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Monksham Farm Solar Farm, Marston Bigot, Somerset

Archaeological Evaluation Report



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**Monksham Solar Farm
Marston Bigot, Somerset**

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Monksham Power Limited to carry out a programme of archaeological evaluation in advance of a planning application in relation to the construction of a solar farm.

Following recommendations by the Senior Historic Environment Officer, Somerset County Council, a programme of archaeological evaluation was carried out to assess the potential for surviving below ground remains in order to inform the proposals and consequently any decision with regards to the future treatment of the archaeological resource.

Six evaluation trenches were sited to investigate a series of linear and pit-like features that were identified by the geophysical survey (WA 2013b). No archaeological features or deposits were encountered and it is assumed that the anomalies identified by the geophysical survey are either ephemeral features in the topsoil or geological features in the underlying Jurassic mudstone.

The trial trenching has confirmed a lack of archaeological remains within the site of the proposed solar farm and as such it is expected that no further archaeological work will be required by SCC either to inform the planning application or as a condition of planning permission, where granted.



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Acknowledgements

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The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Caroline Budd. The fieldwork was carried out by Darryl Freer, Lorrain Higbee and Richard Payne. This report was compiled by Lorrain Higbee and edited by Matt Leivers. The Illustrations were prepared by Liz James.



Monksham Solar Farm Marston Bigot, Somerset

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology (WA) was commissioned by Monksham Power Limited to undertake a programme of targeted archaeological trial trenching on land at Monksham Farm, Marston Bigot, Somerset (**Figure 1**). The site comprises approximately 17ha of arable land centred upon National Grid Reference (NGR) 376420 143030 (hereafter 'the Site').
- 1.1.2 It is proposed by the Developer that a planning application be submitted to the Local Planning Authority (LPA) for the construction of a solar farm on the Site. The trial trenching reported on here forms part of a staged programme of archaeological assessment which has been requested by the Senior Historic Environment Officer for Somerset County Council, acting on behalf of the LPA, in order to inform any decision on the application with regards to the potential archaeological resource within the Site.
- 1.1.3 The fieldwork was undertaken between the 7th–8th May 2013 and is the third phase of archaeological assessment, and follows on from a desk-based assessment (WA 2013a) and geophysical survey (WA 2013b). The purpose of the trial trenches was to ground truth the results of the geophysical survey; identify (or confirm the absence of) any previously unknown areas of archaeological activity; and identify the significance, nature and extent of any such remains.

1.2 Scope of Document

- 1.2.1 This archaeological evaluation report sets out the background, methodology and results of the trial trenching. In format and content it conforms with current best practice and to the guidance outlined in Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) (English Heritage 2009), the Institute for Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation (2008) and the guidelines provided in the Somerset County Council Heritage Service Archaeological Handbook, excepting where they are superseded by statements made in the WSI (WA 2013c).

2 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Location, topography and geology

- 2.1.1 The Site is located in eastern Somerset, approximately 4.6km south of Frome and some 1.4km south-east of the village of Trudoxhill (**Figure 1**). The Site comprises an irregular parcel of agricultural land measuring c. 17ha and consisting of three fields which are currently under arable cultivation.



- 2.1.2 The Site is surrounded by farmland. It is bounded to the west by an un-named road, to the south by the River Frome, to the east by Monksham Farm and the River Frome and to the north by fields.
- 2.1.3 The Site occupies a shallow slope, facing towards the south-east, at the bottom of the River Frome valley. It is only slightly elevated above the river and lies between 85m and 90m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).
- 2.1.4 The underlying geology comprises Jurassic mudstone of the Peterborough Member to the east and sandstone and mudstone of the Kellaways Formation to the west. To the south, the Kellaways Formation is overlain by Quaternary River Terrace Deposits comprising sand and gravel (British Geological Survey Online Viewer).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 Desk-based Assessment (WA 2013a) identified the potential for buried features relating to agricultural practices of medieval and later date to occur within the Site. However, the lack of intrusive archaeological investigations within the Site and surrounding area meant that the archaeological potential of the Site was largely untested.
- 3.1.2 In light of this a geophysical survey was requested by the Senior Historic Environment Officer for Somerset County Council, in order to further ascertain the potential for buried archaeological remains to be present on the Site.
- 3.1.3 The results of the geophysical survey (WA 2013b) revealed a curving ditch in conjunction with smaller possible ditch segments that appeared to relate to agricultural divisions. Groups of small sub-oval pit-like features were also revealed (**Figure 1**). None of the features which were identified appeared to fit with any of the former field boundaries or other features visible in the early maps consulted in the archaeological desk-based assessment, suggesting that the features identified were of post-medieval or earlier date.

4 AIMS

- 4.1.1 The specific aims of the programme of archaeological works are to:
- *ground truth the results of the geophysical survey;*
 - *clarify the presence/absence and extent of any buried archaeological remains within the Site;*
 - *identify, within the constraints of the evaluation, the date, character, condition and depth of any surviving remains within the Site;*
 - *assess the degree of existing impacts to sub-surface horizons and to document the extent of archaeological survival of buried deposits; and*
 - *produce a report presenting the results of the geophysical survey and trial trenching in sufficient detail to allow an informed decision to be made concerning the Site's archaeological potential.*

5 METHODS

- 5.1.1 A detailed methods statement is provided in the WSI (WA 2013c) and will not be repeated here.



- 5.1.2 In summary, a series of six evaluation trenches, each measuring 20m x 2m, were machine excavated under archaeological supervision (**Figure 1**). The trenches were strategically positioned to investigate anomalies identified by the geophysical survey (WA 2013b).

6 RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 Summary information about each of the six trial trenches is provided in **Table 1**. This information includes the size and location of each trench and descriptions of the deposits encountered.

6.2 Overburden and natural deposits

- 6.2.1 Overburden deposits were consistent across the Site and comprised thin friable, mid-grey-brown silty clay plough soil and light orange-brown clay subsoil. No archaeological finds were recovered from overburden deposits.
- 6.2.2 The overburden deposits were removed by machine to the surface of the underlying clay natural (Oxford Clay Formation), which was encountered at a depth of between 0.30m-0.40m (**Table 1**). The natural was tested in each of the six trenches to ensure that it was not re-deposited and therefore masking archaeological features and deposits.

6.3 Trial Trenches

- 6.3.1 **Trench 1** was located on the northern edge of the Site and aligned north-northwest by south-southeast. It was positioned to investigate a possible pit-like feature identified from the geophysical survey however no archaeological features or deposits were evident at this location.
- 6.3.2 **Trench 2** was located in the northwest corner of the Site and aligned northwest by southeast. The trench was positioned to investigate a curvilinear feature identified by the geophysical survey however no archaeological features or deposits were present.
- 6.3.3 **Trench 3** was located to the south of **Trench 2**, in the southwest corner of the most northerly field. The trench was aligned northeast by southwest and was positioned to investigate a linear anomaly which the geophysical survey picked up running in a north-northwest by south-southeast direction adjacent to the edge of the field. No archaeological features or deposits were observed in the excavated trial trench.
- 6.3.4 **Trench 4** was located in the northwest corner of the south-easternmost field and ran parallel with **Trench 3**. The trench was posited to locate the end of the same linear anomaly described above (6.3.3). No archaeological features or deposits were identified in this location.
- 6.3.5 **Trench 5** was located towards the south-southeast corner of the westernmost field. The trench was aligned roughly northeast by southwest and was posited to investigate another linear anomaly identified by the geophysical survey. The linear appeared to be aligned north-northwest by south-southeast however no archaeological features or deposits were evident in the excavated trial trench.
- 6.3.6 **Trench 6** was aligned roughly north-northeast – south-southwest and lay in the south-west corner of the western field. It was positioned to investigate a number of linear anomalies. Two modern land drains were noted running in an east-westerly direction

across the northern half of the trench and this roughly corresponds with the results and interpretation suggested by the geophysical survey.

7 DISCUSSION

- 7.1.1 The first two assessment stages (WA 2013a and 2013b) both indicated that there was potential for buried archaeological remains on the Site. The results of the geophysical survey identified a number of linear anomalies including a large curvilinear ditch in the north-west corner of the Site and groups of pit-like features. However, the trial trenches, which were carefully positioned to investigate these anomalies failed to find any evidence of buried archaeological remains.
- 7.1.2 The most likely explanation for the anomalies identified by the geophysical survey is that they were either ephemeral features in the plough soil (e.g. plough marks) or deeper geological features (Ben Urmston, WA Geoservices, *pers. comm.*). Test pits excavated by Greenfield Associates (2013) to investigate ground conditions on the Site showed that the clay natural is up to 1.80m thick and the geophysical survey equipment is able to penetrate c. 4m below ground surface.
- 7.1.3 The trial trenching has confirmed a lack of archaeological remains within the site of the proposed solar farm and as such it is expected that no further archaeological work will be required by SCC either to inform the planning application or as a condition of planning permission, where granted.

8 ARCHIVE

- 8.1.1 The archive will eventually be deposited with the Somerset County Museum, under Project Reference Number 88962, and under a unique accession code TTNCM 34/2013. This accession code will be marked on all elements of the archive.
- 8.1.2 An OASIS online record <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/projects/oasis/> will be initiated and key fields completed on Details, Location and Creators Forms. All appropriate parts of the OASIS online form will be completed for submission to the SHER. This will include an uploaded .pdf version of the entire report (a paper copy will also be included with the archive).
- 8.1.3 The primary archive, including copies of all photographs, will be deposited with the Somerset County Museum or another suitable depository no later than six months after completion of all required fieldwork and post-excavation work.
- 8.1.4 The project archive was prepared in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 2009), and the *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long term storage* (Walker 1990).

9 REFERENCES

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TABLE 1: TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS

Bgl: below ground level aOD: above Ordnance Datum

Trench 1	Dimensions :	20m by 2m by 0.46m	Ground surface level:	85.29 aOD
	Coordinates (NGR):	376471.79, 143191.26 376470.74, 143190.03 376457.55, 143205.05 376456.32, 143203.87		
Context	Category	Description	Depth (bgl)	
1000	Ploughsoil	Medium grey-brown silty clay with granular blocky structure, rare small subangular stone inclusions and clear lower boundary with 1001.	0-0.23m	
1001	Subsoil	Light orange-brown clay with firm consistency and frequent orange mottles .	0.23m – 0.36m	
1002	Natural	Light yellow clay with frequent blue-grey and orange mottles, and rare manganese flecks/concretions.	0.36m+	

Trench 2	Dimensions :	20m by 2m by 0.50m	Ground surface level:	85.42 aOD		
	Coordinates (NGR):	376337.55, 143131.89 376336.74, 143129.74 376318.98, 143139.46 376318.33, 143137.51				
	Context	Category			Description	Depth (bgl)
	2000	Ploughsoil			Same as 1000	0m - 0.23m
	2001	Subsoil			Same as 1001	0.23m - 0.4m
2002	Natural	Same as 1002	0.4m+			

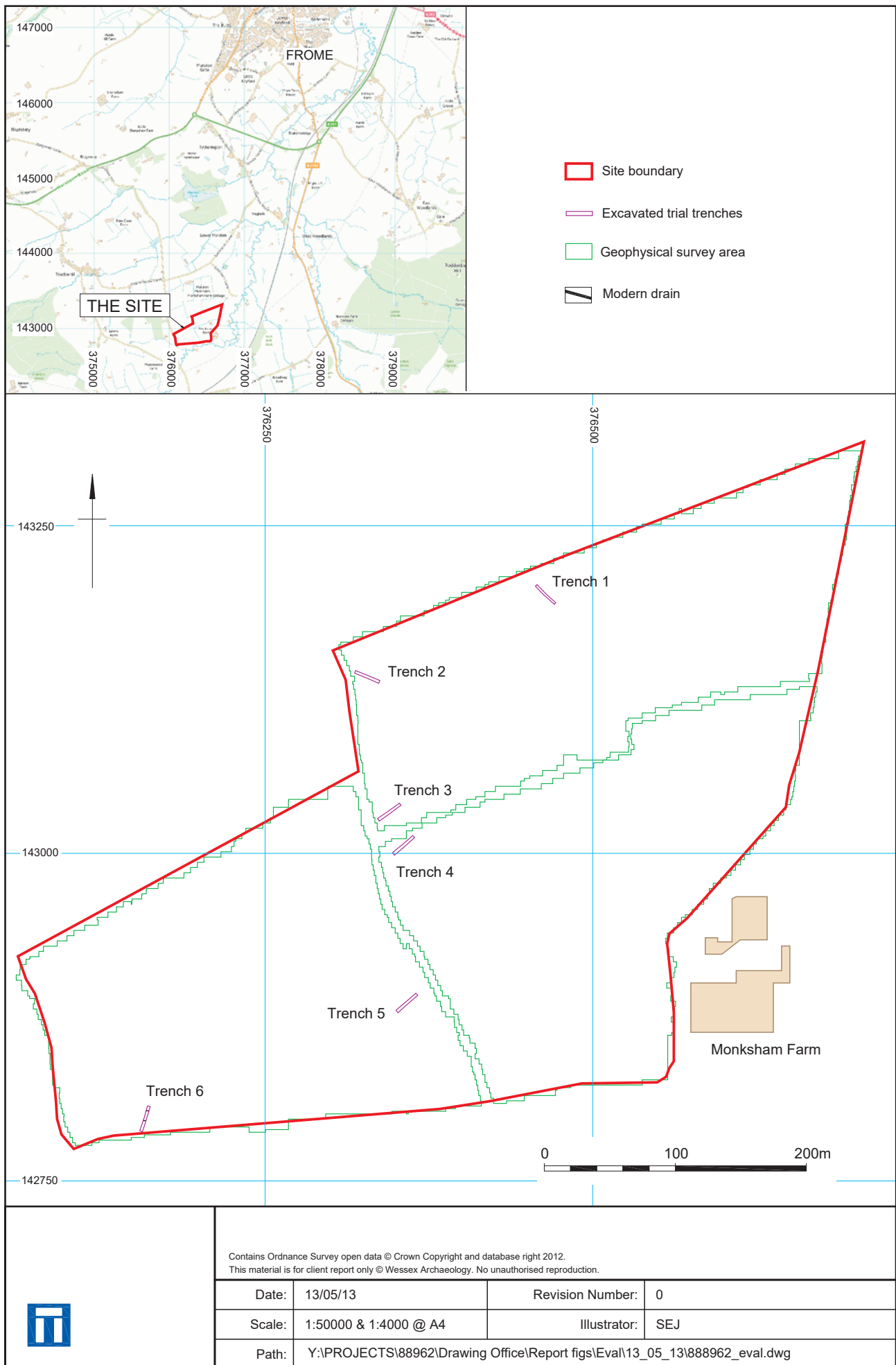
Trench 3	Dimensions :	20m by 2m by 0.58m	Ground surface level:	87.09 aOD		
	Coordinates (NGR):	376352.49, 143038.26 376335.75, 143026.55 376337.15, 143024.61 376353.70, 143036.69				
	Context	Category			Description	Depth (bgl)
	3000	Ploughsoil			Same as 1000	0m - 0.20m
	3001	Subsoil			Same as 1001	0.20m - 0.37m
3002	Natural	Same as 1002	0.37m+			

Trench 4	Dimensions :	20m by 2m by 0.45m	Ground surface level:	87.41 aOD		
	Coordinates (NGR):	376347.25, 143000.56 376348.61, 142998.59 376362.66, 143013.58 376364.06, 143012.05				
	Context	Category			Description	Depth (bgl)
	4000	Ploughsoil			Same as 1000	0m - 0.18m
	4001	Subsoil			Same as 1001	0.18m - 0.35m
4002	Natural	Same as 1002	0.35m+			



Trench 5	Dimensions :	20m by 2m by 0.45m	Ground surface level:	85.18 aOD
	Coordinates (NGR):	376349.91, 142880.35		
		376365.01, 142893.25		
		376351.37, 142878.34		
		376366.52, 142891.71		
Context	Category	Description	Depth (bgl)	
5000	Ploughsoil	Same as 1000	0m - 0.20m	
5001	Subsoil	Same as 1001	0.20m - 0.35m	
5002	Natural	Same as 1002	0.35m+	

Trench 6	Dimensions :	20m by 2m by 0.38m	Ground surface level:	84.77 aOD		
	Coordinates (NGR):	376156.33, 142787.39 376162.30, 142806.82 376160.16, 142807.26 376154.31, 142788.34				
	Context	Category			Description	Depth (bgl)
	6000	Ploughsoil			Same as 1000	0m - 0.20m
	6001	Subsoil			Same as 1001	0.20m - 0.30m
6002	Natural	Same as 1002	0.30m+			
6003	Field drain	East-west aligned modern field drain	0.38m+			
6004	Field drain	East-west aligned modern field drain	0.38m+			



Site location plan showing excavated trial trench locations

Figure 1



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