

**SAFEFIELD FARM, ALCONBURY WESTON 2025
EVALUATION EXCAVATION
SITE DIARY DAYS 1-4 - 16-19 NOV 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: 2nd/3rd Century Roman grey-ware, two rim-sherds showing refit

Aims and Objectives

Project: Continued investigation in order to identify revealed and any additional 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 - 16 Nov 25

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was overcast, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 9°C.

Trench 1 - was too damp to do anything so was left to dry out after the recent storms since Session 3; the considerable leaf-fall and soil-spill caused by those storms were cleaned from the trench floor into piles against the trench walls in order to facilitate drying out of the trench floor.

Trench 2 - became the focus of main effort, with the centre and west sections levels being reduced by mattock to that of the east section, approximately 0.20m depth; this brought the trench floor below the rootbound topsoil (non-archaeological context [2999]), with the new surface designated as context [2001].

Test pit 2 - no work was undertaken.

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was overcast, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 9°C.

Trench 1 - collected leaf-fall and soil-spill were removed in order facilitate drying out of the trench.

Trench 2 - began trowel excavation of context [2001].

Test pit 2 - leaf-fall was removed and the trench floor levelled by trowel excavation.

Finds:

A small assemblage of pottery sherds (samian, grey ware, black burnished ware and Nene Valley colour coated wares), small pieces of mortar, some CBM and an animal tooth were collected from trench 2.

Notes:

Context [2999] mid-brown compact soil, rootbound.

Context [2001] mid-brown compact soil.

Context [TP2999] black organic rich compact soil, rootbound.

Options:

When dry enough, clean floor of trench 1 to refresh context transitions; complete removal of fill (1029); insert 0.60m wide slot full width of trench through contexts [1014], [1015], [1016] and [1017].

Continue trowel excavation of trench 2 context [2001].

Continue trowel excavation of test-pit 2 until below rootbound context [TP2999], then continue trowel excavation of new context [TP2001].

Day 2 - 17 Nov 25

In the afternoon, a 0.60m wide slot the full width of the trench was marked out, centred at 1.45m from the east end, excavation of which was started. The slot cuts through several contexts of clay, natural geology and the mortar feature in order to determine whether the clay was deliberately laid, or a variation of natural geology, and to obtain a profile of the mortar feature.

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was sunny with a stiff breeze, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 6°C.

Trench 1 - had dried out sufficiently for trowel cleaning of the trench floor to remove staining from recent storms, enabling contexts identified in the previous session to be revealed with clarity; the remaining fill (1029) of the rectilinear cut [1030] was removed.

Trench 2 - continued with the trowel excavation of context [2001].

Test pit 2 - no work was undertaken.

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was sunny with a stiff breeze, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 7°C.

Trench 1 - 0.60m wide slot the full width of the trench was marked out, centred at 1.45m from the east end, excavation of which was started; the slot cut through contexts [1012], [1014], [1015], [1016] and [1017], and removed the pole holes (previously excavated in session 3) [1018], [1020], [1022] and [1024], in order to determine whether the clay was deliberately laid, or a variation of natural geology, and to obtain a profile of the mortar feature.

Trench 2 - continued with the excavation of context [2001] by trowel.

Test pit 2 - continued to excavate by trowel; this brought the test pit floor below the rootbound topsoil (non-archaeological context [TP2999]), with the new surface designated as context [TP2001].

Finds:

A sparse collection of Roman pottery (grey ware, shelly ware and Nene Valley colour coated ware) and a piece of Roman CBM tile were recovered from trench 2.

Notes:

Context [1012] is a firm, mid yellow-brown clay.

Context [1014] is a firm, friable grey-brown clay with exceedingly small flint/chert inclusions

Context [1015] is a firm, friable pale yellow-brown clay with very small flint/chert inclusions, that is likely to be natural geology.

Context [1016] is yellow-brown mortar.

Context [1017] is a firm, mid yellow-brown clay.

Cut [1018] is small and circular, the fill of which has been excavated.

Cut [1020] is small and circular, the fill of which has been excavated.

Cut [1022] is small and circular, the fill of which has been excavated.

Cut [1024] is small and circular, the fill of which has been excavated.

Context [2999] mid-brown compact soil, rootbound.

Context [2001] mid-brown compact soil.

Context [TP2999] black organic rich compact soil, rootbound.

Context [TP2001] brown organic rich compact soil.

Options:

Continue trowel excavation of slot in trench 1.

Continue trowel excavation of trench 2 context [2001].

Continue trowel excavation of test-pit 2 context [TP2001].

Day 3 - 18 Nov 25

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was sunny with faint breeze, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 3°C.

Trench 1 - excavation of the slot was completed and the slot recorded on Drawing #3 Sketch Plan; the slot showed the areas of clay were deliberately laid - possibly to form a level surface on uneven natural geology, but did not reveal the anticipated foundation for the mortar related linear structure (context [1004]); a robust trowel clean of the remaining trench floor was then undertaken in order to refresh the surface and expose previously noted pole holes, for recording.

Trench 2 - continued intermittent trowel excavation of context [2001].

Test pit 2 - continued to intermittently excavate context [TP2001] by trowel.

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was sunny with faint breeze, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 7°C.

Trench 1 - the cleaned cut at the west end of trench 1 was recorded as were a number of pole holes associated with the cut - recording was interrupted by a couple of brief light showers, but was then halted when the rain became a little more persistent.

Trench 2 - continued with the excavation of context [2001] by trowel.

Test pit 2 - continued to excavate context [TP2001] by trowel.

Finds:

A surprise find, at the rectilinear cut by the trench south wall - where some residual overlaying context and fill of the cut were removed, of two excellent Roman grey-ware pot rim sherds, where refit demonstrated they were from the same vessel.

Trench 2 produced a minimal assemblage of small pot sherds.

A single Roman grey-ware pot rim sherd was recovered from test-pit 2.

Notes:

Context [1004] (previously excavated during session 3) consisted 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 [2001] mid-brown compact soil.

Context [TP2001] brown organic rich compact soil.

Options:

None

Day 4 - 19 Nov 25

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was raining, the ground conditions were wet and the forecast temperature was 3°C.

Site activity was delayed until 1030 due to the heavy rain; a visit by four members of Huntingdon U3A Archaeology Group was hosted at 1045, the visitors remaining on site until 1200 - the visit covered a brief description of a very waterlogged trench 1, the background of how Sawtry Archaeology came to be excavating in Hermitage Wood and a brief history of Hermitage Wood as determined from current research.

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was cloudy with occasional sunny intervals and a strong chill breeze, the ground conditions were wet and the forecast temperature was 5°C



Figure 2: Waterlogged trench 1 (© M. Tasker)

Trench 1 - unfortunately, the trench remained too waterlogged to complete the final elements of recording.

Trench 2 - continued with the trowel excavation of context [2001]; however, after an hour or so - and despite the shelter afforded by the fortuitously strategically placed spoil heaps, the windchill became too much to continue.

Test pit 2 - no work was undertaken.

Finds:

A few pot sherds (Roman Nene Valley colour coated ware and grey ware) were recovered from trench 2.

Notes:

Context [2001] mid-brown compact soil.

Options:

Complete recording of trench 1.

Excavate fill of pole holes.

Continue excavation of trench 2 and test pit 2.

Consider location for an evaluation excavation trench across one/two ridges and associated furrows.

Consider location for an evaluation excavation trench across east/west agger with associated ditches in the centre of Hermitage Wood.

Consider extending trench 1 to north, full or partial length.