

PROPOSED LIVESTOCK BUILDING

LAND AT SX 58800 54961

PLYMPTON

DEVON

Results of an Archaeological Excavation



South West Archaeology Ltd. report no. 250323



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FIELD AT SX 587 548, PLYMPTON, DEVON RESULTS OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

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Work undertaken by SWARCH for a Private Client (the Client).

SUMMARY

This report presents the results of an archaeological excavation carried out by South West Archaeology Ltd. (SWARCH) on land at SX 587 548, Plympton, Devon as part of a planning application for a proposed livestock building. The field in which the work was undertaken had been subject (in part) to a previous geophysical survey (Bampton 2024), which had revealed possible archaeological features may have been present within the proposed footprint.

The area of the proposed barn was stripped down the natural geology to reveal the possible archaeological features to allow for further investigation. After further excavation a linear running North-South and two sub-circular heat affected areas were identified as archaeological features. These were very shallow and did not produce any finds. Not much can be concluded about these features but the linear was likely a part of a field boundary system. Other non-archaeological features including a single tree throw and two linear land drains were identified. One of the land drains running South-West to North-East was identified in the geophysics. Due to the shallow topsoil and shallow depth of the features coupled with the evidence of plough scars cutting into the natural these features were likely to have all been heavily disturbed by ploughing activity, which likely significantly truncated further features.

The few finds recovered from the site, were all from the topsoil and were post-medieval to modern in date. These included one small iron bolt, a fragment of plastic drain, two sherds of white refined earthenware and two shards of green glass bottle.

Overall a minimal amount archaeological features were revealed to be in the proposed area of the livestock barn and those that are present are poorly preserved and are of unknown date/origin.



March 2025

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

LOCATION:	LAND AT SX 587 548
PARISH:	PLYMPTON
COUNTY:	DEVON
NGR:	SX 58800 54961,
PLANNING NO.:	1981/24/FUL
DCHET REF:	ARCH/DM/SH/39696A
SWARCH REF.	PLAB24
OASIS REF:	SOUTHWES1-526795

1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

South West Archaeology Ltd. (SWARCH) was commissioned by a Private Client (the Client) to undertake an archaeological excavation on land at SX 587 548, Plympton, Devon as part of the planning requirements to be completed in advance of the construction of a livestock building. This work was undertaken in line with best practice, ClfA guidance and in line with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) drawn up in consultation with Devon County Council's Historic Environment Team (DCHET).

1.2 SITE LOCATION

The site lies within a large plot, immediately to the south of Smithleigh and south east of Lee Mill (Figure 1). The landscape is agricultural, with pockets of settlement, and woodland. The proposed livestock building was being constructed to the south-east of an existing modern farm building, and is accessed via a new track, which accesses these barns from the north-west.

1.3 TOPOGRAPHICAL AND GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site is on a very gentle west facing slope at a height of c.85m AOD, in a landscape of relatively gentle rolling hills and valleys. The ground begins to rise more steeply to the east-south-east of the site and the ground to the west is more level until after Collaford Farm. It is between streams and springs that feed watercourses and tributaries to the River Yealm.

The soils of this area are the well drained fine loamy soils over slate or slate rubble of the Denbigh 2 Association (SSEW 1983), which overlie slate of the Middle Devonian Slates Formation (BGS 2024).

1.4 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies within the modern parish of Plympton and historically within the parish of Plympton St. Mary, in the hundred and deanery of Plympton (Lysons 1822). The site was between two Domesday manors; Battisford and Challonsleigh, of which Challonsleigh was the larger, closer and arguably, topographically more connected to the site. In 1066 Challonsleigh was held by Osfrith (of Okehampton) and worth 1 pound; and in 1086 it was held by William of Poilley and worth 2 pounds (Morris 1992). By c.1840 the Plympton St Mary tithe apportionment shows that the site (within plot 1053 – *Lane End Field*) was part of *Collaford* farm, which was owned by the Earl of Morley and John Morth Woolcombe and occupied by a William Wyatt. The apportionment indicates that Morley and Woolcombe owned much of the estates in the wider landscape and that these were rented out across many tenant farmers and tenants. The Woolcombe family had held the barton of Challonsleigh from the late 16th century until the early-mid 18th century and in 1822 held the barton's of Smithleigh and Highwoods (Lysons 1822).

Cartographic sources show that the extant field system of the site and surrounding area was established by the c.1840 tithe map. The evident field system has frequent straight sided, presumably modern enclosures, but within a landscape of long curving and sinuous boundaries that are probably Medieval in date, having probably been farmed previously as open strip fields. The field-scape and general layout of the immediate area of the site shows surprising continuity through the 19th and 20th century, including Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping from 1854-63, 1892-95, 1912-13, and 1933-35. A single relevant change to the boundaries on/near the site is the removal of a boundary at the north-east end of the field immediately south-east of the site. This boundary would be in the approximate location of the extant modern barn. 21st century satellite imagery and LiDAR imagery of the site include evidence of subsequently removed boundaries in the wider landscape, but specific to the site they clearly indicate the impact of agricultural activity, such as ploughing; and the presence of a wide service trench (a gas main from near Choakford to Langage) crossing the field further west of the site.

Devon's Historic Landscape Character (HLC) records the sites as in:

Modern enclosures... 'These modern fields have been created out of probable medieval enclosures. The sinuous medieval boundaries survive in places.' and, *Medieval enclosures based on strip fields... 'This area was probably first enclosed with hedge-banks during the later middle ages. The curving form of the hedge-banks suggests that earlier it may have been farmed as open strip-fields'.*

Previous archaeological works on the site are associated with the gas pipeline instated in the late 2000's. A full historical and archaeological background for the length of the pipeline was included in an Exeter Archaeology assessment (Turton and Ives 2006). This identified the presence of prehistoric activity, particularly in the northern half of the pipeline route, and Medieval settlements and activity located along its length. More pertinent to the site was the subsequent monitoring of field work and evaluation trenching conducted along the length of the pipeline conducted in 2007 (Tyler 2009, Salvatore and Quinnell 2011; EDV5454; EDV5455). This resulted in evidence of settlement activity, pits, ditches and possible enclosures (MDV106140; Tyler 2009; Salvatore and Quinnell 2011). Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age finds and features were encountered to the north-west of this site; while this site contained four to six probable Late Iron Age and/or undated ditches, five undated and/or Romano-British pits and two undated post-holes, presumably associated with the late Iron Age to Romano-British activity.

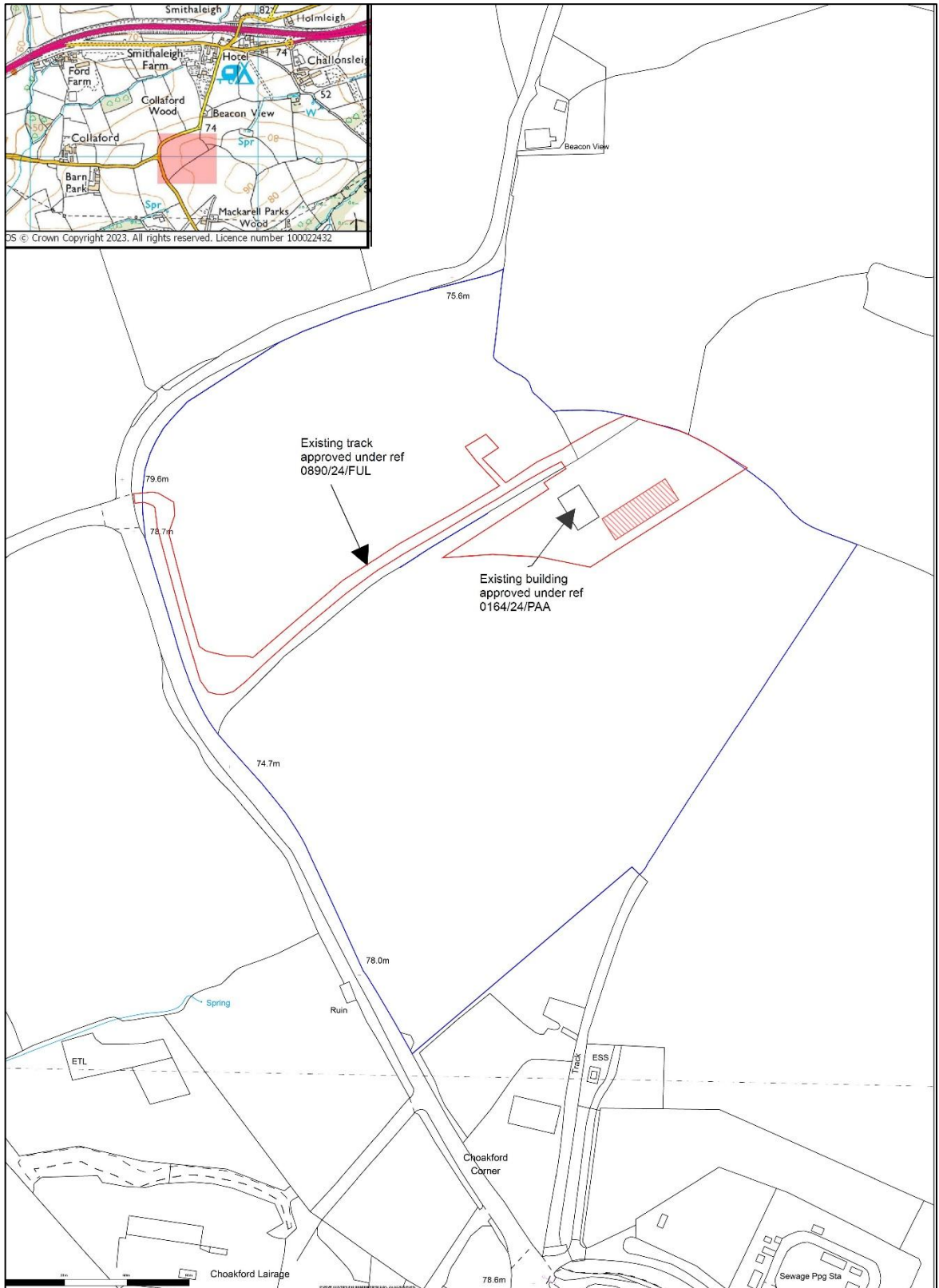


FIGURE 1: SITE LOCATION, THE PROPOSED BUILDING IS SHOWN IN RED (CONTAINS ORDNANCE SURVEY DATA © CROWN COPYRIGHT 2023. LICENCE NUMBER 10002432).

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The excavations were undertaken on 16th August 2024 by Dr. S.H. Walls, Director at South West Archaeology. This followed on from a previous geophysical survey over a portion of the field that the proposed livestock building would be located in early 2024 (see Bampton 2024 and Figures 7 and 8).

2.2 METHODOLOGY

An area of c. 16m wide by c. 37.5m long in the proposed location of the livestock building was excavated down to the local geological natural. This was done using a toothless excavator bucket under the supervision and control of an archaeologist in accordance with the WSI and ClFA guidelines (Boyd, 2024). Any archaeological features revealed were excavated to assess the stratigraphy and for finds recovery.

2.3 RESULTS

The stratigraphy across the site consisted of a mid-yellow-brown silt-clay topsoil (100) with rare small sub-angular stones that were >60mm in size. The topsoil was between 0.28m to 0.25m deep across the entirety of the site. The topsoil directly overlay the natural (101), a firm to hard yellow-clay with rare gravel inclusions (Figure 2). The natural varied slightly across the site, with a grey-brown clay natural band along the western edge of the excavated area. The northern central area becomes a grey-yellow clay with abundant shillet, whilst to the west of the shillet the natural here had a common dark grey/black manganese inclusions to the top, which could suggest that this was once a wetter part of the site.



FIGURE 2: SECTION OF STRIPPED AREA (1M SCALE)

In the western side of the stripped area a single ditch [102] was found running North to South (see Figure 3). Two slots were excavated into this ditch, one to the north and one to the south. It was measured to be 1m wide and up to 0.07m deep in the southern edge but narrowing to 0.6m wide and 0.02m deep at northern edge of excavation, suggesting that it was petering(ploughed) out further north. It had a flat base and gently sloping sides. It was filled by (103) a firm to soft mid-yellow brown silt-clay with rare small sub-angular stone (>60mm diameter). To the southern end there was some very rare charcoal smears present in the top of the fill.



FIGURE 3: NORTH FACING SECTION OF [102] IN SOUTHERN SLOT (1M SCALE).

To the east of the ditch were two small sub-circular areas of heat affected (natural) clay. The northern of these [104] and was 0.8m east of [102], and measured 0.28m x 0.34m and 0.03m deep. This was filled by (105), a reddish clay with charcoal smearing. The second sub-circular feature [106], was c.2m south of [104] and 1.4m east of [102]. It was the same size and diameter as [104] but only 0.01m deep, with much less charcoal smearing within an otherwise similar fill (Figure 4).



FIGURE 4: POST-EXCAVATION PHOTO OF [106], FROM THE WEST (1M SCALE).

Running North-East to South-West across the site is a land drain or service trench. (Figure 5 and 6) This was 0.4m wide and filled with a redeposited firm (re-deposited natural) yellow clay. This land drain was not excavated. Just North-West of this land drain was a possible archaeological linear ditch running North-West to South-East and terminates within the stripped area. (Figure 6) The terminus was investigated which showed it to be 0.6m wide with vertical sides. The fill was a mix of redeposited natural and topsoil, similar to the unexcavated land drain. It was considered likely to be another land drain/service trench and was not fully excavated or recorded.



FIGURE 5: SHOT OF LAND DRAIN OR SERVICES FROM THE WEST (1M SCALE).

To the South-West was an irregularly shaped feature with one vertical side. This was concluded to be a probable tree-throw. (Figure 6) This was filled with a soft grey-yellow clay with shillet and occasional sub-angular quartz inclusions. No finds were recovered and it was not fully excavated. There was evidence of plough scars cutting into the natural running East to West spread across site.

All finds from the stripped area originated from the topsoil and therefore can not be attributed to any of the features. These included one small iron bolt, a fragment of plastic drain, two sherds of white refined earthenware and two shards of green glass bottle.

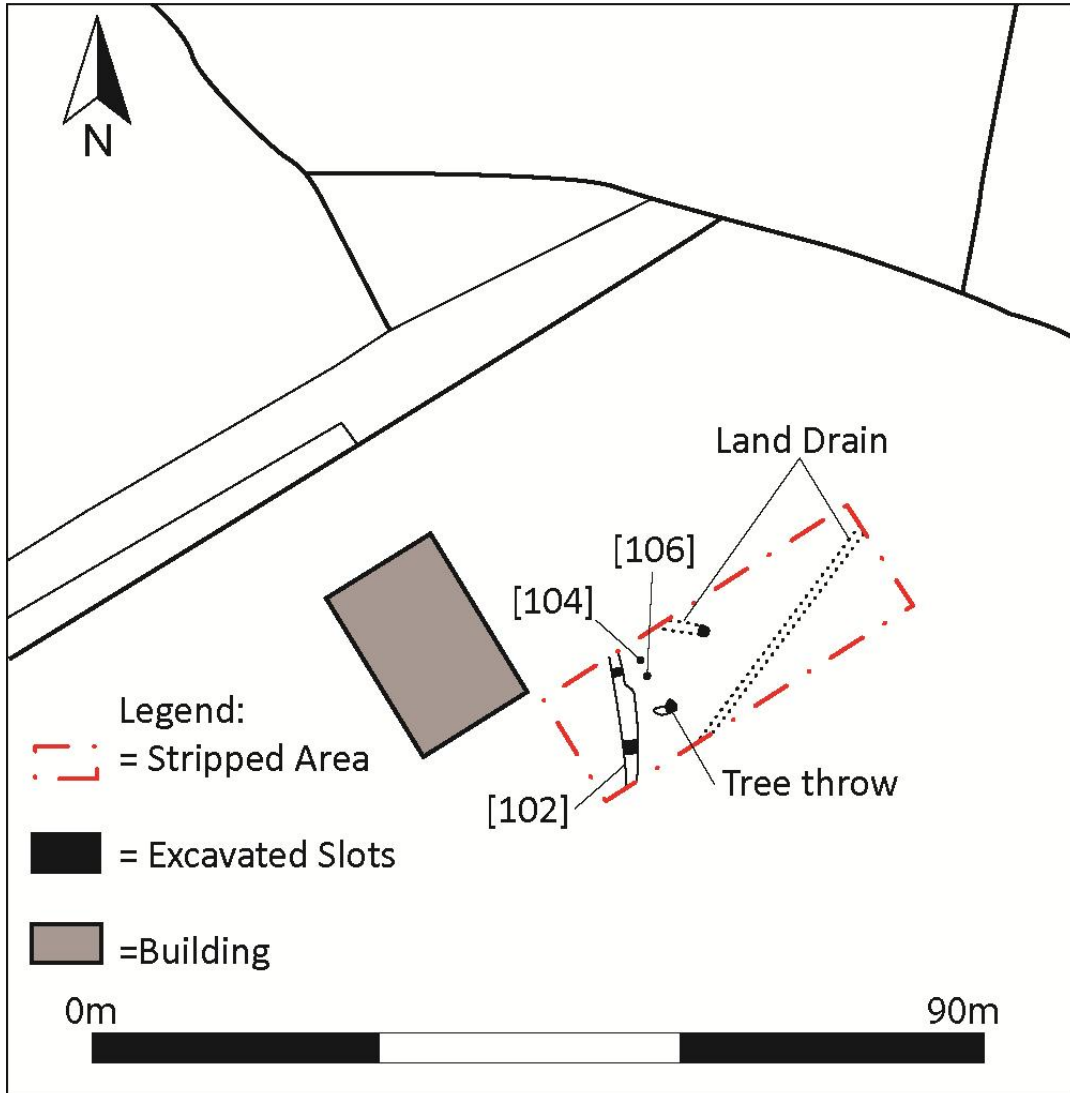


FIGURE 6: SITE PLAN.

2.4 DISCUSSION

Three archaeological features were revealed and investigated, two sub circular heat affected area and a single linear ditch. None of them produced any finds to assist with dating evidence of the features. All features were extremely shallow with the ditch being at max depth of 0.07m and the two sub-circular features a max depth of 0.03. The lack of depth of the features coupled with the shallow topsoil and the evidence of ploughing could mean that the features were heavily disturbed, damaged and other shallower features destroyed/not surviving.

The heat affected areas could be caused by any number of events that involved burning such as hearths or burned-out postholes. Hearths would usually be set within a larger structure made evident by more features such as a ring post holes, since there is a lack of other features a hearth would seem unlikely. They could be part of wider array of burned-out postholes creating a fence line or similar, perhaps along a boundary. However, these were the only two visible in the stripped area. As mentioned previously some could have been destroyed prior to or during excavation due the shallowness of the features. Due to the focussed nature of the stripped area there could be more heat affected areas beyond the edge of excavation. Alternatively due to the lack of dating they could just as easily be from random modern burning events.

The single linear feature reveals very little and was likely a field boundary that can not be dated due to lack of finds. It doesn't seem to appear in the geophysical survey conducted in a portion of this field previously, although it is broadly parallel with another anomaly, so may form a shallower surviving ditch or a double ditched removed field boundary (see Figure 7 and 8) (Bampton. 2024). The South-West to North-East running land drain does clearly appear in the geophysics however, although this was mistakenly interpreted as being a probable archaeological feature.

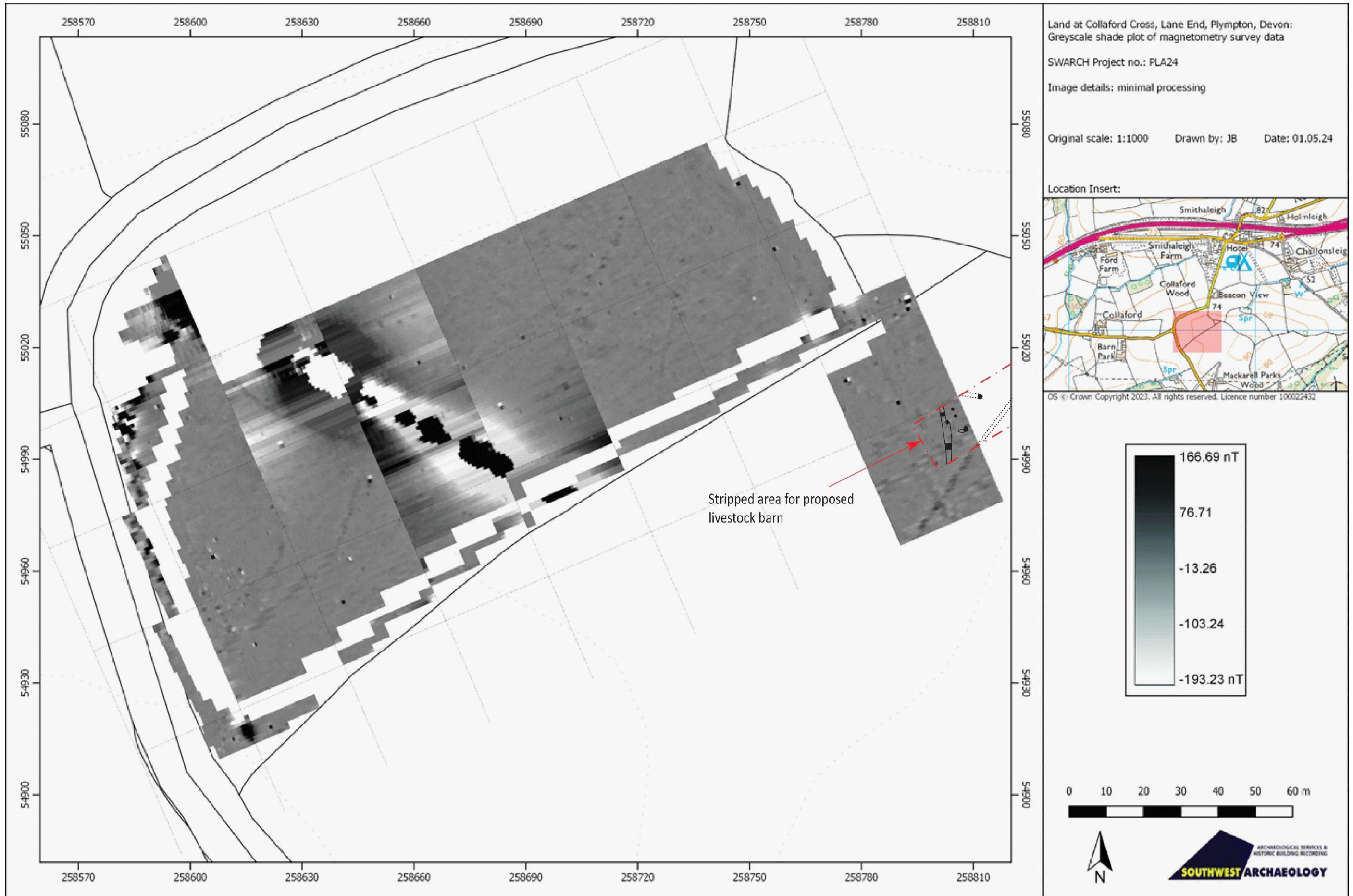


FIGURE 7: GREYSCALE SHADE PLOT OF MAGNETOMETRY SURVEY DATA WITH STRIPPED AREA.

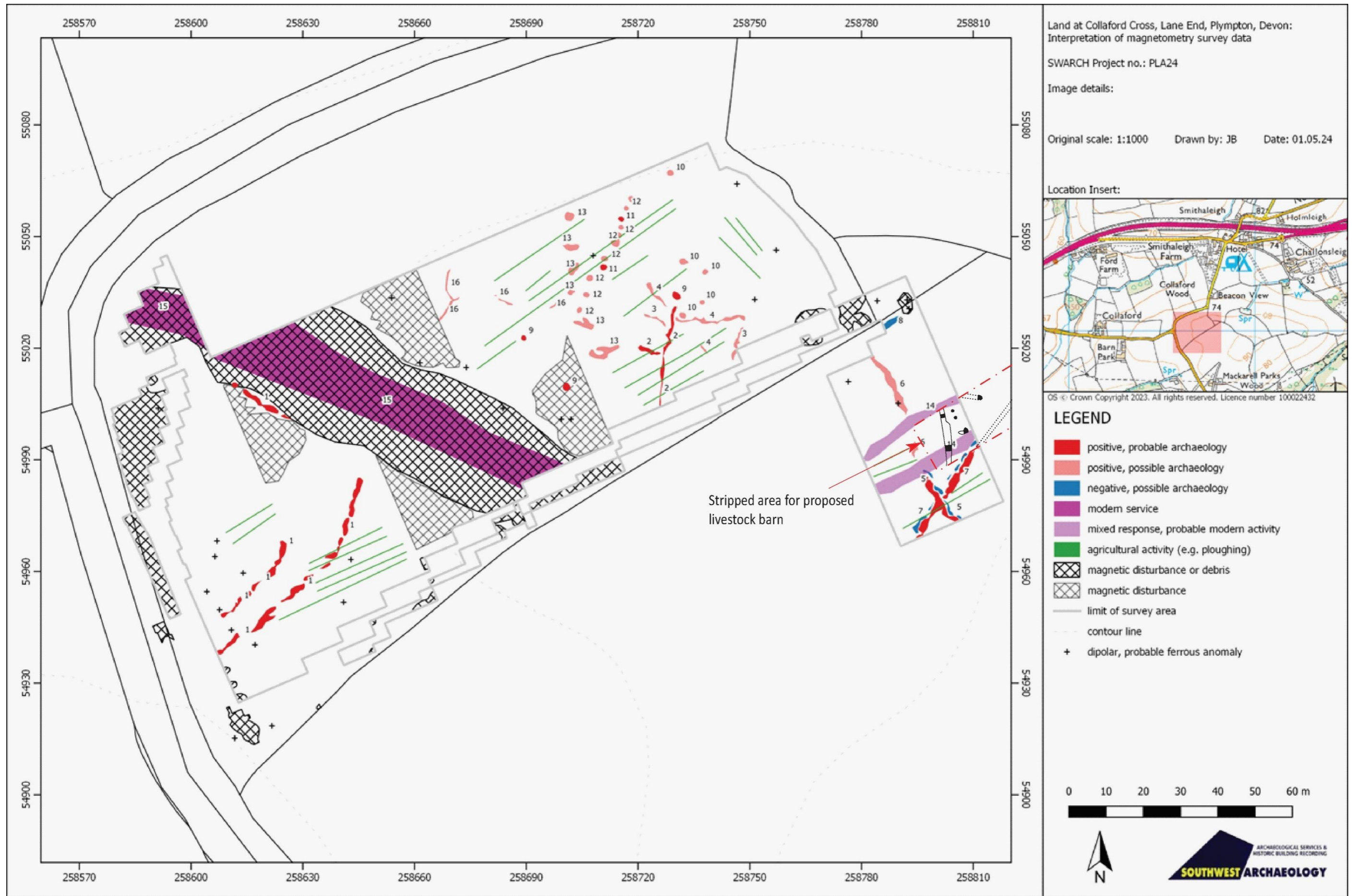


FIGURE 8: INTERPRETATION OF MAGNETOMETRY SURVEY DATA WITH STRIPPED AREA.

3.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion the excavation of the area of the proposed livestock barn revealed a minimal amount of archaeological features with very little that can be learned. The major features that appeared on the geophysical turned out to be a land drain. The archaeological features that were investigated were shown to be relatively shallow and produced no dating evidence. The single ditch may form part of a removed field-boundary, likely of post-medieval date.

Due to the lack of depth and evidence of plough scars the existing features were likely heavily disturbed. All finds recovered were post-medieval to modern in date and found within the topsoil.

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Devon Heritage Centre (DHC)

Plympton St Mary Tithe Apportionment, c.1840
 Plympton St Mary Tithe Map, c.1840

National Library of Scotland (NLS)

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APPENDIX 1: SUPPORTING PHOTOGRAPHS

1. PRE-EXCAVATION SITE SHOT FROM THE EAST (NO SCALE)



3. SITE SHOT FROM EAST SIDE (1M SCALE)



2. SHOT OF SOUTH FACING SECTION OF [102] (1M SCALE)



4. SITE SHOT FROM NORTH-EAST (NO SCALE)



APPENDIX 2: CONTEXT LIST

CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION		RELATIONSHIPS	DEPTH/THICKNESS	SPOT DATE
(100)	<i>Layer</i>	Topsoil: mid yellow-brown silt-clay topsoil with rare small sub-angular stones that were >60mm in size.	Overlies (101)	0.25m to 0.28m thick	
(101)	<i>Layer</i>	Natural: firm to hard yellow-clay with rare gravel inclusions	Overlain by (100), Cut by [102], [104] and [106]	-	
[102]	<i>Cut</i>	Cut of Ditch: Running North-South, Field boundary, 1m wide in the southern edge, narrows to 0.6m wide at northern edge	Filled by (103), Cuts (101)	0.02m to 0.07m deep	
(103)	<i>Fill</i>	Fill of [102]: firm to soft mid-yellow brown silt-clay with rare small sub-angular stone (>60mm diameter). Some rare charcoal inclusions	Overlain by (100), Fill of [102]	Up to 0.07m thick	
[104]	<i>Cut</i>	Cut of heat affected rea (Posthole)?: Sub-circular heat affected area.	Cuts (101), Filled by (105)	0.03m deep	
(105)	<i>Fill</i>	Fill of [104]: a reddish clay with charcoal smearing	Overlain by (100), Fill of [104]	0.03m thick	
[106]	<i>Cut</i>	Cut of heat affected rea (Posthole)?: Sub-circular heat affected area.	Cuts (101), Filled by (107)	0.01m deep	
(107)	<i>Fill</i>	Fill of [106]: a reddish clay with minimal charcoal smearing	Overlain by (100), Fill of [105]	0.01m thick	



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