



**C**ommunity  
**L**andscape  
**A**rchaeology  
**S**urvey  
**P**roject

## **NRTN02\_Medieval Village, Thrupp, Daventry**

### **NRTN02\_Medieval Village, Thrupp, Daventry (SP60256520)\***

CLASP's research work in relation to the deserted medieval settlement at Thrupp is ongoing. This note provides a summary of the work over 2014 to 2018, as initially interpreted by Steve Young, CLASP's Archaeological Director, pending the detailed writing-up of the work and the publication of the final Report. Separately, Jim Aveling has summarized a history of Thrupp written by the late Gren Hatton and himself.

CLASP's involvement commenced in 2014 with a watching brief on features found adjacent to the B4036 Long Buckby to Daventry road near Thrupp Farm as a result of a cable trench being dug. A subsequent Geophysical survey by Fred Kay and his team of Thrupp Grounds Farm in the parish of Norton revealed an extensive landscape of archaeological features. This was of particular interest because of its proximity to CLASP's major landscape research project at the Roman site of Bannaventa and for the potential connection between the settlements in relation to continuity and mobility of occupation during the Dark Age and Early Medieval period.

In 2015, Steve Young, submitted to the CLASP Organising Committee a proposal for "The Archaeological Evaluation and Trial Trenching of Geographical Anomalies at Thrupp Grounds Farm. This was agreed.

CLASP's first excavation in the vicinity of Thrupp Farm was in August 2015, to the north of the B3046. The second was in August 2016, with a trial trench being dug to the south of the B3046. The third excavation was of a potential moat to the west of Thrupp farm, at the end of 2016 and resumed and completed in May 2017. The fourth was of a trial trench to the north of the road in August 2017. The fifth and sixth were in September 2018 with trial trenches first to the south of the road and then the north.

\* CLASP projects are identified by the parish. NRTN02 indicates that this is the second project in the Norton Parish. (Bannaventa is NRTN01).

Rob Close  
January 2019.

## **1. Cable Trench small scale rescue excavation (Dec 2014)**

A cable trench was being excavated along the B4036 near to the site of the Roman town of Bannaventa and immediately adjacent to the deserted Medieval Village of Thrupp. It was felt that the 'cable trench' might reveal some archaeological features and, as there was no official watching brief, Fred Kay (CLASP Geophysical Survey Director) observed the work as it developed.

Initially, apart from a small Victorian pottery dump of mid 19th-century date and some squared stone blocks, very little archaeology of any date was visible. Subsequently an opportunity presented itself to investigate part of the cable trench and more substantial surviving archaeological remains were revealed. Several features were identified and the contractors Morgan Sindall and Western Power gave permission and support to carry out an exploratory excavation. Unfortunately, because of the speed of the cable laying operation and the need to work with the contractor's timetable the features although thoroughly excavated could only be photographed before the trench was back filled as work progressed.

The cable trench cut through a known area of archaeological features which had been revealed through a large-scale geophysical survey to the South and to the North of the B4036. These surveys revealed an extensive complex of ditches and enclosures of indeterminate date but most probably belonging to the Roman and mediaeval periods. The cable trench was 1.2m deep and 0.5m wide and the focus of the archaeological activity was located within a central section of 35m to the west of Thrupp Farm.

At the eastern end lay a length of substantial stonewall (3 m x 1m) which showed two phases of construction and remained in places to 4 courses high. The date of the feature is difficult to interpret with any great certainty as no diagnostically datable material was recovered associated with the wall during the excavation. Less than 5 m to the West a further fragment of walling (2.5m x 1m) at a right angle to the first was located. Constructed of large squared masonry it resembled the foundation phase associated with the wall previously mentioned. This piece of walling appeared to form an apsidal end to a larger rectangular building of which the other wall may have been the eastern side.

Not apparently associated with this building but immediately due east of it was the remains of a hearth or stoke hole which was located in the

face of the northern bank of the trench under the roadway itself. Detailed excavation was impossible because of the high chance of road subsidence into the cable trench. This was the only feature to contain diagnostically datable pottery fragments with the date range between the Late 14<sup>th</sup> and mid 15<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Further east was the foundation of another stone wall aligned like the first, towards the north-west, but in this case associated with a metalled flooring surface that stretched 5m towards the west. Remarkably, virtually no finds were recovered from either around the features or in the fill from the cable trench. This which may have been a by-product of the levelling of the area when the original alignment of the B4036 was constructed presumably at some time during the 19th century. The only other dating evidence came from Metal detecting by Robin Noades (NNPast) of the trench and the field boundary to the south which produced a coin of Constantine dated to the 330s AD.



Cable Trench. Dec 2014



Substantial Stone wall in Trench

## **2. Excavation at Thrupp farm to the north of the B3046 (September 2015)**

The exploratory excavation consisted of three trial trenches and a test pit. These were placed strategically across the field with reference to known geophysical anomalies in order to afford the best opportunity to classify and date the remains and to assess the level of archaeological survival. Removal of the over burden revealed the 'natural' was composed of heavy clay which supported very little depth of topsoil indicating a paucity of period-based

deposition and an almost non-existent archaeological horizon. Indeed, two of the trenches exhibited evidence of both mechanical and horse drawn ploughing scraping directly into the underlying clay. This probably reflects the long-term use of the field for pasture since enclosure in the late 15th century and the relative short period of arable cultivation at some stage in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the 1960s.

Significantly, all of the datable features below the plough horizon that were cut directly into the clay appeared to be Roman in date while none could positively be ascribed to the medieval period. However, occupation of the site in the medieval era was suggested by the spread of residual pottery recovered from the plough soil. Any structural evidence for medieval buildings appeared to be extremely ephemeral and probably means what has survived is disturbed and now is dispersed in the plough soil. However, the existence of habitable 'crofts' is still indicated by the existence of earthworks associated with observable raised rectangular platforms or closes within the field.

The main features noted in two of the trenches were ditches whilst the third held two ironworking hearths. Both ditches appear to have been 'dug' during the late 2nd to late 3rd century AD and to have been abandoned by the early to mid 5th century AD. This initial assessment might signify that many of the anomalies discovered in the geophysical survey in this area are indeed reflecting an underlying Roman settlement. A consequence of this being that the Deserted Medieval village of Thrupp was either significantly smaller than previously believed or that it had a more complex evolutionary development.



Ironworking hearths



Section across Roman ditch

Small amounts of slag from iron working were also recovered from the fill of all three trial trenches as well as the core of an iron bloom. There was no dating

evidence associated with the hearths, but their significance lies in the fact that they indicate that we may be dealing with an iron working area. Very indistinct elements of a roughly metalled track way were also observed in one trench and the test pit consistent with the thoroughfare identified in the geophysical survey. The track way evidently was the major east/west highway through the deserted village. Small spreads of random limestone observed in two of the trial trenches could also be archaeological in nature and possibly were related to flooring surfaces, but they are far too eroded and truncated to confirm such an interpretation.

An assemblage of over 700 shards was recovered from the trial trenches and a range of iron objects including a medieval horse shoe, a knife blade and several nails. Three noteworthy small finds included a late Roman coin which had been pierced for use as an earring or pendant probably in the Anglo-Saxon period, a 15th century copper alloy belt buckle and a curved blade from a seax or Saxon short sword. The blade was subjected to X ray and revealed a pattern weald cross section.

### **3. Trial trench at Thrupp Farm, to the south of the B4036 (Aug 2016)**

A single 69m trial trench revealed the remains of several medieval tenements aligned obliquely to the modern B4036 and a significant track way bisecting the site adjacent to the remains of tenements. These structures probably belong to the demolition and clearance of the township in 1486 by Daventry Priory in its pursuance of large-scale sheep farming. The remains of a medieval street and the tenements based on the pottery indicate a 13th to 15th century date may relate to the heavily disturbed remains of a possible chapel known to exist on the site.



Medieval Tenement at Thrupp

#### **4. Potential moat to the west of Thrupp Farm (end 2016 and spring 2017)**

During late November and early December 2016, initial exploratory work was carried out within a small wooded copse to the west of the deserted township of Thrupp, on the site of a possible medieval moat. Two trial trenches were excavated across the northern ditch and associated bank of this feature which lies immediately to the east of Thrupp Lodge. The potential importance of the site lies in its proximity and relationship to the deserted medieval village, as well as in providing an archaeological background to the role of these features within the wider landscape during the middle ages. Therefore, it was imperative that we ascertained whether these ditches were indeed part of a moat and consequently could be assigned a medieval date.

The excavation trench revealed a ditch with a width of 5m and depth of 1.5m possibly surmounted on the internal edge by a stone foundation for a bank, thus confirming the possibility of the existence at the very least of a partial or complete ditched enclosure within the confines of the current wooded copse, although whether it could be described as a moat is still open to question. The sides of the ditch were not clay lined and water retention for a wet moat would have been limited. Residual pottery recovered from the fill and surfaces of the ditch might indicated a medieval origin between the 13th and 15th century but the moat is more likely part of Victorian garden landscaping. The feature had been cut through in the Victorian period by a drain along the entire length of the base of the ditch, most likely to improve the drainage of the area immediately to the east of the lodge. A very fine clay pipe bowl of the mid 19th century featuring a Red hand of Ulster design was retrieved from this feature. The find could imply seasonal employment of itinerant workers on the farm at that date. Subsequent erosion and development of the site typified by the conversion of the southern half of the features into a pool has made interpretation of the 'moat' more complex than it might otherwise have been.

The investigation continued in Spring 2017 as well as an initial exploration of a new area at the site connected to an up-standing ruin situated on the inside of the 'moated' enclosure in order to assess the status and condition of the ruin. We also excavated some test pits within the 'moated' enclosure to look for any potential medieval occupation debris. The excavation reconfirmed that the ditch was more likely a Victorian drainage ditch constructed to assist in the evacuation of ground water from the farm buildings at Thrupp Lodge which we believe was subject to periodic flooding.



Medieval Moat ditch containing Victorian re-cut drain

The ditch may also have marked the boundary of a Victorian orchard as evident on early maps. This interpretation has subsequently been confirmed by more detailed fieldwork and reassessment of the geophysical survey data along the neighbouring field boundary which shows that the medieval road way aligned from west to east in Six Acre field actually originally ran across what was allegedly the southern ditch of the moat. The date and character of the structure are as yet unknown, but it is possible the earlier structure was an outlying tenement of the medieval township.

#### **5. Trial trench at Thrupp Farm, to the north of the B4036 (Aug 2017)**

This excavation was to explore the extent and layout of any potential medieval tenements to the north and to the west of the Farm itself adjacent to the area of buildings and road way excavated in 2016 on the other side of the road. A 35m trial trench was excavated parallel to the road to ascertain the north-eastern extent of the medieval township. Recently the area has been planted with trees to provide a woodland barrier to the southern approach to the farm and the opportunity for further research in the future will be restricted as the trees mature. Therefore, it was imperative to undertake the field work if we were to understand the development and character of the wider site.

Only two features of archaeological significance were observed during the excavation. The first was a ditch which had also been detected and identified during the geophysical survey of the field and the second a stone foundation for a boundary wall for an animal enclosure or medieval garden plot. Interestingly metal detecting of the trench and spoil heap revealed three

Roman coins and a Dolphin Brooch. Two of the coins are 4th century whilst the other is probably 3rd century and had been pierced to be used as a pendant. Their significance is difficult to interpret and may not be related to any activity during the Roman period.

In relation to the features observed in the trial trench it is evident that the row of tenements excavated in 2016 to the SW, on the opposite side of the B4036, do not continue this far to the NE. Although the geophysical survey indicates extensive archaeological activity in the area this was mostly likely to have been agriculturally based related rather than domestic. Therefore, the focus of the township was probably more constricted than previously believed and situated further to the W and SW.



Medieval Boundary Wall.

Boundary Wall



Section across Medieval

## 6. Trial trench at Thrupp Farm, to the south of the B4036 (Sep 2018)

This was in an area between and adjacent to an earlier excavation of medieval tenements and a large apsidal fronted building which may have been the location of a chapel associated with the 'township' of Thrupp. The excavation rationale was to expose and investigate any structures as well as explore the known site of the apsidal building and any other features identified through geophysical survey. It was also hoped to enhance our understanding of the chronological development of this part of the deserted medieval village.

The trial trench revealed extensive rubble deposits presumably from the demolition of the medieval cottages undertaken by Daventry Priory in the late 15th century AD, which were particularly evident at the western end. The rubble was evidently systematically spread across the external surfaces of the 'tofts' and a trackway, as could be seen by the deposition of the material.

Interestingly the metalled spread at the eastern end lacked the density and depth of rubble apparent elsewhere and appeared to be more heavily robbed out and eroded.

No structures were located in the trial trench, but the trackway previously observed in an earlier excavation further to the west was relocated and the cambered surface cleared. The trackway was metalled and was quite wide with the ability to take two carts at once, operating in different directions. This, with what we already know from other work indicates a regular lay out and well-organized settlement with a level of village infrastructure in excess of the needs of a community without market rights or facilities. Most disappointingly no trace was found of the overall plan of the large structure known to be associated with the wider area around the east end of the trial trench.



Medieval Trackway

Finds from the excavation, although enigmatic, do provide clues as to activity on the site. In particular the recovery of a bronze shroud pin and possibly fragments of jumbled re-interred human bone and a bronze shroud pin hint that the eastern area of the trial trench may indeed be connected to a possible chapel burial yard. The chapel survived the demolition of the village and could have been demolished and robbed more thoroughly after it became defunct in the early 16th century, which is what we may be observing in the archaeological material from the excavation. Meanwhile the recovery of a medieval horse shoe immediately below the debris level of the tenements and on top of the trackway could be interpreted as slight but supporting evidence of the muscle power required in the systematic spreading of the rubble debris

from the medieval cottages by agents of Daventry Priory to forestall any return of the previous occupants.

One other feature was observed towards the centre of the trial trench, which upon excavation turned out to be a ditch that had been noted during the previous geophysical survey. It was neither deep or wide and reflected the ephemeral state of many of the ditches encountered this year. No dating evidence was recovered but the feature is probably to be interpreted as a 'toft' Boundary.

### **5. Trial trench at Thrupp Farm, to the north of the B4036 (Sep 2018)**

This was to the North of the B4036 opposite the first trial trench. The alignment of the trackway known from the other side of the modern road was located as were some foundations stones probably representing another tenement laid out immediately next to that medieval metalled surface. Further east two ditches observed during the geophysical survey were excavated one of which appeared to be recut.

