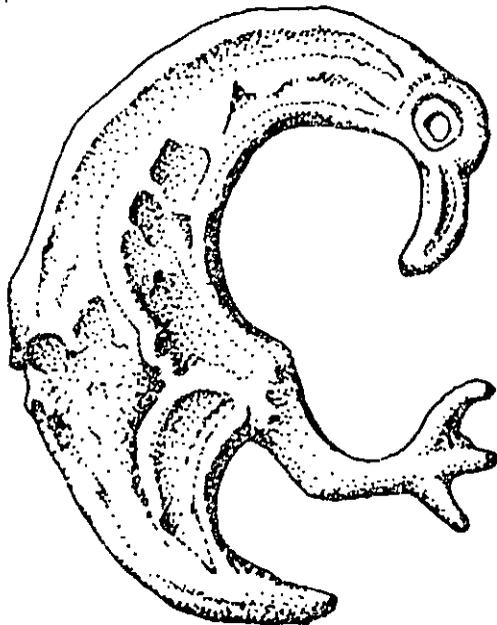


# Leicestershire Archaeological Unit

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*(Reheleton ph)*  
Kirkby House Farm, Kirkby Mallory  
An Archaeological Evaluation

James Gossip

*SMR.  
Sportswear*

## An Archaeological Evaluation at Kirkby House Farm, Kirkby Mallory, Leicestershire.

### Abstract

During January and February 1995, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Kirkby House Farm, Kirkby Mallory, Leicestershire in advance of a housing development by J.S. Bloor (Services) Ltd. While little archaeological fieldwork has been conducted in the vicinity of the development, the Leicestershire Sites and Monuments Record shows that the area is one of high archaeological potential, located at the core of the medieval settlement of Kirkby Mallory, and the junction of probable medieval or earlier communication routes. The Roman road to Mancetter is believed to pass close to or through the southern edge of the development area (Leicestershire S.M.R. site ref. 40 SE. BN. and 40 SE. BL.) and many prehistoric crop-marks have been recorded in the area. It was therefore proposed that the archaeological potential of the area be evaluated by trial trenching in those areas where surviving archaeology could be threatened by the development. Part of the site had already been stripped of top-soil in order to lay a service road; this would be hand cleaned to ascertain whether archaeological deposits were present. Trial trenching would also enable the assessment of the extent of any existing archaeology. Features cut into the natural sub-soil were identified in all trenches; while in many cases these were modern features or naturally occurring geological erratics, substantial Roman features were located in a limited area of the west of the site. These consisted of linear ditches and possible structural features such as post-holes, and contained Roman pottery within stratified contexts.

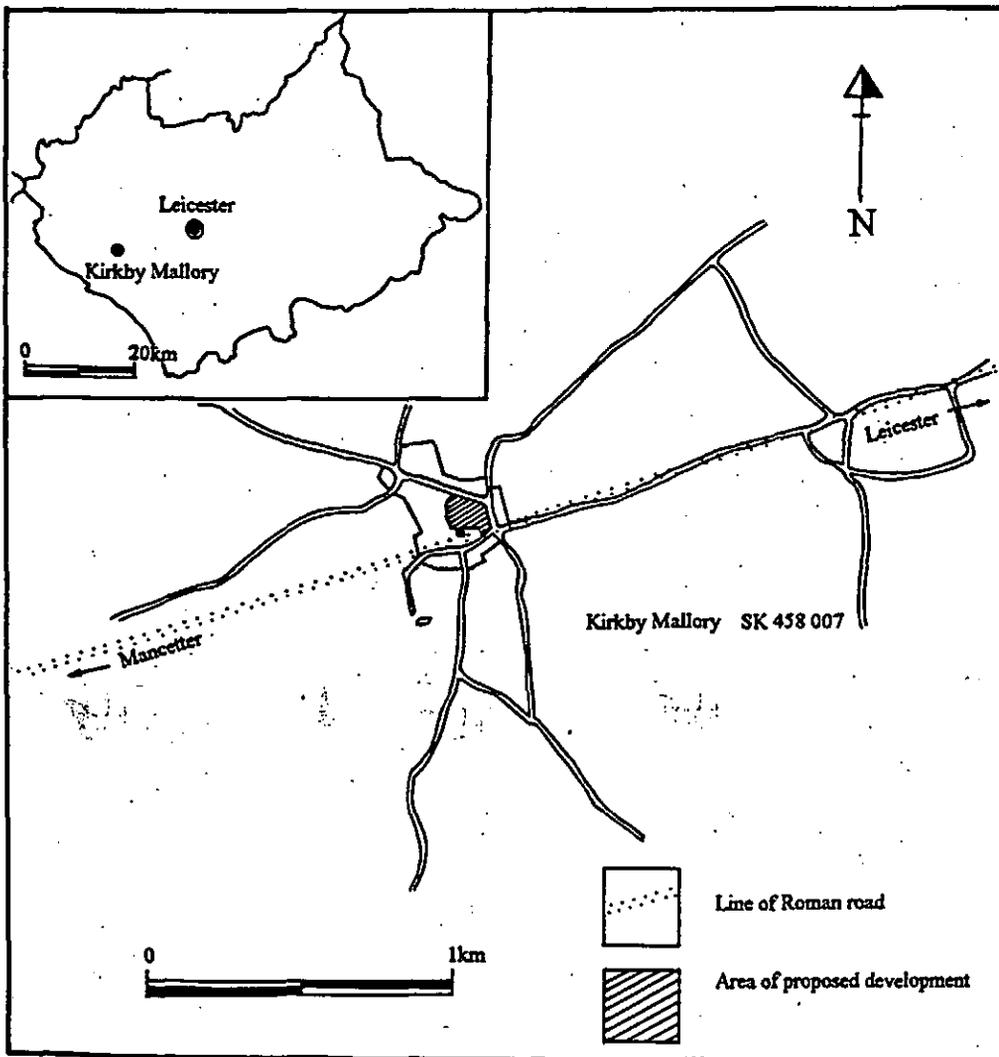


Figure 1. Map showing site location.

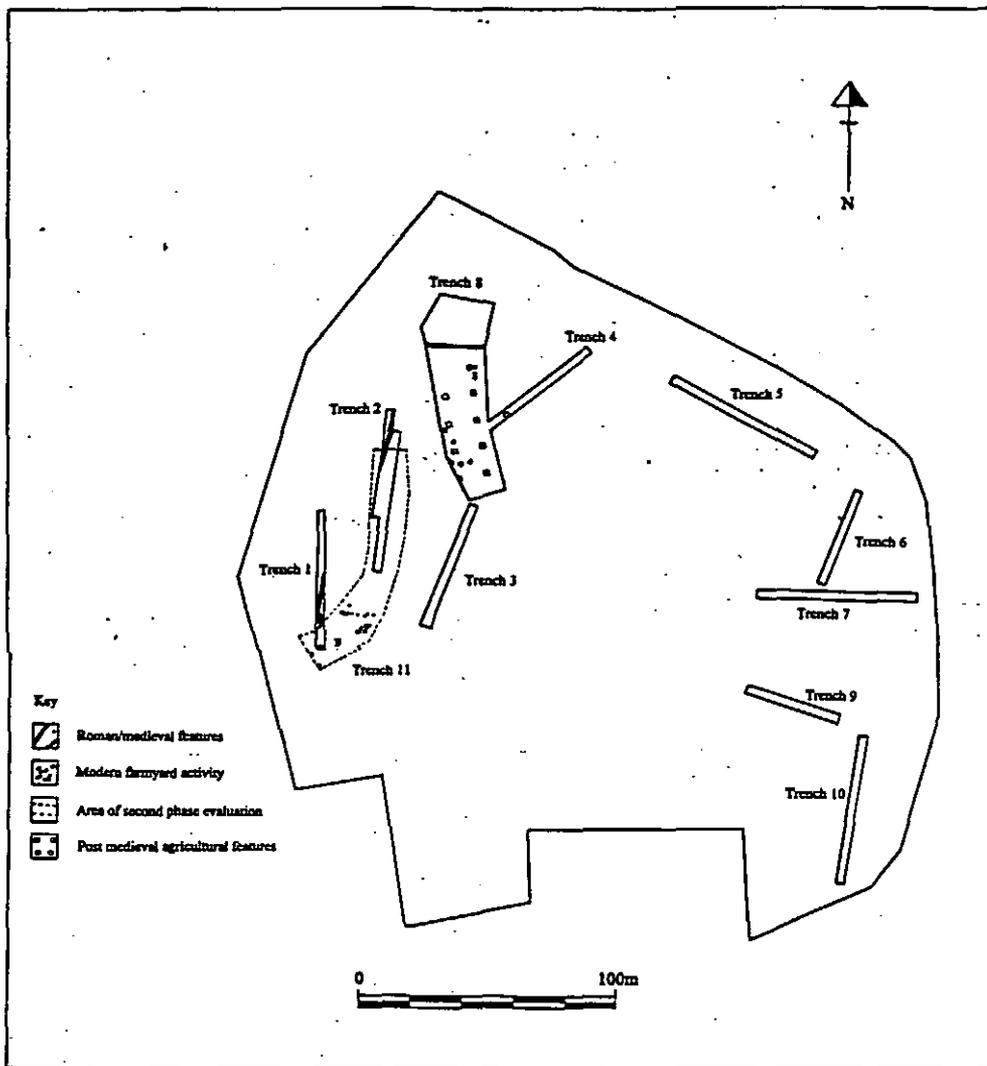


Figure 2. Trench location plan.

## Introduction

The following report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by the archaeological unit of Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service at Kirkby Mallory, Leicestershire, between 23rd January and 6th February 1995. It was the intention of the evaluation to assess the archaeological potential of the area centred on grid reference SK 458007, prior to the development of the land for housing. The site lies on a small hilltop appearing as a raised area bounded by roads to the south, east and north. While ridge and furrow cultivation can be observed in the playing field to the west of the site, all traces of possible medieval ploughing in the development area have either been eradicated by subsequent ploughing or were simply unidentifiable due to the mixed nature of the ploughsoil; the area of the site sloping towards the road to the south and east appeared to have a very thick cover of ploughsoils and colluvial material. The natural geology of the site consisted of well draining glacial sands and gravels on the crest of the hill (the majority of the evaluation area) and heavy boulder clays towards the base of the slope.

Nine trenches were located across the site in order to assess both the archaeological potential of those areas most likely to be affected by the development and the limit of archaeological activity (Fig.2). A further area (Trench 8- Fig.4)) from which topsoil had been stripped prior to the evaluation was also investigated. It was decided that the study of these areas would provide an adequate evaluative sample of the proposed development area.

The immediate results necessitated a second phase evaluation which was undertaken by the stripping of an area (trench 11-Fig.2) where potential archaeological deposits were threatened by the development.

The information presented here represents a preliminary interpretation which may require some revision following further analysis of records and finds. Possible subsequent archaeological excavation and/or watching brief observations may also necessitate revision. The archaeological work and subsequent post excavation analysis has been generously funded by J.S. Bloor (Services) Ltd.

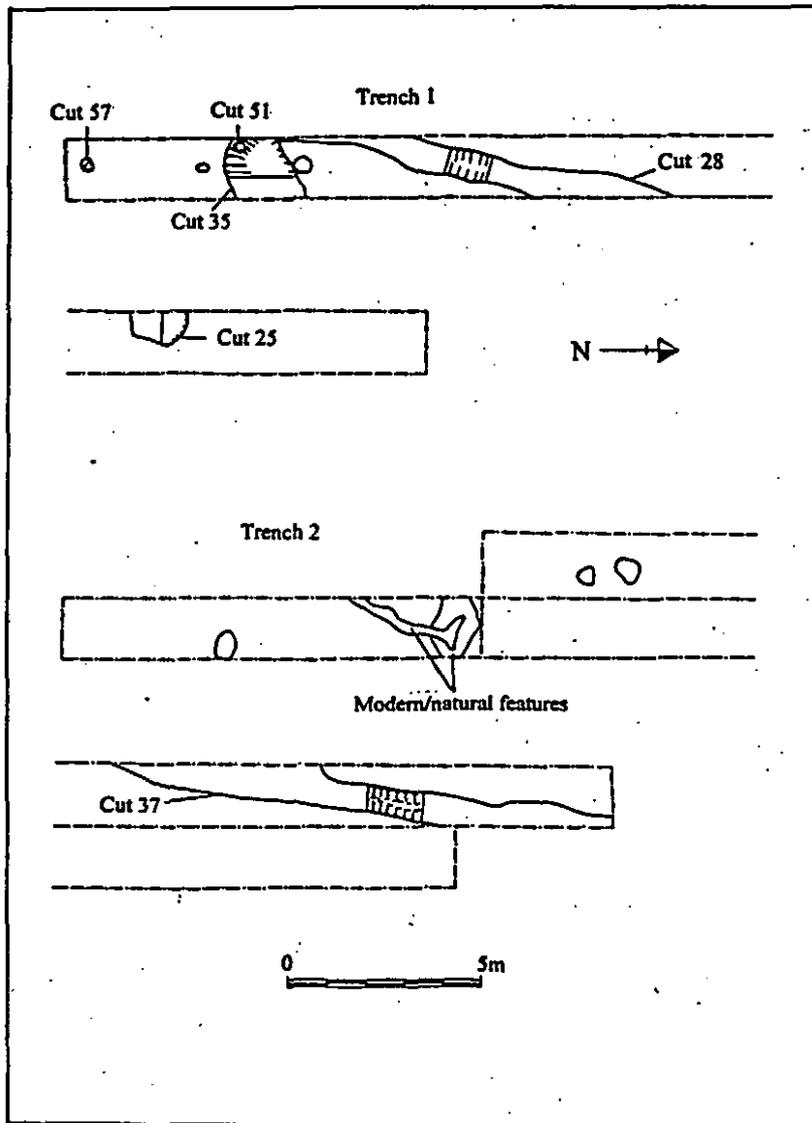


Figure 3. Detailed plans of trenches 1 and 2.

### Archaeological Background

While little excavation has taken place in the region of Kirkby Mallory, the area is thought to have been fairly densely occupied in the prehistoric, Roman and medieval periods. Aerial photography in the vicinity has revealed a number of prehistoric cropmarks, such as bronze age ring ditches (Wood View Farm) and Iron Age enclosure ditches and pit alignments (Folly Farm, Peckleton, Pickering and Hartley 1985 p.30).

The Roman road from Leicester to the Roman fort and town at Mancetter (Manduessedum), is thought to pass through or near to the south of the development area, and has been observed nearby in section (Peckleton) and in aerial photographs (McWhirr 1967 p.5). A number of Roman settlements have been identified in the region, such as Desford and Newbold Vernon, and considerable Roman industrial activity can be seen in the area by the kiln sites at Desford and Earl Shilton (Clarke 1962, p.67), possible outliers of the Roman pottery industry of Mancetter - Hartshill (Liddle 1982, p.42).

## Aims

The archaeological fieldwork was undertaken with the aims of :

1. Establishing the nature and extent of any archaeological deposits within the area affected by the proposed development.
2. To establish a date range for the archaeological deposits located.
3. To define the state of preservation of these deposits.
4. To assess the local , regional and national importance of these deposits.
5. To determine the requirement for further archaeological examination.

## Methodology

Nine trenches were sampled across the site by machine excavation , using a JCB 3C with a wide, toothless ditching bucket (Fig.2). All trenches were hand cleaned over the two week period, with the exception of trenches 7 and 9. Here the clean nature of the natural suggested immediately that archaeological features were absent, and time constraints were such that it was decided that more useful cleaning could be undertaken elsewhere. The area stripped of topsoil in advance of the evaluation (trench 8 - Fig.4) was also hand cleaned.

Features revealed by hand cleaning were subsequently recorded in plan and a sample excavated in order to establish their true character. The majority of features excavated were half-sectioned , avoiding extensive damage to deposits with potential relevance for future excavation. Half-sectioned features were recorded in section. A Top - Con Electronic Distance Measurer GTS - 3B was used to plot trench outlines , planning points , important features and the boundary of the development area. All survey data is stored on computer disc (with back-up) and survey plots lodged with the archive.--

Table 1. Areas of evaluation

Trench number	Area - m <sup>2</sup>	Depth of ploughsoil - m	No. of features
1	44	0.30	7
2	83	0.40	6
3	46	0.35	2
4	43	0.50	2
5	55	0.55	3
6	34	0.90	1
7	54	0.70	1
8	605	0.40	20
9	35	0.60	0
10	55	0.43	3
11	348	0.35	0
Total	1402		45

## Results

**Trench 1- Figure 3 (27.30m x 1.60m - approximately 0.30m of ploughsoil removed. Area - 44m<sup>2</sup>)**

The hand-cleaning of Trench 1 revealed a number of features with a concentration at the southern end of the trench. Individual context descriptions are lodged with the site archive under the accession code A3 1995. Due to time constraints and the need to establish the archaeological character of these deposits, only a sample of the most tangible features were excavated. These included :

Cut 35 - (Fig. 6.1) a steep sided linear feature , 1.80m in width , 0.40m in depth , and traced for 1.60m on an east-west alignment. Apparently representing part of a pit, though further excavation to the east would be required in order to determine its extent. The feature contained a series of sandy silt fills , with various lenses of gravel. The uppermost fill contained three sherds of Roman pottery and a possible fragment of Roman brick or tile. A circular post hole (cut 51) , 0.30m in diameter and 0.56m in depth could be seen cut into the southern edge of the ditch , though the relationship between the features was uncertain.

To the north of this a linear feature (cut 28-Fig 6.2) on a north - south alignment was identified. The excavation of a small section of this feature revealed it to be a ditch , 0.70m wide and 0.25m in depth. The ditch appeared to be a steep 'U' shape in profile and could be traced for a total of 9m within the trench. The fill consisted of an homogenous silty sand, and contained Roman pottery in its uppermost fill. A small quantity of possible medieval pottery was also located within this fill. This ditch was cut by the ditch or pit to the south (cut 35).

A small circular feature (cut 57 -Fig. 7.2) was excavated at the southern limit of trench one. This proved to be a shallow circular post hole 0.33m in diameter and 0.12m in depth. A possible stake hole was cut into the western edge , although this may have been caused by root activity. The fill, a well leached sandy silt, contained one sherd of indeterminate pottery, and a few traces of charcoal. Two additional post holes could be seen on the same north - south alignment to the north of cut 57. All three post holes were equidistant.

A sub-circular feature, cut 25, 1.50m in diameter and 0.50m in depth could be seen at the northern end of trench 1. The fill consisted of a dark silty sand containing a large number of post-medieval pottery fragments and building materials.

**Trench 2 - Figure 3 ( 32m x 1.60m, with extension 16.50m x 1.60m. Approximately 0.40m of ploughsoil removed. Area - 83m<sup>2</sup> ).**

Trench 2 contained a number of potential features, but in consideration of time constraints only the most positive feature was further examined by excavation. This was a linear feature (cut 37-Fig.6.3), on an approximate north - south alignment, 0.55m in width, 0.17m in depth, and traceable for a distance of 12m along the axis of the trench. Excavation of this feature showed it to contain an homogenous sandy silt fill, from which four sherds of Roman and four sherds of medieval pottery were recovered. The profile of the ditch varied between a steep 'V' shape and a shallower , more gradual 'U'.

Three possible post holes were revealed by hand cleaning of the trench and were recorded in plan but not excavated. An additional irregular linear feature was located , though the nature of the fill suggested that this was a modern deposit. This feature appeared to cut a larger area of silty sand, which due to its ephemeral nature may have represented some form of natural geological deposit.

**Trench 3 (25.95m x 1.60m . Approximately 0.35m of ploughsoil removed. Area - 46m<sup>2</sup> ).**

Hand cleaning of trench 3 revealed a large number of deposits, most of which appeared to be natural features. Two features of seemingly greatest potential were excavated, cut 71, a shallow oval feature, and cut 72, the remains of a feature almost entirely truncated by modern disturbance immediately to its south. One sherd of post-medieval pottery was recovered from the surface of the fill of cut 71, though this may have been present in the above ploughsoil. While it is possible that this feature represents the base of a badly truncated post hole, it may simply be due to the compression of

ploughsoil into the natural sub-soil. Similarly, a sherd of Roman pottery was seen on the surface of the fill of cut 72. This may have been redeposited as a consequence of the truncation of the feature, but there is insufficient evidence to verify this.

During the first week of the evaluation heavy rain led to the flooding of the southern end of trench 3, which remained waterlogged for the duration of the work. Archaeological potential of the area was considered to be too low to warrant the use of mitigation strategies.

**Trench 4** (25m x 1.60m ; 0.50m of ploughsoil removed. Area - 43 m<sup>2</sup>).

Two features were identified and excavated in trench 4. The first, cut 49 (Fig. 7.3) was found to be a small sub-circular post hole, 0.20m in diameter and 0.23m in depth. The fill consisted of an homogenous sandy silt, and no finds were present.

A square pit, approximately 1m<sup>2</sup> was also seen in this trench, and would appear to represent part of the same group visible in trench 8.

**Trench 5** (31m x 1.60m ; 0.55m of ploughsoil removed. Area - 55m<sup>2</sup>).

Trench 5 was found to contain 3 possible features, though further investigation suggested that these were the result of natural occurrences. Cut 43, a feature located towards the eastern end of the trench, may have represented the termination of a shallow ditch or portion of a pit, but its fill was more reminiscent of some form of geological feature. A large linear deposit (c.3m in width) containing a silty fill also suggested a natural origin, and may represent an ancient water course or palaeochannel.

**Trench 6** (19 x 1.60m ; 0.90m of ploughsoil removed. Area - 34m<sup>2</sup>).

The natural subsoil of trench 6 was covered by deep layers of topsoil and earlier ploughsoils. Due to the depth of these deposits, care was taken during machine excavation in the event of archaeological features being present in these layers. One large feature (cut 53) was observed in section, and could be seen to be cut from a depth immediately below the modern topsoil. This feature proved to be a section of a large ditch, 3.5m in width and 0.85m in depth. No finds were recovered from the fill, though a large amount of root activity was evident. The size, and the depth from which the ditch is cut, suggests that this may represent an old field boundary.

**Trench 7** (31.5m x 1.60m ; 0.70m of ploughsoil removed. Area - 54 m<sup>2</sup>).

One apparently post - medieval feature was identified, a shallow linear ditch containing a compact black sandy fill. This ran parallel to and nearby the modern road line to its west, and may have been part of an earlier road-side drainage ditch.

**Trench 8** (40m x 15m ; 0.40m of ploughsoil removed. Area - 605m<sup>2</sup>).

Trench 8 was a large area stripped of ploughsoil in advance of the evaluation, in preparation for the construction of a service road. This area was hand cleaned wherever possible in order to determine the full character and extent of possible features obscured by machine trample and other modern deposits. The most dominant features of this area were a series of regularly sized and spaced square pits, all approximately 0.90m and 5m apart. Eleven of these pits were identified, though more may have existed in uncleaned areas. Two pits were excavated in order to retrieve dating evidence and establish their true archaeological character, and both (cuts 14 and 18 ; Figs 8.1 and 8.2) were found to have vertical sides and flat bases. The depths of the pits varied between 0.22m (cut 14) and 0.32m (cut 18). One sherd of white salt-glazed pottery was recovered from within the silty leached fill of cut 18 and charcoal flecks were present in both fills. The square pit in trench 4 would appear to be associated with the trench 8 pits and probably served the same function.

Numerous small, circular features were also recorded, a sample of which were excavated (cuts 12, 16 and 47). These appeared to occur in two distinct groups; the first consisting of cuts 12, 20, 16 (Fig. 8.3) and 22; and the second, cuts 84, 86 and 47 (Fig. 7.1). All excavated examples proved to be post holes, some of substantial depth, such as cut 16 (0.45m in depth and 0.18m wide).

Situated to the north-east of the above group were three closely spaced (0.45m-0.70m apart) post holes, cut numbers 47, 84 and 86 on a north-south alignment. Cut 47 was excavated, revealing a circular post hole 0.55m in diameter and 0.33m in depth, with steep sides and a flat base. The fill consisted of silty sand with some clay and contained a large number of burnt clay fragments with possible wattle impressions.

A linear feature (cut 45- Fig. 6.4) running east-west could be seen in the north of the area. A section of this was excavated revealing it to be a shallow ditch or gully with a 'U' shaped profile, 0.41m wide and 0.15m in depth, traceable for a distance of 9.8m. The fill consisted of a well leached sandy silt, and showed a large amount of root activity. Fragments of brick seen in the surface of the feature could be contemporary with the fill, though they may be present as a result of plough disturbance.

An area of disturbed ploughsoil and redeposited natural clay was situated immediately to the north of the ditch, and seemed to represent an area of 'hard standing' or made ground.

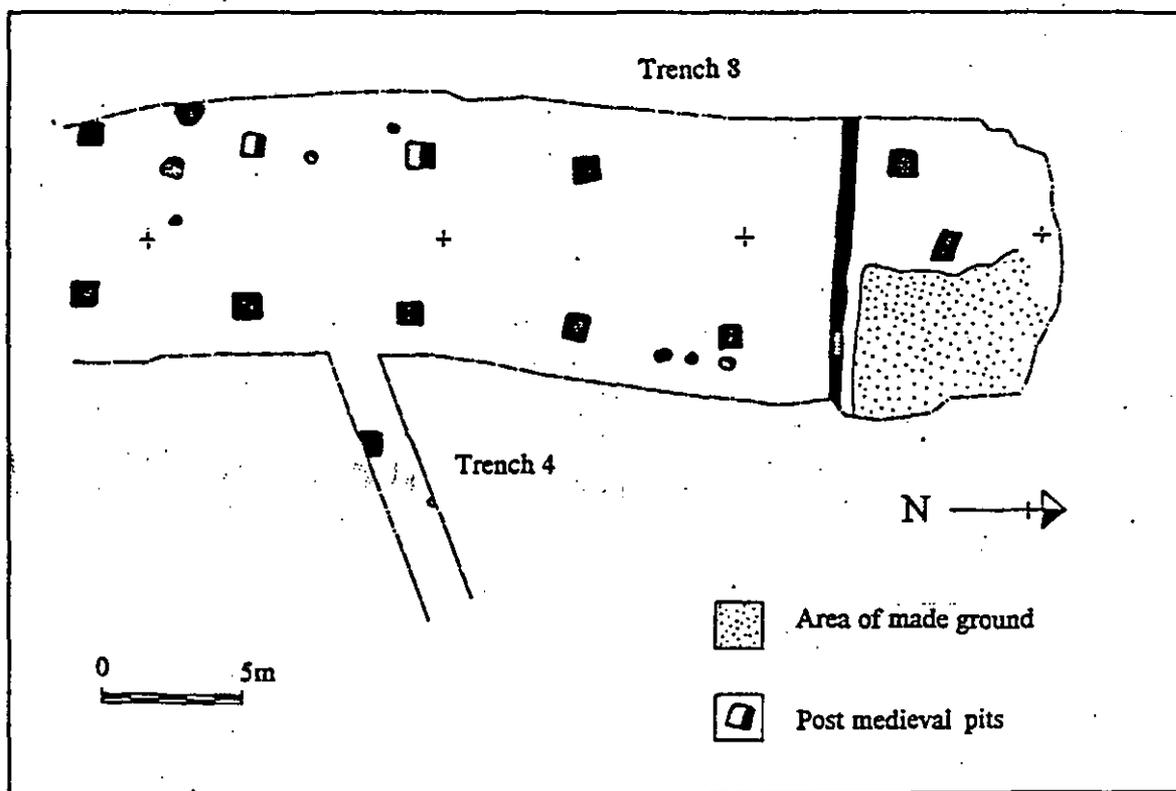


Figure 4. Detailed plan of trench 8.

**Trench 9** (17.95m x 1.60m ; 0.60m of ploughsoil removed. Area - 35).

Trench 9 was devoid of any archaeological features containing only apparently recent animal burials. The top soil and earlier ploughsoils indicated intense root activity.

**Trench 10** (36m x 1.60m ; 0.43m - 1m of ploughsoil removed. Area - 55m<sup>2</sup>).

Two features were identified and excavated in trench 10. Cut 56 appeared to be a shallow pit with a flat base and steep sides, containing an homogenous silt and clay sand flecked with fragments of charcoal. One fragment of iron slag was recovered from the fill.

A linear feature (cut 59) could also be observed running across the width of the trench on an east-west alignment, possibly cut from immediately below the modern topsoil. Excavation showed this to be a shallow ditch or gully approximately 0.25m in depth and 0.52m wide, with a 'U' shaped profile and a silt fill with charcoal flecks. No artefactual material was recovered.

Other possible modern features were identified in trench 10 ; these were not excavated due to time restrictions. One feature was observed during the machine excavation of the southern end of the trench at a depth of approximately 1m - this flooded immediately and remained waterlogged for the duration of the evaluation. Two recent animal burials were also observed in this trench.

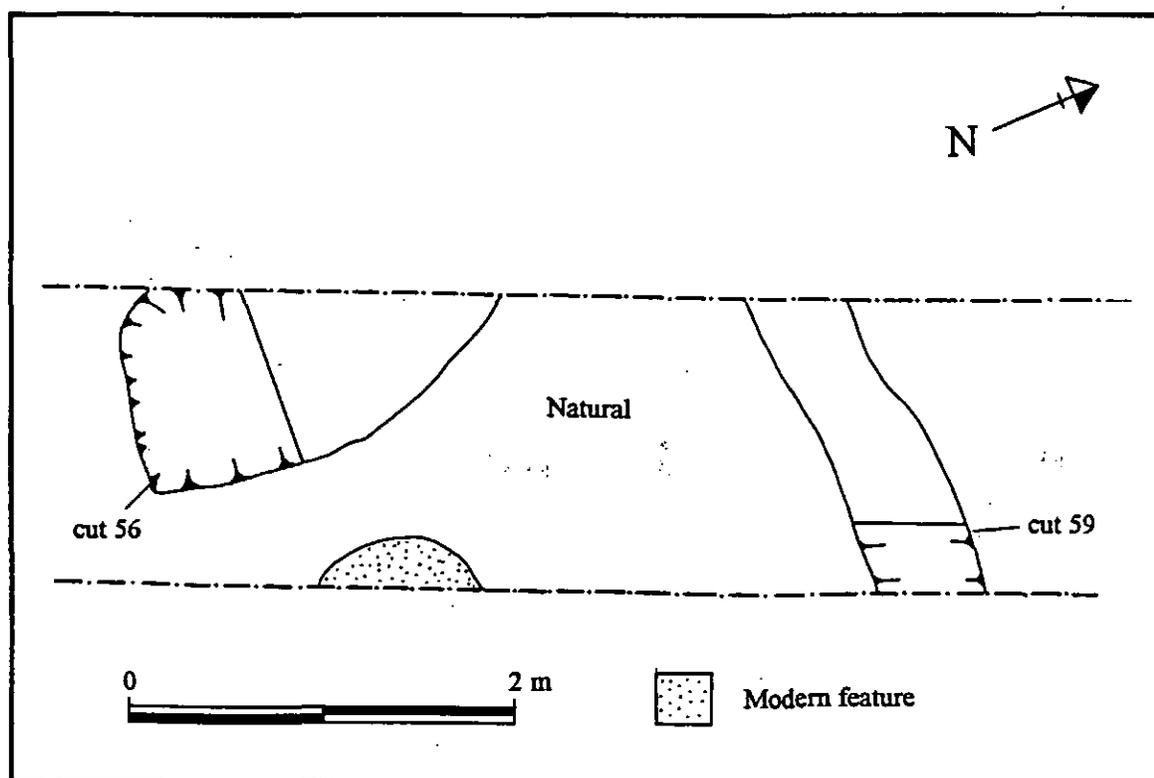


Figure 5. Detailed plan of trench 10

## Conclusion

Features were located in all ten trenches, though upon investigation many of these transpired to be non-archaeological in nature. The evaluation therefore succeeded in establishing the state of preservation of archaeological features and the definition of an area of greatest potential. Trenches 1 and 2 contained features yielding both Roman and medieval pottery and perhaps indicate the area of greatest archaeological importance considering the proximity of the Roman road from Leicester to Mancetter, and other evidence of Roman settlement and industry in the area. The limitations inherent in evaluative excavations make any detailed interpretation difficult. However it is possible to suggest that features were found which indicate some form of occupation activity, such as boundary/drainage ditches and post holes. Stratigraphic evidence clearly shows that the pit visible in trench 1 (cut 35) was the earliest feature located, and is cut by a later phase linear ditch (cut 26). The stratigraphic relationship between cut 35 and the post hole visible in its edge, cut 51, is unclear. Finds from the fill of cut 35 are exclusively Roman, representing two grey ware vessels, and a body sherd from a straight sided carinated vessel suggests a 1st - early 2nd century date for this feature, though the sample is too small to make this implicit. The function of the pit remains unclear.

The linear ditch to the north of this feature and visible in trench 2 contained both Roman and medieval pottery in its upper fills, and suggests that the Roman material may be residual, although the possibility remains that medieval pottery present in the surrounding plough soils has been ploughed into the fill of the feature. The function of the ditch is uncertain though probably represents some form of boundary ditch.

If we assume that they are associated, the three post holes visible in the southern end of trench 1 could represent part of alignment of post holes respecting the line of the boundary ditch, indicating continued use of the same boundary, perhaps as a fence line. Pottery retrieved from the fill of one of the post holes (cut 57) was unidentifiable, leaving the post holes un-dateable.

The absence of other Roman or medieval features over the remaining area of the evaluation suggests intense agricultural activity over a long period of time, and the subsequent destruction of archaeological deposits. Alternatively, this may indicate that both the Roman and medieval deposits located represent the eastern-most limits of settlement of this period, with more intensive activity to the west of this area.

Little can be said in terms of the nature of settlement due to the limited sample of archaeology from the evaluation. Much of the Roman pottery recovered from features suggests a date range between the late 1st - early 2nd centuries, one sherd of white ware indicating local production and sharing affinities with examples from the Mancetter-Hartshill industries (Marsden, P., pers. comm.). The nature of the evidence therefore is possibly indicative of an early Roman settlement coming into existence as a result of the proximity of the road, providing important trade links with the urban centres of Leicester and Mancetter, as well as smaller local agricultural communities. Unfortunately no evidence of the Mancetter - Leicester road was recovered. Since trenching was carried out in the far south east of the development area it can be assumed that the road must have been located further to the south. Studies have shown that only a minority of Roman road-side settlements are located on earlier Iron Age sites, and this is supported by the absence of any Iron Age material from the evaluation (Smith 1987, p.3). However, a number of probable Iron Age sites have been noted in the area from aerial photographs (Pickering and Hartley 1985, p.30), and the Romano-British settlement of Kirkby Mallory was probably inhabited by people indigenous to the area.

An extensive Romano-British farm settlement can be seen from aerial photographs approximately 2 miles to the east of Kirkby Mallory at Leicester Forest West, Peckleton (Pickering and Hartley 1985, p.32), and another example of settlement alongside a Roman road can be seen next to the Gartree road (Liddle 1982, p.41). These sites, all 'Romanised farms integrated into the market economy' (Liddle 1982, p.37), are possibly indicative of the type of settlement that could have been present at Kirkby Mallory during the Roman period.

The evidence for medieval occupation is equally tenuous. While a small sample of medieval pottery was recovered, much was unstratified and only a small amount could be assigned to contexts. It can be suggested, however, that the pottery recovered is indicative of medieval activity at the historic core of the village, probably in the form of agricultural land-use. Medieval ridge and furrow cultivation is still visible to the west of the site, while its absence within the area of development and the unusual depth of plough soils suggests intensive agricultural activity up to the present day.

Most other features seen during the evaluation appear to be the result of post-medieval farmyard activity, such as the erection of fences, the construction of drainage ditches and the burial of

livestock.. The exact function of the square pits visible in trench 8 is still unclear, though it has been suggested that these may represent pits excavated for the planting of an orchard. The 1901 map of the area shows orchard growth to the east of trench 8, reinforcing the possibility of an orchard on the site. The three closely spaced post holes in trench 8 perhaps represent structural elements of some form of farm building. Burnt clay apparently impressed with wattle was recovered from the fill of one of the post holes.

It is clear therefore that while little can be verified in terms of the nature of settlement, the evaluation can at least indicate continuation of land use over a considerable period of time, from the early stages of the Roman period up until the present day.

### **Second phase evaluation**

Further evaluation work was undertaken between 15th-17th February, 1995 (Fig.2). The initial evaluation had succeeded in establishing an area of greatest archaeological potential towards the western limits of the development area. Since the construction of a service road and the footings for three houses placed possible archaeological deposits in this area immediately under threat, further evaluative work was required. The nature and character of such deposits could therefore be more accurately assessed.

### **Methodology and Results**

An area 348m<sup>2</sup> was stripped of topsoil and cleaned by hoe and shovel. A number of features were located, but on closer examination it became apparent that many of these were modern. A row of circular post holes initially thought to represent surviving archaeological deposits was found to respect a row of modern fence post holes, and this in conjunction with more careful cleaning suggested that they were also relatively recent features. Other features revealed by cleaning were interpreted as natural geological deposits.

Two additional features were found to contain the partial skeletons of recently buried animals.

### **Conclusions**

Features revealed in this area would appear to be indicative of modern activity taking place behind farmyard buildings. Due to the proximity of the exposed area to Roman features revealed in trenches 1 and 2 of the initial evaluation, similar levels of activity were expected. However, the absence of any such features suggests that the area of activity reaches its limit immediately to the west of the stripped area. Since archaeology does not extend into the development area it is not considered as threatened by the proposed development.

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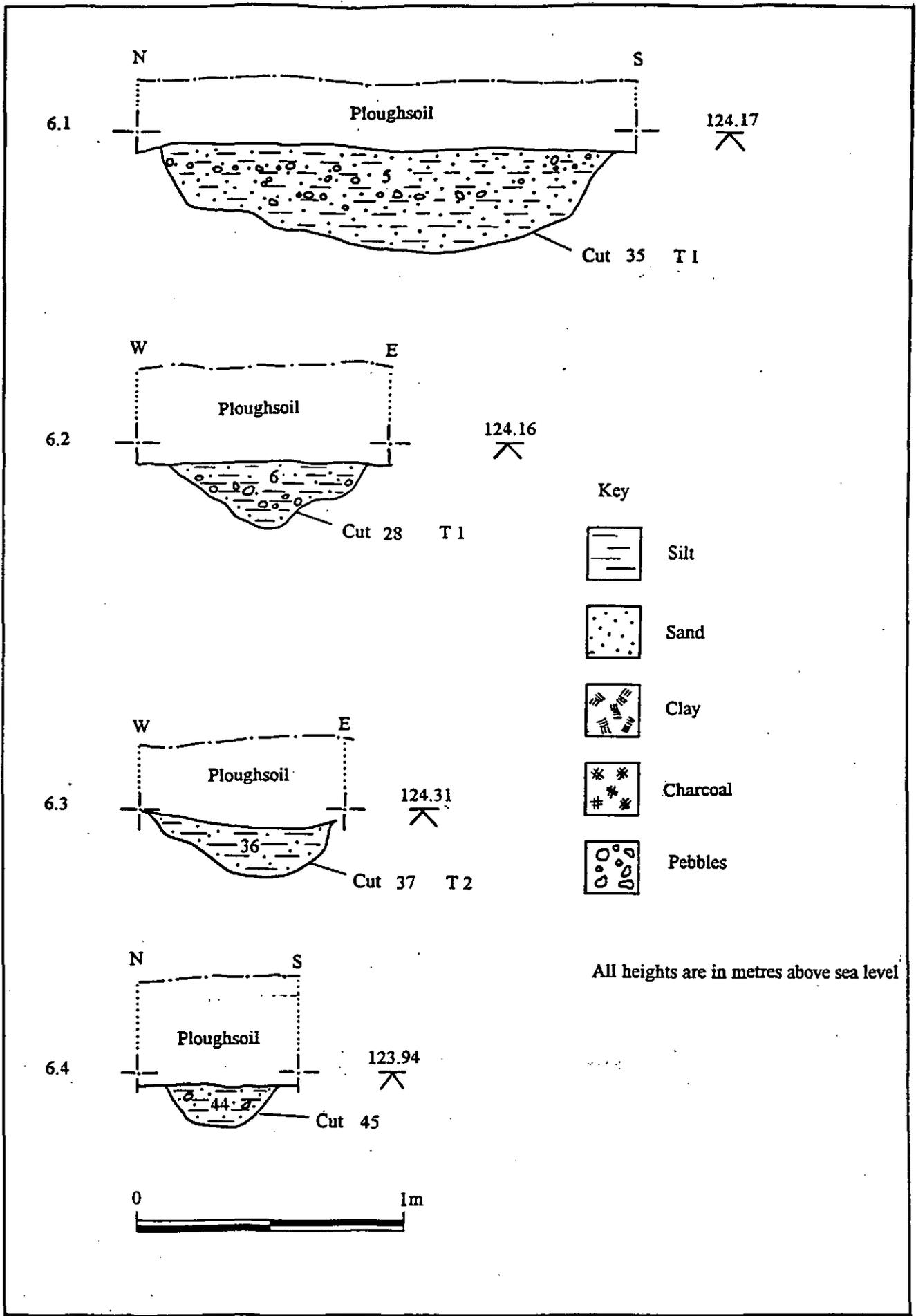


Figure 6. Section drawings

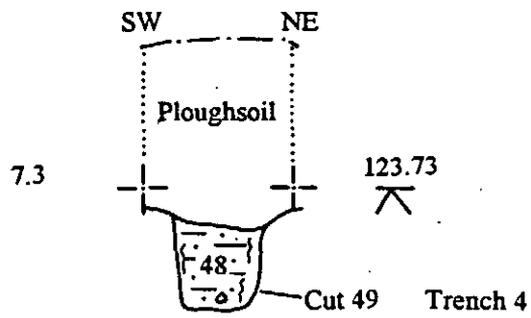
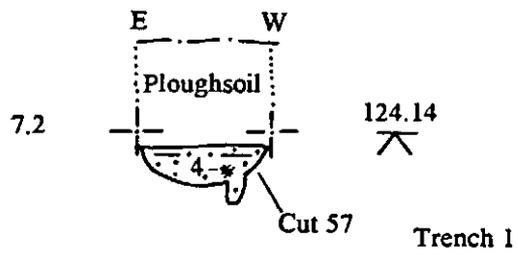
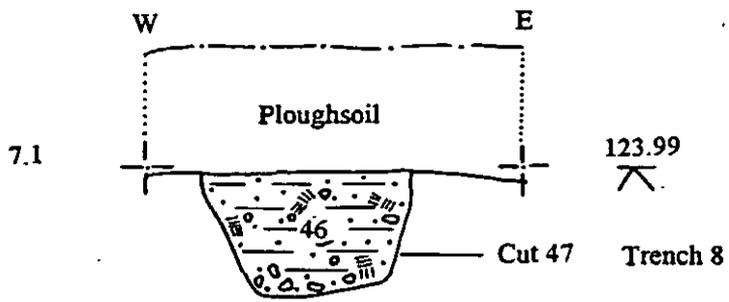


Figure 7. Section drawings

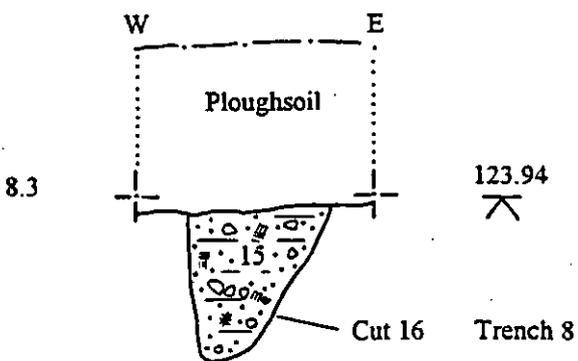
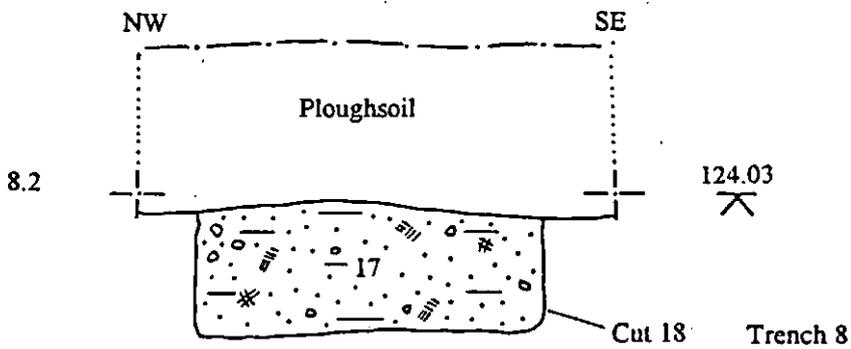
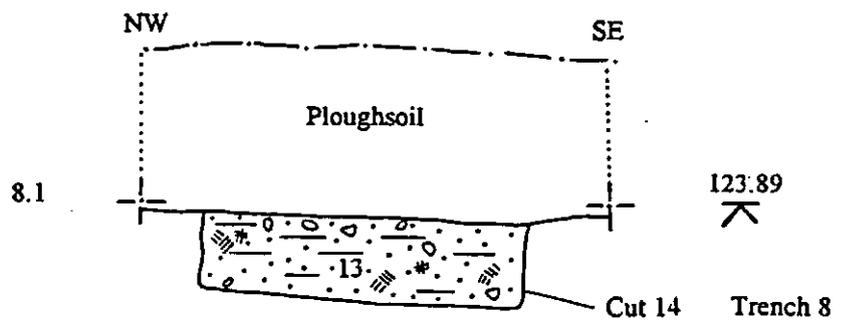


Figure 8. Section drawings.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Leicestershire Archaeological Unit would like to thank J.S.Bloor (Services) Ltd. for their generous funding of the project. The author would also like to thank R.Slack and K. Pickering of J.S. Bloor (Services) Ltd. for their co-operation and support during the evaluation. The report was compiled from information recorded on site by Matt Sharpe, Martin Shore and Sally Warren. The pottery was analysed by Pat Marsden. Project Management was by Patrick Clay.

James Gossip (Site Director).

This report follows Leicestershire County Council guidelines and has been produced on recycled paper.

## **Archive**

The archive consists of :

95 contexts

18 section drawings

12 site plans

Site indices

4 colour slide films

3 monochrome films

1 box of finds including :

25 sherds Roman pottery

15 sherds medieval pottery

2 sherds post-medieval pottery

1 sherd unidentifiable pottery

76 fragments unidentifiable building materials

1 iron nail

1 lead object

1 copper alloy object

1 waste chunk of flint