

PROGRAMME OF  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK AT  
MILL FARM, RADFORD ROAD,  
ALVECHURCH,  
WORCESTERSHIRE



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With a contribution by Alan J Jacobs

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE  
Project 2256  
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## **Programme of archaeological work at Mill Farm, Radford Road, Alvechurch, Worcestershire**

**Darren Miller**

**With a contribution by Alan J Jacobs**

### **Part 1: Project summary**

This report presents the results of a programme of archaeological work at Mill Farm, Radford Road, Alvechurch (centred on NGR SP 0266 7309). The project was undertaken for Persimmon Homes Ltd in connection with their redevelopment of the site. The aims of the project were to produce a photographic record of the site before development, to record archaeological remains exposed during groundworks, and to excavate several trenches across a tail race shown on several historic maps. The tail race belonged to a mill that was housed in a building to the north of the site. The mill is known to have operated from c1647 to the early 1940s, and was thought to have replaced a medieval mill on the same site or nearby.

The photographic survey recorded a mixture of 19<sup>th</sup> century farm buildings and 20<sup>th</sup> century prefabricated sheds. The watching brief provided limited information on these buildings and on earlier deposits. The trenches across the line of the mapped tail race showed the truncated remains of a channel lined with sandstone walls. Artefacts associated with this feature suggested a 19<sup>th</sup> century date of construction. No evidence was found of the original tail race or the documented medieval mill. From this, it appears that the original tail race was entirely replaced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that the medieval mill stood on the same site as the later one to the north of the site.

## **Part 2: Detailed report**

### **1. Background**

#### **1.1 Reasons for the project**

A planning application to develop the site was submitted to Bromsgrove District Council in 2002. As part of their development control process, the Council consulted the Planning Advisory Section of the Worcestershire Archaeology Service (now the Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service) for advice on the potential impact of the development. Records contained in the Worcestershire Sites and Monuments Record (now the Historic Environment Record) suggested that the development might affect remains associated with Alvechurch's Town Mill. The Council therefore made a programme of archaeological work a condition of planning consent.

#### **1.2 Project parameters**

The project conforms to a brief prepared by the Planning Advisory Section of Worcestershire Archaeological Service (AS 2002a) and to detailed proposals based on this document (AS 2002b; HEAS 2005). The project also conforms to standards and guidance set by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 2001a and 2001b).

#### **1.3 Aims**

The aims of the project were to produce a basic photographic record of the site before development, to record archaeological remains exposed during ground-breaking activities, and to excavate trenches across the line of a relict tail race. This last stage of fieldwork was intended to define the tail race and investigate the potential for remains of a medieval mill.

### **2. Methods**

#### **2.1 Documentary research**

Before the fieldwork, the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record was searched for information relating to the site. Copies of primary sources and secondary sources held by the Service were also consulted. These included a series of historic maps, an archaeological assessment of Alvechurch prepared as part of the Central Marches Historic Town Survey (Dalwood 1996), and an archaeological/historical study of earthworks within and around the site (Aston 1974).

#### **2.2 Fieldwork**

##### **2.2.1 Photographic recording**

A photographic record of the site was made on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2005. This involved taking digital photographs (with metric scales) of all standing buildings and selected structural features. Photographs were also taken to show the site in its local setting were also taken. The location and direction of each photograph was recorded on pro-forma sheets and marked on large-scale Ordnance Survey maps.

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### 2.2.2 **Watching brief on ground-breaking activities**

Observations were made during geotechnical investigations on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2002. A single test-pit was excavated in the location shown on Fig 2. This was cleaned and recorded according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995).

Further observations were made during the removal of a concrete raft on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2005, and during soil stripping on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2005. No significant deposits were exposed on either occasion. A brief written record was made on pro-forma sheets.

### 2.2.3 **Sample trenching**

The trenches were excavated on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2005. Five trenches were excavated in the locations shown on Figure 2. The trenches were excavated using a 360° tracked excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. Selected deposits were cleaned and excavated by hand. Drawn, written, and photographic records were compiled and artefacts collected according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995). The trenches were excavated to the top of natural alluvial deposits or to expose the structure of the tail race. The alluvium was excavated by machine in several places down to gravel to check for the absence of recognisable layering and buried soils (none were observed). Once the trenches had been recorded they were backfilled with the excavated material by Persimmon Homes.

## 2.3 **Post-fieldwork**

### 2.3.1 **Artefact analysis**

All artefacts from the area of salvage recording were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended). All hand-retrieved finds were examined and a primary record was made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated and a *terminus post quem* date 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).

### 2.3.2 **Synthesis**

The penultimate stage of post-fieldwork analysis involved co-ordinating interpretations of different types of evidence (stratigraphic, artefactual, historical, etc). In the process, several interpretative problems were identified and addressed.

### 2.3.3 **Contextual analysis**

The final stage involved placing the results in appropriate research contexts with reference to published and unpublished studies.

## 2.4 **The methods in retrospect**

The methods are thought to have fulfilled the requirements of the brief and the proposal prepared by the Service. In the first place, all documentary sources relating to the site were consulted and used to inform the fieldwork and post-fieldwork analysis. Other sources were also used to place the results in appropriate research contexts. Secondly, the photographic recording was comprehensive, covering not only the older farm buildings but the entire site. The record is not interpreted here as this was outside of the scope of the project, but will bear interpretation in the future. Thirdly, the watching brief covered all significant ground-breaking activities prior to construction and enabled an adequate record of exposed deposits to be made. Fourthly, the trenches sampled the mill leat at several points along its line and



extended beyond it into areas where earlier remains might have been found. Finally, the level of artefact analysis was in keeping with the nature and interpretative potential of the material. Some variation in the location of trenches was occasioned by physical and operational obstacles and the variation agreed with the County Archaeologist.

### 3. **Topographical, archaeological and historical background**

The location of the development area in relation to the modern town of Alvechurch is shown on Figure 1. In topographical terms, the area lies in the valley of the river Arrow, on Holocene alluvium over Triassic marl.

Before the project began, knowledge of the archaeology and history of the site was based on historic maps, secondary sources, and buildings and earthworks in the vicinity (Anon 1842; OS 1884; Aston 1973; Dalwood 1996; Davies and Sage 2001; Fish 1701; Godson and Godson 1792; Hayes 1995; Moger and Wragge 1913). These were the sources for the records held in the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record.

In summary, it was known that the building to the north of the site was the Town Mill of Alvechurch from c1647 to the 1940s (WSM 1853), and that the tail race of the mill crossed the area on a north-west to south-east alignment, as shown on maps of 1701, 1792, 1842, and 1884 (the map of 1842 is reproduced as Fig 2). It was also thought that this mill had replaced an earlier one on the same site or nearby. This was suggested by an indenture of 1497 which granted “le Alvechurch mill” with a garden adjacent to William Tybbot of Alvechurch (calendared by Guyatt 1994).

In 2002, the area contained some 14 buildings including stables, barns, and sheds (Plate 1). Only a few buildings were still in use, and then only for temporary storage. Most of the ground between the buildings was surfaced with concrete and gravel. There was no indication of the former tail race on the surface, although part of its course appeared to be indicated by modern drain covers.

## 4. **Results**

### 4.1 **Stratigraphy**

#### 4.1.1 **Natural deposits**

A sequence of gravels over marl was observed in Trench 1 (a geotechnical trial trench) in the south-east of the site (Figure 2). A similar sequence was observed by engineers in an exploratory hole to the south-west (Joynes Pike and Associates Ltd 2002, WPS 2). Elsewhere, however, the sample trenching and ground investigation showed a sequence of reddish/yellowish brown alluvium over marl. The date of this alluvium is uncertain although it is likely to have built up throughout the Holocene, before and after the arrival of human groups in the area. Charcoal inclusions were found within the alluvium in Trench 1 and may represent fires set by prehistoric or early historic people. The rate of alluviation may also have been affected by changes in agriculture or water management. However, in the absence of conclusive evidence for cultural activity, the alluvium is best regarded as a natural deposit.

#### 4.1.2 **Pre-modern deposits**

Before ground levels were reduced across the site, pre-modern deposits were represented in some areas by humic soils stratified between modern made ground and the alluvium described above (Joynes Like and Associates Ltd 2002, WS3, WS5, and WS9). These soils were clearly of natural origin, but greatly transformed by human activity. The fragments of medieval pottery and tile found during the sample trenching probably derive from these soils and represent activity on the site in this period.

Ground reduction before the sample trenching seems to have involved the removal of these soils over most of the site, as they were not represented in Trenches 2-5. However, humic soils were found in Trench 1 and 6, and it seems that ground reduction in this area was not so severe.

#### 4.1.3 Undated features

Four postholes were found to the south of the tail race in Trench 5 (Fig 3). All were filled with brown humic soil, and one contained the base of a wooden post. The date and function of these features could not be determined due to the small window provided by the trench, and the lack of time for full excavation. However, the survival of wood in aerobic conditions suggests that the postholes are of no great antiquity, while the plan of the postholes suggests that they represent more than one post-built structure.

#### 4.1.4 Modern deposits and features

Modern deposits and features fell into two categories: those associated with the former tail race, and those associated with later rubbish disposal, construction, and drainage.

The tail race was located in each of the sample trenches excavated along its anticipated line (Fig 2; Plate 2). The feature had been heavily truncated, although enough evidence survived to indicate its date and method of construction. The feature consisted of two sandstone walls built in a trench with near-vertical sides (Plate 3). Pottery and glass from the fill between the wall and the trench suggests a mid 19<sup>th</sup> century or later date of construction. The lower fill of the feature was a blueish grey alluvial sediment, while the upper fill consisted of redeposited alluvium and humic soil with common brick fragments.

Other features were found cut into the fill of the feature, and into the alluvium on either side. These included several rubbish pits, and the foundations and services of buildings shown on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century maps.

All of these features were sealed by made ground consisting of hardcore and reworked topsoil with common brick fragments. The made ground varied in depth, suggesting that the site has been landscaped in the recent past.

#### 4.2 Artefacts

All the artefacts came from the sample trenching. The pottery assemblage consisted of two sherds of pottery weighing 6g. Fragments of tile, brick, plaster glass and bone were also recovered. The group came from two stratified contexts and one unstratified context (see Table 1). Level of preservation was generally good with the majority of sherds displaying limited levels of abrasion.

All sherds have been grouped and quantified according to fabric type (see Table 1). No diagnostic form sherds were present, individual sherds were therefore, dated by fabric type to a general period or production span.

Material	Context number	Total	Weight (g)
Medieval pottery (Worcester-type sandy ware fabric 55)	unstratified	1	5
Medieval/post medieval tile (fabric 2a)	3000	1	6
Modern glass bottle shard (brown)	3000	1	27

Modern window glass (brown)	3000	1	2
Modern pottery (willow pattern fabric 85)	3000	1	1
Bone	3001	1	7
Medieval/post medieval tile (fabric 2a and 2c)	3001	8	124
Post medieval/modern brick (fabric 2a)	3001	1	21
Post medieval/modern plaster	3001	1	4
Total		16	197

**Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage**

A single sherd of Worcester type sandy ware (fabric 55), most probably from a cooking pot, was recovered from excavated spoil. This fabric dates to the period between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The only other pottery was a single sherd of willow pattern modern bone china (fabric 85) from the fill of the construction trench for the tail race (context 3000). The same context also produced a fragment of flat roof tile, of a type produced between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (fabric 2a), and sherds of modern glass. Other fragments of 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century tile were recovered from the fill of a posthole (context 3001). This feature also contained fragments of later, 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century tile, and single fragments of post-medieval/modern brick, plaster, and bone.

## 5. **Synthesis**

The stratigraphic and artefactual evidence suggest a low level of activity on the site in the medieval period (11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century), and a possible presence in the post-medieval period. However, the bulk of the evidence dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and is associated with the tail race and the later use of the site.

The tail race was clearly a mid 19<sup>th</sup> century or later construction although the use of stone rather than brick for the walls suggests the continued use of traditional materials and techniques. There was no evidence for an earlier tail race, despite the fact that one is mapped on much the same line in 1701 and 1842. It must therefore be presumed that all traces of the original tail race were removed during the construction of its replacement (at least within the areas of the sample trenches).

The later use of the site is not well represented archaeologically, due largely to modern landscaping, and cannot be read from historic maps. However, the buildings photographed at the start of the project suggest a shift from agricultural to light industrial use between the mid 19<sup>th</sup> and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 6. **Research contexts**

In a local context, the project has recorded the archaeology and architecture of the site in some detail. This in itself is a significant contribution to knowledge of the history of Alvechurch, as the town has seen very few investigations of this kind (Dalwood 1996, 3). The project has also demonstrated some medieval and post-medieval activity on the site, and shown that the original tail race of Alvechurch's Town Mill was replaced (and probably widened) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, the fact that the project produced no evidence for a medieval mill on the site strongly suggests that this stood on the site of the later mill to the

north. This suggestion will be considered in future decisions regarding the development of the site, or the conversion of the present building.

In the context of Worcestershire, the project provided a rare opportunity to investigate part of a mill system through excavation, rather than through documentary research, earthwork survey, or building recording. A good deal of such non-invasive work has been done on Worcestershire's mills, notably by contributors to *Wind and Water Mills*, the journal of the Midland Wind and Water Mills Group. However, until now, the only mill system to excavated under controlled conditions is that at Bordesley Abbey near Redditch (Astill 1993, 246-256). The remains at Mill Farm are later and less well preserved than those at Bordesley but they are by no means insignificant in view of the present limited state of archaeological knowledge.

## 7. Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, and unless directed otherwise, the Service will use the following summary as the basis for publication in appropriate journals or other media.

*Between 2002 and 2005, the Worcestershire Archaeology Service undertook a programme of archaeological work at Mill Farm, Radford Road, Alvechurch (centred on NGR SP 0266 7309; HER ref WSM 34490). The project was undertaken for Persimmon Homes Ltd in connection with a residential development. The aims of the project were to produce a photographic record of the site before development, to record archaeological remains exposed during groundworks, and to excavate several trenches across a tail race shown on 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century maps. The tail race belonged to a mill that was housed in a building to the north of the site. The mill is known to have operated from c1647 to the early 1940s, and was thought to have replaced a medieval mill on the same site or nearby.*

*The photographic survey recorded a mixture of 19<sup>th</sup> century farm buildings and 20<sup>th</sup> century prefabricated sheds. The watching brief provided limited information on these buildings and on earlier deposits. The trenches across the line of the mapped tail race showed the truncated remains of a channel lined with sandstone walls. Artefacts associated with this feature suggested a 19<sup>th</sup> century date of construction. No evidence was found of the original tail race or the documented medieval mill. From this, it appears that the original tail race was entirely replaced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that the medieval mill stood on the same site as the later one to the north of the site.*

## 8. The archive

The archive consists of:

- 9 Fieldwork progress records AS2
- 3 Photographic records AS3
- 6 Trench record sheets AS41
- 3 Site drawing sheets AS34
- 1 Box of finds (to be discarded)
- 1 CD-ROM

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum  
Hartlebury Castle

Hartlebury

Near Kidderminster

Worcestershire DY11 7XZ

Tel Hartlebury (01299) 250416

## 9. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank John Bryne (landowner) and Steve Brigg (Persimmon Homes Ltd) for their kind assistance.

## 10. **Personnel**

The project manager was Simon Woodiwiss. Fieldwork was undertaken by Chris Patrick, Thomas Vaughn, and Simon Woodiwiss. Alan J Jacobs analysed and reported on the artefacts, and Laura Templeton produced the illustrations. The report was written by Darren Miller.

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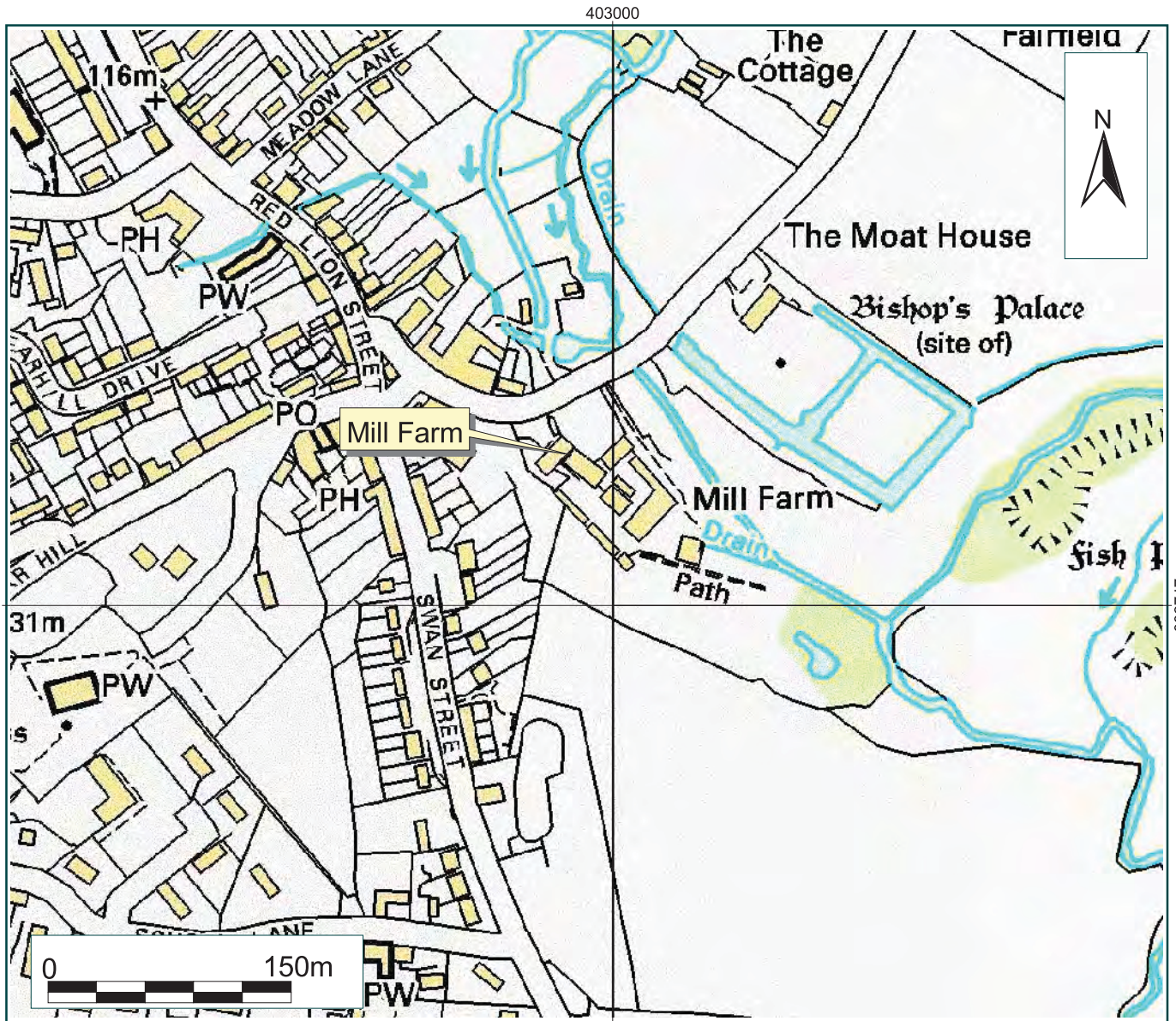
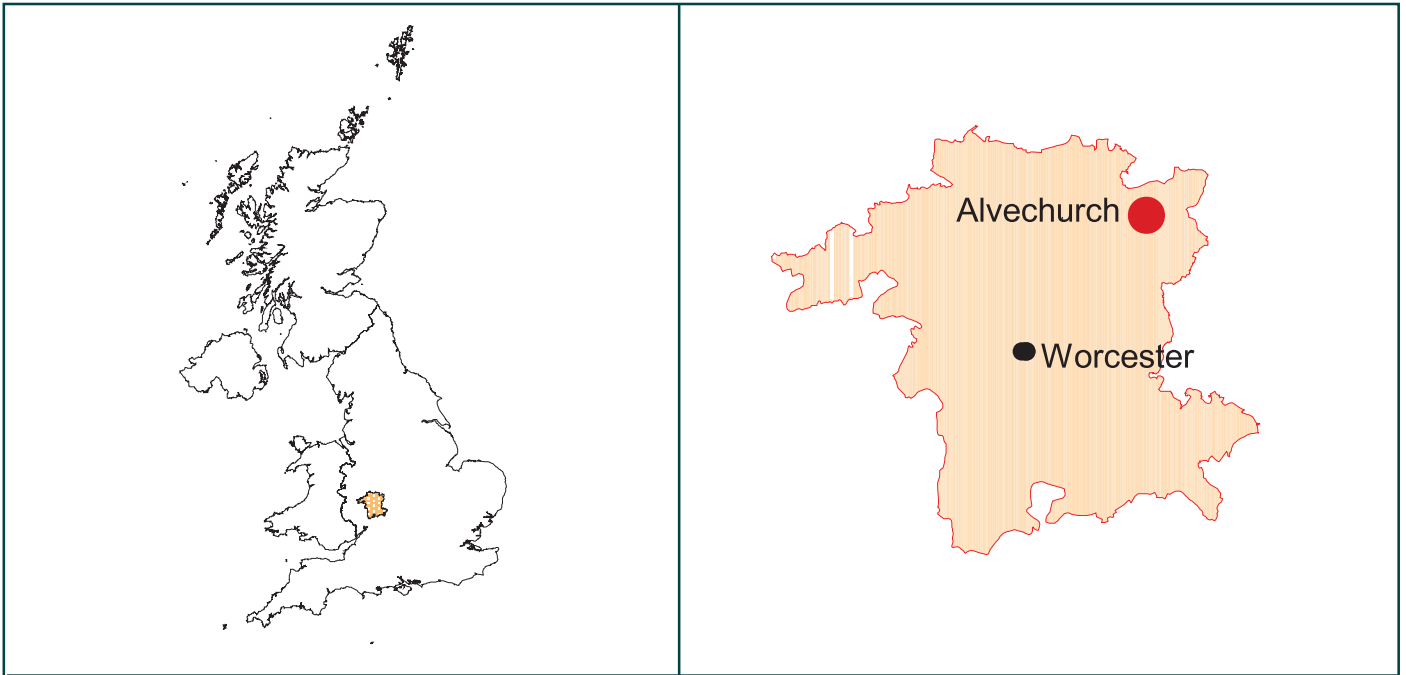
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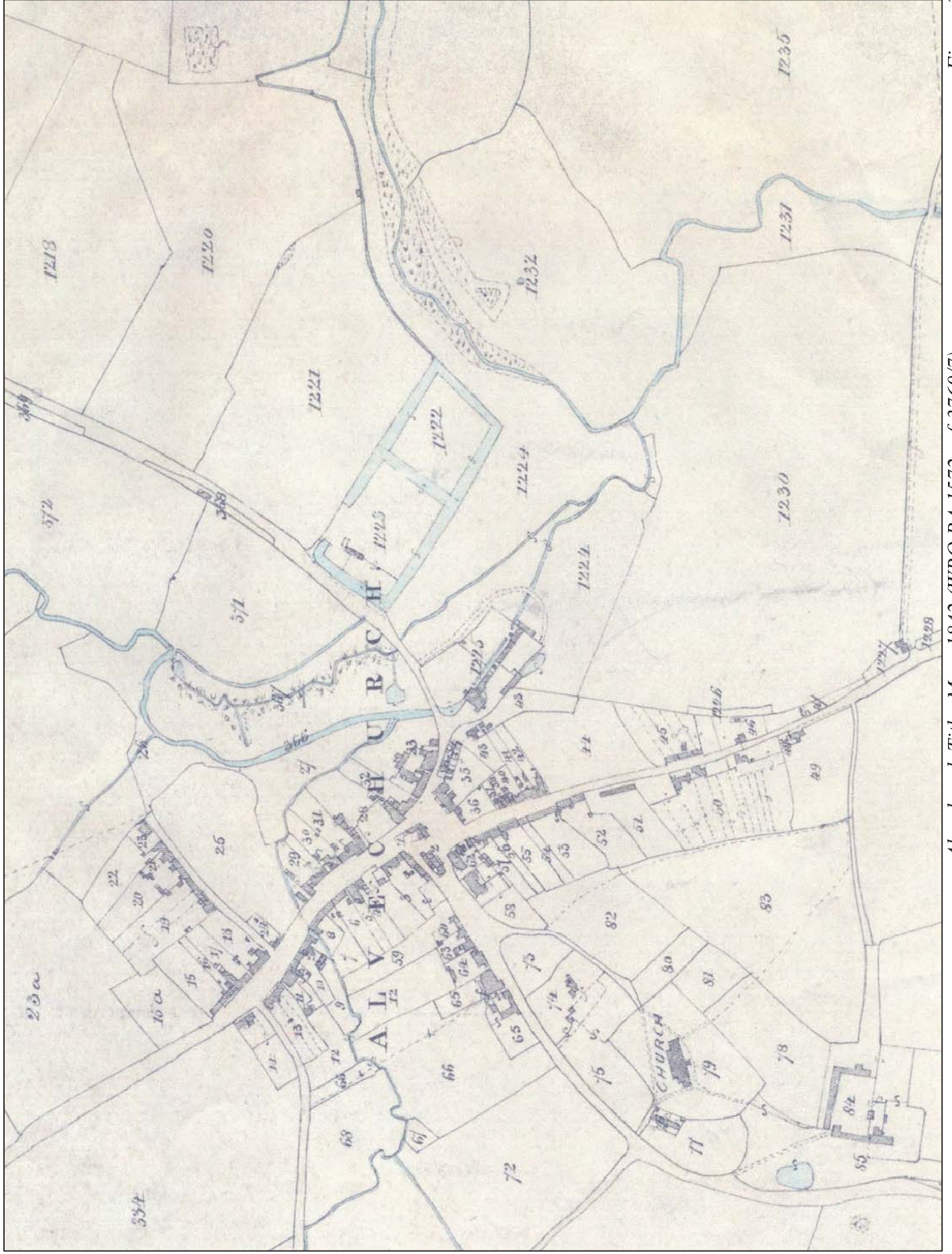
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Location of site

Figure 1



Alvechurch Tithe Map, 1842 (WRO BA 1572 ref:3760/7) Figure 2



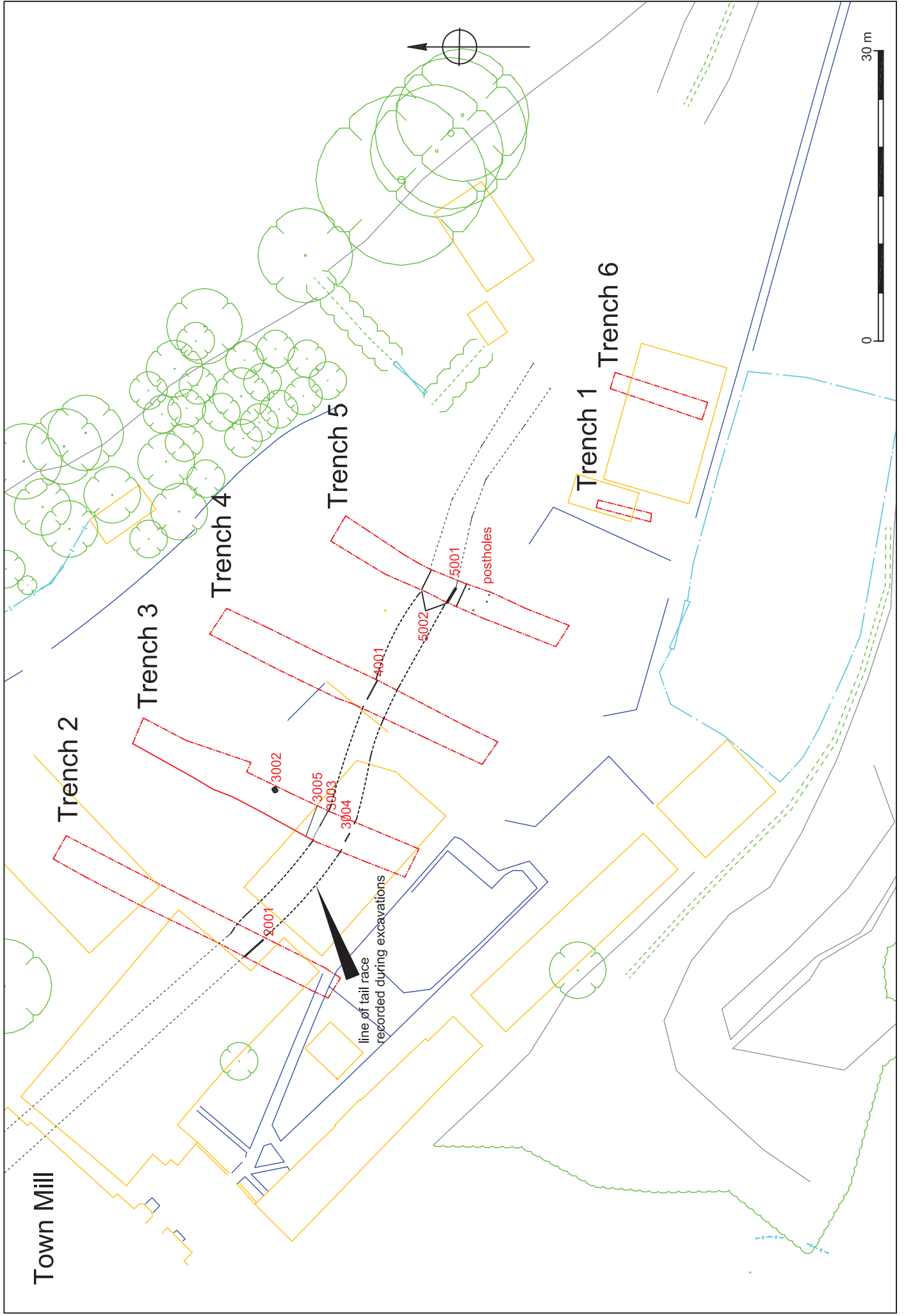


Figure 3

Location of trenches and main features



*Plate 1: General view of the site from the south-west, before demolition and clearance. The taller brick building in the background is the former Town Mill*



*Plate 2: View along Trench 3, facing north-east. The tail race crosses the trench from left to right*

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*Plate 3: Detail of wall in Trench 3*

## Appendix: summary of stratigraphic data

### Trench 1 (geotechnical trench)

Maximum dimensions: Length: 6.00m Width: 1.00m Depth: 2.15m

Orientation: North to south

Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation
1000	Concrete	0.20m	Foundation
1001	Hardcore	0.50m	Made ground
1002	Mid blueish grey silt clay with common small gravels, and fragments of charcoal and waterlogged wood	1.25m	Alluvium
1003	Small gravels in light yellowish brown medium sand	0.20m	Fluvioglacial deposit
1004	Mid reddish brown silty clay	n/a	Marl

### Trench 2 (sample trench)

Maximum dimensions: Length: 31.00m Width: 3.00m Depth: 0.45m

Orientation: North-east to south-west

Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation
2000	Machine-excavated spoil	n/a	n/a
2001	Wall built of large roughly-hewn greyish green sandstone blocks bonded with dark grey silty clay; two courses visible	c0.36m	South side of tail race

Other deposits/features: two small circular pits filled with soil with modern brick inclusions; two square brick manholes; modern made ground over all.

### Trench 3 (sample trench)

Maximum dimensions: Length: 31.00m Width: 3.50m Depth: 0.45m

Orientation: North-east to south-west

Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation
3000	Mid reddish brown and mid grey silty clay with few gravels and sandstone fragments	0.45m+	Fill of 3005
3001	Mid brown silty clay with common gravels and few fragments of brick/tile	0.20m	Fill of 3002
3002	Rectangular feature with rounded corners, near-vertical sides and flat base	0.20m	Posthole?
3003	Wall built of large roughly-hewn greyish green sandstone blocks bonded with dark grey silty clay; four courses visible	0.45m	North side of tail race
3004	As 3003, but severely truncated and only one course high	c0.15m	South side of tail race
3005	Linear, parallel-side cut with near vertical sides: not bottomed	0.45m+	Construction trench for tail race

Other deposits/features: one small circular pit filled with soil with modern brick inclusions (unexcavated); brick foundations of latest buildings on site; modern made ground over all.

**Trench 4 (sample trench)**

Maximum dimensions: Length: 31.0m Width: 3.30m Depth: 0.50m

Orientation: North-east to south-west

Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation
4000	Machine-excavated spoil	n/a	n/a
4001	Wall built of large roughly-hewn greyish green sandstone blocks bonded with dark grey silty clay; one course visible	0.18m	North side of tail race

Other deposits/features: rectangular brick manhole; brick foundations of latest buildings on site; modern made ground over all.

**Trench 5 (sample trench)**

Maximum dimensions: Length: 26.00m Width: 3.30m Depth: 0.40m

Orientation: North-east to south-west

Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation
5000	Machine-excavated spoil	n/a	n/a
5001	Wall built of large roughly-hewn brownish red sandstone blocks bonded with dark grey silty clay; one course visible	0.38m	South side of tail race
5002	Linear, parallel-side cut with near vertical sides: not bottomed	0.66m+	Construction trench for tail race

Other deposits/features: four possible postholes to south-east of 5001; modern made ground over all

**Trench 6 (sample trench)**

Maximum dimensions: Length: 5.00m Width: 2.00m Depth: 1.43m

Orientation: North-east to south-west

Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation
6000	Machine-excavated spoil	n/a	n/a
6001	Mid brown silt loam and reddish brown silty clay; common brick, glass, and other modern inclusions	c0.64m	Reworked humic soils
6002	Mid brown silty clay	0.79m+	Alluvium