



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

**Archaeological Evaluation
on land off Ivy Lane,
Harbury, Warwickshire**

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Ivy Lane, Harbury

Archaeological evaluation on land off

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Iain Soden BA MIFA

Summary

Two archaeological evaluation trenches within the footprint of a proposed Q-House off Ivy Lane produced evidence for medieval land division, but a dearth of finds suggests the site lies at the very margins of occupied plots. The features located probably represent plot boundaries, perhaps from the original laying out of a row of burgage-plots stretching south from the High Street or of the back boundary between such plots on Ivy Lane to the east and Chapel Street to the west. Later features are probably garden-related.

Introduction

Planning consent has been granted by Stratford upon Avon District for the construction of a Q-House at c121m above OD on land behind Ivy Lane, Harbury, near Leamington Spa. (NGR: SP 3730 5991; Application 12/01008/FUL). The site, currently a garden, lies within the historic core of Harbury, which is known to have medieval village origins (Warwickshire HER: MWA 9055). The site was therefore considered to contain archaeological potential.

The site lies as a backplot between the High Street to the north, Chapel Street to the west, South Parade to the south and Ivy Lane on the east, from which access is gained. Ivy Lane is marked on the map below (Fig 1). The planning block surrounded by the four roads is easily distinguishable.

Evaluation took place in December 2012 in accordance with a brief issued by Warwickshire County Council (Rann 2012) and an approved Written Scheme of Investigation compiled by Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd, who carried out the fieldwork (IS Heritage 2012). The work began in cold but clear winter weather but became more difficult when snow fell and the ground froze hard.

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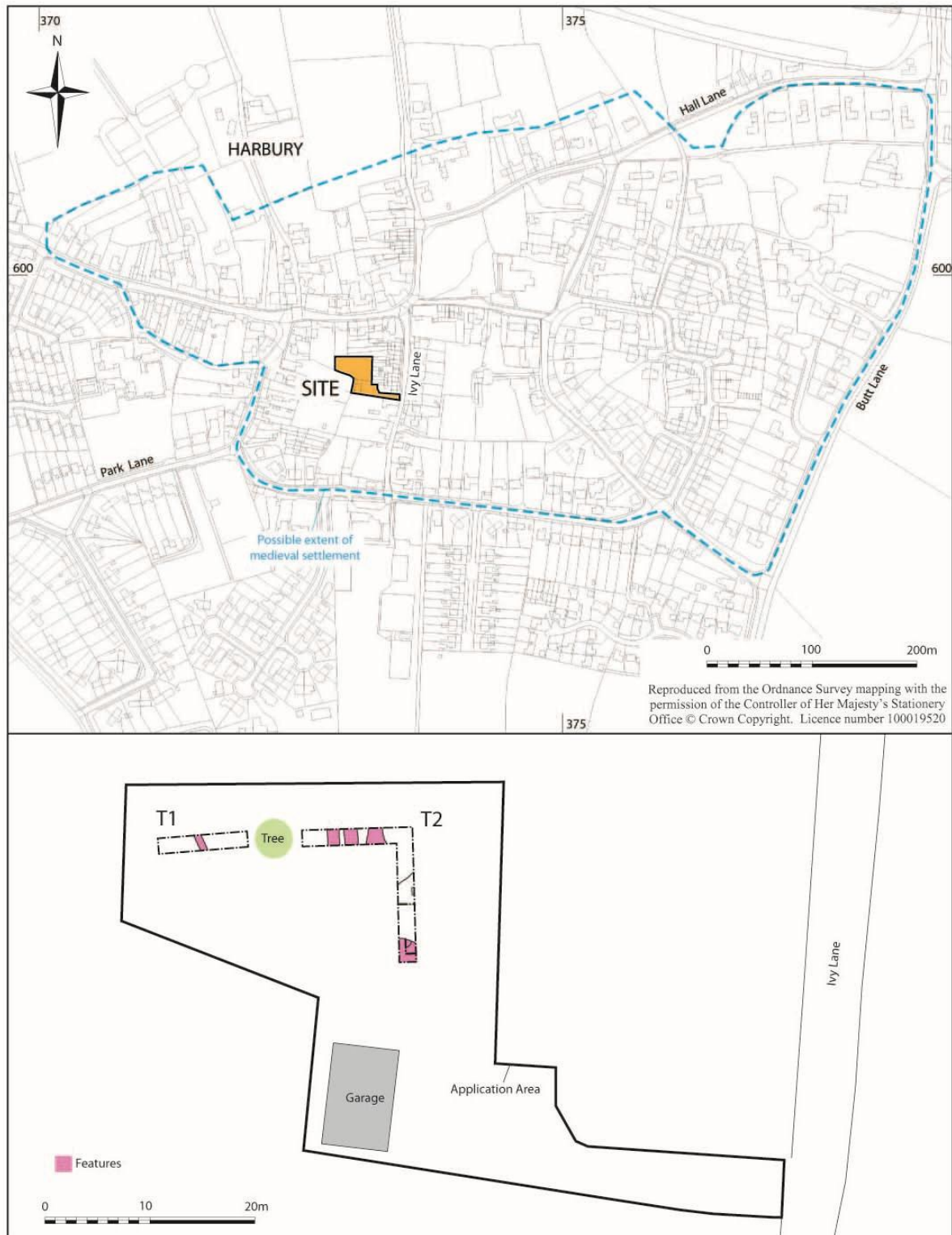


Fig 1: The application area and features located in relation to the suspected medieval settlement.

Historical and Archaeological Background

The medieval settlement of Harbury was clustered around the High Street which historians agree was never a major thoroughfare, being very much a self-contained village (Salzman 1951; VI, 103-8).

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Land ownership within the village was complicated, but dominated by the Abbeys of Kenilworth (Premonstratensian) and Combe (Cistercian) with other lands held by the Templars (later redistributed to the Hospitallers). This made for a complicated series of transactions and sales in the middle of the 16th century when the monasteries were dissolved and their lands were speculated widely.

William Camden (*Britannia*), writing in the early seventeenth century, by which time the old monastic land-units had been lost, said that the village was ‘un-memorable’, commenting upon what he could see on his itinerary.

The site lies in the north-eastern quadrant of a roughly-square planning block which has probably been in existence since the medieval period, fronted by Ivy Lane on the east, High Street on the north, Chapel Street on the west, and South Parade on the south. The site location, just north-east of centre, makes it likely that it once belonged to either High Street or Ivy Lane.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey Map of Harbury (1887) shows that the buildings along Ivy Lane comprised at that date a relatively new range of houses, named ‘Cooperative Terrace’, which survives today (map not reproduced here; Fig 2). The short, narrow back gardens are not demarked on the map of that date so it is reasonable to suppose that these are later additions, not narrow plots redolent of medieval burgage plots. However, the complicated layout of back-plots and gardens which characterise other nearby streets on this planning block, leave few clues as to the early layout and subsidiarity of this planning block. The plot on which the current application site lies is not demarked in maps until well into the 20th century, and has been apparently undeveloped throughout that period. It is a reasonable hypothesis to suggest that the land belonged to whatever buildings previously fronted Ivy Lane, or the plots which front the south side of High Street, likely, although not certain, to have been the earliest plots.



Fig 2: 19th-century Cooperative Terrace looking south. The site entrance is at the far end.

The Warwickshire Historic Environment Record lists many entries for Harbury, including both minor fieldwork interventions and miscellaneous reported finds. However, they are mainly registered as 4-figure grid references and all are related to the expanded settlement which characterises the post-medieval period of Harbury’s history.

Of passing relevance to the site is a 17th-century Grade II listed cottage at 5 High Street, Harbury, noted in *West Midlands Archaeology* **42** (1999), 109. Building recording here by Cathy Coutts noted contemporary fabric on a building which in all probability had a medieval predecessor on the main street. Otherwise the previous fieldwork in the village was conducted at Harbury House, the

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probable Manor House, some way off, which recorded undated brick and stone walls (MacFarland 2005).

In relation to the core medieval settlement of Harbury (MWA 9055), the Warwickshire HER has no recorded associated events or finds. There are said to be possible house platforms which lie on waste ground west of the Parish Church (MWA 636), part of Greville's Charity Estate, mapped in 1813, but these are sufficiently separate from the application site as to have no bearing upon it. This site was viewed by the excavators when transferring the Ordnance Survey Bench Mark from the church, but the site was too overgrown to confirm their presence or absence by casual observation.

The excavations

An L-shaped configuration of two trenches was dug to mirror the proposed plan of the Q-house. The trenches totalled 30m in length and 1.6m wide and were initially dug using a 2-ton mini digger with toothless ditching blade. The trenching would have been slightly longer but a gap needed to be left between the elements of the east-west component of the trench due to the presence of a stump and the extensive very resilient root-system of a tree, one of two only recently felled.



Fig 3: Excavation in progress, looking west .

The loamy black topsoil was on average 200mm thick (1) and was evenly accumulated over a silty brown subsoil which contained few inclusions but supported considerable worm activity (2). This was relatively thick, up to 400mm thick.

Beneath this agricultural/horticultural build-up lay the natural geology (3), a reddish-orange clay with pockets of ill-sorted gravels and gritty sand on top. Into this geology, were cut a number of features.

In Trench 1 lay a small gully, some 600mm across and which was aligned roughly north-west to south-east at some 750mm below the modern ground surface (14). It was sectioned and shown to be only the basal c100mm surviving, although it could not be traced any higher in the trench section. Such an insubstantial gully may be the vestige of something horticultural. A few scraps of bone were retrieved from its fill (15) but nothing dateable was forthcoming.

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In Trench 2 lay a trio of parallel ditches or gulleys. The easternmost was (8), a steep-sided gully some 600mm deep in its own right and filled with brownish-grey sandy clay (9). West of this lay (10) a much shallower, wider gully with a flat to slightly undulating base. Its fill was browner and more clayey (11), akin to the subsoil which sealed all three gulleys. Its uneven, shallow base is redolent of a planting trench with root-damage. The westernmost feature was gully (12), slightly shallower than (8) but altogether with more robust sides and having an even u-shaped profile. The brown clayey fill (13) was similar to (11).



Fig 4: Ditch 12 sectioned, looking north-east. Scale 1m

All three gulleys or ditches were cut from a similar level into the natural geology (c120.86m above OD), some 600-700mm below the modern ground surface. All were sealed by the considerable accumulation of subsoil.

All three produced tiny quantities of butchered scraps of animal bone, probably food waste and ditches 8 and 10 produced sherds of medieval pottery (see below).

At the eastern end of Trench 2, the natural geology rose gently to a height of 121.05m above Ordnance Datum, mirroring the rising modern ground surface and showing that the natural high ground of the plot is at its north-east corner.

South along the north-south arm of Trench 2 the ground dropped very slightly and the subsoil incorporated a slightly deeper element (7). This was some 100mm thick and the natural geology beneath was very disturbed, suggesting that this layer might resemble intensive animal trample or perhaps horticultural activity. This had been disturbed from the level of the topsoil by a modern animal-burial (6), lying only partly within the trench (and not retrieved).

At the southernmost end of the southern arm of Trench 2, where the trench shallows to a depth of as little as 300mm lay a large pit (4) which also contained a deeper element at one side. Its fill (5) was a dark grey/brown loamy clay and pottery retrieved shows it to have been dug and backfilled no earlier than the 19th-century. It is probably horticultural in origin.

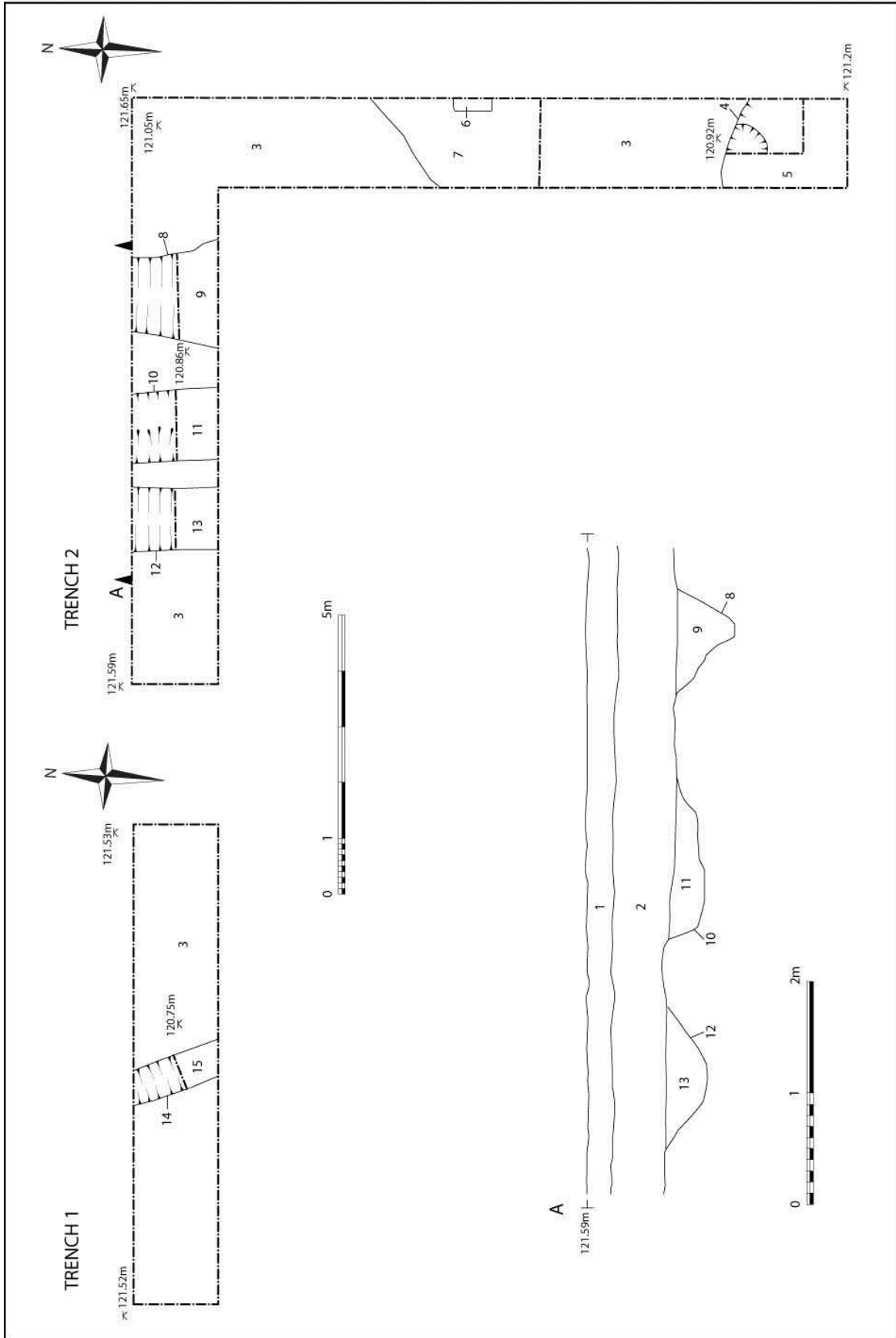


Fig 5: The excavations

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Finds

There were few finds from the site.

Pottery

The six sherds of pottery from the site were as follows (related to the Warwickshire County Type Series):

2 – subsoil: 3 sherds of MGW (Modern Glazed Wares) from 3 vessels, body sherds 19th-20th century;

5 – pit fill (of 4): 1 sherd of MGW (Modern Glazed Ware), body sherd 19th-20th century;

9 – pit fill (of 8): 1 sherd of Sq 20-29 (Sandy Quartz types), splash-glazed body sherd, probably from Coventry area, later 13th -14th centuries; 1 sherd of undiagnostic, burnt (possibly Warwick-type) pottery, unglazed body sherd, slightly micaceous, and broadly medieval;

11-pit fill (of 10): 1 sherd of shelly ware; in neighbouring Northants this is fabric type 330, shelly coarseware, dated c1200-1400.

These few sherds have no intrinsic ceramic value for research and are useful only for broad dating. They provide a *terminus-post-quem* for the filling in of each of the features from which they derive.

Conclusions

The few medieval features present were dated by sparse pottery finds, suggesting this is a marginal area within the medieval settlement. The ditches and possible planting trench between suggest a property boundary of hedge ditched on both sides, potentially between two High Street Burgage plots, perhaps connected with one of the forerunners to the cottages which today front the High Street, such as that photographed below (Fig 6).



Fig 6: North of the site. One of the older High Street properties which may lie on an early frontage

The few sherds of pottery from the medieval features suggest that the ditches were filled in no later than the 14th century. The reason for their disappearance is not known, but it may simply be that a

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simple hedge without ditches was considered sufficient as a boundary within the settlement on well-drained ground. Otherwise the paucity of pottery suggests that this part of the plot in the medieval period was either marginal to habitation or that (amounting to much the same conclusion) that occupants simply chose to discard rubbish elsewhere.

The period from the 14th to the 19th centuries is simply not represented in finds of any sort and it is likely that the considerable build-up of subsoil reflects the long-lived use of the plot for purely agricultural or horticultural purposes.

Acknowledgements

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