



*An Archaeological Watching Brief at
The Old Pike House, Eckington,
Worcestershire*

A report for Stuart and Kathryn Bradbury

June 2004

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Project: PJ 121

WSM 33597

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1. Project Background

1.1. Location of the Site

Eckington lies in a loop on the River Avon around 5 kilometres to the south west of Pershore (NGR SO 9212 4172). The village is centred on the B4080 Tewkesbury Road, which crosses Eckington Bridge to the north and traverses the village to the south. The Old Pike House, the former tollhouse at the northern end of the village, lies adjacent to Eckington playing fields and pavilion (Figure 1).

1.2. Project Details

A planning application was presented to Wychavon District Council for the erection of a two-storey extension at The Old Pike House (W/03/1507). The planning process determined that the proposed development was likely to affect an existing archaeological site (WSM 05905), listed on the County Sites and Monuments Record as the site of a Romano-British settlement. As a result, the Planning Archaeologist, Worcestershire County Council, placed a 'watching brief' planning condition on the application, for which a brief of work was written (WAS 2004).

1.3. Reasons for the Watching Brief

The archaeological watching brief has been suggested as the appropriate response to the threat posed to the potential archaeological site by the development process. This would involve the excavation of foundation trenches and service trenches for the proposed extension.

A watching brief is defined as:

A formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be in a specified area on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed (IFA 1999).

The watching brief at the site was proposed in order that a record of any archaeological remains or deposits encountered during the excavation of the foundations for the building may be made and placed into context using our current archaeological knowledge of the area.

2. Methods and Process

2.1. Project Specification

- ❑ The project fieldwork conforms to the Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief (IFA 1999).
- ❑ The archive conforms to the standards and guidelines established by the Archaeological Data Service.
- ❑ The project conforms to a brief prepared by the Planning Advisory Section, Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service (WHEAS, 2004) and for which a project proposal and detailed specification was produced (Mercian Archaeology (2004).
- ❑ Mercian Archaeology adhere to the service practice and health and safety policy as contained within the Mercian Archaeology Service Manual (Williams 2003)

2.2. Aims of the Project

The watching brief aimed to:

- ❑ To use the results of the archaeological work to produce a report highlighting: -
 1. The survival and location of any archaeological deposits.
 2. Make an analysis and interpretation of all identified natural and cultural deposits
- ❑ Based on the above, establish the significance, survival, condition and period of the archaeological remains and place them within context at local, regional or national level where relevant.

3. The Documentary Research

3.1. The Topography

The underlying solid geology of the area around the development site is Evesham 2 Jurassic and Cretaceous clays (Geological Survey of England and Wales). The overlying soils are of the Bishampton and Pinder series; being typical stagnogley soils of non-calcareous loams over clays with clay enriched subsoil (Soil Survey of England and Wales). The composite geology, together with skilled resource management and local knowledge has ensured that the land around Eckington has provided a basis for sustainable self-sufficiency through the millennia, with fertile agricultural land producing fruit, oats, wheat and barley and rich meadowland skirting the river. The terrain is relatively low lying on the edge of the alluvial floodplain of the River Avon to the north and west. The village stands on the slightly higher clay, sand and gravel plateau.

The topography has, to a certain extent, dictated the communication between the village and the wider area. The approach road from the north traverses the River Severn over Eckington Bridge; a bridge has been located here for around 550 years. The river is relatively slow flowing and general decay and decline appear to have been the reason for frequent documented repairs to the bridge, rather than flood damage.

The railway follows the road corridor past the village, making use of the low flat land as it runs from Worcester to the south west, avoiding The Bredon Hills to the east.

A brief historical and archaeological overview

It is recorded that a Neolithic stone axe was found near the railway bridge in Eckington in 1896 (Wilkes 1996, 8). There is little evidence of later prehistoric activity around Eckington, although an archaeological evaluation carried out by Cotswold Archaeology (WSM 32865) less than 100 metres to the south of The Old Pike House located a curvilinear gully that appeared to pre-date the largely rectilinear overlying Romano-British ditches (Franco 2000). The evaluation was carried out after a programme of fieldwalking by the South Worcestershire Archaeological Group (SWAG) recovered Roman, medieval and post-medieval pottery in the same field (WSM 05905). The evaluation identified ditches, dated by ceramic finds to the 1st-2nd centuries AD, together with evidence for localised iron working. There is further evidence for Roman activity in the area. During construction of the railway bridge around 1840, workmen uncovered substantial structural remains said to include stone building foundations, drains, brickwork and human remains (WSM 07724). The association with 'red' pottery and mortarium, suggests that the remains may be part of a Roman villa, or possibly a mausoleum.

Like in most villages in Worcestershire, evidence for the post-Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods is largely obscure. There is documentary evidence to suggest that the village centre was further to the west until the Norman period (WSM 25914). The late-medieval period is

much evidenced around the village. Eckington Bridge is first mentioned in a document dating to 1440, when the bridge was a timber structure (Wilkes 1996,92), the bridge we see today largely dates from 1729, when any remaining surviving timbers were given to local parishioners, and the structure was replaced in stone (Wilkes 1996, 93). The medieval agricultural heritage can be detected in remnant patterns of ridge and furrow agriculture surrounding the village (WSM 10444; 10493; 10496; 10505; 10505). The Church of the Holy Trinity at Eckington has much remaining 12th century fabric within its construction, although the tower is 15th century and the base and shaft of the village cross is medieval, the head having been replaced in the 19th century.

The Old Pike House was constructed to collect tolls from traffic between Tewkesbury and Pershore around 1756, when a parliamentary act was passed granting Tewkesbury Turnpike Trust permission to include Eckington in the communication network. The tollhouse is now much altered and modernised and the stop gates have gone.

3.2. The Cartography

The 1773 pre-enclosure plan of Eckington gives no useful information with regard to the project.

The earliest available map of use was a plan of Eckington dating from 1813. Although the tollhouse appears to have been built in 1756, it does not appear on this map. The plan shows allotments belonging to Thomas and William Law to the west of the development site.

The earliest Ordnance Survey maps available were at a 6” scale and were of little use as they were not detailed enough.

By the time that the 25” second edition Ordnance Survey map of the area was published (1904) the allotments were still in use, but had been truncated by the Bristol and Birmingham railway line. The map shows the tollhouse as ‘L’ shaped in plan.

Cartographic Sources Used

Source	Reference Number
Pre 1773 enclosure plan of Eckington	Worcester Records Office BA5068 ref: r850 parcel 4
1813 plan of Eckington	Worcester Records Office BA5403/21 ref: b009:1 parcel 21
Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 25”. Worcestershire Sheet XLVIII.6 (1904)	Worcester Records Office
Geological Survey of England and Wales: 1:50,000 Sheet 199	County Sites and Monuments Library
Soil Survey of England and Wales: 1:50,000 Sheet 150	County Sites and Monuments Library

Other sources used are referenced within the report.

3.4. The Fieldwork Methodology

The watching brief was undertaken between 17th and 18th May 2004.

The photographic survey was carried out using digital format. A scale was used where possible.

Proforma Record Forms were used to record the site stratigraphy in tandem with site notes to produce the final record contained within this report.

The methodology adopted and the favourable working conditions meant that the aims and objectives of the brief could be fully met and the fieldwork was successfully concluded.

4. The Watching Brief

The main area of the new extension had previously been a slabbed patio. The slabs were lifted and the sand on which they were laid was cleaned away.

The watching brief followed the progression of the groundwork team as they excavated the foundation trenches and cuts for service runs. The excavations were between 1-1.20 metres deep below the present ground level. Undisturbed natural friable reddish-brown sandy clay was encountered at 0.40 metres below ground level. The top 0.40 metres was a subsoil composed of a loose greyish-brown sandy silt with a small percentage of ash. This showed some evidence of disturbance, probably from being turned as a garden soil, although the lack of humic content suggests it was never cultivated to maximum potential. Two ceramic land drains were located running north-east to south-west (Figure 2). These were within the natural layer and their alignment suggests that they predated the construction of The Old Pike House.

There were no significant archaeological deposits or features encountered during the watching brief and no dateable finds were recovered.

5. Discussion of the Physical and Documentary Evidence

The watching brief determined that there were no significant archaeological features or deposits within the development area. It is clear from previous archaeological work that there is evidence for substantial Romano-British activity less than 100 metres to the south and that there were structural remains from the same period found a little further south near the railway bridge during works in the 19th century. By combining the results of the fieldwork with the previous work, we can suggest that the centre of Romano-British activity and probably settlement, is somewhere to the south of the railway bridge. The industrial waste found during the evaluation by Cotswold Archaeology suggests that the evaluated area was not central to any settlement, although the numerous ditches indicate that the area was central to activity, possibly part of a field system close to a small-scale industrial annexe on the periphery of the settlement. The lack of Roman, or other archaeological material on the development site suggests that there was no activity here until at least the 18th century. The field drains located, suggest that by the 18th century and prior to the construction of the tollhouse, the area was improved agricultural land, probably pasture.

It should, however, be stressed that the development area was small and there is a significant chance that it falls between areas of archaeology, rather than excludes it.

6. Conclusion

The results of the archaeological watching brief demonstrate that there was no evidence for activity prior to the 18th century on the development site. The alignment of field drains located during the watching brief indicate that they must pre-date The Old Pike House and that by the 18th century the area was most likely improved and drained pasture.

7. Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Mr Stuart Bradbury, the owner of The Old Pike House and the staff of Inndecs Building Company of Gloucester; thanks are also due to Mike Glyde, Planning Archaeologist, Worcestershire County Council and the staff of Worcester Records Office.

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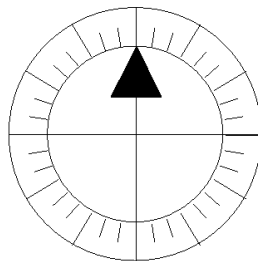
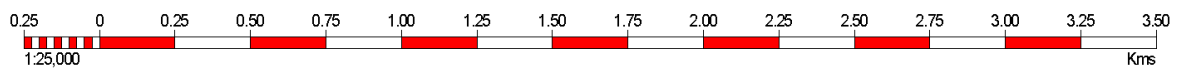
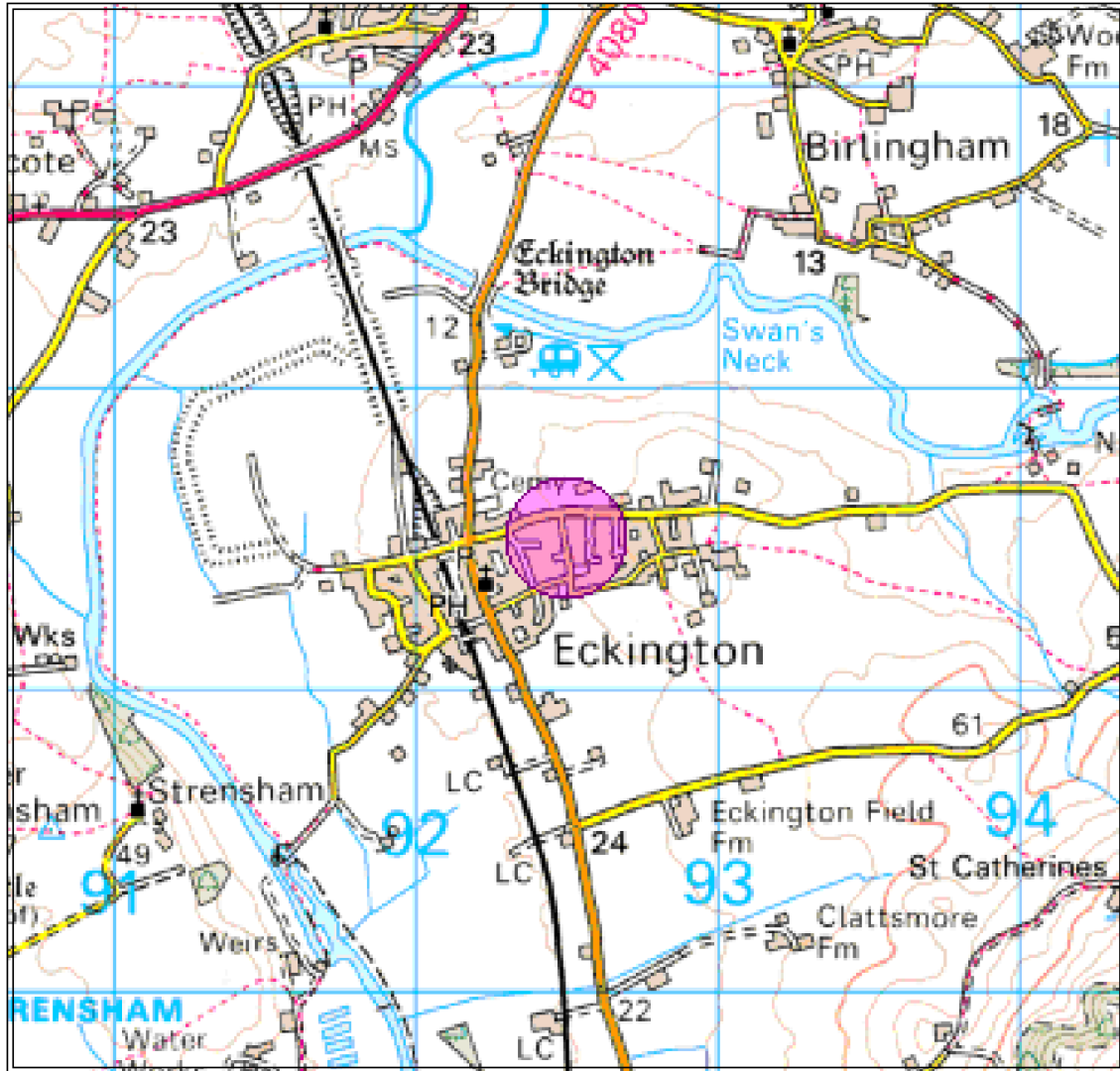
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Figure 1: Location of the Site

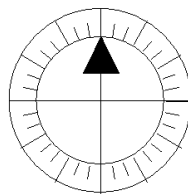
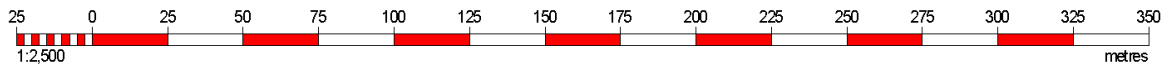
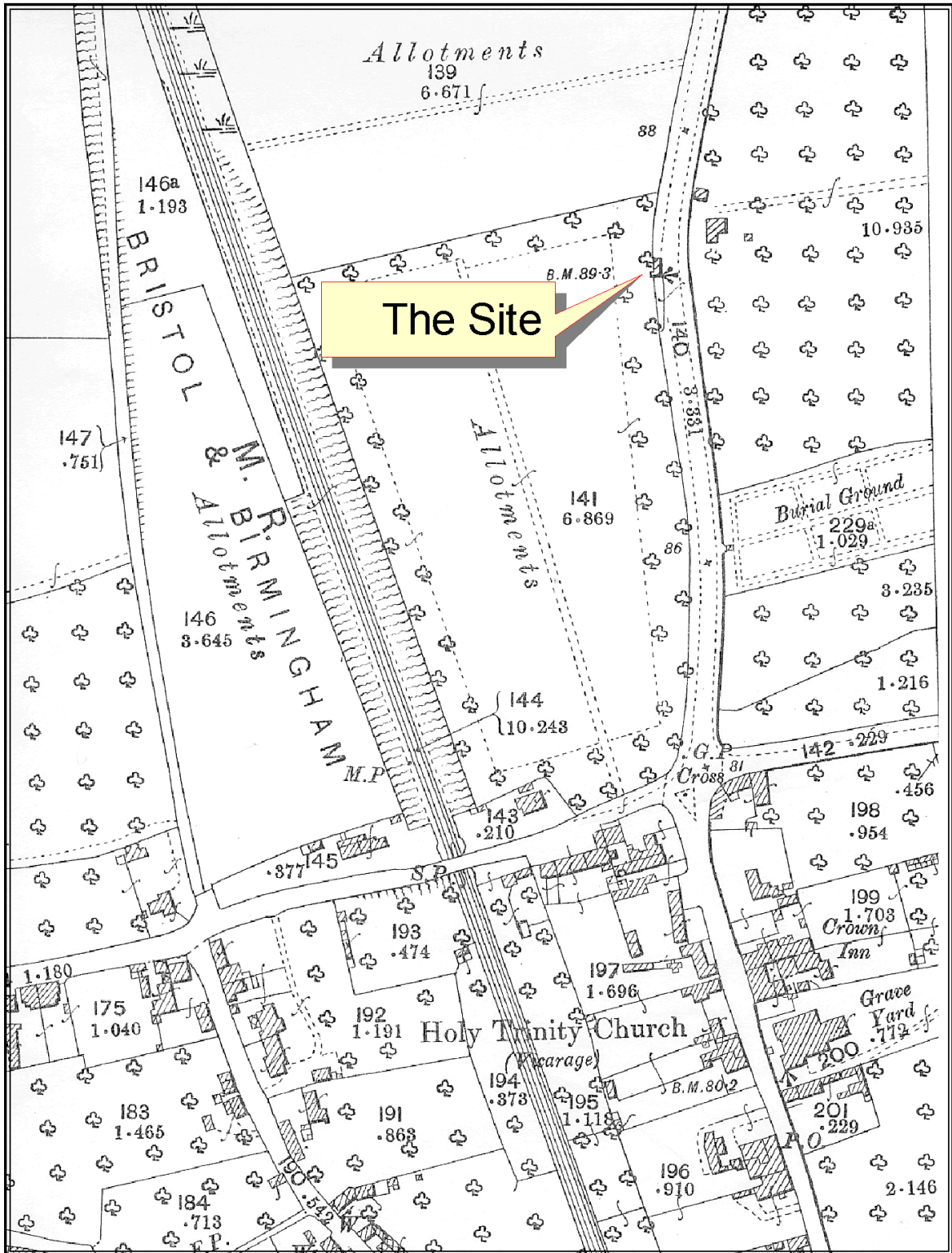


Location of Eckington, Worcestershire

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Figure 2: 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey (1904)



The 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map shows The Old Pike House, then the tollhouse, as 'L' shaped in plan. Allotments lie to the west and a burial ground on the opposite side of the road to the east.