



**An Archaeological Evaluation by trial trench on Land at Blaby Hall and Hall Farm, Blaby, Leicestershire**

**NGR: SP 457120 297827**

**Stephen Baker**



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**Grid Ref:** SP 457120 297827

**Author:** Stephen Baker

**Client:** Sowden Group

**Planning Ref.** 16/0238/FUL

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## OASIS RECORD

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>	<b>Oasis No</b>	universi1-396717		
	<b>Project Name</b>	An Archaeological Evaluation by trial trench on Land at Blaby Hall and Hall Farm, Blaby, Leicestershire		
	<b>Start/end dates</b>	8 <sup>nd</sup> – 10 <sup>th</sup> June 2020		
	<b>Previous/Future Work</b>	None		
	<b>Project Type</b>	Evaluation		
	<b>Site Status</b>	None		
	<b>Current Land Use</b>	Construction site		
	<b>Monument Type/Period</b>	None		
	<b>Significant Finds/Period</b>	None		
	<b>Reason for Investigation</b>	NPPF		
	<b>Position in the Planning Process</b>	As condition		
<b>Planning Ref.</b>	16/0238/FUL			
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>	<b>County</b>	Leicestershire		
	<b>Site Address/Postcode</b>	Blaby Hall, Church Street, Blaby, Leicester. LE8 4FA		
	<b>Study Area</b>	0.28ha		
	<b>Site Coordinates</b>	SP 457120 297827		
	<b>Height OD</b>	70m aOD		
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	ULAS		
	<b>Project Brief Originator</b>	ULAS		
	<b>Project Design Originator</b>	ULAS		
	<b>Project Manager</b>	John Thomas		
	<b>Project Director/Supervisor</b>	Stephen Baker		
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# **An Archaeological Evaluation by trial trench on Land at Blaby Hall and Hall Farm, Blaby, Leicestershire**

**(SP 457120 297827)**

**Stephen Baker**

## **Summary**

*This document is a fieldwork report for an archaeological trial trench evaluation carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on land at Blaby Hall and Hall Farm, Blaby, Leicestershire Leicester (SP 457120 297827), in advance of residential development.*

*Six trenches were opened across the site, positioned to target the footprints of the new buildings. These revealed a truncated gully of Roman date, undated, archaeological features and natural geological anomalies. The development area was subject to significant general disturbance of these levels by modern, recent buildings and past agricultural activity.*

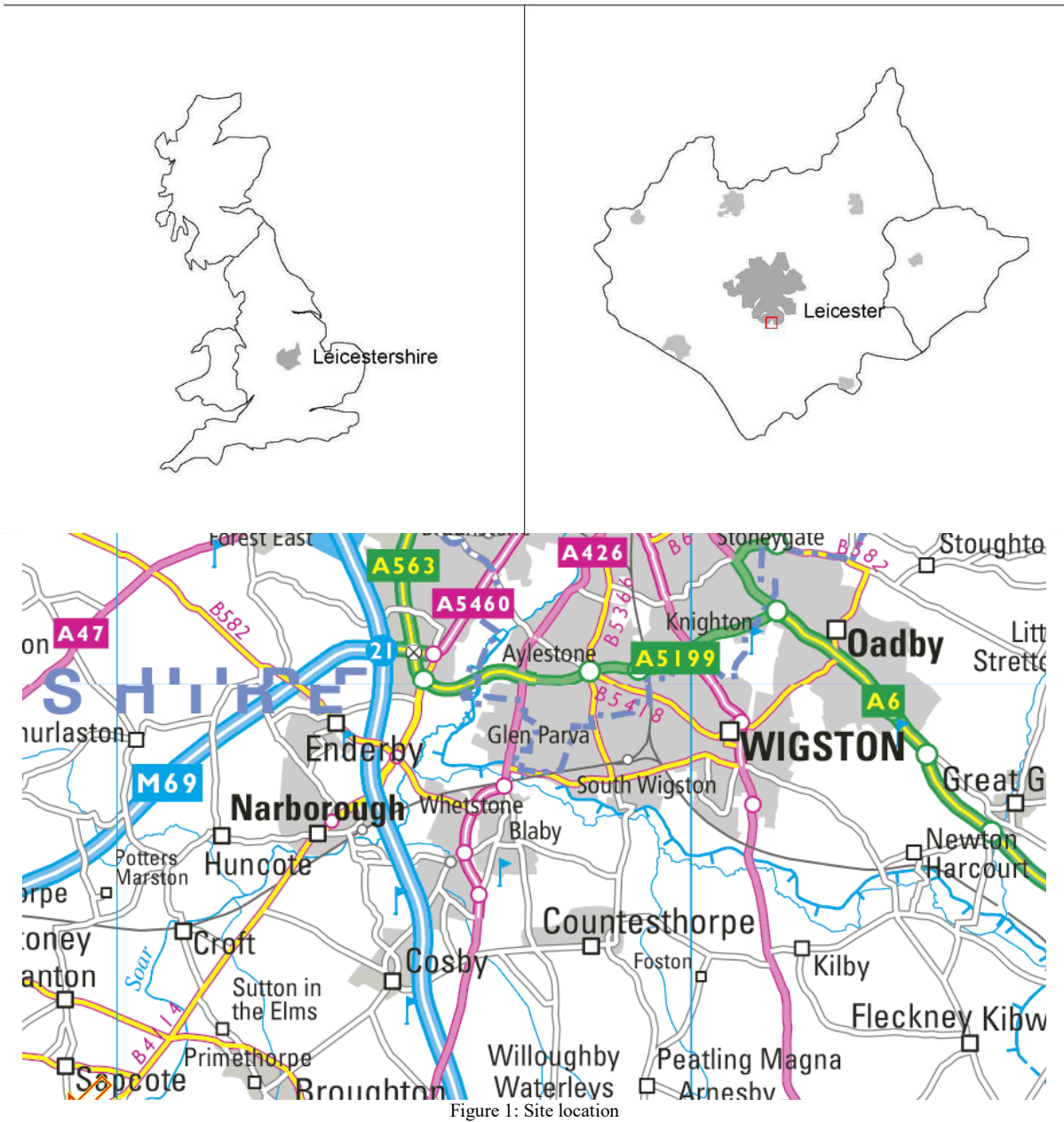
*The archive for the site will be deposited with Leicestershire County Museums under accession number XA49.2020.*

## **Introduction**

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) were contracted by the client, Sowden Group, to carry out an archaeological trial trench evaluation at Blaby Hall and Hall Farm, Blaby, Leicestershire (SP 457120 297827). The fieldwork was carried out between 8th and 10th June 2020.

The work was required as a pre-commencement condition by the Planning Authority following advice from Leicestershire County Council in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, MHCLG 2018). All work was undertaken as per the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (Clapton, 2020)

The development involves the construction of six residential dwellings and the conversion of a former cart shed fronting Church Street, with vehicular access from the latter (Figure 2). The work was intended to provide a preliminary indication 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.



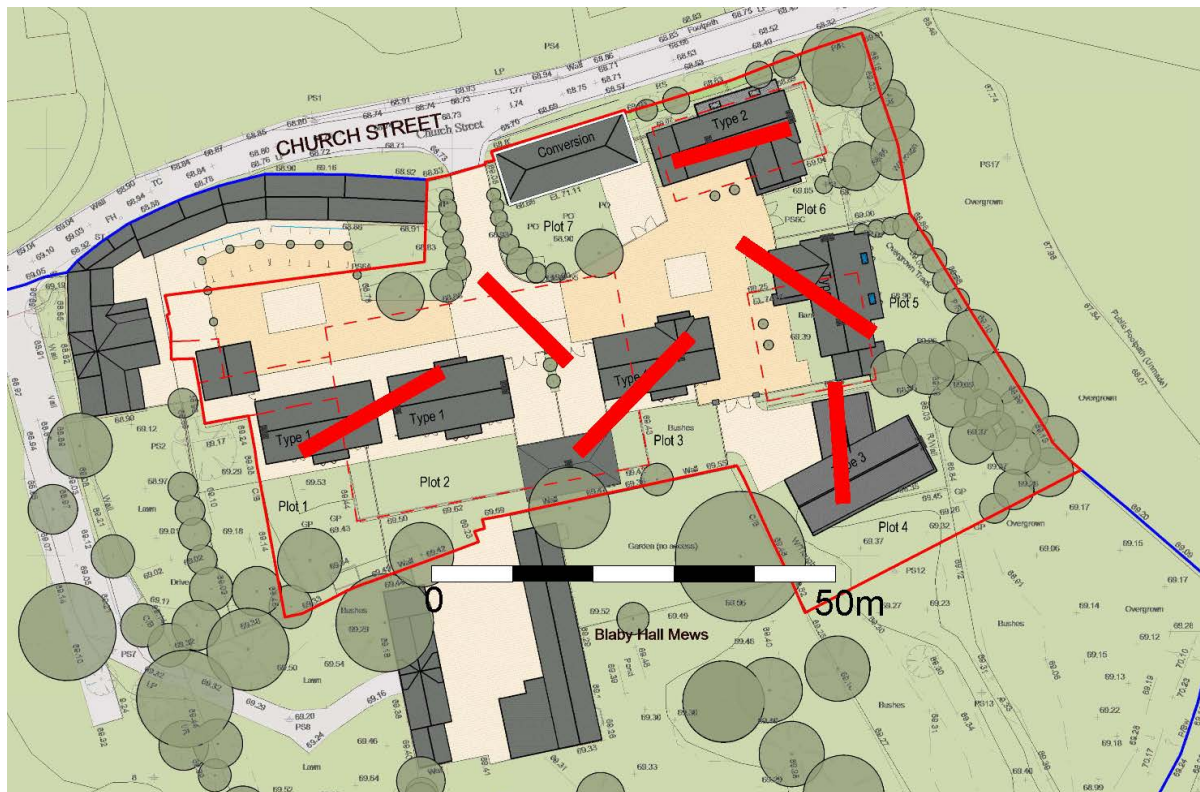


Figure 2: Proposed development (proposed trenches in red)

### Location and Geology (Figure 1)

Blaby lies around 5m south of Leicester within the County of Leicestershire. The site was located on the northeast edge of the village, and formed part of a disused dairy farm. Hall Farm is located immediately to the west, Blaby Hall and grounds lie to the south, a public footpath and agricultural land form its eastern boundary, and Church Street runs to the north (Figure 3) The site covers around 0.28ha of land at an approximate height of 70m aOD.

The British Geological Survey website indicated the underlying geology as consisting of Branscombe Mudstone Formation, this being overlain by Wigston Member sand and gravel.



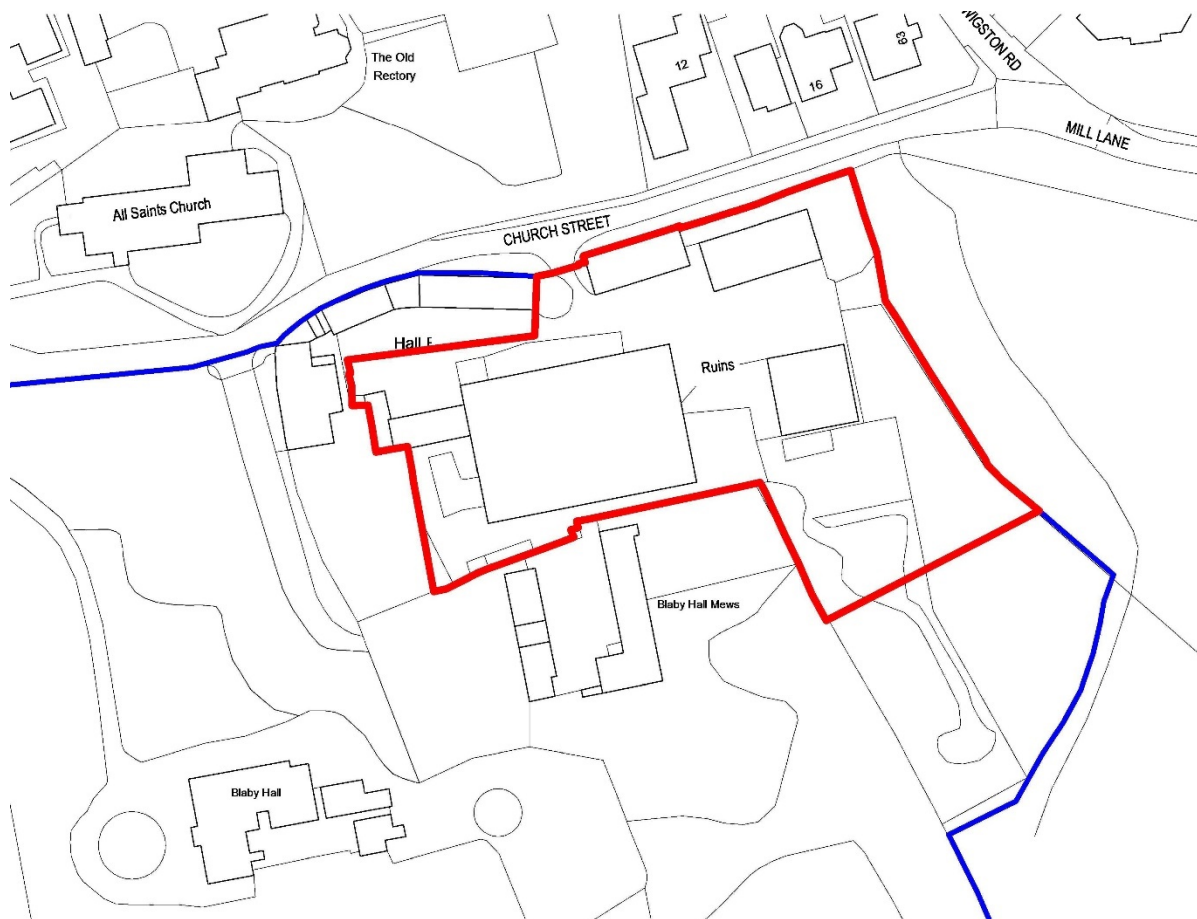


Figure 3: Assessment area

### **Historical and Archaeological Background (summarised from Hunt 2018)**

The place name ‘Blaby’ is Old Norse in form (farmstead or village belonging to Blar) and the settlement is assumed to have its origins on the early medieval (Saxon) period. It is mentioned in the doomsday survey of 1086 and at that time was assessed to have 37 households.

The majority of the site lies within the eastern edge of the historic medieval and post-medieval core of Blaby

#### ***Neolithic and Bronze Age***

During a Watching Brief in 1998, 30m to the north-east of the site, a Neolithic/Bronze age flint scraper and two retouched flakes were found. At 430m to the north-east a Bronze Age site was identified in the 1960s at Glen Parva.

#### ***Iron Age and Roman***

Around 200m to the east of the development a Roman Coin was found at Wigston Road. Roman pottery, and an undated ditch were found during sewer work c.470m north of the site.

### ***Saxon and Medieval***

Blaby's historic core is believed to have its origins in the late Saxon period and to have been occupied throughout the medieval period. Immediately north of the development area, barns associated with an 18th century farmhouse was noted to have 15th century cruck frame elements. Around 30m to the northwest of the development lies the Grade I Listed Church of All Saints dating to *c.*1300. Some 140m to the south earthworks and pottery dating to the medieval period have been identified suggesting medieval settlement in the area. At around 480m to the northeast lies the historic medieval settlement core of Glen Parva.

### ***Post-medieval to Modern***

A brick farmhouse dating to the 18th century, with associated barns, lies immediately north of the site and immediately to the south of the site lies a 19th century stable block. Around 50m southwest sits Blaby Hall, a 17th century mansion house. Associated post-medieval fishponds lie *c.*50m west and *c.*100m south of the Hall. Blaby cemetery is located *c.*280m east of the site.

## **Archaeological Objectives**

The main aim of the investigation was to provide evidence to aid understanding the nature, date, function, and character of the archaeological remains at the site in their cultural and environmental setting, and to preserve it by record.

The main objectives of the archaeological work 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 eco-factual 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.

The results of the evaluation provide information in order for the local planning authority to make informed recommendations and to identify an appropriate mitigation strategy for the proposed development.

## **Research Objectives**

While the nature, extent and quality of archaeological remains within the areas of investigation for the project remained unknown until archaeological work was undertaken, it was possible to determine some initial objectives derived from *East Midlands Heritage* research agenda (Cooper 2006, Knight *et al.* 2012, <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/researchframeworks/eastmidlands/wiki/>). The evaluation site lies on the periphery of the historic settlement of Blaby and therefore has the potential to

contribute to the following research themes:

- *Romano-British:*  
5.1, 5.4-5.6 (dating; rural settlement pattern; agricultural economy; artefacts).
- *Early Medieval*  
6.4, 6.7 (Rural settlement patterns, the agricultural economy and rural landscape).
- *High Medieval*  
7.2, 7.3 (Rural settlement, manors and manorial estates).
- *Post-Medieval:*  
8.2, 8.4 (Landscapes of display: country house and gardens, rural settlement patterns and building traditions).
- *Modern*  
9.1, 9.2 (Urban and rural settlements, buildings in town and countryside).

These research aims have been identified based on the current state of knowledge within the area of the scheme. The research aims were re-assessed and updated during the course of the fieldwork.

### **Methodology** (Figure 4)

Prior to any machining of the trial trenches, general photographs of the site areas were taken. Six trenches were positioned to target the planned building footprints using a Topcon Hyper SR GPS. They were excavated in level spits, where possible, using a mini 360° mechanical excavator equipped with a 1.5m wide toothless ditching bucket.

The trenches were examined for archaeological deposits or finds by hand cleaning and tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid by GPS. They were backfilled and levelled at the end of recording, with approval from the Leicestershire County Council Planning Archaeologist.

The work followed the approved WSI (ULAS 2020) and adhered to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Code of Conduct* and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (2020).

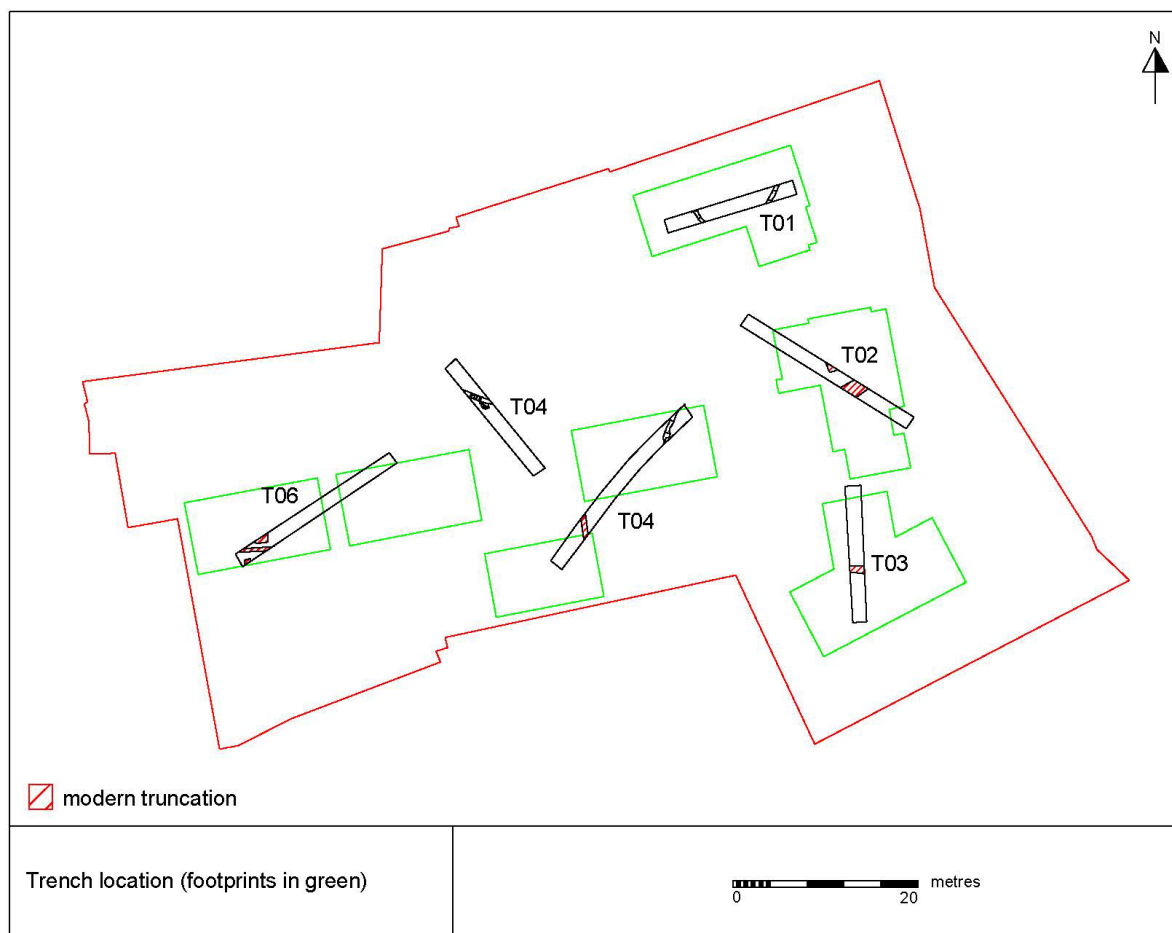


Figure 4: Trench location

## Results (Table 1)

Six trenches were excavated within the development area down to an archaeological horizon or the natural substratum; orange/brown sands and gravels and lighter yellow/brown sands.

Table 1: Trench data

TRENCH	ORIENTATION	LENGTH AND WIDTH (m)	TOPSOIL THICKNESS(m)	SUBSOIL THICKNESS(m)	ARCHAEOLOGY DESCRIPTION	TRENCH DEPTH(m)
1	E - W	14.5 x 1.5	0.11 – 0.21	0.09 – 0.21	Gullies [08] [10]	0.28 – 0.34
2	N - S	21 x 1.50	0.16 – 0.26	0.15 – 0.25	No archaeological deposits	0.30 – 0.49
3	N - S	14.5 – 1.50	0.22	0.14	No archaeological deposits	0.38 – 0.61
4	E - W	21.5 x 1.50	0.18 – 0.40	0.19 – 0.28	Gully [02]	0.50 – 0.70
5	N - S	14.50 – 1.50	0.22 – 0.35	0.20 – 0.29	Gully [04]; Pit [06]	0.59 – 0.72
6	E - W	20 x 1.50	0.15 – 0.19	0.12 – 0.24	No archaeological deposits	0.27 – 0.50

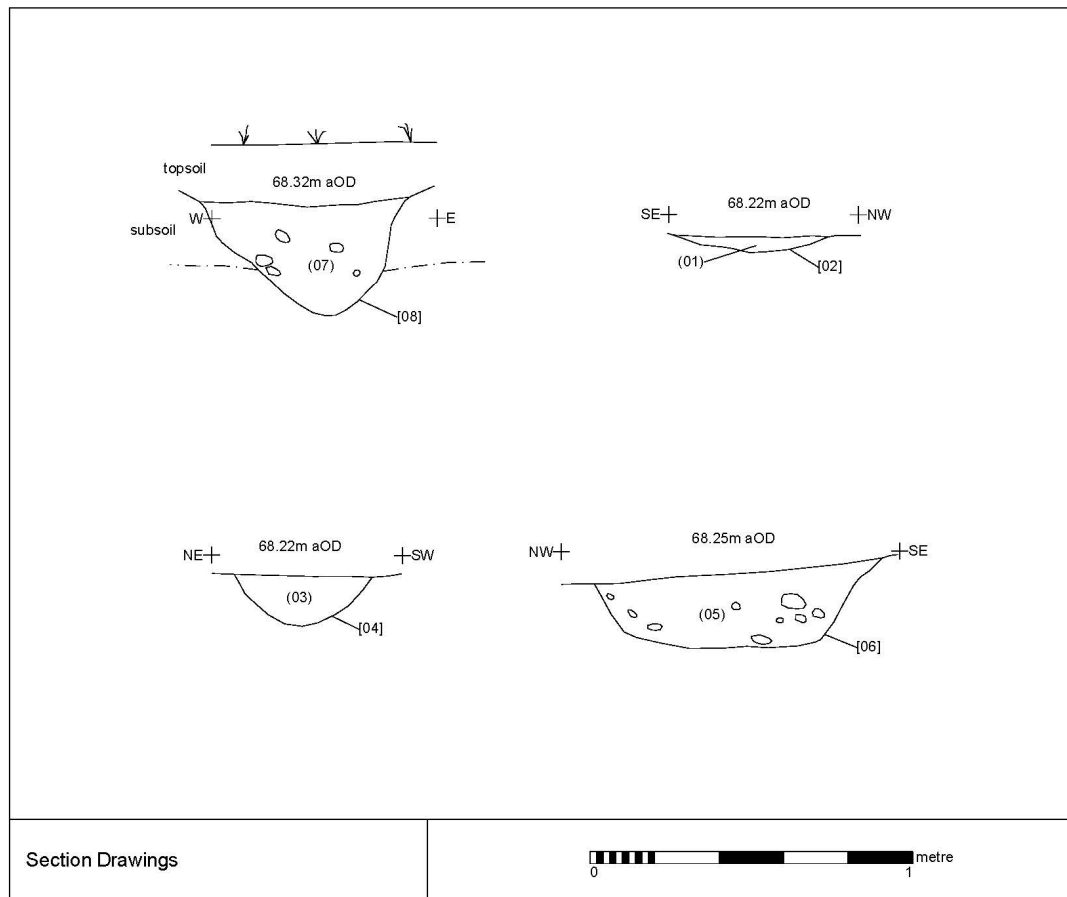


Figure 5: Section drawings

### ***Trench 1 (Figure 8) (Figure 9)***

Trench 1 was positioned to the north of the assessment area and contained a number of anomalies, two of which proved to be tangibly archaeological, albeit devoid of finds. These linear features extended outside the limit of excavation. After investigation, some of these were interpreted as representing plough scarring and disturbance from vegetation.

Gully **[08]** (Figure 5) (Figure 6), slightly curvilinear in plan, was *c.*1.5m long and *c.*0.44m wide, with a maximum depth of *c.*0.32m. It had concave sides, sloping moderately (*c.*45°) and merging with a concave base and appeared to be cut through the sub-soil. It contained a single silty sand fill **(07)**.



Figure 6: Gully [08], Trench 1, looking north



Figure 7: Gully [10], Trench 1, looking northeast

Heavily truncated gully **[10]** (Figure 5) (Figure 7) at the east end of the trench was shallow and survived to a depth of less than 0.05m, a width of *c.*0.47 and length of *c.*2.7m. The south-east edge of this feature may have been disturbed by a geological feature or tree throw although the scant level of preservation made this difficult to ascertain. Single fill **(09)**, was composed of dark grey-brown silty sand. It was not recorded by section drawing.



Figure 8: Trench 1, looking east

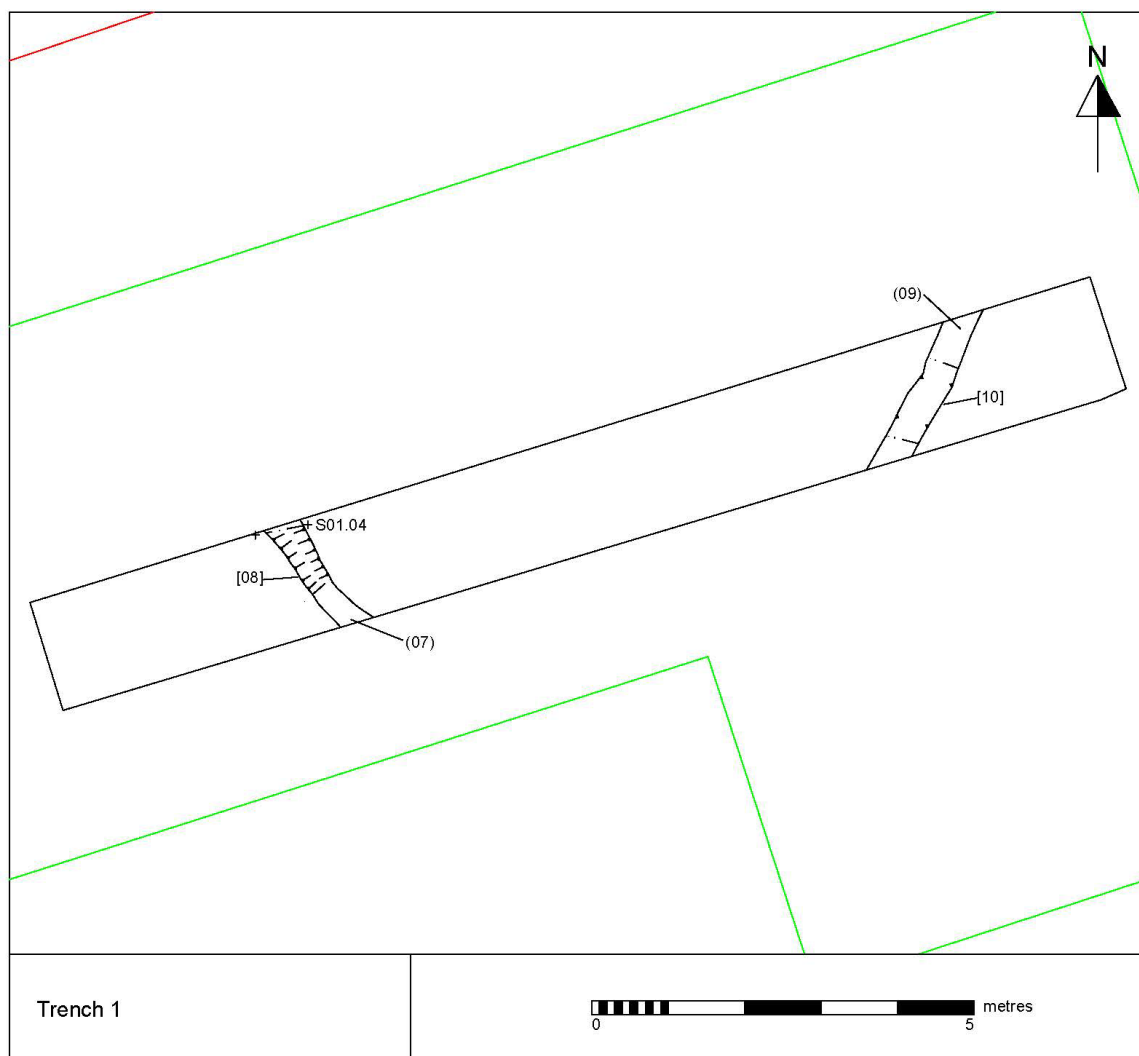


Figure 9: Trench 1 Plan

### ***Trench 2***

Trench 2 was positioned in an area subject to widespread truncation and also contained areas of deeper truncation within it, including a modern pit with timber fragments and plastic, and areas of concrete. Modern services, notably a pipe trench c.6m from the northern end of the trench, were also observed. No archaeological deposits were identified.

### ***Trench 3***

The development area surrounding Trench 3 had visibly been subject to recent disturbance and was apparently the location of a modern 'slurry pit' removed from within the former farm yard area during ground clearance. A modern brick drain also traversed the trench approximately 5m from the south end. Both sand, and sand and gravel, substratum was revealed but no deposits of archaeological significance.

### ***Trench 4 (Figure 10) (Figure 12)***

The subsoil in Trench 4 contained a wall c.5m from the west end, constructed of brick and stone and possibly representing remains of an ancillary farmyard building. The construction of this had caused some disturbance to the substratum below it. Another modern pipe trench truncated the natural sands at the west end.





Figure 10: Trench 4, looking southeast

Gully [02] (Figure 5) (Figure 11), poorly preserved and heavily truncated, survived to a nominal depth of *c.*0.05m. It had a length in excess of 4m, extending beneath the sides of the trench, and a width of *c.*0.52m. The sides and base were irregular. Roman pottery was recovered from single fill (01), a mid-dark grey-brown silty sand.



Figure 11: Gully [02], Trench 4, looking southwest

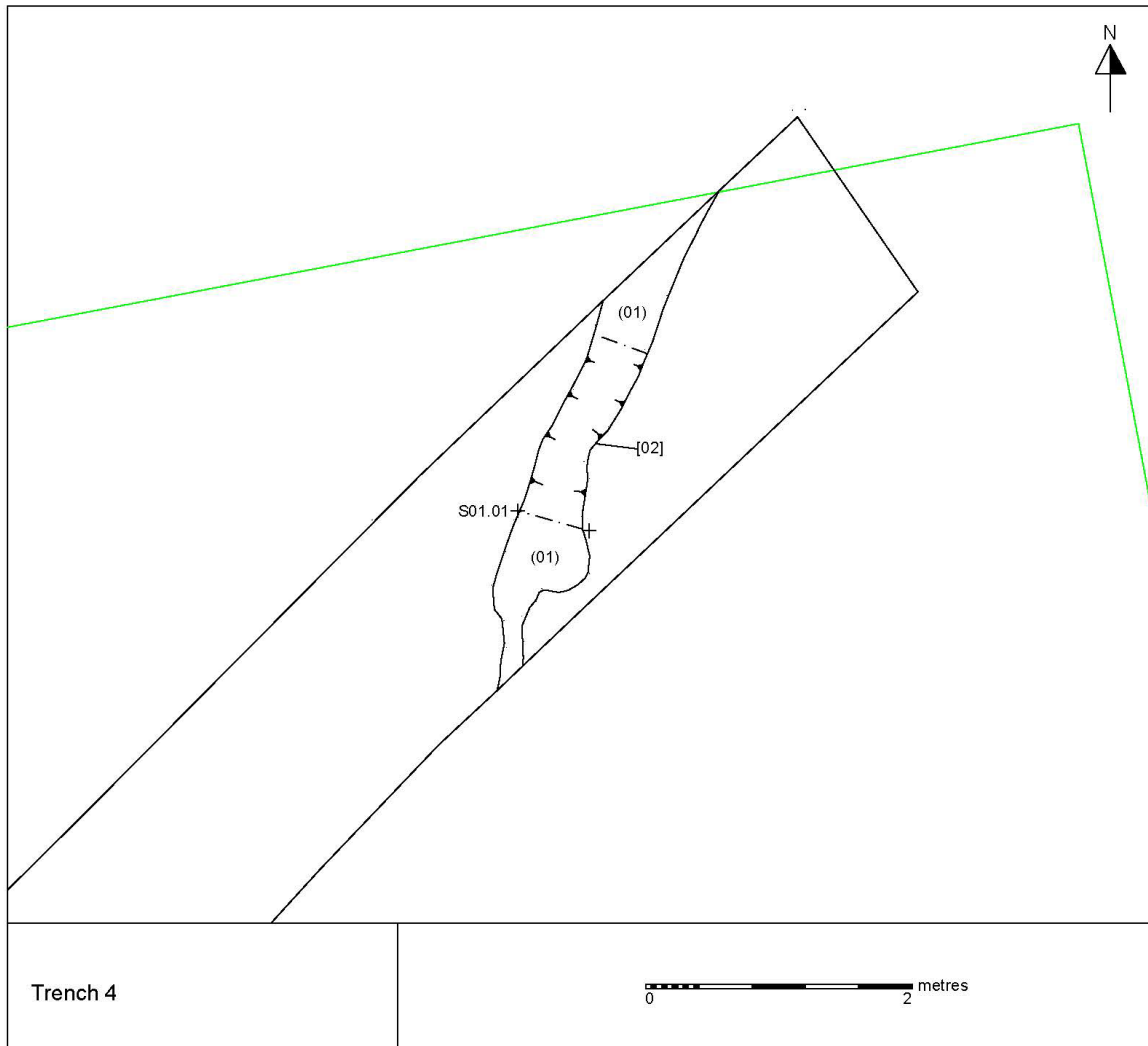


Figure 12: Trench 4 Plan

### ***Trench 5 (Figure 13) (Figure 15)***

Trench 5 was positioned near to the present day vehicle access to the assessment area and an overburden of compacted hard-core laid as an access road, extended up to c.5m from the north end. Discolorations and irregular anomalies within the substratum were investigated and deemed to be geological or modern in origin. Two features, although devoid of finds, were deemed to represent archaeological deposits and were recorded accordingly.



Figure 13: Trench 5, looking south

Gully [04] (Figure 5) (Figure 14), over 3.5m long, *c.*0.53m wide and up to *c.*0.16m deep, displayed concave sides sloping moderately (*c.*45°) and merging with a central and slightly irregular base. It contained a single silty sand fill (03).



Figure 14: Gully [04], Trench 5, looking southeast

Sub-circular, elongated pit [06] (Figure 5) (Figure 16), was *c.*0.90m wide and *c.*0.16m deep, with concave, moderately sloping sides and concave, flat base. It also contained mid-grey-

brown silty sand (05). Its relationship with Gully [04] to the north was not investigated and uncertain in plan.

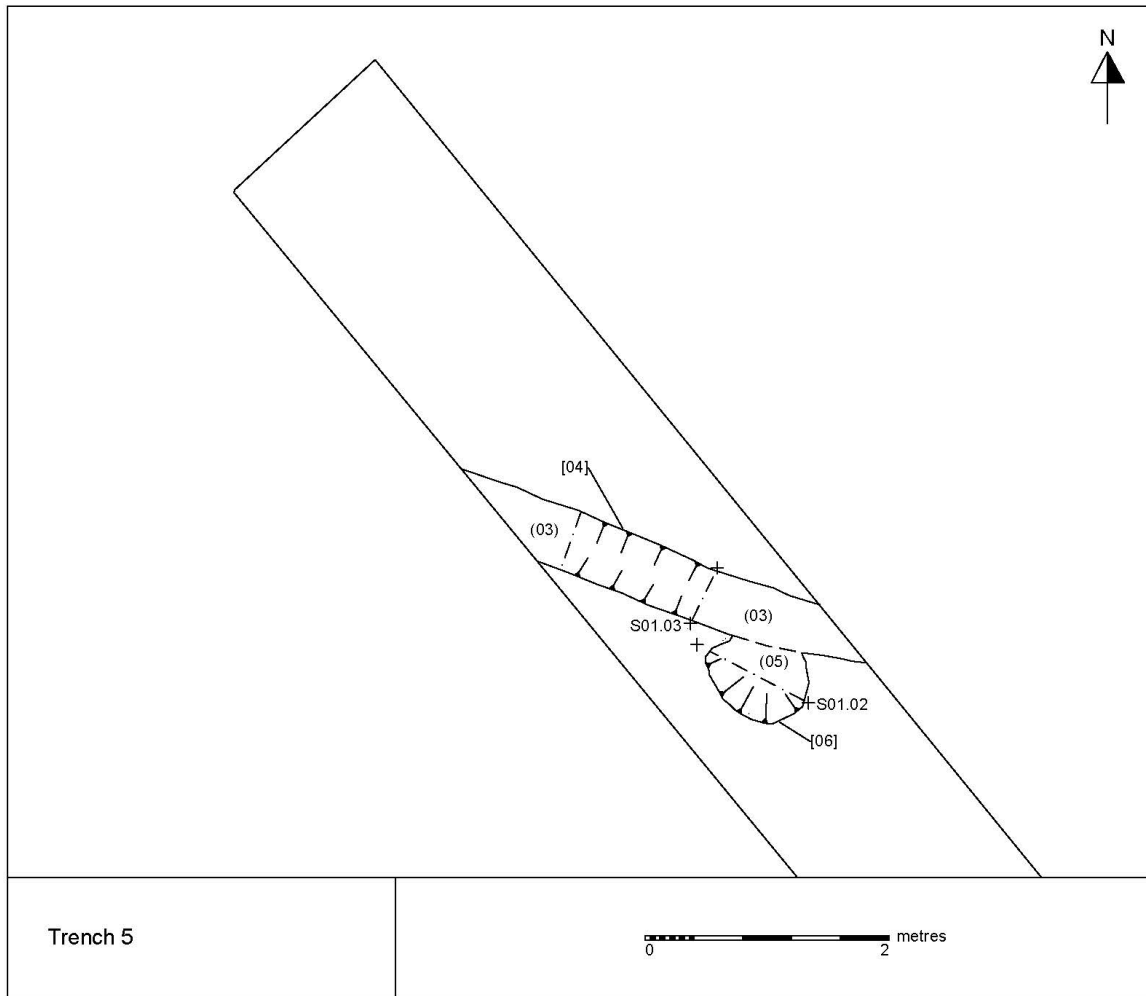


Figure 15: Trench 5 Plan



Figure 16: Pit [06], Trench 5, looking northeast

***Trench 6***

Trench 6 contained modern concrete and service truncation up to c.4m from its west end but was devoid of any deposits of archaeological interest.

## The Finds

### *Roman pottery from evaluation at Blaby Hall, Leicestershire XA49.2020 Nicholas J. Cooper*

#### Introduction

Trench 4 produced a stratified assemblage of 27 sherds of Roman pottery from context (1) [2], probably deposited during the first half of the 2nd century. The material is in good condition, with an average sherd weight of 11.5g, and includes joining sherds from a single vessel, suggesting it has been deposited relatively close to the centre of settlement activity.

#### Methodology

The pottery was analysed by form and fabric in accordance with national guidelines (Barclay *et al.* 2016), using the Leicestershire County Museums Roman pottery fabric series (Pollard 1994, 110-114) and quantified by sherd count and weight (g).

#### Analysis

A total of 27 sherds (310g) were recovered, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 Quantified record of Roman pottery

Table 2: The Roman Pottery

Context	Fabric	VesType	sherds	Weight	Dating
1	CG Samian	Dish Dr18/31	1	29	100-150
1	GW5	jar	21	183	L1st-E2nd century
1	CG1A	Storage jar	3	88	M1st-E2nd century
1	CG1A	jar	2	10	M1st-M-L2nd
<b>Total</b>			<b>27</b>	<b>310</b>	Av.Serd.Wght 11.5g

The assemblage comprises sherds from four different vessels. The most diagnostic is a central Gaulish samian dish of Form 18/31 manufactured between c. AD100-150. The other three vessels broadly support this dating, comprising 21 joining sherds from a grey ware jar with an everted rim, the rim of a shell-tempered storage jar (Fabric CG1A), and two sherds from a smaller shell-tempered ware jar in the same fabric.

The material is typical of Roman Leicestershire and its presence indicates that datable stratified deposits are present on the site, and that further field work will uncover a larger assemblage with research potential regarding the chronology of the structures therein and their wider economic and social connections.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The program of trial trenching revealed heavily truncated archaeological remains of which only a small gully [02] in Trench 4 could be confidently ascribed an early Roman date. In light of the scant return of finds and other features of similar date, it seems likely to represent past agricultural activity, possibly peripheral activity to the nearby historic settlement core. There was some suggestion of anomalies, possibly the results of ploughing. The other undated features also appear to be agricultural in nature and there was no evidence for any structural or more intensive occupational remains, although the scant remains of the linear feature, Gully [10] to the east end of Trench 1 could alternatively be interpreted as a beam slot, albeit tentatively. It was noticeable that none of the linear features identified as archaeological ran parallel to Church Street in the north of the site. All the features identified were poorly preserved and probably had been subjected to disturbance in antiquity and more recently from activity associated with the farmyard and demolished ancillary buildings within it. Drains, service trenches, pits with modern inclusions and the remains of a concrete and brick slurry pit were all identified during the work.

## Archive and publication

The archive for this project will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums with accession number XA49.2020 and consists of the following:

- 1 unbound copy of this report (ULAS Report No. 2020-087)
- 1 context index sheet
- 10 context sheets
- 6 trench recording sheets
- 1 drawing index sheet
- 1 A3 permatrace drawing sheet
- 1 photo index sheet
- 2 contact sheets of digital photographs
- 1 CD containing a copy of this report and the digital photographs
- 1 finds checklist with all finds (Roman pottery).

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 thank Sowden Group for their help and co-operation with the project. Stephen Baker carried out the fieldwork for ULAS and the project was managed by John Thomas. The project was monitored by Sophie Clarke, Planning Archaeologist for Leicestershire County Council.

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