UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER
Archaeological Services

An Archaeological Investigation by Test pitting at St Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire

NGR: SK 75276 19029

Andrew Hyam

ULAS Report No. 2018-153

An Archaeological Investigation by

Test pitting at

St Mary's Church,

Melton Mowbray,

Leicestershire

NGR: SK 75276 19029

A R Hyam

For: PCC of Melton Mowbray Team Parish

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An Archaeological Investigation by Test pitting at St. Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire.

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Summary

An archaeological investigation by test pitting was undertaken at St. Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire between the 20th and 24th of August 2018 by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS). The work took place in advance of a proposed new building on the location of an old boiler house on the north side of the church. Five test pits were excavated in order to assess levels and depths of possible archaeological deposits.

Much of the test pit area is covered by a mound of up-cast material created by the construction of the partially submerged boiler house. This material contains a large quantity of disturbed human bone and roots from nearby trees. Along the northern edge of the side the existing 19th century brick wall was discovered to have been built upon an earlier ironstone wall. A sherd of possible 12th century Stamford ware was recovered from the fill of the wall cut.

The report will be archived under accession number X.A88.2018

Introduction

In accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Section 16 *Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment* this document forms the report for an archaeological investigation by test pitting on the north side of St. Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, NGR: SK 75276 19029. A new building along the northern boundary of the churchyard has been proposed which will replace an existing boiler house. In order to gain an understanding any potential relationships between the proposed building and the adjacent structures and to investigate any archaeological features or deposits which may be present in the area the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) requested that an archaeological investigation take place. The DAC has granted a faculty for work with the condition that no works should take place until the Parochial Church Council (PCC), after consultation with the Diocesan Archaeological Adviser, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work. The results of this work will then be used as guidance to create a mitigation strategy for the new building. At the time of the test pitting work the size, layout and design of the new building had not yet been finalised.

Background

The town of Melton Mowbray is located approximately 17 miles from Leicester in the north-east corner of Leicestershire, and is the largest settlement in this part of the county (Fig. 1). The parish church of St Mary's is a Grade I listed building situated in the heart

of the town centre. The church lies to the south of the market place and is on the western side of Burton Road. The churchyard is within the Melton Mowbray Conservation Area at a height of approximately 74m aOD and is located on fairly flat ground, dropping away slightly to the south and east. The British Geological Survey for England and Wales indicates that the underlying geology is likely to consist of superficial Head deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel overlying Blue Lias Formation Mudstone bedrock.

A desk-based assessment produced by ULAS in 2013 discusses the history and background of the church and of the ongoing improvement works (Clarke 2013). These details therefore will not be discussed in this report although it should be noted that the church lies on the site of a Saxon minster and has had an almost continuous series of rebuilds, extensions and modifications ever since.

The site for the proposed new building is on the northern side of the church within an area of the churchyard occupied by a 20th century boiler-house building (Fig. 2). The flat-roofed boiler-house has been partially submerged into the ground leaving the roof less than a metre above current path level. The location is surrounded by mature trees and shrubs covering a long mound of made-ground associated with building spoil from the boiler-house (Figs 3 and 4). A number of headstones have been re-set into the mound and are now disassociated from their burials. It is likely that they were moved when the boiler-house was built. The area is bounded in the south by a path leading to Burton Street and to the north by a row of brick-built buildings. The buildings to the north belong to the Samworth Centre and to the Crown Inn public house which faces out onto Burton Street.

The hand-drawn Ordnance Survey map published in 1816 shows buildings along the northern edge of the churchyard but the detail is not clear enough to indicate exactly what form these take. It is only possible to state that some buildings were present. More recent historic map evidence indicates that buildings along the northern edge of the churchyard have been present since at least 1886 when the first edition Ordnance Survey County Series map was published. The building layout and sizes all appear to be the same as exists today. The subsequent editions up to the current edition all show the same detail. None of the Ordnance Survey maps show the presence of the boiler-house until the 1981 edition by which time it must have been present for around 60 years.

An earlier phase of archaeological investigation inside the church was undertaken by ULAS in 2014 and then in 2017. This work took place during an extensive phase of restoration which raised the floor back to its original level following a ground reduction carried out in the 1850s. No known archaeological work has been carried out within the northern part of the churchyard.

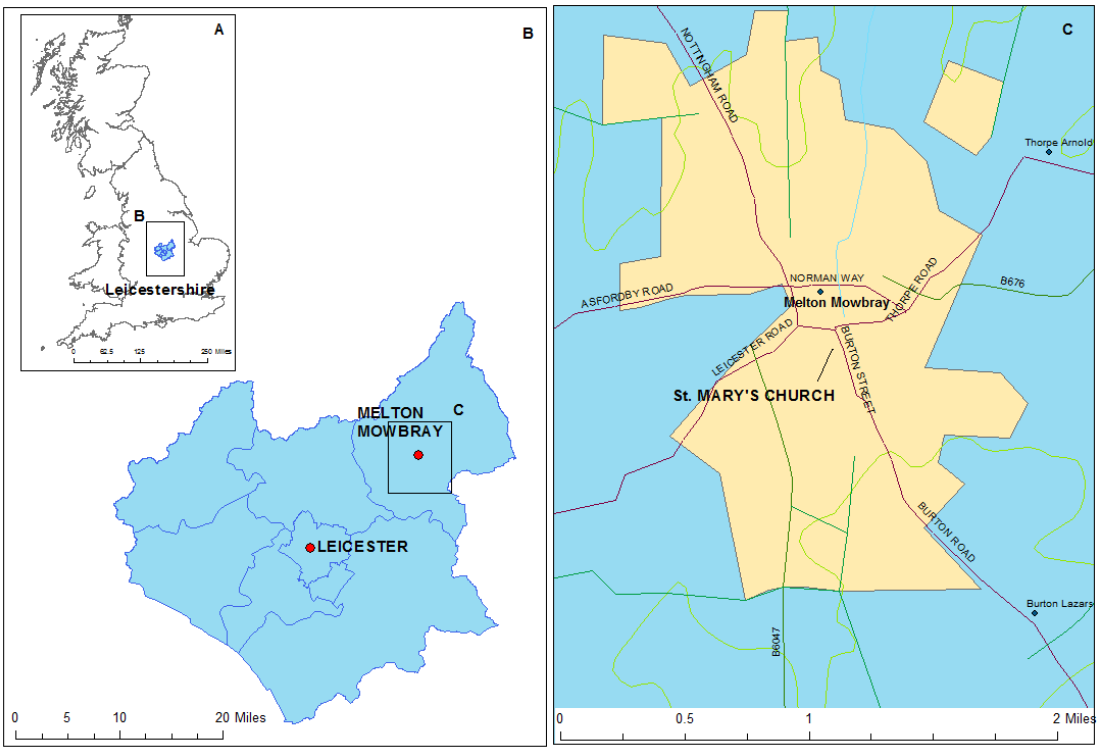

Figure 1 Melton Mowbray and site location

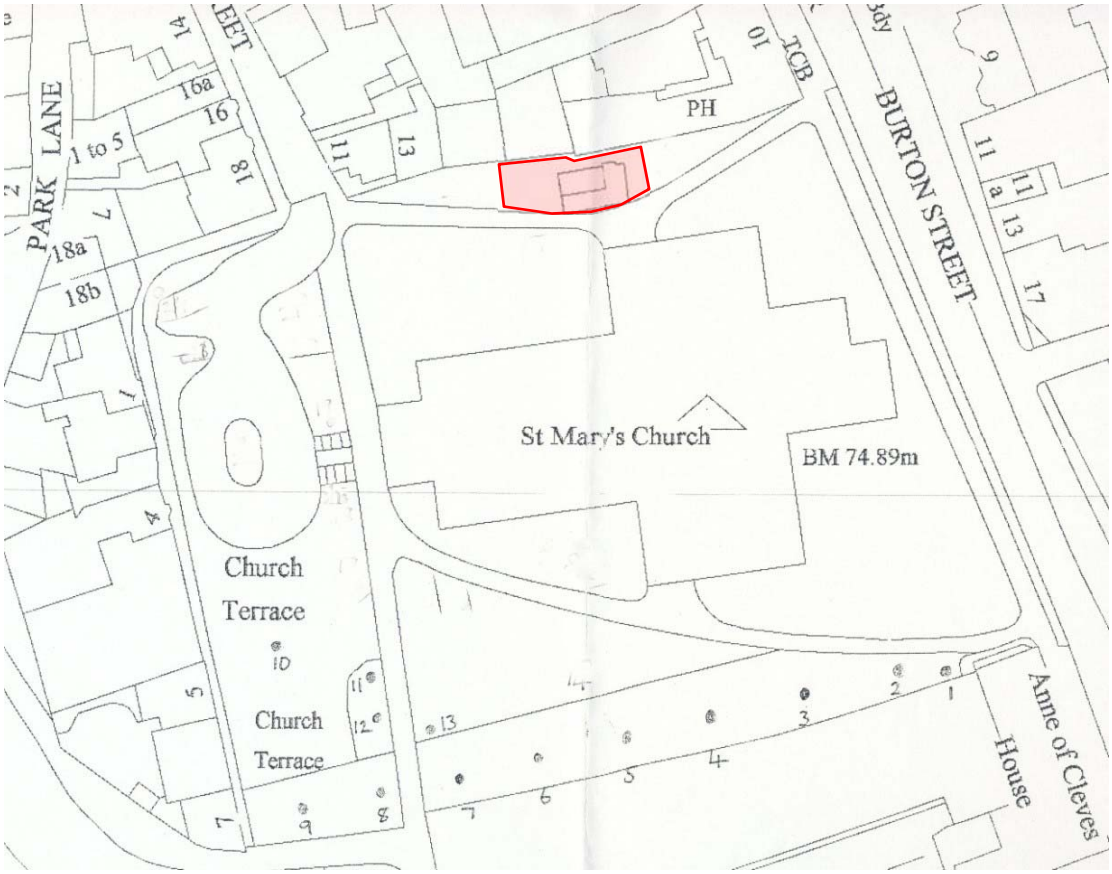

Figure 2 Proposed building location
Test pit area highlighted in red. Plan supplied by client, not to scale. North to top

Figure 3 Proposed building location
Looking north-east. Boiler-house outlined in yellow. North transept on right

Figure 4 View of earth mound
Looking east. North transept on right

Objectives

The overall objectives and research agenda are detailed in the ULAS Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for *Archaeological Evaluation during Groundworks at St Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire* (ULAS 2018).

The specific objectives for this programme of work 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 understand the potential relationship of the new building to adjoining existing structures.
- To record any archaeological deposits to be affected by the ground works.
- To establish the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscape.
- To recover any artefacts and ecofacts.
- To produce an archive and report of the results.
- To ascertain the nature and extent of any further mitigation works required prior to development commencing.

Methodology

The trench excavation methodology used throughout the evaluation is discussed in detail in the ULAS WSI. The WSI specified that five $1m^2$ test pits were to be hand-excavated at locations around the boiler-house (Fig. 5). Because of the proximity of potentially unstable headstones, trees and other site constraints not all of the pits could be excavated to the full $1m^2$.

Levels of the test pits and of the surrounding ground were taken throughout the project and tied in to the Ordnance Survey datum. Any disarticulated human bone was carefully lifted and reburied within the same test pit during backfilling at the end of the project. Care was also taken to avoid damage to existing tree roots.

Results

As noted, five test pits were excavated around the boiler-house as shown in Figure 5 below. Three of the test pits were excavated against the northern boundary wall belonging to the Samworth Centre and the Crown Inn. The remaining two were placed along the southern edge of the proposed new building location. The presence of tree roots and other constraints prevented some of the pits from being excavated to the full specified 1m depth.

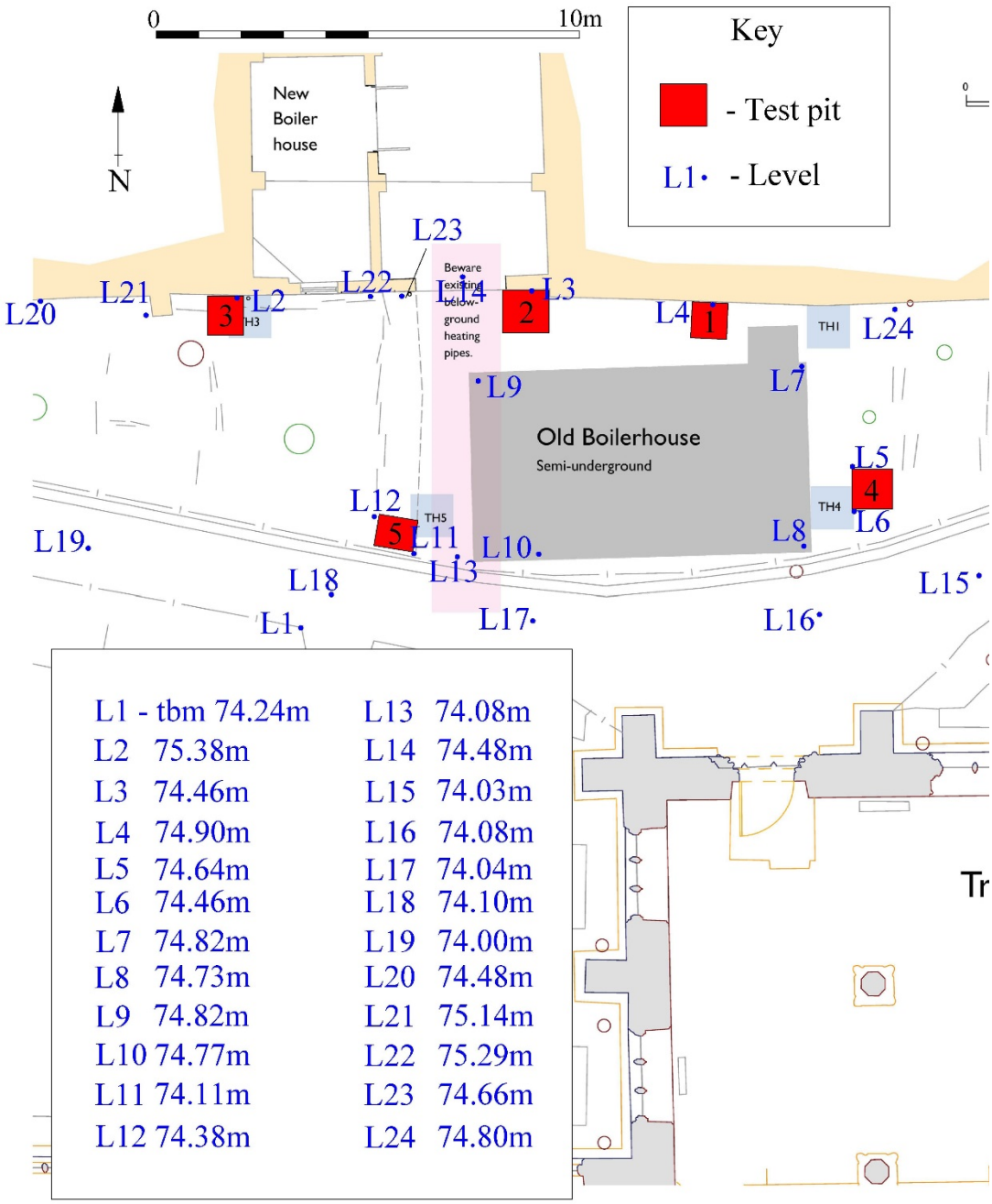

Figure 5 Test pit location and levels
TH1 to TH5 show suggested locations of test pits

Test pit 1

Test pit 1 was placed on the north side of the boiler-house against the brick wall. The WSI suggested that it should be to the east of the boiler chimney but a large holly bush prevented this (Fig. 6). The available space only permitted a 0.85m^2 pit to be excavated. The top 0.4m in the pit consisted of a layer of modern disturbance full of plastic, glass and metal debris (111) suggesting that the gap between the boiler-house and wall had been infilled quite recently (Figs 7 and 8). Beneath this layer was a dark brown clay silt layer (112) with a large amount of brick and stone building debris. Also within this

layer was a quantity of disarticulated human bone which appeared to have been deliberately placed against the Samworth Centre brick wall (115) to the north. This layer seems likely to be the disturbed material created from the excavation of the boiler-house. At 0.75m below present ground level a layer of dark red-brown silty clay with charcoal flecks (113) was encountered. This change in deposits corresponded with the lower courses of the brick wall. Partial excavation of layer (113) exposed the base of the brick wall which has been built on top of an earlier ironstone wall (114). Although no modern material was found within this layer no dateable material was recovered either. The ironstone wall (114) appears to have been laid without mortar using relatively thin pieces of unworked stone which may suggest that it forms the remnant of earlier foundations of a building following a similar alignment to the present buildings. The limited surrounding space only allowed the test pit to be excavated to a depth of 0.86m at which point the excavation was halted.

Figure 6 Test pit 1 location
Looking north-east across boiler-house roof

Figure 7 Test pit 1
South facing elevation. 1m and 0.5m scales

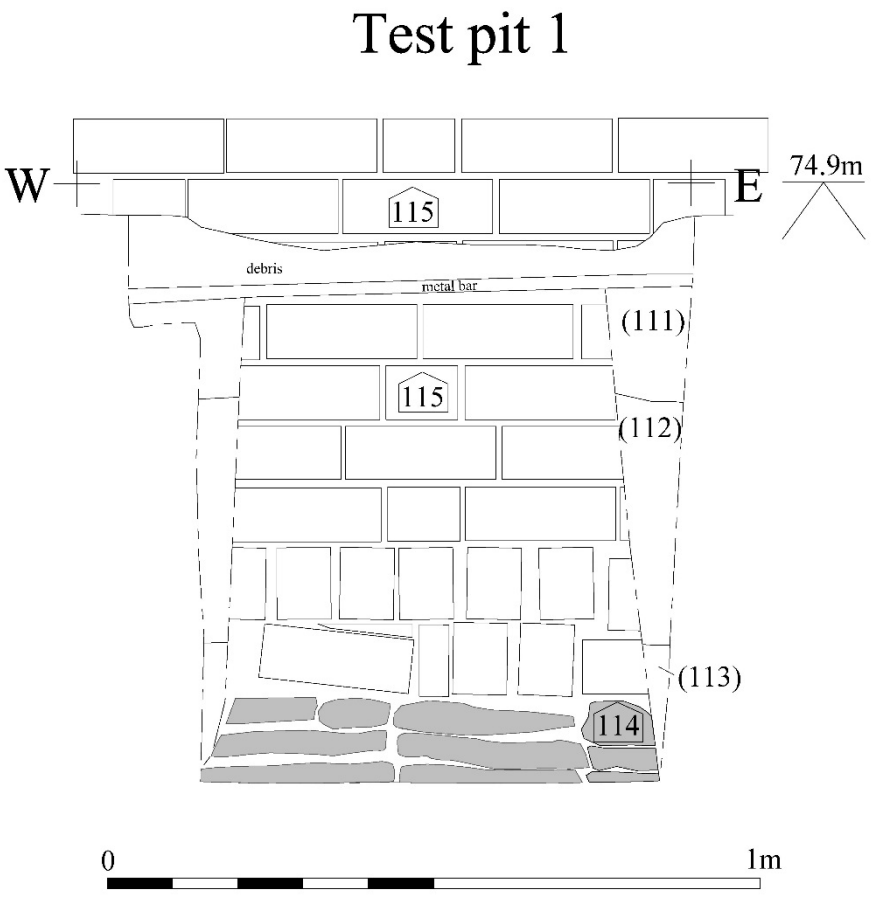

Figure 8 Test pit 1 south facing section

Test pit 2

Test pit 2 was located to the east side of a gateway leading northwards from the churchyard into the Samworth Centre (Fig. 9). At this point the brick wall on the north side of the pit steps outwards and the brick courses do not match which indicates a different phase of building work. As with Test pit 1 the upper layers of overburden (100) and (101) contained modern plastic and building waste. Removal of these layers exposed the base of the Samworth Centre/Crown Inn brick wall (104) showing it to have been patched or repaired in the eastern corner and also to be sitting upon an earlier ironstone foundation wall (105) (Figs 10 to 11). This east to west stone wall is very probably the same ironstone wall seen in Test pit 1. Four courses of wall (105) survive beneath brick wall (104) but, where the brick wall steps outwards, and becomes wall (102) only a single course of stone survives. The ironstone wall does not step out but continues on its east to west alignment. A clear construction cut [108] for wall (105) can be seen cutting into a silty clay layer (106). The back fill of cut [108] contained a mid-red brown silty clay (107) which is probably the same layer as (113) seen in pit 1. A single sherd of Stamford ware pottery of mid to late 12th century date was recovered from fill (107).

Figure 9 Test pit 2 location
Test pit 2 is to the right of the gateway. Test pit 1 is on the far right of the picture. Boiler-house in foreground on right

Figure 10 Test pit 2 south facing section
Looking north. 1m and 0.5m scales

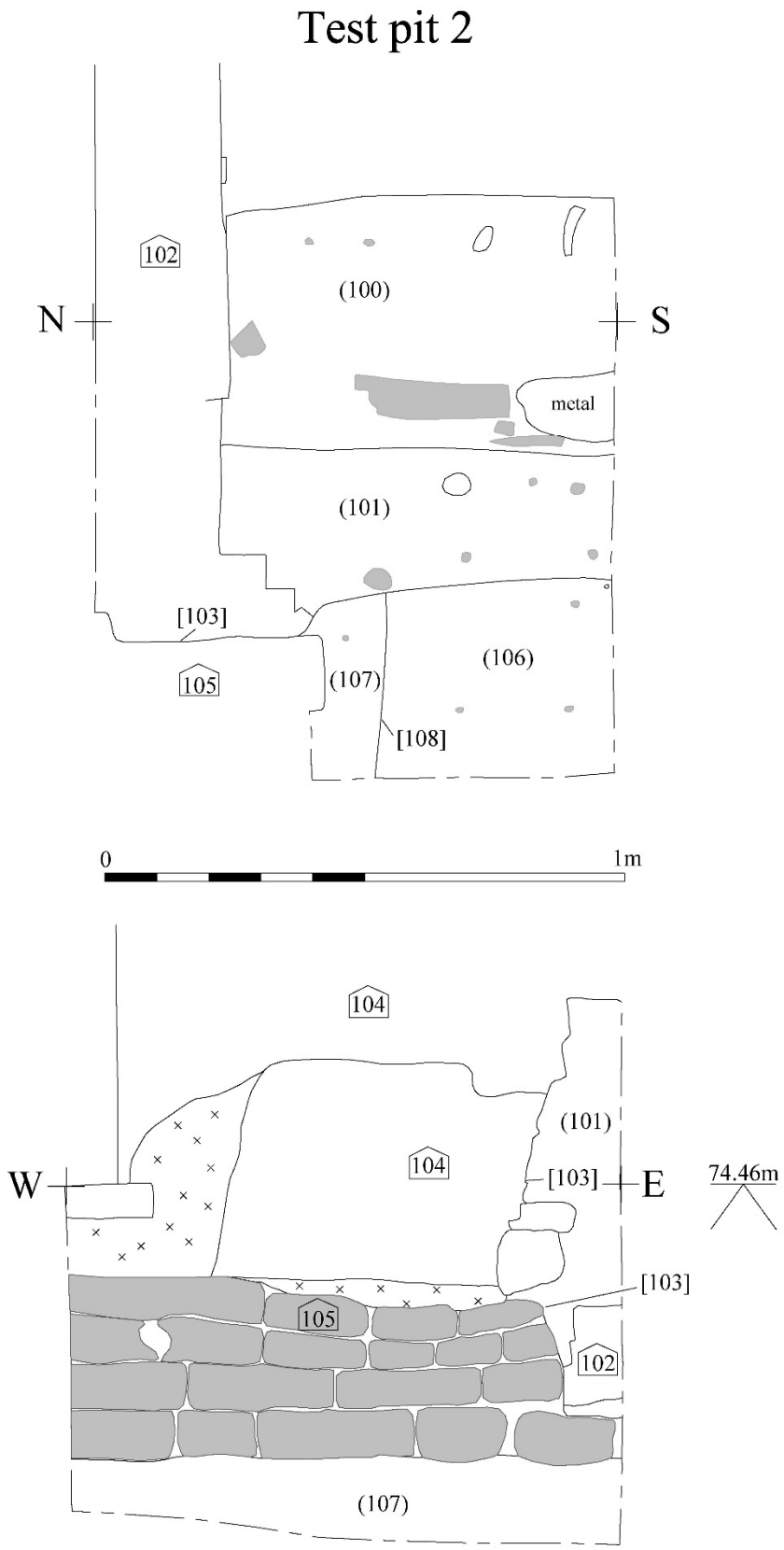

Figure 11 Test pit 2 west and south facing sections

Test pit 3

Test pit 3 was placed against the northern brick boundary wall at the highest point of the earth mound to the west of the Samworth Centre gateway (Fig. 12). At this point the red-brick wall of the Samworth Centre changes to a partially timber-framed wall which has a lower half built from a mix of brick and stone. This wall appears to have been heavily patched and repaired a number of times. A homogenous mid-brownish grey clay silt (119) was encountered throughout the entire 1m depth of this test pit which seems to confirm that the mound is likely to be made from material created from the spoil from the boiler house (Figs 13 to 14). A lot of tree roots were observed within the fill which also contained a small amount of brick rubble. A number of disarticulated human bones were observed throughout this layer.

The south facing section of this pit showed that the stone, brick and timber wall (120) extended down almost to the base of the pit and appears to be sitting on a wider limestone plinth (123) which projects outwards by approximately 0.25m. The brick wall of the Samworth Centre has been crudely repaired at its south-west corner and now sits on a large lump of cement and stone which in turn sits upon wall (120). The crude repairs suggest that the walls were repaired after the spoil mound was created as, presumably, the wall (120) was originally exposed. The height of the limestone plinth is just under 0.3m above the church yard path height (see Figure 5) which suggests that well over a metre of the wall is now hidden beneath the spoil mound.

Figure 12 Test pit 3 location
Looking north. Test pit to left of yellow sign

Figure 13 Test pit 3
Looking north. 1m and 0.5m scales

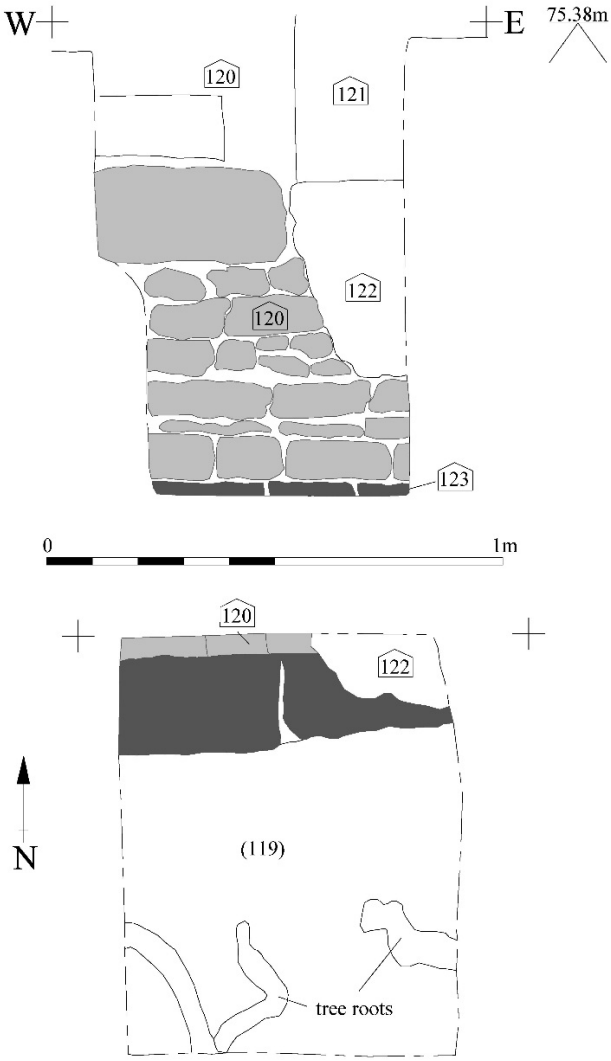

Figure 14 Test pit 3 section and plan

Test pit 4

Test pit 4 was placed on the eastern side of the boiler house close to the churchyard path. At this point the ground rises quite steeply from the path towards the wall of the Crown Inn. A 0.2m layer of grey brown silty clay material (116) resembling garden soil was seen at ground level. This was removed to expose a mid-brownish clay silt (117) very similar in nature to the deposit (119) seen in Test pit 3 which was identified as spoil from the boiler house. In Test pit 4 this deposit also contained a number of human bones and many roots from the surrounding trees and shrubs (Fig. 15). At 0.72m below present ground level a slight change in the soil was seen on the southern side of the test pit. This may be the bottom of the spoil mound material and consisted of a pale brown silty clay (118). The top of a possible intact burial was seen at this point so the excavation of this pit was halted.

Figure 15 Test pit 4
Looking north. 1m and 0.5m scales

Test pit 5

Test pit 5 was located at the corner of the main churchyard path and a path leading northwards to the Samworth Centre. A homogenous and root-filled layer of mid-brown clay silt was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.72m (Fig. 16). Along with 20th century pottery a single sherd of post medieval pottery was observed within the fill. A number of disarticulated human bones were seen close to the surface of the test pit. No apparent changes in the deposit, as seen in Test pit 4, were observed although the presence of some very large tree roots may have disturbed this pit to a greater extent.

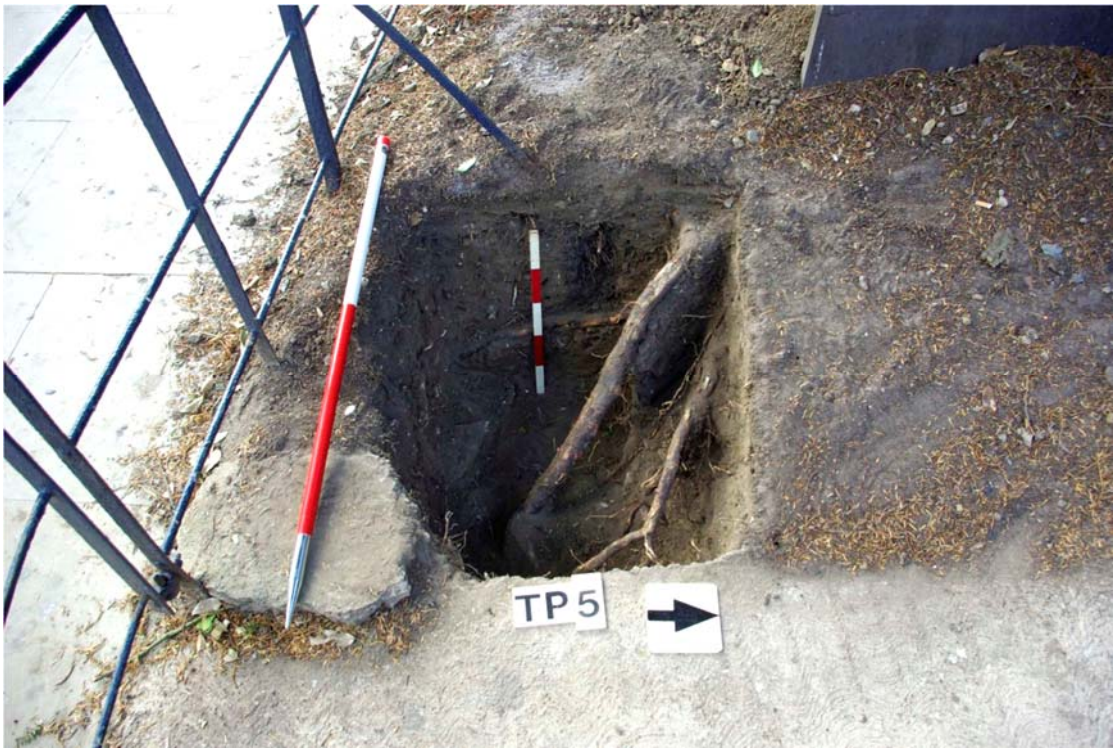

Figure 16 Test pit 5
Looking west. 1m and 0.5m scales

Discussion

The results of the test pitting programme indicate that much of the area surrounding the boiler-house consists of a mound created by the redeposited spoil from the excavated boiler-house. Rather than removing the spoil it would appear that the spoil was banked-up against the buildings along the northern boundary. The excavation of the boiler-house seems to have disturbed a number of human bones although whether these were intact burials or not is hard to tell. The present location of the headstones may indicate that the original burials were somewhere in this area although headstones are moved around quite often in most churchyards. The age of the trees and shrubs must post-date the mound and boiler-house and are therefore not much more than 100 years old.

More interesting is the base of the east to west ironstone wall seen below the present later 19th century brick walls belonging to the Samworth Centre and the Crown. The stone wall clearly represents an earlier structure or line of structures which fronted onto Burton Street which had the same southern property boundary as the present buildings do.

The heavily rebuilt and repaired wall on the north side of Test pit 3 has had a chequered history and may need some further remedial attention if it is to be exposed again. It seems likely that the present mound of earth is not particularly good for it and may be causing problems of damp and pressure against it.

No structures or clear deposits were seen running out from north to sound across the area of the boiler-house. There is however the likelihood of encountering intact burials preserved beneath the present earth mound.

Archive

The archive consists of:
This report,
Context sheets,
1 drawing sheet,
Photo record sheet,
Photo contact sheet,
DVD of photos,
Stamford ware

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 J Thomas and the fieldwork carried out by A Hyam and S Jones. Thanks are due to Mike McClure, St Mary's Fabric Secretary, for arranging access keys and other logistics.

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Appendix 1 OASIS Information

PROJECT DETAILS	**Oasis No**	universi1-327824		
	Project Name	Archaeological Investigation by Test pitting at St Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire		
	Start/end dates of field work	20/08/2018 – 24/08/2018		
	Previous/Future Work	Yes / Not known		
	Project Type	Test pitting		
	Site Status	Grade I listed church		
	Current Land Use	Churchyard		
	Monument Type/Period	Churchyard/Medieval		
	Significant Finds/Period	Pottery /Medieval		
	Development Type	Church building		
	Reason for Investigation	DAC		
	Position in the Planning Process	Planning condition		
	Planning Ref.	N/A		
PROJECT LOCATION	**Site Address/Postcode**	St Mary's Church, Burton Rd, Melton Mowbray		
	Study Area	0.016ha		
	Site Coordinates	SK 75276 19029		
	Height OD	74m OD		
PROJECT CREATORS	**Organisation**	ULAS		
	Project Brief Originator	Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)		
	Project Design Originator	ULAS		
	Project Manager	J Thomas		
	Project Director/Supervisor	A Hyam		
	Sponsor/Funding Body	Developer / Melton PCC		
PROJECT ARCHIVE		**Physical**	**Digital**	**Paper**
	Recipient	NA	LCC MusService	LCCMusService
	ID (Acc. No.)		XA88.2018	XA.88.2018
	Contents		Photos	Field Notes, context sheets
PROJECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	**Type**	Grey Literature (unpublished)		
	Title	Archaeological Investigation by Test pitting at St Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire		
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	Other bibliographic details	ULAS Report No 2018-153		
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