PREHISTORIC AND ROMAN DERBY: EXCAVATIONS AT LITTLEOVER, DERBY, 2003–4

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SUMMARY

A programme of archaeological work was undertaken at Littleover, Derby (NGR SK 32503420) on land adjacent to the site of the former Post House Hotel, in advance of a development by Michael Goodall Quality Homes Ltd. A desk-based assessment and geophysical survey was followed by an archaeological evaluation. An area was then targeted for excavation, together with a watching brief maintained during development groundworks. The earliest excavated feature was the cremation of a juvenile, contained within a Cordoned Urn of later Early Bronze Age date. Further cremations, possibly of this date were recorded, but not excavated. Also recorded was a line of pits, tentatively interpreted as part of a pit alignment. A length of a Roman road, Ryknield Street, surfaced with gravel, and flanked by drainage ditches, was also recorded.

INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of a staged programme of archaeological fieldwork at Littleover, Derby (centred on NGR SK 32503420; Fig. 1) on land adjacent to the former Post House Hotel. Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned to carry out the work by Michael Goodall Quality Homes Ltd in advance of a residential development. The stages of archaeological investigation comprised desk-based assessment (Hancox 2003), geophysical survey (Stratascan 2003), trial-trenching (Cherrington 2003), and finally, a small-scale excavation and watching brief (this report).

Trial-trenching identified a number of cremations, one subsequently dated to the Early Bronze Age, together with a group of adjoining pits containing Iron Age pottery (Cherrington 2003). Trenching also identified a length of Ryknield Street, comprising a gravel surface, with flanking drainage ditches. The Iron Age pits were further investigated in a small-scale excavation. The development plan was amended to exclude the area containing the cremation pits and the Roman road, and for this reason these features were not further investigated.

Location (Figs 1 and 2)

The site is located to the southwest of Derby City Centre. It is bounded by Pastures Hill to the southeast, by Chain Lane to the northeast, by Greenway Drive to

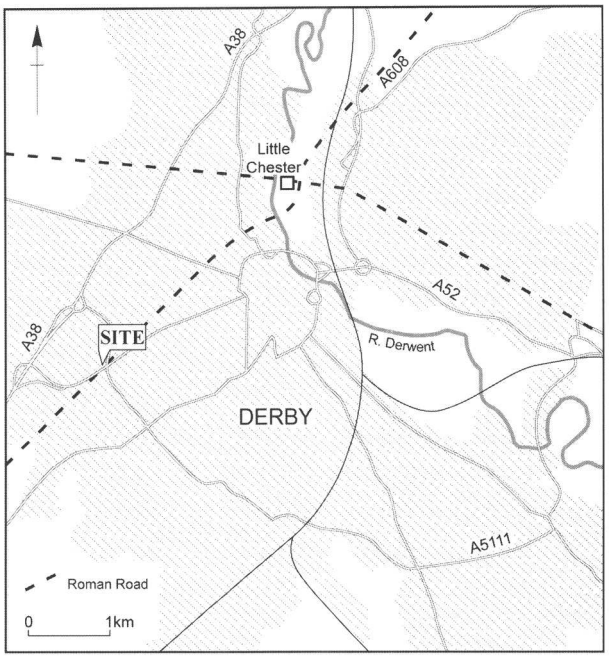

Fig. 1: Location of the site within Derby.

the northeast, and by a new housing estate on its remaining sides. The site formerly comprised the Post House Hotel and grounds which included areas of woodland, lawns and pasture in the south of the site.

Background

Prior to the investigations, the only evidence of prehistoric activity in the area was an Early Bronze Age polished flint axe hammer found in Scarsdale Avenue, approximately 100m from the site (Derby SMR18933). At the inception of site investigations a change of alignment was suggested within the length of Ryknield Street which crossed the site (Fig. 3, mapped in 1768). Ryknield Street (Fig. 1) extended from Bourton-on-the-Water, to Templeborough (Yorkshire), passing to the south of Littleover and *Derventio* (Little Chester, Sparey-Green 2002) further to the north (Margary 1967, 280, route 18a). This route was initially established by the military in the early Roman period and was later used for trade. The settlement of Littleover is believed to date from the Anglo-Saxon period, when it was within Mercia. The village was originally called Parva Ufra, a Saxon name meaning 'over slope'. If Ryknield Street still remained in use at this time, traffic could have travelled along the road on its way to and from Repton, one of the capitals of Mercia. The Anglo-Saxon village of Littleover is believed to have been centred just to the east of the site (Hancox 2003). The Domesday Book lists Parva Ufra as being one of three berewicks within the district of Ufre (modern Mickleover). It was part of the royal manor of King Edward the Confessor in 1066, and had been given to Burton Abbey by 1087. During the medieval period the village

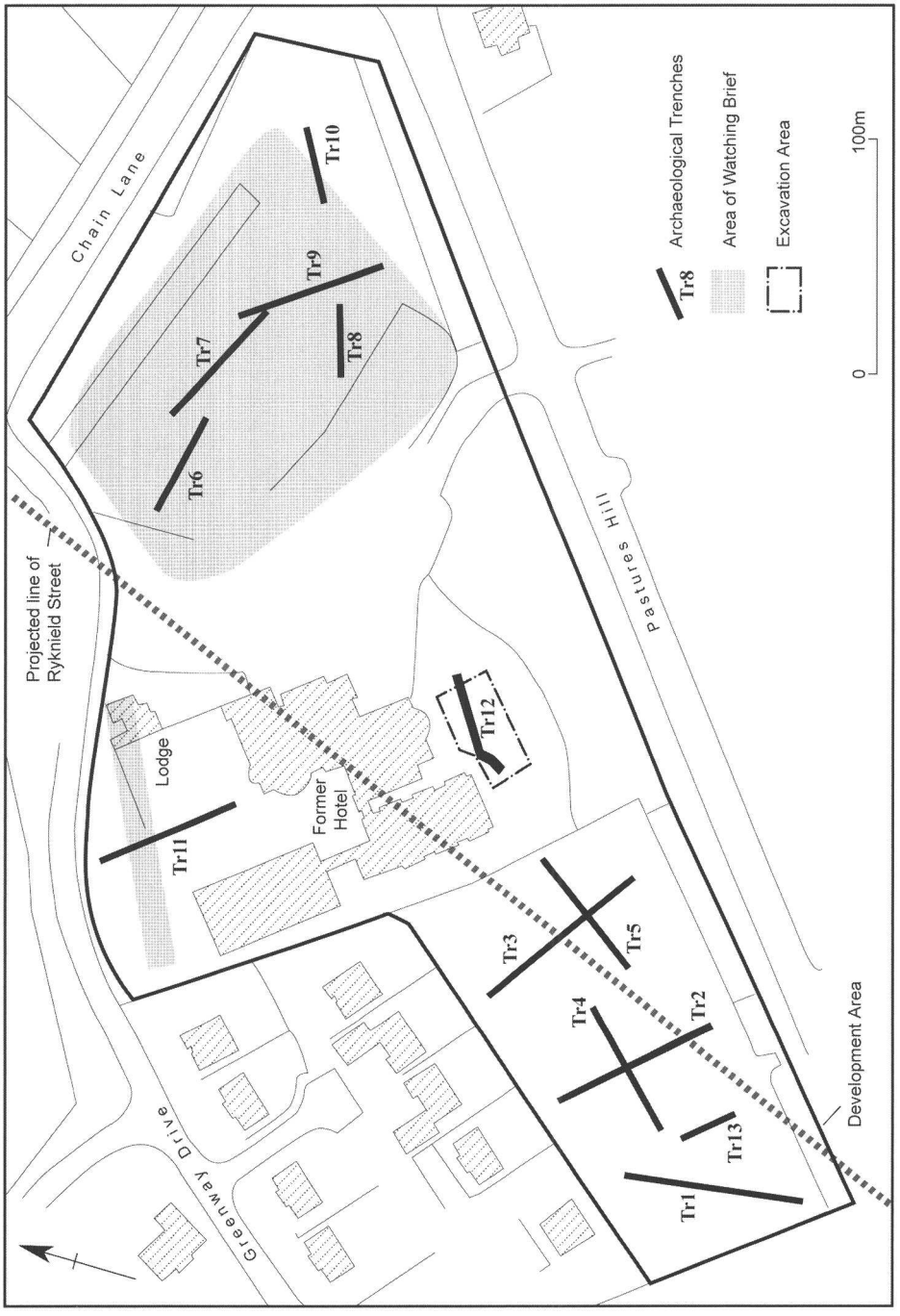

Fig. 2: The site, areas investigated by trenching, area excavation and watching brief (scale: as shown).

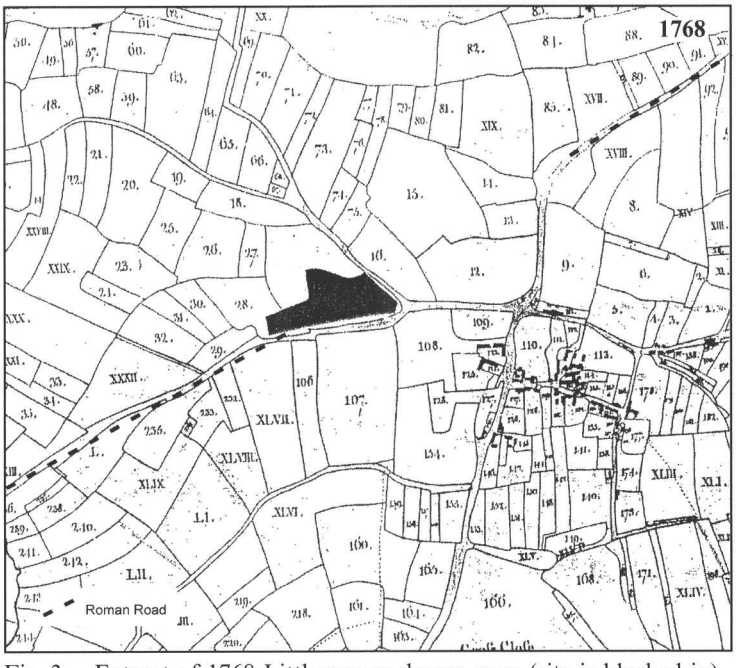

Fig. 3: Extract of 1768 Littleover enclosure map (site is blacked-in).

grew in size but the population suffered during the early years of the plague (Hancox 2003). The village population grew substantially throughout the post-medieval and Victorian periods. In 1968 Littleover became part of the Borough of Derby (Hancox 2003).

Aims

The aims of the evaluation were to test the archaeological potential of the site and to assess the likely impact of the proposed development on any archaeological deposits which might be present. In particular it was intended to locate and test the survival of the Roman road and any associated features, including testing of the geophysical anomalies (Stratascan 2003), interpreted as representing the Roman road. The small-scale area excavation was intended to test for the presence of further evidence of later Iron Age activity, and to place it within its contemporary context. A watching brief was also maintained to examine areas of the development which had not previously been examined archaeologically.

Methodology

Following selective geophysical survey (Stratascan 2003) a total of 13 trial-trenches were opened after the grant of Scheduled Monument Consent. Trenches were excavated to examine the Roman road, to identify its possible change in alignment, and test adjoining areas for evidence of roadside settlement. Following trenching it

was decided to exclude the area to the south of the former hotel from the scope of development, and this area was not further investigated. An excavation further examined the zone surrounding Trench 12 where a group of later Iron Age pits had been identified. More widely, a watching brief was maintained during development groundworks, but excluding the immediate vicinity of the former hotel where archaeological deposits were assumed to have been scoured-out.

During all stages of the investigations the overburden was removed using a JCB excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, continuously monitored by a qualified archaeologist. Base plans were made of the machined surfaces and features were then hand excavated. All Iron Age pits were 100% sampled by hand-excavation. Features and contexts were recorded on *pro-forma* record cards and all deposits were photographed using both colour and monochrome film. Sections and plans were drawn at scales 1:50 or 1:20 as appropriate.

RESULTS (Figs 4–6)

Evidence of four phases of activity was identified:
Phase 1 Early Bronze Age
Phase 2 Later Iron Age
Phase 3 Roman
Phase 4 Post-Roman

The natural subsoil was a red-orange sand with scatters of gravel and flint nodules.

Phase 1 Early Bronze Age (Figs 4 and 5)

Phase 1 cremations were located by trenching in the southwest of the site (Trenches 3 and 5, Fig 4). The only excavated cremation pit was feature F511 which measured 0.5m in diameter, and 0.22m in depth (Plates 1–2). The pit had been backfilled with silty red sand and gravel with frequent rounded stones (5003), some of which appeared to have been deliberately arranged around a Cordoned Urn. This contained the remains of a cremated human juvenile. The urn contained a deposit of dark sandy silt and charcoal (5004). The urn and cremation were removed from site intact and excavated under controlled conditions at Birmingham Archaeology. A further eight possible cremations (F303, F502, F503, F504, F506, F507, F508 and F510), were recorded in plan only, but not excavated in Trench 5. All the unexcavated possible cremation pits were backfilled with charcoal-rich soil, with the exception of feature F502 which also contained small fragments of burnt bone. The unexcavated features are identified as cremations because of the similarity of their fills with feature F511, their proximity, and the lack of evidence to the contrary.

Pit F511 contained ten large fragments of a Cordoned Urn (Woodward below), dating to the later stages of the Early Bronze Age. Other Cordoned Urns are known from funerary contexts within the Peak District, and may have been locally manufactured. The cremated bone derived from an individual within the 'higher' end of the Child category (3–12 years). The cremated bone was burnt on a pyre, with collection of the majority of the burnt bone for burial. The cremated bone yielded an AMS date of 1620–1440 cal BC (3255+/–35BP).

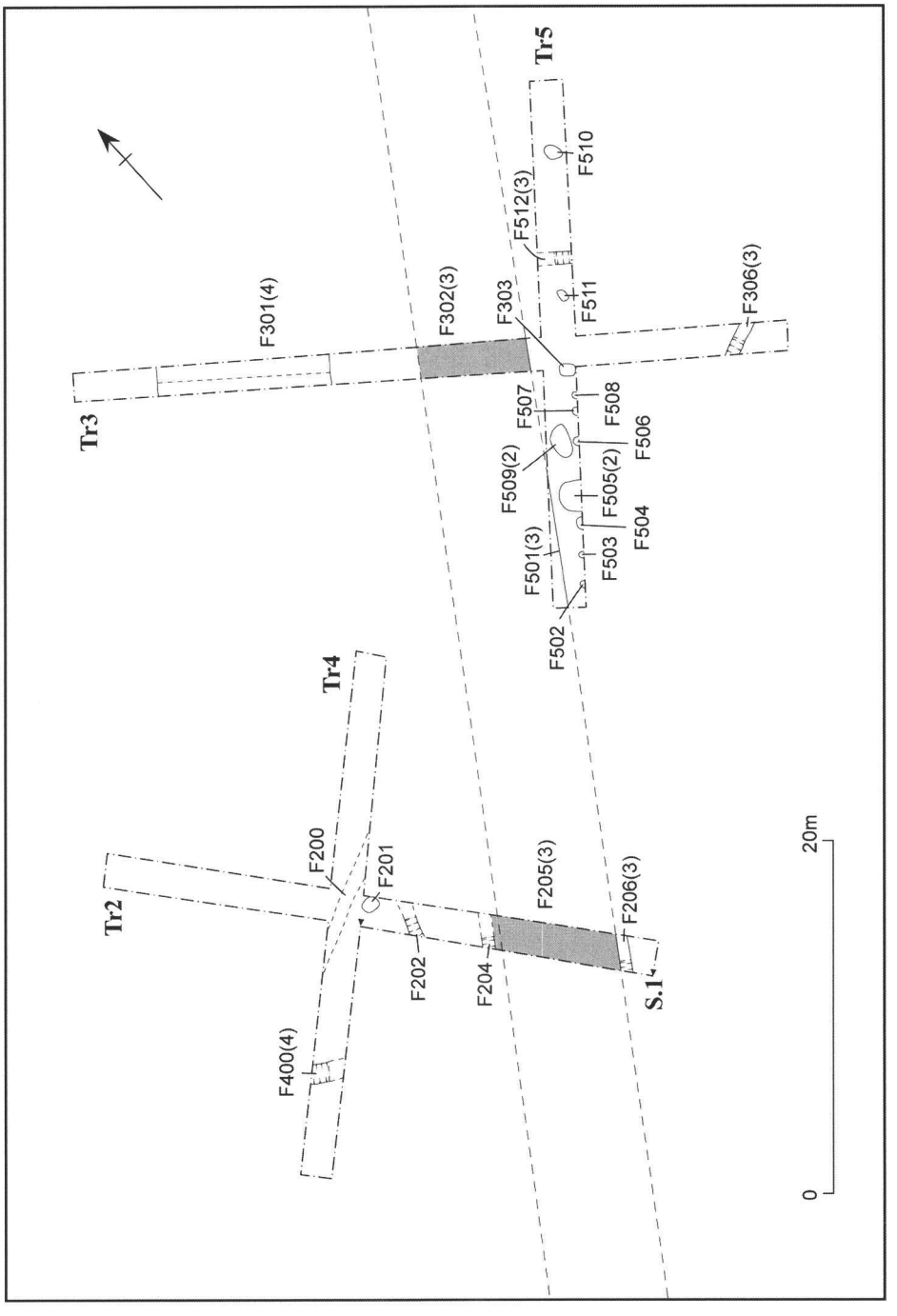

Fig. 4: Trenches 2–5, simplified plan of Phase 1 and Phase 3–4 features (scale 1:400).

Plate 1: Early Bronze Age cremation in feature F511 under excavation.

Plate 2: Cremation pit F511 fully excavated.

Phase 2 Later Iron Age (Figs 4 and 5)

Late Iron Age activity was characterised by a line of pits (Trench 12 and excavation, Fig. 2), forming a northeast-southwest alignment.

A total of four pits were recorded (F602, F603, F604, Fig. 5.S.1; and F605, S.2). All the pits were sub-rectangular in plan, measuring from 1.2m–1.4m in diameter. They

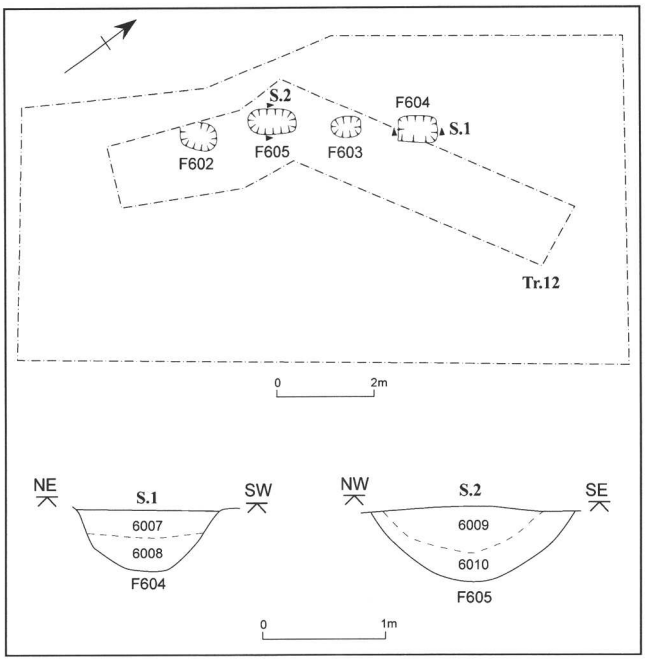

Fig. 5: Trench 2, section (scale 1:40).

were characterised by U-shaped profiles, and measured up to 0.5m deep. Two of the pits (F602 and F603) contained only single fills consisting of the same loose mid-brown clay silt (6005 and 6006) with flint nodules and pebbles throughout. Pits F604 and F605, however, both contained two fills the lower of which was mid-brown clay silt (6008 and 6010) with concentrations of medium sized stones, some of which appeared fire blackened and heat cracked. In the case of both pits, the lower fill was also characterised by the presence of large amounts of charcoal, much of which was in the form of substantial chunks. Only fill (6008) produced Late Iron Age pottery. The upper fills of the pits, however, differed markedly from one another, with pit F604 containing loose mid to dark brown clay silt (6007) with pebbles and flint nodules and pit F605 containing compact, redeposited natural clay (6009).

Although unexcavated, two pits in Trench 5 (F505 and F509, Fig. 4) may also belong to this phase. They too were sub-rectangular in plan, measuring approximately 1.75m long by 1m wide, and both contained deposits of silty redeposited subsoil.

Pits F602 and F604 each contained four sherds of later Iron Age pottery. A further 14 sherds of the same date were recovered from Roman or later contexts. No charred plant remains were recovered from the Phase 2 pits.

Phase 3 Roman (Figs 4 and 6)

Roman activity was represented by a northeast-southwest aligned gravel road surface, with associated drainage gullies. The road was recorded in the southwest of the site only (Trenches 2, 3, 5 and 13).

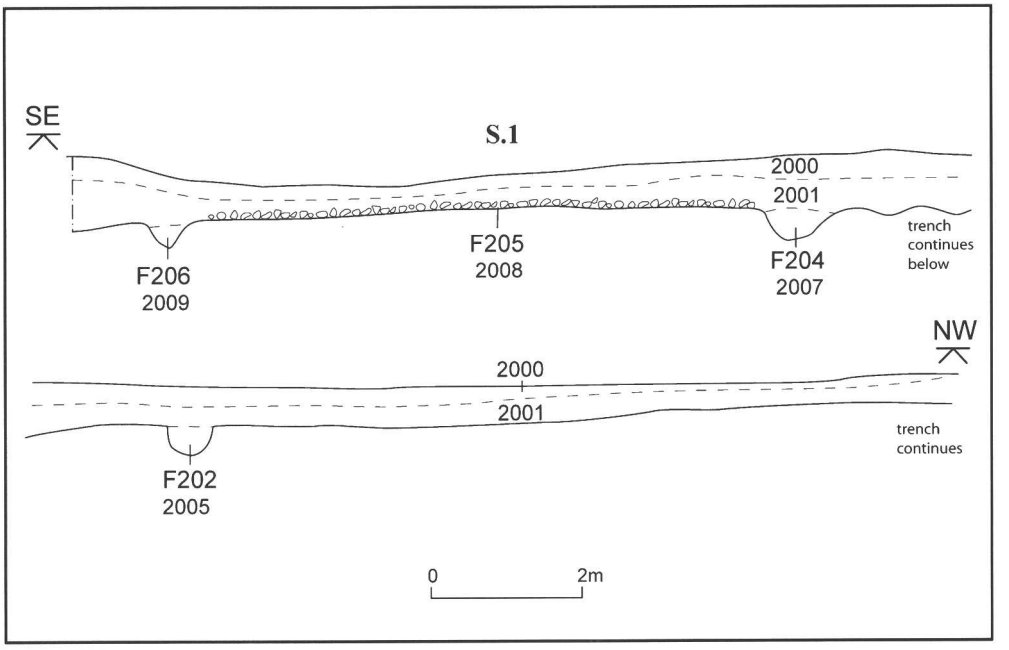

Fig. 6: Plan (scale 1:100) and selected sections (scale 1:40) of Phase 2 features excavated.

The road surface (F205, Fig. 6.S.1; Plate 3, F302, F501) was up to 5.2m wide and 0.10m deep and comprised small and medium sized round pebbles set in a matrix of brown sandy clay which directly overlay the natural subsoil. A number of larger stones were observed on the eastern and western edges of the road, probably forming a kerb. In Trench 2 the road surface was flanked by two ditches (F204 and F206, S.1) which measured up to 0.65m wide and 0.4m deep. These ditches were not recorded as continuing in Trench 3 to the north. Two ditches were recorded to the southeast of the road (Fig. 4). One (F306), which produced a sherd of Roman pottery, was located approximately 12m from the southern edge of the Roman road. The second (F512) was dug at a right angle to the road, but produced no datable finds.

Phase 4 Post-Roman (Fig. 4)

The main post-Roman feature was a northeast-southwest aligned bank (F301) measuring 9.75m in width, with a maximum height of 0.25m. It comprised dark-brown silt-clay (3002). This feature may be interpreted as a plough headland. It was not recorded as continuing in Trench 2 to the south. The remains of a post-medieval field boundary (F400) were recorded in Trench 4.

Other features (Fig. 4)

Two unexcavated gullies (F200, F202), and a possible post-hole (F201) were also recorded in Trench 2.

Plate 3: Roman road F205, view southeast.

Watching brief

No features of archaeological, or possible archaeological interest, were identified during the watching brief maintained during groundworks in the east and north of the former hotel.

FINDS

Prehistoric pottery by Ann Woodward

A total of 142 sherds weighing 1528g were recovered. Most of the fragments (124 sherds) came from a single urn of Bronze Age date, which was found in a pit (F511, 5004) in Trench 5. The urn had collapsed *in situ*; it appears to have been placed in an upright position, but few sherds from the upper body, and no rim sherds, survived. It contained the cremated remains of a human juvenile (Smith below). A small number of sherds were also found in a series of Iron Age pits located in Trench 12, in later contexts or were unstratified. Two sherds, one from the urn and one of Iron Age date were selected for petrographic analysis (Ixer below).

Early Bronze Age urn (Fig. 7.1)

The vessel is represented by ten large fragments of the base and lower wall, weighing 355g, 108 plain wall sherds and six decorated wall sherds, weighing 239g. The total weight of sherds recovered is 1400g. Reconstruction proved extremely difficult but detailed measurement of the diameters of the surviving sherds indicates that the vessel was tall and slender, with two horizontal plain pinched cordons, and incised geometric decoration in a zone between the upper cordon and the rim (Fig. 7.1). The footed base

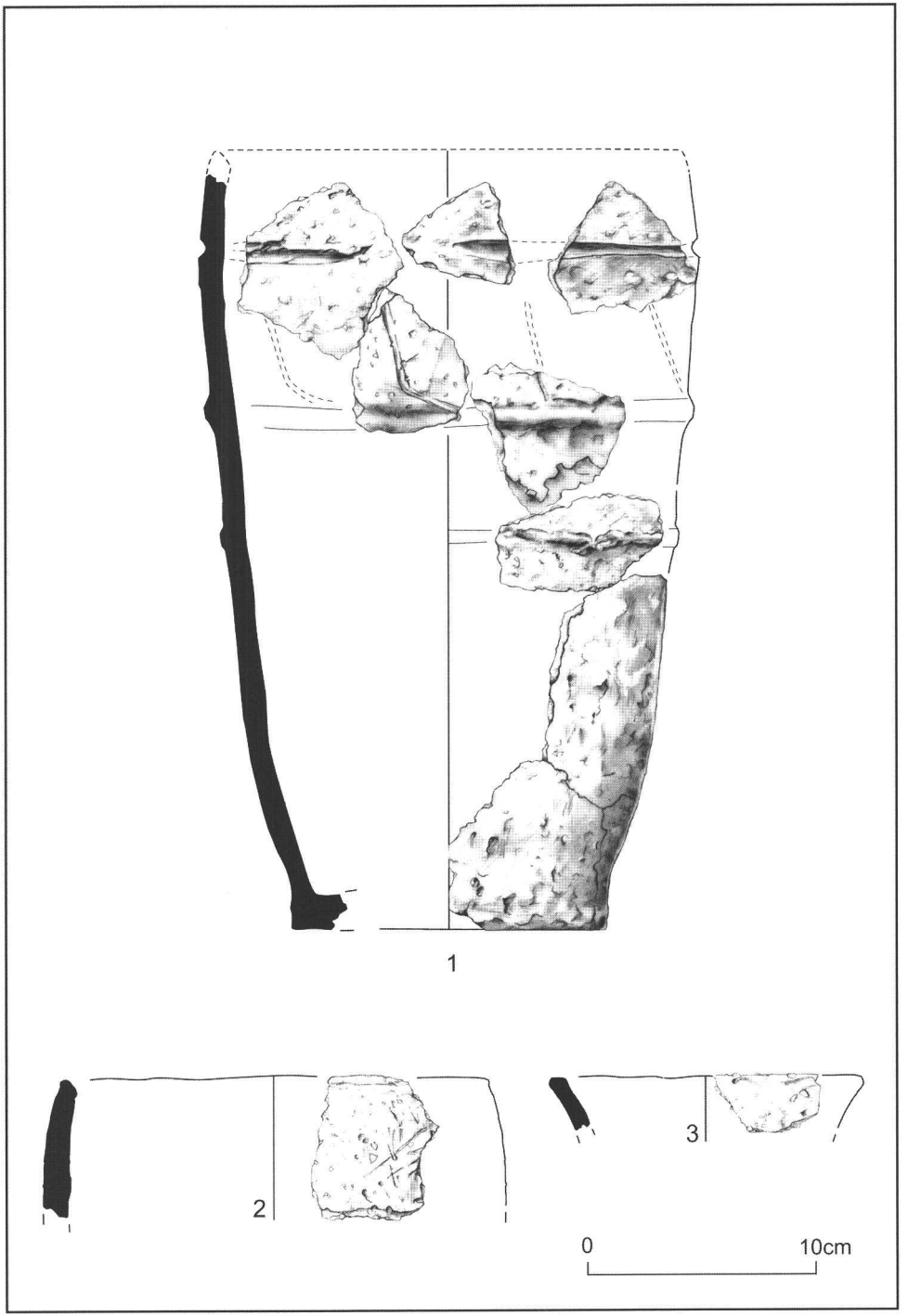

Fig. 7: No. 1 Early Bronze Age vessel from feature F511, nos 2–3, Iron Age vessels.

was thick and raised towards the centre, and the cordons, one wider than the other, were unevenly pinched. The decoration comprised fairly shallow grooves of varying width. There seems to have been a single, discontinous row of horizontal impressions, with very shallow diagonal incisions arranged between the horizontal grooving and the upper cordon. The surfaces of the vessel fabric are reddish brown to dark grey in colour and inclusions of grog had been added deliberately to the clay. The vessel could have been made locally (Ixer below).

The vessel can be identified as a Cordoned Urn, a type which belongs to the later stages of the Early Bronze Age. A tall, slender form with two or more cordons is characteristic of this vessel type (Waddell 1995, figs. 11.1–2), although most Cordoned Urns are decorated with cord impressions rather than with incised designs. The main distribution of Cordoned Urns lies in Ireland and Scotland but there is a distinct group of such vessels from the Peak District and its environs. The closest example to Littleover is the urn from Willington, but this is decorated with zones of cord-impressed panel designs (Manby 1979, fig. 64). An interesting group of Cordoned Urns from Eagleston Flat, Curbar, Derbyshire includes two vessels with incised decoration, one of which resembles the Littleover example in its overall scheme of cordons and decoration (Barnatt 1994, fig. 12, 2). Several Cordoned Urns with zones of diagonal incised lines were also present within a group of funerary vessels from Eye Kettleby, Leicestershire (Marsden and Woodward forthcoming), and other examples with diagonal incised lines are recorded from Beeley Moor Cairn B and Stanton Moor, both Derbyshire (Vine 1982, 351, no. 516 and 350, no. 513, respectively). As at Littleover, the main inclusions in the fabrics of the urns from Eagleston Flat were grog and coarse sand (Beswick 1994, 314), while at Eye Kettleby, grog was sometimes accompanied by inclusions of granodiorite from the Charnwood Forest outcrops.

Cordoned Urns are thought to date mainly from the later stages of the Early Bronze Age. Radiocarbon dates within the 17th to 16th centuries cal BC (at 95% confidence) were obtained for two vessels at Eye Kettleby (Marsden and Woodward forthcoming), but the three dates relating to Cordoned Urns at Eagleston Flat span the whole first half of the second millennium cal BC (Barnatt 1994, Table 1). A fragment of cremated bone from within the Littleover urn yielded an AMS date of 1620–1440 cal BC.

Iron Age (Figs 7.2–3)

A total of 18 sherds (weighing 128g) were found: ten from four different contexts and eight unstratified or from later contexts. These included four sherds (48g) from F604 (6007) in Trench 12; one of these was an internally bevelled rim from a barrel-shaped jar (Fig. 7.2). Two plain wall sherds (32g) came from Phase 3 layer 3004 in Trench 3, two from pit F602 (6005) and two from pit F604 (6008). A flattened and out-turned rim fragment (10g) was unstratified (Fig. 7.3). The sherds were all mid to dark grey in colour, with quartz inclusions. Within the sherd analysed petrographically, some sandstone and quartzite were also shown to be present. The latter derive probably from the local Permo-Triassic sediments and the vessel could have been made locally (Ixer below). The other Iron Age sherds appeared to possess similar fabrics.

The barrel shaped jar (Fig. 7.2) can be matched in two later Iron Age assemblages from sites in the vicinity of Littlover: within Willington Assemblage II (Elsdon 1979, fig. 67, form IV) and at Foxcovert Farm, Aston-on-Trent (Woodward 1999, fig. 4, 7).

This form was current in this region between the late 4th century BC and the 1st century AD. The flaring rim (Fig. 7.3) is a less common form and is more characteristic of the later stages of the Iron Age. It can be paralleled at Enderby, Leicestershire (Elsdon 1992, fig. 39, 78 and 87) where it occurred in Phase 5 contexts, dating from the first half of the 1st century AD. The sandy fabrics can be matched at Foxcovert Farm, where fabrics 2/5 and 3 contained sand and sandstone (Woodward 1999, 180) and at Willington (Elsdon 1979, 162). At Enderby the local sandy clay was used, with the addition of some quartzite, or sometimes inclusions of igneous rock from Charnwood Forest (Elsdon 1992, 40).

Prehistoric pottery, petrography by Rob Ixer

Two polished thin sections were made from two sherds. Each sherd was cut and the colour and texture of the sherd and its cut surface were described using a hand lens and the Geological Society of America (G.S.A.) rock-color chart. Each polished thin section was described using a $\times 20$ hand lens and then under the transmitted light petrological microscope using $\times 6$ and $\times 12$ air lenses. All translucent phases were identified using their optical properties.

F501 (5004), *Bronze Age urn*

This is a grog-tempered pot.

Sherd

The outer surface has fired to a moderate reddish brown (10R 6/6 on the G.S.A. rock-color chart) whereas the inner surface is a dark grey (N3). The cut surface shows a 2.5mm thick, moderate reddish brown (10R 6/6) outer rim above a 5.5mm thick, black (N1) core. The pot is homogeneous with little fabric but carries sparse, 1.5mm diameter, grog clasts.

Thin section

The pot has fired to a 3mm wide, moderate reddish orange (10R 5/6) outer rim above a 6mm thick black (N1) core. There is no strong fabric and the pot appears sparsely tempered. One millimetre, black, and 1–2mm diameter, brown grog and 0.7mm long, white, quartz clasts are present.

Petrographically the pot has a clean clay that carries quartz, rare plagioclase and thin, white mica laths. Larger rock clasts are rare but include fine-grained sandstone; quartz grains in the sandstone have the same grain size as the quartz in the clay.

The pot is tempered with subangular, grog clasts showing a range of firing colours, different plastic to non-plastic ratios and different fabric orientations. One grog-in-grog clast is present. The grog clasts carry quartz as small inclusions and are not very different from the enclosing main clay and many have fired to a similar colour so as with Beaker pottery the grog is not 'exotic' but has similar non-plastics to the main vessel.

The lack of any diagnostic features in the clay and natural, non-plastic components of the pot prevent any meaningful discussion of provenance but there is nothing to suggest that the pot was not locally manufactured.

F604 (6008), *Iron Age sherd*

This is a quartz-tempered pot or is untempered.

Sherd

The cut surface shows the pots to be dark grey to mid grey (N3–N5 on the G.S.A. rock-color chart) with sparse to moderate amounts of temper comprising very light grey (N8) angular to subangular quartz up to 3mm in diameter.

Thin section

The pot has uniformly fired to a brownish black (5YR 2/1). There is no strong fabric and the pot appears sparsely tempered with up to 1.8mm diameter, subrounded to subangular, colourless quartz and 1.5mm diameter, dark, rounded clasts. Brown iron-rich cutans up to 0.2mm thick have infilled thin 'veinlets'.

Petrographically a clean clay carries traces of white mica and single quartz grains. The pot is sparsely tempered with coarse-grained, monocrystalline, strained quartz plus infrequent clasts of medium-grained sandstone, quartzite and rare quartz-potassium feldspar. The size distribution is close to being bimodal.

Rare, rounded, dark, clay-rich areas are interpreted as mudballs rather than grog; they are free of any non-plastics.

The silica-rich clasts are probably from local Permo-Triassic sediments and the pot of local manufacture.

Roman pottery by Annette Hancocks

Feature F306 contained a sherd of Roman pottery. Two further unstratified sherds of pottery dating to the 2nd–4th centuries were also recovered.

Cremated bone (HB01) by Martin Smith

One definite (F511) and eight possible deposits of cremated bone were recorded in Trenches 3 and 5. One of the deposits from Trench 5 (F511) was fully excavated, revealing the respective material (HB01) to have been contained within an urn of Early Bronze Age date. This had been disturbed by ploughing causing some damage to the urn and scattering of its contents. The skeletal material was highly fragmented, with all specimens showing signs of burning. The bone was analysed according to the guidelines given by Brickley and McKinley (2004). Age assessment and sex determination were conducted according to the methods given by Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994) and the data given by Scheuer and Black (2000).

A total of 483.89g of cremated bone was submitted for analysis. Those fragments which were identifiable to element (see Appendix) or skeletal area were sorted and the remaining 'unidentified' material was sieved. The largest maximum fragment dimension was 61.4mm, the mean maximum fragment dimension amongst the identified material was 29mm. The respective weights of material from each sieve fraction and portion of the skeleton are given in Tables 1 and 2; no teeth were present. A fragment of innominate bone weighing 7.65g produced an AMS date of 1620–1440 cal BC at the 95.4% confidence level (SUERC-7623: 3255+/–35BP).

Demographic data

Whilst material from all regions of the skeleton was present no duplication of elements was apparent, there was therefore no evidence that the sample contained bone from more than one individual. Forty four specimens were specifically aged within the child category (3–12 yrs, Table 3). The vast majority of the remaining fragments had thin

Fragment Size	Wt
>9.5mm	42.92g
>4.75mm	69.1g
>2mm	42.56g
<2mm	6.8g
Total	**161.38g**

Table 1: Cremated bone, unidentified material by sieve fraction.

Skeletal area	N. Fragments	Wt
Skull	33	32.6g
Axial skeleton	16	31.72g
Upper limb	33	40.27g
Lower limb	100	150.88
Unidentified long bone	53	64.54g
Hand/ foot bones	8	2.5g
Total	243	322.51g

Table 2: Cremated bone, identified to skeletal area.

Element	No Frags	Comments
Skull	10	V. thin areas of cranial bone (2–3mm thick)
Thoracic Vertebra	2	Vertebral body 21mm approx. AP diameter, ML diameter: <25mm, neural arches fused to centra indicates an age >6yrs.
Vertebra	1	Articular process (unsided) AP diameter 8.7mm
Rib*	3	
Humerus*	2	
Metacarpal	1	Head fragment, AP diameter approx. 10.5mm
Hand Phalanx	2	Shaft fragments only, shaft diameters: 7.2 (ML) and 4.2 AP respectively
Innominate	4	Distance from margin of acetabulum to ischial tuberosity: 37mm (consistent with older child)
Femur *	7	
Tibia*	8	
Unidentified Long Bone*	4	

Key: ML: Mediolateral; AP: Anteroposterior
*Age assessment based upon thin cortices and narrow shaft diameter of these fragments

Table 3: Cremated bone, fragments aged within the Child category (3–12 yrs).

cortices, which were suggestive of sub-adult material. Certainly, none of the material from any other age category was apparent. No specific unfused epiphyses could be identified although the overall size of many fragments was inconsistent with a younger child. The state of fusion observed in two vertebral fragments indicates a child older

than approximately six years of age, whilst the dimensions of the innominate fragments present were also suggestive of an 'older' child, possibly aged between 8 and 12 years.

Oxidation

The predominant colour throughout the sample was neutral white. This shade is 'whiter' than the lightest shade included in the Munsell system, consequently a Munsell code was not assigned to this material. The only other shade noted was Munsell shade: 7.5YR 5/5 (mid grey), this was present on the internal surfaces of three lower limb shaft fragments and the external surface of a further lower limb fragment. Research by Mays (1998) indicates that it is not currently possible to determine the specific maximum temperature reached during burning. However, the colour changes apparent would be consistent with combustion in a well oxygenated environment for a prolonged period at temperatures in excess of 600°C (Shipman *et al.* 1984, 320–1, Brickley and McKinley 2004, 11).

Dehydration

Dehydration fissures (as discussed and illustrated by Mayne Correia 1997, 279; McKinley 2000, 403; and McKinley and Bond 2001, 281) were ubiquitous throughout the sample. Concentric and thumbnail fissures were also common on the larger fragments, with the vast majority of fragmentation apparently having occurred along the lines of these fissures. Almost all fracture margins were identical in colour to the rest of the sample with adherent soil, indicating that the vast majority of fragmentation had occurred prior to excavation. Whilst some degree of shrinkage is highly probable it was not possible to assess its extent. The degree of fissuring and the presence of clearly warped fragments is consistent with the material having been burned while the bone was 'green', that is, with the organic component still present.

Extraneous material

A pebble (3.91g), several small gravel particles (1.1g) and a sherd of pottery (0.53g) were noted. No pyre debris was apparent and there was no other extraneous material. Small areas of light blue/green discolouration were noted on six fragments (three innominate, two lower limb and one unidentified), this colour was different from the shades of blue commonly seen in cremated bone. The author has observed similar discolouration on other cremated material of Bronze Age date, a possible explanation for which is that this may be spot staining from contact with copper or copper alloy objects, possibly at the point of cremation, although this suggestion remains speculative.

Conclusion

HB01 comprised a sample of burned bone consistent with the presence of a single sub-adult individual. This individual was aged at the 'higher' end of Buikstra and Ubelaker's (1994) 'child' category (3–12 yrs). The indications that this material had been burned for a prolonged period at high temperature and that the bone had been 'green' when burned are consistent with the deliberate cremation on a pyre, of a recently deceased corpse. The overall quantity of bone, in addition to the presence of

material from all areas of the skeleton indicate a fairly efficient collection following the child's cremation, where the majority of burnt bone was collected for burial.

DISCUSSION

Despite the small areas investigated, the fieldwork has provided evidence of activity in the Early Bronze Age and later Iron Age, as well as clarifying the alignment of Roman Ryknield Street. Because of a re-design of the development, it has been possible to preserve the Early Bronze Age cremations, and the surviving length of the Roman road *in situ*, and for this reason this part of the site was not further investigated.

The earliest feature was a single datable cremation of Early Bronze Age date (providing an AMS date of 1620–1440 cal BC), set within a Cordoned Urn of later Early Bronze Age type. Other cremation pits were recorded (but not excavated) within the adjoining area. The 'alignment' of the possible cremations, parallel to the line of the Roman road may be more apparent than real. It is more likely that the cremations represented part of a wider burial group. Evidence from Eagleston Flat, Derbyshire (Barnatt 1994, 359) suggests that each individual community is likely to have had its own cremation cemetery (Darvill 1987, 117). The only evidence of contemporary activity at Littleover is the Early Bronze Age polished flint axe hammer found in Scarsdale Avenue (Cherrington 2003), 100m to the southwest of the site. In a short survey of cremation cemeteries Barnatt (1994, 361), noted that the dating evidence for cemeteries containing Cordoned (as well as Collared Urns) is in the first half of the second millennium, which indicates that they were broadly contemporary with barrow construction. Round barrows and ring ditches are the most common monument in the region, dating to the later Neolithic-earlier Bronze Age (Clay 2006, 80). Because of the small area investigated at Littleover it is not possible to establish if the cremations were originally associated with a barrow, although this remains a possibility. Because of the rarity of settlement evidence from the later Neolithic-earlier Bronze Age (Clay 2006, 77), the later Early Bronze Age cremation from Littleover is of particular importantance in reconstructing the early prehistoric settlement pattern.

A cremation burial and pyre/grave goods within a Collared Urn was found at Beeley, in the Derwent Valley, Derbyshire (Barnatt 1998), associated with charcoal dated 2012–1704 cal BC. This pottery vessel contained fragments of charcoal, carbonised plant material, and some pyre and grave goods, for which there was no direct evidence from the Littleover cremation. However, as Smith (above) notes, some discolouration of the Littleover bone could represent staining from contact with copper or copper alloy objects, possible grave-goods, at the point of cremation. A copper alloy knife-dagger was found within the base of the urn at Beeley, but it is not clear if this object is an indicator of status (Barnatt 1998, 30). As at Littleover, it is clear that fairly efficient collection of the bone occurred, with the body being burnt on a pyre.

Iron Age activity was represented by four pits, cut at an average separation of approximately 1.5m (measured centre-to-centre). This alignment was not continued within the area excavated, possibly because of modern disturbance. These features could have formed part of a pit alignment, a typical form of land-division. Two other undated pits (F505, F509) located further to the south could represent part of a further pit alignment, although neither alignment can be proven. In the East Midlands, pit alignments are dated to the 1st milennium BC (Willis 2006, 122). They are interpreted

as markers or boundaries in the landscape, even possibly representing 'ownership' or areas where 'certain rights' were exercised (*ibid.*; eg Swarkestone Lowes, Elliott and Knight 1999, 148). At Littleover, the suggested pit alignment was located at the highest point in the local topography. This interpretation of features F601-F605 is necessarily tentative, since only four examples were excavated. The pits forming an alignment at Swarkestone Lowes, Derbyshire (Elliott and Knight 1999, fig. 9) were arranged at a separation of approximately 1m, and were of similar size and morphology to the Littleover pits.

Within the East Midlands, and elsewhere, there is evidence of pit alignments being located in relation to earlier prehistoric ceremonial monuments (Willis 2006; Taylor 1997, 195–6, 199, 202–3). Such an earlier ceremonial focus could have been provided by the earlier cremations, particularly if they were associated with one or more barrows. A flat cremation cemetery and associated pit alignment were recorded at Swarkestone Lowes (Elliott and Knight 1999, 84).

The Littleover pits contained later Iron Age pottery which could have been made locally. One of the vessels represented comprised a barrel-shaped jar, which may be dated to between the 4th century BC and the 1st century AD. The discovery of pottery within a suggested boundary marker might be relatively unexpected (Knight and Howard 2004, 102). At Whitemoor Haye, Staffordshire (Coates 2002, 15) Middle-Later Iron Age sherds were recovered from a pit, and a pit re-cut. One possibility is that the artifacts deposited within pits had the function of imbuing the boundary with a symbolic value (Jackson 1974), particularly where more unusual finds are recovered.

An alternative interpretation of the pits is that they were associated with a domestic context. The size of the pits and the lack of evidence for post-pipes suggests the pits did not form part of a post-ring round-house (eg Guilbert and Elliott 1994, fig fig. 2), or other structural feature. Equally, the four examples were roughly in alignment, and could not have described part of the circumference of a circular building.

Roman activity was represented by the road surface and adjoining roadside drainage ditches (F204, F206). A further ditch (F306) was recorded at a distance from the road. There was no evidence of the road, or of any associated features in the area surrounding the former hotel. The central and northern parts of the site which could have been favoured for settlement because they were located at the highest point in the local topography were heavily truncated by modern activity, and evidence of the road and any associated features could have been scoured-out. Accordingly, it is not possible to confirm or deny the presence of a roadside settlement within the site.

APPENDIX

Specimen Number	Element	Side	Cracking/ Fissuring	Warping	Max. dimension (mm)	Age	Comments
1	Zygoma	Unsided	Y	?Y	28.6	#C	
2	Zygoma	Unsided	Y	?Y	29.1	#C	
3	Cranium	N/A	Y	N	33.3	Ind.	

4	Cranium	N/A	Y	N	23.2	#C	
5	Cranium	N/A	Y	N	23.8	#C	
6	Cranium	N/A	Y	N	24.1	#C	
7	Cranium	N/A	Y	N	27.3	#C	
8	Cranium	Unsided	Y	N	22.1	#C	
9	Cranium	N/A	Y	N	20	#C	
10	Skull	N/A	N	N	10.4	?#C	
11	Cranium	N/A	Y	N	13.3	#C	Open sutural margin present
12	T. Vertebra	N/A	Y	N	33.8	#C	
13	T. Vertebra	N/A	Y	N	30.9	#C	Body only, processes fused
14	Vertebra	N/A	N	N	29.1	#C	articular process
15	Rib	Unsided	Y	N	27.8	Ind.	
16	Rib	Unsided	Y	N	38.5	?#C	
17	Rib	Unsided	N	N	11.4	#C	Vertical diam. 8.2
18	Humerus	Left	Y	Y	55.1	#C	Distal third of shaft, shaft diam. 14.7 (ML)
19	Metacarpal	Unsided	N	N	12.5	#C	head fragment only
20	Hand phalanx	Unsided	Y	N	23.5	#C	Shaft diam. 7.2 (ML)
21	Hand phalanx	Unsided	N	N	16.8	#C	Shaft diam 4.2 (vertical)
22	Innominate	Unsided	Y	Y	44.7	#C	
23	Innominate	Left	Y	N	53.6	#C	Ischial tuberosity + frag. of acetabulum, consistent in size with older child or adolescent
24	Innominate	Right	Y	N	36.1	Ind.	Ischial tuberosity
25	Innominate	Unisided	Y	Y	44.7	#C	Fragment sent for MMS dating
25	Femur	Unsided	Y	N	24.1	#C	Shaft fragment, diam. 16.5 approx
26	Femur	Unsided	Y	N	22.5	#C	Shaft frag
27	Femur	Unsided	Y	N	24.8	#C	Shaft frag
28	Femur	Unsided	Y	N	42.5	#C	Shaft frag
29	Femur	Unsided	Y	N	32	#C	Shaft frag
30	Femur	Unsided	Y	N	25.1	#C	Shaft frag
31	Femur	Unsided	Y	N	31.6	#C	Shaft frag
32	Tibia	Unsided	Y	N	61.4	#C	Shaft frag
33	Tibia	Unsided	Y	N	45.2	#C	Shaft frag
34	Tibia	Unsided	Y	N	32.1	#C	Shaft frag
35	Tibia	Unsided	Y	N	23.9	#C	Shaft frag
36	Tibia	Unsided	N	N	29.9	#C	Shaft frag
37	Tibia	Unsided	N	N	26.2	#C	Shaft frag
38	Tibia	Unsided	N	N	36.1	#C	Shaft frag
39	Tibia	Unsided	Y	N	24.7	#C	Shaft frag
40	Unid. LB	Unsided	Y	N	18.5	?#C	? Radius/ulna
41	Unid. LB	Unsided	Y	Y	29.2	?#C	? Ulna
42	Unid. LB	Unsided	Y	N	22.8	?#C	? Femur
43	Unid. LB	Unsided	Y	N	26.8	?#C	? Femur

Appendix Table: Skeletal material from context F511 identifiable to skeletal element or age category. Unid. LB: Unidentified long bone fragment; Ind: Age Indeterminate; #C: Child Category (3–12 yrs)

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