LAND TO THE SOUTH OF TAXI-WAY, DUNKESWELL AIRFIELD, DUNKESWELL, DEVON

NGR ST 1337 0790

Results of an Archaeological Watching Brief

Prepared by
Peter Stead

On behalf of:
Skydive Ltd

Report No: ACD492/1/0

Date: 27th June 2012

AC archaeology

Devon County Council Historic Environment Record

Civil Parish & District: Dunkeswell, East Devon	**National Grid Reference** ST 1337 0790	**Number:**
Subject: Land to the south of Taxi-way, Dunkeswell Airfield, Dunkeswell, Devon: Results of an archaeological watching brief		**Photo attached:** Plates 1 and 2
Planning Application no: 12/0409/FUL	**Recipient museum:** Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter	
OASIS ID:128420	**Museum Accession no:** Not available. Temporary reference no. 12/42	
Contractor's reference number/code: ACD492	**Dates fieldwork undertaken:** 31 May 2012	

Description of works
An archaeological watching brief was carried out by AC archaeology on behalf of Skydive Ltd, during the excavation of eight trial pits within the footprint of a proposed swoop pond at Dunkeswell Airfield (Figs. 1 & 2a). The work was required by East Devon District Council under condition 4 of the grant of planning permission for the development.

Dunkeswell was an RAF airfield built in 1942-3. It lies on the edge of former common, which does not appear to have been enclosed until the mid 19th century. The site lies at a height of approximately 250m aOD and occupies a grassed area between three former runways. The underlying geology comprises Cretaceous Upper Greensand overlain by clayey gravel of the clay with flints formation.

A number of iron ore extraction pits have been recorded within the wider area. Although these pits are undated, iron ore extraction and production is likely to have been taking place in the area between the Romano-British and early medieval periods.

Method
All trial pits measured 1.6m wide and were dug using a wheeled excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. Although the primary purpose of the pits was to test for aircraft fuel contamination, in order to more fully understand the archaeological potential of the site the pits were extended to form 6m long trenches. The trenches were generally excavated to the swoop pond formation depth of 700mm, at which point the base and one side of each trench was cleaned. Deposits were recorded using the standard AC archaeology *pro forma* recording system, comprising written, graphic and digital photographic records.

Results (Figs. 2a, 2b; Plates 1 and 2)
Apart from minor variations, the same stratigraphic sequence was exposed within all trenches. To avoid repetition and for ease of discussion, this sequence is described as a whole rather than by individual trench. Individual trench sequences are set out within Table 1 below.

Natural subsoil was exposed within all trenches at 640-750mm below ground level, and in all cases consisted of clean clay with occasional flint. No significant archaeological features were present. A stone filled land drain (705) was exposed within Trench 7, cutting from the level of subsoil and pre-dating the airfield.

Within all trenches natural subsoil was overlain by dark brown (or where waterlogged – blue) silty clay loam, representing the pre-airfield topsoil. This layer occurred at approximately 500 – 600mm below ground level and was up to 200mm thick. It was generally clean with occasional natural flint inclusions and small fragments of red brick. With the exception of Trenches 6-8 within the southeast part of the site, this deposit was heavily waterlogged with a marked organic content, indicating that much of the site and wider area had formerly comprised very wet, possibly marshy ground.

Sealing the former topsoil within all trenches was a broadly homogenous layer of re-deposited natural clay with flint, mixed with frequent patches of loam. This deposit measured up to 480mm thick (though more usually 300-400mm) and extended to within approximately 200mm of ground level. It represents made ground, brought into the site during 1942/3 as part of the airfield construction. Within Trench 3, a length of steel cable was visible at the interface of this material and the underlying former topsoil. Within Trench 1 a ceramic land drain (104) was exposed, cutting from the level of the made ground, and probably dating to or shortly after the formation of the airfield.

The upper layer within each trench consisted of loam topsoil and turf.

With the exception of the brick fragments and steel cable noted above, no dating evidence was observed.

Discussion

Prior to the formation of the airfield the site comprised poorly draining land that is likely to have been marshy in places. As part of the landscaping of the airfield area, a significant amount of material was introduced to the site raising ground level by over 500mm.

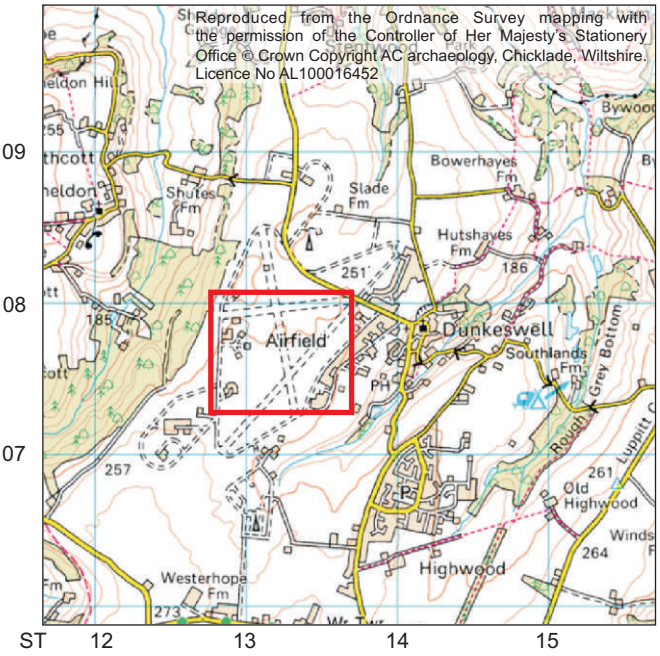
It is understood that excavations for the swoop pond will extend to approximately 700mm below ground level. At this depth the excavations will expose, but will not significantly disturb, the natural subsoil. No evidence for iron ore extraction pits or any other early archaeological activity was found within any of the trenches.

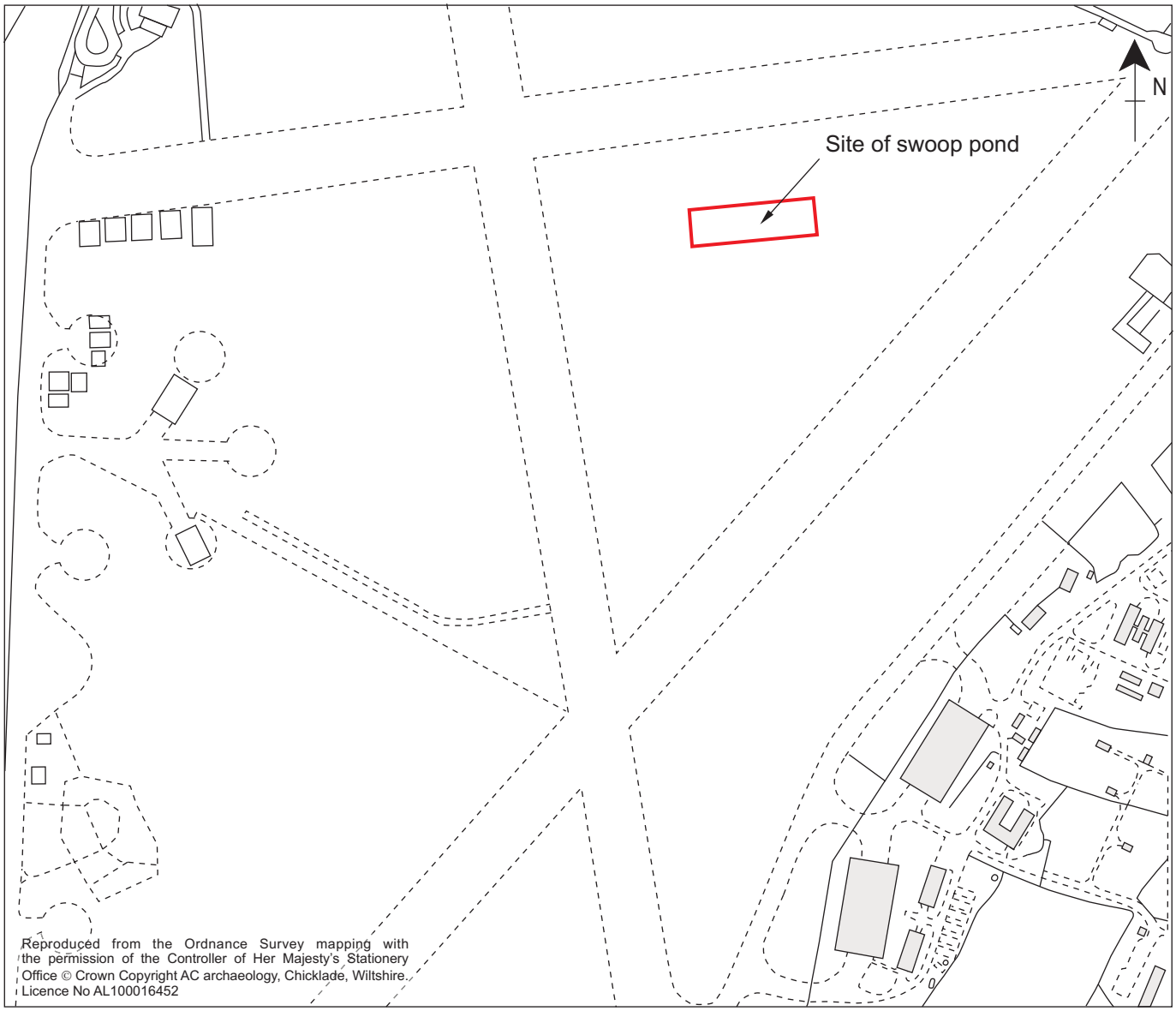
Table 1: Trench deposit sequences

Context	Depth	Interpretation
Trench 1		
100	0-0.20m	Turf and topsoil
101	0.20-0.60m	Made ground (airfield)
102	0.60-0.70m	Pre-airfield topsoil
103	0.70m+	Natural subsoil
Trench 2		
200	0-0.28m	Turf and topsoil
201	0.28-0.50m	Made ground (airfield)
202	0.50-0.64m	Pre-airfield topsoil
203	0.64-0.70m+	Natural subsoil
Trench 3		
300	0-0.22m	Turf and topsoil
301	0.22-0.68m	Made ground (airfield)
302	0.68-0.70m	Pre-airfield topsoil
303	0.70m+	Natural subsoil
Trench 4		
400	0-0.25m	Turf and topsoil
401	0.25-0.65m	Made ground (airfield)
402	0.65-0.75m	Pre-airfield topsoil
403	0.75m+	Natural subsoil

Context	Depth	Interpretation
Trench 5		
500	0-0.25m	Turf and topsoil
501	0.25-0.60m	Made ground (airfield)
502	0.60-0.75m	Pre-airfield topsoil
503	0.75m+	Natural subsoil
Trench 6		
600	0-0.20m	Turf and topsoil
601	0.20-0.50m	Made ground (airfield)
602	0.50-0.70m	Pre-airfield topsoil
603	0.70m+	Natural subsoil
Trench 7		
700	0-0.15m	Turf and topsoil
701	0.15-0.44m	Made ground (airfield)
702	0.44-0.66m	Pre-airfield topsoil
703	0.66m+	Natural subsoil
Trench 8		
800	0-0.18m	Turf and topsoil
801	0.18-0.34m	Made ground (airfield)
802	0.34-0.62m	Pre-airfield topsoil
803	0.62m+	Natural subsoil

Recorder:	**Date sent to HER:**
Peter Stead, AC archaeology	27 June 2012





0 250m

Scale 1:5000@A4

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Dunkeswell Airfield, Dunkeswell, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site

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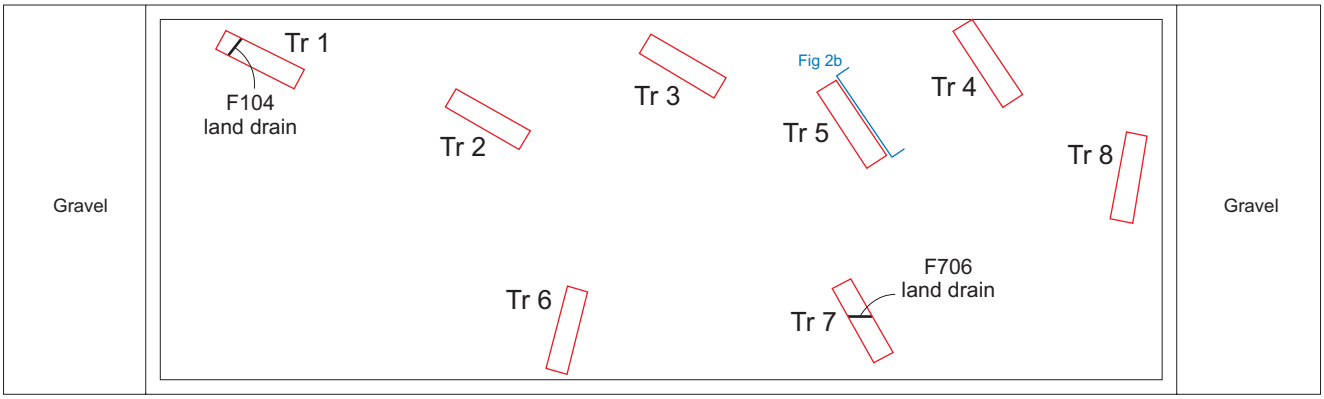
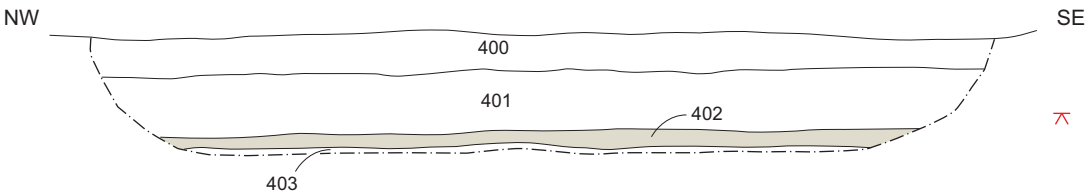
a) Plan



Plan scale 1:500@A4

b) Trench 5, section



Pre-airfield topsoil

Section scale 1:50@A4

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Fig. 2: Location of trenches and representative section

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Plate 1: General view of Trench 3, showing redeposited clay imported to site during construction of airfield. Note steel cable projecting from clay. 1m scale. Looking north

Plate 2: General view of Trench 5. 1m scale. Looking northeast

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