



**Evaluation Trenches
on land east of Leicester Road
Earl Shilton, Leicestershire
10th to 12th of July 2024**

Report No. 024/074

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Illustrator: Carla Ardis



**Archaeological trial trench evaluation
on land east of Leicester Road
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Accession number: X.A52.2024

Report No. 024/074

Project Manager: Tony Walsh

Quality control and sign off:

Issue No.	Date approved:	Checked by:	Verified by:	Approved by:	Reason for Issue:
1	31/07/24	Chris Chinnock	Sara Farey	Tony Walsh	Draft for client review

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OASIS REPORT FORM

Project: Earl Shilton TT		OASIS No: molanort1-527146	
ACTIVITY TYPE			
Project/ Activity type	Evaluation Trenches		
Reason for investigation	Pre-planning		
Development type	Residential development		
Planning reference ID	-	Planning stage	
PROJECT LOCATION			
National grid ref	SP 46903 98425		
Site name	Land east of Leicester Road, Earl Shilton		
REVIEWERS/ ADMIN			
HER for project	Leicestershire		
National organisation	Historic England		
WORK UNDERTAKEN			
Methodological summary	In July 2024, archaeological trial trench evaluation took place on land east of Leicester Road, Earl Shilton, Leicestershire to confirm the results of a prior geophysical survey, specifically a possible medieval or post-medieval recti-linear enclosure. The nine evaluation trenches, totalling 3% of the proposed development.		
Previous works?	Archaeological Impact Assessment (Crothers 2024); Geophysical survey (Emery 2024)	Future works?	Not known
Dates - Start date:	10/07/24	End date:	12/07/2024
Scientific dating done?	No	Type:	N/A
Enviro sampling done?	No		
BIBLIOGRAPHY			
Title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation on land east of Leicester Road, Earl Shilton, Leicestershire		
Author(s)	Alex Shipley		
Date of publication	2024		
Publisher	MOLA		
Place of publication	Northampton		
Report number	24/074		
Report release delay?	No		
PEOPLE			
Organisation	MOLA		
Project manager	Tony Walsh		
supervisor	Alex Shipley		
Funding body	Manor Oak Homes Ltd		
KEYWORDS			
Monuments found/ date	Medieval ridge and furrow, ditch		
Finds types found/ date	None		
RESULTS			
Description of outcomes/ summary of research framework contribution	Evaluation of the proposed development area, did not locate the targeted geophysical anomaly but did identify medieval ridge and furrow, a post-medieval or early modern stone drain and modern dumping alongside an undated boundary ditch, likely associated with ridge and furrow cultivation.		
ARCHIVES			
Accession ID	X.A52.2024		
Documentary Archive repository	Leicestershire County Council Museums	Expected date of submission:	N/A
Digital Archive repository	Archaeology Data Service	Expected date of submission:	N/A

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Archaeological trial trench evaluation on land east of Leicester Road, Earl Shilton, Leicestershire, 10th to the 12th of July 2024

ABSTRACT

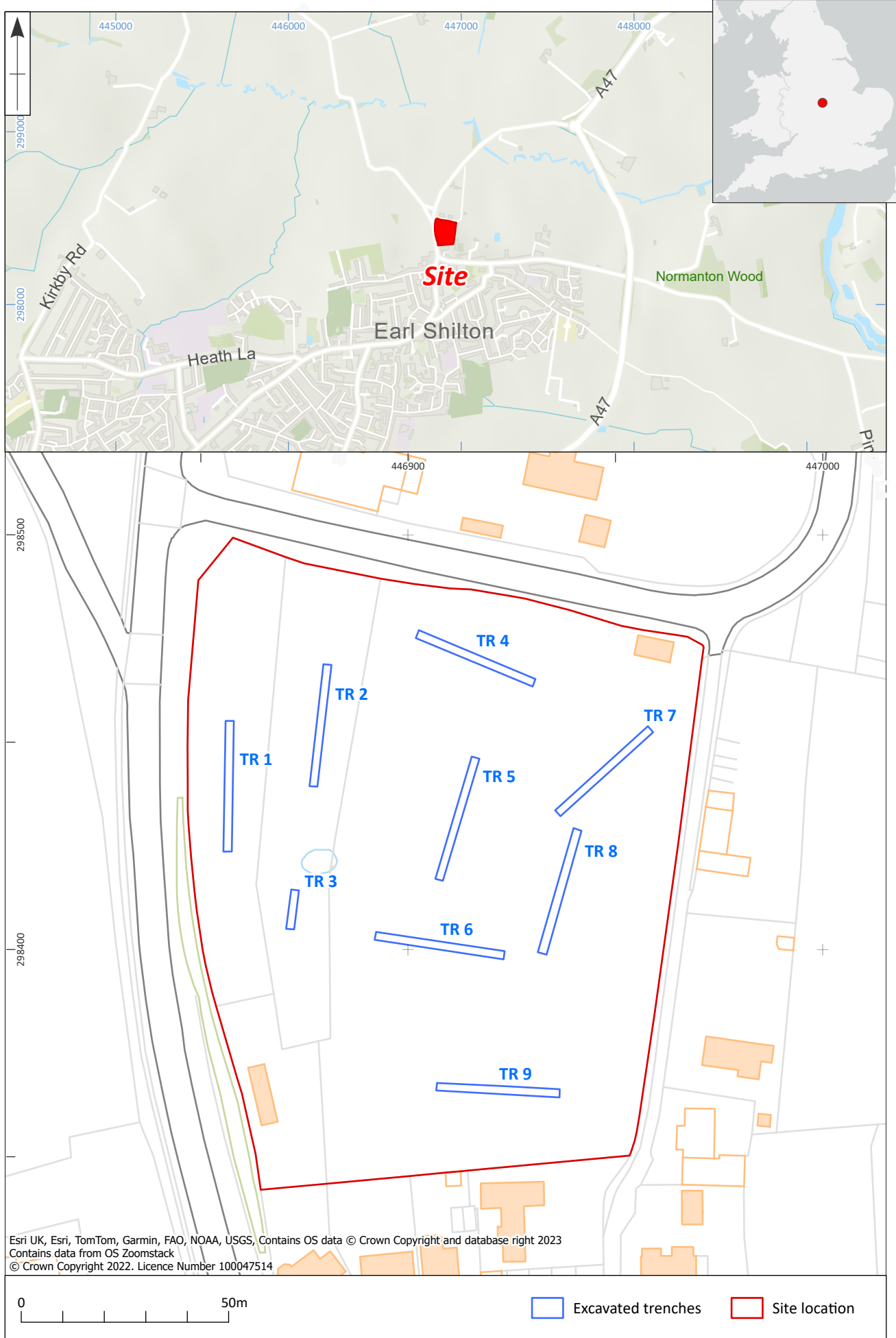
In July 2024, archaeological evaluation took place on land east of Leicester Road, Earl Shilton, Leicestershire to confirm the results of a prior geophysical survey, specifically a possible medieval or post-medieval recti-linear enclosure. The evaluation of the proposed development area, did not locate the targeted geophysical anomaly but did identify medieval ridge and furrow, a post-medieval or early modern stone drain and modern dumping alongside an undated boundary ditch, likely associated with ridge and furrow cultivation.

1 INTRODUCTION

Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) was commissioned by Manor Oak Homes to undertake an archaeological trial trench evaluation on land east of Leicester Road, Earl Shilton, Leicestershire, SP 46903 98425 (Fig 1). The evaluation works were carried out prior to proposed new development on the north side of the town.

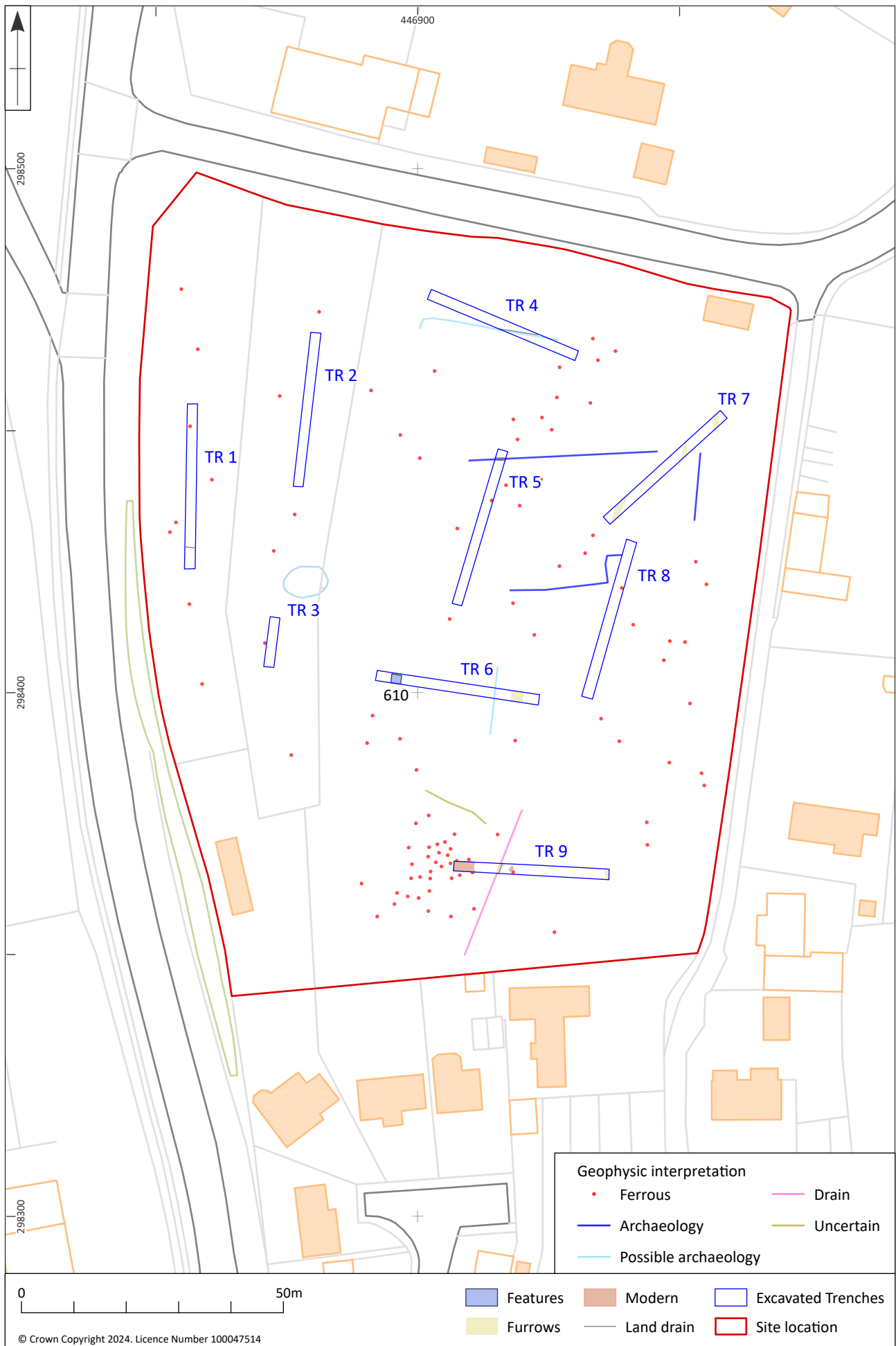
The archaeological evaluation was undertaken to establish the presence/absence, character, date, state of preservation and significance of the proposed development area's archaeological resource, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (DLUHC 2023). The methodology employed by MOLA Northampton was in accordance with the brief prepared by William Kelly, Senior Planning Archaeologist (Heritage) at Leicestershire County Council, Historic & Natural Environment Team and adhered to the Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by MOLA Northampton (MOLA 2024).

This document has been prepared in compliance with current best archaeological practice as defined in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2022), *Universal guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2023a) and Standard for archaeological field evaluation (CIfA 2023b), as well as the Historic England procedural document *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE) (HE 2015a).



Scale 1:1,250

Site location Fig 1



2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location, geology and topography

The site comprises a single field adjacent to the east of Leicester Road on the north side of Earl Shilton, Leicestershire, between the built-up areas of the town and the open countryside (Fig 1). The field was subdivided into four plots, one of which contains stabling for donkeys. A field barn lies at the north-east corner of the site (Fig 1). The site is bounded by Leicester Road and open fields beyond to the west, for which planning applications for c190 dwellings have been approved. The site is bounded to the north by an unnamed road with small commercial premises on the north side. Spring Gardens lies adjacent to the east with a builders' yard, housing, and small open fields beyond and Clearview Crescent lies adjacent to the south.

The evaluation trenches confirmed the detail provided by the British Geological Survey that indicate that the solid geology of the site comprises Gunthorpe Member (BGS 2024). The overlying soils of the site are slightly acid loams and clays with impeded drainage (CSAI 2024).

The northern end of the site gently slopes to the north before dropping sharply to the unnamed road and rises sharply to the south-west towards the crest of the hill and lies between 98m and 112m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) (FMT 2024).

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

A full and illustrated summary of the historic background is presented within the Archaeological Impact Assessment for the site in Crothers (2024).

The site has been subject to recent archaeological investigations, comprised of:

- An archaeological Impact Assessment by MOLA (Crothers 2024)
- A geophysical survey by MOLA (Emery 2024)
- And a Heritage Statement by Asset Heritage Consulting (AHC 2024)

Combined with archaeological works carried out in the near vicinity of the site, the above reports identified the potential for the survival of archaeological remains within the site and the impact of the proposals upon the local heritage resource. The following is a summary of the most relevant evidence drawn from the above documents.

Prehistoric

Land surrounding the site has been exploited during prehistoric periods although no settlement evidence has been found.

A Neolithic macehead and a polished axe were found c720m to the north-west and 700m to the south-east of the site respectively. A small quantity of unstratified prehistoric worked flint was recovered from land close to the site on the west side of Leicester Road but very little material from the period has been found locally.

A Bronze Age cremation was found 700m to the south of the site and a possible pit was found c240m to the west but no further material is known from nearby.

An early Iron Age settlement lies c900m to the south-east of the site, represented by an enclosure, a droveway a possible field system and a boundary ditch. Although undated, a double pit alignment lies c720m to the north of the site. The evidence suggests that although the landscape around Earl Shilton was certainly exploited and controlled during the period, there is no direct evidence that the site or the area around it was occupied at this time.

Roman to early medieval

Roman presence in the area is indicated by groups of finds recovered during watching briefs and metal detecting surveys. No settlement evidence, occupation or activity has been identified from within 1km of the site.

No early medieval remains have been recorded from the locality but Earl Shilton is recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as a relatively large village, which is therefore likely to have been in existence for some time previously and may have Saxon origins.

The site lies within the northern limits of the defined medieval historic settlement core of Earl Shilton and c150m to the north-west of Earl Shilton Castle. However, there is little physical evidence to suggest that the site was inhabited at this time and the medieval settlement boundary may not be definitive. The site contains ridge and furrow throughout, which demonstrates that it lay on the northern hillslopes within the surrounding agricultural land on the periphery of the village. Ridge and furrow has been identified in many areas outside the historic core of Earl Shilton, encircling the medieval settlement in a typical nature. A possible medieval building lies c280m to the west of the site and to the south of areas of surviving ridge and furrow, therefore perhaps within the medieval settlement, although it lies outside the assumed boundary. An irregular rectilinear enclosure was identified within the eastern field of the site during the recent geophysical survey (Emery 2024). Although the feature is undated, its morphology would suggest a medieval date. However, it is likely to pre-date the medieval ridge and furrow.

Post-medieval field boundaries are present within the landscape to the north of Earl Shilton, many of which are still in use. One former boundary lay within the site and is illustrated on the map of 1778 but had been removed by 1835 and is evident on aerial photographs

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the archaeological trial trench evaluation was to examine and understand the nature, function, and character of the archaeological site in its cultural and environmental setting and to preserve by record, that which will be negatively impacted by the proposed development and to inform any requirements for further mitigation.

3.1 Project aims

In order to examine the archaeological resource within the proposed development area the objectives of the investigation were to:

- Mitigate the impact of the geotechnical works by recording any archaeological remains encountered;
- To relate any remains recovered to the geophysical survey carried out on site
- Recover any artefacts that may assist in the development of type series within the region;
- Recover palaeo-environmental remains that may assist in determining the local environmental conditions
- To produce a report describing the findings in their archaeological context, and to
- Create a permanent archive and record of the archaeological information collected during the fieldwork and analysis.

3.2 Research framework

Specific research objectives were drawn from the East Midlands Historic Environment Research Framework (EMHERF 2024) and National research frameworks as appropriate depending on findings.

Prior to the evaluation the undated rectilinear enclosure discovered within the site boundary during the recent geophysical survey was thought to date from the medieval or post-medieval periods, based on its morphology. The site is also thought to lie within the defined medieval settlement of Earl Shilton. As such, there were strategic objectives within the East Midlands Research Framework that were:

- 7E: Investigate the morphology of rural settlements
- 7I: Investigate development of the open field system and woodland management

However, following the evaluation the geophysical anomalies were not located, so the specific objectives were not further researched.

4 METHODOLOGY

The evaluation comprised nine trenches (Fig 2). Eight trenches measured 30m x 1.8m and one trench measuring 10m x 1.8m were excavated to investigate 3% of development area, target the results of the geophysical survey and investigate “blank” areas. The trench locations were planned to ease the opening of the trenches on the steep slope of the terrain .

The trenches were located using a Leica Survey Grade RTK GPS operating to an accuracy of +/-0.05m to Ordnance Survey National Grid and Datum. All trenches were machine excavated using a toothless ditching bucket under continuous archaeological supervision to the level of the upper interface of geological deposits. Topsoil and subsoil were stored separately on either side of the trench, at least 1m from the trench edges.

The trenches were cleaned sufficiently to enhance the definition of archaeological remains. Features present were further investigated through means of hand excavation to determine their date and character, and were plotted on an overall plan at a scale of 1:50. All archaeological deposits, features and artefacts encountered during the course of the excavation were fully recorded following standard MOLA procedures (MOLA 2014). All archaeological features and deposits were assigned a separate context number and were described on pro-forma context sheets that included details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds. No finds were recovered during excavation. Sections and profiles through features and areas of complex stratigraphy were drawn at a scale of 1:10, with all deposit heights established relative to Ordnance Datum.

The excavated area and spoil heaps were scanned with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval.

A photographic record was maintained using high resolution uninterpolated digital photograph exceeding 12 megapixels taken using a camera with an APS-C or larger sensor. Overall shots of the site were taken prior to excavation and after backfilling. Overall shots of each trench were taken together with detailed shots of individual features and feature groups. All photographs, except general site shots, included a north arrow and graduated metric scales of appropriate lengths.

Following the approval of William Kelly, Senior Planning Archaeologist at Leicestershire County Council, the trenches were backfilled with the up-cast, lightly compacted by the mechanical excavator.

Archiving

Following completion of the fieldwork and reporting, born-digital data, such as this report, digital photographs, database and GIS data, with appropriate metadata, will be deposited with a CoreTrustSeal Repository, currently the Archaeology Data Service (ADS), making the archive publicly accessible. Each report, once approved, is subsequently made available for inclusion and publication by digital means through the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) via OASIS V. Digital archiving will follow the and guidelines outlined in MOLA's *Digital Data Management Policy and Procedures* (MOLA forthcoming).

These works were conducted under the appropriate methods and practices as set out in the WSI (MOLA 2024), and in compliance with the ClfA standard and guidance for archaeological monitoring and recording (ClfA 2023a and 2023b) and ClfA Code of Conduct (ClfA 2022) other relevant ClfA standards and guidance (ClfA 2020a and b).

5 EXCAVATION RESULTS

The evaluation confirmed the blank areas recorded in the geophysical survey and the presence of ridge and furrow (Trenches 6, 8, 9), on a north-north-west to south-south-east alignment. At the base of the north facing slope (Trench 5) a stone drain was recorded perpendicular to the slope of the hill.

5.1 General stratigraphy

The stratigraphy of the site was broadly consistent and comprised topsoil, subsoil and a red clay natural substrate. Trenches 1, 5, 6 and 8 contained deposits of colluvium. The natural substrate remained consistent and was comprised of a hard, red clay natural with occasional gravel and blue clay banding. This was overlain in the above trenches by colluvium, characterised by a firm, light red sandy silt a maximum of 0.55m thick. This underlay subsoil comprised of a soft light red-brown sandy silt 0.33m thick, overlain by a mid red-brown, soft, sandy loam topsoil 0.34m thick (Fig 3).



Stratigraphy of Trench 1, looking west Fig 3

Ridge and furrow

Remnants of ridge and furrow cultivation were present in trenches 6, 7 and 9 on a north-north-west to south-south-east alignment corroborating the results of the geophysical survey (Fig 2). The furrows were c7m apart and were between 1.05 and 1.30m wide by 0.15m deep with gently curving sides and flat bases (Fig 4). They were naturally infilled with a soft light red-brown clay silt and no dateable evidence was recorded.



Furrow [705], looking south Fig 4

Stone drain

In the northern end of Trench 5 a stone drain was recorded matching the results of the geophysical survey on a broadly east to west alignment (Fig 2). The cut for the drain was 0.52m wide by 0.30m deep with steep sides and a flattish base. The drain was built with two stones on either side and a cap stone forming a channel. The stones were on average 300mm in length, 150mm wide by 140mm thick and comprised of a hard granite (Fig 5). The channel had silted up from disuse and no dateable evidence was uncovered.



Stone drain, looking south Fig 5

Modern

A modern deposit was recorded in the western end of Trench 9 in the southernmost end of the development and was visible c14m into the trench. (Fig 2). The dumping event had removed the subsoil and topsoil, and various waste was deposited within it including rusted metal farming equipment, masonry, concrete sheeting and plastic (Fig 6).



Modern debris in Trench 9, looking west Fig 6

Undated

In Trench 6 a ditch aligned north to south was recorded in the west of the trench, perpendicular to the extant eastern boundary of the field (Fig 2). The feature was not visible in the results of the geophysical survey. Ditch [610] was 2.08m wide by 0.92m deep and cut through the subsoil, with a U shape profile and a rounded base. This was infilled by a water lain sandy clay deposit 0.40m deep (609). This was overlain by (608) a naturally infilled mid red brown silty sand 0.70m deep. This underlay (607) comprised of eroded sub and topsoil a light yellow brown sandy clay (Fig 7).



North facing profile of ditch [610], looking south Fig 7

7 DISCUSSION

The evaluation confirmed elements of the geophysical survey, such as the ridge and furrow and the disturbance found in the southern part of the site. The rectilinear enclosure in the geophysical survey was not located however the stone drain in Trench 5 aligns well with one of the linear anomalies.

The extant ditch in Trench 6 is on the same alignment as the recorded ridge and furrow and may reflect a related field arrangement. On the surface, the remains of the ditch are quite shallow and appears to be in the process of being naturally infilled. There was no evidence of an earlier boundary below the ditch or of an associated hedgerow. Historic England aerial mapping shows the ditch quite clearly and suggests that it was once a boundary in the medieval period associated with ridge and furrow agricultural practices (AAM 2024).

7.1 Research agendas

Owing to the paucity of surviving archaeological remains the research agendas cannot be directly addressed.

With regards to research objective 7.1 (Investigate development of the open field system and woodland management), gentle infilling of ditch [610] could reflect reorganisation of farmland when the furrows fell out of use. Whilst limited, the evidence for medieval agricultural practices may be considered alongside any future works in the vicinity to allow a broader discussion around the development of the medieval settlement of Earl Shilton.

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July 2024

APPENDIX 1: TRENCH INVENTORY

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height (aOD)	Depth & height of natural
1	30m x 1.8m N-S			
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
101	Topsoil	Soft, sandy loam frequent well sorted small sub angular rocks, mid red brown	0.20m deep	
102	Subsoil	Moderately soft, sandy silt, light red brown	0.20m deep	
103	Colluvium	Sandy silt, mixed red orange with occasional well sorted flint.	0.55m deep	
104	Nat	Firm, red clay with occasional flint		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height (aOD)	Depth & height of natural
2	30m x 1.8m N-S			
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
201	Topsoil	Soft, sandy loam frequent well sorted small sub angular rocks, mid red brown	0.27m deep	
202	Subsoil	Moderately soft, sandy silt, light red brown	0.33m deep	
203	Natural	Firm, red clay with occasional flint		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height (aOD)	Depth & height of natural
3	10m x 1.8m N-S			
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
301	Topsoil	Soft, sandy loam frequent well sorted small sub angular rocks, mid red brown	0.34m deep	
302	Subsoil	Moderately soft, sandy silt, light red brown	0.25m deep	
303	Natural	Firm, red clay with occasional flint		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height (aOD)	Depth & height of natural
4	30m x 1.8m NE-SW			
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
401	Topsoil	Soft, sandy loam frequent well sorted small sub angular rocks, mid red brown	0.27m deep	
402	Subsoil	Moderately soft, sandy silt, light red brown	0.28m deep	
403	Natural	Firm, red clay with occasional flint		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height (aOD)	Depth & height of natural
5	30m x 1.8m N-S			
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
501	Topsoil	Soft, sandy loam frequent well sorted small sub angular rocks, mid red brown	0.27m deep	
502	Subsoil	Moderately soft, sandy silt, light red brown	0.35m deep	
503	Natural	Firm, red clay with occasional flint		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height (aOD)	Depth & height of natural
6	30m x 1.8m E-W			
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
601	Topsoil	Soft, sandy loam frequent well sorted small sub angular rocks, mid red brown	0.17m deep	
602	Subsoil	Moderately soft, sandy silt, light red brown	0.19m deep	
603	Colluvium	Sandy silt, mixed red orange with occasional well sorted flint.	0.25m deep	
604	Natural	Firm, red clay with occasional flint and occasional sandy patches		
605	Furrow	Naturally silted, red orange, with occ. stones		
606	Furrow	N-S Flat based with gradual side		
607	Fill	Naturally silted Light yellow brown, well sorted sandy stones	2.08m wide 0.30m deep	
608	Fill	Mid red brown, soft sand, occasional stones	2.05m wide 0.70m deep	
609	Fill	Water lain, mid blue grey sandy clay	1.28m wide 0.40m deep	

610	Cut	U-shape, concave steep edges, rounded, modern ditch.	2.08m wide	
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Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height (aOD)	Depth & height of natural
7	30m x 1.8m NW-SE			
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
701	Topsoil	Soft, sandy loam frequent well sorted small sub angular rocks, mid red brown	0.23m deep	
702	Subsoil	Moderately soft, sandy silt, light red brown	0.16m deep	
703	Natural	Red clay with blue clay banding and orange sandy gravels		
704	Fill of Furrow	Natural silting clay sands	1.10m wide 0.12m deep	
705	Cut of furrow	Cut of furrow	1.10m wide 0.12m deep	

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height (aOD)	Depth & height of natural
8	30m x 1.8m N-S			
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
801	Topsoil	Soft, sandy loam frequent well sorted small sub angular rocks, mid red brown	0.25m deep	
802	Subsoil	Moderately soft, sandy silt, light red brown	0.15m deep	
803	Colluvium	Sandy silt, mixed yellowish brown with occasional well sorted flint.	0.22m deep	
804	Nat	Firm, red clay with occasional flint		

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height (aOD)	Depth & height of natural
9	30m x 1.8m			
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
901	Topsoil	Mid brown sandy clay loam	0.18m deep	
902	Subsoil	Mottle mid brown sandy clay	0.28m deep	
903	Natural	Red sandy clay with gravel outcrops		
904	Modern disturbance	A large outcrop of modern material comprised of rusted metal farm equipment, bricks and mortar, plastic, bathroom ceramics, cables.	>9m wide	
905	Fill of furrow	Sandy clay fill of furrow	0.90m wide	
906	Cut of furrow	Cut of furrow cut by land drain	0.90m wide	



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