

Archaeological Sampling and Assessment of Land at Uphempston Cottage, Littlehempston, Devon

Report by

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Southwest Landscape Investigations



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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SAMPLING AND ASSESSMENT AT UPHEMPSTON COTTAGE, LITTLEHEMPSTON, DEVON

Location: Uphempston Cottage, Littlehempston

Parish: Berry Pomeroy

District/ Planning Authority: South Hams

NGR: SX 82525 63310

Planning Application No: 1731/17/FUL

HET Ref: Arch/DM/SH/31029a

Proposal: Provision of a timber stable block at Uphempston Cottage, Littlehempston, TQ9 6LP

Designations: None

Summary

An archaeological assessment (watching brief) was carried out on land to the north of Uphempston Cottage, prior to the construction of a new stable block. Machine excavated groundworks were archaeologically monitored as a precautionary step, to prevent the unrecorded destruction of any archaeological features that may survive. No archaeological features were encountered in the extremely shallow soil and no evidence of any human intervention was visible in the dense shale geology below.

The development

Site location

The site lies within a pasture, 160m north of the small hamlet of Uphempston and 200m south of Pennball Cross, within Berry Pomeroy parish (SX 82525 63310). It is located just east of a green lane, at a height of approx 65m above OD on the moderate south slope of Penn Ball, an east-west ridge of high ground that reaches 90m above OD.

Geology

Uphempston lies firmly within the Upper Devonian Nordon Formation of mudstones, with occasional, lateral limestone beds (BGS sheet 350, Torquay), including the Penny's Wood limestone member, named after a small wood 520m to the NW of the site.

Archaeological and Historical Context

The archaeological record in this area of South Devon contains a high number of crop mark sites, discovered from targeted aerial reconnaissance. This includes an enclosure of probable late prehistoric date, recorded on Penn Ball, just 60m north of the assessment site, noted in July 1984 (MDV28902). It is one of several in this locality, where at least five others have been recorded within a distance of less than 1.75km from the site,

including a circular enclosure 700m to the east (MDV37269) and a rectangular, single ditched enclosure 800m to the SW (MDV51376).

Although no surface evidence of the Penn Ball enclosure is visible, the crop mark suggests it was double-ditched and sub-rectilinear in shape, with an entrance opening on the NE side.

Few find spots have been recorded in the Devon HER for this district, but only 220m west of the site, a fragment of an unusually large greenstone axe was found in a field, and now resides in Exeter Museum.

The A381 Newton Abbot to Totnes road, which runs only 270m east of the site, is believed to be a Roman Road (MDV118358) and part of a route from Exeter to Totnes.

Uphempston is an outlying hamlet in the parish of Littlehempston, lying a little over 1km to the east of the village, sitting adjacent to the boundary with Berry Pomeroy parish. The boundary straddles the hamlet, and several properties, including the development site, sit within the latter parish. Three farms are depicted in this hamlet on the Tithe Maps for these parishes, which were surveyed in 1838 and 1841; this number had remained static in 1889 (OS 6-inch) and little had changed by 1904, although Uphempston Cottage, with its long narrow garden is depicted on the 6-inch OS map of that year for the first time. Since then there has only been minor change to the layout of the hamlet, but no known development has ever occurred within at least 70m of the proposed site.

Littlehempston was listed in Domesday for Devon in 1086, but specific references for Uphempston are elusive until the 16th century. These are limited to the names of individuals associated with the place, while little is known of the history of its development and earlier occupation. However, there is no reason to believe that the hamlet does not have earlier origins, although due to the gradient and lack of earthworks, it is unlikely that any medieval activity extended as far up the slope to the area currently under assessment.

In the immediate vicinity of the assessment site, an extremely well-defined hollow way, Bitman's Lane, cuts south to north between Uphempston and Knaves Ash Cross passing only 20m to the west. This linear feature also marks part of the parish boundary between Littlehempston and Berry Pomeroy. Approximately 40m to the north east, an earthwork lynchet runs east to west across the slope of the field providing clear evidence of past agricultural practise.

Groundworks

The new stable is to be built from timber, standing on a full concrete base. This required the excavation of a level platform, which was cut into the slope on the northern higher ground, but built up above the ground at the lower end.

Turf and topsoil were stripped over the whole 15m by 12m plot to a depth of 15cm, using a toothless grading bucket, before proceeding further in 7.5cm spits. At between 20 and 30cm the natural geology was

encountered in the form of dense compacted shale (shillet), which lies fairly consistently at that depth over the entire trench. No structures, features, deposits, burials or artefacts were noted in the very shallow upper soils exposed and the shillet itself showed no signs of any past human interventions such as pits or ditches. Metal detection also revealed nothing of significance. Further examination at greater depth of up to 1.2m, confirmed the shillet to be untouched in-situ geology.

Conclusions

No archaeological structures, features, deposits or artefacts were noted or damaged during the digging of these groundworks and no further archaeological fieldwork will be required.

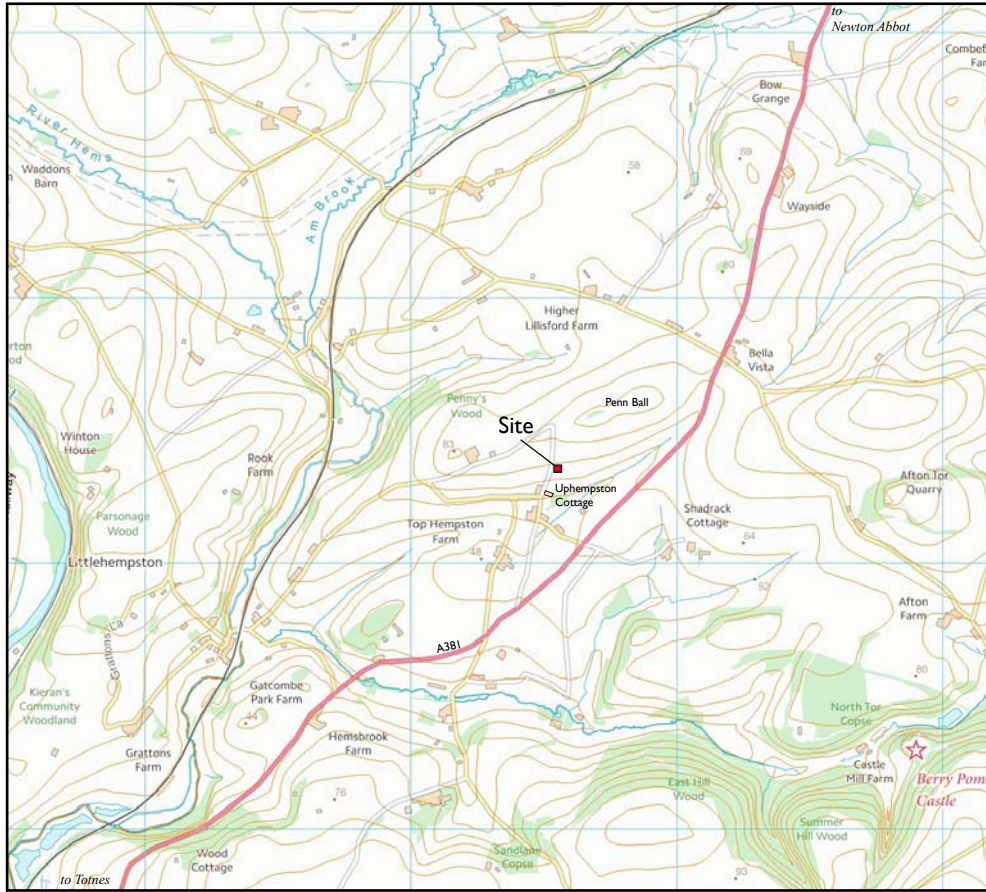


Fig 1. Site location and surrounding district. Ordnance Survey © Crown Copyright and database right 2015.

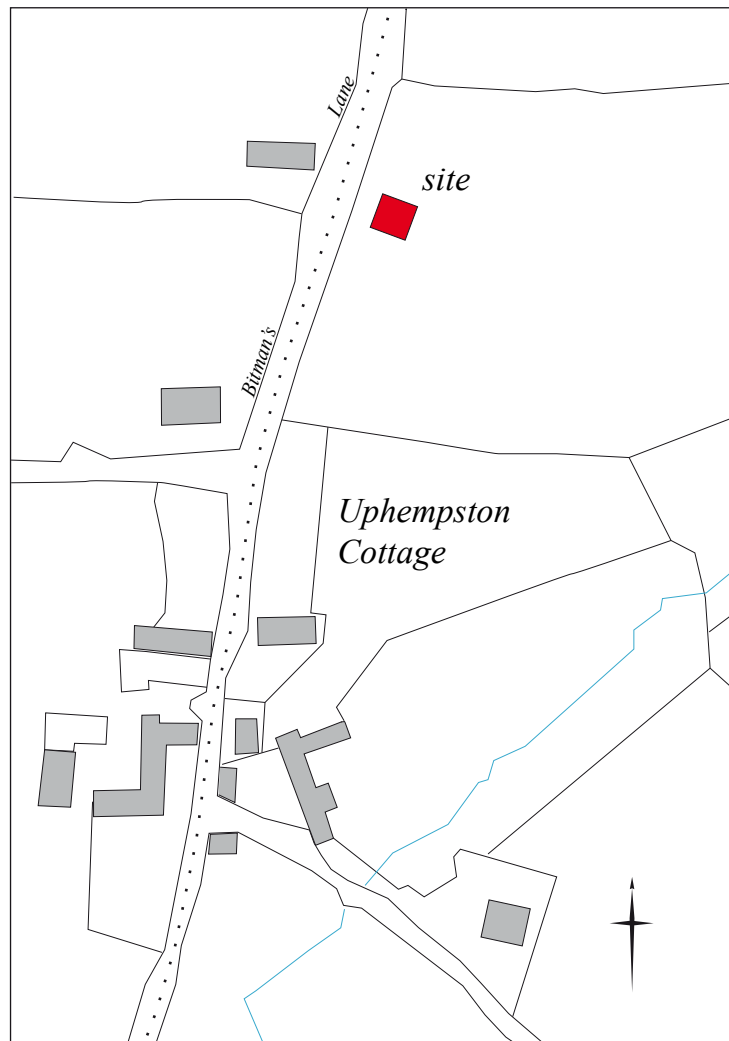


Fig2 Uphempston hamlet and site location, showing approximate extent of the area examined in red.