

LAND AT BUCKLAND BARTON, NEWTON ABBOT, DEVON

Centred on NGR ST 8787 7157

Results of an Archaeological Excavation

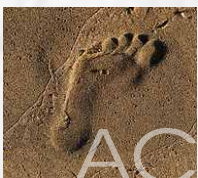
Prepared by:
Paul Rainbird

With a contribution from:
Charlotte Coles

On behalf of:
Barrett Homes

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archaeology

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NGR ST 8787 7157

Results of an archaeological excavation

Planning Reference: Teignbridge District Council 12/02768/MAJ

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Summary

An archaeological excavation was carried out by AC archaeology in July 2014 on land at Buckland Barton, Newton Abbot, Devon (centred on NGR SX 8787 7157). The excavation area measured approximately 225m² and targeted features exposed during previous trial trenching and identified as probable evidence of a post-built structure of unknown date.

The excavation revealed the truncated remains of a post built roundhouse, comprising a central support surrounded by an inner ring of posts set within a fragmented ring gully. A group of postholes on the southeast side appeared to represent a possible entrance or porch structure. A cremation burial in a pit may be associated with the entrance and bone from the cremation was dated by radiocarbon method to 1398 to 1220 cal BC. There were no other finds and the roundhouse is probably Middle Bronze Age in date.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An archaeological excavation of a prehistoric roundhouse on land at Buckland Barton, Newton Abbot, Devon (ST 8787 7157), was undertaken by AC archaeology during July 2014. The excavation was carried out as a second stage in a programme of archaeological works as a condition (13) of outline planning permission (ref: 12/02768/MAJ) for a residential development, required by Teignbridge District Council, following consultation with the Devon County Council Historic Environment Team (DCCHET). The work was commissioned by Barrett Homes.
- 1.2 The wider development site covers approximately 5.7 hectares of agricultural land to the southwest of Buckland Barton Farm, east of Newton Abbot and the A380 dual carriageway and south of the River Teign estuary (Fig. 1). It comprises two grassland pasture fields, divided by hedgebanks, lying at around 45m aOD.
- 1.3 The excavation area measured approximately 225m², targeting features exposed during previous trial trenching and identified as probable evidence of a post-built structure of unknown date.
- 1.4 The underlying solid geology consists of a mixture of Breccia to the east, Greensand in the centre of the site, and the Aller Gravel Formation to the north and west of the area (British Geological Survey 2014). Overlying these deposits are typically free draining acidic brown earth and brown podzolic loamy soils of the Withnell 1 and Crediton Formations (Cranfield University 2014).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site has previously been subject to a desk-based assessment (Cotswold Archaeology 2012), geophysical survey (Dean 2014) and archaeological trench evaluation (Pears 2014). The geophysical survey identified a number of small possible linear and other anomalies which could possibly relate to early settlement and land division. Trial trenching established the presence of former field boundaries of probable post-medieval date and a group of undated postholes, thought to relate to former settlement. The majority of the geophysical anomalies tested were found to be geological in origin.

3. AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the excavation work were agreed in discussion with DCCHET. They were principally to expose, fully excavate and record archaeological features in the area identified for mitigation, with particular reference to possible structural evidence identified at the western end of evaluation trench 13 (Pears 2014).

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1** The excavation area measured 18m x 12.5m. In addition, two trenches (1 and 2) measuring a total of 40m in length, were excavated to the south and west of the open area excavation to confirm that archaeological remains did not extend beyond the main concentration of features (Fig. 2).
- 4.2** Soil overburden was removed using a 360° tracked excavator, fitted with a toothless grading bucket and working under the direction of the site archaeologist. Archaeological deposits exposed were cleaned and investigated by hand.
- 4.3** The site was recorded in accordance with the *AC archaeology pro forma* recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and with reference to AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*. All site levels relate to metres above Ordnance Datum (m aOD).
- 4.4** Where human remains were exposed the relevant Ministry of Justice licence was obtained before these were recovered.

5. RESULTS (Detailed plan Fig. 3 and sections Figs 4-5; Plates 1-4)

- 5.1** The overlying layers sequence encountered was broadly consistent across the area excavated. It comprised natural subsoil at a depth of approximately 0.5m below ground level, overlain by a 0.2m thick agricultural subsoil (101) composed of pale yellowish-grey soft sandy-silt loam, which was in turn sealed by up to 0.3m of topsoil and turf (100).
- 5.2** A group of features were exposed within the main excavation area, forming the poorly preserved remains of a roundhouse structure, comprising an interrupted ring gully in two sections (F183 and F184), two, regular, concentric rings of postholes incorporating a tentative entrance or porch structure, a central post setting and a truncated cremation burial.
- 5.3** Eastern gully segment F183, was arcing approximately north to south, measured 4.36m long, a maximum of 0.22m wide and 0.02-0.15m deep. At its north end the gully terminated adjacent to a posthole F160 and did not continue beyond it. It ended in a collection of postholes to the south. It generally had a steep-sided profile, with a flattish base and contained a consistent mid brown silty-clay fill with small gravel inclusions along its length (145/159/163).
- 5.4** Western gully segment F184, measured 11.3m long, up to a maximum of 0.44m wide and 0.11m deep. At its north end the gully was cut by posthole F129 and did not continue beyond it. Its southern end appeared to peter out, possibly due to later plough damage. In general, its profile was steep-sided with a flattish base and it contained a consistent light-mid reddish-brown sandy-silt fill (105/130/137/165) with few inclusions.
- 5.5** Outer posthole group (F129, F132, F140, F156, F160, F166, F175, F177 and F179) formed a regular ring of postholes which were, with the exception of F132, set within ring gully F183/F184, apparently cutting its fill although, more likely, they represent the infilled voids left by removal of the posts themselves. Postholes measured between 0.23m and 0.6m in diameter and up to 0.32m deep, typically with steep to near vertical sides and a flattish to concave base. Each contained a single accumulated fill of mid reddish-brown to dark grey brown, sandy-silt. Several contained rare charcoal flecks.
- 5.6** A group comprising four adjacent postholes (F146, F148, F150 and F185) and larger posthole F187 lie in alignment with the outer posthole ring group. They are, however, separated from this group by their specific form, and the possibility that they represent part of a porch structure or entrance. They were all filled by mid brown silty-clay. Posthole F185 cuts posthole F150 and

may indicate that the post was replaced or required further support by the addition of an external post.

- 5.7** The inner group of postholes (F107, F112, F115, F117, F120, F122, F123, F124, F135, F142 and F189) were arranged around the interior of ring gully F183/F184, in a consistent ring located c. 1m from its internal edge. Postholes measured between 0.25 and 0.46m in diameter and between 0.03 and 0.23m deep, typically with steep to near vertical sides and a flattish base. With the exception of F112 and F107, each contained a single accumulated fill composed of mid reddish-brown silty-clay or sandy-silt, with rare charcoal flecking and small gravel inclusions. F112 contained two fills. Primary fill 110 was composed of redeposited natural silty sand and appeared to represent deliberate infilling around a post. Fill 108, composed of dark greyish brown sandy-silt, is likely to represent a post pipe, possibly the result of a post having decayed *in situ*. F107 also contained the suggestion of a post pipe.
- 5.8** Central posthole F152 was positioned at the precise centre of the area enclosed by ring gully F183/F184. It measured 0.2m in diameter and 0.06m deep, with moderately steep concave sides and a concave base. It contained a single accumulated fill of mid brown silty-clay.
- 5.9** Truncated pit F134 was positioned in alignment with the inner posthole ring between postholes F107 and F189. It was sub-circular in plan measuring 0.32m in diameter and 0.03m deep with shallow gently sloping sides and a flattish base. It contained a single fill of very dark brown, friable silty-clay with common charcoal and occasional fragments of cremated human bone.
- 5.10** Two additional amorphous features (F155 and F168) were investigated and shown to be of natural origin, probably tree throws. However, tree throw F155 had within it a probable posthole (F173) which had been cut through the fill of F155. It measured 0.36m in diameter and 0.2m deep, with moderate sloping sides and a concave base. Its fill (172) was hard to distinguish from that of tree throw F155 except that it had some large stone inclusions. The outer edge of tree throw F168 also contained a probable posthole (F170). It measured 0.3m in diameter and 0.24m deep steep sides and a concave base. It had a single fill (171) consisting of mid red brown silty-clay. Both of these postholes fall outside of the coherent plan shown by the other postholes.
- 5.11** Complete excavation of all features (with the exception of natural features) produced no finds. While a number of structural features contained small quantities of charcoal flecks, these were incidental within the fills and did not represent single episodes of dumping of charred remains.
- 5.12** No further archaeological features were observed in the excavation of trenches 1 and 2 which tested the areas 20m to the west and south of the open area excavation.

6. CREMATED HUMAN BONE *by Charlotte Coles*

- 6.1** Cremated human bone was recovered from pit F134, which contained small pieces of charcoal and 14g of burnt human bone. The pieces of burnt bone range in size from 1mm to 28mm. 13g of the material was retrieved from the 5.6mm residues and the remaining 1g was retrieved from the material floated off of the sample during processing. Seven of the pieces are cranium fragments, while three are long bone fragments. The other fragments are unidentified.
- 6.2** There are no duplicate elements present and therefore it is likely that these are the remains of only one individual. However, with a very small amount of bone surviving it is not possible to be certain. It is also not possible to ascertain age or sex of the individual, due to lack of bone survival.
- 6.3** All of the bone fragments are neutral white with two small pieces of trabecular bone having a slightly white-beige appearance; this means that the bone was burnt at temperatures of 940°C or above (Shipman *et al.* 1984).

6.4 The fracture patterns identified on the bones are longitudinal with occasional transverse lines, which indicates that the remains were fleshed at the time of cremation (McCarthy 2010).

7. RADIOCARBON DATING

7.1 A piece of cremated human bone from pit F134 was submitted for AMS dating to the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre. The result is presented in Table 1, with the calibration performed using the data set published by Reimer *et al.* (2013) and the program OxCal4 (on-line at: c14.arch.ox.ac.uk).

Material	Context	Lab no.	Result BP	$\delta^{13}C$ (‰)	Cal BC
Cremated human bone	Pit F134	SUERC-58834	3044±30	-24.2	1398-1220

Table 1: Radiocarbon dating results (calibrated to 95.4% probability)

8. DISCUSSION

8.1 The poorly-surviving remains of a probable post built roundhouse were exposed during the excavation. The structure comprised a central support surrounded by an inner ring of posts, presumably providing support for the roof, and an outer ring of posts supporting the eaves. This outer ring was set into a gully which may represent the setting for a wattle or plank wall (although there was no further evidence of either). A group of postholes on the southeast side represent a possible entrance or porch structure. The two gullies (F183 and F184) were in two sections enclosing a broadly circular area of 9.7m internal diameter.

8.2 There are excavated examples of roundhouse structures from lowland locations in Devon for both the Bronze Age and Iron Age periods. Bronze Age structures, such as those investigated at Newcourt in Exeter (Gilbert 2012), Langage near Plympton (Salvatore and Quinnell 2011) and at Pattersons Cross and Hayne Lane on the route of the A30 (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1999), typically comprised a single or double posthole ring without an external gully. Those with a single ring tend to be small around 6m across internally, with double ring structures measuring up to 10.3m. Associated finds have not always been present. In reviewing the evidence for Bronze Age roundhouses in lowland Devon Salvatore and Quinnell (2011, 86) conclude that it is typical that the postholes for Bronze Age houses do not make an obvious pattern, but do more commonly than Iron Age houses have evidence for a porch.

8.3 Excavated roundhouse structures of Iron Age date are more numerous, including examples from Blackhorse, Languard Lane and Long Range in East Devon (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1999), Clyst Heath (Best 2009) and Southernhay (Stead 2004) in Exeter, Twinyeo near Chudleigh Knighton (Farnell 2015) and Middle Burrow Farm in North Devon (Gillard *et al.* 2012). Some variation is displayed in the specific structure of Iron Age roundhouses in the region, however most feature a ring gully which appears to be external to the main structure of the building, serving as a 'drip gully' taking water running off the roof. Some notable exceptions to this are Middle Burrow Farm, where the outer gully was interpreted as a setting for the external plank wall and two examples from Blackhorse which contained stakeholes in their gullies. On balance, the limited structural evidence would point to an Iron Age rather than Bronze Age date for the Buckland Barton roundhouse, however the result of the dating of the cremation indicates that the latter is more probable.

8.4 The truncated cremation burial dates to the Middle Bronze Age and appears to be related to the structure by its position in the centre of the probable building entrance and in line with the internal ring of posts. Cremation as a funerary rite is known from the Bronze Age and if the cremation

deposit is contemporary with the roundhouse then its placement in the doorway would appear to be a highly symbolic act. Such a placement has certainly been noted from later Bronze Age settlement sites in Britain (Brück 1995). It cannot be ruled out, albeit unlikely, that the cremation is from a different phase of activity to the roundhouse and that its position is coincidental.

9. CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 The archaeological excavation on land at Buckland Barton, Newton Abbot revealed the remains of a roundhouse of late prehistoric date. The remains had been heavily truncated by later agricultural use of the site which has resulted in only the bases of features surviving and all evidence for occupation of the site removed.
- 9.2 The disturbed remains of a pit containing a deposit of cremated human bones may relate to the use of the house, perhaps as a foundation deposit or abandonment offering. If it is contemporary with the use of the building then its position on the threshold of the building may be regarded as highly symbolic.
- 9.3 There was no evidence that the structure was located within an enclosure or in the vicinity of other contemporary structures. Significant truncation through ploughing may in part be responsible for this, but the roundhouse may best be interpreted as located in a late prehistoric landscape of dispersed settlement.

10. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

- 10.1 The paper and digital archive has been prepared and will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service. The cremated bone has been deposited with the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter under the number **12/2016**.
- 10.2 The OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS) number for this project is **171234**.

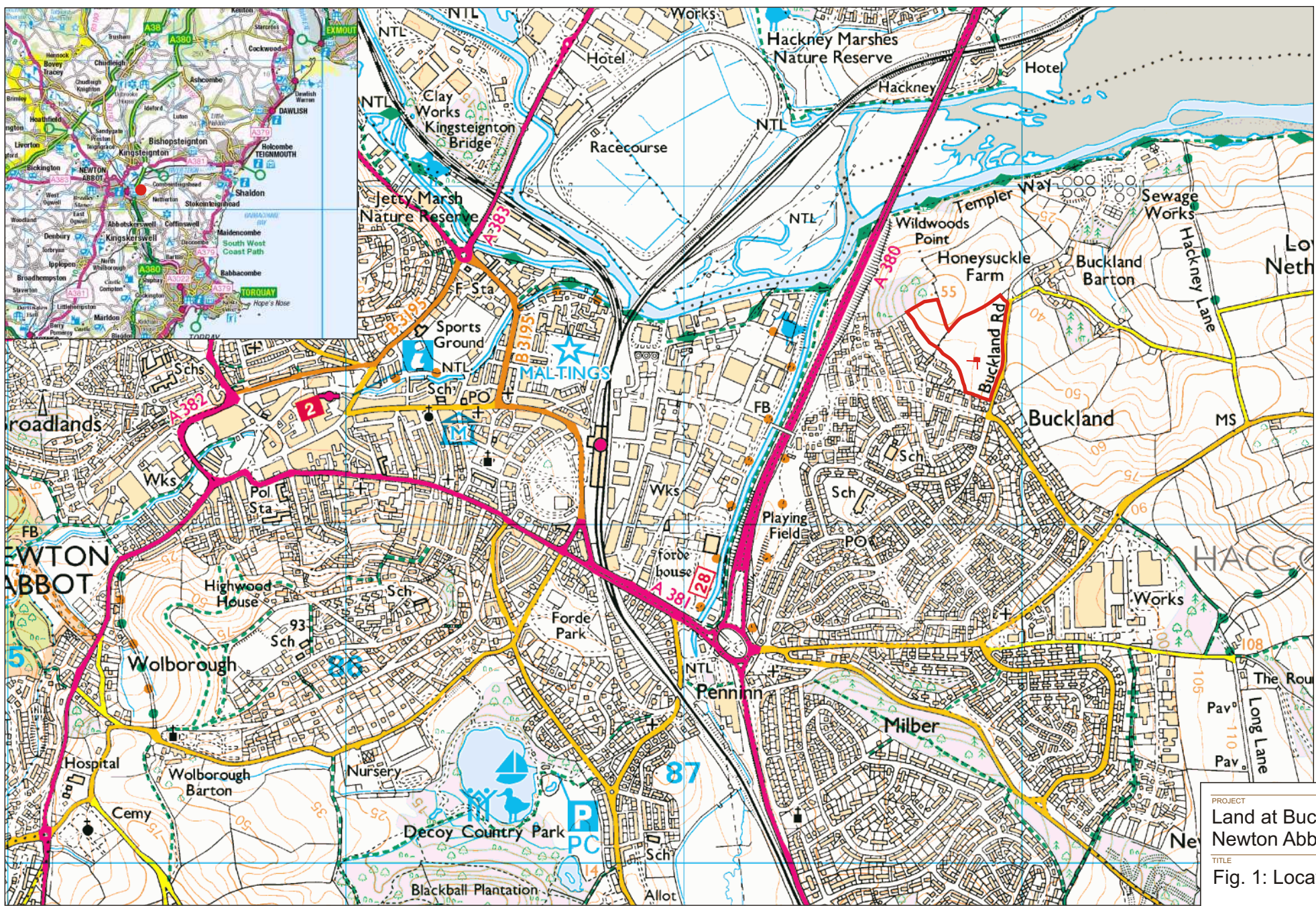
11. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 11.1 The excavation was commissioned by Julian Nuttall on behalf of Barratt Homes. The site work was conducted by Fiona Pink with Kerry Kerr-Peterson, Elisabeth Patkai, Will Smith, Alex Farnell and Paul Cooke, as well as placement students Emma Bullous and Matilda Dare. The illustrations for this report prepared by Elisabeth Patkai. The on-site advice of Stephen Reed, Archaeology Officer, DCCHET, is greatly appreciated.

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 Site boundary

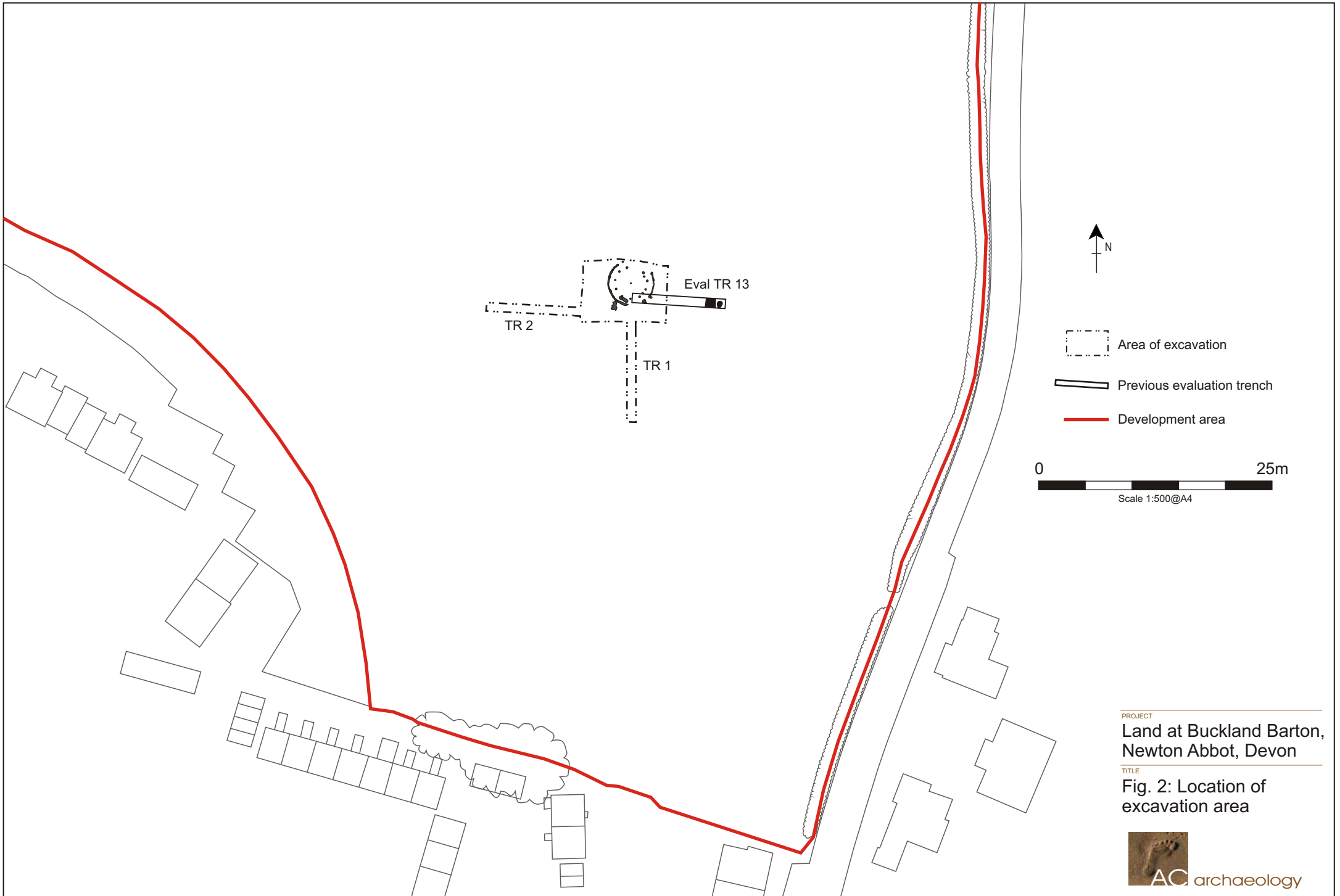
 Location of excavation area

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Land at Buckland Barton,
Newton Abbot, Devon

TITLE
Fig. 1: Location of site



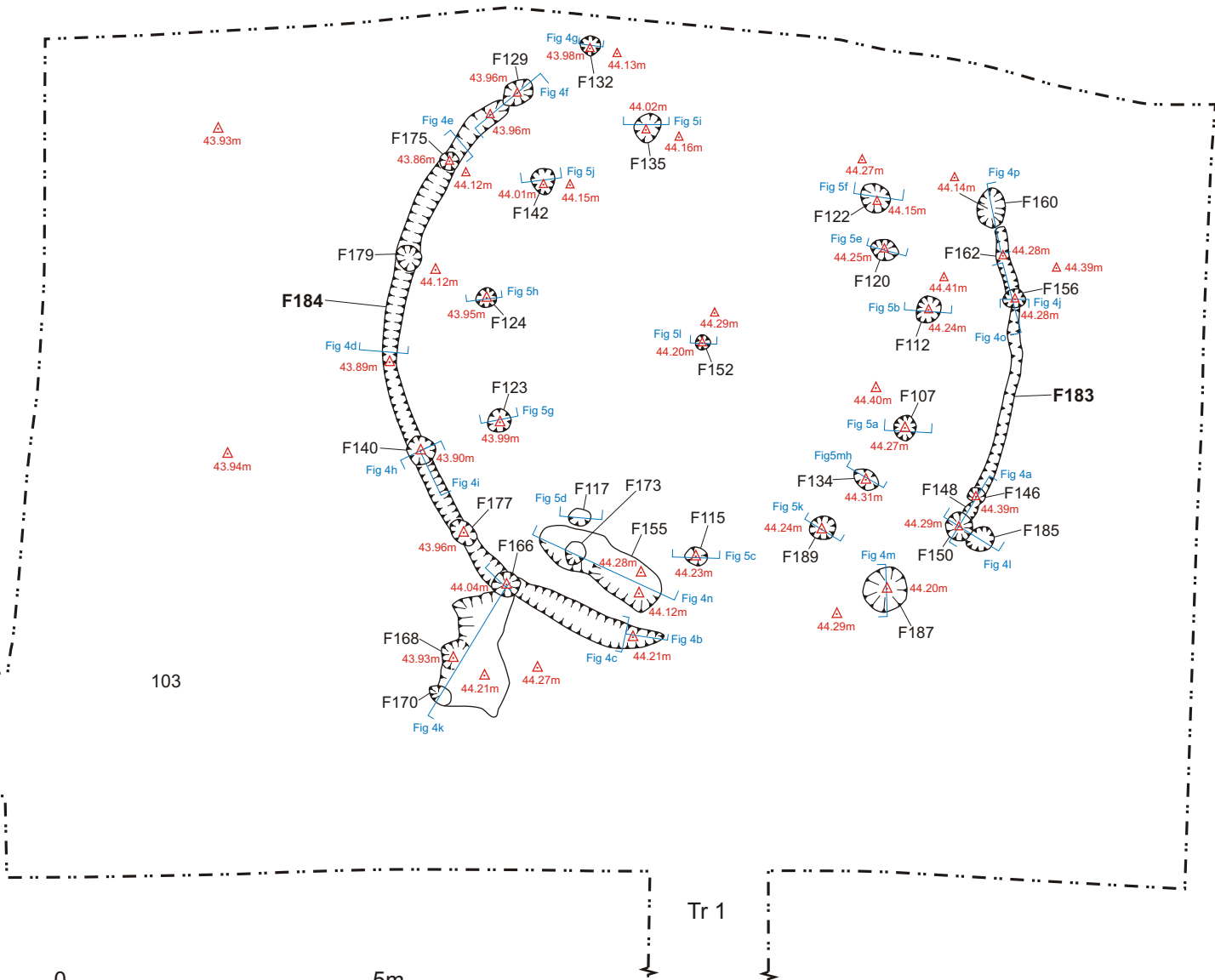
AC archaeology



PROJECT
**Land at Buckland Barton,
Newton Abbot, Devon**

TITLE
**Fig. 2: Location of
excavation area**





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Tr 2

Tr 1

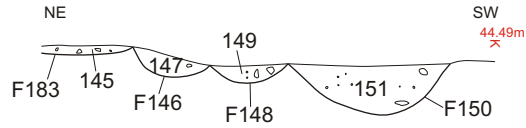


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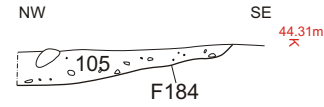
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Fig. 3: Detailed plan of
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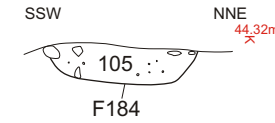
a) Section of F146, F148, F150 and F183



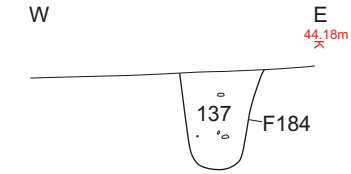
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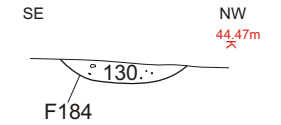
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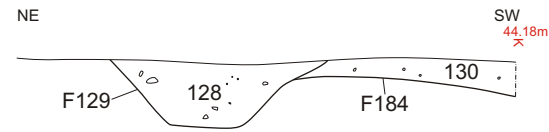
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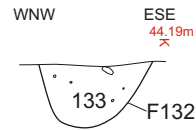
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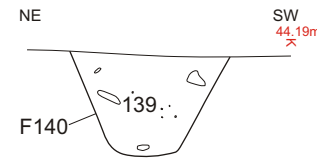
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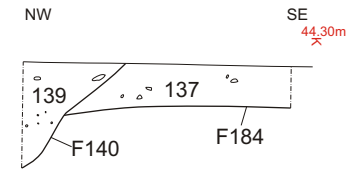
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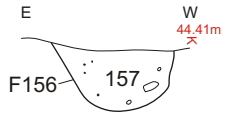
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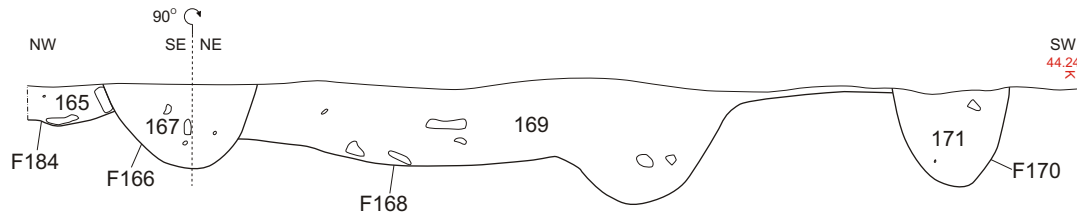
i) Section of F140 and F184



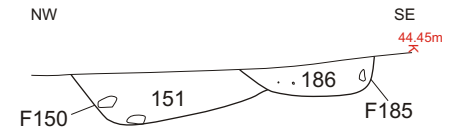
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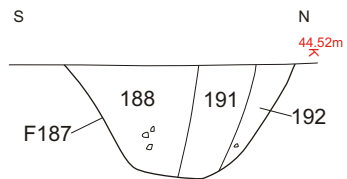
k) Section of F184, F166, F168 and F170



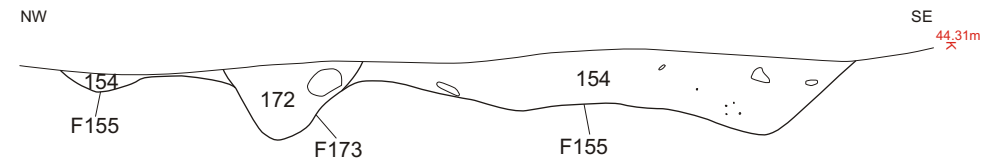
l) Section of F150 and F185



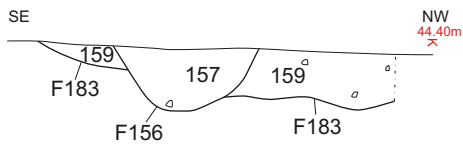
m) Section of F187



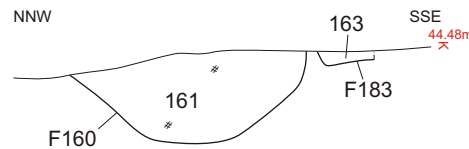
n) Section of F155 and F173



o) Section of F156 and F183



p) Section of F160 and F183

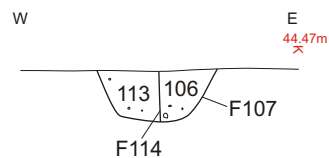


PROJECT
Land at Buckland Barton,
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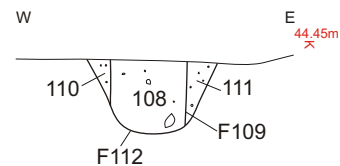
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Fig. 4: Sections of ring
gully, external and natural
features



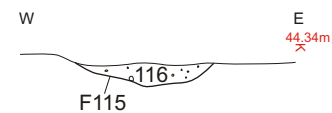
a) Section of F114



b) Section of F112



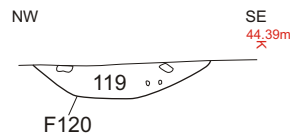
c) Section of F115



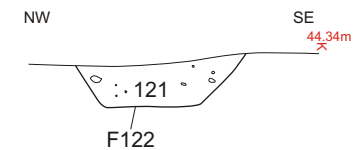
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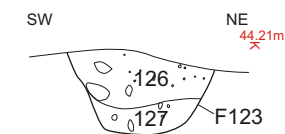
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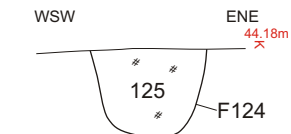
f) Section of F122



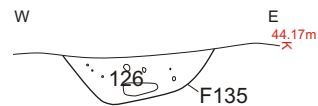
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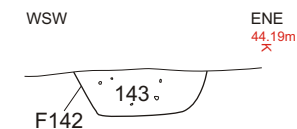
h) Section of F124



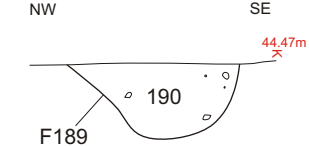
i) Section of F135



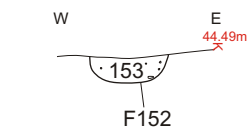
j) Section of F142



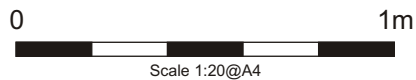
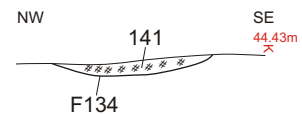
k) Section of F189



l) Section of F152



m) Section of F134



PROJECT
Land at Buckland Barton,
Newton Abbot, Devon

TITLE
Fig. 5: Sections of
internal features





Plate 1: Excavation in progress, overhead view from the southeast



Plate 2: Ring gully F183/F184, view from the southeast (scales 2m x 2m)



Plate 4: Probable porch structure, view from the southeast (scales 2 x 1m)



Plate 3: Southwest-facing section of cremation pit F134 (scale 0.3m)

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