



## Boscombe Down Airfield(UAV Works), Amesbury, Wiltshire

### Archaeological Watching Brief Report





**Boscombe Down Airfield (UAV Works),  
Amesbury, Wiltshire**

**Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

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## QUALITY ASSURANCE

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**BOSCOMBE DOWN AIRFIELD (UAV WORKS),  
AMESBURY, WILTSHIRE**

**Watching Brief Report**

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**Figure 1** Site location and area of watching brief

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**BOSCOMBE DOWN AIRFIELD (UAV WORKS),  
AMESBURY, WILTSHIRE**

**Watching Brief Report**

**Summary**

Wessex Archaeology was appointed by QinetiQ to carry out an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of two arrestor cable assemblages and a topsoil storage area at Boscombe Down Airfield, centred on NGR 417202 139335. The fieldwork was carried out between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

The watching brief monitored the machine excavation of two large areas to the top of the natural chalk and eight 1m deep test pits adjacent to the taxiway. Observation during the fieldwork has shown that whilst the spoil storage area to the northwest of the runway was relatively undisturbed by modern airfield activity, the area of the taxiway, in particular the northern portion, had been extensively raised by between approximately 0.60m to 1.60m using made ground deposits.

No archaeological features or deposits were recorded during this watching brief, although the results have demonstrated that there is the potential for the survival of the archaeological features and deposits at a relatively shallow depth within the general area to the northwest of the taxiway.

Within the line of the western runway it is possible that archaeological features may be preserved sealed beneath the extensive fill deposits, although it was not possible to gauge if the area had been previously truncated.

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**BOSCOMBE DOWN AIRFIELD (UAV WORKS),  
AMESBURY, WILTSHIRE****Watching Brief Report****Acknowledgements**

This project was commissioned by QinetiQ, and Wessex Archaeology is grateful to Mark Newman (Project Manager, Defence Estates Tasks, QinetiQ) and Lee Haynes, construction manager for the sub-contractors Morgan Sindall) for their help and assistance during the course of the Project.

The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Andy Manning. The fieldwork was carried out Dave Murdie and the report was compiled by Sian Reynolds with illustrations prepared by SE James.

## **BOSCOMBE DOWN AIRFIELD (UAV WORKS), AMESBURY, WILTSHIRE**

### **Watching Brief Report**

#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

##### **1.1 Project Background**

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology (WA) was commissioned by QinetiQ to undertake an archaeological watching brief during ground works to develop the taxiway along the western runway at Boscombe Down Airfield, Amesbury, Wiltshire, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 417202 139335, hereafter referred to as 'the Site' (**Figure 1**).

1.1.2 The work comprised the stripping of topsoil and subsoil for two storage areas (approximately 300m<sup>2</sup> and 250m<sup>2</sup> in area) and the machine excavation of eight test pits (each approximately 1 m<sup>2</sup>) for the foundations of two groups of arrestor cables. All excavations were monitored during this watching brief.

1.1.3 The construction was a permitted airfield development, which did not require planning permission. The proposed works lay within an area of known high archaeological potential. Accordingly, QinetiQ commissioned Wessex Archaeology to undertake an archaeological watching brief to monitor all necessary ground works to ensure that any significant archaeological remains would be dealt with in an appropriate manner.

1.1.4 The fieldwork was undertaken on the 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of September 2011.

##### **1.2 The Site, Location and Geology**

1.2.1 The Site lay to the northwest of the main Boscombe Down runway, with the test pits located in two main groups of four test pits each either side of the adjacent taxiway, approximately 750m apart. The two stripped areas for storage were a further 150m to the northwest.

1.2.2 The land slopes gently from the north east, from 116m aOD (above Ordnance Datum) to 120m aOD. The taxiway is positioned on the northwest facing slope of a ridge which is capped by the runway, the latter requiring an easily accessible, relatively flat strip of land.

1.2.3 The underlying geology of the Site is mapped as Upper Chalk (British Geological Survey 1976, Sheet 298).

##### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

1.3.1 The airfield at Boscombe down has a long history. Military flights from Boscombe Down commenced in 1917 with experimental operations beginning at the start of World War II in 1939-40. The airfield was expanded in the early 1950s and the existing 'Hardened Aircraft Shelters (HAS) hangers were constructed in the late 1970s.

1.3.2 The airfield has been the subject of large and small-scale archaeological investigations from the 1940s to the present day.

- 1.3.3 Just over 60 separate monuments, features or findspots are recorded on the Wiltshire Sites and Monuments Record (Wiltshire SMR) as lying within the boundaries of the airfield. These include several Bronze Age round barrows and a Late Bronze Age Wessex Linear Ditch.
- 1.3.4 A concentration of Iron Age and Romano-British pits, inhumations and a double-ditched enclosure associated with settlement were found during levelling work on the eastern boundaries of the airfield in 1949 (Richardson 1951).
- 1.3.5 The results from more recent watching briefs and a programme of trenched evaluation identified further archaeological remains, including ancient field systems and land boundaries, pits and graves (AC Archaeology 2001; Wessex Archaeology 2006, Wessex Archaeology 2007, Wessex Archaeology 2008 and Wessex Archaeology 2009). An evaluation by AC Archaeology in 2001 had identified that areas adjacent to the runway and taxiways have been significantly affected by modern 'cut and fill' groundworks with a severe impact on the archaeological resource. However, the survival of pockets of well-preserved archaeological deposits and features has been found across the airfield.

## 1.4 Previous Investigations

- 1.4.1 Although no previous archaeological fieldwork had been carried out in the area of the proposed works, a recent borehole survey was carried out along the edge of the taxiway. This survey (BH1 and 2, **Figure 1**) recorded natural chalk at a depth of 0.76m at the southern end of the taxiway and 1.60m in depth at the northern end and this clearly shows that construction of the taxiway and runway significantly raised the ground levels in this area.

## 2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

### 2.1 Aims and Objectives

- 2.1.1 With due regard to the *IfA Standards and Guidance for archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008), the generic aims of the project were to;
- Monitor the programme of works to locate, identify and to investigate and record the presence/absence of archaeological features or deposits, including palaeoenvironmental deposits
  - If significant archaeological features or deposits are located, then the watching brief would establish, where possible, the extent, date, character, relationship, condition and significance of these features and deposits within the area impacted, and
  - To inform the scope and nature of any requirements for potential future mitigation, if appropriate.
- 2.1.2 With specific reference to the Site, an additional aim was to assess the general stratigraphy of this area of Boscombe Down Airfield, the degree to which it has suffered truncation/modern build up, and the likelihood of the survival of archaeological deposits and substrata.



### **3 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Methodology**

- 3.1.1 Works comprised archaeological monitoring by an experienced archaeologist of topsoil/subsoil removal and ground reduction during groundworks and the watching brief was maintained throughout initial stripping until it was clear that the potential for archaeological remains to be exposed had been exhausted.
- 3.1.2 The groundwork was carried out, using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. The excavation proceeded in spits to the desired level.
- 3.1.3 All potential archaeological features and deposits were subsequently hand cleaned and sample excavated. Features and deposits were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* record sheets and a unique numbering system for individual contexts, and were planned at a scale of 1:20. Sections were drawn at 1:10. All principal strata and features were related to the Ordnance Survey datum. Following all investigation and recording, the areas were then backfilled.

### **4 FIELDWORK RESULTS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

- 4.1.1 Two large rectangular areas for soil storage were excavated approximately 150m northwest of the taxiway (Red areas, **Figure 1**). These areas were excavated to the top of the natural geology and were used to store excavated material from the groundworks alongside the taxiway.
- 4.1.2 Eight test pits (TPs 1-8, **Figure 1**) measuring 1.3m x 1.3m x 1m deep were excavated adjacent to the taxiway. These were grouped into two sets of four, two either side of the taxiway; TPs 1, 2, 5 and 6 to the south of the Site, and TPs 3, 4, 7 and 8 to the north.

#### **4.2 Stripped Areas**

- 4.2.1 The larger stripped areas were excavated through moderately disturbed topsoil and subsoil deposits, to the top of the Upper Chalk. They measured 32.5, x 9m and 29m x 8.5m respectively. Two modern service trenches ran through the area and there was a limited amount of redeposited chalk and modern truncation.
- 4.2.2 A series of deep plough scars running broadly north/south were noted in the top of the natural chalk. Their presence indicated that the upper surface of the natural geology in this area has not been deeply truncated and therefore there is the potential for the survival of archaeological features and deposits in the general area.

#### **4.3 Test Pits**

- 4.3.1 The test pits in the southern arrestor cable assemblage (TPs 1, 2, 5 and 6) demonstrated a moderate depth of modern made ground overlying, in most cases, natural chalk. TPs 1 and 2, on the eastern side of the taxiway, encountered natural chalk at depths of 0.41m and 0.36m respectively, below the present ground surface and sealed below distinct topsoil and subsoil

deposits. To the west of the taxiway, TPs 5 and 6 were recorded with modern topsoil capping layers of crushed concrete (TP 5), redeposited chalk, and flint gravel ballast (TP 6). Natural chalk was reached in TP 5 at a depth of 0.55m below the present ground surface, while at the 1m limit of excavation in TP 6, natural geology had not been reached.

- 4.3.2 The test pits of the northern arrestor cable assemblage (TPs 3, 4, 7 and 8) were all dominated by modern made ground deposits, none of them exposing natural geology within the 1m maximum depth of the excavation. Modern/reworked topsoil and subsoil layers capped the made ground, which comprised of redeposited chalk, at a consistent depth of 0.30-0.35m throughout the test pits.

#### **4.4 Archaeological Features**

- 4.4.1 No archaeological features or deposits were recorded during this watching brief.

### **5 FINDS AND PALAEO-ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLES**

#### **5.1 Finds**

- 5.1.1 No archaeological artefacts were recovered during the watching brief.

#### **5.2 Environmental Samples**

- 5.2.1 No material suitable for environmental analysis was present within the monitored areas.

### **6 CONCLUSIONS**

#### **6.1 Conclusions**

- 6.1.1 The results from the test pitting along the taxiway are consistent with those previously recorded in the borehole survey. The borehole in the southern arrestor cable assemblage, located between TPs 5 and 6, recorded natural chalk at 0.76m, comparable with depths of 0.55m in TP 5 and over 1m in TP 6.
- 6.1.2 The borehole in the northern arrestor cable assemblage, located between TPs 7 and 8, recorded natural chalk at 1.60m, consistent with finding that original ground level lay beyond the 1m excavation limit of all 4 of the northern test pits.
- 6.1.3 It can be assumed, as has been seen elsewhere, that during the construction of the runway and adjacent taxiway, the natural chalk spur on which it was located had to be sufficiently landscaped by raising significantly the ground levels to make it level.
- 6.1.4 No evidence was seen to indicate the extent that the pre-existing land surface was truncated/worked before the ground levels were raised, but it is possible that the archaeological features and deposits could survive below the made ground, although in this case, the proposed works were either too shallow to impact any potential features or none were present.

- 6.1.5 The results of the watching brief on the soil storage areas to the northwest of the taxiway shows that within this area, no large scale raising of ground levels was required and that the general area has not been deeply impacted by modern activity. Although no archaeological features or deposits were seen within the stripped areas, there is still the potential for the survival of archaeological features and deposits in the surrounding area.

## **7 ARCHIVE**

### **7.1 Preparation and Deposition**

- 7.1.1 The archive is currently held at Wessex Archaeology's office building under the site code **75452**. The complete archaeological project archive will be prepared in accordance with Wessex Archaeology's Guidelines for Archive Preparation and in accordance with *Archaeological Archives: a guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation* (AAF 2007).
- 7.1.2 At a later date, the archive will be deposited with Wiltshire County Council Museum Service under the site code **75452**. The archive will be prepared in accordance with the Museum's archive preparation standards.

### **7.2 The Archive**

- 7.2.1 The project archive was prepared in accordance with the guidelines outlined in Appendix 3 of *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1991) and in accordance with the *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long term storage* (UKIC 1990). It comprises a ring-bound file containing a watching brief attendance form, site 'day book', trench record sheets, and site drawings.

### **7.3 Copyright**

- 7.3.1 This report may contain material that is non-Wessex Archaeology copyright (e.g. Ordnance Survey, British Geological Survey), or the intellectual property of third parties, which we are able to provide for limited reproduction under the terms of our own copyright licences, but for which copyright itself is non-transferrable by Wessex Archaeology. You are reminded that you remain bound by the conditions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 with regard to multiple copying and electronic dissemination of the report.

## **8 REFERENCES**

AC Archaeology, 2001, Boscombe Down FSTA: Results of Archaeological Trench Evaluation, unpublished client report 1001/2/0, April 2001

Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales), 1976, *Salisbury*, Sheet 298, Drift and Solid 1:50,000

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Wessex Archaeology, 2009, Boscombe Airfield Batching Plant, Amesbury, Wiltshire: Detailed Gradiometer Survey Report, unpublished client report 71000.01, February 2009

## APPENDIX 1: OASIS SUMMARY

**OASIS ID: wessexar1-116745**

### Project details

Project name	BOSCOMBE DOWN AIRFIELD (UAV WORKS),
Short description of the project	Wessex Archaeology was appointed by QinetiQ to carry out an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of two arrestor cable assemblages and a topsoil storage area at Boscombe Down Airfield, centred on NGR 417202 139335. The fieldwork was carried out between the 14th and 27th September 2011. The watching brief monitored the machine excavation of two large areas to the top of the natural chalk and eight 1m deep test pits adjacent to the taxiway. Observation during the fieldwork has shown that whilst the spoil storage area to the northwest of the runway was relatively undisturbed by modern airfield activity, the area of the taxiway, in particular the northern portion, had been extensively raised by between approximately 0.60m to 1.60m using made ground deposits. No archaeological features or deposits were recorded during this watching brief. However, the results of the watching brief have demonstrated that there is the potential for the survival of the archaeological features and deposits at a relatively shallow depth within the general area to the northwest of the taxiway. Within the line of the western runway the potential for deeply buried archaeological features or deposits is present, but there was no visible evidence which would indicate what level of truncation may have taken place prior to the raising of ground levels.
Project dates	Start: 14-09-2011 End: 27-09-2011
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	75452 - Contracting Unit No.
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	None
Current Land use	Transport and Utilities 2 - Other transport infrastructure
Monument type	NONE None
Significant Finds	NONE None
Investigation type	'Watching Brief'
Prompt	Voluntary/self-interest

### Project location

Country	England
Site location	WILTSHIRE SALISBURY AMESBURY BOSCOMBE DOWN AIRFIELD
Postcode	SP4 7LN
Study area	0.60 Hectares

Site coordinates SU 172 395 51.15397368 -1.754040964060 51 09 14 N 001 45 14  
W Point

Height OD / Depth Min: 116.00m Max: 120.00m

### Project creators

Name of Wessex Archaeology  
Organisation

Project brief Wessex Archaeology  
originator

Project design Wessex Archaeology  
originator

Project A Manning  
director/manager

Project supervisor D Murdie

Type of Developer  
sponsor/funding  
body

Name of QinetiQ  
sponsor/funding  
body

### Project archives

Physical Archive No  
Exists?

Digital Archive Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum  
recipient

Digital Contents 'none'

Digital Media 'Images raster / digital photography','Survey','Text'  
available

Paper Archive Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum  
recipient

Paper Contents 'none'

Paper Media 'Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General  
available Notes','Section','Survey '

### Project bibliography 1

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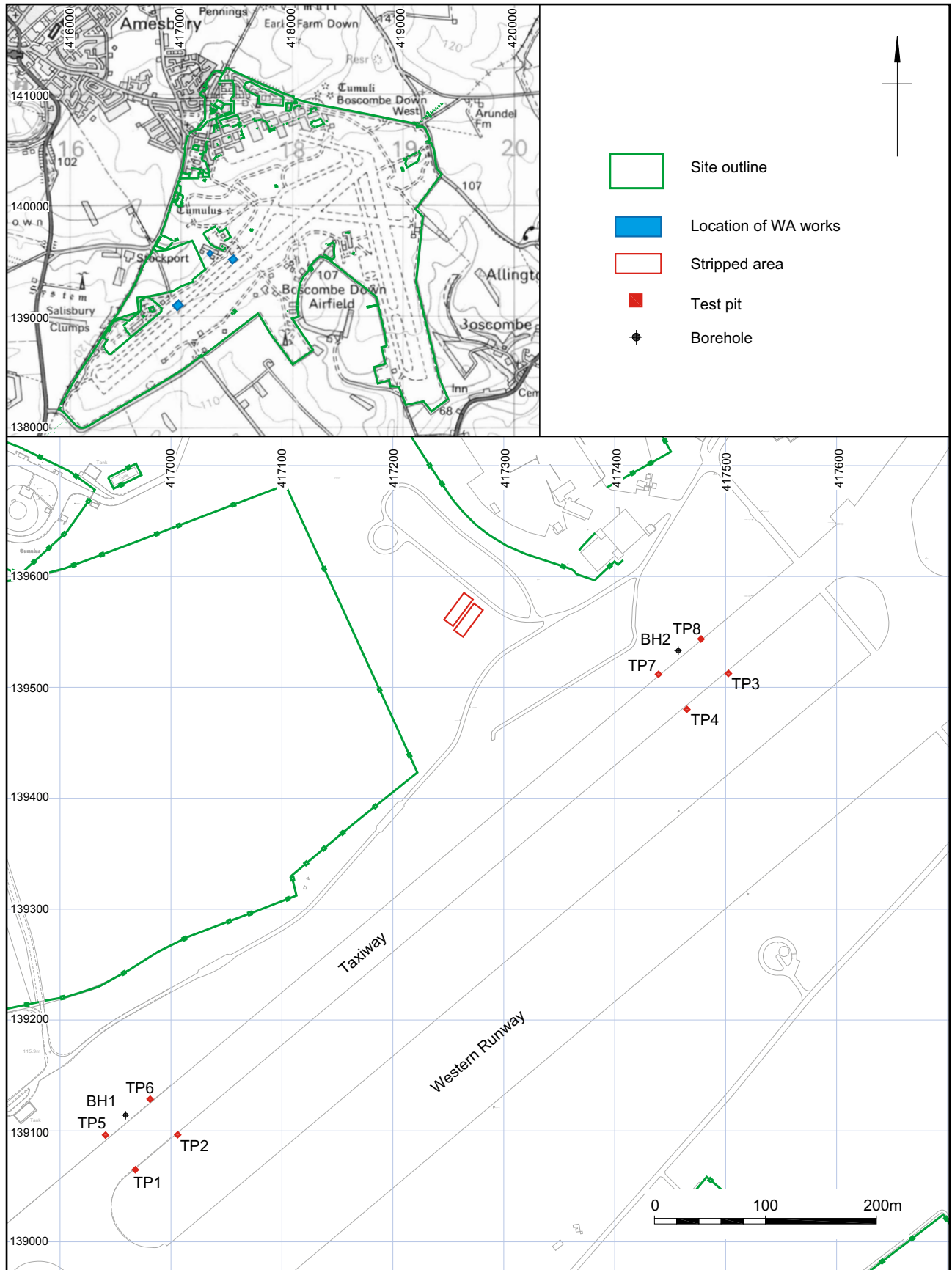
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Site location and area of watching brief

Figure 1





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