



**University of
Leicester**

Archaeological Services

**An Archaeological Watching Brief For
Installation of Lighting and Cable
Trenches At St. Nicholas Church,
Leicester
(NGR SK 5818 0450)**



Richard Huxley

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An
Archaeological Watching Brief
For Installation of Lighting and Cable Trenches
At St. Nicholas Church, Leicester
NGR SK 5818 0450

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For: Leicester City Council

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at St. Nicholas' Church, Leicester during the ground works associated with the installation of external lighting. The site is located within the historic core of Roman and medieval Leicester and specifically affects part of the Scheduled Ancient Monument 17154, The Jewry Wall Baths, palaestra and Anglo-Saxon church. Three sherds of Roman pottery and some Roman tile were recovered, unstratified, during the work, alongside two sherds of medieval pottery and ceramics and glass of modern date. All of the finds were discarded after scanning and identification by a specialist and no human remains were removed from the site. The archive will be held at Leicestershire County Council under the accession number A16.2015.

Introduction

This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief performed by ULAS in December 2015 at St. Nicholas' church, Leicester (NGR: SK 5818 0450). The work was commissioned by Leicester City Council for the installation of external lighting illuminating the windows and sides of St. Nicholas church. Six cable trenches were proposed around the northern and southern edges of the Anglo-Saxon church with the groundwork affecting Scheduled Ancient Monument 17154, The Jewry Wall Baths. To satisfy conditions placed on the Scheduled Monument Consent, Historic England (HE) requires a programme of archaeological work comprising of archaeological attendance and supervision (watching brief) of the ground works.

Site Description, Topography and Geology

The site is situated within the historic core of Leicester and St. Nicholas' church is located in a prominent position adjacent to the ruins of Jewry Wall. The church is surrounded by a graveyard except on the western edge where St. Nicholas walk is located. Modern ground levels slope to the north at the junction with Welles Street, however there is considerable build-up of ground within the churchyard itself. The northern edge of the graveyard is enclosed by Holy bones and Welles Street, which leads to Bath lane. To the south of the church is St. Nicholas circle and to the east is the dual carriageway Vaughan Way.

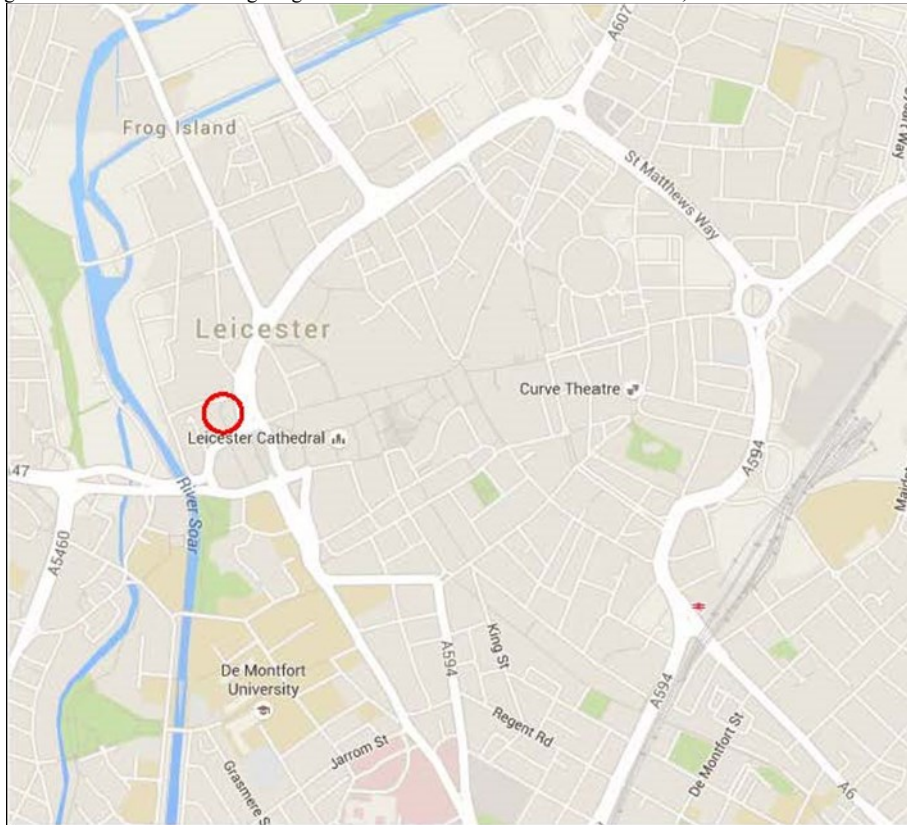


Figure 1: Site Location circled (from Google maps)

The Ordnance Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 156 indicates that the underlying geology of the site is likely to consist of Mercia mudstone, with overlying river sands and gravels.

Archaeological and Historical Background

The site is located within the historic core of Roman and medieval Leicester. The area along the east of the river Soar has been occupied as early as the late Iron Age and evidence suggests occupation of the Jewry wall site began during the early-mid 1st century (Kenyon 1948). The Jewry Wall Baths are dated to the 2nd century and a *palaestra* is thought to be situated directly beneath St. Nicholas church. This is believed to be of basilican plan with a nave and aisles divided by colonnades partly exposed during excavation. The site was excavated between 1936 and 1939 (Kenyon 1948) and since consolidated for display.

St. Nicholas church is Anglo-Saxon in origin and parts of the structure date from the 7th century. The earliest parts of the building are the nave and chancel with evidence for a portico to the west near Jewry wall. The church was developed with the addition of a central tower in the 12th century and the entire east end was rebuilt in the early 13th century. During this time small chapels were also added to the north and south of the chancel. A wider southern aisle was built in the 14th century and the northern aisle was completely re-built in the early 18th century (Radford 1956, 162).

Aims and Objectives

- The purpose of the archaeological work was:
- 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 record any archaeological deposits to be affected by the ground works.
- To advance understanding of the heritage assets.
- To produce an archive and report any results.

Methodology

The work followed the Written Scheme of Investigation (Buckley: 2015) and adhered to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIFA) Code and conduct (2012) and Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (2008).

The programme of work consisted of the excavation of six cable trenches around the northern and southern sides of the church. Four trenches were planned along the southern side of the church and two larger trenches were positioned along the northern side. The trenches were to be hand-dug to a maximum of 0.3m deep and electric cable placed in protective tubing. The methodology for the three proposed lights around the eastern side of the church was changed and it was decided they were to be attached to existing modern brick work and therefore did not need archaeological supervision.

Any human remains encountered during the excavation were removed with due care following the Church of England Guidance. They were not removed from the churchyard and once recorded were re-buried in the same place they originated from.



Figure 2: Showing Trench 1 from the southern side of the church.

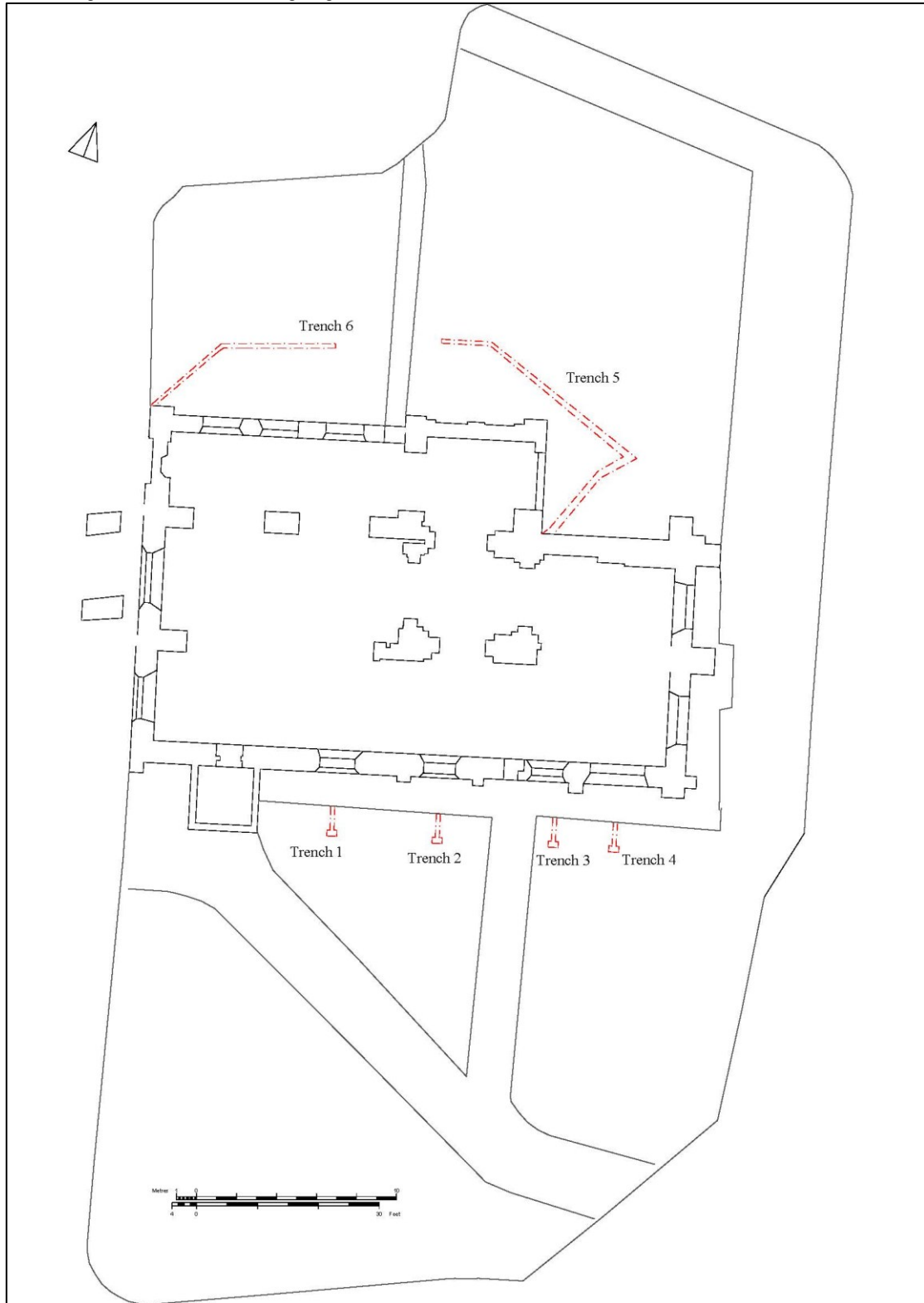


Figure 3: St. Nicholas Church showing trench positions (adapted from Radford: 1956)

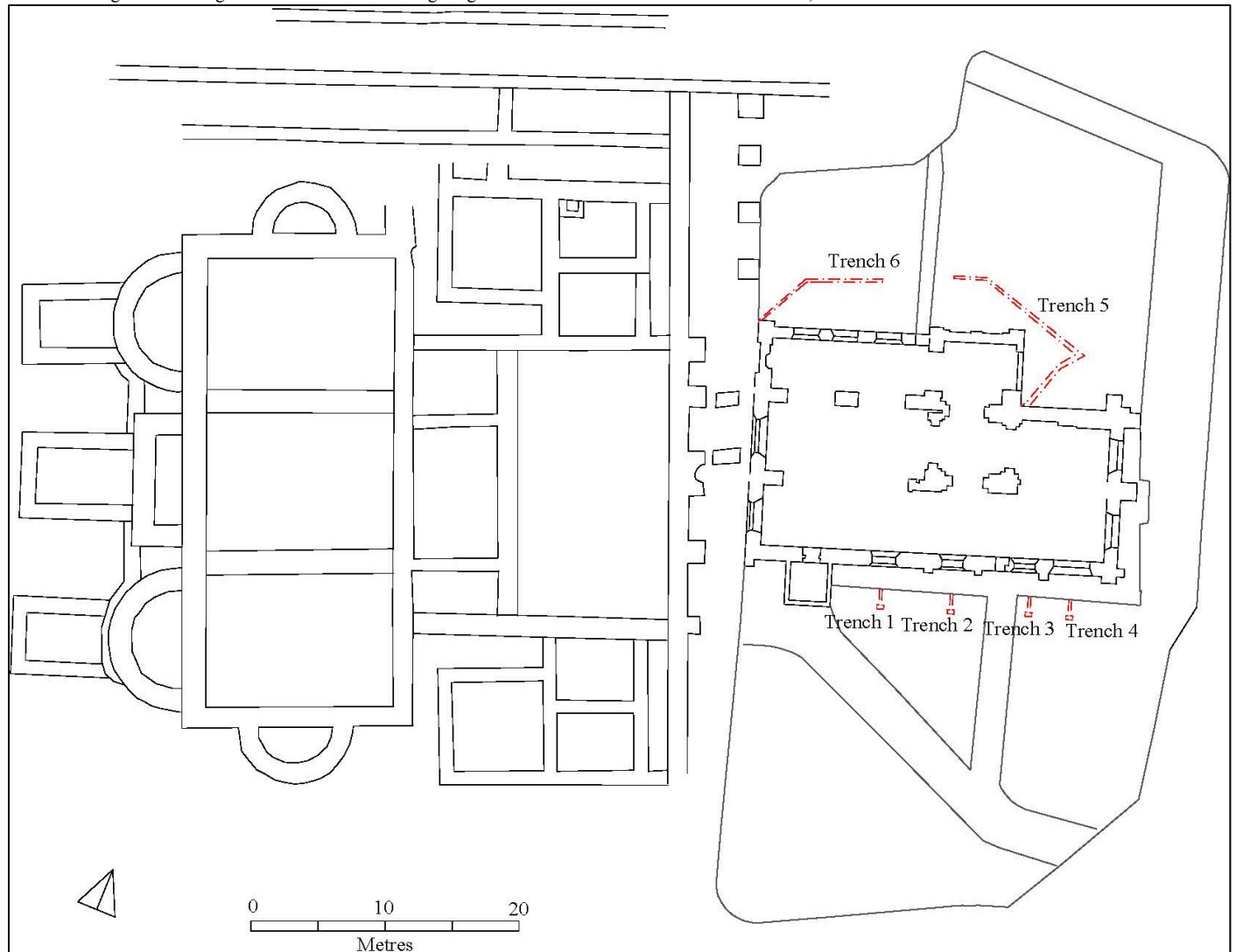


Figure 4: Trench positions in relation to St. Nicholas church and Jewry wall Baths (adapted from Kenyon:1948 and Radford:1956).

Results

Trench 1

Trench 1 was located in the south-west side of the church and was 1.6m long and between 0.2-0.5m wide. The topsoil was composed of dark greyish brown, soft, loamy sandy silt and was the only deposit observed. It contained four fragments of Romna ceramic building material (CBM) including part of an imbres roof tile, and fragments of human skeletal remains including phalanges, rib fragments and a femur head.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was located to the east of Trench 1 and was 1.5m long by 0.2-0.5m wide. The topsoil was the only deposit encountered and was the same consistency as Trench 1. It contained two fragments of Roman CBM and a piece of *opus signinum* wall plaster with white paint. The painted surface of the fragment was angled at 45 degrees, suggesting it came from a window or door recess quarter, potentially from the baths building. In addition, small fragments of disturbed human skeletal remains were also observed.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was positioned to the east of the north-south path (on the southern side of the church) and measured 1.4m long, by 0.2-0.5m wide. The topsoil was the only deposit observed and had the same composition as Trench 1. It contained three fragments of miscellaneous CBM, and human remains consisting of three phalanges.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was positioned to the east of trench 3 and close to the south-east corner of the church. It measured 1.5m long and between 0.2-0.5m wide. Topsoil was the only deposit encountered within this trench and it was the same consistency as Trench 1. It contained one fragment of Roman CBM, a fragment of sandstone rubbleworked, five sherds of modern pottery and a small fragment of bone.

Trench 5

Trench 5 was positioned around the north-east corner of the church and began in the corner of the tower and vestry. The trench headed east towards the north-east corner of the chancel and then continued in an arc along a north-west alignment towards the central path. The trench measured 19.10m long and between 0.2-0.5m wide. Topsoil was the only deposit observed in this trench and it had the same composition as Trench 1. It contained three fragments Roman CBM including a tegula roof tile, and modern pottery and glass. Human skeletal remains were found in two locations within this trench; the first was in the north-western side (close to the path) where 1 fragment of pelvis and 1 fragment of ulna were encountered. The second position was close to the north-east corner of the vestry where 1 fragment of ulna, 1 fragment of rib and 1 fragment of femur was found.



Figure 5: Showing the excavation of Trench 5.

Trench 6

Trench 6 was located close to the north-western corner of the church and began at the corner of the north aisle. The trench headed to the north and then turned to the east towards the central path in an 'L' shape. The trench measured 10.4m long and 0.2-0.5m wide. Topsoil with the same composition as Trench 1 was found and this contained one small fragment of Roman samian pottery of 2nd-century date, alongside fragments of tegula and imbrex roof tiles, and one flue tile all potentially deriving from the bath building and or *palaestra*. Mortar attaching to these fragments ran over broken surfaces and was clearly due to later re-use of tile rubble. Three fragments of plain floor tile of medieval or later date were also identified. A single small Roman tessera made from reused tile was found from this trench, along with glass, pottery and clay tobacco pipe stems of modern date. A large amount of disarticulated human remains were encountered close to the north-west corner of this trench just 70mm below the current ground level. These included 3 femur fragments, 2 complete femurs (measuring 0.31m and 0.42m), 1 complete skull (possibly a juvenile female), 3 cranium fragments, 2 pelvis fragments, ulna and radius fragments. Occasional patches of light yellowy brown silty sand and gravel was found in the north-west corner of the trench and it is unclear whether this represents disturbed Roman stratum.



Figure 6: Showing the excavation of Trench 6 and the proximity to Jewry wall.

Unstratified Artefacts

Two sherds of Early Roman shell-tempered ware pottery were recovered from north and south side of the church. Both were in Leicestershire Roman pottery fabric CG1A and dated from the mid-1st to the early 2nd century. All finds were discarded after specialist identification by Nicholas J. Cooper.

Discussion and Conclusions

The trenches around the southern side of the church encountered little archaeology, with few artefacts and human remains being disturbed by the excavation. Of the two trenches along the northern side of the church, trench 6 produced the largest amount of Roman artefacts in particular CBM, which presumably originates from the western side of the palaestra (Kenyon: 1948, 14 and pl.V).

The large amount of disarticulated human remains found in Trench 6, none of which was removed from the site, probably results from the installation of a drain, which was previously dug to the north-west. The projected line of the drain crosses the trench at the position of the remains. Since the drain was not found during the excavation it appears likely that the bones were interred within the backfill and the drain was dug deeper than 0.3m.



Figure 7: Showing the shallow human remains in Trench 6 and the drain to the north.

Archive and Publications

The site archive (X.A119.2015), consisting of paper and photographic records, will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums Service. None of the finds, which were all unstratified, were retained.

The paper archive consists of:

- 1 x A4 drawing sheet
- 3 x Watching Brief Recording forms
- Photographic record indices
- 82 digital photographs
- A risk assessment form

Publication

A version of the excavation summary (see above) will appear in due course in the Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society.

Acknowledgements

Richard Huxley of ULAS undertook the archaeological watching brief on behalf of Leicester City Council. Nicholas J. Cooper identified the finds, and the project was managed by Richard Buckley.

Bibliography

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Oasis Information

Project Name	An Archaeological Watching Brief for Installation of Lighting and Cable Trenches At St. Nicholas Church, Leicester
Project Type	Watching Brief
Project Manager	Richard Buckley
Project Supervisor	Richard Huxley
Previous/Future work	N/A
Current Land Use	Church
Development Type	Installation of Lighting and cable trenches
Reason for Investigation	Grade 1 listed church and proximity to Jewry wall Scheduled Monument
Position in the Planning Process	Planning requirement 20151451
Site Co ordinates	NGR: SK 5818 0450
Start/end dates of field work	04/11/2015 to 07/11/2015
Archive Recipient	Leicestershire Museums Service
Study Area	383 square metres

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