



University of Leicester

Archaeological Services



**A Second Phase of Archaeological Evaluation
at Friars Mill, Bath Lane, Leicester
NGR: SK 58002 04684**

John Thomas

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**A Second Phase of Archaeological Evaluation
at Friars Mill, Bath Lane,
Leicester.**

NGR: SK 58002 04684

John Thomas

For: Leicester City Council

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Signed:



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A Second Phase Archaeological Evaluation at Friars Mill, Bath Lane, Leicester (SK 58002 04684).

John Thomas

Summary

A second phase of archaeological evaluation was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on behalf of Leicester City Council 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. A further two trenches were excavated in response to new proposals for buildings in the south-east and north-west corners of the development area. Trench 3, adjacent to the Bath Lane frontage at the southern end of the site, contained significant and well-preserved Roman structural remains and associated surrounding deposits. The structural evidence comprised two partially robbed walls forming the probable north-west corner of a building heading towards Bath Lane. A complex sequence of layers either side of the walls indicated that surviving floors and surfaces survived in situ. These were overlain by a finds-rich layer of demolition debris from the buildings demise, containing pottery, roofing tile, tesserae and painted wall plaster. The archaeology in this trench was surprisingly well-preserved and lay at a shallow depth, only c.0.70m below present ground level at its highest. Trench 4, in the north-west corner of the development area lay in a heavily disturbed part of the site, but a small window into the underlying archaeology was achieved. This revealed a sequence of silty layers overlying natural gravels, some associated with Roman pottery and tile. The layers had similarities with those recorded in Trench 2 during the previous evaluation, but are difficult to interpret. They may relate to riverine activity given their location, but they may also be fills of large ditches that are not recognisable within the restricted context of an evaluation trench. 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 A10.2015.

Introduction

A second phase of Archaeological Field Evaluation was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS), at Friars Mill, Bath Lane, Leicester between June 30th & July 6th 2015.

Friars Mill is located in Leicester City Centre on the western side of Bath Lane, a plot formerly occupied by 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.

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>).

Friars Mill 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.

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 first phase ULAS evaluation in 2014 consisted of two trenches excavated in other areas of the development site. Both contained a series of deeply stratified layers associated with Roman and medieval pottery and tile (Thomas 2014a). A later watching brief on excavations for a lift shaft proved produced no evidence for archaeological remains (Thomas 2014b).

Leicester City Council is currently undertaking internal and external alterations to three grade II listed buildings (Friars Mill, the cottages and the pumphouse – amended Planning Application 2013-1614), a three storey extension to the former mill, a two storey extension to the rear of offices and new boundary walls, fencing gates & associated landscaping (amended 2013-1613).

The current (second phase) evaluation was carried out in response to new development proposals by Leicester City Council for the construction of two additional buildings; one on the southern side of the site adjacent to the Bath Lane frontage and another in the north-western part of the site close to the river (Planning Application tbc) (Fig. 2).

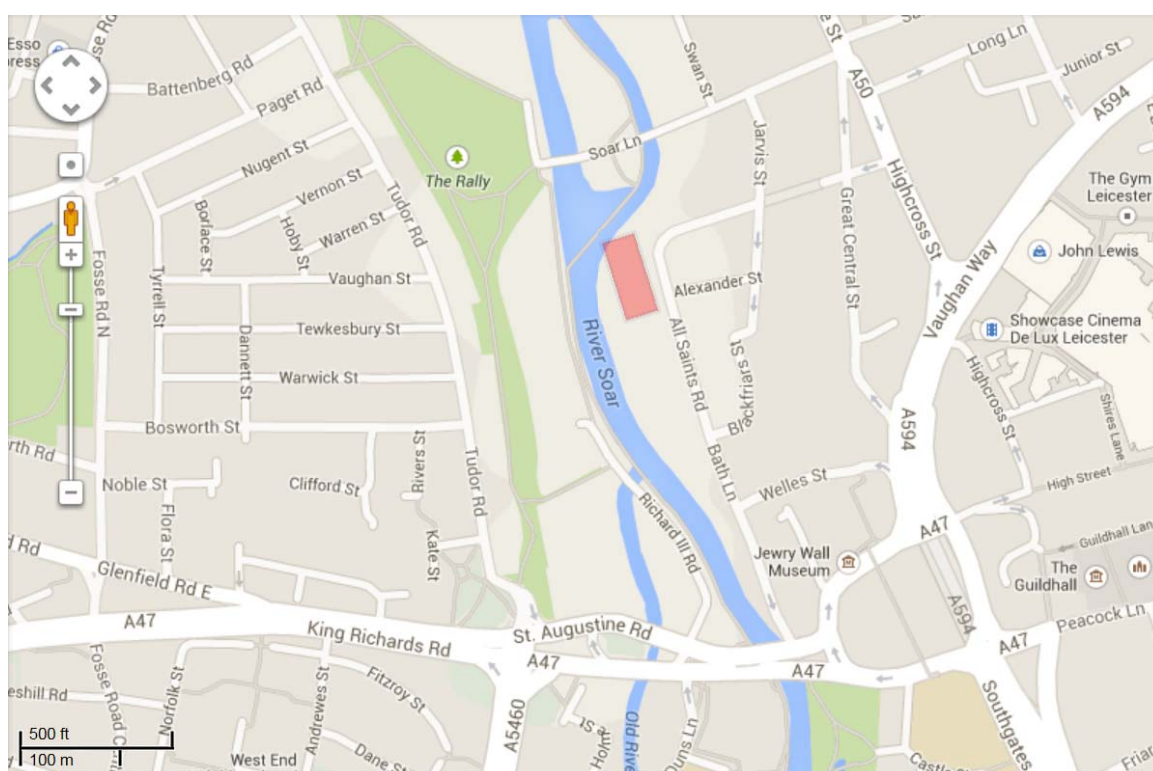


Figure 1 Friars Mill Evaluation: Approximate Site Location (highlighted)

Archaeological and Historical Background

The archaeological and historical background to the site has been covered extensively in the desk-based assessment for the project (Clarke 2013) and the previous evaluation report (Thomas 2014a).



Figure 2 Friars Mill showing the location of the two proposed buildings (shaded red)

Aims and Objectives (as stated in the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) – ULAS 2015)

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 and dimensions of the trenches differed slightly to the details proposed in the WSI due to restrictions on access and available space in the two areas of interest (Fig 3). 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.

To avoid confusion the trenches were allocated numbers 3 and 4, following on from the previous evaluation. However, due to the change in Planning Application a new Accession Number (A10.2015) was given to this phase of the work.

The uppermost demolition, yard surfaces and topsoil layers were removed from the three areas using a JCB 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, 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.

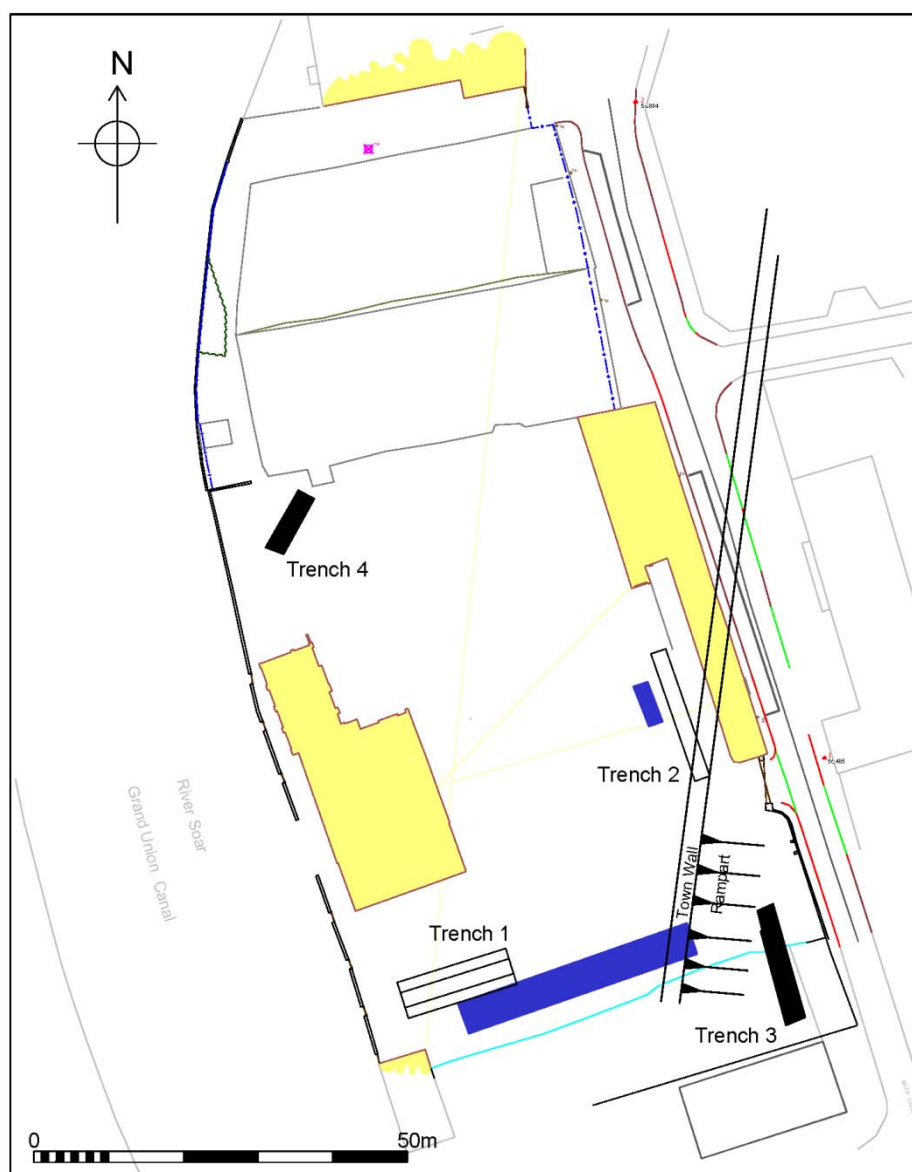


Figure 3 Trench locations in relation to earlier work

Results of the Evaluation



Figure 4 Trench 3 facing north with Roman wall footings in the foreground

Trench 3

Trench 3 was located in the south-east corner of the development area on a north-south orientation, adjacent to the Bath Lane frontage and slightly east of the eastern end of the earlier Birmingham Archaeology trench from 2003. Trench 3 measured c.17m long x 3m wide and was between c.0.70m and 1.30m deep (Fig 4).

The upper c.0.30m of deposits in this trench consisted of a brick demolition rubble/yard surface layer (300). Beneath this was a c.0.40m thick layer of dark greyish brown silty clay (301) mixed with mortar flecks, pottery and stone & ceramic demolition rubble and a thinner layer (302) likely to represent the interface between (301) and (305) – see below. These layers were not closely dated but may have formed during medieval cultivation or garden-use of the site. They sealed the underlying archaeological remains that were predominantly Roman in date (Fig 5).

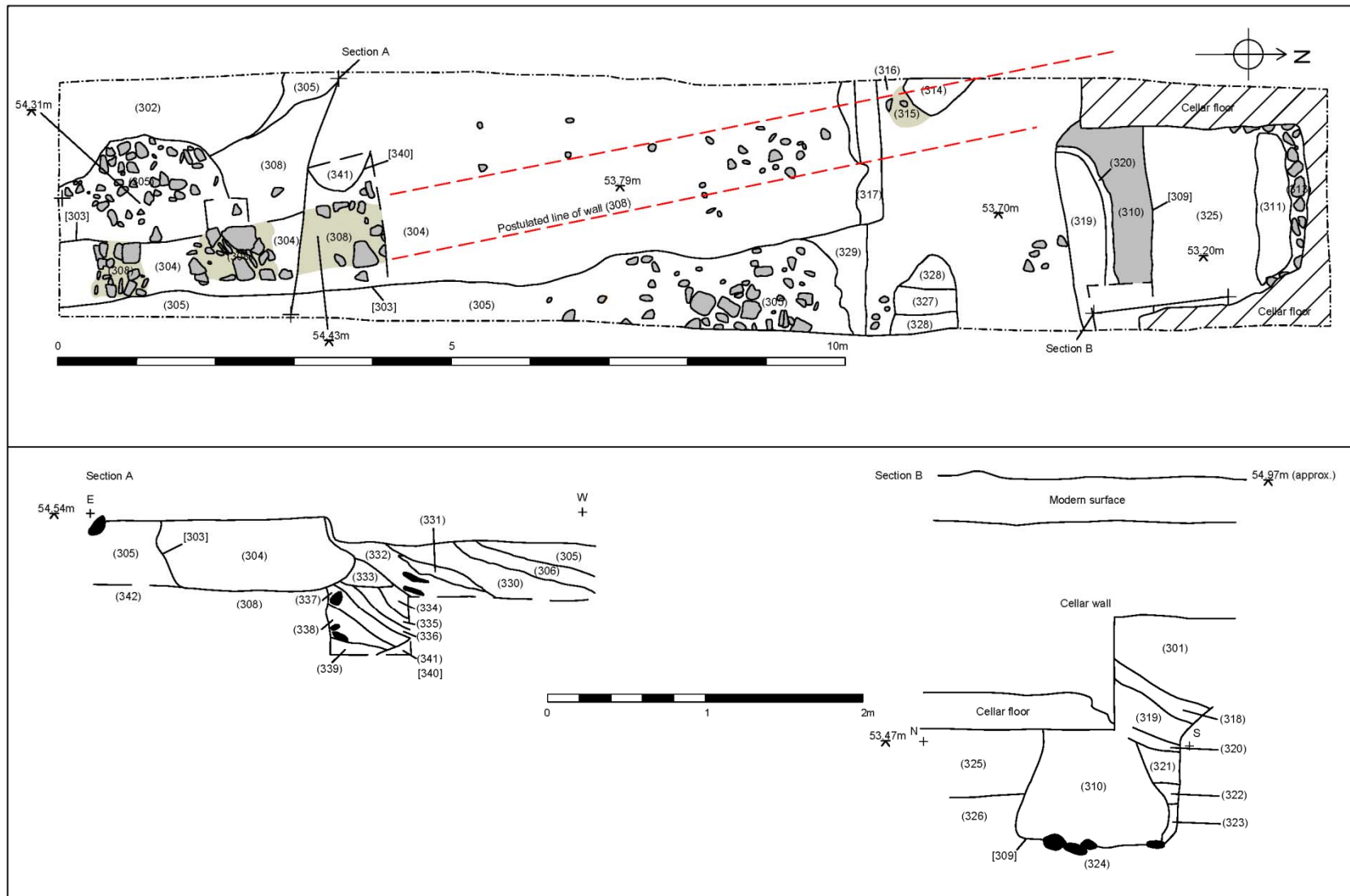


Figure 5 Trench 3 plan and section drawings

The central archaeological feature was a substantial Roman masonry wall (308) that crossed the trench diagonally on a SE to NW alignment. The wall had been partially robbed along its length but limited excavation indicated that the stone robbing had not been comprehensive and that survival generally was very good.

The wall measured *c.*0.60m-0.70m wide by at least 0.80m deep and was revealed over a length of *c.*13m. It survived best at the southern end of the trench where the uppermost courses existed only 0.70m below the current ground level. The wall was constructed of coursed granite blocks forming flat outer faces, with a coarse rubble 'infill' of smaller granite chunks, cobbles and tile fragments all bonded with a hard yellow/creamy brown mortar. There was a noticeable difference in width between the upper wall courses (*c.*0.60m wide) and the lower courses (*c.*0.70m wide) revealed, suggesting that there was a distinction between foundation and superstructure. The thickness of the wall courses (*c.*0.10m towards the top and 0.20m towards the bottom) also appears to reflect this distinction.

The northern *c.*9m of the wall was represented by a robber trench [303] that roughly followed the same alignment. The eastern edge [303] was clearly defined however the western edge of the robber trench cut was more obscure. It is possible that the clarity of this edge was complicated by the presence of other features such as pitting (e.g. medieval pit [341]), but further work would be necessary to clarify this. Sample excavation showed that the robber trench had an irregular U-shaped profile where stone had been quarried from the wall, although some collapse and undermining of the soft surrounding deposits had occurred which distorted the shape. The robber trench contained a single fill of dark greyish-brown silty clay (304), similar to the overlying soil (301) but with a greater concentration of pottery, painted wall plaster and demolition debris. Roman pottery dating between the 2nd-4th centuries came from this context, as well as an assemblage of 12th-14th century medieval pottery, probably providing an indication of when the wall was being dismantled. Also of interest, a group of tiles included further examples from the roof of the building as well as fragments of flue and a wall tile from a hypocaust stack indicative of underfloor heating within the building.

At the northern end of the trench a second robber trench [309] indicated the presence of another wall on a NE to SW alignment. It seems highly likely that the two walls/robber trenches are related as part of the same building, but further work would be needed to clarify this. Robber trench [309] was *c.*0.70m wide x 0.70m deep and was observed for *c.*3m before it ran beneath the eastern edge of the trench. It had similar characteristics and a similar fill to robber trench [303], also containing 12th-14th century medieval pottery. A concentration of granite rubble (324) revealed at the base of the robber trench may have represented surviving in situ footings of this wall (Fig 5 Section B).

A layer of demolition rubble (305) existed on either side of wall (308)/robber trench [303]. This consisted of mid-brown mortar-rich silty soil containing concentrations of granite rubble, Roman pottery and roof tile (Fig 6). On the eastern side of the wall layer (305) was *c.*0.41m thick and lay as a fairly even spread (as far as could be discerned within the trench confines). It overlay a deposit of mid yellowish-brown silty clay (342), the full extent of which was not established.

To the west of the wall at the southern end of the trench the demolition layer (305) covered a series of layers possibly reflecting surfaces associated with the building (Fig 5 Section A & Fig 7). The uppermost was compact pebble surface (306), perhaps relating to a yard or floor.

This surface overlay a sandy layer (330) that may have formed bedding for the pebbles. Below this was a compact mortar surface (331) supported by another possible bedding layer (332). A fragment of crushed mortar surface (333) survived close to the wall. Beneath this a series of sloping deposits (335-338) was associated with 2nd-4th century Roman pottery and painted wall plaster. These may have been fills of a cut feature such as a pit. Below these layers, excavation revealed the top of what appeared to be another demolition layer (339) consisting of mortar-rich silty soil containing stone, tile and painted plaster.



Figure 6 Roman wall remains with associated pebble surface (306) and demolition layer (305) in the foreground



Figure 7 Roman wall remains and associated layers at the southern end of the trench

At the northern end of the trench similar complexity was revealed to either side of robber trench [309]. On the southern side a series of layers was partially exposed which included rubble and mortar-rich deposits and possible mortar surfaces, all suggesting association with the use and disuse of the building.

The northern end of the trench had been disturbed slightly by a brick cellar but this enabled a view of archaeological layers beneath demolition layers associated with the building. Traces of a cobbled surface (311) lay to the north of the robber trench which lay directly below a layer of granite rubble (313), possibly associated with demolition debris. The cobbled surface overlay a deposit of yellowish-brown clay (325) which was up to 0.42m thick and overlay a mortar-rich layer (326).

Trench 4

Trench 4 was located adjacent to the river on the north-western side of the development area. It measured *c.* 7.00m x 3.00m x up to 4.20m deep (Fig 8). Due to space restrictions the trench was smaller than originally intended and a number of large concrete footings from previous buildings further impeded the view of archaeological deposits. That said, a narrow window between areas of disturbance was accessible. This provided a view of soil layers up to 3.30m deep overlying compact natural gravels.

The overlying yard surface layer (400) accounted for the upper *c.* 0.90m of the sequence of layers in this area, below which was a series of archaeological layers (Fig 9 & Fig 10).



Figure 8 Trench 4 general view with river in the background

The earliest of these deposits was a layer of blueish-green silty clay and organic matter (406) associated with large stone blocks and a large fragment of Roman tile (not retrieved). These

finds are interesting in the context, and may indicate nearby structural activity. The thickness of this layer varied between *c.*0.40 and 0.75m.

Above this was a thin (*c.*0.15m) layer of orange silty clay (405) and this in turn was covered with a *c.*1.00m thick deposit of greyish brown clay.

Overlying this was a *c.*0.40m thick layer of sandy gravel (403), and then a layer of grey clay (402 – *c.*0.30m thick) that contained a sherd of late 4th century Roman pottery.

Finally a *c.*0.50m thick deposit of mortar rich silty clay (401) completed the sequence.



Figure 9 Trench 4 facing west

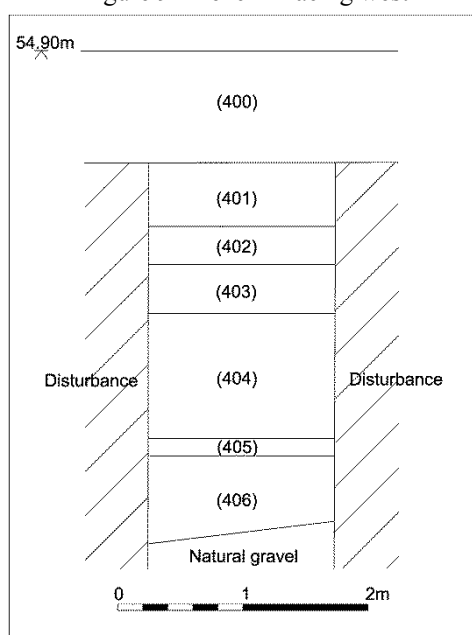


Figure 10 Schematic section drawing of layers recorded in Trench 4

Discussion

The evaluation has indicated that significant archaeological deposits exist within Trench 3 that will be impacted upon by the current development proposals. Trench 4 revealed deeply stratified layers (up to c.3m deep) that were difficult to interpret within the confines of the available space.

Trench 3 contained well-preserved structural remains relating to a Roman building close to the Bath Lane frontage. This discovery fits well with recent archaeological work along Bath Lane that has shown the area to be an important focus of structural activity within the early Roman town.

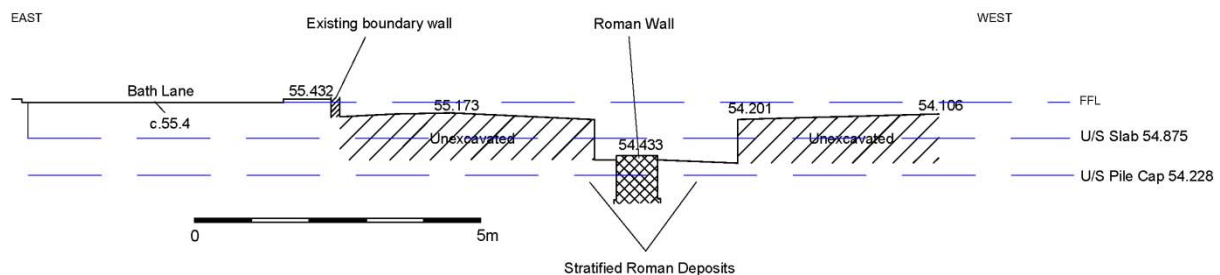


Figure 11 Cross section through Trench 3 archaeological deposits in relation to development proposals

The uppermost levels of archaeology within the trench were only 0.70m deep (c.54.43m AOD) and appear to have survived because of low levels of later intrusive activity such as pitting. A cellar at the northern end of the trench also seems to have caused only minimal disturbance to the Roman archaeology.

In association with the building remains was a series of intact layers, comprising compact mortar and pebble/cobble surfaces probably relating to contemporary floors and yards. Their stratigraphic relationship to the wall suggests that at least some of the building's superstructure may have survived *in situ*. Overlying these layers was a thick demolition deposit containing much roofing tile, painted wall-plaster and tesserae, providing information on the character of the building. Of particular note, the presence of painted wall plaster, mosaic fragments and the suggestion that hypocaust heating and bathing facilities were associated with the building provide a good indication of its status. Further work on this part of the development area would undoubtedly reveal more information about this building, but would also allow a clearer understanding of how it related to the other nearby contemporary buildings that have recently been discovered. Further excavation would also help understand the relationship of the building to the nearby town defences that have been postulated as existing less than c.10m to the north of Trench 3 (from the results of the Birmingham Archaeology trench).

Trench 4 was more difficult to interpret, particularly given the narrow window of access available. What could be seen was a series of deeply stratified silty layers, some in association with Roman pottery and tile, as well as stone blocks, overlying natural gravels. These layers may relate to riverine activity but might also be contained within large archaeological features such as ditches that would not be easily identifiable in a small evaluation trench. Further archaeological monitoring of the groundworks for the new development may shed light on the nature of these deposits, including the intriguing stone blocks and Roman tile that may have originated from nearby structures.

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ULAS, 2015 *Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Work: Friars Mill, Bath Lane, Leicester.* ULAS Ref. 15-067.

Appendix I OASIS Information

INFORMATION REQUIRED	EXAMPLE
Project Name	A Second Phase Archaeological Evaluation at Friars Mill, Bath Lane, Leicester (SK 58002 04684))
Project Type	Archaeological Evaluation
Project Manager	Richard Buckley
Project Supervisor	John Thomas
Previous	Two Earlier Phases of Evaluation
Current Land Use	Disused Mill
Development Type	New Offices
Reason for Investigation	NPPF
Position in the Planning Process	As a condition
Site Co ordinates	SK 58002 04684
Start/end dates of field work	30 June – 3 July 2015
Archive Recipient	Leicester City Museum
Study Area *	

Appendix II The Finds

Finds from Friars' Mill, Bath Lane A10.2015

Nicholas J. Cooper and Deborah Sawday

Introduction

Small assemblages of pottery and animal bone were recovered, alongside notable occurrences of near complete Roman building tiles, mosaic tesserae and painted wall plaster indicative of elite, stone-founded housing in this part of the Roman town, with hypocaust heating and a bathing suite. The most significant group of material is the demolition or robbing deposit (302) which contains large fragments of Roman tile and painted wall-plaster and tesserae from a tessellated pavement or the edging of a mosaic pavement.

Roman Pottery

An assemblage 15 sherds (368g) of Roman pottery was recovered and classified using the Leicestershire Roman form and fabric series (Pollard 1994, 110-114) and quantified by sherd count and weight. The full record is presented below with suggested dating. In the case of contexts (302), (304), (305) and (310), medieval pottery was also present, and the Roman material is therefore residual unless contamination from the overlying layer can be demonstrated.

Friars' Mill, Bath Lane, Roman pottery A10.2015								
Trench	Context	Cut	Fabric	Form	Type	Sherds	Weight	Date
3	302		CG Samian	Dish	18/31	1	10	100-150
3	304	303	GW5	Bowl	HPM 79	1	32	L3rd-4th
3	304	303	MO4	Mortarium	misc	1	35	150-400
3	304	303	CG Samian	Dish	18/31	1	2	100-150
3	305		C2NV	Bowl	31 copy	1	40	L3rd-4th
3	305		GW5	jar	bead rim	1	110	L3rd-4th
3	310		GW5	jar	neck bead	2	20	2nd-3rd
3	314		GW5	bowl	burnished	1	20	3rd-4th?
3	319		GW5	Bowl	burnished	1	35	3rd-4th?
3	319		OW2	jar	flared rim	1	25	2nd-4th
3	336		BB1	jar	HB 12	1	10	120-160
3	336		GW3	jar	neck bead	1	12	2nd-4th
3	338		CG Samian	Cup	27	1	15	100-150
4	402		C13 oxrcc	?lid		1	2	360+
Total						15	368	

Of interest is that the group includes pottery of 4th century date which is relatively unusual in Leicester and especially the Oxford red colour-coated ware from (402) which probably dates to after AD360, right at the end of the Roman period.

Medieval Pottery (Deborah Sawday)

350g of medieval pottery was recovered and classified using the Leicestershire medieval pottery form and fabric series (Davies and Sawday 1999 Table 30). Quantification by sherd count and spot-dating for each context is tabulated below.

Context	material	Nos	date
301	CC1	1	c.1250-1300\=
302	PM, CS	3	13-14 th C+
304 [303]	ST2/1, RS, PM	15	12-14 th
305	PM	4	13-14 th C
310	MS?	2	14 th – 15 th +

Roman Tile

A total of 11.6kg of Roman tile was recovered from demolition layer (302) including two largely complete *tegulae* and part of an *imbrex* (roofing tiles), and a complete wall tile. The fresh state of the fragments and the large size would indicate that this is primary rubbish which has not moved far from its original location. Another group from (304) weighing 4kg comprised the same types and most significantly a fragment of flue tile and a wall tile from a hypocaust stack (1.4kg) with mortar adhering, came from (310) indicating the existence of hypocaust heating in the building. Small fragments of roof tile (500g) came from (305), (319) and (323).

Roman Painted Wall Plaster and Mortar

1.3kg of painted wall plaster came from demolition layer (302) (Sfs2-4 and 6-7), and a single fragment (Sf5 30g) with a red surface came from [303] (304). The material from (302) had red, turquoise, and white surfaces, the latter with a single grey panel line. Additionally, 200g of white faced plaster which had been mortared over during refurbishment was recovered from (339), one fragment of which had the same grey panel line, suggesting it came from the same scheme as that in (302). Two fragments (600g) of *opus signinum* mortar (with tile inclusions) also came from (302) indicating the need for waterproofing and most likely the existence of a bath suite within the building. Another tiny fragment of op sig came from (401). Small fragments of mortar which probably backed the wall plaster came from (304), (305), (319) and (323).

Tessellated Flooring

Four tesserae were recovered: three from (302) and one from (310). Three are grey (of Danehills sandstone) and one of red tile, of the size usually used for corridors and the borders of mosaics.

Metalworking Debris

A single fragment (45g) of vesicular fayellite relating to iron working came from (302).

Metal Finds

An unidentifiable iron object (Small Find 1) was recovered (302) which is currently undergoing analysis.

Animal Bone

800g of animal bone were recovered. These have not been identified in detail at this stage and will be added to excavation assemblage for analysis.

Oyster shell

Five oyster shells probably of Roman date were recovered from (302) and (304). If large groups of at least 100 are recovered during excavation then analysis would be worthwhile to ascertain their sources (East or South coast).

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