

**An Archaeological Watching Brief  
at Boston House,  
Abbey Park Road, Leicester.  
NGR: SK 5875 0605**

Andrew Hyam  
December 2006

*Client: Pearmain Limited*

<p><b>Checked by Project Manager</b></p> <p><b>Signed:</b> ..... <b>Date:</b>.....</p> <p><b>Name:</b> .....</p>
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**Summary**

*A watching brief was undertaken from October 2006 to December 2006 on behalf of Pearmain Ltd by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS). The proposals for redevelopment, under planning application number 2006/0504, include the excavation of a basement car park between the two buildings along with limited piling work across the Abbey Park Road frontage.*

*The site lies to the north of Roman and medieval Leicester and close to the Augustinian abbey and is located close to nineteenth century finds of Neolithic and Bronze Age artefacts. An archaeological desk-based assessment (ULAS report 2003-122) identified the site as having the potential to contain archaeological remains which may have been protected under alluvial deposits.*

*Creation of the underground car park required the removal of a tarmac and hardcore surface and approximately 1.8m of disturbed overburden to reveal alluvial deposits of reddish brown and dark grey clay. The frontage work involved a small amount of piling with narrow concrete foundations.*

*No archaeological deposits or features were observed during the course of the watching brief.*

*Records will be deposited with Leicester City Museums Service under Accession Number A.34.2006*

**1. Introduction**

The site lies well outside the original boundaries of Roman and medieval Leicester but close to the northern boundary of Leicester Abbey. Boston House is located at National Grid reference SK 5875 0605, on the north side of Abbey Park Road and to the east of the River Soar (figures 1 and 2).

Prior to redevelopment Boston House had been used for a short period as a clothing manufacturers although it was originally constructed in the 1920s as a boot and shoe factory. Before the factory was built the area was unoccupied and the earliest available map of 1613 shows it to be part of Abbey Meadows. Most of Abbey Meadows appears to have been developed for light industrial usage from the end of the First World War onwards.

As part of the development work the principal façade of the building was to be modified by removing the centre portion leaving two side wings in-situ which would be modified by the addition of an extra floor. A photographic survey of the building prior to redevelopment was undertaken by ULAS in July 2006, report no. 2006-101.

Prehistoric flint tools and Bronze Age inhumations, a bronze rapier and barbed and tanged arrowheads have all been found close to the development site indicating riverside use well before the founding of a permanent settlement at Leicester. Roman activity around the site is limited although it is possible that a satellite villa or farm could be located nearby. The proximity of the medieval Leicester Abbey has helped produce a number of pottery sherds and building materials around the area and it was expected that this development work would uncover more material of this nature.

In view of the potential for uncovering archaeological deposits it was necessary that there should be archaeological attendance during the work to ensure that any affected deposits were recognised and adequately recorded.

## **2. Geology and Topography**

The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 156 indicates that the geology of the area consists of Boulder Clay lying beneath river alluvium. The site is situated on relatively level ground with a narrow road along its western boundary which runs parallel to the River Soar. The site covers an area of approximately 0.5ha and is at a height of around 55m OD.

## **3. Archaeological Objectives**

The objectives of the watching brief were:

- a. To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.
- b. To establish the character, extent, date range and significance of any archaeological deposits affected by the proposed ground works.
- c. To excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the ground works.
- d. To produce an archive and report of any results.

## **4. Methodology**

The surface and overburden strip covering the entire length of the proposed car park between the two remaining building wings used a mechanical excavator fitted with a large toothed ditching bucket. All spoil was removed from site in order to create a level base in preparation for the new car park surface. The exposed alluvial substratum' which was approximately 1.8 metres below current ground level, was inspected for any archaeological features or deposits and whenever safe to do so the spoil was checked for unstratified finds.

All deposits were recorded by notes and sketches using the standard ULAS pro-forma watching brief form. Digital colour photographs were also taken throughout the course of the work.

All work followed the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) Code of Conduct and adhered to their *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*.

## 5. Results

The overburden consisted of a dark red-brown silty clay which appeared to have been extensively disturbed probably during the construction of the two main wings of Boston House. Although quite badly disturbed in places, by site vehicles tracking over it, the exposed alluvial deposits consisted of patches of mid red brown clay and dark grey clay (plates 1 and 2). This masked any natural substrate across the whole of the excavated area. A small sample excavation showed the alluvial deposit to be at least 0.2m thick.

At the front, southwestern, end of the two wings the ground was very disturbed and no alluvial deposits could be seen. This was probably due to the demolition of the centre portion of the original façade which had relatively deep foundations (plate 3).

The method of construction of the front piled area and associated new foundations did not reveal any archaeological features or indeed any undisturbed ground.

## 6. Discussion

Despite the high potential no archaeological deposits or features were encountered during the watching brief. The presence of alluvial river deposits across the stripped area of car park indicates that any underlying natural deposits remain undisturbed at an undetermined depth. The current phase of redevelopment has little impact below that of the original 1920's building and therefore has little impact upon any surviving archaeological features which may lie beneath.

## 7. Archive

The archive consists of site notes and digital photographs to be held by Leicester City Museums Service under accession number A.34.2006

## 9. Publication

A summary of the work will be submitted for publication in the *Transactions of The Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* in due course. The online form for Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) project will be completed at <http://ads.ac.uk/project/oasis>. Once the report has become a public document following its incorporation into Leicester City SMR it will be made available online via the Archaeology Data Service website.

## 10. Acknowledgements

The watching brief fieldwork was undertaken by S J Clarke and A R Hyam. The project was managed by R Buckley.

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Appendix. Figures and Plates

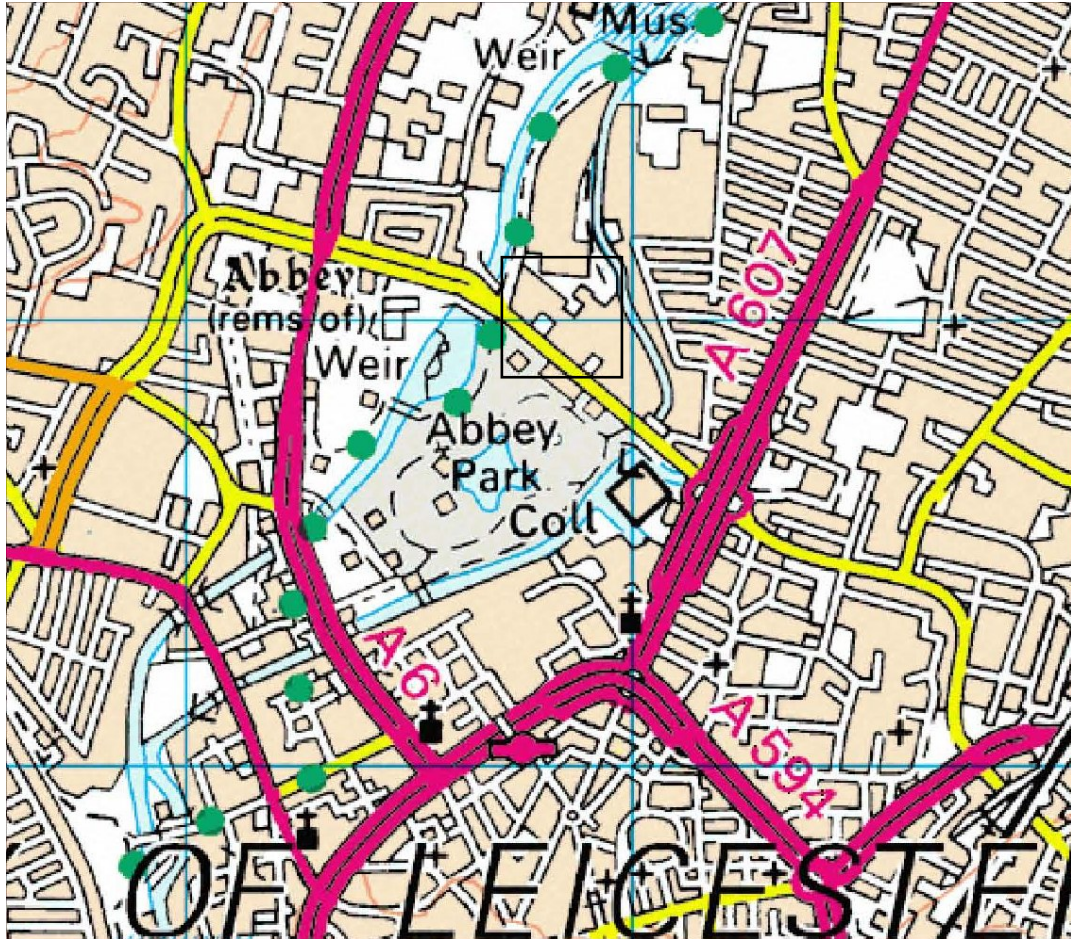
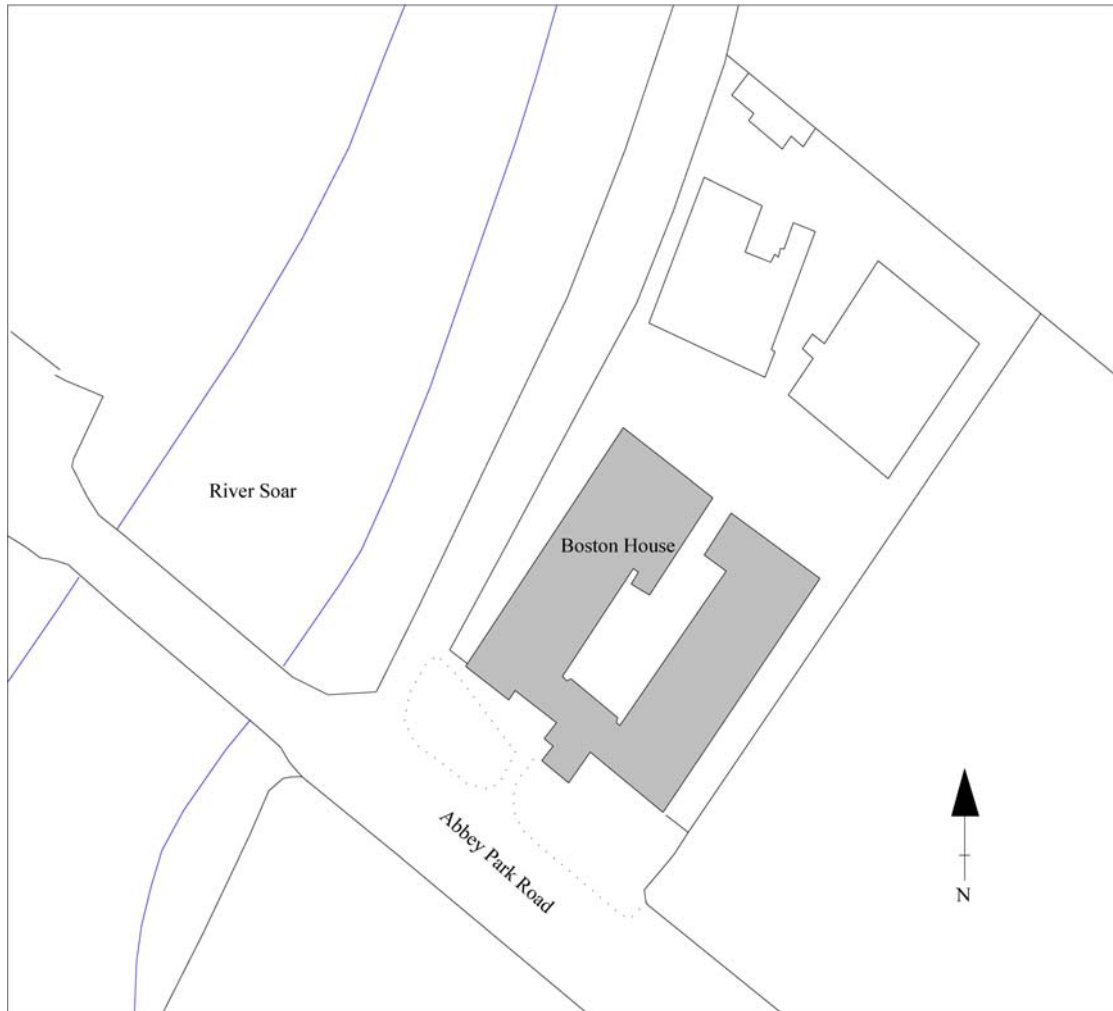


Figure 1. Site location. Source: Ordnance Survey, Licence number AL 10002186



*Figure 2. Plan of site showing original façade before redevelopment*  
Source: Ordnance Survey Licence number AL 10002186





*Plate 1. Stripped car park area between wings looking south.*



*Plate 2. Stripped car park area, looking north.*





*Plate 3. Modified façade of Boston House looking east. Piled foundations in front of both buildings.*