

ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
WATCHING BRIEF  
AT  
LAND ADJACENT TO BREDON  
HOLT, ELMLEY ROAD, ASHTON  
UNDER HILL, WORCESTERSHIRE

Richard Bradley

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt



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WR1 3PB

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# Watching brief at land adjacent to Bredon Holt, Elmley Road, Ashton under Hill

Richard Bradley

## Background information

<i>Client</i>	Huw Miller
<i>Site address</i>	Land adjacent to Bredon Holt, Elmley Road, Ashton under Hill
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SO 99720 37939
<i>Historic Environment Record reference</i>	WSM 46364
<i>Planning authority</i>	Wychavon District Council
<i>Reference</i>	W/12/00252/PN
<i>Brief</i>	WCC 2012
<i>Project design</i>	WA 2012b
<i>Project parameters</i>	IfA 2008

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on land adjacent to Bredon Holt in the village of Ashton under Hill, Worcestershire (NGR SO 99720 37939). It was carried out on behalf of Mr Huw Miller (the Client) in response to a brief (the Brief) prepared by the Planning Advisory Service of Worcestershire County Council (the Curator) in October 2012. The Brief results from the submission of a planning application to Wychavon District Council (reference W/12/00252/PN) which proposes the erection of a single house and garage with an access driveway and is considered to have the potential to affect an archaeological site (HER reference WSM 46364).

The site area comprises land that was formerly garden space owned by the Grade II listed Bredon Holt house (see figure 1) and, whilst small in scale, the development upon it is within the settlement boundary of the historic medieval village. Ashton under Hill is located on the eastern slopes of Bredon Hill, around 5 miles south-west of Evesham and has developed in a broadly linear form along the Beckford to Elmley Castle road (VCH 1968, 245). It has late Saxon origins and land at Ashton is known to have belonged to the bishopric of Worcester in 991 (VCH 1968, 247). Gloucestershire Domesday records identify four hides at Ashton held by Gerard, who himself had one plough as well as two villagers with a plough on the estate, the value being 40 shillings (Moore 1982, 163d). The village developed throughout the medieval period, with 77 inhabitants recorded around 1380, 20 houses and 10 cottages in 1421 and 32 households in existence by 1563. Many of the houses surviving today were built by the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, mostly being 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century timber-framed structures, but an additional feature of the village area is the number of 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century farmhouses (VCH 1968 246). Formerly part of Gloucestershire, the parish was transferred to Worcestershire in 1931 (VCH 1968, 245). Since 2006, the historic core of the village of Ashton Under Hill has been designated as a Conservation Area and the site is just within the western limit of this area.

### *Previous archaeological work on the site*

There has been no previous archaeological work undertaken on the site itself.

## Aims

As specified by the brief (WCC 2012), the aim of the project was to observe and record any archaeological deposits encountered during all ground breaking activity associated with the reduction of ground for a new dwelling and access driveway on the site. It was intended to determine the extent, state of preservation, date and type of any deposits found, as far as reasonably possible. Due to the location of the development within the historic settlement boundary of the medieval village, it was also required to monitor the hand excavation by the client of two 1m<sup>2</sup> archaeological test pits in 10cm horizontal spits in order to assess the range and chronological sequence of activity as shown by discarded artefactual material recovered from the topsoil and subsoil layers.

## Methods

### *General specification for fieldwork*

- Worcestershire Archaeology 2012b

### *Sources consulted*

- Worcestershire Historic Environment Record (HER)

A HER search was conducted covering a 500m radius from the proposed development site. In terms of buried archaeological remains, this indicated evidence for human occupation from the Early Mesolithic through to the Roman period within the area, though no evidence for activity in the direct vicinity of the site itself. Located to the south east of the village is a known concentration of occupation, with Early Neolithic to Late Bronze Age enclosures seen in aerial photography (WSM 08656) and additional cropmark evidence and finds dating from the Roman period (WSM 05503; WSM 07578). On land to the west and south-west there is cropmark evidence from aerial photographs showing an Iron Age to Roman enclosure site (WSM 12177) and extensive Medieval ridge and furrow field systems (WSM 35811; WSM 12178; WSM 35912).

A major component of the village identified from the HER search area are the historic buildings. These include a grade II\* listed 12<sup>th</sup> century church (WSM 00554) and 30 grade II listed 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Century buildings, along with a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 1015967) in the form of a 15<sup>th</sup> Century stone cross (WSM 01442). A post-medieval cider mill is also recorded in the north of the village (WSM 01441).

The HER details two pieces of archaeological work close to the site, both involving survey records. The first occurred in 1997 during work on 'The Old Farmhouse', located approximately 200 metres south-east of the site, where a stone culvert was discovered and noted (WSM 33354). The second was a programme of building recording work undertaken in 2004 on the grade II listed 'The Old Farmhouse' itself (WSM 05430), detailing its architectural history (WSM 34745).

### *Photographic sources*

- 1945 Google Earth historical aerial image
- 1999, 2005, 2007 Google Earth aerial images

### *Cartographic sources*

- 1885 Ordnance Survey, 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1:2,500 (25")
- 1902 Ordnance Survey, 1<sup>st</sup> revision 1:2,500 (25")

- 1923 Ordnance Survey, 2<sup>nd</sup> revision 1:2,500 (25")
- 1938 Ordnance Survey, 3<sup>rd</sup> revision 1:2,500 (25")
- 1973 National Grid 1:2500
- Google Maps Accessed: 29<sup>th</sup> November 2012

*Date of fieldwork*

30<sup>th</sup> November 2012

*Area of site*

c 368m<sup>2</sup>

*Dimensions of excavated areas observed (see figure 2) –*

Area 1 ground reduction strip      length 22m  
width 11m  
depth 0.96m maximum

Test pit 1                      1m<sup>2</sup>  
depth 0.43m

Test pit 2                      1m<sup>2</sup>  
depth 0.42m

### *Access to or visibility of deposits*

Observation of the excavated ground reduction area was undertaken during and after machine excavation, with the test pits excavated by hand and under archaeological supervision at all times. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits, though any less clear may have not been identified.

### Statement of confidence

Access to, and visibility of, deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

## Deposit description

### Area 1 - General site ground reduction

Context	Type	Description	Interpretation	Depth (OD or below ground level)
1000	Layer	Friable dark grey brown clayey silt with frequent bioturbation and moderate inclusions of pottery, CBM, glass and charcoal flecks	Topsoil	0.00-0.20m

1001	Layer	Firm mid yellowish grey silty clay with frequent bioturbation and moderate inclusions of charcoal flecks and small limestone pieces	Subsoil	0.20-0.36m
1002	Layer	Firm yellowish grey clays with patches of oolitic limestone brash	Natural substrate	0.36-0.96m+

### Test pit 1

Context	Type	Description	Interpretation	Depth (OD or below ground level)
100	Layer	Friable dark grey brown clayey silt with frequent bioturbation and moderate inclusions of charcoal, occasional pottery, glass and CBM	Topsoil	0.00-0.21m
101	Layer	Firm light yellowish grey silty clay with frequent bioturbation, coal and charcoal flecks, occasional pottery and CBM	Subsoil	0.21-0.41m
102	Layer	Compacted oolitic limestone brash in a firm yellowish grey clay matrix	Natural substrate	0.41-0.43m+

### Test pit 2

Context	Type	Description	Interpretation	Depth (OD or below ground level)
200	Layer	Friable dark grey brown clayey silt with frequent bioturbation and moderate inclusions of charcoal flecks, pottery and CBM	Topsoil	0.00-0.18m
201	Layer	Firm mid yellowish grey silty clay with moderate bioturbation and inclusions of coal, charcoal and glass	Subsoil	0.18-0.32m
202	Layer	Firm yellowish grey clay with occasional oolitic limestone brash	Natural substrate	0.32-0.42m+

## Discussion

The watching brief focused upon an area of ground reduction undertaken by machine in advance of the construction of a house with associated driveway upon this site and revealed modern topsoil and subsoil deposits overlying a natural substrate consisting of firm yellowish grey clays with patches of oolitic limestone brash. This natural material was observed to a depth of 0.96m at the western end of the site before excavation ceased. In addition, two test pits were excavated by hand that exhibited a comparable sequence of deposits, consistent with the known geological and soil profile of the Bredon Hill area. In the test pit excavations, removal of deposits was undertaken in 10cm spits, with finds retained from each layer. There was no indication of preservation of historic topsoil and subsoil deposits with the site clearly having been subjected to modern reworking and disturbance, as evidenced by the finds recovered in both the test pits and the area of ground reduction.

With the exception of one medieval sherd (glazed Malvernian ware of 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century date) found in context 1000, the pottery finds were all post-medieval or modern. 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> red wares (fabric 78) were recovered from contexts 101, 200, 201, and 1000, and modern (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century) china (fabric 85) from contexts 100, 101, 200 and 1000. Stoneware (fabric 81) sherds from contexts 100 and 1000 were also probably modern. Fragments of brick and tile recovered from 100, 101, 200

and 1000 were either late post-medieval or modern. Contexts 100 and 101 also yielded sherds of 20<sup>th</sup> century colour-glazed sanitary ware and a halfpenny coin dated 1944 was found in context 1000. A number of pieces from modern domestic glass vessels were recovered from contexts 1000, 200, 201 and 100 (pers. comm. D. Williams). Plastic finds relating to the use of the site as a garden and play area for family use in recent times were not retained.

The finds are representative of general discard (or probable loss in the case of the coin) in the area throughout the post-medieval and modern periods. These are probably associated with the occupational buildings closely surrounding the site as most were unabraded, indicating that they have not moved far from their original place of deposition. The presence of one medieval pottery sherd is not unexpected given the history of the village. The disturbance of soil is consistent with the known use of the site area as an orchard in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as indicated on the 1923 Ordnance Survey mapping and reported to this author during site visits by local residents living close by.

## **Conclusions**

No significant archaeological features, deposits or structures were identified during the works. The use of the site as an orchard and latterly as a general garden space has evidently disturbed the site and any intact historical soil sequences that may have once existed in relation to the earlier history of the village are now no longer in existence. Given the small scale of the development, coupled with the lack of finds from earlier periods, there is limited information to be gained with regard to the range and chronological sequence of activity upon the site.

## **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.

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on land adjacent to Bredon Holt in the village of Ashton under Hill, Worcestershire on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2012. The watching brief focused upon an area of ground reduction undertaken by machine and in addition, two test pits were excavated by hand. No significant archaeological features, deposits or structures were identified during the works. The use of the site as an orchard and latterly as a general garden space has evidently disturbed the site and any intact historical soil sequences that may have once existed in relation to the earlier history of the village are now no longer in existence. Given the small scale of the development, coupled with the lack of finds from earlier periods, there is limited information to be gained with regard to the range and chronological sequence of activity upon the site.*

## **Acknowledgements**

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their assistance in the successful conclusion of this project: Mr Huw Miller (Client), Mr Neil Jones (Architect), Mr Mike Glyde Historic Environment Planning Officer (Curator).



## Bibliography

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IfA 2008 *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief*, Institute for Archaeologists

Moore, J S 1982 *Domesday Book - Gloucestershire*, Chichester

*Victoria County History (VCH)*, Elrington, C R (ed.), 1968 *A History of the County of Gloucester*, **Vol. 8**

WA 2012a Manual of service practice, recording manual, Worcestershire Archaeology, Worcestershire County Council, report **1842**

WA 2012b *Proposal for an archaeological watching brief at land adjacent to Bredon Holt, Elmley Road, Ashton under Hill, Worcestershire*, Worcestershire Archaeology, unpublished document dated 5<sup>th</sup> November 2012, **P3994**

WCC 2010 *Standards and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire*, Planning Advisory Section, Historic Environment and Archaeology Service, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished document dated December 2010

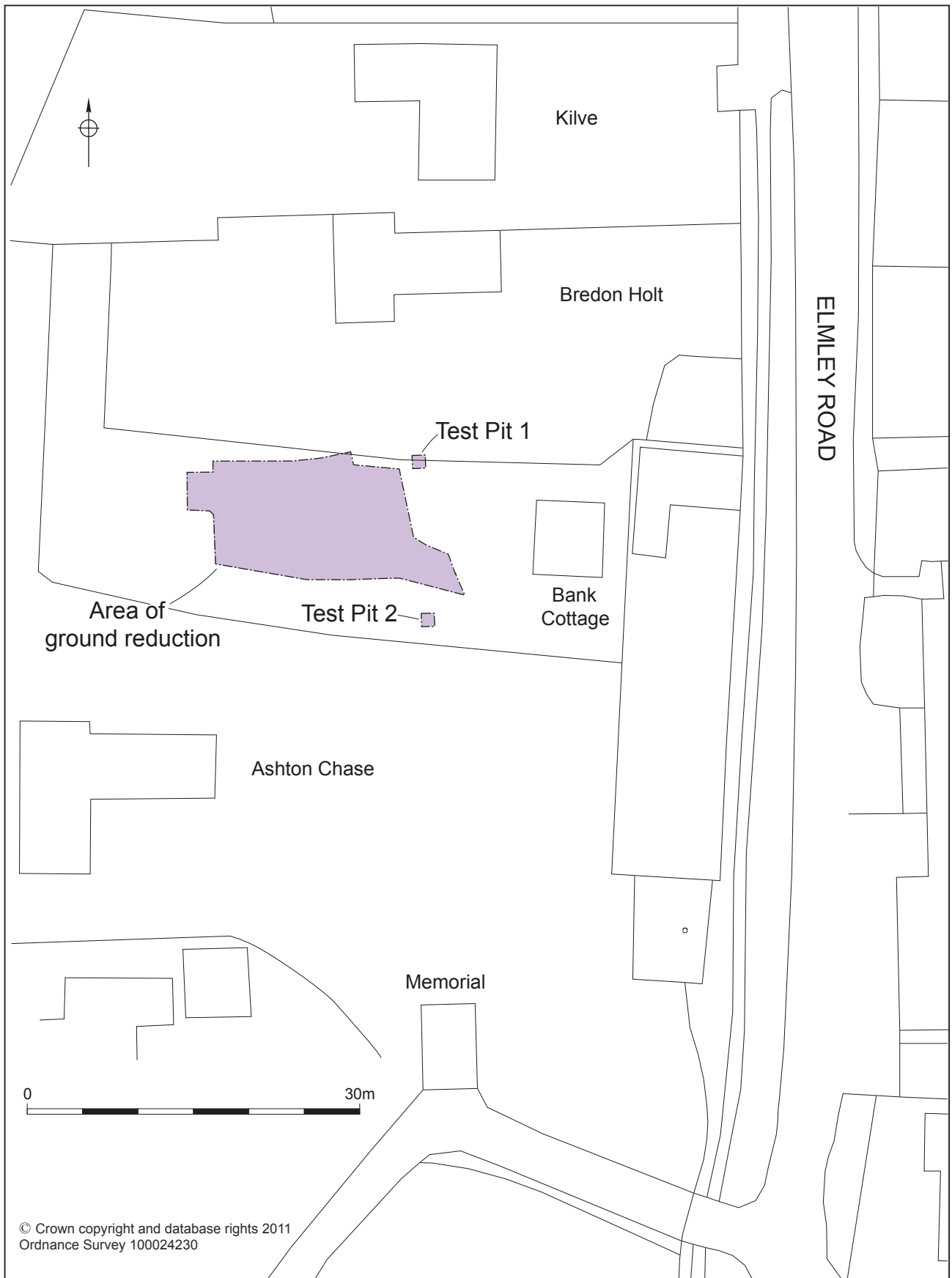
WCC 2012 *Requirements for a programme of archaeological work at land adjacent to Bredon Holt, Elmley Road, Ashton under Hill, Worcestershire*, Planning Advisory Service, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished document dated 26<sup>th</sup> October 2012

**Figures**



*Location of the site*

*Figure 1*



*Trench locations*

*Figure 2*





## Plates



*Plate 1: The site before excavation, facing west*



*Plate 2: The main area of ground reduction under excavation, facing east*





*Plate 3: Profile of soil in main area of ground reduction*



*Plate 4: Section of test pit 1, facing west*





*Plate 5: Section of test pit 2, facing north*



## **Appendix 1 Technical information**

### **The archive (site code: WSM 46364)**

The archive consists of:

- 1 Field progress report AS2
- 1 Photographic record AS3
- 34 Digital photographs
- 1 Scale drawing
- 3 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 Box of finds
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)
- 1 CD

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