

Archaeological Field Evaluation

Client

Mr & Mrs Nigel and Joanna
White

Land Adjacent to Cuckhorn
Farm

Stoke Lacy

Herefordshire



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Cover: View southeast showing the site under excavation, with the 'motte' to the right

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1 Executive Summary

Border Archaeology Ltd (BAL) was commissioned by Mr and Mrs Nigel White to undertake a programme of Archaeological Field Evaluation of land adjacent to Cuckhorn Farm Stoke Lacy Herefordshire. The work was in addition to an Archaeological Assessment carried out by Border Archaeology in January 2016 (BA 2016).

The proposed development will affect the setting of an oval mound listed on the Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) as a 'possible undocumented medieval motte'. The Assessment concluded that, on balance, it was likely that the earth mound adjacent to the site is indeed a motte.

The Archaeological Field Evaluation was intended to complement the conclusions of the Archaeological Assessment, as well as to investigate the proposed footprint of the building.

A substantial ditch aligned east/west running along the northern side of the earthen mound was encountered in Trenches 2 and 3 of the evaluation. Its position and alignment, although running close to the south side of the motte, suggested that it may represent the alignment of a boundary. No finds of early date were encountered; the only ceramic material consisted of brick and tile dating to the 20th century and recovered from recent backfill of the partially silted ditch.

2 Introduction

Border Archaeology Ltd (BAL) was commissioned by Mr and Mrs Nigel and Joanna White to undertake a programme of Archaeological Field Evaluation on land adjacent to Cuckhorn Farm Stoke Lacy Herefordshire in connection with a proposed new-build part-earth-sheltered dwelling, including a submerged integral garage on land adjacent to Cuckhorn Farm Stoke Lacy Herefordshire HR7 4HE (NGR: SO 62527 50579).

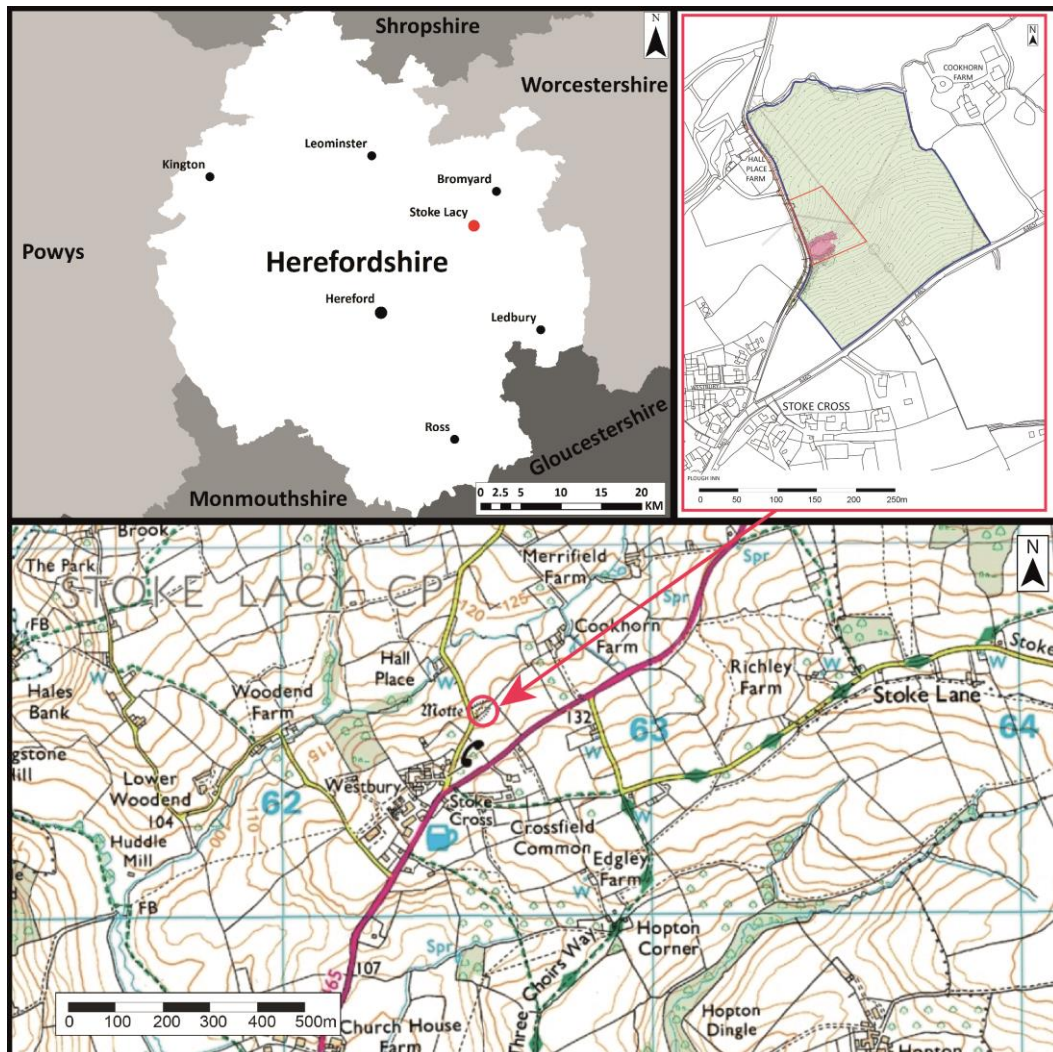


Fig. 1: Site location

2.1 Soils & Geology

The soils are composed of typical argillic brown earths of the BROMYARD series (571b) in the S and the ESCRICK 1 series (571p) in the N.

The BROMYARD (571b) series soils are generally well-drained and of a reddish fine silty composition, overlying Devonian reddish silty shale, siltstone, and sandstone; some similar soils have slowly permeable subsoils and slight

seasonal waterlogging with some well drained coarse loamy soils over sandstone. The ESCRICK 1 (571p) series consists of deep well-drained reddish coarse loamy soils over reddish till, with some similar soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging, and some slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged reddish fine silty soils (SSEW 1983).

2.2 Project Aims

The aims of the project were to identify any known or potential archaeological resource within the study area and to establish its character, extent, quality and importance, within a local, regional and national context; specifically, to identify any features or deposits associated with medieval occupation and to complete the post-excavation phase of the project and to make the evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible.

3 Historical and Archaeological Background

A previous Archaeological Assessment of the site was undertaken by BAL in January 2016 examining documentary sources in conjunction with the Herefordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) database and cartographic evidence (BAL 2016). A brief summary of results is presented below.

The date and function of the earth mound adjacent to the proposed development cannot at present be confirmed, due to a paucity of historical documentation and the impact of modern cultivation activity and landscaping. However, the balance of probability based upon its overall form and the presence of similar sites within the locality would appear to suggest the feature represents the remains of an artificial mound or 'motte' of medieval origin, with the possible remains of a sub-rectangular enclosure or 'bailey' immediately to the E and further rectangular earthworks to the N, possibly the remains of fishponds.

The earthwork exhibits certain features, such as the irregular ovoid form and relatively low height, with an associated enclosure and possible fishpond, which suggest a likely 12th-century construction date, reflecting a period during which the pattern of land tenure within the extensive manor of Stoke Lacy fragmented, with the creation of several subsidiary estates at Hall Place ('le Halle'), Lower Hopton and Mintridge. The mound lies close to the presumed medieval manorial site of 'le Halle'.

This site is first documented in the early-to-mid-13th century, when it was granted to Wormsley Priory, a house of Augustinian canons, who held the estate until the Dissolution. However, the location of the medieval manorial site of 'le Halle' remains uncertain. It may have been located on the site of the present farmhouse of Hall Place or further to the SE.

It is significant that the shape of the oval mound is depicted on the Stoke Lacy tithe map of 1842 (the earliest topographically detailed map of the study area) and that it is respected by the surrounding field boundaries, which further suggests the likelihood of it being a feature of some antiquity.

4 Methodology

The programme of archaeological work was carried out in accordance with *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers' Guide* (Lee 2015) and with practices set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) in *Standard and Guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2014) and *Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2014).

BAL adheres to the CIfA *Code of conduct* (2014), *Standards for Archaeological Projects in Herefordshire* (Issue 1) (Herefordshire Archaeology 2004) and *Archaeology and Development: Supplementary planning document* (Herefordshire Council 2010).

A representative sample of areas immediately adjacent to the mound were investigated, with attention given to remains of all periods (including evidence of past environments), although the primary aim was to establish the extent, character and condition of any deposits or features relating to medieval occupation of the site.

Three standard archaeological evaluation trenches were opened in the area of the presumed remains of a ditch on the northern side of the mound, extending up to the mound's base. Of these, Trench 1 running roughly ENE/WSW parallel to the base of the mound within the revised footprint of the proposed new build measured 10m × 1.5m, Trench 2 immediately S of Trench 1 and running on a NNW/SSE alignment measured 8m × 1.5m and Trench 3 aligned N/S and to the E of Trenches 1 & 2 measured 5m × 1.5m.

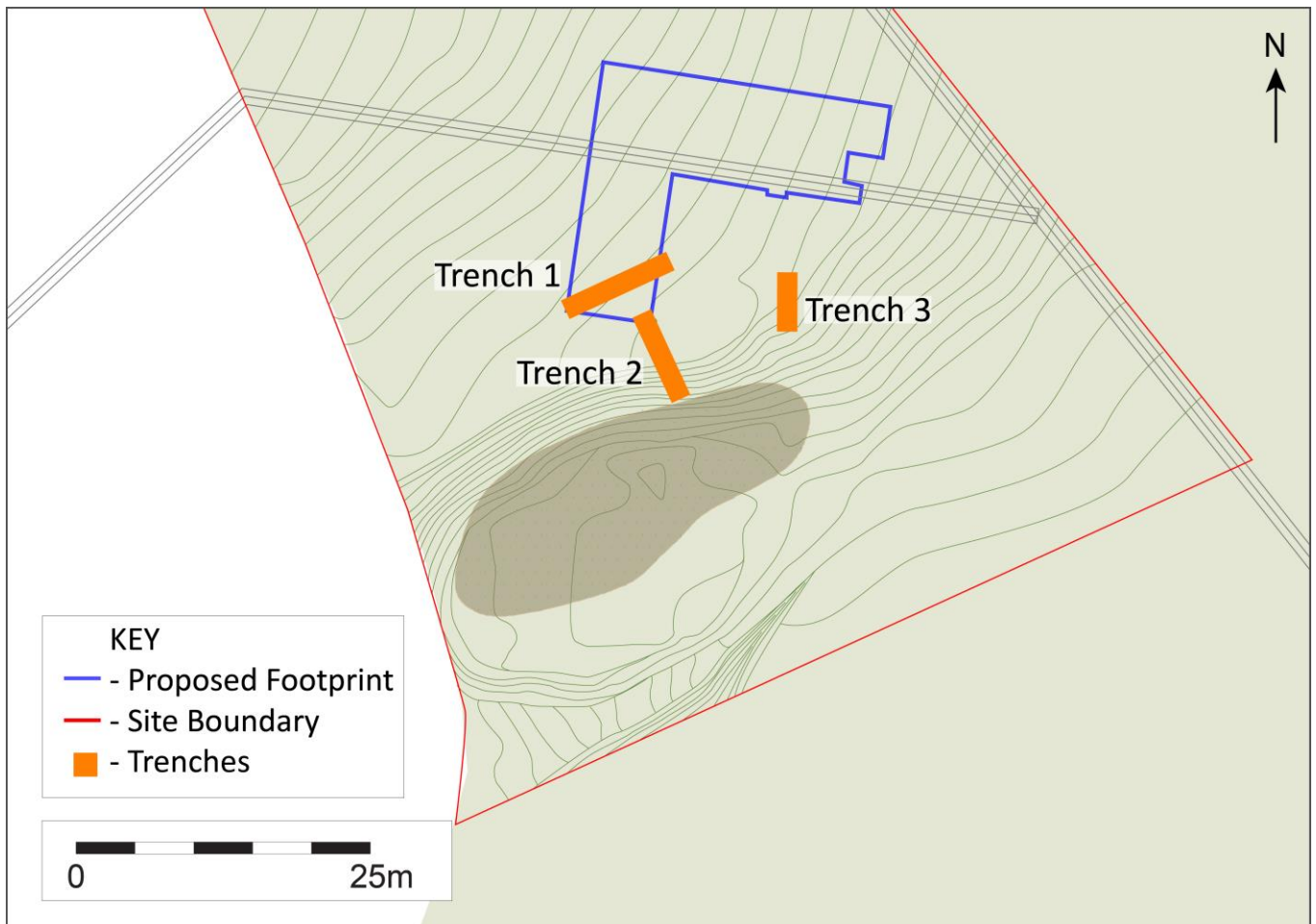


Fig. 2: Trench location plan

Machine excavation proceeded using a 1.5m toothless ditching bucket. Undifferentiated topsoil and overburden of recent origin were removed by machine under archaeological supervision and associated spoil was scanned for artefacts. All significant archaeological deposits were excavated by hand sufficient to fulfil the aim of the project, this being to determine, as far as reasonably possible, the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains likely to be threatened by the proposed development. The evaluation sought to clarify the nature and extent of existing disturbance and intrusion and assess the degree of archaeological survival of buried deposits.

4.1 Paleoenvironmental/paleoeconomic sampling

A single small sample (Sample <1>) for palaeoenvironmental purposes was collected from the primary fill (306) of ditch [303]. As a result of the limited extent of the deposit and difficulty extracting material, only a single tub was obtained. Processing was undertaken by BAL at its Milton Keynes Palaeoenvironmental Processing Facility.

Retents were initially scanned by magnet to retrieve archaeometallurgical debris such as flake and/or spheroidal hammer scale. A sieve bank was used to facilitate visual sorting with the smaller fractions sorted by means of magnifying lamp and/or illuminated stereo zoom microscopy. Non-archaeological, -archaeobotanical, -archaeosteological and -archaeometallurgical material were disposed of on site.

Flots were sorted using an illuminated stereo zoom microscope, with a trinocular head for digital microscopic photography where necessary. Sorting and identification of macro-botanical remains used an in-house reference collection of botanical material, in conjunction with the consultation of academic, specialist reference books.

4.2 Recovery, processing and curation of artefactual data

Associated artefacts recovered were retained, cleaned, labelled and stored according to *Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2014) and *First Aid for Finds* (Watkinson & Neal 2001). All artefacts were bagged and labelled with the site code and context number before being removed off-site.

5 Results

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 ran NE/SW and measured 10m × 1.5m × 1.0 (maximum depth - machine-cut *sondage*).

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Comments
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	100		Deposit	Topsoil	Soft, friable, mid to dark grey brown silt clay; occasional black & white flecks & roots. Overlying (101); 0.10m thick trench wide	-	-	-	-	-	
2	101		Deposit	Subsoil	Compact reddish-brown silt clay; occasional displaced bedrock fragments. Underlying (100), overlying (102); 0.13m thick trench wide	-	-	-	-	-	
3	102		Deposit	Natural	Firm reddish-brown clay; large outcrops of bedrock. Underlying (101); trench wide	-	-	-	-	-	Natural deposits

5.2 Trench 2

The second trench was aligned NNW/SSE and measured 8m × 1.5m × 1.0m (maximum depth).

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Comments
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	200		Deposit	Topsoil	Soft friable mid to dark grey brown silt clay; occasional stones & modern ceramic fragments; >5m × >1.5m × 0.10m. Cut by machine scrape [204]; overlying (201), cut by [204].	-	-	-	-	-	
2	201		Deposit	Subsoil	Firm greyish-brown & pinkish-brown clay; occasional stones. >5m × >1.5m × 0.20m. Underlying (200), overlying (202), cut by [207].	-	-	-	-	-	
3	202		Deposit	Natural	Very firm pink clay; manganese flecking & and degraded sandstone fragments; >0.70m thick, trench wide. Underlying (201).	-	-	-	-	-	Natural deposits
4	203		Deposit	Charcoal layer from hedge/root burning	Loose black ash & charcoal; >3m × >1.5m × <0.17m. Underlying (205), fill of [204]	-	-	-	-	-	Tracks from farm machinery confirmed v. recent date.
5	204		Cut	Machine scoop from levelling field	(?)Linear; break of slope top sharp, side steeply sloping, break of slope base sharp, base flat base; 3.5m × >1.5m × 0.17m. Filled by (203) & (205); cut (200)	-	-	-	-	-	The cut resulted from use of a mechanical excavator to level the area.
6	205		Deposit	Fill of [204]	Loose dark greyish-brown redeposited topsoil/mixed deposit; modern ceramic inclusions; 0.30m (maximum depth). Overlying (203), fill of [204].	-	-	-	-	-	

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Comments
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
7	206		Deposit	Redeposited red clay	Firm red clay; occasional degraded sandstone; 0.90m (length at S end of trench) × 0.04m (thickness). Underlying (203). overlying (202).	-	-	-	-	-	Recent date; associated with disturbance [204].
8	207		Cut	Ditch	(?)Linear; aligned E/W; sides fairly steeply sloping, base not seen; >1.5m × 3.30m × >0.70m. Filled by (208), cut (201).	-	-	-	-	-	Probably same as [303] (Trench 3)
9	208		Fill	Fill of ditch [207]	Pinkish-brown clay; occasional degraded sandstone. Fill of [207].	-	-	-	-	-	Darker than surrounding natural (202)

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was aligned N/S and measured 5m × 1.5m × 1.5m (maximum depth, attained in a hand-dug *sondage*).

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Comments
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	300		Deposit	Topsoil	Soft, friable mid to dark greyish-brown silt clay; 0.10m thick, trench wide. Overlying (304)	-	-	-	-	-	Saturated at time of excavation
2	301		Deposit	Subsoil	Moderately to firmly compacted light reddish-brown clay silt; occasional stone and degraded bedrock. Cut by [303], overlying (302); 0.24m thick, trench wide.	-	-	-	-	-	

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Comments
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
3	302		Deposit	Natural	Firm red brown clay with moderate degraded sandstone. >0.60m thick, trench wide.	-	-	-	-	-	Natural deposits
4	303		Cut	Ditch	(?)Linear; aligned E/W; sides steeply sloping, base rounded; >1.10m x 2.12m x 1.0m. Filled by (306) (305), (304); cut (301).	-	-	-	-	-	Seen in hand-excavated <i>sondage</i> . Probably same as [207]
5	304		Fill	Upper fill of [303]	Firm pinkish-brown silt clay & darker pink patches; >1.10m x 2.0m x 0.60m. Overlying (305), underlying (300).	-	-	-	✓	-	Probably redeposited topsoil & natural material mixed with modern rubble. Modern in date suggesting feature levelled recently
6	305		Fill	Secondary fill of [303]	Firm pinkish-brown silt clay; moderate manganese flecking; >0.20m x >0.90m x 0.30m. Overlying (306), underlying (304).	-	-	-	-	-	Seen in <i>sondage</i> only. Similar material to (304) but with manganese flecks & no finds
7	306		Fill	Primary fill of [303]	Firm mid grey silt clay; few apparent inclusions. >0.20m x >0.90m x 70mm. Fill of [303], below (305).	-	-	-	-	<1>	

6 Discussion

Three trenches were excavated, two of which examined the footprint of the part of the proposed building closest to the 'motte'. No features were identified in Trench 1 (*fig. 3*), with topsoil, subsoil and natural deposits only encountered; outcrops of bedrock were present in the natural clay. Trench 1 lay at the greatest distance from the mound.

No finds of early date were recovered; the lack of early dating evidence means that interpretation of a substantial ditch, assumed to be the same feature, aligned E/W and identified in Trenches 2 and 3 remains problematic.

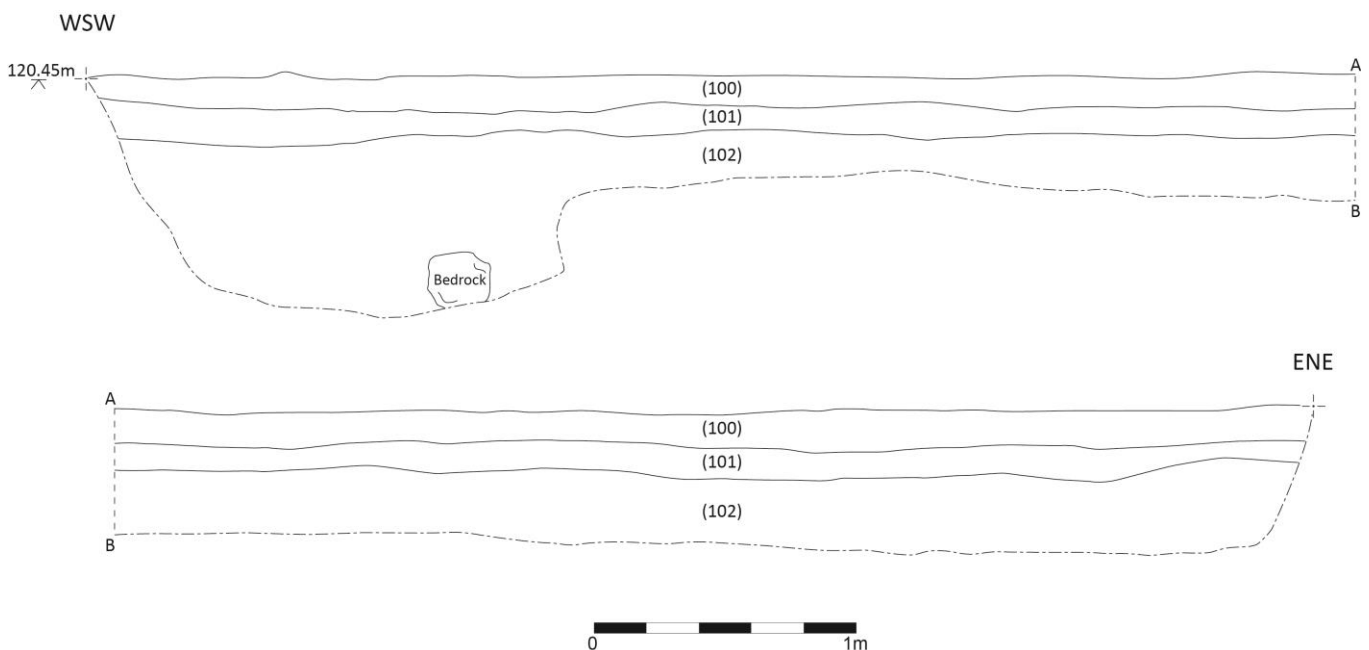


Fig. 3: Section showing natural deposits in Trench 1

The cut, [207]/[303], for the ditch was about 2.5m wide and 1m deep, its size suggesting it may have served more than a drainage function. The proximity, in Trench 2, to the mound certainly suggested that the two features were related. Hickling (1968), who observed the features before the ditch was filled, stated that 'the slope has been artificially steepened and a ditch 2-3 feet deep cut at its foot and back into the hillside.' At the time of the evaluation, there was no evidence on the ground for the ditch.

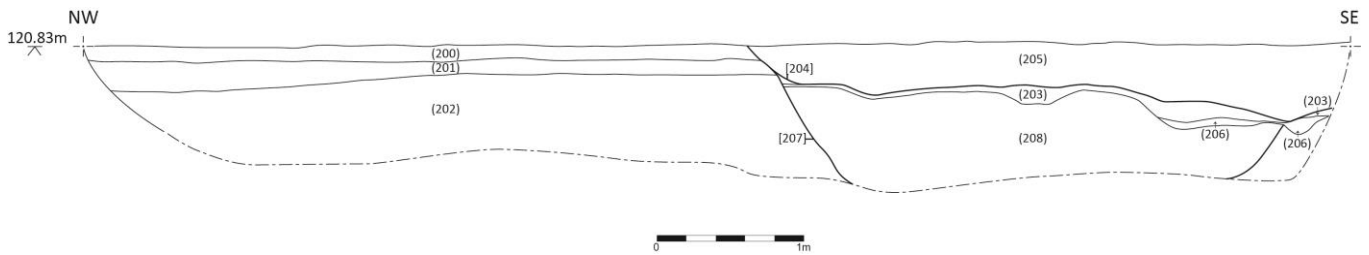


Fig. 4: Trench 2 section showing ditch [207]

In addition to examination of the ditch in two of the trenches, a series of levels was taken on the earthwork to confirm its slope and height above the landscape to the N. It is understood that rubbish may have been dumped onto the mound, presumably at the same time that the partially silted ditch was levelled. The levels were therefore taken at a point close to the lane, where the vegetation suggested that it may have remained relatively undisturbed. These showed a fairly regular slope and a difference in height between the break of the slope at the base of the mound and its summit of some 4m (120.12m AOD at the base of slope and 124.06m AOD at its summit), similar to the height recorded by Hickling in 1968. There was no evidence for the stones on the summit of the mound recorded by Stirling-Brown in 1994.

The very late date of all finds recovered from the topsoil and from ditch fill (304) confirmed that the topography of the site had been substantially altered in recent times. This involved dumping rubble, not only on the field in the vicinity of Trenches 2 and 3, to level the hollow left by the silting of the ditch, but also on the 'motte' itself. The recent date was confirmed by the identification of baler twine within the fill (304) of ditch [303] (*Plate 1*). The modern finds probably derive from the deposit described in the 1994 survey of the site, which stated that the earthworks were 'filled and levelled with rubbish and soil' (Stirling-Brown 1995, 56-7), following which the field had been ploughed up to the base of the 'motte'.

Clearance of woodland around the mound has also taken place at various times; the 1968 survey states that until recently it was covered with 'trees, undergrowth and hedges' (Hickling 1968). A fairly substantial charcoal layer (203) in Trench 2 with tyre tracks of heavy machinery impressed into it appeared very likely to have resulted from one of these phases of recent clearance.

The Archaeological Assessment previously undertaken by BAL suggested the form of the feature more closely resembled a motte of 12th -century date, which would be more likely to have served an administrative than a defensive function (BAL 2016, 21). In view of this, it is interesting to note that the feature is still referred to locally as a 'court'.

While in Trench 2 the proximity of ditch [207] to the 'motte' suggested that these features were associated, the fact that the ditch apparently continued on a similar alignment in Trench 3 to the E [303] could suggest that it was in fact a drain. Heavy waterlogging and considerable surface water was seen on the field throughout the work and a modern plastic water pipe at the S end of Trench 2 demonstrated that water still flowed along its alignment. Storm water was observed draining into the roadside ditch. Ditch [303] had silted in the base, indicating that it had contained water and implying that it was almost certainly the feature recorded by Hickling (1968) as a stream.

Very little evidence was obtained from a Sample <1> taken from the lower fill (306) of ditch [303], which contained only a few uncharred and possibly modern roots and seed cases and no charred material or finds.

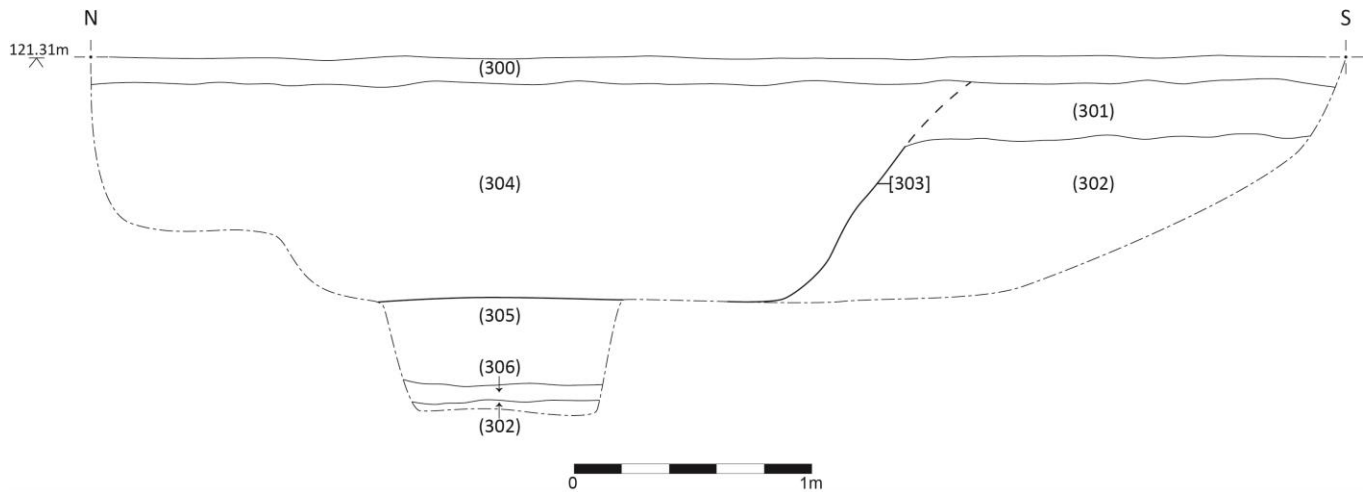


Fig. 5: W-facing section Trench 3, including hand-excavated sondage



Plate 1: View E showing section of ditch [303] prior to excavation of sondage

On the S side of the mound, the form of surviving hawthorn trees suggested that these had once been laid as a hedge (Plate 2; centre left), although the hedge is no longer maintained. The trees were fairly mature and followed the line of the S side of the mound; they seem to have been associated with the alignment of a footpath or hollow

way within the ditch of the motte. The same photograph also demonstrates the similarity of the height of the summit of the mound to the adjacent field.

By the end of the 12th century, pottery was becoming more frequently used in Herefordshire (Vince 2002, 67). It could therefore be argued that, if the mound was indeed a motte of this date, a small amount of ceramic material might be expected to be present, even if the earthwork was occupied only on a temporary basis.

Additionally, the slope of the field could suggest that the feature is unlikely to be a motte, with the land on the S side of the motte at a similar height to its summit. Examination of the surrounding topography also suggests that, had the structure been intended to serve a defensive function, this could have been better achieved by situating it at a higher point, a number of such points being available close by, notably on the W side of the road to Bredenbury.



Plate 2: View S from the summit of the 'motte', showing similar height of field to S of the mound

The presence of natural bedrock in Trench 1 and intermittently in Trench 3 could imply that the earthwork may in fact have been created by quarrying for building stone; Hall Place Farm is partly built of stone and dated to the 17th century. A further outcrop of bedrock was also seen in the W bank of the lane.

In conclusion, no firm evidence to confirm that the mound at Stoke Cross is indeed a 12th century motte was found during the programme of field evaluation. Whilst the proximity of the substantial ditch encountered in Trench 2 suggested that the ditch may have been associated with the mound, it is also possible that the feature served a drainage function.

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9 Appendix 1: Ceramic Building Material

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A small quantity of modern ceramic building material was recovered from the upper fill (304) of ditch [303].

The material included frogged bricks confirming a date of later than the middle of the 19th century for the structure from which the material was derived. It seems likely that the material derived from the rubbish stated to have been dumped on the field prior to the 1994 survey of the site (BAL 2016, 19).

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