

# 9 Lower Street, Hillmorton, Rugby, Warwickshire

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION AND RECORDING



*understanding heritage matters*

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 1627  
MAY 2016



*Working for  
Warwickshire*

**Project:** 9 Lower Street, Hillmorton  
**Commissioned by:** Paul Martin of Martindale & Co Ltd  
**Project Report No.** 1627  
**Site Code:** RL13  
**Planning Reference:** R10/0528  
**National Grid Reference:** SP 5357 7412  
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**Date:** May 2016  
**Report reference:** Coutts, C. M. 2016 9 Lower Street,  
Hillmorton, Rugby, Warwickshire:  
*Archaeological Watching Brief: Archaeology  
Warwickshire Report 1627.*

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## SUMMARY

*Archaeological observation was carried out during groundworks at a site in Hillmorton, between Lower Street and Constable Road. Although part of the site was thought to have been within medieval Hillmorton, no signs of medieval activity were recorded and it is likely that it was, in fact, outside the medieval settlement.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Rugby Borough Council for the erection of four houses (accessed from Constable Road) and one bungalow (accessed from Lower Street) at 9 Lower Street, Hillmorton, Rugby, Warwickshire, CV21 4NP (Planning Ref. R10/0528). The proposed development site lies within an area of archaeological potential, to the south of a medieval moat and partly within the probable extent of the medieval settlement of Hillmorton.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of the archaeological observation of soil stripping and foundation trenches in accordance with a brief prepared by the County Planning Archaeologist on behalf of the Planning Authority (August 2013), was commissioned from Archaeology Warwickshire and carried out in March 2014, January 2015, November-December 2015 and February 2016. This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Rugby Museum under site code RL13.

## 2 SITE LOCATION

2.1 The development site is located within Hillmorton, in the eastern part of Rugby, at National Grid Reference SP 5357 7412. The site is on sloping ground and appears to have been terraced, particularly in the southern part.

2.2 The underlying geology of the area is Charmouth Mudstone formation, overlain by Hillmorton Sand (BGS 1980).

## 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 There is evidence for prehistoric activity in the area and a stone axe (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record No MWA 4951) of Neolithic or Bronze Age date was found approximately 220m to the south-east of the development site. This suggests probable low intensity activity rather than a settlement in the vicinity.

3.2 Medieval settlement is recorded in the area by the time of the Domesday Book (1086) when Hillmorton was already a thriving place divided into four or five manors with a population that can be estimated at over 205 people (Morris 1976 16, 35-7; 18, 1; 44, 5). In the middle ages the parish was divided into the townships of *Hull* (or *Hill*) and *Morton* (MWA 9518). The latter, presumably the original settlement, included a series of strip properties either side of Lower Street with the Manor House and parish church to the north-west. Part of the development site lies within one of these strips and is close to the Manor House. The properties of Hull formed a separate series of strips along Upper (Higher or High) Street, which forms part of the old main road from Northampton to Coventry.

3.3 In 1265 a weekly market was established at Hillmorton. This would have been held in Upper Street, which was laid out especially wide for this purpose. In the medieval period the prosperity of Hillmorton's market made it more important than Rugby. A medieval stone market cross (MWA 3356) survives at the east end of High Street and is protected both as a Listed Building and a Scheduled Ancient Monument (List Entry nos. 1035012 and 1005743 respectively).

3.4 The former parish church of St. John the Baptist (MWA 3370) dates to the 13th century with aisles of the 14th century (VCH 1951). The tower was built in the 15th century, but a plaque in its south wall, formerly dated 1655, suggests some rebuilding at this date. The church lies 400m to the north of the development site and was probably a former focus for the settlement of Morton, lying close to an area of shrunken medieval settlement (MWA 3357). It is now separated from the rest of Hillmorton by the main London-Birmingham railway line which was opened in 1838. To the south is the site of a 16th-century timber-framed house (MWA 3387).

3.5 The Tithe map for Hillmorton of 1841 (CRO CR 569/128) clearly shows the moat around the adjacent Manor House and depicts properties fronting Lower Street. The manor house (MWA 3352) is also shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1887 (Ordnance Survey 1887) and was an 18th- and 19th-century building. It occupied the site of an earlier, medieval house whose backfilled moat (MWA 5641) was formerly visible in the grounds of the later building. Both sites were built over by 1991. The Coventry canal is also shown on this map (MWA 4348) with wharves to the north-east of the site (MWA 4359).

3.6 The 1834 Ordnance Survey shows buildings on both sides of the Lower Street frontage at this time. The 1st Edition 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map of 1888 shows that the

development area was situated behind a property fronting Lower Street. The layout of the site appears to change very little between the 1888 Ordnance Survey maps and those of 1905, 1913 and 1938 (Ordnance Survey 1888, 1905, 1913, 1938). A number of sand pits are marked on the 1905 Ordnance Survey, both to the east and west of the site. Sand extraction must have become an increasingly important local industry in the early 20th century because by 1913 the houses in the large corner plot of land, to the south-east of the junction of Lower Street and Watts Lane, had been demolished and replaced by a large sand extraction pit.

3.7 Further industrial activity is shown on the 1888 and 1905 maps in the form of a brick works (MWA 6912), approximately 800m west of the site. A brick kiln marked on the 1888 map is located approximately 300m south-west of the site, but this appears to have been demolished by the early 1900s. In the 20th century Rugby Radio Station was constructed to the north-east, to transmit Morse Code (MWA 9590).

3.8 Archaeological work in the area has included a watching brief at the Church of St John the Baptist (EWA 7343) where 18th-century alterations were recorded. At 81 High Street a layer containing medieval pottery was recorded (EWA 7706). Further along Lower Street, at number 56, a medieval boundary ditch was found during an archaeological evaluation (EWA 7577).

## 4 AIMS AND METHODS

4.1 The main aim of the work was to record any archaeological remains disturbed by the development, to collate the records in an archaeological archive and present the significant aspects of the archive in a report for dissemination.

4.2 The secondary aim was to form an understanding of the remains recorded in terms of their character and date, and to place the evidence in its local and regional context.

4.3 The objective of the work was a programme of controlled excavation to development formation levels, or the geological natural, whichever the higher.

4.4 The work undertaken involved the examination of early map evidence as well as records of archaeological remains in the area and local historical journals and other publications.

4.5 An experienced archaeologist was made available for each day of ground disturbance when notified by the client in accordance with WSI/Brief planning condition.

## 5 RESULTS

### Ground reduction

5.1 At the beginning of the project the eastern part of the site had standing buildings on it, which were subsequently demolished. This included the removal of a large, deep, inspection pit below one of the buildings. Groundworks were carried out at different times for the four plots. Geological natural sand was recorded in each of the plots, exposed using a large tracked excavator with a ditching bucket. In each instance the plot itself was stripped down to the natural sand, then the ground reduced to a level at which the foundation trenches could be excavated.

5.2 The first area to be stripped was for the proposed property in the western part of the site and the driveway from Lower Street. Here geological natural reddish yellow sand (4) was reached at a depth of between 0.50m and 0.90m. It was overlain by up to 0.30m of brown sandy loam (2), probably a former ploughsoil, from which no finds were recovered. Layer 2 was overlaid by between 0.30m and 0.70m of topsoil mixed with extensive amounts of modern debris: fragments of concrete, bricks, tyres, metal, plastic etc, which had been dumped on the site in recent times. A 1m high brick wall (3) was recorded along the northern boundary of the property which was subsequently demolished.

5.3 The second area was stripped down to natural sand for a slab footing. Overlying the natural sand was 0.25m of brown sandy loam (2) overlaid by 0.30m of topsoil and debris (1). No finds were recovered from this area and no features recorded.

5.4 The area for the third property was stripped with a similar sequence, with 0.30m of brown sandy loam (2) overlaid by 0.25m of dark grey brown sandy loam topsoil with modern debris (1). In the southern part of the site was a 9.5m wide slab of concrete 0.20m thick (5) associated with the buildings that were formerly on the site. The ground immediately south of here was much higher, suggesting it had been terraced to form a level area. An area on the Constable Road frontage was stripped for machine hard standing; here the natural sand was overlain by a scant 0.10m of topsoil, suggesting significant truncation in this part of the frontage.

5.5 The final house, eastern, plot also has similar stratigraphy with natural sand overlain by 0.30m of dark brownish yellow sand mixed with modern building debris (6), presumably derived from the buildings that were formerly on the eastern part of the site. This layer was overlain by up to 0.65m of topsoil and debris (1). No finds were recovered and no features were recorded.

5.6 It was agreed with the Planning Archaeologist, John Robinson, that no further visits would be required to observe groundworks for the bungalow that will be constructed to the south.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The watching brief was able to demonstrate that there was no evidence for medieval settlement on the site, or any other archaeological remains. It appears that there has been minimal disturbance here until the 20th century.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeology Warwickshire would like to thank Mr Paul Martin of Martindale & Co for commissioning the work and the Planning Archaeologist for providing the Brief.

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WRO CR 569/128 *Tithe Map of Hillmorton, 1841, Warwickshire County Record Office.*

## APPENDIX

### A List of contexts

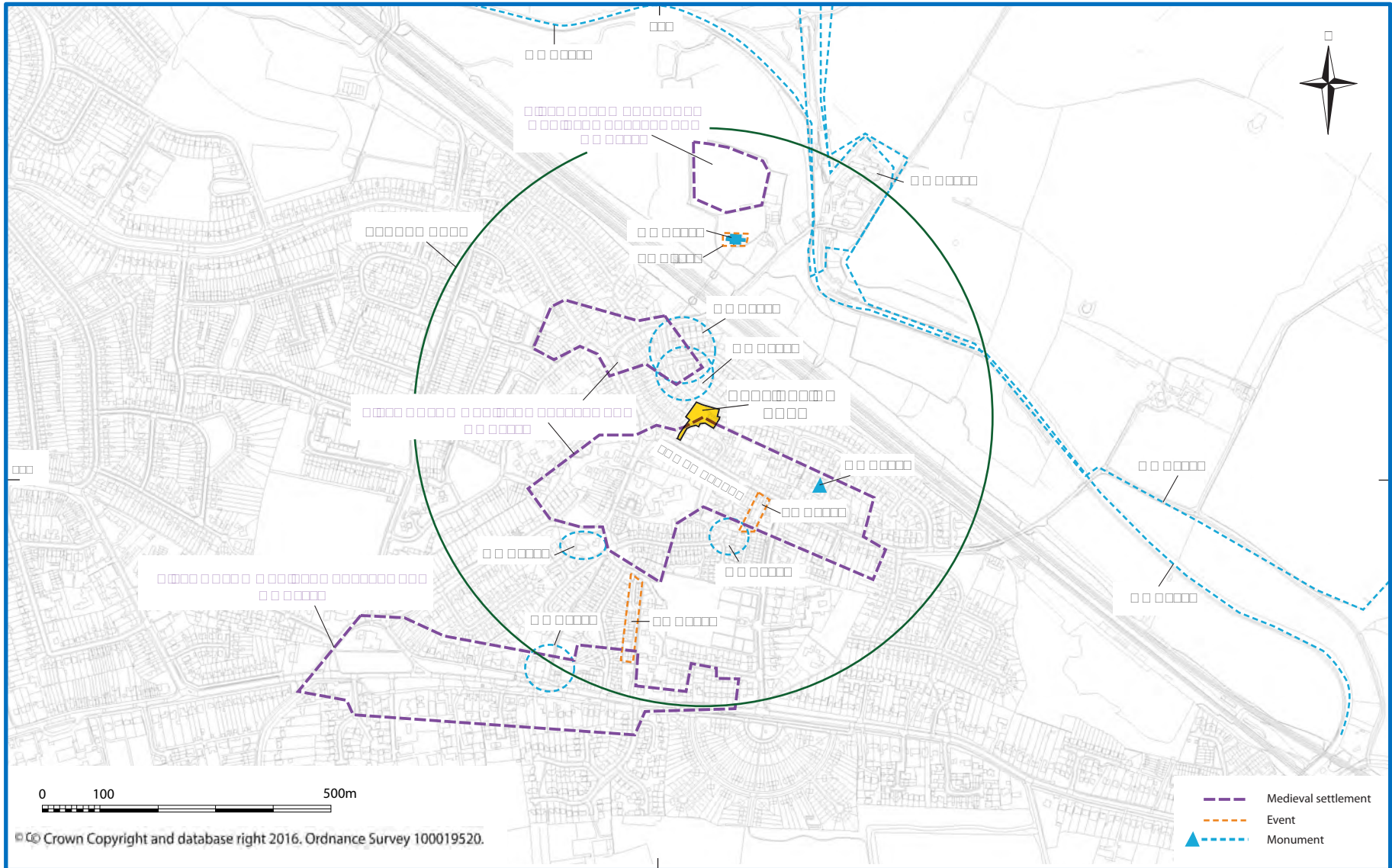
<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comment/details</i>
1	Topsoil	Modern, with debris
2	Layer of brown sandy loam	
3	Brick wall	early 20th century boundary wall
4	Natural sand	
5	Concrete slab	
6	Layer of dark brownish yellow sand	mixed with building debris



1 Site being stripped, looking east



2 Site stripping, looking towards Constable Road

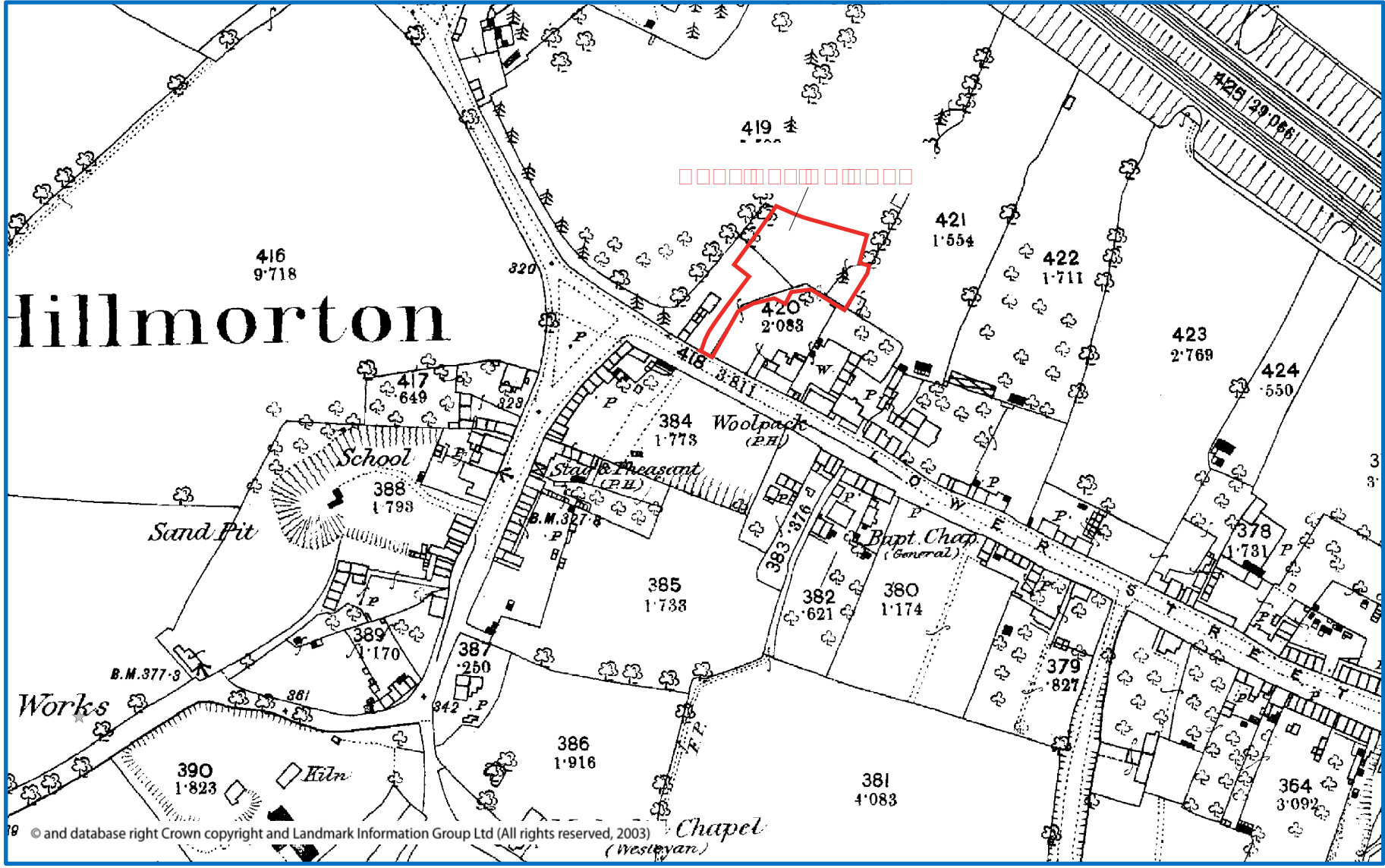
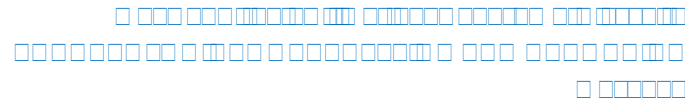


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- Medieval settlement
- - - Event
- ▲ - - - Monument





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