

Archaeological Excavation at Evesham Leisure Centre, Evesham, Worcestershire



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Excavation at Evesham Leisure Centre, Evesham, Worcestershire

Emma Chubb

Summary

An archaeological excavation was undertaken at Evesham Leisure Centre, Evesham, Worcestershire (NGR 403241, 243362). It was undertaken on behalf of David Niblett, Project Manager for Wychavon District Council, who intend to extend the existing overspill car park of Evesham Leisure Centre for which a planning application has been approved.

The proposed car park extension extends slightly further to the west and north of an area which was excavated in 2007 ahead of the construction of the Leisure Centre and in which the partial remains of a Bronze Age settlement and Roman ditch were recorded. It was therefore considered by Aidan Smyth (Archaeology and Planning Advisor for Wychavon District Council) that the extension had the potential to include further archaeological assets and archaeological excavation of the proposed extension was carried out, although, due to the presence of buried services, only one section of the area was excavated.

The excavation uncovered a Roman field boundary ditch known from the previous investigation but no further prehistoric features were discovered. It is thought that either the northern extent of the Bronze Age settlement had been located, or that settlement activity was focused in small clusters. It may also suggest that any potential discrete features had been truncated by modern landscaping around the edge of the current car park. No environmental samples were taken and no significant artefacts were recovered.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological excavation was undertaken at Evesham Leisure Centre, Evesham, Worcestershire (NGR 403241, 243362, Fig 1). It was commissioned by David Niblett, Project Manager for Wychavon District Council, who intend to undertake hard landscaping works to the existing car parking area of Evesham Leisure Centre to form a new overspill car parking area for which a planning application was approved by Wychavon District Council (reference 17/01952/DW3).

The proposed development site was considered by Aidan Smyth, Archaeology and Planning Advisor for Wychavon District Council, to include heritage assets and potential heritage assets (WSM 37561, Mann 2008) and permission was granted subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works (Application No: 17/01952/DW3). Correspondence with Aidan Smyth established that an archaeological strip map and sample of the area was appropriate mitigation.

The project conforms to a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA, 2018). The project also conforms to the *Standards and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire* (WCC 2010, amended July 2012) and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance: Archaeological excavation* (CIfA 2014).

The event reference for this project, given by the HER is WSM 701164.

2 Aims

The aims of the excavation were to locate and sample archaeological deposits and record their nature, extent and date with the aim of preserving these assets by record to mitigate the effects of the proposed development.

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was led by Andrew Mann (BA (hons.); MSc); who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2004 and has been practicing archaeology since 2001, assisted by Emma Chubb (BA (Hons); MA). The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers (BA (hons.); MSc MCIfA). Illustrations were prepared by Laura Templeton (BA; PG Cert; MCIfA).

3.2 Documentary research

Prior to the 2007 fieldwork phases commencing a search was made of the Historic Environment Record (HER). A desk-based assessment of the development area, which included an archaeological appraisal (CgMs 2007), was also consulted and an updated search of the HER was undertaken.

3.3 Fieldwork strategy

A Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2018) and approved by Aidan Smyth. Fieldwork was undertaken between 5th February 2018 and 7th February 2018. The site reference number and site code is WSM 701164.

It was proposed that two joining areas amounting to 290m² (western area 1.8mx53m, northern area 5.4mx39m) were to be excavated around the northern and western limits of the existing car park. These were located along the outer limits of the 2007 excavation area, whilst maintaining a 1m exclusion area around all light columns and electric cables. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2. However due to the locations of the electric cables it was not possible to

excavate along the western side of the site and the north area needed to be reduced to 25mx2.8m to retain the 1m exclusion zones.

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).

During the excavation it was noted that as part of the construction of the leisure centre and carpark in 2008 the ground level of the site had been raised between 40-50cm. These modern landscaping layers in places appeared to have been deposited directly above the original topsoil/subsoil while in other areas they appeared to lie directly on the natural sands and gravels suggesting that such areas had been heavily truncated or entirely striped during the initial construction phase.

Aidan Smyth, Archaeology and Planning Advisor for Wychavon District Council, visited the site on Tuesday 6th February 2018. As no prehistoric discrete features were present and as the overburden (between 0.90-1.10m thick) would provide a significant buffer to protect any potential archaeological deposits based upon the shallow impact levels of the car park extension, it was decided that the area opened was sufficient to mitigate the impact of the proposed development.

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 Artefact methodology

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012; appendix 2). However no finds were recovered from any layers or fills during the works.

3.6 Environmental archaeology methodology

Environmental sampling undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012) however no deposits were identified that were thought suitable for environmental analysis.

3.7 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 site lies approximately 300m from the southern extent of Evesham town centre (NGR 403241, 243362) within a meander of the River Avon that bounds the historic town. The River Avon is located approximately 250m to east, south and west of the site that lies on the second Avon gravel terrace at approximately 27.0m AOD. The terrace slopes southwards to Corporation Meadow at approximately 24.7m AOD that flanks the River Avon. The site lies on a grass verge surrounding the current overflow car park on the edge of agricultural land that bounds the site on the north and west.

The soils surrounding the historic area belong to the Bishampton Series of stagnogleyic argillic brown earths (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983 and Ragg et al 1984). These soils are easily

worked, and allow a wide range of crops to be grown (Ragg et al. 1984). The underlying drift geology consists of gravels of the Second and Third Terraces of the River Avon (Geological Survey of Great Britain 1:50,000 map, sheet 200).

The historic core of Evesham is of medieval origin and evidence of earlier settlement is rare within and surrounding the urban area. Occasional prehistoric flint artefacts have been discovered within Evesham, including Mesolithic material from an evaluation in Bengeworth (WSM 23986). Two other isolated prehistoric finds include a flint knife of Neolithic/ Late Bronze Age date (WSM 21047) and a Neolithic leaf-shaped arrowhead (WSM 21048). Three Late Iron Age coins are listed by Allen (1961) as having also been found in Evesham in 1898 and 1938, but no precise locations are recorded (Edwards and Hurst 2000). Evidence for Iron Age settlement, including enclosure ditches and the remains of a roundhouse structure, was first identified at 95-7 High Street (WSM 26358, WSM 27191 and WSM 28764) (Edwards and Hurst 2000). Excavations at Durcot Lodge have also identified Iron Age activity, again including enclosure ditches and the drip gully of a roundhouse (WSM 30785).

During the 2008 phase of excavation on this site, prior to the construction of the Leisure Centre and car park, the partial remains of a Late Bronze Age settlement was uncovered. As part of this settlement a small roundhouse and numerous reused grain storage features were identified. No contemporary boundary ditches were identified suggesting that the remains form part of an unenclosed settlement. The entire settlement was not exposed and it is thought that the excavation area was only a small proportion of a larger settlement. Cropmarks identified within the next northerly field appeared to confirm this, as the extensive pit groups and ditches visible appeared prehistoric in nature. As with other local and national Late Bronze Age examples, the settlement is thought to have been short lived and remained unenclosed until its abandonment.

Key finds included a small but significant assemblage of Late Bronze Age decorated pottery and an assemblage of Late Bronze Age querns. The environmental remains suggested that the inhabitants of the settlement were processing cereal crops on a relatively large scale. The large numbers of grain storage pits identified also supports the assumption that large quantities of grain were stored on site. Moreover, the significant number of quern fragments recovered implied the inhabitants were heavily engaged in the production and consumption of cereals. Livestock such as cattle, sheep and pigs were purchased fully-grown and were not reared at this site and it is likely that the inhabitants of this settlement traded surplus cereal remains for these animals from other local settlements. The pottery and the quern stone fragments demonstrated that these trade routes may have extended to Martley (Worcestershire), the Woolhope and May Hill areas of Herefordshire and the Forest of Dean (Gloucestershire). In 2007 a c.3.80 m wide ditch was identified running in an approximate north to south direction through the excavation area which was thought to be a Roman field boundary.

4.2 Current land-use

The site consists of a grass verge on the edge of the leisure centre carpark.

5 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Figs 2-3.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

Natural deposits were located at a depth of approximately 0.87-1.10m below the ground surface and consisted of orange sand and gravels (context 109).

5.1.2 Phase 2: Roman deposits

Only a single feature was uncovered during this excavation, a wide V-shaped ditch [104], running on a north to south alignment (Plate 1). The ditch was 3m wide and 0.82m deep and was visible through the full width of the excavated area (2.8m). The linear feature had a sharp break from the

surface with moderately angled sides and a V-shaped base. It contained four deposits which were mostly orange and grey silty sands and gravels, similar to the surrounding natural deposits. The basal fill (context 105) was however noticeably different and consisted of a small dump of medium sized rounded stones and it was unclear whether it had been deposited through natural processes or human agency.

This was sealed by two slumps of sterile grey (106) and orange (107) silty sands likely to have been created through natural weathering processes. Deposit (106) contained a single unidentifiable fragment of animal bone. The main ditch fill (108) mostly consisted of orange redeposited natural and is likely to have originated from an associated bank, which had been pushed back into the ditch after its abandonment. There was no evidence for the periodic cleaning and re-cutting of the feature. No dating evidence was recovered but it is possible to date the feature from the 2008 excavations during which small amounts of Roman pottery were recovered from the upper fill of this linear feature.

5.1.3 Phase 3: modern deposits

In places the natural appeared to be sealed by soft but friable light-greyish brown silty sand subsoil between 0-0.25m thick, which in turn was sealed by a soft mid-olive brown sandy loam topsoil between 0-0.15m thick. Modern landscaping layers (101) between 0.4-0.6m thick, consisting of a mixture of redeposited natural, blue clay and brown loamy soils, containing modern rubbish, including concrete, brick and plastic were located above this soil and in areas lay directly on the natural (109). This suggests that during the construction of the leisure centre areas of topsoil, subsoil, and potentially natural were truncated. The made ground (101) was sealed by a soft dark brown sandy loam modern topsoil and turf matt around 0.16m thick.

6 Synthesis

During excavation it was observed that the ground level had been raised through the addition of various landscaping layers. These either lay upon the original soil horizons or directly upon the natural sands and gravels suggesting that parts of the land surrounding the original 2007 excavation had been partial truncated and stripped during the construction of the leisure centre.

Despite the abundance of Bronze Age features uncovered during the 2007 excavation, no other features of similar date were identified during these works. This could suggest that the northern limit of the Bronze Age settlement has been identified or alternatively that the settlement activity is formed of discrete clusters of features. It could also mean that potential archaeological deposits were truncated during modern landscaping activity, as part of the original construction phase.

The excavation has confirmed that the previously identified Roman boundary ditch continues to the north for another 10m with no sign of turning or terminating. The ditch appears to narrow slightly in this area compared to when it was previously excavated, and is more v-shaped in profile. The narrower width could potentially have resulted from its truncation during the initial construction phase. As no finds were recovered no further conclusions can be drawn with regard to ditch function.

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.

An archaeological excavation was undertaken on behalf of David Niblett, Project Manager for Wychavon District Council, at Evesham Leisure Centre, Evesham, Worcestershire (NGR ref SP

03241, 43362; HER ref WSM701164) who intends to undertake hard landscaping works to the existing car parking area of Evesham Leisure Centre. The footprint of the proposed car park extension extended slightly further west and north of the area which had previously been subject to an archaeological excavation in 2007 during which the partial remains of a Bronze Age settlement and Roman ditch were recorded. The excavation of the extension area revealed the known Roman ditch and confirmed that the feature continues on a N-S alignment with no sign of turning or terminating. As no further prehistoric features were discovered this suggests that the northern extent of the Bronze Age settlement had been located or alternatively that the settlement activity was focused in small clusters. It could also suggest that any potential discrete features were truncated during modern landscaping activities as part of the original construction and are therefore no longer visible.

8 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, David Niblett, Project Manager for Wychavon District Council, and Aidan Smyth, Archaeology and Planning Advisor for Wychavon District Council.

9 Bibliography

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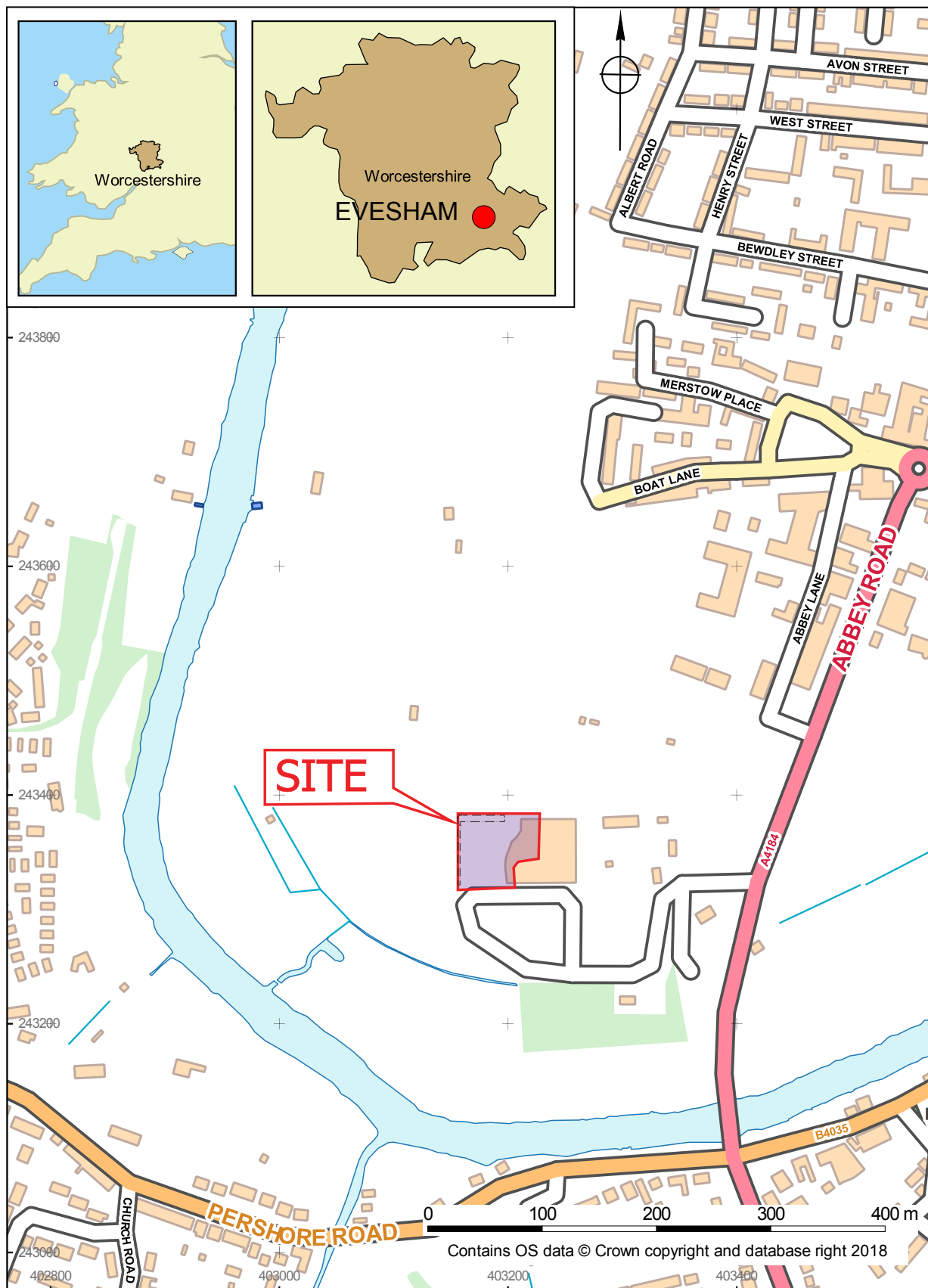
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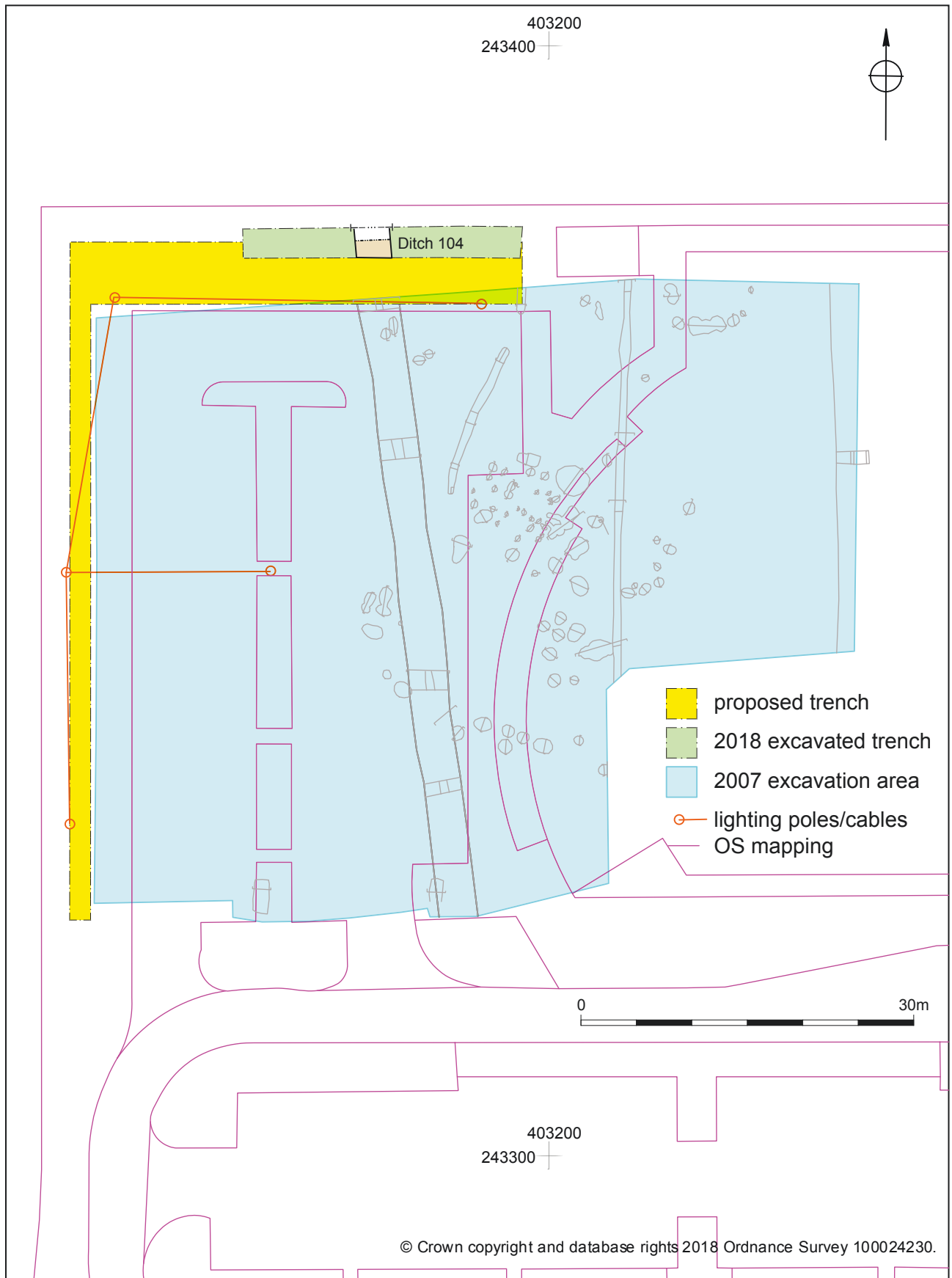
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Figures



Location of the site

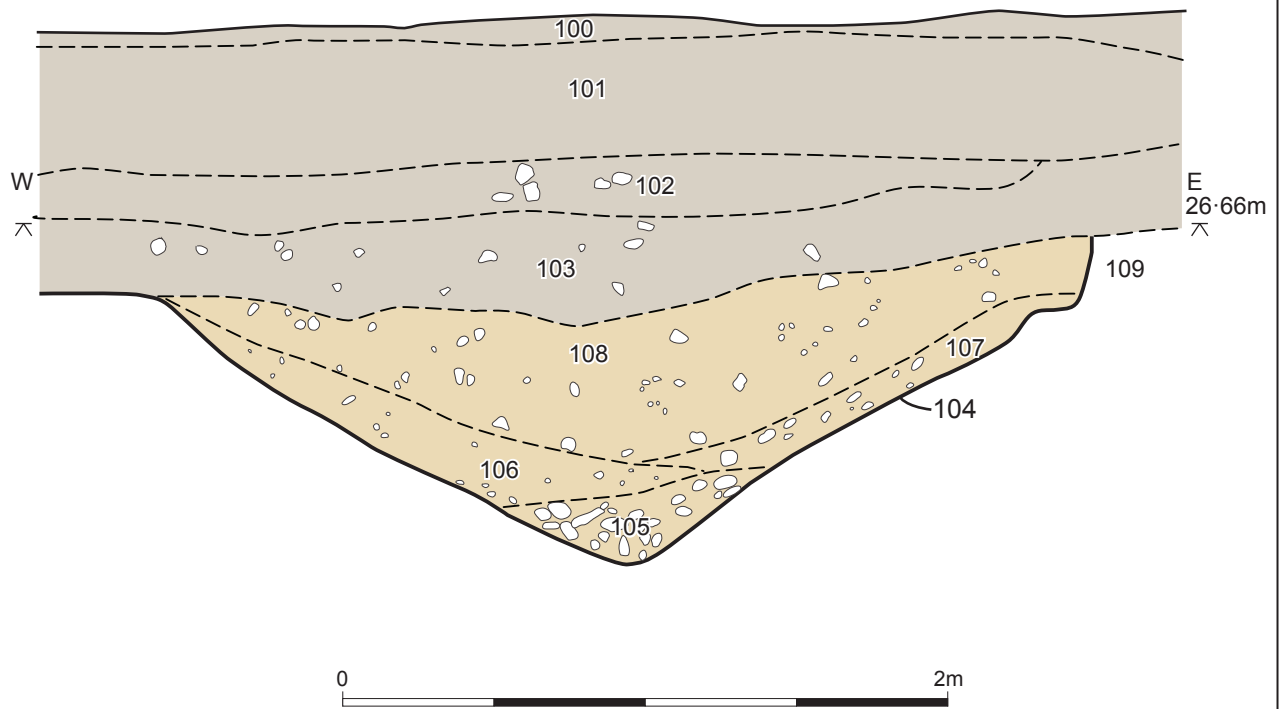
Figure 1



Location of trenches

Figure 2

Section Ditch 104



Section of Ditch 104

Figure 3

Plates



Plate 1: Ditch [104] facing north 2m scale.

Plates



Plate 1: Ditch [104] facing north 2m scale.

Appendix 1 Technical information

The archive (site code: WSM 701164)

The archive consists of:

- 9 Context records AS1
- 1 Field progress reports AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 9 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 2 Scale drawings
- 1 Context number catalogues AS5
- 1 CD-Rom/DVDs
- 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