

Archaeological Evaluation at Mayfield, Atch Lench Road, Church Lench, Worcestershire



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Tim Cornah

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Mayfield, Atch Lench Road, Church Lench Worcestershire (NGR 402965, 251290). It was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Spitfire Properties LLP. It refers to a proposed development site at Mayfield, Atch Lench Road, Church Lench which comprises a house fronting Atch Lench Road on the east side of the village of Church Lench with a large paddock to the rear. An application for residential development of the site has been made to Wychavon District Council and the evaluation was required to support this application.

Previous archaeological works in the area have established the possibility of activity dating to the Iron Age and Roman periods within the wider vicinity of the village of Church Lench though no specific settlement has yet been identified.

The site probably lay between the settlements of Church Lench and Atch Lench, both hamlets at the time of the Domesday survey when the record of a priest at Church Lench would imply the presence of an early church. This was likely replaced in the later medieval period by the current Church of All Saints that dates from the 12th century AD.

A substantial ditch dating from the 11th to 14th centuries with a probable associated bank has been recorded within the village 300m to the west of the site, but the presence of ridge and furrow earthworks, the remnants of medieval strip field agriculture, implies that the site itself was agricultural at this time.

Evaluation of the site comprised the excavation of five trenches. In four trenches topsoil and subsoil lay directly over natural deposits with no archaeological features present. In a fifth trench a considerable depth of recent made ground is thought to represent the deliberate levelling of a depression. Several residual sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from the topsoil and subsoil.

No features of archaeological significance were recorded in the trenches. The presence of ridge and furrow earthworks, suggests that the site has not been significantly disturbed since enclosure of the parish.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Mayfield, Atch Lench Road, Church Lench Worcestershire (NGR 402965, 251290). It was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Spitfire Properties LLP. It refers to a proposed development site at Mayfield, Atch Lench Road, Church Lench which comprises a house fronting Atch Lench Road with a paddock to the rear.

An application was made to Wychavon District Council (reference number W/14/2836) for the demolition of the existing buildings on the site and the erection of 31 no. new dwellings with associated landscaping, public open space, access, drainage, and associated works. This development was considered by the Planning Advisory Section of Worcestershire County Council (the Curator) to have the potential to affect an archaeological site and a brief (WCC 2015) describing and archaeological evaluation of the site was prepared.

The brief stated the requirement for the excavation of 17 trenches, however following liaison between Steven Weaver and Mike Glyde, it was established that a smaller sample was required to achieve a 4% sample of the available areas of the site.

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WA 2015) was prepared for the evaluation and approved by the Curator.

The project conforms to *Standard and guidance: Archaeological field evaluation* (ClfA 2014); *Standards and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire* (WCC 2010).

The event reference for this project, given by Worcestershire County Council's Historic Environment Record is WSM66631.

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 project was undertaken by Timothy Cornah (BA (hons.)), who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2006 and has been practicing archaeology since 2004. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers, (BA (hons.); MSc). Illustrations were prepared by Laura Templeton (BA; PG Cert; MCIfA). Robert Hedge (MA Cantab) contributed the finds report.

3.2 Documentary research

Prior to the evaluation, an archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) was undertaken by Steven Weaver of CgMS Consulting. The results identified within this are summarised within section 4.1 below.

3.3 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2015).

Fieldwork was undertaken between 27th and 29th of April 2015. The site reference number and site code is WSM66631.

Five trenches, amounting to just over 350m² in area, were excavated over the site area of 1.57ha. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 1 and 2.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a wheeled 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 nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012a). On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material. In Trench 5 a considerable depth of modern deposits was revealed and for safety reasons the trench was not excavated to the length described in the project design.

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 Rob Hedge

3.5.1 Recovery policy

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Worcestershire Archaeology 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 phases defined for the site. All information was recorded on *pro forma* sheets.

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 Worcestershire Archaeology (Hurst and Rees 1992 and www.worcestershireceramics.org).

3.5.3 Discard policy

The following categories/types of material will be considered for discard 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;
- generally where material has been assessed as having no obvious grounds for retention.

See the environmental section for other discard where appropriate.

3.6 Environmental archaeology methodology.

3.6.1 Sampling policy

Sampling was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event no deposits were identified 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 site is located to the east of the village of Church Lench. The site slopes from a height of c83m AOD on its western side to a height of c78m AOD at its east, where it is bounded by the Whitsun Brook. The underlying geology of the area is of Blue Lias and Charmouth Mudstone formation. No superficial deposits are recorded (BGS 2015).

The archaeological context set out below is summarised from the desk based assessment of the site (CgMs 2014).

A single unstratified Bronze Age palstave was found about 860m west of the site (WSM07735) but otherwise there is little activity from this period recorded on the HER.

Iron Age field boundaries and trackways are recorded to the south of the site (WSM42103) as well as the remains of a human burial from the banks of the Whitsun Brook, about 765m north of the site (WSM36376). No direct settlement evidence of this period is recorded in the wider area but its presence is likely.

The trackways and field boundaries described above continued to be used in the Romano-British period and unstratified finds of this period (WSM00330) are recorded about 800m to the north of the site and 565m to the south.

The site lies between the settlements of Church Lench and Atch Lench, both hamlets at the time of the Domesday survey when the record of a priest at Church Lench would imply the presence of an early church. This was likely replaced in the later medieval period by the current Church of All Saints (WSM07730) that dates from the 12th century AD.

A substantial ditch (WSM34258) dating from the 11th to 14th centuries with a probable associated bank has been recorded within the village 300m to the west of the site, but the presence of ridge and furrow earthworks, the remnants of medieval strip field agriculture, implies that the site itself was agricultural at this time. An archaeological watching brief has established that the medieval village did not extend far along Low Lane from Main Street (WSM55830).

Church Lench developed largely within the post medieval period, as shown from numerous extant buildings of this date around the area of Main Street. Early maps show the site as agricultural land peripheral to the village and it was not until the 1970s that the strip of land to the south of the site, facing Atch Lench Road was developed for housing. The site, at this time was an orchard.

4.2 Current land-use

The southern part of the site is made up of a residential plot including a 20th century house with some agricultural buildings to its rear. The majority of the site is made up of pastoral agricultural land, of which the south east corner has recently been planted with trees.

5 Structural analysis

Descriptions of all observed deposits can be seen in Appendix 1.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

Natural deposits consisted largely of compact red clay marl weathered mudstones which included occasional patches of gravel and rounded stones. These deposits were numbered as follows (102, 204, 302, and 402). The only exception to this was in Trench 5 where a compact yellow clay (503) lay at the limit of excavation. This deposit appears to have been located within a depression which formerly ran down towards the Whitsun Brook to its east. The exact character of this depression was not identified but it seems likely that it was formed by a tributary to Whitsun Brook so it is

possible that deposit (503) was formed through alluvial processes. This deposit could not be closely inspected.

A further possible alluvial deposit was recorded within Trench 2 (203) which consisted of yellowish brown silty clay and is likely to relate to the Whitsun Brook to its north. A single sherd of Roman Severn Valley Ware was recovered from this context, but given its abraded nature, it is thought to be residual in this context.

5.1.2 Phase 2: Medieval deposits

The primary features identified within the site dating to this period were ridge and furrow earthworks. These were visible across a large percentage of the paddock area, apart from its northern end where there was an in-filled depression. These ran in a north east to south west direction and were curved slightly at the Whitsun Brook end to run in a more NNE to SSW direction. They also widened at this point, suggesting they originally stopped at the brook.

In the centre of the field, the ridges were 7.50m apart and the furrows about 0.30m in depth. The profile here is illustrated in Figure 3. Within Trench 2, a further yellow brown silty clay deposit (202) was seen that is likely to represent mound material within the ridge, as shown in the section in Figure 3.

All of the subsoil deposits within trenches 1 to 4 (101, 201, 301, 401) followed the profile of the ridge and furrow, suggesting that these deposits are no earlier than Medieval in date.

5.1.3 Phase 3: Modern deposits

Within all of the trenches, topsoil deposits consisting of a dark greyish brown clayey silts were recorded (100, 200, 300, 400, and 501). These represent a former plough soil, the dating of which cannot be accurately given due to the modern pastoral use of the field and that the ridge is extant. Modern or post medieval ploughing is likely to have removed the ridge and furrow. These deposits did contain some modern material culture there is likely to have been some reworking of these deposits in the modern era, possibly during the planting or removal of trees from the site.

Trench 5 contained a large amount of modern material such as tarmac and plastic within a mid brown silty clay matrix (500) that extended from the surface to a depth of 1.80m. This material has been used to fill a former hollow as previously discussed.

5.2 Artefact analysis, by Rob Hedge

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

The assemblage came from six stratified contexts. The majority was Roman in date. Using pottery as an index of artefact condition, this was generally very poor, with the majority of sherds displaying high levels of abrasion; the above average sherd size of 13g reflects the presence of a single large sherd of pottery.

period	material class	object specific type	count	weight(g)
Roman	ceramic	pot	8	123
post-medieval	ceramic	pot	1	8
modern	ceramic	pot	1	1
Totals			10	132

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

Broad period	fabric code	Fabric common name	count	weight(g)
Romano-British	12	Severn Valley ware	6	112
Romano-British	98	Miscellaneous Roman wares	2	11

Post-medieval	78.1	Red sandy ware	1	8
Modern	85	Modern china	1	1
		Totals	10	132

Table 2 Quantification of the pottery by fabric

Summary artefactual evidence

For the finds from individual features, including specific types of pottery, consult Tables 3 and 2 in that order and in combination.

Overall there was very little artefactual material associated with this site. Where present it was residual and largely associated with former ploughsoils and subsoils relating to the medieval ridge and furrow earthworks.

Topsoil deposits across the site produced:

- three abraded sherds of mid-1st to 4th century oxidised Severn Valley Ware (fabric 12), including a large body sherd from a jar exhibiting very occasional and probably accidental organic inclusions, typical of vessels produced in the later 2nd and 3rd centuries in the Malvern Link area;
- A single small, very abraded fragment of an oxidised, sandy micaceous ware with occasional small iron ore inclusions. This is likely to be Roman in date but cannot be definitively ascribed to a particular fabric type.
- A single sherd of 17th century red sandy ware (fabric 78.1) and a fragment of 19th or 20th century modern stone china (fabric 85).

From subsoil deposit (101), a single small sherd of oxidised Severn Valley ware and a highly abraded sherd of a sandy micaceous fabric with occasional angular 1-2mm white quartz inclusions were recovered. The latter is considered likely to be Roman although due to the level of abrasion, could not be readily identified to fabric type.

Ridge bank (202) and alluvial deposit (203) each produced a single abraded sherd of oxidised Severn Valley Ware.

context	material class	object specific type	count	weight(g)	start date	end date	TPQ date range
101	ceramic	pot	1	1	43	400	43 - 400
	ceramic	pot	1	10	43	400	
200	ceramic	pot	1	1	43	400	43 - 400
202	ceramic	pot	1	4	43	400	43 - 400
203	ceramic	pot	1	1	43	400	43 - 400
300	ceramic	pot	2	18	43	400	150 - 400
	ceramic	pot	1	88	150	300	
400	ceramic	pot	1	8	1600	1800	1800 - 2000
	ceramic	pot	1	1	1800	2000	

Table 3: Summary of context dating based on artefacts

6 Synthesis

Previous archaeological works have identified a level of Iron Age and Romano-British activity in the vicinity of the village. No archaeological features of these periods were recorded in the evaluation but three or possibly four sherds of abraded Roman pottery were recovered from later deposits

which might indicate activity from this period in the vicinity, perhaps focussed on the Whitsun Brook. It is likely that buried features of this period survive in the surrounding area.

The presence of ridge and furrow earthworks suggested that the site has been agricultural since enclosure of the parish and this is confirmed by a lack of medieval or post medieval features. The ridge and furrow earthworks survive but are not very well defined, and may have been ploughed at some point. In the 20th or 21st Centuries, a depression in the north-eastern part of the site was levelled with made ground and debris.

7 Significance

The only significant archaeological features recorded in the evaluation were ridge and furrow earthworks, the remnants of strip fields which would have formed a part of Church Lench's medieval open field system. Whilst ridge and furrow is a relatively common feature which is rarely designated, it is a relic of the pre-enclosure landscape which has suffered considerable loss through plough damage in recent years.

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, 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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9 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project; Steven Weaver of CgMs Consulting.

10 Bibliography

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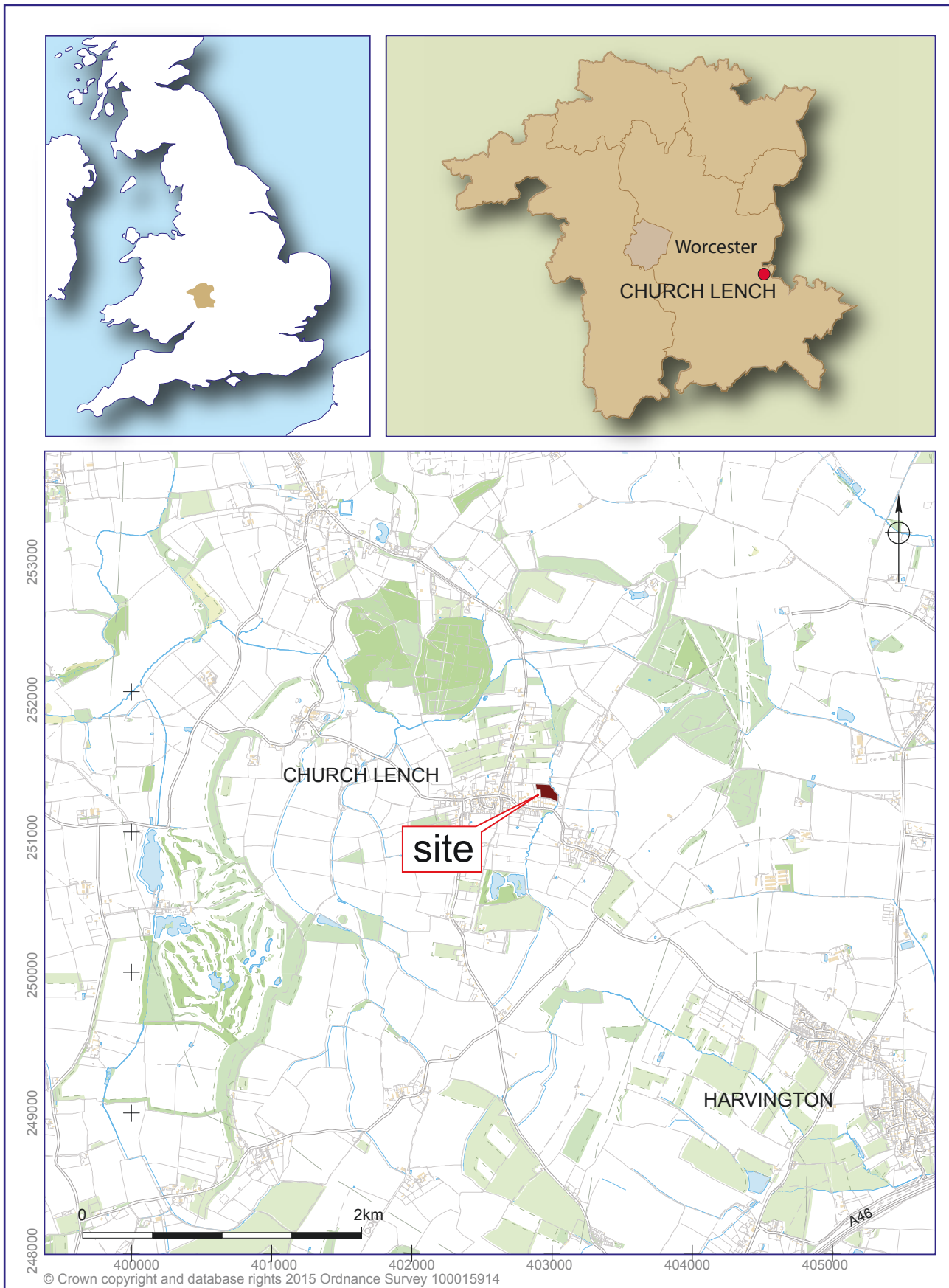
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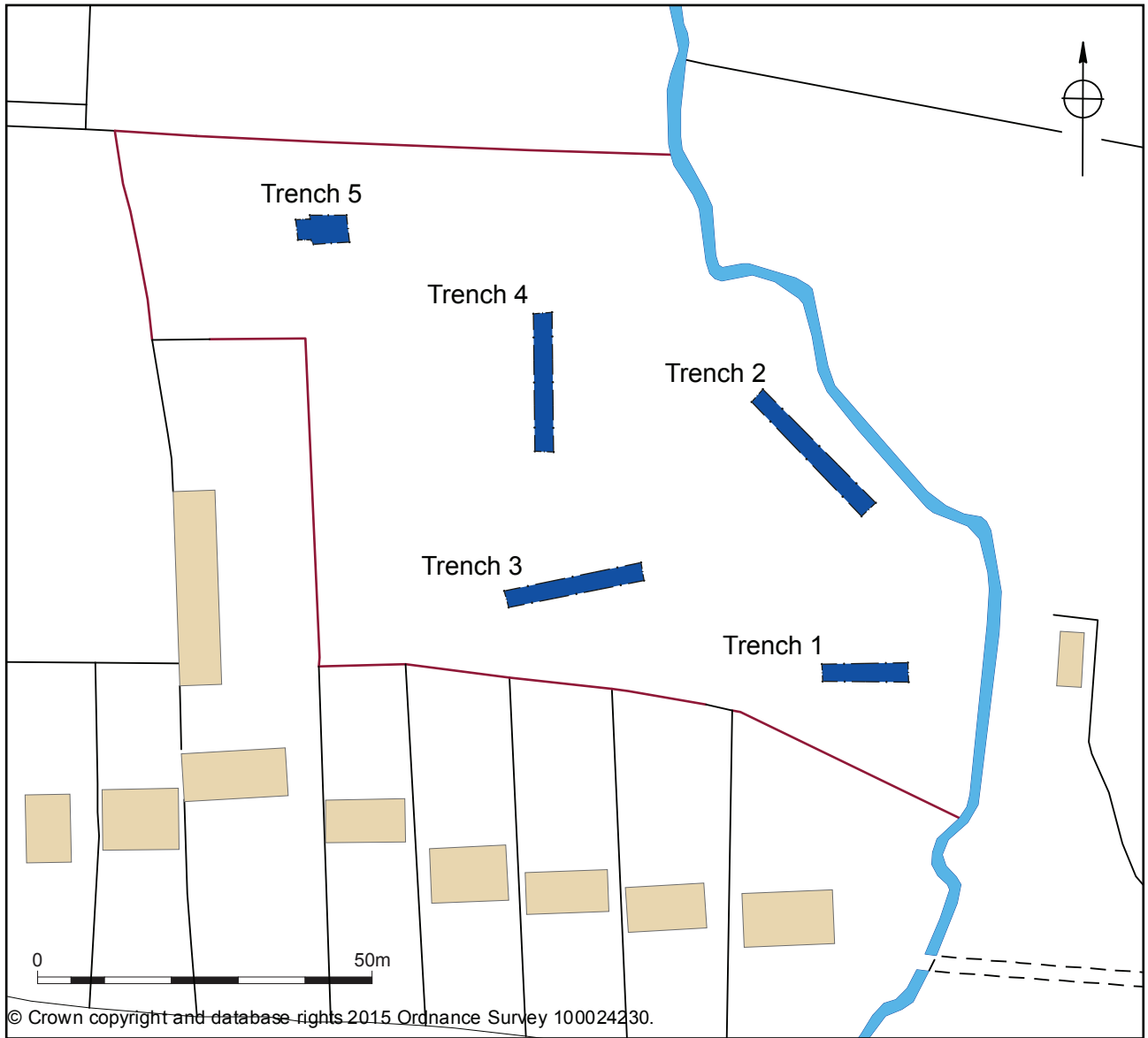
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Figures



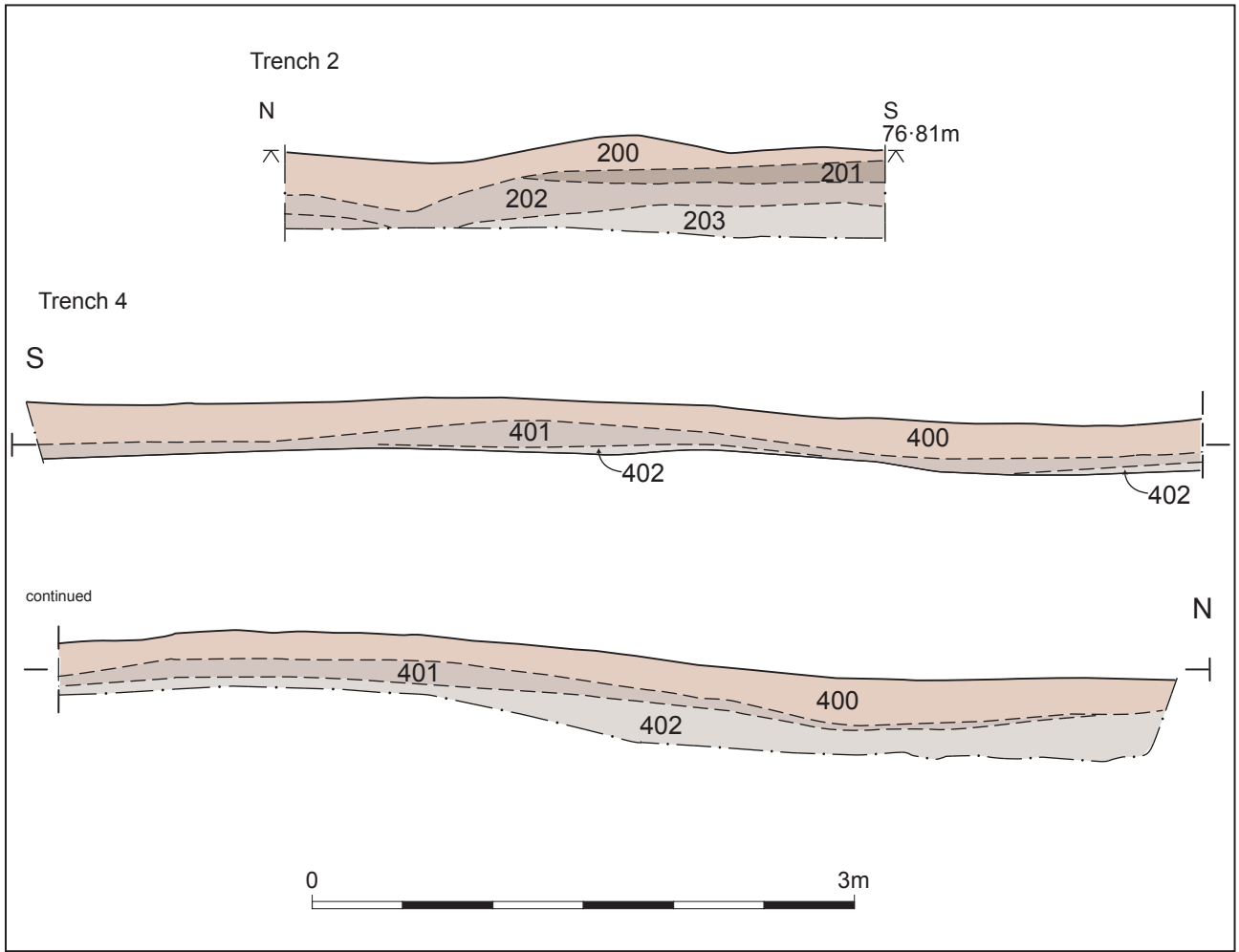
Location of the site

Figure 1



Trench locations

Figure 2



Sections

Figure 3

Plates



Plate 1 The site, looking north west



Plate 2 The natural substrate in Trench 3, looking east



Plate 3 The natural substrate and ridge and furrow earthworks in Trench 4, looking north



Plate 4 Ridge and furrow earthworks within Trench 2, looking east



Plate 5 Trench 5, looking north

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 14.00m Width: 3.30m Depth: 0.76m

Orientation: E-W

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Topsoil	Friable mid greyish brown clayey silt with occasional small rounded stones.	0.00 – 0.52m
101	Subsoil	Moderately compact mid yellowish brown silty clay which also goes into the furrow fills.	0.24 – 0.52m
102	Natural	Compact mid red clay marl with occasional patches of small rounded stones.	0.36 - 0.76m

Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 25.00m Width: 3.50m Depth: 1.17m

Orientation: N-S

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
200	Topsoil	Friable dark greyish brown clayey silt with occasional small rounded stones.	0.00 – 0.35m
201	Subsoil	Moderately compact mid yellowish brown silty clay which also goes into the furrow fills.	0.35 – 0.58m
202	Ridge bank	Firm mid yellowish brown silty clay with occasional sub rounded pebbles and stones approximately 0.20 – 0.50m diameter	0.58 – 0.83m
203	Alluvial deposit	Firm mid yellowish brown silty clay of a denser compaction than 202. Alluvial deposit below ridge and furrow banking.	0.84 – 1.17m
204	Natural	Compact mid yellowish brown marl with occasional patches of small rounded stones.	1.17m

Trench 3

Maximum dimensions: Length: 25.00m Width: 3.50m Depth: 0.55m

Orientation: NW - SE

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
300	Topsoil	Friable dark greyish brown clayey silt with occasional small rounded stones.	0.00 – 0.52m
301	Subsoil	Firm mid orangeish brown silty clay.	0.25 – 0.55m
302	Natural	Firm mid reddish brown silty clay with infrequent patches of sub-rounded stones. Patches of gravels are 0.60m diameter, with stones no greater than 0.03m in diameter.	0.55m

Trench 4

Maximum dimensions: Length: 25.00m Width: 3.50m Depth: 0.88m

Orientation: N - S

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
400	Topsoil	Friable dark greyish brown clayey silt with occasional small rounded stones.	0.00 – 0.25m
401	Subsoil	Firm light yellowish brown silty clay with occasional sub-rounded pebbles.	0.25 – 0.65m
402	Natural	Firm mid reddish brown silty clay with abundant sub-rounded stones, varying from 0.01 – 0.05m in diameter.	0.65 – 0.85m

Trench 5

Maximum dimensions: Length: 8.80m Width: 5.00m Depth: 2.80m

Orientation: E - W

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
500	Made ground	Modern mixed made ground silty clay deposit including tarmac, brick and plastic.	0.00 – 1.80m
501	Former Topsoil	Friable dark greyish brown clayey silt with occasional small rounded stones.	1.80 – 2.18m
502	Former Subsoil	Firm yellowish brown silty clay.	1.28 – 1.91m
503	Natural	Firm sterile yellow clay. Natural or alluvial deposit	2.80m

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive (site code: WSM 66631)

The archive consists of:

- 2 Field progress reports AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 63 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 2 Scale drawings
- 5 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:

Worcestershire County Museum
Museums Worcestershire
Hartlebury Castle
Hartlebury
Near Kidderminster
Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
Tel Hartlebury (01299) 250416
