



# University of Leicester

## Archaeological Services

**An Archaeological Field Evaluation  
on land south & east of 64, Cosby Road,  
Littlethorpe, Narborough,  
Leicestershire.  
NGR: SP 5440 9660**




John Thomas

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**John Thomas**

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## **An Archaeological Field Evaluation on land south & east of 64, Cosby Road, Littlethorpe, Narborough, Leicestershire. NGR: SP 5440 9660.**

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### **Summary**

*An archaeological field evaluation was undertaken on land south and east of 64, Cosby Road, Littlethorpe, Leicestershire by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) between the 24th and 26th of October 2011. Nine trial trenches were excavated in response to proposals for residential development, as outlined under Planning Application number 11/0009/1/OX.*

*The results of the archaeological evaluation were generally negative, although a small pit was revealed in Trench 4 in the southern part of the application area. The pit contained remains of high-temperature burning activity including broken fragments of fired clay, heat-cracked stones and burnt bone. Two flint artefacts were also present although these were not closely datable. Given the available evidence a prehistoric date for the feature may be postulated. The pit and its contents must indicate the presence of nearby occupation of some sort but no other traces of such activity were revealed during the evaluation.*

*The archive will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service (LMARS) under Accession Number X.A157.2011.*

### **Introduction**

In accordance with PPS5 (Planning and the Historic Environment, 2010), this document presents the results of an archaeological field evaluation (AFE) on land south and east of 64, Cosby Road, Littlethorpe, Narborough, Leicestershire (Figure 1). The evaluation was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services in response to development proposals for 39 new houses and associated access roads (Planning Application No. 11/0009/1/OX).

Following Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5) Policy HE6, Leicestershire County Council, Historic and Natural Environment Team (LCCHNET), as archaeological advisors to the planning authority, required an evaluation by trial trenching.

The application area lies on the southern margin of Littlethorpe and comprises a pasture field, residential gardens and associated access lying respectively south and east of 64, Cosby Road. The site lies on fairly flat ground, with a slight west-east trending gradient, at around 68m OD and covers an area of approximately 16,000 square metres (c.1.6ha).

The evaluation consisted of six 30m x 1.6m and two 15m x 1.6m trial trenches that were located across the site to provide a c.2% sample of the area. One trench was slightly extended and another 12m x 1.6m trench added at the request of the County Senior Planning Archaeologist to clarify archaeological questions that arose during the initial trenching programme.



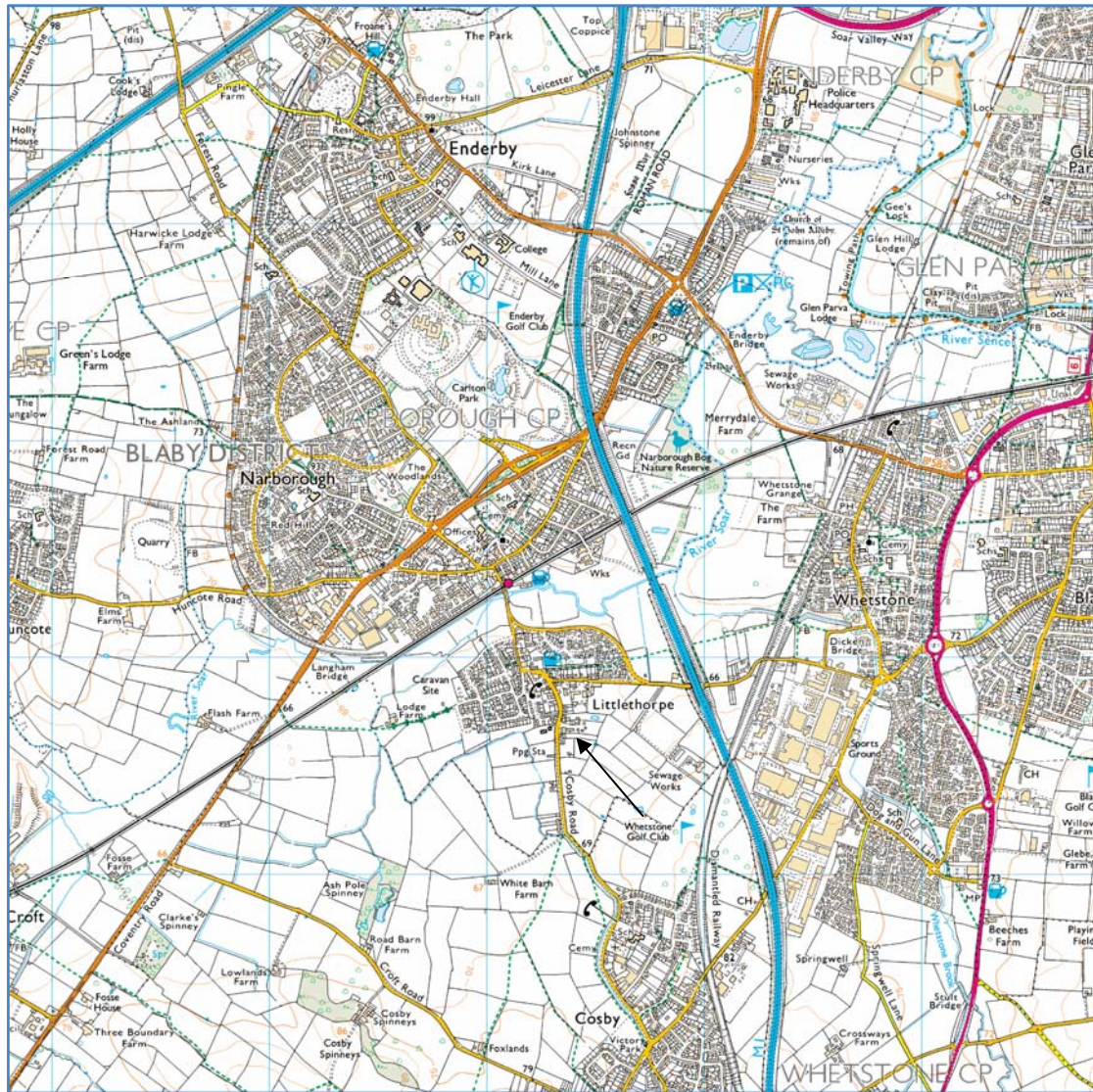


Figure 1 Location of site (arrowed). North to top.

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## Background

The Leicestershire and Rutland Historic Environment Record (HER) shows that the site is situated within an area of archaeological interest, with recorded finds and sites indicating Iron Age and medieval activity in the vicinity. The application area lies on the southern edge of the historic settlement core of Littlethorpe (HER ref. MLE9565). An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment for the Littlethorpe area, previously undertaken by ULAS, has also highlighted the possibility for surviving prehistoric, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, medieval and post-medieval remains in and around the village (George 2004).

Ordnance Survey mapping illustrates that the site has remained largely undeveloped in recent times, so any archaeological remains present are likely to be preserved *in*

*situ*. The larger field forming the southern half of the development area has preserved ridge and furrow remains surviving as low earthworks.

Recent geophysical survey of the application site identified a number of anomalies of potential archaeological origin (Hancock 2010). However the nature and significance of these features is not fully understood from the geophysical survey alone.

The geology of the site comprises soils of the Arrow Association which consist of 'deep permeable coarse loamy soils affected by groundwater' (543: Soil Survey 1983; Sheet 3). The solid geology of the application area comprises glaciofluvial drift.

### **Archaeological Objectives**

The main objectives of the evaluation, as set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological work (WSI) (ULAS 2011) were:

- To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits identified by the geophysical survey.
- To identify the presence or absence of any archaeological deposits and remains not previously identified by geophysical survey.
- To establish the character, extent and date range for any archaeological deposits to be affected by the proposed ground works.
- To produce an archive and report of any results.

Within the stated project objectives, the principal aim of the evaluation was to establish the nature, extent, date, depth, significance and state of preservation of archaeological deposits on the site in order to determine the potential impact upon them from the proposed development. From this an appropriate method of dealing with any archaeological deposits can be formulated or an appropriate mitigation strategy developed.

Trial trenching is an intrusive form of evaluation that will demonstrate the existence of earth-fast archaeological features that may exist within the area.

### **Methodology**

All work followed the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) Code of Conduct in accordance with their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2008).

Topsoil and subsoil was removed in level spits, under continuous archaeological supervision, down to the uppermost archaeological deposits by a JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. All spoil heaps were inspected for unstratified archaeological material. All trenches were excavated to a width of 1.6m and down to the top of archaeological deposits or the natural substratum in the absence of any archaeological deposits. After recording, the trenches were backfilled and levelled during the course of the evaluation.

Trenches were examined by hand cleaning and any archaeological deposits located were planned at an appropriate scale and sample-excavated by hand as appropriate to establishing the stratigraphic and chronological sequence. All plans were tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Spot heights were taken as appropriate.

Each trench was recorded on a standard ULAS pro-forma trench recording sheet noting soil depths and descriptions. One longitudinal face and the base of each trench was recorded in this way. Trench locations were recorded and tied in to the Ordnance Survey National Grid.

A photographic record of the investigations was prepared illustrating in both detail and general context the principal features and finds discovered. Colour digital and black and white 35mm photographs were taken throughout the evaluation. The photographic record also included 'working shots' to illustrate more generally the nature of the archaeological operation mounted.

## Results

The evaluation trenches were laid out to provide the best possible coverage of the application site. Six trenches were excavated in the southern area and three in the garden areas on the northern side of the application area (Figure 2).

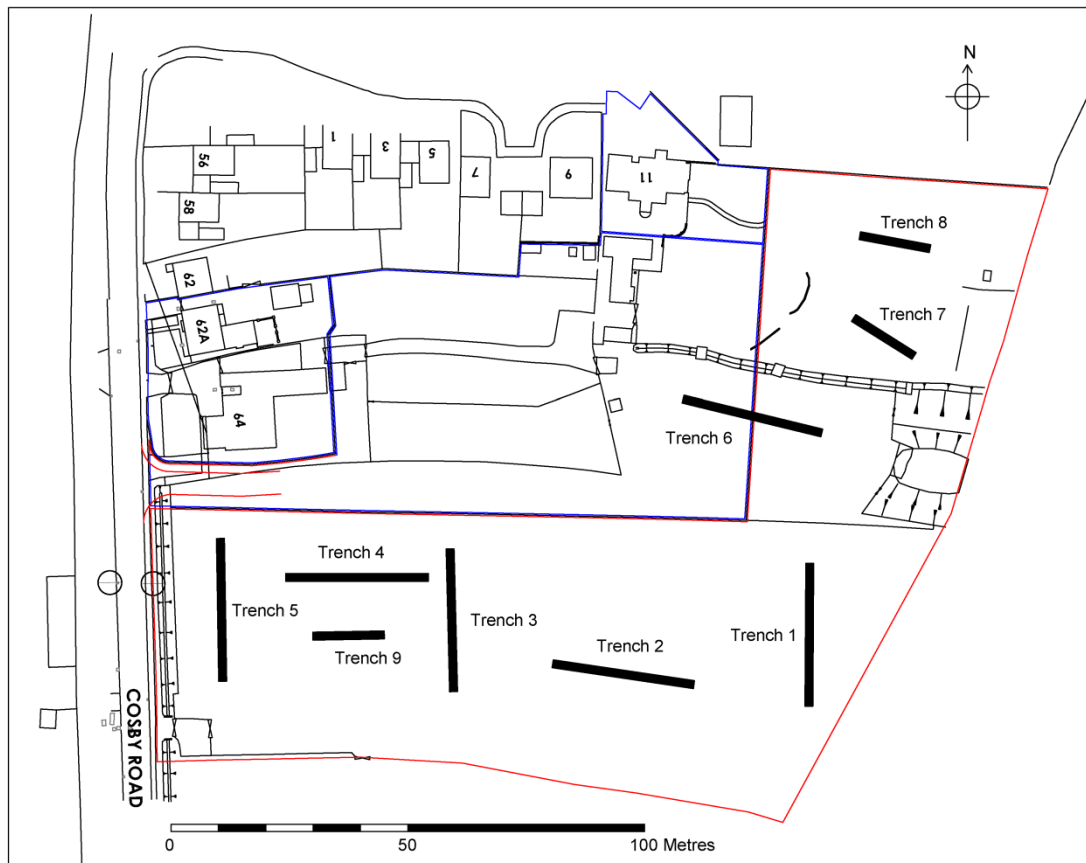


Figure 2 Trench Location plan (adapted from mapping supplied by the client).

### ***Trench 1 (Figure 3)***

Trench 1 was located on the eastern side of the southern field on a north to south alignment and measured *c.*30m x 1.6m wide. Natural subsoil, consisting mainly of mid yellowish-orange sandy gravel with patches of more clay-rich gravels was revealed *c.*0.40m below the present ground level (*c.*66.48mOD). A layer of subsoil consisting of friable mid greyish-orange sandy silt (*c.*0.15m thick) lay above the natural sands, and this was in turn overlain by a topsoil layer of friable greyish brown sandy silt (*c.*0.25m thick). Several furrows, running east-west, and a number of land



drains were encountered but no archaeological features or finds were revealed in this trench.



Figure 3 Trench 1 viewed from the north.

#### ***Trench 2 (Figure 4)***

The second trench was located approximately 23m to the west of Trench 1 on an east to west alignment and measured c.30m x 1.6m wide. Natural subsoil was revealed c.0.40m below the present ground level (c.66.31mOD) and consisted of similar soils to those found in Trench 1. Several furrows and a single land drain were revealed cutting through the natural subsoil, all on similar east-west alignments. These and the natural layer were overlain by subsoil (c.0.20m thick) and topsoil (c.0.20m thick) layers with similar characteristics to those in Trench 1. No archaeological finds or features were revealed in this trench.





Figure 4 Trench 2 viewed from the east.

***Trench 3 (Figure 5)***

Trench 3 was situated in the centre of the southern field, approximately 21m to the west of Trench 2. It lay on a north to south alignment and measured *c.*30m x 1.6m wide. This trench had an average depth of *c.*0.40m beneath the present ground level (*c.*66.70m OD). As with the previous trenches, topsoil (*c.*0.20m thick) and subsoil (*c.*0.20 thick) layers overlay natural substrata of yellowish orange gravelly clay. No archaeological features or finds were revealed.



Figure 5 Trench 3 viewed from the south.

***Trench 4 (Figure 6)***

Trench 4 lay on an east-west alignment and was located approximately 4m to the west of Trench 3, adjacent to the northern boundary of the southern field. This trench measured *c.*30m long x 1.6m wide and was widened to *c.*4m near the centre to better characterise a potential archaeological feature. Approximately 10m from the eastern end of the trench a small oval pit [403] was revealed. This measured *c.*0.70m x 0.50m x 0.20m deep and had sloping edges leading to a narrow, flat base. A single fill (402) consisted of very dark greyish brown, charcoal rich silty sandy clay. As well as abundant charcoal fragments and flecks, (402) contained frequent burnt and heat-cracked stones, broken pieces of fired clay lining and fragments of burnt bone. Unfortunately no datable evidence was recovered from [403] although two struck flints were present, as well as burnt flint and quartz chunks. It seems likely that the pit could be assigned a general prehistoric date based on the evidence recovered. Despite the evidence for burning within the pit fill, there was no reddening of the soils around the features edge that might indicate the feature represents an *in situ* hearth. Perhaps more likely is that the pit was filled with remains of a hearth from elsewhere. Approximately 7m from this pit was a large amorphous feature [405] measuring *c.*5m

in length x c.2.5m wide. This feature was filled with pale orange/brown silty soil and was initially thought to be archaeological in origin but on further inspection was thought to be a naturally derived feature, perhaps relating to a former tree that had caused root disturbance to the underlying natural subsoil. Excavation revealed irregular edges and base to the feature, suggestive of root activity. Occasional lines of manganese-type material were also suggestive of decayed and mineralised roots. Broken pieces of this material were thought to be poorly-fired pottery fragments but on closer inspection these pieces have a distinctly natural appearance. Natural subsoil in this trench comprised similar soils to those encountered in other nearby trenches and lay at a depth of c.0.48m below the present ground level (c.67.10m OD). A subsoil layer (c.0.19m thick) and a topsoil layer (c.0.24m thick) overlay the natural subsoil.



Figure 6 Trench 4 viewed from the south-east showing extension to southern side of trench.

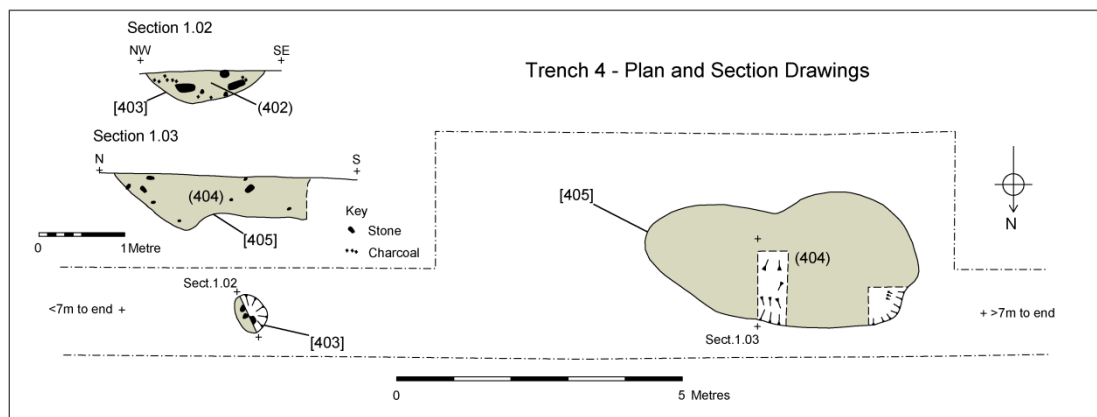


Figure 7 Plan and Section drawings of features in Trench 4.





Figure 8 Pit [403] partially excavated



Figure 9 Feature [405] during excavation



**Trench 5 (Figure 10)**

Trench 5 lay on a north-south alignment and was located on the western side of the southern field, approximately 9m from the site boundary. It measured c.30m in length and 1.6m in width. Natural subsoil in this trench lay at a depth of c.0.43m below the present ground level (c.67.48m OD) and consisted of similar gravelly clays to those encountered in all trenches in this part of the area. A subsoil (c.0.20m thick) and a topsoil layer (c.0.23m thick) overlay the natural substratum. No finds or archaeological features were revealed in the trench.



Figure 10 Trench 5 viewed from the north

**Trench 6 (Figure 11)**

Trench 6 was located in the northern part of the application site, in a lawned garden. The trench measured c.30m x 1.6m wide and lay on an east-west alignment. Natural subsoil in this trench consisted of mid yellowish-brown clayey sand and gravel with some silts and lay at a depth of c.0.50m below the present ground level (c.66.30m OD). A subsoil layer (c.0.20m thick) and a topsoil layer (c.0.30m thick) overlay the natural substratum, both of which were similar in character to corresponding layers in previous trenches. Evidence for ridge and furrow and a pebble-lined land drain, all on

east-west alignments was revealed but no finds or archaeological features were present in the trench.



Figure 11 Trench 6 viewed from the west

***Trench 7 (Figure 12)***

Trench 7 was located in the northern part of the application area, within a former orchard. This trench measured *c.* 1.5m long x *c.* 1.6m wide and lay on a north-west to south-east alignment. Natural subsoil, consisting of mid yellowish-brown clayey sand and gravel with some silt, was revealed approximately 0.40m below the present ground level (*c.* 66.10m OD). A subsoil layer (*c.* 0.26m thick) and a topsoil layer (*c.* 0.14m thick) overlay the natural substratum. No finds or archaeological features were revealed in the trench.





Figure 12 Trench 7 viewed from the west

***Trench 8 (Figure 13)***

Trench 8 lay on an east-west alignment and was located approximately 18m to the north of Trench 7. The trench measured *c.*15m x 1.6m wide. Natural subsoil in this trench was similar to that revealed in Trench 7 and was revealed at a depth of *c.*40m below the present ground level (*c.*61m OD). A subsoil layer (*c.*0.15m thick) and a topsoil layer (*c.*0.25m thick) overlay the natural substratum. Ridge and furrow remains, and two land drains running on an east-west orientation were revealed but no finds or archaeological features were present in the trench.



Figure 13 Trench 8 viewed from the west

***Trench 9 (Figure 14)***

Trench 9 was an additional trench excavated in the southern field. It lay approximately 15m to the south of Trench 4 on an east-west alignment and measured c.12m x 1.6m wide. Natural subsoil comprised similar soils to those previously described for this part of the application area and were reached at a depth of 0.48m below the present ground level (c.66.70m OD). A subsoil layer (c.0.19m thick) and a topsoil layer (c.0.24m thick) overlay the natural substratum. No finds or archaeological features were revealed in the trench.





Figure 14 Trench 9 viewed from the west

### **Discussion**

The evaluation trenches were located across the application area in order to provide a reasonable coverage of the site and assess the potential for archaeological survival.

The earliest potential evidence for human activity on or near the site is the flint flake from Pit [403], which could be Palaeolithic in date. If so this artefact must have been accidentally included within the pit fill as cut features are not generally associated with this early period. Pit [403] represents the only other evidence for archaeological activity on the site. The pit fill contained large amounts of charcoal, fired clay, burnt bone and heat-cracked stones, suggesting it was once part of a domestic hearth or remains from some sort of industrial activity. The lack of burning around the edge of the pit, however, tends to suggest that this was not the hearth itself. It seems more likely that hearth remains were deposited into the pit from elsewhere. The pit and its contents suggest the nearby presence of domestic activity but no further indication of other associated remains was found. The evidence recovered from the pit cannot indicate a firm date for its infilling but, on balance, a general prehistoric date may be postulated. The nearby feature [405] was thought to represent related activity to Pit

[403] but on closer inspection the feature appeared too irregular in shape to be an archaeological feature. The overall character of [405] suggests a natural origin, possibly a tree-throw, for this anomaly. Apart from the pit in Trench 4 no other archaeological features were revealed in any of the trenches and there was also very little evidence for human activity in the form of stray finds. Ridge and furrow remains were recorded consistently across the site in most of the trenches, the furrows all following a broad east-west alignment. Earthwork traces of the ridges were also present across the site and were particularly prominent in the southern field. A series of land drains on various alignments was also revealed.

### **Acknowledgements**

The fieldwork was carried out by John Thomas and Andrew Hyam. The flint artefacts were identified by Lynden P. Cooper, the fired clay analysed by Nicholas J. Cooper and the environmental assessment by Anita Radini. ULAS would like to thank Graham Harris and family for their patience, co-operation and assistance during the work. The project was managed by Dr Patrick Clay and monitored on behalf of Leicestershire County Council by Teresa Hawtin.

### **Site Archive and Results**

The archive consists of:

This report,

9 pro-forma trench recording sheets,

1x 35mm black and white negative film and corresponding contact sheet,

60 colour digital photographs,

Photographic record sheets,

1 small box of finds

1 compact disc of this report and the digital photographs.

The site archive will be deposited with Leicestershire County Council under the archaeological accession number X.A157.2011. A summary of the work will be submitted for publication in the *Transactions of The Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* in due course. An OASIS record will also be produced and this report will be uploaded on to the Archaeology Data Service website.

### **Bibliography**

George, S., 2004 *An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment for a Residential Development at land to the rear of 10 The Square, Littlethorpe, Leicestershire (SP 542 969)* ULAS report 2004-090.

Hancock, A., 2010 *Geophysical Survey: Land to the South and East of 64 Cosby Road, Littlethorpe, Leicestershire*. ASC Report 1334/LCR/01.

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## **Appendix I: The Finds**

### **Lithics - Lynden P. Cooper**

A small collection of lithics was recovered from (402) the fill of pit [403] in Trench 4. This was quite a varied assemblage and comprised a small broken bladelet, a broken patinated flake, a fragment of burnt quartz and three pieces of burnt flint. The two struck flint artefacts are difficult to date however the patinated flake may be of Palaeolithic origin and therefore may have become incorporated into the pit fill accidentally, as may the broken bladelet. The other pieces are all burnt and presumably relate to the hearth/fire from which the pit fill originated. It is possible that these stones were being deliberately burnt to cause them to shatter and create temper for pottery-making.

### **Fired Clay - Nicholas J. Cooper**

A total of 12 fragments of fired clay weighing 110g was recovered from context (402), fill of pit [403]. The clay is sandy and poorly mixed with occasional large rounded pebbles up to 10mm. The fragments are fairly hard (cannot be scratched with a fingernail) and so have been subject to similar heat as well-fired pottery *c.*1000 degrees C. The fragments may therefore have been part of structure such as a hearth, although no vitrification is apparent on their surfaces.

### **Environmental Remains - Anita Radini**

#### **Introduction**

An evaluation was carried out by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services at Littlethorpe, Leicestershire. A feature of unknown date was sampled for the recovery of archaeobiological evidence with the hope that the sample may provide some dating evidence. Volume of the soil sample and the results of this assessment are presented in table 1.

#### **Materials and Methods**

The sample consisted of two bags, each of 6.5 litres of soil, and appeared rich in charcoal fragments. One bag, (6.5 litres) was sieved in a sieving tank with 0.5mm mesh and flotation into a 0.3mm mesh sieve. Residues were all air dried and separated on a 4mm mesh riddle and the coarse fraction (CF) over 4mm sorted for all remains and finds, the fine fraction (FF) below 4mm was reserved for sorting during the analysis stage if required, but little was present so this was not necessary. The flotation fractions (Flots) were transferred from the sieve into plastic boxes and air dried. The flots were scanned in their entirety noting the species present and estimating their abundance (x = 1 to 5 items, xx = 5 to 20 items, xxx = more than 20 items). The presence of charcoal (fragments and flecks), modern root fragments and bones fragments was also noted. Plant names follow Stace (1997).



**Table 1 Remains from Pit [403]**

Sample	Context	Vol. (L)	Ash spherules	Chc	Burnt Clay	Mod Root	Ch Bo
1	402	6.5	present	xxx	x	xxx	x

Vol. (L) =volume in litres, Chc=charcoal fragments and flecks, Burnt Clay=burnt clay/brick fragments, Mod Root=modern root and rootlet fragments, Ch Bo=charred bone fragments.

### Results

The sample was found to be rich in charcoal fragments and flecks but only a few of them were above 4mm in size. A few fragments were identified as oak (*Quercus* sp.). Un-charred seeds were absent but a large quantity of modern root and rootlet fragments was recovered, suggesting a degree of soil disturbance. Small fragments of bone were also recovered, but in small numbers, their state of preservation and size did not allow identification of this bone as human or animal.

In addition a few ash spherules and burnt clay/brick fragments were recovered, suggesting prolonged burning.

### Discussion and Conclusions

The absence of any type of charred plant remains, in particular wheat grains whose species can provide an indication of Prehistoric, Roman or medieval occupation, means that this cannot assist in dating the deposit. Therefore the only means of dating the material would be by radiocarbon dating which would require identification of the charcoal fragments to select suitable short-lived species (if present) for this analysis.

The presence of charcoal and burnt bones, may suggest the possibility that the remains could represent a cremation deposit but in the absence of diagnostic bone fragments this could not be investigated further. An alternative explanation from the evidence of prolonged burning could suggest that some industrial activity was carried out on the site. However, the burnt bones could simply have been the results of occasional disposal of food waste with charcoal from domestic hearths, dumped or accumulated on the site.

Despite the absence of charred remains of seeds and cereal grains, the sample has also shown that there is some potential for features to produce evidence from charred remains. Therefore should any other excavation take place in the area, an appropriate sampling strategy is recommended to recover possible evidence of activities or environment in the past.

### Bibliography

Stace C. (1991) *New Flora of the British Isles*. Cambridge University Press.

## Appendix II OASIS Information

<b>OASIS INFORMATION</b>	
Project Name	64, Cosby Road, Littlethorpe, Leicestershire
Project Type	Evaluation
Project Manager	P Clay
Project Supervisor	J Thomas
Previous/Future work	Geophysical survey, unknown future work
Current Land Use	Pasture field/residential gardens
Development Type	Residential
Reason for Investigation	Pre-determination evaluation
Position in the Planning Process	Preliminary
Site Co ordinates	SP 5440 9660 (centre)
Start/end dates of field work	24-26.10.2011
Archive Recipient	LCCHNET
Study Area	1.6ha

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