

The White House

Worcester Road, Wychbold, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire

The White House

Worcester Road, Wychbold, Droitwich Spa, Worcs., WR9 7PE.

Archaeological Evaluation

NGR: *SO 92123 65828*

Site code: *wych21*

HER ref: *wsm77818*

OASIS ID: *110archa1-503650*

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Front cover; View of the White House from the north, prior to demolition.

SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was carried out at the now demolished White House, Worcester Road, Wychbold, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire, WR9 7PE in advance of residential development of the site comprising five new dwellings. The site fronted the current A38 which is the old Roman road and salt road between Droitwich and Bromsgrove and where evidence of roadside settlement could be expected. The excavations revealed a stratigraphy across the site consisting of a natural clay substrate overlain by an undated relict subsoil marking the earliest soil horizon, clay mottling within this layer is a probable indication of previous cultivation activities and suggests that the site lay outside the focus of settlement and within the surrounding agricultural land. A series of modern linear features recorded within one of the trenches were likely related to garden activities. The results of the excavations confirm the documentary evidence which suggests little human activity within the site until the early-C19 when the Wychbold Road became increasingly developed and the White House, formerly known as Summerfield, was constructed.

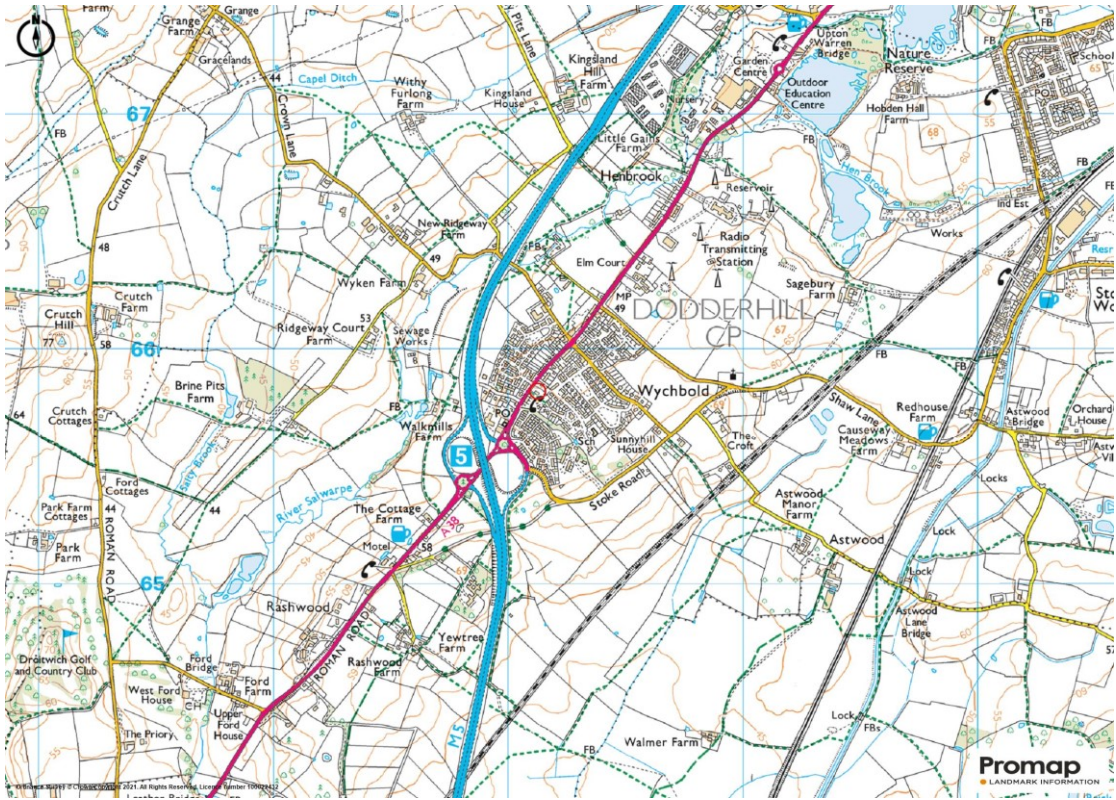


Fig. 1; Site location (circled in red).



Fig. 2; Area of study (outlined in red).

INTRODUCTION

Location and scope of works

This document details the results of an archaeological evaluation during 14th and 15th December 2021 at The White House, Worcester Road, Wychbold, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire, WR9 7PE. A planning application (Planning ref. No 19/02435/FUL) has been approved by Wychavon District Council for demolition of the existing dwelling and construction of five new dwellings on the same plot conditional on a programme of archaeological work. This would comprise initially of trial trenching to determine the presence or absence, extent, date, character, condition and significance of any remains and the likely impact of the development upon them. This work is the subject of a separate WSI. (If archaeological remains were identified that would be damaged or destroyed by the development and they could not be preserved in-situ, then the evaluation would be followed by a defined programme of archaeological excavation and/or a watching brief to record the remains prior to their loss.

The proposed development may affect heritage assets of known archaeological significance ([wsm30529](#) & [wsm17807](#)). The proposed development is located adjacent to an area which has been identified as a possible Roman road running from Worcester to Lickey. Some 60m to the south of the site is an area of extensive Iron Age/Romano-British settlement identified by trench evaluation in 2014.

Geology and topography

Wychbold is a village in the parish of Dodderhill in the Wychavon district of Worcestershire, situated on the A38 between Droitwich Spa and Bromsgrove and by Junction 5 of the M5 motorway. The River Salwarpe flows around the village and Upton Warren and Stoke Prior lie nearby to the north-east, Rashwood to the southwest. At the 2011 UK census, Wychbold had a population of 1,366 in 586 dwellings. The site lies adjacent to the east side of the Worcester Road at a height of about 55m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) and is represented by a rectangular plot about 1,750m². The underlying geology is Keuper Marl River (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* (Wicbold, C7; Wicelbold, C11; Wichebald, C12; Wychebaud, C13). The name Wychbold is derived from the Old English *wīc-bold*, meaning "Dwelling near the trading settlement". It has been recorded as *Uuicbold* (692) and *Wicelbold* (1086, Domesday Book). The "*wych*" element ("near the trading settlement") is likely to refer to Droitwich (VCH, 1913).

Evidence has been found of human settlement in Wychbold from the Iron Age 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. Wychbold is located on an old Roman road and salt road, now the A38. Romans are believed to have settled in the Wychbold area between the C1 and C4, shown by the presence of Severn Valley and samian pottery. 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. Archaeologists have also found various

The earliest known record of Wychbold is in a charter of 692 (where it is known as *Uuicbold*), describing how Æthelred of Mercia "granted ten hides of land there to his thegn Oslaf". The charter is generally considered to be fabricated, but describes the village as being "distinguished", suggesting that the village belonged to royalty at the time. The next known record of Wychbold is in a charter issued by Coenwulf of Mercia in 815. In this, and a later charter issued by Wiglaf of Mercia in 831, Wychbold is referred to as a royal vill, suggesting its importance as a royal base or even residence. Documents point to the existence of the Anglo-Saxon estate within Wychbold, but its location is currently unknown. During the C11, possession of Wychbold passed from Earl Godwine to Osbern fitz Richard, who held it 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 to the C16 or C17. Minor alterations have been made to the house, during the C19 and C20. Excavation near the Grade II listed house revealed pottery dating to the C13 or C14 and evidence of farming in the area at the time.

A manor house called Wychbold Hall, once stood within the village, the residence of the Amphlett family, described as being "modern" in 1911 and in "perfect preservation", the stone-flagged floor of the house was moved to Greyfriars, Worcester

An HER search was carried out on a 500m radius of the provided grid reference on 01/11/2021, as specified in the search request. 21 Archaeological activities and 31 HER Monuments were recorded within the search area. The search area sits within a rolling lowland landscape based on Droitwich Halite bedrock geology with superficial deposits of Holt Heath Sands and Gravels. There has been a high degree of landscape change in the area, with both field amalgamation and field reorganisation clear in the field systems, removing the earlier character of piecemeal and parliamentary enclosure. The settlement pattern has also changed with modern expansion and infill expanding the nucleated row settlement of Wychbold. The insertion of the M5 motorway, including junction 5, also has created landscape change. Within the search area lie 6 unlisted, historic buildings. The earliest structures are farm buildings at Walkmills and Wychbold farm, both probably C19. The remaining buildings date to the C20 and include a public house, village hall and an air raid shelter. The Historic Farmsteads of Worcestershire project also recorded two farmsteads ([wsm60516](#) & [wsm60521](#)) within the search area dating to the C19. In addition to the built environment there are also monument records for the site of buildings that are now demolished including Wychbold Hall ([wsm36589](#)) built in 1812 and demolished in the 1930s, the site of a C19 congregational church, a blacksmiths shop, and a garage and village hall dated to the C20. The C19 parkland at Wychbold Hall is also recorded, as is a C17 pound. Two records for ridge and furrow ([wsm48271](#)) and a record for a pond may date to the Post-Medieval or Medieval periods. The early Medieval period is also represented within the search area, including records for a possible settlement site, an area of quarrying and the conjectured route of Godham Way ([wsm30280](#)). For earlier periods there is evidence for the conjectured route of a Roman road from Worcester to Lickey ([wsm30529](#)), and an Iron Age or Romano-British settlement site at Stoke Lane ([wsm17807](#)). Only one Portable Antiquity Scheme find record is currently identified, recording the find of a Roman coin. Archaeology activities have also recovered several artefacts including prehistoric lithic implements, Iron Age and Roman pottery, Medieval and Post-Medieval pottery and architectural material, and evidence for iron working from all periods. There has been a moderate amount of archaeological investigation within the search area, including several desk-based assessments, two geophysical surveys and numerous evaluations.

Both geophysical surveys failed to record any anomalies considered to represent significant archaeological remains, despite a high potential for deposits. The most recent evaluation identified a woodland boundary, most evaluations in recent decades have principally identified post-medieval or later features, however an evaluation in 1999 ([wsm30041](#)) at Stoke Lane did record Iron Age or Romano-British settlement evidence and again in the same area during further excavation in 2000 ([wsm29599](#)). In the wider landscape there is good survival of the historic landscape with strong potential for the survival of below-ground deposits.

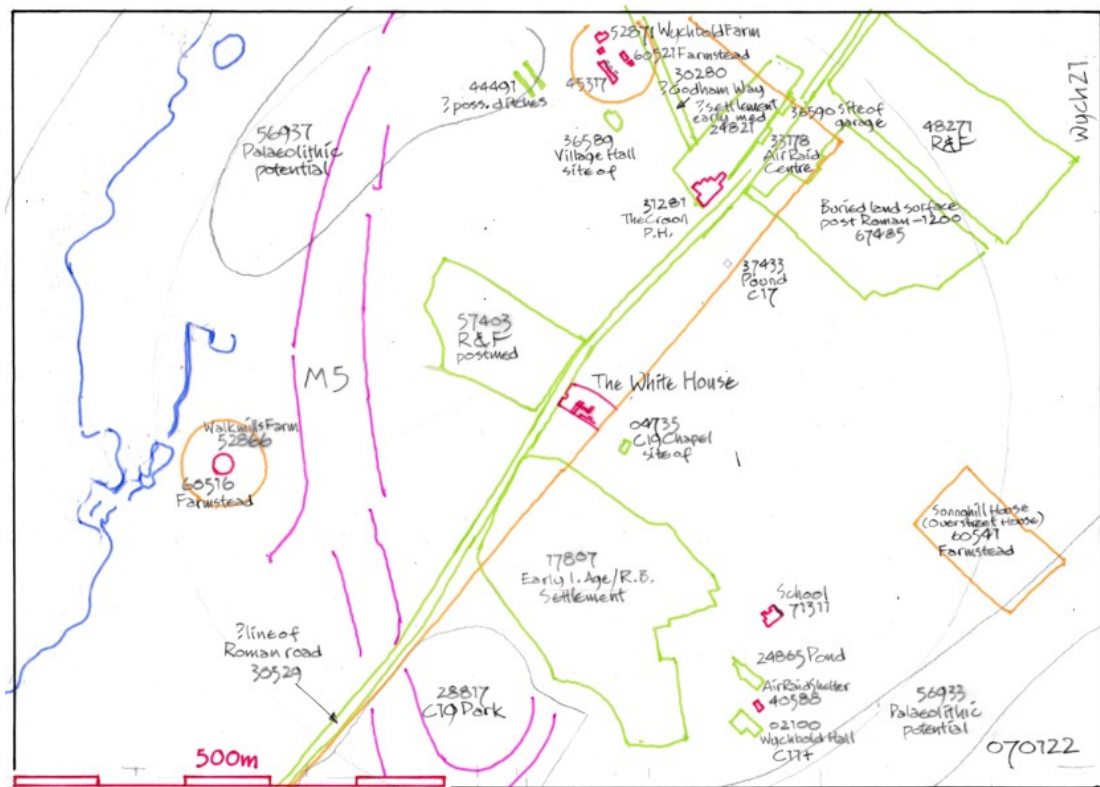


Fig. 3; Historic environment.

EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

Aims of the work

The objectives of the evaluation were 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 can be made. This information would clarify whether any remains should be considered for preservation *in situ* or form the basis of a mitigation strategy.

In particular, the aims of the investigation will include:

- i) establishing the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation on the development site.
- ii) recovering artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region.
- iii) recovering palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions.

Sample size and scope of fieldwork

The evaluation comprised two trenches each located within the main areas of impact of the proposed development. Trench 1 was 15m long located at the western edge of the site orientated northeast-southwest whilst trench 2 was 30m long and aligned northwest-southwest along the northern edge of the site. Both trenches were excavated to a width of 1.50m.

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, 2020). 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 wet during the excavation with the soil layers showing some moisture retention. Excavation was relatively smooth throughout the trench being made through alternate layers comprising of topsoil and an underlying subsoil, leaving a clean and visible surface within the natural substrate, a stiff clay.

Reliability of field investigation

There was some evidence of previous truncation of the underlying deposits in trench 2 where a partially exposed modern pit was recorded within the western half of the trench. The absence of a clear relict subsoil layer in trench 1 suggests significant earlier cultivation in this part of the site.

Distribution of archaeological deposits

No significant archaeological deposits were revealed during the investigation, a series of linear features were recorded at the northeast end of the trench 1, based upon the pottery evidence these can be all be attributed to C19/20 garden activity.

Presentation of results

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

RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

Trenches 1 & 2

The natural substrate (contexts 101 & 203) comprised a stiff light yellowish-brownish red clay with a small pebble component and was exposed throughout the length of both trenches. In trench 1 the surface of this clay was recorded at a level height of about 55.50m AOD, in trench 2 at the southeast end, the clay was at 55.06m AOD and about 55m AOD at the northwest end.

In trench 1 a series of linear features were recorded truncating the natural clay. One of these [103] was a narrow gully-like trench aligned northeast-southwest, about 0.18m wide, 0.16m deep with a flat base and steeply sloping sides. The southwest edge was wider, probably indicating the side of construction and which initially suggested it was about 0.50m wide. It was filled by a single deposit (102) consisting of a greyish-brown, clayey-silt with some small fragments of stone and charcoal flecking throughout.

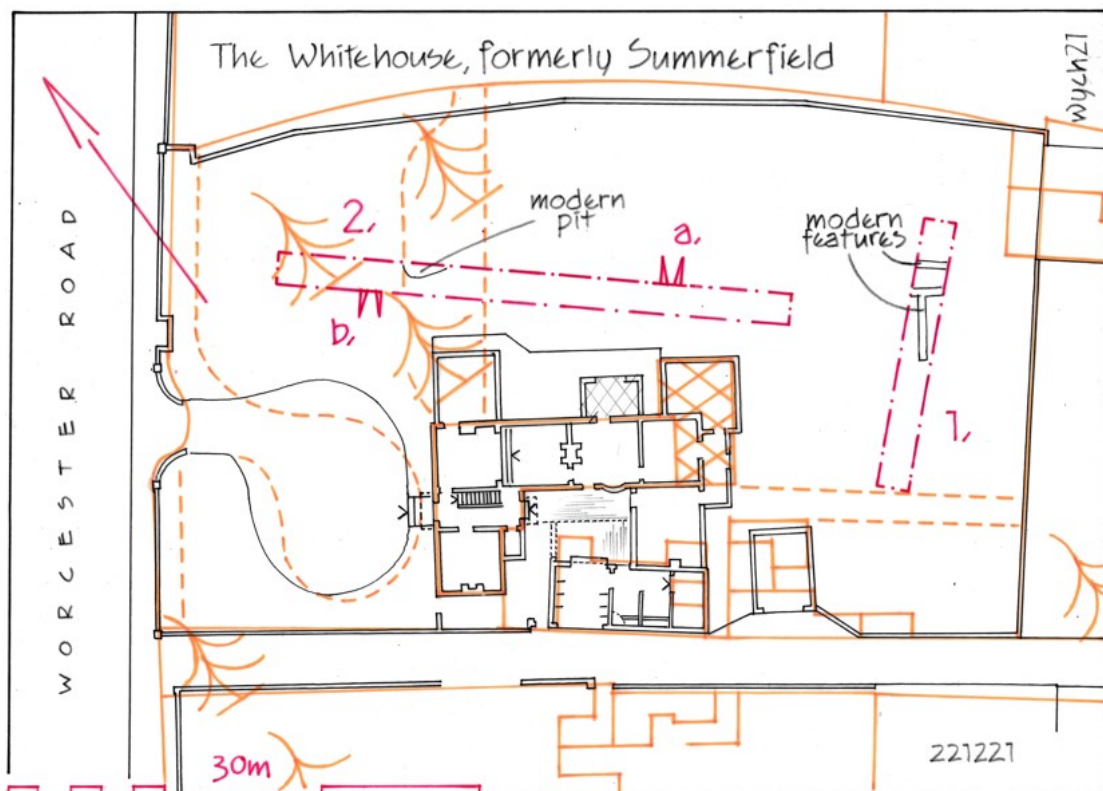


Fig.4; Site plan showing features on 1885 OS, shown in orange, with trench locations.

Finds from the fill, which was fully excavated, comprised a handful of modern pottery sherds, a single brick fragment and a small piece of iron slag. Almost parallel to gully [103] and separated by about 0.40-45m was another ditch-like gully [107]. This was 0.60m wide and 0.09m deep with a gently curving profile. It was filled by (106), a deposit equivalent with the fill (102).

Connecting perpendicular to the south side of feature [107] was another similar gully-like feature [105]. This was also about 0.60m wide, the base was gently sloping from northwest deepening to about 0.15m on the southeast side. The gully ended in square terminus about 0.06m deep with gently sloping sides and a flat bottom. It was filled a single deposit (104) similar in composition to the adjacent fill (106). Finds consisting of four modern pot sherds weighing 6g; two brick fragments weighing 24g; a piece of clay pipe stem, two fragments of coal and three fragments of iron slag weighing 185g were recovered from the fills of these two features.

The features in trench 1 were sealed by the modern topsoil to a depth of about 0.40m.

In trench two the natural clay (203) was overlain by a relict subsoil layer (202) throughout the length of the trench to a depth varying between 0.16m at the eastern end of the trench increasing to 0.24m at the west end, this deposit comprised a light to mid greyish-brown, silty-clay, mottled throughout with light yellowish-brown clay suggesting a mixing of the two deposits during cultivation. A small component of rounded pebbles and charcoal flecking was observed throughout the soil layer. Sealing the subsoil layer was a later garden soil (201) consisting of a mid-dark greyish-brown, silty-clay also with rounded pebbles and a slightly larger component of charcoal flecking throughout the deposit. The layer was recorded 0.12m thick at the eastern end of the trench increasing to 0.25m at the west end. The upper ground in the stratigraphic sequence was marked by the modern topsoil (200) comprising a dark greyish-brown, clayey-silt 0.34m thick. This was truncated by a modern pit within the western half of the trench.

FINDS

Pottery

An assemblage comprising of nine sherds of pottery weighing a total 38g were recovered from three contexts (102, 104 & 106). All the sherds were modern dated from the late C19 and C20. Also included in these contexts were a few fragments of coal, brick and iron slag. None of the finds were retained.

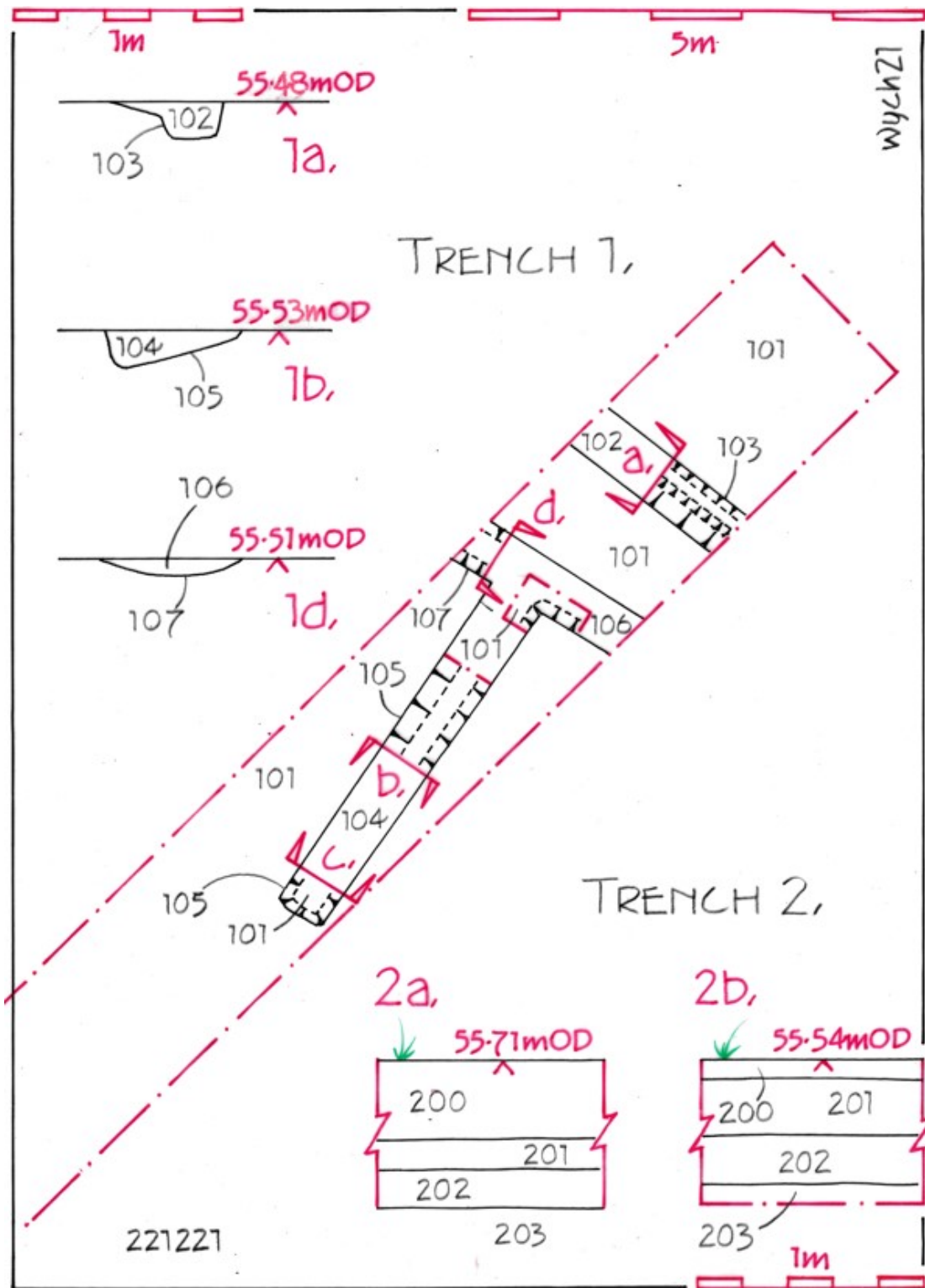


Fig.5; Trench 1 plan and sections.

Environmental data

None of the deposits identified during excavation proved suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling.

DISCUSSION

The site fronts the current A38 which is the old Roman road and salt road between Droitwich and Bromsgrove and where evidence of roadside settlement could be expected. The HER records little evidence of early human settlement within the immediate vicinity of the site however, work at Stoke Lane to the southeast in 1999 and again in 2000 recorded archaeological features indicating a permanent Iron Age settlement. There was further evidence of Roman occupation and based on the pottery assemblages the settlement continued between the C1 and C4 AD. The presence of pottery from Malvern suggests that Wychbold had strong trade links outside of its immediate area, even in the Iron Age.

The relationship of Church Lane and Mill Lane creates a crossroads with the A38/Roman Road, which could be of significance as a possible settlement focus and the location of the Saxon Royal Palace. Mill Lane may lead to one of the five mills mentioned in Domesday and may therefore predate the Conquest.

The excavations revealed a stratigraphy across the site consisting of a natural clay substrate overlain by an undated relict subsoil (202) which marks the earliest soil horizon, clay mottling within this layer is a probable indication of previous cultivation activities and suggests that the site lay within the outlying agricultural belt surrounding the focus of settlement. This layer was not present in trench 1 along the eastern edge of the site the clay was instead sealed by a single thick deposit of topsoil which may be due to a greater mixing of the two soils resulting from more intensive cultivation. The series of modern linear features [103, 105 & 107] recorded within the trench are likely related to these garden activities near to the small buildings in the corner of the site, shown on the early OS maps.

The results of the excavations confirm the documentary evidence which suggests little human activity within the site until the early-C19 when the Wychbold Road became increasingly developed and Summerfield, later known as the White House was constructed.

Summary of results

The investigation revealed no evidence of occupation, instead a stratigraphic sequence across the site suggests that the site was formerly cultivated land and probably lay in the agricultural belt immediately outside the historic core which during the Iron Age and the Roman period was located to the south around Stoke Lane before seemingly being relocated to the north around Church Lane and Mill Lane. The site itself was occupied from the early-C19 when the A38 became further developed and Summerfield, later known as The White House, was constructed.

Significance

The absence of archeological remains and residual finds of an early date would suggest that the site lies outside the focus of the Iron Age and Romano-British settlement which based on current evidence is located to the south around Stoke Lane. During the Saxon and medieval periods this settlement focus appears to shift to north at the junction of Church Lane and Mill Lane with the A38/Roman Road. The site itself lies between these two areas and probably remained as part of the outlying agricultural belt. This is supported by the cartographic sources which shows that the site became first developed during a period of expansion along the A38 in the early-C19.

Impact of development

The results of the investigation suggest that the construction of new dwellings, garages, roadway and associated parking is unlikely to impact on archaeological deposits.

Archive Location

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

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PLATES



Plate 1; trench 1 showing deposits 102, 104 & 106, view to southwest



Plate 2; trench 1, features 103, 105 & 107, sampled, view to south



Plate 3; fill 102 & feature 103, view to northwest



Plate 4; features 105 & 107, view to east



Plate 5; section 1a



Plate 6; section 1b



Plate 7; section 1c



Plate 8; sondage at junction of features 105 & 107, view to north



Plate 9; trench 2, view to southeast



Plate 10; trench 2, view to northwest



Plate 11; section 2a



Plate 12; section 2b

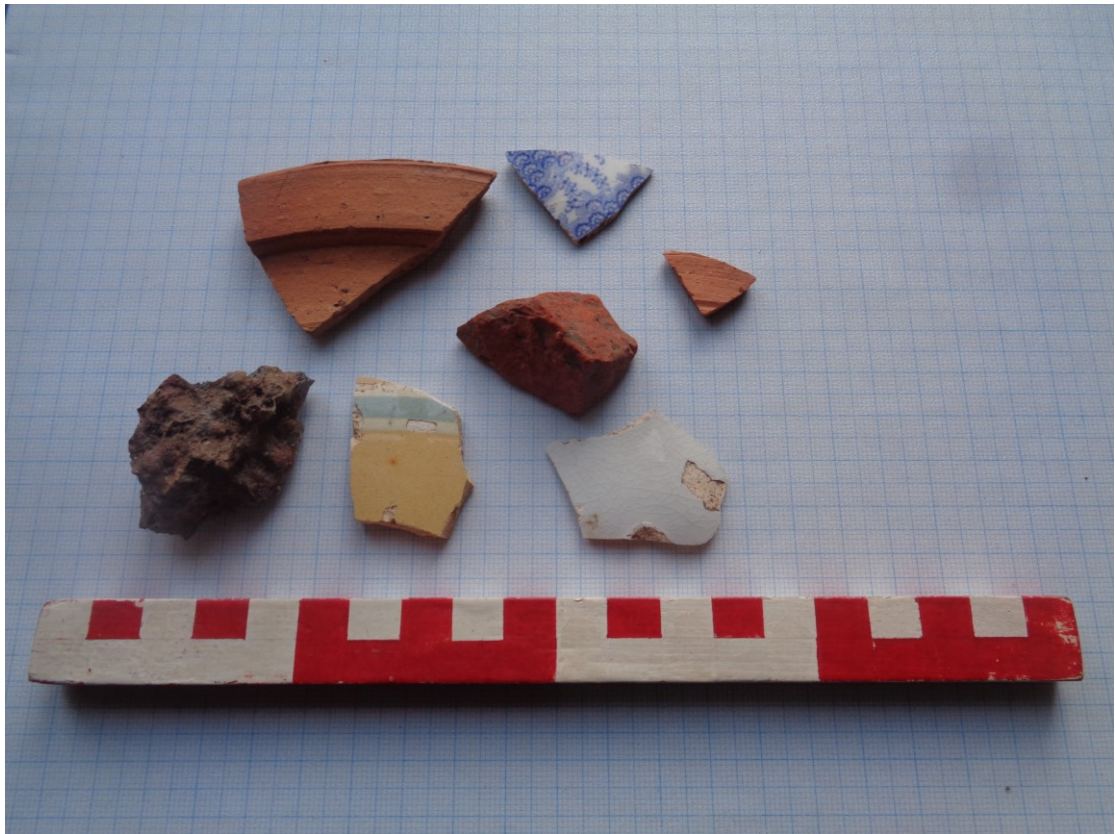


Plate 13; finds from context (102)



Plate 14; finds from (104 & 106)

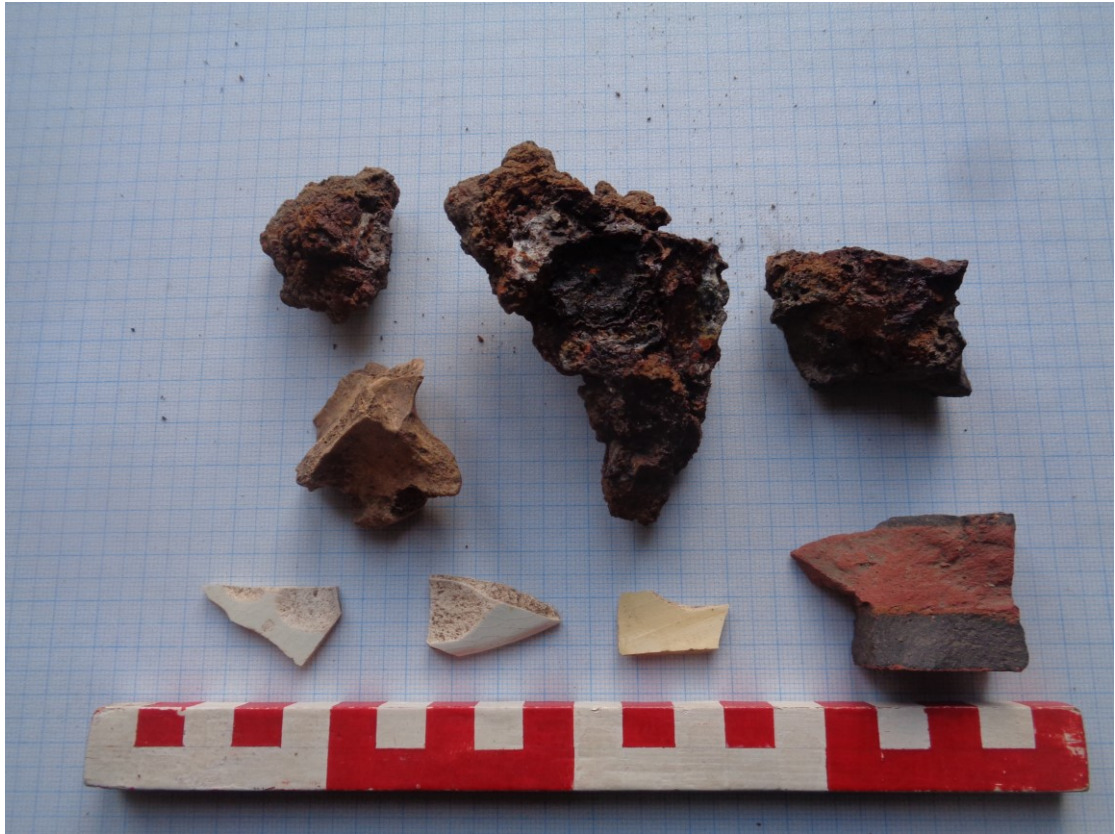


Plate 15; finds from 106

APPENDIX 1: The White House; historic building recording.

The White House

The house with outbuildings, formerly known as 'Summerfield' (OS 1885) was surveyed immediately prior to demolition. The rear wing had already been extended before 1885, beyond the large (2 phase) chimney and by 1903 the attached southwestern part of the glasshouse was demolished. Few original features survive but include three fireplaces on the upper floor. Modern additions include the small record library at the front, a large kitchen closing the southeast side of the courtyard and a passageway providing access to a single storey extension on the site of the old glasshouse, between this and the library is a small conservatory.

The smaller outbuildings have been destroyed and replaced by a garage, set back to allow access from the narrow way. The surviving outhouse, a stable and trap-house, although modified retains the manger extending across two stalls with a corner hayrack over. The trap-house was extended into the yard, and the front opening, under a wide segmental arch, was crudely widened to accommodate a car prior to the garage being constructed, seven tack-hooks are fixed in the side walls. No ancient fabric was found in the cellars under the main range.



Plate 16; View from east.



Plate 17; View from southeast.



Plate 18; 'Art Deco' fireplace on the ground floor.



Plate 19; 1st floor fireplace.



Plate 20; 1st floor fireplace in original rear wing.



Plate 21; 1st floor fireplace, behind that shown in plate 20, in the rear wing extension. Note the positioning to allow for the flue from the ground floor.



Plate 22; The rear of the main range from the brick-paved yard showing later addition with window inserted into doorway. The dormer window is shared between the stairwell and the adjacent garret chamber.



Plate 23; View of courtyard to east.



Plate 24; The trap-house and stable to south with remains of wall at near corner.



Plate 25; Stall to southwest, the two-bay hayloft over is accessed from the southwest via a short door and from within by a ladder fixed to the wall, it is lit by a small window in the northwest gable.

APPENDIX 2: OASIS summary: 110archa1-503650

OASIS ID (UID)	110archa1-503650
Project Name	Evaluation at Wychbold
Activity type	Evaluation
Project Identifier(s)	The White House, Wychbold
Planning Id	19/02435/FUL
Reason For Investigation	Planning: Post determination
Organisation Responsible for work	one ten archaeology
Project Dates	14-Dec-2021 - 15-Dec-2021
Location	Wychbold NGR : SO 92123 65828 LL : 52.2905276129291, -2.11690767259952 12 Fig : 392123,265828
Administrative Areas	Country : England County : Worcestershire District : Wychavon Parish : Dodderhill
Project Methodology	The evaluation comprised two trenches each located within the main areas of impact of the proposed development. Trench 1 was 15m long located at the western edge of the site orientated northeast-southwest whilst trench 2 was 30m long and aligned northwest-southwest long the northern edge of the site. Both trenches were excavated to a width of 1.50m.
Project Results	An archaeological evaluation was carried out during the former Whitehouse, Worcester Road, Wychbold, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire, WR9 7PE in advance of residential development of the site comprising five new dwellings. The site fronted the current A38 which is the old Roman road and salt road between Droitwich and Bromsgrove and where evidence of roadside settlement could be expected. The excavations revealed a stratigraphy across the site consisting of a natural clay substrate overlain by an undated relict subsoil marking the earliest soil horizon, clay mottling within this layer is a probable indication of previous cultivation activities and suggests that the site lay outside the main focus of settlement and within the surrounding agricultural land. A series of modern linear features recorded within one of the trenches were likely related to garden activities. The results of the excavations confirm the documentary evidence which suggests little human activity within the site until the mid-C19 when the Wychbold Road became increasingly developed and Summerfield, later known as the Whitehouse was constructed.
Keywords	
HER	Worcestershire HER - unRev - STANDARD
HER Identifiers	HER Event No - WSM77818
Archives	