ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRENCH EVALUATION AT MILBER ABATTOIR, OLD TORQUAY ROAD, MILBER, NEWTON ABBOT, DEVON

prepared for Allan B. Matthews

by A. Farnell

Exeter Archaeology

Report No. 09.30

Project No. 6756

April 2009

Contents

1.	Introduction 1.1 The site 1.2 Archaeological Background	1 1 1
2.	Project specification	1
3.	Method	2
4.	Result 4.1 Trench 1 4.2 Trench 2 4.3 Trench 3 4.4 Trench 4 4.5 Trench 5 4.6 Trench 6 4.7 Trench 7 4.8 Trench 8	2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 3 3 3
5.	Discussion	3
6.	The archaeological resource	4
7.	Impact of proposed development	4
Ac	knowledgments	4
Bi	Bibliography	

List of Illustrations

- Fig. 1 Location of site
- Fig. 2 Location of trenches and archaeological features
- Fig. 3 Deposit profile across site
- Fig. 4 Trenches 1 and 4: plans and sectionsFig. 5 West facing section at north end of trench1, showing fills of ditch 108.
- Fig. 6 General view of trench 1.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared for Allan B. Matthews (Chartered Architects), and presents the results of an archaeological trench evaluation undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) in March 2009 at Milber Abattoir, Old Torquay Road, Milber, Newton Abbot (NGR SX 8856 6961: Fig. 1). The evaluation was undertaken in support of a planning application to Teignbridge District Council (TDC, ref: 08/02822/MAJ) for the demolition of the existing abattoir and cutting plant and erection of a two-storey office building.

1.1 **The site** (Fig. 1)

Milber Abattoir lies entirely within the boundary of the Milber Down Hillfort Scheduled Monument (DV115). The monument consists of a late Iron Age multivallate hillslope fort, with a smaller earthwork to the south-east known as Milber Little Camp, previously identified as a Roman camp or settlement. Any works within the scheduled area require Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. The south-eastern third of the site is under concrete and tarmac hardstanding and the existing abattoir buildings. The remainder of the site is under pasture.

1.2 Archaeological background

The abattoir partly overlies a settlement known as Milber Little Camp which is contiguous with the south-eastern perimeter of the larger Milber Down Fort. Excavations in 1938 (Fox *et al.* 1949/50) demonstrated the presence of an inner ditch, an outer ditch and associated rampart material that had been reduced by ploughing to a height of no more than 0.3m. Post holes and gullies indicated the former presence of timber structures within the interior of the enclosure. Pottery from this excavation was dated to AD 50-80 and included both native and Roman provincial wares. In 1964 the south-eastern corner of the inner ditch was observed during the construction of Milber Reservoir to the immediate east of the site (Vachell 1964).

More recently, an archaeological trench evaluation undertaken by EA in 1993 reopened the 1938 excavation trench, as well as locating the outer ditch in a second trench further to the south. Coarse micaceous pottery of probable late Iron Age date was recovered from a layer which predated the earthwork (Watts 1993b).

2. PROJECT SPECIFICATION

Specifications for the archaeological trench evaluation were agreed in discussions with the Devon County Historic Environment Service (DCHES) and English Heritage. The principal requirements were:

- evaluative trenching to establish the presence or absence, depth, character, extent and date of archaeological deposits within the site;
- results to inform the foundation design and planning process and to be used to formulate a subsequent programme of archaeological works in mitigation of the impact of the development on the archaeological resource, should planning approval and SMC for the redevelopment be granted; and
- reporting and archiving as appropriate.

3. METHOD

Eight trenches, totalling 24.75m in length, were excavated using a wheeled excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. Four trenches were located close to the existing buildings to establish the depth and impact of the modern disturbance. The remaining four trenches were positioned to target proposed services.

Machine excavation continued until either natural subsoil or the top of archaeological deposits was reached (whichever was higher). Where archaeological deposits were exposed, areas were cleaned back by hand, and the deposits investigated and recorded.

Standard EA recording procedures were employed. Stratigraphic information was recorded on *pro-forma* single context record sheets, a drawn record was compiled in plan and section at scales of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate and a photographic record was prepared in black and white film and digital (colour) format.

4. RESULTS

The following represents the results from each trench. All levels are relative to a temporary bench mark identified by the client.

4.1 **Trench 1** (Figs 2 - 6)

This trench was 4.6m long, orientated north-south, and excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2m. Truncated natural subsoil was encountered at a depth of 200mm below existing ground level. The southern, east-west aligned, edge of the inner ditch (108) to Milber Little Camp was exposed at the northern end of the trench, cutting the natural subsoil from a depth of c.450mm. Fills of the ditch (109, 110) were encountered at a depth of 400mm and continued below 1.2m to an unknown depth. The lower fill (109) was soft pale brown silty clay sand, the upper fill (110) a soft, dark brown silty clay sand. Both fills were homogenous, devoid of finds, and partially disturbed by concrete foundations. Modern deposits of crushed stone hardcore and concrete slab immediately overlay the ditch fills and natural subsoil throughout the trench.

4.2 **Trench 2** (Figs 2 and 3)

This trench was 2.8m long, orientated N-S, and excavated to a maximum depth of 800mm. Undisturbed natural subsoil was encountered at a depth of 700mm. A layer of weathered subsoil, approximately 200mm deep, consisting of yellowish brown silty clay, overlay the natural subsoil. This was overlain by approximately 300mm of buried topsoil. Topsoil was sealed beneath 200mm of modern crushed stone hardcore and tarmac.

4.3 **Trench 3** (Figs 2 and 3)

This trench was 2.8m long, orientated E-W, and excavated to a maximum depth of 800mm. Undisturbed natural subsoil was encountered at a depth of 400mm. A partially truncated layer of weathered subsoil, approximately 150mm deep, overlay natural subsoil. This layer was cut by a north-south aligned modern concrete foundation and was directly overlain by modern deposits consisting of crushed stone hardcore and concrete slab.

4.4 **Trench 4** (Figs 2, 3 and 4)

This trench was 3.5m long, orientated E-W, and excavated to a maximum depth of 1.3m. Natural subsoil was not encountered within this trench, which was located entirely over the inner ditch to Milber Little Camp. The fills of this ditch (405, 406) were encountered at a minimum depth of 850mm and continued below 1.3m to an unknown depth. These were almost identical to those seen in Trench 1, and were also without finds. The upper fill was overlain by a layer of buried topsoil (404) approximately 450mm deep. All deposits were sealed below 400mm of modern crushed stone hardcore and concrete slab. A large rubble filled modern soakaway cut though the hardcore, buried topsoil and the upper ditch fill at the western end of the trench.

4.5 **Trench 5** (Figs 2 and 3)

This trench was 3.8m long, orientated E-W, and excavated to a maximum depth of 600mm. Undisturbed natural subsoil was encountered at a depth of 600mm. This was overlain by 100mm of weathered subsoil consisting of yellowish brown sandy clay. A layer of topsoil, 350mm deep, sealed the subsoil and was cut by a modern land drain and soakaway. All deposits were sealed by a layer of turf.

4.6 **Trench 6** (Figs 2 and 3)

This trench was 2.5m long, oriented c. NE-SW, and excavated to a maximum depth of 1.1m. Undisturbed natural subsoil was encountered at a depth of 850mm. This was overlain by 350mm of weathered subsoil consisting of yellowish brown sandy clay. A c. 500mm layer of topsoil and turf sealed the trench.

4.7 **Trench 7** (Figs 2 and 3)

This trench was 2.1m long, oriented NE-SW, and excavated to a maximum depth of 970mm. Undisturbed natural subsoil was encountered at a depth of 850mm. This was overlain by 350mm of weathered subsoil consisting of yellowish brown sandy clay. This was overlain by a layer of buried topsoil that was in turn sealed by modern gravel and tarmac.

4.8 **Trench 8** (Figs 2 and 3)

This trench was 2.65m long, oriented NE-SW, and excavated to a maximum depth of 850mm. Undisturbed natural subsoil was encountered at a depth of 720mm. Natural subsoil was overlain by 250mm of weathered subsoil consisting of yellowish brown sandy clay. This was overlain by 200mm of buried topsoil that was in turn sealed by 300mm of recently deposited overburden and turf. A number of very small fragments of probable late Iron Age pottery were recovered from this modern layer.

5. DISCUSSION

Trenches 5, 6, 7 and 8, located within pasture, exhibited an untruncated sequence of deposits consisting typically of banded red sandy clay and yellow clay sand natural subsoil, overlain by a poorly defined horizon of yellowish-brown sandy clay subsoil derived from weathering of the natural, sealed by topsoil. This sequence was consistent throughout the remaining four trenches but with levels of modern truncation increasing towards the south-east corner of the site.

The main archaeological feature identified during the trench evaluation was the inner ditch of Milber Little Camp. The fills of this feature were consistent within both trenches 1 and 4, and were homogenous and devoid of finds. A direct relationship between the cut of this ditch and the surrounding deposits was not observed during the evaluation, however, during the 1993 evaluation both the inner and outer ditch were observed to cut through a subsoil layer. The absence of finds from the upper fills suggest that they had been deposited well after the abandonment of any settlement within the earthwork.

6. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE

From the results of this trench evaluation and the investigation undertaken in 1993 (Watts 1993b) the archaeological resource within the site can be seen to consist principally of the two surviving infilled ditches of Milber Little Camp. Remnants of the ramparts were identified during the 1993 evaluation in addition to a surviving subsoil layer that predated the construction of the camp. This layer is present across the majority of the site and is considered to be of good archaeological potential. This potential consists of features associated with the earthworks cut through the layer as well as features predating the camp sealed below the layer and artefacts present within it. The site has been significantly affected by ploughing which has slighted the earth ramparts of the camp and potentially truncated other associated features. The southeast corner of site has also been significantly truncated by the existing buildings, with both topsoil and subsoil having been removed in places.

7. IMPACT OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Based on the results of the trench evaluation, the deposit profiles (Fig. 3) indicate the survival of archaeologically significant deposits across the site and the depth and nature of the overburden. Within the footprint of the proposed building, archaeologically significant deposits are present immediately beneath the modern concrete and hardcore surface, which is typically 200-300mm thick in total. In the south-east corner of the proposed building (trench 1) archaeological deposits are present at a height of 11.25m. The ground level slopes down to the north-west corner (trench 3) where archaeological deposits are present at a height of 10.47m. Any general reduction within the footprint of the building below the level of 11.25m is likely to impact on the surviving archaeological resource.

Beyond the footprint of the proposed building archaeologically significant deposits are present beneath c. 450-500mm of topsoil. Any removal of this layer, or the removal of modern concrete surfaces to the north and west of the proposed building, during the creation of car parks, landscaping or the excavation of service trenches, are likely to expose these deposits.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by Allan B. Matthews, and was managed for Exeter Archaeology by Peter Stead. Fieldwork was undertaken by Alex. Farnell, with the assistance of Chris. Hooper and Mark. Steinmetzer. The report was prepared by Alex. Farnell with illustrations by Sarnia Blackmore.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Fox, A., Raleigh Radford, C.A., Rogers, E.H. and Shorter, A.H. 1949/50. Report on the excavations at Milber Down, 1937-8, *Proc. Devon Archaeol. Soc.* 38, 121-3.
- Watts, M.A. 1993a. An Archaeological assessment of a proposed extention to Milber Abattoir, Milber Down, Newton Abbot, EMAFU Report No. **93.41**.
- Watts, M.A. 1993b. An evaluation of the archaeological resource at Milber Abattoir, Milber Down, Newton Abbot, EMAFU Report No. **93.61**.
- Vachell, E.T. 1964. Milber Down; Excavations encroaching on the site of the 'Romano British Homestead', *Devon Archaeol. Explor. Soc.* 22, 27-30.



Fig. 1 Location of site showing boundary of Scheduled Monument. Reproduced from Ordnance Survey digital data.



Location of trenches and archaeological features. Scale 1:500 @ A4. Fig. 2



Fig. 3 Deposit profiles across site.



Fig. 4 Trenches 1 and 4: plans and sections. Scale 1:50.



Fig. 5 West facing section at north end of trench 1, showing fills of ditch 108. View to the east. Scale 1m.



Fig. 6 General view of trench 1. View to the south. Scale 1m.