

Land Near Hunstrete, Marksbury, Bath and North-East Somerset

Report on Archaeological Watching Brief



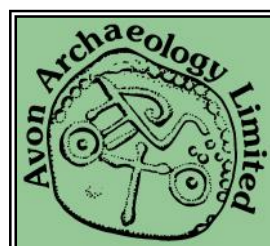
on behalf of

Western Power Distribution Limited

Sarah Newns BA, ACIFA
Nick Corcos BA, MA, PhD, ACIFA

Avon Archaeology Limited

Bristol: December 2014



Land Near Hunstrete, Marksbury, Bath and North-East Somerset

Report on Archaeological Watching Brief (NGR ST 65305 61491)



Frontispiece: Using a mobile elevator to isolate the power supply to the existing overhead cabling, prior to integrating the new poles and cabling into the network. View to west-south-west.

Sarah Newns BA, ACIFA
Nick Corcos BA, MA, PhD, ACIFA

On behalf of

Western Power Distribution Limited

Avon Archaeology Limited
Bristol: December 2014



SUMMARY

Avon Archaeology Limited was commissioned by Western Power Distribution Limited to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording (Archaeological Watching Brief) during groundworks related to the excavation of a number of relatively small holes for the support of standard, telegraph-type wooden poles, along a short, linear stretch of ground centred on NGR ST 65305 61491, on the northern side of the main A368 road. The poles were being inserted to support new high-tension electricity cables associated with the establishment of a new solar panel array a short distance away in a field to the south-west, on the southern side of the main road. This latter site had, in 2012, been the subject of an earlier Desk-Based Assessment (Corcos 2012).

Of a total of five excavations undertaken, it was possible to monitor four. At no point in any of the excavations were any deposits, structures or features of potential archaeological significance identified.



CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION
2. THE SITE: GEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND
3. METHODOLOGY
4. THE WATCHING BRIEF
5. CONCLUSION
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY
7. TABLE OF CONTEXTS

FIGURES

- Figure 1** Location of the Study Area. Extract from OS 1:25 000 map
Figure 2 Locations of the four monitored pits

PLATES

Cover

Excavation of the fifth, westernmost and final hole, with pole for new high-tension cabling being erected by machine. Excavated material in front of the pole consists largely of a mixture of weathered limestone and clay brash, and unweathered limestone and clay. View to east-north-east.

Frontispiece

Using a mobile elevator to isolate the power supply to the existing overhead cabling, prior to integrating the new poles and cabling into the network. View to west-south-west.

Plate 1

Hole 1, excavated almost to full depth. View to north.

Plate 2

Hole 4, west-facing section.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Avon Archaeology Limited wishes to acknowledge the assistance given by the following in the production of this report: Amanda Hillman, of Western Power Distribution Limited; and the on-site staff of the same company, supervised by Tim Durrant, who were all extremely helpful, patient and co-operative during the course of the work.

NOTES

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.

PROJECT HEALTH AND SAFETY STATEMENT

In all matters pertaining to this fieldwork project, Health and Safety has taken priority over all archaeological matters. All archaeological fieldwork has been undertaken in accordance with the guidelines set out by the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers (SCAUM 2002, Health and Safety in Field Archaeology) and also the relevant requirements set out in Construction (Design & Management) Regulations 1994 (Health and Safety Commission 1994).

COPYRIGHT

The copyright to the following text, drawings and photographs is, unless otherwise credited, the property of the author and Avon Archaeology Limited. Full joint copyright passes to the commissioners of the project upon the full settlement of the project account.

All enquiries should be addressed to: Avon Archaeology Limited, Unit 36, Avondale Business Centre, Woodland Way, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 1AW. Telephone 0117 960 8487. Email: mail@avonarchaeology.co.uk.

Plans and maps based on the Ordnance Survey Sheets are reproduced by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown Copyright Reserved. Licence number AL 100005802.



1 INTRODUCTION

Avon Archaeology Limited was commissioned by Western Power Distribution Limited to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording (Archaeological Watching Brief) during groundworks related to the establishment of a photo-voltaic array at a site near Hunstrete, Marksbury, Bath and North-East Somerset district. Monitoring was carried out over the course of two days in November, 2014. The site which is the subject of this report was centred at about NGR ST 65305 61491, and lay on the northern side of the main A368 road. The solar panel site itself had been the subject of an earlier Desk-Based Assessment (Corcos 2012), and lies about 150m away to the west, on the southern side of the road.

The proposed development involved the erection of a number of new, telegraph-type, round timber poles to support a new run of high-tension (33kV) cabling which was required to take power from the PVA site. This involved the rapid excavation and backfilling of holes into which the new poles had been inserted (**Cover** and **Figure 2**). The new cabling was then tied into the existing 33kV power line which runs roughly north-south just over 100m to the east of the extreme eastern corner of the field in which the PVA array is to be established. In addition, some of the new posts had to be firmly anchored with steel stabilisation cables, and these also required the excavation of pits; for this purpose, the end of the cable was passed through, and fixed to, a large wooden slat, and the latter was then placed in the bottom of the pit, which was then backfilled.

The project was commissioned in response to a request from Mr Richard Sermon, the Archaeological Officer for B&NES district, that the groundworks on the site should be recorded in accordance with guidelines for Watching Brief Projects issued by The Institute for Archaeology (IfA).

2 THE SITE: GEOLOGICAL, TOPOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In terms of historical background, everything here is as for the main site, and everything which follows pertains to both the main site and the present one. The geological basis of the immediate vicinity is provided by a series of complex, and highly folded and faulted strata of Triassic and Jurassic age, although with some limited outcropping also of underlying Carboniferous sandstones, especially around Hunstrete itself. The higher ground, however, which includes the present site, tends to be underlain by the later strata, and the site itself lies on top of deposits of the Mercia Mudstone Group (formerly known as the Keuper Marls), which as a series can date to any point within the Triassic period, up to its very latest age sub-division which is known as the Rhaetian. These deposits are also highly varied, and can include both the hard red and green calcareous clays and mudstones for which they are best known, siltstones, sandstones, thin beds of gypsum and anhydrite, and thick but intermittent halite beds, especially in basins (BGS; Kellaway and Welch 1948, 38-60). Slightly later beds



of Jurassic limestones and mudstones, part of the Blue Lias and Charmouth Mudstone formations, outcrop immediately south of the site.

In terms of topography, the single field of which the PVA site itself is now composed, is relatively level in its central part, with elevations centring around 150m aOD. However, the ground rises gently towards the south-west, reaching a high of about 155m aOD at its south-western boundary, but conversely, it begins to drop away slightly to the north-west, towards a far steeper fall outside the site boundary on this side, but its extreme north-western corner is at about 139m aOD. Likewise, in terms of the present report involving the erection of the new poles on the northern side of the A368 main road, the ground is effectively level, with heights aOD centring around 145m aOD.

There are no statutory designations, of any description, affecting the study area itself, and there are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the immediate vicinity, although elements of Hunstrete House, which lies just under 700m north-west of the present site, are Grade II Listed.

The earlier desk-based assessment found that historically, the site appears always to have been farmland, with probably most of it part of a medieval system of open-field arable agriculture. Marksbury itself first emerges in the historical record in the late Anglo-Saxon period, when as an estate it came into the hands of Glastonbury Abbey, perhaps once having been part of a much larger territorial unit along with Compton Dando to the north, and Farmborough to the south. In the post-medieval period, the study site, however, emerges as part of the estate attached to Hunstrete, later, in the 18th and 19th centuries to develop into a major country house and park, but the existence of which as a coherent sub-unit may well be prefigured in the pages of Domesday Book in the late 11th century. The site remained part of the Hunstrete estate well into the 20th century.

With a single exception, a trawl of the B&NES Historic Environment Record conducted for the purposes of the earlier DBA, revealed no items of archaeological significance either on or in the vicinity of the site that might have implications for the proposed development. A rectangular feature, identified from historic Ordnance Survey maps, was noted on the northern side of the A368 road, and suggested as a possible cart-washing pond, but that area is no longer within the scheme boundary. Far more significantly, modern satellite imagery revealed the presence of a circular soil-mark that appears to reflect buried archaeological remains, and which together with a highly indicative, historic field-name (*stoweborowe*), and the large size of the feature (70m in diameter), could reflect the location of a previously unrecorded prehistoric monument, perhaps a barrow or a small henge. The northern edge of the feature probably intrudes into the southern part of the northern enclosure, and it is cut by the main A368 road. However, by far the bulk of this feature lies to the south of the road, on the north-eastern side of the field which now forms the reduced footprint of the proposed solar farm (**Figure 2**). This feature has now been formally accessioned onto the B&NES HER under reference MBN30394. It was primarily the presence of this feature, whatever its nature and origin may be, which prompted the local authority condition relating to an archaeological watching brief on the main PVA site itself,



and a request for the same kind of intervention during the groundworks for the establishment of the new electricity poles on the northern side of the road.

3 METHODOLOGY

The work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Corcos 2014), previously approved by the Archaeological Officer for B&NES Council. Monitoring was undertaken on four of the five pits that were eventually dug. During the Watching Brief, excavation was carried out using a 0.44m toothed bucket mounted on a JCB SiteMaster wheeled excavating machine (**Cover**). The positions of the excavated pits were located using a combination of taped measurements, and readings relating directly to the OS National Grid, taken by a Garmin eTrex 30 handheld GPS unit. Readings taken in this way were accurate to a tolerance of $\pm 2-3$ m. The positions of four of the five post pits are shown on **Figure 2**. All the pits were roughly the same size, being in the order of 0.5-0.70m in width, and in length between 2.20 and 2.70m. Maximum depth of the pits was 1.80m; however, the pit bases were not flat or even, and the maximum depth was confined only to the very small footprint of the pole base, so that the pit profile was essentially an asymmetric 'V' shape (**Plate 2**). This was less so for the pits intended to take the stabilisation cables for the new poles, and which were of about the same depth; but these too were of a somewhat irregular profile. It should be noted that health and safety considerations precluded the possibility of actually entering the pits when excavated to full depth (1.80m as already stated).

4 THE WATCHING BRIEF

The stratigraphy observed in the four pits which were monitored was pretty much identical, save for minor differences in depth. All four deposits listed in the table of contexts (below) were seen in all of those pits, and the contexts presented in the table, from Pit 1, can stand for them all. **Plates 1** and **2** present a small visual sample of the pits, and it is hoped that, along with the captions, these will be pretty self-explanatory. It is clear that the upper two contexts represented active agricultural deposits, although no finds were recovered from either of them; however, given the small size of the interventions, that was perhaps to be expected. Context 1002, and its analogues in the other pits, is certainly an *in situ* natural deposit, probably representing the highly weathered and fragmented upper part of the clay and limestone bedrock layer immediately below it. It is likely that this is actually a frost-shattered bed.



5 CONCLUSION

The monitoring exercise was entirely negative, and at no point during the course of the work were any deposits, structures or features of potential archaeological significance identified. It should be reiterated, however, that, by their very nature, the post pits represented relatively very small interventions, and it would be unwise to rely entirely on such minor 'windows' to come to any firm judgement about the existence or otherwise of archaeological deposits in the immediate vicinity of the work reported on here.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

BGS

Geology of Britain online viewer and database, British Geological Survey.
<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology/geologyOfBritain/viewer.html>

Corcos, N. J., 2012

Land Near Hunstrete, Marksbury, Bath and North-East Somerset: Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment. Unpublished Report, Avon Archaeological Unit Limited.

Corcos, N. J., 2014

Land Near Hunstrete, Marksbury, Bath and North-East Somerset: Scheme of Work for Archaeological Watching Brief. Unpublished Report, Avon Archaeology Limited.

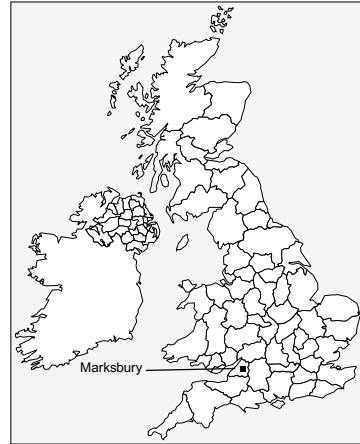
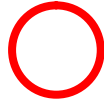
7 TABLE OF CONTEXTS

Context Number	Description (Maximum trench depth in all excavations centred around 1.8m from modern ground level)	Location
1000	Silty clay topsoil, variable thickness between about 0.07 to 0.20m	All monitored excavations
1001	Yellowish brown silty clay subsoil, 0.10 to 0.34m thickness	
1002	Stony limestone brash in a matrix of yellowish-brown clay. Thickness about 0.30m (probably undisturbed and weathered natural)	
1003	Unweathered, limestone and clay bedrock.	



Figure 1

Location of the Study Area



Plans and maps based on the Ordnance Survey sheets are reproduced by the permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office



Scale 1:25000

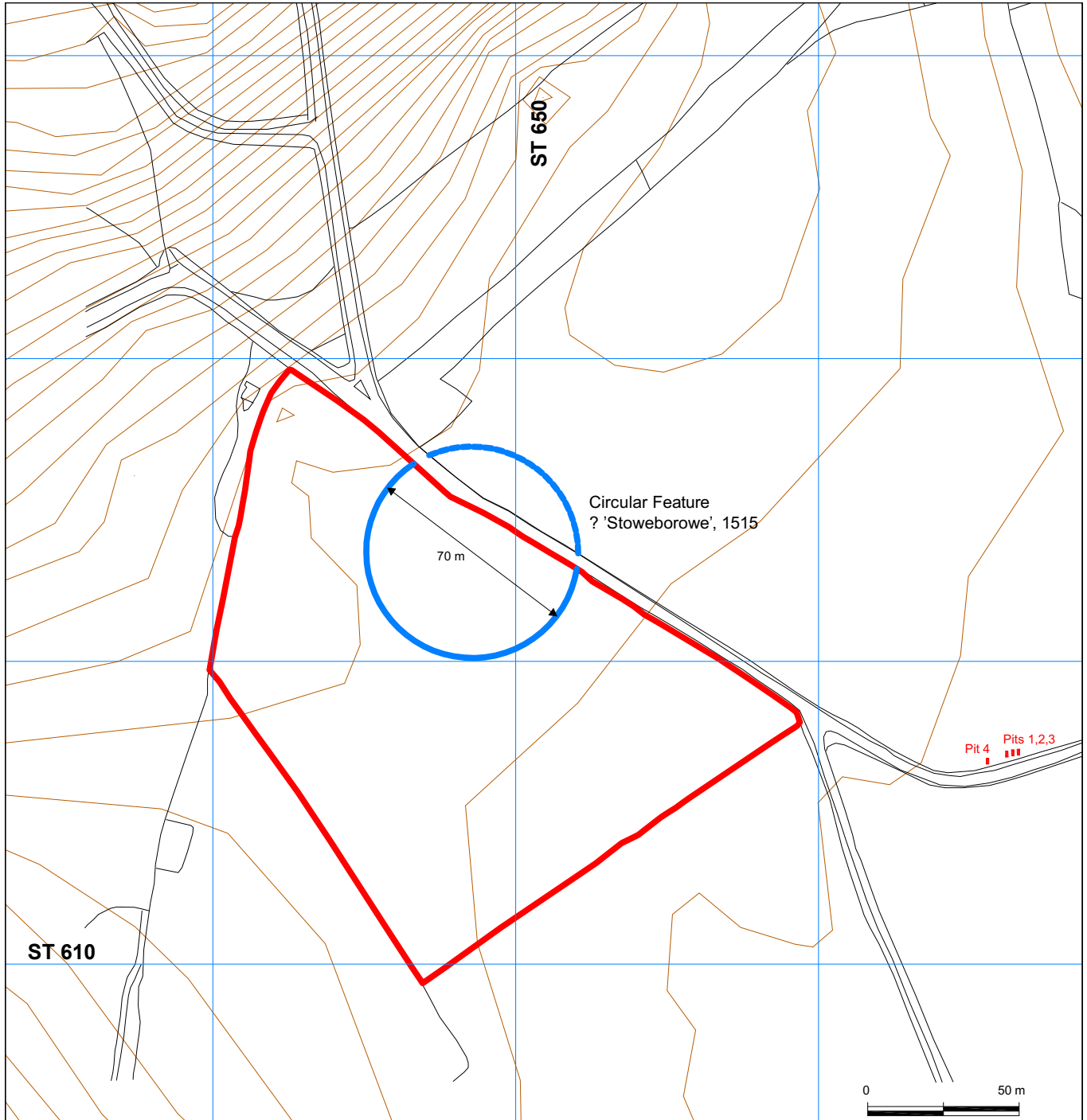
Ordnance Survey © Crown copyright 2005 All rights reserved. Licence Number AL 100005802



Figure 2



Site of solar panel array outlined in red, positions of the four monitored pits indicated



PLATES



1. Hole 1, excavated almost to full depth, at NGR ST 65331 61500.
View from southern end of trench, looking north. Scale: 1m



2. Hole 4, for the final, westernmost pole. West-facing section. Note the slope down from the northern (left-hand) end. Only the southern end, where the pole base itself will sit, is at full depth (1.8m). Scale: 1m.