



**WHITE KNIGHTS  
COTTAGE, CROXALL**

TEST PIT EVALUATION AND  
STRIP, MAP AND RECORD  
INVESTIGATION


Project No.15-34

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White Knights Cottage  
Croxtall Road  
Lichfield  
Staffordshire  
WS13 8RB

**TEST PIT EVALUATION AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL STRIP,  
MAP AND RECORD INVESTIGATION**

By  
William Mitchell  
Senior Archaeologist

	Name	Position
<b>Edited by/ Reviewed by:</b>	Kevin Colls	Manager
<b>Approved by:</b>	Kevin Colls	Manager
	Signature: 	
<b>Version: v1a</b>	Version Date: 14.03.2016	

**For**

David Anslow

**Kevin Colls**  
**Archaeological Project Manager**  
**Centre of Archaeology**  
Faculty of Computing, Engineering and Science  
Staffordshire University  
R102, Science Centre  
Leek Road,  
Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 2DF  
(+44) 01782 294037  
Email: [Kevin.colls@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:Kevin.colls@staffs.ac.uk)  
Web: [www.staffs.ac.uk/archaeology](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/archaeology)

## White Knights Cottage, Croxall

Test Pit Evaluation and Archaeological Strip, Map and Record Investigation, [02/2016]

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## **White Knights Cottage, Croxall**

Test Pit Evaluation and Archaeological Strip, Map and Record Investigation, 02/2016

### **SUMMARY**

*The Centre of Archaeology was commissioned in October 2015 by David Anslow to undertake a test pit evaluation followed by a strip, map and record investigation in respect of a proposed private dwelling at the site of White Knights Cottage, Croxall Road, Croxall (NGR SK 19924 13654). Four Test Pits were observed in October 2015 and a strip, map and record exercise was undertaken within the ground plan of the proposed development area between 22-25<sup>th</sup> February 2016.*

*The purpose of the archaeological investigations work were to evaluate the existence of archaeological features present on the development site. The reason for archaeological interest in the site was the existence of a deserted medieval village to the south- east of the excavation area and a possible hlaew (Anglo-Saxon burial mound) or motte is located immediately to the south of the site. Four test pits and two trenches were excavated, down to natural geology in an attempt to locate any surviving archaeological features.*

*The evaluation found no in situ evidence that predated the 17<sup>th</sup> century. One un-stratified sherd of splash green glazed pottery was recovered, this dated from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century. One small 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century waste pit was identified. This was probably associated with the known 17<sup>th</sup> century former vicarage located in the adjacent eastern plot of land. Three post-holes were identified. These were likely to have been contemporary and they predated the recently demolished 19<sup>th</sup> century White Knights Cottage, although no specific dating evidence was recovered. One large backfilled brick lined well, which probably originated in the later 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century was identified.*

*Thorough analysis of the area surrounding the site reveals the potential for preserved remains from a wide ranging period. These areas, which have received little attention from agriculture or development are highly likely to yield significant archaeological results.*

## **White Knights Cottage, Croxall: Test Pit Evaluation and Archaeological Strip, Map and Record Investigation**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. The Centre of Archaeology was commissioned in October 2015 by David Anslow to undertake a test pit evaluation followed by a strip, map and record investigation programme ahead of a proposed private dwelling at the site of White Knights Cottage, Croxall Road, Croxall (NGR SK 19924 13654, hereinafter referred to as the site)
- 1.2. This report outlines the results of a field evaluation carried out on October 21<sup>st</sup> 2015 and between 22<sup>th</sup>–25<sup>th</sup> February 2106, and has been prepared in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations (CiFA 2014).
- 1.3. Prior to the evaluation a Heritage Statement was completed by Dr Peter Wardle and Colin Lacey (Historic Environment Consultancy 2015). This document outlines the documentary and cartographic information available for the site and should be read in conjunction with this report.
- 1.4. The test pit evaluation and subsequent strip, map and record investigation conformed to a Written Scheme of Investigation (Historic Environment Consultancy 2015) which was approved by the Local Planning Authority (Lichfield District Council) prior to implementation in accordance with guidelines laid down in the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG 2014).

### **2. LOCATION AND GEOLOGY**

- 2.1. The site is located at the former White Knights Cottage, Croxall Road, Croxall, and is centred on NGR SK 19924 13654 (Figure 1).
- 2.2. The underlying geology consists of Triassic Rocks (undifferentiated), Mudstone, which can present as very weathered, Siltstone and Sandstone with no superficial deposits.
- 2.3. The present character of the site was a mixture of hard standing and open ground. To the north of the site is the Croxall Road and to the south of the site lies modern stables beyond which is agricultural land. Croxall church and hall lie to the west of the site and the former vicarage building is located to the east of the site.

### **3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

- 3.1. The site is located in a known area of archaeological interest, being situated within the outer limits of a deserted medieval village, adjacent to an Anglo Saxon burial mound or motte. The Staffordshire County Council Historic Environment record records several archaeological remains, sites and monuments in the vicinity of the area.

#### **Prehistoric**

- 3.2. A circular enclosure was identified from air photographs at Croxall Hall, c 400m from the site. This has been interpreted as dating from the period between the late Iron Age and the Roman period. Further

cropmarks showing enclosures, boundaries and trackways have been identified from air photographs, these being overlain by medieval and post-medieval ridge and furrow.

- 3.3. Two Bronze Age urns containing cremated human remains were found at The Grange, c.160m from the site. It has been postulated that these may be part of a Bronze Age cemetery. In 1873, some '*old British urns containing burnt bones*' were ploughed up in a field near the hall. It is unclear if these are different to those reportedly recovered at The Grange (Minute of Tamworth Natural History, Geological and Archaeological Society 27 May 1873. Minute book No.2 in Tamworth Public Library).

#### **Roman**

- 3.4. The circular enclosure mentioned above, discovered from air photographs, is possibly of Roman date.

#### **Early Medieval (Pre 1066)**

- 3.5. The earliest mention of the settlement 'Crokeshalle' is in AD 942, and it is listed in the Derbyshire Domesday as 'Crocheshalle'. Perhaps meaning 'Croc's halh'. The Old English 'Croc' could be derived from the Old Norwegian, Old Danish or Old Swedish for 'a hook', providing evidence for Scandinavian influence. It has also been interpreted as a meaning 'village on the hill'.
- 3.6. Extant earthworks within the area consist of a Hlaew, or burial mound, of Anglo-Saxon or Viking origin and a deserted village. The mound is 32m in diameter and stands at a height of c.5m and is partly overlain by the churchyard of St John the Baptist.
- 3.7. The HER entry for the Hlaew ascribes a construction date between 410 to 1065AD and was postulated by Ussher (1881) to have been dug in c.1800 by a Thomas Princep who, upon discovering human remains, ceased his investigations. However, the remains may be due to the extension of the nearby churchyard, as noted in the HER description. A *hlaew* is considered by Historic England to be a rare monument class in which all positively identified examples are considered worthy of preservation.
- 3.8. The mound has also been suggested as a motte- a mound on which a fort or castle may have been constructed- and is dated by the HER entry to have been used as such between 1066 to 1485AD. The reason for assigning this monument type is based upon its position on the east bank of the River Mease and subsequently defended on the north, east and south by a large ditch, whilst on the west it is protected by a steep drop to the river. However, the ditch is no longer visible and no evidence of an associated bailey has been found.
- 3.9. Local history has it that the previous owners of Croxall Hall, Mr And Mrs Orme recovered a Saxon font from the River Mease whilst restoring the St John the Baptist's Church, this, they took with them to their current home and presumably still possess (John and Muriel Orme 2006).

#### **Medieval (Post 1066-1485)**

- 3.10. The Manor of Croxall was held by the Curzon family from shortly after the conquest until 1779. The remains of a deserted medieval settlement are situated next to the Hlaew and appear to extend from the north-east side of the river opposite the site of The Grange to Catton Road. The earthworks consist of sunken roads, crofts, enclosures and ridge and furrow, although many of these features have been degraded by ploughing to the point at which many are no longer visible. In addition to these earthworks there is a deep hollow way running from northeast to southwest with a small number of building platforms surrounding it to the north and south. The settlement appeared to respect the burial mound and is constructed around it.

- 3.11. The area between Croxall hall and the old vicarage also has many irregularities, this area is locally well known as impossible to plough and earthworks are still visible.
- 3.12. An entry in Domesday recorded 35 villagers and 11 smallholders with 8 ploughs, 2 mills, 22 acres of meadow and underwood (2 furlongs long by 1 furlong wide). No reason has been ascertained as to why the village was deserted. There are two theories, the first is that the Croxall was ravaged by the plague to the extent that the remaining villagers could not sustain themselves and the survivors moved to Edingale and Alrewas. This fits in with pattern of some other 'lost' villages locally and Croxall is not listed in Edward III's poll tax records in 1377- some 50 years after the Black Death first struck the country. The second theory is that it may have disappeared in the 15<sup>th</sup> century when one of the lords of the manor of Croxall enclosed the land to form a deer park or parkland.
- 3.13. The earliest documentary evidence for a Church at Croxall is a deed, signed in 1130AD by 'Richard, Rector of Croxall'. The earliest fabric in St John the Baptist's Church, is thought to be the chancel doorway and two blocked windows near, these may date to this period. The date of the base of the tower and the lancet windows on either side can be attributed to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, with the windows on the south side of the nave dating to the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Unpublished and undated pamphlet).
- 3.14. Air photo evidence suggests that to the west of Croxall, 570m from the site a ditch and drain of medieval or post-medieval date are present.
- 3.15. An east-west bank is known from an air photo, located c.410m from the site to the northwest of Croxall Hall. This has been interpreted as medieval earthwork.

#### **Post-medieval (1485- c.1700)**

- 3.16. Croxall Hall manor house 260m from the site, is Elizabethan in date and includes a walled garden. It is built in brick, with stone mullions and transoms to its leaded casement windows. It was originally built on the E-plan with two wings forming the larger arms of the E and the two storey porch the shorter central arm. The house was restored and enlarged in 1868, however the west wing was destroyed by fire in 1942. A square dovecote of the 17<sup>th</sup> century constructed in the meadow to the west of the house. The possible remains of a medieval moat are known from Croxall Hall. The earthworks may however, represent a post medieval ha-ha.
- 3.17. The site is situated in an area recorded in the Staffordshire Historic Environment Record as an historic park/ garden likely belonging to Croxall Hall.

#### **4. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

- 4.1. The principal aim of the evaluation was to determine the character, state of preservation and the potential significance of any buried remains.
- 4.2. More specific aims were to:
  - ascertain the presence or absence of archaeological remains in the development area, specifically the outlying areas of the known deserted medieval village.
  - record any archaeological features present and then excavate a sample of them.



## 5. METHODOLOGY

- 5.1. The proposed development area covered approximately 525m<sup>2</sup>. A total of four test pits and two main areas were excavated across the site, these covered the footprint of the proposed buildings, and totalled an area 280m<sup>2</sup>, approximately half of the site (Figure 2).
- 5.2. Four test pits were excavated across the site for the purpose of evaluating the underlying geological layers. Each test pit was approximately 1.2m x 1.5m and excavated to a minimum depth of 1.5m. One of these test pits (test pit 3) was extended to a length of approximately 5m for the purpose of evaluating this area prior to the strip, map and record investigation. This trench lay within the main ground floor footprint of the proposed building.
- 5.3. One trench approximately 11m in width by 21m in length was excavated along the frontage of Croxall Road. This was located to cover the entire ground floor footprint of the proposed building. As such this trench has been named the main house trench. A further trench 7m x 6m was excavated to the south of the site. This covered the footprint of the proposed detached garage building. As such this trench has been named the garage building trench. These trenches were surveyed-in and located on the Ordnance Survey National Grid.
- 5.4. All topsoil and modern overburden was removed using a JCB mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, under direct archaeological supervision, down to the top of the uppermost archaeological horizon. Subsequent cleaning and excavation was by hand. The archaeological and geological features and deposits were manually cleaned and sample excavated. This was done to sufficiently define their character and to obtain suitable dating evidence in order to determine a working sampling strategy for further archaeological works.
- 5.5. Archaeological deposits were not completely excavated unless it was deemed unavoidable. As a result 50% of each feature was excavated. The depth of archaeological deposits across the site was assessed, and the full length of each trench was excavated down to natural. Dating evidence was recovered wherever possible from each archaeological feature.
- 5.6. All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Features were planned at a scale of 1:100, and sections drawn of all cut features and significant vertical stratigraphy at a scale of 1:10. A comprehensive written record was maintained using a continuous numbered context system on *pro-forma* cards. Written records and scale plans were supplemented by photographs using high resolution digital photography.
- 5.7. The few recovered artefacts from excavated contexts were cleaned, marked and remedial conservation work undertaken as necessary. Treatment of all finds conformed to guidance contained within The Centre of Archaeology Fieldwork Manual and *First Aid for Finds* (Watkinson and Neal 1998).
- 5.8. The full site archive includes all artefactual remains recovered from the site. The site archive will be prepared according to guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the Management of Archaeology Projects (English Heritage, 1991), the Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-term Storage (UKIC, 1990), Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological collections (Museum and Art Galleries Commission, 1992) and the Staffordshire Archives guidelines and procedures. The paper archive will be deposited with local museum service. A copy of the report will also be submitted to OASIS (Online Access to the Index of archaeological investigations). The archive procedure will follow the Museums in Staffordshire Procedure for the Transfer of Archaeological Archives 2003.

## 6. RESULTS

- 6.1. The following section is arranged in trench order and both feature (cut) and context numbers are highlighted in bold. Trench plans and sections are illustrated (see Plates and Figures). Ground level was approximately 60.75 AOD. All ground level data was measured against this known height. One unstratified sherd of splash green glazed pottery was recovered, this dated from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century and provided evidence of occupation at this period within the local area.

### Test Pits 1 to 4

- 6.2. Each of the four test pits (Plates 1 to 4) excavated in October 2015 followed the same stratigraphic arrangement and they shall be described as such. The purpose of these trenches was to provide geological information for the architectural planning of the proposed building.
- 6.3. Mercia mudstone was encountered at approximately 3.3m below ground level (57.45 AOD), this presented itself as a mid-orange-red colour.
- 6.4. Overlying this was a weathered Mercia mudstone which in turn was overlain by a red sandy clay which contained inclusions of small rounded quartz cobbles. The depth of this layer was mixed across the site. This layer, which was significant and present across the whole site, occurred as a result of glacial deposition.
- 6.5. Several features were identified within these test pits, all of which were present as a result of the construction of the former White Knights Cottage and outbuildings in the mid-nineteenth century.
- 6.6. In test pit 2 a linear cut (**202**) filled with mid brown sandy silt, occasional rounded pebbles and charcoal flecks (**203**), was present at a depth of 2m below ground level (58.75). The purpose and absolute depth of this feature remained unknown.
- 6.7. In test pit 4 several 19<sup>th</sup> century foundations were identified. These survived to a depth of up to 9 courses (**402**). The structure included a concrete floor and buried yard surface (**403**) and represented a heated greenhouse building to the rear of the former White Knights Cottage.
- 6.8. Each of the test pits was sealed by a mixed dark brown-black silt layer which varied in thickness from 0.5m to 1m in some places. This layer contained much evidence of previous building demolition and occupation from the last few hundred years.

### Main House Trench (Plate 5, Figure 2)

- 6.9. Natural sandy clay deposits (**501**) were reached at a height of 0.5m-1m below ground level (60.25-59.75m AOD). This same layer had been previously identified within the test pits. It was found across the entire trench and was truncated in several locations by later development and human activity.
- 6.10. A waste pit dating to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, and most likely associated with the adjacent vicarage building, was identified (**502**, Plate 6). This pit was 1.2m in length and 0.3m of it was exposed beneath the eastern trench edge. The pit was shallow, being only 0.3 in depth and animal bone and ceramic and pipe fragments were recovered (**503**, Plate 7).
- 6.11. A row of post holes (**508**, **510** & **512**) was identified, these were orientated from east to west and each was very similar in dimensions and excavation technique. These post-holes did not form a perfect line but were in all likely-hood contemporary, predating the construction of White Knight's Cottage in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Each post-hole was approximately 0.4m in diameter and was sub-rounded. The

deepest was 0.7m in depth and each was filled with dark brown-black sandy silt (**509, 511 & 513**). They had been excavated down to the first structurally sound geological layer.

- 6.12. A well (**506**, Plate 8) was identified beneath the southern trench edge. The well was 1.8m in diameter and was made up of dark orange bricks which were approximately 2.1/2 inch x 4 inch x 9 inch. The well was likely to have originated in the late 18<sup>th</sup> to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The well survived to a depth of 9 courses and had been filled with compacted sandstone and red clay (**507**).
- 6.13. Overlying and sealing all of these natural geological and archaeological features was a layer of mixed dark brown-black silt, made ground (**500**). This contained much demolition material and artefactual evidence originating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **Garage Building Trench** (Plate 9, Figure 2)

- 6.14. Natural sandy clay deposits (**600**) were reached at a height of 1.5m-1.8m below ground level (59.25-58.96m AOD). This same layer had been previously identified within the test pits. It was identified across the entire trench.
- 6.15. A two course strengthened brick floor surface (**602**; not illustrated) was encountered at a depth of 1.5m below ground level. This has been interpreted as a lower floor level for the now demolished heated greenhouse building, perhaps the location for the boiler. The bricks were approximately 2.1/2 inch x 4 inch x 9 inch and the lower course of was laid on edge. The extent of the surface was approximately 2.5m x 3m.
- 6.16. Overlying and sealing all of these natural geological and archaeological features was a layer of mixed dark brown-black silt, made ground (**601**). This contained much demolition material and artefactual evidence originating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **7. DISCUSSION**

- 7.1. The evaluation investigated the possible presence of the deserted medieval village of Croxall. The excavations were located in the areas thought to be located in the periphery or agricultural land of the village. Four test pits and two trenches were excavated, down to natural geology in an attempt to locate any surviving archaeological features.
- 7.2. The evaluation found no evidence that predated the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century. One un-stratified sherd of splash green glazed pottery was recovered, this dated from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century. One small 17<sup>th</sup> century waste pit was identified. This was probably associated with the known 17<sup>th</sup> century former vicarage located in the adjacent eastern plot of land. Three post-holes were identified. These were likely to have been contemporary and they predated the recently demolished 19<sup>th</sup> century White Knights Cottage. Although no specific dating evidence was recovered, the consistency and the nature of the fills of these postholes were similar to much of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century deposits across the site. One large backfilled brick lined well, which probably originated in the later 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century was identified.
- 7.3. In both of the trenches there were the foundations of the former White Knights Cottage and associated outbuildings, these were overlain by layers of 19<sup>th</sup> century made ground. The natural ground, which was encountered across the site overlay were glacial clays.
- 7.4. Thorough analysis of the area surrounding the site reveals the potential for preserved remains from a wide ranging period. These areas, which have received little attention from agriculture or development are highly likely to yield significant archaeological results.

## 8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 8.1. The project was commissioned by David Anslow through Dr Peter Wardle of the Historic Environment Consultancy. Thanks are due to Dr Peter Wardle and David Anslow for their co-operation and assistance throughout the project. Thanks also go to Steven Dean, who monitored the project on behalf of Staffordshire County Council. Work on site was undertaken by William Mitchell and Charlotte Nicholson. William Mitchell produced the written report and the illustrations. The report was edited by Kevin Colls, who also managed the project for the Centre of Archaeology.

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10 PLATES AND FIGURES



Plate 1: Test Pit 1 facing south



Plate 2: Test Pit 2 facing south



**Plate 3: Test Pit 3 facing south**



**Plate 4: Test Pit 4 facing west**



**Plate 5: Main House Trench facing west**



**Plate 6: West facing section of Pit 502**



**Plate 7: Artefactual evidence from pit 502**



**Plate 8: North facing section of well 506**

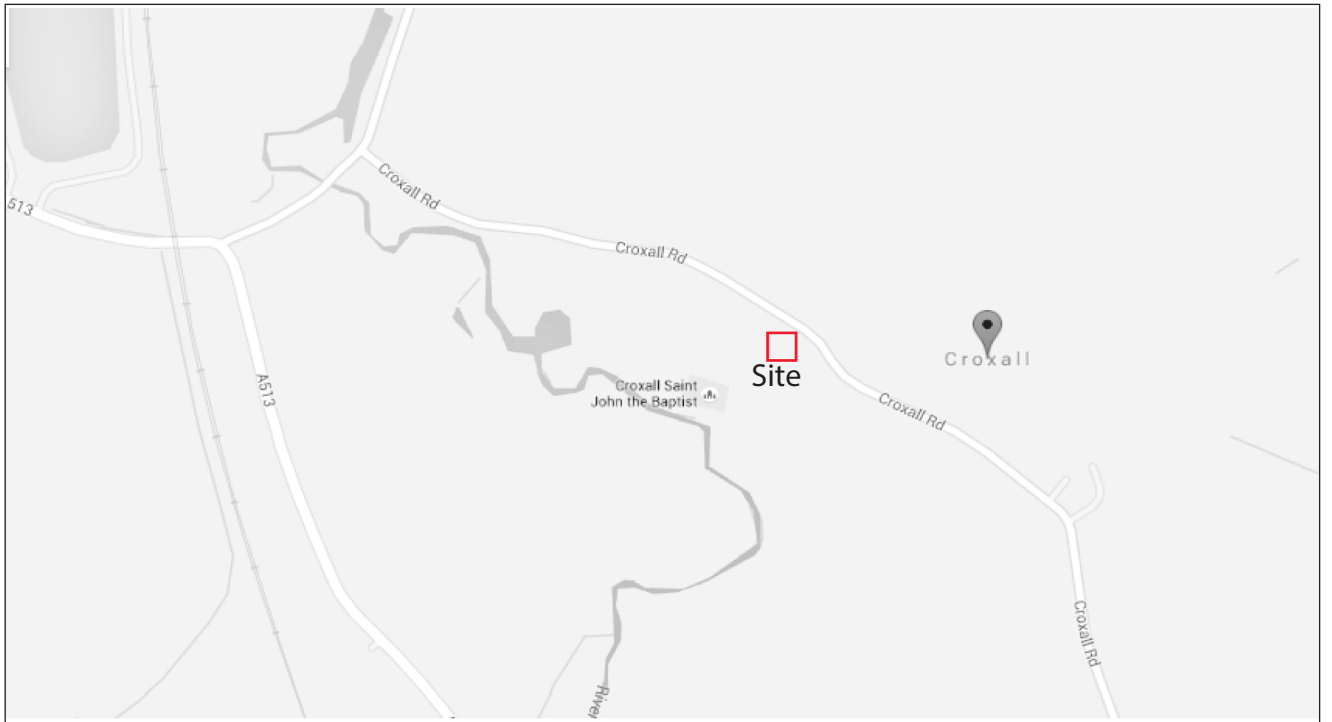
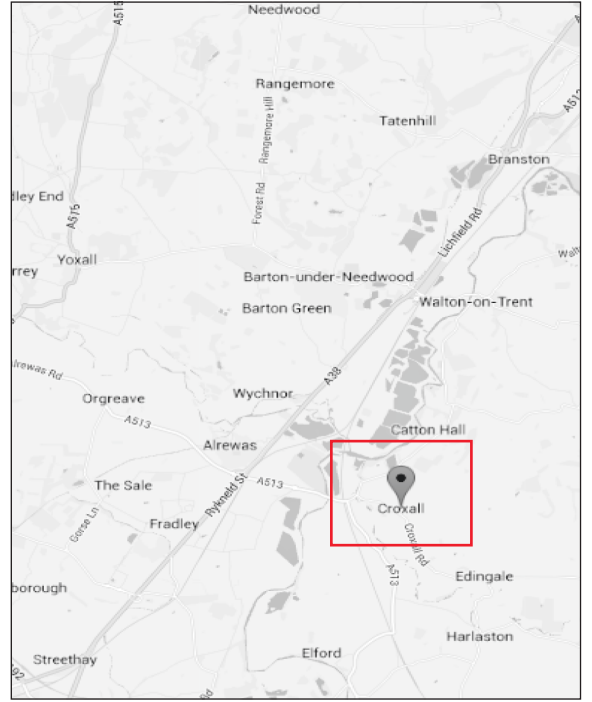
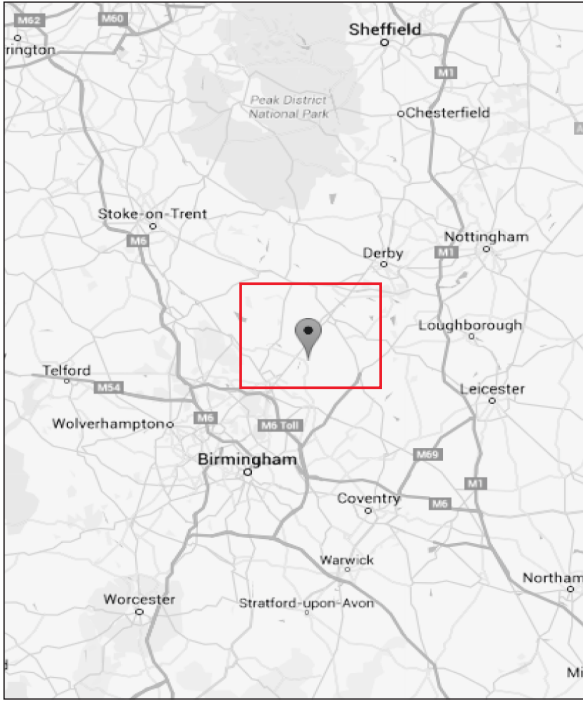


**Plate 9: Garage Building Trench facing south**

## 11 TABLES

Context Number	Description	Date
101	TP1- Dark brown-black silt-clay	18 <sup>th</sup> to 20 <sup>th</sup> century
102	TP1- Red sandy clay natural	Natural
201	TP2- Dark brown-black silt-clay	18 <sup>th</sup> to 20 <sup>th</sup> century
202	TP2- linear cut beneath 201 into 203	
203	TP2- Mid brown sandy-silt clay fill of 202	
204	TP2- Red sandy clay natural	Natural
301	TP3- Dark brown-black silt-clay	18 <sup>th</sup> to 20 <sup>th</sup> century
302	TP3- Red sandy clay natural	Natural
401	TP4-Dark brown-black silt-clay	18 <sup>th</sup> to 20 <sup>th</sup> century
402	TP4-19 <sup>th</sup> Century brick foundations	19 <sup>th</sup> century
403	TP4-Mixed red sandy clay and silt	
404	TP4-Red sandy clay natural	Natural
1001	Trench 1- Same as 301	
1002	Trench 1- Same as 302	
500	Main house trench- Dark brown-black silt-clay	18 <sup>th</sup> to 20 <sup>th</sup> century
501	Main house trench- Red/orange sandy clay natural	Natural
502	Main house trench- Oval? pit	Late 17 <sup>th</sup> to early 18 <sup>th</sup> century
503	Main house trench- Dark brown/black silt fill of 502	
504	Main house trench- Compacted mortar fill of 502	
505	Main house trench- Re-deposited clay fill of 502	
506	Main house trench- Brick lined well	Late 18 <sup>th</sup> to early 19 <sup>th</sup> century
507	Main house trench- Mixed clay and stone fill of well	
508	Main house trench-Post-hole	18 <sup>th</sup> to 19 <sup>th</sup> century
509	Main house trench-Fill of post-hole 508	
510	Main house trench-Post-hole	18 <sup>th</sup> to 19 <sup>th</sup> century
511	Main house trench-Fill of post-hole 510	
512	Main house trench-Post-hole	18 <sup>th</sup> to 19 <sup>th</sup> century
513	Main house trench-Fill of post-hole 512	
600	Garage trench-Dark brown-black silt-clay	18 <sup>th</sup> to 20 <sup>th</sup> century
601	Garage trench- Red/orange sandy clay natural	Natural
602	Garage trench-Brick floor surface	19 <sup>th</sup> century





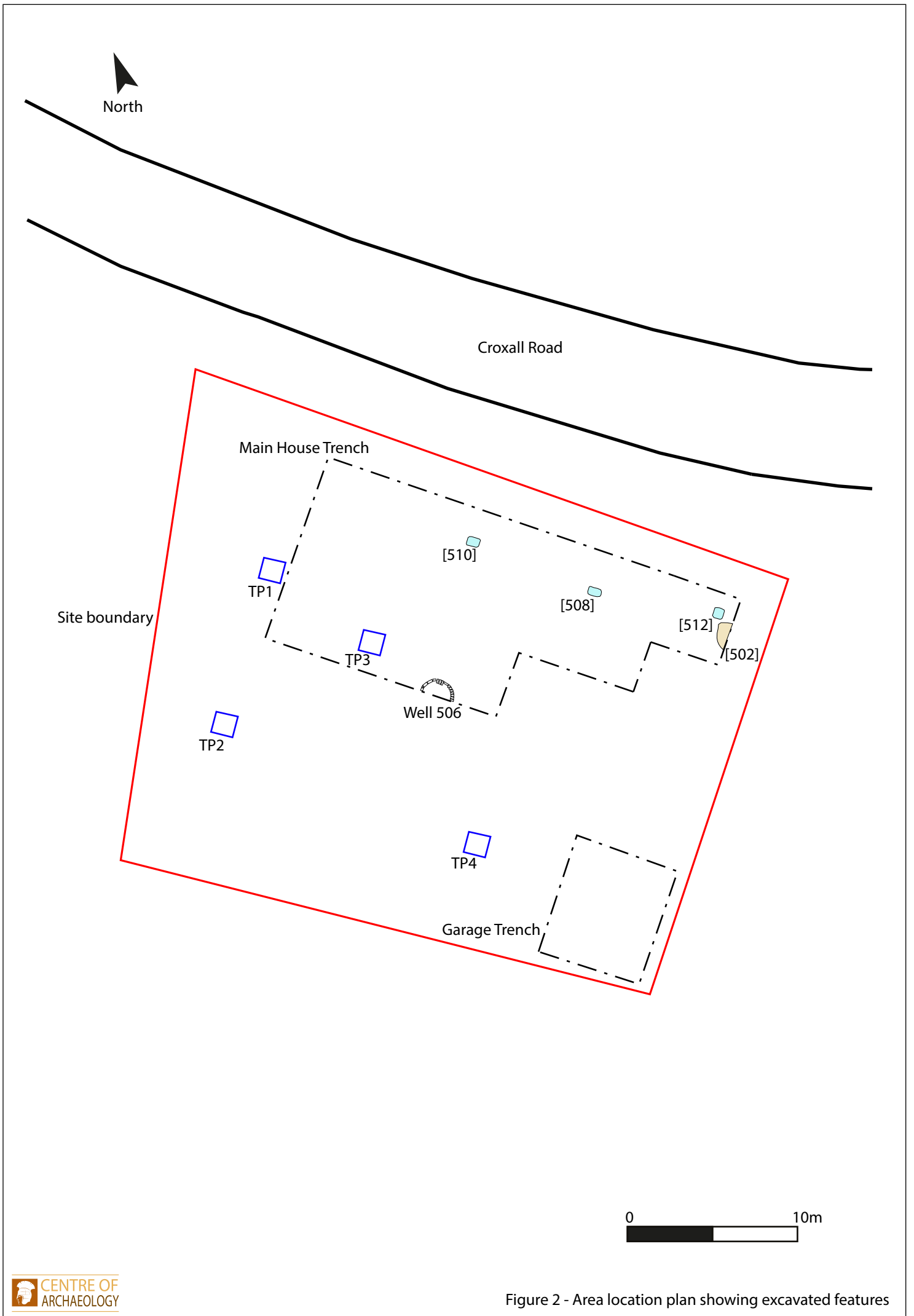


Figure 2 - Area location plan showing excavated features