

Land at the Former Old Mill Garage, Long Street, Croscombe, Somerset

Mendip D. C. Planning Reference 2015/0463/FUL
Somerset HER 37668
Somerset Museum Accession No. TTNCM 68/2017

Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief NGR ST 58841 44324



On behalf of

J. Crozier (Builders) Limited

Nick Corcos BA, MA, PhD, AIFA

Avon Archaeology Limited

Bristol: May 2018



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Abstract

Avon Archaeology Limited were commissioned to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording (Archaeological Watching Brief) during groundworks associated with the construction of three new houses on the southern side of Long Street in the village of Croscombe, in the Mendip local authority area of Somerset. The work was conducted in accordance with a WSI which AAL had produced for and which was approved by the South-West Heritage Trust. The watching brief had been imposed because it was considered that there may be a chance that structures associated with a former mill, now a private house immediately to the east of the development site, may have survived in situ at depth. The work was conducted in two phases, with by far the most important being the excavation of a series of trenches for the footings of the houses. Although only just outside the formally designated Croscombe Conservation Area, the site, as indeed the entire village, lies within an area which the local authority considers to be of High Archaeological Potential.

The monitoring of the footing trenches for the new houses revealed only three features of interest, all of them masonry walls. By far the more significant was at a low level within the trench, and contained a dark, silty fill to one side. It is assumed that this was contained between two walls, the second of which was outside the trench and therefore not seen, but that this deposit had accumulated as a result of water or some other liquid flowing within a culvert or drain of some kind. We think it is at least theoretically possible that this feature may have represented a brief and very partial glimpse of the tailrace from the mill immediately to the east, but this is entirely speculation and must await definitive proof. An attempt has been made to reconcile discovered features with historic map evidence.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the developers of the site, Matthew Crozier, his father Ian, who also acted as machine driver, and site workers John and Paul, all of whom extended every courtesy and kindness in the course of the work. Their patience and good humour was very much appreciated.

Notes

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All enquiries should be addressed to:

Avon Archaeology Limited
Avondale Business Centre
Woodland Way, Kingswood
Bristol BS15 1AW
Telephone 0117 960 8487.
Email: mail@avonarchaeology.co.uk
Website: www.avonarchaeology.co.uk

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Abbreviations

AAL	Avon Archaeology Limited
aOD	Above Ordnance Datum
HER	Historic Environment Record
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation



1 Introduction

Avon Archaeology Limited was commissioned by Mr Matthew Crozier, to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording (Archaeological Watching Brief) during groundworks related to the erection of a new development of three houses on the southern side of Long Street, at Croscombe, Somerset. The land falls within the Mendip District local authority area, and occupies the former site of a garage, immediately to the west of Old Mill House. The site is roughly L-shaped, and occupies a footprint of about 1,200m². It is centred on NGR ST 58841 44324 (**Figures 1 and 2**). The development involved the complete removal of the existing garage facilities, prior to the construction of the new dwellings, and it is proceeding under the local authority's planning reference 2015/0463/FUL.

The watching brief project was commissioned to satisfy Condition 18 of the planning consent, imposed by Mendip District Council on the above Planning Application, and acting upon advice from the Planning Control Section of the South-West Heritage Trust, based in Taunton. The decision notice relating to this planning application was issued on 17th September, 2015. The condition had the effect of requiring that *all* groundworks related to the proposed development should be recorded in accordance with guidelines for Watching Brief projects issued by The Institute for Archaeology (CIfA), the guidelines for archaeological projects set out in MoRPHE (*Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment*) and the standard procedures of Avon Archaeology Limited. The formal methodology for the work, based on these various guidances, was outlined in a WSI produced by AAL, and submitted by the client to, and approved by the local authority (Corcos 2017). An OASIS record (315641) has been opened for the project, and the site archive will be deposited at the Somerset Heritage Centre in Taunton, under the accession number **TTNCM 68/2017**. This report will also be accessioned into the Somerset Historic Environment Record under the reference **PRN 37668**.



2 Site Location, Topography, Geology, Historical and Archaeological Background

The geological underpinning of the site is taken from the British Geological Survey's online Geology of Britain Viewer¹. The solid geology consists of strata of the very widespread Mercia Mudstone Group, a highly disparate collection of mudstones, siltstones, marls and sandstones, laid down throughout the entire duration of the Triassic Period between 250 and 200 million years ago. The physical characteristics of these deposits are described by the BGS as

Dominantly red, less commonly green-grey, mudstones and subordinate siltstones with thick halite-bearing units in some basinal areas. Thin beds of gypsum/anhydrite widespread; sandstones are also present.

These have been recorded to great depths – in excess of 1.35km in places. Borehole data from geotechnical investigations conducted on the site confirm that it is indeed underlain by these strata, which are encountered at between 1.20 and 1.40m below the present ground level, beneath made ground. A single anomalous case in which the natural was encountered only at a depth of 2.90m, may well relate to the presence of a former underground fuel storage tank.

A detailed topographical survey of the site has also been undertaken, which reveals a slight downward gradient to the north, towards Long Street. At the southern boundary of the site, elevations centre around 53.50m aOD, while on the street frontage they are lower by roughly some 3.50m; this is over a distance of just under 40m. The river Sheppey flows through Croscombe east to west in the valley bottom, but its course has been heavily modified historically to drive a series of mills along its course, to both east and west of Croscombe – at Dinder for example, which is the next village to the west. Its course takes it parallel to, but slightly to the south of Long Street, and in doing so it appears to be culverted under the proposed development site.

¹ <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html?>

There does not appear to be any previous desk-based assessment available for this site, but there are in any event no listed buildings or Scheduled Ancient Monuments within its boundary. Historic maps show a small group of buildings fronting the southern side of Long Street at the north-western corner of the site; at the time of the tithe map one of these was non-domestic, but forty years or so later, the First Edition OS map suggests that there were two buildings in this area, both of them residential dwellings. As time went on, this group of buildings appeared to expand slightly. However the main key to the site is its relationship to the 'Old Mill House', the next property immediately to the east. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the Old Mill House is not itself a listed building. Part of this complex still survives, in the form of what is now a domestic dwelling, but historically it was more extensive, consisting of a group of outbuildings which extended north-westwards *onto* the development site. At some point between 1960 and 1970, the site took on almost its present configuration, with the buildings at the north-western corner of the site, and the mill outbuildings formerly extending into its eastern side, being swept away with the establishment of the garage. At that time there was no boundary between the remaining mill building and the garage area. The present boundary separating the two properties does not seem to have been established until after 1975.

There are some caveats here in terms of the Somerset HER's representation of the site. The HER, under PRN 44961 which purportedly refers to this site, says that on the modern map, the "Old Mill House" and "Garage", are marked 'next to the manor house'. In fact, the Manor House, PRN 17396, is well to the east of the garage site, and further, on the online HER map, PRN 44961 is attached to an unnamed house which is not marked on the First Edition OS map and which therefore clearly post-dates it. The HER notes the latter map as recording 'a long building on the north side of the leat leading west away from the Old Manor House', but while this may indeed be another mill, it is palpably *not* the "garage" mill, and anyway, it has now gone. The OS map does not itself explicitly identify what is now called the "Old Mill House" as a mill, and the HER notes this fact (PRN 44961), but further states (citing a secondary source) that the site was 'recorded as a fulling mill for sale in 1812. It was later used as a stocking factory.....[and] as a saw mill, but was then levelled to provide the forecourt for a garage'. From the OS map, the buildings which have been removed from the site are the long narrow structure immediately to the west of what is now

called the Old Mill House, and two other buildings at the north-western corner of the site. The nature of these buildings *at this date* (ie late 19th century) are entirely unknown, and it has not been possible to check the tithe record for the site, such work being outside the remit of the present project. Neither is there any desk-based assessment available for the site. There does not appear to have been any kind of historic building survey undertaken on the structure which is now called the Old Mill House, work which may well have resolved its exact nature and possibly the date of the standing fabric. For present purposes therefore we have no choice other than to accept that the present nomenclature is correct, and that, until shown otherwise, the "Old Mill House" must be presumed to have indeed been originally constructed, and to have functioned as a mill throughout most of its history.

The nearest buildings subject to statutory protection by listing are in fact just on the opposite side of Long Street from the garage site – these are Holly Cottage (Grade II); Long Street House (Grade II); and Paradise House (Grade II). The nearest SAM to Croscombe is the small prehistoric hilltop enclosure, probably of Iron Age date, called King's Castle, which is nearly two and a half kilometres to the north-west of the development site. The mill site to the east is, however, key, and it is always possible that traces of its north-western outbuildings survive on the site, despite the obvious destruction which would have been wrought by the insertion of underground fuel tanks.

In terms of the site's proximity to known archaeological assets within Croscombe, the Somerset HER (PRN 44961) notes the fact that the mill complex extended into the area of the development site, and makes the suggestion that the 19th century mill may well perpetuate a far earlier mill site. On the slopes to the south of Croscombe village, HER PRN 21506 refers to an extensive area of field system, characterised as medieval and/or post-medieval, which includes ridge and furrow, and matching one on the northern flanks of the Sheppey valley. But other than possibly in terms of setting, the presence of these features has no implications for potential archaeology within the bounds of the development site, as they are, and historically always would have been, confined to the slopes above the village. There have been no recent archaeological interventions in Croscombe undertaken as part of the planning system, aside from two watching briefs carried out in 2013 and 2016, at two sites

close to each other, not far north of the church, and about 260m to the north-east of the development site. Neither of these projects have any immediate implications for the proposed development site. So far as we could determine, the only historic structure now standing as part of the site was the wall which bounds its western side, and which will be fully restored, including recapping and repointing, as part of the present development project. This wall has been subject to damage in the recent past, as attested by a window at its northern end punched through it, and made good with a makeshift frame formed from concrete breeze blocks (**Plate 7**). This was almost certainly related to the former use of the site as a garage.

3 Methodology

The main concern for the watching brief was to identify any elements of the former mill which might have survived on the site, and especially any sign of the tail race the presence of which, in its return to the Sheppey River, might be suggested from historic maps, and most notably, from the First Edition OS 25" map, Somerset Sheet 41.11, surveyed 1885, published 1887. As already noted, the work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Corcos 2017) previously approved by the South-West Heritage Trust.

Excavation was carried out by the contractor, using a SiteMaster type wheeled mechanical excavator, with a toothless grading bucket of 0.72m width, under the supervision of the author of this report. Trenches themselves were by and large dug somewhat wider, as ground conditions required, and varied in general between 0.75m and 1m. Field notes and relevant recording sheets were kept as a record of the work, and a photographic record of all significant archaeological deposits and structures was also made. All trenches save one (Trench 12, a short excavation marking the western gable end of the development) were monitored. The work was undertaken in two phases, with Phase 1, a brief programme of site reduction at the southern side of the site, and Phase 2, the excavation of the foundation footings themselves.

4 The Monitoring (Figures 3, 4 and 5).

Phase 1.

Prior to the commencement of the groundworks proper, and the excavation of the house footings themselves, it was first necessary to undertake major ground reduction at the southern side of the site. This involved essentially removing a modern breeze block wall, which was effectively acting as a revetment for the material behind it. It seems clear that, probably at the time of the construction of the garage, a deep vertical cut had been made along the entire southern boundary of the site, in effect creating a 'terrace'. This had then been revetted with the breeze block wall, which was 0.45m in width and 2.15m in height, and the space behind the wall backfilled with scalplings. The present project required the removal of this wall, and then cutting back even further into the north-facing elevation of the section (**Plates 1 and 2**). The section consisted almost entirely of the Mercia Mudstone natural, apart from a layer of topsoil. No features or deposits of any archaeological significance were noted during this phase of the work (contexts 100 to 103).

Phase 2

This formed the main part of the work, and involved the excavation of the footings for the three houses that were to be constructed on the site. Ground (formation) level on the site immediately prior to excavation was about 0.50m aOD. Trenches were numbered in the order in which they were excavated, and as already noted, were of varying widths according to ground conditions, and were of generally about 0.80 to 1m depth. Trench bases were therefore by far the most part at about 49m aOD, although note that where softer deposits were encountered, that were not considered suitably load-bearing, excavation had of necessity to go rather deeper. Most of the trenches were completely empty of features, and the topsoil and subsoil had already been stripped; so that in effect, the excavation actually began at the *top* of the Mercia Mudstone natural. It became apparent soon after the commencement of work that virtually the entire central part of the excavation area had been truncated by a large intervention (ie pit) that in places penetrated to a level *below* that of the trench bases, and was backfilled with a loose and unstable, highly mixed, deposit consisting of general rubble and other debris, and which was clearly of modern origin and is likely to have been related to the former garage on the site. This may perhaps explain the



possible truncation of the two historic walls which were recorded in the course of the work (see further below). A backfilled vehicle inspection trench from the former garage, constructed of breeze block walls and cut through the natural, was encountered at the junction of trenches 1 and 2 (**Plate 5**). It was not removed, but was left in situ. Trench 1, marking the front (ie north) common wall of the new terrace, produced the most interest and potentially significant discovery. This was the line of a wall (context 104), clearly heavily truncated in its upper courses, constructed of rubble masonry, probably carboniferous limestone but this is problematic, and bonded with a mid-orangey red, speckly, friable mortar. Its width was 0.52 m, and its surviving upper course, which was the only part of the wall which was seen, lay at about 0.85m below site formation level, so at about 49.15m aOD. It was aligned north-west/south-east (**Plate 4; Figure 3**). No construction cut was observed for this feature although it had clearly been dug through the natural Mercia Mudstone. This wall was observed only in the base of this particular trench and, in this form anyway, was not traced in any of the trenches to the south-east through which it might have passed. It seemed to us that what made this structure especially significant was the fact that to its north was a deposit (105), which was extremely silty, fine-grained, very dark grey or black in colour, and greasy in the hand. This looked very much like a typical drain or culvert deposit redolent of gradual silting in water (**Plate 4**). The southern side of the wall consisted only of the natural Mercia Mudstone. The clear implication was that *outside* the northern trench section, rather further to the north, was the other side of this channel. The function of this structure is unknown, but we do wonder whether it might be a candidate for the putative, and presumed, tailrace from the former mill building immediately to the south-east (but see further below).

Slightly further to the east, in the northern section of Trench 1, another wall was seen but only in section (108). It *appeared* to be oriented north-east/south-west, but it did not appear in the base of the trench, and did not appear to cross over into the southern section of the trench. Its construction appeared to be of a similar type of rubble build, with a similar type of mortar, as that seen in wall 104 (**Figure 3; Plate 6**). It could not be examined in detail because of the unsafe depth of the trench at this point.

The only other feature of any interest from the monitoring was another wall, identified initially in the western section of Trench 6, but in fact traced from thence south-eastwards, into the northern section of Trench 3, representing the main rear common wall of the terrace of houses. This structure was allocated context 601, and was cut into the natural substrate, although there was no obvious sign of a construction cut. The exaction of the trench cut through this wall, but it was seen in the base of Trench 6, and surviving to almost the full height of the eastern section of the same trench (**Plates 8 and 9**). The wall was aligned south-east/north-west, and was 0.65m in width. It was of rubble limestone construction, with the stone itself being a hard, semi-crystalline, fine-grained, mottled mid to light grey, and it was bonded with a light grey, speckly, friable mortar, quite different in nature from that which was used in the 'culvert' wall 104. It is possible that the stone was a local variety of Lias Limestone, which outcrops locally and is very plentiful, but this is uncertain. **Figure 3** shows the wall and its passage south-eastwards from Trench 6, through Trench 7, and disappearing into the southern baulk of Trench 3.

Table of contexts

Context	Type	Description
100	Structure	Modern breeze block wall, aligned east-west, acting as a revetment wall at the southern side of the site. Width 0.45m, height (to footing course), 2.15m. Associated with former garage on the site.
101	Deposit	Loose modern scalplings, backfilling the narrow space between wall 100 and the natural Mercia Mudstone behind (ie immediately to the south of) it.
102	Deposit	Natural Mercia Mudstone substrate (seen throughout the excavation area)
103	Deposit	Orange-red, silty clay, friable and crumbly in the hand, occasional bone, seen in section at the southern side of the site above natural 102, about 0.40m thick. Probably a subsoil of disturbed and redeposited natural.
104	Structure	Masonry wall, about 0.52m wide, aligned south-east/north-west, heavily truncated in upper courses, upper surviving course at 0.85m below site formation level, bonded with orange-red, speckly, friable mortar. Possibly the southern side of a culvert, perhaps the tail-race of the mill to the south-east.
105	Deposit	Soft, dark brown to black cassy, silty deposit, greasy in the hand, possibly high organic content. Fill? of 104, gives the appearance of a typical ditch/drain/culvert fill.
106	Deposit	Mid red-orange, clayey silt to the base of the western end of Trench 1, very clean, soft to moderate compaction, lying on top of the Mercia Mudstone substrate, 102. Most likely a colluvial deposit representing weathering and movement from higher up the slope to the south.
107	Deposit	A highly mixed deposit of loose brown clay, rubble, and CBM, in a large area occupying apparently the entire central part of the site to the east of wall 104, and probably occupying a pit or other cut. Origin unknown but looked like a demolition deposit levelled back into the site. Where this deposit was found in the base of trenches, they had to be cut deeper to find firmer ground, for example at the eastern end of Trench 3. Seen throughout the excavation area east of wall 104.
108	Structure	A wall seen <i>only</i> in the northern section of Trench 1. Depth of trench here precluded close examination, but it appeared to be of similar construction to wall 104.
601	Structure	A wall aligned south-east/north-west, of mid to light grey, mottled, semi-crystalline, rubble masonry construction, possibly Lias Limestone, bonded with a light grey, speckly, friable mortar. Width 0.65m, and cut into the natural substrate 102. Seen in the base of Trench 6, at the southern end of Trench 7, and entering the southern section of Trench 3. Extended to almost the full height of the southern end of the west-facing section in Trench 6.

There were no finds of any significance from this monitoring project. From the backfill of Trench 11 (context 107), we recovered a large circular object, dished on one side,

and covered with mortar on what was clearly the lower, flat side. It was made from what was probably cast iron, and appeared to be damaged in the centre of the dished side (**Plate 11**). Its date and purpose is unknown. It *may* relate to the earlier garage on the site, but this is problematic.

5 Conclusions

The most important findings from this project were the three walls, 104, 108 and 601. The problem is in coming to any meaningful judgement about how they may relate to each other, if indeed at all. The dark, silty deposit to the north of wall 104 seemed clearly to indicate that it was only the southern side of a culvert-type structure which had once carried flowing water. Wall 601, while of quite a different nature in terms of its construction, *could* be projected north-westwards from its discovery point in Trench 6, to conjoin with wall 108, and, in turn projecting wall 104 to the south-east, this would produce a 'culvert type feature, with walls on either side of about 1m width. The difference in construction between 104 and 601 could perhaps be put down to rebuilding/repair at some point. Is this, however, wide enough for a mill tailrace? There is also the problem that wall 104 was not traced to the south-east, and 601 was not seen anywhere to the north-west of Trench 6. Again, this might simply have been due to the clear (and probably modern) truncation that we observed in the central area of the site. However, there is further problem in that on site, it certainly *seemed* as though wall 108 was oriented south-west/north-east rather than, if it had indeed been a north-westward extension of 601, south-east/north-west. The former orientation might make it theoretically possible, indeed, that 108 actually formed a return from the south-eastern end of 401; and indeed a projection onto the Croscombe tithe map (**Figure 4**) might well incline one to say that 108 could have represented the eastern wall, and 104 the southern wall, of a non-domestic building which is shown occupying a part of the development site in the mid-19th century. A projection on to the First Edition OS map about 40 years later, however, is less convincing, although at least wall 601 has a pretty close relationship, on this map at least, with the northern corner of one of the former mill buildings which no longer exists (**Figure 5**). Indeed the north-western corner of this building, as mapped by the OS, coincides almost perfectly with wall 601 as it was found in the excavation

trenches, and it may therefore represent the best explanation for that wall. The function of this long, narrow building, shown also on the tithe map, is unknown, although its position and orientation clearly indicate some function connected with the mill. There is of course always the problem of trying to reconcile differences in the various surveys, and it is impossible to know what the level of error actually is. In terms of surviving structures, the First Edition OS ties in reasonably well with the modern map, upon which both of the main historic maps have been projected here (**Figures 4 and 5**). Note, for example, the long narrow building attached to the western side of the mill house, shown on both the tithe map, and the First Edition OS. The position and size of this structure is very different between the two maps; and in order to accommodate such a difference we must assume either that the tithe survey map is really wildly inaccurate; or, rather more likely, that between the dates of the two maps, something amounting to roughly 40 years, there had been considerable changes on the mill site, including rebuilding and/or extensions to existing structures.

So while this watching brief project has identified remnants of former structures surviving on the site, and it is very likely that they are somehow related to the former mill buildings immediately to the east, it is, simply because of the very constricted perspective given by the nature of the excavations, rather difficult at the moment to make overall sense of their wider context.

6 Bibliography

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DCLG 2012

National Planning Policy Framework, Department for Communities and Local Government, London, March 2012.

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MoRPHE

Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers' Guide, English Heritage, 2015.

Figure 1

Location of the Site

The Site



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Grid at 1km intervals

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Figure 2

Site Plan Showing Red Line Boundary

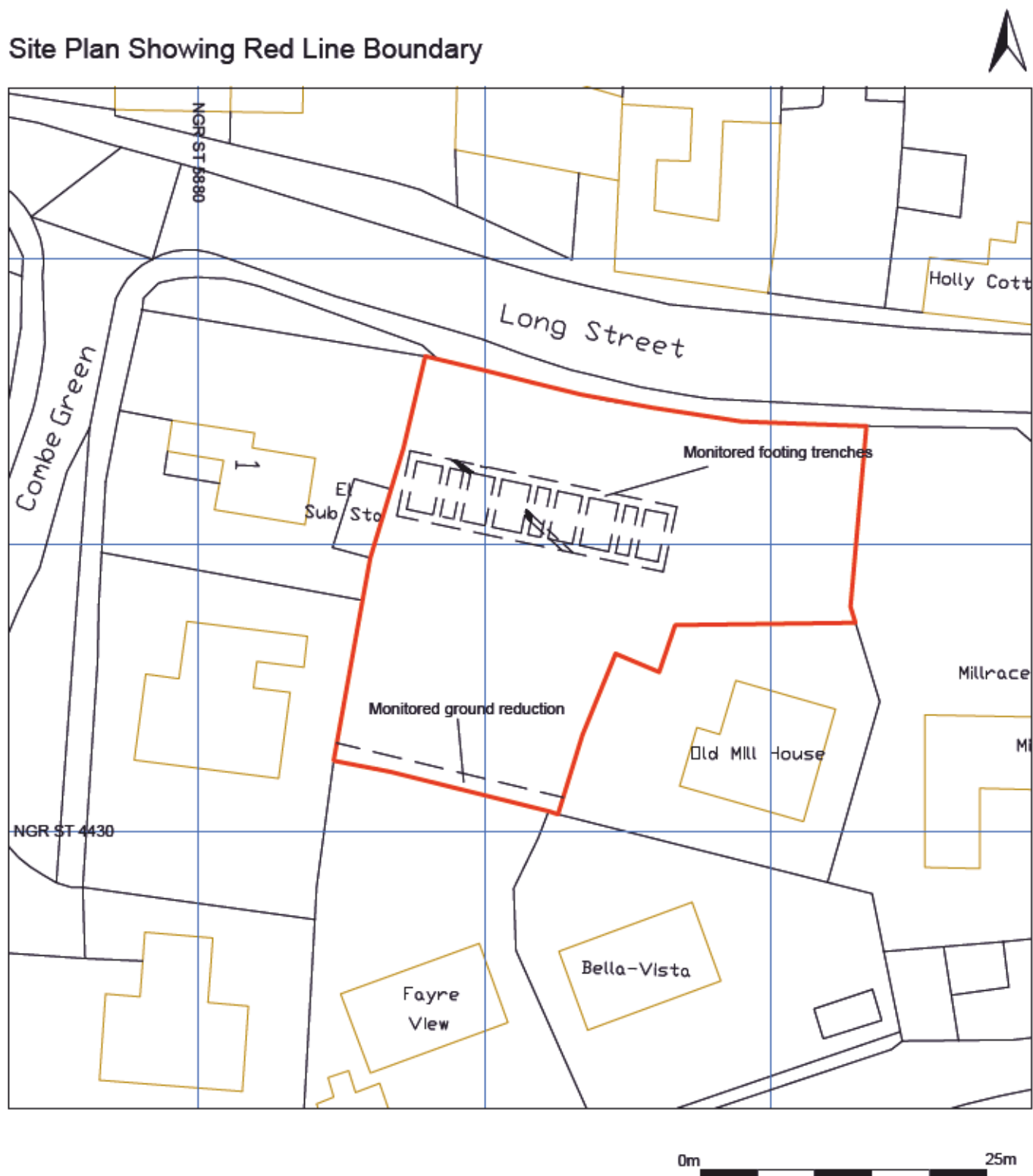
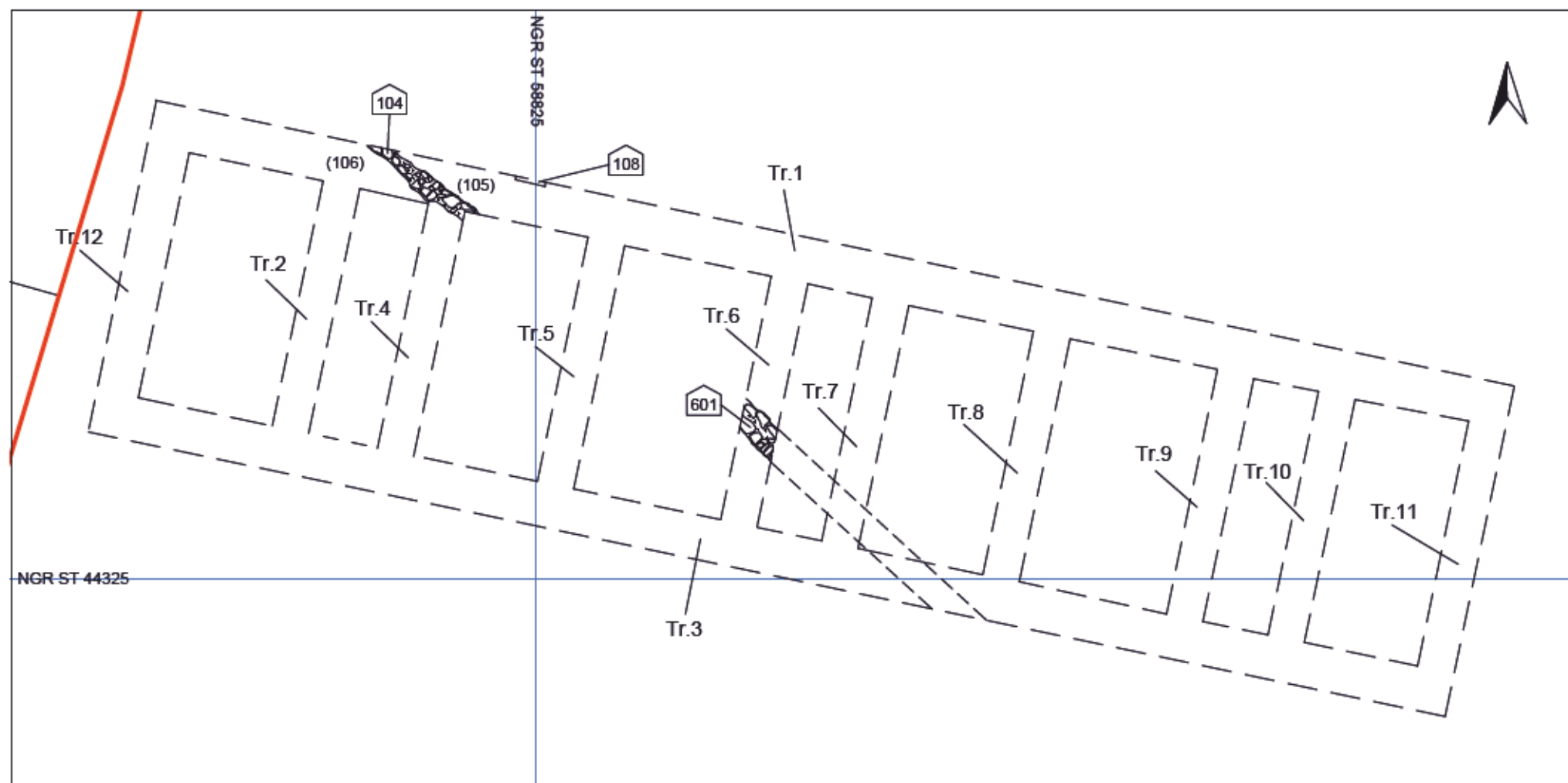


Figure 3

Plan of Recorded Archaeology



0m 5m



Figure 4

Plan Showing Monitored Trenches Overlain onto the 1840 Croscombe Tithe Map. Source: KnowYourPlace, Somerset



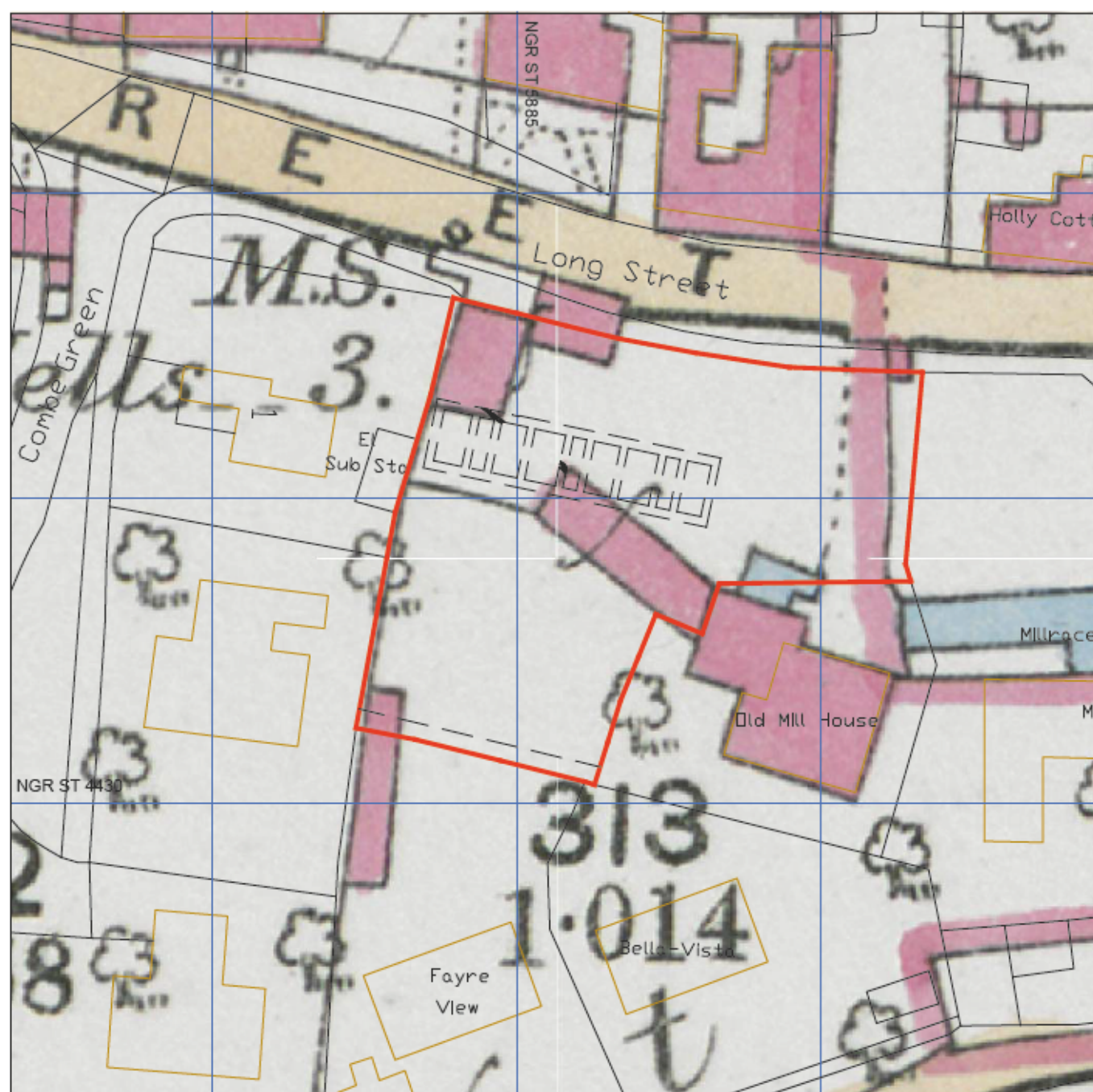
0m 25m



Figure 5

Plan Showing Monitored Trenches Overlain onto the First Edition OS
25" Map. Somerset Sheet 41.11, surveyed 1885, published 1887.

Source: KnowYourPlace, Somerset.



0m 25m



Plates



1. Composite panoramic view of the site prior to the commencement of the main phase of work, taken from the north-western corner of the site. The view pans round from east (left-hand side of frame) to south (right-hand side). Removal of main rear breeze block revetment wall in progress just to the right of the arm of the machine.



2. View of southern side of site following removal of modern revetment wall, and cutting back into the face of the natural Mercia Mudstone as revealed. The view pans round from east on the left-hand side, to south-west on the right. Note remains of modern revetment wall on left, with backfill of scalplings behind it. Scale: 1m. The site has historically, clearly been terraced back into the natural slope profile, which originally would have dropped down towards the little River Sheppey to the north, behind the photographer.



3. Composite panoramic view of the site just prior to the commencement of the main excavation phase for the footing trenches of the three houses, to be built on the part of the site in the foreground. The view pans round from the south (left-hand side) to south-west (right hand side). The masonry wall in the background, marking the site's western boundary, is the only historic structure now standing, and although in its present form it clearly consists of multiple phases, it is probably this wall which was depicted on the tithe map of 1840, and it therefore at the least precedes that date.



4. Wall 104, Trench 1, view to west. Note dark, silty organic deposit 105 to the right (ie north) of the wall. Modern backfilled garage inspection pit, with breeze block walls, in the background on the left (southern) side of the trench. Scale 0.50m.



5. Detail of backfilled garage inspection pit, junction of Trench 1 and Trench 2, view to south. Scale: 1m.



6. Wall 108, seen in section only, in the south-facing section of Trench 1. View to north.



7. Detail of historic wall marking the western boundary of the development site, image taken from its northern end. This is the only structure incorporating historic fabric now surviving above ground on the site. Preparation prior to repointing in progress. The blocked up window is modern, its frame being formed of concrete breeze blocks. View to south. Scale: 1m.



8. Wall 601 at the southern end of trench 6. View to south east, into the east-facing section of the trench. Scales: 1m and 0.50m.



9. Wall 601 exposed in the north-facing section of Trench 3, close to the southern end of Trench 8. View to south-east.



10. Composite panoramic view of the site, with excavation of all trenches completed, save for Trench 12, at the extreme western side of the site, behind the photographer. Pouring of concrete has already begun in the trenches closest to the camera, and proceeded eastwards. View to east.



11. The circular ?cast iron dished object recovered from modern backfill in Trench 11. Scale: 0.50m.