

**An Archaeological Evaluation at  
Shires West, Site 11,  
Freeschool Lane, Leicester,  
NGR SK 584 047 (centre)**

**G. Speed**

For  
Shires GP Ltd

<p><b>Checked by Project Manager</b></p> <p><b>Signed:</b> .....<b>Date:</b></p> <p><b>Name:</b> .....</p>
--

**University of Leicester  
Archaeological Services**

University Rd., Leicester, LE1 7RH  
Tel: (0116) 252 2848 Fax: (0116) 252 2614  
Website: <http://www.le.ac.uk/ulas/>

## Contents

<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Site Description, Topography and Geology.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Archaeological and historical Background .....</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1 The Prehistoric and Roman Period.....	5
3.2 Anglo-Saxon - Medieval .....	6
3.3 Post-Medieval.....	6
3.4. 2004 Evaluation.....	7
<b>4. Aims and Objectives.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5. Methodology.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6. Results.....</b>	<b>9</b>
6.1 Trench 1.....	9
6.2 Trench 2.....	13
6.3 Trench 3.....	13
6.4 Trench 4.....	16
6.5 Trench 5.....	19
6.6 Trench 6.....	19
6.7 Trench 7.....	19
6.8 Trench 8.....	20
6.9 Trench 9.....	24
6.10 Trench 10.....	24
6.11 Trench 11.....	28
6.12 Trench 12.....	28
<b>7. Discussion .....</b>	<b>31</b>
7.1 Roman .....	31
7.2 Anglo-Saxon.....	32
7.3 Medieval.....	32
<b>8. Impact assessment .....</b>	<b>33</b>
8.1 Trench 1.....	33
8.2 Trench 10.....	33
8.3 Trench 4.....	34
8.4 Trench 7.....	34
8.5 Trenches 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12.....	34
8.6 Impact assessment summary.....	35
<b>9. Archive .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>10. Publication .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>11. Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>12. Bibliography.....</b>	<b>36</b>

## List of figures

Fig. 1. Site location plan.....	5
Fig.2. Trench location plan.....	8
Fig. 3. Trench 1 .....	11
Fig.4. Trench 1 section .....	12
Fig. 5. Trench 2 .....	14
Fig. 6. Trench 3a, 3b, 3c.....	15
Fig.7. Trench 4 .....	17
Fig. 8. Trench 4 section .....	18
Fig. 9. Trench 5 .....	21
Fig. 10. Trench 6 .....	22
Fig. 11. Trench 7 .....	23
Fig. 12. Trench 8 .....	25
Fig. 13. Trench 9 .....	26
Fig. 14. Trench 10 .....	27
Fig. 15. Trench 11 .....	29
Fig. 16. Trench 12 .....	30
Fig. 17. Site in relation to the Roman street plan .....	31
Fig.18. Site in relation to the medieval street plan .....	33
Fig. 19. Proposed pile plan .....	34

## **An Archaeological Evaluation at Shires West, Plot 11, Freeschool Lane, Leicester.**

### **Summary**

*University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) carried out an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching on the plot of land previously owned by the Norman and Underwood company at Freeschool Lane, Leicester (SK 584 047) The work was undertaken as part of an archaeological impact assessment for the proposed Shires West development, on behalf of Shires GP Ltd between the 1st August 2005 and 1st September 2005.*

*The evaluation identified the presence of significant archaeological deposits, comprising of both Roman and medieval building remains stretching back from the Highcross Street and Freeschool Lane frontages. Evidence was also revealed for a north-south Roman road, along with upstanding Roman masonry and associated surfaces in the centre of insula 17.*

*The archive is to be deposited with Leicester City Museums Service with accession number A8.2005.*

### **1. Introduction**

Between the 1st August and the 1st September 2005 an archaeological evaluation was carried out by ULAS for Shires GP Ltd, on the site of the former Norman and Underwood premises at Freeschool Lane / St. Peter's Lane, Leicester (SK 584 047).

The work was carried out as part of an archaeological impact assessment for part of the proposed Shires West extension. This report presents the results of the archaeological evaluation by trial trenching, assessing the impact of the proposed development upon the archaeological deposits identified, and referring to the significance of the archaeology in relation to the wider context of the entire Shires West development.

### **2. Site Description, Topography and Geology**

The site is located on a block of land bounded to the north by St. Peter's Lane, to the south by Freeschool Lane, and a small part of the western edge of the site reaches up to Highcross Street (fig.1). As a result of the numerous buildings that previously stood on the site, parts were heavily truncated, either by building piles, deep cellars, or fuel tanks, which removed all trace of archaeological deposits (fig.2.)

The site is located on relatively flat land at a height of 63.1m above OD on Highcross Street, down to 61.9m above OD on St. Peter's Lane. The underlying geology consisted of river terrace gravels overlying Mercia Mudstone.

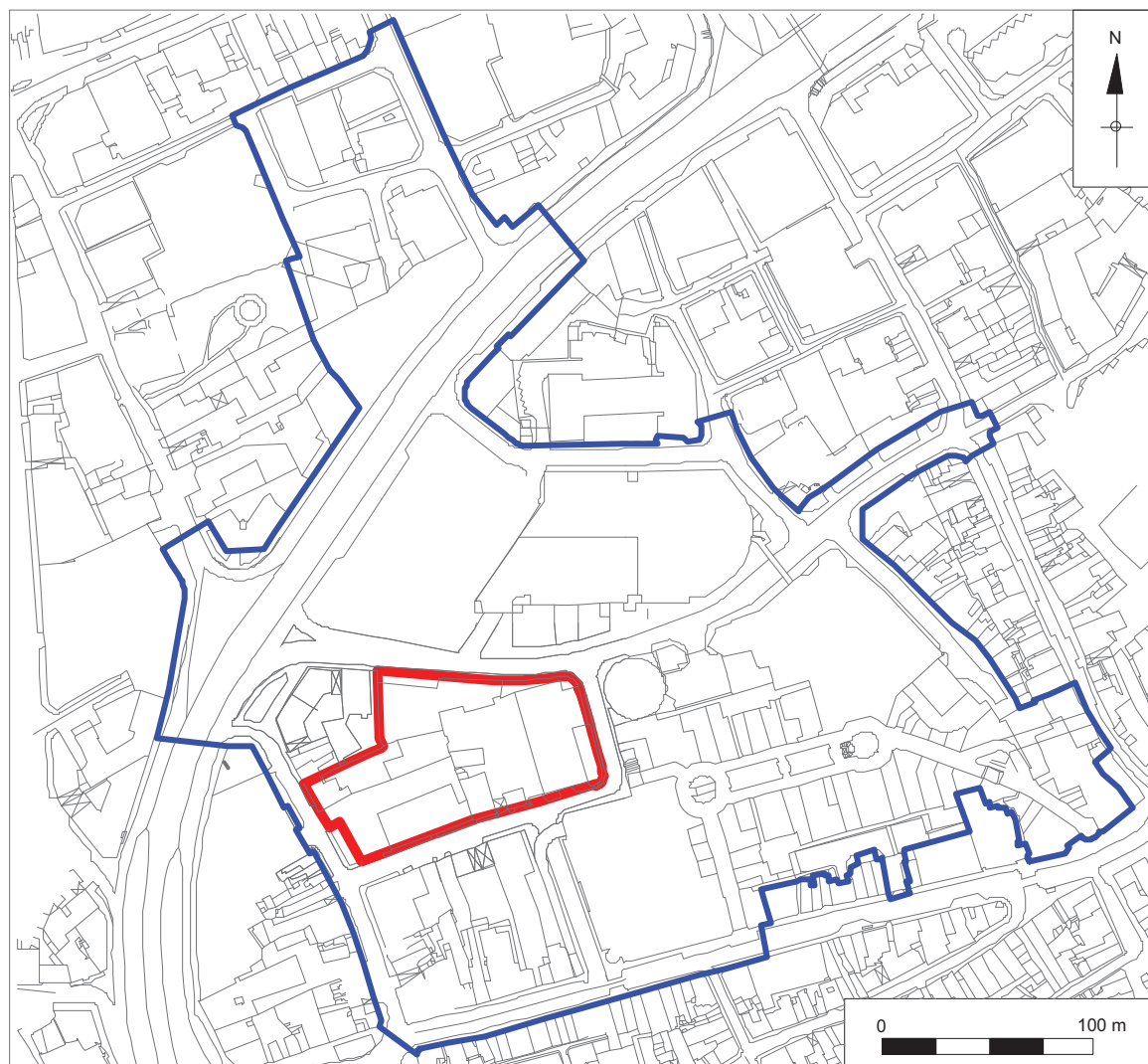


Fig.1. Site location within the Shires development (plan supplied by client)

### 3. Archaeological and historical Background

#### 3.1 The Prehistoric and Roman Period

Although Iron Age activity is known from the West Bridge area and is regarded as a precursor to the Roman town, no evidence for Iron Age activity occupation has been identified this far east as yet.

The first Roman activity in Leicester is represented by a fortlet built to dominate the crossing of the Soar. An early settlement developed, perhaps associated with the fort, and based around the river crossing. This phase is characterised by timber rather than stone buildings on a different alignment (Clay and Pollard 1994:46).

In the early second century, the street grid was laid out, on a different alignment to the early settlement. This is likely to coincide with the establishment of Ratae as a tribal capital. The line of a north-south street should run across the eastern half of the site, and an east-west road in the southern half of the site. According to the street-grid

projection, these roads should form a crossroads in the southeast corner of the site (fig.17).

The site lies mainly within insula 17 of the Roman town, with part of insula 18 on the eastern edge and small areas of insula 23 and 24 in the southern parts of the site (Buckley & Meek 2005:2).

In the middle and later second century a programme of construction of major public buildings was undertaken, including the building of the Forum and Basilica, the Jewry Wall baths and at least one temple, and around this time high status masonry from masonry houses begin to appear (Clay 1985, Clay and Pollard 1994).

Directly opposite the site lay the Roman Macellum, a market-hall of substantial size complementing the Forum to the south. This was built in the early 3rd century and appears to have replaced at least one substantial townhouse of c.125-175. Recent archaeological investigations have confirmed the good survival of the remains of these two structures (M. Derrick *pers. comm.*).

Site 11 is therefore considered to be of high potential for high status Roman activity, with buildings fronting onto one of the principal streets of the Forum, close to what is now Highcross Street.

### **3.2 Anglo-Saxon - Medieval**

The site has potential for features dating to the 5-6<sup>th</sup> century, as evidence from previous excavations close to the evaluation area have revealed evidence for dispersed domestic occupation evidence from this period; there is also potential for 'dark earth' (layers of silty soil found in a number of town concealing Roman deposits) during this period (Buckley & Meek 2005:3).

The site lies within the 'northeast quarter' of medieval Leicester. Medieval remains are likely to exist at a shallow depth, especially along the street frontages. Courtney (2000) suggests that the main focus for settlement was Highcross Street, which ran between the north and south gates of the town, beyond which were later suburbs. The pattern of settlement along the Highcross Street is poorly understood, due to a lack of historical records and until recently a lack of archaeological investigation. Recent work at 9 St. Nicholas Place has shown quite dense settlement, some way back from the frontages (Kipling *forthcoming*).

### **3.3 Post-Medieval**

The map evidence shows buildings along the Highcross Street frontage but Freeschool Lane as almost empty. The Stukeley plan of 1722 shows no buildings at all on the Freeschool Lane frontage, whilst the Roberts plan of 1741 shows a built-up block at the east end of the lane but nothing in the vicinity of the site. The 1828 map shows occasional buildings on both sides of Freeschool Lane, and an L-shaped building within the development area. This also clearly shows the whole of the Highcross Street frontage as being built up. Overall, the plans might indicate that the Highcross Lane had decreased in importance by the post-medieval period (Gnanaratnam 2004:5).

### **3.4. 2004 Evaluation**

Between the 15th March and the 22nd June 2004 an archaeological evaluation was carried out by ULAS on the site of the Freeschool Lane car park, to the rear of the Free Grammar School (trench locations are dashed on fig.2).

The work revealed the presence of significant archaeological deposits, comprising early post-medieval or medieval building remains stretching back from the Highcross Street and Freeschool Lane frontages, these include clay-built walls and clay or earth bonded rubble walls. Below these layers evidence was revealed for Roman deposits of varying thickness, seen mainly in an auger survey (Gnanaratnam 2004:1). A more detailed discussion of the results, in relation to the latest evaluation is discussed in section 6.

## **4. Aims and Objectives**

The principal aims of the archaeological evaluation were:

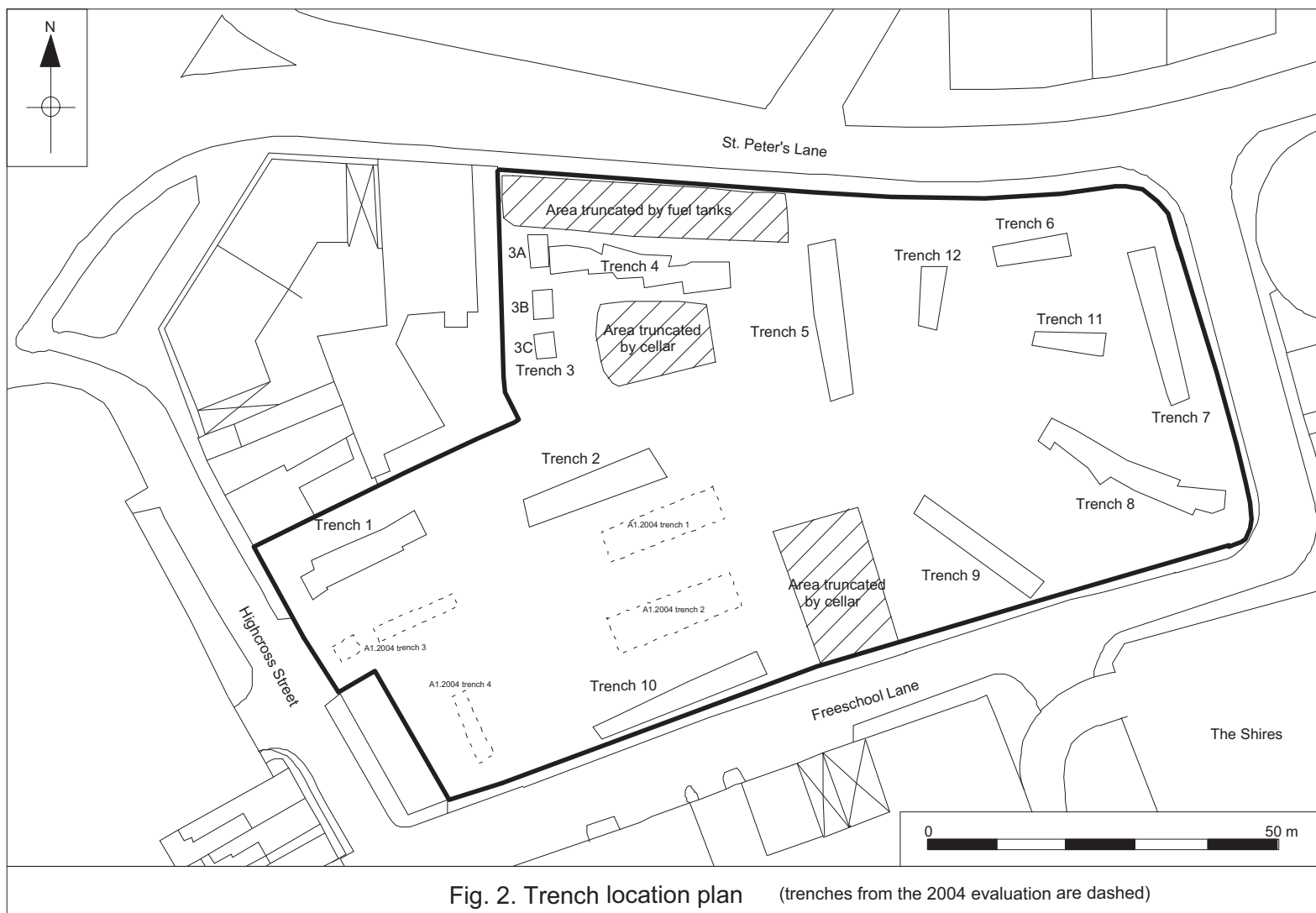
- To identify possible areas of archaeological potential liable to be threatened by the proposed development.
- To establish the location, extent, date, and significance of any archaeological deposits located.
- To define the quality and state of preservation of these deposits.
- To assess the local, regional and national importance of any deposits.
- To produce an archive and report of any results.

This information would allow the City Archaeologist to assess the potential impact of the proposed development upon any archaeological remains.

The objective is to gain an indication of the nature, extent, date and significance of any archaeological deposits in order that an appropriate mitigation strategy may be adopted for remains that may be affected by the development proposals.

## **5. Methodology**

The twelve trenches were excavated using a JCB 360° mechanical digger equipped with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket; where necessary a 0.60m-toothed digging bucket was used. The topsoil and overlying layers were removed under full archaeological supervision until either the top of archaeology or natural undisturbed substratum was reached. Due to the depths of overburden, it was necessary to step the sides of the trenches, they were of various lengths and were generally 3m wide at the base (fig. 2).





The trenches were located using an Electronic Distance Measurer linked to a hand-held Psion data logger. The data was processed using N4ce survey software and the final plans completed with the aid of TurboCAD version 7.1 design software.

The bases of the trenches were hand cleaned and examined for archaeological remains. Where archaeological remains existed they were planned to scale and recorded. Limited excavation of archaeological features was carried out to determine the character and date of any remains.

The work followed the design specification issued by ULAS (Buckley & Meek 2005). All work followed the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations*, and the *Guidelines and Procedures for Archaeological Work in Leicestershire and Rutland* (Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service). The evaluation also adhered to the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers' (SCAUM) Health and Safety Manual and ULAS's Health and Safety Guidelines (2001) and Health and Safety Policy (2001). Archaeological features were recorded with reference to the ULAS recording manual.

## 6. Results

Only a summary of trenches 1 and 10 is included in this report (context numbers have not been assigned to these trenches), as these areas are to be fully excavated in due course. Full descriptions of the remaining trenches are included, as these areas are not planned to be expanded in the excavation phase. A total of twelve trenches were excavated across the site, totalling an area of 747m<sup>2</sup>.

Trench	Length (m)	Width (m)	Area excavated (m <sup>2</sup> )	Notes	Highest level of surviving archaeology (above O.D)
1	18	4	75	Medieval & Roman street frontage activity	62.14
2	20	4	85	Medieval pitting, potential Roman metalling	59.35
3A	4.5	3	12	Medieval pits below garden soils	59.75
3B	4	3	11	Medieval pits below garden soils	59.22
3C	3.5	3	10	Medieval pits below garden soils	59.25
4	25	3.5 - 4	73	Roman building and associated deposits	59.97
5	22	4	88	North-south Roman road	59.11
6	11	3	33	North-south Roman road	59.75
7	22.5	3	75	Saxon feature, medieval pits	59.43
8	28	3.5	100	Medieval features, discrete features	59.46
9	21	3	59	Medieval street frontage activity	59.33
10	25	3	70	Medieval street frontage activity	60.60
11	10	2.5	28	Medieval pitting	59.46
12	9	3	28	North-south Roman road	59.45

### 6.1 Trench 1 (fig.3)

This trench was positioned close to the Highcross Street frontage at the west end of the site (fig.2), orientated northeast-southwest, parallel to the 2004 evaluation trench 3. At the west-end of the trench, close to the frontage, archaeological features were

encountered at a depth of just 0.3m (62.14m above O.D.) below modern ground make-ups. The deposits consisted of numerous silty-clay deposits of probable post-medieval or medieval date.

Below this a series of mortared stone walls located at the west-end of the trench, two of which were probably of post-medieval or medieval date. They appeared to have been built upon the core of a substantial wall, of possible Roman date. All walls were aligned northwest-southeast, parallel to Highcross Street, and therefore are possibly the surviving remains of street frontages. The possible Roman wall (though partly truncated) is of a substantial thickness, and given its location (directly opposite the macellum), could be the remains of a substantial Roman building, either a public building or townhouse.

The back-fill of two modern cellars was removed between 1.8m from the west end to c.5m from the east end of the trench. The two cellars have partly re-used an earlier stone-built boundary wall running eastwards from the street frontage. After removing the cellar floor a substantial amount of archaeological features were revealed ranging in date from Roman to post-medieval.

The medieval and post-medieval deposits were mainly dark silty-clay deposits, probably pits and (partial) cobbled surfaces relating to yard activity. These were located at c.60.74m O.D.

Towards the west-end of the trench, large patches of a dark black-brown organic deposit was encountered, this deposit overlay the Roman features and was seen in section (the cellar removed much of the deposit in plan). This deposit could possibly be a 'dark earth' deposit of post-Roman date. These deposits have been seen mainly around the area of the Roman Forum, most recently at 9 St. Nicholas Circle (R.Kipling *pers. comm.*). Similar deposits have been found at other historic towns such as St. Albans, Canterbury and London (Meek 2003:17), and the presence of it here is of importance in the study of historic towns.

The Roman deposits appeared to be mainly at the west end of the trench, though the medieval and 'dark earth' deposits may be truncating / masking these earlier features elsewhere in the trench. One of the larger Roman deposits was a c.1m x c.1.6m sub-rectangular shaped feature containing a large amount of Roman roof tiles and granite blocks. The feature appeared to be fairly loosely compacted, and may represent a back-filled feature of Roman date.

This trench was located close to trench 3A and 3B from the 2004 evaluation (Gnanaratnam 2004). Within trench 3A, significant archaeological deposits (post-medieval / medieval wall) started at around 62.59m O.D, with floors starting at 62.53m O.D. The size and build of the wall suggested that this was the base of a well-built stone wall that was later replaced in brick. Another wall was on the same line as the rear wall of the Free Grammar School and is potentially of similar antiquity. There seemed to be soily deposits below this, to a depth of around 60.80m O.D when probable building remains started again going down to an unknown depth.

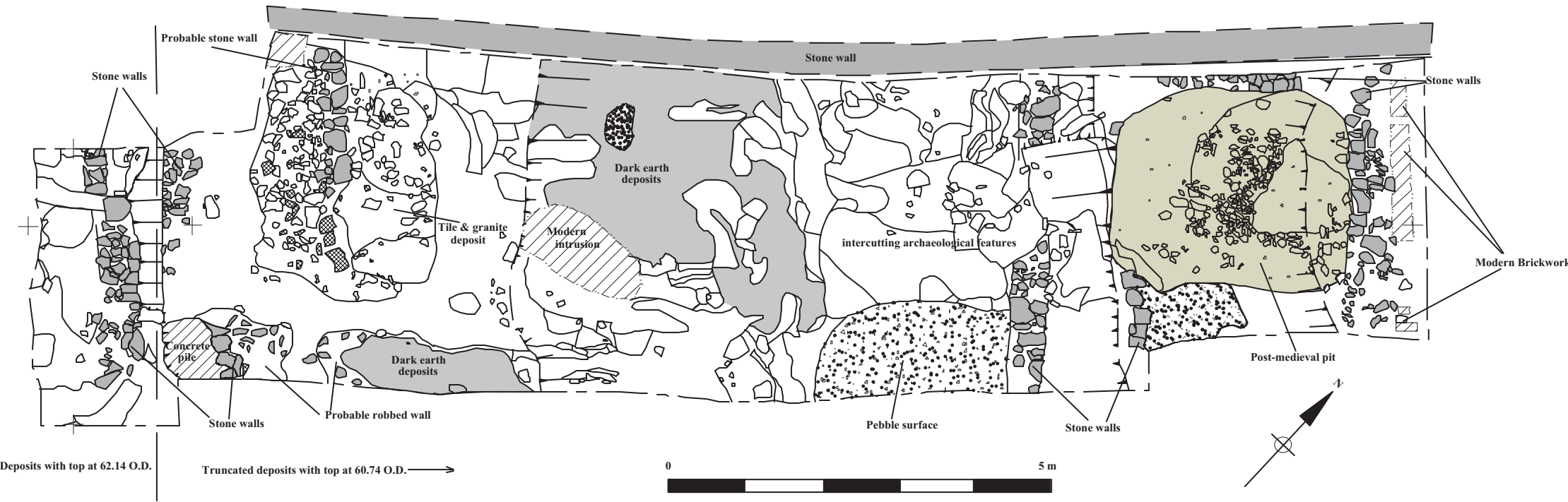


Fig. 3. Trench 1 plan

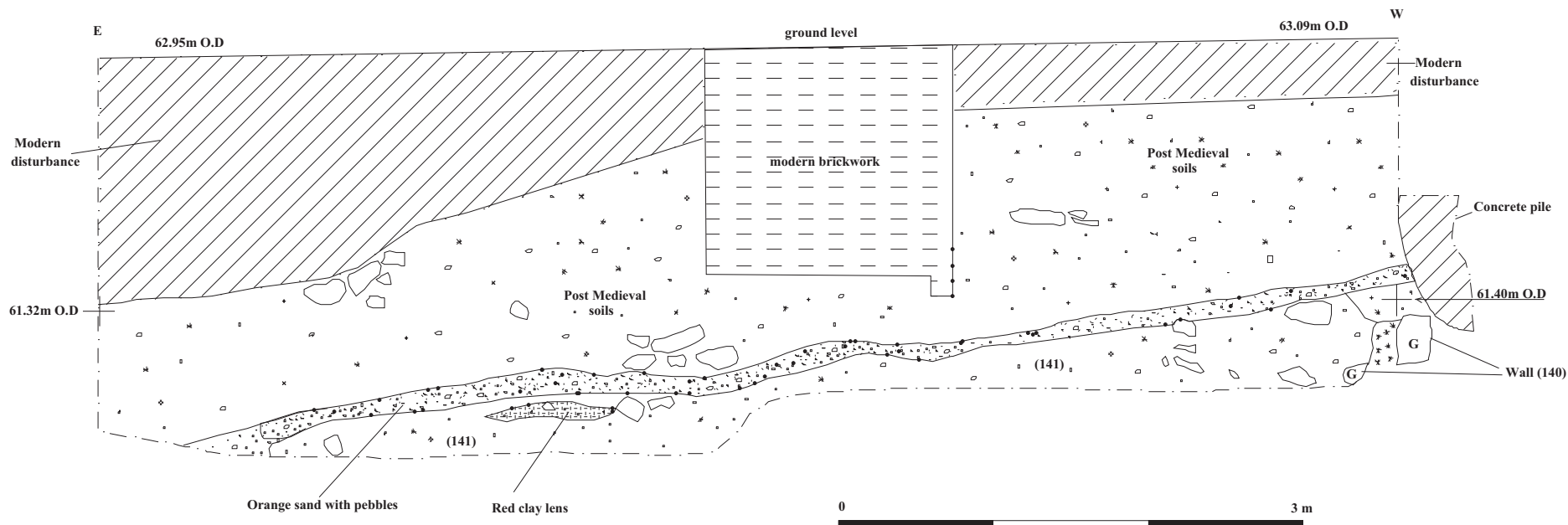


Fig.4 Trench 1 north-facing section

Trench 3B, contained significant archaeological deposits, comprising building remains that started at a depth of around 61.94m O.D and appeared to continue to a depth of around 60.40m O.D. Below this, is a homogeneous soil-like deposit with greenish iron speckling or mottling was seen over much of the trench. This seemed to go down to a depth of c.59.40m O.D and perhaps 59.60m O.D in the east end of the trench. Below this were further probable building remains down to a depth of around 58.90m O.D, possible natural substratum was seen at a depth of around 58.66m O.D.

## **6.2 Trench 2 (fig.5)**

The trench was located approximately in the centre-left of the excavation area, orientated on the same alignment as trench 1: northeast - southwest (fig.2), parallel to trench 1 from the 2004 evaluation.

Demolition rubble, overlying modern make-up was encountered down to a depth of around 0.3 metres from ground level; this sealed a dark brown loamy garden soil (1) that was seen in places across the site. Containing post-medieval pottery this continued to a depth of c.0.85m where a mid-brown garden soil (2) was reached, this contained the occasional sherd of medieval pottery. Cut into these soils, and also seen in plan were pits of post-medieval or modern date. Below the garden soils, cutting into the natural substratum were medieval pits (59.25m O.D), along with a possible Roman metal surface (11).

The 2004 evaluation located a trench close to this trench (fig.2.), and found very similar levels of archaeology. Again, probable garden soils were seen from around 61.00m O.D down to a depth of around 59.60m O.D. Below this a light grey silty subsoil layer was seen overlying the natural substratum (Gnanaratnam 2004:5). Similar deposits were seen at the former St Margaret's Baths (Gnanaratnam 2003:27), the 1989 Shires Excavations (R.Buckley *pers. comm.*) and elsewhere in Leicester such as near Vaughan College (Gnanaratnam 1999).

## **6.3 Trench 3 (fig.6)**

The trench was located in the northwest corner of the site (fig.2). Three separate squares were excavated to accommodate concrete blocks encountered during machine striping (3A, 3B, 3C); overall the trench was orientated north-south.

### **3A**

Below the demolition layer and modern make-up, post-medieval dark brown loamy garden soils (1) were encountered; cutting into this was a post-medieval clay-lined pit (96) at 59.73m O.D. The feature consisted of mid yellow-brown silt with occasional pebbles and charcoal flecks, this was surrounded by a red clay lining.

### **3B**

Below the demolition layer and modern make-up, post-medieval dark brown loamy garden soils (1) and a mid-brown garden soil (2) were encountered. The natural substratum was reached at the same level of archaeological features at 59.22m O.D.

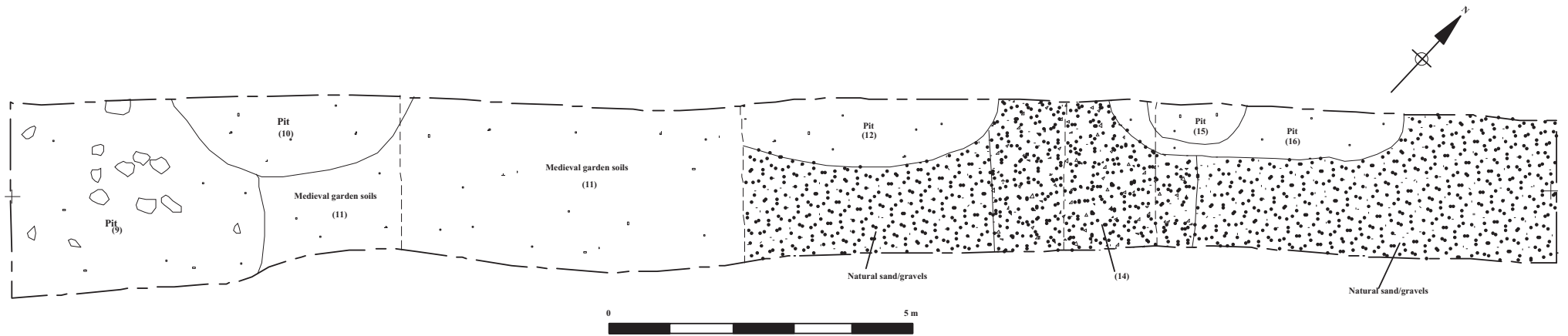


Fig. 5. Trench 2 plan

Cutting into the natural sands and gravels were four features (103,104,105,106) of a probable medieval date.

Feature 103 consisted of very dark grey-brown silt, with occasional small pebbles. Feature 104 consisted of a mid grey-brown silt-clay, with red clay lining and occasional pebbles and charcoal. This indicates that this could be a medieval well. It cut feature 106, which was a mid-grey-brown silty feature, containing frequent small irregular pebbles. Feature 105 was located in the centre of the trench and was sub-rectangular in shape. It consisted of a dark grey-brown silt-clay, with occasional small pebbles, and was a pit of probable medieval date.

### 3C

Below the demolition layer and modern make-up, post-medieval dark brown loamy garden soils (1) and a mid-brown garden soil (2) were encountered, at which level six features were located cutting into the natural sands and gravels at 59.25m O.D.

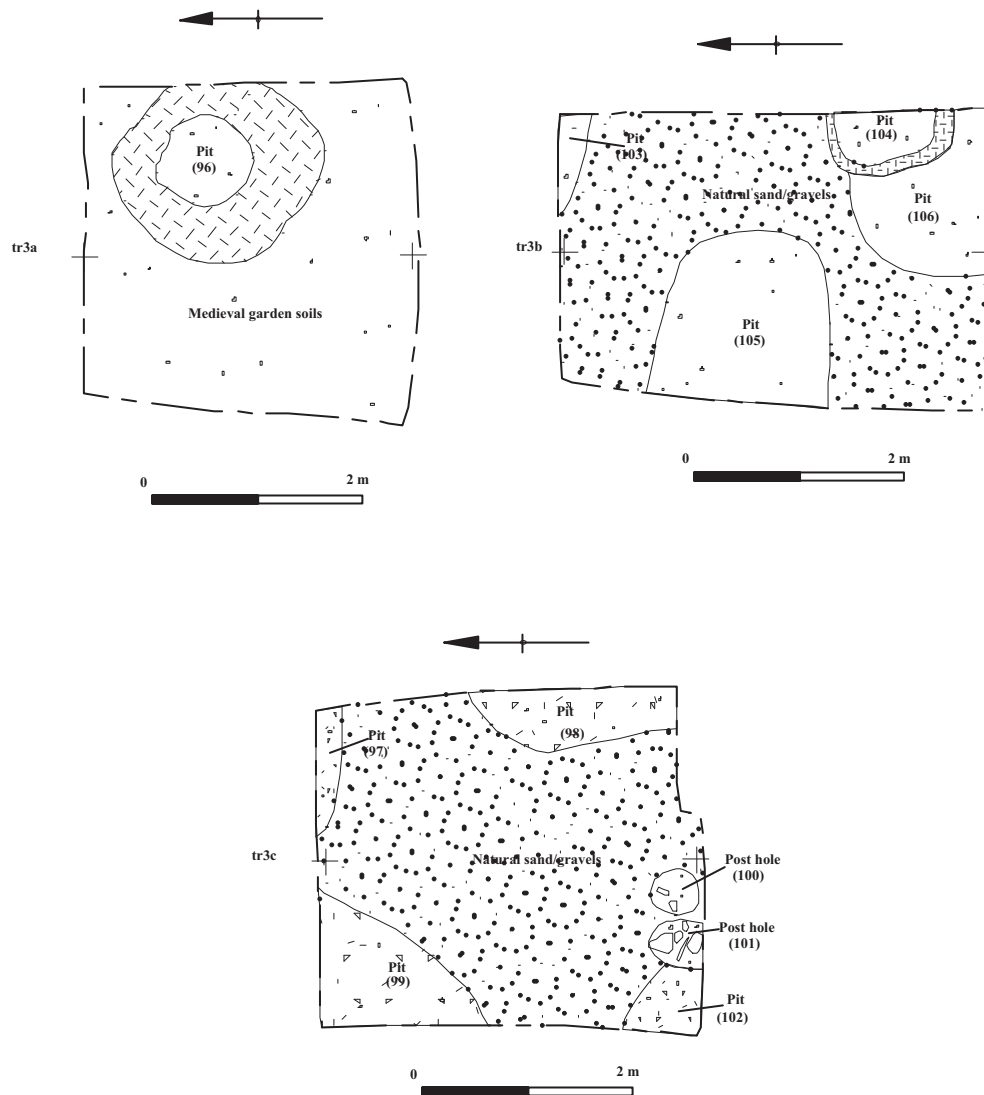


Fig. 6. Trench 3a, 3b, 3c plan

The features were again of a probable medieval date, and consisted of pits (97, 98, 99, 102), and two postholes (100, 101). Feature 97 was located in the southwest corner of the trench; it consisted of dark brown silt, with occasional pebbles. Feature 98 consisted of mid yellow-brown silt with small charcoal flecks. Feature 99 consisted of dark grey-brown silt, with occasional pebbles and stone and small charcoal flecks. Feature 102, located in the northeast corner of the trench consisted of light yellow-brown silt, with occasional small pebbles. Posthole 100 consisted of very dark brown silty-clay, with occasional large stone and small pebbles. It was found adjacent to posthole 101, which consisted of mid yellow-brown silty-clay with large granite and slate packing, the feature cut pit 102.

#### **6.4 Trench 4 (fig.7)**

The area immediately adjacent to St. Peter's Lane was completely truncated by fuel tanks, therefore the trench was positioned behind this area, orientated east-west, parallel to the road (fig.2); the irregular shape of the trench was due to the various modern intrusions encountered during the machine strip. The measurements are taken from the west-end of the trench.

Below the demolition layer and modern make-up, post-medieval dark brown loamy garden soils (1) were encountered, overlying a mid-brown garden soil (2), beneath which numerous archaeological features were located at *c.*59.90m O.D.

Within the first four metres from the west-end a mid yellow-brown sand-gravel deposit (127, 128) was located at a height of 59.89m O.D, this linear feature cut into the medieval garden soil (2) and contained no finds.

Between 4 to 12 metres from the west-end, much of the trench had been truncated by a further fuel tank (to 59.14m O.D), although in section (on the south side of the trench) archaeological stratigraphy could be seen between 59.90m and 59.23m O.D, at which level the natural sands and gravels were reached (see fig.7). Two pits, cutting the medieval garden soil (2) were seen in section (125, 134), both contained similar fills to the garden soil, and probably date to the post-medieval period. A sequence of Roman stratification was also seen in section (features 119, 130, 131).

The Roman stratification was seen in plan in the remainder of the trench. It consisted of a build-up of levels, containing a vast amount of Roman pottery, painted wall plaster, tesserae, and animal bone (features 119, 130, 131). Feature 119 was found below the medieval garden soil (2), it consisted of a mixture of garden soil and mid-grey brown silt-clay. Features 130 and 131 consisted of layers of mid orange-brown sandy-clay and may conceal floor levels. Features 112, 113, 114, 115, 118, 119, 120 are similar features, consisting of orange-brown sandy-clay, again with many finds of Roman date.





Fig.7 Trench 4 plan

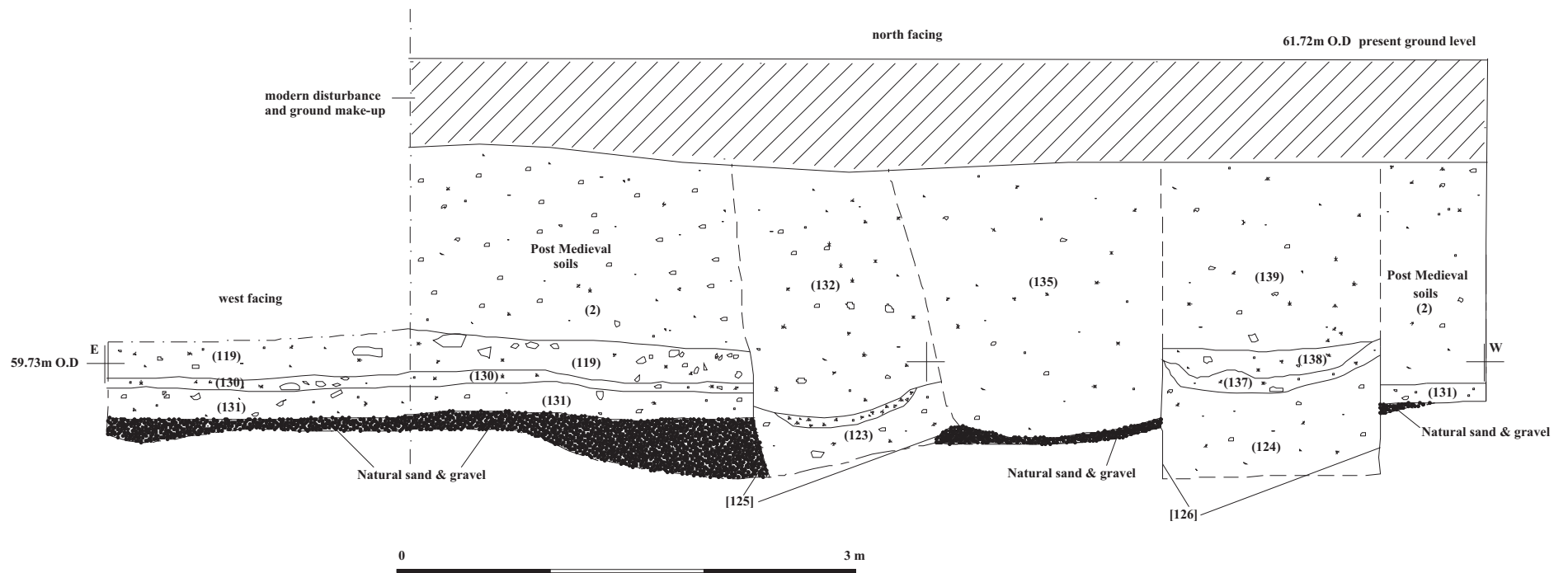


Fig. 8. Trench 4 section

Associated with these deposits was a 1.5m length of mortared wall (121), constructed with granite blocks and slate (59.97m O.D). This would appear to indicate the remains of a Roman building, lying almost centrally within insula 17 of the Roman street grid (fig.16).

Further towards the east end of the trench was a sequence of intercutting pits, represented by much darker soils, which were probably medieval in date (features 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 115, 116, 117).

### **6.5 Trench 5 (fig.9)**

This trench was located running back from the St. Peter's Lane street frontage, orientated north-south (fig.2). Below the demolition layer and modern make-up, post-medieval dark brown loamy garden soils (1) were encountered, overlying a mid-brown garden soil (2); archaeological features were located below this at c.59.8m O.D.

At the north-end of the trench a feature (149) consisting of compacted pebbles and cobbles was identified at 59.8m O.D. This feature can be interpreted as a Roman yard surface, possibly connecting the building in trench 4 with the north-south road in trenches 6 and 12. The same feature was again seen mid-way though the trench, though it was heavily truncated by numerous medieval and post-medieval intercutting pits (152). At the south-end of the trench was a clay-bonded wall (150), constructed with granite and slate, this cut into the medieval garden soil (2) at 59.45m O.D.

### **6.6 Trench 6 (fig.10)**

This trench is located parallel to St. Peter's Lane in the northeast corner of the site, orientated east-west (fig.2). It was located in this position to investigate the potential survival of medieval or post-medieval street frontage activity, and to pick up the projected line of a north-south Roman road.

Below the demolition layer a back-filled Victorian cellar and floor were removed; at this level (59.75m O.D) archaeological deposits were visible. A c.0.4m succession of compacted friable sand and gravel metalled surfaces were observed lying on top of the natural substratum. These deposits represent what remains of a north-south Roman road between insula 17 and 18; this was heavily truncated by medieval pits. Lying above these deposits were two walls, one constructed with granite blocks (7), and another which was brick built. Although the lack of finds makes it difficult to be certain, these may be medieval or post-medieval in date.

### **6.7 Trench 7 (fig.11)**

The trench was located at the east end of the site (fig.2), orientated northwest-southeast. Below the demolition layer and modern levelling was the post-medieval garden soil (1), and earlier medieval garden soil (2); below these deposits lay numerous archaeological deposits at 59.43m O.D.

At the far north-end of the trench two light yellow-brown silty deposits (52, 53) were identified. They appeared to be the scant remains of a surface of possible Roman date overlying the natural substratum. A large area of thin subsoil (56) was also seen in this part of the trench, it consisted of a mid orange-brown silt-clay with frequent stone and pebbles, and it was similar to the subsoil seen in trenches 2 and 11.

Most features were located in the southern half of the trench. The majority were inter-cutting pits (features 54, 55, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72), dating to the medieval period. Features 65 and 67 may date to the Roman period, though they are heavily truncated by the overlying medieval features. Feature 66 consisted of dark grey-brown silt with red clay and occasional pebbles and charcoal, it was rectangular in shape and was granite-lined; it can be interpreted as a medieval cess pit, though this is uncertain due to the lack of dating evidence.

Feature 81 contained sherds of Saxon and late Roman pottery, indicating potential archaeological activity of early Anglo-Saxon date (*c.* 5th-6th century A.D.). Based on finds evidence and recent discoveries in the area a settlement of this period is suspected in this part of the town, this feature may indicate such activity.

### **6.8 Trench 8 (fig.12)**

This trench was located in the southeast corner of the site, orientated northwest-southeast (fig.2). It was positioned here in order to locate the possible crossroads of a north-south and east-west Roman road.

Below the demolition and modern levels the post-medieval (1), and medieval (2) garden soils were encountered. Archaeological features were found to be cutting the garden soils towards the west-end of the trench and consisted of numerous inter-cutting pits (grouped as one context: 42), these are probably post-medieval in date.

Towards the east end of the trench numerous discrete features (26-40) were identified sealed by the garden soils, and cut into the natural substratum. Eight postholes (26, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 36, 40) were located within a fairly tight area. All consisted of dark-brown silty-clay; features 26, 28, and 33 contained evidence for granite stone packing. Feature 30 was a slightly irregularly shaped feature; it consisted of a mid grey-brown soft clayey-silt with some rounded and sub-rounded stones. A section was excavated through this, which recovered two small fragments of Iron Age pottery. Given the similarity in fill to the surrounding features, it is suggested that this feature may be contemporaneous with the surrounding postholes, the features appear to respect the projected line of the Roman roads, though the nature of the evidence is patchy at present. Although the presence of prehistoric pottery could suggest activity of this period, the fact that the features appear to respect the projected line of the Roman roads may indicate that the finds are residual.

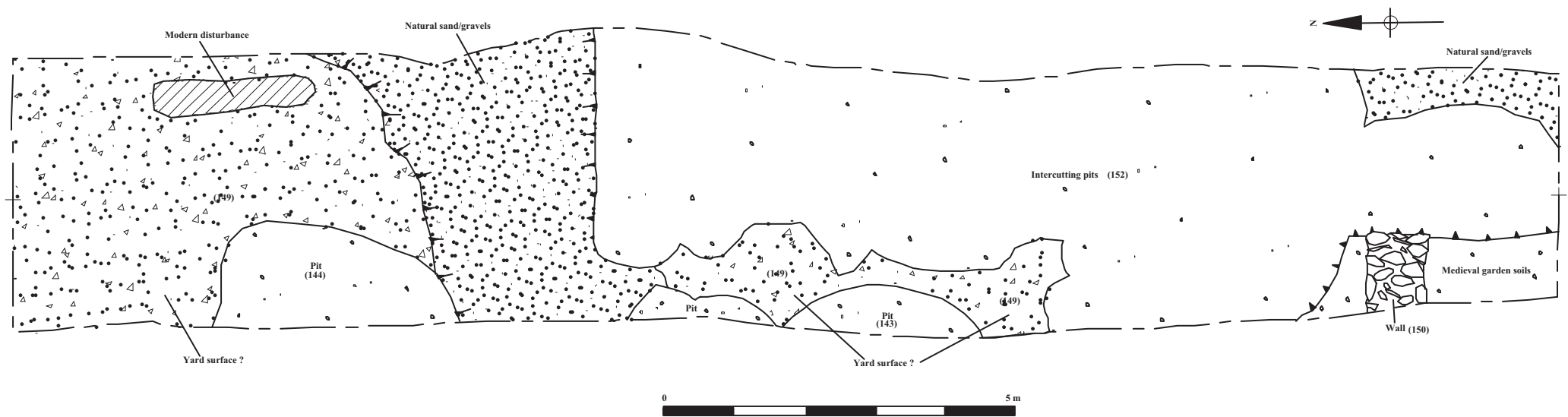


Fig. 9. Trench 5 plan

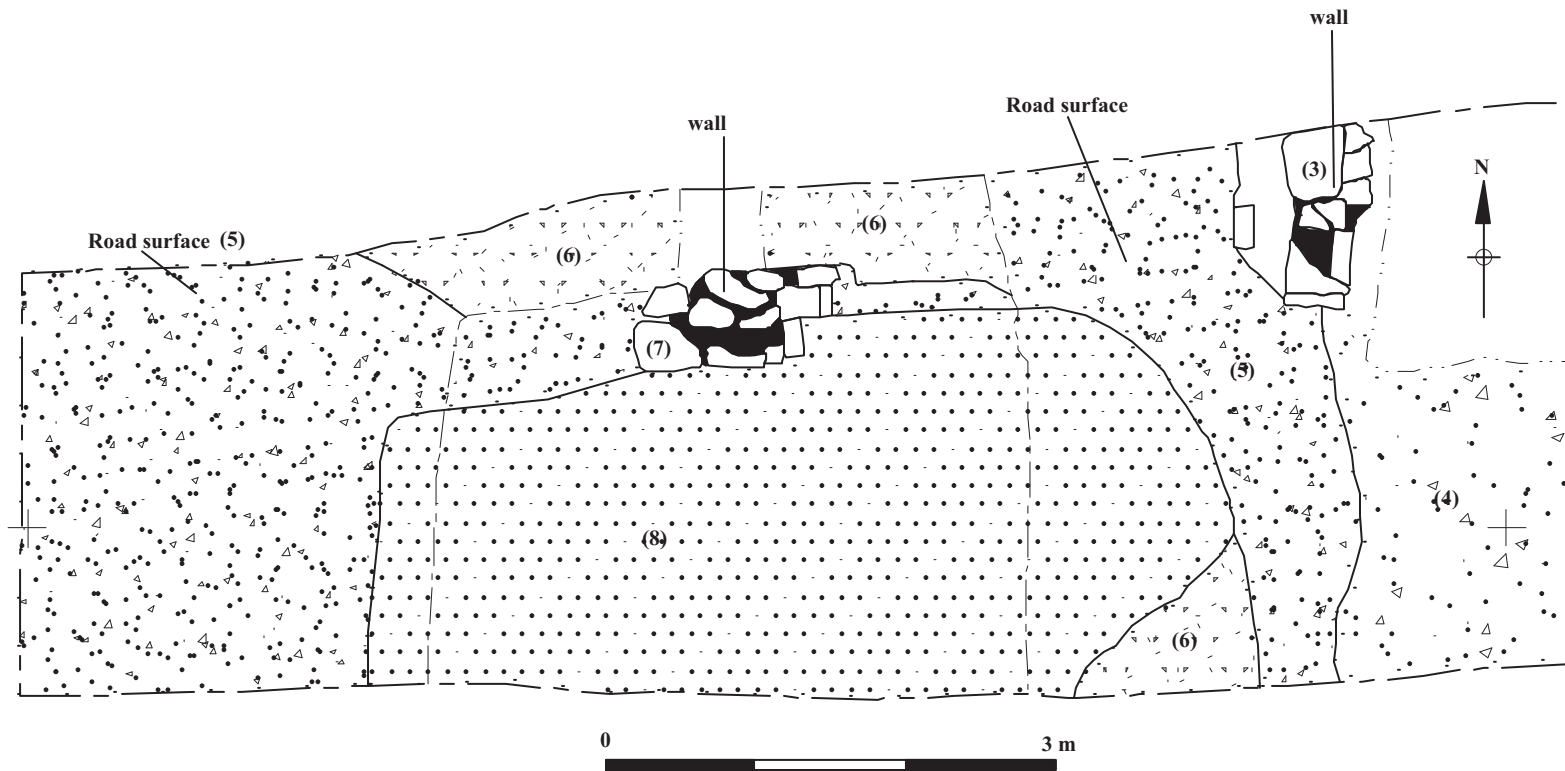


Fig. 10. Trench 6 plan

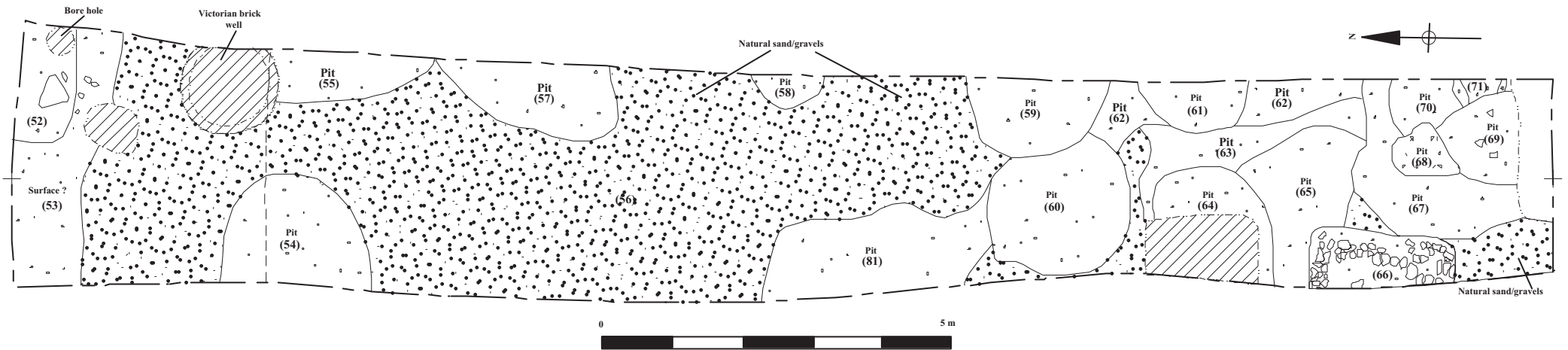


Fig. 11. Trench 7 plan

The Roman crossroads was not identified within this trench; this was either because the proposed road line is slightly different to that indicated in figure 16, alternatively any evidence might have been completely removed from medieval and post-medieval activity.

### **6.9 Trench 9 (fig.13)**

The trench was located in the southern part of the site (fig.2), in an attempt to locate a projected east-west Roman road and medieval street frontage activity along Freeschool Lane.

Demolition rubble, overlying modern make-up was encountered followed by a dark brown loamy garden soil (1) this in turn sealed a mid-brown garden soil (2). Five linear features (84, 85, 87, 88, 90) and four sub-rectangular features (82, 83, 89, 91) were identified below the garden soils, cutting into the natural substratum at *c.*59.33m O.D. The finds recovered suggests a medieval date for these features that probably relate to Freeschool Lane street frontage activity.

### **6.10 Trench 10 (fig.14)**

The trench was located adjacent to Freeschool Lane (fig.2), orientated northeast-southwest. It was located here to expand test pits 5, 6, and 7 from the 2004 evaluation; a continuous trench could not be excavated at the time because of problems ensuring adequate ventilation within the former garage (Gnanaratnam 2004:5).

Demolition rubble overlying modern make-up was encountered down to a depth of around 0.3 metres from ground level; this sealed a dark brown loamy garden soil (1), what continued to a depth of *c.*0.85m where a mid-brown garden soil (2) was reached. In the western half of the trench the back-fill of Victorian cellars was encountered, and then removed.

Below these deposits, at a height of *c.*60.52m O.D was substantial evidence for medieval and post-medieval street frontage activity in the form of buildings, floor surfaces, and yard activity.

At the west end of the trench two walls were located at a height of 60.47m O.D. Both were constructed with granite and sandstone and were orientated at 90° to Freeschool Lane. Associated with these were numerous inter-cutting dark silty-clay deposits that relate to domestic activity.

At the west-end of the trench, a stone wall constructed of granite, sandstone, and slate was located at a height of 60.53m O.D. The wall was orientated parallel to Freeschool Lane and may be the remains of the rear of a street frontage property of medieval date. Again associated with this were fragments of cobbled surfaces and silty-clay deposits. The trench indicates that there is cellarage along the Freeschool Lane frontage.

The 2004 evaluation put a trench 11 metres back from Freeschool Lane (trench 2). It identified the presence of medieval activity below the garden soils at 60.25m O.D. A fragment of Roman stratigraphy was also identified at *c.*59.9m O.D.



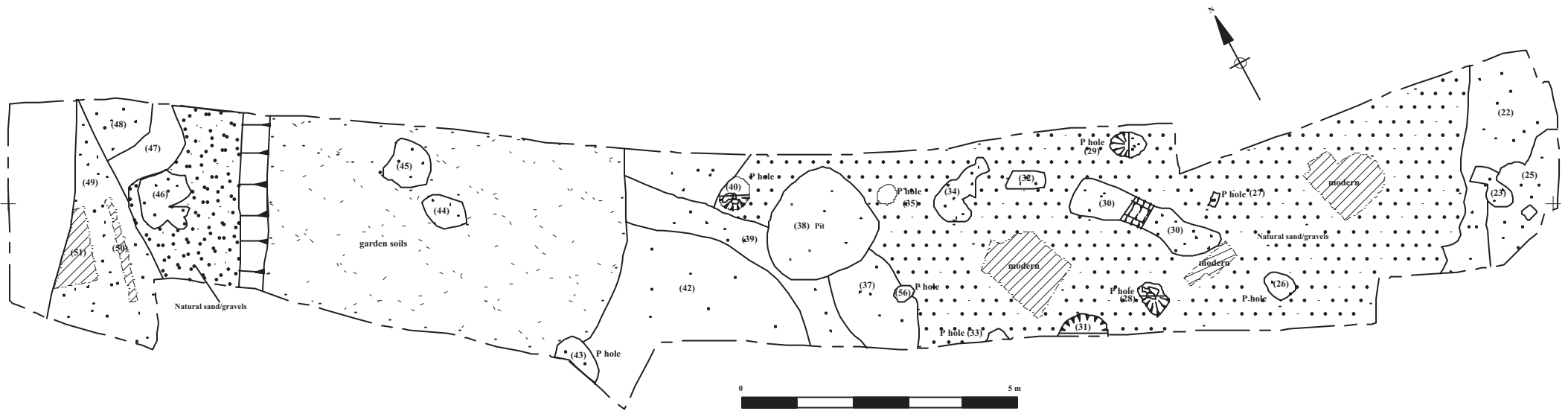


Fig. 12. Trench 8 plan



Fig. 13. Trench 9 plan



Fig. 14. Trench 10 plan

### **6.11 Trench 11 (fig.15)**

The trench was located in the west of the site (fig.2), orientated east-west to a length of 10 metres. Demolition rubble, overlying modern make-up was encountered followed by a dark brown loamy garden soil (1) this in turn sealed a mid-brown garden soil (2).

Three archaeological features (17, 18, 19) were identified within this trench at a height of 59.39m O.D. All were mid grey-brown silt-sand deposits, and based on the finds retrieved probably date to the medieval period. These deposits were cut into subsoil (20), similar to what was seen in trench 2 and 7.

### **6.12 Trench 12 (fig.16)**

The trench was located in the northeast area of the site (fig.2), orientated north-south, and measured 9 metres. Demolition rubble, overlying modern make-up was encountered followed by a dark brown loamy garden soil (1) this in turn sealed a mid-brown garden soil (2).

Below these soils, archaeological deposits were identified (contexts 145-148) at a height of 59.11m O.D. A succession of compacted friable sand and gravel metalled surfaces were observed in the northeast corner of the trench (145, 146). These deposits represent what remains of a north-south Roman road between insula 17 and 18 (part of the road is also seen in trench 6). The deposits were heavily truncated by medieval pits (148).

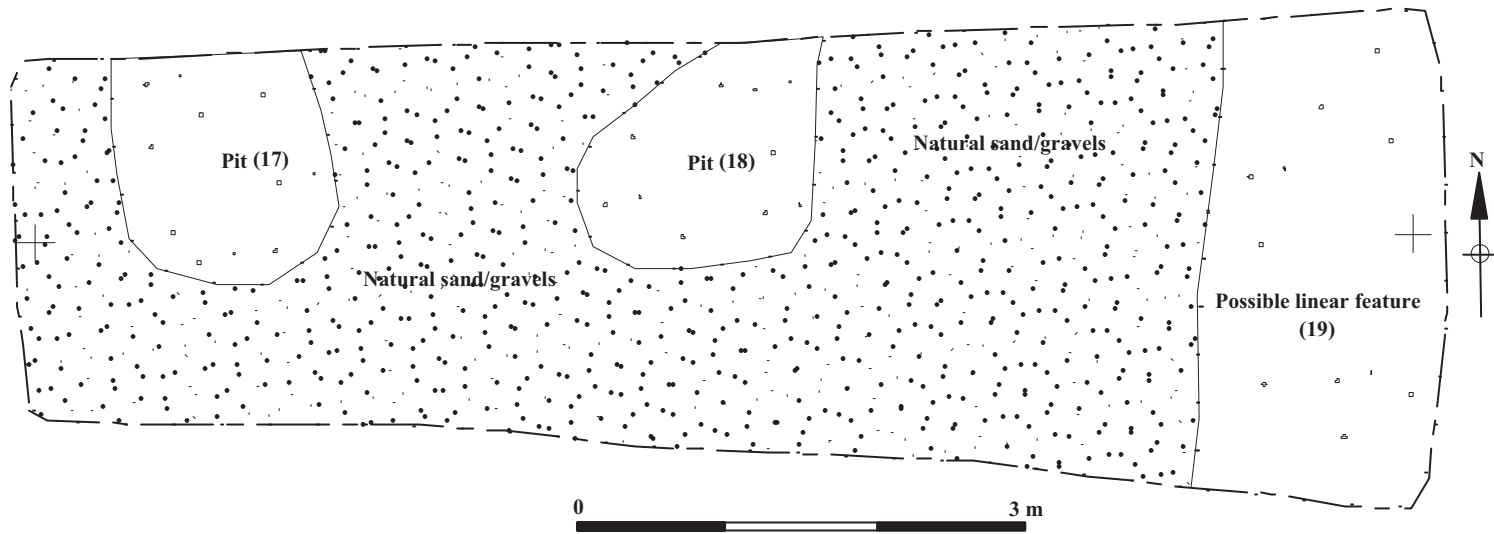


Fig. 15. Trench 11 plan

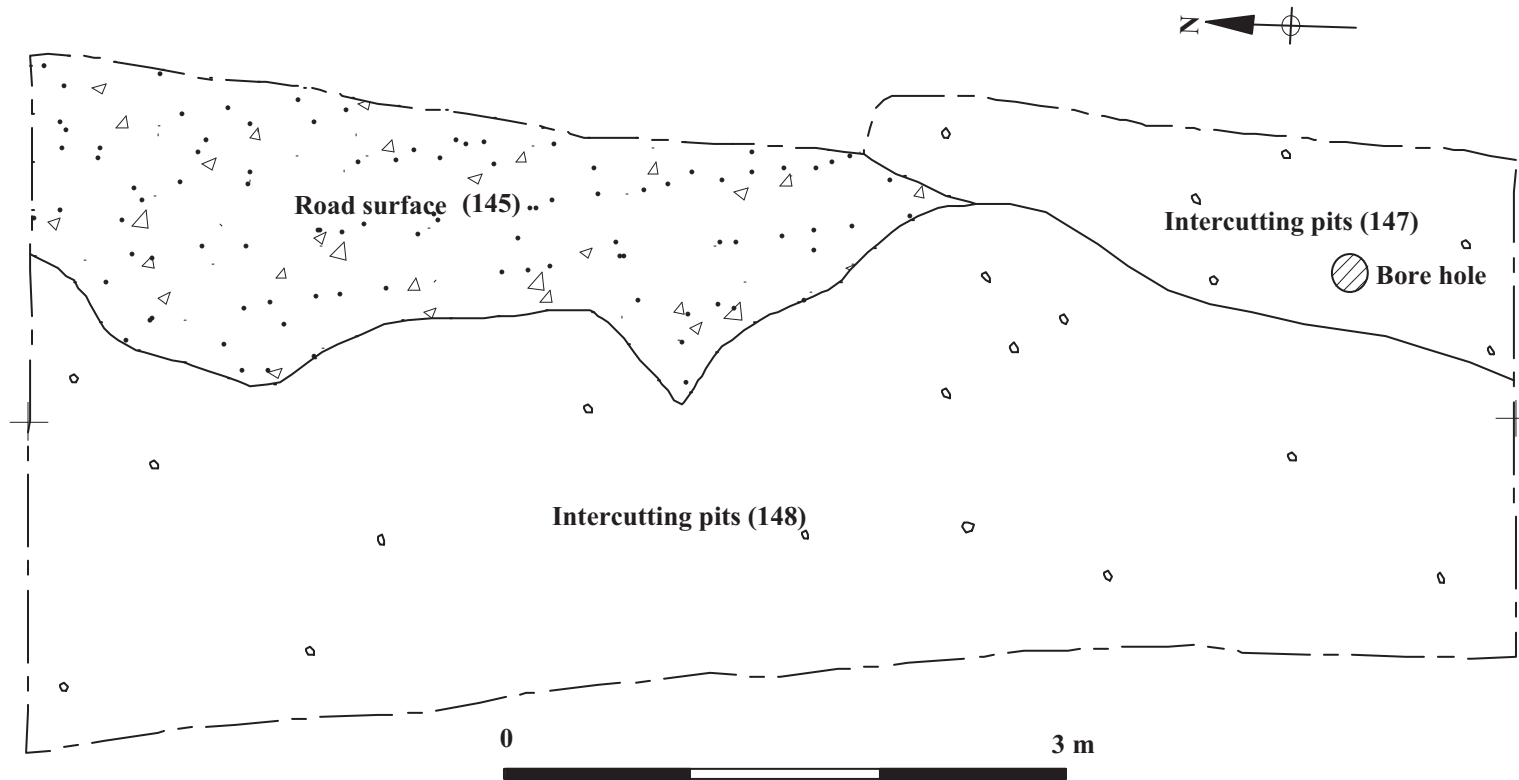


Fig. 16. Trench 12 plan

## 7. Discussion

The archaeological evaluation has identified archaeological remains within four areas of the development area ranging from the Roman to post-medieval periods, which will be impacted on from the proposed development.

Elsewhere on the site, archaeological deposits have seen significant truncation by modern features and by probable medieval horticultural activity as represented by substantial garden soil deposits.

### 7.1 Roman

Archaeological features dating from the Roman period were seen in trenches 1,4,6, and 12 (fig.17). They consisted of building and associated deposits in trenches 1 and 4, and evidence for a north-south road in trenches 6 and 12.

The expected depth of Roman building remains was not clearly visible on site except perhaps, on the Highcross Street frontage. These were encountered at 60.70m OD; elsewhere on site the probable Roman were at a depth varying between 59.40 to 59.70mOD.

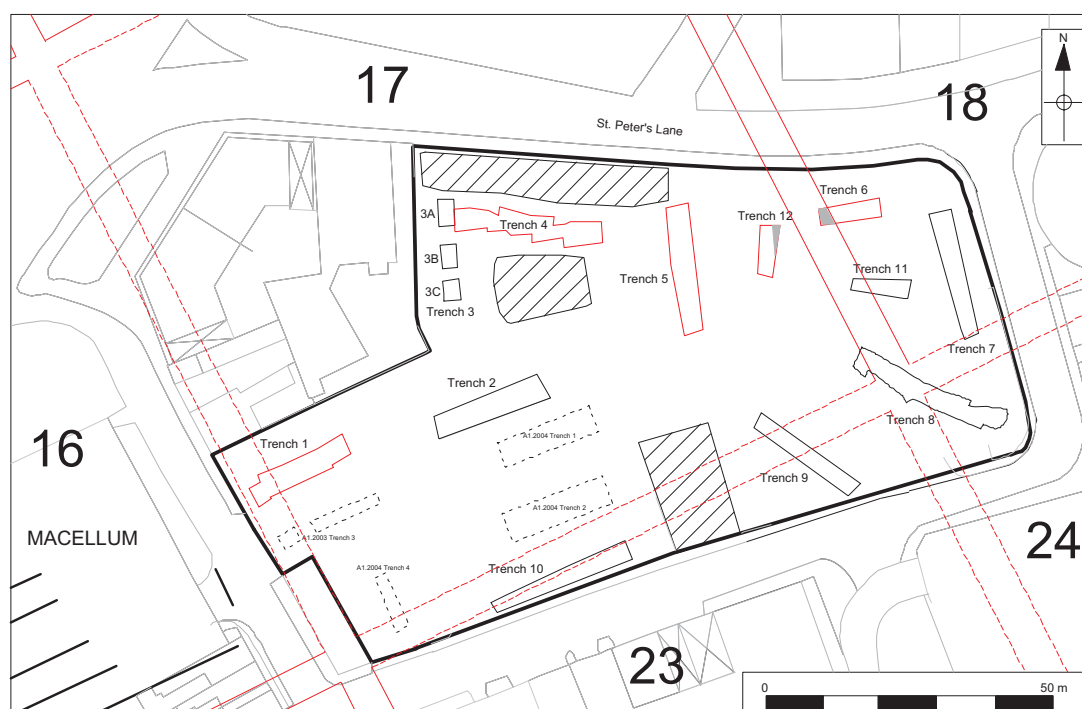


Fig. 17. Site in relation to the Roman street plan  
(trenches containing Roman features are highlighted in red)

The evidence from trench 4, consisted of a masonry wall associated with building material, including tesserae and painted wall plaster, may suggest the presence of a high status town house in the central part of insula 17.

The possible Roman wall encountered close to the Highcross Street frontage, on the western side of insula 17, could indicate the presence of another town house or

possibly a public building. Roman remains in the area were largely masked by medieval and post-medieval activity, or had been severely truncated by later disturbance, and so are difficult to characterise.

Elsewhere on the site, Roman sherds appeared to have been severely truncated, bearing only earthfast features cutting the natural sand and gravel, sealed by large deposits of garden soil.

## **7.2 Anglo-Saxon**

A feature of early Anglo-Saxon date (*c.* 5th-6th century AD) was identified in trench 7. A full understanding of the feature could not be ascertained due to the small area excavated, however, it has raised the possibility of a small settlement in this part of the site.

Immediately to the east, excavation of the St. Peter's Lane site in 1989 revealed an Anglo-Saxon bone combs, and hand made pottery, residual in later contexts. Whilst to the north, Shires West Site 12 has produced possible evidence for a sunken-featured-building associated with hand made pottery. An Anglo-Saxon small long brooch has also been recovered from the site.

## **7.3 Medieval**

Building remains of likely post-medieval or medieval date were seen in trenches 1 and 10; these appeared to stretch back from both the Highcross Street and Freeschool Lane frontages (fig.18). The full extent of these remains was not clear, in particular, how far eastwards building remains may extend. It is quite feasible however, for them to extend some distance back from the frontages, especially along the main medieval street through the town. This was seen at the recent excavations at 9 St Nicholas Place where a number of small structures were found infilling areas to the rear of properties (Kipling *forthcoming*).

Elsewhere on the site, medieval activity was represented by large numbers of pits – perhaps indicative of intense domestic activity in the 12<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. These were sealed by substantial garden soils, as seen on many sites within the north-east quarter of the walled town, suggests depopulation after about 1350, followed by intense horticultural or agricultural exploitation of the land.



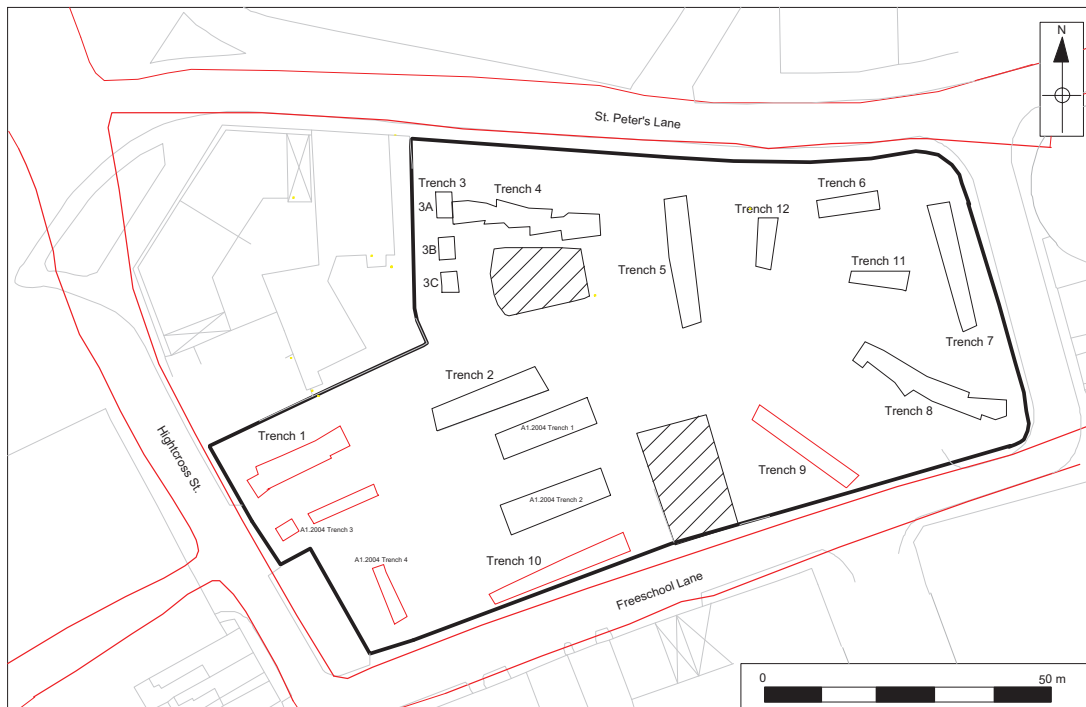


Fig.18. Site in relation to the medieval street plan (trenches containing medieval features are highlighted in red)

## 8. Impact assessment

### 8.1 Trench 1

The significant archaeological deposits identified in this area which survive at shallow depth on the street frontage in particular will be impacted upon by the pile caps, to be excavated to a level of between 60.22m OD and 60.85m OD. The integrity of more deeply buried archaeological deposits, currently masked by later archaeology, may also be compromised by the installation of the piles themselves, especially if the piles hit obstructions, such as earlier masonry features, requiring localised excavation by the contractor. For these reasons, this area has been selected for archaeological excavation, to be undertaken in two phases: an initial area strip to the top of archaeology in order to characterise more fully its nature and significance, followed by excavation of deposits to be affected by the pile caps. Excavation below this depth, to mitigate the effects of the piles, may follow depending on the character of the archaeology revealed.

### 8.2 Trench 10

The archaeology identified in trench 10 would seem to represent rare evidence for medieval properties, although due to the widening of Freeschool Lane in the 19th century and the presence of cellars, it would seem likely that the structures are located a little way back from the frontage. The archaeology, at about 60.4-60.5m OD will be impacted upon by the pile caps, with soffit levels at 58.89m OD and the piles themselves. The impression seems to be that to the rear of trench 10, archaeology has seen some significant disturbance from both medieval agricultural activity and also post medieval quarrying, therefore the impacts here will be reduced. The likelihood is

that there will be an excavation carried out in this area, following a similar strategy to that for the Highcross street frontage.

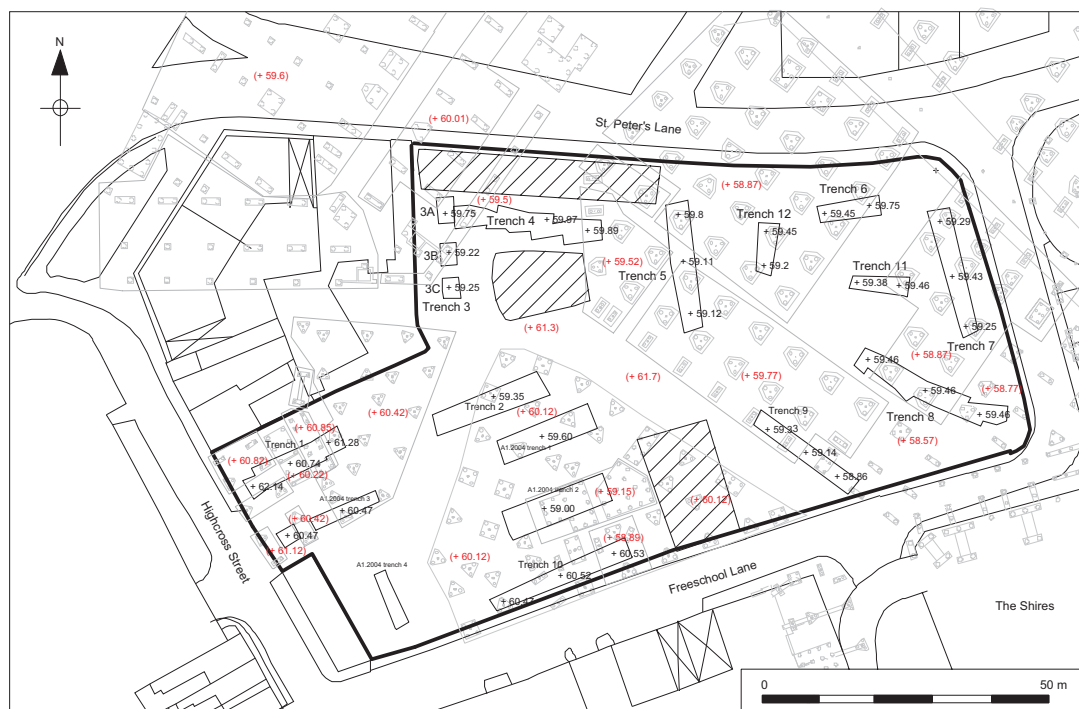


Fig. 19. Proposed pile plan, also showing highest level of archaeology and the underside of the pile cap levels in brackets.

### 8.3 Trench 4

Archaeological features dating from the Roman period were seen in this trench which consisted of building and associated deposits. The area surrounding this trench was heavily truncated, therefore and the area has been selected for more detailed excavation.

### 8.4 Trench 7

Within this trench evidence of a feature of early Anglo-Saxon date (*c.* 5th-6th century AD) was identified. As previously noted, a settlement of this period is suspected in this part of the town based on finds evidence together with the recent discovery of a possible structure of this period on the nearby site 12. It is proposed that the area of the probable Saxon feature is examined through limited excavation in view of its rarity.

### 8.5 Trenches 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12

In all trenches, substantial deposits of medieval and post-medieval garden soils were encountered, sealing a number of cut features (e.g. pits, gullies, ditches) of medieval and post-medieval date. Probable Roman gravel metalling was identified in trench 6 and 12, relating to a north-south street. No significant remains were identified. Levels for the top of truncated archaeology are marked on fig. 18 and it can be seen that it will be affected by some of the pile caps. In general it is considered that the archaeology in this area will not be significantly compromised by the proposed groundworks.

## **8.6 Impact assessment summary**

The archaeological field evaluation of Shires West Sites 5 and 11 has indicated the survival of important complex stratification on the Highcross Street and Freeschool lane frontages (trenches 1 and 10) which will be affected by the groundworks proposals; these areas have been identified as requiring open area archaeological excavation. Other areas of the site are characterised by substantial deposits of medieval and post-medieval garden soils indicating that archaeological deposits have seen a high degree of truncation and therefore will not be significantly damaged by the proposed foundation strategy. The exception to this are two small pockets of archaeology in trenches 4 and 7 which are considered to require archaeological excavation prior to development to secure an adequate record.

## **9. Archive**

The archive consists of site notes and indices colour digital prints and black and white prints, archive records and boxes of finds. It will be deposited with Leicester City Museums Service, under accession number A8.2005.

## **10. Publication**

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

## **11. Acknowledgements**

This report was compiled from information collected on site by the author, Martin Shore, Steve Baker, Jenny Barrett, Pete Burns, Simon Cleggatt, Lucy Griffin, and Dan Prior. Martin Shore was director of excavations, and digitised the trench plans; Richard Buckley managed the project.

## 12. Bibliography

- Buckley, R.J. & Meek, J. 2005 *Project Design for Archaeological Evaluation. Shires West, Plot 11 (Norman & Underwood), Freeschool Lane / St. Peter's Lane, Leicester.* ULAS 05-359-01. 27/07/05.
- Clay 1985 *Excavations at Bath Lane, Leicester.* Leicester: Leicestershire Museums, Art Galleries and Records Service.
- Connor, A. & Buckley, R. 1999 *The Roman and Medieval Occupation at Causeway Lane.* Leicester: excavations 1980 and 1991. Leicester: University of Leicester Archaeological Services, School of Archaeological Studies and Leicester City Museum Service for the Inland Revenue.
- English Heritage 1991 *Planning and Management of Archaeological Projects* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). English Heritage 1991.
- Kipling, R. *An Archaeological Excavation at 9 St. Nicholas Place, Leicester forthcoming* 2003. ULAS Report: Forthcoming.
- Gnanaratnam, A. 1999 *An Archaeological Watching Brief at Vaughan College, Leicester* ULAS Report 1999-061.
- Gnanaratnam, A. 2001 *An Archaeological Watching Brief on the site of the proposed Leicester Cathedral Visitors Centre, St. Martins West and the East Wing of the Guildhall, Leicester* ULAS Report 2001-162.
- Gnanaratnam, A. 2003 *An Archaeological Evaluation on the Site of the former St Margaret's Baths, Leicester* ULAS Report 2003-069.
- Gnanaratnam, A. 2004 *An Archaeological Evaluation at Shires West, Site 5, Free School Lane, Leicester.* ULAS Report 2004-123.
- Lucas, J. 1980 'The Debris of History: an archaeological survey of Leicester' in *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* 56:1-9.
- Meek, J. 2003 *An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment of Proposed Redevelopment of Highcross Street/St Peter's Lane, Leicester.* ULAS Report 2003-058.

Gavin Speed  
Archaeological Supervisor  
University of Leicester Archaeological Services  
University Road  
Leicester  
LE1 7RH

[gs50@le.ac.uk](mailto:gs50@le.ac.uk)  
Tel: 0116 252 2848  
Fax: 0116 252 2614

03.10.05.