

**An Archaeological Evaluation
at 16-26 Oxford Street, Leicester,
(NGR SK 585 040)**

D. Parker & W Jarvis

For
**WSP Environmental Ltd/
Goddard Manton Architects**

Checked by Project Manager

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By David Parker & Wayne Jarvis

1. Summary

An archaeological field evaluation was undertaken at the former Antiques Centre, 16-26 Oxford Street, Leicester (SK 585 040) from the 13th-25th June 2007. Two trenches were investigated within the back yard area, the easternmost of which revealed a human burial, likely to be of the Roman period, and a number of medieval pits. The other trench exposed medieval pitting and other deposits, possibly structural in origin. Finds and records will be deposited with Leicester City Museum Service, Accession Number A4.2007.

2. Introduction

2.1 The proposed development site comprises a series of 19th-century brick industrial buildings at 16-20 Oxford Street, Leicester, most recently used as an Antiques Centre (fig.s 1, 5). Planning permission has been sought for the demolition of existing buildings and the construction of residential apartment buildings and associated car parking.

2.2 An archaeological desk-based assessment of the site area was undertaken in 2006 by WSP Environmental Ltd and confirmed the potential of the site for archaeological remains of Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval date. In view of this, the City Archaeologist, as adviser to the planning authority requested pre-determination archaeological field evaluation by trial trenching in order that the impact of the proposals on buried remains might be assessed and an informed planning decision taken.

2.3 Subsequently, a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for intrusive trial trenching was prepared by the client's archaeological consultant (Meek 2007) and agreed with the City Archaeologist. Since the extant buildings on the site are almost all cellared for depths of up to 2m, with the result that any archaeological deposits in these areas are likely to have been truncated (or even destroyed), it was decided to target the investigation to the back yards where the potential for preservation was greater. ULAS was commissioned to undertake the fieldwork and the evaluation took place between 13th-25th June 2007.

2.4 The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 156 indicates that the underlying geology is likely to consist of river gravels above Mercia Mudstone. The site lies at a height of c.64 m O.D.



Fig. 1: Area of Proposed Development. Scale 1: 50000. Based on Plan Provided by Developer

3. Archaeological and Historical background

3.1 The site lies some 150m to the south of the Roman and medieval town walls of Leicester (figs. 2, 3), close to the line of the Roman road from Leicester to *Tripontium* (Cave's Inn, Works.) which is on a similar alignment to present-day Oxford Street, but slightly to the west. An additional Roman road, the so-called *Via Devana* or Gartree Road, may have joined the *Tripontium* Road just to the north of the site and is thought to be on the same alignment as Newarke Street (Cooper 1996; Derrick 2002). Hence, in the Roman period, the site was close to the junction of two major routes heading for the South Gate of the town. Previous excavations on Newarke Street and Oxford Street (Cooper 1996, Derrick 2002; Gossip 1999a, 1999b) have revealed extensive evidence of Roman inhumation cemeteries, perhaps following the lines of these roads whilst there were also finds of cremation urns and lead coffins in the vicinity in the 19th century (fig. 4). One of the excavations, producing over 60 burials, was at the adjacent property, the Elfed Thomas Law School excavated in 1993 (Cooper 1996).

3.2 Excavations on either side of Oxford street have also revealed evidence of Roman suburban development, including boundary ditches, timber buildings and domestic activity (Oxford Street: Gossip 1999a/b; Bonners Lane: Finn 2004).

3.3 The excavations at Oxford Street and Bonners Lane both produced evidence for early Anglo-Saxon sunken-featured buildings, suggesting a settlement of uncertain extent on the southern approaches to the town, thought to date to the 5th-6th centuries AD (although it has also been suggested that it could be slightly later, *c.* later 7th-mid 8th centuries AD, Vince 2006).

3.4 In the medieval period, the site lay within the south suburb of Leicester, the route to the South Gate following the line of what is now Oxford Street (then

Southgate St.). Suburban development is known to have existed along Southgate St. by c.1200 when a charter shows both burgesses and customary (peasant) tenants were living outside the Southgate (RBL,1, 10-11). There is clear archaeological evidence for settlement of 12th-13th century date on both sides of what is now Oxford Street (Finn 2004, 63).

3.5 The medieval Newarke Precinct lies to the west of Oxford Street, and was established in 1330-1 with the construction of the Trinity Hospital. Later, the church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary was built, together with lodgings and chantry houses. Enclosure walls were perhaps constructed towards the end of the 14th century, together with the Newarke (or magazine) Gateway of about 1400 and other subsidiary entrances.

3.6 During the English Civil War, further earth and timber defences were erected around the walled town of Leicester. The southern part of the town, and specifically the Newarke area was the scene of much activity during 1645. Evidence for Civil War defensive ditches has previously been recorded on Oxford Street (Gossip 1999a) and Bonners Lane (Finn 2004).

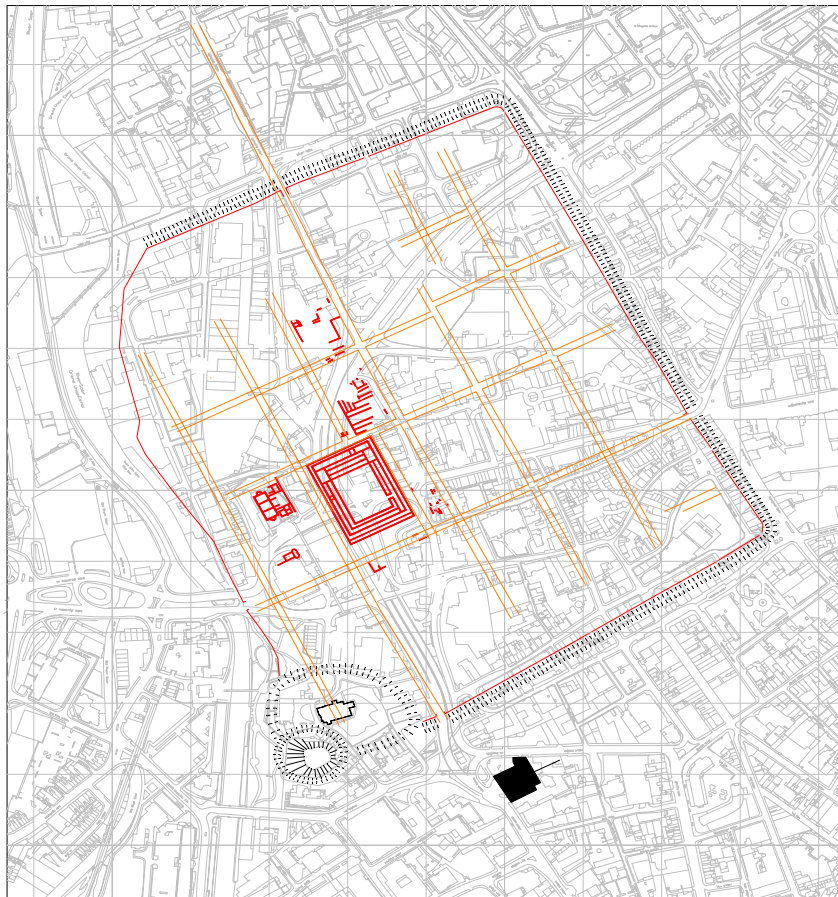


Fig.2 Site location in relation to the Roman Town. 100m grid shown.

4. Archaeological Objectives

The main objectives of the evaluation 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 produce an archive and report of any results.

Within the stated project objectives, the principal aim of the evaluation was 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 development such that an informed decision may be taken by the planning authority on the impact of the development proposals.

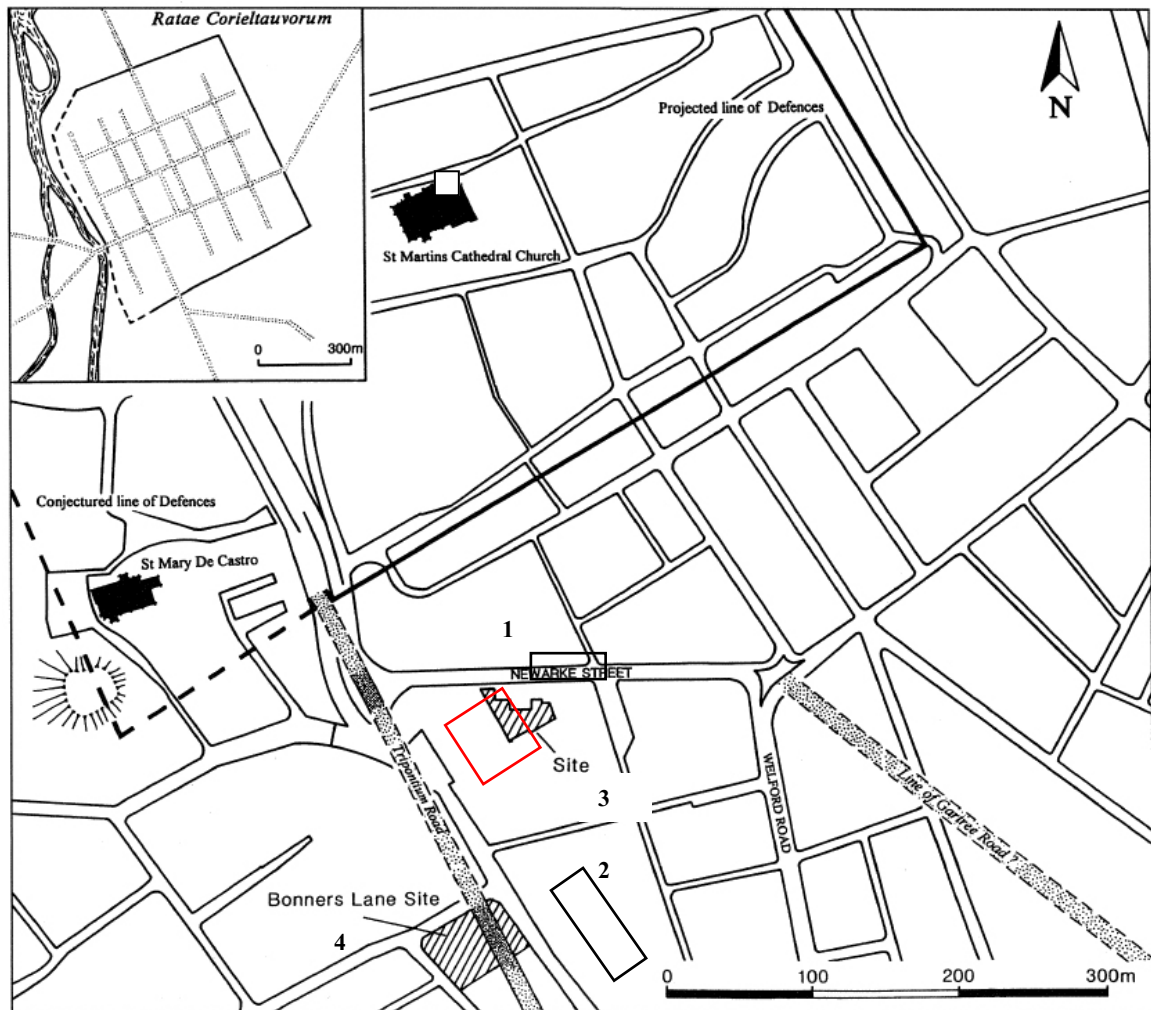


Fig. 3 Site in relation to approximate location of other nearby excavations: 1 Newarke Street (Derrick 2002); 2. York Road/Oxford Street (Gossip 1999); 3 Newarke Street Elfed Thomas (Cooper 1996); 4. Bonners Lane (Finn 2004)

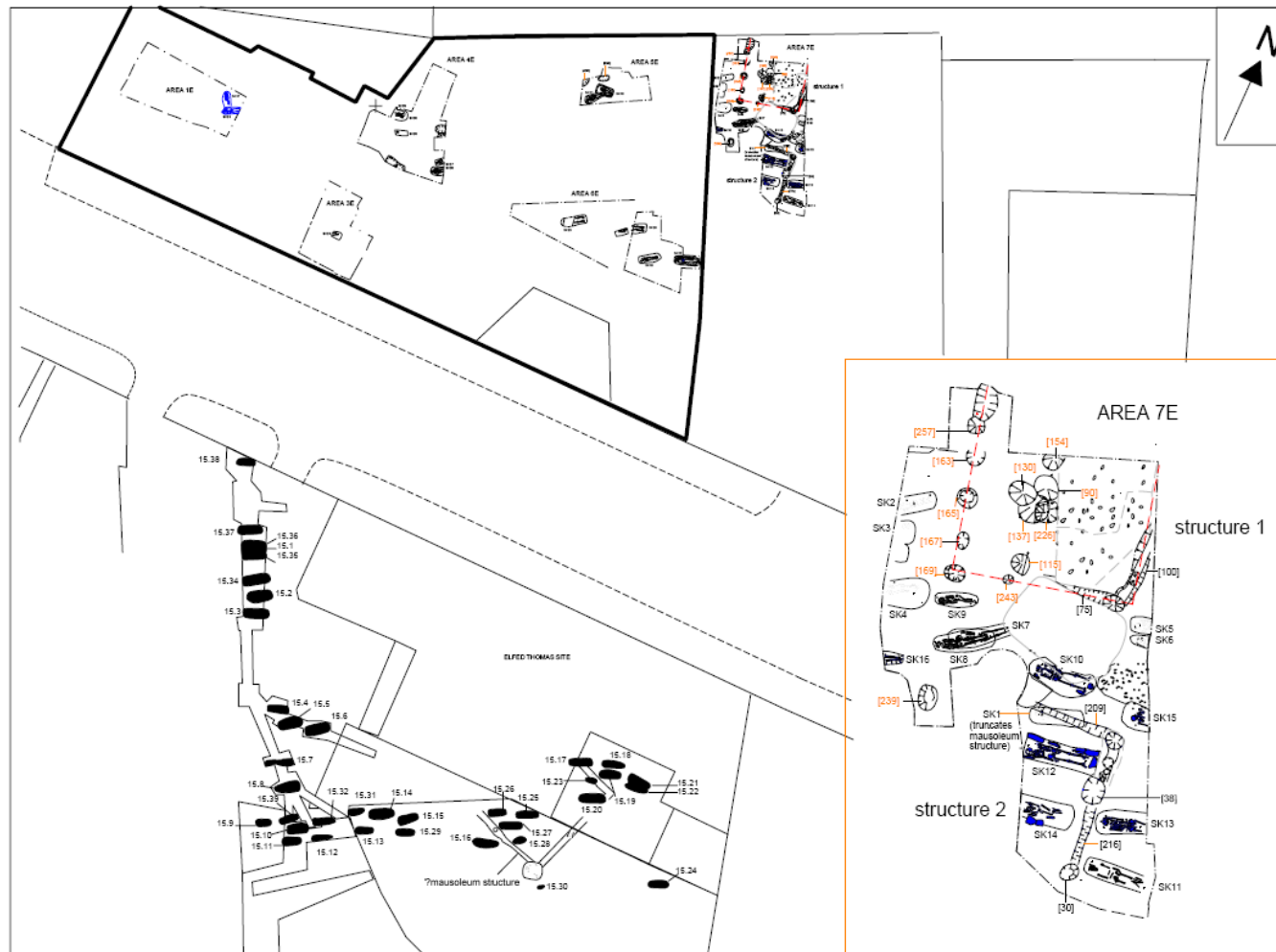


Fig. 4 Distribution of Roman burials at the Elfed Thomas (bottom) and Newarke Street (top and inset) sites (Derrick 2002)

5. Methodology

Recording of archaeological deposits would be carried out as appropriate, and an archive and this report produced. All work followed the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) Code of Conduct and adhere to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (1999), and adhered to the University's Health and Safety policy.

6. Trial Trenching Methodology

Prior to any machining of trial trenches general photographs of the site areas were taken. Topsoil and modern overburden was removed in level spits, under continuous archaeological supervision, down to the topsoil base by a 360 degree mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching bucket. This overburden consisted of brick demolition rubble and a late, mixed garden soil. Two trenches were excavated during the evaluation.

The trenches were examined by hand cleaning to locate any archaeological deposits, which were planned and sample-excavated. The trench locations were recorded and all plans were tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid.

7. Results

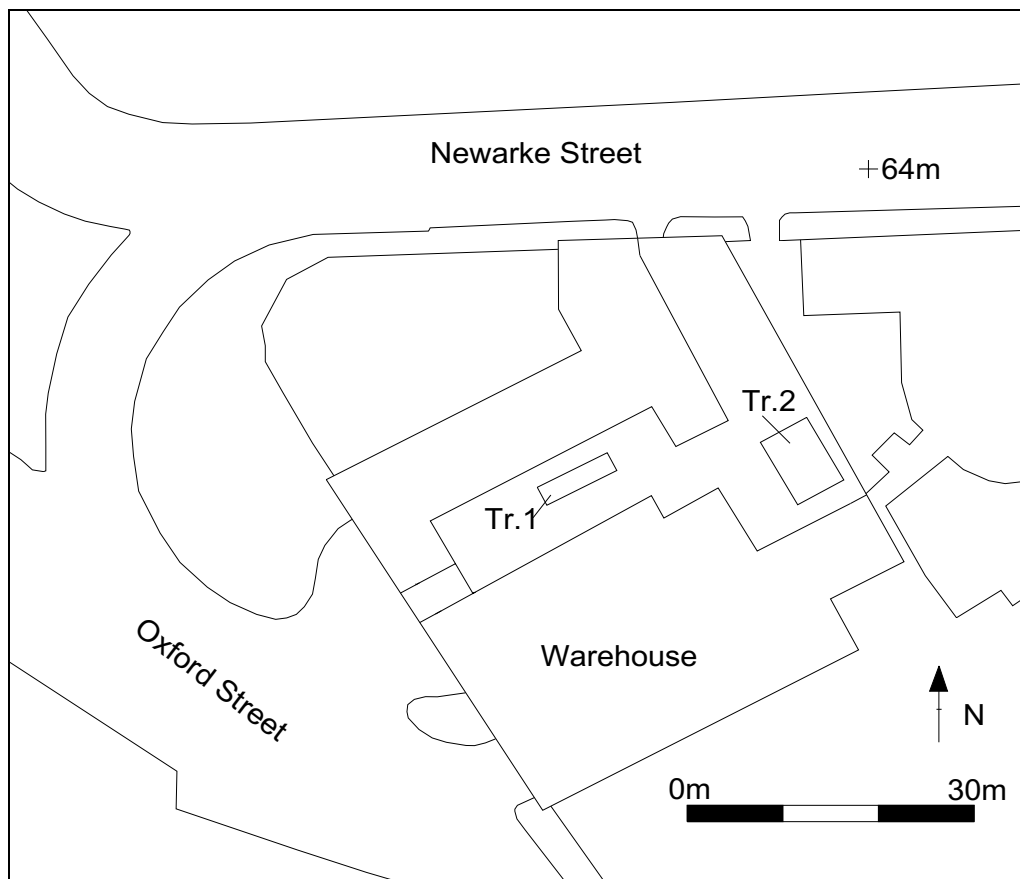


Fig.5. Trench Location Plan

7.1 Trench 1

7.1.1 Trench 1 was located in the centre of the proposed development area (figs. 5, 6, plate 1). For health and safety considerations, it was shortened from the suggested 15m by 3m to 8.2m by 2.1m, due to the small area in which to work in and the presence of cellars at the western end of the trench.

7.1.2 A depth of approximately 1.1m of modern overburden was removed by machine to reveal the uppermost archaeological deposits at a level of 62.84m OD.

7.1.3 Despite restrictions on the area of the trench, a number of features were exposed (fig. 6). These included several medieval pits (cuts [3], [8], [16]) along the southern edge of the trench, filled with (2), (4), (5), (6), (7), and (15). The fills included a mixture of organic, possibly cessy material and red clay backfill. Also of medieval date was a rectangular-shaped cut [26] filled with (23), (24), and (25). Upper fill (23) incorporated demolition material, whilst fills (24) and (25) were more organic and cessy in nature. This pit cut through a substantial deposit of (?)re-deposited natural clay (28), possibly a make up or levelling layer. Pottery from pits [8] and [26] suggests primary refuse, perhaps dating to the 13th century or later (see appendices).

7.1.4 Other features included (22) a linear of granite, sandstone and slate rubble, running northeast-southwest and possibly structural in nature. Feature [12] 2m to the west, was a pit or post-hole, filled with (9), (10), and (11) which included charcoal material but no evidence for post-packing.

7.1.5 All the above features were cut into areas of buried Roman subsoils (17), (20) and (21). These all appeared to be sitting on top of the natural substratum.

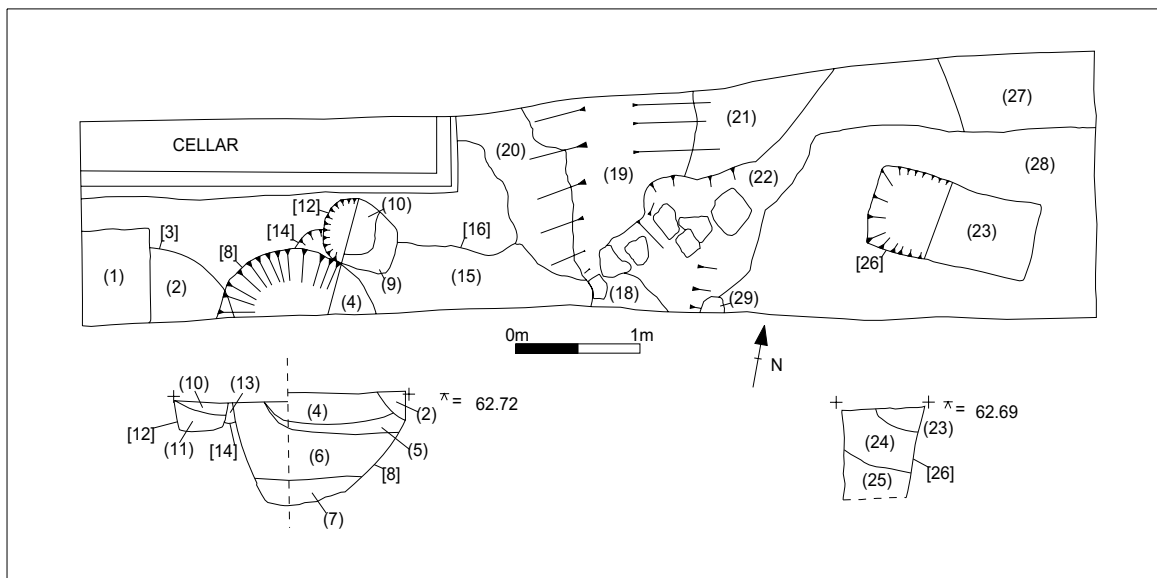


Fig.6. Plan and sections of Trench 1



Plate 1. Trench 1 after cleaning, looking east

7.2 Trench 2

7.2.1 Trench 2 was located in the east of the proposed development area, and 15m to the east of trench 1 (figs. 5, 7, plate 2). The trench measured 7.9m (north-south) by 5.6m (east-west). A depth of approximately 0.7m of modern overburden also consisting of concrete, and brick demolition/levelling and a late garden soil was machined off to reveal the top of archaeological deposits at levels between 63.32-63.60m OD.

7.2.2 During the course of trial trenching a number of features were exposed. These included a number of inter-cutting pits [44] filled with (45) a mid brown silty clay which produced a sherd of 13th century pottery (Nottingham ware). Other pits included [31] [34] (30),(33), potentially of 14th century date, as well as a modern pit [40]. Also present were mixed clay layers of uncertain date, (35) and (32). All of these features appeared to post-date layers of buried sub-soil (42) and (43) which consisted of yellow sandy silts with gravel. In the south-west corner of trench 2 these pits and layers appeared to be masking earlier activity as seen in a possible ditch [54] with a greenish cassy fill, running beneath feature (33).

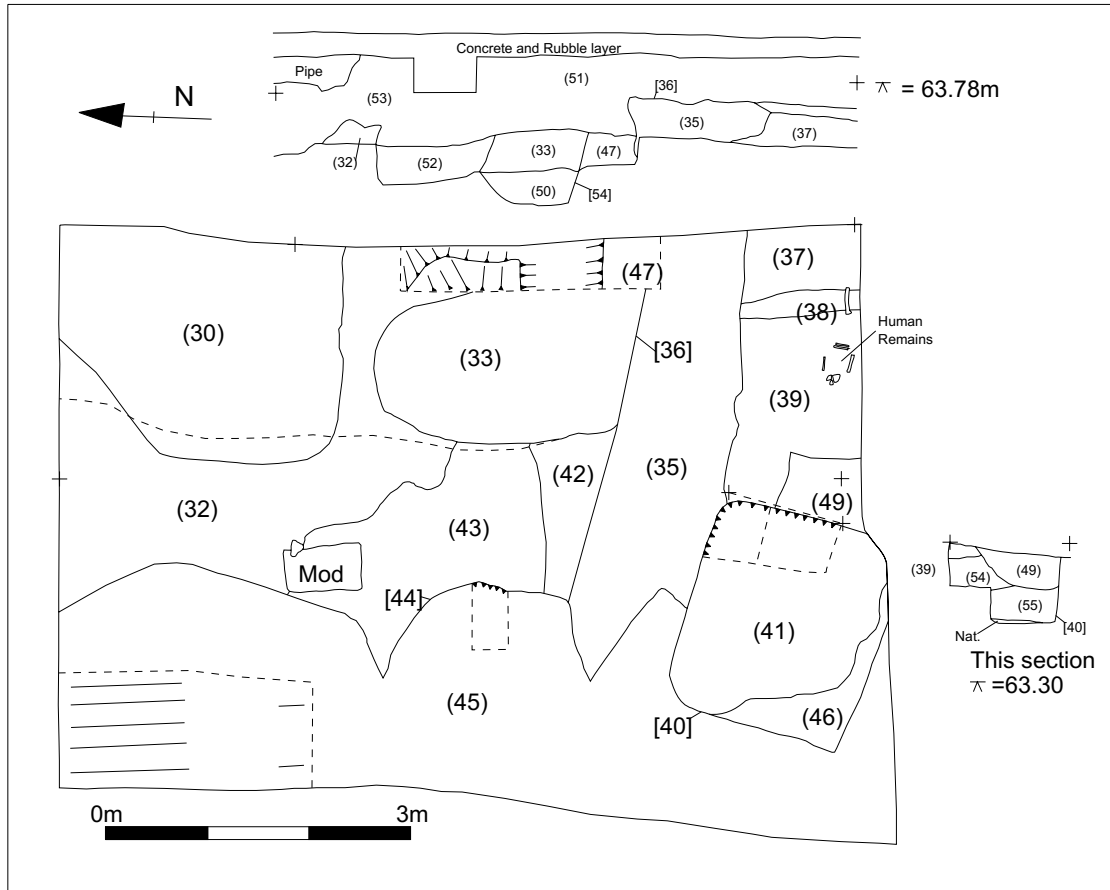


Fig7. Plan and sections of Trench 2. Note north to left.



Plate 2. Trench 2 after cleaning, looking east

In the south-east corner of trench 2 human remains were discovered, indicative of a partially disturbed burial. The bone was badly degraded and consisted of one femur (partial), radius, ulna and humerus of the right arm, humerus of the left arm and three fragments of the skull (see plate 3). Beneath these remains were a number of grey-brown silty deposits containing patches of re-deposited subsoils. However these deposits were not investigated in order to avoid the disturbance of the human remains described here.



Plate 3. Detail of human remains in trench two.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Both trenches of the field evaluation confirmed the presence of buried archaeological remains at shallow depths of between 0.7m and 1.1m below present ground level, with top of archaeology levels varying from 62.84m (trench 1) – 63.60m (trench 2).

8.2 The potential for further archaeology in the site area is high for several reasons:-

This evaluation was carried out in an area with known burials of Roman date. As such the expectation of finding such remains was high. However, although only one probably disturbed skeleton was exposed during the course of this evaluation, it seems likely that potentially more will survive at greater depth, and where not disturbed by medieval activity. This is also true for structural archaeology of Roman date.

The majority of the area exposed by trenching was dominated by medieval pitting. The relatively high proportions of animal bone present in the fills of these pits, and the size and unabraded nature of the pottery indicates their use as rubbish pits. Even if the pits were created for quarrying the fact that they incorporate occupation debris in

the backfill indicates medieval activity in this area. This medieval activity is most likely associated with occupation along the Newarke street frontage, and the archaeology exposed during this evaluation reflects backyard activity. Evidence for buildings may occur too however both in the north of the site area (i.e. part of the frontage), and within the rest of the site, as perhaps suggested by the stone linear (22) in trench 1.

9. Archive

The site archive (A4.2007) will be held by Leicester City Museums Service. It consists of finds, trench and context record sheets, site records, plans, and photographs. A brief summary of this report will be published in the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* in due course.

10. Acknowledgements

The evaluation was carried out by David Parker, Martin Shore and Kieran Armatage. Richard Buckley also of ULAS managed the project. ULAS is grateful to the clients Goddard Manton Architects for assistance in this project.

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Sources

LCC HER Leicester City Council Historic Environment Record

RBL Records for the Borough of Leicester

ROLLR Records Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland maps and records.

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Appendix 12.1 Context Index

Context	Cut	Area	Feature type	Deposit	Description
1	48	T1	Pit	Fill	Square pit [48] fill
2	3	“	“	Fill	Pit [3] fill
3	3	“	“	cut	Pit [3] cut
4	8	“	“	Fill	Pit [8] fill
5	8	“	“	Fill	Pit [8] fill
6	8	“	“	Fill	Pit [8] fill
7	8	“	“	Fill	Pit [8] fill
8	8	“	“	cut	Pit [8] cut
9	12	“	“	Fill	Pit [12] fill
10	12	“	“	Fill	Pit [12] fill
11	12	“	“	Fill	Pit [12] fill
12	12	“	“	cut	Pit [12] cut
13	14	“	“	Fill	Pit [14] fill
14	14	“	“	cut	Pit [14] cut
15	16	“	“	Fill	Pit [16] fill
16	16	“	“	cut	Pit [16] cut
17	-	“	Layer	layer	Orange/yellow clay silt
18	-	“	“	“	Red clay layer
19	-	“	“	“	?demo layer
20	-	“	“	“	Red clay layer
21	-	“	“	“	Orange/red clay layer
22	-	“	“	“	?demo layer with stonework
23	26	“	Pit	Fill	Pit [26] fill
24	26	“	“	“	Pit [26] fill
25	26	“	“	“	Pit [26] fill
26	26	“	“	Cut	Pit [26] cut
27	-	“	Layer	Layer	Demo layer
28	-	“	“	“	Make up layer
29	-	“	“	“	Clay layer
30	31	T2	Pit	Fill	Pit [31] fill
31	31	“	“	Cut	Pit [31] cut
32	-	“	Layer	Layer	Clay layer
33	34	“	Pit	Fill	Pit [34] fill
34	34	“	Pit	Fill	Pit [34] cut
35	36	“	Layer/?Fill	Layer?	Clay Layer (?fill)
36	36	“	Cut	Cut	Unclear feature – cut of
37	-	“	Layer/?Fill	Layer?	Clay Layer (?fill)

38	-	“	Layer	Layer	Clayey feature
39	-	“	?Grave	Fill	Fill, poss. grave?
40	40	“	Pit	Cut	Pit [40] Poss. Mod?
41	40	“	“	Fill	Pit [40] fill Poss. Mod? Dark charcoaly
42	-	“	Cobbling	Layer	Poss. cobbled layer/surface
43	-	“	“?	“	Subsoil/cobbling? layer
44	44	“	Pit	Cut	Generic for E side pits
45	44	“	“	Fill	“ “ “ “
46	40	“	Pit	Fill	Pit [40] fill Poss. Mod?
47	34	“	Pit	Fill	Pit [34] fill
48	48	T1	Pit	Cut	Square pit [48] cut
49	-	“	Layer	Layer	Stony layer
50	54	“	Pit	Fill	Pit [54] fill (poss.)
51	-	T2	Layer	Layer	Layer ?modern
52	-	“	Pit	Fill	Poss. Fill pit
53	-	“	Pit	Fill	Poss. Fill pit (very late)
54	54	“	Pit/Ditch	Cut	?pit/linear, cassy fill (50), only in Section
55	-	“	“	“	only in S

Appendix 12.2: The Romano-British pottery. By E. Johnson

One sherd of Roman grey ware weighing 5g was retrieved from context (7) during the above excavations. The sherd is burnished and is probably from a small jar dating between the second and fourth centuries.

Appendix 12.3 The medieval and later pottery and miscellaneous finds. By D. Sawday

The medieval pottery, eight sherds, weighing 217 grams, was examined under a binocular microscope and catalogued with reference to the ULAS fabric series (Davies and Sawday 1999). The results are shown below.

The relatively large pottery sherd weight, notably from contexts 7 and 25, suggest that relatively undisturbed archaeological levels may survive in the area.

Site/Parish: Former Antiques centre, Oxford St, Leicester Accession No/ Doc Ref: A4 2007/oxford st.3.doc Material: pot & misc. finds Site Type: extra mural suburb	Submitter: D. Parker Identifier: D. Sawday Date of Id: 31.07.07 Method of Recovery: evaluation
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Context	Fabric/ware	Sherd nos.	Weight grams	Comments
POT				
7	PM – Potters Marston	1	137	c.1100-c.1300
23	CC1 – Chilvers Coton ware 1	2	19	c.1250+
25	SP2 – Fine Nottingham Splashed ware	1	159	12 th C+
33	PM	1	11	
33	NO3 – Nottingham ware 3	1	6	
33	MP2 – Midland Purple ware 2	1	12	c.1375-1550

45	NO3	1	13	Mid/late 13 th C+
CBM				
23	EA - Earthenware	3	9	
45	EA	1	51	?Roman tile
ANIMAL BONE				
4		3		
23		9		
30		12 approx		
33		15 approx		
SHELL				
23		Frgs only		
FLINT				
30		1		Heavily patinated