

ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION (WATCHING BRIEF)

CROFT CASTLE

N^R LEOMINSTER

HEREFORDSHIRE

NGR: SO 44913 65555

JOB N^o: BA1311CCL



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Contents

1. NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY	3
2. INTRODUCTION	4
3. SOILS & GEOLOGY	5
4. BRIEF HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND	5
5. METHODOLOGY	8
6. RESULTS	9
7. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS	12
8. COPYRIGHT	12
9. REFERENCES	13
10. APPENDIX 1	15
11. APPENDIX 2	20

Cover: View south towards Croft Castle

Report specification

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1. Non-Technical Summary

Border Archaeology was instructed by Janine Young Archaeology Consultant National Trust Attingham Park Shrewsbury SY4 4TP to carry out Archaeological Observation of approximately 1.3km of trenching excavations in respect of a new water main located to the north and west of the mansion and Home Farm within parkland at Croft Castle.

Ground-works revealed no features or finds of archaeological significance. No evidence for occupation within the area of the parkland excavated was identified.

However, a large section of ENE –WSW terracing was identified within the parkland to the W of Croft Castle, possibly representing the remains of lynchets associated with medieval or early post-medieval ridge and furrow ploughing on the slope to the north. An alternative interpretation could be that it formed a park boundary delineation, as suggested by 19th century Tithe Apportionment and Ordnance Survey mapping.



2. Introduction

Border Archaeology was instructed by Janine Young Archaeology Consultant National Trust Attingham Park Shrewsbury SY4 4TP to carry out Archaeological Observation (Watching Brief) of approximately 1.3km of trenching excavations relating to a new water main located to the N of the mansion and Home Farm (NGR: SO 44913 65555) within parkland at Croft Castle. The area affected by the proposals is shown in the plan below (*fig. 1*).



*Fig. 1: Location plan showing route of proposed pipeline in red
(Based on plan supplied to Border Archaeology by the National Trust)*



3. Soils & Geology

The area affected by the proposals may be characterised as comprising typical brown earths of the MUNSLOW series (541i) consisting of well-drained coarse silty soils over siltstone with occasional similar but fine silty and coarse loamy soils. The underlying solid geology is Silurian siltstone.

4. Brief Historical & Archaeological Background

The pipeline ran immediately W and SW of Croft Castle (HSM 76000) (NGR: SO 4494 6543), a Grade I Listed Building (EH Ref. 1166451) set within a multi-period landscape containing evidence of human activity dating back at least to the Iron Age, a period most visibly represented by the noted hillfort of Croft Ambrey, a Scheduled Ancient Monument situated some 1.5km to the N.

The present castle is an ashlar-faced mansion of three wings arranged around a central courtyard with four corner turrets. The property appears to have been built around the middle of the 17th century in the so-called "Spenserian" style of superficially fortified pseudo-Gothic stately houses, named after the poet of Elizabethan chivalry, Edmund Spenser. The property is set in parkland adorned with ornamental trees, with Home Farm immediately to the NE.

An earlier building is thought to have occupied a site slightly to the W or NW of the present castle represented by dressed stone belonging to a large medieval arch which was recovered from a backfill deposit in 2002 (Ray 2010), together with other moulded fragments of medieval masonry. The stonework was interpreted as debris from a fortified manor that incurred substantial damage during the Civil War and was subsequently converted, probably by Sir James Croft (d. 1590), to a small-scale mansion. The Elizabethan conversion was later demolished and replaced by the present castle in 1662-3, a date subsequently confirmed by the results of dendrochronology carried out on existing roofing and basement timbers by Sheffield University.

The Croft Castle Estate covers an area of 720ha and encompasses a Grade II* landscape park (EH Ref. 1000878) of some 290ha. The castle and central garden area occupy part of the lower, southern portion of the park, adjoining the medieval parish church of St Michael, amid late 18th-century landscaping with 19th- and 20th-century trees. An historic avenue of sweet chestnuts (*Castanea sativa*) of probable 17th-century date radiates N towards Croft Ambrey and to the W of the castle (English Heritage 1999).

A detailed archaeological survey of the estate was undertaken in 2001-2 based on a number of identified landscape character areas. The areas affected by the proposal are those which the survey team designated as Area G – 'Croft Parkland and Area' and Area GA – 'Croft Castle Environs' (Ray & Hoverd 2003).



The pipeline covered a distance of approximately 1.3km across farmland occupying the S-facing slope of a limestone ridge to the N of Home Farm (HSM 12266; NGR: SO 44983 65561), the site of which possibly overlies part of a DMV. The route travelled roughly NNW across Field 1 for 240m from a mains connection point adjacent to the B4362 road, crossing the field boundary into Field 2. At this point, the route doglegged W for 60m before turning NNW once again to intersect with a field boundary after a distance of some 295m. Crossing the field boundary into Field 3, it turned NNE to follow the existing track for approximately 185m, at which point it followed the track ESE towards a holding tank roughly 295m distant, skirting along the northern boundary of Area GA. From there, the route continued a further 110m to a connection point immediately N of Home Farm. An additional pipe line ran 100m NNW from the connection point across the orchard to a terminus to the S of Park House.

A number of archaeological features are recorded within the vicinity of the pipeline route, including relict agricultural and settlement features and some earlier surviving parkland elements, as well as evidence of prehistoric activity.

A possible ring ditch feature (HSM 12624) shown on aerial photography some 300m S of Croft Castle (approximate NGR SO 449 651) and comprising a circular cropmark of some 90m diameter was interpreted by Stanford as a round barrow, although his interpretation has been challenged, principally on the basis of the feature's dimensions (Dalwood & Waller 1992). An artefact scatter (HSM 21850; NGR SO 44 65) was recorded in the vicinity of the cropmark in 1997, although nothing was recovered from the feature itself. The material consisted of much building rubble, especially brick and mortar, together with two flint flakes and a medieval sherd (Feryok, 1997). At NGR SO 450 655, ground works for the laying of a new service pipe uncovered a feature that was interpreted as a ditch and part of an Iron Age/Romano-British field system associated with Croft Ambrey hillfort (HSM 44679) (Wainwright, 2002)

Later remains include earthworks associated with fishponds (HSM 76381) which served the medieval castle; tofts and platforms (HSM 76368, 76369, 76370 & 76379) of the Deserted Medieval Village; and formal garden elements from the 16th to early 18th century (HSM 76372).

Of these recorded features, the pipeline route passed close to an area of ridge and furrow earthworks aligned N-S down slope (HSM 12285; NGR SO 4480 6565) which had been identified to the NW of the Castle. These occurred at 5m intervals and although somewhat ploughed down stood around 0.2m high, with a headland at the S end. A series of lynchets (HSM 76382, 76383, 76384) were recorded some 80m SW of the Castle (NGR SO 446 651) and c. 120m S of the route, comprising an E-W aligned lynchet feature approximately 2m wide and 0.5m high, a linear bank 2m wide and 0.5m high (NGR SO 4461 6510-SO4409 6507, SO 4451 6533-SO 4455 6509) and a bank measuring 2m wide and 0.5m high, located S of a stream (NGR SO 44786527-44845624). These features are shown as boundaries on the 1799 demesne map.

A post-medieval quarry feature some 50m in diameter and 10m deep (HSM 76354; NGR SO 44712 65338) was recorded cut into the hill-slope close to the head of a



deep gully facing Croft Castle approximately 200m E of the pipeline route, the field to the SW being identified as Quarry Paddock on the 1839 tithe map (Dalwood & Waller 1992). An 18th century pond (HSM 12625; NGR SO 4495 6523), now part-drained, was located some 180m E of the quarry at some distance from the route which is shown as a kidney-shaped feature on the 1799 demesne map and evidently formed a component of the post-medieval gardens. A dam was built across the centre and western half of the pond in the early 19th century and it was converted to a larger pond as shown on 1839 tithe.

A 19th century ha-ha (HSM 76385; NGR SO 44769 65477) extending S and W of Croft Castle is located where the pipeline route crosses from Area GA into Area G. This feature measures approximately 1.5m high and is shown as a boundary on the 1839 tithe map, but is not recorded on the 1825 Highway Alteration Application map.

At the point where the pipeline and track turn S, a drainage feature and bank are recorded. The first of these features comprises a large post-medieval drainage ditch (HSM 76342; NGR SO 44539 65476), 3m wide and 0.6m deep. At this point it turns to the NW and to the E, eventually running into the ha-ha (HSM 76385) on the W front. The drain is routed under the track via a 19th or early 20th century stone-built culvert (HSM 76343; NGR SO 44504 65501). Immediately NW of these features is a very substantial hedge bank aligned E-W (HSM 76344; NGR SO 44502 65504). The bank is approximately 2m high and hedged on its top and has been interpreted as a possible park pale continuation.

Situated to the E of the drainage features c. 250m E of the route was a further substantial area of well-preserved ridge and furrow cultivation features (HSM 76340) (NGR SO 44666 65478) aligned NE-SW. To the S of these (NGR SO 44560 65415), approximately 35m E of the route, was a series of low mounds and craters (HSM 76352) either associated with tree clearance during the construction of the new western lime avenue or modern dumping.

To the SE of HSM 76352 c. 60m E of the pipeline was a small lynchet (HSM 76353) located halfway up a low N-facing slope by a triple row of Spanish chestnuts (NGR SO 44600 65368). This ran E and W for c. 100m and was cut at its E by the quarry (HSM 76354). Located some 50m to the W of the pipeline route at roughly this point (NGR SO 44458 65408) was a small medieval lynchet (HSM 76351) measuring c. 0.4m high, which ran along the base of a valley from this point to the E for approximately 60m.

The pipeline then approached a hedgerow bank 450m SW of Croft Castle (HSM 70049*1), before continuing S towards a further series of medieval lynchets located c. 50-60m E of the pipeline route. The first of these (HSM 76356; NGR SO 44719 65387) was aligned roughly E-W and survived in an eroded condition. The second feature (HSM 76357; NGR SO 44719 65387) runs parallel to and is similar in appearance to HSM 76356. A further lynchet feature (HSM 70049*0) was recorded at the point where the pipeline doglegs E and then S, some 500m SW of the Castle.

Continuing S to a mains connection, the pipeline terminated at a hedgerow bank (HSM 70048*0).



5. Methodology

The archaeological watching brief within the area specified was carried out in accordance with *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008). Border Archaeology adheres to the IfA *Code of conduct (2012)*, *Code of approved practice for the regulation of contractual arrangements in field archaeology (2008)* and *Standards for Archaeological Projects in Herefordshire (Issue 1)* (Herefordshire Council, 2004). All intrusive ground works associated with the pipeline installation were observed.

Full written, graphic and photographic records were made in accordance with Border Archaeology's *Field Recording Manual* (2010). Records include:

- A pro-forma context record for each stratigraphic unit. Drawings were produced at a scale of 1:20.
- Plans of any area excavated showing: the extent of the area (tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid and located on a 1:2500 plan), the extent of all stratigraphic units, and appropriate detail within stratigraphic units. Drawings have been numbered and listed in a drawing register, these drawing numbers being cross-referenced to written site records.
- A photographic record of all stratigraphic units in addition to a representative photographic record of the progress of the archaeological work. The record was made using a high-resolution digital camera and comprised photographs of archaeological features and appropriate groups of features and structures. Included in each photograph was an appropriate scale and all photographic records were indexed and cross-referenced to written site records. Details concerning subject and direction of view were maintained in a photographic register, indexed by frame number.
- A temporary benchmark (TBM) established at appropriate locations and all drawings contain grid and level information relative to OS data.

Note: A small assemblage of late post medieval finds was recovered from the topsoil and subsoil deposits in Fields 2 and 3. The presence of this material was noted but the finds were not retained.



6. Results

6.1 Field 1

Field 1 (*fig. 2*) was an arable plot located immediately N of B4362 and SW of Croft Castle, part of an area referred to as 'Lady Meadow' on the 1839 Tithe Map. Four contexts were identified, the uppermost of which was a cohesive mid-greyish-brown slightly gritty silt plough-soil (101), overlying (102), a light brown clayey silt hill-wash deposit. Underlying this was (103) a hard red boulder clay deposit overlying the natural siltstone (104).

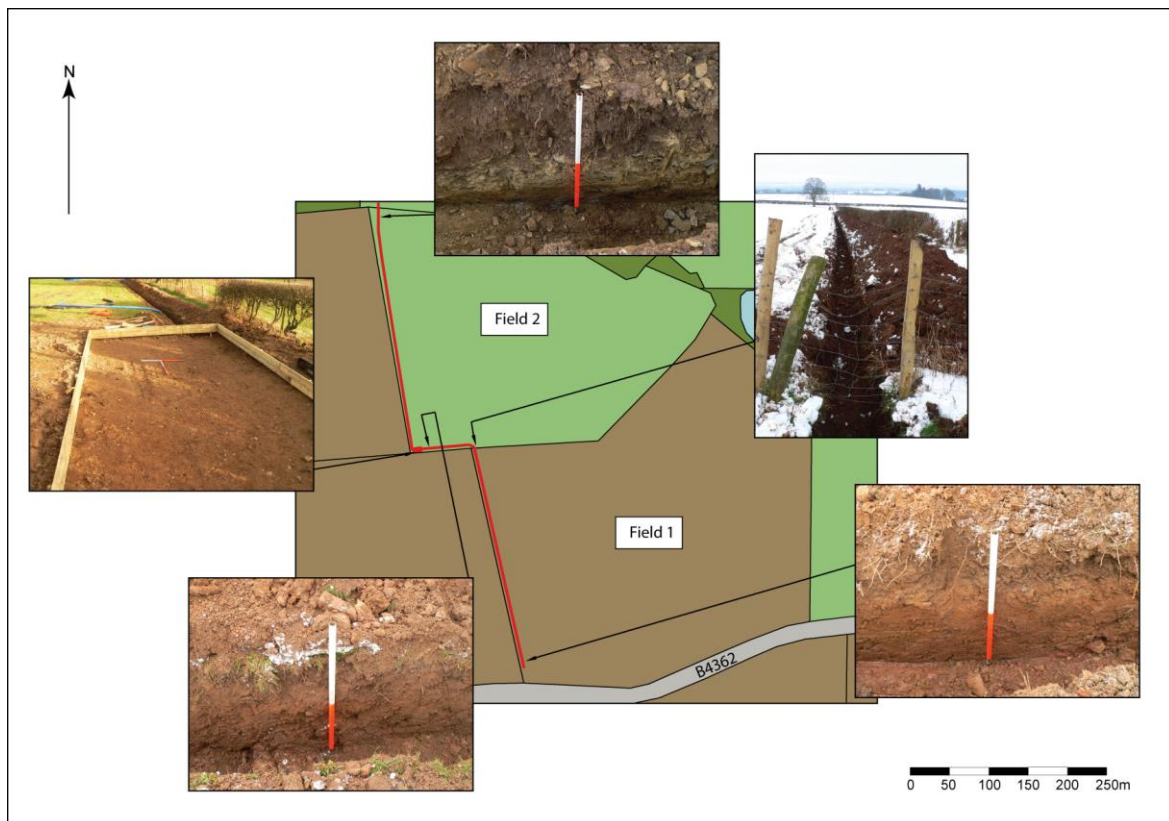


Fig. 2: Plan showing Fields 1 and 2

6.2 Field 2

Field 2 (*fig. 2*) was pasture located immediately N of Field 1 and formerly referred to as 'Quarry Paddock' on the 1839 Tithe Map. Five contexts were revealed. Underlying the topsoil (105) in the centre of the excavated area was a post-medieval soil horizon (109). Underlying (109) was (106), a clean hillwash deposit overlying degraded stone (107) and bedded siltstone layers (108). Soil deposits were less than 0.3m in depth over the bedrock in the northern extent of Field 2.

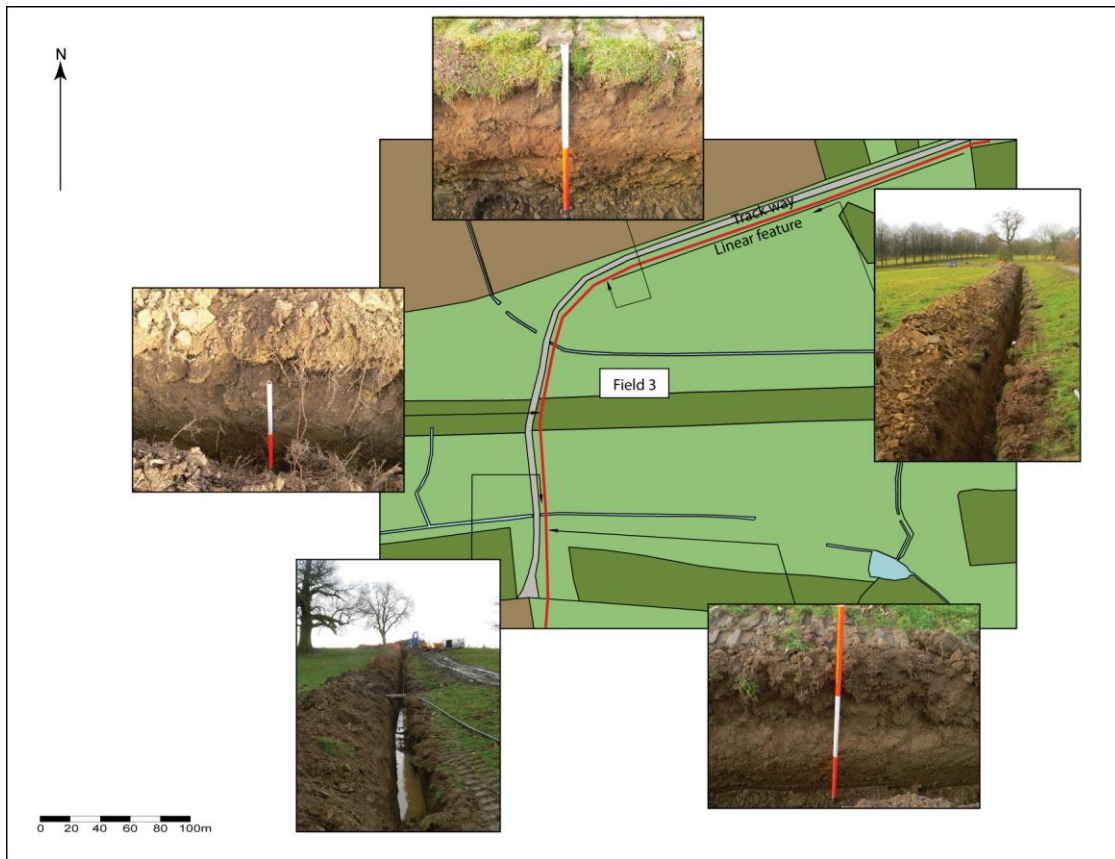


Fig. 3: Plan showing Field 3

6.3 Field 3

Field 3 (*fig. 3*) was a large area of parkland within a small valley, located immediately W of Croft Castle and bisected by an avenue. This area is referred to in the 1839 Tithe Map as 'West Park'. Ten contexts were identified.

Well-compacted clayey silt topsoil (110) extended across the entire excavated area. Three modern features were cut from this deposit, comprising a field water supply pipe [114] running N-S on a similar orientation to the pipeline, a land drain [116] oriented E-W immediately to the N of the avenue and a probable grubbing pit [118] representing the removal of a tree, which was backfilled by a mixed deposit containing stone and brick rubble (119).

Underlying (110) was (111), a continuation of (109) extending 35m in the S extent of Field 3. Underlying (111) was a friable uniform clay silt and degraded siltstone deposit (112), deeply deposited in the centre of the valley. Underlying this was the natural geological siltstone (113).

A pair of ENE-WSW parallel linear features located immediately S of the trackway extending approximately 230m between SO 44546 and SO 65494 were excavated through. These were recorded in profile.

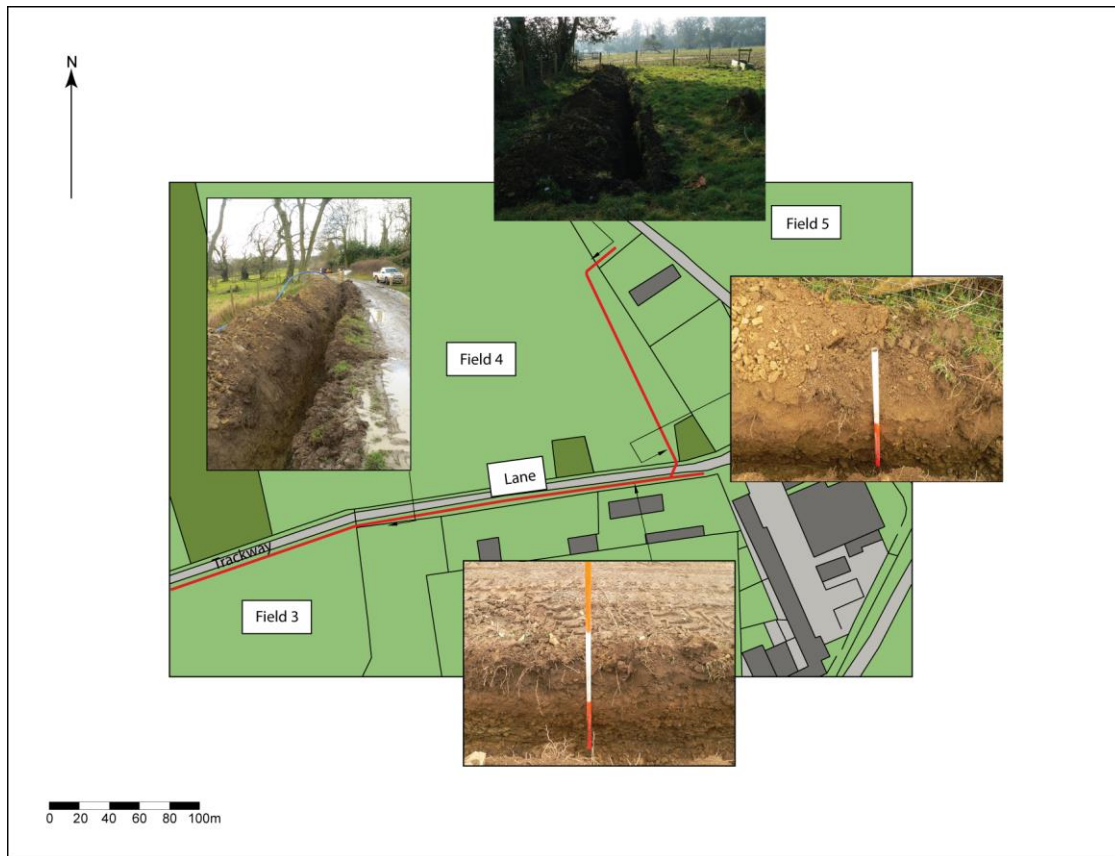


Fig 4: Plan showing Lane area and Field 4 and 5

6.4 Lane

The lane ran immediately to the N of the Walled Garden, connecting the parkland and the farm (*fig. 4*). Two contexts were identified in this area.

The uppermost deposit (120) comprised a well-compacted mid to dark brown deep sandy silt containing very frequent tree roots overlying (113) a continuation of the natural stone deposit within this area.

6.5 Fields 4 and 5

Field 4 (*fig. 4*) was an orchard located immediately to the N of the Lane and to the W of Park House, referred to as 'New Orchard' on the 1839 Tithe Map. The pipeline terminated within Field 5 (*fig. 4*), an area of open parkland to the N and W of Croft Castle referred to on the 1839 Tithe Map as 'Fold Park'. Four contexts were revealed within these areas.

The uppermost deposit within Field 4 was a poorly stratified topsoil deposit (121), overlying clean subsoil (122) overlying natural siltstone (123)



Ground-works within Field 5 revealed a loose dark silty sand (124) containing frequent late post-medieval artefacts and building debris, which probably comprised garden soil from the adjoining Park House.

7. Discussion of Results

Fields 1 and 2, located to the SW of Croft Castle, revealed no features of archaeological significance. Finds from these areas were late post-medieval or modern in date and were retrieved from poorly stratified topsoil or plough-soil deposits.

Field 3 was a large area of open parkland to the N of Field 2 and W of the castle. A series of modern features were revealed consisting of a N-S field water supply pipe cut [114] extending along the E side of the track-way, an E-W land drain [116] running adjacent to the N side of the avenue and a tree-grubbing pit [118] on the S side of the track-way where it turned to the E. The fill of [118] contained post-medieval brick and masonry (119) evidently resulting from the reuse of building rubble as backfill.

A pair of ENE-WSW parallel linear features located immediately S of the track-way were observed running approximately 230m between SO 44546 and SO 65494. These may have been terraces or lynchets possibly formed by ridge and furrow ploughing of the slope to the N. An alternative interpretation is that these formed a remnant parkland boundary delineation (*see Fig 5 for profiles of these features*).

The lane running between Field 3 and the farmyard revealed a very poorly stratified and root-strewn topsoil deposit over natural siltstone; no features were identified and no finds of archaeological significance were excavated.

Field 4 was an orchard used for cattle grazing. No finds or features of archaeological significance were revealed in this area.

Field 5 was a large area of open parkland to the E of Field 4. Ground-works in this area immediately to the N of Park House revealed deep garden soil deposits over bedrock, probably associated with the nearby property.

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9. References

10.1 Bibliography

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10.2 Cartography

Croft Estate Demesne Map 1799

Map accompanying the Croft Highway Alteration Application 1825

Croft Parish Tithe Apportionment Map 1839

OS 1st Edition 1:10,560 map - 1891



10. Appendix 1

10.1 FIELD 1

LOCATION	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
Field to N of B4362 and SW of Croft Castle NGR: SO 44671 64877-NGR: SO 44623 65093	(101)	Cohesive mid greyish-brown slightly gritty clay silt, frequent angular siltstone and organic material, extends >200m x >0.5m x 0.28m. Overlies (102) and (105)	Modern plough-soil
	(102)	Moderate to well-compacted light brown clayey silt, occasional siltstone, extends >200m x >0.5m x 0.25m. Underlies (101) Overlies (103)	Naturally deposited colluvium
	(103)	Well-compacted red silty clay, moderate siltstone inclusions, occasional very large pebbles, extends >200m x >0.5m x 0.37m. Underlies (102) Overlies (104)	Natural boulder clay deposition
	(104)	Friable light yellowish-brown siltstone and clay silt, extends 35m x >0.5m x >0.48m. Underlies (103) Same as (107)	Natural degraded siltstone outcropping



10.2 FIELD 2

LOCATION	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
Field to the N of Field 1 and to the S of Field 3 and SW of Croft Castle NGR: SO 44623 65093-NGR: SO 44563 65097-NGR: SO 44532 65323	(105)	Well-compacted mid greyish-brown clay silt, frequent root disturbance, extends >230m × >60m × 0.2m. Underlies (101) Overlies (109) Same as (110)	Modern topsoil
	(106)	Well-compacted mid reddish-brown silt/silt clay, occasional tree root intrusion, extends >60m × >30m × 0.3m. Underlies (109) Overlies (107)	Naturally deposited colluvium
	(107)	Well-compacted mid reddish-brown sandy silt and siltstone, extends >200m × >0.5m × >0.6m. Underlies (106) Overlies (108) Same as (104)	Natural weathered and degraded siltstone
	(108)	Hard mid greyish-yellow bedded siltstone, extends >200m × >0.5m × >0.8m. Underlies (107) & (113)	Natural bedded siltstone
	(109)	Well- compacted light greyish-brown clayey silt, moderate siltstone, pottery and CBM, extends 200m × >0.5m × 0.3m. Underlies (105) Overlies (106) Same as (111)	Subsoil deposit in the middle and N of Field 2



10.3 FIELD 3

LOCATION	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
Parkland to the N of Field 2 and to the W and NW of Croft Castle NGR: SO 44532 65323-NGR: SO 44542 65497-NGR: SO 44768 65584	(110)	Well-compacted mid greyish-brown clayey silt, frequent tree root disturbance in avenue area, pottery and CBM, extends >170m × >245m × 0.25m. Cut by [114],[116] and [118] Overlies (111) Same as (105)	Modern/late post-medieval topsoil
	(111)	Well-compacted light to mid greyish-brown clayey silt, occasional angular siltstone inclusions, extends >170m × >245m × 0.35m. Underlies (110) Overlies (112) Same as (109)	Post-medieval subsoil deposit
	(112)	Friable light to mid reddish-brown slightly gritty clay silt and degraded siltstone, extends >100m × >0.5m × 0.75m. Underlies (111) Overlies (113)	Alluvial deposit in the centre of Field 3 where it forms a depression
	(113)	Well compacted light reddish- or yellowish-brown degraded siltstone and sandy silt, extends >170m × >245m × 0.6m. Underlies (112) and (120) Overlies (108) Same as (123)	Weathered and degraded siltstone deposition
	[114]	Linear cut oriented N-S extends >6m × 0.6m × 0.5m. Break of slope (top), Sides, Break of slope (base) and Base imperceptible and poorly defined. Filled by (115) Cuts (110)	Cut for modern field water supply pipe
	(115)	Well-compacted mid greyish brown clay silt, CBM, extends >6m × 0.6m × 0.5m. Fills [114]	Backfill for modern cut (incorporates pipe)
	[116]	Linear cut oriented E-W extends 0.6m × >0.5m × 0.75m. Break of slope (top) sharp. Sides steeply sloping. Break of slope (base) sharp. Base flat. Filled by (117) Cuts (110)	Cut for modern land drain



10.4 FIELD 4

LOCATION	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
Parkland to the N of Field 2 and to the W and NW of Croft Castle NGR: SO 44532 65323-NGR: SO 44542 65497-NGR: SO 44768 65584	(117)	Loose scalplings, extends 0.6m × >0.5m × 0.75m. Fills [116]	Backfill of modern land drain
	(118)	Ovoid (?) cut extending >0.5m × 3.35m × 0.98m. Break of slope (top) diffuse. Sides sharply defined, gently sloping. Break of slope (base) gradual. Base flat. Filled by (119) Cuts (110)	Cut of grubbing pit for tree removal
	(119)	Loose, mid brown with blackish patches silt, burnt organic material, brick and stone rubble, pottery, CBM and modern detritus, extends >0.5m × 3.35m × 0.98m. Fills [118]	Rubble backfill of pit [118]

10.5 LANE TO THE E OF FIELD 3 AND S OF FIELD 4

LOCATION	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
Lane running E-W between parkland (Field 3) and farmyard NGR: SO 44769 65583-NGR: SO 44945 65615	(120)	Well-compacted mid to dark brown sand silt, very frequent root disturbance, pottery and CBM, extends 170m × 0.5m × 0.45m. Overlies (113)	Late post-medieval topsoil and up-cast from ditch to S of lane
	(113)	Well-compacted reddish or yellowish light brown degraded siltstone and sandy silt, extends >170m × >0.5m × >0.9m. Underlies (112) and (120) Overlies (108) Same as (123)	Weathered and degraded siltstone deposition



10.6 FIELDS 4 AND 5

LOCATION	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
Orchard (Field 4) to N of lane running into parkland (Field 5) immediately N of Park House NGR: SO 44930 65621-NGR: SO 44900 65725	(121)	Well-compacted mid to light brown clayey silt, frequent roots, pottery, CBM, extends >100m x >10m x 0.25m. Overlies (122)	Modern topsoil deposit
	(122)	Well-compacted mid reddish-brown silt, extends >100m x >10m x 0.15m. Underlies (121) Overlies (123)	Sterile subsoil deposit
	(123)	Well-compacted light brown degraded sandstone/siltstone, extends >100m x >18m x >0.35m. Underlies (122) and (124) Same as (113)	Natural degraded bedrock deposition
	(124)	Loose dark brown silty sand loam, tree roots, mortar, CBM, pottery and glass. Overlies (123)	Deep soil deposit probably garden soil from adjoining Park House



11. Appendix 2

Fig. 5: Profile of terracing along N extent of Field 3

