

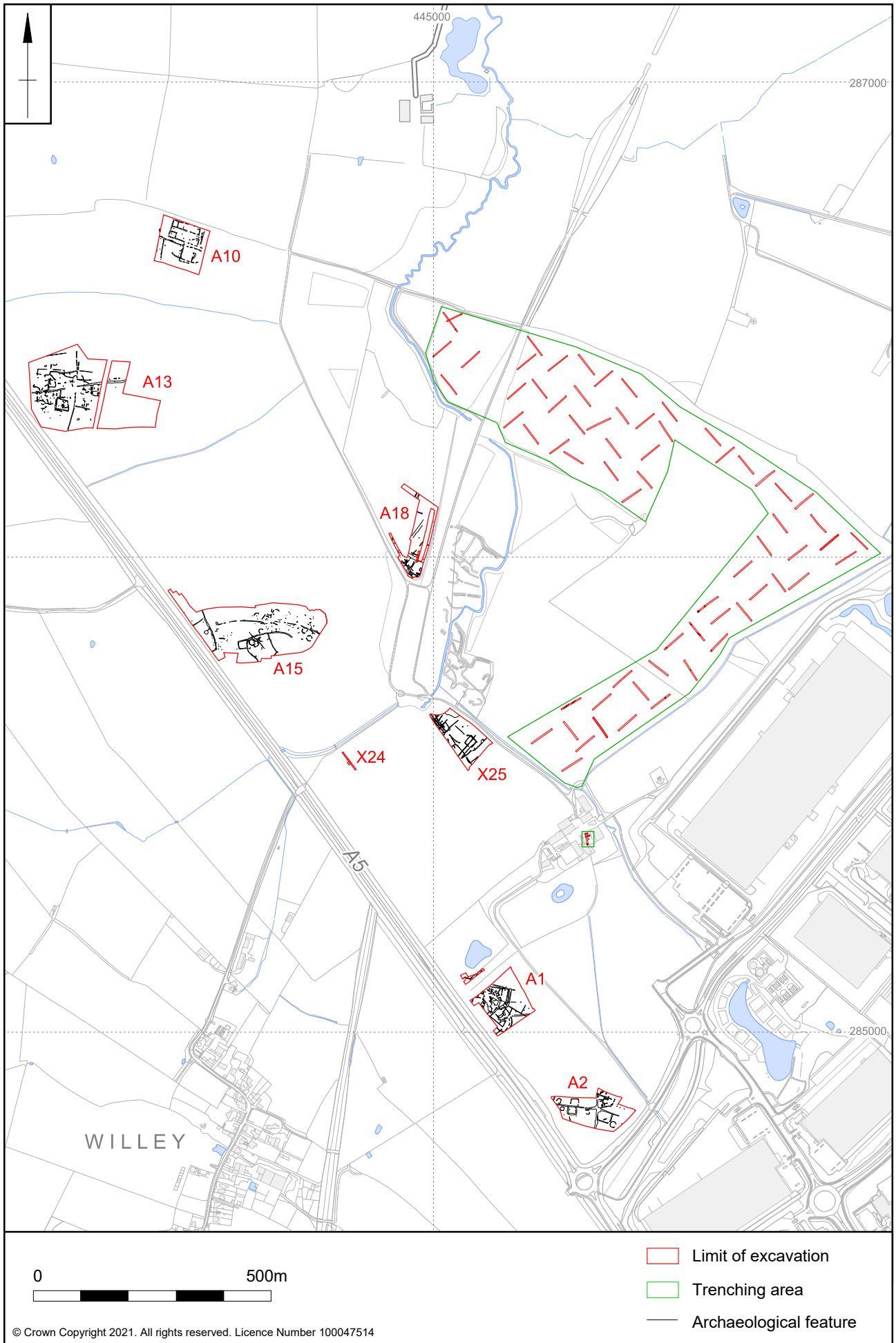
An Interim Summary of Archaeological Mitigation at Magna Park Extension, Lutterworth Leicestershire June 2020 to March 2021

ABSTRACT

Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) carried out a programme of archaeological investigation at Magna Park extension, Lutterworth, Leicestershire between June 2020 and March 2021. The program was devised by and managed by RPS Consulting on behalf of their clients, GLP. Archaeological remains were identified across multiple investigation areas, providing insight into settlement, funerary practices, agricultural production, industrial processing and infrastructure between the early Iron Age, Roman and medieval periods.



Aerial view of Area 1, looking south



Scale 1:11000

Lutterworth Magna Park excavated areas

1 BACKGROUND

Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) was commissioned by RPS Consulting Ltd on behalf of GLP to undertake a programme of archaeological investigation at Magna Park, Lutterworth, Harborough District, Leicestershire (centred on SP 492 863). Outline planning permission for the construction of an extension to Magna Park was granted at appeal (Planning Ref: 15/01531/OUT; Appeal Ref: APP/F2415/W/18/3206389). The scheme of archaeological works was designed to mitigate against potential development impacts in compliance with Condition 18 of the planning approval.

This document comprises a provisional summary outlining the excavation results of eight archaeological mitigation areas, referred to as (broadly from north-west to south-east): A10, A13, A18, A15, X24, X25 A1 and A2.

2 OVERVIEW

Archaeological remains dating to several phases of occupation were encountered during the investigations. These remains have provided insight into activities carried out across the landscape during the Iron Age, Roman and medieval periods concerning settlement, funerary practices, agricultural production, stock management, industrial activity, quarrying and infrastructure.

3 MIDDLE TO LATE IRON AGE

The extensive archaeological investigations carried out across the Parish of Bittesby indicate that there was little or no occupation in the area prior to the middle Iron Age period. Earlier activity is represented by an extremely limited number of worked flints of Neolithic to Bronze Age date. This trend was confirmed by the current programme of archaeological works, with the earliest stratified remains dating to the middle Iron Age. During this period, a small farmstead was established within A13, which encompassed a collection of three modestly sized curvilinear enclosures and potential accommodation in the form of a single round house, which was a structure where people would have lived and cooked. The dimensions, layout and morphology of the enclosure ditches suggests that their main function may have been for stock management.

This transient settlement appears to have been replaced by a more substantial field system towards the middle Iron Age period representing a greater focus on the agricultural economy of the landscape. As with the previous phase of activity, the remains were extremely fragmentary and comprised several incomplete enclosures demarcated by 'L-shaped' and curvilinear ditches.

The features attributed to this period of activity were largely ephemeral. This was in part caused by disturbance during subsequent reorganisations of the landscape, but also due to their intrinsic nature, which was consistent with short-lived or seasonal use of space. Such settlements, defined by being dispersed and small-scale, were common across the region during the early to middle Iron Age period and were representative of more mobile settlement patterns and herding practices.



Aerial view of A13, looking west

4 LATE IRON AGE TO EARLY ROMAN TRANSITION

An increased utilisation of the landscape was carried out during the late Iron Age to early Roman transitional period. Remains attributed to several phases of occupation during this period were typical of rural settlements in the region at the time and appear to have been spread across the surrounding environment. Three late Iron Age to early Roman settlement areas were identified during the excavations, in A2, A13 and A15, with further evidence of agricultural activities located within A10. Settlement activity present across the three areas included circular buildings, known as round houses, ancillary structures that would have been built of posts, land boundaries and field systems used for stock management and crop production. Burial practices were also evidenced in A13 and A15.

Settlement

A15 contained settlement remains that were largely focused within or surrounding several rectilinear enclosures. The ditches demarcating the enclosure boundaries had only survived in a very fragmentary form, hindering a full understanding of their development and relationships to one another. The most complete enclosure was located within the southern part of A15 and was sub-divided to create three distinct internal spaces, the largest of which was located in the central part of the site. This principal space was the only part of the enclosed system to contain internal features, comprising two almost complete ring gullies that represented round houses. Adjoining the north-western corner of this space was a small, squared enclosed area with an

entrance on the eastern side that may have housed livestock. Surrounding this enclosure system was a much-fragmented series of linear ditches and at least five incomplete ring gullies, probably indicating a later extension or replanning of the living space. Other evidence of this settlement being in sustained use for some time was provided by the ditches themselves, which had been maintained and sequentially cleared out or re-cut. The ring gullies were interspersed with post holes and small pits, one of which contained burnt material perhaps indicative of a hearth or oven in the vicinity.

A second Iron Age settlement site was located in A2, encompassing the remains of four circular round houses identified alongside square enclosures that were probably agricultural in function. A broken pot was located within a terminal at the entrance of one of the round houses and appeared to have been placed deliberately. Such deposits are common in Iron Age contexts throughout the country and are widely considered as serving a 'special' function, such as marking a structure's creation or abandonment.



Pottery from the entrance of one of the roundhouses

A third settlement of late Iron Age to early Roman date was identified within A13. This settlement was complex with multiple phases of reuse, development and reorganisation apparent throughout. A single round house was present that had been enclosed by a small rectilinear ditch.

Burial and Cremation

The settlement areas attributed to this period of occupation all appear to have been continually in use for some time, and as such several associated burials were present. Cremations were the principal type of late Iron Age to early Roman burial identified during the excavations, with the ashes placed in ceramic vessels interred in small circular pits. This type of cremation became increasingly popular, particularly in the south and east of the country, during the later Iron Age due to the influence of social and economic contact with Belgic Gaul (now Northern France).



Section of a cremation in A13, viewed looking north-east



Plan view of a cremation in A13, viewed looking north-west

Two cremation burials were identified within A15, associated with the round house settlement, and a small cemetery of 25 cremation burials were recovered from A13. The vessels in which the cremations were buried were common late Iron Age types, being hand-built, made in a coarse clay, and being of a simple open jar shape. Two vessels have been further investigated so far to identify their composition, form and origin. One of the vessels would have been fairly large and shaped like a tall flowerpot with a small flattened rim. This vessel dated to the final century or two BC, or possibly the earlier part of the first century AD. A second vessel investigated was poorly preserved and its shape could not be reconstructed. However, similarities between the clays used to make the two vessels indicate that the two are likely to be of similar dates.

Agricultural Economy

As mentioned above, each settlement area encompassed a number of small enclosures that would have been used for the agricultural economy. In A13, these enclosures were focused to either side of an extensive east to west aligned boundary ditch, which was impressive in its scale and would have been a dominant feature of the landscape. This boundary had truncated the earlier cremation burials and had been well-maintained throughout several generations of occupation as it had been evidently cleaned out and re-dug at periodic intervals.



Intersection showing several re-cuts of a small enclosure ditch in A13, looking south

Further evidence of livestock management during this period was identified in A10, where a late Iron Age watering hole was recorded in close proximity to an oval enclosure that had two opposing entranceways. Watering holes would have been an important fixture of livestock farming in the Iron Age period, particularly on sites where the nearest water source was at a distance from activity foci.

Following the disuse of the watering hole and C-shaped enclosure, an adjacent pair of sub-rectangular enclosures were created in the late Iron Age to early Roman transitional period. These enclosures were delineated by lengths of straight ditches aligned broadly north-east to south-west and north-west to south-east. A shared central ditch formed the eastern side of one enclosure and the western side of the other. No southern boundary was identified to the western enclosure nor an eastern boundary to the eastern enclosure; the presence of medieval furrows on an almost identical alignment may account for the latter.



Section of sub-rectangular enclosure ditch, looking south

The field system in A10 was replaced again in the early Roman period by a large, sub-rectangular enclosure. A ditch, aligned broadly north-east to south-west, formed the western side of the enclosure and a fragmentary north-west to south-east ditch marked the northern edge. The southern arm was formed of a slightly curvilinear ditch, aligned north-west to south-east. The eastern limit of the enclosure extended beyond the area of excavation.

No internal features were identified within any of the three phases of enclosures located within A10. Although it is possible that intrusive activities relating to medieval and later cultivation could have disturbed any less substantial features, it is probable that the enclosures are more indicative of formal pastures or the definition of land boundaries.

5 ROMAN

During the 1st to 2nd century AD, a Roman road now known as Watling Street was constructed, the route of which is followed by the A5 to the west of the site. Occupation areas during this period shifted away from earlier settlement cores to be in closer proximity to the road. The main foci of settlement of this period were investigated during previous excavations by Albion Archaeology in 2016 and the majority of the features identified by the current works constitute peripheral activity of predominantly industrial or agricultural purpose.

Quarrying Activity

Extensive Roman quarrying activity was encountered across A1 at the southern extent of the development area. A series of intercutting quarry pits was present, which would have been used to extract sand and gravels presumably for the construction and maintenance of the Roman road. Gravels appear to have been roughly sorted by their size and shape followed by the discard of unsuitable material either across the site for small to medium stones or within a small section of the site that appears to have been used as a designated waste area for larger stones and boulders.

Roman construction techniques, particular for roads and infrastructure, were varied and demonstrated their ability to adapt to whatever local resources were available to them. The sand and gravel quarry pits at Lutterworth are an excellent example of how local environments influenced the materials and methods used for building roads at the time.

We know from the pottery recovered from the quarried area that the pits were dug in the first and second century AD. Most of the pottery recovered was for everyday cooking, eating and storage, and may represent material discarded from nearby settlement, the quarry workers, or casual disposal from travellers on the adjacent road.



A series of quarry pits in A1, viewed looking west

Settlement

Settlement activity within the development area during the Roman period was limited to A2, which would have been a small nucleated occupation area on the periphery of the main settlement foci identified by Albion Archaeology in 2016. The remains in A2 included post-built structures that may have partly formed accommodation as well as storage areas or activity centres. Pottery recovered from this settlement area was also of 1st-2nd Century AD date and therefore could be contemporary with the quarrying activity in A1.

Agricultural Economy

Roman field systems and associated agricultural activity were encountered throughout the development area. These appear to have been used for some time with evidence of reconfiguration and chronological development present across the sequence of field systems. Of particular note was a series of enclosures located within A10 that would have formed a ladder system, encompassing at least four sub-rectangular internal spaces. Ladder systems were commonly used for rural settlement formations throughout the Roman period. The linear layout with clearly defined zones for activity could have been used for paddocks, large open spaces, crop production, industrial processing and areas for housing and cooking activity. The lack of internal features in the A10 ladder system indicates that it was likely used for formal pasture, stock enclosures or to define land boundaries.



Section of ladder enclosure showing multiple phases of use, looking north-east

Burial

Evidence of burial practice during the Roman phase of occupation is limited to a single inhumation. This comprised the fragmentary remains of a subadult inhumation, which were identified in close proximity to earlier Roman enclosure towards the north of A10. The skeletal remains were in poor condition but the subadult seemed to have been buried prone (laid on the front). No clearly identifiable grave goods were found with the burial although the base of a Roman vessel situated nearby might be related to the inhumation. A large stone found on the southern side of the grave cut might indicate a displaced grave marker.

Trade, Travel and Lifestyle

The artefacts recovered during the investigation on the periphery of Watling Street have revealed some intriguing insights into the individuals that constructed, maintained and travelled along the route during the Roman period.

Several of the finds had been imported, including the pottery rim photographed below that was found in A1. Despite this rim being fairly small, it derived from an amphora, a very large jar used to transport liquid products like wine, olive oil, and fish sauce around the Roman empire. This rim is from a type which is rare in Britain but which was distributed across northern Europe and the Middle East as far as Iraq. The amphora was probably made somewhere around the Aegean sea. It will have arrived in Britain during the third or fourth centuries AD and its find at Lutterworth is evidence of the long-distance connections in which the site was involved.



Amphora rim from A1

There were also several sherds of Samian ware pottery, a kind of high-quality glossy tableware made mainly in Gaul (modern France) between the first and third centuries AD. One such sherd recovered from the quarry pits in A1 was from a decorated bowl. Though now abraded, originally the mould-made decoration on this vessel, which was likely made in the factory at Lezoux in central France, depicts a nude man in a reaching or dancing pose. Such figures were commonly combined with other images of mythological characters, animals and gladiators to create dynamic and highly popular designs.



Samian Ware pottery depicting nude man

Other artefacts retrieved during the excavations have provided an insight into the everyday lives of the people occupying the settlements. One such artefact was a second example of Samian ware, this time without moulded decoration. Such a vessel will have been one of the nicer pieces in the average Romano-British home – the Roman 'Sunday best'. The fact that this bowl is more abraded on the inside than the outside might suggest that it was well used, repeated cutting and grinding actions done during use possibly being the reason why little of the gloss remains on the inside. Further insight into the everyday practices of the Roman inhabitants of the site was provided by the recovery of copper tweezers.



Copper tweezers

Several coins were recovered from within and around a quarry pit in A1. Further analysis of six coins found all to be Denarii, a relatively low denomination made of silver, dating to the 1st to 2nd centuries AD covering the reigns of the Emperors Vespasian (AD69-79), Trajan (AD98-117) and Hadrian (117-138).



Coin SF25, likely issued July to December AD71. The obverse side (left) depicts a laureate bust of Vespasian. The reverse (right) depicts four priestly implements, simpulum, aspergillum, jug and lituus



Coin SF19, Trajan Danube victory issue c.107AD. The obverse side (left) shows a laureate bust of Trajan. On the reverse (right) is a depiction of a personification of the Danube leaning on rocks with a cloak billowing around the head and a hand resting on a rudder.



Coin SF40. The obverse side (left) shows a laureate bust of Sabina, wife of Hadrian, who died in AD137. Sabina is shown diademed and draped with her hair in a plaited coil on her head. On the reverse (right) is the personification of Venus leaning on a column, holding a spear and helmet.

6 MEDIEVAL TO POST-MEDIEVAL

The deserted medieval village (DMV) of Bittesby, a Scheduled Monument, was located towards the centre of the development area between A18 and X25. Bittesby DMV survives in the form of a number of earthworks including house platforms and routeways.

Archaeological remains identified within A18 and X25 were primarily medieval and post-medieval in date and were predominantly agricultural in function, comprising a series of largely fragmentary enclosures delineated by ditches. There was no evidence for surviving structures in either A18 or X25 and it is likely that both areas were on the periphery of the DMV settlement, perhaps functioning as paddocks or stock enclosures. A number of small pits and post-holes were present throughout both areas, which may have been used for fence structures.

Most of the finds recovered were from A18 and were primarily representative of domestic waste dumped to the outskirts of the settlement area. Preliminary dating of some of the pottery from A18 has indicated activity extended into the 16th to 18th centuries.

The majority of the excavation areas identified some evidence of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation and would have been in agricultural use throughout this period.



Drone picture of X25, looking north-west. A18 can be seen in the top right corner; the DMV earthworks are in the pasture field to the right.

7 FUTURE WORK

The excavations have now finished on site and further analyses are being carried out at MOLA's offices. A large assemblage of finds was recovered during the excavations that has the potential to shed further light on the site's occupants from the Iron Age period onwards. The material will be further studied to elucidate our understanding of daily lives, status, diet, crops, animal husbandry, industrial processes and other activities carried out on the site. All of the information gained during the investigations will be compiled into a report, which will be publicly accessible on the Archaeology Data Service website (accessed at <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/library/>).