

**Excavations at the New
Business and Law Building
De Montfort University,
2007-8:
Interim Summary of Results**

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1. Background to the development

The new Business and Law Building for De Montfort University, currently under construction, is located on the west side of Oxford Street, Leicester, in an area of considerable archaeological significance. The lies within the south suburb of Roman and medieval Leicester, incorporating the western frontage of the principal route into the town from the south; in the medieval period it lies partly within the religious precinct of The Newarke. In view of the potential impact of the development on buried archaeological remains, the planning authority required a phased programme of investigation, commencing with desk-based assessment then initial trial trenches to assess the nature and extent of archaeological deposits in order that the impact upon them from the proposed groundworks could be assessed. Following this, major impacts were identified in two main areas: in the courtyard, where a borehole heating system was to be constructed and in the area of the east wing of the building (on the Oxford Street frontage) where pile caps and a basement would penetrate archaeological levels. Subsequently, a mitigation strategy comprising full archaeological excavation of affected remains in the courtyard and east wing, with a watching brief elsewhere, was required by the planning authority and implemented by ULAS on behalf of De Montfort University in 2007-8. The excavation of the courtyard area was undertaken in September and November 2007, followed by the east wing of the building between March and July 2008. The excavation areas effectively joined up with a trench investigated in 2006 prior to the construction of the PACE building. For this reason, the analysis and publication of both sites is to be combined.

The new building, due to open in October 2009, lies partly within the footprint of the former James Went building, demolished in 2004-5. Part of Oxford Street, including the raised section of road that was re-routed to the west of the Magazine Gateway in the 1960s, has been incorporated into the footprint of the new building and a number of logistical problems concerning service diversions, vibration monitoring and access had to be negotiated and taken into consideration at every stage of the archaeological programme. The main contractors for DMU, SOL, now ROK, were very helpful with assisting us deal with these issues and enabling the approximately ten-strong ULAS team to get on with the digging and recording of the affected areas.

2. Archaeological and Historical Background

As part of the planning condition granted by Leicester City Council for the development an archaeological desk-based assessment for the DMU Leicester City Campus was required. This document was put together by ULAS in 2001 and summarised the archaeological potential of the entire area as follows:

The desk-based archaeological assessment for the proposed De Montfort University Leicester City Campus Developments has shown that the site is likely to contain important archaeological remains relating to the Roman and medieval south suburbs. Previous excavations in and around the area have shown that significant remains of Roman, medieval and post-medieval date exist. Roman buildings features and burials may be located within the development area. Two Saxon buildings have been recorded in the vicinity and occupation of this date is possible. The assessment area completely covers the former Newarke precinct, an

originally medieval religious community, and later an autonomous enclave of Leicester for the wealthy. St. Mary's Vicarage, Trinity Hospital and Chapel, Wygston's Chantry House, two arches from the former Church, the Newarke (Magazine) Gateway and a small section of the former enclosure wall are the only structures that remain of the original religious community. The remains of other religious and ancillary buildings associated with the Collegiate Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary are very likely to exist inside of the enclosure, including the former burial ground of the church itself. Medieval structures and back-yard activity are also likely to be found in the area outside of the Newarke. The Newarke was the main focus of attack during the two sieges of Leicester during the English Civil War in 1645. In addition, post-Civil War late 17th and 18th century buildings associated with post-dissolution occupation of the Newarke and the re-building of the south suburbs after the Civil War are likely to be present. The proposed development area, therefore, is recognised as having very significant archaeological potential. Archaeological field evaluation would be advisable on the site to better ascertain the archaeological potential and aid in the design of any future development proposals and mitigation strategies. (Meek 2001)

The archaeological potential for the specific area which would be affected by the PACE building lies was described within Section 8.3 of the desk-based assessment as follows:

Area 4 covers the area of the James Went Building and the surrounding grounds. The eastern side of Area 4 lies adjacent to the former line of the Tripontium road, and thus has the potential for Roman suburban occupation, including archaeological evidence for buildings, plot boundaries and possible burials associated with the former occupants of the plots. This part of the area also has good potential for Anglo-Saxon occupation, suburban medieval occupation and post-medieval occupation. The report has shown that the majority of this area lies within the Newarke enclosure, and on the eastern side of the open square of possibly medieval origin, associated with the Collegiate Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The area has thus high potential for the remains of either religious buildings, or ancillary structures associated with the religious community.

Roman archaeology had been recorded in a number of areas around the development area, including cemetery sites to the East (DMU Elfed Thomas Building) and substantial amounts of suburban activity at Bonners Lane, Grange Lane, York Road and Oxford Street. Excavations by University of Leicester Archaeological Services at York Road and Oxford Street to the east of the development area and at Bonners Lane to the south-east revealed evidence for Anglo-Saxon occupation in the form of structures and finds. Medieval archaeology is represented by suburban occupation, as well as the Newark enclosure. The line of the Newark Wall was known to cross through the footprint of the proposed DMU CEPP building. Post medieval archaeology was also known within the vicinity of the site, with the continued occupation of the Newark area and considerable activity during the English Civil War.

The potential for significant Roman, Saxon, medieval and Post-medieval archaeology within the area was therefore considered to be high.

3. Summary of Principal Results

3.1 *A11.2006 PACE Building (Figs 2 and 3)*

In 2006 Archaeological field evaluation was undertaken by ULAS on the site of the former James Went building in advance of the construction of a new ‘Centre of Excellence in Performance Practice’ building. 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 2, closest to the Oxford Street frontage, where evidence of Roman property boundaries was revealed beneath medieval garden soil. Later medieval and post-medieval pitting was also observed. The site area had been badly damaged by modern disturbances, including the footings of the former James Went building.

Subsequently, during construction, a watching brief within the footprint of the former James Went building revealed Roman boundary ditches, medieval and post-medieval pits and the foundations of the Newarke wall – a substantial sandstone wall built *c.*1400 to enclose the precinct of the College of the Annunciation of St Mary. Outside the footprint of the old building, preservation was better and salvage excavation and recording revealed further Roman boundary ditches, surfaces, possible structural features, a glass-working hearth, etc. relating to extra-mural properties adjacent to the *Tripontium* Road. Structure(s), pits, etc. of medieval/post-medieval date relating to suburban properties along Oxford Street were also recorded. A further short section of the Newarke wall was exposed, this surviving to a height of *c.*1.5m; this was further investigated in 2007 as part of the excavations in advance of the courtyard heating system. Photographs of this area in 1967, prior to construction of the James Went building, indicate that the Newarke wall survived to a height in excess of 3m right across the site at that time. The excavators concluded that a well-preserved stratified sequence should survive in this area, likely to include Roman road and roadside buildings/activity areas, medieval and post-medieval buildings and other settlement related features.

3.2 *A2.2007 – Borehole heating system, north of the PACE (Sept-Nov ’07) (Figs 2 and 4)*

This phase of excavation was in the area of the proposed ‘courtyard/amphitheatre’ borehole heating system, extending as far west as the demolition truncation from the former James Went building.

The excavation revealed an early medieval (1100-1250) timber structure with hearth in the north of the site, and an oven, kiln or corn-drier (awaiting environmental results) of a similar date in the south (See Plate 1). A medieval (1240-1450) timber structure with clay floors and metalled surfaces was located in the centre-west of the site that may have had earlier origins. A quantity of slag was recovered from the area and may suggest it was some kind of metal workshop. A 20m stretch of the Newarke wall (constructed *c.*1400) (See Plate 2) was re-located and recorded (previously observed under the PACE building and trench 3), running north-west to south-east across the east of site and would have originally joined up to the ‘Magazine Gateway’. In view of its poor condition, with the loss of most of its facing stones, the planning authority agreed that it would not need to be preserved provided it was suitably recorded. Medieval and post-medieval rubbish pits and cess pits were excavated either side of the Newarke Wall, which will provide invaluable data about the difference in status of people living inside the Newarke enclosure or outside in the town’s suburbs.

3.3 A7.2008 - Borehole heating system, south-east of area (March-May 2008) (Figs 2 and 5)

ULAS opened up further trenches to record the impact of the borehole heating system serving the new Business and Law Building in the south west of the development area, adjacent to the Hawthorn Building. A series of features associated with Roman occupation were exposed and a small number of early Roman/Iron Age scored-ware sherds were retrieved. A medieval robber trench, a small area of yard surface and a well, possibly relating to a property fronting onto a former street crossing the centre of the Newark enclosure, were also revealed. East of this area, a watching brief was undertaken during piling and drainage works and two substantial sandstone walls were revealed, also possibly associated with structures within the religious complex of the Newarke.

3.4 A8.2008 - Excavation of East wing of Business and Law Building (Areas A and B) (March 2008 –July 2008) (Figs 2 and 6)

East of the PACE, on the Oxford Street side, within the footprint of the east wing of the new Business and Law building, two areas, area A *c.*421m²sq, and area B *c.*252.71m²sq were machined down to the top of archaeology at an average level of 1m below ground level. The areas were divided by an electric service cable trench, which was live until well into our programme. A well preserved sequence of Roman, medieval and post medieval occupation was revealed.

3.4.1 Roman

The north-south *Tripontium* Roman road was clearly visible as a linear feature consisting of a surface composed of small rounded pebbles compacted into mid brown clay, some 2m wide, *c.*0.2m deep (See Plate 4). A surface, initially associated with an east-west branch of this road appeared to adjoin this and continue up to the edge of the pavement adjoining the PACE, and two ditches, associated with road-side drainage for the east-west feature were also revealed. The northern of these two was slightly steeper sided and an excavation slot through it revealed a almost complete black-burnished ware vessel dating to around *c.*120AD, plus a well decorated sherd of Samian ware.

The final stages of excavation revealed that the east-west branch was also visible to continue east and is likely to be associated with a crossroads, possibly linking up with a suggested road at the south end of previous excavations at the Elfed Thomas law school in 1993, across Oxford Street (Cooper 1996). Further excavation revealed that the road-side ditches on both had at least two re cuts, containing early 2nd-century pottery, including a near complete black burnished ware vessel (See Plate 12). A number of post holes and post pads, which post-dated the ditch fills were revealed to the centre and north-west of the exposed area. A surface, wall beam slot and a number of stake holes were also evident suggesting phases of Roman timber buildings in this vicinity (See Plate 8). It is interesting that initial scanning of the pottery shows that this occupation is likely to be no later than 2nd or 3rd century Roman.

Property Boundaries

Two narrow strips of east-west aligned surfaces, possibly associated with access to the back yards of properties, were exposed. Both surfaces appear to have been built up, respected and reused over the centuries. The southern strip appears to have reused and re-metalled the east-west Roman road. An undated beam slot truncating the main Roman north-south road itself to the east may be associated with an earlier medieval structure and more medieval structural

remains or backyard features. Some 5m north of this, another strip of east-west surface, slightly more heavily cobbled, may represent side access to its neighbouring property. Excavation has shown that a series of levelling layers and resurfacing has also taken place, from the medieval period through to the post medieval. It is flanked by pitting to the north of it and to the south, by the robbed-out remains of a possible 'key-hole' shaped oven.

3.4.2 *Medieval*

Further evidence of medieval occupation was marked by extensive pitting. Two cess pits, one stone lined (See Plate 6) and one wood lined were revealed. The latter was also lined with clay and contained two well-preserved leather shoes and some important environmental deposits, including preserved cherry stones. Another c.5m deep cess pit was also exposed in section during the machining for the new basement. This was possibly a communal latrine pit, similar to the other previously-exposed large pit to the north, whereas the smaller wood and timber-lined pits can be associated with possibly more private usage, suggesting a differentiation of status. A clear equidistant line of post holes was located some 2 metres from the east-west beam slot and wall boundary previously exposed in the centre of the area, with pitting respecting this boundary. The fills contained early medieval pottery – so some useful phasing of medieval occupation should come apparent in post-excavation analysis. The medieval phase was also marked by discovery of a ditch and road surface just east of the Roman road, marking the medieval line of Oxford Street. This alignment was clearly then shifted further east after the Civil War when the road then came to respect the defensive ditch, later to be cut by post-medieval stone walls, and latterly Victorian brick-lined cellaring.

3.4.3 *Post Medieval*

Early on in the stripping, footings of a stretch of sandstone wall some 4m long and 0.3m wide, previously revealed in Trench 6 in the A2.2007 evaluation, was identified and can be associated with a property division which exists on the 1888 OS map. A compact red clay layer located south of it appeared to be truncated by a series of post holes and possible post pads, indicating remains of a post-Civil War occupation – probably backyard-type structures. The red-clay layer, which some of the post holes truncated, is similar to the natural clay and may relate to the remains of a bank associated with the Civil War defences, constructed using upcast from the ditch. The deposit may also contain deposits deriving from the demolition of buildings in this area during the Civil War: a slot excavated through it revealed a substantial amount of slate. This levelling also sealed an array of pits and a partially-exposed hearth. East and south of this, an area of heavy pitting was also evident (See Plate 9), including a stone-lined pit or tank containing animal bone fragments associated with tanning waste (See Plate 11).

3.4.4 *Civil War Ditch*

In the east of the exposed area, a large linear feature could be seen to truncate the Roman road on its eastern side (See Plate 5). This was 1.9m deep and 3.8m wide and contained a number of silting layers, whilst the main fills consisted predominantly of re-deposited red clays. Pottery and a musket ball were also retrieved. This aligns with the Civil War ditch excavated further south by ULAS at the Bonners Lane site in 1993 (Finn 2002). Further work in the post-excavation stage will give a clearer picture as to the modifications and design of the town's Civil War defences during this period.

3.4.5 *Finds*

Two key finds included a near complete 13th-century Chilvers Coton vessel (See Plate 8), and a small complete early 2nd century Roman drinking cup or spice jar, which is often associated with grave goods. In total, 132 small finds were found including a post-medieval

lead drinking vessel (See Plate 10), glass fragments, medieval belt buckles, coins, including a Charles I farthing and other metal objects, which are still to be analysed.

3.5 Excavation of East wing of Business and Law Building (Below former Oxford Street: Areas C and D) (Figs 2 and 7)

Further north, just south of the Magazine Gateway, machining of the former line of Oxford Street, now diverted east of the Magazine, revealed heavy truncation had occurred not only from the former subway but from a large cellar some c.2.5 m deep, probably serving the former barracks, plus a substantial north-south concrete culvert. However, a small pocket of preservation in the north-west extent of this area did produce evidence of Roman property boundaries and pitting, whilst to the east, the *Tripontium* Road surface was also visible.

A very impressive medieval cess pit, some 2.1m deep, 3.4m in length and 1.5m wide was also revealed below the concrete base of the cellar (See Plate 3). Animal bone fragments and apparently early medieval pottery, possibly pre-dating the Newarke (provisional dating) were retrieved, suggesting a communal cess pit possibly serving a number of properties along the northern extent of Oxford Street at this point.

4. Conclusion

Despite the potential for significant damage to have occurred to buried archaeological remains on the site from previous 20th-century developments, in particular the James Went Building and the re-routed line of Oxford Street to the west of the Magazine Gateway, pockets of well-preserved deposits were found to survive between areas of disturbance. Such deposits related to the full sequence of activity in Leicester from its origins in the late Iron Age, through its establishment as one of the major towns of Roman Britain – *Ratae Corieltavorum* – to its medieval and post-medieval successors. For the Roman period, the excavations have shed new light on the infrastructure of the town, revealing the line of a major Roman road and a hitherto undetected cross-roads, perhaps indicating an extension of the intra-mural street grid into the south suburb. The impression is that that the zone examined to the west of what is now Oxford Street comprised land divided into plots by ditches, with yards, commercial and domestic timber buildings (represented by post holes and beam slots) fronting on to the road from Leicester to *Tripontium* together with industrial activity, represented by a glass-working hearth. Although no cemeteries were revealed, a small complete pot was found, typically indicative of an offering placed within a grave. This may suggest isolated burials placed on boundaries in the vicinity, rather than densely-packed cemeteries as seen from excavations on the east side of Oxford Street or along Newarke Street.

To the south of the site, the Bonners Lane excavation of 1993 had revealed evidence for early Anglo-Saxon activity of the 5th-6th centuries AD. No such evidence was found here, the earliest post-Roman activity dating to the 12th-13th centuries, attesting the growth of a suburb outside the south gate of the medieval town, with ribbon development along what is now Oxford Street. The evidence for this consisted of structural remains, including timber buildings, a hearth and backyard features, such a cess pits and wells, along with industrial activity, including metal-working and a possible corn-drying kiln. One cess pit in particular was large and stone-lined and may have been for communal use – its contents, together with those from other cess pits on the site, have considerable potential for yielding important environmental evidence for diet, health and living conditions in medieval Leicester. Running across the site was the eastern boundary wall of the Newarke enclosure, thought to

date to around 1400, and it should be possible in the analysis stage to distinguish between pre- and post-Newarke features as well as later medieval features both inside and outside the enclosure.

In the post-medieval period, the site revealed important evidence for suburban industry, probably tanning, followed by indications of the demolition of properties to the east of the Newarke wall, in preparation for the construction of the Civil War defences, as represented by a stretch of substantial ditch and remnants of bank material.

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APPENDIX

DMU Business and Law

1. Breakdown of the contents of the archive from excavations associated with the PACE and Business and Law buildings

Site	A11.2006 PACE buildings (<i>separate budget already agreed</i>)	A2.2007 (B&L Courtyard borehole heating system)	A7.2008 (B&L borehole; heating system adj, to Hawthorn)	A8.2008 (B&L East Wing, plus watching brief all areas)
Finds	6 BOXES (2 bone, 1 med pot, 1 Roman pot, 1 sample box of tile, 1 misc., (1 plastic tub metal finds)	10 BOXES (3 pot, 3 bone, other)	1 BOX (All material inc. I.A, Roman, med and Saxon pot)	28 BOXES(4 CBM, 9 Bone + 1 Sample Bag, 0.5 Med Tile, 2 plastic boxes Metal, 1 Slate, 1.5 Misc., 3 Roman Pot, 6 Med Pot (inc. 1 complete pot) 1 of sample dated material).
Contexts	251	366	82	765
Samples	1	64	2	87
Small Finds	9	49	7	67
Photos: BW	20 (1 Film)	10 films	2 films	15 films
Photos: Digital	125	549	151	1917
Drawing Index	38	153	22	102

2. Research Potential for Post Excavation Analysis

2.1 *Aims and Objectives*

Following completion of the excavation, it is now possible to refine the original academic aims and objectives and characterise the research potential of the site under a series of six broad research themes summarised here. Each is divided into threefold period division of Roman, medieval and post-medieval.

- RA1 The Development of the Roman, medieval and post-medieval town
- RA2 The Built and Natural Environment
- RA3 People of the Newarke and the Leicester suburbs and their living conditions
- RA4 Eating and Drinking
- RA5 Trades, Crafts and Shopping
- RA6 Religion Death and Burial

The academic justification for this research potential is also supported by the East Midlands Archaeological Research Framework (Cooper (ed.) 2006) and particularly the research agendas therein for the Anglo-Saxon (Vince 2006) and medieval periods (Lewis 2006). The research aims of particular relevance are as follows:

- The Anglo-Saxon use of late Roman walled towns (Vince 2006, 174)
- Nature of urbanism in the pre-Norman period (Lewis 2006, 211).
- To improve chronology of the major towns from Anglo-Saxon origins through to later medieval decline (Lewis 2006, 211).
- Standards of living in major towns (Lewis 2006, 211).
- Aspects of change and continuity in the urban context (Lewis 2006, 211).

In addition, the research frameworks of the specialist period and finds study groups mentioned with the individual finds assessments (e.g. the Roman and Medieval Pottery Research Groups); provide further justification for work within urban contexts.

2.2 *Integrated Statement of Potential:*

RA1 - The Development of Urban Topography

RA1a) Roman

- *To understand the early Roman street alignment*
- *To define Roman properties boundaries and structural remains*
- *To refine the chronology of Roman activity on site*

RA1b) The Anglo-Saxon and Medieval

- *To define and understand the nature and chronology of Anglo-Saxon/ Medieval activity on site*
- *To define the possible medieval road alignment*
- *To define medieval properties boundaries and structural remains*
- *To refine the chronology of the medieval pits and examine their spatial distribution*

RA1c) Post-medieval

- *To examine the chronology of the post-medieval structural remains*
- *To examine the archaeology of the property boundaries and their survival*
- *To refine the chronology of the post-medieval pits and examine their spatial distribution*
- *To consider the evidence for post-medieval industry on the site*
- *To establish the sequence and dating of the Civil War ditches and their relationship with other known alignments in the vicinity*

RA2 - The Built Environment

RA2a) Roman

- *To look at the evidence of Roman structural remains*
- *To examine the other general building remains*

RA2b) Saxon and Medieval

- *To look at the evidence, chronology and constructional techniques for medieval structures on site*
- *To look at the extent of the Newarke Wall and evidence for structures associated with the Newarke enclosure*

RA2c) Post-medieval

- *To look at the evidence, chronology of post-medieval structures on site*

RA3 - The People of the Newarke and the Leicester Suburbs

RA3a) Roman

- *Examine the evidence for dress and adornment, household and leisure activities*
- *Examine the evidence for household domestic animals*

RA3b) Medieval

- *Examine the evidence for dress and adornment, household and leisure activities through study of small finds*
- *Examine the evidence for household domestic animals*
- *Examine the evidence for health through analysis of environmental remains—*

RA4 - Eating and Drinking

RA4a) Roman

- *Examine the evidence for the Roman diet by studying faunal remains, environmental evidence and Roman pottery vessel types*

RA4b) Anglo-Saxon/Medieval

- *Examine the evidence for the medieval diet by studying faunal remains, environmental evidence and post-Roman pottery vessel types*

RA5 - Trade and Industry

RA5a) Roman

- *Examine the general evidence for trade and manufacture through analysis of faunal remains (butchery techniques and bone working) and building materials (slate industry).*
- *Examine the evidence for the relationship of the town with its hinterland and beyond through analysis of trading links – Roman pottery and animal bone.*

RA5b) Saxon and Medieval

- *Examine the general evidence for trade and manufacture through a study of animal bone (butchery patterns), the kiln/corndryer and possible metalworking shop.*
- *Examine the relationship of the town with its hinterland through a study of environmental remains*

RA6 - Religion Death and Burial

RA6a) Roman

- *Examine the extent/development of the cemetery in the vicinity*



Figure 1 - Site location

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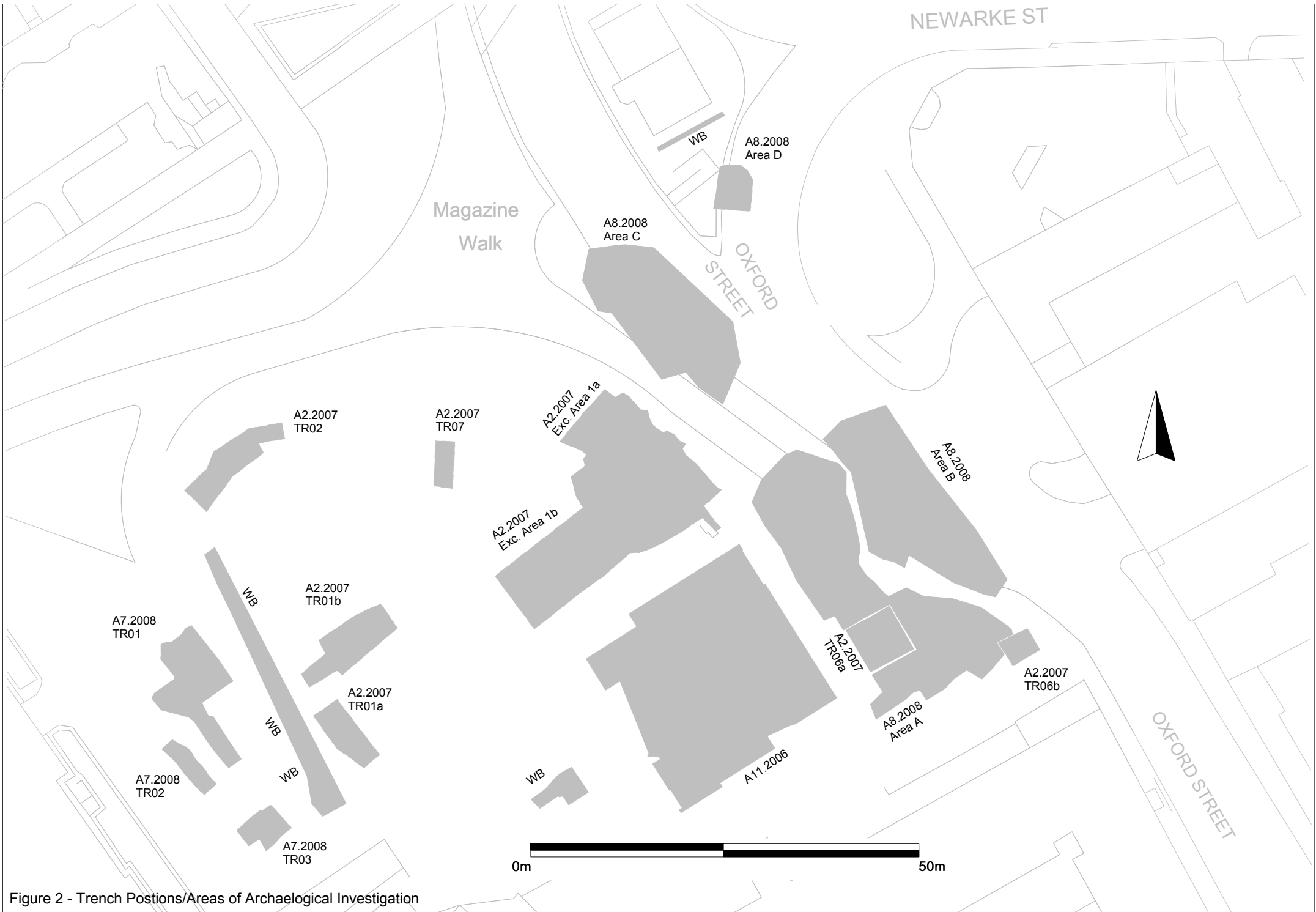


Figure 2 - Trench Postions/Areas of Archaeological Investigation

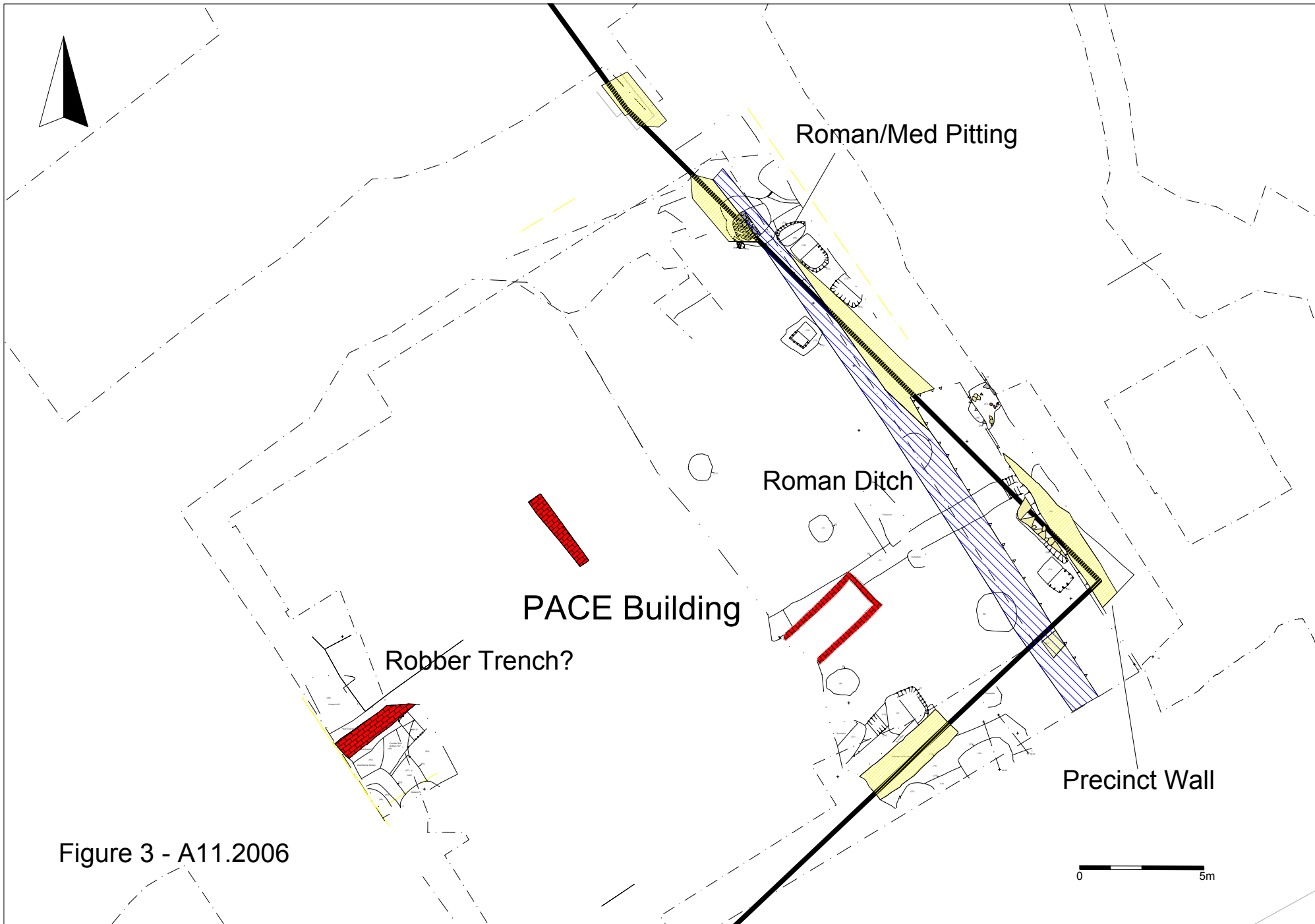


Figure 3 - A11.2006

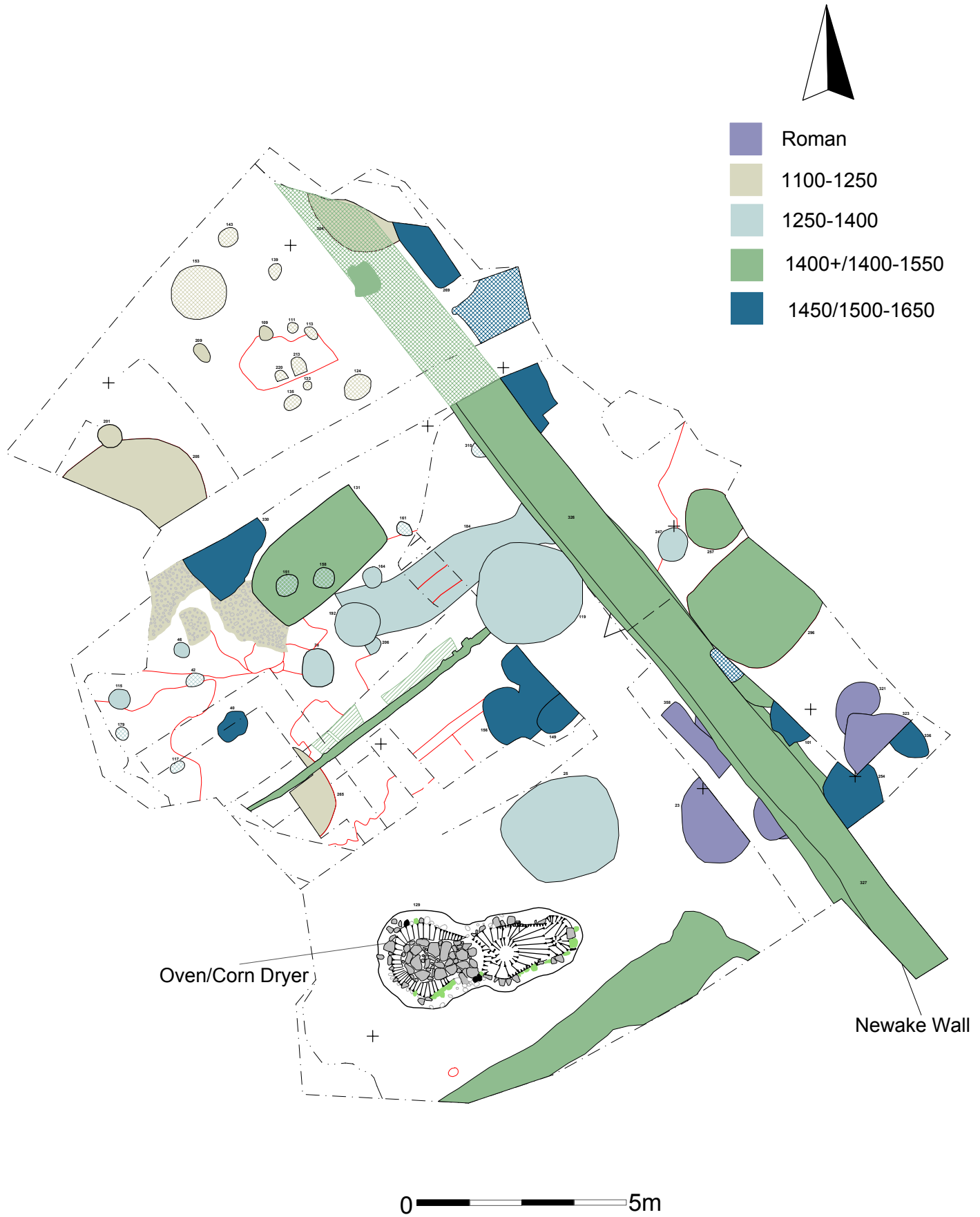


Figure 4 - A2.2007

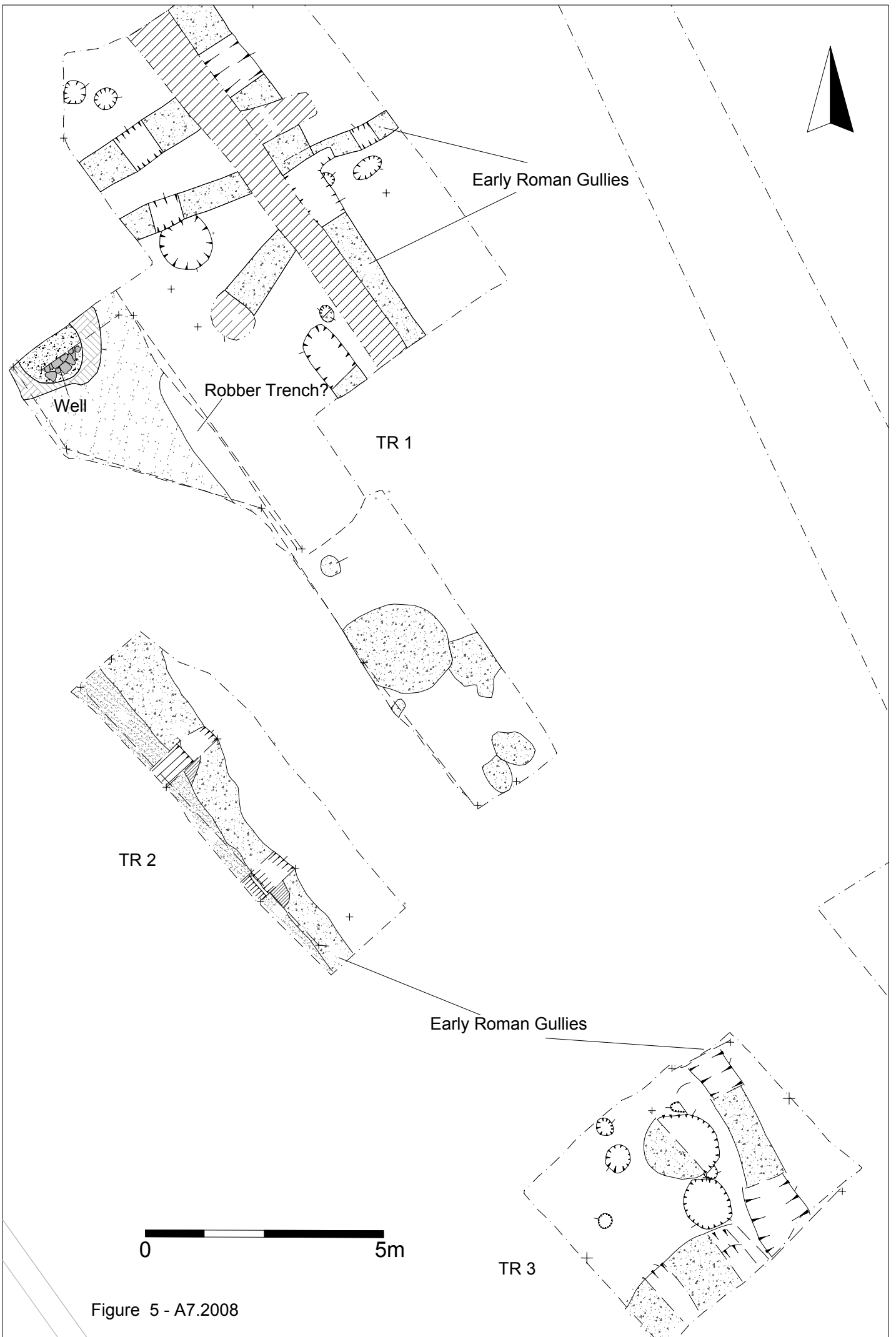


Figure 5 - A7.2008

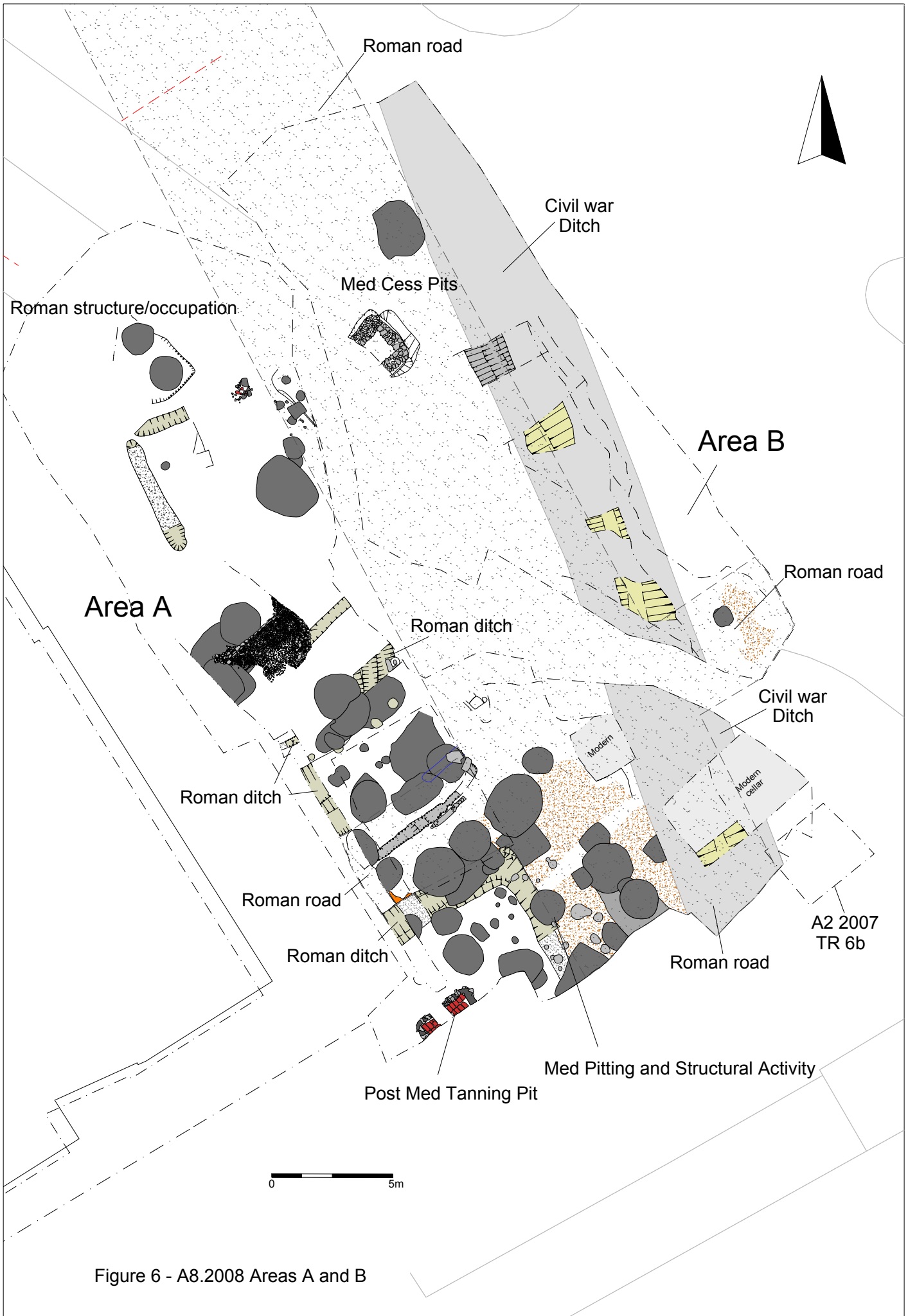


Figure 6 - A8.2008 Areas A and B

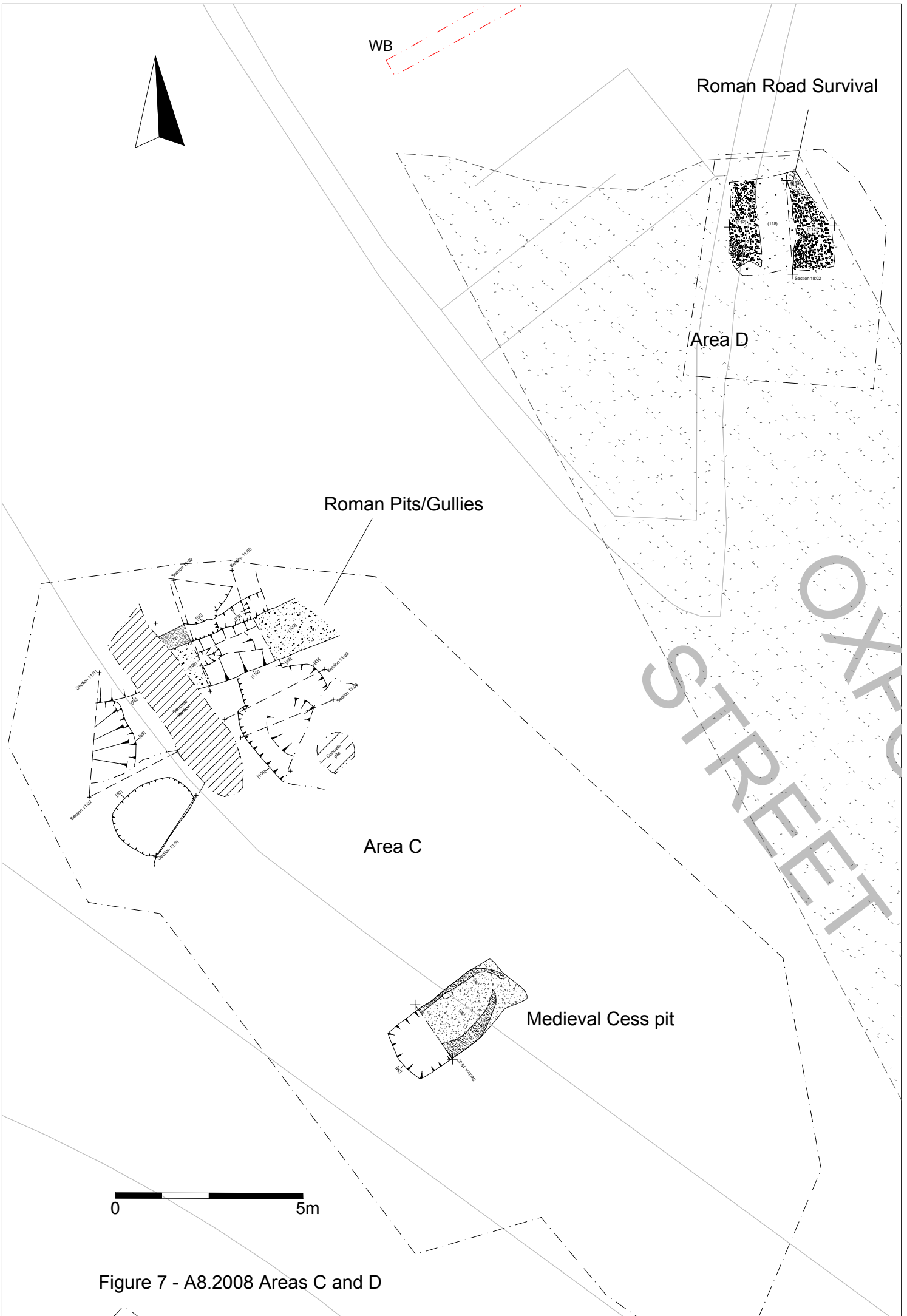


Figure 7 - A8.2008 Areas C and D



Plate 1.
A2.2007 Medieval Oven/Corn Dryer



Plate 2
A2.2007 Fragment of the Newark Wall prior to demolition



Plate 3
A8.2008 Section through medieval cess pit in Area C



Plate 4.

A8.2008 Area A: view north-west. To the right of the picture, the parallel dark lines mark the survival of the north-south Tripontium Roman road surface, with the east-west adjoining Roman road to the left



Plate 5.
A8.2008 Area A: view south. Section through Civil War ditch



Plate 6.
A8.2008 area B: view north. Stone lined cess pit



Plate 7.
A8.2008 Near Complete 13th century Chilvers Coton ware vessel.



Plate 8.
View of A8.2008 Area A looking north



Plate 9.
A8.2008 Excavation of medieval and post medieval pits



Plate 10.
A lead vessel retrieved from a post medieval pit



Plate 11.
A8.2008 Area A: view east. Section through a post medieval stone lined pit – this was backfilled with animal bone associated with tanning waste



Plate 12.
A8.2008. An almost complete Roman black-burnished ware vessel dating to around c.120AD