

# Archaeological excavation at Lea Castle Hospital Site Worcestershire

Worcestershire Archaeology  
*for Wood.*

December 2019



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# LEA CASTLE HOSPITAL SITE KIDDERMINSTER WORCESTERSHIRE

Archaeological excavation report

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## SITE INFORMATION

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Site name:	Lea Castle Hospital
Site code:	-
Local planning authority:	Wyre Forest
Planning reference:	17/0205/OUTL
Central NGR:	NGR SO 8523 7956
Commissioning client:	Wood environment and infrastructure solutions
Client project reference:	-
WA project number:	P5442
WA report number:	2763
HER reference:	WSM70766
Oasis reference:	fieldsec1-375888
Museum accession number:	-

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Version	Date	Author	Details	Approved by
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# Excavation at Lea Castle Hospital, Kidderminster, Worcestershire

By Beth Williams

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

## Summary

An archaeological excavation was undertaken at the site of the former Lea Castle Hospital, Kidderminster, Worcestershire (NGR SO 8523 7956). It was commissioned by Wood on behalf of Homes England, in advance of a proposed housing development for which outline planning permission has been granted subject to a programme of archaeological works.

The excavation area was located at the northern end of the former hospital site and was enclosed by narrow bands of trees and demolished buildings. The excavation targeted potential archaeological features identified through a previous stage of evaluation and revealed these to be of natural origin. No features or finds of interest were located.

# Report

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the project

An archaeological excavation was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) in November 2019 at Lea Castle Hospital, Kidderminster, Worcestershire (NGR SO 8523 7956; Figure 1). The project was commissioned by Wood on behalf of Homes England, in advance of a proposed housing development. Planning permission has been granted subject to a programme of archaeological works (planning reference 17/0205/OUTL).

The archaeological advisor to the local planning authority (the Curator) considered that the proposed development had the potential to impact upon possible heritage assets. Previous evaluation on the site had identified two possible features of unknown date.

A Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared by Wood (Wood 2018) and approved by the Curator.

The excavation conformed to this WSI and also to the relevant industry guidelines and standards set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2014a, b and c) and the *Standards and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire* (WCC 2010).

### 1.2 Site location, topography and geology

The site is located to the north of Kidderminster, c. 800m south-east of Cookley.

The site comprises a single field at the northern edge of the former Lea Castle Hospital estate. It is bounded by narrow woodland belts to the north and south, demolished buildings to the east and a disused road to the west. It was open and unmanaged grassland at the time of the excavation.

The site slopes from south to north, with a significant slope close to the southern edge due to built-up ground. The site rises from 89m AOD to 92m AOD.

The underlying geology of the area comprises Wildmoor Sandstone bedrock overlain by superficial sand/gravel deposits and in places alluvium (BGS 2019).

## 2 Archaeological and historical background

### 2.1 Introduction

An archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) of the site was undertaken by Amec Foster Wheeler Environment & Infrastructure UK limited (2016; appendix B) with a subsequent trenching evaluation completed by WA (Lovett 2017). The findings presented in the DBA and evaluation report are summarised below.

### 2.2 Archaeological and Historic evidence

A search of the Worcestershire HER, Historic England Archive and historic mapping held by the HER identified an absence of assets within the site area and only one listed building was identified within the 500m study area used in the DBA. However, several non-designated assets were identified in the site surroundings. These primarily consist of post-medieval and modern heritage assets such as farm buildings and WWII structures.

A Saxon charter suggested the presence of a potentially Bronze Age barrow somewhere within Talbots Coppice, which lies to the south of site. While no earthworks were visible a medium potential for Bronze Age archaeology was identified in the surrounding area.

## 2.3 Previous archaeological work on the site

Archaeological evaluation of the site in 2017 by Worcester Archaeology revealed one elongated cut feature, tentatively identified as a ditch terminus, and a potential pit or tree throw in the area subsequently selected for excavation at the north end of the site. Both features were barren and provided no dating evidence (Lovett 2017).

Evaluation trenching of the remainder of the development site, to the south, also identified very limited archaeological deposits, only recording evidence of landscaping and terrace building as part of the former hospital's construction. It was noted that an absence of medieval or earlier artefacts within the top and subsoils suggested that, bar agricultural use, the area was not a focus of human activity until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## 3 Project aims

The aims of this excavation were to investigate, record and characterise the nature and extent of the remains identified during the earlier evaluation focussing on the two undated features located towards the north end of the site.

## 4 Project methodology

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by Wood (Wood 2019) and a Methods Statement was prepared by WA to meet this WSI (WA 2019), both of which were approved by the Curator.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 21<sup>st</sup> October and 12<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

The WSI identified an area of 0.66 hectares for excavation, though due to ecological constraints identified on site by Wood this was reduced to 0.44 hectares at the outset of the fieldwork. Following completion of the first half of this area, and in the light of the entirely archaeologically sterile nature of the site revealed at this stage, it was agreed with the Curator that no further excavation was required, thus resulting in the final area investigated being 0.22ha in extent.

The resultant excavated area covered the eastern half of the site as defined in the WSI, including that part of the site where the previously identified features were located (Figure 2).

During the project, a large earthwork mound c. 330m to the east of the excavation area was suggested to possibly represent a barrow (Figure 1). This was investigated by means of a rapid survey and small test pitting exercise.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed under constant archaeological supervision using a 360° tracked excavator, employing a toothless bucket. Spoil was removed using dumpers and stored on the western half of the site area with topsoil and subsoil/overburden being kept separate.

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, the eastern area was reinstated by replacing the excavated material and as noted above it was determined that there was no need to excavate the western half.

On completion of fieldwork, all fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was undertaken through structural evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources. No artefacts were recovered and no deposits warranting environmental sampling were identified.

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

The features recorded in the excavation area are shown in Figure 2. The context inventory is presented in Appendix 1.

The excavation revealed a paucity of archaeological features. Several tree throws were observed (eg [103]; Figure 2; Plate 1), and the elongated feature identified as a potential ditch terminus during evaluation trenching was investigated further [105].

The tree throws yielded no finds or signs of human activity. The potential ditch terminus that was identified in the evaluation in Trench 3 was excavated further. It [105] was determined to be part of a tree throw, probably where a large root had grown. This was truncated by a larger tree throw [107]. Neither feature contained finds, but there was some charcoal flecking within [105] (Plate 2).

The southern edge of the site was observed to have been built up by deposits of sands and topsoil to create a terraced surface.

The possible barrow was investigated, with a small test pit 0.5m x 0.5m hand dug through the western side of it. This revealed mixed soils of sand and topsoil, from which a piece of clay pipe stem was recovered. It was deemed that the earthwork was a modern mound of spoil which had been extant long enough to have become covered in vegetation (Plates 3 and 4).

## 6 Discussion and conclusions

An archaeological excavation was undertaken by Worcester Archaeology (WA) in November 2019 at Lea Castle Hospital, Kidderminster, Worcestershire (NGR SO 8523 7956). The excavation was commissioned by Wood in advance of residential development and followed on from a desk-based assessment and an archaeological evaluation.

The excavation results reflected the low archaeological potential predicted by previous investigation. No finds of non-modern date were identified, and all features recorded were determined to be of natural origin.

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. Conditions were suitable in the trench 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.

## 7 Project personnel

The fieldwork was led by Peter Lovett (ACIfA), assisted by Beth Williams.

The project was managed by Robin Jackson ACIfA. The report was produced and collated by Beth Williams with Illustrations undertaken by Carolyn Hunt MCIfA.

## 8 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following: Helena Deaville (Associate Director) and Mike Glyde (Principal Consultant) from Wood for commissioning the project and on-site security for their assistance in accessing the site. The project was monitored by Emma Hancox and Worcestershire Archaeology would also like to thank her for her advice.



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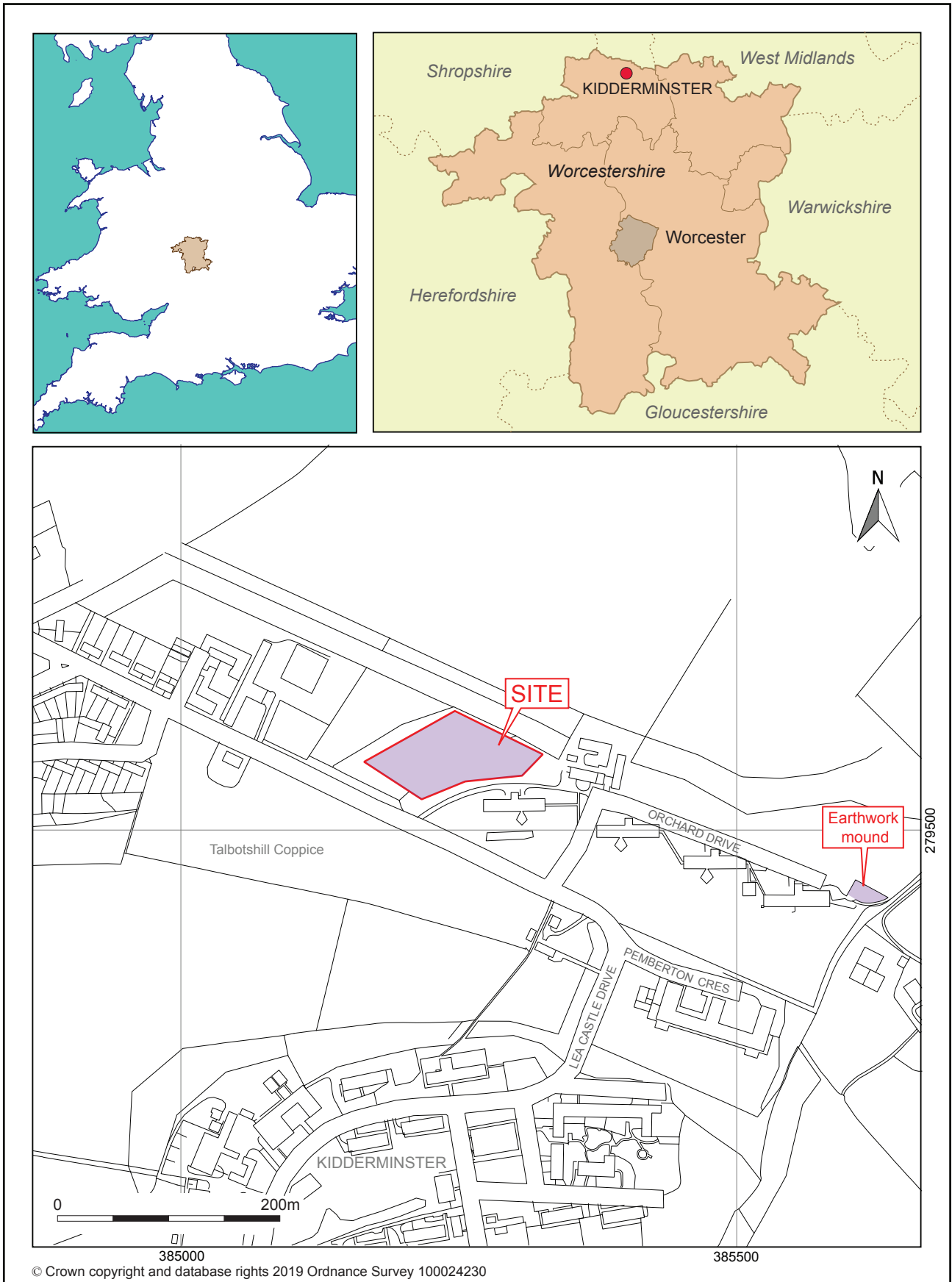
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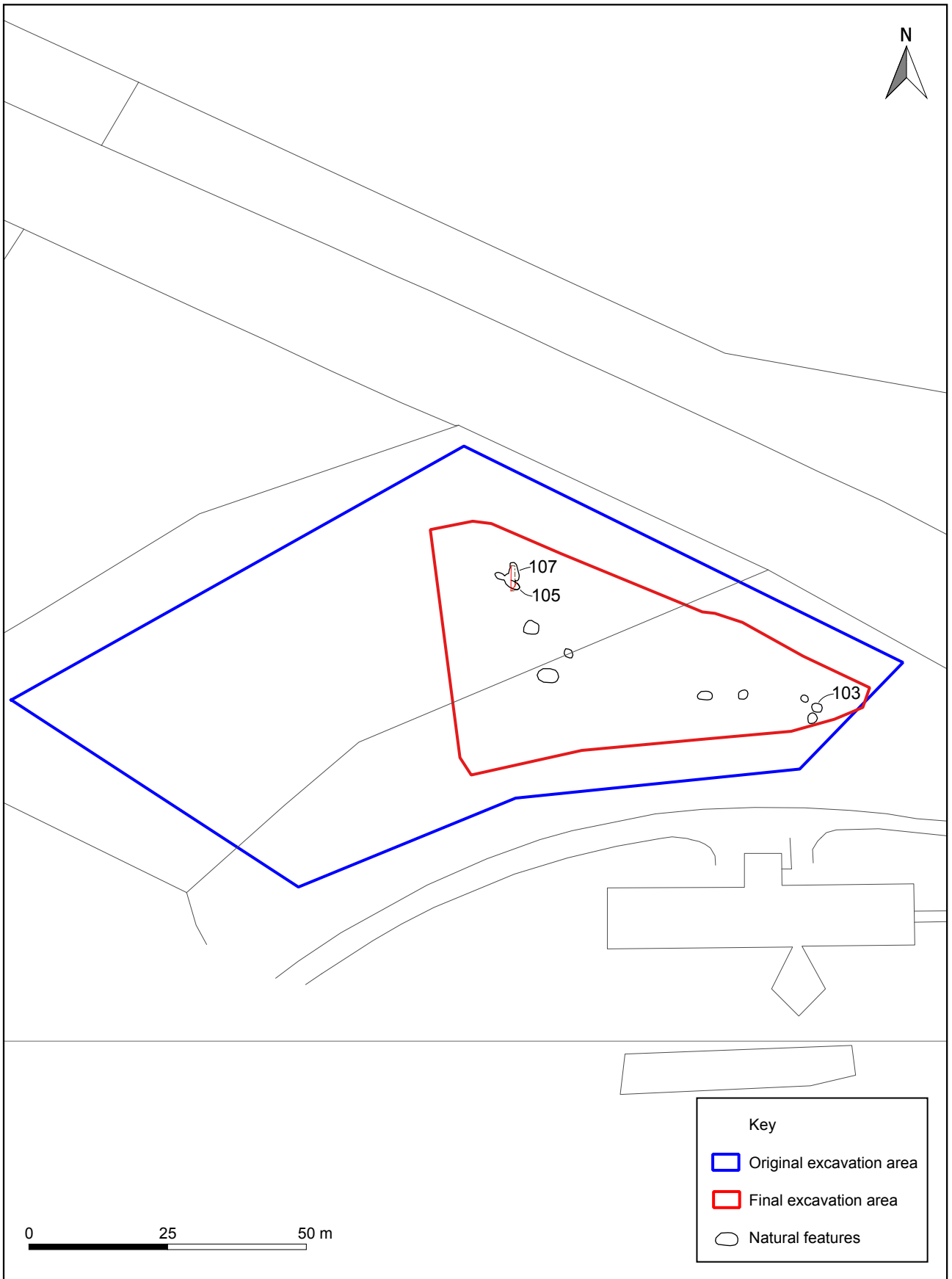
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## Figures



Location of the site

Figure 1



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Location of excavation and features

Figure 2

## Plates



*Plate 1: South facing section of tree throw [103] with neighbouring tree throws in the background, 1m scale*



*Plate 2: Oblique photo of East facing section of tree throw [105]/[107], 2x1m scales*



*Plate 3: View of earthwork mound to east of excavation area. 1m scale*



*Plate 4: Test pit through earthwork mound. 0.5m scale*

# Appendix 1: Trench descriptions

## Trench 1

Length:                      Width:                      Orientation:

### Context summary:

Context	Feature type	Context type	Interpretation	Height/ depth	Deposit description
100	Topsoil	Layer	Topsoil	0.29m max	Loose Mid Brown Silty sand
101	Subsoil	Layer	Subsoil	0.26m max	Loose Mid brownish yellow Sand
102	Natural	Layer	Natural		Loose, soft Mid yellow with brownish orange patches Sand
103		Cut	Cut of tree throw		
104		Fill	Fill of [103]		
105	Pit	Cut	Cut of pit	0.82m	
106		Fill	Fill of pit [105]		Loose, cohesive Mid brown Silty sand
107	Tree bowl	Cut	Cut of tree throw	0.4m	
108	Tree bowl	Fill	Fill of tree throw [107]	0.1m	Loose Mid red and mid black mixture Silty sand
109	Tree bowl	Fill	Fill of tree throw [107]	0.22m	Loose Cohesive Mid brown with yellowish patches Silty sand
110	Tree bowl	Fill	Fill of tree throw [107]	0.24m	Firm Mid Red Silty sand
111		Layer	Topsoil over made ground	0.46m max	Loose Mid Brown Silty sand
112	Layer	Layer	Made ground	0.48m max	Firm Dark Red Silty sand

## Appendix 2: Summary of project archive (WSM 70766)

TYPE	DETAILS*
Artefacts and Environmental	None
Paper	Diary (Field progress form), Drawing, Report
Digital	Database, GIS, Images raster/digital photography, Survey, Text

\*OASIS terminology