

## Compton Cottages, Compton Down Isle of Wight

### Archaeological Watching Brief Report



**COMPTON COTTAGES, COMPTON DOWN, ISLE OF WIGHT**

**Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

Prepared on behalf of

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### Contents

SUMMARY .....	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	IV
<b>1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND .....	1
1.2 PLANNING AND PROJECT BACKGROUND .....	1
1.3 THE SITE AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT .....	1
<b>2 WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES .....	2
2.2 FIELDWORK .....	3
2.3 RECORDING .....	3
2.4 HEALTH AND SAFETY .....	3
<b>3 RESULTS .....</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1 SOIL SEQUENCE AND GEOLOGY .....	4
3.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEATURES .....	4
<b>4 FINDS .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5 CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>6 ARCHIVE .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>7 REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>5</b>
APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT SUMMARY .....	6
APPENDIX 2: FINDS BY CONTEXT .....	6

### Figures

Figure 1. Site location plan

Cover. Machine excavation of trench, view from E

Plate 1. Pipe trench excavation in progress, looking east

Plate 2. Section through deposits of in valley bottom, including ?ditch  
[006]

# **COMPTON COTTAGES, COMPTON DOWN, ISLE OF WIGHT**

## **Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

### **Summary**

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by the National Trust to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundwork for the installation of a 1KV electricity cable and a 25mm water pipe running between Compton Farm and Compton Cottages located on the edge of Compton Down, centred on National Grid reference (NGR) 437180 085256 (hereafter, 'the Site').

The chalk downland ridge which runs approximately east-west to the north of the Site contains numerous groups of prehistoric funerary remains including several scheduled barrow groups of Neolithic and Bronze Age date.

Works were carried out between 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> October 2007 and consisted of an archaeological watching brief during mechanical excavation of a trench 650m long, 0.3m wide and 1m deep, subsequent recording of the soil sequence and archaeological features, and finds retrieval.

Topsoil, subsoil and, in some places, colluvium overlay natural deposits. The only archaeological feature identified was undated though probably recent in date, perhaps representing a former field boundary/drainage ditch. A small assemblage of worked flint from the subsoil included two scrapers of Late Neolithic or, more probably, Early Bronze Age date.

## **COMPTON COTTAGES, COMPTON DOWN, ISLE OF WIGHT**

### **Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

#### **Acknowledgements**

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Paul Rayner of The National Trust for his co-operation and support in the successful completion of this project. Wessex Archaeology also appreciates the assistance from Mr and Mrs Phillips, the tenants of Compton Farm.

Julia Sulikowska undertook the fieldwork and also compiled this report. Worked flint was assessed by Dr Matt Leivers, the report illustrations were prepared by Kenneth Lymer. Richard Greated managed the project on behalf of Wessex Archaeology and also edited this report.

# COMPTON COTTAGES, COMPTON DOWN, ISLE OF WIGHT

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by the National Trust, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundwork for the installation of an 1KV electricity cable and a 25mm water pipe running between Compton Farm and Compton Cottages located on the edge of Compton Down, centred on National Grid reference (NGR) 437180 085256 (hereafter, 'the Site').

1.1.2 The works were carried out in accordance with *Compton Cottages, Compton Down, Isle of Wight: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (Wessex Archaeology 2007b).

#### 1.2 Planning and Project Background

1.2.1 The Site forms part of a National Trust estate comprising Afton, Brook and Compton Downs for which Wessex Archaeology completed an archaeological and historic landscape survey in 2006 (Wessex Archaeology 2007a). The survey was commissioned by the National Trust as part of the continuing land management strategy of the Trust estates on the Isle of Wight. The archaeological watching brief was therefore carried out in line with the National Trust's desire to combine their land management strategy with that of their management and recording of their archaeological resource.

#### 1.3 The Site and Archaeological Environment

1.3.1 The Site is located immediately south of a ridge which forms Afton, Brook and Compton Downs on the south-west coast of the Isle of Wight in the civil parish of Freshwater (**Figure 1**). The Site forms part of a National Trust estate which primarily consists of two distinct areas:

- An area of chalk downland, rising to 160m above Ordnance datum (aOD) and extending eastwards from Freshwater Bay. It consists of at least three areas of downland - Afton, Brook and Compton Downs.
- A thin strip of grassland and grazing above the coastal cliff, consisting of boulder clay, known as Brook Chine, Hanover Point and Shippards Chine.



- 1.3.2 The chalk downland ridge which runs approximately east-west to the north of the Site, consists of a mixture of golf course and rough grazing. It contains numerous groups of prehistoric funerary remains including several scheduled barrow groups of Neolithic and Bronze Age date. From aerial photographs there is evidence of possible field systems and substantial lynchets at the eastern end of the ridge on Brook Down. The ridge is dotted with evidence of quarrying and trackways cut into the slopes.
- 1.3.3 At the southern foot of this downland is the Site forming part of the farmland associated with Compton Farm. The farm contains the only vernacular buildings within the area. Apart from the farmhouse, the twinned cottages (Compton Cottages) are located near to the Military Road at Compton Chine at the entrance to the farm. The cottages (Victorian) are currently under repair having been recently severely damaged by a lightening strike.
- 1.3.4 The coastal edge of the wider estate to the south of the Site includes grazed pasture and the cliff-line. The cliffs contain palaeo-environmental deposits and several hearth sites. Prehistoric remains including Bronze Age burial urns were recovered from eroding cliff-face at Hanover Point in 1999.

## **2 WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Aims and objectives**

- 2.1.1 The aims of the archaeological watching brief were to determine:
- the presence/absence and the general nature of any archaeological remains present;
  - the approximate date or date range of any remains;
  - the depth and sequence of stratigraphy and the location of any significant pre-nineteenth century features, or later features if considered significant to the interpretation of the development of the landscape.
- 2.1.2 The specific objective for the watching brief was to seek to investigate whether any evidence survives which might be associated with the Neolithic and Bronze Age funerary activity, focussed to the north on Compton Down.
- 2.1.3 A further objective was to recover, where encountered, environmental evidence which might broaden existing knowledge of the environmental history of the Site and its immediate surrounding area throughout the sequence of human activity on the Site.

## **2.2 Fieldwork**

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted in compliance with the standards outlined in the Institute of Field Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (as amended 1994), excepting where they are superseded by statements made below.
- 2.2.2 A trench 650m long, 0.3m wide and 1m deep running between Compton Cottages in the west and Compton Farm in the east of the Site was excavated using a tracked 360° mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless bucket under constant archaeological supervision. The trench was dug to enable the laying of an electric cable alongside a mains water pipe between the two aforementioned buildings (see **Figure 1, Plate 1**).
- 2.2.3 Machine excavation continued down in 100mm spits to a maximum depth of 1m. Whenever mechanical excavation encountered archaeological deposits, excavation by machine ceased to allow recording. However, further excavation of archaeological features or deposits by hand was extremely restricted because of the narrow width of the trench.
- 2.2.4 Reinstatement of the trench was undertaken by the client's contractors.

## **2.3 Recording**

- 2.3.1 All exposed archaeological deposits were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* recording system. These are summarised in **Appendix 1**.
- 2.3.2 A complete drawn record of excavated archaeological features and deposits was compiled. This includes both plans and sections, drawn to appropriate scales (1:20 for plans, 1:10 for sections).
- 2.3.3 A full photographic record was maintained using colour transparencies, black and white negatives (on 35 mm film) and digital photographs. The photographic record illustrates both the detail and the general context of the principal features, finds excavated, and the site as a whole.

## **2.4 Health and Safety**

- 2.4.1 Health and Safety considerations were of paramount importance in conducting all fieldwork. Safe working practices override archaeological considerations at all times.
- 2.4.2 All work was carried out in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1992, and all other relevant Health and Safety legislation, regulations codes of practice in force at the time.



### **3 RESULTS**

#### **3.1 Soil sequence and geology**

- 3.1.1 The topsoil **001** along the entire length of the trench was dark grey/brown silt/loam, c. 0.2m deep, with frequent fragments of iron-pan, modern brick and roof tile and farming debris (the latter near Compton Farm only).
- 3.1.2 The subsoil **002** underlying the topsoil was a yellow/brown clay/loam with occasional flecks of chalk. It was on average 0.2m - 0.6m deep, though much shallower at the top of the ridge. From this layer come five pieces of worked flint, all recovered in the bottom of the valley (see **Figure 1**).
- 3.1.3 In the valley, a colluvial deposit **004** of dark red/brown silty/clay was encountered. It underlay the subsoil and is of a relatively recent date since post-medieval pieces of brick were noted, probably dating to the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginnings of farm.
- 3.1.4 Near to the farm, the natural **003** was green/yellow sand/clay layer with patches of orange sand and iron-panning. The chalk bedrock was only exposed in the bottom of the valley, for a distance of 80m, after which it continued underneath the colluvium.

#### **3.2 Archaeological features**

- 3.2.1 Only one archaeological feature was identified during the watching brief. Feature **006** was probably linear, aligned roughly north-south and ran at a right angle to the existing hedge line. It was at least 0.30m long (the width of trench) and approx. 1m wide. Only the top of the feature was exposed in the machine trench, the rest remaining intact underneath (see **Plate 2**).
- 3.2.2 The fill of **006** was dark greyish-brown silty clay with occasional flints and flecks of chalk (**005**), very similar to the overlying colluvium. One piece of animal bone was recovered from the surface of the feature.

### **4 FINDS**

- 4.1.1 Finds were recovered from only two contexts (**Appendix 2**), in a restricted range of material types. All artefacts derive from either an undated, probably modern feature or subsoil.
- 4.1.2 The finds comprise a fragment of animal bone recovered from the fill of **006** and five worked flints found in the subsoil **002**. The flint assemblage consists of two scrapers, one retouched flake and two flakes. They are of Late Neolithic, or, more probably, Early Bronze Age date.

- 4.1.3 The size and range of the assemblage does not warrant long-term curation, and these finds will be discarded prior to archive deposition.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

- 5.1.1 Only one (unexcavated) archaeological feature, a possible boundary or drainage ditch, was recorded in the pipe trench. It is suggested that it is most likely a post-medieval/modern, perhaps contemporary with the Victorian cottages or farm.
- 5.1.2 The small assemblage of worked flint, although not closely datable and from subsoil, is of probably Late Neolithic/Bronze Age date and thus broadly contemporary with the barrows on the ridge to the north of the Site.

## **6 ARCHIVE**

- 6.1.1 The project archive produced by Wessex Archaeology is fully cross-referenced and indexed.
- 6.1.2 The completed project archive, which includes paper records, photographic records, graphics, and digital data, 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).
- 6.1.3 The archive is presently held at Wessex Archaeology's Salisbury office, under the WA project code 67420. In due course, it will be deposited with an appropriate Museum, unless Wessex Archaeology receives instruction to do otherwise.

## **7 REFERENCES**

Wessex Archaeology 2007a *An Archaeological and Historical Survey of the National Trust Estate at Afton, Brook and Compton Downs, Isle of Wight*. (WA client report reference 64400)

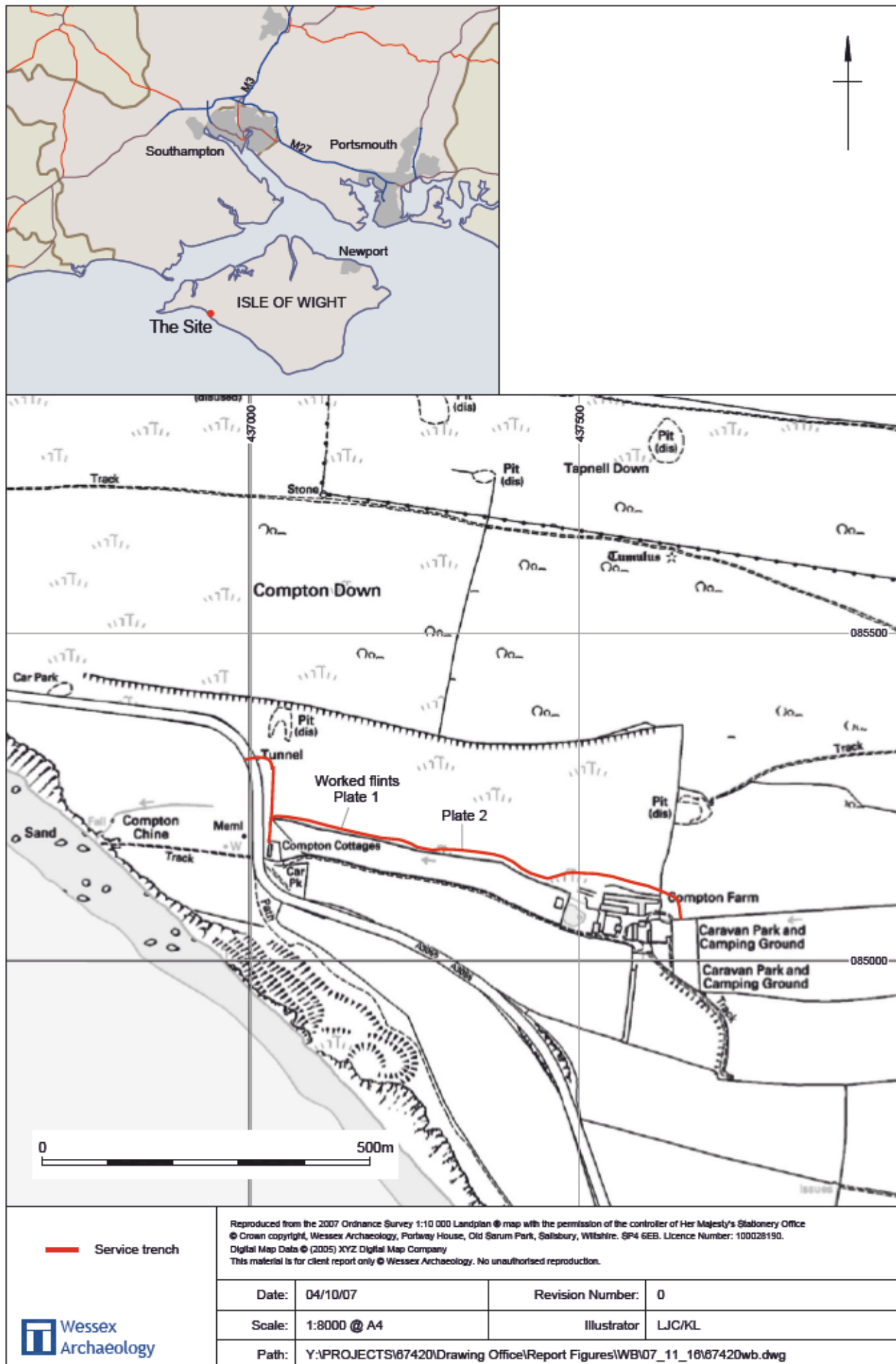
Wessex Archaeology 2007b *Compton Cottages, Compton Down, Isle of Wight, Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*. (WA client report reference 67420.01)

## Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context No.	Type	Description:	Dimensions:
001	<i>Layer</i>	Dark greyish brown silty loam. Topsoil	0 – 0.20m
002	<i>Layer</i>	Mid yellowish brown silty clay loam. Subsoil	0.20 – 0.60m
003	<i>Natural</i>	Greenish yellow sandy clay overlying natural Chalk bedrock	0.60m +
004	<i>Layer</i>	Dark reddish brown silty clay with occasional fragments of rocks and chalk. Colluvium.	0.50m +
005	<i>Fill</i>	Dark greyish brown silty clay with occasional small flints and flecks of chalk. Fill of <b>006</b>	0.58m <i>dia</i> 0.11m <i>depth</i>
006	<i>Cut</i>	Cut of a possibly linear feature, running roughly north-south. Possibly a field boundary ditch, undated but probably recent. Filled with <b>005</b>	0.58m <i>dia</i> 0.11m <i>depth</i>

## Appendix 2: Finds by context

Context No.	Material	No.	Wt. (g)
002	Worked Flint	5	82
005	Animal Bone	1	45



Site location plan

Figure 1





Plate 1: Pipe trench excavation in progress, looking east



Plate 2: Section through deposits in valley bottom, including ?ditch [006]





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