

Land at Witheford, Darracott, Welcombe Parish,
Devon

NGR SS22911974

Results of an archaeological watching brief

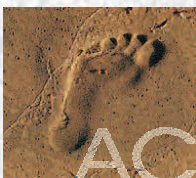
Planning ref. Torridge District Council 1/0324/2010/FUL

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On behalf of:
Mr and Mrs Arkless

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archaeology

LAND AT WITHEFORD, DARRACOTT, WELCOMBE PARISH, DEVON (SS22911794)

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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the conversion of a barn into a single dwelling on land at Witheford, Darracott, Welcombe Parish, Devon, was undertaken by AC archaeology during September 2010. The main archaeological interest in the site is that a settlement at Witheford is first recorded as early as 1330. By 1842, the parish tithe map shows a cluster of six buildings on the site, comprising a farmhouse with barn attached (the one to be converted), with the remainder outbuildings.

The watching brief identified remnants of 19th century structures and associated features adjacent to the barn, which probably relate to the former farmhouse. Also present were two parallel and adjacent ditches which may represent remnants of former boundaries as depicted on historic maps. Of most interest was a linear feature on the north side of the site, which contained a significant quantity of medieval pottery dating to between 1250 and 1350.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An archaeological watching brief on land at Witheford, Darracott, Welcombe Parish, Devon, was undertaken by AC archaeology on 6 and 10 September 2010. The work was commissioned by the site owners Mr and Mrs Arkless, and was carried out during groundworks associated with the conversion of a barn into a single dwelling.
- 1.2 The site occupies what is currently an irregular shaped plot of land containing a derelict barn (Fig. 1). It is situated at around 135m OD and the underlying solid geology comprises Devonian sandstones and slates.
- 1.3 The main archaeological interest in the site is that a settlement at Witheford is first recorded as early as 1330, when it was known as *Wythiford* (Gover *et al* 1931, 80). The Welcombe parish tithe map of 1842 shows a cluster of six buildings at Witheford, comprising a farmhouse with barn attached (the one to be converted). The remainder were outbuildings. The farmstead was owned at this time by William Heddon and it was occupied by John Oke.
- 1.4 By 1884, the first-edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map shows the arrangement of buildings similar to that depicted on the tithe, but an additional structure had been added on the south side. It appears that by 1904, the farmhouse had been removed, along with some of the other buildings forming the complex.

2. METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 All works were undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (Valentin 2010) and with reference to a brief prepared by Devon County Historic Environment Service (Dick 2010).
- 2.2 The first phase of ground reduction comprised an irregular trench targeted on areas to be affected by development, with two east-west and north-south aligned components. The area opened totalled approximately 105m in length and 2m in width (Fig. 1, Plates 1 and 4). The second phase of reductions comprised an open area strip totalling 35m long and 14m wide.

3. RESULTS

- 3.1** All ground reduction areas were excavated onto natural subsoil (102), which comprised yellowish-brown clay with slate present at a maximum depth of 0.5m. In the southeast part of the site the natural subsoil was overlain by made-up ground (101) comprising dark brown sandy silt with an abundance of modern demolition material (Fig. 2a). This deposit was cut by two linear features (103 and 106), each containing modern demolition material and pottery, both of which petered out to the northeast.
- 3.2** A further three linear features were exposed, comprising two parallel ones in the north-south section and the third in the northern most extension of the reduced area (Fig. 1). The pair of linear features (107 and 108) cut into the natural subsoil, but were not excavated as no further groundworks will be undertaken in this area. The third linear feature (F104) was excavated to a depth of 0.8m and was 1.74m wide (Fig. 2b & c, Plate 2). It had a moderately steep, but stepped eastern edge, a concave base and a gently inclined and stepped western edge. It contained a single fill (105), composed of a dark brown and compact silty clay, with an abundance of sub-angular shillet/slate inclusions. The purpose and function of the linear feature is unclear, but it produced a large quantity of unabraded medieval pottery.
- 3.3** The second phase of ground reduction uncovered the remains of part of a small building represented by two wall foundations F109 and F110, located in the southeast part of the site (Fig. 2d, Plate 3). Wall F109 was aligned east-west and measured 2.25m long and 0.65m wide. The return wall (F110) was 0.6m wide, aligned north-south, butted on to the western end of F109 and extended beyond the southern limit of excavation. In the interior of the building was a layer of redeposited natural (111), which overlaid a narrow strip of sub-angular cobbles (112) and may have represented an entrance into the building. Respecting the building and heading northwest towards the derelict barn were two cobbled surfaces (113) and (115), and on the northern edge of surface 115 were some kerb stones (116). A small stone-lined drain (114) leading from the northeast corner of F109 was set into cobbled surface 113. Pottery recovered from the construction trenches of walls F109 and F110 dates to the 19th century.

4. THE FINDS by Kerry Dean and John Allan

4.1 Introduction

All finds recovered on site have been retained, cleaned and marked where appropriate. Finds were then quantified according to material type within each context. The assemblage was then scanned by context to extract information regarding the range, nature and date of artefacts represented. The main finds type is pottery, although one fragment (5 grams) of probable 19th century green bottle glass was recovered from ditch fill 103.

4.2 The pottery by John Allan and Kerry Dean

All pottery recovered from the site is catalogued in Table 1 below. The collection contains one significant group of 82 sherds from context 105 which is datable to between 1250–1350 (Plate 5). This consists entirely of North Devon medieval coarseware of the type made in the Bideford and Barnstaple area (as defined in Allan 1994). There are few medieval assemblages from northwest Devon, with the nearest substantial samples being from Penhallam Manor in northeast Cornwall, as well as Barnstaple, Bideford and Roadford Reservoir to the south (details in Allan 1994). The lack of jugs, glazed wares and imported vessels is typical of rural, and especially peasant sites.

The other contexts all contain 19th century pottery.

Table 1: Pottery summary

Context	Context type	No	Wt (g)	Description
103	Exposed fill of linear feature	8	186	1 Staffordshire white ware, 19th century 1 Staffordshire transfer-print, 19th century 1 Bristol/Staffordshire yellow earthenware, 19th century. 1 South Devon Art pottery c. 1870-1920. 4 sherds NDGT, 19th century oxidised type. Context date: after 1870.
105	Fill of ditch	82	705	NDMC: MNV = 4 cooking pots. Decorated features = 3 applied vertical strips, 10 applied thumb strips at rim, 10 rims. Context date: pre 1350.
109	East-west wall and foundation	11	229	1 black glazed tea pot lid, 19th century. 10 sherds NDGT, incl. 1 brown bottle kiln fired, 19th century. Others residual 17/18 century. Context date: 19th century.
110	North-south wall and foundation	4	265	4 NDGT, 2 residual c. 17/18 century, 2 x 19th century. Context date: 19th century.

Abbreviations:

MNV: Minimum number of Vessels

NDGT: North Devon Gravel Tempered ware, lead-glazed, after 1500

NDMC: North Devon medieval coarseware, 1200–1450

5. COMMENTS

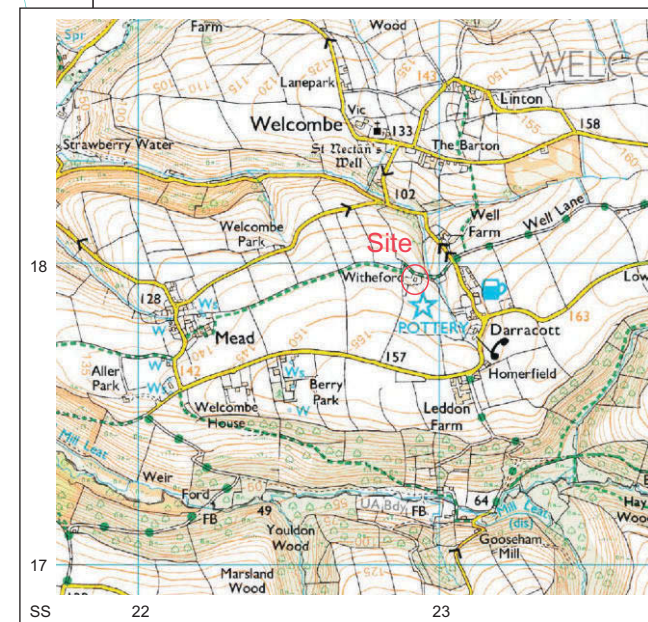
- 5.1** The building remains identified towards the southeast corner of the derelict barn are likely to relate to the former farmhouse, which is depicted on the 1842 tithe map and later historic mapping as being attached to the barn on its east side. Finds recovered from associated features and structures indicate a 19th century date for the building.
- 5.2** The two approximate east-west aligned adjacent linear features (107 and 108) might represent double ditches from a former hedgebank, with a boundary recorded in this approximate location also present on the 1842 tithe and later maps. However, these ditches were c. 5m apart which would have meant an exceptionally wide hedgebank, so it is also possible that one of the ditches might be a later replacement in a slightly different position.
- 5.3** Of most interest is the approximate north-south linear feature F104. The function of this is not certain as it does not relate to any features shown on historic maps. However, it contained a quantity of medieval pottery which can be dated to between 1250 and 1350. The sherds probably represent four vessels, all of which are cooking pots, with the vessels produced in the Bideford/Barnstaple area. The unabraded nature of the sherds does indicate evidence for medieval settlement on the site, although no structural or other remains of this date were identified during the watching brief. This find confirms the historic place name evidence in that a settlement at Witheford is recorded in 1330.
- 5.4** Landscaping proposals which were originally considered as part of development in the area of the medieval feature will not now be undertaken.



6. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

- 6.1** The paper and digital archive and finds are currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. They will be deposited under the accession number NDDMS 2010.49 at the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon. The OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS) number for this project is 84874.

7. REFERENCES

- Allan, J.P., 1994, Medieval pottery and the dating of deserted settlements on Dartmoor, in 'The Archaeology of Dartmoor: Perspectives from the 1990s'. *Proceedings of the Devon Archaeology Society* 52, 141-47
- Dick. A., 2010, *Brief for archaeological monitoring and recording: Witheford, Darracott, Welcombe, Torridge*. DCHES document, ref. Arch/dc/to/16747
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- Ordnance Survey 25-inch Devonshire sheet 27.9, surveyed 1884, published 1886, revised 1904, published 1905
- Valentin, J., 2010, *Land at Witheford, Darracott, Welcombe parish, Devon: Method statement for an archaeological watching brief*. Unpublished AC archaeology document, ref. AC205/1/0



-  Phase 1 ground reduction
-  Phase 2 ground reduction

PROJECT

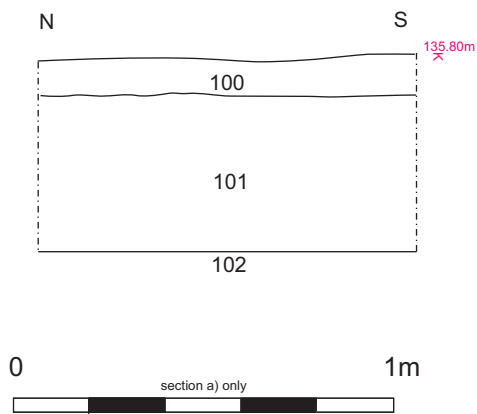
Witheford, Darraclott

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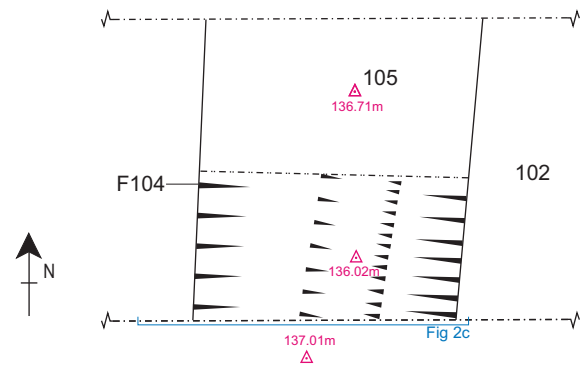
Fig. 1:
Site location and areas of
watching brief



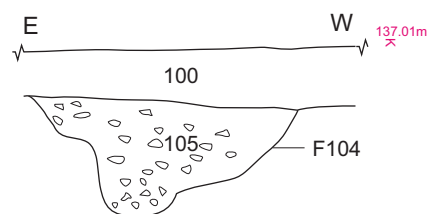
a) Representative section



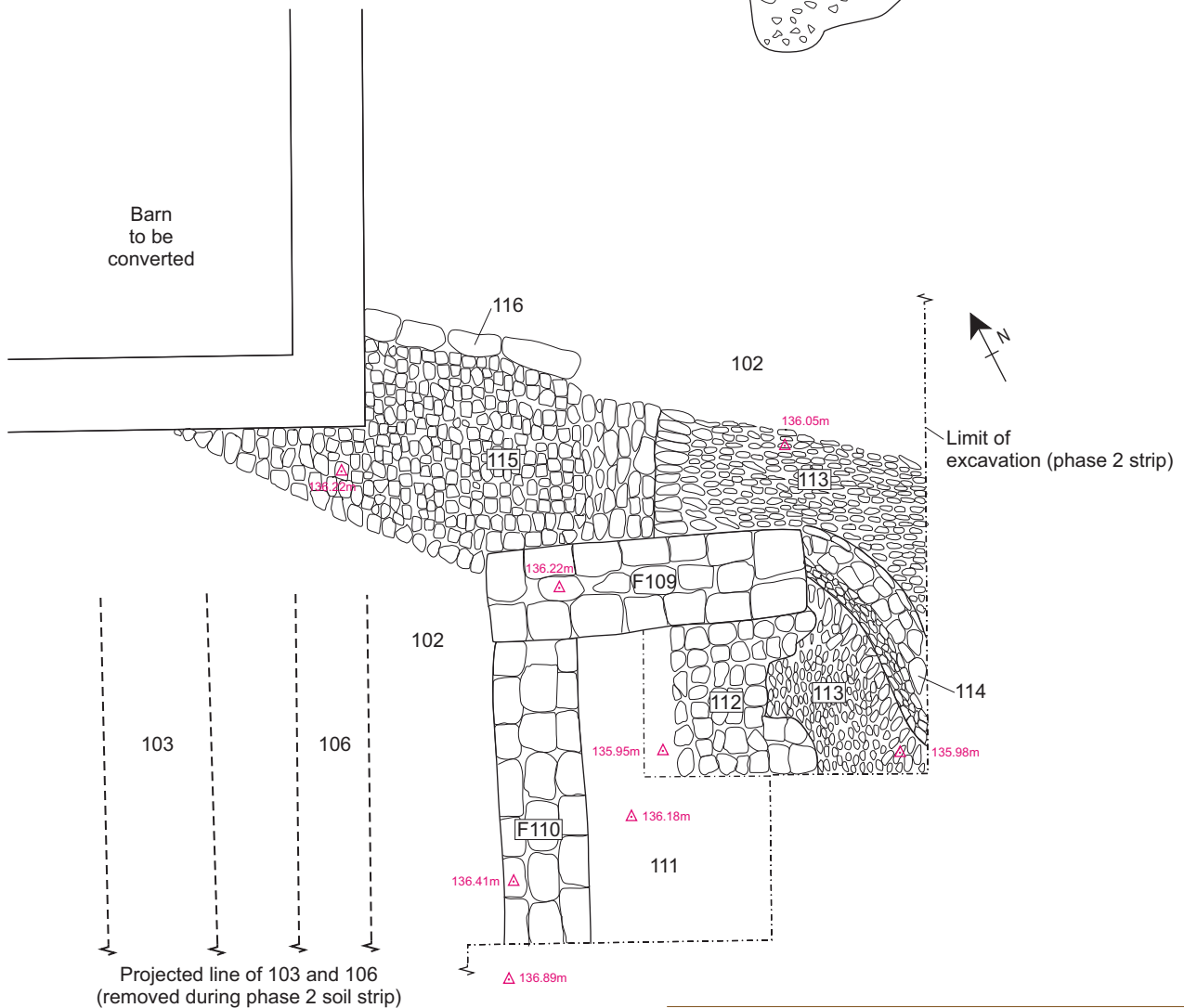
b) Plan F104



c) Section F104



d) Plan



PROJECT

Witthford, Darracott

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Fig. 2: Plans and sections



Plate 1: General view of site, facing northeast



Plate 2: Section of ditch F104, facing south (scale 1m)



Plate 3: General view of walls F109 and F110 with associated cobbled surfaces, facing north (scale 1m)



Plate 4:
North-south aligned trench,
part of Phase 1 ground reduction,
facing north (scale 1m)



Plate 4: Selection of medieval pottery recovered from ditch F104 (context 105)

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