



Land at
Rashwood Hill
Rashwood, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire

Archaeological Evaluation

Land at

***Rashwood Hill, Rashwood
Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire, WR90BS***

Archaeological Evaluation

NGR: SO 91436 65100

Site code: RAS19

HER activity number: WSM72337

OASIS ID: 110archa1-376889

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Front cover; Owlet End, view to the north-east

SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was carried out during November 2019 at Rashwood Hill, Rashwood, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire, WR90BS as part of an application for the conversion of an existing agricultural barn to commercial use. The proposed development lies within an area of archaeological potential, immediately east of the site is the current A38 Road which is a former Roman road from Droitwich to Bromsgrove.

There is currently little historical or archaeological evidence to indicate when the small settlement at Rashwood originated, but stray finds from within the area of the site suggest it may have started out during the medieval period, possibly as a satellite of Wychbold which was the chief manor at the time of Domesday. The development of Rashwood strung out as a ribbon development along the Roman road appears to have been influenced by its location along the Roman road between Droitwich and Bromsgrove where two lesser roads converge, one from Rashwood Farm in the southeast and another connecting with Wychbold Hall to the northeast.

The results of the field investigation were negative, the stratigraphic sequence of deposits recorded comprised clay overlain by a layer of undated relict subsoil and more recent topsoil. The evidence suggests an earlier open rural environment sloping gently towards the Salwarpe with little human activity and the lack of any residual finds supports this interpretation.



Fig.1; site location (outlined in red)

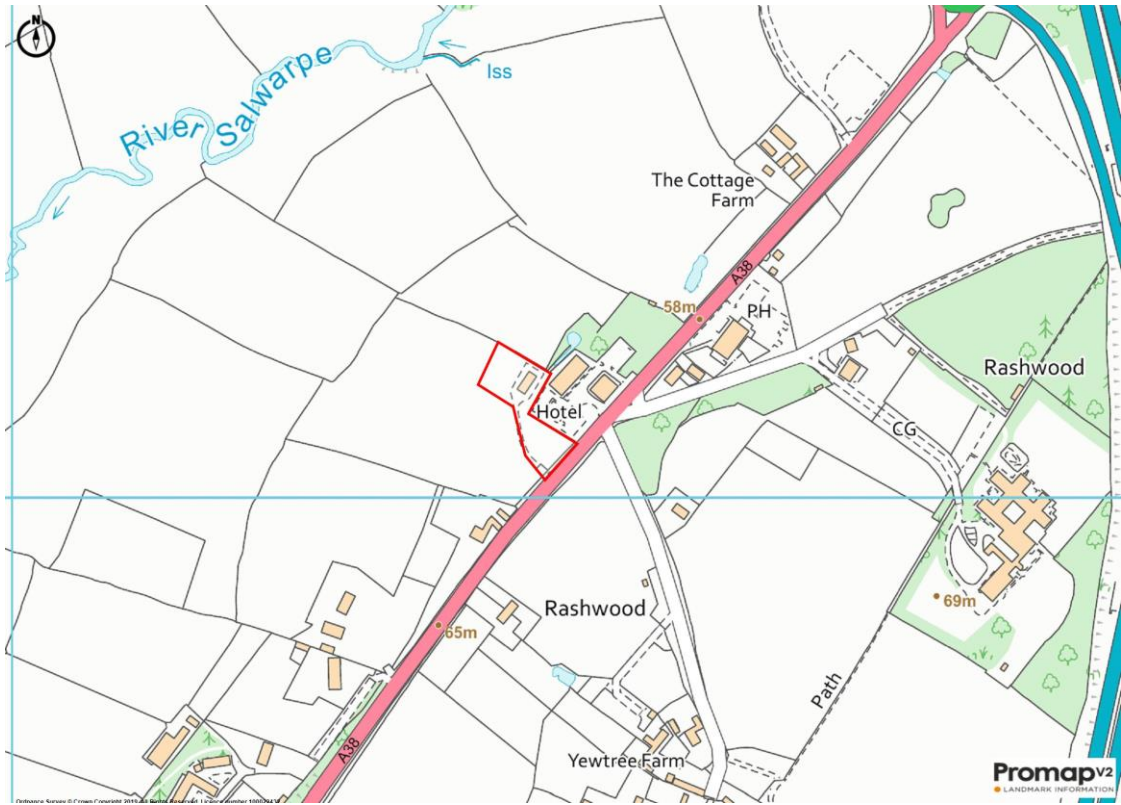


Fig. 2; study site (outlined in red)

INTRODUCTION

Location and scope of work (Figs. 1 & 2)

This document details the results of an archaeological evaluation during 19th and 20th November 2019 at Rashwood Hill, Rashwood, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire, WR90BS at the request of the owner. Planning permission had been granted (planning Ref: 19/00962/CU) for the change of use of an existing agricultural barn to commercial use. The proposed development lies within an area of archaeological potential, immediately east of the site is the current A38 Road which is a former Roman road from Droitwich to Bromsgrove. An evaluation was recommended by the archaeological advisor to Wychavon in accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to investigate the nature of some morphological anomalies identified within the site using LiDAR imagery and to establish if possible, whether these are geological or archaeological in origin. The results of the evaluation would then be used to determine the likely nature, extent, preservation and importance of any archaeological remains, and how these may be affected by development of the site so that an appropriate mitigation strategy could be implemented.

Geology and topography

Rashwood is a small hamlet in the parish of Dodderhill consisting of a string of properties along the current A38 road linking Droitwich in the southwest with Bromesgrove to the northeast. The River Salwarpe enters the parish near the Stoke Prior Mills. It forms part of the northern boundary, and then flows across the parish in a south-westerly direction towards Droitwich. Just above Impney it is joined by the Salty Brook, a continuation of the Capel Ditch which forms the boundary between Crutch and Dodderhill. Body Brook, another tributary, rises in the parish, and, flowing along the south-eastern boundary, joins the Salwarpe in the parish of Droitwich.

The Worcester and Birmingham Canal and branches of the Midland and Great Western railways pass through the parish, and the Stoke Prior Works station on the Midland is just within the boundaries of Dodderhill. The main road from Droitwich to Bromsgrove cuts across the parish in a north-easterly direction. At Rashwood a branch from it connects it with the road from Bromsgrove to Alcester, and another branch from it leads to Elmbridge. The ground is undulating

and is generally higher in the east than in the west, the highest point being about 60m above the ordnance datum (AOD) between Wychbold and Astwood and the lowest 45m on the road from Droitwich to Crutch.

There is no village of Dodderhill; the church of St. Augustine stands on a hill immediately north of Droitwich.

The proposed development site lies within the hamlet of Rashwood and comprises a roughly rectangular plot of land of approx. 3,500m² situated at about 60m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). Geology maps indicate the underlying geology comprises Keuper Marl (BGS, 1976).

Archaeological and historical background

Dodderhill is not mentioned in the Domesday Survey, the chief manor at the time of the Conquest being Wychbold, a village situated about 1km to the northeast of the site at the hamlet of Rashwood which along with Shaw Lane probably represented land included within the manor. Other manors and estates in the parish area included under Wychbold at the time were Elmbridge, Impney, Purshull and Astwood. There is no village of Dodderhill; the church of St. Augustine stands on a hill immediately north of Droitwich and just without the boundaries of the borough (VCH, 1913).

In 815 and 831 Wychbold appears in documentary sources as a royal residence, from which charters were executed by the Kings of Mercia. The name Wychbold is derived from the Old English meaning "Dwelling near the trading settlement" which is likely to refer to Droitwich.

Rashwood like Wychbold is located on an old Roman road and salt road, now the A38. Evidence has been found of human settlement in Wychbold from the Iron Age and Roman times. Various pits, ditches and postholes have been found in sites throughout the village, indicating the presence of roundhouses and a permanent Iron Age settlement. Finds include significant items from the Iron Age, such as broken vessels and a salt container from the Malvern Hills and Droitwich Spa. The presence of pottery from Malvern suggests that Wychbold had strong trade links outside of its immediate area, even in the Iron Age.

The Romans are believed to have settled in the Wychbold area between the 1st and 4th century, shown by the presence of Severn Valley and samian pottery.

At the time of the Domesday Book there were 11 hides (4 of which were exempt from tax), 5 mills and 26 salt-pans in the village. The population was around 50 people. During the Middle Ages, a manor house was built in Wychbold,

north of Church Lane. Now known as Wychbold Court, the current timber-frame house dates back to the C16th or C17th. Minor alterations have been made to the house, during the C19th and C20th. Excavation near the Grade II listed house revealed pottery dating to the C13th or C14th and evidence of farming in the area at the time.

The Worcestershire Historic Environment Record (HER) was consulted with a search carried out over a 500m radius centred on the site in order to understand the archaeology of the locality. There are 4 archaeological activities and 6 HER monuments recorded within the search area which sits within a rolling, lowland topography based on bedrock geology made up of mudstone and superficial geology made up of a large deposit of sand and gravel and alluvium that follows the course of the River Salwarpe. The surrounding region is a mixed landscape made up of small to medium regular and irregular fields and historic parkland associated with historic properties, such as the Chateau Impney, Hadzor Hall, Hanbury Hall and, more notably within this location, Wychbold Hall. The road network within this region dates from the medieval period and is seen to snake across the landscape, particularly at this location Rashwood Road. Settlement is scattered along the road network and ribbon development is seen along the A38. Tree cover survives in places in discrete blocks of orchard and semi-natural woodland. Within the search area interrupted row settlement, modern expansion and isolated farmstead are surrounded by large expanses of piecemeal enclosure, field reorganisation and amalgamation and smaller areas of meadow, Parliamentary enclosure and modern subdivision.

Within the search area there is 1 Listed Historic Building and 6 other unlisted historic buildings. The listed building dates to the 18th century and is a farmhouse. An English Heritage project to identify the Historic Farmsteads of Worcestershire also recorded 4 farmsteads (WSM52864, WSM53518, WSM60514, WSM61168) within the search area dating to the C19th. In addition to the built environment there are also monument records within the search area. One of these is for the site of a Roman road (WSM0529), currently represented by the modern A38 situated approx. 50m to the southeast of the site and which follows the Roman alignment through Droitwich and on to Bromsgrove. A possible medieval moat (WSM10977) identified as a long thin pond on the tithe award (1842) is recorded within the adjacent property to the west of the site and two post medieval ponds (WSM5658 & 56585) are also recorded close to Rashwood Farm. An old gravel pit (WSM06604) shown on the OS 1885 map is located east of Rashwood Lodge.

The Portable Antiquity Scheme has recorded 12 finds within the search area, including medieval strap fitting, token, buckle, coins, vessels and ampullas. The parish records also include a medieval coin hoard.

There have been few archaeological investigations within the search area, however, these do include a desk based assessment (WSM36702) and field walking and metal detecting (WSM42423 & WSM42424). There is some potential for below ground archaeological features and deposits from the Roman, medieval and post medieval periods. Finally, an English Heritage project to identify the potential for Palaeolithic Archaeology in Worcestershire recorded deposits within the search area with potential for archaeology dating back to 298050BC.

EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

Aims of the work

The objective of the evaluation was to determine the date, character, quality, survival and extent of the archaeological deposits within the application area likely to be threatened by the proposed development in order that an informed decision on their importance in a local, regional and national context could be made. This information would inform the basis of a mitigation strategy.

Sample size and scope of fieldwork

The evaluation comprised three trenches located to give a general investigative spread across the application site. Trench 1 was 25m long, trench 2 was 20m and trench 3 was 10m in length, all three trenches were 1.50m wide.

Fieldwork methods and recording

The archaeological field work and post-excavation was carried out in accordance with standards and guidance for archaeological field evaluations produced by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA, 2014). All deposits were excavated removing the overburden under close archaeological supervision and investigated for archaeological features. Plans and sample sections of the trenches were made and recorded during excavation.

RESULTS: GENERAL

Soil and ground conditions

Conditions were generally dry during excavation although the deposits showing some moisture retention as a result of recent rainfall. There was little evidence of root penetration from former trees and excavation was relatively smooth throughout the trench being made through alternate layers of topsoil and underlying subsoil leaving a clean and visible surface within the natural clay substrate.

Reliability of field investigation

There was little evidence of previous activity with the site prior to the erection of the existing open shed apart and two large pieces of steel sheeting driven vertically into the natural clay in trench 3 are probably related to its construction. The underlying stratigraphy was largely undisturbed throughout most of the trenching.

Distribution of archaeological deposits

No archaeological deposits were encountered during the trial trenching. Instead a sequence of three stratified deposits were recorded comprising a natural reddish clay with a pebble component sealed by a homogenous layer of relict subsoil which was in turn overlain by the modern topsoil. Truncating the surface of the clay in trench 3 were parts of steel sheeting driven vertically during recent activities.

Presentation of results

The results of the excavation (below) are described from the earliest to the latest deposits. The trench was attributed context numbers with a numerical value equivalent to the number of the trench.

RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS (Figs. 3 & 4)

TRENCHES 1-3

The surface of the natural substrate (contexts 102, 202 & 302), comprising a reddish-brown clay with a component of medium to large sized rounded pebbles was encountered throughout all three trenches. It was recorded at a height of 53.93m AOD at the northeast end of trench 1 and 54.77m AOD at the east end of trench 2. With a surface height of 55.52m AOD in trench 3, the evidence indicates a gradual downward slope in the natural topography across the application site beginning from the A38 (Roman) road along the eastern edge and falling towards the River Salwarpe lying beyond the western edge of the site. No archaeological deposits of cut features were observed overlying or truncating this clay deposit, in trench 3, two large pieces of sheet steel were observed driven vertically into the clay indicating more recent activity. In all three trenches the natural clay was overlain by a relict subsoil (101, 201 & 301) consisting of a greyish-brown, clayey-silt varying in thickness from 0.16m to 0.24m throughout the three trenches. Sealing this layer was the modern topsoil deposit comprising a dark greyish-brown loam up to 0.34m thick.

FINDS

No finds were recovered during the excavation.

Environmental data

Palaeo-environmental evidence

none of the deposits exposed during the excavation proved suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling.

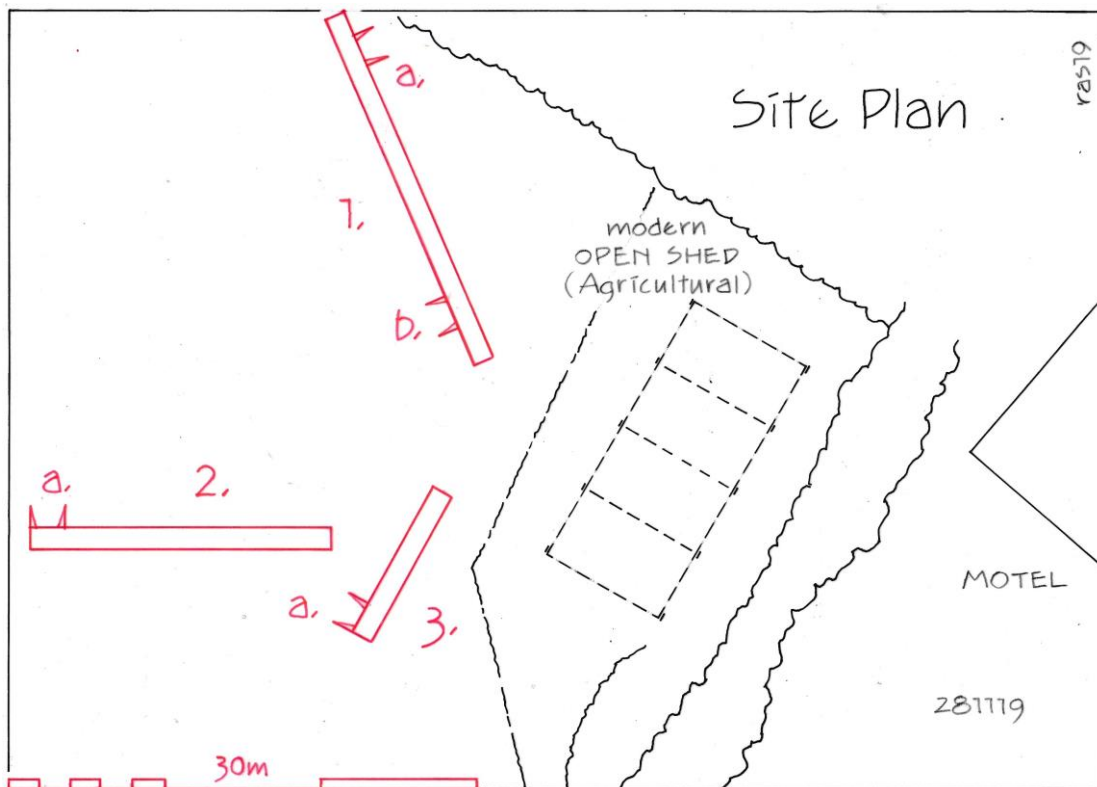


Fig. 3; site plan with trench & section locations

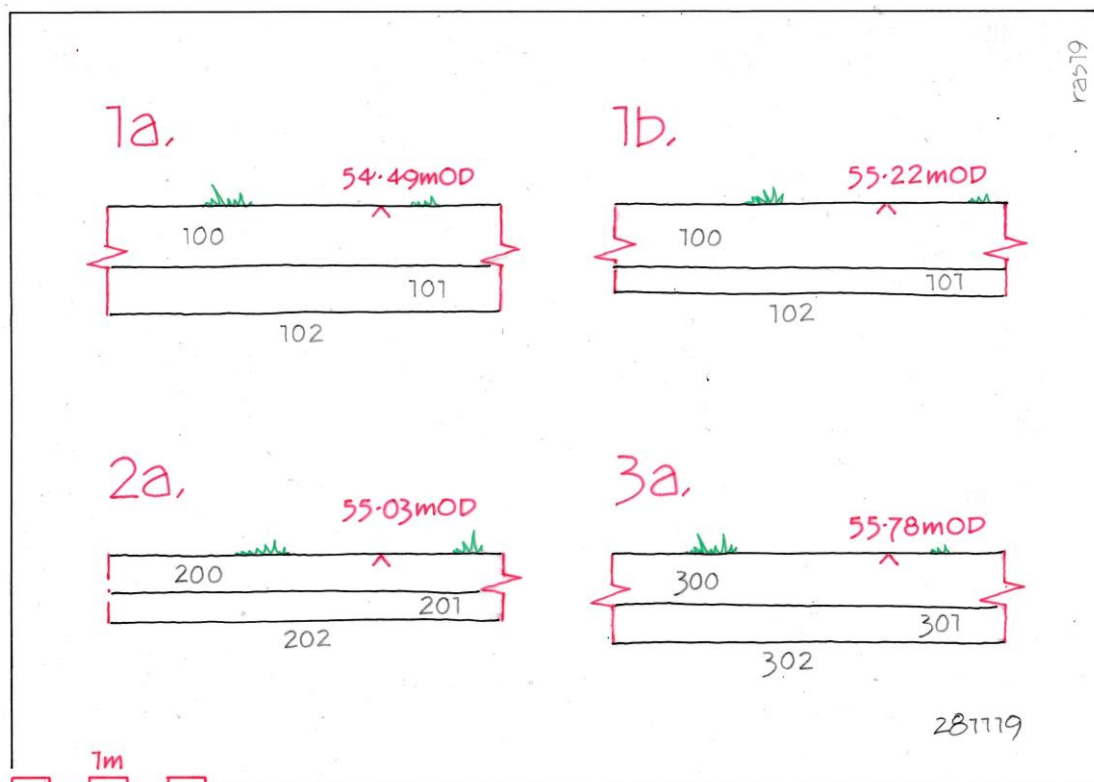


Fig. 4; sample trench sections

DISCUSSION (Figs. 5 & 6)

There is currently little historical or archaeological evidence to indicate when the small settlement at Rashwood originated, but stray finds from within the area of the site suggest it may have started out during the medieval period, possibly as a satellite of Wychbold which was the chief manor at the time of Domesday. Wychbold is located on the same road about 1km to the northeast where Iron Age and Roman occupation deposits from the C1st to C4th have been recorded indicating a permanent settlement. Finds include significant items from the Iron Age and the presence of pottery from Malvern suggests that even during this period Wychbold had strong trade links outside of its immediate area.

The development of Rashwood strung out as a ribbon development along the Roman road between Droitwich and Bromsgrove appears to have been influenced by its location along this ancient route-way where two lesser roads converge, one from the southeast via Rashwood Farm and another connecting with Wychbold Hall to the northeast. The more southerly route may have continued northwest to a crossing at the Salwarpe. The historical importance of these converging routes at Rashwood is reflected in the field pattern and associated boundaries shown on the Tithe map of 1842 and the OS 1885. Along the east side of the Roman road at the intersection of these smaller two route-ways is what appears to be the ghost remains of an older and much wider former road corridor which suggests that this route played a more significant role than it does at present.

The possible medieval moat (WSM10977) identified as a long thin pond on the tithe award (1842) is possibly linked to another similar feature identified on the OS 1885 suggesting that both features may represent the remains of a former watercourse which can be traced in the topography recorded during the survey.

The results of the field investigation were negative. The stratigraphic sequence of deposits recorded comprised clay overlain by a layer of undated relict subsoil and more recent topsoil. The evidence suggests an earlier open rural environment sloping gently towards the River Salwarpe with little or no human activity prior to the development of the area in the late C19. The lack of any residual finds supports this interpretation.

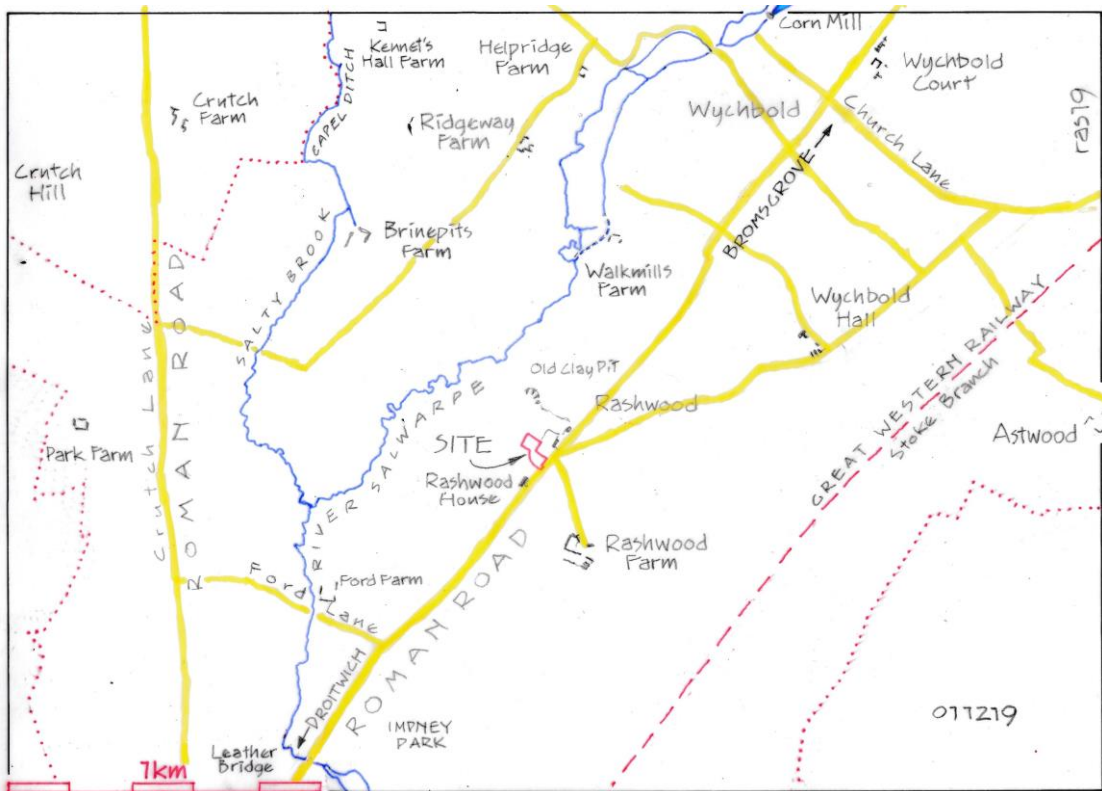


Fig.5; Dodderhill parish (part of) and main Roman roads leading from Droitwich



Fig.6; Rashwood historic environment, based OS 1885 & 1903

Summary of results

The results of the evaluation have shown that archaeological deposits are unlikely to survive within the application site. The area is likely to have remained undeveloped until more recent times following the erection of the open shed which is currently situated within the eastern half of the site.

Significance

The negative results of the evaluation suggest that there has been little human activity within the application site. The area lies to the rear of an earlier development that was surveyed during the C19 indicating that a settlement became established along the Roman road at Rashwood sometime before this date. The absence of archaeological remains within the site associated with the historical development at Rashwood suggest that any settlement remains did not extend this far west of the Roman road. A lack of residual finds supports this interpretation.

Impact of development

The impact of the development is likely to result from the foundations associated with the proposed construction of the new building, associated services and car parking. The results of the investigation suggest that it is unlikely that archaeological remains survive within the proposed development area and that construction will have no impact.

Archive Location

The digital archive arising from the work will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) via the online portal OASIS.

PLATES



Plate 1; the trench 1 view to the NW



Plate 2; trench 2, view west



Plate 3; trench 3, view northeast



Plate 4; section 1a



Plate 5; section 1b, view northwest



Plate 6; section 2a



Plate 7; section 3a

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CIfA, 2014. *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Evaluation*, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.

Victoria County History, 1913. 'Parishes: Dodderhill', in *A History of the County of Worcester: Volume 3*, 58-69 (London).

Worcestershire Historic Environment Record, 2019. *Land at Rashwood Hill, Rashwood, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire, WR90BS*

OS 1885 First Edition

OS 1903 Second Edition

APPENDIX 1; OASIS

Project details

Project name	Land at Rashwood Hill, Rashwood Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire; Archaeological Evaluation
Project dates	Start: 19-11-2019 End: 20-11-2019
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	RAS19 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	WSM72337 - HER event no.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Grassland Heathland 2 - Undisturbed Grassland
Monument type	NONE None
Significant Finds	NONE None
Methods & techniques	""Sample Trenches""
Development type	Rural commercial
Prompt	National Planning Policy Framework - NPPF
Position in the planning process	Between deposition of an application and determination

Project location

Country	England
Site location	WORCESTERSHIRE WYCHAVON DODDERHILL Rashwood Hill, Rashwood
Postcode	WR90BS
Study area	3500 Square metres
Site coordinates	SO 91436 65100 52.283582280071 -2.125554668268 52 17 00 N 002 07 32 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 53.93m Max: 55.52m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	one ten archaeology
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	one ten archaeology
Project director/manager	sean cook

Project supervisor	sean cook
Type of sponsor/funding body	Landowner

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	OASIS
Paper Archive Exists?	No

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Land at Rashwood Hill, Rashwood Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire; Archaeological Evaluation
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Cook, S
Date	2019
Issuer or publisher	one ten archaeology
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