

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at 38,
Braunstone Gate, Leicester (SK 579 040)
15/3/2006.**

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Planning application no 2003/2253

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An Archaeological Watching Brief at 38, Braunstone Gate, Leicester.

Summary

An Archaeological Watching Brief was undertaken at 38 Braunstone Gate, Leicester in March 2006 by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on behalf of Anthony Ricketts Architects Ltd and LMP Consultants. The watching brief uncovered evidence of undated archaeological deposits, although potentially dating to the Roman period. These deposits were uncovered in the western portion of the development site. There was no evidence of the remains found during the evaluation conducted by ULAS during 2005 (Report No 2005-160,) suggesting that these only survive at greater depths than the depth of the pilings that were being constructed by the developers.

1: Introduction

1.1 In accordance with Planning and Policy Guidelines 16 (PPG16, Archaeology and Planning) and the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979), section 2, a watching brief was undertaken during ground works in advance of the development of the area for the construction of residential accommodation by Anthony Ricketts Architects Ltd and LMP Consultants. The work follows the *Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief and Excavation: 38, Braunstone Gate, Leicester* as produced by Chris Wardle in his capacity as archaeological advisor to Leicester City Council.

1.2 This work was carried out as part of an Archaeological Impact Assessment as recommended by the then Planning Archaeologist for the Leicester City Council, as archaeological advisor to the planning authority. The site lies outside and to the south west of the Roman walled town and also to the south west of the medieval town and close to the modern centre of Leicester.

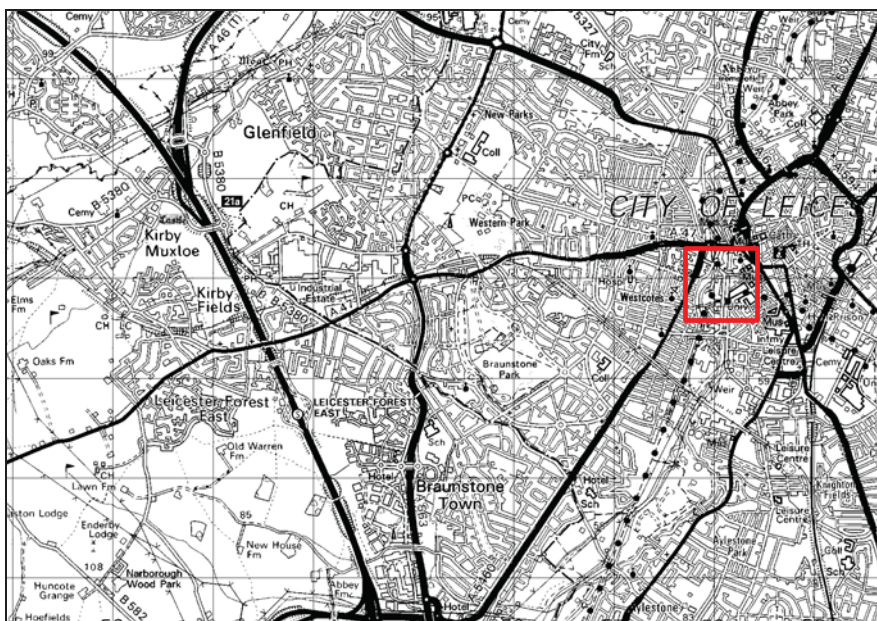


Figure 1: Location of development site. Scale 1:50000

Reproduced from the Landranger OS map 140 Leicester, Coventry and Rugby area 1:50000 map by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown Copyright 1996. All rights reserved. Licence number AL 10002186.

2: Site Location

2.1 The proposed development area is in Westcotes Ward, Leicester. It is on the southern side of Braunstone Gate and to the west of the course of the River Soar (George 2004). It lies to the south west of the defended towns of Roman and medieval Leicester, in an area of archaeological interest and within the Archaeological Alert Area (Local Plan Policy EN6).

2.2 The site measures approximately 0.1 ha of land and lies at 182m OD. The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 156 indicates that the underlying geology consists of alluvium associated with the River Soar that lies a short distance to the east.

2.3 Most recent use of the proposed development area comprised a single storey brick retail store and a car parking area (George 2004). The structure was no longer standing during the time of the evaluation work and the watching brief and the watching brief.

3: Archaeological Background

The following is largely summarised from George 2004.

3.1 *Prehistoric*

3.1.1 A late 1st Century Iron Age settlement on the east bank of the River Soar is the first indication of urban settlement in Leicester and is to the northeast of the development area. Thought to be the tribal centre of the Corieltuavi, it is possible that smaller 'satellite' settlements may exist in the development area.

3.1.2 In addition to potential Iron Age settlement, significant in understanding the development of Leicester, the proximity of the development area to the River Soar raises the possibility that earlier prehistoric remains may also be present. In association with these may be significant environmental evidence. For example, a site located in similar proximity to the River Soar, the Austin Friars excavation, demonstrated the existence of a Mesolithic peat bed (Shackley and Hunt 1985). Former river channels (palaeochannels), also giving insight into previous activity in the area, could be present on the site. Again, in similar proximity to the River Soar, a palaeochannel of Mesolithic-Neolithic date was revealed during archaeological investigation at Crown Hills (Cooper 1993).

3.2 *Roman*

3.2.1 The proposed development area is situated to the southwest of the town walls and west gate of Roman Leicester. Known to be a site of military activity, there is still the potential for evidence of a Roman fort from the conquest period to be uncovered.

This would complement the Roman fortlet of around 80 A.D., situated at West Bridge so as to control the river crossing (Clay and Pollard 1994).

3.2.2 Present evidence for extra-mural settlement comes from east of the city centre and comprises timber buildings dating to the late 1st Century A.D., suggestive of eastward expansion of the Roman city.

3.2.3 The projected line of the Fosse Way Roman Road runs through the western corner of the development area. Excavations have uncovered stretches of the road at Bede Street (Meek and Shore forthcoming), directly to the south west of 38 Braunstone Gate and at Westbridge Place, Dun's Lane (Higgins 1998).

3.2.4 Excavations in the immediate vicinity of the development area at Great Holme Street in the 1970s located intense Roman activity (Mellor 1975). This included two pottery kilns and inhumations. The survival of a wooden coffin from one of these inhumations serves to underline the potential for the recovery of organic remains, rare in the archaeological record.

3.2.5 In addition to locating the Fosse Way, excavations at Westbridge Place, Dun's Lane uncovered yard surfaces and scatters of building material, indicative of extra-mural settlement, perhaps taking the form of ribbon development along the Fosse Way (Higgins 1998).

3.2.6 To the south-west of the development area, around Saxon Street, Roman Street and Western Road, a probable Roman cemetery was uncovered in the late 19th early/ 20th Century.

Roman finds have been recovered from several sites to the west and north of the development area at Ruding Road and 35 Braunstone Gate respectively.

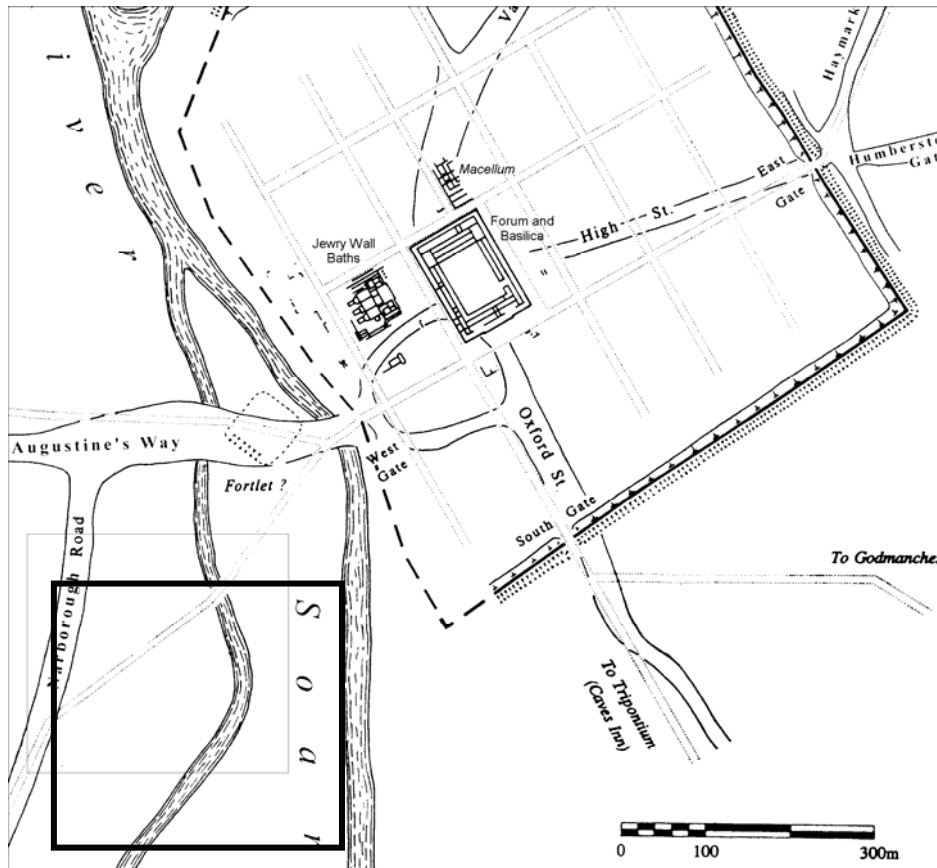


Fig 2: Approximate position of development area in Roman Leicester

3.3 *Anglo-Saxon*

3.3.1 An Anglo-Saxon cemetery was identified to the south-west of the development area in the late 19th Century in the Saxon Street area. A Saxon sword was also found near to Western Road. Current work in the city centre has also uncovered evidence for Saxon settlement.

3.4 *Medieval and Post-medieval*

3.4.1 The development area lay within the manor of Westcotes within the liberty of Bromkinsthorpe (VCH II). The development area was located in the west field of the town during the medieval period. This would have comprised intermixed agricultural strips probably with ridge and furrow. Medieval finds have come from Ruding Road and Braunstone Gate.

3.4.2 Medieval remains have been uncovered at Westbridge Place (Higgins 1998) and Austin Friars (Mellor and Pearce 1981). At Westbridge Place this included structural evidence and pitting, in association with a probable river revetment (Higgins 1998).

The John Speed map of 1610 does not show any record of western suburban development. Little development to the west of the town is also indicated on Stukeley's 1772 map and Robert's 1741 map and the main areas of suburban development are to the east, north and south. By 1828, the map of Leicester shows

various buildings along Braunstone Gate with fields adjacent to the river. This phase of development is confirmed by the 1846/52 Tithe map of Bromkinsthorpe and Westcotes which illustrates various buildings fronting Braunstone Gate. In particular this shows a large structure in the south and various terraced buildings in the north, with open spaces in the north and the east of the area.

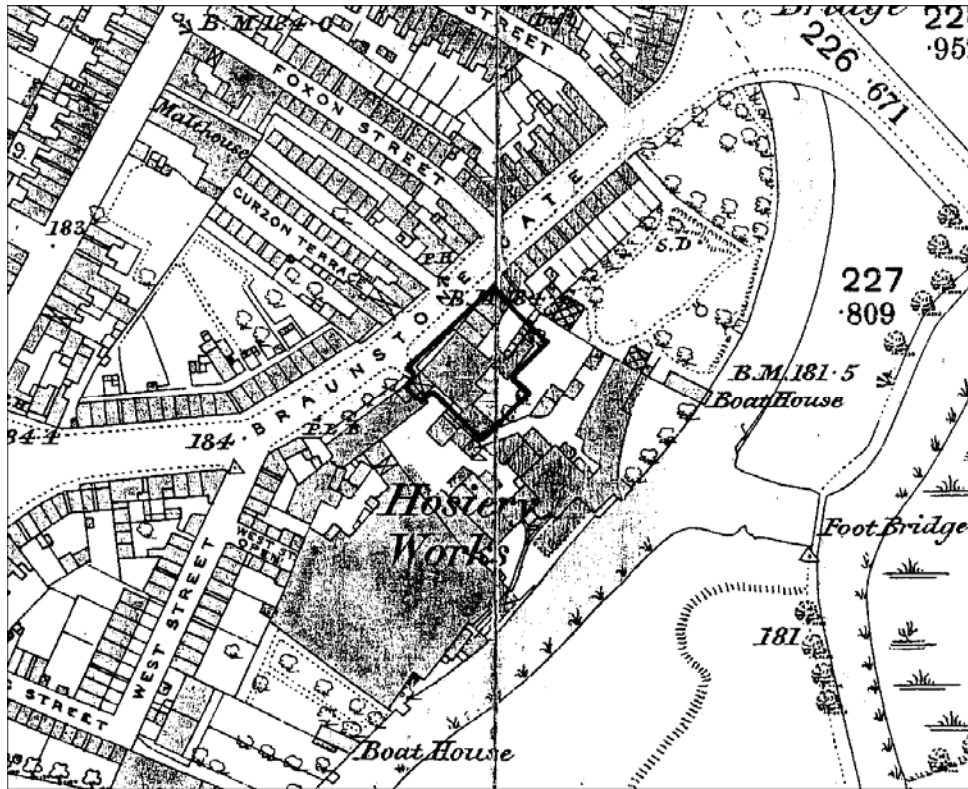


Fig.3: 1888 Ordnance Survey map of Leicester XXXI.14 with development area outlined

4: Previous Archaeological Investigations

4.1 An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services as part of the scheme of archaeological investigation required by the Planning Authority as a condition of accepting the planning application from Anthony Rickett Architects Ltd and LMP Consultants.

4.2 The summary of the results are as follows. An archaeological evaluation of land at 38 Braunstone Gate, Leicester was carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS), between 24th October and 2nd November 2005, on behalf of LMP Consultants Ltd.

Two trenches, totalling 64m² were excavated by machine under constant archaeological supervision. This was followed by hand cleaning of the trenches and selective sample excavation of the deposits.

The evaluation demonstrated the presence of stratified, archaeological deposits, significant in understanding extra-mural settlement activities. In trench one these began at a height of 54.56m OD in the northern end of the trench and 54.19 m OD at the southern end of the trench (c. 1.20m below present ground level).

In trench two, archaeology was encountered at 54.6m OD in the southern end of the trench and 54.49 m OD in the northern end of the trench. This is only *c.* 0.61m and 1.04m respectively, below present ground level.

Damage to archaeological deposits, such as later pitting activities and construction, in particular cellaring, seems to be confined to a small stretch of the frontage with Braunstone Gate and is not continuous. This means that archaeological deposits to the rear of the development area remain in a good state of preservation quite close to the present ground level and there is the potential for environmental evidence to be retrieved from some of the deposits (Griffin 2005).

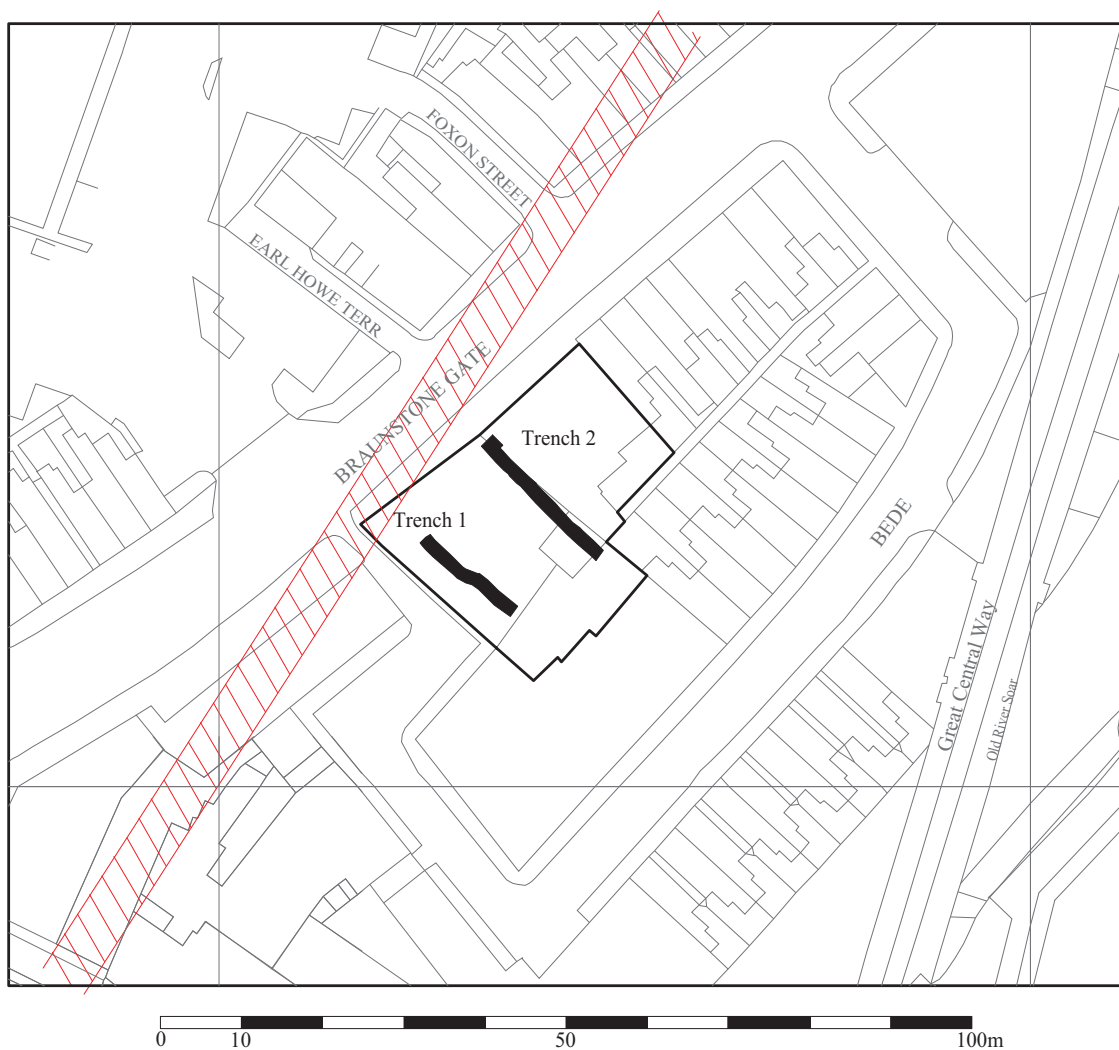


Figure 4: Trench Location Plan



Figure 5: Trench One, Facing east. 1x2m and 1x1m scales



Figure 6: Trench Two, 2 x 2m scales, facing east

5: Archaeological Objectives

5.1 The aim of the archaeological watching brief was to ascertain whether any archaeological deposits were present following the *Design Specification for an Archaeological Watching Brief and Excavation: 38, Braunstone Gate, Leicester* as produced by Chris Wardle in his capacity as archaeological advisor to Leicester City Council. In summary, these were as follows:

General

- The establishment of the presence or absence of important buried archaeological remains and the vulnerability of any surviving remains to the development;
- To characterize the nature of any surviving remains;

Roman

- To characterize the nature of that activity (e.g. was it occupation or merely agricultural in nature,
- To establish a chronology for that activity,
- The identification of any evidence for the nature of that Roman activity,
- The identification of any evidence that might suggest how that activity might fit into the wider pattern of Roman Leicester.

Post Roman

- To characterize the nature of that activity (e.g. was it occupation or merely agricultural in nature),
- To establish a chronology for that activity,
- To the identification of any evidence for the nature of that activity,
- Identify how that activity might fit into a wider pattern of rural or urban activity.

5.2 All work was undertaken in accord with the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) Code of Conduct and adhering to their *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*. The work also was in accordance with the Leicestershire County Council *Guidelines and Procedures for Archaeological Work in Leicestershire and Rutland*.

5.3 The archaeological watching brief was undertaken on the 15th March 2006 by Matt Parker. A previous site visit was made to supervise the excavation of foundation trenches but no work was being conducted on site.

6: Methods

6.1 The removal of the overburden and the subsequent excavation of the boxes for the pilings was undertaken with a Takeuchi tracked 360° excavator. The machining had been completed when the archaeologist had arrived and a thorough examination of the box trenches, stripped surfaces and sections was made for evidence of archaeological deposits cutting the substratum. The limited spoil heap was checked for residual archaeological material.

7: Results

7.1 The overburden and underlying material was removed with a Takeuchi 360° excavator. The depth of the piling locations was *c.* 1.0m in depth. Unfortunately the excavation of these box trenches had already been completed by the time the archaeologist arrived on site.

7.2 Examination of the box trenches put around the locations of the piling caps revealed archaeological deposits in the western edge of the development area. The deposit appeared in two places, adjacent piling cap trenches. The westernmost one was (A) and the adjacent deposit two metres to the east was (B). Whether these were separate discrete features or were part of a larger continuous one was unclear as the machining by the developer had removed any relationship between the two visible archaeological deposits.

7.3 No cultural material was obtained from these features. Additionally, the search of the limited spoil heap did not produce any material.

7.4 Deposit (A) was *c.* 3.0 metres in length and *c.* 0.30 meters in depth. Overlying the deposit were five courses of bricks, from an estimated three different phases of activity. Above this were the modern pavement layers of tarmac. Upon hand cleaning of the section, the stratigraphy comprised four layers.

7.5 Deposit (B) was two metres to the east and little remained of it within the box trench section. The dimensions of this deposit were 0.50 meters width and 0.30 metres in depth. Hand cleaning suggested two layers within the deposit. The material composing both features appeared to be extremely similar in character.

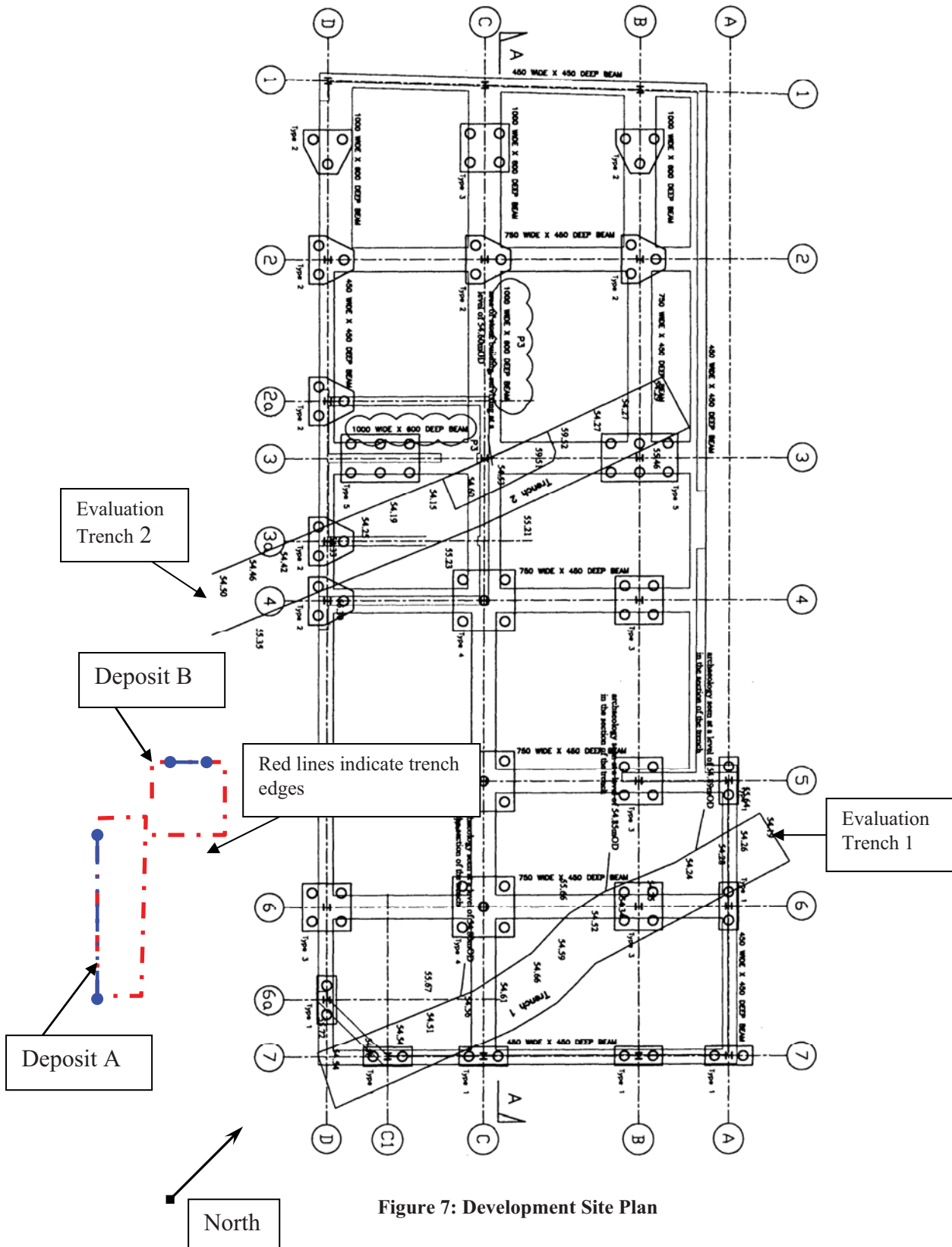


Figure 7: Development Site Plan



Figure 8: Section of stratified archaeology (A) in western portion of site. South-east facing.



Figure 9: Close-up of stratified deposit (A). South-east facing.



Figure 10: Close-up of stratified deposit (A). South-east facing.



Figure 11: Section of stratified deposit (B). South-west facing.

8: Discussion

8.1 The watching brief uncovered stratified archaeological remains of an unknown date. Upon discussion with A. Gnanaratnam, the conclusion was reached that these were probably Roman road make-up layers. However it should be noted that this interpretation was based upon photographic evidence and not a specific site visit by A. Gnanaratnam. No corroborating artefactual material was recovered to put a secure date on the two features.

8.2 No other evidence for archaeological remains was visible within the piling boxes. At the time of the visit three of these had already been battened and filled with cement. The remaining box trenches were *c.* 0.70 metres in depth and consequently were not of sufficient depth to reach the archaeological deposits located during the evaluation. Deposit (A) was located at a depth of *c.* 0.50 metres and thus the potential for the survival of archaeological remains at a higher level in the area during future developments must be born in mind.

8.3 The projected line of the Fosse Way (fig 4) passes through the western corner of the development site, where deposits (A) and (B) were located. The potential for deposits (A) and (B) to be stratified Roman road layers from the Fosse Way is therefore strong. It has been assumed that the Fosse Way would have been truncated by cellarage at the front of the site but if this proved to be a remnant of the road then there is the potential that other parts yet survive.



Figure 12 Section through Roman road at St Peters Lane, Leicester (left) and stratigraphy at Braunstone Gate.

9: Archive

9.1 The site archive (A10 2005) consisting of paper records and digital colour photographs will be housed with Leicester City Museums

10: Acknowledgements

10.1 The watching brief was undertaken by Matt Parker of ULAS on behalf of Anthony Ricketts Architects Ltd and LMP Consultants. The project was managed by James Meek.

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