



**University of
Leicester**

Archaeological Services



**An Archaeological Evaluation
at Friars Mill, Bath Lane, Leicester
NGR: SK 58002 04684**

John Thomas

ULAS Report No 2014-153.
©2014

**An Archaeological Evaluation
at Friars Mill, Bath Lane,
Leicester.**

NGR: SK 58002 04684

John Thomas

For: Leicester City Council

Approved by

Signed:  **Date:** 4 September 2014.

Name: R. J. Buckley

University of Leicester
Archaeological Services
University Rd., Leicester, LE1 7RH
Tel: (0116) 2522848 Fax: (0116) 2522614

ULAS Report Number 2014-153

©2014

[A24.2014]

CONTENTS

Summary	1
Introduction.....	1
Archaeological and Historical Background (from Clarke 2013).....	2
Aims and Objectives	4
Methodology	5
Results of the Evaluation	7
Discussion	11
Bibliography	11
Appendix I OASIS Information.....	12
Appendix II The Finds	13

FIGURES

Figure 1 Friars Mill Evaluation: Approximate Site Location (highlighted)	2
Figure 2 Trench Locations in relation to earlier work	6
Figure 3 Trench 1 facing west	7
Figure 4 Trench 1 section drawing	8
Figure 5 Layers at the western end of Trench 1	8
Figure 6 Trench 2 section drawing	9
Figure 7 Trench 2 facing south	10
Figure 8 Layers at the southern end of Trench 2	10

An Archaeological Evaluation at Friars Mill, Bath Lane, Leicester (SK 58002 04684).

John Thomas

Summary

Archaeological evaluation was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) in advance of redevelopment at Friars Mill, Bath Lane, Leicester. The site lies within the north-west quarter of the Roman and medieval walled town and has high potential for the survival of archaeological remains, particularly relating to the defences of early Leicester. Two trenches were excavated, with both containing a series of deeply stratified layers overlying probable alluvial deposits. Trench 1 adjacent to the River Soar, had layers of mortar-rich soil overlying waterlogged deposits possibly reflecting filled ditches, or channels associated with the river. Trench 2, on the western side of the site contained a thick layer of silty clay with some occupation debris, overlying what appeared to be layers of alluvium. A small assemblage of Roman and medieval pottery and tile was recovered. No evidence was found for the defences of the walled Roman and medieval town. The site archive will be held by Leicester City Museum Service, under the accession code A24.2014.

Introduction

An Archaeological Field Evaluation was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS), at Friars Mill, Bath Lane, Leicester on July 22nd & 23rd 2014. Prior to this phase of work an earlier evaluation had been undertaken by Birmingham University Field archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in 2003 (Jones 2003) and a desk-based assessment had been undertaken by ULAS (Clarke 2013), both of which demonstrated the archaeological potential of the site.

The current evaluation was carried out in response to new development proposals by Leicester City Council which proposes internal and external alterations to three Grade II Listed Buildings (Friars Mill, the cottages and the pump house – amended Planning Application 20131613), a three story extension to the side of the former mill, a two storey extension to the rear of offices along with new boundary walls, fencing, gates and associated landscaping of the site (amended Planning Application No. 20131613).

The site is located in Leicester City Centre on the western side of Bath Lane, a plot formerly occupied by Friars Mill, a textile factory which closed by 2005 (SK 58002 04684, Fig. 1). Some of the later ancillary structures were demolished in 2009 and in 2012 an arson attack damaged the remaining empty mill buildings.

It lies within the north-west corner of the historic core of Roman and Medieval Leicester, and is located near to the site of the north gate of the walled town and near to a concentration of high status Roman buildings revealed through recent excavations.

The site lies on fairly flat ground at a height of approximately 53m OD. The British Geological Survey of England and Wales shows the underlying geology to consist of alluvium – clay, silt, sand and gravel with the bedrock over Branscombe Mudstone Formation (BGS Geology Viewer <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>).

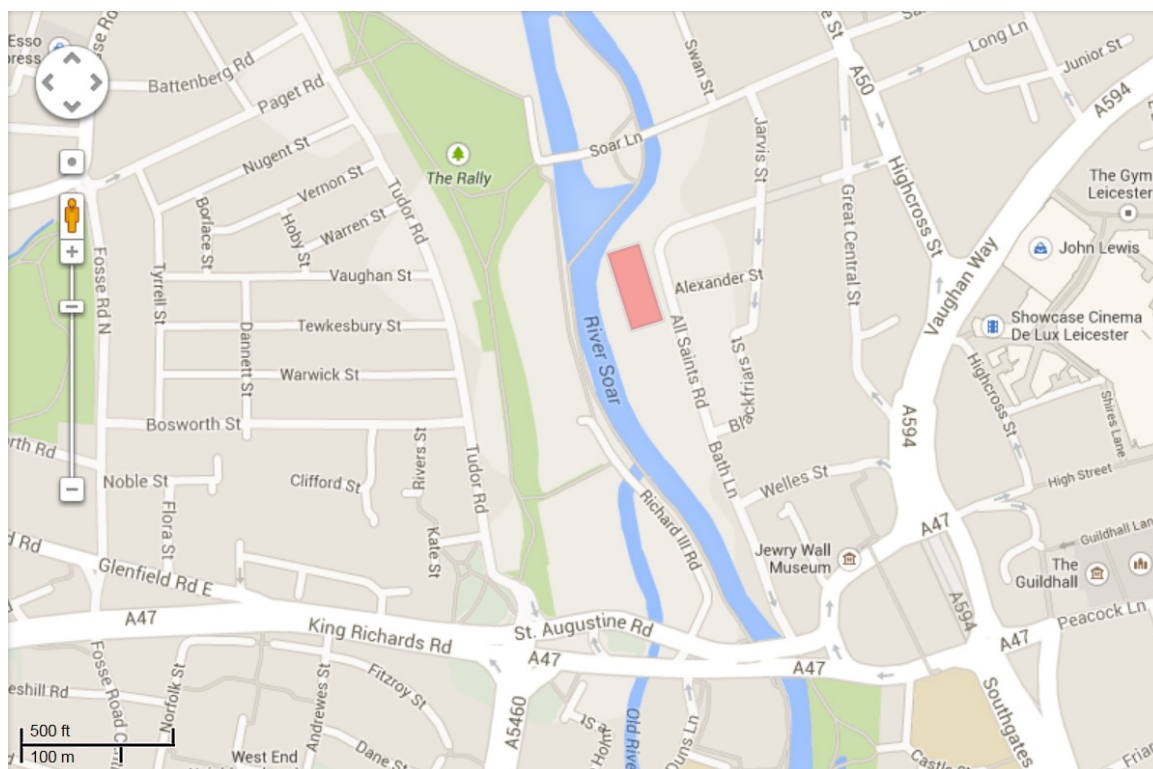


Figure 1 Friars Mill Evaluation: Approximate Site Location (highlighted)

Archaeological and Historical Background (from Clarke 2013).

The site lies within the north-west quarter of the historic core of the Roman and medieval town of Leicester in an area of extremely high potential for remains of the prehistoric, Roman and medieval periods in particular. The site is occupied by Leicester's earliest surviving purpose-built factory, of significant interest as an important survival on a site with early associations with a highly significant phase in the development of Leicester's textile industry.

The Iron Age

At Leicester the development of the Roman and medieval town has meant that evidence of the Iron Age settlement has been severely truncated. A possible circular house was found at St Nicholas Circle and pits and a burial was present at Blackfriars Street. Evidence of the extent of the settlement has depended on the distribution of Later Iron Age artefacts. These include pre-Roman imported pottery from Gaul, Italy and Spain represented by Arretine ware, Gallo-Belgic butt beakers and Terra Rubra/Terra Nigra ware. At Blackfriars Street fragments of flan trays may be evidence of coin manufacture, and further fragments have been discovered on recent sites on both sides of Bath Lane. The distribution of Iron Age finds from Leicester, however, does suggest a large lowland settlement covering c.8ha and the type of material would suggest a high status settlement with extensive trading links by the time of the Roman conquest. It was this settlement which was to become the *civitas* capital during the Roman occupation. It is worth noting that Roman military artefacts have been found within the area immediately to the south of the Blackfriars study area, including fragments of horse harnesses and the cheek piece of a Roman cavalry helmet. Such remains may indicate a military presence in the Blackfriars area at the time of the Roman conquest.

The Roman Period

After the Roman conquest, there is limited evidence to suggest that a small fortlet was established to control the crossing point of the river near the present West Bridge. Evidence for timber buildings of the pre-Flavian period has been encountered, with the suggestion, on the basis of uniformity of alignment, that they have more in common with buildings within a fort than with a native settlement or vicus. Timber buildings later in the first century are on a different alignment, and are considered to represent the first Roman town, expanding to the east from the river, with the presence of wall plaster and *opus signinum* suggesting the gradual adoption of Roman tastes.

In the early 2nd century, a formalised street plan began to be adopted, and the town became the *civitas* capital of the region, Ratae Corieltaavorum. The town was divided up into rectangular blocks, known as *insulae*. Rapid expansion and increased prosperity of the town and its inhabitants is indicated for this period. By the latter part of the 2nd century a major scheme of public and private building occurred. The Forum and Basilica, the Jewry Wall baths, least one temple site and a variety of domestic, commercial and industrial premises were erected, together with large public buildings of uncertain function on either side of Bath lane, to the south of the application area. Town Houses of apparent high status have been recorded over much of the northern half of the walled area, the evidence including stone walls; mud brick walls; tessellated pavements; mosaics; bath houses; hypocausts; and painted wall plaster. In the late second or early third century, the town was defended with a rampart and ditch, with a wall perhaps being added later in the third century). A stretch of the western defences, to the south of the application area has been recently excavated on two sites to the south of the application area at Westbridge Wharf and Merlin Works on Bath Lane. The exact line of the western defences has not been confirmed where it passes through the Blackfriars area, although the line of the northern stretch can be projected with confidence.

There is some evidence for suburban occupation outside the walls to the north comprising both timber and, possibly, substantial masonry buildings, together with cemeteries.

The proposed building behind the cottages on the Bath Lane frontage crosses the projected line of the Roman town wall and rampart. The area between the town wall and the river Soar is considered to be of lower potential, but could contain evidence for the town ditch or ditches, earlier courses of the river Soar and burials.

Post-Roman and Medieval Period

Excavations some 250m to the south of the town, adjacent to the Roman road to Tripontium (Caves Inn) revealed the truncated remains of two sunken-featured buildings associated with finds of the fifth-sixth centuries. These represent the first Anglo-Saxon structures to be located in or near the Roman town, but may indicate no more than a small suburban settlement. Within the walls structures of this period with associated pottery and other finds have now been identified at Freeschool Lane and Vaughan Way, whilst other sites in the north-east quarter of the walled area have also produced early Anglo-Saxon Finds and, in some cases, possible structural features. The density of the Saxon finds recovered from excavations in the north-east quarter suggests extensive Anglo-Saxon domestic occupation during the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries within this area of the walls.

There is little archaeological evidence so far, for late Saxon occupation, and only the church of St. Nicholas, in the Jewry Wall area, has fabric of this period. The medieval 'High Street' (later renamed Highcross and Southgate Streets) was probably the main focus of settlement at

this time. Recent excavations at Freeschool Lane have now revealed evidence for late Anglo-Saxon timber buildings and associated finds on the medieval High Street frontage.

The Dominican Friary of the Blackfriars was established in the north-west corner of the town and, first mentioned in 1284, by the 14th century had more than 30 friars. Although the rough location of the precinct is known, the location of the monastic buildings is not. Somewhere in this same area was the church of St Clement, which later evolved into the Friary Church of the Dominicans. Recent excavations at the Merlin Works site to the south of the study area revealed the southern precinct wall of the friary. Given that the projected line of the town wall runs through the eastern side of the study area, evidence for the friary is perhaps unlikely, although there is potential for openings in the town wall allowing access to the river by the friars.

Post medieval

The principal mill building which fronts onto the River Soar is thought to have been constructed between 1794 and 1820. The Leicester map of 1828 records the site as ‘Stubbing Mill’, stubbing being a part of the process of milling raw wool. By 1887, the site is recorded as Friars Mills and incorporates the Pump House and Bath Lane Cottages. By the late 19th century the site was owned by Donisthorpes and Co., later described as ‘suppliers of Hand Knitting Wools and Cotton Yarns to Central Europe and Scandinavia for over 100 years’ in a trade advertisement of 1938.

Aims and Objectives

(as stated in the Written Scheme of Investigation – WSI – ULAS 2014)

Specific objectives of the trial trench excavation were:

- 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.

The project has the potential to address the following East Midlands Research Agenda Topics (Knight et al 2012):

Iron Age

Late Iron Age Settlements (4.5). How are the settlements related to one another and to other settlements of the period? In particular is there evidence for a developing settlement hierarchy? (4.5.2)

Finds, crafts, industry and exchange How can we add to our existing knowledge of industries and crafts in this region (4.9.1); What can we determine from artefact studies about trade and exchange and the role of coinage (4.9.3).

Roman

Chronology (5.1): How can we advance our knowledge of the chronology of metal finds, particularly brooches? (5.1.4);

The military impact (5.2): Can we define more closely the distribution of early military sites and their periods of use? (5.2.3).

Growth of Urban Centres (5.3): How does the distribution of towns correlate with Iron Age foci and how far may their social, political and economic roles have overlapped? (5.3.2); How were towns organised, what roles did they perform and how may their morphology and functions have varied over time? (5.3.4)

Ritual and Religion 5.8: Why have so few early Roman burials been found, and may practices have varied regionally and between different communities? (5.8.4)

High Medieval

Urbanism (7.1). How did the major towns develop after the Norman Conquest (7.1.1); Can we define more closely the industrial and trading activities associated with towns and the nature and extent of urban influence upon the countryside (7.1.2)

Religion (7.5). Can we identify additional pre-Conquest church, minster and monastic sites (7.5.1);

Methodology

General Methodology and Standards

All work followed the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) Code of Conduct (2010) and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations and excavations* (2010).

The evaluation was undertaken by two ULAS staff members and the fieldwork monitored by site visits from the Project Manager and the Leicester City Archaeologist.

Trial Trenching Methodology

The evaluation consisted of two trial trenches located to coincide with areas threatened by the development proposals. The eventual positioning of the trenches differed slightly to the locations proposed in the WSI due to restrictions on access and available space in the two areas of interest (Fig 2). The location of both trenches was scanned with a CAT Scanner to determine the presence/absence of live services (none were found) and known live services were avoided.

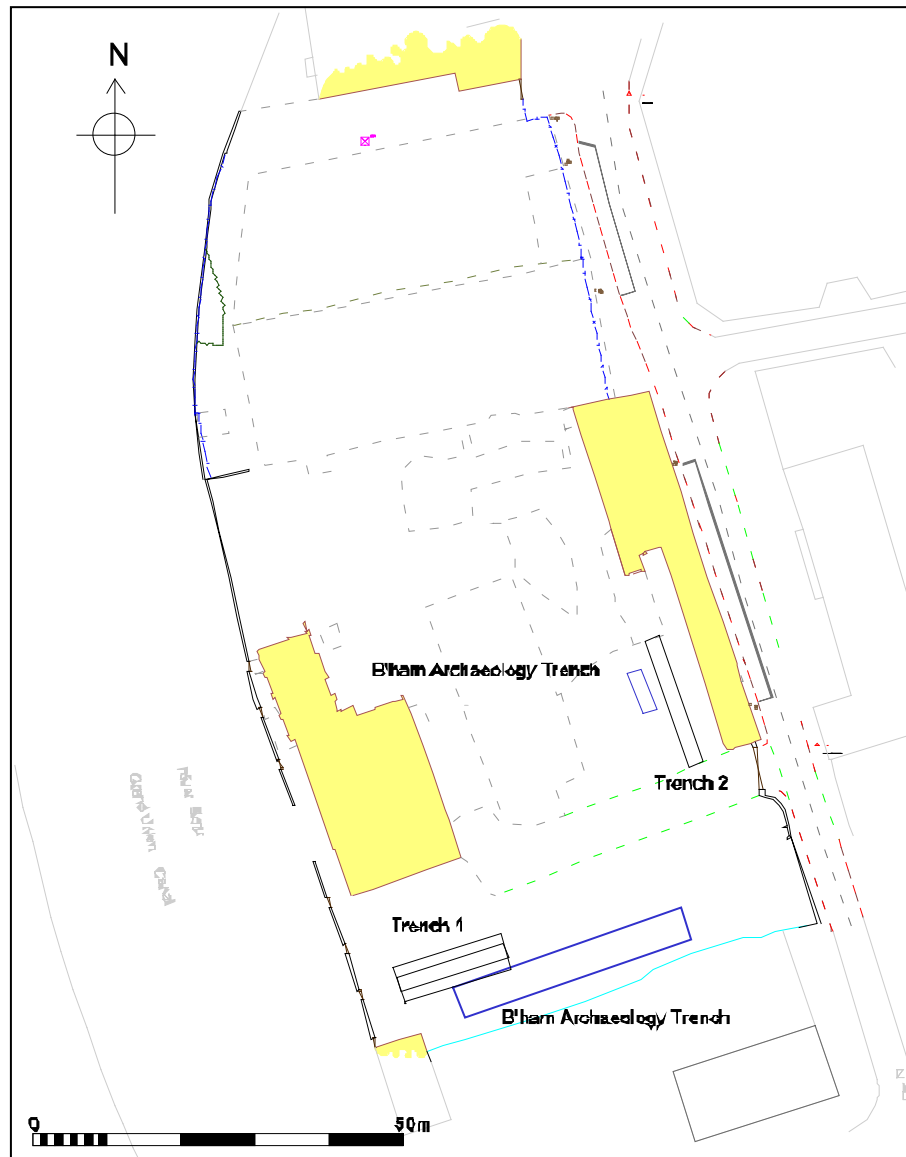


Figure 2 Trench Locations in relation to earlier work

Both trenches were situated close to the locations of the former trenches investigated by BUFAU in 2003 (shown on Fig 2). Trench 1 from that phase of work revealed evidence for the town wall, and it was anticipated that further evidence for the line of the town defences would be revealed in the current evaluation. The results of the Birmingham work suggested that up to 2m of overburden lay above the town wall, with deep deposits to the west of it, perhaps sealing the town ditches.

The uppermost demolition, yard surfaces and topsoil layers were removed from the three areas using a 360° tracked mechanical digger equipped with a toothless ditching bucket. These layers were removed gradually under constant archaeological supervision, until the first significant archaeological horizon was reached. Removed overburden was stored on site at a safe distance from the excavation areas to enable restoration of the site once the archaeological work was complete.

The archaeological deposits revealed in the two trenches were recorded by photography, measured, scale drawings and written description. They were located and tied in to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Following completion of the archaeological recording both trenches were backfilled and levelled.

Results of the Evaluation



Figure 3 Trench 1 facing west

Trench 1

Trench 1 was located in the south west corner of the development area on an east-west orientation, adjacent to the Mill Pump House and close to the River Soar Canal. The excavated area for Trench 1 measured *c.*15m long x 5m wide with a deeper central area measuring *c.*2.80m wide x up to 2.75m deep. Trench 1 also lay adjacent and slightly north of the western end of the earlier Birmingham trench from 2003.

The upper *c.*0.75m of deposits in this trench consisted of brick demolition rubble/yard surface layers (100) and the footings of two brick walls from former mill buildings close to the Pump House. Beneath this was a series of archaeological layers observed to a depth of *c.*2.75m below the modern ground level.

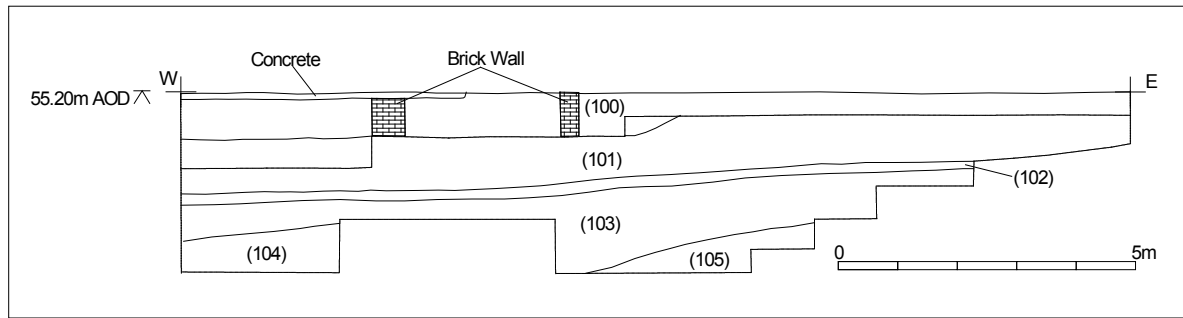


Figure 4 Trench 1 section drawing

At the base of the revealed sequence were two waterlogged deposits (104) & (105). At the western end of the trench (104) consisted of dark bluish-grey waterlogged silty clay containing stone rubble fragments, preserved wood fragments and other organic remains. A sherd of Potters Marston medieval pottery was retrieved from this layer. Approximately 5m to the east of this (105) consisted of interleaved thin layers of orange sand and grey silty clay from which two Roman ceramic tiles were recovered. The relationship between the two earlier deposits was not established but the suggestion was that (105) predated (104) and this is supported by the finds dating.

Overlying both of these layers was a consistent deposit of mixed brown silty clay (103) containing frequent mortar, tile and brick fragments. This deposit was observed along much of the length of Trench 1. Above this was a c.0.20m thick band of clean yellowish-brown silty clay (102) interpreted as an alluvial deposit. Finally another layer of mortar-rich brown silty clay (101) completed the archaeological sequence. This was another consistent layer observed across the entire length of the trench.



Figure 5 Layers at the western end of Trench 1

Trench 2

Trench 2 was located on the eastern side of the development area, close to the site entrance and adjacent to former office buildings associated with the mill. It measured c.18m long x 2.80m wide and lay on a north-south alignment. Trench 2 was also situated close to the second Birmingham trench from 2003 (shown on Fig. 2).

The overlying yard surface layers (200) & (201) accounted for the upper c.0.60m of the sequence of layers in this area, below which was a series of archaeological layers.

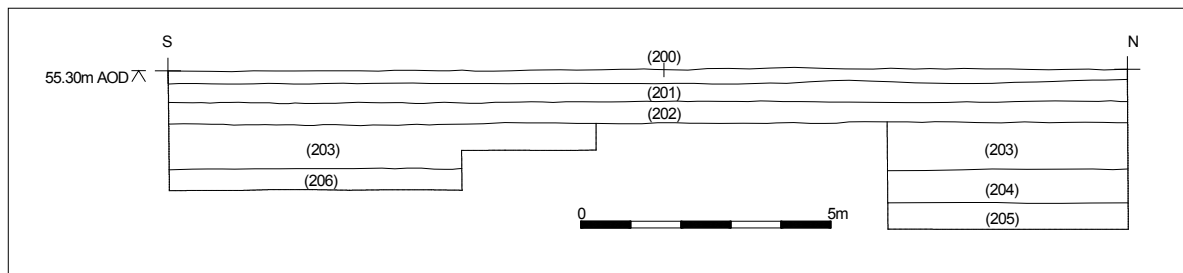


Figure 6 Trench 2 section drawing

The earliest of these deposits was a possible alluvial layer consisting of mid-dark greyish brown silty clay (205), revealed in the northern end of the trench at a depth of c.2.50m below the modern ground level. The full thickness of this layer was not revealed, but was exposed to a depth of c.0.50m.

Above this was a mixed layer of greyish brown sticky clay (204) which possibly represents a slightly disturbed version of (205). At the southern end of the trench a slightly lighter layer of clean silty clay (206) may represent another alluvial event.

Overlying the possible alluvial layers was a c.1.00m thick deposit of mid greyish brown silty clay (203) containing charcoal flecks, two sherds of Roman grey ware pottery dating to the later 1st - early 2nd century AD, occasional rounded cobbles and patches of stone rubble. Above this was a c.0.40m thick layer of very dark greyish brown/black silty clay with rounded cobbles (202), possibly representing a buried topsoil layer.



Figure 7 Trench 2 facing south



Figure 8 Layers at the southern end of Trench 2

Discussion

The evaluation has indicated that significant archaeological deposits are unlikely within this area of the proposed development. Both trenches revealed deeply stratified layers (up to c.3m deep in each trench) that clearly survived at deeper levels than the trench limits.

Both trenches contained silty clay deposits that might be interpreted as alluvial layers, which given the proximity to the river, should not be unexpected. It is a possibility that some of the deposits revealed, particularly those containing charcoal and mortar flecks/fragments, may be contained within ditches associated with the Roman and medieval town defences. The deep, waterlogged layer at the western end of Trench 1 may even relate to a former course of the River Soar, or an associated channel. On such a limited viewing however, it is difficult to determine the exact nature of these deposits.

No evidence was revealed for the town wall, or its robber trench, which was found in the eastern end of the Birmingham Archaeology Trench 1. Based on the alignment of this feature it was hoped that the current Trench 2 would also contain the town wall. The relocation of Trench 2 appears to have missed the projected alignment of the town wall, suggesting it lies slightly to the south of the area evaluated.

Bibliography

- Clarke, S. 2013 *An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment for the Waterside Friars Mill Site, Bath Lane, Leicester. NGR: SK 580 046.* Unpublished ULAS Report 2013-165.
- IfA, 2008 *Codes of Conduct and Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation.*
- Jones, L. 2003 *Friars Mill, 58 Bath Lane, An Archaeological Evaluation.* Unpublished BUFAU Report.
- Knight, D., Vyner, B. & Allen, C., 2012 *East Midlands Heritage: An Updated Research Agenda and Strategy for the Historic Environment of the East Midlands.* English Heritage: Buxton.
- ULAS, 2014 *Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Work: Friars Mill, Bath Lane, Leicester.* ULAS Ref. 14-086.

Appendix I

OASIS Information

INFORMATION REQUIRED	EXAMPLE
Project Name	An Archaeological Evaluation at Friars Mill, Bath Lane, Leicester (SK 58002 04684))
Project Type	Archaeological Evaluation
Project Manager	Richard Buckley
Project Supervisor	John Thomas
Previous	Earlier Phase of Evaluation
Current Land Use	Disused Mill
Development Type	Light industrial
Reason for Investigation	NPPF
Position in the Planning Process	As a condition
Site Co ordinates	SK 58002 04684
Start/end dates of field work	22-23 July 2014
Archive Recipient	Leicester City Museum
Study Area	c.1.8ha

Appendix II The Finds

Roman and Medieval Pottery, Roman Tile and Animal Bone

Nicholas J. Cooper with animal bone by Jennifer Browning

Introduction and Methodology

A small assemblage of pottery and other finds were recovered. The Roman and medieval pottery was classified using the Leicestershire Roman and medieval pottery form and fabric series (Pollard 1994, 110-114; Davies and Sawday 1999 Table 30) and quantified by sherd count and weight.

Results

Two sherds of Roman grey ware pottery (22g) (Fabric GW3) were recovered from (203), one from a jar with a lid-seated rim indicating a date in the later 1st or 2nd century AD. This context also contained a single cattle-sized rib bone (13g). A single sherd of medieval Potters Marston (Fabric PM) ware (3g) came from (104) indicating a date between AD1100-1300.

Two fragments of Roman ceramic tile, in a sandy oxidised fabric, were recovered from (105); one from a wall tile (275g), the other from an imbrex curved roof tile (195g). This context also produced a single bird's wing bone (1g), in very good condition, possibly from a wading species.

References

Davies, S. and Sawday, D., 1999, 'The post-Roman pottery and tile' in A. Connor and R. Buckley *Roman and Medieval Occupation at Causeway Lane, Leicester*. Leicester Archaeology Monograph 5, 165-213. Leicester: University of Leicester School of Archaeological Studies.

Pollard, R., 1994 The Iron Age and Roman Pottery in P. Clay and R. Pollard *Iron Age and Roman Occupation in the West Bridge Area, Leicester; Excavations 1962-71*, 51-114. Leicester: Leicestershire County Council, Museums, Arts and Records Service.

Contact Details

Richard Buckley or Patrick Clay
University of Leicester Archaeological
Services (ULAS)
University of Leicester,
University Road,
Leicester LE1 7RH

T: +44 (0)116 252 2848

F: +44 (0)116 252 2614

E: ulas@le.ac.uk

w: www.le.ac.uk/ulas



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE YEAR 2008/9