



Atherstone Stables

Atherstone Road, Ratcliffe Culey, Atherstone,
Warwickshire.

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Atherstone Road, Ratcliffe Culey, Atherstone,
Warwickshire, CV9 3QW.

Archaeological Strip, Map & Sample Excavation.

NGR: *SP 32085 99010*

Site code: *ath22*

Museum accession number: *X.A138.2022*

OASIS Id: *110archa1-514103*

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Frontispiece view from the east end of the excavation area.

SUMMARY

Archaeological Strip, Map & Sample Excavation (ASMSE) was carried out during February 2023 at Atherstone Stables, Atherstone Road, Ratcliffe Culey, Atherstone, Warwickshire in advance of a new development for eight log cabin pitches including access road, foundations, services and landscaping. The area of the development was stripped of the overlying topsoil revealing the surface of the natural clay substrate. No archaeological features or deposits were recorded cut into or overlying the clay, instead some modern services and pitting represented the only evidence of previous human activity. An assemblage of residual finds was recovered from the topsoil layer, comprising building material, mainly roof tile with some identifiable as Roman, and some pottery fragments, mostly C18, C19 and C20 including a single medieval sherd. An C18-C19 glass bottle fragment was also recovered.



Fig. 1: site location circled in red.

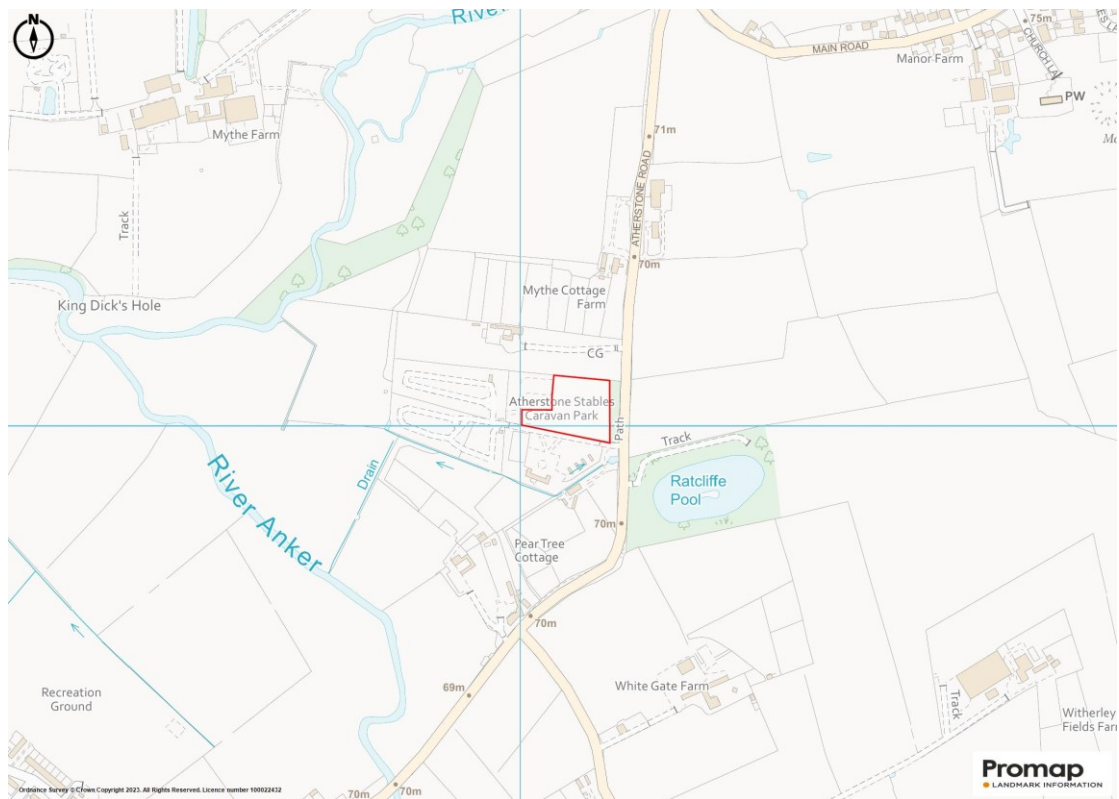


Fig. 2: site location outlined in red.

INTRODUCTION

Location and scope of work

This document sets out the results of an archaeological strip, map & sample excavation (ASMSE) carried out between 20th of February and 1st of March 2023 at Atherstone Stables, Atherstone Road, Ratcliffe Culey, Atherstone, Warwickshire, CV9 3QW on behalf of the owners. A planning application (*Planning ref: 23/00091/CONDIT*) had been approved by Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council for change of use of agricultural land to provide eight log cabin pitches including access road, foundations, services and landscaping.

Appraisal of the Leicestershire and Rutland Historic Environment Record (HER) showed the application area had potential to include heritage assets with an archaeological interest (National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Section 16, paragraph 194-195 and Annex 2). Previous archaeological investigation to the north of the development site, and other finds from its vicinity have indicated archaeological potential of prehistoric and Roman date (*HER ref: mle9941-2*). The location of the site at the confluence of the Rivers Anker and Sence also suggests a heightened archaeological potential. As such, it was considered that there was good potential for prehistoric and Roman remains to be present within the development area.

In consequence, the local planning authority required the developer to record the results to advance the understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance (NPPF Section 16, paragraph 205). To ensure that any archaeological remains present are dealt with appropriately, the applicant would provide for an appropriate level of archaeological investigation and recording. This consisted of an archaeological soil strip of the development area; any exposed archaeological remains would then be planned and appropriately investigated and recorded.

Geology, topography & historical setting

The parish of Atherstone is a market town in the North Warwickshire district of Warwickshire located in the far north of the county. Atherstone is on the A5 national route, and is adjacent to the border with Leicestershire which is here formed by the River Anker.

The application site lies on the north-eastern end of the town along Atherstone road at a height of about 69m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) and is represented by a roughly rectangular shaped plot amounting to an area of about 5,300m²; the underlying geology comprises lacustrine alluvium clay, silt and sand.

HISTORICAL and ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Historical Background

The Domesday Book of 1086, records that Atherstone (then named *Aderestone*) was held by Countess Godiva after the Norman Conquest. Soon after the Conquest, the manor was granted to the Abbey of Bec Herlouin in Normandy by Hugh, Earl of Chester. At the dissolution the manor returned to the crown. The church of St Mary may be built on the foundations of the C12 chapel of the alien Abbey of Bec (VCH, 1947).

The parish of Atherstone comprises the northern part of the old ecclesiastical parish of Mancetter. It is predominantly agricultural, but within the parish has grown up a fair-sized market town built round the Watling Street, a section of which forms its main thoroughfare, Long Street. While the centre of the town remains much as it was early last century, the last twenty years have seen the building of many small houses on the outskirts, particularly to the north of the main street. This has resulted in the clearing of some of the squalid courts leading off Long Street. Moreover, new premises for the Grammar School, a cinema, several modernized shops, and some new factory buildings have all contributed to change the general aspect of the town.

Archaeological Background

An HER search had been completed on a 500m radius of the site, this records that the Shepshed Fieldwork Group walked the field (to the north of Mythe Cottage) centred on SP 320 992 and covering an area of 70m by 196m on 6th April 2003. Four sherds of pottery ([mle9942](#)) including, early medieval and late medieval, late medieval/early post-medieval, early post-medieval and post-medieval were found ([mle9943](#)). Flint included blade-like flakes, a blade and flakes of Mesolithic to Bronze Age date along the southern edge of the field in particular ([mle9941](#)).

A rare early medieval silver penny issued by Archbishop Wulfred of Canterbury (c.AD 823-825) was found via metal detecting in 2017 ([mle24150](#)) 240m southeast of the site. Medieval findspots including a key and thimble have also been discovered through metal detecting 240-260m southeast of the site. In c.2000 six mortarium sherds were found 615m northeast of the site, suggesting possible activity.

The Ordnance Survey First Edition County Series plan of 1889 shows the site as formally open undeveloped agricultural land.



Fig. 3: Atherstone Historic Environment Plan based on OS 1889.

METHODOLOGY

Aims of the investigation

The aim of the work was to carry out a programme of Archaeological Strip, Map & Sample Excavation (ASMSE) prior to development on the site. ASMSE falls within the category of Archaeological Excavation as defined by The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA).

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) defines an Archaeological Excavation as 'a programme of controlled, intrusive fieldwork with defined research objectives which examines, records and interprets archaeological deposits, features and structures and, as appropriate, retrieves artefacts, ecofacts and other remains within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater. The records made and objects gathered during fieldwork are studied and the results of that study published in detail appropriate to the project design' (CIfA 2014a).

The CIfA defines the purpose of an Archaeological Excavation thus (ibid): • The purpose of excavation is to examine the archaeological resource within a given area or site within a framework of defined research objectives, to seek a better understanding of and compile a lasting record of that resource, to analyse and interpret the results, and disseminate them.

In general, the aims of the excavation were to include:

- i) establishing the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation on the development site.
- ii) recovering artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region.
- iii) recovering palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions.

The aims of the SMSE was guided by the relevant research framework for the east of England Regional Research Framework (Medlycott, 2011) in which elements of the Roman (rural) research agenda specific to the site include:

- iv) finds and/or deposits of prehistoric and Roman date related to ([HER ref.: mle9941-2](#)).

How can we improve methodological approaches to the Late Iron Age and Roman periods?

How should we approach sub-regional variation in the Late Iron Age and Roman periods?

How should we approach the study of the Late Iron Age and Roman periods?

How can we map the distributions of key artefact and site types?

How can we better understand the Late Iron Age to Roman transition?

How can we increase our understanding of the Iron Age and Roman environment?

Can we better distinguish between Late Iron Age and Early Roman features and sites?

How can we make greater use of artefact distributional analyses?

How can we increase our understanding of Late Iron Age and Roman pottery industries?

Dependent on results, research aims from earlier and later periods would be explored prior to the preparation of the report.

Field methodology

The archaeological field work and post-excavation assessment was carried out in accordance with the code of conduct (CIfA, 2019) and the standards and guidance for archaeological excavations produced by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA, 2014).

The SMSE area included the new access road, log cabin pitches and associated services comprising an area totalling approximately 2000m² and was mechanically stripped using a toothless bucket, under archaeological supervision, to the surface level of the natural clay substrate (101).

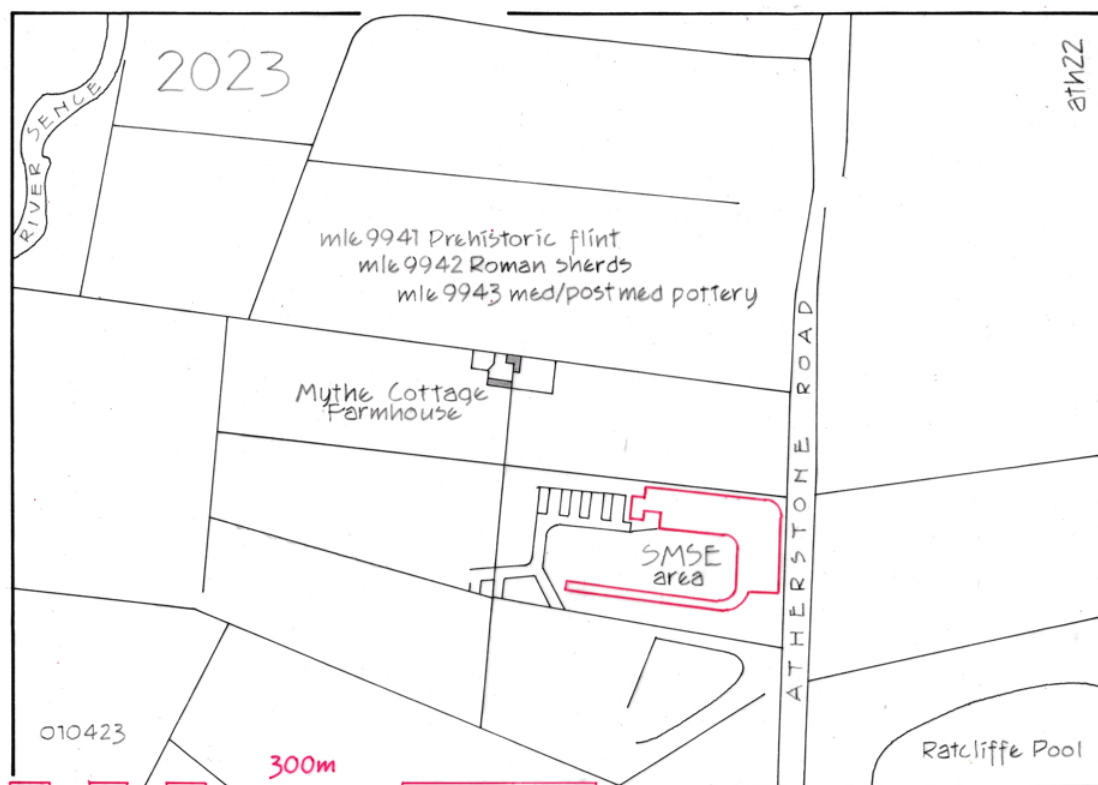


Fig. 4: site plan showing location of the SMSE area.

RESULTS

The natural substrate (101) comprised a light yellowish stiff clay with some small, isolated areas of blue clay mottling, the surface of this deposit was recorded in the northern end of the site at 69.12m AOD and in the southern half at 68.94m AOD indicating a gradually downwards sloping topography from south to north. No archaeological deposits or cut features were observed overlying or cut into the surface of this clay, instead a series of land drains were recorded including some modern services and pitting. Overlying this deposit throughout the area was the existing topsoil layer (100) which composed of a dark greyish-brown clayey-silt varying in thickness between 0.20m-0.30m across the site. This layer (100) produced an assemblage of residually deposited finds comprising bottle glass, ceramic building material (mainly tile) and pottery sherds ranging from the Roman, medieval and modern periods.

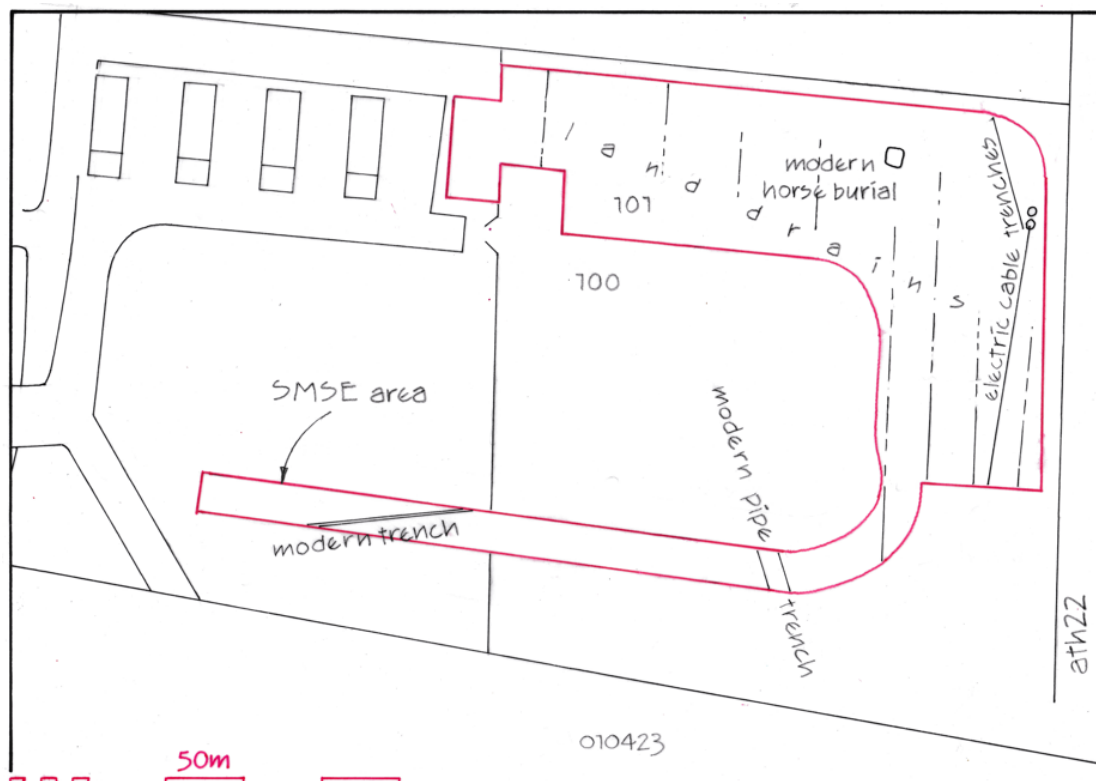


Fig. 5: plan showing main archaeological excavated area.

FINDS

An assemblage of residual pottery ceramic building material comprising mostly roof tile, was recovered from the topsoil layer (100). The pottery assemblage consisted of a total of twenty rim and body sherds with a combined weight of 546g. It comprised a single medieval rimsherd of C13-C14, the remaining glazed sherds were consistent with fabric types broadly dating to the C18, C19 & C20 (see Plate 9).

The building material assemblage consisted of mainly tile, but also some brick totalling 23 fragments weighing 2.090kg. Although many fragments were unidentifiable at least two, possibly more, are Roman in date (see Plate 10). An C18-C19 glass bottle fragment weighing 177g was also amongst the assemblage of finds.

DISCUSSION

The HER shows us that the site lies to the south of an area where fieldwalking and metal detecting has recovered artefacts dated to the prehistoric, Roman and medieval periods ([mle9941](#), [mle9942](#), [mle9943](#), [mle2415](#)). Although archaeological features or deposits related to these periods have not been recorded to date, the evidence suggest some activity in the area. Prehistoric flint blades were found near to the north of the site at Atherton Stables and there was potential for similar finds and associated deposits of all periods to lie within the development site.

The area of the development was stripped of the overlying topsoil deposit revealing the surface of the natural clay substrate across the excavated area. Interestingly, there was little or no indication of a relict subsoil deposit situated between the surface of the clay and the overlying topsoil layer and this may suggest that historically there was little cultivation and regular manuring of the land. There was also no evidence of ridge and furrow and it seems likely that the land was used mainly as pasture. The Ordnance Survey First Edition County Series plan of 1889 shows the site as formally open undeveloped agricultural land. Ordnance datum values across the excavation area show a gradually downwards sloping topography from south to north.

No archaeological cut features or deposits were recorded within or overlying the clay throughout the stripped area, instead some modern services

and pitting represented the only evidence of previous human activity. An assemblage of residually deposited finds recovered from the topsoil layer comprising building material, mainly roof tile with some Roman fragments and pottery sherds including a single medieval fragment, but mostly C18, C19 and early C20 fabric types.

Archive Location

The archaeological documentary archive arising from the work will be appropriately conserved and deposited with the Leicestershire Museum Service. The digital archive arising from the work will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) via the online portal OASIS.

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PLATES



Plate 1; southern half of excavated area, view north.



Plate 2; eastern half of excavated area, view west.



Plate 3; western half of excavated area, view east.



Plate 4; new access road, view east.



Plate 5; new access road, View northeast.



Plate 6; new access road, view east



Plate 7; electric cable in new access road, view east.



Plate 8; northern half of excavated area, view south.



Plate 9; pottery assemblage from the topsoil layer (100).



Plate 10; ceramic building material from the topsoil layer (100).