



Wharton Court, Leominster, Herefordshire:
archaeological evaluation

Huw Sherlock and P J Pikes
2001



archenfield archaeology ltd

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Archenfield Archaeology Ltd is a multidisciplinary archaeological consultancy, offering a complete range of archaeological advice and services to the public and private sector. We specialise in giving archaeological advice to developers, housing associations and private individuals. We also undertake archaeological intervention, from monitoring to full-scale excavation; building survey; landscape and geophysical surveys and community-based historical and archaeological projects.

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Cover Photograph: Wharton Court looking north-east



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Summary

Archenfield Archaeology conducted an archaeological evaluation in advance of an agricultural building development at Wharton Court Farm, Leominster, Herefordshire. The area of the development was in a field immediately to the north of Wharton Court, an early 17th century Grade II listed building.*

Wharton was a Domesday Manor which appears to have originally belonged to the Anglo Saxon Abbey at Leominster prior to its dissolution in 1046. It was returned to the church in 1123 and remained a property of the re-founded Priory at Leominster until Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries in 1539.

Neither archaeological structures nor artefacts were found during the excavation and cartographic evidence suggests the probability that the area was part of the open strip fields of Wharton until the early 19th century.

1.0 Introduction

NGR SO 5110 5600

Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record - Event No 31058

Hereford City Museum Accession No 2001-6

Mr. Nick Helme (the client) commissioned a programme of archaeological work following consultation with Herefordshire Council Archaeology Service who requested that a preliminary evaluation should take place. This was in response to a planning application for permission to construct a new mushroom growing unit and to extend agricultural buildings.

The proposed development would affect, or potentially affect, a site on which archaeological remains of importance might have existed. The available archaeological information suggests that a programme of archaeological works was necessary to fulfil the aims of the County Structure Plan and the District Local Plan

The site is located approximately two and a half miles south east of Leominster Priory, and is bounded to the west by the A49 main trunk road and to the east by the river Lugg. The site lies in the open fields to the north of the farm, which form part of the flood plain of the Lugg. Wharton Court is recorded by the Royal Commission as being an early 17th century building.

The fieldwork took place in February 2001.

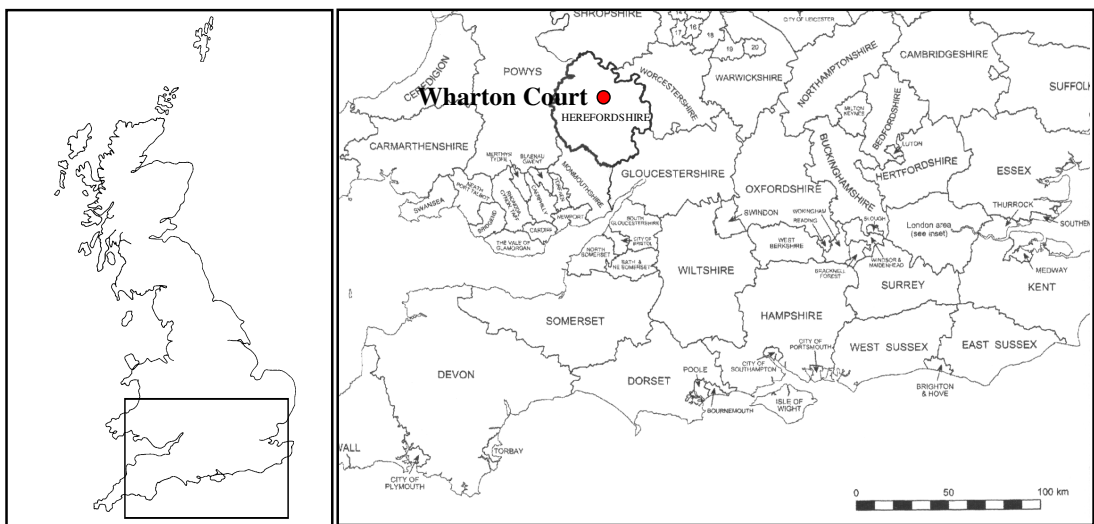


Figure 1: Location plan (OS Superplan data reproduced under license drawing ref. Number 26103978)

2.0 Geological, historical and archaeological background

2.1 Geological background and land use

Wharton Court Farm lies just off the A49, 2 miles south of Leominster and 10 miles north of Hereford.

The site lies on the flood plain of the River Lugg. Beneath the drift, the solid geology of area consists of beds of the Lower Old Red Sandstone including Downtonian (British Geological Survey Ten Mile Map, third edition (solid) 1979). At the time of the field project, the area had most recently been used for potato growing.

The mean height of the surface of the field was 68.3 OD.

2.2 historical background

Wharton was historically a township within the parish of Leominster. It is within the Leominster civil parish but an ecclesiastic parish of Ivington was created in 1844 to encompass the local townships of Ivington, Brierley, Wharton and part of Cholestrey (Blacklock, 1897).

Wharton is *Wavertune* in Domesday, *Wavertuna* in c.1160 and *Warton* in 1599. The name appears to mean a 'settlement by something wavering' but the significance of this is unknown (Copleston-Crow, 1989).

In Domesday *Wavertune* was part of the king's lands and was held in chief by William of Ecuic. It appears to have originally been part of the property of Leominster Abbey which had fallen to the crown, or more specifically Queen Edith, after the abbey had been dissolved in 1049 and had subsequently been held by Wulfward (Thorne and Thorne, 1983).¹

It had one hide in lordship with 2 ploughs, one cottar with ½ plough and four bordars. Its value in 1066 and 1086 was 20s.

The original foundation of the abbey at Leominster was by Merewald, King of the Magonsaete in 660 AD. Merewald endowed his new foundation with estates in the surrounding area² and Wharton probably formed part of this endowment. This first establishment was destroyed by the Danes in 980 and rebuilt in 1042.³

The pre-Norman abbey at Leominster was dissolved following the scandal arising from seduction of the Abbess, Edgiva, by Earl Swein. Swein was the eldest of the sons of Earl Godwine and the brother-in-Law of King Edward the Confessor⁴. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle text C (the Abingdon Chronicle), which tends to place the worst interpretation on the deeds of the house of Godwine, says that '*he ordered the abbess of Leominster to be brought to him and kept her as long as it suited him, and then he let her go home*'.⁵ There are other versions, and it is also recounted that Swein abandoned his earldom because he was not permitted to marry the woman (Stenton, 1971, p429).

¹ A re-foundation of the house as a Benedictine Priory in the early 12th Century established it as a daughter house of Reading Abbey.

² An illustrated talk by J Hillaby at the 2nd 1982 Autumn meeting of the Woolhope Naturalists Field Club. Recorded in the *Transaction of the Woolhope Naturalists Field Club* for that year

³ *ibid*.

⁴ Swein was the first of Godwine's sons to die, on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1052 in expiation of his sins. Three other sons died at Hastings, Harold, then king, and his younger brothers Gyrth and Leofwine. By then another son, Tosti, was already dead, having been killed at Stamford Bridge fighting against Harold.

⁵ In *English Historical Documents*, Volume II, 1042-1189, edited by David C Douglas and George W Greenaway.

The abbess herself seems to be pensioned off with one of the abbey's other manors, Fencote, which she held of the king in 1086 (Thorn and Thorn). There is an irony in the properties of the abbey being in the hands of the Queen Edith as a result of misconduct by her brother but the dissolution of a religious house because of the behaviour of its head seems a somewhat severe reaction (Round, 1908).

In 1123 Henry I re-founded Reading Abbey, and at this time Leominster too was re-established, this time as a priory and a daughter house to Reading (Reeves, 1972). Manors which had previously been confiscated were returned, and among them was Wharton - *Wavertuna* - (Townsend, 1863).

The manor seems to have remained with Leominster Priory until its dissolution in 1539 when John Glover, the last Prior, and the other monks, were turned out (*ibid.* p45).⁶

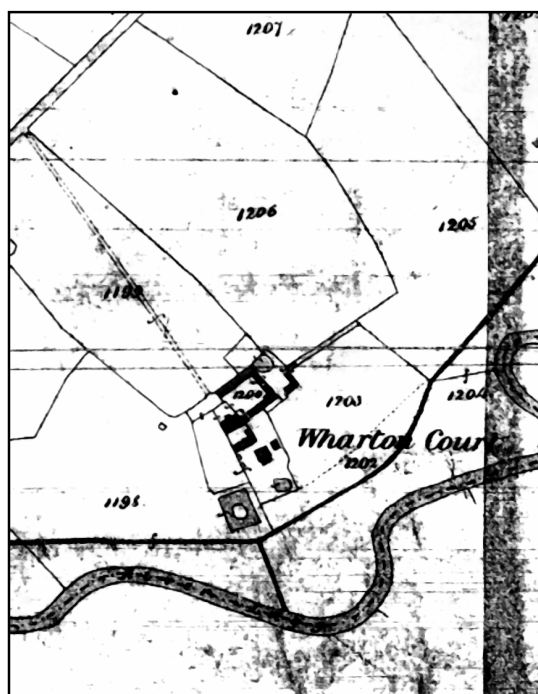


Figure 2: Extract from the 1849 Leominster Tithe map.

In 1799, the then landowner, George Capel Coningsby, Earl of Essex, leased *Wharton-Court-ffarm*⁷ to John and Edward Yeld. The property at this time consisted of 267 acres (108.135 ha).⁸ By 1838 the owner was John Arkwright who had acquired it, together with the Great Coningsby house at nearby Hampton Court (McCarthy, 1964). The occupier was Edward Hodges who farmed a total of 230 acres (93.15 ha).⁹

Figure 2 shows an extract from the 1849 tithe map. The field investigated by the project was number 1206. It was known as Great Orchard although it was described as being under grass rather than orchard.

In 1879, Thomas Meredith, farmer, was listed in the commercial section of Kelly's Directory as the occupant of Wharton Court. The 1895 directory lists, this time in the private resident's section, the Misses Meredith at Wharton Court. By 1905 the property had moved firmly back into the commercial area with the entry *Partridge, Arthur, farmer and hop grower, Court Farm, Wharton*.

⁶ The Right of the Lordship of the Manor of Leominster was bought by Lord Coningsby from Major Wildman for £3060 in 1692 - from a notebook of Joseph Yates, a Leominster man who spent much time as a guest of the Arkwrights at Hampton Court, records that it was built by Robert Whitehall, a citizen of London, and that it was then called Wharton Hall (document in the Arkwright Collection in Herefordshire Record Office - A63/III/72/1)

⁷ The ff form of capital F is a characteristic of certain hand styles, e.g. the secretary hand, between the 14th and the 18th centuries.

⁸ Lease in Herefordshire Record Office – Document A63/III/19/1

⁹ Tithe Apportionments for Leominster 1850

Wharton Court itself is a Grade II* listed building.¹⁰ The RCHME¹¹ entry for Wharton Court records the house as being built in 1604 by Richard Whitehall¹², and also gives the date of the barns to the north west of the house as 17th century. This Jacobean house had a porch added in 1659 (Pevsner). A moat lies some 70 yards to the east of the house and has a small rectangular island enclosed within it.

¹⁰ Grade II* listed buildings are '*particularly important buildings of more than special interest*' (Dept. of National Heritage).

¹¹ Royal Commission on Historic Monuments, England

¹² Joseph Yates' notebook records that it was built by Robert Whitehall, a citizen of London, and that it was then called Wharton Hall .

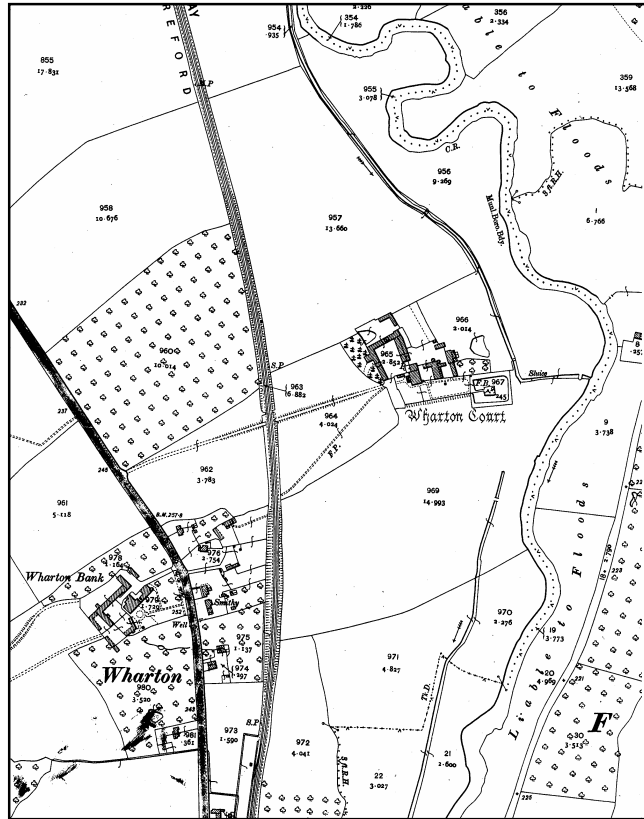


Figure 3: Extract from the OS 1904 2nd edition 1:2500 plan.

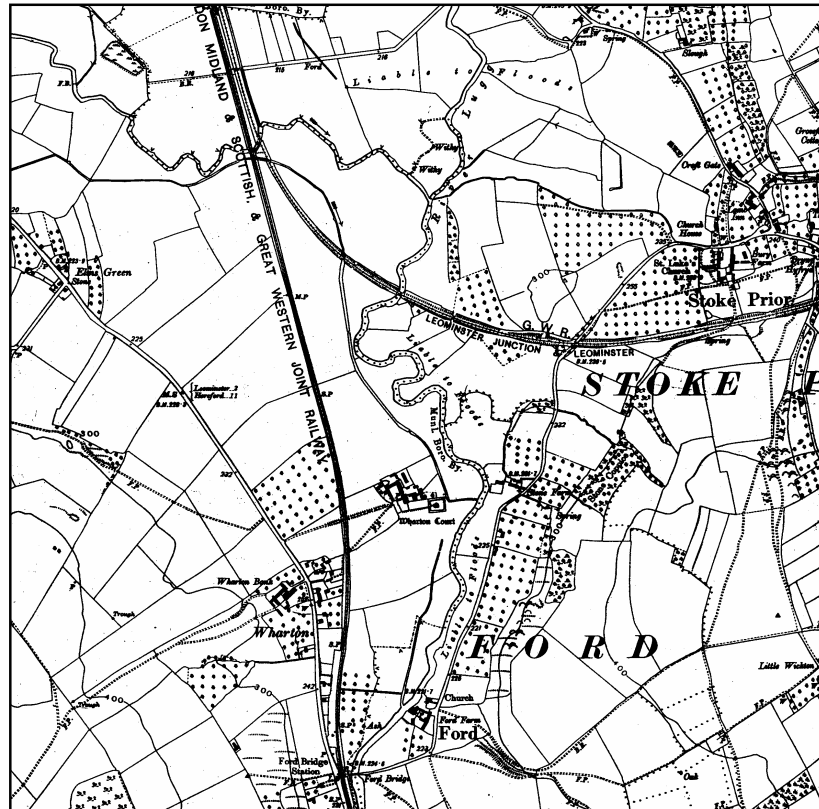


Figure 4: Extract from OS 1930 1:10560 map

2.3 Archaeological background

Leominster was archaeologically assessed in 1996 (Buteux). This survey covered the area of the historic borough but not that of the outlying members, of which Wharton is one. Medieval pottery has been found at Wharton Court but this only amounted to two sherds of '*unglazed cooking pot*'.¹³

The small rectangular water-filled feature to the south-west of the farm is identified as a moat on Ordnance Survey maps. It has been suggested that this is a duck decoy (reported in Shoesmith, 1996). It seems likely to be some sort of water-garden associated with the house.

In the field immediately south of the farm, and adjacent to the 'moat', an extensive complex of well defined earthworks were recorded in 1983 (Mills, 1983).¹⁴ These were fairly substantial features which included two definite and several probable house platforms, together with hollow-ways. Probing with metal rods disclosed that the two definite house platforms had stone footings along their edges. The whole cluster was strongly suggestive of a deserted medieval village.

To the west of Wharton Court the present small settlement of Wharton itself contains four 17th century houses,¹⁵ three of which are Grade II listed buildings.¹⁶

¹³ Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record number 9401

¹⁴ Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record number 5163¹⁴

¹⁵ Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record numbers 5214, 5215, 5216 and 5217

¹⁶ References 808-1/4/309, 808-1/4/310 and 808-1/4/311

3.0 Project aims and objectives

The aims of the project were: -

- To examine, by trenching, a representative area of the proposed development for evidence of human activity.
- The excavations were to be of a sufficient depth to ensure that, unless significant archaeological remains were present, natural pre-archaeological deposits were encountered.
- A textual, photographic and drawn record of any archaeological structures and deposits was to be made.
- This work was to be carried out by means of standard archaeological techniques, following standard Institute of Field Archaeologists guidelines for archaeological excavation, and the methodology laid out in the Archenfield Archaeology Site Recording Manual.
- To record the presence of sensitive archaeological material within all the trenches and in the spoil removed during the excavation, and to retrieve any potential dating evidence.
- To make a record of all finds and any environmental material recovered.
- To ensure that the location and of the area excavated was accurately recorded on a suitably scaled plan.
- To record negative evidence and to consider its implications.
- To ensure that where important archaeological remains existed, plans for the preservation *in-situ* of such remains was discussed with the Archaeological Advisor to Herefordshire Council and the client.
- To ensure that a recording strategy was adopted that allowed for the production of a stratigraphic record of the deposits encountered, and a record of the extent and depth of the excavations.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Field methodology

The following methodology was employed: -

- Three 10 by 2 metre trenches were appropriately positioned within the development area.
- These were excavated by means of a 360° tracked mechanical excavator.
- Suitably qualified archaeologists monitored all activity that involved disturbance of the ground surface.
- A record was made of the location and depth of the trenches and of the soils exposed within them.
- Staff carrying out the evaluation excavation followed the guidelines laid down in the Archenfield Archaeology Health and Safety Policy.
- Archenfield Archaeology conforms to the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Code of Conduct and code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology. All projects are, where applicable, carried out in accordance with IFA Standards and Guidance or Draft Standards and Guidance.

4.2 Processing methodology

The project produced little that called for post-excavation processing. Within this limitation the standard Archenfield Archaeology methodology was applied: -

- Ink versions of site drawings were produced
- All data were entered into a Microsoft Access relational database

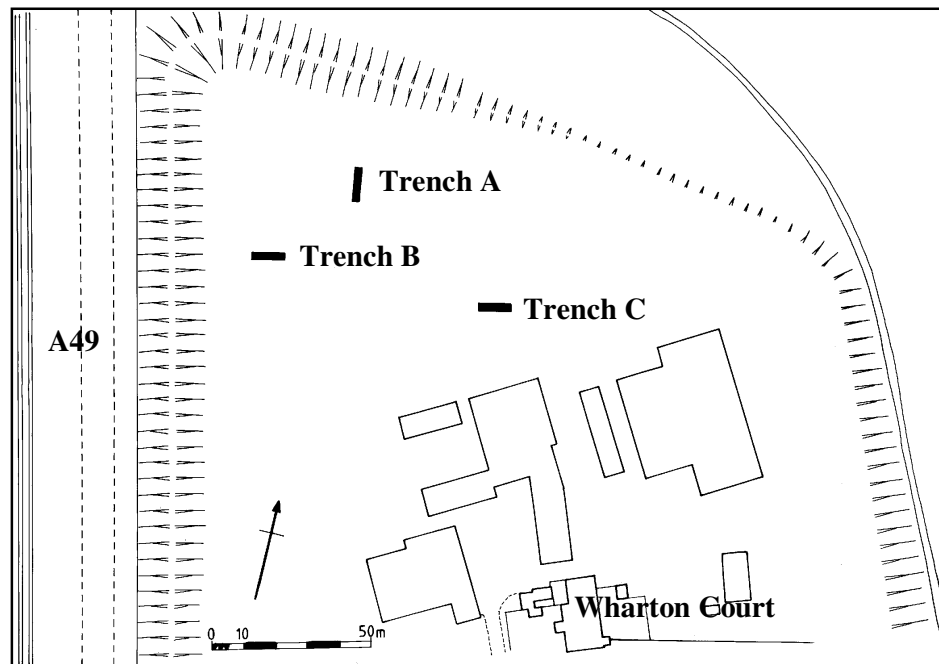


Figure 5: Trench plan

5.0 The results

Trench A

Trench A was excavated towards the northern edge of the proposed development and measured 10 by 2 metres, aligned north to south. The upper layer was a humic ploughsoil. Excavation ceased at a depth of 1.2 metre, where there was clear undisturbed alluvium. No archaeological feature or deposits were encountered.

Trench B

Trench B was excavated towards the western edge of the proposed development and measured 10 by 2 metres, aligned east to west. The ploughsoil was removed and excavation continued into the underlying alluvial deposit. Again, excavation ceased at a depth of 1 metre, where it was into clear undisturbed alluvium. Again no archaeological feature or deposits were encountered.

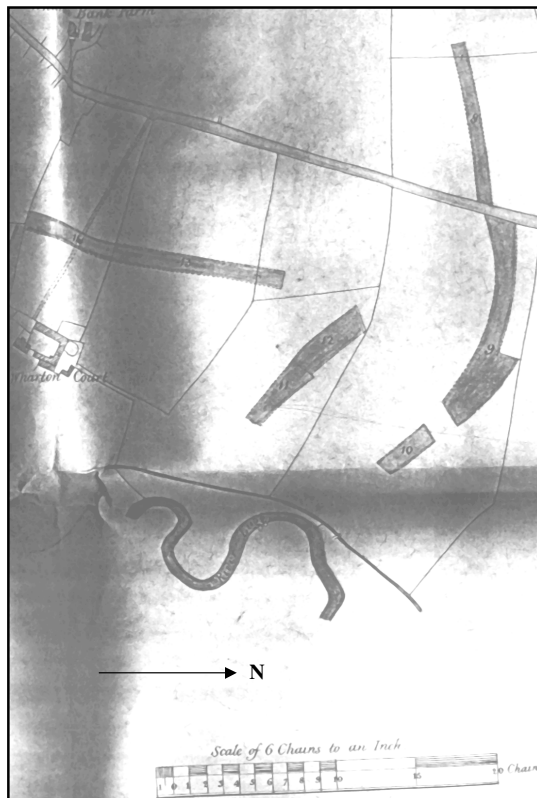
Trench C

Trench C was excavated in the south eastern part of the proposed development. It measured 10 by 2 metres, and it was aligned east to west. The removal of the ploughsoil here exposed a bed of riverine gravel at a depth of 1 metre. No archaeology was present.

6.0 Conclusions

The lack of archaeological features or deposits and the absence of artefacts suggest that this area had always been fields. The plan, which accompanied the 1849 transfer of lands between Brasenose College and Arkwright, supports the interpretation that this was still true at that time.

The sinuous plots shown on the plan indicate medieval field strips. The boundaries shown on the tithe map (Figure 2) are superimposed upon this older pattern. The road too, is post- medieval and seems to cut the later field boundaries, although less obviously than it does the medieval ones.



At the time of the tithe map the name of the field investigated by this project was Great Orchard. This must indicate a previous use as the use is given as 'grass'.

In the early 1850s the Abergavenny, Hereford and Shrewsbury Railway bisected the early 19th century field and it was reduced in size still further by the construction of the Leominster By-pass on the A49 which opened in 1989 (pers. comm. Mr. Tom Davis, Herefordshire Council).

The field strips suggest arable use in the late medieval period. Local produce in the post medieval period may have included flax. This was such a notable crop that dubious etymology linked it to the place-name Leominster - *linum* - flax. Leominster wheat too, was highly valued and the hamlet would certainly have grown that.¹⁷ Above all, would have been the sheep. The value of Leominster wool - *Lemster Ore* was the highest in England and sheep would certainly have been fed in the area.¹⁸

Figure 6: Property Boundaries in 1849. The River Lugg is at the bottom. Above, the sinuous strips are typical of medieval field systems.

The recorded earthworks to the south of the 17th century Wharton Court must represent the likely location of the Domesday hamlet with its one cottar and four

¹⁷ Leominster - 'some, indeed derive it from *Linum*, Flax, an excellent sort of which grows here: but its chief glory at present is from the wool of its sheep fed in the neighbouring grounds, called Lemster Ore, which Europe in general prefers to all, except that of Apulia and Tarentum. It Produces so much wheat and such excellent white bread, that *Lemster bread and Weobley ale* have become proverbial' - William Camden, *Britannia*, Vol III page 67.

¹⁸ The value of this wool is indicated by a 1454 act of parliament which fixed the price of 'Herefordshire wool in Lemyst' at £13 per bag in comparison with £8 6s 8d per bag for Cotswold wool (Roskell, 1992, p437).

bordars. The present hamlet of Wharton lies to the west on the old main road between Hereford and Leominster (now superseded by the new Leominster bypass). This small settlement, with its group of 17th century cottages, may be the result of re-location of Wharton at the same time as the house was built.

The evidence taken together - the earthworks of the medieval hamlet, the field strips shown on the 18th century map, illustrate at least some of the components of the local medieval landscape.

The area of the development was part of the open fields of the medieval township of Wharton, which was probably a manor of the religious house at Leominster for most of its history, the Domesday survey taking place in a relatively brief period when it was in other hands.

The area of the evaluation was to become a mushroom growing unit. This is only the most recent evolution of a long process of agricultural usage of this piece of land. The medieval strip fields became enclosed and re-allocated. Then roads and railways bisected the enclosed fields. The crops too changed – the last crop that had been grown on the field as it existed in February 2001 was potato. This root would have been virtually unknown until comparatively recently.¹⁹

¹⁹

At the end of the 18th century, at least in England, potatoes were mixed with flour to make bread – The Hereford Journal reported on 24th February 1796 '*Great exertions are making, we understand, in cultivating waste pieces of ground in various parts of the kingdom, particularly with that valuable root the potatoe, which is now found to be of the greatest consequence as a substitute for flour; and it is an excellent food without mixture*'. Eating potatoes 'without mixture' was to become more common.

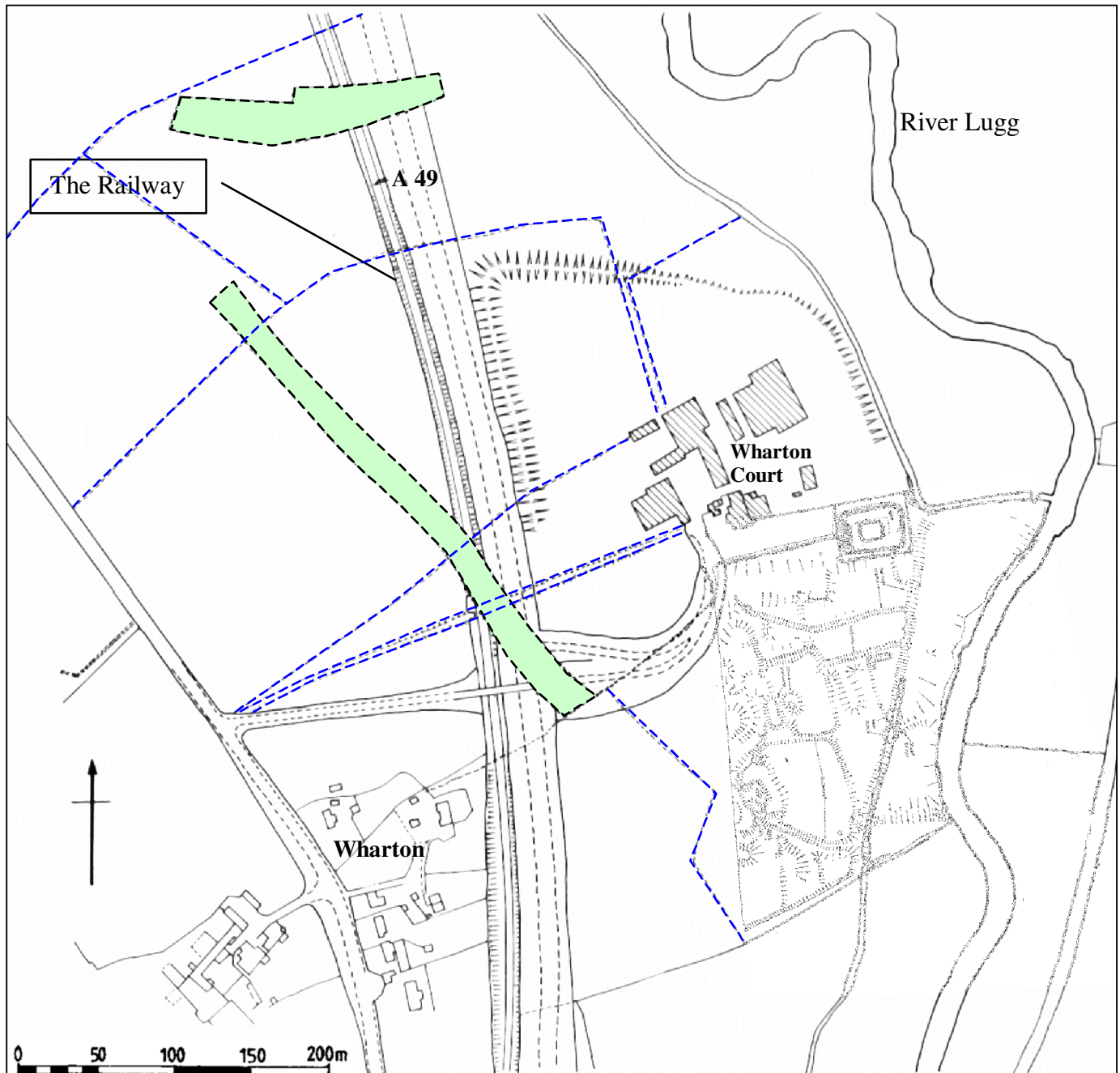


Figure 7: Elements of the medieval hamlet of Wharton. The areas coloured green show the positions of the fields exchanged between Brasenose College and Richard Arkwright. The blue dotted lines show the boundaries of fields shown on the tithe map. The plan of the medieval earthworks south of Wharton Court is taken from an unpublished survey (Mills, Nigel, 1983, ed.).

7.0 Archive deposition

The primary project archive, consisting of the site plan and copies of documents, will be prepared and stored in accordance with the guidelines laid down in the Institute of Field Archaeologists' guidelines for the preparation and storage of archives. The primary archive will be stored with Hereford City Museum.

A copy of the digital archive, stored on CD and consisting of context data, together with the site plan and selected photographs, will accompany the primary archive.

8.0 Publication and dissemination proposals

Paper copies of this report will be lodged with the Archaeological Adviser to Herefordshire Council, Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record and Hereford City Library. A short note on the project will be prepared for publication in the Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists Field Club.

CDs of this report, together with the supporting archival material will be available from Archenfield Archaeology.

The complete photographic record, including the negatives, will be retained by Archenfield Archaeology.

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Cartographic material

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Ordnance Survey, 1904

Ordnance Survey, 1891

Ordnance Survey, 1930

Ordnance Survey, 1964

Ordnance Survey, 1972

Ordnance Survey, 1990

Ordnance Survey, 2001

Leominster Parish Tithe Map

2nd edition 1:2500 plan. County Series, Herefordshire Sheet XIX.8

1st edition 1:10560 County Series, Herefordshire Sheet XIX NE

1:10560 County Series, Herefordshire Sheet XIX NE

1:10560 Sheet SO 55 NW

1:2500 Sheet SO 5055-5155

1:10000 Sheet SO 55 NW

Superplan data

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