



GREATER
MANCHESTER
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UNIT

GREY LITERATURE

Southern Street,
Manchester

An Archaeological
Watching Brief

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Southern Street: An Archaeological Watching Brief
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Introduction

The Southern Street development site is located in Castlefield, Manchester and is found c. 70m north of the Roman fort (NGR: ~~SD~~^T 8335 9768; Figure 1). In antiquity, this area appears to have formed part of the Roman civilian settlement, or *vicus*, and lay between certain known areas of Roman occupation located at Barton Street to the west, the Beetham Tower site to the east and the Bridgewater Street railway viaduct to the south.

Following a desk-based assessment it was anticipated that undisturbed Roman deposits might exist in the development area particularly as the early cartographic sources suggested that significant portions of the site had escaped the ravages of eighteenth and nineteenth century cellarage (Arrowsmith 2002). In view of the obvious archaeological potential the Assistant County Archaeologist for Greater Manchester, recommended that an archaeological planning condition should be placed on the development plot. Unfortunately, for unknown reasons, Manchester City Council Planning Department failed to implement this condition and development was allowed to take place without any preliminary archaeological works. Through subsequent negotiation with the developer and the City Council a minimal phase of archaeological work was, however, arranged in the form of an archaeological watching brief. This watching brief was undertaken between 29th September and 21st October 2004 and was designed to observe and minimally record any Roman deposits which might be exposed during the area stripping of the site and the subsequent placement of foundation and service trenches.

Results

The watching brief indicated that Roman features were present across the site and were located at an average depth of c. 2.1m below present ground levels. In the southern half of the development site the Roman features were also found to be sealed by a c. 1m thick mid-brown loamy deposit, associated with a small assemblage of Roman artefacts, which probably represents a post-Roman ploughsoil. The depth of the Roman archaeology was surprising, particularly as immediately to the west at Barton Street the uppermost level of Roman archaeology was found at c. 1.3m below present ground levels. Whilst this appears to suggest that the Roman ground surface slopes down in an easterly direction from the Roman road exiting the northgate of the fort towards the York/Chester Roman road, now demarcated by the line of Deansgate, it also has other important implications. It clearly indicates, for instance, that in this area Roman archaeology still survives beneath an area of Georgian cellarage that was originally associated with houses fronting Southern Street. Presumably this pattern of survival might also be replicated immediately east and north of the development site.

The Roman features identified during the watching brief were not particularly numerous, in comparison with other areas of the *vicus* excavated immediately to the west and south, and this may suggest a less intensive, or different, use of this area during the Roman period. The Roman features at Southern Street did, however, include a number of pits of varying size and, perhaps, varying function (Figure 2).

OCTOBER 2004

The largest pit [3] was ovoid in plan, measuring c. 5.5m by c. 2.1m, and a portion of this pit was excavated during the placement of a lift shaft associated with the modern development. This excavation indicated that the pit had been cut through natural sand and gravel deposits into the underlying degraded sandstone bedrock and extended to a depth of c. 1.7m. The pit was filled with a mid-grey silty sand and was only associated with a minimal quantity of Roman artefacts, which included one piece of Roman brick and one piece of roof tile, or *tegula*. The morphology of the pit and absence of Roman cultural detritus might suggest that this pit was dug as a means of extracting sand and gravel for use in metalled roads or floor surfaces, associated with buildings, located within the Roman settlement.

A second ovoid pit [5] was found to the north-west (Figure 2). This pit measured c. 2.6m by c. 1.8m and was capped with a layer of sandstone rubble. A foundation trench forming part of the modern development was excavated through the centre of this feature and this indicated that the pit extended for a depth of c. 0.5m and was filled with mid-brown/grey silty clay containing some charcoal. Although no Roman artefacts were recovered from this pit it is possible, on the basis of the pit's fill and the stone capping, that this feature originally functioned as a Roman rubbish pit.

The other identifiable pits were circular in plan, with diameters ranged from c. 0.75m to c. 1.3m, and it is possible that they also acted as small rubbish pits (Figure 2: 1, 2, 4 & 6). Two of these pits [2 & 4] were partially excavated during the placement of foundation trenches forming the footings for the modern development. Pit [2] was c. 0.15m deep and was filled with a mid-grey charcoal rich clay, whilst pit [4] was c. 0.5m deep and was filled with a mid-brown silty sandy clay. Although unexcavated the upper fill of pits [1] and [6] similarly consisted of a charcoal rich grey clay.

The remaining Roman features recognised during the watching brief were linear in form (Figure 2: 7, 8 & 9). Feature [7] was a linear trench c. 0.3m wide, orientated north-west – south-east, which extended for at least c. 3.8m. This feature also truncated pit [1] and was filled with a mid-grey silty clay that contained an oxidised ware rim sherd dating to the mid-late Antonine period. Immediately to the north of this feature a second linear feature [8] was identified. In contrast, this feature was orientated north-south, had a slightly curving form, was c. 2m long and c. 0.3m wide, and truncated pit [2]. This feature was c. 0.1m deep and was filled with a grey clay containing a high percentage of cobbles and a small assemblage of Roman pottery. This pottery included the base of a Dressel 20 amphora, two sherds of Flavian/Trajanic oxidised ware and a mortaria rim. The proximity of these two features may suggest contemporaneity and this is confirmed, in some measure, through their stratigraphic relationships to pits [1] and [2], which were both respectively truncated by these later linear features. The function of the linear features is less clear, however, but it is possible through their superficial resemblance to similar features examined in other areas of the *vicus* that they originally formed the construction trenches of a small and perhaps ephemeral timber building. The remaining linear feature [9] was identified in the northern portion of the development site, c. 2m south of pit [6]. This feature was orientated north-west – south-east, was c. 0.5m, was filled with mid-brown silty sand and probably extended across the development site. The form of this feature is akin to a small Roman ditch and it is feasible that it represents a property boundary or plot division.

Conclusion

Although it is unfortunate that a more thorough archaeological examination was not possible at the Southern Street site the results of the watching brief provide a significant addition to any consideration of the form of Roman Manchester. The results clearly indicate the survival of Roman archaeology across the development site and suggest that a similar level of survival is probably present in the adjacent plots. These areas should, therefore, be subjected to a thorough archaeological evaluation as a prerequisite to any programme of redevelopment. The depth of the Roman archaeology also appears to suggest that in antiquity the pre-Industrial ground surface dipped, by at least *c.* 0.5m, from the Roman road leading from the northgate of the fort towards the major arterial Roman road running along the course of Deansgate. The form of the identified remains at Southern Street is also significant. Compared with those remains excavated at White Lion Street (Jones & Grealey 1974) and Barton Street (Gregory forthcoming) they appear consistent with a less intensive form of activity in this area of the *vicus*. This, in turn, may well suggest that during the Roman period areas of more intense commercial, residential and public development were clustered and concentrated along the major route ways that both exited and ran adjacent to the Roman fort.

Acknowledgements

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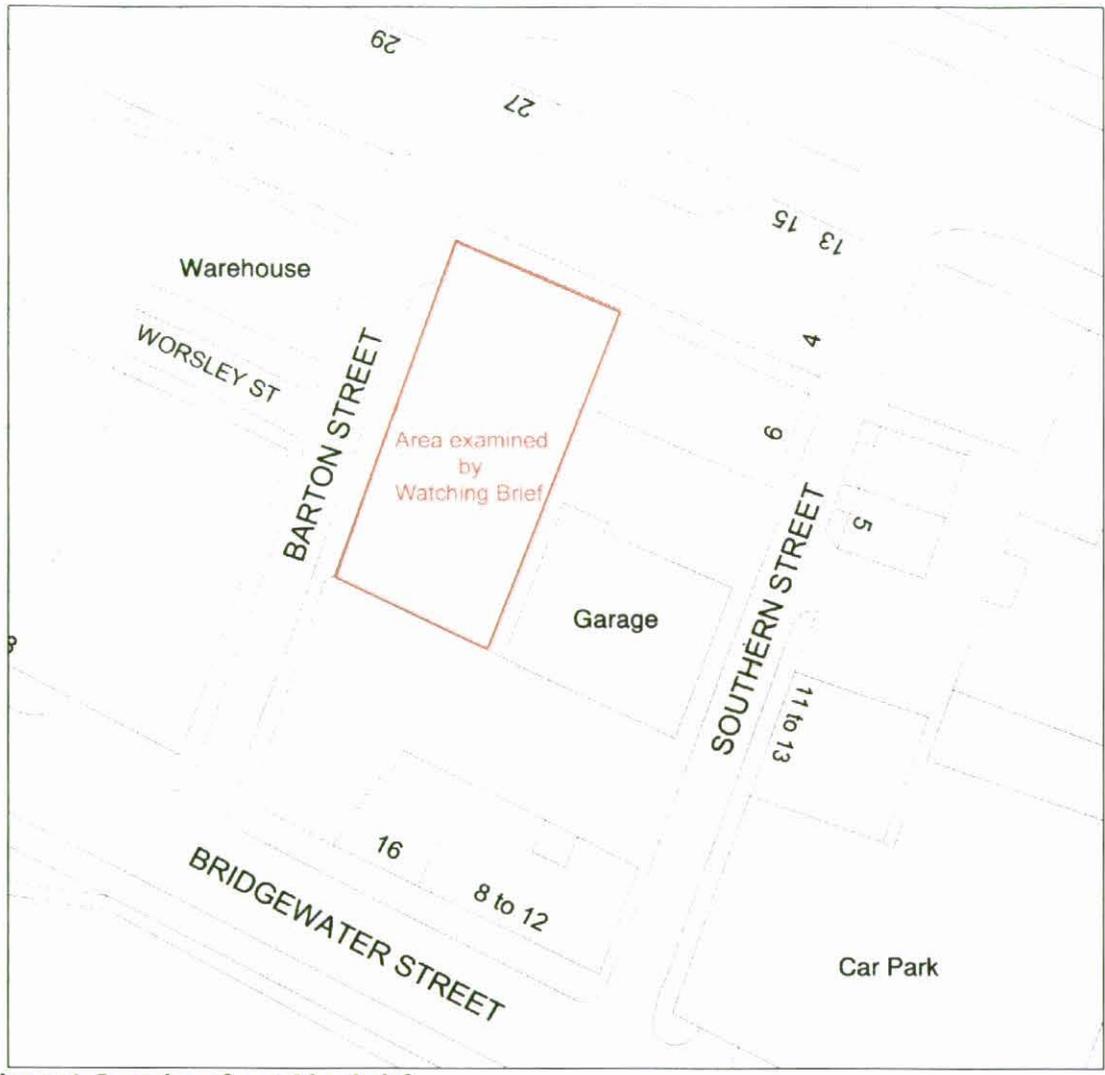


Figure 1. Location of watching brief.

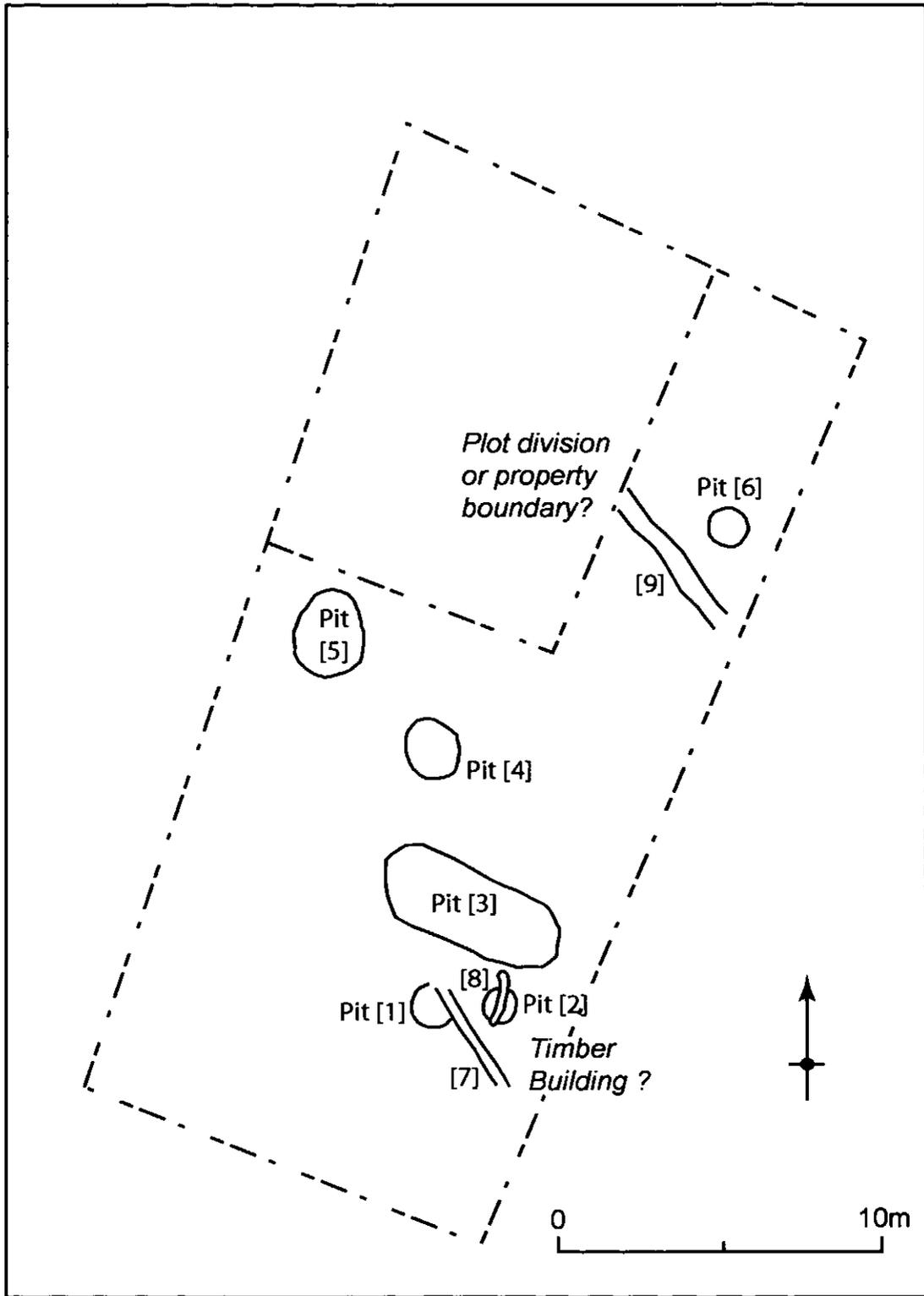


Figure 2. Roman features identified within the development area.



Plate 1. Section through Pit [3].



Plate 2. Surface Pit [2], which was sealed by a post-Roman ploughsoil.



Plate 3. Construction trench [7].