

**Broxted Solar Farm**  
**Former Stradishall Airfield**  
Archaeological Watching Brief  
Event Number: HUN036

*Amended version*



*for*  
**Broxted Solar Company Ltd**


CA Project: 660104  
CA Report: 14070

February 2014

# Broxted Solar Farm Former Stradishall Airfield Suffolk

## Archaeological Watching Brief Event no: HUN036

CA Project: 660104  
CA Report: 14070

prepared by	Caoimhín Ó Coileáin
date	7 October 2013
checked by	Nicola Powell, Post-Excavation Manager
date	12 February 2014
approved by	Simon Carlyle, Principal Fieldwork Manager
signed	
date	20 February 2014
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### Cirencester

Building 11  
Kemble Enterprise Park  
Kemble, Cirencester  
Gloucestershire, GL7 6BQ  
t. 01285 771022

### Milton Keynes

Unit 4  
Cromwell Business Centre  
Howard Way, Newport Pagnell  
MK16 9QS  
t. 01908 218320  
e. enquiries@cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk

### Andover

Stanley House  
Walworth Road  
Andover, Hampshire  
SP10 5LH  
t. 01264 347630

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## SUMMARY

<b>Project Name:</b>	Broxted Solar Farm
<b>Location:</b>	Former Stradishall Airfield, Suffolk
<b>NGR:</b>	TL 7230 4970
<b>Type:</b>	Watching Brief
<b>Date:</b>	2-13 August 2013
<b>Location of Archive:</b>	Suffolk Archaeological Service
<b>Event number:</b>	HUN036

In August 2013, Cotswold Archaeology carried out an archaeological watching brief during groundworks for the Broxted Solar Farm, at former RAF Stradishall, Suffolk. The work, which was commissioned by Broxted Solar Company Ltd, was undertaken to fulfil a condition attached to a planning consent for the development.

Five ditches were identified in a cable trench during groundworks in the centre of the development area, adjacent to a small plantation of trees. Two adjoining sherds from the base of a Samian dish, dateable to the mid-2nd century AD, were recovered from one of the ditches, suggesting that it dates to the Roman period. A parallel ditch immediately to its east is probably of a similar date. These may be associated with the Roman settlement that was discovered during the construction of the airfield in the 1930s. The other three ditches were modern; the base of one of these was filled with concrete, probably capping a redundant service associated with the airfield. The latter corresponded with a linear anomaly shown on a geophysical survey plot of the site, running parallel and to the north of one of the former runways.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In August 2013, Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out an archaeological watching brief during groundworks for the Broxted Solar Farm, at former RAF Stradishall, Suffolk (site centred on NGR: TL 7230 4970; Fig. 1). The work, which was commissioned by Broxted Solar Company Ltd, was undertaken to fulfil a condition attached to planning consent for the development (St Edmundsbury Borough Council, planning ref. SE/12/1114/FUL, Condition 4).
- 1.2 The condition was requested by Dr Richard Hoggett, Archaeological Officer, Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service (SCCAS), as the site lies within an area of archaeological potential, where the remains of a probable Roman settlement were encountered during the construction of the airfield in the 1930s. The scope of the watching brief was originally outlined in a *Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI)* prepared by CA (2012a), following discussions with Sarah Poppy, Archaeological Officer, SCCAS. Subsequent negotiations with Dr Richard Hoggett on extending the watching brief to cover the route of the cable trench to the south of the site led to the issuing of a *Brief for Constant Archaeological Recording at Stradishall Solar Farm, Stradishall* (SCCAO 2013), the requirements of which were followed in the preparation of a supplemental *Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI)* prepared by CA (2013).
- 1.3 The watching brief was carried out in accordance with the WSIs (CA 2012 a; 2013), the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (IfA 2008) and the English Heritage procedural documents *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (EH 1991) and *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE): Project Manager's Guide* (EH 2006).

### ***The site***

- 1.4 The site, which covers an area of approximately 65ha, is located at the site of the former RAF airfield at Stradishall, approximately 10km to the north-east of Haverhill, Suffolk (Fig. 1). It comprises a block of open grassland, occupying a broad, flat hill-top plateau, offering wide views of the surrounding, gently undulating agricultural landscape. The area of the proposed solar farm, which lies at approximately 115m above Ordnance Datum (aOD), is sub-divided by an ancient track that leads northwards from the junction of Cock Lane and Steeplechase.

- 1.5 The solid geology comprises Late Cretaceous rocks of the Lewes Nodular Chalk/Seafood Chalk/Newhaven Chalk/Culver Chalk formations, an undifferentiated series of chalk beds, overlain by superficial deposits of chalky till of the Lowestoft Formation ([www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex](http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex), accessed 23 July 2013.)

### **Archaeological background**

- 1.6 A detailed account of the site's archaeological and historical background has been presented in the desk-based assessment (DBA) prepared by CA (2012b), from which the following account has been summarized. The DBA was carried out as part of the preparation of the Environmental Statement for the application.

### **Prehistoric**

- 1.7 Evidence for prehistoric activity in the vicinity is sparse, although a Neolithic flint arrowhead has been recovered from the site.

### **Roman**

- 1.8 There is documented evidence of Roman activity, possibly associated with a building or small settlement, having been identified within the site in the 1930s, presumably at the time of the construction of the airfield. Across an area measuring approximately 100m by 60m, quantities of Roman brick, tile, nails and pottery, including Samian ware, were recovered. No details of the excavations were published and there is no definitive location for the investigation area or description of the archaeological features which led to the interpretation of the site as a settlement.

### **Medieval**

- 1.9 There is no evidence for early medieval activity within the site or wider study area. During the medieval period, the site formed part of two deer parks which are recorded in Hundon parish as early as 1124. Broxley (or Broxstead/Broxtie) Park lay within the western portion of the site, with its eastern boundary running along the line of the track which passes north to south through the site. Great Park lay immediately to the east, within the eastern part of the site, with part of its western boundary also following the line of the present track within the site. Both parks are thought to have been extant into the mid-16th century when they were sold to Sir John Cheke.

### **Post-medieval/modern**

- 1.10 A lodge was recorded in Broxley Park and the farmstead of Broxstead Lodge is recorded on Hodskinson's 1783 map of Suffolk in the general area of the site. The Tithe Map of 1849 shows Broxstead Lodge within the proposed development area and it is possible that this farmstead had its origins in the medieval period. Broxstead Lodge, which was demolished to enable construction of the airfield in the 1930s, was associated with Great Park and is thought to be on the site of Hundon Great Lodge. A site visit identified an above-ground earthwork in the form of a slight bank and ditch on the western side of the trackway, which historically formed the boundary of the deer parks. It is possible that this feature represents part of the deer park enclosure pale. The low earthwork is only partially visible due to the hedgerow and vegetation adjacent to the trackway, but measures up to 200m in length.
- 1.11 The construction of RAF Stradishall, which opened in 1938, signalled major change to the site and wider study area. Within the footprint of the airfield, which covers approximately 300ha, all existing buildings were demolished and most field boundaries were removed. One of the few boundaries to survive was the line of the north to south trackway which runs through the site. Aerial photographs (RAF/106G/1365) indicate that the proposed development site lay within the main runway complex, with the airfield buildings located immediately to the north, on what is now HMP Highpoint.
- 1.12 Following the closure of the airfield in 1970, the main building complex to the north of the site was used as accommodation for displaced African nationals before being converted to a prison in 1977. Elsewhere within the airfield site, including the area of the proposed development, the runways were taken up and the area restored for agriculture. A number of areas of woodland were planted at this time, including two areas within the proposed development site. Throughout the majority of the proposed development site there is little indication on the ground of its former use as an airfield, aside from occasional areas of concrete hardstanding.

### **Previous archaeological investigations**

- 1.13 A fluxgate gradiometer survey of the site, undertaken by PCG in 2012, determined that the majority of recorded magnetic variation clearly or probably relates to the former use of the site as an airfield. The survey detected residual traces of removed runways and associated features, including dispersal areas, an apron fronting the main airfield buildings (currently HMP Highpoint), services, land drains, probable

remains of landing lights and miscellaneous ferrous-rich deposits of uncertain specific origin (though clearly modern). The survey recorded traces of a number of pre-war field boundaries, some backfilled ditches with land drains possibly installed during construction of the airfield, a backfilled pond and (possibly) *in situ* remains of the post-medieval farmstead of Broxstead Lodge, although it was not possible to clearly differentiate these from the magnetic response induced by airfield residue.

- 1.14 The results also indicate small areas of ploughed out ridge and furrow cultivation in the western part of the site that appear to respect recent field boundaries. There is no clear geophysical evidence of suspected Roman settlement activity in the central part of the site, other than perhaps an isolated and short potential ditch. Similarly, strong variation induced by airfield remains may have served to mask underlying and magnetically weaker features, should any have survived the construction and decommissioning of the airfield.

#### ***Archaeological objectives***

- 1.15 The objectives of the archaeological works, as outlined in the WSI (CA 2012a; 2013), were:
- to monitor groundworks, and to identify, investigate and record all significant buried archaeological deposits revealed on the site during the course of the development groundworks;
  - at the conclusion of the project, to produce an integrated archive for the project work and a report setting out the results of the project and the archaeological conclusions that can be drawn from the recorded data.

#### ***Methodology***

- 1.16 The fieldwork was carried out in accordance with *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney and Bryant 2003) and the WSIs prepared by CA (2012a; 2013). The WSI for the site of the solar farm (CA 2012a) identified three areas of archaeological potential where groundworks may have impacted on archaeological remains, as identified by geophysical survey (PCG 2012). These areas were to have been subject to an archaeological watching brief, should they have been impacted by the development. In the event, groundworks only impacted on the easternmost area, so it was only necessary to monitor the excavation of the cable trench within this area. The watching brief also monitored the excavation of



the cable trench to the south of the site (Fig. 2). The topsoil within the easements was removed with a tracked 360-degree excavator fitted with a 2.0m wide toothless ditching bucket and the trenches were excavated using a trenching machine (Fig. 3).

- 1.17 Where archaeological deposits were encountered written, graphic and photographic records were compiled in accordance with *CA Technical Manual 1: Fieldwork Recording Manual* (2011). Each context was recorded on a *pro-forma* context sheet by written and measured description; principal deposits were recorded by drawn plans (scale 1:20 or 1:50, or electronically using Leica 1200 series GPS as appropriate) and drawn sections (scale 1:10 or 1:20 as appropriate). Detailed feature and general planning was undertaken using GPS, in accordance with CA's *Technical Manual 4: Survey Manual* (CA 2012). Photographs (black & white negative and digital colour) were taken as appropriate. All finds were bagged separately and related to the context record. All artefacts were recovered and retained for processing and analysis in accordance with CA's *Technical Manual 3: Treatment of Finds Immediately after Excavation* (CA 1995). No deposits were encountered that were suitable for environmental sampling.
- 1.18 The archive and artefacts from the evaluation are currently held by CA at their offices in Newport Pagnell. Subject to the agreement of the legal landowner the artefacts will be deposited with Suffolk Archaeological Service along with the site archive. A summary of information from this project, as set out in Appendix C, has been entered onto the OASIS online database of archaeological projects in Britain (OASIS no. 181439).

## 2. RESULTS

- 2.1 Excavation of a cable trench to the west of the small eastern plantation of trees in the centre of the site revealed two ditches of probable Roman date, two undated but probably modern ditches and a trench that probably contains a redundant service associated with the former airfield. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered in any of the other areas monitored during the course of the watching brief.



### **General stratigraphy**

- 2.2 The geological substrate, 102, consisting of yellowish-brown silty clay with chalk flecks and pebbles, was revealed at an average depth of 0.7m below current ground level (bcgl). The subsoil, mottled mid orangey-brown clayey silt, 101, was intermittent but where it did occur it had an average thickness of 0.3m. The topsoil comprised dark greyish-brown clayey silt, 100, c. 0.4m thick (Fig. 4).

### **Roman**

- 2.3 Located in a cable trench near the centre of the site, at the western edge of a small plantation of trees, ditch 107 was aligned roughly north to south and measured approximately 4.0m wide by up to 0.6m deep (Figs. 2a and 5). Two adjoining sherds from the base of a Samian dish, dateable to the mid-2nd century AD, were recovered from its charcoal-flecked basal fill, suggesting that it dates to the Roman period. It may be associated with the Roman settlement that was discovered during the construction of the airfield in the 1930s.
- 2.4 Running parallel and 1.5m to the east of ditch 107 was a small ditch, 113. It had a steep-sided, slightly splayed V-shaped profile and measured 0.9m wide by 0.48m deep. There were no finds in its excavated fill, but its association with ditch 107 suggests that it is probably Roman in date.

### **Modern**

- 2.5 Approximately 11m to the north of ditch 107, the excavation of the cable trench revealed a ditch, 111, aligned east-north-east to west-south-west, the base of which was filled with concrete, possibly covering a redundant service associated with the former airfield. The location of the feature corresponds with the linear anomaly shown on the geophysical survey plot (PCG 2012), which runs parallel and to the north of the former runway.
- 2.6 Two undated, parallel ditches were identified in the cable trench to the west of the eastern plantation. They were spaced c. 15m apart and were almost identical in size and profile, with each measuring 1.0m wide by 0.60m deep, which suggests contemporaneity (Figs. 2a and 5). Both ditches cut the subsoil, indicating a probable modern date for the features.



### 3. DISCUSSION

- 3.1 Despite the archaeological potential of the site, archaeological remains were only encountered in one area during the course of the watching brief. This area lay immediately to the west of a small plantation of trees located near the centre of the site. The remains comprises a broad, shallow Roman ditch, from which was recovered two adjoining sherds from the base of a Samian dish, dateable to the mid-2nd century AD, and a small, parallel ditch to its east. Due to the narrow width of the cable trench and the limited area available for investigation, the function of the ditches is uncertain, but they may be associated with the Roman remains uncovered during the construction of the airfield in the 1930s. Later features in the same area included two parallel ditches of probable modern date and a likely service trench associated with the former airfield, which was identified by geophysical survey running parallel to the edge of one of the former runways.
- 3.2 General observation of groundworks across the site, combined with a study of the results of the geophysical survey (PCG 2012), suggest that the construction of the airfield in the 1930s would have had a significant impact on any buried archaeological remains or upstanding earthworks. However, the presence of the two Roman ditches to the west of the eastern plantation, in an area truncated by the construction of one of the former runways, indicates that archaeological remains associated with the Roman building or settlement discovered in the 1930s are likely to survive in the area.

### 4. CA PROJECT TEAM

The fieldwork was undertaken by Jeremy Mordue, Dan Stone and Mark Patenall. The report was written by Caoimhín Ó Coileáin, with illustrations prepared by Jonathan Bennett. The archive has been compiled by Dan Stone and prepared for deposition by Nicola Powell. The project was managed for CA by Simon Carlyle.



## 5. REFERENCES

SCCAS (Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service) 2013 *Brief for Constant Archaeological Recording at Stradishall Solar Farm, Stradishall*

BGS (British Geological Survey) 2013 <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex>, accessed 23 July 2013

CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2012a *Broxted Solar Farm, Steeplechase, Hundon, Suffolk: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2012b *Land at the former Stradishall Airfield, Suffolk: Heritage and Archaeology*, report **12260**

CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2013 *Broxted Solar Farm, Former Stradishall Airfield, Suffolk: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief (Additional Works)*

PCG 2012 *Archaeological Geophysical Survey: Former Stradishall Airfield, Suffolk*.

Webster, P, 1996 *Roman Samian Pottery in Britain*, Practical Handbook in Archaeology **13**, York, Council for British Archaeology.



## APPENDIX A: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Context	Type	Context interpretation	Description	W (m)	Depth/thickness (m)	Spot-date
100	Layer	Topsoil	Dark greyish-brown clayey silt with occasional small sub angular stones	-	0.40	
101	Layer	Subsoil	Mid orangey-brown clayey silt with slight red mottling, intermittent	-	0.30	
102	Geology	Geology	Yellowish-brown silty clay with chalk pebbles and flecks	-	-	
103	Cut	Ditch	V-shaped profile	1.0	0.59	Modern
104	Fill of 103	Fill of ditch	Dark greyish-brown clayey silt with occasional chalk flecks	-	0.59	
105	Cut	Ditch	V-shaped profile	1.0	0.58	Modern
106	Fill of 105	Fill of ditch	Dark greyish-brown clayey silt with occasional chalk flecks	-	0.58	
107	Cut	Ditch	Wide ditch with gentle concave slope	4.0	0.60	Roman
108	Fill of 107	2nd fill of ditch	Dark greyish-brown clayey silt with occasional charcoal flecks & red grey mottling, Samian sherds.	-	0.50	Roman
109	Fill of 107	1st fill of ditch	Flint cobbles, irregular shapes and sizes, broken	-	0.10	Roman
110	Fill of 111	Services	Concrete in base of cut	-	-	Modern
111	Cut	Trench	Foundation trench for airfield services	1.0	0.8+	Modern
112	Fill of 111	1st fill of ditch	Mixed greyish-brown clayey silt with chalk pebbles	1.0	0.3+	Modern
113	Cut	Ditch	Narrow, v-shaped ditch	0.8	0.47	Roman
114	Fill of 113	Fill of ditch	Dark greyish-brown clayey silt with frequent flat, angular cobbles	-	0.47	

## APPENDIX B: THE FINDS

### *Pottery: Roman*

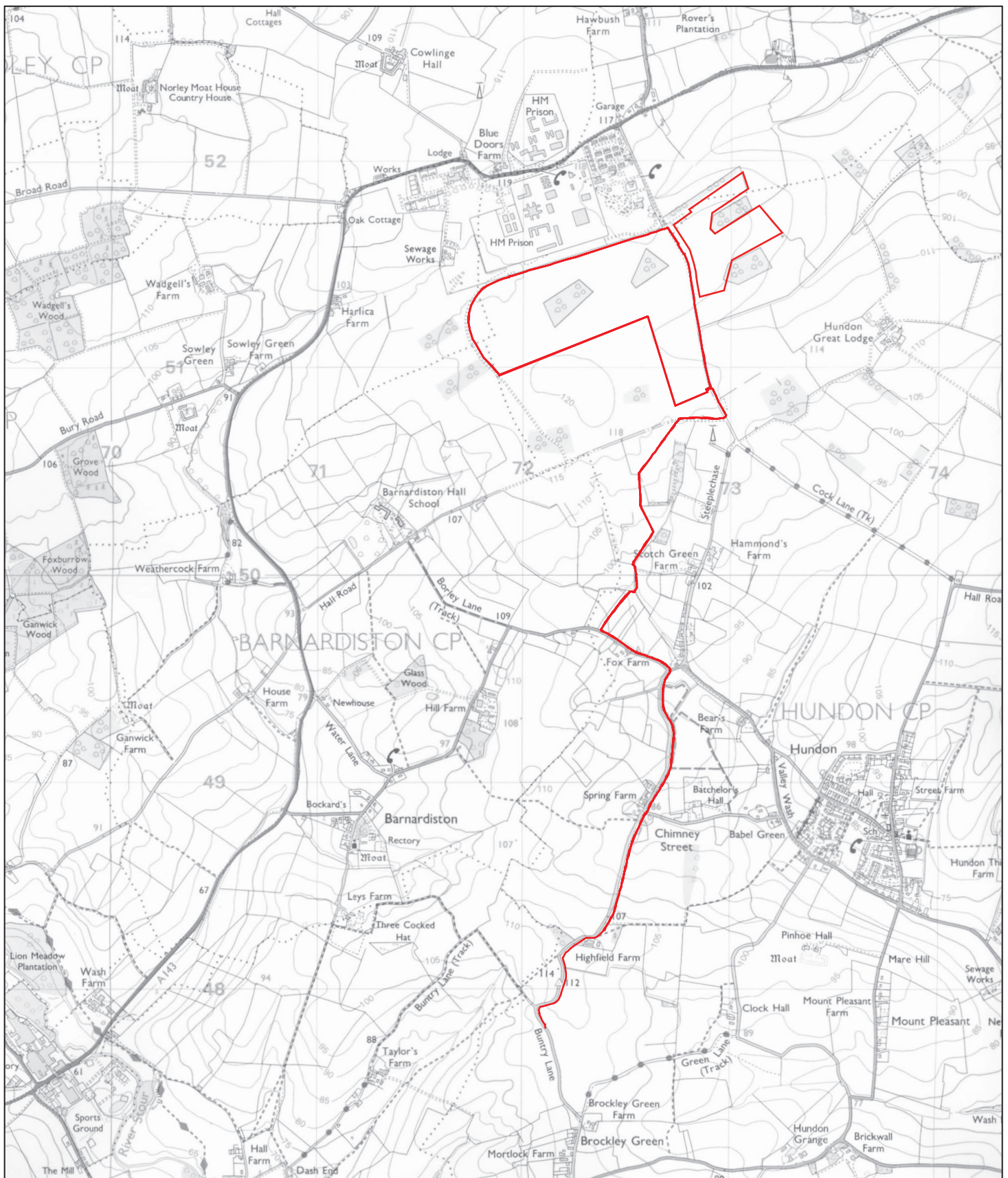
Two sherds, comprising a rimsherd and a large base sherd, of Central Gaulish (Lezoux) samian ware, were recovered from ditch fill 108. The base sherd features a maker's stamp, which is illegible, due to surface damage. They appear to represent one vessel, identified as a Drag 31 dish, which is dateable mid to late-2nd century (Webster 1996, 34-35).

Table 1: Finds concordance

<b>Context</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Weight(g)</b>	<b>Spot-date</b>
108	Roman pottery: samian (Lezoux)	2	133	MC2-LC2

## APPENDIX C: OASIS REPORT FORM

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>		
Project name	Broxted Solar Farm, Former Stradishall Airfield	
Short description	Five ditches were identified in a cable trench during groundworks in the centre of the development area, adjacent to a small plantation of trees. Two adjoining sherds from the base of a Samian dish, dateable to the mid-2nd century AD, were recovered from one of the ditches, suggesting that it dates to the Roman period. A parallel ditch immediately to its east is probably of a similar date. These may be associated with the Roman settlement that was discovered during the construction of the airfield in the 1930s. The other three ditches were modern; the base of one of these was filled with concrete, probably capping a redundant service associated with the airfield. The latter corresponded with a linear anomaly shown on a geophysical survey plot of the site, running parallel and to the north of one of the former runways.	
Project dates	2-13 August 2013	
Project type	Watching brief	
Previous work	CA 2012b; PCG 2012	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type	Roman ditches	
Significant finds	Roman pottery	
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>		
Site location	Former Stradishall Airfield, Suffolk	
Study area	c. 65ha	
Site co-ordinates	TL 7230 4970	
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>		
Name of organisation	Cotswold Archaeology (CA)	
Project Brief originator	Dr Richard Hoggett	
Project Design (WSI) originator	CA	
Project Manager	Simon Carlyle (CA)	
Project Supervisor	Jeremy Mordue (CA)	
<b>PROJECT ARCHIVE</b>		
	Accession no: HUD036	Content
Physical		Roman pottery
Paper		Site records
Digital	Suffolk HER	Report, digital photos
OASIS ref.	181439	
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>		
CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2014 <i>Broxted Solar Farm, Former Stradishall Airfield, Archaeological Watching Brief</i> . CA typescript report <b>14070</b>		



Cirencester 01285 771022  
 Milton Keynes 01908 218320  
[www.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk](http://www.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk)  
 enquiries@cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk

**PROJECT TITLE**

**Broxted Solar Farm, Stratishall Airfield  
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**FIGURE TITLE**

**Site location plan**



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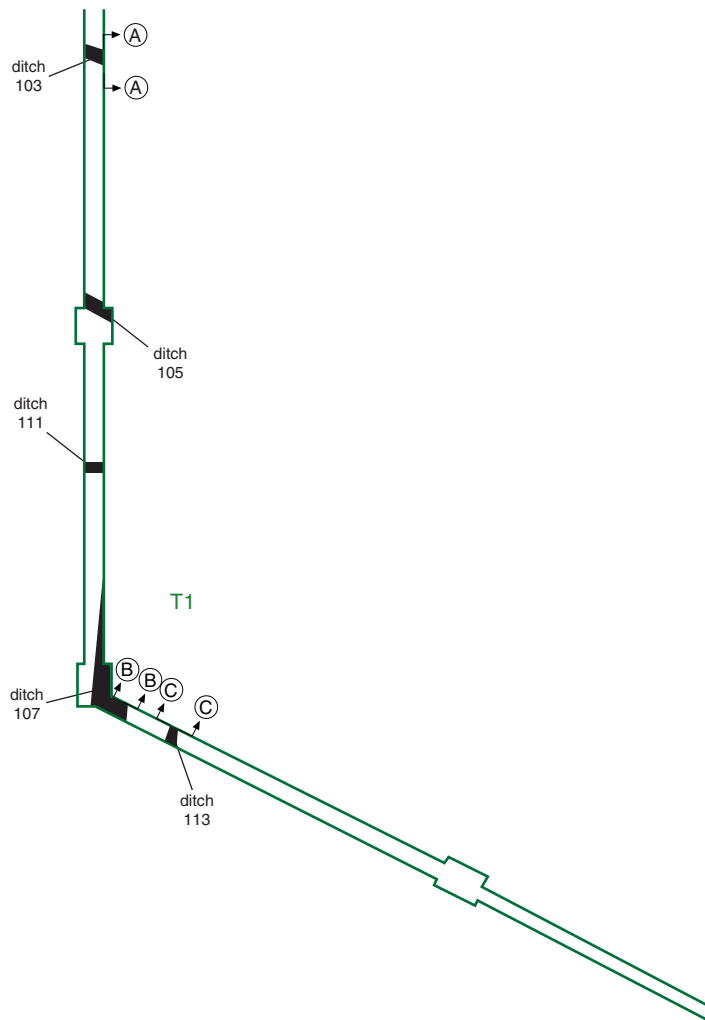
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FIGURE NO.

**1**







 site  
 area of observed groundworks



Cirencester 01285 771022  
 Milton Keynes 01908 218320  
 Andover 01264 347630  
[www.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk](http://www.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk)  
[enquiries@cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk)

PROJECT TITLE

**Broxted Solar Farm, Stratishall Airfield  
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FIGURE TITLE

**Plan of Trench 1**





3



4

3 Excavation of cable trench in progress

4 Cable trench easement, looking north-east



Cirencester 01285 771022  
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FIGURE TITLE

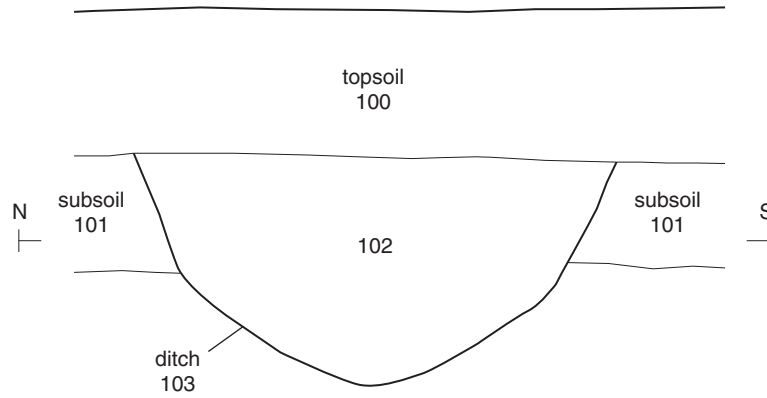
Photographs

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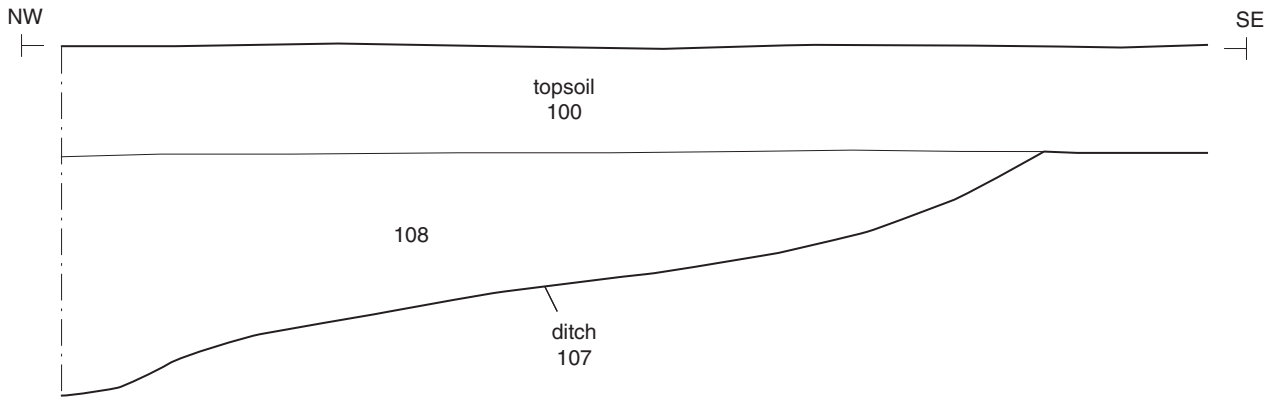
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3 & 4

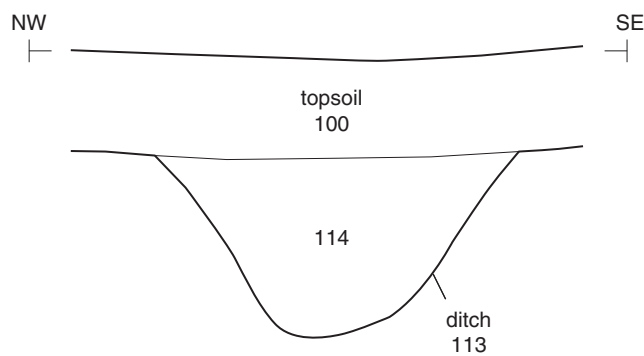
Section AA



Section BB



Section CC



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 Milton Keynes 01908 218320  
 Andover 01264 347630  
[www.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk](http://www.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk)  
[enquiries@cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk)

PROJECT TITLE

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FIGURE TITLE

**Sections**



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FIGURE NO.

**5**