

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING  
BRIEF AT  
BANK FARM AND THOMAS'S  
FARM, BANK ROAD,  
LITTLE WITLEY,  
WORCESTERSHIRE

Elizabeth A Curran

With contributions by Dennis Williams

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Project 3425  
Report 1742  
WSM 41770



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## Archaeological Watching Brief at Bank Farm and Thomas's Farm, Bank Road, Little Witley, Worcestershire

Elizabeth A Curran

With contributions by Dennis Williams

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### Background information

<i>Client</i>	John Wallace, Environmental Services, Worcestershire County Council
<i>Site address</i>	Bank Farm and Thomas's Farm, Bank Road, Little Witley, Worcestershire centred on SO 776 634
<i>National Grid reference</i>	WSM 41770
<i>Historic Environment Record reference</i>	Worcestershire County Council
<i>Planning authority</i>	n/a
<i>Project design</i>	HEAS 2009a
<i>Project parameters</i>	IfA 2008
<i>Previous archaeological work on the site</i>	

Field walking was undertaken in 1983 (WSM 01271) within the same field as the present groundworks. A large quantity of Romano-British pottery, including Severn Valley ware rims, body and base sherds, were observed on the surface of the field in the northeast corner. The Historic Environment Record (HER) contains further information relating to the collection of unstratified Romano-British pottery from this field and the adjacent field to the east over the years. Although no specific details were recorded it is suggested that the majority of the Roman pottery came from the field to the east (WSM 05125). These finds are indicative of substantial Roman activity in the area, although the exact nature is not known.

### *Archaeological and historical background*

The groundworks were located to the north of Bank Farm, on the eastern edge of the village of Little Witley, one mile from the A443 between Ludlow and Droitwich. The site is currently occupied by a recently planted apple orchard (Fig 1). The geology of the site is characterised by the brown earths of the Bromsgrove series with deep permeable sandy loam passing to soft sandstone (Ragg *et al* 1984).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were several farms close to the village of Little Witley, including Thomas's Farm and Bank Farm to the west. Most of the buildings and outhouses associated with Thomas's Farm have now been converted to residential properties, including Woodbury Farmhouse, The Coach House, Wain House, Applewood Barn and Main Barn.

Woodbury Farmhouse (WSM 38894) is grade II listed dating from *c* 1800. The building is of two storeys, built of red brick, with a tiled roof. The main east-west range faces south and the rear a lower range is L-plan. In the grounds of Woodbury Farm an archaeological watching brief (WSM 41570) was undertaken in 1995 during works for an outdoor swimming pool. No significant archaeological deposits or artefacts were observed.

Bank Farmhouse (WSM 12658) is a grade II listed timber-framed building with painted brick infill, two storeys, with a gable lit attic and tiled roof with brick stacks. The building may date to as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century but has undergone alterations in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Barns (WSM 32911) at Bank Farm, while not listed, are noted for having pierced honeycomb brickwork.

The HER has a record relating to the remains of a east-west aligned pond (WSM 12657), north of Bank Farm. The feature is depicted on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map of 1885 running east to

west between two currently existing ponds. This feature has been interpreted as a possible medieval moat. The 1<sup>st</sup> edition also shows that the eastern area of the field was once an apple orchard. A public footpath bisects the field through the orchard, connecting a track way running north-south to a footpath which runs north-westerly from Bank Farm. By the time of the 1903 OS map the area of the orchard has reduced and the rest of the field is arable. The site has undergone no change by the time of the 1954 Ordnance Survey map.

The HER contains several records relating to find spots within a 500m radius of the site. A number of unstratified finds had been retrieved south of the church of St Michael. The finds include three 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century coins, one token and part of a Roman brooch; with reports of another brooch and bronze clasp being retained by the metal detectorist (WSM 15211). The HER also holds further records of metal detector finds in the parish of Great Witley, to the northwest, recorded as part of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (WSM 39528).

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### **Aims**

The aim of the watching brief was to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible. The fieldwork was restricted to areas of ground disturbance associated with the development following the progress of the construction team.

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### **Methods**

General specification for fieldwork	CAS 1995
Sources consulted	HER Sources cited by the HER 1 <sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey, 1885, 1":1 mile 1903 Ordnance Survey, 1":1 mile 1954 Ordnance Survey, 1:10,000
Date(s) of fieldwork	8 December 2009 to 20 January 2010
Area of site	c 2.4 hectares
Dimensions of excavated areas observed	Trial Pit 1      length 2.40m width 0.90m depth 2m Trial Pit 2      length 2.40m width 0.90m depth 2.50m Service Trench and manholes   length 179m width 0.90-1.40m depth 1.10-2.50m

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### **Access to or visibility of deposits**

Observation of the excavated areas was undertaken during and after machine excavation. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits, though any less clear may have not been identified. Access to the deep trenches was not made for safety reasons and observations were restricted to those made from the top of the trench.

Due to unforeseen difficulties accessing the site during bad weather, some sections of the service trench were not monitored. These areas as indicated on Figure 2 totalled c 26.5m<sup>2</sup>.

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## Artefact methodology by Dennis Williams

### *Artefact recovery policy*

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995, appendix 4).

### *Method of analysis*

All hand-retrieved finds were examined and a primary record made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. 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 was examined under  $\times 20$  magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst and Rees 1992, HEAS 2009b)

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## Statement of confidence

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. Having undertaken the project the following comments may be made with regard to the methods adopted. Access to, and visibility of deposits within some sections of the service trench was restricted due to the depth of the trench, although the excavated deposits were examined on site.

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## Structural analysis

The trenches recorded are shown in Figures 2-3, and Plates 4-13. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 2.

Trial Pit 1 (Plate 4) was excavated through made ground (1000) and consisted of clayey and silt loam with occasional decomposing twigs and grasses, along with small pieces of barbed wire. Natural (1001) was recorded at 0.90m below the existing ground level.

Trail pit 2 was excavated to a depth of 2.50m and revealed a full soil sequence (Plate 5). The uppermost layer was comprised of topsoil and turf (2000). Below this layer the observed subsoil (2001) did not contain any archaeological features or deposits. The subsoil overlay and sealed the natural matrix (2002) which comprised compact brownish red marl and sandstone fragments. In this trench the natural matrix lay at approximately 0.30m below the current ground surface.

The Service Trench was excavated south-north along the length of the field, to a varied depth between 2.50m and 1.10m. It revealed a similar sequence of deposits recorded within Trail pit 2, with the natural matrix recorded from 0.64m below the current ground surface (Plates 6-13). During the excavation of this trench pottery sherds were recovered from the subsoil (3001), however no associated archaeological features or deposits were observed.

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## The artefact assemblage by Dennis Williams

The assemblage from this site was small, comprising six sherds of pottery, weighing 280g (Table 1). Their state of preservation was generally good, with only minor abrasion.

Material class	Period	Count	Weight(g)
Ceramic	Roman	6	280
Total:		6	280

Table 1: *Quantification of the assemblage.*

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*The pottery*

The sherds have been quantified according to fabric type (Table 2). None could be dated by form, but all were datable by fabric type to the Roman period.

Period	Fabric code	Fabric common name	Count	Weight (g)
Roman	12	Severn Valley ware	6	280
Total:			6	280

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

The pottery sherds recovered from this site have all been identified on the database as oxidised Severn Valley ware (fabric 12). Several vessels were represented in the group. Subsoil 3001 contained a thick body sherd from a large jar or flagon, and a body sherd, which adjoined the base of a small vessel, probably also a jar or flagon. Three other body sherds, of medium thickness, were undiagnostic. An unstratified deposit contained a rim sherd from a bowl. This rim was flanged, with a pointed outer edge, but no sign of grooved or wavy line decoration. The closest known match is the Type 50 described by Webster (1976), and dated as late 2<sup>nd</sup> to late 3<sup>rd</sup> century (though the present rim lacked the slightly hooked shape of the Type 50).

Although the forms from this assemblage were unremarkable, significant differences in fabric were noted. The smaller jar sherd, and one body sherd, from context 3001, and the unstratified bowl sherd were characteristic of fabric 12, the oxidised Roman coarseware produced in an area concentrated around the north end of the Malvern Hills. The three other sherds, including the thick-walled one from a large jar or flagon, appeared superficially similar to fabric 12, but also contained sparse, ill-sorted, light-brown sandstone inclusions. These were similar to inclusions found in Severn Valley type pottery recovered from a site in Herefordshire (Willis 2003), whereas sandstone does not seem to be present in pottery from the major Severn Valley ware production area near the Malverns.

*Overview of artefactual evidence*

In terms of dating, the pottery finds indicate that there was occupation and use of the Little Witley site during the Roman period, which is consistent with previous observations of surface pottery in the area (WSM 01271). Although one sherd may have been late 2<sup>nd</sup> to late 3<sup>rd</sup> century in date, further finds would need to be examined before firmly assigning the site to this limited date range. The provisional *terminus post quem* date ranges for the site are shown in Table 3.

Context	Material class	Object specific type	Fabric	Count	Weight (g)	Start date	End date	tpq range
U/S	ceramic	pot	12	1	24	175	300	AD 175-300
3001	ceramic	pot	12	5	256	43	400	AD 43-400

Table 3: *Summary of context dating based on artefacts*

**Artefact significance by Dennis Williams**

In spite of its limited size and imprecise dating, the Roman pottery from this site was significant because it not only included typical Severn Valley ware (fabric 12), but also a variant of this, produced from clays that appeared to have come from an area with underlying sandstone. It is noted that the site at Little Witley is situated within 7km of the eastern boundary of the Old Red Sandstones that extend through much of Herefordshire. Therefore, the possibility of Roman coarseware production being carried out at a location nearer to Little Witley than the Malverns should not be ruled out.

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## Conclusions

The pottery finds indicate that there was occupation and use of this site during the Roman period, which is consistent with previous observations of surface pottery in the area (WSM 01271 and 05125). However the location of the service trench is to the west of the main concentration of Roman pottery recorded in the HER. The pottery, recovered from the subsoil, was not associated with any archaeological features or deposits. It is possible that intensive ploughing of the field has dispersed the pottery and any archaeological features have been eradicated. Nevertheless the possibility remains that archaeological deposits, where present, survive in areas of the site not disturbed by the present development.

The deposit within Trial Pit 1 may relate to the backfill of the possible moat or water filled feature as described in the HER (WSM 12657). All other deposits beneath this were of undisturbed geological origin. No further deposits or horizons associated with the moat were revealed and no waterlogged deposits were observed. If a moat was present on the site, it may have been drained and cleared prior to backfilling, which explains the negative evidence relating to such a feature. Alternatively this may be a result of the limited nature of the observations at this point. Unfortunately further exploration of this area was not possible due to the difficulties accessing the site during bad weather. Certainly if any earlier archaeological deposits were previously present, it is considered probable that they had been severely truncated or destroyed by the water filled feature.

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## 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.

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Worcestershire County Council Environmental Services at Bank Farm and Thomas's Farm, Bank Road, Little Witley, Worcestershire (NGR centred on SO 776 634; HER ref WSM 41770).*

*The pottery finds indicate that there was occupation and use of the Little Witley site during the Roman period, which is consistent with previous observations of surface pottery in the area. The sherds were identified as oxidised Severn Valley ware and a variant of this, produced from clays that appeared to have come from an area with underlying sandstone. This was of particular significance suggesting the production of Roman coarseware was being carried out at a location near to Little Witley.*

*The pottery recovered from the subsoil was not associated with any archaeological features or deposits. It is possible that intensive ploughing of the field has dispersed the pottery and any archaeological features have been eradicated. Nevertheless the possibility remains that archaeological deposits, where present, survive in areas of the site not disturbed by the present development.*

*The deposit recorded within the southern end of the works may relate to the backfill of the possible moat or water filled feature as described in the HER (WSM 12657). All other deposits beneath this were of undisturbed geological origin. No further deposits or horizons associated with the moat were revealed and no waterlogged deposits were observed. If a moat was present on the site, it may have been drained and cleared prior to backfilling which explains the negative evidence relating to such a feature. Alternatively this maybe a result of the limited nature of the observations. Unfortunately further exploration of this area was not possible due to the difficulties accessing the site during bad weather. Certainly if any earlier archaeological deposits were previously present, it is considered probable that they had been severely truncated or destroyed by the water filled feature.*

## Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, John Wallace and Gareth Griffiths (Environmental Services, Worcestershire County Council), Mike Glyde, (Historic Environment Planning Officer, Worcestershire County Council) and Oliver Russell (Historic Environment Record Assistant, Worcestershire County Council).

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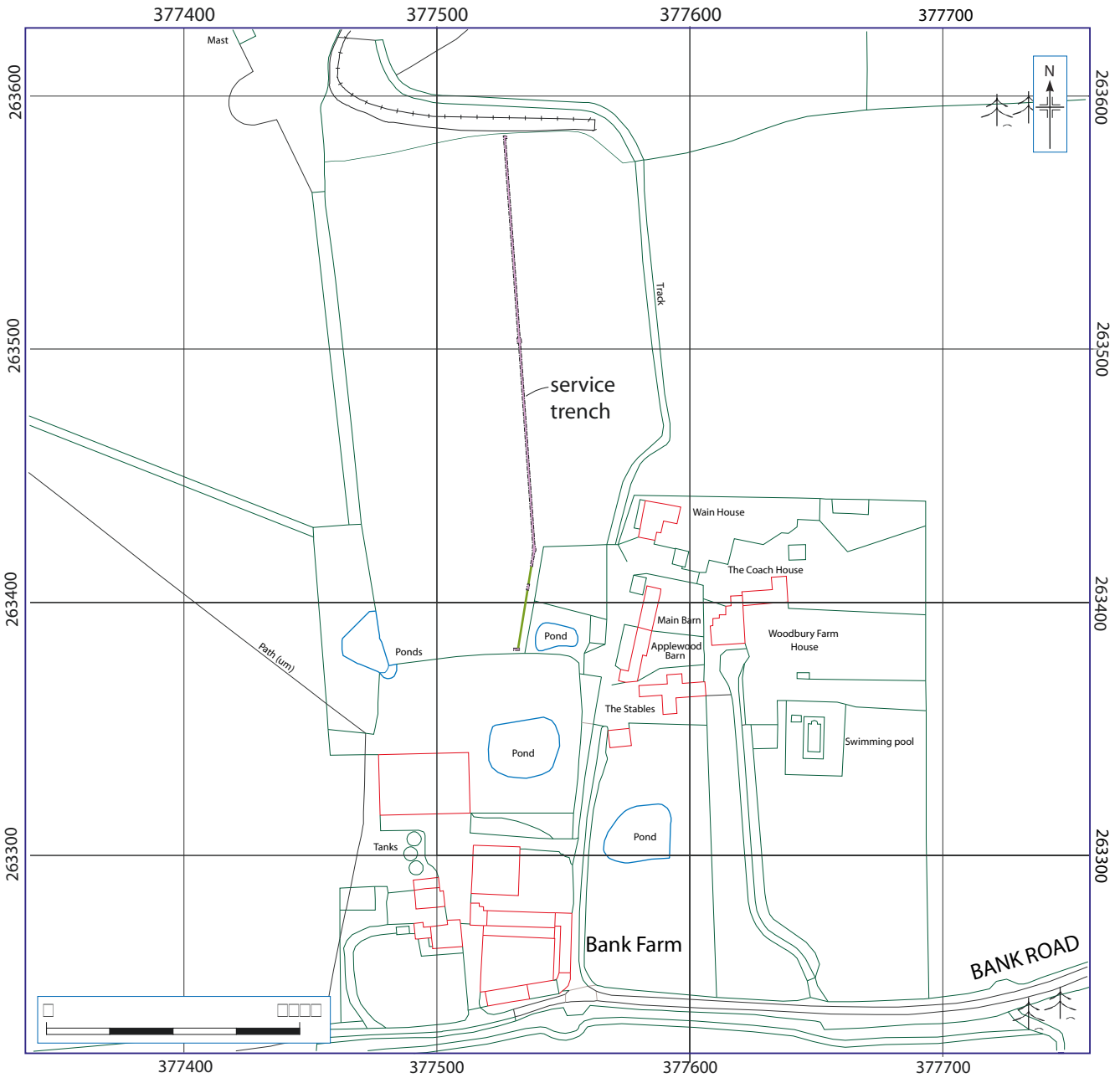
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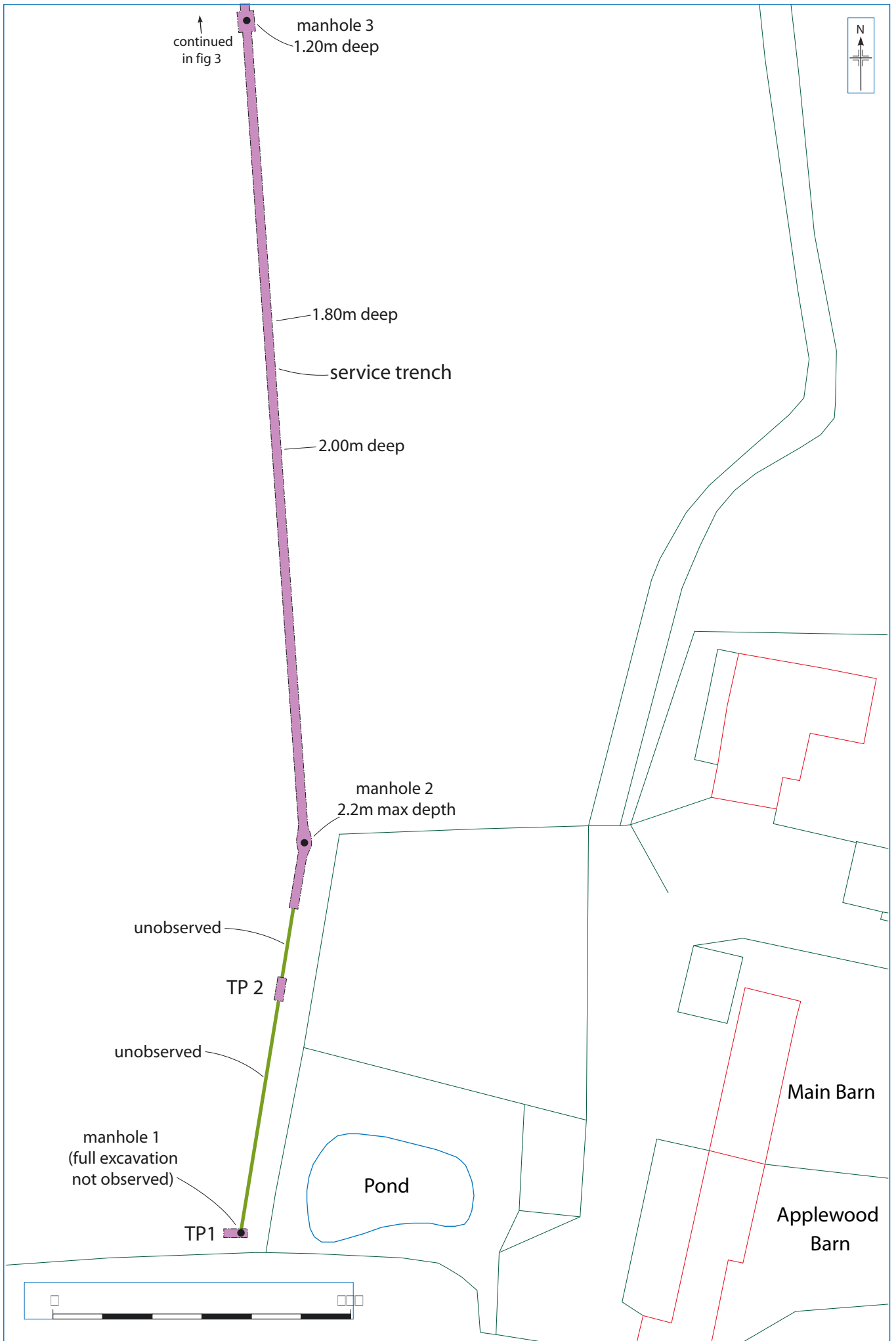
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## **Figures**









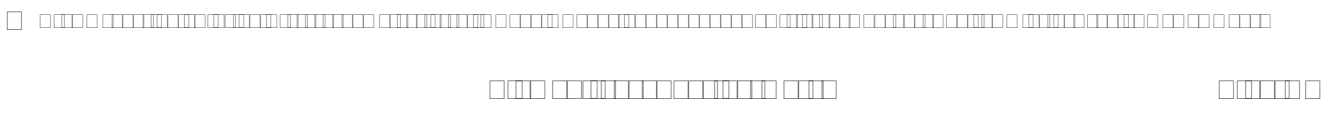
1.80m deep

service trench

continued  
in fig 2  
↓

manhole 3  
1.20m deep

Track



## Plates



*Plate 1, The site, looking south east*



*Plate 2, The site from the south, looking north*





*Plate 3, The site from the south, looking north*



*Plate 4, General view of Trial Pit 1, facing east*





*Plate 5, General view of Trial Pit 2, facing east*



*Plate 6, West facing section of the Service Trench, showing deepest part of the excavation*





*Plate 7, The Service Trench, at the site of the second man hole, facing north*



*Plate 8, West facing section of the Service Trench*





*Plate 9, The Service Trench, facing north*



*Plate 10, The Service Trench and the variation in natural, facing north*





*Plate 11, Sample west facing section of Service Trench*



*Plate 12, West facing section at the shallowest part of the excavation*





*Plate 13, The Service Trench from the north*

## **Appendix 1 Technical information**

### **The archive**

The archive consists of:

- 1 Drawing Number Catalogue Sheet AS4
- 8 Fieldwork progress records AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 53 digital photographs
- 3 Trench Record Sheets AS41
- 2 Scale drawings
- 1 Box of finds
- 1 Computer disk

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

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

## Appendix 2 Context description

### Trial Pit One

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
1000	Made ground	Sub round stones and pebbles. Occasional decomposing twigs and grasses. Small pieces of barbed wire. Mid dark clayey-silt loam.	0.00-0.90m+
1001	Natural	Bright pinkish red clay and sandstone	0.90m+

### Trial Pit Two

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
2000	Topsoil	Firm, compact mid grey brown silty loam. Frequent root action, small to medium sub round and round pebbles. Seals 2001.	0.00-0.19m
2001	Subsoil	Firm, compact, mid to reddish brown clayey sand with occasional root action, sub rounded and sub angular pebbles and stones. Below 2000, seals 2002.	0.15-0.30m
2002	Natural	Very compact brownish red-orangey marl and angular medium to large fragments of sandstone. Below 2001.	0.30m+

### Service Trench

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
3000	Topsoil	Firm, compact mid grey brown silty loam. Frequent root action, fragment of unstratified pot recovered. Small to medium sub round and round pebbles. Seals 3001.	0.00-0.40m
3001	Subsoil	Firm, compact, mid to reddish brown clayey sand with occasional root action, sub rounded and sub angular pebbles and stones. Fragments of pottery recovered. Below 3000, seals 3002.	0.30-0.64m
3002	Natural	Very compact brownish red-orangey marl and angular medium to large fragments of sandstone. Patches and layers of blue-grey marl and mudstone seen at depths of 1m+ Below 3001.	0.64m+



## Summary of data for Worcestershire HER

### WSM 41770 Artefacts

Type	Count	Weight (g)	Date	Specialist report?	Key assemblage?
Pottery	6	280	Roman	Y	Y