

Archaeological evaluation at Woollas Farm, Woollas Hill, Eckington, Pershore, Worcestershire

Worcestershire Archaeology
for L A Righton Rural Planning Consultancy

November 2019



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WOOLLAS FARM, WOOLLAS HILL, ECKINGTON, PERSHORE, WORCESTERSHIRE

Archaeological evaluation report



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SITE INFORMATION

Site name: Woollas Farm
Site code: WSM72334
Local planning authority: Wychavon District Council
Planning reference: 19/01254/FUL
Central NGR: SO 94510 41093
Commissioning client: Lucy Righton – L A Righton Rural Planning Consultancy
WA project number: P5730
WA report number: 2761
HER reference: WSM72334
Oasis reference: fieldsec1-374374

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1	11/12/2019	Elsbeth Iliff	Draft for comment	Tom Rogers

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Archaeological evaluation at Woollas Farm, Woollas Hill, Eckington, Pershore, Worcestershire

By Elspeth Iliff

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Woollas Farm, Woollas Hill, Eckington, Pershore, Worcestershire (NGR SO 94510 41093). It was commissioned by Lucy Righton of L A Righton Rural Planning Consultancy on behalf of Mr and Mrs Steele, in advance of proposed redevelopment of the site. Planning permission has been granted subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works.

The site is located at the base of the northern slope of Bredon Hill, east of the village of Eckington. It is currently in use as a farm yard with a number of modern farm buildings. Three trenches were excavated across the site, placed to achieve an adequate sample of the site around the existing buildings. The only archaeological feature encountered was an undated stone filled land drain. The southern end of the site had been levelled in the recent past and at the northern end a large deposit of modern waste material was found, likely representing more acute levelling or a large modern waste pit.

The potential for further archaeological activity to survive at this site is deemed to be very low. It is considered that the results of this evaluation provide an accurate characterisation of the site.

Report

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) in November 2019 at Woollas Farm, Woollas Hill, Eckington, Pershore, Worcestershire (NGR SO 94510 41093). This comprised the excavation of three evaluation trenches in a working farm yard.

The project was commissioned by Lucy Righton of L A Righton Rural Planning Consultancy on behalf of Mr and Mrs Steele (the client). Planning permission for redevelopment of the site has been granted by Wychavon District Council (planning reference 19/01254/FUL). The development was considered by Aidan Smyth, Archaeology and Planning Advisor to Wychavon and Malvern Hills District Councils to have the potential to disturb archaeological deposits and this permission was granted subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works (Condition 6).

No specific brief was provided but a trenching plan was agreed and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2019) and approved by Aidan Smyth.

The evaluation conforms to the industry guidelines and standards set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in *Standard and guidance: for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2014) and the *Standards and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire* (WCC 2010)

1.2 Site location, topography and geology

The site is located at the base of the northern slope of Bredon Hill approximately 2km east of Eckington. The site is bounded by a road to the north, with agricultural land on all other sides. The River Avon lies 77m north of the site, and Bredon Tower and Kemerton Camp are 1.5km to the south east. The development area is currently occupied by a number of modern farm buildings on a concrete base. Although situated on a hillside, the site itself is relatively flat, at approximately 53.45m AOD. The underlying geology comprises Charmouth Mudstone Formation with superficial Head deposits (BGS 2019).

2 Archaeological and historical background

Prior to fieldwork commencing, a search of the Worcestershire HER was completed, covering a search area of 500m around the site. Documentary sources at Worcestershire Archives, historic mapping and aerial photographs were also consulted. A summary of the results of this research are presented below (WCC 2019).

An HER search was carried out on a 500m radius of the provided grid reference on 12/11/2019, as specified in the search request. Seven archaeological activities and 27 HER Monuments were identified within the search area.

The search area sits within a rolling lowland landscape based on Mudstone geology with superficial Head deposits and utilised for a mixed farming economy. The field pattern has largely been altered through modern subdivision and field amalgamation however there is evidence for both a piecemeal and formal enclosure across the wider area as indicated by significant earthworks of ridge and furrow. The settlement pattern is principally nucleated in the village of Eckington however some isolated farmsteads are also present.

Within the search area lies one Historic England Listed Historic Building and three other unlisted historic buildings, all of which are dwelling and farm buildings dating to the 17th-19th century. An Historic England funded project to identify Historic Farmsteads of Worcestershire also recorded one farmstead within the search area dating to the 17th century.

In addition to the built environment there are also monument records for the post-medieval park at Woollas Hall. The majority of monuments recorded however date to the medieval period and indicate a landscape of ridge and furrow and braided trackways as well as possible earthworks of the deserted medieval village of Wollashill. Earlier evidence within the search area includes a possible Romano-British farm located northwest of Woollas Hall.

No Portable Antiquity Scheme finds are recorded within the search area whilst artefacts collected during archaeological investigations have mainly been identified as Roman, Medieval or Post-medieval pottery and Roman coinage.

There has only been a small amount of archaeological investigation within the search area, principally a series of fieldwalking surveys in the 1980s, a geophysical survey and an Historic environment countryside advice visit in 2006. In the wider area there is considered to be a well preserved medieval and post-medieval landscape with high potential for survival of further remains dating from the Neolithic through to the Medieval period.

Finally, an Historic England funded project to identify the potential for Palaeolithic Archaeology in Worcestershire recorded a number of deposits within the search area with potential for archaeology dating back to 476050BC.

3 Project 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;
- Assess the likely impact of the proposed development.

4 Project methodology

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2019). Fieldwork was undertaken on the 18th November 2019.

Three trenches, amounting to 63.93m² in area, were excavated over the 5,334m² site. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2.

The trenches were positioned around the existing farm buildings in order to provide as representative a sample of the site as possible, given the limitations. Trench 1 was shortened due to the depth of modern deposits encountered and subsequent safety concerns, and Trench 2 was shortened to avoid a number of live services.

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. 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) and trench and feature locations were surveyed using a differential GPS with an accuracy limit set at <0.04m. On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was undertaken of 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 Hartlebury Museum.

5 Archaeological results

5.1 Introduction

The features recorded in the trenches are shown in Figure 2. The trench and context inventory is presented in Appendix 1.

5.2 Phasing/Trench descriptions

5.2.1 Natural deposits

Natural deposits were encountered in two of the three trenches. In Trench 2 the natural strata consisted of a limestone brash in a clay matrix at 0.54m below the ground surface. The natural strata in Trench 3 was a blueish grey silty clay, encountered at 0.35m below the ground surface. This variation reflects the deposits recorded by the BGS mapping (BGS 2019), and demonstrates the superficial Head deposits filling dips in the natural clay. No natural deposits were encountered in Trench 1 despite reaching 2.1m in depth. At this point the trench was considered unsafe to continue.

5.2.2 Phase 1: Modern deposits

The modern deposits varied somewhat between the trenches. The uppermost deposit of Trench 1 consisted of yellow clay made ground containing modern waste with a very thin layer of soil and vegetation on top. Below this was a large dump of made ground consisting of mixed redeposited blue clay natural and modern waste. This deposit was seen in the entirety of the trench and was more than 1.6m deep. The full depth of this deposit was not observed due to health and safety concerns. This deposit may represent levelling of the originally sloping ground, or it may be a large pit filled with the modern waste.

The modern deposits in Trench 2 consisted of the current yard surface of compacted hardcore with a levelling layer of redeposited blue clay beneath. This trench also contained a modern service cutting across the trench on a northeast to southwest alignment. Trench 3 contained similar deposits to Trench 2, but with a thick concrete yard surface above a layer of hardcore.

5.2.3 Undated

The only undated feature found in these trenches was a stone filled French drain [203], encountered in Trench 2. It was 0.4m wide and crossed the trench on a north to south alignment.

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 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.

8 Discussion

The only evidence of archaeological activity identified on site was an undated land drain. The lack of any subsoil on the site indicates that the area has been levelled in the past, and it is unclear to what extent the natural strata has been truncated by this. The fact that natural deposits were not encountered 2.1m below the ground surface in Trench 1 shows the level to which the landscape has been changed at the northern end of the site. 20th Century Ordnance Survey maps depict the site as open farmland until at least 1963, so it can be inferred that these changes are comfortably modern. Due to the lack of archaeological activity across the site and the depth of modern deposits at the

northern end, the potential for further archaeological features to have survived is deemed to be very low.

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 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 Andrew Mann (MCIfA), assisted by Elspeth Iliff (PCIfA).

The project was managed by Tom Rogers (MCIfA). The report was produced and collated by Elspeth Iliff. 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: Lucy Righton (L A Righton Rural Planning Consultancy) for commissioning the project and Mr and Mrs Steele (the clients) for providing access and their help and hospitality during the fieldwork. The project was monitored by Aidan Smyth (Archaeology and Planning Advisor to Wychavon and Malvern Hills District Councils), and Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank him for his advice.

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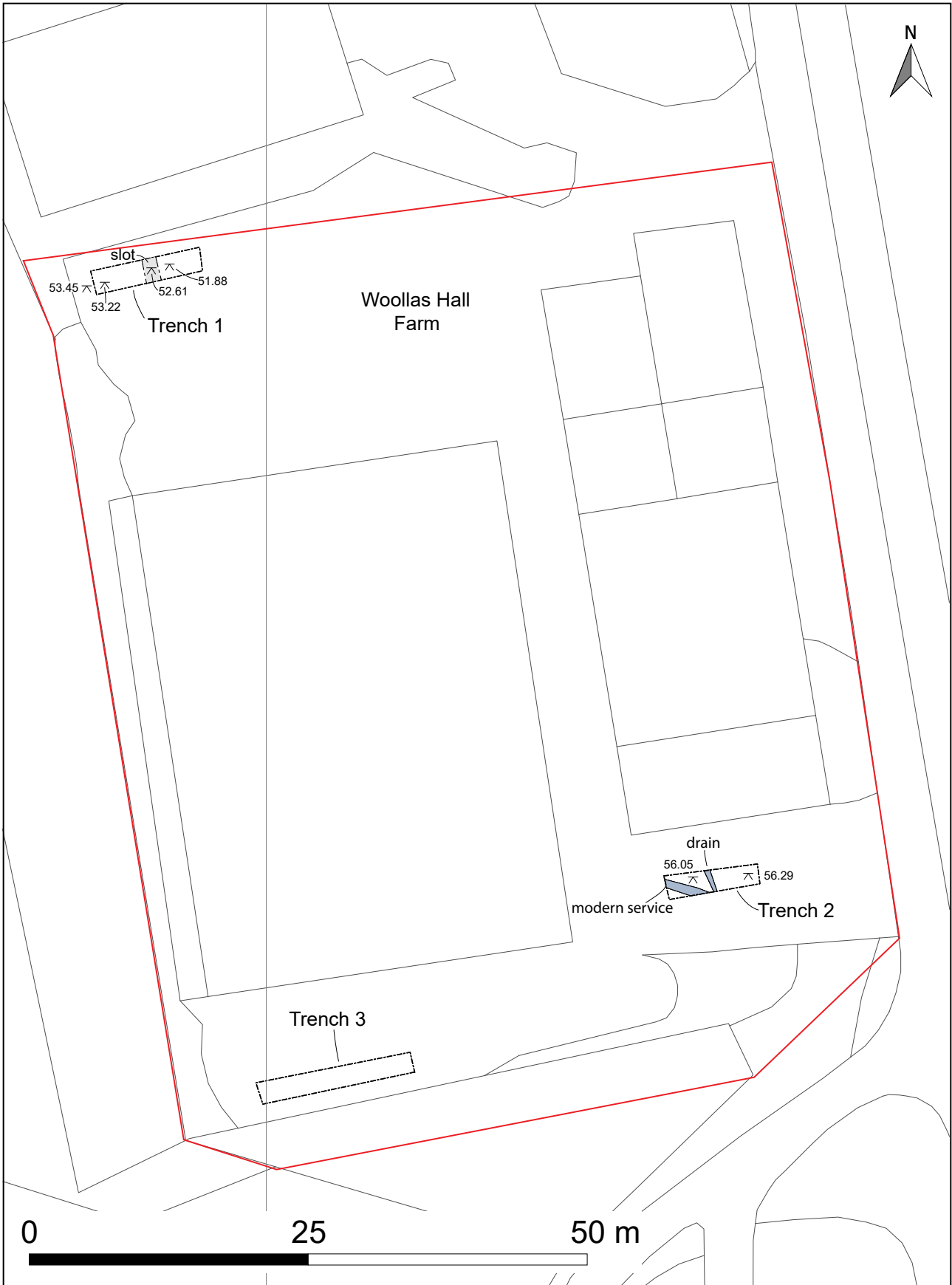
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Figures



Location of the site

Figure 1



394500

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Trench location plan

Figure 2

Plates



Plate 1: Trench 1, looking east (1m scales)



Plate 2: South facing section of Trench 1 showing sondage through deposit (101), looking north (1m scale)



Plate 3: Trench 2, looking east (1m scales)



Plate 4: Trench 3, looking east (1m scales)

Appendix 1: Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Length: 8.5m Width: 1.8m Orientation: East to west

Context	Feature	Description	Height/depth	Deposit description
100	Layer	Made ground/levelling deposit	0.5m	Compact mid greyish yellow clay
101	Layer	Made ground	1.6m+	Compact dark blue grey clay with frequent modern waste

Trench 2

Length: 9m Width: 1.8m Orientation: East to west

Context	Feature	Description	Height/depth	Deposit description
200	Layer	Hardcore	0.32m	Compact road stone
201	Layer	Made ground/levelling deposit	0.22m	Compact mid blue grey clay
202	Layer	Natural		Limestone brash in a compact mid yellowy orange and blue grey clay matrix
203	Cut	Cut of land drain	Unexcavated	
204	Fill	Fill of land drain 203	Unexcavated	Stone slabs in a grey clay matrix

Trench 3

Length: 13.5 Width: 1.8m Orientation: East to west

Context	Feature	Description	Height/depth	Deposit description
300	Layer	Concrete yard surface	0.15m	Concrete
301	Layer	Hardcore	0.2m	Compact road stone
302	Layer	Natural		Compact light greyish blue silty clay

Appendix 2: Summary of project archive (WSM72334)

TYPE	DETAILS*
Paper	Correspondence, Diary (Field progress form), Report
Digital	Database, GIS, Images raster/digital photography, Survey, Text, Digital records (ARK)

*OASIS terminology