

# Archaeological Investigation: Monitoring and Recording

Carriage Splash,  
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## 1. SUMMARY.

1.1 Observations were made over a period of two days in September 2017 whilst contractors removed by machine the upper 500mm of a causewayed feature known as the carriage splash. Elements associated with the original stone metalling of this feature were recorded and details of the approach and exit roads noted. Further recording was undertaken on a series of wooden posts which were part of the structure of a nineteenth century footbridge.

## 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1 General background

2.1.1 Polyolbion Archaeology was commissioned by Alan Cox of Birch Brothers (Kidderminster) to undertake this watching brief. Work was planned following discussions with the Trust's regional archaeology advisor Janine Young. There were no formal planning conditions which required archaeological input.

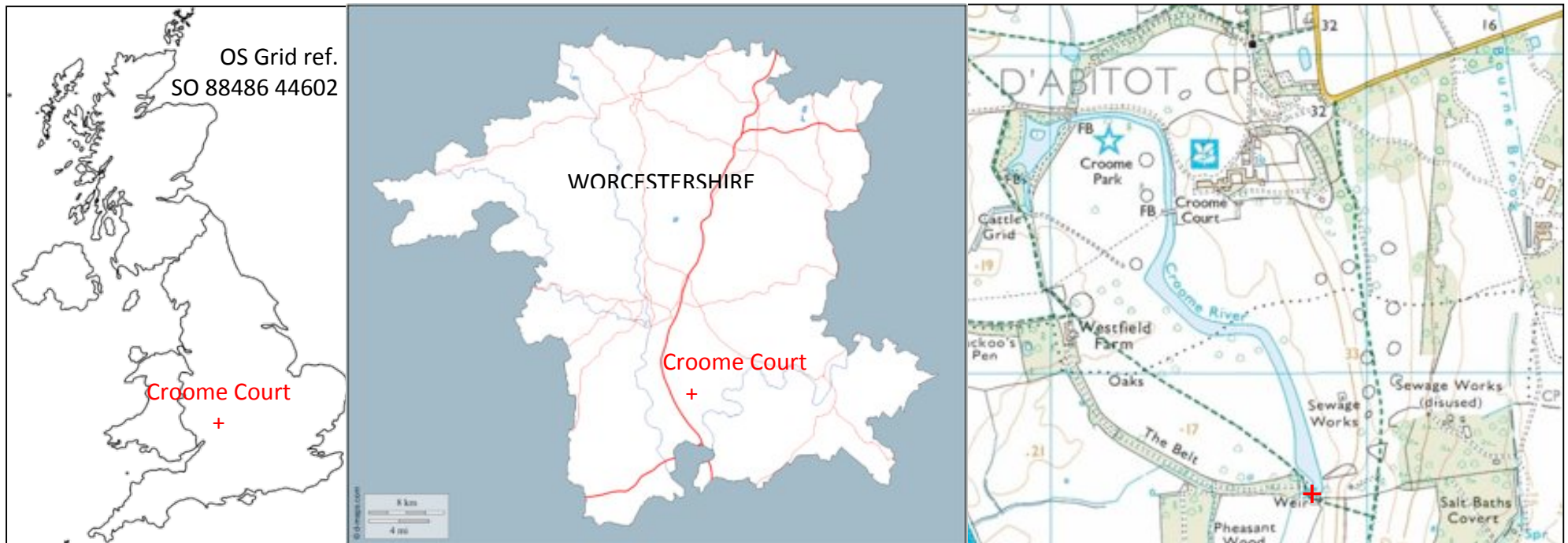


Fig. 2 Location maps.

2.1.2 Earlier work on the site and recent erosion meant that repairs were needed to both strengthen the seating for the carriage splash and restore an appropriate metalled surface so that it was brought back to something resembling its original condition. Because of a very short lead in time in getting the work started it was not possible to produce a detailed WSI with appropriate method statements. Instead a general procedure was adopted based on other projects undertaken for the Trust at Farnborough, Packwood and Croft.

## 2.2 History and Archaeology

2.2.1 Geology and Topography. The local geology consists of alluvium: clays, silt, sand and gravel, above the Branscombe mudstone formation. The local soil is a deep neutral silty loam.<sup>1</sup> The site lies at the end of a landscape feature known as Croome River, engineered in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to improve a low lying area of land bisected by a small southward flowing stream. The level area of pasture to the north is around 17 metres above sea level whilst to the east there is a ridge which rises quite steeply to a height of 33m above sea level. Originally the ground was clearly very damp, The Sixth Earl of Coventry in a memorial to Lancelot Brown describes the terrain as a 'morass' and Mowl notes of the land as being, 'a centre of inland drainage [ ... ] small streams escape from it but not easily and not with any strong flow'.<sup>2</sup>

2.2.2 Archaeology. Presumably the marshy ground precluded any early settlement and apart from scattered remnants of ridge and furrow and a few earthworks close to the church north of Croome Court there are few traces of medieval occupation. Since the National Trust took over the park in 1996 extensive survey work has been undertaken as well as a number of small scale excavations and watching briefs of post-medieval features associated with the landscaped park including work on the site of the Chinese Bridge by Lewis.<sup>3</sup> In particular the South Worcestershire

Archaeological Group examined the site in 2006 following the reduction of the water level so that dredging could take place, going on to excavate portions of the carriage splash in April 2015<sup>4</sup> with an additional test pit being dug in 2016.<sup>5</sup>

2.2.3 History. The early history of the site is summarised by Whitefoot.<sup>6</sup> Of relevance to the site under investigation is that in 1747 one John Phipps was instructed to form a long serpentine body of water which is shown on a map of 1751.<sup>7</sup> However, in 1748 the gentleman architect Sanderson Miller was consulted by the earl about his 'water' and the possibility exists that Miller not only introduced Lancelot Brown but that also made recommendations about further improvements to the river, the kind of garden feature he had had considerable experience in designing.<sup>8</sup> Croome was Brown's first major independent project and he continued to work there until his death in 1783. This all makes the chronology of construction at the far south end of Croome River problematic. Map evidence shows that by 1768 the current arrangement whereby the river terminates in a rounded pool with a central island was in place but there is nothing that shows the presence of the carriage splash although neither does it appear to show any other track ways in the area.<sup>9</sup> The estate map of 1796 by Snape (Fig. 3) clearly does show the crossing point and associated track ways.<sup>10</sup> Presumably this feature continues in use through to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when it appears on the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1885 which also marks on a foot bridge along the same line. However by the end of the century it is no longer shown. This is not to say it fell out of use and one assumes that the local labour force who continued to work the fields would have known about it. Unfortunately there appear to be no contemporary records of the carriage splash regarding its construction or usage.





Fig. 3 Extract from Snape map of 1786.



Fig. 4 Work to strip the topsoil begins, view looking west.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Observations were carried out as the upper surface of the causeway was removed by machine (Fig. 4). Initially the topsoil was taken out to a depth of around 20cm then a second pass was made removing the remains of an earlier metalled surface. Samples of stone slabs were recovered and an area roughly 2m x 1.5m excavated by hand to examine the character of the metalling. Towards the western end of the causeway the upper portion of a brick built conduit was uncovered, cleaned and recorded. Here, as elsewhere on site where possible the context numbering as used by Whitefoot and Williams has been retained. All recording was done digitally on a tablet computer.

3.2 Along the south side of the causeway were a series of wooden posts which had been partially uncovered and recorded in earlier campaigns. These were cleared of surrounding vegetation and individually photographed and planned as a scale of 1:10.

3.3 The areas of stone setts at either end of the causeway had been excavated and recorded in 2015, these were partially re-excavated to make the edges clear to the contractors. The full extent of the pitched stone surface was traced for some 50m to the west. To the east an attempt was made to trace the extent of the stone sets by visual examination and by probing with an iron road pin.

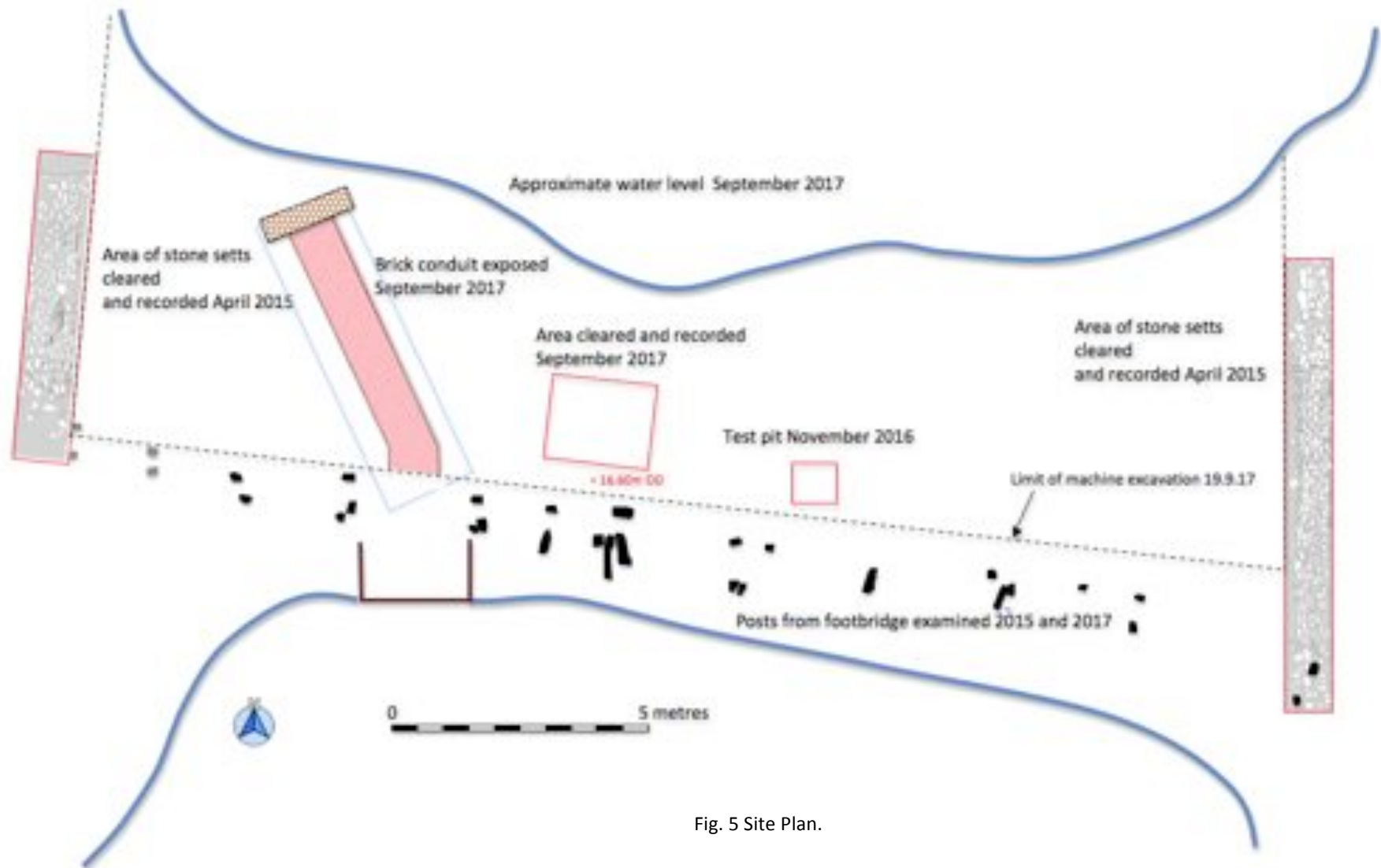


Fig. 5 Site Plan.

## 4. RESULTS

4.1 The causeway. As material was removed from the causeway to a depth of around 50cm the basic stratigraphic sequence noted by Williams in the 2016 test pit was confirmed.<sup>11</sup> This comprised a topsoil made up of a compact dark brown silty clay up to 20cm deep (001) above a deposit of angular fragments of hard limestone which were identified as roughly laid flagstones (002). This material was examined in detail in an area 2m x 1.5m around 4m further west (Fig. 6). Here it was clear that the surface had been broken up, presumably by the wear and tear of vehicle movements, and patched on a number of occasions. Below this was a thick compact layer of greyish brown silty clay and sand with abundant pebbles, cobbles and stone fragments (003). This was interpreted as the make-up for the body of the causeway and it lay above a dense layer of grey clay (004).

4.2 The Conduit. Further stripping of the make-up levels of the causeway (003) uncovered the line of vaulted brick conduit (043). The hand made bricks were laid longitudinally on edge in a light buff lime mortar (Fig. 8). The bricks varied in length from 240 to 245mm with a thickness between 65 and 70mm and were a light red in colour (Munsell colour value 10R 7/8). Having run on a slight diagonal across the causeway towards the southern end the conduit was constructed with a rather clumsy bend (Fig. 10) to bring it into line with a rectangular brick built pier (042) which contained the outlet (Fig. 9). These bricks were slightly shorter and better made with a darker red (Munsell colour value 7.5R 4/8) fabric and are probably a later rebuild. The pier was partially capped with a stone edging presumably for cosmetic effect. At the north end was a modern concrete slab with sluice gate. At two places along its length repairs had been made from ground level using modern concrete.



Fig. 6 Area of patched flag stones.



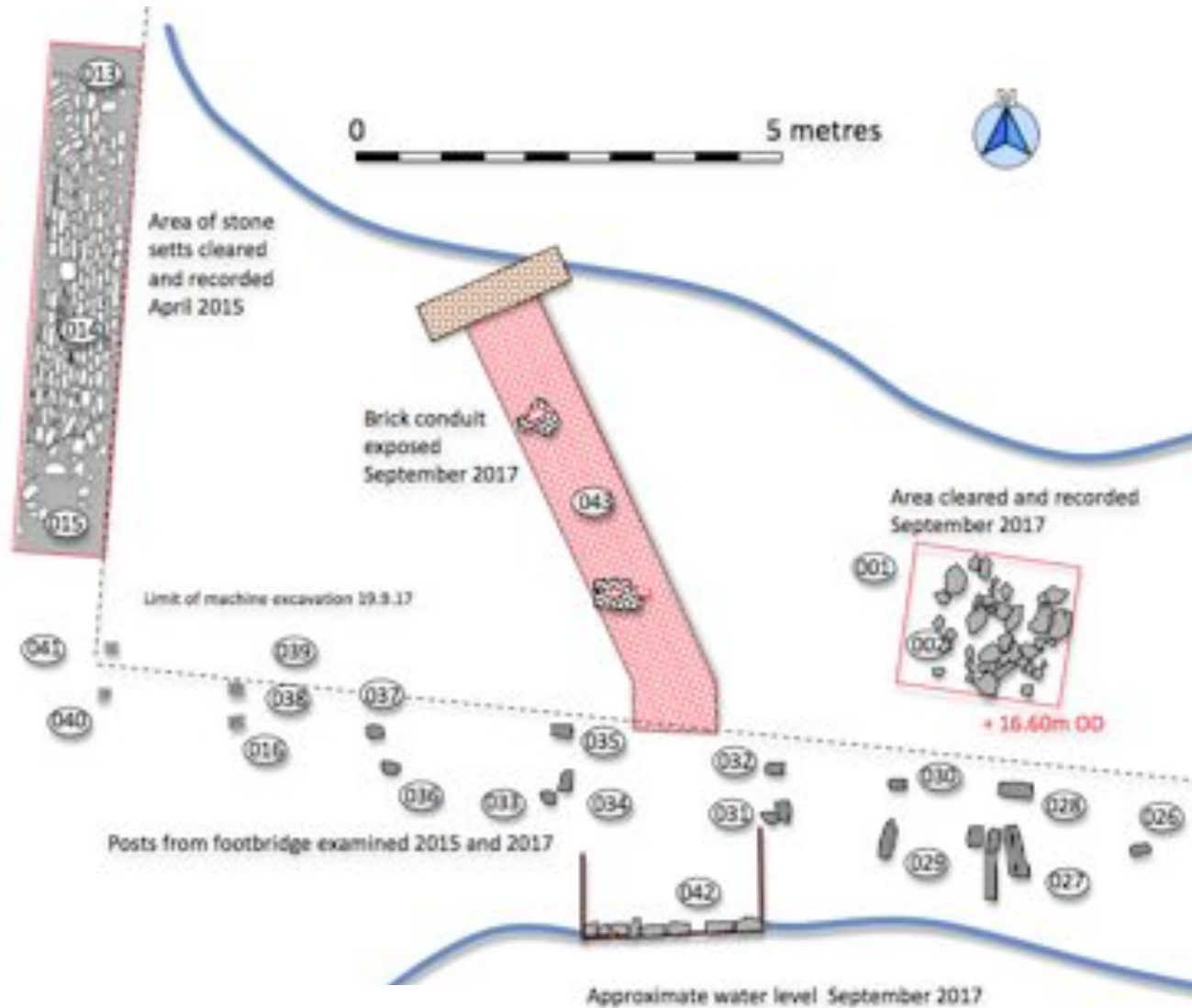


Fig. 7 West end of causeway, Plan



Fig. 8 Central part of conduit looking south west.



Fig. 9 Brick pier with stone edging looking south west.





Fig. 10 Brick conduit, full length, north to right.

4.3 The Wooden Posts. These had already been studied in some detail by Whitefoot. Although there was some variation in the overall pattern essentially there were probably 15 pairs of posts typically around 50 cm apart irregularly spaced at intervals between 1.5m and 2.5m. along the southern edge of the causeway (Fig. 11). The posts 031/032 and 033/035 were spaced to straddle the brick pier suggesting their late arrival on the scene. In places there were additional timbers lying against the face of the south slope of the causeway which may have been additional bracing either between the pairs of upright posts or between the down stream post and the causeway bank (Fig. 12). In places posts were doubled up or additional posts inserted indicating periods of repair and replacement. In one instance (020) a large iron spike remained in situ. This construction is clearly marked as a footbridge on the first edition Ordnance Survey map.

4.4.1 The Pitched Stone Surface (East). Previously partially exposed and recorded by Whitefoot in 2015 (Fig. 13) there were two distinct areas at the eastern and western ends of the causeway. The eastern section (009) is roughly 6m wide on its western edge and extends around 2.5m to the east where it is lost under encroaching vegetation and a modern footpath (Fig. 14). This appears to be its limit as inspection of the woodland immediately to the east which included probing the ground with an iron road pin revealed no further traces. The stones are laid transversely and on edge to a depth of between 25 and 30cm. but vary widely in size from 10cm to 30cm in length. Whitefoot identified two flanking areas of rubble to the north (010) and the south (011).

4.4.2 The Pitched Stone Surface (West). Again brought to a well defined edge at the west end of the causeway this surface (014) extends as a trackway running along the south side of Croome River for around 55m.



Fig. 11 Line of posts looking west.



Fig. 12 Posts 027 and 028 and associated timbers looking north.

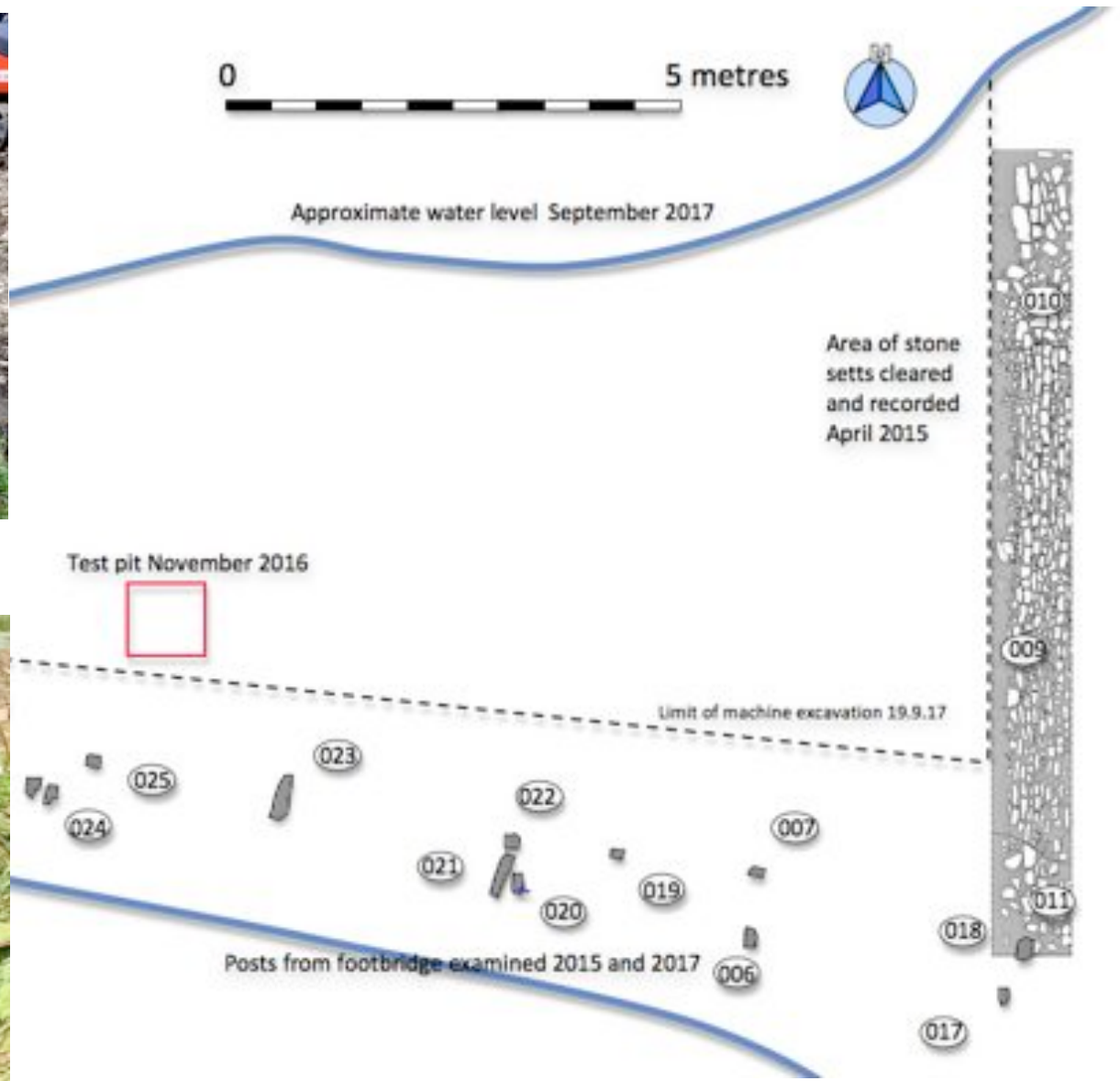


Fig. 13 East end of causeway, Plan.





Fig. 14 Pitched stone surface to east looking east.



Fig. 16 Pitched stone surface to west, centre section looking east.



Fig. 15 Pitched stone surface to west, eastern edge looking north.



Fig. 17 Pitched stone surface to west, end section looking west.



In the initial section adjacent to the causeway the stones are again laid transversely (Fig. 15) but further down the trackway some stones are laid longitudinally presumably to strengthen the surface (Fig 16). The metallised surface finishes at the boundary of the meadow to the west with distinct line of smaller rounded blocks (Fig. 17). Whitefoot also identified rubble spreads (013 North and 015 south) flanking and supporting the metallised surface.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The key questions are what is this feature and how did it function? It is not clear who first identified it as a 'carriage splash' indeed a more neutral term might be 'ford', a feature common throughout the transport network of early modern Britain and still familiar on lesser used roads today. The key distinction is whether its role is primarily a functional one, enabling wheeled and other traffic to pass from one side of the park to the other, or whether the pleasurable excitement of driving into and through a large body of water was the main motivation. Contemporary documents appear silent on the issue and existing parallels are very thin on the ground. There is a named 'carriage splash' on the approach to the site of the former 17<sup>th</sup>.- century mansion of Sir Baptist Hicks at Chipping Campden but this appears more functional, perhaps in terms of a place to wash away the mud that would accumulate during wet weather, than a leisure feature (Fig. 18). Water splashes occasionally feature as adjuncts to village ponds and streams where again presumably they could be used for washing down vehicles as well as perhaps watering stock. Examples are known from old postcards at Brockenhurst in Hampshire, Upwey in Wiltshire and Langley in Berkshire.



Fig. 18 Carriage splash at Chipping Campden looking east.



Fig. 19 View of terraced approach way to carriage splash looking east.

5.2 Evidence from the layout around the site suggests that ‘carriage splash’ is an appropriate name and indeed places it within a circuit that was carefully planned to achieve a desired effect. The key factor in this assessment is the length of the pitched stone surfaces. To the east it extended no more than a couple of metres beyond the causeway whilst to the west it continues a considerable distance further west. This only makes sense if we imagine a short stretch at the entry point, just enough to help protect the bank, and a much greater distance covered on the far side to enable the wet coach and horses to drain and dry with a decent footing to move away on. This in effect indicates something like a one way system with the coaches picking up speed coming down the hill from the east, there is a marked terrace way here (Fig. 19), then splashing spectacularly through the water. You can see a similar effect in modern day carriage driving trials and leisure use (Fig. 20).



Fig. 20 A modern day carriage splash, photo courtesy of Celebration Carriages (<http://www.celebration-carriages.co.uk/picnicrides>).

5.3 In fact the use of a pitched stone surface is in itself significant. A number of investigations have been carried out on track ways and drives around the estate and these have been shown to be either gravelled or surfaced with small rounded cobbles ( for example NT HBSMR Numbers: 73330\*6 Drive in NW section of Lakeside Garden, 73321\*0 Drive within Greenhouse Shrubbery, 73330\*3 Drive on island within Lakeside Garden ). The approaches to the Chinese Bridge further to the north were paved with hoggin, a compacted mixture of clay, gravel and sand a material seen elsewhere in the park ( for example on the path south of the main house (NT ID No. MNA181800).<sup>12</sup> The only instance of stone setts being recorded is as revetment walling on the west bank of the Croome River ( NT HBSMR Number: 78158\*0 ). Clearly the use of a pitched stone surfaces here indicate that special provision is being made for a specific purpose, facilitating the passage of galloping horses and carriage.

5.4 Further insights may be obtained by examining the arrangement of track ways as recorded by early maps. The Snape map of 1796 is particularly interesting (Fig. 3). There is no approach from the east shown on this or any other map indicating that the way was on grass. The causeway is clearly marked but then the main track dips slightly to the south before heading off westwards through a line of woodland shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map as The Belt. This route is barely accessible by vehicle today and shows no traces of pitched stone metalling and was presumably a 'ride' rather than a 'drive'. What is shown is an open area next to the river bank where the extended pitched stone surface has been noted. Significantly just past the point where the field is entered there is a additional length of track shown which reunites the route with the track through The Belt. Could this indicate the different provision for horse riders and carriages?

5.5 In considering route ways one needs to ask why the track did not simply pass by the southern end of Croome River without any unnecessary engineering. As the Broome map of 1768 shows (Fig. 21) the end of the River is hard up against the boundary of the park, generally regarded as the southern limit of the earlier deer park and defined by a substantial earthwork and wall ( NT HBSMR Number: 73296\*0 ). This together with the out flowing stream, not shown by Broome but depicted as a double channel by Snape, is strong motivation for keeping the track a little to the north of the park boundary and so in this case the carriage splash is almost an added bonus.

5.6 The Conduit. This brick built feature is undoubtedly part of the original construction of the causeway as there was no evidence for a cut into which it could have been inserted. The causeway of course also functions as a dam. In the normal course of events water would drain from the surrounding fields and there would be a steady flow of water towards the southern end of the River. The aim would be to keep the top of the causeway submerged but not too deeply. The conduit and



Fig. 21 Detail from the Broome map of 1768.

accompanying sluice gate would be used on those occasions when it was necessary to empty the River although it would have to be used in conjunction with the weir and sluice a little further to the south. Presumably it could also be used, if the lower sluice was open too, to regulate the depth of water above the carriage splash.

5.7 The footbridge is probably a late addition and again its function must be questioned as it was certainly an easy walk to pass around the southern end of Croome River. It may be that the bridge dates from a time when the causeway had become more of a functional crossing place, the bridge put up so that farm workers could perhaps lead wagons or livestock across the ford from one part of the park to another.



## 6. EVALUATION, ARCHIVE AND PUBLICATION

6.1 There were no adverse conditions to impact on the observation and recording that was undertaken. The contractors maintained strict site discipline with appropriate briefings and a signing in system and no health and safety concerns were raised. Co-operation from the machine operator and banksman was excellent with deposits being removed with a high degree of precision and work being paused whenever it was necessary to clarify particular points on the ground.

6.2 No finds were recovered and the recording was undertaken digitally so the archive exists only in digital form and will be passed on together with the photographs on a CD to:

- The Trust's archaeology advisor
- The local management of Croome Court
- Worcestershire HER.
- South Worcestershire Archaeology Group

6.3 The Report will be uploaded via OASIS onto the Archaeology Data Service's Library of Unpublished Fieldwork Reports. Hard copies will be made available to any party with an interest on payment of a small charge to cover duplication costs.

Stephen Wass 14.11.17

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<sup>1</sup> British Geological Survey © NERC 2016 accessed 13.11.17

<sup>2</sup> Mowl, T. 2006 *Historic Gardens of Worcestershire* Stroud: Tempus, p. 45

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, J. 2011. *Excavation of the Chinese Bridge, Croome Court, Worcestershire*. University of Worcester

<sup>4</sup> Whitefoot, H. 2016 *Archaeological Excavation at Croome Park SWAG*

<sup>5</sup> Williams, D. 2016 *Archaeological Evaluation at the Carriage Splash, Croome Park, Croome d'Abitot, Worcestershire SWAG*

<sup>6</sup> Whitefoot Ibid. p. 6

<sup>7</sup> Mowl Ibid, p. 46

<sup>8</sup> Meir, J. 2006 *Sanderson Miller and his Landscapes* Chichester: Phillimore p. 200

<sup>9</sup> Whitefoot Ibid. p. 9

<sup>10</sup> Snape, J. 1796 *Croome Estate Map*. Held in the Croome Archive at Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service.

<sup>11</sup> Williams Ibid p. 5

<sup>12</sup> Lewis Ibid, p. 3