

**An Archaeological Watching Brief on
land behind 1-3, Grey Friars, Leicester
(SK 58600 04348)**

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Planning Authority: Leicester City Council

For: Leicester City Council

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on land behind 1-3, Grey Friars, Leicester (SK 58600 04348) on the 24th and 31st July 2007. This work was carried out on behalf of Leicester City Council, by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS). Roman metalling and silt layers were observed for 0.6m depth, in an area 4msq, which dated from the late 1st – mid 3rd century AD. The area lies c.5m from a projected Roman north-south street. Due to the size of the intervention interpretation remains as either a sequence of street metalling or yard surfaces. The medieval period was represented with c.1m of garden soil. The site archive will be held by Leicester City Museum under the accession number A8.2007.

1 Introduction

1.1 This document provides details of the results of an archaeological watching brief by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) carried out on land behind 1-3, Grey Friars, Leicester (SK 58600 04348) on behalf of Leicester City Council.

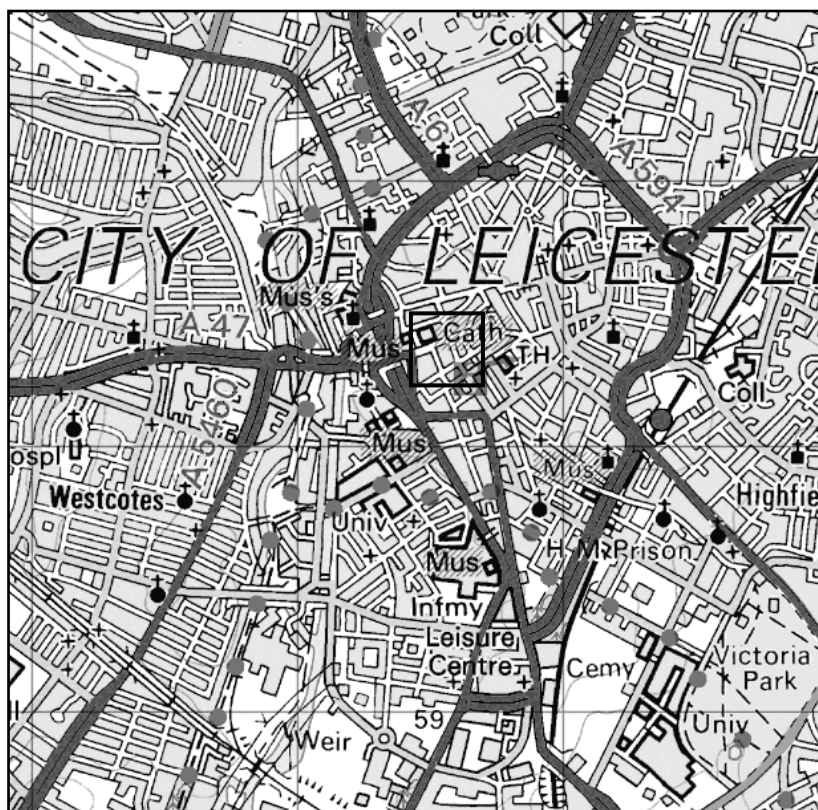


Fig. 1- Site Location (Scale 1:25000).

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1.2 The site lies within the city of Leicester, inside the inner ring road and within the Market Street Conservation Area (Fig.2). Historically, it lies within the boundaries of both the Roman and medieval town defences, and within the precinct of the medieval Grey Friars Priory. The development area of c.25sqm lies at a height of c.64.5mO.D (Fig.2).

1.3 The proposed work involved the excavation of a lift shaft and a trench around it in which services were to be diverted. The City Archaeologist, in his capacity as archaeological adviser to the planning authority, requested that a watching brief be carried out as a condition of the planning permission.

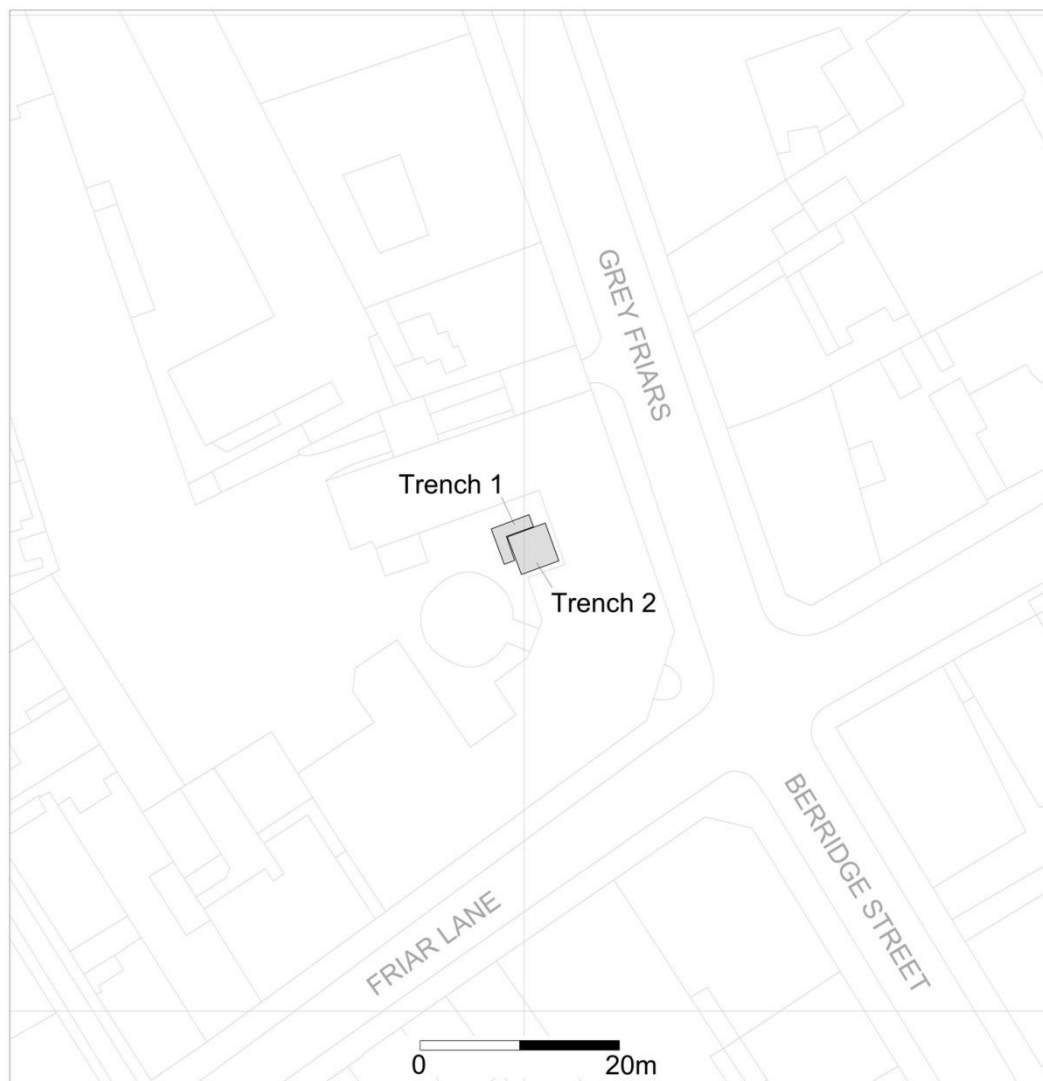


Fig.2: Site and trench location observed during the watching brief.

2 Site Background

2.1 Context of the Project

2.1.1 The proposed development is for the construction of a lift for disabled access within the Council buildings.

2.2 Archaeological and Historical Background

2.2.1 An archaeological desk-based assessment for a site c.40m to the north-east of the area summarised the archaeological potential of the area as follows:

...the area is known for finds of a number of different periods, though many of these are poorly located. Very little archaeological evidence of prehistoric activity has been found within the area. However the site is located within the southern half of the Roman and medieval walled town and there is high potential for intra-mural domestic and commercial use in the Roman and medieval period. The Grey Friars Priory and grounds lay within the proposed development area, and limited finds of Roman and medieval date have been recovered nearby. The importance of the area continued into the post-medieval and modern period, where the site was incorporated in part within the grounds of the Grey Friars House owned by the Herrick and Pares family. In conclusion, the area is seen to have high potential for containing archaeological deposits primarily medieval and post medieval in date, although Roman activity should also be apparent. There is a much lower potential for uncovering archaeological remains of a prehistoric date.

2.2.2 Previous archaeological work in the area has resulted in the discovery of remains from the Roman period onwards. These include evidence for Roman deposits close to the present ground level recorded during a watching brief by Leicestershire Museums Archaeological Survey Team for the St. Martin's Redevelopment (Cookson, 1983), north of the proposed development area. An evaluation under the former Nat West bank to the north-east of the development area revealed between 0.5-1m of medieval and post-medieval stratified deposits that increased in complexity with depth, which overlay between 0.5-1m of Roman deposits that also appeared to increase in complexity with depth (Tate, 2007).

3 Aims and Methods.

3.1 Aims

3.1.1 Through archaeological control and supervision of existing overburden stripping and by the client's contractors:

- 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.

3.2 Methods

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

3.2.2 A 360° tracked machine with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket was used to excavate modern overburden and existing service trenches in level spits under full supervision, until archaeological deposits or undisturbed substrata were encountered.

3.2.3 Archaeological deposits that were located were hand cleaned and planned as appropriate. Samples of the archaeological deposits were hand excavated. Measured drawings of all archaeological features and deposits were prepared at a scale of 1:20 and tied into an overall site plan of 1:100. All plans were tied into the National Grid using an Electronic Distance Measurer (EDM).

3.2.4 All excavated sections were recorded and drawn at 1:10 scale, levelled and tied into the Ordnance Survey datum (Benchmark on west corner of Grey Friars and St. Martins). Spot heights were taken as appropriate.

4 Results

4.1 Trench 1 (24/07/07)

This area was excavated to divert services that would otherwise be disturbed with the construction of the lift shaft. This was primarily over the line of a current service and therefore revealed a modern backfill containing brick and sewer pipe fragments. The sides were shuttered at a depth of 2m. Although continuation of machining occurred with a toothed bucket, no masonry, building materials or obvious archaeological deposits were encountered and the natural substratum was reached at a depth of c.2.1m below ground level for c.0.2m on the north side of the trench. The ground was still disturbed in the rest of the trench.

4.2 Trench 2 (31/07/07)

This area was excavated for the lift shaft. Modern overburden and a sterile garden soil were removed to a depth of c.1.2m, where archaeological deposits were reached.

4.2.1 Slot 1

The north and west of the trench revealed another service that ran diagonally across the area (the service that was diverted). This area of disturbed ground was removed to reveal the archaeological deposits in section and plan (Fig.3 & 4).

The earliest observed layer was a uniform metallised surface (11) 0.03m thick, which had been laid directly above the natural substratum of red marl. It consisted of a light yellowish-beige sand with very frequent cobbles and very frequent rounded stone <0.05m. It slopes on the west, downwards towards the west. The subsequent layers

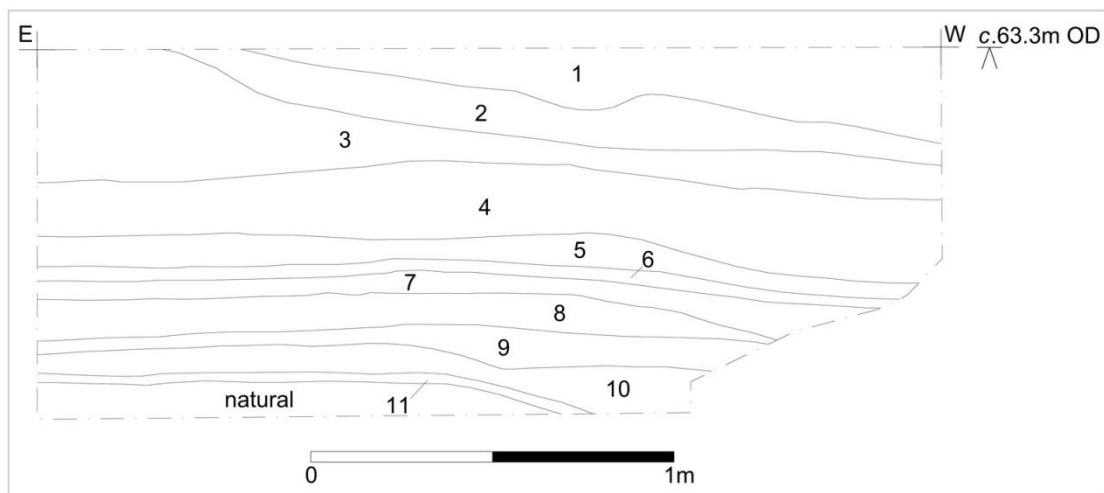


Fig.3: Section 1.01 revealing Roman metalling and silts.

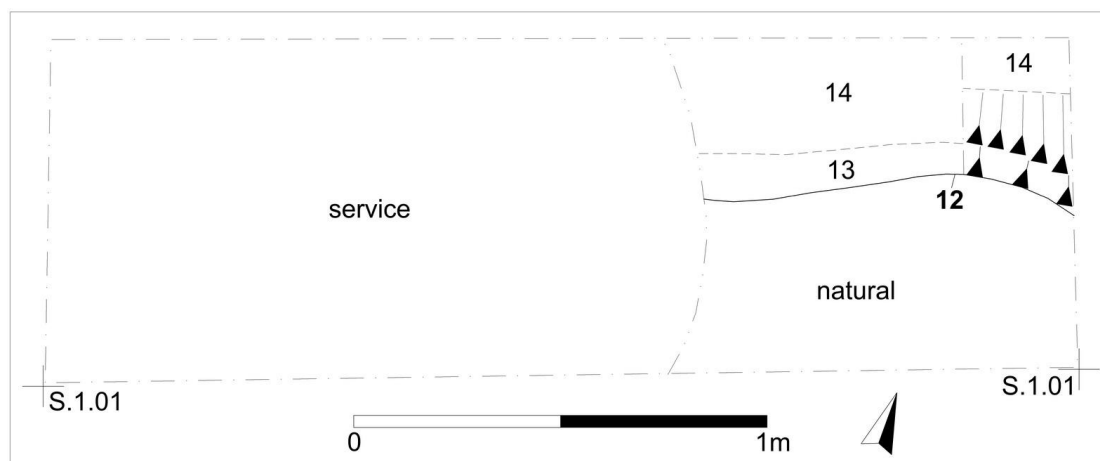


Fig.4: Plan of base of slot 1 revealing linear feature.

seem to follow this artificial slope. Above this was a pinkish/red-brown sandy clay layer with rare charcoal and frequent rounded stone (10).

Linear feature [12] was observed running south-west to north-east for *c.*1m in the base of the trench and appeared to truncate these layers. The primary fill (13) consisted of a light-mid grey sandy silt with occasional charcoal and rare small angular and rounded stone. Secondary fill (14) consisted of a dark greenish-grey sandy silt, but with a greater proportion of charcoal, and contained pottery dating from the mid-late 1st century.

Overlying (10) and possibly the same as (14) was a mid greenish-brown sandy silt with occasional charcoal, and rare rounded stone and oyster shell fragments (9).

Sealing all of these was a cobbled/metalled surface (8) 0.1m thick. It consisted of very frequent pebbles and rounded stone sat within a light yellowish-beige sand matrix. Overlying this surface was a mid greenish-brown sandy silt with occasional charcoal and rare oyster fragments and rounded stone (7). It contained pottery from the early-mid 2nd century.

Above this was another surface (6) which consisted of a pinkish-orange sand with very frequent small rounded stone and was 0.04m thick. Overlying this was a mid reddish-brown sandy loam (5) with occasional rounded stone and charcoal, and rare oyster fragments. It contained pottery dated to the 2nd century.

Overlying this was a substantial metallated surface (4), which consisted of a brownish-orange sand with very frequent rounded stone.

Above this final metallated surface was layer (3) which consisted of a mid greenish-brown sandy loam with occasional rounded stone, charcoal and rare oyster fragments. It contained pottery dating from the late 1st to the mid-3rd century.

The uppermost layers observed here, (1) and (2), appeared to be either late- or post-Roman deposits, possibly disturbed by agricultural activities associated with the overlying medieval garden soil which extended for a further 1m above context (1). The pottery recovered from these layers dated to the mid 2nd century AD +.

4.2.2 Slot 2

The south and east of the trench revealed deposits in plan that were recorded and will be discussed below (Fig.5). Slot 2 was placed through these to record the section (Fig.6) and help understand the underlying deposits and any continuity with slot 1.

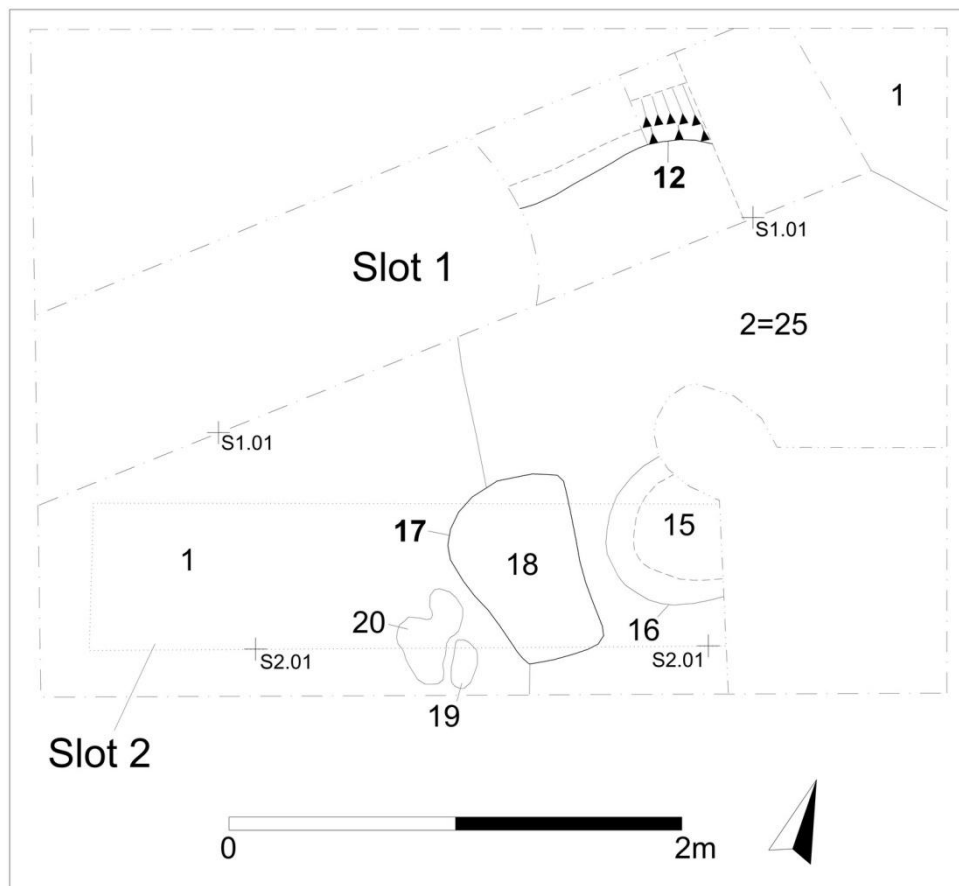


Fig.5: Plan of Trench 2 showing location of slot 1 and position of slot 2 through archaeology.

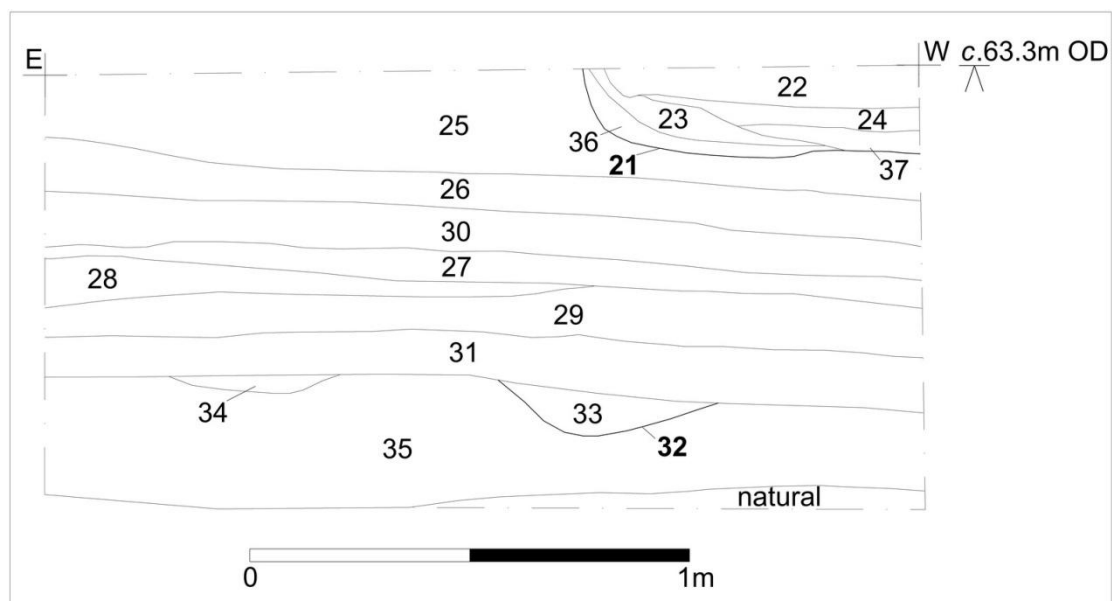


Fig.6: Section 2.01 from slot 2 through metallised surfaces, layers and a hearth.

Metalled layer (35) overlay the natural red Mercia Mudstone and consisted of a mid-orange sand matrix with very frequent medium rounded stone and small rounded stone, was 0.3m thick, thinning towards the west to 0.19m.

Overlying the metalling on the east was a small patch of light-grey clayey silt with occasional charcoal (34) 0.03m thick. On the west, a feature cut the metalling [32] which had a gully-like profile with a maximum depth of 0.14m. If a gully, the orientation was likely to be roughly north-south. It was filled with a mid-grey-orangey-brown silty sand with occasional charcoal and frequent small rounded stone (33).

Above these and the metallised layer (35) was a mid greenish-brown silty sand (31) with frequent charcoal and occasional small rounded stone and 0.13m thick. It was similar to layers (7) and (9) in slot 1. The pottery from this layer dated to the late 1st to 2nd century+.

Overlying this was another layer of metalling (29), which consisted of a pinkish-red clay with very frequent small rounded stone, occasional charcoal and rare oyster shell fragments. It was 0.14m thick. Overlying this on the eastern side of the slot was metallised layer (28) which consisted of a reddish-orange sand with very frequent small rounded stone and frequent small angular stone 0.11m thick thinning towards the west. The two layers together slope slightly down towards the west from the east. These two layers of metalling are comparable with metallised layer (6) in slot 1. Above these was a mid reddish-orangey-brown silty sand (27) with frequent small rounded stone and occasional charcoal. Its thickness varied across the section 0.03-0.08m. Again, a slight slope down towards the west was observed and the layer is very similar to (5) in slot 1.

A metallised layer overlay this (30). It consisted of a mid brownish-orange sand with very frequent small-medium rounded stone, was 0.13m thick and also sloped down towards the west from the east. It was very similar to metallised layer (4) in slot 1.

Overlying this was layer (26) which was identical to layer (3) in slot 1, and layer (25) above that, which was identical to layer (2) in slot 1.

Truncating layer (25) was a hearth-like feature [21] with diffuse edges. It was 0.2m deep but is likely to have been truncated and was only observed for 0.75m east-west, extending into the western baulk. Fill (36) appeared to be a burnt sand, observed here as a mid brownish-red sand with a mid brownish-red sandy loam mixed in. Above this was a dark black-brown organic silt (23) 0.07m thick with frequent charcoal and contained pottery from the 2nd century+. Overlying this on the west was a fill of re-deposited red clay (37) which also contained pottery from the 2nd century AD+. Above this was another patch of burnt sand (24) appearing a mid orange-red and was 0.05m thick. Overlying this and the latest fill of this feature observed here was a mid orangey-brown sandy loam with occasional small rounded stone and charcoal (22).

Above layer (2)/(25) was another hearth like feature which consisted of a mid brownish-red sand with a sandy loam mixed in (16). It was *c.*0.4m in diameter, though was truncated on the east and north. It was overlain by a dark blackish-brown organic silt with frequent charcoal (15). Both were reminiscent of (36) and (23) in hearth feature [21]. It was not excavated so a cut was not established.

To the west of this was a possible cut feature [17] which was sub-rectangular in plan and filled with a mid-dark orangey-brown clayey sand with occasional small rounded and angular stone and charcoal (18). The fill was very similar to layer (1).

To the south-west of this were two discreet deposits, a patch of re-deposited red clay (19) and a patch of a possible building material (20) which consisted of a mid yellowish-brown clayey sand with rare charcoal and extended for *c.*0.4m north-south and *c.*0.25m east-west.

5 Discussion

5.1 The earliest feature observed here was the east-west ditch observed in the base of slot 1 and is likely to date to the late 1st century AD. It truncated the earliest metalling layer and could be interpreted as either a boundary/drainage ditch to a property, or even possibly a drainage ditch for a previously unknown east-west street.

5.2 However, the metallated surfaces are most likely to be yard surfaces that slope down slightly towards the west away from one of the possible north-south streets to the east (Fig.7), with occupation debris building up between each successive layer. The differences at the lowest levels may represent areas of repairs. This would suggest that the area is possibly a courtyard to a Roman building set back from the north-south road, and was in use from the late 1st to early 2nd century through to the mid 3rd century.

5.3 The alternative interpretation of the metallated surfaces is that of a Roman street. The slope down to the west from the east may represent a camber on the western side of a north-south street, or an east-west street that follows a natural slope down to the west from the east (where the river lies). The occupation debris could be reinterpreted as road silts, however they do not really resemble road silts as seen

elsewhere in the city. There is no projected east-west street in this southern part of the Roman town at present.

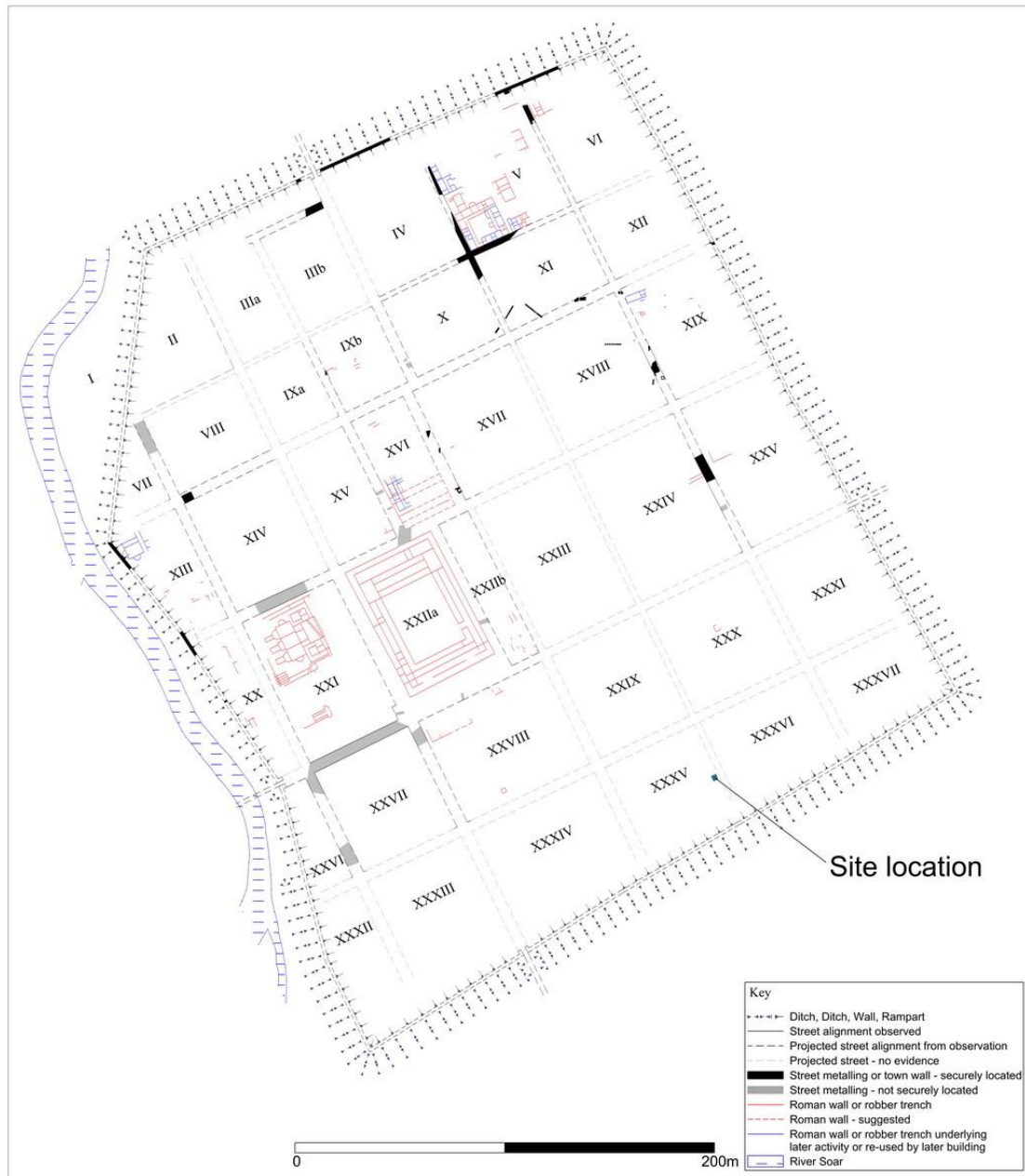


Fig.7: Site location in relation to the Roman Town Plan.

5.4 The two hearths are either Late- or Post-Roman in date. The pottery is likely to be residual. The paucity of medieval artefacts and nature of the deposits suggests they are pre-medieval.

5.5 The ‘garden soil’ removed above these was relatively sterile, as has been observed in the north-east of the medieval town and is likely to reflect the use as agricultural/horticultural soils within the Grey Friars Priory property in the medieval period, and subsequent use as a garden to the Grey Friars House in the post-medieval to modern periods.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Due to the size of the observation, and paucity of observations within the immediate area, interpretation of the Roman metalled surfaces will remain questionable.

6.2 The nature of the medieval deposits observed does not place any building activity within the immediate area and confirms previous thoughts about the area.

7 Archive

A provisional list of archive contents is appended below Appendix 2 (p.14 section 10.2). A more detailed list will accompany the archive at time of deposition. The site archive will be held by Leicester City Museum, accession number A8.2007.

8 Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the clients, Leicester City Council, and Newline for their assistance and co-operation on site. Richard Buckley, managed the project, and the fieldwork was carried out by the author, all of ULAS.

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19.8.2008

10 Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1 The Roman pottery and other finds E. Johnson

Assemblage Size and Condition

A stratified assemblage of 52 sherds of Roman period pottery weighing 845g was retrieved from work carried out as part of an archaeological watching brief. The average sherd weight of 16.3g suggests good levels of preservation. A further 18 sherds (315g) were recovered from re-deposited layers, including two sherds of post-Roman pottery.

Methodology

The material was classified using the Leicestershire Fabric Series (Pollard 1994) and quantified by sherd count and weight as shown in the catalogue below. Vessel forms were also assigned where diagnostic sherds allowed using published typologies (Howe *et al* 1980; Pollard 1994; Webster 1996).

Pottery Catalogue

Context	Fabric	Form	Sherds	Weight (g)	Dating
1	Grey ware	Jar	1	6	late1st-mid2ndC
1	Grey ware	Jar	1	16	2ndC+
2	White ware	Flagon	1	27	late1st-mid2ndC
3	Amphora (Dressel 20)	Amphora	1	69	mid1st-mid3rd
3	White ware	Flagon	1	22	late1st-2ndC
5	Grey ware	Jar	1	4	2ndC+
5	Grey ware	Jar	1	33	2ndC+
7	White slipped ware	Misc	1	8	late1st-2ndC
7	Oxidised ware	Jar	1	89	late1st-2ndC
7	Samian	Cup	1	13	early-mid2ndC
7	Grey ware	Beaker/Jar	2	15	2ndC
7	Grey ware	Bowl	1	19	late1st-early/mid2ndC
7	Grey ware	Beaker/Jar	1	3	2ndC
7	Grey ware	Beaker/Jar	1	2	late1st-early2ndC
7	Grey ware	Jar	2	19	2ndC+
14	Grog tempered ware	Jar	1	33	mid/late1stC
14	Grey ware	Misc	1	14	late1st-2ndC
23	Grey ware	Misc	1	4	2ndC+
25	Grey ware	Jar	1	39	2ndC+
26	Mortarium (Ver)	Mortarium	1	56	late1st-mid2ndC
26	White ware	Misc	1	2	late1st-2ndC
26	Oxidised ware	Misc	1	12	late1st-2ndC+
26	Oxidised ware	Bowl	1	25	late1st-mid2ndC
31	Samian	Bowl	1	3	mid-late1stC
31	Grey ware	Bowl	1	22	late1st-mid2ndC
31	Grey ware	Jar	1	14	late1stC-early2ndC
31	Grey ware	Misc	1	4	late1st-2ndC+
31	Grey ware	Misc	1	1	2ndC+

Context	Fabric	Form	Sherds	Weight (g)	Dating
31	Grey ware	Misc	1	5	late1st-2ndC+
31	Grey ware	Jar	9	96	2ndC+
37	Oxidised ware	Bowl	2	58	late1st-2ndC
37	White ware	Misc	1	2	late1st-2ndC
37	Mortarium	Mortarium	1	44	2ndC+
37	Grey ware	Jar	1	16	late1st-2ndC
37	Grey ware	Jar	1	13	2ndC
37	Grey ware	Beaker/Jar	2	15	2ndC
37	Grey ware	Misc	1	7	late1st-2ndC+
37	Grey ware	Jar	3	15	2ndC+

Occupation Layers

In Section 1 contexts (5) and (7) represented occupation layers. Most vessels are grey ware small jars or possibly beakers, including roulette, rusticated and grooved decoration indicating dates from the late first and second centuries. A reeded rimmed bowl dates from the late first to the mid-second century. The oxidised ware lid seated jar and Samian ware cup also suggest a date from the late first to the middle of the second century (Pollard 1994: 77-79; Webster 1996: 37-38).

Contexts (31) and (37) form a single occupation layer in Section 2 and account for 51.9% of the total stratified assemblage. As with the occupation layers in Section 1 above, most vessels are grey ware jars, bowls and possibly a beaker. Everted rimmed vessels with grooved, rusticated and roulette decoration suggest dates from the late first and second centuries (Pollard 1994: 77-79). The oxidised ware carinated bowl is comparable to bowls found at Bath Lane in Leicester dating to the late first-early second century (Clamp 1985: 50-51). The white ware and mortarium are most likely from a Midlands source dating within the second century. A South Gaulish Samian ware Curle 11 bowl dates to the mid-late first century (Webster 1996: 49-50).

Ditch [12] (14)

A ditch running east-west in front of the upper section revealed two sherds of pottery. The grog tempered ware jar with comb decoration dates to the mid-late first century and is a “transitional” fabric (Pollard 1994: 72-73). The other sherd is an undiagnostic grey ware which could date to any time from the late first-early second century onwards.

Layers

Contexts (1), (2) and (3), formed a sequence of layers at the top of Section 1. Two grey ware jars were found in (1), including one with barbotine dot decoration dating from the late first to mid-second century (Pollard 1994: 77-79). A flagon in Verulamium white ware also dating from the late first to mid-second century was recovered from (2) (Tyres 1996: 199-201). Context (3) revealed a Dressel 20 South Spanish olive oil amphora and a white ware flagon again most likely dating within the second century.

Contexts (25) and (26) formed layers in Section 2. The pottery from lower layer (26) comprises a Verulamium ware mortarium, a white ware flagon or bowl, an oxidised

ware jar and carinated bowl with white painted decoration. Together, this suggests a date from the late first to the mid-second century. A fragment of general purpose wall tile was also found in (26). The upper fill (25) produced one sherd of grey ware, probably a jar, which could date any time from the second century onwards. A hearth [21] (23) truncating layer (25), also produced one sherd of undiagnostic grey ware dating from the second century onwards.

Summary

The material in the assemblage suggests evidence for activity from the late first and second centuries. The occupation layers dating to the late first to mid-second century form the lowest levels in both Sections. Material from the layers above could easily be contemporary, with the absence of regional wares such as Black Burnished ware suggesting a date within the second century, possibly as early as the mid-second century.

The 18 sherds of re-deposited material are largely comparable with the stratified assemblage including a Dressel 20 amphora, a ring necked flagon and grey ware with barbotine dot decoration. The only Roman material found to positively date beyond the second century was two sherds of Nene Valley colour coated ware including a dish dating to the fourth century (Howe et al 1980: 24-25). Two sherds of post-Roman pottery comprise one sherd of Potters Marston dating to c.1150-1300 and one sherd of modern stone ware (D. Sawday *pers. comm.*).

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10.2 Appendix 2. Archive Contents List

Archive Contents A8.2007

Report No. 2007-124

Miscellaneous site notes

Watching Brief sheets 2 sheets

Context sheets 37 sheets

Drawing index 1 sheet

Small finds index

Levels index

Context index 1 sheets

Digital photograph index 2 sheets

Monochrome photographic index 2 sheets

Monochrome negatives 13 frames in 1 sleeves

Monochrome contact sheets 13 frames in 1 sleeves

Disc containing photographs

Contact sheets from disc 1 sheets

Permatrace drawings 2 sheets

Roman Pottery Report (included in main report)

One box of finds of Roman and medieval pottery, and ceramic building material.