

Archaeological evaluation at Church Farm, Elmbridge Lane Elmbridge, Worcestershire

Worcestershire Archaeology
for Robert and Caroline Needham

July 2021



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CHURCH FARM, ELMBRIDGE LANE, ELMBRIDGE, WORCESTERSHIRE

Archaeological evaluation report



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SITE INFORMATION

Site name: Church Farm, Elmbridge Lane, Elmbridge, Worcestershire
Local planning authority: Wychavon District Council
Planning reference: 20/02445/FUL Condition 6
Central NGR: SO 9009 6743
Commissioning client: Robert and Caroline Needham
WA project number: P6029
WA report number: 2946
HER reference: WSM 77415
Oasis reference: fieldsec1-425363

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1	09/07/2021	Hazel Whitefoot	Draft for comment	Tom Vaughan

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Archaeological evaluation at Church Farm, Elmbridge Lane, Elmbridge, Worcestershire

By Hazel Whitefoot

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Church Farm, Elmbridge Lane, Elmbridge, Worcestershire (NGR SO 9009 6743). It was commissioned by Robert and Caroline Needham in association with a proposed extension to a barn originally constructed in 2016. Planning permission was granted subject to a programme of archaeological works.

The Archaeology and Planning Advisor to Wychavon District Council considered that the development had the potential to impact upon heritage assets. The site is within an area of Late Iron Age and Roman activity, indicated by numerous metal-detecting finds dating to these periods, and also lies on the postulated route of a Roman road.

One evaluation trench was excavated over the postulated alignment of a Roman road at Church Farm, Elmbridge Lane, Elmbridge, Worcestershire. A combination of documentary and aerial photographic evidence suggests that Elmbridge lies on the route of the road which ran between the Roman settlements at Droitwich and Stourbridge. A significant number of recorded findspots of items, particularly coins, dating from the late Iron Age to the Roman period in the area of the present site indicates the potential for below ground archaeological features and deposits.

Two thin bands of stones and gravel were recorded at the eastern end of the trench. They were aligned approximately north to south across a c 3.50m wide area, in parallel with Elmbridge Lane to the east. They were sealed by the subsoil and lay within the surface of the natural mudstone. The origin of these layers is unclear and there were no finds recovered in association. Whilst they were moderately compact and distinct, there was no indication of defined structure or surface to indicate a deliberately laid metalled road, nor were any defined wheel ruts present.

The gravels could represent a very degraded section of Roman road, although this is not a definite interpretation. Ridge and furrow has been recorded within the fields around Elmbridge, but none is known within this field, and no defined furrows were revealed across the rest of the trench. The gravel bands were also sealed by the subsoil, which precludes their being medieval furrows. The gravels may be of natural origin. Although no superficial deposits are recorded by the British Geological Survey in the immediate area, sand and gravel is noted to the west (BGS 2021), which could extend into the present site.

No other features, structures, layers, deposits or horizons, nor artefacts of any archaeological significance were identified.

Report

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) in June 2021 at Church Farm, Elmbridge Lane, Elmbridge, Worcestershire (NGR SO 9009 6743). The project was commissioned by Robert and Caroline Needham in response to the requirements of the Archaeology and Planning Advisor to Wychavon District Council following a planning application for an extension to the existing barn. Planning permission was granted subject to a programme of archaeological works (planning reference 20/02445/FUL).

The Archaeology and Planning Advisor considered that the proposed development had the potential to impact upon heritage assets, specifically deposits relating to the postulated route of a Roman road. No brief was provided but a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by WA (WA 2021) which conforms to the generality of briefs and was approved by the Archaeology and Planning Advisor.

The evaluation also 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 2019).

1.2 Site location, topography and geology

The site is located adjacent to Elmbridge Lane, approximately 320m south of the village of Elmbridge. The site lies within the north-east corner of a larger field that covers an area of approximately 4.8 hectares. The field is of slightly irregular shape and is bounded by hedgerow on all sides with Elmbridge Lane running immediately alongside the eastern edge. A modern barn structure is sited in the north-east corner and, at the time of the evaluation, the majority of the field was under cereal crop.

The underlying geology comprises bedrock of the Sidmouth Mudstone Formation without overlying superficial deposits, although superficial sand and gravel is noted to the west (BGS 2021).

2 Archaeological and historical background

2.1 Introduction

Prior to fieldwork commencing, a search of the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record (HER) was completed, covering a search area of 500m around the site. Historic mapping and aerial photographs were also consulted. A summary of the results of this research are presented below.

2.2 Iron Age and Roman

To the south of Elmbridge village aerial photographic (cropmark) evidence of an irregular enclosure, consisting of a rectangular enclosure linked via ditches to a ring ditch, is considered to be of Late Iron Age (LIA) to Roman date (WSM00751). Probably associated with this is a recorded findspot of a concentration of Romano-British pottery (WSM 26381) approximately 80m to the south of this enclosure.

Although the exact alignment is unclear at this point, a combination of aerial photographic and documentary evidence suggests that the Roman road (WSM 30543), which ran north from Droitwich to Greensforge (Stourbridge), may run through Elmbridge. The road is known to follow the route of the modern Crutch Lane further south and Elmbridge lies directly north of this.

In addition to these monuments there are numerous findspots within the HER search area for items, dating from the LIA to the Roman periods, registered with the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS).

These finds include numerous coins (both silver and copper alloy), brooches, a LIA/early Roman harness fitting (WSM74327) and a LIA lead figurine (WSM64353).

2.3 Medieval

The area is recorded on the HER as being agricultural and pastoral in character with the current field pattern having evolved by piecemeal enclosure and some field amalgamation. Two areas of ridge and furrow, dating from the medieval period, lie within the study area (WSM 41697, 21624). One such area is situated just to the west of Church Farm. Findspots of items of medieval date registered with the PAS include both coins (WSM 64199, 75245, 75251) and lead seals (WSM 63676, 63958).

2.4 Previous archaeological work on the site

No previous archaeological work has been recorded on this site.

3 Project aims

The aims 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 (where the foundation, landscaping and service trench plans and depths have been made available to WA).

4 Project methodology

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2021). Fieldwork was undertaken on 16 June 2021.

One trench, amounting to 30m², was excavated across the postulated alignment of the Roman road. The location of the trench is indicated in Figure 2.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed under constant archaeological supervision using a JCB 3CX type 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) and trench and feature locations were surveyed using a GNSS device 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 through an analysis 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 Museums Worcestershire.

5 Archaeological results

5.1 Introduction

The trench is illustrated in Figure 2 and Plates 1-3. The trench and context inventory is presented in Appendix 1.

5.2 Natural deposits

The natural geological substrate (102) was visible throughout the base of the trench. This consisted of a compacted brownish red mudstone with some irregular green grey banding. This lay at a depth of 0.72m below the ground surface.

5.3 Modern deposits

The natural geology was overlain by a brownish red silty clay subsoil (101) up to 0.37m thick. This was sealed by a topsoil layer (100) of a firm mid reddish brown clayey silt, with occasional subrounded stones and fragments of modern ceramic building material, up to 0.35m thick.

5.4 Undated

At the eastern end of the trench two bands of stone were identified, (103), sealed by the subsoil, and within the surface of the natural, (102), at c 0.72m depth. The bands were c 1.8m and c 0.5m in width across a c 3.50m wide area, broadly orientated north to south. A section excavated through the wider band to the west revealed it to be very shallow, a maximum of 0.09m in depth and without defined structure. A single small animal bone was recorded in association with the layer.

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. The single animal bone was not retained for analysis.

8 Summary, discussion and conclusions

By Hazel Whitefoot and Tom Vaughan

One evaluation trench was excavated over the postulated alignment of a Roman road at Church Farm, Elmbridge Lane, Elmbridge, Worcestershire. A combination of documentary and aerial photographic evidence suggests that Elmbridge lies on the route of the road which ran between the Roman settlements at Droitwich and Stourbridge. A significant number of recorded findspots of items, particularly coins, dating from the late Iron Age to the Roman period in the area of the present site indicates the potential for below ground archaeological features and deposits.

Two thin bands of stones and gravel were recorded at the eastern end of the trench. They were aligned approximately north to south across a c 3.50m wide area, in parallel with Elmbridge Lane to the east. They were sealed by the subsoil and lay within the surface of the natural mudstone. The origin of these layers is unclear and there were no finds recovered in association. Whilst they were moderately compact and distinct, there was no indication of defined structure or surface to indicate a deliberately laid metalled road, nor were any defined wheel ruts present.

The gravels could represent a very degraded section of Roman road, although this is not a definite interpretation. Ridge and furrow has been recorded within the fields around Elmbridge, but none is known within this field, and no defined furrows were revealed across the rest of the trench. The gravel bands were also sealed by the subsoil, which precludes their being medieval furrows. The gravels may be of natural origin. Although no superficial deposits are recorded by the British Geological Survey in the immediate area, sand and gravel is noted to the west (BGS 2021), which could extend into the present site.

No other features, structures, layers, deposits or horizons, nor artefacts of any archaeological significance were identified.

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. Conditions were suitable within the trench to identify the presence or absence of archaeological features. It is considered that the absence of significant archaeological features provides an accurate characterisation of the proposed development area as a whole.

9 Project personnel

The fieldwork was led by Andrew Walsh MCIfA, assisted by Hazel Whitefoot PCIfA.

The project was managed by Tom Vaughan, MCIfA. The report was produced and illustrated by Hazel Whitefoot.

10 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for the successful conclusion of the project: Robert and Caroline Needham (Elmbridge Farm), and Aidan Smyth (Archaeology and Planning Advisor, Wychavon District Council).

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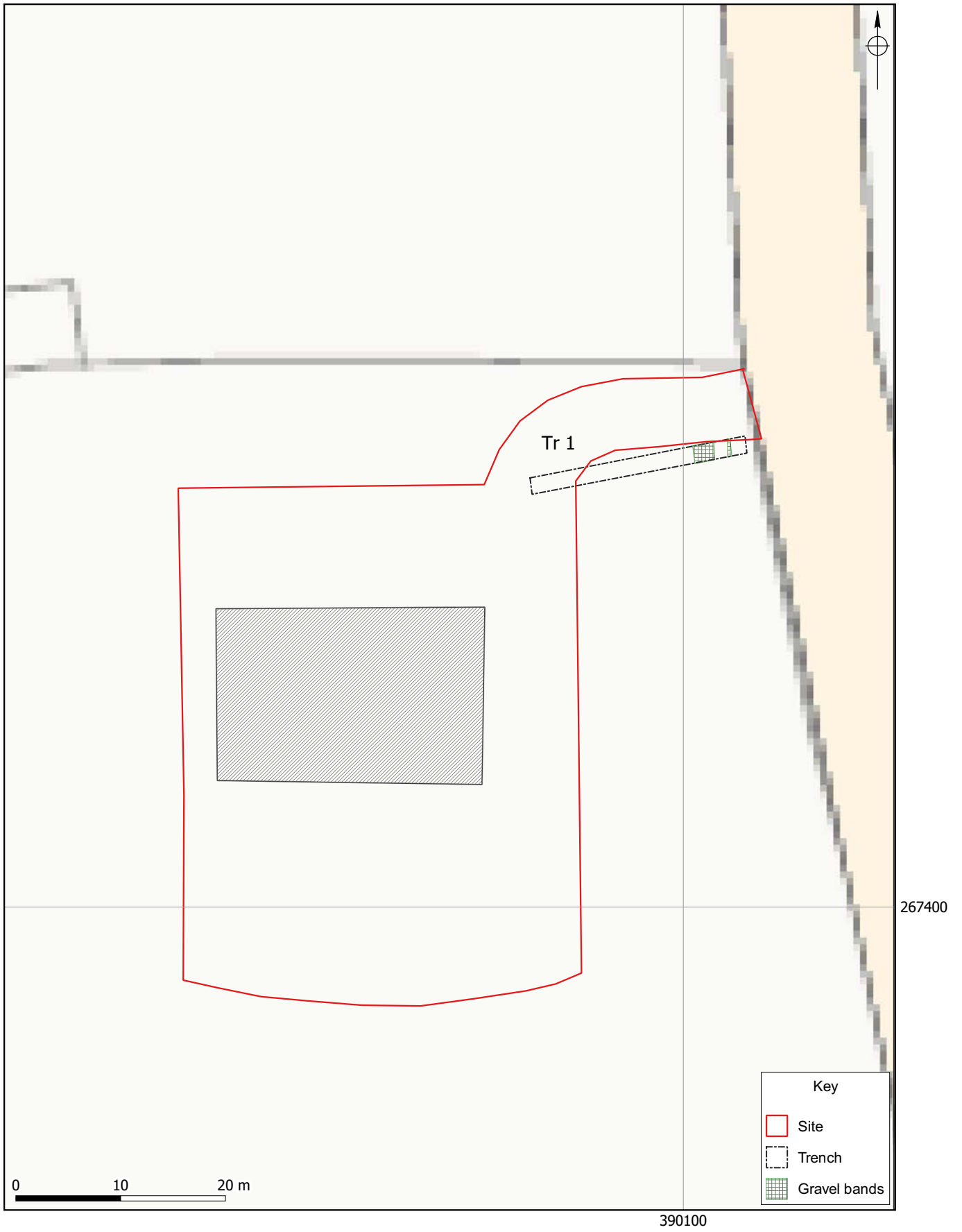
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Figures



Location of the site

Figure 1



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Location of trench

Figure 2

Plates



Plate 1: General view of trench, facing east, 2x 1m scales



Plate 2: Stone and gravel layer 103, facing north-east, no scale



Plate 3: South facing section through stone and gravel layer 103, facing north, 1m scale

Appendix 1: Trench 1 context descriptions

Orientation: west-south-west to east-north-east

Length: 20m

Width: 1.50m

Depth: 0.87m

Context	Depth	Description	Interpretation
100	0.00-0.35m	Firm mid reddish brown clayey silt	Topsoil
101	0.35-0.72m	Firm mid brownish red silty clay	Subsoil
102	0.72m+	Very compact brownish red clay mudstone with irregular green grey bands	Natural
103	0.72-0.81m	Two bands of compact reddish brown small to medium subangular and subrounded stones and gravels; c1.80m and c 0.50m wide; 0.09m thick; sealed by 101; within surface of 102	Stone/gravel spread

Appendix 2: Summary of project archive (WSM 77415)

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

**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 Museums Worcestershire.