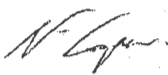


**An Archaeological Watching Brief at
The Dicken, Whetstone,
Leicestershire (SP 577 971)**

James Harvey

For: Westleigh Developments Ltd.

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CONTENTS

Summary	1
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Site Description, Topography and Geology.....	2
2. Historical and Archaeological Background	2
4. Aims and Objectives	4
5. Methodology	4
6. Results.....	5
7. Discussion	6
8. Archive and Publication.....	6
9. Acknowledgements.....	7
10. Bibliography	7

FIGURES

Figure 1: Site Location Plan (Scale 1:50000).....	2
Figure 2: Site Location Plan (close up).....	3
Figure 3: Trench plan (incorporating former building footprint)	5

An Archaeological Watching Brief at land West of High Street and North of The Dicken Road, Whetstone, Leicestershire (SP 557 971)

James Harvey

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out at land west of High Street and north of The Dicken, Whetstone, Leicestershire (SP 557 971) on the 5th March 2008 by University of Leicester Archaeological Services. The work was carried out on behalf of Westleigh Developments Ltd. in advance of the construction of a new residential complex on the site. The work involved the excavation of four trial trenches in order to inspect the site for archaeological potential. However no significant archaeological deposits or artefacts were encountered during the watching brief.

The site archive will be held by Leicestershire County Council Museum Services under the accession number X.A53.2008.

1. Introduction

This document presents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at land west of High Street and north of The Dicken, Whetstone, Leicestershire (SP 557 971) The work was undertaken on behalf Westleigh Developments Ltd. by University of Leicester Archaeological Services on the 5th March 2008.

Planning permission has been granted by Blaby District Council for the redevelopment of the former Aylestone House site into a residential complex, Planning Application: 07/0781/1/PX. The proposed development lies in an area of significant archaeological potential, within medieval and post-medieval core of the village of Whetstone.

In accordance with Planning Policy Guidelines 16 (PPG16, Archaeology and planning), para.30, archaeological monitoring of groundworks was requested by Leicestershire County Council's Historic and Natural Environment Team in their capacity as archaeological advisors to Blaby District Council. The scope of the works was defined in their *Brief for archaeological attendance for inspection and recording*. However, with the agreement of the Senior Planning Archaeologist, the fieldwork strategy was subsequently modified at the request of the client to comprise the examination of three archaeological trial trenches to determine the presence or absence of archaeological deposits.

2. Site Description, Topography and Geology

Whetstone is situated 6 miles south of Leicester. The development area is situated within the village core, west of High Street and north of The Dicken, Whetstone (figs. 1 and 2).

The underlying geology, as indicated on the Geological Survey of Great Britain, Drift Geology sheet 156 for Leicester is alluvium overlying Mercia Mudstone. The site consisted of an area of c. 0.45 ha. that had previously been developed, although the eastern part of the site seemed relatively undisturbed. The ground was relatively flat at a height of c.65m OD.

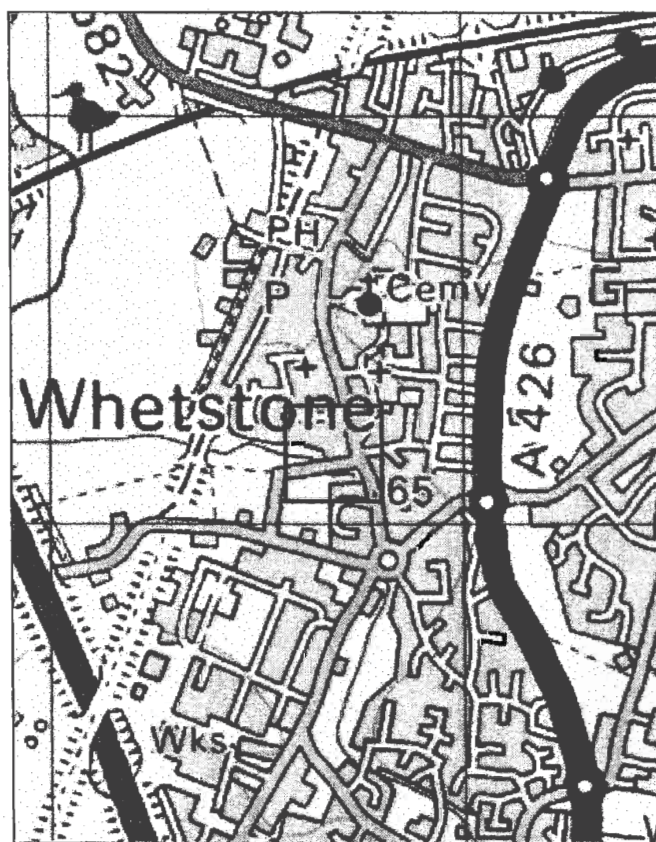


Figure 1: Site Location Plan (Scale 1:50000)

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2. Historical and Archaeological Background

Whetstone is referred to in the Domesday Book as being held by Ralph, from Count of Meulan. He holds "1/2 hide and 1 carucate of land. There were 6 ploughs. Now in lordship 2 ploughs; 2 slaves. 24 Freemen and 11 villagers with 5 smallholders have 5 ploughs. 1 man-at arms. 1 mill at 2s; meadow, 16 acres." (Morgan 1979). The name Whetstone is "probably referring to places where stone suitable for whetstones was

found” (Mills 1998). The settlement has been previously referred to as Weston, Whetstone and Hevetsan and is likely to have Anglo-Saxon origins.

The development area is located within the historic medieval village core of Whetstone (MLE15731). As such, there is a potential for archaeological deposits relating to the medieval and post-medieval period to be located within the development area. Also various cropmarks have been observed 500m west of the site in fields south of Narborough Bogs that are likely to represent evidence of prehistoric settlement within the vicinity of the development area (MLE366-8).

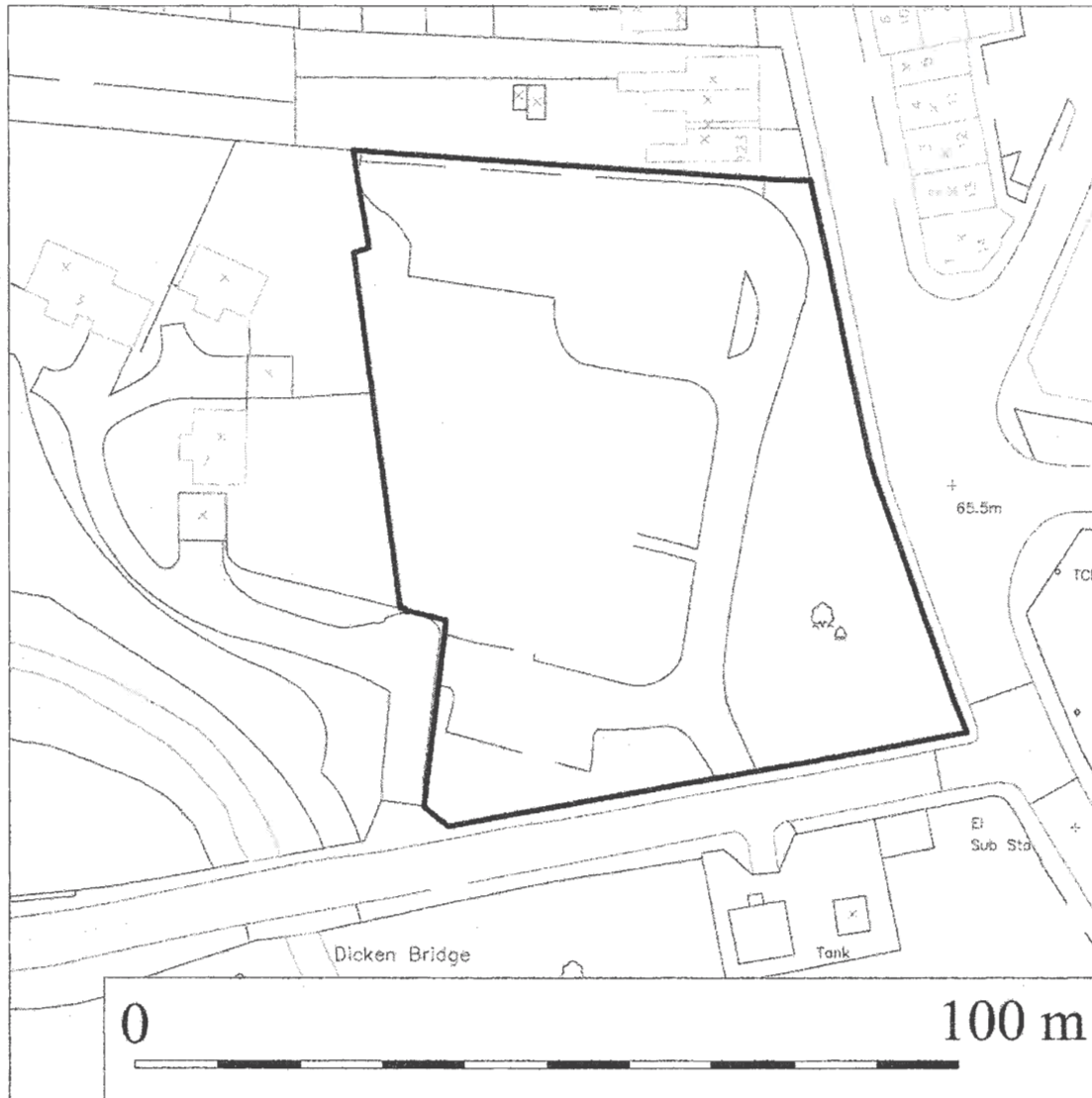


Figure 2: Site Location Plan (close up)

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4. Aims and Objectives

The main aims through archaeological observation and investigation were:

- To identify the presence/absence of any earlier building phases or archaeological deposits.
- To establish the character, extent and date range for any archaeological deposits to be affected by the proposed ground works.
- To record any archaeological deposits to be affected by the ground works.
- To produce an archive and report of any results.

5. Methodology

It was suggested that 3 trenches, 30m x 1.5m in length were to be located in order to evaluate the site for archaeological potential of the site as an alternative to the inspection and recording of foundation trenches during the construction of the new residential dwellings.

The trenches were excavated using a JCB 3CX equipped with a 1.5m wide toothless ditching bucket attached to its back actor. The topsoil and overlying layers were removed under full archaeological supervision until either the top of archaeology or natural undisturbed ground was reached.

The bases of the trenches were examined for archaeological remains and brief trench recording was undertaken. The trenches were approximately located using triangulation from known point on the site boundary.

All work followed the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) Code of Conduct and adhere to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (1999).

6. Results

As a result of site constraints (services and spoil heaps), four smaller trenches were located within the development area (fig. 3)

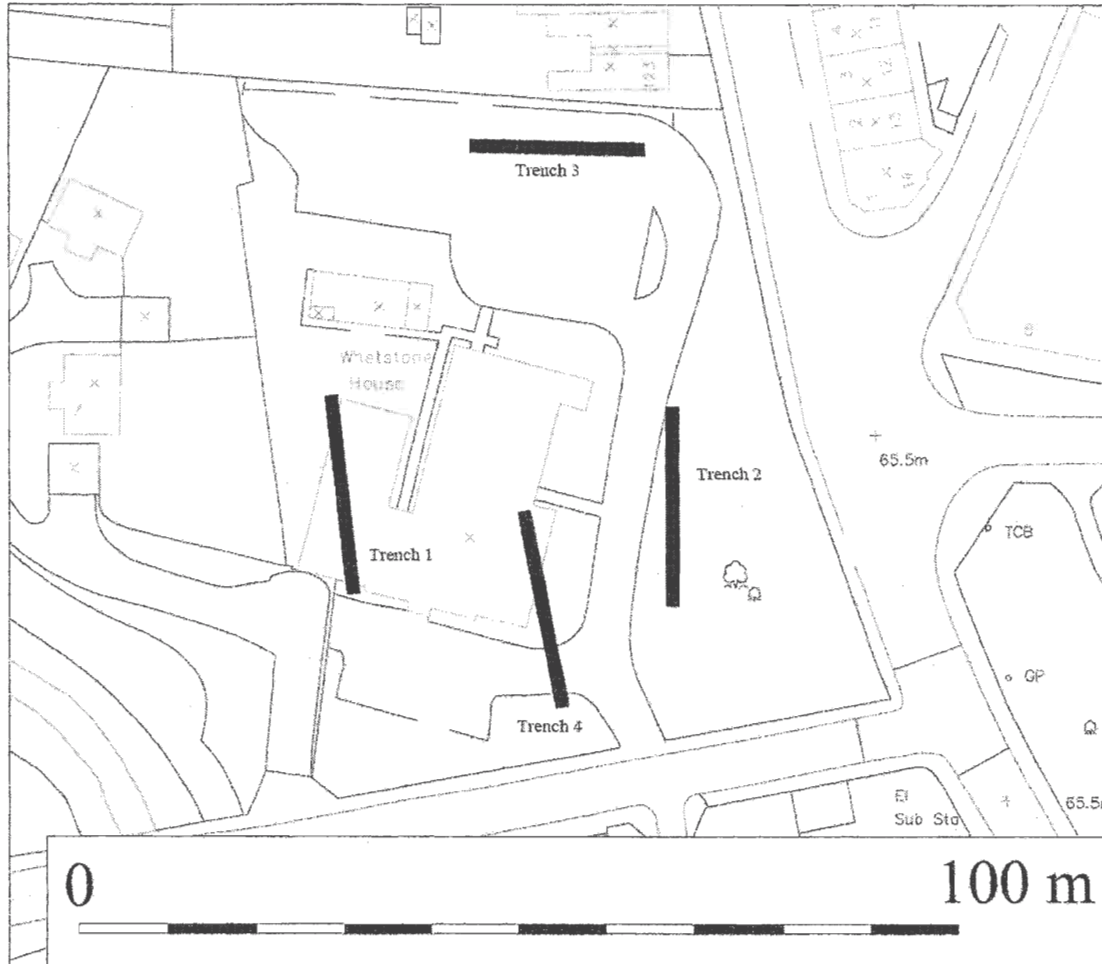


Figure 3: Trench plan (incorporating former building footprint)

Trench 1

Trench 1 measured 23m x 1.5m and was orientated north-south. The majority of this trench was located within the footprint of the former Aylestone House. The uppermost deposits consisted of overburden containing abundant brick and other building rubble. This varied in depth between 800-1500mm and directly overlaid the natural substratum that consisted of reddish brown clayey sand and gravel. Both ends of the trench contained deep truncation relating to the brick footings of Whetstone House.

Trench 2

Trench 2 measured 22m x 1.5m and was orientated north-south in an area of undisturbed grassed verge on the eastern part of the site. The topsoil consisted of dark greyish-brown loam that contained abundant charcoal flecks, pebbles and brick fragments. This was c. 400mm thick and overlaid a rubble make-up layer that measured c.150mm thick. Beneath the make-up was a second topsoil type deposit that

was similar to the first but contained no bricks. This measured c. 350mm thick and overlaid a dark greyish brown silty sand (alluvial?) subsoil deposit that contained common pebble inclusions. This measured c. 400mm and directly overlaid the natural substratum that consisted of orangey brown sand and gravel.

Trench 3

Trench 3 measured 19m x 1.5m and was orientated east-west. This trench was located at the back of the site, within the former car park area. The uppermost layer consisted of gravel make-up. This measured c. 350mm deep and overlaid a thin layer of topsoil. This measured c. 150mm thick and directly overlaid the natural substratum at the eastern end of the trench. From the centre of the trench subsoil (alluvium?) was observed that measured c.350mm at the west end of the trench. The natural substratum consisted of reddish brown sand and gravel.

Trench 4

Trench 4 measured 23m x 1.5m and was orientated north northwest-south southeast. It was located across the driveway and footprint of the former building. The uppermost layer consisted of gravel make-up. This measured c. 400mm deep and overlaid a thin layer of topsoil. This was c. 200mm thick and overlaid a subsoil deposit (alluvium?). This measured c. 350mm thick and directly overlaid the natural substratum that consisted of reddish brown sand and gravel. A redundant sewer pipe was observed towards the centre of the trench and the ground was truncated to natural beyond c. 18m from the northern end of the trench (within the footprint area).

7. Discussion

No significant archaeological deposits or artefacts were encountered during this watching brief. Although areas within the footprint of the former Aylestone House exhibited severe truncation, elsewhere on the site the ground was reasonably well preserved. Two layers of topsoil were observed in Trench 2. This is likely to represent banking relating to the construction of Aylestone House. The presence of alluvium may show that the development area has been subject to inundation from the Whetstone Brook during the past. Although no dating evidence was recovered from the alluvial deposits, an absence of medieval activity may be taken to indicate that the area was prone to flooding at this time, and therefore unsuitable either for settlement or cultivation.

8. Archive and Publication

The archive will be held by Leicestershire County Council Museum Services under the accession number X.A53.2008. The content of the archive consists of:

- 1 Unbound A4 copy of this report
- 2 A4 Watching Brief recording sheet
- 1 A4 Colour digital photo contact print
- 1 CD of 4 digital photos

A record of the project will also be submitted to the OASIS project under the code universi1-39082. Oasis is an online index to archaeological grey literature reports.

A summary of the work will be submitted for inclusion in the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* in due course.

9. Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was carried out by the author. R. Buckley managed the project, both of ULAS. I would like to thank the client, Westleigh Developments Ltd., for their assistance and cooperation throughout the duration of the project.

10. Bibliography

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