

Archaeological Field Evaluation

On behalf of

Metro Realty Homes Ltd

Concerning the

Former Women's Royal

Voluntary Service Hall

Land off Lax Lane

Bewdley

Worcestershire

DY12 2DZ

February 2017



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Cover: View northeast showing the site during excavation

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1 Executive Summary

Border Archaeology Ltd (BA) was instructed by Colm Coyne of Quattro Design Architects on behalf of Metro Realty Homes Ltd to carry out a programme of Archaeological Field Evaluation (AFE) in connection with a proposed residential development of four dwellings at the former Women's Royal Voluntary Service Hall on Land off Lax Lane Bewdley Worcestershire.

Lax Lane represents one of the oldest roads in the town and links directly with the ford over the River Severn, which, prior to the construction of a bridge in 1447, served as the main crossing-point. Additionally, the site lies close to a post-medieval tannery, indicated on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map, and the only archaeological evidence of tanning so far recorded in the town, consisting of an alignment of seven 17th and 18th -century plank-lined pits, were found during building work in Corporation Yard.

Although post-medieval features were present, including a section of wall running northeast/southwest, their purpose could not be ascertained and no evidence for tannery structures or of waste associated with the process was present. Two small pits or postholes contained post-medieval pottery and ceramic building material. Their fills were very similar to the deposited subsoil above and it could not be confirmed whether they had been cut through this material.

No deposits, structures or features of archaeological significance were identified during the course of the AFE.

2 Introduction

Border Archaeology Ltd (BA) was instructed by Colm Coyne of Quattro Design Architects on behalf of Metro Realty Homes Ltd to carry out a programme of Archaeological Field Evaluation (AFE) in connection with a proposed residential development of four dwellings with associated access and amenities at the Former Women's Royal Voluntary Service Hall on Land off Lax Lane Bewdley Worcestershire DY12 2DZ (NGR: SO 78850 75099) (Planning ref. 15/0329/FULL) (figs. 1 & 3).



Fig. 1: Site location plan (site marked in red)

Adrian Scruby Esq Historic Environment Advisor Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service (HEAWAAS) advised via email on November 4th 2016 that a single trench (1.6m wide minimum) excavated along the length of the new house plots would be required.

3 Site Description

Bewdley lies at a height of between 20m and 90m AOD. The site covers an area of approximately 800 sq. m of 'brownfield' land situated to the rear of the properties fronting onto Lax Lane, with access via a private drive between No 44 Lax Lane and the British Red Cross Society building. The site is bounded to the SW by No 46 Lax Lane, to the SE partly by the rear curtilage of No 20 Gardners Meadow and to the NE by a carparking area for the residents of Gardners Meadow. The site also borders the Bewdley Conservation Area to the N and W.

3.1 Soils and Geology

The site occupies a flat level terrace on the SW bank of the River Severn comprising a natural floodplain that was almost entirely developed prior to the 20th century to form the existing town centre.

The area is characterised by typical brown earths of the RIVINGTON 2 series (541g), consisting of well-drained coarse loamy soils over Palaeozoic sandstone and shale, and typical brown sands of the BRIDGNORTH series (551a), consisting of well-drained sandy and coarse loamy soils over Permo-Triassic and Carboniferous reddish sandstone (Soil Survey of England & Wales, 1983).

4 Historical & Archaeological Background

The importance of early prehistoric activity in Worcestershire has recently been highlighted by the Historic England-funded project 'Putting the Palaeolithic into Worcestershire's HER: creating an evidence based toolkit' (Shaw, Daffern & Russell 2015). The project has enabled a reassessment of the Palaeolithic in Worcestershire, collating and updating existing information based on recent evidence and revised interpretations. However, no evidence dating from this early period of human activity is recorded within the present study area or the immediate vicinity.

The site itself appears to lie within the oldest component of the town, the ford at the end of Lax Lane being the earliest crossing-point over the River Severn, which may well have been in use from prehistoric times. The Domesday Survey does not mention Bewdley by name; however, the modern suburb of Wribbenhall, located on the NW bank of the river, is listed as one of 16 outlying estates of the manor of Kidderminster (Thorn & Thorn 1982). The manor of Wribbenhall was in the possession of the monks of Worcester until the 14th century, when land on both sides of the river was acquired by the Mortimers, before passing to the Crown in the 15th century (Buteux 1995, 2).

The place-name 'Bewdley' occurs in 1275 as *Beuleu*, with the meaning 'beautiful place' (Mills 2003, 55). The name later appears in the form *Beaulieu* in the Close Roll of Edward I dated 1304.

Together with Wyre Hill, Lax Lane is likely to have been the early focus for settlement at Bewdley. The area was apparently associated with a ferry across the Severn, which is first recorded in 1336, although the ford may have continued in use for a time after this date. Urban development occurred during the late 14th century, with the grant of a market and fair by Edward III to Philippa Countess of March in 1376. Following construction of a bridge in 1447, a planned layout appears to have been established under the auspices of Richard Duke of York, lord of Bewdley. Settlement shifted to the quays and bridge at this time and the Lax Lane area declined in importance, becoming peripheral to the town (Buteux 1995, 2-5). Tinkers Gate/Lax Gate, one of four timber medieval gates, appears to have been constructed in the mid-15th century,

In view of the fact that Lax Lane served as the principal route to the ford, evidence for early tenement plots and structural remains may be anticipated. A half-burgage is mentioned in 1367 and a single Grade II Listed 15th -

century building (Building ID: 156741), Nos. 3-4 Lax Lane, survives on the NW side of the street. No surviving medieval buildings or tenement plot boundaries are recorded to the SE.



Fig. 2: Extract from the OS 1st edition 25-inch map of 1884 showing the tannery off Lax Lane in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development

Bewdley continued to flourish during the early post-medieval period and seven buildings survive from the 16th century, including No 33 Lax Lane (St Anne's Cottage), a Grade II Listed building (Building ID: 156750) located on the NW side of the street.



Fig. 3: Extract from the OS 4th edition 25-inch map of 1938

In terms of industrial activity, a brass foundry was established in 1697 and associated buildings survive at the rear of a tenement plot fronting onto Load Street. Twelve tan-yards are recorded in the reign of Elizabeth I and tanning continued to be an important industry throughout the post-medieval period. The study area contains the only archaeological evidence of tanning so far recorded in the town, comprising seven 17th -and 18th -century plank-lined pits aligned in a row found during building work in Corporation Yard (HWCM 17761; Buteux 1995, 11). Each pit was 2.8m × 1.4m and at least 0.6m deep, and was coated with clay below the timber lining. Bone and horn cores were also recovered. The site is shown as a 'Tannery' on the 1884 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch map (fig. 2); however, the site is no longer marked as such on the 1938 4th edition OS.

By the mid-18th century, Bewdley had become one of the most important inland ports in the country, functioning as a collection centre and trans-shipment point for bar-iron and other goods from Wales and the West, which were sent either to Birmingham or Bristol; however, its prosperity declined with the development of the canal network in the late 18th century and increasing competition from the nearby commercial centre of Stourport (Buteux 1995, 3). Nevertheless, the preponderance of fine 18th century townhouses in Bewdley attests to its considerable wealth and importance during this period.

5 Scheme of works

The programme of Archaeological Field Evaluation was carried out in accordance with practices set out in *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (ClfA 2014) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (ClfA 2014). BA adheres to *Standards and Guidelines for Archaeological Projects in Worcestershire* (WCC 2016), *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers' Guide* (Lee 2015) and the *ClfA Code of conduct* (2014).



Fig. 4: Plan showing location of trench (in blue)

The intention, as specified in the Written Scheme of Investigation, was to open a single evaluation trench of 1.8m width by machine and toothless bucket along the length of the new house plots. However, the substantial reinforced concrete surface on the SE part of the site made it necessary to adjust the dimensions of the trench and, following consultation with the HEAWAAS, this was amended to measure 11.5m in length by a maximum 3m wide (fig. 4). The trench was aligned NW/SE and was excavated to natural geology, which was confirmed as such in a *sondage* excavated at the NW end of the trench.

6 Results

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Comments
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	101		Deposit	Topsoil	Loose friable dark greyish-brown sandy silt; moderate mortar & CBM flecks, late post-medieval pottery (not retained). Maximum thickness 0.60m (NW end), trench-wide. Cut by [107], [111], overlying (106), (110), (112).	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	102		Deposit	Subsoil - possibly imported to raise surface above flood level	Compact but friable mid brown sandy silt; frequent CBM, coal, mortar & C19-C20 pottery. Maximum thickness 0.60m. Cut by [104], [109], [111], overlying (103).	-	✓	-	-	-	Pottery not retained
3	103		Deposit	Natural geology	Firm bright yellowish-brown silty sand (to NW) & silty clay (to SE); patches of strongly yellow pebbles. Measured >0.60m (thickness), trench-wide. Underlying (102).	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	104		Cut	Foundation trench for wall structure (105).	Linear in plan; aligned NE/SW. Measured >3m x 0.70m (depth unknown). Cutting (102), filled by (105) & (106).	-	-	-	-	-	Possible return present as some disturbance may have been present in the section
5	105		Structure	Post-medieval wall	Brick (machine-made but unfrogged) masonry; header bond (as seen); lime-mortared. Measured >3m x 0.50m (depth not established). Overlying [104], underlying (106).	-	-	-	-	-	Up to three (partial) courses surviving above ground
6	106		Deposit	Fill of construction cut [104]	Loose dark brown silty clay; frequent charcoal & mortar. Measured >3.0m (length), maximum width seen 0.10m (NE side). Overlying (105), underlying (101).	-	-	-	-	-	Backfill of construction cut so later than wall (105). Hand

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Comments
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
											cleaned; not excavated
7	107		Cut	Cut for C20 electricity cable	Cut; aligned NE/SW. Measured >2.5m × 0.20m × 0.60m. Cutting (101), underlying (113).	-	-	-	-	-	(108) possibly contemporary
8	108		Deposit	Concrete	Patch of concrete. Measured 0.70m (width) × 0.10m (thickness). Overlying (113),	-	-	-	-	-	Seen in section only
9	109		Cut	Post-medieval pit or posthole	Square in plan; sides steep, base flat. Measured 0.40m × 0.40m × 0.28m. Cutting (102), filled by (110).	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	110		Deposit	Fill of [109]	Firm mid greyish-brown silt clay; frequent mortar & CBM flecks. Fill of [109], underlying (101), similar to/same as (102).	-	✓	-	-	-	Post-medieval
11	111		Cut	Post-medieval pit or posthole	Rectangular in plan; aligned NW/SE; sides steeply sloping to an undulating base. Measured 0.54m × 0.35m × 0.10m. Cutting (102), filled by (112).	-	-	-	-	-	Possibly associated with [109] but different in form
12	112		Fill	Fill of post-medieval feature [111]	Firm mid brown silty clay; frequent charcoal & CBM flecks. Fill of [111], underlying (101).	-	-	-	✓	-	Charcoal denser than in (102) but otherwise similar.
13	113		Fill	Capping for C20 electricity cable duct [107]	Brick; single course, stretcher bond. Fills [107], underlying (108).						-

7 Discussion

Although post-medieval features were present in the evaluation trench, including a NE/SW -aligned wall (*Plate 3; fig. 5*), their purpose could not be ascertained and no evidence for tannery structures or associated waste was present. Two small pits or postholes contained post-medieval pottery and ceramic building material. Their fills were very similar to the deposited subsoil above and it could not be fully confirmed whether they had been cut through this material.



Plate 1: View NW showing structure (105) and electricity cable duct (112) (foreground)



Plate 2: View SE showing wall structure (104), duct (112) (top) and pit/posthole (centre)

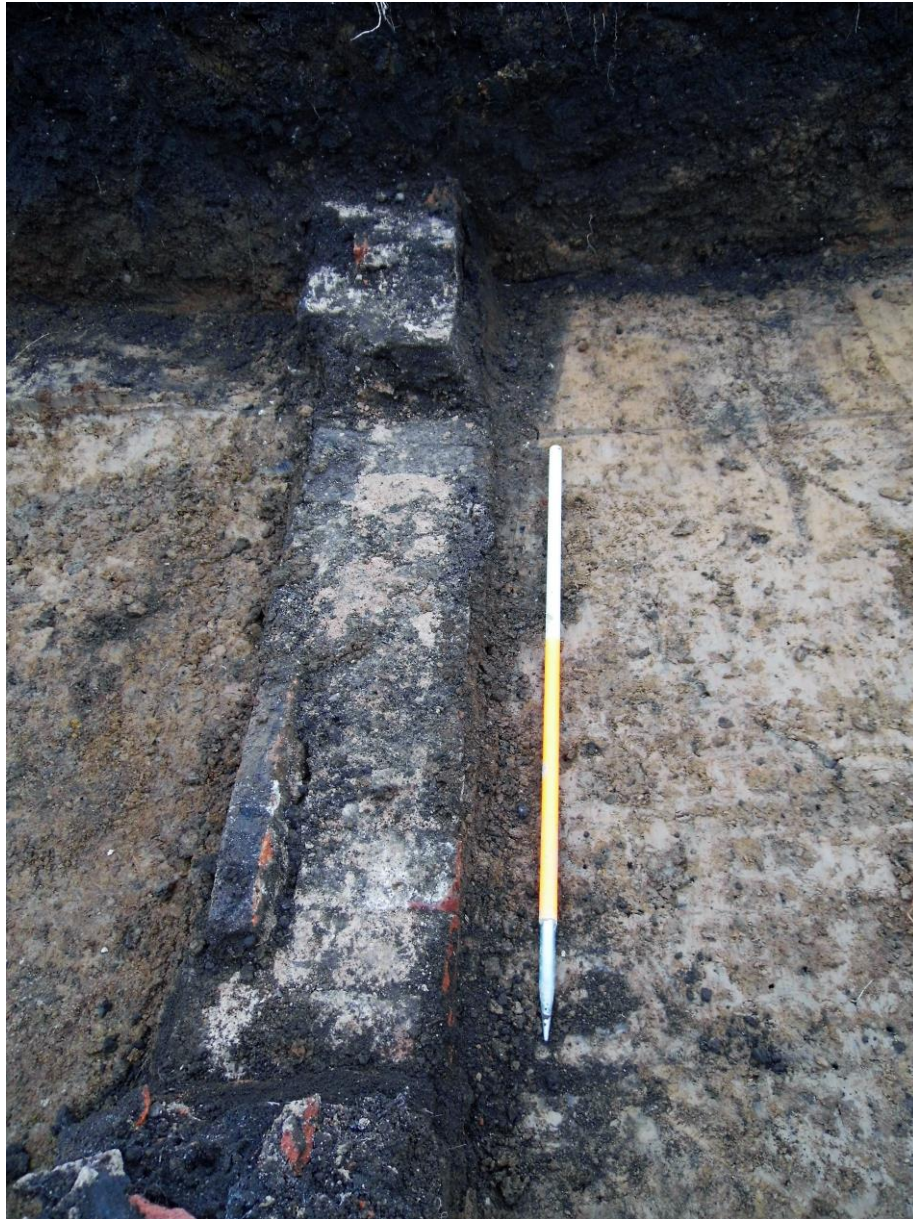


Plate 3: View NE showing detail of structure (105)

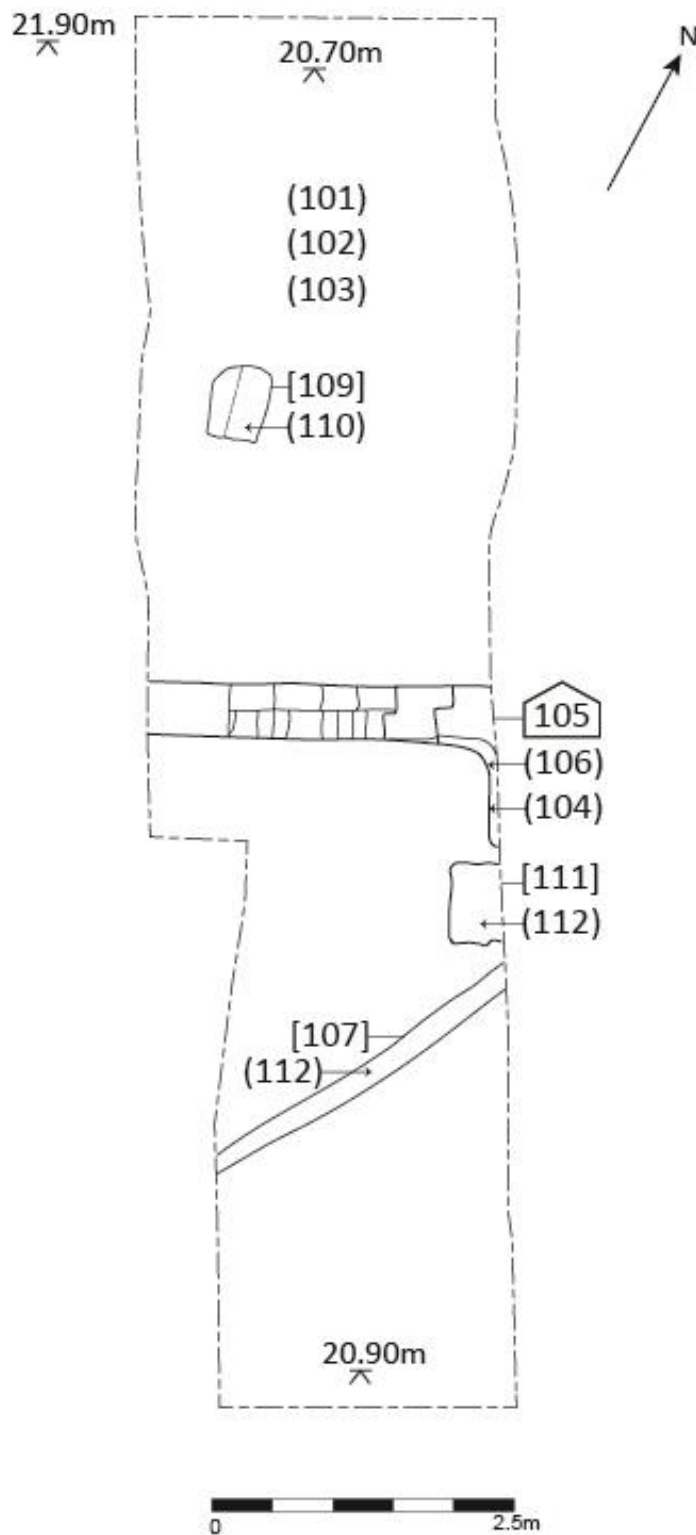


Fig. 5: Plan of trench

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9.1 Cartography

1883 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 6-inch Map (Worcestershire XIV.NW)

1884 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 25-inch map (Worcestershire XIV.1)

1903 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 6-inch Map (Worcestershire XIV.NW)

1938 Ordnance Survey 4th Edition 25-inch map (Worcestershire XIV.1)

1947 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 6-inch Map (Worcestershire XIV.NW)

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