

# Archaeological Evaluation at Abbots Court Cottages, Abbots Lench, Worcestershire



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Status: Version 1  
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Project reference: P5293  
Report reference: 2552  
HER reference: WSM70253  
Oasis id: fieldsec1-312422



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## **Archaeological evaluation at Abbots Court Cottages, Abbots Lench**

Tim Cornah

With contributions by Rob Hedge

Illustrations by Laura Templeton

### **Summary**

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Abbots Court Cottages, Abbots Lench (NGR SP 01209 51844). Wychavon District Council have granted planning permission for change of use of land from agricultural to provide 4no. visitor car parking spaces and allotments at Abbots Court Cottage, Abbots Lench Lane, Abbots Lench, Church Lench (18/00017/FUL). Permission was granted subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works and correspondence with Aidan Smyth, Planning Archaeologist for Wychavon District Council established that evaluation of the part of the site intended for allotments was appropriate mitigation.

The site lies within an asset recorded on the Historic Environment Record for Worcestershire; WSM07732 earthworks for a deserted medieval settlement recognised from various sources including the Victoria County History of Worcestershire and aerial photographs. It is also immediately to the north of the former Manor Farm which is the suggested location of a moated site.

Two test pits of 2m square were opened within the footprint of the proposed allotments. Within one a rough stone surface of likely medieval date was present and a second stone surface likely to have been of probable post-medieval date was present in the other. The presence of vitrified brick and clinker overlying the later surface is suggestive of industrial activity in the vicinity. Features of archaeological interest extended across the full extent of the areas excavated suggest potential for the survival of features across the extent of the site.

## Report

### 1 Background

#### 1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Abbots Court Cottages, Abbots Lench (NGR SP 01209 51844). Wychavon District Council have granted planning permission for change of use of land from agricultural to provide 4no. visitor car parking spaces and allotments at Abbots Court Cottage, Abbots Lench Lane, Abbots Lench, Church Lench (18/00017/FUL). Permission was granted subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works and correspondence with Aidan Smyth, Planning Archaeologist for Wychavon District Council has established that evaluation of the part of the site intended for allotments is appropriate mitigation.

The proposed development site is considered to include heritage assets and potential heritage assets, the significance of which may be affected by the application, most notably the earthworks of a deserted Medieval Settlement (WSM07732).

No brief was prepared for this project but its scope was agreed with Aiden Smyth Planning Archaeologist for Wychavon District Council. A Written Scheme of Investigation was produced (WA 2018) and approved.

The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance: Archaeological field evaluation* (ClfA 2014a) and the *Standards and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire* (WCC 2010).

### 2 Aims

The aims of the evaluation brief were;

- determine the presence or absence of archaeological deposits beyond reasonable doubt;
- identify their location, nature date and preservation;
- assess their significance;
- assess the likely impact of the proposed development.

The evaluation will only assess heritage assets which are of archaeological interest. This project will not include consideration of Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, historic hedgerows.

### 3 Methods

#### 3.1 Personnel

The project was led by Timothy Cornah (BA (hons.), MSc), who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2006 and has been practicing archaeology since 2001, assisted by Jessica Wheeler (BA (hons.)). 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), Robert Hedge (MA Cantab, PCIfA) contributed the finds report.

#### 3.2 Documentary research

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

#### 3.3 List of sources consulted

##### *Cartographic sources*

- 1843 Tithe Map of Abbots Lench
- 1888 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1:10560

- 1904 Ordnance Survey Map 1:10560

#### *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 2018).

Fieldwork was undertaken on 19 March 2018. The site reference number used by the Historic Environment Record to record archaeological "events", and site code used in the archive is WSM70253. The Worcestershire Archaeology project number is P5293.

Two trenches, amounting to just over 8m<sup>2</sup> in area, were excavated over the site area of 574m<sup>2</sup>, representing a sample of about 1.4%, though this equates to 2% when the area to be used as a car park is excluded, as this was deemed to have minimal impact. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2. The trenches were located within the areas of the site to be used as allotments as these were deemed likely to have the greatest future impact. The trenches were further located so as to gain as representative sample of the site as possible.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed under archaeological supervision using a wheeled excavator, employing a toothless bucket. 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). On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

### **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, by Rob Hedge**

The finds work reported here conforms with the following guidance: for findswork by ClfA (2014), for pottery analysis by PCR/SGRP/MPRG (2016), for archive creation by AAF (2011), and for museum deposition by SMA (1993).

#### **3.6.1 Recovery policy**

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

#### **3.6.2 Method of analysis**

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. They were identified, quantified and dated to period. A *terminus post quem* date was produced for each stratified context. The date was used for determining the broad date of phases defined for the site. All information was recorded on Microsoft Access database.

The pottery and ceramic building material was examined under x20 magnification and referenced as appropriate by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by Worcestershire Archaeology (Hurst and Rees 1992 and [www.worcestershireceramics.org](http://www.worcestershireceramics.org)).

#### **3.6.3 Discard policy**

Artefacts from topsoil and subsoil and unstratified contexts will normally be noted but not retained, unless they are of intrinsic interest (eg worked flint or flint debitage, featured pottery sherds, and other potential 'registered artefacts'). All artefacts will be collected from stratified excavated contexts, except for large assemblages of post-medieval or modern material, unless there is some

special reason to retain such as local production. Such material may be noted and not retained, or, if appropriate, a representative sample may be collected and retained. Discard of finds from post-medieval and earlier deposits will only be instituted with reference to museum collection policy and/or with agreement of the local museum.

### **3.7 Environmental archaeology**

No deposits suitable for environmental analysis were present.

### **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.

## **4 The application site**

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

The site is located within Abbots Lench at a height of approximately 62m AOD. The village is located on a slight rise within the landscape and the site itself slopes down towards the south and east, partially into the terraced area that once occupied by Manor Farm, now Abbots Cottages. The bedrock geology is recorded as blue lias formation and Charmouth mudstone formation, with no superficial deposits recorded (BGS 2018)

The following archaeological context is derived from the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record data, which was searched within a 500m area centred on the site.

The village of Ab Lench, also known as Abbots Lench, potentially originated as early as 983 AD though the manorial history extends from the 11<sup>th</sup> century with the lordship of the Bishops of Worcester, passing into the Beauchamp family in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The only suggested remaining tangible elements of this are in the form of earthworks (WSM07732) which extend across the development site. The village is believed to have had a chapel (WSM07736) and moated manor house (WSM07731). The location of these is unclear but is likely to be to the south of the site, potentially in the area of Manor farm (WSM53083), which itself dates to the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Many of the agricultural buildings of Manor Farm have been converted and are now part of Abbots Cottages. Around the village there is clear evidence of the medieval agricultural landscape with numerous examples of ridge and furrow (WSM35252, WSM35253, WSM35258, WSM35259 WSM41326 WSM41328).

The only archaeological intervention within the area was an excavation immediately to the east of the site (WSM29822) and identified the remains of a north-south aligned Holloway with a small but significant pottery collection of 12<sup>th</sup> century date.

Mapping of 1843 shows the barns of Manor Farm as partly remaining, with no features extending across the development site, apart from potentially a field boundary. No features are illustrated on the site on the Ordnance survey map of 1888.

### **4.2 Current land-use**

The site remained in pastoral agricultural use.

## **5 Results**

### **5.1 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

Natural deposits consisted of compact mid yellow clays with some interbedded blue lias bedrock (102 and 205). These were located at a depth of 0.51m in trench 1 and 0.74m in Trench 2.

### 5.1.2 Phase 2: Undated deposits

Within both trenches a buried soil horizon was present directly above the natural deposits. Within Trench 1 this consisted of moderately compact light reddish brown silty clay with abundant lias stone fragments which extended for a depth of up to 0.21m (105). Within Trench 2 this consisted of a mid to light greyish brown silty clay with some lias fragments and extended for a depth of up to 0.34m (204). Despite their similarity in position above the natural, their difference in appearance suggests that it is unlikely that they are the same deposit extending across the site, decreasing the chance that they were formed by widespread ploughing.

### 5.1.3 Phase 3: Medieval deposits

Within Trench 1, a rough stone surface was present (104), made up of small sub-angular lias stone fragments. This extended across the whole of the trench and was up to 0.16m deep. From within the surface material of 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century and 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century date was recovered, as well a single piece of clay pipe stem of post-medieval date and a button of 20<sup>th</sup> century date, the latter two of which are potentially intrusive.

This surface was overlain by sub-soil layer (101) consisting of a mid-greyish brown clayey silt with some lias stone fragments.

### 5.1.4 Phase 4: Post-medieval deposits

Within Trench 2, a further small area of stone surface was present (203). This consisted of flat laid lias stones up to 0.20m in length, and no more than a single course deep. It is possible that the surface was aligned north-east to south-west, but this could not be confirmed. The dating of both the overlying and underlying deposits does not rule out this surface belonging to Phase 3.

Surface (203) was overlain by deposit (202) which consisted of a fairly compact layer of orange/red daub and clinker material up to 0.05m in depth. A single piece of tile was recovered from this, though this could not be closely dated. Deposit (202) was in turn overlain by a mixed yellow clay deposit of up to 0.27m in depth which also contained some daub and clinker as well as stone fragments. This is likely to have been deposited as part of a ground levelling event and contained brick of post-medieval date.

### 5.1.5 Phase 5: Modern deposits

Top soil deposits (100 and 200) consisted of a fairly soft dark greyish clayey silt and extended for up to a depth of between 0.12 to 0.27m, being deeper within trench 2.

## 6 Artefactual analysis, by Rob Hedge

The artefactual assemblage recovered is summarised in Tables 1 and 3.

The assemblage came from five stratified contexts and could be dated from the medieval period onwards (see Table 1). Artefact condition was generally poor; the majority of artefacts displayed high levels of abrasion.

Period	material class	material subtype	object specific type	count	weight(g)
medieval	ceramic		pot	2	34

Period	material class	material subtype	object specific type	count	weight(g)
late med/early post-med	ceramic		pot	1	4
medieval/post-medieval	ceramic		daub	4	159
medieval/post-medieval	ceramic		roof tile	11	461
medieval/post-medieval	slag	Clinker	clinker	6	170
medieval/post-medieval	stone	Limestone	roof tile	1	841
post-medieval	ceramic		brick	1	603
post-medieval	ceramic		clay pipe	1	1
post-medieval	ceramic		vitrified brick	12	208
Modern	metal		button	1	1
Undated	bone	animal bone	mammal bone	2	19
Undated	bone	animal bone	mammal tooth	1	32
Undated	organic	coal	coal	3	27
Undated	stone		cobble	1	556
<b>Totals</b>				<b>47</b>	<b>3116</b>

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

Broad period	fabric code	Fabric common name	count	weight(g)
Medieval	57	Cotswolds unglazed ware	1	31
Late med/early post-med	70	Southern white ware	1	4
Medieval	99	Miscellaneous medieval wares	1	3
<b>Totals</b>			<b>3</b>	<b>38</b>

Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by fabric

### Summary artefactual evidence by period

For the finds from individual features, including specific types of pottery, consult Tables 3 and 2 in that order and in combination.

#### Medieval

Three sherds of medieval pottery were present within surface (104). The earliest piece was a squared and clubbed rim of a Cotswold unglazed ware (fabric 57) jar, type 3. It is comparable to that illustrated in Bryant (2004), Fig 189:6; jars of this type appear in Worcester in the later 11th century and continue through the 12th, though an earlier origin in the southeast of the county — closer to the production centre — is possible.

The other diagnostic sherd was a later 15th to 16th century piece of southern white ware (fabric 70), with characteristic bright green glaze. The fine wall suggests that it is from a small vessel such as a lobed cup.

The remaining sherd was a small, abraded undiagnostic body sherd in an unglazed, sandy buff fabric.

None of the flat roof tile recovered showed any diagnostic features. All were somewhat abraded, rendering identification difficult. Four small fragments from (104) in a sandy fabric are likely to be medieval in date; the remainder — in a variety of probably local fabrics incorporating small iron-rich and grog inclusions — span the later medieval and early post-medieval periods.

A quantity of daub was recovered from (202), and a limestone roof tile from (204): they cannot be closely dated, but a medieval origin is possible.

#### *Post-medieval*

Vitrified fragments of brick and amorphous undiagnostic clinker attest to some sort of industrial activity on the site, probably in the post-medieval period.

A single fragment of clay pipe stem was present within (104).

#### *Modern*

The only modern artefact was a fragmentary button — in a lightweight alloy — from surface (104).

#### *Undated*

Several pieces of mammal bone – a tooth from (104) and limb and rib fragments from (105) — could not be intrinsically dated, but are likely to pertain to domestic consumption.

Context	material class	material subtype	object specific type	count	weight(g)	start date	end date	TPQ date range
104	ceramic		pot	1	4	1450	1600	AD1900 - 2000
	ceramic		pot	1	3	1100	1600	
	ceramic		pot	1	31	1066	1200	
	bone	animal bone	mammal tooth	1	32			
	ceramic		roof tile	3	152	1400	1800	
	ceramic		roof tile	2	29	1475	1800	
	ceramic		roof tile	4	38	1200	1600	
	stone		cobble	1	556			
	slag	clinker	clinker	3	83	1200	1900	

Context	material class	material subtype	object specific type	count	weight(g)	start date	end date	TPQ date range
	organic	coal	coal	3	27			
	ceramic		clay pipe	1	1	1600	1910	
	metal		button	1	1	1900	2000	
	ceramic		vitriified brick	12	208	1600	2000	
105	bone	animal bone	mammal bone	2	19			
201	ceramic		brick	1	603	1600	1900	AD1600 - 1900
	ceramic		roof tile	1	116	1475	1800	
202	ceramic		roof tile	1	126	1200	1800	AD1200 - 1900
	ceramic		daub	4	159	1000	1800	
	slag	clinker	clinker	3	87	1200	1900	
204	stone	limestone	roof tile	1	841	1200	1800	AD1200 - 1800

Table 3: Summary of context dating based on artefacts

## 6.1 Synthesis

The small finds assemblage attests to agricultural/industrial activity on the site in the medieval and post-medieval periods. The presence of pottery of later 11th to 12th century date corroborates the evidence obtained from other investigations in the vicinity, (WSM29822) confirming the potential for remains of this date — pertaining to deserted medieval settlement WSM07732 — to survive within the study area.

There is no clear evidence for activity between the 12th century and the late 15th/16th century, although the broad date ranges for the building material mean that settlement activity between these dates cannot be ruled out.

## 6.2 Recommendations

### 6.2.1 Further analysis and reporting

No further work on the assemblage is required at this stage. However, given the limited scope of this evaluation assessment, the finds should be incorporated into any subsequent analysis of further material from the site.

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### 6.2.2 Discard and retention

It is recommended that the medieval pottery and the roof tile be retained; the remainder of the assemblage should be considered for discard, although the final decision rests with Museums Worcestershire.

## 7 Synthesis

The trenches were located within an area previously suggested to have been part of a deserted medieval village, an assertion which had been partly confirmed with the presence of a medieval holloway to the immediate east of the site which contained a significant assemblage of 12<sup>th</sup> century pottery.

Activity confirmed within Trench 1 by the presence of an assemblage of medieval material within a rough stone surface. Within the scope of the scope of the trenching of this project, it is difficult to assess the use of this surface whether it was agricultural, domestic or industrial in nature. The assemblage of pottery recovered from it may support a domestic interpretation, though this remains problematic.

The stone surface identified within Trench 2 is similarly difficult to interpret but the presence of a layer of clinker and daub may suggest that a form of industrial activity was taking place in the vicinity. Whilst these deposits are likely to have been post-medieval, a medieval date could not be entirely discounted. It is certainly the case that they do not relate to any of the features of the 1843 or subsequent mapping, suggesting they pre-date this. They were sealed in the post-medieval era by a ground levelling deposit.

### 7.1 Research frameworks

The small scope of this project does not allow it to fit clearly into any of the established frameworks, apart from giving some light on the date of activity. Identifying both the origin and finish of medieval villages is one of the research aims identified within the West-Midlands (Watt (ed) 2011).

## 8 Significance and impact of the development

The interest in the site is primarily within activity related to the deserted medieval village. The activity of this date identified within the Trench 1 took the form of a rough stone surface, though the later stone surface within Trench 2 may also give some insight into an extended use of the settlement.

The importance of these deposits is difficult to assess within the scope of this project given the limited window into the deposits, though those identified as medieval are likely to be significant, with the structured deposits of post-medieval date being of moderate significance. Given that both trenches contained features of significance or moderate significance across their full extent, archaeological features of interest cannot currently be ruled out from any point of the site.

The medieval surface identified within Trench 1 was located at a depth of 0.19m below the current ground surface, with the burnt daub and clinker layer within Trench 2 at a depth of 0.38m below the surface. The topography of the site would also confirm a higher degree of preservation nearer to the surface in the eastern half of the site, with the western half potentially having been levelled to some degree in the post-medieval era. The impact of any groundwork is likely to therefore be greater across the eastern half of the site.

## 9 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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## 10 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Jeremy Oates and Aidan Smyth.

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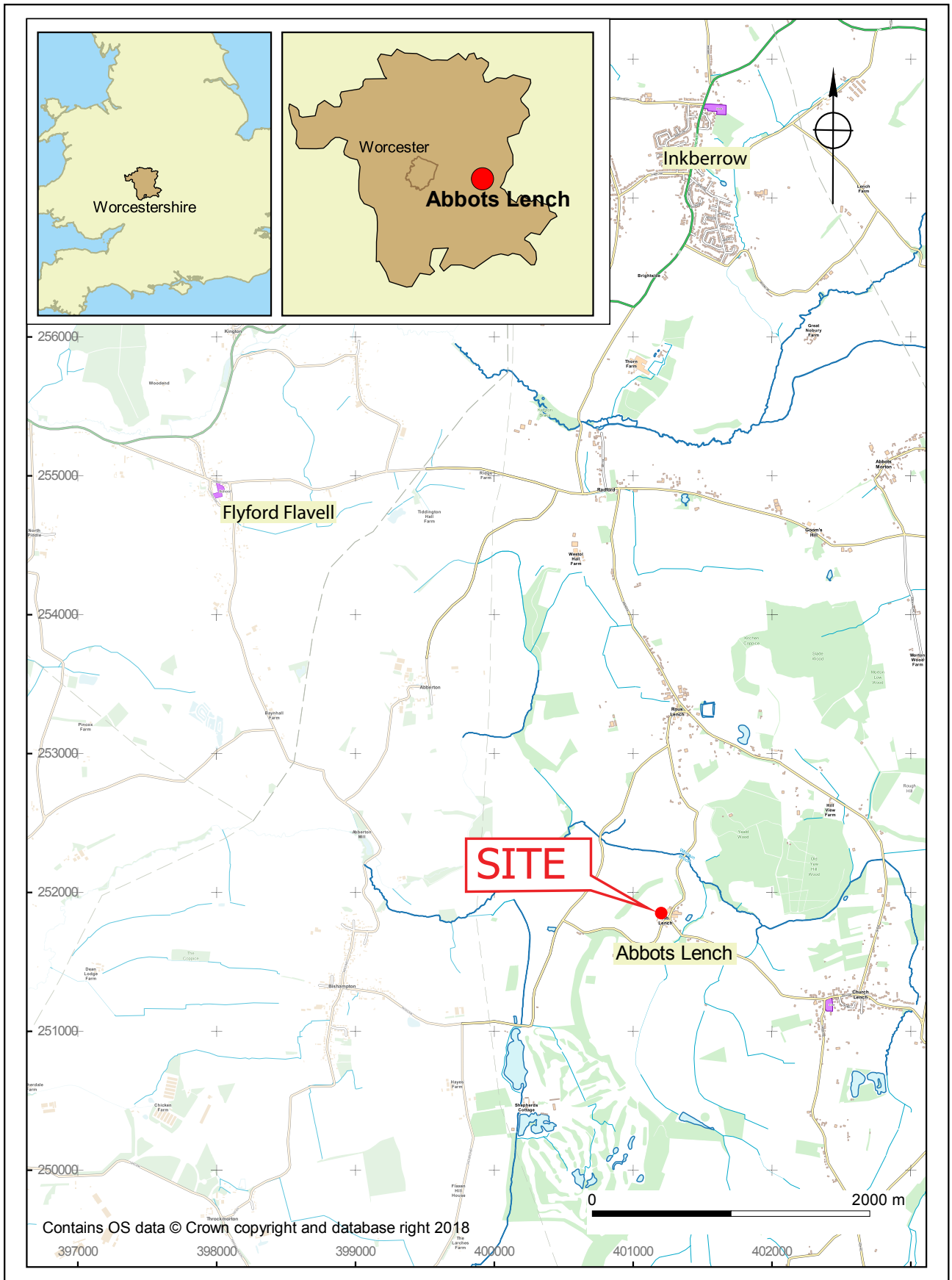
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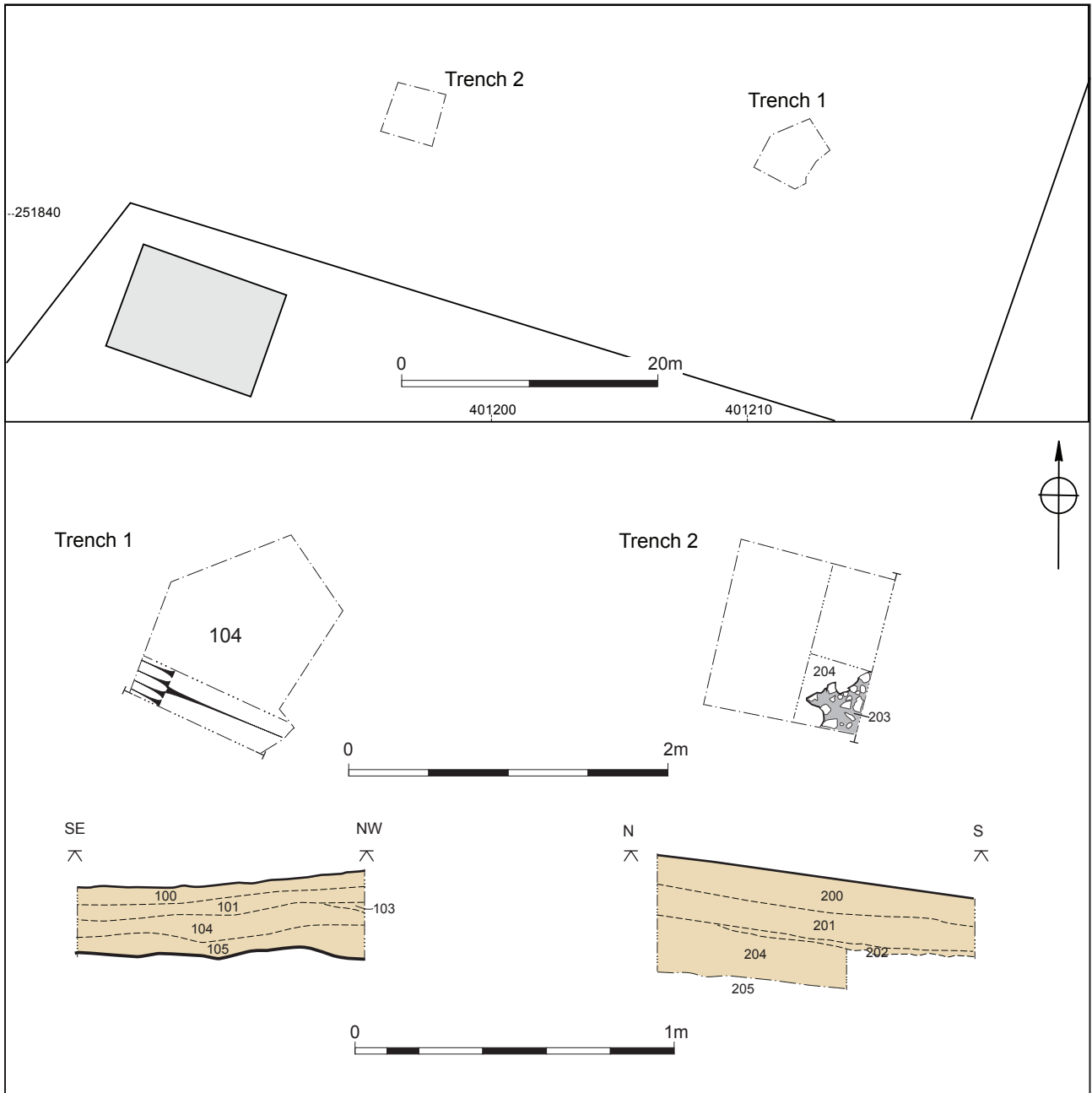


## Figures



Location of the site

Figure 1



Trench plans and sections

Figure 2

## Plates



*Plate 1, the site looking south-east*



*Plate 2 rough rubble stone surface (104) within Trench 1, looking north*

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*Plate 3 section through surface (104) within Trench 1, looking south*



*Plate 4 surface (203) and section deposits within Trench 2, looking east*

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## Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

### Main deposit descriptions

#### Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 2m      Width: 2m      Depth: 0.55m

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Topsoil	Soft loose dark greyish black clayey silt	0.12m
101	Subsoil above (103)	Moderately compact mid greyish brown clayey silt with occasional sub-angular stones	0.16m
102	Natural	Compact mid yellow clay with blue lias bedrock	0.28m from surface
103	Coal layer above (104)	Coal layer	0.07m
104	Rough stone surface above (105)	Medium to large sub-angular and rounded stones in a light reddish brown silty clay matrix containing some coal, charcoal, pottery, tile bone and daub.	0.12m
105	Buried soil horizon above (102)	Moderately compact light reddish brown silty clay with abundant sub-angular bedrock fragments.	0.28m

#### Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 2m      Width: 2m      Depth: 0.74m

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
200	Topsoil	Soft loose dark greyish black clayey silt	0.27m
201	Ground makeup/levelling layer above (202)	Mixed mid yellow brown clay with some orange red daub fragments and post-medieval CBM	0.20m
202	Clinker and daub layer above (203)	Fairly compact layer comprised of red daub and clinker, possibly a rebuild of (203)	0.05m
203	Flat stone surface above (204)	Blue lias constructed flat stone surface potentially aligned NE-SW though this is not clear	0.05m
204	Buried soil horizon above (205)	Mid to light greyish brown clay silt with frequent sub-angular stones	0.34m
205	Natural	Compact mid yellow clay with blue lias bedrock	0.72m





## **Appendix 2 Technical information**

### **The archive (site code: WSM70253)**

The archive consists of:

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

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

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

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