

## **1.0 Introduction**

This report covers a watching brief that was carried out in response to work instigated by a local metal detectorist, Mr. Charles investigating the results of earlier geophysical surveys (Geoflo Ltd Report No.GF1003). Somerset County Council had commissioned gradiometry and resistivity surveys of the field at Misterton (GR 45060 08400) to investigate an area which had yielded a large number of artefacts, located and mapped by Mr Charles. As a result of this report, Mr Charles with the permission of the landowner Mr Bowditch, and the tenant farmer Mr Wyatt, elected to open a series of trenches to further investigate geophysical anomalies indicated by the survey. The South Somerset Archaeological Research Group (SSARG) were invited to carry out an informal watching brief once the work had commenced. The watching brief was carried out by Neil Tinkley and Nigel Harvey over several days in September 2008. Due to the situation it was not possible to precisely locate the three trenches.

## **2.0 Geology and Topography**

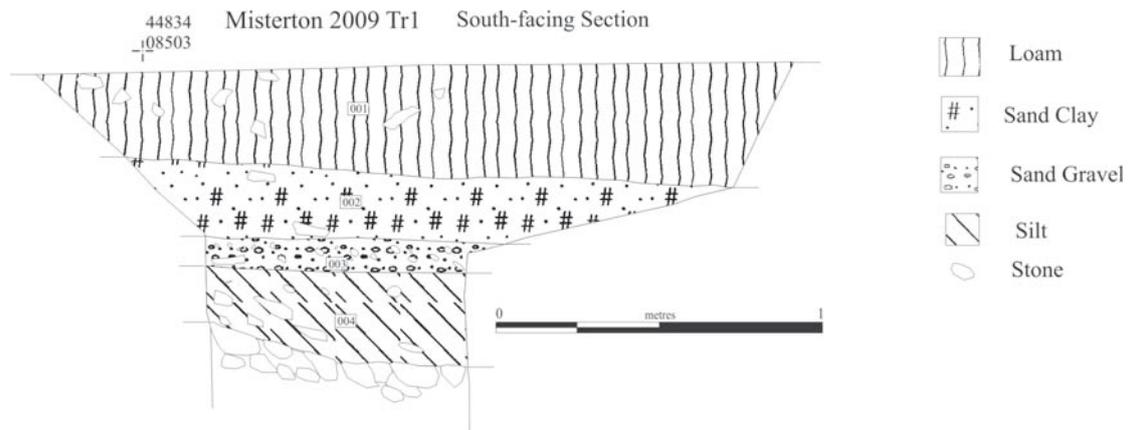
The field is located immediately south of the Exeter to London Paddington railway line, to the west of Misterton village and the land slopes from North to South. The general geology of the area is Inferior Oolitic limestone capping Bridport Sand and is overlain by a thin soil containing large numbers of stones of varying sizes. The field has been regularly ploughed, and consequently, the area of investigation at the top of the slope has only a thin ploughsoil over the natural limestone bedrock.

## **3.0 Methodology**

Three trenches were machine stripped by the landowner using a backhoe mounted on a tractor with a 1m wide toothless bucket. Trench 1, 2m square, was targeted on a low resistance feature in the corner of the field, Trench 2, 16m x 4m, was targeted at a long NE-SW low resistance linear feature; and Trench 3, approx 3m east of Trench 2, was subsequently opened in further attempt to locate the linear feature sought in Trench 2. SSARG's involvement was to observe the work and record where possible by photography and drawings. Drawings are given below with photographs in Appendix 1. A range of artefactual and environmental material was recovered where disturbed in order to gain some insight into the chronology, and provide an evaluation as to the likely preservation and potential of the site. In addition a quantity of worked flint and other material was recovered from the surface of the field, and is included in this report.

## **4.0 Results**

Trench 1 was recorded in a single section only, at a scale of 1:20 (Figure 1). Trench 2 was metal detected by Mr. Charles for check for metal finds, and the trench was then cleaned by hand, and surface finds removed for analysis. It was then recorded in plan at a scale of 1:50 (Figure 2), and photographed by SSARG. F003 was sectioned in order to understand the nature of the deposits. Trench 3, through lack of available time, could not be recorded, but contained no evident features.



**Figure 1: Trench 1, South facing section.**



**Figure 2: Trench 2, Plan.**

## 4.1 Stratigraphic information

### 4.1.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was targeted at a low resistance feature consistent with a pit. This was machined to a depth of 60 cm, and a sondage hand excavated into an apparent feature to a further depth of 50cm. The section was cleaned and recorded. No edge definition of the feature was observed in the area excavated and it was not possible to determine whether the feature was man-made or natural.

The surface layer (001) consisted of a light brown, humic ploughsoil with some abraded pottery sherds and small stones up to 20cm diameter. Context 002 was a yellow/brown sandy clay, which contained increasing amounts of stone, and some pottery. Context 003 was similar, but inspection of the section indicated that it was possibly aceramic. Context 004 was a black, silty, friable soil with some stones and a significant amount of animal bone and pottery. This in turn overlay the bottom context of the excavation (005). This context was not fully excavated, and therefore it was not possible to determine the bottom of the feature. 005 consisted of large stones, with large voids, little soil and no artefacts. Some bone was found at the interface of 004/005 but is probably material from 004 that has slipped into the voids, rather than material deposited in 005.

#### 4.1.2 Trench 2

The upper level of Trench 2 consisted of a light brown, humic, ploughsoil (corresponding to 001 in Trench 1). This was machine stripped. The underlying context (002) is a compact, yellow/brown, clay soil with frequent small angular limestone inclusions, containing numerous archaeological features and ceramic material. The section was not recorded.

#### 4.1.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was not recorded due to lack of observed features and time constraint.

#### 4.2 Archaeological Deposits

Within Trench 2, eleven discrete archaeological features were recorded (Table 1), and were identified as six areas of burnt clay and stones (F006; 007; 008; 009; 010 & 011), generally darker than the surrounding areas and containing charcoal. Three small areas of darker material containing stones set on edge, (F003; 004; 005 & 006), a linear feature of pitched stones (F002), and a large area 1.5 – 2m across of hard clay, containing burnt clay and stone, pottery and charcoal (F001). F003 was sectioned, and proved to be shallow (10cm) and contained only the pitched stones in darker soil, with no apparent voids, and no other finds.

**Table 1: Trench 2 Feature Summary**

Feature	Description
001	An oval patch of hard clay, 2.0m x 1.5m, overlying an area of large stones. The feature contained burnt stone, burnt clay, pottery and charcoal.
002	A linear feature across the width of the trench 0.5 – 1.0m wide, consisting of pieces of flat limestone approx. 5cm thick pitched on edge and level across the trench approx 5cm higher than the surrounding context (002). No apparent associated cut. Some larger flat stones up to 1.0m appear to be associated, but unconfirmed, as disturbed by the mechanical excavator.
003	An area of approx 0.5m of pitched stones set in a darker material, no apparent cut, no other finds.
004	Similar to F003.
005	An area of less than 0.5m of dark soil, containing flat stones and charcoal.
006	An area of less than 0.5m, of dark soil containing burnt pitched stones.
007	An area of less than 0.5m, containing burnt stone set in a ring with further dark material in the middle.
008	A burnt area of less than 0.5m.
009	An area of 1.5m x 0.5m of charcoal, containing some burnt stone.
010	An area 1.0m x 0.25m against the trench baulk, of burnt clay and stone.
011	An area of 3.0m x 1.5m of pitched stones, similar to F002.

#### 5.0 Finds from Field Walking

(A. Dickinson and M.D. Wiggins)

During the excavation the opportunity was taken to carry out casual field walking in the field. This yielded approximately 3kg of material. This has not been analysed in detail but visual inspection shows material of all historical periods from Romano-British to Modern. Amongst the material were:

- Significant quantities of Romano-British pottery;
- Late Black Burnished ware, Oxford and New Forest wares;
- Flue tile with keying for plaster;

- 3 white tesserae.

The latter two structural fragments possibly indicate the presence of a high status building in the vicinity.

### **5.1 Flint from Field walking**

**(N. Plunkett)**

66 pieces of flint were examined from the surface collection. 62 pieces of these fit comfortably within the Bronze Age, 18 of which can reasonably be assigned to the Early Bronze Age. Eleven of the Early Bronze Age flints are thumbnail scrapers, with one made from Portland Chert, and another, small and well made, possibly indicating Beaker connections. The Early Bronze Age cores tend to be of the “dog-nobbler” variety, and are worked to small size. Two core types exhibited Neolithic characteristics, one of earlier type, and one of later. Two Mesolithic cores were also identified from the assemblage. Only one of the Bronze Age flakes was burnt.

## **6.0 Finds from Trenches 1 and 2**

Small quantities of pottery, worked stone, and bone were recovered from the excavations. A further quantity of pottery, ceramic material and worked flint was recovered by casual field walking in the vicinity. It is included in the report as it provides an indication of both the potential artefactual richness of the site and the degree to which it is currently being disturbed by agricultural operations.

### **6.1 The Pottery**

**(A. Dickinson and M.D. Wiggins)**

The pottery (Appendix 2) was generally fragmented and abraded. The total weight of the assemblage was 1151g, 228g from Trench 1 and 923g from Trench 2. With the exception of a few sherds that are potentially Iron Age in date these are all Romano-British with the majority of identifiable material being represented by black burnished wares. A limited range of other types, including a small number of finewares is represented of a potentially wide range of the dates throughout the Romano-British period.

### **6.2 The flint**

**(N. Plunkett)**

26 pieces of flint were recovered from the Trench 2 features. 18 pieces are of general Bronze Age type, mainly of uncertain function and/or waste, and include seven burnt flints, only two of which were worked beforehand. Six examples are Early Bronze Age type flakes, again confirming the presence of Early Bronze Age material on site, proportionate to the field-walking results. One flint is of Neolithic type, and a second from F002, is a Mesolithic flake.

The lithic assembly (excavated and field walked) is predominantly Bronze Age in origin, with a strong component of thumbnail scrapers suggesting an Early Bronze Age date. One scraper may indicate a Beaker component in the area. The later Neolithic flints might also suggest a Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date to the start of what became Bronze Age activities in the area, supported by the strong correlation between the field-walked material, and that recovered from Trench 2. The absence of ceramic evidence from this period does not detract from this hypothesis, considering the collection method. Interestingly, three of the flints are clearly Mesolithic (two cores and a flake), implying a long occupation sequence for the site.

### **6.3 Other finds**

**(A. Dickinson and M.D. Wiggins)**

Several pieces of ceramic were recovered from Trench 2 including 3 small pieces of tile and a ceramic ball (weight 119g) with a hole partially pierced through it from Context 002, and a further piece of tile from Context 006. Also recovered from Context 002 was a fragment of blue glass (maximum dimension 26mm and thickness 4mm), probably Romano-British in date, and from Context 003 an iron nail, 65mm long. Context 002 of Trench 1 yielded a broken whetstone (weight 56g) a broken flint blade, and a shaped stone, possibly part of a dish or bowl (weight 26g).

### **6.4 Faunal and human remains**

**(C.E. Randall)**

A small faunal assemblage provided evidence of the presence of a range of largely domestic species (Appendix 2). The main value of this group of material is in indicating that a full range of faunal information is likely to be available on this site with good preservation potentially allowing analysis of taphonomy, herd structure and butchery practices if further material were recovered from sealed contexts. A small number of fragments of human remains (Appendix 3) indicates the presence of either entire inhumations or disarticulated remains on the site which needs to be taken into account in any subsequent research design.

## **7.0 Discussion**

The features recorded by the geophysical survey, and targeted in the trenches were only partially revealed. However, what had been unclear and confusing anomalies on the geophysical plots, evidently relate to genuine archaeological features. The excavation of the three trenches has not provided a great deal of additional information on the layout of the site, but has demonstrated that stratified archaeological deposits are still present, and are being cut into by ploughing.

### **7.1 Fieldwalking**

Finds recovered during casual fieldwalking indicate a range of material which was not recognised during the trench excavations. The lithic artefacts recovered indicate a substantial and long period of prehistoric use of the area, although how this may relate to sub-surface features is not understood. The exercise also produced a range of material dateable to the Romano-British period. The substantial amounts of pottery confirm the chronological spread indicated by the excavated artefacts. In addition it has supplied evidence of the possible presence of a high status Romano-British building.

### **7.2 Trench 1**

Trench 1 was placed in the north-west corner of the field, to investigate a large low resistance anomaly, also apparent in the gradiometry, and interpreted as ferrous magnetic disturbance. On excavation, this proved a false assumption, and is probably a pit or natural hole, which has been filled with domestic rubbish in the late Iron Age/ early Romano-British period. The unusual nature of the lower excavated level has marked similarities with a Middle Iron Age pit excavated at Sheep Slait near Cadbury Castle (Tabor 2008), where the deposited material has not penetrated the voids between the stones and it is assumed that the rubble had been sealed with something which survived long enough for the soil to build over it without filling the gaps.

### **7.3 Trench 2**

As with Trench 1, the vast majority of dateable material is Romano-British in origin. The low resistance linear anomalies targeted (Geoflo anomalies I &K), were not apparent in the trench, or the section, and may still exist below the excavated level. The isolated low resistance within linear I, thought to be part of it, was revealed as a separate feature of hard, packed clay (F001). Conversely, many features discovered by excavation were not apparent in the geophysical results, in particular, the pitched stones at F002, and may well have been masked by a number of large flat slabs of limestone overlying the pitched stones which had been disturbed by the mechanical excavator.

The main feature (F002) of pitched stone surmounted by large flat stones is similar to Mid to Late Romano-British wall foundations in Ilchester (Leach 1982) and other Roman buildings in the area. F001 is consistent with a packed clay hearth. Four of the features (F003; 004; 005 and 006) are suggestive of shallow post holes with stone packings, but the size and nature of the features would suggest a structure of a more ephemeral nature, and coupled with the burnt areas, suggest occupation/industrial activity, but probably not contemporaneous with the wall at F002. More than one phase of structure appears to be indicated.

### **9.0 Recommendations and Conclusion**

Bearing in mind the limitations of recording the site, it seems likely that the area which has been investigated is part of a wider multi-phase Romano-British site. This appears to include buildings of various construction types. Field walking has produced materials that hint at the possibility of an as yet undiscovered substantial Romano-British building. In addition, flint recovered from the surface of a wide area of the field indicates a long prehistoric use of the area, although how this may relate to some of the geophysical anomalies and features observed in the trenches.

It is recommended that should the field be subject to further disturbance, further investigation of the site should be carried out. Preservation of artefacts and animal bone is good, and likely to yield assemblages capable of more detailed interrogation. Additional crop marks in the field to the north of the railway line, and adjacent to the site should be investigated using appropriate geophysical techniques. It is apparent that agricultural operations are bringing materials to the surface, and must be cutting into archaeological features and layers. If possible the land should be removed from cultivation.

### **References**

Tabor, R., 2002 *South Cadbury Environs Project interim fieldwork report 1998-2001* Centre for the Historic Environment University of Bristol: Bristol

Tabor, R., 2004 *South Cadbury Environs Project interim fieldwork report 2002-2003* Centre for the Historic Environment University of Bristol: Bristol

Tabor, R., 2008 *Cadbury Castle: The Hillfort and Landscapes* The History Press: Stroud

Tabor, R., n.d., *South Cadbury Environs Project prehistoric pottery form series* South Cadbury Environs Project Unpublished internal document

Leach, P., 1982 *Ilchester Volume1 Excavations 1974-5* Western Archaeological Trust: Gloucester.

## Appendix 1.

### Photographic Record

All images in this section are of features in Trench 2, no photographic record was made of Trench 1.



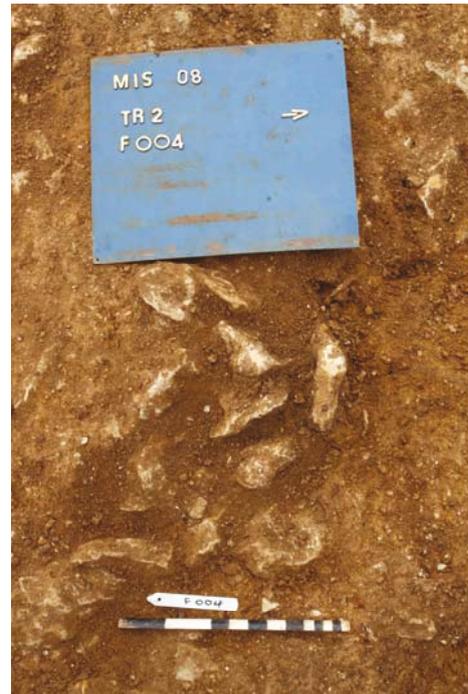
F001



F002



F003



F004



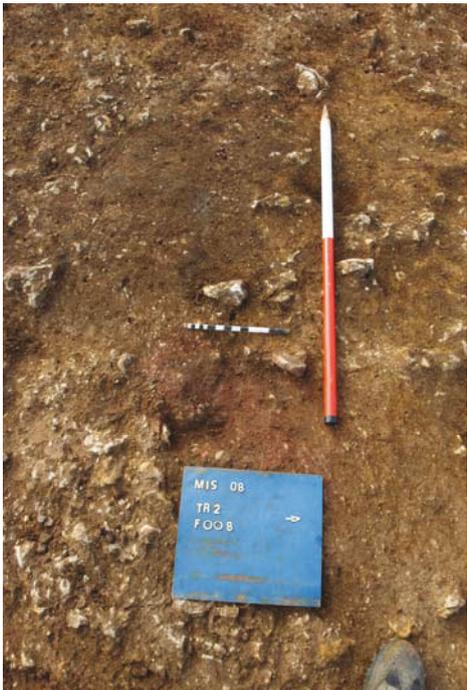
**F005**



**F006**



**F007**



**F008**



**F009**



**F010**



**F011**

## Appendix 2

### The Pottery

*A. Dickinson & M.D. Wiggins, (SSARG)*

#### Introduction

The pottery sherds from the excavation were generally fragmented and abraded. The total weight of the assemblage was 1151g, 228g from Trench 1 and 923g from Trench 2. The assemblage from Trench 1 was only 24 sherds with an average weight of 9.5g. There were 171 sherds from Trench 2 with an average weight of 5.4g.

#### Methods

The pottery was recorded using the methods developed by the South Cadbury Environs Project (Tabor 2002;2004; u.d.). Because of the circumstances the methodology applied was that sherds which were potentially diagnostic, i.e. rims, base/angles and decorated, were fully recorded. Their sizes, weights, and where possible forms were noted. Their fabrics were examined with a hand lens. Other sherds were visually inspected for their fabric type. No sherds showed a full profile, were reconstructable, or worthy of illustration.

#### Trench1

The pottery from Trench 1 is from Context 002 and 004, with two sherds from 005. This assemblage is summarised in Tables 2.1 and 2.2. The assemblage is Romano-British, possibly starting in the late Iron Age. Closer dating is not possible based on such a small sample but there is an impression of the late rather than early RB period. The relative absence of Black Burnished Ware, a fabric which dominates assemblages in this region, is perhaps surprising. It is likely that some of the quartz tempered "indeterminate" sherds were originally Black Burnished. The 2 sherds from F005 are both Romano-British of indeterminate date.

**Table 2.1 Trench 1 Context 002**

<b>Fabric</b>	<b>No of Sherds</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Black Burnished	1	RB (or late IA)
Greyware	5	Romano British
Shell Tempered	2	Later Iron Age
Colour Coated ware	1	Very worn -beige coat on pink fabric. 3 <sup>rd</sup> /4thC
<b>Samian</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1-2C</b>
Coarse ware	1	RB Storage jar
Grass Impressed	1	Late or post-Roman?
Indeterminate coarse ware	10	RB (or late Iron Age) Fabrics
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	

**Table 2.2 Trench 1 Context 004**

<b>Fabric</b>	<b>No of Sherds</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Black Burnished	8	RB/IA , decorated
Samian	1	1/2C
Flint Tempered	2	IA
Indeterminate Coarse ware	11	RB/LIA Fabrics
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	

**Trench 2**

Context 002 is the layer immediately below the plough soil and all the pottery recovered in Trench 2 was from the surface of this context, and as such has not been recorded as part of the discrete features.

The 157 pottery sherds from Trench 2 are all from Context 002 and are summarized in Table 3.1.

**Table 2.3 Trench 2 Context 002**

<b>Fabric</b>	<b>No. of Sherds</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Shelly-limestone	4	Temper totally absent; voids. Prehistoric
Black Burnished	74	RB (or late IA) Rims mainly simple (1/2C?) 1 rim 2/3C 1 Decorated sherd with obtuse x-hatching->AD 260
Greyware	10	RB
Samian	1	With repair rivet-1/2C
Colour Coated	1	Beige Coat-3 <sup>rd</sup> /4 <sup>th</sup> C
Shell Tempered	1	Late RB or Iron Age
Indeterminate	66	RB or late IA fabrics

**Faunal remains**

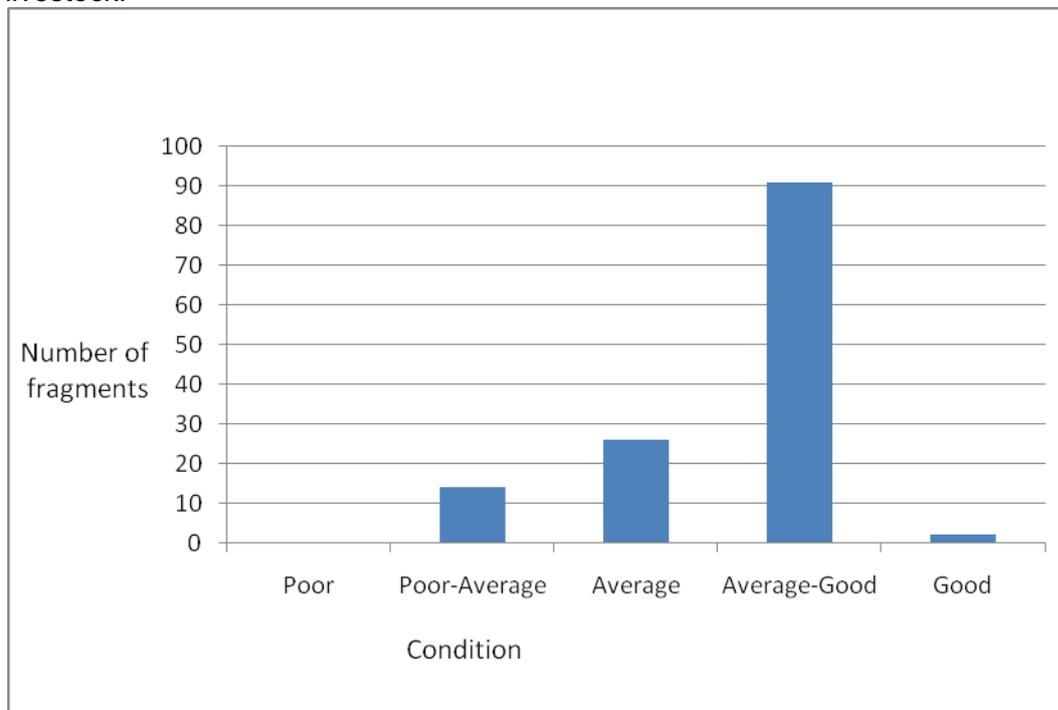
A total of 133 fragments of animal bone were recovered from the topsoil and the surface of the exposed features. In the absence of phase information and secure context it cannot be used to discuss site economy or depositional practice, but the assemblage does offer information on the possible value of the site for faunal study in the area.

The range of species are shown in Table 3.1 .

**Table 3.1: Species representation**

Species	Number of fragments	Percentage
Cattle	12	9%
Sheep/goat	38	29%
Pig	2	1%
Dog	3	2%
Large Mammal	17	13%
Medium Mammal	23	17%
Bird	1	1%
Unidentified	36	28%

Given the circumstances under which the material was collected there is relatively small proportion of material that is not identifiable to species. In addition the general bone condition was very good (See Figure 3.1) given that it was not recovered from sealed contexts. There is no reason however to believe that it represents modern livestock.



**Figure 3.1: Bone condition**

A range of body parts were present. Fusion data was available for a number of species and there was porous bone present. Mandibles were fragmented, but this is unsurprising in disturbed contexts. A larger sample would have the potential to provide comprehensive information on herd structures and culling practice. Taphonomic markers (gnawing, weathering and burning) were all noted, as were a

small number of cut marks and deliberate breakage of fresh bone associated with carcase processing. In addition, some elements were measureable and others displayed pathological change. This is a well preserved group of material which suggests that the site may preserve an assemblage of some scale. The condition indicates that excavation would yield a faunal assemblage that would be capable of providing a wide range of data, and has the potential to be extremely useful in understanding the rural economy of this part of the county in the Romano-British period.

## **Appendix 4**

**Clare Randall**

### **Human remains**

Three fragments of human bone were recovered alongside the animal remains, and recognised during analysis. They comprised fragments of adult tibia and radius, and a perinatal femur. Little can be inferred from these fragments apart from the observation that disarticulated human bone is common on Later Iron Age sites in the area, and infants are a common occurrence on local Romano-British sites. It is possible that these fragments may relate to articulated interments that were scraped over by the mechanical excavator, but not examined further. Either way, it should be noted that if there were to be further excavation on the site, there is a strong likelihood of encountering human remains in some form, and this should be taken into account in the research design.