

Land at Bleadon Level, Bleadon, North Somerset

Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment



on behalf of

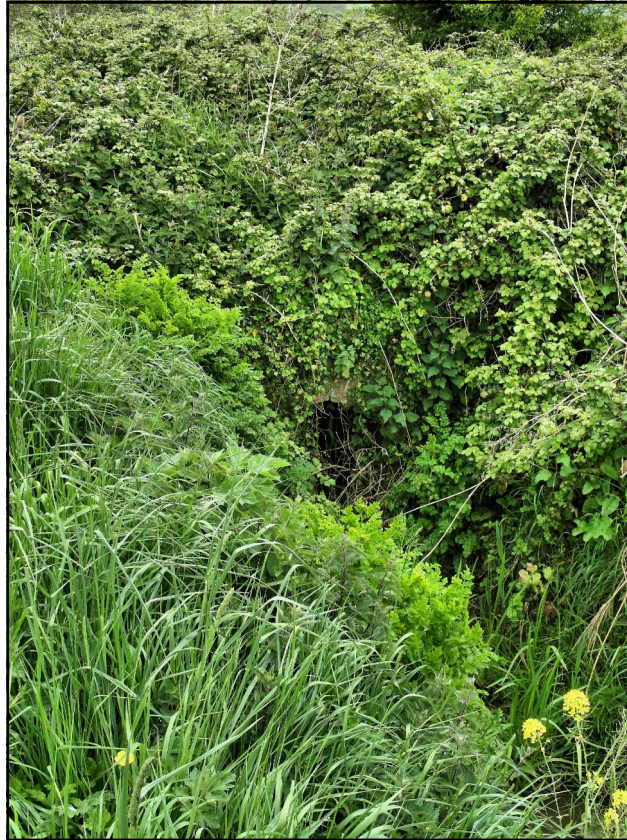
A & R House Partnership

Nick Corcos BA, MA, PhD, AIFA
Avon Archaeology Limited

Bristol: May 2013

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Frontispiece: Buried in a tangle of undergrowth and barely visible, the south-western end of the arched, finely-constructed stone culvert which runs along, and parallel to, the south-eastern side of the Old Wall at its closest point to the River Axe. The date of this feature is unknown but it is the landowner's belief that it is directly related to the 17th drainage works of which one of only two known windmills used for pumping on the Somerset Levels was also a major element. Image taken at ST 32939 56582. See also **Figure 6**.

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ABSTRACT

Avon Archaeology Limited was commissioned by A and R House Partnership to undertake an archaeological desk-based assessment of their site at Bleadon Level, Bleadon, North Somerset. The site is centred on NGR ST 32709 56378, occupies a total of 53ha (just over 130 acres), and lies in a loop of the River Axe, flowing from east to west to discharge into the Severn Estuary near Uphill. The study area is an irregular, elongated oblong in shape, with its long axis oriented north-south. Its north-eastern corner lies about 1,120m west of Bleadon church. The maximum length of the site is 1166m from north to south, and maximum width is 530m from east to west.

Virtually the whole site consists at present of undeveloped farmland, and its entire area has been ploughed in recent years, but it has also been used in part or in whole as grazing land. It is part of the far more extensive complex of low-lying, former estuarine and alluvial salt flats, marshes and freshwater fen environments which together make up the various elements of the Somerset Levels. There are no buildings or structures of any kind currently occupying the site, which is divided by hedgelines and rhynes into six separate enclosures; the largest of which is further partially subdivided by a rhyne running north-south from its southern boundary.

There are no statutory designations, of any kind, affecting the area of the site itself, although part of the western boundary of the Mendip Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty runs just over 1km to the north-east of the site's north-eastern corner, along Celtic Way which runs northwards from the centre of Bleadon village. The village itself is not in a Conservation Area, and there are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments anywhere in the immediate vicinity.

The earliest available map covering the area of the site, an unusually early survey for Somerset dating to 1658, shows that at that time it consisted of agricultural land, and indeed this has continued to be the case up to the present day. It appears, however, that prior to this, the site fell within an area which had been subjected to successive phases of medieval reclamation from the low-lying land of the Severn Estuary levels, and indeed its outer boundary, and another one which runs within the site, have been shown to mark specific stages in this process.

The study found that there had been no previous archaeological work, of any description, carried out within the site boundaries, and the Historic Environment Record notes only a very few items in the immediate vicinity, most notably the site of a post medieval windmill, probably of late 16th/early 17th century date, and which appears to have been a pump associated with then newly cut drainage rhynes and flood banks. This appears to have been one of only two known examples of windmills being used for drainage purposes in the entire Somerset Levels. Perhaps of most significant consideration for present purposes is the potential, but completely unquantifiable resource represented by the complex sequence of Quaternary alluvial deposits, and especially the so-called Wentlooge Series, of which the site is entirely composed; the sheer richness of this material in terms of the preservation of multi-period archaeological assets, is now well-attested in very similar environments elsewhere on the Severn estuary littoral, and the study site must by definition be included within that category. Historic aerial photographic evidence emphasises this point by highlighting the survival of numerous palaeochannels both within the site boundary itself, and in the wider landscape around this part of the Axe Valley.

However, purely on the basis of the documentary and other evidence reviewed in this report, the study area is considered to offer a low to moderate potential for the survival of buried archaeologically-significant deposits and structures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

Whereas Avon Archaeology Limited have taken all care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAL	Avon Archaeology Limited
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
NA	National Archives
NGR	National Grid Reference
NMR	National Monuments Record, Swindon
NSHER	North Somerset Historic Environment Record
OS	Ordnance Survey
SRO	Somerset Record Office

1 INTRODUCTION

Avon Archaeology Limited was commissioned by A and R House Partnership to undertake an archaeological desk-based assessment of their site at Bleadon Level, Bleadon, North Somerset. The site is centred on NGR ST 32709 56378, occupies a total of 53ha (just over 130 acres), and lies in a loop of the River Axe, flowing from east to west to discharge into the Severn Estuary near Uphill. The study area is an irregular, semi-curvilinear oblong in shape, with its long axis oriented north-south, and its north-eastern corner lies about 1,120m west of Bleadon church. The maximum length of the site is 1166m from north to south, and maximum width is 530m from east to west (**Figures 1 and 2**)¹. By any measure, this is an extremely large site, its total circumference running to something in the order of just over 3km. It is bounded on the western side for almost its entire length, by a virtually dead straight section of the main railway line between Weston-super-Mare and Taunton; along virtually the whole of its southern and eastern sides by a loop of the River Axe; and for a very short stretch on the north-eastern side, and the whole of the northern side, by the minor road called Accommodation Road, some minor rhynes, and a short part of the major drainage channel called the New Rhyne, which shares an alignment, diagonally across the middle of the site from north-east to south-west, with a track called the Old Wall.

Virtually the whole site consists at present of undeveloped farmland, and its entire area has been ploughed in recent years, but historically it has also been used in part or in whole as grazing land. It is part of the far more extensive complex of low-lying, former estuarine and alluvial salt flats, marshes and freshwater fen environments which together make up the various elements of the Somerset Levels. There are no buildings or structures of any kind currently occupying the site, which is divided by hedgelines and rhynes into six separate enclosures; and the largest of which is further partially subdivided by a rhyne running north-south from its southern boundary.

There are no statutory designations, of any kind, affecting the area of the site itself, although part of the western boundary of the Mendip Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty runs just over 1km to the north-east of the site's north-eastern corner, along Celtic Way which runs northwards from the centre of Bleadon village. The village itself is not in a Conservation Area, and there are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments anywhere in the immediate vicinity. There is a live planning application currently in force relating to the proposed development of the site, and it is progressing under **North Somerset Planning Reference 11/P/0305/F**.

2 METHODOLOGY

Searches were made of the indices of the collections of the Somerset Record Office, Bristol Record Office, and the main Arts and Social Sciences Library of the University of Bristol. A variety of online bibliographic resources, most notably COPAC, BIAB, The Archaeology Data Service, and Google Scholar, were used to identify potentially useful sources of information, whether published or otherwise². In addition,

¹ Note that the red line shown on Figure 2 represents the *ownership* boundary of the site.

² www.copac.ac.uk; www.biab.ac.uk; <http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/>; www.scholar.google.com

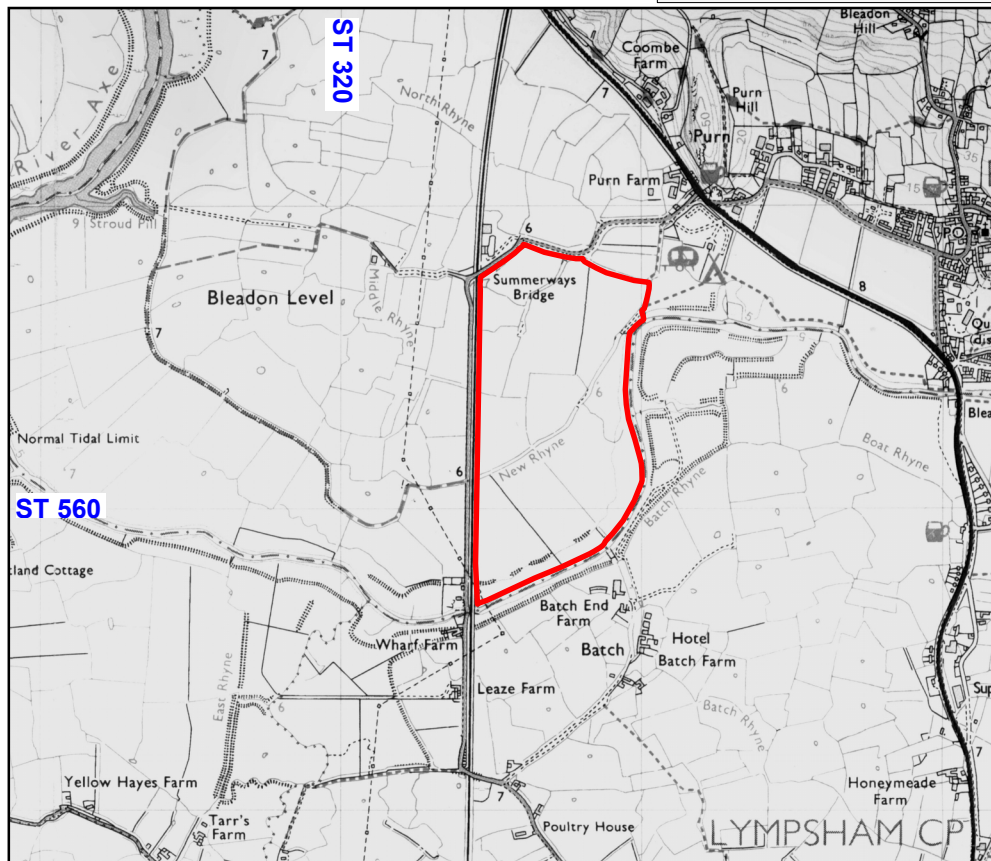
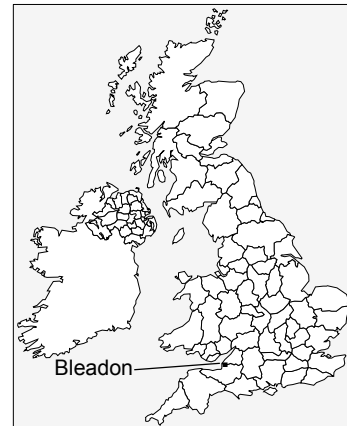
Figure 1

Location of the Study Area

The Study Area



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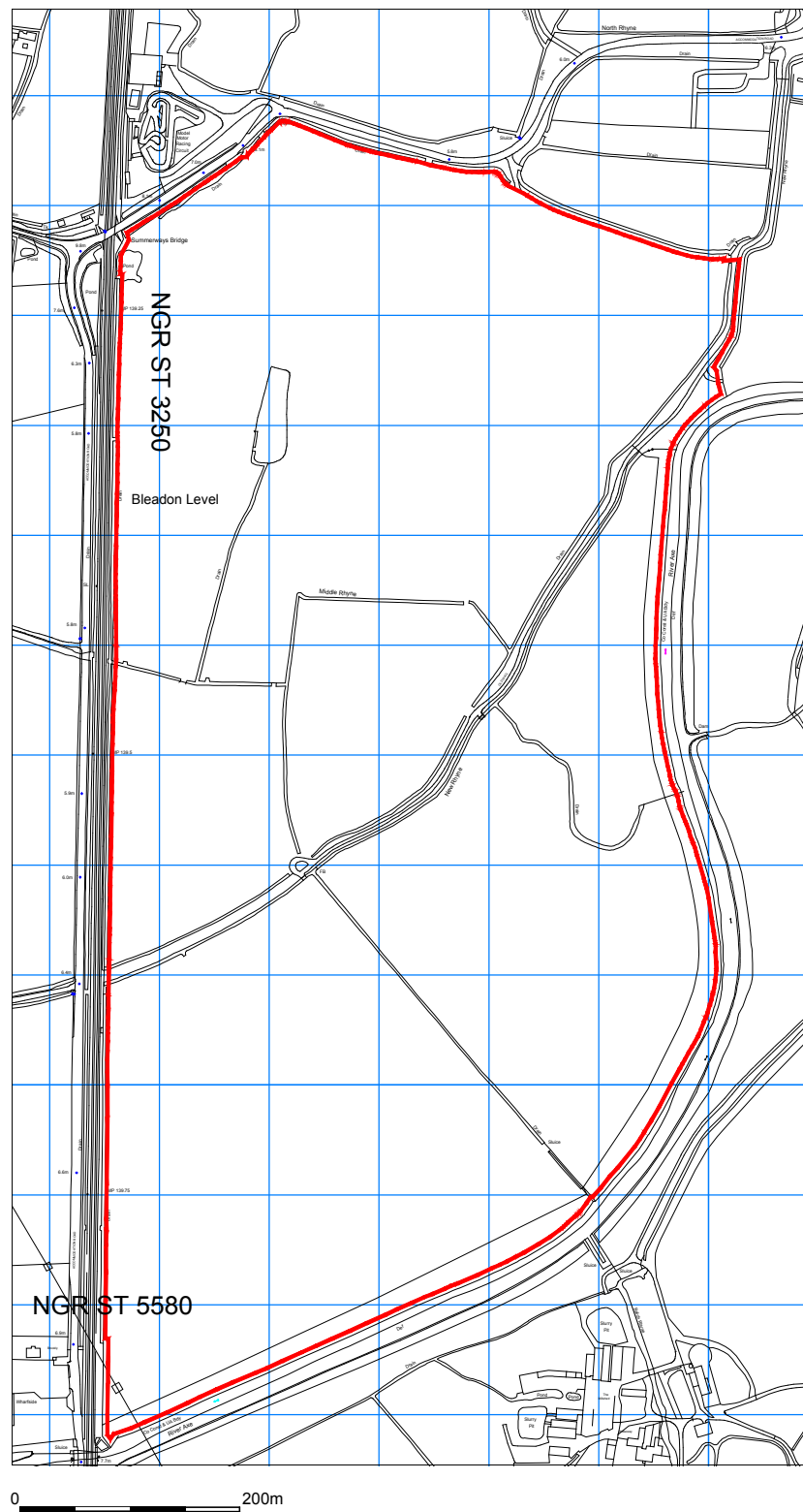
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Figure 2



Site Location Plan and Boundary of the Study Area



information was utilised from a trawl of the North Somerset Historic Environment Record, conducted on behalf of AAU Limited by Dan Smith, HER Officer for North Somerset Council. A visit to the site was made by the author on Wednesday, 22nd May, 2013, and a digital photographic record was made (**Cover, Frontispiece and Plates 1 to 5**).

3 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

As, in effect, merely a western extension of Mendip, Bleadon Hill, to the east of the site, shares, in miniature, some of the main characteristics of the parent body further eastwards, in that it consists, essentially, of an anticlinal outcrop of limestone, surrounded, to north and south, and indeed curving around its western end, by later deposits of the Triassic Mercia Mudstone group of calcareous marls and clays; these deposits 'lap' unconformably around the lower flanks of the limestone, and north, south and west Bleadon Hill they are in turn covered by the much later, and highly varied alluvial drift deposits, of Quaternary (and mainly Holocene) date, which further afield make up the bulk of the Somerset Levels and Moors, both north and south of Bleadon Hill. The study site is part of this complex by virtue of both its position on the Severn Estuary Levels, and also by its being encompassed within a loop of the River Axe on its way to the Bristol Channel at Uphill. The drift deposits on the site are therefore likely to consist of a complex mixture of both freshwater, and estuarine salt alluvial sequences (BGS). The site is, however, rather too far inland to have received deposits of windblown sand, such as occurs further to the west, closer to the coast, and most notably forming the beaches and immediate hinterland of Uphill, Brean, Weston-super-Mare, and northwards to Sand Bay; and so far as the site itself is concerned, the depth and nature of the Quaternary sequences there is completely unknown. There are, however, some scant indications of *minimum* depths of these deposits from elsewhere on the Bleadon Level. Most notably, a watching brief carried out in 1991 prior to the construction of a new sewerage treatment works, on a site lying just under 1.4km due west of the study site's western boundary, monitored the excavation of trenches down to a maximum of c.4m in depth. This work revealed only alluvial deposits to that depth (Russett 1990/91, 68), and was too shallow to reveal any peat sequences, which by and large, elsewhere on the Severn Estuary littoral, generally appear at around 20m below aOD, which in the case of the study site would be at a depth of about 25m below the present ground level (Crowther and Dickson 2008, 11-12). The depth of the hard geology on the study site itself, most notably the Mercia Mudstone Group, is at present a complete unknown.

The topography of the site itself is essentially flat, as may be expected of land in this location, with elevations aOD pretty much all over the entire area centring around 5.5m³.

³ AA Ltd is very grateful to Alistair House for supplying us with a detailed topographical site survey in the form of a CAD file.

4 THE ALLUVIAL SEQUENCES: GENERAL BACKGROUND

On the Bleadon Level, as elsewhere on the Severn Estuary Levels in general, the overlying Quaternary drift geology consists, as already noted, of various alluvial phases; and these deposits are known collectively as the Wentlooge Series, from the location of its type-site immediately south-west of Newport, south Wales. The nature and thicknesses of these deposits in the North Somerset area are summarised by Rippon (2006, 33-37), but they consist essentially of a band of peat (the Middle Wentlooge Formation) 'sandwiched' between two much thicker layers of estuarine alluvium (the Lower and Upper Wentlooge Formations respectively). Crowther and Dickson note of the Middle Wentlooge that the peat

is usually found at 20 metres below OD (Ordnance Datum) and is often associated with *in situ* tree stumps (Crowther and Dickson 2008, 11).

Although of varying date dependent on location, much of the Upper Formation is generally considered to represent a marine incursion of post-Roman date. These deposits, or variations thereon, are pretty much ubiquitous throughout the low-lying coastal areas on both sides of the Upper Severn Estuary littoral. For example, in the Axe Valley, Somerset, below the southern flank of Mendip, a campaign of transect coring by Haslett revealed an estuarine depositional sequence which Haslett equates directly to the Wentlooge Series (Haslett *et al* 2001)⁴.

Archaeologically, these deposits are of crucial importance – it should be noted that a large body of accumulated evidence from fieldwork studies on both sides of the estuary, has identified numerous locations attesting to the fact that parts of the Upper Wentlooge Series *seal* not only prehistoric occupation and activity sites, but also entire Roman and post-Roman landscapes. The Middle and Lower Wentlooge Series also contain extensive evidence of occupation and activity from the Mesolithic through to the Bronze Age⁵. This evidence has, for example, very much informed Steve Rippon's narrative relating to the landscape evolution of the North Somerset Levels in the late prehistoric, Roman and post-Roman periods (Rippon 2006), but other examples of relevant studies include Young 2006, Yates *et al* 2001, and Allen and Fulford 1993⁶. What chiefly emerges from a consideration of this corpus is that well-preserved sites, with a full range of artefactual and recoverable palaeoenvironmental evidence, can be buried both under and within metres of estuarine alluvium and so present no surface expression whatsoever to reveal their existence. This fact needs to be borne in mind as a material consideration when assessing the archaeological potential of any proposed development site lying in these coastal alluvial areas.

⁴The Axe Valley deposits are designated the Somerset Levels Formation by Haslett.

⁵Some of this evidence is little short of spectacular – see for example the account of the alluvial preservation of Mesolithic human footprints in Aldhouse-Green *et al*, 1993. Many more similar discoveries have been made since that date.

⁶The literature on the palaeoenvironment of the Severn Estuary littoral, and in particular the role of the various alluvial series as an archaeological resource of unsurpassed richness, is now voluminous, but much is conveniently brought together in the various Annual Reports of the Severn Estuary Levels Research Committee, beginning in 1993. An extremely important, and up to date overview survey of large parts of the estuary and its archaeological resource, can now also be found in Crowther and Dickson 2008.

5 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Historically, the study area lay in the ancient ecclesiastical parish of Bleadon, which in turn lay in the Somerset Hundred of Winterstoke. Winterstoke was one of the largest of the Somerset Hundreds, extending in length, west to east, from Weston-super-Mare on the Bristol Channel coast, inland to East Harptree (a distance of just over 25km), and in width, from its northernmost point at Kenn, southwards to its southernmost at Rodney Stoke, a distance of just over 20km. This hundred has not yet been covered by the Victoria County History for Somerset, so that there is as yet no *modern*, well-referenced historical narrative, firmly underpinned by primary sources, that can be used for Bleadon. However, Dr Frank Thorn has very recently undertaken a detailed critical review of the historical evidence for the hundred, its internal structure, origins, and its relationship and affinities with surrounding hundreds (Thorn 2011).

Modern authorities consider it most likely that the place-name itself is from Old English *blēo dūn*, meaning ‘variegated hill’, possibly a reference to a perceived vegetational mottling of colour on the flank of the hill (Mills 2011, 62; Gelling and Cole 2000, 168; Hough 2006, 187-188). In coming to this conclusion, scholars in this field are fortunate in that Bleadon first emerges into documentary history through not one, but two Anglo-Saxon charters, both of the 10th century. These are respectively, S606 dated to AD956, and S804, dated to AD975, in Sawyer’s standard catalogue of these documents (Sawyer 1968)⁷. As with all charters of this date, a great deal of scholarly ink has been spilled in reviewing these documents in terms of their *actual* (as opposed to their *purported*) dates, and the veracity, or otherwise, of their content. The minutiae of these views stands well outside the remit of this study, and it will be sufficient for present purposes to present a very brief overview of the main lines of argument. The earlier of the two charters is considered pretty much genuine by most authorities, and of, or close to its purported date. It deals with the transfer of an estate of 15 hides at Bleadon from King Eadwig to a retainer called Æthelwold. It contains a detailed boundary clause in Old English which still awaits a satisfactory, and definitive solution, despite the fact that it also contains a great deal of detailed topographical information, including minor toponyms which survived to be preserved on maps from the mid 19th century onwards⁸. The general academic view, however, is that the Bleadon estate of 956 encompassed roughly the area of the later ecclesiastical parish, and there are certain stretches where the two boundaries can actually be shown to coincide. The earlier charter is also intriguing in that it provides glimpses of features which, by the mid 10th century, could probably be regarded as archaeological. For example, at an as yet unknown location somewhere on the hillside above the modern village, and perhaps, indeed, not too far from the study site, it mentions a *cyrīc stædc*, a ‘church site or enclosure’. Michael Costen is of the view that

This seems to have stood somewhere along the top of Bleadon Hill, perhaps close to a

⁷ The full texts of both these charters, with references to critical scholarly opinions, can be found on the Electronic Sawyer website, at: <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/about/index.html>

⁸ As with so many of the relatively very large corpus of Anglo-Saxon charters relating to Somerset, to date the only sustained, *published* attempt to provide an ‘end to end’ solution for the Bleadon example remains that proposed by G B Grundy. This is not, however, entirely reliable, and a modern review, integrating far more recent principles of historical topography, place-names and archaeology, is urgently needed; Grundy 1935, 154-60.

track running along the Mendips to Uphill and possibly to Brean. This would have been an early church built to serve scattered groups of farmsteads and hamlets, in a landscape without villages or towns (Costen 2011, 184)⁹.

If true, by definition this would suggest very strongly that by the mid tenth century at the latest, something approaching the present, far more nucleated pattern of settlement had been established, at its far more convenient site at the southern base of the hill, and perhaps with the site of the present church as its focus. The charter also mentions *pa ealdan med.dic*, “the old meadow dyke” (Grundy 1935, 156), which, when used in this context, “was nearly always a ditch and a bank” (Costen 1994, 103). Michael Costen notes that although such features

Could have been described as ‘old’ at various points in their history.....it seems most likely that they were ‘old’ because they were pre-existing, like Wansdyke and Grim’s Ditch and that, where convenient, they had been chosen as boundaries (Costen 1994, 104).

It is quite possible that this feature may well survive in the modern landscape, its significance unrecognised, and this simply reinforces the need for the Bleadon bounds to be solved using modern techniques of landscape analysis, so that the exact location of it, and the church site, can be identified. Apart from anything else, if we may trust Grundy’s translation, the suggestion of a major boundary feature (a ‘dyke’) associated with meadow land, suggests a low lying position on, or at the least fringing, the alluvial levels.

By contrast, the later of the two charters, of purported date 975, is regarded with deep suspicion by most of the experts in this field who have looked at it, and attempted to understand its provenance. It is, supposedly, a grant of land at Bleadon to the Old Minster at Winchester. The bounds are not in Old English, but, from the toponyms alone, is in a form which manifestly post-dates 1066, and indeed may be no earlier than the 13th century, the date of the earliest surviving manuscript copy of the bounds. In addition, the preamble, in describing the resources of the estate, seems clearly to have lifted at least some of the figures out of the entry for Bleadon in Domesday Book. This charter is a clear forgery, and almost certainly designed to bolster Winchester’s claim on the estate, which in itself may well have been genuine: there is plenty of precedent for an Anglo-Saxon nobleman donating an estate to a religious house either on his death, or retiring there in old age and ‘taking’ the estate with him as a gift. It may well be that Æthelwold, if it were indeed he, died before he could make a charter formally ‘booking’ the land to Winchester, or that such a charter had been made, but was subsequently lost. There may even have been competing claims on the estate, of which Winchester’s was merely one. Either way, that house clearly felt the need to fabricate a charter in its own favour, although as Lesley Abrams has reminded us regarding items of similarly dubious provenance in the Glastonbury archive,

a forged document does not necessarily indicate a false claim. Charters can have been fabricated for a variety of reasons, not all of them dishonest (Abrams 1996, 319).

⁹ It needs to be explicitly stated that the site of the present church at Bleadon cannot, by definition, also mark the site of the pre-Conquest ‘field-church’ noted in the charter of 956; since the latter, by that date, had clearly become isolated on the *boundary* of the estate. This is important because at least one expert authority has, regrettably, claimed otherwise; see Blair 2005, 385, n.65.

Whatever the exact means it is, anyway, clear that at some point in the 130 years between 956 and 1086, an estate at Bleadon had come into the hands of the See of Winchester, because it was firmly in the possession of the Bishop of Winchester at the time of Domesday Book, and indeed remained so until the mid 16th century (Thorn and Thorn 1980)¹⁰. In the late 11th century, the Bleadon estate was still assessed at 15 hides, with a very high proportion of the land (two-thirds) held as demesne. Surprisingly for an estate of this large size at that date, no mill is mentioned, although later evidence suggests very strongly that the existence of an extensive area of open-field arable land would certainly have justified it. However, although impossible now to quantify exactly, there was clearly a large area of pasture, recorded as being one league long and half a league wide. Using Oliver Rackham's formula that equates a league at this date to 1½ miles (Aston *et al* 2011, 79-83), this comes out an area of just over 700 acres, or 288ha; this was probably split between unenclosed grazing lands on the upper slopes of Bleadon Hill, and the large area of low-lying, partially reclaimed moor ground west of the village, contained within a loop of the River Axe on its north bank, and known historically as Bleadon Hams, and later Bleadon Level. As already noted, this is the location of the study site. The DB surveyors also considered that Bleadon had enough arable land to service no fewer than 17 ploughs, although a total of only 14, split between the demesne and the tenants' lands, were actually in operation there. But such relatively large areas of both arable and pasture also probably explain why Bleadon seems to have been almost totally bereft of woodland in 1086, with only a single acre of underwood (ie *not* 'timber' woodland) recorded, and even that was not on the main manor, but on a small one-hide sub-holding. This seems extraordinary for a manor of Bleadon's size, and it can be contrasted with other estates nearby, such as Winscombe, at this date belonging to the Abbot of Glastonbury, which seems to have had by far the majority of its area covered by woodland (Aston *et al* 2011, 79-83).

Bleadon had two open arable fields in the medieval and indeed at least into the early modern period – these were known as West Town Field and East Field. The possible extent of the system has been mapped and it seems to have occupied large areas of the middle slopes of Bleadon Hill east and west of the village. The East Field lay on the slopes above Shiplate and it appears to have been particularly extensive (Iles and Stacey in Iles 1984, 55-56). Bleadon's medieval field system is significant because it appears that at least elements of it, in terms of certain individual furlongs, were laid out deliberately to respect pre-existing field boundaries of much earlier date, perhaps part of a Romano-British, or even prehistoric arrangement. Well-preserved and extensive areas of this earlier system survive on the upper slopes of Bleadon Hill, especially north-west of the village, and they are regarded as important local survivals of their type (Fowler 1978, 29-47, and esp. at 37; Wykes 1997; 1998a; 1998b). They are as yet, however, completely undated¹¹.

Throughout the medieval and into the early modern period, Bleadon appears to have remained an unremarkable rural parish. To the west, on the low-lying alluvial moor

¹⁰ There is a tradition that the transfer was effected by the Lady Gytha, wife of Earl Godwin of Wessex, in the mid 11th century (see for example NSHER 5600), although the basis for this belief is somewhat problematic; this matter, and the question of the nature and origin of Bleadon's relationship with a small estate at Priddy, on central Mendip, have recently been reviewed by Thompson, 2011, 208-209 (and see further below).

¹¹ The level of preservation of parts of the system is such that they are visible even on Google Earth.

ground of Bleadon Hams, a succession of concentric, curvilinear sea defence walls were constructed, with the earliest dating to before about 1221, and with each one superseding its predecessor. Stephen Rippon has identified four stages in the full reclamation of the Level, not all of them accurately dated (Rippon 1994, 241); but the last was certainly associated with a formal parliamentary enclosure for which the award was granted in 1791, and this was the only phase of enclosure on the Level which was subject to formal mapping. The study site lies entirely within these various phases of enclosure, on the eastern side of the Level.

Historically however, settlement within Bleadon parish was not by any means completely nucleated in nature, and there were several isolated farmsteads and hamlets that appear to have been in existence by the medieval period, most notably Shiplate and Wonderstone east of the present village, and Purn to the west. Indeed, *scypeladæ's pyllæ* is noted as a boundary point in the Anglo-Saxon charter of 956¹². Neither should it come as any surprise that there are hints that settlement at Bleadon has contracted or at least shifted since the medieval period: for example the site of what appears to have been a small farmstead, of 12th or 13th century date, was revealed in the course of a pipeline watching brief in a rather surprising location, in the far west of the parish, on the now-reclaimed, low-lying saltmarsh in the north-western quarter of the Bleadon Level (Webster 2003, 204); clearly demonstrating that at least this part of the level was habitable by that date in terms of flood control. This site lies just under 1km to the north-west of the study site's extreme north-western corner, in a location that appears to be just inside the earliest of the multiple sea banks depicted by Rippon (1994, 241, Fig. 12.2 B). This in turn may well suggest a date for this initial phase of reclamation as much as a century earlier than what seems to be, as we have already noted, its earliest appearance in the documentary record in the early 13th century.

By at least the mid 18th century, and probably far earlier, a small estate at Priddy, in the centre of the Mendip plateau, was closely connected with the manor of Bleadon (or 'Bleadon with Priddy' as it sometimes appears in documents, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries), and indeed surviving land tax records between 1766 and 1832 show that, for the purposes of paying the tax, this Priddy land was counted, effectively, as part of Bleadon (SRO Q/REI/42/5). Thompson (2011) has equated this estate with Plummer's Farm, in Priddy parish, and the Priddy land is actually depicted on a map of Bleadon dated to 1658 (see further below). However, it seems clear that this connection between the two estates is almost certainly far earlier, and indeed probably pre-Conquest in origin. Michael Costen, citing detailed research by Bob Smisson, remarks how

There was a drove which ran from Bleadon in the west onto the highest parts of the hills around Priddy and he has suggested that a system somewhat like that of the 'Great Flock of Lansdown', near Bath was in existence (Costen 2011, 113).

The connection between these two places, otherwise, apparently, completely unrelated, is most likely to have arisen as a result of early transhumance practices, involving the droving of sometimes extremely large sheep flocks, on the part of the

¹² The first element of this name is a reference to sheep. The second element is Old English *gelād*, 'a difficult river crossing', which topographically would make perfect sense from the place's location close to the north bank of the River Axe; Gelling and Cole 2000, 81-83.

ancient royal and ecclesiastical estates ringing Mendip, and which between them had possession of probably the vastly greater part of the upland plateau. Michael Costen is of the view that this practice may date to at least the 7th century,

with sheep brought up onto the hills from the townlands in the summer to graze and returning in the autumn (*ibid*).

In the general hiatus of the mid-16th century monastic Dissolution, and the subsequent Reformation which gave birth to the Church of England, Winchester Cathedral Priory was refounded, and the manor of Bleadon passed to the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral, in whose hands it remained until well past Collinson's day (Collinson 1791, III, 571-572). In the early 17th century, a further southward extension of the Bleadon Level reclamation resulted in the construction of a sea bank which gave rise both to the Old Wall, which traverses the site diagonally from south-west to north-east, and the highly characteristic lobe-shaped protrusion which projects southwards from the main alignment of this bank slightly to the west, and outside of the study area (Rippon 1994, 241, Figure 12.2 D). The Old Wall was associated with rhynes running parallel to it on either side of its base, and the complex as a whole is now known simply as the New Rhyne. As a part of this early modern scheme, a windmill driving a pump was erected, and the full background to this development, as described by Michael Williams, seems worth quoting in full here:

The greatest [reclamation] activity [at this date].....was in the estuary of the River Axe. The documentary evidence concerning the exact location of these new warths, and of the areas involved, is a little confused and possibly repetitious, yet it seems that below Hobb's Boat, separate parcels [enumerated].....were reclaimed. Of this possible total of 305 acres [just over 123ha], 140 [57ha] had been recently 'fenced and kept from overflowing' in the Bleadon Level. One of the warths reclaimed in 1613 was particularly noteworthy because the sea was 'kept out from overflowing the same by a windmill built at the time of the said enclosure for that purpose.....' This is one of only two known instances of the use of a windmill for pumping purposes in the Levels (Williams 1970, 94-95).

Several other authors cite the account of the construction of the windmill (most notably Rippon, 1994, 241), but the ultimate and sole authority for it appears to be this description by Williams. He, in turn, cites as his source documents at the National Archives, giving references relating to records among the Special Commissions of Inquiry of the Exchequer King's Remembrancer (NA E178); and Depositions by Commission of the Exchequer King's Remembrancer (NA E134). It was not, unfortunately, possible to check these original records, but this is of far more than mere academic interest, because the North Somerset HER actually marks the supposed position of the Bleadon pumping windmill, at a position in the north-eastern corner of the study site, the formal location being given as ST 329566. However, I can find absolutely no authority whatsoever for this attribution – Williams himself makes no mention of the actual physical position of the windmill, and contrary to the HER, its location is *not* marked on any of the several maps that were examined for the purposes of this report. The site of the windmill must at the moment, then, be regarded as unknown¹³ (see further below, **Archaeological Background**, and **Historic Map Evidence**).

¹³ The HER claims that "a windmill has been evident at ST329566 until 1930 when the OS map was last revised for that site", but this is palpably incorrect.

A further hiatus, arising from the widespread tenurial displacements of the English Civil War, saw the manor pass, albeit temporarily, into the hands of Anthony Ashley Cooper, First Earl of Shaftsbury. It is this connection which explains the existence of a splendid 17th century map of Bleadon (and another one of Pawlett, near Bridgwater), which was made for Cooper in 1658 (copy at SRO T/PH/sfy/1), presumably not long after he acquired the manor, and the original of which remains in the hands of his descendant, the present (12th) Earl of Shaftsbury, at the estate office at Wimborne St Giles, in Dorset (see further below, **Historic Map Evidence**).

In the mid 17th century there were still extensive areas of open field arable farmed as furlongs divided into strips, and this was especially true of the East Field, which still, at that relatively late date, consisted of an extensive and continuous block of furlongs. However, enclosure had already begun by that date, and consolidated blocks had been taken out of the open fields. On Bleadon Level, where lies the study site, the land was already heavily subdivided into generally small closes, many of which amounted to no more than narrow strips. As might be expected of such low-lying ground, some of which had been reclaimed only within the previous half-century, much of it is identified as meadow and pasture. Perhaps surprisingly however, there was also by this date a considerable amount of arable, including the highly distinctive lobe-shaped enclosure, already noted, marking a southwards protrusion at the very southern extremity of the early 17th century defences, and consisting entirely of just over 4 acres (1.6ha) of arable. This must indicate very clearly that the reclamation process had been effective enough, and over a relatively very short period, to 'dry out' this area sufficiently for it to be put down to the plough.

Doubtless this process of enclosure and 'improvement' continued right up to the eve of the passing of a formal parliamentary enclosure act in 1788 (Tate 1948, 43 and 68)¹⁴. An apportionment and map arising directly from the act was produced in 1791 (SRO A/AKH/22), and involved the formal enclosure of some 1,260 acres (510ha) of land, which as well as 'mopping up' the last remaining vestiges of open field arable, also, as already noted, took in the final phase of reclamation on the Bleadon Level, and also dealt with extensive areas of formerly open, common grazing land on the upper slopes of Bleadon Hill¹⁵. The final phase of the Bleadon Level enclosure is within the study site, and it was this development which brought the boundary of the reclaimed land right up to the northern bank of the River Axe.

At the very end of the 18th century, and the beginning of the 19th, persistent problems with flooding and the control and management of the drainage regime generally, especially as they pertained to the River Axe, reached a head, and a major scheme of works was initiated in the Bleadon area in an attempt to solve the problems once and for all. Although having many facets, the scheme was underpinned by the installation of a system of new sluices (locally known as 'clyces'), including a major one at Bleadon Bridge, at the point where the modern A370 road crosses the Axe (NSHER 46663), and immediately to the east of it, just over 1km to the east of the study site's eastern boundary, the excavation of a new, canalised course for the river,

¹⁴ A copy of the act itself can be found bound along with other Somerset parliamentary enclosure acts at SRO DD/SAS/c795/SE/10. Bleadon is on p87.

¹⁵ The historical background to the the Bleadon enclosure, and that for both for Wedmore and Weston-super-Mare, has been examined in detail by Ingles; Ingles 1997. Just under 46% of the total land area of Bleadon's historic parish (2745 acres; 1,111ha) came within the remit of the 1788 Act.

cutting off and bypassing a large southerly meander (NSHER 46664)¹⁶. It is likely to have been as a result of this work that the Axe itself was itself heavily constrained into a far narrower channel than formerly.

Within the study site, as indeed elsewhere on Bleadon Level, the main landscape development up to the present day has been the almost total removal of virtually all the small field and enclosure boundaries shown on the 1658 map, and, between 1841 and 1844, the carving of the line of the Bristol and Exeter Railway through the Level from north to south, and which, as already noted, now forms the western boundary of the study site.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The strict remit of this study is to consider the evidence for archaeological survival in the vicinity of the study site, based on current knowledge as expressed in the North Somerset Historic Environment Record. This specific aspect of this review, therefore, is underpinned by information taken from the North Somerset online HER (see bibliography under North Somerset). It should be noted that the HER revealed no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the boundary of the study site itself, the closest one to it being the Bronze Age bell barrow at Walborough (NGR ST 31611 57914), which lies just over 1,400m to the north-west of the study site's north-western corner.

A brief review of the general archaeological background will be useful to set the study site itself in the context of the known archaeological resource within the wider Bleadon area. A crucial, and very particular aspect of the local archaeology is the very full record of Pleistocene faunal remains, some of it associated with clear evidence of early human occupation and activity, which has been recovered from the sometimes extensive cave and fissure systems in the local Carboniferous Limestone. This material has attracted the attention of antiquarian scholars since at least the late 18th century, but more modern work has also led to important reassessments about its significance. The evidence for a human presence comes in the form of a wide range of worked tools made of both chert and flint, and is attested from many sites on western Mendip¹⁷. One of the key sites in this respect is Uphill quarry, which lies only 3km north-west of the present study area, and which in the late 19th century was the subject of a series targeted field investigations overseen by Bristol Museum and the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Although some of the Uphill material, but faunal and of human manufacture, cannot be closely dated, the general view is that a large proportion of it is of Later Middle Palaeolithic and Earlier Upper Palaeolithic date (Jacobi and Currant 2011, 54). By virtue of both the range and quantity of finds discovered over the years at Uphill, the site is considered to be certainly of national importance, but not all of the human material from it is flint or chert; and the discovery of a later Aurignacian bone point which could be subjected to C14 assay, and which produced a date of 31,730 ± 250 yr BP, elevates the site to

¹⁶Some of the proposals for the scheme, including plans, and lists of landholders, are preserved at the SRO. See 'A Plan of the River Axe from Wear Bridge to Black Rock.... and of the Proposed Dam and Lock near Bleadon.....and the Proposed Sluice and Drain.....in the Parish of Lymsham', 1801. SRO Q/RUP/17. This element of the proposed scheme, however, was never actually carried through.

¹⁷The most recent and authoritative review of both the human and the faunal Pleistocene material from Mendip can be found in Jacobi and Currant 2011.

international significance (Jacobi and Pettitt 2000; NSHER 00003).

As already noted (above, **Historical Background**), an important general element of the wider archaeological context is the survival, on both Bleadon Hill and South Hill, of extensive areas of well-preserved field-systems that may be of Romano-British or prehistoric date. The nearest parts of these systems, on Bleadon Hill, are only just over 1km to the north-east of the study site's eastern boundary. The South Hill fields are recorded under NSHER 0043, but other elements on different parts of Bleadon Hill are recorded separately under references 0038, 0026, 00100, 0027 and 0028. The eastern boundary of Little Down Quarry has clearly impinged on, and destroyed, the western part of the South Hill field system, but much still survives, and its general extent has been mapped and discussed by Iles and Stacey (1983, 55-56; see also Fowler 1978, 29-47). None of it is scheduled. These published accounts of the Bleadon field system are relatively brief, but rather more recent reviews, based in part on new fieldwork, have, as already noted, been produced by Richard Wykes (1997, 1998a and 1998b). It is unfortunate, though, that none of these latter accounts are published, because Wykes makes the important suggestion that there may be remnants of a Late Bronze Age field system underlying the 'Celtic' [*sic*] fields. Indeed NSHER 05280, towards the eastern end of South Hill, is recorded as a cropmark enclosure of possible Bronze Age date.

There have been scattered prehistoric artefactual finds from the parish which demonstrate human activity from the Neolithic period onwards, but none has come from within the 500m radius of the HER trawl (see for example NSHER 00032, a flint scatter from a field on the upper, south-facing slope of Bleadon Hill, just to the south of Bleadon Hill Road). The identification of actual settlement sites from the prehistoric period is more problematic, but a major discovery was made in 1996-1997 at Whitegate Farm, only 1km to the east-north-east of the study site's eastern boundary, and within the historic settlement core of Bleadon village, when trial trenching in advance of development, later expanded to encompass a large, open area excavation, revealed intensive activity of the Mid to Late Iron Age (NSHER 40222); this consisted of a series of pits, some of them in what appeared to be a planned arrangement, and two of which had been used to deposit two crouched burials dated to the Late Iron Age. Residual ceramic evidence from the site suggested some activity across the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age transition, but the site produced no certain indications of structural remains that might have suggested the existence of occupation in permanent dwellings. The excavator suggests, however, that part of the reason for this may be that settlement shifted between the Middle and Late Iron Age. Be this as it may, it seems at least plausible that the extensive field systems on Bleadon Hill and South Hill may somehow have been associated with this archaeologically-attested activity (Young 2008). The accumulated experience of decades of archaeological fieldwork elsewhere in the Somerset Levels, but especially in the Brue Valley, allows us to be confident that these communities were also fully utilising the extensive and extremely rich range of resources provided by the marshland environment immediately to their west, and of which, of course, the study site was a part.

The HER contains some indication of Romano-British activity within the wider area of Bleadon parish. NSHER 47453 records a hoard of Roman coins found on top of South Hill at a location about 1.5km east-north-east of the study site's eastern

boundary, although by definition, such a find says little about actual *occupation* of that date in the area. There have also been stray finds of Roman coins (such as NSHER 00039), although again, in terms of furthering our knowledge of occupation and settlement, such discoveries are effectively useless. In this respect, however, a site on the south-eastern flank of Bleadon Hill just above Shiplate (NSHER 00060), is more helpful, because it is recorded as a Romano-British occupation site. In this respect, and despite going unremarked in the NSHER, it may well be significant to note that the 1658 map of Bleadon (see further below, **Historic Map Evidence**) marks a large enclosure called Black Furlong very close to this location; this is significant because there is now enough accumulated evidence to suggest a very strong causal relationship between field names of the 'Black' type, and occupation sites of Romano-British date (Corcos 2008, 'Blacklands', and fn 26). But at the same time, this site is about 2.6km to the east of the study area, and cannot be said to hold any archaeological implications for present purposes. Burials, attributed with some uncertainty to the Romano-British period, have come from Bleadon Hill (NSHER 00024).

There are certainly no known occupation sites of RB date within the bounds of the study site itself, or in the immediate vicinity, and none was identified in the course of the intensive fieldwork at Whitegate Farm, which we have already noted (Young 2008). The core of the medieval settlement of Bleadon in the late Anglo-Saxon and early post-Conquest periods is assumed to have lain around the church, about 1.2km to the east-north-east of the study site's eastern boundary, and perhaps also extending westwards, north of the present Coronation and Bleadon roads. Archaeologically this period is elusive, although a radiocarbon date of middle to late Anglo-Saxon date was returned from a single cereal grain recovered from Whitegate Farm, found intrusively in one of the Iron Age pits on that site. The same campaign revealed possible enclosures defined by ditches extending east of the excavated area, although no certain structures were identified, but as the excavator notes, "the enclosures were arranged along one side of the main north-south road through the medieval village and opposite the church". Pottery of mid 12th to early 14th century date was recovered from the ditch fills (Young 2008, 76). By contrast, structural evidence, with separate phases covering the same date range, was recovered from excavation of a paddock fronting onto the northern side of Coronation Road, just south of Whitegate Farm (Young, *ibid*, 76-77; NSHER 46650).

It is only when we move into the post-medieval and modern periods, that we begin to see sites recorded on the HER that sit within the bounds of the study site itself. Perhaps the most important of these is NSHER 00010, which is, supposedly, the location of an early 17th century windmill, one of only two on the Somerset Levels which are known to have been used for pumping and drainage. However, as we have already noted (see above, **Historical Background**, and below, **Historic Map Evidence**), the provenance of this information is by no means sound, and the actual physical position of this feature must for the time being be regarded as problematic. At the extreme southern end of the site, NSHER 42266 relates to the site of an aircraft which crashed in 1941, and quite close by to the south-west, but *outside* the boundary of the study site on the western side of the railway line, NSHER 03505 records the site of Lympsham Wharf. At the extreme north-western corner, and within the site boundary, three borrow pits at Summerways Bridge, one infilled, are noted as NSHER 44052, the authority for this record being the First Edition OS 25" map. The

HER attributes a date of the 1840s to these features, and it seems pretty certain that they are related somehow to the construction of the Bristol and Exeter Railway¹⁸. The Summerways road bridge over the Bristol and Exeter Railway lies immediately to the north of this latter record, although it is outside the study site, and on the western side of the railway.

Finally, outside, and to the north-east of the site, although only 300m away from its northern boundary, lies the settlement of Purn, which the HER defines as a core settlement area centred around Purn Farm (NSHER 43151), and a number of associated buildings all with their own record numbers, but all of which are identified as being of post-medieval date¹⁹.

This, then, sets the general archaeological context for the site, and also sets out what is known at present about the archaeological potential of the site itself. In the latter instance, it might appear on the face of it as though the site presents few implications for the proposed development in terms of impact on the archaeological resource. This, however, would be to ignore the potential of the alluvial deposits themselves, the significance of which we have already been at pains to emphasise, and which are valuable not only as an archaeological resource which cast light on much of the human activity taking place in the Somerset Levels in the distant past, but also, as importantly, for what they can tell us about the palaeoenvironments within which those activities were so firmly anchored²⁰.

6 HISTORIC MAP EVIDENCE

Researchers working on the historic parish of Bleadon are fortunate in that its varied ownership history has bequeathed to us a fairly good run of early maps, even though the study site itself does not necessarily appear on all of this material; some of the maps have already been noted in passing (see above, **Introduction**, and **Historical Background**) and indeed, the first map in the series which is included here is an especially splendid example of the mid 17th century estate-surveyor's craft.

Figure 3 represents an extract from a really remarkable map of Bleadon manor

¹⁸ Each of the two extant pits is identified as a 'pond' on the modern OS. The Bleadon tithe map of 1843 notes a small, elongated enclosure abutting the eastern side of the railway easement, in exactly the position of the smaller of the two surviving ponds, and which is labelled plot no. 101a. This carried through onto the First Edition OS 25" map (surveyed 1884) as 'field' number 414 (**Figure 6**). The tithe award describes the land-use of this plot, which shared the name 'Busketts' with several adjacent enclosures, as simply 'pits', and it can be no coincidence that the owner was listed at that date as the Bristol & Exeter Railway Co.

¹⁹ I could find nothing which suggests that Purn is anything other than a late medieval or probably even post-medieval roadside settlement. The SRO holds no early records whatsoever relating to it, although the meaning and origin of the place-name itself is obscure, and it is perfectly possible that it at least may be of early provenance. DB mentions, although does not name, a one-hide sub-holding of the main manor of Bleadon, and this is far more likely to have been at Shiplate – 'Shiplate Pill' is mentioned as a boundary point in the Anglo-Saxon charter of 956 (S606), and Shiplate was regarded as a manor in its own right by the late 16th century (SRO DD\X\WBB/246). Shiplate Farm (NSHER 06508) is considered to contain elements of at least 15th century date (SRO DD\V\AXR/6/1), although it is not a listed building.

²⁰ The most recent and detailed survey of a specific aspect of the archaeology of the Somerset Levels, namely the peat deposits, is found in Brunning 2013.

dated 1658, the provenance of which has already been noted (SRO T/PH/sfy/1). The area of the study site, as closely as can be judged, is outlined in red. As originally drawn, the map is oriented, as it were, 'upside down', with north to the bottom, but for ease of reference for present purposes it has been inverted to follow modern convention of having north towards the top of the map. What this map strikingly shows above all else, is the really very intense level of sub-division to which the Bleadon Level had been subjected by this date. Aside from a few larger enclosures on the eastern side of the site, the majority consist of small, strip-like fields, many of them well under an acre in size. The outer boundary of the reclaimed land is marked by what is now the line of the New Rhyne, and shows the extent of reclamation on the Level as it had been attained after the drainage campaign of the early 17th century. To the south, however, the large area identified as 'Southerne Meade' still lay open and unenclosed, although of course still providing valuable additional grazing even in that state. Note particularly, however, that nowhere does the map mark the position of the 1613 pumping windmill, and certainly not in the location that is specified by the HER. A very few of the fieldshapes are still recognisable today, most notably the highly characteristic lobe-shaped southern protrusion, outside the study site to the west; and just outside the site's north-eastern corner, a sub-rectangular unit consisting in 1658 of one larger enclosure on the southern side, and a group of much smaller strips to its north. Within the bounds of the study site itself however, only a single recognisable enclosure has survived to the present day, a rather trapezoidal-shaped field pretty much in the middle of the site, with its south-eastern side bounded by New Rhyne and which in 1658 was identified as Mead Crofte.

The next map in this series comes from the best part of a century and a half later, and it is that relating to the parliamentary enclosure for Bleadon for which an Act was obtained in 1788 (**Figure 4**; SRO A/AKH/22; Tate 1948, 43 and 68). The map, though, is dated to 1791, and so far as the study site is concerned, the main point of relevance is that the enclosure dealt with the final area of Bleadon Level which had remained open and unenclosed since the mid 17th century, and part of which, the 'Southerne Meade' of 1658, fell within the bounds of the study site. The map shows three small enclosures in the north-eastern corner of the newly-enclosed area which all appear to be hedged, but to the south-west, a number of long, narrow plots are contained within two hedgelines, probably with rhynes, running south-east/north-west, and these sub-divisions could well have consisted of only relatively flimsy fencelines. Within the study site the entire length of the easternmost of these main boundaries survives, albeit described on the modern map only as a 'drain', as does the one immediately to the west, although most of the latter lies outside the site, on the western side of the railway, which bisects it. To the north-east, the line of a small, curving creek draining into the north side of the Axe, survives in the modern landscape, and is marked on the modern map as a 'drain'. Again however, of the early 17th century wind pump, there is no sign.

Exactly ten years after the enclosure map and award, in 1801, and as already noted above (**Historical Background**, and fn. 15), a map was produced as part of a major drainage and flood prevention scheme for the lower Axe valley. However, it is not reproduced here as it shows no internal detail of the study site whatsoever. One would have thought, though, that if the elusive 17th century wind pump was to be depicted on any map, it would have been this one; but it is absent.

The best part of half a century later, Bleadon's tithe map shows the state of the entire parish as it was in 1843 (**Figure 5**), and **Table 1** presents information from the accompanying award (1841) relating to the size, ownership, occupation and nature of the enclosures contained within the bounds of the study area (SRO D/D/Rt/416). It is worth pointing out a few basic statistics that arise from the award relating to Bleadon as a whole. The entire parish area in 1841/43 amounted to 2,745 acres (1,111ha). Of this, arable came to 298 acres (just over 120ha), or just under 11% of the total parish area. Pasture, by contrast, extended to 2,425 acres (just over 981ha), which is fully 89% of the total²¹. Bleadon, then, was overwhelmingly a pastoral parish by this date, which must come as no surprise given the close availability of both upland, hill pasture, on the high ground immediately to the north and east of the village, and the low-lying reclaimed land, including of course the area of the study site, to the south and west.

Indeed the study site itself reinforces the point that has already been made above (**Table 1**). In the entire area, only a single close of arable, of only half an acre or so, appears in the land use column, and the general impression is that this may well represent a decrease in arable use even from the time of the 1658 map. There are no glaringly obvious fieldnames which may be archaeologically indicative, but these, anyway, tend to be associated rather more with arable land (Corcos 2008). But perhaps most strikingly, and again reinforcing the impression of the map of 1658, just under two hundred years later, the landscape of the Bleadon Level remained, essentially, one of a mixture of small and larger enclosures, but, in any, case, fundamentally *enclosed*. There had, of course, been a degree of disenclosure since the mid 17th century, as attested, for example, by tithe enclosure 88, on the eastern side of the study site, and running to some 20 acres (9ha) of pasture (compare this area on the map of 1658, **Figure 3**). But even by the mid 19th century, the study site was characterised by *boundaries*; today, it is characterised by large, open areas, and of the historic boundaries there is little to be seen. From both the enclosure and the tithe map together, and indeed the 1658 survey, it does not look as though Bleadon operated any kind of annual redistributive scheme relating, especially, to low-lying meadow and involving the reallocation, by drawing lots, of very small strips of land, such as that demonstrated by Keith Gardner at Puxton (the so-called 'Dolmoors'; Gardner 1985). By this date as well, the Axe had been constrained to pretty much its present course and width, and the line of the Bristol and Exeter Railway had been established.

The next map in the sequence which depicts the area of the study site is the First Edition OS 25" sheet. The unusually large size of the site means that it is covered by two sheets: Somerset 16.12 (north) and 16.16 (south), both surveyed in 1884, but the northern sheet published in 1886, and the southern a year earlier. A composite image of both, covering the entire site, is presented here as **Figure 6**. We can immediately see that in the forty or so years since the time of the tithe map, the overwhelming development within the study site had been the removal of boundaries. There is certainly no sign of the very small, narrow closes that were a feature of the

²¹ Interestingly, the tithe award distinguishes 'pasture' (1571 acres), and 'hill pasture' (854 acres). It seems clear from this that just under half of the parish grazing consisted of reclaimed land on the Bleadon Level. A further 22 acres (9ha) were woodland, which at 0.8% of the total parish area can be accounted for by discrepancies in the imperial/metric conversion.

central part of the site in the middle 19th century (enclosures numbered 96 on the **Table 1: Extract from Bleadon Tithe Award, 1841 (SRO D/D/Rt/A/416)**
A – acres; R – Roods; P – Perches²²; Gdn – Garden; Pa – Pasture

Landowner	Occupier	No.	Name & Description	Cultivation	A	R	P
Mary Prankard	John Ridon	77a	Part of Southernmead	Pasture	4	0	20
Thos Evans	Thos Evans	78	West Mead	Pasture	5	2	0
Thos Evans	Thos Evans	79	West Mead	Pasture	5	2	0
Thos Evans	Thos Evans	80	Southernmead	Pasture	5	2	0
Thos Evans	Thos Evans	81	Southernmead	Pasture	3	2	0
Thos Evans	Thos Evans	82	Southernmead	Pasture	2	2	16
Geo Barons Northcot Esqr	John Amesbury	83	Southernmead	Pasture	9	0	0
Geo Barons Northcot Esqr	John Amesbury	84	Southernmead	Pasture	7	2	16
Hannah Fear	Hannah Fear	85	Southernmead	Pasture	2	1	38
Wm Tripp	Wm Tripp	86	Allotment	Pasture	1	0	39
Mary Rugg	Robert Ellerd	87	Southernmead	Pasture	1	0	39
Thos Evans	Thos Evans	88	Cow Leaze	Pasture	20	0	0
Geo Barons Northcot Esqr	John Amesbury	89	Madcat	Pasture	7	2	38
Thos Evans	Thos Evans	90	Matgeet (?)	Pasture	4	1	26
Charlotte and Elizabeth Newman	John Ridon	91	Eight Acres	Pasture	4	2	22
Joseph Wollen	Wm Durston	95	Seven Acres	Pasture	6	0	8
Martha Williamson	Jn Carpenter	96a	In East Mead	Pasture	0	1	15
Peter Dowding	Geo Slade	96b	In East Mead	Pasture	0	1	15
Martha Williamson	Jn Carpenter	96c	In East Mead	Pasture	0	1	25
Geo Barons Northcot Esqr	John Amesbury	96d	In East Mead	Pasture	0	1	24
Ann Norman	Wm Parker	96e	In East Mead	Pasture	0	1	0
Ann Norman	Wm Parker	96f	In East Mead	Pasture	0	1	0
Mary Yeo	Wm Parker	96g	In East Mead	Pasture	0	0	23
Charlotte and Elizabeth Newman	John Ridon	96h	In East Mead	Pasture	0	2	4
Revd David Williams and Hester Carpenter	Jn Carpenter	96i	In East Mead	Pasture	0	3	15
Mary Prankard	John Ridon	96k	In East Mead	Pasture	0	1	14
Geo Barons Northcot Esqr	John Amesbury	96l	In East Mead	Pasture	0	1	17
Priscilla Rowland	John Ridon	96m	In East Mead	Pasture	0	2	24
Priscilla Rowland	John Ridon	97	Acre	Arable	0	2	38
Joseph Wollen	Wm Durston	98	Four Acres	Pasture	2	0	10
Thos Evans	Thos Evans	99	The Acre	Pasture	0	3	8
Thos Evans	Thos Evans	100	Plash	Pasture	2	1	24
Charlotte and Elizabeth Newman	John Ridon	101	Busketts	Pasture	4	1	2
Bristol and Exeter Railway Co.	Themselves	101a	Busketts	Pits	0	1	24
Priscilla Rowland	John Ridon	102	Busketts	Pasture	4	1	16
Geo Yeo	Joseph Avery	118	Summerways	Pasture	5	2	7

²² There were traditionally 4 roods to the acre, and 40 perches to the rood. An acre is the equivalent of 0.405ha (or just over 4,000m²), and this therefore makes a rood about 1012m², and a perch just over 25m².

tithe map), although the *outer* boundaries which contained them still survived, for the most part, pretty much intact at this date. To the south, on Southern Meade, there was by this time only a single major boundary rhyne, running south-east/north-west and separating two very large fields (OS numbers 193 and 199). This boundary survives. The majority of the site by this date was made up of only four large enclosures (OS numbers 193, 199, 314 and 315) amounting to just over 34ha, or 64% of the site area.

At the north-western corner of the site, one of the three ponds noted in the HER sits just within the site boundary, on the eastern side of the railway. At the north-eastern side of the site, very close to the course of the Axe, both a stone and a post are marked, the latter one of a series running off eastwards outside the site. The former cannot be a boundary stone, and although it is likely to have been inscribed, its purpose is not made clear by the map. Hachures running parallel with both banks of the river mark its original width, and give a clear impression of how much it had been constrained by this date.

Figure 7 presents the Second Edition of the OS 25" maps (same sheet numbers), published in 1903 from a revision of a year before. There has apparently been very little change from the time of the First Edition map surveyed some eighteen years before, and indeed the number of enclosures making up the study site, remained identical between the two editions. In the north-western corner of the site, the positions of the three borrow ponds close to the railway, identified by the First Edition and recorded by the modern HER, are marked; but because this OS edition does not use colour to distinguish water, it is impossible to tell from this map alone whether we are supposed to infer that two of them (of the three original ponds) had by this time already been filled in. However, two of the ponds are still marked on the modern large-scale OS map (**Figure 2**), hard against the eastern and western sides of the railway respectively; and aerial imagery from the immediate post-war period, makes it clear that all three pits remained open and flooded at least as late as 1946 (**Figure 9**).

The SRO did not have a copy of the OS Third Edition sheets for this site, which in Somerset tend to appear just after the First World War, from revisions made either slightly before or during hostilities; so the final OS map presented here is the Edition of 1936 (**Figure 8**; same sheet numbers). In the intervening 34 years since the revision for the Second Edition map, there has apparently been hardly any discernible change in the outlines of the various boundaries, with the exception that a couple of short stretches of minor rhyne have been either added or deleted. Historic OS maps available online indicate that the main period of further disenclosure was from the early 1970s to the early 1980s, by which time the site had taken on the very open aspect that it has today (Old Maps). However, in the north-eastern quarter of the site, just where the course of the River Axe comes closest to the line of the (probably 17th century) Old Wall, a windpump has been erected on the river side of the wall itself. The mechanism itself, including the tower and sails, has now gone, but its site still survives and is marked by a circular concrete caisson sunk into the bank, and containing a vertical pipe driven down towards the level of the river (**Plate 4**). It is the landowner's view that, because of the differential in the levels between the land on either side of the bank, with the landward side being considerably lower, the 17th century windpump is far more likely to have lain somewhere near its much later

successor, ie actually on the Old Wall bank itself, than in the position suggested by the HER²³.

7 SITE VISIT

The **Cover, Frontispiece** and **Plates 1 to 5** represent part of a photographic record made by the author during a site visit conducted on Wednesday 22nd May, 2013. The descriptive captions accompanying the plates will, it is hoped, be reasonably clear. A particular search was made at the supposed site of the early 17th century windmill identified in the North Somerset HER, but even if that record is accurate, no features of any archaeological or historic significance were noted during the course of the walk-over²⁴. A specific search was made for the location of the 17th century windmill which is recorded in the HER, at the NGR given, but there was no trace of anything on the ground, apart from anything else because earth-moving operations have now obscured the site marked by the grid reference given in the HER.

8 AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

For the purposes of this review, a trawl of all the available aerial photographic material held at the National Monuments Record, Swindon, was carried out on behalf of AAL by staff at the NMR; and the results of the entire trawl are given in **Appendix 1. Figure 9**, dating to 1946, represents an example from an early run of RAF vertical images of the site in the collections of the NMR, and is reproduced here as an example, to emphasise this point. Regrettably, this image does not include the very southern part of the site and there were no images in this particular run which did so, but it was felt that the quality of the remainder of the image was such as to justify this slight omission.

South of the hill, the River Axe sweeps round in a great southwards meander, and inside the loop, numerous palaeochannels and the courses of relict tributary streams can be seen, both inside and outside of the study area itself. Interestingly, it seems clear that just after the war the entire area of the study site was given over to grassland, as attested by the systems of 'gripes' (drainage channels) which cover almost the entire area of the image (Rippon 2006, 102-105); this situation has now, of course, become reversed and the study area has in recent been given over entirely to arable, with the consequent level of destruction of surface features that that has entailed; there is now no trace of the gripes either on the ground or on modern satellite imagery (and see further below).

At the north-western extremity of the site, the three flooded borrow pits mentioned in the North Somerset HER are clearly visible, and still open, and as already noted the

²³ An extremely well-engineered, stone-lined, arched culvert runs parallel to the Old Wall, on its south-eastern side, in exactly this position, at the closest point of the Old Wall to the Axe; Mr House is of the view that this is not coincidence, and that this feature may be directly related to the task for which the earlier wind pump was designed, ie the removal of water from the north-western side of the bank, into the River Axe. The inference is that the culvert itself is of 17th century date.

²⁴ Map references were identified using a Garmin Etrex 30 handheld GPS unit, which returned locational accuracy of 2-3m across the whole of the site.

smaller example within the study area, on the eastern side of the railway, is still marked on modern large-scale OS maps. The image also shows two features at the north-eastern side of the site in close proximity to each other, and in locations which appear to correspond roughly with the suspected position of the 17th century windpump, as described by the North Somerset HER. One, the more easterly of the two, amounts to no more than a faint soilmark, but the other, at this date, was expressed as a clear albeit rather degraded small earthwork. As already noted, whatever they may actually be, there is now no trace whatsoever of these features on the ground.

It seems very clear that, like the system of gipes which drained the pasture enclosures for which the study site was used immediately after WWII, this little earthwork became a casualty of the later, overwhelmingly arable use of the site. The same is true of some of the enclosure boundaries depicted in 1946, and in particular the small, but very substantially hedged enclosure towards the northern, central part of the site, of which the only trace now are two dark, linear soilmarks, presumably representing the rhynes on the western and southern sides of the enclosure (Google Earth, imagery date 6th Feb., 2009)²⁵.

9 NATIONAL AND LOCAL PLANNING POLICIES

Planning policies both national and local which have direct implications for the site under consideration here, cascade down in the following order of primacy:

- National Planning Policy Framework, March 2012, Dept of Communities and Local Government. See especially Section 12, Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment, 30-32.
- North Somerset unitary authority, Replacement Local Plan Written Statement, adopted March 2007. Matters relating to archaeology are dealt with as part of Chapter 5, *Environment and Cultural Heritage*, Paras. 5.19 to 5.28. The local authority's rationale in regard to the protection of archaeology within the district is outlined in Policy ECH/6, as follows:

Development will not be permitted where it would involve significant alteration or cause damage to nationally-important archaeological remains (whether Scheduled or not), or would have a significant impact on the setting of such remains.

10 CONCLUSIONS

The study found that there had been no previous archaeological work, of any description, carried out within the site boundaries. The earliest available map covering the area of the site, an unusually early survey for Somerset dating to 1658, shows that at that time it consisted of agricultural land, and indeed this has continued

²⁵ The site owner, Mr Alistair House, advised me that the very particular reddish colour of these soil marks arises from the fact that these rhynes were backfilled, within living memory, by the dumping of soil of this colour brought in from elsewhere, and which, of course, has since been spread by subsequent ploughing.

to be the case up to the present day. It appears, however, that prior to this, the site fell within an area which had been subjected to successive phases of medieval reclamation from the low-lying land of the Severn Estuary levels, and indeed its outer boundary, and another one which runs within the site, have been shown to mark specific stages in this process.

The North Somerset Historic Environment Record notes only a very few items in the immediate vicinity, most notably the site of a post medieval windmill, probably of late 16th/early 17th century date, and which appears to have been a pump associated with then newly cut drainage rhynes and flood banks. This appears to have been one of only two known examples of windmills being used for drainage purposes in the entire Somerset Levels. Contrary to the HER, however, the study has not been able to confirm the physical location of this feature purely from the map evidence, since the windmill was not marked on any of the maps that were examined for the purposes of this report.

Perhaps of most significance for present purposes is the potential, but completely unquantifiable resource represented by the complex sequence of Quaternary alluvial deposits, and especially the so-called Wentlooge Series, of which the site is entirely composed; the sheer richness of this material in terms of the preservation of multi-period archaeological assets, is now well-attested in very similar environments elsewhere on the Severn estuary littoral, and the study site must by definition be included within that category. Historic aerial photographic evidence emphasises this point by highlighting the survival of numerous palaeochannels both within the site boundary itself, and in the wider landscape around this part of the Axe Valley.

In conclusion, and on the basis of the documentary and other evidence reviewed here, the study area is considered to offer a low potential for the survival of archaeologically-significant buried deposits and structures.

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- 1843 Tithe map for Bleadon, D/D/Rt/M/416
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- 1902 Second Edition OS 25" map, Somerset Sheets 16.12 and 16.16, published 1903
- 1936 OS 25" map, Somerset Sheets 16.12 and 16.16.
- 1981 Vernacular architecture report on Shiplate Farm, Bleadon, DD\W/AXR/6/1
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APPENDIX 1

ENGLISH HERITAGE : NATIONAL MONUMENTS RECORD Air Photographs

Full single listing - Verticals, Standard order

Customer enquiry reference: 78304

Sortie number	Library number	Camera position	Frame number	Held	Centre point	Run	Date	Sortie quality	Scale 1:	Focal length (in inches)	Film details (in inches)	Film held by
RAF/CPE/UK/1869	526	RS	4303	P	ST 335 569	32	04 DEC 1946	AB	9840	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/CPE/UK/1869	526	RS	4304	P	ST 327 569	32	04 DEC 1946	AB	9840	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/CPE/UK/1869	526	RS	4305	P	ST 320 570	32	04 DEC 1946	AB	9840	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/541/41	869	RP	3255	P	ST 331 565	2	22 MAY 1948	A	10000	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NAW
RAF/541/41	869	RP	3256	P	ST 325 564	2	22 MAY 1948	A	10000	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NAW
RAF/540/479	1205	RS	4044	P	ST 327 571	14	22 APR 1951	A	9960	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	MOD
RAF/540/479	1205	RS	4045	P	ST 333 570	14	22 APR 1951	A	9960	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	MOD
RAF/58/1421	1583	F21	235	P	ST 321 566	6	22 APR 1954	AB	10000	36	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NAW
RAF/58/1421	1583	F21	236	P	ST 326 572	6	22 APR 1954	AB	10000	36	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NAW
RAF/58/1421	1583	F22	160	P	ST 335 566	10	22 APR 1954	AB	10000	36	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NAW
RAF/58/1421	1583	F22	161	P	ST 330 559	10	22 APR 1954	AB	10000	36	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NAW
RAF/58/1371	2363	F22	8	P	ST 325 567	5	05 MAR 1954	AB	10000	20	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/58/2180	2521	F42	59	P	ST 319 574	12	27 MAY 1957	AC	15333	36	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	MOD
RAF/3G/TUD/UK/21	2859	V	5371	P	ST 327 564	7	13 JAN 1946	A	5200	12	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/3G/TUD/UK/21	2859	V	5372	P	ST 330 565	7	13 JAN 1946	A	5200	12	Black and White 8.25 x 7.5	NMR
RAF/FNO/37	8799	RV	6100	P	ST 330 569	20	11 JUL 1942	AC	13700	14	Black and White 5 x 5	FDM
RAF/FNO/37	8799	RV	6101	P	ST 331 560	20	11 JUL 1942	AC	13700	14	Black and White 5 x 5	FDM

OS/88030	10776	V	30	P	ST 328 563	3	10 APR 1988	A	5300	12	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
OS/88030	10776	V	31	P	ST 328 567	3	10 APR 1988	A	5300	12	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
OS/69115	11616	V	71	P	ST 326 559	4	17 APR 1969	A	7000	12	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
OS/69115	11616	V	72	P	ST 326 566	4	17 APR 1969	A	7000	12	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
OS/89071	13438	V	212	P	ST 322 568	4	08 APR 1989	A	8500	12	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
OS/89071	13438	V	213	P	ST 330 568	4	08 APR 1989	A	8500	12	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
OS/78083	20684	V	4	P	ST 326 565	1	11 JUN 1978	A	10200	6	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
OS/78133	20687	V	68	P	ST 329 564	1	03 SEP 1978	A	10400	6	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
OS/78143	20690	V	190	P	ST 326 565	2	04 SEP 1978	A	10000	6	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
OS/98068	22577	V	414	N	ST 325 563	4	18 MAY 1998	A	7500	12	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR
OS/98068	22577	V	415	N	ST 330 563	4	18 MAY 1998	A	7500	12	Black and White 9 x 9	NMR

Total sorties 15

Total images 28

Figures

Figure 3

Extract from photostat copy of map of the manor of Bleadon, 1658. SRO T/PH/sfy/1. Not to scale, outline of study site in red, best fit to this survey.



Figure 4

Extract from enclosure map of Bleadon, SRO A/AKH/22, 1791. Study site outlined in red, not to scale, best fit to this survey.

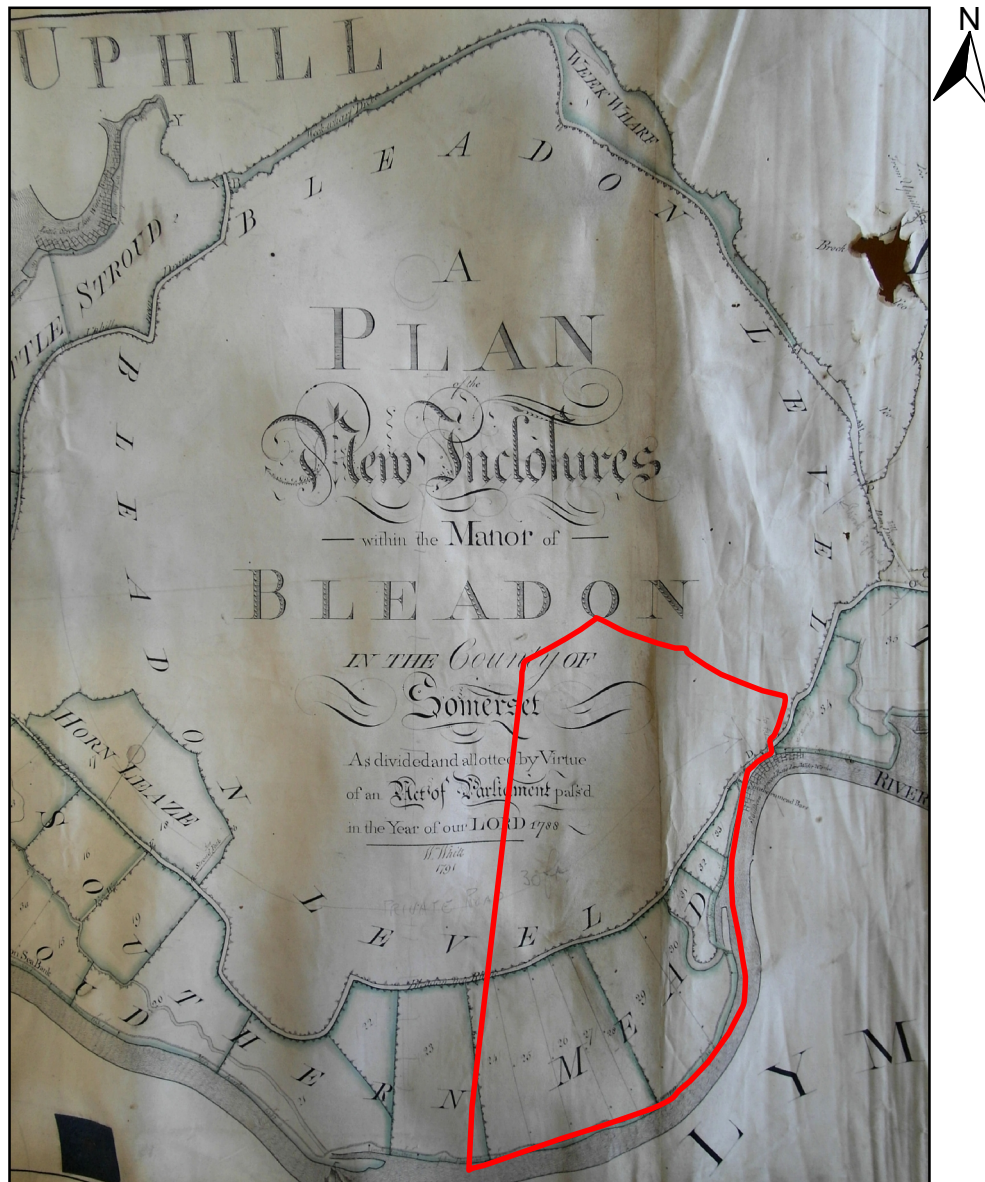
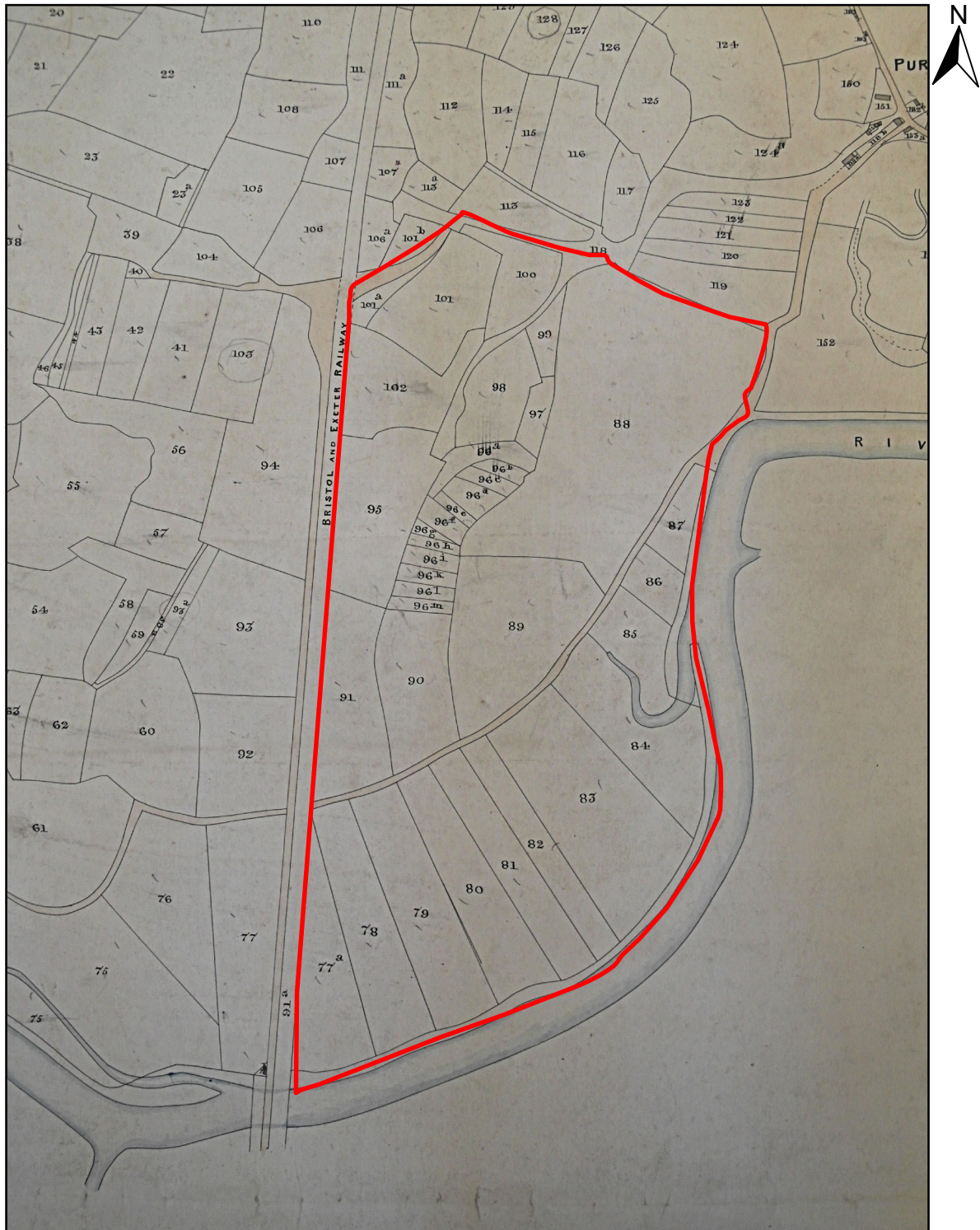


Figure 5

Extract from tithe map for Bleadon parish, 1843, SRO D/D/Rt/M/416. Outline of study site in red, not to scale, best fit to this survey.



This is a historical map of the Bristol and Exeter Railway area. The map shows the railway line running vertically on the left side, labeled 'BRISTOL & EXETER RAILWAY'. To the right of the railway, there are numerous land parcels, many of which are numbered. A red line is drawn across the map, starting from the railway line, passing through several parcels, and ending near the bottom right. The map also shows the 'Bathwick' area at the bottom right, with a 'Bathwick' label. A north arrow is located in the top right corner. The map is titled 'Bristol & Exeter Railway' at the top.

Figure 7

Composite extract from OS 25" Second Edition maps, Somerset Sheets 16.12 (north) and 16.16 (south), both revised 1902, published 1903. Outline of study site in red. SRO. Not to scale.

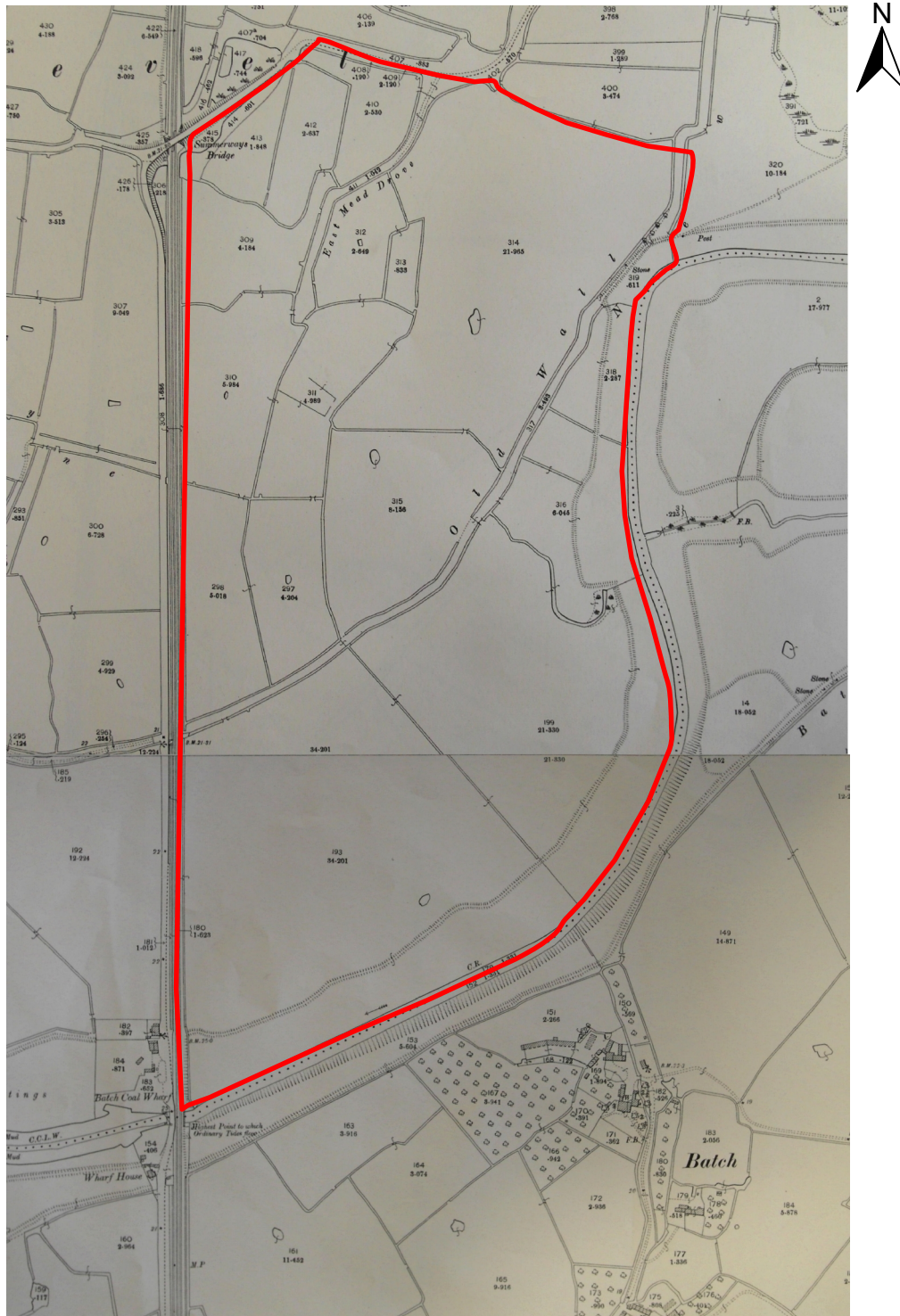


Figure 8

Composite extract from OS 25" map, Edition of 1936, Somerset Sheets 16.12 (north) and 16.16 (south). Outline of study site in red. SRO. Not to scale.

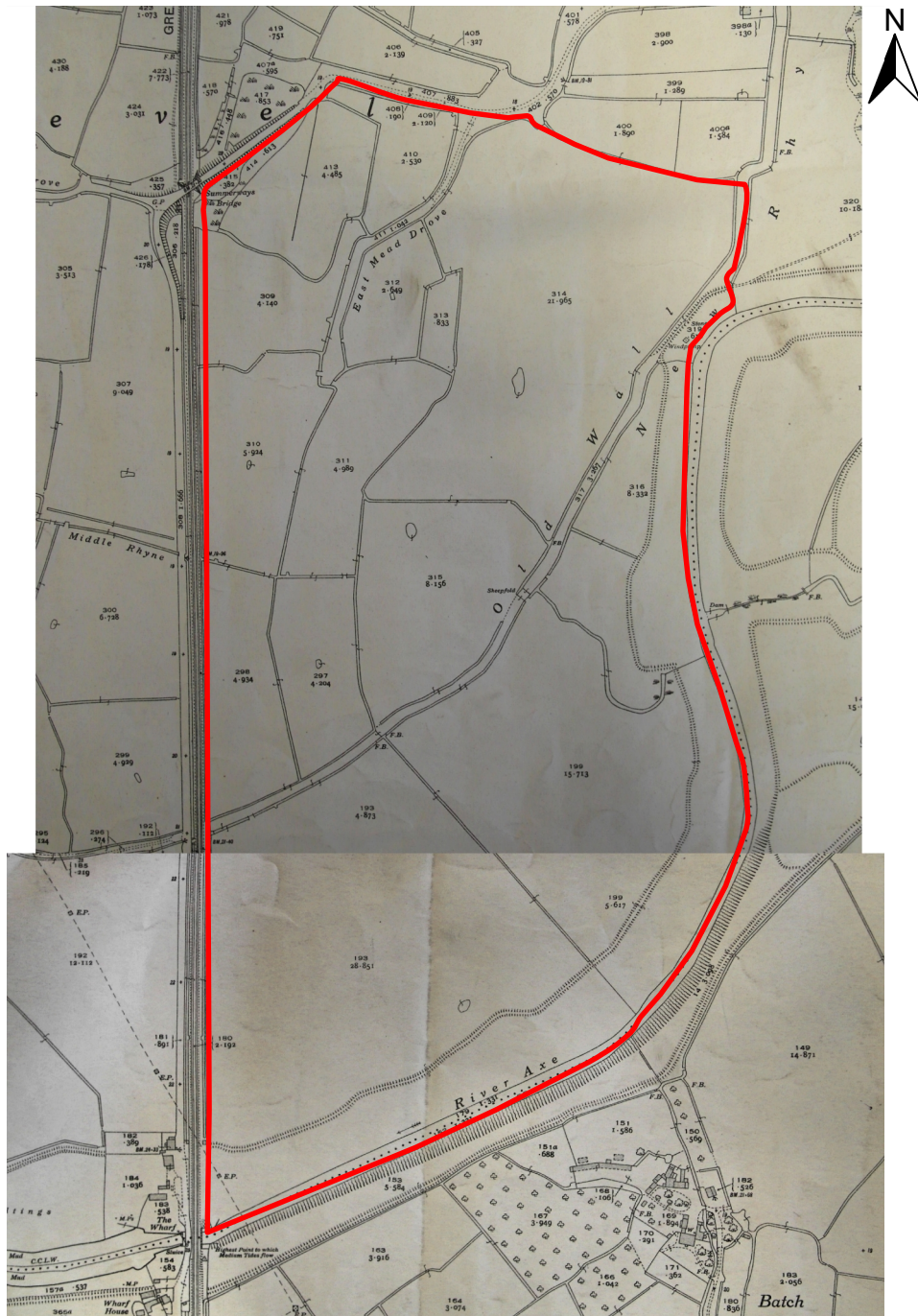
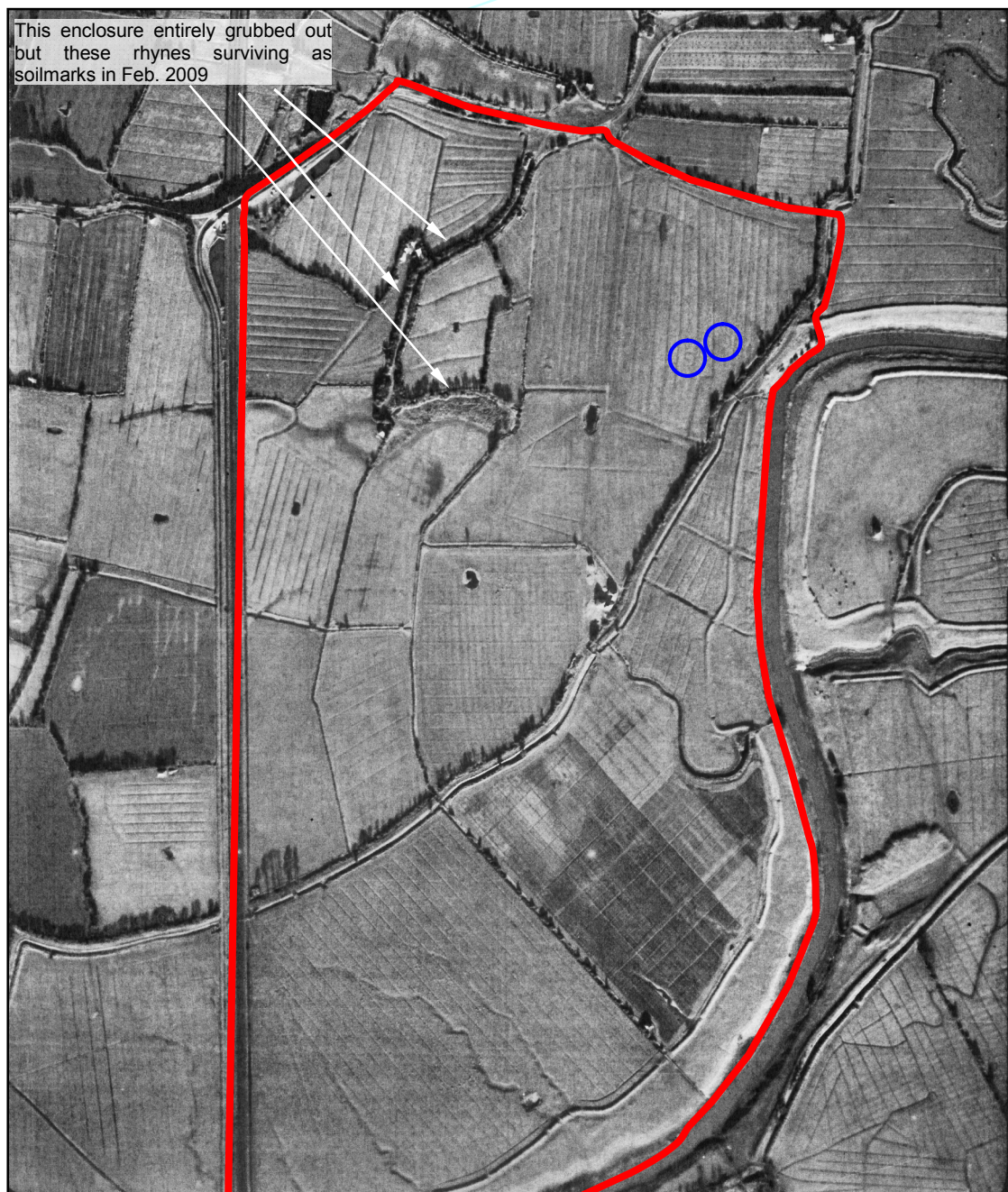


Figure 9

Historic aerial photograph, taken January 1946. Study site outlined in red. Not to scale. NMR RAF/3G/TUD/UK/21, Frame 5371. Blue circles indicate features discernible in the supposed general location of a 17th century windpump, as noted by the North Somerset HER.



Plates



1. Composite panoramic view taken from the northern part of the site, at ST32790 56725. The view pans round from north-east on the left-hand side of the frame, to west-south-west on the right hand side. Brent Knoll can just be seen on the horizon, in the middle of the frame.



2. Composite panoramic view taken in the central part of the site, on the north-western side of the Old Wall, which can be seen on the left-hand side of the frame, at ST32630 56210. The view pans round from south-west on the left-hand side of the frame, to north-west on the right hand side. The Old Wall has been recently cleared of undergrowth along this stretch, and the rhyne on either side of it scoured out.



3. Composite panoramic view taken in the south central part of the site, at ST 32640 56193, and looking into OS Field Number 193 (Figure 6), at just over 34 acres (just under 14ha) the largest single historic field on the site. The view pans round from the south-east on the left-hand side, to south-west on the right-hand side of the frame; the rhyne on the right is that on the south-eastern side of, and running parallel to the Old Wall at this point. Brent Knoll is on the horizon in the central background.



4 The site of the modern windpump which stood on the Old Wall at its closest point to the River Axe, at ST 32968 56603. The only surviving remains are a concrete caisson, containing a narrow pipe sunk vertically into the bank of the Old Wall. The pump was intended to remove water from the inner (north-western) side of the bank, and discharge it into the River Axe, which can just be seen in the background.



5 View from top of one of the modern spoilheaps on the site, north-eastern corner, looking north-north-west, at ST 32790 56378. In the background are Uphill (left) and the western part of Old-mixon Hill (right). The supposed site of the 17th century windpump noted by the HER (NSHER 00010), is roughly in the middle background of this image.