

VENN FARM, EAST PUTFORD, HOLSWORTHY, DEVON
ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AND RECORDING 2009

SUMMARY

Archaeological monitoring at Venn Farm during partial stripping of the ploughsoil in one of the farm's fields located no archaeological features. Finds recovered from the exercise comprise a broken flint scraper and eighteen flint debitage fragments, probably of Neolithic or early Bronze Age date, two medieval pottery sherds, and a collection of post-medieval pottery fragments.

THE PROJECT

Location: Venn Farm
Parish: East Putford
District: Torridge
County: Devon
NGR: SS377170

HLS Application no: AG00238175
Historic Environment Service ref: Arch/AE/TO 10882

A Culm Grassland Recreation project instigated by Natural England as part of a Higher Level Stewardship agreement with Mr. and Mrs. J G and R I Jessel, owners of Venn Farm, included soil stripping within selected areas of one of the farm's fields. Parts of the field were stripped to a depth of 15cm, others to a depth of 30cm (Fig. 1). The project was overseen by Becky Aston of Natural England, who commissioned Stewart Brown Associates to carry out archaeological monitoring and recording. A written scheme of investigation (WSI) for the project was prepared by Stephanie Knight, Archaeological Officer, Devon County Council (appended).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AND RECORDING

The soil stripping was undertaken by two mechanical diggers on May 18th and 19th 2009. Archaeological monitoring was carried out by Stewart Brown on May 19th. The soil stripping revealed natural clay in only one small area toward the bottom of the field where the ground was wet and the ploughsoil shallow. Elsewhere, the soil stripping was confined to within the depth of ploughsoil and did not reveal natural clay. No archaeological features were uncovered.

The ground surface exposed by the stripping on both days was closely inspected, and stripping on the 19th May was monitored. Finds were collected from the exposed surfaces, and concentrations of finds recorded (Fig. 2). The finds are shown in Plates 1 and 2, and listed below.

FINDS (identifications by John Allan, Exeter Archaeology)

Pottery

Context	sherds	description	date
1	10	transfer-printed and other Staffs. type white earthenware, including 1 willow pattern	after 1780
	3	N. Devon gravel-tempered ware with Internal brown glaze, 1 sherd from a bowl	1500-1800
	1	N. Devon coarseware hand-made unglazed cooking pot or jug	medieval
	1	probably as above, but possibly S. Devon	medieval

Flints

Context	sherds	description	date
1	6	brown flint, possible source – gravel beds at Orleigh Court, N. Devon all debitage, one unsuccessful core with pebble cortex	Neolithic or early Bronze Age
	6	spotty black flint, 3 with cortex, including 1 white cortex	Neolithic or early Bronze Age
	7	misc. mottled grey/brown flint, all struck, incl. 1 broken scraper with retouch along one side	Neolithic or early Bronze Age

The finds, having been identified and recorded, are to be returned to the landowner.

CONCLUSION

The soil stripping was insufficiently deep to establish whether archaeological features survive beneath the ploughsoil in this area. The recovery of more prehistoric lithic finds than would normally be expected from such a small area indicates prehistoric activity in the vicinity. The locality surrounding Venn Farm is known to contain a concentration of burial mounds ('barrows'), most of which are Scheduled Monuments, as noted in the attached WSI. It is possible that prehistoric remains lie buried in the area.

Prehistoric Flint Finds

The only flint tool recovered was a broken scraper. The remainder of the flint finds comprises debitage (waste from flint working). It is difficult to date such material, but the most likely period for its production lies in the Neolithic or early Bronze Age. Flint does not occur naturally in the immediate vicinity. The closest and only inland source in North Devon is at Orleigh Court, Buckland Brewer, where there are gravel beds containing residual flint nodules and fluvial pebbles (Newberry and Pearce, 2005, 5). The six brown fragments of flint in the collection from Venn Farm originate from there. The thirteen other flint finds are likely to have come from further afield. Some flints, especially those with cortex still attached, probably originate from beach cobbles and pebbles gathered on the North Devon coastline.

Pottery Finds

The two sherds of medieval pottery are small fragments abraded by ploughing. Both are from coarseware cooking pots or jugs and are not more closely datable. These and the later pottery finds were probably transported to the site from the farmstead together with organic household waste used to manure the fields.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Newberry, J. and Pearce, N, 2005 'A Mesolithic lithic scatter from Abbotsham Court, North Devon', *Proc. Devon Archaeol. Soc.* **63**, 1-32.