An Archaeological Watching Brief as part of the Earl Shilton A47 Bypass, Leicestershire

NGR: SP476 991 - SP453 964

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For: Carillion Capital Projects

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An Archaeological Watching Brief

as part of the Earl Shilton A47 Bypass, Leicestershire

(SP476 991 - SP453 964)

Summary

A programme of archaeological fieldwork was carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) between August 2007 and November 2008, during work on the A47 Earl Shilton Bypass. This work consisted of a watching brief on the roadline during contractors' groundworks. Archaeological deposits were identified during the removal of the Wilkinson Lane/Station Road carriageway. These deposits are thought to represent construction layers for the dam/bank at the east end of the north pond of the Elmesthorpe earthworks. A small amount of medieval demolition material was identified at the base of these deposits, including pottery, tile and roof slate. To the south of Elmesthorpe Lane, the line of a linear feature could be traced north-west to south-east, and can be seen to be on the line of the village boundary earthworks surveyed in the past. No other features or finds were identified during the watching brief. The work was carried out for Carillion Capitol Projects and Sir Alfred McAlpine plc. Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service will hold the finds and documentary archive under the Accession number XA184 2007.

1 Introduction

A programme of archaeological fieldwork was carried out by ULAS between 20th August 2007 and 11th November 2008, during work on the A47 Earl Shilton Bypass. This work consisted of a watching brief on the roadline during contractors' groundworks. These groundworks included topsoil stripping, level reductions where the carriageway is in cutting, drainage works, and new road junction works at Station Road/Wilkinson Lane, Thurlaston Lane, and on the A47 junctions. The work was carried out initially for Sir Alfred McAlpine plc with later work for Carillion Capital Projects. Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service will hold the finds and documentary archive under the Accession number XA184 2007.

2 Background

2.1 Location, Topography and Geology

The route of the proposed bypass runs from the A47 in the north-east (SP 476 991) across Thurlaston Lane then south-west rejoining the A47 at Carrs Hill (SP 453 964), see Figs. 1, 2-5. The route crosses a series of agricultural fields, currently of mixed arable and pastoral use. The topography is varied, as the bypass transects a series of shallow east-west valleys. The ground level thus varies between *c.*88m aOD and 110m aOD. The solid geology of the area is Triassic Mercia Mudstone, with superficial deposits consisting of alluvium (valleys), sands and gravels, and glacial tills (Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of England & Wales, Coalville, sheet 155; Edina Digimap). The total length of the bypass is some 4.5km, and the total area within the easement is *c.*0.215k $m^{2.}$

Fig. 1 Location of bypass. Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey 1:50000. O.S. Licence no. AL10009495

2.2 Historical and Archaeological Background

The following information was obtained from DMRB Stage 2 (Challis 2001). The study area contains known archaeological sites from the prehistoric, Romano-British, Anglo-Saxon, medieval, and later periods. A total of 17 archaeological sites are included in the Leicestershire Sites and Monuments Record and other records suggest further archaeological potential.

The prehistoric period is represented by a cropmark, possibly a Neolithic enclosure, close to the eastern edge of Earl Shilton village (SP477979) and is not listed on the SMR. A Neolithic macehead was recovered from Earl Shilton (SMR 49NE.F). A middle Bronze Age cremation burial was recorded from Earl Shilton itself and a bronze palstave from close to Huit Farm (SMR 49NE.AQ). Cropmark ring-ditches (SMR 49NE.CB and AA) might be ploughed out Bronze Age round barrows or could be associated with later prehistoric settlement. Other cropmarks include a pit-alignment (SMR 49NE.AV), enclosures (SMR 49NE.S, P and J) and linear cropmarks, which may represent Iron Age and Romano-British settlement sites and agricultural activity. A pottery kiln (SMR 49NE.BF) and a possible villa site near to Mirfield Farm (SMR 49NE.BZ) may also be of Romano-British date.

The only known Anglo-Saxon evidence is the find of a 7th century gold sword pommel from Elmesthorpe (SMR 49NE.BY). By contrast, there is considerable evidence for medieval and later settlement. This includes the settlement cores of Barwell and Earl Shilton and the manorial complex at Basset Farm (SMR 49NE.Q),

agricultural earthworks at Alexander Avenue, Earl Shilton and Huit Farm and well-preserved manorial earthworks and fishponds at Elmesthorpe (SMR 49NE.BG *et al*). A series of linear cropmarks along the parish boundary between Earl Shilton and Tooley (SMR 49NE.N) may indicate the line of the former boundary hedges and most probably date from the post-medieval period.

Within the road line are a series of fishponds, thought to be of 16th or 17th century date (Clark 2007b), which are thought to be part of the manorial complex of Elmesthorpe. Nicholls, writing in 1811, recorded that "the ancient hall stood on an eminence, and was a very large and extensive building… From the traces which now remain of the extensive pleasure grounds, etc., it appears to have been a large and commodious residence…Mr Thompson was the first tenant who lived at the present farm-house where the hall originally stood…There have been several fish-pools, from small ones to six or seven acres apiece" (Nichols, 1811:605 referred to in Clark 2007b)**.** Hartley commented "To the south of Earl Shilton the parish takes in part of a former fishpond. This is one of a series of earthworks in the parish of Elmesthorpe which appear to be the remains of a grand 17th century formal garden scheme associated with the now-vanished Elmesthorpe Hall" (2008:16).

2.3 Previous Fieldwork as part of the Bypass Project

Initial non-intrusive work in 2001 and 2002 was summarised as follows:- "non-intrusive survey was carried out by ULAS over the area of the proposed Earl Shilton bypass. This work included fieldwalking, metal-detecting, auger and geophysical survey. Few significant finds were recovered during the fieldwalking and metal–detecting, but small assemblages of medieval pottery and worked flint were recovered. The auger survey revealed indications of alluviation close to the existing streams. Little of significance was located in the course of magnetic susceptibility and gradiometer surveys. A measured survey was undertaken of the earthworks of the Elmesthorpe manorial complex in the area affected by the proposed Earl Shilton bypass (Browning, Butler and Coward 2002:1). Follow-up resistivity survey was carried out in fields north of Church Farm, Elmesthorpe, and targeting land thought to be part of the Elmesthorpe manor (Butler 2003). Although most of the resistivity anomalies were attributed to either modern activity or a geological or hydrological origin, medieval ridge and furrow and a possible demolished building were identified. The latter feature was outside the area of the final road line, however.

Follow-up fieldwork incorporated a test-pit survey and evaluation trenches on land east of Earl Shilton, this area being in close proximity to the aforementioned cropmark (above p.1), and where a flint scatter had been recovered during fieldwalking (Coward 2003, Jarvis forthcoming). Additionally, land adjacent to the Elmesthorpe manor site (site A) and adjacent to Breach Lane, and a scheme of survey and investigation at Elmesthorpe fishponds was scheduled (Clark 2007a, ibid.). The results of sites A and D are reported elsewhere (ibid.), whilst a watching brief was specified for the other areas of the bypass line (Clark 2007a).

3 Results

The line of the bypass has been separated into sites 1-6 for convenience, running from the north-east to the south-west. The locations of these sites are shown on Fig. 2, with detailed plans on Figs. 2-5, and these site areas are as follows:-

Site 1:A47 Leicester Road Compound ('area 24A' grid ref: SP477 991)
Site 2: Thurlaston Lane temporary diversion (grid ref: SP479 981)
Site 3: Station Road/Wilkinson Lane to Breach Lane (grid ref: SP466 967)
Site 4: Station Road to Elmesthorpe Lane - North of the Fishponds (grid ref: SP461 967)
Site 5: Station Road to Elmesthorpe Lane - South of the Fishponds (grid ref: SP459 966)
Site 6: Elmesthorpe Lane to Carrs Hill (grid ref: SP456 964)

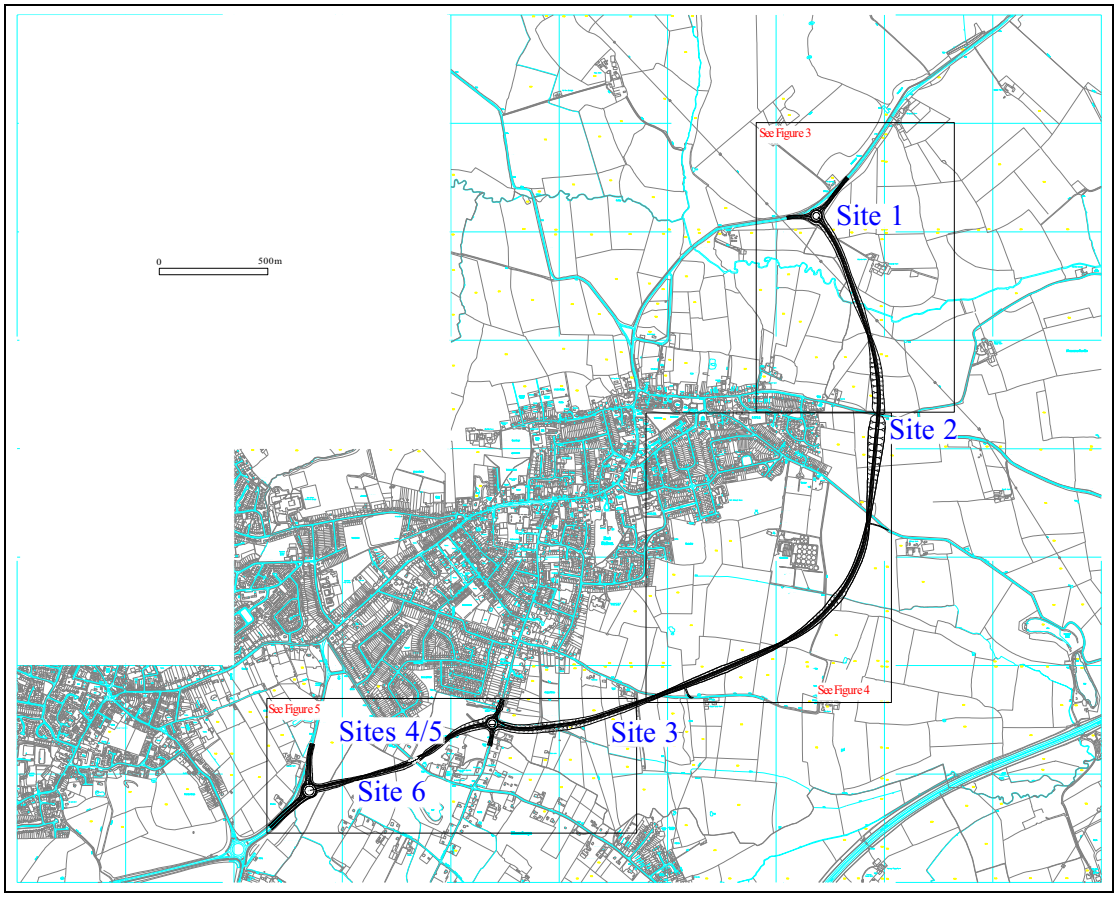

Fig. 2 Route of Earl Shilton Bypass, location of detailed plans, and site areas. Map supplied by TPAU

3.1 Site 1:A47 Leicester Road Compound ('area 24A' grid ref: SP477 991)

Fieldwork was carried out between 20/08/07 – 23/08/07 (inc.) on this area (see Fig. 3). The first phase of the topsoil strip was to excavate a haul road across the temporary working area. An area approximately 6 metres wide by approximately 60 metres long was excavated towards the northern edge of the temporary working area,

joining the existing A47 directly opposite The Spinneys, aligned north-west to south-east. Approximately 200mm of topsoil was excavated revealing a horizon of weathered clay bedrock. Nothing of archaeological significance was observed within this part of the topsoil strip. This haul road was extended towards the south, a further 40 metres by 6 metres was again excavated to approximately 200mm. The exposed bedrock was the same as was observed earlier and again nothing of archaeological significance was observed. The temporary working area was further extended to the north in order to construct a temporary car park. An area of approximately 660 square metres was excavated to the north of the original haul road. As with the other areas approximately 200mm of topsoil was excavated again revealing weathered clay bedrock and nothing of archaeological significance.

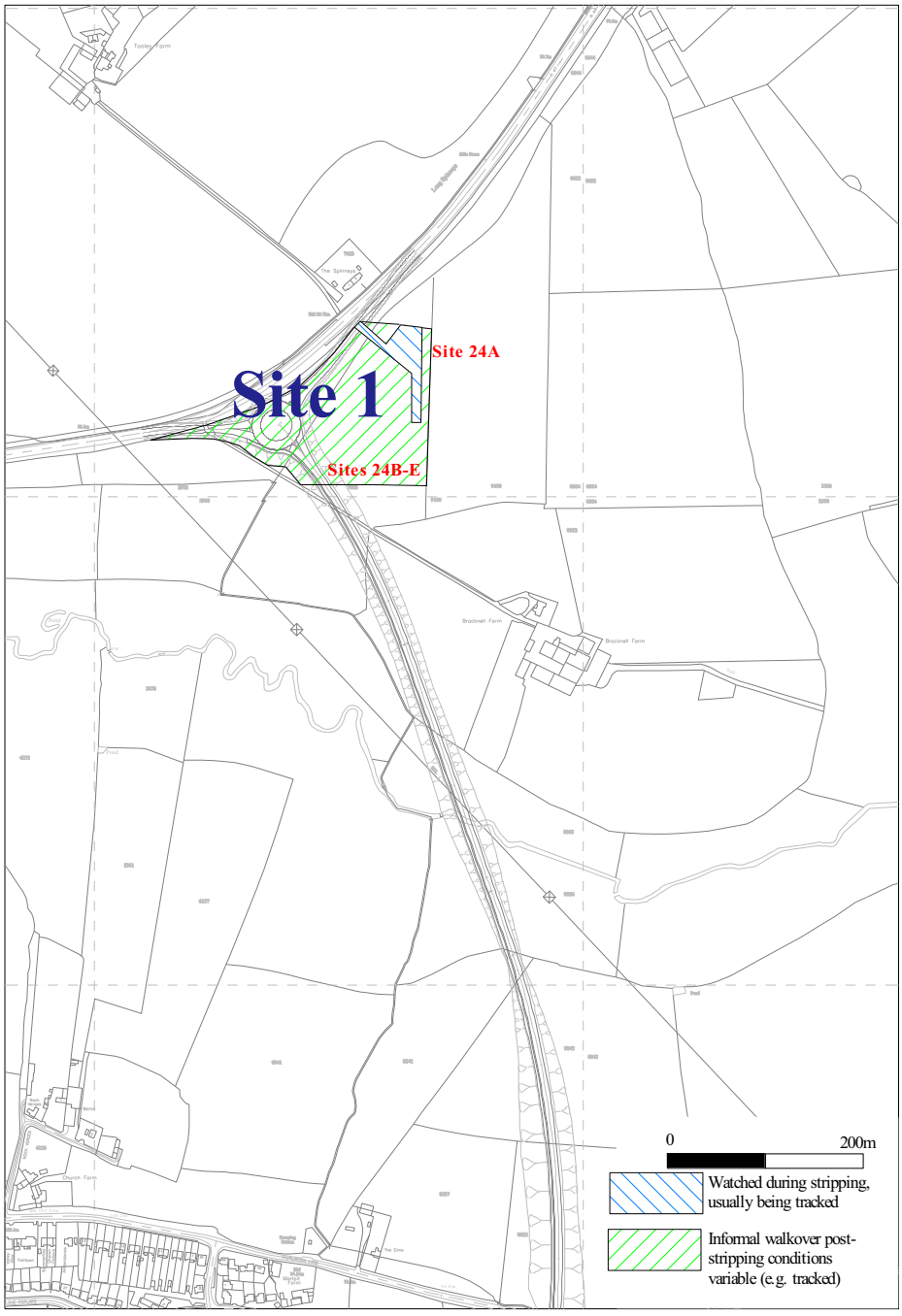

Fig. 3 Northern section of roadline (site 1)

In all, an area of approximately 1400m^2 was monitored during topsoil stripping, during which nothing of archaeological significance was observed. There was also a noticeable lack of any kind of material within the topsoil, for example post medieval ceramics. This along with the lack of any medieval or early post-medieval ridge and furrow cultivation indicates that the area has always been pasture, this is to be expected as the site is low laying with heavy clay soil, likely to be flood prone and, some distance from the settlement focus at Earl Shilton; it is likely, therefore, not to have been used for cultivation or indeed settlement.

3.2 Site 2: Thurlaston Lane temporary diversion (grid ref: SP479 981)

The majority of fieldwork was carried out on 09/10/07, although other interim visits were made during topsoil machining here (see Fig. 4). Topsoiling was carried out with a hymac 360 and ditching bucket, whereas subsoiling was carried out with a toothed bucket. Observations in particular were targeted to identify any continuation of the features from site D to the south (pit alignments, ring ditches and linear features; Jarvis forthcoming). No archaeological features were observed and no unstratified finds were recovered, however. It seems likely that if the alignments continue this far northward, they lie to the east of the temporary road diversion observed here.

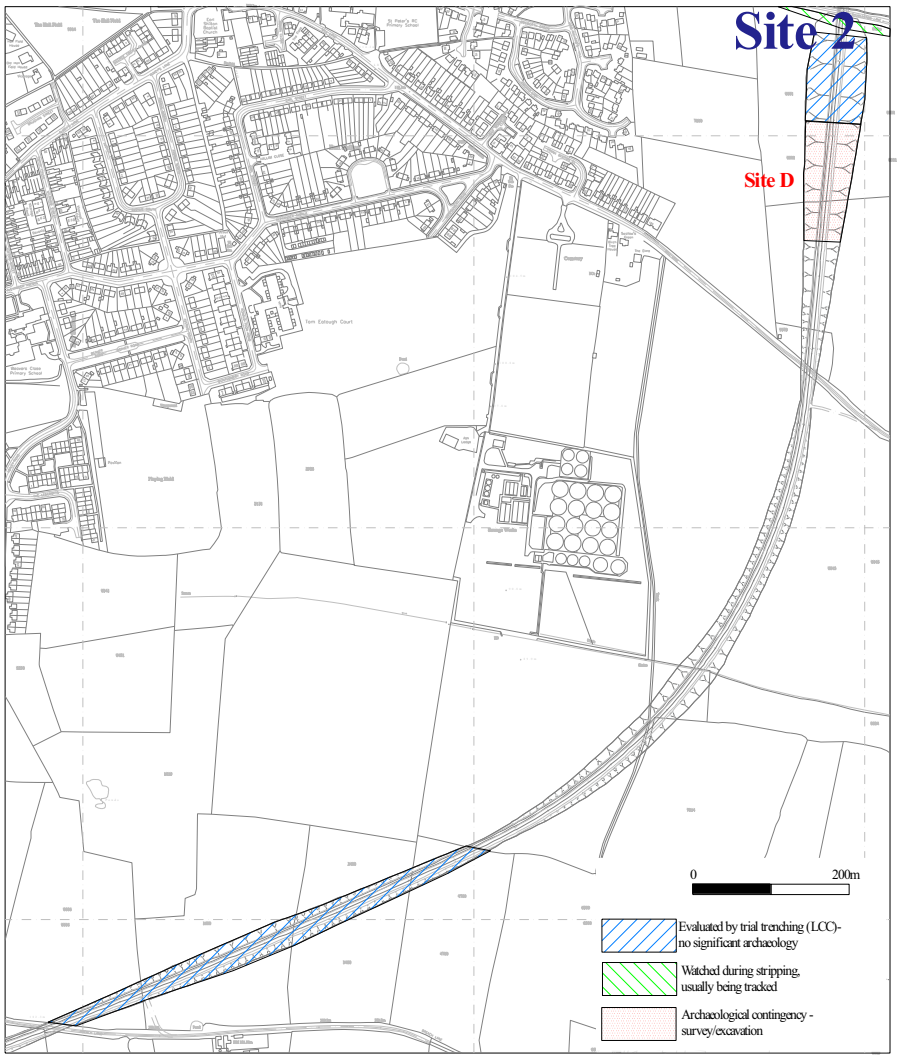

Fig. 4 South-east section of roadline (site 2)

3.3 Site 3: Station Road/Wilkinson Lane to Breach Lane (grid ref: SP 466 967)

Fieldwork was carried out on 13/11/07. The area between Station Road and Breach Lane was walked by two ULAS staff (see Fig. 5), but after the area had already been stripped and had been less tracked over by ongoing plant operations. No archaeological features were observed and no unstratified finds were recovered, although it was felt that only more substantial features could have been identified.

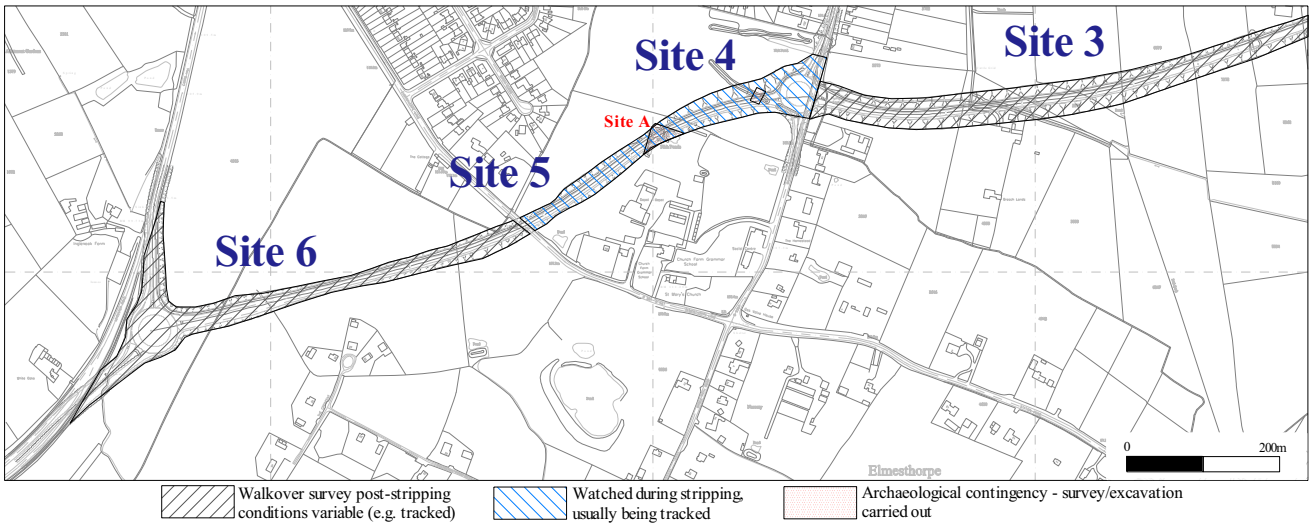

Fig. 5 South-west section of roadline (sites 3-6)

3.4 Site 4: Station Road to Elmesthorpe Lane - North of the Fishponds (grid ref: SP 461 967)

Site 4 area was targeted for several reasons (see Fig. 5). Evaluation work just west of Station Road (Jarvis forthcoming, client LCC, same accession no. XA184 2007) had identified several features, including a north-south linear ditch which produced sherds of Romano-British pottery and a sherd of medieval Potters Marston ware, CBM and animal bone, and a feature *c.*5m to the south that produced fired clay, charcoal and Potters Marston ware. Both these features were very truncated however, probably due to landscaping works for the pond and embankments in this area. Also, Station Road clearly runs along an embankment here, thought to be a dam or embankment earthwork for the large pond to the west. This pond is interpreted as a wildfowl pond or artificial lake being part of the landscaping (pleasure grounds) for Elmesthorpe Hall to the south, and of probable late 16th century or early 17th date (Hartley 1989:56). Recording of the south embankment for this pond had already been carried during evaluative work (Jarvis forthcoming). This work indicated that the south bank was of simple earth construction, from upcast clay earth probably extracted during the levelling of the pond area just to the north. However, there was the possibility of structural features (e.g. a weir, revetting) in the east bank or dam on the line of Station road, hence this follow up watching brief.

Fieldwork was carried out on 03/03/08, 10/03/08 and 11/11/08, the initial two visits for the groundworks between the fishponds and the Station Road carriageway, and the later stage (11/11/08) for the actual works during the removal of the carriageway on the line of the dam, for the new road junction. During the initial groundworks, topsoil and subsoil removal, topsoil to a depth of *c.*300mm was removed across the bypass

area, exposing subsoil which was then later removed (see Plate 1). The stripped area was tracked by plant during this work, and levelled with a bulldozer. No archaeological features or finds were recorded during this work. It was not possible to identify further features, nor those seen during the evaluation stage, as described above, most likely because of the severely truncated nature of these features, and the stripping methodology.

During the carriageway groundworks (11/11/08), a *c.*1.2m depth of ground was removed from current road level (see Plate 2). The ground consisted of 0.5m of road makeups (see Fig. 6), below which was 0.5m of a pale grey to orange clayey sand. This overlay a very compacted layer (context 80) which dipped and thinned out from 0.15m in the west (where it continued into the unexcavated baulk) to the east. This compacted layer consisted of grey brown loamy material occasionally with limestone fragments, roof slate and tile. The tile comprised medieval/post-medieval flat roofing tile, whilst pottery from this context consisted of three adjoining sherds of a jug neck, of later 13th century date and in a medieval sandy ware fabric. Below this was a layer of reduced grey clayey sand, some 0.2m thick. This material was very similar to context 79 which could be seen to the south, and running a further southwards for 15m in plan. This context was up to 1m wide in plan, appeared to have a reduced, waterlogged nature to it, and also contained medieval/post medieval flat roofing tile. Adjacent to this was a pale grey silty clay, up to 6m wide (east-west) and 20m long (north-south), with occasional small gravel, and again reduced and waterlogged in appearance. It is likely that the whole sequence below the modern road make up is bank material, part of the pleasure garden pond embankment. Both of the main layers seen had a curving outline in plan – widening eastwards towards the south, perhaps suggesting the original bank was curving out eastwards too, unlike the modern roadline which is straight (see Plate 2). The bank material might indicate a minimum height of 0.7m here for the dam bank, with the possibility of truncation during the original road construction. No structural features were identified, with most of the bank material being re-deposited clay and earth presumably from the initial levelling of the pond area. However, context 80 consisted of re-deposited demolition material including medieval finds, indicating activity of this date in the close vicinity, as also recorded in the evaluation to the west (Jarvis forthcoming). The lower layers of grey reduced clays and sands were also comparable to natural deposits seen during the evaluation, and most likely represent the effect of water leaching into these deposits from the former pond.

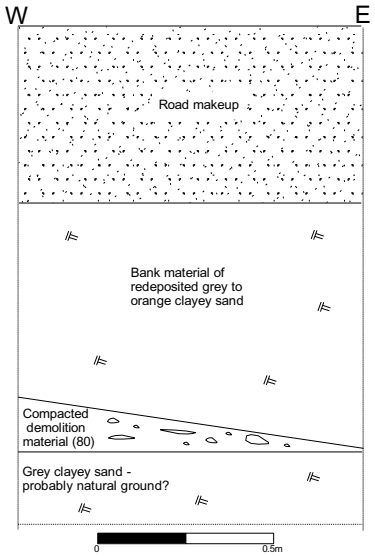

Fig. 6 South facing section seen below roadline Station Road (Site 4)

Plate 1 Site 4 looking south-west towards the fishponds. After initial topsoiling.

Plate 2 Site 4, removing the Station Road carriageway (11/11/08), looking south.
Edge of pond material highlighted.

3.5 Site 5: Station Road to Elmesthorpe Lane - South of the Fishponds (grid ref: SP459 966)

Initial evaluation work here had identified a small north-south aligned gully crossing the evaluation trench, *c.*40m north of Elmesthorpe Lane (Jarvis forthcoming; see Fig. 5). This feature produced a small sherd of handmade (probably Anglo-Saxon) pottery. Watching brief fieldwork was carried out on 09/01/08 and 03/03/08, during topsoiling. The same methodology for the stripping as at site 4 was used, so stripped areas were tracked upon during plant operations, and levelled. No further evidence of features could be identified on site, although it was considered that more substantial features would have been visible. Additionally, no unstratified finds were recovered.

3.6 Site 6: Elmesthorpe Lane to Carrs Hill (grid ref: SP456 964)

Fieldwork was carried out on 14/11/07 on this area (see Fig. 5). This area was walked after stripping of the area had been carried out, after a period of tracking by plant and weathering of the exposed surface. No archaeological finds were recovered during this walkover survey; however the line of a linear feature could be traced just south of Elmesthorpe Lane (B581). This feature ran north-west to south-east and is on the line of an earthwork surveyed by Hartley (1989), and considered to be part of the medieval village earthworks. That this feature survived as both an earthwork and could also be seen as a cut feature would indicate a bank and ditch arrangement – presumably a boundary feature associated with the village.

4 Discussion and Conclusions

Archaeological fieldwork carried out by ULAS during work on the A47 Earl Shilton Bypass identified archaeological deposits during the removal of the Wilkinson Lane/Station Road carriageway. These deposits most likely represent construction

layers for the dam/bank at the east end of the north pond of the Elmesthorpe earthworks (the 'wildfowl' pond). Some medieval demolition material was identified at the base of these deposits, including pottery, tile and roof slate. This adds to evidence from the evaluation to the west (Jarvis forthcoming), indicating medieval activity in the area – most likely associated with the medieval settlement at Elmesthorpe. No other significant features or finds were identified during the watching brief.

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6 Acknowledgements

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7 Archive

Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service will hold the finds and documentary archive under the Accession number XA184 2007. This watching brief archive consists of 1 bag of finds, CD of digital photographs and associated contact prints, and site record sheets. Full details of this will be provided as part of the larger archive for XA184 2007 (Jarvis forthcoming), which includes the initial evaluation and fieldwork on the area to the west (client LCC).

8 Appendices

8.1 The Finds by Deborah Sawday

POST-ROMAN POTTERY				
Context		Nos.	Grams	Comments
80	MS – Medieval sandy ware	3	7	Joining fragments, probably part of a jug neck, mid/later 13th C
CERAMIC BUILDING MATERIAL				
79	EA	2	259	?Medieval/post medieval flat roofing tile
80	EA	2	87	?Medieval/post medieval flat roofing tile
MISC				
80	Roofing Slate	5		1 with bored hole – (?possibly Roman)

8.2 OASIS Record

INFORMATION REQUIRED	**EXAMPLE**
Project Name	Earl Shilton Bypass (A47)
Project Type	Watching Brief
Project Manager	Patrick Clay
Project Supervisor	Wayne Jarvis
Previous/Future work	Various previous
Current Land Use	Agricultural (mixed)
Development Type	Bypass scheme
Reason for Investigation	PPG16
Position in the Planning Process	As a condition
Site Co ordinates	NGR: SP476 991 - SP453 964
Start/end dates of field work	20/08/07 - 11/11/08
Archive Recipient	LMARS
Study Area	*c*.0.215k m^2)

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