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Acknowledgements:

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1.0 Introduction

Location: Marcliffe, Comers Lane, Combe Martin
Parish: Combe Martin
District: North Devon
County: Devon
NGR: SS 5894 4615

South West Archaeology was commissioned by Mr.Marsden (the client) of 'Marcliffe', to undertake evaluation trenches to ascertain the archaeological sensitivity of the building plot to the south of Marcliffe, Combe Martin (Fig. 1b).
Planning permission was granted by NDDC with a condition that no work was to proceed on the site until a program of archaeological investigation was established prior to works commencing.

The site was considered to have considerable archaeological potential as the putative location of a medieval manor house shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig 1c.) lay very close to the site. In addition, the site was within 50m of a 19th century mine working. There was therefore the possibility that medieval or later industrial deposits could be exposed.
Siting of the trenches was agreed with the Devon County Archaeological Service (DCAS) and all four were aligned as proposed with a slight reduction in length of two of the east/west trenches due to the proximity of a telegraph pole (Fig 2).
Fieldwork was carried out by Chris Preece for South West Archaeology between the 17th and 19th January 2006 and conducted to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the DCAS (Appendix 1).
Conditions were generally dry and mild with slight misty rain on the last morning. A general lack of rain previously meant the ground was fairly dry and workable.

1.1 Summary of results

There was no direct evidence of the former manor house. There was no trace of mine working, either in terms of structures or waste deposits. No built structures were located with the exception of a cobbled surface of unknown date in the west of the site. The ceramic evidence also provided little indication of early use of the site, finds being predominantly of post-medieval date.
There was however, a considerable spread of building debris (grey roof slate and lime mortar fragments) but given that this could be seen as part of the making up and levelling of the site, its significance was limited. This material was concentrated to the west of the site. If it was associated with a former building (rather than being merely imported for levelling) this, along with the evidence of the cobbled surface, suggests, that the modern buildings to the west of the site may conceal further evidence.

1.2 Methodology

Four trenches (T1-4) were excavated utilising a mechanical digger with a 1m wide grading bucket. Excavation was stopped for archaeological investigation or recording where necessary. Once the excavation was completed the sides of each trench was cleaned to clarify and define features. With the exception of the south-west end of T1 and the linear in T4, there was no call to clean the bases of trenches with natural shale bedrock being clearly exposed.
The trenches were given separate numbers and contexts within those trenches numbered sequentially, with the earlier numbers generally relating to the uppermost contexts (e.g. 100 = topsoil in trench 1).
Standard recording procedure was followed. This included written context descriptions on pro-forma sheets, hand drawn plans at appropriate scales, and a full photographic record comprising digital, monochrome and colour slide photography.

2.0 Results

2.1 Trench 1

This trench measured 19.30m in length, 1.20m in width and had a maximum (stepped) depth of 1.5m. It was sited to investigate the proposed locations of the splay and access drive from Castle Street (Fig. 2). The length was marginally curtailed due to the retaining wall to the south-west and to a drainage pipe to the north-east. The slight increase in width (1.2m rather than 1m) of the trench ensured the required coverage, however.

The south-west end of T1 was characterised by a considerable depth of silty, sorted shale fragments (109) sealing a lens (108) of orange clay. The sorted shale (109) backed up against the wall, at a depth of 0.8m from surface and probably representing material washed down following the cut for the road and wall construction (Fig. 3). Anecdotal evidence suggested the road was constructed around the turn of the 19th/20th century. The cut for this had truncated a cobbled surface (106) comprising rounded (perhaps sea-worn) pebbles. This surface was sectioned (see Fig. 3) and revealed that the cobbles were set upright in clay which sat on the natural shale bedrock (111). A sample area of 0.5m² was drawn and the surface recorded digitally in overlapping areas. In one place lime mortar had clearly been mixed on the surface (Fig. 3). The varying 'lines' of the cobbles are noteworthy and might suggest more than one person at work.

Sealing the cobbles was a layer of sandy mid-brown clay (107) with building rubble incorporating slates and mortar, which probably represented an episode of levelling towards the wall. The layer above (102), had the largest percentage of finds including post-medieval glazed earthenware, blue and white ware and a clay pipe stem. Sealing this and running most of the length of the trench below topsoil (100) was a layer of mid-brown/orange clay with frequent inclusions of grey roof slate and lime mortar fragments (103). This layer was observed in other trenches (i.e. 201,301,401) and obviously represented a levelling episode. To the south west a thin band of redeposited topsoil (105) below topsoil was evidenced.

In the north-east end of the trench 103 was cut by 112 which was filled by re-deposited pinkish shale (110). This event was mirrored in T4 by (401/402).

2.2 Trench 2

This trench was 8.1m in length; 1.2m width; 0.8m depth (max.). It ran across the length of the proposed parking area to the south of the planned dwelling (Fig. 2). Generally, the section revealed a fairly consistent profile and was sterile in terms of archaeological features. Beneath the well cultivated topsoil (200), was a layer of orange-brown clay (201) with frequent lime mortar fragments and grey roof slates, some almost intact. This was a continuation of 103 and petered out some 3 metres to the south-east. The natural shale (211) was, in places, a mere 0.4m below the surface of the topsoil. At the SE end was another deposit of building debris (202), just visible in section (Fig. 4).

2.3 Trench 3

This trench measured 6.9m in length, 1.2m in width and had a maximum depth of 0.8m. It was located to assess the south wing of the proposed housing (Fig. 2).

As with T2 there were no archaeological features. Beneath topsoil (300) the ground had been made up and levelled with a layer of building rubble (301), probably the spread, with slight variations in composition, evidenced in other trench contexts (i.e. 103). In places the natural shale (311) was only a little over 0.5m depth from surface (Fig. 5).

2.4 Trench 4

This trench was 7.1m in length; 1.2m width; 1.3m depth (max.). It was sited to assess the impact of the north part of the proposed development (Fig. 2). There was a greater depth of topsoil (400) here, 0.6m in places.

Natural shale (411) was overlain by a layer of pinkish re-deposited shale (405) The cut for this deposit (406) was visible to the south east. This was cut to the south east by a linear cut (404) that extended irregularly upto 0.4m into natural and was filled by a mid brown gritty clay with roof slate and mortar fragments (403). To the south-west 405 was cut by a vertical cut (402) that did not extend into natural and contained mid-brown to orange clay (401). The function of these cuts into and through levelling deposits remained unclear.

2.5 Watching brief of grading for splay (19/1/06)

With the agreement of the DCAS and the client, the site archaeologist monitored preliminary groundwork defining the width of the splay, following completion of the recording of evaluation trenches. This was primarily to ascertain the extent of the cobbled surface (106). To define this to the west, an extension of 3.5m (as close to the boundary as feasible) was opened up (see Fig. 2; T1 ext.). This revealed that the cobbles (106) ran up to the boundary fence and appeared to continue under it.
Subsequently, T1 was, widened by 1m to the north-west, defining the width of the access drive. Cobbles were noted here too and continued slightly further to the south-west than noted in T1 where they had evidently been truncated. Monitoring to the south-east revealed a similar profile to that evidenced in the south-west end of T1, i.e. silting following wall construction and a cut into the natural which displayed a similar lack of depth and features to that evidenced in T2. Further monitoring was therefore deemed unnecessary.

3.0 Finds

(See Appendix 2)

A number of roofing slates were recovered and retained, mainly from the levelling contexts below topsoil. These were predominantly top-hung pegged grey roof slates, 7" in length (0.18m), with one being 8" (0.255m). A band of mortar was often visible across the middle of the outer side and the base of the inside.One slate was considerably wider and probably came from a lower course. This example showed signs of re-use as did another with two peg holes, one of which had been damaged.

The samples of lime mortar, again from levelling contexts, showed two differing compositions. One was a creamy beige mortar, the other white. Both had inclusions of coal or charcoal as well as minute fragments of shale and other stone.
The cobbles have already been described; suffice it to add that such surfaces are known to have been constructed from medieval times until at least the late nineteenth century (cf. Meeth Church) and are thus difficult to date in isolation.
The pottery is detailed below (Appendix 2) but as has already been noted, was almost exclusively post-medieval in date.

4.0 Conclusion

Given the concentration of finds in the south-west end of T1, the western spread of the building debris and the location of the cobbled surface (106), it is most likely that significant archaeology lies to the west of the development site. Although it is possible that the cobbles and building debris are associated with the former manor house there was no definitive dating to link them. Indeed, the pottery on site was predominantly post-medieval with a percentage of modern ceramics.
There was no evidence of mine-working *per se* on site, although the occurrence of re-deposited shale in the north of the site is of interest. This deposit was cut by later activity and given the widespread occurrence of re-deposited shale elsewhere in Combe Martin (which is assumed to be related to mine-working), hints that further such evidence might be found to the north.

5.0 Bibliography

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