

An Archaeological Excavation  
on land south of The Towers Hospital,  
Gipsy Lane, West Humberstone,  
Leicester (SK 6172 0590)

**Matthew Hurford**

<p><b>Checked by Project Manager</b></p> <p>Signed .....Date.....</p> <p>Name.....</p>
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**For: Taylor Woodrow Ltd.**

**University of Leicester Archaeological Services**  
**Report 2006/014**

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D. Sawday

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## **1. Summary**

*An archaeological excavation was undertaken on land to the south of The Towers Hospital, Gipsy Lane, West Humberstone, Leicester (SK 6172 0590) by ULAS in January 2006. The work was commissioned by Taylor Woodrow Ltd. Excavation revealed further evidence of a small-scale settlement, perhaps an isolated farmstead, in the vicinity of the medieval village of Humberstone that was originally found during a 2003 evaluation (ULAS Report No. 2003/080). The features were badly truncated and lay beneath ridge and furrow remains. Ceramic evidence suggests a 12th or 13th century date for the settlement. To the west of the medieval remains a single pit containing Iron Age pottery was found that could be associated with the occupation at Elms Farm to the northeast.*

## **2. Introduction**

This report presents the results of archaeological excavation on land to the south of The Towers Hospital, Gipsy Lane, West Humberstone, Leicester (SK 6172 0590). The work was carried out prior to proposed residential development of the site and was commissioned by Taylor Woodrow Ltd.

The proposed development site consists of a roughly 'L' shaped area of some 5.5ha. The site was formerly part of The Towers Hospital grounds and is predominantly grassland with some evidence of ridge and furrow cultivation. The northern part of the area has elements of landscaped grounds also associated with the hospital.

The development proposals include the construction of 146 new dwellings, access roads and a link to Gipsy Lane. The excavation was undertaken between the 4th and 23rd of January 2006.

The archaeological excavation was undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the City Archaeologist, Leicester City Museum Service as archaeological advisor to the planning authority following Planning Policy Guidelines 16 (PPG 16, Archaeology and planning para.30) outlined in the *Brief for archaeological field excavation south of Towers Hospital, Leicester* (LCC 9.12.05).

## **3. Geology**

The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 156 indicates that the underlying geology on the development site consists of Rhaetic beds with underlying

Mercia Mudstone in the northern part and alluvium above Mercia Mudstone to the south. The general topography of the site is characterised by gently sloping ground from north to south with a variable height between c. 71 and 63m OD.

#### **4. Archaeological and Historical Background**

A desk-based assessment (ULAS Report No. 2003/017) had established the archaeological potential of the development area. The site was shown to be close to an area of known Roman archaeological remains including both settlement and cemetery elements (DBA page 7, 8.1). The site is also located close to the medieval village of Humberstone and a post-medieval windmill location. Less than a kilometre to the northeast of the site an extensive area of previously unknown Iron Age settlement has been revealed during pre-development work.

The results of a geophysical survey (Stratascan March 2003 Ref:1751) located several anomalies, thought to have been archaeological in origin.

An evaluation (ULAS Report 2003/080) provided evidence of a restricted area of archaeological remains dating to the 12th or 13th centuries. The features, mostly pits and gullies, were badly truncated and lay beneath ridge and furrow remains. It is likely the features relate to small-scale settlement, perhaps an isolated farmstead, in the vicinity of the medieval village of Humberstone. Despite their truncation the majority of the features produced datable evidence suggesting they related to domestic activities.

#### **5. Aims and Objectives**

The site has the potential to address the research questions *The evolution of medieval and rural settlement* (EH 1997; T3). The presence of an undocumented medieval settlement of 12th – 13th century date may suggest that it is a farmstead within the parish of Humberstone. The presence of such sites is unusual and a regional research priority (Lewis 2005). Recording the distribution of remains on the site may help to define domestic activity in contrast to other activity such as crop processing and may help to determine patterns of deposition on the site.

The objective of the excavation is to ascertain whether any significant archaeological remains are present and characterise their nature within the area to be developed. Specifically the excavation will aim to identify any evidence for medieval activity, identify whether it was occupational or agricultural, establish a chronology and identify how this activity might fit into a wider pattern of medieval rural activity in mid Leicestershire.

#### **6. Methodology**

The archaeological work followed the programme set out in the *Design Specification for Archaeological Work* (ULAS Report No: 06/556).

An area of approximately 1351 sq metres was excavated targeting the archaeological remains found in the evaluation and anomalies highlighted in the geophysical survey.

A 360 mechanical digger with a 3m wide toothless ditching bucket was used to excavate the modern overburden and buried soil in spits under archaeological supervision down to the substratum. All archaeological deposits located were hand cleaned, recorded and excavated.

All plans were tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Excavated sections and plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20 and were levelled and tied into the Ordnance Survey Datum. Spot heights were taken where appropriate. All archaeological deposits were recorded using the standard ULAS Recording Manual. This involved a written description, a drawn record and a photographic record of all excavated deposits.

The location of the excavated area was surveyed using a Topcon GTS 303 Total Station Electronic Distance Meter (EDM) linked to a hand held Psion Data Logger. The data was processed using n4ce software, and the final illustrations were produced with the aid of TurboCad drawing software version 11.

All archaeological work adhered to the Institute of Field Archaeologist's (IFA) *Code of Conduct* and followed their *Standard and guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs and Excavations*.

The site archive will be held by the Leicester Museum Service under the Accession Number A3 2006.

## **7. Results**

The layers of modern overburden and the buried topsoil and subsoil were machined in spits to a depth of *c.* 64.50 OD to reveal archaeological features cutting the substratum. A cigarette packet recovered from the base of the modern overburden suggests that the landscaping took place in the late 19th century.

Located in the north eastern part of the site was pit [009]. It was oval and very shallow, up to 0.14m in depth. The fill was mid grey soft silty clay (010) that contained two sherds of Iron Age pottery.

To the east of [009] was another pit [011]. It was irregular in shape also very shallow, up to 0.06m in depth and contained mid grey silty clay (012). Located to the south was feature [007]. It was a circular stone lined pit that contained mixed reddish grey silty clay (008). No finds were recovered from either feature to assist with dating.

Three very shallow features were encountered in the eastern part of the site, two of which were circular pits [003] and [006], one of which was a gully [001]. All the features were filled with mid brown silty sandy clay that was very similar to the fills of the medieval features found to the north and south in the 2003 evaluation. A single sherd of Medieval Sandy Ware pottery dating to the mid 13th century was recovered from the fill of [005].

The latest features encountered were northeast to southwest aligned furrows. They were regularly spaced across the site with an average distance between each of *c.* 5m. The only exception was the eastern most furrow that was almost 10m away from its western neighbour that suggests that a field boundary, perhaps in the form of a lane giving access to fields to the north or south, was located here.

## **8. Discussion**

The archaeological features are very shallow and appear to have suffered truncation from later ploughing (ridge and furrow) and landscaping associated with the hospital.

The single pit of Iron Age date encountered in the northern part of the site indicates that prehistoric activity is present in the area and could be associated with the occupation at Elms Farm to the northeast. The pottery recovered from its fill was similar to that from the settlement to the northeast.

The excavation has revealed further evidence of a previously unknown medieval settlement. The occupation remains are characterised by a series of gullies and pits that are likely to date from the 12th – 13th centuries.

The peripheral location of the remains in relation to the village and manors of Humberstone may suggest some form of dispersed settlement or isolated farmstead. The narrow dating sequence from the pottery recovered from the evaluation and excavation suggests that the settlement was short-lived and may have declined as a result of the formation of the open field system. Based on the ceramic evidence the open field in this area originated later than the 13th century.

## **9. References**

Lewis, C., 2005 'The Medieval Period', in N. J. Cooper (ed) *The Archaeology of the East Midlands. An archaeological assessment and research agenda.* University of Leicester Monograph 13

Marsden, P., 2003 An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment for land south of The Towers Hospital, Leicester (SK 6172 0590). Unpublished ULAS Repott No. 2003-017

Thomas, J., 2003 An Archaeological Evaluation of land south of The Towers Hospital, Gipsy Lane, West Humberstone, Leicester (SK 6172 0590). Unpublished ULAS Report No. 2003-080

## **10. Acknowledgements**

Fieldwork was undertaken by the author with the assistance of D. Parker and G. Jones. Dr. Patrick Clay managed the project.

## Appendix 1.

### The pottery from excavations at The Towers Hospital, Humberstone, Leicester.

D. Sawday

The pottery, three sherds, weighing seventeen grams, was examined under a binocular microscope and catalogued with reference to the ULAS fabric series (Davies and Sawday 1999), (Marsden 2000).

One, sherd, from context 6 [5], was in a Medieval Sandy ware dating from the mid thirteenth century, possibly from Chilvers Coton in Warwickshire (Mayes and Scott 1984). This sherd probably originates from the manuring of the fields associated with the medieval village nearby. The author has previously noted pottery of a similar date from the fields now associated with the Hospital.

The other two joining fragments with an igneous rock fabric were recovered from context 10 [9]. They are thought to be Iron Age in date, although they are unusually thin walled for this type of pottery. Similar material with Mountsorrel granite or granodiorite inclusions has been found at the Iron Age settlement at Elms Farm, Humberstone to the east of the excavation site and at other Iron Age sites in Leicestershire, (Marsden 2000, 173-174).

#### Bibliography

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- Marsden, P., 1984. 'The Prehistoric Pottery' in B. Charles *et al* 'A Bronze Age Ditch and Iron Age Settlement at Elms Farm, Humberstone, Leicester.' *Trans Leicestershire Archaeol & Hist. Soc.* **74**, 113-220, (170-186).
- Mayes, P., and Scott, K., 1984. *Pottery kilns at Chilvers Coton, Nuneaton*. Soc. Medieval Archaeol. Mon. Ser. **10**.

Site/Parish: Towers Hospital, Gypsy Lane, Humberstone, Leicester. Accession No/ Doc Ref: A3 2006/Humberstone2.doc Material: pottery Site Type: fields adjacent to medieval settlement	Submitter: M. Hurford Identifier: D. Sawday Date of Id: 30.01.06 Method of Recovery: excavation
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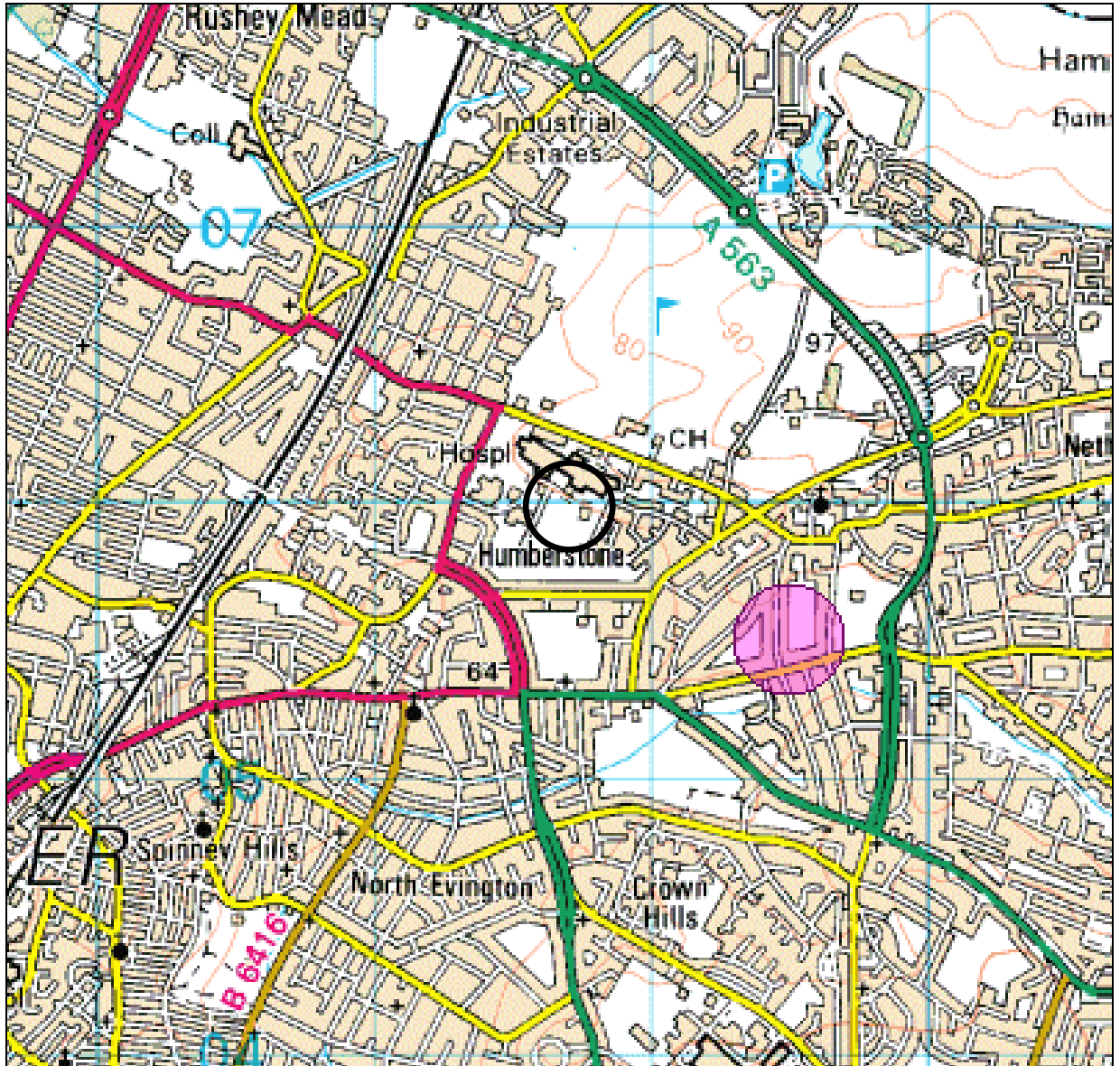


Figure 1. Location of proposed development area.

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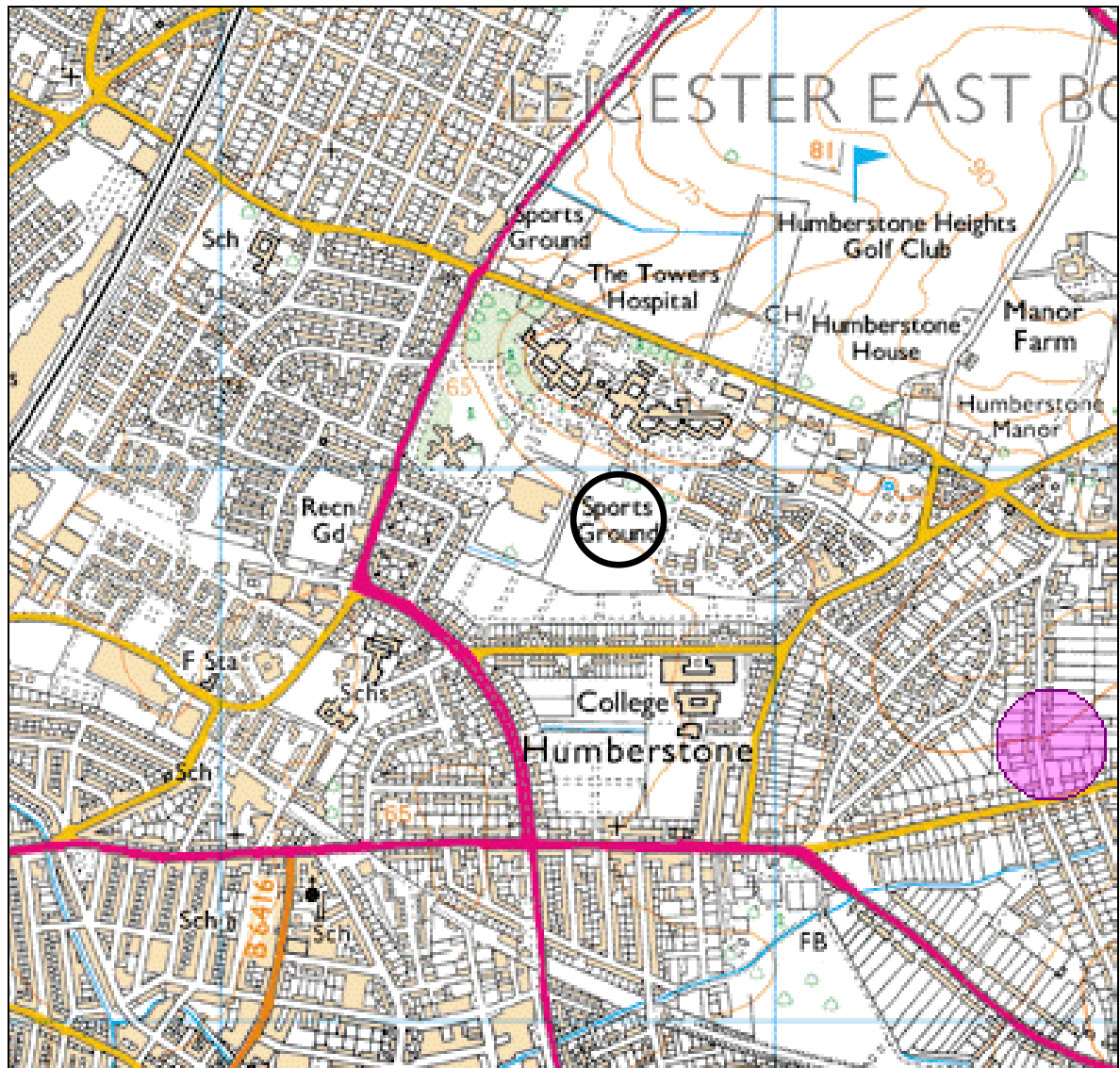


Figure 2. Location of proposed development area.

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Figure 3. Excavation in relation to the evaluation trenches and geophysical anomalies. (Scale 1:2500)

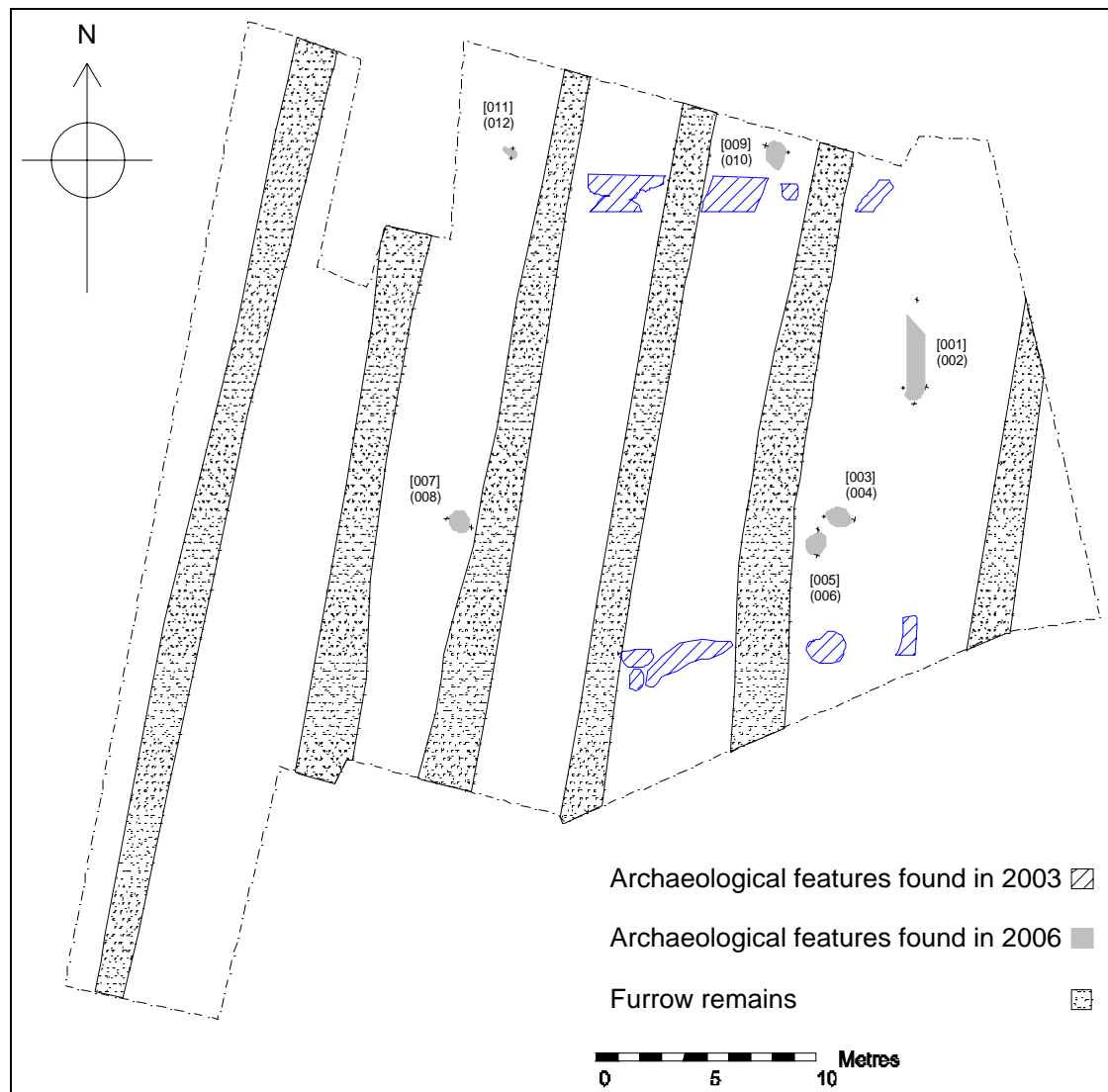


Figure 4. Plan of the features found in the 2003 evaluation and 2006 excavation.

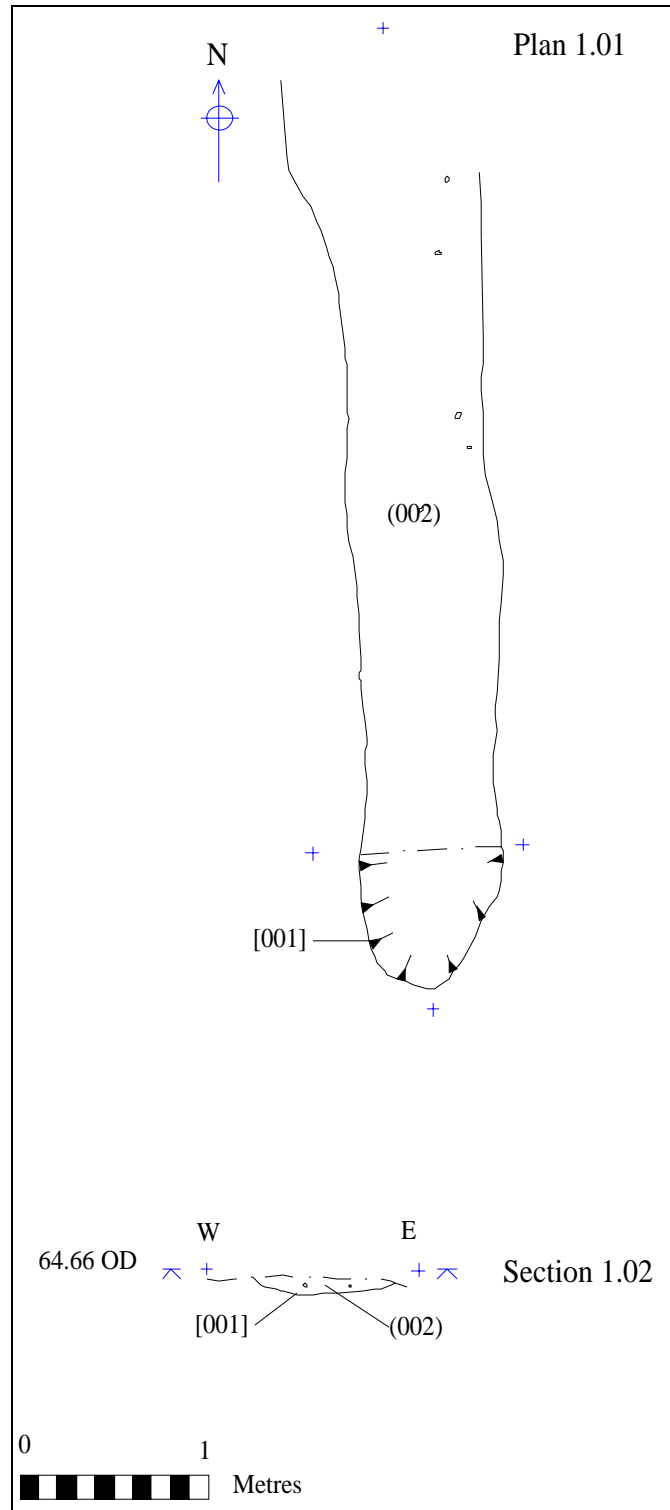


Figure 5. Plan 1.01 and Section 1.02.

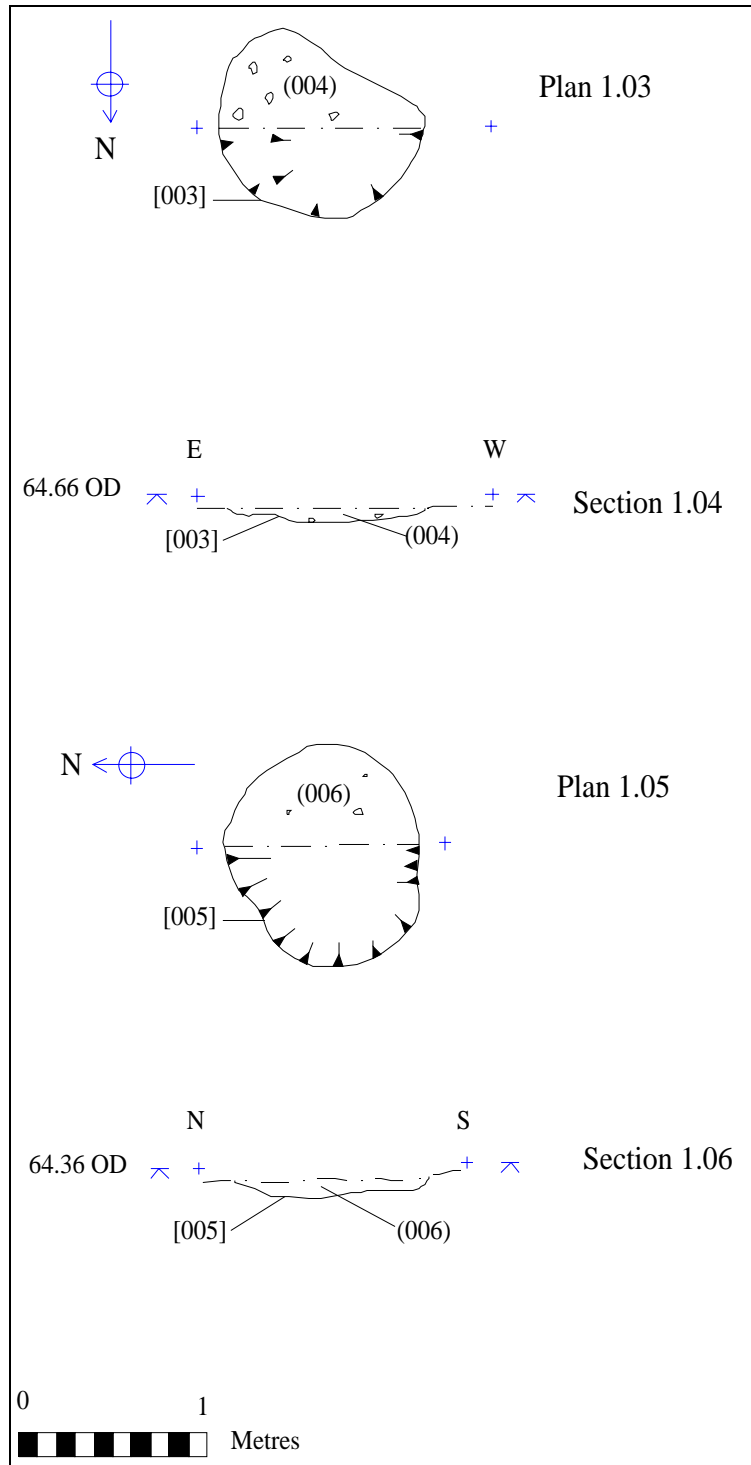


Figure 6. Plans 1.03 and 1.05 and Sections 1.04 and 1.06.

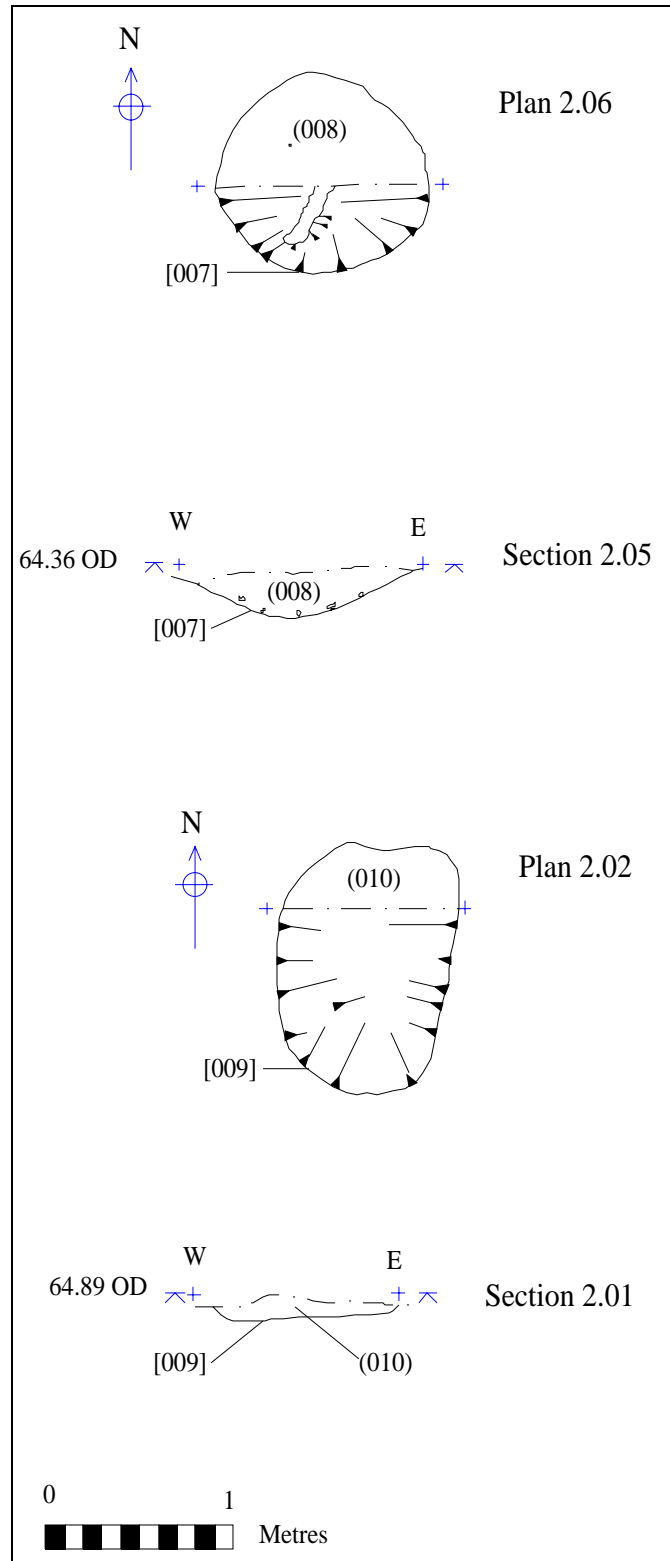


Figure 7. Plans 2.06 and 2.02 and Sections 2.05 and 2.01.

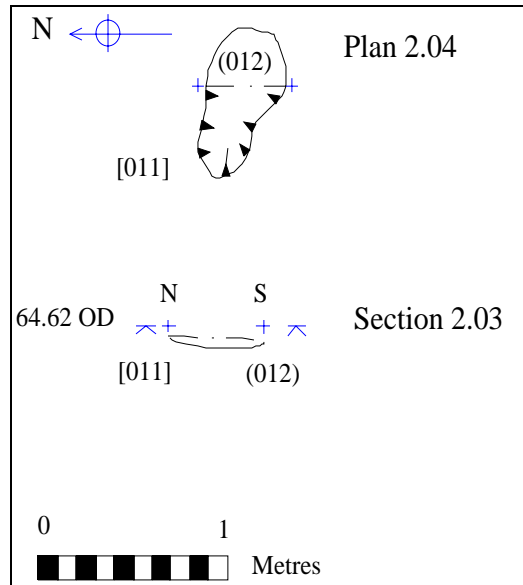


Figure 8. Plan 2.04 and Section 2.03.



Plate 1. General view of the excavation looking southeast.





Plate 2. Feature [009] looking north.

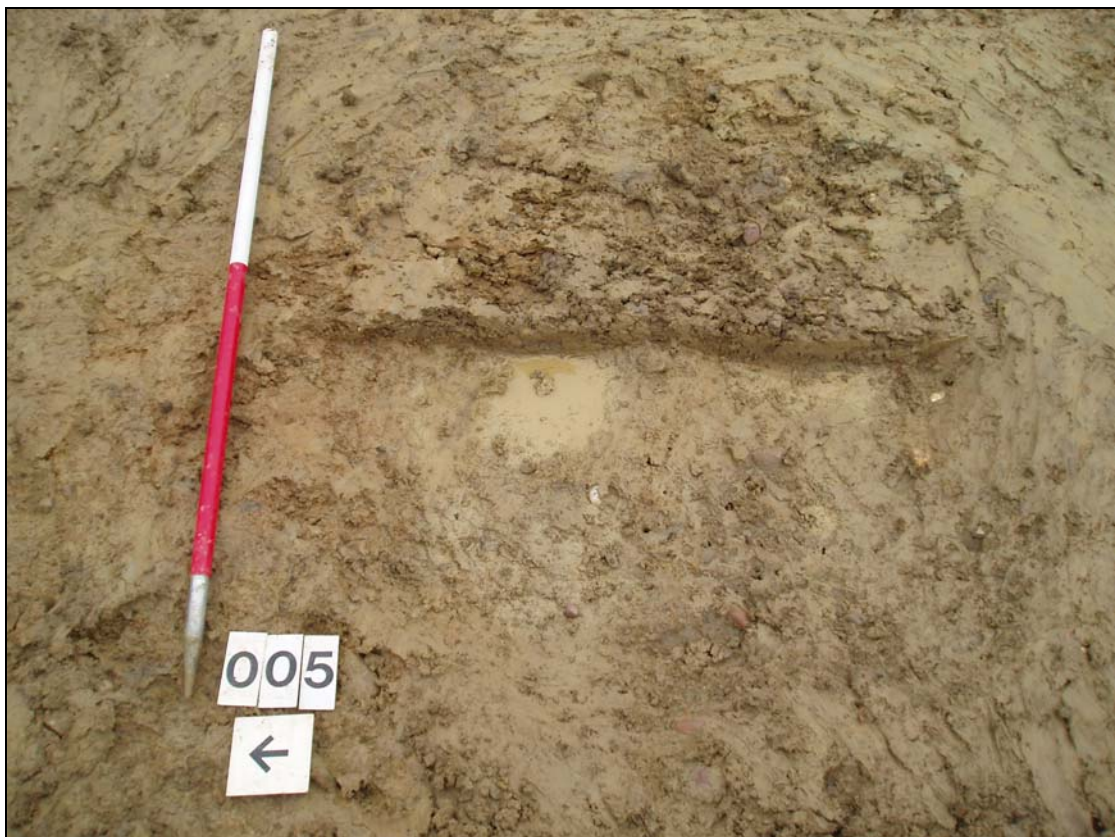


Plate 3. Feature [005] looking east.



Plate 4. Late 19th century cigarette packet