

## Stablebridge Road, Aston Clinton

Site visit on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2014

A hot and sunny day saw seven members of the Bucks Archaeological Society Active Archaeology Group visiting Stablebridge Road, which is being excavated by University of Leicester Archaeology Service in advance of a housing development by Taylor Wimpey. The visit was organised by Jean Savigar, an Active Archaeology Group member and local resident. Jean had built up a splendid relationship (based primarily on cakes!) with the ULAS team during the 7 weeks they had been excavating, resulting in our guided tour by Mathew Morris, the Site Director.

The site had been subject to a magnetometry survey by Oxford Archaeology in 2010 when the development was initially put into the planning process. The geophysical survey only showed a water main, gas pipe, a couple of magnetic anomalies and one pit anomaly, but generally it was suspiciously 'quiet'. OA then put in about 20 machined trenches across the site and found very little archaeology - mostly in the northern half of the field.

The County Planning archaeologist put a full open area excavation of 1.8 hectares into the planning conditions, which was tendered for and won by University of Leicester Archaeology Service.

So we arrived when ULAS' team of five had two more weeks to dig the site. They had machined off most of the area. This had revealed a number of dark areas in the predominantly chalky soil. These were their targets for more intensive excavation together with a percentage of the linear features found.

So what had they found? The most exciting find is a big trackway (1) running from SW to NE across the site downhill towards the Roman Akeman Street. It is too substantial for a farm track and there were patches of compacted flint (still to be investigated) which might indicate metalling. There's also some hope that there might be evidence of ruts still left. Was this part of the Icknield Way?

Under this trackway on the NW side of the site ULAS found an enclosure ditch, which formed a rectangular feature containing a lot of pottery.

Just outside the enclosure to the west were a set of 11 post holes in a circle - a roundhouse (2) - with two additional post holes outside the ring for the porch. The unusual feature of this roundhouse was that the porch/entrance is facing west. It had no interior floor left or any artefact remains.

Near the roundhouse to the south-west ULAS found an irregular rectangular feature with rounded ends - a bit like a figure of eight - containing late Iron Age/early C1<sup>st</sup> AD pottery and charcoal. They've concluded it is probably a corn dryer. The charcoal has been sampled and may reveal the date of its last use.



*Learning about land drains*

Close to this was a large pit, maybe over 6' in diameter. It didn't contain any dating evidence and no real remains. What it was for is also a mystery. One theory Mathew has is that it could have been dug to get to the more malleable chalk (under the main chalk layer), which is suitable for daub.

Going NE there is another enclosure ditch running SE/NW. Inside this second enclosure is a well and a lot of pits of unknown purpose next to it. The well has been excavated down to a safe level (before shoring or stepping the sides is needed) but no substantive evidence has come out of it.

There is also a four large-post structure (3), which might be a granary. Intriguingly there is also a 6 post structure (4) to the north of this 'granary'. The structure is about 2.5m wide and pottery (very abraded) came out of all the post holes. The post holes are bigger than those of the roundhouse and it looks like some of the posts may have been replaced over time. It also seems to be in its own enclosure.

There was another large pit on site which was full of big sherds of pottery and a lot of cracked flint/stone, which looked like they had cracked through heating. In an impressive display of observation Jean S. picked up a piece of smooth stone from the spoil next to the pit - which turns out most likely to be a piece of quern stone. It was duly taken away and bagged! A real touch of active archaeology.



The rest of the site to the north is crossed with more ditches which might be trackways or enclosure ditches and this is the area that the ULAS were working on. In fact while we were on site one of the team found a rather superb Roman greyware pot in one of the ditches next to the main SW/NE trackway.

One benefit from the visit for the BAS group was a much better understanding of the planning process and the role of commercial archaeology in it.

So from what looked like an unimpressive geophysical survey with few items of interest, the ULAS team have found what may be a substantial section of the Icknield Way, and at least one possible farming settlement with its

associated structures.

*Roman greyware pot*

But then the hard work really begins for Mathew to try and work out the relationships between all the numerous ditches on the site, which came first and how they relate to each other, and what was their purpose (if any). There is also a lot of pottery which will need to be dated, and environmental samples to be analysed. But without a doubt this excavation will add another chapter in the history of Aston Clinton.

Many thanks go to Mathew Morris and the ULAS team for spending so much time with us and answering all our questions. Huge thanks too to Jean Savigar for building the relationships which made the visit possible.

*Barbara Evans Rees*

