

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION
AT
MANOR FARM,
PEASON LANE, ECKINGTON,
WORCESTERSHIRE

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With contributions by Angus Crawford

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

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Worcestershire County Council



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Report 1834
WSM 43243

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Archaeological evaluation at Manor Farm, Peason Lane, Eckington, Worcestershire

Jo Wainwright

With contributions by Angus Crawford

Part 1 Project summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Manor Farm, Peason Lane, Eckington, Worcestershire (NGR SO 9196 4163).

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken on behalf of Mrs J Garner who intends to erect an agricultural workers dwelling with associated works for which a planning application has been submitted.

This report on an archaeological evaluation describes and assesses the significance of a heritage asset with archaeological interest potentially affected by the application. The impact of the application on the significance is assessed.

One trench was excavated within the footprint of the proposed building. Due to health and safety reasons significant archaeology and the natural substrata was only reached in two sondages.

Three postholes, one pit and a possible cultivation or earlier soil horizon within the southern end of the trench were tentatively dated to the Romano-British period. The features were only observed within a machine cut sondage. They were not hand excavated and their relationship with the soil horizon was unclear. It is possible that they are later features, or are associated with two probable early 20th century land drains adjacent.

Archaeological investigations to the east identified a Romano-British settlement and it is possible that the soil horizon identified on the current site was associated with this settlement. The focus of activity for this period seems to be situated to the east or north-east of the present site. This area may therefore have been used for agricultural purposes outside of the main settlement. However, if the features identified are indeed archaeological and date from the Romano-British period then they could represent a more intense level of activity here.

A post-medieval soil horizon was seen across the trench, which in turn underlay a thick rubble deposit which is believed to be the remains of Eckington Railway Station which was demolished sometime between 1970 and 1972 and brought onto the site to level the area.

It is difficult to assess the significance of the site as the evaluation was on such a small scale. Therefore it can be argued that the potential for archaeological research from the results is limited.

Part 2 Detailed report

1. Planning background

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Manor Farm, Peason Lane, (NGR SO 9196 4163), Eckington, Worcestershire (Fig 1), on behalf of Rhodes Rural Planning and Land Management for their client Mrs J Gardner. The client intends to erect an agricultural workers dwelling with associated works and has submitted a planning application to Wychavon District Council (reference W/10/02450).

The proposed development site is considered to have the potential to affect a heritage asset with archaeological interest, the significance of which may be affected by the application (HER ref WSM 41487; Fig 1).

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008) and *Standards and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire* (HEAS 2008).

The project also conforms to a brief prepared by the Planning Advisory Section of Worcestershire County Council (HEAS 2011a) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (HEAS 2011b).

2. Aims

The aims of this archaeological evaluation were:

- to determine if the possible Romano-British villa site identified during works associated with adjacent railway cutting in the 19th century, and the prehistoric and Romano-British remains excavated in 2007 opposite, extend into the present site;
- 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 Documentary search

A search of the Historic Environment Record (HER) was not undertaken for this project as recently two archaeological investigations have been undertaken on land to the east, on the other side of the railway, for which documentary research was carried out (Colls and Mann 2007; WSM 39299; Vartuca 2003; WSM 41487). The findings are briefly summarised in Section 4 below.

3.2 Fieldwork methodology

3.2.1 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by the Service (HEAS 2011b).

Fieldwork was undertaken on 9 March 2011. The site reference number and site code is WSM 43243.

One trench, amounting to just over 29m², was excavated within the footprint of the proposed new building (Plates 1 and 2). The location of the trench is indicated in Figure 2.

Mechanical excavation was undertaken to remove non archaeologically significant horizons. However, due to substantial modern overburden, no hand excavation was undertaken on health and safety grounds. Further investigations were undertaken via two machine excavated sondages down to the natural substrate under constant archaeological supervision.

Deposits were recorded according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995). However, due to health and safety issues only measured sections and plans were produced. On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

The Planning Advisor of Worcestershire County Council agreed that an arbitrary bench mark of 100m could be referenced instead of an Ordnance Survey benchmark.

3.2.2 **Structural analysis**

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural and artefactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

3.3 **Artefact methodology, by Angus Crawford**

3.3.1 **Artefact recovery policy**

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

3.3.2 **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.

Pottery fabrics are referenced to the fabric reference series maintained by the Service (Hurst 1994).

3.4 **Environmental archaeology methodology**

3.4.1 **Sampling policy**

The environmental sampling strategy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995; appendix 4). In the event, no deposits were revealed which were deemed suitable for for analysis.

3.5 **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. **Topographical and archaeological context**

The site lies on a ridge approximately 50m to the west of the main railway line on the eastern side of Peason lane (Fig 1). To the west are new cattle sheds and associated yards. The site is fairly level at approximately 24m AOD but slopes down to the east.

The underlying geology of the area is of Charmouth Mudstone and the drift geology is of New Inn sand and gravel (www.bgs.ac.uk/opengeoscience).

The following is a summary from Colls and Mann (2007, 4) with additions.

A collection of Romano-British artefacts were recovered to the north and east of the site during the construction of the railway in 1838. Some of these artefacts were identified as building material, perhaps from a villa (WSM 07724).

A number of archaeological trial trenches were excavated on the other side of the railway in 2003 (Vartuca 2003; Fig 1) revealing a dense concentration of ditches and gullies, the majority of which dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Although very little structural elements were identified, this site may represent a Romano-British settlement site.

An archaeological excavation followed on from the trial trenching in 2007 (Colls and Mann 2007) and identified features, deposits and structures dating from the Neolithic to post 2nd century AD. Evidence of Neolithic and Late Iron Age activity was uncovered in the form of a

Neolithic pit and a probable Late Iron Age ring gully. Also revealed were complex sequences of archaeological deposits dating to the Romano-British period, including a human burial dating to the 1st-2nd century AD.

The manor of Eckington is documented throughout the medieval period, with the parish church (250m to the south-east of the site) dating to the 12th century. Evidence for intensive agricultural practices are visible within the landscape today as ridge and furrow earthworks.

In 1838 the cutting for the Birmingham and Gloucester Railway was excavated to the east of the site. It is believed that the spoil from the cutting was spread over the surrounding land. Following the closure of Eckington Railway Station in 1965, the building was pulled down between 1970 and 1972 and the rubble was spread across the present site to level the area (pers comm Ted Grazier).

5. Results

5.1 Structural analysis

The trench and features recorded are shown in Figures 2 and 3. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

The natural sands and gravels, 103, were identified at a minimum of 1.75m below the existing ground surface.

5.1.2 Phase 2: Romano-British deposits

In the sondage at the south end of the trench a possible pit, 111, and three possible postholes 105, 107 and 109 were cutting natural (Plates 3 and 4). These features were not excavated due to health and safety concerns. It is possible that they are later features or disturbance when two land drains were laid, probably in the 20th century.

Above the natural in the southern sondage was a layer of yellow brown silty sand 102 which could be tentatively identified as a Romano-British cultivation/earlier soil horizon. The top of this deposit was 1.45m below the ground surface and the layer was 0.30m thick. The relationship of the pits and postholes with this soil horizon was unclear.

5.1.3 Phase 3: Post-medieval and modern deposits

A layer of dark grey brown sandy clay silt was excavated in the two sondages above natural in the north, 101 and in the south, 102 (Plates 3 and 5). This deposit was also at the limit of excavation across the rest of the trench. The top part of this deposit was disturbed by rubble, 100, which had been dumped on top of it. The rubble comprised a substantial dump of brick, tile, metal, plastic and hardcore, 100, which formed the present ground surface of the site. This was at least 1.30m thick. Two land drains of probable early 20th century date were recorded cut into the natural within the sondages.

5.2 Artefact analysis, by Angus Crawford

The finds assemblage was of limited archaeological significance. Two small abraded pottery sherds of Roman Severn valley ware (fabric 12) were identified along with a prehistoric flint core, all from context 102. A small 19th to 20th century porcelain sherd (fabric 83) was recovered from context 101.

The assemblage may indicate some level of activity during the prehistoric and Romano-British period on site. However, the small size of the assemblage makes the interpretation and dating of the material problematic. The remaining porcelain sherd would generally be interpreted as rubbish discard from the 19th or 20th century.

6. **Synthesis**

6.1 **Prehistoric**

The unstratified flint core indicates that prehistoric activity was taking place in the area or perhaps on the site. Prehistoric flint was identified in the archaeological investigations to the east, as was a Neolithic pit (Colls and Mann 2007). Therefore the focus of activity could have been further east during this period.

6.2 **Roman**

The cultivation/earlier soil horizon, 102, could date from the Romano-British period but with only a small area excavated and only two sherds of residual Roman pottery recovered from this layer, dating is problematic. The stratigraphic relationship of the pit and postholes with the soil horizon was unclear due to their similar constituents and colour. They were tentatively identified below this soil layer, although their dating is uncertain.

It is possible that the soil horizon and features are associated with the Romano-British settlement identified during investigations to the east. The focus of activity for this period seems to be situated to the east or north-east of the present site and perhaps this area was just used for agricultural purposes outside of the main settlement. However, if the features identified are indeed archaeological and date from the Romano-British period then they could represent a more intense level of activity here.

6.3 **Post-medieval and modern**

The soil horizon seen across the entire trench probably built up from the Romano-British period onwards. By the time of the 1924 6" Ordnance Survey map the field that the site is situated in was used for allotments. The top of this soil horizon is considered to represent the ground surface before the rubble was dumped in the early 1970s.

6.4 **Research frameworks**

The results of the fieldwork can be discussed in the broader framework of the river valleys and aggregates survey (Jackson and Dalwood 2007; section 22.3.5). However, the findings from this small scale evaluation cannot be interpreted with any certainty so will have limited research value.

7. **Significance**

7.1 **Significance of a heritage asset with archaeological interest**

The aim of an archaeological evaluation is to provide the client and the planning authority (and its advisors) with sufficient information to assess the significance of a heritage asset with archaeological interest, in line with *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (DCLG 2010: Policy HE6). More detailed guidance on assessing the significance of site with archaeological interest is set out in the associated *Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide*, which advises that an on-site evaluation should establish the nature, importance and extent of the archaeological interest in order to provide sufficient evidence for confident prediction of the impact of the proposal (DCLG/DCMS/EH 2010: Section 5, Development Management).

7.2 **Assessment of significance**

The on-site evaluation has possibly provided new evidence on a site with archaeological interest. As a result, an assessment of the significance of this site can be made in terms of the nature, importance and extent of the archaeological interest.

Nature of the archaeological interest in the site

Four features, tentatively dating from the Romano-British period were identified. However, the small sample of the features and finds assemblage makes the interpretation and dating of the material problematic. The archaeological investigations to the east identified a Romano-British settlement and it is possible that the soil horizon excavated was associated with this settlement. The focus of activity for this period seems to be situated to the east or north-east of the site and perhaps this area was just used for agricultural purposes outside of the main settlement. However, if the features identified are indeed Romano-British then they could represent a more intense level of activity here.

Relative importance of the archaeological interest in the site

The archaeological site is probably on the periphery of a settlement dating from the Romano-British period. This settlement has been partially excavated in the east and the chronology and site interpretation has been established to some degree. However, the extents of the settlement are not known. It is difficult to assess the importance of the site as the evaluation was on such a small scale. It can be suggested that the potential for archaeological research from the results is limited.

Physical extent of the archaeological interest in the site

The significant archaeological deposits and features are buried beneath at least 1.40m of overburden. Only two areas were excavated deep enough to reveal either the natural substrata or the possible Romano-British soil horizon. The extent of the features and deposits in the central part of the trench is not known as excavation ceased because of health and safety reasons before the level that significant deposits could have been encountered.

7.3 **Assessment of the impact of the proposal**

The on-site evaluation, and the information provided by the Client, allows an assessment to be made of the potential impact of the proposed development on the archaeological interest in the site.

It is believed that the below groundworks for the development will be a maximum 1m deep from the ground surface. If this is the case then there will be little to no impact on buried significant archaeological deposits.

8. **Publication summary**

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service 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.

A archaeological evaluation was undertaken on behalf of Mrs J Garnert at Manor Farm, Peason Lane, Eckington, Worcestershire (NGR SO 9196 4163; HER ref WSM 43243).

One trench was excavated within the footprint of the proposed building. Due to health and safety reasons significant archaeology or the natural substrata was only reached in two sondages, greater than 1.40m below the current surface.

Three postholes, one pit and a cultivation/earlier soil horizon were tentatively dated to the Romano-British period. However, the features were not hand excavated and it is possible that they are later features or disturbance when two land drains were excavated probably in the early 20th century.

Archaeological investigations to the east identified a Romano-British settlement and it is possible that the soil horizon excavated was associated with this settlement. The focus of activity for this period seems to be situated to the east or north-east of the site and perhaps this area was just used for agricultural purposes outside of the main settlement. However, if the features identified are indeed of Romano-British date then they could represent a more intense level of activity here.

A post-medieval soil horizon was seen all over the trench which in turn underlay a thick rubble deposit which is believed to be the remains of Eckington Railway Station which was demolished sometime between 1970 and 1972 and brought onto the site to level the area.

It is difficult to assess the significance of the site as the evaluation was on such a small scale. However, it can be suggested that the potential for archaeological research from the results is limited.

9. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Mrs J Gardner and Ted Grazier (Manor Farm), Paul Rhodes (Rhodes Rural Planning and Land Management) and Mike Glyde (Historic Environment Planning Officer, Worcestershire County Council).

10. **Personnel**

The fieldwork and report preparation was led by Jo Wainwright. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Vaughan. Fieldwork was undertaken by Jo Wainwright and Richard Bradley. Finds analysis was by Angus Crawford and illustration by Carolyn Hunt.

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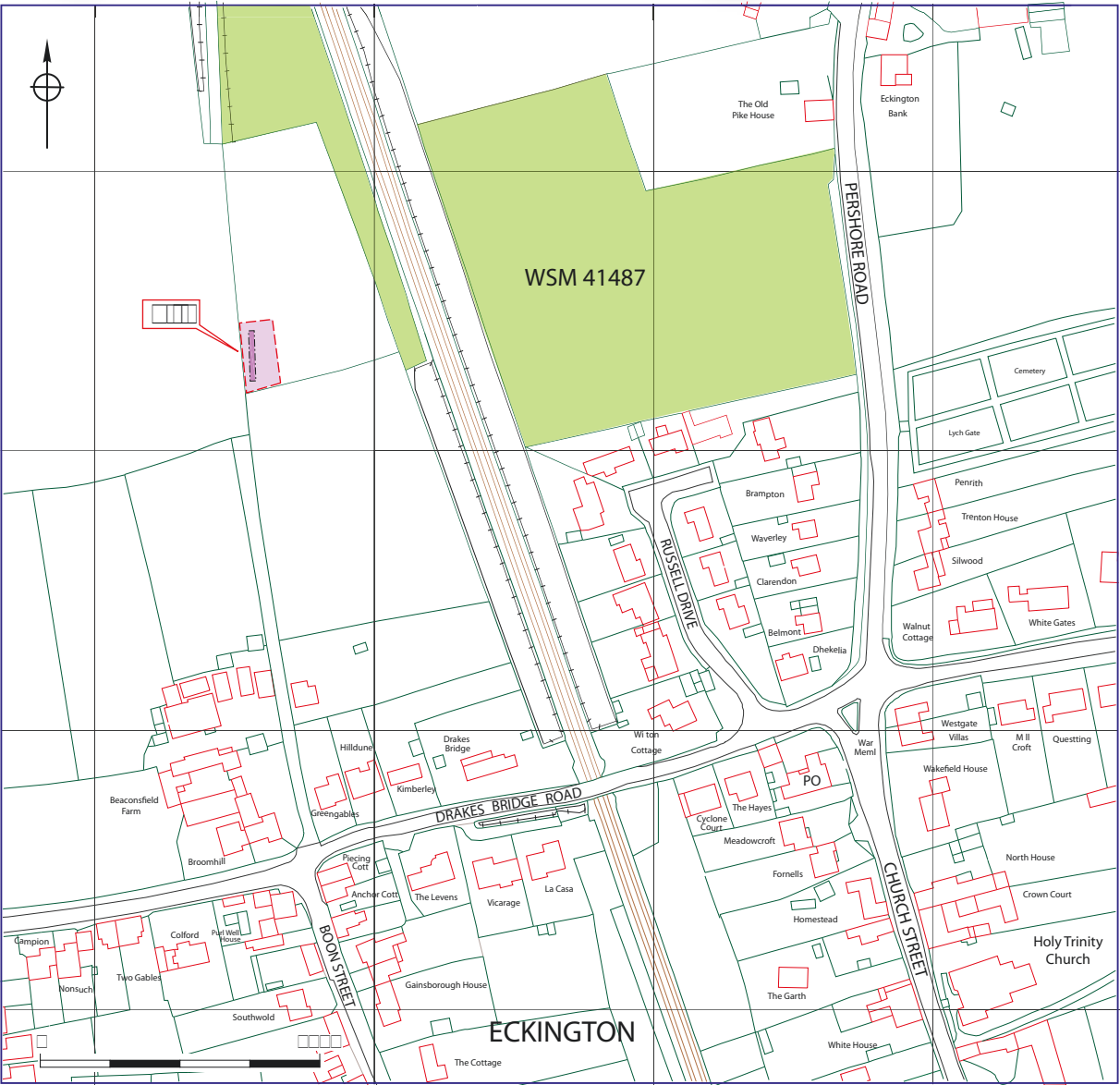
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www.bgs.ac.uk/opengeoscience

Figures

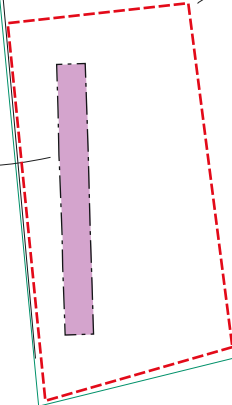


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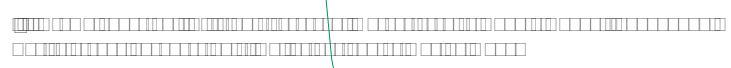


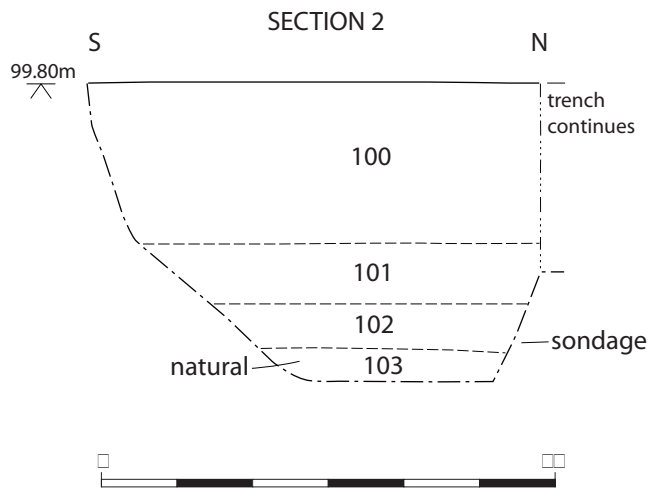
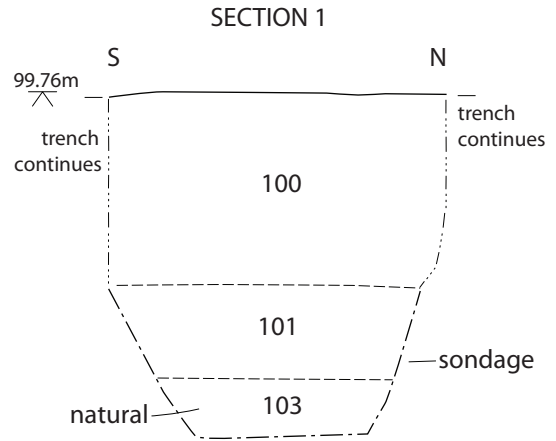
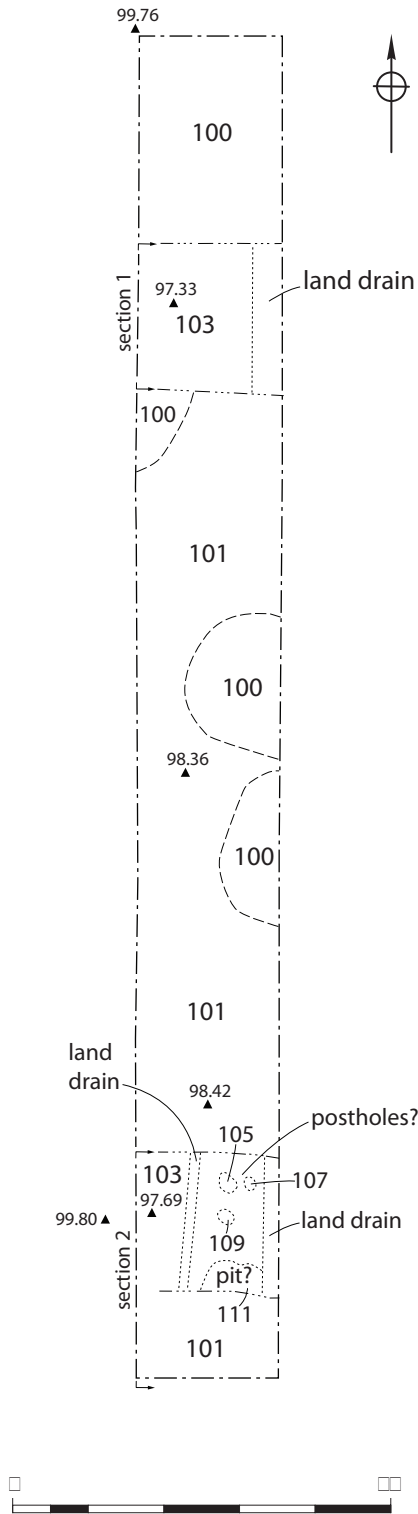
approximate
area of site

Trench 1



392000





Plates



Plate 1, Excavation of the trench, view north-east



Plate 2, Location of the trench (to the far side of the excavator) showing build up of ground, view south-west



Plate 3, Sondage in south end of trench showing postholes and pit, view north



Plate 4, Sondage in south end of trench showing postholes and pit, view north-west



Plate 5, Sondage in north end of trench showing 100, 101 and 103, view north-west

Appendix 1 Trench description

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 17.50m Width: 1.90m Depth: 1.30-2.30m

Orientation: N-S

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Make-up	Mixed rubble and demolition material with some hardcore/gravels in a mixed dark blackish brown sandy silt. Contains frequent bricks, tile, plastic and metal	0-1.30m
101	Earlier soil horizon	Soft to loose dark grey brown sandy clay silt with moderate small and medium sub-rounded stones. Demolition material 100 pressed into the top of this deposit. Above 102	1.10-1.90m
102	Earlier soil horizon	Soft to loose mid yellow brown silty sand with occasional small and medium sub-rounded stones. Only seen in sondage in south end of trench. Probable Roman soil horizon. Above natural 103	1.45-1.75m
103	Natural	Light brownish yellow gravel and sand	1.75m+
104	Fill	Mid grey brown clayey silt. Fill of 105	c 1.90m+
105	Possible posthole	Sub-circular. Not excavated	c 1.90m
106	Fill	Mid grey brown clayey silt. Fill of 107	c 1.90m
107	Possible posthole	Sub-circular. Not excavated	c 1.90m
108	Fill	Mid grey brown clayey silt. Fill of 109	c 1.90m
109	Possible posthole	Sub-circular. Not excavated	c 1.90m
110	Fill	Light grey brown sandy clay. Fill of 111	c 1.90m
111	Possible pit cut	Possible sub-ovoid	c 1.90m

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive (site code: WSM 43243)

The archive consists of:

- 1 Field progress reports AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 30 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 3 Scale drawings
- 1 Levels records AS19
- 1 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 Box of finds
- 1 CD-Rom/DVD
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

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