



**An Archaeological Evaluation at West End Farm, West End, Bitteswell,
Leicestershire, LE17 4SE**

NGR: SP 535 860

Nathan Flavell



**ULAS Report No 2019-136
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Grid Ref: SP 535 860

Author: Nathan Flavell

Client: Mr & Mrs C Faircliffe / STOAS Architects

Planning Ref. 19/00798/PCD

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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

PROJECT DETAILS	Oasis No	universi1- 369657		
	Project Name	West End farm, West End, Bitteswell, Leicestershire		
	Start/end dates	09-09-2019 – 11-09-2019		
	Previous/Future Work	DBA (ULAS 2019-049)		
	Project Type	Evaluation		
	Site Status	None		
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	Monument Type/Period	Roman		
	Significant Finds/Period	Pottery		
	Reason for Investigation	NPPF		
	Position in the Planning Process	Planning condition		
Planning Ref.	19/00798/PCD			
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	Site Address/Postcode	West End Farm, Bitteswell, Leicestershire LE17 4SE		
	Study Area	0.4 ha		
	Site Coordinates	SP 535 860		
	Height OD	123m aOD		
PROJECT CREATORS	Organisation	ULAS		
	Project Brief Originator	Harborough District Council		
	Project Design Originator	ULAS		
	Project Manager	John Thomas		
	Project Director/Supervisor	Nathan Flavell		
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An Archaeological Field Evaluation at West End Farm, West End, Bitteswell, Leicestershire

Nathan Flavell

Summary

This document is a fieldwork report for an archaeological trial trench evaluation, carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) at West End Farm, Bitteswell, Leicestershire (NGR: SP 535 860) in advance of the construction of a residential development.

A total of four trenches were excavated across the site revealing two undated ditches, an undated pit, two post holes and part of a Roman gully.

The archive for the site will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums with accession number X.A79.2019.

Introduction

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) were commissioned by Mr & Mrs C Faircliffe and STOAS Architects to carry out an archaeological trial trench evaluation at West End Farm, Bitteswell, Leicestershire (NGR: SP 535 860; Fig. 1). The work was carried out between the 9th-11th September 2019.

The work was carried out to provide preliminary indications of the character and extent of any heritage assets in order that the potential impact of the development on such remains may be assessed by the Planning Authority as planning permission is being sought for the proposed residential development of the site and the Planning Archaeologist as advisor to Harborough District Council has therefore requested an archaeological field evaluation (19/00798/PCD). This is in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, MHCLG 2018) for Harborough District Council.

Bitteswell (Bitteswell and Bittesby Parish) lies in the Harborough District of Leicestershire around 1.5 miles north-west of Lutterworth. The site itself lies to the north of West End Farm, which lies at West End, around 200m north-west of the parish church of St. Mary's.

Location and Geology

The proposed development area (henceforth 'the assessment area') consists of two parcels of land; one triangular, the other rectangular, separated by a hawthorn hedge. Both were under pasture at the time of the evaluation; the eastern containing orchard trees, the western containing ridge and furrow earthworks. The land is flat and lies at a height of 123m aOD. The total area of the site is around 0.4ha (Fig. 2).

The British Geological Survey website indicates that the underlying geology consists of Oadby Member Diamicton over Blue Lias Formation Mudstone.

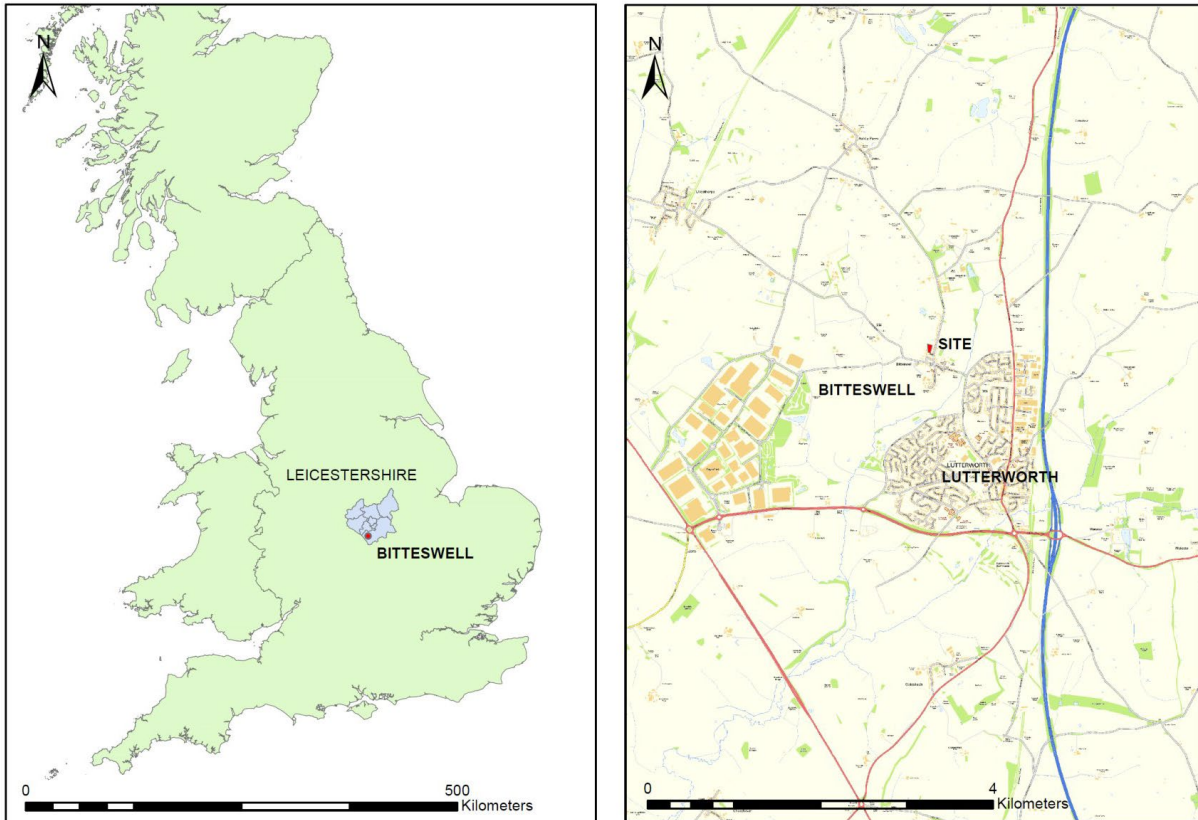


Figure 1: Site Location
Contains Ordnance Survey Data
Contains OS data © Crown copyright [and database right] 2019

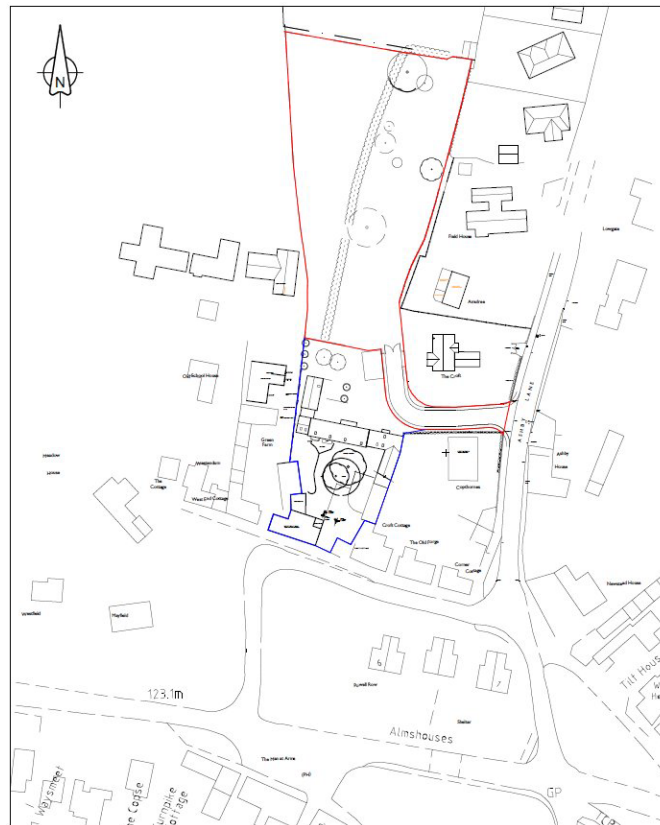


Figure 2: Detailed site location plan (supplied by client)

Historical and Archaeological Background

Bitteswell is recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as ‘Betmeswell’, which is derived from the Anglo-Saxon ‘bytme’ or broad river valley and ‘wella’, for a spring or stream. Therefore the place name means ‘broad valley spring’ (Mills 2003).

The Domesday Survey records the Earl Aubrey held land in Bitteswell that consisted of land valued at 10 shillings, under a tenant called Robert. Geoffrey de la Guerche also held land in Bitteswell valued at 12d, also with Robert as a tenant (Morgan 1979).

The nearby Magna Park once housed an RAF station called RAF Bitteswell. Hawker Siddeley had a factory next to the airfield, where Vulcan bombers, and many other aircraft, were maintained (Control Towers Website).

The Historic Environment Record (HER) for Leicestershire and Rutland indicates that there are a number of known archaeological sites in the vicinity of the assessment area. A summary of these within a 1km radius of the assessment area is described below. The full list is shown in the ULAS Archaeological Desk-based Assessment for land at West End Farm, West End, Bitteswell, Leicestershire (ULAS Report 2019-049). The HER reference numbers are shown in bold in the text.

While none of these records relate directly to the development area, archaeology nearby suggests that there is the possibility for archaeology to be present on the site.

Prehistoric

Archaeological work, including field walking and small scale excavations, undertaken in the area west of Leicester Road and Bill Crane Way, around 900m-1km to the east of the assessment area has produced a large amount of prehistoric artefacts and features, including flint (**MLE7117**; **MLE6438**; **MLE6440**) and pottery (**MLE6539**). An evaluation in the area in advance of new development revealed a number of Bronze Age features, such as pits and post-holes, plus a large amount of pottery and flint (**MLE19048**). The nearest Scheduled Monument to the site is the bowl barrow at Misterton, which lies 3 miles to the south-east.

Roman

Fieldwalking across the area close to Leicester Road have also yielded Roman pottery sherds (**MLE8140**; **MLE8142**).

Medieval

Bitteswell village is Anglo-Saxon in origin. The historic medieval core of the village has been derived from map evidence. The assessment area lies partially within the medieval core (mainly the eastern side of the site) (**MLE9239**). Medieval finds have been found in and around the village (**MLE6704**; **MLE7667**). The remains of the medieval village pound may lie 250m to the south of the assessment area (**MLE1236**). The 13th-14th century church of St. Mary lies 200m to the south-east of the site. It is Grade II* listed (**MLE11772**).

Post-medieval-modern

Post-medieval pottery was also found during fieldwalking close to Leicester Road (**MLE7667**). Two post-medieval windmills are shown on early maps of the area. One lies 400m to the north of the site (**MLE1233**), the other lies 800m to the south-east (**MLE1901**).

Archaeological Objectives

The main objectives of the evaluation were:

- To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.
- To establish the character, extent and date range and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits.
- 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 cultural heritage and to help formulate a mitigation strategy
- To record any archaeological deposits and produce an archive and report of any results.

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 results of which will provide information for the local planning authority to identify an appropriate mitigation strategy.

Research Objectives

While the nature, extent and quality of archaeological remains within the areas of investigation for the project remain unknown until archaeological work is undertaken, it is possible to determine some initial objectives derived from *East Midlands Heritage* research agenda (Cooper 2006, Knight *et al.* 2012). The site's location just outside the historic village core suggests that there is potential for archaeological deposits from the medieval period onwards. The finds spots and HER records also suggest that there is some potential for archaeological deposits of prehistoric, Bronze Age and Roman origin. The evaluation therefore has the potential to contribute to the following research aims.

Prehistoric and Bronze Age

How may we characterise more effectively the frequently ephemeral structural traces that might relate to settlement activity? (3.5.1)

What may analyses of lithic scatters teach us about developing settlement patterns in the region? (3.5.3)

Romano-British

What resources moved in and out of the region during this period? (5.6.1)

Medieval

How can we shed further light upon the origin and development of dispersed hamlets and farms in champion and pastoral areas? (7.2.2)

Methodology

All work followed the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (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 Evaluation* prepared by ULAS and agreed with the Leicestershire County Council Planning Archaeologist (August 2019). The work was monitored by the client and the Leicestershire County Council Planning Archaeologist.

An accession number (X.A79.2019) was obtained prior to commencement of the project and used to identify all records.

A total of 4 15m trenches were proposed targeting the footprint of proposed new buildings. An area on the east side of Trench 4 was extended to investigate a possible feature.

Trenches were measured in using DGPS. The excavation of the trenches was carried out using a 360 tracked excavator fitted with a 1.6m wide ditching bucket under constant supervision by an experienced archaeologist.

Trenches were excavated to the level of the natural sub-stratum or to archaeological layers, whichever the higher in the sequence. All archaeological work was undertaken as specified within the WSI. The trenches were verbally signed off by the Planning Archaeologist before being backfilled by machine.

Results

All trenches contained archaeology (Fig. 3). Extant ridge and furrow was observed on the ground and this was reflected within the trenches. The natural varied between mixed orange sandy clay and yellow-grey clay with pebbles and some manganese mottling. Subsoil was streaky orange-brown sandy clay with pebble inclusions. Topsoil was dark brown sandy loam.

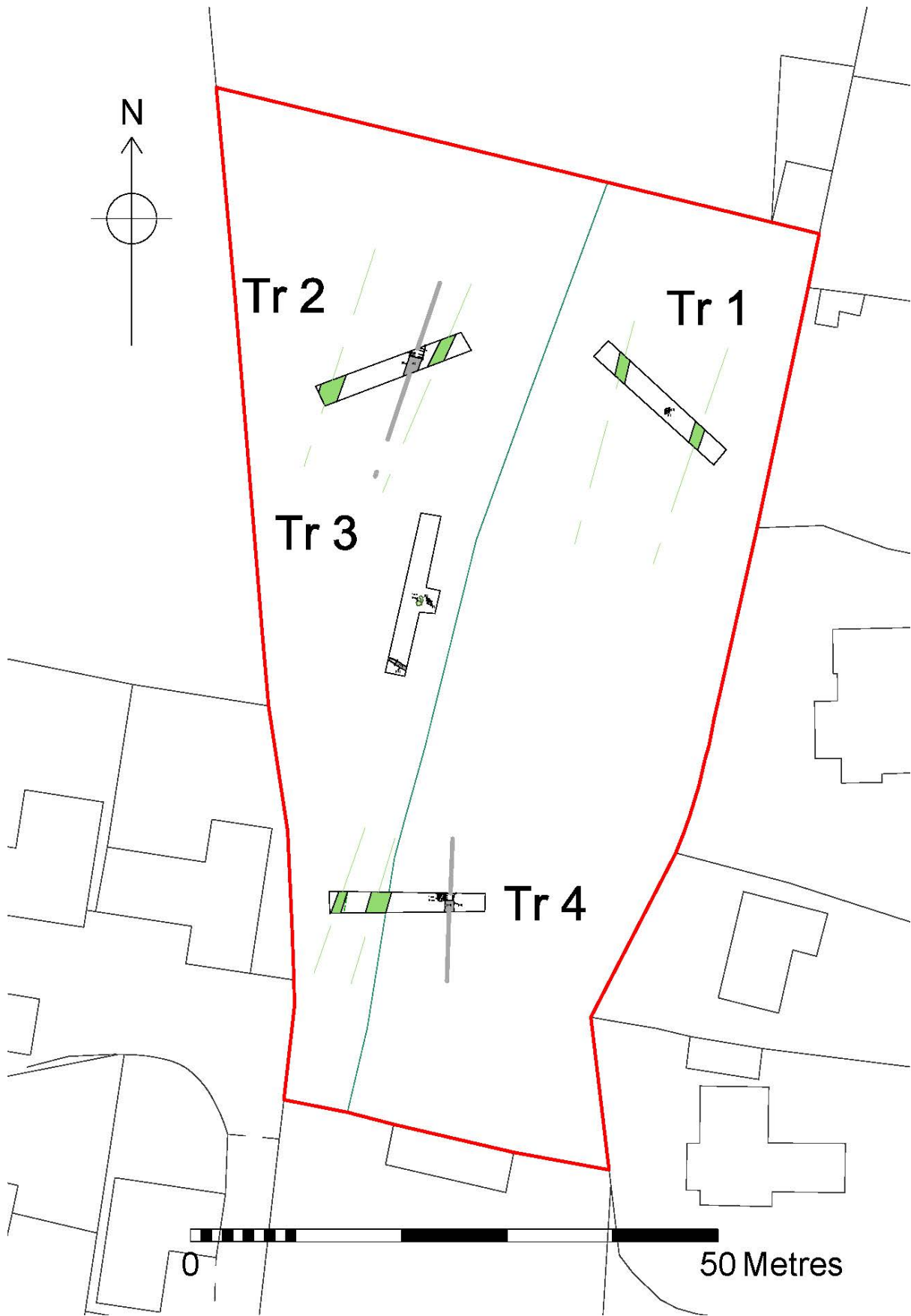


Figure 3: Site plan with archaeology

Trench 1

Trench 1 measured 15.2m x 2m, and was aligned northwest to southeast (Figs. 4 & 5). The natural substratum consisted of mixed orange sandy clay and manganese mottled orange-grey clay at a depth of between 0.47m – 0.7m below ground level. Cut into this was a posthole [2], (Figs. 6 & 7). It was circular in plan reasonably steep sides and a flattish base, 0.4m diameter, 0.27m deep. It was filled buy (1), dark orange-grey silty clay with very occasional pebbles. Above this was subsoil 0.18m-0.32m. Within this were two furrows aligned almost north-south as noted in extant earthworks. Topsoil was 0.2m-0.38m thick.

OD Height: 126.36m	(NW) 0m	5m	10m	15m (SE)			
Topsoil Depth	0.38	0.35	0.2	0.24			
Subsoil Depth	0.32	0.18	0.27	0.24			
Depth of Natural	0.7	0.53	0.47	0.48			
Base of Trench	0.7	0.62	0.47	0.63			



Figure 4: Trench 1 looking southeast

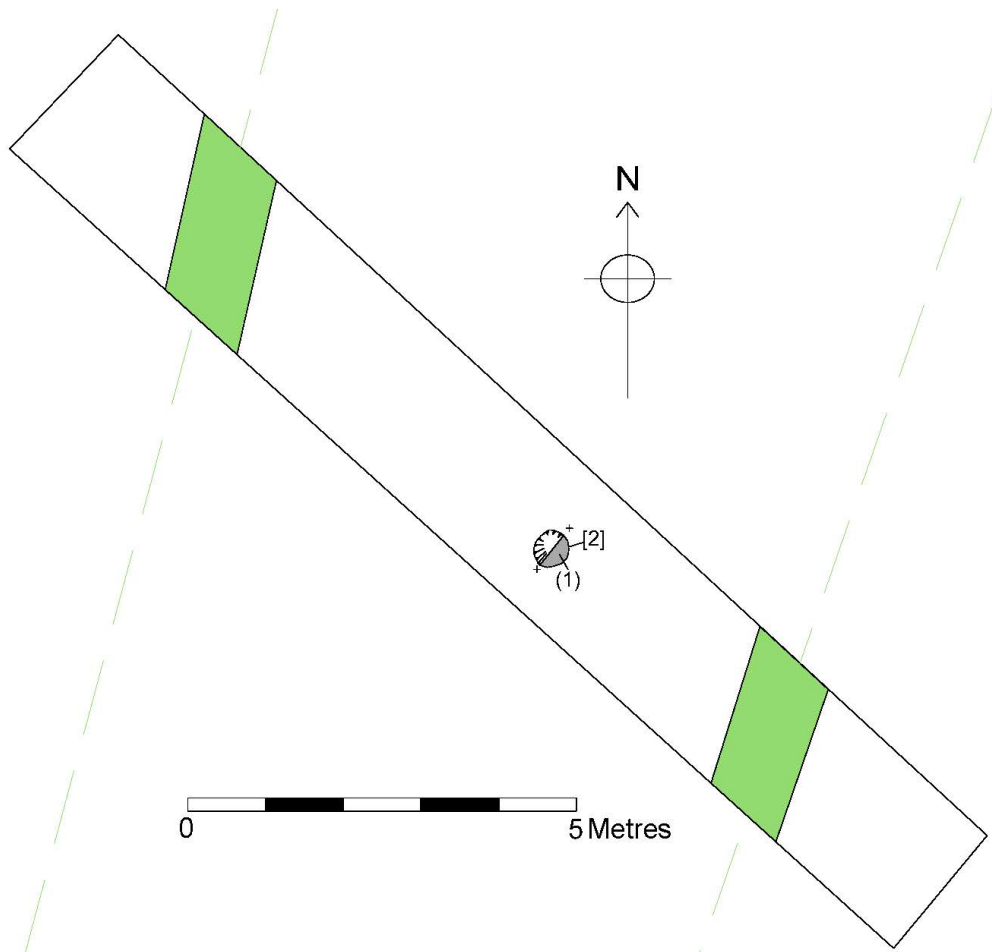


Figure 5: Trench 1 plan

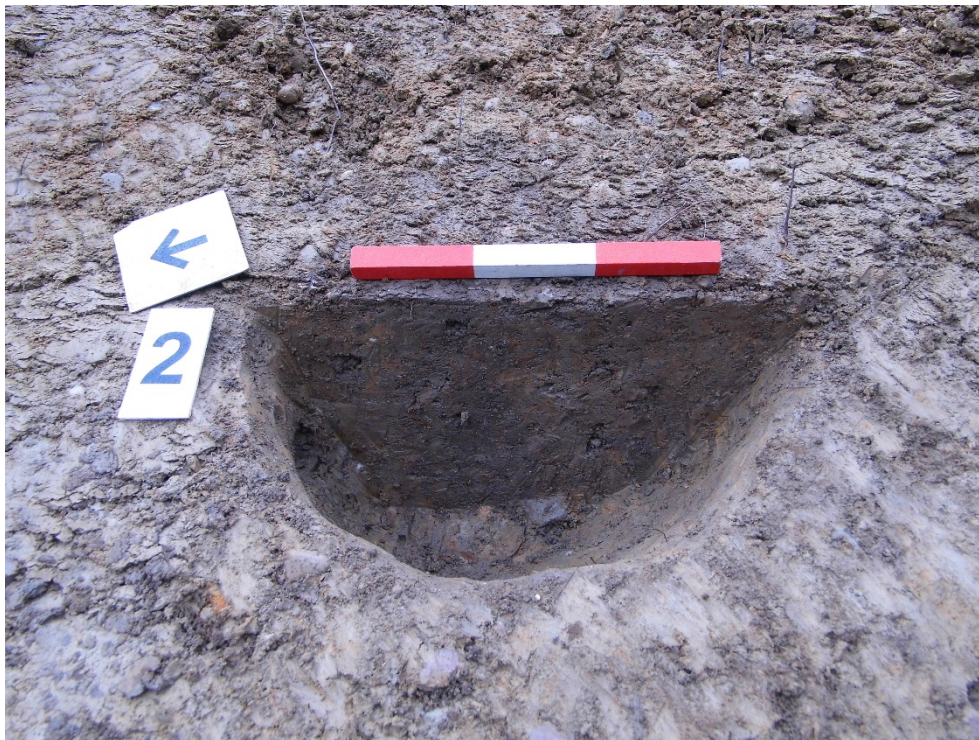


Figure 6: Post hole [2] looking southeast

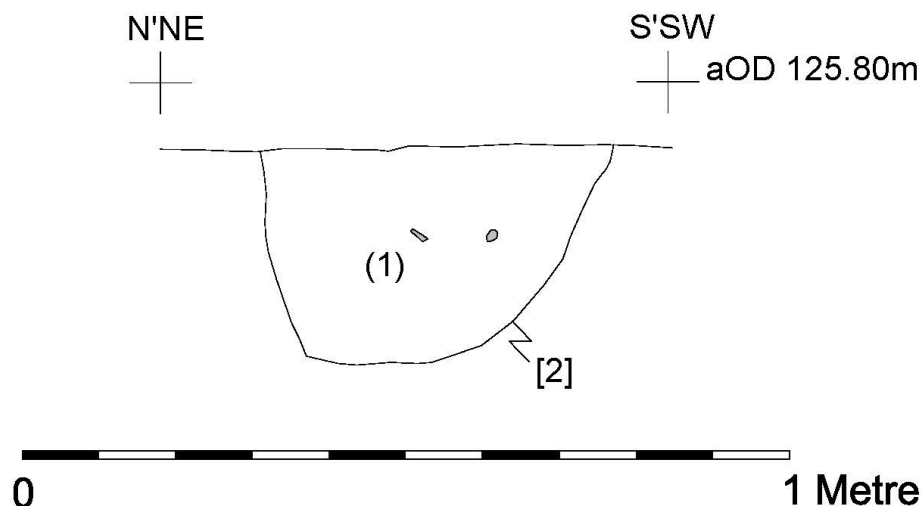


Figure 7: Post hole [2] section

Trench 2

Trench 2 measured 14.7m x 2m, and was aligned northeast to southwest (Figs. 8 & 9). The natural substratum was mixed yellow-grey clay at a depth of between 0.43m-0.53m below ground level. Cut into this was ditch [5], aligned northeast-southwest, with sloped v-shaped profile, 1.3m wide, 0.56m deep (Figs. 10 & 11). The lowest fill (4), was mid orange-brown silty clay with occasional pebble inclusions, 0.3m thick. This was overlain by (3), light orange-brown silty clay with occasional pebbles, 0.18m thick. Subsoil overlay this 0.19m-0.24m thick. Two furrows were also noted within the trench. Topsoil was 0.2m-0.33m thick

OD Height: 125.75m	(SW) 0m	5m	10m	14.7m (NE)			
Topsoil Depth	0.2	0.25	0.33	0.24			
Subsoil Depth	0.21	0.24	0.2	0.19			
Depth of Natural	-	0.49	0.53	0.43			
Base of Trench	0.62	0.52	0.64	0.51			



Figure 8: Trench 2 looking southwest

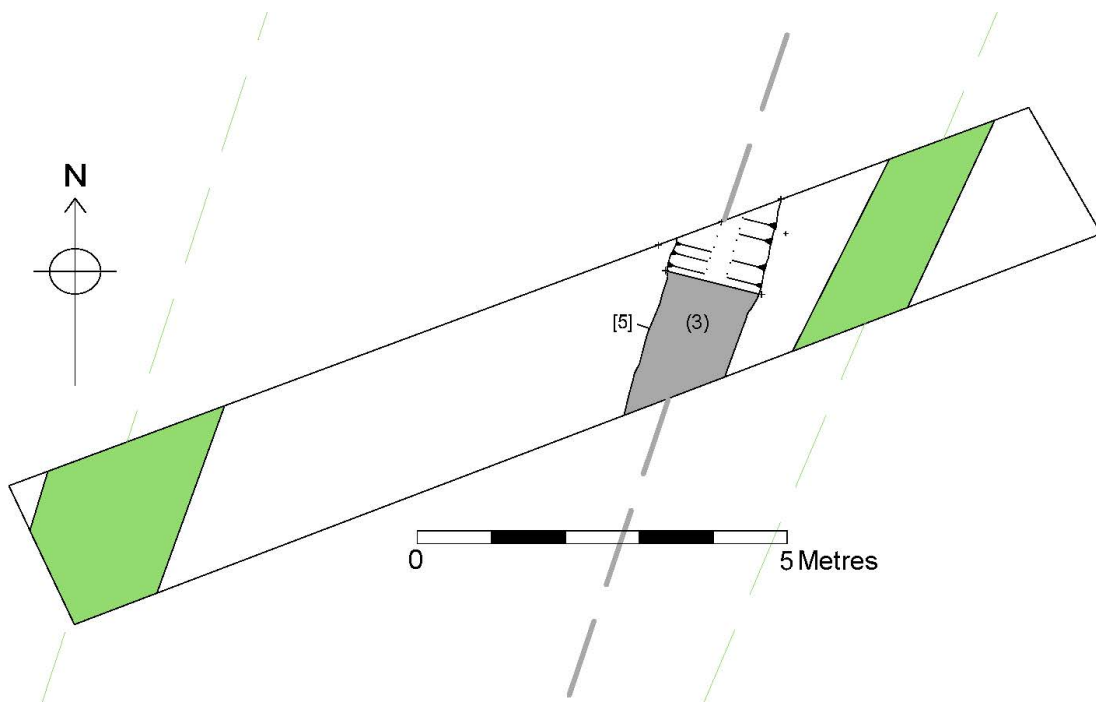


Figure 9: Trench 2 plan



Figure 10: Ditch [5] looking northwest

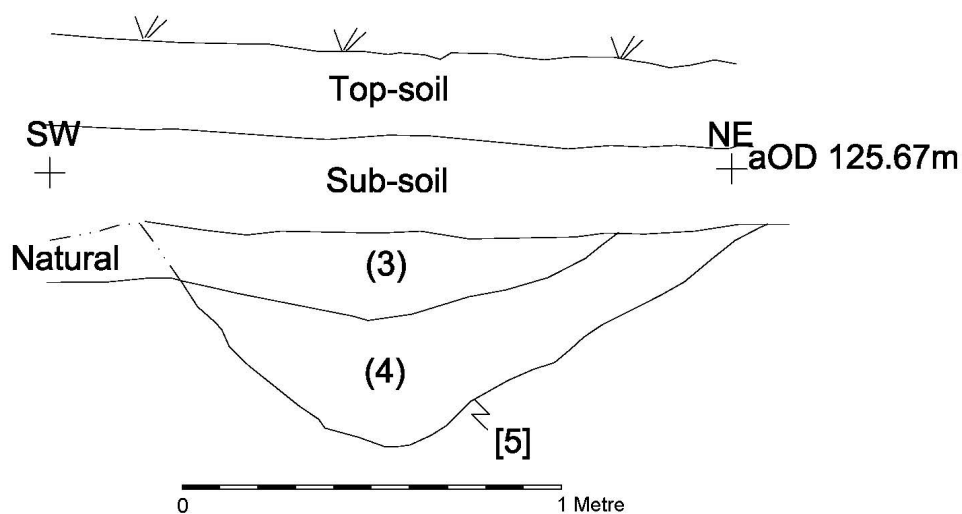


Figure 11: Ditch [5] section

Trench 3

Trench 3 measured 15.3m x 2m, and was aligned northeast to southwest (Figs. 12 & 13). The natural substratum was the same as trench 1, at a depth of between 0.38m – 0.5m below ground level. Cut into this was two postholes and a gully. Posthole [7] was circular in plan with a moderate concave profile, 0.3m diameter, 0.08m deep. It was filled by (6), dark-grey boron silty clay with frequent charcoal inclusions (Figs. 14 & 15). Within the fill was a single cattle tooth (P4), retained in the finds archive. On its north edge was another posthole [9] (Fig. 16). This was also circular with a moderate concave profile, 0.2m diameter, 0.07m thick. It was filled by (8), orange-brown silty clay with occasional pebble inclusions (Figs. 17 & 18).

At the southwest end of the trench was gully [13]. It was aligned northwest-southeast with a mostly steep but slightly irregular profile and almost flat base, 0.33m wide, 0.38m deep (Figs. 19 & 20). The lowest fill, (12) was a grey-black sandy clay that was mostly a charcoal mix, 0.05m thick. Above this was (11), russet mottled brown-grey clay with daub and charcoal inclusions, 0.12m thick. The final disuse fill (10) was brown-grey silty clay with occasional pebble inclusions, 0.17m thick.

These were covered by subsoil, 0.18m-0.25m thick. Topsoil was 0.2m-0.25m thick.

OD Height: 125.73m	(NE) 0m	5m	10m	15.3m (SW)			
Topsoil Depth	0.24	0.2	0.2	0.25			
Subsoil Depth	0.24	0.18	0.2	0.25			
Depth of Natural	0.48	0.38	0.4	0.5			
Base of Trench	0.52	0.44	0.47	0.61			



Figure 12: Trench 3 looking northeast

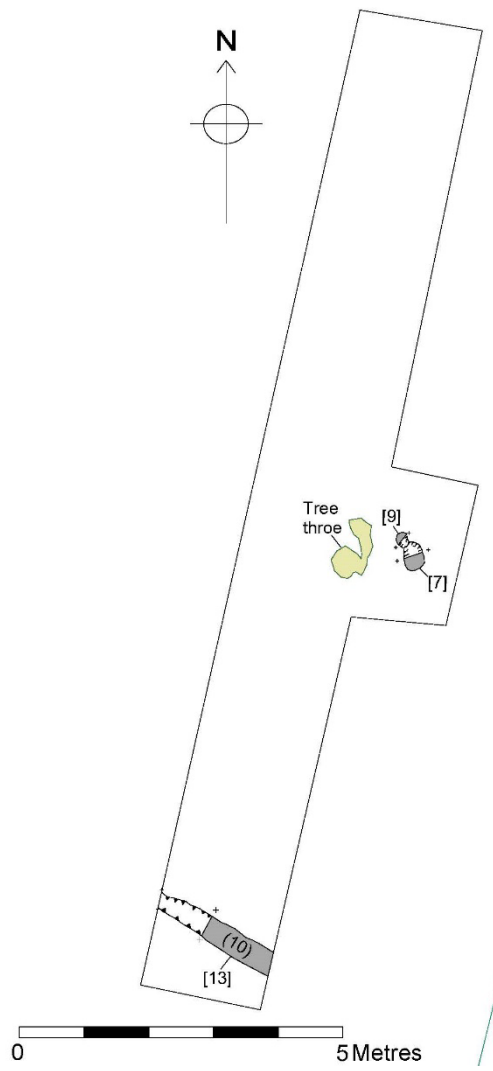


Figure 13: Trench 3 plan



Figure 14: Posthole [7] looking southeast

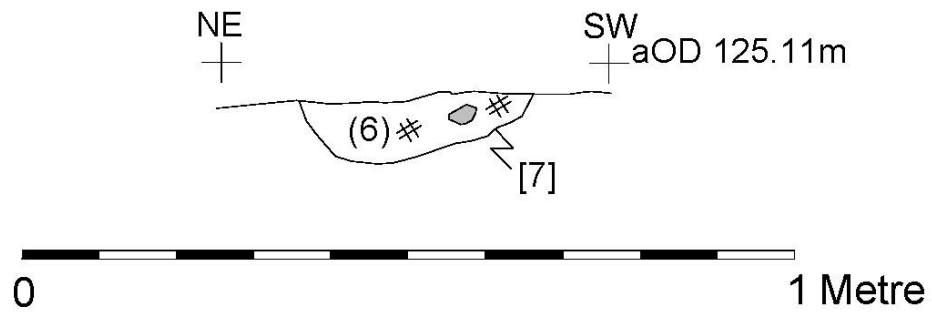


Figure 15: Post hole [7] section

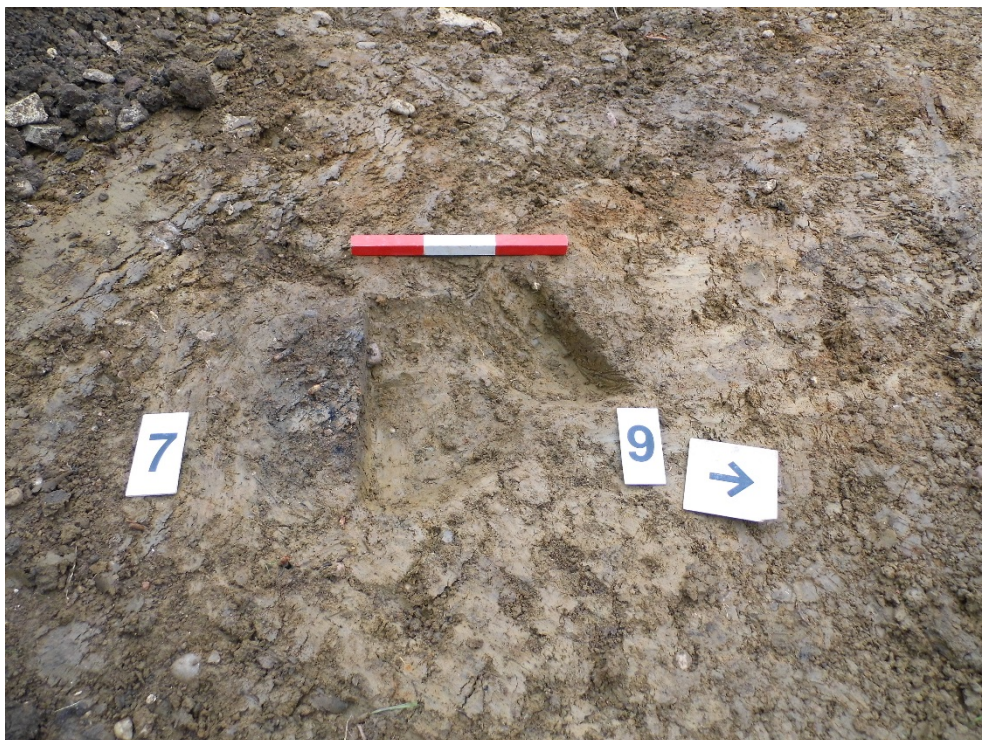


Figure 16: Post holes [7] & [9] looking southwest



Figure 17: Post hole [9] looking northwest

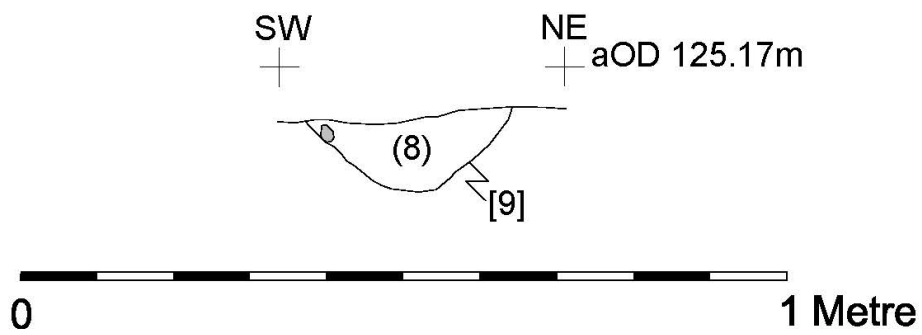


Figure 18: Post hole [9] section



Figure 19: Gully [13] looking northwest

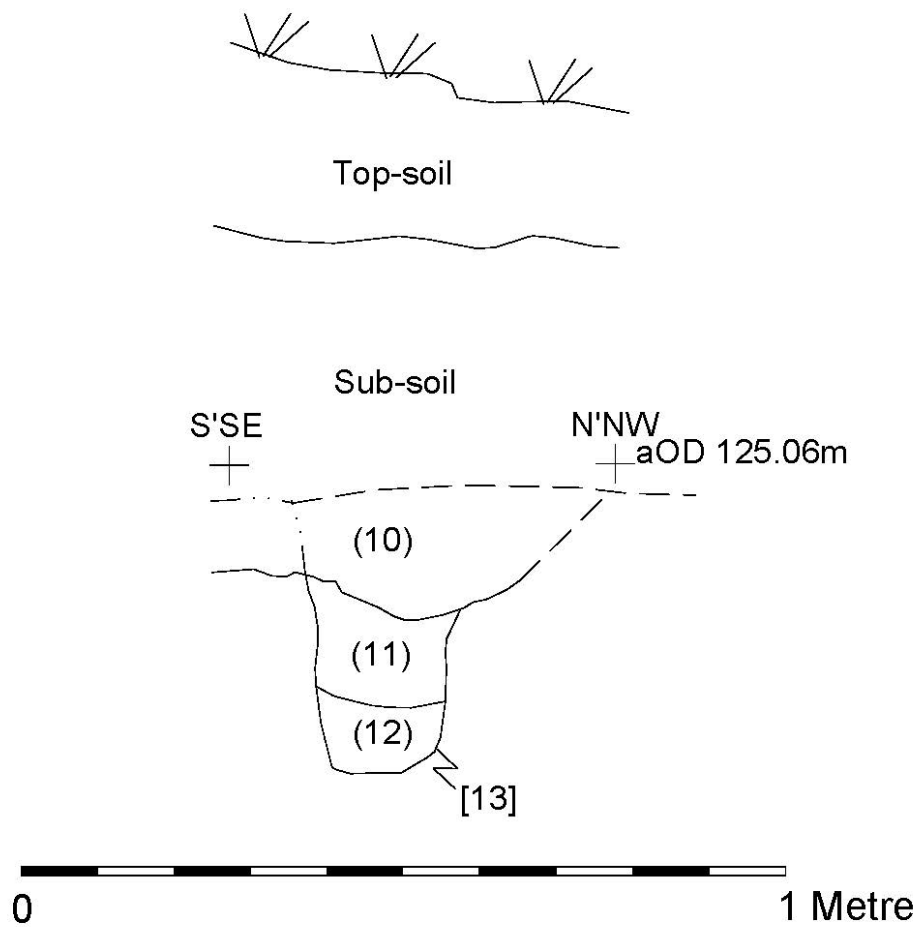


Figure 20: Gully [13] section



Figure 21: Gully [13] looking southeast

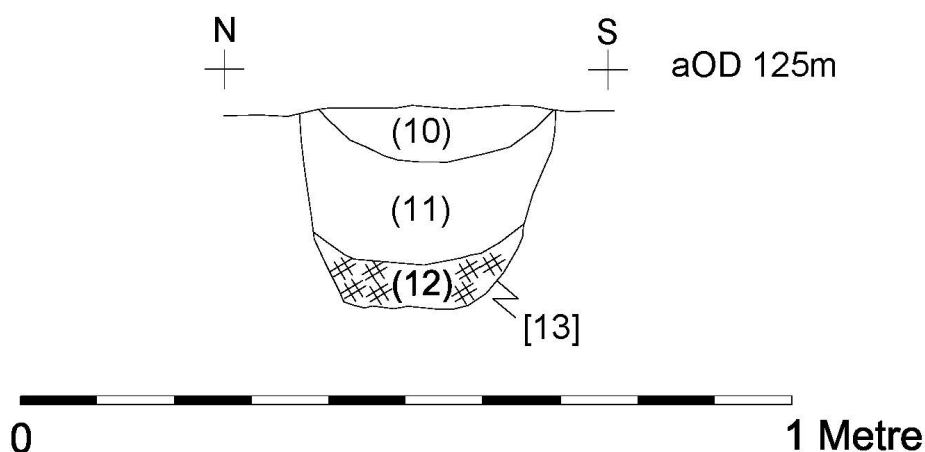


Figure 22: Gully [13] section

Trench 4

Trench 4 measured 14.6m x 2m, and was aligned east to west (Figs. 23 & 24). The natural substratum was yellow-orange clay with pebble inclusions, at a depth of between 0.55m – 0.67m below ground level. Cut into this was a north-south aligned ditch [15]. It had a moderately concave profile and concave base (Figs. 25 & 26). It was filled by (14) mid orange-brown silty clay with occasional pebble inclusions. Next to this was a tree bole. Covering these was subsoil 0.23m-0.32m thick. Within this at the western end of the trench were two more furrows. Cut into the furrow in the middle of the trench was a modern hedgerow. Topsoil was 0.3m-0.36m thick.

OD Height: 125.16m	(W) 0m	5m	10m	14.6m (E)			
Topsoil Depth	0.3	0.36	0.34	0.31			
Subsoil Depth	0.32	0.26	0.23	0.24			
Depth of Natural	0.62	0.62	0.57	0.55			
Base of Trench	0.63	0.7	0.65	0.67			



Figure 23: Trench 4 looking west

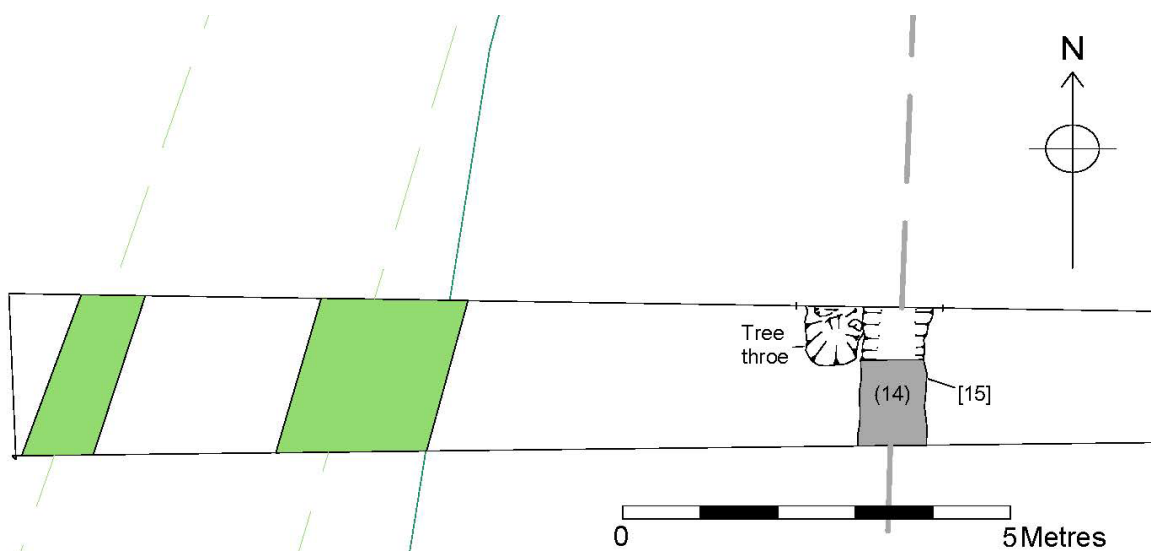


Figure 24: Trench 4 plan



Figure 25: Ditch [15] looking north

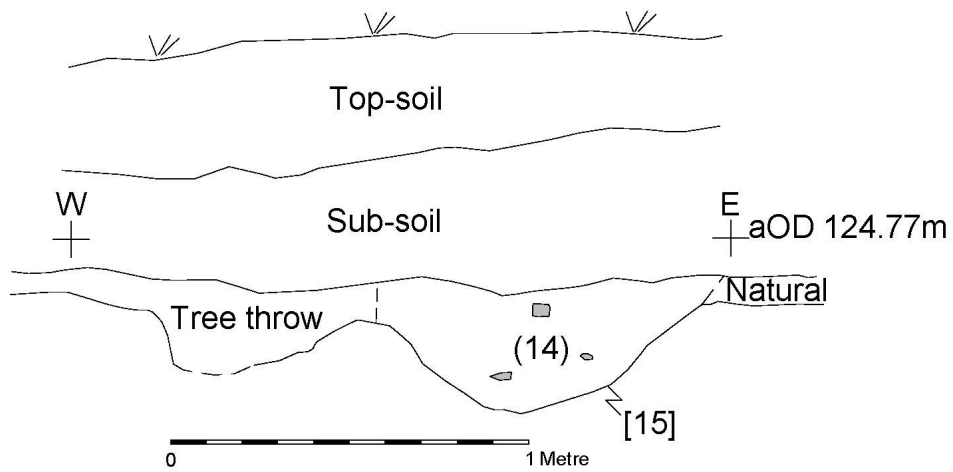


Figure 26: Ditch [15] section

The Roman pottery and fired clay– *Nicholas J. Cooper*

A small assemblage of Roman pottery and fired clay was recovered from gully fill (11). Some of the fired clay was recovered by hand but most of it, together with a small amount of pottery was extracted from the heavy residue once the bulk soil samples had been sieved to recover plant remains.

Roman pottery

A total of six small, abraded, sherds (10g) of Roman pottery belonging to a single vessel in Oxfordshire red colour-coated ware (Leics. Fabric C13, Pollard 1994, 114) was recovered from fill (11). The remains have been discoloured through burning after breakage but clearly comprise part of the foot ring base (diameter 70mm) of a small dish or bowl, probably copying samian Forms 31, 36, 37 or 38, together with body sherds (Young 1977 Forms C45-C90). Oxfordshire red colour-coated wares are not exported to Leicestershire until the later 4th century and so a date between AD360 and 400 is the most likely *terminus post quem* for the filling of the feature. The pottery has been retained in the finds archive.

Fired clay

A total of 480g of fired clay or burnt daub fragments were recovered from (11), 140g of which was hand collected. Flat surfaces were recorded on two of the larger fragments, but no wattle impressions, the material being otherwise amorphous and fragmentary. A wattle and daub or cob wall structure presumably stood in the vicinity, and was either destroyed by fire or was subject to heat through an industrial process, and this represents the surviving debris. A sample has been retained in the finds archive.

Discussion

The burnt condition of the pottery and the daub suggests a nearby structural conflagration or high-temperature industrial structure such as a hearth or kiln, the debris from which has accumulated in the gully towards the end of the Roman period or later. Further fieldwork would no doubt increase our knowledge of the structure and the gully feature and yield more ceramic evidence to enhance our understanding of the dating.

The Environmental Remains - *Rachel Small*

Introduction

Two bulk samples were taken during an evaluation at Bitteswell from the fill of a post hole and gully in trench 3 dating to the early Roman period. The samples were processed in a York tank using a 0.5mm mesh with flotation into a 0.3mm sieve. The flots and heavy residues were dried and then rapidly scanned under a microscope to assess their potential for further analysis and the results are presented below.

Results

Sample 1 was taken from fill (6) of post hole [7]. This sample did not contain any charred plant remains. Charcoal fragments were frequent; pieces over 4mm in size that have the potential to be identified to species and radiocarbon dated were present (see table 1).

Sample 2 which was taken from the upper fill (11) of gully [13] contained a small number of charred plant remains. This included a wheat (*Triticum* sp.) grain, two wheat glume bases and two fragments of hazelnut (*Corylus avellana* L.) shell. The specimens were heavily fragmented and the grain distorted probably from burning at high temperatures. These were not retained in the finds archive.

The charred material found likely represents windblown accumulations of material that was burnt on hearths. The plant remains likely represent residues from processing and consuming cereals and wild foods on site.

Table 1: plant remains/charcoal present in samples.

Sample	Context	Cut	Date	Volume (L)	Notes
1	6	7	Early Roman	6	Flot contained 3 charcoal frags over 4mm 0.19 grams. Heavy residue contained 12 charcoal frags over 4mm 0.61 grams.
2	11	10	Early Roman	10	Charcoal poorly preserved no suitable frags for ID/dating. Plant remains inc. wheat grain, 2 x glume base, 2 x hazelnut shell frag.

Potential for further work

If further work is carried out at the site or in the near vicinity it is recommended that a suitable sampling strategy is implemented. Charcoal and charred plant remains have shown to preserve; a larger assemblage could have the potential to reveal further insight into diet and crop processing at the site alongside changes over time.

Discussion

The trenching revealed archaeological features across all four trenches in the form of ditches, post holes, a pit and a gully. The ditches indicate a system of boundaries or enclosures located within the development area, but currently their date is unknown. The ditches were however sealed by the subsoil, which provides some indication of their early date. The pit and postholes were also undated, but were located at a similar level beneath the subsoil, and are therefore also potentially early in date. The gully in Trench 3 was the only positively dated archaeological feature. This contained fragments of 4th Century Roman pottery and an abundance of charcoal with many fragments of burned clay. The sharp, squared profile of the gully suggested that it might have a possible structural function, possibly a kiln flue or a wall-slot, but the material appeared to be dumped into the gully as there appeared to be no in-situ burning. It may come from a hearth or perhaps a kiln or corn-drier type structure nearby.

There were clear furrows cut into the natural subsoil which were reflected within the spread of extant earthworks still visible across the site.

Archive and publication

The archive for this project will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums with accession number X.A79.2019 and consists of the following:

- 1 Unbound copy of this report (ULAS Report No. 2019-136)
- 4 Trench recording sheets
- 1 Context index sheet

- 12 Context sheets
- 1 Drawing index
- 1 Drawing record sheet
- 1 Permatrace drawing sheet
- 1 Sample index
- 1 Photo Record sheet
- 1 Contact sheet of digital photographs
- 1 CD containing a copy of this report and the digital photographs
- 1 finds checklist with accompanying finds.

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

ULAS would like to thank Mr & Mrs C Faircliffe / STOAS Architects for their help and co-operation with the project. Nathan Flavell carried out the trial trenching with Jamie Patrick for ULAS and the project was managed by John Thomas. The mechanical excavator was provided by the client.

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Nathan Flavell
ULAS
University of Leicester
University Road
Leicester LE1 7RH
Tel: 0116 252 2848
Fax: 0116 252 2614
Email: nf70@le.ac.uk
09/10/2019



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

