

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION
AT
GREAT BARR PARK, WALSALL



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Status:	Revision 4
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Project reference:	P4059
Report reference:	1984

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Archaeological Evaluation at Great Barr Park, Walsall

Jonathan Webster and Tom Rogers

With a contribution by Derek Hurst

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Great Barr Park, Walsall (centred on NGR SP 04900 59500). It was commissioned by Mr Mike Kalam of Lapworth Architects (the client) on behalf of their clients who intend restoration of Great Barr Hall and Park for which residential enabling development would be required. A planning application for this development is in preparation.

Great Barr Park is a Grade II registered park (Black Country SMR 3952; English Heritage List Entry 1001202) which surrounds Great Barr Hall, a Grade II* listed building (Black Country SMR 15099; English Heritage List Entry 1076395). Proposed enabling works include development of an area south of Chapel Lane to the north west of the park.

Two areas, one comprising St Margaret's Church, Great Barr and an area to its east, and the other in the area of a moated site, were defined as areas of high archaeological potential and earmarked for preservation. Buffer zones were defined around these and it was agreed that in those parts of the buffer zones where development was proposed trial trenches would be excavated to assess whether archaeological deposits of value were present. Seven trenches were excavated: three in a buffer zone to the south east of the church, including an area where an early lane was thought to be located; and four in a buffer zone to the west and south of the moated site.

The three trenches in the church buffer zone located several linear features but the line of the lane could not be located, possibly because it was never much more than a trackway. A large dump of modern material was recorded in one trench.

Three of the four trenches excavated in the buffer zone around the moats failed to reveal any archaeological features. In the fourth trench to the west of the moat a large negative feature was recorded, extending in three directions, and is interpreted as a backfilled gravel extraction pit.

The evaluation supports the approach adopted and suggests that the archaeological impact of development within the buffer zones is likely to be low.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Great Barr Park, Walsall (centred on NGR SP 04900 59500). It was commissioned by Mr Mike Kalam of Lapworth Architects (the client) on behalf of their clients who intend restoration of Great Barr Hall and Park for which residential enabling development would be required. A planning application for this development is in preparation.

The proposed development site is considered to include heritage assets with archaeological interest, the significance of which may be affected by the application. Great Barr Park itself is a Grade II registered park (Black Country SMR 3952; English Heritage List Entry 1001202) which surrounds Great Barr Hall, a Grade II* listed building (Black Country SMR 15099; English Heritage List Entry 1076395). These are currently on English Heritage's Heritage at Risk Register due to the poor condition and vulnerability of both.

The project conforms to a brief prepared by Mike Shaw, Walsall Council Archaeological Advisor (Shaw 2013) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (WA 2013).

The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2009).

2 Strategy

Two zones of high archaeological potential (ZHAP) were defined (Fig 2):

(A) The area of St Margaret's church and an area to its east which is shown as a farm and adjacent paddock on a map of 1798

(B) A moated site and its immediate environs

It was agreed that the development proposals would avoid these areas.

A buffer zone was then defined around each of these areas. In the case of Area A the buffer zone also included the area of a former lane located on the 1798 plan. It was agreed that there should be archaeological evaluation in those parts of the buffer zones which were affected by development proposals in order to check for the presence of archaeological deposits.

Area A

Initially two trenches (Fig 2: Trenches 1-2) were excavated to the south of the ZHAP in an area proposed for housing. Subsequently Trench 2 was extended to the north and a further trench, Trench 7, was excavated, to check possible features of interest.

Area B

Four trenches (Fig 2: Trenches 3-6) were excavated in an area to the south and west of the moated site/ZHAP where housing development is proposed.

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was undertaken by Jonathan Webster, BA (Hons), who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2009 and has been practising archaeology since 2001, and assisted by Mike Nicholson, BSc (Hons), who has been practising archaeology since he joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2008. The finds analysis was undertaken by Dennis Williams, MInstP CPhys BSc MA PhD, who has been in professional archaeology since 2006 when he joined WA. The project

manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers BA (Hons) MSc. Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt, MfA BSc (Hons).

3.2 Documentary research

The archaeological background to the site has been summarised in a recent desk based assessment (Bradley and Patton 2012).

3.3 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2013).

Fieldwork was undertaken between 18 and 21 February 2013. The site reference number and site code is P4059.

Seven trenches, amounting to just over 275m² in area, were excavated. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2. Trenches 1, 2 & 7 were placed to investigate the projected route of a road depicted on Yates' map of 1798 whilst the remainder of the trenches were located to investigate the extent of a feature interpreted as a moat shown on the 1845 Great Barr Parish map, the northern arm of which survives as a elongated pond.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 180° wheeled excavator and subsequently a 360° tracked excavator, employing toothless buckets and 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 Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

3.4 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.

3.5 Artefact methodology, by Derek Hurst

3.5.1 Recovery policy

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Service practice (WA 2012; appendix 2).

3.5.2 Method of analysis

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. They were identified, quantified and dated to period. A *terminus post quem* date was produced for each stratified context. The date was used for determining the broad date of contexts/phases defined for the site.

The pottery and ceramic building material was examined under x20 magnification and referenced as appropriate by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the Service (Hurst and Rees 1992 and www.worcestershireceramics.org).

3.5.3 Discard policy

The following categories/types of material will be discarded after a period of 6 months following the submission of this report, unless there is a specific request to retain them (and subject to the collection policy of the relevant depository):

- where unstratified
- post-medieval pottery and other finds, and;
- generally ie where material has been assessed as having no obvious grounds for retention.

3.6 Statement of confidence in the methods and results

The constraints imposed by the unstable nature of the fill material uncovered in Trench 3 mean that the evaluation was not able to establish the extent of this feature. Other than this the methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved

4 The application site

4.1 Topography, geology and archaeological context

The area of investigation is situated in a bowl-like valley running north to south and following the line of the former watercourse that once existed in this area. The park is mostly open parkland with scattered groups of established trees and rises moderately steeply from around 130m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum) to about 160m AOD. The geology comprises a combination of sandstone with siltstone and mudstone conglomerates of the Enville Member formation dating to 256 to 308 million years ago (Permian and Carboniferous Periods) overlain by a combination of clay, sand and gravel alluvial deposits associated with drift deposits of glacial origin of Pleistocene date.

An overview of the known historic and archaeological background is provided in a recent desk based assessment (Bradley and Patton 2012).

No activity has been recorded within the area of investigation that predates the medieval period. A manor house and chapel were established at Great Barr by c 1200 and a deer park was established by 1335 (Bradley and Patton 2012, 7). The areas subject to archaeological evaluation lies within the historic parkland associated with Great Barr Hall, which was developed from the early 18th century (Bradley and Patton 2012, 7-11). Prior to the development of the park, it is likely that some of the land was rough pasture, but it has been suggested that some of the land was cultivated, based on the identification of a medieval moated site (SMR 2689) in the western part of the Park. A building is shown within the moat on the 1845 tithe map, which may be a post-medieval farm building (SMR 13073). A find-spot of 12th to 15th century pottery is recorded to the west just outside the boundary of the registered park (SMR 2892). The information recorded on the Walsall SMR indicates the area investigated through this evaluation is an area with potential for the survival of medieval and post-medieval archaeological deposits.

4.2 Current land-use

The area of investigation is confined within the registered area of Great Barr Park itself. It is located to the north of Junction 7 of the M6, around 4.5km south-east of the centre of Walsall. The site is bounded by the M6 and Queslett road to the south, the A34 and associated developments to the west, Chapel Lane to the north and a modern housing estate to the east.

5 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Fig 2. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

The natural substrate was observed in six of the seven trenches excavated and comprised gravels along the crest of the ridge in Trenches 1, 2 and 7, dropping down on to fine silt rich sands with bands of gravels running through. Although evidence of plough scarring of this natural substrate was noted in Trenches 4, 5 and 6, the weathered crust remained and, as such, the potential for any archaeological features remained high. Despite the trenches being on the top, sides and base of slopes within the valley, the depth of the natural substrate remained fairly consistent between 0.4 and 0.5m below the present ground surface and no evidence of colluvial deposition or plough build-up/reduction was noted.

5.1.2 Phase 2: Undated deposits

A small gully [208] was noted in Trench 2 orientated east/west and measuring 0.49m in width. It had moderately steep concaved sides that slipped without a break into a concave base producing a U-shaped profile 0.16m thick. It was filled by a single fill 207 that had accumulated through natural low energy processes as opposed to deliberate backfilling. No artefactual material was recovered from this feature.

5.1.3 Phase 3: Post-medieval deposits

A moderately large ditch [206] was recorded in Trench 2, 1.16m wide and orientated northeast to southwest with a wide U-shaped profile and steep to moderate sloped sides dropping onto a flat base 0.32m deep. The single fill, 205 had accumulated through low energy natural silting as opposed to deliberate backfilling, and contained pottery, ceramic building material and animal bone. It was sealed by 203, a former subsoil that suggested that the area had not been ploughed for some years.

Trench 3 was filled by a large feature [303] that extended beyond the limit of excavations in all directions except to the northwest. It was filled by a single fill 302 that contained ceramic building material and charcoal flecks and is interpreted as infilled through a combination of silting and backfilling.

5.1.4 Phase 4: Modern deposits

A small linear feature [210] was recorded in Trenches 2 and 3, the fill of which included modern material.

A large cut feature was recorded in Trench 7. Apart from the north-western edge the extent of this feature could not be established. It was filled by a mottled greyish red and mid blue grey silty clay with frequent modern inclusions including ceramic building material, metal, plastic, glass, a vehicle tyre and wallpaper.

5.2 Artefact analysis, by Derek Hurst

The artefactual assemblage recovered is summarised in Tables 1–2.

The assemblage came from only two stratified contexts and could be dated from the (later) post-medieval period onwards (see Table 1). Using pottery as an index of artefact condition, this was generally good with the majority of sherds displaying low levels of abrasion, and the average sherd size being about average.

period	material class	material class sub-type	object specific type	count	weight (g)
post-medieval	ceramic		pot	1	10
post-medieval	ceramic		flat roof tile	2	62
post-medieval	ceramic		brick	1	610
post-medieval	Metal	iron	nail	1	5
modern	composite		?lino	1	4
undated	bone		animal	1	78
Totals					

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

context	material class	object specific type	Count	weight (g)	start date	end date	context terminus post quem date
205	Ceramic	pot	1	10	1700	1799	1700+
	Ceramic	flat roof tile	1	16	1300	1799	
	Ceramic	brick	1	610			
	Metal	nail	1	5	-	-	
	Bone	animal	1	78	-	-	
302	Ceramic	flat roof tile	1	46	1300	1799	1855-present
		?lino	1	4	1855	1970	

Table 2 Summary of context dating based on artefacts

Summary artefactual evidence by period

Post-medieval/modern

Only a very small artefactual assemblage was recovered and, where datable, was all of post-medieval/modern date. Nothing of intrinsic interest was identified.

6 Synthesis

Evaluation has demonstrated only a low archaeological potential in those parts of the buffer zones which were investigated.

Remains of the road which formerly ran to the east of St Margaret's Church were not present in the three northern trenches (Trenches 1, 2 and 7). There are several possible explanations for this. Firstly the road may have been too ephemeral to have left a trace in the archaeological record. Secondly it may have been destroyed by subsequent activity, either agricultural or landscaping of the park or thirdly, the 1798 map may not have depicted the road accurately. It is noted that a ridge of gravels cross the slight valley at this point and it is possible that it was this natural ridge which was used as a road. It is thought that the linear features in this area probably represent boundaries, the area being too well drained to require drainage gullies.

No medieval or later features related to the adjacent moat were recorded in the trenches in the southern area. A large cut feature was identified in Trench 3 to the west of the extant pond. It is thought, that this feature represents a backfilled gravel extraction pit. This may be one of a series of gravel pits in this valley including the dump of modern material uncovered in Trench 7. The archaeological evaluation did not investigate the identified medieval moated site directly.

7 Significance

7.1 Nature of the archaeological interest in the site

The evaluation demonstrated that no features relating either to the former road or possible moat, survive in the areas assessed.

7.2 Relative importance of the archaeological interest in the site

The evaluation demonstrated that the archaeological significance of the two areas assessed is low.

7.3 Physical extent of the archaeological interest in the site

The physical extent of the large cut feature recorded in Trench 3 is largely unknown except that it is clear it does not extend as far south as Trench 4. It may extend as far as the extant pond to the east.

8 The impact of the development

The evaluation has demonstrated that the impact of the proposed development in the areas tested is likely to be low.

9 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology 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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The trenches in the area adjacent to the church failed to locate the early lane but did record a number of small linear features which may demarcate boundaries. A large cut feature backfilled with modern material was recorded in one trench.

The trenches excavated in the area adjacent to the moated site were sited in areas of proposed housing. In three to the south of the extant pond, no archaeological features were recovered while in one to the west a large cut feature extending in three directions is thought to be a gravel extraction pit.

The evaluation demonstrated that the archaeological impact of the proposed development in these areas is likely to be low.

10 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Mike Kalam, Lapworth Architects and Mike Shaw, City Archaeologist Wolverhampton City Council.

11 Bibliography

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IfA 2009 *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation*, Institute for Archaeologists

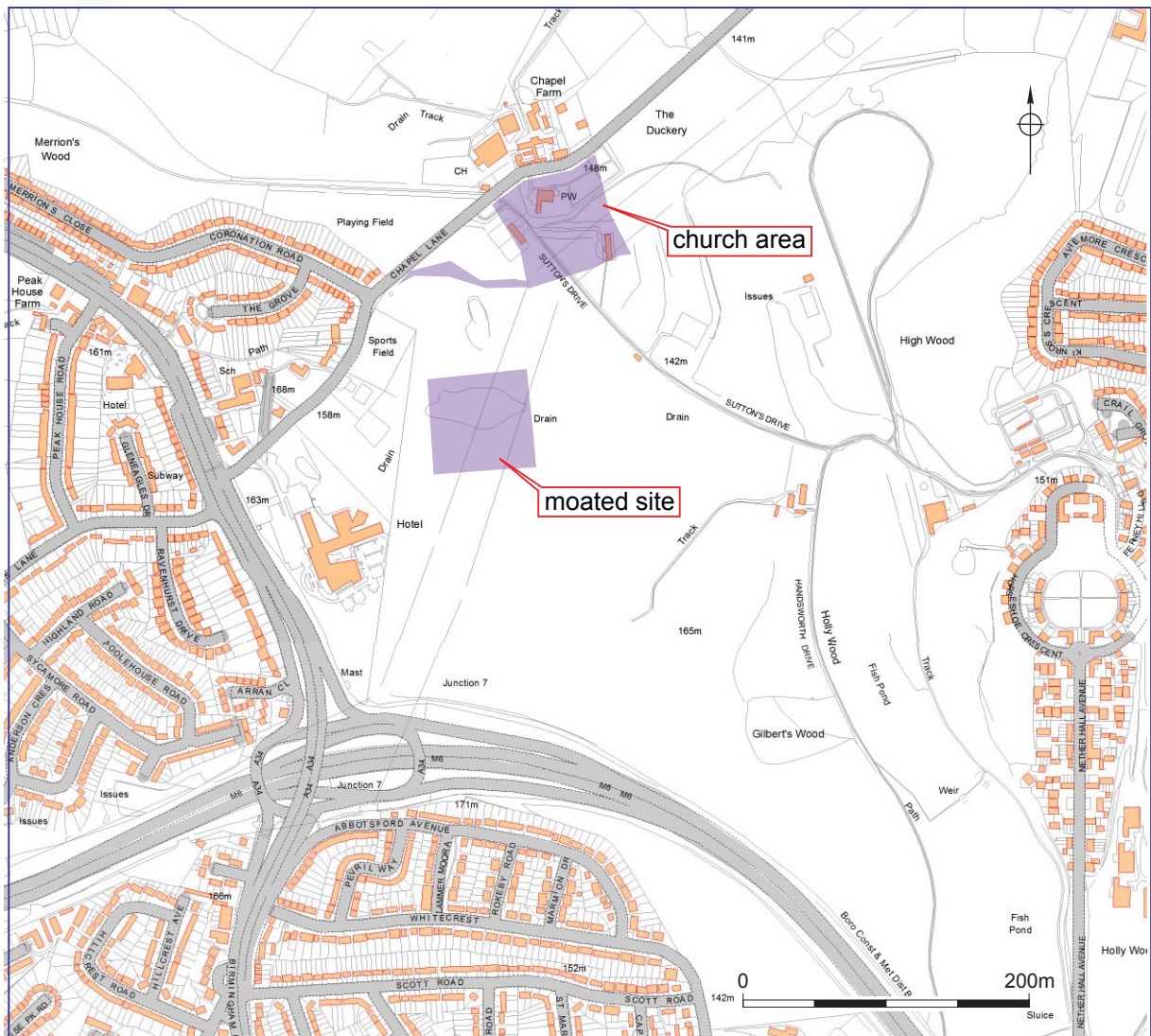
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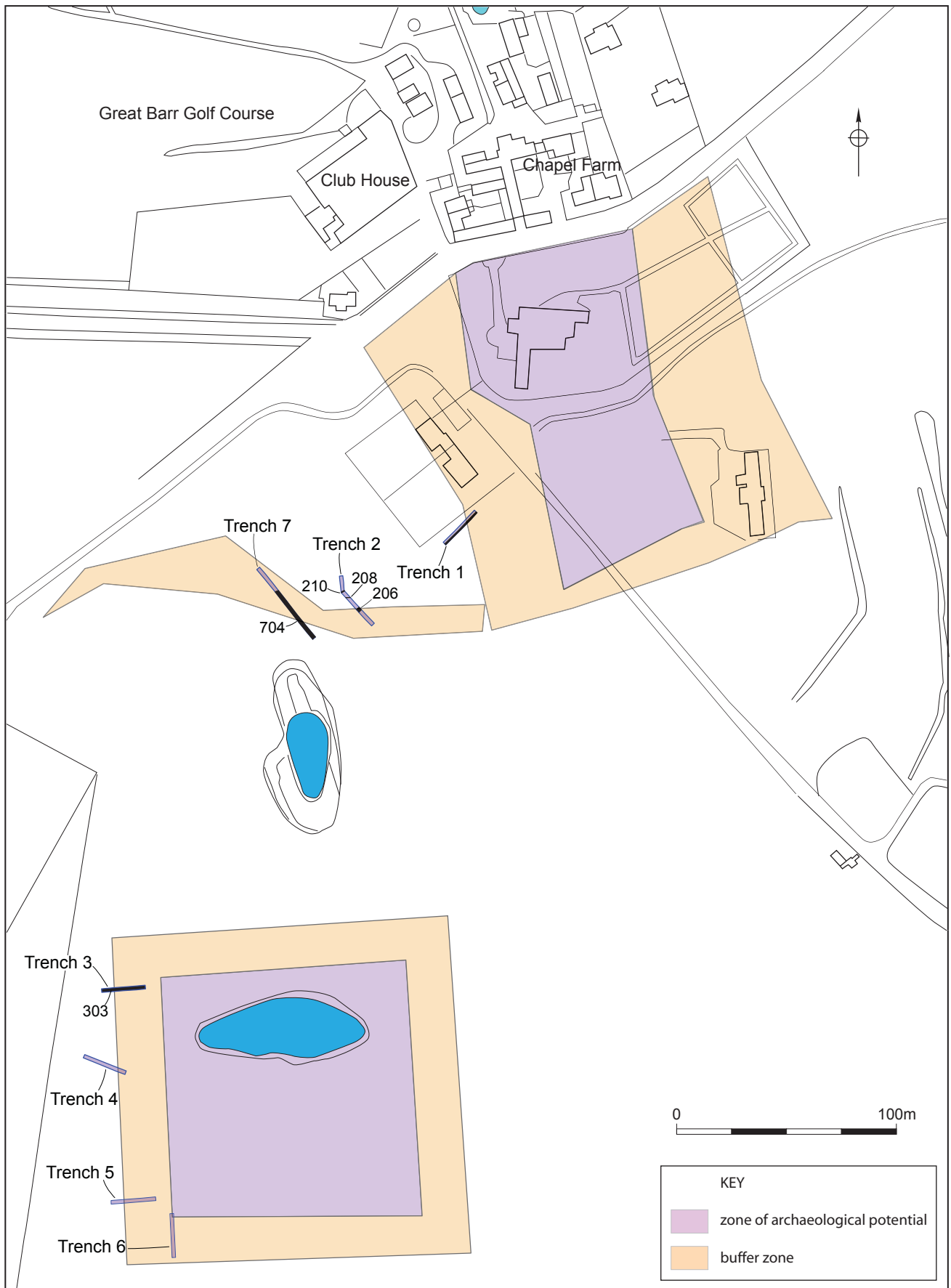
Figures



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Location of the site

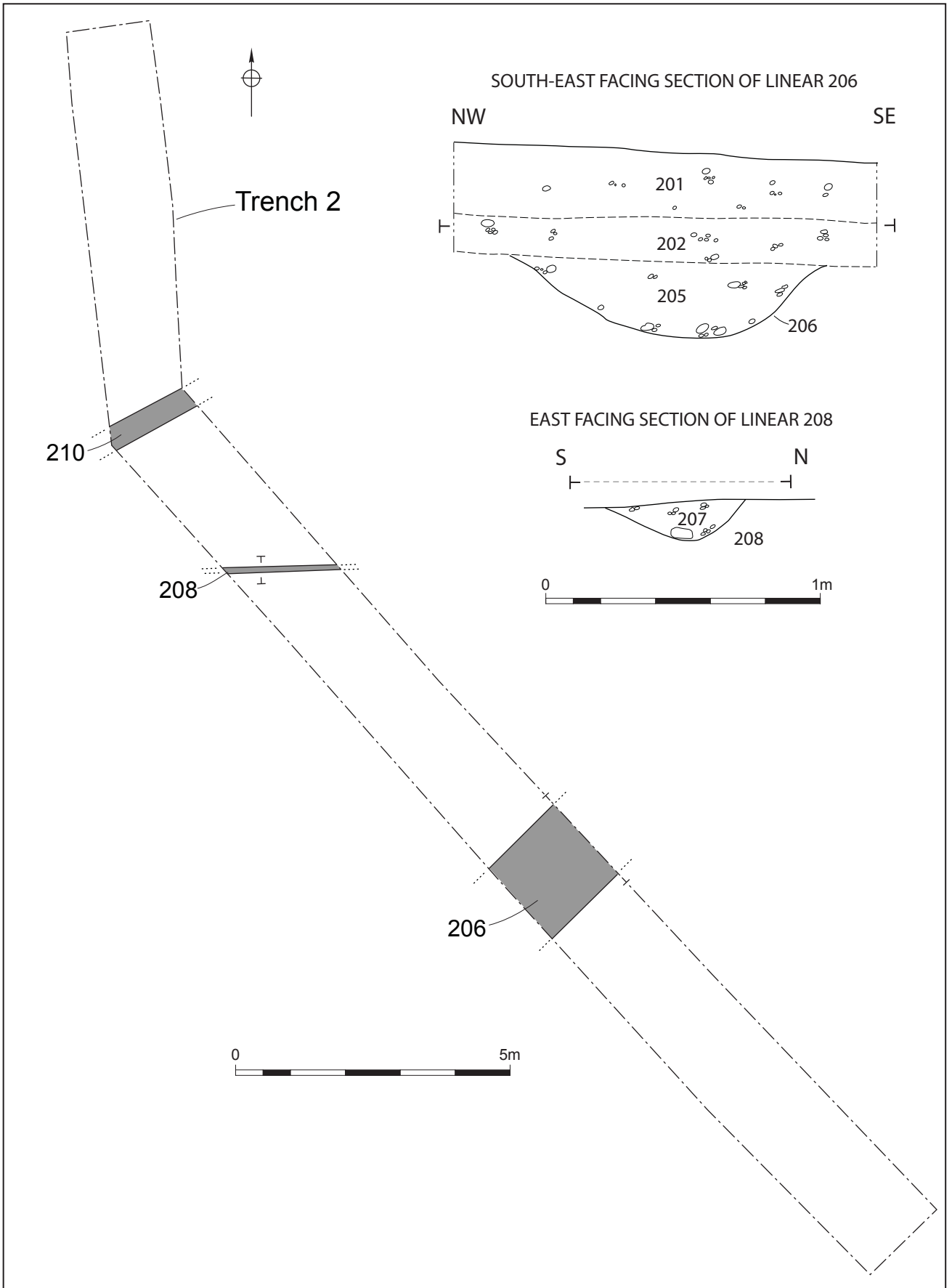
Figure 1



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Trench location plan and zones of archaeological potential

Figure 2



Trench 2: plan and sections

Figure 3

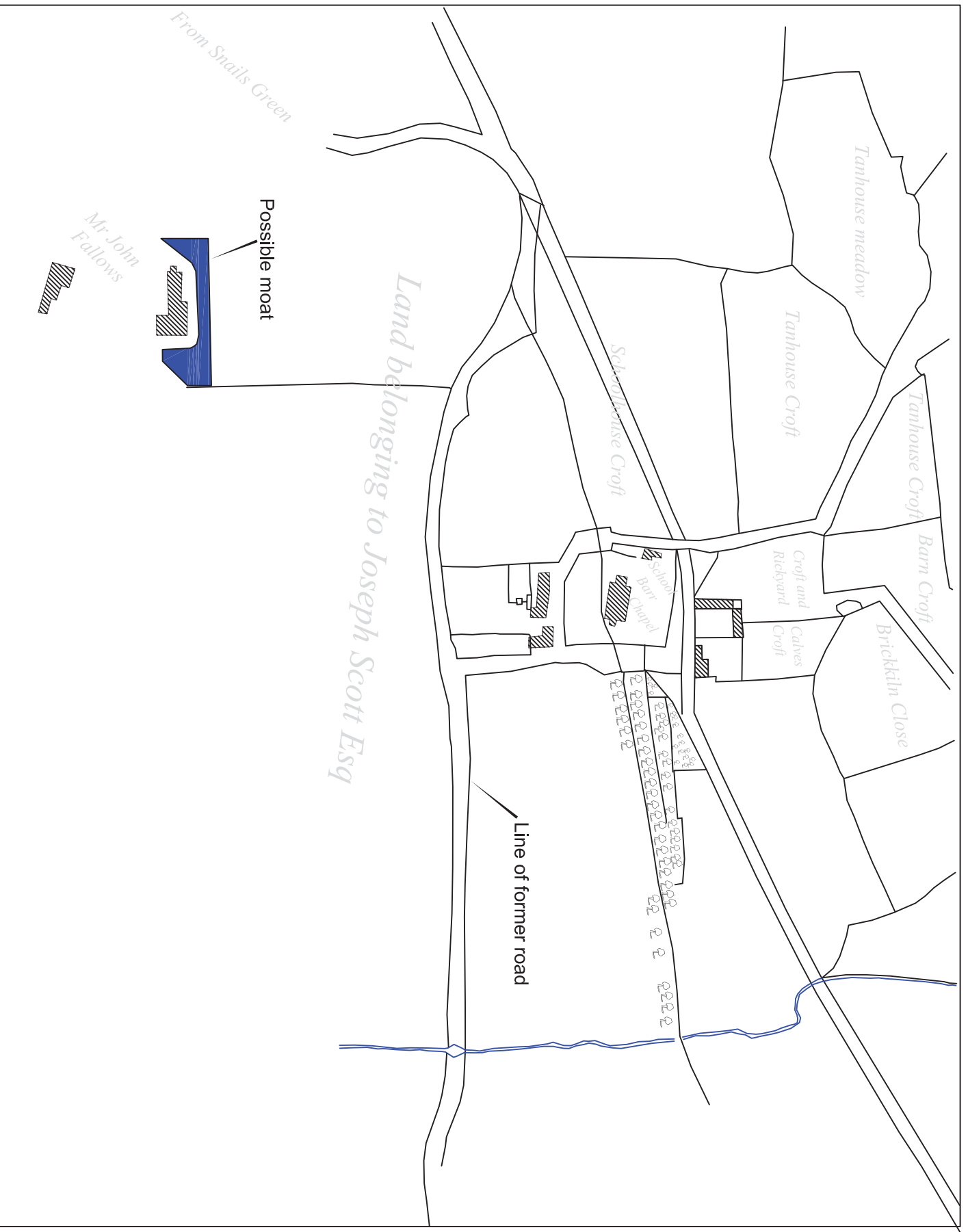


Figure 4. Sketch plan based on map dated 1798, showing the possible moat and former road line to the east of the church

Plates



Plate 1. Ditch 206 facing north-east



Plate 2. Gully 210 looking north



Plate 3 Feature 303 looking east



Plate 4 Example of finds from feature 704



Plate 5. South facing section at east end of Trench 7

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 30m Width: 1.70m Depth: 0.54m

Orientation: Northeast/southwest

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
101	Topsoil	Light greyish brown silt rich loam with occasional sub-rounded gravels. Frequent root disturbance and rare charcoal flecks throughout	0.00-0.024m
102	Subsoil	Light greyish brown silts, moderate compaction with rub-rounded gravels, occasional roots and rare charcoal flecks throughout	0.25m-0.38m
103	Natural interface	Light brown silty loam of moderate compaction and occasional rounded to sub-rounded gravels. Rare charcoal flecks throughout	0.39-0.53m
104	Natural substrate	Light orange-brown sand rich silts with frequent rounded to sub-rounded gravels	0.54m+
105	Fill of [106]	Light greyish brown silty sand with occasional medium rounded to sub-rounded gravels throughout and occasional charcoal flecks	0.53-0.73m
[106]	Cut of linear ditch	Northeast-southwest aligned linear ditch that although turfed over is still visible on surface. Moderately sided with a concaved sides coming down onto a flat base. Feature is 0.74m wide.	0.53-0.73m

Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 27m Width: 1.80m Depth: 0.60m

Orientation: Northwest-southeast

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
201	Topsoil	Light greyish brown silty loam of soft compaction with occasional sub-rounded gravels throughout. Frequent root disturbance and occasional charcoal flecks throughout	0.00-0.23m
202	Subsoil	Light greyish brown silty loam of moderate compaction with occasional root disturbance and rounded to sub-rounded gravels throughout. Rare charcoal flecks also noted throughout	0.24-0.39m
203	Deposit	Light reddish brown silt rich loam, moderately compact with occasional sub-rounded gravels and charcoal flecks throughout	0.40-0.54m
204	Natural substrate	Light reddish brown silty sands with frequent rounded to sub-rounded gravels throughout and bands of limestone aligned roughly northwest/southeast	0.55m+
205	Fill of [206]	Light greyish brown silt rich loam of soft compaction with occasional sub-rounded gravels throughout.	0.54-0.86m
[206]	Cut of linear	Northeast/southwest aligned ditch with moderate concaved sides dropping onto a slightly concaved base. 1.16m in width	0.54-0.86m
207	Fill of [208]	Mid pinkish brown moderately compacted sandy silt with frequent rounded to sub-rounded gravels throughout. Appears to have been deliberately backfilled as opposed to natural siltation	0.54-0.70m
[208]	Cut of gully	East/west aligned gully like feature with moderately steep concaved sides dropping onto a concaved base creating a U-shaped profile 0.49m in width.	0.54-0.70m

Trench 3

Maximum dimensions: Length: 20m Width: 1.80m Depth: 1.20m

Orientation: East/west

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
301	Topsoil	Mid bluish brown humeric silty clay with frequent root disturbance, charcoal flecks and occasional rounded to sub-rounded gravels throughout	0.00-0.46m
302	Fill of [303]	Light greyish yellow silt rich sand of moderate compaction with occasional charcoal flecks, CBM and rounded to sub-rounded gravels throughout	0.47-1.20m+
[303]	Cut of large feature	Large feature that extends beyond the limit of excavation. No true edges recorded.	0.47-1.20m+

Trench 4

Maximum dimensions: Length: 20m Width: 1.80m Depth: 0.43m

Orientation: East/west

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
401	Topsoil	Dark blue grey silty sand and humeric mix highly mixed by root action with moderate rounded to sub-rounded gravels noted throughout	0.00-0.31
402	Subsoil	Light yellowish grey silty sand with moderate compaction and occasional charcoal flecks noted throughout	0.32-0.42m
403	Natural substrate	Light reddish grey silty sands and rounded to sub-rounded gravels throughout	0.43m+

Trench 5

Maximum dimensions: Length: 20m Width: 1.80m Depth: 0.55m

Orientation: East/west

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
501	Topsoil	Dark blue grey silty sands and humeric mix highly disturbed by root action with frequent rounded to sub-rounded gravels and charcoal flecks throughout	0.00-0.42m
502	Subsoil	Light yellowish grey silty sands of moderate compaction with occasional charcoal flecks and rounded to sub-rounded gravels noted throughout	0.43-0.54m
503	Natural substrate	Light reddish grey silty sands and gravels mix rounded to sub-rounded	0.55m+

Trench 6

Maximum dimensions: Length: 20m Width: 1.80m Depth: 0.41m

Orientation: North/south

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
601	Topsoil	Dark blue grey silty sands and humeric mix highly disturbed by root action with frequent rounded to sub-rounded gravels and charcoal flecks throughout	0.00-0.28m
602	Subsoil	Light yellowish grey silty sands of moderate compaction with occasional charcoal flecks and rounded to sub-rounded gravels noted throughout	0.29-0.40m
603	Natural	Light reddish grey silty sands and gravels mix rounded to sub-rounded	0.41m+

Trench 7

Maximum dimensions: Length: 40m Width: 1.80m Depth: 1.08m

Orientation: Northwest/southeast

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
701	Topsoil	Mid greyish brown silt rich sands with very humeric content, loose compaction and frequent roots and rounded to sub-rounded gravels throughout	0.00-0.32m
702	Subsoil	Light yellowish grey silty sands with firm compaction and occasional charcoal flecks throughout	0.33-0.35m
703	Modern make up fill of [704]	Mottled greyish red and mid blue grey silty clays with frequent modern inclusions including CBM, metal, plastic, glass, a vehicle tire and wallpaper	0.36-1.08m+
[704]	Large cut feature	Large cut feature that extends beyond the limit of the excavation and as such the dimensions are unknown	0.36-1.08m+
705	Natural substrate	Seen in the northwest end of the trench and comprising a light yellowish red silty sand with frequent manganese flecks throughout. Firm compaction and sterile	0.41m+

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive

The archive consists of:

- 4 Context records AS1
 - 3 Field progress reports AS2
 - 1 Photographic records AS3
 - 91 Digital photographs
 - 5 Scale drawings
 - 1 Levels records AS19
 - 7 Trench record sheets AS41
 - 1 Box of finds
 - 1 CD-Rom/DVDs
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Walsall Local History Centre
Essex Street
Walsall
WS2 7AS
