

Archaeological watching brief
(Phase 1) of
land on the corner of
Lapley Lane and Starkey's Lane,
Wheaton Aston,
Staffordshire



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Status: Revision 1: 27 September 2017
Date: 14 July 2016
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Project reference: P4842
Report reference: 2357
Oasis id fieldsec1-256394

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Archaeological watching brief of land on the corner of Lapley Lane and Starkey's Lane, Wheaton Aston, Staffordshire

James Wilkins

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken of land on the corner of Lapley Lane and Starkey's Lane, Wheaton Aston, Staffordshire (NGR SJ 8600 1378). It was undertaken on behalf of T Swift and Son, who intend to construct a new farmstead comprising two agricultural dwellings and a range of farm buildings for which a planning application has been submitted (reference number 14/007296/OUT).

Phase 1 of this project consisted of the stripping of topsoil allowing for the construction of an access road and an agricultural dwelling. No archaeological evidence was recorded that may relate to the construction or maintenance of the adjacent Roman road, or for related roadside activity. All finds were of post-medieval and modern date and were residual within the soils. A single pit was present within the observed area. The pit was sterile and undated. It may relate to the Roman road, but this cannot be confirmed. It does provide evidence for human activity and the potential survival of archaeological deposits within the wider site.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken of land on the corner of Lapley Lane and Starkey's Lane, Wheaton Aston, Staffordshire (NGR SJ 8600 1378). It was commissioned by T Swift and Son who intend to construct a new farmstead comprising two agricultural dwellings and a range of farm buildings. A planning application has been submitted to South Staffordshire Council (Council (reference number 14/007296/OUT).

The proposed development is considered by the Curator to have the potential to affect heritage assets with archaeological interest (HER ref. PRN 05209).

The project conforms to a brief prepared by Staffordshire County Council (SCC 2016) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (WA 2016).

The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance: Archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014).

2 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible within the constraints of the Client's groundworks.

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was led by Jamie Wilkins (BA (hons.)); who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2015. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Vaughan (BA (hons.); MA; ACIfA). Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt (BSc (hons.); PG Cert; MCIfA).

3.2 Documentary research

Prior to fieldwork commencing a search was made of the Historic Environment Record (HER).

3.3 List of sources consulted

Documentary sources

Published and grey literature sources are listed in the bibliography.

3.4 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2016).

Fieldwork for phase 1 of the development was undertaken between 27 and 28 June 2016.

A single trench, amounting to c 1,142m² in area, was excavated to allow for the construction of an access road and agricultural dwelling. The location of the trench is indicated in Figure 2.

A drainage trench, c 533m in length and approximately 2m in width, was excavated along the south-western site boundary and across the centre of the field, and backfilled prior to the watching brief commencing. Therefore, this was not observed.

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 and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012).

3.5 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.

3.6 Artefact methodology

3.6.1 Artefact recovery policy

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012; appendix 2).

A small quantity of post-medieval and modern material was recovered from the soils. As the material was residual and of later date, it was left on site. No artefacts were retained for further analysis.

3.7 Environmental archaeology methodology

3.7.1 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.

3.8 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. It should be noted that a trench alongside the south-western boundary of the site, adjacent to the Roman road, was excavated and backfilled prior to the commencement of the watching brief so was not made available for observation.

4 The application site

4.1 Topography, geology and archaeological context

The underlying geology of the site is mapped as Mercia Mudstone formations, which is overlain by a superficial deposit of till or boulder clay (BGS 2016).

The archaeological background to the site is given in the brief (SCC 2015, 2):

The site lies adjacent to the line of a Roman road which appears to link Whitchurch (Shropshire) with the Watling Street Roman road (PRN 05209) at Stretton. This junction is located approximately 4.5km to the south of the site. Settlement, industrial sites and burials are not unusual along the line of Roman roads and this site lies less than 1km from a series of Roman forts/marching camps at *Pennocrucium* (Penkridge). The Historic Environment Record (HER) records the evidence of metal detecting in the surrounding area including a substantial coin hoard (400+ coins dating to the 4th century AD) was recovered along the line of the Roman road approximately 700m northwest of the site.

Excavations have previously been carried out on this particular Roman road. In 1938 an archaeological section was cut through the road (EST154), and in 2006 an archaeological watching brief at Aqualate Mere, Forton, revealed the gravel bedding of the road (EST1719, AAA Archaeological Advisors 2006).

4.2 Current land-use

The site is currently used for pasture. Prior to this, the field was regularly ploughed for arable farming.

5 Results

5.1 Structural analysis

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

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

The natural geology observed across the site consisted of brownish orange and yellow till, with red marl Mercian mudstone present in patches. These deposits were observed at 100.45m AOD at the southern limit of Trench 1, and 99.27m AOD at the northern limit of Trench 1.

5.1.2 Phase 2: Modern Deposits

A dark, clay loam topsoil (100) was present across the entirety of the trench. This topsoil sat directly above the natural geology (101). No defined subsoil was present. The topsoil ranged between 0.22m and 0.41m in depth and contained the occasional sherd of post-medieval and modern pottery. A series of regularly spaced ceramic land drains were present throughout Trench 1. These drains lay on a north-west to south-east alignment, and were observed to cut the natural clays.

5.1.3 Phase 3: Undated deposits

The only archaeological feature observed during this phase of ground work comprised a single, undated pit [104]. This pit was located approximately 40m north-east of the Roman road, and survived at 100.15m AOD. The pit was sub-circular, with a diameter of 0.88m and a depth of 0.33m. It contained two sterile, sandy fills that appeared to have formed via siltation processes. There were no associated artefacts.

5.2 Artefact analysis

Topsoil (100) contained occasional sherds of post-medieval and modern ceramics, which were not retained for further analysis.

6 Synthesis

The area of the development site excavated during phase 1 of this project was limited in archaeological features and deposits. Topsoil covered the site and existed to a depth of between 0.22 and 0.41m below ground surface. The field is understood to have been ploughed regularly prior to being put to pasture, and combined with the shallow nature of the topsoil may explain the lack of a defined subsoil across the site.

A single, undated pit was observed and recorded within the area; approximately 40m north-east of the Roman road. This pit was a well-defined circular feature of considerable size with a diameter of 0.88m. It contained two fills, both of which were described as sandy and sterile. The function of this pit is unknown and the lack of dating evidence provides some difficulty in attributing much significance to the feature. As this pit was not sealed by a layer of subsoil, it is entirely possible that the feature is of later origin, possibly post-medieval or modern. However, if this was the case, a more rich or loamy fill could be expected, rather than the sterile, sandy fills observed.

No archaeological evidence was recorded that may relate to the construction or maintenance of the adjacent Roman road or for related roadside activity. However, the presence of pit [104] does indicate that evidence of human activity is present and does therefore potentially survive within the wider site.

7 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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8 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, John Swift (T Swift and Son), Mark Stubbs (Mark Stubbs Contractors Ltd), Suzy Blake (Historic Environment Record Officer, Staffordshire County Council) and Stephen Dean (Principal Archaeologist, Staffordshire County Council).

9 Bibliography

AAA Archaeological Advisors 2006 *New Guild Farm, Aqualate Mere, Forton: Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief*, Macclesfield

BGS 2016 *Geology of Britain Viewer*, British Geological Survey, <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>, accessed 29 June 2016

CifA 2014 *Standard and guidance: Archaeological watching brief*, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, <http://www.archaeologists.net/codes/ifa>

DCLG 2012 *National Planning Policy Framework*, Department for Communities and Local Government

English Heritage 2011 *The setting of heritage assets*, English Heritage

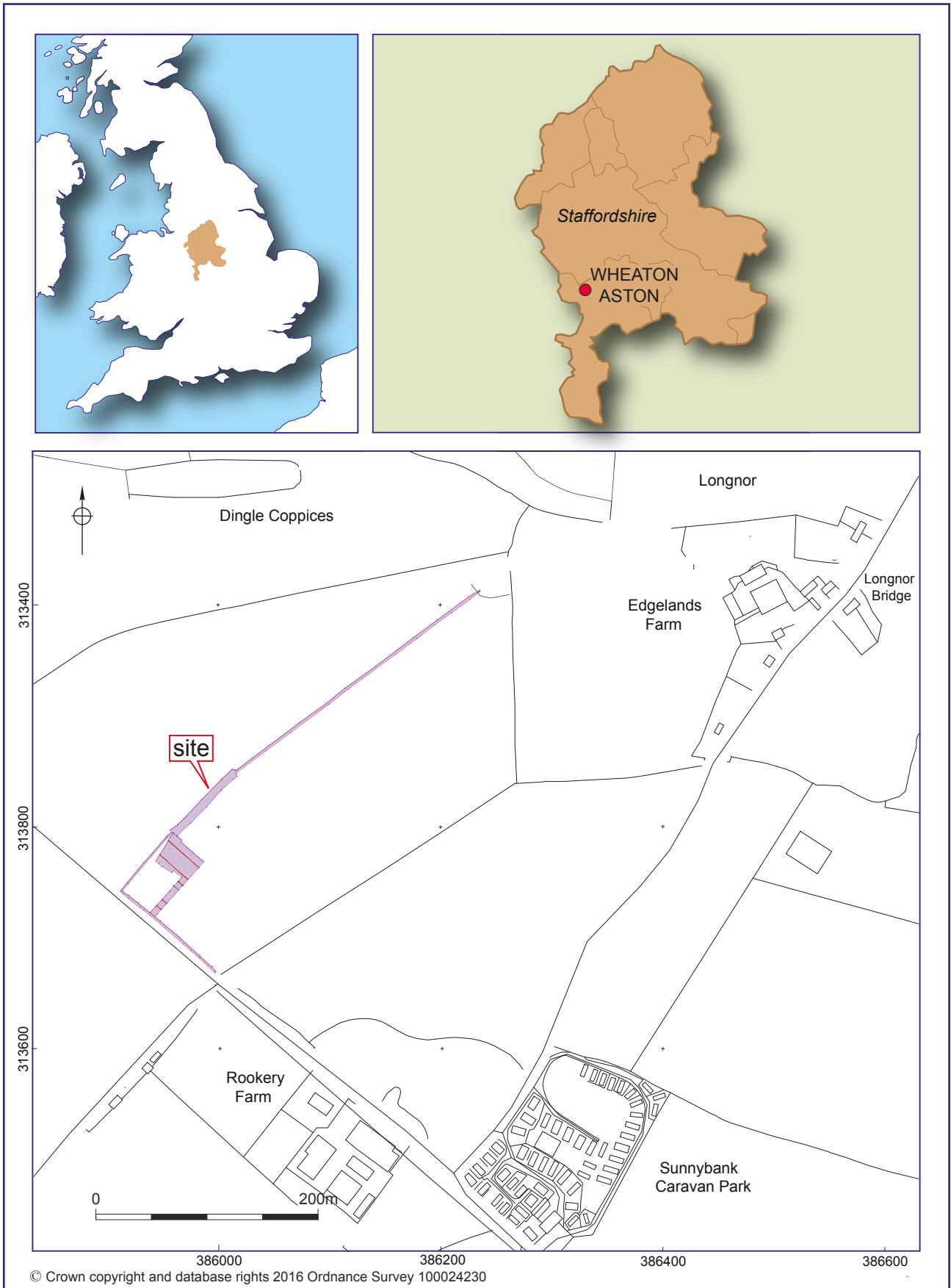
SCC 2015 *Specification for an Archaeological Watching Brief: Land Adjoining Corner of Lapley Lane and Starkey's Lane, Wheaton Aston*, Rural County Historic Environment Team, Staffordshire County Council, dated August 2015

WA 2012 *Manual of service practice, recording manual*, Worcestershire Archaeology, Worcestershire County Council, report **1842**

WA 2016 *Proposal for an archaeological watching brief at land on the corner of Lapley Lane and Starkey's Lane, Wheaton Aston, Staffordshire*, Worcestershire Archaeology, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished document dated 23 May 2016, **P4842**

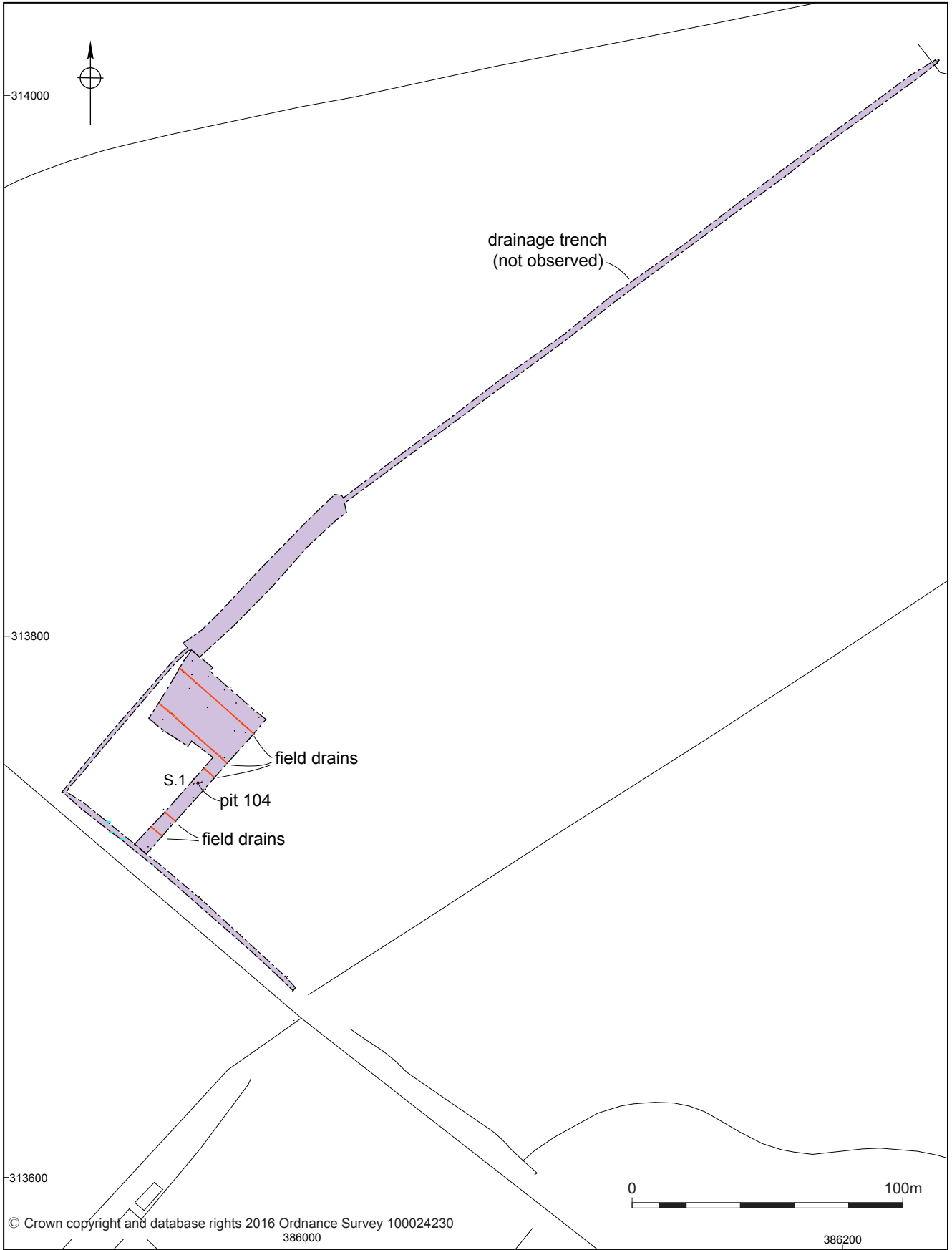
Watt, S, (ed) 2011 *The archaeology of the West Midlands: a framework for research*, Oxbow Books, Oxford

Plates



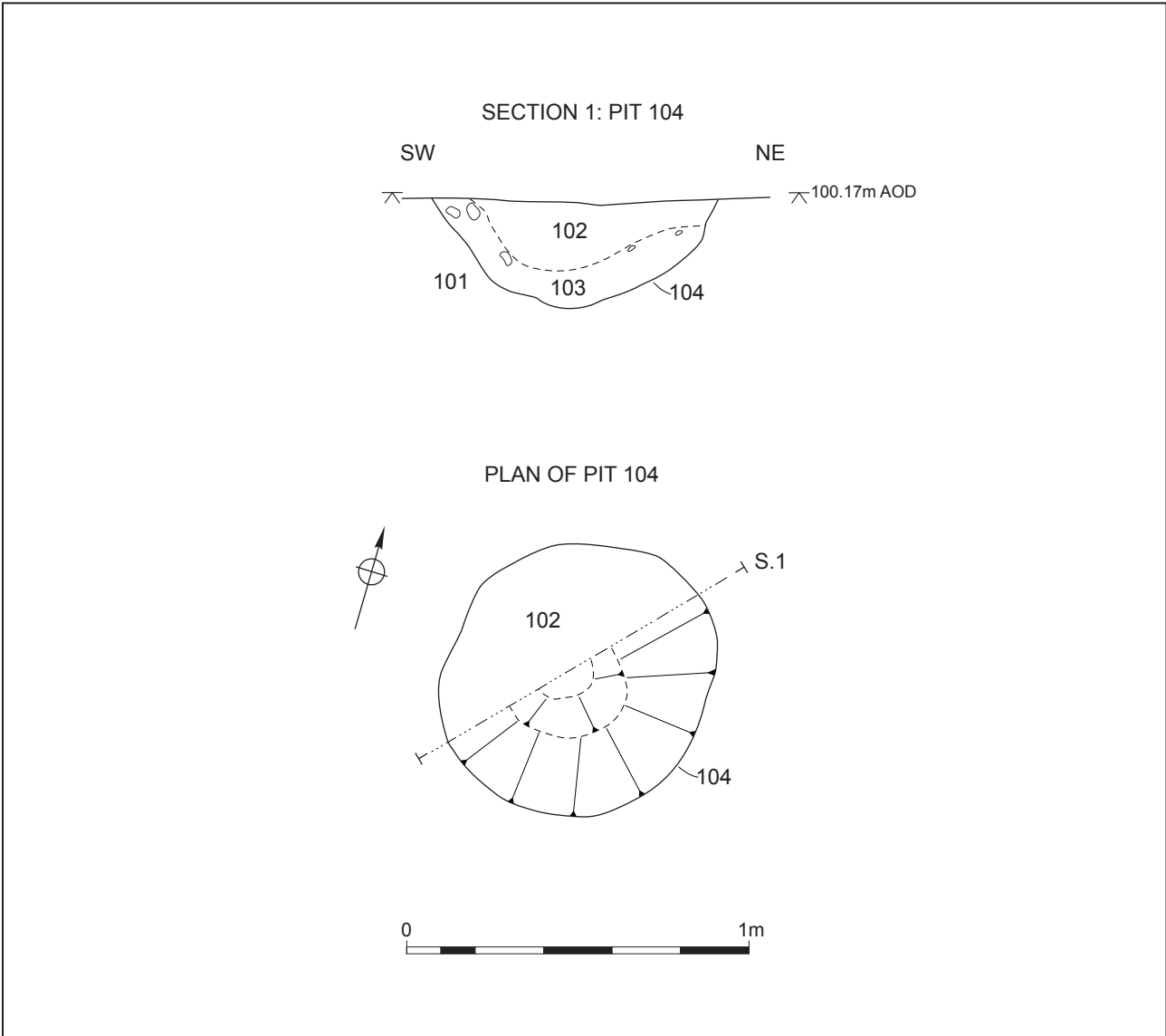
Location of the site

Figure 1



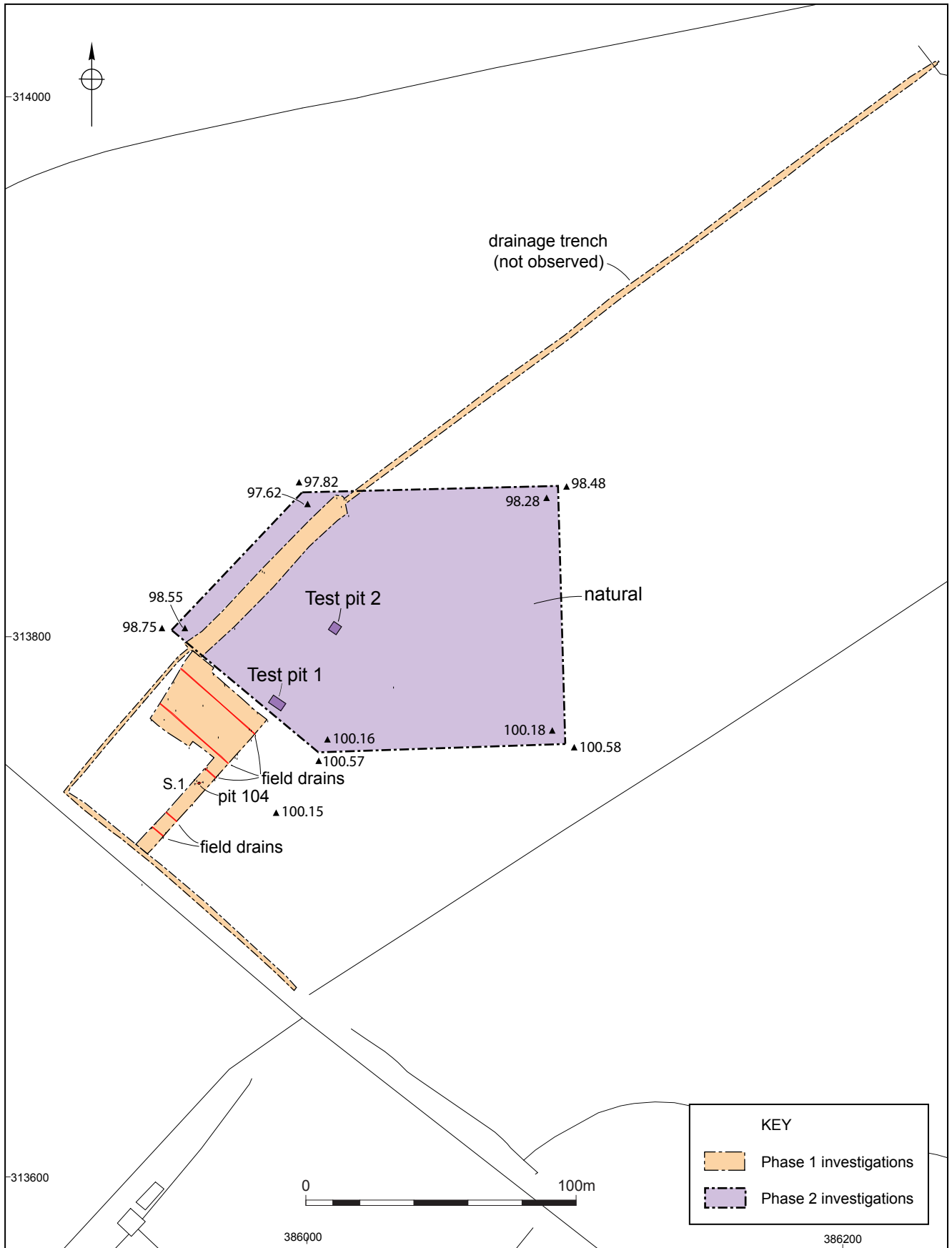
Plan of Trench

Figure 2



Plan and section of pit 104

Figure 3



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Plan of Trenches (Phases 1 and 2)

Figure 4



Plate 1 Area of development in advance of groundworks, view north-east



Plate 2 Access Road strip, view north-east, 1m scales

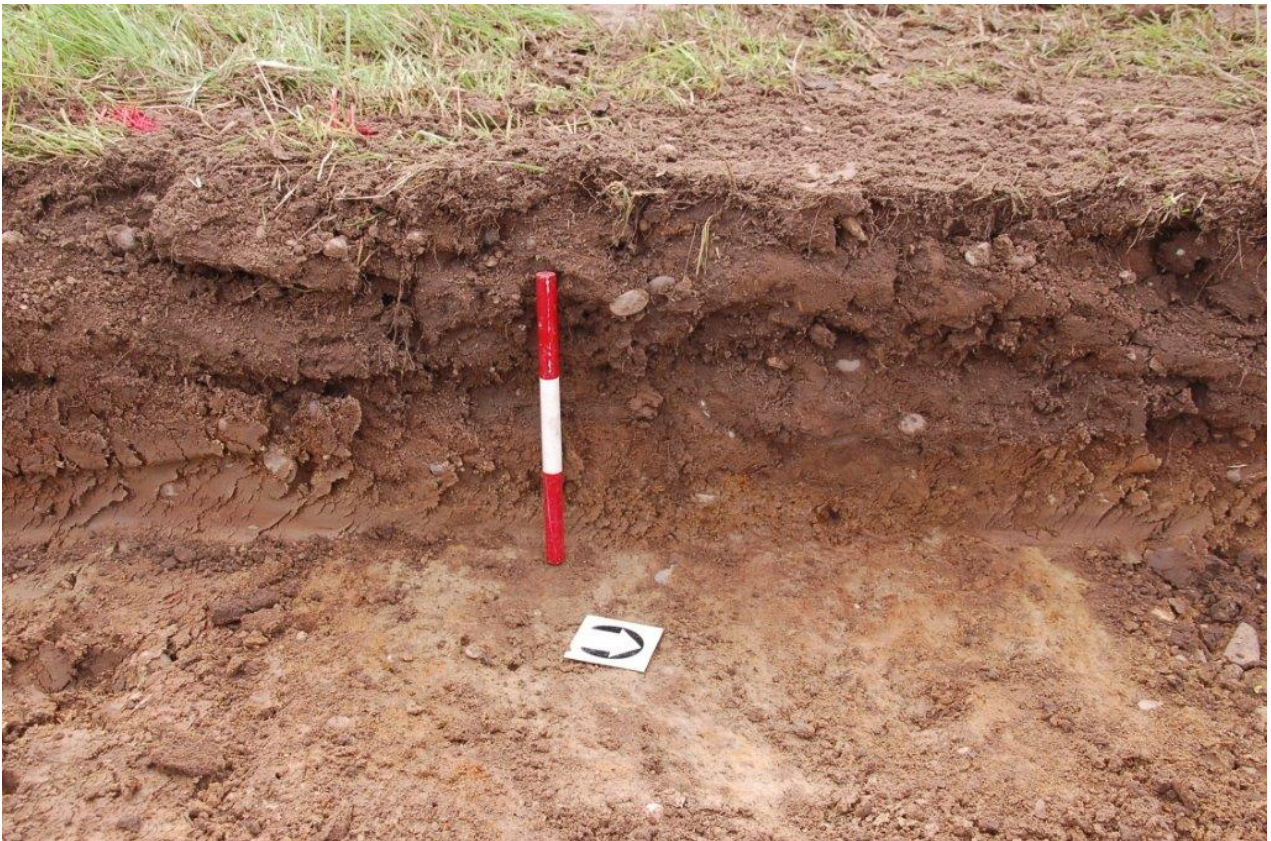


Plate 3 East facing baulk of Trench 1 showing topsoil sitting above the till geology, 0.3m scale



Plate 4 South-east facing section of pit [104], 0.5m scale



Plate 5, area of trench 1 excavated for agricultural dwelling, view northwest, scales 1m



Plate 6 Backfilled drainage trench along southern boundary of site, completed prior to watching brief commencement, view south-east

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Site area: Access Road and Agricultural dwelling

Maximum dimensions: Length: 66.32m Width: 5.30m – 37.35m Depth: 0.22m-0.48m

Orientation: N/A

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s.) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Topsoil	Friable, dark greyish-brown, clay loam. Contains frequent charcoal flecking, sub-rounded pebbles and cobbles, with the occasional sherd and fragment of modern pottery and CBM.	0.00m-0.41m
101	Natural	Compact, mid brownish-orange, sand, clay and gravel till. Superficial boulder clay geology. Patches of red marl Mercian mudstone.	0.22m-0.41m +
102	Pit fill	Soft, light whitish grey, silty sand upper fill of pit [104]. Contained occasional charcoal flecking and sub-rounded pebbles. Very sterile fill. Likely deposited via siltation processes.	0.41m-0.61m
103	Pit fill	Soft, mid greyish-brown, silty sand lower fill of pit [104]. Contains the occasional charcoal fleck and sub-rounded cobble. Sterile fill.	0.41m-0.74m
104	Pit cut	Cut of circular, undated pit. Concave sides with a narrow concave base. Observed to cut natural (101).	0.41m-0.74m

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive (WA project reference / site code: P4842)

The archive consists of:

- 3 Context records AS1
- 1 Field progress reports AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 42 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 2 Scale drawings
- 1 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:

The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery
Bethesda Street
Hanley
Stoke on Trent
ST1 3DW

Appendix 3 Staffordshire County Council Historic Environment Record Activity and Source Submission Form

Submission date – 14 July 2016

Site Activity or Event

Name of **event** (eg. Watching Brief at The Blue Boar, Ipstones.)

Watching Brief at Wheaton Aston

Location of **event** (eg. The Blue Boar P.H. Overton Lane, Ipstones.)

Land on the corner of Lapley Lane and Starkey's Lane, Wheaton Aston, Staffordshire

NGR SJ 8600 1378

Parish

Lapley, Stretton, and Wheaton Aston

Brief Description of **event** (eg. Watching brief during cellar alterations and renovation, prior to conversion to residential use.)

Watching brief during the stripping of topsoil in order to construct an agricultural dwelling and related farm buildings.

“Activity Type(s)” (highlight as appropriate) *Air Photography / Evaluation-trial excavation / Field Walking / Measured survey-drawing / Geophysical survey / Archaeological excavation-full / Archaeological excavation-part / Field survey / Photogrammetric survey / Rectified photo survey / Photographic record / AP interpretation / Salvage-rescue excavation / Watching brief / Environmental sampling / Post-excavation analysis / Documentary research*

Commencement and completion dates

Phase 1: 27-28 June 2016

Organisation or contractor details (organisation name, address, telephone, e-mail etc.)

Worcestershire Archaeology,
Worcestershire County Council,
The Hive,
Sawmill Walk,
The Butts,
Worcester,
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01905765908

Report Details

Date

14 July 2016

Type of document (highlight as appropriate) *Written / Photographic / Cartographic / Drawn*

Title

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Author(s)

Wilkins, J.

Brief summary of contents

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Brief description of document (eg. Written text with illustrations, bibliography and references. Appendices dealing with environmental sampling. 32 pages. etc.)

Written text with photographs, figures, bibliography. Appendices dealing with trench descriptions and archiving.
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Cross references to Staffordshire H.E.R. (if applicable please list Primary record numbers)

PRN 05209

PRN 01729-MST1721

EST154

EST1719
