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The Tanyard, Shifnal, Shropshire.

> An Archaeological Evaluation, 2006





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THE TANYARD SHIFNAL, SHROPSHIRE. AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION, 2006.

By

Mary Duncan

For

Morris Homes West Midlands Ltd

For further information please contact: Alex Jones (Director) Birmingham Archaeology The University of Birmingham Edgbaston Birmingham B15 2TT Tel: 0121 414 5513 Fax: 0121 414 5516 E-Mail: bham-arch@bham.ac.uk Web Address: http://www barch.bham.ac.uk/bufau

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CONTENTS

1	INT	RODUCTION1
	1.1 1.2	BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT
2	ARC	CHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND1
3	TAN	INING IN SHIFNAL
4	AIN	IS AND OBJECTIVES
5	ME	THODOLOGY4
6	RES	SULTS
	6.1 6.2 6.3	TRENCH 1 4 TRENCH 2 5 TRENCH 3 6
7	THE	FINDS6
	7.1 7.2	The pottery by Stephanie Rátkai7Other finds by Erica Macey-Bracken7
8	THE	E INSECT REMAINS BY DR. EMMA TETLOW7
	8.1 8.2 8.3 <i>Con</i> <i>Con</i> 8.4	МЕТНОО. 8 RESULTS 8 INTERPRETATIVE VALUE 9 text 2003. 10 text 2009. 10 texts 2011 and 2012. 10 FURTHER ANALYSIS. 11
9	DIS	CUSSION
1	0 A	CKNOWLEDGEMENTS13
1	1 R	EFERENCES

List of Figures Fig. 1 Site Location Plan Fig. 2 Trench Location Plan Fig. 3 Plan of Trench 2 Fig. 4 Section Through Trench 2 Fig. 5 Proposed Development Plans

List of Plates Plate 1 Trench 1 Plate 2 Trench 2 viewed from the north Plate 3 Tanning pit complex 1 (northern) Plate 4 Tanning pit complex 2 (southern) Plate 5 Trench 3

SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation at the site of a former tanyard, High Street/Broadway, Shifnal, Shropshire (NGR SJ 7480 0802) was commissioned by Morris Homes West Midlands. The work was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology in May 2006 as part of a staged archaeological response to a planning application for the development of the site with residential accommodation.

An earlier desk-based assessment identified that the site was located in one of the earliest parts of the town which was planned in the 14th century. It also identified that the site bordered the Wesley Brook, and there was therefore the potential for good environmental remains, dating from the medieval period onwards, to survive within the bounds of the proposed development. There was also good documentary and cartographic evidence for a tannery, known to have been in operation from at least 1828.

Three trial trenches were excavated to assess the archaeological potential of the site revealing that structures from the tanning complex were well preserved. The tanning pits themselves, also identifiable from cartographic sources, were found to have been constructed variously from brick and wood, and re-used masonry. The environmental evidence showed that following its abandonment circa 1929, the pits were backfilled up to ground level to increase yard space, and the buildings were re-used as stabling.

THE TANYARD, SHIFNAL, SHROPSHIRE:

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Planning Application Number 05/0863

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the project

Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by Morris Homes West Midlands to undertake a programme of trial trenching ahead of a proposed residential development (Planning Application Number 05/0863) on the site of a tanyard in Shifnal, Shropshire (hereinafter referred to as the site).

This report outlines the results of trial trenching carried out in May 2006, and has been prepared in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations (IFA 2001). This stage of evaluation carried on from a desk-based assessment of the site (Pearson and Nichol 2006).

The evaluation was carried out in accordance with guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990). Michael Watson monitored the work on behalf of Shropshire County Council.

1.2 Location and geology

The site is located to the west of the High Street-Broadway in Shifnal, Shropshire, and is centred on NGR SJ 7480 0802 (Fig. 1). The underlying geology consists of Glacial till and sand overlying Triassic sandstone (Pearson and Nichol 2006, 1).

The character of the site at the time of the evaluation was open, with demolition rubble stock piled at the eastern end. To the east the site was bordered by buildings fronting on to the High Street-Broadway, and associated back gardens. To the south, the back plots of 14th-century burgage plots survive well, extending back to the Wesley Brook which bounds the site to the west. To the north the site was bordered by a 20th-century housing estate.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

A full desk-based assessment has been produced for this site (Pearson and Nichol 2006) and will not be repeated in detail here. However the main points of relevance will be highlighted.

There is no evidence for Prehistoric or Roman settlement in Shifnal itself although Roman Watling Street (the modern A5) forms the northern parish boundary. Shifnal can be identified with the Saxon settlement of *Idsall* an important ecclesiastical centre in the late Saxon period, and a planned development of the town was undertaken in the 14th century which is when the linear settlement along the High Street-Broadway was laid out. The town was well located throughout its history for good transport connections, and it became an important staging

point between Holyhead and London in the 18th century. The arrival of the Shrewsbury to Birmingham Railway in the mid-19th century provided the impetus for further expansion; however, it remained primarily a small market town serving the local agricultural community (ibid.).

There are good documentary references to the site being occupied by a tannery (SMR No 07301, MSA No. 3930) from 1828 onwards. However, the establishment of this could have been much earlier (Pearson and Nichol 2006, 3). The tannery buildings were eventually demolished in the 1950s.

3 TANNING IN SHIFNAL

The processes involved in the production of leather are well understood, and techniques have changed little over time. Even with technical innovations, and mechanisation being introduced to many industries during the Industrial Revolution, tanning remained a largely labour intensive manual operation (Cherry 1991, 300). Tanning itself can be broken down into several distinct processes (Thomson 1981, 161) which begin with the animal carcass. It is likely that animals were not slaughtered on site, and were a by-product of butchery for food (Cherry 1991, 295-8). However, it is unlikely that the hides travelled very far from the butchery site, as the putrefaction processes that occur shortly after death would quickly start to degrade the quality of the end leather product (Thomson 1998, 3-4). Shifnal had developed into a relatively large market town by the 18th century, mainly dealing in cattle (Pearson and Nichol 2006, 2-3), so there would have been a steady supply of hides for tanning.

Prior to the 19th century animal hide was generally supplied with feet and horns attached which required removal prior to tanning, an accumulation of these elements of the skeleton are therefore commonly considered an indicator of tanning (Cherry 1991, 295-6.). Although no bones were found in contexts associated with the tannery, several cattle bones were noted in a mass rubbish dump identified in Trench 1 (section 6.1 below), which may indicate butchery in the local vicinity.

After an initial washing of the hide the fur, fat and flesh were removed (Thomson 1981, 162), usually by the hides being soaked in urine or immersed in a lime solution (Thomson 1981, 163). There was no evidence for the use of lime in the pits excavated during the evaluation at Shifnal, however, it is possible that it was used elsewhere in the tannery. The production of lime escalated in the post medieval and early industrial period, when it was widely used in mortar and plaster in the construction of buildings, it was also increasingly used in the 18th century for agricultural purposes (Williams 1989, 7). Unlike most of the other raw ingredients used in tanning, lime could be re-used in fact it improved the effectiveness of the mixture with age (Thomson 1998, 5).

Once this process was complete the hair and flesh was scraped off the hide manually using a blunted knife or blade (Cherry 1991, 296). The hide was then re-washed and treated to create softer leather, a process that also de-limed the hide (Thomson 1998, 7). Two processes could be employed for this; either the alkaline process that involved soaking the hide in a solution of bird droppings or dog dung (Cherry 1991, 296). Alternatively, the acid process which involved the hide being drenched in a solution of barley, rye or ash bark, with stale beer, urine or a rotting hide which would begin a kind of fermentation process (ibid.). Given the location of the tannery in the immediate vicinity of both a malthouse and an inn it is likely that the tannery used some of their waste products. Indeed, there is documentary evidence to show that by the mid-19th century both the malthouse and the tannery had the same owner (Pearson and Nichol 2006, 3). There dies not seem to have been unusual, and there is further evidence for

tanneries being associated with malt-houses in Ashbourne (<u>http://www.ashbourne-town.com/history/labour.htm</u>).

After further washing the actual tanning process, the curing of the hides, could take place this consisted of two processes, the first involving near constant agitation of the hides in a weak tanning solution made of water and ground bark (Cherry 1991, 297). The second process involved the alternate layering of the hide with ground bark, most often oak, these were left for up to a year and a half (Thomson 1981, 166). It is likely that it was this process that was undertaken in the vats found at Shifnal (see below).

The best bark for tanning was found in young coppiced trees that were about 20 years old (Clarkson 1974, 139). It has been suggested that in the early post medieval period there may have been a connection between the emerging iron industry and leather working as they both required wood and there was a demand for leather and metal products such as saddles, harnesses and the like (Clarkson 1966, 29-30). Shifnal would have had a particular need for saddles and harnesses not only for the surrounding rural community, but also for the coach teams arriving at this important staging point. There is also cartographic evidence depicting areas of plantation in strips along the road and field boundaries in 1840 (Pearson and Nichol 2006 Fig. 3) along with areas of coppice. A timber yard is also depicted close to the town centre.

Following this process, the hides were once again rinsed, smoothed and dried out at a controlled rate, this last process was probably undertaken indoors, the hides were then ready for working (Thomson 1981, 166). Generally, the working of leather beyond this stage was done elsewhere by specialised craftsmen (ibid.). Very limited amounts of leather were recovered from the evaluation and the extent of leather craft carried out on the site if difficult to assess. However, there is documentary evidence for a tenant of the tannery being a shoemaker in 1851 (Pearson and Nichol 2006, 3), suggesting that the working of the raw material up into finished goods was taking place on the site.

It is clear, given the processes outlined above, that there was a great need for a good water supply throughout all stages of the leather making process, and the site's location adjacent to the Wesley Brook would have been ideal. However, the siting of the site is slightly strange in that it was located upstream of the town centre, so any waste, which there would have been, from the complex would have been washed straight through the town centre. Tanning is a smelly process, and produces rather noxious waste material, therefore waste from here would effectively have contaminated the steam from this point down.

4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The principle aim of the evaluation was to determine the character, state of preservation and the potential significance of any buried remains surviving on the site.

More specific aims were to:

- Identify any medieval activity specifically relating to occupation along the High Street at the eastern side of the site and stream usage at the western end of the site.
- To investigate the remains of the tannery known to have occupied the site in the 19th century.

5 METHODOLOGY

A total of 3 trenches were excavated across the site (Fig. 2). Trenches 1 and 3 were located to investigate surviving medieval remains associated with the laying out of the planned town in the 14th century. Trench 1 was located to examine deposits close to the brook along the western boundary of the site, to identify possible early industry associated with the water course. Trench 2 was located within the tannery complex to assess its survival. Trench 3 was located to assess occupation and land use behind the frontage of the main road.

All topsoil and modern overburden was removed using a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, under direct archaeological supervision, down to the top of the uppermost archaeological horizon, or the subsoil. Subsequent cleaning and excavation was by hand.

All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Features were planned at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50, and sections were drawn through all cut features and significant vertical stratigraphy at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50. A comprehensive written record was maintained using a continuous numbered context system on *pro-forma* context and feature cards. Written records and scale plans were supplemented by photographs using digital, monochrome and colour slide photography.

Twenty litre soil samples were taken from datable archaeological features for the recovery of waterlogged remains. The environmental sampling policy followed the guidelines contained in the Birmingham Archaeology Guide to On-Site Environmental Sampling, this element of the project was overseen by Dr Emma Tetlow (Birmingham Archaeo-Environmental). Recovered finds were cleaned, marked and remedial conservation work was undertaken as necessary. Treatment of all finds conformed to guidance contained within 'A strategy for the care and investigation of finds' published by English Heritage.

The full site archive includes all artefactual and/or ecofactual remains recovered from the site. The site archive will be prepared according to guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the Management of Archaeology Projects (English Heritage, 1991), the Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-term Storage (UKIC, 1990) and Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological collections (Museum and Art Galleries Commission, 1992). Finds and the paper archive will be deposited with the insert appropriate repository subject to permission from the landowner.

6 RESULTS

6.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was located towards the western boundary of the site (Fig. 2, Plate 1). This was located to identify any activity related to the Wesley Brook that flows down the western boundary of the site. This trench was 6m wide and 14m long and was excavated to a depth of 3m.

The natural clay was identified at the northwestern end of the trench this was located 2.23m below current ground surface (85.2m AOD), this was cut by the northern edge of a palaeochannel. The upper fill of the channel (1005) consisted of compact grey clay and silt, this lay 2.77m below the ground surface (84.69m AOD), but for safety reasons could not be excavated. Overlying this deposit, at the south end of the trench, was a layer of dark grey silt (1004) 0.25m deep. This was sealed by a layer of orange alluvial sandy silt (1003) also 0.25m deep. This deposit was a layer of dark grey clay rich silt (1002) 0.35m deep. This

was overlain by a modern levelling layer comprising loose soil and clinker (1001) that contained quantities of glass bottles and ceramic vessels, mostly whole, and animal bone, this had a depth of 1.6m. A layer of crushed rubble (1000) sealed the area of the trench.

6.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was aligned north-south and was located in the middle of the site (Fig 2). It was 30m long and 6m wide, and was machine excavated to a maximum depth of 2m below the current ground surface (85.81m AOD).

The earliest deposits identified in the trench were at the southern end where a layer of alluvial silt (2019, Fig. 3) indicated the continuation of the palaeochannel identified in Trench 1. No further naturally occurring subsoil horizons were encountered within the area of this trench. Early garden soil horizons were preserved at the south end of the trench (2017 and 2018, Fig. 4) which together measured 0.65m of build up.

The majority of the deposits surviving in the trench could be identified as being associated with the tanning complex. At the northern end of the trench were the remains of a structure (Figs 3 and 4, Plate 2), which was 6m wide and consisted of an outer wall to the north, constructed on sandstone footings (2031), and a brick built wall (2030) to the south. Internally the structure had a well-preserved quarry tile floor (2024) surviving in-situ.

To the south of this structure were a series of pits (Figs 3 and 4 and Plates 3 and 4), that comprised two separate pit complexes. The northern series (Plate 3) abutted the external wall (2030) of the building. A total of five pits (2004, 2007, 2013, 2029 and 2032), closely grouped, were identified The complex was three pits wide, with an overall width of 7m. However, the full length and extent of this range of pits could not be ascertained within the confines of the trench and two of the pits (2029 and 2032) were so close to the baulk that they could not be excavated for health and safety reasons. They were defined by pink clay linings, their internal widths ranged from 1.3-2.25m and the two pits that were excavated to their full depth (2004 and 2007) were 1m deep.

Large wooden planks lined three of the pits (2004, 2013 and 2029), and there was evidence, in plan, for the stabilisation of these with wooden posts and metal pins, on the outside of 2004 and 2029 (Fig. 3). Pit 2007 was lined with bricks and it is probable that Pit 2032 was also. In Pit 2004 and Pit 2013 the earliest fills (2003 and 2012) consisted of the waterlogged remains of chipped bark. Above this, in Pit 2013, was a layer of compact waterlogged organic material, similar to the primary fill of Pit 2007 (2009). Surviving at intervals between the pits were the remains of sandstone paving slabs. The upper fill of all of the pits was a very compact black ash and clinker deposit that was part of the same layer (2002) that sealed the whole complex.

To the south of this range of pits was a second pit complex (2021) which was 3.1m wide (Figs 3 and 4, Plate 4). These were again defined by their clay linings, and were sub-divided by the insertion of wooden dividers at 0.9m intervals. The fills of two of these subdivisions were (2005 and 2006) found to consist of burnt coal and clinker. The north and south walls of the complex were constructed from sandstone, and survived to a height of 0.6m, three courses high. They were structural, used as a revetment wall around the edge of the pit complex, rather than forming part of the lining, and originally were probably higher which would have made the pits semi-sunken.

Between the two sets of pits there appeared to be a break in activity (Figs 3 and 4), which was probably where the yard surface around the pit complexes had been. Unfortunately the cut for a large modern drain truncated deposits at this point. However, the northern edge of a cut

feature (2015) was evident to the north of the drain. It was filled by clean silt rich clay and contained stones (2014), but no dating evidence. To the south of the drain cut was a shallow layer of silt (2027) from which a single sherd of Staffordshire Slipware dating to the late 17th-mid 18th century was recovered.

Overlying the tanning complex, across the whole of the trench, was a levelling layer (2001) primarily consisting of crushed rubble, roof tile, mortar and concrete. It was deepest at the northern end of the trench where it was 1.5m deep. At the southern end of the trench the continuation of 1001 identified in Trench 1 was identified (2016). A narrow layer of broken brick rubble (2000) sealed the area of the trench.

6.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was 10m long and 2m wide, aligned east-west and located towards the eastern side of the site (Fig. 2, and Plate 5). It was located to identify potential back-plot activity within the area relating to properties along the High Street-Broadway.

The natural sand and clay (3010) was identified at the eastern end of the trench, 1.5m below the current ground surface (87.37m AOD), and the overlying stratigraphy became shallower towards the west. Overlying the natural subsoil was a layer of mixed sand and gravel (3006), which was around 0.5m deep. This in turn was overlain by a series of buried garden soils (3003, 3004 and 3005) that had evidently built up over time in the area of the backplots to the rear of the properties fronting the main street. A lens in these soils (3009) produced a sherd of pottery dating to the 18th century. The only feature present in the trench cut the garden soils, this was a small brick built coal-bunker (3012). This trench was once again sealed by a layer of crushed rubble and hardcore (3002).

7 THE FINDS

Finds recovered from the site included post-medieval pottery, animal bone, glass, slag, leather and wood, as shown in the table below:

Context	Post- Medieval Pottery	Animal Bone	Window Glass	Glass Bottles / Jars	Stone	Slag	Leather	Wood	Plastic	Rubber
1001	4	809g	-	15	I	-	-	-	-	-
2002	13	26g	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
2005	6	137g	-	4	-		-	1	-	1
2006	4	49g	-	10	1	8	-	1	1	-
2008	7	22g	-	-	I	-	1	-	-	-
2010	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3011	8	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 1 Finds Summary

Context	Date	Comment
1001	20 th century	Teapot late 19 th -20 th century
2002	19 th century	
2005	19 th century	
2006	20 th century	
2008	19 th century	
2010	19 th /20 th century	
2027	Late 17 th -Mid 18 th century	1 sherd slipware
3009	18 th century	1 sherd slipcoated ware

7.1 The pottery by Stephanie Rátkai

Table 2 Pottery Spot Dating

7.2 Other finds by Erica Macey-Bracken

Other finds included 30 glass bottles and jars from a dump at the site. Many bottles were complete, and several were embossed with brand names still popular today such as Marmite (2005) and Domestos (1001), as well as older brands such as the California Fig Syrup Co (2006), Hazlewood & Co Products Ltd (1001) and Booth's Distilleries Ltd of London (1001). Unmarked bottles included two ink bottles (2006), a narrow phial (2006) and a blue poison bottle (1001). All of the bottles were of late 19th – early 20th century date.

The remainder of the assemblage included 1043g of animal bone, a fragment of window glass (3011), the end of a whetstone (2006), ten fragments of slag (2002 x 2, 2006 x 8), a strip of desiccated leather (2008), a wooden clothes peg (2006), a small slice of wood (2005), a plastic ring from a bottle seal (2006) and a section of a rubber inner tube (2005).

All the finds were from the later period, and probably associated with the levelling of the site prior to the construction of the light industrial units that occupied the site from the early post-war period onwards.

8 THE INSECT REMAINS BY DR. EMMA TETLOW

Three pits in Trench 2 contained waterlogged material and were sampled for palaeoentomological analysis. Large wooden planks lined two of pits (2004 and 2013), a single sample, 2003, was recovered from pit 2004, samples from the top (2011) and bottom (2012) of pit 2013 were recovered. Pit 2007 was lined with bricks and a single sample, 2009, was recovered.

It was hoped that an assessment of the insect remains from these samples would provide information on the following:

- Are any insect remains of interpretative value?
- Do any of the insects present suggest the nature of human activity at the site?
- Are any of the insect species recovered particularly associated with the tanning process.

Samples 2009 and 2011 were recovered from layers of compact waterlogged organic material and samples 2003 and 2012 were recovered from contexts rich in chipped bark.

8.1 Method

Four samples were processed using the standard method of paraffin flotation as outlined in Kenward *et al.* (1980), weight and volume of the processed material may be found in Table 3 below. The paraffin flot was then sorted and identification undertaken, where possible, using a binocular microscope. The system for 'scanning' faunas as outlined by Kenward *et al.* (1985) was followed in this assessment.

When discussing the faunas recovered, two considerations should be taken into account:

1) The identifications of the insects present are provisional. Many of the taxa present could be identified down to species level during full analysis.

2) The various proportions of insects are subjective assessments.

8.2 Results

The insect taxa recovered from the flots are listed in Table 3 below.

Feature	2004	2008	2013	
Sample no	2003	2009	2011	2012
Volume (I)	101	101	101	101
Weight (kg)	7kg	7kg	7kg	7kg
COLEOPTERA				
Carabidae				
Clivina fossor			*	
Trechus spp				*
Bembidion spp.		**	****	
Bradycellus spp.				*
Hydreanidae				
Limnebius spp.				**
Hydrophilidae				
Cercyon haemorrhoidalis (F.)		***	**	
Cercyon aquatic spp.		****	**	**
Staphylinidae				
Olophrum spp.		*		
Trogophloeus spp.		***		**
<i>Lesteva</i> spp.				**
Oxytelus sculptus Grav.		***	**	**
Oxytelus rugosus (F.)			**	*
Oxytelus nitidulus Grav.		**		***
Oxytelus tetracarinatus (Block.)		**		*
Oxytelus spp.	*	**		*
Platystethus cornutus (Grav.)	**	***		
Staphylinus spp.				*
Philonthus spp.		****		**
Lathrobium spp.		**	**	*
Leptacinus spp.			**	
Gyrohypnus fracticornis (Mull.)	*			
Xantholinus spp.		***	**	**

Feature	2004	2008	2013	
Sample no	2003	2009	2011	2012
Volume (I)	101	101	101	101
Weight (kg)	7kg	7kg	7kg	7kg
Tachinus rufipes (Geer.)				*
Aleocharinae gen. & spp. Indet.	***	****	****	
Elateridae				
Agriotes spp.				*
Dermestidae				
Dermestes spp.				*
Rhizophagidae				
Rhizophagus spp.			***	
Cucujidae				
Monotoma spp.				**
Cryptophagidae				
Cryptophagus spp.				*
Atomaria spp.			**	**
Lathridiidae				
Lathrididius spp.	**	**		*
Encimus minutus (L.)	***	****	****	****
Corticaria spp.			**	**
Anobiidae				
Anobium punctatum (Geer.)		**	**	**
Ptinidae				
Tipnus unicolor (Pill.Mitt.)		**		
Ptinus fur (L.)		**		
Scarabaeidae				
Aphodius spp.		****		
Scolytidae				
Hylastes spp.			*	
Chrysomelidae				
Phylotreta spp.	*			
Chaetocnema concinna (Marsh.)		***		
Diptera				*

Table 3 Beetle Identification

The taxonomy used for the Coleoptera (beetles) follows that of Lucht (1987). A number of Dipterous (fly) puparia remains were found. The numbers of individuals present is estimated using the following scale: * = 1-2 individuals ** = 2-5 individuals *** = 5-10 individuals *** = 10+ individuals.

8.3 Interpretative value

Diverse, well-preserved and interpretable assemblages were recovered from 3 of the four samples: 2009, 2011, 2012. Material from sample 2003 was well preserved, whilst species abundance and diversity was limited, the assemblage recovered from this sample is interpretable at assessment level. The principal research question for this assemblage was whether any of the insects present reflected the nature of human activity at the site?

Context 2003

The assemblage from this sample consisted of a range of species associated with compost, stable manure and domestic activity. For example, the Staphylinidae *Platystethus arenarius* and *Gyrohypnus fracticornis* are usually both found associated with foul decaying organic matter, the latter taxon is particularly associated with stable manure and compost (Tottenham 1954). The Lathridiidae *Lathridius* spp. and *Enicmus minutus* are both found with drier mouldering organics such as compost and mildewed hay (Kenward and Hall 1995).

Context 2009

The sample from context 2009 also indicates an accumulation of foul and rotting material. One of the most striking features of this assemblage was the presence of dung beetles, a family absent in the other three samples. Sample 2009 also contained a number of taxa found in Kenward's 'House' Fauna (Hall and Kenward 1990, Kenward and Hall 1995).

As well as dung beetles, the Lathridiidae, a family that includes species associated with drier decomposing material, and other taxa indicative of similar conditions (including the Ptinidae, *Tipnus unicolor, Tipnus fur* and the anobid, or common woodworm, *Anobium punctatu*), were also found in abundance. This group also form part of Kenward's 'House' Fauna and are commonly associated with human habitation and housing (Hall and Kenward 1990, Kenward and Hall 1995). *Anobium punctatum* is primarily a pest of dry, seasoned wood used in construction and furniture (Koch 1989), and is therefore likely to have originated in the timber framing of the structure.

The presence of Scarabaeidae, or dung beetles, in this sample is intriguing, no artefactual evidence suggests that animals were either kept at, or slaughtered on the site during its use as a tannery. Faecal material from herbivorous taxa is not generally used in the tanning process, unlike that of carnivorous animals. However, the relatively large numbers of dung beetles recovered from this sample *does* indicate that large herbivores were kept at the site; and perhaps suggests reuse of the tannery buildings following its closure. One possible explanation may be that the building was used as a stable by the nearby public house. Full analysis of the dung beetle remains may identify the type of animals kept in the tanyard and shed further light on this issue. Other indicators of foul, decaying organic matter and dung include the Staphylinidae *Oxytelus sculptus, Oxytelus nitidulus* and *Oxytelus tetricarinatus* and the hydrophilid *Cercyon haemorrhoidalis*, which were also abundant in this sample (Hansen 1987, Tottenham 1954).

Contexts 2011 and 2012

The assemblages from these samples also suggest quantities of foul and rotting material, whilst the synanthropic species that constitute the 'House' fauna are still found in large numbers. Several taxa also hint at the wider environment and indicate dry, open, well-vegetated grassland.

Taxa associated with typical 'House Fauna' are more numerous in these samples than the other, both in abundance and diversity. The lathridiid *Enicmus minutus* is found in relatively large numbers, as are the Cryptophagidae and the anobid *Anobium punctatum* (Hall and Kenward 1990, Kenward and Hall 1995).

The Carabidae *Clivina fossor*, *Trechus* spp. and *Bradycellus* spp. are all usually found in dry, well-vegetated, open ground (Lindroth 1974), as is the elaterid *Agriotes* spp. which is found in grassland and light woodland (1989). It is likely that these species are allocthonous and their presence is a result of transportation from the surrounding countryside, probably in hay. Further lignacious taxa in this sample include the Rhizaphagidae and the scolytid *Hylastes* spp.

that are all associated with species of pine (Bullock 1993, Koch 1989a). The presence of these species is likely to be associated with the wood linings of the tanning pits, and several species of *Rhizophagus* spp. and *Hylastes* spp. are more commonly associated with fallen, rotting pine wood (Koch 1989), which may make up some of the chippings

8.4 Further analysis.

None of the species identified is likely to have been associated with tanning pits (Hall & Kenward, 2003). Further fuller analysis of this material might yield more precise information, however, it appears likely that the samples looked at there post date the use of the site as a tannery.

9 DISCUSSION

The evaluation revealed that the footings of buildings and pits associated with the tannery complex were well preserved. The archaeological evidence also revealed that there had been an accumulation of garden soil across the site prior to the establishment of the tannery which contained 18th-century pottery. There was also evidence of silted palaeo-channels that predated occupation of the site. The majority of the artefactual evidence came from late 19th-century contexts, and deposits that post-dated the tanyard.

Comparison of the cartographic and archaeological evidence for the site reveals that the space between the two separate lines of tanning pits may relate to a boundary illustrated on the First Edition Ordinance Survey Map. This may reflect spatial divisions relating to the different processes associated with tanning (see section 3 above), and the division of the complex into different functional zones. It is possible that ditch 2015 represents part of this boundary, which may have originally been an open ditch which was latterly replaced by drain pipe. The division of tanneries into different functional zones is paralleled on other sites, for example at the Rhaedr tannery in Wales, and High Ousegate in York where there was evidence for the separation of the different processes (Cherry 1991, 297). Similarly, at a tannery excavated in Northampton the separation on the site could clarify this.

The First Edition Ordinance Survey Maps illustrates several structures and pits, which can be related to excavated features on the ground. The northern most structure in Trench 2 corresponds to this, however it was obviously cleared prior to demolition leaving no evidence, within the area of the evaluation, as to what function this particular building served. Although the mechanical and chemical processes of tanning are well understood, techniques can vary widely depending on local circumstances. Exactly how this particular tannery was operating, how it was organising production and what sort of output it was producing is unknown.

The structures to the south of the tannery can be directly related to pit complex 2021. The cartographic evidence suggests a roofed structure, and it is likely that this was open-sided to allow easy access to the raised pits or vats. This need for cover may have been due to some parts of the process being reliant on specific chemical balances in order to be fully effective. Shelter from rain, which could possibly change this balance and would certainly dilute solutions in which the hides were soaking, would have been considered necessary.

Early map evidence illustrates three long tanks situated centrally within the yard area. The archaeology demonstrated that these were subdivided into a series of multiple tanks, which could presumably have been used individually at different times. Given that processing the hides involved it soaking in bark solution for up to a year and a half, separate compartments

would have enabled the tanning complex to have been used over a prolonged period of time. The use of different lining materials, evident in the construction of the pits, may either relate to specific functions of specific pits, or the date of construction of the pits. Unfortunately, it was not possible to clarify this at the time of the evaluation. It is equally possible that either the brick or the wooden structures were later pits added to the complex during the life of the tannery. However, it may have been a case of continual repair and re-lining with whatever materials were cheapest or closest to hand at the time.

Unfortunately almost all of the finds excavated during the evaluation came from demolition layers across the site. On present evidence both the artefactual and the beetle analysis suggest that the tanning complex was cleared when it was abandoned. The beetle assemblage in particular suggests that the site was probably used for stabling, and there was no evidence of fauna associated with carrion. It also reveals that conditions within the pits were dry and that sometime later they were backfilled with general rubbish which may have included an abandoned stockpile of bark chippings which was used to level up the partially sunken tanning pits to ground level so that the yard could be used for stock. However, only a small fragment of the overall complex was investigated during the evaluation, and islands of survival may still exist across the site.

It is obvious from the results of this evaluation that the remains of the tanyard are well preserved on this site and it is probable that the majority, if not all, of the structures and pits illustrated in the historic maps survive. However, the question still remains as to how significant this is to our cultural heritage. To date only the remains of the final phase of occupation was excavated during the evaluation, which dates to the period following the closure of the tannery. It is probable that the property was unoccupied briefly before its conversion to stabling or stockyard. The area was then cleared, and the pits capped, perhaps in an effort to improve accommodation prior to the demolition of the buildings.

During the development of towns the majority of industries located in small towns were reliant on each other and the surrounding rural communities. Shifnal is a good example of this, demonstrating how various members of the community were interlinked. By the 18th century Shifnal had become a relatively large market town with established routes of communication well into the surrounding hinterland (Pearson and Nichol 2006, 2-3). The 1840 map of Shifnal demonstrates what must be an inter-reliance of trade and production in this small town, with apparently small-scale industry taking place within or close to the centre of the town. Other industries that are notable in the vicinity of the town include Brick Kiln Leasow, Rope Walk and Dye House Bank as well as a Smithy and the Tannery. The surrounding area consists of fields, the names of which suggest relatively low intensity arable land with crofts and allotments and areas of meadow. There are also areas of plantation and coppice that, in specific relation to the tanner and other industries, suggest a ready supply of bark and wood. Shifnal at this time has the appearance of a self-sufficient community, presumably producing surplus to support the demands of the staging post and the fair. The tannery fits well into this wider picture of rural-urban life, with supplies of materials available locally as well as a ready market for finished goods.

This evaluation has revealed that although there is good survival of structural remains across the site, the majority of the deposits associated with these buildings post-date the tannery phase of occupation. Comparison of the archaeology and the proposed development plans reveals that the majority of this complex will be preserved in-situ (Fig. 5).

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Fig.1



Fig.2







Fig.5



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5