



University of Leicester

Archaeological Services

An archaeological evaluation
On land west of Gaulby Road,
Billesdon,
Leicestershire
(SK 720 022)

Leon Hunt



ULAS Report No 2012-204
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on land west of Gaulby Road,
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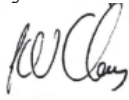
Leon Hunt

**for:
CgMs Consulting Ltd**

Pre-planning enquiry

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An archaeological evaluation on land west of Gaulby Road, Billesdon, Leicestershire (SK 720 022)

Leon Hunt

Summary

An archaeological field evaluation was carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services on land west of Gaulby Road, Billesdon, Leicestershire.

A heritage statement for the site had identified some potential for Iron Age and Roman remains to be extant on the land, which is currently under pasture.

A geophysical survey was carried out on the site, which identified linear and discrete features, possibly enclosure ditches and other features associated with an Iron Age or Romano-British settlement.

Due to heavy rain the original plan to excavate 12 trenches over three areas had to be modified, with the approval of Leicestershire County Council, as much of the southern fields were waterlogged. Consequently, only seven trenches were excavated on the northern part of the site.

All but two of the seven trenches contained archaeological features, many of which contained Romano-British pottery mainly dating from the 2nd century. These were mostly linear features representing enclosure ditches and gullies, most likely associated with the outlying enclosures of a Romano-British farm or settlement.

Introduction

An archaeological field evaluation by trial trenching was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services on land west of Gaulby Road, Billesdon, Leicestershire (NGR: SK 720 022).

The fieldwork was in accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF; Department for Communities and Local Government March 2012) Section 12 Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment. The fieldwork was intended to provide a record of any buried archaeological remains which will be impacted on by the development to address the requirements of the Planning Authority.

The site lies on pasture fields on the south-eastern side of Gaulby Road to the south-west of the village of Billesdon. A geophysical survey carried out prior to the evaluation had identified possible Iron Age or Romano-British features.

Aims and Methods

The definition of archaeological field evaluation, taken from the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standards and Guidance: for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2010) is a limited programme of non-intrusive and/ or intrusive fieldwork which determines the presence or absence of archaeological features, structures, deposits, artefacts or ecofacts within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater. If such archaeological remains are present field evaluation defines their character, extent,

quality and preservation, and enables an assessment of their worth in a local, regional, national or international context as appropriate.



Figure 1: Site Location

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Site Location, Geology and Topography

Billesdon lies around 9 miles east of Leicester in the Harborough District of Leicestershire (Figure 1).

The site comprises two pasture fields and a small disused compound on the south-eastern side of Gaulby Road to the south-west of the village centre of Billesdon, with a combined area of around 5.2 hectares.

The British Geological Survey website indicates that the underlying geology of the area is likely to be mudstones and siltstones of the Lias Group (Dyrham and Charmouth Formations), with overlying glacial tills, sands and gravels.

The proposed development site lies on slightly inclined ground on the northern slope of an open shallow valley at approximately 175m aOD. The site is located in an area of clay ridges east of Leicester city and the village is situated on the edge of the east Leicestershire Uplands.

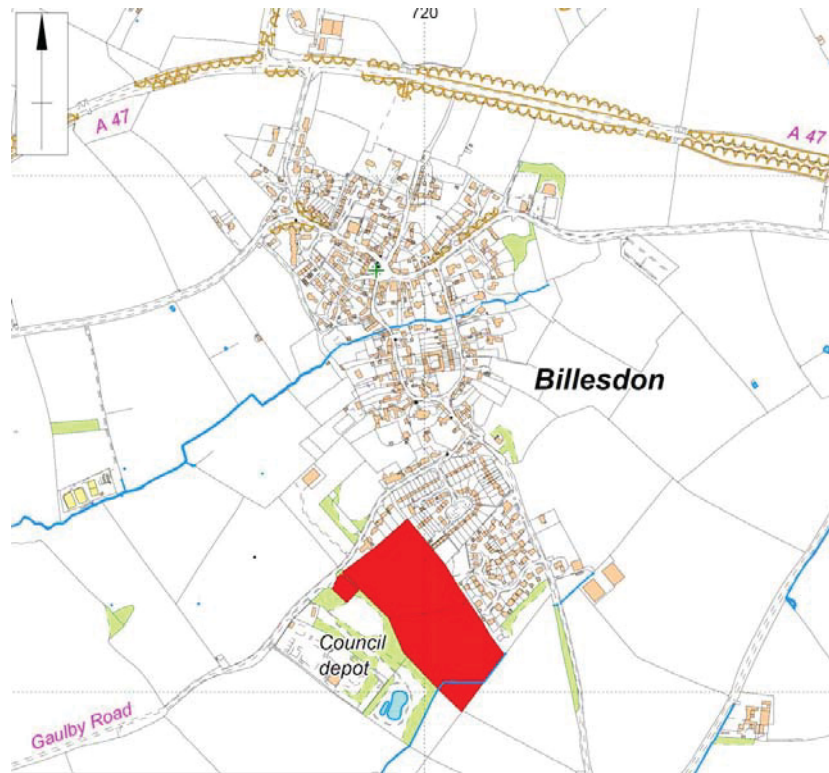


Figure 2: Location of site Scale 1: 2500
Plan provided by developer

Historical and Archaeological Background

A heritage statement had been prepared for the site and indicated that there was some potential for Iron Age and Roman archaeological remains to be present on the site (Dawson 2012). The site contains some earthworks and very slight ridge and furrow.

The line of a Roman road runs around 1km to the south-east of the site (HER Ref No. MLE8910).

A geophysical survey was carried out in 2012 prior to the evaluation (Walford 2012). This identified an area of archaeological remains, most likely part of a settlement of Iron Age or Romano-British date.

Methodology

The main objectives of the trial trenching will be:

- 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 produce an archive and report of any results.

Within the stated project objectives, the principal aim of the archaeological work is 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.

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

Leicestershire County Council Historic and Natural Environment Team, as advisors to the planning authority had requested a total of c.1140 square metres of trenching, equating to 12x50m trenches and 1x30m trench.

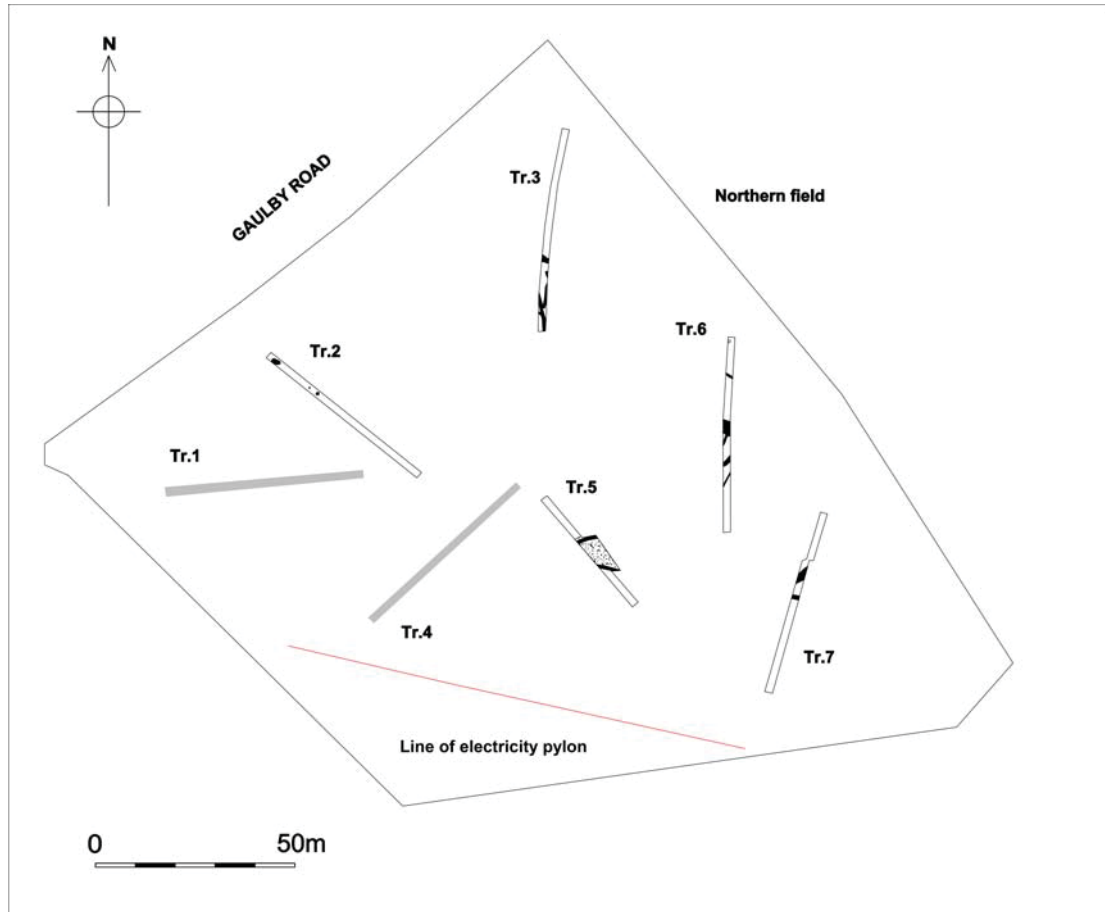


Figure 3: Plan of trench locations, with features highlighted in black.
Negative trenches in grey

Due to heavy rain prior and during the evaluation it was decided, in consultation with Leicestershire County Council, that only the seven trenches in the northern part of the site would be excavated, as much of the southern fields were waterlogged and were under standing water in parts.

Trench 3 was extended by 5m in order to reveal more of the features at the southern end, and Trench 5 was widened to 3.6m in the centre for the same reasons.

The trenches were excavated by a large tracked excavator under the supervision of an archaeologist. Upper soils and layers were removed using a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket to archaeological layers or the natural sub-stratum, whichever the higher.

The trenches were placed across the site in order to target the features identified by the geophysical survey. The southern edge of the field was avoided due to an electricity pylon (Figure 3).

Trench locations were recorded and tied in to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. At the end of the evaluation the trenches were back-filled. Cut numbers are recorded in square brackets (e.g [7]) while fills are shown in round brackets (e.g (6)).

The work was carried out between 5th December and 14th December 2012.

Results

Trench 1

Orientation: East-West

Length: 50m

Width: 1.8m

Topsoil: A dark brown sandy silt with occasional angular stones

Subsoil: A yellow-brown sandy silt with occasional angular stones

Natural sub-stratum: Yellow-brown sandy clay at west end and yellow-brown stony clay at the east end

Interval	0m W	10m	20m	30m	40m	50m E
Topsoil Depth	0.24m	0.32m	0.30m	0.30m	0.27m	0.30m
Subsoil Depth	0.29m	0.28m	0.25m	0.26m	0.27m	0.22m
Top of Natural	0.53m	0.60m	0.55m	0.56m	0.54m	0.52m
Base of Trench	0.63m	0.68m	0.74m	0.70m	0.69m	0.70m

The trench contained a number of field drains, running north-west to south-east.

No archaeological features were identified in this trench.

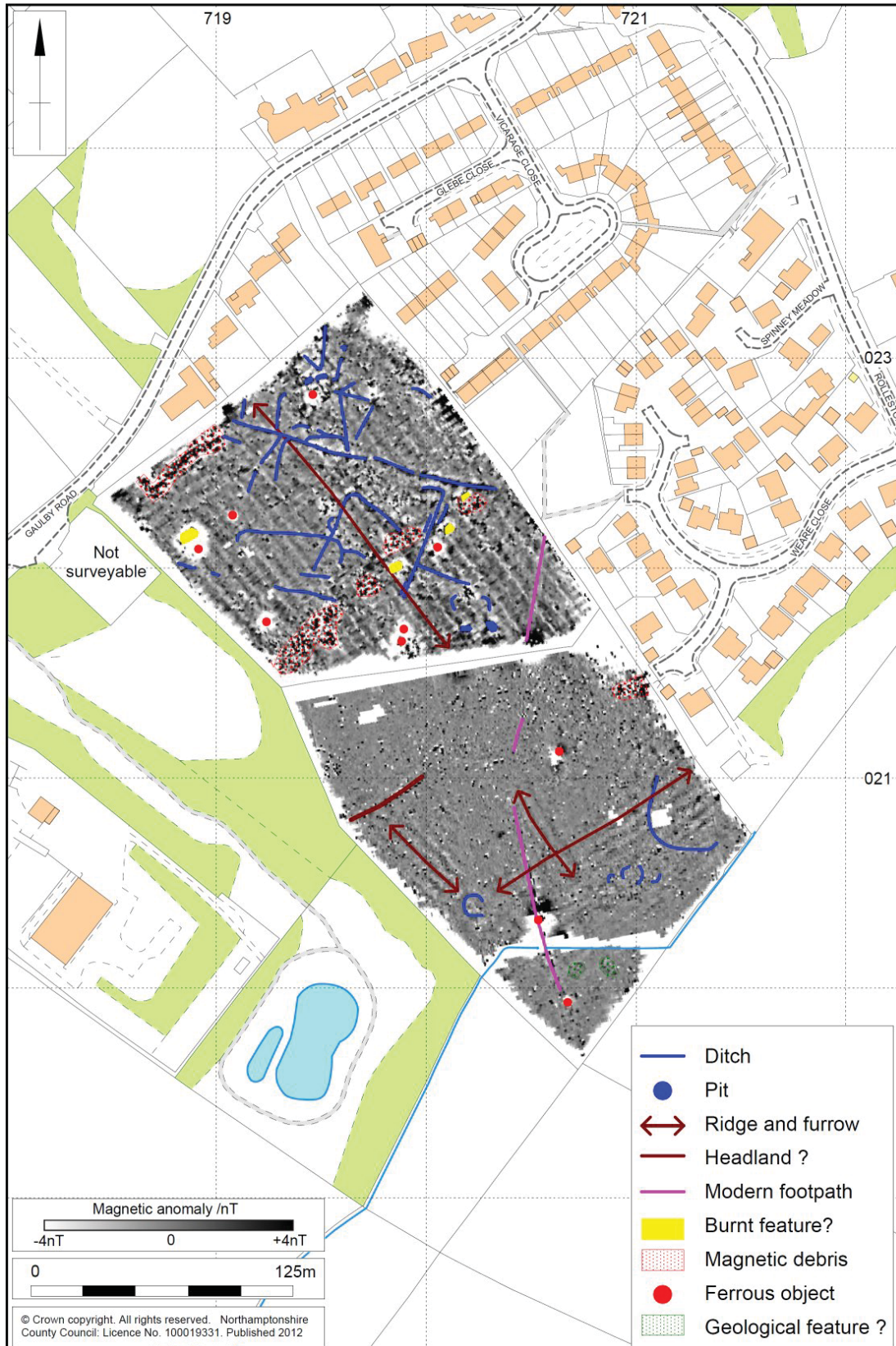


Figure 4: The results of the geophysical survey. Taken from Walford 2012

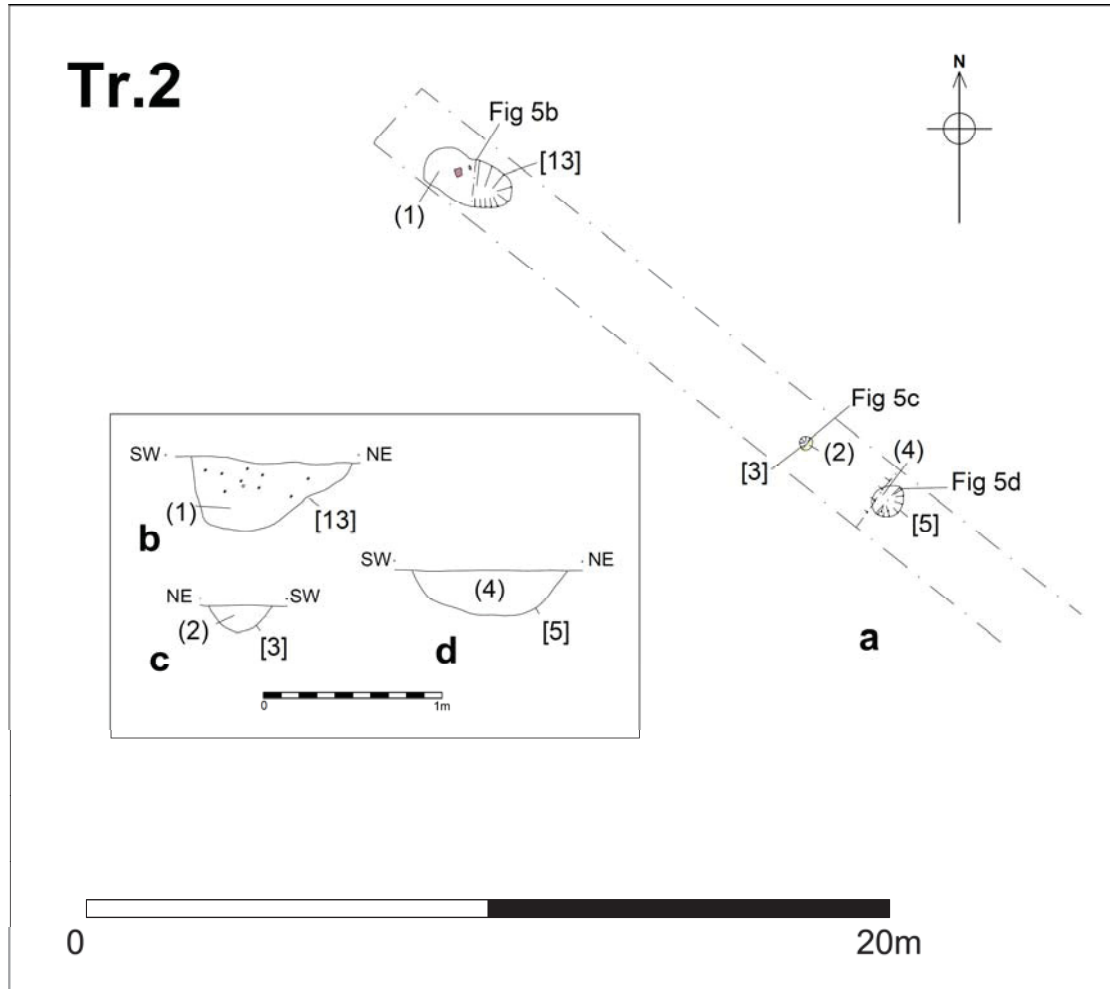


Figure 5: Plan and sections of Trench 2

Trench 2

Orientation: NW-SE

Length: 50m

Width: 1.8m

Topsoil: Mid- dark brown yellow-brown slightly sandy silt with very occasional sub-rounded stones

Subsoil: A yellow-brown sandy silt with occasional angular stones

Natural sub-stratum: Yellow-brown silty clay or orange-brown sandy clay

Interval	0m SE	10m	20m	30m	40m	50m NW
Topsoil Depth	0.27m	0.28m	0.30m	0.40m	0.33m	0.36m
Subsoil Depth	0.10m	0.11m	0.10m	0.16m	0.30m	0.20m

Top of Natural	0.37m	0.39m	0.40m	0.56m	0.63m	0.56m
Base of Trench	0.47m	0.48m	0.47m	0.60m	0.95m	0.60m

Features: (1), [13], (2), [3], (4), [5]

At the north-western end of the trench was a large oval pit [13], measuring 2.25m by 1.07m (Figure 5a). It had a vertical western edge and a shallower eastern edge and a flat base (Figure 5b). The fill (1) was a pale grey silty clay with a few charcoal flecks and seven sherds of Romano-British pottery, including shelly ware and sherds of oxidised ware from roll necked jars. There was also a single large piece of sandstone within the fill and a piece of fired clay.

Nearby were two more features. The smaller was a possible post-hole [3] of 0.35m diameter with fairly smooth sides and a concave base of 0.15m depth (Figures 5a and 5c). The fill of the post-hole (2) was a mid-grey-brown silty-clay with no stones. A large sherd of abraded Roman grey ware pottery was within the fill.

The second feature was a sub-rounded pit [5], 0.87m wide and 0.25m deep, with quite steep sides and a concave base (Figures 5a and 5d). The fill (4) was a mid-grey-brown silty-clay with no stones but with Roman pottery, including sherds from a bead and flanged bowl.

Trench 3

Orientation: N-S

Length: 55m

Width: 1.8m

Topsoil: Dark brown yellow-brown slightly sandy silt with very occasional sub-rounded stones

Subsoil: Mid-yellow-brown silty-clay with occasional angular stones

Natural sub-stratum: Brown-yellow clay and orange-brown sandy-silt

Interval	0m N	10m	20m	30m	40m	50m	55m S
Topsoil Depth	0.29m	0.35m	0.29m	0.40m	0.36m	0.30m	0.35m
Subsoil Depth	0.27m	0.32m	0.30m	0.50m	0.40m	0.20m	0.26m
Top of Natural	0.56m	0.67m	0.59m	0.90m	0.76m	0.50m	0.61m
Base of Trench	0.59m	0.70m	0.60m	1m	0.97m	0.70m	0.70m

Features: (6), [7], (14), [15], (16), [17], (18), [19], (22), [23]

This trench contained a number of linear features, mainly at the southern end of the trench. There were also a number of features that on examination proved to be natural and a field drain.

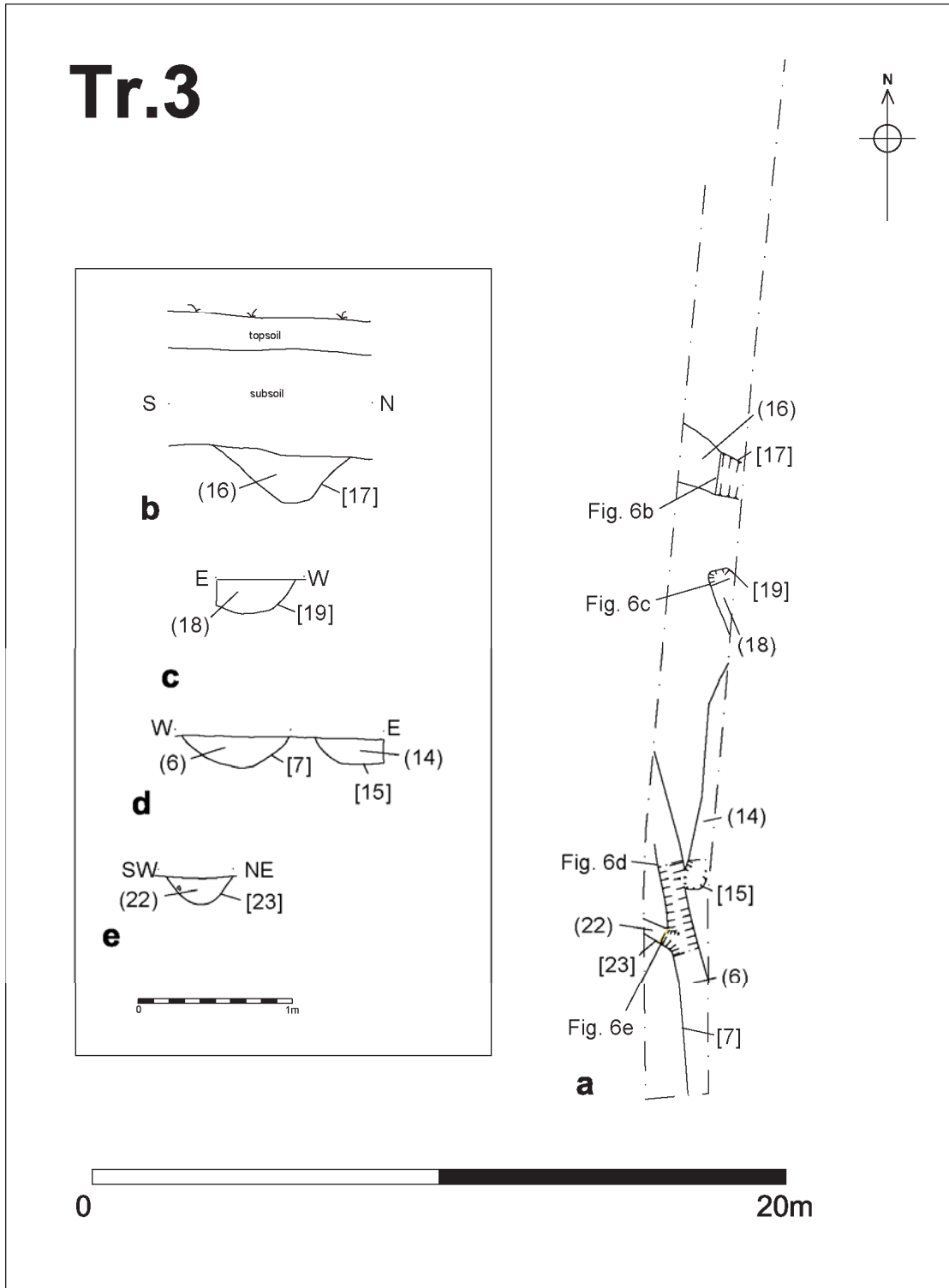


Figure 6: Plans and sections of Trench 3

A ditch, approximately 1m wide and 0.42m deep [17] ran across the trench from north-west to south-east. The sides were around 45 degrees and the base was curved.

The fill (16) was a mid-dark grey-brown silty-clay with very occasional small stones. The fill contained no artefacts (Figures 6a and b).

Further south was a gully or ditch [15] running north-south, which lay mostly under the eastern baulk of the trench, and appeared to end in a butt-end to the north [19]. The sides of the feature were quite shallow and the base appeared flat and quickly filled with water once excavated, as did all the features in this trench. The visible section of this feature was 9.5m long and at least 0.57m wide at the butt-end, although the feature's nature was obscured by the baulk. It was around 0.23m deep and contained a fill (14) or (18) consisting of a pale to dark grey brown silty clay with no stones. No artefacts were retrieved from the fill (Figures 6 a-d).

Feature [15] appeared to butt-end at the southern end but also possibly empty into a wider ditch [7], running north north-west to south south-east across the trench for around 4m. This feature was 0.75m wide and 0.40m deep with 45 degree sides and a flat base. The fill (6) was a pale grey silty-clay with no stones (Figures 6a and d). The fill contained grey ware Roman pottery.

A smaller ditch or gully [23] joined the ditch [15] from the eastern baulk, oriented north-west to south-east and visible for around 0.8m. It also had 45 degree sides and a flat base (Figures 6a and e). The fill (22) was a pale grey silty-clay with no stones and no pottery.

All the fills in these features were very similar and no relationships between them could be ascertained.

Trench 4

Orientation: NE-SW

Length: 50m

Width: 1.8m

Topsoil: Dark brown slightly silty-clay with occasional small stones

Subsoil: A yellow-brown sandy-silt with occasional angular stones

Natural sub-stratum: Yellow-brown silty-clay

Interval	0m SW	10m	20m	30m	40m	50m NE
Topsoil Depth	0.25m	0.20m	0.25m	0.30m	0.30m	0.39m
Subsoil Depth	0.07m	0.10m	0.08m	0.05m	0.10m	0.15m
Top of Natural	0.32m	0.30m	0.33m	0.35m	0.40m	0.54m
Base of Trench	0.35m	0.33m	0.37m	0.37m	0.45m	0.63m

Features:

Trench 4 contained a field drain but no archaeological features.

Trench 5

Orientation: NW-SE

Length: 40m

Width: 1.8m-3.6m

Topsoil: Mid-dark brown yellow-brown slightly sandy silt with very occasional sub-rounded stones

Subsoil: A yellow-brown silty-clay with occasional angular stones

Natural sub-stratum: Yellow-brown clay and an area of stony clay

Interval	0m NW	10m	20m	30m	40m SE
Topsoil Depth	0.30m	0.30m	0.30m	0.35m	0.30m
Subsoil Depth	0.17m	0.20m	0.25m	0.30m	0.25m
Top of Natural	0.47m	0.50m	0.55m	0.65m	0.55m
Base of Trench	0.52m	0.66m	0.64m	0.72m	0.60m

Features: (9), [10], (11), [12]

This trench contained two linear features, which appeared to follow the edges of a large spread of stone. The trench was widened across this area to examine this feature, which turned out to be a natural spread of stony clay.

The northernmost feature [10] was oriented east to west and cut through the stony area for around 5m. The feature was 0.90m wide and 0.40m deep with 40 degree sides and a flattish base (Figures 7a and b). The fill (9) was a pale to mid grey clayey-silt with very occasional gravelly stones and grey ware pottery.

The southern feature [12], which appeared to respect the edge of the stony area, was oriented north-west to south-east and had steep sides and a concave base. The fill (11) was a mid-dark greyish brown silty-clay with few sub-rounded stones and some natural flint (Figures 7a and c).

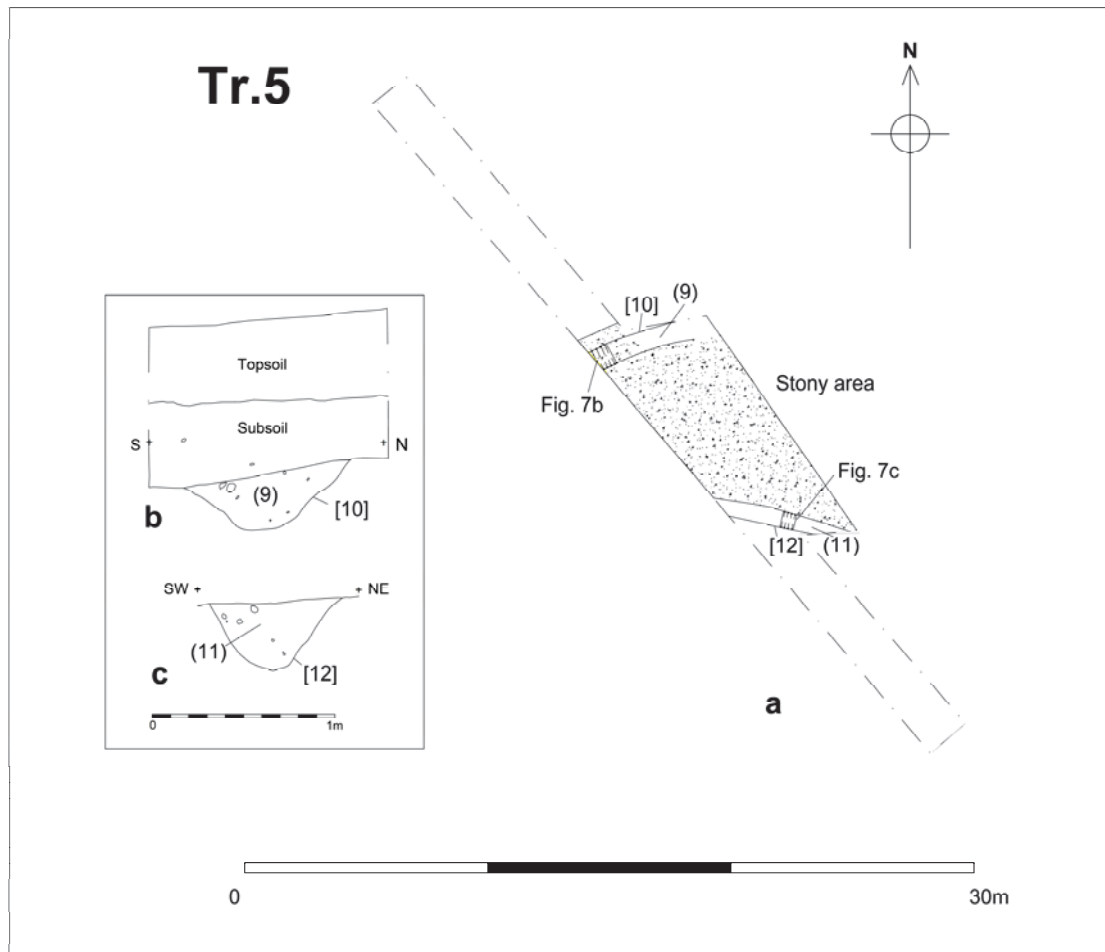


Figure 7: Plans and sections of Trench 5

Trench 6

Orientation: N-S

Length: 51m

Width: 1.8m

Topsoil: Mid- dark brown yellow- brown slightly sandy silt with very occasional sub- rounded stones

Subsoil: A yellow- brown silty clay with occasional angular stones

Natural sub-stratum: Yellow- brown clay

Interval	0m S	10m	20m	30m	40m	50m N
Topsoil Depth	0.30m	0.30m	0.33m	0.32m	0.30m	0.37m
Subsoil Depth	0.30m	0.50m	0.46m	0.29m	0.30m	0.33m
Top of	0.60m	0.80m	0.79m	0.61m	0.60m	0.70m

Natural						
Base of Trench	0.66m	0.92m	0.90m	0.65m	0.65m	0.77m

Features: (20), [21], (24), [25], (26), [27], (28), [29], (30), [31], plus an undesignated pit (?) and linear feature

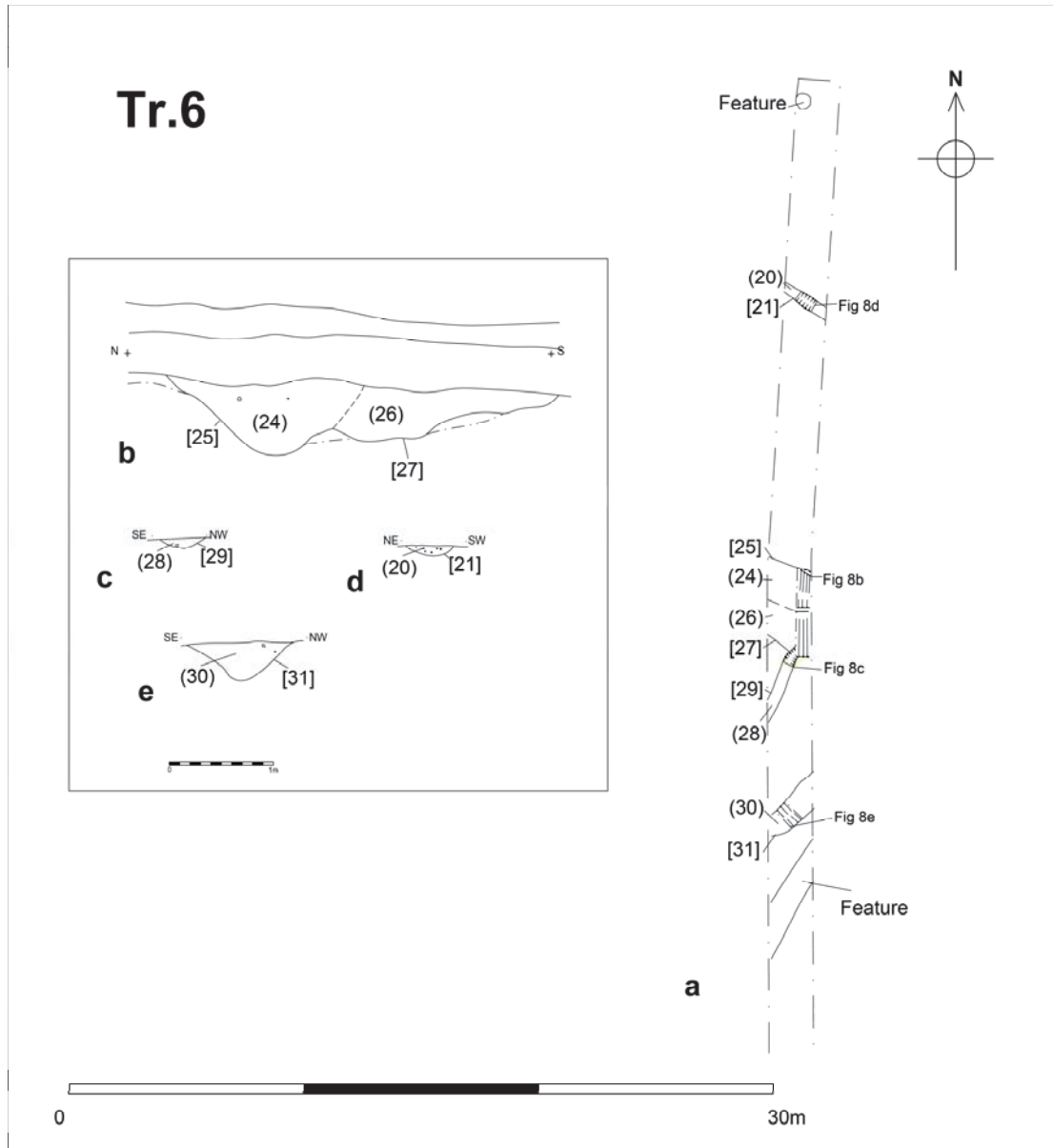


Figure 8: Plans and sections of Trench 6

The trench contained a number of features, most of which were sampled. Around the centre of the trench was a very large ditch [27], most likely recut as [25], which ran north-west to south-east across the trench. The combined width of the feature was around 2m and the deepest section, within the recut [25] was 0.7m. The earlier ditch [27] had a shallow southern edge (although the section through the feature had been

cut obliquely against the baulk) and the recut [25] had 45 degree sides on both sides. The base was relatively flat and then concave within the recut [25].

The earlier fill (26) consisted of a mid to dark brown sandy-clay with very few small stones and no artefacts and the later fill (24) was a darker grey-brown sandy-clay with some charcoal flecks, numerous flecks of manganese and a few small stones. A single sherd of grey ware was recovered from this fill.

Entering the large ditch from the south-west was a 0.54m wide gully [29], which was only 0.10m deep with shallow sides and a flat base. This feature appeared to curve from the north-east to the south. The fill (28) was a dark yellow-green sandy clay with manganese flecks and small stones, but no artefacts.

To the north of the large ditch [27] was a narrower ditch [21], which ran north-west to south-east across the trench and was 0.48m wide. The sides of the feature were at a 45 degree angle and a concave base. The fill (20) was a yellow-grey-brown sandy-silt with frequent small stones and manganese flecks. No artefacts were recovered from this feature.

To the south of the large ditch was a further ditch [31], which was oriented east to west, with a slight turn to the north-west. The sides of the ditch were *c.* 45 degrees and it had a narrowly concave base. The fill (30) was a mid-brown-grey silty-clay with very few small stones and no artefacts.

There were two further features within the trench; a 0.92m wide ditch, oriented north-east to south-west to the south of feature [31] and a possible pit at the very northern end of the trench.

Trench 7

Orientation: N-S

Length: 50m

Width: 1.8m

Topsoil: Mid- dark brown yellow- brown slightly sandy silt with very occasional sub-rounded stones

Subsoil: A yellow- brown silty clay with occasional angular stones

Natural sub-stratum: Yellow- brown clay

Interval	0m S	10m	20m	30m	40m	50m N
Topsoil Depth	-	-	0.27m	0.36m	0.30m	0.40m
Subsoil Depth	-	-	0.50m	0.45m	0.60m	0.55m
Top of Natural	-	-	0.77m	0.81m	0.90m	0.95m
Base of Trench	c.1m	c. 0.75m	0.84m	0.84m	0.92m	1.05m

Features: Two undesignated linear features

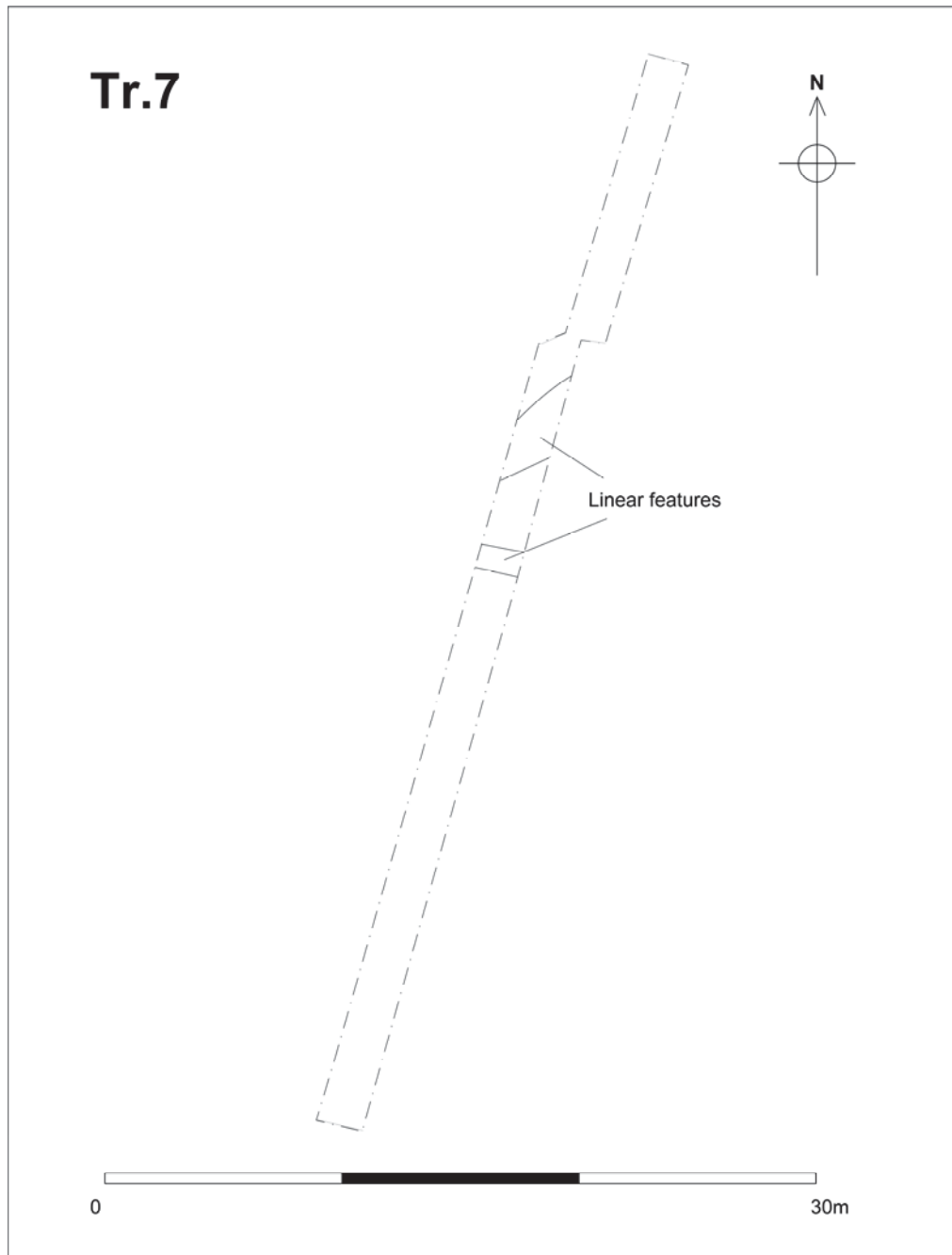


Figure 9: Plan of Trench 7

Trench 7 was excavated in two parts with the northern end stepped to the east to avoid a field drain, which flooded the trench at the northern end. The ground was very boggy at the southern end of the field and the southern end of the trench was soon full of water. It was not possible to measure the soil depths at this end.

There were two linear features close to the northern end. Neither was sampled due to the flooding (Figure 9).

At the step in the trench at around 40m from the southern end was a layer of large stone cobbles within the sub-soil; possibly an attempt to relieve the boggy ground here.

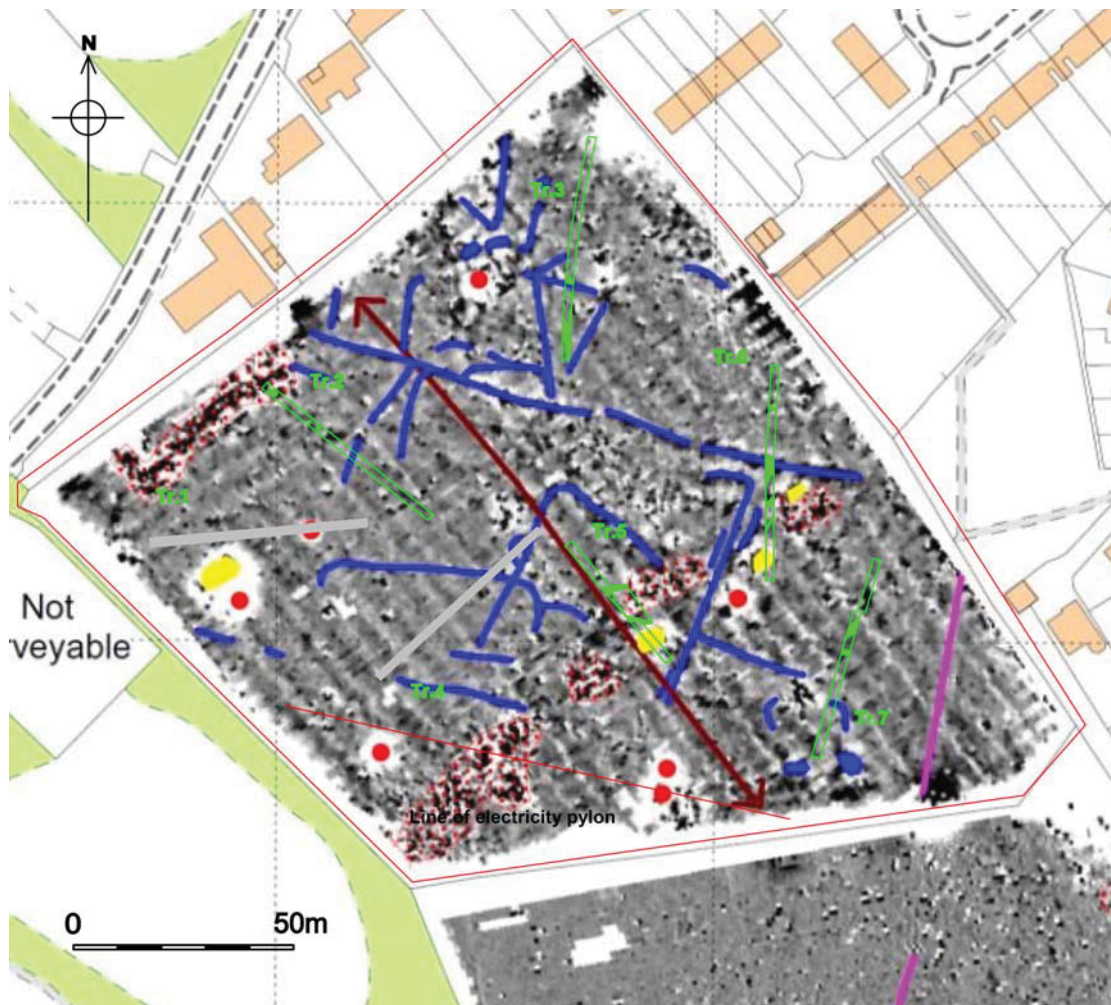


Figure 10: Trench plan overlain onto Geophysical Survey results

Conclusion

The evaluation at Gaulby Road, Billesdon confirms the evidence from the geophysical results carried out prior to this stage of work, which identified linear and discrete features that appeared to be most likely late prehistoric or Romano-British in origin.

Overlaying the trenches onto the survey has shown that in many cases the trenches had picked up anomalies that were identified on the survey, particularly the ditches in Trench 6, which match up with the large north-west to south-east ditch on the survey and the smaller ditches to the south, which also appear to broadly match the orientation of the north-east to south-west ditches nearby (Figure 10).

Trench 3 also matches up some of the features on the survey and the stoney area in the centre of Trench 5 matches the 'magnetic debris' identified on the Geophysical survey. There are some features identified by the Geophysical survey, which were not revealed during the evaluation, but largely the trenches mirror the findings of the Geophysical survey and therefore, the survey was very successful in identifying archaeological features.

Ditches and gullies were identified and excavated in five of the seven trenches, with pottery artefacts exclusively Romano-British in date. Most of the material is from the 2nd century, except the material from the bead and flanged jar that dates from the 3rd century.

The features are most likely agricultural in origin, representing enclosure ditches and drainage gullies, along with the occasional discrete feature, such as the large pit [13] in Trench 2. There was no evidence for post-holes and or other features that may be interpreted as being structural.

The evidence from the coverage of the trenches and the geophysical survey would suggest that the archaeological activity is largely focussed throughout the northern field, although it was not possible to evaluate the southern fields at this stage. Trenches 1 and 4 were negative, which may suggest that the archaeology is more concentrated on the eastern side of the site.

These features appear to represent the outlying agricultural ditches of a Romano-British farmstead, with the its focus possibly to the east of the fields, closer to the centre of Billesdon.

References

Dawson., M., 2012 *Heritage Statement. Land at Gaulby Road, Billesdon, Leicestershire (SP 712 020)*. CgMs Report

Walford, J., 2012 *Archaeological Geophysical Survey on land at Gaulby Road, Billesdon, Leicestershire SP 712 020. October 2012*. Northamptonshire Archaeology Report 12/179

Archive

The archive for this project will be deposited with Leicester Museums in due course with accession number X.A125.2012. The archive consists of the following:

- 1 Unbound copy of this report (ULAS Report No. 2012-204)
- 7 Trench recording sheets
- 1 Context record
- 15 Context sheets
- 2 Contact sheets of digital photographs
- 1 Drawing index
- 5 A3 Sheets of permatrace
- 1 photographic record (2 sheets)
- 1 CD of digital photographs
- 1 Set B&W contact sheets
- 1 Set B&W negatives

Publication

Since 2004 ULAS has reported the results of all archaeological work through the *Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations* (OASIS) database held by the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York.

A summary of the work will also be submitted for publication in a suitable regional archaeological journal in due course.

OASIS data entry

Project Name	Gaulby Road, Billesdon
Project Type	Evaluation
Project Manager	Patrick Clay
Project Supervisor	Leon Hunt
Previous/Future work	Geophysical Survey
Current Land Use	Pasture
Development Type	Housing
Reason for Investigation	NPPF
Position in the Planning Process	Pre-planning enquiry
Site Co ordinates	SK 720 022
Start/end dates of field work	05-12-12 to 14-12-12
Archive Recipient	Leicestershire Museums
Study Area	5.2 ha

Acknowledgements

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Leon Hunt, Steve Baker and Roger Kipling of ULAS carried out the work and the project was managed by Patrick Clay.

Thanks to Steve Baker for assisting with the drawings and Liz Johnson and Anita Radini for the pottery and environmental reports.

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Revised 06-02-2013



Plate 1: The site with trenches excavated, looking south-east



Plate 2: Work in progress on Trench 2



Plate 3: Feature [13], fill (1) in Trench 2, looking north-west

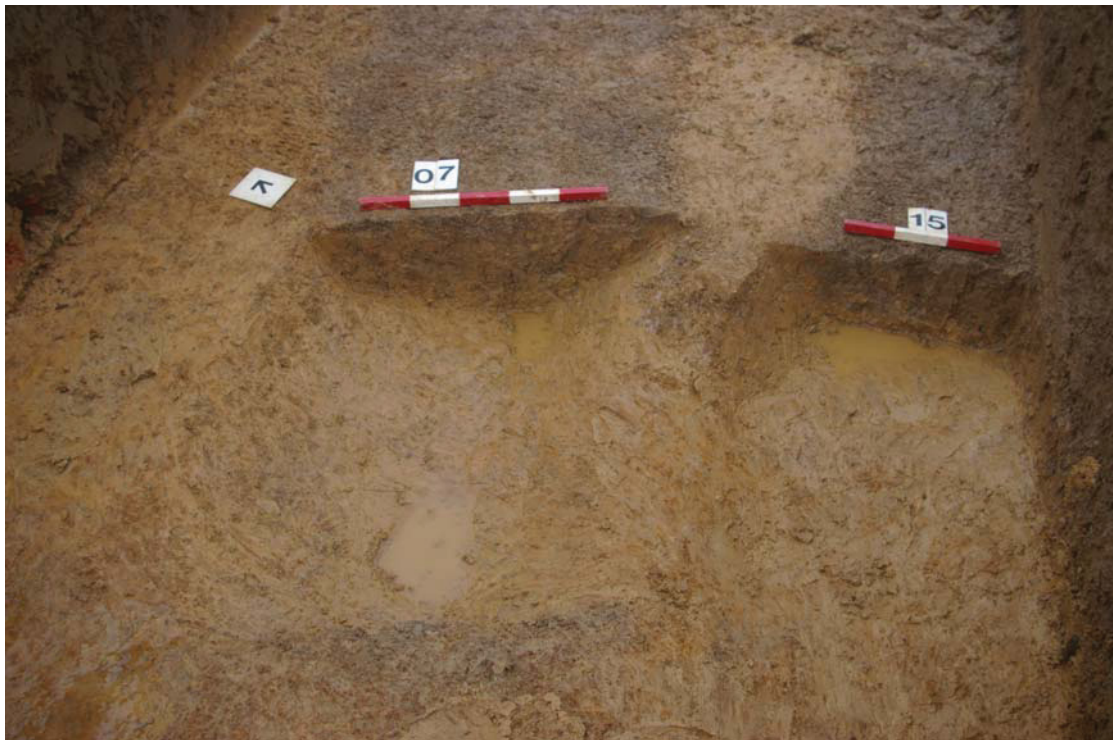


Plate 4: Features [7] and [15] in Trench 3, looking north



Plate 5: Trench 5 after excavation, showing stony area, looking south-east



Plate 6: Features [25] and [27], with gully [29] to right, Trench 6, looking east



Plate 7: Trench 7, post-excavation showing severe flooding, looking north-east

Appendix I: The Romano-British Pottery

Elizabeth Johnson

Introduction

An assemblage comprising 15 sherds of Romano-British pottery weighing 376g and one fragment of fired clay weighing 24g was recovered as part of evaluation excavations at Gaulby Road, Billesdon, Leicestershire. The average sherd weight of 25g indicates a good level of preservation overall, although some surfaces are abraded.

Methodology

The pottery was classified using the Leicestershire Museums Fabric Series (Pollard 1994, 112-114). All the material was quantified by sherd count, weight (grams) and estimated vessel equivalent (EVEs using rims only), with forms assigned wherever possible as detailed in the table below.

Cut	Cont	Fabric	Form	Sherds	Weight (g)	Diam (cm)	EVEs	Dating	Comments
13	1	OW3	Jar	2	128	32	0.11	2ndC+	
13	1	OW2	Jar	1	20	16	0.07	2ndC	
13	1	GW5	Misc	3	25			2ndC+	Burnt.
13	1	CG1	Jar	1	6			2ndC+	Abraded.
3	2	GW3	Jar/Bowl	1	22	24	0.1	2ndC	Abraded.
5	4	BB1	Bowl	1	3			c.AD120+	
5	4	GW5	Jar	2	21			2ndC+	2 vessels, abraded.
5	4	GW5	Bowl	1	131	19	0.175	c.AD250+	
7	6	GW5	Jar	1	6			2ndC+	Abraded
10	9	GW3	Jar	1	4			2ndC+	Abraded
25	24	GW6	Jar	1	10			2ndC+	Abraded, burnt.

Discussion

The assemblage is small with local grey wares forming the majority, the most notable of which is a bead and flanged bowl dating from the middle of the 3rd century onwards from [5] (4) (Pollard 1986, 5). The only sherd of Black Burnished ware was also recovered from (4). Two oxidised ware roll necked jars, a small sherd of shelly ware and three sherds of burnt grey ware were recovered from [13] (1), and a date within the 2nd century is most likely for this material. The fragment of fired clay was also found in (1). The remaining contexts revealed single sherds of undiagnostic grey ware, which could date any time from the 2nd century onwards.

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Appendix II: Assessment of potential for archaeobotanical analysis

Anita Radini

During an archaeological evaluation at Billesdon, conducted by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services, four samples of soil were taken to assess survival of plant and animal remains, in order to provide information of food production, consumption and the environment of the site in the past.

The soil samples ranged between 10 to 20 litres of soil. Sample 1 (22), sample 2 (24), sample 3 (4), were found to contain only a few flecks of charcoal and some small rootlet fragments, in very low amounts.

Sample 3 (4) was found to have a higher amount of small flecks of charcoal. However, none could be identified due to their very small size. The survival of pollen was also unlikely.

Therefore, the samples taken during the evaluation hold little potential for archaeobotanical analysis and no further work is required. It must be taken in account that soil condition can vary throughout a site and while this assessment is negative, an appropriate sampling strategy should still be adopted if any further work is carried out in the area in the future.

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