

# Archaeological Watching Brief at Abbots Court Cottages, Abbots Lench, Worcestershire



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Worcestershire Archaeology  
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## **Archaeological watching brief at Abbots Court Cottages, Abbots Lench, Worcestershire**

Tim Cornah

With contributions by Rob Hedge

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

### **Summary**

An archaeological watching brief 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 a watching brief of the car park area, informed by an earlier evaluation, 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 also lies immediately to the north of the former Manor Farm which is the suggested location of a moated site.

Within the watching brief, the same stratigraphic sequence of that previously identified was present though including a rough stone layer from which post-medieval date was recovered. and showing the character of ground levelling. Below these was a possible cess pit from which a small assemblage of medieval pottery and modified animal bone suggests domestic activity on site in or around the 12th century A.D.

## Report

### 1 Background

#### 1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological watching brief 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 a watching brief of the car park area, informed by an earlier evaluation, was appropriate mitigation

The proposed development site was considered to include heritage assets and potential heritage assets, the significance of which may have been affected by the application, most notably the earthworks of a deserted Medieval Settlement (WSM07732). An earlier evaluation of the site (Cornah 2018) identified archaeological deposits including a post-medieval surface and a further possible medieval surface

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

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

### 2 Aims

The aims and scope of the project were to undertake sufficient fieldwork to:

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

### 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 2003. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers (BA (hons.); MSc; MCIfA). Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt (BSc (hons.); 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.

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### 3.4 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2018).

Fieldwork was undertaken between 23rd and 24<sup>th</sup> of April 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.

A single area was stripped ahead of a carpark totalling an area of 13.30 by 8m and up to 0.60m in depth. The location of this area is indicated in Figure 1.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed under archaeological supervision using a 360° tracked, 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).

### 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 findwork 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 a 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 (e.g. 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 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).

An archaeological intervention within the vicinity was an excavation immediately to the east of the site (WSM29822) which identified the remains of a north-south aligned holloway. From this a small but significant pottery collection of 12<sup>th</sup> century date was recovered. Further to this, evaluation of the site undertaken as part of the same development (Cornah 2018) identified a surface of potential medieval date as well as a further surface likely to be medieval 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 trench and features recorded are shown in Fig 2. Detailed description of the deposits and features is given in Appendix 1.

#### **5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits**

Natural deposits (305) consisted of compact mid yellow clays with some interbedded blue lias bedrock.

#### **5.1.2 Phase 2: Medieval deposits**

Pit [304] was the earliest dated feature recorded on site. It was not possible to determine the full extent of the pit as it extended beyond the limit of the excavations but within the stripped area it ran in a NE-SW direction for 2.73m and was 0.50m wide. It is possible that this was the extent of a wider cut feature by 0.63m deep into which a pit and a possible small posthole were cut, as illustrated on Figure 2 and Plate 2. If they were multiple features, they were filled with a single



deposit (303). This had a slightly greenish tinge towards its base, so it is possible that cess at least partially made up its fill. Pottery of broadly 12th century date was recovered from its fill, as well as a possible unfinished ice skate.

### 5.1.3 Phase 3: Post-medieval deposits

Pit [304] was sealed by deposit (302) which was up to 0.24m in depth which was recorded in the evaluation stage as context (105). No dateable material was recovered from this in either case. It consisted of moderately compact light reddish brown silty clay with abundant lias stone fragments. It is possible that this was an earlier ploughsoil layer, though it contained a relatively large amount of stone, so interpretation as a levelling deposit cannot be ruled out.

Deposit (301) sealed deposit (302) and comprised mixed material with areas of orangey clinker type material but also a fairly high blue lias stone and rounded stone content. No elements of this were clearly laid and it seems that this was a levelling deposit. This deposit ran for the full length of the trench and was up to 0.12m thick. It contained elements of broken building material and pottery indicating an 18th century *terminus post quem*.

### 5.1.4 Phase 4: Modern deposits

A linear feature running NW-SE along the rear of the modern plot boundary was present [307] and its fill (306) contained tarmac as well as plastic. This feature was presumably a modern drainage feature and was not excavated.

All of the features were sealed by topsoil (300) which was a soft and loose dark greyish black clayey silt up to 0.14m in depth

## 5.2 Artefact analysis, by Rob Hedge

The artefactual assemblage recovered is summarised in Tables 1 and 2. The assemblage retrieved from the excavated area comprised 17 sherds of pottery weighing 215g, fragments of animal bone, charcoal, and a single piece of roof tile. The group came from two stratified contexts and could be dated from the medieval period onwards (see Table 1). Using pottery as an index of artefact condition, this was generally fair with the majority of sherds displaying moderate levels of abrasion, and the average sherd size — at 12.6g — being slightly above average.

period	material class	material subtype	object specific type	Count	Weight(g)
medieval	ceramic		pot	15	184
late med/early post-med	ceramic		pot	1	14
late med/early post-med	ceramic		roof tile	1	18
post-medieval	ceramic		pot	1	17
undated	organic	animal bone	cattle radius	1	118
undated	organic	animal bone	modified horse metacarpal	1	262
undated	organic	animal bone	pig mandible	1	82
undated	organic	animal bone	unident butchered fragment	1	28
undated	organic	charcoal	charcoal	1	1
<b>Totals:</b>				<b>23</b>	<b>724</b>

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

### 5.2.1 Pottery

All sherds have been grouped and quantified according to fabric type (Table 2). Where mentioned, all specific forms are referenced to the type series within the report for Deansway, Worcester (Bryant 2004).

Broad period	fabric code	Fabric common name	Count	Weight(g)
Medieval	55	Worcester-type sandy unglazed ware	9	51
Medieval	57	Cotswolds unglazed ware	1	18
Medieval	58	Sandy limestone tempered ware	5	115
Medieval/Post-medieval	69	Oxidized glazed Malvernian ware	1	14
Post-medieval	78	Post-medieval red ware	1	17
<b>Totals:</b>			<b>17</b>	<b>215</b>

Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by period and fabric-type

### 5.2.2 Site dating

context	material class	material subtype	object specific type	count	weight(g)	start date	end date	TPQ date range
301	organic	animal bone	pig mandible	1	82	undated		A.D. 1700 - 1800
			unident butchered fragment	1	28			
	ceramic		roof tile	1	18	1400	1800	
			pot	1	17	1700	1800	
				1	14	1450	1630	
			1	7	1075	1400		
303	ceramic		pot	1	18	1066	1200	A.D.1066 - 1400
				1	13	1100	1350	
				5	115	1066	1200	
				7	31	1066	1400	
	organic	animal bone	charcoal	1	1	undated		
			cattle radius	1	118			
			modified horse metacarpal	1	262	?medieval		

Table 3 Summary of context dating based on artefacts

### 5.2.3 Period discussion

#### Medieval

Fill (303) of pit [304] contained a small but consistent group of medieval pottery. Three fabrics were represented:

- a single body sherd of Cotswold-type sandy unglazed ware (fabric 57), of later 11th to 12th century date.
- A rim sherd from a type 3 jar, and seven body sherds, of Worcester-type sandy unglazed ware (fabric 55): the rim form indicates a 12th to early 14th century date;
- Five sherds of a fabric similar to the Worcester-type fabric 55, but with the addition of small quantities of fossiliferous limestone in the matrix. This is believed to be sandy limestone-tempered ware (fabric 58), thought to have been produced somewhere to the southeast of

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Worcester during the later 11th and 12th centuries. Several everted rims similar to fabric 55 Type 3 jars suggest a production date in the latter part of this range.

The finds from this pit are in relatively fresh condition. Although a broad *terminus post quem* date range of late-11th to 14th century is possible, a 12th century date is most likely.

Although not intrinsically dateable, one of the pieces of animal bone from (303) is worthy of note: the left metacarpal of an adult horse (plate 3), it has been carefully and systematically modified to smooth both upper and lower surfaces, and lateral margins at both proximal and distal ends have been trimmed with the apparent intention of smoothing and rounding-off the bone. This type of modification is typically seen in the production of medieval ice-skates. Similar examples, made from cattle and horse metapodials, have been recorded from Worcester, including one within 11th to mid-13th century deposits (Greep 2004, 491). There is no visible use-wear, and the typical (though not ubiquitous) perforation to allow leather straps is absent: the artefact may be unfinished, or a rough and expedient version.

A further, residual sherd of fabric 55 was present within deposit (301).

#### *Post-medieval*

The remainder of dateable finds from (301) comprised:

- a sherd of 15th to early 17th century Oxidised glazed Malvernian Ware (fabric 69);
- abraded late medieval to post-medieval roof tile, and;
- a sherd of robust 18th century redware (fabric 78).

## **6 Synthesis**

The site is located within an area of medieval settlement remains recognised through extant earthworks and the record of a holloway of 12<sup>th</sup> Century date to the east.

The presence of a possible cess pit with 12<sup>th</sup> Century pottery presents further evidence of medieval settlement in the close vicinity whilst the finds assemblage as a whole (including the evaluation phase) attests to agricultural/industrial activity on the site.

A piece of worked bone associated with the medieval phase of activity is thought to be an unfinished ice skate. This is an unusual find within a rural context. The only suggested body of water on which such a skate could be used was the moat around the manor. No direct evidence for either the moat or manor has yet been found within the village.

There remains 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. However, this may equally suggest a date for a decline in the size or movement of the early settlement of Abbots Lench.

### **6.1 Research frameworks**

The small scope of this project does not allow it to fit clearly into any of the established frameworks, apart from casting 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).

### **6.2 Discard and retention**

The presence of a well-stratified pottery assemblage of this date, containing diagnostic form sherds and with three key fabrics of this date — 55, 57, and 58 — occurring together, are factors in favour of retaining the medieval component of this archive for deposition with Museums Worcestershire. The presence of the modified horse metacarpal — an object of intrinsic interest as few have been recovered from this area — strengthens the case for retention.

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The archive should be amalgamated with that from the previous (evaluation) stage of works. Post-medieval finds from the former could be considered for discard.

## 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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*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.*

*The earlier evaluation a rough stone surface of potential medieval date was present. Within the watching brief, the same stratigraphic sequence of that previously identified was present though with the rough stone layer presenting material of post-medieval date and showing the character of ground levelling. Below these was a possible cess pit from which pottery of 12th century date and a modified horse metacarpal, thought to be intended for use as an ice skate, were recovered.*

## 8 Acknowledgements

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

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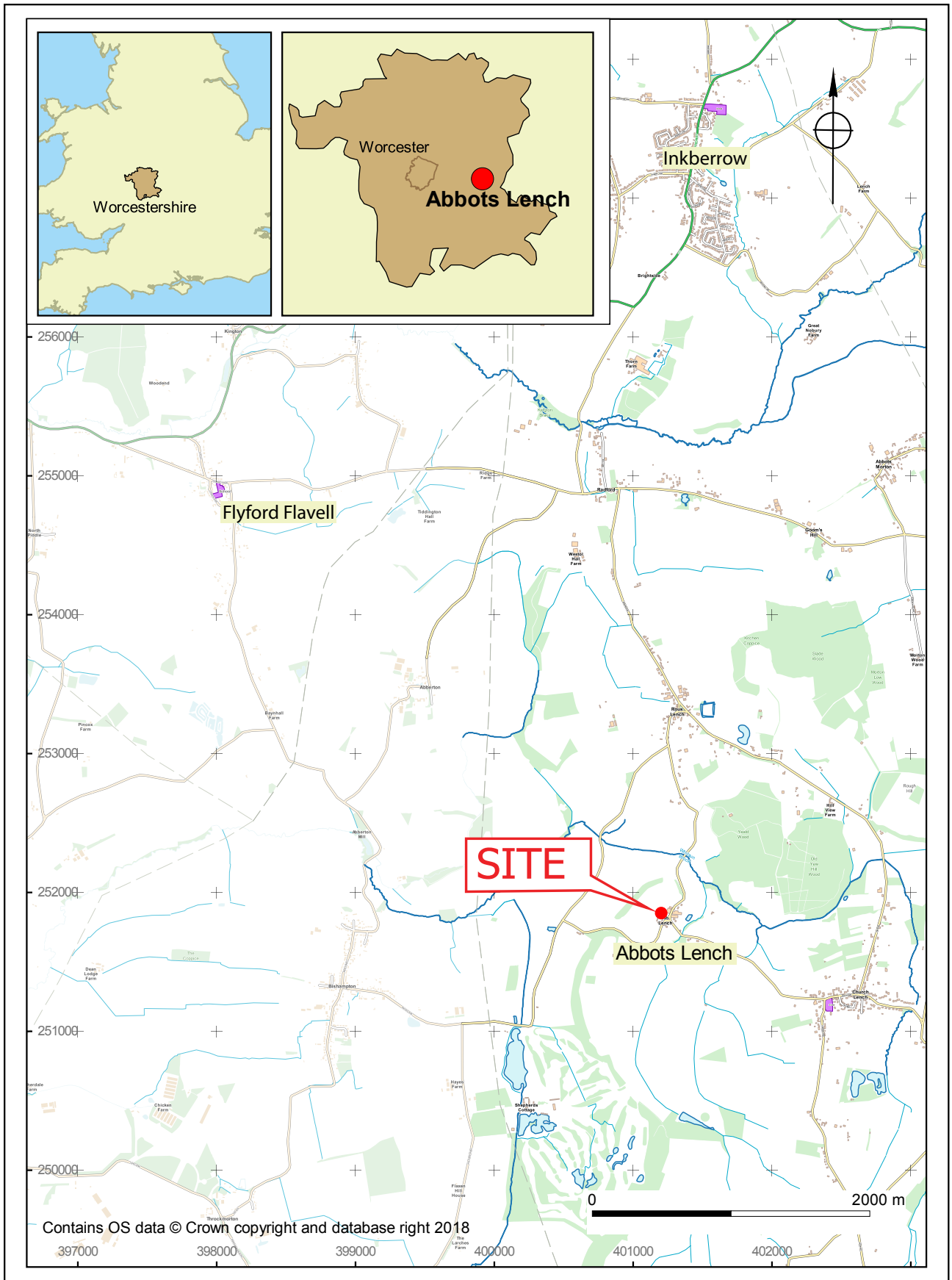
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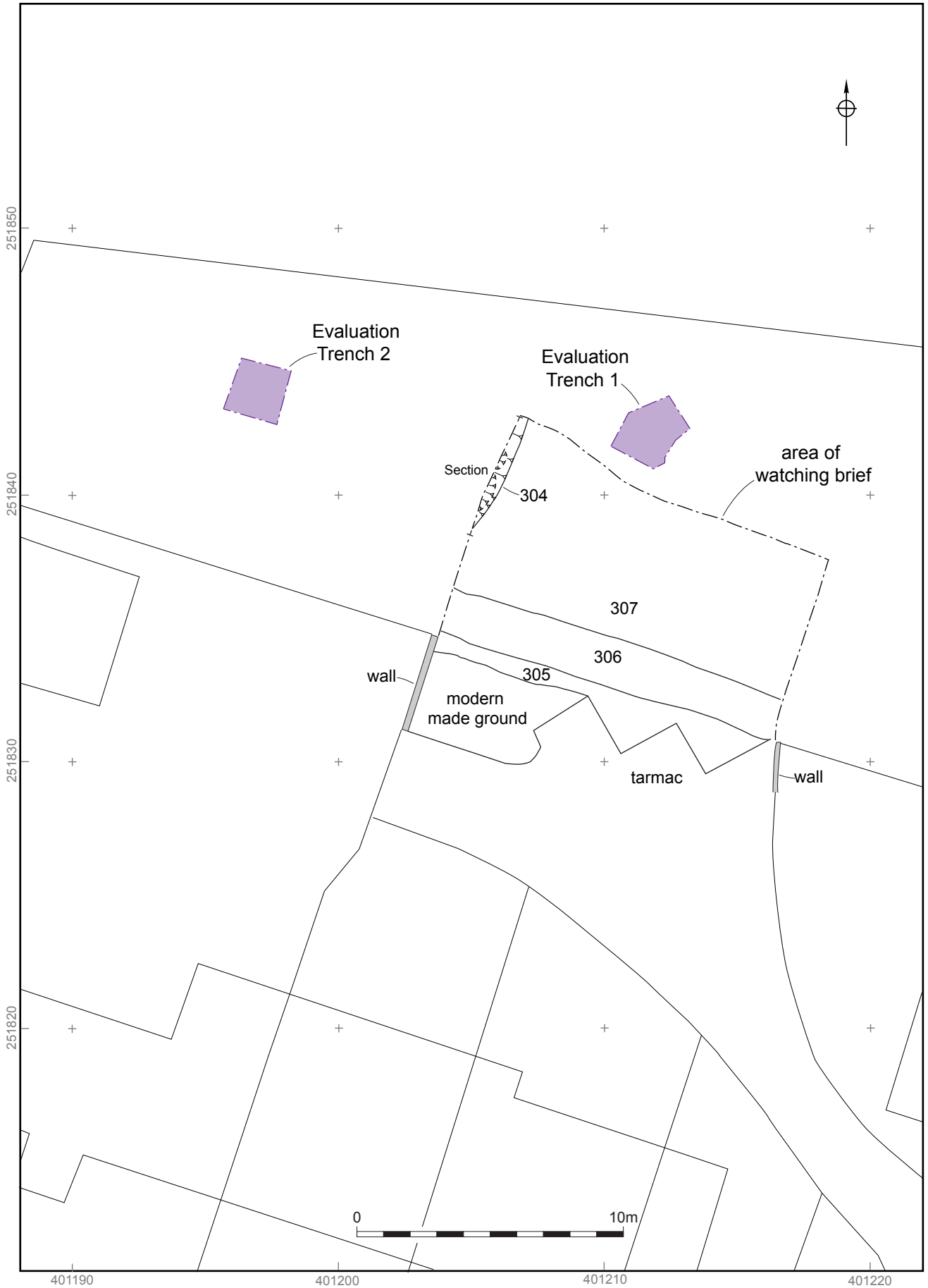
## Figures





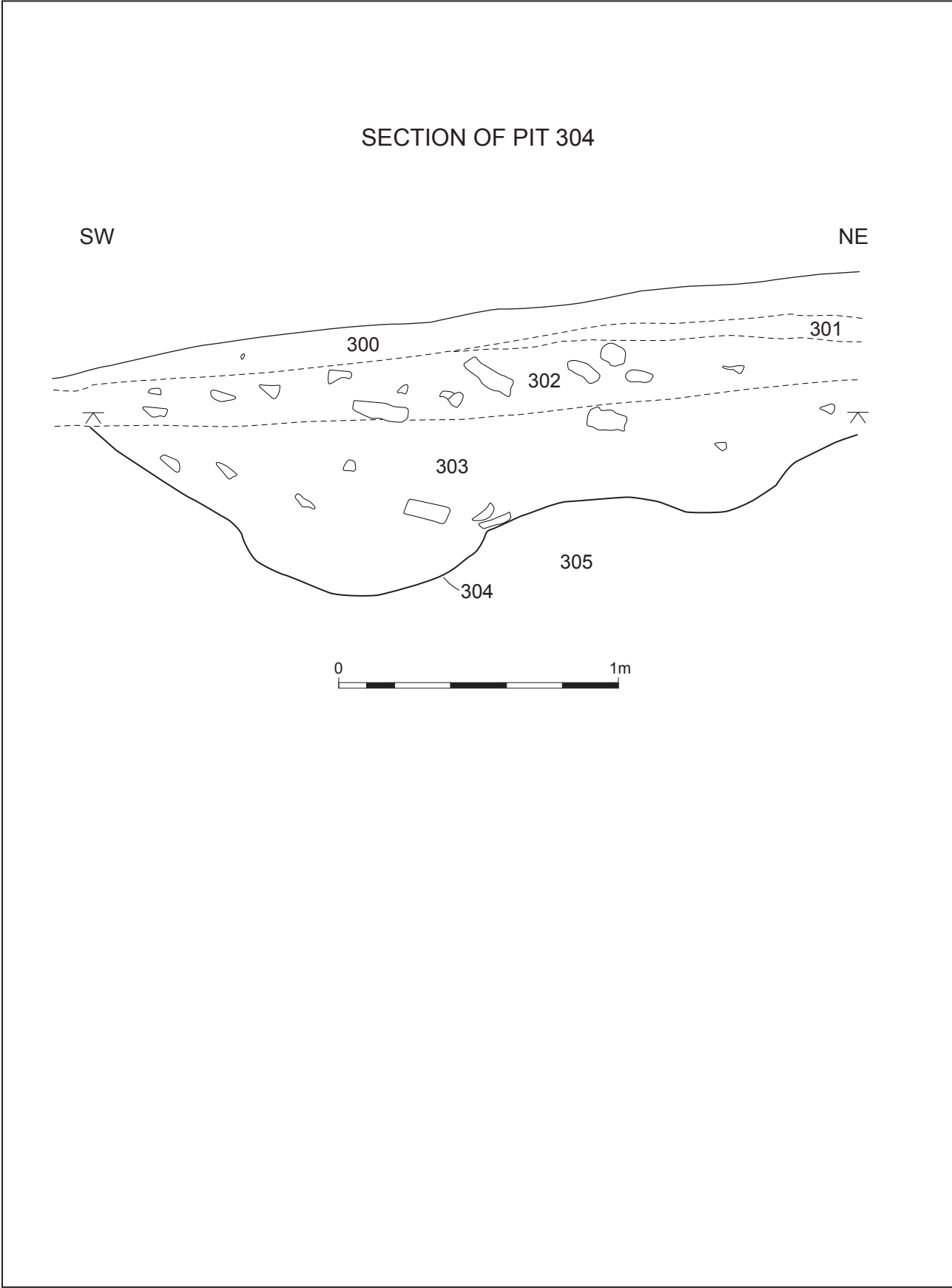
Location of the site

Figure 1



Trench plan

Figure 2



Pit 304: section

Figure 3

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## Plates



*Plate 1 The site, looking south east*



*Plate 2 Pit 304, looking north-west, scale 1m*

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*Plate 3 Modified Horse metacarpal from fill (303) of medieval pit [304]*

## Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

### Main deposit descriptions

#### Trench 3

Maximum dimensions: Length: 13.30m Width: 8m Depth: 0.30-0.60m

Orientation: North-west to south-east

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
300	Topsoil	Soft loose dark greyish black clayey silt	0-0.14m
301	Ground make up layer, below (300)	Medium to large sub-angular and rounded stones in a light reddish brown silty clay matrix containing some coal, charcoal, tile bone, daub CBM and post-medieval pottery	0.14-0.26m
302	Buried soil horizon above or ground make up layer, below (301)	Moderately compact light reddish brown silty clay with abundant sub-angular bedrock fragments.	0.26-0.40m
303	Fill of [304], sealed by (302)	Mid grey fairly soft silty clay with frequent angular limestone fragments and yellow clays, has a slightly more greenish hue towards the base but not easy to define as a separate fill.	0.34-0.98m
304	Pit cut	NE-SW aligned pit cut, though only the edge was present and most is likely to be outside the limit of excavation. Within the wider cut is a deeper area which is a possible cess pit and it possible that there was a post-hole to the north of this. These are certainly contemporary as the fill was the same throughout	0.34-0.98m
305	Natural	Compact mid yellow clay with blue lias bedrock	0.30
306	Fill of [307]	Mixed grey brown clay containing modern material such as tarmac and plastic	Not excavated
307	Modern drainage ditch	NE-SW aligned modern drainage ditch along the back of the extant plot boundary	Not excavated

## **Appendix 2 Technical information**

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

The archive consists of:

- 1 Field progress reports AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 11 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 2 Scale drawings
- 3 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 Box of finds
- 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

## Summary of data for Worcestershire HER

WSM 70253 (event HER number)

P5293

### Artefacts

period (note 1)	material class	material subtype	object specific type	count	weight(g)	start date	end date	specialist report? (note 2)	key assemblage? (note 3)
medieval	ceramic		pot	7	31	1066	1400	Y	N
medieval	ceramic		pot	7	140	1066	1200	Y	N
medieval	ceramic		pot	1	13	1100	1350	Y	N
medieval	ceramic		pot	1	7	1075	1400	Y	N
medieval	organic	animal bone	modified horse metacarpal	1	262	1066	1400	N	N
late med/early post-med	ceramic		pot	1	14	1450	1630	Y	N
late med/early post-med	ceramic		roof tile	1	18	1400	1800	Y	N
post-medieval	ceramic		pot	1	17	1700	1800	Y	N
undated	organic	animal bone	cattle radius	1	118			N	N
undated	organic	charcoal	charcoal	1	1			N	N
undated	organic	animal bone	pig mandible	1	82			N	N
undated	organic	animal bone	unident butchered fragment	1	28			N	N

### Notes

- 1) In some cases the date will be "Undated". In most cases, especially if there is not a specialist report, the information entered in the Date field will be a general period such as Neolithic, Roman, medieval etc (see below for a list of periods used in the Worcestershire HER). Very broad date ranges such as late Medieval to Post-medieval are acceptable for artefacts which can be hard to date for example roof tiles. If you have more specific dates, such as 13th to 14th century, please use these instead. Specific date ranges which cross general period boundaries can also be used, for example 15th to 17th century.

period	from	to
Palaeolithic	500000 BC	10001 BC
Mesolithic	10000 BC	4001 BC
Neolithic	4000 BC	2351 BC
Bronze Age	2350 BC	801 BC
Iron Age	800 BC	42 AD



Roman	43	409
Post-Roman	410	1065
Medieval	1066	1539
Post-medieval	1540	1900
Modern	1901	2050

<b>period specific</b>	<b>from</b>	<b>to</b>
Lower Paleolithic	500000 BC	150001
Middle Palaeolithic	150000	40001
Upper Palaeolithic	40000	10001
Early Mesolithic	10000	7001
Late Mesolithic	7000	4001
Early Neolithic	4000	3501
Middle Neolithic	3500	2701
Late Neolithic	2700	2351
Early Bronze Age	2350	1601
Middle Bronze Age	1600	1001
Late Bronze Age	1000	801
Early Iron Age	800	401
Middle Iron Age	400	101
Late Iron Age	100 BC	42 AD
Roman 1st century AD	43	100
2nd century	101	200
3rd century	201	300
4th century	301	400
Roman 5th century	401	410
Post roman	411	849
Pre conquest	850	1065
Late 11th century	1066	1100
12th century	1101	1200
13th century	1201	1300
14th century	1301	1400
15th century	1401	1500
16th century	1501	1600
17th century	1601	1700
18th century	1701	1800
19th century	1801	1900
20th century	1901	2000
21st century	2001	

2. Not all evaluations of small excavation assemblages have specialist reports on all classes of objects. An identification (eg clay pipe) and a quantification is not a specialist report. A short discussion or a more detailed record identifying types and dates is a specialist report. This field is designed to point researchers to reports where they will find out more than merely the presence or absence of material of a particular type and date.

3. This field should be used with care. It is designed to point researchers to reports where they will be able to locate the most important assemblages for any given material for any given date.

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