point in the area. The village of Higham does not appear in the Domesday survey of 1086, although the lost village of Lindley is mentioned. St Peter's Church was built between 1130 and 1180 and the Norman (Romanesque) tower remains. Other parts of the present church were added in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Plague reached Leicestershire in 1348 killing probably a third of the population. It was a contributory cause to the desertion of Lindley, along with the enclosure of the open fields for sheep rearing in the 16th century (Cox 2002). A directory of 1863 shows a large variety of trades and professions within the village including 2 bakers, a wheelwright, a blacksmith, 2 millers, 2 carpenters, 4 shoemakers, 2 tailors and 3 other shops. The farm at Lindley has the fame of being the geographical centre of England, according to the Ordnance Survey.

MIRA (Motor Industry Research Association) was set up in 1945 but the company dates back to the foundation of the Cycle Engineers' Institute (CEI) in 1898, which became the Incorporated Institution of Automobile Engineers (IAE) in 1906. The IAE became the Automotive Branch of the IMechE in 1946. The proving ground was built on the old Lindley Airfield, in operation from 1943. Following a survey by the Air Ministry a site for the airfield was selected between the villages of Fenny Drayton and Higham on the Hill and known locally as Lindley, however the Air Ministry chose to use the name RAF Nuneaton. The airfield was a satellite of RAF Bramcote in Warwickshire and was used for operational training, with aircrews learning to operate Wellingtons, Oxfords and Dakotas (Chorlton 2003; 202-203).

The development site is situated in a wide area of archaeological potential as indicated by the Leicestershire & Rutland and Warwickshire Historic Environment Record (HER). Enclosures possibly dating to the Iron Age are located adjacent to the site (MLE9578) and other prehistoric sites are located nearby (MLE8245, MLE6080 and Warks. HER 4420 & 4501). The southern part of the site lies adjacent to the A5 Watling Street, a former Roman Road (MLE1388) and the Mancetter Roman Road has been projected to run to the north of the site (MLE3019). Roman pottery has been found within the former Lindley parish at the edge of the assessment area (MLE8503) and a large assemblage has been found further to the south (Warks HER 7439). Roman coins have also been retrieved from two hoards to the south of the site (Warks HER No. 5141) and near Harper's Hill, around 800m south-east of the site (Warks HER 1653). The development area lies within the deserted parish of Rowden (MLE2795) and adjacent to earthworks associated with the abandoned medieval village of Lindley (MLE2792). The area was also the site of the old Lindley Airfield (MLE15973). A Level 2 Historic Building Survey was carried out by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services at the airfield's former watch office building (Hyam 2012).

University of Leicester Archaeological Services has carried out archaeological evaluations at MIRA during the various phases of groundworks. The evaluation of the southern border of the development, adjacent to the A5 (Watling Street) located at least two distinct areas of Roman roadside occupation characterised by linear boundaries that probably demarcated plots adjacent to Watling Street. Material evidence from these features included pottery, quernstones and roof tile, indicating domestic occupation on the site between the 2nd and 4th centuries AD (Thomas

2011; Flavell 2014). Further activity, consisting of a boundary ditch and small pit, was recorded approximately 150m from the A5/Watling Street (ibid.). Trial trenches were excavated within the Phase I of the proposed Business Technology Campus development revealed one discrete area of Roman roadside occupation, consisting of a refuse pit which contained Roman pottery, and boundary ditches (Higgins 2014). The evaluations on the location of Building 4 (Sixpack) revealed medieval plough furrows, but no archaeological features or artefacts were recovered (Baker 2014b; Jarvis 2014) and the archaeological investigation prior the erection of Building MAB3 revealed further evidence of furrows but no archaeological features (Morris 2015).

Methodology

During the evaluation, the soil overburden was removed in level spits under continuous archaeological supervision down to the uppermost archaeological deposits or the natural substratum, depending on which was reached first. This was carried out with a 360 mechanical digger using a 1.6m wide, toothless ditching bucket.

All trenches, open areas, exposed sections and spoil heaps were visually inspected for features and finds. Features were hand cleaned, planned, photographed and sample excavated as appropriate. Field notes were recorded on pro-forma ULAS trench recording forms whilst stratigraphic units were to be given a unique context number and recorded on pro-forma ULAS context sheets.

Trench and feature plans/sections were drawn at appropriate scales and tied into the National Grid using appropriate methods. A photographic record of the excavation was prepared, illustrating in both detail and general context the principal features and finds discovered. Colour digital photographs were taken throughout the excavation. The photographic record also includes ‘working shots’ to illustrate more generally the nature of the archaeological operation mounted.

All work followed the approved written scheme of investigation (Clay 2017) and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Code of Conduct* and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2014).

Results

Fourteen evaluation trenches were excavated and numbered 11-24 to differentiate from an earlier phase of trenching in the south of the field (Flavell 2016).

Trench	Orientation	Length	Width	Min. Depth	Max. Depth	Comments
11	NW-SE	30.20m	1.60m	0.29m	0.45m	Slight trace of ridge and furrow, land drain
12	NE-SW	30.30m	1.60m	0.23m	0.39m	Slight trace of ridge and furrow, cable trench
13	E-W	30.30m	1.60m	0.26m	0.46m	No features
14	N-S	30.40m	1.60m	0.25m	0.37m	Slight trace of ridge and furrow
15	NW-SE	29.75m	1.60m	0.22m	0.41m	No features
16	NW-SE	30.70m	1.60m	0.29m	0.41m	Slight trace of ridge and furrow
17	NE-SW	29.90m	1.60m	0.30m	0.37m	Slight trace of ridge and furrow
18	NW-SE	30.10m	1.60m	0.28m	0.38m	Slight trace of ridge and furrow

19	NW-SE	29m	1.60m	0.29m	0.40m	Slight trace of ridge and furrow
20	E-W	30.10m	1.60m	0.28m	0.48m	Slight trace of ridge and furrow, land drain
21	E-W	29.10m	1.60m	0.28m	0.51m	Slight trace of ridge and furrow, land drain
22	NW-SE	30.25m	1.60m	0.30m	0.41m	Electric cable trench
23	NE-SW	30m	1.60m	0.29m	0.41m	Slight trace of ridge and furrow
24	NE-SW	29.40m	1.60m	0.33m	0.43m	Slight trace of ridge and furrow

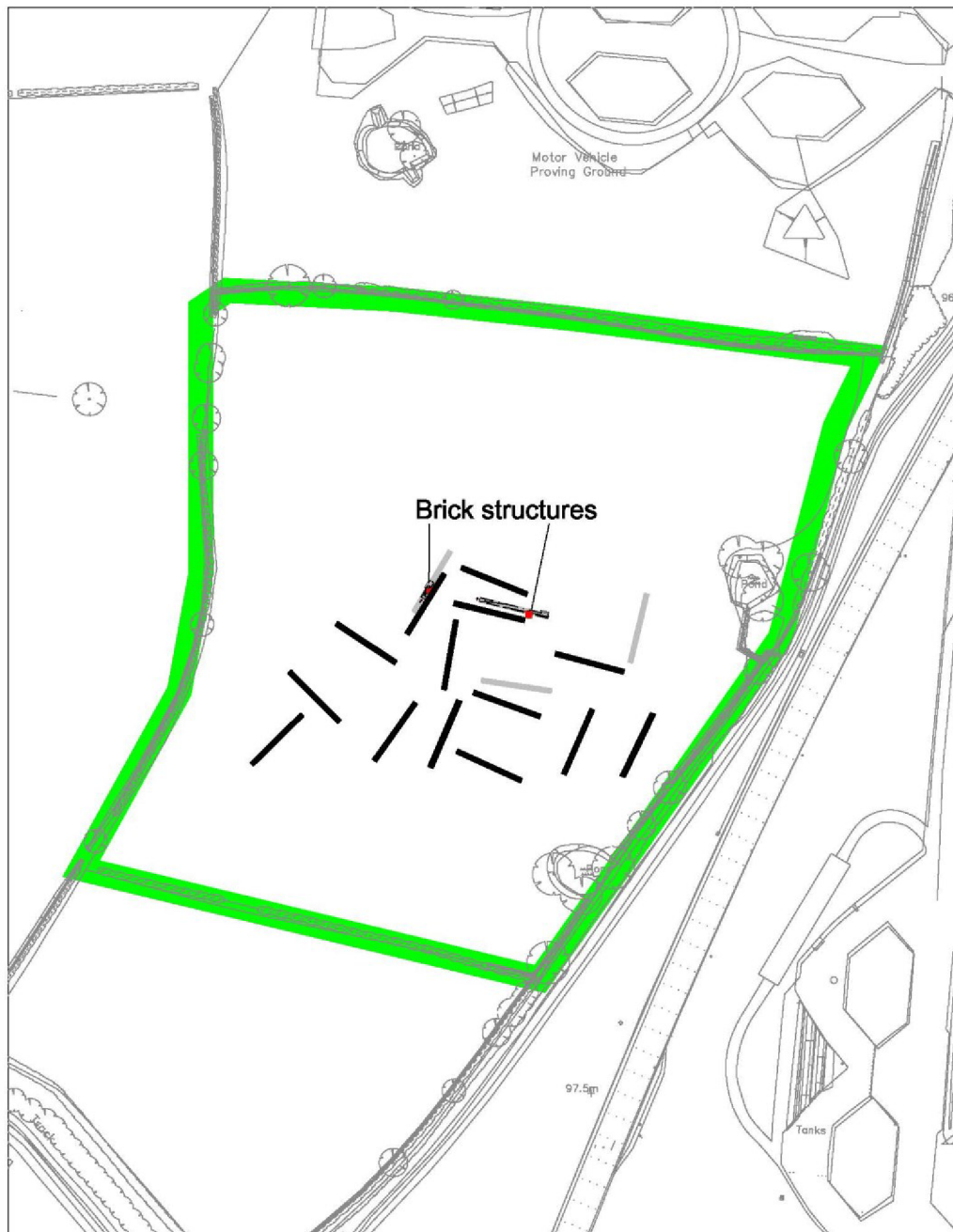


Figure 4: Location of trenches (2017 in black, 2011 in grey) showing location of brick foundations

No archaeological remains were located in the fourteen trenches initially opened. In view of this and following consultation with the Senior Planning Archaeologist the areas where brick foundations had been located in 2011 (Thomas 2011) were extended. This confirmed the presence and extent of the two brick and concrete structures.

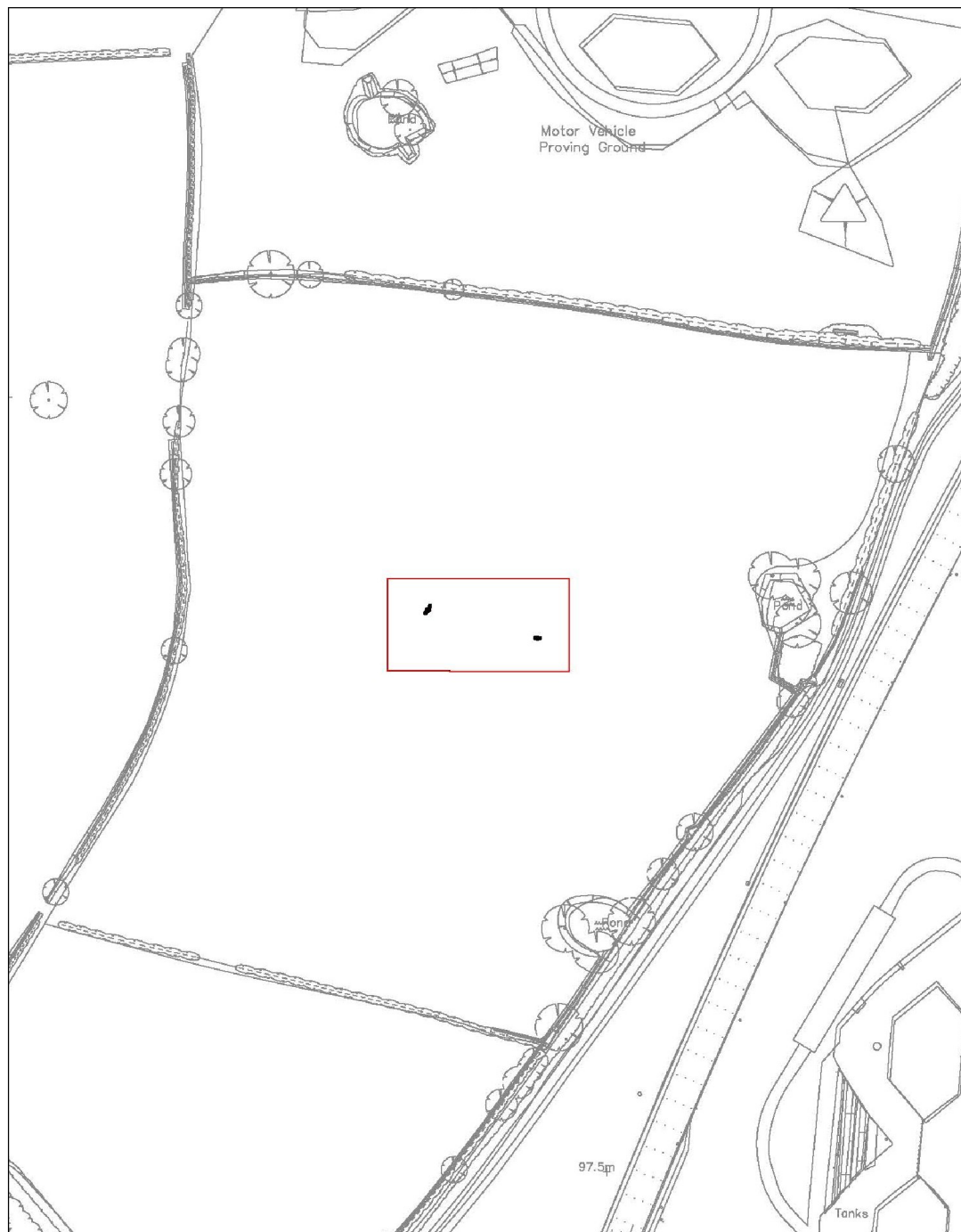


Figure 5: Position of brick structures within field. Red rectangle enlarged below

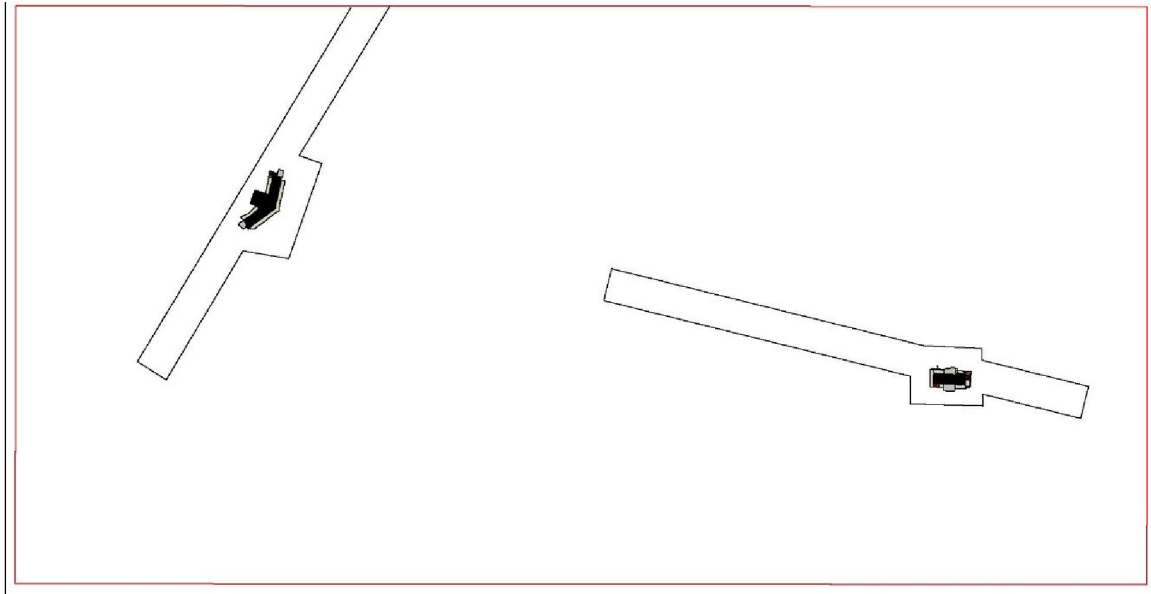


Figure 6: Enlargement of area showing relationship between the two brick structures and the extent of the stripped areas

To the west was a chevron shaped structure first partially revealed in trench 33 of the 2011 evaluation (Thomas 2011, 19). To the east a rectangular structure first revealed in Trench 32 of the 2011 evaluation was rectangular (Thomas 2011, 20, fig 11). These comprised two single skin brick constructions with a concrete pad mid-way along the northern side. The structures were both filled with an ashy/tarmac type material which appears to have been the cause of the geophysical anomalies (Austrans 2011). No datable material was recovered from the buildings however it seems likely that it was associated with the defence of the former airfield.

Impact of development

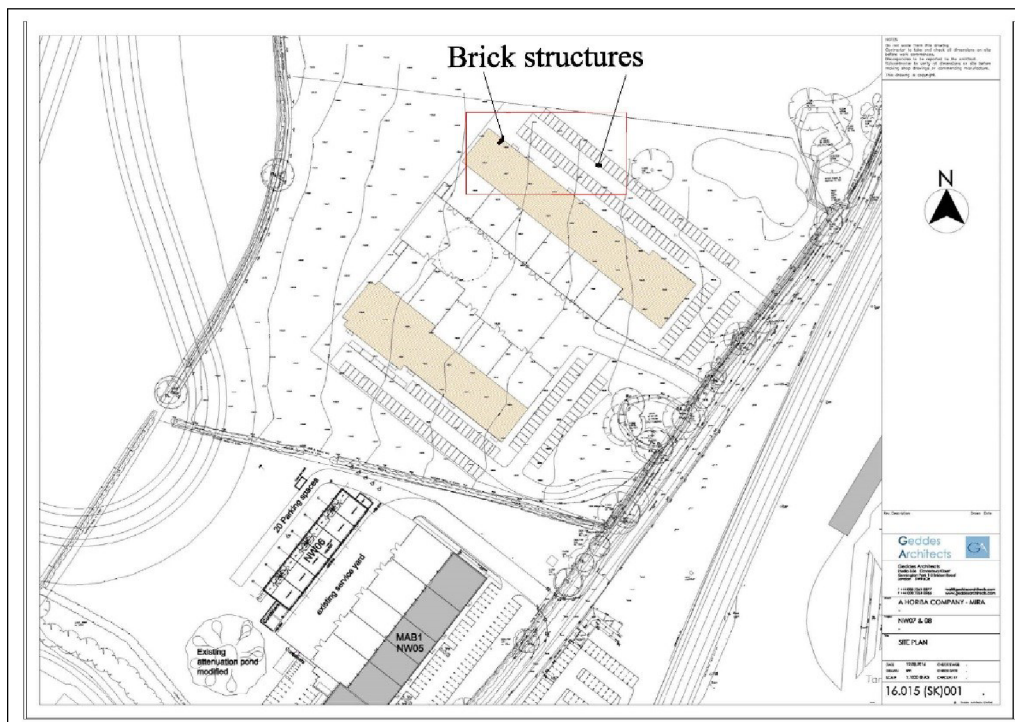


Figure 7: Plan of proposed development with locations of brick structures highlighted

Figure 7 shows the positions of the two brick structures superimposed on the proposed development plan of the site.

Chevron shaped structure

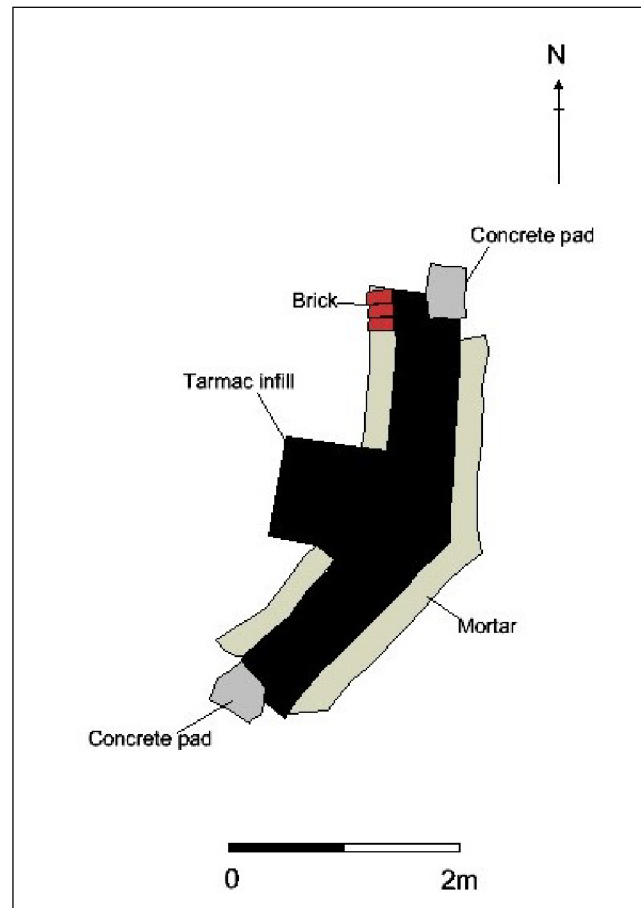


Figure 8: Plan of chevron shaped structure. Possibly a V-shaped 3 man weapon slit



Figure 9: Chevron shaped structure looking north-east



Figure 10: Chevron shaped structure looking south-west

The total length of the chevron shaped structure was 5.04m and it was 1.24m wide which differs from the template drawings (Fig. 8 and 9). The templates give a total length of 4m and width

of 0.60m, these measurements having been converted from the Imperial. Also of interest is that the tarmac extends in a channel west from the structure and a similarly positioned feature is incorporated into the diagram in Fig.9 and described as having been adapted to allow for a Vickers MMG anti-air gun. The 1944 diagrams also reveal that the slits were dug into the ground with an earthen mound formed around the top, so although a course or two of brickwork may have been lost, it is unlikely that any superstructure ever stood above ground. During the evaluation a small sondage was excavated into the tarmac to reveal three surviving courses of brick going down. It is probable then that the structure survives intact other than the loss of the topmost courses.

Rectangular shaped structure

The rectangular shaped structure is located 41m to the east of the chevron shaped construction and is constructed of similar materials, brick and mortar, concrete and deliberately infilled with a tarmac/ash deposit. Due to time constraints the trench was not fully investigated but it is probable that the structure survives intact below the surface. The structure was 2.52m long and 1.07m wide but no comparable structure were found in Field Engineering 1944.

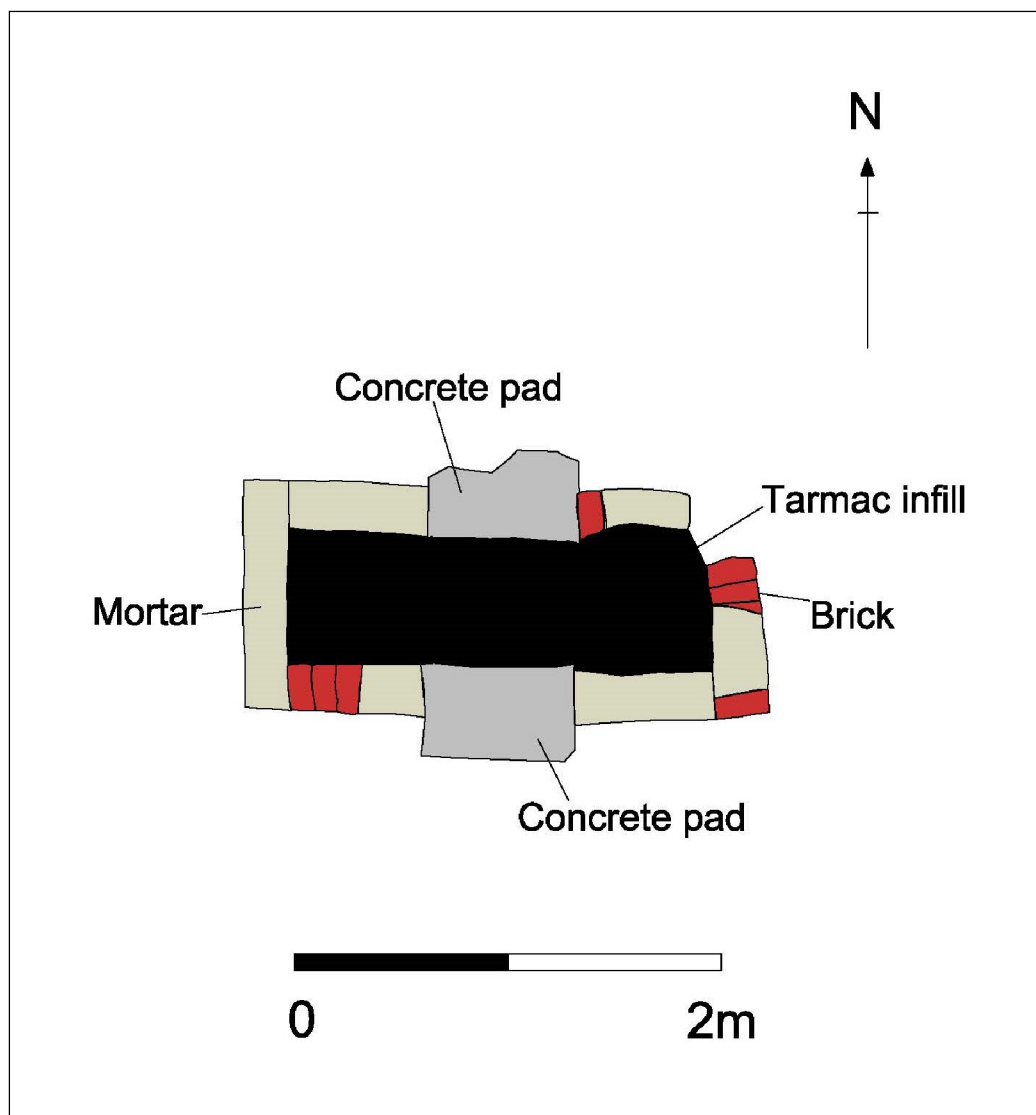


Figure 11: Plan of rectangular structure, probable slit trench



Figure 12: Rectangular structure looking south



Figure 13: Rectangular structure looking east

Conclusion

Fourteen evaluation trenches were devoid of archaeology however two brick and mortar structures were located which had previously been partially revealed during the 2011 evaluation (Thomas 2011). The two brick built structures are evidence of possible slit trenches constructed during the Second World War as positions to defend the north-west side of the airfield.

V-shaped three man weapon slit

The chevron shaped structure has been initially identified as a V-shaped three man weapon slit. This identification is based on diagrams found within a copy of Field Engineering (1944 edition). The pamphlet was issued during the Second World War and set out instructions for the construction of military defences etc. and the example investigated was constructed of brick, mortar and concrete and had been deliberately infilled with a tarmac/ash deposit.

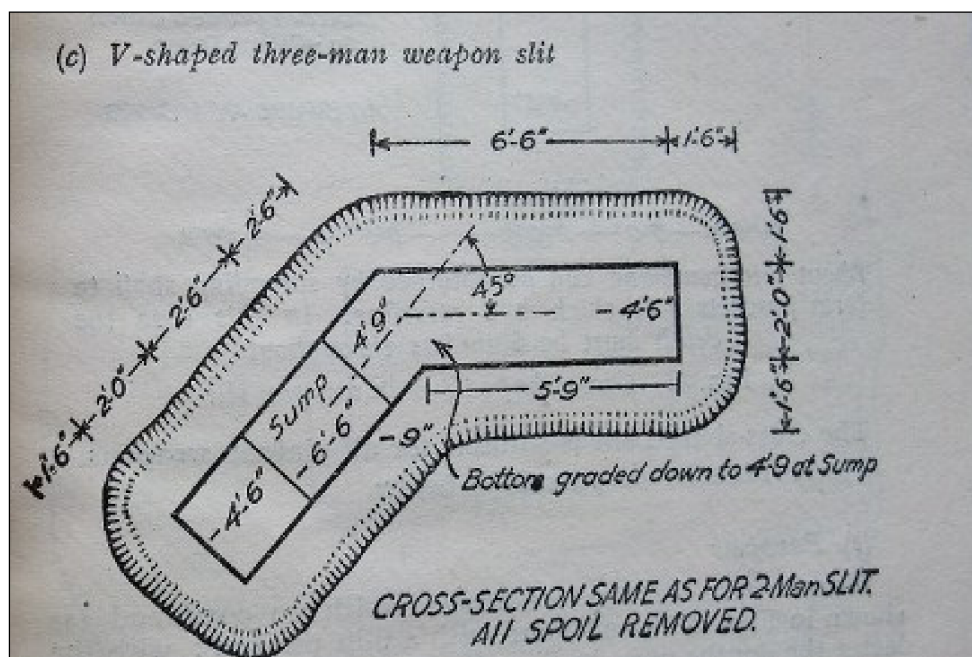


Figure 14: Diagram of V-shaped weapon slit in plan from Field Engineering 1944

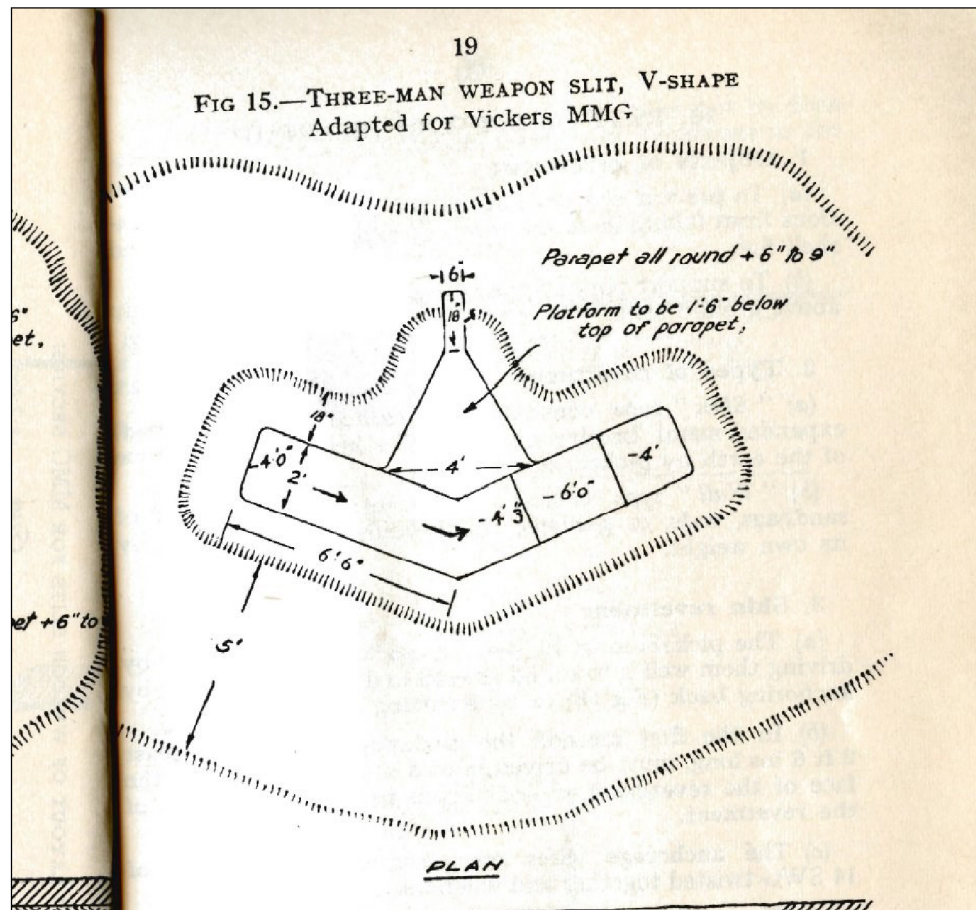


Figure 15: A further diagram of V-shaped three man weapon slit, also from Field Engineering 1944

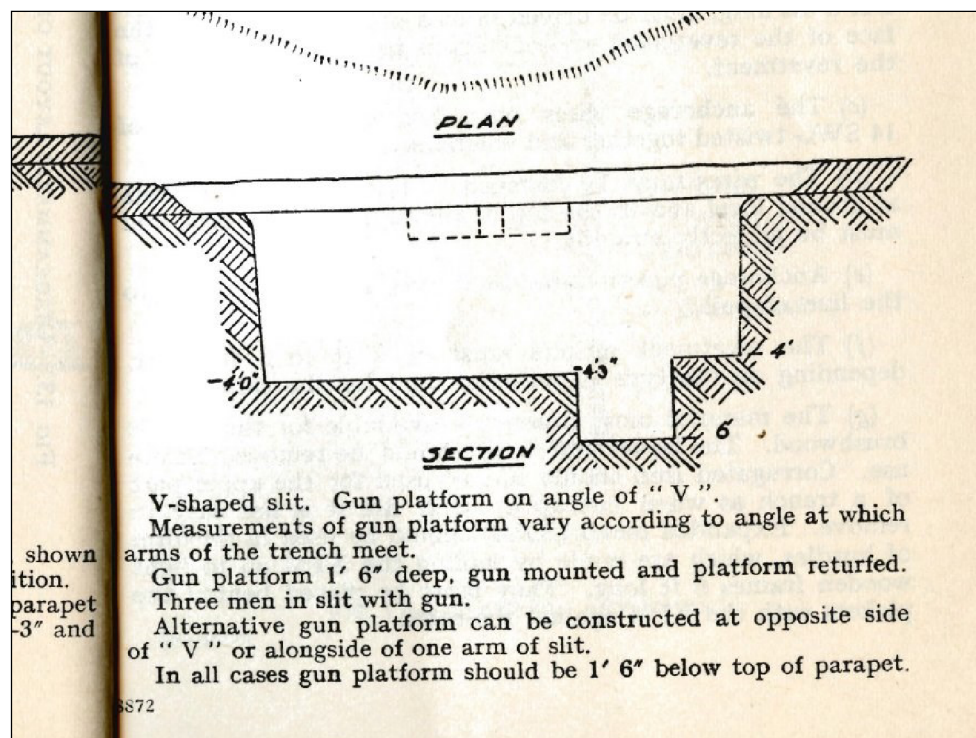


Figure 16: Section of V-shaped three man weapon slit, Field Engineering 1944

Rectangular slit trench

The rectangular structure is probably a version of a weapon slit but no comparable diagram was available. The fact that the construction materials of the two structures are similar as is the deliberate backfill, suggests they were contemporary and associated with the defence of the airfield and that they were also backfilled at a similar time following the end of the site's use as an airfield.

Archive

The site archive consists of: 14 A4 trial trench sheets, 1 A4 photo index sheet, and 57 digital photographs.

The site archive will be held by Leicestershire County Council Museum Services under the accession number X.A23.2016.

Publication

Since 2004 ULAS has reported the results of all archaeological work through the *Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations* (OASIS) database held by the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York. A summary of the work will also be submitted for publication in a suitable regional archaeological journal in due course.

OASIS no.	universi1-244335
Project Name	NW07, NW08, Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire
Project Type	Evaluation
Project Manager	Patrick Clay
Project Supervisor	Donald Clark
Previous/Future work	ULAS reports: 2011-023, 2011-047, 2011-148, 2012-113, 2013-192, 2013-213, 2014-050, 2014-052, 2014-104, 2014-178, 2014-206, 2015-102
Current Land Use	Pasture
Development Type	Commercial
Reason for Investigation	NPPF
Position in the Planning Process	Pre-planning enquiry
Site Co ordinates	SP 36821 96192
Start/end dates of field work	09/02/16-10/02/16
Archive recipient	Leicestershire
Study Area	478.5 square metres

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No. **2011-148**

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