

Archaeological Observation

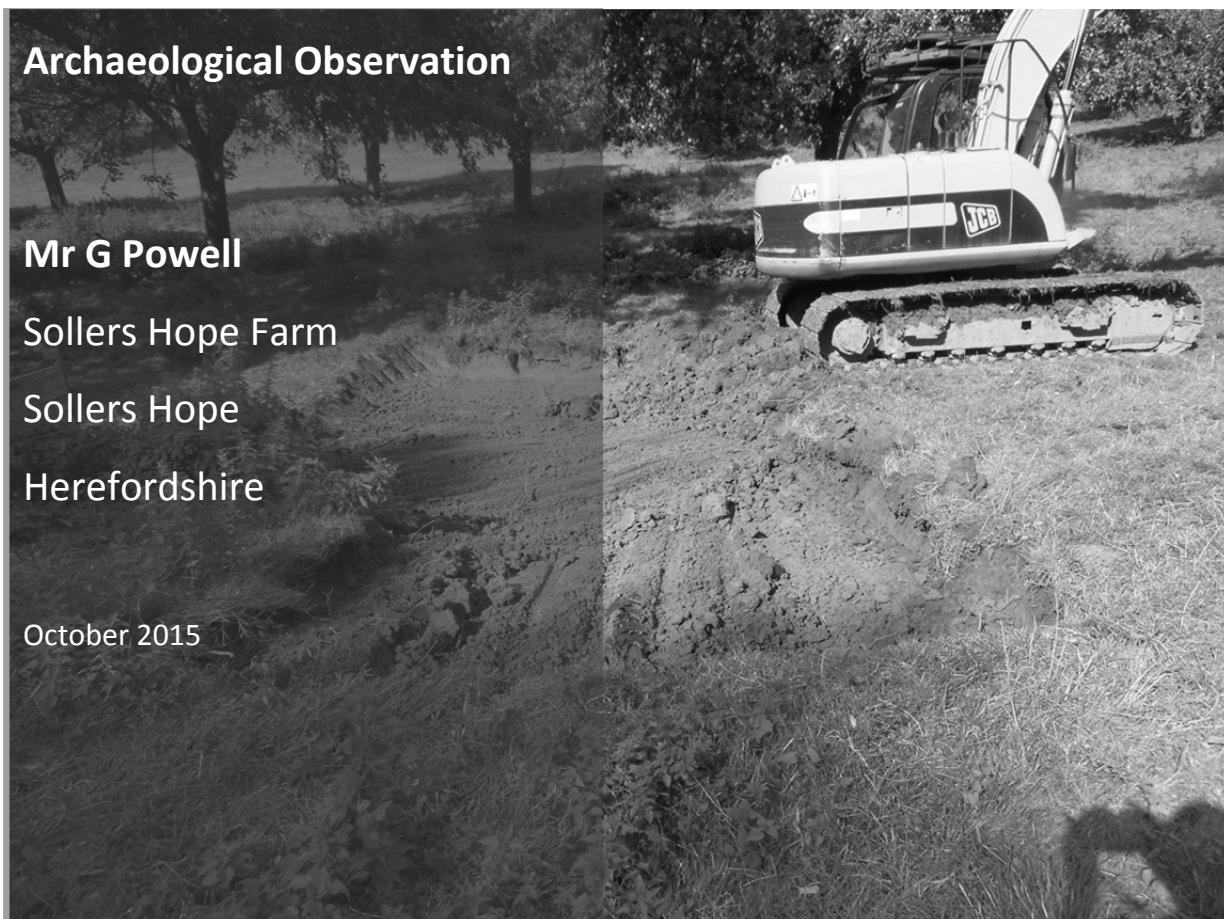
Mr G Powell

Sollers Hope Farm

Sollers Hope

Herefordshire

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Cover: View north showing Area 2 under excavation

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1 Executive Summary

Border Archaeology Limited was commissioned by Mr G. Powell of Sollers Hope Farm Sollers Hope Herefordshire to undertake archaeological observation of groundworks relating to the construction of an egg-production unit at Sollers Hope Farm.

The site lies some 250m to the east of an 11th -century motte and finds dating to the prehistoric period have been discovered in the area. The site is also close to the Iron Age hillfort sites of Capler Camp, located 1.9km to the west, and Oldbury Camp, which lies 1.8km east-southeast.

No finds or features were seen during the course of the work. It is possible that the steep slope of the ground at the rear of the egg-production unit meant that the area has remained unoccupied. A considerable depth of subsoil was present, probably representing an accumulation of colluvium (sediment transported by slope processes). The area to the east of the egg unit (Area 2) was low-lying and may have been subject to flooding.

2 Introduction

Border Archaeology Limited (BAL) was commissioned by Mr G. Powell of Sollers Hope Farm Sollers Hope Herefordshire to undertake a programme of archaeological observation (or watching brief) during groundworks associated with the construction of an egg-production unit (Planning Ref: P132959/F). The observation area partly encompassed the footprint of a former barn and some hard-standing and lay to the E of the core of the farm (*fig. 1*).

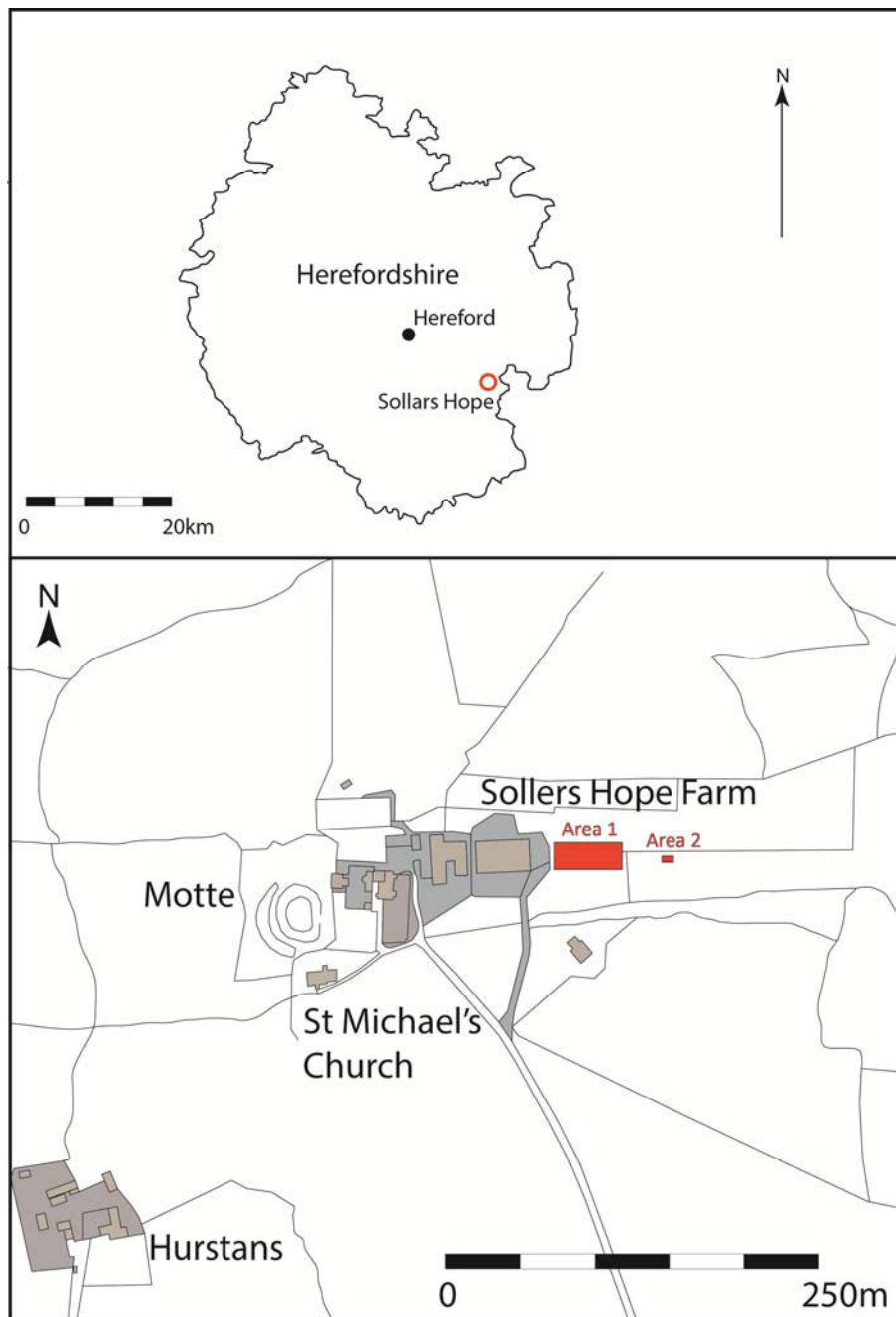


Fig. 1: Site location.

2.1 Soils & Geology

The site is located in an area characterised by typical argillic brown earths of the BROMYARD series (571b) and stagnogleyic argillic brown earths of the YELD series (572a). The former consist of well-drained reddish fine silty soils over shale and siltstone, overlying Devonian reddish silty shale, siltstone and sandstone, whilst the YELD brown earths consist of fine silty soils with slowly permeable subsoils overlying Silurian silty shale, siltstone and limestone.

3 Historical and Archaeological Background

The earliest finds recorded in the vicinity of the study area comprise prehistoric worked flint artefacts and flakes recovered from land to the E of Rock Farm (HER 6638), 1km to the SE, and a Neolithic leaf-shaped arrowhead (HER 31977) recovered from a footpath close to St Michael's church.

No Bronze Age finds have been recorded in the immediate vicinity, although a palstave was found at Oldbury Camp (HER 8435) and the remains of a settlement, including a substantial assemblage of finds comprising flints, pottery and palstaves, was discovered at Gamages Farm, 4km to the SE (HER 7856).

The study area is located close to two Iron Age hillforts. Capler Camp (HER 911), located approximately 1.9km to the W on a hilltop site overlooking the Wye, is a small multivallate hillfort, probably constructed in the 4th century BC (Children & Nash 1994). Oldbury Camp (HER 916), located 1.8km ESE of the study area, comprises a poorly preserved univallate hillfort.

Evidence of Romano-British occupation in the immediate vicinity largely consists of isolated finds, including a 2nd-century coin (HER 6642) found near Satness Farm 1km to the NE, and pottery recovered to the W of Oldbury Camp (HER 6639). Evidence of settlement during this period has been found at Oldbury Camp (HER 916 & 10300) and Capler Camp (Children & Nash 1994), suggesting continuity of occupation of existing sites between the Iron Age and Romano-British periods.

There is little historical evidence for the post-Roman period. The entry for Sollers Hope in the Domesday Survey of 1086, which records the settlement as being within the Greytree Hundred, reads: 'Hagen held it. 5 hides which pay tax. Richard holds from Ansfrid. He has 2 ploughs in lordship and 11 slaves. A man-at-arms holds 1 1/2 hides; he has 1 plough and 1 smallholder. A mill at 5s; 3 ploughs possible. Value before 1066 £4; later £3; now £4' (Thorn & Thorn 1983, 21).

A castle motte (HER 6635) was probably constructed after 1086 and survives as an earthwork 250m W of the study area. It measures 33m in diameter and has a flat top, rising up to 2.1m above the wide surrounding ditch. The ditch itself has an outer bank but the eastern half of the ditch has been destroyed, as has the SE corner of the motte.

To the S of the castle site, St Michael's Church was originally constructed during the mid-12th century. An incised slab to a Knight (*sic*) c. 1225 (Pevsner 1963) and a Caplar stone font (HER 6780) are believed to be survivals of the original fabric.

To the N of the castle site, two depressions in the ground have been interpreted as medieval fishponds associated with the castle and church complex (HER 36525).

It seems likely that the medieval settlement of Sollers Hope entered a period of decline, possibly at some point between the start of the 13th century and the mid-14th century, when depopulation affected much of the country; upland areas became unusable for agriculture and labour was in short supply. It has been suggested that Sollers Hope, which is located in an upland area, represents a shrunken medieval settlement (HER 893)

Post-medieval occupation focused on Court Farm (HER 6641), originally constructed in the early 16th century on the site of an earlier manor house. A stone and timber-framed barn with dovecote (HER 23912) was erected in the 18th century.

Post-medieval industrial activity was represented by brickworks located at Sollers Hope. A field referred to on the 1840 Tithe map as 'Brick Wood Ground' (HER 32464) lay adjacent to the castle to the W. The 1838 Tithe map refers to the field where the proposed development is located as 'Brick Kiln Orchard' (HER 32385). A lime kiln (HER 11025) was located approximately 1km to the E at Lyndalls Wood. A water mill, described as the 'Grey Mill' (HER 43091), is located on the Totnor Brook to the S of Whittlebury Farm (approximately 500m S of the site).

Several quarries were identified on the 1st -Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1888, including two to the S of Long Wood (approximately 130m N of the study area) and one located approximately 600m to the S close to Perryfield (formerly 'The Pounds').

The Ordnance Survey map of 1888 depicts the study area as being located within a large orchard plot. This orchard area remained unchanged until 1973, when it appears to have been partially grubbed-out to form an open field area to the E of the farmyard. The extant farm building on the site appears to have been constructed post-1982.

4 Methodology

All archaeological site work within the study area was consistent with accepted standards of professional and ethical procedure as set out in *Management of Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers' Guide* (Lee 2015) and *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014). Border Archaeology adheres to the ClfA *Code of conduct* (2014).

Topsoil was removed by a machine equipped with a toothless bucket under archaeological supervision down to a depth determined by engineering requirements. Subsequent investigation was sufficient to define any identified archaeological deposits, features and structures in terms of their character, extent, quality and preservation, and

enable an assessment of their worth in a local, regional, national or international context, as appropriate (ClfA 2014, 14).

4.1 Palaeoenvironmental/palaeoeconomic sampling

No deposits of palaeoenvironmental/palaeoeconomic significance were encountered during the archaeological observation. No samples were taken.

4.2 Recording

Full written, graphic and photographic records were made in accordance with BAL's *Archaeological Field Recording Manual* (2014). The written record comprised detailed stratigraphic recording using individual *pro-forma* context sheets and a context numbering system.

No archaeological features were present. Measured sketches of geological deposits were produced.

A photographic record was made using a high-resolution digital camera, comprising photographs of archaeological features and appropriate groups of features and structures. An appropriate scale was included in each photograph and all photographic records were indexed and cross-referenced to written site records. Details concerning subject and direction of view were maintained in a photographic register, indexed by frame number.

4.3 Recovery, processing and curation of artefactual data

No artefacts were seen during the archaeological observation. No finds were recovered from the site.

5 Results

5.1 Area 1

Area 1 lay to the N of the egg-producing unit. The surface to the N of the building was lowered by some 1.40m. The trench was aligned E-W.

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Description	Finds					Comments
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	101		Deposit	Topsoil	Mid brown silty clay, occasional small stones & roots; 0.20m deep, trench wide. Overlying (102)	-	-	-	-	-	
2	102		Deposit	Naturally-derived subsoil; depth suggests it may have resulted from erosion of the nearby slope	Reddish-brown silty clay; no inclusions; 0.80m depth. Underlying (101), overlying (103) & (104)	-	-	-	-	-	
3	103		Deposit	Natural	Natural greyish-pink stony clay; >0.20m thick. Underlying (102)	-	-	-	-	-	Natural deposits
4	104		Deposit	Natural	Strongly purplish-brown clay. Underlying (102) to W end of trench. Underlying (102)	-	-	-	-	-	Natural deposits

5.2 Area 2

Area 2 lay some 43m to the E of the new unit. It was dug to a maximum depth of 0.30m.

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Description	Finds					Comments
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	201		Deposit	Topsoil	Soft but fairly compact, dark brown silty clay, occasional small stones & roots; 0.20m thick across excavated area. Overlying (202)	-	-	-	-	-	Considerably darker than equivalent topsoil to W, probably due to flooding / waterlogging
2	202		Deposit	Subsoil	Clean reddish-brown silty clay; no inclusions; >0.10m thick. Underlying (201)	-	-	-	-	-	Similar/identical to subsoil (102) to W

6 Discussion

No features or deposits of archaeological significance were observed during the course of groundworks excavations. It appears likely that the steeply sloping topography of Area 1 would have discouraged occupation. Similarly, Area 2 would probably have remained under pasture due to the potential for seasonal flooding from the brook which runs along the S side of the field.



Plate 1: View N of deposits revealed in Area 1 with natural clay (104) shown at base of trenching

The site lay at some distance from the medieval core of Sollers Hope. As Area 1 occupies a steep slope and Area 2 appears to have been subject to flooding, it seems likely that these areas have remained as marginal land.

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