

# Archaeological watching brief at Prestbury House, The Burgage, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire



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## **Archaeological watching brief at Prestbury House, The Burgage, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire**

Elsbeth Iliff

With contributions by Laura Griffin and Elizabeth Pearson

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

### **Summary**

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Prestbury House, The Burgage, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (NGR SO 96763 23983). It was commissioned by CgMs Consulting Ltd whose client intends to install a new swimming pool for which a planning application has been submitted to Cheltenham Borough Council.

The site comprised an open lawn garden with mature trees, to the south of the Prestbury House, an early 18<sup>th</sup> century Grade II listed building. This property is situated within the area of Prestbury, just under 3km to the north-east of the historic centre of Cheltenham.

The excavation of the entire footprint of the new swimming pool was monitored during groundworks; an area just under 63m<sup>2</sup>. Three post-medieval pits and an undated gully were identified. The pits appeared to be related to construction rubble deposition, and the gully may have been a former field boundary.

Finds comprised nine sherds of pottery with a terminus post quem of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, a single modern china fragment and two pieces of cattle bone.

No other significant archaeological features, layers, structures, horizons or artefacts were identified.

## Report

### 1 Background

#### 1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Prestbury House, The Burgage, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (NGR SO 96763 23983). It was commissioned by CgMs Consulting Ltd, whose client intends to install a new swimming pool with associated services for which a planning application has been submitted to Cheltenham Borough Council (reference 18/00147/FUL). Permission was granted subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works.

The site is located in Prestbury on the north-eastern edge of Cheltenham. The area of the groundworks is within a garden to the south of the property it belongs to. Prestbury House itself is a Grade II listed building of early 18<sup>th</sup> century date (NHL 134458).

The proposed development site was considered to include potential heritage assets, the significance of which may have been affected by the application.

The project conforms to a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2018a) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (WA 2018b). The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance: Archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014a).

### 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 Elspeth Iloff (BA (hons.); MSc; PCIfA) who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2015. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Vaughan (BA (hons. Dunelm); MA; ACIfA). Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt (BSc (hons.); PG Cert; MCIfA). Laura Griffin (BA (hons.); PG Cert; ACIfA) contributed the finds report. Elizabeth Pearson (MSc; ACIfA) contributed the animal bone report

#### 3.2 Documentary research

There was no preceding desk-based assessment of the built or buried archaeological heritage assets and, therefore, prior to commencing fieldwork, a search was made of the Gloucestershire Historic Environment Record (HER) within a 1km search radius from the centre of the site. This provided access to records of archaeological sites, monuments and find-spots in the surrounding area.

##### *Documentary sources*

Published and grey literature sources are listed in the bibliography.

#### 3.3 Fieldwork strategy

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

Fieldwork was undertaken on 4 and 5 June 2018. The Worcestershire Archaeology project number is P5360.

Groundworks related to the development were excavated in an area amounting to just under 63m<sup>2</sup>. The location of the groundworks is indicated in Figure 1.

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

### **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, by Laura Griffin**

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

#### **3.5.1 Artefact recovery policy**

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

#### **3.5.2 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. This date was used for determining the broad date of phases defined for the site. All information was recorded on a Microsoft Access 2007 database.

For the purposes of this report, pottery has not been quantified according to specific fabric type. However, where mentioned, fabric types are classified according to the Gloucester fabric type series (Vince 1974).

#### **3.5.3 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.

### **3.6 Environmental archaeology methodology, by Elizabeth Pearson**

#### **3.6.1 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. Animal bone was hand-collected.

#### **3.6.2 Processing and analysis**

Hand-collected animal bone was recorded according to fragment count and weight by context, and comments were made on condition and key species.

### **3.6.3 Discard policy**

The bone will be discarded after a period of 6 months after the submission of this report, unless there is a specific request to retain it.

## **4 The application site**

### **4.1 Topography, geology and current land-use**

The underlying geology is mapped as Charmouth Mudstone with superficial deposits of the Cheltenham sand and gravel (BGS 2018).

The site is currently in use as a garden consisting of a grassed area surrounded by mature trees to the south of the property. The garden area is flat at a level of c 72.6m AOD across the site.

### **4.2 Archaeological and historical context**

The site is situated by the former Prestbury medieval and post-medieval market. It is also positioned just over 500m south-east of a medieval deer park, and the site of a moated residence of the medieval Bishops of Hereford. While very little archaeological evidence has been recovered in the area around the site, there are a number of listed buildings dating from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century on the same street as Prestbury House. As the area of the groundworks is situated within the grounds of Prestbury House itself, it is likely that only activity linked to the property will have taken place at the site, but there is potential for earlier activity dating to before the construction of Prestbury House.

Despite the apparent potential for archaeological remains, very little has been found in the area around the site. A watching brief conducted on an area 35m north of the site produced no archaeological remains, but an unidentified findspot was made just over 85m south of the site. Effectively, before this watching brief commenced, the archaeological potential remained fairly unknown as there was little previous knowledge regarding archaeological features in the surrounding area.

## **5 Results**

### **5.1 Structural analysis**

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Figs 2-4. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

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

The natural deposit encountered in the area of the groundworks was recorded between c 72.0m AOD at the northern end of the trench, and c 71.5m AOD at the southern end.

The geology of the site consisted of a loose, brownish orange sand and gravels, which reflects the superficial deposits shown on the BGS mapping (BGS 2018).

#### **5.1.2 Phase 2: Post-medieval deposits**

Two discrete features were uncovered in the area of the groundworks containing large stones and pottery dating to the post-medieval period, [106] and [110]. One of these features [106] was excavated and found to be 0.18m in depth and was interpreted as being a pit. These features were positioned close to one another, and also close to undated feature [108], which was considered likely to be of a similar date and function. The presence of large pieces of stone in these features suggests that they functioned as pits for the deliberate deposition of building rubble and waste. These features were all of slightly different shapes and were all somewhat irregular, which may suggest a fairly fleeting and utilitarian use.

### 5.1.3 Phase 3: Undated deposits

Two undated features were excavated in the area of the groundworks. One of these features was a small, shallow gully [104], measuring just 0.05m in depth. The gully appeared to terminate within the excavation area, but may just have been more heavily truncated. The lack of finds recovered from this feature and the particularly shallow nature made it difficult to determine a specific function for the gully, but it may have been the base of a former field boundary or similar. The other undated feature was a discrete feature [108] filled with large stones that appeared very similar to pits [106] and [110]. Although no finds were recovered from this feature, the close similarity in size, shape and fill to the other two pits made it very likely that this feature was of a similar date and function.

## 5.2 Artefact analysis, by Laura Griffin

The assemblage recovered from the site totalled 12 finds weighing 87g (see Tables 1 and 3). Material came from two pit fills (105 and 109) and the topsoil (101). Although the majority of pottery sherds were small with an average weight of just 5g, the level of preservation was good with finds displaying low levels of surface abrasion. Material could be dated to from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

period	material class	material subtype	object specific type	count	weight (g)
post-medieval	ceramic		pot	9	52
modern	ceramic		brick	1	19
modern	ceramic		pot	1	1
undated	metal	iron	nail	1	15

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

### 5.2.1 Summary of artefactual evidence by period

#### **Post-medieval**

The post-medieval assemblage consisted of nine sherds of pottery. All were undiagnostic but included two sherds of oxidised glazed Malvernian ware (TF52; context 101), four of Ashton Keynes ware (TF80; contexts 105 and 109) and three of unglazed flowerpot fabric (TF63; context 101). The Malvernian sherds displayed a thin yellowish internal glaze typical of 16<sup>th</sup>-early 17<sup>th</sup> century production. Likewise, the Ashton Keynes sherds could be dated 16<sup>th</sup>-late 17<sup>th</sup> century, on the basis their high-fired dark purplish grey surface and very dark green glaze.

#### **Modern**

Finds of modern date consisted of one small sherd of modern china (TF69; context 101) and an abraded brick fragment.

Broad period	fabric number	Fabric name	count	weight (g)
Post-medieval	TF52	Oxidised glazed Malvernian ware	2	12
Post-medieval	TF63	Flowerpot ware	3	23
Post-medieval	TF80	Ashton Keynes ware	4	17
Modern	TF69	Staffordshire miscellaneous bone china	1	1

Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by fabric type

Context	material class	material subtype	object specific type	count	weight (g)	start date	end date	finds TPQ
101	ceramic		pot	2	12	16C	E17C	L19-20C
101	ceramic		pot	3	23		18C	
101	ceramic		brick	1	19			
101	metal	iron	nail	1	15			
101	ceramic		pot	1	1	L19C	20C	
105	ceramic		pot	3	16	16C	L17C	16-L17C
109	ceramic		pot	1	1	16C	L17C	16-L17C

Table 3: Summary of context dating based on artefacts

### 5.2.2 Significance

Although a small assemblage, the pottery recovered has provided a *terminus post quem* of late 17<sup>th</sup> century for both of the rubble pits from which the sherds were recovered.

### 5.2.3 Recommendations

No further work is considered to be required.

### 5.3 Environmental analysis, by Elizabeth Pearson

Two residual fragments (85g) of animal bone were hand-collected from the subsoil (101) which contained late medieval to early post-medieval pottery. The bone was well-preserved, consisting of single distal cattle metacarpal and cattle-sized rib fragments. Cut marks were visible on the rib fragment.

Little interpretation could be made of these remains, although they indicate the general potential of the site to contain small quantities of well-preserved animal bone of late medieval to early post-medieval date.

#### 5.3.1 Significance

The environmental remains are considered to be of low significance from this site.

## 6 Synthesis

The archaeological watching brief established the presence of a small number of post-medieval and undated features. All of these were confined to the northern end of the area excavated. The post-medieval features were interpreted as rubble pits, indicating some demolition or construction activity in the area. The undated gully may be the remains of a former field boundary, and if so, might represent previous agricultural use of the area. This would suggest that this area of land was in agricultural use before the construction of Prestbury House in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## 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 watching brief was undertaken at Prestbury House, The Burgage, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (NGR SO 96763 23983). It was commissioned by CgMs Consulting Ltd whose client intends to install a new swimming pool.*

*The site comprised an open lawn garden with mature trees, to the south of the Prestbury House, an early 18<sup>th</sup> century Grade II listed building. This property is situated within the area of Prestbury, just under 3km to the north-east of the historic centre of Cheltenham.*



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*Finds comprised nine sherds of pottery with a terminus post quem of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, a single modern china fragment and two pieces of cattle bone.*

*No other significant archaeological features, layers, structures, horizons or artefacts were identified.*

## 8 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project: the clients Chris and Emma Young, Neil Wright (Senior Consultant, CgMs Consulting Ltd), and Charles Parry (Senior Archaeological Advisor, Gloucestershire County Council).

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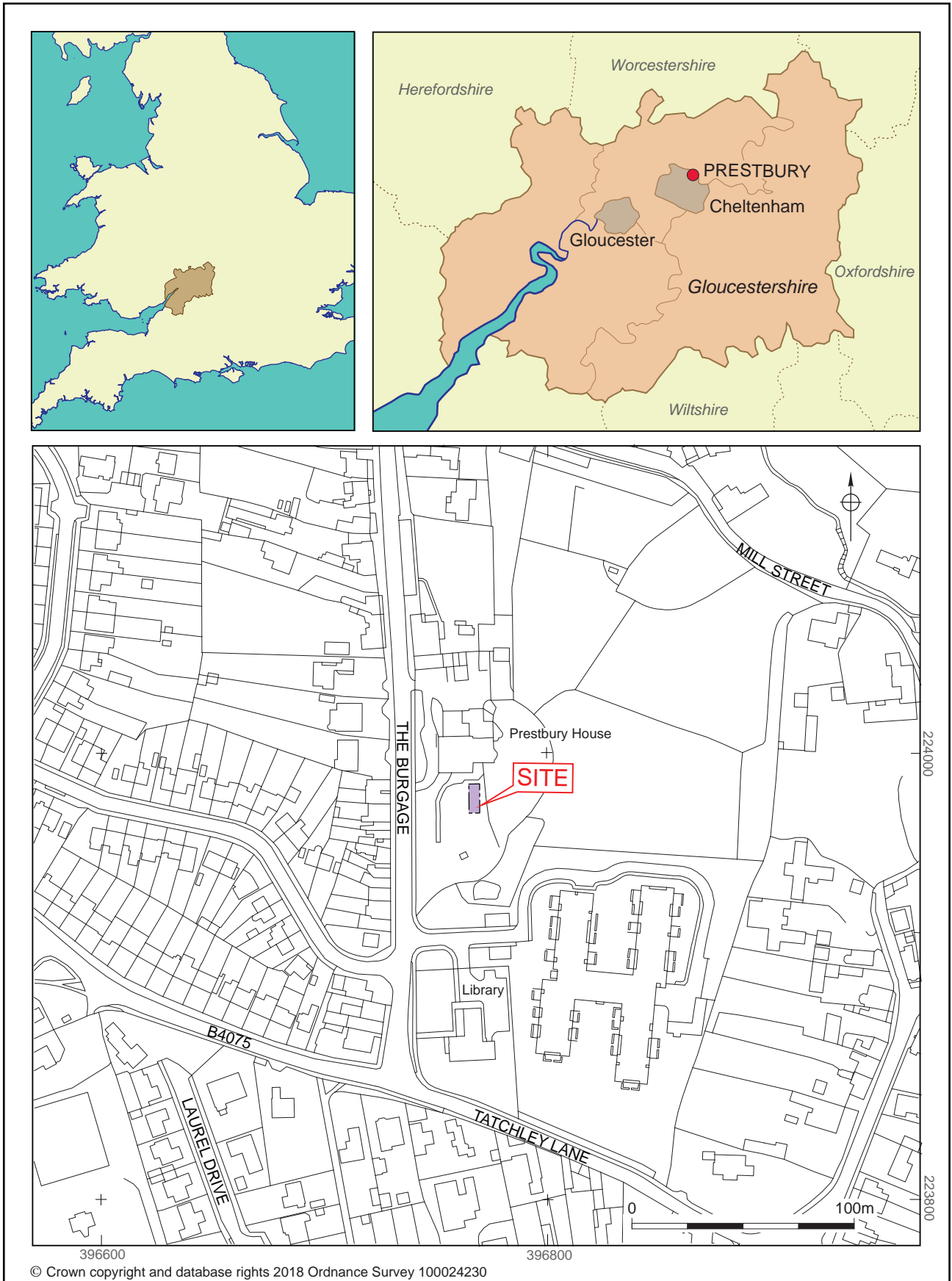
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WA 2018a *Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological watching brief at Prestbury House, The Burgage, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire*, Worcestershire Archaeology, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished document dated 29<sup>th</sup> May 2018, **P5360**

WA 2018b *Proposal for an archaeological watching brief at Prestbury House, The Burgage, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire*, Worcestershire Archaeology, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished document dated 29<sup>th</sup> May 2018 **P5360**

WCC 2014 *Requirements for an Archaeological Watching Brief as a Condition of Planning Consent*, Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished document, Version 1, dated September 2014

**Figures**



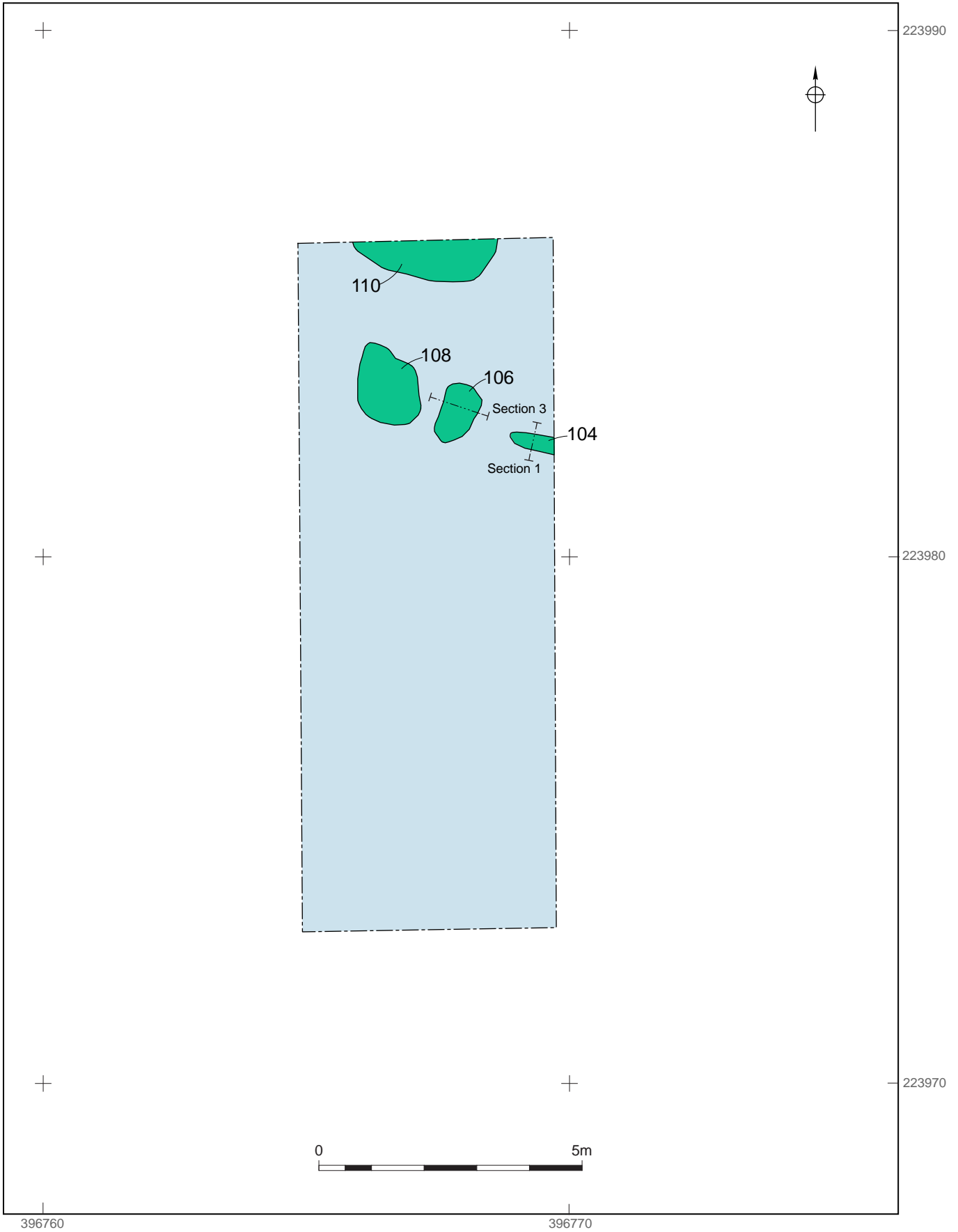
Location of the site

Figure 1



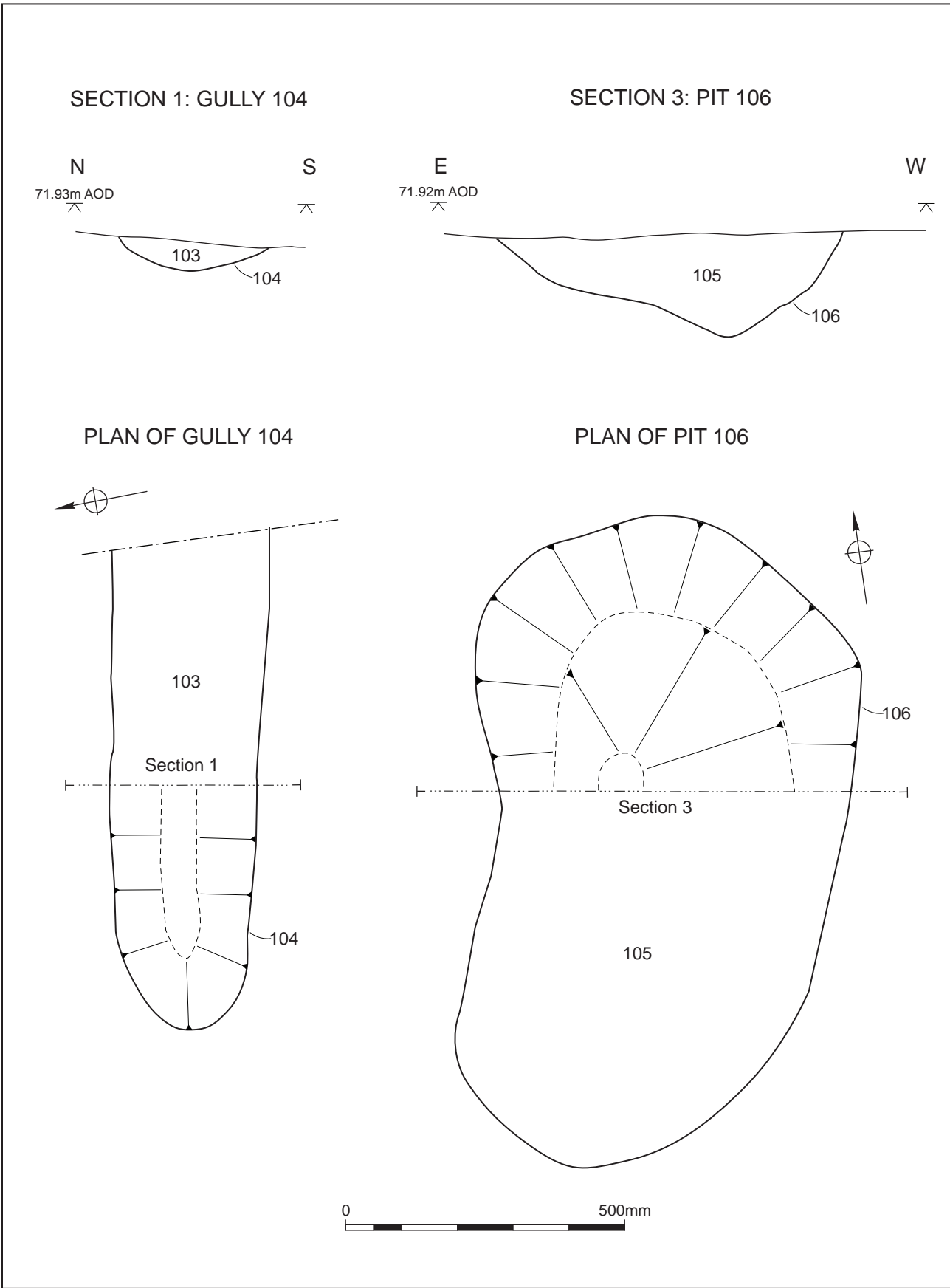
Trench location plan (based upon FLAC Dwg no. 37-1008.01)

Figure 2



Plan of trench

Figure 3



Gully 104 and pit 106: plans and sections

Figure 4



## Plates



*Plate 1: The marked out area of the groundworks, looking north-east, no scale*



*Plate 2: The northern end of the area, looking south, 2x 1m scales*

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*Plate 3: Gully 104, looking east, 0.2m scale*



*Plate 4: Pit 106, looking south-west, 0.4m scale*

## Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

### Main deposit descriptions

#### Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 13.1m Width: 4.8m Depth: 0.72m

Orientation: N-S

Context	Context type	Feature type	Description	Interpretation	Depth
100	Layer	Topsoil	Soft and loose, mid greyish brown silty sand with occasional subangular cobbles.	Topsoil	0.3m
101	Layer	Subsoil	Soft and loose, mid orangey brown silty sand with frequent subangular pebbles and cobbles, occasional animal bone, CBM and pot.	Subsoil	0.4m
102	Layer	Natural	Soft and loose, mid brownish orange sand with occasional gravels.	Natural	
103	Fill	Gully	Soft and loose, mid brownish grey silty sand.	Fill of shallow gully [104]. Occasional charcoal but no finds.	0.05m
104	Cut	Gully		Cut of gully. Possible terminus or truncation, difficult to tell due to shallow nature.	0.05m
105	Fill	Pit	Soft and loose, mid brownish grey silty sand with orange sand patches.	Fill of pit [106]. Contained large stones, charcoal and pot.	0.18m
106	Cut	Pit		Cut of pit. Appears to be post-med. Similar to others in the immediate vicinity, [108] and [110].	0.18m
107	Fill	Pit	Soft and loose, mid brownish grey silty sand with orange sand patches.	Fill of pit [108]. Same as (105) but no finds.	Unexc.
108	Cut	Pit		Cut of pit. Similar to [106] but slightly larger.	Unexc.
109	Fill	Pit	Soft and loose, mid brownish grey silty sand with orange sand patches.	Fill of pit [110]. Same as (105), and contained pot.	Unexc
110	Cut	Pit		Cut of pit. Similar to [106], but not completely visible. At edge of trench and continues under baulk.	Unexc

## **Appendix 2 Technical information**

### **The archive (WA project number: P5360)**

The archive consists of:

- 1 Field progress reports AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 15 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 1 Scale drawings
- 1 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 Box of finds
- 1 Bag of hand-collected animal bone (if retained)
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

The Wilson  
Clarence Street  
Cheltenham  
GL50 3JT  
Tel: 01242 237 431

A copy of the report will be deposited with the Historic Environment Record (HER) and/or the National Monuments Record (NMR) as appropriate.

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## Summary of data for OASIS

**WCM 101973 (event HER number)**

**P5360**

Methods of retrieval	Yes/No
Hand retrieval	Yes
Bulk sample	
Spot sample	
Auger	
Monolith	
Observed	

Type	Preservation	Date	Specialist report? Y/N	Key assemblage? Y/N
Bone – large mammal	Not decayed	Late medieval to early post-medieval	Yes	No

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