

# Archaeological Evaluation at the site of Harbour, Dirty Lane, Castleshaw, Saddleworth

May 2015



Friends of Castleshaw Roman Forts volunteers undertaking test pitting

Report written by Norman Redhead  
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## **Background**

As part of the Castleshaw Roman Forts Hinterland Survey, the Friends of Castleshaw Roman Forts carried out an archaeological evaluation of the site of Harbour located on the north side of Dirty Lane adjacent to Castleshaw Upper Reservoir and north of the Roman Forts Scheduled Monument. The site of Harbour is at Grid Ref: SD99780976. It is entered on the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record as No.10281. The land is owned by United Utilities and farmed by David Hirst.

The proposal was to undertake archaeological test pitting to determine the site's archaeological potential. It was hoped that this would reveal and record remains of the outbuilding or dwelling, aiding our understanding of the character and evolution of Castleshaw settlement. A further objective was to examine the potential for Roman deposits beneath and adjacent to the former building footprint (Redhead 2013).



Location of area of proposed investigation

## **History**

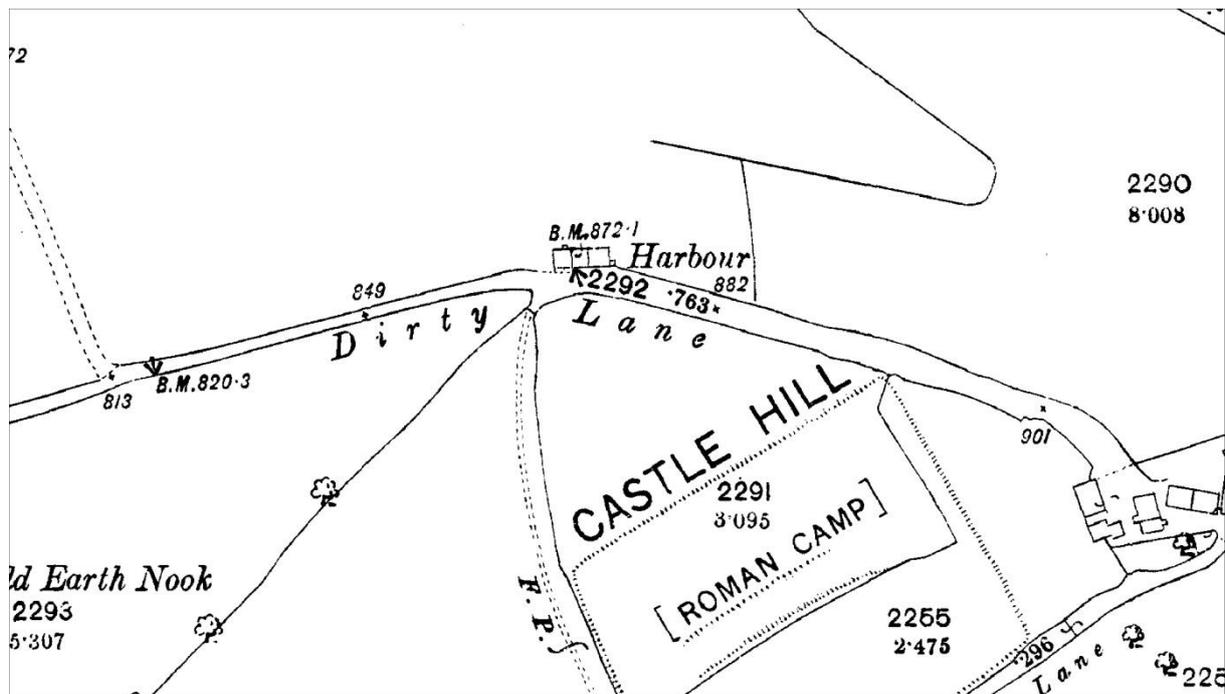
Mike Buckley has kindly prepared the following historical analysis:

‘Harbour, an early nineteenth century settlement on Dirty Lane, Castleshaw, was built on a field called the Bow Clough, part of a farm centred on the Fold at Castleshaw. In a survey of the estate in 1813 there is no indication of Harbour in either the valuation or the associated estate plan (SHSA, 1813). In 1822, however, the building appears on the Saddleworth Township Map (Buckley 2010, p 181). Land tax records support the dating of the settlement to between 1810 and 1822 (WHAS, 1810 and 1822). In 1810 the Castleshaw farm was assessed at 5s 8¾d but by 1822 addition sums of 2½d and 6½d were payable for properties on the estate let to tenants. On a further estate survey of 1823 the property is shown but is called Field Top (SHSA, 1823). It appears as Harbour on the 6” OS map surveyed in 1851 (Buckley, 2007, p 47), the 1886 Castleshaw Oldham water works survey (OLSA 1886a) and the first 25in OS Map surveyed in 1892 (Buckley 2007, p 109).

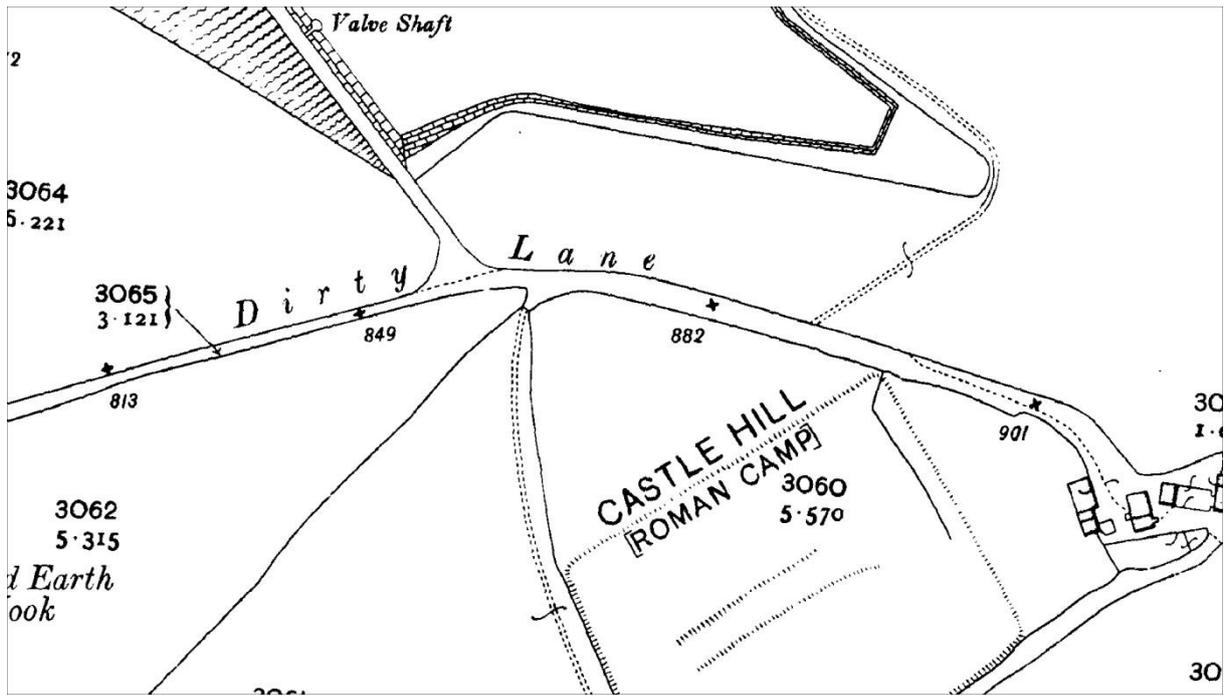
The 1841 census (TNA, 1841) lists three families living at Field Top and in the 1851 census (TNA, 1851) three families were living at Harbour; clear indications that the property was then made up of three cottages. This is supported by the 1892 OS map which shows that the property had three bays. The 1861 census refers to the property as Castleshaw Lane (TNA 1861).

The last reference to Harbour in the registers of St Thomas's Church, Friarmere, was a burial in June 1890 (Manchester Diocesan Archives). The Castleshaw Farm was sold to Oldham Corporation in 1886 (OLSA 1886b), although this sale makes no mention of Harbour. It seems likely however that Harbour was included in the sale and that Oldham Corporation was responsible for its demolition.'

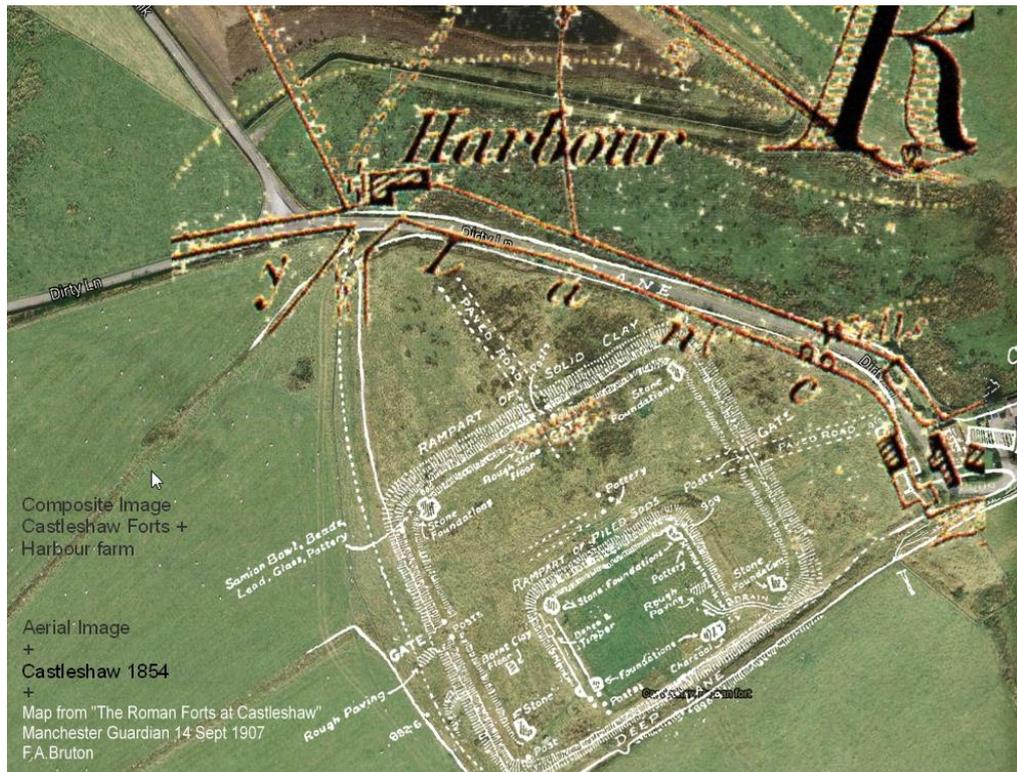
On the OS 1<sup>st</sup> edition 6" map of 1854 the building has a reverse 'L' shape but later mapping shows a more simple rectangular form. The 1892 map indicates the building was divided into three equal sized dwellings. Harbour appears to have been demolished at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as it is present on the OS 6" map of 1895, but has disappeared by the time of the OS 25" map of 1898. The demolition therefore took place several years after completion of the reservoirs construction in 1892. Today a grassed-over building platform is the only visible remnant on the site.



Harbour as shown on the 25" OS map of 1892



The site has been demolished by the 25" OS map of 1898



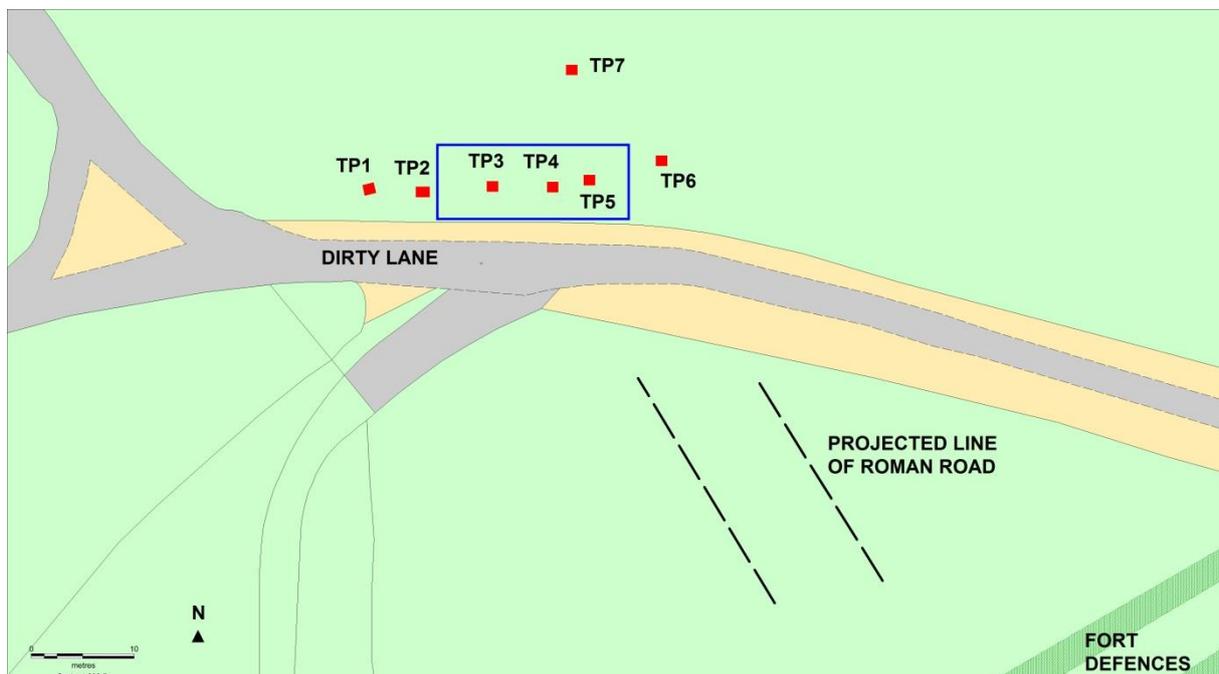
Aerial photograph showing site of Harbour and Roman features (courtesy of Phil Barrett, Friends of Castleshaw Roman Forts webmaster)

## Methodology

### Test Pitting:

Test pitting consisted of one metre square sample excavations. A written description and photographic record was made of each test pit and its position recorded. Depths of archaeological deposits were measured. Finds were cleaned and photographed. This report sets out the results of the test pitting and a copy has been lodged with the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record. An Oasis record form has also been created.

The investigations were undertaken by a mixture of experienced and inexperienced volunteers drawn from the Friends of Castleshaw Roman Forts, under the supervision of Norman Redhead. A risk assessment was prepared and agreed with the land owner. All test pits were excavated and backfilled in one day so that no holes were left overnight.



Location of test pits in Plot 8 with the Roman road line indicated as it exits the fort north gate.



Some of the volunteers next to their test pits, adjacent to Dirty Lane

## Results

### **Test Pit 1**

Topsoil was 10 cm deep onto a brown ploughsoil of 7 cm depth which overlay a similar depth deposit of mid- orange brown silty sand. This contained some small rounded gritstones towards which appear to have been deliberately laid as they were tightly grouped and formed a compact, albeit fragmentary, surface. Under this material was layer of weathered orange sandstone with patches of light grey silt and frequent medium size gritstones, many of which were at an angle. Patches of yellow silty sand were revealed in gap areas between the stones. It was not possible to finish the test pit but these stones might represent fragmentary remains of the Roman road. The pitched angle of some of the stones doesn't fit well with laying a road and it is possible that the weathered sandstone and light grey silt are the top of natural geology. Further investigation is recommended for this area.



TP 1 after removal of topsoil and, right, showing stone deposit in base of sondage

### **Test Pit 2**

The topsoil was thin at only c 8 cm deep and contained in the east half a deposit of thin stones which appear to be a dump of stone roof tiles. The mid-brown soil deposit underneath the topsoil contained frequent small to medium gritstones mostly lying horizontally and giving the appearance of a linear pattern. There was not enough time to investigate further and it is possible that this is demolition debris from the dismantling of Harbour Farm. The spread of stone could resolve into a wall foundation if further excavation was undertaken here, although the angle does not align with the map evidence for the farm walls.



TP 2 showing stone roof tile deposit and, right, spread of stones

### Test Pit 3

This test pit had a shallow dark topsoil layer which came off to reveal a spread of demolition debris. This comprised a dense concentration of small to medium gritstones, of varying shapes, interspersed with frequent brick fragments and sherds of pottery and glass. The stones were found to form a single layer overlying a deposit of mortar. This in turn was quite shallow and lay on a mid-brown soil layer which was not excavated.



TP 3 showing demolition rubble deposit and, right, the underlying mortar spread and, below, the mid-brown layer beneath



#### Test Pit 4

A 10 cm deep layer of topsoil was removed to reveal a deposit of demolition rubble rich in finds and similar to that seen in TP 3. This was 12 cm thick and overlay a soft mid- orange brown silty clay loam layer which was 18cm deep and almost devoid of stones. This had the appearance of plough soil and it sealed a layer of small flat sandstones set in a matrix of mid- brown grey silty clay. This stone layer was 15 cm deep and lay over natural orange sand. Whilst no finds came from the stone layer, it clearly pre-dates the farm site and could well be of Roman origin. Further investigation is recommended for this area.



TP 4 showing demolition rubble deposit and, right, mid-brown layer underneath



TP 4 showing sondage through mid-brown layer and, right, with the flat stone deposit visible in the section

#### Test Pit 5

Topsoil of 10 cm depth came off onto a demolition deposit similar to that encountered in TPs 3 and 4, clearly relating to the destruction episode for Harbour Farm. The demolition deposit was found to be 16 cm deep and, as in TPs 3 and 4, overlay a mid-brown grey silty clay loam layer. A sondage in one corner of the test pit showed that this layer was 12 cm deep. Three pieces of pottery were recovered from this layer. They fitted together and formed part of an orange ware base of Roman date. Under this layer was mid-yellow brown natural sandy

clay. The pottery could be Cheshire Plains Ware of late 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD date. It is the only Roman pottery to be found in the test pit exercise and the fact that it was well stratified, being sealed underneath the Harbour cottages site, suggests that intact Roman deposits may lie nearby. Further investigation of this area is recommended.



TP 5 showing demolition deposit and, right, mid-brown layer underneath



TP 5 showing sondage in corner of test pit revealing lower deposit which contained the Roman orange ware pottery base illustrated to the right

### Test Pit 6

Topsoil of c 12 cm depth overlay a cinder and dark grey soil with very few stones. This was a shallow deposit which in one half of the test pit was 15 cm deep and sealed a dark grey silty clay but in the other half was much shallower as it overlay the edge of a demolition deposit. This comprised various shaped sand stones with mortar, some bricks and patches of dark yellow sandy clay. The demolition material was up to 30 cm deep and this also came off onto the dark grey silty clay. The latter became soft and damp as it got deeper. At 60 cm depth a light grey-orange silty clay deposit was encountered which was considered to be natural. The fills of this test pit were full of finds. The cinder material may have been to cover what was a damp area. TP 6 is a lot deeper than the other test pits and suggests that domestic rubbish has filled in a negative feature such as a pond, pit or drainage gully.



TP 6 showing cinder layer under topsoil and, right, demolition material



TP 6 after removal of rubble and, right, showing natural at 60 cm depth



TP 6 showing post-medieval finds from demolition deposit and, right, from the lower grey silty clay loam deposit



Details photos of some of the finds from TP6, showing base of ceramic marmalade jar (left), base of glass vessel with initials 'CPK' (centre), and lead kame fragments from window glass (right)

### Test Pit 7

This was located on a grassed, raised area to the north of the other test pits and was seen as a potential site of the Roman road. However, it soon became apparent that the material was a more recent dump of stone comprising angled, small to medium sized gritstones loosely packed together. The stones had not been carefully laid as one would expect with a Roman road foundation. They may have been deposited to fill in a depression or drainage area.



TP 7 showing the dump of stones pre-excavation and, right, partly excavated

### Conclusions

The evaluation of the Harbour site has demonstrated that, when the farm was demolished at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the building materials were largely recycled and only the building terrace and a thin demolition deposit were left after it had been taken down. However, there could be external wall foundations elsewhere, beyond the test pit locations. Several test pits provided tantalising evidence for Roman potential, sealed beneath a brown (agricultural?) soil and demolition deposits from the 19<sup>th</sup> century cottages.

There were no clear signs of the Roman road but one metre square test pits are rather limiting for interpretation and it is felt that TP 1 provided some potential for remnants of the road. The Roman fort's northern defences lie only c 65 metres to the south and it is possible that the test pitting exercise has picked up evidence for the edge of *vicus* activity. Deposits in

TPs 4 and 5 that were sealed under the pre-cottage brown soil horizon appear to be of Roman origin, as evidenced by the Roman pottery base from TP 5.

The test pitting has shown enough promise to warrant further investigation of the site. This should take the form of evaluation trenches to expose large enough areas to determine the presence or absence of Roman deposits and features.

## **Sources**

Buckley, M et al, 2007, *Mapping Saddleworth I*, Saddleworth Historical Society (SHS), Uppermill, p.41.

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OLSA, 1886b, Conveyance Thomas Shaw of St Chad's, Uppermill to Oldham Corporation Water Works, 30 October 1886, Water Works Collection, Ref. NWWA/52/00130/7.

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TNA, 1861 Census, RG 9/3240.

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This report and a range of other archaeology reports can be accessed on the Friends of Castleshaw Roman Forts website: [www.castleshawarchaeology.co.uk](http://www.castleshawarchaeology.co.uk) .

## **Acknowledgements**

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