Archaeological watching brief at Stokesay Castle, Craven Arms, Shropshire

Worcestershire Archaeology

for

J N Bentley Ltd

July 2020





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Archaeological watching brief report

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SITE INFORMATION

Site name:	CSO Improvement works at Stokesay Castle, Craven Arms
Site code:	P5682
Local planning authority:	SMC – Historic England
Planning reference:	SMC S00218293
Central NGR:	SO 43523 81606
Commissioning client:	JN Bentley on behalf of Severn Trent Water
WA project number:	P5682
WA report number:	2815
HER reference:	SM 1003011
Oasis reference:	fieldsec1-395402

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Version	Date	Author	Details	Approved by
1	07/07/2020	G Arnold	Draft for comment	T Rogers

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An archaeological watching brief at Stokesay Castle, Craven Arms, Shropshire

By Graham Arnold

Illustrations by Graham Arnold

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Stokesay Castle, Craven Arms, Shropshire (NGR SO 43523 81606). It was commissioned by J N Bentley Ltd on behalf of Severn Trent Water Ltd, monitoring the replacement over a combined sewer overflow (CSO) pipe scheme running roughly north / south, from Craven Arms sewerage treatment works, to the river Onny. The route of the pipe runs through the designated Stokesay Castle Scheduled Monument area. Scheduled Monument Consent was granted by Historic England, subject to a programme of archaeological works.

Stokesay Castle is a moated 14th Century manor house, with a 17th Century Gatehouse and associated medieval water management systems. It is also the site of a postulated shrunken medieval settlement to the north of the castle. Due to the high potential for archaeology within the area of the proposed works and Scheduled land, an archaeological watching brief was undertaken.

The water pipe replacement scheme replaced an existing pipeline and monitoring of a topsoil strip across the scheduled area running for a length of about 350m revealed the cut for the mid-20th Century sewer whilst over the majority of the remaining easement topsoil overlay natural deposits with some modern truncation.

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic the watching brief was suspended and the majority of the new sewer line was installed without archaeological supervision though within the monitored easement and largely along the line of the previous service.

A further visit took place to monitor later works undertaken to locate a drainage connection, in an area to the southeast of StokeCastle Farm. This revealed a substantial U-shaped cut running from the farm towards the River Onny to the southeast. At the base of the cut, a dumped layer including material estimated to be late post medieval in date were preserved, suggesting that the cut was extant during this time. A homogenous layer overlying this is thought to be deliberate backfill to facilitate passage across the cut.

No significant archaeological finds, features or deposits relating to the medieval and post-medieval period of Stokesay Castle were revealed during the works, with modern truncation from farm use and the previous pipe installation in the 20th Century.

Report

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) from October 2019 to June 2020 at Stokesay Castle, Craven Arms, Shropshire (NGR SO 43523 81606; Fig 1). This comprised observation of a topsoil strip through the Scheduled Monument area and preparatory works for a replacement pipeline, followed by monitoring of excavations to locate an existing drain within the easement. The project was commissioned by JN Bentley on behalf of Severn Trent Water. An application for Scheduled Monument Consent was granted by Historic England subject to a programme of archaeological works (Scheduled Monument Consent S00218293).

The Principal Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Historic England considered that the development had the potential to impact upon specific heritage assets at Stokesay Castle (SM1003011), a 14th Century Manor House with a 17th Century Gatehouse, within a moated site, with associated gardens and water management. The replacement pipeline ran immediately east of Stokesay Castle through fields owned by StokeCastle farm, within the boundary of the Scheduled Monument area.

The project conforms to the granted Scheduled Monument Consent prepared by Historic England, dated 16th March 2020 (ref S00218293), and modified and approved in May 2020. No brief was provided, but a WSI was prepared by Mott MacDonald Bentley (MMB 2019) and approved by Bill Klemperer (Historic England) and Shropshire County Council Archaeology Service.

The watching brief conformed 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).

1.2 Site location, topography and geology

Stokesay Castle Is located to the south of Craven Arms and north of Onibury, on the west side of the A49 and River Onny. The total pipeline runs from the Craven Arms water treatment works (NGR: SO 43693 81009) to the River Onny, east of the Old School House (SO 43760 81817) which is roughly 700m. A section of the pipe runs through the land immediately east of Stokesay Castle (SO 43523 81606) within the Scheduled Monument area administered by Historic England and runs for approximately 300m.

The Scheduled area at Stokesay Castle covers a total area of 0.17 hectares (Figure 2).

The pipeline route runs through pasture fields of StokeCastle farm with occasional animal shelters and the site of the pipeline is generally flat at 114m -115m AOD with a slope at the southern end (Plate 2), assisting drainage and livestock movement from StokeCastle farm. The land slopes down on the east towards the river Onny and other tributaries and ox-bow lakes.

The underlying geology comprises bedrock of Lower Ludlow Shales Group (Siltstone and Mudstone, Interbedded. Sedimentary Bedrock) formed approximately 426 to 427 million years ago in the Silurian Period. The overlying drift geology is comprised of Bromfield Sand and Gravel (Sand and Gravel. Superficial Deposits) formed up to 2 million years ago in the Quaternary Period (BGS 2020).

2 Archaeological and historical background

The archaeological written scheme of investigation (MMB 2019) provides a comprehensive historical background to the site, together with the NHLE Scheduled Listing from Historic England and is summarised below:

The historical development of Stokesay Castle as described in the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) is as follows:

Stokesay Castle is a fortified manor house built in the 1260s-80s and early 1290s by Laurence of Ludlow, on the profits of his business as a wool merchant. The earliest buildings on the site are located within the main block to the west, which includes the hall and solar, and the north and south towers to either end of the range. The north tower may have originated as a pele tower, dating from the late 12th or early 13th Century. The hall and solar are ascribed a date circa 1260-80, and the south tower is a little later, presumably constructed as a result of Laurence's receipt of a licence to crenellate, granted in 1291. Tree-ring dating confirms that Laurence had completed virtually the whole of the house by 1291 using the same team of carpenters throughout, and it has been altered very little since.
Laurence's descendants remained in ownership of Stokesay for more than 200 years until it passed to the Vernon family. Henry Vernon made repairs in about 1577, but he later fell into financial ruin and sold the castle to Sir George Mainwaring in 1598. Dame Elizabeth Craven and her son William then bought the castle in 1620, along with several other properties in Shropshire. William made several alterations to the castle which are detailed in his accounts record. According to these accounts he spent more than £468 in 1640 'about the building at Stokesay', and further money 'for finishing the work' in 1641. Tree-ring dating of the gatehouse timbers has confirmed it was constructed for William, in 1639-41. The castle surrendered to Parliamentary forces in 1645 without incident, although two years later the barns and stables were demolished. During the 18th Century the buildings were allowed to decay until Frances Stackhouse Acton, a noted antiquarian and. artist, co-ordinated a series of repairs; and in the 1870s the glovemaker John Derby Allcroft bought Stokesay and had it substantially restored.

Stokesay Castle, Craven Arms, Shropshire (NGR: SO 43523 81606) was scheduled on 18th November 1960 and its List Entry Number is 1003011. The site includes a 13th Century fortified manor house with a 17th Century gatehouse within a moated site, and associated gardens and water management system.

The monument, falls into two separate areas of protection, including the fortified manor house, earthwork and buried remains of Stokesay Castle and part of its associated gardens. It is situated in the Welsh Marches, the England-Wales borderlands, in a valley bottom, to the west of the River Onny as it passes through Wenlock Edge. A roughly oval-shaped moat (now dry), with the remains of a perimeter wall which originally rose up to 10m above the bottom of the moat, encloses an area measuring approximately 50m North/North-East to South/South West and 40m West/North West to East/South East, covering an area of approximately 0.17 hectares. The moat is circa 8m wide and up to 2m deep.

The moated island is raised above the surrounding ground level. At its North East corner stands a 17th Century timber-framed and elaborately decorated gatehouse. The original gatehouse was probably of stone; however, the current mid-17th Century building is timber-framed with elaborately carved brackets and lozenge patterns, typical of houses in Ludlow of this period. At ground level the building has upright timbers infilled with plaster, and the upper floors are jettied out with square panels containing lozenges. There is a gable above the gate-passage which has a central window with a row of five stars beneath it, and a pattern of quarter circles above. Tree-ring analysis of the Gatehouse timbers date the construction to 1639-41.

At its western side stands an older range of buildings dating to the 13th Century, built of sandstone rubble and timber-frame, with a stone tile roof. It includes a four-bay, open-hearthed great hall with an extraordinary roof which is a hybrid mixture of raised crucks, aisled end trusses and an unusual

example of collar-purlins without crown posts. At its north end is a late-13th Century timber stair which gives access to the upper floors of the north tower, with a jettied timber first floor of the 17th Century. At the south end of the hall range is a cross wing housing the solar block, with the first-floor solar reached by an external stair; both ground and first floors have 17th Century interiors. To the south stands a stone tower, polygonal in plan, of three storeys, with crenellations. The kitchen, service range and other ancillary buildings would have filled the courtyard; these survive as buried features. The remains of a designed landscape and garden features include an artificial lake to the South West.

A complex system of ponds, dams, sluices and culverts is associated with the Castle. A leat takes water from the River Onny above the weir at Stokesay Bridge to a mill South East of the Castle. Earthworks between the Castle and the mill may represent a second mill-pond, fed from an independent source. A causeway South of the castle held back a pond, fed by a stream from the NW, which almost certainly supplied the castle moat, and which may also have served as a fishpond. Culverts under the causeway were controlled by sluices. Some of the works must be medieval in origin; the system is unlikely to be later than the first half of the 17th Century.

The moated site, designed landscape and associated water features at Stokesay Castle, and the standing buildings within the moated site, together with the buried archaeological remains of those demolished parts of the complex, are scheduled for the following principal reasons:

- *Survival: a well-preserved group of buildings and archaeological remains which represent the growth and development of this site from a moated medieval manor house to a fashionable 17th Century residence with ornamental gardens; as such they exhibit considerable longevity as monument types;*
- *Potential: buried archaeological evidence for the layout and types of structures that formerly occupied the rest of the courtyard will survive beneath the ground surface, whilst the moat ditches and the ponds will retain artefactual and environmental information relating to the occupation of the site; and the remains of the wider water management system will retain valuable evidence of its construction and the way in which it functioned;*
- *Historic interest: the post-medieval creation of an ornamental garden reflects the status and wealth of the Craven family and will provide a valuable insight into garden design at that time.*

Non-designated sites in the area include a possible deserted medieval settlement, north of Stokesay Castle, recorded on the Shropshire Historic Environment Record (PRN 00955). The HER data states that:

Surviving buildings on the site are the 12th century castle (PRN 00159) and gatehouse (PRN 14855), and the church (PRN 11389) built as a chapel to the castle, a farmhouse of 18th or 19th century construction and a brick cottage dated 1871. There appear to be slight earthworks in the orchard at NGR: SO 437 817. There are also earthworks in the farmyard in the form of a linear depression and bank which could be associated with the millpond. The general impression is that earthworks associated with the mill survive but there is little evidence of village earthworks. (MMB 2019)

3 Project aims

The aims and objectives of the archaeological watching brief, outlined in the WSI (MMB 2019) were to determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the sewer trench excavations, and characterise (nature, data, complex and extent) any deposits identified.

Specific aims of the investigation were to identify and record any buried archaeological evidence relating to former structures associated with the castle and postulated shrunken medieval village, artefactual and environmental information relating to the occupation of the site; and remains of the wider water management system including evidence of its construction and function.

The WSI also outlined that both the topsoil strip of the easement for the pipeline and the open-cut excavation running through the Scheduled Monument area and the field to the north, were to be monitored by an archaeologist. However, following the initial topsoil strip of the area demonstrating extensive disturbance from the original pipe installation and restrictions due to the Coronavirus pandemic, discussions with Bill Klemperer concluded that archaeological monitoring at this point could be suspended. The new sewer was laid within the mapped footprint of the disturbance from the

previous sewer and was not archaeologically monitored. A further visit was made in June 2020 to monitor works outside of the original cut, but within the pipe easement that had been topsoil stripped under archaeological supervision, to the southeast of StokeCastle Farm.

4 Project methodology

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by Mott MacDonald Bentley (MMB 2019). Fieldwork was undertaken in October 2019, February and June 2020.

The pipeline route, with a maximum easement of 14m wide for access and 350m in length through the scheduled area, was stripped of topsoil to a maximum of 0.20m depth. This amounted to 4900m² in area excavated across the site. A trial trench to find an existing drain connection was monitored in June 2020 and was c.16m². The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 1 and 3.

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

Observation of excavated areas 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. Spoil was checked for finds, but only modern ceramics were present.

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

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was undertaken through a combination of structural and artefactual 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 Shropshire Museum.

5 Archaeological results

5.1 Trench descriptions

A site visit prior to the works was made in October 2019 to discuss the scheme and archaeological requirements (Plates 1 – 4).

The initial topsoil strip and preparatory works were monitored in February 2020 over the footprint of the pipeline (Figures 3 - 4), a total easement width of 14m for access (Plates 5-8). The original cut for the existing pipe was visible and surveyed at 4m wide. Only topsoil with modern and post-medieval residual material was observed, together with modern backfill and disturbance from the original pipe installation in the mid-20th Century. The topsoil (100) overlaid a moderately compact mid orangey brown silty clay subsoil (101), with patches of orangey brown sand and gravel natural substrate visible (104) throughout the area.

On 11th June excavations were undertaken in the easement of the pipeline immediately south-east of the farm to locate a drain leading from the farm towards the river. Topsoil stripping in this part of the easement had previously been monitored and the new sewer had been laid, but during these works the existence of the drain was not known and the connection had not been secured.

A square excavation approximately 4m x 4m and up to 2.5m deep was excavated mechanically (Figures 3 - 4 and Plates 9 – 10). By the time the archaeologist was present, it was too deep and the sides not stable enough for the excavation to be entered and it was therefore recorded from above the cut. The excavations revealed a section across a U-shaped linear cut (105) which spanned the

entire excavation. The upper layers comprised a topsoil similar to that recorded in the remainder of the easement (101) and below this a layer of loose mid brown silt (106). At the base of the cut was a dark brown/black silt with frequent animal bone, bottles, shoes and stoneware jars (107). Natural gravel (104) was revealed at an estimated depth of 2.5m.

It is thought that prior to the laying of the drain, a large open linear cut for drainage ran from the corner of the farm south-west towards the river Onny. This was subsequently used to dump waste from the farm and then deliberately infilled for to allow the track to cross this area. To the south-east there are earthwork banks which could well be the upcast from earlier excavation of this feature, although their date remains unclear.

5.1.1 Model summary trench description table

Context	Brief description	Max depth (m)	Depth from ground surface (m)	Comments
100	Topsoil	0.15	0.00	Friable dark grey brown clayey silt with frequent rooting and turf.
101	Subsoil	0.05+	0.15	Moderately compact mid orangey brown silty clay with occasional pebbles.
102	Backfill of existing sewer pipeline	Unexc	0.05	Mixed backfilled material from pipeline including modern plastic, abundant sands and gravels, cobbles and pea grit. Modern backfill material
103	Cut of existing sewer pipe to be replaced	Unexc	0.05	2m – 4m wide cut for sewer pipe, with occasional manholes / inspection chambers along the route.
104	Natural	-	0.20	Firm reddish brown sandy gravel
105	Linear cut for drain	2.50	0.00	U shaped cut for probable drainage feature leading from farm towards River Onny
106	Layer	2.20	0.20	Mid brown silt backfilling modern drainage ditch 105 to allow farm track to cross over
107	Layer	2.50	2.20	Waste dump layer at base of drainage cut consisting of a dark brown / black silt with frequent stoneware jars, glass bottles and animal bones of late 19th / early 20th Century date

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. Only modern glass and porcelain and residual material was observed within the topsoil. The dump deposit at the base of the June excavations was photographed and identified at a safe distance

from the top of the trench and up-cast spoil and not retained. No artefacts predating the mid-19th Century were identified in the works.

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 Discussion and conclusions

No significant archaeological finds, features or deposits relating to the medieval and post-medieval phases of Stokesay Castle were revealed during the works. During the easement strip topsoil consistently overlay natural deposits except for areas of modern truncation from farm use and the previous service installation in the 20th Century.

Following the easement strip, the watching brief was suspended due to the COVID-19 outbreak and the sewer pipe was installed without archaeological presence but within the monitored easement and following the line of the previous service.

A further phase of monitoring was undertaken of excavations for a later connection to a drain. This revealed a substantial cut leading from the farm toward the river. Deposits present in the base of the cut demonstrate that this feature was extant during the 19th Century. A homogenous layer overlying is evidence that the feature was backfilled in a single episode, probably to facilitate the construction of a track to a farm gate to the south. Immediately to the east, the continuation of the cut is evident as an earthwork flanked by banks and it is thought likely it was the bank material which was used to backfill the cut adjacent to the farm.

It is likely that this feature acted as a drain from the farm but may also have been connected to water management features west of the farm and castle complex and may also have fed the mill pond known to have existed to the south east.

Despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic, the methods adopted allow a good degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

9 Personnel

The fieldwork was led by Graham Arnold, PCIfA and Tom Rogers, MCIfA. The project was managed by Tom Rogers, MCIfA. The report and illustrations were produced and collated by Graham Arnold.

10 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for the successful conclusion of this project: Keith Scoble (Craven Arms Site Manager, J N Bentley Ltd) and Bill Klemperer (Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Historic England).

11 Bibliography

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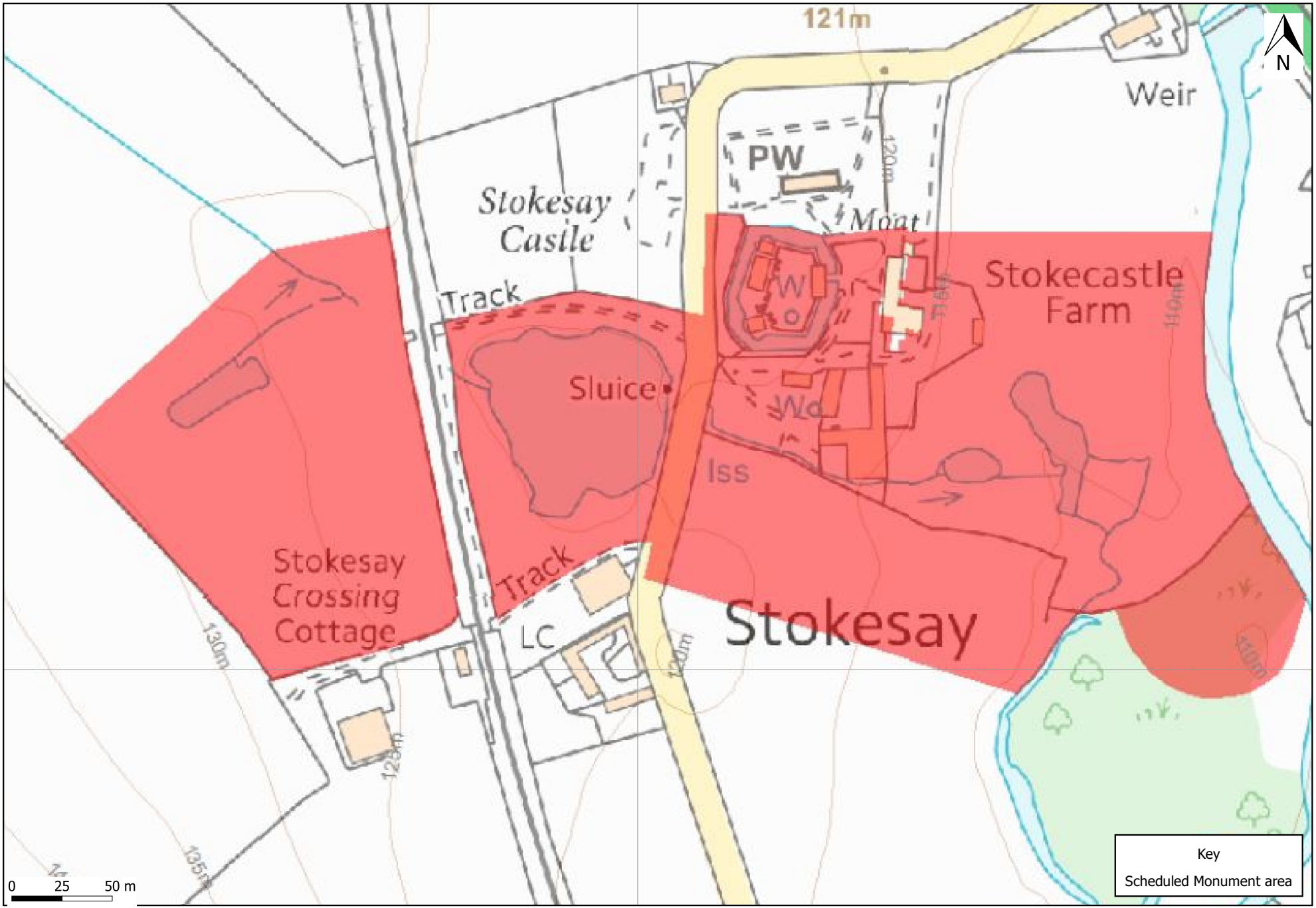
Figures

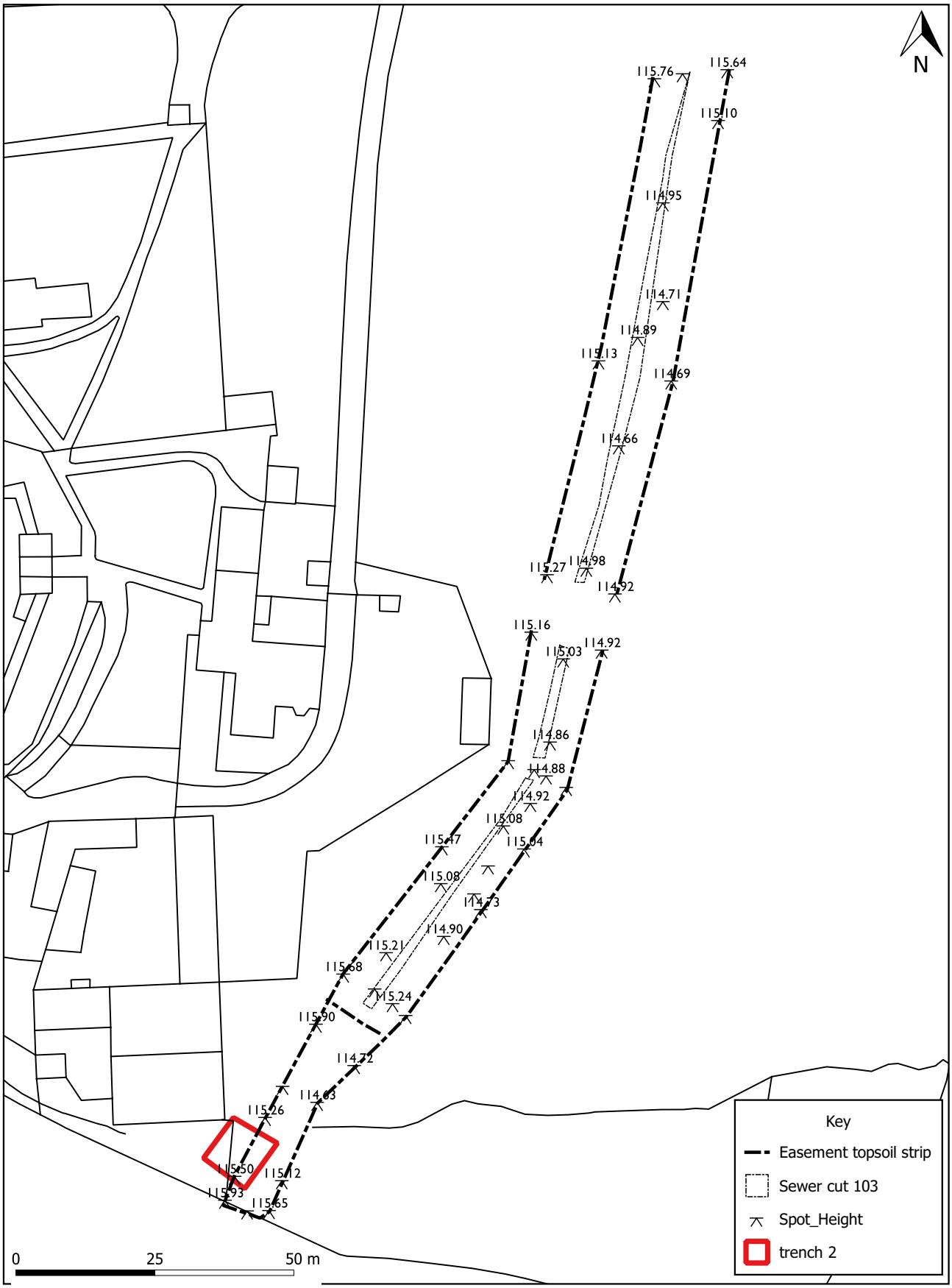
Location of the site *Figure 1*



Scheduled Monument Area from NHLE record

Figure 2

Monitored works at Stokesay Castle for Scheduled Monument Consent *Figure 3*



Monitored soil strip and trench in SMC *Figure 4*

Plates

Plate 1: Scheduled Monument area of Stokesay Castle on initial site visit, prior to works commencing. From southern boundary looking north.

Plate 2: Scheduled Monument area of Stokesay Castle on initial site visit, prior to works commencing. Manhole in centre of field with 1m scales looking north.

Plate 3: Scheduled Monument area of Stokesay Castle on initial site visit, prior to works commencing. Centre of field with 1m scales looking south.

Plate 4: Stokesay Castle on initial site visit, prior to works commencing from proposed pipeline route south of the castle.

Plate 5: Easement topsoil strip with Stokesay Castle in background. looking southwest.

Plate 6: Easement topsoil strip looking south with 1m scales.

Plate 7: South end of Scheduled Monument area of Stokesay Castle following topsoil strip, with manhole in foreground. 1m scales looking south.

Plate 8: Easement topsoil strip with Stokesay Castle and StokeCastle farm in background, looking southwest.

Plate 9: Location of trial hole for drain connection, during initial topsoil stripping in February. Looking north

Plate 10: Trial hole for drain connection showing U-shaped drainage channel and backfill. Looking northwest, no scale.

Appendix 1: Summary of project archive

TYPE	DETAILS*
Artefacts and Environmental	None
Paper	Context sheet, Correspondence, Drawing, Report,
Digital	GIS, Images raster/digital photography, Survey,

**OASIS terminology*

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 Shropshire Museum.