

# Archaeological watching brief at Bean Hall Mill Farm, Moors Lane, Feckenham, Worcestershire



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Worcestershire Archaeology  
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Project reference: P4532

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HER reference: WSM 66601

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## Watching brief at Bean Hall Mill Farm, Feckenham, Worcestershire

Jonathan Webster and Tom Vaughan

With a contribution by Robert Hedge

### Background information

<i>Client</i>	Worcestershire Wildlife Trust
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SP 00625 60210
<i>Historic Environment Record reference</i>	WSM 66601
<i>Planning authority</i>	Worcestershire County Council
<i>Reference</i>	R/14/0366
<i>Brief</i>	WCC 2015
<i>Project design</i>	WA 2015
<i>Project parameters</i>	ClfA 2014

#### *Previous archaeological work on the site*

Bean Hall Mill Farm was the subject of a photographic survey with specific focus on the former mill and associated features in 2009 by Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service (now Worcestershire Archaeology; WSM00082, 39499, 39500, 39501, and 41820).

No other archaeological works are known to have been undertaken within the site.

#### *Previous archaeological work on associated sites*

A similar scheme was undertaken on the opposite side of Bow Brook in 2013 by Worcestershire Archaeology (Arnold and Vaughan 2013; WSM 49771). Centred on national grid reference SP 0058 6023, this involved monitoring of the top soil strip. Residual finds were found in the topsoil dating to the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, probably deposited during manuring of the fields. Sterile alluvial clay was observed at 0.30m below the ground surface, over sands and gravels, above the natural marl. No significant archaeology was encountered.

No other archaeological works have been undertaken in the immediate vicinity of the present investigation.

#### *Archaeological Background*

The site lies immediately adjacent to Bean Hall Mill (WSM 0082) which is listed as a corn mill and watermill in use from at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The first reference to the mill is on Blagraves map of 1591 that records the site as Astwood's Mill. This name being changed to Lower Mill in 1832. The mill was in operation until at least 1913 and an associated mill leat (WSM 41820) of possible medieval origins runs through the current site which joined Bow Brook and Brandon Brook. This leat, noted on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886 is still visible as a distinct earthwork.

Later post-medieval buildings including a 19<sup>th</sup> century outbuilding for the mill (WSM 39501), the farmhouse (WSM 39499) and farm outbuilding (WSM 39500) are all present to the immediate south-west of the current intrusive works.

Historic mapping has demonstrated that the area in which the current works have been undertaken were historically marshland, so along with the former mill leat, the potential for palaeoenvironmental deposits was considered to be high (WSM 56645 and 56556).

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## Aims

The aim of the archaeological works was to observe all intrusive works to gain an understanding of any and all archaeological deposits present, to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible. The brief indicated that whilst the general potential for significant archaeological deposits on the site was low, the area of investigation had the potential to disturb the partially infilled leat associated with the possible medieval mill and an area of marshland. As such these works provided a unique opportunity to investigate and study the infilled remains of this structure, with specific importance placed on the recovery of palaeoenvironmental remains and dating.

## Methods

General specification for fieldwork

WA 2015

Sources consulted

Worcestershire HER

Date(s) of fieldwork

24 and 25 February 2015

Area of site

c 1,887m<sup>2</sup>

Sampling	area sampled	c 271m <sup>2</sup>
	sample size	c 14.8%

Dimensions of excavated areas observed –

Pond/Trench 1	length 18.60m
	width 3.80m
	depth 0.94m

Pond/Trench 2	length 19.70m
	width 19.56m
	depth 1.50m

## Access to or visibility of deposits

Observation of the intrusive works was undertaken during and immediately after mechanical excavation had taken place by a 360° tracked excavator using a toothless ditching bucket. The deposits were clearly seen and ample time and space was given for appropriate recording of all deposits and features.

### *Statement of confidence*

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

## Deposit description

The development area was split into two separate pond areas (Figs 1-3), the first (Pond 1/Trench 1) being a linear sausage shaped pond that enhanced the existing depression slightly to create a small water collecting feature (Plates 1-3). The second (Pond 2/Trench 2), was excavated in a roughly three leaf clover shape to the immediate east with gradually sloping sides and two deeper areas in the two westernmost lobes (Plates 1, 4 and 5).

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The underlying natural substrate was seen in both trenches and comprised well sorted and rounded gravels of firm compaction. In Trench 1 this was overlain by four sequential bandings of silts and clays which alternated in composition to suggest periods of anaerobic stagnation and moderate energy aerated siltation. This is consistent with an area that is frequently flooded and marshy; however, despite this relatively active landscape no bands of organic material were seen.

It is not known over what timespan this accumulation occurred although it is considered probably to be measured in thousands of years as opposed to hundreds based on the compact nature of the deposits and their relative depth.

Within Trench 1 these deposits had been partially truncated by linear feature 104/207, which could be seen from the surface to be the eastern limit of the known leat. This feature was 0.94m in depth and at least 3.60m in width, although the western side of the feature was not exposed within the groundworks. This was then sealed by a thin turfed topsoil that ranged from 0.12m at the west side of the investigation area to 0.29m at the east.

No other features were noted within Trench 2.

Detailed descriptions of the deposits are given in Appendix 1.

## **Artefacts, by Robert Hedge**

Stratified finds were recovered from four contexts, and were all post-medieval or modern in date as follows:

Topsoil (101): 4g modern drainage tile, modern window glass, and two abraded sherds (8g) of modern china (fabric 85).

Layer (102): a large fragment of a handmade brick with a clear thumb impression; ? (l) x 4 3/8 (w) x 2 5/8 inches (th) suggests 18<sup>th</sup> century date (Lloyd 1925, 95). A small undiagnostic fragment of cement-mortared brick was also present.

Layer (103): two sherds (12g) of 19<sup>th</sup> century china (fabric 85) and modern wire mesh.

Layer (202): smooth-surfaced, probably machine-moulded brick dating to the mid-19th century onwards, and a poorly-mixed undated handmade brick with frequent coarse stone and slag inclusions.

Layer (203): undiagnostic ceramic building material (CBM) fragment and an undated corroded iron nail or pin, 66mm long (6g).

The finds are typical of later post-medieval and modern domestic refuse and construction material and will not be retained.

## **Discussion**

It is clear from the artefactual material recovered from the linear feature that while it is clearly older in construction, the final 'cleaning' of the leat within the area of the trench removed all earlier traces and potential palaeoenvironmental deposits and had been backfilled after its abandonment in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is clear from the extant earthworks that the various elements of the mill water management system remain, albeit buried and infilled.

## **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 watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Worcestershire Wildlife Trust at Bean Hall Mill, Moors Lane, Feckenham, Worcestershire (NGR ref SP 00625 60210; WSM 66601). The excavation of two trenches to form two ponds was monitored. The former leat, of possible*

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*medieval origin was identified to the west. Debris of 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century date was recovered, indicating that it had been cleaned out periodically into the modern period, and deliberately backfilled in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. No earlier archaeological deposits or material were recorded. To the east, at least four phases of deposition of material were noted, through a combination of flood events and standing water. At no point were organic deposits revealed, so no samples were taken for environmental analysis. No significant archaeological features, deposits, layers or structures were exposed.*

## **Acknowledgements**

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Peter Case (Water and Wetlands Officer, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust), Mr and Mrs Venables (the landowners), Richard Holloway and Gary Wilkinson (Holloway and Sons Ltd), and Aisling Nash (Historic Environment Planning Officer, Worcestershire County Council).

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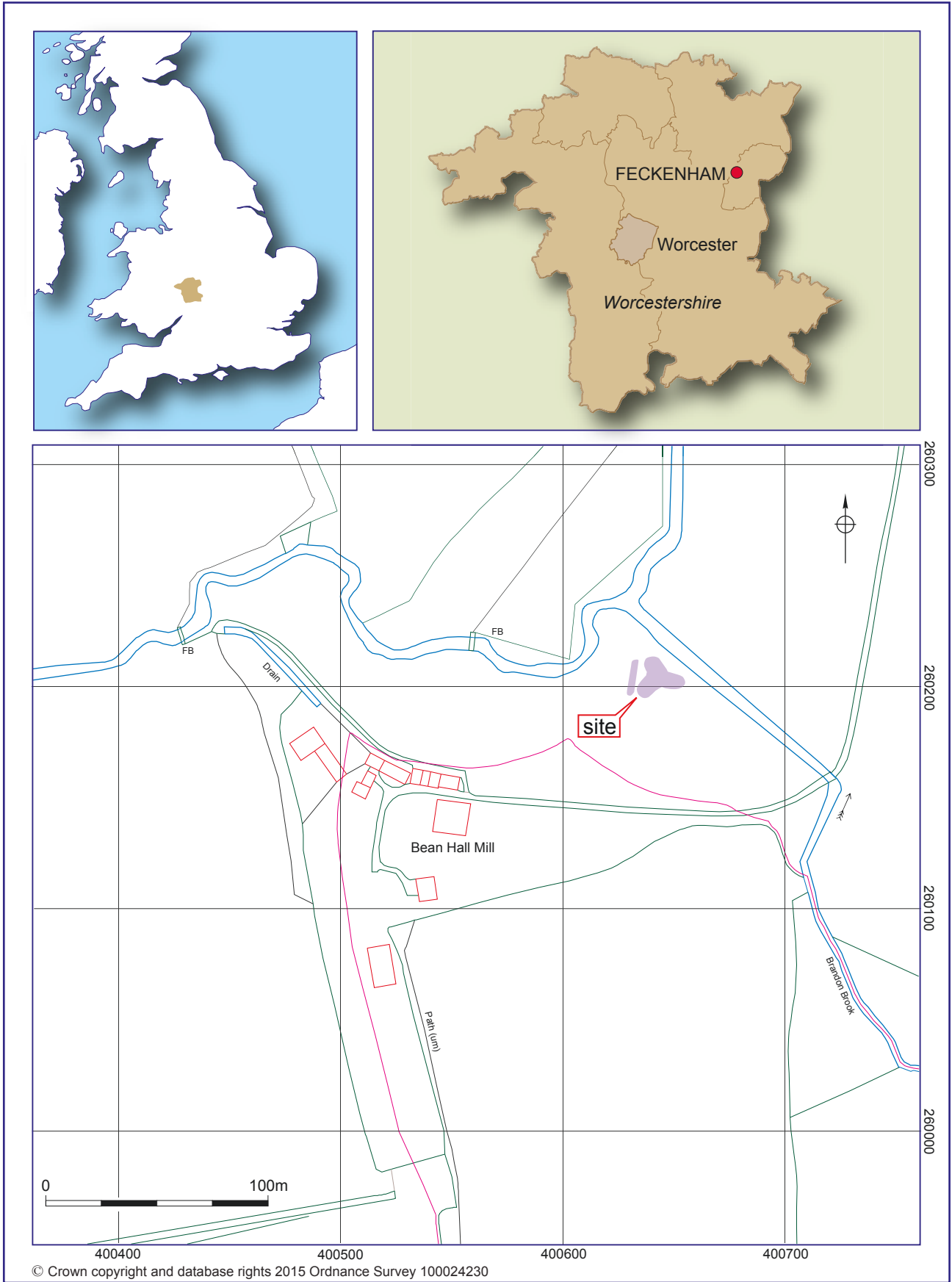
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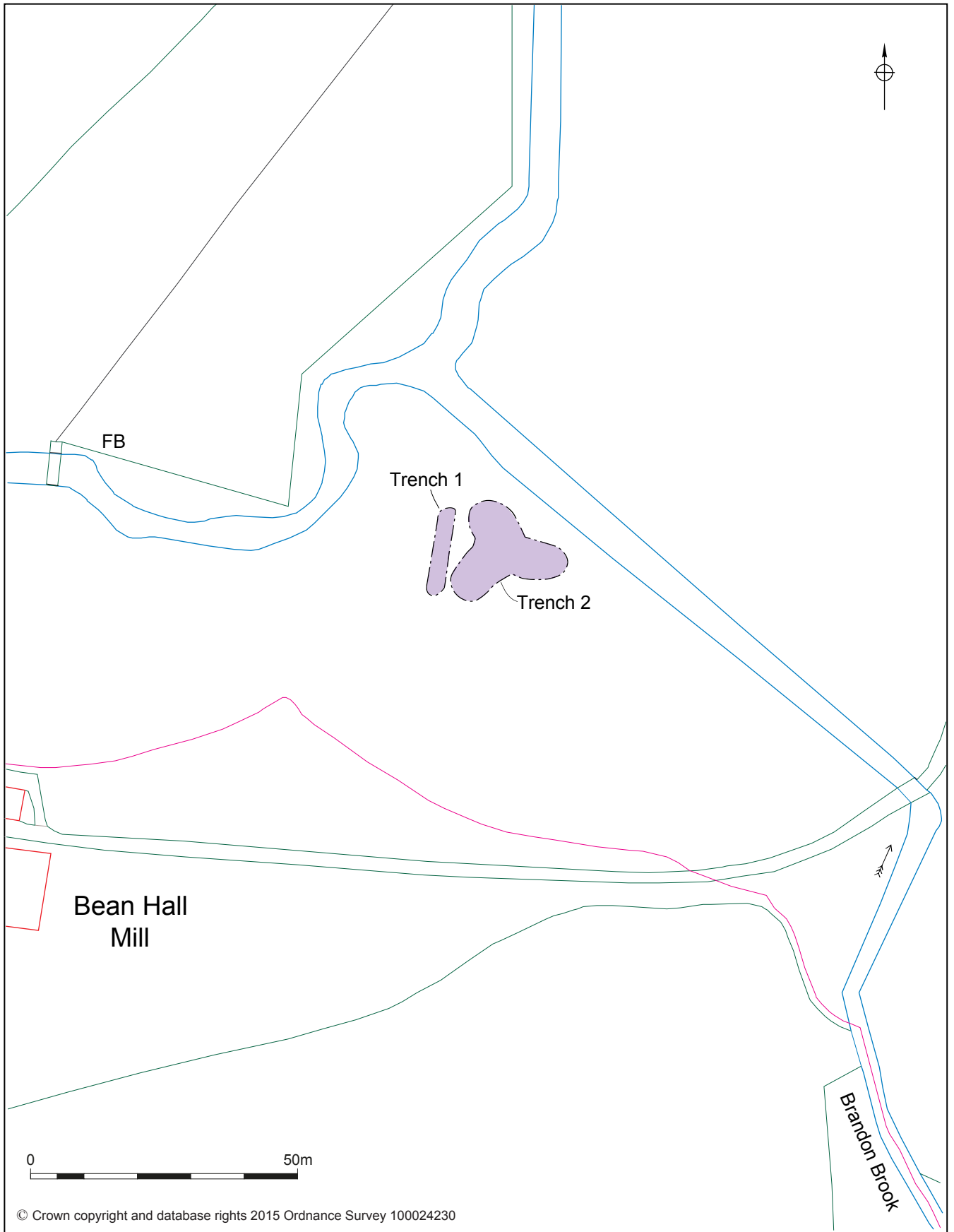
WCC 2015 *Brief for an archaeological Watching Brief at Bean hall Mill, Moors Lane, Feckenham, Worcestershire*, Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished document dated 03 February 2015

**Figures**



Location of the site

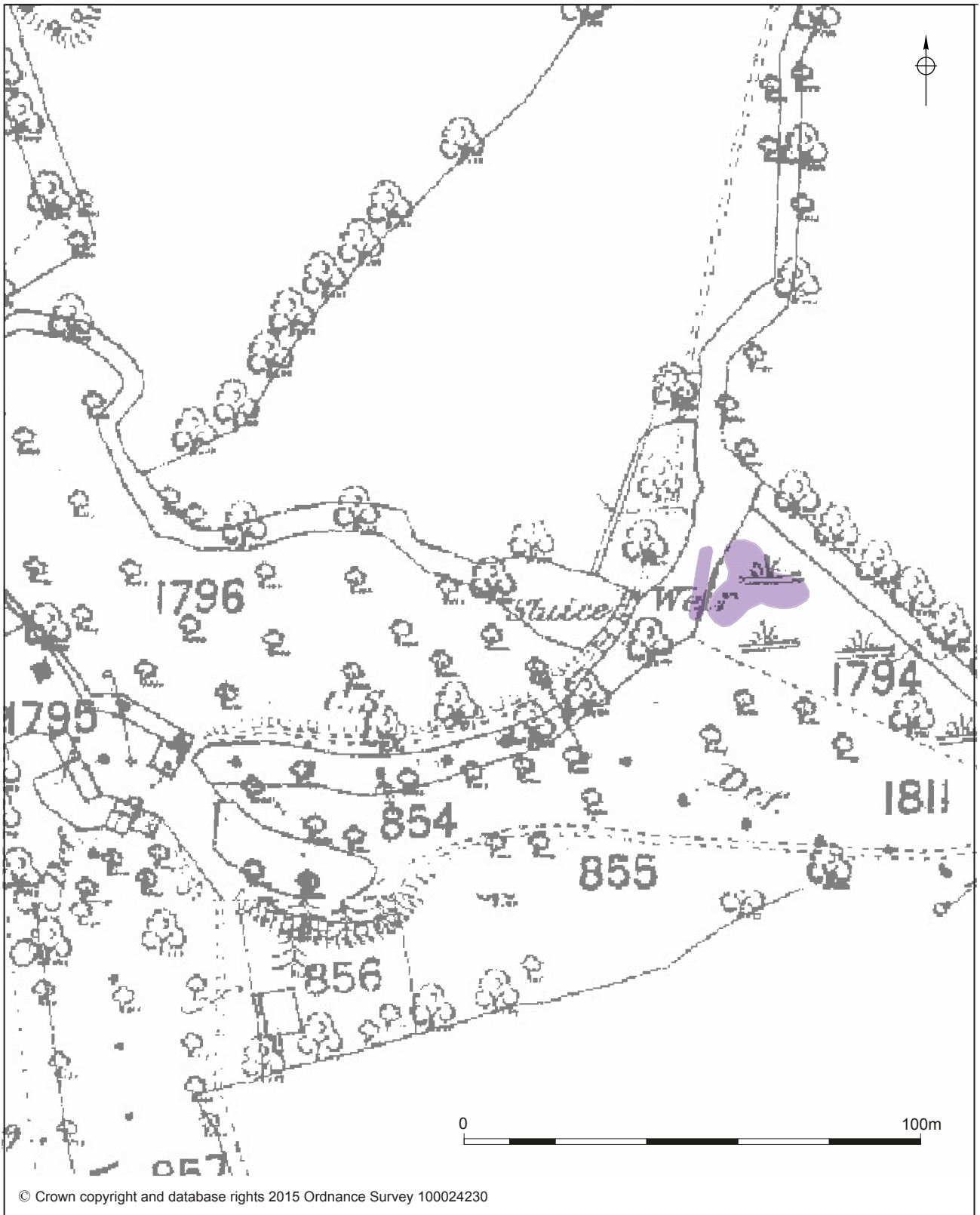
Figure 1



Trench location plan

Figure 2





*Location of ponds related to 1884 features*

*Figure 3*

## Plates



*Plate 1; General view of the area of investigation, looking north*



*Plate 2; General view of Pond 1, looking south*





*Plate 3; North facing section showing deposits within feature [104], scale 1m, looking south*



*Plate 4; Pond 2 under construction, scale 1m, looking west*





*Plate 5; General view of Pond 2, looking south*

## Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

### Pond/Trench 1

Length: 18.60m Width: 3.80m

#### Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context type	Description type	Height/ depth	Interpretation
101	Topsoil	Layer	Firm dark bluish brown silty clay	0.12m	Dark bluish brown silty clay with a high humic content and highly disturbed by root action. The high organic content also suggests a possible mixing with underlying peats or similar fibre rich material. Highly worked and mixed and modern in date.
102	Layer	Layer	Firm mid bluish grey silty clay	0.26m	Mid bluish grey silty rich clay with moderate charcoal flecks and CBM throughout and occasional to moderate fibrous material and degraded wood. Appears to be material of probable stagnant water and natural deposition with later material deliberately dumped within it.
103	Layer	Layer	Firm light bluish grey silty	0.56m	Light blue grey silty clay with occasional rounded to subrounded gravels throughout and very occasional charcoal flecks. Multiple CBM and metal dump inclusions. Appears to be a naturally low energy silted deposit that has infilled in the later post medieval period. Within feature [104].
104	Linear	Cut	0.94m	Cut of linear that is the same as [207]. Aligned North/South across much of the area before turning Southwest to rejoin the brook. The linear had a gentle sloping wedge which was even and dropped imperceptibly onto a slightly concave base. Roughly 3.6m in width.	
105	Natural	Layer	Firm light yellowish grey gravels	0.10m +	Band of glacial gravels, round to sub-round, well sorted with no silty matrix. Consistent with glacial terrace gravels. Natural substrate.

**Pond/Trench 2**

Length: 19.70m Width: 19.56m

**Context summary:**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Feature</b>	<b>Context type</b>	<b>Description type</b>	<b>Height/ depth</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
201	Topsoil	Layer	Compact mid bluish grey silty clay	0.29m	Mid bluish grey silty rich clay with high humic content and mixed by root action. Modern topsoil in nature with no other visible inclusions.
202	Layer	Layer	Firm light bluish grey silty	0.34m	Light bluish grey silty clay of firm compaction with occasional charcoal flecks and moderate to frequent root action throughout. Also contained occasional rounded peagrit, and small fragments of oyster shell, too degraded and fragmentary to be recovered.
203	Layer	Layer	Firm light orangey grey sandy clay	0.73m	Light orange grey sandy clay of firm compaction with occasional root disturbance throughout, occasional charcoal flecks and moderate peagrit. (203) descends to the east where it underlies (202), at the west end of the pond it directly underlies (201). Also overlies (206). No physical relationship between (203) and (205) was seen. Most likely post-med in date, a redeposited natural mixed with lenses of what appears to be natural flood and accumulation deposits.
204	Linear	Fill	Firm mid bluish grey clay	0.73m	Mid bluish grey clay of firm compaction with moderate charcoal inclusions (plastics, concrete and metal waste). Modern dump of material used to infill depression [207]. Late 20th century in date. Directly underlies (201) and in feature that truncates (203).
205	Layer	Layer	Firm mid reddish brown clay	0.09m	Mid reddish brown clay rich sand of firm compaction with occasional root disturbance and appears to be the probable result of marshy ground and stagnant water. Underlies deposit (202).

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206	Layer	Layer	Firm light bluish grey silty	1.07m	Light bluish grey silty clay of firm compaction with occasional discolouration that would suggest that it was deposited in low aerated conditions. Thought to be a probable natural siltation in marshy ground. No inclusions. Underlies (205).
207	Linear	Cut	0.94m		Linear which originates from the brook to the Southwest on the current investigation area before turning gradually North back towards the brook. Not fully excavated. 3.6m in width.

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## **Appendix 2 Technical information**

### **The archive (site code: WSM 66601)**

The archive consists of:

- 1 Field progress reports AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 55 Digital photographs
- 1 Scale drawings
- 2 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 Computer compact disk
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum  
Museums Worcestershire  
Hartlebury Castle  
Hartlebury  
Near Kidderminster  
Worcestershire DY11 7XZ  
Tel Hartlebury (01299) 250416