

ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
WATCHING BRIEF AT THE  
MASTER'S HOUSE, LEDBURY



# ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT THE MASTER'S HOUSE, LEDBURY

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With a contribution by Dennis Williams

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

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Project P3801  
Report 1898  
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## Archaeological watching brief at the Master's House, Ledbury

**Darren Miller**

**With a contribution by Dennis Williams**

### Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during Phase 1 of a project to restore and refurbish the Master's House in Ledbury (NGR SO 71033 37653; EHE 1929). The watching brief was commissioned by Butler Hegarty Architects, in accordance with a brief prepared by Herefordshire Archaeology.

The watching brief focused on the excavation of a lift shaft and service duct in the west wing of the Master's House, a 19<sup>th</sup> century addition to the core of the building, which formed part of St Katherine's hospital (a 13<sup>th</sup> century foundation that became an almshouse after the Reformation).

The excavation of the lift shaft provided the only window onto pre-modern deposits. It exposed a sequence of deposits and features dating from the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century. No medieval deposits were present, as the area had been severely truncated. Natural marl was cut by three features which were sealed by made ground from different sources. The made ground was sealed by a similar deposit, which was cut by a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century land-drain. The sequence continued with more made ground and the brick rubble substrate of the west wing.

The results of the watching brief support other evidence for the creation of a formal garden around the Master's House between c1785 and 1817, and for later developments in the same vein.



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## Report

### 1. **Planning background**

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at the Master's House in Ledbury, Herefordshire (Fig 1; NGR SO 71033 37653). The watching brief was commissioned by Butler Hegarty Architects, who are restoring the Master's House for use as an information centre (alongside a new public library). It was required by Herefordshire Council, on the advice of Herefordshire Archaeology.

The watching brief focused on groundworks inside the west wing of the Master's House (Fig 2). The excavation of a pit for a lift shaft and a duct for services was considered to have a potential impact on archaeological deposits.

The project conformed to a brief prepared by Herefordshire Archaeology (Herefordshire Archaeology 2011), for which a detailed specification was produced (HEAS 2011). It also conforms to the Institute of Archaeologist's *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008), and Herefordshire Archaeology's *Standards for archaeological projects in Herefordshire: issue 1* (Herefordshire Archaeology 2004).

### 2. **Aims**

The aim of the watching brief was to record any archaeological deposits exposed during the groundworks. It also provided an opportunity for the project team to identify significant deposits that required further investigation. The overall objective was to establish and make available more information about the archaeological resource (IfA 2008, 2).

### 3. **Methods**

#### 3.1 **Documentary research**

Documentary research included a review of HER records, the most relevant published sources (Hillaby 2003; Hillaby 2005), and two unpublished archaeological reports (Miller and Potten 2008; Hoverd and Atkinson 2009).

#### 3.2 **Fieldwork methodology**

##### 3.2.1 **Fieldwork strategy**

A detailed specification was prepared by the Service (HEAS 2011).

The fieldwork was undertaken between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of November 2011. The site reference number and site code is EHE 1929.

The pit for the lift shaft measured 2.45m by 2.20m. It was excavated by contractors using a compressor and shovels to a depth of 1.65m below the former floor surface. The excavation of the floor and brick rubble substrate (context 100) was not observed.

The adjacent service duct was 6.15m long and 0.60m wide, but less than 0.80m deep. It was excavated before the first site visit.

Drawn, written, and photographic records were made according to standard Service practice (HEAS 2012).

##### 3.2.2 **Stratigraphic analysis**

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. A stratigraphic matrix was produced and phased on the basis of common characteristics and associations.

#### 3.3 **Artefact methodology, by Dennis Williams**

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995; appendix 2).



All hand-retrieved finds were examined. They were identified, quantified and dated to period. A *terminus post quem* date range was produced for each stratified context. This was used for determining the broad date of phases defined for the site. All information was recorded on *pro forma* sheets.

The pottery and ceramic building material was examined under ×20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst and Rees 1992 and [www.worcestershireceramics.org](http://www.worcestershireceramics.org)).

#### 4. **Historical and archaeological background**

The Master's House (or Mansion House) comprises a discrete group of buildings at the centre of St Katherine's car park, behind the frontages of High Street and Bye Street (Fig 1). At the core of the Master's House is late 15<sup>th</sup> century timber-framed hall of four bays with solar and service cross-wings (SMR 19873), although the fabric is obscured by later buildings and brickwork (Fig 2). The hall was built as the residence of the Master of St Katherine's hospital, a 13<sup>th</sup> century foundation that became an almshouse after the Reformation (SMR 11322 and 19891). The original hall and chapel still stands to the south-east, with its east end fronting onto High Street, while a 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century barn stands further to the south (SMR 151870).

Previous research on the history of the hospital has provided much information on about its endowment and organisation but less about its topography (Hillaby 2003). It has been suggested that the hospital was built on the site of an episcopal palace (Hillaby 2003, 3; Hillaby 2005, 15). It has also been suggested that the precinct included the whole of the present car park, and that the hall and chapel formed the southern range of a quadrangle with a gate to the east, a service range to the east, and chambers to the north, although other buildings mentioned in a 14<sup>th</sup> century inventory are likely to have stood elsewhere (Hillaby 2003, 19-21).

More evidence has come to light through recent archaeological work. In 2008, a trench excavated c7m to the south of the Master's House exposed the truncated foundation of a medieval stone wall, aligned roughly east-west (Miller and Potten 2008). It was suggested that this wall formed the north wall of a hall or domestic range. In 2009, however, the excavation of a larger area to the south found a similar foundation which had clearly supported a free-standing wall (Hoverd and Atkinson 2009). On this evidence, it was suggested that the excavated foundations and the southern boundary wall represented two burgage plots, one or both of which may have lain outside the hospital precinct.

In this context, the watching brief provided an opportunity to add more information on medieval and post-medieval arrangements. As shown on Figure 2, the groundworks were located inside a wing to the west of the 15<sup>th</sup> century solar.

### 5. **Results**

#### 5.1 **Stratigraphy**

The stratigraphy observed is summarised below and described in more detail in Appendix 1. The main features are illustrated on Figure 3, and on Plates 1-4.

##### 5.1.1 **Natural deposits**

Marl (Raglan Mudstone) was observed in the pit for the lift shaft at 1.35m below floor level (context 107). It was cut by the Phase 1 features and sealed by the Phase 2 made ground.

##### 5.1.2 **Phase 1: late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century landscaping**

The absence of soil above the marl indicates an episode of landscaping. The soil formed on the marl had evidently been removed, along with any evidence for medieval or earlier land-use.

### 5.1.3 Phase 2: late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century features

The marl was cut by a pit (context 106), a posthole (context 103), and a drain on a north-west to south-east alignment (contexts 104, 110, and 112).

The pit extended beyond the limit of excavation to the east and south (Fig 3). It was at least 2.20m long and 1.80m wide, but only c 0.30m deep, with gently sloping sides. The limited depth of the pit in relation to its size might be due to the landscaping noted above: if so, it belongs to an earlier phase. The pit was filled with mid greyish brown silt loam with few charcoal, ceramic, and mortar inclusions. As described below, the pottery from the fill dates to the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The sides of the drain were made of roughly-hewn stones laid on stretchers of handmade brick (context 110; Plate 1). They formed a channel that was approximately 0.15m wide and 0.15m deep. The dimensions (in inches) of three measured examples were 8¾ x 4½ x 2¾, 9 x 4¼ x 2¾, and 8¾ x 4 x 2½. The sides of the drain were capped with large roughly-hewn stones laid edge-to-edge (context 104; Plate 2).

The posthole lay between the pit and the drain (context 103; Plate 3). It was sub-circular in plan, with a diameter of c 0.30m. The sides were irregular, sloping more or less steeply to a flat base. It had a lower fill of redeposited marl (context 108) and an upper fill of marl mixed with common charcoal, mortar, and stone inclusions (context 102).

### 5.1.4 Phase 3: 19<sup>th</sup> century made ground and land drain

The Phase 2 features were sealed by 0.40m of mid greyish brown clay silt with common charcoal, mortar, and ceramic inclusions (context 101). The deposit also contained common small aggregates of redeposited marl. It represents another episode of landscaping and implies a degree of truncation elsewhere.

The deposit was cut by a ceramic land drain (context 112). The drain was made up of identical sections laid end to end in a narrow trench (context 116). Each section was 14 inches long, and comprised an extruded 5-inch diameter pipe on a flat, 5½-wide base (Plate 4). According to a well-informed amateur archaeologist, these characteristics suggest a date after 1850, perhaps 1860-70 (Vanda Bartoszuk, pers comm).

The drain was sealed by another deposit of made ground (context 100). It was slightly darker than the earlier made ground but similar in its composition and depth.

### 5.1.5 Phase 4: 19<sup>th</sup> century substrate

The latest deposit (excavated by the contractors) was a mixture of soil and brick rubble (context 111). It was clearly the substrate for the floor of the west wing.

## 5.2 Artefact analysis, by Dennis Williams

The artefactual assemblage is summarised in Table 1. Two of the stratified contexts yielded finds that could be dated to the post-medieval period. The level of preservation was generally good, with none of the pottery sherds displaying significant abrasion.

Period	Material class	Material subtype	Object specific type	Count	Weight (g)
post-medieval	ceramic	-	brick	2	126
post-medieval	ceramic	-	clay pipe	1	12
post-medieval	ceramic	-	roof tile	1	104
post-medieval	ceramic	-	roof tile(flat)	1	112

Period	Material class	Material subtype	Object specific type	Count	Weight (g)
post-medieval	ceramic	earthenware	pot	6	77
post-medieval	ceramic	stoneware	pot	1	32
post-medieval	glass	-	vessel	5	510
undated	bone	animal bone	-	7	286
undated	shell	shell	oyster	2	18
Totals:				26	1277

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

### Pottery

The pottery sherds were grouped and quantified according to fabric type (Table 2). No diagnostic form sherds were present, but all were datable by fabric type to their general periods or production spans.

Period	Fabric code	Fabric common name	Count	Weight(g)
post-medieval	78	Post-medieval red wares	2	52
post-medieval	81.2	Westerwald stoneware	1	32
post-medieval	84	Creamware	2	5
post-medieval	85	Pearlware	1	4
post-medieval	91	Post-medieval buff wares	1	16
Totals:			7	109

Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by period and fabric-type

Layer 101 produced a distinctive rim sherd, from a Westerwald stoneware (fabric 81.2) jug decorated with a cobalt blue cordon. This was late 17<sup>th</sup> to mid-18<sup>th</sup> century in date. The remaining three sherds recovered from this context were English earthenwares. A flanged rim from an unglazed red ware (fabric 78) bowl could not be more precisely dated than to a broad 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century range, while a body sherd of brown-glazed buff ware (fabric 91) was likely to be 18<sup>th</sup> century. A small body sherd of creamware (fabric 84) was probably late 18<sup>th</sup> century in date, though substantial production of this material continued into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A very small sherd of similar creamware was found in pit fill 105, along with a body sherd from a large, unglazed red ware vessel. The only other pottery noted in this context was a flanged rim from a jar or bowl, with an uneven blue glaze characteristic of pearlware (fabric 85). Production of this pottery started c 1780, and continued alongside creamware, into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*Other artefacts*

Ceramic building material found in context 101 comprised undiagnostic fragments of brick from context 101, and a piece of curved roof tile, from a post-medieval pantile. A fragment of flat roof tile, also likely to be post-medieval, was recovered from context 105.

Parts of glass bottle bases, found in both contexts 101 and 105, were from free-blown vessels with hemispherical kick-ups and parallel sides, suggesting a date range within either the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A clay pipe bowl found in context 101 was unfortunately without its spur or heel, and of a plain design with no milling around the rim, but was of a form broadly similar to that of Broseley types produced during the date range 1660-1700 (Oswald 1975). It is noted that the archaeological evaluation carried out in the St Katherine's car park in 2009 recovered clay pipes manufactured mainly in Broseley and Gloucester, covering the overall date range 1660-1730 (Peacey 2009).

Seven fragments of bone (cattle, pig and sheep), and two oyster shells were recovered from context 101, but were not analysed in detail.

**Overview of artefactual evidence**

The artefacts from this limited assemblage were indicative of domestic activity on or around the St Katherine's site during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (and possibly extending into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century), as would be expected for this part of Ledbury. The dating evidence was based on the pottery, glass and clay pipe finds, with the creamware and pearlware sherds suggesting *terminus post quem* date ranges extending not later than 1840 for both layer 101 and the pit fill 105 below it, as shown in Table 3.

Context	Material class	Object specific type	Fabric code	Count	Weight (g)	Start date	End date	<i>Terminus post quem</i> range
101	ceramic	pot	91	1	16	1700	1800	1760-1840
	ceramic	pot	84	1	4	1760	1840	
	ceramic	pot	81.2	1	32	1680	1750	
	ceramic	pot	78	1	14	1600	1800	
	ceramic	brick	-	2	126	1600	1850	
	ceramic	roof tile	-	1	104	1700	1850	
	shell	oyster	-	2	18	-	-	
	ceramic	clay pipe	-	1	12	1660	1700	
	glass	vessel	-	1	442	1750	1850	
105	ceramic	pot	84	1	1	1760	1840	1780-1840
	ceramic	pot	85	1	4	1780	1840	
	ceramic	pot	78	1	38	1600	1800	
	ceramic	roof tile (flat)	-	1	112	1600	1850	
	glass	vessel	-	3	22	1750	1850	
	glass	vessel	-	1	46	1750	1850	

Table 3: Summary of context dating based on artefacts

## 6. **Synthesis**

The results of the watching brief fit an established archaeological and documentary context.

Similar evidence was found to the south of the Master's House in 2008 and 2009 (Miller and Potten 2008, 5-6; Hoverd and Atkinson 2009, 11-13). Both projects found evidence for extensive late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century landscaping which had removed most medieval deposits and features. There was also evidence of near-contemporary activity in the form of pits and postholes (some of which probably pre-date the landscaping, as they were very shallow in relation to their size). This evidence suggests that the whole precinct was redeveloped in this period. The nature of this redevelopment is indicated by two features found in 2009 and subsequently dated by other evidence: a fishpond established in 1785, and the retaining wall of a terrace, present by 1817. Taken together, the evidence indicates the creation of a formal garden.

The deposits and features of Phases 1 and 2 are consistent with this evidence. The Phase 3 remains relate to later developments which were not so evident in the earlier fieldwork, although the fishpond was backfilled and new drains were laid. The Phase 4 deposit represents the construction of the west wing of the Master's House. Historic maps show that this was built sometime between 1817 and 1887, although the Phase 3 drain suggests a date after 1850. By this time, the garden to the south of the Master's House had been landscaped again, and was bounded with conifers, while the land to the north was criss-crossed by paths and planted with deciduous trees.

## 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, and unless directed otherwise, the Service intends to publish the following summary in the most appropriate local and regional journals.

*In November 2011, the Worcestershire Archaeology Service undertook an archaeological watching brief during Phase 1 of a project to restore and refurbish the Master's House in Ledbury (NGR SO 71033 37653; EHE 1929). The watching brief was commissioned by Butler Hegarty Architects, in accordance with a brief prepared by Herefordshire Archaeology.*

*The watching brief focused on the excavation of a lift shaft and service duct in the west wing of the Master's House, a 19<sup>th</sup> century addition to the core of the building, which formed part of St Katherine's hospital (a 13<sup>th</sup> century foundation that became an almshouse after the Reformation).*

*The excavation of the lift shaft provided the only window onto pre-modern deposits. It exposed a sequence of deposits and features dating from the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century. No medieval deposits were present, as the area had been severely truncated. Natural marl was cut by three features which were sealed by made ground from different sources. The made ground was sealed by a similar deposit, which was cut by a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century land-drain. The sequence continued with more made ground and the brick rubble substrate of the west wing.*

*The results of the watching brief support other evidence for the creation of a formal garden around the Master's House between c1785 and 1817, and for later developments in the same vein.*

## 8. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank Gary Butler of Butler Hegarty Architects, Edmund Mandrell and the team from Speller Metcalfe, and Melissa Seddon of Herefordshire Archaeology following for their kind assistance.

## 9. **Personnel**

The fieldwork and report preparation was led by Darren Miller. Fieldwork was undertaken by John Webster and Darren Miller. The finds were analysed by Dennis Williams and the

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illustrations were drawn by Carolyn Hunt. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers.

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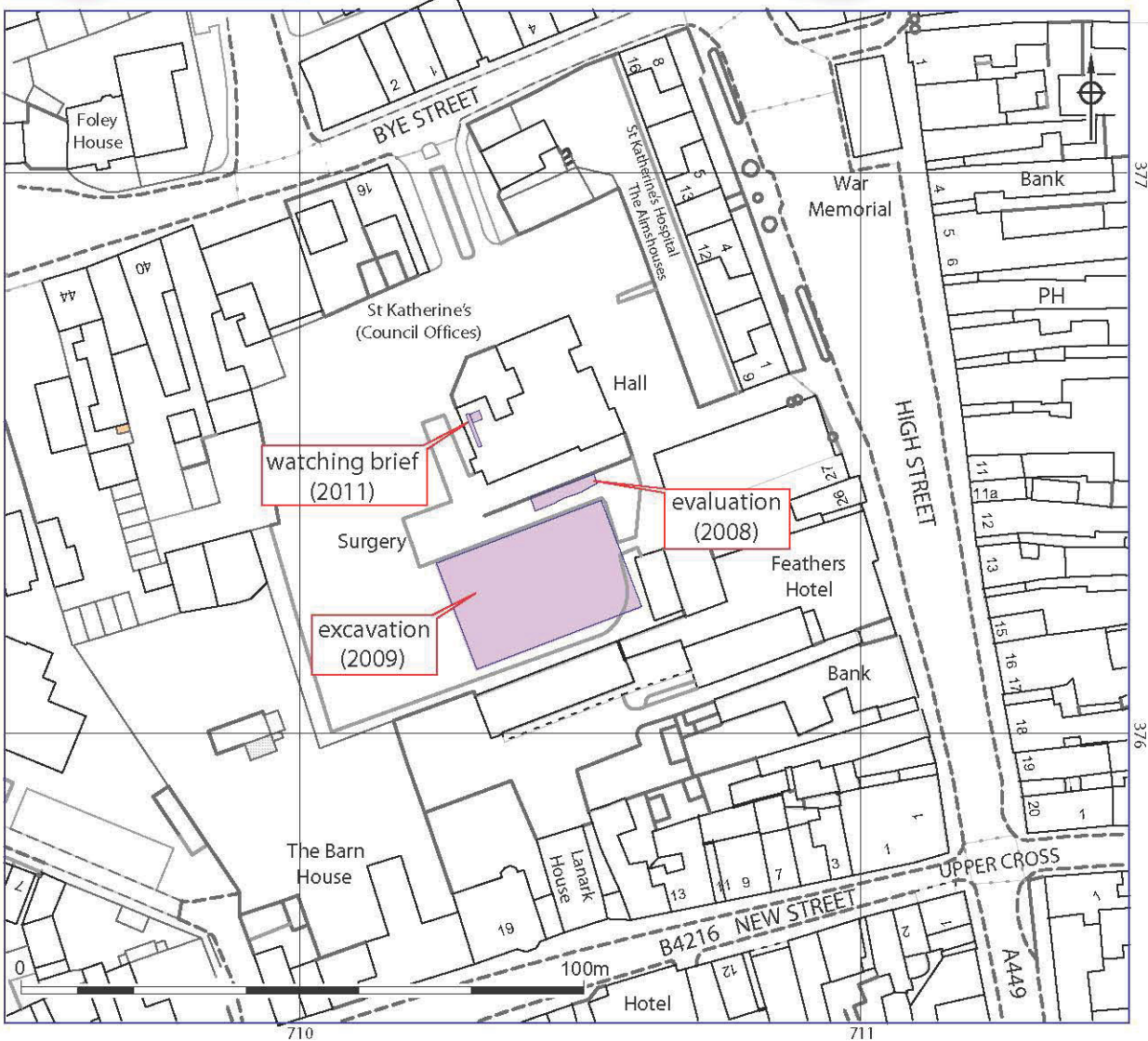
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## Figures

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Location of the site

Figure 1



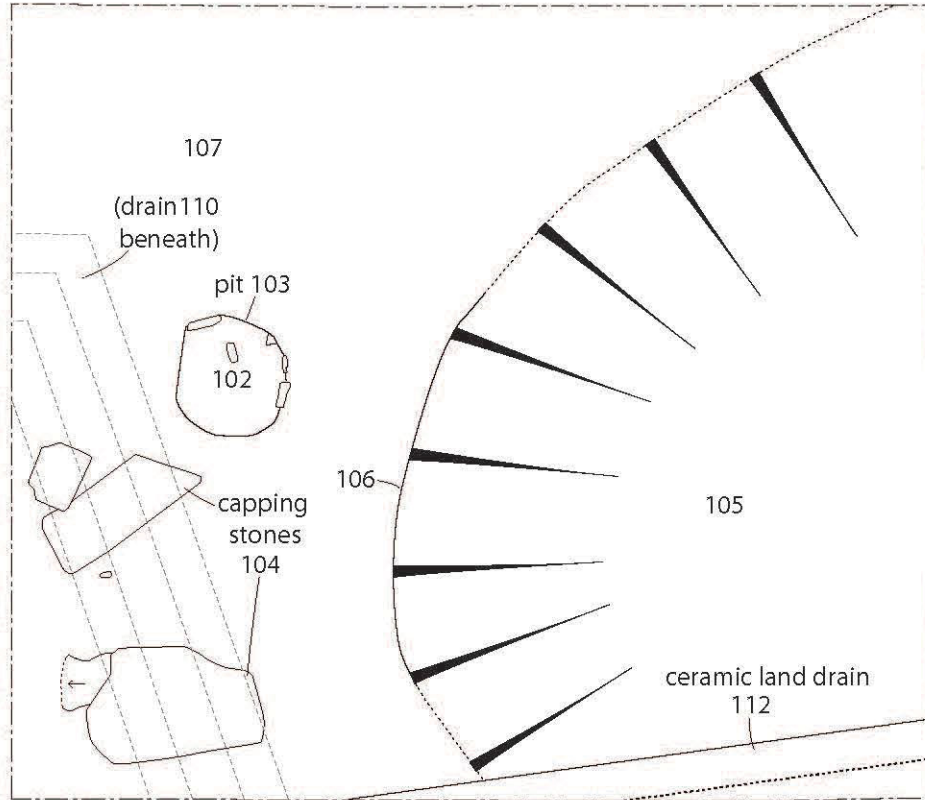


Figure 2

Location of groundworks (plan of the Master's House based upon Butler Hegarty Drg. No. co00378128/0512509/Sk101A)



### PLAN OF LIFT PIT



*Plan of lift pit*

*Figure 3*

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## Plates



*Plate 1: West side of drain 110, facing west*



*Plate 2: Capping stones 104 above drain 110 (posthole 103 in background, pit 106 to right)*

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*Plate 3: Posthole 103, facing north*



*Plate 4: Section of drain 112*

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## Appendix 1: stratigraphy

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface
100	Made ground	Firm mid and dark greyish brown silt loam with common charcoal, mortar, and brick/tile inclusions. Excavated by contractors.	0.55-0.95m
101	Made ground	Firm mid greyish brown silt loam with common charcoal, mortar, and brick/tile inclusions and aggregates of mid reddish brown clay silt (redeposited 107)	0.95-1.35m
102	Upper fill of 103	Firm mid reddish brown clay silt with common charcoal and mortar inclusions. Also several medium sub-angular stones on edge around side of cut.	1.35-1.49m
103	Posthole	Sub-circular cut c 0.30m in diameter and 0.28m deep, with steeply-sloping sides (near-vertical along east side) and rounded base.	1.35-1.63m
104	Capping of 104	Large roughly-hewn sub-angular stones up to 470x330x150mm laid on bed above brick and stone sides 110.	1.35-1.50m
105	Fill of 106	Firm mid greyish brown silt loam with few charcoal, mortar, brick/tile, and bone inclusions.	1.35-1.65m
106	Pit	Sub-circular cut at least 2.20m long and 1.80m wide, with gently sloping sides and flat base. Approximately 0.30m deep.	1.35-1.65m
107	Natural	Firm mid reddish brown clay silt	>1.35m
108	Lower fill of 103	Firm mid reddish brown clay silt – a shade darker than 107.	1.49-1.63m
109	VOID		
110	Drain	Parallel lines of roughly-hewn medium sub-angular stones laid over one course of handmade bricks to form a channel 0.15m wide. Dimensions of measured bricks (in inches): 8¼ x 4½ x 2¼, 9 x 4¼ x 2¼, and 8¼ x 4 x 2½.	1.50-1.65m
111	Substrate	Firm to loose mid brown silt loam with abundant brick and tile fragments.	0-0.55m
112	Drain	Ceramic land drain built in 14" long sections, with 5" diameter pipe on 5½" wide base. Altogether 6½ high and 6½ high.	1.04-1.21m
113	VOID		
114	Cut	Vertical-sided, flat-bottomed but for 110.	1.50-1.65m
115	Fill of 116	As 101.	0.95-1.21m
116	Cut	Vertical-sided, flat-bottomed but for 112.	0.95-1.21m

## **Appendix 2: the archive (site code EHE 1929)**

The archive consists of:

3	Field progress reports AS2
1	Photographic records AS3
4	Trench record sheets AS41
23	Digital photographs
4	Scale drawings
1	Box of finds
1	CD-Rom/DVDs
1	Bound copy of report

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Museum Resource and Learning Centre  
58 Friars Street  
Hereford  
HR4 0AS  
Telephone 01432 383383  
Email: [herefordmuseums@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:herefordmuseums@herefordshire.gov.uk)

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