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Staffordshire County Studies
Sample

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THE LANDSCAPE OF THE STAFFORDSHIRE HOARD

DELLA HOOKE

INTRODUCTION

In July 2009 a metal detectorist, Mr Terry Herbert, surprised the archaeological world when he found gold objects buried in a field beside the Watling Street in Ogle Hay, Staffordshire. The site was immediately excavated by archaeologists from Staffordshire County Council and Birmingham Archaeology and the remainder of the 'hoard' retrieved. It was made up of mainly small gold objects (with some silver and alloy) that appear to represent war-gear, perhaps battle booty, including pommel caps (or pommel-cap fragments) and other sword fittings, parts of a helmet, folded crosses such as might have been carried into battle, and other probable talismen in the form of small gold serpents. The ironwork had been stripped away from the swords and even most of the garnet decoration removed from the objects. One strip of gold alloy bore a Biblical inscription asking God to disperse enemies (Leahy, Blane, Hooke, Jones, and Okasha 2011).

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE HOARD

The hoard was located close to the Watling Street where it crossed through a spine of upland that linked the Cannock Hills to the uplands of the southern part of the Birmingham Plateau. It was, in the Anglo-Saxon period, a remote area of woodland and heath. The Roman Watling Street was the most obvious man-made feature running through the area and was still in use in the Anglo-Saxon period (Champness 2008, 59).

As far as is known this was an area relatively empty of settlement in the Roman period, apart from the centre at Wall (*Letocetum*) and a few outlying villas and farms. There had been two Iron

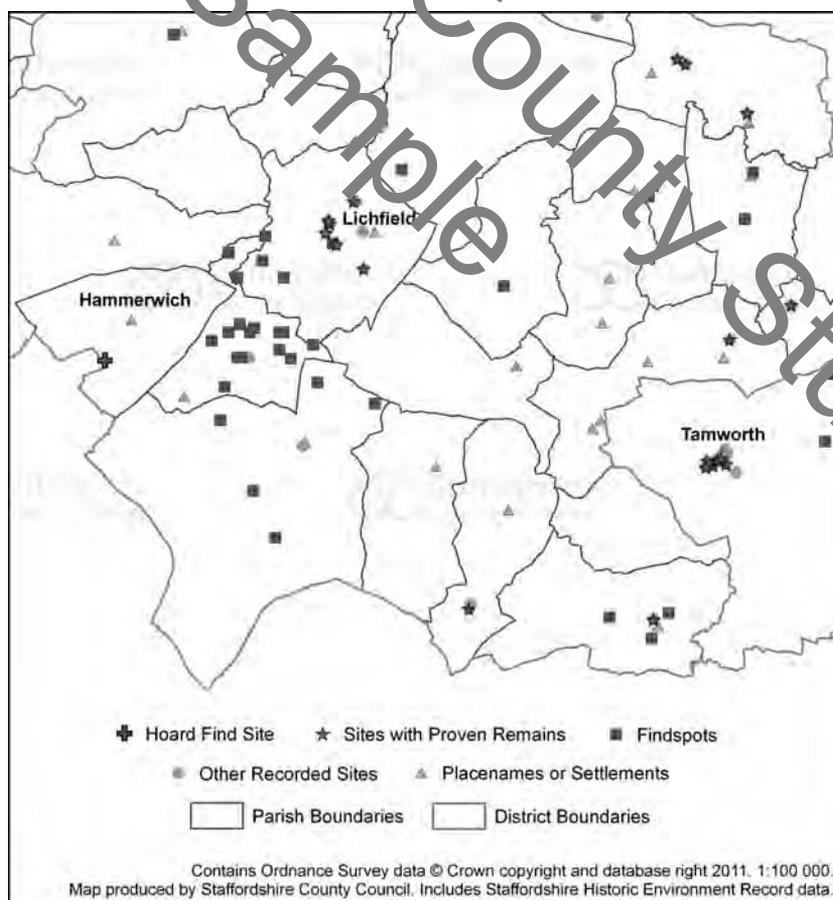


Fig. 1 Staffordshire HER record of Anglo-Saxon sites in the vicinity of the hoard

Age hillforts on the upland spine – Castle Ring to the north and Castle Hills to the south – but these may have been placed to control pastoral resources in a period when cattle, especially, were a sign of status and wealth. For the early medieval period one finds a scatter of find-spots in the vicinity of the Watling Street and Roman Wall (Fig. 1) – as might be expected – and now, also, evidence of occupation at Lichfield before the establishment of Chad’s see in the 660s (S. Dean, pers. comm.). The Mercian capital of Tamworth (if the earlier *Tomtun*) was already described as a royal *vicus* in the late 7th century but it lay away to the east, and there was little to provide any reason to suspect such a significant find as the Staffordshire Hoard. (The boundary of the West Midlands which runs north–south close to the find spot did not exist until modern times when the new county was demarcated in 1974.)

The site lies towards the westernmost end of the Lichfield/Tamworth territory and this may have been a significant boundary in the Anglo-Saxon period, forming a boundary between two south Staffordshire folk groups. This area of highland running north–south through southern Staffordshire

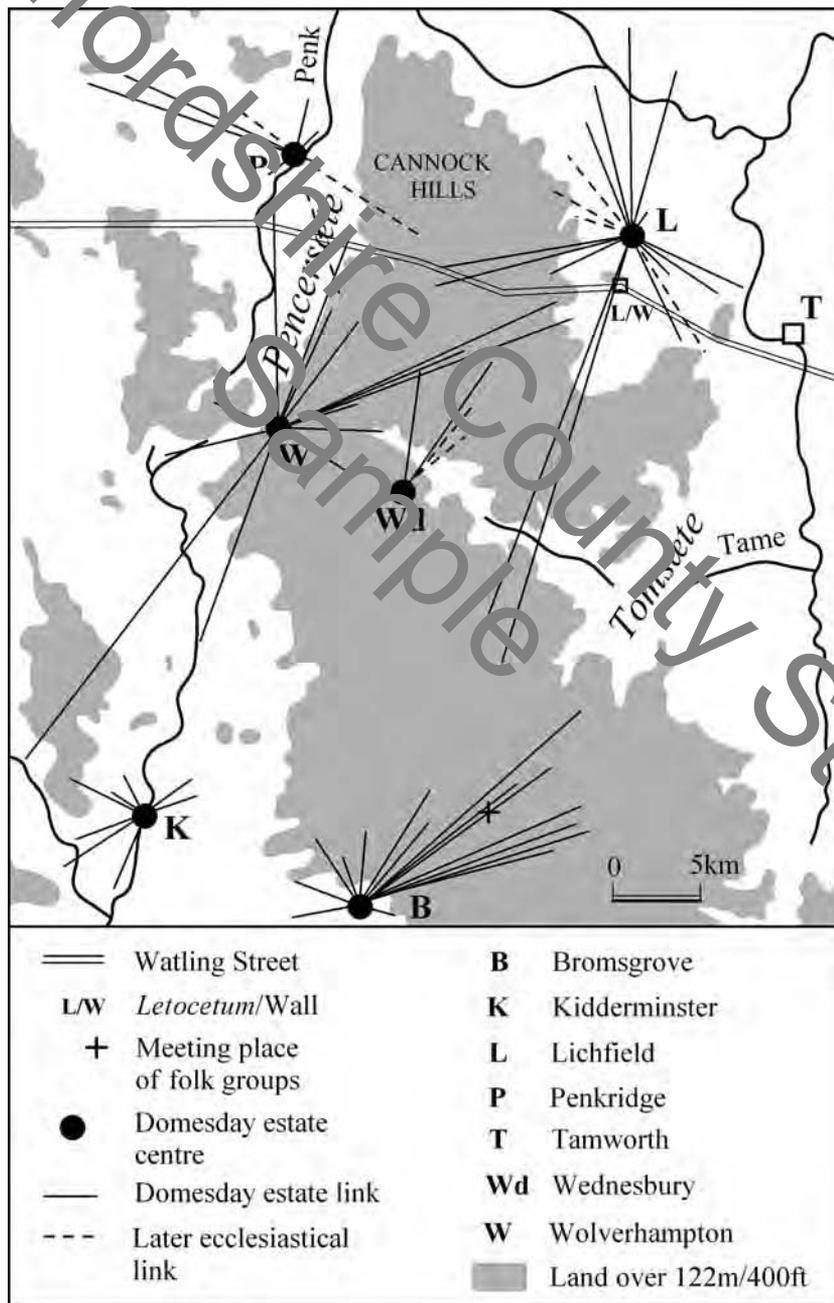


Fig. 2 Domesday estate links in south Staffordshire

13. 'following the road then to the dyke';
 14. 'following the dyke then again to the great alders' [the dyke appears to have run alongside an area of later common land south of Muckley Corner].

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MANOR FARM, WALL, STAFFORDSHIRE: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF 2003

JOHN HALSTED

SUMMARY

In September 2003 an archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology at a proposed farm composting site at Manor Farm, Wall, Staffordshire. The site lies adjacent to the Roman road, Ryknild Street, and c 1.5 km east of the Romano-British town of Wall, itself on Roman Watling Street. Recent excavations on the Birmingham Northern Relief Road had also produced Romano-British archaeology. Therefore, although no known archaeology had previously been identified on the site, the potential for archaeological remains was considered strong enough to warrant a watching brief.

No Romano-British archaeology was recorded, but a discreet group of features filled with heat-fractured stone was excavated, and produced a Middle-Late Iron Age radiocarbon date. This, together with the morphology of the feature group contrasts with burnt mound sites found elsewhere in the West Midlands, although parallels for the use of burnt stone in this period can be found in Staffordshire.

INTRODUCTION

The archaeological watching brief at Manor Farm, Wall, Staffordshire (NGR 411200/306600 and Fig. 1) was undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology on behalf of the client, Mr A. J. Ryman, for Staffordshire County Council Historic Environment Team. The watching brief was designed to monitor the removal of topsoil over an area of c 6000m², down to the uppermost archaeological horizon. In the event of encountering archaeological deposits a mitigation strategy was to be negotiated between the curator and the client.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

A Roman fort at Wall is thought to have been established around AD 60, c 750m north-west of the junction between the Roman roads, Watling Street and Ryknild Street (Fig. 2; Wardle 2003a, 11). Further phases of the fort may have continued into the 2nd century AD (Jones 1998, 1). A large triple ditched enclosure straddling Watling Street is considered to date from the late 3rd to 4th centuries AD (Wardle 2003a, 12; Jones 1998, 1). Further civilian activity dating from the early to mid 2nd century AD through to activity in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries AD has been identified to the south-east of the forts to the east of the junction with Ryknild Street (Fig. 2; *ibid* 3). Such activity may suggest that Romano-British occupation extended further north-eastwards into the area of the development site. This potential is highlighted by the recent discovery of a previously unknown Romano-British cemetery to the south-east discovered during the construction of the Birmingham Northern Relief Road (Wardle 2003a, 12).

METHODOLOGY

The area of the proposed composting site was stripped with a toothless ditching bucket and stripped surfaces were protected from being tracked over or driven upon, in accordance with the written scheme of investigation. Possible archaeological features were marked on the ground and recorded on a location plan. Colour and black and white print photographs were also taken during the topsoil stripping.

A mitigation strategy was negotiated on the identification of archaeological features. A second archaeologist was employed to investigate these features while the topsoil strip continued to be monitored. The archaeological features were excavated in selected sections, a 1:20 scale plan and section drawings were produced together with colour and black and white print photos. Bulk samples were taken for the assessment of palaeoenvironmental plant remains, and for radiocarbon dating.

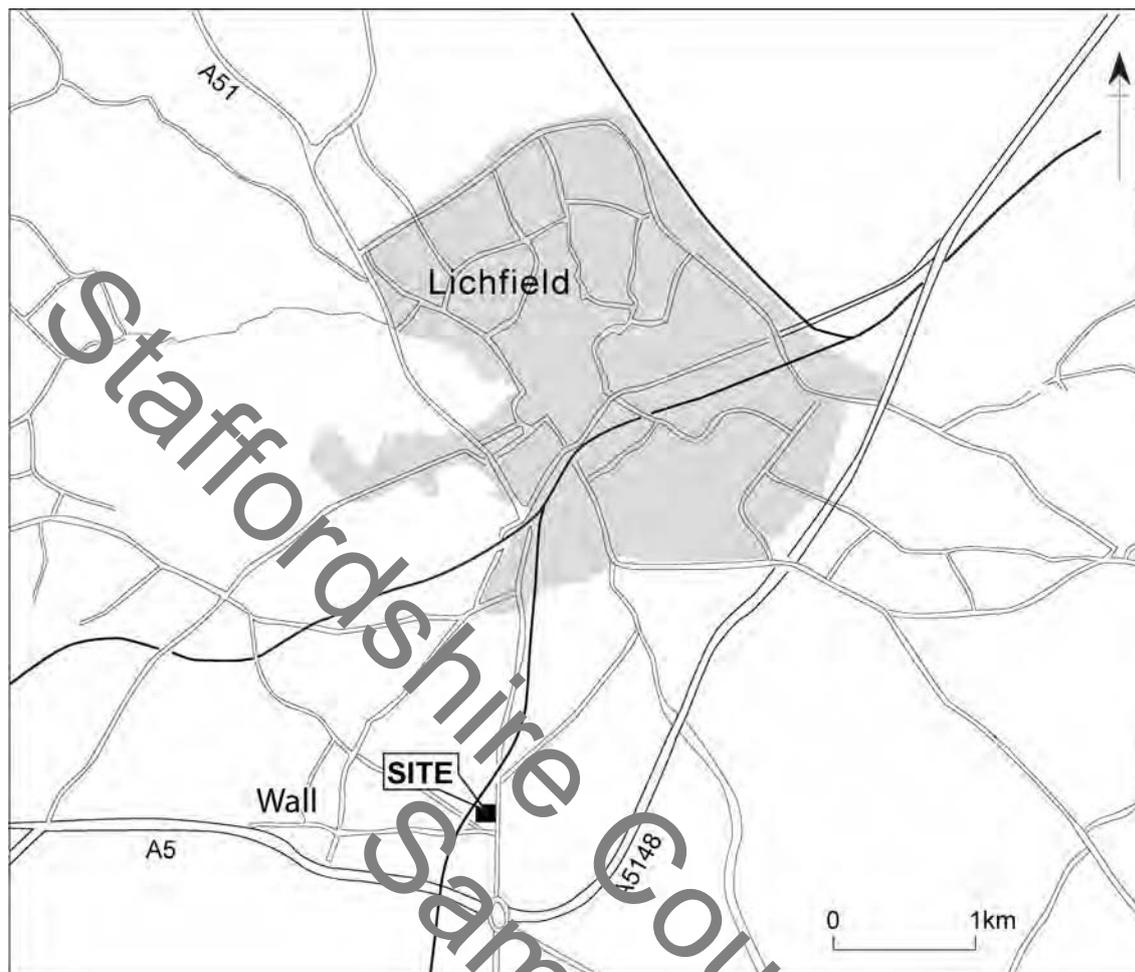


Fig. 1 Site location

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

The ploughsoil was removed to a depth of *c* 0.45m across the site. This horizon (1000) was made up of an orange-brown silty clay, sub-rounded pebbles with occasional brick and tile fragments. The ploughsoil was removed to the upper surface a light brown-orange sandy clay subsoil (1001) with sub-rounded pebbles (Plate 1).

Three archaeological features were identified during the topsoil stripping of the site (Fig. 3). The first feature (F100), was a shallow gully 11.0m in length and 0.2m in depth, orientated north-west to south-east (Fig. 4; Plates 2 and 3). The feature was filled with a light grey-brown silty clay (1002) with charcoal fragments (*c* 5%) and a large quantity of red, purple and blue-grey angular heat fractured stones (*c* 25%) 0.03–0.06m in length (Fig. 5; Plate 3). The quantity and density of heat-fractured stone and charcoal diminished towards the north-west and south-east ends of the linear feature. F100 was subdivided into excavated sections numbered F100–F100.03, filled by contexts (1002), (1004), (1006) and (1008).

Two further features (F101) and (F102) were recorded to the west of F100 (Fig. 4). F101 was a shallow sub-circular feature *c* 1.5m in diameter and 0.08m in depth. This feature was filled with a light orange-brown silty clay (1005) with occasional charcoal flecks and a large quantity (*c* 50%) of heat-fractured stone (Fig. 5; Plate 4). F102m, another shallow sub-circular feature *c* 1.0m by 1.3m and 0.06m in depth, was filled with a light orange-brown silty clay (1007) and a large quantity (*c* 50%) of heat-fractured stones (Fig. 5; Plate 5). No archaeological finds were recovered from these features. It is likely that F101 and F102, and therefore F100, have been substantially truncated by modern land-use regimes.

These features are interpreted as the remains of prehistoric settlement activity and are compared with a number of sites in the West Midlands and Britain in the discussion below. A charcoal sample

400 and 155BC (Beta-135227) and 320–205 BC (Beta-135226) in a pit alignment at Whitemoor Haye (*ibid* 13–15), further demonstrates the use of heated stone in the Iron Age in Staffordshire.

The pit alignments at Whitemoor Haye have been considered to represent a symbolic boundary between landscape zones (Coates 2002, 82) rather than having a purely utilitarian function. In a wider context, linear stone-filled channels associated with burnt stones have also been identified in Denmark dating to the Bronze Age, again recorded over several hundred metres, although their function is unknown (Barfield pers. comm.). The features at Wall do not form part of any such large-scale boundary. This does not preclude, however, the similar use of burnt stone as a symbolic deposition at a specific place, representing activities associated with its primary use. The location of the feature in a potentially waterlogged location in prehistory may represent activities at the limits of a settlement in the Middle–Late Iron Age. It is also possible that the stone-filled features at Wall represent the truncated remains of Iron Age settlement activity, although no associated settlement features, structures or enclosures were present as exemplified at Whitemoor Haye (Coates 2002). The lack of additional associated Iron Age activity at the site at Wall is further emphasised by the large area stripped under controlled conditions and the fact that no artefacts were recovered. It is, therefore, unlikely that the features recorded relate to an associated nucleated settlement site. If such a site existed it must be separated from these features by some distance.

The features excavated at Wall demonstrate the use of burnt stone in contexts separated from core settlement activities beyond the Bronze Age and into the late first millennium BC in Britain. The features demonstrate that not all isolated concentrations of burnt stone are necessarily of Bronze Age date, and that the use of radiocarbon dating of all such features in Staffordshire and the West Midlands is essential. The context of depositions of burnt stone in the Iron Age in the West Midlands in relation to enclosed settlement and agriculture may be the subject of future research in the region.

The fact that no Romano-British archaeology was encountered during the watching Brief demonstrates that the civilian occupation recorded to the southeast of Wall (Jones 1998), does not extend into this area. This may be of use in future interpretations of the development of the Roman town at Wall.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

John Halsted undertook the watching brief, assisted by Sally Radford. Gary Coates and Richard Cuttler managed the project. The report and illustrations were prepared by John Halsted and edited by Richard Cuttler and Mark Hewson. The charred plant remains were analysed by Wendy Smith, Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, University of Birmingham. The charcoal sample was identified and processed by Rowena Gale, Department of Archaeology, University of Reading. I would like to thank Dr Laurence Barfield, Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, University of Birmingham, for bringing to my attention the previously excavated burnt stone feature at Wall, and further parallels to the features recorded here. Thanks are also due to Mr Reynolds for commissioning the project.

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Staffordshire
Sample County Studies



Plate 1 F100, with burnt stones excavated, looking north-west



Plate 2 F100, looking north-west

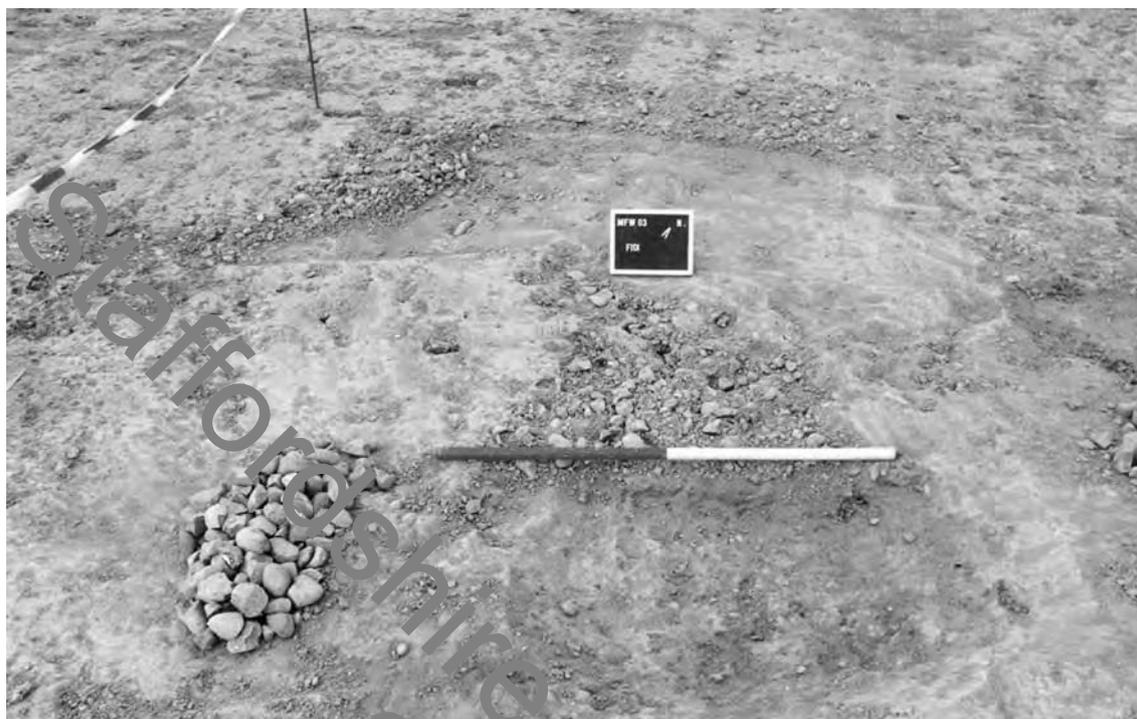


Plate 3 F101, with burnt stones excavated, looking west



Plate 4 F102, with burnt stones excavated, looking west

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING AT SHUGBOROUGH PARK, STAFFORDSHIRE 2005

JOHN HALSTED

with contributions by Ann Woodward, James Grieg and Rob Ixer

SUMMARY

Archaeological evaluation and watching brief was undertaken at Shugborough Park, Staffordshire (centred on NGR 399000, 322900) by Birmingham Archaeology, commissioned by Staffordshire County Council, in advance of the construction of a new car park, visitor centre and access road.

The trial trenchings recorded a Bronze Age pit, sealed beneath an alluvial deposit in the vicinity of a brook. Further pits were recorded, some of which corresponded with a pit alignment previously recorded by aerial photography. A large enclosure ditch containing a sherd of Romano-British pottery was recorded to the southwest of Shugborough Park Farm.

Two sandstone structures were recorded in association with a large hollow feature visible in the area of the car park, which may have represented a natural feature or a holloway. These features may pre-date the 18th-century landscaped park. A post-medieval brick building was recorded to the west of the walled garden, together with a further brick boundary wall laid on sandstone foundations.

INTRODUCTION

The evaluation and watching brief was undertaken at Shugborough Park, Staffordshire by Birmingham Archaeology (Halsted 2005). The work was commissioned by Staffordshire County Council in advance of the construction of a new visitor building, car park and access road.

Shugborough Park lies *c* 7 km to the east of Stafford (NGR 399000, 322900; Fig. 1) and to the south of the confluence of the Rivers Sow and Trent. The park overlies sand and gravel terrace deposits, with alluvial deposits characterising areas adjacent to the rivers. The area of the evaluation lies at *c* 80m AOD, to the north of a ridge of higher ground rising to *c* 130m AOD.

The site is located to the north of the railway line and to the west of the walled garden (Fig. 1) and between this and James Stuart's Triumphal Arch of 1761–7. The Sher Brook lies to the west of the walled garden and runs northwards towards Shugborough Park Farm.

A number of archaeological sites and monuments exist within the Shugborough Estate. The earliest potential features relate to cropmarks identified by aerial photography. These appear to represent possible ring ditches which may date to the Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, a pit alignment which may date to the Iron Age, and a rectilinear enclosure which may date to the Iron Age or Romano-British period (Staffordshire Historic Environment Record, Primary Record Number 04512; Fig. 1).

A deserted medieval and post medieval village site (PRN 01649; not illustrated) extends either side of the road approaching the Shugborough Hall, to the northeast of the walled garden area and Park Farm. This village is documented as having been relocated as part of 18th-century improvements to the estate (Staffordshire County Council 2005, 7).

A number of mills and mill ponds (PRN 20791, 20798, 50721; not illustrated) associated with the village and the Sher Brook also exist within the estate and are also recorded on the map of 1600 (*ibid* 24.). Shugborough Hall itself originated as a medieval moated manor (PRN 00862; not illustrated) enclosed by a diverted section of the River Sow to the north of the present site of the Hall. The location of the present hall appears to date to the late 17th century.

A number of Greek revival style monuments were constructed in the 18th century (PRN 08029, 08025, 08030; not illustrated), and a walled garden and associated cottage (PRN 12803) were constructed in the early 19th century.

AIMS AND METHODS

The evaluation and watching brief were designed to identify any archaeological features lying within the bounds of the proposed development, and to assess the date, character and significance of any such deposits. The evaluation was undertaken in two stages comprising a geophysical survey followed by the excavation of ten trial trenches.

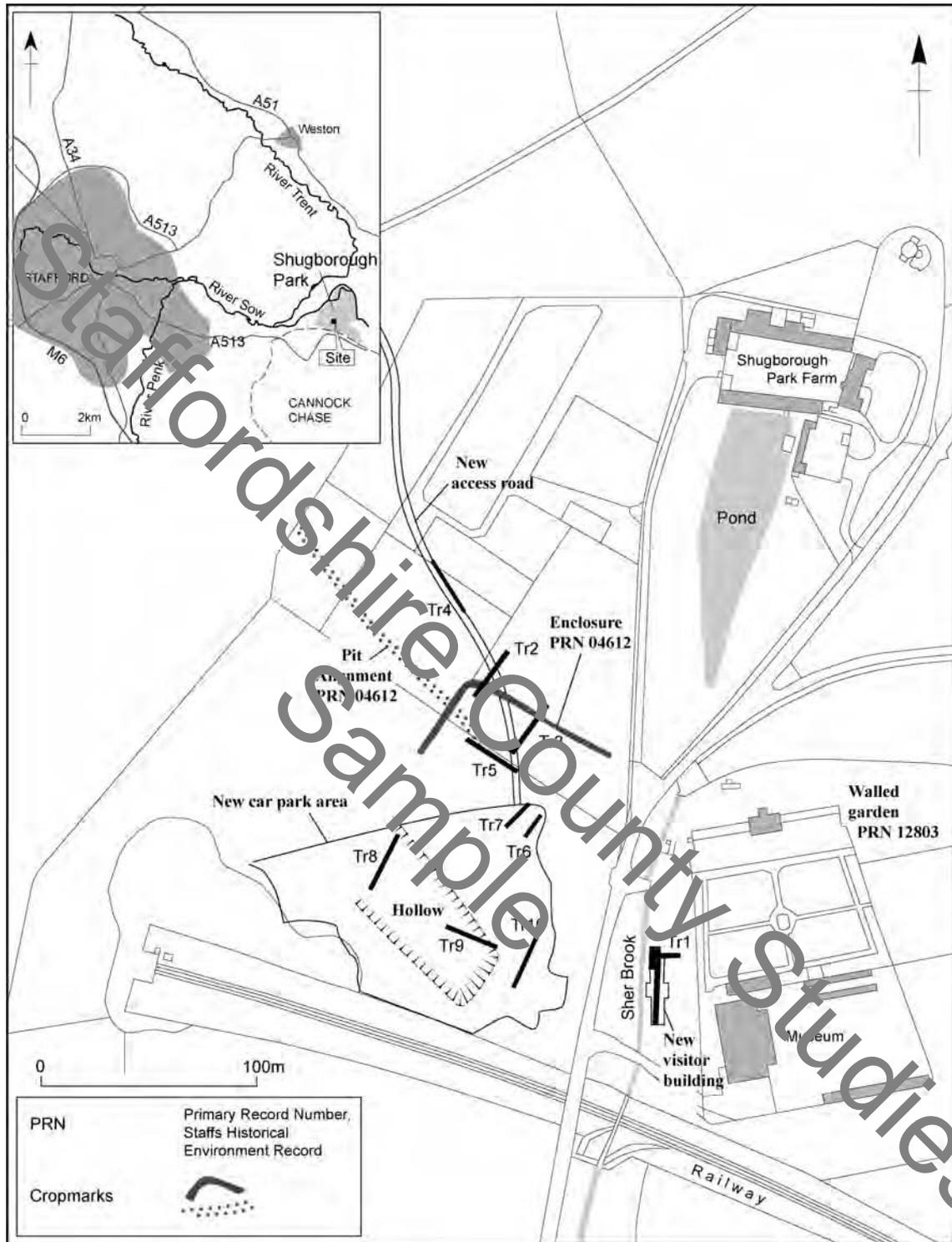


Fig. 1 Site location

A magnetic susceptibility scan was carried out over the area of the new car park and southern portion of the new access road. Detailed geophysical survey (magnetometry and resistivity) was designed to establish more fully the character of these areas. A detailed geophysical survey was also undertaken in the area of the new visitor building, to the west of the walled garden.

The trenches were positioned in the area of the new visitor centre, the area of the new car park, and along the line of the new access road (Fig. 1). The positioning of the trenches was influenced by the location of features plotted from aerial photographs of the park, which had

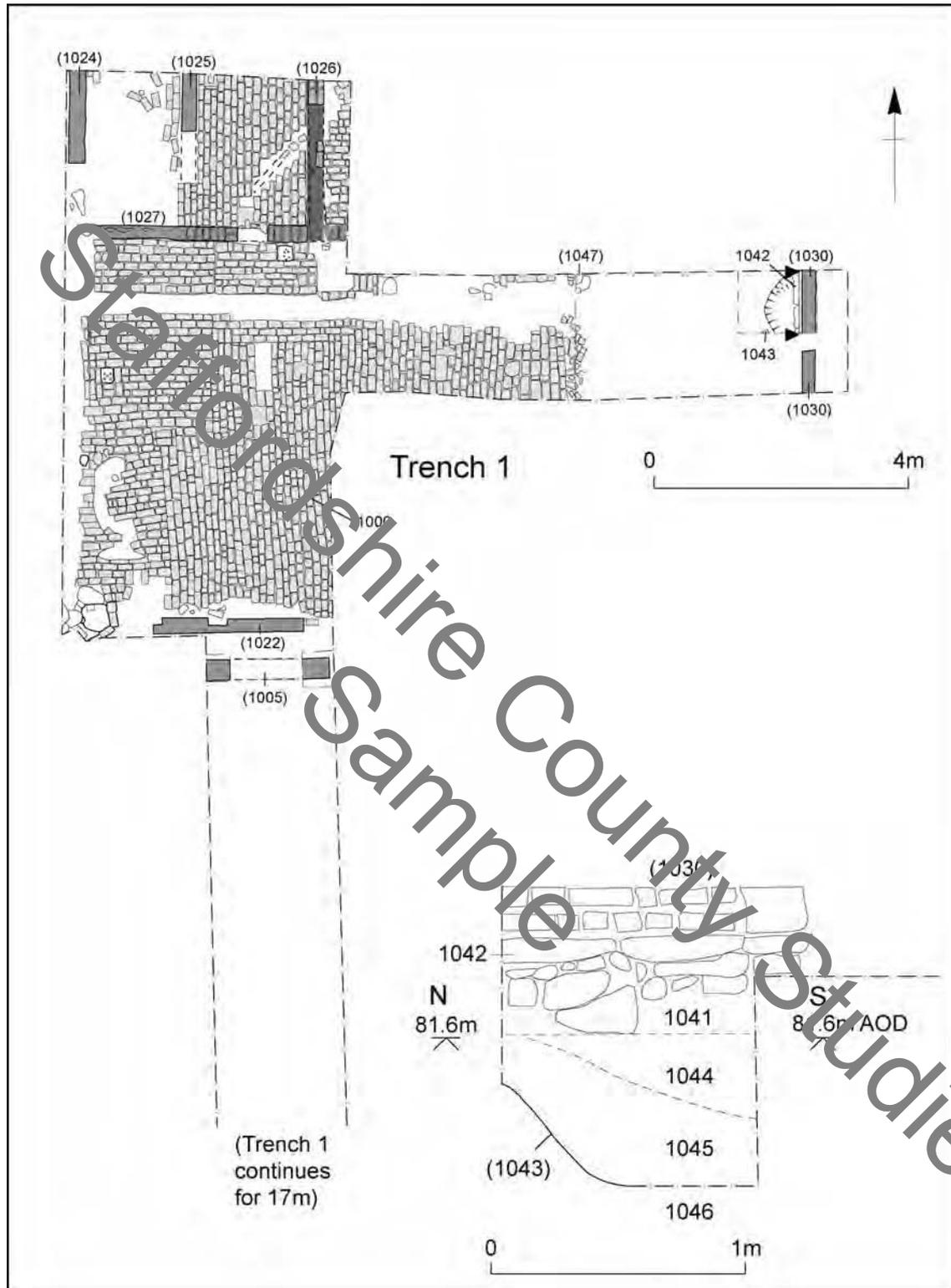


Fig. 2 Trench 1

suggested the presence of a pit alignment and an enclosure ditch of unknown date (Fig. 1). Further trenches were excavated in relation to linear anomalies present on the geophysical survey, and in areas where no archaeological information was available. A watching brief was maintained in the area of the new visitor centre during the excavation of footings and associated service trenches.

Microscopic Description

Petrographically a clean clay carries small, monocrystalline quartz plus minor to trace amounts of muscovite flakes, untwinned feldspar and plagioclase altering to fine-grained white mica. Locally the clay is very clean and is devoid of non-plastics.

Non-igneous rock clasts are rounded to angular and include polycrystalline quartz/quartzite and fine-grained, grain-supported, arkosic sandstone. Igneous rock clasts are all highly altered/ weathered and include fine-grained feldspathic rocks with a trachytic texture, fine-grained mafic-bearing volcanics and coarse-grained quartz-altered feldspar. Other rocks comprise ?metamorphic, quartz-fine-grained epidote and fine-grained quartz-biotite/ brown amphibole \pm ?epidote the latter is identical to clast present in sherd 2.

Minor amounts of paler fired grog show fabrics at variance with the main clay fabric. Post-depositional gypsum with fluid inclusions is also present as euhedral crystals or irregular patches but not very common and has precipitated from local groundwaters that in Permo-Triassic rocks of the Midlands are calcium sulphate-bearing.

The clay is clean and the rock non-plastics are sparse but large so giving a bimodal size distribution to the non-plastic component of the pot. It is difficult to determine for certain if the pot was intentionally tempered for although the size distribution suggests that it was, the polyolithic nature of the rock clasts suggest a natural assemblage namely a sand/gravel comprising weathered rocks. There is too little grog to suggest that it was added intentionally.

Sherd 4

Macroscopic Description

The outer surface is a light brown (5YR 6/1 on the G.S.A. rock-colour chart) but the cut face shows the body of the pot to be medium dark grey (N4) with a moderate yellowish orange (10YR 5/6), 1mm thick, outer rim. It is quite sparsely ?tempered with 3-4mm diameter, cubic rock clasts that are very fine-grained and pale green (pale olive 10Y 5/2) in colour.

Thin Section

The pot has a black (N1) core with a 1mm thick dark yellow orange (10YR 5/6) outer rim. Large, 4mm diameter, porphyritic and vesicular, altered lava compose the main rock clasts and are dark greenish grey (5GY 4/1). Some grog may be present.

Microscopic Description

Petrographically a clean clay carries small, monocrystalline quartz some showing stained extinction plus minor to trace amounts of rounded plagioclase and muscovite flakes.

Rock clasts are sub-rounded to sub-angular and the pot is close to being monolithic. Non-igneous rock clasts are rare but include 'chert' and polycrystalline quartz. Igneous rock clasts are all altered/ weathered and include fine-grained, feldspathic rocks with a trachytic texture but are mainly porphyritic lavas with plagioclase phenocrysts set in a fine-grained, microlitic feldspar or feldspar-quartz matrix. Some 'chert' may be rhyolite. One clast comprises polycrystalline, coarse-grained plagioclase.

Small, angular, pale-fired grog has little or no non-plastics in them.

Post-depositional gypsum with fluid inclusions is also present as euhedral crystals or polycrystalline irregular patches and has precipitated from local groundwaters that in Permo-Triassic rocks of the Midlands are calcium sulphate-bearing.

The clay is clean and the rock non-plastics are sparse but large so giving a bimodal size distribution to the non-plastic component of the pot. It is difficult to determine for certain if the pot was intentionally tempered but the size distribution and limited lithologies suggest that it was. There is too little grog to suggest that it was added intentionally.

BEAUDESERT HALL, STAFFORDSHIRE: A HOUSE OF THE BISHOPS OF COVENTRY AND LICHFIELD

MALCOLM HISLOP AND SHANE KELLEHER

SUMMARY

Emergency recording of the upstanding remains of Beaudesert Hall, between Cannock and Lichfield, has added to our knowledge of this former medieval and Elizabethan great house. Of the late medieval residence belonging to the bishops of Coventry and Lichfield, only the south wall of the great hall survives, in a much altered state, whilst the two other surviving fragments of the building are probably late 16th-century in origin; these are the replacement north wall of the hall, together with part of the adjoining east wall of the west range, and the north-west angle of the building. Despite the fragmentary state of the remains, the present survey has nevertheless allowed the degree of medieval survival to be assessed, and the bishops' house to be considered in greater detail than has hitherto proved possible.

INTRODUCTION

In November 2007 Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by the King George V Memorial Scouts and Guides Recreation Trusts (more commonly known as The Beaudesert Trust) to carry out a programme of historic building recording of the upstanding remains of Beaudesert Hall following a structural collapse. The recording comprised analytical written descriptions, a photographic survey, and a measured survey, the latter being carried out at a distance by a laser scanner owing to concerns about the structural stability of the remains and the inadvisability of coming into too close contact with them. This report outlines the results of the historic building recording.

LOCATION

The remains of Beaudesert Hall are located within Beaudesert New Park in Staffordshire, approximately five miles north-west of Lichfield and approximately three miles north-east of Cannock and are centred on NGR SK 0546 1336 (Fig. 1). The park is situated to the north of Gentleshaw village, at the south-east end of the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Agricultural lands extend eastwards from the hall towards the A51, which links Lichfield and Rugeley, and to the north the land falls away quite sharply.

The remains of the hall lie at the heart of an historic landscape which includes the Iron Age Castle Ring univallate hillfort, an historic deer park, and various outbuildings and garden features, including a Victorian walled garden and a late 18th-century semi-circular stable block. The ruins, which stand at the edge of a level clearing within an area of woodland, which was formerly an ornamental garden, comprise three main elements: the remains of the two east-west aligned side walls of the hall and, to the north, part of a subsidiary wing (Figs 2 and 3, Plate 1).

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Originally in the extensive royal forest of Cannock, Beaudesert Park had been created by the bishops of Coventry and Lichfield even before they acquired a large part of the forest as a private chase in 1290 (Kettle 1967, 342–3). What was presumably a lodge was rebuilt by Bishop Walter Langton, who in 1306 was granted a licence to crenellate a house he was having built at Beaudesert (CPR 1301–1307, 462).

In 1546 Bishop Richard Sampson was forced to surrender the chase to the Crown, the acquisition being engineered by Sir William Paget, Henry VIII's Secretary of State, who then obtained the property for himself, including the episcopal house of Beaudesert (Colvin 1985, 107). It was Paget's second son Thomas, however, who undertook the task of converting the former bishops' house into an Elizabethan mansion, the work being carried out between 1573 and 1583. An extensive programme of works oversaw the demolition of most of the medieval house (including the chapel), the main exception being at least part of the great hall, which was incorporated into the new house as a rear wing of the east-facing main range. The principal fabric used in the new build was red brick, which

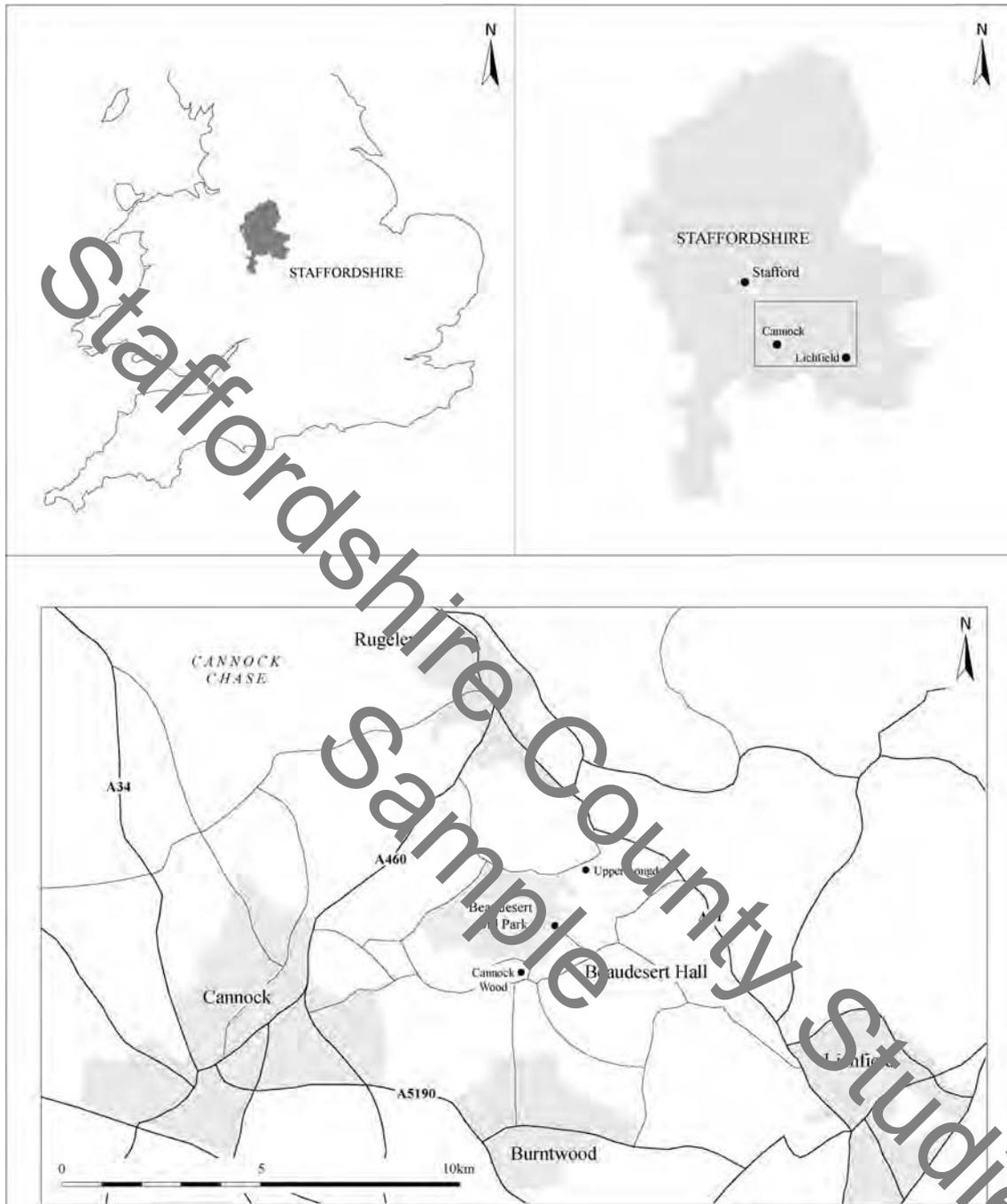


Fig. 1 Site location

was largely sourced and fired on-site, although some bricks were purchased from manufacturers at Brereton and Lichfield (Castlering Archaeology 2005, 3); stone dressings were quarried on site and at Rugeley (Colvin 1985, 109). Lord Paget's religious and political sympathies led to his precipitate departure into exile in 1583 and the confiscation of his estates, so bringing about a brusque curtailment of the works at Beaudesert (Colvin 1985, 110).

The property was regained in 1597 by Paget's son, William, who probably built a gatehouse and forecourt before he died in 1628. No further substantial works appear to have been done at Beaudesert until 1771–2 when extensive alterations were carried out by the Wyatt family, the leading architects and builders in Staffordshire at the time (Colvin 1985, 112–14). One of the main tasks was the 'gothicking' of the medieval great hall, and although very little is known of the interior composition, the plans show a music gallery at one end supported by quadrilobe columns, and it is

known that Gothick chimney pieces of Roach Abbey stone were inserted. A central leaded cupola was constructed on the roof and stucco was applied to the brickwork.

In 1826 the Great Hall was remodelled again by Henry Paget, marquess of Anglesey, to designs by the Wyatts' associate and successor Joseph Potter, who remodelled the hall 'in a style of Gothic, a little more archaeological than Wyatt' (Colvin 1985, 120). This scheme included a projecting billiard room to the south, and the construction of a series of greenhouses, which stood against the south wall of the hall and which were recorded in an etching of 1882 (Colvin 1985, 112).

The interior of the house was greatly damaged by a fire in 1909. All vestiges of the Wyatt and Potter schemes were removed in the subsequent restoration, which saw the interior of the house reconstructed as a series of period rooms, ranging from a late medieval great hall to a 'Queen Anne' bedroom (Colvin 1985, 120). In addition, a substantial neo-Elizabethan wing was built immediately to the south of the great hall on the site formerly occupied by Potter's billiard room. The exact relationship of this new wing to the great hall has yet to be ascertained, but photographs published in *Country Life* in 1919 show that they were in very close proximity to one another, the hall being dwarfed by the new wing, but also that the south windows of the hall still emitted light, suggesting that there was space between the two structures.

The poor financial climate and the burdens of taxation of the post-World War I period forced the sale of the Beaudesert estate. The marquess ceased to use the house from 1920, being unable to afford the running of two country houses (Beaudesert and Plas Newydd in Anglesey) and a town house in London. Much of the land was sold off to the Forestry Commission in 1920 and the house put up for sale. Despite the rest of the estate being completely sold off by 1932, the building remained unsold when in 1935 the marquess decided to sell the interior fixtures and fittings and demolish the building. The demolition firm was given 15 years to undertake the work; however, they went out of business during World War II with the ruins as they stand today still awaiting demolition. Even though these were subsequently listed in the 1980s, the Territorial Army used explosives in the 1970s to collapse a concrete pad into the cellars under part of the building (Michael Street, *pers comm*), whilst part of the ruins recently suffered structural collapse.

BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Summary

Three main elements of Beaudesert Hall which have survived the demolition (Figs 2–3) are: (a) the south wall of the medieval and later great hall; (b) a parallel wall that formed the north side of the great hall in the post-medieval period together with an attached fragment of the west wing; and (c) the north-west angle of the 16th-century house. A cursory inspection of these remains reveals that a great deal of repair, alteration, and remodelling has taken place subsequent to the replacement of the medieval house with the 16th-century mansion. The earliest visible fabric is the late 15th-century sandstone ashlar of the great hall, and while 16th-century and 19th-century stone phases have also been discerned, most of the subsequent work is in red brick of varying sizes and manufacture, ranging in date from the late 16th century to early 20th century. In addition, a great part of the remains appears to have been underpinned with concrete in the early 20th century.

The Great Hall South Wall (Figs 4 and 5, Plate 2)

Phase 1: 15th century

Of the bishops' house only the south wall of the great hall survives above ground level. This shows that the hall was built of sandstone ashlar, and although only limited expanses of the medieval fabric are still to be seen on the exterior (south) elevation (Fig. 4), they include a chamfered plinth and, more significantly, three large late 15th-century Perpendicular transomed windows. Set high up in the wall, each window has four lower lights with segmental-pointed heads and four upper lights, of which the round trefoil heads and sunken spandrels form a single component with the flat lintel. Inside, these openings are provided with Tudor rere-arches composed of two-stone lintels (Fig. 5). Immediately west of the easternmost window is the least altered part of the medieval fabric, an area of large smooth-faced ashlar blocks in regular courses corresponding with the blocks of the window jambs. Directly over the windows, the elevation is capped by a chamfered stone string.

On the interior (north) elevation (Fig. 5) the stonework is not so much in evidence, but most of that which does survive dates from the 15th century. Immediately to the left (east) of the central

Later Phases

Apart from the medieval structures, the other elements of the standing remains seem to belong, in origin at least, to the construction of Paget's late 16th-century mansion. Despite the substantial demolition of the Elizabethan house, the survey has thrown some extra light upon the replacement of the medieval house by its successor. It does, for example, seem that the great hall was even more substantially altered than has been generally recognised, the former north wall apparently being pulled down and replaced to produce a narrower hall than the 15th-century original. The extensive alterations to the north wall have obscured the 16th-century scheme, although the very fact that the great hall was largely demolished suggests that the retention of the south wall had little to do with reverence for the past and more to do with emphasising the superiority of the present.

While the north wall tells us little about the 16th-century phase, fabric from this period survives within the south wall. This is, on the whole, represented by thin orangey-red brick laid in English bond, by the sandstone ashlar of the chimney stack, by the blocking of the late 15th-century high four-centred arch window which lit the west end of the hall, and by the moulded stone window jamb surviving on the sub of the west wall. It is clear that Paget extended the hall eastwards, using red brick with sandstone dressings, to meet his east-facing Elizabethan mansion. In addition, the cores of the great hall north wall and the west range west wall also date from this late 16th-century phase, as does much of the north-west angle, even though it may contain earlier material.

There does not appear to be much surviving evidence of any of the remodelling work carried out by Wyatt in the late 18th century, and Joseph Potter's hand is similarly elusive, having been almost completely erased by the reconstruction carried after the 1909 fire, which is, to a great extent, represented by distinctive smooth-faced dark red brick as well as fine quality stone in keeping with the south elevation of the hall.

CONCLUSION

The recording and analysis of the fabric has told us a good deal more about the remains of Beaudesert Hall, and about the complexity of its structural history. While this is a step towards a deeper understanding of one of Staffordshire's lesser known great houses, there is still much to be learnt, particularly about the medieval house and the process by which it was replaced in the 16th century, and the extent to which it influenced the character of Paget's mansion. There is certainly a good deal of scope for further research: technically it would be possible to excavate substantial areas of the site; at the very least it would be feasible to confirm the ground plan through a programme of targeted clearance and survey. Although the greater part of the area occupied by the Elizabethan house was cellared, there is scope for geophysical survey to the south of the medieval great hall and the possible site of a medieval outer court. Topographical and archaeological surveys of the landscape setting would be likely to add perspective to the record of the upstanding remains, while a detailed programme of documentary research might draw forth further references to the medieval building and this would allow us to recreate its character more closely. It is to be hoped that it might prove possible to pursue some of these lines of enquiry in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The building recording project was commissioned by the King George V Memorial Scouts and Guides Recreation Lands (The Beaudesert Trust). Thanks are owed to Michael Street OBE of The Beaudesert Trust for his co-operation and assistance throughout this project, and to Stephen Dean who monitored the project for Staffordshire County Council. Thanks must also be given to Tim Nicol of NJL Consultants who provided drawings of previous surveys of the study area, and to Castlering Archaeology for providing the Cultural Heritage Assessment. The project was managed for Birmingham Archaeology by Malcolm Hislop, and the historic building recording was carried out by Shane Kelleher. Michael Lobb undertook the laser scanning, the collected data being processed by Shane Kelleher to produce CAD drawings, which were prepared for publication by Ric Tyler.

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Staffordshire County Studies
 Sample

EXCAVATIONS AT CHURCH HILL, WALSALL

ELEANOR RAMSEY AND RICHARD CUTTLER

with a contribution by Steve Litherland

SUMMARY

The following report summarises the results of a programme of archaeological investigation that took place ahead of a major redevelopment scheme on the edge of the historic centre of Walsall. These investigations have added greatly to our knowledge of the town's character and development. This area of historic Walsall has been occupied and reoccupied over the post-medieval period and has seen dramatic changes in use, character and fortune. The hill itself was extensively quarried for limestone, with terraces and deposits relating to quarry backfill and some industrial activity being tentatively dated to the 17th century. After the quarrying had ceased, the area was given over to settlement, with the construction, firstly, of large affluent houses along the Upper Rushall Street frontage, and then in the mid to late 19th century smaller slum houses crowded in behind these on the hill. The last of the slums was demolished in the 1930s. The project complements and enhances previous archaeological work in the area, so contributing to a greater understanding of the historic development of the town.

INTRODUCTION

The development area lies on the south-eastern side of a shallow stream valley which runs through Walsall. The land rises from around 125m AOD at the valley bottom to 150m AOD at the summit of Church Hill. The drift geology is made up of sand and gravel at the valley bottom, and clay on the slopes of Church Hill. The hill itself is a limestone outcrop which has witnessed several quarrying and terracing events in its recent history.

The main excavations were located in an area bounded by Bullock's Row, The Ditch, Ablewell Street, and Upper Rushall Street (hereinafter referred to as the Church Hill site), with additional archaeological observation conducted at the car park situated at the east end of the High Street and the adjoining section of the High Street itself (hereinafter referred to as the High Street site, Fig. 1). The results are described in this report and compared with those of other archaeological works conducted previously.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND *by Steve Litherland*

Walsall is not mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086, but most writers have nevertheless suggested that an early settlement is likely to have been located in the area of St Matthew's church (earlier dedicated to All Saints) on the summit of Church Hill. Gould has put forward a case for an original centre further north by the river crossing (Baker 1989, 23; Gould 1983, 1). At present there is no archaeological evidence to support either of these suggestions.

The first definite record of a settlement dates from 1159 when Henry II granted the manor to Herbert le Rous in return for an annual fee farm of £4. The parish church is mentioned for the first time in 1200 when it was granted by the Crown to the bishop of Lichfield. We can expect that Walsall took on an urban status around this time as well: the wide High Street, which runs down from the church, is an obvious planned urban element, allowing room for a street market. William le Rous, the lord of the manor in the early 13th century, was granted the right to hold a weekly market and an annual fair in 1220 and he may have re-planned the settlement around this time. Subsequently, around 1235, he granted burgage tenure to his tenants, freeing them from many feudal services, presumably again to encourage marketing and trading and to increase his own revenue from the manor (Baker 1989, 5, 7, 22).

The town is likely then to have expanded to the north-west, with the laying out of Park Street, southwards along Peal Street and Dudley Street, and to the north-east into Upper Rushall Street and Ablewell Street and also Lower Rushall Street (Baker 1989, 22). While the precise chronology of this development of the early town is uncertain, it is likely to have taken place before the onset of the Black Death and other economic problems of the mid 14th century.

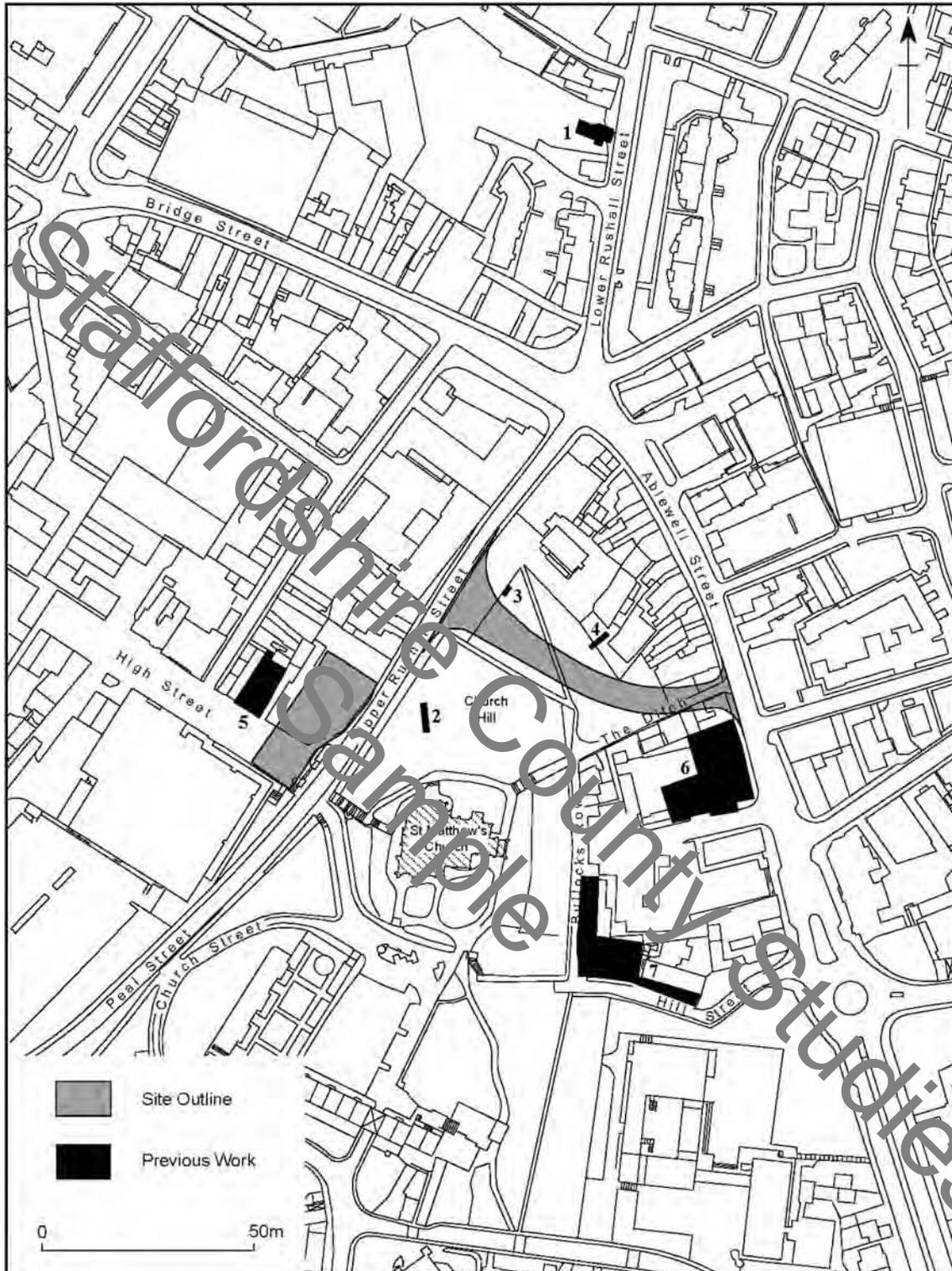


Fig. 1 Location of sites 1–7 and current work

There are indirect early 13th-century references to Rushall Street, and it was first specifically so named in a deed of 1339 (WLHC 63/19). By the mid 15th century buildings on the street included one known as ‘my lord’s inn’, which may have been a precursor of the Bull’s Head coaching inn (Currie *et al* 1976, 146–65). The earliest known reference to Ablewell Street dates from 1309 when it is called ‘Ablewellsych’ (*Ibid* 1976, 146–65). Many early writers have followed Duignan’s derivation of the name as being from a corruption from the Norman French *aval* meaning below or

Survey mapping (Fig. 5). It is highly likely that these properties dated from the mid to late 19th century, and were also representative of the down-turn in affluence and fortune of the inhabitants of the area. While it has been problematic to identify exactly which yard listed in the census relates to the archaeology, the general area was shown from the documentary evidence to be incredibly poor and crowded, with each small property housing a whole family and often others. The stone rubble and brick wall identified as having been buttressed and reused may have originally been a boundary wall defining the northern edge of the Bull's Head Yard area that is feasibly earlier, delineating a terrace in this area. The recovery from this part of the site of waster pottery which may have actually been bought and used as seconds further highlights the impoverished character of this area of 19th century Walsall.

The properties on the hill were occupied by labourers, servants, the old, and the unemployed, with trades listed in the census returns including whip-thong makers, buckle burnishers, saddle stitchers, and harness stitchers. As well as living in the properties, these small-scale traders were also likely to work on the premises, and in workshops that also crowded the yards and courts. The yard area to the east, with its unidentifiable brick structures and ashy deposits, was likely to be a communal area, similar to those around which back-to-back housing was built, and may have had a tap, the wash-house, toilets, dustbins, and workshops (Upton 2005, 6). Although Walsall did not have back-to-back housing, *road* court housing such as that recorded during this work, fulfilled a similar function in housing the massively expanding and essentially poor population of the industrialised town.

The squalid, claustrophobic, and insanitary conditions of these houses led to major health problems, including several cholera epidemics, and in the late 19th century the area was considered for clearance, though this was in reality dealt with on a piecemeal basis (Lewis and Woods 1987, 73). The properties were demolished as slums during the 1930s, but the exceptional state of preservation suggests that the demolition involved pulling them in on themselves and then grassing over the rubble remains.

CONCLUSION

The current excavations are a valuable contribution to the study of the early history of Walsall, especially when taken in conjunction with the results of earlier small-scale work in the area. It is the nature of urban archaeology that a single site is unlikely to answer all or even most of the questions about the development of an area, but a targeted programme could go a long way towards doing so. The recent programmes of excavation in Birmingham are a good example of this (Brickley *et al* 2006; Patrick and Rátkai 2009) and it is to be hoped that as development proceeds in Walsall a similar degree of attention to the archaeology will prove as instructive.

In the case of the present excavation it has been demonstrated that the slope of Church Hill lay outside the medieval town and formed the focus of a large-scale limestone quarrying industry from at least the 17th century. This industry played a major role in the economy of Walsall from at least the medieval period, and is well evidenced in the documentary and cartographic evidence. Archaeological evidence from various projects in the town illustrates the real effect of the industry and documents its development. The location and make-up of the geology and natural resources of the region influenced the growth of the industry locally, whilst the physical remains of quarrying are subsequently re-used in places or built over by later buildings, so creating their own place in the town's history.

The infilling of quarry pits and the re-use of the area for settlement is an early example of regeneration demonstrated not only by the excavation described here, but also recorded in previous work to the north and south.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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‘OPENING THE FLOODGATES’ ON STAFFORDSHIRE’S WATER MEADOWS: THE STAFFORDSHIRE WATER MEADOWS SURVEY, 2008

PAUL BREEZE, MARK KINCEY, and KEITH CHALLIS

SUMMARY

This article relates to a county-wide survey, commissioned by Staffordshire County Council and undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology between September 2007 and March 2008, to locate and analyse potential former water meadows across Staffordshire. The aim of investigation was the identification of the extent and characteristics of any of these predominantly post-medieval agricultural systems which may be present, and the assessment of their preservation and changing condition over recent time. This was to be achieved through GIS-compiled survey of the vicinity of all watercourses within the county, as identified from contemporary and historic Ordnance Survey maps: a total of 959 miles of watercourses and their surroundings. Historic maps and two series of aerial photographs (taken in 1963 and 2000) were analysed in concert for these areas, in an attempt to identify features indicative of water meadow agriculture and to define potential former system extents.

As a result of this analysis, a total of 182 potential former water meadow systems were identified, and a 10% sample of these was subsequently assessed in the field in order to ‘ground-truth’ the survey. The field survey results appeared to support the validity of the desk-based analysis, suggesting that a sizable proportion of the areas identified remotely may indeed represent the locations of former water meadows. This article attempts to contextualise these findings through a brief discussion of water meadows and their history, before proceeding to explore the methodology of the survey, to discuss the characteristics and distribution of the potential water meadows identified within the county, and to investigate some of the implications of trends observed in these data.

The results of this study have suggested there was a substantially greater adoption of water meadow technology within Staffordshire than has previously been demonstrated, and should provoke further local and regional questions regarding the nature, time-scale, and driving factors behind the adoption of this agricultural method. This research could also be seen to support the case for further such surveys, within neighbouring midland counties and also nationally.

AN INTRODUCTION TO WATER MEADOWS

The intensive post-medieval adoption of water meadow technology was an innovation particularly associated with the transformation of lowland agriculture in the south-western counties of Wiltshire and Hampshire, but variations of this technology were also adopted on varying scales across much of England. For many regions, the precise scale and chronology of the adoption of water meadow technology remains unclear, with relatively little documentary evidence charting the scale of water meadow construction over time, and with large-scale remote survey to identify features having previously been applied only within the meadow heartlands. This survey represents the first application of a remote survey methodology to an area which is distant from the known meadow heartlands and which possesses an uncertain level of water meadow adoption: namely, the county of Staffordshire.

The intricacies of water meadows and their management have been fully discussed in several previous works (e.g. Cook and Williamson 2007; and Everard (ed) 2005) and consequently are discussed here only in brief in order to contextualise this research. Whilst casual description of an area of pasture land near to a river as being a wet meadow or even a water meadow is relatively common, the use of the phrase ‘water meadow’ in archaeological or historical parlance has a much more specific meaning; namely, an area of land in proximity to a watercourse (usually, but not exclusively, a river), which has been carefully altered to allow deliberate flooding under the control of a landowner. This alteration most commonly took the form of a remodelling of the surface of the field through the creation of a series of banks and graded channels in order to distribute and control the flow of water within the field. The point of deliberate, controlled flooding is to be emphasized here, as it is the use of a careful system to manage a constant flow of water across the field, without the production of any standing water, which truly defines these features and distinguishes them from fields which are allowed to flood naturally or from other methods of artificial irrigation (Everard 2005a).

The basic benefits of watering land through flooding have of course long been known, with the basic concept potentially stretching back almost as far as the origins of agriculture (coupled closely as it is with the principles of irrigation), and with evidence for the deliberate flooding of agricultural land in Britain from the early medieval period onwards (Everard, Cook, and Cutting 2005, 8). However, from the 17th century onwards agricultural reformers began to advocate the benefit of controlled temporary flooding of land, not only as an *ad hoc* way to fertilise pasture and encourage growth, but also as a managed component of an annual farming cycle. It was recognised that the flooding of land at specific times of the year could be used to produce such effects as insulating pasture against frost, encouraging earlier spring growth, and maximising hay production (Everard 2005a, 26; Williamson and Cook 2007, 5). However, it was also noted that prolonged immersion in standing water generated negative effects upon the productivity of pasture (Betty 2007). The alteration of land to allow topographically controlled irrigation was an innovation which provided a method by which the benefits of controlled flooding could be exploited, whilst mitigating against any potential negative effects. Combining water meadow agriculture with the sheepfold system was found to generate further benefit, particularly in chalkland areas (Betty 2007), through a translation of the increased fertility of floodable pasture to less fertile soils elsewhere through overnight livestock rotation. Consequently, given the multiplicity of benefits, it is unsurprising that the widespread adoption of water meadow technology in areas where it had been shown to be effective (such as the south-eastern chalklands) was relatively rapid.

Having defined what water meadows are, it is prudent to define the characteristics which differentiate the primary water meadow types. These types are known as 'floating upwards', 'catchworks', and 'bedworks', dependant upon the method by which the artificially-induced flooding is achieved.

'Floating upwards' or 'warping' are terms which can be used to cover a range of some of the simplest measures employed to produce artificially managed flooding, although some more specific categories have been proposed within this type of management. These forms of systems generally employed dam or weir features to temporarily force a watercourse to back up and overflow across adjacent fields. Given the simplicity of this strategy, and some historical references, it has been suggested that this may represent an early form of water meadow-like management, likely to have originated before the 17th century (Taylor 2007). The remains of these systems are archaeologically ephemeral at best, given the lack of any significant landscape alteration during their construction and the likelihood that structural features were made of wood. As a result systems of these forms are unlikely to be detected through remote survey of the type performed in this study.

'Catchwork' meadows employed natural gradients to water the pasture, using tapering or dead-end carrier channels which followed the contours of a slope. As water was released into the system (from a drain connected to the watercourse) the channels would fill and overflow. This resulted in water running downwards across intervening areas of the slope in a relatively even fashion (sometimes via several further contour-following carriers), until reaching a drain at the base of the slope which removed the water back to the watercourse. Whilst the origins of this system remain enigmatic, the initial use of catchworks is believed to predate bedworks, perhaps being present during the early medieval period, and definitely recorded from the 17th century onwards (Taylor 2007). The requirement for a sufficient gradient can be seen as restricting these features topographically, with an increased likelihood that they would be located in the more narrow upland valleys of the county.

'Bedwork' water meadows were the most complex system, utilising configurations of channels and earthwork banks to distribute water from a parent watercourse evenly across the meadow, in such a manner that a constant flow across the surface was achieved without the detrimental production of standing water. A 'main carrier' channel took the water from the river (which had often been partially dammed by a weir) into a series of 'carriers' or 'floats' (Fig 1). These were graded channels on top of wide grassy banks that were designed to overflow, watering the sides (or 'panes') of the banks. Excess water was then taken away by drains at the bottom of the banks to a large 'tail drain' which led back to the river. This system was controlled through the use of networks of sluices, and was employed in lowland middle-river environments with broad floodplains and relatively stable channel courses. Bedworks could be considered the pinnacle of water meadow technology due to their sophistication and apparent technical evolution from the other, earlier methods. Bedworks are the most widely recorded and readily identifiable form nationally, as a consequence of the prominence and diagnostic interlocking pattern of the drains and earthworks of the systems.

As can be seen, a variety of methods can be employed to create managed flooding, and the degree to which these differing water management regimes may truly be considered water meadows has

Degradation of preserved structures associated with the systems because of encroachment of vegetation was also observed, with Plate 5 showing the effect of tree-root encroachment between 1991 and 2008 on a stone sluice hatch setting at Willows Farm.

Any future mitigation and management of any of such threats depends primarily upon prior knowledge as to the whereabouts of potential former meadow systems, something which this survey, together with the Staffordshire County Council HER, is intended to provide.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SURVEY, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The results of the Staffordshire survey demonstrate that water meadows were previously a significantly under-represented form of archaeology within the county's HER (as formerly only three features had been recorded for the county), and therefore within associated cultural management strategy. Indeed, it was the Staffordshire County Council HER team's foresight and recognition of the potential for this under-representation which instigated this research, in order to allow the future management of the resource. Most significantly, the number and nature of the features identified suggests that a sizeable and potentially important aspect of Staffordshire's post-medieval agricultural heritage had previously remained relatively unconsidered. Consequently, this data may necessitate a reassessment of the precise nature, balances, and evolution of post-medieval agriculture within the county by historians and archaeologists dealing with this period, so 'opening the floodgates' (if the pun can be forgiven) for further research.

At the local scale the results prompt further research questions specific to the water meadows themselves. These questions are primarily focused around the requirement for more detailed characterisation of a larger proportion of the potential water meadows identified during this survey, particularly in terms of chronology and morphology. Field assessment of a further spread of targets from within the model would help to achieve this purpose and further ascertain its effectiveness in a wider variety of conditions. Upland targets, in particular, would benefit from such an assessment, as no permissions were available for such targets during this phase of field survey.

In terms of individual water meadows, our understanding would be best complemented through the reconstruction (where possible) of detailed plans or systems in earthworks, and through dating. This strategy would be best applied to well defined systems where a detailed examination of how a system was managed may become possible. Relatively few systems seen within this study showed sufficient definition in aerial photographs to permit the reconstruction of detailed plans from these sources alone. Detailed topographic or airborne lidar survey may be appropriate methods to produce such plans, and subsequent to this study a topographic survey has already been performed upon the Willows Farm complex by Benchmark Archaeology (pers. com Richard Cherrington, June 2010). Further such work might permit the characterisation of any recurrent patterns or trends amongst the morphologies of the county's water meadows. The dating of the water meadows remains a prime concern that can be addressed only through assessment of extant structural remains by appropriate specialists, or through excavation of one of the identified meadows and the dating of securely stratified materials.

To complement the archaeological investigation of these features, analysis of documentary sources specific to smaller areas of the county may prove useful, in order to refine the extent of identified targets or potentially to identify further areas which were overlooked by this survey. Examination of the 1820 discussion of lands at Trentham (Loch 1820) indicated the former presence of more than ten separate areas of water meadow, and more detailed historical examination of the estate by Gregory shows records to be present for several meadows over a prolonged period from 1678 to at least the early 19th century (Gregory 2010, 78, 81). However, this survey revealed only four targets, and farms which Loch referred to as possessing meadow showed no indicative features on the historic mapping. Additionally, Loch also implied the production of meadow away from significant watercourses, reducing the likelihood of such features being identified within studies such as this one, which focus upon mapped watercourses. If the same is true for other areas within the county, it would suggest that a detailed examination of appropriate historical documents could substantially enhance the picture of water meadow cultivation provided by this survey. A comparative examination of earlier maps for specific areas, such as available estate and tithe maps may also be of particular benefit.

Seen from a regional perspective the scale of water meadow adoption suggested by the survey has demonstrated the potential for substantial numbers of water meadows to have been created within

a Midland county (although the chronology of this adoption remains to be explored in detail). This observation in turn supports the possibility that significant quantities of former water meadows could also remain unidentified (and therefore unmanaged by heritage agencies) at a regional level, particularly within neighbouring counties of similar character.

Finally, from a national perspective, the results have demonstrated the value of this form of this form of rapid remote survey methodology in areas beyond the traditional water meadow heartlands. As with the previous surveys of this type, the remote methodology, use of historical maps and aerial photographs, and the large-scale nature of this method can also be seen as potentially allowing a more effective overall assessment of the likely former level of water meadow adoption within an area than would field survey alone, divorced as it is from whether or not the features still retain an obvious expression within the modern landscape. Indeed, a case could be made for other test-cases nationally, in order to gain a more rigorous assessment of the true former scale, extent, and geographical characteristics of these striking agricultural features beyond their traditional heartlands. It should be noted, however, that whilst this method remains an effective rapid large-scale remote investigation tool, it does have limitations, as only features discernable to aerial photography and represented on historic maps are recorded. Whilst the value of the 1st edition maps cannot be refuted, their use as a base survey dataset means that only features which had notable expression since the mid 19th century onward can be identified, a window which in the case of Staffordshire has been shown by documentary research associated with this project to lie nearly 200 years after the first arrival of the technology within the county. Consequently, there remains the possibility of future technical refinement of surveys of this type, at varying scales, in order to develop the potential for the identification of as many former water meadows as possible from a wider chronological range, including those features with little or no recent visual or mapped expression.

Ultimately, whether the Staffordshire results are typical or atypical of areas beyond the known meadow heartlands remains to be seen, and can be determined only if further landscape-scale assessments be undertaken. Suggestions that the central western counties were an area of relatively widespread water meadow adoption (Williamson 2007, 47), coupled with this survey having identified just over half the number of features recorded during remote survey in the meadow heartland of Hampshire, may raise the possibility that Staffordshire stands mid-range between those areas where this striking form of agriculture was most widely adopted and those where it remained a more restricted practice. However, only time and further data will tell.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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BRITONS AT MORFE

ANDREW BREEZE

The name of Morfe has been a Staffordshire mystery. All accept it as Celtic, but its meaning has been unknown. Yet discussion of the place's history may provide an answer. In the 13th century Morfe was a royal forest, like the nearby Kinver, Wrekin, and Cannock Chase (also with Celtic names).¹ Its whereabouts is shown by Morfehall Farm (SO 8287), Morfe House Farm, and Morfeheath Farm, near Enville in the far south of the county. The region has woodland to this day, and its wildness in the middle ages is implied by a grant of 736, fortunately surviving in an original copy.² Thanks to this charter, Morfe and Kinver figure on a map for the early Anglo-Saxon period.³ The grant refers to lands on each side of the river Stour, including Kinver and a 'wood called Moerheb, of which woods the greater part belongs to the aforesaid land'.⁴ This vagueness contrasts with the precision of other charters, setting out boundaries by reference to specific landmarks. The place must have been a wilderness, and it is thus no surprise that in the earlier 7th century Morfe and its neighbouring forests should have blocked Mercia's advance westwards for some fifty years.⁵ Besides informing us on landscape, the charter (the oldest document for Staffordshire's history to come down to us in a contemporary form) provides vital evidence on forms of *Morfe*.⁶

It there figures in the archaic form *Moerheb* and (in a later hand) *Moreb*; in Domesday Book it is *Morve*; and in 1166 *Morf* and *Morfe*. Ekwall thought this might be the equivalent of Welsh *mor-dref* 'big village'.⁷ But Coates observes that we should not expect loss of *tr* as early as the 8th century.⁸ Nor would we find villages big or small in remote woodlands. The new Cambridge dictionary says nothing on Morfe, although it tentatively explains the name of Kinver from Welsh *ci* 'dog' and *bre* 'highland', with the sense of 'uplands of nowds'.⁹ The question needs looking at again.

Now, in its entry for *mwyar* 'blackberries; brambles; briars', the University of Wales dictionary cites the Old Cornish cognate *moerbren* (*-bren* = 'tree') as a gloss on Latin *morus* 'mulberry plant'.¹⁰ This suggests a meaning for the first part of *Moerheb*. But there is an objection. The diphthong (with rounding after a labial) of Cornish *moyr-* is also spelled *oe*.¹¹ Yet that would not accord with the *oe* of *Moerheb*, since the Old English grapheme represented not a diphthong but a half-open front rounded vowel.¹² We may compare the diphthong of Old Welsh *mearen* 'brambles' (glossed by its Middle Irish cognate *smér*) in an Oxford manuscript.¹³ How do we solve this problem? It seems that Old English, having no exact equivalent to the post-labial *oia* (where *i* is a semi-vowel) of Primitive Welsh and Cornish, here substituted the front rounded vowel represented by *oe*. If this solves the phonological difficulty, then there is no difficulty in citing the element from other place-names. A variant form of Welsh *mwyar* occurs in Cilmeri 'nook of brambles', a spot (near Builth Wells in Powys) sacred to Welsh patriots as being where the last native prince of Wales died in 1282.¹⁴ One might add that, in a tangled Staffordshire forest, briars and thorns would not be unknown.

As for the second element of *Moerheb*, this is explicable from the Welsh element *eb-* 'horse', which is well-attested. It can be related to Welsh *ebol* and Breton *ebeul*, both meaning 'colt', or the name of Eposognatus 'one expert with horses', a prominent Celt mentioned by Livy and Polybius.¹⁵ In place-names it occurs in Mynydd Epynt 'horse-track mountain' (north of Brecon), where the

1 A. L. Poole, *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1955), 28

2 E. A. Lowe, *English Uncial* (Oxford, 1960), plate 23.

3 *Map of Britain in the Dark Ages* (2nd edn, Southampton, 1966).

4 F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (3rd edn, Oxford, 1971), 40, 286.

5 Peter Hunter Blair, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1977), 36, 250.

6 *English Historical Documents, c. 500–1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock (2nd edn, London, 1979), 492.

7 Eilert Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (4th edn, Oxford, 1960), 331.

8 Richard Coates and Andrew Breeze, *Celtic Voices, English Places* (Stamford, 2000), 334.

9 *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, ed. V. E. Watts (Cambridge, 2004), 349; cf. David Horowitz, *The Place-Names of Staffordshire* (Brewood, 2005), 395–6.

10 *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* (Caerdydd, 1950–2002), 2516.

11 K. H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), 359.

12 Alistair Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959), 15.

13 Joseph Vendryes, *Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien: Lettres R S* (Paris, 1974), S 141.

14 Hywel Wyn Owen and Richard Morgan, *Dictionary of the Place-Names of Wales* (Llandysul, 2007), 86.

15 D. Ellis Evans, *Gaulish Personal Names* (Oxford, 1967), 90–2, 197–9, 209.

REVIEWS

Martin Carver, *The Birth of a Borough. An Archaeological Study of Anglo-Saxon Stafford* (The Boydell Press, 2010), pp. xv + 176. £60.00. ISBN 9780851156231.

Between 1975 and 1985 the county town of Stafford was the subject of an extensive campaign of excavations, unprecedented in its history, as redevelopment made large areas of the town archaeologically accessible to area excavations. To these Professor Martin Carver has added a consideration of excavations before and since, drawing on some fifty-five archaeological interventions to tell the story of early medieval Stafford, ‘an attempt to use archaeology to write history’ (p. xi). Carver declares in the preface that he is not offering a conventional archaeological report aimed only at other archaeologists and in this aim he has surely been successful. The content of the volume is readily intelligible, indeed eloquent, if a little repetitive. The specialist reader will find what they need, supported by excellent drawings, plans and photographs and a full archive available digitally through the Archaeological Data Service. For the non-archaeologist, Carver has taken great care to explain the implications of archaeological method, of the stratigraphy encountered and its interpretations, and the ways in which ceramic evidence may be used to map out ‘cultural markers’ (eg Chapter 5). While not disregarding documentary research, his focus is firmly on the archaeology of Stafford, but within which the author has some challenging things to say not only on Stafford, but on burhs and early medieval towns more broadly; his avowed intention is to re-open discourse on the Anglo-Saxon town, and consequently this is a book of much more than local relevance.

The volume is well designed. The six chapters begin by setting the scene on burhs and Anglo-Saxon towns, and posing key questions that reflect the fact that the programme in Stafford was undertaken against the background of a wider enquiry looking at the origins of places that became burhs. Stafford was one of the places established as a burh (in 913) by Æthelflaed, ‘Lady of the Mercians’, as part of the conquest of those parts of England under Danish control. There follows a discussion of the project design and context and of the ‘seven windows’ on early Stafford – six excavations and a pollen sequence from King’s Pool. Thus informed, the reader is then taken through three key themes: firstly, the character of Æthelflaed’s burh, discussing its form and the activities found within it; Chapter 5 turns to examine the Norman and Medieval town; while the final chapter returns to a discussion of Anglo-Saxon Stafford and Carver’s perspective on how Stafford informs a wider debate.

Stafford burh is perceived as a military base with an authoritarian feel to it. The defences of Stafford have so far proven elusive but Carver argues for a small rectangular fort to the west of Greengate Street, at the centre of the peninsula on which Stafford stands. This contained a new minster church and grain-processing area, while east of the axial street was a pot-making suburb. From Clarke Street came the best assemblages of animal bone, suggesting a 10th-century community heavily dependant upon cattle processed centrally. This was a place where provisioning rather than trade was the purpose, a closed military system that lacked the material clutter of town life and was not integrated with existing economic networks. Carver sees Æthelflaed’s Stafford as a military depot supplying Mercian forces campaigning against the Danes and linking into a series of fortifications, but failing to mature into a thriving urban place.

Carver challenges the prevailing view that the choice of burh sites related to what was there before, whether that be the ‘royal hypothesis’ supposing some prior administrative or seigneurial centre, or the ‘minster hypothesis’ which supposes the use of an ecclesiastical centre. Although unpersuaded by either model the author notes the interest of the Mercian rulers in subsequent royal free chapels, which might reflect areas under the control of royal centres and therefore lend some weight to the ‘royal hypothesis’ in the case of the west midland burhs.

However, the archaeology of Stafford offers no evidence to suggest, as yet, activity between the Roman period and the 10th century: the impact of the Late Saxon development was ‘sudden, planned and ubiquitous’ (p. 56). Looking beyond Stafford Carver is unconvinced by Bassett’s confirmation of pre-burh defences on some sites, and argues (p. 132) that while we do have pre-9th century power centres and minsters, they have not been found in direct relationship to later burhs. He suggests that burh sites were chosen for their strategic location and defensive capabilities: that they were an innovation of the later 9th century, created *de novo* in pursuance of a particular ideal rather than developing from pre-existing centres.

The ideal that Carver postulates is in imitation of Rome. The model envisaged for Stafford burh is of a Roman-type fort laid out on one side of the previous Roman road, with a Roman-type 'vicus' on the other side, east of the axial street. He suggests that there are likely to be other instances of rectilinear forts modelled on the Roman fort, dismissing the possibility that rectilinear defended enclosures and street grids might simply be a logical consequence of form rather than conscious imitation. Furthermore, he suggests that the pottery made in the burhs deliberately resembled Roman pottery previously made in the same region – here Stafford Ware taking as its model Severn Valley Ware. Noting West Saxon associations with Rome, and an English landscape that would have been full of Roman buildings offering inspiration, Carver suggests that Æthelflaed and the late Saxon aristocracy was consciously modelling its campaign of conquest and control on Roman ways, as the heirs of Rome (pp. 93, 101). Rome provided an image of triumph.

Carver's portrayal of post-Conquest Stafford is no less controversial, as a place in need of continual resurrection, requiring successive surges of external investment, 'a place unenthused by the urban project' (p. 8). For instance, he argues that a consequence of the Norman Conquest was the abandonment of the east side of the peninsula and the installation of a new regime to the west: 'Stafford in the Norman period appears from its archaeology as a bleak place'; and the 'fury of William I had left its mark'. One feels that Carver is sometimes prone to assumptions when aligning the story of a site to a wider historical narrative. By 1086 life in Stafford had become 'too miserable' and the Norman 'headquarters' had shifted definitively to the castle to the west (p. 107). Here, however, Carver's account seems particularly strained. Accepting at face value the cessation of a town castle site by 1086, he overlooks the continued activity of the royal castle site in Stafford, while the notion that Norman 'headquarters' (whatever they might be?) had shifted to the castle to the west is simplistic, misleading and confuses the nature of the authority involved. Furthermore, Domesday Book confirms that life was still a-buzz in the town.

Carver suggests that the late 12th century brought revival, but not a gradual revival, rather 'another jump start with a central investment and a controlling design' (p.108), a characterisation that seems rather improbable to this reviewer. In his discussion of mid 14th-century decline and an urban downturn, Carver himself admits that the picture is uneven (p. 122), leaving the reader to wonder if the case is not overstated. It does not seem to differ greatly from many other places.

Recent years have seen the west midlands well served in publications pertaining to the themes in this volume, among them Steven Bassett's articles on midland burhs; a review of Stafford's archaeology through the Broadeye excavations; and the recently published, 'The Archaeology of the West Midlands'. This latter volume called for long-awaited publication of some key archaeological projects and here Professor Carver has responded to that plea in challenging fashion! Thanks are warranted to the author not only for his perseverance in bringing this major project to publication, but also for doing so in such a stimulating manner. This book will prompt debate, just as the author intended!

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JOHN HUNT

Christopher Hewitson, Eleanor Ramsey, Michael Shaw, Malcolm Hislop, and Richard Cullen. *The Great Hall, Wolverhampton: Elizabethan Mansion to Victorian Workshop. Archaeological Investigations at Old Hall Street, Wolverhampton, 2000–2007* (BAR British Series 517, 2010), pp. vi + 102. £35.00. ISBN 978 1 4073 0702 2.

This well-produced report, published by Archaeopress in their *British Archaeological Reports* series, is issued as a volume in the 'Birmingham Archaeology Monograph' Series 5. It brings together the outcomes of a range of investigations – desk-top evaluations, watching briefs, and excavations undertaken over some seven years on one of Wolverhampton's best-known and perhaps best-loved buildings. Old Hall Street has for many years been associated by Wulfrunians with the College of Adult Education, but many will have been unaware of the fascinating history of the site, developing from a medieval agricultural landscape to a moated mansion house of the 16th and 17th centuries, an industrial works in the late 18th century, and an Adult Education College by the early 20th century. This report tells that story through the excavations undertaken, together with the findings of documentary, cartographic, and genealogical studies related to the site and its owners.

The volume is organised rather traditionally around eight chapters. The Introduction is followed by three chapters looking at different aspects of the history of the site. Michael Shaw sets the context

1750 the platform was laid out by quadrants with the hall in the north-west, flanked on the remaining quadrants by lawns, fruit trees, and gardens.

Apart from the layout of the hall and site there are two points in the discussion that might be noted. Firstly, whether or not this mansion was preceded by a residence on the site that Leland might have considered 'ancient' in c.1540. The evidence for moated sites in the area is noted but not very systematically reviewed and this reviewer was surprised to see the work of Le Patourel and Roberts applied for dating purposes when more appropriate local and regional studies might have been consulted. The argument, that the presence of a moat makes more likely the presence of a pre-mansion residence on this site, feels forced at times. The possibility is noted, and there are some encouraging hints in the ceramics, a fragment of window tracery, and a wooden wedge from a timber-framed building but there is insufficient here to either confirm or deny the presence of an earlier medieval residence on this site, and of course, if there was, there is no reason to assume that the site was necessarily moated. This could have been introduced as a part of the later enhancements to the site.

Finally, there is also a useful summary placing the Elizabethan mansion into the context of brick building in the west midland region, from the mid 15th century to the end of the 17th century; this serves again to demonstrate the high status of this building within the area, and the suggestion is made that its construction does find resonance with the much debated notion of the Great Rebuilding of 1570–1640.

This is an excellent report. Well produced, it tells a remarkable story in a short, unfussy, and well-illustrated manner, while recognising that there is more to tell if we had the evidence. There are also strands that others can take up and follow elsewhere. For the historian and archaeologist working on medieval and post-medieval life and society in the west midlands, this is a report that they should know about. It is also very much the kind of report that those concerned with the development of an archaeological research framework for the west midlands hoped to encourage.

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