

ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
EVALUATION  
AT  
LAND OFF LAUREL'S AVENUE,  
OFFENHAM, WORCESTERSHIRE

James Goad

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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Project 2669  
Report 1305  
WSM 34043



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# Archaeological evaluation at land off Laurel's Avenue, Offenham, Worcestershire

## James Goad

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### Background information

<i>Client</i>	Evesham and Pershore Housing Association Ltd
<i>Site address</i>	Land off Laurel's Avenue, Offenham
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SP 05924570
<i>Sites and Monuments Record reference</i>	WCM 34043
<i>Planning authority reference</i>	Wychavon District Council W04/1091
<i>Brief</i>	WHEAS 2004a
<i>Project design</i>	WHEAS 2004b
<i>Project parameters</i>	IFA 1999
<i>Previous archaeological work on the site</i>	

There has been no previous archaeological work undertaken on site.

### *Topographical, archaeological and historical background*

The soils in this part of the village are from the Wick series. These are deep, well-drained light loams developed in glaciofluvial deposits and classified with typical brown earths. They are extensive on low terraces along the Avon, Severn and Arrow. These are very good arable soils and support a wide range of crops including cereals, oilseed rape, root crops, hops and vegetables (Beard *et al* 1986).

The parish of Offenham lies along the west bank of the River Avon and on the south-west is bounded by the Broadway brook flowing in to the Avon from Badsey (VCH II, 420). A former route of the old road from Worcester to London branched off the Roman road of Buckle Street and passed through the south-western part of the parish to a point on the Avon where a ferry took traffic across the river. This service is reflected in the names of the streets through the village (Ferry Lane and Boat Lane). The ferry replaced stone bridge known as Offenham or Twyford bridge (VCH II, 420). The area of investigation lies midway between the central core of Offenham village and Bennett's Hill. There have been a number of significant archaeological sites discovered around the village. Roman coins have been discovered in the parish (VCH II, 420) although their precise location doesn't seem to have been recorded. Approximately 100m to the south-west of the evaluated area, 20 Roman skeletons (WSM 02827) were discovered in 1887, adjacent to Faulk Mill (WSM 07807). Bennett's Hill, over 150m east of the site, is the location of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery (SAM 30099). The burial area is on the eastern edge of the parish boundary. The remains of three human burials were discovered in 1996 and were dated to the early Anglo-Saxon period by grave goods interred with the bodies. A range of artefacts were also discovered in the vicinity of the bodies, namely amber and crystal beads, iron shield bosses, brooches, belt fittings and a knife.

Given the presence in the village of both Anglo-Saxon and Roman cemeteries in the village, along with post-medieval buildings, the evidence of settlement in these periods was good enough to justify an archaeological investigation prior to the development of the land off Laurel's Avenue.

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### Aims

The aim of the evaluation was to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible.

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## Methods

General specification for archaeological evaluation	CAS 1995
Sources consulted	SMR Sources cited by the SMR Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1886 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1904 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1927
Date(s) of fieldwork	25 <sup>th</sup> and 26 <sup>th</sup> November 2004
Area of deposits observed	c 82m <sup>2</sup> . Indicated on Figure 2
Dimensions of excavated areas observed	Foundations      length 51.50m width 1.60m depth 0.70-1.00m

### *Access to or visibility of groundworks*

Excavation was undertaken by JCB 3CX using a flat ditching bucket and under archaeological supervision. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits. The section and selected parts of the base of the trench were cleaned by hand.

### *Statement of confidence*

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

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## Context table

Context	Type Colour Texture	Description	Date	Interpretation	Depth (OD or below ground level)
101	Friable dark brownish grey silty sand	Layer		Topsoil	30.65-30.37
102	Friable mid reddish brown silty sand	Layer		Subsoil	30.37-29.85
103	Loose mid reddish brown sand and firm mid yellowish brown clay. Occasional patches of medium to large round stones			Natural	29.85-
104		BST-Gradual Sides-Straight (west) -Irregular (east) BSB-Gradual Base-Concave		Ditch – possible field boundary	30.37-29.59
105	Friable mid brown silty	Fill of 104		Ditch fill	30.37-29.59

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## Discussion

The area sample was achieved by excavating one long 51m trench from east to west across the site. The trench was 0.70-1.00m deep and was machined down to the natural strata, which appeared as reddish brown sand and patches of sandy gravels. The topsoil was quite a shallow layer in contrast to the subsoil, which was more substantial in depth. The trench was devoid of all but one archaeological feature: a ditch running north-south towards the centre of the trench (Figure 2). This was sectioned and also noticed in the northern section of the trench. The ditch measured 2.30m wide and 0.80m deep and was filled with a homogenous brown fill. The feature was sealed by the topsoil. The profile of the ditch was interesting, with a straight and quite steep western edge, and a more shallow and irregular eastern side (Figure 3). No artefactual material was recovered from the fill. The rest of the trench did not have any significant archaeological features within it.

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## Conclusions

Unfortunately the sole feature found during the evaluation could not be dated due to the absence of artefactual material. A map regression study was undertaken using a variety of historical Ordnance Survey and tithe maps to try and find if the ditch was present as a field boundary in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The location of the ditch did not conform to any of the field boundaries shown on the Ordnance Survey maps (Figure 4) and the 1841 Tithe map shows the evaluation trench to have existed within an open field called Bush Ground. It seems reasonable to assume that the ditch located during the evaluation is a feature that pre-dates the 1841 map. The orientation of the ditch is similar to field boundaries shown on both the Tithe and the Ordnance Survey maps. The absence of any features in the trench on either side of the ditch, indicate it is very unlikely to have been an enclosure ditch for a settlement of any period. Other features would likely be very close to the ditch on one side of it, if it was a farmstead or dwelling area. The absence of features on either side of it indicates the ditch existed in some isolation and is therefore more likely to be a ditched field boundary of an open, large field system of the post-medieval period.

The boundary ditch points to land usage in this part of the village being agricultural in nature. Whilst Roman and medieval areas of settlement existed to the west and south of this site, the study area seems to have been, in all probability, an area of farmland.

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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 evaluation was undertaken on behalf of Pershore and Evesham Housing Association at land off Laurel's Avenue, Offenham, Worcestershire (SP 05924570; WSM 34043). The evaluation succeeded in locating a north to south orientated ditch running through the trench. This was thought to be an old field boundary. Although no dating evidence was recovered from the ditch, it was assumed that the ditch dated broadly to the post-medieval period, as it was on the same orientation and close to field boundaries located on the 19<sup>th</sup> century maps of the area.*

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## Archive

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Fieldwork progress records AS2	2
Photographic records AS3	3
Digital photographs	22
Abbreviated context records AS40	1
Drawings	3

The project archive is intended to be placed at:	Worcestershire County Museum Hartlebury Castle, Hartlebury Near Kidderminster Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
telephone	01299 250416

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### Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Katherine Portman of Pershore and Evesham Housing Association and Mike Glyde (WCC).

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### Bibliography

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IFA, 1999 *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation*, Institute of Field Archaeologists

VCH II, Page, W (ed), 1913 *Victoria History of the County of Worcestershire*, **II**

WHEAS 2004a *Brief for an archaeological programme of work at land to the rear of Laurel's Avenue, Offenham, Worcestershire*, Historic Environment and Archaeology Service, Worcestershire County Council unpublished document dated 15<sup>th</sup> November 2004

WHEAS 2004b *Proposal for an archaeological type of project at site name, parish, county*, Historic Environment and Archaeology Service, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished document dated 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2004, **P2669**