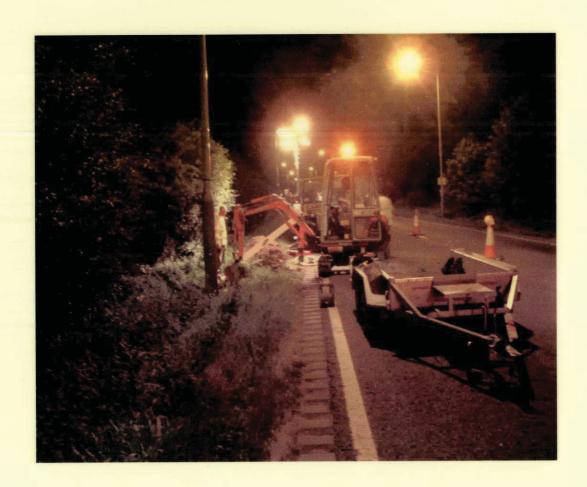
The Fosse Way (A46), near Margidunum, Nottinghamshire

A report on an archaeological watching brief conducted during the erection of traffic signs

2004

Laurence Platt and Howard Jones





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Prepared on behalf of Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick & Co Ltd

2004

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Summary

- Trent & Peak Archaeological Unit was commissioned by Scott Wilson to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of footings for new traffic signs, within the roadside verges either side of the A46 (Fosse Way), between the Margidunum roundabout and the turning for Car Colston (Fig.1).
- The ground-works focused on a section of the A46 whose line is considered to be broadly coincident with that of the Fosse Way Roman Road linking Exeter and Lincoln. The first of the new road-signs was located c.300 metres north-east of the centre of the Roman town of Margidunum, a Scheduled Ancient Monument protected by law.
- Safety and traffic flow considerations prompted the decision to conduct the excavations overnight using temporary lighting.
- In four of the excavated footings disturbance was complete (Areas 07, 08, 10, 11), whilst in three instances excavation did not exceed the depth of modern topsoil/backfill (Areas 04, 12, 13). Despite these limitations, and poor lighting conditions, archaeological monitoring of the ground-works resulted in a number of significant observations.
- Two adjacent areas (01 and 02) on the north-west side of the carriageway produced evidence consistent with a possible road-side ditch or gully. Whilst no independent dating evidence was recovered, the stratigraphic position perhaps favours a medieval – or more probably post-medieval - interpretation.
- The most significant of the features revealed during the watching brief represents the potential survival of an earlier, possibly Roman, surface on the north-east side of the modern carriageway in Areas 03 and 06. Area 03 contained a surface of well set roughly shaped sub-rectangular slabs of the local skerry. In contrast Area 06 revealed a densely packed double layer of skerry. Dating evidence was limited to Area 03, where Roman pottery together with three undiagnostic sherds was recovered from a thin layer of sandy loam directly overlying the stones. The evidence is inconclusive but allows for a possible Roman date for the stone surfacing in Area 03. However, the Roman sherds are abraded, and the possibility of a later (medieval?) dating for the unclassified sherds underlines the need for caution in any interpretation.

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Acknowledgements

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1 Planning and project background

Trent & Peak Archaeological Unit was commissioned by Scott Wilson to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of footings for new road signs on the A46 (Fosse Way) between the *Margidunum* roundabout and the turning for Car Colston (Fig.1). This was carried out overnight from the 31st of August to the 7th of September 2004. The watching brief was necessitated by the close proximity of the ground-works to known sites of archaeological importance (Section 3). The scheme required the monitoring of the excavation of footings to a depth of 1100mm for fifteen new road signs located within the roadside verge either side of the A46. Additional shallow trenching was undertaken between the footings to lay power cables for illumination, although in every instance this penetrated no deeper than 400mm and therefore had no archaeological impact.

Archaeological monitoring was conducted by Laurence Platt and Howard Jones, and the project was managed by Howard Jones.

2. Site topography and geology

The road is positioned on a ridge of mercia mudstone aligned north-east/south-west and lies at c.30m OD with the river Trent to the north and the Vale of Belvoir to the south. The modern carriageway is substantially embanked with a steep incline and deep roadside ditch adjacent to the south-east side, and a shallower incline to the north-west.

3. Archaeological background

The ground-works focused on a section of the A46 whose line is considered to be broadly coincident with that of the Fosse Way, a major Roman road linking the centres of Exeter (Isca) and Lincoln (Lindum). The first of the new road-signs was located c.300 metres north-east of the centre of the Roman town of Margidunum, a Scheduled Ancient Monument protected by law, now occupied by the roundabout at the junction with the A6097. The archaeological potential of the site has long been known, having been amply demonstrated by the excavations of Felix Oswald between 1911 and 1934, and subsequently by Malcolm Todd (1969). These and more recent discoveries have been the subject of detailed consideration (Leary and Baker 2004), and hence only the briefest of summaries is provided here. The archaeological work carried out over the last hundred years has demonstrated occupation of the site during both the Iron Age and Roman periods, with more ephemeral traces of early Anglo-Saxon activity. Although the current works lay out-side the core of the town as defined by the enclosing ramparts, it encroaches on an area of probable extra-mural occupation and activity, in addition to providing an opportunity for the detection of any surviving deposits relating to the Roman road. During the early Anglo-Saxon period there are indications that the road may have been perceived as a significant linear boundary as much as a route way. A number of burials have been noted cutting into the Roman road surface and a possible burial mound apparently blocked the road at Potter Hill, near Collingham (Stukeley 1776; Bateman 1848; 1853). The road also forms part of parish boundaries, and in the section under discussion it forms the boundary between the parishes of East Bridgford and Car Colston.

4. Methodology

Archaeological monitoring was undertaken throughout the period of intrusive ground-works. Fourteen of the fifteen proposed footings were excavated (Area 09 was omitted). A plan and representative section was recorded for eleven of the footings, as in three instances (Areas 04, 12, 13) the proliferation of existing services (electric and fibre optic cables) prevented excavation below the level of modern disturbance. Where connecting cable trenches were required these were also watched but since their depth was less than 400mm and did not penetrate below the topsoil, there were no archaeological implications. The footings for the signs were irregular, broadly subrectangular - sub-square in plan and measuring approximately 1m x 1m or 2m x 1m, and excavated to a depth of c.1100mm. Due to the proximity of the carriageway to the working areas. safety requirements dictated the operation of a temporary road management system. To lessen disruption to traffic flow the work was conducted overnight. The excavation of the footings was carried out by a mini-digger, and where necessary by hand, with the aid of arc lamps. In contrast the archaeological recording was often completed with the assistance of light from the streetlights and by handheld flashlight, clearly compromising colour distinction and photographic recording. The sections and the base of each footing was cleaned manually and was then recorded by drawn plan and section and, where practical, photography. Safety considerations prohibited the reexamination of the excavated footings in daylight hours due to their proximity (less than a metre) to the busy carriageway. Spoil was searched visually and by metal detector, although the latter was compromised by proximity to modern service cables.

Each of the fifteen footings was allocated a two digit area number (01-15; Fig.1). All contexts have been allocated a four digit number (0100-0158), cut or feature numbers are not employed in line with the recording format described in the Unit's Recording Manual, a copy of which is lodged with the County Archaeological Oficer. Small finds are identified by a unique three letter code (e.g. AAA).

Overnight working posed problems for the surveying of OD heights on sections and plans. As a result OD heights shown on sections have been calculated using the OS spotheights on the carriageway and have an estimated accuracy of c.0.1m.

5. Results

Area 01 (Fig.2) Contexts: 0100, 0101, 0102, 0103

The south-east third (kerb-side) of Area 01 had been disturbed by the insertion of modern service pipes (0102). Elsewhere in the trench underlying c. 0.5m of topsoil (0103) were two distinct layers of sandy loam (0101 over 0100), shelving away from the carriageway towards the north-west. Within the base of the trench layer 0101 was traced as a band of grey sand suggestive of the edge of a possible linear road-side ditch or gully. A post-medieval potsherd recovered from the base of the trench might relate to the feature but cannot be regarded as securely stratified.

Finds: x1 Post-medieval potsherd (AAA)

Area 02 (Fig.3) Contexts: 0104, 0105, 0106, 0107, 0108/0109, 0149

Area 02 may show evidence of the continuation of the possible road-side ditch noted within Area 01. The feature (0107) was infilled by a homogenous deposit of mid-brown loamy sand, capped by layers of modern limestone aggregate and ash (0105 and 0106) under a thin turf and topsoil

(0104). Only a partial profile of the ditch survived, the south-east edge having been truncated by the modern pipe trench (0149); this indicated a moderately sloping north-west edge and flat base. A post-medieval date seems probable for the feature, although no stratified finds were recovered. Interpretation of 0108 and 0109 is problematic, comparison with the stratigraphic sequence in neighbouring Area 03 might favour their identification as post-Roman build-up over or adjacent to the Roman carriageway, but this remains speculative. Two pieces of Roman pottery were recovered from the spoilheap.

Finds: x2 RB potsherds (AAB, AAC)

Area 03 (Fig.4) Contexts: 0110, 0111, 0112, 0113, 0114, 0115, 0116, 0155

As in all previous trenches the south-east side of Area 03 had been disturbed by a modern kerb-side pipe-trench (0155). This had cut through a build up of loamy sand (0111 & 0112) of probable post-medieval date; the lower of the two layers contained a securely stratified potsherd of 20th century date (AAK). However, within the base of the trench a thin layer of yellowish brown loamy sand (0113) overlay three flat slabs of skerry, firmly set within a near identical deposit of loamy sand (0115). Hand removal of 0113 led to the recovery of four sherds, including a fragment of Samian. Whilst the latter may be redeposited, a Roman dating for the stone surface is possible and along with a layer of similar stone noted in Area 06 may be consistent with the localised survival of a Roman road surface (Section 6). However, the limited evidence does not permit a conclusive interpretation. As the footing did not require the removal or disturbance of the stone settings it was requested that a protective barrier of plastic sheeting be inserted prior to infilling with concrete to aid preservation *in situ* and assist future identification.

Finds: Samian (AAE), RB sherd (AAD), x3 Undiagnostic sherds (AAJ), Post-medieval glass (AAF),

20th century rim sherd (AAK).

Area 04

Located on the south-east side of the carriageway, due to the presence of existing service pipes, electric cabling and fibre optics, Area 04 did not penetrate below the base of the topsoil, and hence had no archaeological implications.

Area 05 (Fig.5) Contexts: 0127, 0128, 0129, 0151

Badly disturbed by modern service trenches, Area 05 was cut to a limited depth of 600mm. Below the topsoil (0127) was a layer of dark brown sandy loam (0128), whose surface was demarcated by a thin discontinuous line of small fragments of skerry. A speculative comparison can be made between 0128 and the stone layers/surfacings noted in Areas 03 and 06, whilst layer 0129 forming the basal deposit in Area 05, was of similar appearance to 0115 underlying the stone slabs in Area 03. However, interpretation is constrained by the limited area of excavation and dearth of dating evidence.

Finds: -

Area 06 (Fig.6) Contexts: 0121, 0122, 0123, 0124, 0125, 0126, 0150, 0156

Despite the encroachment of modern disturbance both on the south-east and north-west sides (0150, 0156), Area 06 contained evidence of the survival of a stone surfacing. This took the form of a double layer of unshaped flat pieces of skerry (0124), up to 200mm x 1600mm and averaging c.30mm in thickness, densely packed above a deposit of grey-brown loamy sand (0125). The basal layer within Area 06 comprised a deposit of loamy sand distinguished by its sparse gravel inclusions (0126). Whilst a constructional origin might be suspected for 0126, the limited scale of excavation prohibits secure identification. Although contrasting with the more ordered appearance of the stone settings recorded in Area 03, layer 0124 presented a relatively regular surface and may represent the survival of an earlier road surface. No dateable finds were recovered from

either the suggested stone surface 0124, or layers immediately above (0123) or below (0125). A fragment of post-medieval tile was recovered from 0122, the uppermost of the layers of loamy sand overlying the possible surface 0124. This may not necessarily preclude a much earlier date for 0124, given the high levels of disturbance and truncation observed within the roadside verges. Finds: post-medieval tile (AAG)

Areas 07, 08, 10 and 11 (Fig.7, 8, 9, 10) Contexts: 0136, 0137, 0138, 0139, 0140, 0141, 0142, 0143, 0144, 0145, 0146, 0147, 0148, 0153, 0154, 0157, 0158.

Examination of these areas demonstrated conclusively that they had been subjected to total disturbance by recent road/services related activity throughout the depth of the excavated footing, and hence contained no deposits of archaeological value. A thorough record was made in each instance including a representative section and plan (in archive). Finds: Area 11: post-medieval tile/drain (AAI)

Area 09

Not excavated, the required road sign was attached to an existing lighting column.

Area 12

Excavation below 500mm was prohibited by the presence of modern cabling; this did not exceed the depth of modern topsoil/backfill, and hence had no archaeological impact.

Finds: -

Area 13

Excavation of the footing was limited to 400mm due to modern cabling and did not penetrate below topsoil and therefore had no archaeological impact.

Finds: -

Area 14 (Fig.11) Contexts: 0117, 0118, 0119, 0120, 0152

A sequence of three distinct layers of loamy sand (0118, 019 and 0120) were observed to underlie the modern topsoil, cut on the north-west side by a modern service trench (0152). The stratigraphic sequence was noted to have some similarity to that recorded in Area 03, the lowest of the layers (0120) perhaps correlating with the matrix supporting the stone settings (0115). However, no independent dating evidence was recovered from 0120, and as Areas 03 and 14 are over 850m apart and on differing sides of the carriageway, the linkage must remain speculative. Finds: -

Area 15 (Fig.12) Contexts: 0130, 0131, 0132/0135, 0133, 0134,

Below the topsoil and underlying a relatively recent deposit of ash and sand (0131) was a deposit of mid-light brown compacted loamy sand (0132), which continued into the base of the trench. Layer 0132 produced no dateable finds and is of unknown origin, although within the lighting constraints it appeared to have some similarity to the basal layer (0115) supporting the stone surfacing in Area 03. Within the north-west side of Area 15 this stratigraphic sequence had been disturbed by an undated trench (0133), whose depth exceeded that of the sign footing. Only the south-east edge of 0133 was exposed within Area 15, indicating an upper fill of clast supported graded fragments of stone and below that grey sand (0134). The vertical edge, sharp distinction in fills and lateral position would appear consistent with a recent origin as a service trench (an electrical cable lay directly above 0133).

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6. Discussion and Conclusions

Over more recent decades the road-side verges of the A46 have formed a convenient location for the positioning of service trenches, including drainage, electric and fibre optics. In four of the excavated footings this disturbance was complete (Areas 07, 08, 10, 11), whilst in three instances excavation did not penetrate below modern topsoil/backfill due to the presence of existing service cables (Areas 04, 12, 13). Despite these limitations, and the poor lighting conditions, archaeological monitoring of the ground-works resulted in a number of significant observations.

Two adjacent areas (01 and 02) on the north-west side of the carriageway produced evidence consistent with a possible road-side ditch or gully. Whilst an earlier dating cannot be wholly ruled out, its stratigraphic position perhaps favours a medieval, or more probably, post-medieval interpretation; such drainage features are still present on either side of the modern carriageway. Both the medieval and post-medieval status of this stretch of the Fosse Way remain unclear, and in the medieval period in particular there is uncertainty as to the primacy of road and river transport in regional and intra-regional travel (*cf* Langdon 1993; Edwards & Hindle 1993). By the later 18th century the road was turnpiked within Lincolnshire, but there is conflicting evidence for its status in Nottinghamshire (Knight 1991, 8).

The stone layers recorded within Areas 03 and 06 in the north-west verge are the most significant of the features revealed during the watching brief, representing the possible survival of an earlier road surface. The two occurrences differ in their detail. 0114 in the base of Area 03, observed only in plan, presented a surface of well set sub-rectangular slabs of the local skerry. In contrast a section through 0124 in Area 06 revealed a densely packed double layer of stone above a similar deposit of compacted loamy sand. In Area 03 potsherds representing three distinct vessels were recovered from 0113, a thin layer of yellowish brown loamy sand directly overlying the stones; these comprise Samian and Roman greyware, and three (joining) undiagnostic wheel-turned sherds. The evidence is limited but might support the identification of the stone surfacing in Area 03, and perhaps by extension Area 06, as being of Roman date, and possibly relating to the Fosse Way Roman road. However, this interpretation must be qualified by the limitations of the dating evidence; the Roman pottery is abraded and was found together with undiagnostic sherds, for which a later (medieval?) date cannot be ruled out. Within Nottinghamshire the Roman Fosse Way has been claimed to have been exposed on a number of occasions (Knight and Kinsley 1992, 9-11), although in the great majority of instances the upper layers and surfaces of the road have been truncated. A parallel for the stone surfacing can however be noted; this occurred during excavations within the suggested limits of the small town of Crococalana (Brough), which revealed evidence of lias limestone paving (Bishop 1980). There is likely to have been significant localised variation in the detailed composition and surfacing of the road, and comparison is made all the more difficult by variable preservation of the upper layers. At Margidunum an evaluation trench, excavated in 1992 in the field beyond the south-east roadside verge, revealed a gravel surfacing overlying a layer of sand with a V-shaped ditch running along its south-east edge (Knight and Kinsley 1992, 10). If the suggested interpretation of these features as the Fosse Way is correct. the location may query the identification of the stone surfacing in the current ground-works on the north-west side of the modern carriageway, although this could perhaps be accounted for by a disparity in alignment between the Roman road and later A46. Alternatively the stone surfacing in Areas 03 and 06 could relate to roadside activity; a predictive map based on a synthesis of available evidence suggests extra mural settlement may have stretched along both sides of the Fosse in the watching brief area (Leary and Baker 2004, Fig.31). Elliott (2000) also reported the occurrence of skerry in some contexts, although this was redeposited and possibly originated from disturbed building foundations, typical of those exposed by the excavations of Oswald and Todd.

Reference	es

Todd, M.

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and Hindle, B.P.	1991	'The transportation system of medieval England and Wales', <i>J. Hist. Geogr.</i> 17 (2), 123-134.
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Knight D. and		
Kinsley, G.	1992	Archaeology of the Fosse Way: implications of the proposed dualling of the A46 between Newark and Widmerpool (T&PAU).
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Loom, D		
Leary, R. and Baker, S.	2004	Margidunum Roman villa and small town (T&PAU report for the Highways Agency).
Stukeley, W.	1776	Itinerarium Curiosum, 2 nd edition (London: Baker and Leigh)

1969 'The Roman settlement at Margidunum: the excavation of 1966-8', Trans. of the Thoroton Society 73, 6-104.

Appendix 1: Summary context descriptions.

dark grey gritty ash and sand, Area 15.

0131

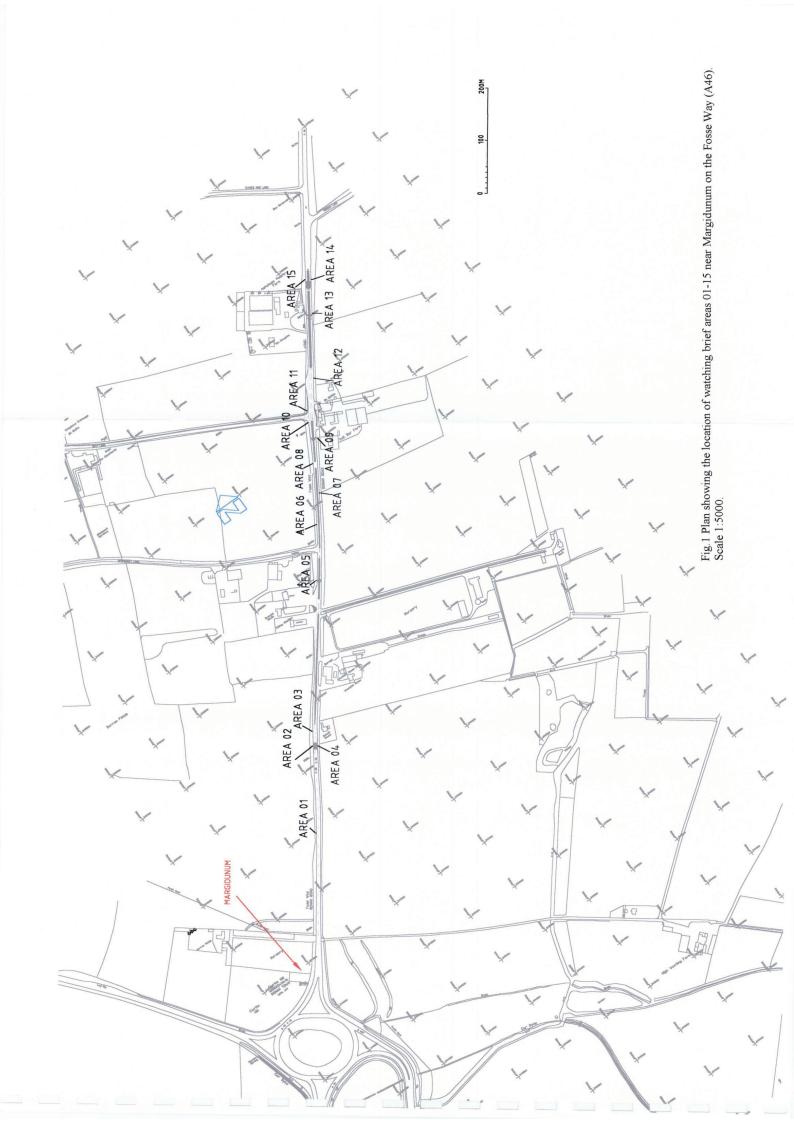
Appendix 1: Summary context descriptions.			
0100	mid yellowish brown sandy loam, no inclusions, Area 01.		
0101	pale grey sand, occasional inclusions of small rounded pebbles, less than 2%, Area 01.		
0102	mixed backfill of modern pipe-trench, Area 01.		
0103	topsoil, mid brown sandy loam, Area 01.		
0104	topsoil, mid brown sandy loam, Area 02.		
0105	graded angular limestone rubble, clast supported, Area 02.		
0106	dark grey ash, Area 02.		
0107	mid brown loosely compacted loamy sand, some root action but no inclusions, Area 02.		
0108	light brown firmly compacted sand, very occasional limestone inclusions less than 1%, Area 02.		
0109	mid brown sand loosely compacted, some root action (less than 5%) but no other inclusions, Area 02.		
0110	topsoil, with limestone fragments frequently distributed throughout, Area 03.		
0111	fine yellow loamy sand, very weak, no inclusions, Area 03.		
0112	dark brown loamy sandy, Area 03.		
0113	yellowish brown compacted loamy sand, Area 03.		
0114	laid skerry slabs, Area 03.		
0115	yellowish brown compacted loamy sand, occasional inclusions of limestone rubble less than 5%, Area 03.		
0116	grey ashy stain in the base of Area 03.		
0117	topsoil, mid brown sandy loam, Area 14.		
0118	fine yellow loamy sand, loose, no inclusions, Area 14.		
0119	dark brown loamy sand, Area 14.		
0120	yellowish brown compacted loamy sand, Area 14.		
0121	topsoil, mid brown sandy loam, occasional limestone inclusions, Area 06.		
0122	mixed dark brown loamy sand with aggregate inclusions decreasing away from the road, Area 06.		
0123	mid grey loamy sand, no inclusions, Area 06.		
0124	densely packed double layer of skerry, Area 06.		
0125	grey brown loamy sand, Area 06.		
0126	grey brown loamy sand with 5% rounded gravel inclusions, Area 06.		
0127	topsoil, mid brown sandy loam, Area 05.		
0128	dark brown sandy loam with limestone inclusions focusing at the boundary with 0127, Area 05.		
0129	very compacted yellowish brown sand, Area 05.		
0130	topsoil with limestone inclusions less than 20%, Area 15.		

0132	light brown weakly compacted loamy sand, no inclusions, Area 15.
0133	angular limestone fragments, clast supported, Area 15.
0134	light grey/brown sand, Area 15.
0135	same as 0132.
0136	topsoil, ill-defined boundary with 0137, Area 10.
0137	grey brown sandy loam, along with 0138 and 0139 appears to represent recent disturbance, Area 10.
0138	lens of pale brown sand, Area 10.
0139	grey brown sandy loam with 25% gravel, sub rounded and rounded, average size 10mm, Area 10.
0140	soft loose mid to dark grey sandy silt loam, Area 10.
0141	topsoil, Area 11.
0142	buff mortar and aggregate, Area 11.
0143	pale grey concrete, Area 11.
0144	mid to dark grey sandy silt loam, Area 11.
0145	topsoil, Area 07.
0146	mixed grey brown sandy loam, occasional brick fragments , disturbed, Area 07.
0147	reddy brown sandy clay, no inclusions, Area 07.
0148	same as 0147.
0149	mixed backfill of modern service trench, Area 02.
0150	mixed backfill of modern service trench, Area 06.
0151	mixed backfill of modern service trench, Area 05.
0152	mixed backfill of modern service trench, Area 14.
0153	mixed layer of dark brown loamy sand, modern backfill, Area 08.
0154	topsoil, Area 08.
0155	mixed backfill of modern service trench, Area 03.
0156	mixed backfill of modern disturbance, Area 06.
0157	cast iron pipe, fractured and obsolete, Area 11.

glazed earthenware pipe, Area 11.

Appendix 2: Summary finds list Identification of Roman pottery by Ruth Leary.

Finds code AAA	Area 01	Context Unstratified	Comments Post-medieval potsherd, trailed slip with fine pale cream well-sorted fabric, possibly C18th/C19th date.
AAB	02	Unstratified	Romano-British potsherd, small, abraded. Fabric: CTA1: orange to buff, often with grey core. Hard with sandy feel and laminar fracture. Abundant, ill-sorted, fairly coarse irregular and platey vesicles and sparse, ill-sorted, medium to fine iron oxides. Present at Derby Racecourse kilns but probably not made there. Used for storage jars and rebated-rim jars. It is not clear if the similar oxidised shell-tempered fabric at native sites in the Trent Valley such as Holme Pierrepont and also at Margidunum is the same fabric or not.
AAC	02	Unstratified	Romano-British potsherd, small, abraded. Fabric: GRB1:greywares. A group of grey fabrics tempered with moderate quantities of medium-sized quartz not otherwise subdivided due to the endless variations in the attributes and impossibility of either consistently identifying subgroups or identifying their sources. Distinctive fabrics are given their own code once recognised. GRB1L as GRB1 but with lead grey colour.
AAD	03	0113	Romano-British, base of jar. Fabric: as AAC.
AAE	03	0113	Samian, rim sherd from a Dragendorff 31 current in the 2nd century.
AAF	03	Unstratified	Post-medieval glass fragment.
AAG	06	0122	Post-medieval tile fragment.
AAI	11	0144	Post-medieval tile/drain fragment
AAJ	03	0113	Undated, three joining body-sherds of an orange sandy well-sorted fabric with exterior sooting. Possibly medieval ?
AAK	03	0112	20 th century, fine thin walled white glazed sherd with remains of gilding on the rim (tea-cup?).



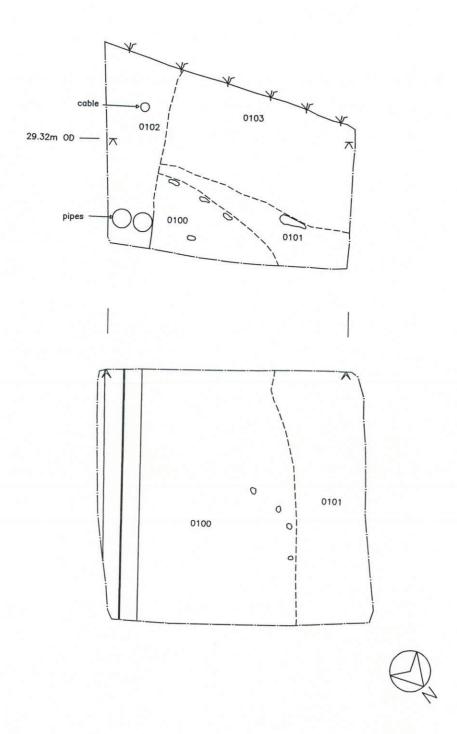


Fig.2 Area 01 plan and north—east facing section. Scale 1:20

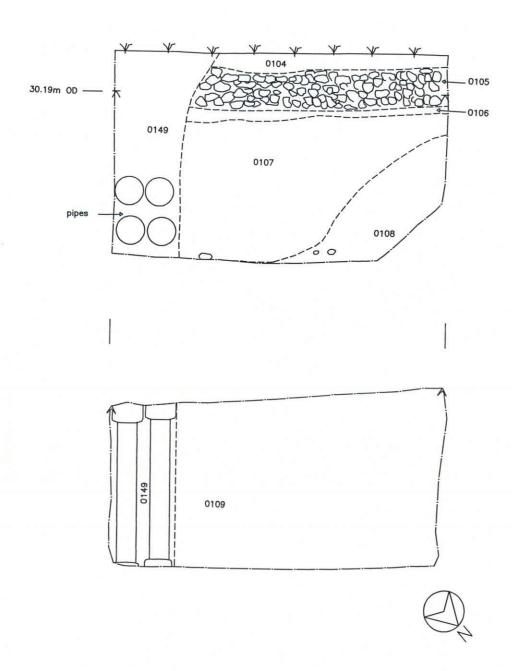


Fig.3 Area 02 plan and north—east facing section. Scale 1:20

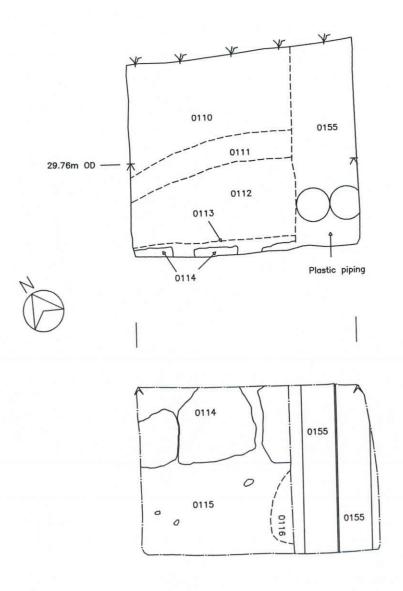


Fig.4 Area 03 plan and south—west facing section. Scale 1:20

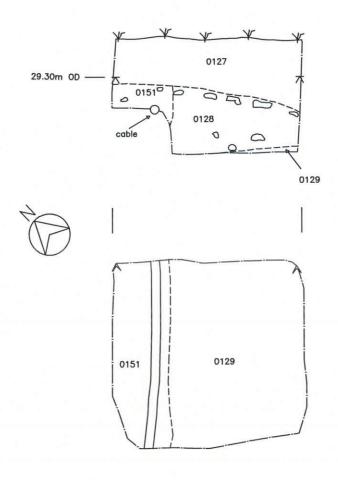


Fig.5 Area 05 plan and south—west facing section. Scale 1:20

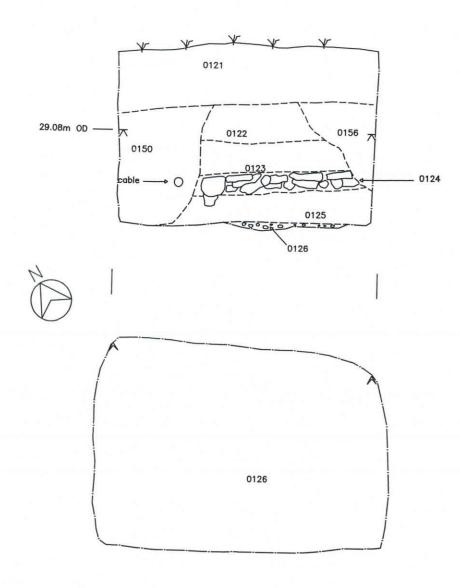


Fig.6 Area 06 plan and south—west facing section. Scale 1:20

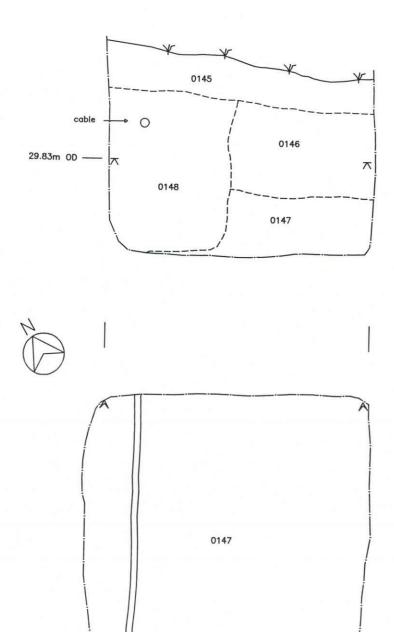
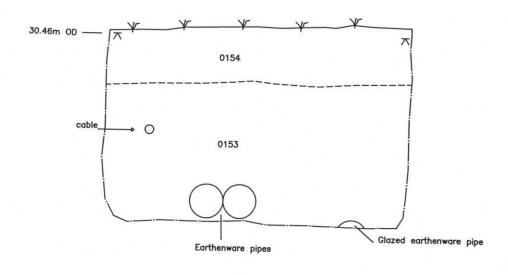


Fig.7 Area 07 plan and south—west facing section. Scale 1:20



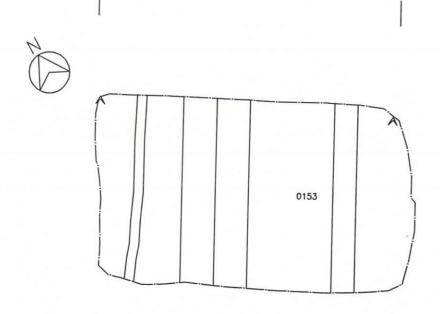
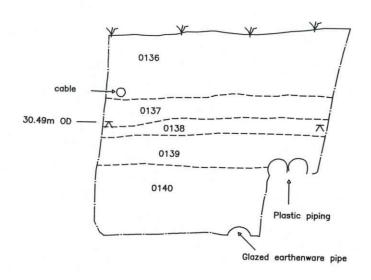


Fig.8 Area 08 plan and south—west facing section. Scale 1:20



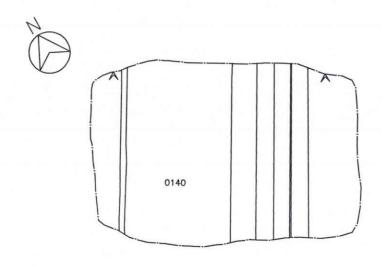


Fig.9 Area 10 plan and south—west facing section. Scale 1:20

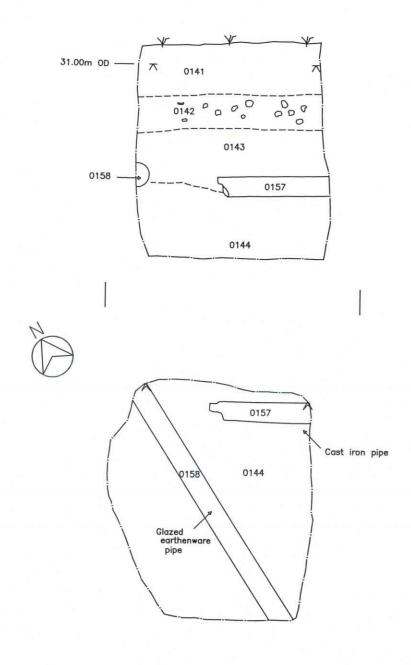


Fig.10 Area 11 plan and south—west facing section. Scale 1:20

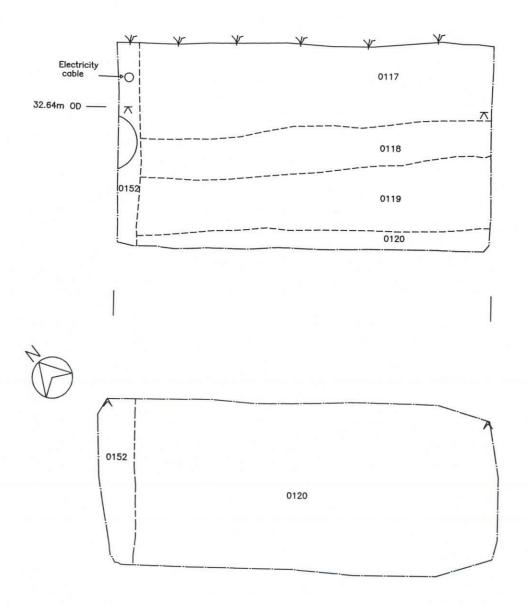


Fig.11 Area 14 plan and south—west facing section. Scale 1:20

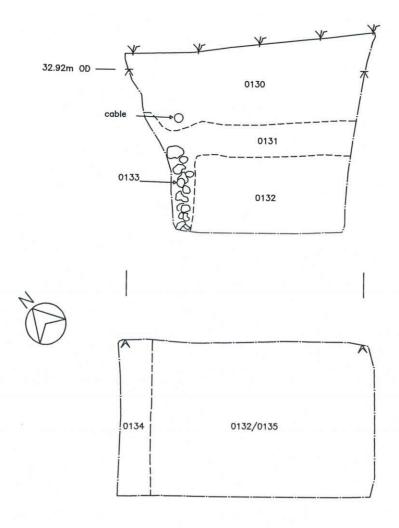


Fig.12 Area 15 plan and south—west facing section. Scale 1:20