

**Herefordshire Nature Trust Parkland Project,  
Archaeological Investigations 2: Laugh Lady  
Valley, Brampton Bryan Park**  
December 2013



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**Herefordshire Archaeology**  
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Places and Communities Directorate Herefordshire Council



# Herefordshire Nature Trust Parkland Project, Archaeological Investigations 2: Laugh Lady Valley, Brampton Bryan Park

NGR: SO 351 716  
Event Number: EHE 80024

**Herefordshire Archaeology** is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic landscapes, maintains the county Sites and Monument Record, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects.

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## Summary:

The investigations within Brampton Bryan Park formed part of a larger project entitled: The Herefordshire Nature Trust Parklands Project. This project involved the recording of ecological and archaeological / historical features within parklands across the county. Ecological and archaeological assets were recorded by volunteers under professional supervision in order to enhance and update the data held within the Biological Record Centre and The Historic Environment Record. The final Phase of the project included the more detailed investigation of a range of parkland features within Moccas Park, Brampton Bryan Park and Hays Park.

The investigations within Brampton Bryan Park comprised the detailed survey and partial excavation of a series of earthworks within Laugh Lady Valley thought to be part of a charcoal burning settlement.

The detailed survey recorded the location and scale of a series of earthworks within Laugh Lady Valley. These had been previously identified during a walk over survey of the Deer Park in 2003. The location and form of the earthworks suggested that they related to timber extraction and charcoal burning. A levelled platform was tentatively recorded as a hut / building platform and a low mound a midden.

The excavations confirmed the existence of a charcoal burning platform. However trenches across the platform and midden showed that these were in fact the earthwork remains of a brick kiln and associated wasters. The excavation of a presumed saw-pit revealed a feature most likely linked to brick production during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. National Grid References are accurate to approximately 10m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50 and 0.02m at 1:20m

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## 1. Introduction

This report provides an account of a series of investigations at Brampton Bryan Park, Herefordshire, (NGR SO 351 716). This is the second in a series of three reports looking at archaeological features within three different parklands within Herefordshire. The investigations within Brampton Bryan Park were based on the recognition of features recorded during a walk over Survey in 2003, (*An Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey of Brampton Bryan Park*, Herefordshire Archaeology Report No 69).

## 2. Aims and Objectives

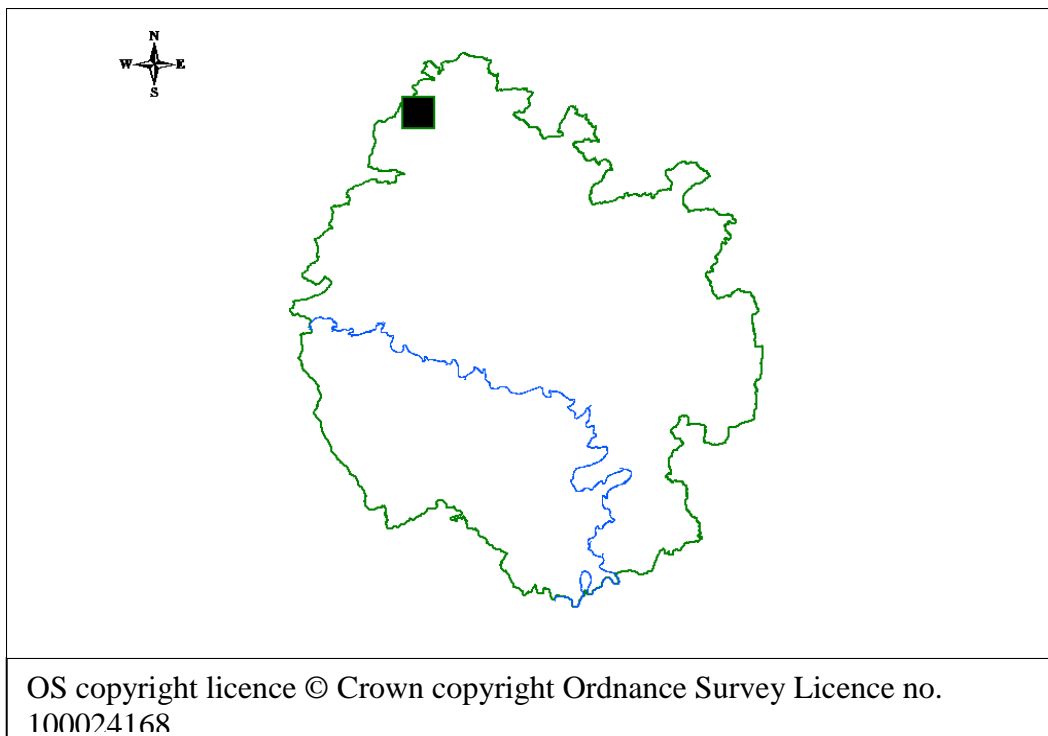
The aim of the works at Brampton Bryan Park was to record in more detail selected features whose presence was noted in an earlier walk-over survey and to investigate these features by limited archaeological excavation.

The objectives of the project were:

- To survey and investigate a number of earthwork features believed to be associated with charcoal production and / or the processing of lumber.
- To accurately survey and investigate a linear earthwork feature, tentatively previously recorded as a length of medieval park pale.

## 3. Location, Topography, Geology and Land-use

Brampton Bryan Park is located approximately 35km to the north west of Hereford City. It has an area of over 130ha and covers the eastern, western and northern flanks of a large hill overlooking the River Teme from the south at a point where it has created a pass between high hills to the north and south.



**Figure 1: Location of Brampton Bryan Park within the county of Herefordshire.**

The solid geology under Brampton Bryan Park comprises mudstone and siltstone of the Coalbrookdale formation with occasional limestone outcrops of the Leintwardine and Lower Bringewood formations.

The valley bases are covered in till and moranic deposits giving rise to sandy clay soils.

The Historic Landscape Characterisation for Herefordshire lists the study area as a retained parkland.

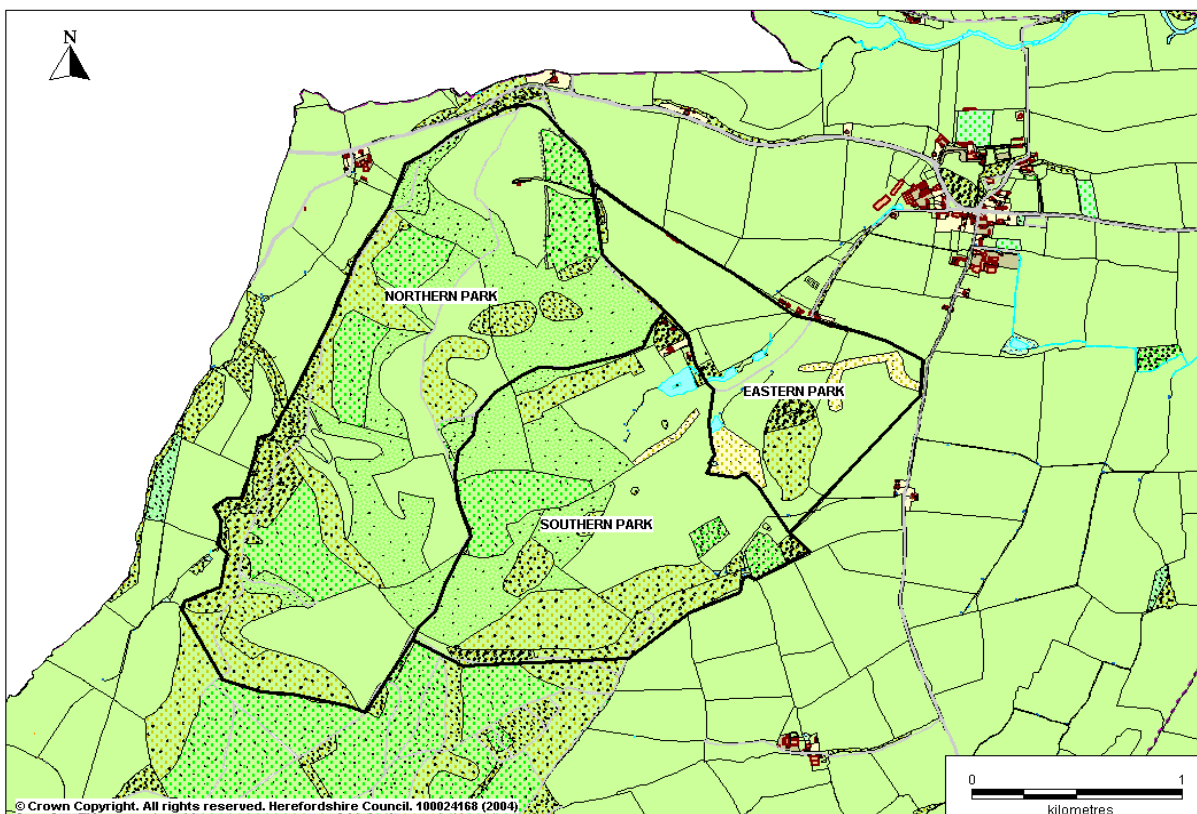
### ***Brampton Bryan Park, Location and Setting***

The Eastern Park (figure 2)

This area of the park is immediately west of the road to Birtley and encompasses Broomy Hill Plantation and the land either side of the drive. It is bounded on its north east and south east by the modern deer fence. This area comprises a mix of pasture and wood pasture.

The Southern Park (figure 2)

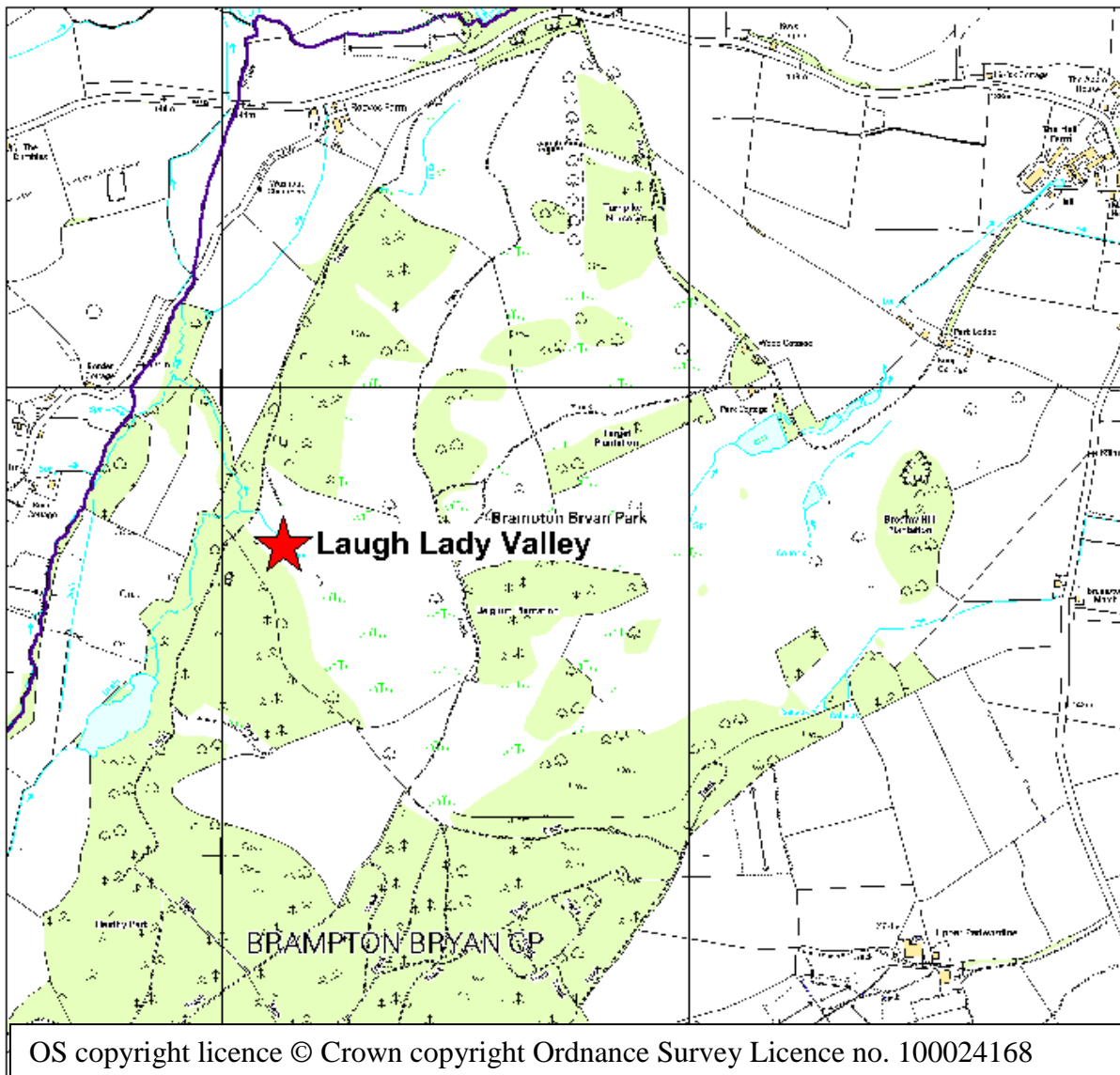
This comprises the lower and upper slopes of the north / east facing aspect of the park and is bounded by the modern deer fence on its southern side and Belgium Plantation on its northern side. The steepest slopes within this area are mostly covered in deciduous woodland and bracken.



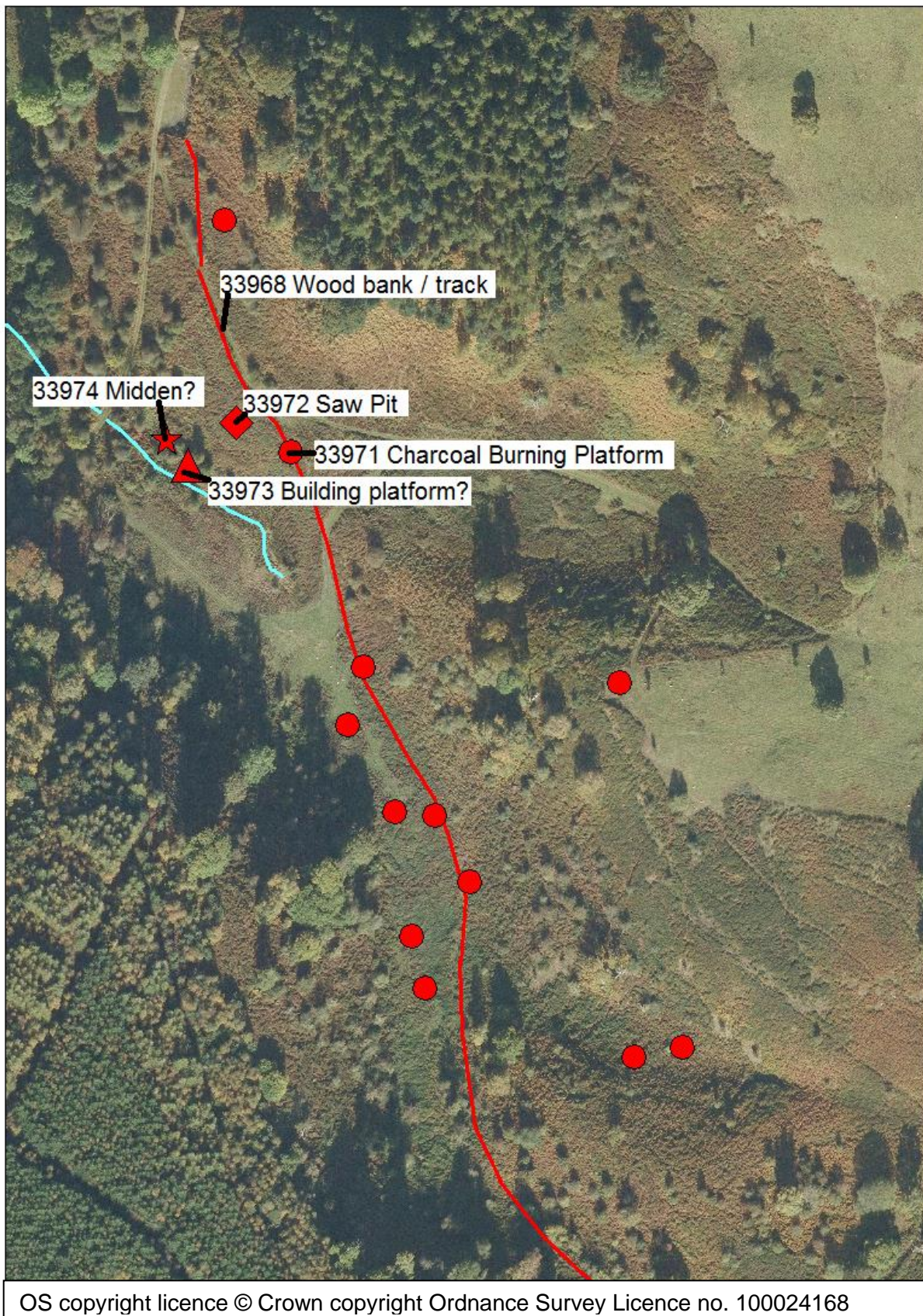
**Figure 2: Topography and land-use of Brampton Bryan Park**

### The Northern Park (figure 2)

This is the largest area running north from Belgium Plantation up to its boundary with the A4113. The western boundary is largely defined by the present deer fence. This area covers the highest ground on the estate and is largely either rough grazing or is heather and bracken. It is also the area in which Laugh Lady Valley is located (Figure 3). This runs from Heathy Park, in a north westerly direction to the northern boundary of the park and comprises a small valley with a spring and associated small stream in its base. This area was targeted for this element of the Parkland Project due to the series of well preserved earthworks which were recorded there during the 2003 walkover survey. These features comprised what was initially identified as a charcoal burner's settlement comprising a building platform, midden, and a saw pit along with a series of charcoal burning hearths / platforms, (figure 4).



**Figure 3: Location of Laugh Lady Valley within Brampton Bryan Park.**



**Figure 4: Location of sites investigated within this report.**



#### **4. Methodology**

Each site was surveyed using a Leica 905 Total Station instrument. This not only recorded the shape and scale of the earthwork but also the topography within its immediate environs. Sections across each feature were excavated by hand in order to retrieve data concerning the construction of the features, the character of the features and any evidence of their use and date.

Full written and drawn records of all excavated contexts were be made in accordance with best archaeological practice. Archaeological deposits, which are not excavated, will be recorded to the maximum extent possible. Records included the overall excavation area and phase plans, as appropriate.

All on-site recording was be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Institute For Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavations* (as amended 1999).

A continuous unique numbering system was operated. Written descriptions were recorded on proforma sheets comprising factual data and interpretative elements.

Where stratified deposits were encountered a Harris matrix was compiled during the course of the excavation.

Hand drawn plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20 or 1:10 as appropriate.

The site grid and plans were accurately tied into the National Grid.

A register of plans was kept.

A register of sections was kept.

A full digital photographic record, illustrating in both detail and general context the principal features and finds discovered was maintained. The photographic record also included working shots in order to illustrate more generally the nature of the archaeological work.

Upon completion of the excavation, the trenches were backfilled by hand and where appropriate, turves replaced.

#### **5. Current Knowledge**

The group of earthwork features selected for investigation within this report were identified during the walk-over survey of 2003. On the basis of their size and shape, state of preservation and topographic location, various functional "labels" were assigned to them without any further investigation.

These features were therefore entered into the Sites and Monuments Record (now the Historic Environmental Record) as:

HER No.	Description
33968	Wood bank leaves pale and runs up eastern side of valley, cuts both Phase 1 and 2 park pales
33970	Pools roughly rectangular pools
33971	Charcoal Burning Platform , 8m in diameter facing SSW
33972	Saw Pit, 4m long and 1.5m wide
33973	Building platform? 5m square
33974	Midden? mound 4m in diameter and 1m high

It was thought that this group of features represented the remains of a seasonal charcoal burning / woodland management settlement site dating from the post-medieval period. This group of features was chosen for investigation during the Parkland Project principally because, nationally, few such sites have been investigated archaeologically. It was anticipated that small scale, archaeological excavation, would provide enough evidence to confirm the site types and their date of use.

## 6. Field Survey Results

The features will be dealt with in this section in the order in which they were investigated. The fieldwork was undertaken between 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013. Project staff included, Dr. Keith Ray, County Archaeologist, Tim Hoverd and David Williams of Herefordshire Archaeology, Lewis Goldwater, Parkland Projects Officer, Herefordshire Nature Trust and Rosalind Skelton, volunteer.

### HER 33973 Building platform? 5m square (Trenches 1 & 2)

A 2m long by 1m wide trench (Trench 1), was excavated by hand on the eastern side of this feature. The earthwork comprised a flat topped mound approximately 5m square next to the small stream in the base of Laugh Lady Valley. The mound appeared to have a 0.4m wide and 0.2m high bank around its top. The trench was located to cut through the bank and open up a sample area on the top of the mound in order to identify any structural evidence on the mound and to investigate the construction of the bank.

Upon removal of the turf and topsoil layer, it was immediately apparent that the mound top had been exposed to a high degree of burning and that this had reached high temperatures. The clay subsoil had been reduced by heating into friable, baked clay fragments mixed with fragments of brick. Many of the brick fragments showed signs of vitrification. The bank was constructed of earth and its internal edge was burnt.

Limited excavation took place which revealed ever increasing evidence of intense burning and brick fragments suggesting the presence of a kiln rather than a domestic building.

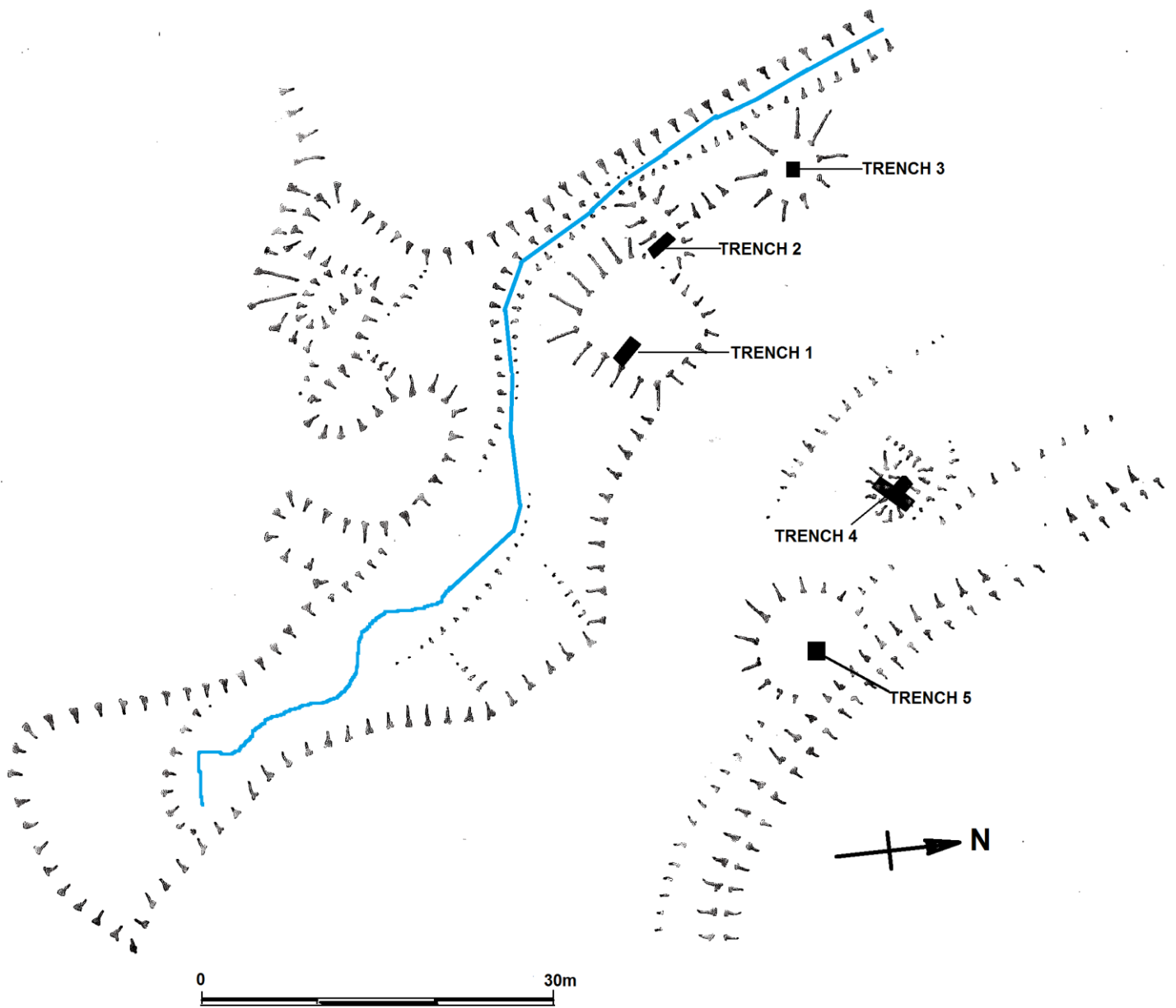


Figure 5: Earthwork survey and trench location plan.



**Plate 1: Trench 1 looking north-east after topsoil removal.**



**Plate 2: Showing detail of burning and vitrified brick fragments within the western end of Trench 1.**

A second trench, (Trench 2) was excavated to the west of the mound where a small inear mound was identified. This was approximately 3.5m long (aligned roughly north-south) and 1.5m wide. It survived to a height of 0.4m. A 1m long and 0.5m wide trench was excavated over this feature (Plates 3 and 4).

As in Trench 1, the removal of the topsoil revealed large quantities of brick fragments. These however were not mixed with burnt subsoil but in a looser, loamy earth matrix. The fragment size was much larger than those recorded within Trench 1, many being half bricks or larger.



**Plate 3: Trench 2 after topsoil removal showing brick fragments and dark soil.**

The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.4m at its deepest point (effectively half sectioning the mound). The mound appeared to comprise a large quantity of over-fired brick wasters from the kiln. Most examples recovered had either fractured during firing or had warped beyond the tolerances of usefulness. Most showed signs of severe vitrification.

Rather than the building platform, initially recorded during the walk over survey of 2003, it would appear that this feature comprises the earthwork remains of a brick kiln or clamp. The depth of burning into the ground and the number of wasters would indicate that this could have been used on a number of occasions. Unfortunately no dating evidence was forthcoming from the site.



**Plate 4: Trench 2 showing brick wasters.**

### **HER 33974 Midden? mound 4m in diameter and 1m high (Trench 3)**

Approximately 12 m to the north of the brick Clamp / kiln was a circular mound approximately 4m in diameter and 1m in height. It had initially been identified as a possible midden, on the basis of its proximity to the supposed “building platform”. A 1m square test pit (Trench 4) was excavated into the centre of the mound revealing that it was made up of very clean, stone free, yellow clay. It is suggested that this represent a weathered pile of raw clay awaiting processing prior to making into bricks.



**Plate 5: Trench 3, top of mound showing the yellow clay.**

#### **HER 33970 Pools roughly rectangular pools**

#### **HER 33972 Saw Pit, 4m long and 1.5m wide**

The was located approximately 20m to the east of the brick kiln / clamp and comprised a 1.5m wide and 4m long depression, 0.7m in depth. It “dog-legged” at its northern end, turning to the west by 90 degree for an additional 1.3m. The spoil from the excavation appears to have been used to form the downslope bank.

A 3m long and 1m wide trench was excavated across the centre of this feature (Trench 4). This was extended by 2m to the north to form a “T” shape in order to expose more of the base of this feature.

Upon removal of the turf, a dark loam was evident filling the feature. This extended to a maximum depth of 0.35m and contained occasional small stones and small fragments of charcoal. Directly beneath this deposit within the eastern side of the cut, was a clean, buff clay subsoil. However on the western side of the cut there was a lens of bright orange burnt clay which in turn overlay the subsoil. The cut for the feature was gently sloping with a curved base. The maximum depth of the earthwork appears to have been approximately 1m from top of bank to base of cut. The burnt clay lens ran out approximately 0.4m from the southern section and appears to have been deposited rather than being burned *in situ* as there was no evidence of burning on the subsoil immediately below it.

The use of this feature is unclear – in form and scale, the earthwork looks like a saw pit however the excavation has revealed a shallow feature with gently sloping, curved sides. Saw pits would be expected to have vertical sides and flat bases and be considerably deeper in order to accommodate either the length of the saw or the person helping pull the saw through from underneath (the under-dog).

Its proximity to the kiln and the small charcoal fragments and burnt clay lens may suggest that this was used as part of the brick making process possibly as a water tank, however this is speculation.



**Plate 6: Trench 4 looking south**





**Plate 7: Trench 4 showing burnt clay deposit**



**Plate 7: Trench 4 showing burnt clay in detail**

### **HER 33971 Charcoal Burning Platform, 8m in diameter facing SSW**

This was located approximately 33m due east of the brick kiln / clamp and had been constructed on top of a wood bank which ran up the eastern side of the valley. The wood bank comprised a low bank approximately 1.7m wide and 0.3m high with a 2m wide berm or terrace on its eastern side. A 1m square trench was excavated in its centre (Trench 5) in order to establish the depth of burning and the nature / character of any charcoal remaining. Charcoal was present immediately below the turf and comprised a 0.2m thick layer of very fine charcoal dust, very few fragments larger than 5mm diameter were present, suggesting that it had been thoroughly cleaned after its last use.

The trench was emptied of charcoal in order to see if there was a ditch associated with the wood bank. Immediately beneath the charcoal deposit was a clean, clayey, subsoil with two linear depressions running parallel to the axis of the wood bank. These have been interpreted as wheel ruts cut into the natural subsoil, each was approximately 40mm deep and 90mm wide, suggesting that they were made by wooden cart wheels. No dating evidence was forthcoming from this trench. It would appear that the berm or terrace which was cut to form the wood bank was used as a track way. The fact that two charcoal pruning platforms have been constructed over it, the one investigated and a second one further south would suggest that this fell into disuse as a routeway whilst intensive charcoal production was still being undertaken within the valley. This implies that the charcoal was not being transported along the track which leads into the parkland and towards the domestic heart of the estate but was being taken elsewhere – possibly only as far as the brick kiln!



**Plate 8: Trench 5 during excavation**



**Plate 9: Trench 6 after excavation showing rutting**

## 7. Discussion

This small scale fieldwork has been extremely useful in clarifying the identification of a number of earthworks. The initial observations and conclusions from the 2003 walkover survey have been shown to require updating. Rather than a seasonal encampment relating to woodland management and charcoal burning, a small complex relating to brick making has been identified. The dating for this is still unclear, no artefacts relating to domestic activity were recovered. However, it is suggested, due to the fact that there is no record of this site within the estate records (Victoria Harley *pers comm.*) that this almost certainly pre-dated the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The amount of pitting within the stream valley, (together with the number of brick wasters within trench 2), would suggest that a considerable number of bricks were manufactured at this site, possibly over many seasons. The earthwork through which trench 4 was excavated remains unidentified as far as use goes but appears to be related to the brick making process. The charcoal burning platform excavated in trench 5 is almost certainly directly related to this complex. This explains why it was constructed over what had previously been an access track running up the valley (as documented by the wheel rutting). Clearly this had fallen into disuse by the time that the brickmaking had begun and the track was used as a level platform onto which the charcoal hearth was constructed.

## 8. Acknowledgements

Herefordshire Archaeology would like to acknowledge the help and co-operation of the Harley Estate, Lewis Goldwater, The Heritage Lottery Fund, Herefordshire Nature Trust and Ros Skelton.

## **9. Bibliography**

Hoverd, T. An Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey of Brampton Bryan Park, Herefordshire. Herefordshire Archaeology Report No 69. 2003

## **10. Archive**

38 digital photographs  
3 site notebook entries  
16 context cards  
1 sheets of field drawings  
1 sheets of inked drawings  
2 DXF Cad files  
This document