

**An Archaeological Evaluation at
Land south of London Road,
Markfield,
Leicestershire.**

NGR: SK 48918 09389

Donald Clark



Site Name: Land south of London Road, Markfield, Leicestershire.

Grid Ref: SK 48918 09389

Author: Donald Clark

Client: Avison Young (c/o Jelson)

Planning Ref. 20/01283/FUL

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An Archaeological Evaluation at Land south of London Road, Markfield, Leicestershire

Donald Clark

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services on land south of London Road, Markfield, Leicestershire (NGR: SK 48918 09389), prior to groundworks associated with proposed housing development.

Fifty-three evaluation trenches were excavated across the site, with two containing archaeological features. Trench 7 contained an undated quarry pit, likely to be post-medieval and Trench 52 contained a circular pit which contained Roman pottery.

The archive for the work will be deposited with Leicestershire Museum Service under accession number X.A3.2021.

Introduction

In accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Section 16 *Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment* this document forms the report for an archaeological evaluation carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services at Land south of London Road, Markfield, Leicestershire (NGR: SK 48918 09389).

The fieldwork was carried out to support a planning application for a housing development (Planning ref. 20/01283/FUL) as part of a staged programme of archaeological work as requested by the Leicestershire County Council Planning Archaeologist as advisor to Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council. The evaluation was intended to determine the impact of the proposed scheme on any buried archaeology and provide a mitigation strategy for the site.

Planning permission is being sought for residential development, consisting of housing, roads, and drainage (Fig. 2). The Leicestershire and Rutland Historic Environment Record (HER) notes that within the application area there is ridge and furrow earthworks and that there is potential for prehistoric remains.



Site Location, Geology and Topography

Markfield lies in the Hinckley and Bosworth Borough of Leicestershire around 10 kilometres west of Leicester city centre (Fig.1). The site is situated south of London Road at the southern edge of Markfield and to the east and north of Vine Cottage. The proposed application site extends to approximately 18.3 hectares. Land topography overall is undulating at an average height of 160m aOD, with the eastern and central parts of the site falling towards the stream that runs broadly north-east to south-west across the site, whereas the western part of the site falls gently to the west.

The British Geological Survey of England and Wales indicates that the underlying geology is likely to be Edwalton Member Mudstone overlain by Oadby Member Diamicton. The soil is slightly acidic clayey loam according to the UK Soil Observatory.



Figure 2: Masterplan of the development area within Markfield, Leicestershire. (Plan supplied by client)

Historical and Archaeological Background

A desk-based assessment was undertaken for the site in December 2019 and the following is summarised from, that (Evern & Hunt 2020).

Markfield is Anglo-Saxon in origin and appears in the Domesday Book as ‘Merchenefeld’. The place-name is from the Old English for ‘open land of the Mercians’. Prior to the Norman Conquest the land at Markfield was owned by an Anglo-Saxon called Ulf. After the Conquest, the land was given to Hugh de Grentmesnil, a Norman general at the Battle of Hastings and afterwards a great landowner in Leicestershire. The Domesday Book records that the land at Markfield was worth ten shillings under de Grentmesnil. By 1270 the land belonged to Roger de Quincy and on his death passed to his daughters and was therefore divided into the hands of the de Holland, Beaumont and the de Seagrave families, although by the 15th century the Beaumonts had been stripped of their land due to treason. The village developed as a small hillside settlement along Main Street and around the Parish Church. Originally agricultural in nature, it gradually changed and extended with the growth of industrial employment in the 19th century including framework knitting, quarrying and mining. Many of the village farms were sold during the 20th century, encouraging residential development particularly to the south and east.

The Historic Environment Record (HER) for Leicestershire records several known archaeological sites in the vicinity of the assessment area.

Prehistoric

There are no known archaeological sites of a prehistoric date in the vicinity of the proposed development area.

Roman

There are two sites of Romano-British date nearby; there is a Roman slate and granite quarry that lies around 500m east of the site (**MLE8338**). Fieldwalking on the western side of the motorway, 550m south-west of the assessment area, found a scatter of Roman pottery and kiln bars suggesting Roman occupation and industry in this area (**MLE2945**). The line of a possible Roman road, running roughly north-west to south-east may be represented by Coalville High Street, Hotel Street, London Road and Ashby Road. This lies 700m south-west of the assessment area (**MLE9876**).

Anglo-Saxon

A single sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery was found by fieldwalking west of the motorway, 300m to the west of the assessment area (**MLE6184**).

Medieval

The medieval core of the village of Markfield lies around 200m south of the village core. The Grade II* 12th century Church of St. Michael lies in the town centre (**MLE11696**) within the Conservation Area, 480m north of the assessment area. The medieval deer park of Groby Park, lies to the east of the site (**MLE2779**). Within the park lies a stone quarry said to be used to build Kirby Muxloe castle. It was disused after 1484, although Roman tile found there may suggest its use in earlier periods (**MLE9513**). The deserted medieval village of Whittington lies around 800m south of the assessment area. There is documentary evidence for the village, plus place-names that remain in the area, although there is no archaeological evidence (**MLE3099**).

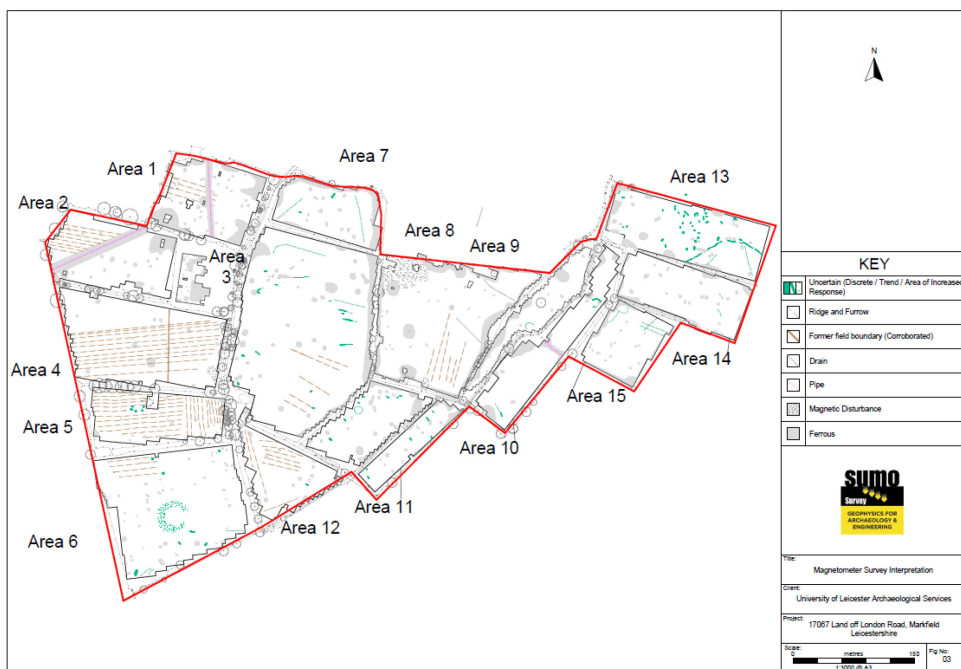
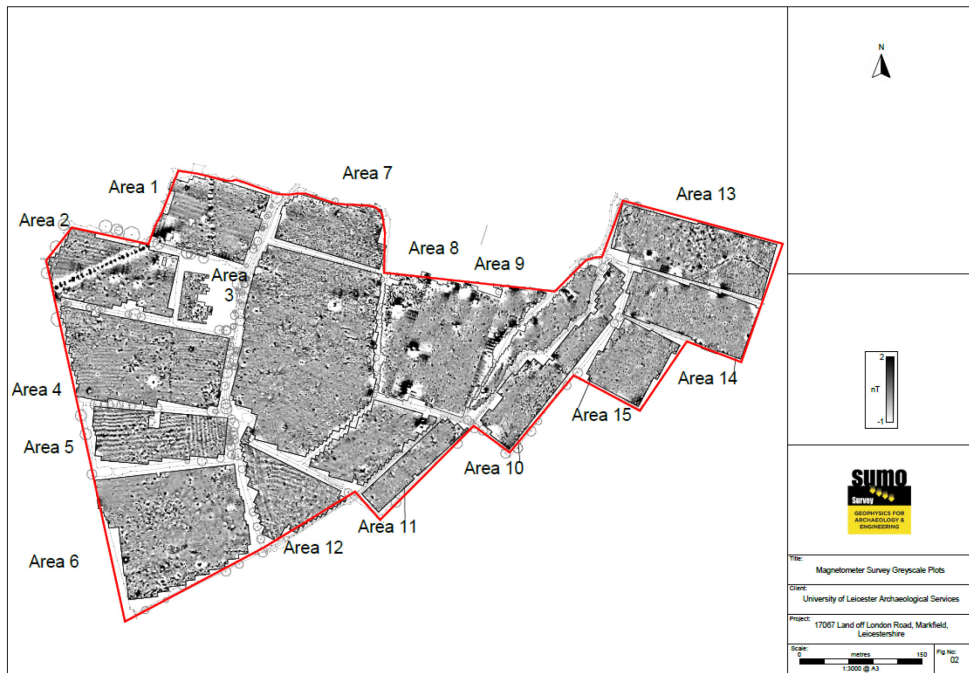
Post-medieval – modern

The turnpike road from Leicester to Ashby-de-la-Zouch runs along the approximate line of Leicester Road (**MLE20653**). To the west of the town is Markfield Stone Quarry (**MLE21633**). All of the other listed sites in the vicinity refer to post-medieval buildings (see below). Several groups of ridge and furrow earthworks are known to lie within the Site, mainly east to west or north-west to south-east, with a small group at the south-western end running north to south. The geophysical survey suggests traces of ridge and furrow earthworks may survive better in the western fields, where pastureland predominates and there are faint traces of earthworks still visible in these areas. The earliest map of 1849 shows most of the eastern part of the site as a large unenclosed field with very little development in the area. The western side is shown as part of three enclosed fields, with the still present footpath running from London Road to the south shown as a narrow strip. The first edition Ordnance Survey (OS) map of 1884 shows Lower Grange Farm, with the open area shown previously now sub-divided into separate enclosed fields. The fields are bounded by hedgerows and a number of trees both on the line of the hedge as well as scattered to the south and south-east of Lower Grange Farm. Both the public footpaths and the stream are shown, along with Vine Cottage. The OS maps of 1903 and the 1929 show relatively little change across the area. The OS map from 1958 shows development to the north of the site along London Road with the insertion of Birchfield Avenue. There is also a small sewage works to the west. The 1967 map shows more development to the north (Croft Way).

Geophysical Survey

A Geophysical Survey was undertaken for the project in February 2020 across a larger area than the trial trenching (Sumo 2020). No anomalies of archaeological potential were detected during this survey, though several uncertain anomalies were identified.

Some anomalies and a segmented linear response were recorded in the north-east of the site (Area 13); whilst the origin of these cannot be firmly interpreted, they were thought to be modern or natural. Ridge and furrow ploughing is present throughout the survey area, particularly in the western areas, as well as a former field boundary. A number of service pipes were also mapped (Fig. 3).



Aims and Objectives

The main objectives of the archaeological work were:

- To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.
- To establish the character, extent, 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.

The results of the evaluation will 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

The presence of prehistoric features in the area suggests a potential for further features of this date. There is also potential for further information on the origins of the farm complex. It is therefore possible to determine some initial objectives derived from *The Archaeology of the West Midlands: A Framework for Research* (2011).

Roman (Cleary 2011)

Although there are few findspots or sites in the area, the nearby Roman Road suggests some activity in this area from the Roman period and there could be activity associated with the road.

Medieval (Hooke 2011)

The area lies within a medieval agricultural landscape and may contribute to the study of rural medieval settlement and early field systems.

Post-Medieval – Industrial (Belford 2011)

A post-medieval trackway was discovered to the south-east and there may be remains associated with post-medieval agriculture.

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

Methodology

The work followed the methodological statement set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for the project (ULAS 2020).

All work was carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations (2014) and adhere to their Code

of Conduct (2019). The Site Accession Number (X.A3.2021) was used to identify all records and artefacts.

The fieldwork was carried out between the 11th and 22nd January 2021.

The project involved the excavation of fifty-three trenches across the development area using two 360 excavators with ditching buckets.

On arrival at the site the position of the trenches were marked out across the area to be affected by the proposed scheme. In general, all trench positions adhered to the proposed trench plan (Fig. 4) with the exception of Trenches 13, 35, 46 49, 51 and 52, which were moved slightly to accommodate either existing trees or boundaries.

Following the identification of a possible Roman pit in the final trench (Trench 52), this trench was extended and an extra trench (Trench 53) was added in an attempt to find the extents of the archaeology in this area (Fig. 7).

All of the trenches measured approximately 30m x 2m, apart from additional Trench 53 which was 15m x 2m long (Fig. 7).

Monitoring

The Leicestershire Planning Archaeologist visited the site mid-way through the trenching. A number of negative trenches were looked at as well as Trench 7. Following the visit, trenches were backfilled once they had been recorded.

The Planning Archaeologist was also notified of the discovery of the Roman pit in Trench 52, and agreed the strategy of a further trench to ascertain whether other associated features were present.

Results

The topsoil across the site comprised a dark grey-brown silty-sand, overlying a mixture of silty clay colluvium and alluvium. A number of land drains - stone, ceramic and plastic, were observed across the site and these may have contributed to some of the anomalies picked up by the geophysical survey. A number of furrows were also identified consistent with the geophysical survey.

The natural sub-stratum was a mix of pink and yellow clay, and this was consistent across the site (Figs 5 and 6).

Archaeological features were noted within Trenches 7 and 52.

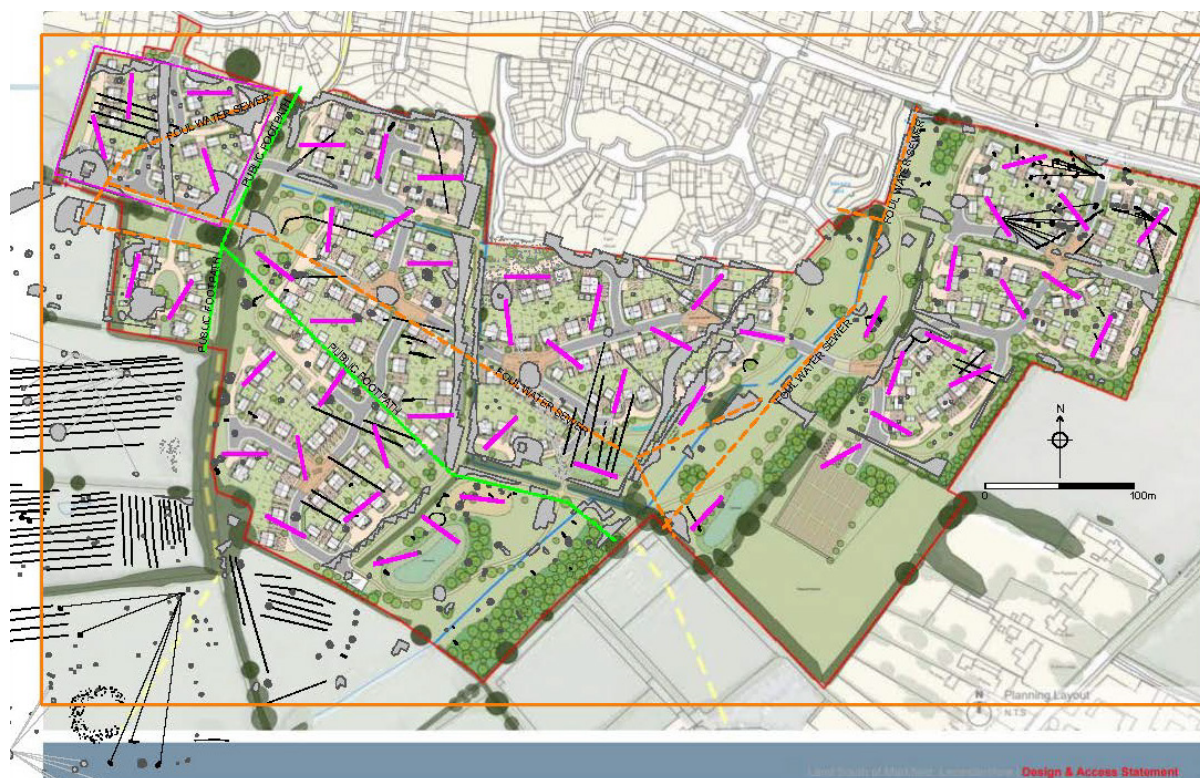


Figure 4: Proposed trench positions, overlain on the geophysical survey and masterplan (from WSI, ULAS 2020)





Figure 7: Actual trench positions overlain on geophysical survey with Trenches 7 and 52 highlighted

Table 1: Trench depths and descriptions

Trench	Orientation	Height (aOD)	Min. Depth	Max. Depth	Comments
1	NE-SW	168.70m	0.30m	0.38m	Modern linear and field drain
2	NW-SE	164.20m	0.35m	0.56m	Plastic and stone field drains
3	NE-SW	162.50m	0.48m	0.59m	Blank trench
4	NW-SE	160.40m	0.56m	0.80m	Stone field drain
5	N-S	158.60m	0.71m	1.36m	Blank trench
6	NW-SE	162.60m	0.69m	1.14m	Modern land drain
7	WNW-ESE	164.70m	0.54m	0.89m	Undated quarry pit – see below
8	N-S	167.60m	0.26m	0.60m	Blank trench
9	NE-SW	161.80m	0.78m	1.0m	Blank trench
10	WNW-ESE	160.00m	0.86m	0.94m	Blank trench
11	NNE-SSW	157.90m	0.44m	1.10m	Stone field drain
12	ENE-WSW	161.20m	0.40m	0.82m	Blank trench
13	NE-SW	159.90m	0.40m	0.52m	Stone field drains
14	NE-SW	156.80m	0.86m	1.20m	Modern field drain
15	NE-SW	154.90m	1.0m	1.04m	Blank trench
16	E-W	155.70m	0.82m	0.98m	Blank trench
17	NNE-SSW	154.90m	0.76m	0.94m	Blank trench
18	NE-SW	157.20m	0.73m	0.99m	Stone field drain
19	NW-SE	156.10m	0.69m	1.04m	Blank trench
20	N-S	156.30m	0.62m	0.74m	Blank trench
21	E-W	153.10m	0.62m	0.80m	Blank trench
22	NW-SE	156.20m	0.58m	0.84m	Stone field drain
23	NNE-SSW	158.50m	0.62m	0.98m	Blank trench
24	E-W	158.10m	0.60m	0.81m	Blank trench
25	N-S	156.80m	0.62m	1.01m	Blank trench
26	NE-SW	154.50m	0.48m	0.95m	Blank trench
27	ENE-WSW	152.00m	0.52m	0.68m	Blank trench
28	NW-SE	151.80m	0.90m	1.02m	Blank trench
29	E-W	152.50m	0.55m	1.20m	Blank trench
30	E-W	158.50m	0.58m	0.85m	Blank trench
31	N-S	160.80m	0.36m	0.81m	Blank trench
32	E-W	161.60m	0.32m	0.56m	Furrow
33	E-W	157.20m	0.39m	1.19m	Blank trench
34	E-W	154.10m	1.01m	1.22m	Blank trench
35	E-W	158.20m	0.29m	0.80m	Ceramic field drain
36	N-S	160.90m	0.33m	0.56m	Stone field drain and furrow
37	E-W	158.50m	0.41m	0.57m	Blank trench
38	NE-SW	157.80m	0.47m	1.0m	Furrows
39	N-S	155.40m	0.30m	0.51m	Stone field drain and furrows
40	NE-SW	153.70m	0.42m	0.54m	Blank trench
41	NE-SW	160.40m	0.48m	0.52m	Furrows
42	NE-SW	159.30m	0.52m	0.80m	Furrow
43	NW-SE	156.90m	0.52m	0.76m	Blank trench
44	E-W	156.50m	0.60m	0.74m	Blank trench
45	WNW-ESE	153.40m	0.48m	0.80m	Blank trench
46	E-W	155.50m	0.54m	1.12m	Field drain
47	E-W	163.50m	0.28m	0.70m	Blank trench
48	N-S	160.80m	0.35m	0.72m	Furrows
49	NE-SW	161.90m	0.26m	0.60m	Drains and manhole
50	NW-SE	162.10m	0.37m	0.49m	Furrow
51	NNE-SSW	160.30m	0.64m	0.70m	Ceramic field drain, modern landscaping
52	NE-SW	160.20m	0.40m	0.86m	Pit with roman pottery – see below
53	N-S	159.80m	0.26m	0.49m	Blank trench



Figure 8: Trench 49 showing natural substrata truncated by a modern drain, looking east

Trench 7

The excavation of Trench 7 revealed what appears to be a post-medieval marl pit. It was partially revealed within the trench and then further excavated by machine, although the full extent was not revealed. It was 3.43m wide and 0.87m deep with steep sloping sides and a reasonably flat base (Figs 9 – 11). The fill (2) consisted of mid grey-brown silty-clay with occasional angular and rounded stones. No dating evidence was recovered from the pit, but it seems likely that it is post-medieval in date.

The pit was not identified in the geophysical survey, however it lay at some depth (approximately 0.8m below the surface).

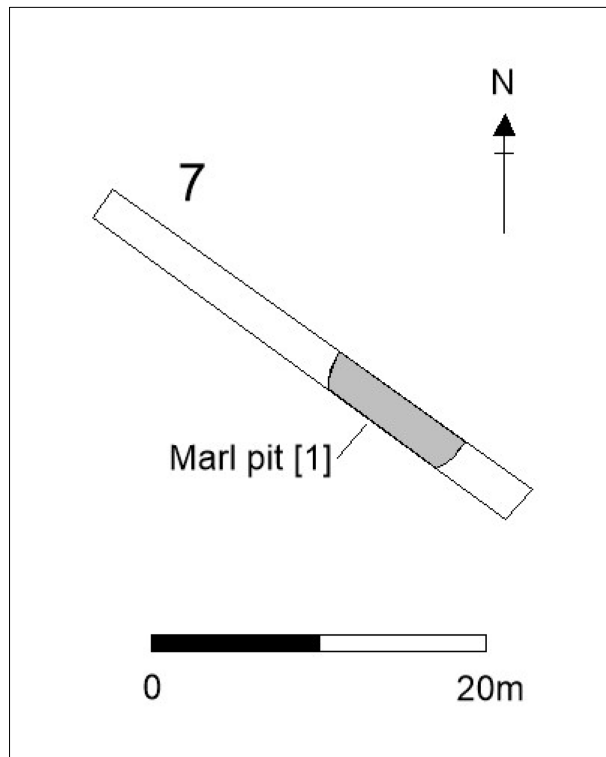


Figure 9: Trench 7 - Location of marl pit [1]

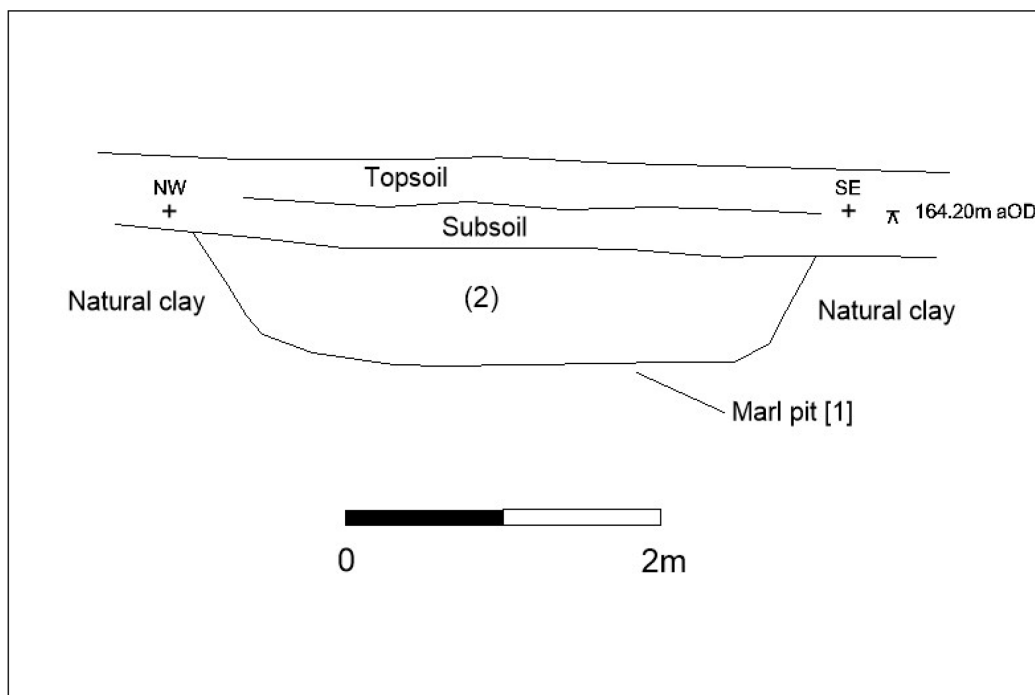


Figure 10: Trench 7 - Section through marl pit [1]



Figure 11: Marl pit [1] in trench 7, looking north-east

Marl is a soft concentration of secondary calcium carbonate found along the contour lines of the slopes left by the retreating ice. It had been known since the Roman period that spreading clay over sandy soils enriched the soil and improved its water holding capacity. This practice is known as “marling”. Marl is commonly found at depths of 1 to 2 metres and had to be dug out of the ground creating large areas known as marl pits. Several similar features identified as marl pits were uncovered 8km east during excavations at Ashton Green, Leicester (LaCombe forthcoming). Stimulated by the increase in food prices for food crops in the 1790’s many marl pits were dug to help improve the soil but by the mid-nineteenth century the practice of ‘marling’ was dying out. Even though marl was available and free it needed a great deal of labour for excavation, haulage and spreading over the fields.

Trench 52

The excavation of Trench 52 revealed a circular pit [3] measuring 1.26m in diameter and 0.39m in depth. The sides of the pit were steeply sloping, and the base was slightly concave (Figs 12-14). The fill (4) was a mid brownish-grey silty-clay containing several large stones. After recording the pit was fully excavated (Fig. 15) and pottery recovered from the fill has been dated to between the 2nd and 4th century and is detailed below.

The trench was extended either side in case any associated features were present but no other features were identified. Trench 53 was also excavated 5m to the west of Trench 52, but no other archaeological features were identified.

Trench 52 was located in the garden south of Vine Cottage and only a small portion of this area was surveyed due to the large number of trees and shrubs present (Fig. 3, Area 3).

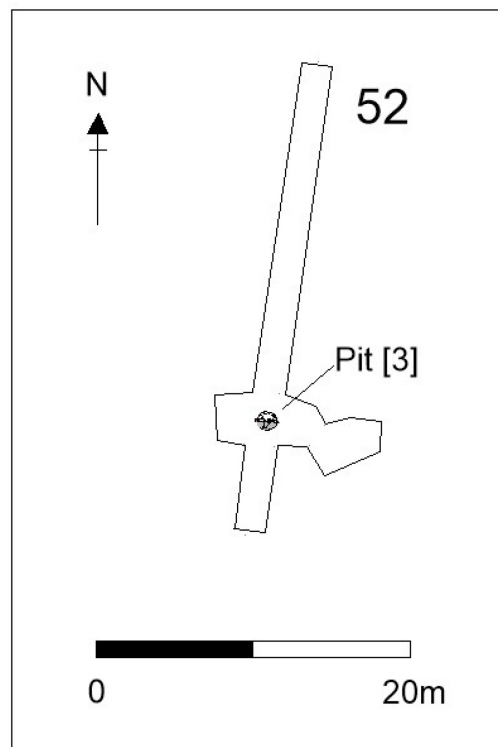


Figure 12: Trench 52, Location of pit [3]

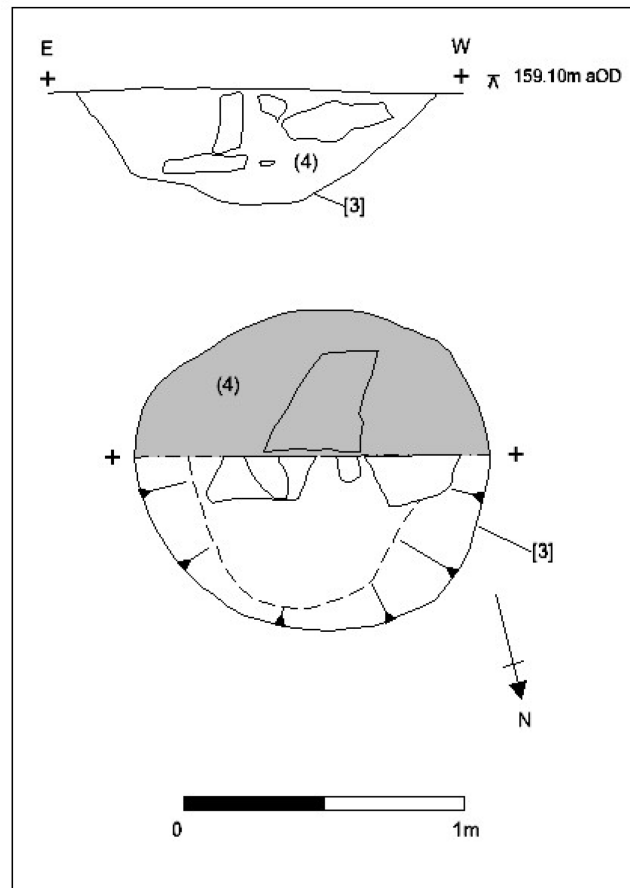


Figure 13: Trench 52, detail of pit [3]



Figure 14: Half excavated pit [3] in trench 52, looking south



Figure 15: Fully excavated pit [3] in trench 52, looking south

The Roman pottery *Nicholas J. Cooper*

Introduction

Three sherds were recovered from Pit [3] (4) with another was unstratified from nearby. The material is in fair to poor condition, with signs of abrasion, on the unstratified sherd.

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 four sherds (59g) were recovered, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: Quantified record of Roman pottery

Context	Fabric	VesType	sherds	Weight	Dating
[3] (4)	MO4	Mortarium	2	50	L3rd-Early 4th cent
[3] (4)	OW2	misc	1	6	2nd-4th century
U/S	GW5	jar	1	3	2nd-4th century
Total			4	59	

Pit [3] (4) contained two sherds from a reeded rim hammerhead mortarium from the Mancetter-Harthill potteries (Fabric MO4) dating to the later 3rd or early 4th century, accompanied by a less diagnostic sherd in an oxidised ware (Fabric OW2). The abraded rim of a grey ware jar (Fabric GW5) was found unstratified and again indicates a broad Roman date for activity.

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

Discussion and Conclusion

Trenches were spaced evenly across the site to allow the best opportunity to reveal hidden archaeological features. Only two of the fifty-three trenches revealed any archaeology and in general this confirms the results of the geophysical survey which identified only agricultural features and anomalies of uncertain origin. The uncertain features in the north-east area were not picked up in Trenches 1-4 and these are likely to be natural in origin.

The marl pit in Trench 7 is undated, but likely to be post-medieval in date. Although the 2nd to 4th century pottery from the pit in Trench 52, suggests some Roman activity nearby, it appears to be an isolated feature. It does however, add to the sparse amount of known Roman activity in the area.

Archive and Publication

The archive for the project will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums with accession number X.A3.2021 and consists of the following:

- 1 unbound copy of this report (2021-020)
- 1 unbound copy of the WSI
- 1 context index sheet
- 4 context sheets
- 54 trench recording sheets
- 3 photographic index sheets
- 5 colour photo contact sheets
- 1 sample index sheet
- 1 finds checklist (boxed with appropriate 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.

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