

Archaeological Evaluation of Plot E, north of Lower Castleshaw hamlet, Dirty Lane, Castleshaw, Saddleworth

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Volunteers undertaking test pitting
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Background

This report describes archaeological investigations in a field to the east of the Scheduled Monument of the Castleshaw Roman Forts. The area of investigation lies against the north side of Lower Castleshaw hamlet and east of Dirty Lane, located at SE00020971. The land is owned by United Utilities and farmed by David Hurst.

The investigations were in the form of an evaluation and were designed to progress our understanding of the Roman Fort and its environs in accordance with the recommendations of the Castleshaw Conservation Plan (2012). This strategy is supported by a plan showing the location of potential investigation sites, with red being within the Scheduled Monument area and blue outside. The Plot E site is shown in blue (see Figure 1).

This report can be accessed as a pdf on the Friends of Castleshaw Roman Forts website: www.castleshawarchaeology.co.uk.

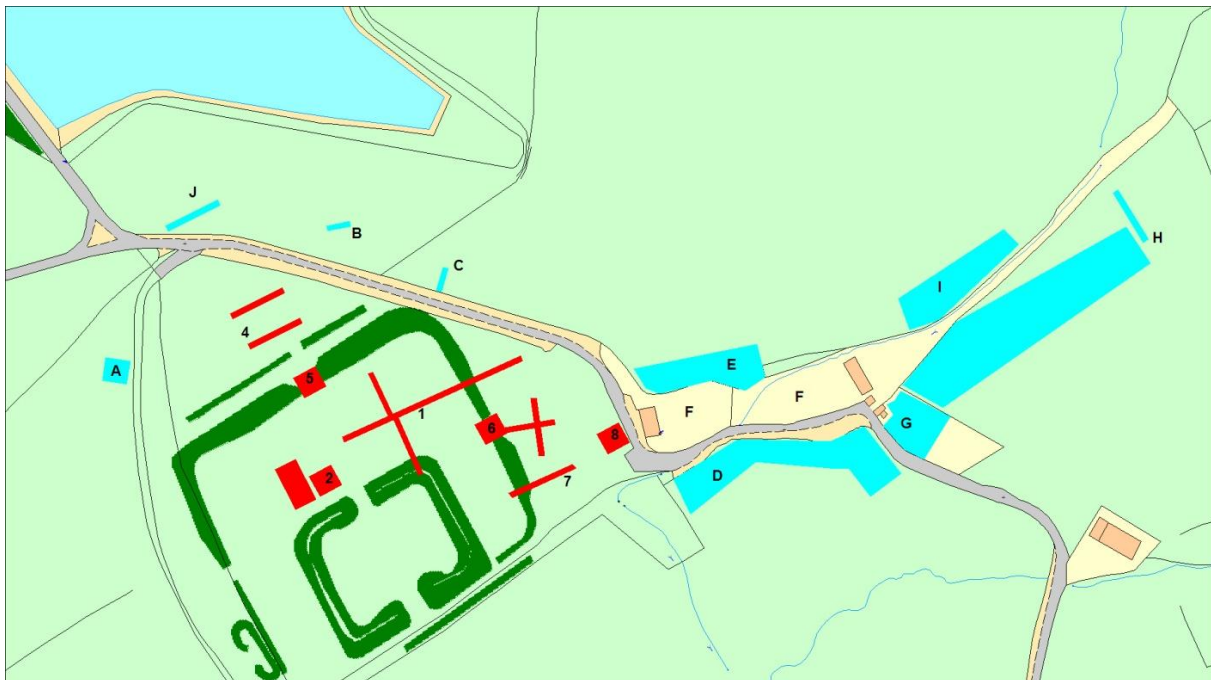


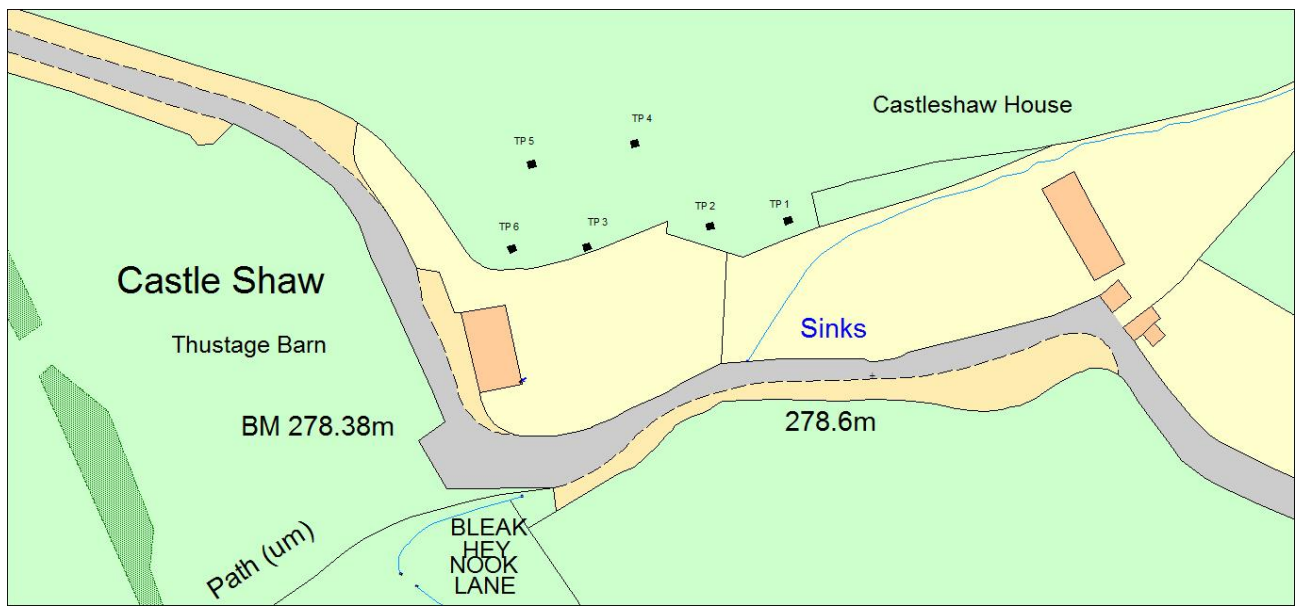
Figure 1: Location of proposed investigation areas, including Plot E, in relation to the current landscape and fort and fortlet sites.

Plot E is an area of relatively flat ground north of the garden wall belonging to the two houses, Castleshaw House and Thustage Barn, at Lower Castleshaw. This area was test pitted for evidence of potential Roman activity. In particular it has been postulated that the Roman road exiting the east gate may have angled up to the main highway which is evident as an earthwork to the east of Castleshaw House, climbing up to Stanedge. It is possible that the north boundary wall of the gardens reflects the former line of the Roman road. Given the close proximity of Plot E to the Roman forts, there is also potential for Roman buildings or related activity. Lower Castleshaw hamlet was once a much larger settlement and part of the research objective of the hinterland survey is to understand the growth and origins of Castleshaw in the post medieval period.

Methodology

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. Levels were taken of significant archaeological deposits, top and bottom of test pits. Finds were cleaned and described. A report will be produced on the results and lodged with the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record and put on to the Friends of Castleshaw Roman Forts website.

The investigations were undertaken by a mixture of experienced and unexperienced volunteers drawn from the Friends of Castleshaw Roman Forts, under the directorship 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 E



Test pits 2 and 5 being excavated

Test Pit 1

In boggy, rushy ground, located close to a stone enclosure wall and garden boundary wall. Dark grey silt came off onto loose rubble, which had post medieval pottery sherds in its matrix. The eastern half of the test pit was a raised 'shelf' with a flat laid stone evident. This could be the remains of a floor surface. The west half had a linear cut defined on its east side by stones set on edge; the cut's western edge was not visible within the confines of the test pit. The shelf was at 25 cm beneath turf level. The base of the linear feature was natural yellow clay at 35 cm depth. These features are likely to relate to agricultural buildings and activities that took place here during the 18th and 19th centuries. A few sherds of white glazed pottery of 20th century date came from the fill of the linear cut.

Top of test pit = 279.31 m OD, shelf level = 279.06 m OD, base of linear cut = 278.91.



Test Pit 2

Sited in or near a former square outbuilding or enclosure shown on 1892 OS map. Loose angular gritstones in dark grey soil removed to reveal a well preserved cobbled surface, also of gritstone. The cobbles were a maximum of 10cm long and some fragments of 19th century brick were found lying on top. This appears to have been a yard for an outbuilding forming part of Castleshaw hamlet. Sealed under the cobbling was a post hole c 15cm deep cut into natural orange clay and partly exposed against west edge of the test pit. It contained loose dark grey silty clay with some medium to large gritstones. The topsoil yielded a mix of 20th century transfer patterned ware, white glazed ware, and dark earthen ware, and glass. However, finds from the layer immediately above the cobbled surface were dominated by 19th century and earlier dark glazed earthenware. One sherd of this type of pottery was also found in the post hole fill, and there was also a fine rim and handle fragment of yellow glazed pottery of 18th century date.

Top of test pit = 279.05 m OD, cobble surface = 278.91 m OD, top of natural clay = 278.76 m OD.



Test Pit 3

This was close to the garden wall. A thin topsoil c 5 cm overlay c 25 cm of compact dark brown-grey soil with fragments of post medieval bricks and other finds, over sub-natural comprising 20 cm depth mid- brown-yellow silty clay loam with frequent small sandstones. This in turn overlaid a deposit of compact grey shale identified as natural. Turf level = 278.41 m OD, top of brown-grey layer = 278.10, top of shale = 278.88.



Test Pit 4

Designed to examine the flat area north of the garden walls. Hard mid- brown silty clay loam was encountered at shallow depth, and this deposit included post medieval pottery. A possible feature was cut through this layer on the south side of the Test Pit. The feature was filled with grey silty clay and included medium to large gritstones, some at a pitched angle. A sondage was cut through the east side of the trench and came down to a mid- grey silty clay layer interpreted as natural subsoil. There was no evidence of Roman activity. A few sherds of 19th century dark glazed earthenware came from this test pit. Turf level = 278.68 m OD, top of brown layer = 278.56 m OD, top of grey layer = 278.41.



Test Pit 5

Located as for TP5. Top soil of 20 cm depth came off onto soft brown silty clay loam also of 20 cm depth. Under this was yellow/orange natural clay. A band of light grey silt c 35 cm wide could be seen running diagonally across the natural clay in an approximate west-east direction. On excavation this was found to be very shallow, c 1 cm. This may be remains of a truncated feature of some considerable age as it is sealed under what appears to be a brown plough soil. However, the feature was too ephemeral to say much more than this. Top of test pit = 277.83 m OD, yellow/orange natural clay = 277.40 m OD.



Test Pit 6

Top soil of 30 cm was excavated down to a mixed yellow-brown soil. The test pit was not completed but a sondage was cut through this layer to reveal natural yellow clay in one corner. No Roman artifacts or features encountered. A few mixed types of 19th and 20th century pottery fragments were recovered. Turf level = 277.91m OD.

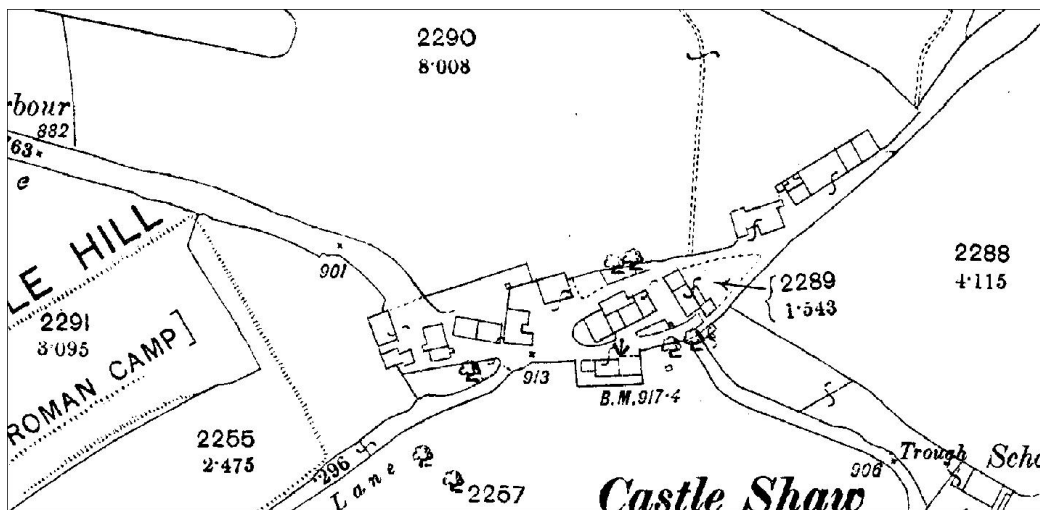


Conclusion

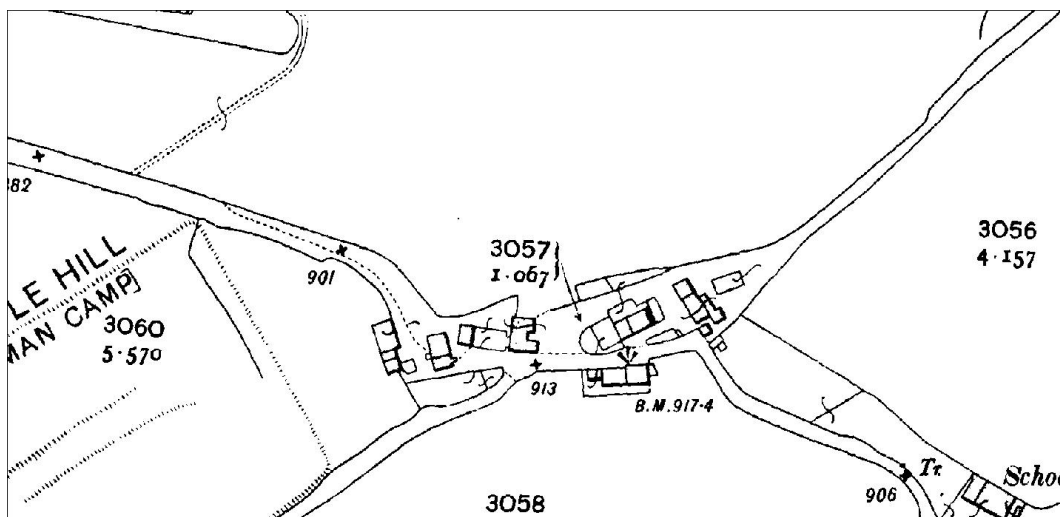
Six test pits were inserted in Plot E, which is the area of flat ground bordering the north side of the Lower Castleshaw property gardens. Test pits 1 and 2, close to the garden walls, revealed a cobbled surface, pit/post hole and a cobbled surface associated with 18th and 19th century pottery. Three of the other test pits showed natural deposits whilst one, test pit 5, had a very shallow light grey linear spread which was undated.

These test pits suggest that Area 8 has limited archaeological potential for the Roman period. There were no Roman finds and only one possible early feature at the right stratigraphic level to be possibly of that period. Clearly, only 6 test pits over a large area does not provide conclusive evidence of absence or presence of Roman features; but the lack of 'background noise' in terms of Roman material culture suggests a limited use of this area of land which is less than 60 metres from the eastern defences of the Roman fort.

There is some post-medieval archaeology, in the area of test pits 1 and 2, which is of local archaeological significance which could be the subject of further investigations at some stage.



These Ordnance Survey maps date to 1892 (above) and 1898 (below). A large square outbuilding is shown on the earlier map which coincides with the location of Test Pit 1, whereas Test Pit 2 was outside this structure to the west. By 1898 this outbuilding and associated walling has been removed



Acknowledgements

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The volunteers who excavated the test pits were:

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Sources

Castleshaw Roman Forts, Saddleworth, Greater Manchester – Conservation Management Plan. Prepared by Northern Archaeological Associates December 2011

Redhead, N (2013) *An excavation strategy for Castleshaw Roman Forts*. Prepared in March 2013.