

**PIXFORD FRUIT FARM,  
ASH PRIORS,  
TAUNTON DEAN,  
SOMERSET**

**Archaeological  
Evaluation**

Client: SUNFARMING UK

AB Heritage Project No:10600

Date:26/08/2015

## Pixford Fruit Farm, Ash Priors, Taunton Dean, Somerset Archaeological Evaluation

**Client** SUNfarming UK  
**Project Number** 10600  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

A total of ten archaeological evaluation trenches were excavated across the proposed development site, as part of a planning proposal for a solar farm.

A geophysical survey of the site had previously been undertaken and several of the trenches were targeted on potential features. Only a single undated ditch was recorded, however a buried soil horizon containing Roman pottery sherds was encountered at the east of the site.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Project Background**

- 1.1.1 AB Heritage was commissioned by SUNfarming UK to undertake a programme of archaeological evaluation at Pixford Fruit Farm, Ash Priors, Taunton Dean, Somerset in advance of a proposed solar farm development. Rubicon Heritage Services Ltd was appointed to carry out the fieldwork as AB Heritage's elected subcontractor.
- 1.1.2 Fieldwork was undertaken between the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, 2015.
- 1.1.3 The archaeological investigations were carried out prior to an application for planning permission.
- 1.1.4 AB Heritage undertook a Desk Based Assessment in April 2015 (AB Heritage, 2015). A geophysical survey of the site was also undertaken by AB Heritage in May 2015.
- 1.1.5 The archaeological evaluation was carried out in accordance with a WSI submitted to and approved by Steve Membury the Senior Historic Environment Officer for Somerset County Council in advance of the work, which outlined a methodology for the fieldwork and recording.
- 1.1.6 The work was carried out in compliance with best practice as defined by ClfA (2014), English Heritage (2006) and Somerset County Council (2011).

### **1.2 Site Location & Description**

- 1.2.1 The site covers one field with a total area of c. 8.2 hectares, located at ST 15107 30165 (Figure 1). The site is situated c. 400m to the north of the village of Ash Priors and is bounded on the west side by a narrow road. The site is bounded by agricultural fields to the east, north and south.
- 1.2.2 A footpath runs approximately north-south along the eastern boundary of the site. A pond is situated towards the southern boundary of the site. A small farmyard is located immediately adjacent to the south-east corner of the site.

### **1.3 Geology & Topography**

- 1.3.1 The topography of the site slopes down from the west towards the east. The western end of the site is located c. 105m above OD and the eastern end of the site is situated c. 97m above OD.
- 1.3.2 The underlying solid geology within the site is sandstone of the Otter Sandstone Formation. This was laid down 229–246 million years ago in an environment previously dominated by rivers. (<http://maps.bgs.ac.uk>).

### **1.4 Proposed Development**

- 1.4.1 The proposed development consists of the installation of a 7 MW solar farm. This will include the insertion of solar panels, associated inverter housing sub stations, transformers, access roadways from the south-western corner to the inverter housing sub stations and a perimeter

fence. The solar panels will avoid the area immediately surrounding the existing pond towards the southern boundary of the proposed development site.

## **2. AIMS & METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Aims of Works**

2.1.1 The aims of the archaeological evaluation proposed in the WSI were to:

- Determine the extent, condition, nature, character, date and significance of any archaeological remains encountered.
- Establish the nature of the activity on the site and accurately sequence the different phases.
- Identify any artefacts relating to the occupation or use of the site.
- Provide further information on the archaeology of the site from any archaeological remains encountered.

2.1.2 These results will be used to inform any potential requirement for further archaeological mitigation works.

### **2.2 Methodology of Works**

2.2.1 All fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with current best practice and the ClfA's standards and guidance for archaeological evaluation (ClfA 2014).

2.2.2 A toothless ditching bucket was used throughout the evaluation process.

2.2.3 Where archaeology was encountered the mechanical excavation was halted until the deposits had been investigated and fully recorded.

2.2.4 All information identified in the course of the site works was recorded stratigraphically, with sufficient pictorial record created to identify and illustrate individual features.

2.2.5 The recording included where appropriate:

- The recording of individual contexts on pro-formas
- Overall excavation plans at 1:50 scale; planning and section drawing of single contexts and features (usually at 1:20 scale for plans and 1:10 scale for inhumations and sections)
- Photographs; and other drawn and written records

2.2.6 Site photography was by high resolution (7 megapixel or greater) colour DSLR photography. Photography includes general site shots, shots of each trench, and shots of individual features and groups of features. All photographs are recorded on a photographic register detailing as a minimum the subject, feature number, location and direction of each shot.

#### *Reporting and Archiving*

2.2.7 The preparation of the report follows the guidelines published by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. Details of style and format was determined by AB Heritage and Rubicon Heritage Services UK Ltd.

- 2.2.8 The results of the archaeological work will form the basis of a full archive to professional standards, in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage, 2013), and compiled in line with ADS digital records.
- 2.2.9 The deposition of a properly ordered and indexed project archive in an appropriate repository is considered an essential and integral element of all archaeological projects by the ClfA in that organisation's code of conduct (ClfA, 2014). For this project archival material will be deposited with the Museum of Somerset. A copy of the final report will be deposited with the Somerset Historic Environment Record.

### **3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE BASELINE**

#### **3.1 Historic Environment Record Data**

- 3.1.1 There are 32 sites listed in the Somerset Historic Environment Record (HER) in the vicinity (1km) of the proposed development.
- 3.1.2 The earliest human activity in the immediate area is represented by an isolated scatter of prehistoric flint flakes, discovered 570m to the south of the site.
- 3.1.3 There are no heritage features of Roman date located within the proposed development site and there are no heritage features of Roman date located within the 1km study area.
- 3.1.4 Medieval occupation has been identified within the 1km study area in the form of an area of shrunken medieval settlement at Combe Florey, located c. 750m to the north of the proposed development site. As early as the 9<sup>th</sup> Century AD, the area of Ash Prior was part of the manor of Bishops Lydeard (Collinson, 1791). The place name elements contained within the name Ash Priors include the Old English word 'aesc' meaning 'at the ash tree' and 'prior' meaning 'held by the prior'.
- 3.1.5 Post-Medieval agricultural activity has been identified in the study area in the form of a possible water meadow, located east of Pixford Farm, c.700m to the north-east of the proposed development site. A corn mill was located at Combe Florey c. 900m to the north of the proposed development site.
- 3.1.6 There are no heritage features of Modern date recorded on the Somerset HER within the bounds of the proposed development site, however there are 10 heritage features of this period located within the study area that relate mostly to industry, infrastructure and enclosure within the region.

#### **3.2 Previous Archaeological Works in the Study Area**

- 3.2.1 A number of previous archaeological works have been undertaken within the 1km study area. These are mostly watching briefs that have focused within the area immediately surrounding the village of Ash Priors, c. 500m to the south of the proposed development site.
- 3.2.2 A watching brief carried out c. 480m to the south of the proposed development site identified a buried soil containing 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> Century pottery beneath a 19<sup>th</sup> Century farmyard surface.
- 3.2.3 A watching brief undertaken c. 570m to the south of the proposed development site also produced evidence of medieval occupation in the form of a timber structure. This was associated with a colluvium deposit that produced further pottery dating to the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> Century and some flint flakes.
- 3.2.4 An additional watching brief carried out c. 580m to the south of the proposed development site identified the site of a possible bell foundry.

#### **3.3 Historic Map Sources**

- 3.3.1 The earliest detailed plan that depicts the proposed development site is dated c. 1826. The plan shows the proposed development site as made up of 2 square fields and part of an oval

plantation to the south of a former Turnpike road that is located within the southern part of the proposed development site. A footpath is shown running along the eastern boundary of the proposed development site.

- 3.3.2 The fields are called Samson's Close and Ridgway. The name Samson is a personal name and probably relates to landowner. The term Ridgway is suggestive of the location of a roadway running along the ridge located along the eastern side of the field, also suggestive that this roadway may be of some antiquity. It is likely that the present footpath in this location was the original routeway between the villages of Combe Florey and Ash Priors.
- 3.3.3 The proposed development site was mostly located within the parish of Bishops Lydeard in 1837-8. The southern part of the proposed development site, south of the pond, was located within the parish of Ash Priors. It is shown as a large rectangular field with a narrow, oval shaped plot located along the southern boundary. The field boundary shown separating the field into two on the previous map is no longer extant.
- 3.3.4 The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> editions of the 25" OS map show the proposed development site as a large rectangular field with a narrow, oval shaped wooded plot along the southern boundary called Highland Covert. A pond is shown on the northern side of the wooded plot. The footpath is shown running along the eastern boundary of the proposed development site.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Archaeological Evaluation

- 4.1.1 The archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Pixford Fruit Farm by AB Heritage and Rubicon Heritage Services Ltd between the 21<sup>st</sup> July and the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2015. Fieldwork was undertaken by Enda O’Flaherty and Dave Gilbert of Rubicon Heritage, both of whom are full Members of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA). Both AB Heritage and Rubicon Heritage Services Ltd are Registered Organisations within CIfA.
- 4.1.2 A total of ten archaeological evaluation trenches were excavated across the site, in accordance with the proposed scheme of evaluation, set out in the approved WSI (Figure 2). Trench 11 located in the northwest corner of the field was not excavated due to its placement under overhead power cables.
- 4.1.3 All trenches were surveyed in position by GPS and excavated by a 13 tonne tracked 360° excavator with a toothless bucket.
- 4.1.4 The lowest deposit encountered was a natural geological layer related to the Otter Sandstone Formation (008). Across the south and west of the site was dark red-brown clay-sand, mottled in places with patches of yellow sand and small quantities of gravel and pebbles. Towards the north of the site the quantity of rock inclusions increase and outcrops of bedrock were observed close to the present ground surface along with noticeable bands of yellow-grey and orange-brown sand and gravel.
- 4.1.5 A ditch [004] aligned northwest to southeast was recorded in Trench 1. This was 0.45m wide, 0.26m deep with a roughly U-shaped profile and was filled with a red-brown silt-clay (003). This ditch matched one of the linear features noted on the geophysical survey.
- 4.1.6 Trenches 1, 3 and 8 located to the south and west of the site displayed a similar layer lying above the natural. This was a 0.1-0.15m thick deposit of dark red-brown sand-clay with very sparse charcoal flecks; recorded as contexts (005), (006) and (007) in trenches 1, 3 and 8 respectively. A small quantity of Roman pottery sherds was recovered from the base of this layer in Trench 1; where it also sealed the fill of ditch [004].
- 4.1.7 Above this in trenches 1, 3 and 8 or sitting directly above the natural in the other trenches was a layer of pale red-brown sand-clay (002) lower ploughsoil. The thickness varied between 0.10m and 0.30m, but it was generally thick towards the south and west of the site. An electrical cable was seen cut into this layer in trenches 1 and 2 running roughly northwest to southeast, the farmer mentioned that this was close to a water pipe running in the same direction. A section of the trench was left high in these areas to avoid hitting the services.
- 4.1.8 The uppermost layer seen across the entire site was a mid red-brown sandy loam topsoil (001) that varied from 0.15m to 0.35m thick and notably devoid of pottery sherds.
- 4.1.9 The geophysical anomalies that were sampled by trenches 4 and 5 appear to have been caused by the presence of natural rock outcrops in the area, creating natural seems of deeper soil sequences. While the long northwest to southeast linear that passes through both trenches is the field boundary as seen on the New Road Plan of 1826 and the First edition OS map of 1887. The anomalies sampled by trenches 6, 7 and 10 were seen to be the result of



banding in the natural geological layers. The anomaly sampled in trench 3 appeared to be associated with deep root disturbance and may be related to an earlier field boundary that predates the historic mapping in the area.

#### 4.1.10 Small finds.

##### **Roman Pottery** (*By D. Gilbert*)

Three sherds weighing a total of 17g were recovered from the interface of context (005) and the natural (008) within Trench 1. All had a hard, granular dark grey or black (2.5YR 3/0-4/0) fabric with abundant well-sorted translucent quartz and mica common to Black Burnished (BB1) ware (Williams 1977). Two were plain body sherds and the third an everted rim of a jar. The rim was heavily abraded while the two body sherds much less so.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Conclusion of fieldwork**

- 5.1.1 A buried soil horizon to the south and west of the site appears to be Roman in date, perhaps a relict plough soil of the 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> century. This sealed an otherwise undated ditch that must be 2<sup>nd</sup> century or earlier. The ditch itself may represent a change in field lay out during the early Roman period. No concentrations of artefacts were noted during the evaluation that would point to a farmstead or dwelling being close by.

### **5.2 Outline Recommendations**

- 5.2.1 Based on the results of the evaluation further archaeological works at the site may be required by Steve Membury the Senior Historic Environment Officer for Somerset County Council who was unable to attend a site visit during the excavation.

## 6. REFERENCES

AB Heritage. 2015 *'Pixford Fruit Farm, Ash Priors, Taunton Dean, Somerset: Archaeological Desk Based Assessment'*, AB Heritage Limited

CIfA 2014 *'Code of Conduct'*, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

CIfA 2014 *'Standards and guidance for Archaeological Evaluation'*, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

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English Heritage 1991 *'Management of Archaeological Projects'* (2nd edition), Portsmouth, English Heritage

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Holbrook, N. and Bidwell, P. T., 1991 *'Roman finds from Exeter, Exeter Archaeological Reports'*, 4, Exeter City Council and the University of Exeter, Exeter

Richards, J.C., Richards, J., and Robinson, D., (Eds), 2000, *'Digital Archives from Excavation and Fieldwork: Guide to Good Practice (Second Edition)'*, Archaeology Data Service

Somerset County Council 2011 *'Heritage Service Archaeological Handbook'*, Taunton, Somerset County Council

Williams, D. F., 1977 *'The Romano-British black-burnished industry: an essay on characterization by heavy-mineral analysis'* in Pottery and early commerce. Characterization and trade in Roman and later ceramics, ed. D. P. S. Peacock, Academic Press, London, pp. 163-220

## **Appendices**

## Appendix 1      Archive Statement

The site archive is comprised of the following materials:

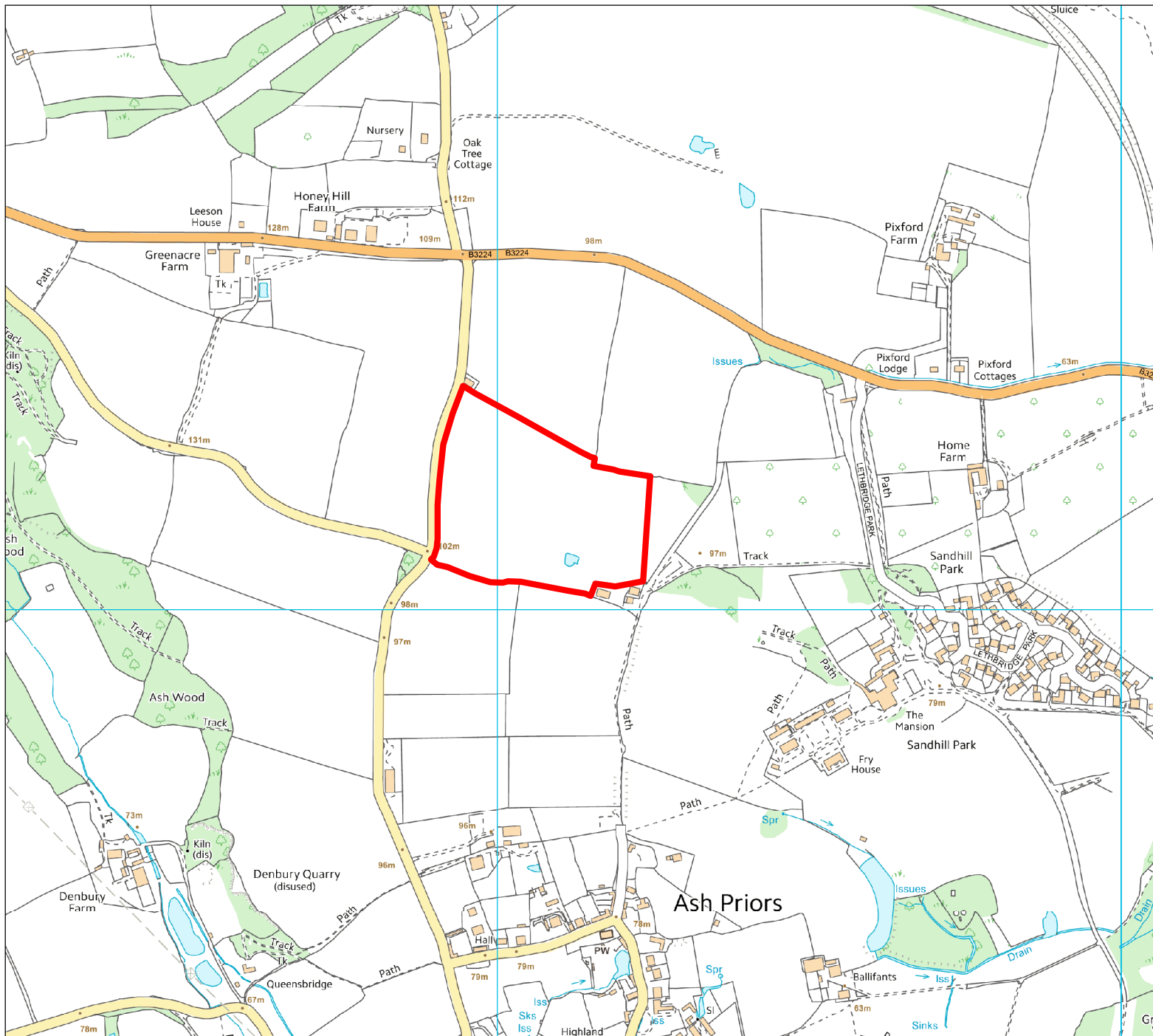
Item	Quantity
Photographs	22
Registers (Context, finds, drawing, sample, photo)	1
Annotated maps	2

The archive material is contained within one folder.

The archive is currently stored in the offices of Rubicon Heritage Services Ltd, Malthouse Avenue, Cardiff Gate Business Park, Cardiff, CF23 8RU, Wales

## Appendix 2 Photo Register

Photo No.	Direction Facing	Description
PFSE15-1	N	Pre-excavation ditch [004]
PFSE15-2	N	Post excavation ditch [004]
PFSE15-3	E	Overview of Trench 1
PFSE15-4	NW	Overview of Trench 3
PFSE15-5	S	Overview of Trench 2
PFSE15-6	S	Section profile Trench 2
PFSE15-7	W	Section profile Trench 3
PFSE15-8	S	Section profile Trench 4
PFSE15-9	W	Overview of Trench 4
PFSE15-10	NW	Overview of Trench 5
PFSE15-11	S	Section profile Trench 5
PFSE15-12	NW	Overview of Trench 10
PFSE15-13	S	Section profile Trench 10
PFSE15-14	NW	Overview of Trench 6
PFSE15-15	S	Section profile Trench 6
PFSE15-16	NE	Overview of Trench 7
PFSE15-17	E	Section profile Trench 7
PFSE15-18	E	Overview of Trench 9
PFSE15-19	N	Section profile Trench 9
PFSE15-20	N	Overview of Trench 8
PFSE15-21	E	Section profile Trench 8
PFSE15-22	N	Panoramic across field



**Legend**  
 Site Boundary

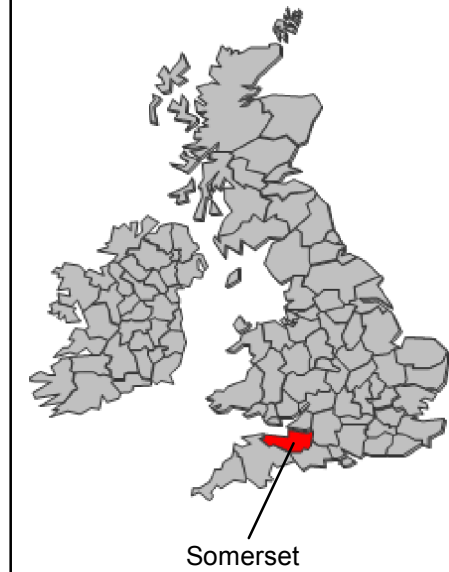


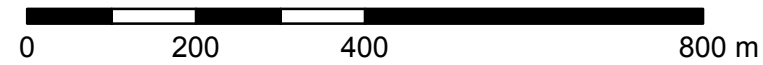
Figure 1: Site Location

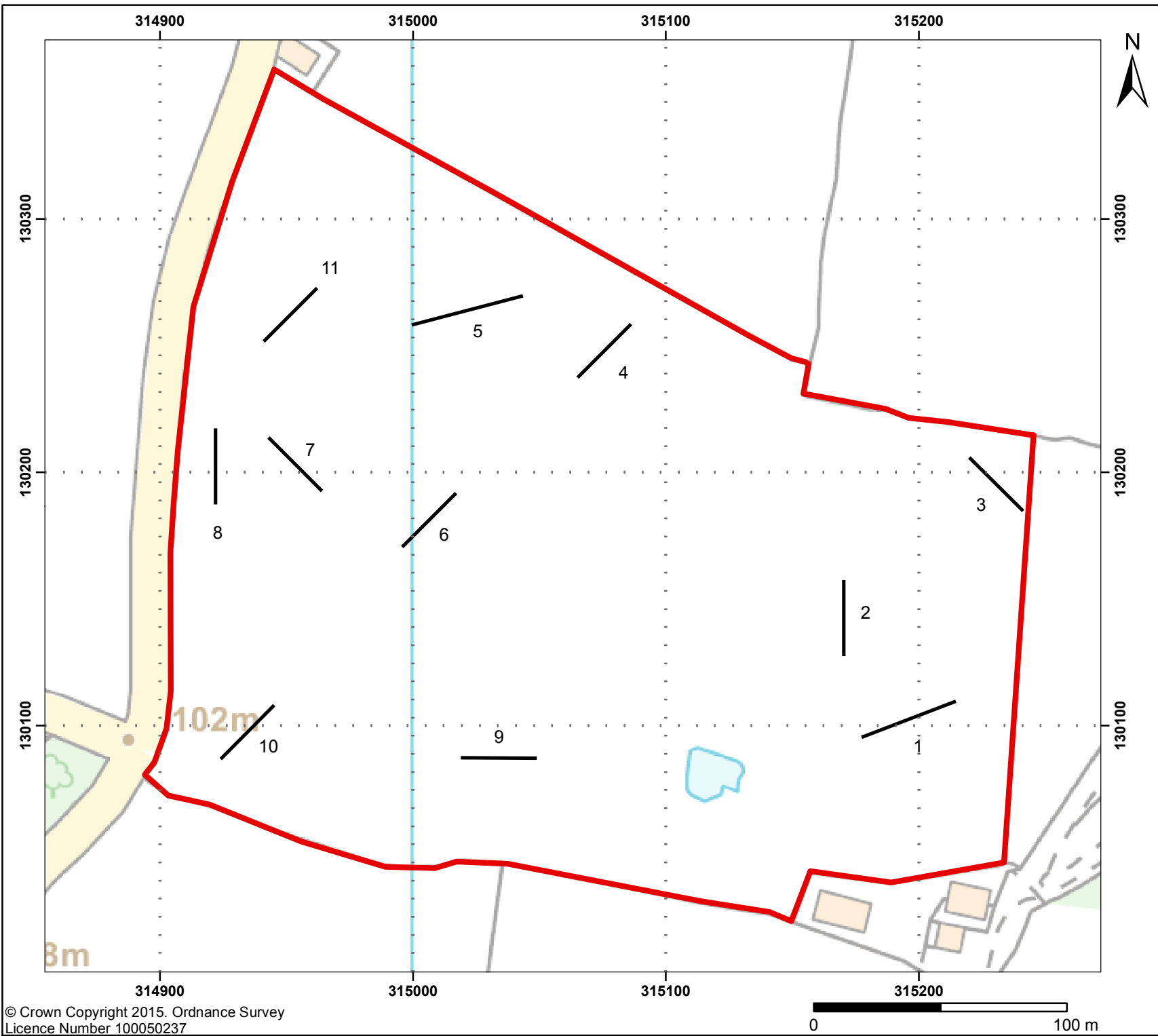
Project: Pixford Farm

Date: 23/04/15    Job Number: 10600


Drawn by: ZE    Approved by: HS

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Legend

-  Trenches
-  Site Boundary

Trench 11 not excavated due to overhead power cables

Figure 2: Trench Location Plan

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315205.669, 130106.825                      315204.873, 130106.694

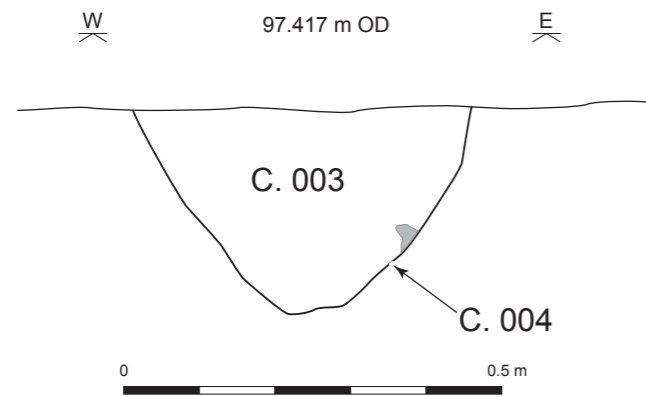


Figure 3 (b) - Southwest-facing section of ditch [004]

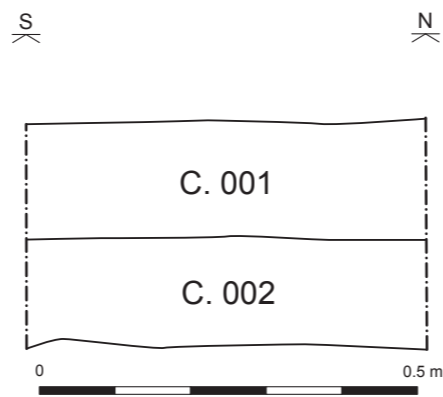


Figure 3 (c) - Trench 1 - Section

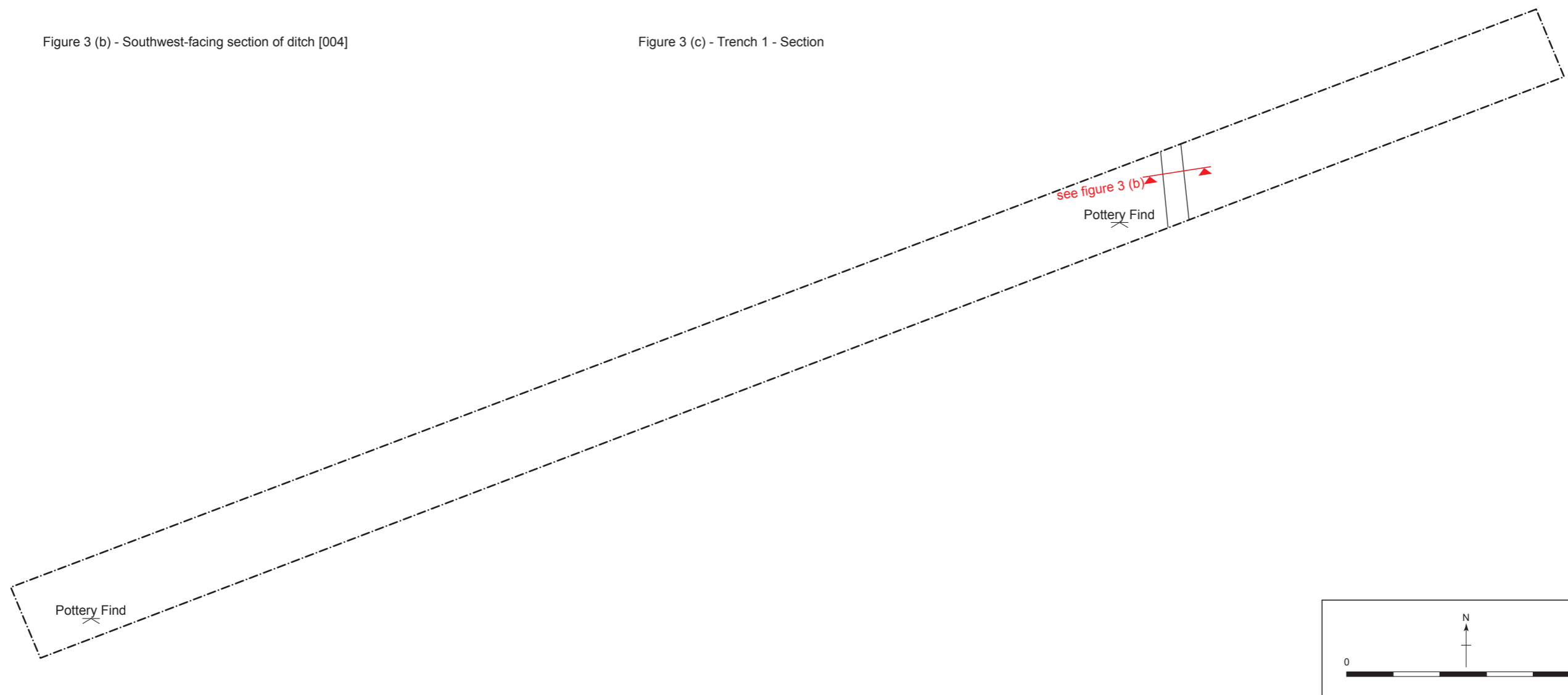


Figure 3 - Pixford Fruit Farm, Somerset : Trench 1 plan and section of ditch [004].





Plate 1 - Trench 1, ditch (004), facing north



Plate 2 - Trench 3 post-excitation, facing northwest





Plate 3 - Trench 4 post-excavation, facing west



Plate4 - Trench 5 post-excavation, facing northwest



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