An Archaeological Evaluation At 71, Great Central Street, Leicester. NGR SK58222 04871.

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For: HKM LLP.

Planning Application 2004/1445.

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation in the form of trial trenching was carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on the site of the former Pretty Legs factory at 71, Great Central Street, Leicester (NGR SK58222 04871). The evaluation, on behalf of HKM LLP, formed part of a staged programme of archaeological investigation on the site prior to proposed redevelopment. A desk based assessment of the site had highlighted the strong potential for buried archaeological remains, showing that it lay within the Roman and medieval walled area of Leicester, close to the northern town gate, on the principal thoroughfare, Highcross Street.

Despite deep cellaring from the factory development two areas of the site (one to the north and one to the south) had been unaffected and were found to contain important, well preserved archaeological remains. In the northern area of the site structural remains indicative of a street frontage building of the medieval or post-medieval period were revealed less than half a metre below the modern surface. The remains consisted of intact stone walls with associated occupation and in situ floor layers and a stone built cellar. An area to the rear of the cellar contained layers and surfaces probably associated with backyard activities connected to the frontage building. Evidence for 1st/2nd century AD Roman occupation was revealed in a test slot through the stone cellar floor.

Similar evidence for medieval occupation was revealed in the southern area of the site where a length of stone wall probably reflected the rear of building(s) fronting onto Highcross Street. Evidence of other structures, possibly of different phases, was also recorded in the trench as well as 12th/13th century pitting and remains of metalworking. A complex sequence of layers and features recorded in the trench section revealed that the archaeological sequence in this area of the site had also survived very close to the modern ground level. Evidence for a second stone cellar was also revealed in the eastern trench side and probably relates to a cellared building located directly adjacent to Highcross Street.

Inspection in the cellared areas of the former factory revealed evidence of the bottom layers of the archaeological sequence, indicating Roman occupation from the 2nd to 4th century AD. Isolated medieval pits or wells were also evident. The information gathered from the site as a whole suggests that the stratified archaeological sequence is approximately 3m thick at the southern end of the site and 2.5m thick to the north.

Finds and records from the evaluation will be deposited with Leicester City Museums Service under the Accession No. A13.2006.

1. Introduction

1.1 An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on land at 71, Great Central Street, Leicester (NGR SK 58222 04871). The site was previously occupied by the Pretty Legs textile factory which was demolished before the

- archaeological work began. The evaluation took place between 6/3/2006 and 21/3/2006 and was commissioned by HKM LLP.
- 1.2 The evaluation was undertaken in response to planning proposals for redevelopment of the site (Application No. 20041445). Proposed redevelopment plans involve a multi-storey building with provision for residential, office and retail space with basement car-parking facilities.

2. Site Location

- 2.1 The development site consists of a roughly triangular piece of land, approximately 0.142ha in area, which is situated between Highcross Street on the east and Great Central Street on the west (Figure 1). The site lies between *c*.56-58m above Ordnance Datum, the ground level sloping gently down to the north.
- 2.2 The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 156 indicates that the underlying geology of the site consists of fluvial sand and gravel deposits of the Wanlip river terrace.

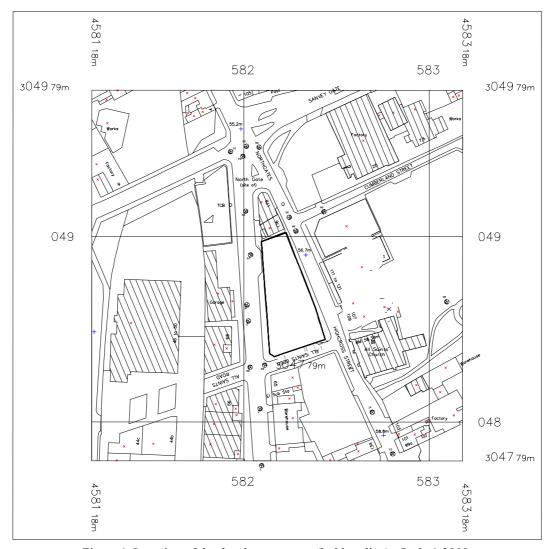


Figure 1 Location of the development area (bold outline). Scale 1:2000.

3. Aims and Objectives

3.1 As outlined in the *Design Brief for Archaeological Excavation* (City Archaeologist, Leicester City Council, 3-11-2004 – hereinafter 'the Brief') and the *Project Design for Archaeological Evaluation at 71, Great Central Street, Leicester* (ULAS 15-11-2004 – hereinafter 'the DS'), the aims and objectives of the evaluation can be summarised as follows:

3.2 General Aims

- To establish the nature, character and extent of any archaeological deposits within the designated areas whilst minimising the damage to any such deposits.
- To establish the date range for any archaeological deposits located.
- To define the state of preservation of these deposits, including the potential for survival of palaeo-environmental data including waterlogged deposits.
- To assess the local, regional and national significance of any archaeological deposits revealed on the site.
- To produce an archive and report any results.

3.2 Post-fieldwork and reporting objectives

- To create an ordered and fully documented archive to a recognised standard for storage in perpetuity.
- To present the results in sufficient detail to enable an assessment to be made of the archaeological impact of the future development without recourse to the site archive.
- To produce a report interpreting the significance of the results in a local, regional and national context to a high academic standard.
- To disseminate the results through publication in an appropriate academic journal.

4. Archaeological and Historical Background

- 4.1 Prior to the archaeological evaluation of the site, a desk-based assessment of the area was conducted by ULAS which discussed the proposed development site in its archaeological and historical context (Gnanaratnam, 2004). The findings of the report can be summarised as follows:
- 4.2 The development area is situated within the town walls of Roman and medieval Leicester, in the northern part of the town, just to the south of the north gate (see Figures 2 and 3). The site fronts onto one of the principal Roman and post-Roman streets of Leicester and lies in an area of very high archaeological potential. Archaeological deposits in this part of Leicester are predicted as existing to a depth of 2.5 to 3m below present ground level and also have the potential to start at around 0.5m beneath ground level close to the frontage.

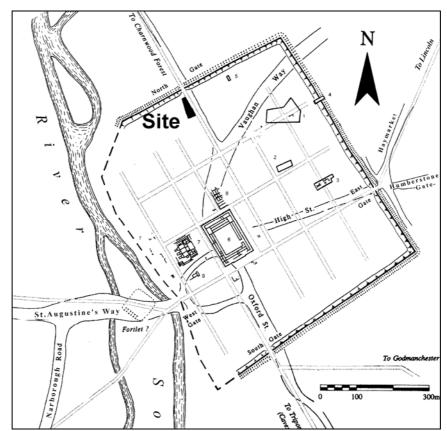


Figure 2 Approximate position of the development area within Roman Leicester.

- 4.3 Documentary evidence indicates that much of the footprint of the former factory has been cellared. Although this will have removed a substantial proportion of the archaeology within the footprint, there is a chance that deeper cut features, or those at the bottom end of the stratified sequence, will have survived.
- 4.4 Three areas of the site, two on the northern, and one on the southern sides of the area, were identified as possibly having escaped cellaring associated with the factory. The northern area was originally occupied by domestic dwellings before they were incorporated into the factory and therefore may not have been subject to extensive cellaring. A yard area fronting onto Great Central Street, also at the northern end of the site, was not cellared as part of the factory building and an area facing onto Highcross Street in the southern part of the site also appears to have escaped cellaring. All three areas have high archaeological potential.

5. Methodology

5.1 Trial Trenching Methodology

5.1.1 As outlined in the Brief, the Leicester City Archaeologist required the excavation of two evaluation trenches (Areas 1 and 3), one in each of the potentially uncellared areas at the northern and southern ends of the site and each measuring not less than 30 square metres in area (Figure 4).

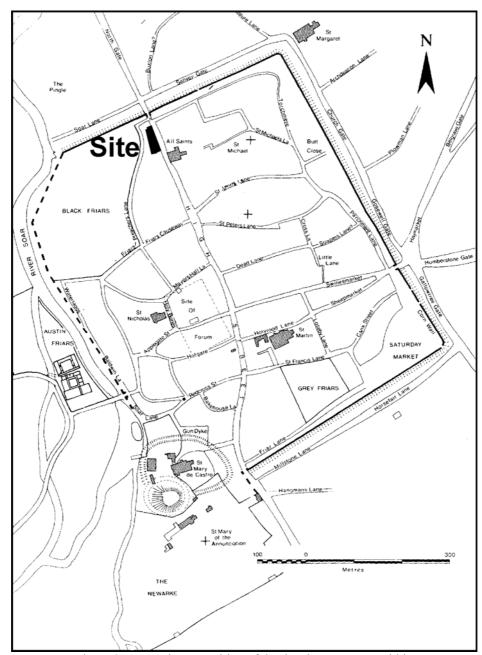


Figure 3 Approximate position of the development area within medieval Leicester.

- 5.1.2 The excavation of each evaluation trench was undertaken using a 360° tracked excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket for the removal of overburden.
- 5.1.3 The overburden was removed from the trenches in level spits, under constant archaeological supervision, until the top of archaeological deposits were revealed or to a depth of 1.20m, whichever was higher.

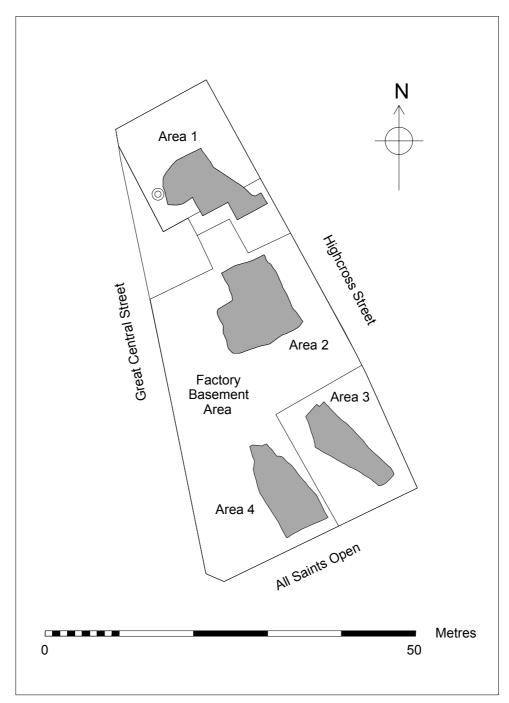


Figure 4 Location of evaluated areas within the development site.

5.1.4 The trenches were hand-cleaned and any archaeological deposits revealed were photographed, planned to scale and sample excavated as appropriate to establish their stratigraphic and chronological sequence. Due to the depth of stratigraphy encountered in the trenches it was only possible to evaluate in plan the latest archaeological phases. Where possible, 'modern' intrusions were removed in order to gain a 'window' into underlying archaeological deposits to assess their nature, depth and date.

5.2 Evaluation within factory cellar areas

- 5.2.1 Prior to the evaluation, during the demolition of the factory building, the concrete cellar floors had been removed, revealing the underlying soils. As part of the evaluation work, two areas (Areas 2 and 4) were examined, for the survival of archaeological remains, within the cellared parts of the site (Figure 4).
- 5.2.2 It was not possible to examine the full extents of the cellared areas for archaeological remains as 'ramps' of soil had been left at strategic points to enable machinery access both in and out of the cellared areas and across the site.
- 5.2.3 Debris and disturbed soil was removed from the cellar areas using a 360° mechanical digger with toothless ditching bucket and the areas were subsequently cleaned by hand.
- 5.2.4 The cleaned areas were photographed, planned to scale and finds recovered during cleaning were retained for dating purposes.

6 Results of the Evaluation

6.1 **Area 1**

- 6.1.1 Area 1 consisted of an irregular shaped trench covering approximately 67.38 square metres (Figure 5, Plate 1). It was situated at the northern end of the site, an area that appeared not to have been affected by deep cellaring during the construction and use of the former factory. The trench was positioned to evaluate the potential for surviving archaeology both on the street frontage of Highcross Street and backyard remains closer to Great Central Street.
- 6.1.2 As predicted from the results of the desk-based assessment there was little evidence that the factory development had significantly impacted upon this part of the site and well-preserved archaeological remains were revealed at a depth of only 0.20m 0.30m beneath the present ground surface (between 56.90m OD on the east and 56.71m OD on the west).

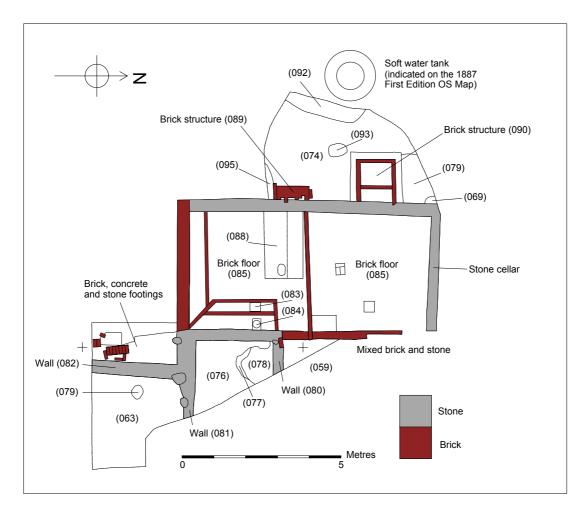


Figure 5 Area 1 showing main archaeological remains.

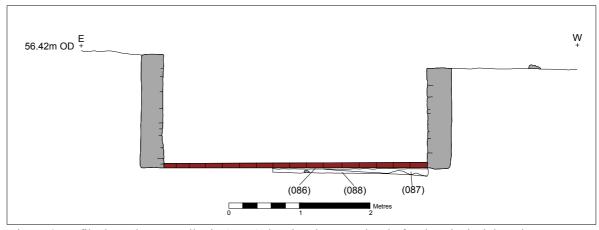


Figure 6 Profile through stone cellar in Area 1 showing the upper level of archaeological deposits to the east and west, and layers beneath the cellar floor.



Plate 1 Area 1 facing south showing the stone cellar and archaeological remains fronting onto Higheross Street.

6.1.3 The main feature in Area 1 was a rectangular stone-built cellar (141) measuring approximately 8m x 4m x 1.5m deep (Figure 6). The cellar was predominantly constructed of mortared granite blocks, although occasional blocks of Daneshill sandstone were also included in the walls. Areas of brick infill and repair were also evident, particularly within the eastern wall of the cellar where former entrances to the cellar had been infilled. The southern wall was constructed entirely of brick and retained evidence of a former vaulted ceiling. A brick partition wall effectively divided the area of the cellar in half, presumably indicating that at some point the structure served two properties, although it is unclear at this stage if this had always been the case. A brick floor (085) covered the internal area of the cellar and there was also evidence of internal sub-division and features (083 and 084) within the floor of the southern half. A test slot through the brick floor revealed an earlier floor, consisting of a beaten earth surface, (087). This overlay a Roman layer of greenish orange silty sand (088) containing animal bone, tile and pottery dating to the 1st/2nd century AD (Plate 2). All bricks used in the cellar floor and walls followed consistent dimensions of 0.24m x 0.12m x 0.05m thick. The cellar was filled with a loose mixture of bricks and mortar (091) which contained finds to indicate disuse in the late 19th century.



Plate 2 Revealing the Roman layer beneath the cellar floor



Plate 3 Area 1 facing north showing remains of street frontage archaeology. In the middle distance the darker area to the right of the cellar wall contains preserved floor layers.

6.1.4 A series of stone walls on the eastern side of the trench were apparently related to the cellar and survived only just below the modern ground surface (Plate 3). Walls (080) and (081) consisted of coursed granite and sandstone

blocks bonded with light yellowish brown mortar and both appeared to have been 'keyed in' to the eastern cellar wall. A third stone wall (082) projected southwards from (081) at a right angle and was built of large, rough granite blocks bonded with reddish brown clay. To the north of wall (080) a layer of loose mortar and rubble (059) represented the infill of a former entrance to the cellar. Between walls (080) and (081) a series of layers ((076-8)), provided evidence of occupation and included at least one floor layer (mortar floor (077)), indicating that the walls formed two sides of a room within a building. Layer (076) yielded pottery dating from between the 13th and 15th centuries. Further layers revealed in the section (Plate 4 and Figure 7) provided more evidence for the complexity and remarkable survival of archaeological remains on this part of the site. To the south, between walls (081) and (082) a thick layer of dark brown silty clay was revealed (063) from which several fragments of 12th or 13th century pottery was recovered. A single post hole (079) was observed cutting through this layer. On the western side of wall (082) a palimpsest of wall foundations included stone, brick and concrete footings which were difficult to interpret, however the suggestion was that a further cellar may exist to the south of the one revealed. No firm evidence was revealed to suggest a further cellar existed to the north.



Plate 4 Surviving occupation layers and stone walls illustrate the shallow nature of the archaeological remains.

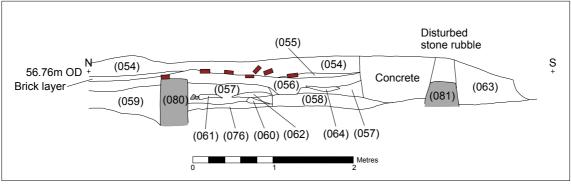


Figure 7 Occupation layers and stone walls revealed in the eastern section, Area 1.

6.1.5 To the rear of the cellar on the western side of the trench, evidence of possible backyard activity was revealed. Two brick-built structures (089) and (095) were attached to the western wall of the cellar and had apparently functioned as coal bunkers. Both had been backfilled during the late 19th century, the same time that the cellar had gone out of use. The brick features had been cut into a thick layer of dark greyish brown silty clay (074) that was seen to overlie a layer of mid brown silty clay (075). A small assemblage of pottery and a ridge tile indicated a 13th to 15th century date for layer (074). Two features (092) and (093) were seen to cut into layer (074). On the northern side of the area a concentration of stone rubble (079) above (074) may have represented a collapsed wall. This was in turn covered by several successive layers culminating in (065) which produced pottery of a 17th/18th century date. On the southern side of the area a concentration of cobbles set in clay (095) may represent a cobbled surface to the rear of the cellar. At the westernmost point of the area a brick-built soft water tank was revealed which coincides with that indicated on the 1887 First Edition Ordnance Survey map for the area although it is unclear how old the feature is.

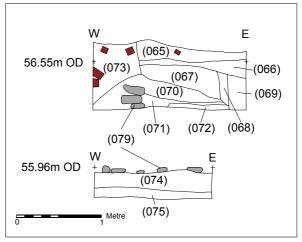


Figure 8 Sections through archaeological layers at the rear of Area 1

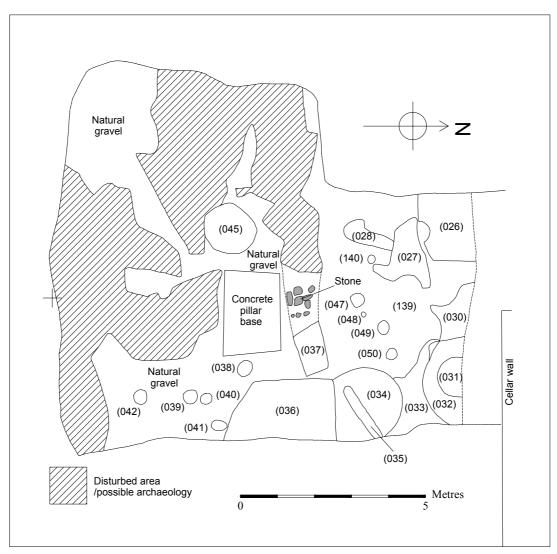


Figure 9 Archaeological features revealed in Area 2.

6.2 Area 2

- 6.2.1 Area 2 was located in the central cellared area of the former factory and comprised approximately 95.03 square metres (Figure 9, Plate 5). The area was almost 2.5 metres deeper than the uppermost levels of archaeological survival encountered in Area 1, with an average height of 54.24 metres OD.
- 6.2.2 Natural sands and gravels were revealed on the southern part of Area 2 after cleaning however it was clear that a significant amount of archaeology had survived at this depth.



Plate 5 Area 2 after cleaning, facing east.

- 6.2.3 In the northern half of Area 2 a fairly dense spread of archaeological features producing Roman pottery appears to represent the lowest levels of the stratigraphic sequence. The remains were characterised by a series of circular postholes (047-50) and (140), pits (034), (031), (026) and other archaeological features that were associated with a distinct greenish brown layer (139). A mixed assemblage of pottery recovered from the archaeological features reflected a broad date range from the 1st century to the 4th century AD. A concentration of stones near the centre of the area may also have been associated.
- 6.2.4 In the southern half of the area there was less evidence for stratified archaeological remains although a spread of post holes (038-042) and pits (036, 037 and 045) provided evidence of further archaeological activity. Medieval pottery from the 14th/15th century was found in association with pits (034) and (036).
- 6.2.5 Two large amorphous spreads of disturbance dominated the southern part of the area which also had the potential to be masking archaeological remains however in the scope of the evaluation it was not possible to test this theory.
- 6.2.6 A large concrete pillar base associated with the former factory was revealed in the centre of the area.

6.3 **Area 3**

- 6.3.1 Area 3 consisted of a linear trench covering approximately 53.88 square metres, located in the south eastern part of the site (Figure 10, Plates 6 and 7). The trench was placed to evaluate evidence for street frontage activity adjacent to Highcross Street and lay in an area that appeared not to have been affected by recent cellaring.
- 6.3.2 As was found in the Area 1 trench, the factory development had not affected Area 3 to any significant degree and well-preserved archaeological remains were revealed less than 0.30m below the current ground level which lies between 57.69m and 57.48m OD.
- 6.3.3 The main feature in the southern end of the trench was a wall made predominantly from Daneshill sandstone and bonded with yellowish brown mortar (112). The wall was aligned roughly with Highcross Street on a north east to south west course. Surviving wall plaster on one area of the wall provided an indication of the high quality of preservation in the area however the date of the plaster is unclear. Several areas of brick repair along the length of the wall indicate that it was reused as a foundation at least once. At the northern end of wall (112) another wall was aligned at a right angle (115). This was also constructed of Daneshill sandstone but bonded with red clay.



Plate 6 Area 3 facing north Stone Wall (112) can be seen in the centre of the trench.

6.3.4 On the eastern side of wall (112) several small brick foundations were recorded although what they related to was unclear. They were recorded in association with a layer of broken brick and yellowish brown mortar (114)

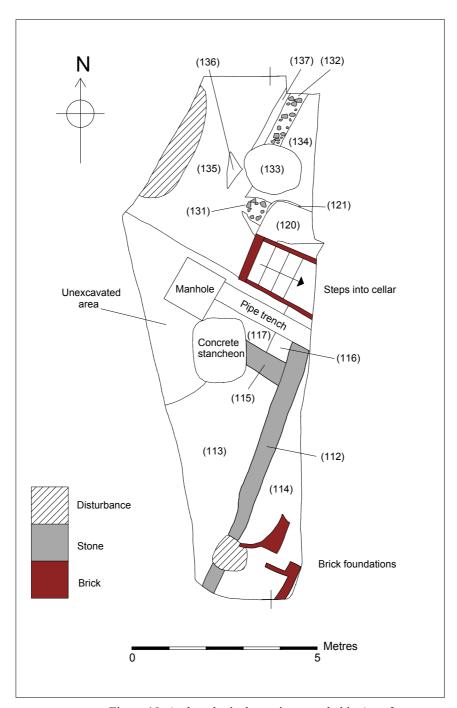


Figure 10 Archaeological remains revealed in Area 3.

which may represent demolition deposits. To the west of (112) a layer of dark greyish brown silty clay contained post medieval pottery.

6.3.5 The northern part of the trench revealed evidence for a complex sequence of archaeological deposits including layers, structural remains and industrial deposits. On the western side a layer of greyish brown silty clay (135) was revealed which contained frequent mortar flecking and charcoal. Denser areas of mortar were also recorded ((135) and (137)). To the east possible structural remains were observed which comprised two roughly built granite wall footings (131) and (132), bonded with red clay. A layer of reddish brown silty clay (134), was observed within the boundary of the walls. Both walls had been truncated by later features including a large pit (133) containing 12th/13th century pottery and a possible metalworking hearth (121) that lay beneath layer (120).



Plate 7 Area 3 facing south.
Wall Footing (132) can be seen in the foreground and the cellar stairwell in the middle distance.

- 6.3.6 Close examination of the trench section above the previously described remains showed a complex sequence of layers, pits and structural remains beginning just below the modern concrete surface (Figure 11).
- 6.3.7 In the centre of the trench a brick stairwell was partially excavated that apparently led to a stone built cellar. Part of a stone wall was revealed in the eastern trench edge suggesting that a cellar exists between the trench and Highcross Street in this area. The late 19th century date from the backfill of the stairwell coincides with that from the cellar in Area 1.

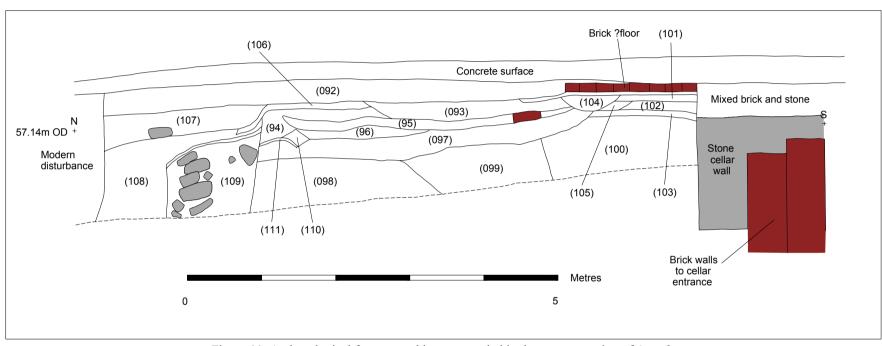


Figure 11 Archaeological features and layers revealed in the eastern section of Area 3.

6.1.1 Examination of the deposits behind the brick walls of the stairwell revealed more evidence for a considerable depth of complex archaeological deposits. On the northern side a series of layers had been cut through by a possible pit containing several fills (Plate 8, Figure 12). A section of the possible metalworking hearth (121) was also revealed from which fragments of hearth lining and slag were recovered.



Plate 8 Archaeological remains revealed on the northern side of the stairwell. The stone cellar wall can be seen on the right side of the picture.

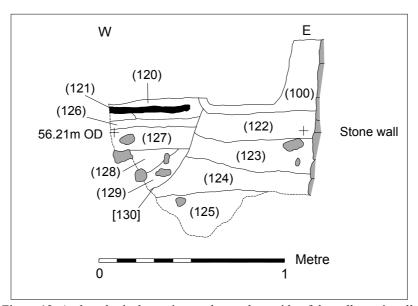


Figure 12 Archaeological remains on the northern side of the cellar stairwell. (As also shown in Plate 8).

On the southern side of the stairwell fills of a probable rubble filled feature were revealed (Plate 9, Figure 13 - Contexts (117-9)). The nature of this feature is not entirely clear although in plan it appears to have a relationship with wall (115), which was partially obscured by a modern pipe trench. A large worked stone was recovered from the upper most fill of the feature (117) which is likely to have been part of a window or door frame.



Plate 9 The Rubble Filled Feature on the Southern Side of the Stairwell

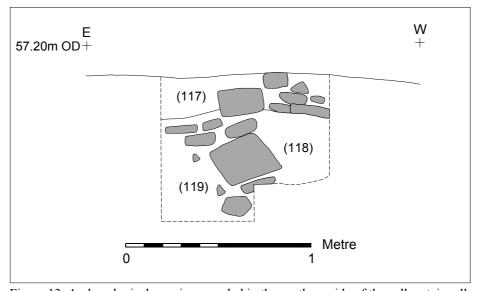


Figure 13 Archaeological remains revealed in the southern side of the cellar stairwell. (As also shown in Plate 9).

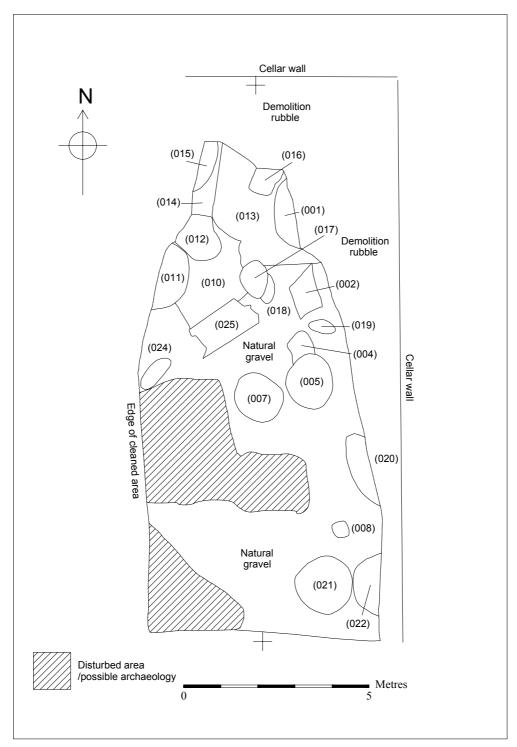


Figure 14 Archaeological remains revealed in Area 4.

6.2 Area 4

6.2.1 Area 4 consisted of a narrow linear area of approximately 66.71 square metres that was examined for archaeological survival in the southernmost area of factory cellaring (Figure 14, Plate 10).



Plate 10 Area 4 facing south.

6.2.2 As with Area 2 the depth of the cellaring in this part of the site had exposed natural sands and gravels although a spread of archaeological layers and features was also evident. The average level of the area, at *c*. 54.24 metres, was 3 metres deeper than the level of the uppermost archaeological levels in Area 3 (*c*. 57.25 metres – see Plate 11 below).



Plate 11 Area 4 facing east. The cellar wall provides an effective indication of the depth of stratified archaeology on this part of the site.

- 6.2.3 A dense area of stratified archaeology was recorded in the northern part of Area 4, consisting of Roman, medieval and post-medieval features. Several probable layers (010), (013) and (014) were revealed in association with a concentration of pits (001), (002), (011), (012), (016-18) and (025) and other features (004), (019) and (024).
- 6.2.4 In the southern part of the area a series of large circular pits was revealed cutting into the natural sands and gravels (005), (007) and (020-22). Two areas of disturbance on the western edge of the examined area may also have potential to be masking archaeological features.
- 6.2.5 Pottery recovered from the top of the archaeological features during cleaning indicated a 1st/2nd century date range for the Roman remains present as well as isolated 12th/13th century medieval and 16th/17th century post-medieval features.

7 Discussion

- 7.1 The evaluation has revealed that very well preserved archaeological remains exist on the development site. Despite deep cellaring in the central and south western parts of the site, important remains representing occupation on the Highcross Street frontage were located in the northern and south eastern areas of the site.
- 7.2 In the areas not affected by factory cellaring archaeological remains existed very close to the modern ground surface, providing a level for the top of the archaeological sequence. In the cellared areas, although natural sands and gravels were exposed, the base of the stratified archaeological deposits was also revealed. This evidence has been important in providing a guide to the depth of stratified archaeology across the site which on current information is 3m thick at the southern end of the site and 2.5m thick to the north.

7.3 Roman remains

7.3.1 Roman remains were recorded in Areas 1, 2 and 4 and the associated finds provided a broad range of dates from the 1st to the 4th century. In Area 1 too little of the deposits were revealed to provide an understanding of the nature of the activity represented although the range of finds would suggest domestic occupation. Larger areas of Roman activity were exposed in Areas 2 and 4 where pits and occupation layers characterised the remains. Although none of the features were excavated a good range of finds was collected from the surface of the features, again suggesting domestic occupation. Given the location of the Roman deposits it may be that they represent activities to the rear of buildings fronting onto Highcross Street in the Roman period.

7.4 Medieval and post-medieval remains

- 7.4.1 The majority of the remains revealed represented medieval activity across the site. In Areas 1 and 3 street frontage activity adjacent to Highcross Street was represented by structural remains and associated occupation layers. This was most evident in Area 1 where stone walls bounding *in situ* floor layers clearly represented part of a building with associated cellar. Dating of the cellar and associated stone walls is not clear however there is a strong probability that they were constructed in the late medieval period. Dating evidence collected from the associated layers in the trench suggest a 12th to 14th century date for at least some of the activities represented. The evidence suggests that occupation on the frontage did not move considerably and points to the reuse of earlier foundations. The dimensions of the bricks used to repair and refloor the cellar would not be inconsistent with a 17th century date indicating that the initial construction of the cellar was at an earlier date (N. Finn *pers comm.*).
- 7.4.2 In Area 1 important well-preserved archaeological remains also existed to the rear of the stone cellar raising the possibility that a relatively coherent sequence of remains may have survived from the front to the back of a property. If so, this would be a rarely observed situation in the City and would present an important opportunity to further archaeological understanding of urban occupation during the Medieval and Post medieval periods.
- 7.4.3 Medieval street frontage activity including structural remains was also revealed in Area 3. Although not entirely clear, it is possible that the long sandstone wall (112) represents the back of a building/or buildings fronting Highcross Street. Further structural remains using different construction techniques highlight the likelihood of several separate phases of building activity in the area. A second stone cellar, located to the east of the trench indicates the former presence of a cellared building directly adjacent to the street frontage. This is contrasting evidence to that from Area 1 where the cellar was constructed to the rear of the building. Important evidence of industrial activity was also recovered from Area 3 where hearth lining, slag and an associated area of burning indicated metalworking.

7.4.4 Isolated medieval and post-medieval pits were also recorded in the deeply cellared areas (2 and 4). Given the location of the areas, away from the Highcross Street frontage, it is likely that the pits revealed represent more deeply cut features such as wells or cess pits that would have been placed in the backyard areas.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 The evaluation has served to confirm the prediction of the desk based assessment that two areas of the site escaped deep cellaring during the factory development.
- As a result the two areas, on the southern and northern parts of the site, have been found to contain significant and well-preserved archaeological remains reflecting rare and complex evidence for street frontage activity on one of the more important streets of Roman and medieval Leicester.
- 8.2 Due to the nature of the sites former development, two large areas had been subject to deep cellaring. Examination within these areas revealed stratified archaeological remains reflecting Roman occupation of the site and gave an indication of the lowest level of the archaeological sequence. When compared with the levels from the uppermost part of the sequence, an estimate of the general depth of archaeology across the site can be made. On the evidence recovered from the evaluation the estimated depth of stratified archaeology varies from 3m in the south to 2.5m in the north of the site.
- 8.3 Given the provision for basement car parking across the site in the new development proposals, it is clear that although the depth of archaeological deposits is considerable, it will be destroyed during construction.

9 Archive

9.1 The paper and material archive for the evaluation consists of:
5 A2 permagraph sheets containing site plans, section drawings and context details; 3 A4 context indices sheets; 3 A4 level sheets containing details of 93 levels OD; digital survey files; 2 colour and two monochrome films and associated photographic records and two boxes of finds.

10 Acknowledgements

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11 Bibliography

Gnanaratnam, A. 2004 An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment for the Proposed Development at 71 Great Central Street, Leicester (SK 58222 04871). ULAS Report No. 2004-091.



