BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

INTERIM REPORT
on the
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEILLANCE
at
LEWELL FARM, WEST KNIGHTON, DORSET, 1990

B.U.F.A.U.

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Prepared for
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by
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Introduction

This document is an interim, end of season report on the archaeological surveillance undertaken at West Kighton Quarry for ARC Southern by Birmingham University Field Arcaheology Unit (BUFAU) during 1990.

The archaeological involvement on this site was a consequence of ARC Southern's planning application to quarry gravel from the area. The archaeological potential of the site had been demonstrated by a preliminary field walking exercise undertaken by BUFAU in 1989 (Woodward 1989). This current season's work follows a recommendation, made as a result of the field walking exercise, and was directed towards monitoring the topsoil stripping in order that any sub-surface features that had survived could be identified and recorded.

This report briefly summarises the results of the work in 1990 and outlines the work that remains to be completed in 1991. It also makes a provisional, interim assessment of the significance of the features and material recorded this year. The finds have been examined and are briefly reported upon by Dr. Ann Woodward.

The Area

The site is centred at SY 7360 8833. Three fields make up the area of the concession at Lewell Farm, which lies on the north side of West Knighton village. Two of the fields abutt the east side of Highgate Lane and all have been ploughed in recent times. The total area of these field is approximately 21ha but not all of the south western field (Field A) in the group was to be quarried (Figure).

The area of the concession to be worked is approximately 18ha. During 1990 approximately 10ha were stripped of topsoil and made available for archaeological examination. This represents 56% of the total projected area and leaves 8ha to be completed during the 1991 season.

A total of 14 man days were spent on the project during 1990. Eleven days were spent in the field and three in the office processing the records and finds.

Methodology

With the principal objective of identifying sub-surface archaeological features, the areas stripped of topsoil were scanned from the tops of the spoil lines and then walked in 3.0m strips. Where features were encountered they were surveyed and either sample excavated or completely excavated depending on their nature and apparent significance.

A subsidiary activity was the recovery of worked lithic material. This material was bagged and labelled according to the field designation and the windrow strip. This provides very generalised locational information. Given the nature of the stripped surface, and the consequent horizontal movement of material, more precise locational data was not considered appropriate.

The depth of the top-soil stripping was fairly consistent at between 200mm and 300mm.

Results of Surveillance

There were two features which were visible in the surface of the subsoil and both were recorded in Field B, the eastern field in the group.

The first feature, Unit 5, was located at the east end of Field B and comprised a linear strip of soil identified by a higher clay content than

the surrounding soils. It was 4-5m wide and comprised a shallow deposit of yellow/brown (6.5YR) clay with a low chroma value. It was distinguishable from the surrounding, similarly coloured silty clays, more by the visible textural and structural differences of the soil than by the colour. It appeared to contain a higher proportion of clay. The feature lay east-west across the middle of the field with a right-angle turn to the north at its east end, 30m from the eastern boundary of the field. Its east-west arm was visible for 80m before fading out completely at its western end. The north-south arm ran visibly to the northern boundary of the field. A strip 2m wide and 12m long at right-angles across the north-south arm of the feature in BI, 10m north of the turn, was cleaned back and examined. The clay formed a shallow deposit between 20mm and 40mm thick and lay on the surface of the surrounding gravelly silts. The coincidence of this feature directly under the post and wire division of the field, suggests that it may be a form of headland deposit and is consequently of fairly recent origin.

The second feature, Unit 1, was initially recorded as an irregular, sub-circular patch of reddish brown silty clay, 800mm in diameter. It lay 18m north of the southern boundary of Field B and 115m east of the western boundary. This feature was completely excavated and proved to be a shallow circular pit which appeared to have been used as a sunken hearth. The bottom of the feature was lined with closely-packed flint nodules, all of which displayed evidence of significant heating - being either burnt red, black or crazed grey to white. Flint flakes, charcoal and prehistoric pottery were recovered from the upper deposits within the pit. This pit (Unit 1) lay in the area from which the later Bronze Age concentration of flints was recovered.

The filling contained a group of freshly struck, unretouched flakes and a rough core, in association with 22 sherds of pottery. These sherds derived from at least six vessels and some were abraded. The fabrics all contained fragments of grog, and two plain rim sherds may have belonged to a Beaker domestic ware jar and small urn or accessory vessel, respectively. A date of deposition in the Early or Middle Bronze Age seems to be indicated.

A total of 7.14kg of worked flint was recovered during the examination of the surface of the sub-soil. In Field A 0.56kg were recovered, in Field B 6.43kg and in Field C 0.15kg.

The flint debitage recovered from the plough and sub-soils included at least 31 implements. The types represented were scrapers, borers, cores, one arrowhead, one fabricator, a chopping tool and one microlith. The microlith was the only piece of potential Mesolithic date. Late Neolithic forms included thumbnail scrapers, blade cores, blades, the fabricator and a petit tranchet derivative arrowhead. These implements were distributed widely across the areas so far stripped. A concentration of flint artefacts in the southern half of Field B included waste and implements of later Bronze Age character, including scrapers of ovate or denticulate form, and borers.

No prehistoric ceramic material was recoverd as a result of examining the surface of the subsoil and only a very few sherds of 19th-century pottery were recorded.

The second feature, Unit 1, is of considerable significance given the results of the 1989 field walking exercise, since it demonstrates the fact that prehistoric features have survived below the level of both the modern and medieval ploughing. It is also signficant in as far as it may shed more light on when this part of the Dorset Heathland was first settled. The identification of the charcoal wood species will provide environmental evidence for the area. Further examination of the worked flint will contribute to our general understanding of human activity on the heathland during the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age periods.

Work Outstanding

The 8ha of ground remaining to be stripped during 1991 will, on the basis of this seasons work, take 11 more days. The time required to prepare the final report will depend upon the nature of the subsequent records and

discoveries, but given the nature of this season's work it is unlikely to take more than 8 man days.

Work remains to be done in Fields B and C. Field B is clearly of some archaeological significance, where as well as the remaining areas to be stripped of top soil there is the sub-soil surface currently under the spoil heaps to be examined. Field C has hardly been touched yet and represents the bulk of a 1991 commitment.

Acknowledgements

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References

Woodward, A.B., 1989. Lewell Farm West Knight, Dorset. A preliminary archaeological evaluation. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. Birmingham, May 1989.

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