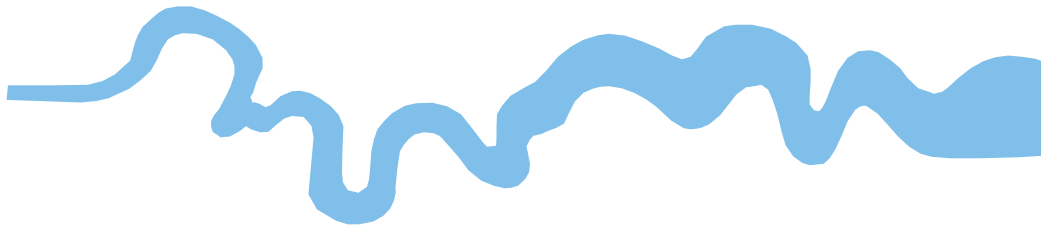


T V A S



NORTH MIDLANDS

**Land behind Smithy Lodge, Nantwich Road,
Wrenbury, Cheshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Helen Daniel

**Site Code: NRW21/27
(SJ 5956 4771)**

Land behind Smithy Lodge, Nantwich Road, Wrenbury, Cheshire

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
for Markden Homes Limited**

by Helen Daniel

TVAS (North Midlands)

Site Code NRW21/27

April 2021

Summary

Site name: Land behind Smithy Lodge, Nantwich Road, Wrenbury, Cheshire

Grid reference: SJ 5956 4771

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: Between 2nd – 11th March 2021

Project coordinator: Helen Daniel

Site supervisor: Helen Daniel

Site code: NRW21/27

Area of site: c.1,250 sq m

Summary of results: The areas of the new house footprints and access roads were stripped of overburden under archaeological supervision but no deposits of archaeological interest were revealed. A small collection of 18th-20th century post-Medieval pottery was recovered from the topsoil and subsoil and also included a single sherd of medieval date.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at TVAS North Midlands, Stoke-on-Trent and a digital copy will be deposited with Cheshire HER and the ADS.

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www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp.*

Report edited/checked by: ✓ Steve Ford 04.05.21

Land behind Smithy Lodge, Nantwich Road, Wrenbury, Cheshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Helen Daniel

Report 21/27

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out on land behind Smithy Lodge, Nantwich Road, Wrenbury, Cheshire (NGR: SJ 5956 4771) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mark Ellis of Markden Homes Ltd, Green Lane House, Green Lane, Audlem, Cheshire, CW3 0ES as advised by Ms Helen Martin-Bacon of Avalon Heritage Ltd, Dairyhouse Lane, Dilhorne, Cheadle, Staffordshire.

Planning consent (18/5849N) has been granted by Cheshire East Borough Council for the erection of three dwellings, associated landscaping and access on land to the rear of Smithy Lodge. Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service identified that the site is located within the historic core of Wrenbury, *c.*150m east of the boundary around the medieval parish church of St Margaret's. As such, the consent is subject to a condition (12) which requires an archaeological watching brief to be carried out during any intrusive groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2019) and the Borough Council's policies on archaeology. The watching brief was carried out to a specification provided by Avalon Heritage Ltd. The fieldwork was undertaken by Helen Daniel on four occasions between 2nd and 11th March 2021 and the site code is NRW21/27. The archive is presently held at TVAS North Midlands, Stoke-on-Trent and a digital copy will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service.

Location, topography and geology

The small village of Wrenbury is situated in the parish of Wrenbury-cum-Frith in south Cheshire; *c.*7km south-west Nantwich (Fig. 1). The development site is located on land to the rear of Smithy Lodge on the north-eastern side of Nantwich Road, approximately 350m north of the River Weaver; prior to development was in use as gardens and a paddock. The topography of the site was fairly level with an average height of 73m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is recorded as Wilkesley Halite Member – Halite-stone and Mudstone with superficial Glaciofluvial Deposits, Devensian – Sand and Gravel (BGS 2021).

Archaeological background

The village of Wrenbury has late Saxon origins and recorded in Domesday Book in 1086 as *Wareneberie* and later as Wrennebury in 1230. The name is a compound of OE *wrenna* or pers. name + *burh* meaning ‘stronghold of the wren or Wrenna’ (Mills 2011).

Wrenbury was originally a chapelry and part of the ancient parish of Acton, forming part of the extensive lands of William de Malbanc (d.1093), who owned much of the Nantwich hundred. The lands passed to his son Hugh who founded the Cistercian Combermere Abbey in 1133, to which the lands at Wrenbury were donated. A chapel there was dedicated to St Margaret of Antioch, a popular cult figure in the Middle Ages. Documentary evidence points to its existence from the early part of the 12th century as a dependant of Acton church. Around 1180, Acton and its dependant chapels were passed to the Abbey and little reference occurs until records of the family surname *de Wrenbury* occur in the 14th century. Their descendants were the Starkey family who were the later residents of nearby Wrenbury Hall. In 1539, after the Dissolution, the lands were granted to George Cotton, and the Cotton family remained important local landowners in the area for centuries (RSLC 2009).

The red sandstone St Margaret’s Church was originally rebuilt in 1488, but much of its fabric dates from the early 16th century. In the churchyard is a small 17th century Grade II listed black-and-white cottage with brick infill, likely a former almshouse and school. The church sits in a prominent position overlooking the village green, which is also the focus of Wrenbury conservation area. Two black-and-white houses also overlook this position; Elm House, a 17th century Grade II listed cottage with prominent brick chimneys and Stanley House, a mock Tudor building, dated 1859. Nearby, the Grade II listed brick Hawk House was formerly the Hawk and Buckle Inn dating from the early 18th century. There are also several black-and-white farmhouses and cottages within the surrounding parish, some of which date from the 17th century.

The village is well served by transport links, standing on the river Weaver, the Crewe and Shrewsbury railway and the Shropshire Union Canal. Crossing the canal near the village are three rare single-span timber lift bridges dating from 1790, among Thomas Telford’s earliest works. They drawbridge type, with a wooden platform hinged at one end which is raised and lowered by counterbalancing beam weights. Two are Grade II* listed footbridges; the Grade II third bridge carries road traffic and is lifted by a powered winch.

Whilst the site lies outside Wrenbury conservation area, it is bounded by it on both the south and west sides. Limited archaeological work that has taken place around the church, suggested the church was a focus for early settlement. This work has also led to the suggestion that there may be evidence of much earlier activity within the village, with some settlement during the Roman period.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development and in the event that archaeological remains are encountered, interpret and fully characterise any phases of archaeological activity.

The general aims are:

- to determine the presence or absence of buried archaeological remains within the areas of the groundworks;
- to determine the character, date, extent and distribution of archaeological remains and their potential significance in accordance with NPPF (DHCLG 2019);
- to determine levels of disturbance to any archaeological deposits from later activities;
- to inform upon appropriate mitigation measures should significant archaeological remains which require further investigation and/or preservation in situ be uncovered.

Specific objectives relate to the following:

- to identify and record any features or deposits within the groundworks associated with the prehistoric or Roman period;
- to identify any potential deposits or features associated with the medieval period;
- to consider any relevant research objectives contributing to a wider understanding of the archaeological context, an understanding of the topography of the PDA and its environs;
- to identify any research themes relevant to the nature of the PDA which are contained within the North West Regional Research Framework (2007);
- to highlight relevant research aims should further archaeological work be required as a result of the watching brief;
- to disseminate the results of the fieldwork through an appropriate level of reporting including potentially in period relevant journals or journals dealing with historic industrial processes.

The programme of monitoring was to involve constant archaeological supervision and observation during the stripping of overburden across the areas of the house foundations and access roads prior to construction and of the excavation of a service trench. All mechanical excavation was to be carried out using a toothless ditching bucket. Any archaeological deposits under threat from groundworks were to be sampled sufficiently in order to characterise, date and determine the significance of them. Spoil heaps were to be monitored for finds. Sufficient time was to be allowed to undertake these objectives within the groundworkers schedules, without causing any undue delay.

The watching brief was carried out as intended but following observations of the access road, drainage trench and two of the dwelling areas, the consultant and the Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service were informed of the negative results obtained across the site and it was agreed by all parties concerned that it would not be necessary to observe the removal of overburden in the area of the remaining dwelling.

Results

The watching brief was carried out as intended and the total area subject to this observation was approximately 1,250 sq m. The northern site boundary is taken as the extent of the built environment and does not include the open green space to the rear (Fig. 3; Pl. 1).

Access Road, Dwellings and Driveways (Fig. 3 and ; Pls 2-6)

Areas comprising the main north-east/south-west access road, two areas of the dwellings and their driveways were observed during the watching brief. All areas were excavated to a depth of between 0.45m and 0.7m and the stratigraphy across all of the areas was very similar with on average 0.28m of brown-red sandy loam topsoil over 0.17m orange-red sand subsoil.

The main access road is 95m long by 5m wide and runs in a north-easterly direction off Nantwich Road, utilising the existing entrance to Smithy Lodge and running to the east of that property to access the land to the rear. The first 20m of this road extending from the street was excavated prior to our attendance and was therefore not observed. At 16m to the south of the northern site boundary, a 5m wide turning bay extends south-eastwards off the access road for 9m and is slightly offset from the driveway access situated to the west.

The dwelling areas and their driveways are situated off the western side of the access road; the central dwelling access is located at 13m to the south of the northern site boundary. All driveway access areas were all 6m wide, projecting eastwards for approximately 8m before opening out into the dwelling and garden areas. The stripped areas of the main dwellings extended for approximately 20m from the access road in a north-westerly direction and extended southwards to the boundary with the grounds of Smithy Lodge.

No features of archaeological interest or significance were present in any of the monitored areas, however a ceramic assemblage of a range of glazed wares from the 18th-20th centuries, which included fairly large sherds of Staffordshire slipware, was collected from the topsoil/subsoil horizon on the site. but was retained on site. One small sherd of orange earthenware from the subsoil in the area of the most northerly dwelling was identified by Ms Alice Lyons as also being of Post-Medieval date. All of the pottery was retained on site.

Drainage Trench (Fig. 3 and ; Pl. 7)

The drainage trench is located in the centre of the footprint of the access road and follows its alignment, starting 3m south of the sites northern boundary. The trench was 80m long by 2m wide and excavated to an average depth of 1.3m. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.3m brown-red sandy loam topsoil over 0.2m of orange-red sand

subsoil above 0.15m of gravelly sand over orange sand natural geology. No finds or features of archaeological interest were encountered.

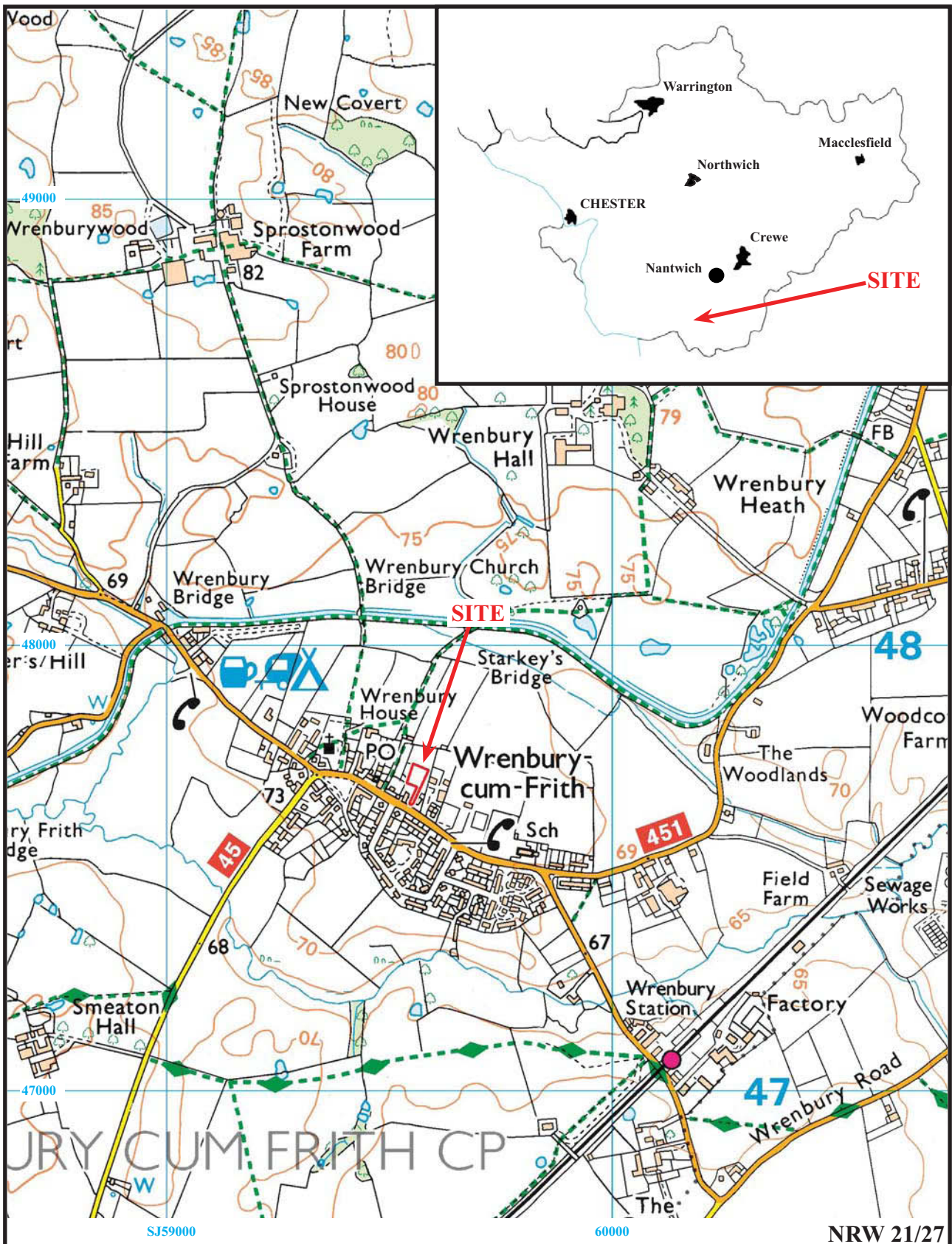
Conclusion

The watching brief comprised the monitoring of the main site access road with drainage trench and turning bay, along with the sites of the three dwellings and their associated patio and driveway areas. Except for the drainage trench, all of the areas observed were excavated to a depth of no more than 0.5m and involved the removal of only overburden and a minimal amount of subsoil; the drainage trench extended to a depth of 1.3m. No finds or features of archaeological significance were encountered; as a result the site is considered to have low archaeological potential.

Following observations of the access road, drainage trench and two of the dwelling areas, both the consultant and Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service were informed of the negative results obtained so far across the site and it was agreed that it would not be necessary to observe the remaining dwelling area.

References

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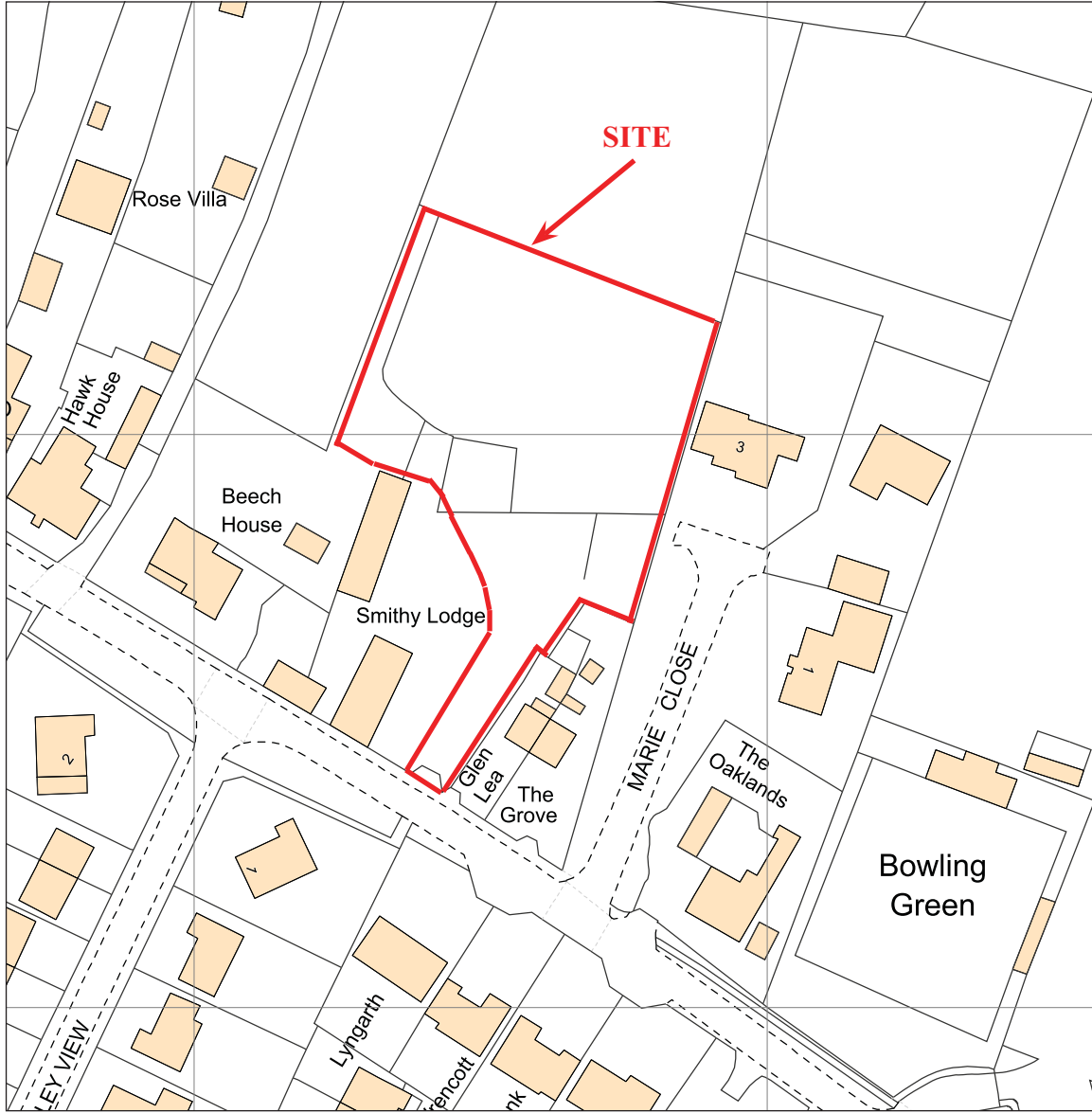


**Land behind Smithy Lodge, Nantwich Road
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Figure 1. Location of site within Wrenbury and Cheshire.

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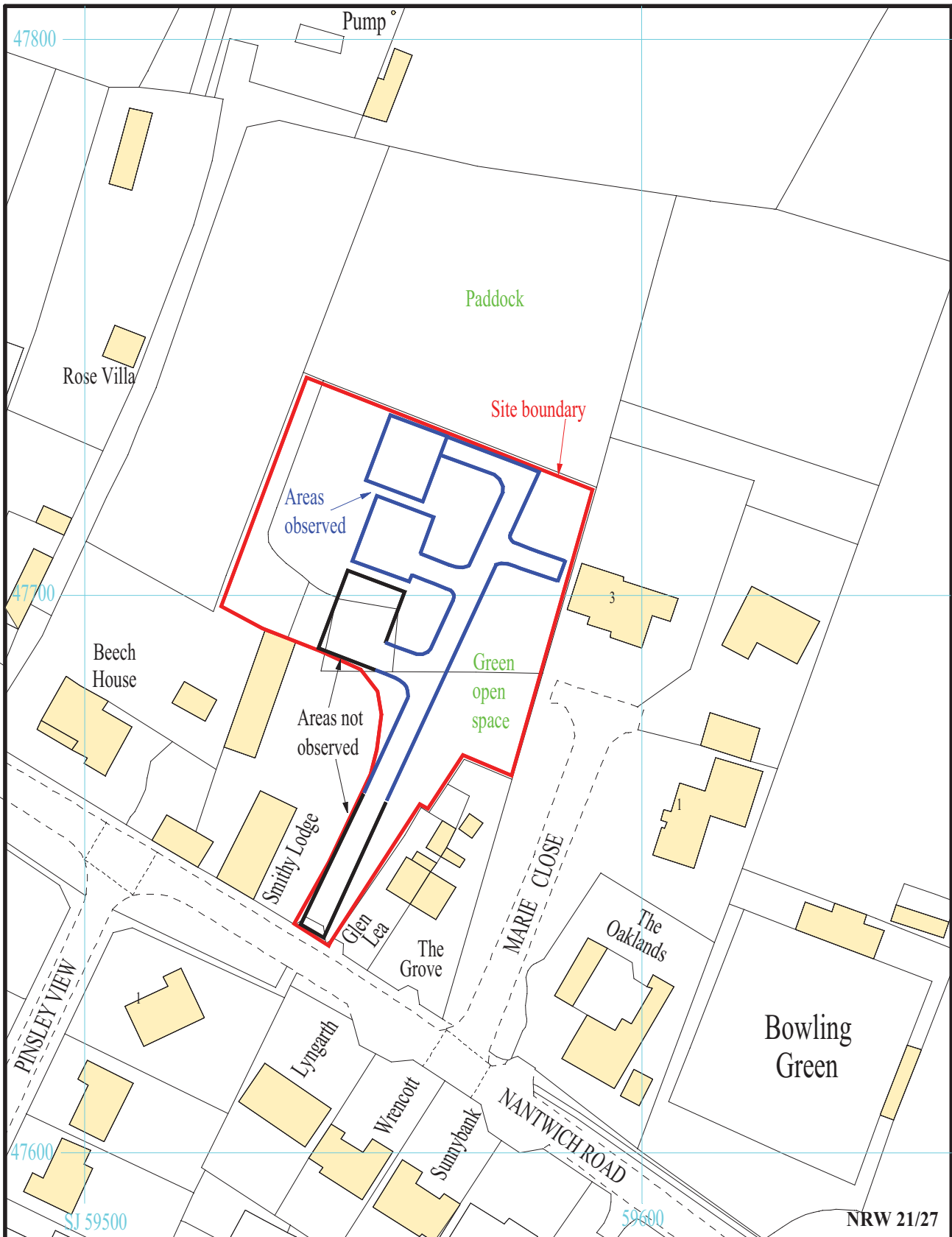
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**Land behind Smithy Lodge, Nantwich Road,
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Nantwich Road.

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Figure 3. Location of site and area monitored during watching brief





Plate 1. General site view, looking west.



Plate 2. Access road (southern end), looking south,
Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 3. Access road (northern end), looking north,
Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 4. View of dwelling area and driveway (front),
looking west, Scales: 2m and 1m.

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**Land behind Smithy Lodge, Nantwich Road,
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Plates 1 to 4.**





Plate 1. Turning bay and section, looking east,
Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 2. Access road (north), looking east,
Scales: 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 7. Drainage trench (north end), looking east,
Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 8. Section showing demolition layer of brick and
concrete, looking west, Scales: 2m and 1m.

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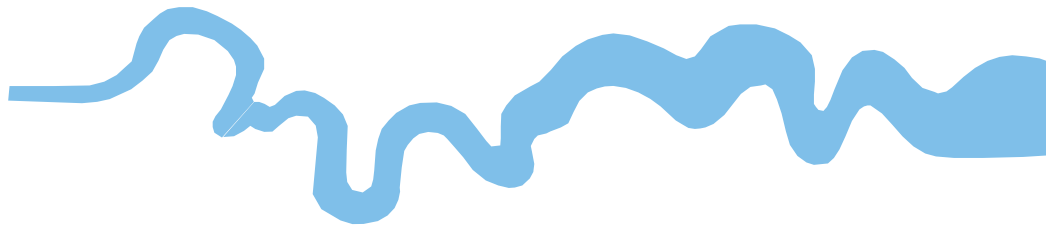
**Land behind Smithy Lodge, Nantwoch Road,
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Plates 5 to 8.**



TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43 AD 0 BC
Iron Age _____	750 BC
Bronze Age: Late _____	1300 BC
Bronze Age: Middle _____	1700 BC
Bronze Age: Early _____	2100 BC
Neolithic: Late	3300 BC
Neolithic: Early	4300 BC
Mesolithic: Late	6000 BC
Mesolithic: Early	10000 BC
Palaeolithic: Upper	30000 BC
Palaeolithic: Middle	70000 BC
Palaeolithic: Lower	2,000,000 BC





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