

Archaeological Evaluation at Land at Marlene Croft, Chelmsley Wood, Solihull



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Status: Vers.1
Date: 19 February 2016
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Project reference: P4725
Report reference: **2302**
Oasis id: Fieldsec1-241293

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Archaeological evaluation at Marlene Croft, Chelmsley Wood, Solihull

Pete Lovett

With contributions by Rob Hedge

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Marlene Croft, Chelmsley Wood, Solihull (NGR SP 18421 86292). It was undertaken on behalf of CgMs, whose client intends a residential development for which a planning application has been granted, subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works.

Seven trenches were excavated on the site of the former school ground. Evidence for a probable pond or marshy area was discovered, with the earliest dated material from the 18th century. The soil profile indicated that the whole site had been formerly waterlogged. Historic maps depict a brook running across the land, and a small enclosed copse growing over the possible pond area.

The site was reclaimed via the importation of large amounts of made ground, as the area saw rapid development to alleviate the housing shortage in the post-war period.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Marlene Croft, Chelmsley Wood, Solihull (NGR SP 18421 86292). It was commissioned by CgMs, whose client intends a residential development of a former school site for which a planning application was submitted to Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (reference PL/2015/51742/PPFL) and approved subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works.

A Written Scheme of Investigation for evaluation of the site was produced (CgMs 2015) and approved by Solihull MBC.

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance: Archaeological field evaluation* (ClfA 2014).

2 Aims

The aims of the evaluation were to:

- To determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological remains within the development site;
- To assess the artefactual and environmental potential of the archaeological deposits encountered;
- To provide further information on the archaeological potential of the site to enable that archaeological implications of the proposed development to be assessed;
- To assess the impact of previous land use on the site;
- To inform formulation of a strategy to avoid or mitigate impacts of the proposed development on surviving archaeological remains; and
- To produce a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the Historic Environment Record.

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was led by Richard Bradley (BA (hons.), MA; ACIfA who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2008 and has been practicing archaeology since 2005, assisted by Elspeth Iliff (BA (hons.); MSc), The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers (BA (hons.); MSc). The report was prepared by Pete Lovett and illustrations by Carolyn Hunt (BSc (hons.); PG Cert; MCIfA). Robert Hedge (MA Cantab) contributed the finds report.

3.2 List of sources consulted

Cartographic sources

- 1st edition Ordnance Survey

Aerial photography

- Google Earth historic photography 1945

Documentary sources

Published and grey literature sources are listed in the bibliography.

3.3 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by CgMs Consulting (CgMs 2015).

Fieldwork was undertaken between 25 January and 27 January 2016.

Seven trenches, amounting to just over 420m² in area, were excavated over the site area of 1.74ha, representing a sample of 2%. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 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). Due to the depths of material observed in some of the trenches, natural geology was not reached even in deep sondages. Following consultation with CgMs, trenches 3 and 4 were investigated via sondages at either end in order to ascertain the depth of material. If the natural geology could not be reached at a depth of up to 1.2m, then the trench would not be excavated to its full extent. 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 sampling policy

Sampling was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event no deposits were identified which were considered to be suitable for environmental analysis.

4 The application site

4.1 Topography, geology and archaeological context

The natural geology consists of Mercian Mudstone Group, overlain by glaciofluvial deposits of sand and gravel (BGS 2016).

The site lies upon relatively level ground at 95m AOD though historically there would have been more of a slope from the east down to the west, judging from the heights of surrounding housing.

The 1st Edition OS map shows a brook running south-east to north-west on the south-western side of the site. There is also a small enclosed copse depicted, which can still be seen on aerial photographs taken in 1945 (Google Earth accessed 25/01/16) (Fig 3).

No archaeological sites or finds are recorded within the development area, and there is little evidence for any form of activity other than agricultural use, which is likely to have begun at least as early as the medieval period.

4.2 Current land-use

The site was until very recently occupied by Colehill Heath Junior and Infants School, which at the time of this investigation had just been demolished.

5 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Fig 2. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

A loose light yellowish grey silty sand deposit was present in Trenches 4, 5, 6, and 7, and ranged in depth from 1.2m to 2m below current ground level. In trenches 1, 2, and 3 the natural stratum was not observed, despite sondages of up to 3m.

5.1.2 Phase 2: Pond deposits

In trenches 1, 2, and 3 the natural geology was not reached, due to a thick sequence of probable pond deposits. These were at least 0.83m thick and reached a depth of at least 2m below current ground level. Within this sequence was a tree stump and fragments of brick and ceramic land drain. In trenches 4, 5, 6, and 7 the waterlogged material was thinner (0.26m to 0.9m), and more consistent with a buried topsoil than pond deposits.

5.1.3 Phase 3: Modern deposits

There were varying levels of made ground across the site, with the thickest deposits in trenches 1, 2, and 3. The ground was clearly waterlogged and some effort had been made to reclaim the land via the importation of rubble and soils. In trenches 1 and 2 this material was up to 1.6m thick, though it varied according to the depths of the underlying waterlogged deposits. This made ground contained large amounts of concrete and steel rebar, indicative of a 20th century date.

There was a 19th or 20th century land drain, as well as a modern service. Two linears in trench 5 were of modern date. A topsoil covered the investigated area.

5.2 Artefact analysis, by Rob Hedge

A single brick fragment from (202) was retained for inspection. It comprised a 147g piece of hand-made, slightly overfired brick with a sandy fabric and frequent small red-brown iron-rich inclusions. A date range of 16th to early 19th century is possible, although it is considered most likely to be 18th century in date.

6 Synthesis

6.1

The enclosed copse that was identified on the 1st edition OS map, and which can still be seen on the 1945 aerial photographs, was clearly growing in boggy ground. There may once have been a pond here; if so it had slowly silted up. The presence of a probably 18th century brick from within the pond deposits suggests a time frame for the transition from pond to boggy copse, if not an origin date for the pond itself.

The rapid development of the area following the Second World War led to reclamation of this land, with rubble and soil dumped across the wet ground in order to allow for construction.

6.2 Research frameworks

The absence of significant archaeological remains does not allow for any interrogation of the research frameworks outlined in *The archaeology of the West Midlands: a framework for research* (Watt 2011).

7 Significance

The nature of the site consists of a sequence of silted up pond deposits and waterlogged soils, dating from at least the 18th century, buried beneath post-war made-ground. The site is considered likely to have been agricultural in use since at least the medieval period, and the evaluation has provided no further evidence to the contrary.

The depth of the water logged deposits was not fully established, but they exist in places up to 3m below the current ground surface. Due to this depth, the investigation of the deposits was limited, and the dating of the material is therefore unresolved. However, this depth also limits the vulnerability of the site to the impact of development.

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.

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on behalf of CgMs Consulting at Marlene Croft, Chelmsley Wood, Solihull (NGR SP 18421 86292).

Seven trenches were excavated on the site of the former school ground. Evidence for a probable former pond or marshy area was discovered, with the earliest dated material from the 18th Century. The soil profile indicated that the whole site had formerly been waterlogged, with historic mapping depicting a brook running across the land, and a small enclosed copse growing over the probable area of the pond.

The site was reclaimed following the Second World War, via the importation of large amounts of made ground, as the area saw rapid development to alleviate the housing shortage.

9 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Paul Gajos of CgMs Consulting, and Anna Stocks, Archaeological Advisor to Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

10 Bibliography

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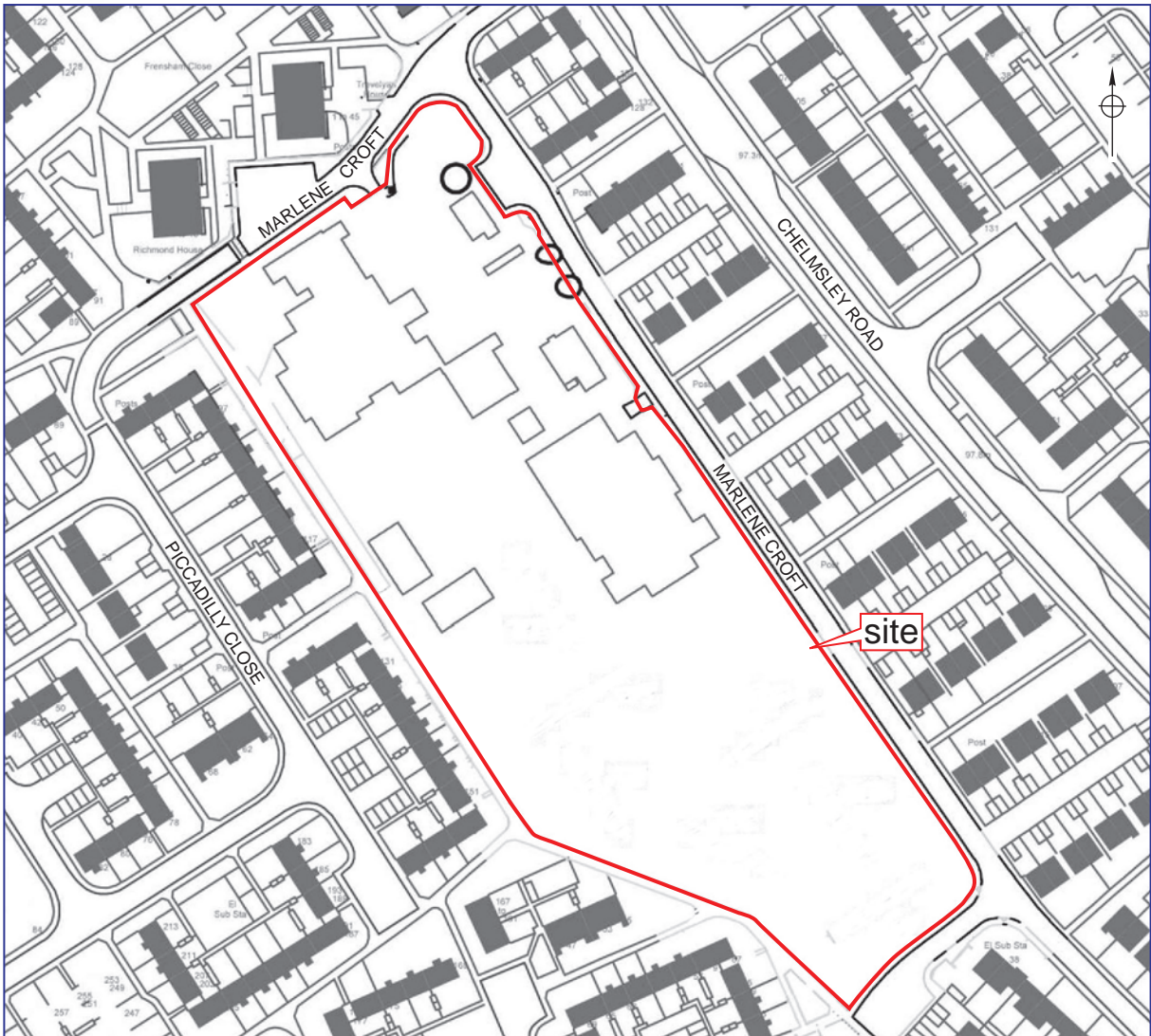
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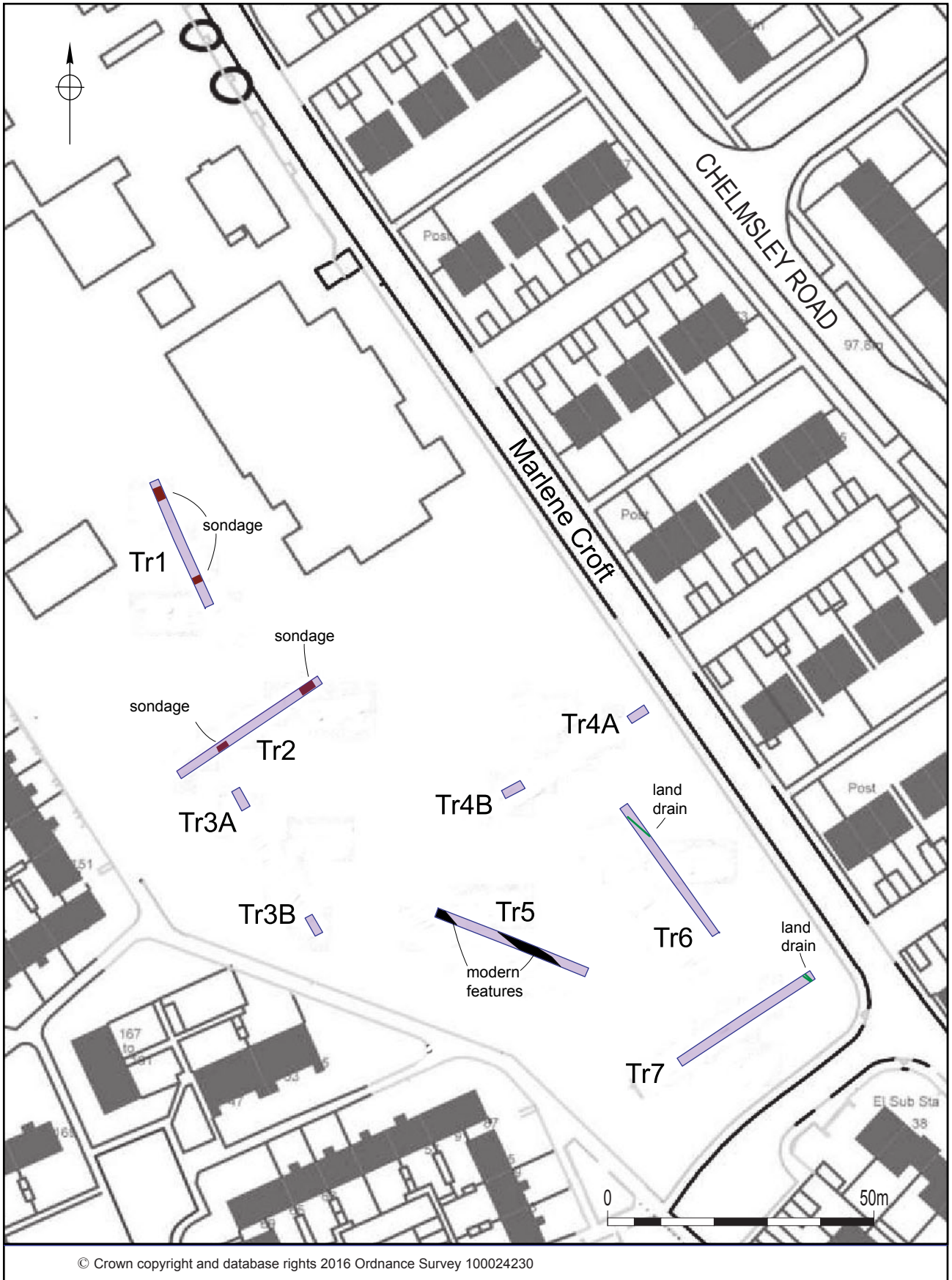
Figures



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Location of the site

Figure 1



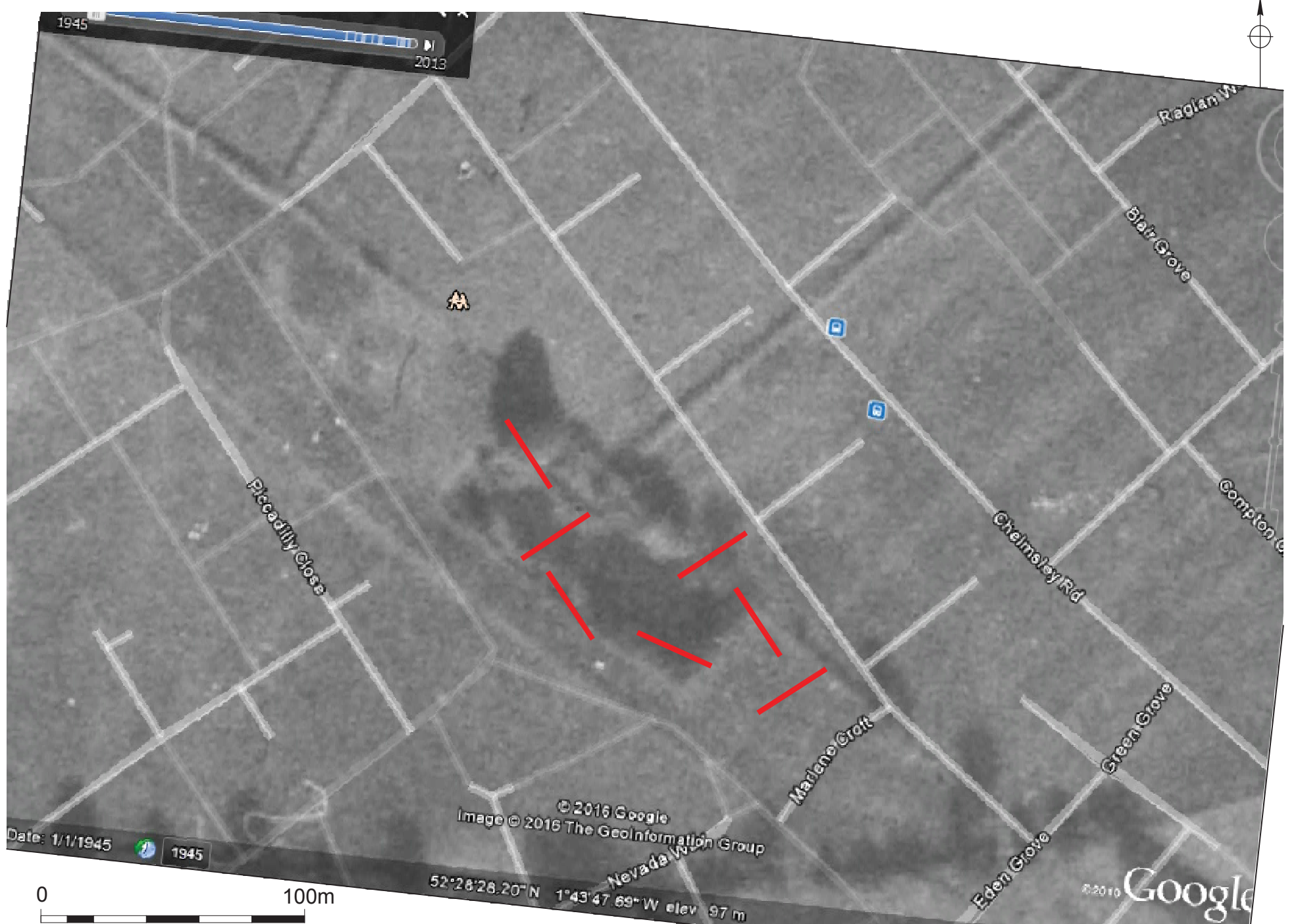
Trench location plan

Figure 2



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Trench locations on OS 1st Edition



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Trench locations on 1945 aerial photography

Trench locations on historic mapping

Figure 3

Plates



Plate 1 The site, looking north-west



Plate 2 Trench 1, looking south-east (1m scales)



Plate 3 Sondage in Trench 2 showing probable pond deposits, looking north-west (1m scale)



Plate 4 Sondage in Trench 2 showing probable pond deposits, looking south-east (1m scale)



Plate 5 Trench 2, looking south-west (1m scales)



Plate 6 Trench 7, looking south-west (1m scales)



Plate 7 Buried topsoil in Trench 7, looking north-west (1m scale)



Plate 8 Section of Trench 5, looking north-east (1m scale)



Plate 9 Sondage in Trench 4, looking north-west (1m scale)

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Length: 25 Width: 1.75 Orientation: North-west to south-east

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
100	Topsoil	Layer	Friable dark greyish brown silty sand	0.49	Turfed school playing field
101	Modern Layer	Layer	Loose mid brownish orange silty sand	0.16	Redeposited natural as made ground
102	Modern Layer	Layer	Moderately compact dark blackish brown clay silt	1.8+	Thick deposit of made ground

Trench 2

Length: 30 Width: 1.75 Orientation: North-east to south-west

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
200	Topsoil	Layer	Firm dark greyish brown silty sand	0.48	Topsoil
201	Modern Layer	Layer	Loose mid brownish orange silty sand	0.45	Redeposited natural as made ground
202	Layer	Layer	Compact dark blackish brown clay silt	1.6+	Thick waterlogged deposit
203	Modern Layer	Layer	Moderately compact dark blackish brown clay silt	0.45	Modern made ground
204	Layer	Layer	Moderately compact dark blueish grey sandy silt	0.25	Lens in pond deposit
205	Layer	Layer	Moderately compact dark blackish brown sandy silt	0.08	Lens in pond deposit
206	Layer	Layer	Friable mid reddish brown silty sand	0.27	Lens in pond deposit
207	Layer	Layer	Loose mid brownish orange silty sand	0.07	Lens in pond deposit
208	Layer	Layer	Friable dark greyish brown silty sand	0.16	Lens in pond deposit

Trench 3

Length: 8

Width: 1.75

Orientation: North-west to south-east

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
300	Topsoil	Layer	Friable dark greyish brown silty sand	0.3	Topsoil
301	Modern Layer	Layer	Friable mid greyish brown sandy silt	0.36	Made ground
302	Layer	Layer	Moderately compact dark greyish black clay silt	0.14	Lens in pond deposit
303	Layer	Layer	Friable mid greyish brown silty sand	0.22	Lens in pond deposit
304	Layer	Layer	Loose mid greyish orange silty sand	0.08	Lens in pond deposit
305	Layer	Layer	Friable mid blackish brown silty sand	0.07	Lens in pond deposit
306	Layer	Layer	Moderately compact mid greyish yellow sandy silt	0.16	Lens in pond deposit
307	Modern Layer	Layer	Friable mid greyish brown silty sand	0.36	Made ground
308	Layer	Layer	Compact dark blackish brown clay silt	0.34	Peaty buried topsoil
309	Layer	Layer	Moderately compact mid greyish yellow silty sand		Pond deposit

Trench 4

Length: 8

Width: 1.75

Orientation: North-east to south-west

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
400	Topsoil	Layer	Friable dark greyish brown silty sand	0.42	Topsoil
401	Modern Layer	Layer	Friable mid greyish brown sandy silt	0.68	Made ground
402	Layer	Layer	Compact dark blackish brown silty clay	0.9	Peaty buried topsoil
403	Natural	Layer	Loose light yellowish grey silty sand		Natural sands

Trench 5

Length: 30

Width: 1.75

Orientation: North-west to south-east

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
500	Topsoil	Layer	Friable dark greyish brown silty sand	0.3	Topsoil
501	Layer	Layer	Friable mid greyish brown sandy silt	0.56	Made ground
502	Layer	Layer	Compact dark blackish brown clay silt	0.36	Peaty buried topsoil
503	Natural	Layer	Loose light yellowish grey silty sand		Natural sands
504	Linear	Cut			Machine dug linear
505	Linear	Fill	Moderately compact mid brownish orange sandy silt		Fill of modern linear
506	Pit	Cut			Possible modern gravel extraction
507	Pit	Fill	Moderately compact mid brownish orange sandy silt		Fill of modern pit

Trench 6

Length: 30

Width: 1.75

Orientation: North-west to south-east

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
600	Topsoil	Layer	Friable dark greyish brown silty sand	0.28	Topsoil
601	Modern Layer	Layer	Friable mid greyish brown sandy silt	0.94	Made ground
602	Layer	Layer	Compact dark blackish brown silty clay	0.26	Peaty buried topsoil
603	Natural	Layer	Loose light yellowish grey silty sand		Natural sands
604	Field drain	Cut			Victorian land drain
605	Field drain	Fill	Compact dark blackish brown silty clay		Fill of land drain cut

Trench 7

Length: 30

Width: 1.75

Orientation: North-east to south-west

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
700	Topsoil	Layer	Friable dark greyish brown silty sand	0.37	Topsoil
701	Modern Layer	Layer	Friable mid greyish brown sandy silt	0.23	Made ground
702	Layer	Layer	Compact dark blackish brown silty clay	0.46	Peaty buried topsoil
703	Natural	Layer	Loose light yellowish grey silty sand		Natural sands
704	Field drain	Cut			Victorina land drain
705	Field drain	Fill	Compact dark blackish brown silty clay		Fill of land drain

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive

The archive consists of:

- 2 Field progress reports AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 68 Digital photographs
- 7 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:

Solihull Heritage Services

Central Library

Homer Road

Solihull

B91 3RG

Tel: 0121 704 6934
