

ERSS/02



LAND AT ECCLESHALL ROAD, STONE, STAFFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

commissioned by The Environmental Dimension Partnership
on behalf of Taylor Wimpey Limited

14/20854/OUT

May 2016

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project info

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PARISH Stone
LOCAL AUTHORITY Staffordshire County Council
OASIS REF. headland3-236409

project team

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ARCHAEOLOGY**
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PROJECT SUMMARY

Archaeological investigations at Eccleshall Road, Stone, revealed no archaeological remains, other than evidence of post-medieval agricultural use in the form of a field boundary and the truncated remains of a ridge and furrow field system.

The excavation was located within a topographic basin which had resulted in the accumulation of groundwater and consequently the formation of a gley soil.

Modern building material comprising brick, concrete and stone had been deposited within the basin in order to firm up the soft ground within this area of the site.

A single flint artefact, believed to date to the Mesolithic period, was recovered from subsoil deposits. However, there was no evidence for in situ Mesolithic activity within the excavation area itself.

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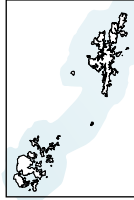
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ERSS/02

land adjacent to Eccleshall Rd
Walton
Stone
Staffordshire

0 200km



0 100m
scale 1:2,000 @ A4

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ILLUS 1 Site location

LAND AT ECCLESHALL ROAD, STONE, STAFFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

1 INTRODUCTION

Taylor Wimpey Ltd, through their agent The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP), commissioned Headland Archaeology to undertake an archaeological excavation on an area of land at Eccleshall Road, Stone, Staffordshire. The site had previously been the subject of an archaeological evaluation (Tetlow 2015) which identified two undated features, potentially of archaeological origin. Based on the results of the evaluation, the archaeological advisor to the planning authority, Stephen Dean, requested that archaeological mitigation be undertaken in the east of the proposed development site. Through consultation between EDP and the archaeological advisor, targeted set-piece excavation was determined to be an appropriate methodology.

1.1 PLANNING BACKGROUND

The developer has been granted outline planning permission (14/20854/OUT) for a residential development of up to 92 dwellings and associated infrastructure.

Condition 24 of the planning permission states:

'No development shall take place within the area of the proposed scheme on the application site until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work (to include post-excavation reporting and appropriate publication) in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the Local Planning Authority (LPA).'

A Written Scheme of Investigation (Craddock-Bennett 2015) proposing the excavation of an area measuring 1,800m² (centred on the previously identified features of archaeological potential) was submitted to and approved by the archaeological advisor to the LPA in November 2015.

1.2 SITE DESCRIPTION

The development site comprises a single field located to the south of Eccleshall Road, to the east of Walton, and 2km south-west of Stone, Staffordshire. The development site is centred at NGR SJ 89350 32650 and measures approximately 3.7ha in area.

The excavation area (**ILLUS 1**) is located within a topographical depression in the north-eastern part of the development site and comprises an area of approximately 1800m².

Underlying geology is Mudstone of the Mercia Mudstone Group with superficial deposits of Devensian Diamicton (BGS 2015).

1.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

A concentration of findspots of prehistoric date are known from the area around Cold Norton Farm, approximately 1.5km west of the development area. The nearest significant prehistoric monument to the site is Bury Banks, an iron age hillfort that lies some 3km northwest of the development area.

Little is known of the Romano-British period or the earlier medieval period in the area and no entry exists in Domesday for Stone. It has been considered that any settlement may have been incorporated within the entry for Walton. During the 12th Century however, an Augustinian priory was founded which may support a suggestion that a settlement existed and had developed during the earlier medieval period.

An aerial photograph transcription undertaken by EDP identified potential archaeological features within the proposed development area including traces of ridge and furrow cultivation and possible infilled clay extraction pits.

A subsequent geophysical (magnetometer) survey undertaken on the site (Bartlett 2015) produced only limited findings. These included a former field boundary and a few possible pit-like features



KEY

- excavation area
- location of evaluation trench
- archaeological features identified during evaluation
- drainage system
- extent of deposit (2008)

GEOPHYSICAL ANOMALIES

- ⊗ strong (recent/natural?) magnetic disturbances
- ⊗ small background magnetic anomalies (natural?)
- ⊗ cultivation
- ⊗ strong (ferrous) magnetic anomalies

ILLUS 2 Excavation area showing topography, deposit (2008) and drainage system

which did not appear to be of archaeological relevance. The survey also detected traces of ridge and furrow cultivation, and various drainage channels and land drains.

An archaeological trial trench evaluation (Tetlow 2015) undertaken in August 2015 identified two features of possible archaeological origin within the eastern part of the site (**ILLUS 1** – Trench 5); these comprised a small, oval pit feature and a more substantial elongate, curvilinear pit feature which contained abundant charcoal. No dateable artefacts were recovered from either feature. They were thought to possibly be of post-medieval or modern date, although

an earlier origin could not be ruled out. The proposed excavation area was targeted upon these features.

Ordnance Survey cartographic evidence

The Tithe map and apportionment for Walton (1835) shows little detail in the vicinity of the excavation area. The name of the field immediately to the west of the site, along with five others in close proximity, is prefixed with 'Black' which the Historic Environment Record (HER) has interpreted as relating to the colour of the soils in this area.



ILLUS 3 General view of excavation area showing flooding in area of deposit (2008)

The first edition Ordnance Survey map (1891) shows the proposed area of excavation as being located within enclosed farmland. Immediately to the east, a brick works and clay pit are annotated. To the west of the site, the field known as 'Black Pits' is shown as containing extensive clay pits adjacent to the Eccleshall Road. They are marked as 'old' in 1891, suggesting they are at least post-medieval in date.

The second (1904) and third (1924) edition Ordnance Survey maps show the same detail as the earlier mapping, but with two semi-detached blocks of houses and associated gardens occupying the land between the edge of the clay pit and the proposed excavation area. These buildings are also indicated on the 1949 edition, but only one survives on the 1952 map.

2 OBJECTIVES

The general purpose of the investigation was to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets before they were lost. This would be achieved by determining and understanding the nature, function and character of any remains on the site, disseminating the results of that work and archiving the material and paper records.

The local and regional research contexts are provided by the West Midlands Archaeological Research Framework. Evidence retrieved during the works have been analysed in light of the objectives contained in that framework.

The archaeological investigations were carried out in order to:

- assess extent, layout, structure and date of features and deposits of archaeological interest; and
- place, where possible, the identified features within their local and regional context.

The resulting archive (finds and records) will be organised and deposited with the local Museum to facilitate access for future research and interpretation for public benefit.

3 METHOD

Topsoil and subsoil deposits were removed using a 21 tonne mechanical excavator fitted with a flat bladed bucket between the 23rd and 25th November 2015. These deposits were separated and stockpiled to the north and south of the mitigation area respectively. Stripping ceased upon identification of archaeological features or natural geological deposits.

Due to the ingress and pooling of water in the southeast of the site, a baulk was left in to prevent excessive flooding of the central basin within the site.

Excavation slots were positioned across the identified archaeological features to characterise their form and retrieve dateable material.



ILLUS 4 South-west facing section through baulk

Working practices followed the CIFA code of conduct (2014a) and all recording was in line with Cifa Standards and Guidance for conducting archaeological excavations (2014b) and the Headland manual.

All contexts and environmental samples were assigned unique numbers. Contexts numbering commenced at 2000, to avoid duplication with numbers from the prior field evaluation. Recording was undertaken on Headland Archaeology pro forma record sheets with a diary record of the excavation kept.

The photographic record comprised black-and-white prints and digital photographs where appropriate for use in the report etc. A graduated metric scale was clearly visible in each image. A representative photographic record of the excavation method and site conditions was also taken.

An overall site plan was digitally produced using a dGPS and accurately linked to the National Grid.

Section drawings were hand-drawn on permatrace at a scale of 1:10.

A 40 litre bulk sample was taken from an organic deposit identified within the central area of the site.

4 RESULTS

4.1 GENERAL SITE STRATIGRAPHY

Complete context descriptions are provided in Appendix 1. Features described in the text are presented on ILLUS 2.

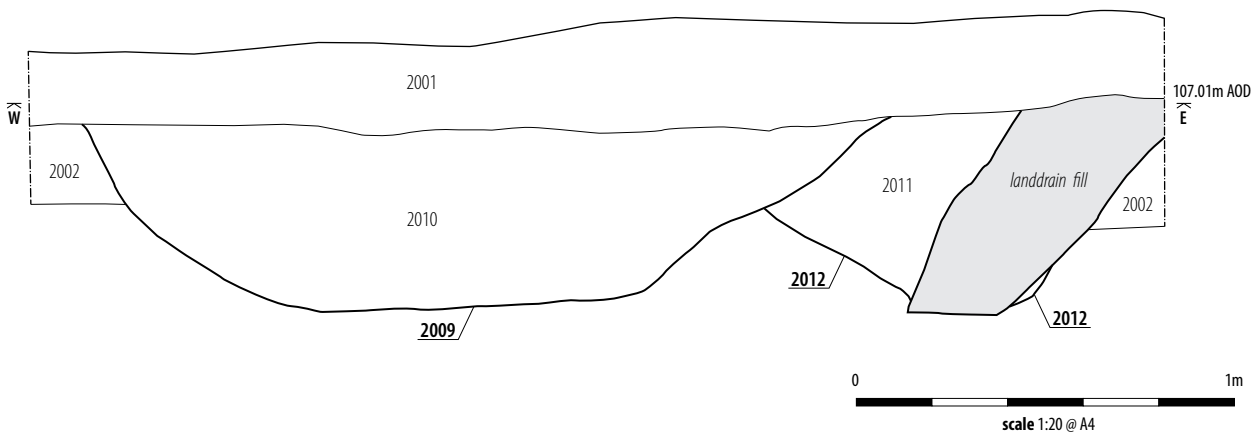
Across the entire site, a mid-brownish grey silty clay topsoil (2001) up to 0.30m thick sealed a lower horizon of mid-reddish brown clayey silt subsoil (2002). The subsoil varied in depth from 0.15m deep in the northwest up to 0.45m deep elsewhere on the site. Occasional fragments of white-glazed modern pottery and frequent inclusions of coal and clinker were present within the subsoil deposit, along with a single worked flint (Appendix 2).

The lithic was identified as a Mesolithic microburin which is a by-product created in the production of microliths. Despite its fresh condition, the location of the artefact within a disturbed subsoil deposit suggests that the flint was not discovered in situ. Indeed, no evidence for prehistoric archaeological remains were encountered anywhere within the site.

Topsoil and subsoil deposits sealed a variably light reddish brown and light yellowish brown clayey sand and gravel natural geological deposit (2003). No archaeological remains that pre-dated the post-medieval period were located.

4.2 ORGANIC DEPOSIT

Within the central area of the site, in a shallow basin (ILLUS 2) and generally sealed by the subsoil formation, a patchy dark grey sandy silt and blueish grey sandy clay (2008) was recorded (ILLUS 3 and 4). The deposit, which measured up to 0.20m in depth, represented in situ organic decay and gleying of underlying clays through anaerobic conditions. The deposit was disturbed with apparent dumping of brick, concrete and masonry. Modern white glazed ceramic sherds were also noted within this deposit during machining.



ILLUS 5 SE facing section through ditches [2009] and [2012]



ILLUS 6 General view ditches [2009] and [2012] looking SE

Worked masonry was recovered from the subsoil deposit (2002) overlying the organic deposit (2008). The deposition of the worked stone appeared to be contemporary with the deposition of the underlying brick and rubble. No in situ building remains; i.e. wall foundations and floor surfaces, were found within the site.

Environmental analysis of a sample from the deposit identified very little environmental material (Appendix 3). Modern roots constituted the bulk of the flot sample, with no environmental finds of archaeological significance being present. Small fragments of charcoal present in the sample may represent fragments that were incidentally included in the shallow depression at the same time as the modern bricks and concrete.

4.3 POST-MEDIEVAL REMAINS

Aligned northwest by southeast, and truncating deposits (2002) and (2008), a ditch [2009], traversed the entire excavation area, and was filled with a reddish brown sandy clay (2010) containing modern brick and bottle glass. The ditch, which measured 2.10m in width and 0.48m in depth, was a recut for an earlier ditch [2012], crossing the site on the same alignment (ILLUS 5 and 6). Ceramic building material including tile and brick dating to the modern period was recovered from the fill (2011) of [2012].

Toward the northeast corner of the site, two furrows [2005/2007] measuring 0.05m and 0.07 in depth were recorded and represented the truncated remains of a former ridge and furrow field system.

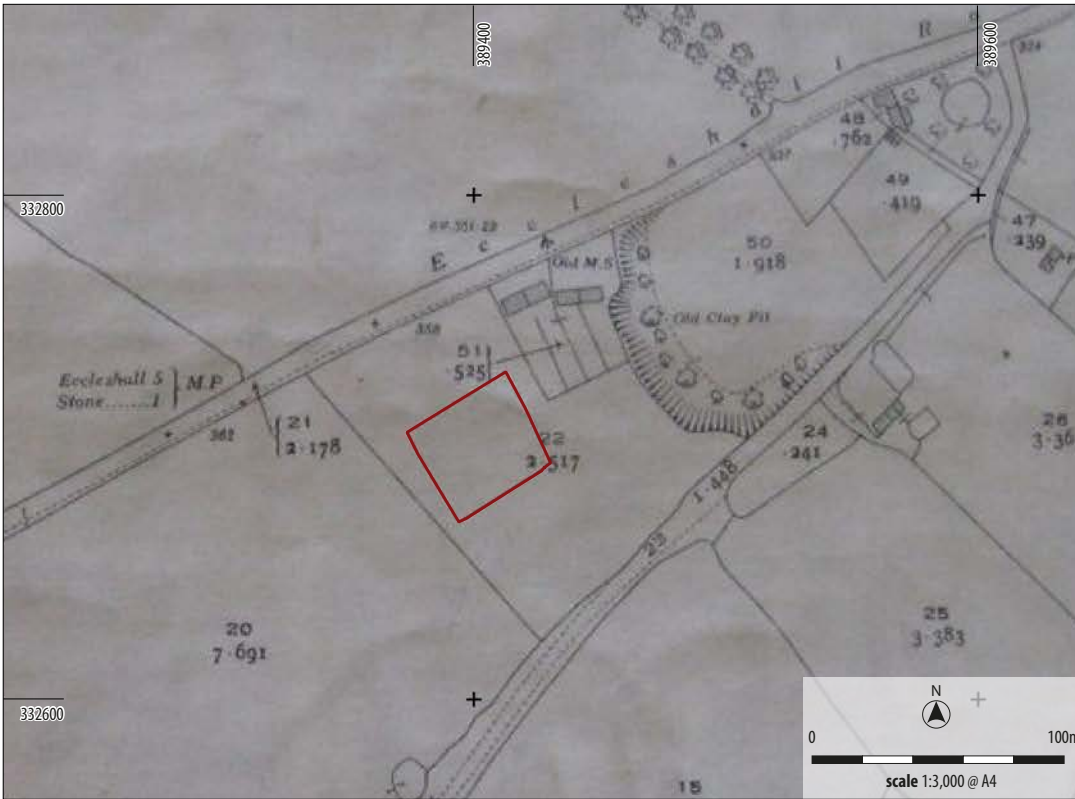
5 DISCUSSION

Geological deposits identified during the excavation were comparable to those previously identified and mapped on the site during the trial trenching.

No evidence was found for the continuation of the two undated features identified during the preceding archaeological evaluation. No further features of comparable form were identified, although the environmental material recovered from the evaluation features was similar to that recovered from the organic-rich spread identified during excavation.

The grey, organic-rich sandy clay and silt deposit identified in the south and east of the site correlated entirely with the topography of the field. The deposit was largely confined to the 106.25m contour, occupying a shallow depression where surface water had pooled. Prior to the stripping of topsoil deposits, water reeds were observed at this location, and the land drainage system diverted water into this area of the site.

It is unclear whether the topographical depression is a geological formation or whether it is man-made; potentially the remnant of one of the numerous post-medieval or Victorian clay pits recorded in the area. Although the deposit itself was not waterlogged at the time of excavation, it is apparent that wetter conditions in this area have led to the gleying of the soils and the rich organic nature of the deposit. The appearance of the deposit and its possible presence in surrounding fields may explain the 'black' pre-fix to a number of field names within the area.



ILLUS 7 Excavation area shown on 1924 OS map



ILLUS 8 Masonry recovered from subsoil deposit

0 20cm
scale 1:5 @ A4

There is no evidence to suggest that the deposit is of archaeological significance. The presence of concrete, brick and stone rubble within the deposit would appear to be an attempt to firm up a soft spot within the field. The materials may well have derived from the demolition of the semi-detached houses immediately to the north of the excavation area (ILLUS 7). The worked stone recovered is chamfered on two faces suggesting that it formed a sill or capping to a boundary wall typical of the Victorian period (ILLUS 8).

The linear feature traversing the full length of the site, was straight and regular in form. It mirrored the orientation of a field boundary, identified on historic mapping (and in geophysical survey), located c.35m to the south-west.

Given the correlation of the feature with the prevailing field orientation and the presence of modern brick, tile and bottle glass within the fill, all the evidence indicates that it represents a further, unmapped, field division of relatively recent origin. The ditch corresponds to the approximate location of a linear feature containing post-medieval pottery identified during the evaluation.

The presence of two further furrows, orientated at a right angle to the alignment identified by geophysical survey, would appear to represent the western extent of a further field system to the northeast, potentially defined by boundary [2009/2012]. No archaeological remains that pre-dated the post-medieval period were identified.

6 CONCLUSION

Archaeological investigations at Eccleshall Road, Stone, revealed no archaeological remains, other than evidence of post-medieval agricultural use of the land in the form of a field boundary and the truncated remains of a ridge and furrow field system.

The excavation was located within a topographic basin which had resulted in the accumulation of groundwater and consequently the formation of a gley soil.

Modern building material comprising brick, concrete and stone had been deposited within the basin in order to firm up a soft spot within the site.

A single flint artefact, believed to date to the Mesolithic period, was recovered from subsoil deposits. However, there was no evidence for in situ Mesolithic activity within the excavation area itself.

No further analysis is recommended. The results of the excavation will be published as a short publication note in West Midlands Archaeology (CBA West Midlands).

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Craddock-Bennett, L 2015 *Land at Eccleshall Road, Stone, Staffordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Excavation (ERSS/02)* Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd.
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- Tetlow, E 2015 *Land adjacent to Eccleshall Road, Stone, Staffordshire: Archaeological Evaluation (ERSS/01)* Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd.

8 APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 SITE REGISTERS

Context register

Context	Description	Dim (m)	D (m)	Interpretation
2001	Mid brownish grey, silty sandy clay. Occasional CBM, post-med/modern pot, coal and cinders.	Extent of excav area	0.25–0.30	Topsoil
2002	Mid reddish brown clayey sandy silt. Frequent charcoal fragments, Occasional CBM, coal, cinder, white-glazed and post-med pottery. Rare glass.	Extent of excav area	0.15–0.45	Subsoil
2003	Mixed light reddish brown and light yellowish brown clayey sand and gravels	Extent of excav area	Not excavated	Natural geological deposit
2004	Mid greyish brown silty clayey sand. Occasional charcoal fragments.	3 x 1.38	0.05	Single fill of furrow [2005]
2005	Linear cut, gradually sloping sides, uneven base E-W orientation	>3 x 1.38	0.05	Furrow
2006	Mid greyish brown silty sandy clay. Occasional charcoal fragments.	3 x 1.35	0.07	Single fill of furrow [2007]
2007	Linear cut, gradually sloping sides uneven base E-W orientation	>3 x 1.35	0.07	Furrow
2008	Mottled black and mid-blueish grey sandy silts and sandy clay. Contains decayed organic matter, probably tree roots. Worked stone blocks, white-glazed pottery identified.	40 x 13.5 N-S	0.2	Organic gley deposit in shallow basin
2009	Linear cut, step sides, concave base NNW-SSE orientation	45 x 2.10	0.48	Ditch
2010	Mid-reddish brown sandy clay. Occasional coal, charcoal.	45 x 2.10	0.48	Single fill of [2009]
2011	Mid-reddish brown sandy clay, Occasional charcoal, rare coal.	45 x 1.10	0.43	Single fill of [2012]
2012	Linear cut, steep sides concave base NNW-SSE orientation	>45 x 1.10	0.43	Ditch

Photographic register

Photo	Direction	Description
001	NE	General view of site
002	E	General view of site
003	N	General view of site
004	W	Working shot - machine excavation of mitigation area

Photo	Direction	Description
005	SW	Working shot - machine excavation of mitigation area
006	SW	General view condition - disturbance of soils
007	NW	General view condition - disturbance of soils
008	W	Working shot - after standing down dumper
009	SE	Working shot - after standing down dumper
010	S	General view flooded area Southeast corner of site
011	S	General view flooded area Southeast corner of site
012	W	General view central flooded area
013	E	General view excavation area
014	NE	General view excavation area
015	NE	General view excavation area
016	E	Section through furrow [2007]
017	E	General view furrow [2007]
018	E	West facing section through furrow [2005]
019	E	General view furrow [2005]
020	S	General view furrows [2005 & 2007]
021	E	West facing section drawing 001 general stratigraphy
022	E	West facing section drawing 001 general stratigraphy
023	N	South facing section ditches [2009 & 2012]
024	E	General view slot through [2009 & 2012]
025	S	General view ditch cuts [2009 & 2012]
026	S	General view excavation area
027	Plan	View stone slab in drain
028	Plan	View of unstratified stone slab (not retained)

Drawing register

Drawing	Type	Scale	Description
001	Section	01:10	West facing section general stratigraphy central area of site
002	Section	01:10	South facing section ditch cuts [2009 & 2012]

Sample register

Sample	Context	Volume	Description
001	2008	40 litres	Dark grey-brown silty clay waterlogged organic deposit

APPENDIX 2 FINDS ASSESSMENT

BY JULIE LOCHRIE

A single lithic was retrieved from subsoil (2002). It is a Mesolithic microburin which is a by-product created in the production of microliths. A deep, abruptly retouched notch has been created on the left lateral and the distal end snapped off obliquely towards the ventral.

The flint is very fresh in condition and has not been subject to much movement or exposed to the elements.

Context	Qty	Wgt (g)	Material	Object	Description	Period
2002	1	1	Lithic	Microburin	Flint, fine-grained, mid translucent brown. Triangular sectioned blade with a deep abruptly retouched notch to the left lateral. The distal end has been snapped off obliquely back towards the ventral.	Meso

TABLE A2.1 Finds catalogue

APPENDIX 3 ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

BY CATHERINE LONGFORD

Method

One soil sample <001> of 40 litres was taken from a potentially waterlogged deposit in a shallow depression (2008) and was received for environmental analysis. Bricks, masonry and modern ceramics were found in the fill of the shallow depression. The aims of the assessment were to assess the presence, preservation and abundance of environmental remains in the sample and to characterize the assemblage as far as possible.

Initial observation of the sample prior to processing determined that the plant remains were not waterlogged and therefore the sample was subjected to flotation and wet sieving in a Siraf-style flotation machine. The floating debris (the flot) was collected in a 250 µm mesh and air dried. Any material remaining in the flotation tank (retent) was wet-sieved through a 1mm mesh and air-dried. This was then sorted and any material of archaeological significance removed. The flot was scanned using a binocular microscope and wood charcoal identification made with reference to Schweingruber (1990).

Results

The results are presented below in TABLES A3.1 and A3.2.

The sample contained very little environmental material. Modern roots constituted the bulk of the flot sample (TABLE A3.1). Small fragments of abraded wood charcoal were present in the flot

together with two uncharred elder seeds (*Sambucus nigra*). The retent (TABLE A3.2) contained wood charcoal, small fragments of ceramic building material and magnetised soil particles. Some of the wood charcoal in the retent was highly vitrified. Both oak (*Quercus* sp.) and non-oak wood charcoal, including conifer, were present in the retent of the sample.

Discussion

No environmental finds of archaeological significance was present in the sample. The small fragments of charcoal present in the sample may represent fragments that were incidentally included in the shallow depression at the same time as the bricks and modern ceramic.

References

Schweingruber, FH 1990 *Microscopic Wood Anatomy; Structural variability of stems and twigs in recent and subfossil woods from Central Europe* Birmensdorf; Eidgenössische Forschungsanstalt WSL.

Context	Sample	Total flot Vol (ml)	Charcoal		Material available for AMS	Comments
			Qty	Max size (cm)		
2008	001	30	++	0.4	No	Very abraded charcoal. Abundant modern roots. 2 uncharred Elder seeds (<i>Sambucus nigra</i>)

Key: + = rare (0–5), ++ = occasional (6–15), +++ = common (15–50) and ++++ = abundant (>50)

NB charcoal over 1cm is suitable for identification and AMS dating

TABLE A3.1 Flotation sample results

Context	Sample	Vol (l)	Ceramic			Mag res	Qty	Max size (mm)	Material available for AMS dating	Comments
			CBM	Mag res	Charcoal					
2008	001	40	++	++	+++	0.5	No	No	Some charcoal highly vitrified. Oak and conifer charcoal present.	

Key: + = rare (0–5), ++ = occasional (6–15), +++ = common (15–50) and ++++ = abundant (>50)

NB charcoal over 1cm is suitable for identification and AMS dating

TABLE A3.2 Retent sample results



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