



THE UNIVERSITY
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**Ménage on Land to the
rear of St. Leonard's
House, Wychnor,
Staffordshire:
An Archaeological
Watching Brief
2002**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit



Institute of Field
Archaeologists

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Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 975
December 2002

**Ménage on Land to the rear of St. Leonard's House,
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Ménage on Land to the rear of St. Leonard's House, Wychnor, Staffordshire: An Archaeological Watching Brief 2002

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on land to the rear of St. Leonard's House, Wychnor, Staffordshire (NGR SK 1780 1615) in September 2002. It was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Windley, during the construction of a new ménage, a rectangular area for the exercise of horses. The development site lies within the deserted medieval village of Wychnor, recorded on the County Sites and Monuments Record as PRN 00128, and near to a Scheduled Ancient Monument (PRN 22436). Previous archaeological work had been carried out to the west of the site, during the construction of a new stable block and the extension of Church Cottage (now St. Leonard's House). The aim of the watching brief was to record the extent, location and date of any archaeological features affected by the excavation of the new ménage. The watching brief was required by Staffordshire County Council in order to fulfill a condition of planning consent. No archaeological features were observed during the groundworks.

1.0 Introduction

This report details the results of the archaeological observation of the excavation of drainage channels and the topsoil strip for a new ménage, a rectangular area of land used for exercising horses, on land to the rear of St. Leonard's House, Wychnor (NGR SK 1780 1615). The work was commissioned by Mr. and Mrs. Windley and was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in September 2002. The watching brief was carried out in order to fulfill a condition of planning consent in accordance with advice from Chris Wardle, Development Control Archaeologist for Staffordshire County Council. The project followed the requirements set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (Institute of Field Archaeologists, revised 1999).

2.0 Site Location and Geology (Fig. 1)

The site lies near to the deserted medieval village of Wychnor (Staffordshire Sites and Monuments Record Number 00128), to the northeast of St. Leonard's Church and to the east of a new stable block, which was subject to archaeological evaluation and observation in 2000. Much of the area of the deserted medieval village lies to the south of St. Leonard's Church and in a field to the west of St. Leonard's House. The land for the new ménage was under pasture at the time of the groundworks.

The drift geology consists of sand and river terrace gravel. The village lies on sloping ground immediately above the edge of the floodplain of the River Trent.

3.0 Archaeological Background

Wychnor is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 as being held by Robert of Stafford (Derby 1977). It is described as consisting of four villagers and two smallholders, with land for four ploughs, a mill, meadow and woodland with a total value of 15s. The basic pattern of settlement in medieval Staffordshire had been established by 1086 and did not alter much in the next two centuries. Wychnor bridge was on Icknield Street and provided an important crossing over the marshy valleys of the River Trent (VCH Vol. II). Such was its importance that it was gifted oak trees from the crown forest at Cannock Chase. Medieval villages began to decline from the 14th Century, and this was true in southeast Staffordshire, where one in every two villages or hamlets began to disappear, possibly due to pestilence and climatic deterioration (Palliser 1976).

Previous archaeological work in the area includes, an evaluation and watching brief during the construction of a new stable block, to the west of the site, undertaken in 2000 and resulted in the location of two linear gullies containing medieval pottery (Mather 2000). These features were interpreted as possible drainage features associated with a former trackway or field boundary. Between October and June 2000, an evaluation and a watching brief were carried out in the vicinity of Church Cottage (now St. Leonard's House), which was undergoing an extension. Those excavations also found evidence of drainage gullies that were broadly medieval in date, but no actual settlement activity. No further evidence of medieval activity was found during the watching brief. The only archaeological feature affected by the ground works for the new extension was a well of Victorian date (Litherland 2000).

In 2001 a watching brief was carried out during the redevelopment of Cunnery Farm, to the northeast of St. Leonard's Church. During this phase of work an undated ditch was found and a single sherd of Bronze Age pottery was found in the ploughsoil (Cutler 2001).

4.0 Aims

The general aim of the archaeological watching brief was to record any archaeological remains uncovered during the course of groundworks, in order to contribute to an understanding of the nature, extent and significance of any archaeological remains within the area.

The specific aim of the watching brief was to identify any archaeological remains associated with the known deserted medieval village.

5.0 Method

The area for the new ménage measured 20m by 40m and was stripped of the topsoil only. Five drainage channels, each approximately 20m in length and 0.3m wide, were excavated to a depth of 0.4m. The trenches were excavated with a mini-digger under archaeological supervision. All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-forma for

contexts and features, supplemented by plans (at 1:20 and 1:50), sections (at 1:10 and 1:20), monochrome print and colour slide photography, that, together with recovered artefacts and environmental evidence, form the site archive, which is stored at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

6.0 Results (Fig. 2; Plates 1 & 2)

The stripping of the turf and the topsoil in the area did not reveal any archaeological features or artefact scatters. The excavation of the drainage channels proved that they were also devoid of any archaeology. The drainage channels were cut into a mid-brown silt-sand subsoil, which contained many pebbles, the natural soil was not revealed. The topsoil strip of the southern end of the ménage area was very shallow, with only the turf removed, this was because this area was to be built up using stone to make the surface level.

7.0 Discussion

The absence of any archaeological evidence found during this watching brief does not necessarily mean that this particular area contains no archaeological deposits. The probability that archaeology exists in this field is still high, due to the extensive earthwork features of the deserted medieval village in the surrounding fields. The nature of the ménage construction meant that excavations were not deep or wide and ground disturbance was minimal. The excavation did not reveal any archaeology. It may be that features exist at a greater depth than the level the drainage channels reached and, if this is the case, then they will remain protected *in situ*.

8.0 Acknowledgements

The watching brief was carried out by Charlotte Neilson, who also wrote this report. It was edited by Gary Coates, who managed the project. The illustrations are the work of Bryony Ryder and the plates were prepared by Ed Newton.

The work was commissioned by Mr.C.L.Windley and thanks are due to John Day and his team for their assistance and co-operation.

The project was monitored by Chris Wardle, Development Control Archaeologist, on behalf of Staffordshire County Council.

9.0 References

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Figures

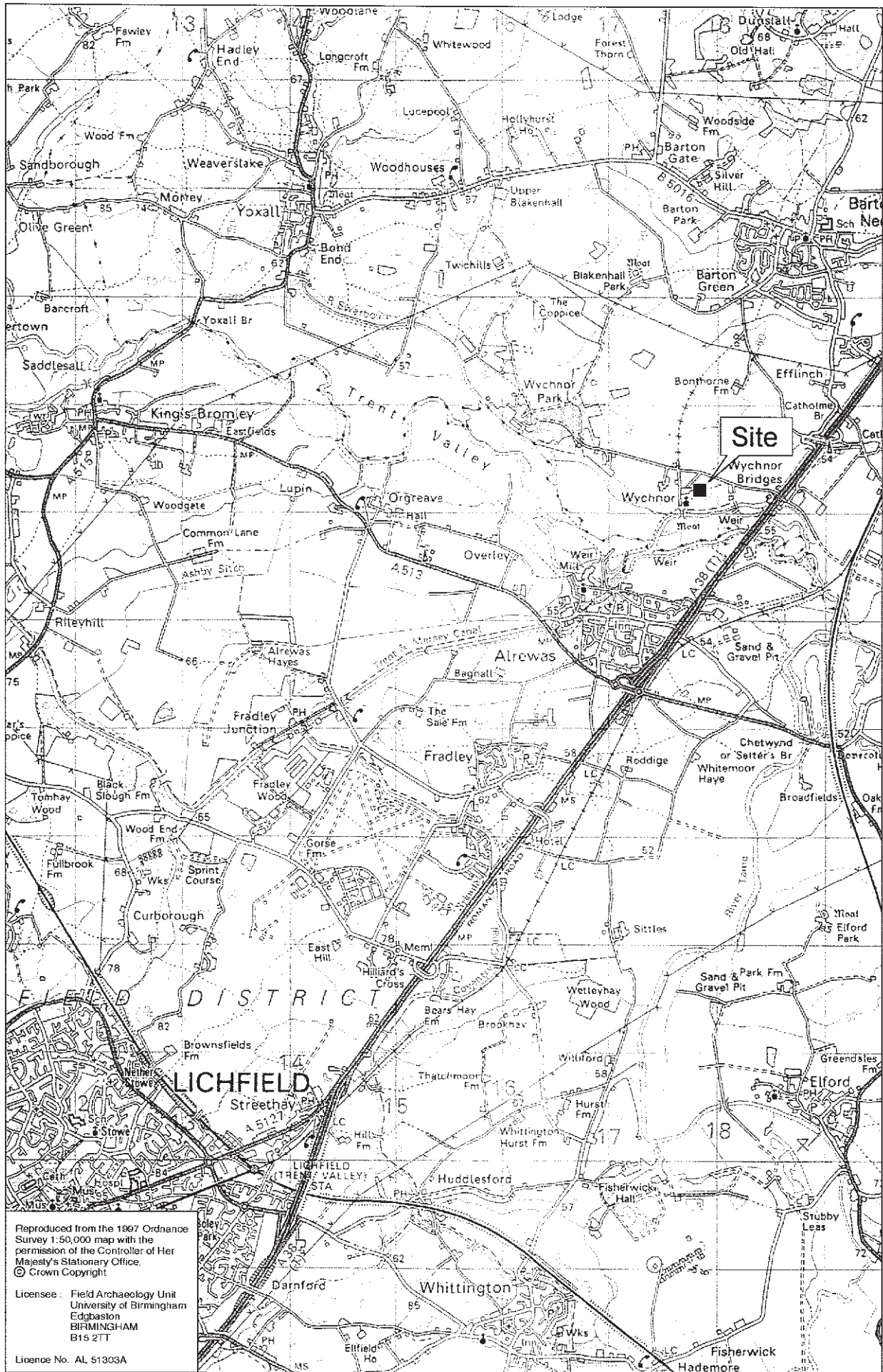


Fig.1

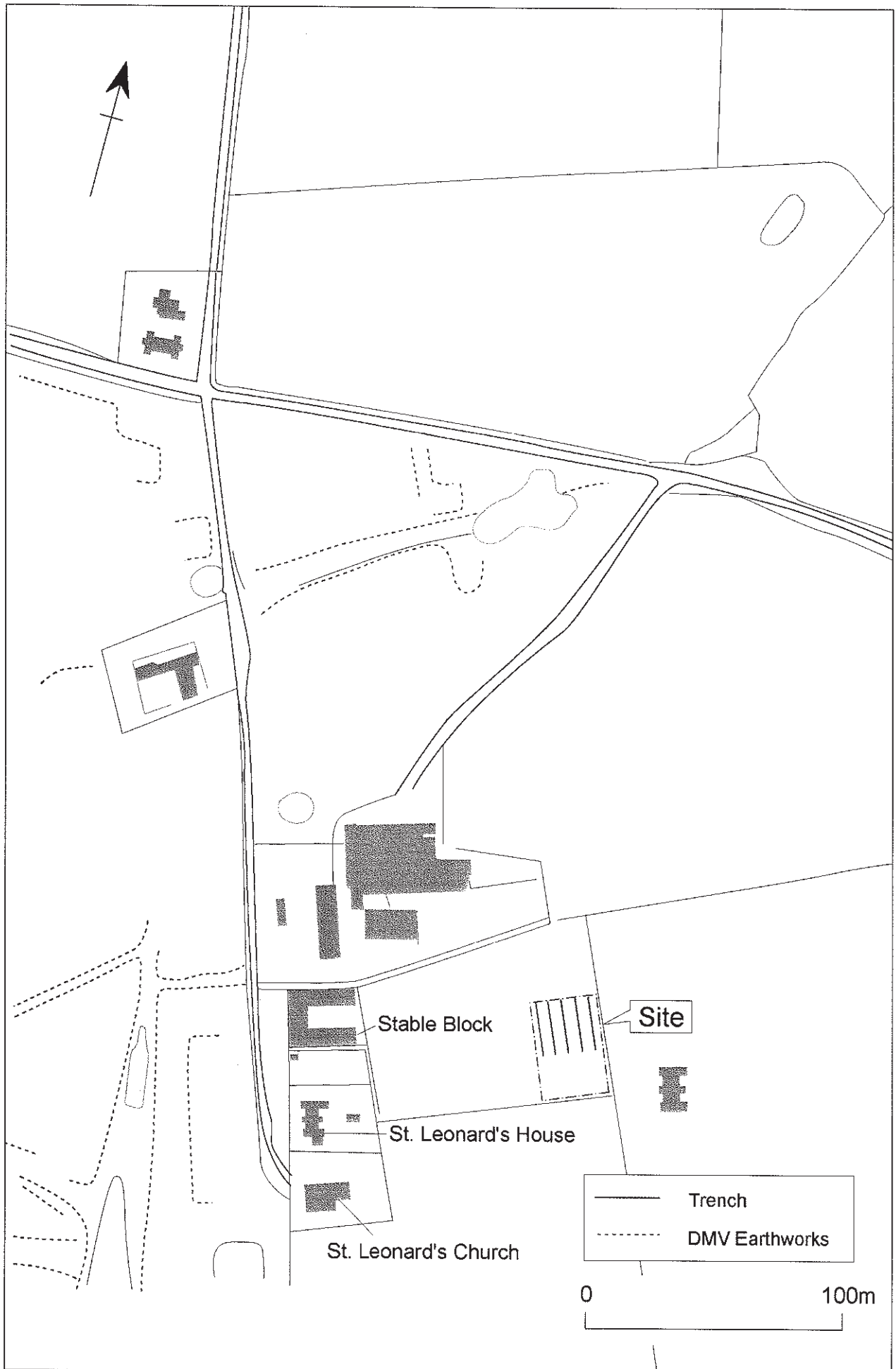


Fig.2

Plates



Plate 1

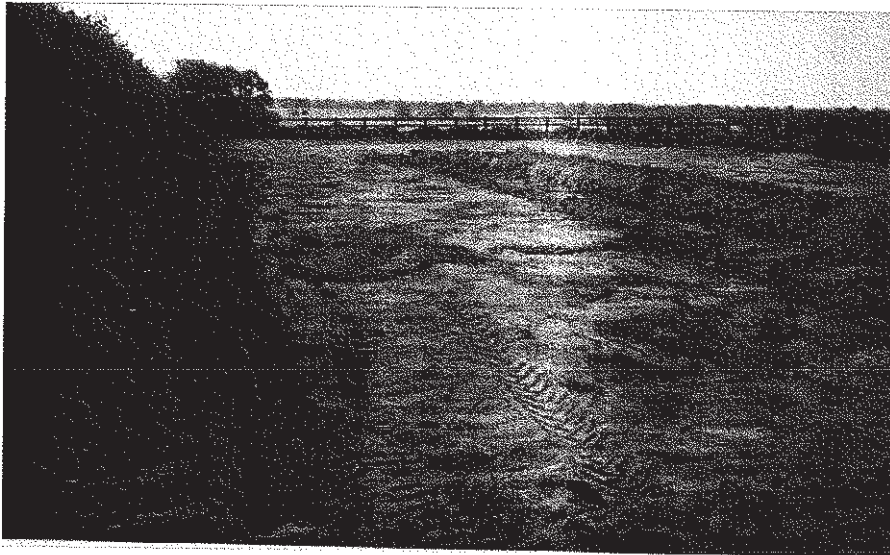


Plate 2