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Archaeological Services

Archaeological work during ground-works at Church Farm, Wilkinson Lane, Elmesthorpe, Leicestershire (SP 460 965)

Leon Hunt




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**Archaeological work during ground-works
at Church Farm, Wilkinson Lane,
Elmesthorpe,
Leicestershire (SP 460 965)**

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**for:
Mr Martyn Bright**

Planning Application No. 10/0731/1/PX

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief and strip plan and sample excavation was carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) at Church Farm, Wilkinson Lane, Elmesthorpe, Leicestershire (SP 460 965) during a series of ground-works associated with a new development at the property, which included the conversion and extension of existing farm buildings, some of which date to the 19th century. The proposed development also included the construction of a new equestrian manège and various new services.

The ground-works on the old barns revealed no earlier structures, phases or deposits. The manège area and much of the ground-works nearby revealed no earlier structures apart from the concrete stanchions of a Dutch barn, an old slurry pit and various areas of debris.

The ground-works to the south of the central range revealed the brick foundations of a building, which was still extant at the end of the 20th century (as shown on aerial photographs and maps of the area) and was likely to be at least 19th century in date as it is likely to be part of a structure shown on the 1852 tithe map of the area.

The archive for the site will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums with accession number X.A85.2012.

Introduction

An archaeological watching brief and strip plan and sample excavation was carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services on behalf of Mr. Martyn Bright at Church Farm, Wilkinson Lane, Elmesthorpe, Leicestershire (NGR: SP 460 965) during a series of ground-works associated with a new development at the property.

The proposed development is for the conversion/rebuilding/extension of former agricultural barns to form two dwellings and the creation of residential curtilages, the erection of stables and construction of an equestrian manège. Conditions 11 and 12 require schemes of archaeological work.

Leicestershire County Council, as archaeological advisors to the planning authority have requested a historic buildings survey, a strip map and sample excavation and a watching brief as mitigation against the likely impact of the development.

The historic building survey will be undertaken by The Martin Design Partnership and is subject to a separate report.

Site Location and Geology

Elmesthorpe lies in Blaby District of Leicestershire, around 2.5 miles (4km) north-east of Hinckley (Figure 1). Church Farm is situated at NGR SP 460 965 to the west

of the village of Elmesthorpe and north of St Mary's church (Figure.2). It consists of an area of *c.* 2500 sq m at a height of *c.*107 metres OD.

The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 155 (Atherstone) indicates that the underlying geology is likely to consist of Wolston and Shawell sand and gravel.



Figure 1: Location of Church Farm, Elmesthorpe

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Archaeological Objectives

The main objective of the archaeological excavation is to determine and understand the nature, function and character of any significant archaeology on the site in its cultural and environmental setting.

The aims of the watching brief and strip plan and sample excavation are:

- To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.
- To establish the character, extent and date range for any archaeological deposits to be affected by the proposed ground-works.
- To record any archaeological deposits to be affected by the ground-works.
- To produce an archive and report of any results.

Historical and Archaeological Background

The Leicestershire and Rutland Historic Environment Record (HER) shows that the application site lies in an area of archaeological interest as it is situated close to a deserted medieval village (HER ref. MLE70). Roman and Saxon remains are also known from land north and west of Church Farm (MLE17739 & MLE17740). The application area is also close to the Church of St Marys (MLE11899).

The site contains a number of agricultural buildings of various dates and states of repair. Early maps of the site show a well established farm at the site by the early-mid 19th century.

The site is believed to be within the curtilage of the former Manor of Elmesthorpe. A series of earthworks lie to the north and east of the house and barns and have been interpreted as the remains of a grand 17th century formal garden scheme associated with Elmesthorpe Hall, since demolished (MLE16977). A series of fishponds associated with the manorial complex lay to the north and were subject to archaeological survey and recording prior to the construction of the Earl Shilton bypass (MLE71) (Jarvis 2009)

The historian Nichols wrote that “the ancient hall stood on an eminence, and was a very large and extensive building... From the traces which now remain of the extensive pleasure grounds, etc., it appears to have been a large and commodious residence” (Nichols 1811).

Methodology

All work followed the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) *Code of Conduct* (2010) and adhered to their *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (2008).

A Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Work (see Appendix) was produced by ULAS prior to the archaeological work being undertaken.

The project involved the supervision of overburden removal and other groundworks by an experienced professional archaeologist during the works.

The watching brief included ground-works on the internal floor of a two storey barn at the eastern edge of the site, on an area between two single storey barns in the centre of the site and on various trenches for drainage throughout the site. A strip plan and record investigation was to take place on an open area to the east of the buildings (Figure 2).

The groundworks were carried out by a mini-digger and a JCB with backacter, except the strip plan and record which was carried out by a large tracked excavator.

The site was visited on the 14th June 2011, 1st and 4th August 2011, 29th September 2011 and ground-works associated with the new development were observed and monitored by an archaeologist.

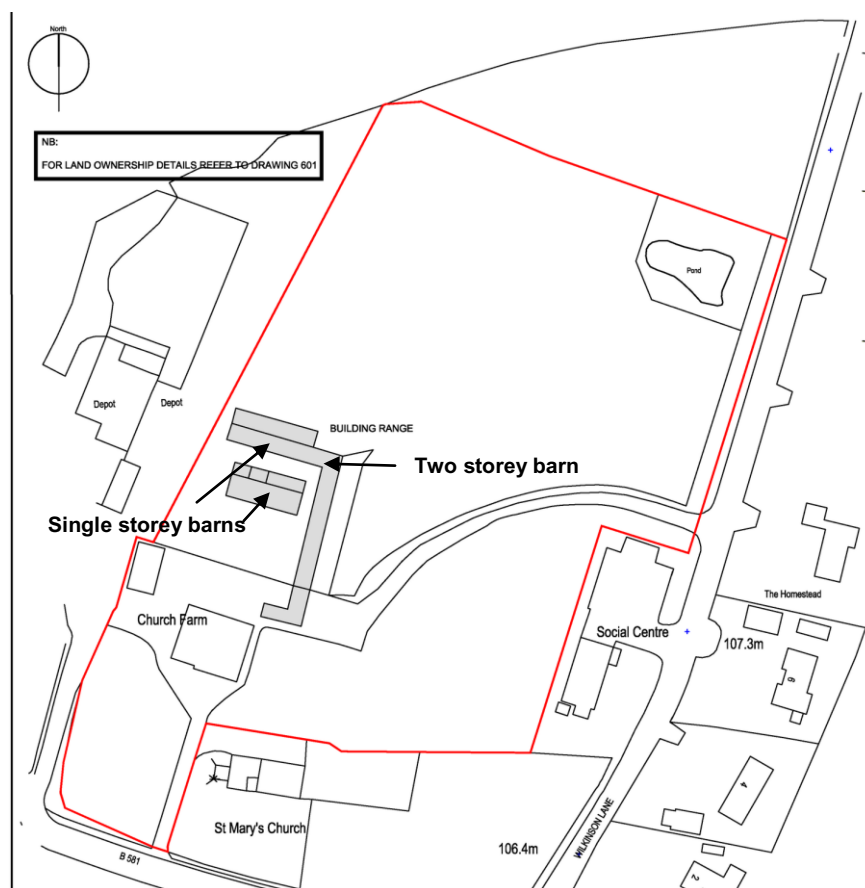


Figure 2: Plan of the site. Provided by developer. Scale Unknown

Results

Watching Brief

The initial visit to the site on 14th June 2011 was to monitor the removal of a brick and concrete floor within a two storey barn at the north-east corner of the building range (Plate 1) and ground reduction prior to the excavation of foundation trenches between two single storey barns close to the centre of the site (Plate 2).

The two storey block had a floor in the northern part of the building constructed of bricks laid face up. These were removed by a small digger fitted with a toothed bucket and the area then cleaned with a shovel (Plate 3). The bricks were laid in a single course and overlay a layer of yellowish brown silty sand, which was fairly sterile and contained few coarse components, except a few sub-rounded pebbles and some roots. Several sherds of modern pottery and part of a glass bottle were retrieved from the matrix.

The bricks and soil were fully removed within this area to a depth of around 0.54m below the floor level, exposing more soil (Plates 4 & 5). The southern end of the floor was constructed of thick layers of concrete so that the floor sloped to the west. These were at least 150mm deep and have to be removed with a breaker. The concrete also lay over the silty clay.

The foundations of the barn were exposed along three walls. The foundations consisted of at least eight courses of bricks with the bottom five courses stepped from

between 60-100mm out from those above. There were no indications of earlier building phases.

An area to the south of the northern range, partially covered in concrete, was stripped with a JCB with a toothed bucket to a depth of around 1m from the top of the concrete (Plates 6 & 7). A depth of 60mm-0.2m of concrete (at the southern edge of the area close to the building to the south) overlay 0.25m of brick rubble/hardcore. This lay over 0.25m of yellowish brown silty-sand, which lay over 0.25m of ash and clinker (Plate 8). Under this was either the natural substratum of reddish brown sand and gravel or, in places a further 0.20m of silty-sand, over the substratum. The area was cleaned at the appropriate level with a toothless ditching bucket, exposing the sand and gravel across the area. No features were revealed.

The site was then visited on the 1st August 2011. After removing a concrete raft in the courtyard, the remains of a structure were observed (Plates 9 & 10). Further brick demolition rubble was removed during the visit to partially expose the structure, using a small tracked excavator with a ditching bucket. It was constructed of modern-sized brick and there was evidence for a brick floor. The remains of the brick footings indicated that the building was approximately 18m in length and measured 3.7m in width. There was some evidence that the building was divided into bays (Plate 11). Two narrow bays measuring approximately 1.5m were observed, although it was not possible to obtain a full floor plan. A ceramic drain with a metal grate was present close to the centre of the southern side of the structure. Along the northern wall of the structure, directly behind the brick foundation, was a long concrete 'beam' measuring approximately 13m. Where exposed the natural subsoil consisted of dark red brown sandy-gravel.

A further visit was made on 4th August 2011 to view the excavation of trenches for new drains in the farmyard. A CAT 442D excavator with a narrow toothed ditching bucket (0.4m) was used to excavate two joining trenches connecting the new building at the north of the site to existing drains. The top 0.2-0.3m of overburden in the north-south aligned trench contained frequent modern brick rubble, tiles and stone and the former yard surface could be seen at the north end of the trench (Plate 12). Below this layer the trench cut through the remains of brick footings (one located c 11m from north) and disturbed ground, presumably representing a demolished farm building. Clean natural subsoil, consisting of orange/brown sand was observed at the southern end of the trench only. The second trench, orientated east-west, was excavated through 0.3m of overburden, containing brick rubble, into natural orange/brown sand (Plate 13). Both trenches had a maximum depth of 0.95m, but the depth varied slightly to allow for the fall for the new drain.

Further clearance of the yard area exposed a well and an area of cobbling. The well was constructed of modern sized curved well bricks and measured approximately 1.4m in diameter (outer measurement) (Plate 14). It was several metres deep and still wet to a depth of 2m (Martyn Bright pers. comm.). The well was roughly located by triangulating off two points on the supplied plan and it is not quite clear how it related to the structure observed on the previous visit, presumably it was outside this building. An area of intact cobbling, indicative of the previous yard surface was observed to the north-west of the well (Plate 15).

A further trench was observed on the 29th September 2011. This ran broadly south to north from the rear of the most northerly farm building to a new soakaway to the east. The trench was around 57m long, and was 0.4m wide and 0.85m deep. The sequence

visible in the section consisted of 0.3m-0.4m of made-up ground consisting of mixed loamy soil, with varying amounts of brick and other modern building debris over 0.45m of brown subsoil over natural clay or sand, with the sand being more predominant as the trench progressed north.

In some areas, single layers of modern brick and thin layers of hardcore could be observed. A Dutch barn once existed in the area to the east of the trench line (to the north of the current building) and the remains of concrete stanchions associated with this structure could be seen partially within the ground to the west of the trench.

Towards the northern end of the trench the ground was more disturbed, with much of the entire sequence within the section consisting of made-up ground, including plastic material and contaminated ground characterised by a pungent odour. This was the site of an old slurry pit. No archaeological features were observed in this trench.

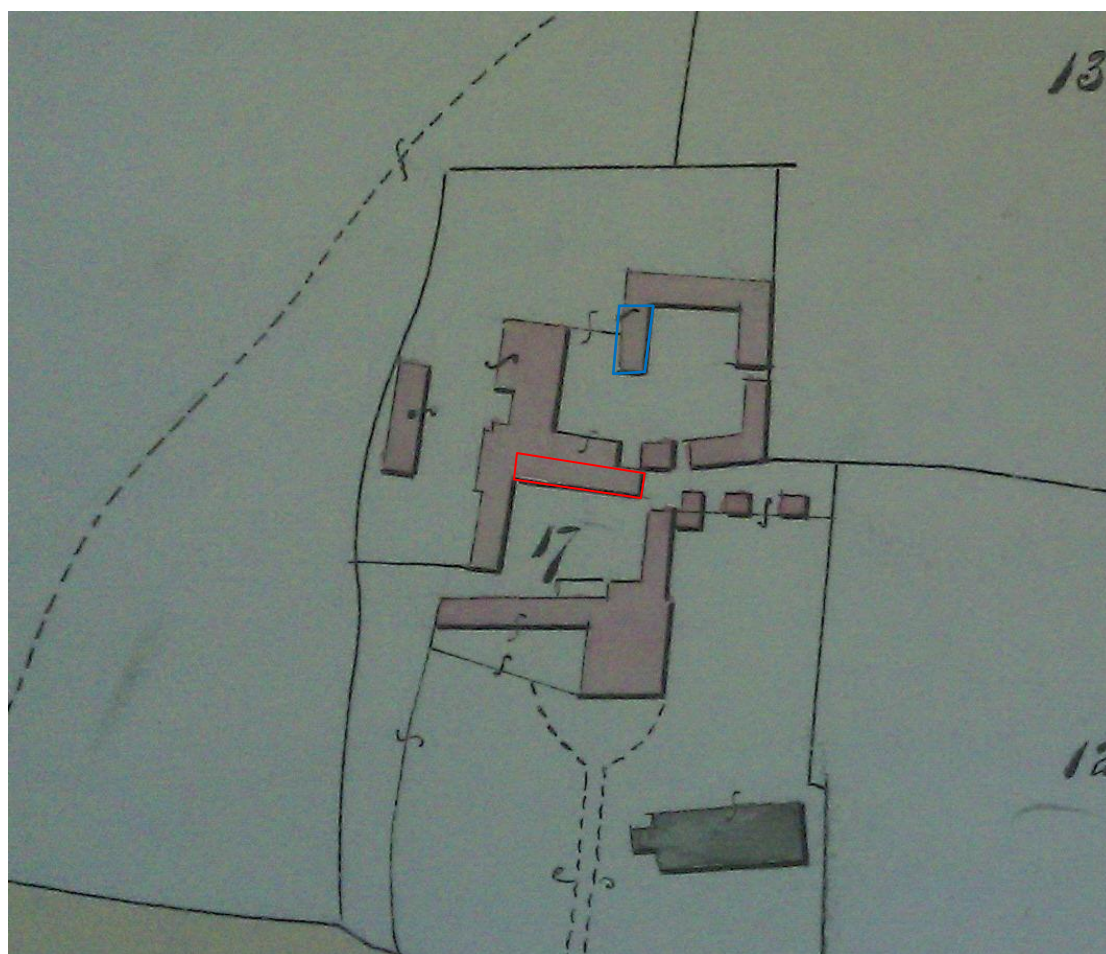


Figure 3: Detail of 1852 tithe map of the farm. Footprint of brick building observed in watching brief highlighted (red); return of northern range (blue).

Provided by Martyn Bright. Scale Unknown

Strip, Plan and Record

The strip plan and record section of the archaeological work covered an area of land to the north of the main site, on the site of a proposed manège.

The ground here is flat and then slopes away to the north, so that only the first 8m would have to be reduced to the correct level (around 1m-1.2m). The rest of the area would be built up to the required level.

A trial trench along the footprint of the proposed manège was excavated by an excavator. This covered an area of around 14m by 7m-8m, excavated south to north and east to west.

The upper soil sequence consisted of 0.3m of made-up ground consisting of mixed sandy and silty dark brown soil with some brick rubble, concrete rubble and plastic, over 0.25m of dark brown silty buried topsoil, over 0.3m-0.4m of yellowish brown sandy silt subsoil. Brownish red natural sand was reached at 1m depth. The total depth of the trench was 1.2m.

At the western end (around 12m from the eastern side of the trench) the finished reduction level was only 0.95m and here natural sand was only just exposed. To the west for the last 2m of the trench the land fell away slightly again and so at the required reduction level (0.8m) the area was only excavated within the made-up ground. Within this area a drain was observed running north-west to south-east, which would take it into the old slurry pit to the south-east.

No archaeological features were revealed during these works.

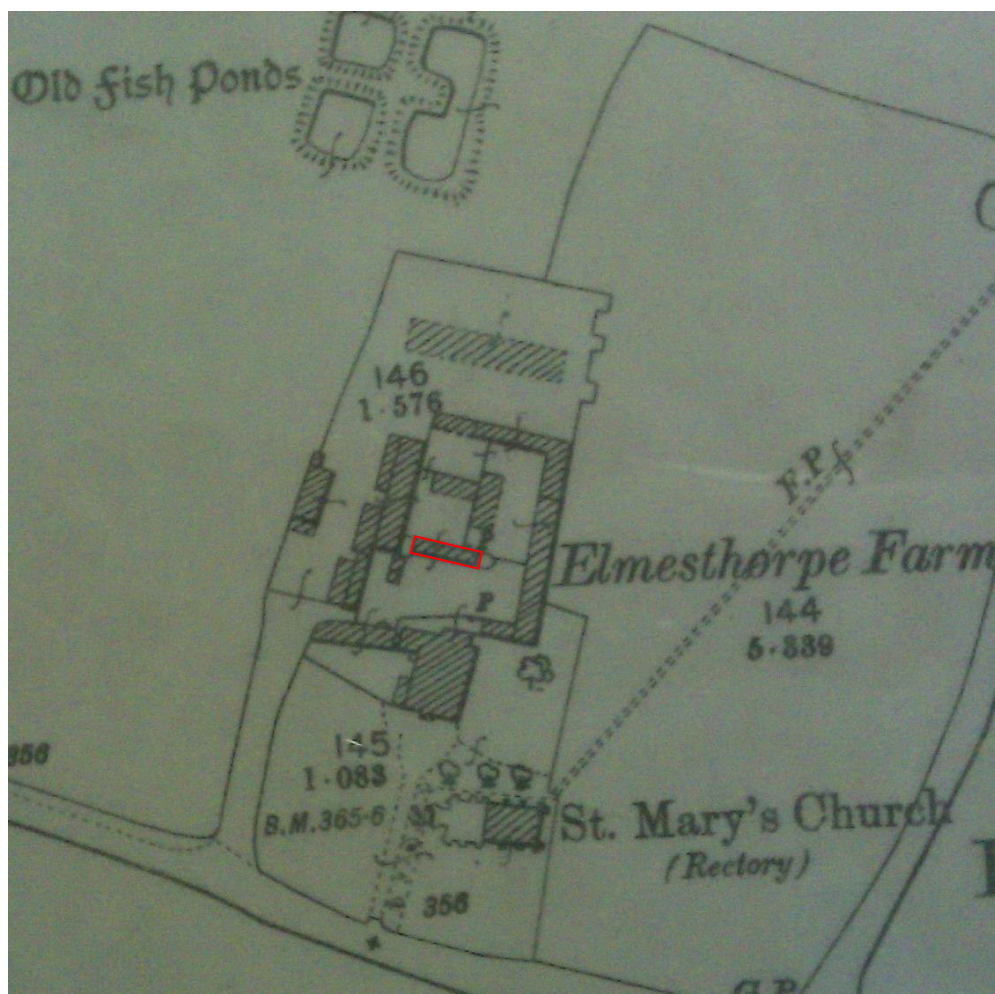


Figure 4: Detail of 1903 OS map of Elmesthorpe. Rectangular building observed in watching brief highlighted. Provided by Martyn Bright. Scale 25 inch to 1 mile

Conclusion

No archaeological features were observed during the excavation of the two storey barn at the north-east corner of the site. Although this building is at least 19th century in date (it is featured on the 1852 tithe map: Figure 3), the soils below the brick floor revealed only modern willow pattern and glazed stoneware pottery sherds, suggesting that the floor had been relaid in more recent times, possibly when the extension was added to the south as shown on the 1903 OS map (Figure 4). No earlier phases were revealed under the foundations of the barn.

No archaeological features were revealed during the ground-works in the area between the one storey barn; although the tithe map shows a return from the northern range to the south here (Figure 3; blue line). This was either fully removed sometime between 1852 and 1903 or did not contain very substantial foundations. The clinker and coal discovered here points to this area as being used for either coal storage or possibly a blacksmiths.

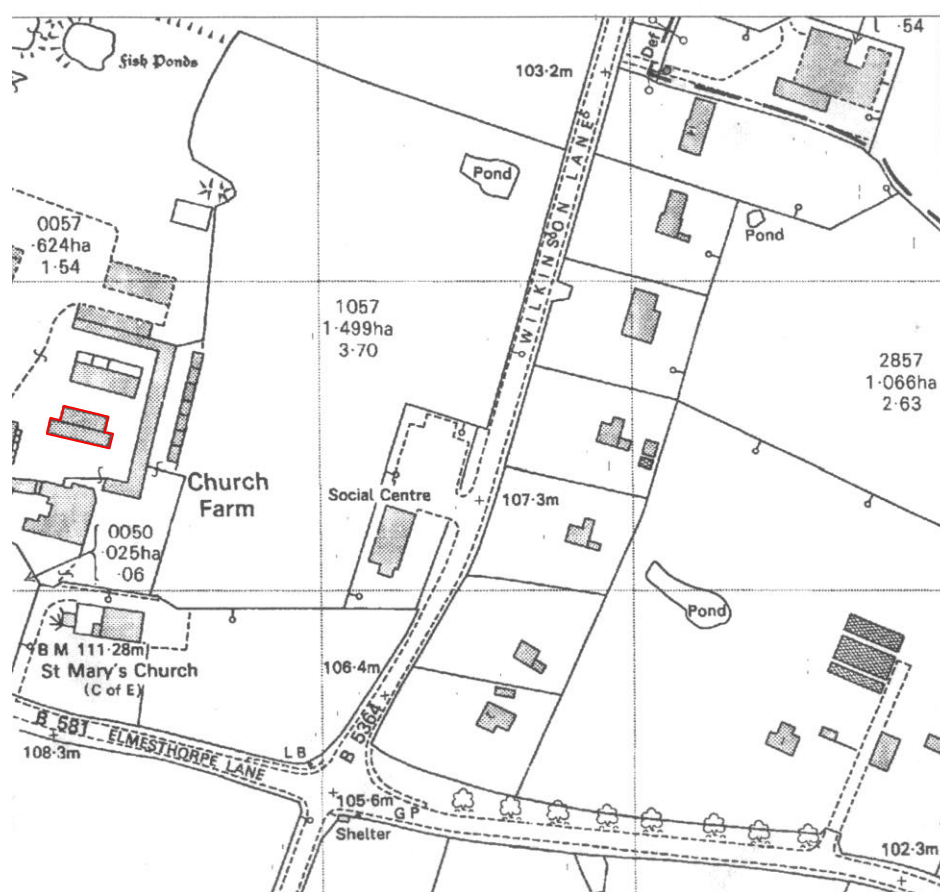


Figure 5: Detail of 1985 OS map of Elmesthorpe, with buildings observed highlighted. Provided by Martyn Bright. Scale 1: 2500

No archaeological features were revealed during the strip, plan and record in the area to the north where the new manège was to be constructed, nor were there any structures revealed within the northern pipe trenches, other than evidence for the Dutch barn featured as a dotted line on the 1985 OS maps of the area (Figure 5).

The remains of a brick building and a well were revealed during work to the south of the central one storey range. This structure was 18m in length and measured 3.7m in width and appeared to be divided into bays. This is likely to be the rectangular structure shown on the 1985 OS map of the area (Figure 5; red line) and is possibly part of the building shown on both the 1903 OS map and the 1852 tithe map, although the buildings had changed somewhat during the late 19th century and may not represent the same structure. The 1985 map shows two buildings in this area. The northern building may account for the concrete beam revealed to the north of the brick foundations. Both these buildings and the Dutch barn are shown on the late 20th century aerial view of the farm (Plate 16).

The archaeological work revealed no evidence for earlier phases of buildings below the present structures and no evidence of structures that may be the remains of buildings associated with the original hall. The well and the brick foundations to the south of the central range are likely to be mid 19th century in date.

References

- Jarvis, W 2009 *Archaeological Fieldwork for the Earl Shilton Bypass, Leicestershire: Site A, off Elmesthorpe Lane, Elmesthorpe (SP 460 966)* ULAS Report No. 2009-085
- Nicholls, J., 1811, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*. London, Vol. 4, pt.

Acknowledgements

ULAS would like to thank Martyn Bright and family for their help and co-operation during these archaeological works. Leon Hunt would like to thank Martyn Bright for his help and hospitality and for the early maps and pictures of the site.

The work was carried out by Leon Hunt and Jennifer Browning and the project was managed by Patrick Clay for ULAS.

Archive

An archive of the archaeological work will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums with accession number X.A85.2011. The archive contains the following:

- 1 Unbound copy of this report (2011-096)
- 1 Copy of written scheme of investigation for archaeological work
- 3 Watching brief recording sheets
- 1 Photographic Record
- 1 Set B&W contact sheets
- 1 Set B&W negatives
- 1 CD of digital photographs
- 1 A3 sheet of permatrace with notes and drawings
- 3 sheets of miscellaneous material (plans, maps and notes)

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Plate 1: The two storey barn to the north-east, looking north-east



Plate 2: The area between the two single storey barns, looking north-west



Plate 3: Work in progress inside two storey barn, looking south-east



Plate 4: Floor partially excavated, showing foundations, looking north-east



Plate 5: Floor fully excavated, looking north-east



Plate 6: Work in progress on centre barns, looking west



Plate 7: Excavated area at single barns, looking south-west



Plate 8: North-north east facing section at edge of southern single barn, looking south south-west



Plate 9: Concrete beam and brick foundations, looking east to two story range



Plate 10: Close-up of brick foundations, looking north-east



Plate 11: The beam and brick foundations to south of central range, looking north-east



Plate 12: Northern end of drain trench, looking north north-west



Plate 13: Drain trench, looking south south-east



Plate 14: Well, looking north-west



Plate 15: Cobbling, looking north north-east



Plate 16: Trench at northern end of site, towards new soakaway, looking north



Plate 17: North-west facing section of trench, looking south-east



Plate 18: Work in progress on manège area, looking north



Plate 19: Stripped manège area, looking north-west

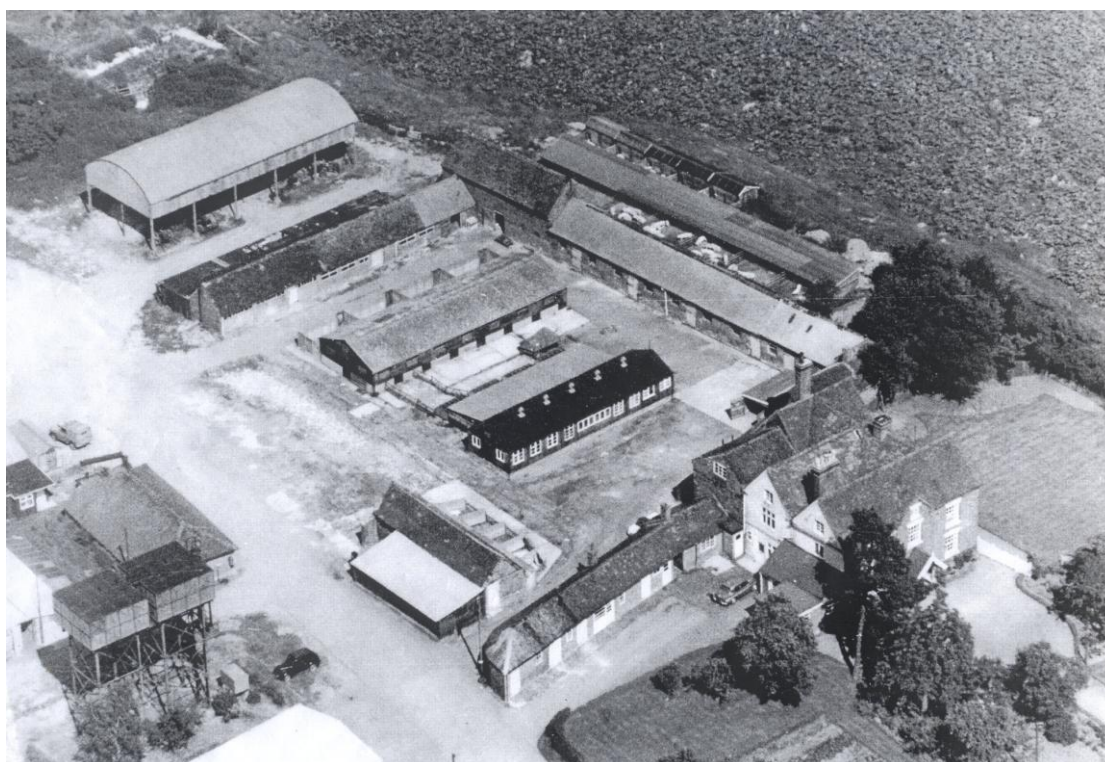


Plate 20: Aerial view of Church Farm late 20th century. Provided by Martyn Bright

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