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## Northamptonshire Archaeology

**Archaeological Evaluation (Trial Trenching) at  
Leicester College, Abbey Park Campus,  
Leicester  
April 2006  
Y.A15.2006**



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April 2006

Report 06/68

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## **QUALITY CONTROL**

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## OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	Leicester College	
Short description (250 words maximum)	Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by RPS Planning, Transport and Environment on behalf of Leicester College to conduct an archaeological trial excavation at the Abbey Park Campus. The object of the evaluation was primarily to ascertain whether the site had the potential to contain Roman or Medieval burials or other remains. No archaeological features pre-dating the mid 19th century were identified. The remains of 19 <sup>th</sup> century buildings, including a large culvert or sewer and a small square or rectangular structure with a sunken floor, were located. A single flint blade of probable early Neolithic date was found in the subsoil.	
Project type (eg desk-based, field evaluation etc)	Evaluation	
Previous work (reference to organisation or SMR numbers etc)	N/A	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	no	
Monument type and period	N/A	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)		
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Leicestershire	
Site address (including postcode)	Leicester College, Abbey Park Campus, Painter Street, Leicester	
Easting (use numerical 100km grid square no.)	459110	
Northing	305500	
Height OD	53-54m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Leicester City Council	
Project Design originator	RPS Consultants	
Director/Supervisor	Paul Mason	
Project Manager	Anthony Maull	
Sponsor or funding body	Leicester College	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	April 2006	
End date	April 2006	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.) YA15.2006	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		Single Neolithic flint blade, no other finds.
Paper		1 lever arch file of paper records
Digital		Not prepared at present
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	Archaeological Evaluation (Trial Trenching) at Leicester College, Abbey Park Campus, Leicester	
Serial title & volume	Unpublished client report	
Author(s)	Paul Mason	
Page numbers	8 text, 4 figures and plates	
Date		

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION (TRIAL TRENCHING) AT  
LEICESTER COLLEGE, ABBEY PARK CAMPUS, LEICESTER  
APRIL 2006**

*Abstract*

*Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by RPS Planning, Transport and Environment on behalf of Leicester College to conduct an archaeological trial excavation at the Abbey Park Campus. The objective of the evaluation was primarily to ascertain whether the site had the potential to contain Roman or medieval burials or other remains. Whilst natural geology was exposed in every trench, no archaeological features demonstrably pre-dating the 19<sup>th</sup> century were identified. Some shallow linear depressions cut into the natural geology (with fills containing 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery) were noted, as were the remains of 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings and structures, including the disturbed foundations of a row of terraced housing, a large sewer or culvert and a small square or rectangular building/structure with a sunken floor. Excepting for sunken features, the surviving 19<sup>th</sup> century features had been significantly impacted by previous phases of demolition, landscaping and construction of college car-parking. A single flint blade of probable early Neolithic date was found in the subsoil.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by RPS Consultants on behalf of Leicester College to conduct an archaeological trial excavation at the Abbey Park Campus, Leicester (NGR 459110 305500, Fig 1). The project was undertaken in compliance with a specification prepared by RPS in response to development proposals for a new college block. The fieldwork was undertaken between 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> April 2006.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Topography and Geology**

The site is located on the northern fringe of Leicester city centre within the Abbey Park Campus. The proposed development area lies on the eastern side of the college campus at the corner of Painter Street and Belgrave Gate (A607). The Grand Union Canal is located to the west. The land is currently occupied by a car park and an area of modern soft landscaping.

The campus lies on the edge of the River Soar floodplain at *c* 53-54m OD. The local geology comprises alluvium/river terrace gravels overlying Triassic mudstones ([www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex](http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex)).

## **2.2 Previous Work**

No previous archaeological work has been undertaken on the site itself. A desk-based assessment prepared by Jacobs Babbie (2005) considers the archaeological potential of the site in the context of the wider area. This concluded that, because of the close proximity of the Fosse Way (Belgrave Gate) and the probable site of a medieval hospital, the site had the potential to contain Roman and/or medieval burials or other remains.

## **3 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY**

The aim of the evaluation, as defined by RPS in their Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (March 2006), was ‘to provide information that can be taken into account by the local planning authority when considering the application’.

In accordance with the WSI three trenches were initially opened as close to the pre-agreed locations as the site topography, tree coverage and services would allow. These constraints resulted in a reduction in the size of trenches which was mitigated by the addition of a fourth trench (Fig 2).

Where hard standing was present it was broken by mechanical digger fitted with a ‘pecker’. Modern made-up ground and buried soils were excavated with a 1.5m wide toothless ditching bucket except where excessive depths were encountered. In the absence of working space a slot was cut through the centre of the deep trenches with a 0.60m wide bucket to reveal the top of the natural geology. Some hand digging around services was required and the bases and sides of trenches were cleaned by hand.

A complete photographic record of each stage of the work was made and written records were kept on pro-forma Northamptonshire Archaeology sheets. Plans of the excavated trenches were made at a scale of 1:50 and spot heights taken and related to the Ordnance Datum.

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Trench 1

Trench 1, measuring 15m by 1.6m, was 'L' shaped and located in the centre of the existing car park area (Figs 2 and 3, Plate 1). A clean reddish brown clay alluvium (112) was present at a depth of *c* 1.25m below the modern ground surface (52.59m OD) (Fig 4, Section 1). A mechanically excavated sondage in the southern end of the trench showed this deposit to be undisturbed natural geology, more than 0.5m thick. No buried soil or subsoil was present.

Cut into the natural geology towards the northern end of the trench were two narrow linear gullies were aligned roughly east-west [114], [116]. They measured up to 0.54m wide and 0.2m deep and were filled with a blue grey clay (Fig 4, Sections 4 and 5). Sherds of 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery were present in the fill of one of the gullies (115). Towards the southern end of the trench a circular depression in the alluvium [118] with a diameter of 0.9m and a depth of 0.09m was also filled with blue grey clay flecked with charcoal (117). No dating evidence was retrieved from this feature.

Between these features, in the centre of the trench, a tongue of concrete protruding from its western edge overlay a hard packed conglomeration of stone and concrete. The mechanical digger was unable to remove these obstacles which were thought to cap a void of some description, perhaps a well. As a result of this the top of the alluvium was not observed in the centre of the trench.

Away from this intrusion a 0.5m thick layer of light green grey clay (111) overlay the alluvium. This in turn was overlain by a succession of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century construction, surface and demolition layers which are summarised in Appendix 1.

A tubular steel conduit was aligned roughly east-west to the immediate north of the concrete cap.

### 4.2 Trench 2

Trench 2, measuring 13.5m by 1.6m, was aligned roughly east-west to the north of the area of modern soft landscaping fronting Painter Street (Figs 2 and 3, Plate 2). The underlying natural geology, a yellow brown gravelly clay (211), was revealed *c* 2m below the surface (*c* 52m OD), in a 0.6m slot dug along the centre of the trench (Fig 4, Section 7). A wider exposure of the natural geology was not possible due the restricted space offered by services aligned parallel with either side of the trench.

Cutting the natural geology in the centre of the trench was an irregularly shaped pit, some 1.75m wide and 0.20m deep [212]. It was filled with a mid greyish brown clay loam mottled with a bluish veining and fine root systems (213). No dating evidence or indication of deliberate construction was found. The feature was probably an ancient tree bole.

Overlying both this and the natural geology was a light yellow brown subsoil (210) measuring *c* 0.40m thick. A single flint blade of probable early Neolithic date (Andy Chapman, pers comm) was found in this deposit at the western end of the trench. Overlying the subsoil was a layer of buried topsoil (209), a mid grey brown clay loam, also *c* 0.40m thick.

A succession of thin layers overlying the topsoil probably related to the construction of the terraced 19<sup>th</sup> century housing along the southern side of Painter Street. These layers were overlain by a 0.15m thick layer of clinker, ash, fragmented bricks and mortar (204) which formed a hardcore level for a broken-up brick floor (203). This floor level was *c* 0.7m below the surface of the modern soft landscaping (*c* 53.3m OD) and capped with a 0.40m thick deposit of imported olive brown clay (202) which lay directly below the modern topsoil for the garden (201).

Two ceramic pipes and a tubular steel conduit crossed the trench north to south and another tubular steel conduit was aligned along the northern edge of the trench.

#### 4.3 Trench 3

Trench 2, measuring 10m by up to 3m, was an irregularly shaped trench located close to the southern edge of the area of modern soft landscaping fronting Belgrave Gate (Figs 2 and 3, Plate 3). The area available for full excavation was restricted by the presence of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century services including a brick barrel vaulted sewer or culvert, a ceramic sewerage pipe and four tubular steel conduits. As a result, the natural geology was only observed in a strip measuring 5.50m x 0.70m wide dug along the edge of the access road to the south of the modern soft landscaped area.

In the base of this strip the natural geology, a yellow brown gravelly clay (315), was observed at a depth of 1.55m below the modern ground surface (*c* 52.35m OD) (Fig 4, Section 2). To the south this was cut by a linear gully [319], aligned east-west and filled with a blue grey clay (314) (Fig 4, Section 3). This was most probably a continuation of one of the linear features observed in Trench 1.

Along the northern edge of the strip was the cut of the foundation trench for the large brick sewer/culvert [318]. An excavated section revealed the southern side of the sewer/culvert



which was evidently aligned west north-west to east south-east, in excess of 2m wide and only 1.24m below the surface of the modern soft landscaping at its highest point (c 52.6m OD) (Plate 3).

Overlying the natural geology was a succession of layers similar in character to those observed in Trench 1. They are summarised in Appendix 1.

#### **4.4 Trench 4**

An additional trench was excavated to compensate for the diminished area covered by Trenches 1-3. Trench 4, measuring 9.5m by up to 2.10m, was located c 6.5m to the south of Trench 1 and aligned roughly east-west (Figs 2 and 3, Plate 4). A combination of unmapped services and depth resulted in the need to excavate a 0.60m wide slot along the centre of the trench in order to reach the underlying natural geology. The natural geology, a yellow brown gravelly clay (412), was located c 2.15m below the ground surface (c 52.30m OD) (Fig 4, Section 6). It was overlain by c 0.35m of light yellow brown subsoil (411) and a layer of mid grey brown clay loam topsoil (410) also measuring c 0.35m thick.

Neither the underlying geology, subsoil or topsoil contained any archaeological features. These layers sealed by a of mid grey brown silty clay (409) which may have been imported to level the ground in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, roughly corresponding with the construction of a square or rectangular brick-built structure or building of 19<sup>th</sup> century date [407] (Plate 5). Abutting the western side of this structure were the remains of a broken-up brick surface (408) similar to that observed in Trench 2. This lay 0.9m below the ground surface at c 53.60m OD, some 0.75m above the level of the floor surface within the structure. Overlying the brickwork was a 0.65m thick deposit of imported clay (403) and the modern topsoil (402). All brickwork was of regular handmade red bricks, bound with a lime mortar.

A cable trench and a tubular steel conduit crossed the trench at its western end and a foul water service was aligned east-west along its northern edge.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

The single early Neolithic flint blade could be a chance loss or have been deposited by alluvial action.

With the exception of the flint no archaeological features demonstrably pre-dating the 19<sup>th</sup> century were identified. Excepting for sunken features, the surviving 19<sup>th</sup> century features had been significantly impacted by previous phases of demolition, landscaping and construction of college car-parking. The 19<sup>th</sup> century structures were generally found to be constructed over contemporary made-up ground which sealed the natural topsoil and subsoil beneath. The only identifiable structure noted was the disturbed foundations of a row of mid 19<sup>th</sup> century terraced dwellings on the south side of Painter Street. The square or rectangular brick building with a sunken floor, located in the eastern end of Trench 4, cannot be securely dated or identified from published mapping. Its position corresponds with outbuildings located to the rear of properties fronting Painter Street and Belgrave Gate as shown on the 1887 25" Ordnance Survey map (Jacobs Babbie, Fig 6.3).

The original top and subsoil appear to have been removed in areas to the south and west, where Trenches 1 and 3 revealed 19<sup>th</sup> century features and deposits lying directly over the natural geology. The only convincing cut features were shallow linear depressions/gullies cutting into the natural geology in Trenches 1 and 3, aligned north-west to south-east. These could not be dated although their fills contained 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Jacobs Babbie, 2005 *Desk Based-Assessment*

RPS, 2006 Written scheme of investigation (WSI) for a programme of archaeological evaluation at Abbey Park Campus, Leicester College, Belgrave Gate, Leicester (NGR 459110 305500), RPS Planning, Transport and Environment

### **Websites**

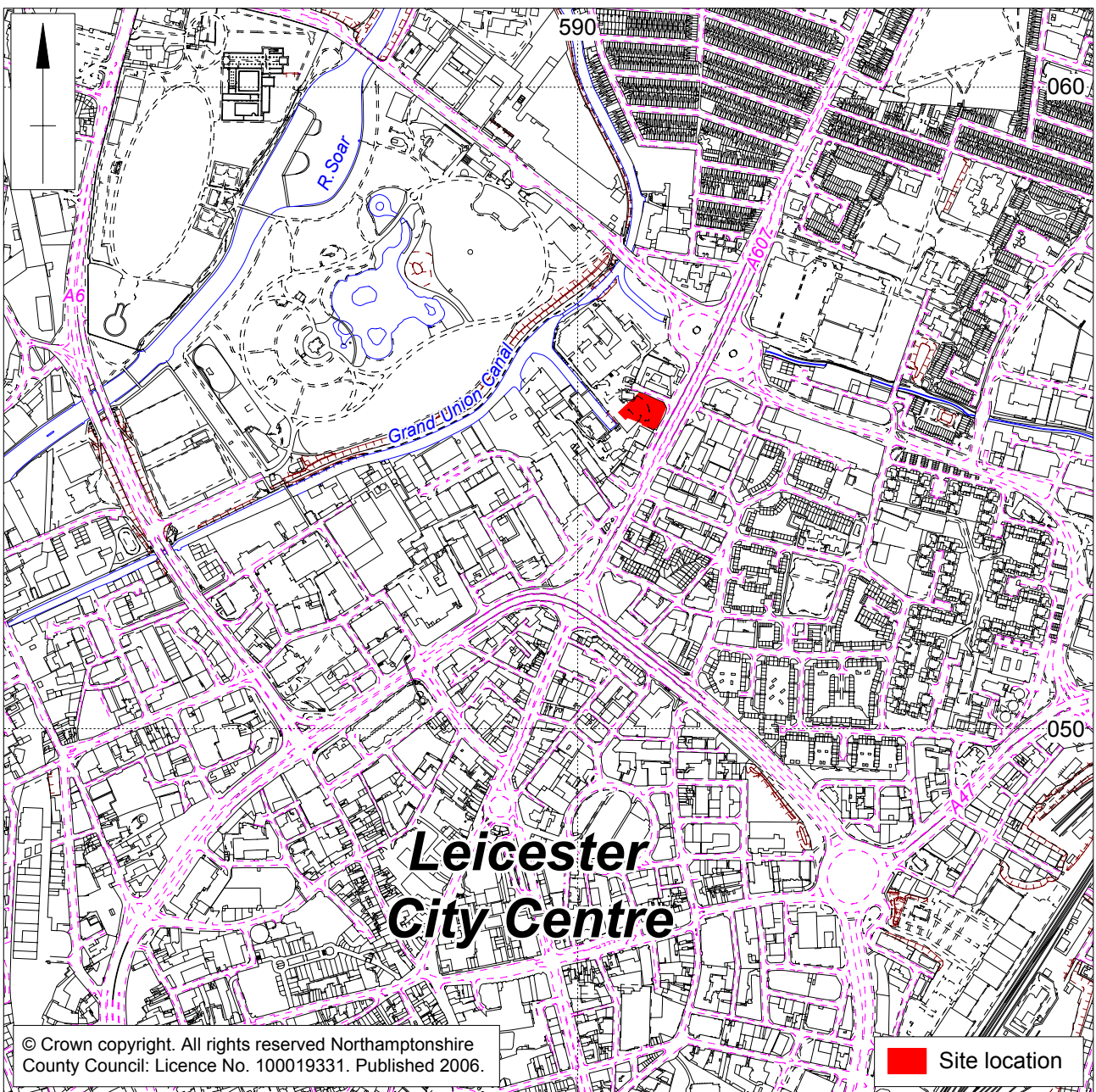
British Geological Survey [www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex](http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex)

## APPENDIX 1

Table 1: Contexts by trench

Trench	Context Number	Description	Figure/Plate
1	101	Car park surface	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 1
	102	Hardcore layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 1
	103	Hardcore layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 1
	104	Hardcore layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 1
	105	Rubble layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 1
	106	Sand and rubble layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 1
	107	Demolition layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 1
	108	Sand and rubble layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 1
	109	Yard surface	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 1
	110	Hardcore layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 1
	111	Clay layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 1
	112	Natural	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 1
	113	Fill of 114	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 4
	114	Gully	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 4
	115	Fill of 116	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 5
	116	Gully	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 5
	117	Fill of 118	Fig 3
	118	Circular depression	Fig 3
2	201	Topsoil	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 7
	202	Imported clay	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 7
	203	Remnant of brick surface	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 7
	204	Hardcore layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 7
	205	Clay layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 7
	206	Loam layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 7
	207	Sand/clay layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 7
	208	Loam levelling? layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 7
	209	Buried topsoil	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 7
	210	Subsoil	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 7
	211	Natural	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 7
	212	Tree bole	Fig 3
	213	Material filling 212	Fig 3
3	301	Topsoil	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 2
	302	Hardcore layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 2
	303	Hardcore layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 2
	304	Stone layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 2
	305	Stone layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 2
	306	Rubble layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 2
	307	Yard surface as 109?	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 2
	308	Hardcore layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 2
	309	Stone layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 2
	310	Rubble layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 2

	311	Stone layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 2
	312	Sand layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 2
	313	Stone layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 2
	314	Fill of 319	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 3
	315	Natural	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 3
	316	Brick culvert	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 3; Plate 3
	317	Fill of 318	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 3
	318	Trench for culvert	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 3
	319	Gully	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 3
4	401	Turf	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 6
	402	Topsoil	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 6
	403	Imported clay	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 6
	404	Demolition layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 6
	405	Demolition layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 6
	406	Demolition layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 6
	407	Structure	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 6; Plate 5
	408	Remnant of brick surface	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 6
	409	Loam levelling? layer	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 6
	410	Buried topsoil	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 6
	411	Subsoil	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 6
	412	Natural	Fig 3 and Fig 4, Section 6



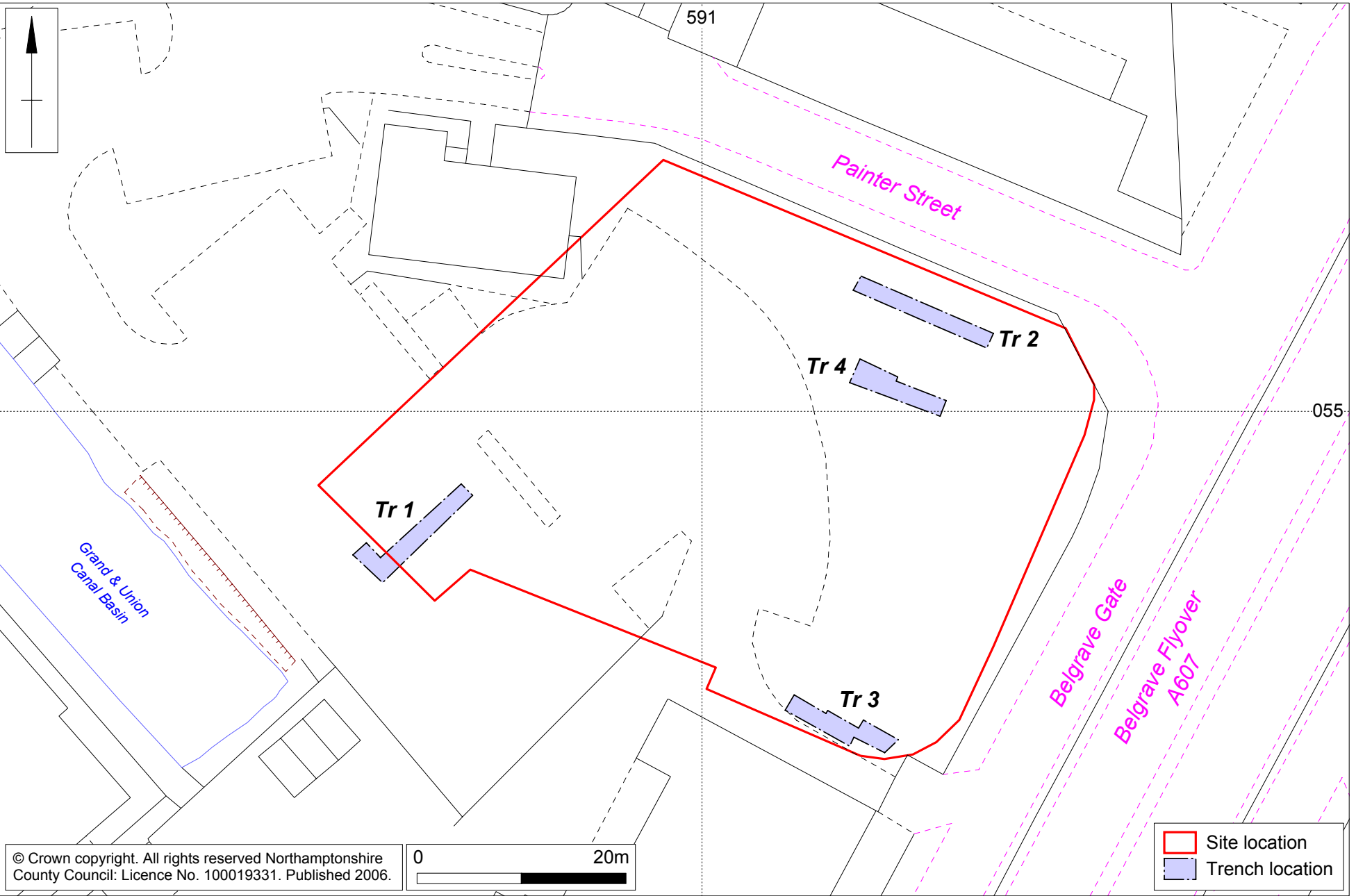
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Site location Fig 1

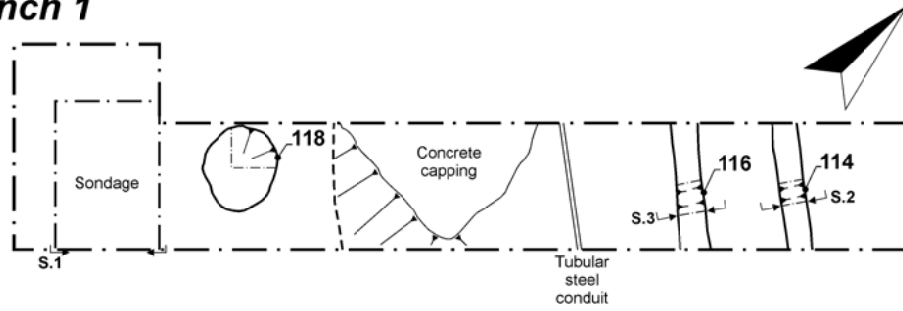
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Trench location

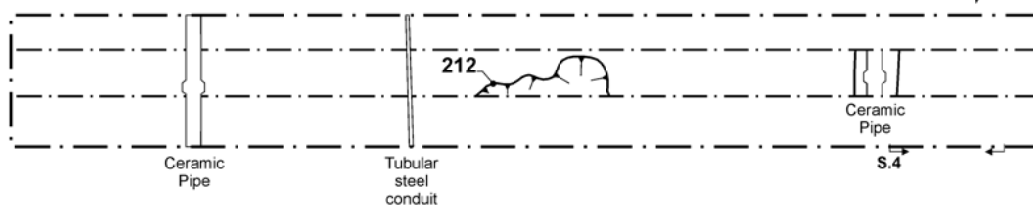
Fig 2



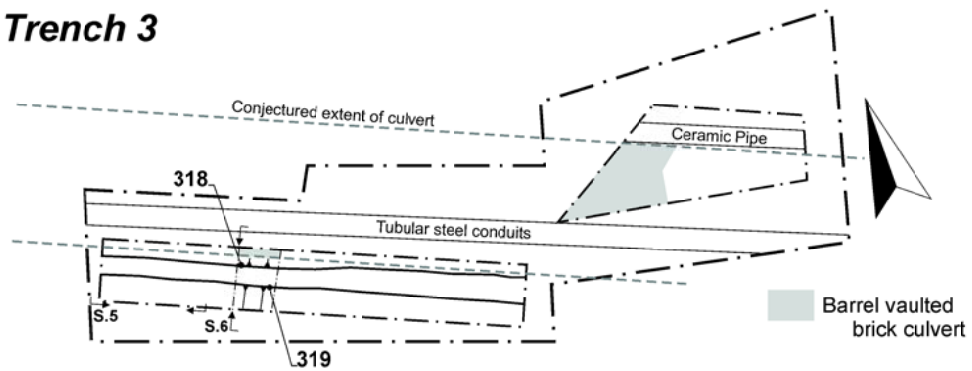
### Trench 1



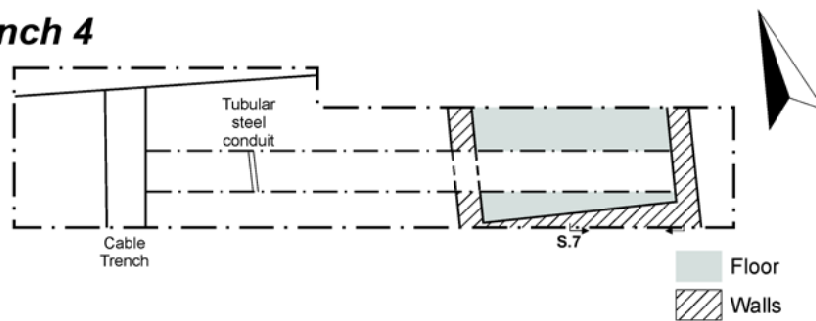
### Trench 2



### Trench 3



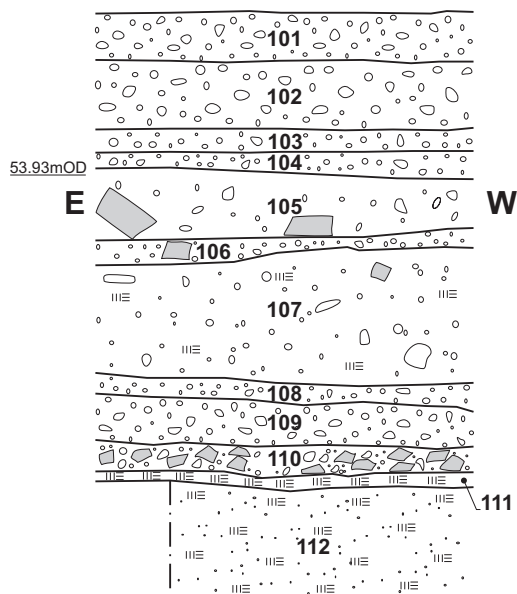
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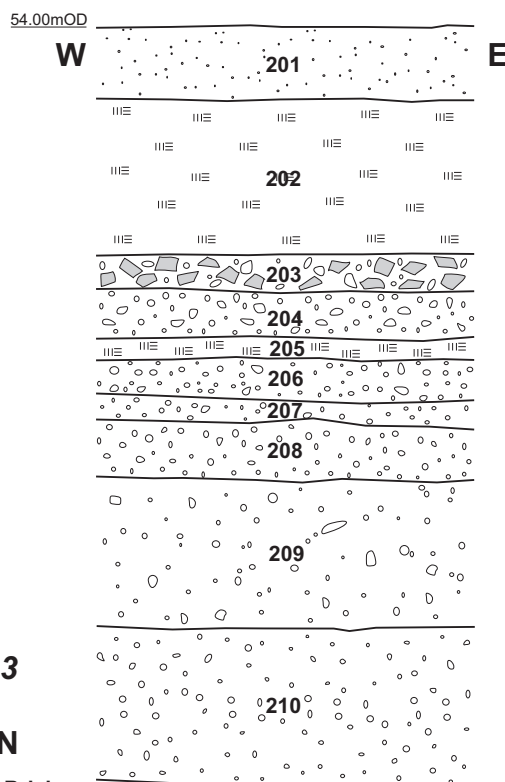
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Trench plans Fig 3

### Section 1 - Trench 1



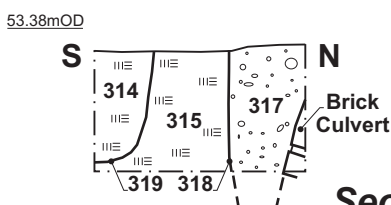
### Section 7 - Trench 2



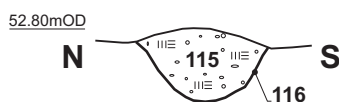
### Section 4 - Trench 1



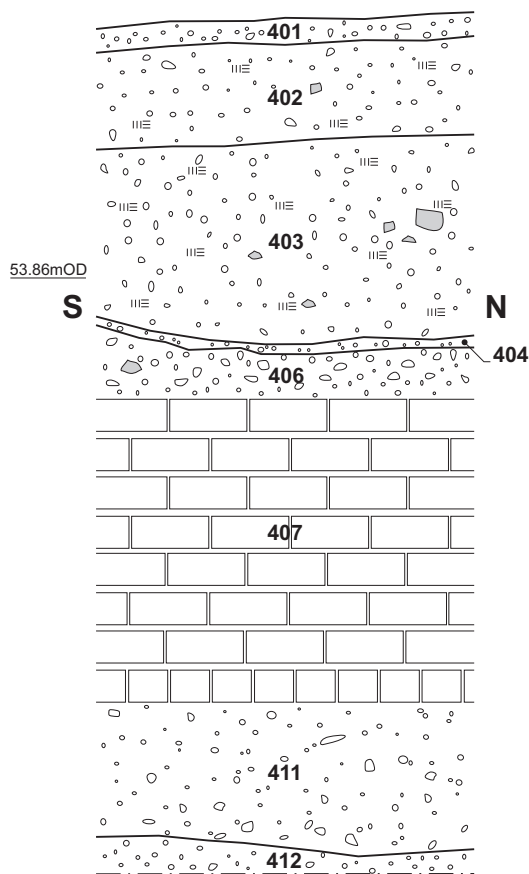
### Section 3 - Trench 3



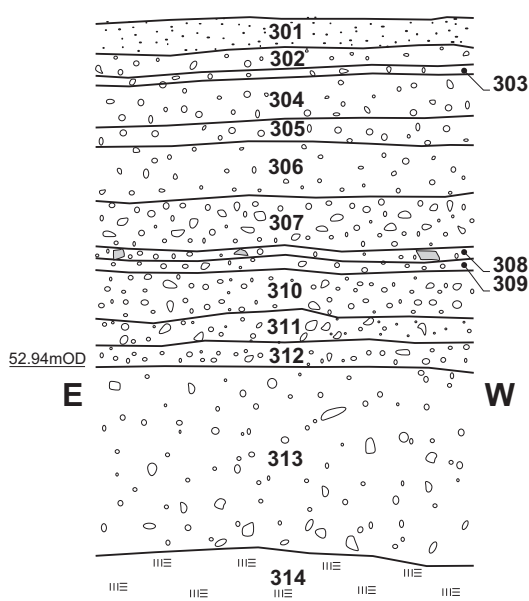
### Section 5 - Trench 1



### Section 6 - Trench 4



### Section 2 - Trench 3



Sections Fig 4





Plate 1: Trench 1



Plate 2: Trench 2



Plate 3: Trench 3 showing barrel vaulted culvert/sewer



Plate 4: Trench 4



Plate 5: Brick structure (Trench 4)