

**An Archaeological Evaluation of Land at Court Farm, Halewood,  
Knowsley (NGR SJ 451 864)**

**Interim Report**

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## **1. Introduction**

An archaeological evaluation was conducted by NMGM, Field Archaeology Section at Court Farm, Halewood, Knowsley. The evaluation was commissioned by Knowsley MBC in advance of development of the land for housing on the recommendation of the Merseyside Archaeological Officer. The plot is located on the south facing slope of a slight rise in an otherwise flat landscape at approximately 10.50m AOD. A Romano-British settlement occupied between the 2nd-4th centuries AD was excavated field HW1 immediately to the west and was believed to extend into the land under discussion (Figure 1).

*This document is an interim discussion of the results of the evaluation and is not intended as a full evaluation report.*

### **1.1. Background**

The site was initially identified by the Merseyside Archaeological Officer (AO) as an area of archaeological potential from information held on the Merseyside Sites and Monuments Record (MSMR), Liverpool Museum, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside. Subsequent desk based assessment, evaluation and excavation proved the existence of previously undisturbed archaeological deposits belonging to a Romano-British farmstead dating to between the 2nd-4th centuries AD. Excavation to date has been confined to field HW1.

The evaluation brief is intended to allow a formal programme of observation and identification of deposits which may be disturbed by non-archaeological ground works.

### **1.1 Site Location and Description**

The development site is 18.62 hectares in area at a height of approximately 11.0m AOD and is defined by Cartbridge Lane on the north west; a footpath, leisure centre and school between Cartbridge and Greenbridge Lane to the north east, and the built up area off Church Road and Halewood Conservation area to the south. The NGR is 4530 8630. The site consists of currently undeveloped agricultural land under grass crop and includes an Public Open Space (POS). The solid geology is of sandstone and the overlying drift is boulder clay.

The area covered by this evaluation is located in field HW3, immediately to the east of HW1 which was excavated between July-October 1996.

### **1.2 Previous work**

The site forms part of a landscape known to be of archaeological importance. Cowell (1982) identified a possible moated site within the proposed development; and a site visit in 1981 (detailed on the MSMR, ref: 4586-9) to land north east of St. Nicholas' Church, revealed the presence of an earthwork of unknown origin and a quantity of post-medieval pottery, glass and tile. The Halewood area was known to be an area of archaeological potential from excavation along the line of the M57/A562 link road in 1993 which produced substantial evidence for occupation of the area from the Prehistoric, Romano-British and Medieval periods. Although the desk-based assessment and field walking of HW1 and 3 failed to locate any evidence for the moated site, field-walking did produce sufficient evidence to suggest the presence of a Romano-British site in field HW1. This was confirmed by the evaluation trenches which located a series of truncated pits, gullies and a ditch which suggested the presence of a farmstead enclosed by a ditch, a settlement type known to occur on Merseyside

in the 2-4th centuries AD. The subsequent excavation demonstrated that the settlement was in fact more extensive and in some areas better preserved than indicated by the evaluation trenches and was an unenclosed settlement of a type previously unidentified on Merseyside; although the core area of the settlement has been excavated, a lower density of deposits appeared to extend outside the excavated area into field HW3. The feature which was originally interpreted as defining the limits of the settlement actually proved to be part of a stock enclosure within the settlement.

### **1.3 Reasons & Circumstances**

An application for outline planning permission, APP/94/00738 was submitted to the AO for comment on 25.1.95 by Knowsley MBC to erect 420 dwellings and to construct a new vehicular and pedestrian access to the site. Consequently the AO identified the archaeological interest in the site, and the need for an archaeological assessment to be made. Following a site visit the AO recommended evaluation by desk based assessment with a programme of fieldwalking. This identified the need for evaluation by excavation which in turn justified the excavation in field HW1.

## **2. The Evaluation Trenches**

Fifteen trenches were opened between the 14th and 17th of October, 1996, using a JCB backhoe excavator fitted with a 1.2m toothless ditching bucket. The trenches were excavated in level spits onto undisturbed natural deposits or the top of stratified archaeological deposits. The trenches were numbered in sequence with those of the evaluation and excavation in the adjacent field, HW1.

Not all of the finds have been processed at the time of writing, so it is not possible to give closely defined dates for any of the contexts described below. However, all deposits dated as Romano-British contained pottery dating to between the 2-4th centuries AD.

### **2.1 Trench XVI**

This was located in the extreme north-west corner of the plot and was designed to pick up the continuation of a ditch excavated in Field HW1 to the west. No evidence was found for this ditch which must therefore either change direction or terminate before reaching this point. No cut features were noted in this trench. However, there was a thick accumulation of dark reddish brown silty clay (up to 0.75m). This material may be either hill wash (the trench was located at the base of a substantial slope) or the continuation of the large post-medieval ditch excavated in HW1.

### **2.2 Trench XVII**

All of the archaeological features were located at the western end of the trench and are truncated post-holes and pits. Cut [3039] was a sub-circular pit 1.14m across and 1.14m deep, this had been filled by a dark grey loamy sand, [3033], containing burnt and unburnt sandstone cobbles, shattered glacial erratics and frequent charcoal flecks. Two iron objects were recovered from this fill, one could be identified as a pair of tongs, the other was too corroded to identify but appeared to be composed of at least two elements. Cutting into the centre of this was [3016], an oval pit with a bowl shaped cross-section ca. 0.60m in diameter and 0.40m deep. It contained two fills, the lower fill, [3027] was a compact reddish yellow clay, virtually indistinguishable from natural. This was sealed by the final fill a dark brown sandy silty loam containing rounded pebbles derived from the boulder clay up to 50mm across.

The sides of both of these pits were very easy to distinguish and did not appear to have been allowed to weather.

Cut [3041] was located 3.5m to the east of the contexts described above. This was a shallow, oval pit with its long axis aligned east-west. It measured 0.94x0.65m and was 0.22m deep. The sides were almost vertical and the base flat. It had been filled with [3040] which was almost identical to the fill of pit [3039]. This feature also appeared to have been filled up soon after it fell into disuse.

Careful cleaning of the rest of the trench revealed a series of mid-dark grey stains. These were excavated but all appeared to be of natural origin, possibly root action.

### 2.3 Trench XVIII

This trench was aligned in the same direction as Trenches XVI and XVII. Close to the western end of the trench were two pits, cuts [3001] and [3018]. These features were partly obscured by the edge of the trench so it was not possible to establish their exact size. However, both had shallow, bowl shaped profiles; [3001] was at least 1.27m across and 0.26m deep; [3018] was at least 0.94m across and 180mm deep. Although these were inter-cutting, the fills were identical in character so it was impossible to establish which was the later. Both were dark grey sandy loams containing cobbles and pebbles of red sandstone and glacial erratics. Both fills also contained approximately 1% of charcoal flecks.

Approximately 1.0m to the east of these features was a dark grey stain 0.16m wide running north to south across the trench. Although this deposit was not excavated it was very similar in character to the two pits discussed above and is therefore probably of similar date.

Although these were the only unambiguous archaeological features present in this trench, two features approximately 20m from the western end may represent activity in this area. Context [3025] was a dark greyish brown sandy loam which filled a very irregularly shaped pit measuring at least 1.38x0.40m and 0.27m deep. Context [3030] was identical to [3025] but filled a linear cut running north-west to south-east across the trench for 1.90m. It was 0.30m wide and 0.26m deep with a slightly undercut, "u" shaped profile. Neither of these fills contained any finds and they were broadly similar in character to naturally deposited contexts excavated elsewhere on the site. However, the cuts were sufficiently regular in plan and profile to suggest that they could have been man-made.

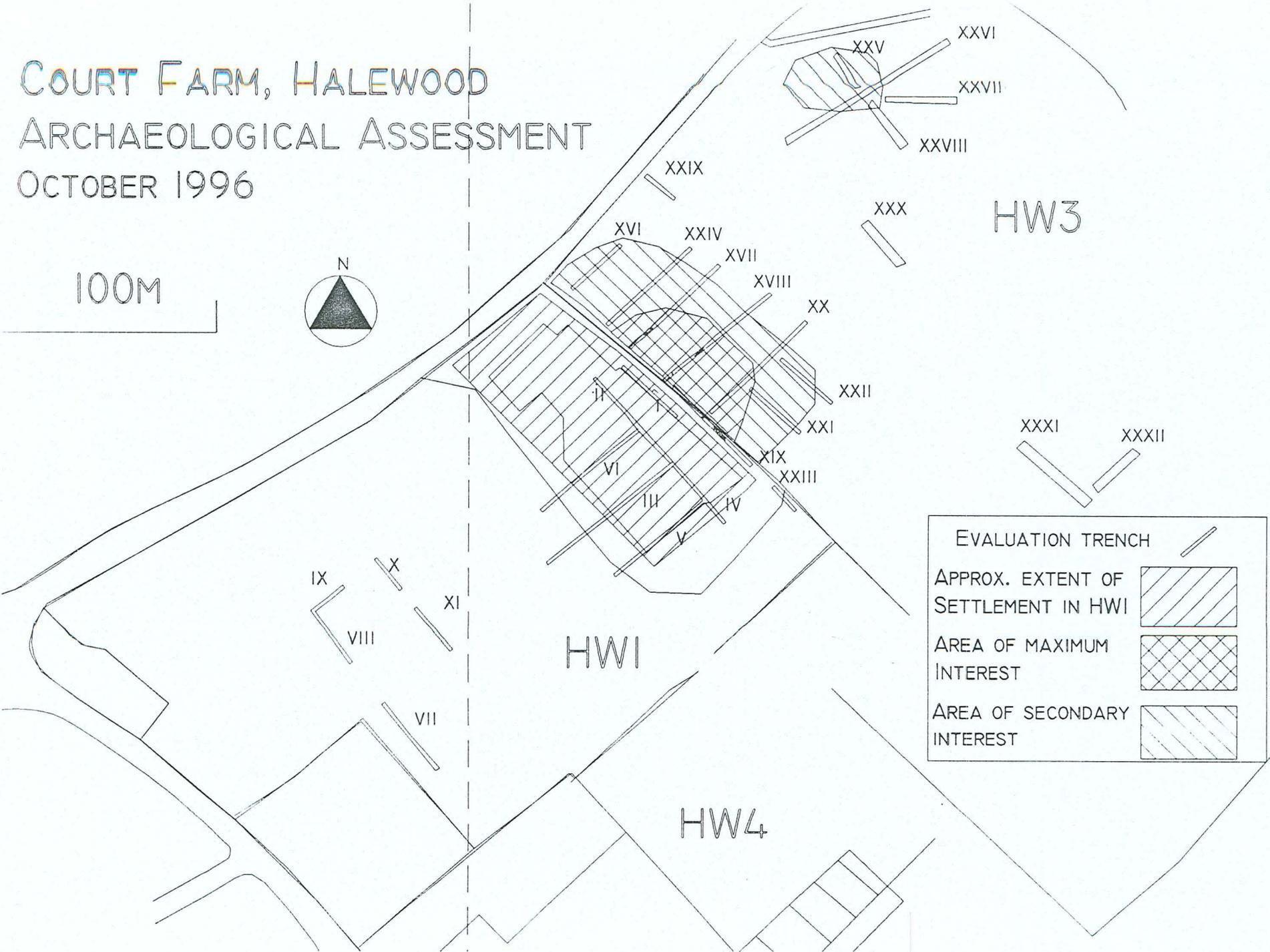
All of the other contexts excavated in this trench appeared to be features of natural origin such as ice-wedges formed by peri-glacial action on the Boulder Clay.

### 2.4 Trench XIX

This trench ran parallel to the modern hedge from the western end of Trench XVIII. A series of very shallow (less than 0.10m deep) lenses of dark grey sandy loam were excavated at the northern end of the trench. These were probably features of natural origin. Approximately 19.0m from the northern end was a circular pit (cut [3023]). This was 0.76m in diameter and 0.36m deep. The sides were nearly vertical and the base uneven, the excavator had difficulty locating the edges suggesting that it had been allowed to weather prior to backfilling with [3005]; a dark greyish brown sandy clay containing pebbles and up to 10% charcoal flecks. To the south of this feature was another pit, [3029]. This extended beyond the edge of the trench and its southern edge was truncated by a modern field drain; consequently its full extent could not be determined but it was at least 0.60m across and 0.34m deep. The sides were almost vertical and the base flat. It contained two fills, the lower fill [3028] was a very dark grey clayey loam containing up to 20% fired clay, 5% charcoal and 5% cobbles. The upper fill, [3007] was very similar but slightly sandier and contained no fired clay.

COURT FARM, HALEWOOD  
 ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT  
 OCTOBER 1996

100M



EVALUATION TRENCH	
APPROX. EXTENT OF SETTLEMENT IN HWI	
AREA OF MAXIMUM INTEREST	
AREA OF SECONDARY INTEREST	

Figure 1. Location of evaluation trenches and areas of archaeological deposits

To the south of this deposit was a layer of dark grey silty sand containing 5% charcoal flecks and 5% cobbles and fragments of orange ware. This was probably a layer of occupation debris. No archaeological deposits were observed to the south of this layer.

## **2.5 Trench XX**

This trench ran parallel to Trench XVIII from approximately the mid-point of Trench XIX. A small pit, [3019], was located in the middle of the trench ca. 5.0m from the western end of the trench. It was oval in plan and measured 0.77x0.65m with its long axis aligned east-west. Its profile was bowl shaped. It was filled by a greyish brown sandy loam, [3002], containing large flecks of charcoal. Another, larger pit, [3020] lay just to the south-west and continued into the southern edge of the trench. Its minimum length was 1.20m and it extended 0.65m into the trench. It was 0.65m deep with a shallow, bowl shaped profile. The upper fill, [3003], was identical to [3002]. The lower fill [3034] was similar but contained less charcoal, apart from a thin lens at the base which was very rich in charcoal.

Pit [3054] was located 12.0m from the western end of the trench and was roughly oval measuring 1.01x0.90m. It was 0.22m deep with a shallow bowl shaped profile. The fill was very similar to the pits to the west but contained smaller charcoal flecks.

## **2.6 Trench XXI**

This trench contained no stratified deposits.

## **2.7 Trench XXII**

A single small pit, [3053] was located 9.5m north of the southern end of the trench. It was 0.35m in diameter and 0.25m deep with a sides evenly sloping to a slightly pointed base. The fill was a very dark grey silty clay loam containing burnt cobbles and charcoal flecks

## **2.8 Trench XXIII**

This trench contained no stratified deposits.

## **2.9 Trench XXIV**

A dark grey stain running across the trench at the extreme western end was probably of natural origin. Another, similar area ca 4.0m from the western end was not excavated. This may correspond with the crop mark described in the desk based assessment but was not excavated. A heavily corroded knife blade was found pressed into the boulder clay (possibly by the JCB bucket) ca.10m from the west end of the trench

## **2.10 Trench XXV**

Only one feature was excavated in this trench, a small pit [3056], probably a post-hole. It was located roughly half way along the trench and was apparently circular, 0.25m in diameter with a bowl shaped profile. The upper fill [3055] was a dark grey loamy sand containing pebbles and charcoal flecks, the lower fill [3057] was lens of redeposited clay.

## **2.11 Trenches XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXII**

These trenches contained no stratified deposits.