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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Summary

Location: Betton Way, site of new primary school
Parish: Moretonhampstead
District: Dartmoor National Park
County: Devon
NGR: SX7509 8628

This archaeological assessment was undertaken by South West Archaeology in response to an instruction from Michila Wilks, Architect for Devon County Council to a specification set by Devon County Archaeological Service (appendix 1).

The purpose of the assessment was to place the site in its historical and archaeological context in order to gauge any potential archaeological impact which may occur as a result of the proposed development on this site.

The proposal is the construction of a new primary school in a field to the north west of the historic core of Moretonhampstead (fig 1b), formerly part of Forder Farm.

The assessment is commissioned in accordance with paragraphs 19 and 20 of Central Government's PPG16, Archaeology and Planning.

The development site is on the edge of the historic core of Moretonhampstead, which the Devon Historic Environment Record records as being of Anglo-Saxon origin (PRN 8287). Moretonhampstead is referred to as a Borough in 1640 (PRN 21811). A Bronze Age palstave has been discovered in the vicinity (PRN 30142), with further prehistoric features and finds in the wider area (appendix 2 and fig 6).

The site is outside the Moretonhampstead conservation area.

1.2 Methodology

This assessment has been undertaken by Terry Green MA working in association with South West Archaeology.

It is based on material drawn from the Devon Record Office, the Devon County Archaeological Service, the West Country Studies Library and the Moretonhampstead Historical Society website www.moretonhampstead.org.uk.

The site was visited on 11th November, 2005 by Terry Green and Colin Humphreys.

2.0 Results of the Desk-based Study

2.1 General Historical Background

Styling itself “Gateway to the Moor”, Moretonhampstead is a small town in the north-eastern quarter of Dartmoor National Park. Situated in fertile country away from the high moor and between the Rivers Bovey and Teign, the settlement, formerly known simply as Moreton, has been important since before the Conquest, when it was the centre of a royal estate. During the medieval period it received a market charter and became the centre of an important woollen industry, which, however, dwindled away in the 18th and early 19th centuries. A branch of the Great Western Railway opened here in 1866, but fell victim to cutbacks in the mid-20th century. The decline in woollen manufacture coincided with the growing 19th century desire to visit wild and romantic out-of-the-way places, and since that time Moretonhampstead has flourished through tourism. In recent years it has attracted many new residents with the means and independence to live remote from major centres of population.

2.2 Early History

2.2.1 Prehistory

Dartmoor is well known for its widespread evidence of Bronze Age settlement. The reave system of Bronze Age land division extends into this parish. Traces of Bronze Age field-systems persist in northern parts of the parish, and stone monuments of probably Bronze Age date are to be seen on Mardon and Butterdon Downs. Of probably Iron Age date, hillforts or hilltop settlements at Cranbrook and Wooston overlook the Teign Valley. A number of artefacts of prehistoric date have been found in the area.

2.2.2 Medieval Period

At the time of the Domesday survey in 1086, *Mortona* was within the Hundred of Teignbridge. It was a royal manor, having previously been held by Harold Godwinson (Reichel 1901, 566). A note in Domesday tells us that “to the manor of Moreton belongs the third penny of the Hundred of Teignbridge” (Thorn and Thorn 1985), that is: it received a third of the income of the Hundred, indicating its importance. It appears to have stood on an equal footing with Teignbridge, the hundredal manor, and there are indications that it was, for a period at least, itself the centre of a hundred (Reichel 1915, 199). Its early importance probably derives at least in part from its location on a north-south route skirting the wilds of Dartmoor. It remains the centre of a rural deanery.

The following is a summary of the manorial history of Moretonhampstead provided by the Moretonhampstead History Society on their website: www.moretonhampstead.org.uk.

The lordship of the manor of Moreton remained in royal possession until Henry I (1099-1135) gave it to his illegitimate son William de Tracey. It then passed from William to his daughter Grace, and from her to her son, another William, who adopted the name ‘de Tracey’. In 1173 William divided off the manor of Doccombe from that of Moreton, giving ‘100 shillings of land in Doccombe’ to the monks of Canterbury Cathedral. By this process of sub-infeudation, there became three manors in the parish: Moreton, Doccombe and Wray.

The rest of the manor of Moreton was inherited from William de Tracey by his son, Henry the hunchback, who gave it to the Chief Justice, Geoffrey fitz Piers (d1213), in return for assistance in regaining his inheritance after his father's disgrace. Geoffrey Fitz Piers changed his name to Geoffrey de Mandeville, and was granted the title Earl of Essex. It was he who in 1207 obtained Moreton's first charter from King John and with it the right to hold a market and fair. In about 1257 Geoffrey's descendant, Aveline married Walter de Burgh, Earl of Ulster, bringing the manor of Moreton to the de Burgh family. It is recorded that the Earl held Morton in return for the duty of providing a sparrowhawk to the king. In 1279 the lord of the manor was Richard de Burgh, Earl of Ulster. Shortly afterwards, however, there was a rival claim on the manor, which was only resolved when in 1299 it was allocated to Richard de Burgh, son of Walter and Aveline. It was bought in 1309 by Sir Hugh de Courtenay, later Earl of Devon, in whose family it remained until 1890. None of the de Courtenays ever lived here.

2.2.3 The Development of the Town

The name of Mor(e)ton is recorded in Domesday (Thorn and Thorn), but -hampstead was not added until the 15th century (Gover, Mawer and Stenton 1931, 483). The combination of *-ton* added to a broad topographic reference ("moor"), suggests that this name originally referred to an estate rather than a settlement with its manorial centre probably roughly at the present location of the town. The layout of the town is comparable to that of other small market towns in Devon which received market and/or borough charters in the 13th century. A number of these show clear signs of having been set up within an existing field-system (cf. Weddell 1985), the former long ploughlands becoming the burgage-plots on either side of a main street. If this is the case here, then the town in its present form probably dates from the early 13th century. The market would have taken place in a wide open space to the west of the church, but which has been filled in with buildings in later centuries. This pattern of development is also common in Devon towns.

Until the 20th century there is little sign of the town developing beyond its medieval boundaries. By the 1940's there had been some expansion to the north beside the road to North Tawton and recent years have seen more development in that direction.

2.3 The Landscape

There is little cartographic evidence in the environs of the town to suggest remnants of a medieval common field system, though it is possible that there were once ploughlands to the south of the town. Long, narrow rectangular fields to the west along the road towards Lowton and Sloncombe *might* be thus interpreted, but are more convincing as enclosed pasture. Other irregularly shaped fields in this area (south-west of the development site) suggest late medieval closes. On the other hand, the medieval development of the surrounding land probably involved assarting into woodland and moor, the evidence for which is often a long curving boundary forming a loop and demarkating the extent of intake at any one time. Such a boundary is to be seen to the north-west of the town (and including the development site) with a further probable extension beyond it to north and west.

2.4 The Development Site

2.4.1 Description

The site for development is a more or less square area of land occupying most of a field (roughly two hectares) of rough grazing to the north-west of the town. To the south of the site is a new housing estate, and to the east is the A382 towards North Tawton. The field may be accessed through a gate off the A382 beside which there is a stone barn. Running from the gate on the east to the western boundary of the field is a broad, recently constructed east-west track to the north of which the land rises gently towards a hedge, while to the south it slopes somewhat more steeply towards a wooden board fence. About 30 metres into the field a smaller track veers south. Beside this track on the left about 30 metres from the junction is a wet area, probably a former pond. The track descends towards a broad concrete pad with an area of derelict dutch barns on the right and building debris strewn about; on the left is a modern block-built shelter shed. In the south-east corner of the area a short length of stone (boundary?) wall remains intact. The southern boundary of the field is a modern board fence forming the garden boundaries of recently built houses. Running east-west across the field roughly halfway between the broad east-west track and the wooden fence is a long level area or platform which is distinguished by a growth of thistles and nettles. To the south of this there are a number of “humps and bumps”. On the west side of the field another track runs north from the boundary of the housing estate and meets the east-west track. From the junction a narrower track leads through a gate into the next field. The western boundary of the field is a hedge. In the north-west corner of the field is an area of irregular topography.

2.4.2 Cartographic History of the Development Site

The earliest available detailed map is the Moretonhampstead tithe map of 1840 (fig 2). On this map the field described above is bounded more or less as at present, The field is numbered 1353. and in the Moretonhampstead tithe award (1839) is named “The Little Field”. It was owned and occupied by George Bragg who also held the field to the north, number 1354, “The Bain Field” (= the Bean Field?) and the field to the south, number 1352, “Forder Meadow”. In the south-east corner of 1354 a building is shown corresponding to the present location of the stone barn beside the entrance to the field. The building depicted has a “porch” on the south, possibly representing the cheeks of a threshing barn or the entrance of a cart-house. In the south-east corner of 1353 (the development site) a group of three small rectangular buildings is shown. The Ordnance Survey First Edition 25 inch map surveyed in 1884 and published in 1889 (sheet No. 90:7, see fig 3) shows the barn now minus its “porch”. It identifies the group of buildings in the south-east corner of the field as “Kennels” and shows four buildings in a rather more elaborate arrangement than in 1840. The corresponding map of 1904 (fig 5) shows further change in this area with a new building on the north of the group beside the road. An aerial photograph of 1947 (CPE/UK/1995 13APR 47 F20”//MULTI 4.16, 400’ 58 SQDN 1348, see plate 1) shows apparently the same.

2.4.3 The Boundaries

The present boundaries of the field remain as in 1840 (though the southern boundary has been replaced with a board fence), and are therefore part of the historic landscape. The northern boundary is of particular interest, since it is part of a long, curving boundary identified above as that of a medieval assart. The southern quarter of the western boundary represents part of the boundary of a field identified in 1840 as part of Court Tenement (number 1359). This small field belongs to a group of irregularly shaped fields which may represent late medieval closes. The rest of the western boundary as well as the southern boundary are very straight and are probably post-medieval

3.0 Conclusions

- The general area provides evidence of occupation from the Neolithic period onwards.
- Moretonhampstead appears to originate as the centre of a large and important pre-Conquest (Anglo-Saxon) estate.
- The north-south route, next to which the development site is situated, was probably a major source of this importance.
- From this beginning the market town (borough) developed or was created in the 13th century.
- The site for development lies near to the core of the medieval town, though outside any visible area of development prior to the 20th century.
- Medieval agricultural expansion involved creating assarts into moor and woodland.
- The site for development is within such an assart and preserves part of its boundary on the north side.
- Buildings to the north-east and south-east have probably pre-19th century origins.

4.0 Archaeological Potential and Recommendations

1. Apart from a Bronze Age palstave from roughly this area, there is nothing in the available documentary or cartographic sources to suggest buried archaeology on the site.
2. On the other hand, this close to the medieval core, it is *possible* that settlement remains are within the site.
3. The topography of the field suggests slight earthworks which *may* be significant, but which may equally be geological or agricultural in origin.
4. The north boundary is probably of medieval origin and should be recorded. If it has a bank and if this is breached, then there may be environmental evidence to be recovered.
5. Unstratified prehistoric, medieval and post-medieval material may turn up in any area of ground disturbance.
6. An archaeological watching brief is recommended.

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Aerial Photograph: CPE/UK/1995 13APR 47 F20"/MULTI 4.16, 400' 58 SQDN 1348