

An Archaeological Evaluation at Land east of the A49, Holmer, Herefordshire




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Archaeological Evaluation at land east of the A49, Holmer, Herefordshire

Peter Lovett

With contributions by Laura Griffin and Elizabeth Pearson

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at land east of the A49, Holmer, Herefordshire (NGR SO 350629 242441). It was undertaken on behalf of CgMs Consulting Ltd, whose clients Aiden and Laura West, intend to construct a residential development for which a planning application has been submitted.

Seven trenches were excavated across the site, revealing two undated ditches of uncertain function, along with evidence of colluvial movement and post-medieval landscaping of the hillside. No artefactual or ecofactual evidence earlier than the post-medieval period was recovered from the site. No evidence to contradict the long agricultural function of the site was forthcoming.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at land east of the A49, Holmer, Herefordshire (NGR SO 350629 242441). It was undertaken on behalf of CgMs Consulting Ltd, whose clients Aiden and Laura West, intend to construct a residential development for which a planning application has been submitted Herefordshire County Council (reference P141487/O). Permission was granted subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works.

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

The project programme was agreed following discussions with Julian Cotton (Archaeological Advisor at Herefordshire Council) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (CgMs 2017).

The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance: Archaeological field evaluation* (ClfA 2014a); *Standards for archaeological projects in Herefordshire: issue 1* (Herefordshire Archaeology 2004).

2 Aims

The specific aims of this project are, where possible:

- To establish the presence/absence, extent and character of any archaeological features on the site and to consider the archaeological interest of these in the context of the regional archaeological framework (West Midlands Archaeological Research Framework)
- To examine any available evidence for economic activity and environmental conditions
- To generate an archive which will allow future research of the evidence to be undertaken if appropriate
- To disseminate the results of the work in a format and manner proportionate to the significance of the findings

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was led by Peter Lovett (BSc (hons.) ACIfA) who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2012 and has been practicing archaeology since 2004, assisted by Beth Williams (BA (hons); MA) and Gwyneth Thomas (BA (hons)). The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers (MSc; MCIfA). Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt (BSc (hons.); PG Cert; MCIfA). Elizabeth Pearson (MSc; ACIfA) contributed the environmental report. Laura Griffin (BA (hons.); PG Cert; ACIfA) contributed the finds report.

3.2 Documentary research

An archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) was undertaken by AC Archaeology (AC 2014).

3.3 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by CgMs Consulting Ltd (CgMs 2017).

Fieldwork was undertaken between 16 and 18 July 2018. The Worcestershire Archaeology project number is P4885.

Seven trenches, amounting to just over 336m² in area, were excavated over the site area of 18.2ha, representing a sample of 1.8%. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2. The trenches were located in a rough array to get a broad spread of coverage.

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.

3.4 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 C. Jane Evans

The finds work reported here conforms with the following guidance: for finds work by ClfA (a, 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. All information was recorded on Microsoft Access database. No artefacts from environmental samples were examined.

The pottery and ceramic building material was examined by eye and referenced as appropriate to the fabric reference series maintained by Worcestershire Archaeology (www.worcestershireceramics.org).

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

The environmental project conforms to relevant sections of the *Standard and guidance: Archaeological field evaluation* (ClfA 2014), *Environmental Archaeology: a guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation* (English Heritage 2011), and *Environmental archaeology and archaeological evaluations* (AEA 1995).

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.

3.6.2 Processing and analysis

Animal bone was quantified according to fragment count and weight (g) by context. Key fragments were identified with the aid of modern bone reference collections housed at the Historic Environment and Archaeology Service and identification guides (Schmid 1972 and Hillson 1992).

3.6.3 Discard policy

As the quantity of animal bone was small and not suitable for analysis, this material will be discarded after a period of three months following submission of this report unless there is a specific request to retain it.

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 is bordered to the north by agricultural land, to the east and south by residential properties, and to the west by the A49, with Church of St Bartholomew on the far side of the road. The study site consists of two parcels of land, sitting on a small ridge on the eastern side. This lies at c.78.5m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum), before dropping off to the west to around 74m AOD.

The geology comprises Raglan Mudstone Formation – Siltstone and Mudstone, Interbedded (BGS 2018). No superficial deposits are recorded.

The desk-based assessment (AC 2014) investigated a study area of 1km around the site. The following is a brief summary of its findings.

There are two spot finds of prehistoric date within the wider area of the site, along with two undated but potentially prehistoric cropmarks. Similarly there are two spot finds of Roman date within the study area, as well as a Roman road. This road is still in use, as the A4013, though below-ground evidence survives.

References to villages in the Domesday Book are the only evidence for Saxon settlement referenced by the DBA. However, recent excavations to the west have discovered early medieval loom weights in a pit, dating to the 8th-10th century, as well as 10th-11th century field systems (Arnold *et al* 2018, 9).

The Grade I listed Church of St Bartholomew is directly opposite the site, on the western side of the A49. Deserted medieval settlements are recorded to the south-west of the church and to the east of the site. The earliest cartographic evidence, from the mid-19th century, showed the land in use as an orchard. It has remained as undeveloped agricultural land ever since.

4.2 Current land-use

The land is laid to pasture, and supports two horses.

5 Results

5.1 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Fig 2-4, and Plates 1-8. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

The natural geology was reached in all seven trenches. It consisted of a red marl, with interbedded sandstone in all of Trench 3 and the western half of Trench 5 (Plates 2 and 8). It was observed at between 0.4m and 1.3m below the current ground surface. This variation was due to the sloping landscape, and the colluvial processes that were revealed to have occurred. The shallowest soil depths were observed in Trench 3 at the top of the slope on the eastern side of the site, whilst the deepest were encountered in Trench 2. Here it seemed like there had previously been a cleft in the topography, which had slowly been levelled out by colluvial flow (Plate 4). This colluvium could be separated into two distinct phases in Trench 2, with the upper material being a compact mid reddish brown silty clay, 0.3m thick. The lower material was a yellowish brown silty clay, up to 0.4m thick. The upper colluvium was also observed in Trenches 4 and 5.

Three possible linear features were tested by excavation, and all three were determined to be of natural origin, either undulations in the natural ground that were filled by subsoil, or glacial scarring. These were [303], [403], and [505] (Plate 7).

5.1.2 Phase 2: Post-medieval deposits

A dump of stone rubble, CBM fragments, pottery and animal bone within a silty clay matrix was identified between the subsoil and upper colluvial layer in Trench 2 (Plate 3). This material (203) was probably deposited in order to further level the land and remove the cleft that had already been partially infilled by hill wash.

5.1.3 Phase 3: Undated deposits

Two linear features of uncertain date were excavated in Trench 2 (Fig 3-4). Ditch [206] was steep sided, 0.5m deep and 0.68m wide (Plate 5). Ditch [207] ran roughly at a right angle to [206], and had a more shallow profile (Plate 6). It was 1.1m wide and 0.2m deep. Both features were sealed beneath the upper colluvium.

5.1.4 Phase 3: Modern deposits

All the trenches contained a subsoil and a topsoil. The subsoil was between 0.24m and 0.35m thick, and the topsoil was between 0.18m and 0.35m thick. Trench 7 was foreshortened by 2m due to the discovery of a soakaway at the eastern end. A number of stone rubble land drains were observed across the site.

5.2 Artefact analysis, by C. Jane Evans

The artefacts are summarised in Table 1.

The only finds, all post-medieval or later, comprised a small assemblage of pottery, tile and ironwork found in layer of rubble (203) associated with post-medieval landscaping.

period	material class	material subtype	object specific type	count	weight(g)
post-medieval	ceramic	earthenware	pot	3	31
post-medieval/modern	ceramic	earthenware	tile	1	41
post-medieval/modern	ceramic	earthenware	wig curler	1	7
post-medieval/modern	metal	iron	horseshoe	1	88

post-medieval	metal	iron	nail	1	4
undated	bone	animal bone	fragment	16	427

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage from layer 203 by period

Summary artefactual evidence by period

The finds were all recovered from a layer of rubble used in landscaping, and potentially therefore brought onto the site from elsewhere. They comprised: three sherds from black-glazed bowls in post-medieval red ware (fabric 78), dating broadly to c 1600 to 1800; a fragment of post-medieval or later tile; an iron horse shoe and nail; and half of a ceramic wig curler. The wig curler, in a white pipe-clay fabric, had a narrow centre flaring out towards a bulbous terminal with a flattened end. There was no makers mark. Pipe-clay wig curlers were used from the 17th-19th centuries and are particularly associated with the Georgian period.

5.3 Environmental analysis, by Elizabeth Pearson

The environmental evidence recovered is summarised in Table 1.

Animal bone was hand-collected from a single post-medieval layer of rubble set in colluvium (203). A total of 16 fragments (427g) was recovered which included a single proximal cattle tibia, showing signs of butchery, and horse/cattle/red deer sized limb fragments. Little interpretation could be made of these remains.

context	material class	material subtype	count	weight(g)	Feature type	Period	Comments
203	bone	animal bone	16	427	Layer	Post Medieval	Incl. single cattle proximal tibia fragment & other cattle/horse/red deer sized limb fragments

Env Table 1: Hand-collected animal bone

Significance

Environmental evidence was of low significance as only a small quantity of animal bone was hand-collected from the site.

6 Synthesis

The site has been in agricultural use since at least the mid nineteenth century, and none of the archaeological findings from this evaluation suggest that it has been used for any other purpose before that. Two undated ditches of uncertain function were excavated in the middle of the site, but whilst they were only c. 3m apart and perpendicular, they had very different profiles, and so cannot be confidently suggested to be contemporary.

There was very little in the way of artefactual evidence identified on the site. Few sherds of pottery were observed in the top and sub soils, being only 19th and 20th century fragments that were not retained. The only dateable deposit was the dumped landscaping material (203), which contained artefacts dating broadly from 17th-19th century, and seemed to be laid to level out the hillside.

The lack of archaeological remains does not allow for any interrogation of the research framework for the area.

7 Significance

The archaeological remains consist of two undated ditches, both with sterile fills, buried beneath a colluvial layer. No artefactual or ecofactual evidence was present. As such, little importance can be given to the archaeological interest of the site. The extent of the archaeology is unknown, other than to say that these features do not extend into the evaluation trenches to the north, south, or east, though they are 40m, 30m, and 80m away respectively. The features are buried beneath c.0.8m of overburden.

8 The impact of the development

8.1 Impacts during construction

During the construction phase there will be particular impacts, due to the excavation of footing and service trenches, as well as any access roads and landscaping that may be required.

8.2 Impacts on sustainability

The historic environment is a non-renewable resource and therefore cannot be directly replaced. However mitigation through recording and investigation also produces an important research dividend that can be used for the better understanding of the area's history and contribute to local and regional research agenda.

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, Laura West, the land owner, Neil Wright of CgMs Consulting Ltd, and Julian Cotton, Archaeological Advisor at Herefordshire Council.

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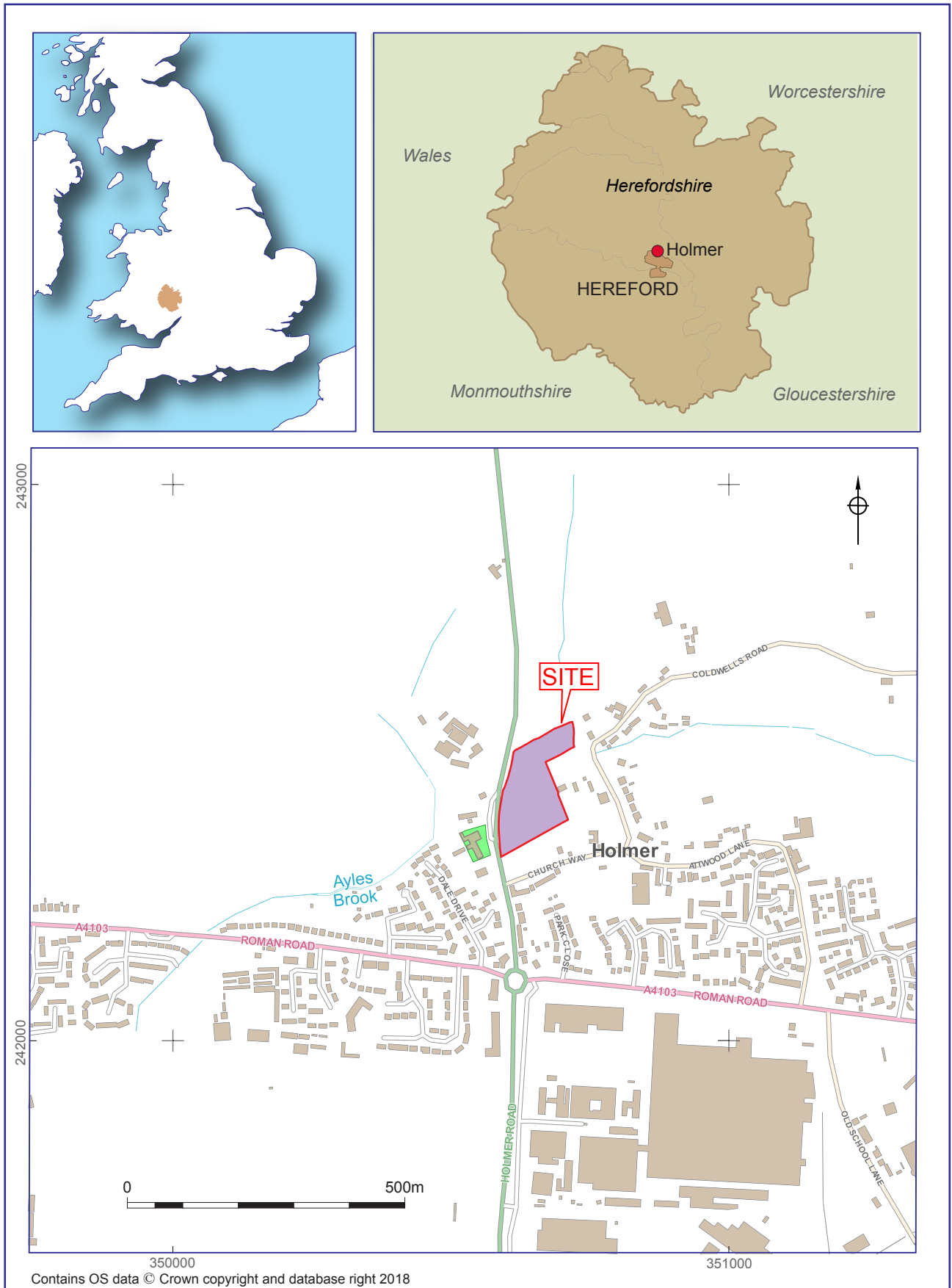
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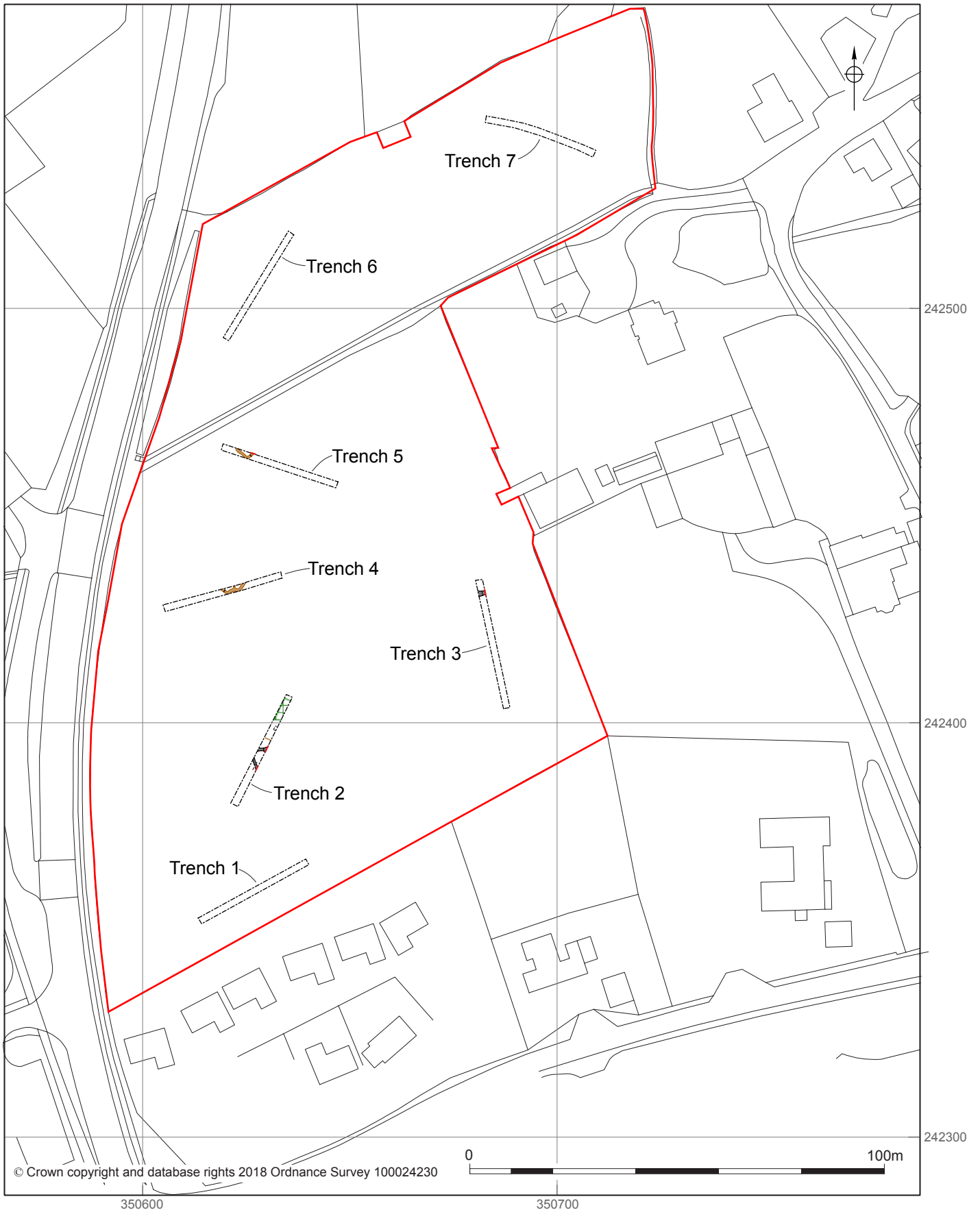
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Figures



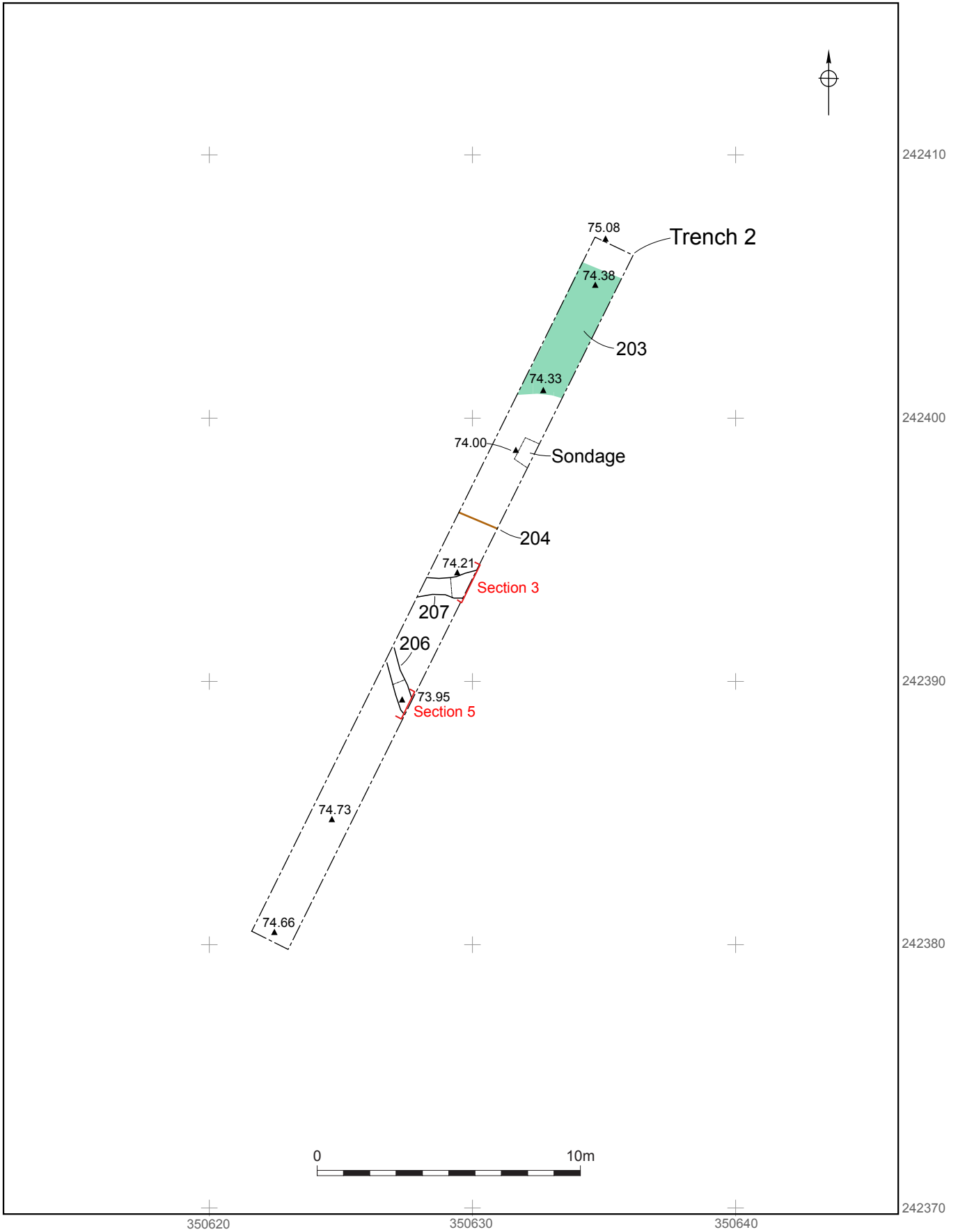
Location of the site

Figure 1



Trench location plan

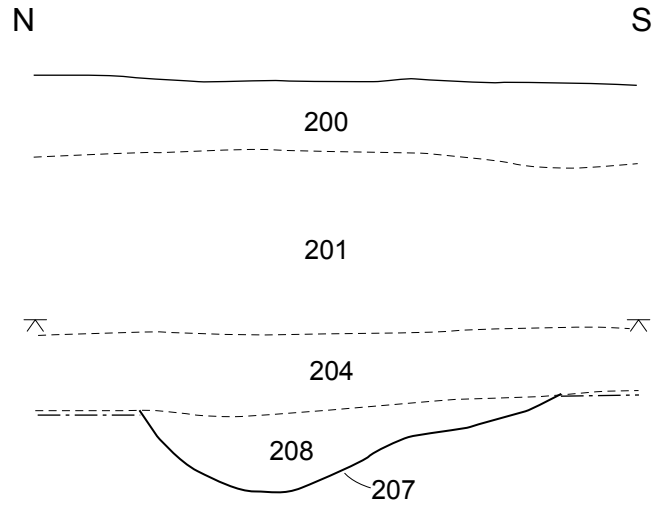
Figure 2



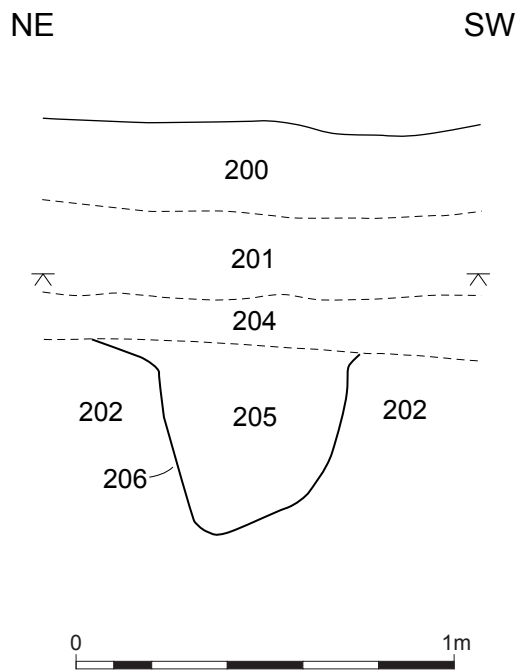
Plan of Trench 2

Figure 3

SECTION 3: DITCH 207



SECTION 5: DITCH 206



Sections

Figure 4

Plates



Plate 1 View of the site, looking south-west

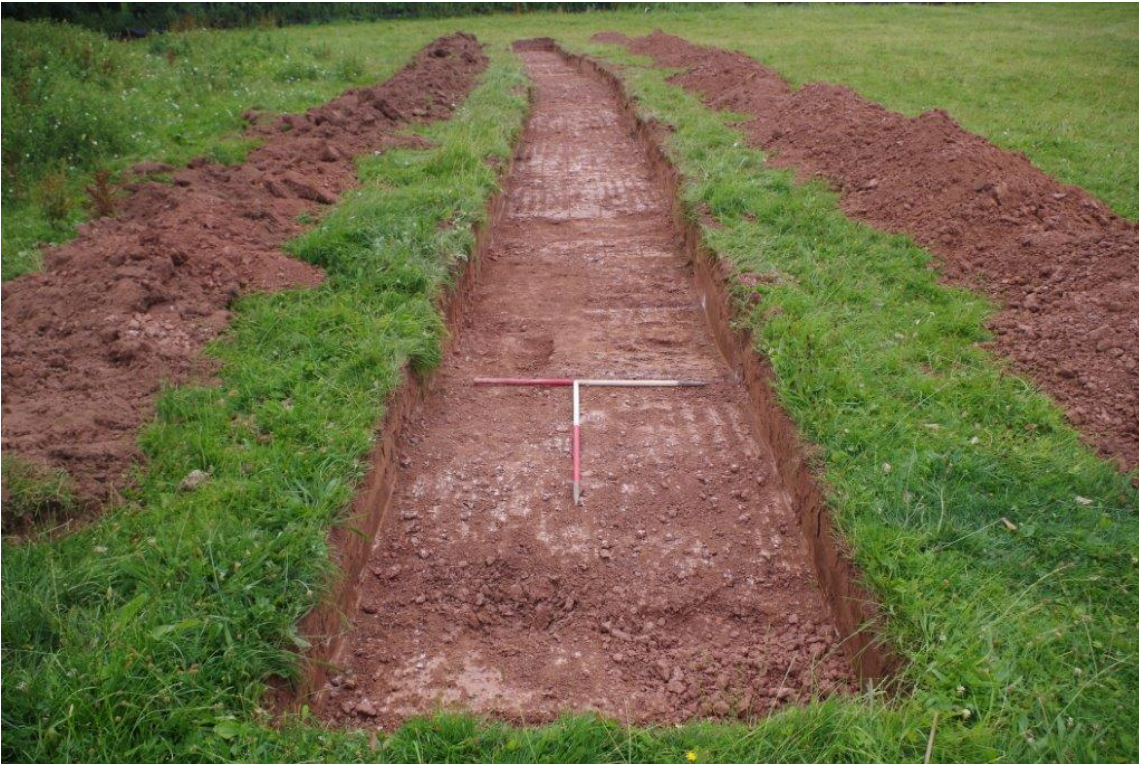


Plate 2 Trench 3, looking south (1m scales)



Plate 3 Post-medieval spread (203) (1m scale)



Plate 4 Sondage through colluvium in Trench 2 (1m scales)



Plate 5 Undated ditch [206], looking east (1m scale)



Plate 6 Undated ditch [207], looking east (1m scale)



Plate 7 Geological scarring [505], looking north (1m scale)



Plate 8 Trench 5, looking west (1m scales)

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Main deposit descriptions

Trench 1

Length: 30m Width: 30m Orientation: NE-SW

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Deposit description
100	Topsoil	Layer	Topsoil	0 - 0.2m	Loose reddish brown silty clay
101	Subsoil	Layer	Subsoil	0.2 - 0.25m	Moderately Compact reddish brown silty clay
102	Natural	Layer	Natural		Compact reddish brown silty clay

Trench 2

Length: 30m Width: 30m Orientation: NE-SW

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Deposit description
200	Topsoil	Layer	Topsoil	0 - 0.35m	Loose reddish brown silty clay
201	Subsoil	Layer	Subsoil	0.35 - 0.73m	Moderately Compact reddish brown silty clay
202	Natural	Layer	Natural	1.3	Compact reddish brown silty clay
203	Layer	Layer	A layer of rubble set into the colluvial deposit layer (204). This is most likely to help stabilise the landscape. Finds of pot, bone and iron.	0.78 - ?	Moderately Compact reddish brown silty clay
204	Layer	Layer	Upper colluvial layer	0.6 - 0.9m	Moderately Compact reddish brown silty clay
205	Ditch	Fill	Fill of linear ditch running NE-SW. Undated. Some sparse charcoal fragments found within the deposit but otherwise sterile. Likely low energy deposition via natural processes, probably derived from surrounding upcast and soils.	0.51m	Soft greyish orange silty clay
206	Ditch	Cut	Linear ditch running NW-SE. Undated. Nearby feature (203) likely of medieval to post-med in date. Fill (205) of ditch appears to be low energy deposition via natural processes, so the ditch was likely dug to obtain the clay contents or possibly for drainage or field	0.51m	

207	Ditch	Cut	demarcation. A ditch running NW - SE. Filled by (208)		
208	Ditch	Fill	Fill of NW-SE Ditch		Moderately Compact greyish orange silty clay
209	Layer	Layer	Lower colluvial layer	0.9 - 0.13m	Moderately Compact yellowish brown silty clay

Trench 3

Length: 30m Width: 30m Orientation: N-S

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Deposit description
300	Topsoil	Layer	Topsoil	0 - 0.2m	Loose reddish brown silty clay
301	Subsoil	Layer	Subsoil	0.2 - 0.45m	Moderately Compact reddish brown silty clay
302	Natural	Layer	Natural	0.45 - ?	Compact reddish brown silty clay
303	Gully	Cut	Cut of a possible feature, however it is more likely to represent variation in the natural or a natural gully.		
304	Gully	Fill	Fill of [303].	0.45 - 0.53m	Moderately Compact greyish red silty clay

Trench 4

Length: 30m Width: 30m Orientation: E-W

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Deposit description
400	Layer	Layer	Topsoil	0 - 0.2m	Loose reddish brown silty clay
401	Layer	Layer	Subsoil	0.2 - 0.7m	Moderately Compact reddish brown silty clay
402	Layer	Layer	Natural	0.7 - ?m	Compact reddish brown silty clay
403	Gully	Cut	Cut of an irregular linear feature (gully) with a steep western edge and an undercutting eastern edge. Believed to be a natural scar/gully.		
404	Gully	Fill	Fill of natural gully [303]. The fill contained patches of yellowish green silt.	0.7m	Moderately Compact greyish orange silty clay
405	Layer	Layer	Colluvium	0.2m	Compact reddish brown silty clay

Trench 5

Length: 30m Width: 30m Orientation: NW-SE

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Deposit description
500	Topsoil	Layer	Topsoil	0 - 0.22m	Loose reddish brown silty clay
501	Subsoil	Layer	Subsoil	0.22- 0.35m	Moderately Compact reddish brown silty clay
502	Natural	Layer	Natural	0.35 - 0.82m	Compact reddish brown silty clay
503	Layer	Layer	Colluvium layer.		Firm reddish brown silty
504	Gully	Fill	Fill of natural gouge in the geology [505]	0.68m	Moderately Compact reddish brown silty clay
505	Gully	Cut	Natural gouge in the geology, tapered under cutting cut. Probably glacial.		

Trench 6

Length: 30m Width: 30m Orientation: NE-SW

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Deposit description
600	Layer	Layer	Topsoil	0 - 0.23m	Loose reddish brown silty clay
601	Subsoil	Layer	Subsoil	0.23 - 0.28m	Moderately Compact reddish brown silty clay
602	Natural	Layer	Natural	0.28 - 0.51m	Compact reddish brown silty clay

Trench 7

Length: 30m Width: 30m Orientation: NW-SE

Context summary:

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Deposit description
700	Topsoil	Layer	Topsoil	0 - 0.2m	Loose reddish brown silty clay
701	Subsoil	Layer	Subsoil	0.2 - 0.27m	Moderately Compact reddish brown silty clay
702	Natural	Layer	Natural	0.27 - 0.47m	Compact reddish brown silty clay

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive

The archive consists of:

- 4 Context records AS1
- 1 Field progress reports AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 43 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 4 Scale drawings
- 7 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:

Hereford City Museum and Art Gallery
Broad Street
Hereford
HR4 9RU

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