

LAND AT CLARKS LANE, MERTON, DEVON

NGR Centred on SS 52609 11989

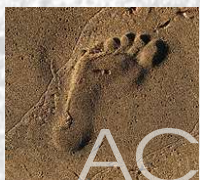
Results of an Archaeological Trench Evaluation

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On behalf of:
Clinton Devon Estates

Report No: ACD842/2/0

Date: March 2014



AC archaeology

LAND AT CLARKS LANE, MERTON, DEVON

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Summary

An archaeological trench evaluation on Clarks Lane, Merton, Devon (centred on NGR SS 52609 11989), was undertaken by AC Archaeology during March 2014. The site occupies an area of approximately 0.15 hectares of rough pasture land adjacent to All Saints Church and within the historic core of the village.

The evaluation comprised the machine-excavation of three trenches totalling 42m in length, with each trench measuring 1.70m wide. These were positioned to provide sample coverage of the proposed development area. Two trenches contained archaeological features. These consisted of pits, linear features and postholes associated with a small assemblage of 13th to 16th century pottery. There is clearly settlement evidence on the site, but whether an early building is present has not been fully established.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An archaeological trench evaluation on land at Clarks Lane, Merton, Devon (centred on SS 52609 11989), was undertaken by AC archaeology during March 2014. The evaluation was undertaken in support of a forthcoming planning application for residential development and was required by Torridge District Council following consultation with the Devon County Historic Environment Team (hereafter DCHET). The evaluation was commissioned by The Clinton Devon Estates.
- 1.2 The site comprises a rectilinear plot, covering approximately 0.15ha to the south of All Saints Church and fronting onto Clarks Lane (Fig. 1). It lies on rough pasture land (Plate 1), that slopes gradually to the southeast at around 82m aOD. The underlying solid geology comprises sandstones of the Bude Formation (British Geological Survey website).

2. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site has been subject to a previous desk-based assessment (Pink 2014). The assessment established that the site itself contained no known designated or non-designated heritage assets.
- 2.2 Merton is named 'Mertone' in the Domesday Book of 1086 and the site itself lies within the historic core of the village, immediately to the southeast of All Saints Church that dates to the 15th century.
- 2.3 The 1842 Merton parish tithe map depicts the site within part of a wider field containing a row of buildings to the west, which lie outside of the proposed development area. The plot is named in the accompanying apportionment as 'Church Yard Orchard'. The 1887 25-inch Ordnance Survey first-edition map depicts the wider plot as divided into its current arrangement by this date, with the buildings to the west of the site no longer present and the line of Clarks Lane to the southeast more formalised.
- 2.4 Recent fieldwork undertaken by Southwest Archaeology in the adjacent plot to the southwest of the site recorded features dating to the medieval period. These are thought to have comprised the structural remains of a possible building (Stephen Reed, Devon Archaeology Officer *pers comm*).

3. AIMS

- 3.1 The aim of the trial trench evaluation was to establish the presence or absence, extent, depth, character and date of any archaeological features, deposits or finds within the application area. This was with particular reference for the potential for medieval remains on the site. The results

of the work as set out in this report will be reviewed and used to inform any subsequent mitigation as a condition of planning permission, once granted.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists 2009 document *Standards and Guidance for Field Evaluation* and following approval of a trench plan submitted to the DCHET prior to commencement. The work comprised the machine-excavation of three trenches totalling 42m in length, with each trench measuring 1.70m wide (Fig. 2). Trenches were positioned to provide a sample coverage of the proposed development area. The removal of soil overburden was undertaken under the control and direction of the site archaeologist.

4.2 All features and deposits revealed were recorded using the standard AC archaeology pro-forma recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2* (revised August 2012). Detailed sections or plans were produced at a scale of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate. All site levels relate to Ordnance Datum.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

Archaeological features were present within two of the trenches (1 and 3), with these discussed in detail below. Trench 2 did not contain any archaeological features. All of the trenches are summarised in tabulated form in Appendix 1. Detailed plans and sections are included as Figs 3-4 and photographs as Plates 2-4.

The weathered natural subsoil across the site was present at a depth of between 0.32m and 0.62m below current levels, with this comprising a variable light yellow, light grey or light red silty-sand with frequent iron staining, mineral leaching and common inclusions of sandstone ranging from 0.05m to 0.12m in size. This was overlain by a light brownish-grey to light yellow silty-sand subsoil and a very dark grey sandy-silt loam topsoil.

5.2 Trench 1 (Plan and sections Fig. 3; Plates 2 and 3)

This trench was located in the northwest part of the site and adjacent to the boundary with All Saints Church. The trench contained five adjacent features, which comprised a ditch (context F103), two probable pits (F109 and F112), a possible posthole (F105) and a probable tree throw (F107). These features were all cut into the natural subsoil (context 102) and were beneath 0.32m of subsoil (101) and 0.33m of topsoil (100).

Ditch F103 was northwest to southeast-aligned and measured 0.82m wide and 0.28m deep, with moderately steep sloping sides onto a narrow concave base. It contained a single fill of mid reddish-brown sandy silty-clay (104), which had rare small sub-angular sandstone inclusions. No finds were recovered.

Probable pit F109 was sub-circular in plan and measured 1.43m in diameter and 0.31m deep, with well-defined steep to vertical sides onto a flat base. It contained a basal fill (110) of light brown silty-clay loam with rare charcoal flecks, which was overlain by a mid brown silty clay loam upper fill (111) containing occasional poorly-sorted sub-angular gravel inclusions. Two sherds of North Devon medieval coarseware pottery were recovered from fill 111.

Pit F112 was sub-rectangular in plan, measuring 1.05m across and 0.16m deep, with moderately-steep sloping sides onto a flattish base. It contained a mid reddish-brown silty-clay fill (113), which contained moderately common sub-angular gravel and rare charcoal inclusions. No finds were recovered.

Possible posthole F105 measured 0.24m in diameter and 0.08m deep, with moderately steep sloping sides onto a concave but irregular base. It contained a mid greyish-brown clay fill (106), containing rare small sub-angular sandstone gravel inclusions. The possible posthole was cut by adjacent probable tree throw F107. No finds were recovered.

5.3 Trench 3 (Plan and sections Fig. 4; Plate 4)

This trench was located in the southeast part of the site, parallel with Clarks Lane. It contained seven features, including six probable pits and postholes (F304, F306, F308, F310, F314 and F316) and a short linear feature (F312). The features were all cut into the weathered natural subsoil (302) and were overlain by 0.13m of subsoil (301) and 0.25m of topsoil (300).

Possible postholes or small pits F304, F306 and F310 were located towards the southwest end of the trench. They measured between 0.35m to 0.55m across and between 0.08m to 0.10m deep, with moderately-steep sloping sides onto concave bases. Each of the features contained similar light brownish-grey to dark grey sandy-silt fills (305, 307 and 309), with occasional small sandstone fragments and rare degraded charcoal flecks. No finds were recovered from these features.

Pit F308 was circular in plan and measured 0.80m in diameter and 0.23m deep, with steeply-sloping sides onto a flat base. It was filled with a dark grey to brown sandy-silt (309), with inclusions of small sandstone fragments and rare charcoal flecks. One sherd of North Devon medieval coarseware and one sherd of North Devon gravel-tempered pottery of probable 16th century date were recovered from fill 309.

Posthole F316 was located towards the centre of the trench and was cut by pit F314. The posthole measured 0.25m in diameter by 0.20m deep, with steeply-sloping sides onto a concave base. It was filled with a dark greyish-brown silty-sandy loam (317), containing common charcoal inclusions. No finds were recovered.

Possible pit F314 was more irregular in plan and measured 1.75m across and 0.09m deep, with a shallow flat-based profile. It contained a dark grey to dark greyish-brown sandy silty-loam fill (315), containing common charcoal pieces and occasional small sandstone gravel inclusions. No finds were recovered.

Adjacent to shallow pit F314 was short linear feature F312. This measured 2m long, 0.40m wide and 0.2m deep, with steeply sloping sides onto a narrow concave base. It contained a single fill (313) which consisted of a dark grey to light brown sandy-silt, containing occasional sub-rounded sandstone fragments and rare small charcoal flecks. No finds were recovered.

6. THE FINDS *by Naomi Payne*

6.1 Introduction

All finds recovered on site during the evaluation were retained, cleaned and marked where appropriate. They have been quantified according to material type within each context and scanned to extract information regarding the range, nature and date of artefacts represented. This is discussed below. Two of the three evaluation trenches produced finds, which comprised very small quantities of medieval and post-medieval pottery. The finds are summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Summary of finds

Context	Context Description	Medieval pottery		Post-medieval pottery	
		No.	Weight (g)	No.	Weight (g)
100	Trench 1 topsoil			1	3
111	Upper fill of pit F109	2	1		
309	Fill of posthole F310	1	4	1	4
Total		3	5	2	7

6.2 Medieval pottery

Three sherds (5g) of medieval pottery were recovered from two contexts in Trenches 1 and 3. All are body sherds from North Devon medieval coarseware jars. Pottery of this type was first manufactured in c. 1200 and continued in production with little discernible change until c. 1450. The sherd from pit F310 is residual as this context also contained a 16th century pot sherd.

6.3 Post-medieval pottery

Two sherds (7g) of post-medieval pottery were recovered from two contexts in Trenches 1 and 3. Trench 1 topsoil produced a body sherd from a 17th-18th century North Devon gravel-tempered vessel. Context 309, fill of posthole F310, contained a body sherd of North Devon gravel-tempered pottery of probable 16th century date.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 The features exposed in Trenches 1 and 3 comprised two concentrations of pits, linear features and postholes, with these located to the front and rear of the site. A small assemblage medieval to early post-medieval pottery was recovered from two of the features. The features were generally shallow, with this perhaps due to later cultivation on the site, as indicated by the deep overlying soil layers.

7.2 In Trench 1, only pit F109 contained pottery, which dates it to the 13th to 15th century. However, the similar fill composition and the stratigraphic position of all the features below the subsoil suggest they are of a comparable date. The function of the pits was not established, but they are likely to represent activity either to the rear of a building fronting Clarks Lane, or the structure identified by South West Archaeology in the plot of land immediately to the southwest. Ditch F103 may represent the position of a former boundary or sub-division in this part of the site.

7.3 The features in Trench 3 were also poorly-dated. Probable posthole F310 contained early post-medieval pottery, but no finds were recovered from the remaining features. While the collection of postholes formed no coherent arrangement within the confines of the trench, their presence suggests the potential for structural remains such as a timber building or post division in this part of the site. The short linear feature (F314) shallow pit F312 and posthole F316 contained notable charcoal inclusions.

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1 The archaeological trench evaluation has established the presence of concentrations of poorly-dated archaeological features comprising pits, postholes and ditches/gullies. A small assemblage of pottery recovered from two of the features suggest that occupation of the site ranges from the 13th to 16th century. The archaeological features were concentrated to the southeast and northwest parts of the site, adjacent to Clarks Lane and the churchyard boundary. While it was not possible establish any definite arrangement, the presence of posthole features, particularly located adjacent to Clarks Lane, indicate the potential for a

former timber structure or post division. The associated pits and linear features may relate to general rubbish pits and sub-divisions. Whether an early building is present within this plot has not been established, as the features could be associated with a medieval structure located immediately to the southwest.

9. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

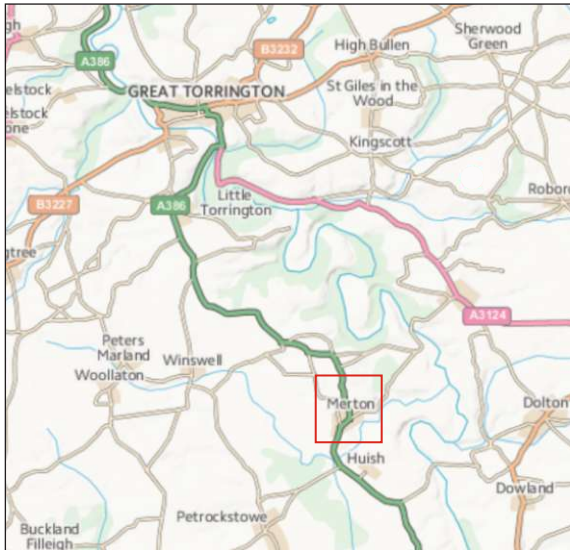
- 9.1** The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. It will be held until the need for any further archaeological work on the site via condition is established and whether the creation of a digital archive for deposition at the Archaeology Data Service is required. The archive from this work and any subsequent work will be deposited under an accession number obtained from the Barnstaple and North Devon Museum, Barnstaple.
- 9.2** An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier 175990, which includes a digital copy of this report.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 10.1** The evaluation was commissioned by The Clinton Devon Estates. The fieldwork was conducted by Ben Pears and Will Smith, with the illustrations for this report prepared by Sarnia Blackmore. The advice and collaboration of Steve Reed, Devon Archaeology Officer is duly acknowledged.

11. REFERENCES

Pink, F. 2014, *Land at Clarks Lane, Merton, Devon: Historic Environment Assessment*. AC Archaeology report no. ACD842/1/1.



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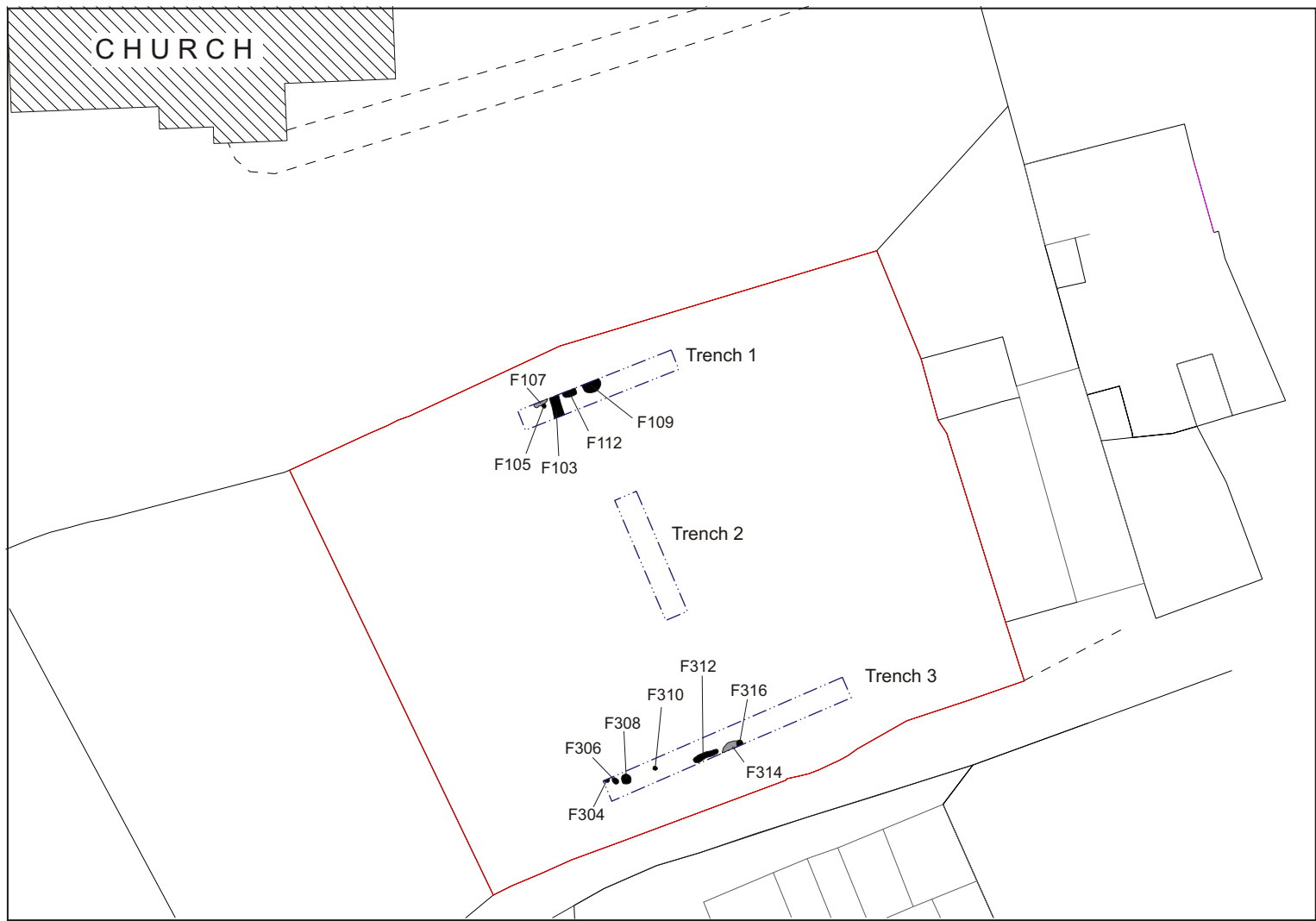


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Clarks Lane, Merton, North Devon

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Fig. 1: Location of site



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Fig. 2: Location of trenches, showing archaeological features

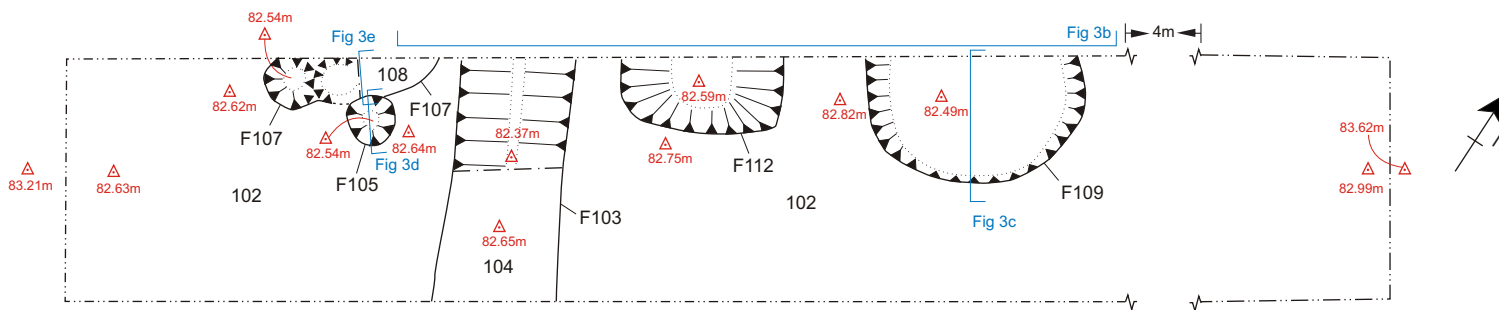


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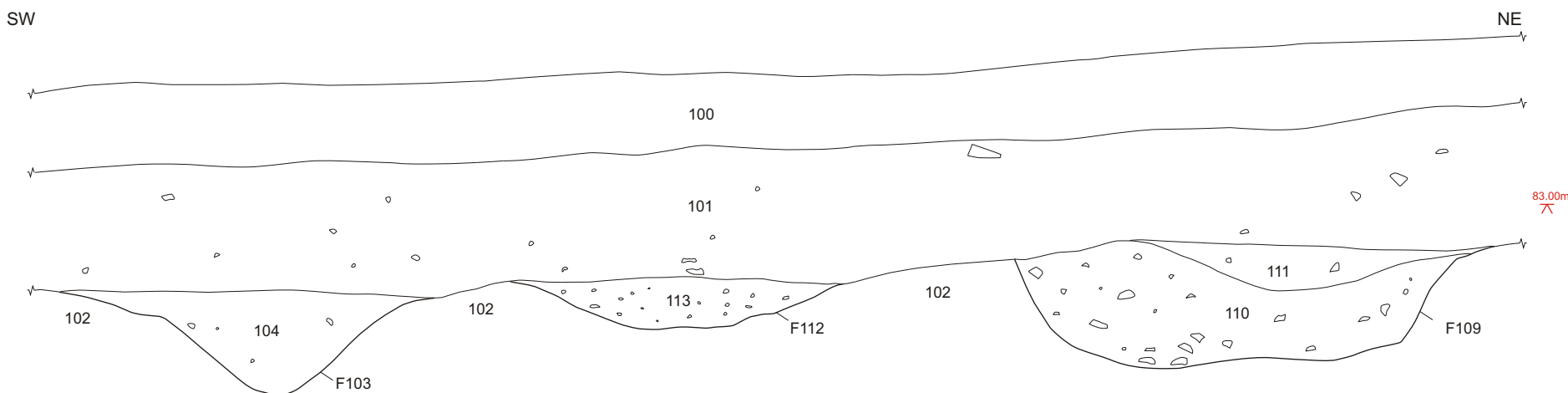


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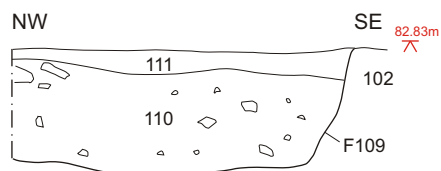
a) Trench 1, plan



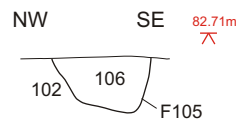
b) Sections of F103, F112 and F109



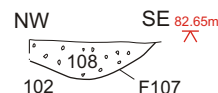
c) Section of F109



d) Section of F105



e) Section of F107



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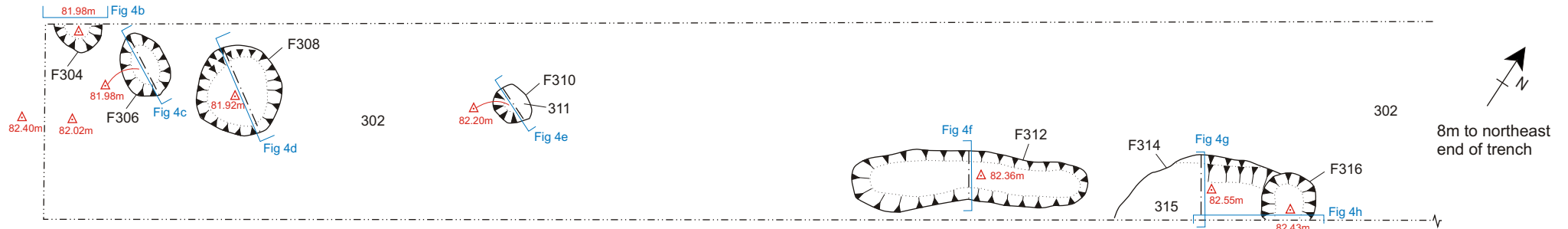
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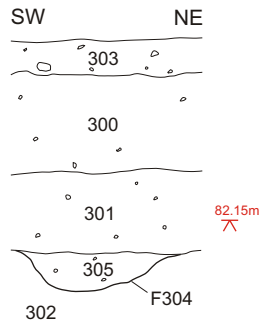
Fig. 3: Trench 1: plans and sections



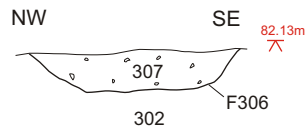
a) Trench 3, plan



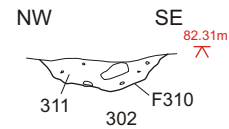
b) Section of F304



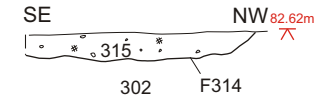
c) Section of F306



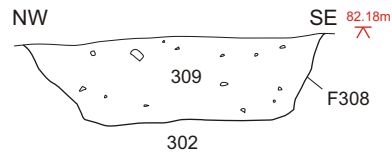
e) Section of F310



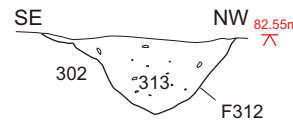
g) Section of F314



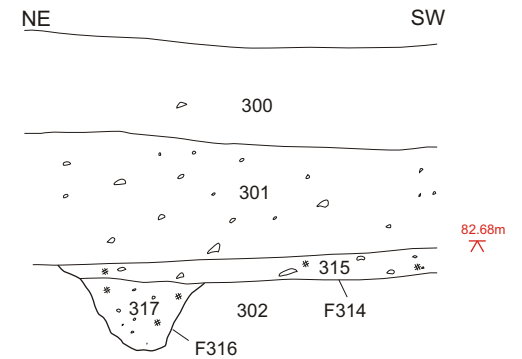
d) Section of F308



f) Section of F312

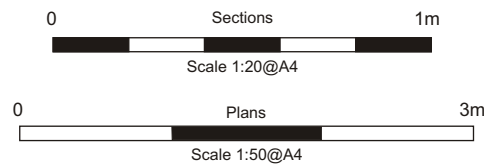


h) Sections of F314 and F316



Key

Charcoal



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Fig. 4: Trench 2: plans and sections



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Plate 1: General view of site looking northwest towards the church



Plate 2: General view of Trench 1, looking northeast (scale 1m)



Plate 3: Trench 1, view of pit F109, looking northwest (scale 1m)



Plate 4: Trench 3, posthole F306 and pit F308, looking north (scales 1m and 0.4m)

Appendix 1

Tabulated context descriptions by trench



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Appendix 1: Tabulated context descriptions by trench

Trench No. 1			
Dimensions – 12m x 1.70m			
Orientated – NE-SW			
Context	Depth (m)	Description	Interpretation
(100)	0.33	Very dark grey to grey black sandy silt loam (40-40-20%) with a friable to compact consistency and inclusions of medium to large rootlets and organics c.25-40mm. Also large tree roots present and inclusions of small sub-rounded to sub-angular sandstone fragments c.15-40mm at 5-10% alongside post-medieval to modern pottery, slag and charcoal.	Topsoil
(101)	0.32	Light brownish grey to yellow silty sand (40-60%) with a friable consistency and inclusions of small to medium sub-rounded to sub-angular sandstone fragments c.20-40mm at 5-10% alongside few degraded organics.	Subsoil
(102)	+0.10	Light yellow to orange and occasionally white degraded sandstone geology. Contains large 50-110mm sub-angular sandstone fragments at 35% occurrence. No organics but heavily Fe stained in places.	Degraded Sandstone Geology
F103	0.28	NW-SE orientated linear measuring +1.70m long by 0.82m wide. The feature had moderately steep edges and breaks of slope with a rounded 'v' shaped base. Filled with (104).	Ditch feature
(104)	0.28	Mid orange brown sandy silt clay (30-30-40%) with a moderate compaction and sparse sub-angular sandstone inclusions c.10-45mm in size. No organic material present or artefacts.	Fill of F103
F105	0.08	Sub circular feature Ø0.24m with moderately sharp upper breaks of slope, steep sides and a concave but irregular base. Filled with (106).	Post hole
(106)	0.08	Mid grey brown clay with a moderate compaction and sparse sub-angular sandstone inclusions <10mm in size. No organics or packing material.	Fill of F105
F107	0.10	Irregular, sub-oval shaped feature 1.0m long by 0.40m wide with variable, shallow to moderate breaks of slope, shallow steep sides and a highly irregular base. Filled with (108).	Vegetation feature
(108)	0.10	Mid orange to brown coloured clay with a moderate compaction and inclusions of frequent moderately well sorted sub-angular sandstone fragments <10mm in size. No organics or artefacts were identified.	Fill of F107
F109	0.31	Sub-circular feature Ø1.43m in diameter with very sharp top and bottom breaks of slope, steep vertical sides and a flat base. Irregularities in the base are due to the bedding of the sandstone. Contains two fills (110) and (111).	Large pit feature
(110)	0.25	Light brown silty clay loam (30-30-40%) with a moderate compaction and stony consistency with inclusions of frequent poorly sorted sub-angular gravels c. 10-80mm with sparse charcoal flecks and few organics. No artefacts found.	Fill of F109
(111)	0.11	Mid brown silty clay loam (40-20-40%) with a moderate compaction and occasional poorly sorted sub-angular gravels c.5-60mm. Fill contained a single degraded sherd of medieval pottery which could derive from the overlying subsoil.	Fill of F109
F112	0.16	Sub-rectilinear feature measuring 0.50m long by 1.05m wide with gradual to moderate upper breaks of slope, shallow sides which break gently into an irregular but flat base. Filled with (113).	Shallow pit feature
(113)	0.16	Mid orange brown silty clay (40-60%) with a moderate compaction and inclusions of moderate angular sandstone gravels to 35mm and sparse charcoal flecks. No artefacts or organics were present.	Fill of F112

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Appendix 1: Tabulated context descriptions by trench

Trench No. 2			
Dimensions – 10m x 1.70m			
Orientated – NW-SE			
Context	Depth (m)	Description	Interpretation
(200)	0.26	Very dark grey to grey black sandy silt loam (40-40-20%) with a friable to compact consistency and inclusions of medium to large rootlets and organics c.25-40mm. Also large tree roots present and inclusions of small sub-rounded to sub-angular sandstone fragments c.15-40mm at 5-10% alongside post-medieval to modern pottery, slag and charcoal.	Topsoil
(201)	0.20	Light brownish grey to yellow silty sand (40-60%) with a friable consistency and inclusions of small to medium sub-rounded to sub-angular sandstone fragments c.20-40mm at 5-10% alongside few degraded organics.	Subsoil
(202)	+0.10	Light yellow to orange and occasionally white degraded sandstone geology. Contains large 50-110mm sub-angular sandstone fragments at 35% occurrence. No organics but heavily Fe stained in places.	Degraded Sandstone Geology

Trench No. 3			
Dimensions – 20m x 1.70m			
Orientated – NE-SW			
Context	Depth (m)	Description	Interpretation
(300)	0.25	Very dark grey to grey black sandy silt loam (40-40-20%) with a friable to compact consistency and inclusions of medium to large rootlets and organics c.25-40mm. Also large tree roots present and inclusions of small sub-rounded to sub-angular sandstone fragments c.15-40mm at 5-10% alongside post-medieval to modern pottery, slag and charcoal.	Topsoil
(301)	0.18	Light brownish grey to yellow silty sand (40-60%) with a friable consistency and inclusions of small to medium sub-rounded to sub-angular sandstone fragments c.20-40mm at 5-10% alongside few degraded organics.	Subsoil
(302)	+0.10	Light yellow to orange and occasionally white degraded sandstone geology. Contains large 50-110mm sub-angular sandstone fragments at 35% occurrence. No organics but heavily Fe stained in places.	Degraded Sandstone Geology
(303)	0.10	Light grey to yellow silty sand (40-60%). Dump of sandstone and sediment c.20-60mm at c.20% occurrence. No organics.	Made ground
F304	0.10	Circular feature Ø0.40m with an asymmetrical profile with sharp SW edge and a shallower NE edge, sharp breaks of slope and a rounded base. Filled with (305).	Post hole
(305)	0.10	Light brown grey sandy silt (40-60%) with a friable consistency and inclusions of small sandstone fragments c.10-30mm at 5-10% alongside some small degraded organics. No artefacts found.	Fill of F304
F306	0.10	Ovoid shaped feature measuring 0.55m long by 0.30m wide with a symmetrical profile and sharp edges, breaks of slope down to a flat base. Filled with (307).	Post hole
(307)	0.10	Dark grey to light brown sandy silt (40-60%) with a friable consistency and inclusions of small sandstone inclusions c.20-40mm at 5-10% alongside moderate charcoal fragments c.5-10%. No artefacts found.	Fill of F306
F308	0.23	Circular feature Ø0.80m with a symmetrical profile with sharp edges and breaks of slope down to a flat base. Filled with (309)	Pit feature
(309)	0.23	Dark grey to brown sandy silt (40-60%) with a friable consistency and inclusions of small sandstone fragments c.15-40mm at 10%, charcoal c.5-10% and degraded organics. Two sherds of medieval pottery were also identified in the fill.	Fill of F308
F310	0.08	Circular feature Ø0.35m with a symmetrical profile with shallow dipping edges and breaks of slope to a rounded base. Filled with (311).	Post hole

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Appendix 1: Tabulated context descriptions by trench

(311)	0.08	Light grey to light brown sandy silt (40-60%) with a friable consistency and inclusions of small to medium sandstone fragments c.10-30mm at 5-10% alongside highly degraded organics c.2-5% at 5mm. No artefacts found.	Fill of F310
F312	0.20	Linear NE-SW gully feature 2m long by 0.40m wide with a symmetrical profile with steep edges and sharp breaks of slope down to a sharp 'u' shaped base. Possibly part of a larger feature under the SE section. Contained a single fill (313).	Gully feature
(313)	0.20	Dark grey to light brown sandy silt (40-60%) with a friable consistency and inclusions of sub-rounded sandstone fragments c.10-30mm at 5-10% with small charcoal fragments c.5-10mm at 2-5%. No artefacts found.	Fill of F312
F[314]	0.09	Sub-circular shape in plan measuring 1.75m long by 0.65m wide with a symmetrical yet very shallow profile with sharp edges and breaks of slope to a flat base. Filled with (315).	Shallow pit feature
(315)	0.09	Dark grey to dark grey brown sandy silt loam (20-40-40%) with a friable to soft consistency and inclusions of small sandstone fragments c.10-30mm at 5-10% sub-angular to sub-rounded shape alongside common charcoal fragments c.2-10% at 10mm. No artefacts found.	Fill of F314
F316	0.20	Circular shape in plan with a symmetrical profile and sharp edges and breaks of slope down to a rounded base. Filled with (317).	Post hole
(317)	0.20	Dark grey to dark grey brown silty sand loam (40-20-40%) with a friable to soft consistency and inclusions of small sub-angular sandstone fragments c.10-30mm at 5-10%, charcoal common c.10-20mm at 10-20%.	Fill of F316

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