

**SAFEFIELD FARM, ALCONBURY WESTON 2025
EVALUATION EXCAVATION
SITE DIARY DAYS 1-4 - 31 JUL-3 AUG 25**

Site Details

Event number: ECB7612

Site Reference Code: SFF192-25

Site Benchmark (SBM):

Description – NE corner of footbridge

Lat and Long – 52°23'11.00"N 0°14'43.00"W

NGR – TL 19519 77933

AMSL – 48m (Ordnance Survey - Ordnance Datum Newlyn (ODN))



Figure 1: Trench 1, looking west at the start of day 1



Figure 2: Trench 1, mortar lumps at the start of day 1



Figure 3: Trench 1, looking west at the end of day 4



Figure 4: Trench 1, looking east at the end of day 4



Figure 2a: Small finds; Copper alloy belt mount, worked bone handle, jet bead, curved blue glass sherd, iron ring



Figure 2b: Small finds; Iron blade fragment and tang, iron rod in copper alloy sheath, large blade and tang at right angle, lead component of figure, apparatus or automata with hands

Aims and Objectives

Project: Continued investigation in order to identify any building features and determine the evolving nature of settlement activity. Additionally, to locate and determine the nature of the Roman/Romano-British pottery and metal objects assemblage discovered by Landowners Historical Research Group (LHRG) detectorists.

Season: 3

Trenches: 1 & 2

Test Pit: 2

Site Orientation

Trench 1 is located 52m west of the SBM and 10m south of the drainage ditch at the north edge of Hermitage Wood on Safefield Farm and is aligned longitudinally E/W.

Trench 2 is located at the north edge of Hermitage Wood on Safefield Farm, 9.1m east of Trench 1, and is aligned longitudinally E/W.

Test-pit 2 is located in the north edge of Hermitage Wood on Safefield Farm, 8.5m east of Trench 2, and is aligned E/W by N/S.

Activity

Day 1 - 31 Jul 25

Morning:

The morning session was delayed until 1000 due to earlier inclement weather. When the session commenced the weather was overcast with a light breeze, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 20°C.

Trench 1 - no activity was undertaken in order to allow the trench floor to dry out from the earlier rain

Trench 2 - marked out at 4m x 2m after-which the vegetation growth was removed

Test-Pit 2 - marked out at 1m x 1m after-which the vegetation growth was removed

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was sunny intervals, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 23°C.

Trench 1 - the trench floor, contexts [1002] and [1003] but excluding the mortar feature [1004] were cleaned back and excavated in order to reduce levels to that of the clay immediately north of [1004]

Trench 2 - a 1m wide sondage was marked out at the east end and excavated to remove the organic layer of the topsoil and to reduce the level of the remaining topsoil [2999]

Test-Pit 2 - no further activity

Finds:

Trench 1 - the assemblage continued in the same vein as the previous session, consisting of pot sherds (Nene Valley, shelly ware, grey ware, Black Burnished), iron slag, animal bone, oyster shell and charcoal

Trench 2 - a small assemblage of pot sherds (shelly ware, grey ware) was revealed

Test-Pit 2 - none

Notes:

Context [1002] is a firm, friable mid-yellow-brown soil.

Context [1003] is a firm, friable dark grey-brown soil with sporadic dense charcoal inclusions.

Context [1004] consists of collapsed lumps of compact, granular and friable yellow-brown mortar with very small white shell inclusions, interspersed with thin bands of dark brown soil leached in from context [1003].

Context [2999] is a mid-brown compact soil of the organic layer and upper zone of the topsoil with a significant intrusion of flora roots.

Context [TP2999] is a grey-brown compact soil of the organic layer and upper zone of the topsoil with a significant intrusion of flora roots.

A ground survey was undertaken to investigate a concave linear feature bounded by ditches, some 40m to the west; this linear feature measured approximately 14m in width, with each ditch measuring approximately 2m in width.

Options:

Excavate to reduce levels [1002] and [1003] until anticipated natural geology across entirety of trench, less mortar feature [1004].

Landscape research of Hermitage wood and field to immediate north with a view to further the ground survey.

Day 2 - 1 Aug 25**Morning:**

At the start of the morning session the weather was overcast with a light breeze, rain setting in in the late morning, the ground conditions were dry, becoming wet and the forecast temperature was 16°C

Trench 1 - the trench floor, contexts [1002] and [1003] but excluding the mortar feature [1004] continued to be excavated in order to reduce levels to that of the clay immediately north of [1004]

Trench 2 - the 1m wide sondage at the east end continued to be excavated to remove the organic layer of the topsoil and to reduce the level of the remaining topsoil [2999]; a similar 1m wide sondage was opened at the west end and excavated to remove the organic layer of the topsoil and to reduce the level of the remaining topsoil [2999]

Test-Pit 2 - no further activity

Afternoon:

No activity due to rain.

Finds:

Trench 1 - the assemblage was similar to that of the previous day, consisting of pot sherds (Nene Valley, shelly ware, grey ware, Black Burnished), iron nails, iron slag, animal bone, oyster; with small finds consisting of a small coin and a fragment of worked bone

Trench 2 - a few more pot sherds (shelly ware, grey ware) were added to the assemblage from the previous day

Test-Pit 2 - none

Notes:

Context [1002] is a firm, friable mid-yellow-brown soil.

Context [1003] is a firm, friable dark grey-brown soil with sporadic dense charcoal inclusions.

Context [1004] consists of collapsed lumps of compact, granular and friable yellow-brown mortar with very small white shell inclusions, interspersed with thin bands of dark brown soil leached in from context [1003].

Context [2999] is a mid-brown compact soil of the organic layer and upper zone of the topsoil with a significant intrusion of flora roots.

The small find fragment of worked bone was decorated with two horizontal incised lines and a partial fixing hole; the smooth surface is likely the result of frequent handling.

The small find coin is copper alloy with some visible detail on one face.

The landscape research of Hermitage wood and field to the immediate north revealed evidence of broad ridge-and-furrow within the wood and corresponding ridge-and-furrow in the field.

Options:

Conduct further ground survey of the ridge-and-furrow within the wood.

Continue with same activity in trenches.

Day 3 - 2 Aug 25

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was overcast with light breeze, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 16°C.

A small party of four children and two adult leaders from Fenland Young Archaeologists Club were hosted over the period 1000 - 1200 hours; the children excavated in Trench 1 and rotated to assist with ground survey.

Trench 1 - the trench floor, contexts [1002] and [1003] but excluding the mortar feature [1004] continued to be excavated in order to reduce levels to that of the clay immediately north of [1004]

Trench 2 - the 1m wide sondage at the west end continued to be excavated to remove the organic layer of the topsoil and to reduce the level of the remaining topsoil [2999] during the period that the party from YAC were excavating in Trench 1

Test-Pit 2 - no further activity

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was sunny intervals with light breeze, the ground conditions were dry and the forecast temperature was 19°C

Trench 1 - the trench floor, contexts [1002] and [1003] but excluding the mortar feature [1004] continued to be excavated in order to reduce levels to that of the clay immediately north of [1004]

Trench 2 - no further activity

Test-Pit 2 - excavation was begun to remove the organic layer of the topsoil and to reduce the level of the remaining topsoil [TP2999]

Finds:

Trench 1 - the assemblage continued in a similar vein as before, pot sherds (Samian, Nene Valley, shelly ware, grey ware, Black Burnished), iron nails, iron slag, CBM, isolated building stone, charcoal, burnt stone; with small finds consisting of an iron ring, glass sherd, jet bead, iron blade fragment and tang with rivet and a worked fossil fragment

Trench 2 - no finds were revealed during the short period of excavation

Test-Pit 2 - a small assemblage of pot sherds (shelly ware, grey ware) was revealed

Notes:

Context [1002] is a firm, friable mid-yellow-brown soil.

Context [1003] is a firm, friable dark grey-brown soil with sporadic dense charcoal inclusions.

Context [1004] consists of collapsed lumps of compact, granular and friable yellow-brown mortar with very small white shell inclusions, interspersed with thin bands of dark brown soil leached in from context [1003].

Context [TP2999] is a grey-brown compact soil of the organic layer and upper zone of the topsoil with a significant intrusion of flora roots.

The small find iron ring is heavily corroded.

The small find glass sherd is very thin, and clear.

The small find jet bead is hollow with a fractured end, the jet is most likely from Whitby.

The small find iron blade fragment and tang appears to have a rivet in situ and is heavily corroded.

The small find worked fossil fragment has a partial hole across the width at the fracture point, which suggests use as a craft tool; the smooth surface is likely the result of frequent handling.

A further ground survey was undertaken to measure the broad ridge-and-furrow, measurements are west to east:

- peak of ridge #1 to peak of ridge #2, 12.60m; intervening trough, 0.40m
- peak of ridge #2 to peak of ridge #3, 10.40m; intervening trough, 0.40m
- peak of ridge #3 to peak of ridge #4, 14.00m; intervening trough, 0.40m
- peak of ridge #4 to peak of ridge #5, 11.59m; intervening trough, 0.26m
- peak of ridge #5 to peak of ridge #6, 10.23m; intervening trough, 0.23m
- trough between ridges #6 and #7 to trough between ridges #7 and #8, 11.00m
- trough between ridges #7 and #8 to trough between ridges #8 and #9, 11.50m
- trough between ridges #8 and #9 to trough between ridges #9 and #10, 9.00m

Options:

Remove individual lumps of collapsed mortar in context [1004] where it is clear they are not contiguous.

Day 4 - 3 Aug 25

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was sunny with broken cloud and occasional light breeze, the ground conditions were dry and the forecast temperature was 17°C.

Trench 1 - the individual lumps of collapsed mortar in context [1004], where it was clear they were not contiguous, were removed; the trench floor, contexts [1002] and [1003] but excluding the mortar feature [1004] continued to be excavated in order to reduce levels to that of the clay immediately north of [1004]

Trench 2 - no further activity

Test-Pit 2 - no further activity

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was overcast with sunny intervals and mild breeze, the ground conditions were dry and the forecast temperature was 19°C.

Trench 1 - the trench floor, contexts [1002] and [1003] but excluding the mortar feature [1004] continued to be excavated in order to reduce levels to that of the clay immediately north of [1004]

Trench 2 - no further activity

Test-Pit 2 - no further activity

Finds:

Trench 1 - as with previous days, the assemblage consisted of pot sherds (Nene Valley, shelly ware, grey ware, Black Burnished), iron nails, iron slag, CBM; with small finds consisting of a copper alloy bar, partial iron ring, sherd of blue glass, lead item, iron rod enclosed in an alloy sheath, iron blade fragment with tang and iron blade with tang at right angle

Trench 2 - none

Test-Pit 2 - none

Notes:

Context [1002] is a firm, friable mid-yellow-brown soil.

Context [1003] is a firm, friable dark grey-brown soil with sporadic dense charcoal inclusions.

Context [1004] consists of collapsed lumps of compact, granular and friable yellow-brown mortar with very small white shell inclusions, interspersed with thin bands of dark brown soil leached in from context [1003].

The small find copper alloy bar is possibly a broach or buckle pin or the shaft of a personal grooming tool.

The small find partial iron ring is heavily corroded.

The small find sherd of glass is thick and blue with air bubbles.

The small find lead item decorated with a pair of hands is possibly a piece of a larger figure or apparatus.

The small find iron rod enclosed in an alloy sheath is heavily corroded.

The small find iron blade fragment and tang is heavily corroded.

The small find iron blade with tang at a right angle is heavily corroded.

The removal of the collapsed pieces of mortar in context [1004] revealed a possible cut containing mortar as part of the fill.

Options:

During the next session, continue to excavate Trench 1 to reduce levels of [1002] and [1003].

Determine whether mortar containing context [1004] is the fill of the possible cut.

Resume the excavation of both Trench 2 and Test Pit 2.

Identify the optimum location for an evaluation excavation trench across one of the ridges and its associated furrows.

Summary:

This was a very productive session of excavation that provided further evidence that continued to be highly suggestive of a building or structure. Removal of the collapsed lumps of mortar revealed a possible cut, for which the remaining mortar may well be the fill.

The small finds assemblage was exceptional with several items intriguing the small finds experts at the Oxford Archaeology Cambridge office. An impromptu ground survey revealed a series of unusually wide ridge-and-furrow, made possible due to the natural reduction of vegetation. Finally, there continued to be no evidence of the concentrated assemblage of Roman pot discovered by Landowners Historical Research Group (LHRG) detectorists.