
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS
AT THE CHURCH OF
ST MARY DE CASTRO
LEICESTER,
LEICESTERSHIRE
(LSMC17)**

Work Undertaken For
EB McEvedy
Historic Building Consultants
On behalf of
The PCC to the Church of St Mary de Castro

Report Compiled by
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National Grid Reference: SK 5828 0418
Leicestershire Museums Accession Number:
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APS Report No: **66/17**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
PROJECT
SERVICES**



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1. SUMMARY

A scheme of archaeological work was required during investigatory works at the church of St Mary de Castro, Leicester.

The site is archaeologically sensitive, lying within the Scheduled Monument of Leicester Castle, a motte and bailey castle dating to the 11th century. The collegiate church of St Mary de Castro dates to c. 1107, though the standing fabric is mostly of 13th and 14th century date with alterations and restorations of 15th and 19th century dates. The church is also a Grade I Listed Building.

The investigation involved the excavation and recording of three trial pits, although one had to be abandoned due to a brick structure, possibly a crypt. The sequence of deposits was broadly similar in the remaining trial pits, comprising former floors and levelling deposits. The sequence in one pit was extended to include the floor make-up for the current concrete slabs of the north aisle. No deposits were identified that could be definitely related to the scheduled castle or to the early construction of St Mary de Castro.

No finds were retrieved during the investigation, although fragments of 19th century tile were observed in a levelling layer.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Planning Background

Trial pit excavations were to be undertaken in advance of the installation of new lavatories at the west end of the north aisle of the church. This required the excavation of trial pits at key locations to ascertain the nature of archaeological deposits, their likely disturbance and to inform the specification for the works. As

the church lies within a Scheduled Monument, consent was applied for and granted by the Secretary for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Archaeological Project Services was commissioned by EB McEvedy Historic Building Consultants to undertake this work which was carried out on the 9th November 2017, in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by Archaeological Project Services and agreed with Historic England.

2.2 Topography and Geology

The church of St Mary de Castro is located 330m southwest of the centre of Leicester as defined by the Cathedral church of St Martin. The church lies within a bend of Castle View at National Grid Reference SK 5828 0418.

The church lies at a height of c. 61m OD on land that slopes down to the west, towards the River Soar.

Local soils have not been mapped as they lie within an urban area. The church overlies a solid geology of Branscombe Mudstone Formation of the Triassic Mercia Mudstone Group (BGS 2007).

2.3 Archaeological Setting

The church of St Mary de Castro was founded in the first decade of the 12th century by the first Earl of Leicester. Its initial foundation was as a collegiate church annexed to Leicester Castle. An earlier pre-conquest collegiate foundation is attested to, as lands were said to have been restored to the canons. Although collegiate, housing a dean and 12 canons, the church also served a parochial role, its parish lying principally within the open fields of Leicester.

The church, though founded in the early 12th century has few elements of this date visible. Mostly dating to the early 13th

century and early 14th century there are 15th century alterations with restoration in the mid-19th century by Sir George Gilbert Scott. The church is a Grade I Listed Building.

The church lies centrally within the bailey of Leicester Castle, a Scheduled Monument (No. 17127). Originating as a motte and bailey castle in the 11th century, it gradually developed as an administrative centre throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods with a succession of defences and replacement of buildings as well as the construction of the 'Newark', a defended enclosure that housed the collegiate church of St Mary of the Assumption and the Hospital of the Holy Trinity. The castle also occupies part of the Roman town and remains of this period may also be preserved.

A number of archaeological interventions have taken place within the immediate vicinity of the church of St Mary de Castro, though none are associated with the church or its graveyard. Archaeological investigations have demonstrated a complex structural sequence as evidenced by the remains of several stone walls contemporary with the castle. These walls may relate to buildings, though some define enclosures within the bailey, including the southern boundary wall of the churchyard, which overlooks the defensive ditch. It is possible that many of the stone buildings relate to the 15th century work at the castle mentioned in documentary sources (Fox 1942-3).

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the work was to gather sufficient information for the archaeological curator to be able to formulate a policy for the management of the archaeological remains present on the site and to establish whether further

archaeological excavation was required to preserve the archaeological resource by record.

The objectives were to:

- Establish the type of archaeological activity that may be present within the site.
- Determine the likely extent of archaeological activity present within the site.
- Determine the date and function of the archaeological features present on the site.
- Determine the state of preservation of the archaeological features present on the site.
- Determine the spatial arrangement of the archaeological features present within the site
- Determine the extent to which the surrounding archaeological features extend into the application area.
- Establish the way in which the archaeological features identified fit into the pattern of occupation and land-use in the surrounding landscape.

4. METHODS

The investigations comprised three small hand excavated trial pits, the second being abandoned when solid brickwork was encountered.

Each deposit exposed during the evaluation was allocated a unique reference number (context number) with

an individual written description. A list of all contexts and their interpretations appears as Appendix 1. A photographic record was also compiled and sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10. Recording of deposits encountered was undertaken according to standard Archaeological Project Services practice.

Following excavation the records were also checked and a stratigraphic matrix produced.

5. RESULTS

The results of the archaeological investigations are discussed in trial pit order. Archaeological contexts are described below. The numbers in brackets are the context numbers assigned in the field.

Trial Pit 1 (Fig 4; Fig 5, Section 1; Plate 3)

Trial Pit 1, located in the north aisle, was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.45m. The earliest deposit encountered was a layer of compacted brown earth (110), measuring at least 55mm thick.

This was overlain by a 30mm thick hard off-white mortar layer (109), perhaps a former floor or a sub-base for a tile floor which has since been removed. This was in turn sealed by a layer of mid brown silty sand (108) which was interpreted as either a rammed earth surface or levelling deposit. Above this was a further episode of levelling in the form of a 0.13m thick layer of loose rubble, incorporating tile, slate, stone and bones (107).

Cut into the levelling deposit (107) was an irregular feature (106) of uncertain function. This had a visible extent of 0.25m by 0.25m and was over 0.32m deep. A single fill of loose stone rubble,

concrete and tile fragments (105) was recorded.

Sealing this pit was a tile floor (104) constructed from square (120mm x 40mm) tiles which were only encountered along the southern side of the trial pit.

Overlying the tile floor were make-up layers of yellow mortar (103) and grey cement (102) for the current concrete slab floor.

Trial Pit 2 (Fig 4; Plate 4)

This pit, located between pews, was soon abandoned due to a solid brick structure, perhaps one side of a brick lined crypt.

Trial Pit 3 (Fig 4; Fig 5, Section 2; Plate 5)

This pit was also excavated between the pews as a replacement for Trial pit 2. The earliest deposit encountered was a layer of near white mortar (303), either a mortar floor or floor sub-base.

This was overlain by a 0.14m thick layer of mid brown silty sand (302), either a rammed earth floor or levelling deposit which was sealed by a loose rubble layer (301) comprising brick and stone fragments.

There was a void of some 0.15m above the rubble layer over which was the wooden pew platform.

6. DISCUSSION

The investigations revealed a similar sequence of deposits recorded within both of the completed trial pits, comprising the mortar floor or sub-floor, overlain by a rammed earth layer followed by a layer of loose rubble.

Within Trial Pit 1, the sequence continues to provide the make-up for the north aisle floor, comprising an earlier brick tile floor and the modern concrete slab. Also revealed within this pit was an earlier brown earth layer, which may potentially pre-date the church, though no dateable artefacts were retrieved from this deposit.

Also within this trench was a rubble filled cut. This could represent a grave cut although its position within the sequence could be considered too high, particularly as it cuts a layer which incorporates 19th century tile fragments.

Apart from the few tile fragments, no other finds were observed or retrieved during the investigation.

The proposed works at the church of St Mary de Castro are unlikely to impact on remains associated with the scheduled castle or the early development of the church.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Archaeological investigations were undertaken at the church of St Mary de Castro, Leicester, prior to internal improvements, as the site lay within the scheduled remains of Leicester Castle.

However, no deposits were revealed that could be assigned to the castle or the subsequent early construction of the church. Most of the deposits encountered appear to relate to current and former floor surfaces and their relevant make-up or levelling layers.

No finds were retrieved during the investigation, though 19th century tile fragments were observed.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeological Project Services wishes to acknowledge the assistance of EB McEvedy Historic Building Consultants for commissioning the fieldwork and post-excavation on behalf of the PCC to the church. A warm welcome was supplied by the parishioners who provided drinks and cakes. The work was coordinated by Paul Cope-Faulkner who also edited this report. Liz Bates kindly allowed access to the library maintained by Heritage Lincolnshire.

9. PERSONNEL

Project Coordinator: Paul Cope-Faulkner
 Site Supervisor: Mark Peachey
 Archiving: Denise Buckley
 Photographic reproduction: Mark Peachey
 Illustration: Mark Peachey
 Post-excavation Analysis: Mark Peachey

10. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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11. ABBREVIATIONS

APS Archaeological Project Services

BGS British Geological Survey

CIfA Chartered Institute for
Archaeologists

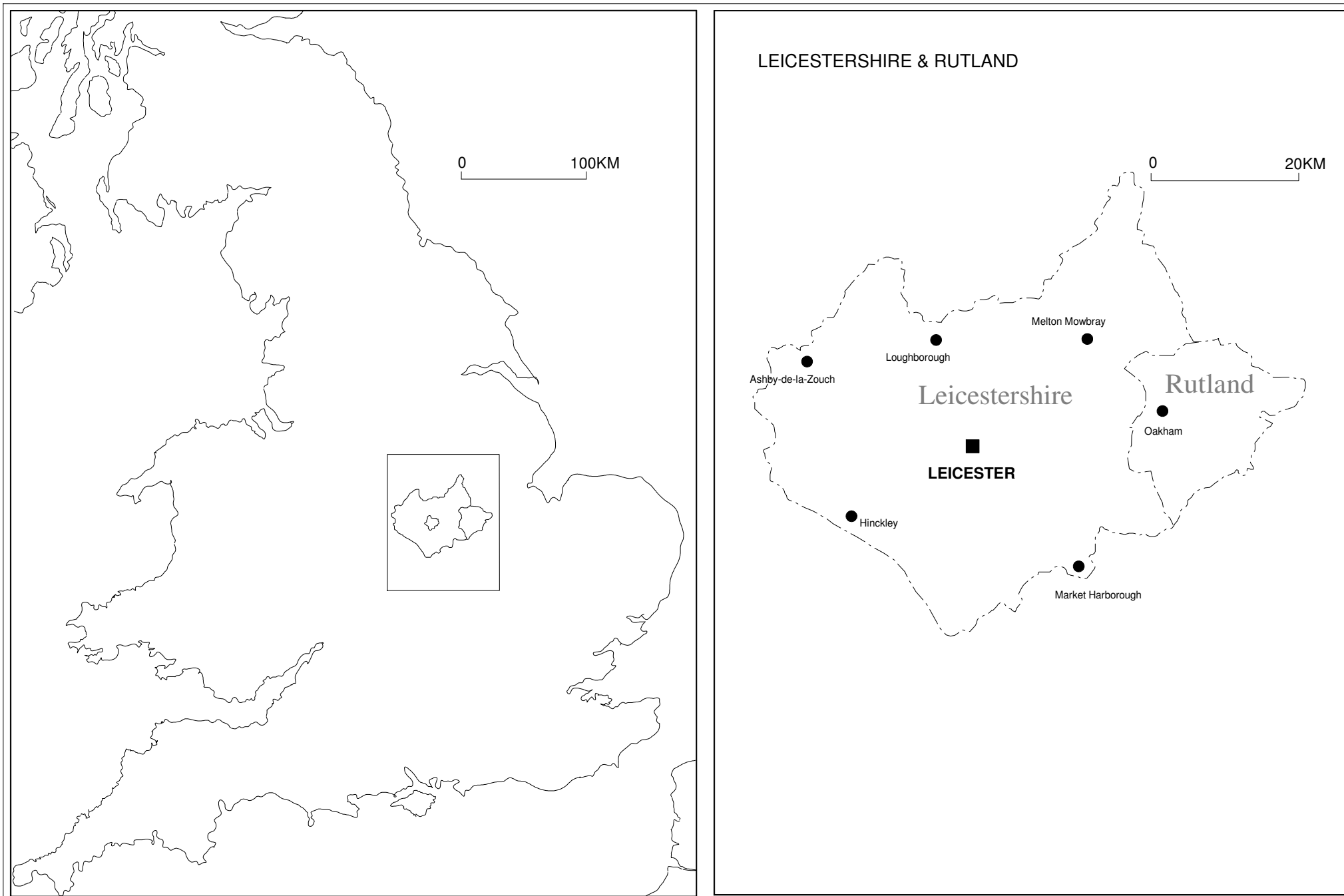
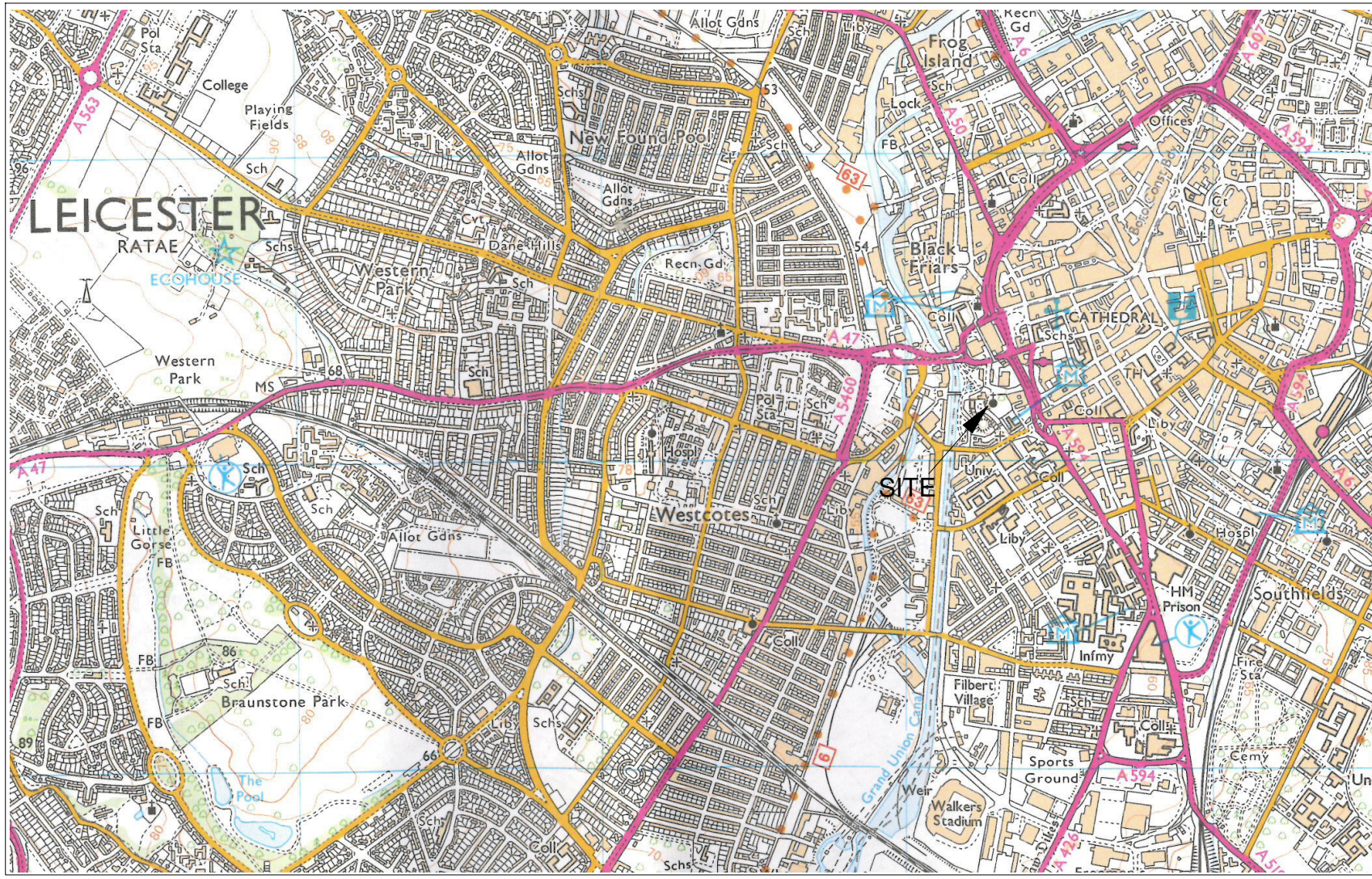


Figure 1: General location map



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58

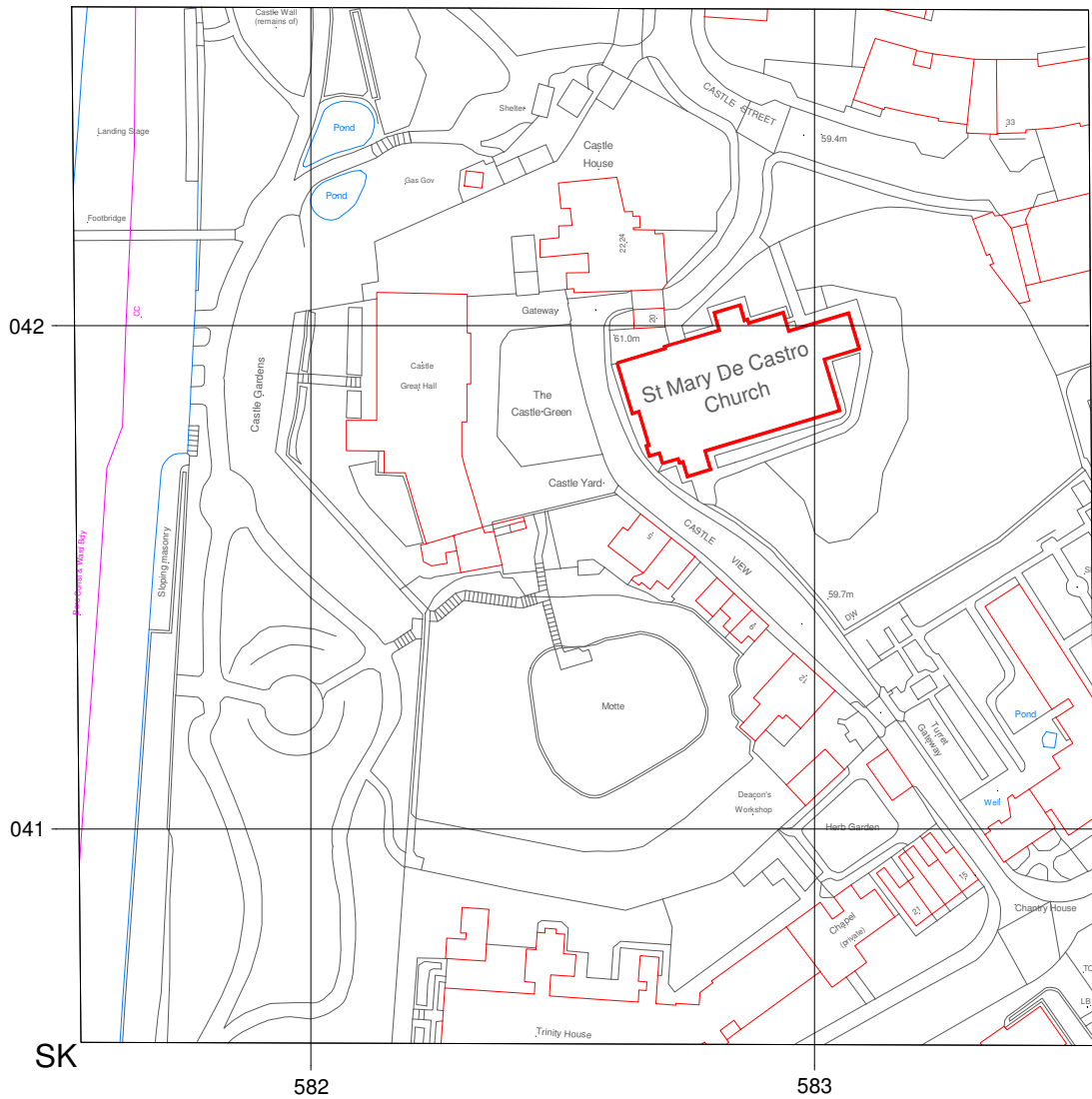
59



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ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT SERVICES		
Project Name: St Mary de Castro church, Leicester		
Scale 1: 20000	Drawn by: MJP	Report No: 66/17

Figure 2. Site location



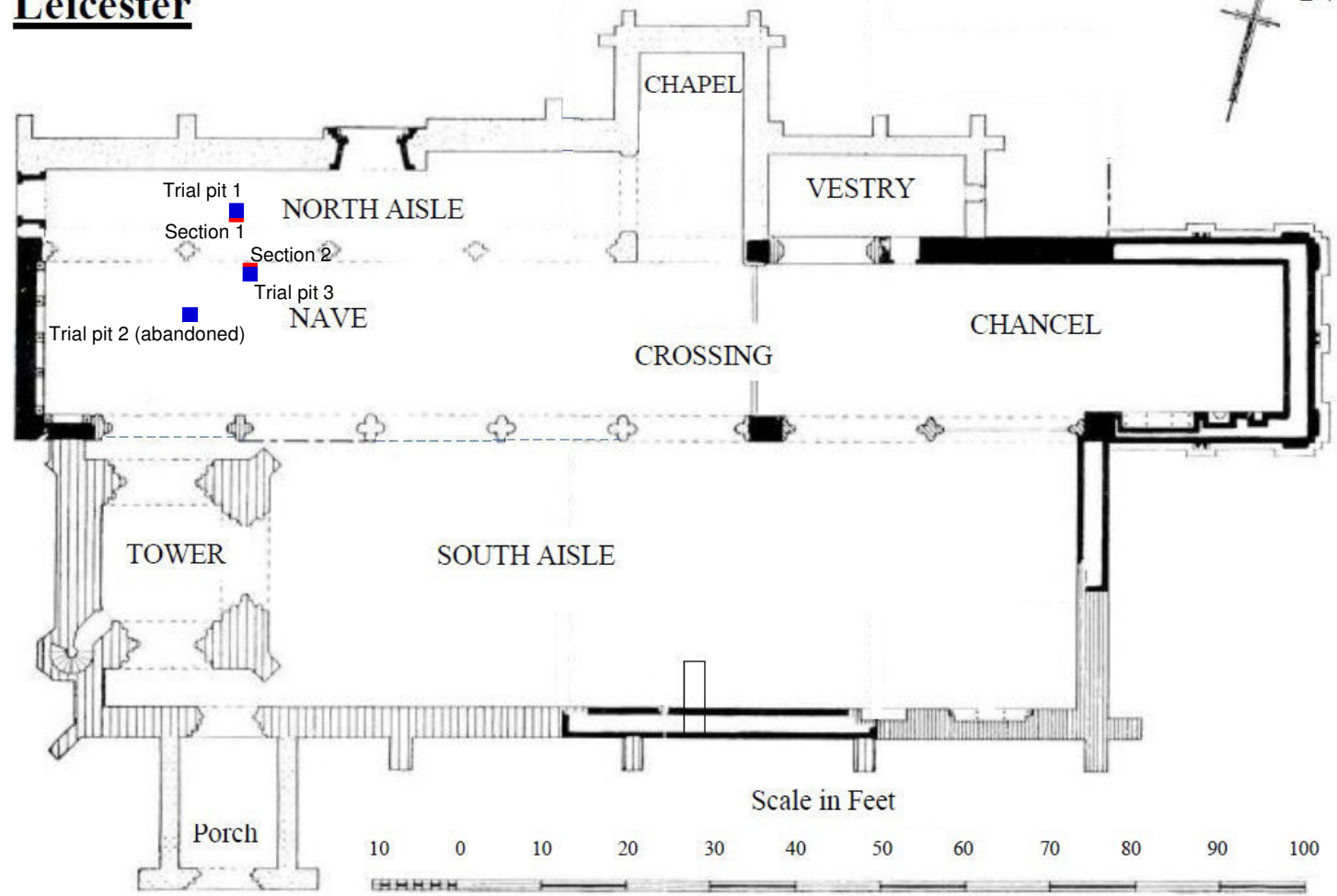
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Scale 1: 1500	Drawn by: MJP	Report No: 66/17

Figure 3. Map of immediate area

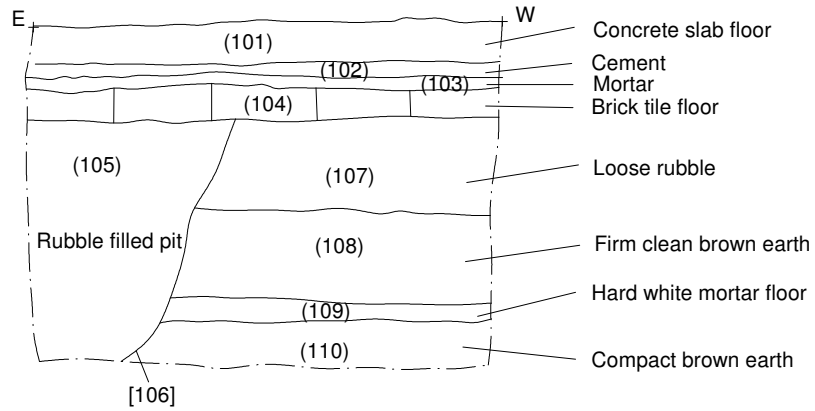
St Mary de Castro
Leicester



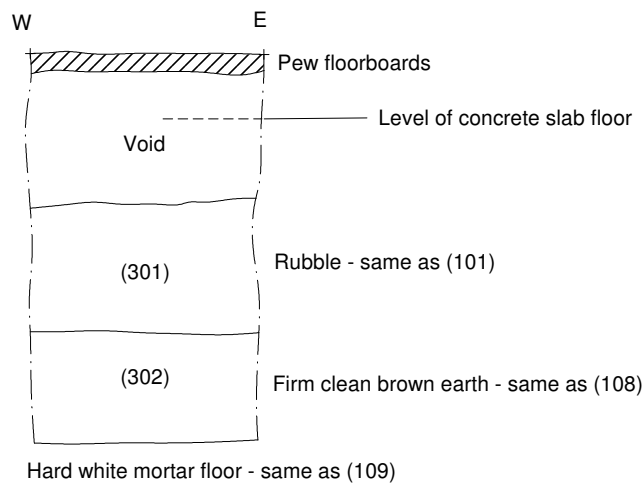
■ Approximate trial hole position (hole shown 0.5m x 0.5m)

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Fig. 4. Location of trial pits



Section 1, Trial Pit 1



Section 2, Trial Pit 3



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Scale 1:10	Drawn by: MJJ	Report No: 66/17

Figure 5. Sections



Plate 1 - Pre-excavation view, area of Trial pit 1, looking east



Plate 2 - Pre-excavation view, area of Trial pits 2 and 3, which were between pews, looking northeast



Plate 3 - Trial pit 1, Section 1, looking south



Plate 4 - Trial pit 2, abandoned due to solid brickwork, looking east



Plate 5 - Trial pit 3, Section 2, looking north

Appendix 1

CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Test Pit 1

Context	Type	Description	Interpretation
101	Deposit	Hard, grey concrete, 0.62m square, 50mm thick	Current prob late C20 floor of north aisle
102	Deposit	Hard, creamy grey cement, 20mm thick	Base for floor (101)
103	Deposit	Hard, yellow mortar, 20mm thick	Mortar adhering to top of tile floor (104)
104	Masonry	Red brick tiles, 120mm square, 40mm thick, floor, fairly modern, machine made	Remains of former tile floor in north aisle – along south side of TP1
105	Deposit	Loose, grey/cream stone, concrete/tile rubble	Fill of [106]
106	Cut	Irregular, 0.25x0.25m in plan, >0.32m deep, sharp, irregular sides, not fully excavated	Cut of rubble filled intrusion
107	Deposit	Loose, grey/reddish brown tile (C19) slate, stone rubble, loose bones, 0.13m thick, spade, dry	Loose rubble layer
108	Deposit	Firm, mid brown, clean silty sand, 0.12m thick, spade, dry	Poss rammed earth surface or levelling layer
109	Deposit	Hard, off-white mortar, 30mm thick, spade, dry	Mortar floor or perhaps a base for a removed tile floor
110	Deposit	Compacted, brown earth, >55mm thick, spade, dry	

Test Pit 3

Context	Type	Description	Interpretation
301	Deposit	Loose, grey brown, brick/stone rubble, 0.17m thick, spade, dry	Loose rubble layer
302	Deposit	Firm, mid brown, clean, silty sand, 0.14m thick, spade, dry	Poss rammed earth surface or levelling later
303	Deposit	Hard, off-white mortar, spade, dry	Poss mortar floor or base for a removed tile floor

Appendix 2

GLOSSARY

Context	An archaeological context represents a distinct archaeological event or process. For example, the action of digging a pit creates a context (the cut) as does the process of its subsequent backfill (the fill). Each context encountered during an archaeological investigation is allocated a unique number by the archaeologist and a record sheet detailing the description and interpretation of the context (the context sheet) is created and placed in the site archive. Context numbers are identified within the report text by brackets, <i>e.g.</i> [004].
Cut	A cut refers to the physical action of digging a posthole, pit, ditch, foundation trench, <i>etc.</i> Once the fills of these features are removed during an archaeological investigation the original 'cut' is therefore exposed and subsequently recorded.
Fill	Once a feature has been dug it begins to silt up (either slowly or rapidly) or it can be back-filled manually. The soil(s) that become contained by the 'cut' are referred to as its fill(s).
Layer	A layer is an accumulation of soil or other material that is not contained within a cut
Medieval	The Middle Ages, dating from approximately AD 1066-1500.
Natural	Undisturbed deposit(s) of soil or rock which have accumulated without the influence of human activity
Post-medieval	The period following the Middle Ages, dating from approximately AD 1500-1800.
Romano-British	Pertaining to the period dating from AD 43-410 when the Romans occupied Britain.

Appendix 3

THE ARCHIVE

The archive consists of:

1	Context register sheet
13	Context record sheets
1	Section record sheet
1	Photographic record sheet
1	Daily record sheet
1	Sheet of scale drawings

All primary records are currently kept at:

Archaeological Project Services
The Old School
Cameron Street
Heckington
Sleaford
Lincolnshire
NG34 9RW

The ultimate destination of the project archive is:

Leicestershire County Council Heritage Services
Room 500
County Hall
Leicester Road
Glenfield
Leicester
LE3 8TE

Museum Accession No:	X.A17.2017
Archaeological Project Services Site Code:	LSMC 17
OASIS Record No:	archaeo11-306612

The discussion and comments provided in this report are based on the archaeology revealed during the site investigations. Other archaeological finds and features may exist on the development site but away from the areas exposed during the course of this fieldwork. *Archaeological Project Services* cannot confirm that those areas unexposed are free from archaeology nor that any archaeology present there is of a similar character to that revealed during the current investigation.

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