

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION  
OF  
LAND OFF ST JOHNS CLOSE  
KNOWLE  
SOLIHULL



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Worcestershire Archaeology  
Archive and Archaeology Service  
The Hive, Sawmill Walk,  
The Butts, Worcester  
WR1 3PB

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Date: 1<sup>st</sup> May 2014  
Author: Andrew Walsh, [awalsh@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:awalsh@worcestershire.gov.uk)  
Illustrator: Carolyn Hunt  
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**Contents**  
**Summary**

**1**

**Report**

<b>1 Background</b> .....	<b>2</b>
1.1 Reasons for the project .....	2
<b>2 Aims</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>3 Methods</b> .....	<b>2</b>
3.1 Personnel .....	2
3.2 Documentary research .....	2
3.3 Fieldwork strategy .....	2
3.4 Structural analysis .....	3
3.5 Artefact methodology .....	3
3.5.1 Recovery policy .....	3
3.6 Environmental archaeology methodology .....	3
3.6.1 Sampling policy .....	3
3.7 Statement of confidence in the methods and results .....	3
<b>4 The application site</b> .....	<b>3</b>
4.1 Topography, geology and archaeological context.....	3
4.1.1 Current land-use .....	3
<b>5 Structural analysis</b> .....	<b>4</b>
5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits .....	4
5.1.2 Phase 2: Undated deposits .....	4
5.1.3 Phase 3: modern deposits .....	4
<b>6 Synthesis</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>7 Significance</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>8 Publication summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>9 Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>10 Bibliography</b> .....	<b>5</b>



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## **An archaeological evaluation of land off St Johns Close, Knowle, Solihull**

Andrew Walsh

### **Summary**

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at St Johns Close, Knowle, Solihull (NGR SP1814 7663). It was commissioned by CgMs Consulting, on behalf of their client who has consent to build a foodstore and associated parking. The work was required as a condition of consent, following the preparation of an archaeological desk-based assessment. The site is located adjacent to the historic core of the medieval town of Knowle.

Two trenches were excavated on the site of a former bowling green. One small ditch cutting the natural substrate was identified in the southern part of the site. Historic mapping suggests this ditch may have been a property boundary between agricultural land and occupied properties fronting onto Station Road to the south. However no artefacts were recovered, and the date and interpretation of the ditch remains uncertain. No other archaeological remains were identified. The natural silty sand lay below a well developed subsoil, at a depth of 0.55-0.63m below the present ground surface (127.3m AOD).

## Report

### 1 Background

#### 1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at St Johns Close, Knowle, Solihull (NGR SP1814 7663). It was commissioned by CgMs Consulting, on behalf of their client who has consent from Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to build a foodstore and associated parking. The work was required as a condition of consent, following the preparation of an archaeological desk-based assessment (CgMs 2011). The scope of the works had been agreed in advance between CgMs and the planning archaeologist for the local authority.

The proposed development site is considered to include heritage assets and potential heritage assets relating to the undesignated historic settlement core of Knowle, the significance of which may be affected by the application.

No brief has been issued by the archaeological advisor to Solihull MBC but the project aims to conform to the generality of briefs issued in the past. A Written Scheme of Investigation was produced by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2014) and the project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008). The WA event reference for this project is P4320.

### 2 Aims

The aims of this evaluation are:

- to describe and assess the significance of the heritage asset with archaeological interest;
- to establish the nature, importance and extent of the archaeological site;
- to assess the impact of the application on the archaeological site.

### 3 Methods

#### 3.1 Personnel

The fieldwork was led by Andrew Walsh BSc MSc FSA Scot AlfA who joined WA in 2013 and has been practicing archaeology since 2004. He was assisted in the field by Mike Nicholson BSc. The report preparation was led by Andrew Walsh and the project managers responsible for the quality of the project were Tom Rogers BA MSc and Tom Vaughan BA MA AlfA. Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt BSc MlfA.

#### 3.2 Documentary research

An archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) for the site was undertaken by CgMs Consulting (2011). The site is adjacent to the historic core of Knowle. The DBA identified moderate to high potential for archaeological remains relating to the medieval settlement to survive on the site.

#### 3.3 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared by WA (2014). Fieldwork was undertaken between 7 and 8 April 2014. The WA site reference number and site code is P4320.

The development site comprises a former retail property, residential units, village hall and car park although the evaluation focused on a small plot of land in the southern part of the site which had formerly been a bowling green. Two trenches, amounting to approximately 80m<sup>2</sup>, were excavated in this area. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 180° wheeled mechanical excavator, employing a toothless bucket 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

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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**

#### **3.5.1 Recovery policy**

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard WA practice (2012; appendix 2). In the event, no finds were recovered.

### **3.6 Environmental archaeology methodology**

#### **3.6.1 Sampling policy**

The sampling policy conformed to standard WA practice (2012). In the event no deposits were revealed which were considered to be suitable for environmental analysis.

### **3.7 Statement of confidence in the methods and results**

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 former bowling green occupies a small parcel of land (hereafter the 'site') to the rear of properties fronting onto High Street to the east, Station Road to the south and St Johns Close to the west. To the north is a car park. The site is flat, lying at a height of 128m AOD. The underlying geology is mapped as Mercia Mudstone Formation, overlain by superficial deposits of glaciofluvial sand and gravel (BGS 2014).

No prehistoric, Roman, or early medieval activity was identified on or near the site in the DBA (CgMs Consulting 2011). Knowle is a medieval settlement which is first documented in 1200 and which became a Royal Manor in 1285. The medieval town prospered and a Guild Hall was constructed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century on the High Street, to the east of the development area. Evidence of the medieval agricultural landscape survives in the form of ridge and furrow to the east, south-east and west of the site.

Historic mapping shows that the extent and form of the historic town core has changed little since the earliest map of the area was produced in 1728, although the town has expanded significantly during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (CgMs Consulting 2011). The site was recorded as a small field on the earliest available map, dated 1820. The tithe apportionment describes it as a brickyard and croft. However no buildings or structures are illustrated on the site on the tithe map and it appears likely that it was the site of the croft with the brickyard fronting onto the road to the south. The site appears to have remained relatively unchanged until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century when it was recorded as a bowling green. The bowling green on recently fell out of use.

#### **4.1.1 Current land-use**

The site was formerly a bowling green, although it has been abandoned for a number of years.

## 5 Structural analysis

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

### 5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

The underlying natural deposit in all the trenches was a light yellowy brown silty sand with frequent cobbles and pebbles, at a depth of 0.55-0.63m (Plate 1).

### 5.1.2 Phase 2: Undated deposits

In Trench 1 the natural strata was cut by a small ditch aligned roughly north-east to south-west (105; Plate 2). It measured 0.80m in width and 0.23m in depth and was filled by a sterile light greyish brown silty clay (104; Figure 3). The fill was fully excavated within the trench but no finds were identified. A tree throw (205) was identified in Trench 2.

### 5.1.3 Phase 3: modern deposits

In both trenches the features and natural deposits were sealed by light greyish brown silty sandy subsoil measuring 0.24-0.40m in depth. This was sealed by a layer of dark clinker, measuring 0.10-0.15m in depth, which was overlaid by a thin topsoil. These had presumably been laid during the construction of the former bowling green.

## 6 Synthesis

Although the topsoil had been removed and replaced by a clinker layer and new topsoil during the construction of the bowling green, a relatively well preserved subsoil survived sealing natural deposits and one feature of archaeological interest. This feature (ditch 105; Plate 2; Figs 2 and 3) was identified in Trench 1. It may have been the medieval/post-medieval rear boundary for the properties fronting onto Station Road to the south. Although this interpretation needs to be treated with caution because no dateable material was recovered, plot boundaries are visible to both the south-west and north-east of the site on the historic mapping (CgMs 2011, figs 5-7) on the same alignment. Within the site the boundary appears to have been removed by 1820 when the enclosure map was produced (CgMs 2011, fig. 5).

It is possible that archaeological features relating to the historic settlement may survive on the site to the south of the plot boundary. The historic mapping and the absence of archaeological features identified during the evaluation suggests that the area to the north was in agricultural use during the medieval and post-medieval periods.

## 7 Significance

One archaeological feature, tentatively interpreted as the rear boundary for properties fronting onto Station Road, was identified during the evaluation. No other archaeological features, deposits or finds were identified during the evaluation. It is concluded that the area to the north of the plot boundary was in agricultural use and is of low potential. To the south of the boundary there is moderate potential for features relating to the medieval and/or post-medieval settlement of Knowle to survive.

## 8 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, WA 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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## **9 Acknowledgements**

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project; Cathy Patrick (CgMs Consulting) and Anna Stocks (Planning Archaeologist, Warwickshire County Council).

## **10 Bibliography**

BGS 2014 *Geology of Britain Viewer*, <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>, British Geological Survey, accessed 9 April 2014

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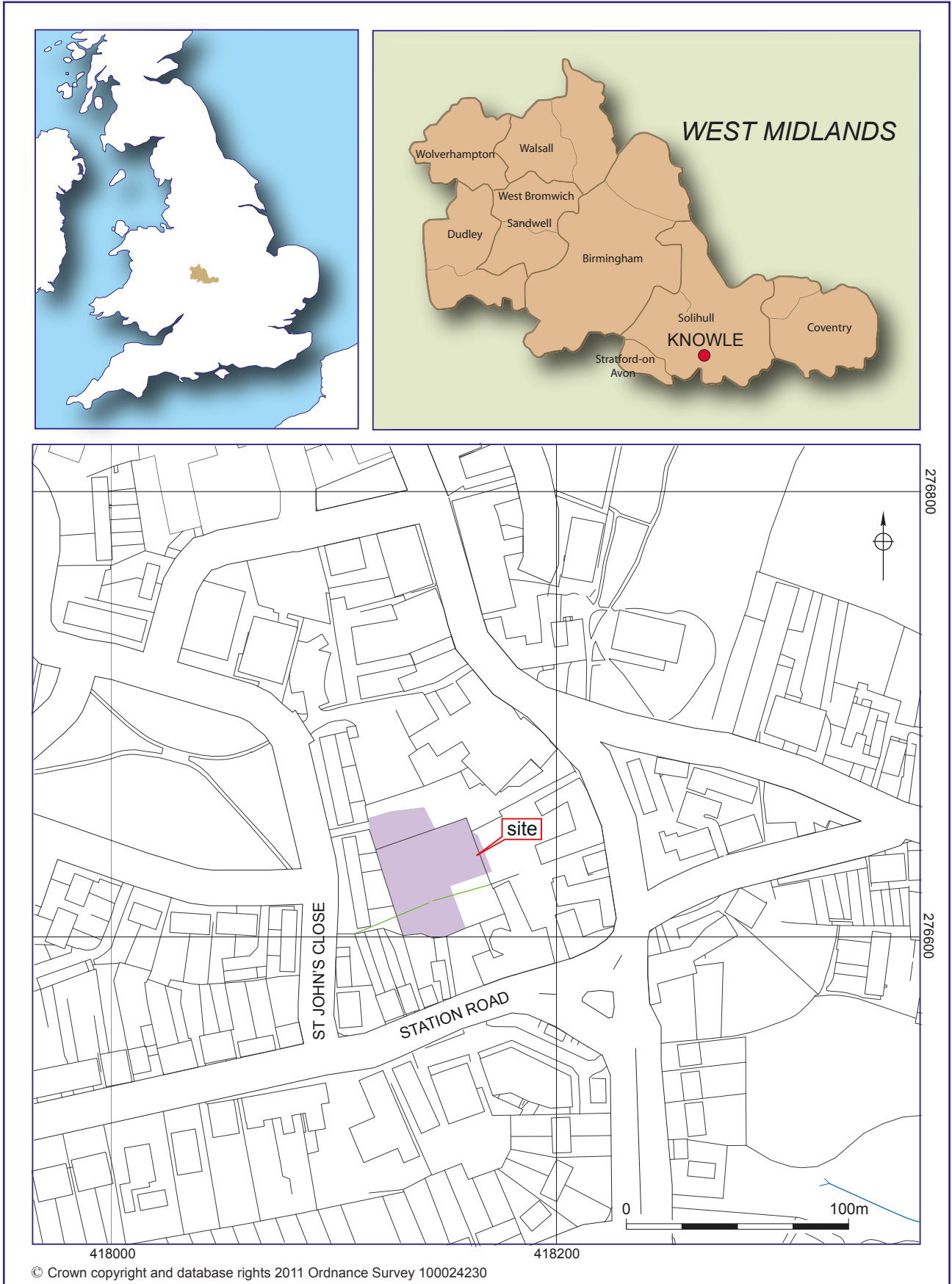
WA 2014 *Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological evaluation of land of St Johns Close, Knowle, Solihull*, Worcestershire Archaeology, Worcestershire County Council, document dated 3 April 2014, P4320





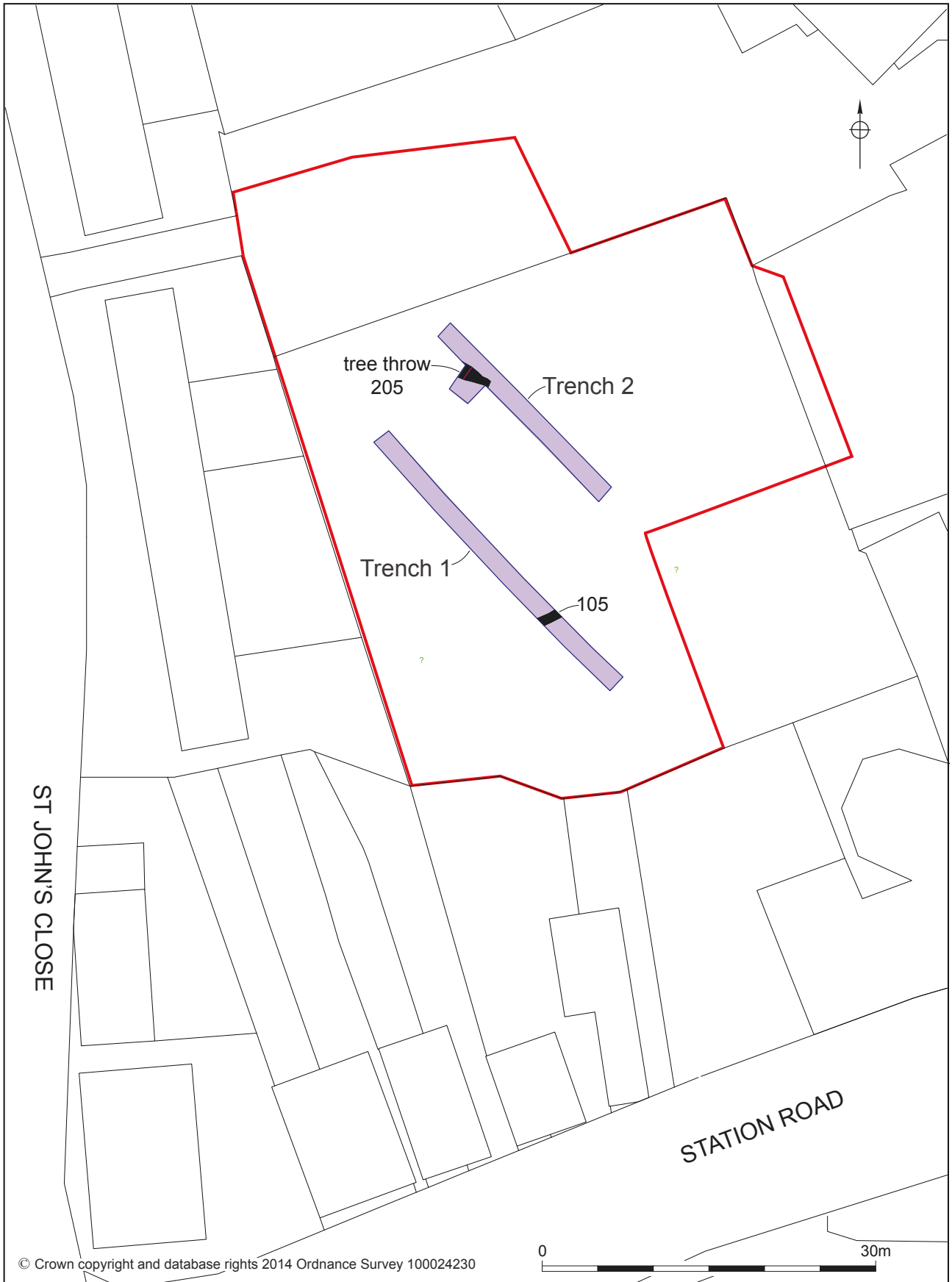
**Figures**

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Location of the site

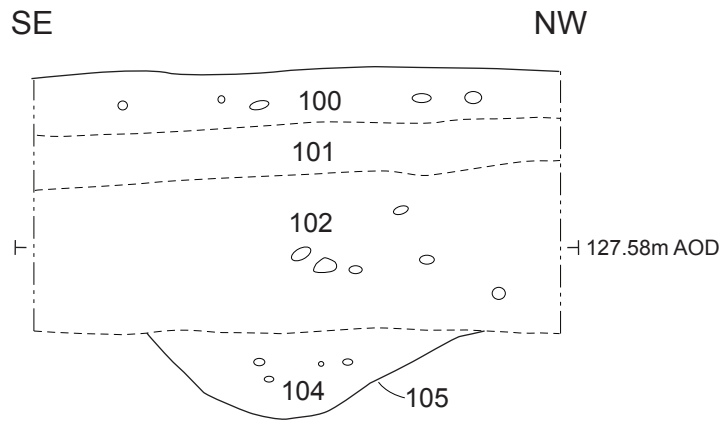
Figure 1



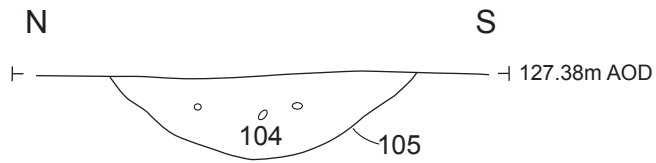
Trench location plan

Figure 2

SECTION 2



SECTION 3



Sections of linear 105

Figure 3

**Plates**



*Plate 1 Trench 2, looking north-west*



*Plate 2 Ditch 105 in Trench 1, looking south-east*



## Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

### Main deposit descriptions

#### Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 30.6m Width: 1.6m Depth: 0.56m

Orientation: north-west to south-east

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Topsoil	Light greyish brown silty clay with frequent cobbles and pebbles	0-0.16m
101	Clinker	Dark grey/black modern clinker	0.16-0.31m
102	Subsoil	Light greyish brown silty sand with occasional pebbles and cobbles	0.31-0.55m
103	Natural	Light yellowish brown with orange mottling, silty sand with frequent pebbles and cobbles and manganese deposits	0.55m+
104	Fill	Light grey brown with orange mottling, silty clay. 100% excavated within trench – no finds	0.55-0.78m
105	Cut	Cut of ditch oriented north-east to south west	0.55-0.78m

#### Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 20.6m Width: 1.6m Depth: 0.80m

Orientation: north-west to south-east

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
200	Topsoil	Light greyish brown silty clay with frequent cobbles and pebbles	0-0.13m
201	Clinker	Dark grey/black modern clinker	0.13-0.23m
202	Subsoil	Light greyish brown silty sand with occasional pebbles and cobbles	0.23-0.63m
203	Natural	Light yellowish brown with orange mottling, silty sand with frequent pebbles and cobbles and manganese deposits	0.63m+
204	Fill	Very mottled sandy silt fill of 205. Dark brown and black patches to north-east side, with mid-brown and pale grey patches elsewhere.	0.63-1.15m
205	Tree throw	Tree throw	0.63-1.15m

## **Appendix 2 Technical information**

### **The archive (site code: P4320)**

The archive consists of:

- 4 Context records AS1
- 1 Field progress reports AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 22 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 1 Permatrace scale drawings AS34
- 2 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 CD-Rom/DVDs
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Warwickshire Museum  
The Butts  
Warwick  
CV34 4SS  
Tel. Warwick (01926) 412500

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