

# LAND EAST OF THE PICKWICK INN, ST ANN'S CHAPEL, BIGBURY, DEVON

(Centred on NGR SX 6638 4718)

## Results of Archaeological Investigations

South Hams District Council Planning Reference  
4120/17/FUL

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Prepared by:  
Simon Hughes

With contributions from:  
Naomi Payne  
and  
Cressida Whitton

On behalf of:  
Vestia Projects Ltd

Report No: ACD1912/2/1

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archaeology

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| Contributions  | Naomi Payne and Cressida Whitton |
| Report Authors | Simon Hughes                     |
| Checked by     | Paul Rainbird                    |
| Approved by    | Simon Hughes                     |

## **Acknowledgements**

The archaeological investigations were commissioned by Vestia Projects Ltd and coordinated for AC archaeology by Simon Hughes. The site works were carried out by Abigail Brown and George Gandham, with the illustrations for this report prepared by Leon Cauchois. The advice of Bill Horner, Devon County Archaeologist, is duly acknowledged.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of AC archaeology and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

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## Summary

*Archaeological investigations were undertaken by AC archaeology during February 2019 on land east of the Pickwick Inn, St Ann's Chapel, Bigbury, Devon (SX 6638 4718). This comprised a trial trench evaluation and subsequent excavation, which were carried out ahead of a residential development.*

*The archaeological investigations exposed a concentration of archaeological features in part of the site. These comprised numerous postholes, some pits and a hearth. Based on a sherd of pottery recovered from the hearth, this activity was of probable Romano-British date. Hammerscale was also recovered from the hearth. This provided evidence that there was likely to be iron smithing carried out on the site, while the inclusion charred grains also suggested domestic occupation or crop processing. Although almost certainly representing structural remains, the postholes did not form a coherent arrangement. Nevertheless, it was considered that they were likely to represent some form of structure such as a timber building and/or fence division.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Archaeological investigations associated with a four-unit residential development on land east of the Pickwick Inn, St Ann's Chapel, Bigbury, Devon (SX 6638 4718) were undertaken by AC archaeology during February 2019. The investigations were required as a condition of planning consent reference 4120/17/FUL granted by South Hams District Council, following consultation with the Devon County Council Historic Environment Team.
- 1.2 The site lies in the centre of St Ann's Chapel and opposite The Pickwick Inn (Fig. 1 and Plate 1). It is bounded to the southwest by the B3392 Bigbury road and to the northeast by the road to Easton. The site comprises a triangular plot, which prior to commencement, was grass and scrub-covered land. It is situated on flat ground at 122m aOD (above Ordnance Datum), with the underlying solid geology comprising slate, siltstone and sandstone of the Dartmouth Group ([www.bgs.ac.uk](http://www.bgs.ac.uk)).
- 1.3 The archaeological investigations were commissioned by Vestia Projects Ltd and comprised a trial trench evaluation followed by an open area excavation.

### 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Pickwick Inn is Grade-II listed (National Heritage List for England reference 1108104) and represents a building converted during the early 19th century into an inn but incorporates the remains of the medieval St Ann's Chapel. The chapel, which dates to the 15th century, has retained its barrel roof within the later fabric that dates from the 17th and 18th centuries (Devon County Council Historic Environment Record ref. MDV4872).
- 2.2 In the vicinity of the site are several prehistoric sites, with these principally comprising a Neolithic long barrow and two late Neolithic to early Bronze Age bowl barrows located approximately 70m to the southeast (MDV36059, MDV36060 & MDV16575). Recent evaluative work carried out by AC archaeology on land immediately opposite the site to the southwest, exposed a probable enclosure ditch of Middle Bronze Age date, as well as part of a ring-ditch representing the possible remains of a barrow feature of comparable date (Smith and Valentin 2014).

- 2.3 The 1843 Bigbury parish tithe map depicts the site as an open plot (no. 300). The accompanying 1842 tithe apportionment lists it as being a garden. This arrangement is consistent with the subsequent editions of Ordnance Survey mapping dated 1885 and 1905.

### 3. AIMS

- 3.1 The aim of the archaeological investigations was to preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits exposed during groundworks associated with the scheme. This was with particular reference to the potential for prehistoric activity to be present on the site.

### 4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The investigations were carried out in accordance with a project design for a Programme of Archaeological Work prepared by AC archaeology (Hughes 2018) and with reference to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Trench Evaluation* (2014). It comprised the initial excavation of three trial trenches totalling 44m in length, with each trench 1.8m wide (Fig. 1). The subsequent open area excavation, which targeted a portion of Trench 1, measured approximately 7m square.
- 4.2 The removal of soils within the trenches and excavation area was undertaken in 20cm spits (maximum) under the control and direction of the site archaeologist. Stripping by mechanical excavator ceased at the level at which archaeological deposits or natural subsoil was exposed.
- 4.3 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 and plans were produced at a scale of 1:20 and 1:50 as appropriate. All investigations were located with a Leica Net rover GPS accurate to 1cm and levels relate to height aOD.

### 5. RESULTS (Fig. 1)

#### 5.1 Introduction

Natural subsoil, which consisted of a light to mid yellow silty clay with common weathered slate inclusions, was exposed at a depth that ranged between 1.15m and 1.3m below existing levels. It was overlain by a consistent mid-yellowish brown silty-clay subsoil, which was around 0.7m thick. This was then sealed by a modern made ground deposit or directly by gravels and a former asphalt surface, which was in turn beneath an imported topsoil. Archaeological features were exposed in Trench 1, while Trenches 2 and 3 contained no pre-modern activity. The results from Trench 1 are described below.

#### 5.2 Trench 1 (Plan Fig. 2; Plate 2)

This was excavated onto natural subsoil (context 103), which was present at a depth of 1.3m below subsoil (102), asphalt surface and makeup, and imported topsoil (100). A total of 17 features consisting of two pits (F111 and F117), 12 postholes (F104, F107, F109, F113, F115, F120, F122, F124, F126, F130, F132 and F134), two possible postholes (F107 and F128) and a hearth (F136) were exposed.

- 5.3** Pits F111 and F117 (Plan Fig. 2 and sections Figs 3a-b; Plate 3)  
Pit F111 measured 0.88m across and 0.15m deep with moderately-steep sloping sides and a concave base. It contained a mid-yellowish brown silty clay fill (110). Pit F117 measured 0.59m across and 0.46m deep with steeply sloping sides and a concave base. It contained two yellowish brown silty clay fills (118 and 119) of which the lower deposit had common stone rubble inclusions. No finds were recovered from the pits.
- 5.4** Postholes F104, F107, F109, F113, F115, F120, F122, F124, F126, F130, F132 and F134 and possible postholes F107 and F128 (Plan Fig. 2 and sections Figs 3c-m; Plates 4-5)  
The group of 12 round postholes measured between 0.11m (F122) and 0.4m (F132) in diameter and between 0.15m (F130) and 0.36m (F104) deep, while possible postholes F107 and F128 were both 0.07m deep. Each of the postholes contained similar mid yellowish brown silty clay fills. Posthole F104 also included a post packing deposit of redeposited natural subsoil and sub-angular stone rubble (105). No finds were recovered.
- 5.5** Hearth F136 (Plan Fig. 2 and sections Figs 3m-n; Plates 5-7)  
This was exposed in the northwest corner of the area and was adjacent to postholes F120, F132 and F134. It was sub-round in plan measuring around 1m across and 0.09m deep with moderately steep sloping sides and a flat base. It contained a light grey clay fill (138), which was reddened through heat effect at the top and contained occasional quartz gravel inclusions (Plate 7). This was overlain by a dark grey silty loam that contained frequent charcoal (137). Deposit 137 contained a sherd of pottery and a quantity of hammerscale. An assemblage of charcoal and charred plant remains were also obtained from a bulk sample (see section 7 below).

## **6. THE FINDS** *by Naomi Payne*

### **6.1 Roman pottery**

A single sherd of Roman pottery was recovered from context 137, fill of hearth F136. This is a base sherd of Black-burnished 1 type pottery which cannot be more closely dated than 1st to 4th century AD.

### **6.2 Other finds**

The sample for context 137, fill of hearth F136, produced a total of 11.8g of hammerscale, a small amount (0.1g) of fuel ash slag and seven small rounded lumps (4g) of fired clay. The hammerscale suggests an iron smithing association on the site.

## **7. PALAEOENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT** *by Cressida Whitton*

### **7.1 Introduction and methodology**

An environmental bulk sample was recovered from fill 137 of hearth F136. The sample was processed by standard AC archaeology flotation method and assessed for environmental potential.

### **7.2 Results and discussion**

The results from the sample are summarised in Table 1, below.

Table 1. Results of palaeoenvironmental assessment

| Sample no. | Context no. | Description         | Sample volume  | Ecofacts   | Suitable for radiocarbon Dating? | Suitable for environmental analysis?     |
|------------|-------------|---------------------|--|--|----------------------------------|--|
| 1          | 137         | Fill of hearth F136 | Litres processed & % of flot assessed (scanning & sorting)<br><br>24 litres processed (100% of sample).<br><br>100% of small - medium flot (75ml) sorted/scanned | Charcoal - size (mm) type eg trunk/branchwood (t/bwd).<br>xx – moderate (<100)<br>CPM (Charred Plant Macrofossils)<br><br><i>Charcoal</i><br>xx - moderate (<100)<br>small - medium size (< 10mm), (t/bwd) fragments.<br>Roundwood charred twigs (2)<br><br><i>CPM</i><br>20+ grains (wheat/barley type)<br>4 x weed seeds<br>2 x hazelnut shell<br>10+ x ?CPM | Y/N (type)<br><br>Y - grain      | Y/N (type)<br><br>Y- CPM & wood charcoal |

**7.3** Recovered charred plan macrofossils (CPM) included a modest concentration of wheat/barley type grain. The charred grain is reasonably well-preserved but based on the 24 litres of processed sample, has a concentration that is relatively low. Also present were two possible hazelnut shell fragments and potential weed seeds. The presence of grain may reflect the residue of domestic food production/processing, although, given the quantity of hammerscale recovered from this deposit, the use of wheat chaff as a fuel associated with industrial processes cannot be ruled out.

**7.4** The sample contained a moderate amount of small-medium sized trunk/branchwood charcoal fragments. The assemblage is relatively well preserved, and identification of wood species would be possible.

## 8. COMMENTS

**8.1** The archaeological investigations exposed a concentration of archaeological features in the northwest portion of the site. These have been shown to comprise numerous postholes, some pits and a hearth. Based on the sherd of pottery recovered from hearth F136, this activity is of probable Romano-British date.

**8.2** Hearth F136 was principally comprised of the homogeneous pale grey clay (138) that was set within the shallow round hollow. With no hearth superstructure present, its remains were limited to the *in situ* reddening of the clay base, while overlying burnt deposit 137 was almost certainly the residue of its use. Adjacent postholes F120, F132 and F134 may also have represented part of the hearth arrangement. The inclusion of quartz within clay base deposit 138 was notable, but it is not clear what, if any, function this would have served. Its occurrence may simply have been that it was naturally present within the clay that was sourced for the hearth's construction.

**8.3** The recovery of hammerscale from hearth deposit 137 indicates that there is likely to be an industrial association with the activity represented on the site, with this comprising iron smithing. As well as the pottery, grain recovered from the hearth may also indicate the integration of domestic occupation, something that is perhaps unsurprising from rural activity of this date.

**8.4** Although almost certainly representing structural remains, the concentration of postholes did not form a coherent arrangement. This may have been due to different phases, or indeed eras, of use and/or the presence of a mixture of structures such as a timber building and fences etc. Nevertheless, based on the presence of a hearth,

which was potentially used for smithing, it is likely that there would have been some form of associated structure.

## 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, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ under the unique project code of **ACD1912**. It will be held until it is known if any further archaeological work on the site is required. On completion of all archaeological work the finds and paper archive will be offered to the Plymouth City Museum Plymouth under the accession reference **PLYBX.2020.2**, but if they are unable to accept this, then it will be dealt with under their current accession policy. Also, at this stage and if required, a digital archive will be compiled in accordance with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) standards, guidelines and the AC archaeology Data Management Plan for Digital Archives (Coles 2018).
- 9.2 An online OASIS entry has been completed using the unique number **382444**, which includes a digital version of this report.

## 10. REFERENCES

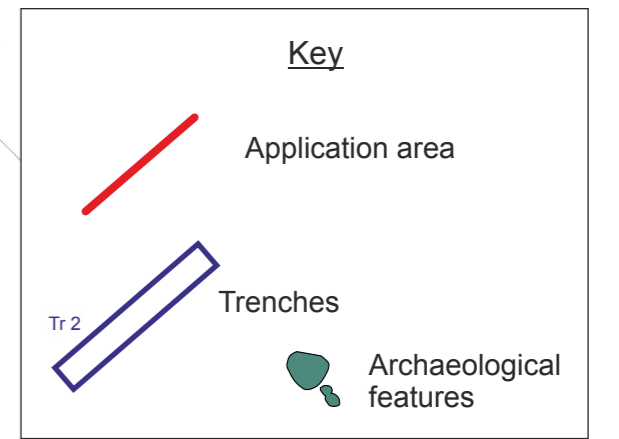
British Geological Survey Online Viewer, [www.bgs.ac.uk](http://www.bgs.ac.uk).

Coles, C., 2018, *AC archaeology Data Management Plan for Digital Archives*. In-house AC archaeology technical document.

Devon County Council Environment Viewer <http://map.devon.gov.uk/dccviewer/>

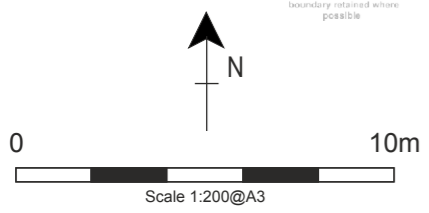
Hughes S., 2018, *Land east of the Pickwick Inn, St Ann's Chapel, Bigbury, Devon: Project design for a programme of archaeological work*. Unpublished AC archaeology document No. ACD1912/1/0

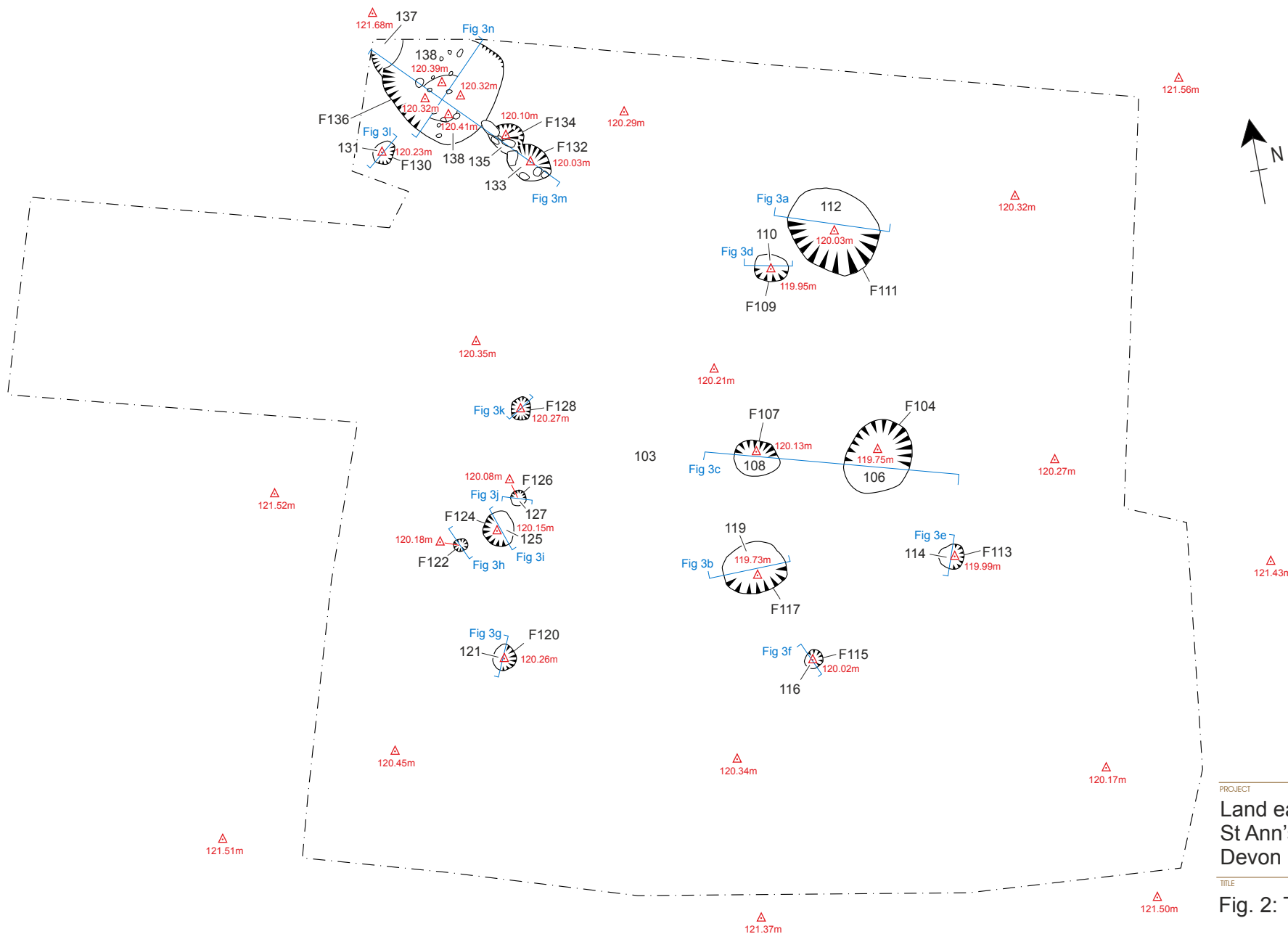




PROJECT  
 Land east of the Pickwick Inn, St Ann's Chapel, Bigbury, Devon

TITLE  
 Fig. 1: Location of site and development plan with trenches and archaeological features shown



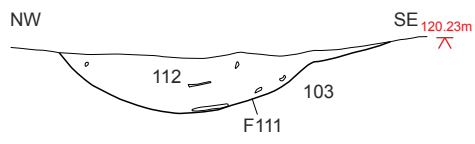


PROJECT  
 Land east of the Pickwick Inn,  
 St Ann's Chapel, Bigbury,  
 Devon

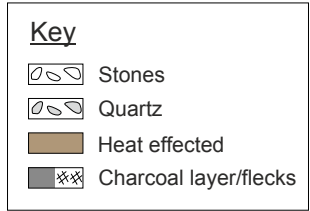
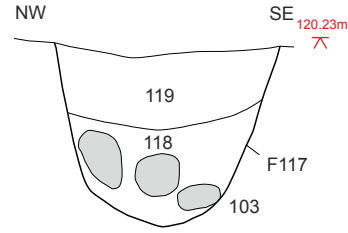
TITLE  
 Fig. 2: Trench 1, plan



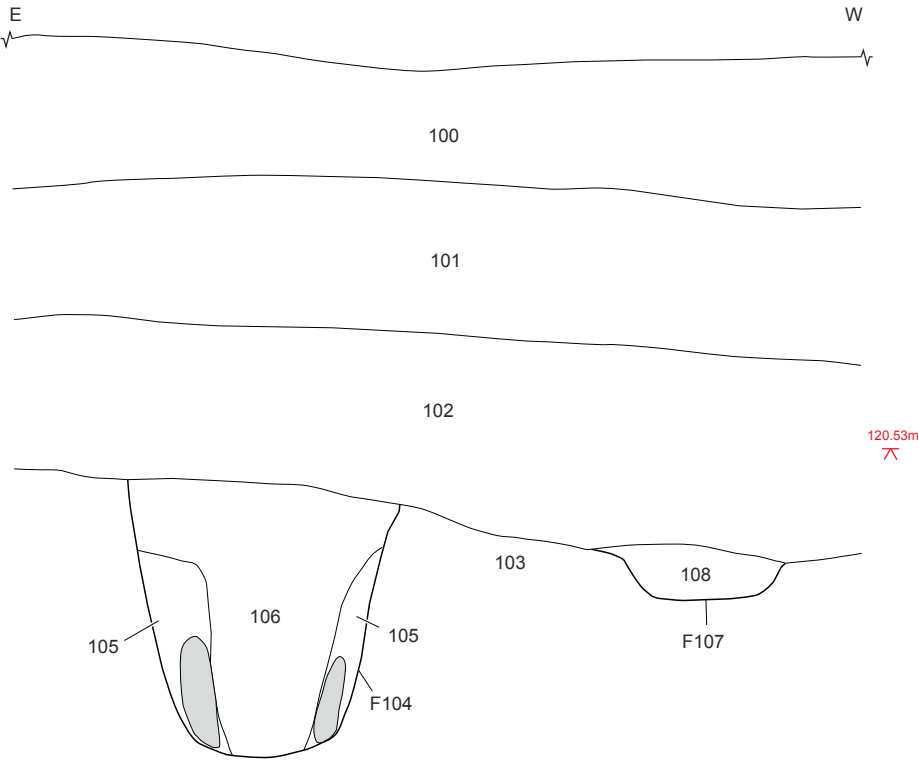
a) Section of pit F111



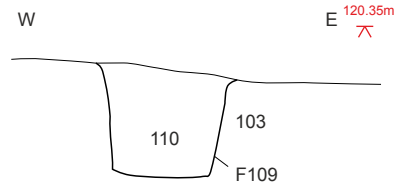
b) Section of pit F117



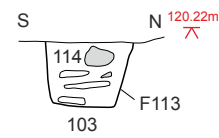
c) Section of posthole F104 and possible posthole F107



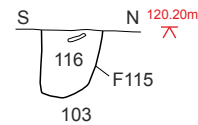
d) Section of posthole F109



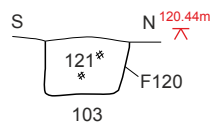
e) Section of posthole F113



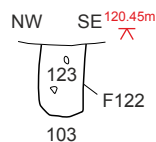
f) Section of posthole F115



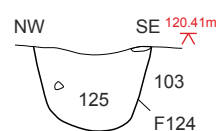
g) Section of posthole F120



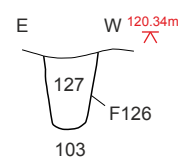
h) Section of posthole F122



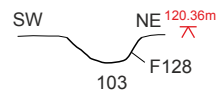
i) Section of posthole F124



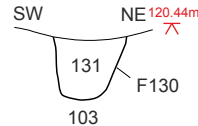
j) Section of posthole F126



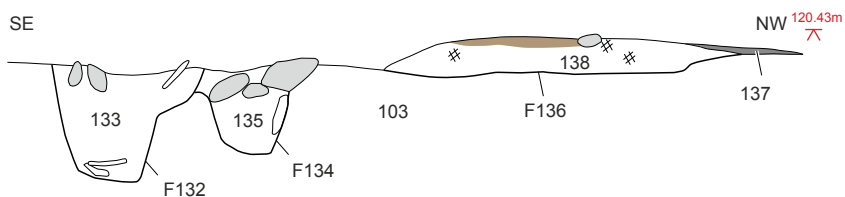
k) Profile of possible posthole F128



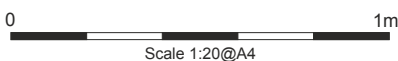
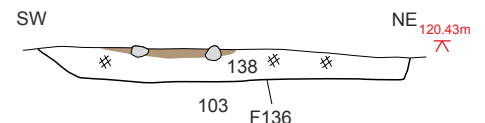
l) Section of posthole F130



m) Section of postholes F132 and F134 and hearth F136



n) Section of hearth F136



TITLE  
Fig. 3: Sections



Plate 1: General pre-commencement view of site, looking northwest towards the Pickwick Inn



Plate 2: Trench 1, view to west (scales 2 x 1m)

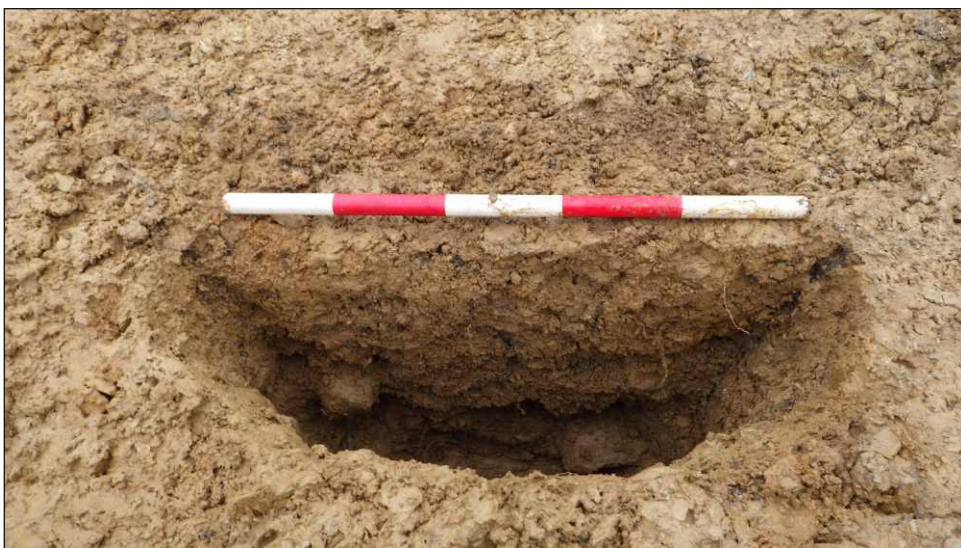


Plate 3: Pit F117, view to north (scale 0.5m)



Plate 4: Posthole F104 and possible posthole F107 with overlying soils and surface layers. View to south (scale 1m)



Plate 5: Hearth F136 and postholes F132 and F134. View to southwest (scale 1m)



Plate 6: Hearth F136, pre-excavation view, looking north (scale 1m)



Plate 7: Detailed view of hearth F136 section with heat effected upper portion. View to southeast (scale 0.3m)

### Devon Office

AC archaeology Ltd  
Unit 4, Halthaies Workshops  
Bradninch  
Nr Exeter  
Devon  
EX5 4LQ

Telephone/Fax: 01392 882410

### Wiltshire Office

AC archaeology Ltd  
Manor Farm Stables  
Chicklade  
Hindon  
Nr Salisbury  
Wiltshire  
SP3 5SU

Telephone: 01747 820581  
Fax: 01747 820440

[www.acarchaeology.co.uk](http://www.acarchaeology.co.uk)