



**ULAS NEWS**

**September 2010**

**BRIEF SUMMARIES OF SELECTED RECENT PROJECTS**

**Launde Abbey (Neil Finn)**

The excavation of a trench for an electricity cable within the chapel at Launde Abbey exposed part of an alabaster memorial slab, the corner of a second memorial slab and an associated floor surface. The chapel was constructed in the 13th century as a side chapel to the 12th century priory church of St John the Baptist.

The service trench ran diagonally across the white alabaster slab, exposing its north-east corner. An incised design on this represented the lower portion (feet end) of a figure wearing a cope with decorated edging (see below). This was recognisable as a stone illustrated by John Nichols in his *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* (vol. 3, part 1, published in 1800), being one of six memorial slabs set into the floor visible at that time. Nichols gives the following description:

‘A large white stone, or alabaster, with the traces of one of the priors of this house, in his habit; his hands joined, his head upon a tasselled cushion, at each corner of which is a cross crosslet.’

Nichols provides the then legible portion of the black letter inscription around the margin of the stone (though this is not shown in his illustration), which is translated in John C. Hughes’ *Launde Abbey: The Story of the Abbey* (1998, 92) as follows:

‘Pray for the soul of Hum (or Will) G... on the ..... day of the month of October in 1482 A.D. on whose soul may god have mercy. Amen.’

It is not certain which of the priors of Launde this stone commemorates. According to the *Victoria County History*, Thomas Frisby is recorded as prior in documents dated between 1464 and 1478, and Robert Northampton is recorded as prior in a document of 1482-3 (VCH Vol. 2, 1954). Neither of these is remotely similar to Hum (presumably short for Humphrey) or Will G... of the inscription, even allowing for some difficulty in reading the black letter script. The slab may therefore commemorate another, otherwise unknown, prior who was in post for a brief period after 1478 and who, on his death in 1482, was succeeded by Robert Northampton.

On the east side of the alabaster stone was a second memorial slab, of which only the corner was exposed within the service trench. Nichols records this as:

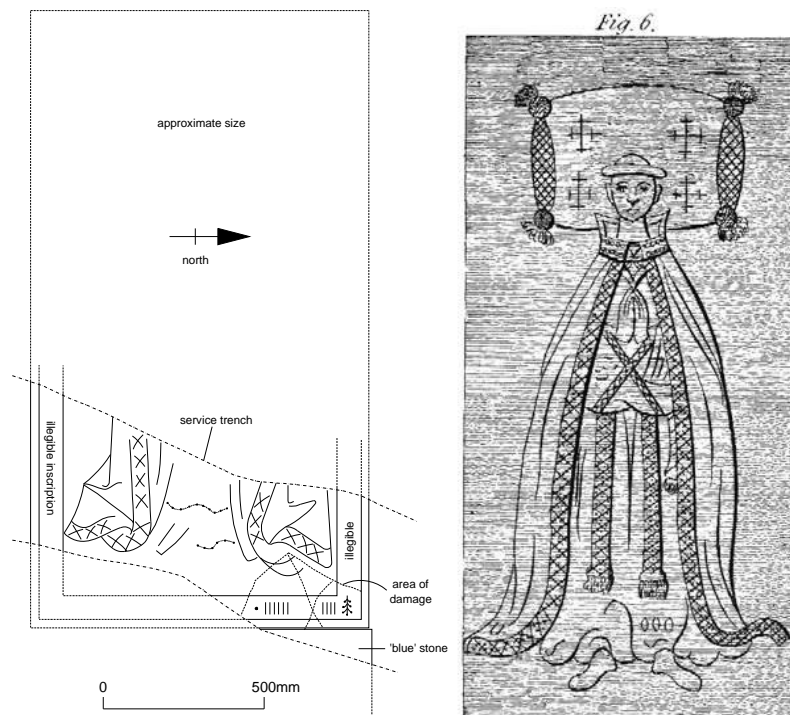
‘...a blue stone, on which are traces of a figure in armour, with helmet, crest, and mantle; a large cross above his head, eight shields of arms, and illegible inscription round the ledge, all deeply sunk in the stone; but the brasses torn off’ (Nichols 1800, 327).

Part of an early floor surface also survived. This included a number of medieval decorated tiles, though worn to the degree that their designs were unidentifiable.

Previously it had been assumed that the memorial slabs set into the chapel floor at Launde were removed when the chapel was restored in 1839-40. It is now clear that the floor level was raised at that time and all of the slabs described by Nichols are likely to survive *in situ*.



Portion of the alabaster slab exposed within service trench



Left: detail of alabaster slab exposed within service trench; right: the slab as illustrated in Nichols (1800)

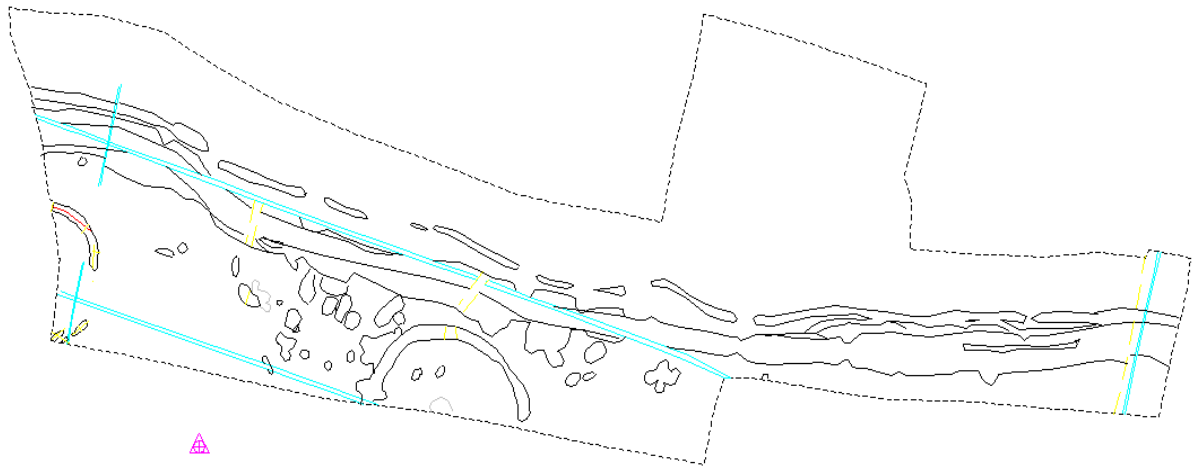
### **Leicester, Humberstone Thurmaston Lane (James Harvey, Andy Hyam)**

Continuation of the extensive Iron Age site previously investigated by Oxford Archaeology and ULAS. The initial phase has recorded an extensive linear boundary that marks a topographic change from higher ground to the south, sloping down steeply beyond the boundary to the south. The boundary was found to have at least three separate re-cuts perhaps suggesting some longevity of the feature. Extensive Late Iron Age activity has been recorded

immediately south of the boundary ditch on the ULAS site immediately to the east. This activity clearly continues onto the current site and although only excavating *c.*10m into the area south of the boundary, parts of two roundhouses and *c.*30 'pits' were recorded. The extensive pitting may indicate a different aspect of the settlement in this area as little evidence of pitting was recorded further east. However the pits themselves were fairly disappointing, representing more shallow scoop-like features in nature than true pits, yielding little artefactual remains. The function of them is uncertain although one possible interpretation is that they could represent small scale clay extraction pits. A very large fragment of Granodiorite located in the vicinity within the boundary ditch backfill may suggest pottery production was occurring close by (granodiorite being used as pottery temper). The portions of roundhouse were more rewarding, both producing good quantities of finds. The eastern roundhouse was much better preserved than the western one with the gully measuring nearly 1m in depth. Lots of pottery and bone was recovered but perhaps the nicest find was a probable handle made out of worked deer antler which ties in well with the known antler working area previously recorded.



View looking north-west, Andy Hyam excavating the eastern of the two roundhouses



Thurmaston Lane, Humberstone survey (scale c.100m east to west extent)



Fragment of Granodiorite recorded within ditch

### **Leicester, Bosworth House, Southgates (Roger Kipling)**

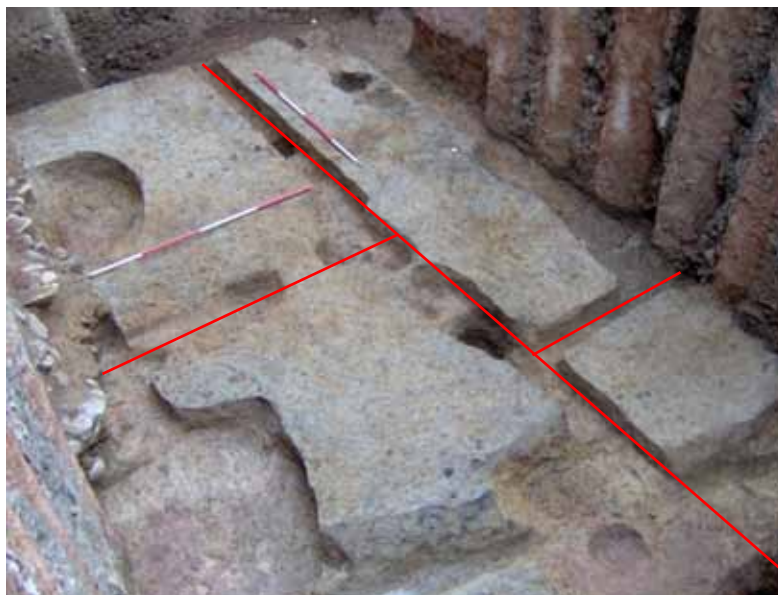
A six-week excavation has recently been completed alongside Bosworth House, Southgates, the follow-up to a short evaluation carried out in December 2009 by ULAS for De Montfort University, which had demonstrated good survival of Roman stratigraphy, possibly relating to the town defences. Excavations in 1967 close by had revealed the Roman rampart, and the castle bailey ditch was subsequently traced in Newarke Houses car park in 1972, along with the robbed medieval town wall and a series of medieval burgage plots fronting Southgates.

A preliminary monitored programme of contiguous drilled foundation piling for the new building which, following machine removal of garden soil and 18th-century cellars, resulted in a small box measuring 5m x 9m and around 2.5m deep. The 1m+ stratigraphic sequence was subsequently removed by hand. The depth and confined nature of the trench with its piled vertical sides presented unusual difficulties in terms of access and spoil removal.

Consultation with Baggaley Construction resulted in the erection of a skip and barrow hoist which, despite a number of problems proved an effective aid to excavation.



The hoist



The pre-defensive Roman timber building phase (projected wall lines marked), truncated by the medieval ditch (in the background)

Following removal of 18th-century cellars, it became apparent that, with the exception of two truncated medieval cess or rubbish pits and a substantial ditch (of which more later), the surviving 1m+ deep sequence was entirely Roman in date and largely untruncated. An accompanying detailed soil sampling strategy was undertaken in order to test for possible

changes to soil chemistry and compaction by the concrete piling process, as stipulated by English Heritage.

### *Roman*

The earliest activity on the site consisted of a single mid-1st century AD gully, followed in the late 1st or early 2nd century by the construction of a substantial timber building, set out on a probable east-west alignment and extending beyond the confines of the trench, constructed of a combination of post-holes and beam-slots, the latter housing substantial stakes and further posts. The structure appears to have been the subject of further additions and/or alterations subsequent to its initial construction. A number of tile- and granite-built hearth or oven bases set in a probable external yard area flanked the building to the north-west. The building was subsequently demolished and apparently sealed by a series of clay and earth dumps likely forming the tail of and/or wash off the late 2nd century Roman defensive rampart, which extended south of the trench. A substantial wall, constructed on the same alignment as the timber structure and defences, was traced along the northern excavation edge and appears to represent a masonry building constructed at the base of the rampart.



Left to right: Roman possible clay rampart material, hearths and masonry building



Roman masonry building phase truncated by medieval pits

### *Medieval*

The masonry Roman wall was subsequently truncated by two medieval cess or rubbish pits, suggesting its continuing use as a medieval property boundary. In addition, a substantial ditch was located at the eastern end of the trench, measuring *c.* 1.7m deep and aligned north-south and truncating the timber building. The feature appears to have been open for a short period of time prior to its deliberate backfilling. Pottery dating places this activity within a close (1275-1300) date range. Functionally, the ditch may represent a defensive link either with castle (to the west) or the road approaching the medieval south gate. Subsequent phases were represented by 18th and 19th century cellared buildings.

### **Leicester, 40-46 Western Road (Mathew Morris and Siobhan Brocklehurst)**

Recent groundworks between Western Road and the river have revealed part of an extensive Roman cemetery. Nine trenches were excavated across the site and an area containing exposed human remains was cleaned in order to establish the extent of the inhumations and test unknown areas. Seven of the trenches produced clear evidence of an extensive palaeochannel covering the northern two-thirds of the site. The inhumations were solely confined to the site's south-western corner and were identified in two of the evaluation trenches as well as the cleaned area.

In all, 17 exposed inhumations and at least a further 19 probable grave cuts were identified across the three areas. As a mitigating strategy it was decided to excavate and lift 15 of the exposed inhumations before they sustained further damage. These were buried on north to south and east to west alignments, the east to west ones being typically later, and all appeared to date to the late 3rd or 4th century AD. Grave goods were recovered from a number of them including three buried with hobnail shoes and two with ceramic vessels. One individual had been buried with an enamelled copper alloy seal-box whilst one infant

burial contained a shale bangle and a jet and glass bead necklace. No other archaeological features were noted. It is hoped further work will take place on this site in the future and a skeletal assessment is now underway.



Siobhan Brocklehurst excavating one of the east to west burials



The final burial excavated, a possible female juvenile buried prone in a coffin. Note she is wearing hobnail shoes.

**Mendips, Somerset (Leon Hunt, Andy Hyam, Matt Beamish)**

In a joint project with Fiona Fyfe of the Living Landscapes Consultancy, ULAS staff spent a week surveying field monuments at Black-Down and Burrington Ham, in the Mendips, just north of Cheddar Gorge.



A view across the survey area

The area contains a considerable amount of archaeological features, including several Bronze Age barrows, and earthworks from various periods. The area was also used as a bombing decoy during WWII and the whole landscape of Black Down contains several interconnected rows of ‘tumps’; small round mounds allegedly used as anti-aircraft obstacles, but lying in long avenues to give the effect of railway lines or roads. The whole area was controlled by a number of command bunkers, which also lie within the study area. There are also a large number of caves and swallets, some of which contain nationally important Palaeolithic and Mesolithic remains.



Erosion by mountain bike across one of the barrows

The area as a whole is under threat from heavy erosion due to its popularity with locals and tourists alike. The area is within an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) and the Black

Down is also a Scheduled Monument. Despite this, the barrows are sustaining damage from mountain bikes and the paths between the 'tumps' and the barrows are being heavily eroded by walkers, horse riders and bikes. The paths have also been used in the past by 4X4s which have badly damaged many of the 'tumps' and have also been driven over one of the command bunkers.

Our job was to visit each monument and photograph them and assess the damage. This information would then form part of a larger study, with contributions from ecologists and other consultants, which would lead to the formation of a management plan for the area. Many of the features were very obvious, like large barrow mounds, but many were obscured by extensive gorse and heather and only locatable using the GPS. Much of the northern part of both areas was a swathe of thick bracken and it soon became obvious that many of the features, even the barrows and a small hillfort on the top of Burrington Ham, were completely covered.