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Archaeological Services

**An Archaeological Evaluation of land at Sandacre Street,
Leicester**

NGR: SK 587 049

Mathew Morris



ULAS Report No 2019-122

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Site Name: Sandacre Street, Leicester

Grid Ref: SK 587 049

Author: Mathew Morris

Client: West London Properties Ltd

Planning Reference: Leicester City Council 20171254

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University of Leicester, Archaeological Services,

University Rd., Leicester, LE1 7RH

Tel: (0116) 2522848

www.le.ac.uk/ulas

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OASIS RECORD SUMMARY

PROJECT DETAILS	Oasis No	universi1-366782		
	Project Name	Archaeological Evaluation at Sandacre Street, Leicester		
	Start/end dates	09/09/2019 – 11/09/2019		
	Previous/Future Work	None / Not known		
	Project Type	Evaluation by sample trenching		
	Site Status	None		
	Current Land Use	Car Park		
	Monument Type/Period	Pit / Early Modern Cellar / Early Modern Cellar / Modern		
	Significant Finds/Period	Pot/Early Modern		
	Reason for Investigation	NPPF		
	Position in the Planning Process	After full determination (planning condition)		
	Planning Ref.	20171254		
PROJECT LOCATION	County	Leicestershire		
	Site Address/Postcode	Sandacre Street, Leicester LE1 3DD		
	Study Area	4840 sq m		
	Site Coordinates	SK 587 049		
	Height OD	55-56m aOD		
PROJECT CREATORS	Organisation	University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS)		
	Project Brief Originator	City Archaeologist, Leicester City Council		
	Project Design Originator	John Thomas		
	Project Manager	John Thomas		
	Project Director/Supervisor	Mathew Morris		
	Sponsor/Funding Body	Developer		
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An archaeological evaluation of land at Sandacre Street, Leicester (SK 587 049)

Mathew Morris

Summary

An archaeological evaluation by trial trenching was carried out on land at Sandacre Street, Leicester (SK 587 049) by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on 9-11 September, 2019. Work was undertaken for West London Properties Ltd in order to establish the nature, extent, date and significance of any archaeological deposits which may be present, in order that an assessment may be made of the impact of any proposed development on the buried remains. The site comprised c.4840 sq m of brownfield, presently car parking. Four trenches, totalling 221 sq m, were excavated to achieve a 5% sample of the development area and a 10% sample of the footprint of the proposed buildings. Extensive evidence for 19th- and 20th-century activity was found on the site – namely brick cellars, yards covered with granite set, services and other foundations. One 18th or 19th-century pit was identified on the south side of the site, otherwise no archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were recorded. The pit was probably dug to extract sand and gravel. Its backfill contained semi-articulated horse bones, probably dumped from some form of animal processing industry nearby. Overall, it would appear that ground across the site was extensively reworked in the past, first through cultivation which likely dated back to at least the medieval period and probably further, then in the 19th- and 20th-centuries by industrial buildings, domestic dwellings and associated activities. Where cellars were present all previous activity was dug away leaving it unlikely that any archaeological features survived. In open areas and beneath buildings without cellars the stratigraphic sequence was well preserved. However, no evidence was found to suggest that significant archaeological activity was taking place in the development area. The archive will be held by Leicester Arts & Museum Service under the accession number A.20.2019.

Introduction

In September 2019, University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) carried out an archaeological evaluation of land at Sandacre Street, Leicester, LE1 3DD (SK 587 049 - Figure 1). The work was undertaken for West London Properties Ltd to establish the nature, extent, date and significance of any archaeological deposits which might be present, in order that an assessment may be made of the impact of any proposed development on the buried remains.

Work was carried out in advance of proposed construction of 267 residential flats in two buildings of between 5 and 11 storeys, with associated car parking and landscaping (Planning ref. 20171254). Following advice from the City Archaeologist as advisor to Leicester City Council, conditional planning permission, granted on 25 January 2018, included pre-commencement Condition 6: “No demolition or development shall take place or commence until a programme of archaeological work including a Written Scheme of Investigation has been submitted to and approved in writing by the City Council as local planning authority.” This was in accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Section 16: Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment (MHCLG 2019).

Following the agreed Written Scheme of Investigation (Day 2019), a programme of archaeological trial trenching took place between 9-11 September, 2019 in order to assess the potential impact of the proposed scheme on any archaeology, and implement an appropriate

mitigation strategy as necessary. This document presents the results of the archaeological investigation.



Figure 1: Site Location

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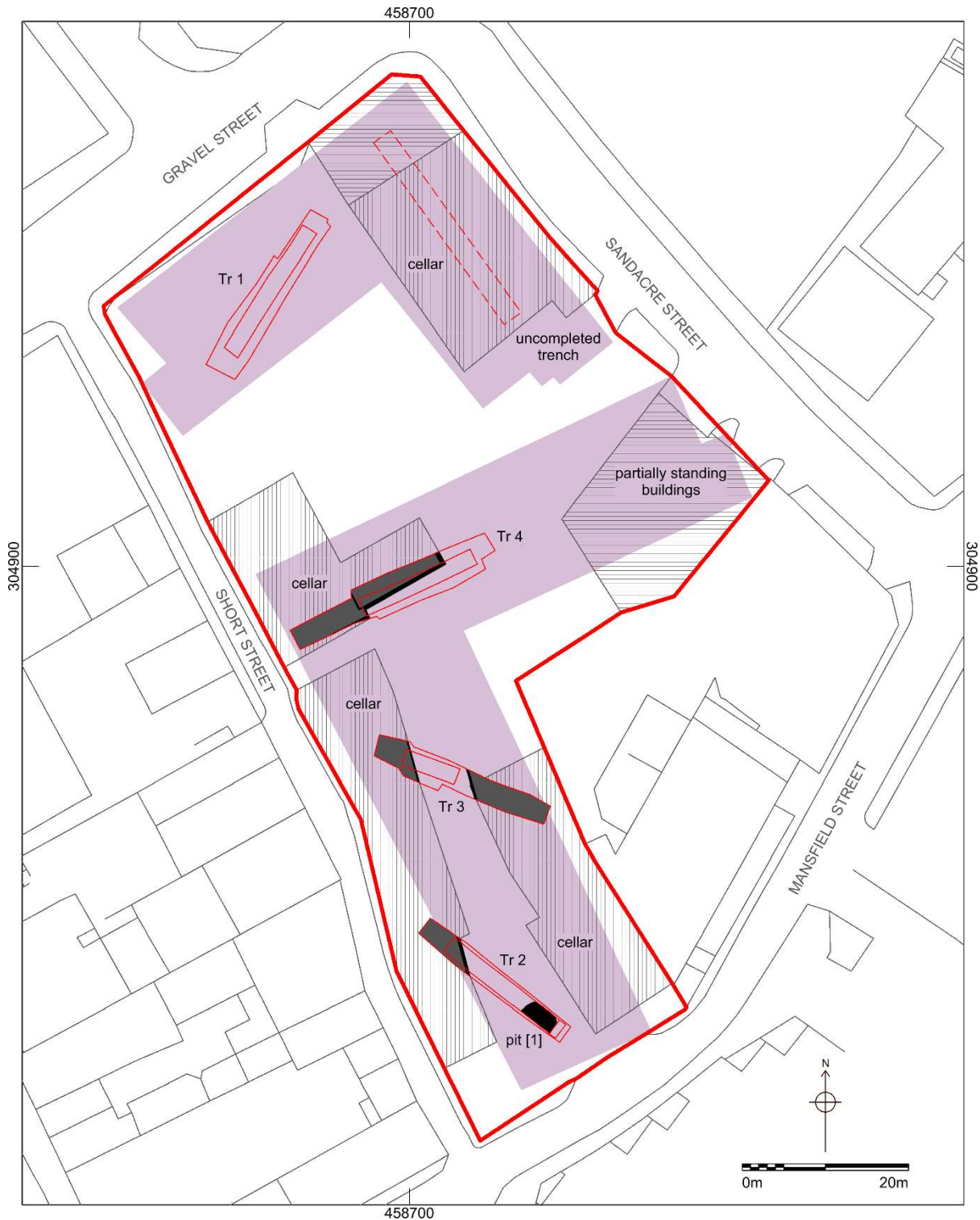


Figure 2: Plan of the development area showing trench locations (red), proposed building locations (purple) and observations (black/grey). Background map provided by client.

Site Location, Geology and Topography

The development area comprised an L-shaped block of land covering c.4840 sq m bound by Sandacre Street to the east, Mansfield Street to the south, Short Street to the west and Gravel Street to the north (Figure 2). The site lies approximately 200m north of Leicester city centre

at SK 587 049. At the time of work the site was brownfield used as car parking with a number of partially demolished buildings still occupying areas on the Sandacre Street frontage.

The British Geological Survey shows that the underlying geology was likely to consist of superficial Head deposits of Quaternary period clay, silt, sand and gravel overlying bedrock deposits of Triassic period mudstone of the Branscombe Mudstone Formation (BGS Open Geoscience). The development area lay on ground gently sloping down from 57m above Ordnance Datum (OD) in the south-west to 56m OD in the north-east.

Archaeological and Historical Background

The Historic Environment Record (HER) for Leicester indicated that the site lay outside the Roman and medieval town walls close to extramural activity focussed along roads exiting the town's east gate, including the Fosse Way (today Belgrave Gate), the main road from Leicester to Lincoln.

A number of Roman structural remains and findspots have previously been found in the vicinity of the site. A Roman cinerary urn, personal items and pottery were all found on Mansfield Street immediately south of the site (HER ref. MLC1060). Another cinerary urn and a human skull were found at Abbey Street (MLC60), 130m to the north-east, and there was a large late Roman inhumation cemetery at Clarence Street (MLC1279), 130m to the south-east. Together, these suggest that ground outside the town's eastern defences was widely used for burial throughout the Roman period. There is also suburban occupation nearby, with timber and stone buildings and industrial activity outside the town walls at Butt Close Lane (MLC78), 100m to the west, and a piece of Roman mosaic (MLC87) found during the construction of the Savoy Cinema (later ABC), which once stood 80m east of the site.

Two Anglo-Saxon burials (MLC83) are recorded at Churchgate, 140m south-east of the site, and a further two Anglo-Saxon pottery vessels found nearby at Belgrave Grave (MLC82) suggest that there may be a cemetery in the vicinity.

By the medieval period, an extensive suburb was developing outside the east gate along Church Gate, Belgrave Gate, Humberstone Gate and Gallowtree Gate. Medieval artefacts, including a key and a pin were found at Mansfield Street, adjacent to the site (MLC731).

Thomas Robert's 1741 map of Leicester (ROLLR map 4D65) shows that the site was still open field in the 18th century. Mansfield Street to the south and Short Street to the west existed and had likely developed as alleyways running along the backs of properties fronting onto Church Gate and Belgrave Gate. By 1828, Sandacre Street was laid out and in the site a number of buildings occupied the Mansfield Street and Short Street frontages. Considerable development had taken place on the site by the mid-19th century, including domestic dwellings and two large factories.

Ordnance Survey maps show that from the late 19th century onwards, the site was completely developed with a number of large factories, warehouses and domestic dwellings present. There was little change until post-war regeneration in the late 1940s – 1960s saw many of the dwellings demolished and replaced with offices and other industrial premises. Other major changes included the extension of Gravel Street to connect with Church Gate along the north side of the site and the extension of Sandacre Street to connect with Gravel Street. Buildings on the western half of the site were mostly demolished in 2010-11 with the area becoming car parking, whilst buildings on Sandacre Street were demolished in 2018-19 shortly before archaeological investigation commenced.

Archaeological Objectives

The main objectives of the work were:

- To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits on the site.
- To establish the extent, date range, character, condition and significance of any archaeological deposits to be affected by the proposed ground works.
- To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of any archaeological deposits and features encountered.
- To provide sufficient information on the archaeological potential of the site to assess the impact of the proposed development on the cultural heritage and to help formulate a mitigation strategy.
- To record any archaeological deposits and produce an archive and report of any results.

The results of the investigation were also considered in light of the East Midlands Research Agenda (Cooper 2006) and updated Agenda and Strategy (Knight et al. 2012), particularly:

The Romano-British period (AD 43-c.410)

- Growth of urban centres (Knight et al. 2012, 5.3)
- Roads and waterways (Knight et al. 2012, 5.7)

The Early Medieval period (AD c.410-1066)

- Roads and rivers: transport routes and cultural boundaries (Knight et al. 2012, 6.3)
- Inland towns (Knight et al. 2012, 6.5)
- Industry, trade and the emergence of a monetary economy (Knight et al. 2012, 6.6)

The High Medieval period (AD 1066-1485)

- Urbanism (Knight et al. 2012, 7.1)
- Industry and trade (Knight et al. 2012, 7.6)

The Post-medieval period (AD 1485-1750)

- Urbanism: morphology, functions and buildings (Knight et al. 2012, 8.1)
- Industry and communications (Knight et al. 2012, 8.5)
- Material culture (Knight et al. 2012, 8.8)

The research aims were reviewed and updated as work progressed and new information came to light.

Methodology

All work followed the Chartered Institute for Archaeologist's (CIfA) *Code of Conduct* (rev. 2014a) in accordance with their *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (rev. 2014b). The archaeological work followed the *Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for Archaeological Monitoring and Recording* (Day 2019) prepared by ULAS and agreed with Leicester City Council as local planning authority. The work was monitored by the City Archaeologist as advisor to Leicester City Council.

During the evaluation, modern hardstanding, overburden and soil was removed in level spits under continuous archaeological supervision down to the uppermost archaeological deposits or the natural substratum, depending on which was reached first. This was carried out with a 22 tonne 360° JCB JS 220 LC mechanical digger using a toothed bucket to remove modern hardstanding where necessary, and a 2.2m wide toothless ditching bucket (Figure 3). Where cellars were encountered, test pits were dug through the loose rubble infill to establish the

cellars' depth in relation to the natural substratum. For safety, cellars were not emptied of their rubble and test-pits were immediately filled in once their objective was achieved (Figure 4).



Figure 3: Looking north across the development area, with the mechanical digger excavating Trench 3.



Figure 4: Left, the mechanical digger removing cellar infill from the west end of Trench 3. Right, test-pit excavated into cellar infill at the west end of Trench 4 to establish depth.

All trenches, open areas, exposed sections, and spoil heaps were visually inspected for features and artefacts. Features were hand cleaned, planned, photographed and sample excavated as appropriate. Field notes were recorded on pro-forma ULAS urban trench recording forms whilst stratigraphic units were, as necessary, given a unique context number and recorded on pro-forma ULAS context sheets. Trench and feature plans/sections were drawn at appropriate scales and tied into the National Grid using appropriate methods. A photographic record of the excavation was prepared, illustrating in both detail and general context the principal features and finds discovered. Colour digital photographs were taken throughout the excavation. The photographic record also included ‘working shots’ to illustrate more generally the nature of the archaeological operation mounted.

An accession number (A20.2019) was obtained from Leicester Arts and Museum Service prior to commencement of the project and used to identify all records and artefacts.

Results

At the direction of the City Archaeologist, the Written Scheme of Investigation (Day 2019) provided for the investigation of five 30m by 2m trenches (totalling 300 sq m) to achieve a 6% sample of the c.4840 sq m development area (Figure 2). Trenches were to target the footprints of the proposed buildings (c.3050 sq m; 10% sample). Due to on-site constraints, namely: constricting site boundaries, extant cellars, the size of the mechanical excavator and the significant depth of the archaeological/natural substratum it was only possible to excavate four trenches totalling c.221 sq m (a 5% sample of the development area and 7% sample of the proposed building footprints). In consultation with the City Archaeologist, this was deemed adequate to assess the impact of the proposed scheme on the site’s archaeology.



Figure 5: Trench 1 from the south-west.

Trench 1*Table 1: Summary of Trench 1*

Length (m)	Width (m)	Area (sq m)	Min. depth (m)	Max. depth (m)	
19	2.3	85	2.02	2.41	
Interval from NE end	0m	5m	10m	15m	19m to SW
Ground (OD)	55.83	55.73	55.64	55.62	55.56
Overburden depth	0.60	0.61	0.79	0.78	0.89
Cultivation soil depth	1.45	1.49	1.23	1.12	0.95
Top of natural substratum (OD)	53.78	53.63	53.62	53.72	53.72
Trench depth	2.13	2.15	2.41	2.03	2.02

Trench 1 was positioned close to Gravel Street at the north end of site, broadly orientated north-east to south-west. Gravel car park surface and a mixed modern overburden of soil and rubble, up to 0.89m thick, was removed exposing dark yellowish-grey sandy-silt. This appeared to be a cultivation or garden soil up to 1.49m thick. Few inclusions were observed, apart for pebbles and some flecks of charcoal. No subsoil was evident. The natural substratum, mixed reddish-orange and yellowish-orange sand and gravel was reached at the bottom of the trench between 1.84m and 2.1m below ground level (Figure 5).

*Figure 6: South-facing section at north-east end of Trench 1.*

During machining, the mechanical digger encountered a number of modern north-south aligned brick walls and other structures which can be equated with buildings on maps of late 19th-century and later date. These truncated the cultivation soil but generally did not reach the natural substratum and had only caused minimal disturbance to the stratigraphic sequence (Figure 6). No archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were present.



Figure 7: Trench 2 from the south-east. Pit [1] is visible in the foreground.

Trench 2

Table 2: Summary of Trench 2

Length (m)	Width (m)	Area (sq m)		Min. depth (m)		Max. depth (m)
21	2.3	57		0.73		2.02
Interval from SE end	0m	5m	10m	15m	20m to NW	
Ground (OD)	57.02	57.01	57.02	57.00	56.81	
Overburden depth	0.63	0.88	0.96	Cellar		Cellar
Cultivation soil depth	0.10+	1.02	0.59	Cellar		Cellar
Top of natural substratum (OD)	Pit [1]	Pit [1]	55.47	54.98	Unknown	
Trench depth	0.73	1.90	1.60	2.02	2.02	

Trench 2 was positioned close to Mansfield Street at the south end of site, broadly orientated south-east to north-west. Gravel and asphalt car park surface covering granite sets and mixed modern overburden of soil and gravel, up to 0.96m thick was removed from the southern two-thirds of the trench to expose very dark brownish-grey clayey-silt. This appeared to be a cultivation or garden soil up to 1.02m thick. Few inclusions were observed, apart for pebbles and some flecks of charcoal. No subsoil was evident. The natural substratum, reddish-brown sandy-gravel overlying greyish-yellow sand with gravel was reached at the bottom of the trench between 1.55m and 2.02m below ground level (Figure 7).

The northern third of the trench was truncated by a 19th-century brick cellar which were backfilled with loose building rubble. The cellar truncated *c.*0.5m into the natural substratum removing all stratified deposits at the north end of the trench.



Figure 8: Animal charnel in pit [1] in Trench 2. The bones are in pit fill (2).

At the south end a large circular pit [1] was dug into the natural substratum beneath the cultivation soil (Figure 7). It was at least 4m in diameter and was filled with homogenous very dark brownish-grey clayey-silt (2) identical to the cultivation soil. A small quantity of modern building rubble was present in the pit fill together with a deposit of semi-articulated animal bones which were tipped into the pit from the south. The bones were all from large mammals, predominately horse, and included articulated legs and sections of vertebrae together with other charnel (Figure 8), most likely waste from some form of animal processing industry. The pit was likely dug to extract sand and gravel and subsequently was used as a convenient place to dump refuse from nearby industrial and domestic occupation. Pottery from the pit, including whiteware with blue transfer print decoration, gave it a *terminus post quem* of the 18th or 19th century¹. No other archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were present.

Trench 3

Table 3: Summary of Trench 3

Length (m)	Width (m)	Area (sq m)	Min. depth (m)	Max. depth (m)	
21	2.30	69	2.47	2.80	
Interval from NW end	0m	5m	10m	15m	20m to SE
Ground (OD)	56.64	56.64	56.66	56.68	56.76
Overburden depth	2.50	1.02	1.68	2.80	2.80
Cultivation soil depth	Cellar	1.12	0.71	Cellar	Cellar
Top of natural substratum (OD)	Unknown	54.50	54.27	Unknown	Unknown
Trench depth	2.50	2.47	2.57	2.80	2.80

¹ Pottery was identified in the field and was not archived.



Figure 9: South-facing section at centre of Trench 3.



Figure 10: Trench 3 from the north-west. Backfilled cellars are visible in the foreground and background.

Trench 3 was positioned in the southern half of the site close to Short Street, broadly orientated north-west to south-east. Across the central third of the trench, gravel and asphalt car park

surface covered a layer of granite sets which overlay thin layers of soil, sand, cinder and concrete (up to 0.35m thick), a second layer of sets and a further 0.3m of mixed modern soil and rubble overburden (Figure 9). Beneath the overburden was very dark brownish-grey clayey-silt which appeared to be cultivation or garden soil up to 1.12m thick. Few inclusions were observed, apart for pebbles and some flecks of charcoal. No subsoil was evident. The natural substratum, soft yellowish-orange sand with gravel was reached at the bottom of the trench between 2.47m and 2.57m below ground level (Figure 10).

The east and west thirds of the trench were truncated by large 19th and 20th-century brick cellars which were backfilled with loose building rubble. Both cellars were at least 2.8m deep and had truncated at least 0.3m into the natural substratum removing all stratified deposits in these areas. The central third of the trench had experienced less modern intrusion to the stratigraphic sequence but no archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were present.



Figure 11: Trench 4 from the north-east. Backfilled cellars are visible to the right and in the background.

Trench 4

Table 4: Summary of Trench 4

Length (m)	Width (m)	Area (sq m)	Min. depth (m)		Max. depth (m)
24	2.3	100	2.10		2.80
Interval from NE end	0m	5m	10m	14m	20m to SW
Ground (OD)	56.64	56.72	56.68	56.65	56.42
Overburden depth	1.45	1.36	1.43	1.90	2.80
Cultivation soil depth	1.05	0.67	0.71	0.48	Cellar
Top of natural substratum (OD)	54.14	54.69	54.54	54.27	Unknown
Trench depth	2.60	2.10	2.28	2.43	2.80

Trench 4 was positioned in the centre of the site close to Short Street, broadly orientated north-east to south-west. Gravel car park surface covering granite sets and mixed modern overburden of soil and gravel, up to 1.9m thick was removed from the eastern two-thirds of the trench exposing a modern brick floor covering very dark brownish-grey clayey-silt. The soil appeared to be a cultivation or garden soil up to 1.05m thick. Few inclusions were observed, apart for pebbles and some flecks of charcoal. No subsoil was evident. The natural substratum, mottled greyish-yellow and yellowish-orange sand and gravel was reached at the bottom of the trench between 2.03m and 2.5m below ground level (Figure 11 & Figure 12).



Figure 12: North-facing section at centre of Trench 4.

The west third of the trench and its northern side were truncated by 20th-century brick cellars which were backfilled with loose building rubble. The cellars had truncated at least 0.4m into the natural substratum removing all stratified deposits in these areas. The southern side of the trench had experienced less modern intrusion to the stratigraphic sequence but no archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were present.

Discussion

Overall, the results of the archaeological investigation were negative, aside for an 18th- or 19th-century pit in Trench 2 close to Mansfield Street and extensive areas of deep cellaring (Figure 2). The pit was probably dug to extract the natural sand and gravel observed across the site. Adjacent street names such as Gravel Street and Sandacre Street attest to the local alluvial geology which would have been a good resource for building work throughout history.

Buildings and modern overburden overlay dark cultivation/garden soil. The soil's thickness and the scarcity of artefactual evidence within it were both consistent with prolonged arable or pastoral use before the construction of buildings in the early 19th century. Small quantities of charcoal in the soil suggested that it was being enriched, most likely with medieval and post-medieval midden material being used as manure. This is consistent with historic maps of the

area. Robert's town plan of 1741 shows the site as open ground, part of a group of small fields behind properties fronting onto Church Gate and Belgrave Gate whilst Fowler's plan of 1828 (ROLLR map 7D64/50) shows some buildings occupying the site. Earlier maps do not provide sufficient detail of the area to say more but it is likely that in the medieval period the site formed part of the Bishop's Fee, a manor and liberty belonging to the Bishop of Lincoln which included part of the borough's east field and was focused around a grange near St Margaret's church, with tenants living in the east suburb (Billson 1926, 11-12; McKinley 1958).

The soil changed and thickened across the site from south to north, from clayey-silt approximately 1m thick to sandy-silt approximately 1.5m thick. Natural ground also dropped by 1.69m across the site from south to north, from 55.47m OD to 53.78m OD and the extra thickness of soil may, in part, be explained by colluvial movement. The change in soil morphology is less readily explained but is probably due to localised changes in geology, land use and drainage.

The cellars were all of 19th- or 20th-century date and were so deeply dug that they had truncated through all earlier deposits into the natural substratum leaving it unlikely that any but the deepest features would survive beneath their footprints. Cellars at the west ends of Trenches 2 and 3 were the basements of a 19th-century factory which formerly stood on the corner of Mansfield Street and Short Street. Goad insurance plans reveal that it was the I & W Taylor Cotton & Reel Factory in 1892, a role which had changed to the Joseph Allen & Co. (Leicester Ltd) Fancy Box Factory in 1923 and the Rex Gem Co. Ltd Jewellery Factory in 1947 before became a boot factory and a plumbers and sanitary engineers in 1961. The cellar at the east end of Trench 3 belonged to an early 20th-century factory on Mansfield Street: the J Partridge & Son Glove Factory in 1923, later the J Goddard & Sons Ltd Cleaning Powder Warehouse in 1947 and the James Lulham Boot & Shoe Factory in 1961. Whilst the cellars in Trench 4 were part of the early 20th-century T Mathews & Co. Showcard Printers and Publishers on Short Street. The 20th-century factories in Trenches 3 and 4 both replaced earlier 19th-century industrial and domestic premises. Areas of yard and alleyway between buildings could still be identified by granite sets and brick surfaces. The northern part of the site, around Trench 1, showed less ground disturbance. This was probably because it was covered by a large, seemingly uncellared, single-storey brick factory shed, part of the Vipian & Headly Agricultural Implement Factory on Short Street in the late 19th-century and later Gunton & Co. Ltd Engineers & Knife Factory on the corner of Short Street and Gravel Street in the early 20th century, then Castle Ltd Body Repair Shop in 1961.

Conclusion

The archaeological investigation produced extensive evidence for 19th- and 20th-century activity on the site – namely brick cellars, yards covered with granite set, services and other foundations. One pit was identified on the south side of the site close to Mansfield Street, otherwise no archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were recorded. The pit had a *terminus post quem* of the 18th or 19th century and was probably dug to extract sand and gravel. Its backfill contained a deposit of semi-articulated horse bones, probably dumped from some form of animal processing industry nearby. Overall, it would appear that ground across the site was extensively reworked in the past, first through cultivation which likely dated back to at least the medieval period and probably further, then in the 19th- and 20th-centuries by industrial buildings, domestic dwellings and associated activities. Where cellars were present all previous activity was dug away leaving it unlikely that any archaeological features survived. In open areas and beneath buildings without cellars the stratigraphic sequence was well preserved. However, no evidence was found to suggest that significant archaeological activity was taking place in the development area.

Archive and publication

The site archive consists of an unbound copy of this report (ULAS Report No. 2019-122), 4 A4 trench recording sheets, 2 A5 context sheets, 1 annotated A4 site plan, 1 A4 context index sheet, 1 A4 photo record sheet, 2 A4 contact sheets of digital photographs, and a CD of 26 digital photographs, 1 csv file of survey data, 1 tcw file showing final site plan and a pdf of this report. The archive will be deposited with Leicester Arts and Museum Service under accession number A20.2019.

Since 2004 ULAS has reported the results of all archaeological work through the *Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations* (OASIS) database held by the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York. A summary of the work will also be submitted for publication in a suitable regional archaeological journal in due course.

Acknowledgements

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Mathew Morris MA ACIfA

Project Officer

Archaeological Services (ULAS)

University of Leicester

University Road

Leicester LE1 7RH

Tel: 0116 252 2848

Email: mlm9@le.ac.uk

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UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

Archaeological Services

University of Leicester
University Road
Leicester LE1 7RH
UK

Directors

Dr Richard Buckley OBE BA PhD FSA MCifA

e: rjb16@le.ac.uk

t: +44 (0)116 252 2848

f: +44 (0)116 252 2614

e: ulas@le.ac.uk

