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Land Adjacent to Santon Way, Seascale, Cumbria

Archaeological Watching Brief Report No. 3886

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Archaeological Watching Brief

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 General

A watching brief was undertaken in June 2019 during ground breaking works for the construction of a Flood Alleviation Scheme on land adjacent to Santon Way, Seascale, Cumbria (NGR: NY 04280 01064 centred) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mayson Bros Ltd.

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) dated 12th June 2019, was produced by CFA Archaeology Ltd (CFA) and was approved by the Cumbria County Council Historic Environment Service (CCCHES) in advance of the works.

1.2 Background

The Cumbria County Council Historic Environment Service (CCCHES) indicated that their records show a number of finds of prehistoric dates, including 45 flint scrapers, 11 flint knives, an axe and an anvil stone, have been found in the immediate vicinity of Santon Way. CCCHES therefore considered it likely that buried archaeological assets of local significance or archaeological artefacts may be disturbed by the construction of the proposed development.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The objectives of the programme of archaeological works were:

- to conduct an appropriate programme of archaeological investigation (watching brief) during all groundbreaking works to record any features or deposits of archaeological interest uncovered and produce a report on these; and
- if necessary undertake post-excavation analysis and produce a publication report.

2. WORKING METHODS

CFA follows the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Standards and Guidance and Code of Conduct.

The removal of topsoil was carried out using a tracked excavator equipped with a smooth-bladed ditching bucket, under constant archaeological supervision. Any further work required to fulfil the terms of the brief was carried out by hand.

All excavation and on-site recording was carried out according to standard CFA procedures, principally by drawing, photography and by completing standard CFA record forms.

The stratification of the excavated area was recorded whether or not significant archaeological deposits were identified.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

3.1 General

Works for the construction of a Flood Alleviation Scheme on land adjacent to Santon Way, Seascale, involved the stripping of an area c. 10m wide and c. 200m long, northeast to south-west down-slope from Bailey Ground Farm towards an access lane off Santon Way. At the bottom of the slope, a wider area was excavated for the construction of a reed bed.

Numbers in bold refer to contexts, a full list of which is contained in Appendix 1.

Atop the slope to the north-east of the watching brief area, deposits consisted of topsoil (014) comprising dark brown silty clay to a depth of 0.3-0.4m overlying natural orange-brown compact sandy clay (013). These deposits deepened down-slope, with up to 0.6m of topsoil (013) accumulated atop up to 0.7m of dark brown peaty silt subsoil (022). Numerous clay pipe field drains were cut into the natural subsoil from midway down the slope towards the swale area.

3.2 Archaeological Features

Ditches

Two 1.4m wide, parallel linear ditch features were identified atop the slope, orientated southeast to northwest. These were very shallow at 0.14m (**002**) and 0.1m (**003**) depth, and appeared to represent field boundaries.

Corn-drying kiln

The remains of a corn-drying kiln (**001**) were uncovered atop the slope towards the north-east end of the watching brief area, near Bailey Ground Farm (Fig. 2). The kiln took the form of a narrow key-hole with a curvilinear flue, on an axis down-slope from south to north (Fig. 3).

The kiln bowl, measuring 2.5m by 2.6m, was cut into compact natural clay (013) and sparsely lined with large unshaped sub-rounded stones (008). These structural stones were recorded *in situ*, lining the break of slope at the southern and north-western edge of the kiln bowl, and across the entrance to the flue (Fig. 4). A line of stones continued along the north-western edge of the ditch forming the kiln flue. A compact deposit of mid grey re-deposited natural clay (018) was packed between the stones.

The lowermost deposits of the kiln bowl formed layers of ashy residue and charcoal lenses, comprising pink-orange sandy clay (020) and black-grey ashy sand (021). These were overlaid with a rich black charcoal/silt layer (015) consisting predominantly of burnt grain, 0.14m deep, lining the concave profile of the kiln bowl. This charred deposit was confined by the structural stone (008) lining the flue entrance. Atop this, a 0.14m band of mottled sandy silt (007) extended across the kiln bowl and half of the flue, containing grey sand and ash lenses with charcoal and burnt grain.

Within the kiln flue, a basal deposit of dark grey-black clay/silt (006), 0.1m deep, extended to the north-east terminus. A middle fill of dark brown-grey clay/silt (005) extended throughout the centre of the flue, containing charcoal staining and occasional manganese.

Two deposits of backfill were recorded at the southern edge of the kiln bowl, comprising slump infill of 0.23m deep mid brown-grey silty clay (016) beneath 0.4m deep mid orange-brown silty clay (017). A final homogenous fill of mid grey-brown sandy silt (004), containing fine orange sand and manganese, overlaid the entire feature profile up to 0.5m in depth.

No further archaeological features or finds were observed during the watching brief.

3.3 Environmental Assessment by Mhairi Hastie

Four soil samples (Appendix 4) were retained from the corn drying kiln (001). The soil samples were processed through a system of flotation. The floating debris (flot) was collected in a 250μ m sieve and the remaining material (retent) in the tank was washed through a 1mm mesh. Both the flot and retent fractions were then air-dried under controlled conditions.

The retents were sorted by eye for small finds and non-buoyant archaeobotanical remains and scanned with a magnet to pick up ferrous debris. Any archaeological significant material was removed and bagged.

The flots were scanned using a binocular microscope (x10-x200 magnifications) and the presence of any charred plant remains recorded. Identifications of archaeobotanical material were carried out with reference to seed atlases and in-house reference collection.

This report concentrates on the carbonised plant remains recovered from the samples. For an assessment of the artefacts (small finds) see section 3.4.

Results

The results are summarised in Appendix 5 (Composition of Carbonised Material) and Appendix 6 (Composition of Carbonised Cereal Grain and Weed Seeds).

A rich and well-preserved assemblage of carbonised plant remains, including cereal grains, weed seeds, straw, charcoal and burnt peat, were recovered from the samples.

Cereal grains

The samples were dominated by grains of oat (*Avena* sp.) with particularly high concentrations of grain (10,000s of grains) being recovered from the fill of the kiln bowl (Sample 4). A proportion of the oat grains were found to still have their outer awns (lemma/palaea) attached, although in most cases these were fragmentary and did not allow identification of the oat species present. Where preservation allowed, one or two oat grains did appear to have long and narrow rachilla suggesting the possible presence of *Avena strigosa* (black oat).

Occasional grains of wheat, of bread/club wheat form (*Triticum aestivo/compactum*), hulled barley (*Hordeum* var *vulgare*) and rye (*Secale cereale*) were also noted within Sample 1, 2 and 3 principally taken from the basal fills of the kiln bowl and flue.

Weed seeds

A well-preserved assemblage of weed seeds (seeds of wild taxa) were recovered from the samples; a variety of different weed seeds were noted throughout.

The bulk of the seeds recovered were commonly associated with cultivated land in the past, including *Chrysanthemum segetum* (corn marigold), *Rapahnus rapanistrum* (charlock), *Spergula arvensis* (corn spurrey), *Stellaria media* (chickweed), *Galeopsis* spp. (hempnettle).

Other weed seeds, including *Prunella vulgaris* (selfheal), *Centura nigra* (lesser knapweed), and *Polygonum persicara/lapathifolium* (persiacria/pale persicaria) are found in grassland areas, such as meadows and pastures. Whilst a large quantity of carbonised vetch seeds (*Vicia/Lathyrus* spp.), possibly remnants of cultivated vetch, were also noted along with the cereal grain.

Other plant remains

Large amounts of burnt peat were recovered from the kiln, along with occasional fragments of heather charcoal, carbonised rhizomes (underground stems) and fragments of rus, all of which was probably brought with the peat.

Occasional fragments of charred hazelnut shell were also recovered from the basal fill of the kiln flue. It is likely that this debris is remnants of the nutshell discarded onto the kiln fire.

Occasional fragments of unidentifiable straw (culm nodes) were recovered along with the cereal grains.

Discussion

It was common practice for cereal crops to be dried in corn-drying kilns throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods. Given the temperate climate of northern Britain there was a requisite to dry the grain so as to: a) harden the grains to facilitate grinding/milling, b) to help make brittle the outer awns of the grain to aid threshing, c) to dry seed for the following year's planting and d) to stop germination in grains for malting.

The overall structure of the kiln uncovered at Santon Way is similar to other medieval and post-medieval kilns that have been discovered in Britain (for examples, see Gibson 1989, Holden 2006, Johnson *et al* 2008 and Raiton *et al* 2014).

Corn-drying kilns were notorious for burning down and had to be watched continuously while in use. Evidence from Hoddom (Holden 2006) particularly indicates that kilns regularly burnt down, with several at the site having been rebuilt three or four times during the site's occupation. The particularly high concentration of burnt cereal grain recovered from the kiln bowl indicates that, in this instance, the kiln had caught fire when in use.

Oat dominated the samples and would be typical of a medieval or later date. Most of the oats were found to still have their awns (outer husks) attached suggesting that they were being dried specifically to help remove the awns prior to grinding, a common practice in the medieval/post-medieval periods. Several of the oat grains were found fused together suggesting that some of the grain were damp when placed in the corn drying kiln.

The small number of non-oat grains (including hulled barley, bread/club wheat and rye) recovered from the kiln suggests that these were either growing as weeds of the oat crop or, alternatively, the grain may have been burnt during previous drying sessions.

The grains would have been laid on a raised surface over the kiln bowl to allow hot air to circulate. Ethnohistorical evidence from the Hebrides (Fenton 1999) tells us that oats were laid on a straw bed in the drying kiln, therefore it is possible that the charred straw fragments recovered from the kiln may have formed part of the drying rake, alternatively the straw may have been used as kindling/tinder for the kiln fire.

The weed seed assemblage consisted principally of weeds of cultivation and all were likely harvested along with the oat crop. Species, such as corn marigold, corn spurrey and charlock were particularly common weeds of cereal crops in the past. The seeds of corn marigold ripen in July to September (https://pfaf.org) and their presence suggests that the oat crop was spring-sown. Both corn marigold and corn spurrey favour light soils, and the particularly large number of corn marigold seeds, recovered from the samples, would suggest that the oat crop was being grown on light, sandy or loamy soils. The presence of chickweed and corn spurrey, both relatively low-growing species, may also suggest that the grain was cut low on the stalks. Other grassland species may have been growing on the edges of the cultivated fields.

Of note is the large amount of carbonised vetch seeds recovered along with the cereal grains. Monckton (2004) notes that these may have been grown as part of the crop rotation programme to maintain soil fertility and the vetch seeds may be remnants of an earlier crop growing as weeds in the oat fields.

Environmental analysis of a corn-drying kiln recovered at Cumwhinton (Railton *et al* 2014) suggested, that in this case, there was evidence for a turf-built construction element of the structure. At Santon Way, however, the carbonised peat and heather charcoal was recovered from the basal fills of the kiln bowl and flue, suggesting that the peat was being used to fuel the kiln rather than once forming part of the superstructure of the kiln itself.

Records from Scotland (Fenton 1999) suggest that peat was used to fuel corn drying kilns prior to use of smokeless fuels, such as coke, during the post-medieval period.

3.4 Radiocarbon dating

A single radiocarbon date was obtained from an oat grain within context 015 (sample 4), the fill of the kiln bowl. This date calibrates to the 13^{th} century, the medieval period. This date corroborates the expected date of the kiln's usage, which was based

upon the type of cereal grain it contained and its morphology, and is likely to provide a reliable date for the final firing of the kiln.

Lab No.	Context	Туре	Date BP	95% probability	δ ¹³ C
SUERC-90798	015	Charred cereal grain:	742 ± 24	1225-1289 AD	-26.5‰
		oat (Avena)			

Table 1. Radiocarbon date. calibrated using OxCal v4.3.2 and the IntCal13 atmospheric calibration curve

3.5 Finds by Christina Hills

A small number of finds were retained from the retents of the soil samples and are tabulated in Appendix 7. All archaeobotanical material recovered was analysed as part of the environmental assessment, section 3.3.

Slag/magnetic and burnt soil material was recovered from samples of the fill of the kiln (001). These are probably a natural result of the burning processes of the kiln. This is also probably the reason for the presence of fired clay in the samples.

Small sherds of much abraded pottery were found in the basal fill of the kiln flue (006). The sherds probably do not relate to the kiln as the abrasion indicates movement in the soil over a long period of time and were probably incorporated with the kiln's backfill.

A piece of corroded iron was recovered from the sample of fill **021**, the basal fill of the kiln bowl. It was probably the result of accidental loss and is likely to be a nail or other fitting.

4. CONCLUSION

A watching brief was carried out by CFA Archaeology Ltd during all works associated with the construction of a Flood Alleviation Scheme on land adjacent to Santon Way, Seascale, Cumbria.

The remains of a medieval corn-drying kiln were recorded atop the slope at the edge of Bailey Ground Farm. The kiln was a narrow key-hole shape with a curvilinear flue, yet produced no dateable finds. A rich and well-preserved carbonised plant assemblage was retrieved from retained soil samples and indicated a predominance of oat (*Avena* sp.) dried using peat fuel. Finds recovered from the sample retents were limited to slag, burnt soil and a piece of corroded iron, in addition to small heavily-abraded pot sherds. A radiocarbon date from oat grain within the kiln bowl provided a date range of 1225-1289 AD for the final firing of the kiln.

The project archive, comprising all CFA record sheets, maps and reports, will be deposited with the appropriate repository and copies of reports will be lodged with the Cumbria County Council Sites and Monuments Record. This work will also be reported through *OASIS*.

5. **REFERENCES**

Atkins, R. and Webster, M (2012) Medieval corn-drying discovered on land probably once part of Repton Manor, Ashford, Archaeologia Cantiana, Vol 132, p275-289.

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Monckton, A (2004) Plant Macrofossils, in N, Finn 'The Origins of a Leicester Suburb: Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Medieval and Post-medieval Occupation on Bonners Lane' BAR British Series 372.

Railton, M. Bradley, J. Millar, I. Stoakley, M. Jackson, D O'Meara, D and Hall, A (2014) Peter Gate, Cumwhinton: Archaeological investigations of a medieval rural site. Transactions C&WASS CW3, xiv, 2014, pp.63-102.

APPENDIX 1: Context Register

Context	Fill of	Description
001		Cut for kiln structure; curvilinear ditch with deep bowl to S and shallow
		terminus to NE
002		Cut for linear ditch, parallel to 003; shallow field boundary
003		Cut for linear ditch, parallel to 002; shallow field boundary
004	001	Upper fill of kiln structure, comprising grey silty sand with manganese and orange sand inclusions.
005	001	Middle fill of kiln flue, comprising laminated layers of dark brown-grey clay- silt with charcoal staining and ash.
006	001	Basal fill of kiln flue and terminus, comprising dark grey-black clay-silt with ashy lenses, charcoal staining and occasional fine sand.
007	001	Layer of lenses across kiln bowl and flue entrance, comprising pink-grey silty- sand with grey ashy and charcoal lenses and occasional burnt grain.
008	001	Structural stones lining break of slope in kiln bowl and flue entrance. Unshaped sub-angular and sub-rounded, measuring 0.4-0.5m in length and width.
009		Cut for possible feature on western edge of 001. Poorly defined extent with mottled natural infill
010	009	Natural infill of 009 comprising grey-brown silty sand with orange natural inclusions.
011		Rectangular modern cut perpendicular to nearby field drain NW of 001
012	011	Grey peaty-silt fill of modern cut
013		Natural subsoil comprising orange-brown compact sandy clay
014		Topsoil - dark grey-grey brown silty clay
015	001	Brunt grain layer in kiln bowl within charcoal-silt matrix with ashy lenses.
016	001	Lower infill of kiln bowl comprising mid orange-grey silty clay with manganese
017	001	Upper infill of kiln bowl comprising orange-brown silty clay
018	001	Redeposited natural clay stone-packing w/ manganese, surrounding 008
019	001	Discrete deposit of redeposited natural clay at NNE kiln terminus
020	001	Slump infill of ashy clay at kiln bowl edge
021	001	Basal fill of kiln bowl comprising black-grey ashy sand with moderate charcoal and ash lenses.

APPENDIX 2: Photographic Register

Shot No.	Summary description of subject	Facing
001-008	General pre-ex site views	Various
009-010	Soil profile at the north side of the trench	SW + W
011	General site view	NE
012	General progress view	SW
013-015	Feature (001) cleaned	SSW
016-017	Feature (001) cleaned	SW
018-019	Feature (001) cleaned	NNE
020-021	Feature (001) cleaned	WNW
022-023	Ditch features $(002) + (003)$	S
024-025	Ditch features $(002) + (003)$	N
026-029	North-facing section of feature (001)	S
030-031	South-facing section of feature (001)	N
032	Soil profile to south downslope	SSW
033	ESE-facing section of kiln flue terminus	WNW
034	NE-facing section of kiln flue terminus	SW
035	ENE-facing section of kiln bowl	WSW
036	SSW-facing section of kiln bowl	NNE
037	NNW-facing section of kiln bowl	SSE
038	WSW-facing section of kiln	ENE

Shot No.	Summary description of subject	Facing
039	Plan of stone (008) in kiln bowl entrance	ENE
040	WNW-facing section of kiln flue	ESE
041	SW-facing section of kiln flue terminus	NE
042	General shot of kiln w/ quadrants, post-ex	S
043	General shot of kiln w/ quadrants, post-ex	SSW
044	Post-ex shot of kiln structure	S
045	Close-up of kiln bowl + structural stone	S
046	General shot of kiln bowl	W
047	Post-ex shot of kiln structure	NNE
048	Post-ex shot of reed bed area, topsoil strip	NW
049	Post-ex shot of reed bed area, topsoil strip	S
050	Post-ex shot of lower slope in WB area w/ field drains	NE
051	Post-ex shot of upper slope in WB area w/ field drains	NE

APPENDIX 3: Drawing Register

Dwg No.	Sheet No.	Description/contexts	Scale	Plan / Section
1	1-2	Plan of feature (001)	1:20	Р
2	1-2	N-facing section of feature (001), slot 1	1:10	S
3	3	ENE-facing section of kiln structure (001)	1:20	S
4	3	ESE -facing section of kiln terminus (001)	1:20	S
5	3	Plan of kiln structure (001), post-ex	1:50	Р
6	3	N-facing section of kiln bowl (001)	1:10	S
7	3	NE-facing section of kiln terminus (001)	1:10	S

APPENDIX 4: Sample Register

Sample	Context	Feature description	Sample vol (litres)
1	007	Deposit within kiln bowl and flue entrance	0.1
2	021	Basal fill of kiln bowl	10
3	006	Basal fill of kiln flue	10
4	015	Burnt grain deposit in kiln bowl	10

APPENDIX 5: Composition of Carbonised Material

Sample number	Context number		Feature description	Approx. Flot Vol (ml)	Cereal grain	Weed seeds	Culm nodes	Hazelnut shell	Rhizomes	Rush (poss)	Heather charcoal	Wood charcoal	Burnt peat
1	007	001	Deposit within kiln bowl	30	+++	+						++	
			and flue entrance										
2	021	001	Basal fill of kiln bowl	500	++++	++++	+		+		+	++	++++
3	006	001	Basal fill of kiln flue	250	++++	++++	+	+	+		++	++	++++
4	015	001	Burnt grain deposit in	2000	++++	++++	+			++		++	
			kiln bowl										

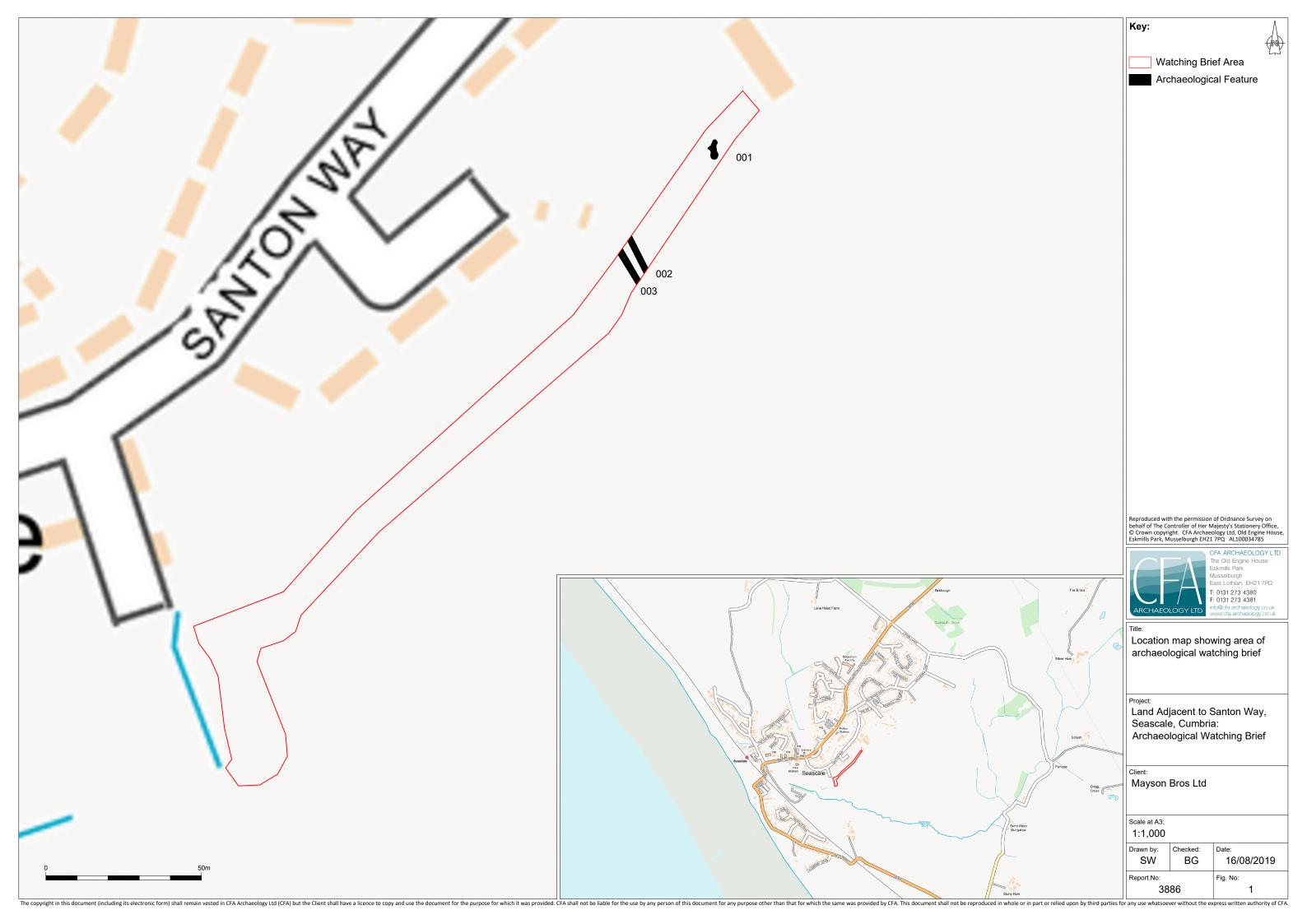
APPENDIX 6: Composition of Carbonised Cereal Grains and Weed Seeds

Sample	Context	Fill of	Feature	Approx.			Cereal grain		Weed seeds
number	number		description	Flot Vol (ml)	Qty	Pres.	Id.	Qty	Id.
1	007	001	Deposit within kiln bowl and flue entrance	30	+++ (100s)	varied	Avena sp. +++ Hordeum sp. +	+	Chrysanthemum segetum Vicia/Lathyrus sp.
2	021	001	Basal fill of kiln bowl	500	++++ (100s)	varied	Avena sp. +++ Hordeum vulgare + Secale cereale +	+++	Centura cf. nigra Chrysanthemum segetum Crepis sp. Galeopsis spp. Polygonum persicaria/lapathifolium Prunella vulgaris Raphanus raphinistrum (siliqua) Spergula arvensis Vicia/Lathyrus spp.
3	006	001	Basal fill of kiln flue	250	++++ (100s)	varied	Avena sp. +++ Hordeum sp. + Secale cereale + Triticum aestivo/compactum +	++++	Cf. Agrosteema sp. Carex spp. Chrysanthemum segetum Crepis sp. Galeopsis sp. Gramineae indet (small grained) Polygonum persicaria/lapthifoilum Polygonum aviculare

Sample	Context	Fill of	Feature	Approx.			Cereal grain		Weed seeds
number	number		description	Flot Vol (ml)	Qty	Pres.	Id.	Qty	Id.
									cf. Poa sp. Potentilla sp. Rapahnus raphinistrum (silqua) Rumex spp. Spergula arvensis Stellaria media Vicia/Laythrus spp.
4	015	001	Burnt grain deposit in kiln bowl	2000	++++ (1000s)	varied	Avena sp.++++	++++	Chrysanthemum segetum Gramineae indet (medium grained) Polygonum cf. persicaria/lapathifolilum Raphanus raphinistrum (siliqua & seeds) Spergula arvensis Vicia/Laythrus spp.

APPENDIX 7: Composition of Retents

Sample	Context	Retent weight (g)	Artefacts From Retent by weight (g)						
			Charcoal	Cereal Grain	Pottery	Slag/Magnetic	Iron	Fired Clay	Burnt soil
1	007	2							
2	021	416				1	3	1	2
3	006	776	1		5	1			2
4	015	245		1		1		4	



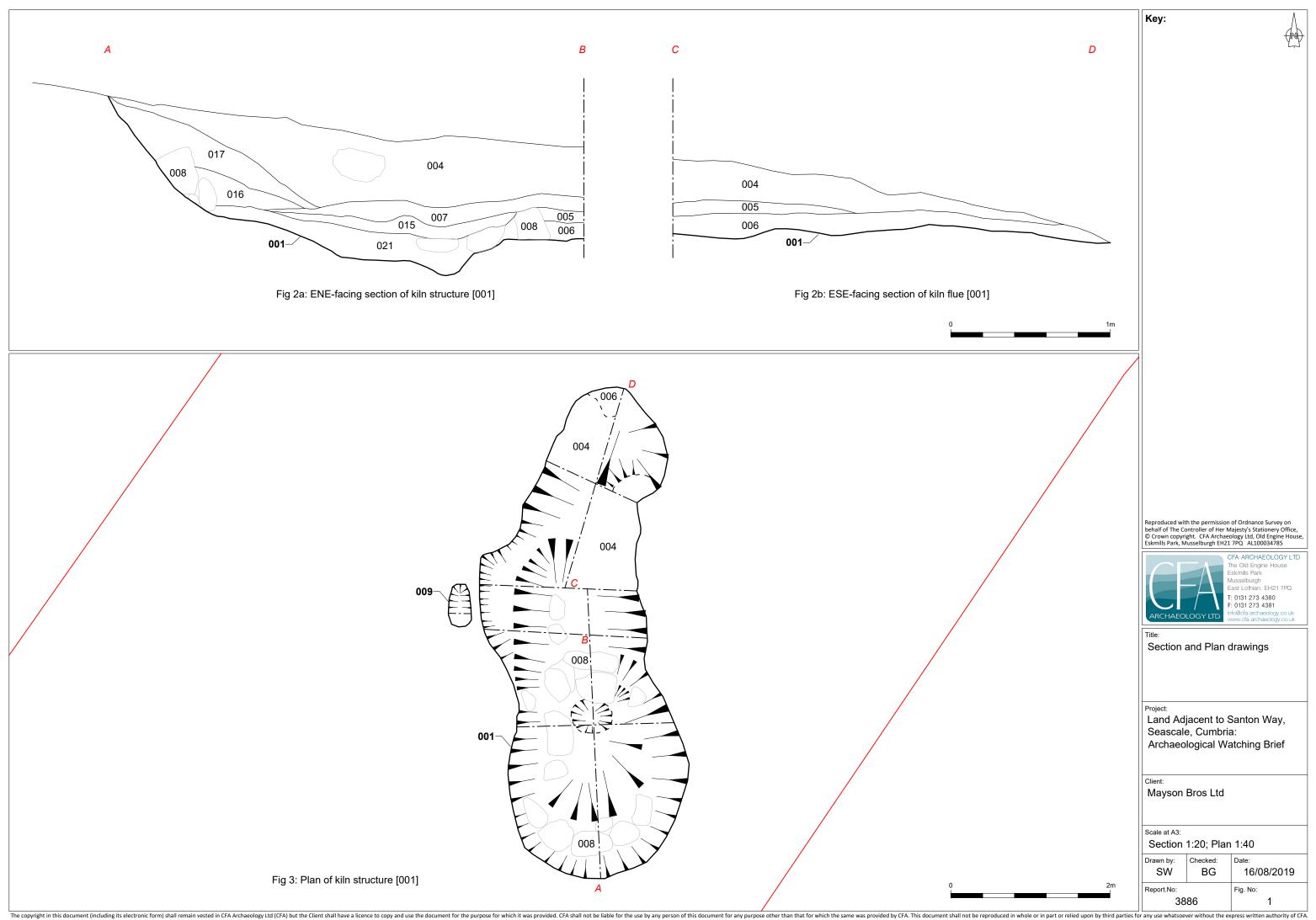




Fig. 4: ENE-facing section of kiln bowl



Fig. 5: NNW-facing section of kiln bowl and flue entrance

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Fig. 6: Post-excavation shot of kiln structure [001], facing SSW



Fig. 7: Post-excavation shot of kiln bowl and flue entrance, facing south

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