



# **Fenton Street, Lancaster, Lancashire**

## **Archaeological Watching Brief Report**



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## SUMMARY

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An archaeological watching brief was carried out at the former Royal Mail depot site off Fenton Street, Lancaster (NGR SD 4746 6153). The watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology North for Fairclough Homes in advance of a residential development. This entailed the watching brief of the excavations of a service pipe trench, a network of trenches between building-support piles and the excavation of a sewage pipe trench with associated manholes. The trenches and manholes were entirely mechanically excavated and the watching brief was carried out between 5th November and 13th December 2002.

Excavation of the service trench on the eastern part of the site (Fig 2) occurred first and revealed a possible surface at *c* 1.0m below ground. This surface had been cut by a gully which was overlain by an homogenous sandy clay, but no dating evidence was found associated with these features.

The trenches between the building support piles showed that the land in the south-west quadrant of the site had been levelled with the deposition of large amounts of overburden. For the most part, the excavations were not sufficiently deep to disturb the underlying strata and, in the few small areas where they did, no significant archaeology was found. The overburden included redeposited natural which seemingly had been removed from the south-east quadrant of the site, when it had been terraced in order to level the site for the 20th century development of the area. Any archaeological remains would have been removed as a result of these works and, consequently, no archaeology was found. The trenches in the north-west quadrant demonstrated that this area had been cellared for use as vehicle inspection pits, and had then been then backfilled with large cobbles when the depot was demolished. This cellaring did not extend into the natural sub-soils, but cut into the associated, aforementioned, terracing deposits. There is, therefore, the potential for archaeology to survive at a greater depth, undisturbed by this development. However, at the depth of the present excavation no significant archaeological deposits were encountered.

The excavation of the sewer trench and manholes, aligned approximately north south on the eastern side of the development (Fig 2), also did not encounter any discernible archaeology. The manholes were dug to an approximate depth of 2.8m below the ground surface, and the trench itself to an average of 2.0m, within which the material was almost entirely redeposited twentieth century backfill or overburden, likely to relate to the development for the Royal Mail depot. However, there is potential for archaeology to have survived beneath this disturbance and, south of the second manhole, a layer was encountered that resembled the natural clay in composition and colour, but it contained small amounts of charcoal, and could have been redeposited natural. No significant archaeological deposits were identified in the course of the work, and therefore the construction of the residential block will not impact on a significant archaeological resource.

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The fieldwork was undertaken by Ian Miller, Andy Bates and David Tonks. The drawings were produced by Emma Carter and the finds work was undertaken by Sean McPhillips. The report was written by David Tonks and edited by Jamie Quartermaine and Emily Mercer. The project was managed by Jamie Quartermaine.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 1.1.1 In November and December 2002, Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) undertook a watching brief on an area of land formerly occupied by Royal Mail premises at the south end of Fenton Street, Lancaster (centred on SD 4746 6153; Fig 1). The site is to be redeveloped for residential use and the watching brief was carried out for the developers, Fairclough Homes, in accordance with a verbal brief by Lancashire County Council.
- 1.1.2 In 2000, Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (now OA North) conducted an archaeological evaluation on King Street, Lancaster (LUAU 2000), in close proximity to the Fenton Street site, which revealed Romano-British cremations. Given that neither the location nor the existence of a south gate or southern road to the Roman fort has yet been established and that the development site is to the south-east of the postulated southern extent of the fort, there was a possibility that the line of a Roman road, leading from the southern gate of the fort on Castle Hill, may exist in the vicinity of the development site. Burials were commonly concentrated along the principal roads leading into settlements and, should the Fenton Street site have been located near the southern thoroughfare to the Roman fort, there would be a likelihood of finding burial remains. Similarly, although the main known extramural settlement for the fort is known to have been located along, what is now, Church Street to the east of the fort, there exists the possibility that this activity also spread into the Fenton Street area.
- 1.1.3 It was therefore considered that the development area had considerable archaeological potential, warranting the implementation of a watching brief, which was intended to identify the presence or absence of buried deposits and features of archaeological significance.

### 1.2 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 1.2.1 The site (Fig 1,) is located at the southern end of Fenton Street, Lancaster. The development area is roughly rectangular in plan with an adjacent small rectangular plot extending out to the north-east (Fig 2). It is bordered to the north by Fenton Street and a pedestrian thoroughfare between Fenton Street and Dallas Road; to the east by the gardens of buildings fronting onto High Street; to the south by the Dallas Road County Primary School, and to the west by a municipal car park located adjacent to Dallas Road. The site occupies an uneven but generally level plot of land, at c19.3m OD, which covers about 5100 sqm in area.
- 1.2.2 The solid geology of Lancaster consists predominantly of Silesian (Upper Carboniferous) grey-brown or reddened, medium to coarse grained sandstones of the Pendle Grit Formation, which is part of the Millstone Grit Group (British Geological Survey 1992). These sandstones are thickly bedded with thin siltstone partings, but with mixed sandstone/siltstone units near the top. The drift geology for the site has been mapped as glaciofluvial sheet deposits of clayey sands and gravels.

### 1.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.3.1 **Prehistory:** there has been no deliberate excavation of known prehistoric sites within the city, all excavated material having been encountered by chance during the course of other projects. Excavations in Church Street (Penney 1981b) produced Neolithic pottery and a series of stake holes, perhaps suggesting a settlement site close by, presumably on or near the banks of the river Lune. Most other finds are of a chance nature which might be expected anywhere, particularly flints and isolated items of metalwork, and only a few of them are well provenanced. Of particular interest, however, is the group of Bronze Age vessels found at various times on Lancaster Moor and within the limits of the urban area, which appear to represent the presence of at least one, probably two, flat inhumation cemeteries. A number of authors have suggested that the anomalous earthworks on Castle Hill, now assumed to be medieval, but following the line of the Flavian fort on the site, might, in fact represent the re-use of existing Iron Age earthworks by the Romans (OA North 2002). There is a cluster of burials centred around upper Penny Street, which are probably Romano-British in date, but could also potentially be of pre-Roman origin. The putative Iron Age artefacts from the city, La Tene-type ironwork from the site of Westfield Memorial Village, are now thought to derive from Romano-British burials (*ibid*).
- 1.3.2 **The Roman Period:** a Roman fort was founded on Castle Hill at the strategic lowest crossing point of the Lune, during the Flavian period. It appears to have been aligned following the natural lie of the hill, with its north/south axis lying along the highest ridge. The many small excavations on or around Castle Hill (best summarised by Jones and Shotter 1988; Shotter and White 1990) have suggested that the earliest Flavian fort was of conventional size and shape with turf ramparts and timber buildings. It appears that this fort, despite modification, was short-lived and that it was briefly abandoned and then reoccupied towards the end of the first century. At this point it appears to have been extensively re-modelled, the northern rampart was moved northwards, possibly suggesting an enlargement and reorientation.
- 1.3.3 The fort was substantially reconstructed in the early second century, and it is probable that it was abandoned in the course of the short-lived Antonine advance into Scotland. It appears that it was reoccupied during the AD 160s, but reduced to a normal-sized garrison - perhaps suggesting that some of the fort was allowed to fall into dereliction (Shotter 1993, 92-92). Certainly, by the mid-third century it was occupied by a cavalry regiment (*Ala Gallorum Sebosiana*) who appear to have undertaken a considerable programme of building restoration (*ibid*).
- 1.3.4 The political confusion of the fourth century AD, when it seemed that the Roman Empire was tearing itself apart, left Britain especially vulnerable to attack from the sea. The fort at Lancaster was clearly important in the defence of the west coast and to this end, about AD 330, the entire fort was reoriented and rebuilt on the northern and eastern sectors of Castle Hill. The substantial nature of the new fort can be demonstrated by the surviving fragment of its circuit wall (Wery Wall) which is thought to incorporate an external bastion, indicating the shift in military thinking towards static defence (Shotter and White 1990). The exact shape and size of the fort, however, remains problematic and only this one wall can be identified with

certainty. The fort was probably effectively abandoned at the beginning of the fifth century (*ibid*).

- 1.3.5 Roman finds have been collected and reported from Church Street for three centuries or more, indicating the location of the extramural settlement. In recent years development in the City has centred around this area, at first piecemeal and more recently with major re-development projected for the Mitchell's Brewery Site, Damside Bus Station, and Pye's Warehouse (on Damside Street). Keyhole excavations along the length of Church Street have demonstrated a range of timber strip houses lying at right-angles to the road. Large-scale excavations in 1988, 1992, 1999 and 2000 on the site of Mitchell's Brewery in Church Street, demonstrated a succession of buildings and a range of artefacts from the first to fourth centuries AD. Richmond (1959) has suggested ribbon development along the road from the north gate of the fort towards the river crossing and Roman material has come from the St George's Quay / Union Square / Fleet Square area. Trial excavations alongside Damside Street (LUAU 1991) have also indicated Roman material along the old line of the Lune, perhaps indicating an extended river frontage to the west.
- 1.3.6 It seems that development of the extramural settlement lagged slightly behind the fort, and not beginning to flourish, probably until the beginning of the second century. It had been thought, from lack of evidence, that it had largely failed in this eastern area by the end of the second / early third centuries, but the range of fourth century finds from the uncellared Mitchell's Brewery site (Howard-Davis *et al* forthcoming) has demonstrated that this apparent failure is simply a stratigraphical anomaly, created by extensive cellaring in the city centre, which had effectively obliterated the later Roman and early medieval levels from the street frontage.
- 1.3.7 The extent of the extramural settlement has yet to be determined, although cremations from the southern end of Penny Street seem to give clear indication that this area lay outside the settlement (LUAU 1996; LUAU 1997). It now seems clear, that the edge of Roman settlement lay between Common Garden Street and Spring Garden Street to the south, as cremations have been excavated at the junction of Penny Street with Spring Garden Street and George Street (LUAU 1995) and also a funerary urn recovered from the former Brambles site in 1987 (LSMR 10114, Lcity Mus 876).
- 1.3.8 To the west of Castle Hill, little is known, although Roman material was encountered during the construction of Castle Station, and in 1934-5 burials were excavated on the site of Westfield Memorial Village (Shotter and White 1990). It is highly unlikely that settlement extended far on the western side as most of the residential area, known today as the Marsh, was not drained until the nineteenth century. The spread of evidence does, however, suggest that Roman Lancaster was a settlement of regional significance.
- 1.3.9 **Post-Roman:** little is known of the post-Roman activity in the town, though most likely it would have related to a slow transition from Roman town to early medieval township. It seems unlikely that there was a complete break in settlement of any length, since the modern street layout barely deviates from that of the earlier Roman town, suggesting that the roads, at least, remained in existence; indeed, the coincidence of individual property boundaries along Church Street is marked.



- 1.3.10 **Early Medieval:** at least fifteen early cross fragments have been recovered from the Priory area of St Mary on Castle Hill, or were built into its fabric. This large number, coupled with a date range of AD 750-900, must strongly suggest the existence of a significant religious establishment on the site (Newman 1996). The existence, at Domesday, of a clearly defined dual focus for the settlement, with *Loncastre* specifically differentiated from *Chercaloncastre* (Faull and Stinson 1986), tends to suggest an ecclesiastical establishment surrounded by secular activity, in the manner of that at Whithorn, Dumfries and Galloway (Hill 1997). The dominance of the religious settlement may explain the puzzling shift of secular lordship to the neighbouring manor of Halton, recorded in Domesday.
- 1.3.11 It is likely that cellared street frontages have substantially removed evidence for early medieval Lancaster in most of the built-up areas, but there must remain the strong likelihood that the ecclesiastical establishment lies beneath the church and Vicarage Fields and there may also be islands of intact early medieval deposits between the cellars within the rest of the city. Artefact evidence is largely restricted to coin finds, but these are sufficient in number to reinforce the presence of a substantial settlement on, or around, Castle Hill (Penney 1981a). It has been suggested, from numismatic evidence, that Lancaster may have functioned as a mint during the reigns of Aethelred II (AD 840-848), Cnut (AD 1016-1035), and Harold I (AD 1035-40) when three moneymen are recorded, although this is now questioned (A White, pers comm).
- 1.3.12 **Medieval:** the Domesday entry lists two settlements at Lancaster (*Loncastre*, perhaps centred on the Church Street area, and *Chercaloncastre*, around the Priory, on Castle Hill), as well as several other settlements which now fall within the city confines, *Scozeforde* (Scotforth), *Sline* (Slyne), *Aldeclif* (Aldcliffe) *Schertune* (Skerton) and *Neutun* (Newton).
- 1.3.13 In 1094 Roger of Poitou moved to found, or re-establish, a monastic house in Lancaster and to this end he gave the already extant church of St Mary, several local manors, churches, and tithes to the Benedictine house of St Martin at Sees, in return for the establishment of the Priory of St Mary (White 1993). From the late eleventh century Lancaster's importance to the security of the emergent Norman kingdom was clear. The date at which the Castle was built is not known precisely, but it was certainly in existence by 1102 when the Honour of Lancaster was forfeited to Henry I. By 1351 the Duke of Lancaster was granted Palatine jurisdiction for life and by 1396, in the hands of John of Gaunt, the Duchy was declared a Palatinate in perpetuity (*ibid*). Lancaster has remained a royal duchy since the accession of John O' Gaunt's son to the throne as King Henry IV. Lancaster's political significance was thus assured, although the later medieval development of the town can best be described as one of gentle economic stagnation. The impact of the Scottish Wars was severe and Lancaster was in the hands of David, King of Scotland for a brief spell but this was the case for much of the North during the reign of the English King Stephen.
- 1.3.14 Documentary evidence for the street layout of Lancaster dates from as early as the twelfth century and certainly Penny Street was recorded as having been burnt by the Scots in 1322 (Penney 1981a), one of several occasions on which the town suffered severe damage by raiding. Many of the street names remain, unchanged, to this day. A single elevation sketch of the city (PRO MR 15. D.L.31/112) is known, dated to

the second half of the sixteenth century, but its main concern is Castle Hill; for the rest of the city it provides only an outline townscape lacking in detail and distorted in layout and scale. No true map of the city exists prior to that drawn up by Speed in 1610. The central road plan shown by him differs little from the present and it would seem that the basic layout of Lancaster's road system was firmly established at an early date and has only been modified by recent development.

- 1.3.15 Despite the existence of standing buildings, and firm locations for several buildings, now completely destroyed, such as the Dominican Friary which lies beneath Dalton Square, very little archaeological evidence has been recorded for the medieval period. This is, as for earlier periods, largely the result of extensive cellaring and sweeping development in the 1960s, undertaken in effect without archaeological observation. Some archaeological excavation has been undertaken on the site of the Dominican Friary and at Mitchell's Brewery, but there has been little other archaeological investigation.
- 1.3.16 **Post-Medieval:** for the post-medieval period there is more extensive evidence of land use from cartographic records. John Speed's map of 1610 and, although rather stylistic in character, this shows King Street (then known as Chennel Lane) to the east and south-east of the study area, but the study area itself is not shown as developed in any way.
- 1.3.17 The Docton map reveals a reconstruction of the town as it was in 1684, (Docton 1957), and shows a building with a rectangular plot of land to the rear along the alignment of the present-day Fenton Street, but no development on the area of the site itself. Part of the site lies within an area separated by a south-west to north-east field boundary and it is, therefore, probably pasture or arable land at that time.
- 1.3.18 Mackreth's map of 1778 shows and names 'Fenton Gardens and House' on a plot of land aligned with the present-day Fenton Street. The house comprises two buildings, one fronting onto Market street and one fronting onto Meeting House Lane, with a path and courtyard between them which leads to the formal gardens to the rear. The map clearly shows that the part of the site, separated by the field boundary, is now also formal gardens on land owned by a Mr Rawlinson.
- 1.3.19 There exists a plan from 1798 of a proposed 'communication' between High Street and Castle Hill (1798 Proposal). This is the plan, prior to construction, of Fenton Street itself and the proposed works occupy the plot of land marked 'Fenton Gardens and House' on Mackreth's map. The eastern building, which fronted onto Market Street, is still shown with its own shortened garden, but the western building on Meeting House Lane has been earmarked for demolition and the gardens given over to the development of the road and terraced housing. Although the 1798 plan does not show any detail for the study area, it is evident that the adjacent land to the east of the site was still owned by Mr Rawlinson.
- 1.3.20 A map of 1807 (Clark 1807) depicted Fenton Street flanked by the terraced housing proposed in 1798 and the study area as the rear gardens of properties which fronted onto High Street. The site was at that date undeveloped. The south-west to north-east field boundary evident on the Docton 1684 map continues to persist both on the 1807 map, Binns' plan of 1821 and on the OS map of 1938, which clearly shows the site to have been partly built on by this time. This diagonal boundary is by 1807 shared with Trades Hall which, evidently built sometime between 1798 and 1807.

1.3.21 By 1957 the site had been developed into The Royal Mail depot which was demolished before the current works began, and the diagonal field boundary still exists as the south-west boundary wall of the site.

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

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### 2.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.1.1 A watching brief was maintained during the groundworks for the construction of residential properties on Fenton Street. The ground works comprised the excavation of trenches for ground beams by means of a 360° mechanical excavator or JCB. The primary excavation was a service trench in the north-east corner of the main site extending into the attached smaller plot. It was oriented east/west and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2m below ground surface (Fig 2).
- 2.1.2 The second set of excavations were undertaken for ground beams linking a series of deep, concrete support pilings drilled in advance of the construction works. A network of interconnecting trenches, on average between 1.5m and 1.7m wide, was excavated to 18.52m OD, a level roughly 0.75m below ground surface.
- 2.1.3 The third trench was excavated to accommodate a sewage pipe, and was c56.0m by 1.5m in extent and was mechanically excavated using a combination of concrete breaker, and both toothed and toothless buckets. It was oriented north to south and was excavated to a maximum depth of c2.80m below ground surface, equating to c16.50m OD. It was opened in sections of approximately 5-6m, with two 16.0m stretches of trench between the first three manholes and 24.0m between the third and fourth. Once the trench had been opened to an average depth of 1.7m, a steel safety shoring box was placed within it prior to excavating to a greater depth. Section photographs were taken prior to the insertion of the safety box and the spoil heap was examined for significant finds. Once the pipe had been laid, the open section of trench was backfilled prior to the excavation of the next section.
- 2.1.4 **Recording:** the recording comprised a full description and preliminary classification of features or materials revealed, on OA North *pro-forma* sheets, and their accurate location, either on plan and/or section. Records were kept of all the sections of the watching brief even if the results were negative. A plan was produced of the areas of groundworks showing the location and extent of the ground disturbance (Fig 2). All areas of archaeological interest were fully photographed, both in general terms and in specific detail.

### 2.2 FINDS

- 2.2.1 All finds were treated in accordance with standard OA North practice. Analysis of the pottery was based solely on visual inspection of individual sherds, and has been described using the terminology developed by Orton *et al* (1993). A catalogue of the artefacts have been included in *Appendix 1* in Object Reference Number order.

### 2.3 ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with current IFA and English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 1991). The paper and digital archive will be deposited in Lancaster City Museum together with the excavated material; a

further copy will be made available for deposition within the County Record Office (Preston), and a summary sent to the LSMR (Lancashire Sites and Monuments Record) and NMR (National Monuments Register).

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### 3. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

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#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1.1 The watching brief was maintained during the mechanical excavation of a service trench in the north-east quadrant of the site, trenches for ground beams between piles, and a sewer trench on the east side of the site.

#### 3.2 THE SERVICE TRENCH

- 3.2.1 The service trench (Fig 2) was located in the north-east quadrant of the site and extended into the small rectangular plot adjacent to the main site. It was excavated to a depth not exceeding 1.2m below the ground surface. In the base of the trench, for a length of 2.9m, a mid-orange-brown plastic clay, containing charcoal flecks and occasional small to medium sized sub-rounded stones, was exposed; the stones appeared to have been deliberately laid and subsequently packed with clay. However, the base of the deposit was not exposed, being only excavated for 0.2m and no dating evidence was found. One small fragment of burnt bone was observed but not recovered. The rest of the trench was heavily disturbed by 20th century activity.
- 3.2.2 The possible floor surface had been cut by a shallow 'U'-shaped gully aligned north/south. It was 0.12m deep and 0.36m wide with a sharp break of slope and a rounded base. The top of the feature was exposed at a depth of 0.98m below the ground surface, and it was filled with a dark-grey-brown sandy silt with charcoal flecking.
- 3.2.3 The gully was overlain by a 0.64m deep deposit of dark-grey-brown friable sandy clay, dipping slightly to the west, which contained some post-medieval material. The layer appeared to have been cut, as a deposit of mortar/brick/fuel-ash was exposed at a depth of 0.59m. The exact extent of this later intrusion was not clearly identified, but the deposit was clearly of recent date and sealed by a layer of redeposited sandy clay. The uppermost deposit was 0.15m of much disturbed, modern overburden.
- 3.2.4 The trench was extended to the west, revealing the same stratigraphic sequence with the same layer of seemingly deliberately laid stones. However, the character and extent of these could not be defined due to lack of time.

#### 3.3 THE PILING/ GROUND BEAM TRENCHES

- 3.3.1 The network of trenches between the piles was extensive and covered approximately two-thirds of the site, and was excavated to a depth of 18.5m OD. The network of interconnecting trenches, excavated in sections, left rectangular islands of undisturbed stratigraphy as blocks, which have been numbered (from 1 to 34) for purposes of description (Fig 2).
- 3.3.2 **Blocks 1-7:** the trenches opened in the south of the site cut through two layers of notably different composition. In the south-west quadrant of the site, comprising Blocks 1 to 7 (Fig 2), the land had clearly been made level by the build up of a modern make-up layer of mixed lithology, **04**, (Plate 1), comprising a dark-brown-black sandy clay interspersed with rubble, lenses of sand and clumps of reddish-brown

redeposited natural clay. For the most part, the machining did not reach a depth sufficient to penetrate this modern layer and the ground below it remained undisturbed. Within a north/south section of around c3.0m length from the south-east corner of Block 2 (Fig 2), the sub-soils were at a higher level than the surrounding ground and became exposed at a depth of around 0.20m. The interface between the make-up layer and the substrata was very pronounced and there were two very compacted layers exposed (Plate 2). The upper layer, **01**, comprised a hard, dark-grey silty clay and the lower, **02**, was a hard, mid-brown-grey silty clay which had presumably become compacted by the deposition of the levelling layer. Whilst late finds were recovered from context **02**, no further archaeology was encountered during the excavation of Blocks 1 to 7.

- 3.3.3 **Blocks 8-10:** the excavations in the south-eastern quadrant, comprising Blocks 8, 9 and 10, demonstrated that the area had been terraced to make it level with the make-up layer adjacent to it in the south-west quadrant. The terracing had cut down to, and through, the natural sub-soil, **03**, which comprised a very firm, reddish-brown clay with pebble inclusions. The natural was encountered almost at surface level, just below a deposit of modern machine track disturbance. Any archaeological deposits that may have existed here before would have been removed by the terracing works and, consequently, no archaeology was encountered during the excavation of this area of trenching.
- 3.3.4 It is probable that much of the excavated natural from this area of the site (Blocks 8-10) was re-deposited to the west as part of the levelling layer encountered in Blocks 1-7 (*Section 3.3.2*). As a consequence of this, the interface between the redeposited natural to the west and the true natural to the east was not clearly evident. However, the change occurred somewhere between Blocks 6 and 7, as natural only was encountered to the east of Block 7.
- 3.3.5 **Blocks 11-14:** the trenches around Blocks 11 through to 14 were excavated through the modern build up layer described in *Section 3.3.2*. Neither the underlying substrata nor natural sub-soils were encountered during these excavations.
- 3.3.6 **Blocks 15-34:** the areas affected by the trenching in the north-east quadrant of the site, Blocks 15 to 34, had been almost wholly cellared-out when The Royal Mail depot was built. Vehicle inspection pits had occupied this part of the site and they had been backfilled with cobbles when the building was demolished. Several brick walls were encountered comprising c13 courses (brick dimensions 230 x 105 x 75mm) with concrete footings bottoming at a depth of around 2.0m. The footings, along with the cobbles, constituted an obstruction for the piling rig and had to be removed prior to the piles being drilled. Whilst the excavation of these trenches and removal of the cobbles, walls and concrete footings were observed, any ground beneath was largely concealed owing to the nature of the cobble backfill; on excavation the sides of the trench were subject to limited collapse immediately re-covering the excavated area and floor of the trench (Plate 3). It appeared, however, that the cellaring had not reached the natural in any excavated part of this site. The unstable nature and depth of the trenches precluded, for health and safety reasons, any further scrutiny after they had been opened and no archaeology was identified during the excavation of this area of trenching.

### 3.4 THE SEWER TRENCH

- 3.4.1 The excavation of the sewer trench covered an area of approximately 97.5 sqm in total and went to a maximum depth of c2.8m below the ground surface. The northern most c4m length of the sewage trench had been previously excavated for an earlier sewage pipe which was still *in situ*. The new excavation ran from north to south and was approximately 2.5m in depth from ground level. It showed the backfill of the original trench to be c1.5m of brick rubble with a further c1.0m deposit of black, organic silt with a high humic content below it, probably seepage from the existing pipe. No natural ground was encountered and there was no observed archaeology.
- 3.4.2 In the next c4m section of the trench the ground had been cellared-out in the same manner as that encountered in the north-east quadrant. A brick wall was encountered and an associated concrete floor was removed by concrete breaker. Reaching a depth of approximately 2.8m, the cellaring had been backfilled with an assortment of modern material including rubble, clay, soil and cement. No natural ground was encountered and there was no observed archaeology.
- 3.4.3 The trench for Manhole 1, which measured c2.0m x 2.0m x 2.8m, was excavated into wholly made-up ground comprising brick rubble and sand. No natural ground was encountered and there was no observed archaeology.
- 3.4.4 A further c4m section of trench was excavated southwards and was excavated c2.0m in depth from ground level. Only rubble and sand were encountered (Plate 4). The sand and ground, were highly contaminated with diesel and there was water seeping into the trench. It is possible that this area had been previously excavated for the placement of underground diesel storage tanks. No natural ground was encountered and there was no observed archaeology.
- 3.4.5 A further c4m section was excavated southwards towards the site of the second manhole. An approximately 1.25m depth of blue, diesel-contaminated sand was exposed at the bottom of the trench, whilst the upper c0.75m layer was rubble and soil. The trench was still being excavated into 100% redeposited material and the natural sub-soils were not encountered.
- 3.4.6 The trench for Manhole 2, which measured 2.3m x 2.4m x 2.3m, was excavated through 1.5m of overburden onto a mid-brown-orange-grey medium sand clay with around 5-10% inclusions of sub-rounded sandstone fragments (maximum dimensions 0.15m x 0.11m x 0.08m).
- 3.4.7 Excavations south from Manhole 2 were excavated to a depth of c1.8m from the ground surface. The first 5.0m section encountered a sandstone foundation, which was oriented east/west, and a dump of rubble. The main excavated material very closely resembled the natural, but it contained very occasional charcoal flecks which may indicate that it was redeposited.
- 3.4.8 At 7.0m south of Manhole 2, there were occasional glimpses of a light-orange-grey medium sand clay containing sub-rounded stone (maximum dimensions 0.50m x 0.45m x 0.20m). Encountered at a depth of 1.6m from the ground surface, this deposit is thought to represent natural subsoil.
- 3.4.9 The trench for Manhole 3, measured 3.0m x 2.5m x 1.1m, and was excavated through overburden.



### 3.5 THE FINDS

- 3.5.1 In total, 38 artefacts were recovered during the watching brief comprising ceramic fragments with some smaller denominations of glass, bone and shell (*Appendix 1*). The assemblage is representative and not a 100% sample; the recovered artefacts were intended to represent only the types of material that were generally being excavated.
- 3.5.2 **Ceramics:** most of the ceramic assemblage derived from the post-medieval period encompassing a date range of between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. They were from unstratified contexts and were largely insignificant. The collection included seven fragments of bone china, six sherds of Victorian flower pot, two sherds of glazed earthenware and one sherd of probably twentieth century tile. There was, however, one fragment of German Westerwald stoneware ceramic dating to seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is significant from the point of view of its origin and antiquity, but it may have been imported to the site as part of the material which comprised the overburden. It is not, therefore, necessarily indicative of seventeenth century activity within the site's environs. Finds of ceramic from stratigraphically discrete contexts comprised nineteenth century pottery only. Five unglazed sherds and one glazed sherd were recovered from context **02**, which firmly placed the context to within the nineteenth century.
- 3.5.3 **Animal Bone:** two segments of cleanly butchered animal bone were recovered from deposit **02** along with a fragmented rib and two partially-decomposed oyster shells. This was most likely domestic refuse, discarded directly onto the open ground as there was no evidence for a refuse pit.
- 3.5.4 **Industrial Fragments:** one fragment of kiln lining was also recovered from context **02**, which implies that there had been some kind of industrial activity on the site prior to its development by The Royal Mail.
- 3.5.5 **Conclusion:** the finds assemblage is of limited archaeological significance. In all probability, the finds represent the dumping of domestic refuse. The material adds little to aid the interpretation or development of the site to the present day.

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## 4. DISCUSSION

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### 4.1 FEATURES OF SIGNIFICANCE

- 4.1.1 **The Service Trench:** the most significant discoveries of the watching brief was the presence of possible clay and stone surface and a gully seen in the north-facing section of the service trench. This trench was seemingly in the one area of the site which had not been made-up or truncated by cellars and, therefore, the potential to find archaeology in this part was greater than elsewhere. Regrettably, no dating evidence was recovered either from the fill of the feature or the deposit which it cut, and therefore it is difficult to gauge the importance of the feature. Nevertheless, the presence of such a feature demonstrates that potentially significant archaeology remains in this part of the site.
- 4.1.2 The interpretation of the layer into which the gully was cut also remains obscure. It was at first thought to be a possible surface, but is now considered to have been the same material as that encountered in the south-east quadrant of the site, Blocks 8-10 (Fig 2). While it is possible that this was the natural subsoil, the occasional finds of charcoal in the section, at a depth of 1.8m below the ground surface, suggest that this too was redeposited. However, it is possible that root disturbance or other bioturbation could result in the presence of the charcoal at this depth.
- 4.1.3 It is probable that the dark homogenous layer noted physically above the gully was the remains of cultivation and garden soils from when the site was used as agricultural land. It is interesting that a slight dip toward the west was noted, and may be the original gradient of the slope, which elsewhere on site, specifically Blocks 1-10, was terraced to level the ground prior to the construction of The Royal Mail depot.
- 4.1.4 **The Piling Trenches:** it has been noted previously (*Sections 3.3.3 and 4.1.2*) that the south-east quadrant of the site had been truncated through terracing to level the ground. It is unlikely that there would be any surviving archaeology in this area as the activity cut deeply into the natural and any archaeological features would have been removed. However, in the south-east quadrant, where the ground had been made-up, it is quite possible, that significant archaeological deposits remain. It is assumed, that the ground here remains largely undisturbed, albeit compacted in the upper strata by the levelling layer and subject to piling.
- 4.1.5 Similarly, whilst almost all of the north-west quadrant (Blocks 15-34, Fig 2) had been deeply cellared to create vehicle inspection pits, there is potential for archaeological deposits to remain beneath the disturbance. Natural subsoils were not observed within the base of any trenches and, given that the hill slope probably inclined westward, the natural would be encountered at a much deeper level than in the eastern half of the site. Therefore, whilst some archaeological layers may have been removed during the course of these works, there is the potential for earlier deposits to have survived largely undisturbed beneath the cellarage. Although it must again be noted that the area has now been subject to deep piling.
- 4.1.6 Where the overburden was penetrated to expose lower deposits, two distinct layers could be seen (Plate 1, *Section 3.3.2*). The upper dark-grey layer was interpreted as compacted garden soil and no finds were recovered. Finds of cleanly butchered bone

and nineteenth century pot were, however, found in the lower layer; from when the area was used as gardens from the early nineteenth century. The survival of deposits of such late date suggests that any earlier deposits may also survive, notwithstanding the piling activity. Therefore, there is potential for the survival of extant archaeological deposits below these layers.

- 4.1.7 ***The Sewage Trench:*** the excavation of the sewage trench demonstrated that most of this part of the site had been previously disturbed to a depth of at least 2.8m from ground level, c 16.5m OD, and therefore any archaeological deposits present when the groundworks were effected would have been removed or otherwise destroyed. A layer of potentially redeposited natural, containing charcoal flecks, was encountered south of the second manhole, but no dating evidence was recovered.

## **4.2 IMPACT**

- 4.2.1 The watching brief established that little of demonstrable archaeological significance was encountered or disturbed during the course of the groundworks. Moreover, it highlighted the potential for archaeological deposits to remain undisturbed in some areas of the site. It is, however, likely that the piling activity will have had some impact on any archaeological deposits which may remain beneath the depth of the current works.

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## APPENDIX 1: FINDS LIST

<b>Object No.</b>	<b>Context No.</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Description</b>
1001	<i>U/S</i>	7	Pottery	19th century China
1001	<i>U/S</i>	6	Pottery	19th century Flowerpot/Garden ceramic
1001	<i>U/S</i>	2	Pottery	Glazed Earthenware, Post-med
1001	<i>U/S</i>	1	Pottery	1 Fragment Bathroom Tile
1002	<i>U/S</i>	1	Pottery	1 Fragment Imported Westerwald Stoneware, 17th century
1003	<i>U/S</i>	2	Glass	1 Fragment Case Gin Bottle, 1 unidentified
1004	<i>U/S</i>	1	Glass	Modern Window Glass
1005	<i>U/S</i>	1	Bone	Bone
1006	<i>U/S</i>	1	Shell	Oyster Shell
1007	<i>02</i>	6	Pottery	Post-med 5 Unglazed, 1 Glazed
1008	<i>02</i>	2	Shell	Oyster Shell
1009	<i>02</i>	3	Bone	2 Butchered Segments, 1 Rib
1010	<i>02</i>	1	Glass	Post-med
1011	<i>02</i>	1	Tile	Post-med Tile Fragment
1012	<i>02</i>	1	Kiln Lining	1 Fragment Kiln Lining

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**APPENDIX 2: LIST OF CONTEXTS**

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<b>Block No</b>	<b>Context No</b>	<b>Description</b>
1-2	<i>01</i>	Hard, dark grey silty clay
1-2	<i>02</i>	Hard, mid-brown-grey silty clay
8-9	<i>03</i>	Firm, reddish brown clay with pebbles, natural subsoil
1-7	<i>04</i>	Mixed rubble and sand, redeposited natural and brown/black silty clay, build up layer

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

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### FIGURES

Figure 1: Fenton Street Location Map

Figure 2: Trench Location Plan

### PLATES

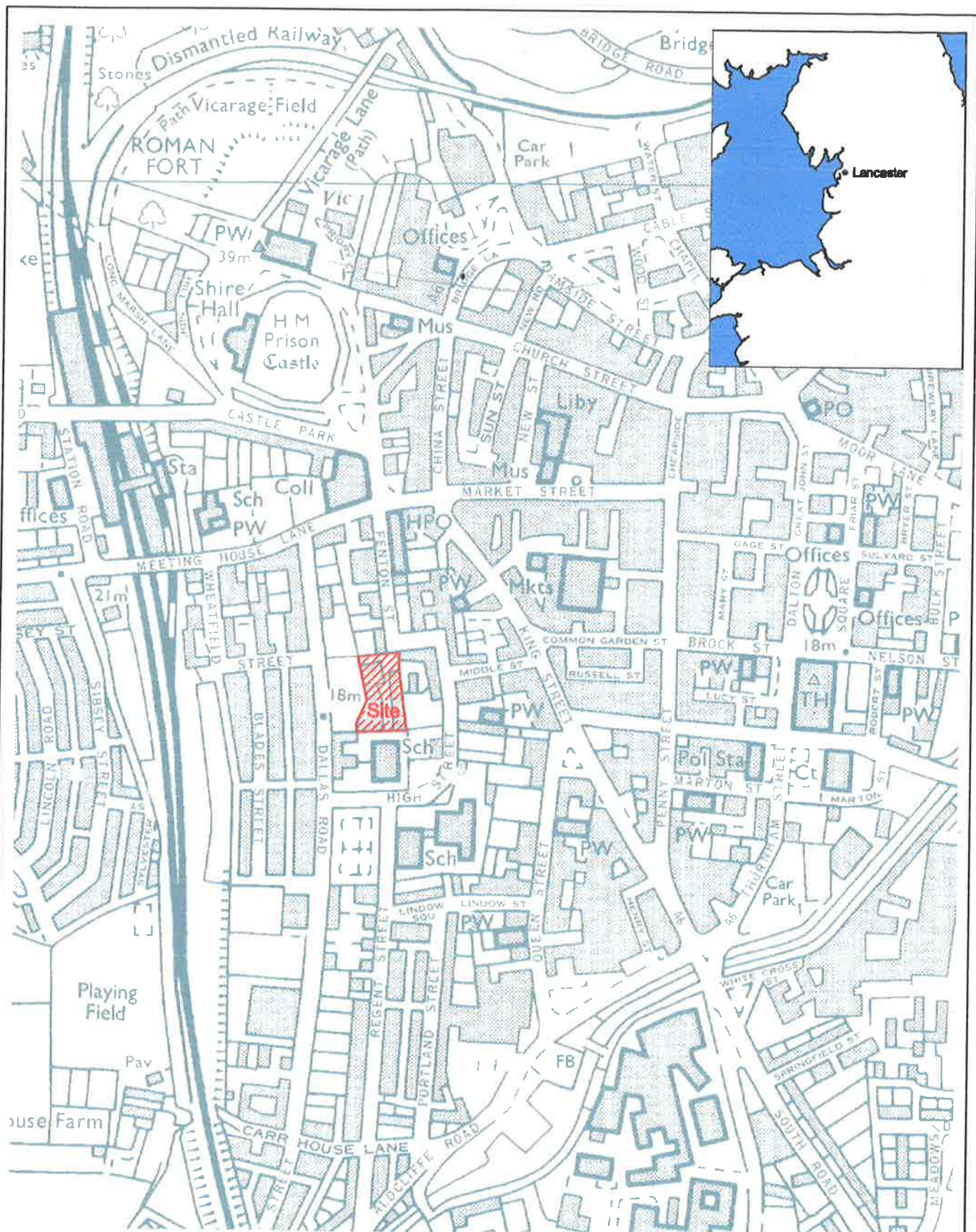
Plate 1: Representative section of overburden in Blocks 11-14

Plate 2: West-facing section showing redeposited natural above subsoils **01** and **02** in Blocks 1 and 2.

Plate 3: Cobble backfill in piling trench north of Blocks 31-34

Plate 4: West-facing section of sewage trench detailing contamination





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Figure 1: Fenton Street Location Map





Figure 2: Trench Location Plan



Plate 1: Representative section showing overburden in Blocks 11-14



Plate 2: West-facing section showing the redeposited natural above subsoils *01* and *02* in Blocks 1 and 2





Plate 3: Cobble Backfill in piling trench north of Blocks 31-34



Plate 4: West-facing Section of sewage trench detailing contamination



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