



**University of  
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**Archaeological Services**

**An Archaeological Watching-Brief  
on the site of Groby Castle, at St Philip  
and St James Church, Groby,  
Leicestershire  
NGR: SK 523 076**

Mathew Morris



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**An Archaeological Watching-Brief on the site of Groby Castle,  
at St Philip and St James Church, Groby, Leicestershire**

**NGR: SK 523 076**

**Mathew Morris**

With contributions from N Finn and D Sawday

**For: St Philip and St James Church**

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## CONTENTS

Summary .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Geology and Topography .....	1
Historical and Archaeological Background <i>Neil Finn</i> .....	3
Archaeological Objectives .....	5
Methodology .....	5
Results .....	5
The Finds <i>Deborah Sawday</i> .....	7
Discussion .....	8
Bibliography .....	9
Archive .....	10
Acknowledgements .....	10
Appendix 1: OASIS database entry .....	15

## FIGURES

Figure 1: Location plans with area of work highlighted.....	2
Figure 2: Extant remains of the medieval manorial complex.....	3
Figure 3: Plan of area of work showing the location of major archaeological features .	11
Figure 4: Photo showing the exposed sequence of archaeology .....	12
Figure 5: Photo showing the stratigraphy in the north-facing section .....	12
Figure 6: Photo showing the floor stratigraphy in the north-facing section .....	13
Figure 7: Photo showing in-situ fragments of tile floor (9).....	13
Figure 8: Photo showing possible robbed wall footing [16] .....	14
Figure 9: Photo showing in-situ masonry wall (20).....	14

## **An Archaeological Watching-brief on the site of Groby Castle, at St Philip and St James Church, Groby, Leicestershire (SK 523076)**

Mathew Morris

### **Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief was carried out on the site of Groby Castle at St Philip and St James Church, Groby, Leicestershire (SK 523 076) on 9th November by University of Leicester Archaeological Services. The work was undertaken on behalf of St Philip and St James Church in advance of dismantling and rebuilding a revetted boundary wall to the east of the church. The work involved the observation and inspection of the demolition of the original wall and the machine excavated foundation trench for its replacement. The results of the investigation revealed a substantial masonry wall, tile floor and demolition deposits of 14th or 15th century date all believed to be associated with buildings belonging to the manorial complex that succeeded the castle. Evidence of activity pre-dating these structures was present in the form of an expansive spread of charcoal and ash resting on scorched natural clays. The site archive will be held by Leicestershire County Council Museum Services under the accession number X.A.242.2009.*

### **Introduction**

This document constitutes the final report of an archaeological watching brief carried out at St Philip and St James Church, Groby, Leicestershire (SK 523 076). The work was undertaken on the request of John Dodson of Parkinson, Dodson and Cheung Architects, as agents for St Philip and St James Church, by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on 9th November 2009.

The area of work is bound to the north by the A50, to the west by the churchyard of the Church of St Philip and St James, to the south by Markfield Road and to the east by Groby Old Hall. It is situated on the site of an 11th to 12th century motte and bailey castle and subsequent manorial complex, the area of work being approximately 50m south-west of the surviving castle motte and within the western part of the bailey. The castle and manorial site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, no. 17066, and the area of work lies adjacent to the scheduled area. The watching brief was concerned with the rebuilding of the existing revetted boundary wall separating the raised churchyard to the west from a paddock associated with Groby Old Hall to the east. Extant remains of the manorial complex were present within the immediate vicinity of the area of work, including a ruined stone-built wall on a north-west to south-east alignment abutting the revetted boundary wall.

The watching brief was requested by the Diocesan Advisory Committee on advice from the Diocesan Archaeological Adviser because of the potential impact the proposed work could have upon archaeological remains associated with the adjacent Scheduled Monument.

### **Geology and Topography**

The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain, Sheet 155 indicates that the underlying geology is likely to consist of superficial deposits of Middle Pleistocene

glaciofluvial sands and gravels overlying deposits of Triassic mudstone belonging to the Mercia Mudstone Group. The site lies at a height of c.96m above Ordnance Datum.



Figure 1: Location plans with area of work highlighted

Reproduced from Explorer® 233 Leicester and Hinckley 1:25 000 OS map by permission of Ordnance Survey® on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright 1996. All rights reserved. Licence number AL 100029495.

## Historical and Archaeological Background

*Neil Finn*

The following text is adapted from Finn 2009.

The area of work lies within an extensive complex with origins in the pre-Conquest period. Immediately to the north of the site are the earthwork remains of Groby Castle, a Norman motte and bailey castle generally accepted as having been constructed *c.*1086. The northern portion of the bailey was destroyed when the A50 bypass was built in the 1960s, however earlier maps illustrate the form and extent of the monument prior to this. Limited excavation in 1962-3 revealed the substantial remains of an earlier building at the core of the castle motte. This is interpreted as being of pre-Conquest date, possibly representing the remains of a late Saxon manorial complex (Creighton 1997, 22-5). The castle was besieged and destroyed following the revolt against Henry II in 1173 (Burton gives the date of its destruction as 1176, cited in Nichols 1811, 631). Subsequently a medieval manor was established on the site. Documentary sources provide some details of the manor house and associated buildings in the 14th century, including reference to the ‘olde chapele’ (Farnham 1928, 211-12; 1933, 350). The location of this chapel is indicated on the earliest surviving map of Groby, made in 1757 by John Doharty. It was ruinous by that date, however some elements of the chapel may have survived to the present day, incorporated into a garden wall and a former stable some 40m east of the area of work.



Figure 2: Extant remains of the medieval manorial complex  
Looking from the church towards Groby Old Hall. The area of work was to the left of the ruins

Other fragments of the medieval manorial complex remain as ruins in the paddock to the immediate south of the area of work, including a stone wall with an arched doorway and splayed window opening. According to the 1757 map this wall formerly extended up to the corner of the brick-built tower at the south end of the Old Hall. The medieval

complex appears to have extended as far west as the 1840 church (still within the area of the castle bailey). It is reported that bakehouses were discovered within the area of the chancel when this was constructed and that the sexton would break down walls when digging graves in the 1940s (Richardson 1978).

Creighton (1997, 25) notes that the siting of the Norman castle is not ideal in strategic terms, being overlooked by the village to the south-west. He suggests that the reasoning behind the decision to locate the castle on the site of an earlier building, of probable manorial/religious status, may have been twofold: firstly reflecting a degree of martial opportunism, in using the fabric of an extant standing structure to immediate defensive advantage; and secondly as a highly visible manifestation of an act of conquest. In suppressing and dominating the earlier complex, construction of the castle ensured continuity of occupation at the site although the castle itself was relatively short-lived, slighted within a century of its construction. The site developed as the focus of the medieval manor, probably soon after the castle was slighted, then passed to the Ferrers in 1279. It is not until 1371 that the manor complex is described in any detail, and then only partially, in the dower settlement of Margaret, wife of William de Ferrers, made on 4 June, 45 Edward III (1371):

*A third part of the manor house of Groby, namely, one great chamber called the "whit chamber" with one cellar below the same called the "wyn celer", two chambers abutting towards the north with two wardrobes, a chamber with a wardrobe below the said two chambers where Robert Bradenham used to lie, two chambers at the end of the whit chamber above the door of the wyn celer, two chambers called the "tayleryes" extending to the chamber called Sir Thomas de Ferrers' chamber, a chapel called the "oldechapele" with the cloister by the same towards the south, one house called the "culnehous" with the double gate, all the piece of ground between the culnehous and garden called the "Tourhulle" towards the south with the great gate called the "chapelesgate", a grange called "the heyberne" and a long house called the "sheepcote", a house called the "bailies chamber" with all houses under the roof thereof, a dovecot by the said house, and all the piece of ground abutting on the byre towards the "est" in length and breadth between the sheepcot house and the "wayour" even to the gate called "Bernerdsgares", with free ingress and egress night and day and all other easements of the "wayour" by the manor gate; also a third part of the forge house, a third part of the garden called the "Tourhulle" towards the west as appears by metes and bounds, a third part of the garden, namely from the "popeler dyche" towards the "est" in length and breadth as Isabel who was the wife of Henry de Ferrers lately held in dower...' (Cal. Close Rolls 1369-1374, p.350, cited in Farnham 1928, 211-212).*

There is no evidence to suggest that any of the structures mentioned in this document have survived substantially intact to the present day and only one building, the chapel, can be located with any certainty. It is interesting to note that the chapel is referred to as 'old' in 1371. The chapel is mentioned again in 1446 when, soon after coming into possession of Groby, Sir Edward Grey obtained a special dispensation from the Archbishop of Canterbury to have his expected child christened in the chapel of the

Manor House rather than in the parish church at Ratby, on account of its great distance and the foulness of the ways thereto (Ramsey 1982, 17). By the early 17th century the chapel was ‘ruined and gone’ according to Burton, though its wall lines were apparently still discernible in the mid 18th century for Doharty to have mapped them and some fragments may yet remain.

### **Archaeological Objectives**

The principle objectives of the watching brief were:

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

### **Methodology**

The project required a professional archaeologist to supervise all groundwork likely to impact upon any archaeological remains.

During the work the present revetment wall was demolished and its footing removed using a 360° mini JCB mechanical digger using a 0.5m toothed bucket. All exposed areas, sections and existing spoil heaps were visually inspected for features and finds. Archaeological deposits were hand cleaned, planned, photographed and sample excavated as appropriate to addressing the objectives of the watching brief. Field notes were recorded on a pro-forma ULAS watching brief recording form whilst all stratigraphic units were given a unique context number and recorded on pro-forma ULAS context sheets. A measured site plan at a scale of 1:100 was created showing the disposition of all archaeological features in relation to the surrounding geography. Sections were sketched to a scale of 1:20.

All work followed the *Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) Code of Conduct* and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* and the *Guidelines for Archaeological Work in Leicestershire and Rutland (LMARS)*.

### **Results**

The former revetment wall extended north-east from Markfield Road *c.*7m east of the chancel of the Church of St Philip and St James before turning north-west *c.*8m to the north of it. It was constructed from coursed, dry-bonded granite and slate rubble, *c.*0.8m wide and *c.*2m high, topped with a further *c.*0.5m mortared granite balustrade of more recent construction. The wall was resting on footings sunk *c.*0.4m below ground level in the paddock to the east. The proposed work involved the demolition of the present wall from *c.*4.8m north of the extant manorial remains to the churchyard boundary wall to the west (Figure 3). In all *c.*14.5m of the present wall was dismantled, its footings removed and the existing foundation trench widened to *c.*1.3m in preparation for a concrete plinth to support the new wall.

Once removed, a *c.*2.4m section of stratified archaeology was revealed (Figure 4 and Figure 5). At the top was *c.*0.2m of dark topsoil and turf – (1) – overlying a further



c.0.1m to c.0.2m of paler brownish-grey clayey-silt subsoil – (2). These sealed c.0.7m of redeposited greyish-pink clay and loose building rubble – (3) and (4) – spread across a further c.0.5m of dark brownish-grey clayey-silt – (5) and (6). This soil layer is believed to represent the area’s original ground level prior to the construction of the church in 1840. It was into this soil that the revetment wall appeared to have been initially dug suggesting its origins date to the establishment of the churchyard in the mid-19th century. The rubble, primarily large granite and slate fragments – (4) – resting on its surface as a large „pile“ in the churchyard’s north-eastern corner is also probably left over from the construction of the church, whilst the redeposited clay – (3) – appeared to make up the ground level. At the north-western end of the area collapse during removal of the revetment wall partially revealed the brick lining of a crypt (Figure 3) belonging to the tomb of William Martin (d. 1841) and his sister Margaret (d. 1898) in the churchyard above.

Beneath this preserved topsoil was a substantial layer of compact, well sorted building rubble – (8) – predominately comprised of granite, sandstone and slate fragments mixed within greyish-brown silt. Within the exposed north-facing section (Figure 6) this rested directly on a floor of *in-situ* tiles – (9) – bedded in 10mm of pale yellowish-white mortar – (7) (Figure 3 and Figure 7). This was laid on a further c.0.3m of pale greyish-yellow sand – (10) – overlying crushed sandstone – (18) – and redeposited clay – (11). These appeared to represent bedding layers for the tile and mortar floor and signify the construction horizon of the building in which the floor was laid. This must have been of considerable dimensions as the tile and mortar floor was visible in section for c.7.5m and could be observed continuing beneath the churchyard boundary wall at the north-western end of the area. At the eastern visible extent of the floor it appeared to have been truncated by a shallow linear cut – [16] – c.0.9m wide and c.0.16m deep filled with greyish-brown clayey silt – (17) (Figure 8). This could represent the robbed out remains of a shallow wall footing orientated approximately north-east to south-west although it’s insubstantial nature, with the base of its cut just 0.15m below floor level, suggests it could not have been significantly structural in nature.

Within the exposed east-facing section building rubble (8) sealed a very substantial masonry wall – (20) and [21] (Figure 9). This was 0.95m wide and still survived to a visible height of 0.93m. The footing was constructed from large clay bonded granite blocks (typically 200mm to 300mm in size) laid as rough facing stones with a rubble core. Its depth remains unclear, however, as it continued below the formation level of the proposed work. The first two courses of the wall itself were constructed using large squared sandstone blocks (typically 350mm by 270mm by 250mm) facing a mortared granite and sandstone rubble core. The surviving evidence also indicates that the third and final surviving course was faced with roughly squared granite. This construction matches that in the extant ruined manorial wall to the south. Slate was also incorporated into the wall fabric, typically to aid levelling between courses. This wall was uncovered c.5.6m north of the extant ruined manorial wall on a similar south-east to north-west alignment (Figure 3).

No evidence of the tile and mortar floor was visible to the north but bedding layers (10) and (11) were present resting up against the wall’s facing stones at a height which suggests the floor would have been level with the top of the first sandstone course.

Against the wall, layer (10) was sealed beneath a very fine dark greyish-orange sandy-silt – (19). This was present beneath building rubble (8) and appeared to represent accumulated natural weathering, evidence that suggests the building was in a derelict state before being demolished. No evidence of floor levels was visible to the south of the wall and building rubble (8) continued below formation level. This suggests some disparity between ground levels to either side of the wall with building rubble to the south dropping over 0.5m lower than the floor level to the north. This, coupled with the presence of a thin lime-mortar rendering on the wall's south-facing elevation, may be an indication of a lower floor level.

Evidence of activity pre-dating the establishment of the tile floor, and presumably the building within which it was situated was visible in the north-facing section. Here the earliest floor bedding material (11) was deposited on a thin spread of greyish-brown sandy-silt - (12). The bland, homogenous nature of this soil suggests it was naturally accumulated rather than redeposited but beneath it was 20mm of charcoal and ash – (13) and (14). This rested directly upon the natural substratum of red clay which appeared scorched on its surface suggesting the burning had occurred *in-situ*.

In the opposing trench sections, beneath the paddock to the north and east of the area, no evidence of the tile and mortar floor or any floor bedding material survived and it was apparent that material similar to building rubble (8) rested directly upon the natural substratum. The only feature which could be identified as extending further east was a substantial masonry wall (20).

No further damage to the surviving archaeological deposits occurred during the groundwork beyond what had already been impacted upon during the construction of the original wall, and the archaeology uncovered in plan and section will survive intact beneath or behind the newly constituted revetment wall.

## **The Finds**

*Deborah Sawday*

The pottery, one sherd, weighing ten grams and the floor tile, six fragments, weighing 882 grams, was catalogued with reference to the ULAS fabric series, (Davies and Sawday 1999).

The pottery, a rouletted piece of Potters Marston ware dating from the mid or later 12th or 13th century, was recovered from context (8), a demolition layer above the floor. The floor was made up of in situ medieval tile; the sample removed for analysis was in the later medieval Chilvers Coton fabric, CC2, Warwickshire fabric SQ30, dated generally from *c.* 1300 to *c.*1500 in the type series (Ratkai and Soden 1997, 90-91). Much of the tile was abraded and all was apparently undecorated save for a green glaze on the upper surfaces. The dimensions are comparable to material recovered from the production centre, notably site 2 kiln 11 and site 10, kiln 29, which are dated from the second quarter and the mid 14th century respectively, at the production centre (Mayes and Scott 1984, table 1, table 3, fig.116, 60-61).

Much of the tile had traces of mortar on the upper surfaces, suggesting that at some later date another floor had been laid on top of this one, though no other evidence for a later floor was found during the watching brief. The early medieval pottery in the demolition layer above was evidently residual in this context.

The floor is thought to relate to a medieval building on the site, probably part of the manorial complex, subsequently overlain by the Church, (M Morris pers. comm.).

Site/ Parish: Groby Church, Leics. Accession No.: XA242 2009 Document Ref: groby3.docx Material: floor tile & pot Site Type: medieval castle & manorial complex	Submitter: M. Morris Identifier: D. Sawday Date of Identification: 23.11.09 Method of Recovery: wb Job Number: 10-702
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Context	Fabric/Ware	Nos	Grams	Comments
POT				
(8) - demolition layer above floor (9)	PM – Potters Marston	1	10	Thin walled body sherd with rouletted decoration, mid/late 12th – 13th C.
FLOOR TILE				
(9) - in situ floor	CC2 – Chilvers Coton ware 2	2	325	2 joining fragments, one complete side of tile measuring a maximum of c.116 mm, with a maximum thickness of 22mm. Part of a canine paw print on upper surface which is abraded but shows evidence of an over fired greenish yellow glaze.
(9) - in situ floor	CC2	1	239	Complete side of tile measuring c.115mm & c.24mm thick. Abraded, but dark green glaze survives in depressions on upper surface, possibly part of an animal paw.
(9) - in situ floor	CC2	3	318	Miscellaneous fragments, 2 with mottled dark & light green glaze. The third is abraded with no surviving evidence of glaze.

### Discussion

The discovery of an *in-situ* 14th or 15th century tile floor and substantial masonry wall within the area of work indicates significant survival of medieval remains beneath the present churchyard and provides further proof that the late medieval manorial complex, which succeeded the 11th to 12th century motte and bailey castle, did extend west beneath the church.

This watching brief has significantly advanced our understanding of this medieval manor. Until now it has remained unclear as to the role the extant ruined stone wall in the paddock to the south had within the wider structural complex. Now the identification of a counterpart of similar construction and orientation c.5.6m to the north indicates that this once formed part of an extensive range extending east towards the late 15th century brick-built tower at the south end of Groby Old Hall and west beneath the churchyard. The presence of floor surfaces beyond this range to the north is an indication that further chambers also extended perpendicularly away towards the site of the motte and the chapel. The presence of a sizeable glazed tile floor suggests one of these chambers was of some significance within the manorial complex. The tiles also bore signs of wear and evidence that it had been resurfaced, with mortar adhering to

both sides of the tiles, suggesting prolonged occupation. No evidence of later surfaces was visible in section however.

Evidence that the floor within the southern range was significantly lower than the chambers to the north and the arched doorway within the extant stone wall to the south, both of which suggest the floor was level with the top of the first course of sandstone in both walls, also hints at possible semi-sunken cellars beneath this range. This bears some similarities to the 14th century reference to „one great chamber called the “whit chamber” with one cellar below the same called the “wyn celer”, two chambers abutting towards the north...” and although no definitive correlation can be made with this limited evidence it is significant that parallels between the archaeological and documentary material are potentially emerging.

The demolition of these chambers remains undefined. The single sherd of pot recovered from the building rubble covering the 14th century floor was clearly residual and no further dateable material was recovered. It is known that the manor declined in importance from the early 16th century as the Gray family moved to their new, grander country mansion within Bradgate Park and that by the mid 17th century it was in serious decay. Some accumulated natural weathering within the northern chambers did suggest the building was in a derelict state before being demolished. However, this was minimal and for the most part rubble from the building’s demolition rested directly on its floor surface.

Evidence for activity pre-dating the 14th century buildings also survived in the layer of burning beneath the floor levels. However, although it’s tempting to suggest this is evidence of the castle’s slighting on Henry II’s orders in 1176 this must remain wishful conjecture and more prosaic explanations, such as land clearance or domestic activity, could be equally plausible. It should also be noted that a bakehouse was reported to have been found c.18m to the south-west during the construction of the church’s chancel (Richardson 1978).

Finally, evidence for the church’s construction in 1840 is testified by the presence of large quantities of building rubble and redeposited clay spread across soil which represents the area’s original ground level. This also demonstrates that landscaping following the church’s construction had raised the areas ground level by c.0.9m to its present height. Evidence in the north-facing section suggests the original ground level had dropped gradually down to the east prior to this terracing.

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### **Archive**

The site archive consists of:

- 1 A4 context index
- 1 A4 drawing index
- 2 A4 digital photo indices
- 1 A4 watching-brief recording form
- 21 A5 context record sheets
- 1 A2 permatrace planning sheet with 1 plan and 3 sections
- 39 digital photographs
- 1 small bag of pottery (10grams)
- 1 large bag of tile (882 grams)

Since 2004 ULAS has been obliged to report the results of archaeological work to the *Online Access to the Index of archaeological investigations* (OASIS) database held by the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York (see Appendix 1).

The archive will be held by Leicestershire County Council Museum Services under the accession number X.A.242.2009

### **Acknowledgements**

Thanks are extended to Andrew Boyd churchwarden of St Philip and St James Church, to John Dodson of Parkinson, Dodson and Cheung Architects and to the building contractors for their co-operation and assistance on site. Thanks also to Mr and Mrs Dickens for allowing access to their paddock. Fieldwork was undertaken by Mathew Morris. Pottery and tile were examined by Deborah Sawday. The project was managed for ULAS by Neil Finn.

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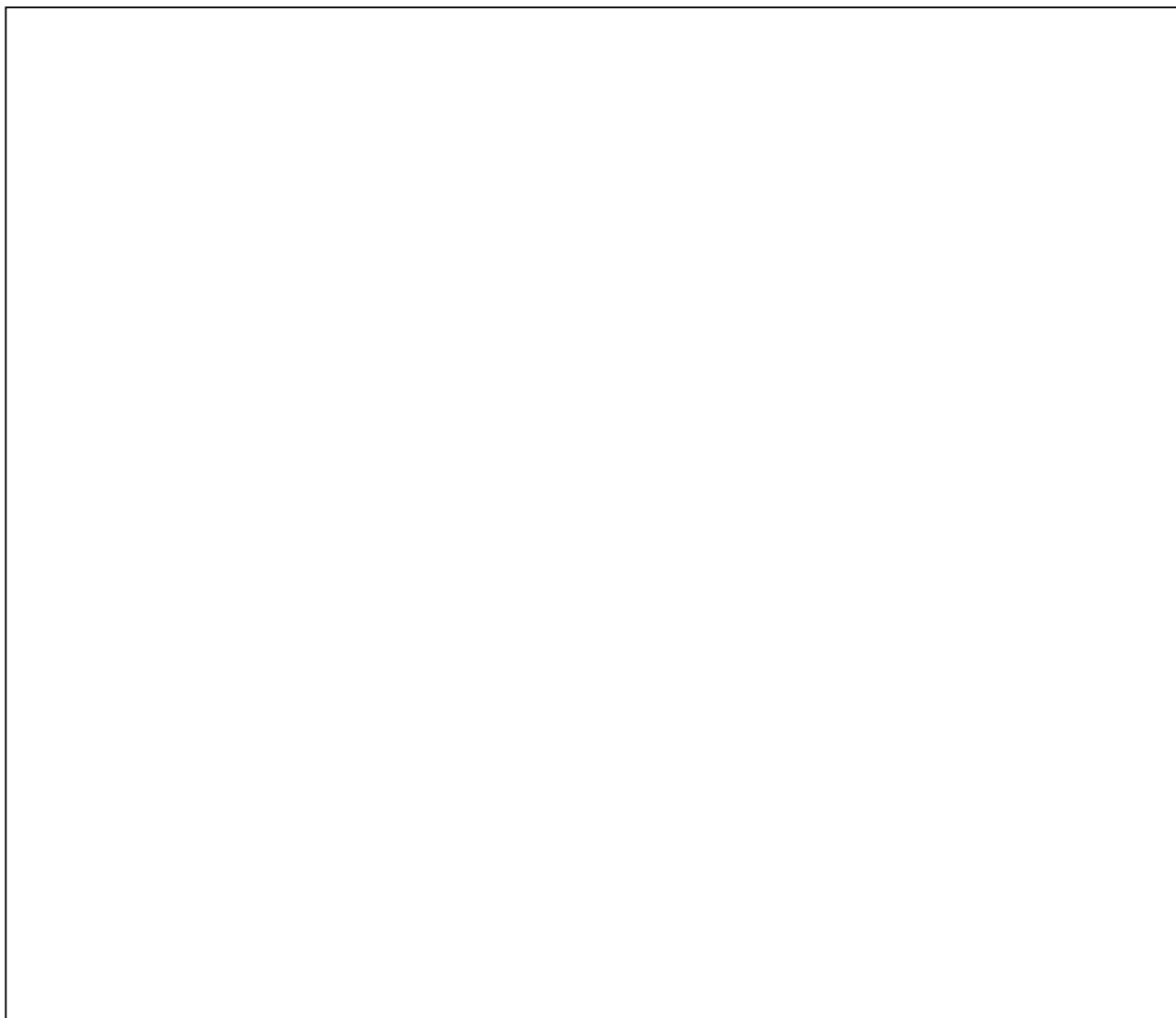


Figure 3: Plan of area of work showing the location of major archaeological features

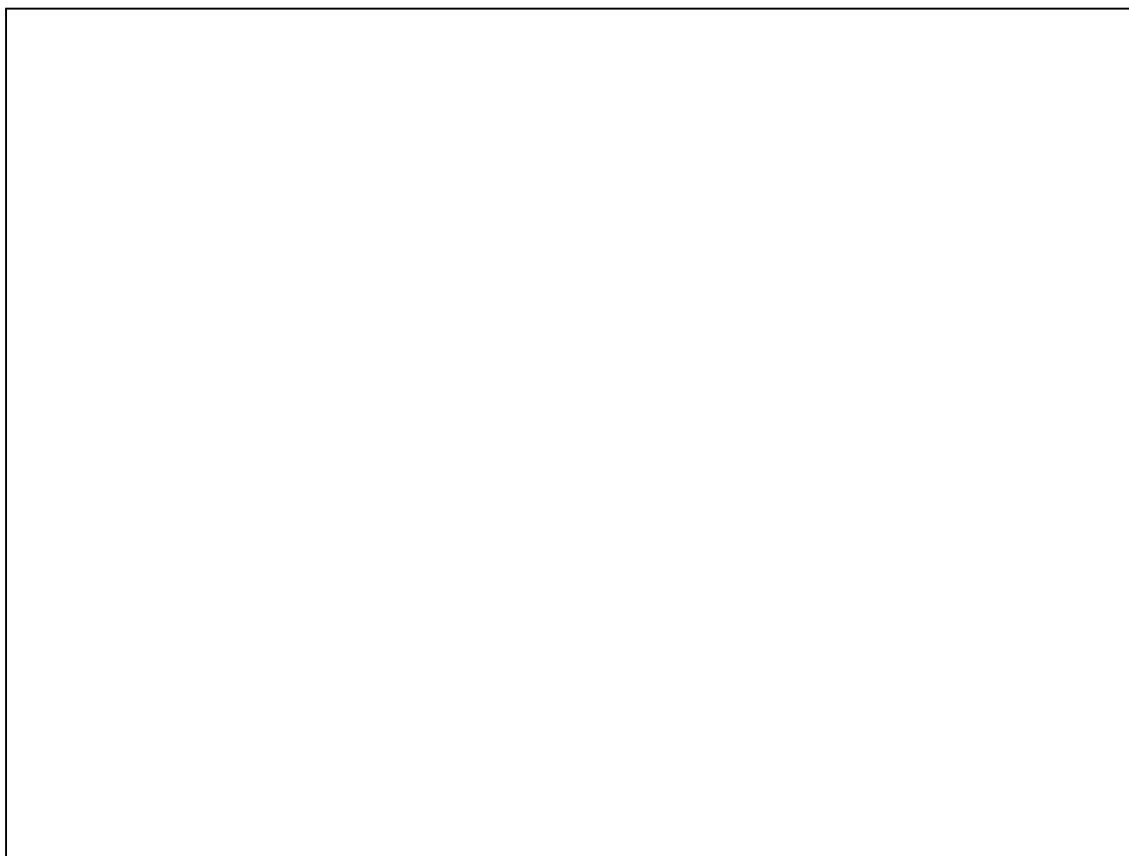


Figure 4: Photo showing the exposed sequence of archaeology

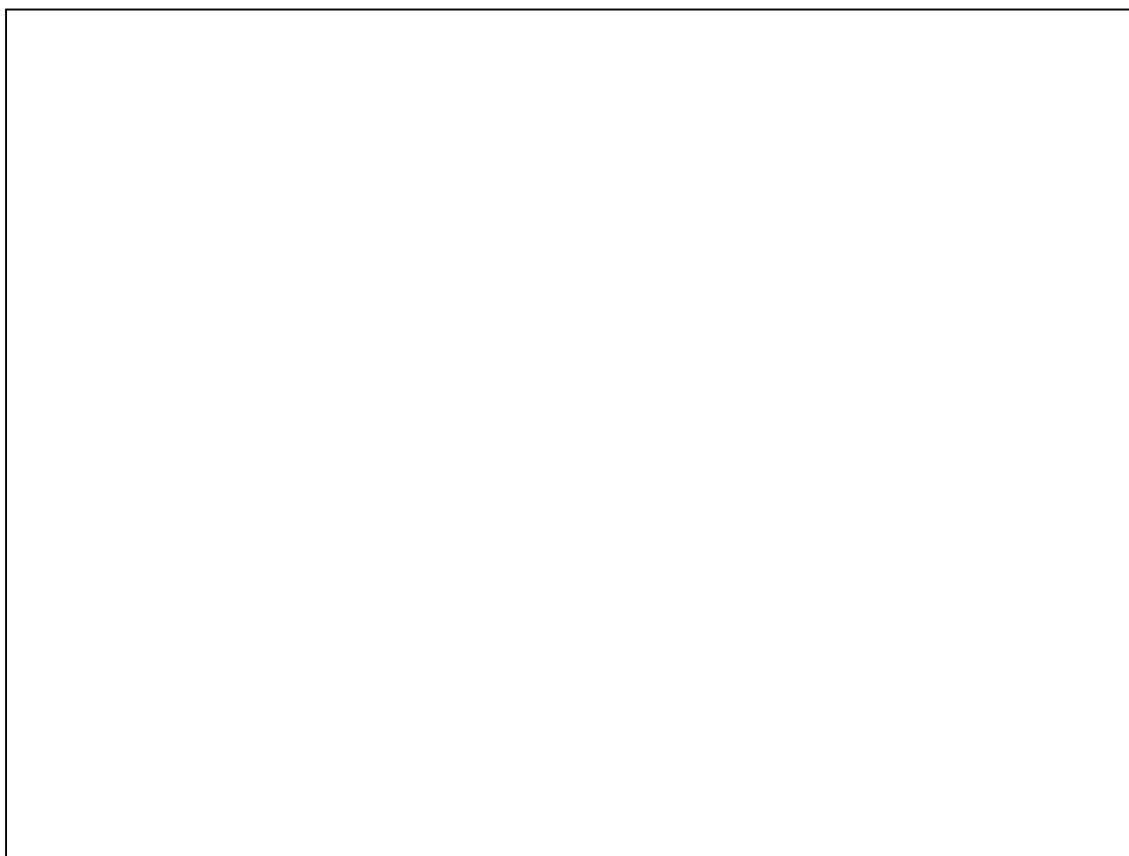


Figure 5: Photo showing the stratigraphy in the north-facing section

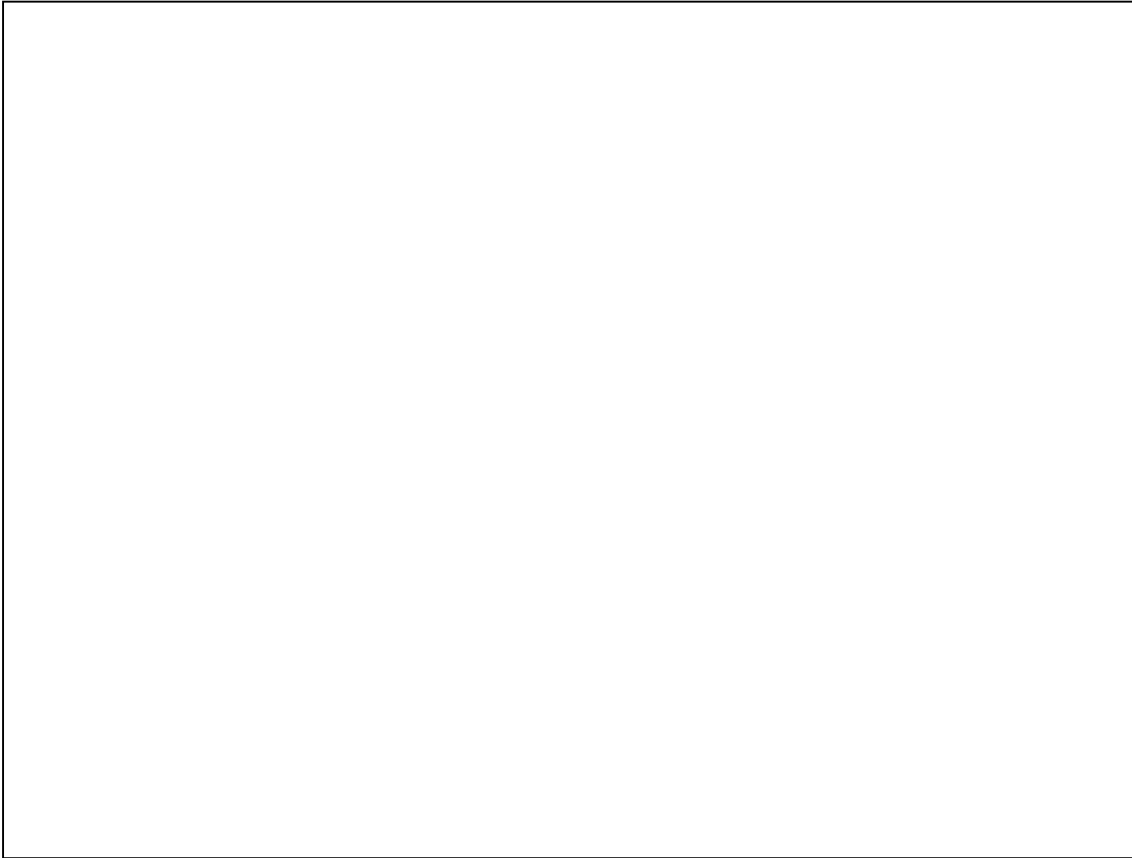


Figure 6: Photo showing the floor stratigraphy in the north-facing section

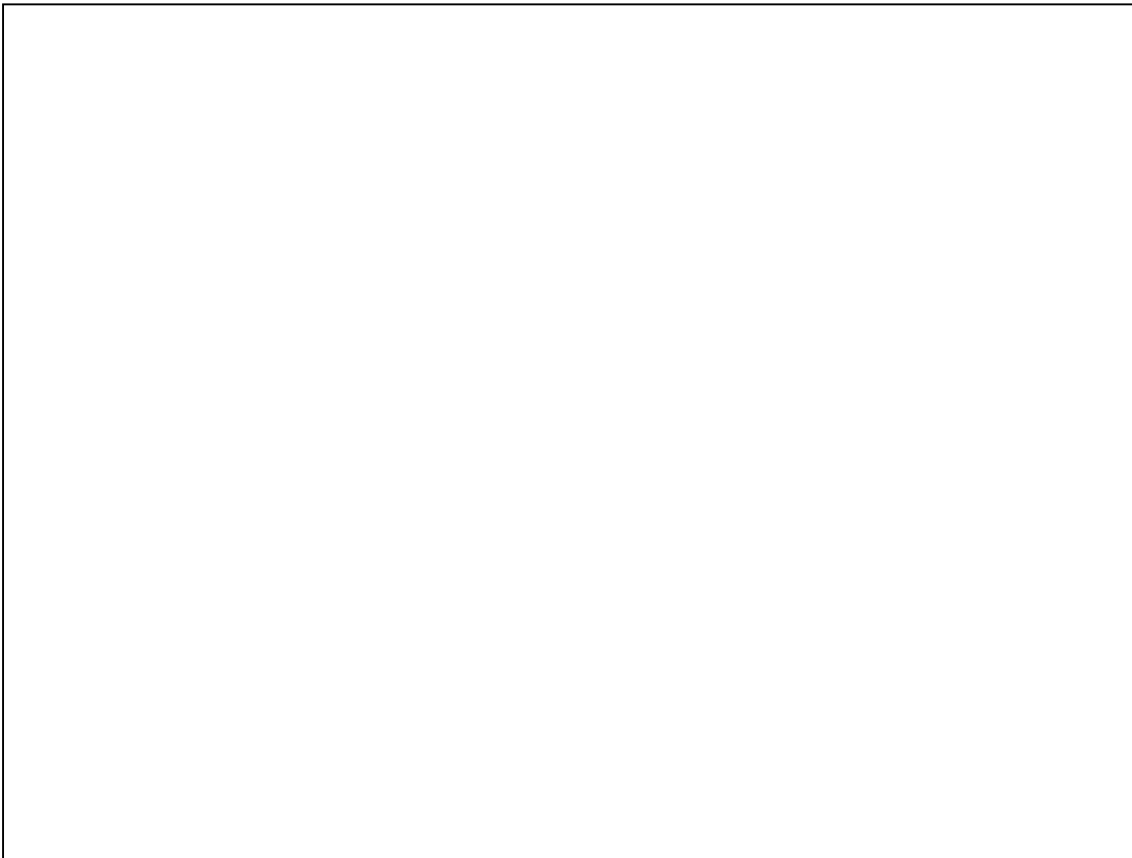


Figure 7: Photo showing in-situ fragments of tile floor (9)



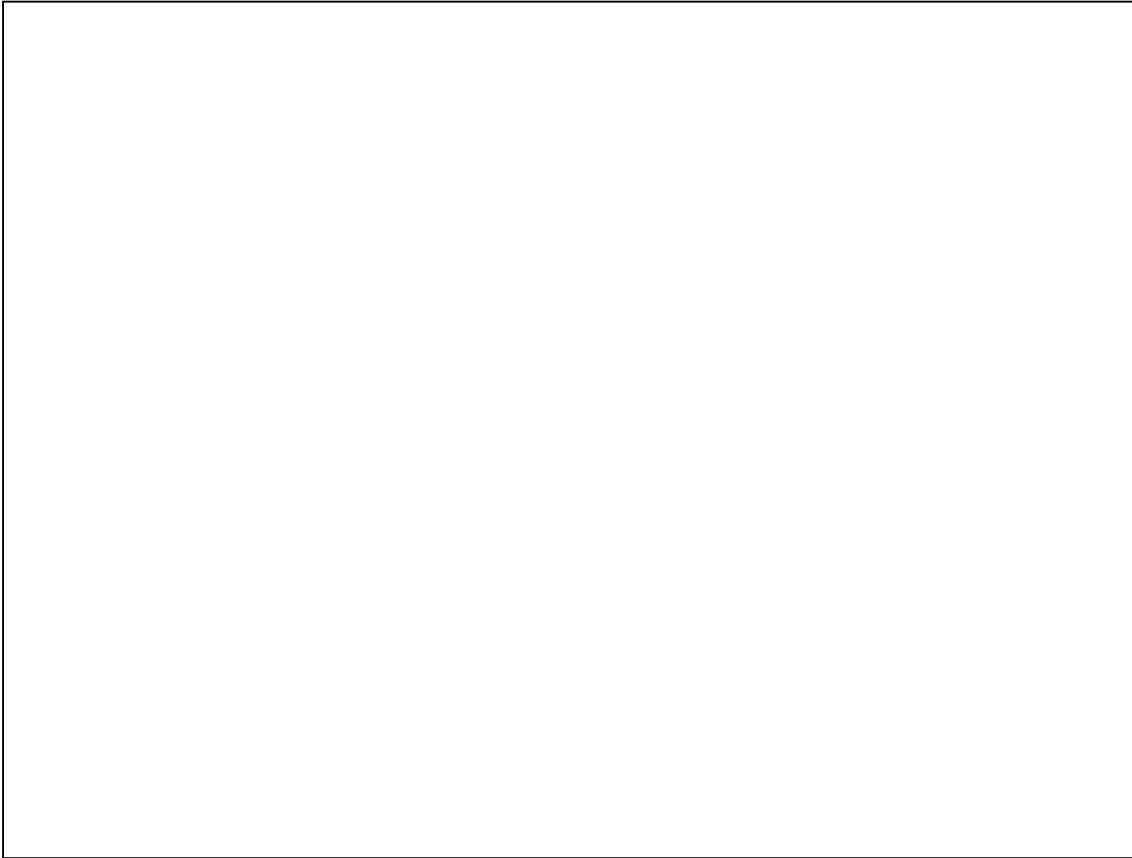


Figure 8: Photo showing possible robbed wall footing [16]

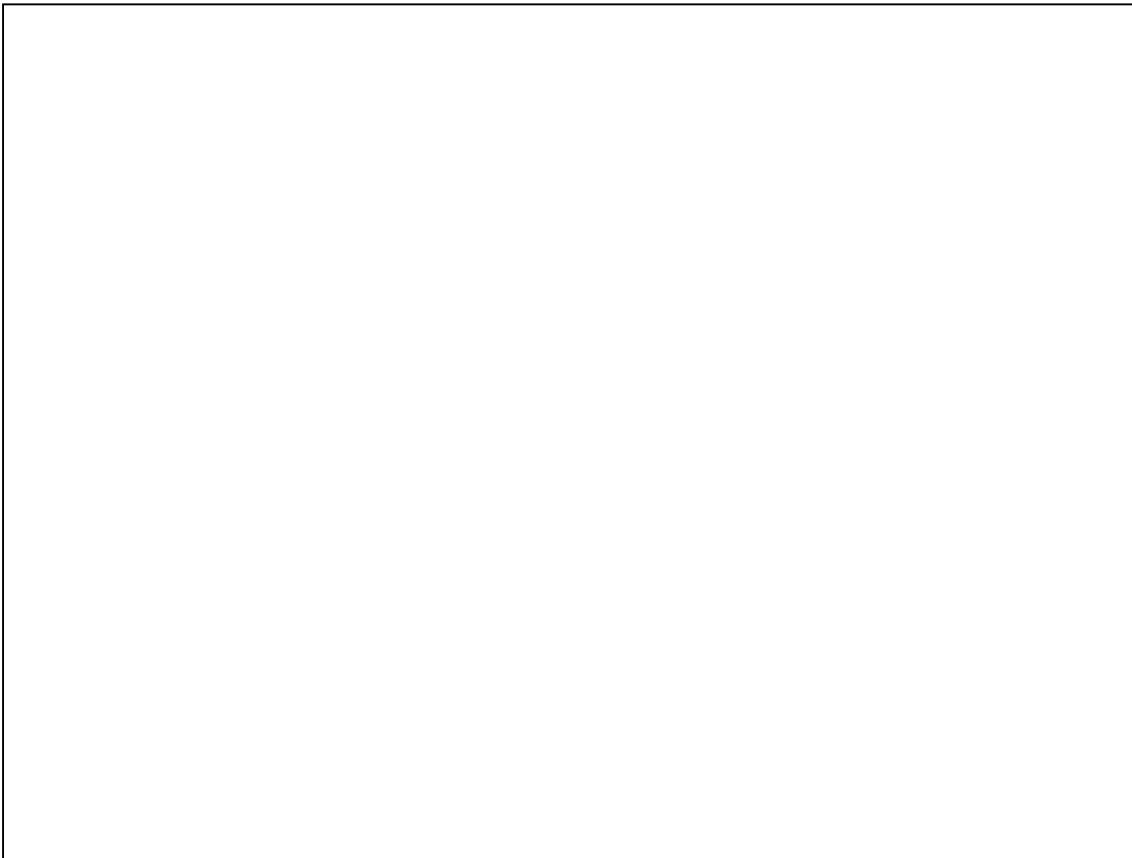


Figure 9: Photo showing in-situ masonry wall (20)

### Appendix 1: OASIS database entry

<b>Project Name</b>	An archaeological watching brief on the site of Groby Castle at St Philips and St James Church, Groby, Leicestershire
<b>Project Type</b>	Watching Brief
<b>Project Manager</b>	Neil Finn
<b>Project Supervisor</b>	Mathew Morris
<b>Previous/Future work</b>	None
<b>Current Land Use</b>	Churchyard and paddock
<b>Development Type</b>	Replacement of revetted boundary wall
<b>Reason for Investigation</b>	Diocesan Advisory Committee ; proximity to Scheduled Ancient Monument
<b>Position in the Planning Process</b>	Requested by client
<b>Site Co-ordinates</b>	SK 523 076
<b>Start/end dates of field work</b>	9/11/09
<b>Archive Recipient</b>	Leicestershire County Council Museum Services
<b>Study Area</b>	c.42 square meters

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