

## Archaeology on Throckmorton Airfield, Worcestershire

In 2001 Throckmorton airfield was selected as the site of the Foot and Mouth mass burial pit for the Midlands. Despite the urgency of the situation, archaeology was planned into the project from the start.

Grateful thanks are therefore owed to the staff of MAFF (now DEFRA), the MoD, Environment Agency, DERA (now QinetiQ) and the contractors for their cooperation in what was a true partnership project.



### The Strategy

The archaeology of the site was recorded as work proceeded on the excavation of the burial pits. Their backfilling with animal carcasses could, at times, be very unpleasant. Nonetheless, the archaeological contribution did provide a positive aspect to a very unhappy situation. The sites of a previously unknown Iron Age settlement and Roman farmstead were discovered, as well as part of the medieval open field system.



The strategy was to undertake a watching brief on the initial soil stripping and excavation of the burial pits themselves. Initial finds suggested the presence of a Roman farmstead, whose corner had been clipped by the excavation of the burial pits.

The work was undertaken from dawn to dusk, in three shifts.



Close liaison was needed with the contractors to ensure that the work was undertaken safely.

Staff on site had to wear disposable protective clothing. Their boots and vehicle were disinfected daily at the on-site decontamination centre.



Every opportunity had to be taken to record features as they were exposed. Here we see the recording of a Romano-British yard surface (later excavated in plan).



A metal detector was used to scan newly-stripped areas in order to allow better targeting of resources.

Once the presence of significant archaeology had been established, a geophysical survey was used to target areas of high potential in areas where excavation was proposed in the second stage of creating burial pits. As a result, the rest of the plan of the Roman farmstead was recovered, suggesting that the bulk of this lies preserved beneath the runway and land to the north.



The site of a previously unknown Iron Age settlement was also discovered. This was in an area which was originally going to be used for the excavation of burial pits. Because of the significance of the discovery, however, MAFF immediately took this part of the site out of the scheme.



After work on the burial pits had been completed, a more formal evaluation excavation was undertaken in an area projected for further pits. This confirmed the presence of well-preserved Roman remains.

Although no further burial pits are now planned, this part of the site is still under threat from degradation of the archaeology by the engineering works. It is hoped to complete the open excavation of this area in the near future.



## The Results

### Iron Age

The initial geophysical survey was extended as the result of a subsequent involvement with the Channel 4 *TimeTeam* programme.

This revealed the almost complete plan of an Iron Age settlement.



Excavation was carried out by staff of Time Team, the Archaeology Service and local volunteers.

Here we see excavation within the entrance to one of the Iron Age enclosures.



A completed section through the terminal of an Iron Age ditch, bounding the entrance to the enclosure.



Excavation on the site of one of the Iron Age huts



Reconstruction of the type of hut that was used in both the Iron Age and early Roman periods.



## Roman

Excavation adjacent to the completed burial pits revealed a dense pattern of Roman cobbled surfaces and buildings, bounded by ditches. This was probably part of the farm complex attached to a Romano-British estate centre.



Roman pottery of the 1st/2nd century. The fragment of a colander is unusual, and an indicator of the degree of Romanisation on the site.



1st / 2nd century 'Trumpet' brooch



2nd century coin of Commodus



The site has produced rare finds of late 4th century Roman pottery. The Roman farmstead was long-lived, although it is not yet clear when it was finally abandoned



Environmental samples were taken of key deposits. These will help characterise both the general environment, and also the specific economy of the farm.

The types of snails found in the ditches suggest that the immediate landscape was one of open pasture.

But the recovery of spelt wheat suggests that the farmers were engaged in arable farming in the valley below.

