

LAND AT TOWN FARM, BLACKAWTON, SOUTH HAMS, DEVON

Centred on SX 80582 51092

Results of an Archaeological Excavation

South Hams District Council Planning Reference:
06/0992/14/F (Condition 10)

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On behalf of:
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AC archaeology

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Summary

A small archaeological excavation on land at Town Farm, Blackawton, South Hams, Devon (SX 80582 51092) was undertaken by AC archaeology during August 2015. The excavation occupied an area of 12m by 13m and followed on from the findings of a previous archaeological trench evaluation.

The excavation exposed three clay quarrying pits of probable late-medieval or post-medieval date and a natural tree throw. A small collection of finds were derived from the excavation and previous evaluation and comprises medieval and post-medieval pottery, post-medieval glass and brick and two pieces of worked flint.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 This document sets out the results of an archaeological excavation undertaken on land at Town Farm, Blackawton, South Hams, Devon (centred on SX 80582 51092). The works were required by South Hams District Council as a condition (10) for the grant of planning permission (reference 06/0992/14/F) for a residential development and community facilities. Guidance on the scope of the archaeological investigations were agreed with Devon County Council Historic Environment Team.
- 1.2 The archaeological works were commissioned by Cavanna Homes and carried out by AC archaeology between the 6th and 10th August 2015.
- 1.3 The site covers approximately 3 hectares of agricultural land to the southeast of Town Farm and to the north of the village of Blackawton. It is situated on land that slopes down from 155m aOD at the northeast corner to 127m aOD at the southern edge of the site. The underlying solid geology comprises sandstones, mudstones and siltstones of the Bovisand Formation (BGS 2015).

2. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A previous geophysical survey has been carried out on the site (Dean 2014) followed by a targeted evaluation, which led to an interim report and a proposal for further mitigation (Rainbird 2015). In the archaeological evaluation a series of linear anomalies thought to represent former divisions of the existing field system as well as a sub-square feature were investigated and recorded.
- 2.2 Blackawton is a Domesday Manor and is the location of the 14th century Grade I listed Church of St Michael (Kerr-Peterson and Pink 2014). The main archaeological interest is considered to be in regard to the proximity of the site to the historic core of the village.

3. AIMS

- 3.1 The results of the previous evaluation identified what was initially thought to be a sub-square enclosure and associated features recorded in Trench 3 whose function was unclear. The character of this group of features was investigated by open-area excavation.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 An area of approximately 12m by 13m was stripped of overburden by a 360o mechanical excavator working under the supervision of the site archaeologist and down to the level at which natural subsoil and archaeological features were exposed. The site was then cleaned by hand and sections were excavated across all archaeological features exposed.

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 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate.

5. RESULTS (Plan Fig. 2, sections of features Fig. 3; Plates 2-6)

5.1 Introduction

The excavation area was stripped onto deposits of natural subsoil (context 102), consisting of light yellowish red silty clay and present at a depth of around 0.20-0.30m below ground level. The natural subsoil was overlain by a subsoil (101) consisting of a reddish brown silty clay, which in turn was below ploughsoil, a dark brown silty loam with rare small gravels. The stripped area exposed a number of irregularly shaped pits (F109, F112 and F119) and a dark charcoal-rich feature that may be a tree throw hollow (F115). Following completion of the work, the majority of fills were removed rapidly by hand to enable finds retrieval.

5.2 Sub-oval pit F109 was exposed towards the south side of the excavation area (Plate 2). It measured 2.00m long, 1.03m wide and 0.40m deep, with steeply sloping sides and a concave base. The pit contained two fills (107-8). The primary fill (107) consisted of light reddish brown silty clay, with the upper fill (108) a yellowish brown silty clay. No finds were recovered. Pit F109 abuts pit F112 to the northwest.

5.3 Sub-oval pit F112 was exposed towards the west side of the excavation area (Plate 3). It measured 2.20m long, 0.80m wide and 0.26m deep, with steeply sloping sides and a flat base. The pit contained two fills (110-1). The primary fill (111) consisted of light reddish brown silty clay with the upper fill (110) a yellowish brown silty clay. No finds were recovered, although the feature had been investigated during the evaluation phase (as F314) when one sherd of medieval pottery was recovered.

5.4 Irregular pit F115 was exposed in the east side of the excavation area (Plate 4). It measured 1.60m long, 0.88m wide and 0.12m deep, with irregular shallowly sloping sides, an imperceptible basal break in slope onto an irregular concave base. The feature contained two fills (113-4). The primary fill (114) consisted of greyish brown silty clay, with the upper fill (113) a dark grey silty clay with abundant charcoal flecks. No finds were recovered.

5.5 Sub-circular pit F119 was exposed towards the north side of the trench (Plate 5). It measured 4.16m long by 4.10m wide and 0.72m deep. It had an irregular stepped moderately sloping northeast side and an irregular shallow sloping southwest side, onto an uneven and undulating base. The pit contained three fills (116-8). The primary fill (118) consisted of pinkish red sandy loam, with the secondary fill (117) a light reddish-brown sandy silt loam. The upper fill (116) was a brownish yellow silty clay redeposited natural. A small piece of prehistoric worked flint was recovered from fill 117.

6. THE FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE by Naomi Payne and Cressida Whitton

6.1 All finds recovered on site during the both phases of investigation have been retained, cleaned and marked where appropriate. They have been quantified according to material type within each context and the assemblage scanned to extract information regarding the range, nature and date of artefacts represented. The small finds assemblage comprises prehistoric worked flint, medieval pottery and some post-medieval material. The finds are summarised in Table 1.

Phase of work	Context	Context description	Worked flint		Glass		CBM		Medieval pottery		Post-medieval pottery	
			No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt
Evaluation	201	Trench 2 subsoil									1	54
Evaluation	202	Buried subsoil							2	3		
Evaluation	317	Fill of F314 (same as 110)							1	1		
Evaluation	501	Trench 5 subsoil	1	7					8	21		
Evaluation	504	Fill of ditch F503							1	13		
Excavation	100	Topsoil			1	34	1	37			7	66
Excavation	117	Fill of pit F119	1	7								
Total			2	14	1	34	1	37	12	38	8	120

Table 1: Summary of finds by context

6.2 Worked flint

Two prehistoric worked flints (14g) were recovered. One was found in Trench 5 topsoil during the evaluation and the other in context 117, the fill of pit F119, during the excavation. Both flints are broken primary flakes with pebble cortex on their dorsal surfaces. The flake from context 117 has been retouched along one lateral edge.

6.3 Medieval pottery

A total of 12 sherds (38g) of late medieval pottery was recovered from four contexts in evaluation trenches 2, 3 and 5. All of the sherds are from handmade Upper Greensand Derived jars. The two conjoining sherds from context 202 are from an out-turned rim.

6.4 Post-medieval pottery

A total of eight sherds (120g) of post-medieval pottery was recovered from topsoil. The sherds comprise six pieces of 19th or early 20th century transfer-printed pottery, a footing base sherd from a 19th century glazed earthenware bowl and a rim sherd of glazed coarse earthenware, which is likely to be of a similar date.

6.5 Glass

Two sherds (34g) of post-medieval English green bottle glass were recovered from the topsoil.

6.6 Ceramic building material (CBM)

A single fragment (37g) of abraded hand-made post-medieval brick was recovered from the topsoil.

6.7 Environmental assessment

Two x 10 litre bulk samples were retrieved and processed by standard flotation methods in the AC archaeology offices in Bradninch. Sample 1 (context 113, upper fill of irregular pit F115), contained frequent (250+ pieces) of small to medium-sized charcoal heartwood fragments, the majority of which is oak. There were no charred plant remains present and no evidence for domestic or industrial activity. Sample 2 (context 116, upper fill of pit F119) produced only very occasional small charcoal (< 10 pieces) and no charred plant remains. Based on the results and likely function and date of the features, it is considered that the samples have limited potential for further analysis. There were no roundwood twigs recovered that would be more suitable for radiocarbon dating.

7. DISCUSSION

- 7.1 F109 and F112 are likely to be contemporary as they are a similar shape and filled with the same types of deposits infilling them. They are probably quarry pits for small-scale clay extraction, which were left open and allowed to fill up naturally. A single sherd of late medieval pottery was recovered from F112 during the previous evaluation (from F314), but this is very small and abraded.
- 7.2 F115 was probably a tree throw which may have been burnt out once the tree had fallen, allowing for a short period of silting followed by a deposit of charcoal-rich organic material, which filled up the feature.
- 7.3 F119 was comparatively wide for how shallow it was, which may seem unusual for small scale quarrying. However, with the two small quarry pits F109 and F112 to the southwest being in close proximity (Plate 6), they appear to be respecting F119 (or *vice versa*), this is suggestive of a contemporary date and infers a likely similar function. The single piece of prehistoric worked flint from pit F119 is most probably residual in this context.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The excavation has revealed evidence for small scale quarrying of clay on the northern edge of Blackawton village. This probably dates to no earlier than the late medieval period and most probably is post-medieval in date. The clay could have been used in buildings and combined with other materials, for floors, cob or mortar.

9. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

- 9.1 The finds, paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. The finds and paper archive will be offered to Plymouth Museum under the reference number **PLYMG.2015.7**.
- 9.2 An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier **221593**, which includes a digital copy of this report.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

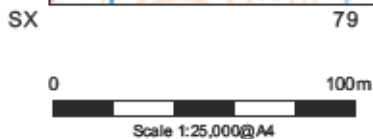
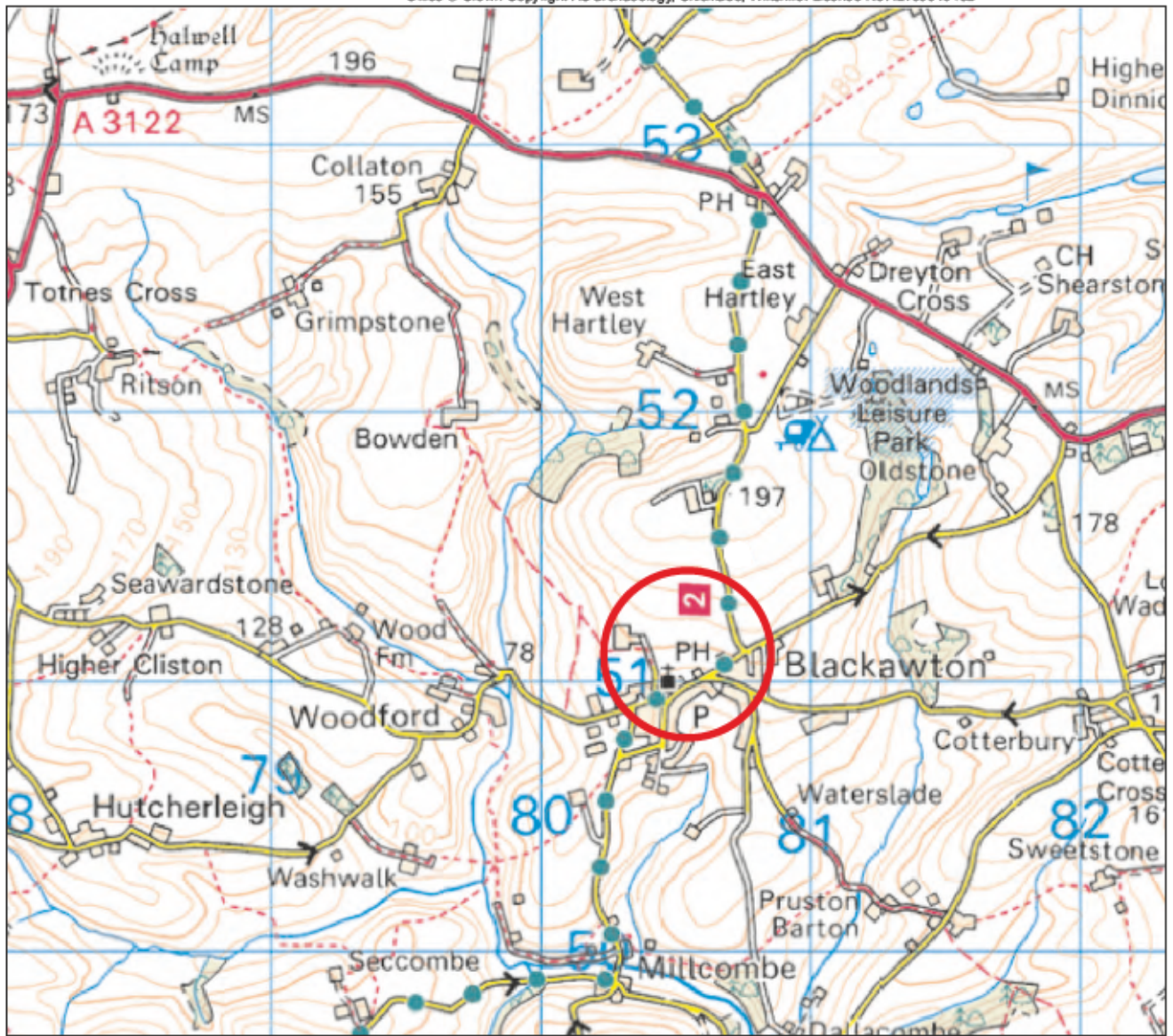
- 10.1 The excavation was commissioned by John Rook of Cavanna Homes. The site work was undertaken by Chris Caine and Abigail Brown, with the figures prepared by Sarnia Blackmore and Stella De Villiers. The collaborative role of Stephen Reed, Archaeology Officer, Devon Historic Environment Team, is duly acknowledged.

11. REFERENCES

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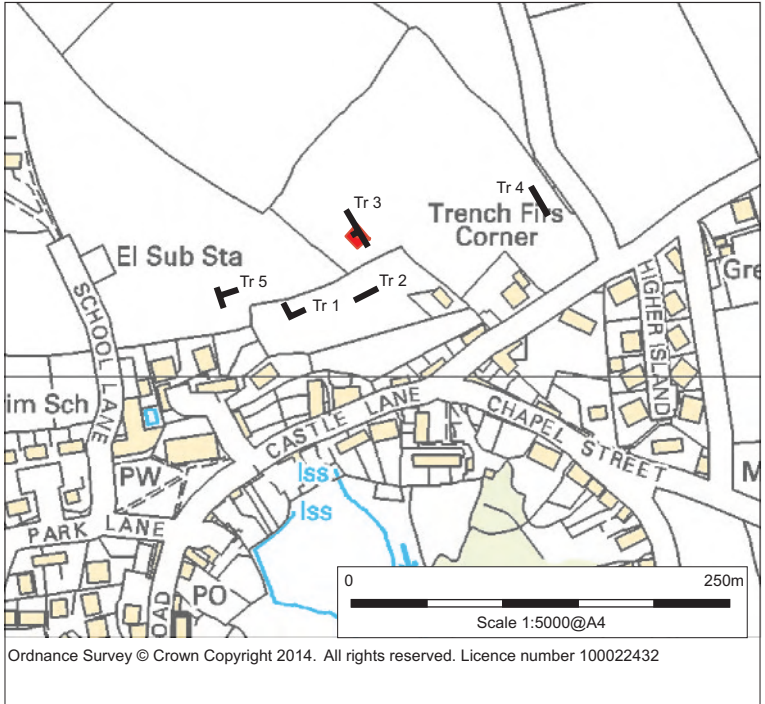
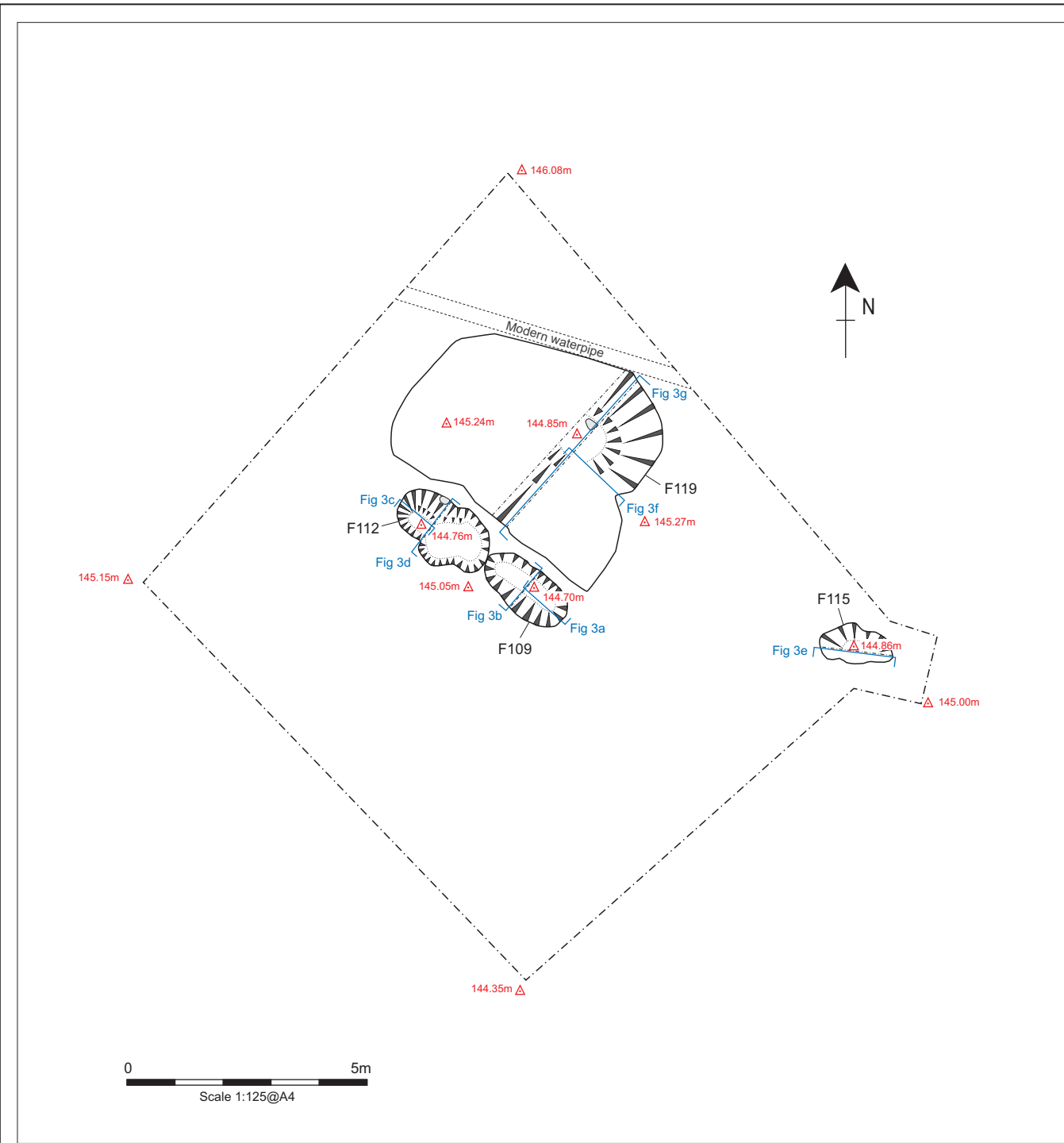



 Location of site


PROJECT
Land at Town Farm, Blackawton,
South Hams, Devon

Fig. 1: Location of site





 Location of excavation trench

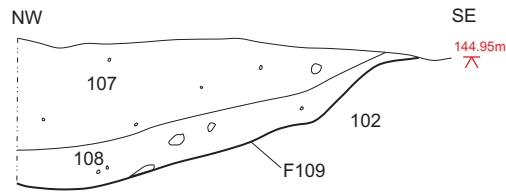
 Evaluation trenches

PROJECT
**Land at Town Farm,
 Blackawton, South Hams,
 Devon**

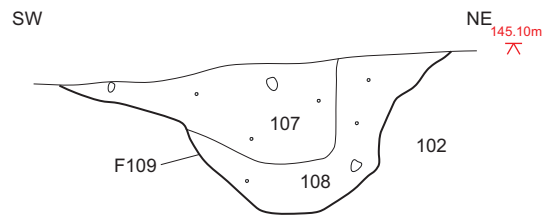
TITLE
**Fig. 2: Plan of excavation
 area**



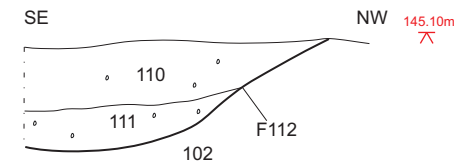
a) section of F109



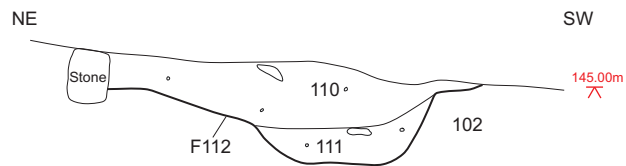
b) section of F109



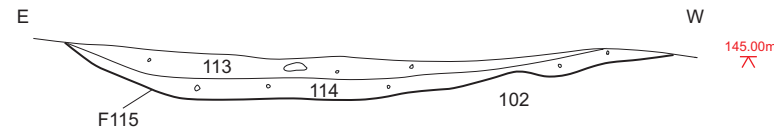
c) section of F112



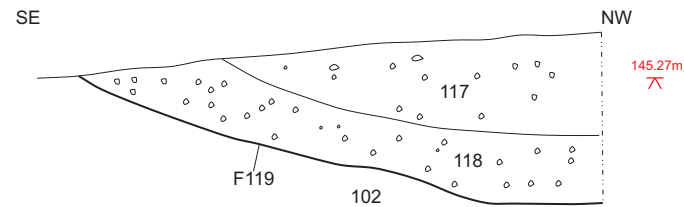
d) section of F112



e) section of F115



f) section of F119



g) section of F119



Key

- Quartz
- Shale
- Slate
- Stones

PROJECT
**Land at Town Farm,
 Blackawton, South Hams,
 Devon**

TITLE
Fig. 3: Sections of features





Plate 1: Excavation in progress, looking southeast



Plate 2: Southeast-facing section of small quarry pit F109 (scale 1m)



Plate 3: Northwest-facing section of small quarry pit F112 (scale 1m)



Plate 4: North-facing section of probable tree throw F115 (scale 1m)



Plate 5: Northwest-facing section of large quarry pit F119 (scale 2m)



Plate 6: View of trench, post-excitation, looking southeast

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