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TEST PITS FOR PROPOSED QUARRY, HOME FIELD, ACTON, LANGTON MATRAVERS, PURBECK, DORSET
Archaeological Observations and Recording

Report No. 53349/3/1

August 2011

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Archaeological Observations and Recording,

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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching was carried out by Terrain Archaeology in August 2011, during mechanical excavation of seven geotechnical test pits at Home Field, Acton, Langton Matravers, Dorset (centred on OS NGR SY 98877773). The pits were dug to determine the presence and depth of suitable limestone deposits prior to submission of a planning application to open a new stone-quarry at the site.

No finds, deposits or features of archaeological significance were identified within the test pits, but two sub-oval hollows up to about one metre deep and approximately 15-20m across may attest earlier small-scale quarrying of limestone within the proposed application area. These features are undated, but may warrant recording or survey before they are destroyed.

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INTRODUCTION

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Keates Quarries, through their agent, Nick Dunn of Land and Minerals Management Ltd to undertake a programme of archaeological observations and recording during excavation of geotechnical test pits at Home Field, Acton, Langton Matravers, Purbeck, Dorset (OS NGR SY 98877773, Figure 1). The test pits were dug to assess the depth and nature of limestone deposits within the site, prior to submission of a planning application by Keates Quarry to conduct stone quarrying and extraction at the site

The site is owned by the National Trust and the archaeological works were carried out at the request of the National Trust's Regional Archaeologist.

Archaeological Observations and Recording, also known as an archaeological watching brief, is defined by the Institute of Field Archaeologists as "*a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons, within a specified area or site where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed*" (IfA 2008).

The fieldwork was carried out on the 4th August 2011 by Mike Trevarthen, BA (Hons.), AIfA.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge the help and co-operation of Nick Dunn (Land and Minerals Management Ltd), Kevin Keates Sr and Kevin Keates Jr (Keates Quarries) and Martin Papworth (National Trust Regional Archaeologist). The project was managed for Terrain Archaeology by Peter S. Bellamy.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

There is no previously recorded archaeology within the proposed quarry site. RAF vertical photographs dating from 1947 and other aerial photographs from 2002, 2005 and 2009 (available online via Dorset Explorer) do not reveal any archaeological remains in Home Field. However, the grassed-over remains of two possible shallow surface-quarries were noted during fieldwork.

Although undated, these are most likely to be post-medieval in date. A post-medieval surface quarry or probable similar type was investigated at Downs Quarry about 2 km to the north west (Montague *et al.* 2008).

Some Neolithic and Bronze Age worked flint has been found locally (Papworth 2004; 2005, Tatler & Bellamy, in prep.). A small prehistoric pit and possible hearth were found in Pond Field about 400 m to the ENE of the site (Tatler & Bellamy, in prep.).

An Iron Age and Romano-British settlement and shale-working site was discovered in the southwest corner of the field immediately to the east, during the working of Blacklands Quarry in 1945 (Calkin 1948). Subsequent archaeological evaluation in Blacklands Field by the National Trust (Papworth 2004; 2005) and watching briefs by Terrain Archaeology in 2005 and 2007 (Tatler & Bellamy 2007; in prep.) located limited Iron Age and Roman finds and features including a stone-lined grave, but their distribution indicates that the main area of contemporary activity probably did not extend very far beyond the bounds of Blacklands Quarry. Immediately to the north of the grave, geophysical survey undertaken for the National Trust identified a possible ditched enclosure. Observation of soil stripping for a haul road immediately east of the site did not locate any archaeological features (Tatler & Bellamy, in prep.).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

No formal aims and objectives were defined prior to fieldwork. However, the generic objective of the archaeological observations was, within the limitations of the work programme, to establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on the site in order to inform future planning decisions regarding the proposed mineral extraction scheme.

The archaeological works also aimed aim to observe and record all the in situ archaeological deposits and features revealed during the groundworks to an appropriate professional standard.

METHODS

No brief or written scheme of investigation was produced in connection with the watching brief. Works were therefore carried out in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists *Code of Conduct* and *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (IfA 1998).

The test pits were excavated by Keates Quarry staff using a tracked 360° excavator fitted with a toothed bucket. Resulting ground visibility was moderate, but was of sufficient clarity to determine the absence of archaeological features and artefacts. Fieldwork was undertaken in intermittent driving rain and thick fog, limiting the scope and quality of the photographic record.

Approximate test pit positions (centre points) were recorded using a Garmin Geko 201 handheld GPS handset, operating to an accuracy of ±5m. These are plotted on Figure 2.

A qualified, experienced archaeologist was present on-site during all key groundworks. Spoil arising from the test pits was visually scanned for artefacts and all deposits exposed in the trench edges, regardless of their perceived date and archaeological significance, were recorded using components of Terrain Archaeology's system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records.

A digital photographic record of the watching brief was maintained, incorporating specific aspects of its technical detail as well as its conduct and wider setting.

RESULTS

A total of seven geotechnical test pits were dug at locations throughout the proposed extraction area (Figure 2). All pits measured a nominal 3m by 4m.

No archaeologically significant features or deposits were identified within the excavated areas.

Summary deposit sequences are presented below. All depths are expressed as below local ground level (BGL).

Test Pit 1

(SY9892177714)

0.00 – 0.15m **Topsoil**: Thin turf over mid dark orange-brown clay silt with scarce stones.
0.15 – 0.55m **Natural deposits**: Red-brown clay silt with much limestone rubble up to 0.6m.
0.55m+ **Natural deposits**: Poorly-sorted (often large) limestone rubble in intermittent light yellow brown clay matrix.

Test Pit 2

(SY9892477749)

0.00 – 0.20m **Natural deposits?**: Thin turf over mid orange-brown clay silt with occasional small stones.
0.20m+ **Natural deposits**: Common/abundant weathered and fragmented limestone in mid orange brown clay silt matrix.

Test Pit 3

(SY 9889477733)

0.00 – 0.15m **Topsoil**: Thin turf over mid dark orange-brown clay silt with occasional small stones
0.15m+ **Natural deposits**: Poorly sorted rubbly degraded limestone with some mid orange-brown silty clay.

Test Pit 4

(SY9887477716)

0.00 – 0.15m **Topsoil**: Thin turf over mid dark orange-brown clay silt with occasional small stones.
0.15 – 0.50m **Natural deposits**: Mid dark orange- and red brown clay silt with abundant small fragmented limestone pieces (mostly <0.2m).
0.50m+ **Natural deposits**: Rubbly- and tabular fragmented limestone over light grey clay-rich 'white earth'.

Test Pit 5

(SY 9887077755)

0.00 – 0.15m **Topsoil**: Thin turf over mid dark orange-brown clay silt with occasional small stones.
0.15 – 0.30m **Natural deposits**: Mid orange-brown clay silt with occasional small stones.
0.30m+ **Natural deposits**: Light orange and yellow clay-silt with common small rubbly limestone pieces.

Test Pit 6

(SY 9882877747)

0.00 – 0.15m **Topsoil**: Thin turf over mid dark orange-brown clay silt with occasional small Stones.
0.15 – 0.25m **Natural deposits**: Mid orange-brown clay silt with occasional small stones.
0.25m+ **Natural deposits**: Light orange and yellow clay-silt with abundant small fragmented tabular limestone pieces.

Test Pit 7

(SY 9883377708)

0.00 – 0.15m **Topsoil**: Thin turf over mid dark orange-brown clay silt with occasional small Stones.

0.15 – 0.30m **Natural deposits**: Mid orange-brown clay silt with occasional small stones.

0.30m+ **Natural deposits**: Light yellow clay-silt with abundant small fragmented tabular limestone pieces.

In Test Pit 1 and Pits 3-7, topsoil comprised c0.15m depth of relatively stoneless clay loam, directly overlying upper natural deposits comprising variously degraded and fractured bedrock in red-brown clay-silt or yellow-brown clayish matrix. In Test Pit 2 the original topsoil unit seems to have been removed at some point in the past (possibly by the adjacent surface quarrying activity). Here thin turf directly overlies an upper unit of mid orange brown clay silt: This may inconclusively be a localised pocket of developed subsoil or a stoneless upper facies of natural deposits.

FINDS

No archaeological finds were recovered during the watching brief.

CONCLUSIONS

The watching brief has not identified any archaeologically significant finds, features or deposits within the geotechnical test pits. However, previous work in the locality has demonstrated the potential for apparently isolated archaeological features to be discovered. It was clear from the test pitting that some areas of the site are undisturbed except by previous agricultural land use, and, therefore, there is potential for archaeological remains to be preserved below the base of topsoil. If present, these remains may be adversely impacted by any works at depths greater than about 0.15m below ground level.

Evidence for former (undated) shallow surface quarrying of limestone was been noted within the proposed extraction area, as shallow-sided sub-oval hollows surviving up to about one metre deep. Within these areas there is negligible potential for earlier archaeological remains to survive. However, these features themselves represent a significant phase of human land use and may warrant recording or survey prior to their destruction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The negative results from the test pit observations indicate there is unlikely to be major extensive archaeology across the area. However, it is clear from the archaeological works in the adjacent

fields that there are a number of significant isolated archaeological features present in the area. The presence or absence of these features on the site of the proposed quarry cannot be confidently assessed on the basis of the small sample size represented by the test pits.

The negative results suggest there is no reason to undertake any further archaeological evaluation of the proposed quarry area. However, it is recommended that an archaeological watching brief (archaeological observations and recording) be undertaken during topsoil stripping of the area of the proposed new quarry in order to identify and record any isolated archaeological features and deposits that may exist on the site.

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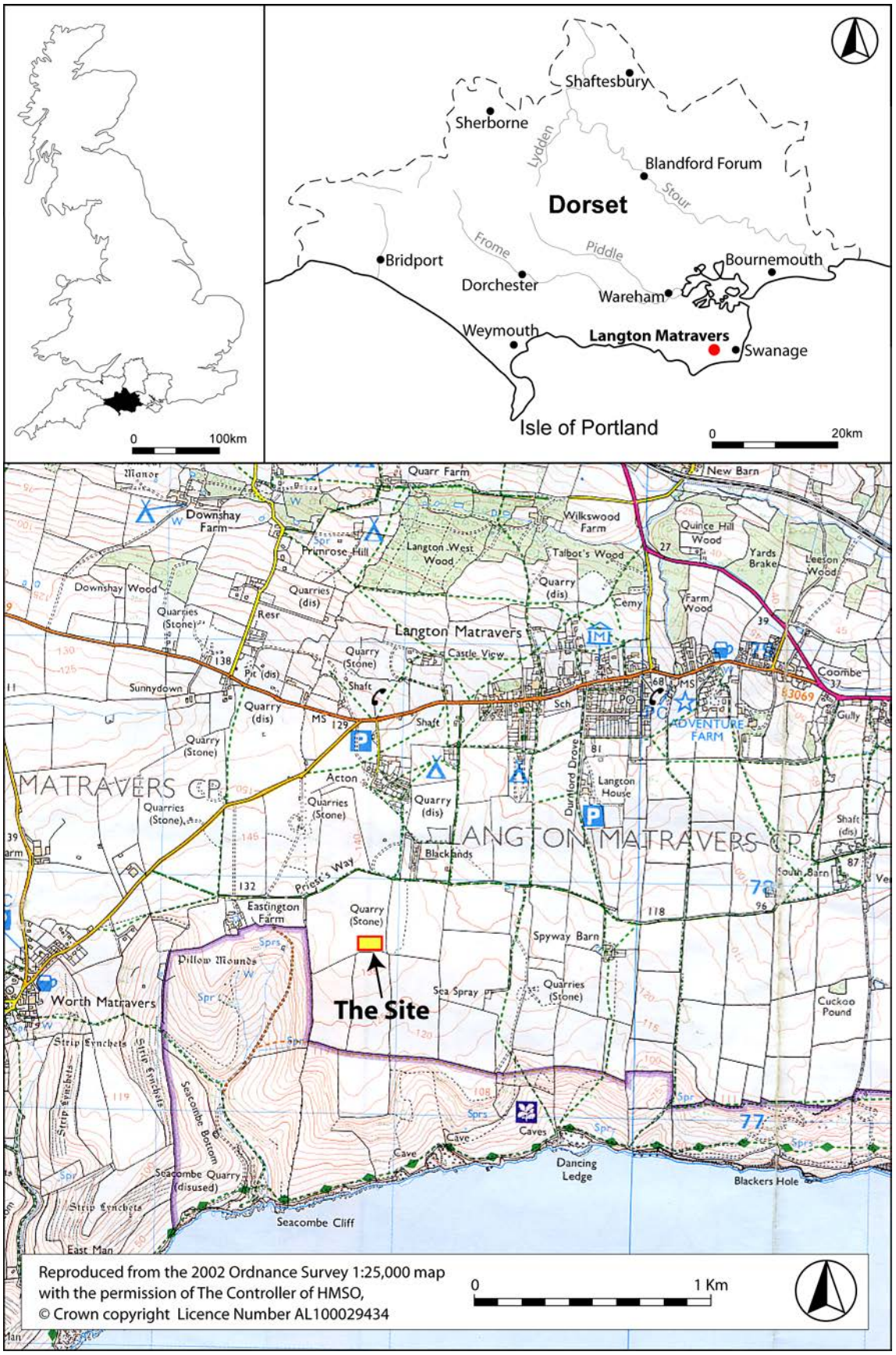

Figure 1: Location map.

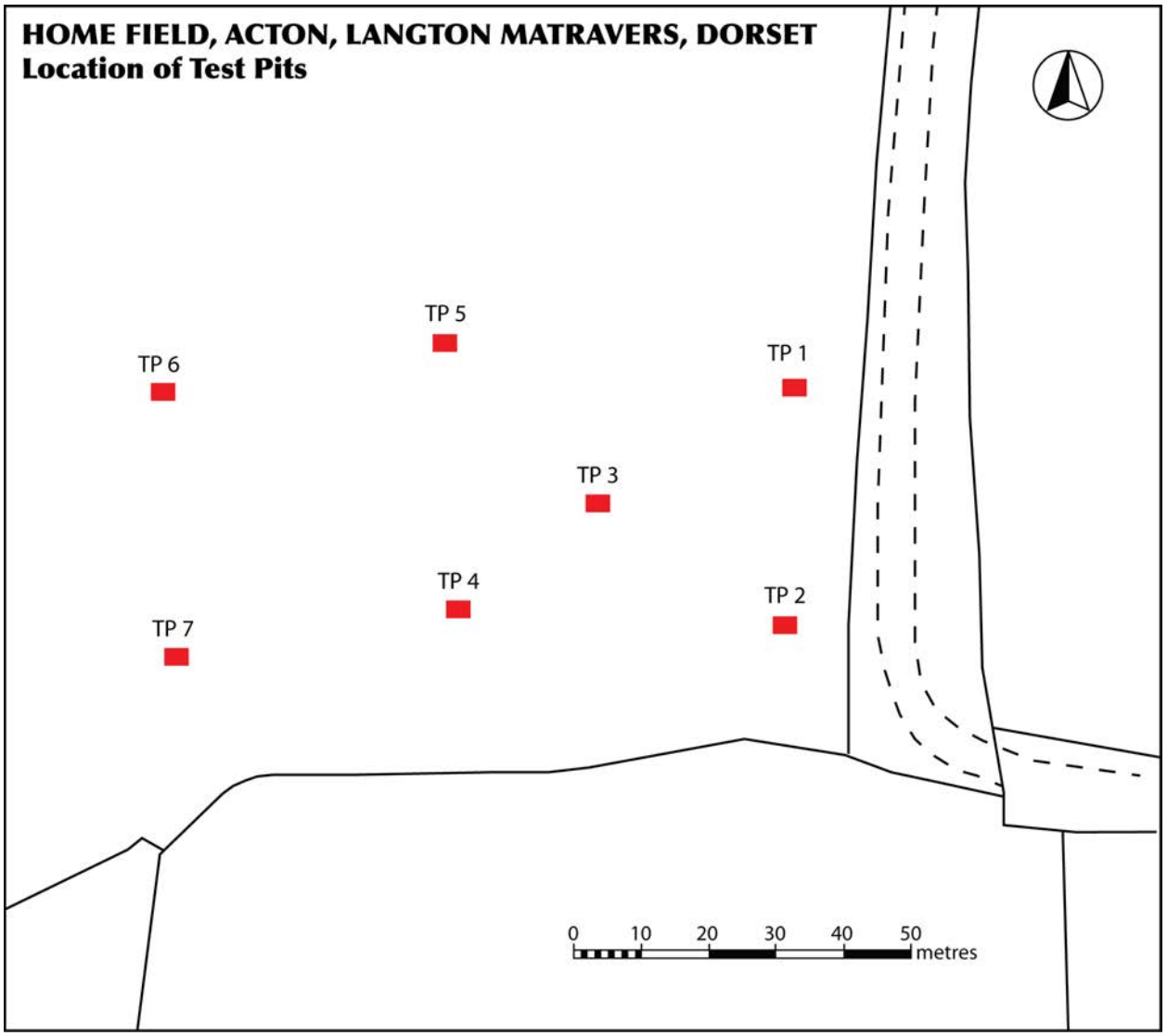

Figure 2: Plan showing locations of geotechnical test pits.