

# Archaeological evaluation of land north of Fenny Compton, Warwickshire



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## **Archaeological evaluation of land north of Fenny Compton, Warwickshire**

Elizabeth Connolly

With contributions by Elizabeth Pearson

### **Summary**

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken of land north of Fenny Compton, Warwickshire (National Grid reference 441980, 252750). It was undertaken on behalf of CgMs Consulting, and their client, Bloor Homes Midlands, who intend to apply for planning permission for residential development at the site. A desk-based assessment prepared for the site identified a moderate potential for the survival of Prehistoric remains within the site and a low potential for Roman, Medieval and more recent activity. A geophysical survey identified potential archaeological assets within the southern half of the site.

The proposed development site comprises pasture to the north of Fenny Compton village, set back from the junction of High Street and Station Road. A watercourse flows through Fenny Compton from south to north forming the site's western boundary.

Prior to works, a detailed specification was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology and approved by Anna Stocks, Planning Archaeologist, Warwickshire County Council. Six trenches were excavated across the site in locations selected to target geophysical anomalies. Two intercutting ditches were recorded in a trench at the northern end of the investigated area and another in an adjacent trench. These are thought to form part of the same feature, such as an enclosure, although they appear to match separate anomalies identified on the geophysical survey.

Part of a greyish red sandstone ashlar block was present in the fill of one ditch and animal bone was recovered from a further two but no datable artefacts were recovered. The environmental remains assessed were of low significance, suggesting low probability of recovering environmental remains suitable for analysis.

No trace of features suggested by the geophysical survey was recorded in other trenches, and it is thought that archaeological features within this part of the site are confined to a relatively small area.

## Report

### 1 Background

#### 1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on land north of Fenny Compton, Warwickshire (National Grid reference 441980, 252750). It was commissioned by CgMs on behalf of their client, Bloor Homes Midlands, The evaluation was required to accompany an application for residential development of the site.

A desk-based assessment (CgMs 2014) of the site identified a moderate potential for the survival of prehistoric remains and a low potential for Roman, medieval and more recent activity. A geophysical survey (Stratascan 2014) identified potential archaeological assets within the southern half of the study site.

The project conforms to a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2014).

The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008).

### 2 Aims

The aims of this evaluation are:

- to describe and assess the significance of any heritage assets 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 Personnel

The project was undertaken by Richard Bradley MA, AlfA; who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2008 and has been practicing archaeology since 2005. Report writing was undertaken by Elizabeth Connolly MA. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers MSc. Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt. Elizabeth Pearson, Senior Environmental Archaeologist, contributed the environmental report.

#### 3.2 Documentary research

An archaeological desk-based assessment was undertaken by CgMs on behalf of their client (CgMs 2014).

A geophysical survey (Stratascan 2014) was also undertaken at the site.

##### *Documentary sources*

Published and grey literature sources are listed in the bibliography (Section 10).

#### 3.3 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2014) and approved by Anna Stocks, Planning Archaeologist, Warwickshire County Council.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 7 and 9 October 2014.

Six trenches, amounting to just over 270m<sup>2</sup> in area, were excavated in the southern part of the site area of 3.05ha. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2. The trenches were targeted

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specifically to investigate a number of positive linear and curvilinear anomalies identified by the geophysical survey (Figure 3) (Stratascan, in CgMs 2014). The locations of trenches were constrained to some degree by the presence of buried services within the site and two public rights of way. The project design proposed the excavation of four trenches, but a further two were opened, on the request of the client, to establish the extent of features in Trenches 1 and 2. Furthermore both Trenches 1 and 2 were extended to gain a better understanding of the nature of these features.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 180° wheeled 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 and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012a). On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

### **3.4 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.

### **3.5 Environmental archaeology methodology, by Elizabeth Pearson**

#### **3.5.1 Sampling policy**

Samples were taken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (2012). A single sample (context 202) of 20 litres was taken from an undated fill of ditch 203.

#### **3.5.2 Processing and analysis**

The sample was processed by flotation using a Siraf tank. The flot was collected on a 300µm sieve and the residue retained on a 1mm mesh. This allows for the recovery of items such as small animal bones, molluscs and seeds.

The residue was scanned by eye and the abundance of each category of environmental remains estimated. A magnet was also used to test for the presence of hammerscale. The flot was scanned using a low power MEIJI stereo light microscope and plant remains identified using modern reference collections maintained by Worcestershire Archaeology, and a seed identification manual (Cappers *et al* 2012). Nomenclature for the plant remains follows the *New Flora of the British Isles*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Stace 2010).

#### **3.5.3 Discard policy**

Scanned residue and flot will be discarded 6 months after submission of this report, unless a specific request is made to retain this material.

### **3.6 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 The application site**

### **4.1 Topography, geology and archaeological context**

The solid geology of the study site comprises Charmouth Mudstone. There is no superficial geology mapped for the study site. The overlying soils are known as Denchworth which are typical pelo-stagnogley soils. These consist soils with similar loamy over clayey soils (Stratascan 2014).

An archaeological desk-based assessment was carried out by CgMs Consulting (CgMs 2014). An area of 1km diameter from the proposed development site was studied and the information below derives from this report.

### **Prehistoric**

The Warwickshire HER holds one record for prehistoric activity within the study area; a Neolithic arrow head had been found c 35m to the south of the site (MWR 9746). The study site has a relatively favourable topographic position for prehistoric archaeology. Although on a north-facing slope, it is close to a watercourse and it was considered that the anomalies recorded by a recent geophysical survey may represent activity dating to this period.

### **Saxon-Early medieval**

The Domesday Survey includes two references to Fenny Compton, formerly known as 'Contone' which is listed within the 'Hunsbri' Hundred. The first reference is 'the count himself holds in Fenny Compton 4 hides and 3 virgates of land, and Gilbert (holds) of him. There is land for 6 ploughs. In demesne are 2 ploughs, and 7 slaves; and 8 villans with a priest and 6 bordars with 4 ploughs. There are 40 acres of meadow'. The second reference is to 'From Thorkil Almeare holds two hides in Fenny Compton. There is land for 2 ploughs. In demesne are 1.5 ploughs and 4 slaves; and 6 villeins and 2 bordars with 1.5 ploughs. There are 16 acres of meadow'.

Although the HER records that early Medieval pottery was found during an evaluation of land c 110m to the south of the study site, it is likely that the focus of settlement during this period lay within the later Medieval historic core and within the limits of the village as shown on the 1886 Ordnance Survey map. The study site would have formed part of the surrounding undeveloped landscape recorded by the Domesday Survey.

The study site is likely to have comprised part of an undeveloped rural landscape bordering Fenny Compton at this time.

### **Medieval**

The Church of St. Peter and St. Clare is dated to the early 14<sup>th</sup> century (MWA 664) and is located c 585m to the southwest of the study site. The church is likely to represent the focus of medieval settlement (MWA 8983) and the HER records settlement remains at Church Street (MWA 7458 and EWR 5805), along with possible evidence of ploughing (EWR 10186). A medieval brooch was recorded c 710m to the southeast of the historic settlement boundary (MWA 9872) and the site of a possible shrunken medieval settlement is noted on this south-eastern edge (MWA 667). Further to the north, there is a possible moat associated with Manor House and Manor Farm (MWA 646) and another possible shrunken medieval settlement (MWA 668), c 240m to the south-west of the study site. It is noted that archaeological evaluation at Manor Cottages, c 335m to the southwest of the study site (MWA 7523), recorded two 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century houses and yards which were interpreted as representing a peripheral area on the edge of the medieval settlement.

Large areas of ridge and furrow are recorded by the HER to the south-west, east and north-east of the study site and ploughing evidence was also recorded to the west of Fenny Compton (EWA 10186).

### **Post-medieval to modern**

The majority of assets recorded for the wider study area from this period are related to the historic settlement, comprising chapels, windmills, houses and gardens. The East and West Junction Railway is located just to the north of the study site and the Oxford Canal lies c 745m to the east.

Saxton's Map of Warwickshire, dated 1579, depicts a church and settlement at Fenny Compton. Yates gives a little more detail in 1789, showing that the study site lies to the northeast of the settlement within undeveloped land. Two windmills recorded by the HER (recorded as one entry: MWA 666) are noted to the east of the settlement and the Oxford Canal is also shown.



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No original title, enclosure or estate maps covering the proposed development site predating the Ordnance Survey were available for the desk-based assessment. A conjectural enclosure map locates the study site within undeveloped agricultural land.

By the 1812 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey the surrounding field systems are mapped and the proposed development site is shown still lying to the north-east of the Fenny Compton settlement and within the surrounding fields.

The 1886 Ordnance Survey map demonstrates the undeveloped nature of the landscape surrounding Fenny Compton, which, with the exception of the canal and two railway lines, is unchanged from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century mapping.

By 1905 the northern part of the study site is being used as a cricket ground and there are two footpaths within the study site.

By the 1974-75 OS map, residential development has extended north along High Street and continues along Station Road and Berry Meadow to the east of the proposed development site. A sewage works is shown just beyond the site's northern boundary and there is an electricity sub-station at the southern end of the proposed development site. The area of site itself remains unchanged, although the cricket ground annotation is no longer shown - a playing field and pavilion are shown in a field to the southeast. There is no change to 1993.

The Fenny Compton Conservation Area, along with its associated listed buildings, lie c 85m to the southwest.

## **4.2 Current land-use**

The proposed development site is located to the north-east of the historic core of the village and conservation area (Figure 1). It comprises a pasture field used for horse grazing. A watercourse flows through Fenny Compton from south to north forming the site's western boundary.

## **5 Structural analysis**

The trenches 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**

In all trenches a compact mid-greyish yellow, silty clay natural was observed at a depth of around 0.30m. In Trench 1 it was recorded that this clay became a bluish grey clay at a depth of 0.65m. A bluish grey clay was also observed in Trench 4 (Plates 1-6).

### **5.1.2 Phase 2: modern deposits**

Topsoil throughout the site was a compact mid-grey silty clay, about 0.28m depth. A modern land drain was recorded in Trench 6.

### **5.1.3 Phase 3: undated deposits**

Two intercutting ditches were recorded in Trench 1 at the northern end of the site; both orientated approximately north-west to south-east. Feature 107 (depth 0.58m, width 0.86m, Plate 9, Figure 4) has a single fill of greyish red clay interpreted as re-deposited natural clay (106), containing snail shells and part of an ashlar block of building stone. The stone (Plate 11) is of greyish weathered red, iron rich sandstone and has two squared faces, 240mm and 220mm in length.

Ditch 107 was cut by a second ditch, 105 (depth 0.76m, width 1.94m, Plate 8) with a shallow bowl-shaped profile, containing three fills, also very similar to the natural. No artefacts were recovered from sections excavated through these features.

In Trench 2, which was positioned to the south of Trench 1, a more substantial ditch cut, 203 (depth 0.85m, width 2.28m, Plate 10, Figure 5), was recorded running approximately SW-NE. This was bowl shaped in profile with a flat base containing a single fill of re-deposited natural clay (202) which contained organic material; no artefacts were recovered.

## 5.2 Environmental analysis, by Elizabeth Pearson

Environmental remains are summarised in Tables 1 and 3.

A small quantity of hand-collected animal bone (in total 713g, 23 fragments) was recovered from contexts 102 and 106: fills of ditches 105 and 106 respectively. This included cattle tibia and cattle premolars. Little interpretation could be made of these remains.

Environmental remains were poorly preserved in context 202 (fill of ditch (203)). Only occasional seeds of elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) and birch (*Betula pendula*) were identifiable. These were uncharred, and as the deposits were not waterlogged and or anaerobic, it is uncertain whether these are of any antiquity. Occasional molluscan remains, of low diversity, including most likely *Cepaea* were also noted and small fragments of charcoal. Little interpretation could be made of these remains.

context	small mammal	mollusc	charcoal	uncharred plant	comment
202	occ	occ	occ	abt*	*mostly unidentified

Table 1: Summary of environmental remains (Key: occ = occasional, abt = abundant)

context	202
category remains	
<i>Uncharred plant remains</i>	
misc (indet herbaceous root & woody root fragments)	++++/low
seed	+/low

Table 2: Plant remains

### Key to plant table:

quantity	diversity
+ = 1 - 10	low
++ = 11- 50	medium
+++ = 51 - 100	high
++++ = 101+	
* = fragments	

## 6 Synthesis

The geophysical survey of the site identified a series of strong curvilinear anomalies within the southern half of the site which were thought to have the potential to represent features of archaeological significance, as depicted in Figure 3. However, of these, only two corresponded to archaeological features. It is possible that other anomalies relate to agricultural activity within the topsoil.

Three ditches were recorded within Trenches 2 and 3, each filled with material similar to the natural clay. These may be part of the same archaeological feature or the same complex of features. The ditches within Trench 1 equate to a large anomaly which forms a right angle extending eastwards from the stream though no other trace of this anomaly could be discerned in Trenches 2 and 5. Trench 2 also appears to be in the position of a smaller anomaly enclosed by

the right angle. It is thought, however, that the geophysical anomalies may be misleading here, and there is a strong chance, given the similarity of their fills and profile that they are in fact part of the same feature which makes a sharp turn between the two trenches, perhaps forming an enclosure ditch, of which the stream course may form the western edge.

The ashlar block recovered from ditch 107 would imply the proximity of a high quality, stone building. Red sandstone is not the bedrock in this area, the nearest outcrop being Triassic Mudstone which outcrops approximately seven miles to the north-west (British Geological Survey).

The location of these features next to a watercourse would not lend itself to defence in a low lying area, but the proximity of a stream might suggest occupation or features related to the rearing of stock.

## **6.1 Research frameworks**

At present the features recorded at this site are undated and, as such, cannot be placed in a framework for research.

## **7 Significance**

### **7.1 Nature and importance of the archaeological interest in the site**

The nature of the archaeological features recorded is not currently understood, and in the absence of dating evidence it is not possible, at this stage, to establish their significance.

The environmental remains were of low significance, suggesting low probability of recovering environmental remains suitable for analysis.

### **7.2 Physical extent of the archaeological interest in the site**

The physical extent of the features is not clear, although the stream to the west forms an obvious boundary. No archaeological deposits were recorded in Trenches 3 and 4 to the south, 5 to the east or 6 to the north, implying that the archaeological features within the site are confined to a relatively discrete area in the vicinity of Trenches 1 and 2.

## **8 Publication summary**

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology 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 proposed development site comprises pasture to the north of Fenny Compton village, set back from the junction of High Street and Station Road. A watercourse flows through Fenny Compton from south to north forming the site's western boundary.*

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*No trace of features suggested by the geophysical survey was recorded in other trenches, and it is thought that archaeological features within this part of the site are confined to a relatively small area.*

## 9 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Cathy Patrick (CgMs Consulting) and Anna Stocks (Planning Archaeologist, Warwickshire County Council).

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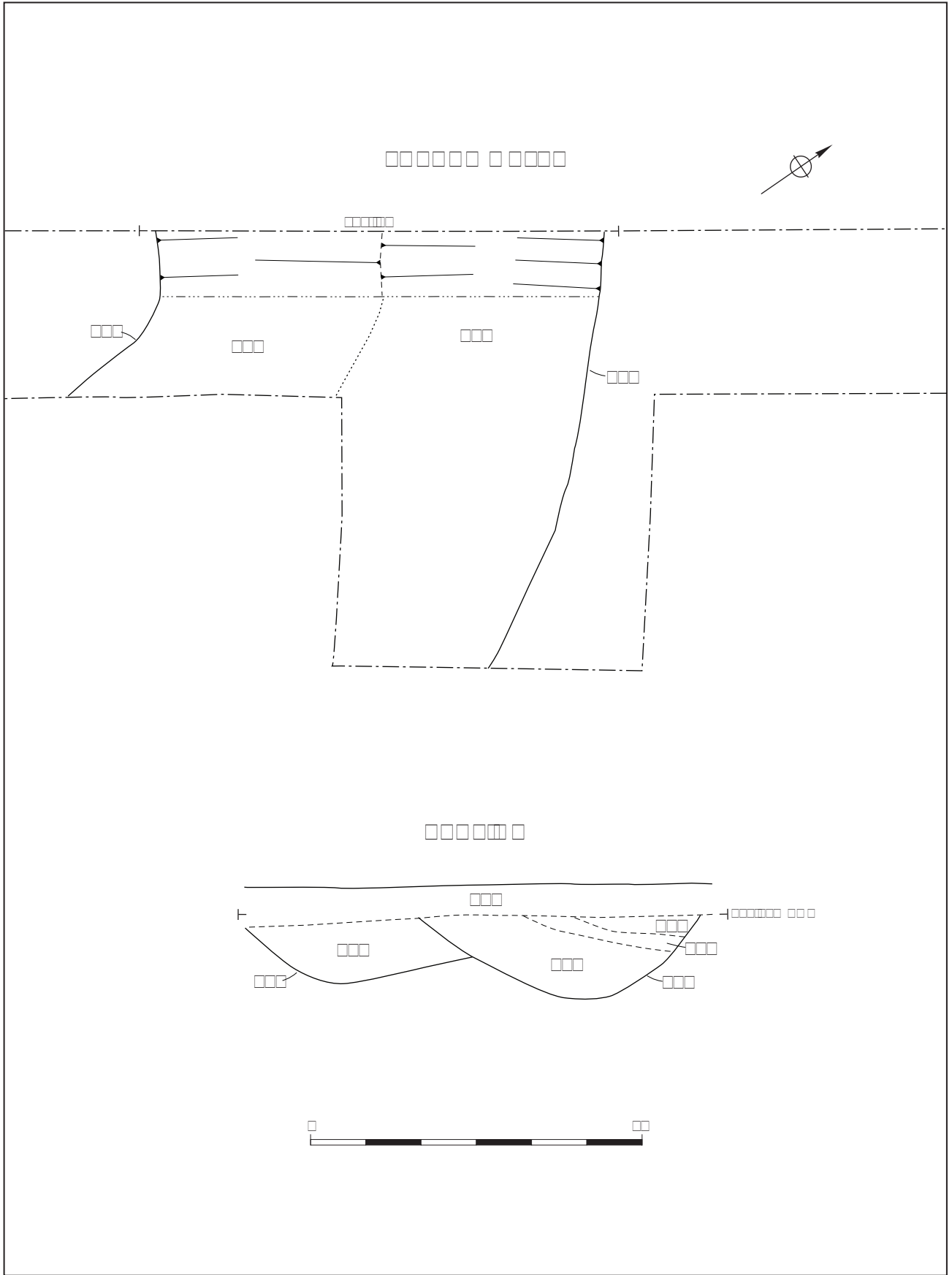
**Figures**







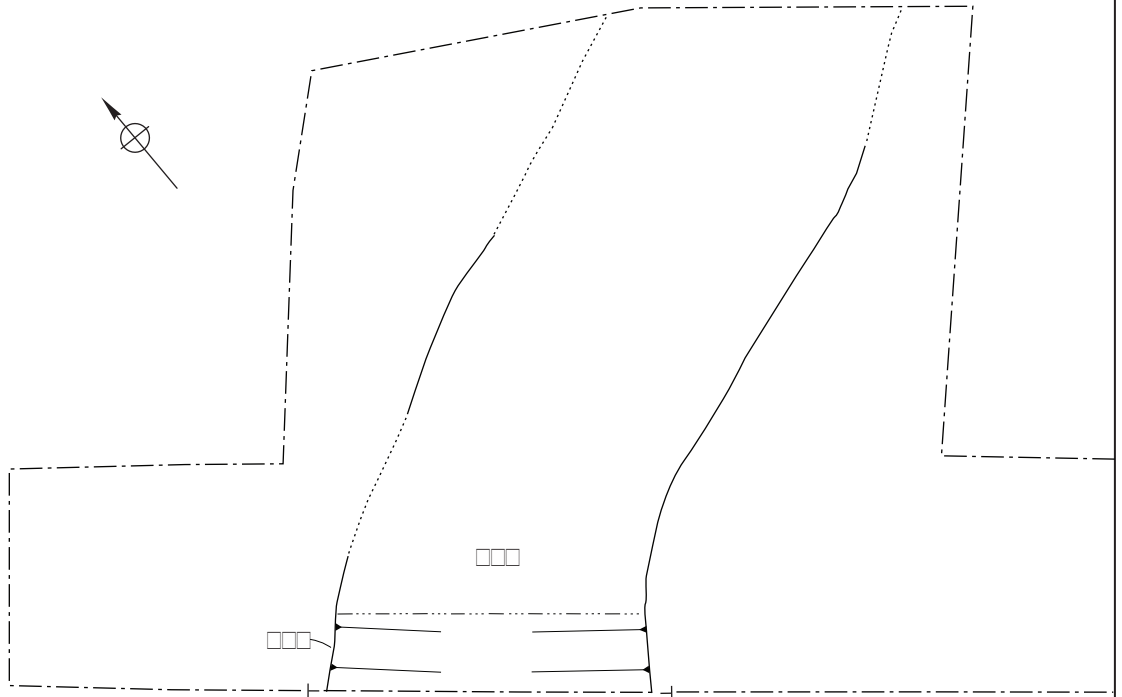




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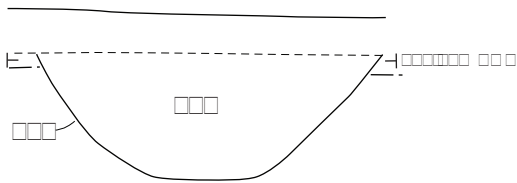


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**Plates**



*Plate 1 Trench 1, general shot from south*



*Plate 2 Trench 2, general shot from north-west*



*Plate 3 Trench 3, general shot from north-east*



*Plate 4 Trench 4, general shot from south-east*

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*Plate 5 Trench 4, general shot from north-west*



*Plate 6 Trench 5, general shot from south-west*



*Plate 7 Trench 6, general shot from south-east*



*Plate 8 Ditch, 105, from south-east*

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*Plate 9 Ditch 105 and 107 from east*



*Plate 10 Ditch, 203, from north-east*

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*Plate 11 Sandstone ashlar block from ditch 107 (scale 20cm)*

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## Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

### Main deposit descriptions

#### Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 30.50m Width: 1.5m Depth: 0.60m

Orientation: NE-SW

Context	Feature type	Context type	Description	Height/Depth	Interpretation
100	Topsoil	Layer	Compact mid grey silty clay	0.28m	Topsoil - Turf over alluvial clay
101	Natural	Layer	Compact mid greyish yellow silty clay	>0.65m	Natural substrate
102	Linear	Fill	Compact mid orangey brown silty clay	0.20m	Top fill of ditch 105. Very similar to natural clays.
103	Linear	Fill	Compact mid yellow clay	0.31m	Clay band within ditch 105
104	Linear	Fill	Compact light reddish brown silty clay	0.76m	Fill in base of ditch 105. Very homogenous, probably redeposited natural.
105	Linear	Cut		0.76m	Ditch feature, looks to form a square enclosure on the geophysics and the depth of the ditch could support this. Possibly prehistoric in date? Could turn and join up with 203 in Tr 2, or perhaps be an elongated pit.
106	Linear	Fill	Compact mid greyish red silty clay	0.58m	Fill of ditch 107. Probably redeposited natural. Included animal bone and possible building stone.
107	Linear	Cut		0.58m	Possibly a ditch, though full route is unclear. Pre dates 105.

#### Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 30m Width: 1.50m Depth: 0.40m

Orientation: NW-SE

Context	Feature type	Context_type	Description	Height/Depth	Interpretation
200	Topsoil	Layer	Compact mid greyish brown silty clay	0.28m	Topsoil - Turf over alluvial clay
201	Natural	Layer	Compact mid greyish yellow silty clay	>0.10m	Natural substrate
202	Ditch	Fill	Compact mid greyish brown silty clay	0.85m	Single fill of ditch 203. Undated, contains organic matter which is the only differentiation between this and the natural. Probably redeposited natural. Sampled.
203	Ditch	Cut		0.85m	Large ditch feature of unknown date and unclear orientation. Possibly a former boundary or enclosure, or potentially an old channel or leat?

#### Trench 3

Maximum dimensions: Length: 29.50m Width: 1.50m Depth: 0.42m

Orientation: NE-SW

Context	Feature type	Context_type	Description	Height/Depth	Interpretation
300	Topsoil	Layer	Compact mid greyish brown silty clay	0.19-0.31m	Topsoil - Turf over alluvial clay
301	Natural	Layer	Compact mid greyish yellow silty clay	>0.09m	Natural substrate

#### Trench 4

Maximum dimensions: Length: 33m (NE-SW), 12.20m (NW-SE) Width: 1.50m Depth: 0.42m

Orientation: T-shaped; NE-SW and NW-SE

Context	Feature type	Context_type	Description	Height/Depth	Interpretation
400	Topsoil	Layer	Compact mid greyish brown silty clay	0.27m	Topsoil - Turf over alluvial clay
401	Natural	Layer	Compact mid greyish yellow clay	0.39m	Natural substrate
402	Natural	Layer	Compact light greyish blue clay	>0.48m	Natural substrate

#### Trench 5

Maximum dimensions: Length: 16m Width: 1.60m Depth: 0.35m

Orientation: NE-SW

Context	Feature type	Context_type	Description	Height/Depth	Interpretation
500	Topsoil	Layer	Compact mid greyish brown silty clay	0.26m	Topsoil - Turf over alluvial clay
501	Natural	Layer	Compact mid greyish yellow clay	>0.09m	Natural substrate

#### Trench 6

Maximum dimensions: Length: 31m Width: 1.60m Depth: 0.35m

Orientation: NW-SE

Context	Feature type	Context_type	Description	Height/Depth	Interpretation
600	Topsoil	Layer	Compact mid greyish brown silty clay	0.32m	Topsoil - Turf over alluvial clay
601	Natural	Layer	Compact mid greyish yellow clay	>0.03m	Natural substrate
602	Drain	Cut			Modern land drain

## **Appendix 2 Technical information**

### **The archive**

The archive consists of:

- 8 Context records AS1
- 2 Field progress reports AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 76 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 4 Scale drawings
- 1 Sample number catalogues AS18
- 1 Flot records AS21
- 6 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 CD-Rom/DVDs
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Warwickshire Museum  
The Butts  
Warwick Warwickshire, CV34 4SS  
Tel. Warwick (01926) 412500

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