

**An Archaeological Investigation by Test
Pits at Shires Plot F (SK 583 046),
and Shires Plot G1 and G3 (SK 585 047),
St. Peter's Lane, Leicester.**

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For: Shire GP Ltd.**

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Summary

An archaeological investigation by test pitting was carried out at the 'Stride' building on Shires Plot F (SK 583 046) and the 'Megabowl' complex, Shires Plot G1 and G3 (SK 585 047), St. Peter's Lane, Leicester on behalf of Shires GP Ltd by University of Leicester Archaeological Services. The work assessed the potential depths of overburden, and therefore archaeological deposits or natural substratum, across the two sites as a preliminary investigation prior to evaluation by trial trench. The results revealed that depths of overburden varied across both sites and that a safe zone of 1-1.3m (though generally 1.8m) below the current floor surface was observed for Shires Plot F and 1.4m (though generally 2m) below the current floor surface for Shires Plot G1 and G3.

1 Introduction

1.1 This documents constitutes the first stage of archaeological investigation to be carried out on land at the 'Stride' building, Shires Plot F (SK 583 046) and the 'Megabowl' complex, Shires Plot G1 and G3 (SK 585 047), St. Peter's Lane, Leicester. This work was undertaken on behalf of Shires GP Ltd by University of Leicester Archaeological Services. This work was carried out prior to evaluation by trial trenching.



Fig. 1 Site Location. Scale 1:25000

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1.2 In preparation for redevelopment, Shires GP Ltd are to demolish both the 'Stride' building and other structures in Plot F to convert an area of 0.2ha; and the 'Megabowl' complex (Plot G1 and G3), along with the adjacent St. Peter's car park (Plot G2), and convert an area of 0.82ha of land to make way, in part, for the extension to the Shires shopping centre in Leicester city centre. In view of the tight development timetable, it was considered desirable to undertake some preliminary investigations prior to demolition in order to assess the potential depth of overburden above buried archaeological deposits. A plan of test pits within available areas was prepared and agreed with the City Archaeologist in his capacity as archaeological adviser to the Planning Authority. The archive is to be deposited with Leicester City Museums Service with accession number A10.2006 (Plot F) and A5. 2006 (Plot G1 and 3).

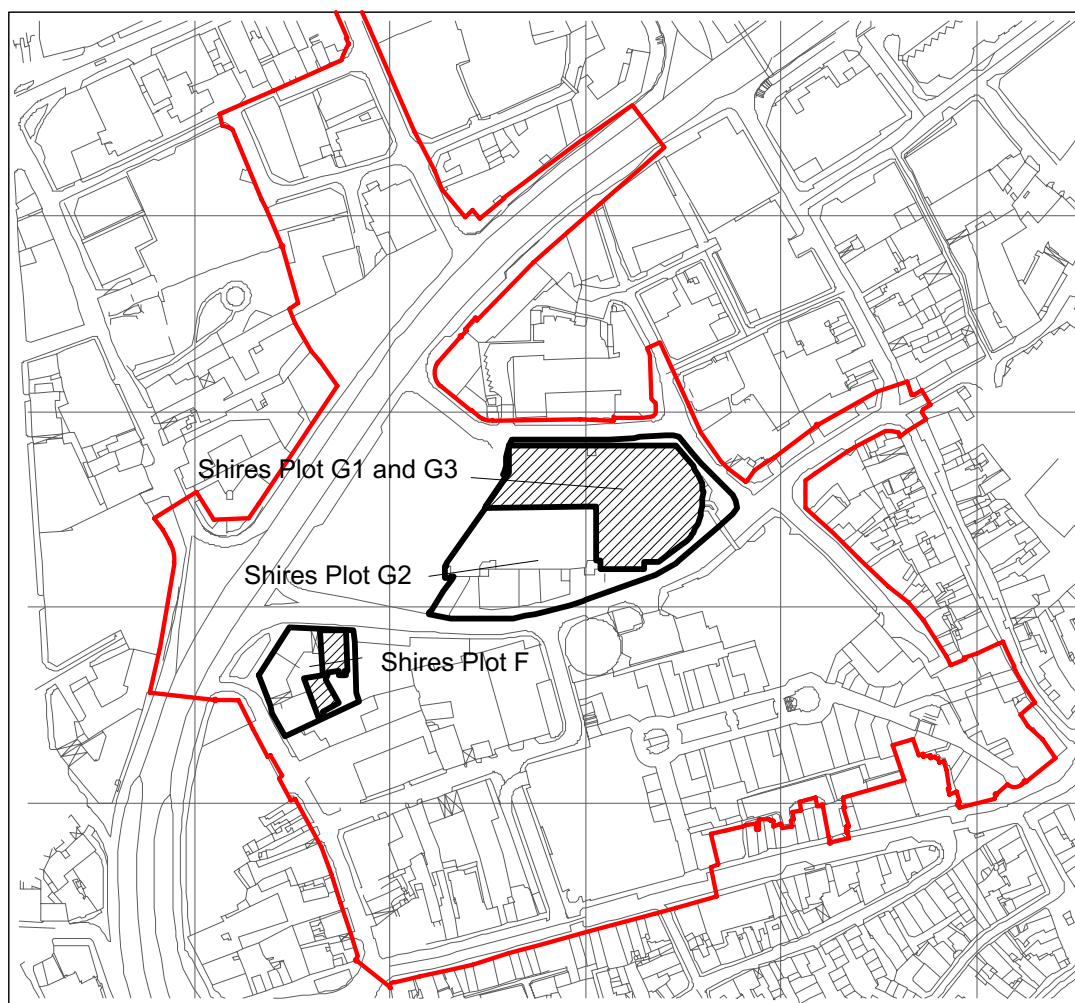


Fig.2 – Site Investigated (cross hatched) within Site Location (outlined) on Shire Development Plan showing outline of development (thin outline). Scale 1:4000

2 Aims and Methodology

2.1 The aim of the test pitting programme was to provide a general assessment of the depth of overburden above significant archaeological deposits within the areas under examination. The objective of the work was to establish the presence or

absence of archaeological remains at shallow depth which might be affected by pile caps and other comparatively shallow groundworks associated with the development. Since the pits were to be excavated through concrete floors within standing structures, and were potentially to be of considerable depth, it was not considered practicable for reasons of health and safety to characterise any archaeological deposits encountered. Hence the pits were not to be entered and would be recorded from present ground level. Any deposits encountered would be recorded in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) Code of Conduct and Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs. The work adhered to the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers' (SCAUM) Health and Safety Manual and ULAS's Health and Safety Guidelines (2001) and Health and Safety Policy (2001). The recording followed the ULAS Field Recording Manual.

2.2 The two areas were visited on various dates between 01/02/06 and 10/02/06 when the programme of work consisted of excavating trial pits using a mini-digger excavator fitted with a 0.30m toothed bucket. The concrete flooring, where present, had been broken at the location of the test pits with a breaker prior to excavation. Due to the depth of the majority of the test pits (greater than 2m), once archaeological deposits or natural substratum was reached, an appropriate section was hand drawn and photographed. The pits were then immediately backfilled for Health and Safety reasons.

2.3 The constraints of working within a building with artificial lighting required the use of a torch and inspection of the machine bucket on each intrusion made. In most cases, the archaeology was only seen on the tooth area of the bucket where it penetrated deepest. This depth was then recorded and the deposit recorded and interpreted.

3 Results

3.1 Shires Plot F

3.1.1 Five test-pits were excavated within the 'Stride' building area of Shires Plot F. These were located to give a broad picture of the underlying deposits across the site, including one on the periphery of the site to locate any surviving medieval frontage (Fig.3).

3.1.2 The upper deposits consisted of either a wood surface (TP 17, 18 and 19) or concrete (TR's 20 and 21). Below these were varying depths of Modern make-up material overlying the garden soil, where present.

3.1.3 All of the test pits located archaeological deposits. Below is a table laying out the results of the test pits (Table 1). Noted here is the top of the garden soil, or bottom of modern make-up material or modern disturbance. In one case these have two numbers, which reflects an uncertainty and can be seen in section (Fig.4). Secondly, the depth of archaeological deposits or natural substratum has been noted. The deposits observed have been described and interpreted, including a possible medieval well, pits and stratified deposits. Natural substratum was not encountered.



Fig.3 – Test Pit location for Shire Plot F, showing depth to top of archaeology (North to top)

Table 1 – Results from test pits (depths are from current concrete floor level).

Test Pit no.	Top of Garden Soil (metres)	Top of Archaeology or Natural (metres)	Description of Deposit Observed	Interpretation
17	Not seen	1.0/1.3	Pinkish brown loam, occasional charcoal, c.0.3m granite blocks	Medieval/Late Medieval well?
18	Not seen	2.5	Reddish orange brown silty clay, occasional charcoal, crushed mortar, and one sherd of Potters Marston pottery (AD1100 - c.1300 (Deborah Sawday pers. comm.))	Early Medieval -Medieval Pit?
19	1.0	2.4	Mid yellowish brown clayey silt with occasional charcoal and mortar flecks	Archaeological deposit
20	0.9	2.0	Orange brown sandy silt with crushed mortar and sand stone and granite c. 0.2m	Archaeological deposit
21	1.0	1.8	Mid purplish brown sandy silt with flecks of CaCO ₃ , crushed mortar and charcoal. Bands of stratigraphy with a green cassy material and red clay.	Archaeological Stratigraphy, possibly pit fill.

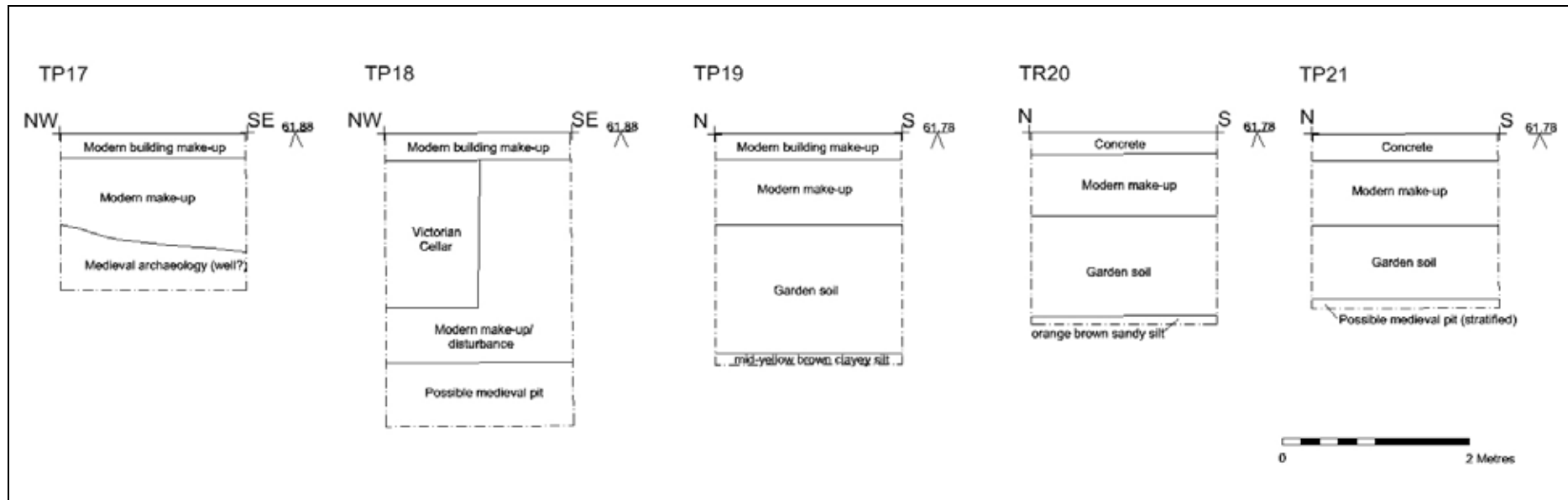


Fig.4 – Test Pit sections 17-21

3.2 *Shires Plot G1 and G3*

3.2.1 Sixteen test-pits were excavated within the 'Megabowl' complex area of Shires Plot G1 and G3. These were located to give a broad picture of the underlying deposits across the site, as well as paying attention to the periphery of the building to ascertain the survival on any potential medieval frontage (Fig.5).

3.2.2 It was observed that the upper deposits encountered were present across the site. These consisted of a concrete surface overlying modern make-up or disturbance, before reaching the medieval 'garden soil'. The depths of these deposits varied but were invariably present.

3.2.3 No stratified medieval deposits were encountered other than pits that lay below the garden soil and presumably cut through the natural substratum. In places, Victorian cellaring had removed all deposits down to, and through, the natural substratum. Where deposits were located below the 'garden soil', a brief description was made of the deposit and interpreted (see Table 2 below). In most respects, these deposits could be interpreted as either possible pit fill (garden soil with a high number of inclusions, usually of building material) natural substratum or Roman structural deposits (i.e. road, footing material).

3.2.4 Below is a table laying out the results of the test pits (Table 2). Noted here is the top of the garden soil, or bottom of modern make-up material or modern disturbance. In a couple of cases these have two numbers, which reflects an uncertainty and can be seen in section (Fig's.6 and 7). Secondly, the depth of archaeological deposits or natural substratum has been noted. The deposits observed have been described and interpreted.

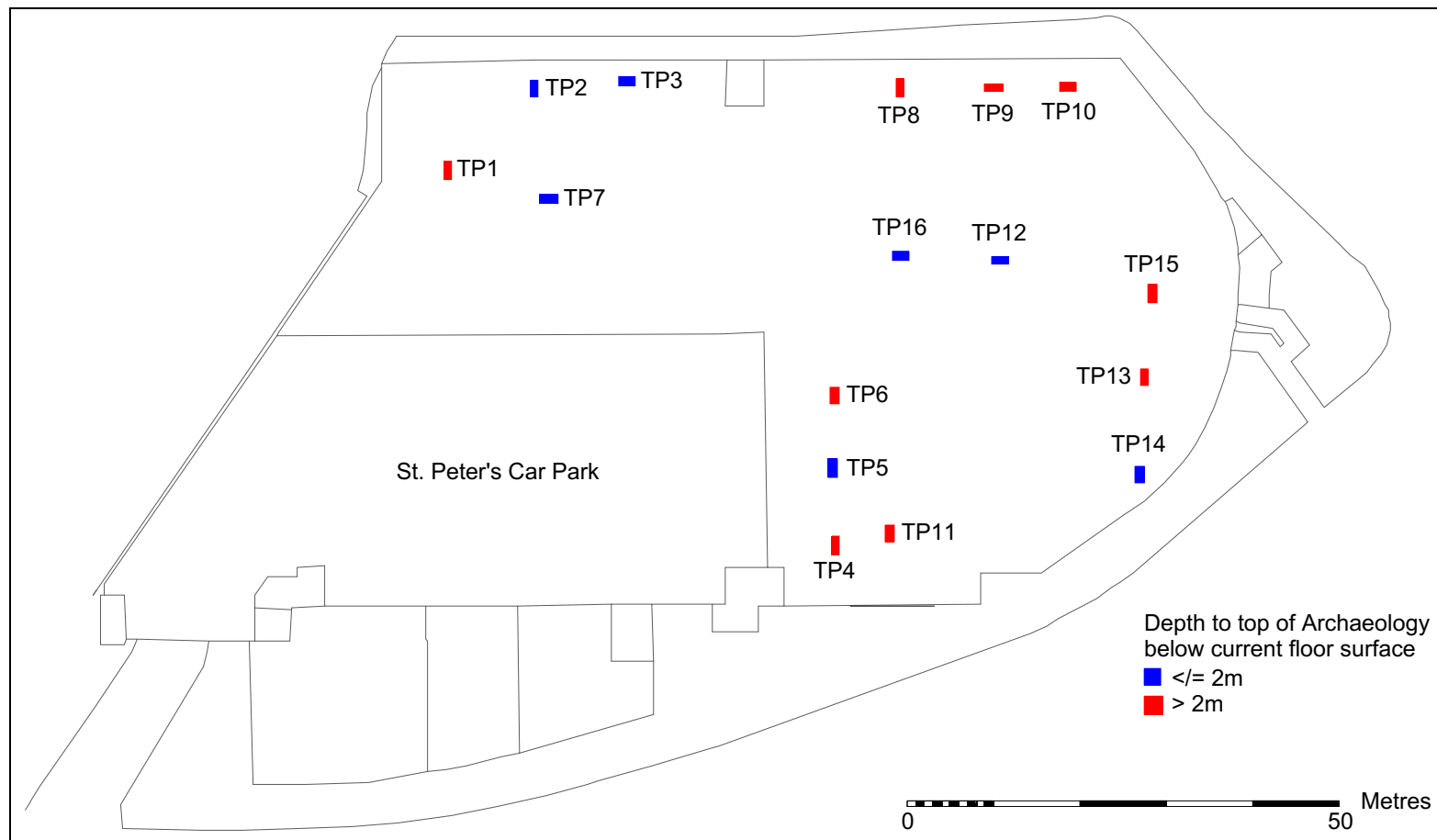


Fig.5 – Test Pit location for Shire Plot G1 and G3, showing depth to top of archaeology (North to top)

Table 2 – Results from test pits (depths are from current concrete floor level).

Test Pit no.	Top of Garden Soil (metres)	Top of Archaeology or Natural (metres)	Description of Deposit Observed	Interpretation
1	1.5	3.0	Garden soil contains mortar fragments and flecks.	Possible pit
2	None seen	1.6	Pale yellow brown silty sand, occasional small rounded pebbles.	Natural substratum? Or Roman footing material?
3	0.6	2.0	Mid yellow brown slightly silty sand, frequent small to medium pebbles.	Natural substratum?
4	1.1	2.5	Mid brown orange slightly silty sand, occasional pebbles.	Medieval layer?
5	0.9	1.8	Mid reddish brown, occasional medium pebbles.	Medieval Layer?
6	1.2	2.6	Mid brownish orange fine sand and frequent small gravel.	Natural substratum? With Possible pit cut.
7	1.1	1.4	Orange yellow brown fine sand.	Natural substratum?
8	1.1/1.7	2.7	Mid brownish orange fine sand and gravel. And a charcoal and mortar layer.	Natural substratum? Possible pit cut in base and stratigraphy higher up
9	1.6	2.8	Dark brown clayey sand.	Garden Soil, Victorian cellar prevented further excavation.
10	1.6	2.5	Orange brown sandy silt with occasional charcoal.	Archaeological deposit.
11	1.1	2.6	Slight change noted from garden soil.	Possible pit fill at base.
12	1.2	1.5	Orange yellow sandy gravel.	Natural substratum?
13	1.5	2.2	Garden soil with occasional mortar and charcoal.	Possible pit fill.
14	1.2	2.0	Orange brown sandy silt.	Archaeological deposit or natural substratum.
15	1.0/1.3	2.6	Orange brown sandy silt.	Archaeological deposit or natural substratum.
16	1.2	1.2/1.9	Deep reddish brown layer, stratified deposits.	Archaeological deposits.

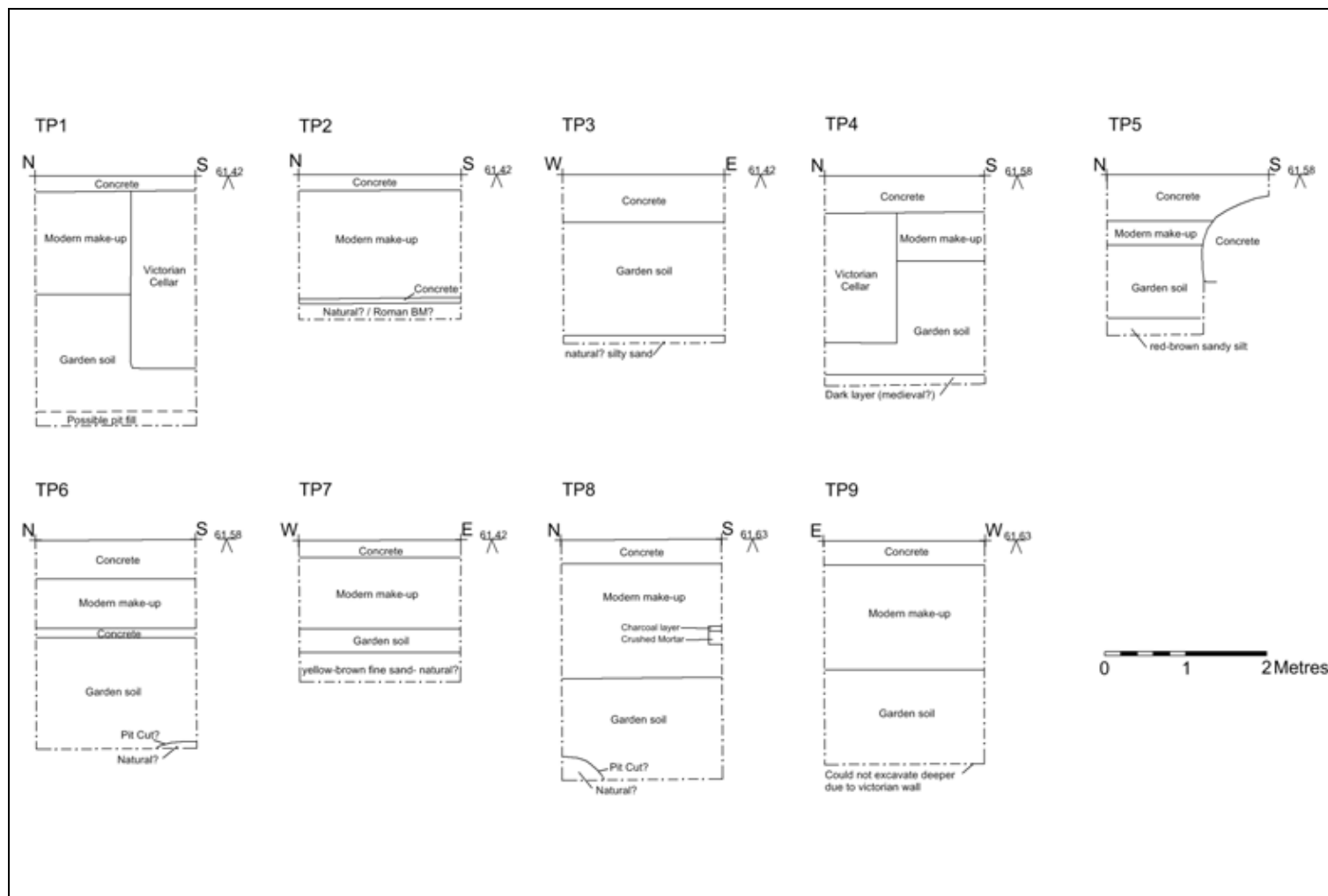


Fig.6 – Test Pit sections 1-9

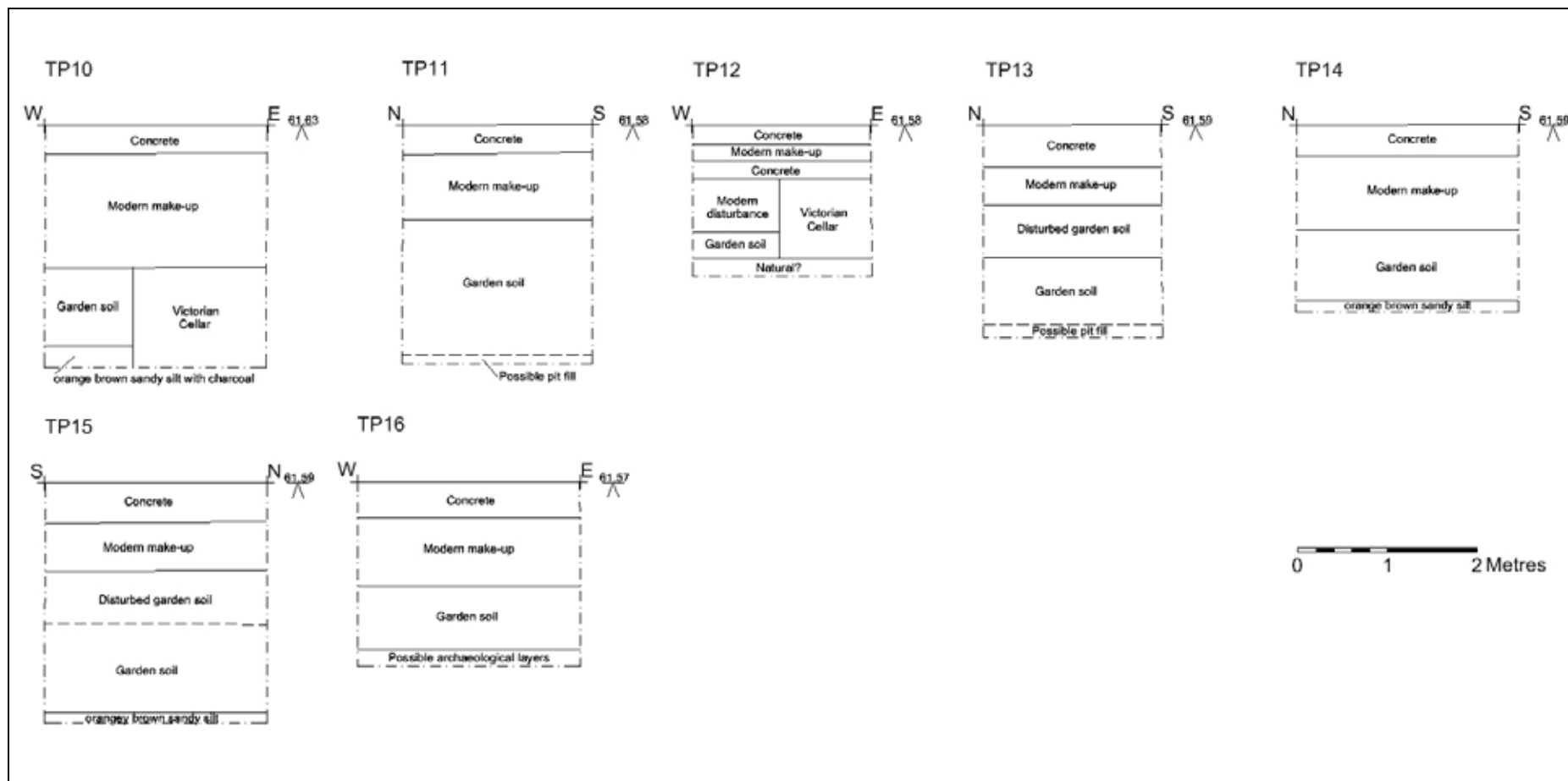


Fig.7 – Test Pit sections 10-16

4. Discussion

4.1 *Shires Plot F*

4.1.1 It may be observed from the summary of results presented on Fig.3 that the depths to archaeology are varied, but are shallow towards the rear and front of the building and deeper within the middle of the building. The depth of overburden varied between 1-2.5 m below the current floor surface (61.78-61.88m OD).

4.1.2 It can be stated that archaeology has not been seen above a depth of 1m from the current floor surface. However, this is based on one of the test pits (TP 17), whilst the general depth of overburden was between 1.8 and 2.5 below current floor surface. These greater depths may however reflect the consolidation of archaeological pits with garden soil, and represent a false depth to top of archaeology, meaning archaeological depths may be shallower than these figures.

4.1.3 The natural substratum was not encountered in Plot F, and cannot be discussed further.

4.2 *Shires Plot G1 and G3*

4.2.1 It may be observed on Fig.5 that the results are varied and there is no pattern to the depths of archaeology that might reflect an underlying landscape. This would give weight to the argument that any archaeology below the overburden is also of varied depth. However, when a depth was reached that appeared to be a natural substratum-like material throughout the bottom of the test pit, the depths were a consistent 1.4-2m below current floor surface (61.42-61.63m OD) (TP 2, 3, 7, 12).

4.2.2 It can be stated that archaeology was not seen above a depth of 1.4m from the current floor surface, and generally the overburden depth was greater than 2m. The overall range of overburden was between 1.4m and 3.0m below the current floor surface. Again, these greater depths may, however, reflect the consolidation of archaeological pits with garden soil, and represent a false depth to top of archaeology. Where pit cuts were observed cutting the natural substratum, (TP6 and 8) this depth was 2.6-2.7m below current floor surface. Due to visibility constraints, it could be suggested that the test pit may have cut into the side of the pit, and the top of the cut of the pit was in fact higher and to one side of the test pit, and may be represented better by the aforementioned natural substratum depths.

5. Conclusion

5.1 It can be concluded that any proposed groundworks up to a depth of 1m below the current floor surface (61.78-61.88m OD) for Shires Plot F and 1.4m below the current floor surface (61.42-61.63m OD) for Shires Plot G1 and G3 are unlikely to impact on any significant archaeological deposits.

5.2 Any intrusion below these depths may impact upon significant archaeological deposits, and this will increase in probability with depth, particularly over 2m from the current floor surface for either site.

5.3 The test pitting programme examined only a very small percentage of both sites, and therefore only displays a general overview of the nature and depth of uppermost deposits. The St. Peter's Car park area (G2) of Shire Plot G was not investigated and so remains an unknown area. This is the same for the other building areas of Plot F. With evaluation trial trenching being the next stage of archaeological investigation, this will obviously give a much more informed view of the depths, nature, extent and date of any significant archaeological deposits. With the first phase of evaluation incorporating the area beneath the car park for Plot G, this will certainly add to what has been learnt from the test pitting below the 'Megabowl' complex.

6 Acknowledgements

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