



University of
Leicester

Archaeological Services

**An Archaeological Field Evaluation on
Land west of Winchester Road, Blaby,
Leicestershire**

NGR: SP 5690 9660 (centre)

Andrew Hyam



ULAS Report No. 2013-072

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Summary

An archaeological field evaluation was undertaken on land to the west of Winchester Road, Blaby, Leicestershire by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) between the 22nd and 25th of April 2013. Planning permission has been granted for a residential development of 130 dwellings with associated landscaping and access road. Due to the location within an area of archaeological potential, the Senior Planning Archaeologist at Leicestershire County Council, as advisor to Blaby District Council has requested that a programme of trial trenching take place to identify and locate any archaeological remains that may be affected by the development.

Seventeen 30m long by 1.8m wide trench were excavated across the proposed development site, most targeting anomalies highlighted in a geophysical survey. No archaeological features or deposits were observed within the trenches. The anomalies were identified during the evaluation as geological differences in the natural substrata.

The archive will be deposited with Leicestershire County Council under Accession Number X.A45.2013

Introduction

In accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Section 12 Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment, the Senior Planning Archaeologist for Leicestershire County Council, as archaeological advisor to the planning authority, requested that trial trenching be undertaken to ascertain whether heritage assets were present. This document forms the report for an archaeological field evaluation consisting of seventeen 30m long by 1.8m wide trenches on land west of Winchester Road, Blaby, Leicestershire. Planning permission has been granted by Blaby District Council under planning application number 11/0811/1/OX for a residential development consisting of 130 dwellings with associated landscaping and an access road onto Winchester Road.

Background

Blaby lies approximately 8km to the south-west of Leicester, west of Wigston and just to the north of Countesthorpe (Fig. 1). The proposed development site lies on the southern limit of Blaby in an open field to the west of Winchester Road and immediately to the north of Blaby Golf Club (Fig. 2). The site is rectangular in shape and covers an area of approximately 5.6 hectares. The ground is relatively level at

around 82m above OD but there is a gentle rise towards the centre of the site. At present the site is covered in grass but local residents indicate that crops have been grown on the site quite recently and that the field was once used as a chicken farm. The field surface is relatively smooth but has areas of apparently disturbed ground and a number of deep wheel ruts especially in the north of the field. The site is regularly used by dog walkers and there are a number of well-worn paths running around and across it. Some groundwater evaluation trenches have been dug at intervals across the site and there are some possible backfilled geotechnical trenches. There is no evidence for surviving ridge and furrow earthworks. Access to the site is from Winchester Road which runs from north to south along the eastern boundary of the site (Fig. 3)

The underlying geology is Triassic Mudstone (British Geological Survey South Sheet, Fourth Edition Solid, 2001). The drift geology is Boulder clay & Morainic Drift (Geological Survey 10mile Map, First edition (Quaternary), 1977). The overlying soils are known as Beccles 3 which are typical stagnogley soils. These consist of seasonally waterlogged, fine loamy over clayey soils (Soil Survey of England and Wales, Sheet 3: Midland and Western England).

The 1886 Ordnance Survey First Edition County Series map of the area shows the site as two evenly sized fields divided by a north to south hedge. This hedgeline appears to survive on subsequent editions as late as 1992. This hedge is no longer present. The 1970 Ordnance Survey Edition shows a row of small sheds or outbuildings in the centre of the field running out from the southern site boundary.

The Leicestershire HER has records of a number of prehistoric sites in the vicinity, including cropmarks and findspots which suggested that there would be some potential for the presence of prehistoric remains. A geophysical survey carried out in 2008 identified a small number of possible archaeological features including two clearly defined linear features running from north to south near to the western site boundary. Several discrete features were also noted across the site which were thought to have a possible archaeological origin. A line of disturbance was recorded which is approximately along the location of the north to south hedge which has since been removed.



Figure 1 Site location

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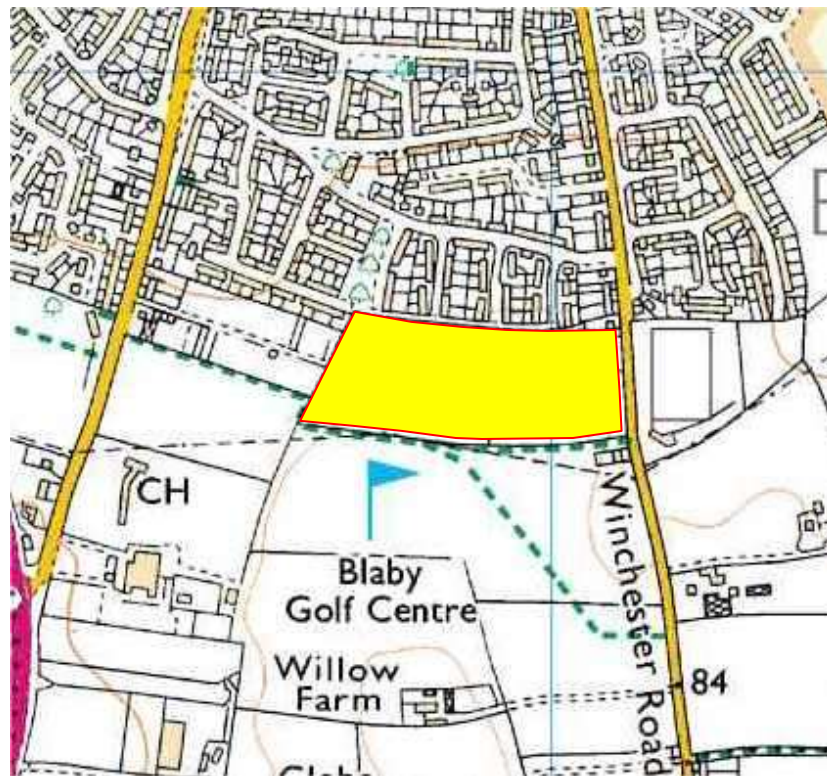


Figure 2 Site highlighted

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Figure 3 Development site seen from Winchester Road
Looking south-west

Objectives

The research aims and objectives of the field evaluation are outlined in the ULAS *Written Scheme of Investigation for archaeological work on Land West of Winchester Road, Blaby, Leicestershire*.

The main objectives of all field evaluations are:

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 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.

Trial trenching is an intrusive form of evaluation that can 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).

Seventeen 30m long by 1.8m wide trenches were proposed and located to target a number of anomalies suggested by the geophysical survey (Fig. 4). Topsoil/modern overburden was removed in level spits, under continuous archaeological supervision, down to the uppermost archaeological deposits by a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. All spoil heaps were inspected for unstratified archaeological material. All trenches were excavated down to the top of archaeological deposits or the natural substratum in the absence of any archaeological deposits.

Trenches were examined by hand cleaning and any archaeological deposits located would be 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. Sections of any excavated archaeological features would be drawn at an appropriate scale. Any drawn sections of archaeological features would also be levelled and tied to the Ordnance Survey Datum, or a permanent fixed bench mark. 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.

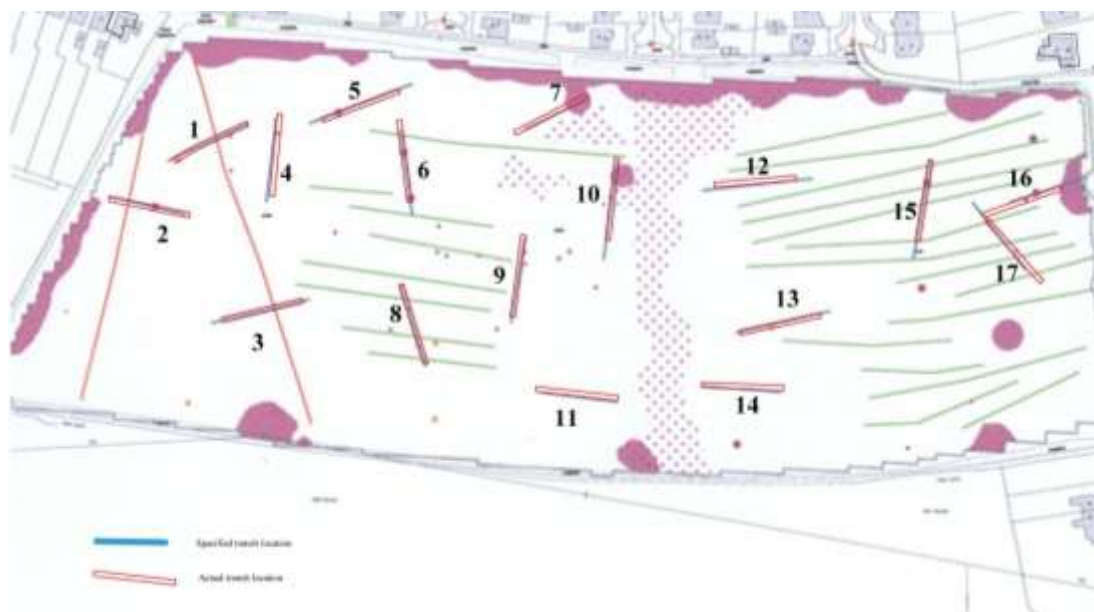


Figure 4 Trench locations overlaid on geophysical survey results
Modified from Stratascan plan. The trench length is 30m.

Results

Summary photographs of each trench and general site photographs are shown in Appendix 2 of this report.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was located near to the north-west corner of the development site and laid out on a north-east to south-west orientation. The aim was to target a linear anomaly which the geophysical survey suggested could either be an archaeological linear feature or possible service trench. In addition to this there were two anomalies which could have represented a pit and magnetic response.

A greyish brown sandy loam topsoil was removed in level spits down to the top of a mid-yellow brown sandy clay subsoil. Removal of the subsoil revealed a mid-brownish red slightly sandy clay substratum with patches of mid orange sandy gravel. All seventeen trenches contained the same topsoil and subsoil but the natural substratum was distinctly variable from trench to trench. The truncated evidence of two east to west plough furrows was noted running across the trench. As in all of the trenches the fill of each plough furrow was removed. The possible linear feature was a 0.3-0.4m wide slot filled with pieces of brick and broken land drain which were quite clearly modern. Because of the strong geophysical response it was thought that the drain might still be open so it was left unexcavated and intact. The patches of cleaner clay and gravel substratum appeared to coincide with the responses seen in the geophysical survey.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 2

Trench 2 targeted the second linear anomaly identified in the geophysical survey as well as a discrete positive anomaly. The same description of topsoil and subsoil as in Trench 1 was removed to reveal a substratum similar to in Trench 1 but with small areas of fine-grained light brown clay. The linear response was seen to be a land drain running from north to south near to the western end of the trench. Two other smaller land drains were seen joining each other near to the east end of the trench. The positive anomaly appeared to be located around the junction of these two drains and may perhaps represent a slightly more disturbed area of ground created during the laying of the drains.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was placed to target the southern end of the linear feature seen in Trench 1. The natural substratum consisted of brownish red clay with bands of gravel rich silty clay yellow silty clay. The linear anomaly was again confirmed as a modern disturbance with modern building material within the fill. Two other north-west to south-east land drains were observed near to the western end of the trench.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 4

The substratum consisted of a brownish red clay with occasional patches of mid yellow and light grey clay. Three east to west running plough furrows were seen at evenly spaced intervals along the length of the trench.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 5

The natural substratum in Trench 5 consisted of brownish red clay with patches and strips of orange brown gravel. Two approximate east to west plough furrows were observed, as was a small area of modern disturbance near to the north-eastern end of the trench. A positive anomaly identified by the geophysical survey appeared to be a variation in the natural.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 6

Trench 6 was placed near to the end of Trench 5 and was located to target two discrete anomalies. The natural substratum consisted of a brownish red gravelly clay with cleaner patches of clay which are likely to be the causes of the geophysical responses. Four east to west furrows were observed at regular intervals running across the trench.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 7

Three east to west furrows were located within this trench. One of the furrows contained a horseshoe shaped ceramic field drain.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 8

The natural substratum in Trench 8 was quite varied with brownish red clay alternating with bands of orange brown gravel. Four east to west furrows were located running east to west across the trench.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 9

A different type of natural substratum was observed in this trench which consisted of a dark brownish orange sand containing bands of darker mineralised sand. Only a faint trace of east to west aligned plough furrows could be discerned.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 10

The natural substratum in Trench 10 consisted of a brownish red clay with patches of mid orange gravel. Three east to west oriented furrows were located along the length of the trench.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 11

Trench 11 was located just to the west of the location where the OS maps indicated that the sheds or outbuildings were placed. The natural substratum consisted of brownish red clay with bands of mid grey clay and orange brown gravel. No indication of the buildings was located.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 12

This trench, along with Trenches 13 to 17, was located in the eastern half of the site which was once divided by the hedgeline recorded on the early OS maps. Trench 12 contained a fairly consistent brownish red clay natural substratum. Two field drains were observed running from north-west to south-east across the trench.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 13

The natural substratum in this trench consisted of bands of mid yellowish brown clay and gravel with areas of brownish red clay. Two plough furrows running from east to west were noted.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 14

A patchy mix of brownish red clay and mid yellow clay natural substratum was observed in this trench. No plough furrows were present but some north-east to south-west plough scarring was evident.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 15

Trench 15 was located to target a possible positive anomaly identified in the geophysical survey. The natural substratum consisted of a light brownish yellow sandy clay with patches and bands of mid orange sand and gravel. It seems likely that the anomaly was caused by these variations.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 16

The originally specified location for this trench was in the centre of the gateway into the site which has been stoned and partially landscaped to create a level and firm entrance. In view of this the trench was moved by approximately 2m to the south and 4m to the east, but was still located to expose a small geophysical anomaly. As a result of this the western end of the trench was quite close to the north-west end of Trench 17. Evidence of two north-east to south-west furrows was located cutting into the darkish brown sandy clay natural substratum. Patches of sandy gravel were also evident within the natural substratum.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Trench 17

Trench 17 contained a brownish red clay natural substratum with small patches and bands of light yellow sandy gravel. Two east to west (slightly north-east to south-west) furrows were observed.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in this trench.

Discussion

Despite the potential for archaeological features on this site none was observed. The variable nature of the natural substrata seen across the site clearly explains the anomalies noted in the geophysical survey. The potential linear features in the western side of the site noted in the geophysical survey were, unfortunately, modern drainage features. The trenches did confirm the presence of ploughed out ridge and furrow cultivation aligned east to west and identified from the geophysical survey.

Archive

The archive consists of:

This report,
17 pro forma trench recording sheets,
2 photographic record sheets, combined black and white and digital,
Contact sheet of 35 35mm black and white photographs and negatives,
Contact sheet of 49 digital photographs,
CD of this report and digital images.

Publication

A summary of the work will be submitted for publication in the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* in due course. A record of the project will also be submitted to the OASIS project. OASIS is an online index to archaeological grey literature.

Bibliography

Brown, D., 2008 *Standard and guidance for the preparation of Archaeological Archives* (Institute for Archaeologists).

Haddrell, S. 2008. *Geophysical Survey Report. Winchester Road, Blaby*. Stratascan reports r

ULAS *Written Scheme of Investigation for archaeological work on Land West of Winchester Road, Blaby, Leicestershire*.

Appendix 1. Trench measurements

Trench No	Length (m)	Width (m)	Min Trench Depth (m)	Max Trench Depth (m)	Av. Topsoil thickness (m)	Av. Subsoil thickness (m)
1	30.0	1.80	0.35	0.55	0.32	0.08
2	29.8	1.80	0.33	0.61	0.30	0.16
3	30.7	1.80	0.32	0.59	0.34	0.05
4	30.0	1.80	0.32	0.55	0.32	0.09
5	31.5	1.80	0.30	0.43	0.30	0.05
6	32.0	1.80	0.35	0.45	0.30	0.05
7	30.0	1.80	0.30	0.59	0.30	0.07
8	30.0	1.80	0.38	0.51	0.27	0.10
9	30.0	1.80	0.51	0.67	0.31	0.12
10	30.1	1.80	0.32	0.53	0.32	0.09
11	31.0	1.80	0.35	0.49	0.34	0.70
12	30.0	1.80	0.50	0.60	0.30	0.12
13	30.0	1.80	0.35	0.60	0.30	0.10
14	30.2	1.80	0.30	0.40	0.31	0.05
15	30.0	1.80	0.35	0.60	0.30	0.05
16	30.2	1.80	0.40	0.70	0.29	0.15
17	30.0	1.80	0.5	0.65	0.30	0.10

Appendix 2. Trench photographs

Trench 1 looking north-east



Trench 1 looking south-west



Trench 2 looking west



Trench 2 looking east



Trench 3 looking south-west



Trench 3 looking north-east



Trench 4 looking north



Trench 4 looking south



Trench 5 looking west



Trench 5 looking east



Trench 6 looking south



Trench 6 looking north



Trench 7 looking north-east



Trench 7 looking south-west



Trench 8 looking north-west



Trench 8 looking south-east



Trench 9 looking north



Trench 9 looking south



Trench 10 looking south



Trench 10 looking north



Trench 11 looking west



Trench 11 looking east



Trench 12 looking east



Trench 12 looking west



Trench 13 looking east



Trench 13 looking south-west



Trench 14 looking east



Trench 14 looking west



Trench 15 looking south



Trench 15 looking north



Trench 16 looking north-east



Trench 16 looking south-west



Trench 17 looking south-east



Trench 17 looking north-west



General site views











Typical backfilled trench



Appendix 3. OASIS Information

Project Name	Land west of Winchester Rd, Blaby, Leicestershire
Project Type	Evaluation
Project Manager	P Clay
Project Supervisor	A Hyam
Previous/Future work	No previous work
Current Land Use	Arable field
Development Type	Residential
Reason for Investigation	As a condition
Position in the Planning Process	Ongoing
Site Co ordinates	SP 5690 9660 (centre)
Start/end dates of field work	22.04.2013 – 25.04.2013
Archive Recipient	Leicestershire County Council
Study Area	5.6 hectares

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