

# Great Bowden Heritage & Archaeology



**Bowden Ridge Research - Test Pit 5 (BRR/17/5)**

**Great Bowden Road, LE16 7DF**

**Market Harborough LE16 7DF**

**Leicestershire County Council Accession No. X.A46.2016**

**Grid Reference: SP7414 8786**

**Date of Excavation: 2nd September 2017**



*Fig. 1 Sieving the spoil , showing the contrast between the garden loam and the underlying clay.*

This test pit excavation was carried out by Great Bowden Heritage & Archaeology in the back garden of a house in Great Bowden Road, in the north-east part of Market Harborough and on the southern slopes of the hill known as Bowden Ridge.

## **Topography**

The property lies in a residential area of Market Harborough adjacent to the Main Line Railway which runs in a cutting beyond the rear boundary of the back garden. It lies on the lower slopes of the hill that separates the town of Market Harborough from the village of Great Bowden and known locally as Bowden Ridge. The property is at an altitude of 92 metres at the front on the roadside dropping gradually to an altitude of 89 metres at the end of the back garden where it adjoins the railway cutting. The railway line itself has an altitude of 87 metres in this vicinity. The River Welland is some 320 metres distant at its nearest point where it passes through an industrial estate. The historic church site of St Mary in Arden dating to the late Anglo Saxon period and with an extant Norman porch is some 300 metres south and the site is approximately 1 Kilometre to the centre of Market Harborough.

The gradual downward slope of the site to the east before the sudden steep drop to the railway suggests that the gardens may have been leveled after the construction of the houses along this part of Great Bowden Road in the 1930s.

## Test Pit BRR/17/5

30, Great Bowden Road (SP 7414 8786)

Compiled by Helen Wells on 24 August 2017

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Scale 1:500



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Fig.2 showing the location of the test pit in the back garden.  
*Point A (corner of house) to north-west corner of pit = 37.15 metres*  
*Point B (corner of house) to north-west corner of pit = 28.83 metres*

## Geology

The first four test pits in Bowden Ridge Research were in areas where after an initial layer of garden soil the glacial till present on the hill top emerged as the main constituent of the spoil. In pit 5 this glacial till did not appear and the site is just outside its geographical extent. The overlying geology was the thick compacted clay common in Great Bowden and the valley areas. Unlike in the glacial till areas there were very few stones.

## History

The site would have been part of the medieval open fields of Great Bowden in the past. The actual furlong name or its extent is not known. To a depth of 25 cm, approximately, the soil was a dark well worked loam with numerous small chalk inclusions. This suggests that it was well cultivated either in situ or that this soil was brought in from elsewhere. Medieval and post medieval pottery was found in the first three contexts along with modern finds suggesting that the ground had been deep dug. Below this level the soil became much more compacted; the colour changed to a dark yellowish brown and after a further 10 cms the soil became too compacted to dig or sieve or even break up by hand. Between 40-50 cm depth there were no finds and the only disturbance seems to have been by plant roots leaving dark stains.

It was felt that the top three contexts had been worked in recent years before the lawn was laid, and that below this was a narrow area of plough soil 30-40 cm below the surface.

The house was built in 1931 and had further extensions in the 1980s. No other structures are known other than the current owners reported finding foundations further up the lawn towards the house which they thought had been agricultural buildings, possibly the remains of a pig sty. Local Board map and schedule from 1880 shows the owner as Lady Surtees and the farmer as W.C. Sedgeley

They had been told that the old pear tree in the garden was 150 years old and that the neighbourhood had been cultivated as orchards in the past. We could find no mention of these orchards in documents nor in large scale maps of the area from 1885-1923. The pear was producing much fruit and it seemed unlikely that it was 150 years old. There were old fruit trees in other gardens in the neighbourhood and we think it more likely that these trees were planted shortly after the houses were built in the early 1930s.

The area north of the site is rich in archaeological finds from the Roman period.

### **Roman pottery from the Ridgeway identified May 1985 by Dr Richard Pollard of LCC**

The finds were probably collected by residents from their gardens and donated to the Harborough Historical Society. These were placed in the Harborough Museum when it opened in 1983 and were accessioned under the reference LEIMH100.1983.

*Looking on an old OS map the finds seem to come from the first area of development along The Ridgeway ie from 2-34 and some were handed over to the Historical Society in the late 1950s and early 1960s when the houses were first built. Not sure if there was another time of collection around when the Museum opened in 1983. (Pam Aucott Feb 2016)*

1. 3 The Ridgeway Small bronze coin of Valens AD 364-378 SP1408 3305 (?) possibly SP74088805
2. 17 The Ridgeway Small bronze coin of Crispus (*became a Caesar in AD 317executed by his father ! Constantine I in AD326*)
3. 2 The Ridgeway Fragments of greyware found 2' deep under layer of broken stone.
4. 6 The Ridgeway Follis of Constantine I (AD 306-337)" Small bronze coin Vileuthian (*could be Vitellius AD69 or more likely because of date -Valentinian I or II (AD364-392)*)
5. 10 The Ridgeway Bronze coin of Allectus (AD 293-296)
6. 22 The Ridgeway 113 Roman sherds (mostly late grog tempered ware), 2 medieval and post medieval
7. 24 The Ridgeway 2 sherds Roman pottery
8. 30 The Ridgeway 123 sherds Roman, 11 medieval, 2 post medieval, 2 tessera and a coin.
9. 32 The Ridgeway 88 Roman sherds, 1 tessera, 1 late Iron Age, 12 medieval, 4 post medieval.
10. 34 The Ridgeway Roman sherds and an area of cobbled floor
11. 56 The Ridgeway bronze coin Constantine II (AD317-340), 32 Roman sherds and 2 medieval
12. 47 Great Bowden Road 4 sherds Roman (1 geyware, 1 shelly , 1 colour coated) + coin of Magnus Maximus (AD383-388)
13. 97 Great Bowden Road 35 Roman sherds, 7 late Iron Age, 9 medieval, 5 post medieval.
14. 99 Great Bowden Road 2 sherds greyware and 1 shellyware.
15. White Lodge, Great Bowden Road sparse scatter of Roman (inc greyware and samian), tessera and oyster shells
16. Great Bowden Hill A substantial rim sherd of a vessel decorated by scoring and finger decoration, but no exact location.

*Ignoring the coin from possibly 69AD the period covered by evidence of Roman occupation is mostly 4th century (293-392 AD) which would fit the late grog tempered ware from 22 The Ridgeway. (R Culkin 2016) 2016 additions in italics.*

Great Bowden Heritage carried out two excavations at **12 The Ridgeway in 2005.** (Historic Environment Record MLE16380) Pottery found during these excavations was verified by Leicestershire County Council and is summarized below:

**Late Iron Age/Early Roman 1cAD = 18 sherds**

**Roman (13 categories) = 103 sherds Early Anglo-Saxon = 2 sherds Early Medieval = 9 sherds Late Medieval = 2 sherds**

**Post medieval = 25 sherds**

Two large jars full of Roman and possibly Iron Age pottery from **8 The Ridgeway** was handed in at an event run by Great Bowden Heritage. This was taken and identified by Leicestershire County Council Museum Service. **It is listed as 200 plus sherds on Historic Environment Record entry MLE 1948.** No further details are available at present. The excavation site is approximately **340 metres south-east of Waterfield Place MLE19107, a mid to late Iron Age settlement excavated by ULAS in 2011.**

**NB The sites shown in bold above are within approximately 350 metres of the excavation site.**

Finds from Bowden Ridge Research project carried out by Great Bowden Heritage & Archaeology in 2016-7 have revealed further pottery sherds from the Prehistoric, Roman and Medieval periods.

**BRR/16/2 - 1 Bowden Ridge (380 m from site) = 60 sherds Roman period, 2 medieval, 14 post medieval & modern.**

**BRR/17/3 - 68 Great Bowden Road (225 m from site) = 1 sherd mid to late Iron Age, 7 Roman, 2 medieval, 8 post medieval & modern**

**BRR/17/4 - 35 The Ridgeway - (320 m from site ) = 1 Roman period, 6 medieval, 8 post medieval & modern**

## **Method**

A test pit, 1 metre x 1 metre was dug in 10 cm contexts in the lawn in the back garden. The pit was photographed before the start of each context and the spoil was sieved or broken up into small pieces to extract any finds. When it was considered that the natural had been reached the sections were photographed and the pit was backfilled replacing the soil in the correct order and finally replacing the turf. The finds have been photographed, and identification of the pottery verified by an expert at Leicester University before being returned to the safe-keeping of the property owners. A documentary archive will be placed in the care of Leicestershire County Council and data passed to the Historic Environment Record.

## **Results**

**Context 1** Dug to a depth of 10 cm. Beneath the turf was a fine, mid-dark brown garden soil with an even scattering of small pieces chalk or lime, possibly added during cultivation. There were few stones, 1 sherd of medieval pottery and 2 sherds of post medieval pottery, a clay pipe stem and some small fragments of construction and general waste. (see detailed lists)

**Context 2** Dug to a depth of 20 cm. The cultivated loam was similar to that in Context 1. There were two sherds of medieval pottery and modern construction and general waste as in Context 1. (see detailed lists)

**Context 3** Dug to a depth of 30 cm. The soil was still similar to that in the first two contexts with possibly a slight increase in the number of chalk pieces. Finds included 2 sherds of medieval pottery 4 sherds of modern pottery along with similar construction and general waste as in the previous contexts.(see detailed lists)

**Context 4** Dug to a depth of 40 cm. The loamy soil was present over most of the surface at the beginning of the context but changed rapidly to a light yellowish brown clay showing signs of having been worked. It was felt that this context represented the ploughed soil of

the medieval fields and that later garden cultivation had not penetrated to this depth. Some charcoal was present. One sherd from the Roman period was found and one sherd of Stamford ware along with medieval green glazed ware and early post medieval earthenware. One, not datable, terracotta floor tile was found (74.4grams) otherwise very few general finds. (see detailed lists)

**Context 5** Dug to a depth of 50 cm. This was compacted and very difficult to dig and impossible to sieve. The soil was yellowish light brown with a few dark stains possibly from plant roots. No finds were recorded. The soil appeared undisturbed and the excavation was halted at this point.



## Pottery extracted from BRR/17/5 Verified by Leicester University

Context	Details
1	1 x Early medieval oxidised sandy ware c.1100+ = 3.95g 1 x Post medieval Cistercian/Midland Black ware 1450/1475-1650+ = 0.60g 1 x Post medieval salt glazed stoneware (SW4) c.1730-1770 = 0.40g
2	1 x Medieval, potters Marston ware c. 1100 + = 4.30g 1 x Late medieval Cistercian ware, cup, c.1450-1475 = 4.40g
3	1 x Medieval, possibly a coarse iron mineral tempered Chilvers Coton ware B, (CC5), c1250-1300 + = 1.50g 2 x Modern stoneware, white, from same vessel = 18.75g 2 x Modern white china = 11.50g
4	1 x Roman grey ware, not closely datable, 2nd-4thC = 1.35g 1 x Medieval Stamford ware, c 1100-1250 = 2.25g 1 x Medieval green glazed ware, fine medieval sandy ware, possibly Nottingham ware, 13thC+ = 11.00g 2 x Early post medieval earthenware, EA1, 16th-17thC + = 31.10g
5	No pottery





## BRR/17/5 Post Excavation Processed Finds, Discarded & Retained

C1	Type	Discarded	Retained
	Pottery	None	All retained (see detailed list)
	Flint/worked stone	None	None
	Animal Bone	None	None
	Ceramic excluding pottery	None	All (see detailed list)
	Glass	None	All (see detailed list)
	Metal & Metal working	None	None
	All other finds	None	All (see detailed list)

C2	Type	Discarded	Retained
	Pottery	None	All retained (see detailed list)
	Flint/worked stone	None	None
	Animal Bone	None	All (see detailed list)
	Ceramic excluding pottery	None	All (see detailed list)
	Glass	None	All (see detailed list)
	Metal & Metal working	None	All (see detailed list)
	All other finds	1 x concrete = 77.45g 14 x coal, coke 12.75g	4 x various pieces mortar & plaster = 13.35g 2 x slate frags = 16.30g 1 x coal/coke/charcoal = 1g

C3	Type	Discarded	Retained
	Pottery	None	All retained (see detailed list)
	Flint/worked stone	None	None
	Animal Bone	None	All (see detailed list)
	Ceramic excluding pottery	None	All (see detailed list)
	Glass	None	All (see detailed list)
	Metal & Metal working	None	All (see detailed list)
	All other finds	1 x concrete tile = 56.60g 1 x concrete = 42.05g 8 x coal/coke/charcoal = 21.95g	1 x frag. slate = 36.60g 1 x coal/coke/charcoal = 1.00g 1 x tin foil top = 0.20g 4 x various pieces plaster/mortar = 25.95g

C4	Type	Discarded	Retained
	Pottery	None	All retained (see detailed list)
	Flint/worked stone	None	All (see detailed list)
	Animal Bone	None	All (see detailed list)
	Ceramic excluding pottery	None	All (see detailed list)
	Glass	None	None
	Metal & Metal working	None	All (see detailed list)
	All other finds	None	All (see detailed list)

## Conclusion

This piece of land would have been agricultural before the houses were built and probably under the plough prior to Enclosure in 1776. This would have been one of the furlongs surrounding St Mary in Arden or "Our Lady in the Fields" as the church was called in local Wills. The pottery is unstratified showing disturbance through ploughing and garden digging but the grey ware sherd does suggest the Roman fields extended this far from the township on the hill top and the Stamford ware sherd that this area was ploughed as early as the 12th Century, both sherds probably deposited during manuring.



The first three contexts had been thoroughly worked as garden soil and as the pottery finds are what one would expect to find locally it is likely to have been in situ during and after the house construction. The addition of chalk/lime suggests it was well dug as a vegetable garden area possibly at the time the house was constructed in the early 1930s and very likely throughout WWII and beyond. The earliest aerial photograph available from Google Earth which is from 2002 shows the back garden mostly lawn as it is today. The only context showing signs of ploughed soil was context 4 with early pottery from the Roman period and also early medieval pottery.

*RC*

*September 2017*