

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION OF LAND OFF
JACOBAN LANE, KNOWLE,
SOLIHULL

Steve Litherland

With a contribution by Laura Griffin

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt and Tom Rogers

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Project 3167
Report 1592

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An Archaeological Evaluation of Land off Jacobean Lane, Knowle, Solihull

Steve Litherland (project leader)

With a contribution by Laura Griffin

Part 1 Project summary

1.

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken of land adjacent to Grove Farm situated off Jacobean Lane, Knowle, Solihull (NGR 417870 278240). This was requested by Cathy Patrick of CgMs Consulting on behalf of Grand Union Marine and Leisure Ltd (the Client) who intend to apply for planning permission to construct a mooring facility.

The evaluation was required by Warwickshire County Council following an archaeological desk-based assessment and aerial photographic analysis that had identified a potential for the survival of archaeological features on the site of prehistoric and medieval date. Twenty one trenches of fifty metres in length were excavated, representing a four per cent sample of the proposed development area.

No archaeological deposits or features were identified. Two pieces of 18th century pottery were recovered from the topsoil, along with other sherds of 19th century date, mainly from the vicinity of the adjacent Grand Union Canal. Environmental remains were poorly preserved and of no significance in the interpretation of this site.

The lack of artefacts pre-dating the post medieval period would lead to the conclusion that no significant activity, other than pasture-based farming, was occurring here prior to that period. What is indicated is that this farming regime was improved in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries – evidence for which is also mirrored in the developmental history preserved within the standing buildings of Grove Farm. In this context the growing population of nearby towns like Birmingham would have provided a ready, expanding, and profitable market for dairy and meat products, and the story of Grove Farm no doubt mirrors numerous other farms in the locality. Given the paucity of tangible evidence recovered during this evaluation, it is not relevant to relate these results to broader archaeological research frameworks at a local, regional or national level.

Part 2 Detailed report

2. Background

2.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken of land off Jacobean Lane, Knowle, Solihull (NGR 417870 278240; Figure 1). This was requested by Cathy Patrick of CgMs Consulting on behalf of Grand Union Marine and Leisure Ltd (the Client) who intend to apply for planning permission to construct a mooring facility (CgMs 2007a) and conforms to a brief provided by Warwickshire County Council (WCC 2007).

The archaeological background to the site is given in a desk-based assessment for the site prepared by CgMs Ltd (CgMs 2007b). This document indicated that there was potential for the survival of archaeological features on the site of prehistoric and medieval date.

2.2 Project parameters

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IFA 1999). A project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (WHEAS 2007) and approved prior to the commencement of the project.

2.3 Aims

The aims of the type of project were to locate archaeological deposits and determine, if present, their extent, state of preservation, date, type, vulnerability and documentation. The purpose of this was to establish their significance, since this would make it possible to recommend an appropriate treatment, which may then be integrated with the proposed development programme.

More specifically the following aims have been identified.

- To assess the evidence for potential prehistoric or medieval activity within the proposed development area.

3. Methods

3.1 Documentary search

Prior to fieldwork commencing a desk-top assessment and aerial photographic analysis was carried out by CgMs (CgMs 2007b). No further historical research was carried out as a part of the evaluation.

3.2 Fieldwork methodology

3.2.1 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by the Service (WHEAS 2007).

Fieldwork was undertaken in December 2007.

A total of 21 50m long trenches were excavated, representing c4% of the 4.76 hectare site. The location of these trenches is indicated in Figure 2. Trenches were located to transect aerial photographic features as well as to evaluate apparently blank areas.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 360° tracked excavator, employing a toothless bucket under archaeological supervision. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995).

The following techniques were considered for use but were not considered to be appropriate for this project; geophysical survey, fieldwalking and topographic/earthwork survey.

3.2.2 **Structural analysis**

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

3.2.3 **Artefact recovery policy**

All artefacts from the area of the evaluation were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended). All hand-retrieved finds were examined and a primary record was made. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated and a *terminus post quem* date produced for each stratified context. The pottery and ceramic building material was examined under x20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst 1994).

3.2.4 **Environmental recovery policy**

The environmental sampling strategy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995, appendix 4). In the event no environmental samples were taken during the evaluation as no suitable datable deposits were identified.

3.3 **The methods in retrospect**

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. The weather was good throughout the course of the fieldwork and the nature of the subsoil allowed easy identification of any archaeological features cut into it.

4. **Topographical and archaeological context**

The topographical and archaeological context of the evaluation is set out in section 3.0 of the desk-based assessment (CgMs 2007b). In summary, the superficial geology largely consists of undifferentiated sands and gravels, although alluvium and clay is also present associated with the drainage system that empties into the River Blythe, a kilometre to the northeast. The underlying geology belongs to the Mercia Mudstone Group, although the poorly drained highest half of the field, where the proposed access road is to be located, is in fact a large dump of material deposited here when the nearby M42 was built in the 1980s. A series of faults are also known to surround the site. A distinctive area of soft shaley limestone corresponded with a southwest-northeast running depression from Grove Farm towards the pond adjacent to the Grand Union Canal. Earthwork evidence suggested that this area may have been excavated in the past, either in order to recover the limestone, or for fishponds. The enclosure to the southeast of the evaluation area had also been extensively quarried for limestone for agriculture or building, and clay for lining the canal (*pers.comm.* previous tenant farmer).



Plate 1. Access route location



Plate 2 General view of canal and pond



Plate 3 Earthworks between pond and Grove Farm

Grove Farm is situated on a river terrace of the Blythe, at a height of roughly 125m A.O.D. The land falls generally in an easterly direction towards the canal, which is embanked on its northeastern side above a stream in the bottom of the valley that drains into the Blythe.

Only potential for prehistoric or medieval activity was identified by the desk-based assessment, based upon known sites in the vicinity. It is probable that pasture has been the predominant land use in this area for several centuries although the survival of ridge and furrow in the surrounding fields (some of which is recorded on the HER as MSI 87631) is evidence that more intensive agriculture was practised prior to enclosure. No obvious evidence for ploughing or assarting (tree clearance) was found during the evaluation, but the pasture may have been improved from the 17th or 18th century onwards which is from when the majority of the trees comprising the historic hedgerows appeared to date. This improvement, in turn with scatters of pottery of 19th century date adjacent to the canal, may account for the background noise of pottery scatters of this and later dates found in the topsoil here, as well as for the presence of clover.

5. Results

Apart from numerous field drains of 19th and 20th century date no other archaeological features were identified by the evaluation, with the exception of an undated discrete thin patch of blue clay at the southeast end of Trench 9. Several of the later field drains corresponded with linear cropmarks identified by the aerial photographic analysis, while another more amorphous cropmark was considered to be the product of recent farming activity. The pottery recovered from the topsoil was all post-medieval date.

5.1 Structural analysis

The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1. Trenches where no archaeological features were present have been grouped together and only a general description of the topsoil, subsoil and natural deposits provided (equivalent to --000, --001 and --002, respectively).

5.1.1 Natural deposits and topsoil

The natural deposits (--002) consisted of weathered Mercia Mudstone clays and occasional patches of gravels, and were machined down to their upper horizon in each trench. Trenches 5 and 6 contained very platy shaley weak limestone. The clays were generally grey or orange in colour with grey mottling, but were occasionally yellow, the weathered limestone was uniformly dark brown to grey in colour.

The subsoil interface (--001) was shallow, generally being no more than 0.10m thick, which is typical of a low-lying pasture environment, although there was evidence of waterlogged deposits near the pond at the northeastern end of Trench 6, and up to 4.5m of made ground in Trenches 1, 2 and 3 associated with the construction of the motorway. The topsoil mantle (--000) was generally shallow, varying between 0.2m and 0.3m in depth, apart from the trenches adjacent to the pond (Trenches 5 and 6), which indicated that the soft limestone was more prone to weathering and that the depressions had naturally filled in over time.

5.2 Artefact analysis by Laura Griffin

From the topsoil of Trench 16 a 6g sherd of post-medieval red sandy ware (fabric 78) was recovered of 18th century date, together with an 86g sherd of unidentified English stoneware (fabric 81.4). It had a pale buff fabric with a thin light brown mottled exterior glaze and unglazed interior, and was part of a handle from a large jug form, with thumbled decoration where attached to vessel body, and was also probably 18th century in date.

6. **Synthesis**

6.1 **Prehistoric, Roman and Medieval**

No archaeological features, deposits or artefacts of this broad date range were identified during the evaluation. In addition, no archaeological event was identified that might have accounted for this absence. Even the deposition of several metres in depth of spoil from the construction of the M42 was preceded by systematic scouring into the natural here, and therefore the potential truncation of archaeological features or deposits. Ridge and furrow identified in the fields surrounding the site is evidence of intensive agriculture prior to enclosure, possibly centred on Grove Farm, but it is likely that post enclosure the land-use regime here was primarily pasture based dairy or meat-based farming. All environmental remains were poorly preserved and of no significance in the interpretation of this site.

6.2 **Post-medieval and modern**

Artefacts of post-medieval date were recovered from the topsoil, but these are likely to be associated with the improvement of the pasture in the 17th and 18th centuries, and subsequently refuse thrown from passing canal boats. The scattered post medieval and modern materials found over the proposed development area are of a type commonly encountered on agricultural sites and are usually indicative of general rubbish discard or field manuring practises during the 17th to 20th century.

6.3 **Research frameworks and overall significance**

Given the paucity of tangible evidence recovered during this evaluation, it is not relevant to relate these results to broader archaeological research frameworks at a local, regional or national level. What is indicated is that the pasture-based farming regime here was improved in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries – evidence for which is also mirrored in the developmental history preserved within the standing buildings of Grove Farm. In this context the growing population of nearby towns like Birmingham would have provided a ready expanding and profitable market for dairy and meat products. In this respect the story of Grove Farm no doubt mirrors numerous other farms within the peripheries of these towns prior to the invention of refrigeration and quick national transportation based on railways and later roads.

7. **Publication summary**

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

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8. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Cathy Patrick of CgMs Consulting, Grand Union Marine and Leisure Ltd (the Client), and Anna Stocks, the Planning Archaeologist for Warwickshire County Council (the Curator).

9. **Personnel**

The fieldwork and report preparation was by Steve Litherland. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers. Fieldwork was undertaken by Steve Litherland and Elizabeth Plane, finds advice was by Laura Griffin, and the illustration was by Tom Vaughan and Tom Rogers.

10. **Bibliography**

CAS, 1995 (as amended) *Manual of Service practice: fieldwork recording manual*, County Archaeological Service, Hereford and Worcester County Council, report, **399**

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Plate 4. Trench 3 facing North west



Plate 5. Trench 7 facing north east



Plate 6 Trench 10 facing north east



Plate 7 Trench 14 facing north east

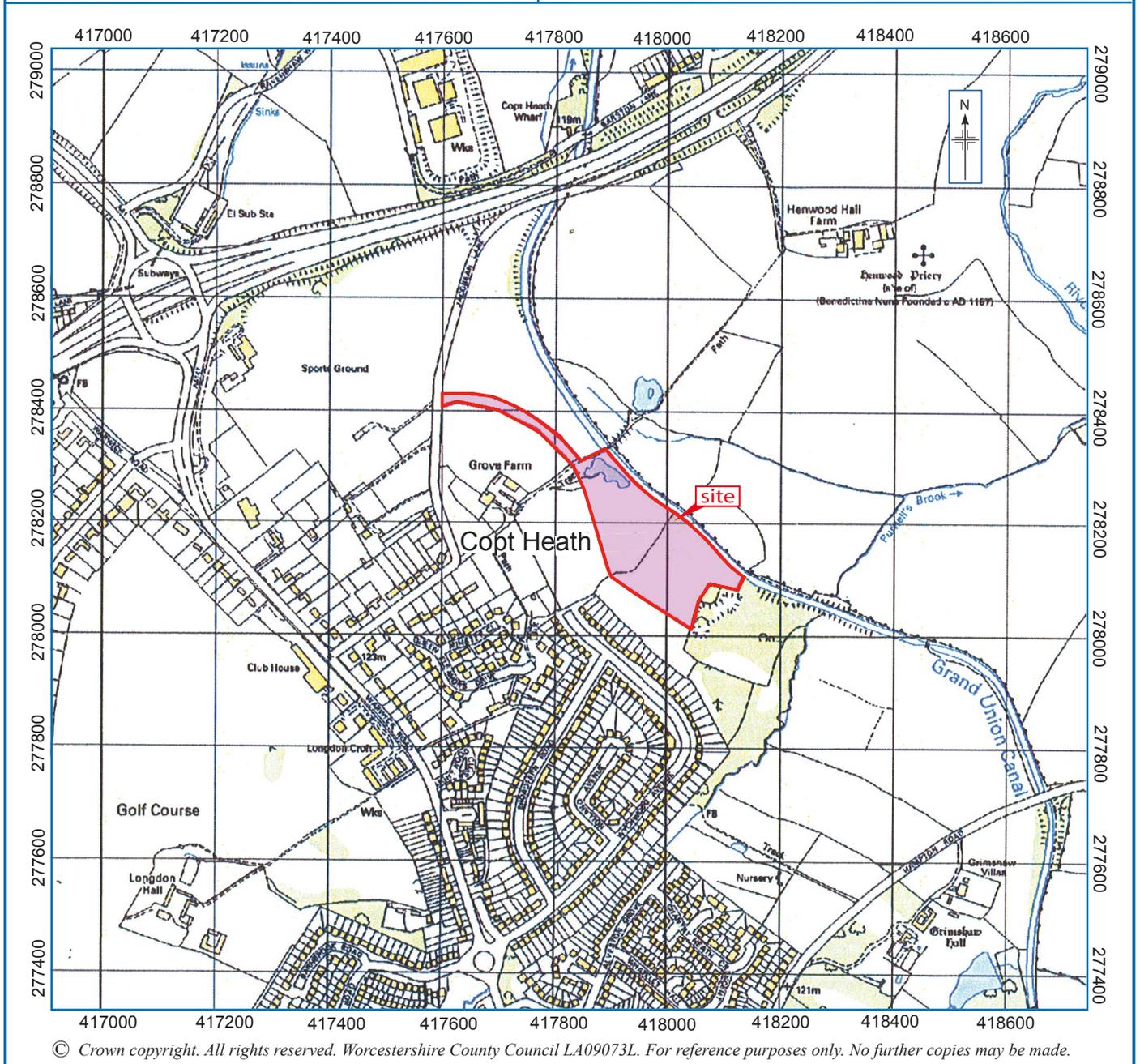
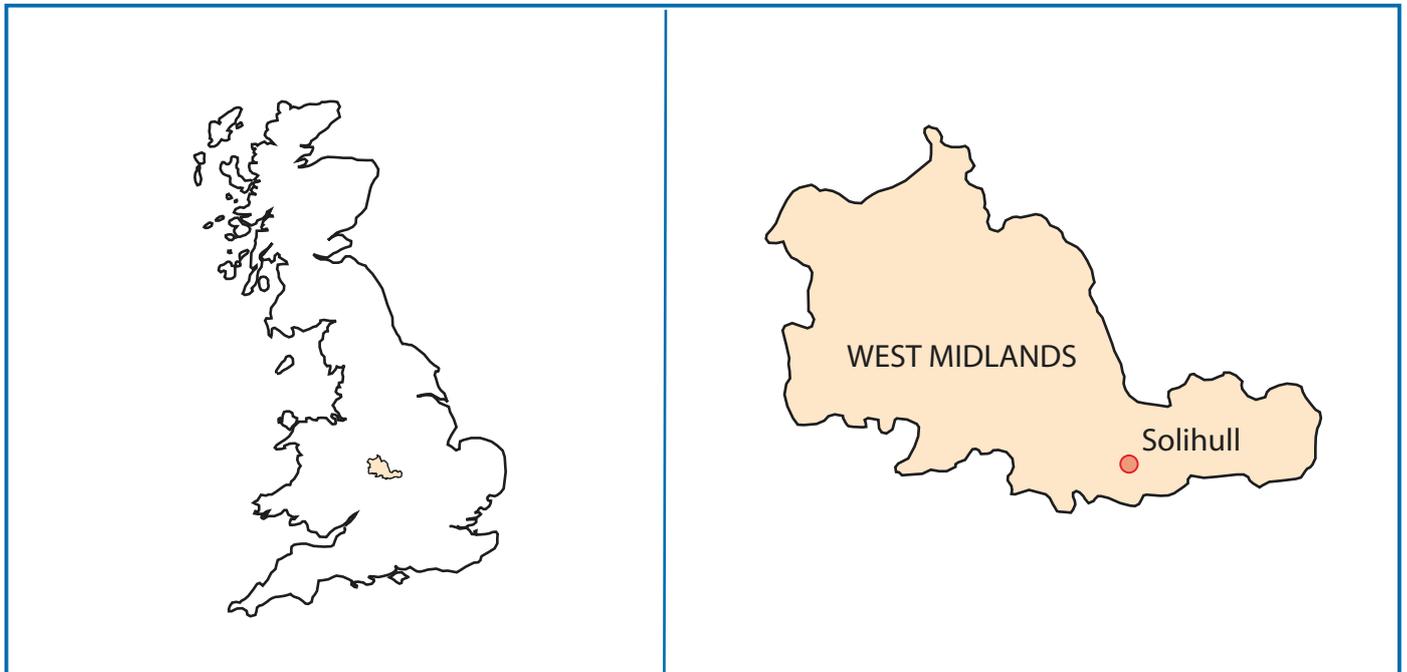


Plate 8 Trench 15 facing north



Plate 9 Trench 19 facing west

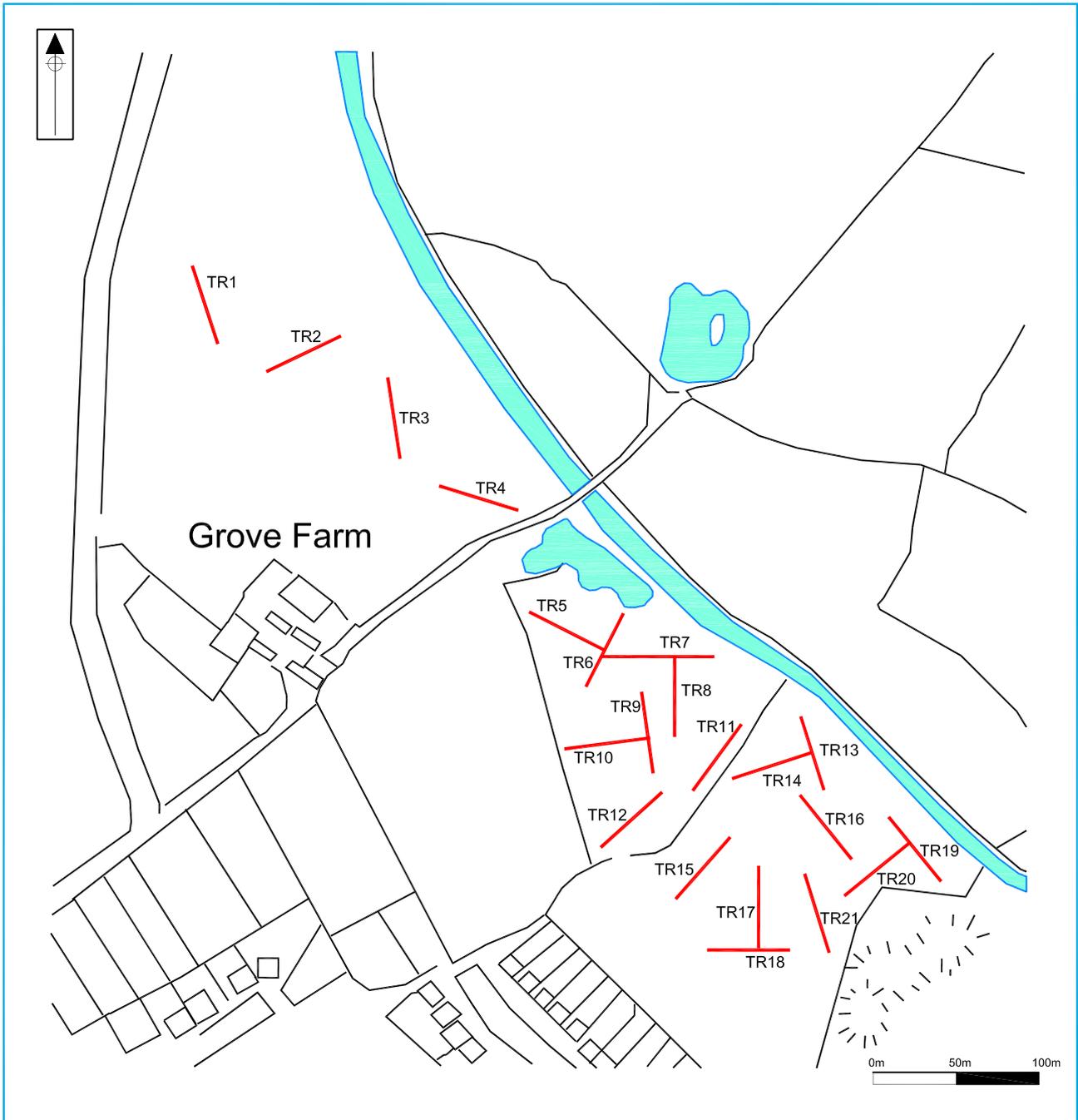
Figures



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Location of the site.

Figure 1



Location of trenches

Figure 2

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trenches 1 - 3

Site area: Field to north of Grove Farm, location of access route

Maximum dimensions: Length: 50m Width: 1.8m Depth: 0.3m – 4.5m (in trial pit in Tr 1)

Orientation: see Figure 2

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
--000	Imported Topsoil	Medium brown clayey sand silt with moderate compaction. Contains occasional small to medium sized ovoid pebbles. Poorly drained.	Variable, but generally 0-0.3m
--001	Redeposited natural	Medium brown-orange sandy clay, with occasional small to medium ovoid pebbles, modern brick and patches of red clay. Compact. Dumped material from construction of M42 motorway.	0.3m-up to 4.5m
--002	Natural	Very compact red/orange clay with veins and patches of grey clay, some manganese mottling, and occasional small to medium ovoid pebbles. Typical Mercia Mudstone deposit.	0.3m- 4.5m not excavated. Original natural ground level prior to dumping episode

Trenches 4, and 7- 21

Site area: Field to north of Grove Farm (Trench 4)
Fields to southeast of Grove Farm (Trenches 7 – 21)

Maximum dimensions: Length: 50m Width: 1.8m Depth: 0.4m

Orientation: see Figure 2

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
--000	Topsoil	Mid dark brown clayey sand, moderately compact with sub-rounded pebbles.	0-0.2 or 0.3m
--001	Subsoil	Darkish red-orange sandy clay. Compact with sub-rounded pebbles.	0.2or 0.3 to 0.4m
--002	Natural	Generally very compact red/orange clay with some patches of gravel and areas of yellow and grey clay, some manganese mottling, and occasional small to medium ovoid pebbles. Where this clay has been subject to water-logging the clay is grey. Cut by field drains. Typical Mercia Mudstone deposit with glacial gravel mantle.	0.4m-not excavated

Trenches 5 and 6

Site area: Adjacent to the pond near the canal to the east of Grove Farm

Maximum dimensions: Length: 50m Width: 1.8m Depth: 0.4 -0.6m

Orientation: see Figure 2

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
--000	Topsoil	Darker brown silty clay with very few rounded pebbles. Variable depth due to solifluxion within earthwork system associated with different underlying geology (--002).	0-0.2 to 0.5m
--001	Subsoil	Dark brown/black weathered degraded limestone.	0.2 to 0.5m – 0.4 or 0.6m in depth
--002	Waterlogged clay deposit	Blue clay waterlogged deposit seen in eastern end of Trench 5, adjacent to the pond by the canal.	0.4 – 0.6m
--003	Natural	Very platy weathered limestone deposit almost black in colour. Cut by numerous field drains.	0.4 to 0.6m – not excavated

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive

The archive consists of:

2	Photographic records AS3
2	Colour transparency film
2	Black and white photographic films
69	Digital photographs
3	Levels record sheets AS19
21	Trench record sheets AS41
1	Box of finds
1	Computer disk

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Warwickshire County Museum
The Butts
Warwick
Warwickshire,
CV34 4SS
