

An Archaeological Evaluation on land at 52, Grange Lane, Castle Ward, Leicester (NGR SK586 038)

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services on land at 52, Grange Lane, Castle Ward, Leicester for Ridge and Partners (NGR SK 586 038). The work was carried out in response to development proposals for residential dwellings in April 2005 and consisted of two trial trenches. Archaeological features relating to Roman, medieval and post-medieval occupation on the site were revealed in the two trenches. The densest activity was recorded in Trench 1, adjacent to the Grange Lane frontage where stratified evidence of Roman structural and boundary activity was revealed beneath medieval pitting. Disarticulated human bone was recovered from a Roman pit and evidence for medieval ironworking and hornworking was recovered from a 12th/13th century feature. A single sherd of early Anglo-Saxon pottery suggested nearby activities from this period. In Trench 2, on the eastern side of the site, shallow surviving Roman features included a possible ditch which had disturbed an early cremation burial, both of which were dated to the 1st or 2nd century AD. Overlying the Roman features was a patchy layer of cobbling dated to the late 18th century which may have related to backyard surfaces of buildings fronting onto Grange Lane or Oxford Street. The finds and records from the site will be deposited with Leicester City Museums under the Accession Number A3.2005.

Introduction

Archaeological evaluation by trial trench was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on land at 52 Grange Lane, Castle Ward, Leicester (NGR SK586 038, Figs. 1 and 2). The site is located on the eastern side of Grange Lane, opposite the entrance to Deacon Street, lying at a height of c. 60m OD. It comprises an area of approximately 492m² upon which residential development is proposed. The work took place between 13-4-2005 and 18-4-2005 and was commissioned by Ridge and Partners LLP.

The evaluation was undertaken in response to planning proposals for redevelopment of the site. Planning permission with conditions has been granted by Leicester City Council for residential development on the site.

An archaeological desk-based assessment of the proposed development area had previously been commissioned from ULAS by Dennis Walker Welham Ltd. The archaeological potential of the area, which lies in the southern suburbs of Roman and medieval Leicester, was confirmed in the results of the desk-based assessment (Harvey 2004).

In view of the potential damage that might be caused to any surviving archaeological levels by the proposed development, the City Archaeologist of Leicester City Council, in his capacity as advisor to the planning authority, recommended prior archaeological assessment of the area. This recommendation was in accordance with the guidelines

set out in Planning Policy guidance Note 16 (PPG 16, Archaeology and Planning, paragraph 30).

This report details the results of the archaeological evaluation of the site.

Archaeological Background

The archaeological desk-based assessment for the proposed development area summarised the archaeological potential of the area as:

The desk-based archaeological assessment for proposed redevelopment at Grange Lane has concluded that archaeological remains may exist within the application area. The proposed development is located on the east side on Grange Lane, opposite Deacon Street, Leicester (SK 586 038). Previous archaeological investigations in the vicinity of the proposed development area at Grange Lane, Bonners Lane, Mill Lane, Oxford Street and York Road have uncovered significant remains of Roman, medieval and post-medieval date. Roman buildings, features and burials may be located within the development area, and possibly a Roman road or even the Raw Dykes aqueduct. Two Saxon buildings have been recorded in the vicinity and occupation of this date is



Figure 1 Site location (OS map 233 Leicester & Hinckley area 2000)

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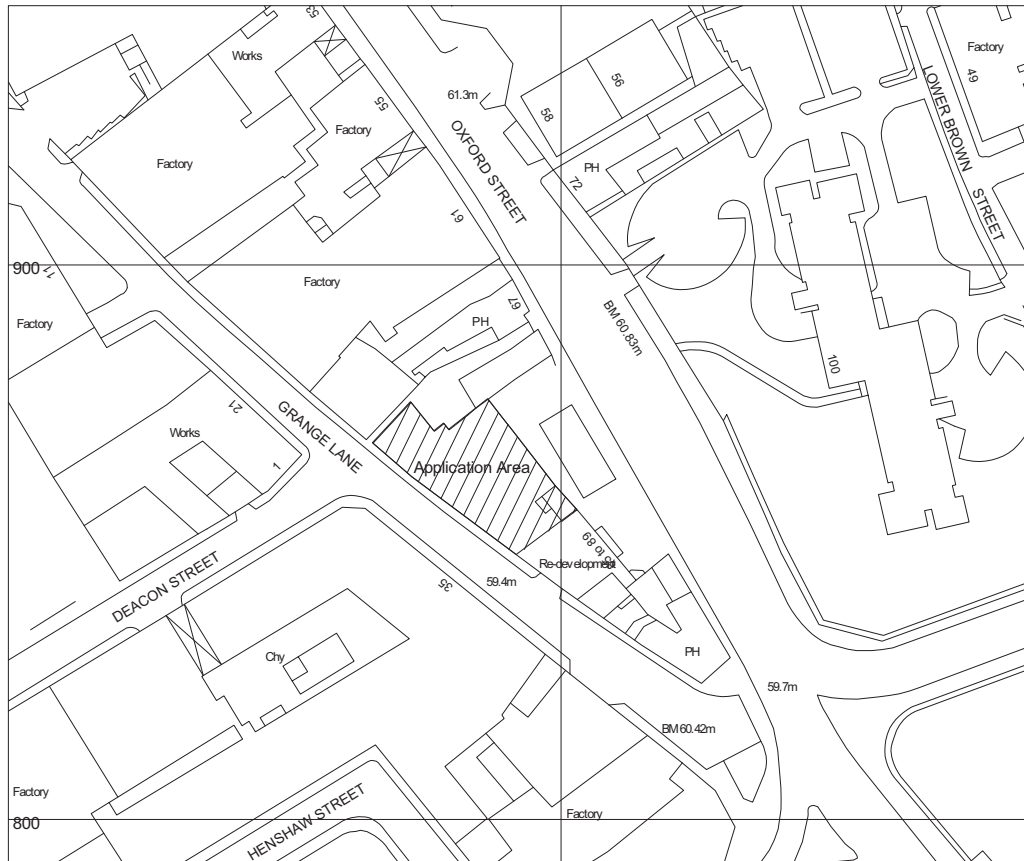


Figure 2 Application Area

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also possible. Medieval and post-medieval houses and back-yard activity are also likely to be found in the area given its location close to Oxford Street. The site also lies adjacent to the possible location of a medieval post-mill. Late medieval and early post-medieval industrial activity is also known to the northwest, off Bonners Lane. The medieval Newarke Grange may also be located within the area. Remains associated with the Civil War sieges of Leicester in 1645, including a defensive ditch are also possible. In addition, post-Civil War late 17th and 18th century buildings associated with the re-building of the south suburbs may be present. The proposed development area, therefore, is recognised as having very significant archaeological potential. Although parts of the proposed development area are likely to have been disturbed by the previous structures and their demolition and removal, there are likely to be pockets of undisturbed ground where archaeology may survive'. (Harvey 2004)

Archaeological investigations have been undertaken on a number of sites in close vicinity to the proposed development area, on the western side of Grange Lane, Oxford Street and Deacon Street. A site on the north corner of Deacon Street and Grange Lane revealed a number of Roman features suggesting that evidence for Roman suburban occupation and activity is still present within the vicinity. It may therefore be seen as quite likely that similar remains might be present on this site.

Archaeological evaluation of a second site just to the south-west of the area, on the western side of Grange Lane revealed evidence for post-medieval and modern quarrying. These quarries would appear to have disturbed earlier archaeological

deposits, suggested by the quantities of residual medieval and Roman pottery within the features.

The site is located on the eastern side of Grange Lane. Land ownership within this area is very likely to have been different to that on the western side of Grange Lane, and thus it is quite likely that post-medieval quarrying will not be present on this side of the road.

The results of the archaeological evaluation on the adjacent site to the south was summarised as follows *'An archaeological evaluation of the site of a former petrol station at 85-89 Oxford Street, Castle Ward, Leicester, was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services on behalf of Gralewood Homes Limited, between the 13th and 18th of August 2003. Two trenches were opened during the evaluation, which revealed evidence of Roman and medieval activity, in addition to a ditch which contained pottery attributable to either the Iron Age or middle Saxon period. The Roman deposits located include a compact pebble surface, overlying a possible linear ditch type feature, towards the Oxford Street frontage. Further to the west, towards the Grange Lane frontage, was a curving, possibly part of a circular ditch, dating to the medieval period. Along side the inner edge of the ditch was a narrow gully, which appeared to respect the curve.'*

Aims and Objectives

As specified in the *Project Design Specification for Archaeological Evaluation* (Meek 11/04/2005). The specific aims and objectives of the project were:

- To identify the presence/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.

Within the stated project objectives, the principal aim of the evaluation is to establish the nature, extent, date, depth, significance and state of preservation of archaeological deposits on the site in order to determine the potential impact upon them from the proposed redevelopment.

The following site-specific objectives are also to be considered:

- establishment of the form, function and chronology of any preserved archaeological remains, utilising all appropriate scientific and analytical techniques;
- the recognition and investigation of activity and occupation areas
- recovery of paleo-environmental remains, including waterlogged deposits;
- examination of evidence for settlement development within the hinterland around Leicester;

- recovery of artefactual remains to assist in the development of local and regional type series;
- further information regarding the possible post-mill revealed during the evaluation of the adjacent site;

Methodology

General Methodology and Standards

All work followed the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) Code of Conduct and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (1999).

Trial Trenching Methodology

Two trenches were excavated during the evaluation of the site. Trench 1 was located on the south-western edge of the area, parallel with Grange Lane and Trench 2 was situated in the north-eastern part of the site, roughly parallel with the eastern boundary to the site. The trenches were located to avoid the position of an existing drain on the south-eastern part of the site area.

Trenches 1 and 2 were of 20m length and 15m length respectively, and both were 1.6m wide. The total area of the trenches (c. 52 square metres) provided a c. 10% sample of the site area.

The present ground surfaces and underlying modern overburden was removed in level spits, under continuous archaeological supervision, down to the uppermost archaeological deposits by JCB 3C mechanical digger using a toothless ditching bucket. The trenches were excavated to a width of 1.6m and down to the top of archaeological deposits. Both trenches were backfilled and levelled at the end of the evaluation.

Following the removal of the overlying layers the base of both trenches was examined by hand cleaning and archaeological deposits located were planned at an appropriate scale and sample-excavated by hand as appropriate to establish the stratigraphic and chronological sequence. All plans were tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Relative spot heights were taken as appropriate.

Sections of sample-excavated archaeological features were drawn at an appropriate scale. All sections were levelled and tied to the Ordnance Survey Datum.

Trench locations were recorded using 30m tapes, with reference to existing points on surrounding buildings and tied in to the site plan. They were also tied in to the Ordnance Survey National Grid.

Results of the Evaluation

Trench 1 (Figures 3 and 4)

Natural undisturbed clay subsoil was observed in this trench at a depth of 0.80m below the present ground surface, the level of which varied between 59.28m and 59.38m OD. The archaeological horizon at the northern end of the trench was deeper than at the southern end where evidence of a stratigraphic sequence of deposits was revealed. In the northern half archaeological features survived in a truncated state, apparently as a result of modern excavation or demolition work. This was evidenced by several linear score marks, indicative of a previous episode of excavation using a toothed bucket.

In spite of the truncation at the southern part of the trench archaeological features were observed cutting into the natural clay. The northernmost feature was a circular pit [102], partially revealed at the trench end. Pit [102] had shallow sloping sides and a flat base which became deeper towards its centre. The pits fill, Context (103), consisted of firm, mid brown sandy silt and contained 2nd century Roman pottery and tile fragments as well as animal bone. Overlying the backfilled pit was a partially surviving, circular arrangement of flat cobbles (104), the upper surface of which may have been heat affected. Two small sherds of 1st or 2nd century Roman pottery were associated with the cobbles.

To the south of the pit was a shallow gully on a northwest-southeast alignment, [105]. The gully appeared to have been badly truncated and survived to only 0.10m in depth at the point of excavation. It was filled with greyish brown silty clay, which yielded animal bone and Roman pottery suggesting a 3rd or 4th century date for the features infilling.

Towards the southern end of gully [105], its fill became indistinguishable from other areas of 'fill' indicating that more archaeological features were present in this part of the trench. No further excavation was undertaken in this area although the plan form of the anomalies, particularly Context (122), suggested pitting. No datable evidence was recovered for the anomalies.

Near the centre of the trench a modern drainage pipe crossed the trench at right angles and effectively marked the boundary between the higher and lower areas of survival. The earliest features revealed in the trench were located near the southern end and were seen to cut the natural clay. Here, a well-defined post hole, some 0.30m deep, [121] was recorded in association with a truncated gully, [119] which had a flat base and steep edges reminiscent of a beam slot. Both features were filled with greyish brown silty clay but were undated.

Above the level of the post hole and beam slot was a layer of compact mixed, yellowish brown and pink clay (111). This was possibly the remains of a deliberately laid surface and was observed at various points in the southern half of the trench. A fragment of Roman tegula tile provided the only dating evidence for this deposit.

Cutting through layer (111) was a series of later pits, several of which were partially excavated. To the north, a possible circular pit, [107], had steep sloping sides and an irregular base. The fill of the pit, Context (108), consisted of orange/grey silty clay and contained Roman and medieval pottery indicating a 12th/13th century date, at the latest, for its infilling. Iron working slag and animal bone evidence indicative of hornworking or tanning, was also recovered. Pit [107] was seen to cut through the remains of at least one other feature (Cut [109]) to the east however this was not fully characterised given its location against the edge of the trench. A single human bone (metatarsal) was recovered from the fill of [109].

To the south, a probable pit, [123], was seen to have been truncated by a further steep edged feature, both of these contained Roman pottery sherds but otherwise they were difficult to characterise in the context of a narrow test slot. A single sherd of early Saxon pottery was recovered from Context (117) the fill of Pit [123]. On the available evidence it is possible to suggest that the Pit may be of Anglo-Saxon origin.

The archaeological remains were sealed with a layer of dark reddish brown subsoil and finally a layer of demolition material.

Trench 2 (Figures 3 and 4)

Natural clay in Trench 2 was revealed at a depth of 0.30m in the northern end of the trench and 0.60m to the south, below present ground level, which was 59.28m and 58.92m OD respectively.

The earliest feature revealed was a 1st or 2nd century cremation in a Roman 'greyware' vessel, located near the centre of the trench, Cut [207]. The cremation had been disturbed by a later activity although enough of the vessel remained *in situ* to indicate it had been placed upright in a shallow pit. Patchy remains of a blueish grey clay layer adjacent to the cremation, were similar to the fill associated with the cremation and may have been related.

The cremation had been disturbed by an apparently curvilinear feature, Cut [209], on its western edge. Cut [209] had shallow sloping sides and a flat base and was filled with dark greyish brown silty clay (Context 205) which contained later 1st or early 2nd century Roman pottery.

Cutting the natural clay to the east of the cremation was a narrow linear feature, possibly the remains of a plough scar. Overlying the natural clay and the earlier features were disturbed remains of a shallow cobble layer, (Context (208)). Where it survived, this consisted of densely packed rounded cobbles containing mid-late 18th century pottery.

At the northern end of the trench a modern well had disturbed the cobble layers and at the southern end of the trench modern pits containing brick debris were located. Where not truncated by the modern pits, a layer of reddish brown silty clay subsoil overlay the archaeological layers. This was finally covered with a layer of demolition rubble.

Discussion

In terms of the specific aims of the evaluation both trial trenches have revealed evidence of archaeological remains across the development site in variable states of preservation. The findings of the evaluation have also supported the suggestion made in the desk-based assessment for the high archaeological potential of the site.

The Archaeological Sequence

Roman

Evidence for Roman activity was revealed in both trenches, supporting similar evidence from other sites in the area for activity throughout the period in the south suburbs of Leicester. The projected line of the Tripontium Roman road, discovered during excavations at nearby Bonners Lane (Finn 2004) passes close to the site. It was suggested that Roman cobbled surfaces observed during an evaluation on the neighbouring plot to the south might relate to the Roman road (Clarke 2003). Given the proximity of the road to the current site it is not surprising that Roman remains exist here. The available evidence is not sufficient to fully characterise the remains however the features recorded suggest possible roadside activity including putative structural and boundary features. The presence of the cremation is an important element of the Roman evidence and complements several other such burials in the near vicinity listed in the SMR. Cremations in general from Leicester conform to the early Roman date range, however because of their fragility they are likely to have been underestimated in the archaeological record for the city. Where distribution patterns have been possible to assess they appear to cluster in relation to the main routeways into Leicester. Given the suggested location of the site in relation to the Tripontium road. It is tempting to see this cremation in the same light. It is also possible that further cremations may exist on the site. Disarticulated human bone was also recovered from another Roman context, further emphasising the evidence for burial rites from the site. Similar evidence for loose human bone in pits or ditches was recovered from excavations to the west of the site, at Mill Lane (Finn 2002) and may point to a different burial tradition than cremation.

Anglo-Saxon

A single sherd of early Anglo-Saxon pottery was recovered during the evaluation providing some indication of activities during the period either on, or near the site. Nearby archaeological sites have been steadily piecing together a picture of Anglo-Saxon activity in the southern suburbs area which further evidence from the period will complement. Saxon sunken-featured buildings have been discovered during excavations at Bonners Lane (Finn 2004) and Oxford Street (Gossip 1999) and a large assemblage of hand-made pottery (attributable either to the Iron Age or the Anglo-Saxon period) was recovered from a ditch on the neighbouring plot to the south (Clarke 2003). It is also possible that the pottery was disturbed from contemporary deposits by later activities.

Medieval

Pottery dating to the 12th or 13th centuries was recovered during the evaluation and was concentrated on the western edge of the site, in Trench 1. Sample excavation

suggested episodes of pitting along the Grange Lane frontage. The most revealing of the medieval features sampled provided evidence for contemporary craftworking, particularly ironworking (iron slag and hearth bottom pieces) and an assemblage of horn cores suggesting either tanning or horning activities. It is a possibility that further features relating to these activities exist on the site.

Post Medieval

In Trench 2 sparse evidence for cobbled surfaces of the 18th century was revealed and perhaps related to yards to the rear of buildings fronting onto Grange Lane or Oxford Street. No further evidence was recovered for this period although further evidence for the surfaces and related features may survive on the site.

Modern

Modern disturbance was evident, particularly on the eastern side of the site where the southern end of Trench 2 had suffered badly from modern pitting and pipe trenches. Effects of modern activities were less evident in Trench 1 apart from the truncation at the northern end of the trench.

Impact

It is evident from the trial trench results that important archaeological remains survive close to the present ground level and as such, they will be vulnerable to any ground disturbance associated with the redevelopment programme.

The present plans for the development (Shepherd Gilmour drawing Numbers LE6278/01 and LE6278/02) indicate that the proposed building is based on pile and ground-beam foundations. In addition there is an, as yet unspecified, area allotted for a basement, as well as an area for crane foundations.

The areas of deep excavation (i.e. the crane footings and basement area) will result in the destruction of any existing archaeological remains. Given the relatively shallow depth of the archaeology in the trenches, the density and depth of the piling arrangement will also have a detrimental effect on surviving remains. Service diagrams were not supplied with the piling plans however these too will impact upon the archaeology.

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Archive

The site archive consists of :

3 sheets of A2 permagraph containing trench location plan, trench plans, section drawings, context information and level information
colour slide and monochrome film
pottery, slag and animal bone finds

Publication

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

Acknowledgements

The evaluation was carried out by the author with assistance from Martin Henson and Dan Prior. The Roman pottery was analysed by Nicholas Cooper, the medieval and post medieval pottery by Debbie Sawday, the animal bone by Jennifer Browning and the ironworking remains by Dr. Graham Morgan. The Project Manager was James Meek. ULAS would also like to thank Mike Ewers of Ridge and Partners Ltd for his interest and help during the project.

Appendix: The Finds**Pottery and Tile from Grange Lane Leicester A3.2005***Nicholas J. Cooper*

Roman pottery and a single sherd of early Saxon Pottery was recovered from the following contexts and indicate the following dates of deposition.

| Context | Cut | material | tpq | Comment |
|---------|-----|---|---|----------------------------|
| (103) | | Roman Pot and Roman tile | Second onwards | Two small sherds |
| (104) | | Roman Pot Grey ware, Whiteware | Later first at earliest ncd. | Two small sherds |
| (106) | 105 | Roman Pot Nene valley colourcoat and Roman tile | Later third or fourth? | Two beakers |
| (108) | 107 | Roman and medieval pottery | 12 th -14 th + | Mixed |
| (110) | 109 | Roman greyware pot | Second + | Single sherd |
| (111) | 112 | Roman Tegula Tile | Second + | One frag |
| (115) | 116 | Roman greyware pot | Second + | Single sherd |
| (117) | | Roman and Early Saxon sherd | 450-650 | Single abraded Saxon sherd |
| (203) | 204 | Postmed pot and claypipe | 1800+ | |
| (205) | | Roman Pottery | L. 1 st -early 2 nd | |
| (206) | 207 | Roman greyware jar (cremation) | 70-120 | |

Medieval and post-medieval pottery

Debbie Sawday

| Context/Cut | Type | Sherds/Weight (g) | Date |
|-------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| (108) [107] | Potters Marston | 7/52 | Early 12th/mid 13thC |
| (203) [204] | White salt glazed Stoneware | 2/16 | c.1730-1770 |
| (203) [204] | Post-med earthenware | 2/54 | 18thC |
| (203) [204] | Bowl frags | 2/16 | c.1750-1780 |

Summary of the Animal Bone Recovered from 52 Grange Lane, Leicester. A3 2004

Jennifer Browning
April 2005

A small quantity of bone was hand-recovered from five contexts; (103); (106); (108); (110); and (205). The bone has been quickly scanned to assess anatomy, species and condition.

Comments

None of the bones are complete and are in general quite badly fragmented. However, most of the fragments were identifiable to some degree and several could be re-assembled. No bones from small mammals, birds or fish were observed.

| Context | Feature | Date | Summary |
|---------|---------|-----------------------|--|
| 103 | pit | Roman (2nd century) | Sheep/goat (tibia df; radius frg); Pig (femur pu); Cattle (premolar; rib frg); 2 unidentified |
| 106 | gully | Roman 3rd/4th century | sheep-size (rib fragment), 2 unidentified fragments |
| 108 | pit | medieval 12th-13th | cattle (4 x (base of) horncore; 20x horncore fragments); Sheep/goat (2 x tibia df; 1 x pelvis; 3 x sheep-size shaft fragments; 2 x horncore frg) Goat (horncore); Pig (tibia; canine frg); cattle-size (2 x skull fragment; 2 x fragments); 13 unidentified fragments; |
| 110 | ?pit | Roman | human metatarsal, poss burnt. |
| 205 | ditch | Roman (1st/2nd) | Cattle (upper premolar; 2nd phalange; metatarsal du;); cattle-size (3 fragments); Dog (tibia df); sheep/goat (humerus df; incisor; maxilla frg); sheep-size (4 fragments) |

Cattle, sheep/goat, pig, dog and a human bone was recovered during the excavation. Butchery and gnawing was observed on several specimens. All of the bones were from domestic species, with the exception of a single human bone found in Roman context (110). This appeared to be burnt, although not at a temperature high enough to cause shrinkage or distortion. The bones from the other Roman contexts appear to represent general domestic waste.

The bones from medieval context (108) consist mainly of horncore fragments; both cattle and goat were noted. It is possible that these are representative either of horners or tanners waste. However, a larger sample would be needed in order to verify this possibility. The deposit also contained post-cranial bones of both sheep/goat and pig.

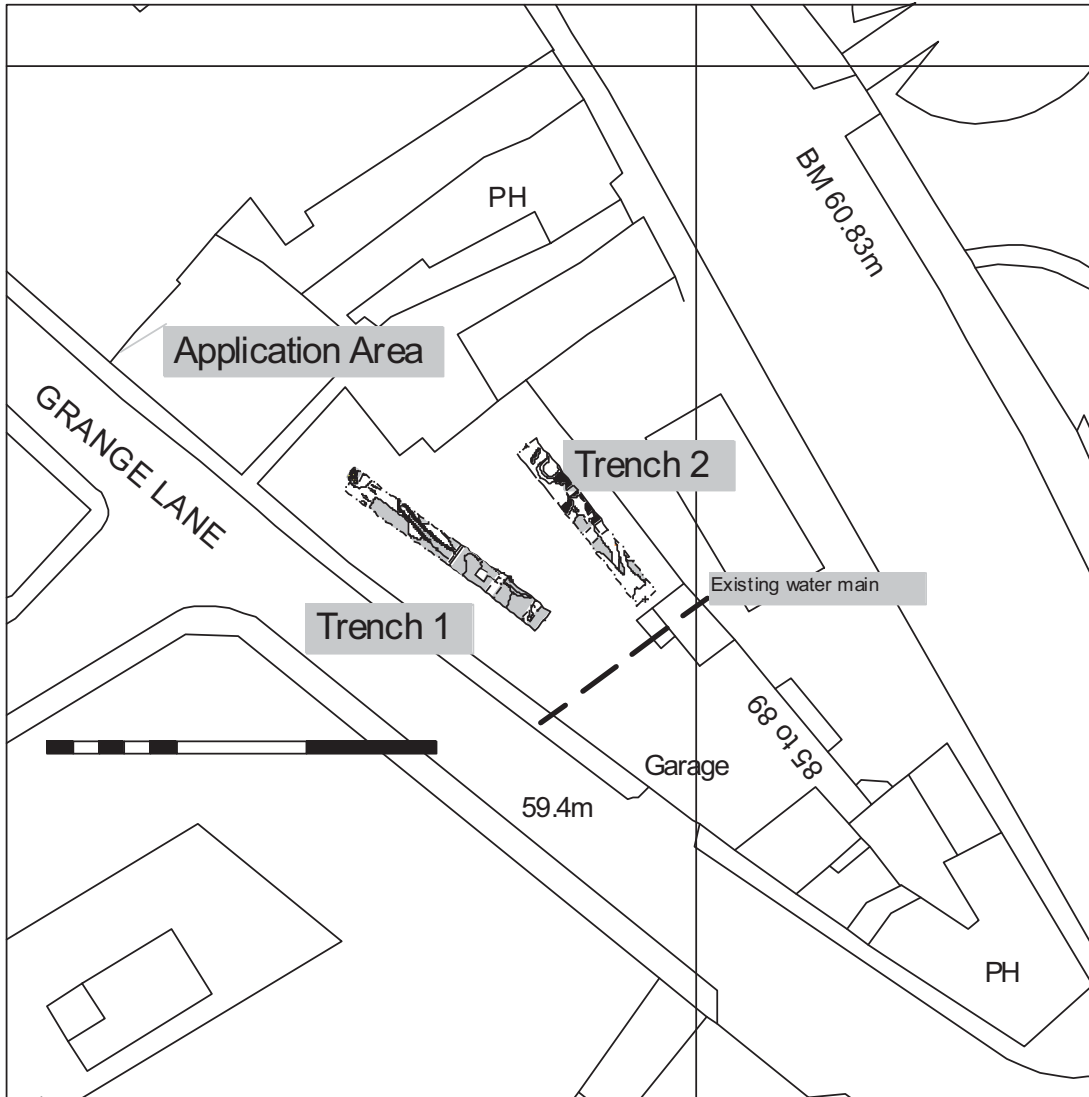


Figure 3 Trench location

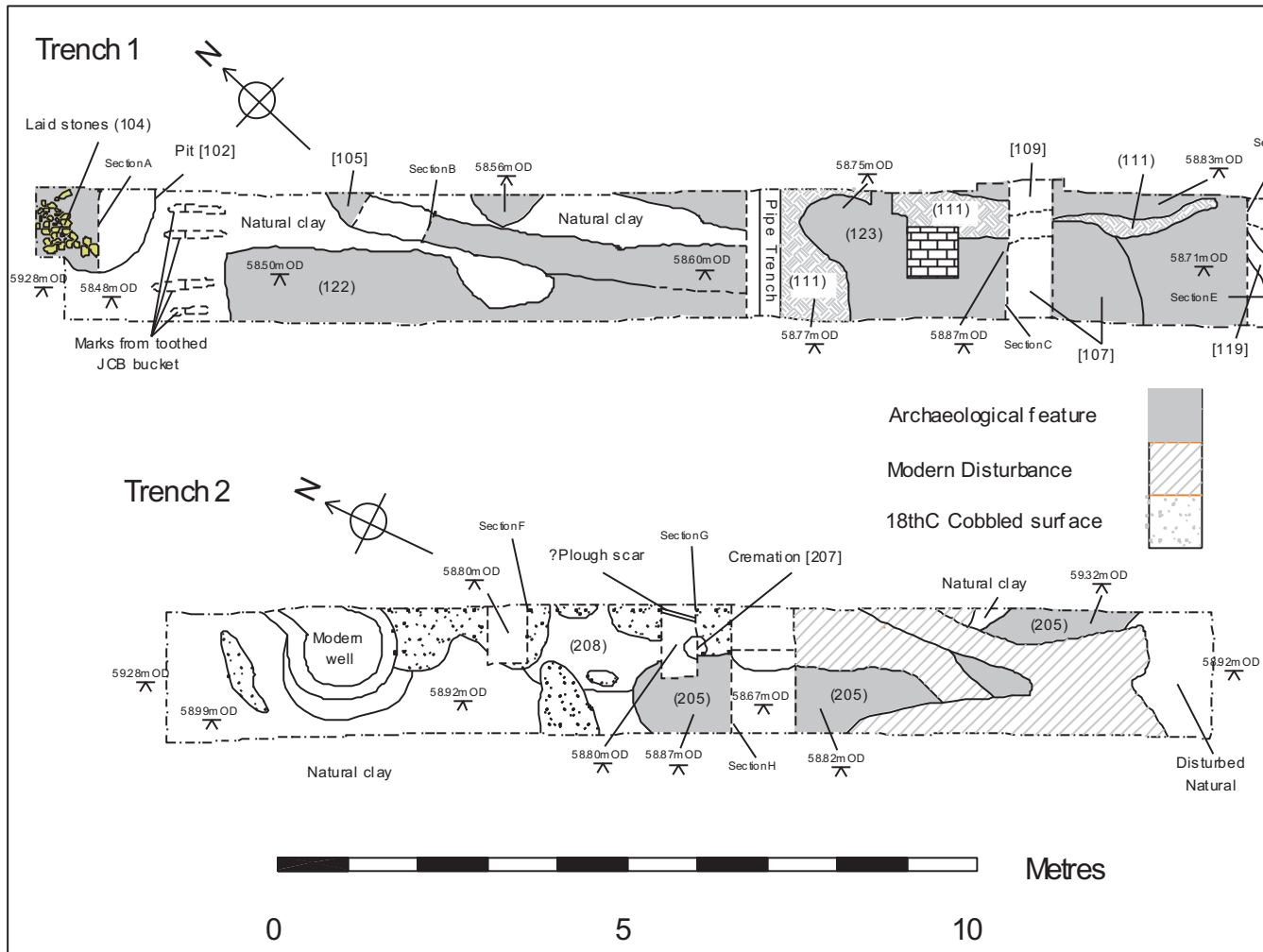


Figure 4 Trench Plans

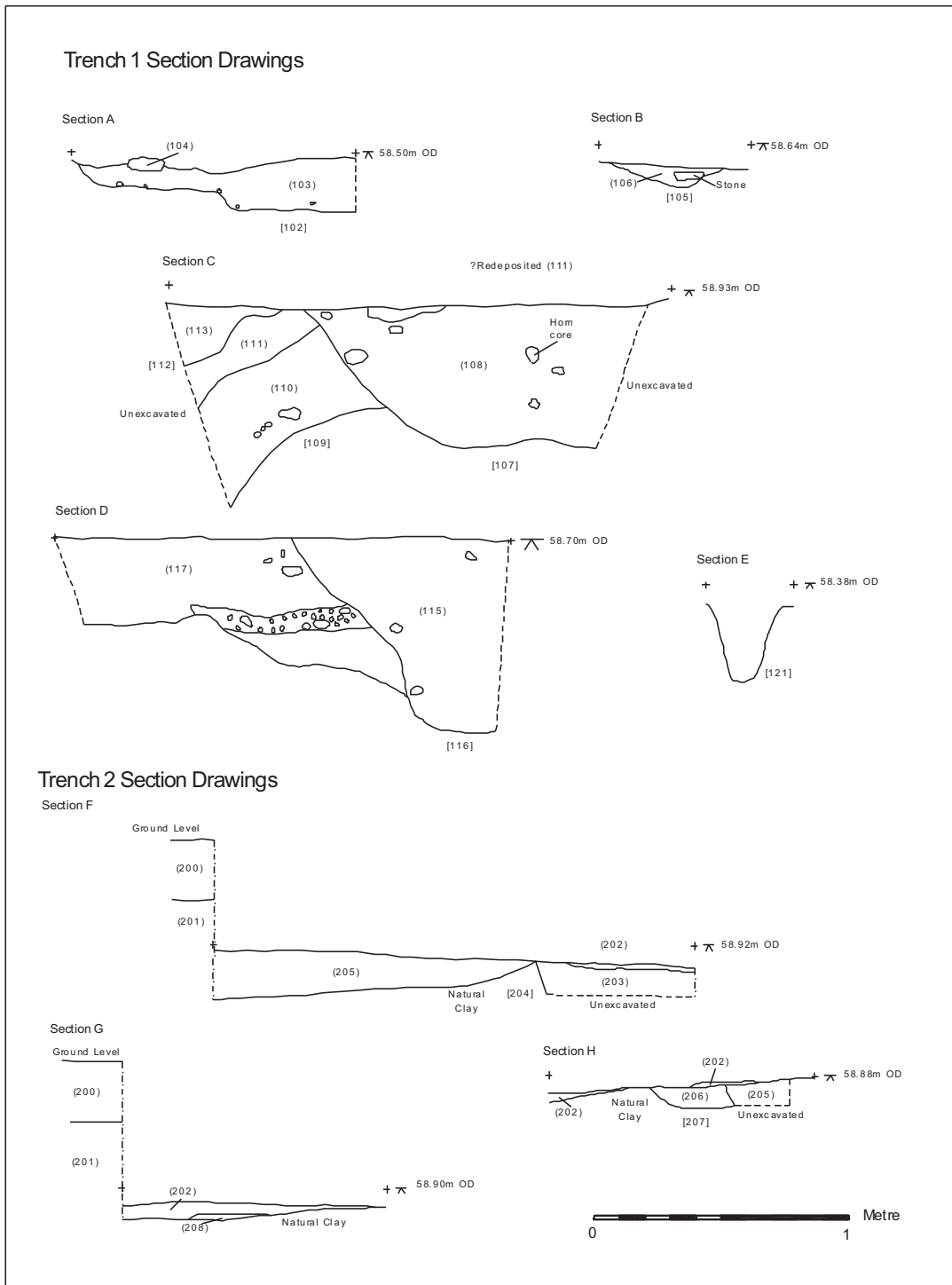


Figure 5 Section Drawings