

Devon County Council Historic Environment Record

Civil Parish & District: Okehampton, West Devon	National Grid Reference SX 5993 9585	Number:
Subject: An archaeological trench evaluation on land to the south of Crediton Road, Okehampton, Devon		Photo attached? N
Planning Application no: 12853/2009/OKE	Recipient museum: Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery	
OASIS ID: exeterar1-71440	Museum Accession no: AR.2010.3	
Contractor's reference number/code: EA7160	Dates fieldwork undertaken: 15/01/10 – 18/01/10	
<p>Background: An archaeological trench evaluation was undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) on land to the south of the B3215 Crediton Road on the edge of Okehampton. The work was required under a condition attached to planning consent for the construction of a new housing development.</p> <p>The site (Fig. 1) is a single field under pasture, totalling approximately 3.3hectares. It is bounded to the north by Crediton Road, considered to follow the line of the Roman road from Exeter to Launceston, to the west by a recent housing development and to the east by a pair of cottages built in the 1930's. The southern boundary consists of a substantial hedge bank. The Scheduled Ancient Monument of Okehampton Roman Fort lies approximately 250m to the north.</p> <p>A geophysical survey of the site, carried out in December 2009 (EA report No. 09.130), showed a number of linear features, in particular a ditch, labelled as Feature 1, and a series of shallow ditches or gullies considered to be of possible archaeological origin. A series of regular NW-SE aligned linear features were interpreted variously as probable recent land drains and widespread agricultural striations (plough scarring). The survey revealed no evidence of settlement, or of the putative Roman road that is generally considered to follow the same alignment as Crediton Road.</p> <p>Excavations for a pond in the NE corner of the site were monitored ahead of the trench evaluation. No archaeological features or deposits were exposed; the area proving to be archaeologically sterile.</p> <p>Method: 6 trenches totalling 290m in length and 1.8m wide were excavated by machine to the level of natural subsoil. Trenches were positioned to investigate linear and point anomalies identified from the geophysical survey and to achieve, as closely as possible, a complete transect of the site from both east to west and north to south. Machine excavation continued until either natural subsoil or archaeological deposits were encountered, whichever was higher. Where archaeological deposits were exposed they were cleaned and investigated by hand and recorded using EA standard recording procedures.</p> <p>Results: (Fig. 2) The typical sequence of deposits comprised natural subsoil exposed at a depth of 400mm, below approximately 100mm of subsoil, which was sealed by up to 300mm of topsoil. Along the northern site boundary, a layer of colluvial soil (105) up to 400mm thick had accumulated over the natural subsoil at the base of the slope. This layer was overlain by subsoil and topsoil. No archaeological deposits or features were exposed in trenches 3-6. Trenches 1 & 2 are described below:</p> <p><i>Trench 1</i> This trench was aligned WNW-ESE, measured 85m long and was excavated to a maximum depth of 800mm. At the northern end of the trench natural subsoil (106) was overlain by up to 400mm of colluvial soil (105). This was cut through by a small NW-SE aligned ditch (102). Ditch 102 measured 500mm wide, up to 600mm deep and was exposed to a length of 3.35m. It had a steep-sided profile with a concave base and contained two fills (103 & 104). Primary fill 103 consisted of yellowish brown silty clay and appeared to be derived from weathering of the surrounding natural subsoil. Secondary fill 104 consisted of reddish brown silty clay loam with frequent medium sized sub-angular stone inclusions and appeared to be the result of deliberate infilling. The ditch fills and surrounding colluvium was sealed by ploughsoil (101) and topsoil (100).</p> <p><i>Trench 2</i> This trench was aligned NE-SW, measured 50m long and was excavated to a maximum depth of 400mm. Natural subsoil (202) was encountered at a depth of approximately 400mm, overlain in places by a thin subsoil up to 100mm thick sealed by 300mm of topsoil (200). A small NW-SE aligned ditch (203 - the same ditch exposed in trench 1) cut the natural subsoil. Ditch 203 measured 800mm wide and 400mm deep and was exposed to a length of 2m. It had a moderately steep-sided profile with a concave base and contained two fills (204 & 205). Primary fill 204 consisted of mid yellowish brown silty clay and appeared to be derived from weathering of the surrounding natural subsoil. Secondary fill 205 consisted of dark yellowish</p>		

brown silty clay with occasional shale fragments. It may have been the result of deliberate infilling. The infilled ditch was sealed by topsoil.

Discussion:

A single NW-SE aligned ditch extends across the site; exposed in trenches 1 and 2, it represents a ditch (Feature 1) identified from the geophysical survey. It was observed to cut through an undated layer of colluvial soil accumulated along the northern site boundary at the base of the slope. Its size and profile are unremarkable, being broadly consistent with a field boundary ditch of medieval or post medieval date. No finds were recovered from the fill, which comprised a layer of redeposited natural below a homogenous layer of probable deliberate backfill. In trench 1 the upper fill contained a concentration of moderately sized stones. These stones are not naturally occurring in the subsoil and were possibly either introduced to aid drainage or are the residue of an associated earthwork now entirely removed.

The remainder of the anomalies identified in the geophysical survey were not represented. They can be interpreted as variations in the natural subsoil or in the case of a number of very straight linear anomalies, as shallow drainage restricted to the depth of topsoil.

The evaluation revealed no evidence of settlement within the site, or of the possible Roman Road and no finds were recovered. The ditch exposed in trenches 1 & 2 appears to respect the layout of the surrounding post medieval fields and is likely to represent a slighted field boundary of the same date. It is absent from the tithe map of 1841, indicating only that it had been removed by this date.

Recorders:

A. Farnell (Exeter Archaeology)

Date sent to HER:

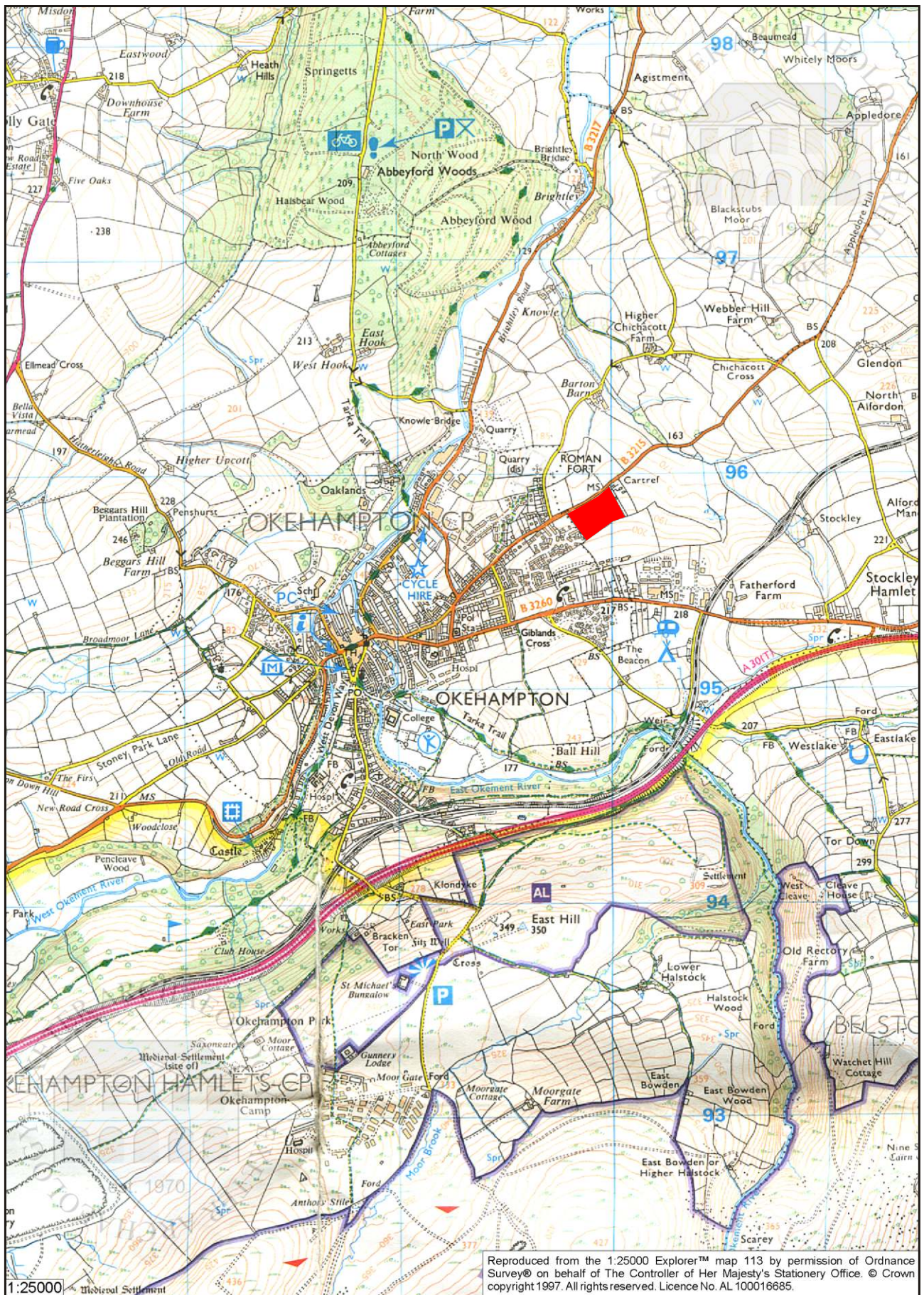


Fig. 1 Location of site.



Fig. 2 Trench plan.