Early Neolithic, Iron Age and Roman settlement at Monksmoor Farm, Daventry, Northamptonshire

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Project background

The investigations at Monksmoor Farm were undertaken in three parts between July 2013 and March 2015. MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) were commissioned by AECOM to undertake archaeological excavation prior to construction of a residential development.

Desk-based assessment (Rouse and Hunn 2005) was followed by a geophysical and fieldwalking survey of the site (Hancock 2005a, 2005b) and trench evaluation works (Hancock 2006c). A detailed geophysical survey of the entirety of proposed development site was undertaken by MOLA (then Northamptonshire Archaeology) in 2012 (Walker and Walford 2012). A final phase of trial trenching of the northern area was completed in 2014 (Burke and Simmonds 2014). After the evaluation, a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was produced for the excavations by MOLA (MOLA 2014a) following the objectives for the excavation identified in the brief provided by the County Archaeological Advisor for Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) (Mather 2013).

Two separate phases of excavation were undertaken; to the north were Areas 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 which were excavated between December 2014 and March 2015 whilst the south-west part of the development, Area 6, was excavated between July 2013 and September 2013 and then, after a short hiatus, between March 2014 and April 2014. In February 2015 Area 6 was extended to pursue two linear features which extended outside the excavation area. Monitoring was undertaken by Lesley-Ann Mather of NCC on behalf of Daventry District Council (DDC).

Location, topography and geology

The site occupies an area of c51ha located on the north-eastern edge of Daventry, north of Daventry County Park and bordering the Daventry Reservoir (Fig 1.1). To the west lies Welton Lane and beyond is modern suburban development. To the east lies open farmland. The main site has been subdivided into a south-west area of c28ha and a northern area of c23ha. This latter area is bounded by the Grand Union Canal on its northern edge. The...
Figure 1.2 Site topography
development area was formerly arable farmland with the recently demolished Monksmoor Farm at its centre. This latter building only survived as a small area of concrete footings during the time of the excavation.

The topography varied across the site; the southern area was largely flat with an average height of 125m above Ordnance Datum, falling to the east towards a stream at the eastern boundary (Fig 1.2). The northern area was on a slight south-eastern slope, with Areas 1, 3, 4 and 5 positioned along the slope at heights between 114m-120m aOD. Area 2 was located on a small plateau at 112m aOD, with the aforementioned slope c15m west of it.

The soils are slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged fine loamy, fine silty and clayey soils (SSEW 1983, 711f) (Fig 1.3). There are small areas of slowly permeable calcareous soils on steeper slopes. The underlying geology consists of glaciofluvial or alluvium deposits (BGS 2017).

Historical and archaeological background

Prehistoric

Scant archaeological remains dating to the early prehistoric period are known within the study area. An Iron Age hillfort, Borough Hill (NHLE 1010696: RCHME 1981, 3, fig 54) is situated c1.5km to the south-east of the site (Fig 5.1). Multivallate ditches enclose the hillfort over a distance of 1.5km north to south. The hillfort has been partly overlain by ditches of another smaller multivallate hillfort on the northern part of the hill. Archaeological sites of both earlier and later date lie within the two hillforts, including two Bronze Age barrows, a Roman building complex and barrow cemetery. Excavations at Daventry Apex Park 2km to the west of Monksmoor Farm revealed an early Bronze Age segmented enclosure, a late Bronze Age to early Iron Age pit alignment and polygonal enclosure and an early to middle Iron Age settlement dating to c450-250BC including ring gullies and post-structures (Markus 2016; Markus and Morris forthcoming).

Late Iron Age and/or Roman period

Late Iron Age and Roman remains have been identified at Borough Hill (ibid), and a settlement of this period has been excavated at Middlemore Farm (Wilson 2004), c1.5km to the west of the site. Features comprised a boundary ditch thought to denote the limits of the cultivated areas, separating livestock on the southern side of the hillslope with crops to the north. Further ditches defining enclosures were identified along with associated pits or postholes. The pottery from the site is dated to between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD.

Saxon/medieval and later

No Saxon remains have been identified within the development area but the site is close to the town of Daventry. An excavation in Daventry uncovered 6th-century remains with the site reoccupied from the 10th century (Soden 1996/7). An isolated sunken feature building was investigated during the Apex Park excavations (Markus 2016).

The area around the development site probably comprised open, agricultural land during the medieval period. The area lay to the north-east of the medieval centre of Daventry, within the open field landscape of the township. Ridge and furrow cultivation earthworks have been recorded both within and adjacent to the site boundaries.

The Daventry Extensive Urban Survey records the existence of a windmill and watermill (SMRs 638/0/184, 638/38 and 638/36/1) adjacent to the parish boundary and c400m west of site (Foard et al 2006, 3.1.2.5). Directly to the south of Monksmoor Farm, field names recorded in the Daventry Extensive Urban Survey (Windmill Piece, Old Mill Piece) show the presence of mills in the area that later became the Daventry Reservoir (Fig 3). The landscape around the site has been reconstructed to indicate that the area was made up of large, open, irregularly shaped furlongs, including Langdon Furlong, Priors Furze in Daventre Field and Windmill Piece shooting East and West.

The Grand Junction Canal (SMRs 442, 442/1 and 442/1/1) was constructed by William Jessop between 1793 and 1815 and forms the northern boundary of the site. The stretch of the canal within the study area includes the Braunston Tunnel (SMR 442/1/13). The Daventry Reservoir (SMR 7824/0/0) was opened in 1804 and forms the southern boundary of the site.

The 1803 Inclosure Map shows the area surrounding the site consisting of an open landscape, labelled Bean Field, with a few rectilinear field boundaries marked along the southern side of the canal. In contrast, by the time the First Edition Ordnance Survey map was published in the 1880s, the entire surrounding landscape had been subdivided by rectilinear field boundaries. Thrupp Grounds Farm, to the east of the site, and Lang Farm, to the west of the site, were both in existence by this time.

Archaeological work within the area

The development area has been subjected to previous archaeological investigations comprising a geophysical survey (Hancock 2005a), fieldwalking (Hancock 2005b) and two phases of targeted evaluation trenching (Hancock 2006b and c).
Figure 1.3 Site geology
Figure 1.4 Geophysical survey interpretation and trenches to the north
Figure 1.5 Geophysical survey interpretation and trenches to the south
Detailed gradiometer survey blocks were located over two discrete areas of possible archaeology as well as apparently blank areas. The first archaeological area was located to the north of the farm buildings and comprised four ring gullies and two small enclosures. The second area was situated in the south-west corner of the site. Subsequent trial trench evaluations (Hancock 2006a, b and c) confirmed the presence of archaeology in both areas, with the northern area of activity dating to the late Iron Age, with some evidence of continuity of settlement from the early middle Iron Age. The activity in the south-west was shown to comprise a series of Roman ditches.

Subsequent detailed geophysical survey of the entirety of the proposed development site was undertaken by MOLA (formerly Northamptonshire Archaeology) in 2012 (Walker and Walford 2012). Area 6 was located in the south-western part of Field 1 (Fig 1.5) and incorporated the Roman features identified in the previous geophysical evaluation survey (Hancock 2006b). Due to unfavourable magnetic properties of the soil the 2006 evaluation was unable to provide a clear layout and extent of enclosure or boundary ditches. Area 1, to the north consisted of a cluster of six small features, comprising penannular gullies and sub-square ditched enclosures (Fig 1.4). This site was first found and investigated during the earlier phase of evaluation and was shown by excavation to be of Iron Age date (Hancock 2006c). In Area 2, approximately 250m east of Area 1 there was a rectangular ditched enclosure. Its eastern edge lay close to a sewer pipe and was obscured in the geophysical survey by the resultant magnetic halo. Within the enclosure were the remains of a ring ditch and a pit.

The 2012 works also included trial trench evaluation of the south-western part of the development area. The trenching confirmed the presence of features associated with the less clearly defined Roman site situated in the south-western corner (Area 6) (Fig 1.5). Fewer pottery sherds were recovered from this phase of the evaluation than previously and features appeared to be earlier, dating from the middle Iron Age to early Roman period. Features investigated during the 2006 evaluation in this area were dated from the 1st to 3rd centuries (Hancock 2006 a, b and c).

In 2014 a trial trench evaluation was conducted in the northern area (Burke and Simmonds 2014). The evaluation identified a series of features of late Iron Age to early Roman (early to mid-1st-century AD) date which related to subsidiary occupation or to livestock management. A small rectangular enclosure was identified within Trenches 46 and 47 that was defined by a broad ditch, c220m to the east of the settlement. Within the enclosure were the remains of a ring ditch and a pit.

Two separate phases of excavation were undertaken; to the north were Areas 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 (Fig 1.6) whilst to the south-west was Area 6 (Fig 1.7). The southern excavation comprised Area 6 (2.3ha) in one arable field. The northern excavation was split into separate areas over two fields Area 1 (0.4ha), Area 2 (0.22ha), Area 3 (10m x 30m), Area 4 (20m x 70m) and Area 5 (110m x 20m). Both the north and south areas initially targeted archaeological features identified by previous geophysical survey and trial trench evaluation, these areas were then extended to encompass all further exposed archaeological features.

**Site phasing**

The results of the excavation confirmed the pattern of enclosure and ditch systems highlighted by the geophysical survey and trial trench evaluations. The stratigraphic analysis combined with the pottery has enabled a chronological sequence to be established which is summarised below. Archaeological features were encountered across all six excavated areas with the main concentrations in Areas 1, 2 and 6 and these will be discussed by Area.

### Table 1.1 Summary of site chronology and significant archaeological features

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