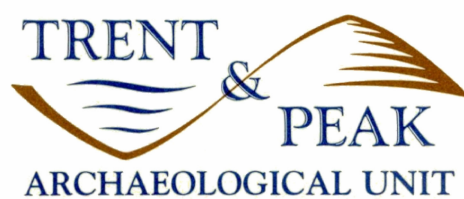


**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING-BRIEF AT
MANSFIELD ROAD / DRAGE STREET
POST-OFFICE, DERBY**



**An Archaeological Watching-Brief at
Mansfield Road / Drage Street
Post-Office, Derby**

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Summary

Background

This watching-brief was commissioned by A Solutions of Derby in connection with the construction of an extension and garage at the Post Office, 164 Mansfield Road, Derby.

Location and description

The site lies in the northern outskirts of Derby, in the Little Chester area.

Archaeological background

The site lies 200m to the south of the Roman fort at Little Chester, with a series of roads and adjacent settlement areas to the south-east and an industrial area and cemetery beyond, at the Racecourse Park.

Conclusions

As a whole, the visible evidence from the excavated foundation trenches of the development suggests that before the 19th century the site was occupied by alluvial silts including a possible pond, with no archaeological features present, and that the topsoil had been subsequently shaved off and then the site level raised by the dumping of industrial waste, during the establishment of the current site layout in the late 19th century.

1 Project background, site location and brief description of the proposed scheme

This watching-brief as was commissioned by A Solutions of Derby and carried out by Trent & Peak Archaeological Unit in connection with the construction of an extension and garage at the Post Office, 164 Mansfield Road, Derby. No brief was issued by the Local Planning Authority, but the Written Scheme of Investigation was submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority's Archaeological Advisor, Andy Myers.

The rear of the development site due to receive the new buildings occupies an area of about 10x4m and is located at NGR 435644 337330 at an altitude of 46.63m O.D.

The site lies on alluvium of the river Derwent (GSGB 1972) and the surrounding ground is generally flat. The Chester Green Recreation Ground appears somewhat sunken in relation to the streets to the east, which suggests that the streets have been deliberately built up, presumably in order to reduce the risk of flooding.

The standing building at the Mansfield Road frontage appears to be late 19th or early 20th century in date, in keeping with the surrounding properties. The current scheme involves construction of an extension to the rear, and a free-standing garage at the back of the plot.

2 Archaeological background

The site lies in the northern outskirts of Derby, in the Little Chester Area. 200m to the north lies the Roman fort of Little Chester, with a road network and adjacent settlement areas to east and an industrial area and cemetery beyond at the Racecourse Park.

3 Method

An archaeological watching-brief was carried out on excavations for the footings for the extension by G. Kinsley on December 1st 2006.

A small part of the extension had already been built (Fig. 2), but to judge from the visible features on site, this seems likely to have been occupied by disturbance from services.

The excavation of all four wall-footings of the main extension was watched continuously. The excavation was carried out by JCB with a 4ft toothed bucket. Excavation was carried out down to between 1m and 2m below the surface. Two sample sections (01, 02) were drawn as sketches, and photographs were taken, together with selected other views. 02 was too deep to approach safely and was recorded from the top (Fig. 2).

As no archaeological features were found during these excavations, it was agreed with Andy Myers, Development Control Archaeologist for Derby City Council, that no further watching-brief would be required on the remaining excavations for the garage.

4 Results

All four trenches contained the same sequence of deposits. About 200mm of the surface had already been removed during general site clearance prior to the watching-brief commencing, but a spot height (of approximately 46.6m OD) on the Ordnance Survey map on the road centre at the Drage Street / Mansfield Road junction shows that the original site surface was also at approximately that level. The top in situ deposit, 800mm thick, contained glassy slag and iron-rich concretions, clearly derived from an industrial process. The extent of the deposit suggests that the whole site has been made up in this way.

Beneath this overburden was a dark grey clay about 700mm thick, over a light grey clay 300mm thick, over a yellow-brown clay to the full excavation depth. The dark grey clay thinned out at the west end of the excavation, so that the light grey clay lay directly beneath the industrial overburden.

5 Interpretation

The clays in general can presumably be identified as the alluvial deposits of the Derwent. The dark grey clay appeared to occupy a depression in the lower grey and yellow clays, and may have been a localised silted-up pond.

It is not impossible that the deposit was in fact the fill of a large ditch, but this seems improbable for the following reasons. First, the interface between the dark grey clay and the underlying clays, which lay at the western end of the area, was diffuse and irregular. Second, the dark grey clay was homogenous and devoid of the tip-lines which would be expected in an infilled ditch.

It was noted above that the surface level of the streets in the vicinity of the site is noticeably higher than the recreation ground to the west (perhaps 1m or more). Although in theory the recreation ground level might have been lowered for some reason, it seems much more likely that the street level has been built up: presumably to avoid flooding. It is further reasonable to suppose that this happened when the streets were laid out in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. Within the development site, at least, and possibly over a wider area, the raising of the ground seems to have been achieved by dumping industrial waste.

As a whole, the visible evidence from the foundation trenches suggests that before the 19th century the site was occupied by alluvial silts including a possible pond, with no archaeological features present, that the topsoil had been shaved off and then the site level raised by the dumping of industrial waste.

6 Reference

Sparey-Green,, C.S.J., 2002. 'Excavations on the south-eastern defences and extramural settlement of Little Chester Derby, 1971-2'. *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal* 122, 1-328.

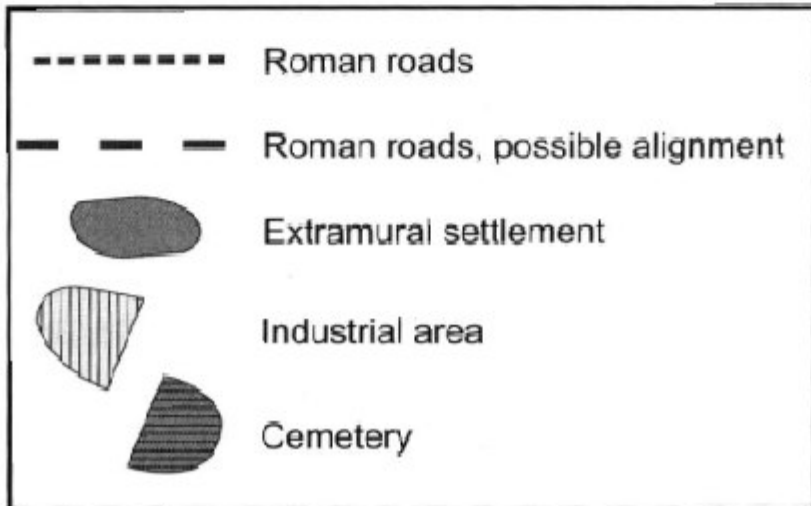
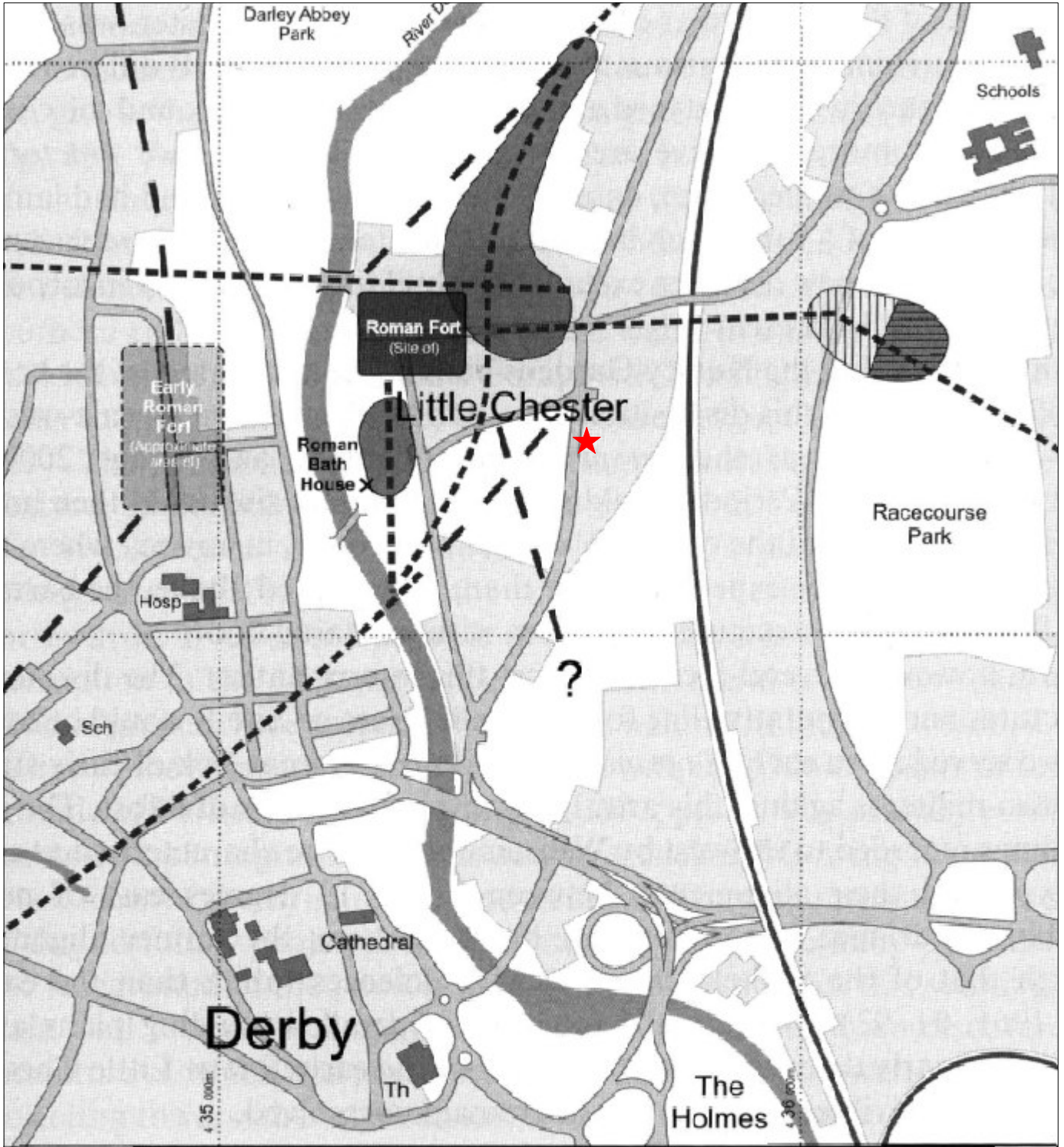


Fig. 1: Site location (red star) in relation to Roman Derby and environs as mapped by Green 2002, Fig. 28; grid is 1km.

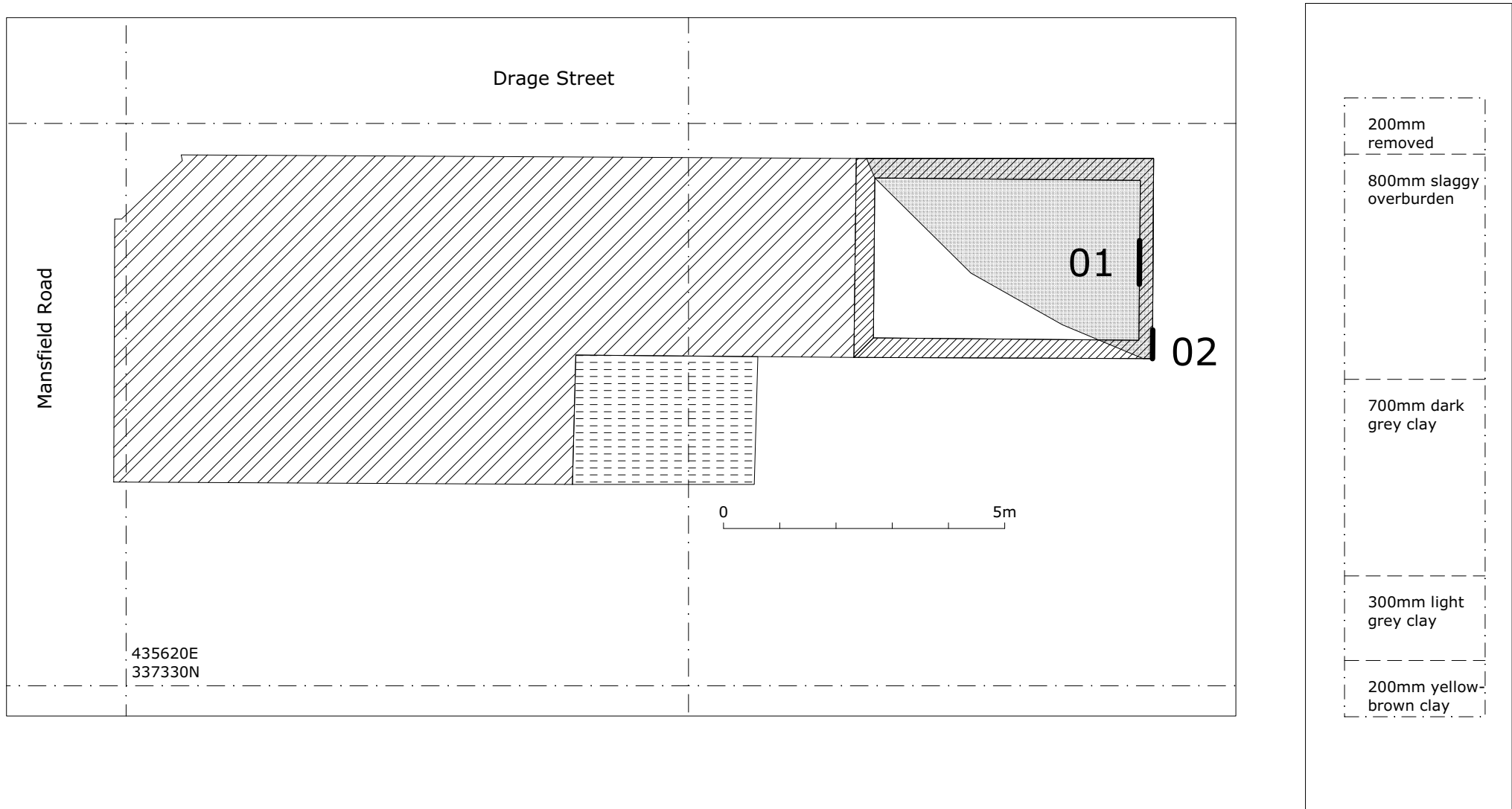


Fig. 2: Site plan showing area of existing building (double line hatch), area of extension completed prior to inspection (dashed hatch), and area recorded during watching-brief (close hatch), including drawn / photographed sections 01 and 02; area of grey clay shown as grey tone. Details of Section 02 are shown to the right



Plate 1: footings of existing building cutting through clays



Plate 3: detail of section 02



Plate 2: Detail of section 01



Plate 4: Detail of west edge of grey clay, overlying yellow-brown clays adjacent to pavement