

CPAT Report 1616

Shugborough Estate Arboretum, Staffordshire

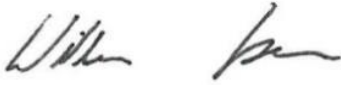


Archaeological Evaluation



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Summary

In October 2018 the Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) carried out an archaeological evaluation on behalf of the National Trust within the arboretum at Shugborough Estate, Staffordshire, located to the west of the Hall, on the banks of the River Sow.

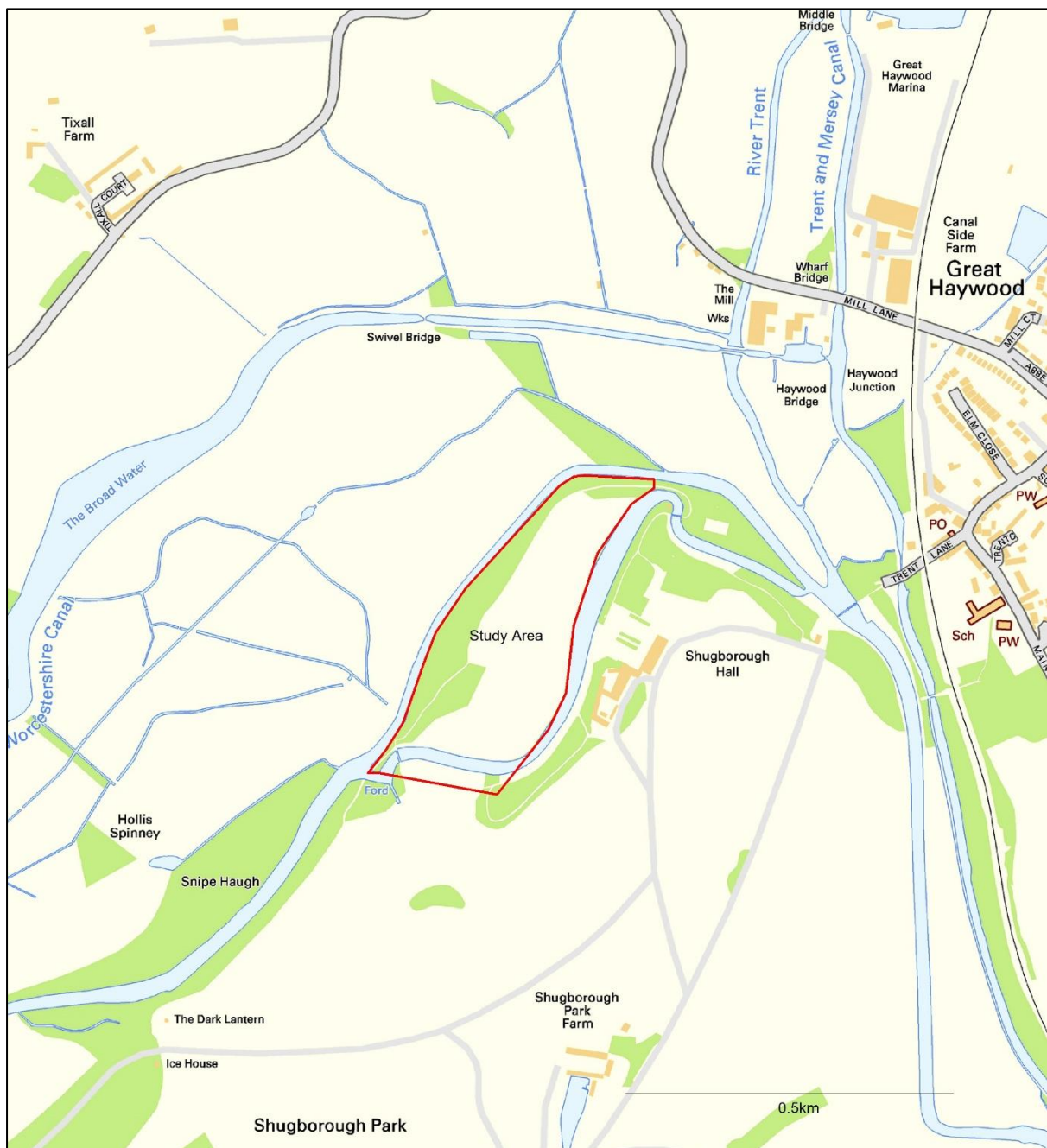
Four trenches were excavated in total, three of which were positioned to locate and examine pathways recorded on historic mapping. A fourth trench was positioned in parkland to the south of the lake to determine whether a ha-ha had formed the northern boundary of this area.

The trench in the northernmost area of the arboretum revealed the extent of a former pathway, constructed from finely graded riverine sand and gravel. Two trenches to the south of the arboretum investigated a pathway which ran east from a bridge at the south end of the arboretum. This was revealed to be a broad structure also constructed from imported sand and gravel. Evidence of a whitish stone top dressing was visible in a trench located to the south of the bridge.

The trenching located in parkland revealed multiple layers of dumped material of 18th-century date. The natural deposition in the base of the trench sloped gently to the south, possibly indicating a ha-ha structure located outside of the excavated area to the south.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. In September 2018 the Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) were invited by the National Trust to carry out an archaeological evaluation within the area of the Arboretum at Shugborough Estate, Staffordshire. The purpose of the evaluation was to investigate a network of historic paths within the Arboretum, which is located to the west of the Hall, on the banks of the River Sow (Fig. 1; SJ 98990 22588, Fig 2; Trenches 1-4). Additionally, a trench was excavated across the line of a possible ha-ha (Fig. 2, Trench 5). The excavations were conducted with the assistance of National Trust volunteers.



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Fig. 1 Location of study area (marked in red)



Fig. 2 Trench location plan

- 1.2. Shugborough is located approximately 6km to the east of Stafford, and the park is partly bounded to the south by the A513 from Stafford to Rugeley. To the north-east the park is separated from the village of Great Haywood by the A51. The boundary along Shugborough's north-west side is formed by the River Sow. At the northernmost point of the park this joins with the Trent, which passes through the east side of the park and for c 1km forms its boundary. The highest ground lies to the west, where Stafford Plantation occupies the lower slopes of the Satnall Hills.

2 Historical Background

- 2.1. Shugborough was formerly one of the manors of the bishops of Lichfield until it was given up around 1540. It was subsequently purchased by William Anson, a lawyer, in 1624. The earlier manor house was demolished by William's grandson, also called William in 1693 and replaced by a three storey building which now forms part of the Hall.
- 2.2. The Anson family prospered throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. In 1762 Thomas Anson inherited a considerable fortune from his younger brother George, who had been an Admiral and was First Lord of the Admiralty during the Seven Years' War. Much of the estate and parkland was created during this period.
- 2.3. Following Thomas's death the estate was inherited by his nephew, also called Thomas, who took the Anson name and arms. His son Thomas embarked on a programme of remodelling and improvement works on the estate during the late 18th and early 19th century. His son Thomas William, first Earl of Lichfield, incurred huge debts during the early 19th century which resulted in the family fortune being depleted. The estate was offered to the National Trust in 1960 following the death of the fourth Earl.
- 2.4. Shugborough Hall (listed grade I) comprises a central block, built c 1695 for William Anson, to which wings were added in 1748, probably by Thomas Wright. About 1768 the single-storey links to the wings were raised, probably by James Stuart. In the 1790s the Hall was further enlarged and transformed, both inside and out, by Samuel Wyatt, who carried the cornice level of the wings across the east front of the Hall in the architrave of a new, octostyle Ionic portico. At the same time the whole building was clad in slate, which was painted to resemble ashlar. Further alterations by Wyatt followed in 1803-6, with the creation of a large new saloon which projects from the centre of the west front. To the south of the Hall are extensive stables, service courts and ranges (listed grade II), which were largely constructed c 1767.
- 2.5. The main formal gardens lie west of the Hall and consist of a series of four low terraces laid to lawn with a central axial path, laid out c 1855 to a design by William Andrews Nesfield (1793-1881). To the south of the Hall is the Wild Garden, a 19th century shrubbery with specimen trees.
- 2.6. The park is roughly triangular, almost 3km wide along its southern side and approximately 2km from south to north. Shugborough Hall lies towards the northern tip of the park, on relatively low-lying ground, with the River Sow to one side and the Trent to the other. The ground immediately to the south of the Hall is fairly flat. Thereafter, to the south-west, it rises onto the lower slopes of the Satnall Hills.
- 2.7. In 1795 a flood swept away many parkland features. Viscount Anson employed John Webb to re-landscape the grounds which was completed around 1805. During this phase of works the excavation of a channel (The New Cut) around an area on the east bank of the Sow formed an island upon which the arboretum was established. Cast iron bridges, erected in 1813 were constructed at the south and north-west extent of the arboretum, presumably replacing earlier bridges depicted in the same locations on mapping from 1806. The 1806 map also depicts the circular walk along the north and east edge of the island.

3 Archaeological Evaluation

Trench 1

- 3.1. Trench 1, which measured 8m by 1m, was located to the south of the New Cut, to evaluate a pathway between the 1813 Blue Bridge and the shrubbery south of the Hall.
- 3.2. The uppermost deposit comprised a loamy topsoil (101) up to 0.25m thick. Underlying this was compacted silt sand deposit containing frequent charcoal and mussel shells (103). A compacted silt sand and gravel layer, containing occasional large sub angular stones, was laid directly over layer 103, forming a likely path surface 4.5m in width (Figs 3-4).

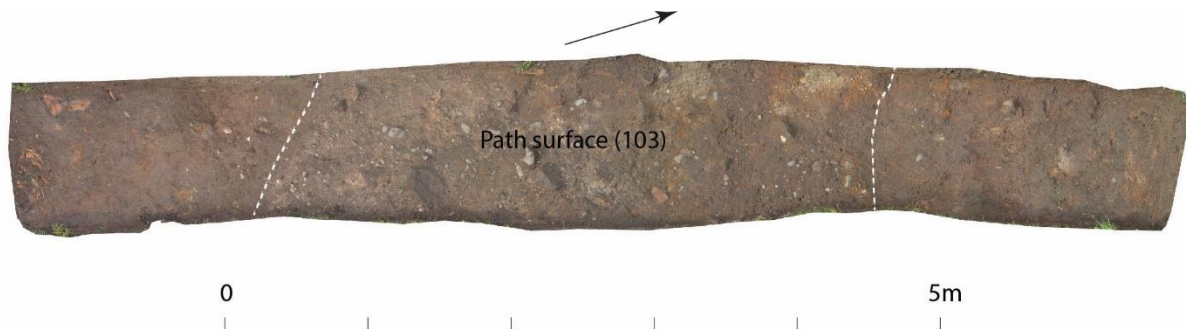


Fig. 3 Plan view of Trench 1 showing extent of path (indicated in white)



Fig. 4 Trench 1 from the south. Photo CPAT 4550-0083

Trench 2

- 3.3. Trench 2, which measured 2m by 2m, was located immediately to the west of the Blue Bridge, south of the New Cut, in an area where the surface of the pathway between the bridge of the shrubbery was exposed.
- 3.4. Removal of a leaf litter and organic material, up to 50mm thick, revealed a level surface (001) comprising a rammed or earth bonded layer of small angular light grey or whitish stones. This surface extended across the entire excavated area (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5 View from the north of Trench 2. Photo CPAT 4550-0084

Trench 3

- 3.5. Although it was intended to position a trench to determine the location of the early 19th-century pathway along the bank of the River Sow, this was not excavated owing to time constraints.

Trench 4

- 3.6. Trench 4 was located at the north extent of the arboretum, in order to determine the extent and survival of a section of part which was already partially visible in this area. The trench measured 3.5m by 1m.
- 3.7. Removal of the sandy topsoil (401), 0.1m thick, revealed the full extent of the pathway, (403) which consisted of a compacted silt sand and fine gravel deposit 2.4m in width (Figs 6-7). Underlying the pathway on the western side was a pale orange sandy silt (402) which was not investigated further. This deposit was not attained on the east side of the pathway where a loose silty sand and coarse gravel deposit was identified, extending to >0.2m in thickness.

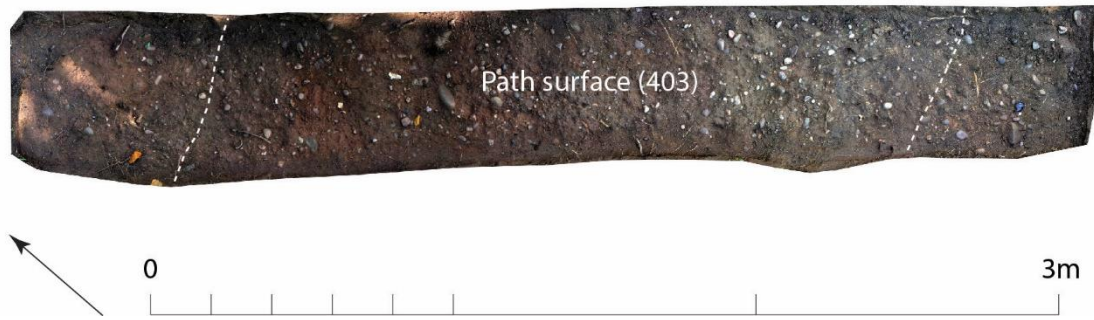


Fig. 6 Plan view of Trench 4 showing extent of path (indicated in white)



Fig. 7 View of Trench 4 from the east. Photo CPAT 4550-0006

Trench 5

- 3.8. Trench 5 was located on the northern boundary of parkland, south of the arboretum. It was positioned to evaluate a landform running immediately to the south of the modern fence line, believed to be a ditch or ha-ha.

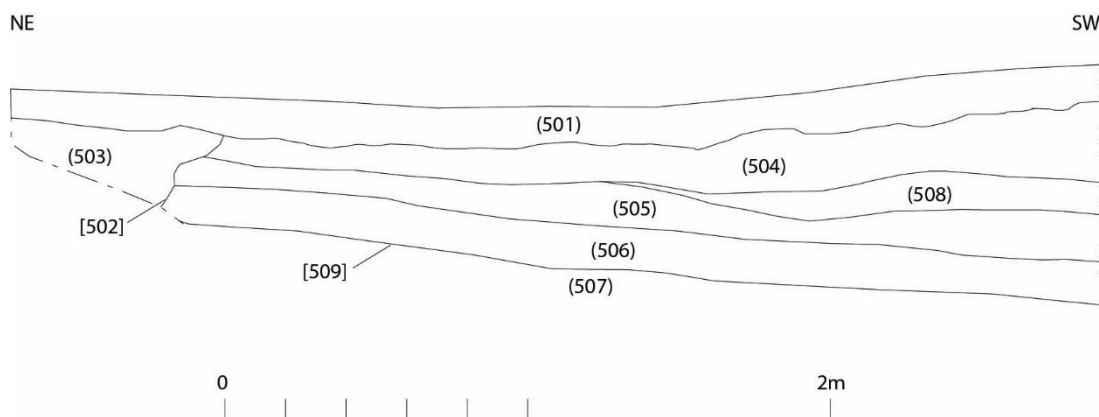


Fig. 8 North-west-facing section of Trench 5



Fig. 9 View from the north-east of Trench 5. Photo CPAT 4550-0025

- 3.9. Removal of the topsoil (501), 0.1m thick, exposed a compact dump of sand and gravel (504), 0.2m thick, containing post-medieval pottery, ceramic building material and a single large piece of worked sandstone (Fig. 10). Deposit 504, and underlying layers, were cut by a modern ceramic land drain [502] at the north end of the trench, filled by (503) and oriented broadly east-west. Underlying deposit 504 was a soft, black clay deposit (508), 0.18m in thickness, probably a former topsoil horizon. This sealed a gleyed deposit (505), 0.18m thick, overlying a reddish sand and gravel layer (506), 0.15m thick. A cohesive red sand containing frequent patches of degraded stone (507)

was revealed in the base of the trench, probably representing the natural subsoil, although this was not investigated further. The surface of deposit 507 sloped slightly to the south, against that natural lie of the land, suggesting that it may have been truncated by a cut feature [509] which extended beyond the limits of excavation. It is therefore possible that the stratigraphic sequence revealed in trench 5 represent infilling of a ha-ha.



Fig. 10 Fragment of worked sandstone recovered from deposit 504. Photo CPAT 4550-0042

4 Conclusion

- 4.1. The excavation of Trenches 1 and 2 exposed two surviving sections of a pathway recorded on 1806 mapping, running between the bridge at the south end of the arboretum and the shrubbery south of the house complex. As suggested by the historic mapping, the path was located much closer to the edge of the New Cut, and comprised a compacted deposition of sand and gravel, 4.5m in width, containing occasional large angular stones. Investigations in Trench 2 suggested that the path structure in this area was surfaced with a layer of rammed stone. It is possible that the unusual width of the pathway at this point was due to it being employed as an access for removal of spoil from the excavation of the New Cut or to transport the cast-iron Blue Bridge into position.
- 4.2. The excavation of Trench 4, located to the north of the arboretum, revealed a path structure approximately 2.4m in width, made from compacted sand and finely graded gravel. No evidence of a top dressing was evidence for the path within the arboretum.
- 4.3. Trench 5 revealed that the ground level had been raised using a mixed sand and gravel layer (504) dumped onto an earlier topsoil horizon (508). It was noted that deposit 508 and the underlying deposit (505) were both waterlogged. It is unclear

whether this waterlogging was due to the presence of a ha-ha ditch, although this seems plausible, given that the surface of the natural subsoil sloped to the south, suggesting that it had been truncated. This would indicate that the ha-ha wall was built to enclose the parkland to the south. The artefactual material recovered from the dumped layer is 18th-century in date, suggesting the ha-ha may have been an earlier feature that was backfilled and buried during the re-landscaping work following the 1795 flood.

5 Archive deposition Statement

- 5.1. The project archive has been prepared according to the CPAT Archive Policy and in line with the ClfA Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives guidance (2014). The archive will be deposited with the Stafford County Museum Service.

Archive summary

87 Digital photographs, CPAT Film No. 4550

4 Trench recording forms