

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION IN DROITWICH
SPA TOWN CENTRE,
WORCESTERSHIRE

Darren Miller

Illustrated by Laura Templeton

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE
Project 3273
Report 1648
WSM 39889

Archaeological evaluation in Droitwich Spa town centre, Worcestershire

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Introduction

The evaluation concerned a 2-hectare car-park on the south side of Droitwich Spa town centre (Fig 1; NGR 89710 63360). It was commissioned by CgMs for Kandahar (Droitwich) Ltd, who intend to develop the site, and had already begun to address the archaeological implications, in line with district and county council policies. In 2007, CgMs produced a desk-based assessment, based on previous finds and historic maps (Patrick 2007). This identified a moderate potential for Iron Age and post-medieval remains, and a moderate to high potential for Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Medieval remains. The evaluation aimed to provide more information on the survival of archaeological deposits and the impact of later 19th and 20th Century development. The evaluation formed the first stage of a mitigation strategy designed by CgMs, in consultation with the Planning Advisory Section of the Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service.

Aims

The evaluation was regarded as initial stage of prospection, pending further work. It aimed to test the archaeological potential of three areas by means of sample trenches. More specifically, it aimed to record any remains found in the trenches, and to establish their character, date, and significance. It also aimed to provide basic information on ground conditions, and the extent of modern landscaping.

Methods

Three trenches were excavated, as shown on Figure 2. The tarmac was cut first, then excavated along with modern roadstone by a JCB fitted with a toothless bucket. All further work was undertaken by hand, although only limited further excavation was required. Drawn, written, and photographic records were made according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995). The trenches were then backfilled with layers of roadstone, each layer being compacted by a 7-ton roller. Finally, the tarmac surfaces were replaced and the lines of parking bays were repainted.

Results

Trench 1

This trench showed c0.40 of roadstone over truncated marl (Photo 1). No archaeological features were observed. There was no evidence of a path shown on a map of 1970 (Patrick 2007, fig 11). Clearly, all pre-modern deposits in this area were removed during the construction of the car park in the early 1980s.

Trench 2

This trench showed c0.30m of roadstone over truncated marl (Photo 2) One feature was observed, however: a linear cut aligned NW-SE (context 204). The feature had near vertical sides, and was over 1.20m deep. Given the location and alignment of the feature, it probably represents the removal, during landscaping, of the remains of the salt works brine reservoir shown on a map of

1885 (Patrick 2007, fig 6). Nothing remained of the Council Offices that stood on the site in the 1970s (Patrick 2007, fig 11).

Trench 3

Three archaeological features were found in Trench 3, under c1.00m of very compact roadstone (Fig 3; Photos 3-5). Near the centre of the trench were two small pits, one cutting the other (context 304 and 306).

The earlier pit (context 306) was oval with concave sides and a flattish base. It had a primary fill of mixed marl and subsoil (context 314) and a secondary fill of dark brown silt loam (context 305). One artefact was recovered from the secondary fill: a fragment of brick or tile with one slightly convex surface. This is not diagnostic, and might be Roman, medieval, or post-medieval in date. The later pit (context 304) was circular with concave sides and a gently rounded base. It had a primary fill like that of the earlier pit (context 311), and a secondary fill of charcoal and fire-reddened clay (context 303), probably a dump of material from a nearby hearth. Two small pieces of pottery or fired clay were recovered from the secondary fill (context 303). The pieces are too small to identify with certainty, but they are probably conjoining sherds of sandy briquetage, a fabric produced locally in the Iron Age to make simple vessels for containing salt (Rees 1996). If so, they are clearly residual, in view of the brick or tile fragment from the earlier pit, but they nonetheless suggest some kind of Iron Age activity in the area. The pits themselves were probably dug to hold timbers of a building or structure.

The third feature was a ditch that crossed the east end of the trench on a NW-SE alignment (context 310). The ditch proved to be more than 3.00m wide (extending beyond the trench to the east), and 1.15m deep. These dimensions suggest a substantial field or property boundary rather than a drain. The ditch had three fills, all apparently resulting from erosion of the open sides. Three sherds of 13th century pottery and several fragments of animal bone were recovered from the upper, tertiary fill. However, it is possible that the ditch was excavated much earlier. Environmental samples were taken from all features but it is intended that these will be processed at a later stage in the mitigation strategy.

Context number	Description	Type	Quantity	Weight	Description
303	Secondary fill of pit 304	Pottery	2	7g	Two conjoining sherds of handmade vessel in fabric 1 (sandy briquetage)
305	Secondary fill of pit 306	Brick/tile	1	62g	Fragment with one slightly convex surface in undiagnostic fabric
308	Tertiary fill of ditch 310	Pottery	2	12g	Body sherd of vessel in fabric 55: (Worcester unglazed sandy ware)
		Pottery	1	4g	Rim sherd of ?jug in fabric 99 (miscellaneous medieval ware)
		Pottery	1	7g	Body sherd of handmade vessel in unfamiliar fabric with common quartzite inclusions
		Brick/tile	1	1g	Small fragment in undiagnostic fabric
		Bone	4	107g	Cattle

Table 1: The artefact assemblage

Discussion

The results suggest that large areas of the site have been stripped of all pre-modern deposits, including any archaeological remains that might have been present. The evidence from Trenches 1

and 2 suggests that archaeological deposits are not present within the northern two-thirds of the site. and as the land around them is generally flat, it is reasonable to assume that these areas have been truncated to a similar extent. However, the evidence from Trench 3 shows that archaeological remains are well preserved beneath c1m of car park make-up in this area. Moreover, the remains are apparently of different periods, as anticipated in the desk-based assessment. Along with other remains found nearby (Patrick 2007, 9-10), they suggest an area of archaeological significance. In particular, the ditch in Trench 3, if originally cut well before the 13th Century could, along with a very similar ditch found c45m to the east in 1975 (WSM 601), could form part of an Anglo-Saxon farmstead or be associated with the main settlement at Droitwich.

Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, and unless directed otherwise, the Service intends to publish the following summary in the most appropriate local or regional journals.

In September 2008, Worcestershire County Council were commissioned by CgMs Consulting to excavate three sample trenches in a car park on the south side of Droitwich town centre (NGR 89710 63360). The project was associated with a proposed development by Kandahar (Droitwich) Ltd. It was designed as an initial stage of field evaluation after a desk-based assessment identified at least a moderate potential for various remains. The trenches showed evidence of severe truncation during the construction of the car park in the early 1980s. No pre-modern deposits survived in the northern and central trenches, but a ditch and two pits were found in the southern trench, opposite the Covercroft Centre. The ditch was interpreted as a substantial boundary of medieval or Anglo-Saxon date. The pits were interpreted as structural features of historic but uncertain date. One of the pits also contained sherds from an Iron Age salt container. These remains and others found to the south and east suggest the survival of a multi-period site.

Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank Cathy Patrick and James Gidman (CgMs) and Mike Glyde (HEAS) for their assistance throughout the project.

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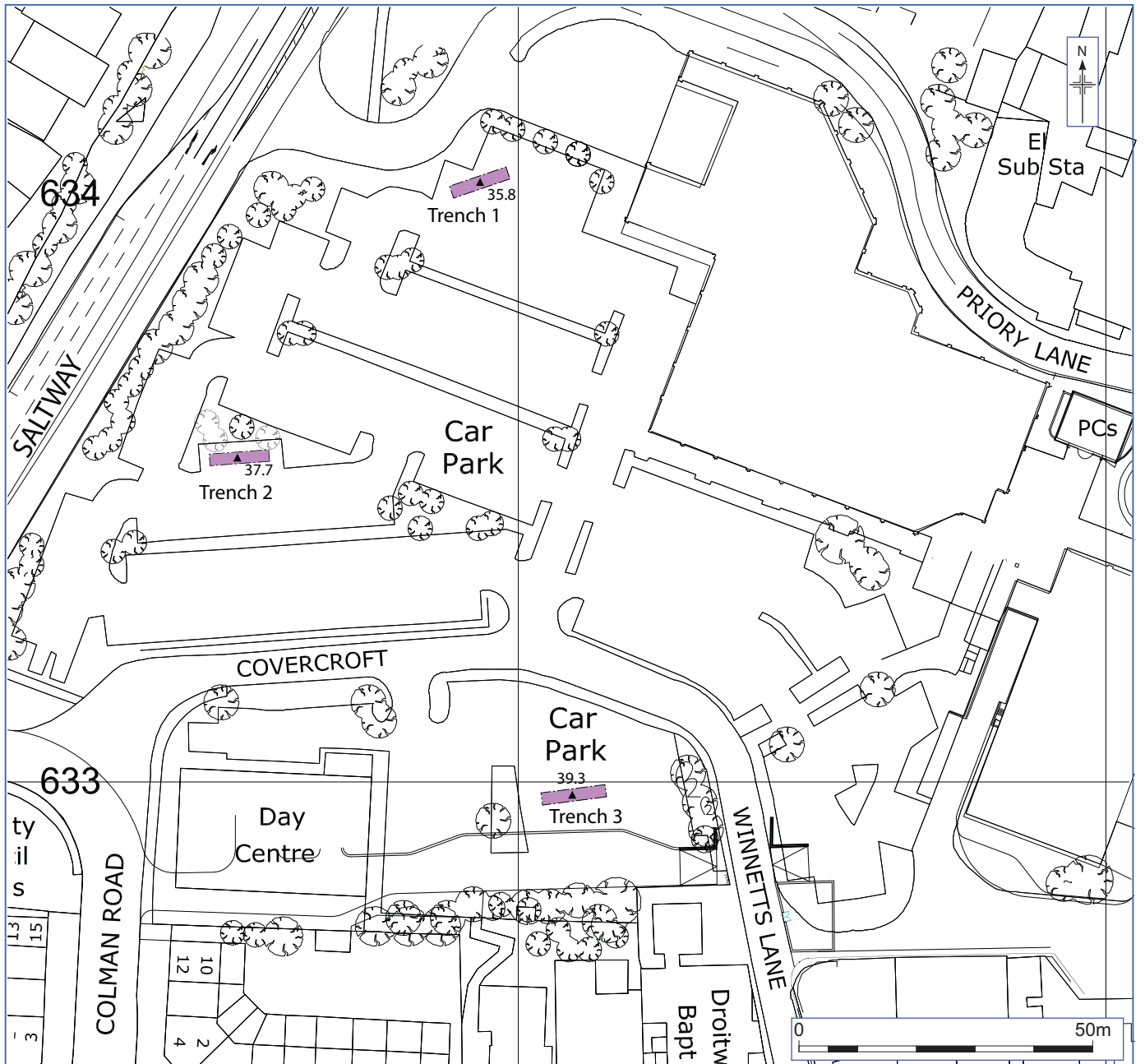
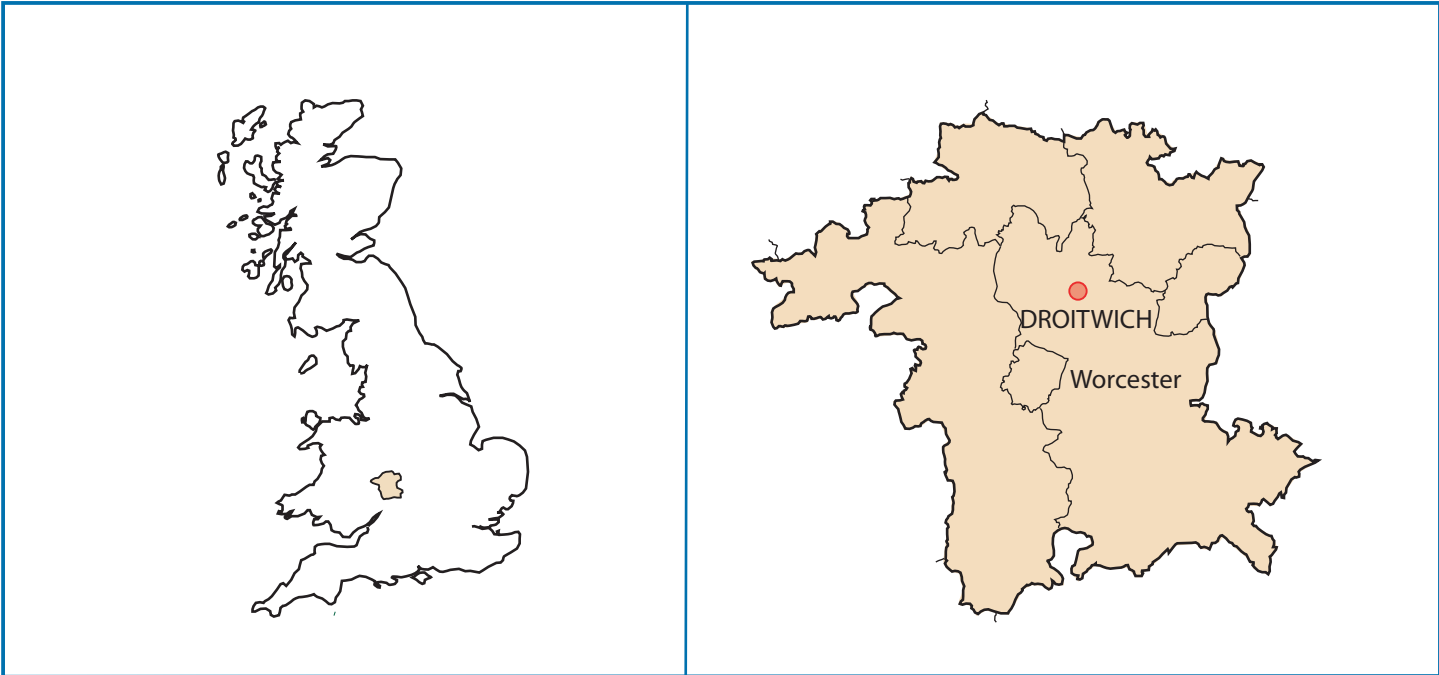
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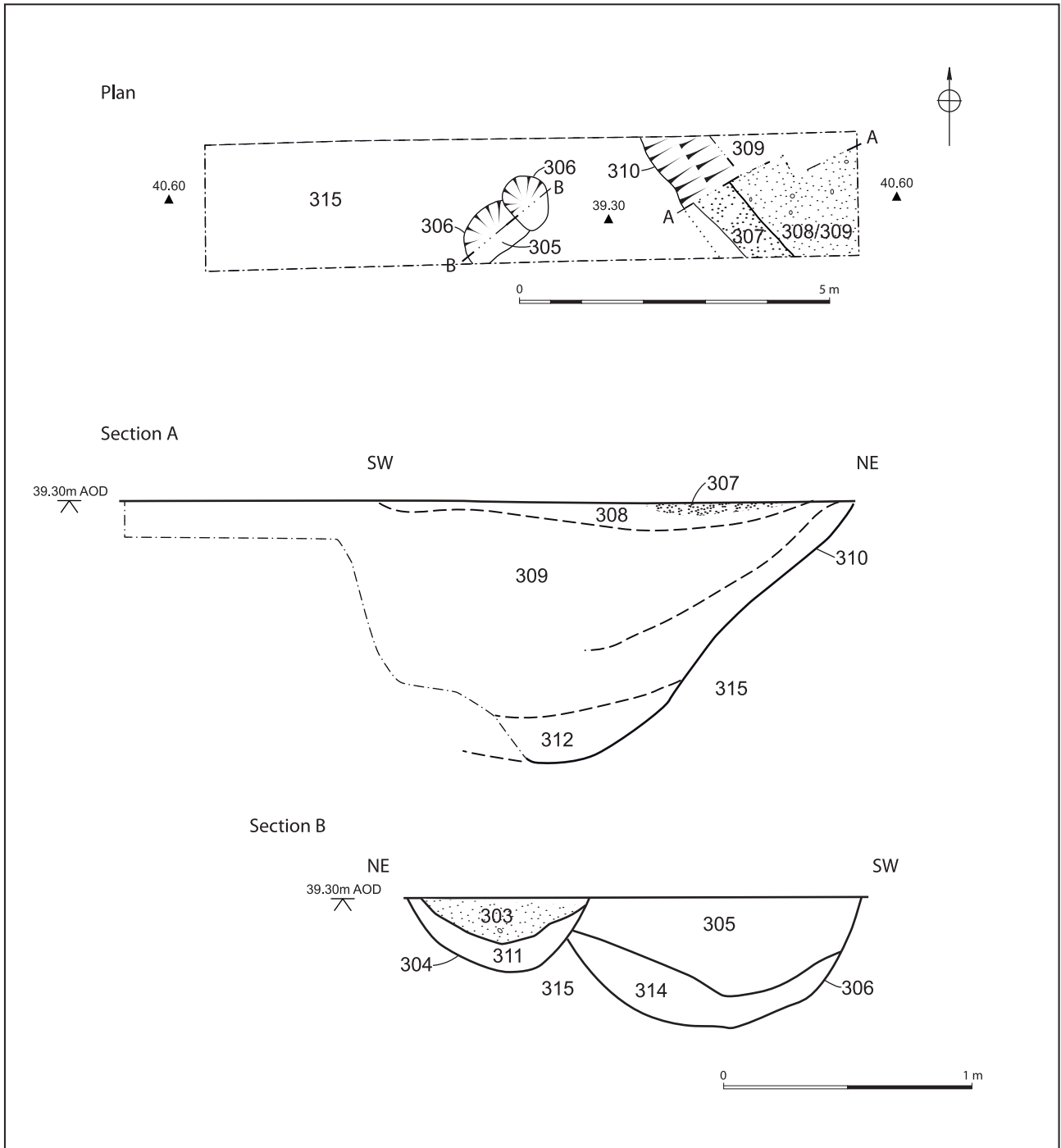
Figures



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Location of the site and trenches

Figure 1



Plans and sections - Trench 3

Figure 2

Photographs



Trench 1, facing south-west, showing roadstone over truncated marl

Photo 1



Trench 2, facing north-east, showing excavated footprint of 19th century brine reservoir

Photo 2



Trench 3, facing east, showing pits near centre and ditch at east end

Photo 3



Pits 304 and 306, facing south-west

Photo 4



Ditch 310, facing south-east

Photo 5

Appendix 1: Technical information

The archive

The archive consists of:

- 13 Context records AS1
- 4 Fieldwork progress records AS2
- 1 Drawing number catalogue AS4
- 1 Photographic record AS3
- 1 Sample number catalogue AS18
- 2 Site drawing sheets AS34
- 3 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 Box of finds
- 1 Computer disk

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum
 Hartlebury Castle
 Hartlebury
 Near Kidderminster
 Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
 Tel Hartlebury (01299) 250416

Summary of data for Worcestershire HER

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303	Secondary fill of pit 304	Pottery	2	7g	Two conjoining sherds of handmade vessel in fabric 1 (sandy briquetage)
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