

EVALUATION OF LAND  
AT THE  
CIVIC CENTRE SITE, PERSHORE,  
WORCESTERSHIRE

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With contributions by  
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## **Evaluation of land at the Civic Centre Site, Pershore, Worcestershire**

**Anna Deeks**

### **Part 1 Project summary**

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at the Civic Centre Site, Pershore, Worcestershire (National Grid reference 394772 246213). The evaluation was undertaken on behalf of CgMs Consulting (the Client) in response to a specification (the Specification) prepared by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Wychavon District Council who propose to redevelop the site as a Cottage Hospital. The proposal is considered by the Curator to have the potential to affect an archaeological site. The project aimed to determine whether any significant archaeological site was present and if so to indicate what its location, date and nature was.

The trenches revealed a substantial build up of topsoil, buried soil layers and subsoil. Evidence of extensive root disturbance and tree throws was observed both through the upper topsoil and buried soil layers, correlating well with the cartographic sources which show the site in use as an orchard until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition a small number of periglacial features were noted.

## Part 2 Detailed report

### 1. Background

#### 1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at the Civic Centre Site, Pershore, Worcestershire (National Grid reference 394772 246213; Fig 1). The evaluation was undertaken on behalf of CgMs Consulting (the Client) in response to a specification (the Specification) prepared by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Wychavon District Council who propose to redevelop the site as a Cottage Hospital.

#### 1.2 Project parameters

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IFA 1999).

The project also conforms to a specification prepared by CgMs (CgMs 2003) for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (HEAS 2003).

#### 1.3 Aims

The aims of the evaluation are given in the Specification, which indicated that significant deposits may be defined as those likely to be of medieval and post-medieval date.

More specifically the project had the following aims. To:

- Clarify the presence/absence and extent of medieval and any other deposit evidencing settlement at the site;
- Identify, within the constraints of the evaluation, the date, character, condition and depth of any surviving remains within the site;
- Assess the degree of existing impacts to sub-surface horizons and to document the extent of archaeological survival of buried deposits.

### 2. Methods

#### 2.1 Documentary search

Prior to fieldwork commencing a search was made of the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). In addition the following sources were also consulted:

##### *Cartographic sources*

- Ordnance Survey 1885 1:10,000
- British Geological Survey 1993 England and Wales Sheet 199: Worcestershire

##### *Documentary sources*

- Dalwood 1996
- Hooke 1990
- Slater 1983
- Ragg *et al* 1984

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## 2.2 **Fieldwork**

### 2.2.1 **Fieldwork strategy**

A detailed specification has been prepared by the Service (HEAS 2003). As a result of services adjustments were made to the fieldwork strategy resulting in the relocation of a trench to the south of the evaluation area, the reduction of trench sizes to the east and west of the evaluation area and the removal of a trench to the north.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> December 2003.

A total of three trenches, amounting to just over 37m<sup>2</sup> in area, were excavated, representing a sample of 1.5% of the area. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 360° tracked 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, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995). On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

### 2.2.2 **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.

## 2.3 **Artefacts**

### 2.3.1 **Artefact recovery policy**

All artefacts from the area of the evaluation were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended). This in principal determines that all finds, of whatever date, must be collected. However, in this case only a sample of later material was collected from the spoil during machining, in addition to all stratified finds from buried soil and subsoil layers (context numbers 104 and 302; see Section 5).

### 2.3.2 **Method of analysis**

All hand retrieved finds were examined. A primary record was made of all finds on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated and a terminus post quem produced for each stratified context.

Pottery was examined under x20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst and Rees 1992).

## 2.4 **The methods in retrospect**

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

## 3. **Topographical and archaeological context**

Pershore lies to the north of the River Avon at a height of approximately 20m AOD. The underlying geology comprises Jurassic Lower Lias Clay, overlain by alluvium and river gravel

terraces sloping down towards the floodplain (British Geological Survey 1993). The soils are argillic brown earths of the Bishampton Series (Ragg *et al* 1984). The site is located to the north of the High Street and consists of two areas of tarmac-surfaced car park, a Transco gas installation and a residential house, which is surrounded by gardens.

Pershore has been the subject of an extensive assessment as part of the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey (Dalwood 1996). There is no existing evidence for prehistoric activity within the vicinity of the site and Romano-British evidence is also sparse comprising stray finds in the vicinity of Priest Lane (WSM 16059).

Although there is little archaeological evidence of Anglo-Saxon occupation documentary sources indicate that Pershore formed the centre of a large estate (Hooke 1990, 177-90). By the medieval period the town was moderately prosperous its location enhanced by a bridge over the River Avon and its associated routeways including one of the many routes following the line of the saltway to and from Droitwich (Dalwood 1996). Documentary evidence suggests that the layout of the town at this time comprised a series of burgage plots running north and south from the High Street (Slater 1983, 185). The site appears to be located on the northern edge of the medieval town, and is evidently on the periphery of the main town in later 19<sup>th</sup> century cartographic sources (Fig 3). However the southern extent of the site is included in the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey (Dalwood 1996).

The post-medieval and modern town plan maintained much of the medieval layout with orchard and market garden cultivation forming the main land use to the north of the High Street until the late 19<sup>th</sup> /early 20<sup>th</sup> century. An early mapped source of the site in 1885 (Fig 3) reflects this depicting the building, which currently occupies the centre of the site surrounded by orchards.

#### 4. **Description**

The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1, with Tables 1 and 2 summarising the artefacts recovered. The trenches and features recorded are shown in Fig 2.

##### 4.1 **Phase 1 Natural deposits**

Natural deposits were observed in all sample trenches and comprised a combination of mid brown/orange/red sandy clay with ‘peagrit’ gravels (c 2-3%) and larger gravels (c 5%) present at a thickness of between 0.80 – 1.00m below the ground surface (103/203).

##### 4.2 **Phase 2 Prehistoric deposits**

No features were dated to the prehistoric period on the basis of artefactual evidence, although a few residual flint fragments were recovered from trenches 1 and 3 during machining (see section 5).

##### 4.3 **Undated deposits**

During machining a series of deposits were uncovered that are consistent with buried soil horizons (101/201/301/102/202/302). These were found directly below the modern topsoil and would indicate agricultural use of the land, either in the medieval or post-medieval period. These deposits were directly overlying number of periglacial features comprising a narrow linear observed in trenches 1 and 2 (105/206), measuring approximately 0.40m wide and roughly 0.16m deep in trench 1, and 0.70m wide and approximately 0.25m deep in trench 2. The fills (106/207) were entirely sterile, and strongly indicate that the features are periglacial in formation (see discussion below).



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In addition a sub oval feature (204) was uncovered in trench 2, measuring approximately 2.40m in width and roughly 0.50m in depth. The fill was highly clayey in contrast to the gravel natural but was entirely sterile with no indication of an anthropogenic origin (charcoal flecks, bone or pot for example). As such it would appear likely that this features is also the result of periglacial activity.

A number of small irregular areas of tree root disturbance were also observed in the upper levels of the buried soil horizon (102) in trench 1. These were recorded in plan and removed by machine in order to reveal natural. These features would appear consistent with the evidence that the land was under extensive cultivation.

No deposits relating to the gas works, which formerly lay immediately to the north of the site, were observed.

## 5. **Artefactual Analysis**

A summary of the artefacts recovered can be seen in table 1. The assemblage recovered from the evaluation trenching came from two stratified contexts and the site surface. Only two sherds of modern pottery were recovered during the evaluation totalling 10.5% of all material recovered. A single lithic flake of prehistoric date was also identified.

The pottery was identified and grouped by fabric (see Table 2). The two recovered sherds were undiagnostic but could be dated between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century by fabric type. Other finds consisted of common building material as roof tile, a clay pipe fragments, burnt stone (surface find) and pieces of unworked flint.

### 5.1 **Discussion**

The discussion below is a summary of the finds and associated location or contexts by period. The importance of individual finds has been commented upon as necessary.

#### 5.1.1 **Prehistoric**

A single knapped flint blade 25mm long was recovered from a buried subsoil layer in trench 3 (context 302). Diagnostic features displayed included bulb scar and ripples from proximal to distal end. No retouching was evident. As this artefact was found within context with modern materials it is identified as a residual find within a modern context.

#### 5.1.2 **Modern**

The modern assemblage consisted of two pottery sherds totalling 100% of the pottery finds recovered during trenching. The sherds, from trench 2 context 200 (surface find), were undiagnostic and identified as modern stone china (fabric 85). The rest of the modern assemblage consisted of six pieces of roof tile and a piece of clay pipe stem; both from a buried subsoil layer in trench 3 (context 302).

### 5.2 **Significance**

The examination of all recovered finds and the results from quantification indicate that there is no evidence for significant on-site activity prior to the modern period. The flint blade, through its deposition with modern materials, is a residual find redeposited by modern agricultural activity. In all, the modern ceramics were consistent in condition and size to items deposited through the agricultural process of field manuring.

Context	Material	Total	Weight (g.)
104	Unworked flint	4	53
200	Modern pottery	2	1
200	Burnt stone	5	289
302	Flint blade	1	0.7
302	Clay pipe stem	1	4
302	Modern roof tile	6	229

Table 1: *Quantification of evaluation assemblage.*

Context	Fabric name	Fabric	Total	Weight (g.)
200	Modern stone china	85	2	1

Table 2: *Quantification of evaluation assemblage fabrics by context.*

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Prehistoric

No deposits of prehistoric date were revealed within the evaluated area, although four fragments of flint were recovered from topsoil and subsoil layers.

### 6.2 Undated deposits

The possible features in trenches 1 and 2 would appear to be the result of periglacial activity. The completely sterile nature of the fills as well as the diminutive size of the linear strongly indicates that features are not of anthropogenic formation. Similar linear features have been observed in the vicinity at Defford Lane, Pershore (Woodiwiss 2001) and were also interpreted as the periglacial frost wedges, thus supporting the conclusions of the current evaluation.

The buried soils horizons present in all trenches were not dated. However they clearly represent cultivation over a substantial period of time likely to be of either later medieval or post-medieval date. The presence of extensive root disturbance across the site is consistent with the cartographic evidence of the site which shows the land in use as an orchard.

## 7. Conclusion

The results of the evaluation provided only a few fragments of flint dating to the prehistoric period, indicative of ‘off-site’ activity during this period. The substantial build up of buried soil horizons testifies to an extensive period of agricultural land use with tree throws and root disturbance at the upper levels of the buried soil horizon (102) consistent with the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century cartographic evidence of orchards.

## 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.

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*The trenches revealed a substantial build up of topsoil, a buried soil and subsoil. Evidence of extensive root disturbance and tree throws was also observed and correlates with cartographic sources which show the site in use as an orchard until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition a small number of periglacial features were observed.*

## 9. **The archive**

The archive consists of:

- 3 Context records AS1
- 2 Fieldwork progress records AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 0 Colour transparency film
- 0 Black and white photographic films
- 0 Matrix sheets AS7
- 0 Context finds sheets AS8
- 0 Sample records AS17
- 0 Abbreviated context records AS40
- 3 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

## 10. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Wychavon District Council, Cathy Mould and Jim Hunter of CgMs and Mike Glyde (Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service, Planning Advisory Service).

11. **Personnel**

The fieldwork and report preparation was led by Anna Deeks with elements of the report writing contributed by Marc Steinmetzer. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Simon Griffin. Fieldwork was undertaken by Anna Deeks, Marc Steinmetzer and Andy Brown, finds analysis by Angus Crawford and illustration by Carolyn Hunt.

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13. **Abbreviations**

WSM Numbers prefixed with 'WSM' are the primary reference numbers used by the Worcestershire County Sites and Monuments Record.

WCRO Worcestershire County Records Office.

NMR National Monuments Record.

SMR Sites and Monuments Record.

## Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

### Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 10m Width: 1.60m Depth: 1.50m

Orientation: N-S

#### Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below the ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Topsoil	Loose mid to dark grey black silty loam with large gravels (c 2-3%)	0.0 – 0.35m
101	Buried soil horizon	Loose mid to dark grey silty loam with large gravels (c 2-3%) and charcoal flecks (c 1%)	0.35 – 0.90m
102	Buried subsoil	Loose to friable mid yellow brown silty sand with large gravels (c 1%)	0.90 – 1.40m
103	Natural	Compact mid red brown silty sand with peagrit gravels (c 2-3%) and large gravels (c 5%)	1.40m
104	Disturbed soil	Compacted mid red brown sandy clay with large gravels (c 2-3%)	
105	Ditch cut	Linear with gently breaking sides and a concave base. Approx. 0.40m wide and roughly 0.16m deep	1.40 – 1.56m
106	Ditch fill	Friable light to mid brown silt with charcoal flecks (c 1%) and large gravels (c 1%) and 0.16m thick	1.40 – 1.56m

**Trench 2**

Maximum dimensions: Length: 10.5m Width: 1.60m Depth: 1.00m

Orientation: NE-SW

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below the ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
200	Topsoil	Loose mid to dark grey black silty loam with large gravels (c 2-3%)	0.0 – 0.30m
201	Buried soil horizon	Loose mid to dark grey silty loam with large gravels (c 2-3%) and charcoal flecks (c 1%)	0.30 – 0.60m
202	Buried subsoil	Loose to friable mid yellow brown silty sand with large gravels (c 1%)	0.60 – 1.00m
203	Natural	Compact mid red brown sandy clay with peagrit gravels (c 2-3%) and large gravels (c 5%)	1.00m
204	Pit cut	Semi-circular with gradually breaking sides and concave base. Approx. 2.40m wide and roughly 0.50m deep	1.00 – 1.50m
205	Pit fill	Friable light to mid grey sandy clay with large gravels (c 2-3%) and 0.50m thick	1.00 – 1.50m
206	Ditch cut	Linear with gently breaking sides and a concave base. Approx. 0.70m wide and roughly 0.25m deep	1.00 – 1.25m
207	Ditch fill	Friable light to mid grey brown silty sand with large gravels (c 2-3%) and 0.25m thick	1.00 – 1.25m

**Trench 3**

Maximum dimensions: Length: 2.75m Width: 1.60m Depth: 0.50 – 0.90m

Orientation: N-S

## Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below the ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
300	Topsoil	Loose mid to dark grey black silty loam with large gravels (c 2-3%)	0.0 – 0.28m
301	Buried soil horizon	Loose mid to dark grey silty loam with large gravels (c 2-3%) and charcoal flecks (c 1%)	0.28 – 0.80m
302	Buried subsoil	Loose to friable mid yellow brown silty sand with large gravels (c 1%)	0.80m