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On paper - In practice:
**An Assessment of an Archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation and
Project Delivery at Braybrooke Substation, Braybrooke, Northamptonshire**
(Assessment 1)

Archaeological Project Design and Delivery (HPAR7003)

(Humanities)

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Introduction

The following work will assess a completed archaeological project in terms of how successfully the project design delivered a contextualised research design and an appropriate methodology as well as a suitable outcome of publication and archive. I chose a project where both, the written scheme of investigation (WSI) and the report were available, however I had no direct involvement with the project. Unfortunately the majority of the archaeological works I took part in are not yet completed or if they are, there is only partial information that can be accessed online (ADS or open company databases, resources). Due to the lack of involvement in the selected project, the examination of the project management and communication within and beyond the project team will only briefly be assessed based on the available information in the studied reports.

The chosen archaeological work is an evaluation project of the Braybrooke Substation in Northamptonshire carried out by Oxford Archaeology South in 2018 (Brady 2018; Champness 2018). The evaluation was followed by an excavation in 2019, where the footprint of the actual substation was investigated (Scott and Howsam 2019). Further works on the access road of the development area were carried out by Network Archaeology Ltd. in 2021 (Townend 2022, p. 1).

Written Scheme of Investigation and the delivered project

The excavation

The Written Scheme of Investigation ('WSI' in the following) contained all the necessary information for the next phase of the archaeological works carried out at the planned footprint of the substation. The author introduced the site, its location and geology then referred to the known historical and archaeological evidence in the area. The chapter included a shorter summary referring to the desk-based assessment prepared for the project (Champness 2018, pp. 3-5). The background was well researched and informative which introduced the expected or possible archaeological periods on site. Based on the desk-based research the WSI predicted a moderate potential for prehistoric and Roman presence while low potential was expected regarding the Anglo-Saxon, medieval and post-medieval remains (Champness 2018, p. 5). Based on the nature of the project (evaluation) and the limited archaeological potential of the site indicated by the desk-based assessment, generic aims and objectives were set out as there were no previous archaeological investigations in the close vicinity. The main aim was to '*determine the presence or absence of archaeological features and deposits within the proposed development area*' (Champness 2018, p. 6). More specific aims and objectives were also listed such as the nature of any remains, confirming locations, extents, dates, character, condition, significance of the archaeology encountered, establish the of the site by palaeoenvironmental evidence and recommend any further works in the light of the findings. Testing the geophysical survey data was amongst other goals. There were no specific research questions referring to the East Midlands Research Framework (Knight et al. 2012). To reach the aims a site specific excavation and recording methodology was

planned with 20 trenches and a programme of watching brief for the access road was implemented. The duration of the project was estimated between one to two weeks. The methodology was described in detail referring to the general approach to excavation and recording of the company (Champness 2018, pp. 7-9).

The excavation phase of the project took a week to complete, well within the estimated time scale as both the weather conditions and the geology in terms of identifying the features was favourable (Brady 2018, p. 10). Twenty trenches were investigated and the excavation revealed two areas with archaeological features present. The set aims and objectives were fulfilled as the evaluation provided evidence of past human activities in the development area, however the dating material recovered suggested Roman presence was sparse leaving the dating of many excavated features uncertain or unknown. The results of the evaluation seemed to confirm the outcome of the desk-based assessment and the potential predicted by the WSI. Amongst the finds were pottery, animal bones, and the samples yielded charred plant remains (Brady 2018, p. 10). While the WSI mentioned about a geophysical survey when describing the aims and objectives (Champness 2018, p. 6) there was no further reference to it in the evaluation report, leaving some questions about the site specific methodology when planning the location of the trenches. It is not known whether there was any geophysical survey prior to the evaluation and if there was an investigation how the results affected the planning process. There was also no mention about the watching brief in the evaluation report, however it was part of the evaluation programme set out in the WSI. This might be the result of the changes in approach (if there was any) of which unfortunately the reader was not informed.

Communication

The communication with the Archaeological Advisor to Northamptonshire County Council, who set the brief of the archaeological investigation, was a returning element of the WSI. The Planning Archaeologist was consulted about the excavation methodology of the features and had to be informed about any changes in the methodology and final specification. The Planning Archaeologist was also responsible for signing off the site on completion and had free access to the site and all records if requested. Copies of the reports were also provided for comments and approval (Champness 2018, pp. 7-11).

The evaluation report mentioned that they were seeking advice from the NCC Archaeologist regarding the features encountered during the excavation as it was stated in the WSI (Brady 2018, p. 4). Other aspects of team communication in the WSI included guidance and review of the sampling methodology by the Head of the Environmental Department of the company and further supervision of an experienced osteologist was required in case any human remains were discovered. Cooperation with other team members (survey etc.) and internal and external specialists was another key element (Champness 2018, pp. 7-10) (see next paragraph). Unfortunately I have no information how the project was actually managed and what level of communication was achieved on a daily basis while the team was on site.

Reporting and archive

The key elements of a Watching Brief and Evaluation report were established in the WSI. The content included the style, format and essential elements such as location plans, illustrations (plans and section of features), a summary statement, reconsideration of the methodology, interpretation and tables with trench and context summary and dating information (Champness 2018, p. 25, Appendix F). Four to six weeks were estimated for completing the report after the site work finished. Post-excavation communication with the selected specialists was designed to assess the archaeological material and add essential data to create the results. The archive requirements and deposition was summarised in the text (Champness 2018, p. 10) and a general company approach to the documentary archiving was included as an appendix (Champness 2018, pp. 30-31, Appendix H). The site archive was deposited with the appropriate museum following the completion of the works, and the archive was prepared and submitted in line with the Archaeological Archive Standard of the county (Champness 2018, p.10).

The evaluation report following the completion of the fieldwork contained the results of the archaeological investigation. It was prepared according to the guideline set out in the WSI and within the set timeline (evaluation from 3rd to 7th September 2018, eval report October 2018) (Brady 2018, 19). The report was complete, clear and understandable and contained all the required elements (site figures, plans tables etc.) by the WSI. It answered the main aims and objectives of the project and Brady (2018) noted that the works '*provided an accurate demonstration of the archaeological remains present within the evaluation area*', although not all the answers could be answered to a completely satisfactory level due to the limited information available (e.g. dating material). No further research questions arose during the assessment, and there was no reference to the available Research Frameworks; the report focussed mainly on the key points in the WSI. The excavated features and recovered material were interpreted and described accurately using the available specialist information which was also included in the report, suggesting an effective communication between the post-excavation team and the experts. The author emphasised the significance of the results of the evaluation but recommended no further actions or works to be undertaken. The document had no paragraphs referring to the archiving methods and deposition which would also be an important element of the completion.

Dissemination

The eighth point of the aims and objectives of the WSI was to create and deposit the site archive and disseminate the results by providing information to the Northampton HER database (Champness 2018, p. 6). The same statement was repeated in the evaluation report (Brady 2018, p. 4). There is evidence in the Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record, that the data indeed was submitted and processed providing open, accessible information to the archaeologists and the wider public (HER number: 2851/1) (Heritage Gateway 2024). The WSI did not mention, but a

summary of the evaluation was also published in the South Midlands Archaeological Journal (Brady 2019, p. 87).

Further works

The evaluation was followed by a programme of archaeological excavation on the footprint of the substation in 2019 by Oxford Archaeology. Unfortunately the Written Scheme of Investigation was not accessible but the excavation report offered further generic and specific aims and objectives (Scott and Howsam 2019, pp. 3-4.) which were based on the results of the evaluation and the East Midlands Heritage: An updated Research Agenda and Strategy for the Historic Environment of the East Midlands (Knight et al. 2012). The excavation targeted the two areas encountered during the evaluation phase resulting in features dating from the late Iron Age to the Roman period and Anglo-Saxon times (Scott and Howsam 2019, pp. 6-7). The excavation report offered solutions to the archive deposition and disposal, which was not included in the evaluation report. The results of the excavation were also submitted to the Historic Environment Record (see above) and further dissemination options were pursued (Scott and Howsam 2019, p. 14) and published in 2020 (Scott and Howsam 2020, p. 90).

Another project relating to the substation was carried out in 2021 by Network Archaeology Ltd. The excavation took place on the access road to the substation yielded significant archaeological features dating from the prehistoric to the post-medieval period (Townend 2022, pp. 10-61). The result not only confirmed the results presented by Oxford Archaeology but widened the knowledge of the surrounding area and showed that a site which carried a low and moderate archaeological potential can turn out to be something important. The Network Archaeological project was designed based on the Oxford Archaeology WSI prepared for the 2019 excavation and a watching brief WSI by Network Archaeology (Townend 2022, p. 7). The report contained the general aims and objectives for the archaeological works, the aims of the assessment and the updated project design using the Research Framework to outline the potential and further questions of the analysis stage (Townend 2022, p.63). The completed project will include an analysis report uploaded to ADS and a journal publication (Northamptonshire Archaeology) for further dissemination while the archive will be deposited at Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre (Townend 2022, pp. 70-72). A summarised data about the site is available on the Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record with the HER number 2851/2 (Heritage Gateway 2024).

Summary

The archaeological investigation at Braybrooke Substation Northamptonshire brought a great example, how a desk-based assessment, a written scheme of investigation and its executions can shape our knowledge of the past. The research design for the evaluation was well thought out based

on the gathered information and it was well delivered as it fulfilled the expectations of a site with low or moderate archaeological potential. The later excavation at the substation showed that the approach was right for the site and indicated that there could be further potential which was proven by the investigations on the access road. The WSI for the evaluation set out the main aims and objectives which were later extended. The project report for the evaluation followed the requirements of the design taking the dissemination into account, which was achieved on several platforms in the form of short journal entries and submission to the Historic Environment Record. The outcome of the evaluation helped to move forward resulting in a well researched, comprehensive and accessible archaeological project, which is a desirable outcome. Hopefully the analysis of the findings will enrich our knowledge further.

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