

# **Witham** Archaeology

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A Report to Cairns Heritage Homes

August 2013



**96 MILL LANE, EARL SHILTON,  
LEICESTERSHIRE**

**Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief**

*G Trimble*

# 96 MILL LANE, EARL SHILTON LEICESTERSHIRE

Site Code: ESML13  
OASIS ID.:withamar1-156660  
Planning Application No.: 07/01447/FUL  
NGR: SP 476 978

## *Archaeological Trial Trench Evaluation and Watching Brief*

<i>Contents</i>	<i>Page</i>
SUMMARY .....	1
1.0 INTRODUCTION .....	1
2.0 SITE LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY & GEOLOGY (Fig. 1) .....	1
3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND .....	2
4.0 AIMS & OBJECTIVES .....	2
5.0 METHODOLOGY (Fig. 2).....	3
6.0 RESULTS (see Figs. 3-7 & Plates 4-11).....	3
6.1 Trench 1 (Figs. 3-4 & Plates 4-5) .....	3
6.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 5, Plate 6).....	4
6.3 Trench 3 (Fig. 5, Plate 7).....	4
6.4 Trench 4 (Fig. 5, Plate 8).....	4
6.5 Trench 5 (Fig. 5, Plate 9).....	4
6.6 Watching Brief (Figs. 3 & 6, Plates 10 & 11) .....	4
7.0 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION .....	4
8.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	5
9.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	5
10.0 PROJECT/ ARCHIVE DETAILS .....	6
10.1 Project Information.....	6
10.2 Archive Details.....	6
 <i>Colour Plates</i>	
<i>Plate 1 - View of site from southeast corner, facing north.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Plate 2 - View of site from southeast corner, looking north.....</i>	<i>7</i>

<i>Plate 3 - Excavation of Evaluation Trench 1, looking southeast .....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Plate 4 - Trench 1 showing Ditch [01], looking north; 2 x 1m scales .....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Plate 5- Ditch [01] fully excavated, facing south; 2 x 1m scales .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Plate 6 - Evaluation Trench 2, looking north; 2 x 1m scales .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Plate 7 - Evaluation Trench 3, looking west; 2 x 1m scales.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Plate 8 - Evaluation Trench 4, looking north; 2 x 1m scales .....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Plate 9 - Evaluation Trench 5, looking west; 2 x 1m scales.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Plate 10 - Excavation of foundation trenches .....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Plate 11 - Section showing wall of foundation trench; 2 x 2m scales .....</i>	<i>12</i>

### ***Illustrations***

Fig. 1 Site Location Maps

Fig. 2 Trench Location Plan - Scale 1:1000

Fig. 3 Plan showing Ditch [01] - Scale 1:100

Fig. 4 Trench 1 Sections – Scale 1:20

Fig. 5 Trenches 2, 3, 4 & 5 Sections – Scale 1:20

Fig. 6 Section 7: Ditch [01] as seen in House Plot – Scale 1:50

Fig. 7 Ditch [01] with previous discoveries – Scale 1:1250

### **APPENDIX A – CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS**

### **APPENDIX B – FINDS REPORTS** *by Alex Beeby with Dale Trimble*

# **96 MILL LANE, EARL SHILTON LEICESTERSHIRE**

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCH EVALUATION AND WATCHING BRIEF**

### ***SUMMARY***

*An archaeological trial trench evaluation followed by a watching brief was undertaken by Witham Archaeology on the proposed site of a new housing development in grounds currently forming 96 Mill Lane, Earl Shilton, Leicestershire.*

*The development site is situated within an area rich in archaeological remains. Bronze Age barrows were excavated prior to the construction of the Earl Shilton bypass, along with Iron Age and Roman features. To the east of the site is a Middle to Late Iron Age enclosure recorded as part of a programme of trial trenching. An Iron Age/Roman field system located north of Mill lane and south of Thurlaston Lane was also recorded. Geophysical survey work has recorded a number of undated linear anomalies to the southeast of the site, including one which follows a SE-NW alignment extending towards the current development area.*

*Five evaluation trenches, each measuring 10m x 1.80m, were excavated as part of the current project. All of the trenches were located within the footprint areas of the proposed dwellings.*

*A ditch on a SSE to NNW alignment was recorded in the northernmost trench (Trench 1) nearest Mill Lane. Pottery recovered from the fill indicates an Iron Age date.*

*Further archaeological work in the form of a watching brief during the excavation of footings across the northernmost house plot resulted in further recording of the ditch located in Trench 1. The ditch may define part of the western side of a Middle to Late Iron ditched enclosure whose eastern and southern sides were investigated during a trial trench evaluation on land to the north of Mill Lane in 2010.*

### ***1.0 INTRODUCTION***

This report describes the results of an archaeological trial trench evaluation and watching brief undertaken by Witham Archaeology on the proposed site of a new housing development in the grounds of No. 96 Mill Lane, Earl Shilton, Leicestershire. The project - commissioned by Mr Paul Cairns of Cairns Heritage Homes – was carried out in response to a planning condition imposed by Leicestershire County Council. Fieldwork for the evaluation was undertaken during the period 29<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> April 2013 and attendance on site for the watching brief took place on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

The information in this document is presented with the proviso that further data may yet emerge. Witham Archaeology cannot, therefore, be held responsible for any loss, delay or damage, material or otherwise, arising out of this report. The document has been prepared in accordance with the Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

### ***2.0 SITE LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY & GEOLOGY (Fig. 1)***

Earl Shilton lies approximately 15km southwest of Leicester city centre, in the borough of Hinckley and Bosworth.

The site, at NGR SP 476 978, is located on the eastern periphery of Earl Shilton, south of Mill Lane. The site of c. 0.2 ha originally contained a bungalow and various outbuildings (all now demolished), with open ground covered by grass and shrubs to the west, in the area nearest to the adjacent cemetery.

The geology of the area comprises Mercia Mudstone overlain by drift deposits of Diamicton Till (British Geological Survey, 1:50 000, Sheet 155). The site is generally level at around 102m OD.

### **3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Information available in the Leicestershire Historic Environment Record indicates that the site lies at the periphery of the historic core of Earl Shilton.

Two ring ditches representing ploughed out barrows of Early Bronze Age date (HER Ref. MLE 9771) were recorded during evaluations and an excavation carried out between 2003 and 2008, on the route of the Earl Shilton Bypass (Jarvis 2009). The barrows were succeeded during the Iron Age by pit alignment boundary systems and other activity indicative of a change to arable land use. Activity continued into the early Roman period (HER Refs. MLE 17758 and MLE16734).

Part of a rectangular enclosure east of the current site was observed as cropmarks on aerial photographs taken around 2006. The cropmarks were recorded as anomalies by a geophysical survey carried out in 2008 and were subsequently investigated by trial trench evaluation (Morris 2010). The work confirmed the presence of a probable ditched enclosure, dated as Middle to Late Iron Age on the basis of four sherds of associated pottery (HER Ref. MLE17049). The evaluation also revealed ditches and gullies further to the north, in the area north of Mill Lane and south of Thurlaston Lane (HER Ref. MLE17958). The features were interpreted as components of an Iron Age/Roman field system.

A geophysical survey (Walford 2012) revealed a pair of parallel linear anomalies interpreted as a possible trackway, on land to the south of the current site (HER Ref. MLE20593), as well as three linear anomalies in closer proximity to the site (HER Ref. MLE 20592). One of the latter anomalies is situated in the adjacent field, following a SE-NW alignment extending towards the current site.

### **4.0 AIMS & OBJECTIVES**

The principal objectives of the trial trench evaluation were set out in a Witham Archaeology specification dated 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013. They were to:

- *provide information on the presence/absence, nature, date and quality of survival of archaeological deposits and remains which might be contained within the site, at the depth of proposed construction disturbance, and to assess the importance of such remains in terms of their local, regional and national context.*
- *assess the possible scale of development impact on any remains and provide information which might influence development design so that impact on any remains can be avoided or minimised.*
- *provide information that will allow the local planning authority to reconcile development proposals with their policy for preserving archaeological remains and make an informed and reasoned decision on a planning application.*
- *provide site specific archaeological information which (if necessary) would allow for the design and integration of timing and funding of any further archaeological work (or other mitigating strategy) which might be required in advance of or during any subsequent development programme.*
- *produce a project archive for deposition with the appropriate museum and from which the potential for further study and academic research could be assessed.*
- *provide information for accession to the Leicestershire Historic Environment Record (HER).*

The principal aims and objectives of the watching brief, set out in a specification dated 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2013, were to:

- *Allow the preservation by record of any surviving archaeological deposits and artefacts exposed by the development groundwork within the constraints imposed by the contractor's working methods, programme and development design.*
- *Produce a project archive for deposition with the appropriate museum together with a client report.*
- *Provide information for accession to the Leicestershire and Rutland Historic Environment Record.*

## **5.0 METHODOLOGY (Fig. 2)**

The proposed development site was assessed through the excavation of five trenches, each measuring c. 10m long and 1.8m wide. Trench positions targeting the footprint areas of five of the eight proposed houses (see Fig. 2) were agreed with the Historic Environment Team, Leicestershire County Council in advance of fieldwork. On the discovery of a probable Iron Age ditch, Trench 1 (located on the plot closest to Mill Lane) was extended by the excavation of offshoots to the east and west, to assess the potential for further deposits and features associated with the ditch. The further extent of the ditch was recorded during the subsequent watching brief, during excavation of foundations for the northernmost house.

Topsoil and other recent deposits were removed from the evaluation trenches by means of a mechanical excavator fitted with a c. 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket. Any features of potential archaeological significance revealed in the trenches were cleaned by hand and then photographed. They were then investigated by hand excavation to determine character, extent and date.

Plans were produced at scale 1:20 and sections were drawn at scale 1:10. The photographic record, including general views of the area and views of specific features as excavated, was compiled in 35mm monochrome and digital colour. Context descriptions were made on *pro forma* recording sheets. The position of the trenches was located by reference to fixed reference points on the neighbouring buildings and boundaries.

## **6.0 RESULTS (see Figs. 3-7 & Plates 4-11)**

For ease of reference the following discussion is presented on a trench by trench basis.

### **6.1 Trench 1 (Figs. 3-4 & Plates 4-5)**

Trench 1 was located in the northern part of the site close to Mill lane. It measured 10m in length and 1.8m in width and was orientated NNE-to-SSW. Following the identification of a large ditch the trench was extended to the east and west to assess the wider area for related deposits or features. No further features were revealed.

Geological deposits of mixed yellow-brown sand and reddish-pink clay (17) were encountered at around 0.65m below existing ground level. The natural was cut by a ditch [01] following a SSE-to-NNW alignment and measuring 2.40m in width and 0.60m in total depth. The ditch had a broad, shallow profile with a deeper 'gully' 0.45m wide by 0.08m deep running longitudinally along the central part of the base. The fill of the gully (16) was distinct from the main fill of the ditch, comprising reddish brown sand with frequent quantities of small and moderately sized angular and rounded stones. The remainder of the ditch was filled by mid brown sand with light yellow brown mottling (02), containing a moderate quantity of small and medium sized angular and rounded stones. Three sherds of Iron Age pottery were recovered from (02).

Ditch [01] was sealed by a layer of 'subsoil' described as light orangy brown sand (15) 0.22m deep. The overlying topsoil (03) comprised mid to dark greyish brown sand 0.30m deep.

### **6.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 5, Plate 6)**

Trench 2 was located in the southeastern part of the site. It measured 10m in length and 1.8m in width and was orientated NNE-SSW. Geological deposits of reddish-pink clay with patches of yellow brown sand (04) were encountered at around 0.70m below existing ground level. The clay was sealed by a layer of 'subsoil' 0.35m thick and comprising light to mid brown sand (05). The subsoil was in turn sealed by mid greyish brown sand topsoil (06). No archaeological features were identified in the trench.

### **6.3 Trench 3 (Fig. 5, Plate 7)**

Trench 3 was situated in the southern part of the site. It measured 10m in length and 1.8m in width and followed a general east-west alignment. Geological deposits of mixed reddish-pink clay with patches of yellow brown sand (07) were encountered at around 0.55m below existing ground level. The clay was sealed a layer of light to mid brown sand 'subsoil' (08) 0.25m thick. The topsoil (09) comprised mid brown sand and measured 0.35m thick. No features or deposits of archaeological interest were recorded in the trench.

### **6.4 Trench 4 (Fig. 5, Plate 8)**

Trench 4 was positioned in the southwest corner of the development area. It measured 10m in length and 1.8m in width and followed a general north-south alignment. Geological deposits of light yellow brown sand (10) were encountered at around 0.55m below existing ground level. The sand was overlain by 'subsoil' (11) characterised as mid brown sand 0.30m thick. The topsoil consisted of mid to dark grey sand (12). No features or deposits of archaeological interest were recorded in the trench.

### **6.5 Trench 5 (Fig. 5, Plate 9)**

Trench 5 was located in the southern part of the area, near the boundary with other properties fronting onto Mill Lane. It measured 10m in length and 1.8m in width and was orientated east-west. Geological deposits of mixed reddish-pink clay with patches of yellow brown sand (13) were encountered at around 0.60m below existing ground level. A subsoil deposit (14) of mid to dark grey sand 0.35m thick lay immediately above the natural sand. The topsoil (18), which measured 0.30m in depth, comprised dark grey sand. No features or deposits of archaeological interest were recorded in the trench.

### **6.6 Watching Brief (Figs. 3 & 6, Plates 10 & 11)**

The watching brief related to excavations for house footings in the area targeted by Trench 1; foundation trenches were 0.65m wide by 1.2m in maximum depth. The watching brief resulted in further recording of Ditch [01], which was shown extend south of the length revealed in Trench 1 (see Fig. 3). Despite careful inspection of the trench sides and limited digging into the deposits, no further finds were retrieved. No other features of archaeological significance were identified during the course of the watching brief.

## **7.0 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

Previous investigations in the locality of the site have recorded a landscape rich in archaeological remains, demonstrating a continuum of activity spanning the Early Bronze Age to Roman periods. The remains include Early Bronze Age barrows evidence relating to Early Iron Age to Roman field systems.

The broad ditch [01] recorded in Evaluation Trench 1 and during the subsequent watching brief is tentatively dated as Iron Age on the basis of three pottery sherds found in the fill. The ditch probably forms part of the western side of the Middle to Late Iron Age enclosure (HER Ref. MLE 17049) recorded during the evaluation (Morris 2010) carried out on land to the east of the site (Fig. 7; Morris 2010). The interpretation is supported by similarities in dating evidence, ditch size and morphology, as well as the respective orientations of the ditches. If correct, it suggests an enclosure measuring 62m southwest to northeast by at least 32m southeast to northwest. Much of the central and northern parts of the proposed enclosure are obscured by Mill Lane and housing which lines the north side of the road.

An alternative but less feasible interpretation is that Ditch [01] represents a northward continuation of the southeast to northwest orientated linear anomaly recorded during the geophysical survey on land to the south and southeast (Fig. 7; Walford 2012). Although the ditch and the anomalies follow very similar alignments they are slightly offset from one another and might not therefore represent a

continuous feature. However, the common alignment does suggest that they both form part of the wider pattern of Iron Age ditched enclosure and linear field boundary systems.

## **8.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author of this report would like to thank Mr Paul Cairns of Cairn Heritage Homes and Richard Clark and Teresa Hawtin of the Historic Environment Team, Leicester County Council for their assistance in ensuring a successful outcome to the project.

## **9.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Jarvis, W. 2009 *Archaeological Fieldwork in advance of the Earl Shilton Bypass, Leicestershire*, ULAS Report No 2008-110

Morris, M. 2010 *An Archaeological Evaluation of land between Thurlaston Lane and Mill Lane, Earl Shilton, Leicestershire*, ULAS Report No. 2010-079

P.C.R.G., 2010, (3rd edition), *The Study of Prehistoric Pottery: General Policies and Guidelines for Analysis and Publication*, Prehistoric Ceramic Research Group Occasional Papers 1 and 2.

Walford, J. 2012 *Archaeological geophysical survey of land to the south-east of Earl Shilton*, Northampton Archaeology Unit Unpublished Report



## **10.0 PROJECT/ ARCHIVE DETAILS**

### **10.1 Project Information**

PLANNING APPLICATION No.: 07/01447/FUL

FIELD OFFICER: G Trimble

NGR: SP 476 978

CIVIL PARISH: Earl Shilton

HER EVENT NO.: ESML13

DATE OF INTERVENTION: 29<sup>th</sup> April – 28<sup>h</sup> May 2013

TYPE OF INTERVENTION: Trial Trench Evaluation and Watching Brief

UNDERTAKEN FOR: Cairns Heritage Homes

### **10.2 Archive Details**

PRESENT LOCATION: Witham Archaeology, Unit 6, Sleaford Station Business Centre, Station Road, Sleaford, NG34 7RG

FINAL LOCATION: Leicestershire Museums Service

MUSEUM ACCESSION No.: X.A55.2013

ACCESSION DATE: October 2013

#### ***The Site Archive Comprises:***

Context Records	19
Plans at Scale 1:50	2
Section Drawings at Scale 1:20	7
Colour Digital Photographs	10
Monochrome Photographs	4
Set of Site Notes	1

*It is intended that transfer of the archive in accordance with current published requirements will be undertaken following completion of this project.*

## ***COLOUR PLATES***



*Plate 1 – General view of the site from the southeast corner, facing north*



*Plate 2 – General view of the site from the southeast corner, looking northwest*



*Plate 3 - Excavation of Evaluation Trench 1, looking southeast*



*Plate 4 – General view of Trench 1 including Ditch [01], looking north; 2x 1m scales*



*Plate 5- Ditch [01] fully excavated, facing south; 2 x 1m scales*



*Plate 6 - Evaluation Trench 2, looking north; 2 x 1m scales*



*Plate 7 - Evaluation Trench 3, looking west; 2 x 1m scales*



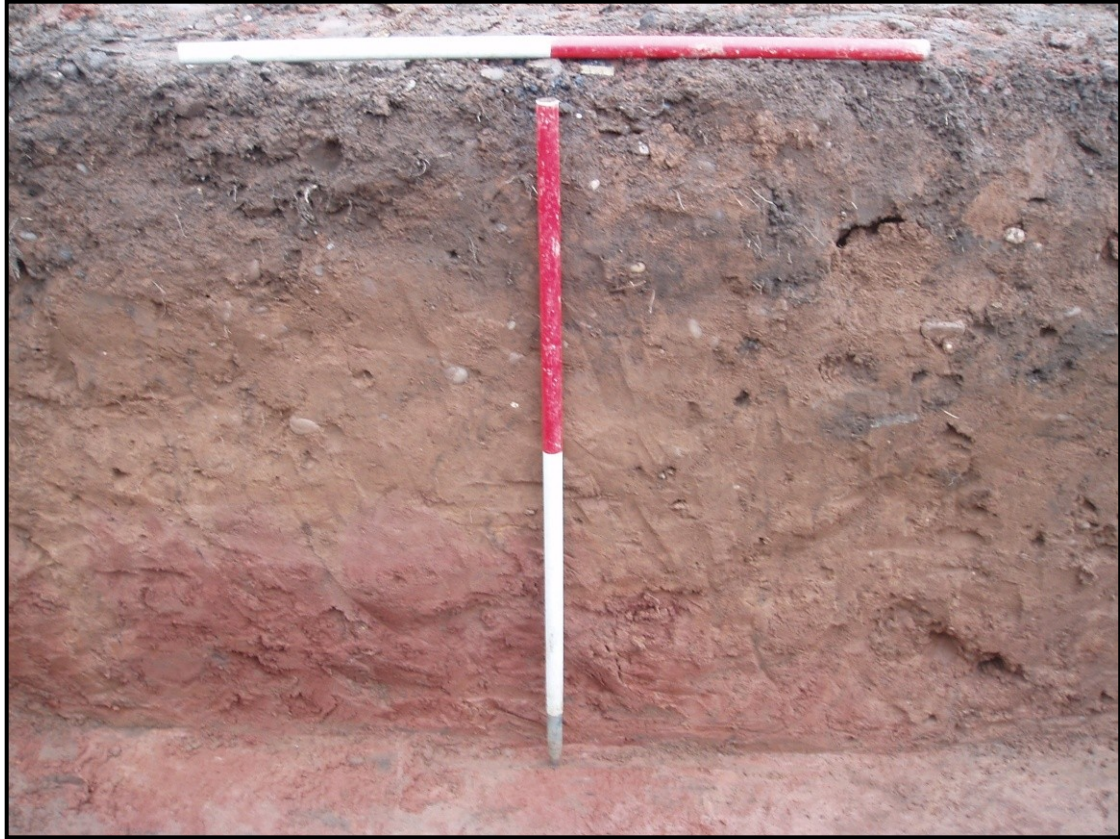
*Plate 8 - Evaluation Trench 4, looking north; 2 x 1m scales*



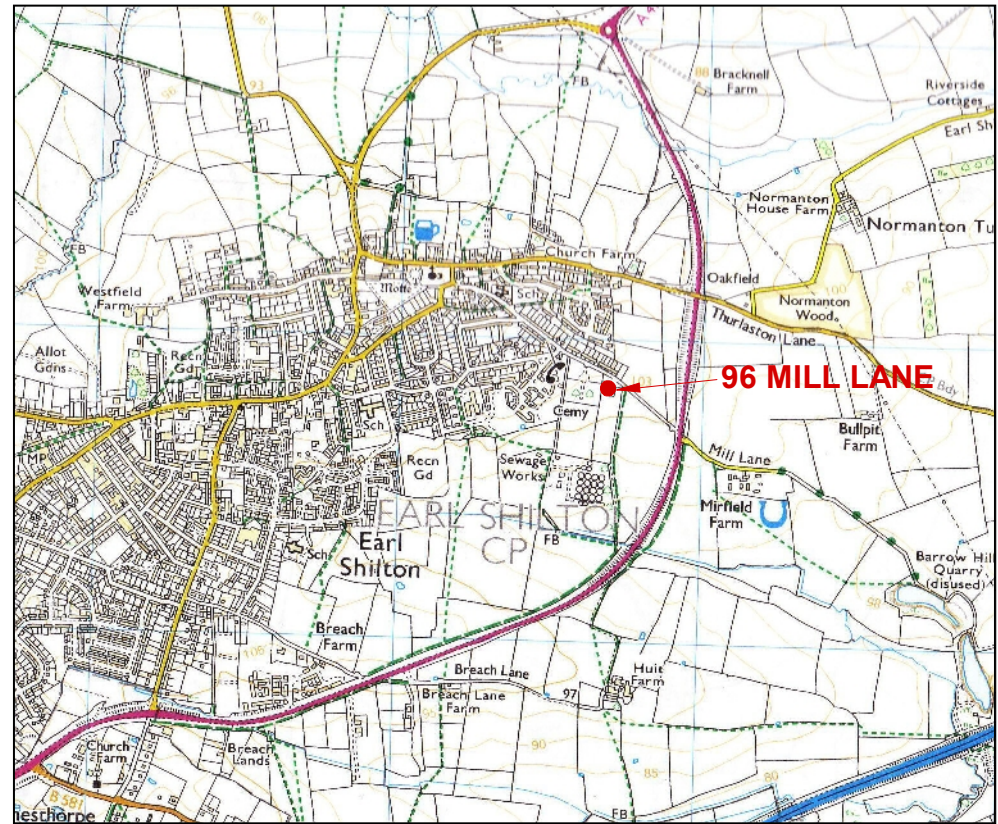
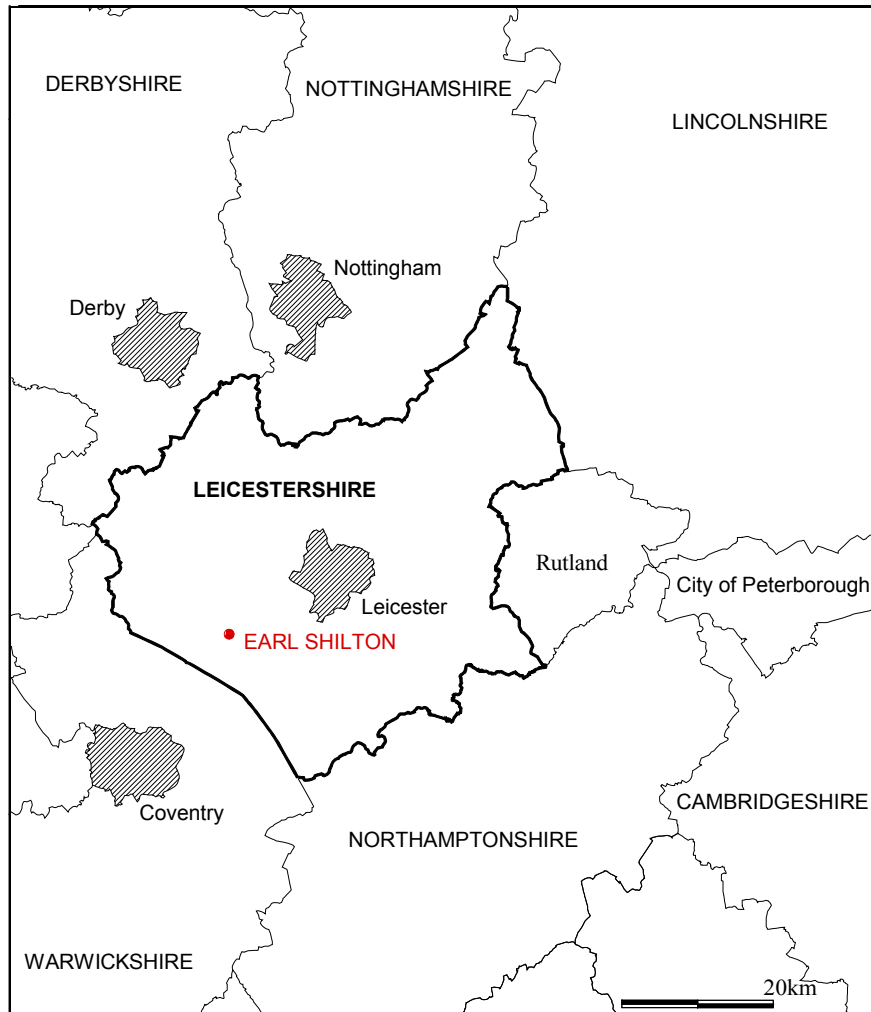
*Plate 9 - Evaluation Trench 5, looking west; 2 x 1m scales*



*Plate 10 - Excavation of foundation trenches*

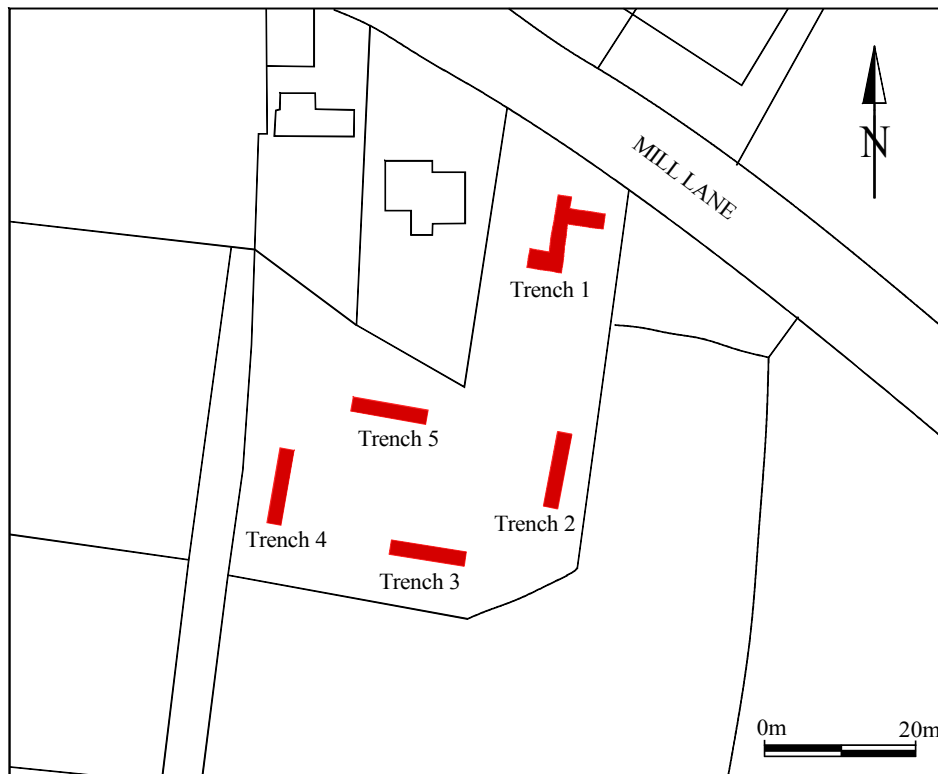


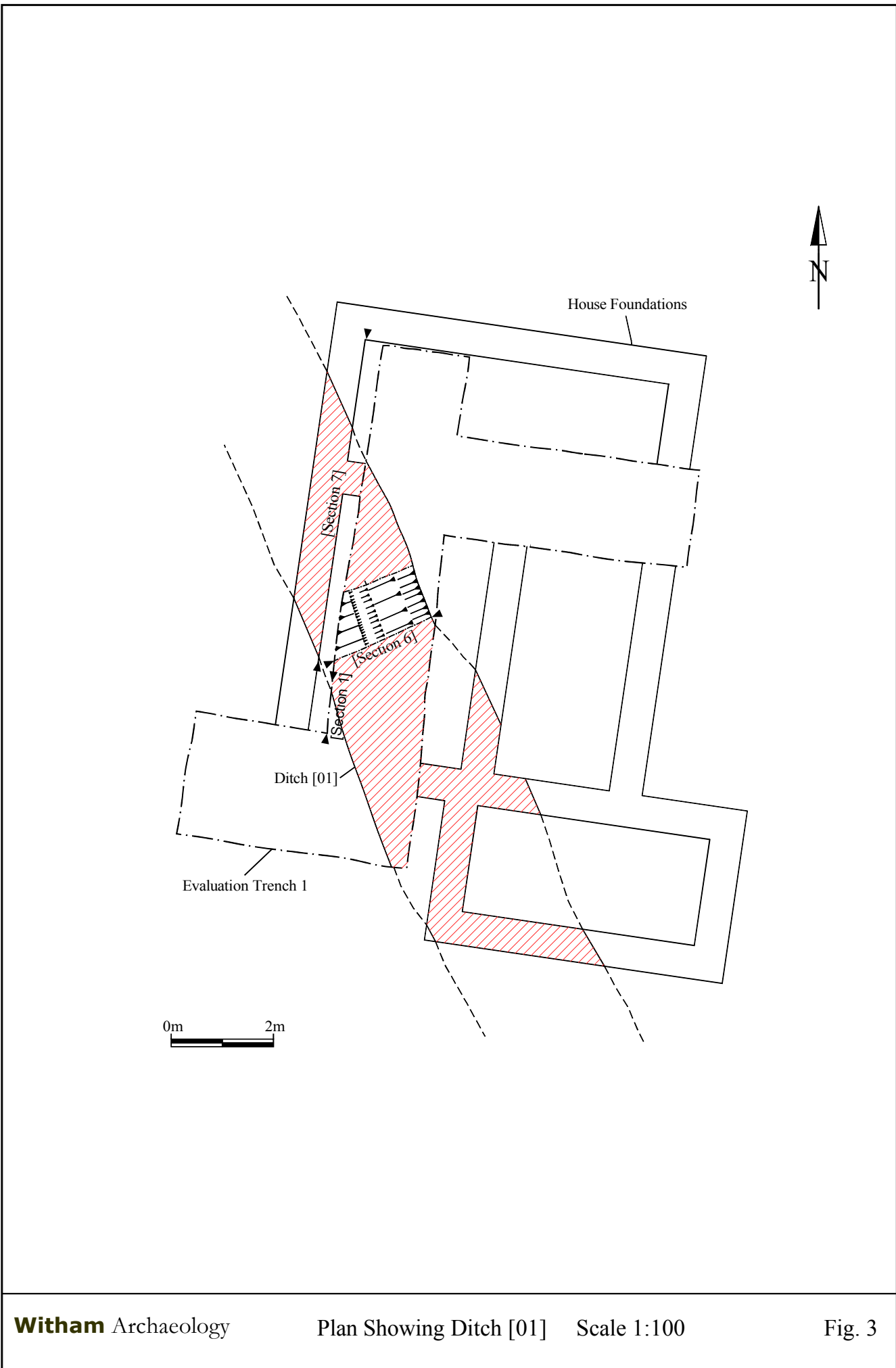
*Plate 11 - Section showing wall of foundation trench; 2 x 1m scales*

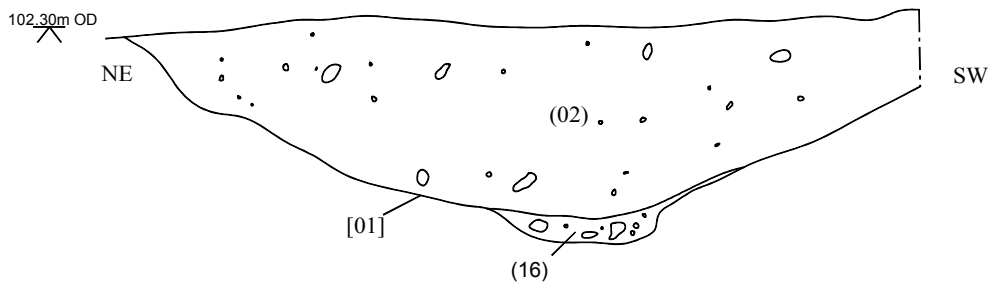


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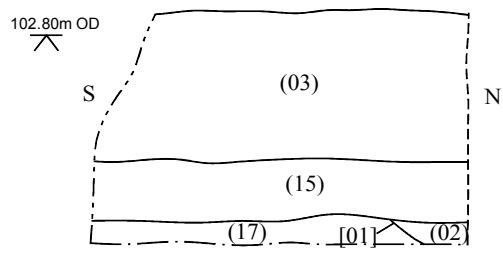






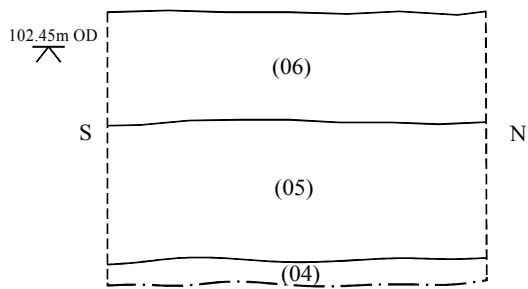


Section 6

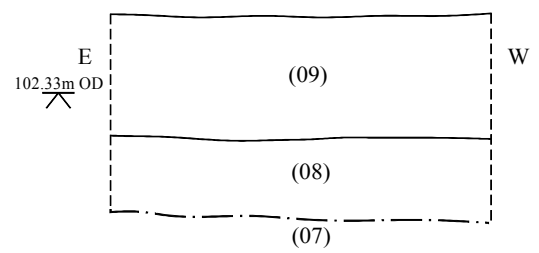


Section 1

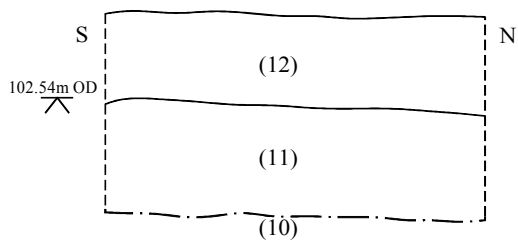




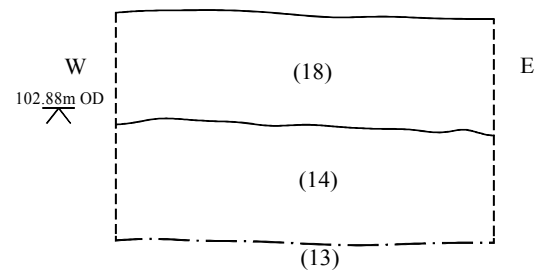
Trench 2 - Section 2



Trench 3 - Section 3

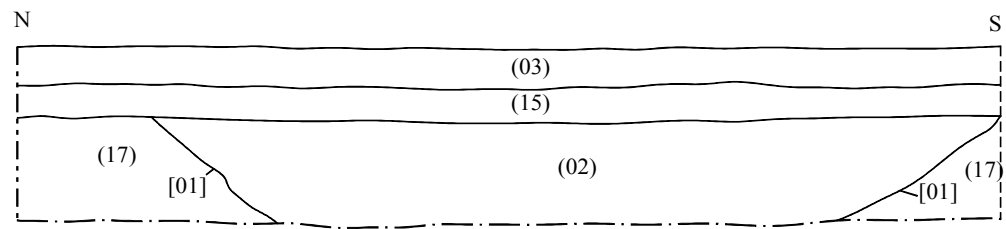


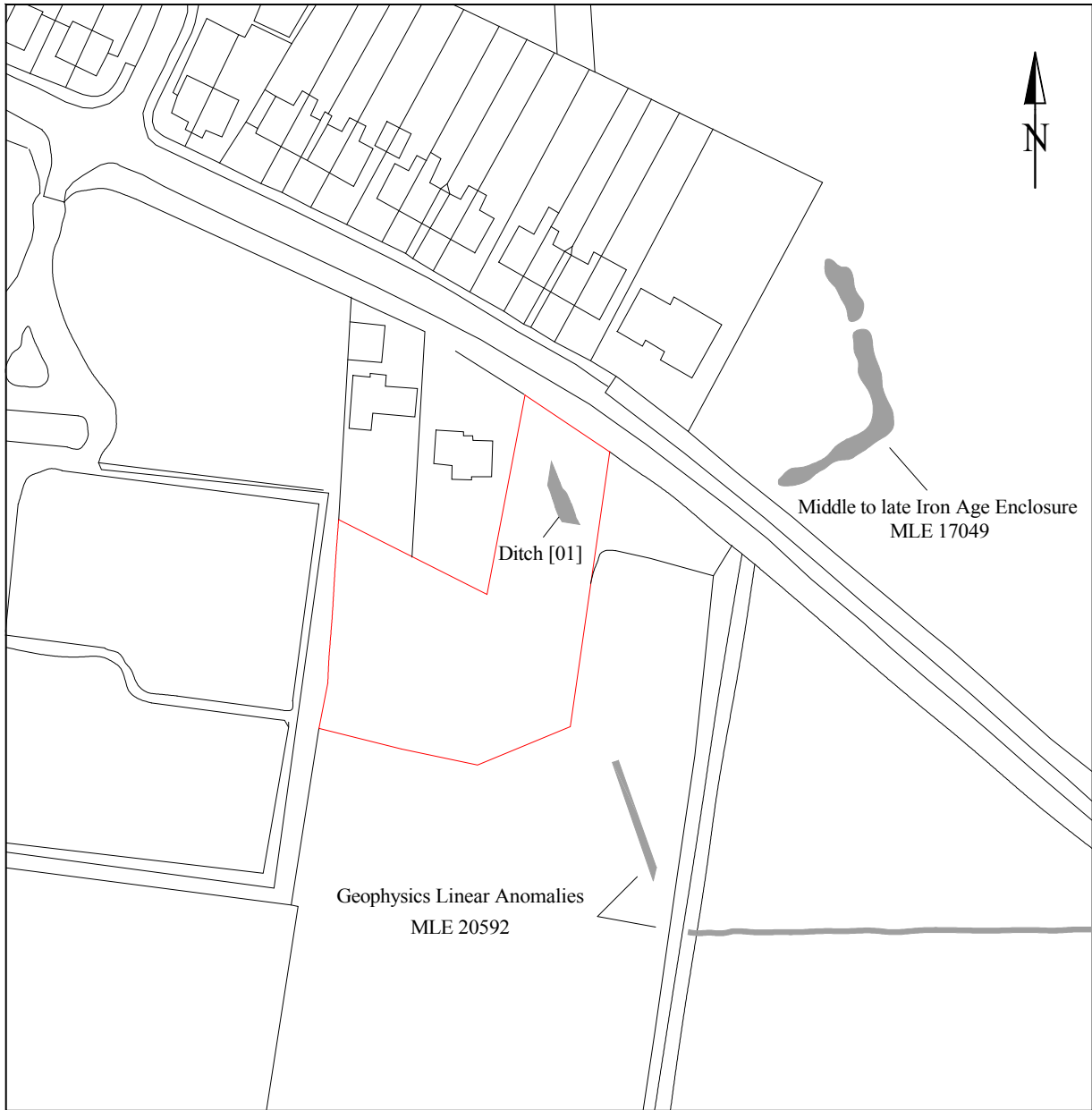
Trench 4 - Section 4



Trench 5 - Section 5







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## APPENDIX A – CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

<i>Context</i>	<i>Trench</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Description</i>
01	T1	Ditch cut	Broad, shallow profile. 2.40m in width, 0.60m depth
02	T1	Upper fill of ditch [01]	Mid brown sand with light yellow brown mottling. 2.40m in depth, 0.52m in width
03	T1	Topsoil	Mid to dark greyish brown sand. 0.30m in depth
04	T2	Natural deposit	Reddish-pink clay with patches of yellow brown sand
05	T2	Subsoil	Light to mid brown sand. 0.35m in depth
06	T2	Topsoil	Mid to dark greyish brown sand. 0.30m in depth
07	T3	Natural deposit	Mixed reddish-pink clay with patches of yellow brown sand
08	T3	Subsoil	Light to mid brown sand. 0.25m depth
09	T3	Topsoil	Mid brown sand. 0.35m depth
10	T4	Natural deposit	Light yellow brown sand
11	T4	Subsoil	Mid brown sand. 0.30m depth
12	T4	Topsoil	Mid to dark grey sand. 0.25m depth
13	T5	Natural deposit	Mixed reddish-pink clay with patches of yellow brown sand
14	T5	Subsoil	Mid to dark grey sand. 0.35m depth
15	T1	Subsoil	Light orange brown sand. 0.22m in depth
16	T1	Primary fill of Ditch [01]	Reddish brown sand with frequent quantities of small and moderately sized angular and rounded stones. 0.45m width, 0.08m depth
17	T1	Natural deposit	Mixed yellow-brown sand and reddish-pink clay
18	T5	Topsoil	Dark grey sand. 0.30m depth

# APPENDIX B – POTTERY REPORT

By Alex Beeby with Dale Trimble

## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

All the material was recorded at archive level in accordance with the guidelines laid out by the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group (2010). A total of three sherds from two vessels, weighing 27 grams was recovered from the site.

The pottery was examined visually and using x20 magnification before being weighed. This information was then added to an Access database. An archive list is shown in Table 1 below.

## PROVENANCE

All three sherds were recovered from fill context (02) within linear ditch [01].

## RANGE

The fragments are very abraded and undiagnostic of form. Because of this precise dating is difficult, although all three pieces are likely to be Pre-Roman.

Two sherds in a grog and shell tempered fabric (GRSH/SHSM) are from a handmade vessel with a relatively highly fired and silty fabric and oxidised surfaces. The third piece recorded is in a hard, silty, reduced fabric with iron oxide grit inclusions.

Although a Bronze Age date cannot be ruled out given the poor state of the pieces, the fabrics recorded here are not typical of vessels of that period. An Iron Age date is most likely.

Table 1, The Prehistoric pottery

Cxt	Cname	Leics Cname	Full Name	Fabric	Class/Form	Con	Comments	Date	Part	NoS	NoV	W(g)
02	GRSM/SHSM	IA?	Grog and Shell Tempered with Sparse Medium Sized Inclusions	OX/R/INCOX	V	ABR; LEACH	Soft silty fabric; common fine flakes of silver mica	IA?	BDY S	2	1	15
02	IOSC	IA?	Iron Oxide Tempered with Sparse Coarse Inclusions	R	V	ABR	Softy silty fabric; rare fine silver mica	IA?	BDY	1	1	12
<b>Total</b>										<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>27</b>

## POTENTIAL

The pottery is stable and should pose no problems for long term storage. The material should be retained as part of the site archive and would warrant re-examination in the light of any subsequent work on the site. Should more closely diagnostic material be recovered here it may be possible to suggest a more refined date.

## SPOT/LIKELY DATE

(02) – Iron Age

## ABBREVIATIONS

ABR	Abraded
BDY	Body Fragment
CON	Condition
CXT	Context
IA	Iron Age
NoS	Number of sherds
NoV	Number of vessels
R	Reduced



V  
W (g)

Vessel  
Weight (grams)

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