

# **Test Pit Investigation, Oldbury Farm**

Worcester, March 7 and 14, 2017



**Data Structure Report**

**July 2017**

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**DATA STRUCTURE REPORT**  
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## Abstract

Archaeology students of the Institute of Science and the Environment, at the University of Worcester conducted an archaeological investigation at Oldbury Farm, SO 827 554, on March 7 and 14, 2017, to follow up the results of field survey undertaken in 2016. Test pits were placed in an area in which Middle Palaeolithic and Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age flints had been previously recovered. Excavation and further surface pick-up identified an area of fire cracked rock which coincides with an area of ferrous dipolar anomalies revealed by a gradiometer survey conducted by CsMg associates (2016). These results suggest the presence of prehistoric activity, which invites further investigation.

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## Introduction

This report will relate the results from two half day field work sessions conducted by staff and students from the BA (Hons) in Archaeology and Heritage, in the Institute of Science and the Environment, at the University of Worcester, as part of the first-year module ARCH 1101 'Introduction to Archaeology'. The field work was directed by the module leaders Dr Andrew Hoaen and Dr Helen Loney, and students were supervised by Institute of Science and Environment (ISE) technicians James Atkins, Jo Brigdale and Tom Elliott. The field work was conducted on March 7 and 14, 2017.

## Site Location and Geology

Excavations were conducted at Oldbury Farm, SO 827 554, recently purchased by the University of Worcester (Figure 1).

The superficial geology of the area around Oldbury Farm is formed of Holt Heath Sands and Gravels, dating to the Wolstonian II, or the Middle Pleistocene, overlying Mudstones of Triassic date (British Geological Survey 2016).

## Land Use

The site is surrounded by arable fields, now fallow, running alongside Oldbury Road. The area around Oldbury Farm is characterized as capable of supporting arable and horticulture (Digimap 2017). Historic and Ordnance Survey maps indicate that this area has been under cultivation since the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Bourn et al. 2008), and the site is located near the Medieval farms of Temple Laughere, Earls Court and Coneygee Farm at Henwick Grove. Also in the immediate vicinity, there is some recorded evidence of Post-Medieval activity, including the construction of Ambrose Farm, the iron crushing mill at Henwick Mill, as well as a number of installations relating to World War II (Bourn et al. 2008).

## History, Archaeology and Previous Research

The history of the area around Oldbury Farm until World War I is that of farming, with little evidence of urban expansion until the Dines Green development in the 1950s. The immediate area under excavation fell between two main estates, the Temple Laugherne estate in Lower Broadheath and the Earls Court estate to the south, near Bromyard Road, St. John's. An Archaeological Desk Based Survey published in 2008 produced a very negative picture of the archaeological potential around the area between Oldbury and Ambrose farms, noting particularly the absence of any prehistoric materials (Bourn et al. 2008).

Since Bourn et al. (2008), evidence of all periods of archaeological activity have been recovered, consisting mostly of isolated finds, but including a possibly Middle Palaeolithic/late Acheulean hand axe (WSM31633), a small number of Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age flint tools (WSM15259), some abraded Roman sherds (WSM29659; WSM31973) and slag (WSM100681), medieval fish ponds associated with Earl's Court (WSM07296), and the previously noted World War II installations (WAAS 2016).

Finally, in September 2016 an Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment was produced for the University of Worcester prior to the development of Oldbury Farm. Geophysical prospection of the

site, using magnetometry, revealed sparse evidence of archaeological activity (Thomas 2016), though further discussion will be made below.

In summary, the study area, whilst having little previous published archaeological evidence of settlement activity has archaeological potential based on its situation within an established agricultural landscape, dating back to the Roman and Medieval Periods, as well as its geological situation, on an identified Pleistocene terrace. Finally, fieldwalking in March 2016 revealed significant Middle Palaeolithic finds, justifying further research.

### Objectives

The aim of this research was to introduce undergraduate Archaeology students to archaeological excavation through test pitting. The objective was to investigate in more detail the discovery in March 2016 of several pieces of worked flint, including a middle Palaeolithic 'mini-hand axe' (Loney and Hoaen in prep), as well as Post-Medieval pottery and a small amount of waste from the Worcester Royal Porcelain factory.

### Methods

Seven 2 m x 2 m test pits were positioned based on the results of the earlier survey. They were dug by hand, using spades, mattocks and trowels over an area of approximately 28 x 12 m<sup>2</sup> (Figure 2). Excavation was conducted using the single context planning system (MoLAS 1994). Soil was sieved on a roughly every other bucket basis. Context forms were completed by the student trench teams, and checked by the director (Dr Helen Loney). Trenches were backfilled on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March, 2017.

Post-excavation finds processing took place on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of March 2017, during in class sessions and follow ups by the directors, and consisted of basic sorting to material and type, weighing and counting. Initial pottery identifications were made referencing Ruffle (2012) and the Worcestershire On-line Ceramic Database (Accessed 1/6/2017).

### Results

Upon removing the topsoil, the seven test pits revealed a widespread plough zone of mottled yellowish brown and reddish-brown sandy and clayey silts overlying a yellow-brown clayey sand with pebbles. Trench Five recovered plough marks in context 5002 (Appendix 1). Some of the trenches suggested the possibility of a buried soil.

The finds identified covered periods from prehistoric, Roman/Medieval, Post-Medieval up to the present day. Materials recovered included flints, pottery, brick and tile, glass and fire cracked rock. Overall, 215 pieces of material were collected (Appendix 2).

### **Prehistoric**

The prehistoric period was represented by lithics, including worked and unworked flint, ground stone, and a spread of fire cracked rock. The worked flint (Figure 2; Plate 1, b) and a possible ground stone tool were recovered from the surface (Plate 1, a). In Trench Six, a piece of unworked flint, 4 cm x 5 cm in dimension, was recovered from Context 6002 (Plate 1, c).



## **Roman/Medieval**

There was a single piece of possible roman/green glaze pottery found in Context 1000, Trench 1, and a single piece of possibly medieval brick found in Context 2001, Trench 2.

## **Post Medieval**

A single piece of yellow and brown slip ware was recovered from the plough zone, Trench Five. A single piece of pre-Industrial glass was recovered from below the plough zone, Trench Six.

## **Industrial**

The pottery finds were dominated by 19<sup>th</sup> and potentially 20<sup>th</sup> century Staffordshire China and Earthenware. The dominant patterns included red and black wares, 'brown betty' tea pot fragments, Staffordshire transfer wares, and a single fragment of porcelain.

Also present was industrial debris from the porcelain works, including saggar fragments, porcelain rings, unglazed porcelain wasters, and a single piece of glazed porcelain waster.

Finally, modern brick, tile and other coarse products were present, in relatively low numbers, as were scrap metals and plastics.

## Discussion

Evidence from the area around Trenches Four, Five, Six and Seven suggest the presence of a prehistoric activity of some type. This consists of the scatter of fire cracked rock, the quantity of flint from Trench Six and the find spot of a flint tool (Figure 2, Plate 1). Revisiting the magnetometry survey conducted by CgMS in September 2016, there is a correspondence between an area of scattered ferrous dipolar anomalies and the distribution of fire cracked rock and flint (Thomas 2016: Figure 7).

The results of the test pits did not reveal any subsurface archaeological features. The majority of the finds were post medieval or industrial, and came from the plough zone, which is consistent with patterns of modern rubbish tipping. There was no evidence of sustained disposal of modern waste.

## Conclusion

Test pits excavated in an area identified through fieldwalking as having potential for earlier prehistoric archaeology, including a Middle Palaeolithic hand axe, revealed some evidence to support the further potential of recovering prehistoric activity. The presence of fire-cracked rock, coarse ground stone tool and flint corresponds to an area of geophysical potential (Thomas 2016).

Follow up work could include a more targeted geophysical survey, as well as a more extensive excavation, if desired.

This report demonstrates the utility of even short but intensive periods of fieldwalking in the identification and recovery of otherwise ephemeral archaeology, particularly earlier prehistoric, including Middle Palaeolithic.

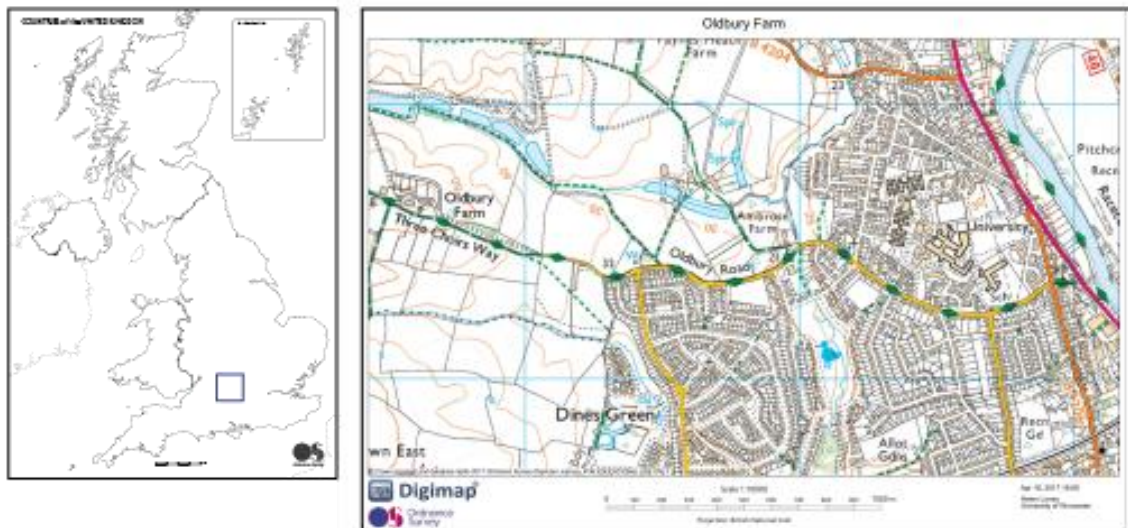
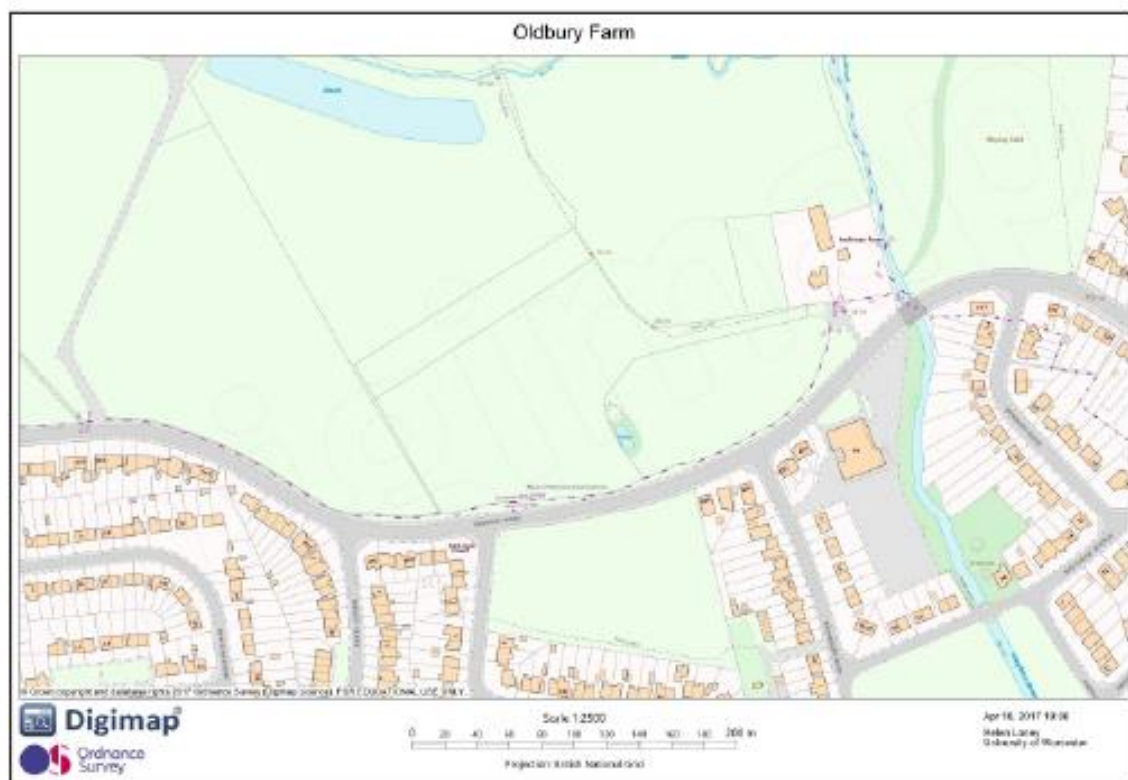


Figure 1 Location of Oldbury Farm, Worcestershire, UK



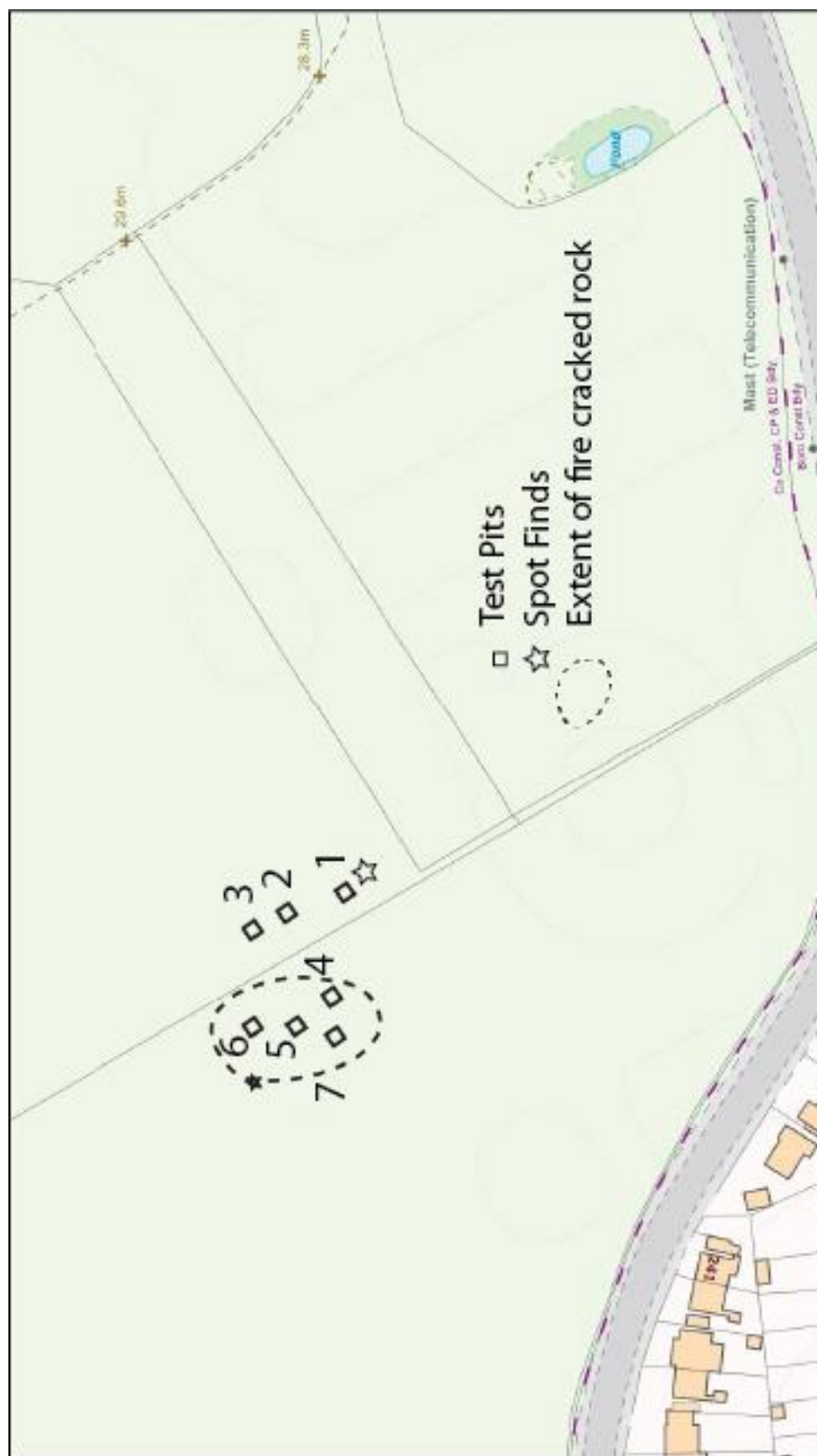


Figure 2. Location of Test Pits, Spot finds and fire cracked rock.



a) ground stone tool, spot find



b) flint, spot find



c) unworked flint flake, Trench 6,  
context 6002

Plate 1: finds from Oldbury Farm, 2017.

## Appendix 1: Context Summary

Trench 1		
Context	Description	Depth
1001	Loosely compacted topsoil layer, dark reddish brown, silty sand, with 1-5% inclusions of rounded and subrounded medium pebbles, 6 mm – 20 mm.	0-36 cm
1002	Moderately compacted subsoil layer, dark reddish brown, clayey silt, with 1-5% inclusions of rounded and subrounded pebbles, 6 mm – 20 mm.	36-50 cm
Trench 2		
2001	Loosely compacted topsoil layer, brown, clayey silt, with flecks of charcoal and 1-5% inclusions of rounded and subrounded medium pebbles, 6 mm – 20 mm.	0-35 cm
2002	Loosely compacted subsoil layer, yellowish red, silty clay with charcoal flecks.	35-40 cm
2003	Loosely compacted subsoil layer, yellowish red, silty clay with charcoal flecks.	40-50cm
2004	Loosely compacted layer, yellowish red, coarse sand, possibly natural.	50 cm
Trench 3		
3001	Loosely compacted topsoil layer, reddish brown, sandy clay, with 1-5% inclusions of medium pebbles, 6 mm – 20 mm.	0-31 cm
3002	Loosely compacted layer, reddish brown sandy clay. 10% inclusions of rounded and subrounded medium pebbles, 6 mm – 20 mm.	31-38 cm
3003	Moderately compacted subsoil layer, reddish brown, silty clayey sand.	38-50 cm
Trench 4		
4001	Loosely compacted topsoil layer, reddish brown sandy clay, with charcoal flecks	0-34 cm
4002	Moderately compacted subsoil layer, reddish brown, clayey sand. With occasional charcoal inclusions.	34-40 cm
Trench 5		
5001	Moderately compact topsoil layer, greyish brown sandy clay, with 1-5% inclusions of medium pebbles, 6 mm – 20 mm.	0-34 cm
5002	Moderately compacted subsoil layer, yellowish brown, clayey sandy with 1-5% inclusions of medium pebbles, 6 mm – 20 mm, possible plough marks.	35-38 cm
5003	Moderately compacted subsoil layer of yellowish grey, clayey sand, with 1-5% inclusions of medium pebbles.	38-44 cm
5004	Loosely compacted subsoil layer of yellowish grey clayey sand, with 1-5% inclusions of cobbles, 60 – 200 mm.	45-55 cm
5005	Loosely compacted subsoil layer of yellowish grey sand.	55-60 cm

Trench 6		
6001	Compacted topsoil layer of dark brownish yellow clayey silt, with charcoal flecks.	0-40 cm
6002	Loosely compacted dark yellow sand layer.	40-57 cm
Trench 7		
7000	Loosely compacted topsoil layer of dark brown, silty sand, with 5 – 10% inclusion of coarse pebbles, 20 mm – 60 mm.	0-35 cm
7002	Fill of root hole. Loosely compacted dark brown, silty sand, with 5 – 10% inclusion of coarse pebbles, 20 mm – 60 mm.	35–40 cm
7003	Cut of root hole. Irregular shape, rounded corners, NE/SW orientation. Fill is 7002.	35–40 cm
7001	Loosely compacted topsoil layer of dark brown, silty sand, with 5 – 10% inclusion of coarse pebbles, 20 mm – 60 mm.	35-55 cm

## Appendix 2: Finds Summary

Trench	1		1		2		2	
Context	1001		1002		2001		2002	
	count	weight	count	weight	count	weight	count	weight
Transfer ware	5	6.25					3	0.69
Porcelain			1	0.18	1	3.97	4	0.26
Red wares	2	10.36			1	6.01	1	0.03
Clay pipes	1	1.75						
Glass	1	0.28			1	0.4	2	0.19
Brick	4	10.99			2	133.5		
Flint	1	11.33						
Burnt Flint			1	0.23				
Plastic							1	0.00
Bone								
Metal	1	13.32						
Fire cracked rock	2	24.02	2	25			12	0.34
Slag			1	5				
Saggars	1	30						
Waster	1	1						
Yellow and brown slipware								
total	<b>19</b>	<b>109.3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>30.41</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>143.88</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>1.51</b>

Appendix 2 cont.

Trench	3		3		4		4		5	
Context	3001		3002		4001		4002		5001	
	3	weight	count	weight	count	weight	count	weight	count	weight
Transfer ware			3	9.43			2	1.06	4	4.93
Porcelain	1	1.14	2	4.66	5	4.85	8	12.93	1	2.52
Red wares	1	0.6	1	5.72	1	4.6	4	18.66	1	15.4
Clay pipes	2	4.84							1	0.61
Glass			2	3.41	1	3.88	4	4.13	1	9.3
Brick			4	139.66	3	2.32	17	121.89	8	181.44
Flint	1	2.66								
Burnt Flint										
Plastic										
Bone										
Metal										
Fire cracked rock									5	254.7
Slag										
Saggar							1	74.66		
Waster										
Yellow and brown slipware									1	11.75
total	<b>5</b>	<b>9.24</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>162.88</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15.65</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>233.33</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>480.65</b>



Appendix 2 cont.

Trench	6		6		7		7	
Context	6001		6002		7001		7002	
	count	weight	count	weight	count	weight	count	weight
Transfer ware	4	3.22	13	13.62	6	22.69	3	3.39
Porcelain	1	0.77	2	9.3	4	4.03		
Red wares			7	30.9	5	11.76	1	1.4
Clay pipes					2	3.53		
Glass	1	1.11	5	81.8	2	6.24		
Brick	2	76.2	6	69.62	4	22.01	3	63.42
Flint	1	30.73	1	12.7				
Burnt Flint								
Plastic			1	0.13	1	0.04	1	0.62
Bone								
Metal							1	0.07
Fire cracked rock								
Slag			1	100				
Saggar								
Waster								
Yellow and brown slipware								
total	<b>9</b>	<b>112.03</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>318.07</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>70.3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>68.9</b>

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