

Black Barn Farm, Chalbury, Dorset
A Preliminary Archaeological Assessment

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1. Introduction

A preliminary archaeological assessment of c.115 hectares of primarily agricultural land at Black Barn Farm, Chalbury, Dorset (centred on SU 010 067) was undertaken in advance of proposals for the creation of a golf course. The assessment was commissioned by Belddir Estates Ltd and carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit between 19 – 23 November 1990.

The preliminary assessment comprised non-intensive field walking of all arable land (c.102 hectares), inspection of pasture (c.5 hectares) and woodland (c.8 hectares), rapid recording of hedgerows and boundaries, and a brief search of documentary sources.

2. Archaeological and historical background (Figure 1)

Prior to the present assessment no archaeological sites had been recorded within the proposed development area. However, the locality is one of considerable archaeological importance, containing numerous sites, particularly of the prehistoric period. Many Bronze Age barrows and barrow cemeteries are to be found in the vicinity, while the Knowlton henges, Gussage All Saints Iron Age settlement and the Dorset cursus all lie only a few kilometres to the north, and Badbury Rings hillfort only a few kilometres to the south-west.

The bulk of the proposed development area is contained within the parish of Chalbury, while a small strip to the south falls within Hinton Martell. Prehistoric remains in Chalbury parish are represented by a single barrow of probable Bronze Age date, appearing as a ring-ditch on aerial photographs and situated just to the west of the development area (RCHM 1975, 4). The original medieval settlement was at Didlington, to the north-west of the development area, now virtually

deserted and surviving only as earthworks (RCHM 1975, 2). The village of Chalbury, on the eastern edge of the development area was a secondary settlement, although of probable pre-conquest origin (*ibid*). The small size of the church, which dates from the 13th century, suggests that the settlement was never very large. It is reported that a cinerary urn, thought at the time to be of Anglo-Saxon origin, was discovered in the Rectory garden in 1878 (Brewster n.d.).

In Hinton Martell parish a group of at least ten Bronze Age barrows has been recorded at High Lea Farm (RCHM 1975, 31), just to the south-west of the development area. Like Chalbury, the village of Hinton Martell is of medieval origin, the open fields being enclosed in 1789 (RCHM 1975, 30).

3. Topography and soils

A ridge of high ground, rising to c.80m AOD, extends south-westwards from the village of Chalbury into the centre of the proposed development area. To the west of the wooded ridge the land slopes gently down to the Wimborne Road and the River Allen. The south-eastern flank of the ridge is relatively steeply sloping, with a stream forming the eastern boundary of the development area.

To the west of the development area the topsoil lies on a yellow clay above the chalk-with-flints subsoil. The wooded eminence of Chalbury Hill is on the Reading Beds, while to the east the land falls away on London Clay.

4. Survey Results

Fieldwalking

The arable fields were divided into survey areas of between one and four hectares (Figures 2 and 3), each survey area being subdivided on a

10m grid. The first field (survey areas 1–4) was walked at 10m intervals, subsequent fields at 20m intervals. The approximate position of all artefacts was noted and a sample of diagnostic types was retained for study.

The Finds

i) Flint (Figure 2)

Natural flint was abundant in all the fields; only flints exhibiting signs of working were recorded. Although the fieldwalking method was non-intensive, it is unlikely that any significant concentrations of worked flints will have been missed. A thin scatter of worked flints, which may be treated as 'background noise', was observed across much of the site and four possible clusters of potential significance were identified. The bulk of the flints recovered were re-touched flakes; tools included two scrapers of probable neolithic date, a core used for the production of mesolithic bladelets, a large multi-faceted core and a blade-shaft fragment.

ii) Pottery (Figure 3)

No prehistoric pottery and only three sherds of Romano-British pottery were recorded.

There was a general scatter of medieval pottery over all the fields, of a density commensurate with manuring operations. Most of the pottery appears to be of the 12th to 16th centuries, with some possible late Saxon sherds. Four clusters deserve discussion. Cluster A comprised a dense scatter of pottery from the 11th/12th centuries through to the 14th century. A selection of types was recovered, mainly rims. It seems likely that this area was formerly part of the medieval settlement of Chalbury but was deserted in the 14th or 15th century. Cluster B comprised a discrete scatter of pottery, of a similar date range to Cluster A, in the parish of Hinton Martell, and may mark the remains of a deserted medieval farm or dwelling. Cluster C was a more dispersed scatter of pottery than Clusters A and B and may simply represent manuring. However, on the Hinton Martell Tithe Map of 1840 this field is called 'Town Edgarstone', and although obviously a part of Hinton Martell's north field, it may at an earlier date have contained a small

settlement. Cluster D, to the west of the present house and farm, comprised a fairly heavy scatter of medieval pottery, possibly denoting earlier settlement on the site.

A very low level of post-medieval pottery, primarily 18th to 20th centuries, was noted on all fields.

iii) Tile

Orange roof tile was scattered liberally over all fields, with the heaviest concentrations nearest to the present farmhouse. It is probable that this tile derives from manuring after the demolition of old farm buildings. The tiles are mostly well-fired and are identical in type to tiles noted on Chalbury Church. The clay in the north-eastern part of the development area contains a similar iron flecking to that noted in many of the tiles, and it is possible that some of the quarrying within the present wood was connected with tile production.

Hedges (Figure 4)

As part of the assessment, in order to provide information on former land use, a brief inspection was made of the hedge boundaries of each field and the species present noted.

Black Barn Farm's hedges are notable for the large number of woodland species, eg. spindle, sloe, dogwood, hazel, field maple, wayfaring tree, privet and holly. Also present are hawthorn, elder, dogrose, old-man's beard, ash and willow by the stream. The wood is bounded by large oaks and coppiced ash, maple and hazel.

On Figure 4 the distribution of woodland species and hawthorn in the hedge boundaries is plotted. Hawthorn is the agricultural hedging plant par excellence and in most instances will have been deliberately planted. In places the hawthorn has a vigorous undergrowth of spindle, usually considered a relict woodland scrub. However, in order to screen out any shrubs which may have self-seeded from the wood, the spindle, though plentiful, has been omitted from Figure 4. Also omitted are elder, noted for its easy propagation in hedges, sloe, rose and other climbers such as brambles. Even with these

omissions the woodland character of the hedges is pronounced. This may suggest that much of the agricultural land at Black Barn Farm was carved out of woodland in the medieval period.

Woodland and Pasture (Figure 4)

The wood is contained within a small wood bank on which coppiced hazel stands. The wood bank appears to respect at least one quarry pit, of which there are many within the wood. There are many coppice stools in the wood, mainly ash, hazel and maple. Some of the coppice stools are large enough to date from the medieval period. Other wood banks, still with boundary oaks or coppices, are evident north, north-east and south of the present wood, where the land has been assarted.

The pasture to the north of the wood and west of Chalbury is subdivided by earthen banks. These banks may represent former woodbanks, possibly defining old wood compartments.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The preliminary assessment has identified several zones of potential archaeological significance within the proposed development area. The most important of these comprises Survey Areas 36-39 (Figures 2 and 3) immediately to the west of Chalbury village. A dense scatter of medieval pottery (Figure 3, Cluster A) suggests the possible presence of a deserted part of the medieval village of Chalbury. A possible concentration of prehistoric worked flint was also noted covering a similar area (Figure 2). Systematic, intensive fieldwalking in combination with sample geophysical survey is

recommended in order to define more fully the nature and potential importance of any archaeological remains here.

Concentrations of worked flint and medieval pottery were also noted in Survey Areas 1-4 (Figures 2 and 3) in the field to the north-west of Black Barn Farm. Intensive, systematic fieldwalking is likewise recommended in this field.

The necessity for further investigation of other areas of possible archaeological interest, Survey Areas 13-16 and 40-42 (Figures 2 and 3), would depend on the precise nature of the development proposals and the degree of ground disturbance entailed.

The wood and areas to the north, east and south, contain woodbanks and other earthworks of historical interest. If the development proposals entail the obliteration of any of these features, prior measured survey and recording would be a minimum requirement.

6. Acknowledgements

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7. References

- Brewster, Rev. T. F., n.d.
Guide to Chalbury Church and Parish.
- RCHM, 1975
*Royal Commission on Historical Monuments
England, County of Dorset, Volume 5, East.*

Pottery Distribution

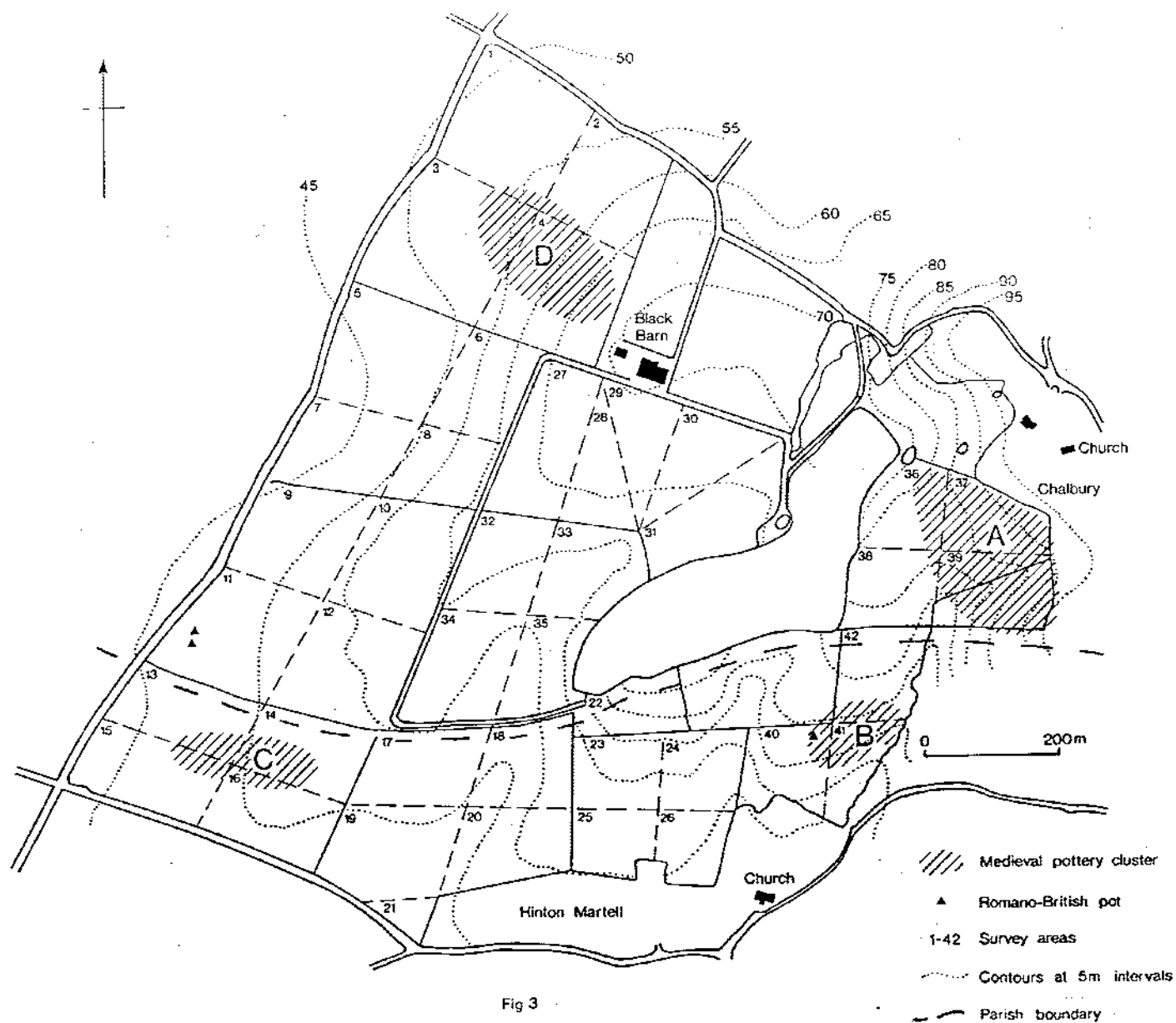


Fig 3

SITE LOCATION

Selected Archaeological Features

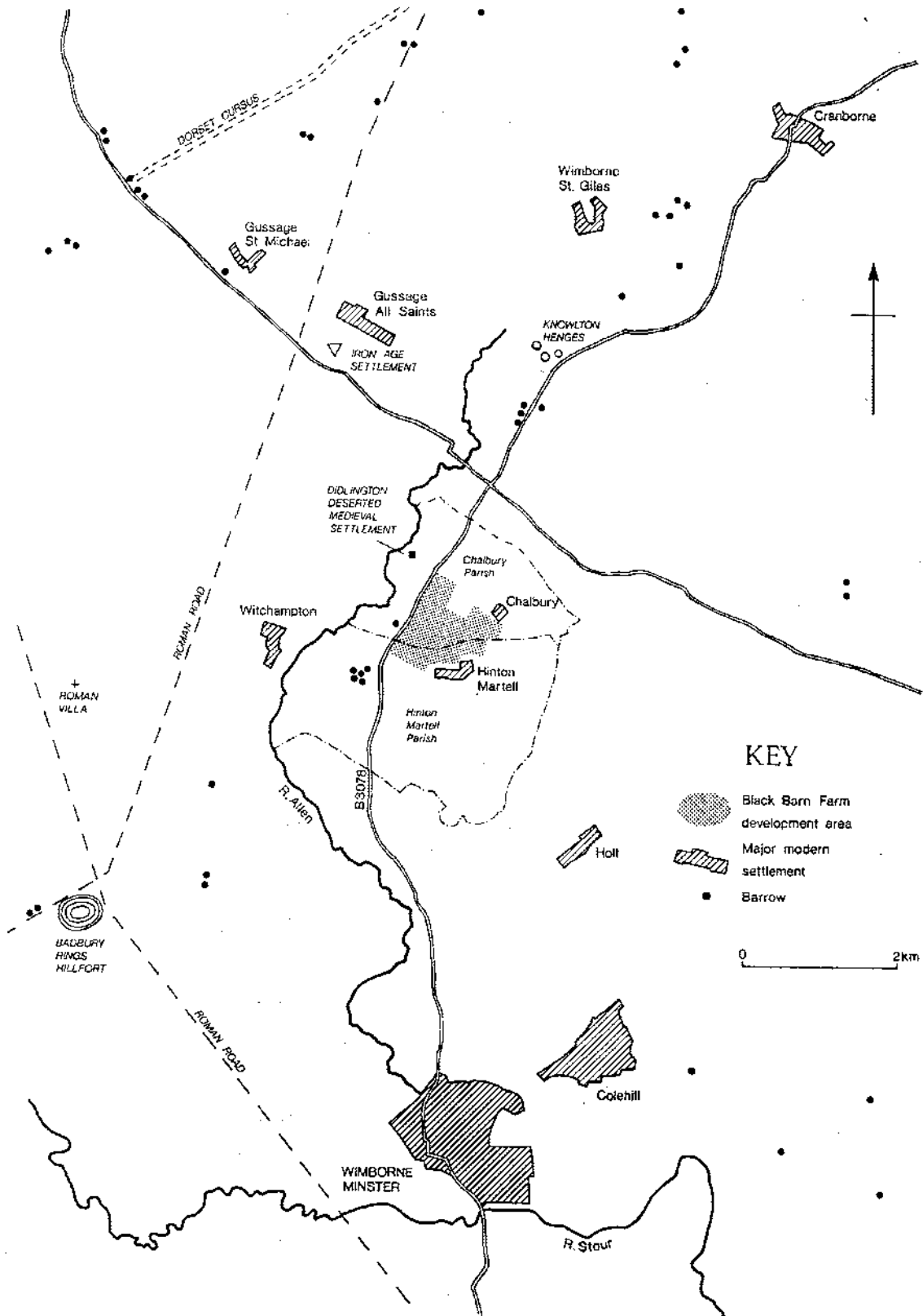


Fig 1