



**An Archaeological Watching Brief  
At Carey's Close, Leicester  
(NGR SK 5838 0438)**

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**For  
Askam Construction Ltd**

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## **An Archaeological Watching Brief at Carey's Close, Leicester (SK 5838 0438)**

### *Summary*

*Between 29/9/08 and 20/11/08, an archaeological watching brief was carried out on the redevelopment of a site at Carey's Close and Peacock Lane, Leicester (NGR SK 5838 0438) for Askam Construction Ltd as part of a mitigation strategy. The foundations for the new building were designed to sit above the level of significant archaeological deposits. In the event they largely sat within homogenous dark soil deposits, which are likely to have been either the top of inter-cutting refuse pits or 'garden soils' of medieval or post-medieval date.*

*Possible Roman dump layers were seen at the base of a lift pit, but no other Roman deposits were observed. Evidence for the processing of sheep skins was also observed. This took the form of pits containing sheep metapodials and probably dating to the later medieval or post-medieval period. No structural remains of any period were observed.*

*The archive is to be deposited with Leicester City Museum Service with accession number A15. 2008*

### **Introduction**

Between the 29th September and 20th November 2008, an archaeological watching brief was carried out by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) for WSP Askam Construction Ltd at Carey's Close, Leicester (NGR SK 5838 0438). The watching brief was carried out as part of the re-development of the site as a residential complex.

The watching brief was required by the City Archaeologist as archaeological advisor to the planning authority, following the evaluation of the site as part of an archaeological impact assessment.

A Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared by WSP Environmental Ltd (Meek 2008) and approved by the City Archaeologist and used as a methodology for the watching brief.

The work was carried out by ULAS and the archive is to be deposited with Leicester City Museum Service with accession number A15.2008.

### **Aims and Methods**

The watching brief was intended to record to an acceptable level those archaeological deposits which might be affected by the current development.

All work followed the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*. The watching brief adhered to the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Manager's (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.



Figure 1 - Location of the site, at scale 1:30,000.

From the Ordnance Survey Landranger Map (140 Leicester Coventry and Rugby)

## The Historical and Archaeological Background

A desk based assessment for the site had been commissioned but was not issued (Meek 2005). This identified the high potential of the site, given its location within the core of the Roman and medieval town. It also indicated that remains could survive close to the current ground surface, given observations at nearby site such as the former Castle park car park in St Nicholas Place.

Consequently a phase of archaeological field evaluation was required by the City Archaeologist. This was carried out by ULAS in June 2007 (Shore, Parker and Jarvis 2007). This showed that the site had been cellared on the Peacock Lane frontage to a depth of around 2m depth, identified as area A. North of this were of 'garden soils' or large medieval pits which were likely to overlie Roman levels, and thus there was good survival of archaeological deposits. The evaluation also indicated that the upper 1.5m or so consisted of modern material associated with the demolition of the previous factory building.

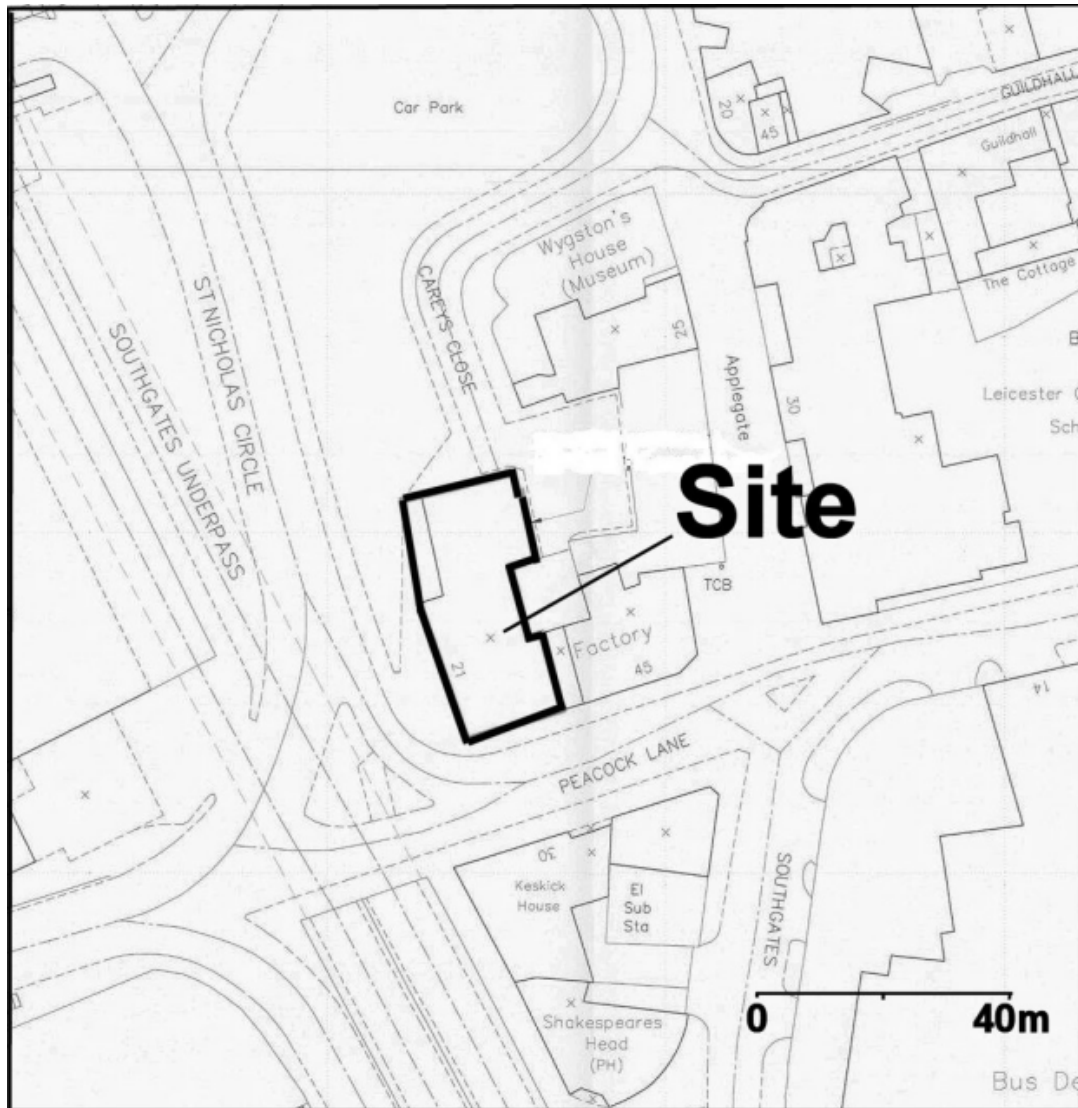


Figure 2 - The Site Location. Form Ordnance Survey sheet SK5804SW

### The Mitigation Strategy

The piled foundations were designed to have a minimal impact upon buried archaeological remains. Given the depth of the presumed modern disturbance, the pile caps and ground beams were designed to sit within this deposit. Thus, the ground beam soffits were designed to go no further than 600mm below ground level and the pile cap soffits were around 1100mm below this level.

The piling scheme itself was partly designed to have minimal impact upon any buried archaeological remains. Rather than use Continuous Flight Augered piles, driven steel tubular piles were used. The locations were pre-augered to ensure that the piles would not encounter obstructions and the piles could be re-located if necessary. The other effect of the pre-augering appears to be to minimise any lateral distortion of the surrounding deposits during to pile driving (Williams, Sidell and Panter 2007, 17). A smaller number of widely spaced piles was used at the north of the site, where the evaluation had indicated better archaeological survival. This removed the need for deep pile caps and any consequent disturbance.

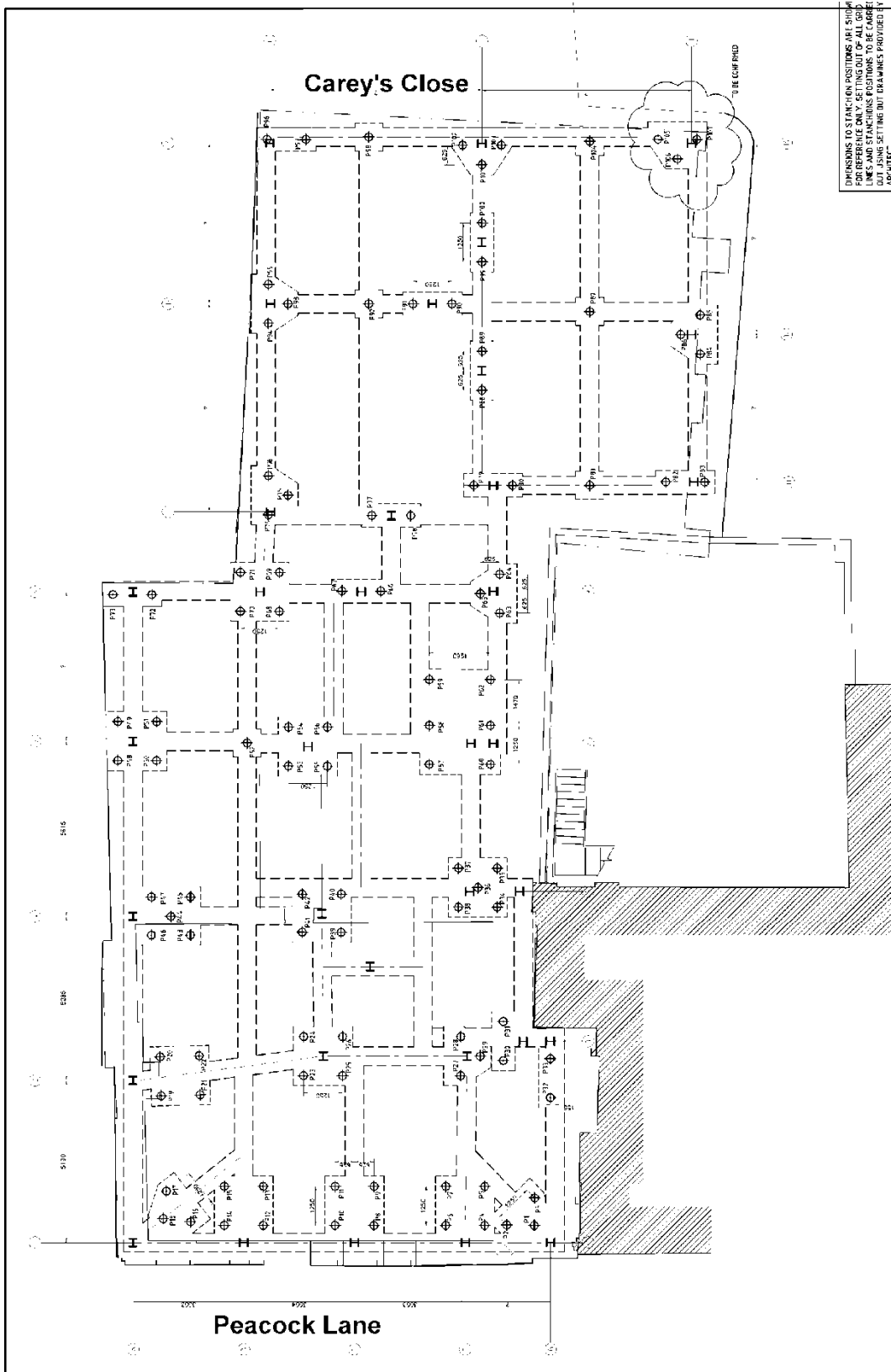


Figure 3 - The Pile plan at roughly 1:100. From plan supplied by Askam Construction Ltd

As well as the system of pile caps and ground beams the other potential impact was from the lift pit. This was dug to a depth of *c.*2000mm below the ground level. As this was dug through loosely compacted sandy soils this could not be closely investigated.



**Figure 4 - The lift pit partly constructed, looking north**



Figure 5 - the foundations in progress showing constrained nature of site. Looking north



## The Results

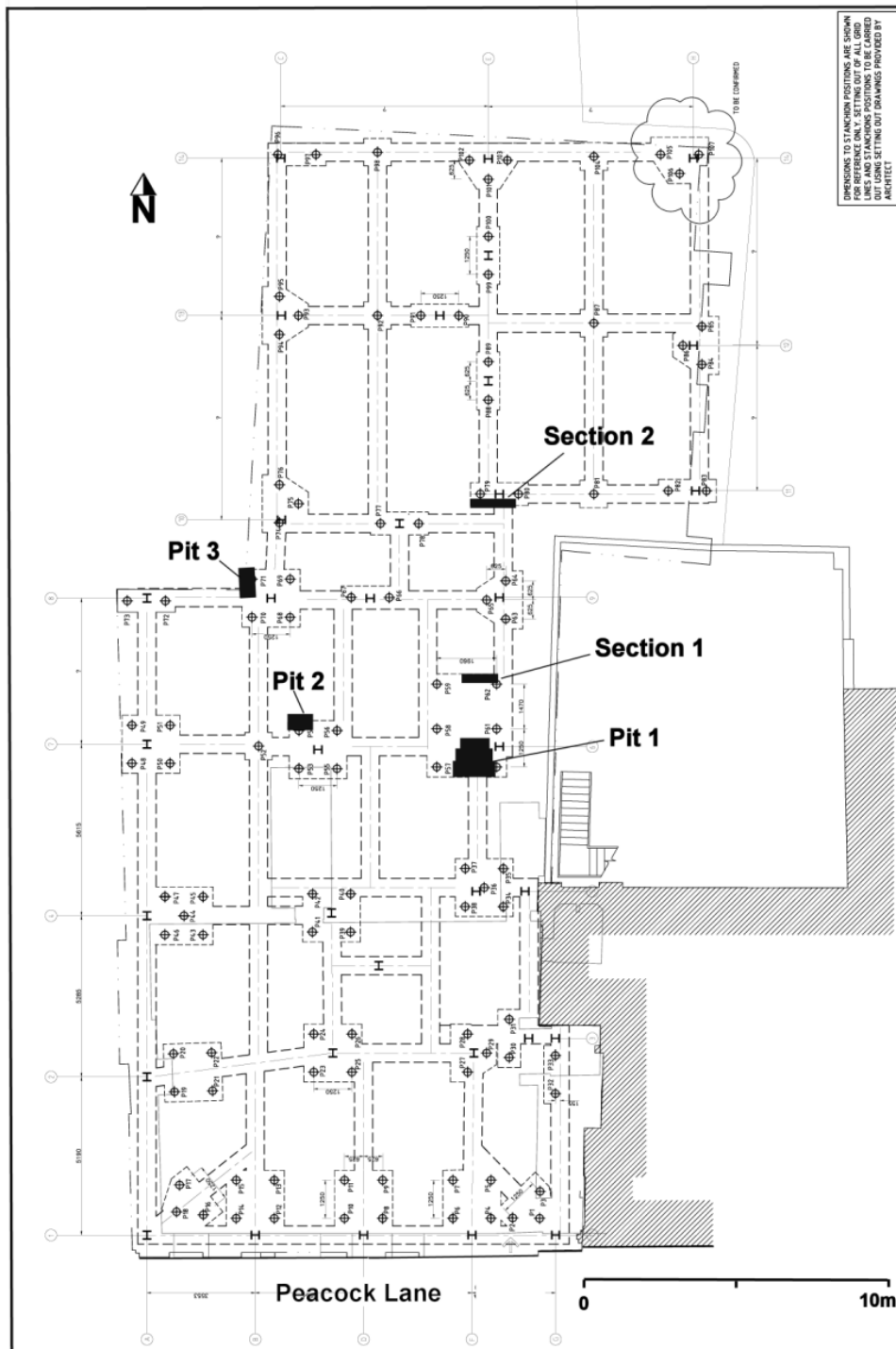


Figure 6 - The Location of Archaeological Deposits (from plan supplied by Askam Construction Ltd)

The area of Peacock Lane had been substantially disturbed due to cellaring. The piles were driven through the floor of the cellar. No archaeological deposits were disturbed during this process and no archaeological deposits were exposed or recorded.

In the northern and central parts of the site, rather than encountering the expected modern disturbed deposits, there were in fact dark grey-brown clayey silts and sandy silts which appeared to be fairly homogeneous. The depths of these deposits could not be easily measured on site but was around 1.5m from the Peacock Lane ground level.

At three locations, separate pits or their fills could be distinguished (Figure 6). In the northernmost of these (Figure 7, Figure 8), a roughly bowl shaped, deposit of sandy gravel with cobbles and slates could be seen (2). Over this was a mid brown sandy silt (1). The deposits below this appeared very similar to the 'garden soils'. It is likely that this represents a surface of medieval or post-medieval date slumping down into the top of an earlier pit [8] (Figure 8 Section 2). These gravels were not seen anywhere else on site and were presumably truncated away during later phases of building work on site.



**Figure 7 - Slumped Surface (2)**

The other two pits (Figure 6 pits 2&3, Figure 9, Figure 10) both comprised reddish clay over the top of charcoal and ash deposits within the pits [21] [28]. The pits continued down below the ash but this was below 'dig level' and so could not be investigated. Both pits contained considerable quantities of sheep metapodials, mainly within the ash deposits, a small sample was taken for identification. During the excavation of the lift pit, a further concentration was visible although the pit edges could not be seen (Figure 6, Pit1)

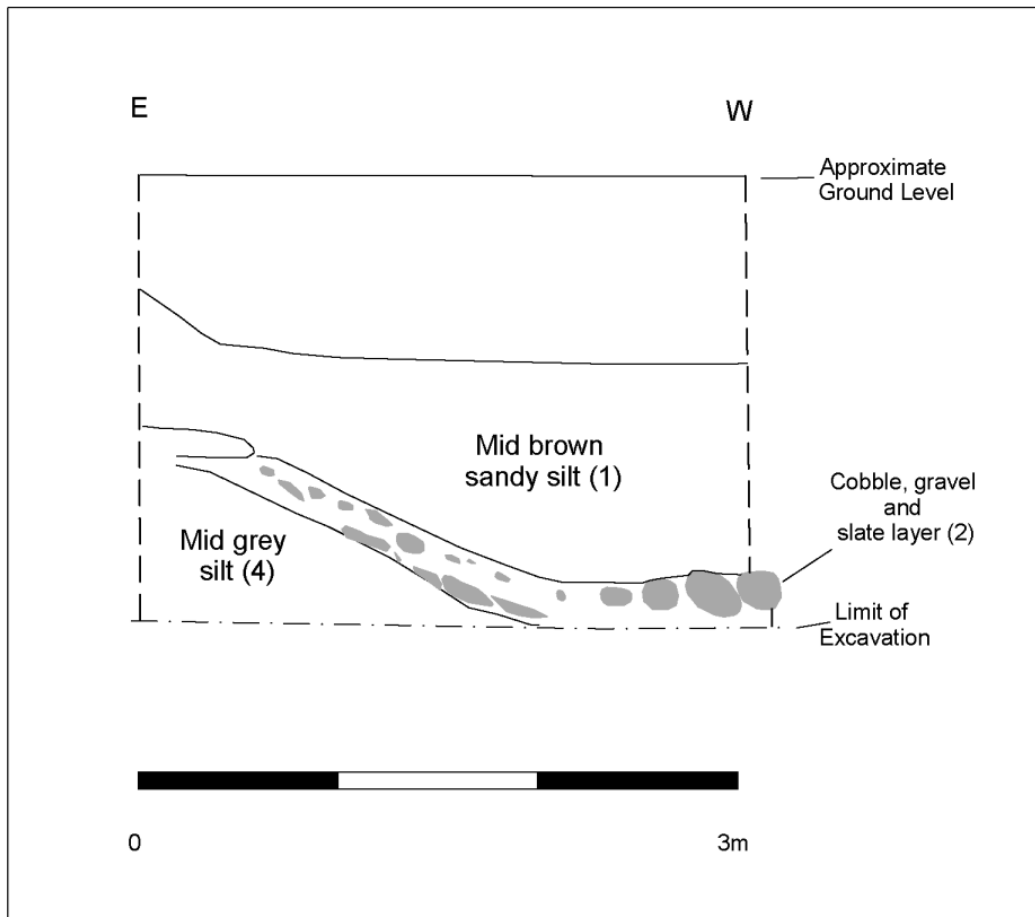


Figure 8 – Section 2 - Slumped surface (2)



Figure 9 - Pit 3 showing ash and bone (20) in cut [21], looking west



**Figure 10 - Pit 2 showing ash and bone (27) in pit [28], looking south**

It is likely that these deposits represent the remnants of the working of sheep hides.

The deepest excavations were carried out for the lift pit (Figure 11, Figure 12). This went down to a depth of *c.*2m from ground level. Although probably Roman deposits were encountered these could not be investigated closely due to safety considerations. However, inspection of the sections and of the spoil, indicated that the deposits consisted of light brown sandy silt layers (11). No evidence of stone-built walls was seen nor were any floor levels observed. Thus it seems that there were no structural remains disturbed during the excavation of the lift pit.



Figure 11 - Possible Roman Deposit (11) at base of lift shaft, looking north

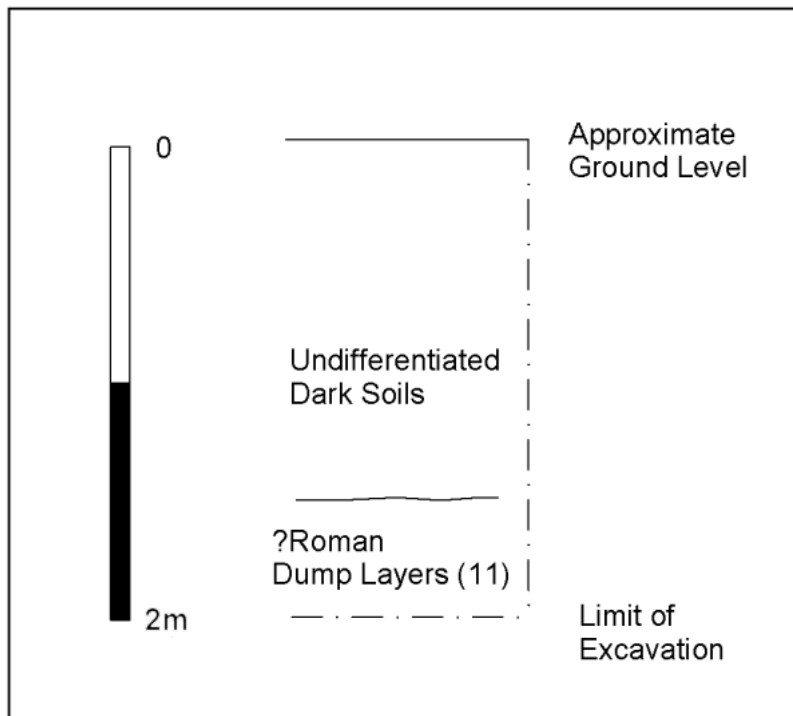


Figure 12 -Section 1 - Possible Roman deposits, looking north

No other significant deposits were recorded within the watching brief.

## Discussion

Due to factors of depth, almost no deposits of Roman date were observed. Within the lift pit, deposits could not be effectively investigated due to safety considerations. However, although c.0.50m depth of Roman deposits were disturbed these were probably dump deposits, and no structural remains, walls or floors were revealed.

The deposits exposed and recorded during the watching brief were largely of medieval (c.1100-1480) or post-medieval (c.1480-1750) date. The lack of finds meant that features could not be dated. Roman features were largely below 'dig level' except within the lift pit, although they could not be investigated due to safety considerations. However visual inspection, indicated that there were no structural remains, or at least no stone-built walls nor floor layers.

The discovery of deposits of sheep metapodials probably indicated the working of sheep skins on site. Typically the foot bones were left on the skins and were only removed when the skins were prepared. Given the location of the site within the town this seems slightly surprising. However the preparation of sheepskin requires much less water than tanning, and also does not use the noxious substances used in tanning. The skins instead are dried and treated with alum. Researches into early post-medieval whitayers indicate that some operated within the walls.

## Conclusions

Relatively few archaeological deposits were revealed and recorded during this watching brief. This in turn indicates that the mitigation strategy was successful and relatively little damage was caused to the underlying significant archaeological deposits. However the archaeological results were of interest, specifically the indications of the processing of sheep skins, during the late medieval or post-medieval period.

## Bibliography

Meek J., 2005 *An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment at Peacock Lane, Leicester* ULAS unpublished report

Meek J., 2008 *Specification for Archaeological Mitigation at Peacock Lane/Carey's Close, Leicester* WSP doc ref 12261413-001

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Williams J., Sidell J. and Panter I., 2007 *Piling and Archaeology, An English Heritage Guidance Note* English Heritage

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **The Archive**

The archive consists of:

13 pro-forma ULAS watching brief sheets

1 permagraph section sheet

1 A3 plan of pile layout

1 A3 location plan on pile layout

1 CD 67 digital photographs

2 films B/W contact and negatives

Appropriate indices

The archive will be deposited with Leicester City Museums Services with accession number A15.2008