



**University of
Leicester**

Archaeological Services

**An Archaeological Field Evaluation on
land adjacent to Skew Bridge Ski Slope,
Northampton Road,
Rushden,
Northamptonshire.**

NGR: SP 9380 6784 (centre)

Andrew Hyam




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Northampton Road, Rushden,
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NGR: SP 9380 6784 (centre)

A R Hyam

For: LXB RP (Rushden) Ltd and Campbell Reith Hill LLP

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| Approved by: |
|  |
| Signed: ... |
| Date: ...13.10.2014. |
| Name:Patrick Clay |

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

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Summary

An archaeological field evaluation and watching brief was undertaken by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on land adjacent to Skew Bridge Ski Slope, Northampton Road, Rushden, Northamptonshire between the 23rd and 26th of September 2014. The work was carried out as a response to a planning application to develop the former ski slope and surrounding land and was designed to provide archaeological information in advance of the development work.

Nine 30m by 1.8m trenches were specified in the original Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), however a number of unforeseen site constraints resulted in some slightly shorter trenches being excavated. Undisturbed natural substratum was observed in all of the trenches but no archaeological features or deposits were present.

The report will be archived under temporary accession number NHRUSHLK2014

Introduction

In accordance with NPPF (Section 12 Enhancing and Conserving the Historic Environment) this document forms the report for an archaeological field investigation (evaluation) on land adjacent to Skew Bridge Ski Slope, Northampton Road, Rushden, Northamptonshire, NGR: SP 9380 6784 (centre). It is intended that this programme of archaeological fieldwork will provide preliminary indications of the character and extent of any heritage assets which may be present on the site in order that the potential impact of any future development on such remains may be assessed by the planning authority. The work has been commissioned by LXB RP (Rushden) Ltd and Campbell Reith Hill LLP and followed that specified in the ULAS *Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Work on Land Adjacent to Skew Bridge Ski Slope, Northampton Road, Rushden, Northamptonshire* (hereinafter the WSI).

Full planning permission, under planning application EN/2014/00010/FUL, appeal ref APP/G2815/V12/2190175, has been granted for: the erection of a home and garden centre, retail units, drive-through restaurant, gatehouse, lakeside visitor centre, restaurants, boathouse, together with proposals for access and outline planning permission for the erection of a hotel, crèche and leisure club with some matters reserved (appearance); plus removal of the existing earth ski slope and associated levelling, landscaping, habitat management and improvement works, vehicular access and servicing proposals together with the provision of car and cycle parking and a bus stop.

Northamptonshire County Council, as archaeological advisors to the planning authority requested that an evaluation by trial trenching be undertaken as Condition 9 of the planning permission states that: *Development shall not take place on any phase approved under condition 7 of this permission until a scheme for the implementation of a programme of archaeological recording has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority for that phase. The recording must be carried out by an appropriately qualified and experienced archaeological consultant or organisation. The scheme shall be implemented before construction commences at the site on any phase approved by condition 7 of this permission.*

Background

The town of Rushden lies to the east of Northampton on the southern side of the main A45 road (Fig. 1). The Application Site lies to the north-west of Skew Bridge roundabout and is on the northern side of the A45 to the north-west of Rushden. The National Ordnance Survey (OS) Grid Reference for the approximate centre of the Application Site is SP 9380 6784. The Application Site itself and a large area to the east and west of the Application Site has been quarried for sand and gravel resulting in a number of lakes and ponds which form a series of nature reserves (Fig. 2). The Application Site is generally flat and at a height of approximately 39 to 46m OD. Prior to any construction work the development area (southern part of the Application Site where the Proposed Development will be located) contained a large earth-built dry ski slope, the concrete bases of former buildings and a number of tarmac and concrete trackways in the western area. The eastern part of the development area was, and still is, a large grassed area. A large lake forming part of Ditchford Lakes and Meadows Nature reserve forms the northern boundary of the development area (Fig. 3).

At the time of the evaluation most of the ski slope had been taken down and the spoil spread in long heaps across the western part of the development area in preparation for soil contamination testing (Figs. 4 and 5). Live services were also found to be present across parts of the development area.

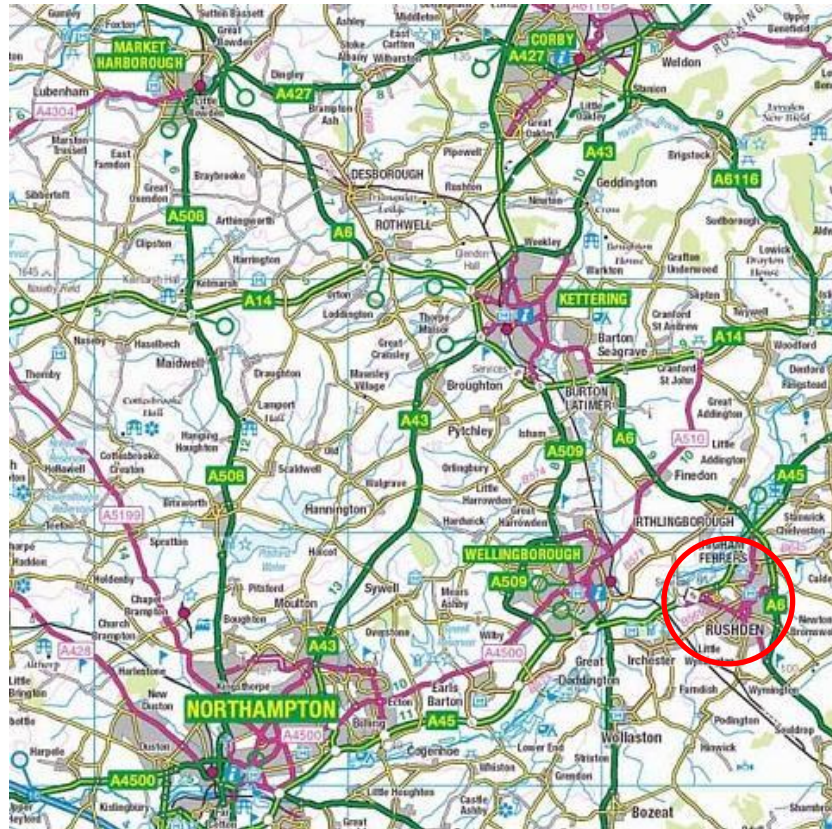


Figure 1 Rushden location

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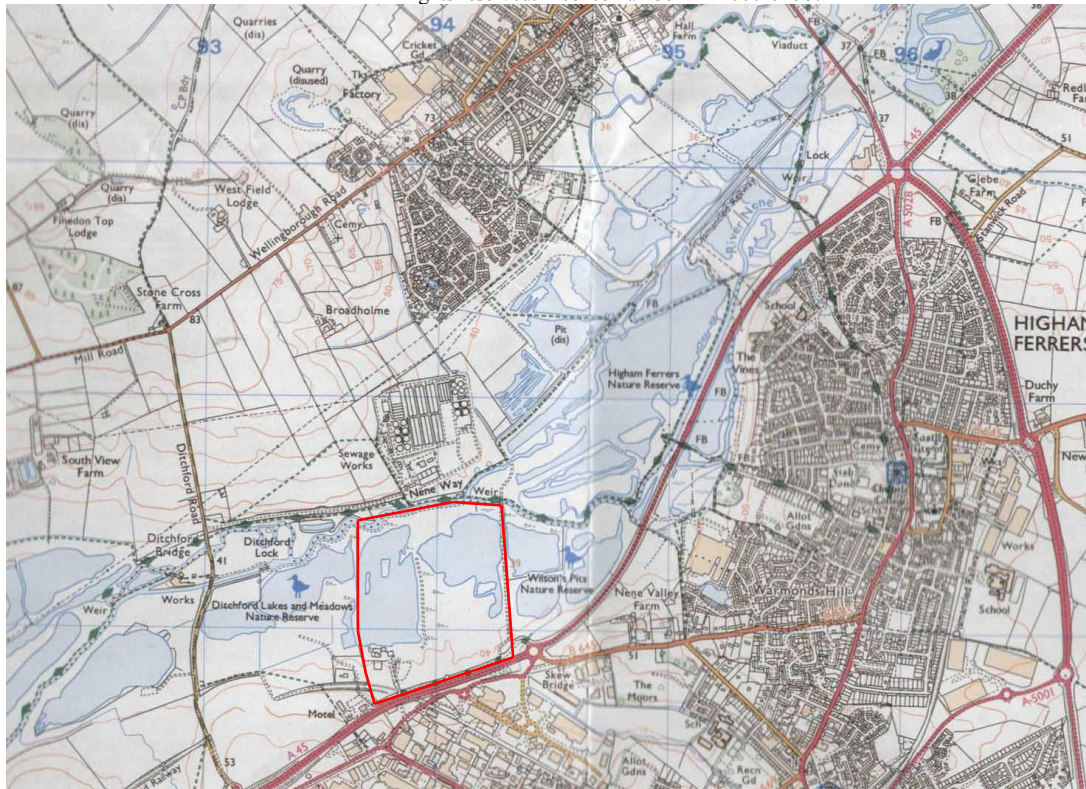


Figure 2 Site location

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Figure 3 Development area with suggested trench locations



Figure 4 General view of the development area
Looking north-west



Figure 5 Spoil heaps across development area
Looking north-east

Objectives

As identified in the ULAS Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for archaeological work the main objectives of the evaluation 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; and
- 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 any archaeological deposits on the development area 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

Prior to any machining of trial trenches general photographs of the Application Site were taken.

A c. 3% sample by trial trenching of the areas of less disturbance was proposed with an area of c. 486 sq. metres, the equivalent of nine 30m by 1.8m trenches. The provisional trench plan in Figure 3 shows the proposed location of the trenches although the size and position of the trenches indicated on the plan had to be adjusted due to the presence of existing spoil heaps and service pipes (Fig. 6).

Topsoil and overburden was removed carefully in level spits, under continuous archaeological supervision using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. Trenches were excavated down to the top natural undisturbed substratum. All excavation by machine and hand was undertaken with a view to avoid damage to any archaeological deposits were they to be present.

The trenches were backfilled and levelled at the end of the evaluation.

Results

In order to assess the nature of the soil deposits around the development area a watching brief was undertaken on the 23rd of September during the digging of a number of geotechnical test pits along the eastern edge of the development area. All of these appeared to show a significant level of made ground, presumably from gravel extraction activity. This indicated that the choice of location in the west of the development area for the evaluation trenches was justified.

As noted in the methodology the trench locations had to be adjusted to fit around the large spoil heaps created during the removal of the ski slope. This resulted in a number of curving and kinked trenches. The actual trench locations are shown in Figure 6 below.

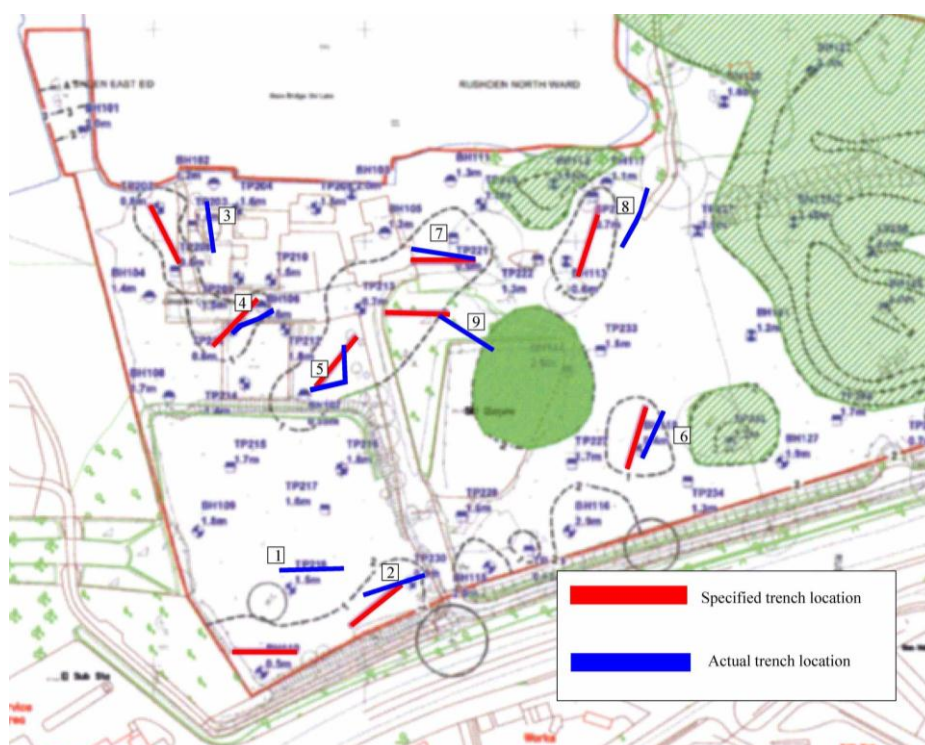


Figure 6 Trench locations

Trench 1

Trench 1 was intended to be placed in the south-western corner of the development area but the presence of a gas pipe meant that it had to be relocated slightly further to the north and east. Between 0.10 and 0.15m of a mid grey-brown clayey sandy-silt topsoil was removed to reveal a mid orange brown sandy silty-clay subsoil with a depth varying between 0.05 and 0.16m. The shallow nature of the topsoil and subsoil suggested that the ground may have been truncated, possibly due to a now removed railway track which once ran across the development area at this point. Removal of the subsoil exposed the natural substratum consisting of a greyish brown sandy-clay with pockets and bands of orange brown sandy-clay (Fig. 7).

No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.



Figure 7 Trench 1
1m scales

Trench 2

Trench 2 was originally supposed to be near to Trench 1 in the south of the development area but again the presence of the gas pipe meant that it had to be moved slightly the north and east. Topsoil of the same consistency as in Trench 1 and with a depth between 0.10 and 0.30m was removed to reveal a disturbed subsoil consisting of a mid orange brown sandy silty-clay with a large number of bricks dispersed throughout. The subsoil had a depth varying between 0.20 and 0.50m. Removal of the subsoil exposed the natural substratum consisting of a light grey brown sandy-clay

with patches of orange brown sandy gravel and lumps of ironstone (Fig. 8). Occasional bricks had been pressed into the surface of the natural substratum suggesting that the subsoil had indeed been quite badly disturbed. A band of modern disturbance with plastic debris within the fill could be seen running across the centre of the trench. Because of the modern nature of the fill this feature was not excavated.

No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.



Figure 8 Trench 2
1m scales

Trench 3

Trench 3 was located in the north-western corner of the development area. The spoil heap prevented the trench being placed in the specified position so it was relocated slightly to the east where it had to be fitted around a number of concrete bases and roadways. This necessitated a trench being excavated in two parts with a large concrete block in the middle. Between 0.20 and 0.30m of topsoil and demolition material was removed to reveal 0.30 to 0.40m of undisturbed subsoil. Below the subsoil was a clean orange brown silty-sand natural substratum (Figs. 9 and 10).

No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.



Figure 9 Trench 3 south portion



Figure 10 Trench 3 extension to north
1m scales

Trench 4

Trench 4 was located to the south-east of Trench 3 and had to be fitted around the existing spoil heaps that had been created by the spoil from the levelled ski slope. This resulted in a rather S-shaped trench following a south-west to north-east alignment. The topsoil at this point was quite disturbed with areas of sand and gravel, made ground with lumps of concrete demolition material in evidence. Running along part of the eastern edge of the trench was a thin band of tarmac from a small trackway. The subsoil was also relatively disturbed due to the tarmac and other demolition debris. Removal of the subsoil exposed an undisturbed orange brown silty-sand substratum which had been cut through in two places by gravel-filled land drains (Fig. 11). The disturbed nature of the subsoil may indicate that the upper layers of the natural substratum may have been slightly truncated.

No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.



Figure 11 Trench 4
1m scales

Trench 5

In the same way as Trench 4 Trench 5, which was slightly further south-east, had to be fitted around the ski slope spoil heaps resulting in an L-shaped trench. Prior to excavation the area around most of Trench 5 was covered in grass. To the south of Trench 5 was a long earth bank forming the northern boundary of a large flat terrace. Excavation removed between 0.15 and 0.30m of clean topsoil above the same mid orange brown sandy silty clay subsoil seen elsewhere on the development area. The subsoil, with a depth between 0.18 and 0.30m, was similarly undisturbed and lay above an orange brown silty-sand natural substratum (Fig. 12). No features were present although at the interface of subsoil and natural were a number of isolated small fragments of ironstone.

No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.



Figure 12 Trench 5

Trench 6

Trench 6 was located towards the south of the development area. The presence of a nearby north to south sewer pipe meant that, for safety reasons, this trench was reduced to 24m in length rather than 30m. Between 0.20 and 0.4m of topsoil was removed across the trench. At the south-western end of the trench was a 0.20m thick band of pebbles with a thin skim of tarmac just below turf level which appeared to be the remains of a footpath or narrow track. The subsoil was relatively undisturbed and had a depth varying between 0.20 and 0.30m. The natural substratum consisted of the same orange brown silty sand but with irregular bands of slightly darker material with some gravel within it (Fig. 13).

No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.



Figure 13 Trench 6

Trench 7

Trench 7 was placed between a number of concrete roadways in the central northern area of the development area. In view of the proximity of the surrounding demolished buildings and roads no topsoil was present in this trench. A small area of subsoil survived at the eastern end of the trench but none was present elsewhere. The fill which was removed consisted of a dark grey sandy material full of building debris and which smelt strongly of hydrocarbons. The natural substratum consisted of mid orange brown silty-sand with large areas of stained and contaminated dark grey silty sand (Fig. 14). The level of the undisturbed natural substratum varied considerably which suggests that the upper levels may have been truncated. A concrete-covered service pipe was seen at the west end of the trench which was left intact.

No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.



Figure 14 Trench 7
1m scales

Trench 8

Trench 8 was located in the north of the development area. In order to avoid excavating near to the sewer pipe the trench had a slight turn to go around a large spoil heap. The topsoil or overburden in this part of the development area consisted of a light yellowish brown sandy gravel with fragments of concrete and limestone throughout. This material had a depth varying between 0.30 and 0.50m and was removed to reveal a slightly disturbed subsoil of mid orange brown silty-sand and gravel. Cutting through the subsoil at various points were three gravel filled drains which continued down into the natural substratum (Fig. 15). Around one of the drains was an area of contamination which had stained the natural substratum to a dark grey brown colour and smelt of hydrocarbons. Elsewhere the natural orange brown silty-sand substratum was relatively clean and undisturbed.

No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.



Figure 15 Trench 8

Note north to south gravel-filled drain in centre of trench. 1m scales

Trench 9

Trench 9 was located below what was the dry ski slope in the centre of the development area. By the time that this trench was excavated the whole earth-built ski slope had been removed leaving a flat stripped area which appeared to have been levelled before the slope was constructed. A compact layer of sandy-silt which was possibly the equivalent of subsoil with a depth of between 0.20 and 0.30m was removed to reveal a mid orange brown subsoil layer of only 0.05 to 0.11m in depth. The shallow nature of the subsoil tends to confirm the suggestion that some landscaping and truncation did indeed take place before the ski slope was built. Most of the undisturbed natural substratum within the trench consisted of orange brown silty sand although the north-western end showed some evidence of a small amount of clay (Fig. 16).

No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.



Figure 16 Trench 9
1m scales

Discussion

The watching brief results during the excavation of geotechnical test pits in the east of the development area suggests that much of this area has been badly disturbed, probably by extraction activity which has removed most of the original natural substrata. Within the area that was evaluated, despite identifying locations of relatively undisturbed substratum, no archaeological features or deposits were observed in any of the trenches. Trenches 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 all contained what appeared to be intact natural substratum. The northernmost trenches 3, 7 and to some extent 8 clearly showed signs of disturbance caused by the buildings associated with the ski slope. In places this disturbance may also have truncated the upper layers of natural substratum. Trench 9 appears to have been landscaped prior to the construction of the ski slope which may have had an impact upon any buried deposits. However, no unstratified archaeological material was recovered during the machining of any of these, or indeed any of the other, trenches suggesting that the negative result is due to the lack of any surviving archaeological features rather than to disturbance and destruction.

Archive

The archive consists of:

This report,
Nine A4 pro-forma trench recording sheets,
One A4 digital photographic record sheet,
Three A4 digital photographic contact sheets,
One CD of the digital photographs.

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.

Acknowledgements

The project was managed by Dr P Clay, the fieldwork was undertaken by A Hyam and S Henderson.

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Andrew Hyam
ULAS
University of Leicester
University Road
Leicester LE1 7RH

10.10.2013

Appendix 1 Trench Information

| Trench No | Length (m) | Min depth (m) | Max depth (m) | Topsoil depth-min/max (m) | Subsoil depth-min/max (m) | Presence of archaeology | Notes |
|-----------|------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| 1 | 29.99 | 0.20 | 0.38 | 0.10 to 0.15 | 0.05 to 0.16 | No | Some modern disturbance down to natural |
| 2 | 28.90 | 0.38 | 0.70 | 0.10 to 0.30 | 0.20 to 0.50 | No | Some modern disturbance down to natural |
| 3 | 23.70 | 0.55 | 0.70 | 0.20 to 0.30 | 0.30 to 0.40 | No | Trench cut by concrete foundations |
| 4 | 25.60 | 0.55 | 1.00 | 0.20 to 0.75 | 0.20 to 0.40 | No | Disturbed subsoil survival, tarmac track on surface |
| 5 | 34.50 | 0.45 | 0.65 | 0.15 to 0.30 | 0.18 to 0.30 | No | Trench just north of landscaped earth bank |
| 6 | 23.70 | 0.50 | 0.65 | 0.20 to 0.40 | 0.20 to 0.30 | No | Evidence of gravel track below topsoil |
| 7 | 30.40 | 0.70 | 1.00 | made ground to natural | n/a | No | Very disturbed and evidence of contaminated ground |
| 8 | 29.60 | 0.55 | 1.10 | 0.30 to 0.50 | 0.20 to 0.40 | No | Cut by modern drains |
| 9 | 28.40 | 0.30 | 0.45 | 0.20 to 0.30 | 0.05 to 0.11 | No | Shallow trench beneath ski slope |

Appendix 2 OASIS Information

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Project Name | Land adjacent to Skew Bridge Ski Slope, Northampton Road, Rushden, Northamptonshire |
| Project Type | Watching brief and evaluation |
| Project Manager | P Clay |
| Project Supervisor | A Hyam |
| Previous/Future work | None |
| Current Land Use | Derelict ski slope |
| Development Type | Retail/leisure |
| Reason for Investigation | As a condition |
| Position in the Planning Process | Ongoing |
| Site Co ordinates | SP 9380 6784 (centre) |
| Start/end dates of field work | 23.09.2014 – 26.09.2014 |
| Archive Recipient | |
| Study Area | 15ha |

ULAS 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



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