



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

Archaeological Services

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at
59 Friar Lane, Leicester**

NGR: SK 58457 04246

Isobel Moss



**ULAS Report No 2022-039
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Grid Ref: SK 58457 04246

Author: Isobel Moss

Client: East Bond Ltd

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An archaeological watching brief at 59 Friar Lane, Leicester.

Summary

This report details the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) in the grounds of 59 Friar Lane, Leicester. The work was undertaken between 8th February – 3rd March on behalf of East Bond Ltd to mitigate the impacts of the installation of new services for the residential development at 59 Friar Lane.

An area, approximately 3.58m by 5.92m was stripped down 1.44m to mitigate the impact of service work. A small quantity of human bone representing two 19th century individuals and other charnel was recovered along with associated coffin furniture. This area was heavily truncated and disturbed by modern service trenches. The archive will be deposited under the accession number A4.2022.

Introduction

In accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Section 16 Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment, (MHCLG 2021) this document forms the report for an archaeological watching brief at 59 Friar Lane, Leicester. The work was carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on behalf of East Bond Ltd.

Planning Permission has been granted for the installation of new services for the new residential development at 59 Friar Lane, Leicester and during the installation of these new services, below the modern street, workmen uncovered human remains. An archaeologist from ULAS confirmed the remains, initial indications suggested these were of ‘antiquity’ and the Planning Archaeologist for Leicester City Council therefore requested attendance for inspection and recording (a watching brief) during any groundworks for the proposed development in order to record any archaeological remains that may be present and mitigate the impacts of the scheme.

Location, Topography & Geology

Friar Lane is located within the city of Leicester and the site lies on the north side of Friar Lane, under the public footpath, to the front of no.59 (SK 58457 04246), currently containing a new residential development. Directly to the north and west is a large recent student accommodation building. To the east are small buildings. The development area is approximately 2m² in size.

The British Geological Survey identifies the geology of the area as likely to consist of bedrock deposits of late Triassic mudstone of the Branscombe Mudstone Formation overlain by superficial deposits of Devensian Age sand and gravel of the Wanlip Member. The site was broadly flat, at c.64m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

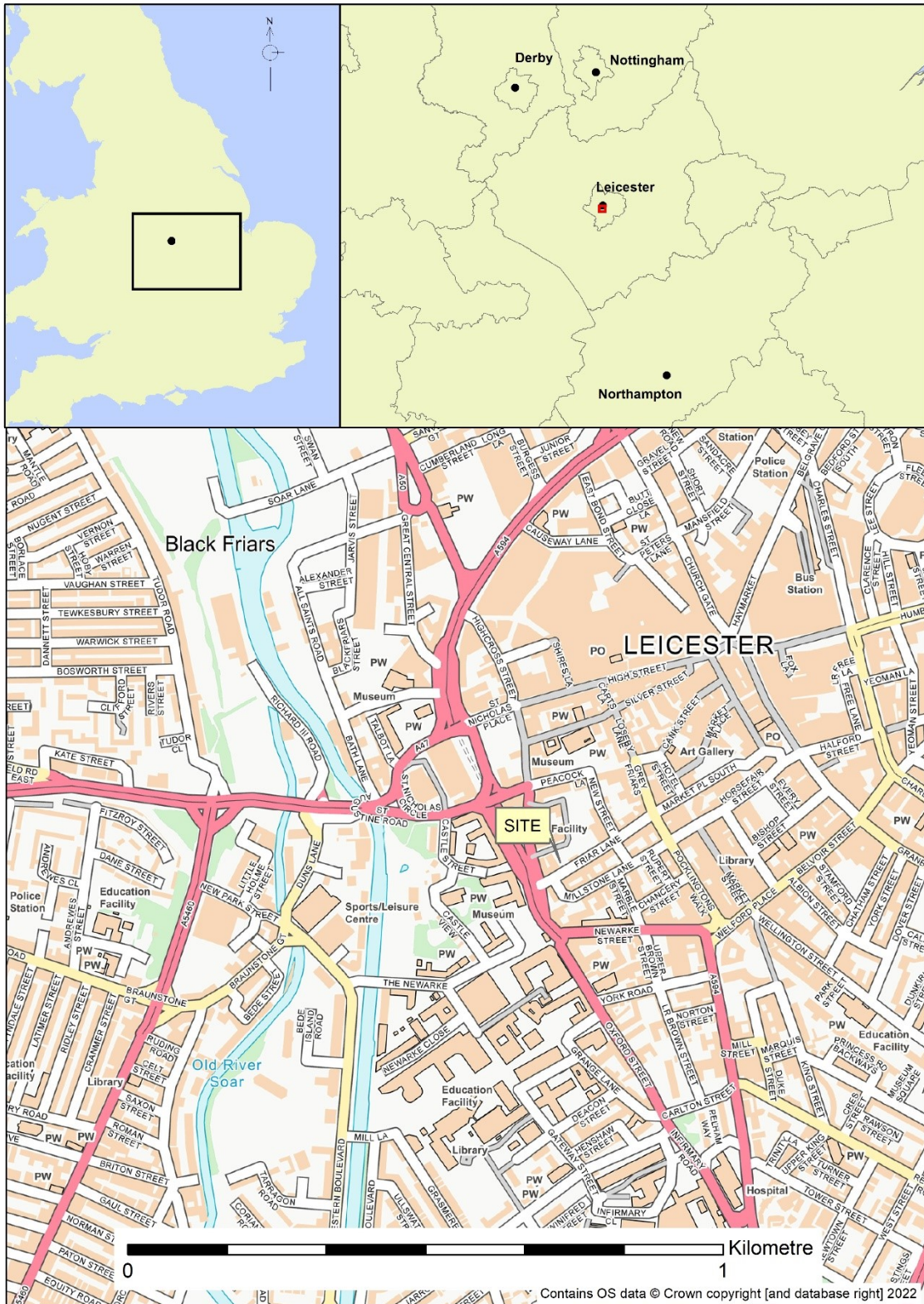


Figure 1: Site location within UK, county of Leicestershire, and city of Leicester.

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Historical and Archaeological Background

The site lies on the north side of Friar Lane, close to Southgates Street to the west, one of the main thoroughfares of Roman and medieval Leicester. No designated heritage assets (World Heritage Sites, Scheduled Monuments or Listed Buildings) are located within the site boundary. The site lies just within the walls of Roman and medieval Leicester (the town defences ran E-W along the southern edge of Friar Lane). The Site lies just outside of the precinct of the Grey Friars to the east.

Leicester has seen a vast amount of archaeological work over recent years. Significant sites include, to the north, the large excavations at the former Maxim and Stibbe Buildings. An open-area excavation was undertaken in 2016-2017 (following trial trenching in 2001). The excavations revealed some of the most important archaeological remains discovered in this part of the city in recent years including large portions of Roman streets, town houses and other buildings, including walls and highly decorated mosaics, which were lifted and preserved. Medieval activity was also recorded, including evidence for medieval properties fronting on to what is now Highcross Street (Speed 2019). Elsewhere, excavations of the former All Saints' Brewery site in 2016/17 recorded significant survival of Roman archaeology across the site, including parts of a street, stone and timber buildings, a mosaic pavement, pits and yard surfaces. Medieval archaeology survived to a lesser extent, predominantly in the form of pits and garden soils but close to the Highcross Street frontage was a considerable depth of medieval and post-medieval archaeology including stone boundary walls, a stone cellar and a potential medieval building (Morris forthcoming). Also, to the north-east, excavations for the Highcross Retail Quarter: Vine Street, Vaughan Way and Freeschool Lane and excavations on Blue Boar Lane and Highcross Street (Buckley et al 2021). To the north-west of the assessment area is the Jewry Wall site. Seminal excavations here by Dame Kathleen Kenyon in the late 1930s recorded an extensive, very well-preserved Roman public bathing complex (Kenyon 1948). To the west, numerous excavations have taken place in the Bath Lane area since the 1950s (Clay & Mellor 1985), the most recent being excavations by ULAS on the former Merlin Works site and at Westbridge Wharf; and excavations on Bath Lane and Blackfriars Lane by Birmingham Archaeology (Paul & Mann 2010). From 2017-2019 a series of further archaeological excavations were undertaken by ULAS (and Wardell Armstrong on Alexander St). These have all recorded significant Iron Age, Roman and medieval archaeology.

The 1st edition Ordnance Survey 1:500 town plan of 1887 shows that the western half of the Site was formerly occupied by a General Baptist Chapel (shown in more detail on the 1892 Goad insurance plan). This was built in 1866 and contained enough seating for 1000 people and replaced an earlier meeting house built in 1719. An associated Sunday School, built in 1796, lay to the west beyond the Site (McKinley 1958). By the 1940's the decreasing city centre population led to the chapel's closure, and it was moved to Braunstone in 1962. The Friar Lane Baptist Church was demolished before 1969 and replaced by an office block and car park.

There have been archaeological investigations in the immediate vicinity, most significantly at the former Bus Depot immediately to the north in 2011 (A6.2011, Meckseper 2011) and in 2015 by ULAS. The latter revealed significant Roman and medieval deposits. The Southgates excavation located a Roman street that was projected to run southwards, and directly through the middle of this Site. The closest trench to the Site lay *c.* 10m to the west. Most of the trench was truncated by 19th-century cellars and more modern disturbances to a depth of 3m below ground level (Trench 5, Meckseper 2011, 17-18). Post-medieval garden soils were up to 1m deep, below which were intercutting medieval pits. Roman deposits were located at around 2.5m below the ground surface at *c.* 61.10m OD. A sondage in the bottom of the trench indicated that Roman deposits were a minimum of *c.* 0.5m in thickness.

Previous Archaeological Work

At 59 Friar Lane, in 2017, CFA Archaeology Ltd undertook an archaeological watching brief of a new soakaway in the car park covering the eastern half of the development area (A6.2017, Mann 2017). Walls and cellaring relating to 19th-century shops and houses to the east of the Friar Lane Baptist Chapel were noted as well as thick deposits of post-medieval garden soil. The trench was dug to a depth of 1.9m (62.1m OD) below ground level and did not reach Roman or medieval archaeology or the natural substrate.

In September 2020, ULAS undertook a trial trench evaluation in the west half of the site, below the basement floor. The work recorded a remarkably well-preserved sequence of early Roman street-front activity, with more limited evidence of mid-Roman activity. Whilst elsewhere in the trench large areas of modern disturbance beneath the basement floor had truncated into the natural substrate destroying all stratified deposits (Morris 2020).

In winter 2020-1, ULAS undertook a mitigation excavation. The excavation revealed significantly truncated Roman and medieval archaeology. This included the remains of road gravels from a Roman street with evidence for intermittent roadside ditches or robber walls, and a building fronting onto it from the east. Represented by the remains of floors, construction deposits and occupation layers, with possible robber trenches, these generally dated to the later 1st – early 2nd century AD and survived over a larger area beneath medieval garden soils to the south-east. A substantial cut feature, interpreted as a well, post-dated these remains and yielded an impressive assemblage of ceramics dated to the late 2nd to early 3rd century AD (Baker 2021). During these excavations there was no evidence remaining for the Baptist Chapel which occupied the site more recently.

Objectives

The main objectives of the archaeological work were defined as follows:

- 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.

Research Objectives

The site had the potential to add to research objectives mainly from the prehistoric, Roman, Medieval, and post-medieval/modern periods, identified within *The Archaeology of the East Midlands: An Archaeological Resource Assessment and Research Agenda*, *Leicester Archaeology Monograph 13*, (ed. Cooper 2006), and *East Midlands Heritage: An Updated Research Agenda and Strategy for the Historic Environment of the East Midlands* (ed. Knight et al 2012), and updated here: <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/researchframeworks/eastmidlands/wiki/>:

The research aims were re-assessed during the course of the field work where post-medieval burials were excavated and the following Research Objective was therefore suggested:

Post-Medieval

- 8.6.3: How can we ensure appropriate recording of churches and chapels, graveyards, artefacts of burial and remembrance and human remains (with their major potential for elucidating diet, health and demography).

Methodology

All work followed the procedures set out in the approved *Written Scheme of Investigation* (WSI) for the project (ULAS 2022).

All work was carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief (updated 2020) and adhered to their Code of Conduct (updated 2021). The accession number A4.2022 was used to identify all records and artefacts.

Fieldwork was carried out by ULAS between the 8/2/2022 and 14/2/2022 and was followed by post-excavation and reporting.

| Date | Site Staff | Duration | Description |
|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 8/2/22 | IM, GI | 1 day | Sitework |
| 11/2/22 | IM | 1 day | Sitework |
| 14/2/22 | IM | 1 day | Sitework |
| 21-22/2/22 | HA, NC, JB | 3 days | Finds analysis & report |
| 1/3/22 | IM | 1 day | analysis & report |
| 2/3/22 | IM | 1 day | analysis & report |

Excavation was carried out by the client's contractor, using machines provided and operated by the contractor. Due to small area and live services, the excavator used was a mini digger, fitted with a half metre bucket and rubber caterpillar tracks to remove rubble and concrete. In addition to this workmen were also digging the area using insulated spades due to the live services and confined spaces (Figure 14 and Figure 15). Spoil was removed from the excavation area and placed on the side to be backfilled later.

Monitoring

Notification of the start of works was made to the Planning Archaeologist prior to the commencement of the recording work in order that monitoring arrangements were made. All monitoring was carried out in accordance with the CIfA *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (2020).

Internal monitoring procedures were undertaken with the project manager, to ensure that project targets were met and professional standards maintained. Provision was also made for external monitoring meetings with the Planning Authority and the Client, if required.

Unlimited access to monitor the project was available to the Client and their representatives, the planning authority and the Planning Archaeologist, subject to the health and safety requirements of the site.

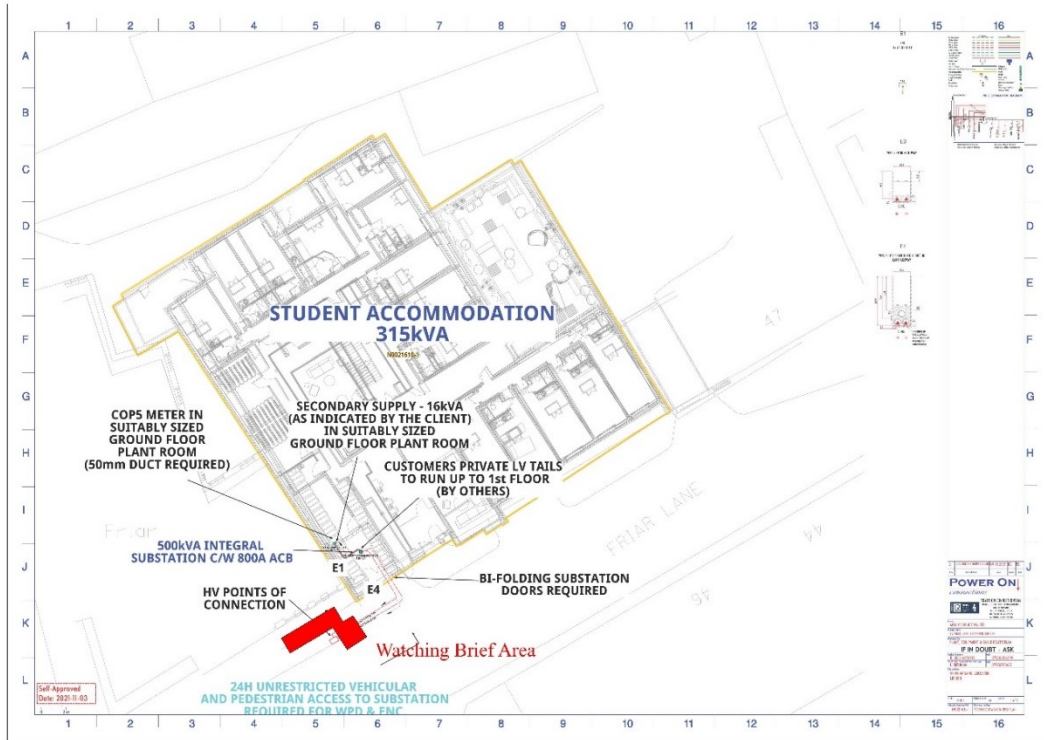


Figure 2: Detailed location plan showing proposals and the approximate location of area watched for mitigation (provided by client).

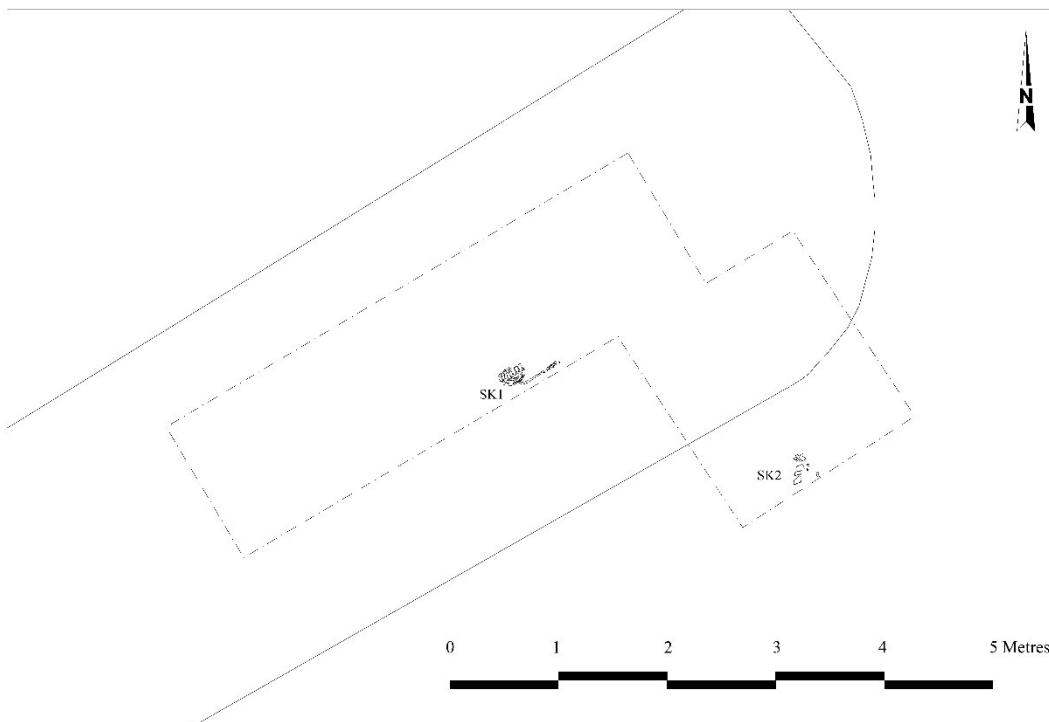


Figure 3: Detailed plan of trench.

Results

The area under development for the installation of the new services was underneath the street and disturbed by modern service trenches (Figure 1). It was also mostly stripped before the watching brief began (Figure 4 and Figure 5). During this phase of work the ground was lowered in an roughly 'L' shaped area (Figure 3) measuring approximately 3.58m by 5.92m to expose the modern services and did not reach natural; finishing at an approximate depth of 1.44m in the deeper parts and approximately 1.05m in other areas.

The area was almost completely truncated and disturbed by previous installations of modern services and comprised mixed modern material with some disturbed disarticulated human bone recovered from this deposit (5). A stratified post-medieval deposit (4) (Figure 13) was also identified across the area which contained some sherds of pottery, clay pipe, charcoal, animal bone and CBM. This deposit was reached at 0.82m below ground level and was also quite truncated by these modern services. During this phase of work two articulated human skeletons were excavated and recovered. Neither were complete due to the severe truncation caused by modern disturbance.



Figure 4: Area prior to the watching brief looking southwest.



Figure 5: Area prior to the watching brief looking east.

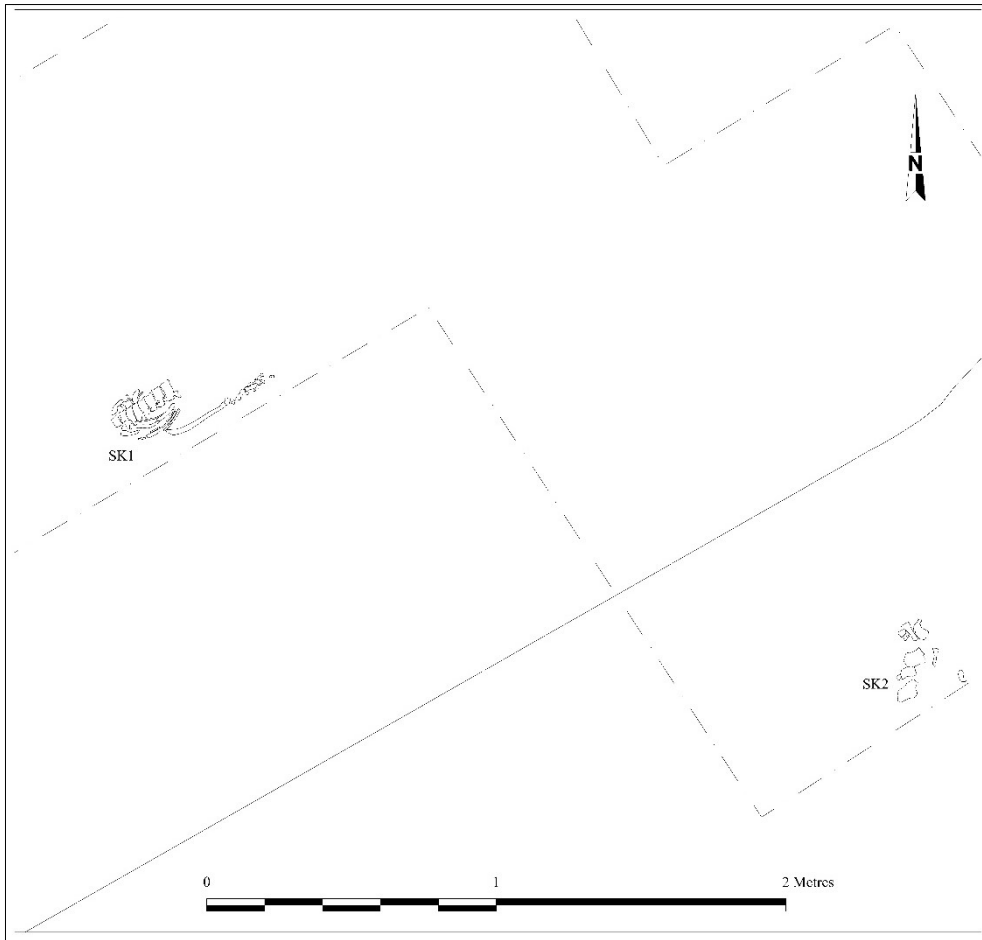


Figure 6: Plan of trench including location of skeletons.



Figure 7: Image of SK1 position in ground, with disturbed bone from the individual removed.

SK1

This individual was initially found by workmen and triggered archaeological mitigation through the watching brief. This skeleton was found at a depth of 1.06m. The skeleton was partially disturbed and truncated, the bones were highly fragmented and in a brittle condition, but the surface preservation was good to fair.

The burial was orientated north-west to south-east and the attitude of the skeleton was extended, laid supine and represented by the right arm, thorax, and parts of the upper leg, see Figure 7.

It was noted during the excavation of this individual that the spinal processes of the thoracic and lumbar vertebra were facing right towards the arm, which is unusual (Figure 7). Could potentially mean that the burial was disturbed before the modern service trenches.



Figure 8: Image of SK2 position in ground.

SK2

This individual was found during the ground reduction at the opposite end of the trench from SK1 and was aligned east-west and was found at a depth of 1.22m. These remains were cut by a service trench and the only surviving elements of the skeleton were the lower leg and feet, see Figure 8. The bones of SK2 were also highly fragmented, in a brittle condition with the surface preservation good to fair.

SK1 and SK2 Overview

Both of these individuals were found with associated staining and furniture relating to post-medieval coffins CF2 and CF7 namely iron nails and two iron drop-handle coffin handles Sf2 (SK1) and Sf4 (SK2) (Figure 9). Sf4 was most likely in-situ (see Figure 8) whereas Sf2 was found loose in the area where the leg and pelvis bones were disturbed by workmen. Fragments of a degraded and fragmented tin-dipped iron breast plate were also found on vertebra and ribs of SK1 but was not retained as it was so degraded.

In addition to the coffins, SK1 and SK2 also share similar finds from their burial attire, which were a complete copper alloy pin Sf1 (SK1) (Figure 10) and two pin shafts Sf3 (SK2) often referred to as shroud pins. The burials, however, seem differ in their orientation.

The Finds (*Heidi Addison*)

Two iron drop-handle coffin handles Sf2 (6) and Sf4 were recovered from the site relating to skeletons SK1 and SK2 respectively, including three incomplete iron nails, one from each skeleton, and another from (5). Additionally, a complete copper alloy pin Sf1 (SK1) (L.18mm) and two pin shafts Sf3 were also found in association with both of the skeletons.



Figure 9: Coffin handle Sf4 from Coffin 7 (SK2).

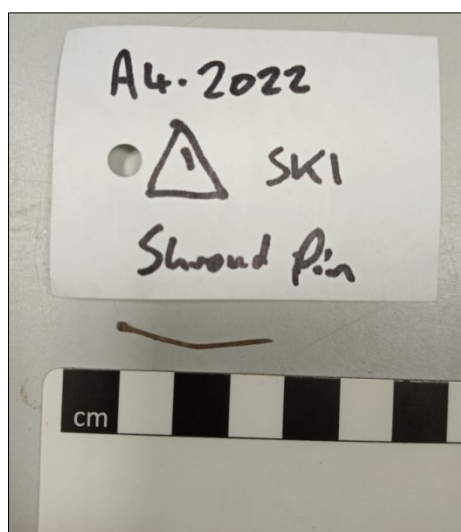


Figure 10: Shroud Pin, SK1 Sf1

Modern pottery (Nicholas J. Cooper)

A total of seven sherds of modern pottery (119g) were recovered from grave fills (4), (5) and (6), analysed by form and fabric in accordance with national guidelines (Barclay *et al.* 2016) and the Leicestershire Post-Roman Fabric Series (Davies and Sawday 1999, 166), and quantified by sherd count and weight (g).

Analysis

Context (4) contained a sherd (10g) from a Staffordshire slipware plate (Fabric EA7) with feathered decoration dating c.1680-1730, and sherd of cream ware (1g) (Fabric EA8) dating 1730-1850. Context (5) contained the base (65g) of a possible cistern in an unglazed cream earthenware fabric similar to that used in Midland Yellow (MY), dating c.1500-1725. The vessel has a perforation low on the wall stabbed through from the outside, before firing, which is plugged with lead. Two other earthenware sherds also came from this context; one (16g) in pancheon ware (EA2), dating 1600-1900, and the other (4g) in a mottled ware (EA3) dating 1680-1780. Context (6) contained two joining sherds (23g) from a cream ware vessel dating 1730-1850.

All the pottery is residual and redeposited in the grave fills having been disturbed from earlier occupation layers. Overall, it indicates that the burial probably took place in the second half of the 19th century at the earliest.

References

Barclay, A., Booth, P., Brown, D.H., Evans J., Knight, D. and Wood, I. 2016 *The Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology*. PCRG, SGRP, MPRG

Davies, S. and Sawday, D. 1999. 'The post Roman pottery and tile'. In A. Connor and R. Buckley 1999, *Roman and Medieval Occupation at Causeway Lane, Leicester*. Leicester Archaeology Monograph 5, 165-213. Leicester: University of Leicester Archaeological Services.

The Human and Animal Bones (Jennifer Browning)

An assemblage of human and animal bones were recovered during the watching brief. These were collected during excavation between modern services. SK1 was encountered within a mixed soil (1), which included redeposited material and was dated to the modern period. A second group of bones, SK2, was identified within soil fill (6). Both were associated with coffin fragments. Further bones were retrieved from two other deposits, an archaeological deposit (4) and a rubble layer (5).

The assemblage was examined by context group and a record was made of taxa, element, possible articulation and any notable features. A full analysis of the human skeletal remains has not been carried out.

Description of remains

The assemblage was highly fragmented, with many recent breaks. The bones were in a brittle condition but surface preservation was good or fair (after Harland et al 2003) and enabled identification of modifications, such as butchery or pathologies.

SK1 (1)

A partially disturbed extended burial, laid supine and orientated north-west to south-east was represented by the right arm, thorax, and parts of upper leg, which the excavators' report had been previously disturbed. The right ulna (complete and fused), distal radius (fused); eight carpals; all five metacarpals (complete and fused) and thirteen of the expected fifteen phalanges were recovered. A number of fragmented ribs were present, of which nine articular heads were counted. There were two thoracic and five virtually complete lumbar vertebrae. Osteophytes and spicules of bone were noted around articulations of several vertebrae. The pelvis was severely fragmented but both the right and left acetabulum were present (fused). The right femur was largely intact and fully fused, while only the distal part of the left femur was identified.

SK2 (6)

SK2 was aligned east-west, however the grave was cut by a service trench and only part of the lower leg and feet survived. The partially articulated bones consisted of the left distal tibia and fibula, along with both left and right calcaneus (complete and fused), the left talus; three tarsals; metatarsals 1-5 and two phalanges. A fragment of goose tibio-tarsus was recovered from the same context.

Context (4)

Several human bones were retrieved from context 4. These were evidently not in articulation and consisted of a metatarsal (complete fused); a partial calcaneus; and a maxillary fragment from the left side. The maxilla contained only a single tooth (m1), in which a large dental caries had developed in the occlusal fold (Figure 11). The adjacent socket was pitted. A fragment of human fibula shaft was also recovered.



Figure 11: Maxillary tooth with dental caries

The same context contained a small quantity of animal bone, which included a sheep metatarsal shaft; and a large mammal rib shaft fragment, which had been chopped through transversely.

Context (5)

The human bones from context (5) were not in articulation. They included a lumbar vertebra; part of the right pelvis (acetabulum, fused); left distal tibia (fused); five fragments of rib; a metatarsal and several long bone, vertebrae and cranial fragments. In addition the animal bones included a cattle first phalanx (fused) and cattle ulna (butchered); a sheep mandible with two permanent premolars, and sheep/goat shaft fragments from the radius and metatarsal.

Unstratified

Unstratified bones collected from the site included a human metapodial, fibula fragment, vertebral and long bone fragments. The animal bones consisted of a cattle maxilla fragment; equid prox femur; a pig metacarpal and fragment of cattle humerus (distal fused).

Comments

The severely truncated remains of two individuals were identified in the course of the watching brief. SK1 was the most complete of the two and was represented by elements from the upper and lower limbs and the torso. SK2 was very partial and consisted of elements from the lower legs and feet only.

In both cases, epiphyseal union has taken place in all recovered bones, indicating that they belonged to adult individuals. Pathologies on some vertebrae of SK1 may be suggestive of more advanced age. In addition, some human bones in a non-articulated state, presumably disturbed and re-deposited, were recovered from contexts (4) and (5).

A small assemblage of animal bones was recovered, in which the remains of cattle, sheep/goat, pig, equid and goose were identified. This disparate group, which included some butchered bones, is likely to represent debris from domestic activities, which has been re-worked and re-deposited into later deposits.

References

Harland, J. F., Barrett, J. H., Carrott, J., Dobney, K. and Jaques, D. 2003 The York System: an integrated zooarchaeological database for research and teaching. *Internet Archaeology* 13: (http://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue13/harland_toc.html).

Discussion and Conclusions

The watching brief at 59 Friar Lane revealed post-medieval burial activity where two partial articulated skeletons were recovered. They were orientated north-west to south-east and east-west, differing in orientation, suggesting they were non-conformist burials.

The pottery found in the grave fills of these two individuals indicates that the burials took place in the latter part of the nineteenth century at the earliest (see Cooper specialist report). The corresponding coffin furniture from these burials also supports this with the coffin handles and shroud pins being in a similar style to those being excavated by ULAS from a current archaeological investigation at Leicester Cathedral excavations dating to the 1850s, therefore suggesting this site is contemporaneous.

These factors suggest that these burials were associated with the General Baptist Church which was built on the site in 1866 (it replaced an earlier meeting house built in 1719, an associated Sunday School, built in 1796, lay to the west). This church was demolished in 1969 and replaced by an office block and car park. Previous archaeological work undertaken in 2020 found no evidence of this building, but did find evidence for the mechanical removal of the walls and cellaring from later buildings on this site.

The majority of the burials from this church may have been removed with the replacement of the General Baptists Church but these remains may have been outside the imprint of the previous building and therefore remained undisturbed until later modern services were implemented. However, SK1 may have shown signs of being disturbed before these modern services truncated it due to the displacement of the vertebra in the ground, but cannot say when due to the truncation. It is likely that there are other skeletons in the area, but probably as truncated as these individuals.

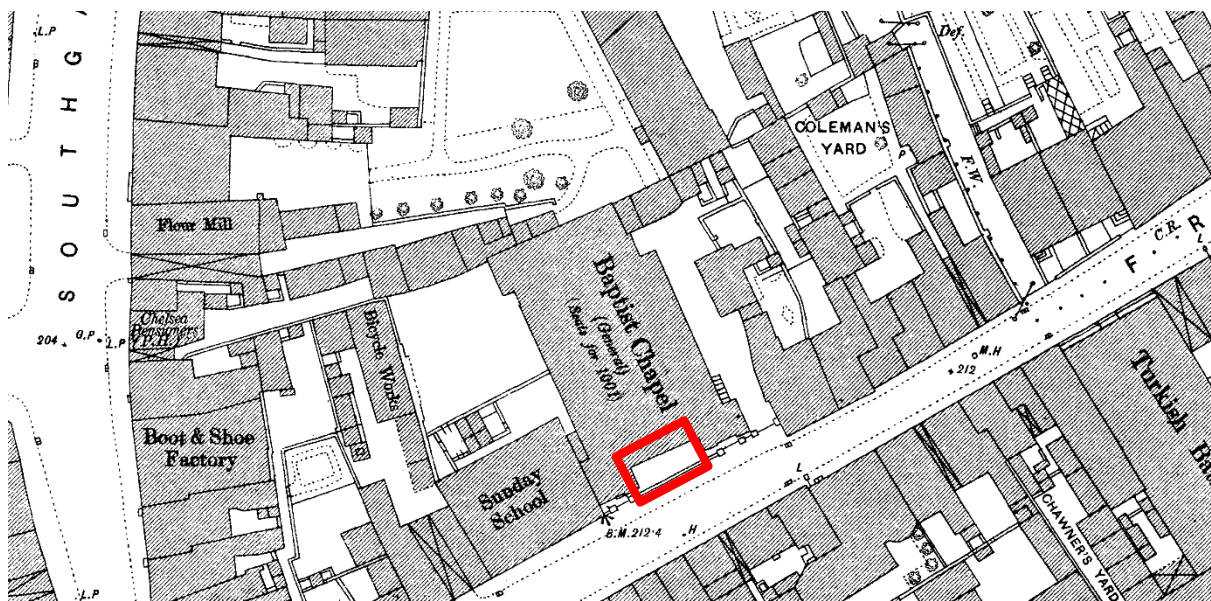


Figure 12: Approximate location of burials in relation to Baptist Chapel (from 1885 OS map)

Archive and Publication

The archive for the project will be deposited with Leicester Museums & Galleries with accession number A4.2022 and consists of the following:

- 1 Unbound copy of this report (2022-22) and electronic copy (pdf_A).
- 1 Photographic record sheet

- 1 DVD of 24 digital photographs
- 1 Contact sheet of digital photos
- 1 artefact - bone brush handle

A summary of this report will appear in due course in the Transactions the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society.

University of Leicester Archaeological Services supports the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) project. The online OASIS data entry has been completed detailing the results of the project and will be digitally accessible through The Archaeological Data Services (<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/>).

Acknowledgements

The project was managed by Gavin Speed of ULAS. The archaeological fieldwork was carried out by the author and George Issitt, finds were reported by Heidi Addison and Nick Cooper, and the human and animal bones by Jen Browning, all of ULAS. Thanks have to go to East Bond Ltd for enabling the work to go ahead so smoothly.

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Appendix



Figure 13: Deposit (4) under service pipe.



Figure 14: Working shot of digger.



Figure 15: Working shot of hand reduction.



Figure 16: Post-ex shot.



Figure 17: Post-ex shot.



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