

White Ladies Aston Big Dig

Community test pitting report

April 2023



White Ladies Aston Big Dig

Small Pits, Big Ideas

Worcestershire

Community test pitting report



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Community Test Pitting in White Ladies Aston

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With finds analysis by Laura Griffin

Summary

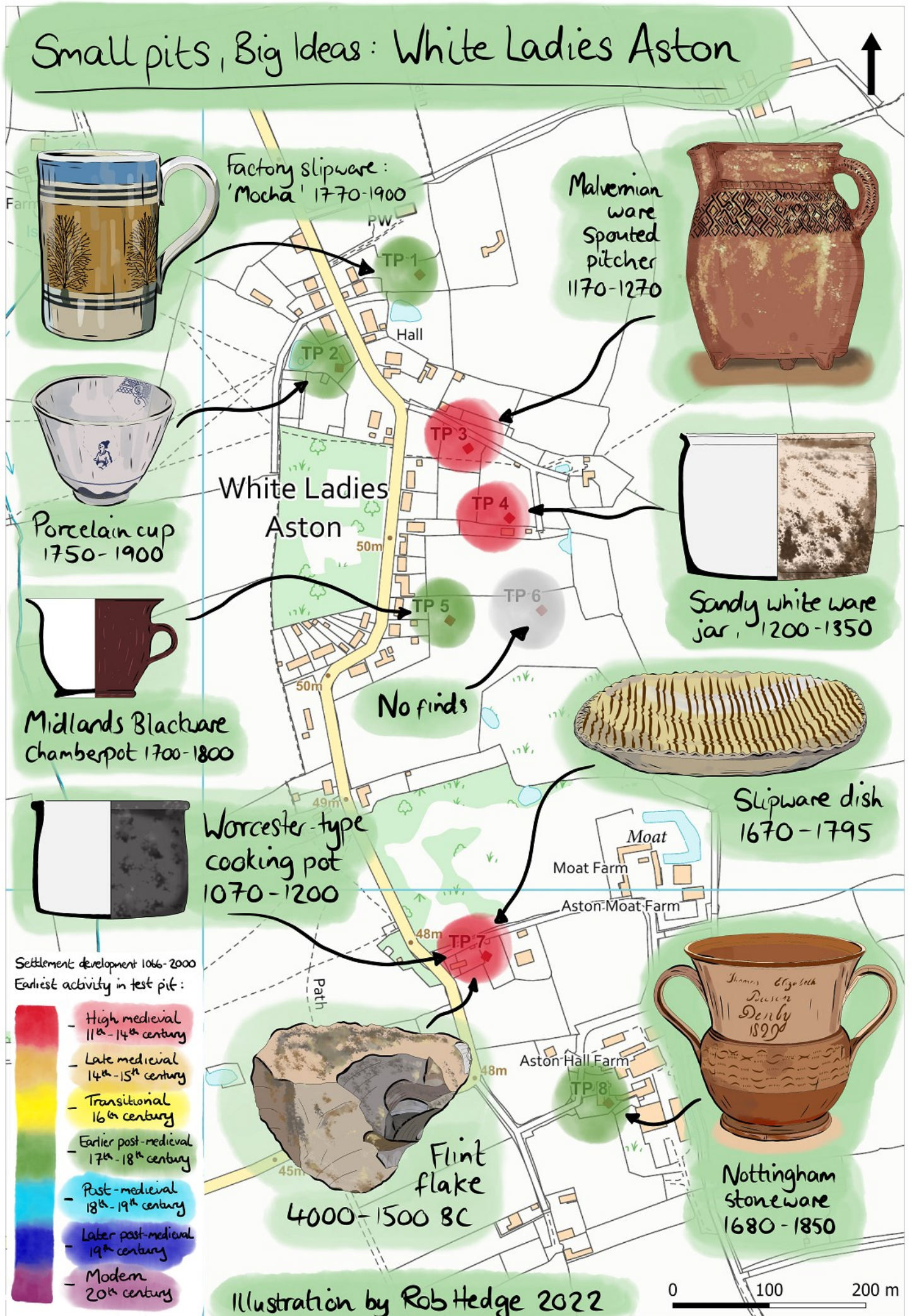
In October 2021, 8 test pits were excavated across White Ladies Aston, Worcestershire. This community excavation was part of a wider project – Small Pits, Big Ideas – researching rural medieval settlements across the county. These test pits add to 8 previously excavated, in 2017-18, and help to provide a more complete picture of settlement in the parish during the medieval period.

Medieval pottery was found in three test pits, including both test pits on Polly's Piece. The large quantity of pottery found at Polly's Piece confirms that the visible earthworks there are the remnants of medieval occupation, probably house platforms in use between the 12th and 14th centuries. This is an important discovery, as the earthworks appear to contain well preserved medieval archaeology and were previously unidentified.

The third location with evidence of medieval activity was land adjacent to Nordle Cottage in Moat Lane. This test pit contained evidence for 900 years of occupation, making it the longest continuously occupied site so far found within White Ladies Aston. Two sherds of pottery dating to around the Norman Conquest (AD 1066) are unusually early and the oldest medieval artefacts found from any of the six Small Pits, Big Ideas settlements.

The overall distribution of finds suggests that White Ladies Aston had two centres of medieval settlement, one around Polly's Piece and the other in the southern half of the modern village. Around the 14th century the village seems to have declined, either in population and/or prosperity. The reduction in finds is mirrored by a significant reduction in the number of households eligible to pay tax. White Ladies Aston may not have fully recovered until the 17th century, when new house building took place and the village began to take on its current linear layout.

Small pits, Big Ideas: White Ladies Aston



About the project

Small Pits, Big Ideas helps communities reveal the origins of local villages and their story over time. Relatively little is known about the development of Worcestershire's rural medieval settlements as many are lived in, making large archaeological excavations impossible. By uncovering the archaeology hidden in back gardens, the project brings people directly in touch with their past and shines new light on the story of rural Worcestershire. Between autumn 2021 and summer 2022, six locations were investigated: Beoley, White Ladies Aston, Wichenford, Badsey, Wolverley and Bewdley.

This project follows a [pilot phase in 2017-18¹](#) and [extensive research in East Anglia²](#), where this approach has revealed changes caused by the Black Death in 1348-9. Small Pits, Big Ideas was run by Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service on behalf of Worcestershire Archaeological Society, with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Big Dig weekend

Over the 25th – 26th October 2021, 8 'test pits' were excavated across White Ladies Aston village. A total of 37 people took part in digging the test pits and processing the finds. For most, this was their first hands on go at archaeology. Support was provided by staff from Worcestershire Archaeology.

What is a test pit?

Test pits are mini excavation areas, just 1m by 1m. They are dug in 10cm layers (called 'spits') with the finds from each spit kept separately, so that it's known how deep down they were found. Test pits were mostly excavated down to the 'natural', which is the point at which archaeology stops and undisturbed geology begins. In White Ladies Aston, this was generally 40-60cm below ground level.

What were we looking for?

Today our household rubbish is taken away regularly, but in the past rubbish was often thrown out the back of houses. This wasn't just food waste, but broken pots, bits of building rubble and anything else that was old or broken. Back gardens are therefore an ideal place to look for clues. Pottery can be easily dated, as fashions for different styles changed over time. The amount of pottery found in a test pit can give us a rough idea of how nearby people lived at different times in the past.

Where were the test pits?

Take a look at the map on page 5 to see where the 8 test pits across White Ladies Aston were located.

¹ www.explorethepast.co.uk/2017/11/small-pits-big-ideas-investigating-a-worcestershire-village

² Lewis 2016, available online:

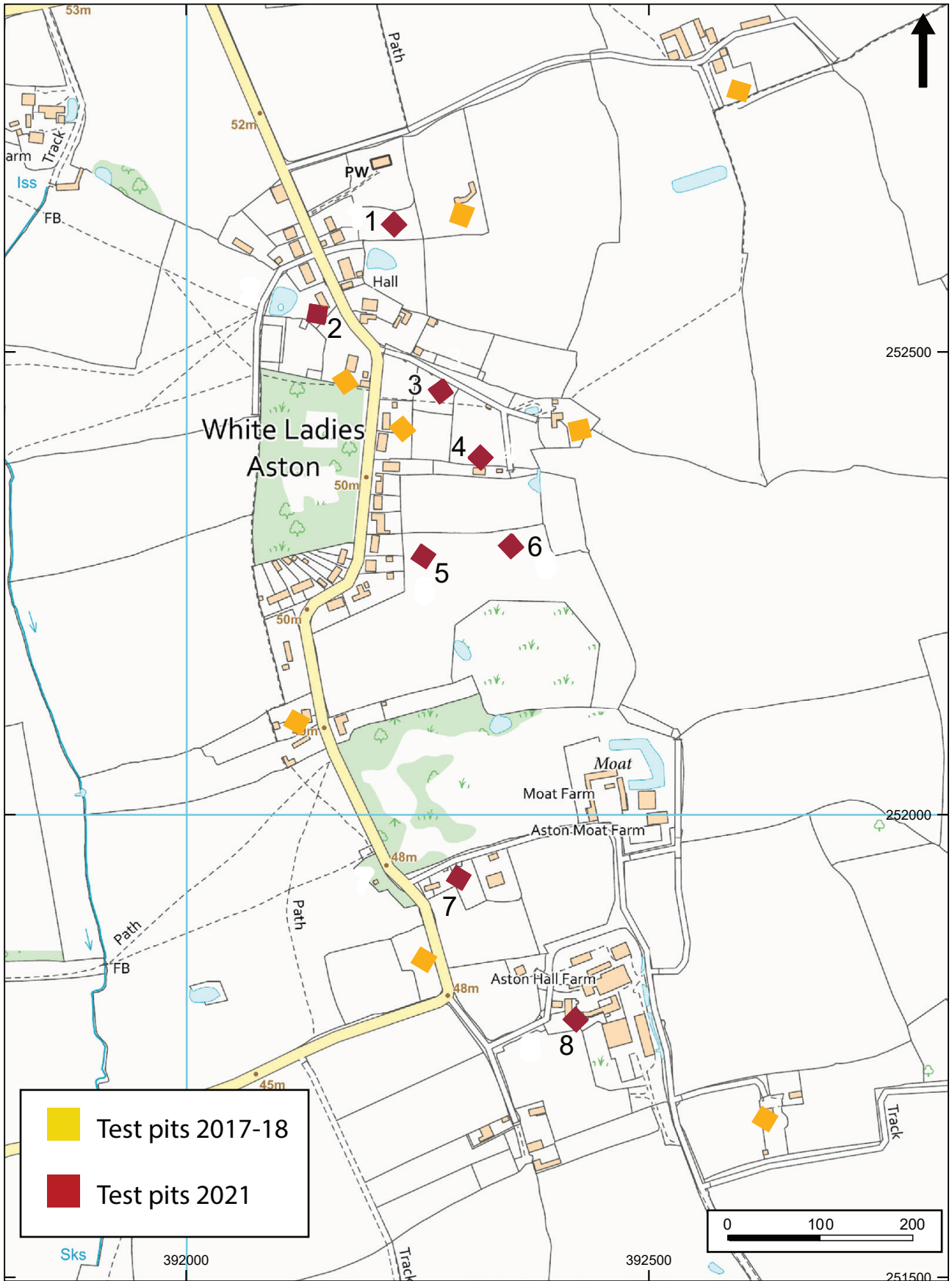
www.researchgate.net/publication/303316768_Disaster_recovery_New_archaeological_evidence_for_the_long-term_impact_of_the_calamitous_fourteenth_century



Photo 1: Test Pit 8 during excavation – test pits were dug in 10cm ‘spits’ (layers) until the underlying geology was reached (P. Haywood)



Photo 2: Using a sieve to check the soil for finds at Test Pit 4 in Polly’s Piece (P. Haywood)



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Test pit locations at White Ladies Aston

Figure 1

History of White Ladies Aston

The first recorded mention dates back to around AD 977 when occupation is recorded 'aet eastune', which means East Farm. The Domesday survey of 1086 lists 'Aston' twice with a total of 10 households. Both parts were under the ownership of the Bishop of Worcester at the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066, and the Bishop was still noted as the 'tenant in chief' by 1086, but the survey details one part as being under the lordship of 'Ordric' (of Croome) and the other under the lordship of 'Robert'. Of the two parts, the former was clearly more populous than the latter³.

Variations in the population of White Ladies Aston can be traced in the Lay Subsidy Rolls from 1280 to 1525. Different names are used over time (e.g. Estone and Aston Episcopi), but nevertheless they record 18 people in 1280 and only 9 by 1327⁴. These were the heads of households that were wealthy enough to pay tax, so the reduction could reflect households becoming poorer or fewer people living in the settlement. In 1332 White Ladies Aston paid less than ¼ of its tax – one of only 20 out of 137 Worcestershire parishes to do so⁵.

Medieval ownership records are somewhat complex with the place apparently being split into three estates or manors: Aston Episcopi (retained by the Bishop of Worcester), Aston Bruley (which ceased to exist sometime around 1620) and White Ladies Aston (which was given to the newly-founded nunnery at Whistones in the 13th century). The latter is thought to be where 'White Ladies' comes from. The land held by Whistones Nunnery was sold off after the Reformation and eventually became part of the Spetchley estate, owned by the Berkeley family⁶.

Just one medieval building survives in the parish today: St John the Baptist's church, which has a 12th century chancel and nave. A number of 17th century timber-framed buildings still remain today, despite the loss of others depicted on historic maps. These also details the loss of a trackway that ran east from the Old Vicarage towards the Bow Brook (see Figure 2).

Want to know more?

For a more detailed history and overview of previous archaeological work in the area, see [Appendix 1](#).

³ Open Domesday: <https://opendomesday.org/place/SO9252/white-ladies-aston/>

⁴ Worcestershire Historical Society publications: Willis Bund (1893) and Amphlett (1899)

⁵ Worcestershire Historical Society publication: Eld (1895)

⁶ Victoria County History 1913, available online: www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/worcs/vol3/pp557-561

Glossary

Abraded: how worn, or not, finds are, is often a good indication of how much they have been moved around in the ground. Pot sherds that have sharp breaks are likely to have been thrown away close to where they were found. The opposite may be the case with abraded sherds.

Ceramic building material: This term covers brick, and roof/floor tiles that are made from clay and fired in a kiln.

Context: This term refers to the precise location on an archaeological site in which a sherd was found, usually marked by a number. Each different soil layer, pit fill, wall, or deposit will have a separate number. The finds within that deposit can then be used to determine a *Terminus Post Quem* date - the earliest possible date that the deposit could have formed.

Form: the shape of a pot. The same potters and kilns often produced lots of different forms for different purposes. Common types include 'cooking pots' or jars, storage jars, pitchers, bowls, and drinking vessels like cups and tankards.

Fabric: the composition of the clay used to make the pot. This varies according to the source of the clay. Each production centre used clay from a different (usually very local) source. Other material like small fragments of stone or shell often occurs within the raw clay. Sometimes, coarse material was deliberately added to the pot to make it easier to fire. This is known as 'temper'. Collectively, non-clay materials within a pot are called 'inclusions'. Inspecting the broken edges of a piece of pottery under a microscope allows us to identify the inclusions, differentiate the fabrics, and match them to pieces of known origin in our reference collection (available at <https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/>)

Natural: the 'natural geology' is the point at which archaeological layers stop and undisturbed geology begins. Excavations generally aim to reach the natural, as this means that all archaeological layers have been uncovered in that spot.

Post-medieval: archaeological shorthand for the later 16th – 19th centuries. After the post-medieval period is the modern era (1901 onwards). Many pottery traditions span period boundaries, and are therefore recorded as, for example, "post-medieval/modern". Sometimes the same fabrics or wares are given slightly different dates. This is usually because the individual sherd has characteristics which enable the date to be refined.

Medieval: 1066AD – 1539AD

Post-medieval: 1540AD – 1900AD

Modern: 1901AD – 2050AD

Test pit: a small area excavated in order to sample a location's archaeology.

Slip: a thin layer added to a pot after it has air dried but before it's fired. Slips are usually added for decoration.

Spit: each test pit was divided into 10cm layers, called spits. Spit 1 was 0- 10cm below the ground, Spit 2 was 10 – 20cm and so on. Spits are used to divide up a deposit into fixed depths. They are not the same as a context, which is the name given to an archaeological layer or deposit – spits can be used to divide up a large context or to record the depth in a test pit. Gardens tend to have been dug

over and churned up a lot, so there is usually little difference between the archaeological contexts in a test pit.

Sherd: the term for a fragment of pottery

Ware (for example 'Midlands Purple ware', 'black glazed red sandy ware' or 'earthenware'): The name given to a style of pottery. In the post-medieval and modern periods, pottery fabrics become a lot more homogenous, and the local variations are harder to spot (at least visually). The styles and traditions of potting become more useful than the fabric for identifying the pottery.

Results

The results from each test pit are described separately below, then drawn together in the conclusion. For details about the method of excavation and deposits found, see [Appendix 2](#). A full list of finds is given in [Appendix 3](#) and descriptions of different pottery types can be found in [Appendix 4](#).

Test Pit 1: The Willows

Three adjoining cottages are historically recorded within the garden of The Willows, which lies directly south of the churchyard. The timber framed dwellings are thought to date from the 17th century and are first depicted on the 1804 survey of Aston Episcopi manor. Whilst the cottages were demolished during the mid-late 20th century (they are still visible on the 1904 2nd edition Ordnance Survey), a large level area is visible in the general location where they once stood. This house platform has a straight northern edge, from where the ground drops away before rising up again towards the churchyard.

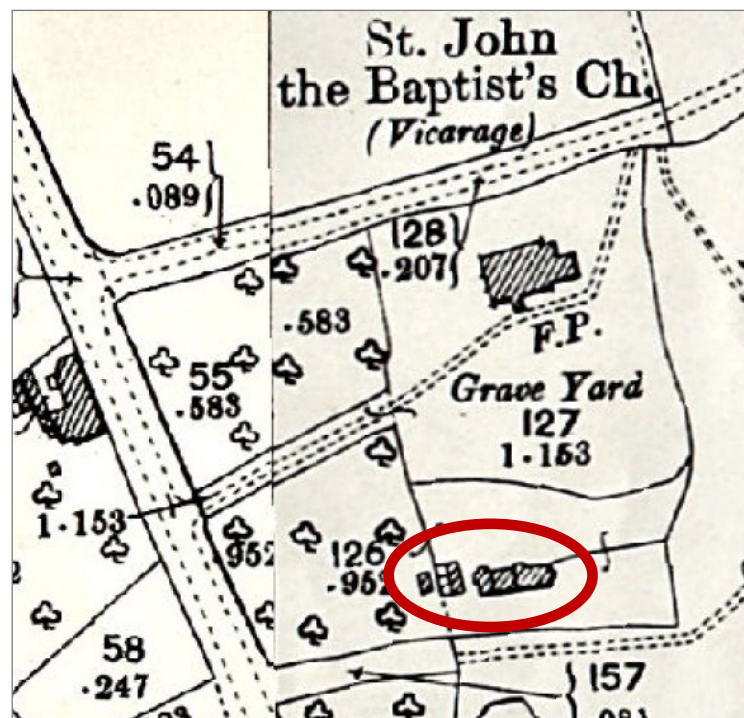


Figure 3: Extract of 1904 Ordnance Survey with cottages to south of churchyard circled in red (Worcs XXXIV.10 & 11, CC-BY [NLS](#))

Test Pit 1 was located towards the east end of this house platform. Unfortunately, excavation revealed that the area has been heavily disturbed, presumably during the cottages' demolition, so no layers from the time of the cottages occupation survive intact. Beneath the topsoil, relatively clean layers of red clay, sand and gravelly yellow clay were encountered.

Finds

A total of 31 finds were retrieved from Test Pit 1. All were of post-medieval and modern date. The majority were highly abraded sherds of domestic pottery. Other finds included fragments of ceramic building material, four pieces of vessel glass, a fragment of clay pipe stem, a highly corroded, unidentifiable iron object and a plastic hair comb. The comb may well have belonged to one of the cottages' last residents and is a reminder that archaeology is ultimately about people and their everyday lives.

The earliest datable material consisted of two sherds of black-glazed red sandy ware ([fabric 78](#)) and a fragment of slipware ([fabric 91](#)). The latter was likely from a press-moulded dish form. The blackware sherds were undiagnostic. All could be dated late 17th - 18th century. All remaining pottery was of 19th - 20th century date, the majority being white glazed tablewares.



Photo 3: Modern comb for styling and decorating hair

What does this tell us?

Despite modern disturbance, hints of the cottages' early days do survive. Given the close proximity to St John's Church, it was expected that medieval artefacts may be found. Their absence might be due to a lack of medieval occupation in this area, but could also be a result of extensive demolition or landscaping works. On balance, it is considered more likely that the 17th century cottages built in this area were the first dwellings on this parcel of land – if this had been the site of a medieval house, then it's likely that some of these earlier finds would have become mixed into the layers excavated.

Test Pit 2: Priors Croft

Priors Croft is a 20th century bungalow towards the northern end of the village. However, historic maps dating from 1825 to 1904 show a small dwelling and large pond in this area. By 1885, the house had an outbuilding and a well just to the north. The pond and well are still present today, although the buildings disappeared in the early 20th century.

Test Pit 2 was placed south of the well, broadly in the area of the historic house. Dark deposits were encountered down to 60cm, at which point the natural red clay was reached. No structural remains were found.

Finds

This test pit produced an assemblage totalling 241 finds. All appeared to have come from domestic activity in the post-medieval and modern periods. Post-medieval pottery included nine sherds of black glazed red sandy wares ([fabric 78](#)) and six sherds of buff ware ([fabric 91](#)). The black-glazed wares included fragments of pantheon, a large, flared bowl commonly found in assemblages of later 17th - 18th century date. The buff wares included four sherds of manganese mottled ware, likely from cup or tankard forms, and one sherd from a press-moulded slipware dish. As with the blackwares, these sherds could be dated to the late 17th - 18th century.

Modern pottery was mainly of later 18th and 19th century date and included sherds of porcelain ([fabric 83](#)), one of which had transfer decoration in the form of Chinese-style figures, and a variety of white-glazed tablewares ([fabric 101](#)), some with transfer decoration and a small number with [engine-turned slip decoration](#).

Other finds of note included 18 shards of vessel glass, mainly from bottles, 57 fragments of ceramic building material and three fragments of clay pipe. In addition, there were 15 pieces of highly corroded iron, which included nails and unidentifiable modern fittings.



Photo 4: 18th and 19th century pottery from test Pit 2, including a sherd decorated with a figure

What does this tell us?

The garden soils within Test Pit 2 have been heavily churned up over the years, as modern pottery was found as far down as spit 5 (40 – 50cm below ground level). Nevertheless, pottery from the earlier dwelling was found. Given the quantities found, it is likely that the former cottage was built around the late 18th or early 19th century. This ties in with historic maps of the area, which indicate that the house appeared between 1804 – when a ‘pound’ but no building is depicted – and the creation of the 1825 Inclosure map.

A small quantity of late 17th – 18th century pottery was also found. This implies that people were living nearby during these dates, but given the small quantity found and historic map evidence, this pottery is most likely to come from neighbouring dwellings. The lack of medieval and early post-medieval pottery probably represents a true absence of occupation in this area during those dates, as the test pit was excavated down to the bottom of the archaeological sequence.

Test Pits 3 & 4: Polly's Piece

An area of earthworks is located east of the Evesham Road, within the middle of the current village. The field is currently horse paddocks and known locally as Polly's Piece; a name that dates back to at least 1825 when the land is recorded as 'Polly's Ground'. Test Pit 3 was placed on the northwest side within a small, raised platform. The earthworks are characteristic of medieval settlement – house platforms and boundaries between plots (see Figure 4). Along the field's northern edge is an old trackway, which runs east towards the Bow Brook, that may also be medieval or earlier in origin.

Test Pit 4 was located over a less distinct earthwork against the southern boundary of Polly's Piece, which borders a timber framed cottage. Both test pits contained very compact soil that lacked the rich organic quality typical of garden soils. Test Pit 3 in particular was fairly sterile in appearance and contained no charcoal flecks, which is unusual within settlements. Both test pits produced large quantities of medieval pottery from the lower levels – whilst there was no change in colour, there appeared to be in situ medieval deposits below the topsoil. The underlying geology appeared to be reached in both test pits around 40cm below the present ground level.

Finds – Test Pit 3

A total of 117 finds were retrieved from this test pit. The assemblage was of particular interest due to the presence of medieval pottery retrieved from the lower spits. All identifiable types were of



Photo 5: Sherds of medieval pottery from Test Pit 3, spit 3

local Worcester and Malvernian production. Worcester wares consisted of ten fragments of sandy unglazed ware ([fabric 55](#)) and nine of glazed sandy ware (fabric 64.1). The unglazed sherds were likely from cooking pots and included one decorated with an applied vertical strip. Cooking pot forms were produced in Worcester from the late 11th to mid-14th century, at which point ceramic cooking vessels were largely replaced by metal cooking pots. The increase in availability of such vessels at all levels of society appears to coincide with an increase in the average wage and standard of living following the Black Death⁷. The glazed ware sherds were undiagnostic but most likely from jugs dated 12th - 14th century.

The Malvernian wares included five sherds of early glazed ware (fabric 53), 59 sherds of unglazed cooking pot ([fabric 56](#)) and ten of oxidised glazed ware (fabric 69). The early glazed ware sherds were distinctive, having a thin green glaze and bands of roller-stamped decoration in the form of diamonds (see photo 5). Diagnostic sherds of this fabric from elsewhere have all come from tubular spouted tripod pitcher forms of 12th - early 13th century date. Therefore, it is assumed that these sherds were also from a vessel of this form. The cooking pot sherds included five rim sherds, all of an everted, folded form that could be dated 12th - 14th century. The glazed sherds included rims from flared bowl and jar/pipkin forms of 15th - 16th century and a base that originally had a small foot (see large central sherd in photo 4) and is thought to come from either a pitcher or dripping dish form.



Photo 6: Two sherds of decorated early glazed Malvernian pottery

A further five medieval sherds were of fabrics which could not be identified (fabric 99). All were oxidised and sandy and one could be identified as a base that, like the pitcher/dripping dish sherd above, appeared to have originally had a small foot.

⁷ Le Patourel (1968); Bryant (2004) page 290

Remaining pottery consisted of seven sherds of late post-medieval/modern white glazed wares (fabrics 100 and 101), one of which had blue transfer decoration. Other finds of interest included six fragments of brick, four pieces of mortar, one nail and a fragment of clay pipe.

Finds – Test Pit 4

The finds from this test pit were very similar to those from Test Pit 3. The assemblage consisted of 40 finds and included 33 sherds of pottery. Once again, there was a group of medieval sherds, which included two small sherds of undiagnostic Worcester cooking pot ([fabric 55](#)) and twelve of Malvernian cooking pot ([fabric 56](#)). The Malvernian sherds included four rim sherds of the same everted (in turned) form identified in Test Pit 3. In addition, a small sherd of unglazed sandy white ware was also retrieved. Sherds of this fabric type generally come from jar or bowl forms and are thought to have been produced in Staffordshire⁸.

Remaining sherds included two small pieces of black-glazed buff ware ([fabric 91](#)) of 18th century date and sixteen of modern table wares, including [porcelain](#), [creamware](#) and [china](#), all of late 18th date onwards.

Other finds were all of later post-medieval and modern date and consisted of a small, handmade nail, an unidentified iron object, two tiny fragments of ceramic building material and a piece of clay pipe.

What does this tell us?

The finds from Test Pits 3 and 4 confirm that the earthworks across Polly's Piece are medieval. Spits 3 and 4 of both test pits appear to be undisturbed medieval layers, as they contained no later artefacts. From the type and date of pottery found, it suggests that people were living in this area around the 12th – 14th centuries. These dwellings may have gradually dwindled away, before ceasing to be occupied during the 15th – 16th centuries.

Whilst Polly's Piece appears to have seen the most activity during the 12th – 14th centuries, it is possible that some of the pottery slightly pre-dates this. During [test pitting in 2017-18](#)⁹, a sherd of late 11th to late 12th century pottery was found at Nightingale Cottage, just east of Polly's Piece. Significantly, both the cottage and Polly's Piece lie alongside an historic trackway. This routeway has been preserved in field boundaries and can be traced east to the Bow Brook, past fields that have yielded Roman and Saxon metal detecting finds (see [Appendix 1](#) for full details). Medieval dwellings at Polly's Piece supports the idea that people have lived alongside the track since Roman times, with occupation gradually shifting westwards over the centuries.

A small quantity of 15th – 16th century pottery was also found in Test Pit 3, demonstrating that people were still living at or near to Polly's Piece around this time. There were considerably fewer 15th – 16th century pot sherds from Test Pits 3 and 4 than there are pre-14th century ones (9 sherds compared to 69, respectively). This reduction in late medieval pottery could reflect a shrink in settlement size, a partial move to other locations or simply be the result of households switching from ceramic to metal cooking vessels. The shift to metal is likely to account for some of the drop, but given the lack of 15th – 16th century pottery from Test Pit 4 and complete absence of 17th century finds, it is probable that the Polly's Piece dwellings dwindled after the 14th century. It is tempting to

⁸ Bryant (2004) page 317

⁹ O'Hare (2018), available online: <https://doi.org/10.5284/1049841>

link this change to the Black Death, which rampaged across England during the 1340s, and other crises of the 14th century.

By the 18th century, it appears that people were once again living near to – but not within – Polly's Piece. The majority of artefacts came from Test Pit 4 and probably originate from the adjacent timber framed cottage.

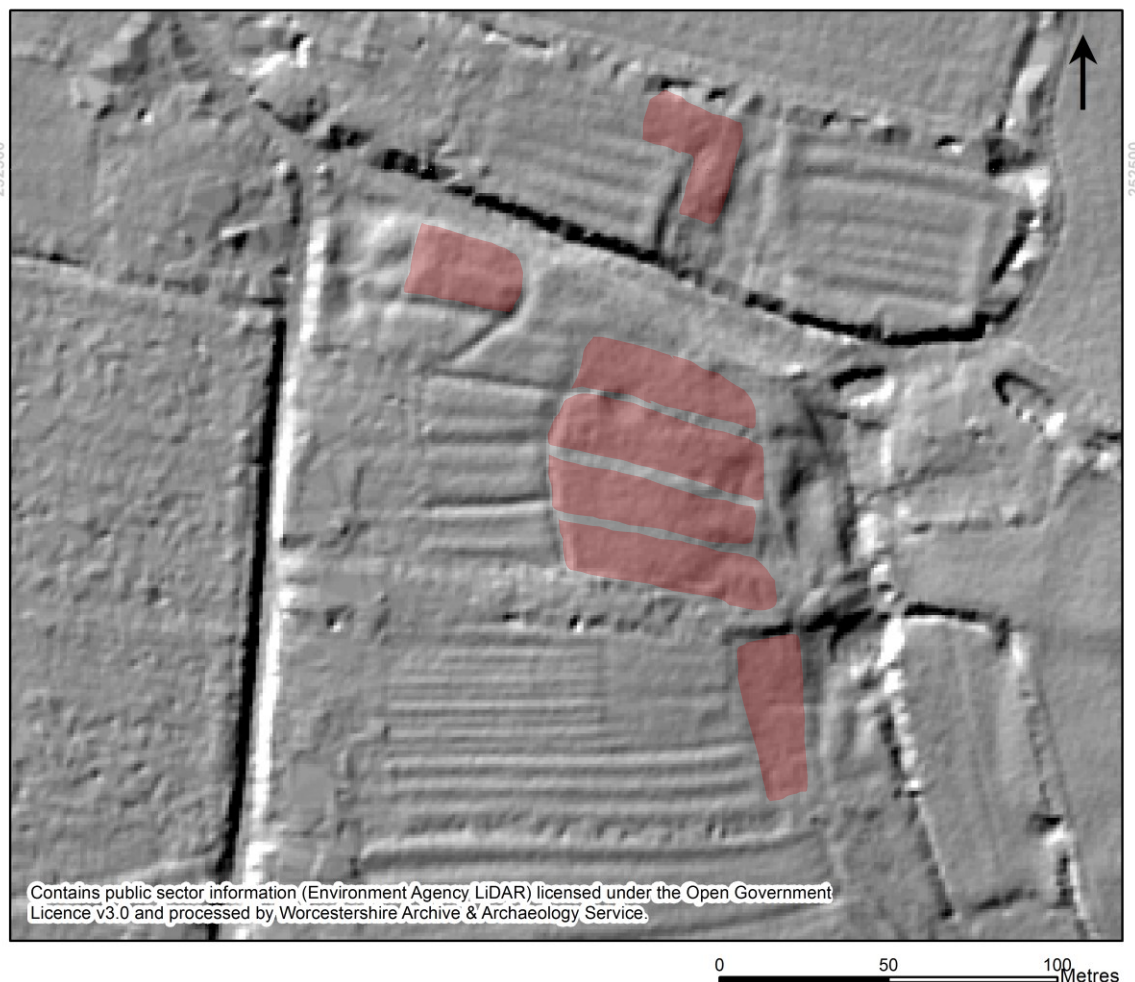


Figure 4: Lidar image of fields around Polly's Piece with possible medieval house plots highlighted in red LIDAR composite digital terrain model (DTM) at 1m resolution

Test Pit 5: Orchard Field west

Test Pit 5 was at the back of houses along Evesham Road, in a field immediately to the east. The test pit was not fully excavated due to there being fewer participants on day 2 of the excavation. However, spits 1 and 2 were relatively sterile with little charcoal and only a few small artefacts. The field is currently pasture and contains ridge and furrow earthworks created by historic ploughing.

Finds

Finds from this test pit consisted of just six sherds of post-medieval buff ware ([fabric 91](#)). These included a small fragment of a slipware press-moulded dish and five undiagnostic, black-glazed sherds. All were of late 17th - 18th century date.

What does this tell us?

Results from the 2017-18 test pits suggested that several of the existing houses along Evesham Road were built on previously unoccupied plots. The finds from Test Pit 5 tentatively support the idea that the village has only been spread out along the Evesham Road since the 17th century. The lack of



Photo 7: Test Pit 5 looking west towards housing fronting Evesham Road

earlier artefacts may be due to the test pit's lower deposits not being excavated. However, given the evidence for historic ploughing across the field, it is more likely that this area was agricultural during the medieval period than the possibility that earlier settlement evidence was just not excavated.

Test Pit 6: Orchard Field east

Test Pit 6 was located in the same field as Test Pit 5, but further to the east. The test pit was placed near to earthworks of a former trackway that ran south from Polly's Piece towards Aston Moat Farm. Test Pit 6 did not reach the natural geology, as only spits 1 and 2 were excavated due to a lack of participants on day 2 of the excavation. Other test pits were prioritised as Test Pit 6 appeared virtually sterile, with no artefacts and only rare flecks of charcoal.

What does this tell us?

It is unlikely that medieval or later houses ever existed in this area. The trackway alongside Test Pit 6 runs north to Polly's Piece where medieval occupation has been revealed in Test Pits 3 and 4. However, that area of settlement does not appear to have extended this far south. It is feasible that medieval evidence has been missed, as the test pit was not excavated to the lowest deposits, but that is considered less likely given the evidence for historic ploughing in this area.

A thin scatter of medieval pottery is often found across arable land, due to being added to the manure heaps that were later spread over fields. Research is beginning to suggest that pottery was typically only included by peasants working their own land, with manor lands being fertilised by pure animal dung¹⁰. Given the complete absence of medieval pottery and proximity to Aston Moat Farm

¹⁰ Jones, R. 2009 *Manure and medieval social order*.

(which was probably a high status medieval site), it is intriguing to consider whether this field may have historically been farmed directly by a medieval manor.

Test Pit 7: Nordle Cottage field

To the west of Nordle Cottage, at the southern end of the village, is a former house plot. The land is currently used in part as an allotment garden, but historic maps show that a house stood here until the mid-late 1800s. The earliest map of the area – the 1825 enclosure map – depicts a rectangular building in the northwest corner, against Moat Lane (see Figure 5). Between 1838 and 1885 the dwelling disappeared, and an orchard was planted.

Test Pit 7 was located towards the northwest corner, slightly south of the historic house. Dark garden soils containing a large quantity of artefacts were encountered. The top of the natural orangey clay was encountered 60cm below the current ground level.



Figure 5: Extract of 1825 Inclosure map with unnamed cottage to the west of Nordle Cottage highlighted (Worcestershire Archive ref. BA4618 r267.6)

Finds

A total of 278 finds were recorded from this test pit. The assemblage included the earliest find from White Ladies Aston's test pits: a piece of worked flint of Neolithic or early Bronze Age date. All other finds appeared to have resulted from domestic activity in the medieval and post-medieval periods. Medieval material was spread across all of the spits, indicating a degree of disturbance, possibly as a result of orchard trees being planted or the area's later use as a smallholding.

The flint was identified as a utilised flake produced from good quality flint. It is possible that it was originally intended as an arrowhead blank. There was no visible retouch, but damage along one edge was consistent with use for slicing or cutting (Rob Hedge *pers comm*).



Photo 8: Possible arrowhead blank from Test Pit 7



Photo 9: Sherd of Worcester-type early medieval cooking pot with a square rim

The earliest medieval finds consisted of a rim sherd from an unglazed Worcester-type cooking pot ([fabric 55](#)) and the body sherd of a Cotswold unglazed ware cooking pot ([fabric 57](#)). The rim sherd was of a square-rimmed form and could be dated late 11th to mid 12th century. This form is thought to be a copy of those made in Cotswold unglazed ware, which are slightly earlier in date (10th – 12th century) than their Worcester counterparts¹¹. In addition, a further 21 sherds of Worcester cooking pot were identified, including six rim sherds of thickened, everted form, similar to those seen in the assemblages from Test Pits 3 and 4. This is the latest rim type associated with vessels of this fabric and could be dated between the 12th and mid-14th centuries. A single sherd of Malvernian unglazed cooking pot of 13th - 14th century date was also present. Remaining pottery of medieval date included a small body sherd of Worcester sandy glazed ware ([fabric 64.1](#)) and the rim of a sandy white ware jar ([fabric 64.4](#)), both of which could be dated 13th - 14th century. There was also a base from an unidentified form type in oxidised glazed Malvernian ware ([fabric 69](#)), which was considered to be of late 15th - 16th century date. Seven fragments of roof tile were also thought to be of medieval date based on fabric type.

All remaining pottery was of 17th and 18th century date. It included a small quantity of 17th century material in the form of Midlands yellow ware ([fabric 77](#)), black-glazed red sandy wares ([fabric 78](#)), buff wares ([fabric 91](#)), including manganese mottled cup sherds and sherds from a number of Staffordshire slip-decorated dishes of later 17th - 18th century date ([fabric 91](#)). There were also two sherds of tin-glazed ware sherds ([fabric 82](#)) and a small number stoneware mug/tankard forms of 18th century date ([fabrics 81](#), [81.3](#) and [81.5](#)). The latest pottery in the group, which date from the 19th or 20th century, included a sherd of biscuit fired porcelain ([fabric 83](#)), a sherd of creamware ([fabric 84](#)) and a large quantity of miscellaneous white glazed earthenwares, some with transfer

¹¹ Bryant 2004, page 290

decoration and others with machine-turned slip decoration (fabric 100). There were also fragments of china tablewares ([fabric 85](#)), as well as transfer printed and late stoneware sherds ([fabric 81.4](#)).

Other finds of note were all of post-medieval date and included fragments of clay pipe stem, fragments of ceramic building material and mortar and various pieces of highly corroded iron, including nails and sheet.

What does this tell us?

Test Pit 7 contains evidence of occupation on, or close to, this site for at least 900 years. This makes it the longest-lived house plot so far found in White Ladies Aston. Whilst the medieval archaeology has been disturbed and churned up over the years, most of the medieval sherds from spits 4 and 5 are fairly large, indicating that they have not moved particularly far from where they were originally thrown away.

The earliest sherds date from around, or shortly after, the Norman Conquest in 1066. Only one other location in the village has previously produced pottery of a similar date – Nightingale Cottage, just east of Polly’s Piece, during [test pitting in 2017-18](#)¹². Nightingale Cottage and Test Pit 7 are 500m apart and there is currently no evidence for activity of this date in between these locations. Whilst the evidence amounts to just a few artefacts, it does imply that settlement was either very scattered or had two separate centres in the centuries around the Norman Conquest. As Test Pit 7 is relatively close to the moat at Aston Moat Farm – which are typically high status sites built between 1200 and 1400¹³ - it does hint at the possibility that the medieval manors or estates within White Ladies Aston were separate settlements, at least early on in the period.

Interestingly, Test Pit 7 contained a continuous spread of artefacts from the 11th or 12th century onwards. However, the majority of pottery dates from either the 12th – 14th centuries or 17th – 18th centuries, with relatively few dating to the intervening years. A dip in activities during the 15th – 16th centuries is mirrored in other test pits across White Ladies Aston. It may be that occupation was slightly further from the test pit during these centuries, but this cannot explain the trend seen across the village as a whole.

The later cluster of pottery ties in well with map evidence, which implies that the building disappeared in the early 19th century. A collection of Victorian and modern artefacts were also found, which are likely to have come from the neighbouring cottages.

Test Pit 8: Aston Hall Farmhouse

Aston Hall farmhouse, at the southern end of the village, is part timber framed. The northern end of the house is clad with 18th century brick but is thought to be 16th century in origin, whilst the southern wing was added in the early 17th century. The latter addition may be linked to a change of ownership as the Berkeley family bought the Spetchley Estate, within which Aston Hall Farm lies, in 1606.

Test Pit 8 was located close to the southern end of the farmhouse in what is now the back garden. Natural red sand was encountered 60cm down, beneath a dark topsoil that was filled with building

¹² O’Hare 2018, available online: <https://doi.org/10.5284/1049841>

¹³ Coveney 2014, available online: <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.668360>

rubble. It is possible that older deposits were partially truncated during 20th century renovations to the farmhouse.

Finds

A substantial assemblage of 508 finds dating from the post-medieval period onwards were retrieved from this test pit. Building materials formed the largest proportion of the group, with 155 fragments of late post-medieval/modern brick and roof tile and 233 fragments of mortar recorded. In addition, a small assemblage of window glass shards was also identified, as well as a number of highly corroded iron nails and fittings that may also have been used in a structure.

The pottery assemblage amounted to 33 sherds. Pottery fabrics and forms were all of commonly identified domestic types. The earliest of these included black-glazed red sandy ware ([fabric 78](#)) and buff wares ([fabric 91](#)), which included two sherds from a slip-decorated dish. The majority could be dated to the later 17th - 18th century. However, one sherd of blackware was more typical of the early-mid 17th century, being highly fired to a dark purplish brown and having a slightly metallic appearance to the glaze. A small sherd of tin-glazed ware ([fabric 82](#)), with blue hand-painted decoration, was also dated to the 17th - 18th century. Remaining sherds were of later 18th century date onwards and included porcelain and china tablewares ([fabrics 83, 85](#) and 100), as well as two sherds of stoneware – one of Nottingham production ([fabric 81.3](#)) and one with a white salt glaze ([fabric 81.5](#)).

What does this tell us?

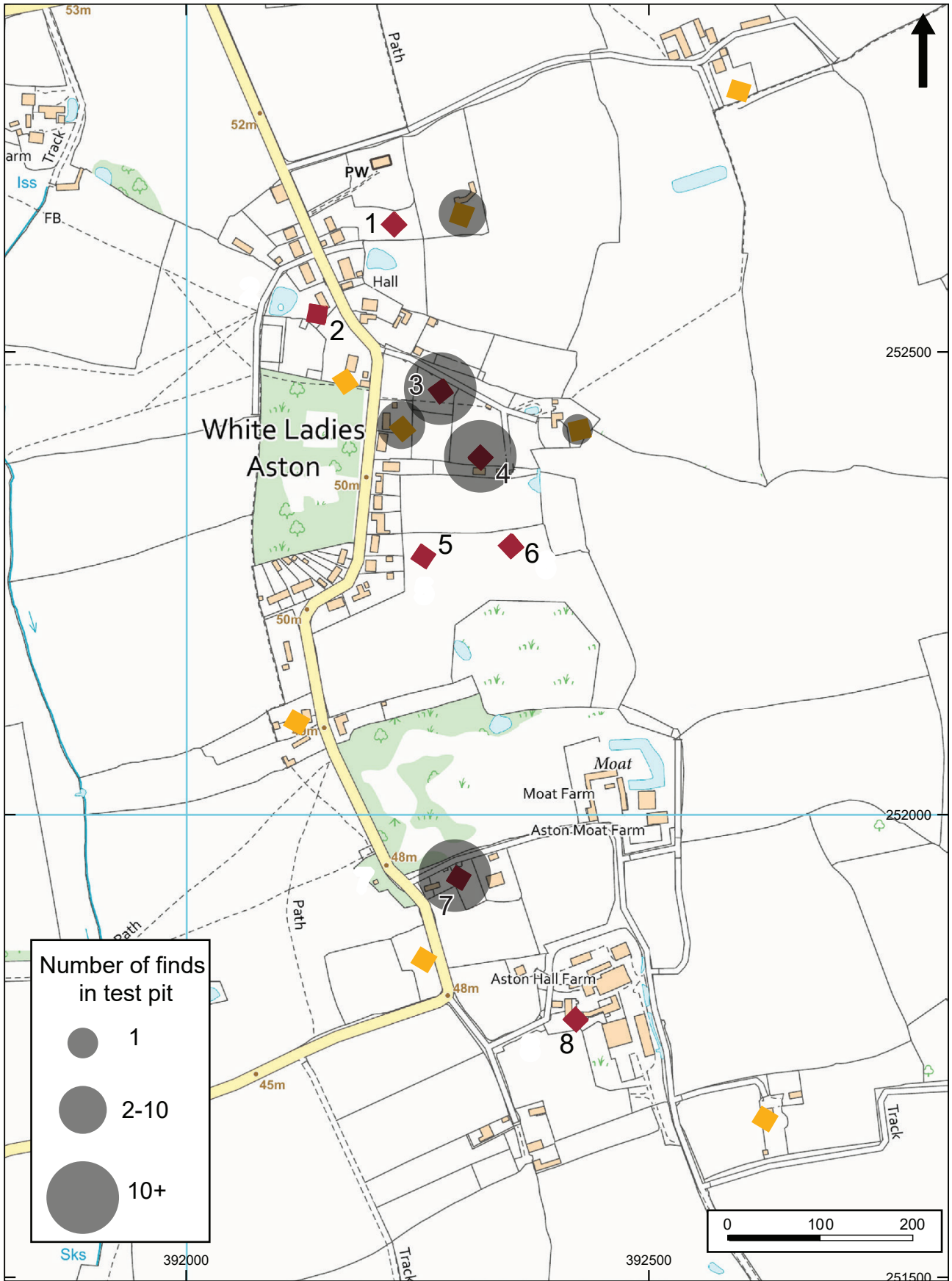
All artefacts from Test Pit 8 date to the existence of Aston Hall Farm. The majority of pottery dates from the 17th and 18th centuries, which ties in with alterations to the farmhouse. However, nothing dating to or before the farmhouse's establishment in the 16th century was found. The ground around Aston Hall farmhouse does appear to have been disturbed during building work, which partially accounts for the lack of earlier finds. All hints of earlier occupation are unlikely to have been removed though, meaning that Aston Hall farmhouse is probably the first dwelling to be built in this location.

Conclusions

A total of 16 test pits have now been excavated across White Ladies Aston. Combining the results of 2021's test pits (detailed above) with those excavated in 2017-18 offers us a clearer window into the village's earliest days and changes over time.



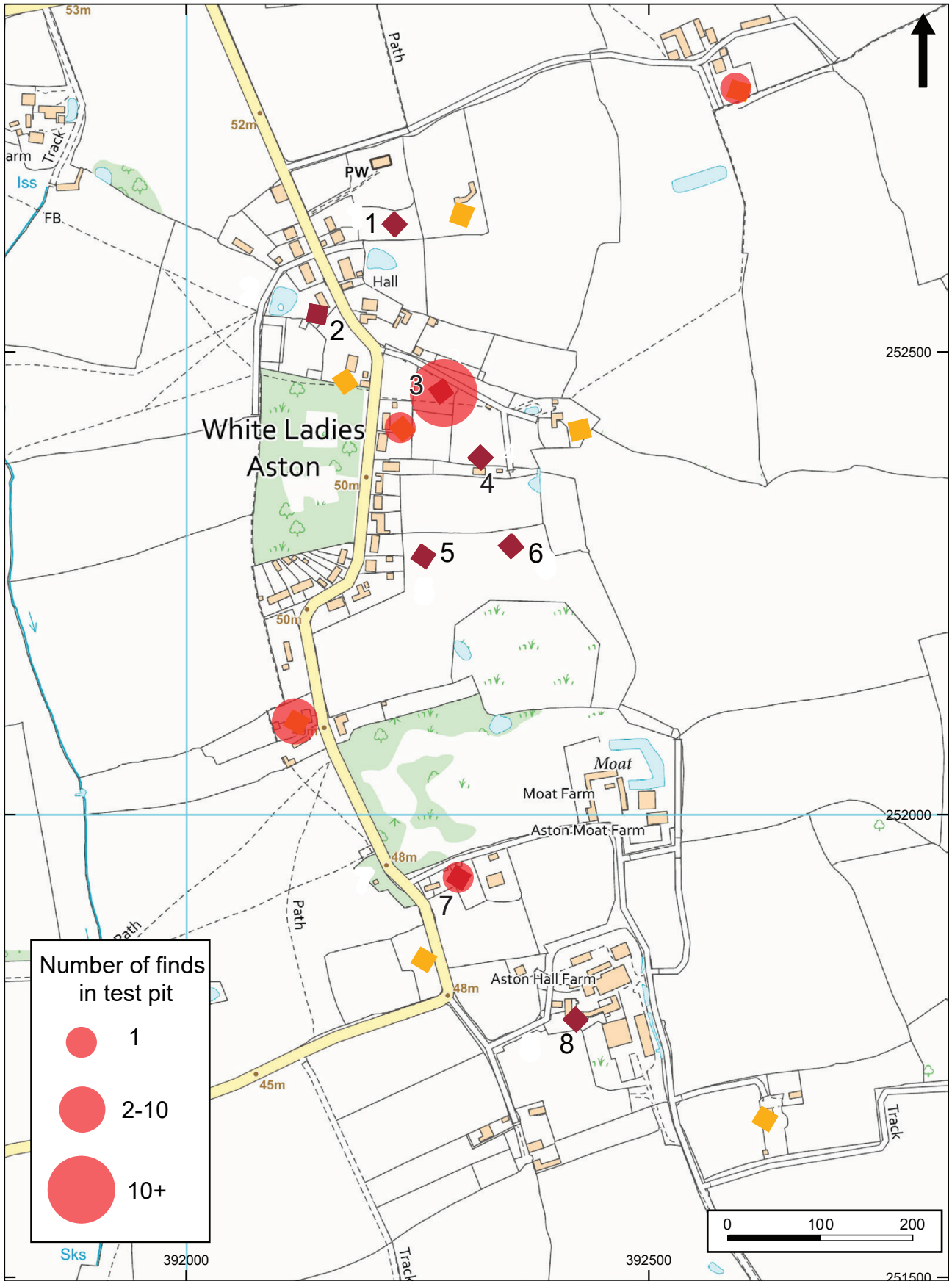
Photo 10: Test pit at Aston Hall Farmhouse (P. Haywood).



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Quantity of pottery from the 12th - 14th centuries

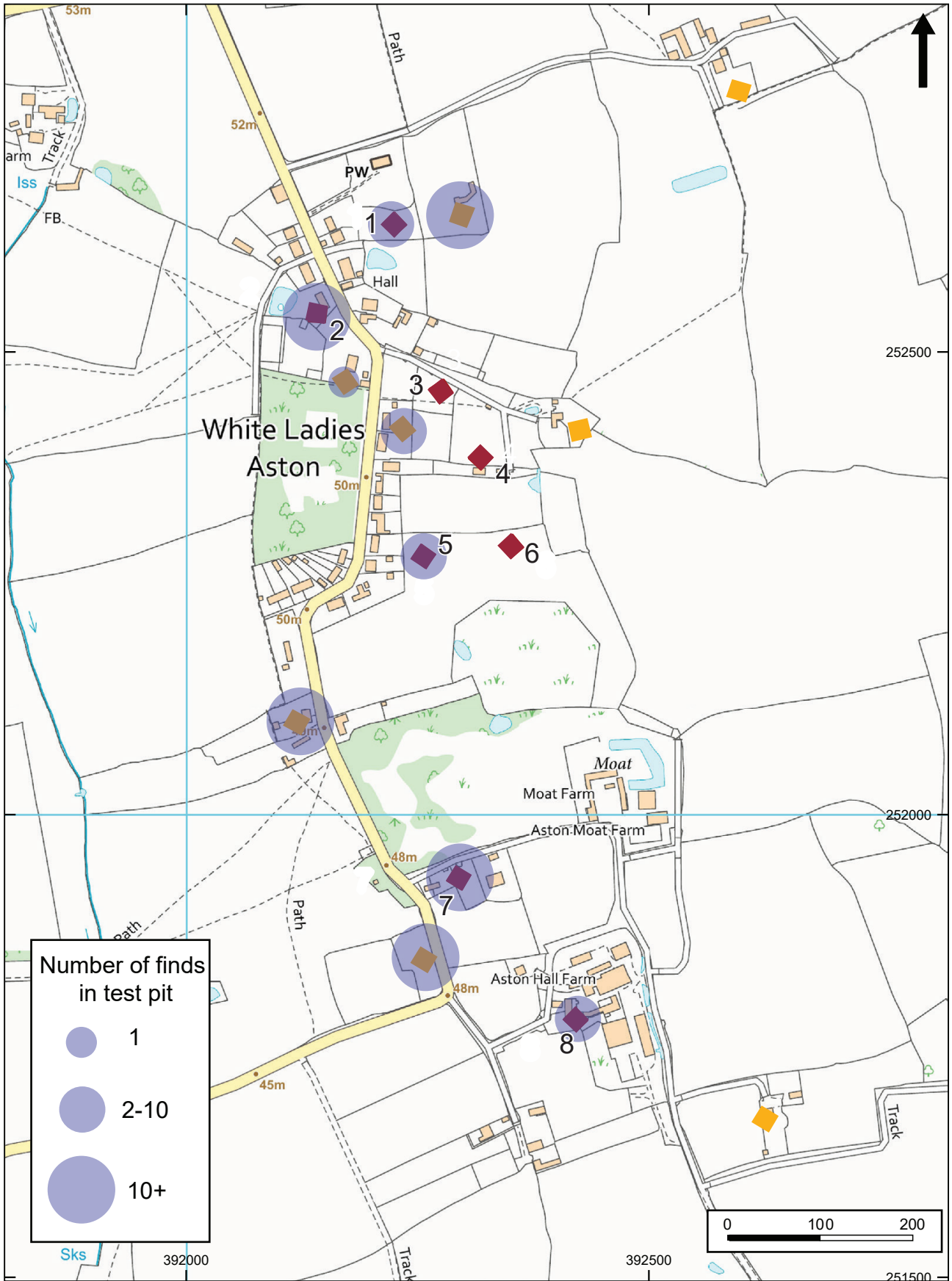
Figure 7



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Quantity of pottery from the 15th - 16th centuries

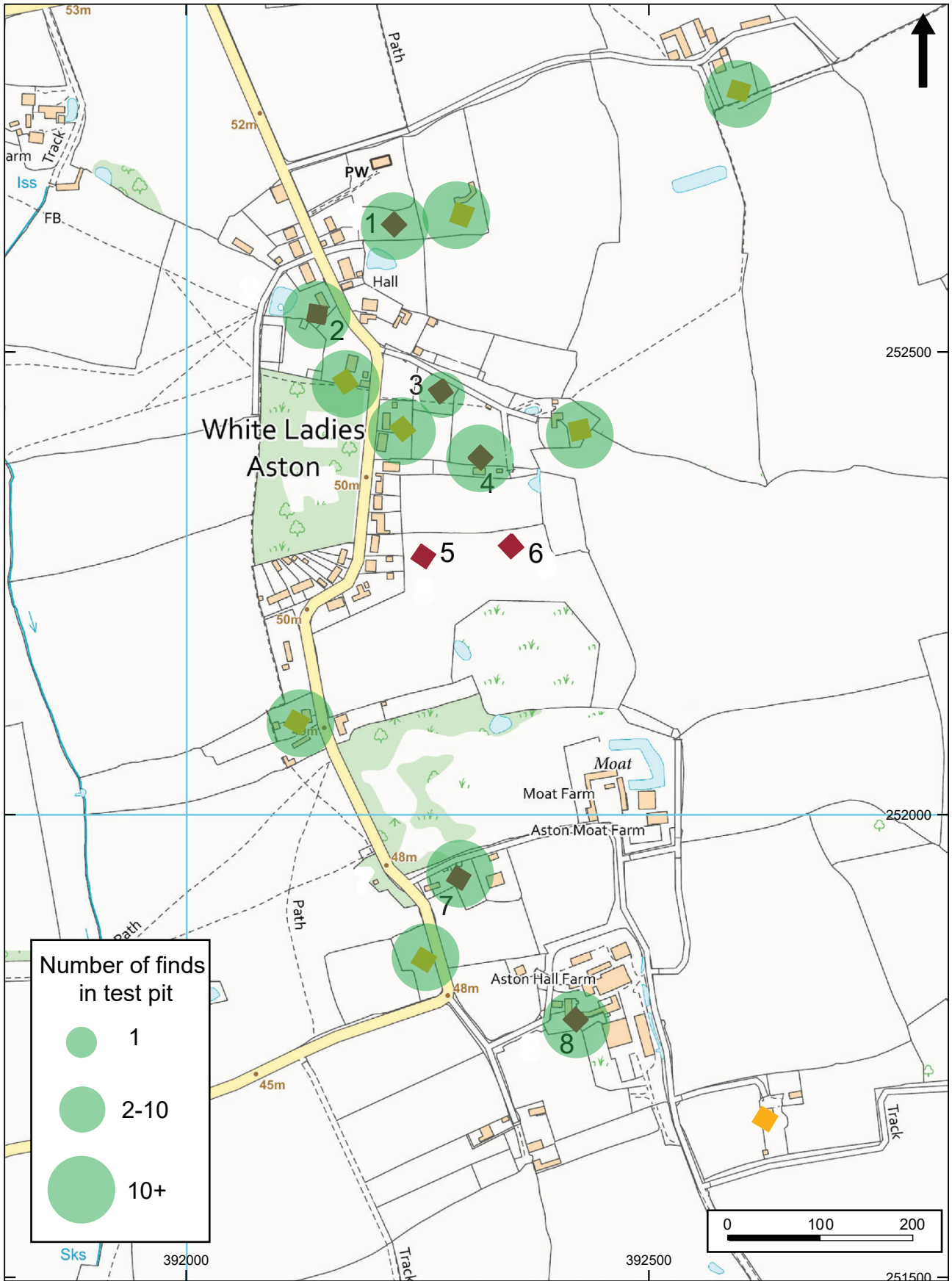
Figure 8



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Quantity of pottery from the 17th - 18th centuries

Figure 9



Quantity of pottery from the 19th - 20th centuries

Figure 10

Where was the earliest village?

The earliest settlement evidence found in the test pits dates from around the 11th century. Throughout the medieval period White Ladies Aston was not a single concentrated village – instead, there appears to have been two separate clusters of houses: one around Polly's Piece and the other further south around Moat Lane.

The northern settlement is likely to have formed around an older trackway, which runs southeast towards the Bow Brook. These dwellings may be a continuation of Roman and Saxon settlement slightly further to the east, although these older areas of occupation haven't been confirmed by excavation. The earthworks across Polly's Piece date from the 12th or 13th century and may be planned, probably by the landowner, rather than ad hoc settlement.

To the south, continuous activity from the 10th – 11th century onwards has been found by Nordle Cottage in Moat Lane. This settlement cluster may have been smaller as another test pit close by, at Aston Hall Farm, produced no medieval pottery. However, as at Polly's Piece, there appears to have been building work going on in the area – this time of a moated site (at Aston Moat Farm), most likely during the 13th or 14th centuries.

Given that two clusters of settlement are emerging from the archaeological evidence, it is interesting to note that historic records also show divided land ownership. Medieval White Ladies Aston had an array of changing landlords and as far back as the Domesday survey of 1086 two different tenant lords held land under the Bishop of Worcester: Ordric of Croome and Urse the Sheriff (who in turn rented to Robert)¹⁴.

Late medieval decline

Historic documents suggest that a series of changes took place in White Ladies Aston during the 14th century. Firstly, fewer people are listed on the lay subsidies (tax lists of the day). It is also possible that the number of major landholders in White Ladies Aston reduced during the 14th century¹⁵, although challenges with translating early records and the system of overlords and tenant lords makes this hard to untangle with certainty. At a national and European level, the 14th century also saw the Great Famine from 1315-17, Great Bovine Pestilence of 1319-20 and Black Death in 1348-49.

The widespread troubles of the early 14th century may account for the reduction in tax-eligible households within White Ladies Aston. The lay subsidies, which only list the heads of wealthy households, record 18 names in 1280 and only 9 in 1327¹⁶. In 1332-3 it is also noted that the settlement as a whole only paid under a quarter of the total tax due. Whilst the majority of Worcestershire parishes paid under half that year, only 20 of the 137 parishes paid less than a quarter¹⁷. It is clear that White Ladies Aston experienced hard times before the arrival of the Black Death, although whether it shrank in population or just prosperity is hard to ascertain from records alone.

¹⁴ Domesday translation for Worcestershire entries 2,53 and 2,55 – available online:

<https://hydra.hull.ac.uk/assets/hull:461/content>

¹⁵ <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/worcs/vol3/pp557-561>

¹⁶ Transcriptions by Worcestershire Historical Society: Willis Bund (1893) and Amphlett (1899)

¹⁷ Transcriptions by Worcestershire Historical Society publication: Eld (1895)

Artefacts uncovered by test pitting seemingly mirror the recorded late medieval decline. Only Test Pits 3 and 7 yielded 15th – 16th century pottery and both in relatively small quantities. The majority of 12th – 14th century finds are ceramic cooking pots, which do become less available after the mid 14th century due to households switch to longer-lasting metal versions. However, Malvernian pottery does continue to be made and only a handful of such sherds are seen in White Ladies Aston's test pits, despite households previously having access to these wares.

At Polly's Piece, Test Pit 3 revealed ongoing – if dwindling – occupation until the 15th or 16th century whilst Test Pit 4 implies that at least some medieval house plots were abandoned either during or shortly after the 14th century. Combined with a small number of 15th – 16th century finds in test pits that lacked medieval activity (Sandfield Cottage and Aston Court Farm¹⁸), this tentatively points towards a settlement that reduced in prosperity during the 14th century and possibly a little in population size as well. White Ladies Aston appears to have taken a while to regain its strength, but as it regrew during the 15th and 16th centuries there began to be dwellings built on new plots.

Current village layout

The village today runs north to south along the Evesham Road, yet test pit evidence suggests that the medieval settlement had two separate centres. So, when did the village take on its current layout?

The beginnings of today's linear layout can be seen in the 15th or 16th century when activity appeared in previously unoccupied areas. However, given the small quantity of artefacts from this date and the relative explosion of 17th – 18th century test pit finds, it's likely that the village's reorientation took place towards the end of this time period. Interestingly, the early 17th century is also the last time that Bruley manor is mentioned in records and when the Berkeley family purchased White Ladies Aston manor, which was held until 1544 by Whiston's Nunnery¹⁹.

What next?

The results from all six test pit locations were drawn together in a touring exhibition in early 2023. After this, the archaeological finds will either be returned to the landowner or deposited with Museums Worcestershire, depending on the owner's preference. The reports and archaeological records will be stored by the [Archaeology Data Service](#) – a publicly accessible digital archive. A copy of each report will also be available on www.explorethepast.co.uk, which is run by Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service, and the county's Historic Environment Record.

Archaeological investigations often unearth as many questions as they do answers. It is an ongoing process of gradually piecing together details about the past, so it is hoped that the stories revealed by these Big Digs will be expanded in future.

¹⁸ 2017-18 test pits

¹⁹ Victoria County History 1913, available online: www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/worcs/vol3/pp557-561

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the owners, including the Spetchley Estate, who generously hosted a test pit and everyone on the Dig Team and Finds Team. Without your support, enthusiasm and hard work these stories would not have been unearthed.

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Appendix 1: Detailed historical background

Location and geology

White Ladies Aston is located 5 miles southeast of Worcester and just east of the A44, between the villages of Churchill to the north and Peopleton to the south. The modern village mainly lies along a single road, with St John the Baptist's Church at the northern edge and Aston Hall Farm towards the southern end. Whilst the village itself is on relatively level topography, to the east the land gently slopes down towards the Bow Brook. A small tributary of the brook lies west and south of the village, forming a loop of land in which White Ladies Aston sits.

The present settlement predominately lies in an area with mudstone bedrock, of the Wilmcote Limestone Member, overlain by sand and gravel of the Ailstone Member, which was formed in riverine environments. No overlying superficial deposits are recorded for the area around Aston Court Farm and the village's eastern periphery. Towards the south-eastern end of the village, from Aston Moat Farm down beyond the eastern edge of Aston Hall Farm, the underlying geology changes to interbedded mudstone and limestone of the Wilmcote Limestone Member, with no recorded superficial deposit (BGS 2022). Across all test pit locations are slightly acidic loamy and clayey soils (Soilscape 2023).

Historical background

The earliest reference to occupation at 'aet Eastune', meaning East Farm, is from c 977 AD (Mawer & Stenton 1927). A settlement at 'Aston' is then recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086 as comprising of 10 households (Open Domesday 2022). Northwick manor, within which Aston fell, belonged to the Bishop of Worcester in 1066. The manor at Aston has a complex history of medieval ownership and the original manor of Aston appears to have been split into three: *Aston Episcopi*, which was retained by the Bishop of Worcester, *Aston Bruley*, which ceased to exist as a manor sometime after 1610, and *White Ladies Aston* (VCH 1913: 558-560). The latter was first granted by the Bishopric to a Robert de Evercy and his descendants, but in the mid-13th century it was given to the newly founded nunnery at Whistones, then just north of Worcester. Whistones Nunnery, which gave White Ladies Aston its name, held these lands until it was suppressed during the Reformation and its lands sold off. After passing through various owners, Robert Berkeley of Spetchley eventually bought the manor of White Ladies Aston in 1612 (*Ibid.*) – the Berkeley family remain the present owners of much farmland within the parish.

During the reign of Henry II (1133-1189), the boundaries of Feckenham Forest were considerably expanded. White Ladies Aston lay on the southern edge of this expanded Royal Forest and would have been subject to the harsh forest law until c.1300, when the boundaries were reduced again and moved further north (Atkins 2006; WSM42160).

The oldest surviving building in White Ladies Aston is the Grade II* listed St John the Baptist's Church, which has a 12th century nave and chancel (NHL 1258836). No other medieval structures survive within the village and it is unclear what form the medieval settlement took. The present-day village appears to be the remnant of post-medieval occupation, arranged as a cluster of farmsteads

and cottages in an interrupted row along Evesham Road. Aston Hall Farm, at the southern end of the village, is 16th century in date with a surviving farmhouse and several outbuildings (WSM02954, WSM02956, WSM30760, WSM51767). At the northern edge of the parish lies the 17th century Green Farm (WSM51765) and 18th century Aston Court Farm (WSM51768). Despite cartographic and oral history evidence for the loss of many timber framed cottages in the early 20th century (e.g. WSM02983), numerous 17th century timber framed houses remain throughout the village, including Redfern House (NHL 1258658), Nightingale Cottage (NHL 1273353), Laburnum Cottage (NHL 1259090) and Rose Cottage (NHL 1273323).

Unusually, White Ladies Aston has both inclosure and tithe maps, dating from 1825 and 1838 respectively. Worcester Cathedral Library also holds a 1713 map of the Bishop's manor at White Ladies Aston, which covers a strip of land across the western side of the parish from the church to the main Worcester road (now the A44). The most significant change visible in these maps is the existence, and subsequent loss by 1838, of a north-west to south-east aligned road extending from the Old Vicarage past Nightingale Cottage towards the Bow Brook. A former continuation of this road to Green Farm can be seen preserved in field boundaries and a disjointed track also runs south from Nightingale Cottage to join Moat Lane on the 1825 inclosure map. A later note alongside the 1713 map transcription suggests that the Bishop's estate was not well kept during the early 20th century, as it was described in 1957 as being an "awful mess" with derelict cottages and farm buildings (Jenkins 2000).

Archaeological background

Introduction

Prior to test pitting, a search of Worcestershire Historic Environment Record (HER) was completed for an area of 500m around the village and historic maps were also consulted. A summary of the results of this research are presented below and shown in Figures 11-14.

Prehistory

Geology with the potential to contain Palaeolithic remains, dating to Marine Isotope Stage 6 (189,000-128,000 BC), lies across the northern and western portions of the village (WSM56925), although no Palaeolithic finds have so far been recorded from the parish. The earliest known archaeological activity in the area is a Bronze Age barrow at Low Hill (WSM02901), which is located just west of White Ladies Aston alongside the A44.

Roman to Anglo-Saxon (43AD – 1066)

Multiple areas of Roman occupation have been identified in the parish through metal detecting finds and field name evidence, although to date none have been excavated. East of Aston Court Farm, a concentration of Roman finds is suggestive of an early Romano-British farmstead or building (WSM29790), whilst two clusters of 3rd - 4th century AD finds (WSM29791) and Roman to Saxon artefacts (WSM29792) have been found east of Nightingale Cottage. These finds assemblages support local field name evidence of Roman and/or Saxon occupation – Burnt Ground (WSM29596) and Black Meadow (WSM29597). A fourth group of finds found south-west of Aston Hall Farm are indicative of another area of Roman settlement (WSM29675). Continuity of local occupation into the Anglo-Saxon era is attested to by a 6th century cemetery found north-east of White Ladies Aston

along the eastern bank of the Bow Brook, during gravel extraction in the mid-19th century (WSM00599).

The description of 'Salt Street' in an Anglo-Saxon boundary charter for Upper Wolverton (WSM30992), to the south of White Ladies Aston, implies that a Saxon and probably Roman road for trading salt from Droitwich passed close by. The probable continuation of a trackway that runs past Nightingale Cottage, seen preserved as a holloway and in later field boundaries, heads towards the Bow Brook; presumably to a ford or small bridge crossing. Whilst undated, areas of probable Roman and Saxon occupation lie along the track and it is most likely to be pre-medieval in date (WSM30702).

Medieval (1066 – 1539)

The layout of medieval White Ladies Aston is not clear. The extent of medieval occupation is thought to lie broadly within the limits of the present day village (WSM29789), although as the settlement was split between three manors it is perhaps unlikely to have formed a single planned village during this era. One of the medieval manor houses was located at the moated site that now lies within Aston Moat Farm (WSM02903), c 700m south of the 12th century church (WSM02953), and the remnant of a second moat may exist immediately north of Aston Court Farm house (WSM30761). Interestingly, neither of these two sites are part of the Bishop's manor, *Aston Episcopi*, by the time it is mapped in 1713 (Jenkins 2000) and may have belonged to the medieval manors of *Aston Bruley* and *White Ladies Aston*.

Ridge and furrow earthworks survive in many fields towards the edge of the parish and around the shrunken medieval settlement and moated site at Churchill (WSM02921), attesting to the agricultural economy and landscape that supported and surrounded White Ladies Aston (WSM09769, WSM67266-7, WSM67271, WSM67273, WSM70142-3). A medieval moot, or meeting place, may also have existed alongside what is now the A44 (WSM32535).

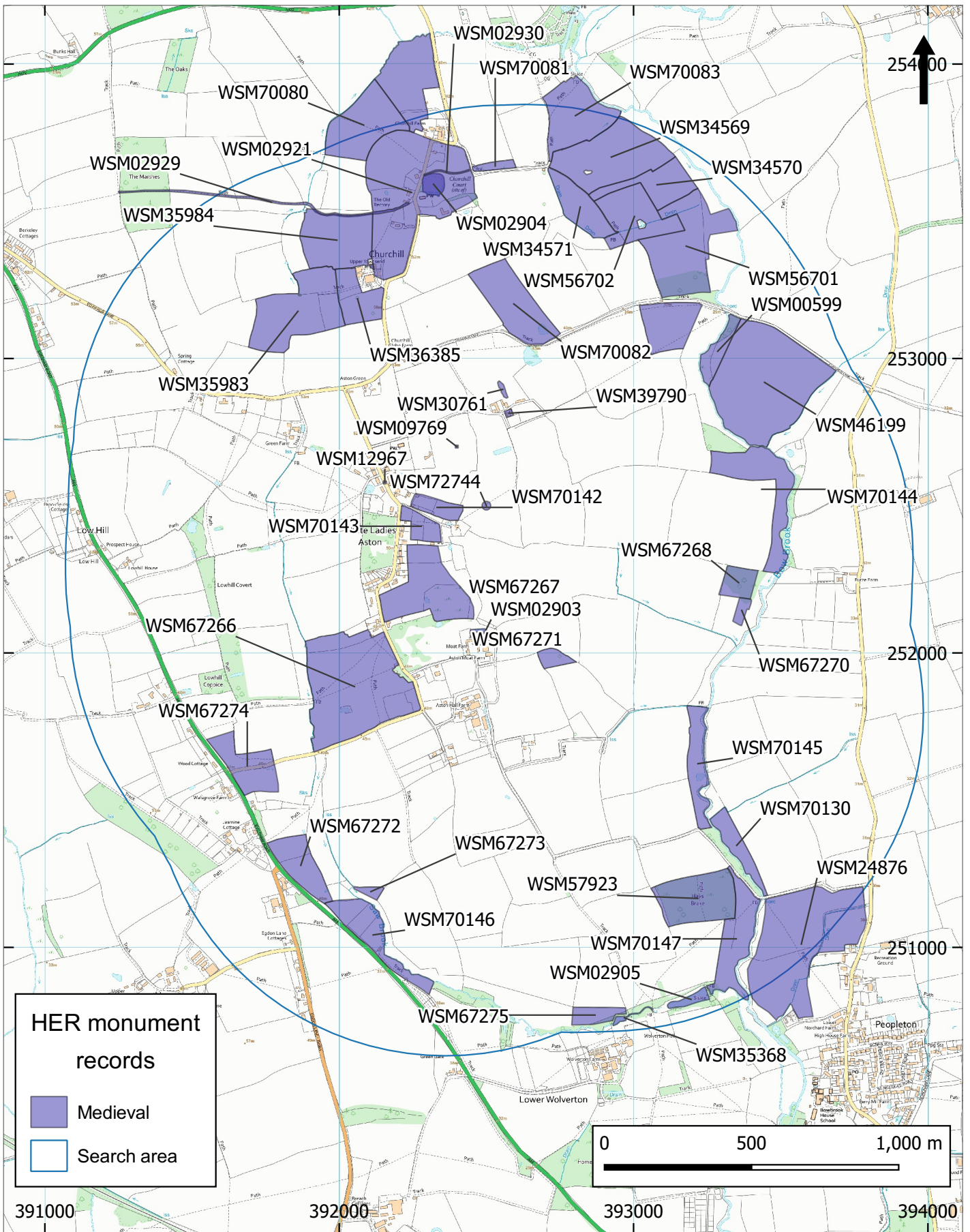
Post-medieval (1540 – 1900)

During the Civil War, Aston Court was plundered due to being the former residence of the Goods, who were royalist supporters (WSM39790). Direct evidence for this event comes from a collection of musket balls found by a metal detectorist to the southeast of Aston Court Farm, which are thought to result from Cromwell's encampment in 1651 (WSM27217).

Several industrial sites and former ponds also relate to the post-medieval era, including limekilns in the vicinity of Old Gardens (WSM57362, WSM57364) and clay or marl pits around Aston Court Farm (WSM35442, WSM47556).

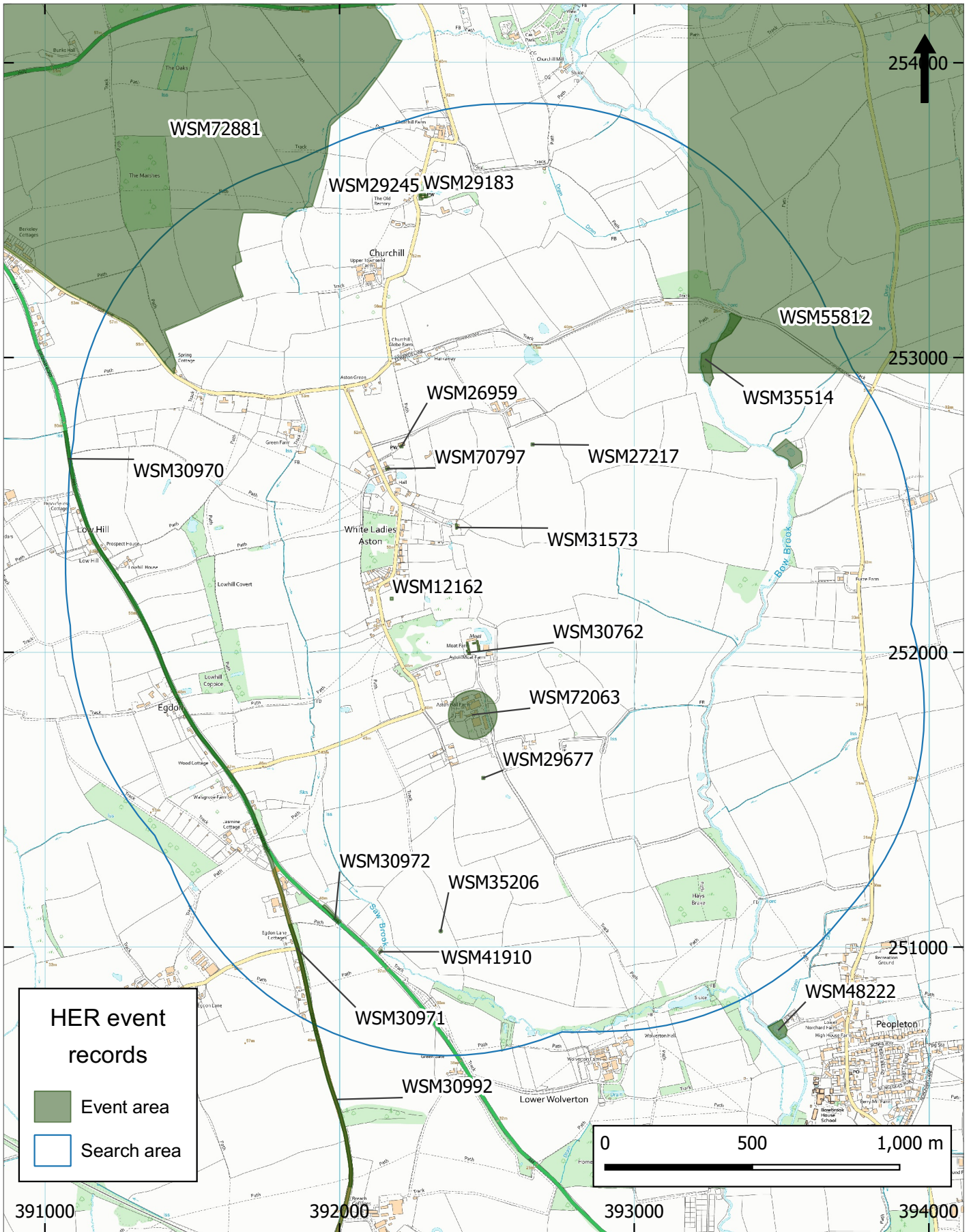
Modern (1901 – present)

Immediately south of White Ladies Aston, at Wolverton Hall Farm in Peopleton, a World War II Auxiliary Unit Training facility was established (WSM27636). There is no record of any military sites or defensive features existing in the village itself.



Medieval monuments

Figure 12



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Archaeological events recorded on the Historic Environment Record (HER)

Figure 14

Appendix 2: Methodology & spit descriptions

Project methodology

Location

Eight test pits were excavated across White Ladies Aston, east of Worcester (SO 92271 52139) over the 25th – 26th October 2021. Test pits were randomly spread across the village in private gardens and fields, including the paddock known locally as ‘Polly’s Piece’. Test pits were located by preference close to the back of houses where rubbish was historically often thrown.

Aims

The archaeological aims were to:

- Further our understanding of the form, character and development of rural medieval settlements in Worcestershire, as it is an area lacking research (Hunt 2011: 176).
- Investigate areas of White Ladies Aston that were not close to previous test pits, in order to establish a picture of the medieval village’s layout.
- Date the earthworks across ‘Polly’s Piece’.

Fieldwork methodology

The fieldwork model used here follows that developed by Professor Carenza Lewis for researching Currently Occupied Medieval Rural Settlements (CORS) and used extensively in East Anglia with considerable success (for methodology in full, see Lewis 2007). Instead of recording conventional archaeological contexts, excavation focused on the recovery of artefacts and the depths at which they are discovered, as Lewis' methodology uses the presence, quantity and condition of pottery as a proxy indicator for occupation. This method of excavating in spits also makes it easy for those without archaeological training to participate.

Each test pit covered a 1m² area and was de-turf then excavated by hand in 10cm spits. Spoil was checked for finds, using a 1cm mesh sieve where possible, and artefacts separated by spit. A pro forma record booklet was used to record soil descriptions and inclusions within each spit, and photographs were taken regularly. The majority of test pits reached natural, but several were not completed due to time constraints. Test pits were photographed and drawn in both section and plan before being backfilled and any turf reinstated. The precise location of each test pit was recorded by GPS.

Personnel

Fieldwork was undertaken by local volunteers and undergraduate archaeology students from the University of Worcester, with the support of Worcestershire Archaeology.

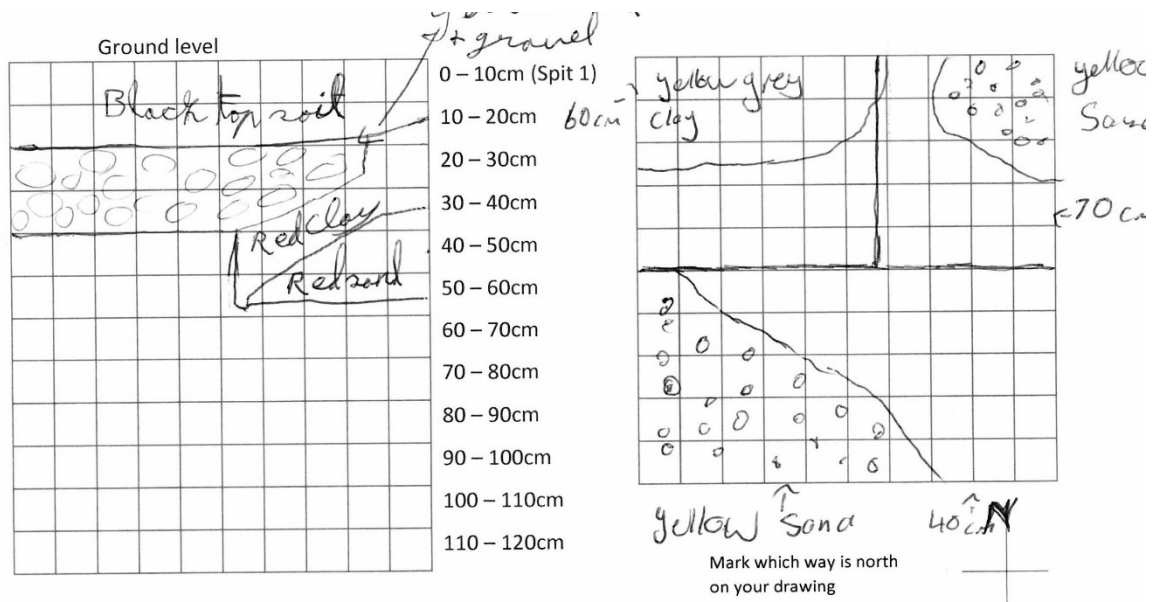
Archive

The HER event number for this investigation is WSM71094 and the WAAS project number is CE004. The project archive is currently held at the offices of Worcestershire Archaeology. Subject to the agreement of the landowners it is anticipated that it will be deposited with Museums Worcestershire and the digital archive sent to the Archaeology Data Service (ADS).

Spit records

Test Pit 1 The Willows (SO 92225 52638)

Spit no.	Soil description	Inclusions	Artefacts
1	Firm dark orangey brown clay loam	-	Yes
2	Compact mid orangey brown clay loam	Occasional medium pebbles and rare charcoal	Yes
3	Compact mid orangey brown clay, with an area of loose orange sand in southwest corner	Abundant medium pebbles, rare charcoal and small roots	Yes
4	Firm dark orangey brown sandy clay, with light orange sand in southwest corner	Abundant medium pebbles and rare charcoal	No
5	Firm mid orangey brown sandy clay, with orange sand in southwest corner and yellowish grey clay in northwest corner	Occasional medium pebbles	No
6	Compact red clay (sondage in northeast corner only)	-	No



Drawing 1. Section (left) and plan (right) of Test Pit 1. Each square equals 10cm



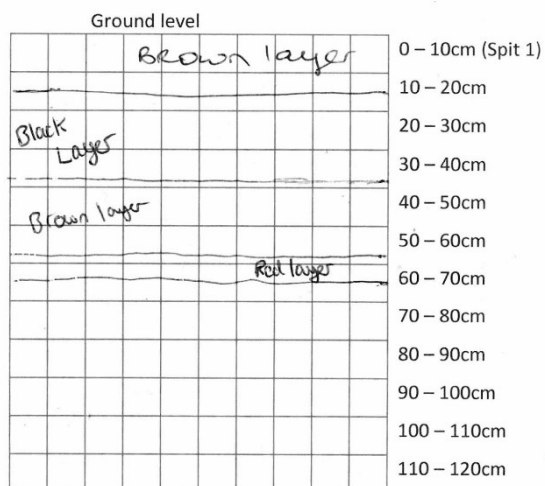
Photo 2. Test Pit 1 final photograph, showing sondage in north-east corner.



Photo 1. West-facing section of Test Pit 1.

Test Pit 2 Priors Croft (SO 92142 52541)

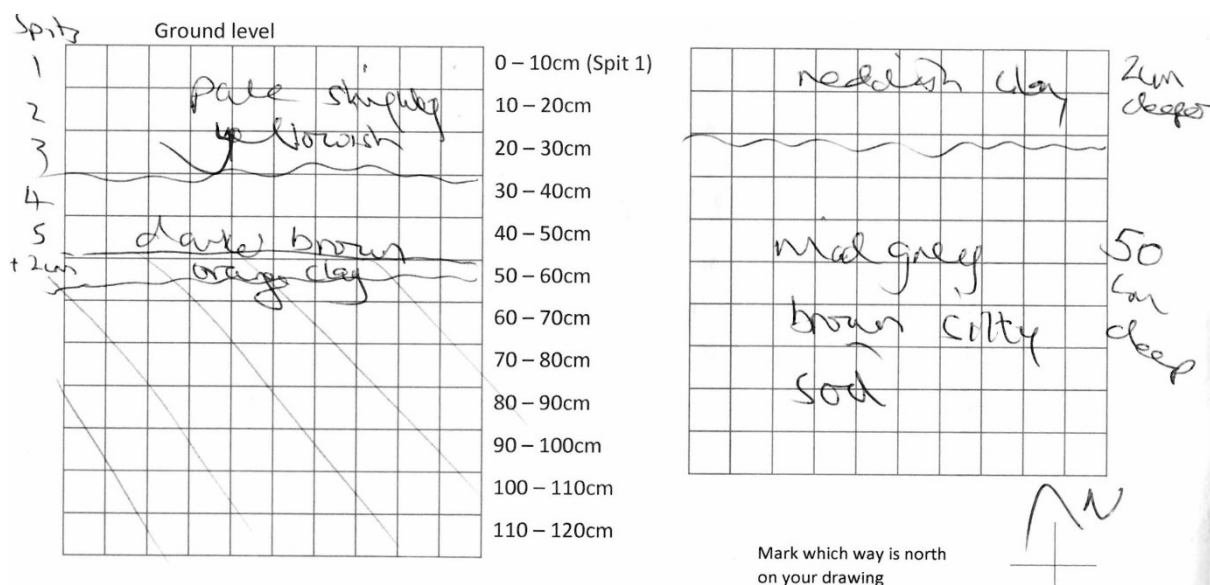
Spit no.	Soil description	Inclusions	Artefacts
1	Loose greyish brown silt	Charcoal flecks	Yes
2	Firm dark blackish brown silt	Small and medium pebbles, rare charcoal and occasional roots	Yes
3	Firm dark blackish brown silt	Occasional pebbles, charcoal flecks and roots	Yes
4	Firm dark blackish brown silt	Occasional pebbles, abundant charcoal flecks and roots	Yes
5	Compact dark blackish brown	Medium pebbles, charcoal and small roots	Yes
6	Compact red clay	Occasional medium pebbles, charcoal and rare small roots	Yes



Drawing 2. Section drawing of Test Pit 2

Test Pit 3 Polly's Piece (SO 92275 52458)

Spit no.	Soil description	Inclusions	Artefacts
1	Compact mid greyish brown sandy silt	Occasional small and medium pebbles and abundant small roots	Yes
2	Compact mid greyish brown sandy silt	Occasional small and medium pebbles, occasional coal and small roots	Yes
3	Firm mid greyish brown clay	Occasional medium pebbles, rare coal and small roots	Yes
4	Compact mid greyish brown silt	Occasional medium pebbles, rare coal and small roots	Yes
5	Firm mid greyish brown silt	Occasional medium pebbles, rare coal flecks and small roots	Yes



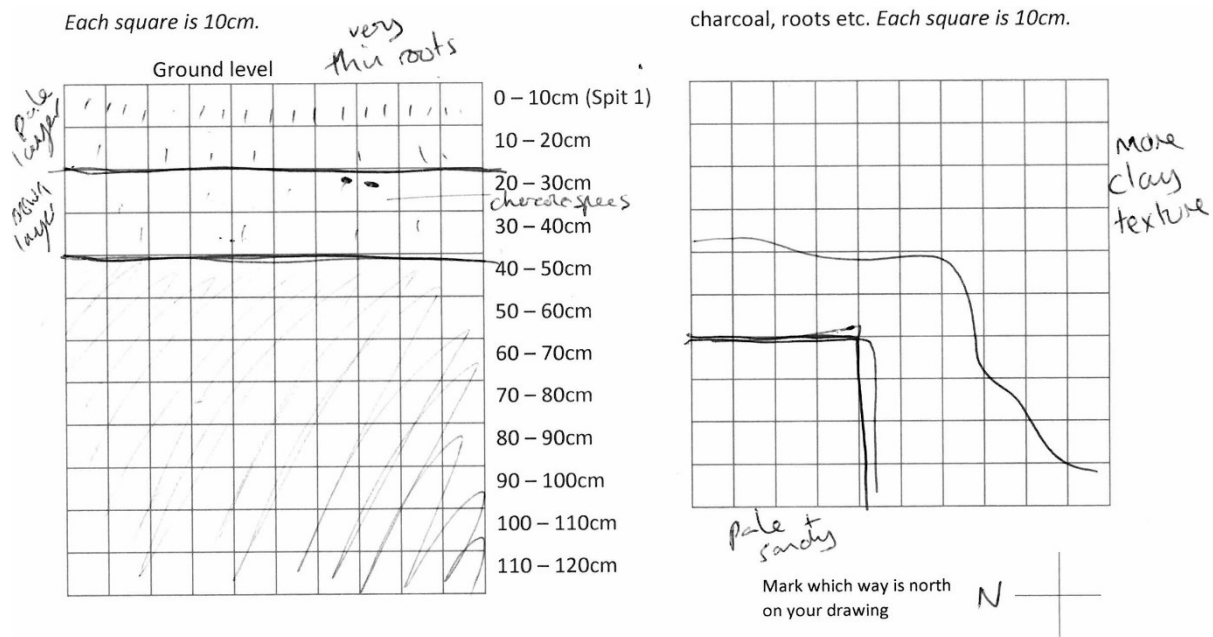
Drawing 3. Section (left) and plan (right) of Test Pit 3. Each square equals 10cm



Photo 3. Test Pit 3, final photograph.

Test Pit 4 Polly's Piece (SO 92318 52385)

Spit no.	Soil description	Inclusions	Artefacts
1	(Not recorded)		Yes
2	Loose mid yellowish brown sand	Occasional small pebbles, charcoal flecks and small roots	Yes
3	Loose mid yellowish brown sand	Occasional small pebbles	Yes
4	Loose mid yellowish brown clay	Occasional small pebbles	Yes



Drawing 4. Section (left) and plan (right) of Test Pit 4.



Photo 4. Test Pit 4, final photograph.

Test Pit 5 Orchard Field west (SO 92257 52279)

Spit no.	Soil description	Inclusions	Artefacts
1	Compact light orangey brown sandy silt	Occasional small and medium pebbles and abundant small roots	Yes
2	Firm light orangey brown sandy silt	Occasional small and medium pebbles and charcoal flecks	Yes



Photo 5. Test Pit 5, final photograph

Test Pit 6 Orchard Field east (SO 92352 52290)

Spit no.	Soil description	Inclusions	Artefacts
1	Firm mid orangey brown sandy silt	Occasional small pebbles	No
2	Firm light orangey brown sandy silt	Occasional small and medium pebbles and rare charcoal flecks	No



Photo 6. Test Pit 6, final photograph

Test Pit 7 Nordle Cottage field (SO 92294 51931)

Spit no.	Soil description	Inclusions	Artefacts
1	Firm mid greyish brown silt	Occasional medium pebbles, rare charcoal flecks and small roots	Yes
2	Compact dark blackish brown clayey silt	Occasional medium pebbles, charcoal flecks and small roots	Yes
3	Compact dark blackish brown clayey silt	Abundant medium pebbles, occasional charcoal and rare small roots	Yes
4	Compact dark blackish brown silt	Abundant medium pebbles and occasional charcoal flecks	Yes
5	Compact dark orangey brown silty clay	Abundant medium and occasional large pebbles	Yes
6	(Not recorded)		No



Photo 7. Final photograph showing a section view of Test Pit 7.

Test Pit 8 Aston Hall farmhouse (SO 92421 51779)

Spit no.	Soil description	Inclusions	Artefacts
1	Loose dark blackish brown soil	Occasional pebbles and roots	Yes
2	Loose dark blackish brown soil	Occasional pebbles, charcoal and roots	Yes
3	Loose mid blackish brown soil with patches of sand in northwest and northeast corners	Occasional pebbles	Yes
4	Firm orangey brown sand in northern half, compact clay in southern half of test pit	Occasional pebbles, charcoal flecks and rare small roots	Yes
5	Loose orangey brown sand, more compact in southern half of test pit	Occasional pebbles, charcoal flecks and roots	Yes
6	Firm orangey brown sand	Occasional pebbles and rare roots	Yes
7	Loose orangey brown sand	-	No
8	Loose orangey brown sand	-	No

Appendix 3: Finds analysis

Recovery policy

Artefacts were recovered according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). All artefacts collected in the field were recovered by hand. Where a significant quantity of post-medieval or modern building material was encountered, a sample was retained, and the remainder left on site.

Method of analysis

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. They were identified by broad material type and quantified by project participants, under the guidance of an experienced WAAS volunteer. All pottery was assessed by Bob Ruffle, who identified and recorded those of post-medieval and modern fabrics. Earlier pottery and significant non-pot finds were assessed and recorded by Laura Griffin. Due to the project's research aims, the analysis of medieval and early post-medieval ceramics was prioritised, so later post-medieval and modern finds were dated by period and fabric only. All information was recorded on a Microsoft Access 2016 database, with tables generated using Microsoft Excel.

Where fabric types are mentioned, they are referenced according to the fabric reference series maintained by Worcestershire Archaeology (Hurst and Rees 1992; WAAS 2017; www.worcestershireceramics.org).

Discard policy

A specific selection strategy will be agreed with Museums Worcestershire. It is anticipated that all pre-1600 finds will be retained, along with a sample of later material and any unusual or significant finds.

Results

The assemblage totalled 1190 finds weighing 16.7kg, as summarised in Table 1 below. The assemblage was of mixed date, with finds largely ranging from medieval to modern periods, with the exception of a single piece of worked flint. Level of preservation was mixed, but the majority of finds displayed some degree of surface abrasion, as reflected in relatively low average pottery sherd weight of 3.8g.

Test pit	Material class	Material subtype	Object class	Object specific type	Total	Weight (g)	Period
TP1 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	2	3	
TP1 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	clay pipe	1	1	post-medieval
TP1 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	13	18	modern

Test pit	Material class	Material subtype	Object class	Object specific type	Total	Weight (g)	Period
TP1 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	3	17	post-medieval
TP1 spit 2	glass		domestic	vessel	4	17	post-med/modern
TP1 spit 3	metal	iron	building material	other	1	19	
TP1 spit 4	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	1	1	modern
TP2 spit 1	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	2	5	
TP2 spit 1	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	clay pipe	1	1	post-medieval
TP2 spit 1	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	5	6	modern
TP2 spit 1	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	2	71	post-medieval
TP2 spit 1	glass		domestic	vessel	4	32	post-medieval
TP2 spit 1	metal	iron	building material	other	1	39	modern
TP2 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	23	155	post-medieval
TP2 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	9	6	modern
TP2 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	3	6	post-medieval
TP2 spit 2	ceramic	porcelain	domestic	pot	1	2	post-medieval
TP2 spit 2	glass		domestic	vessel	5	39	post-med/modern
TP2 spit 3			building material	mortar	3	64	
TP2 spit 3	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	15	2115	modern
TP2 spit 3	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	26	34	modern
TP2 spit 3	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	1	2	post-medieval
TP2 spit 3	ceramic	porcelain	domestic	pot	4	18	modern
TP2 spit 3	glass		domestic	vessel	6	15	post-med/modern
TP2 spit 3	metal	iron	building material	nail	1	4	

Test pit	Material class	Material subtype	Object class	Object specific type	Total	Weight (g)	Period
TP2 spit 4	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	16	1244	
TP2 spit 4	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	clay pipe	2	5	post-medieval
TP2 spit 4	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	15	39	modern
TP2 spit 4	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	36	42	post-medieval
TP2 spit 4	glass		domestic	vessel	3	28	post-med/modern
TP2 spit 4	metal	iron	building material	other	6	114	post-med/modern
TP2 spit 4	slag		production waste	undiagnostic	3	22	
TP2 spit 5			building material	mortar	6	19	
TP2 spit 5	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	1	6	
TP2 spit 5	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	18	23	modern
TP2 spit 5	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	16	80	post-medieval
TP2 spit 5	ceramic	porcelain	domestic	pot	3	7	post-medieval
TP2 spit 5	metal	iron	building material	other	8	26	post-med/modern
TP2 spit 6	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	2	39	post-medieval
TP3 spit 1			building material	mortar	3	1	
TP3 spit 1	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	2	2	modern
TP3 spit 1	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	2	2	post-medieval
TP3 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	6	261	post-med/modern
TP3 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	clay pipe	1	1	post-medieval
TP3 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	3	2	post-medieval
TP3 spit 3	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	21	211	medieval

Test pit	Material class	Material subtype	Object class	Object specific type	Total	Weight (g)	Period
TP3 spit 3	metal	iron	building material	other	1	4	
TP3 spit 4			building material	mortar	1	9	
TP3 spit 4	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	45	207	medieval
TP3 spit 5	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	32	138	medieval
TP4 spit 1	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	2	1	modern
TP4 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	3	4	
TP4 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	clay pipe	1	1	post-medieval
TP4 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	3	11	medieval
TP4 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	15	36	post-medieval
TP4 spit 2	ceramic	porcelain	domestic	pot	1	2	post-medieval
TP4 spit 2	metal	iron	building material	object	2	4	
TP4 spit 3	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	5	27	medieval
TP4 spit 3	metal	iron	building material	nail	1	7	
TP4 spit 4	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	7	29	medieval
TP5 spit 1			unidentified	other	1	3	
TP5 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	6	5	post-medieval
TP7 spit 1	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	10	108	late post-med/modern
TP7 spit 1	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	1	2	medieval
TP7 spit 1	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	13	22	post-medieval
TP7 spit 1	ceramic	porcelain	domestic	pot	1	1	post-medieval
TP7 spit 1	ceramic	stoneware	domestic	pot	1	3	post-medieval
TP7 spit 1	metal	iron	building material	other	1	1	post-med/modern

Test pit	Material class	Material subtype	Object class	Object specific type	Total	Weight (g)	Period
TP7 spit 2			building material	mortar	4	12	
TP7 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	14	184	post-medieval
TP7 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	clay pipe	2	1	post-medieval
TP7 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	6	45	medieval
TP7 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	25	46	post-medieval
TP7 spit 2	ceramic	stoneware	domestic	pot	2	23	post-medieval
TP7 spit 2	glass		domestic	vessel	10	79	modern
TP7 spit 2	metal	iron	building material	other	5	23	post-med/modern
TP7 spit 2	stone			worked stone	1	21	
TP7 spit 3	stone	flint		utilised flake	1	3	Neolithic/ early Bronze Age
TP7 spit 3			building material	mortar	5	24	
TP7 spit 3	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	12	376	post-med/modern
TP7 spit 3	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	clay pipe	3	3	post-medieval
TP7 spit 3	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	5	42	medieval
TP7 spit 3	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	50	152	post-medieval
TP7 spit 3	ceramic	stoneware	domestic	pot	7	19	post-medieval
TP7 spit 3	glass		domestic	vessel	6	18	modern
TP7 spit 3	metal	iron	building material	object	13	204	modern
TP7 spit 4			building material	mortar	1	34	
TP7 spit 4	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	7	69	medieval
TP7 spit 4	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	clay pipe	4	6	post-medieval

Test pit	Material class	Material subtype	Object class	Object specific type	Total	Weight (g)	Period
TP7 spit 4	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	1	5	late med/early post-med
TP7 spit 4	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	3	43	medieval
TP7 spit 4	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	30	54	post-medieval
TP7 spit 4	ceramic	stoneware	domestic	pot	2	3	post-medieval
TP7 spit 4	metal	iron	building material	nail	1	7	
TP7 spit 5			building material	mortar	6	20	
TP7 spit 5	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	2	12	
TP7 spit 5	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	11	135	medieval
TP7 spit 5	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	6	11	post-medieval
TP7 spit 5	ceramic	stoneware	domestic	pot	1	2	post-medieval
TP7 spit 5	glass		domestic	window	2	3	post-medieval
TP7 spit 5	metal	iron	building material	nail	2	9	
TP7 spit 5	stone			worked stone	1	275	
TP8 spit 1			building material	mortar	82	1612	
TP8 spit 1	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	53	1013	post-med/modern
TP8 spit 1	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	9	76	post-medieval
TP8 spit 1	ceramic	stoneware	domestic	pot	1	2	post-medieval
TP8 spit 1	glass		domestic	misc	11	26	late post-med/modern
TP8 spit 1	metal	iron	building material	misc	26	123	late post-med/modern
TP8 spit 2			building material	mortar	116	2559	
TP8 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	61	2604	post-med/modern

Test pit	Material class	Material subtype	Object class	Object specific type	Total	Weight (g)	Period
TP8 spit 2	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	6	57	post-medieval
TP8 spit 2	ceramic	porcelain	domestic	pot	1	4	post-medieval
TP8 spit 2	ceramic	stoneware	domestic	pot	1	1	post-medieval
TP8 spit 2	glass		domestic	misc	4	8	post-med/modern
TP8 spit 2	metal	iron	building material	misc	25	219	post-med/modern
TP8 spit 3			building material	mortar	30	201	
TP8 spit 3	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	36	554	post-med/modern
TP8 spit 3	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	1	4	modern
TP8 spit 3	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	9	16	post-medieval
TP8 spit 3	ceramic	porcelain	domestic	pot	1	1	post-medieval
TP8 spit 3	ceramic	porcelain?	domestic	pot	1	2	post-medieval
TP8 spit 3	glass		domestic	misc	10	13	modern
TP8 spit 3	metal	iron	building material	other	10	54	post-med/modern
TP8 spit 4			building material	mortar	5	12	
TP8 spit 4	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	3	46	post-med/modern
TP8 spit 4	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	2	3	post-medieval
TP8 spit 4	metal	iron	building material	nail	1	8	
TP8 spit 5	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	1	4	
TP8 spit 5	ceramic	earthenware	domestic	pot	1	42	post-medieval
TP8 spit 6	ceramic	earthenware	building material	cbm	1	88	

Table 1: Quantification of the artefactual assemblage by test pit and spit

broad period	fabric code	fabric name	count	weight (g)
medieval	53	Early Malvernian glazed ware	5	20
medieval	55	Worcester-type sandy unglazed ware	34	312
medieval	56	Malvernian unglazed ware	72	304
medieval	57	Cotswolds unglazed ware	1	7
medieval	64.1	Worcester-type sandy glazed ware	10	27
medieval	64.4	Unglazed sandy white ware	2	9
medieval/post-medieval	69	Oxidized glazed Malvernian ware	11	169
post-medieval	77	Midlands yellow ware	1	7
post-medieval	78	Post-medieval red ware	48	402
post-medieval	81	Stonewares	3	4
post-medieval	81.3	Nottingham stoneware	5	27
post-medieval	81.5	White salt-glazed stoneware	7	22
post-medieval	82	Tin-glazed ware	3	3
modern	83	Porcelain	13	37
modern	84	Creamware	13	31
modern	85	Modern china	1	4
post-medieval	91	Post-medieval buff wares	43	187
medieval	99	Miscellaneous medieval wares	5	49

post-medieval	100	Miscellaneous post-medieval wares	132	151
modern	101	Miscellaneous modern wares	91	130

Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by fabric type

Appendix 4: Common pottery types

Fabric 12: Severn Valley ware, 1st to 4th century

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/63>

These Roman pots are the most common type found across Worcestershire. They came in a wide variety of forms, including as jars, bowls, tankards and flagons. Vessels were made in Malvern, in both [reduced](#) and [organically tempered](#) versions, as part of a widespread regional pottery tradition – production of similar pottery is known from sites along the Severn Valley as far south as Shepton Mallet and Wroxeter in the north.

Fabric 55: Medieval cooking pot, 12th to 14th century

Coarse, earthenware cooking pots were made in most major towns and cities across medieval England. We often find them covered in soot from cooking fires.

They're often dull grey or brown, with a gritty texture and visible inclusions, and can be hard to distinguish from Iron Age and Roman fabrics at first sight.

In the later medieval period, technological advances and increasing wages (due to labour shortages caused by the Black Death) made metal pots more affordable, and ceramic cooking pots disappear from the archaeological record.

Most found in this area were made in or around:

Worcester (Worcester-type sandy unglazed ware, fabric 55):

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/2>

Malvern (Malvernian unglazed ware, fabric 56):

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/3>

Fabric 62: Deritend ware, 13th to 14th century

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/47>

Decorated jugs from the Deritend area of Birmingham. The fabric is generally orange all the way through and the surface may be decorated with painted white lines and a sparse green glaze.

Fabric 63: Brill-Boarstall ware, 13th century

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/26>

Made in Buckinghamshire, these highly decorated jugs are found across Oxfordshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire. Jugs tend to have a green glaze and be decorated with roller stamps, extra clay strips or faces, or painted with red and white slip. The fabric varies from pale orange to buff and pale grey.

Fabric 64.1: Worcester-type 'sandy' ware, 13th to 14th century

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/5>

Highly decorated jugs and pitchers covered in splashes of green lead-based glaze were made in most major cities in the medieval period.

They tend to have inclusions, visible by eye, of quartz, stone or shell, and will vary in colour: often with a grey core and buff/orange/brown surfaces

Fabric 72: Brown glazed speckled ware, 15th to 17th century

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/48>

Also known as Cistercian ware, these cups were glazed inside and out. Their speckled appearance comes from small pieces of sand in the glaze that haven't fused. The fabric is usually orange when fired at lower temperatures and dark red/ purple at higher temperatures.

Fabric 77: Midlands yellow ware, late 16th to 19th century

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/191>

Pale yellow was the most sought-after colour, but the lead glaze (which can be shiny or dull) is more often bright yellow. Large vessels tend to be made from red clay and have a white slip between the body of the pot and yellow glaze.

Fabric 78: Post-medieval 'redware', late 16th to early 19th century

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/196>

Cheap and robust, this earthenware pottery has a red body with few visible inclusions, and glossy dark glaze. It was the staple of a country household, made in a wide variety of forms including 'pancheons' (mixing bowls), mugs, and chamberpots.

It emerged from earlier 'Cistercian'-type wares, the most common form being fine walled drinking vessels with multiple handles, known as 'tygs' <https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/forms/441> .

Black or dark brown glazes are common in the upper Severn valley, but further south products from the Ashton Keynes-type industry appear, which tend to have orange glazes.

Earlier examples often have a bubbly or streaky glaze. By the 18th century they tend to have a smooth and even glaze. Although tablewares are largely replaced by other refined earthenwares (such as creamware) by the late 18th century, larger forms like pancheons continue well into the 19th century.

Fabric 81.3: Nottingham stoneware, late 17th to 19th century

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/195>

This early English stoneware is usually thin-walled with a dark brown surface. It can be identified by the presence of a thin white line visible between the fabric and the glaze.

Other types of stoneware are also found in Worcestershire, including those imported from abroad e.g. Siegburg stoneware <https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/40> and Westerwald stoneware <https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/194>

Fabric 81.4: 'Late stoneware', 19th to early 20th century

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/200>

This hard-fired stoneware has a very fine fabric and smooth orange, brown or buff-coloured surfaces. Sometimes a brown or white glaze was added. Marks from throwing are sometimes visible on the inner surfaces. Vessels were used for fluid storage—inkpots, beer bottles, condiment jars etc. — right up until the mid-20th century.

Fabric 82: Tin-glazed earthenware, 17th to 19th century

Sometimes referred to as 'Delft' after its most famous production centre, this attractive white-glazed pottery was made in England from the early 17th century, copying the Dutch potters. The fabric is soft and cream-coloured, and the pots often have a pinkish or bluish tint. In the later medieval period, tin-glazed earthenwares were imported in small quantities from Italy, Spain and Holland, although they are difficult to tell apart.

Italian maiolica (fabric 82.2): <https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/42>

South Netherlands tin glazed (fabric 82.3): <https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/39>

Seville ware (fabric 82.4): <https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/37>

Italian tin glazed (82.7): <https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/201>

Fabric 85: Transfer-printed whiteware, 19th to 20th century

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/199>

Commonly referred to as 'Victorian china' or 'blue-and-white', this mass-produced tableware is common from 1800 onwards. It has a very fine white core, white glaze and printed patterns in blue, red, black or green.

Watch out for similar-looking earlier pottery such as:

Fabric 83.1: Porcelain, mid-18th century onwards

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/192>

Translucent appearance and hand-painted decoration.

Fabric 84: Creamware, late 18th to early 19th century

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/193>

Cream-coloured glaze, sometimes moulded. Rarely decorated.

Fabric 91: Post-medieval 'slipware' pottery, 17th to 18th century

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/189>

Brightly decorated plates and dishes with yellow and brown/red patterns were popular in ordinary 17th/18th century households. They usually have a buff-coloured fabric. The elaborate patterns were made by trailing red and white 'slip' (liquid clay) over the plate before glazing and firing.

Fabric 108: Midlands Purple, late 14th to 18th century

<https://www.worcestershireceramics.org/fabrics/53>

Common across the midlands, these highly fired pots tend to have a purple tinge and a dark patchy glaze on the outside. They were made in a variety of forms, particularly cups and jars.

Engine-turned dipped earthenwares, late 18th to early 20th century

These brightly-coloured bowls, jugs and mugs are often mistaken for modern pots, but were first made by Wedgwood in the 1760s. Look out for tree-like 'mocha' decoration, multi-coloured 'cats-eyes' and cables, and geometric patterns and bands in different colours, produced by turning on a lathe. The fabric is smooth, white/light-grey, and the vessels are thin-walled.