



**Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society
Archaeology Field Group**

**Report of Earthwork Survey at
South Marston Farm, South Marston, Wilts.**

Report Number 167.0305



South Marston Farm

Brian Clarke, May 2010

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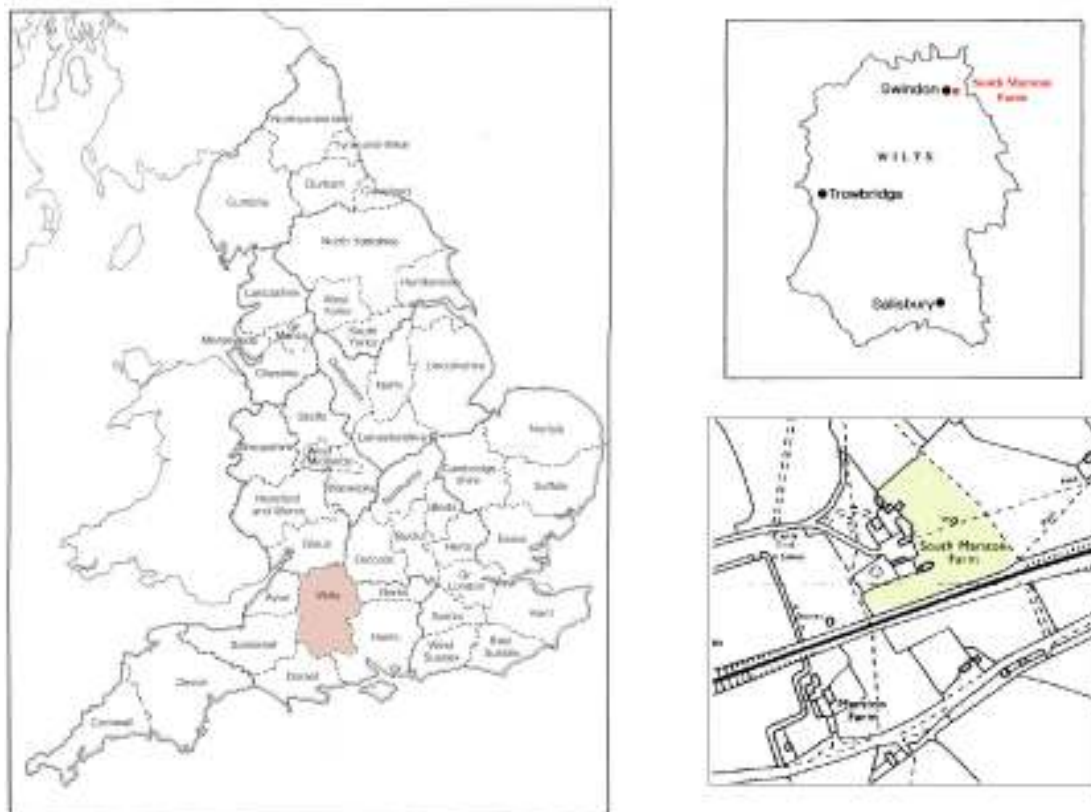
Summary

Earthworks identified as possible remnants of a deserted medieval settlement were surveyed using tape and offset methods which revealed a series of raised areas and ditches possibly representing house platforms and the boundaries of associated plots of land. A resistivity survey of the area failed to provide any further information. Earthwork survey of a second field revealed a large sub-rectangular raised area possibly the site of a former building, and other features. Further work would be necessary to determine the nature of these.

1. Introduction

The Archaeology Field Group was approached by Darren Cook the owner of South Marston Farm following a discussion with the County Archaeologist who suggested that earthworks adjacent to the farm buildings could be the remains of a medieval settlement. The farm is at NGR SU 195 870 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Location of South Marston Farm



The earthworks are visible in two fields, one to the south of the farmhouse and the other to the east. The southern field borders the main railway line between London

and the southwest and a series of linear depressions run north from the railway boundary at right angles to join another linear depression running west to east (Figure 2) and there are a number of raised mounds to the north of this. There are a series of mounds and depressions in the field to the east of the farmhouse and two linear depressions running west to east follow course of tracks marked on early Ordnance Survey maps and visible on an aerial photograph from 1943 (Figure 8).

The earthworks in the southern field are recorded on the Wiltshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) under reference SU18NE461 and described as medieval house platforms and holloways. An evaluation in 2002 in advance of development of a site to the south of the railway line revealed three ditches, one dated to the medieval period (Cotswold Archaeological Trust, 2002). A quantity of Romano-British was recovered from the fill of these ditches and also from the field to the west of South Marston Farm (Darren Cook, pers.com.).

Figure 2. Aerial Photo of South Marston Farm showing location of Earthworks



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2. Methods.

The earthwork surveys of both fields at South Marston Farm used the tape and offset method. In the southern field a base line was laid east to west across the centre of the field. Points delimiting features on the ground were recorded as eastings and northings by measuring their position from the base line at 90°. The Ordnance Survey grid references for the start and end of the base line and the four corners of the field were recorded using hand-held GPS. The same method was used in the eastern field with the base line again running east to west.

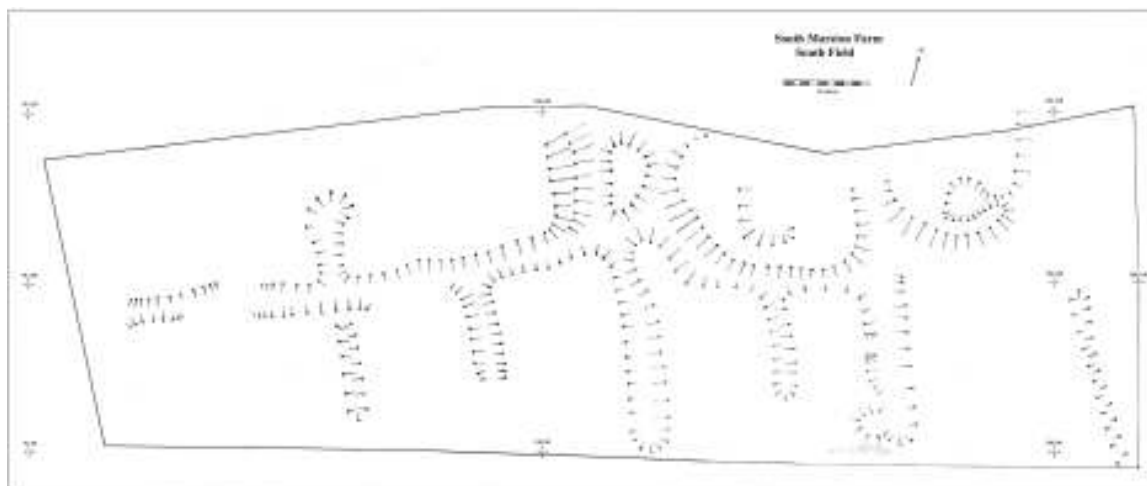
A resistivity survey of the southern field was based on a series of 20mx20m grids positioned from a base line along the southern edge of the field. A Geoscan RM15 resistivity meter was used taking readings at 1 metre intervals along transects spaced 1 metre apart. The results were plotted using Geoscan's Geoplot software.

3. Results of Earthwork Survey.

3.1. Southern Field.

The survey (Figure 3) revealed a series of linear depressions running northwards from the fence alongside the railway. These terminated in a series of raised areas along the northern edge of the field. There were slight depressions in the top of two of these raised areas. These features were provisionally interpreted as possible house platforms and boundaries of associated crofts (Gunter *et al*, 2008).

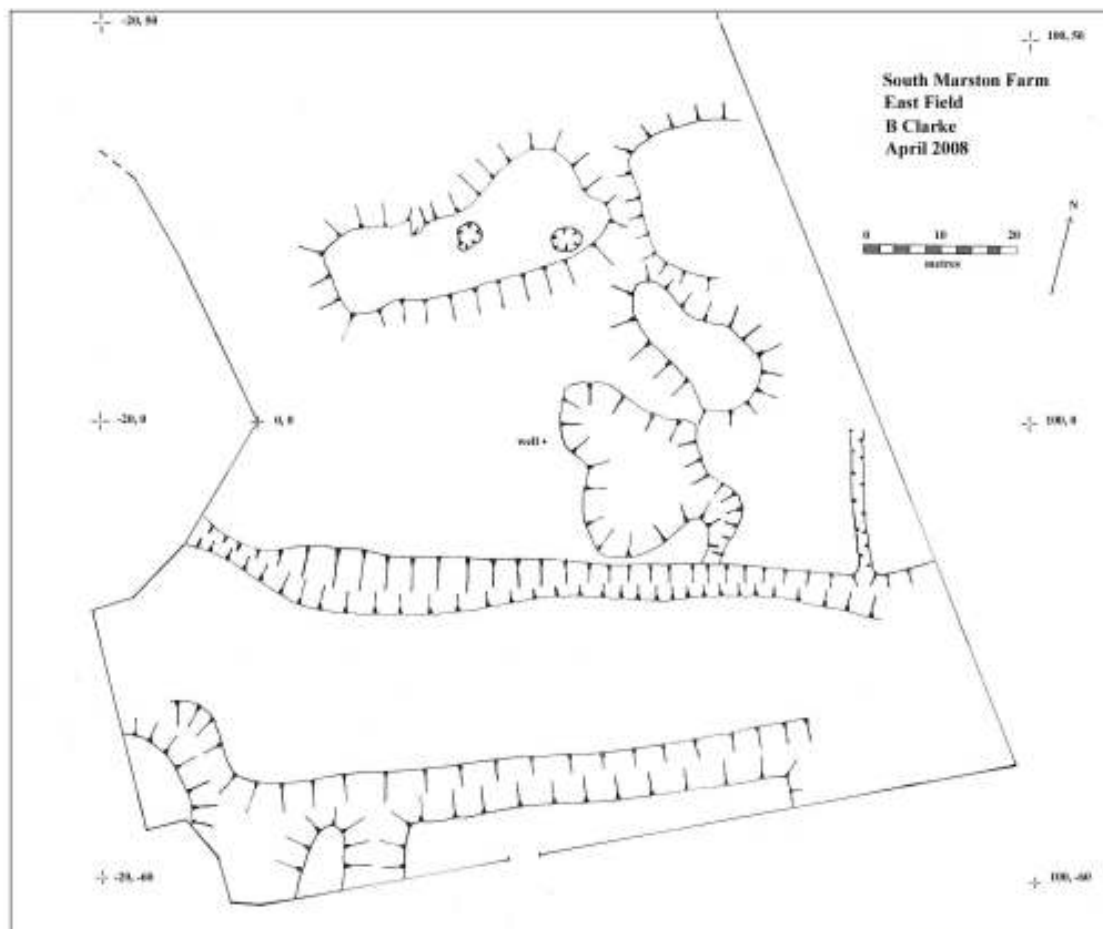
Figure 3. Earthworks in southern field South Marston Farm



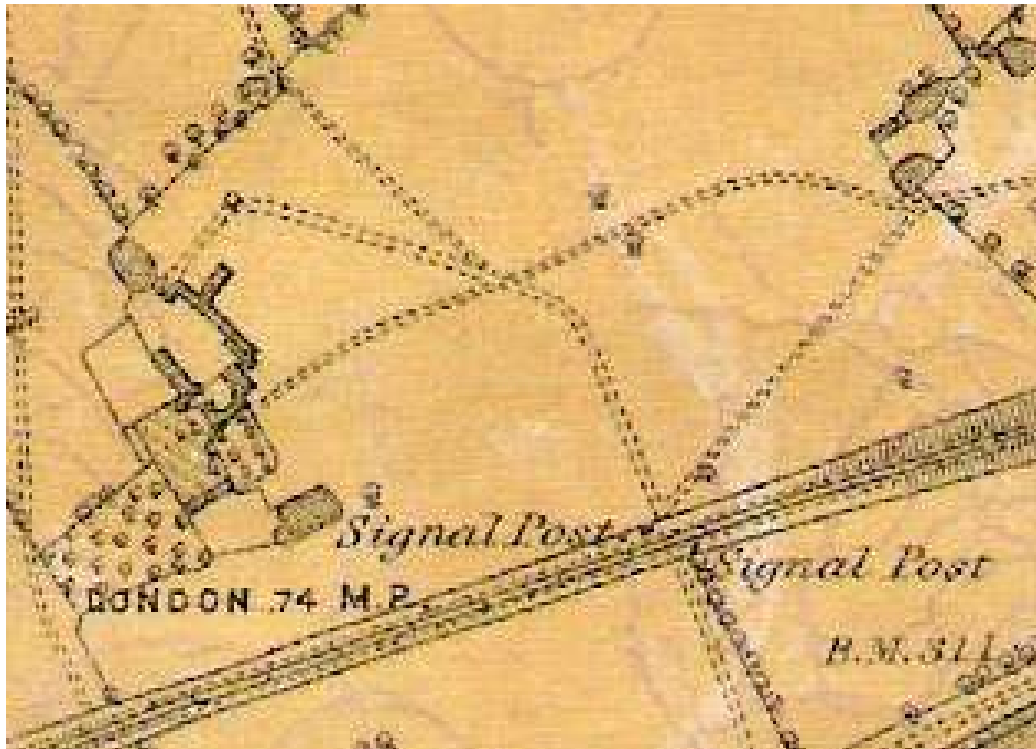
3.2. Eastern Field

There are two well defined linear depressions running in a west to east direction across the field (Figure 4), the northern most follows the route of a track marked on the first edition of Ordnance Survey 6 inch map (Figure 5). The southern feature appears to be a track with offshoots to fields to the south, possibly pre-dating construction of the railway which blocked the routes making them redundant. Both these features show clearly on an aerial photograph taken in 1943 (Figure 8).

Figure 4. Earthworks in eastern field South Marston Farm

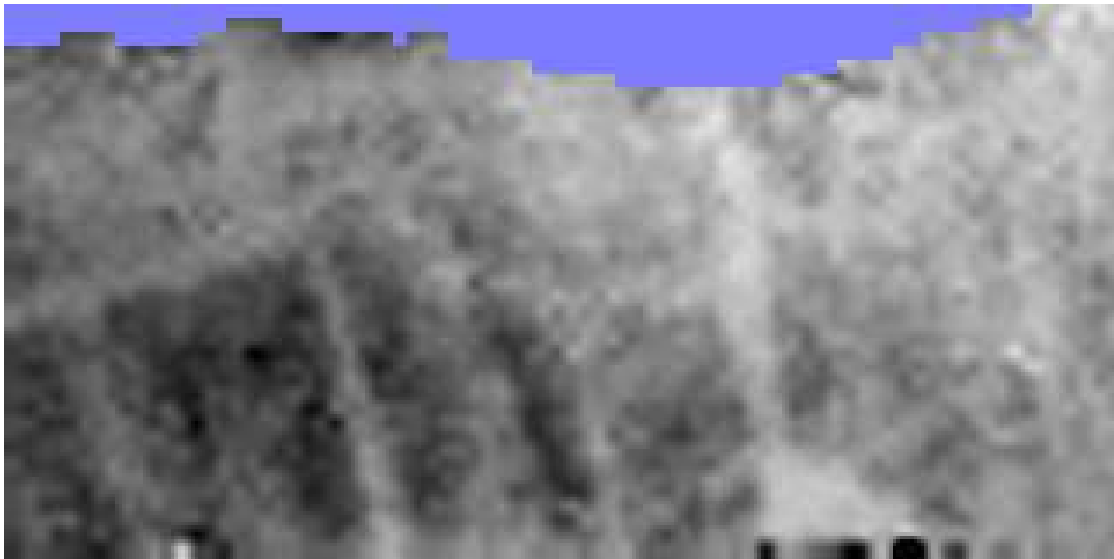


The other features revealed by the earthwork survey comprised a series of raised areas to the north of the track, and a depression between these raised areas and the track itself. There were two smaller depressions on one of the raised areas.

Figure 5. First Edition OS 6in Map

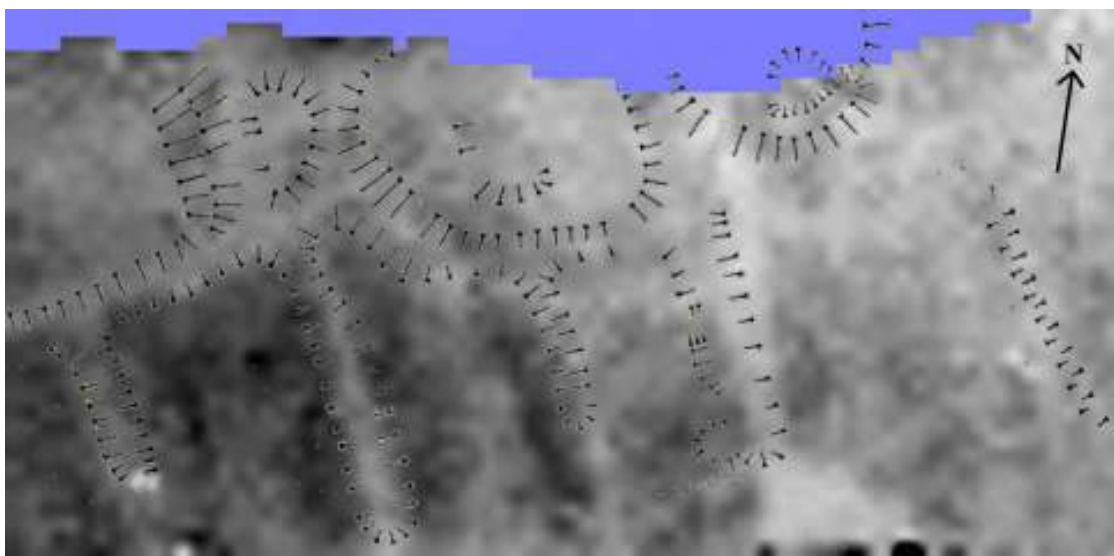
4. Results of Resistivity Survey.

The resistivity survey results (Figure 6) show clearly linear low resistance features running north to south across an extensive area of high resistance in the southwest of the field. These appear to continue beyond the field boundary to the south and terminate in the north along another linear area of low resistance running in an ENE direction. This runs into a curving low resistance feature at its eastern end. An area of low resistance runs right across the field from north to south to the west of centre, beginning at the fence by a pond in the next field and expanding into a larger area by the southern fence. The series of high resistance features along the western end of the southern fence correspond with areas of hardcore spilling through from the railway line beyond.

Figure 6. Results of Resistivity Survey of South Field

J Gunter, 2008

Figure 7 below shows the results of the earthwork survey overlaid on the geophysics plot. The geophysical survey did not include the western end of the field but concentrated on the area of raised platforms at the east. There is some correlation between the linear depressions and low resistance areas to the west, and between the curving low resistance feature and the depression round the southern edge of the largest mound, but the resistivity survey did not reveal any detail of the raised areas themselves.

Figure 7. Earthwork Survey superimposed on Resistivity Survey of South Field

5. Discussion.

Wartime aerial photography of the area (Figure 8) shows evidence of extensive ridge and furrow across the area but none shows the characteristic reverse S shape usually associated with medieval ploughing and there no obvious headlands. However, engineering work associated with the construction of the canal and railway immediately to the south may have destroyed such features.

Figure 8. 1943 Aerial Photograph of South Marston Farm



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Together with two east-west holloways, the earthwork survey of the eastern field revealed a sub-rectangular raised area approximately 34 x 12 metres and two other raised areas one extending into the adjacent field. There is an irregular depression in the centre of the field next to a well which may be evidence of a former pond although it is at a higher level than the adjacent holloway into which it appears to drain.

The sub-rectangular feature which may indicate the site of a former building has two depressions approximately 4 metres in diameter in on its surface. Geophysical survey

of this feature may provide further information although resistivity surveying in the southern field added no information to that obtained from earthwork survey there.

Initial review of the results of the earthwork survey in the southern suggested the features could be the remnants of medieval tofts and crofts. A resistivity survey to test this provisional interpretation proved inconclusive revealing no additional detail of the supposed house platforms and providing no target for a trial excavation trench.

Other commitments and lack of resources prevented further investigation at the time but magnetic survey techniques may reveal information not detectable by resistivity. South Marston Farm is included in the proposed Eastern Development Area (EDA) described in the Swindon Borough Local Development Framework (Swindon Borough Council, 2009). Extensive geophysical survey of the EDA has been undertaken but the results are not generally available, not even the locations surveyed.

With landowner permission a magnetic susceptibility survey could be undertaken to identify targets for more detailed magnetometry to reveal sites of hearths or other areas of enhanced magnetism resulting from human activity.

Acknowledgements.

The AFG would like to thank Darren and Jane Cook for permission to undertake the project and for their active support during the surveying work, and apologise for the delay in preparing this report.

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