



University of
Leicester

Archaeological Services



**An Archaeological Watching
Brief on Land between Braunstone
Gate/Narborough Road, Leicester
(Planning consent 20101687)**


NGR: SK 578 041

Wayne Jarvis

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For: Fairgate Investments

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Summary

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) carried out an archaeological watching brief on land between Braunstone Gate/Narborough Road, Leicester. The work was undertaken as part of a planning condition during the redevelopment of the former Great Holme Street area into a new retail development (Planning consent 20101687). Groundworks that required archaeological observation consisted of the grubbing out of old foundations from the former buildings, reduction in site levels and the digging of new service runs. This work was carried out during January and February 2012. No archaeological features were identified, and no artefacts were recovered. The site archive will be held by Leicester City Council, with the accession no. A5.2011.

1. Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by ULAS for Fairgate Investments during January and February 2012 on land between Braunstone Gate/Narborough Road, Leicester (SK 578 041). This was undertaken during the redevelopment of the Great Holme Street area (formerly the MFI retail park), when work involved the construction of a new supermarket and ancillary works (Narborough Road Retail Park).

Previously, excavations in the 1970s had identified significant Roman deposits including a wooden coffin inhumation burial, and kiln activity (Lucas n.d.). Additionally, an evaluation had recently identified Roman and medieval activity within the site area (Jarvis 2011b). Therefore further archaeological work was requested by the City Archaeologist of Leicester City Council, in the form of a watching brief during the site works. The work was required in order to record any archaeological deposits potentially to be affected during the development. This report presents the results of this follow-up stage of fieldwork.

2. Site Description, Land use, Topography and Geology

2.1 Site Description

Planning permission has been granted by Leicester City Council for the construction of a retail store (class a1, Planning consent 20101687). The site is on the line of the former Great Holme Street (SK 578 041 centre; Figs. 1, 2), on land bounded by Braunstone Gate to the east, New Park Street to the north and Narborough Road North to the west. The site area consists of c.14,000 sq m (1.4ha) of land in total, and the site lies at a height of c.55.80m aOD. This is relatively low-lying land adjacent to the river Soar, within the former floodplain and probably marshy at times in the past.

The development would take place following demolition of existing buildings, with a new associated car park and service yard; services, alterations to vehicle access from New Park Street; associated highway works on New Park Street and Narborough Road

North.

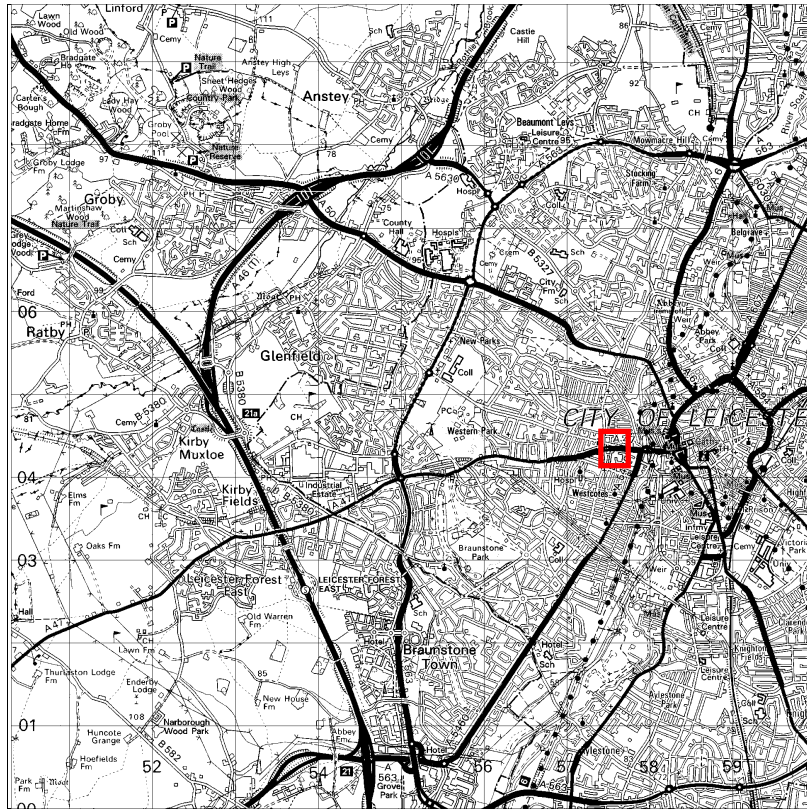


Fig. 1: Site Location.

Scale 1:50000 Reproduced from the Landranger OS map 140 Leicester, Coventry and Rugby area 1:50000 map by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown Copyright 1996. All rights reserved. Licence no. AL 10002186

2.2 Land use and Topography

The site has until recently been used as a mixed ownership retail park (Jarvis 2011a). Prior to redevelopment the site had warehouse buildings standing, including the MFI, Allied Carpets and Carpet Right warehouses being within the footprint of the proposed development. To the east of these buildings, the area was hard standing for car parking, this being brick paved. West of the standing buildings the ground was undeveloped, landscaped and with mature trees present. Access to the site is currently available from the north (New Park Street), and also at the south-east (Braunstone Gate).

The site is relatively flat ground, sloping away slightly from the central area with the slope only noticeable to the south. There is no noticeable difference in ground level between the site and the frontages of Braunstone Gate, New Park Street and Narborough Road North, indicating that the site has not appreciably been reduced in level, nor has the ground level been made up significantly.

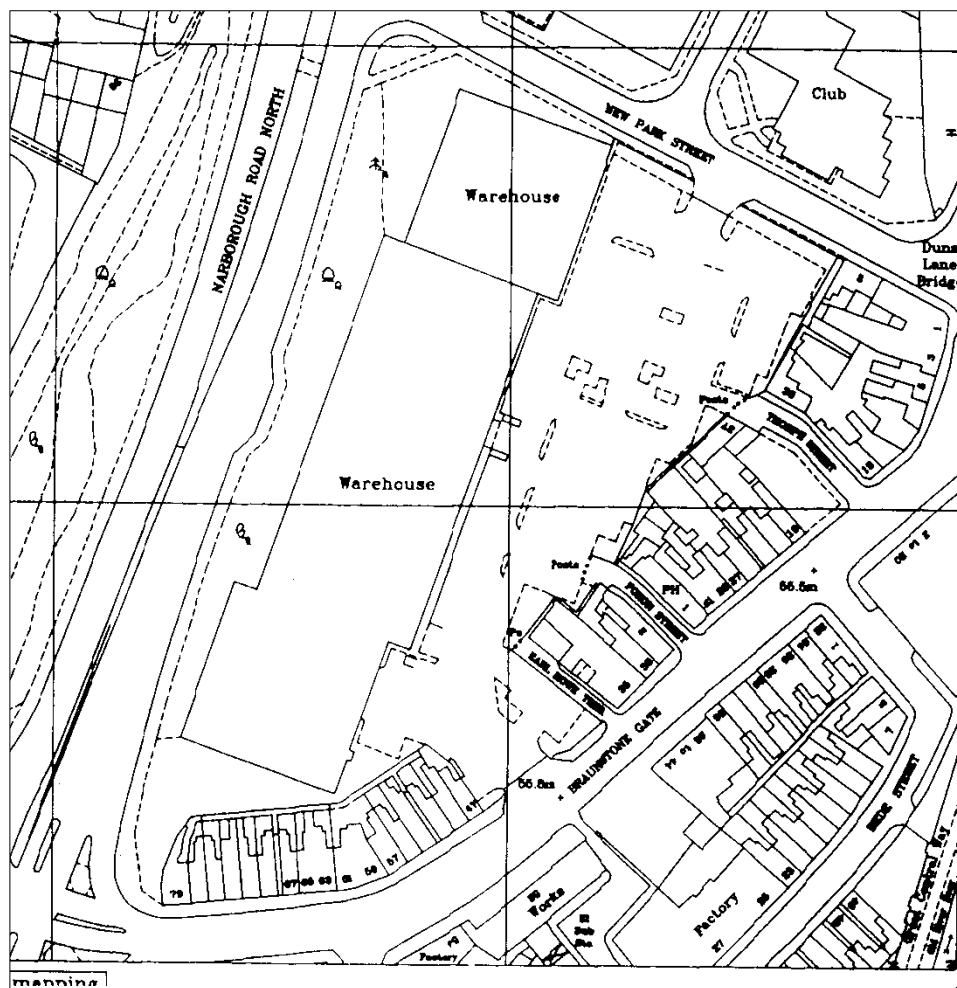


Fig. 2: Current Ordnance Survey map showing standing buildings and surrounding land use

(1:1250, SK5704SE, 2000, by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown Copyright 2000. All rights reserved. Licence no. AL 10002186).

2.3 Geology

The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 156 indicates that the drift geology consists of alluvium associated with the River Soar that lies a short distance to the east, this being part of the ancient Soar floodplain. Additionally the 1970s excavation identified waterlogged channel material presumed to be of medieval date within the site area (Lucas n.d.), suggesting a more recent watercourse. The underlying solid geology below the drift is Mercia mudstone (formerly Keuper marl).

3. Historical and Archaeological Background

The site lies to the south-west of Roman and medieval Leicester in Westcotes Ward in an area of archaeological interest (Jarvis 2011a). Braunstone Gate lies within the Archaeological Alert Area (Local Plan Policy EN6). The site is very close to the projected line of the Fosse Way Roman road leading south-west from Leicester. Excavations within the site area in the 1970s identified Romano-British archaeology including an inhumation and cremation cemetery and domestic and industrial activity (Lucas n.d.). Further evidence of Romano-British, Anglo-Saxon and medieval date comes from within the vicinity (ibid.). Due to this evidence, an archaeological desk-based assessment and an evaluation of the site was requested by Leicester City Council, the results of which are detailed below.

3.1 Recent Work

An archaeological desk-based assessment was prepared by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on behalf of CRM Architects for the proposed development (Jarvis 2011a). The assessment has shown that although the development site lies outside the walls of Roman and medieval Leicester, it is located in an area of high archaeological potential on the site of a known Roman cemetery and other Roman domestic and industrial activity. More specifically, within the actual footprint of the proposed building, a Roman burial with a unique wooden coffin surviving was found in the 1970's excavations (Lucas n.d.). The site is close to the Fosse Way so it is likely that this Roman activity represents at least 'ribbon development' relating to this road, and perhaps a more substantial suburban site here. The medieval potential is perhaps less significant as for at least some of this period the site may have been in agricultural use. However, ditches and pits have previously been recorded within the proposed area and waterlogged artefacts of this date are known to survive here too. Also, the footprint lies on a (presumed) medieval watercourse, and the site is therefore of some potential for the survival of timber structural remains related to waterside activity. Earlier river channels may additionally survive in this floodplain area, with a high potential for associated waterlogged deposits. Additionally, prehistoric remains might survive beneath any alluvial cover. There are also other Roman and medieval findspots in the vicinity of the site, including for instance the Fosse Way Roman road itself, Roman cemeteries to the south, and medieval frontage activity.

In view of the high archaeological potential of the site, a condition was placed on the planning permission, as follows:-

"No development shall take place until a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority, and shall be implemented. The work shall be carried out by a body the details of which shall first be to be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. No work shall take place in the site except in accordance with these approvals. (To ensure satisfactory archaeological investigation and recording and in accordance with Core Strategy policy CS18.)"

ULAS carried out a follow-up archaeological evaluation of the site by trial trenching during June 2011 (Jarvis 2011b). Archaeological features were identified in the east of the site area and within the footprint of the proposed building. These included an early Roman ditch and other Roman deposits, a water course potentially of medieval date with waterlogged materials surviving and presumably a continuation to that seen in the 1970's. Also, a stone structure also of possible medieval date was recorded here. These deposits were sealed by agricultural soils of medieval and post-medieval date, and survived at a depth of 1.5m from current ground level. Further trenching identified the 1970s limits of excavations in the east of the current proposed site. Post medieval or modern levelling has truncated deposits in the areas examined on the north and west side on the former street frontages, although a sequence of early alluvial deposits probably from an old course of the river Soar was identified.

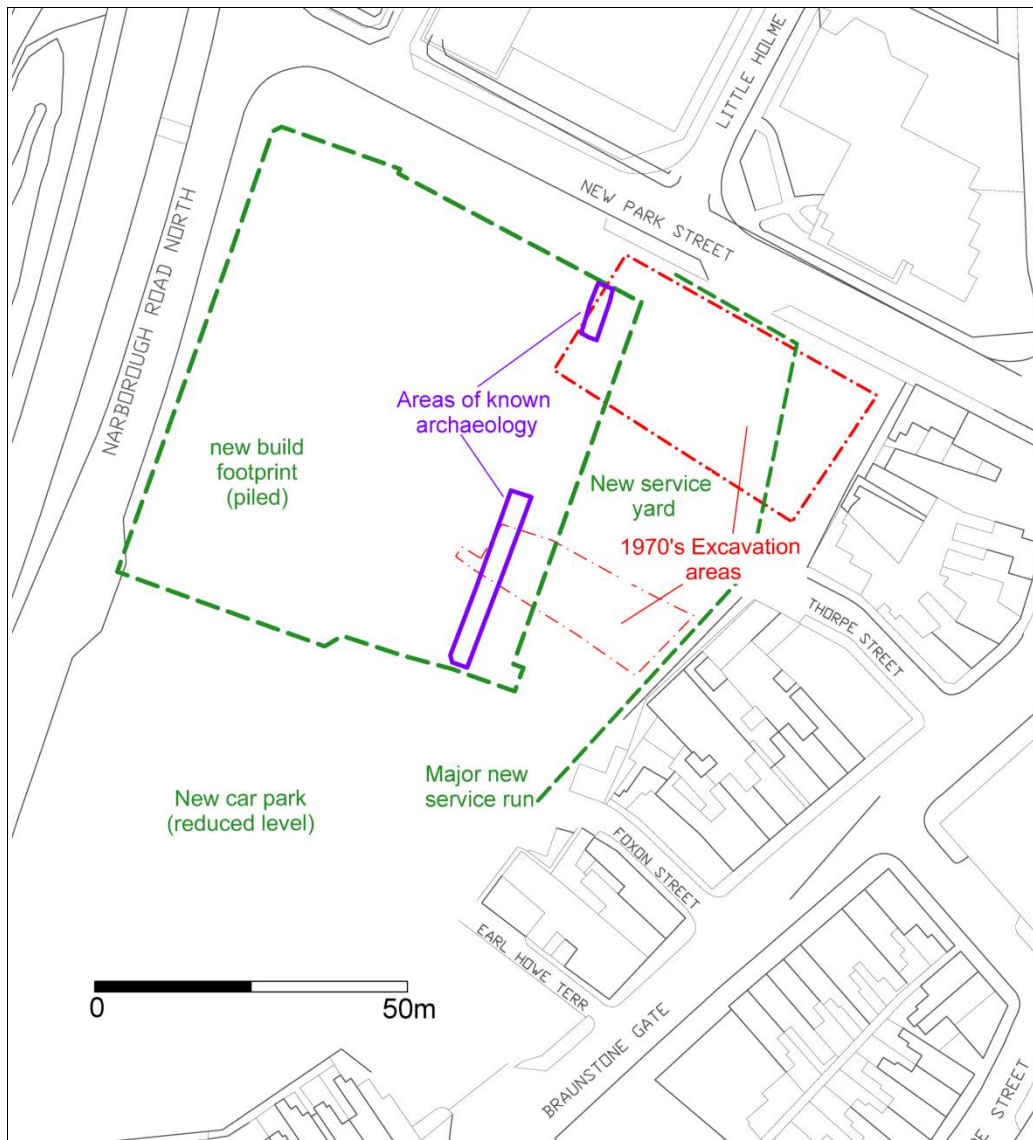


Fig. 3: Main areas referred to in text.

4. Aims and Objectives

4.1 Development Proposals

The development involved the demolition of the standing buildings, and removal of their foundations and old service lines. The construction of the new building would be with a piling regime using vibro-compaction largely around the external perimeter of the building. Pile caps were to be c.1m deep maximum, below which the ground would not be exposed but compacted in situ. Internally the pile mat would provide a base for the floor of the new build with no other substantial below ground work, and the FFL (finished floor level) would be c.500mm above current ground level. Externally new service runs would be provided. The deeper works for these were predominantly along the rear of the frontage properties on Braunstone Gate to the east, and along the frontage of New Park Street in the north of the site. Provision of car park surfaces, pavements and internal floors would have minimal effect on the ground. Additionally some diversionary works to the New Park Street and Narborough Road North roads were to be made.

4.2 Aims & Objectives

The evaluation work had demonstrated that archaeological deposits were at sufficient depth to remain unaffected by shallow groundworks. Archaeology could, however, be affected by the deeper works such as service trenches and pile foundations. In view of the fact that the latter disturbance should affect no more than 3% of the site by area, the City Archaeologist has agreed that a watching brief during groundworks will be a suitable strategy to mitigate any damage that may occur to buried archaeological remains. The watching brief aims were:-

Through archaeological observation of groundworks by the client's contractors to create a formation for the proposed building and for the excavation of e.g. foundation and service trenches:

1. To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.
2. To establish the character, extent and date range for any archaeological deposits to be affected by the proposed ground works.
3. To record any archaeological deposits to be affected by the ground works.
4. To recover any artefacts, worked stone and other building materials from the fabric of the walls.
5. To produce an archive and report of any results.

5. Methodology

5.1 Archaeological attendance for inspection and recording

The Written Scheme of Investigation ('WSI') set out the methodology as follows, (Buckley 2012):-

The project will involve archaeological attendance during all groundworks which will have the potential to disturb buried archaeological remains (including stripped areas and service and foundation trenches) by an experienced professional archaeologist. During these groundworks, if any archaeological deposits are seen to be present, the archaeologist will investigate and record areas of archaeological interest. If the initial monitoring identifies areas of no archaeological interest (e.g. modern made ground or disturbed areas), then the archaeologist may stand down monitoring of that area. If significant archaeological deposits are discovered work may need to be halted in order for contingency excavation and recording to be carried out. The archaeologist will co-operate at all times with the contractors on site to ensure the minimum interruption to the work. Any archaeological deposits located will be hand cleaned and planned as appropriate. Samples of any archaeological deposits located will be hand excavated. Measured drawings of all archaeological features will be prepared at a scale of 1:20 and tied into an overall site plan of 1:100. All plans will be tied into the National Grid. Archaeological deposits will be excavated and recorded using standard ULAS procedures. Sufficient of any archaeological features or deposits will be hand excavated in order to provide the stratigraphic and chronological sequence of deposits, recognising and excavating structural evidence and recovering economic, artefactual and environmental evidence. All below ground stratigraphy will be recorded. Particular attention will be paid to the potential for buried palaeosols and waterlogged deposits in consultation with the ULAS environmental officer. All excavated sections will be recorded and drawn at 1:10 or 1:20 scale, levelled and tied into the Ordnance Survey datum. Spot heights will be taken as appropriate. Spoil will be monitored for artefacts. A representative sample of unstratified finds may be retained. Any human remains encountered will be initially left in situ, covered and protected, and only be removed in

accordance with a Ministry of Justice licence and in compliance with relevant environmental health regulations. The landowner and/or developer, the Planning Authority and the coroner will be informed immediately of their discovery.

5.2 General Methods

Staffing, recording systems, health and safety provisions and insurance details are included in the WSI (Buckley 2012). The work would follow the approved design specification (ibid.), and adhere to the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) *Code of Conduct* (2010) and their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (2008). An accession number will be obtained prior to commencement of the project and used to identify all records and artefacts.

6. Results

Initial demolition works started on the week ending 06/01/2012, when a preliminary meeting was held and to ascertain the nature and timing of below-ground works. From visit 16/01/2012 onwards observations were carried out of the groundworks. Initially this work involved the digging of trenches to allow the former foundations to be removed, these stanchions being sited around the perimeter of the original building. This involved substantial excavations as the stanchions were up to 2m x 2m x 1m, and showed the deposits across the site to consist largely of c.1.2m – 1.5m of modern ground and earlier garden soils, on to natural deposits.

From 19/01/2012 excavation of service trenches took place. Initially a trench was dug at the west end of Foxon Street in the east of the site, and adjacent to Braunstone Gate. Here a large T-shaped trench was cut to locate and expose the surviving foul service. This trench measured c.7m x 3m and 3.5m deep (Figs. 4-5). Below the garden soils here a series of layers of cemented sand and gravel were observed (at a depth of 1.7m), potentially comparable to road metalling seen for example on the other side of Braunstone Gate where they were identified as being make ups for the metalling of the Roman Fosse Way (Parker 2006). Further examination along the line of the service trench here indicated that they were in fact mineralised natural deposits of gravel, probably stained at the south end from the adjacent extant service trench. In the north of the site area, along the frontage of New Park Street a new service trench was excavated, which continued southwards to this Foxon Street junction (Figs. Front page, 6-7), also passing Thorpe Street. Only modern levels and historic garden soils were observed here too onto natural deposits at a depth of 1.75m, and no cut features were observed.

The final area of site observed was the reduction in level of the main car park area at the south of site. Here profiling was carried out with a reduction in level of as much as 0.6m in the central area of the site. At the base of this reduced level were possible undisturbed levels of garden soil, potentially indicating that there could be survival of features at a deeper level here. This was an area that had not previously been evaluated; however no archaeological deposits were seen. No unstratified artefacts were recovered during any of the above work.



Fig. 4: Box prop support in service trench adjacent to Foxon Street (looking north)...



Fig. 5: ... Foxon Street (cont'd) Mineralised deposits adjacent to service trench (looking southwest)



Fig. 6: Service trench adjacent to New Park Street (looking east)



Fig. 7: New service works adjacent to Thorpe Street (looking east)

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Whilst the recent evaluation work identified several Roman and medieval features, these were at considerable depth and only survived in relatively isolated areas. The archaeological watching brief reported here did not reveal any further archaeological features or unstratified finds to add to this although a good indication of potential depths was recorded. It is likely that this current phase of work was negative due to the limited scope of groundworks at a deep enough level to affect the buried deposits, as clearly archaeological features do survive here at a greater depth than the levels affected currently.

8. Archive

The site archive will be held by Leicester City Museum Service, with the accession no. A5.2011.

The archive includes the earlier fieldwork (evaluation) material (documentary and finds archive), and contains:

Watching Brief:-

- 3 watching brief recording sheets
- 1 site notes/diary
- Digital photographs on CD and contact prints
- Photo Index
- Unbound copy of this report

Evaluation:-

- 5 trench recording sheets
- 1 context summary record sheet
- 1 drawing index sheet
- 1 drawing records index sheet (detail)
- 1 survey sheet
- 2 photographic indices recording sheets
- 1 small finds index sheet
- 1 sample records sheet
- 22 A5 context sheets
- Site drawings (4 A3 permatrace)
- CD containing digital photographs
- Thumbnail contact prints of digital photographs
- Unbound copy of evaluation report (ULAS report 2011-101)
- 35mm black and white contact sheet and negatives (x2 films)

The report is listed on the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) held by the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York. Available at: <http://oasis.ac.uk/>

ID	OASIS entry summary
Project Name	Braunstone Gate/Narborough Road (Great Holme St)
Summary	University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) carried out an archaeological watching brief on land between Braunstone Gate/Narborough Road, Leicester. The work was undertaken as part of a planning condition during the redevelopment of the Great Holme Street area (Planning consent 20101687). Groundworks that required archaeological observation consisted of the grubbing out of old foundations from the former MFI buildings, reduction in site levels and the digging of new service runs. No features were identified, and no artefacts were recovered. This work was carried out during January and February 2012. The site archive will be held by Leicester City Council, with the accession no. A5.2011.
Project Type	Watching brief
Project Manager	Richard Buckley
Project Supervisor	Wayne Jarvis
Previous/Future work	Previous: DBA, evaluation. Future: None
Current Land Use	Retail area (and associated parking, landscaping)
Development Type	Retail
Reason for Investigation	PPS5
Position in the Planning Process	as a condition
Site Co ordinates	SK 578 041
Start/end dates of field work	9/1/12 – 9/2/12
Archive Recipient	Leicester City Museums
Study Area	14,000 sq m (1.4ha)

Associated project reference codes	Museum accession A5.2011
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9. Publication

A summary of the work will be submitted for publication in the local archaeological journal *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* in due course. The report has been added to the Archaeology Data Service's (ADS) Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) database held by the University of York.

10. Bibliography

- Buckley, R., 2012 *Written scheme of investigation for archaeological work: Job title: Braunstone Gate: Narborough Road Retail Park*, ULAS Report
- Jarvis, W., 2011a *An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment for Land between Braunstone Gate/Narborough Road Leicester*, ULAS Report no. 2011-035
- Jarvis, W., 2011b *An Archaeological Evaluation on Land between Braunstone Gate/Narborough Road, Leicester (Planning consent 20101687)* NGR: SK 578 041 ULAS Report no. 2011-101
- Lucas, J., n.d. *Excavations in the Great Holme Street Area, Leicester*. Unpubl'd Leicestershire Archaeological Unit interim summary report
- Parker, M., 2006 *An Archaeological Watching Brief at 38, Braunstone Gate, Leicester (SK 579 040)* ULAS Report No. 2006-108

11. Acknowledgements

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