

Archaeological Watching Brief at Church Hill Brook Ravensbank Drive, Redditch Worcestershire

Worcestershire Archaeology
for Wyre Forest District Council

March 2019



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CHURCH HILL BROOK RAVENSBANK DRIVE REDDITCH WORCESTERSHIRE

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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SITE INFORMATION

Site name:	Church Hill Brook, Ravensbank Drive, Redditch
Site code:	WSM71486
Local planning authority:	Wyre Forest District Council
Planning reference:	18/00648/FUL
Central NGR:	SP 07307 69203
Commissioning client:	Wyre Forest District Council
Client project reference:	-
WA project number:	P5434
WA report number:	2683
HER reference:	WSM71486
Oasis reference:	fieldsec1-346554
Museum accession number:	-

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Version	Date	Author	Details	Approved by
1	29/03/2019	Jamie Wilkins	Draft for comment	Robin Jackson

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An archaeological watching brief at Church Hill Brook, Ravensbank Drive, Redditch, Worcestershire

By Jamie Wilkins

Illustrations by Laura Templeton

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology in March 2019 at Church Hill Brook, south of Ravensbank Drive, Redditch, Worcestershire (NGR SP 07307 69203). It was commissioned by Wyre Forest District Council on behalf of North Worcestershire Water Management, in advance of the creation of a balancing area which will store water and create a wetland environment on land which is currently unused.

The site is located within the confines of a former fish pond (WSM00062) thought to be medieval in origin. The aims of the archaeological watching brief were to identify the presence of any organic-rich pond deposits and subsequently implement a programme of environmental sampling.

In the event, no organic-rich pond deposits were encountered within the confines of the groundworks, and no other significant archaeological features or deposits were present. A clay deposit present below the topsoil may represent a gleyed subsoil or possibly the remnants of a pond fill, but did not exhibit any signs of organic preservation.

The results of this project indicate that the pond may have been situated within a pre-existing natural depression and followed the contours of the area.

Report

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) in March 2019 at Church Hill Brook, south of Ravensbank Drive, Redditch, Worcestershire (NGR SP 07307 69203). It was commissioned on behalf of North Worcestershire Water Management by Joseph Baker (Water Management Officer) of Wyre Forest District Council (the Client), in advance of the creation of a balancing area which will store water and create a wetland environment on land which is currently unused. Planning permission has been granted subject to a programme of archaeological works (planning reference 18/00648/FUL).

The archaeological advisor to the local planning authority considered that the development had the potential to impact upon specific heritage assets, in this instance an historic pond in which the site sits.

No brief was provided but email discussion with the Curator established a working methodology. A WSI was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2018) and approved by the Curator. The watching brief also conforms to the industry guidelines and standards set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in the *Standard and guidance: for an archaeological watching brief* (CIfA 2014) and in the *Standards and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire* (WCC 2010).

1.2 Site location, topography and geology

The site is located along the Church Hill Brook, immediately south of Ravensbank Drive, Redditch. The site is located within the slight depression of a former pond (WSM00062; Fig 1) thought to have been associated with the nearby Beoley Manor. The pond is broadly tear-drop shaped and covers an area of roughly 16,900m².

Currently this area of land is unused, and is now a young forest mixed with scrubland. The Church Hill Brook runs broadly north-south through the site. It is bounded to the north by Ravensbank Drive, and the Church Hill housing estate to the west and south.

The underlying geology comprises bedrock of Mercia Mudstone formation overlain by superficial deposits of alluvial fan deposits comprising sand and gravels (BGS 2019).

2 Archaeological and historical background

A rapid survey of the area was undertaken in 2007 and provides the archaeological background to the site (WSM37557; Hancox & Mindykowski 2007). The findings presented in the survey are summarised here.

The pond (WSM00062) in which the site sits is thought to be medieval in origin and was likely constructed whilst Pershore Abbey were the overlords of Beoley (AD 972-1439). The documentary evidence indicates that the fish ponds were instated by at least 1316 and had gone out of use by 1650.

The earliest cartographic evidence for the pond is the 1843-4 Tithe which shows the area of the pond as field called *Upper Skilts Moor*. This may indicate that the pond had been backfilled or silted up by this date. Additionally, there is some evidence that earlier medieval fishponds tended to follow natural contours which in this instance may comprise a natural waterlogged depression (Chambers 1988).

3 Project aims

The aims of the Project were to:

- Undertake a Watching Brief during groundworks undertaken to establish a proposed new channel, approximately 1.00m deep and located approximately as shown on the attached figure.
- Subsequent to the fieldwork, prepare a report and deposit the project archive.

The objectives of the Project were to:

- Determine the presence or absence of archaeological deposits.
- Identify their location, nature, date and preservation.
- Take appropriate samples of any organic remains present.
- Assess their significance.
- Analyse and report on any significant deposits recovered.

Available information indicated that significant deposits could be defined as organic remains with a high potential for palaeoenvironmental analysis. These may have been of medieval or potentially earlier date (including Mesolithic material).

4 Project methodology

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2018). Fieldwork was undertaken on 20 March 2019.

A stream diversion represented the deepest excavations during the project, and was identified as the groundworks most likely to expose or disturb organic pond deposits. The stream diversion trench measured 0.75m wide and between 0.75m and 1.00m deep.

The trench was monitored in five locations across the meander of the diversion in order to provide a sample of the stratigraphic sequence across the site. The area of the meander had previously been identified by the Curator as the having the greatest potential for the presence of organic pond deposits. A control structure and a stretch of the southern stream diversion had previously been completed.

The location of the trench is indicated in Figure 2.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed under constant archaeological supervision using a 360° tracked excavator, employing a toothless bucket. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand.

Observation of the trench was undertaken during and after machine excavation. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits, though any less clear may have not been identified.

Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012) and trench and feature locations were surveyed using a differential GPS with an accuracy limit set at <0.04m.

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was undertaken through structural evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

The project archive is currently held at the offices of Worcestershire Archaeology. Subject to the agreement of the landowner it is anticipated that it will be deposited at Worcestershire County Museum.

5 Archaeological results

5.1 Trench description

The stratigraphic sequence was simple and consistent across the site. This comprised a thin topsoil (100), overlaying a gleyed clay deposit (101), which overlay the natural geology (102) (Plates 1-2). No archaeological features or deposits were observed. Specifically, no organic-rich pond deposits were encountered.

The gleyed clay deposit (102) comprised a yellow and blue mottled silty-clay which had a maximum thickness of 0.58m, though this was reduced to 0.38m in the north-east of the site. The nature of this deposit could not be discerned within the confines of the groundworks; however a gleyed subsoil or former pond deposit seems likely. The deposit did not contain any organics and in places was just 0.12m below ground surface (*bgs*).

5.2 Summary trench description table

Context	Brief description	Max depth (m)	Depth from ground surface (m)	Comments
100	Topsoil	0.18	0.00	Thin turf / topsoil layer. Dark brownish-black, soft, clay-loam.
101	Gleyed clay deposit	0.58	0.12m-0.18	Compacted, light blueish-yellow, silty-clay containing frequent rooting and occasional sub-rounded pebbles and cobbles. A deposit of gleyed clay – possibly a former subsoil or pond deposit.
102	Natural	Unex	0.60m-0.72	Natural geology comprising moderately compacted sub-rounded cobbles, pebbles and gravels in a mid blueish-red silty-clay matrix.

Table 1: Summary context descriptions

6 Artefactual evidence

Recovery of artefacts was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event, no artefacts were identified which were considered to be suitable for analysis.

7 Environmental evidence

Environmental sampling was approached using standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event, no deposits were excavated which were considered to be suitable for environmental analysis.

8 Conclusions

No significant archaeological features or deposits were observed within the confines of the groundworks. More specifically, no organic-rich pond deposits worthy of detailed environmental sampling and analysis were present.

The gleyed clay (102) below the topsoil is of some potential interest but it could not be determined whether this deposit represents a gleyed subsoil or a pond deposit. The sterile nature of the deposit may indicate the former. No organic-rich peat pond fills were encountered.

The lack of any significant pond deposits and the shallow depth at which the natural geology was encountered (0.60m *bgs* in some places) may indicate that the medieval pond (WSM00062) followed the contours of the area and was located within a pre-existing natural depression.

As mentioned previously, Chambers (1988) suggests that ponds with these traits are often early medieval in origin, and this remains consistent with the information available which indicates that the pond had been instated by at least AD 1316.

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. Conditions were suitable in all of the trenches/areas to identify the presence or absence of archaeological features. It is considered that the nature, density and distribution of archaeological features provides an accurate characterisation of the development site as a whole.

9 Project personnel

The fieldwork was led by Jamie Wilkins.

The project was managed by Robin Jackson. The report was produced and collated by Jamie Wilkins. Specialist contributions and individual sections of the report are attributed to the relevant authors throughout the text.

10 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following: Joseph Baker (Water Management Officer) of Wyre Forest District Council for commissioning the project, and Dave Jones of D and R Jones for providing access and their help during the fieldwork.

The project was monitored by Emma Hancox, Historic Environment Policy and Advisory Manager for Worcestershire County Council and Worcestershire Archaeology would also like to thank them for their advice.

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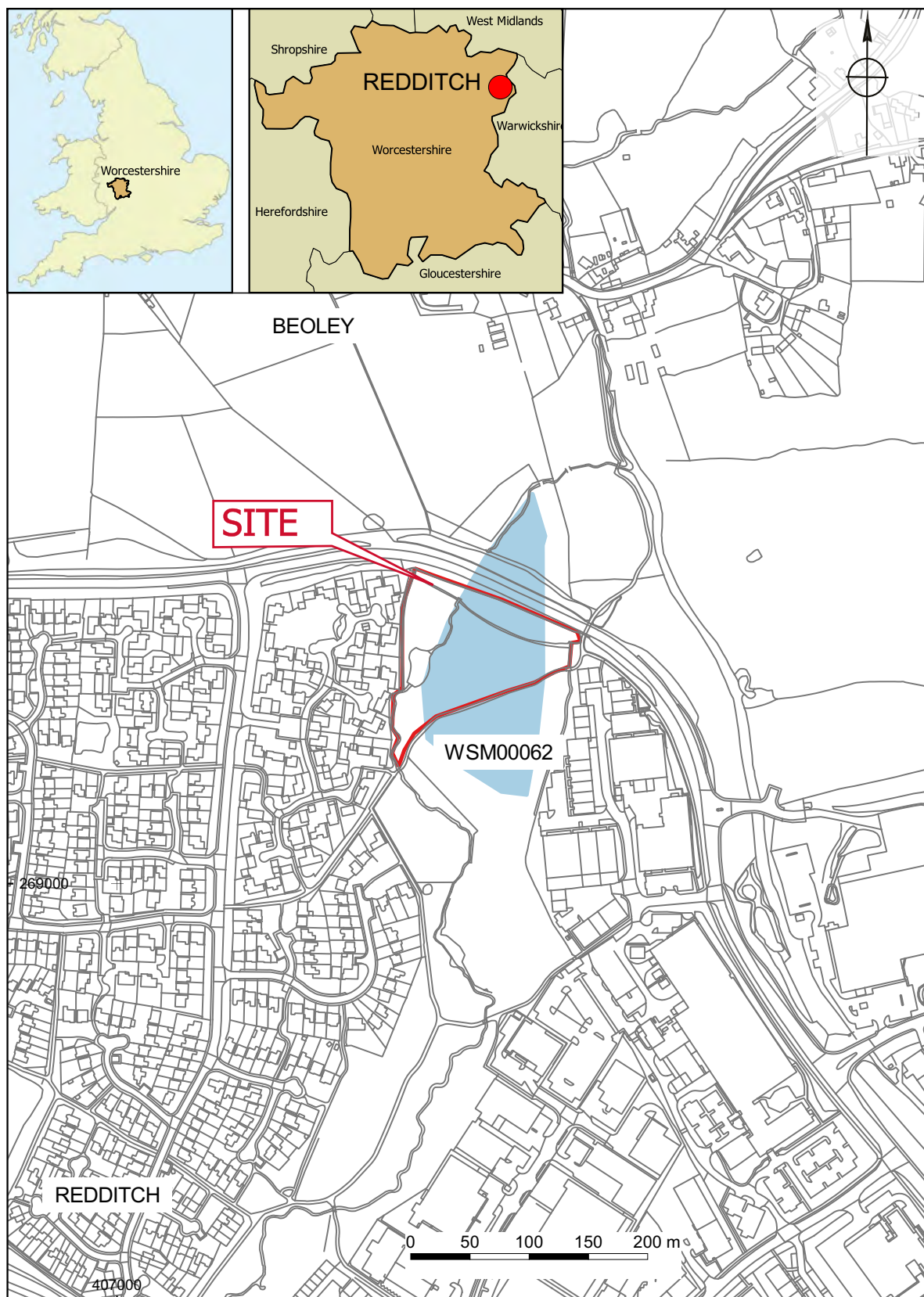
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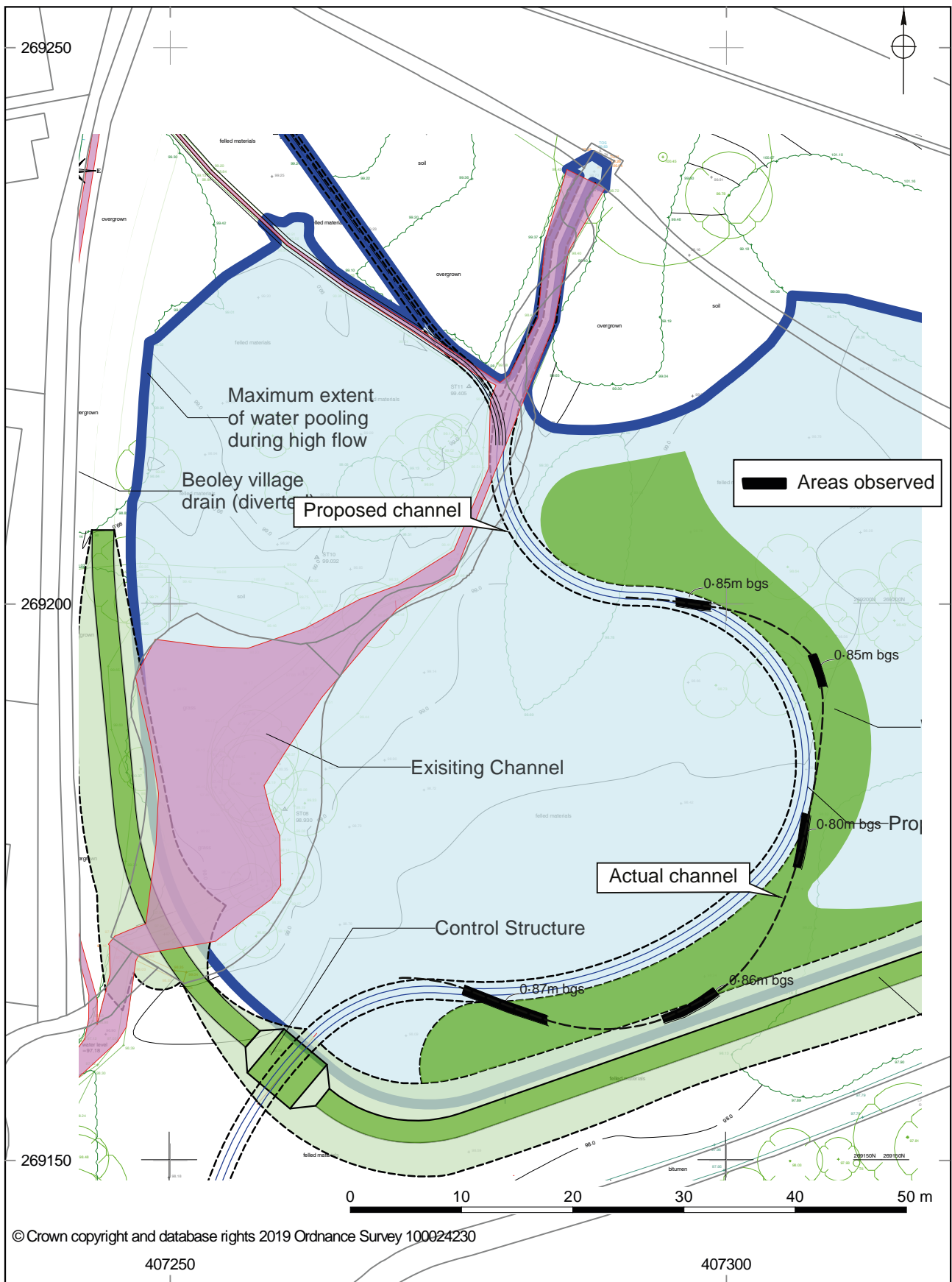
Figures



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Location of the site

Figure 1



Areas observed showing depths below ground surface

Figure 2

Plates



Plate 1: The stratigraphic sequence within the eastern meander of the trench. Topsoil (100) can be seen above gleyed clay (101), which sits above natural gravels (102), 1m scales.



Plate 2: The stratigraphic sequence observed in the northern extent of the stream diversion, scales 1m.



Plate 3: An example of the previously excavated stream diversion in the south of the site. The control structure can be seen towards the rear, 1m scale.

Appendix 1: Summary of project archive

TYPE	DETAILS*
Artefacts and Environmental	-
Paper	Context sheet, Report,
Digital	GIS, Images raster/digital photography, Survey, Text

**OASIS terminology*