

# NETHERAVON AIRFIELD: ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Prepared for:  
**Aspire Defence Services Limited**

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## 1.0 Introduction

In March 2018, SLR Consulting was instructed by Aspire Defence Services Limited to maintain an archaeological watching brief (monitor) groundworks relating to the installation of badger fencing at Netheravon Airfield. The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared in liaison with Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger, Wiltshire County Council (WCC) Archaeological Advisor (CA). The WSI was approved by WCC, being the Local Planning Authority, prior to the commencement of the groundworks.

### Requirement for the watching brief

A badger main sett is present beneath the site of the former Netheravon Balloon Hangar, located towards the eastern end of Netheravon Airfield, Wiltshire (SU 169496; Figure 1). Recent Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) scans indicated that expansion of the badger sett had the potential to damage the runway where it passes to the east of the hangar. It was therefore proposed that underground badger fencing should be installed to a depth of 2m to prevent the sett expansion and potential associated damage.

### The site and its location within the airfield

Netheravon Airfield is located within Salisbury Plain, much of which is part of the Defence Training Estate Salisbury Plain. The location of the monitored groundworks, hereafter referred to as the 'site', comprised a single SW-NE oriented dog-legged trench, 80m long x 0.4m wide x 2m deep, comprising a total area of c.32m<sup>2</sup>. The NE end of the trench was located at NGR: 0417028,0149731 / SU 17028 49731, with the SW end at NGR: 0416983,0149631 / SU 16983 49631 (Figure 2).

**Figure 1**  
**Site Location**



**Figure 2**  
**Approximate area of badger fence outlined in red**



Image @2018digitalglobe

## 2.0 Archaeological Background

The following is largely taken from the approved WSI for the watching brief, as prepared in March 2018<sup>1</sup>.

### 2.1 Geology and Topography

There are no superficial deposits recorded within the site. Bedrock within the site is recorded as being the Seaford Chalk Formation formed during the Cretaceous Period<sup>2</sup>. Beyond the airfield, the site is surrounded by farmland, with agricultural fields to the west and open upland pasture in all other directions. The relief slopes to the north.

The southern end of the site was located at 131.96m aOD, the centre at 130.58m aOD, and the north at 129m aOD.

### 2.2 Prehistoric and Roman

Salisbury Plain is internationally renowned for its concentration of prehistoric monuments. Examples within proximity to the site include Durrington Walls, c.6km to the south, and Stonehenge c.9km to the south-west. Both are part of the 'Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites' World Heritage Site, the nearest point along the boundary of which is c.5.8km to the south of the site. A number of cursus monuments are also present within the wider landscape, as are a large number of prehistoric barrows and other mortuary monuments, including 'The Archer', and those at Normanton Down and Lake Down. Figheldean Down Prehistoric Landscape, a Scheduled monument, is located 1km to the east of the site.

The Wiltshire Historic Environment Record (HER) records three prehistoric assets within 500m of the site. These comprise two ring ditches, of probable Bronze Age date, 290m north-east of the site (Figure 3, **H13836** and **H13831**), and an enclosure located c.500m to the south east (Figure 3, **H73398**); there is some potential for the latter to date to the Romano-British, as opposed to the prehistoric, period.

### 2.3 Medieval and Post-Medieval

The HER records medieval field systems (Figure 3, **H11589**) approximately 550m to the west of the site, and the Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) data, maintained by the HER, records the airbase within a probable medieval open field system. The HER also records three former post-medieval out-farms within 500m of the site, the nearest of which – 'Pearce's Barn' (Figure 3, **H70689**) – was located c.280m to the east.

### 2.4 Modern

Netheravon airfield was established in 1912-13. The site was originally in two parts, with the domestic and administrative buildings to the west and the airfield, sheds, fuel stores and other technical buildings to the east. All of the buildings dating to this period within the eastern part of the site have been removed, although some buildings within the former domestic and administrative area survive. The site is located within the eastern part of the base.

The eastern part of the site was redeveloped around 1952, with the addition of new hangars and a control tower. At this time the site was used to train navy officers for the newly formed Fleet Air Arm. At the start of the Second World War the site was used by various squadrons, but from December 1941 it became the base of the Parachute Exercise Squadron, used to prepare gliders and brief officers ahead of the Normandy landings.

<sup>1</sup> SLR 2018 *Netheravon Airfield; A Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

<sup>2</sup> British Geological Survey mapping at <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>

The Parachute Exercise Squadron remained at the site until 1950 when ground-based RAF units took over the site. The site was then transferred to the army in 1963 and redeveloped in 1966 for use by the Air Army Corps.

Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping records that, despite different phases of remodelling, the airbase maintained the same broad footprint, and no buildings or other features are recorded as ever having stood within the site itself. Available mapping of 19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> century date depicts the site in agricultural use.

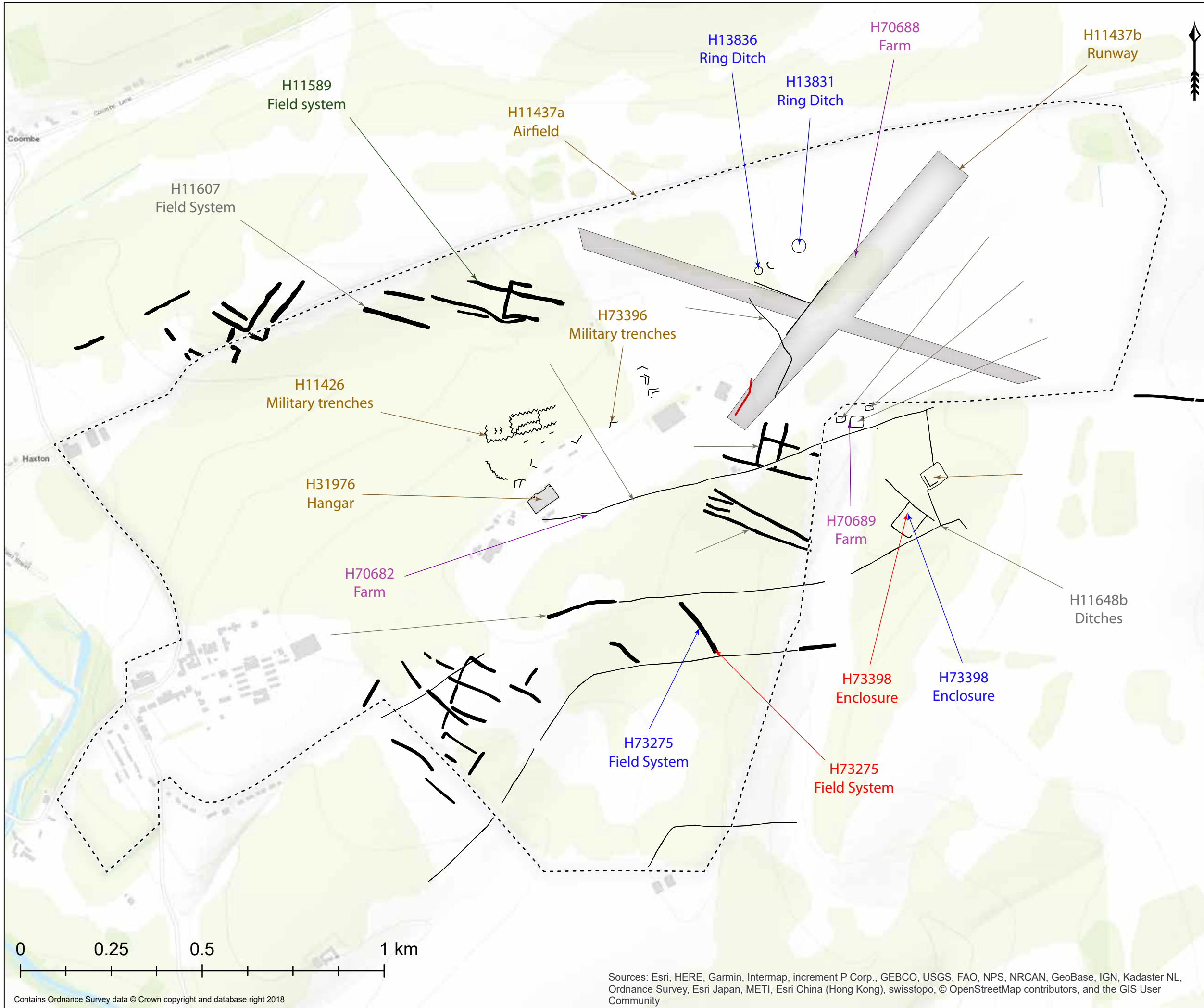
The HER also records the airfield (Figure 3, **H11437 a** and **b**) and an associated hangar (Figure 3, **H31976**), as well as trenches (Figure 3, **H77396** and **H11426**) and an enclosure (Figure 3, **H73399**), within 500m of the site.

## 2.5 Undated Features









Numerous undated assets are recorded within the wider site environs, including two field systems of possible medieval date (Figure 3, **H11607** and **H11591**), three undated enclosures of possible prehistoric date (Figure 3, **H11431 a-c**), and two ditches of likely historic (as opposed to prehistoric) origin (Figure 3, **H11648 a** and **b**, **H73410**).

## 2.6 Previous Archaeological Works

An archaeological watching brief carried out in 1999 approximately 415m west of the site recorded only modern disturbance.



### Legend

-  Site
-  Airfield boundary
-  Prehistoric asset
-  Romano-British asset
-  Medieval asset
-  Post-medieval asset
-  Modern asset
-  Undated asset



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**NETHERAVON AIRFIELD**  
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**  
**HER RECORDS WITHIN SITE ENVIRONS**

**3**

Scale 1:10,000 @ A3 Date JUNE 2018

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## 3.0 Aims and Objectives

### 3.1 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to:

- monitor the groundworks associated with the installation of badger-fencing to a depth of 2m; and
- identify, investigate, record, and report upon any archaeological remains that might be revealed during the course of those groundworks to an extent proportionate to their significance, as per national policy and guidance.

### 3.2 Objectives

The objectives of the watching brief were to:

- identify and record an outline plan of any archaeological features revealed;
- investigate and record an appropriate sample of any features present, to place on record, and sufficient to inform our understanding of their nature, sequence, date and significance; and
- compile an archive and report to be disseminated in an appropriate format.

## 4.0 Methodology

All fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with the approved WSI.<sup>3</sup>

The topsoil was removed from the site to reveal the natural substrate; this was done using a tracked excavator with a toothless bucket. The soil removal was monitored by a qualified and experienced archaeological supervisor, employed by SLR Consulting. Where no archaeological features were revealed, excavation of the trench was continued to a depth of 2m. Areas devoid of features were recorded as such.

### 4.1 Monitoring

All archaeological work was monitored by Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger, WCC Archaeological Advisor.

### 4.2 Archive Deposition

Wiltshire Museum was contacted regarding deposition of the archive. It was agreed that an OASIS record would be sufficient. The OASIS record has been completed under **slrconsu1-312182 (1)**.

### 4.3 Reporting

Approved versions of this report will be made available to:

- The Client;
- Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger; and
- SLR Consulting Limited.

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<sup>3</sup> SLR Consulting 2018 *Netheravon Airfield; Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

## 5.0 Results

The stratigraphy identified across the site comprised a single homogeneous layer of topsoil overlying the natural chalk substrate. The topsoil was 0.3m - 0.4m deep, and comprised mid-brown clayey silt (100). This overlay fragmented chalk (101), the compaction of which increased with depth (Figures 4 to 8).

Small plough furrows were observed within the central area of the trench, continuing for c.20m (Figure 6). These were regularly spaced at intervals of c.0.2m. They averaged 0.4m wide and 0.2m deep and were filled with topsoil. Their form and regularity suggest a recent (modern) origin.

No archaeological features were observed during the works.

**Figure 4**  
**Section of north of trench looking north west**



**Figure 5**  
**Northern end of trench looking SSW**



**Figure 6**  
**Section half way along trench looking NW showing plough scrapes**



**Figure 7**  
**Section of south of trench looking south east**



**Figure 8**  
**General working area following excavation, looking north**



## 6.0 Conclusion

The watching brief was successful in establishing the nature and depth of the stratigraphy across the site, this being mid-brown clayey silt topsoil overlying a fragmented chalk substrate.

Evidence for modern ploughing was identified, but no archaeological remains were otherwise observed.

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