

# Watching Brief at COB West, MOD Boscombe Down, Salisbury, Wiltshire

30 September 2014

For

Boscombe Down Conservation Group

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October 2014

Bob Clarke



### Summary

A watching brief was carried out during the groundwork for the installation of a new traffic control system at Central Operating Base (COB) West, MoD Boscombe Down. It was unlikely that the work would reveal below ground archaeology as the immediate area was extensively damaged during the construction of the Hardened Aircraft Shelters and associated taxiways in this area. No archaeological features were noted.

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## **Introduction**

A watching brief was carried out during the groundwork for the installation of a new traffic control system at Central Operating Base (COB) West, MoD Boscombe Down. It was unlikely that the work would reveal below ground archaeology as the immediate area was extensively damaged during the construction of the Hardened Aircraft Shelters and associated taxiways in this area. It is, however, Boscombe Down Conservation's intention to monitor all ground works on site, irrespective of potential. No archaeological features were noted.

The watching brief was carried out 30 September 2014, by Bob Clarke.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks go to Dennis Hill for reporting the work to the archaeology team and Lee White of T.L. Contractors Ltd. for access to the site during the groundwork phase. Site plan derived from Ordnance Survey Landline digital data produced with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office ©Crown Copyright, QinetiQ plc., Farnborough, Hampshire. Licence number 100042019.

Report prepared by Bob Clarke [rclarke1@qinetiq.com](mailto:rclarke1@qinetiq.com)

Boscombe Conservation Archaeologist, Building 45, MoD Boscombe Down, Salisbury, SP4 0JF.

### Site Location

COB West is located in the north/west sector of the MoD airfield Boscombe Down. The current groundwork was located next to the transit road running through the facility.

### National Grid Reference

SU 17587 39990 (centrally)

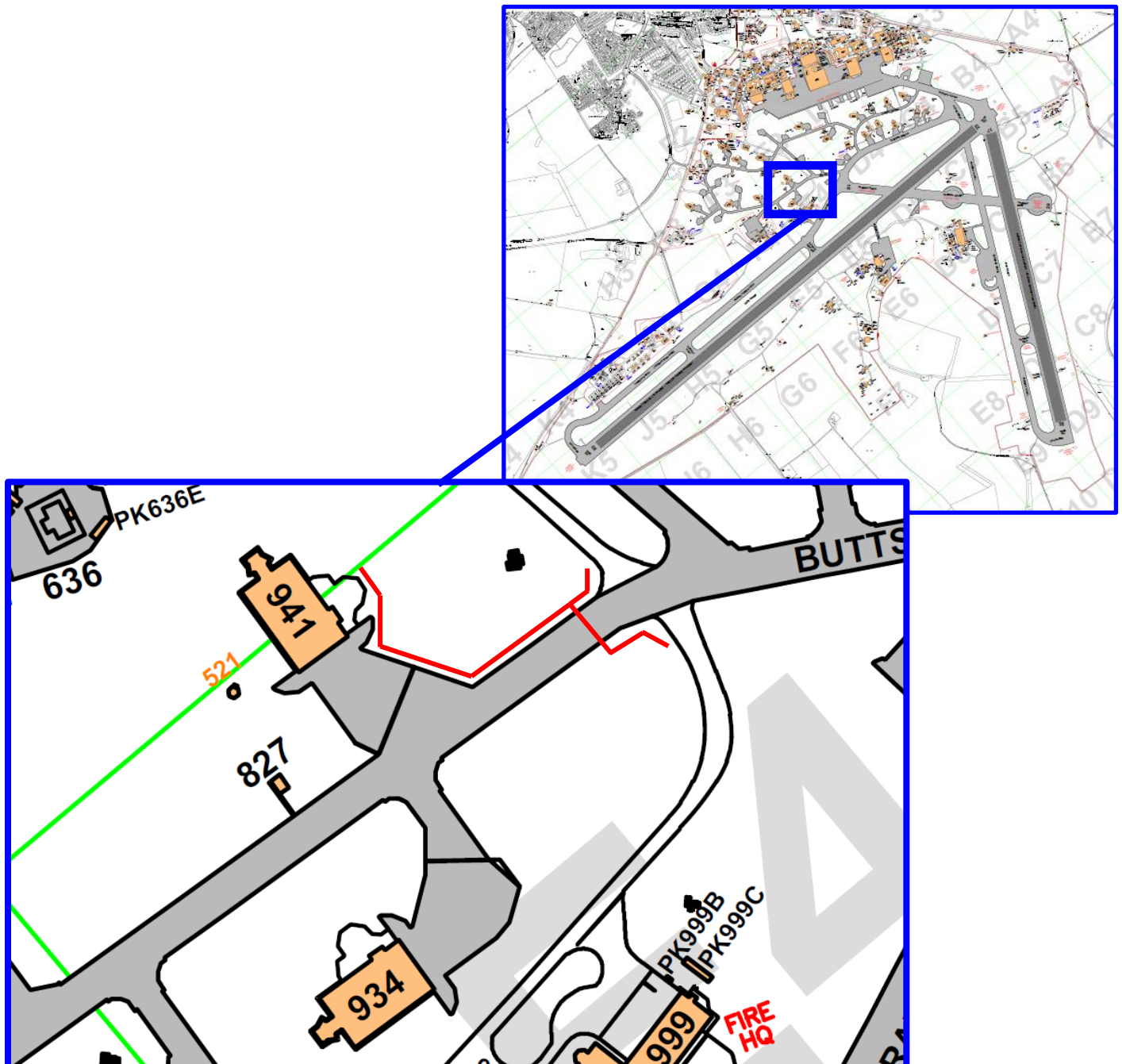


Figure 1. Site excavation indicated by red line. Produced with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office ©Crown Copyright, QinetiQ plc. Farnborough, Hampshire. Licence number 100042019.

## Geology

The Underlying geology of the area comprises Upper Chalk of the Cretaceous Period (Geological Survey of Great Britain, 1:50,000 Solid and Drift Series, Sheet number 298).

## Environs

The proposed development is in an area of low archaeological potential. The area that houses the COB West complex was substantially landscaped during 1978-1981 as part of the NATO upgrade of aircraft facilities on Boscombe Down. A number of archaeological features appear on the Wiltshire HER – most prominently a surviving Disc Barrow – a list of those sites is noted below.

Site Type	Protection	NGR	HER Ref.	Reference
Disc Barrow	Scheduled Monument 28938	SU 1745 3998	MWI10513 - SU13NE601	Kirby, C. + Clarke, B., 1998. Annual Archaeological Report for Defence Evaluation and Research Agency Establishment, Boscombe Down, Publisher: Boscombe Down Conservation Group, Wiltshire Council Catalogue Number: 1998.027
Pill Box	Scheduled Monument, 28938	SU 1749 3998	MWI31546 - SU13NE	Department of the Environment, Department of the Environment Scheduled Monuments List, 13 November 1996
Linear Feature		SU 1777 4007	MWI12032 - SU14SE359	Wessex Archaeology, 2008. Boscombe Down Airfield New Accommodation Block (OP Tamarin), Amesbury, Publisher: Wessex Archaeology, Unit Report number: 66982.02, Wiltshire Council Catalogue Number: 2008.097
Site of levelled Barrow		SU 1736 3990	MWI10514 - SU13NE602	Valentin, J., Robinson, S. + Laidlaw, M., 2001. Boscombe Down FSTA, Publisher: AC Archaeology, Unit Report number: 1001/2/0, Wiltshire Council Catalogue Number: 2001.088
Undated Square Enclosure		SU 1720 3992	MWI10531 - SU13NE619	Fieldwork – Ordnance Survey, 1972. Ordnance Survey Fieldwork 1972
Undated Parallel Ditches		SU 1728 4020	MWI12264 - SU14SE749	Kirby, C. + Clarke, B., 2001. Watching Brief and Section Through Monument SU14SE749 at SU17174029 DERA, Boscombe Down, Amesbury, Publisher: Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Volume: Number 7, Wiltshire Council Catalogue Number: 2001.039
Undated Ditch		SU 1751 3982	MWI10594 - SU13NE682	Clarke, B., 1999. Interim Report on New Fire Station Site at the Establishment of DERA Boscombe Down, Publisher: Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Wiltshire Council Catalogue Number: 1999.055

A major Iron Age and Romano-British settlement first noted in 1948, through ground works in preparation for the construction of a second runway (Richardson 1951) lies 1.3 km to the east of the excavation. To date the western edge of this settlement has not been determined. Recent work in advance of the Fire Fighting Water Main has produced evidence of prehistoric activity across the site (Wessex Archaeology 2000; Manning *et al* 2010). Clearly the airfield landscape has much potential.

### Building History

COB West was constructed as part of the airfield upgrade programme in 1979-81. A range of structures are present within the complex including a protected squadron headquarters; tanker hides; the airfield battle headquarters, a two tank Bulk Fuel Installation and ten Hardened Aircraft Shelters (HAS) Mk 3s. This is typical of the protected structures encountered on many stations, especially those hosting American forces in locations across the United Kingdom.

As the Cold War temperature steadily rose due to the deployment of Soviet SS-20s and American Cruise Missiles, both in Europe, plans were laid to disperse USAF forces across the United Kingdom (Clarke 2009). Aircraft, General Dynamic F1-11 fighter-bombers from Lakenheath or Upper Hayford, would likely have dispersed to Boscombe Down in the event of war. Since the USAF Drawdown the COB has been turned over to a wide range of activities.

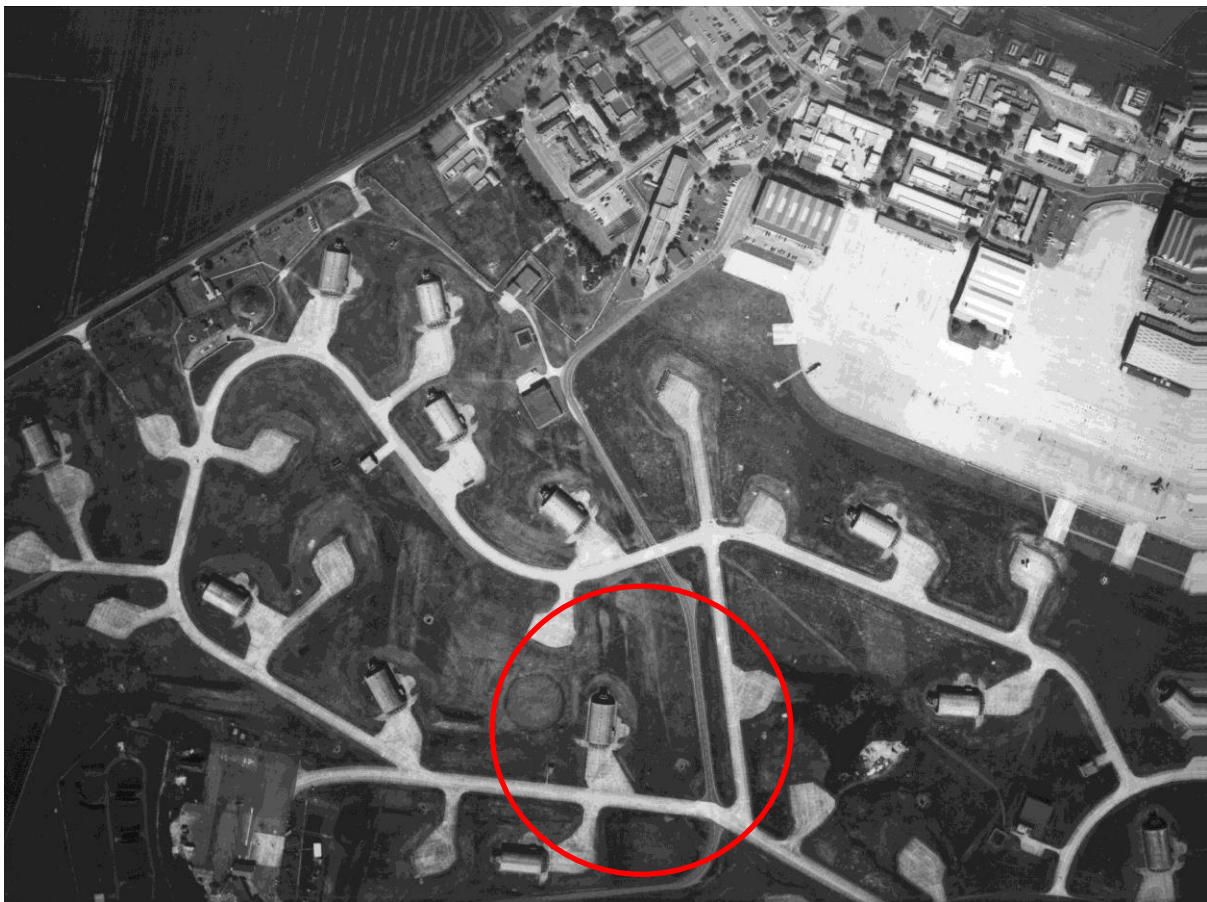


Figure 2. COB West c.1986, Area of current work inside red circle. SAM 28938, Disc Barrow is also located inside the circle (BD0008aC ©Ministry of Defence).



### **Methodology**

A trench 300 mm wide and approx. 500- 750 mm deep (dependant on underlying concrete) was cut using a toothless bucket. All features were recorded photographically and three location points were obtained using a Garmin Etrex handheld GPS, deviation on the day 4/3m.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The aim of the watching brief was to record the location of any archaeological deposits, features and their relationship/chronology, where possible with any known features or landscapes.

### **Archive**

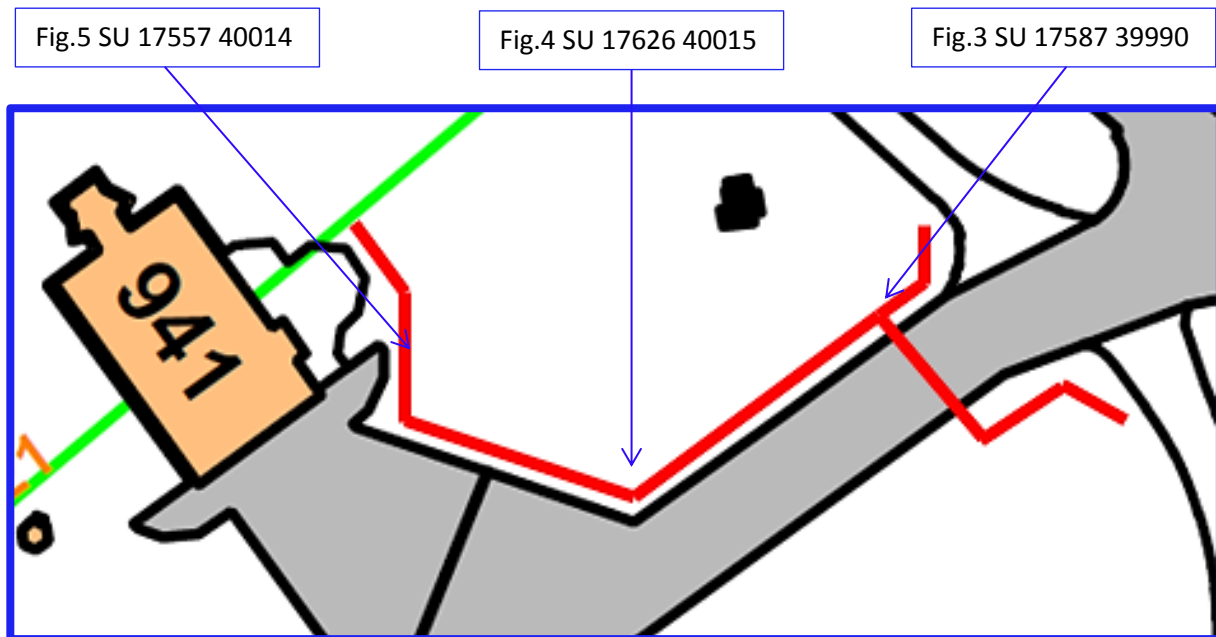
The archive will be retained at the Information Warehouse, MoD Boscombe Down. An Electronic copy will be available for dissemination.

The work is also recorded through OASIS.

## **Results**

Topsoil was very thin – just 25mm in places. The horizon between the topsoil and the parent rock (chalk) was clearly defined suggesting it had been levelled by machine during the construction of the COB West complex. In those areas parallel with the taxiway concrete foundations were encountered. This has been interpreted as strengthening for the taxiway as the maximum armed weight of an F1-11 was 45,300 kg (44 Long Tons). Apart from that mentioned above there was no evidence of any further archaeological features.

## Image Locations



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Figure 3. Cable cutting at SU 17587 39990 (Image created 30 September 2014 ©QinetiQ plc).





Figure 4. Cable cutting at SU 17626 40015 (Image created 30 September 2014 ©QinetiQ plc)



Figure 5. Cable cutting at SU 17557 40014  
(Image created 30 September 2014 ©QinetiQ plc)

## **Finds**

No finds were located during the watching brief.

## **Discussion & Recommendations**

The opportunity to investigate this area was important. Much intrusive work has been undertaken in the area of COB West and the current state of the archaeological record, especially what had survived major groundwork three decades ago, was currently not known. This work has provided Boscombe Down Conservation with an opportunity to investigate the effects of the construction of COB West on that record. We can now say that there is unlikely to be any archaeology surviving in the area of the COB West taxiway where it meets the COB and BUTTS Link roads and the area immediately to the north-east of HAS 941. It is recommended that any additional intrusive work required in COB West be conducted under archaeological supervision, at least until a higher level of confidence can be achieved.

## **Bibliography**

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