

**SOUTH SOMERSET ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
RESEARCH GROUP (SSARG)  
(Incorporating the South Cadbury  
Environs Project Volunteers Association  
and the South East Somerset  
Archaeological Society)**

**SSARG EXCAVATION REPORT    No1  
Hazlegrove House, Sparkford  
April 2009**

**June 2009**

## **Excavation at Hazlegrove House, Sparkford.**

### **Background and Objectives**

Significant areas of the landscape around South Cadbury hillfort have been surveyed archaeologically to determine the human development of the area. Institutional funding for this South Cadbury Environs Project (SCEP) ended in early 2008. Since then a volunteer organisation has continued archaeological survey work in the area filling-in areas not surveyed by SCEP and addressing questions arising from the SCEP activities. While SCEP had examined the landscape to the South of Sparkford it had not surveyed areas further north in Queen Camel parish and towards South Barrow. In Summer 2008 the opportunity arose to carry out a gradiometry survey of the sports fields of Hazlegrove School, Sparkford, an area of about 4ha to the east of the main House. This area was particularly interesting since some Romano-British pottery had been reported to have been found close by during the construction of a swimming pool in the 1950's. (Leech 1977 and Lankester 1958,13)

### **Gradiometry Survey**

The results of the gradiometry survey were reported in SCEP/GS/1001. These showed ridge and furrow over much of the survey area. An estate map shows that this area had been enclosed by 1575 (Lankester 1958, Fig. 4) and thus the ridge and furrow belonged to an earlier landscape. No obvious Romano-British or Iron Age field systems were shown by the survey. There were however some less clearly identifiable features which could represent ditches or gullies. Most of these features were under or close to the sports pitches and were thus not accessible for further examination. However a strong positive feature, suggesting either ferrous magnetic interference or a strong thermo-remanent deposit, to the north of the surveyed area, was clear of the sports pitches and was chosen for an exploratory excavation.

### **Hazlegrove House Trench No.1**

After resurveying, an excavation of the target feature was carried out from 6<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> April 2009. A trench 4m N/S by 2m E/W with its SW corner at GR ST360120/126931 was targeted to cut the edge of the feature. Unexpectedly, directly beneath the turf was a dense stony layer. To determine the full extent of this layer the western 1m of the trench was

extended southwards by 4m. The gradiometry and positioning of the trench are shown on Fig.1. Removal of the turf and top-soil showed that the stony layer was a drive or garden feature approximately 3.5m wide. A width of 50cm of this feature was sectioned along the western edge of the trench to determine its composition. To confirm that there were no deeper deposits a sondage was dug to a depth of 40cm in the NE corner of the trench.

The overall plan of the excavation and the east facing section are shown on Figs. 2 & 3. An overall photograph of the completed excavation is shown on Fig 4.

The excavated feature was found to run approximately NW to SE across the excavation. A construction trench about 30cm deep and 3.5m across had been dug into the natural clay, (Contexts 005/006). This trench had been curbed on the southern edge with stones approximately 50cmx25cmx10cm (Context 008). There was no trace of similar stones on the north edge of the feature, which might have been expected since this is the downhill edge. Perhaps any such stones had been robbed out. The construction trench had been filled over at least its northern part to a depth of about 20cm by limestone stones averaging about 10cm in maximum dimension (Context 007) set in a clay matrix. This had set into a very hard agglomerate which was unbreakable by trowel or mattock. Over this and filling the full width of the construction trench was a layer of smaller stones (up to about 10cm maximum dimension), and up to about 20cm thick, set in a dark loam matrix (Context 009). This context contained rare brick and burnt stone. Over the southern part of the feature a further thin layer of small stones, (c5cm in maximum dimension), had been laid (Context 003). This layer contained significant amounts of crushed brick, burnt stone and ash. This material was apparently the source of the strong magnetic signal seen on the geophysics. Over the feature was a layer of dark-brown loam, (Context 001), which had presumably been used to cover the stony feature before turf had been laid. Outside the stony feature was a yellow-brown silty loam (Context 002). Beneath this was a thin layer of scattered stones and building material, including slate, (Context 004). This layer was at approximately the same depth as the stony feature but its source and relationship with the stony feature was unclear.

## **Discussion**

No pottery was found in the stony make-up. The only item which could be broadly dated was a piece of brick found in Context 004 which was thinner than modern brick and had no frog, indicating a pre-20thC date. However as stated above Context 4 could not be directly connected to the stony feature.

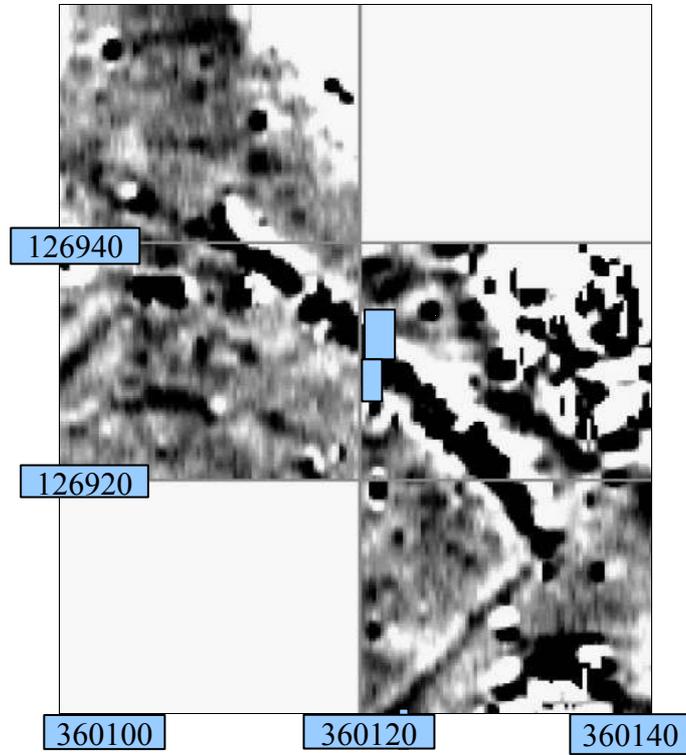
The gradiometry results show the targeted feature curving along the northern edge of the sports fields for about 70m. No such feature is shown on the 1795 estate map (Lankester 1958, Fig. 5). However a closer inspection of the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition O.S. Map of 1889 shows a driveway leading from the buildings at the rear of Hazlegrove House curving through the parkland to the east of the house to Hazlegrove Lane. It is presumably this service driveway that was found on the geophysics, and was excavated, its strong magnetic signature being due to the brick and burnt material used in its metalling. Its construction can thus be dated to within the 19th century, a period when the Mildmay family were making various alterations to the house and the park. (Lankester 1958, 28-34).

### **Acknowledgements**

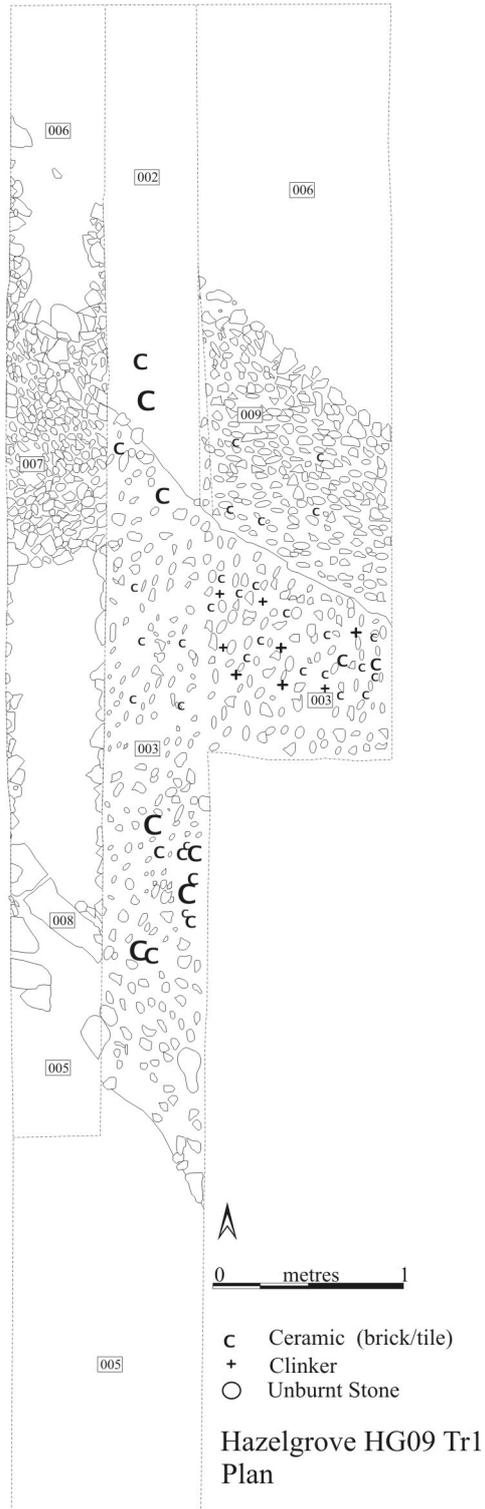
Our thanks are due to the Headmaster of Hazlegrove School for giving us permission to carry out our survey and excavation and to his staff for their support and tolerance as we carried out our strange rituals on the playing fields.

### **Bibliography**

- Hazlegrove School, Sparkford, Somerset Gradiometer Survey - August 2008* Report no. SCEP/GS1001
- Lankester R.P.A. 1958 *A history of hazlegrove house*. Edwin Snell & sons, Yeovil.
- Leach R.H. 1977 *Romano-British Rural Settlement in South Somerset and North Dorset*. Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, University of Bristol (Copy in Somerset Studies Library, Taunton)

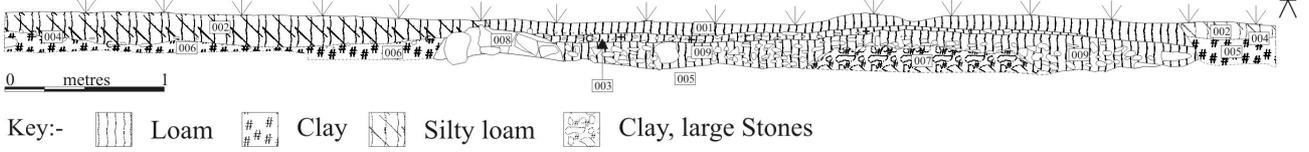


**Fig 1 -Gradiometry of Target Feature and Location of Trench**



**Fig 2 Overall Plan**

Hazelgrove HG09 TR1 East-facing Section



**Fig 3 Overall Section**



**Fig 4- Plan of Excavation at Completion**