

Land at Holt Ball Farm, Luccombe, Somerset

Centred on NGR SS91 80243972

Results of archaeological investigations

Prepared by:
Christopher Caine

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AC archaeology

LAND AT HOLT BALL FARM, LUCCOMBE, SOMERSET (SS9180243972):

RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

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Summary

An archaeological trial pit excavation and watching brief on land at Holt Ball Farm, Luccombe, Somerset (SS9180243972), was undertaken by AC archaeology between August and November 2009. The site is located immediately to the east of the present farm complex, which comprises an arrangement of buildings around a central courtyard, possibly dating to the 16th century or earlier.

The investigations comprised the hand-excavation of two 0.60m² trial pits at the back/east side of the granary, followed by a watching brief during ground reduction for a new barn, access tracks and spoil heap area. Other than a few natural tree throws and a small quantity of 19th century pottery, no evidence for archaeological activity was identified.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 An archaeological trial pit excavation and watching brief carried out prior to and during groundworks associated with the construction of a new farm building at Holt Ball Farm, Luccombe, Somerset, was undertaken by AC archaeology between August and November 2009. The work was required by Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) as a condition of planning permission (ref. 6/19/08/103) and was undertaken on behalf of the National Trust.

1.2 The new barn is located immediately to the east of the present farm complex, which comprises an arrangement of buildings around a central courtyard. The farm itself probably dates to as early as the 16th century. The site lies at around 120m OD and the underlying solid geology is Luccombe Breccia over Hangman Sandstone.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The present farmhouse and some of the outbuildings at Holt Ball Farm contain structural elements dating to as early as the 16th century. The complex could potentially be located on an earlier, possibly medieval farm.

2.2 The new barn is located immediately to the east of the main farmstead and straddles a now removed field boundary as shown on the 1841 Luccombe parish tithe map. The two fields were called 'Stoney Piece' and 'Long Close'. Both were under arable cultivation at this time, as described in the accompanying apportionment of 1840. The present granary building was sited within a small enclosure, described as 'Barn and Mow Plot'. The owner of all holdings was Sir Thomas Dyke Acland and the occupier John Ridler.

2.3 By 1888 the Ordnance Survey 25-inch map of the area shows that the boundary of the small enclosure next the granary had been removed by this date. Other than the presence of a small extension to one of the farm outbuildings, there are no further changes shown between 1888 and 1927.

3. AIMS

3.1 The aim of the test pit excavation was to establish the depth of the granary foundation, and the presence/absence of any earlier structural/archaeological evidence. The main aim of the watching brief was to establish the presence or absence, extent, depth, character and date of any archaeological features, deposits or finds within the site.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The test pits and watching brief were undertaken in accordance with a method statement prepared by AC archaeology (Valentin 2009), submitted to and approved by ENPA prior to commencement on site, as well as with reference to the Exmoor National Park Authority document *The conduct of archaeological work and historic building recording within Exmoor National Park* (n.d.)
- 4.2 The excavation of test pits against the granary wall was undertaken by hand with these each 0.60m x 0.60m in plan. Excavations for the watching brief were undertaken by a mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless grading bucket and working under constant archaeological supervision.
- 4.3 The test pits and archaeological features identified in the watching brief were hand cleaned, excavated and 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 1*. Sections were drawn at 1:10 and plans at 1:50. All levels, where possible, have been related to Ordnance Datum.

5. RESULTS

5.1 The test pits

Two 0.60m by 0.60m test pits were excavated at the NE and SE corner of the eastern granary wall building on 26 August 2009 (Plate 1). The test pits were excavated to a depth of between 0.44-0.54m below ground level. The layer sequence exposed consisted of 0.10m of topsoil, over between 0.34-0.44m of stony subsoil onto natural subsoil. The depth of the granary foundation was recorded at around 0.36-0.40m below ground surface and the structure appears to have been built directly onto the stony subsoil layer.

Table 1. Test Pit 1 (NE corner of granary; Fig. 3b and Plate 1)

Context	Depth (m)	Description	Interpretation
100/101	0.36	Stone wall foundation of large sub-angular blocks 0.15-0.25m long by 0.05-0.10m thick. Stones are a mix of limestone, sandstone and local breccia with a mortar bonding	Granary wall foundations
102	0.10	Mid brown soft sand silt clay with moderate small-medium sub-angular stones <0.05m	Topsoil
103	0.44	Dark brown soft sand silt clay with common small-medium sub-angular stones <0.05m and frequent stones >0.05m. A stony subsoil.	Subsoil
104	-	Mid brownish-red firm clay with frequent/common medium-large sub-angular stones >0.05m	Natural subsoil

Table 2. Test Pit 2 (SE corner of granary)

Context	Depth (m)	Description	Interpretation
200/201	0.40m	As 100/101 above	Granary wall foundation
202	0.10	As 102 above	Topsoil
203	0.34	As 203 above	Subsoil
204	-	As 104 above	Natural subsoil

There was no evidence of any earlier structures or other *in situ* archaeological features/deposits within either test pit. No finds were recovered.

5.2 The watching brief

The watching brief was undertaken for excavations for the new barn, during topsoil removal for the creation of a spoil heap and for a connecting access track (Fig. 1). In all areas natural subsoil comprised a light brownish-red silty clay (301), present at depths of between 0.50m and 0.55m below ground level. The natural clays were directly below a 0.38m to 0.45m thick layer of dark brown sandy silt subsoil (302), which was below a 0.10m to 0.12m thick layer of mid brown sandy silt topsoil (300).

Topsoil stripping on the site of the new barn (Fig. 2 & Plate 4) and access tracks revealed no evidence for archaeological activity, other than a few industrial white ware pottery fragments (not retained).

The area stripped of topsoil for the new spoil heap (Fig. 3a) was located in a field across Holt Ball Steep road from the entrance to Holt Ball farm. The soil strip revealed a small number of features, which were either naturally-formed (304, 307 and 311) or undated (312). A large hollow on the west side of the stripped area (313) had been naturally infilled with colluvial soils containing charcoal (Plate 3).

The natural features uncovered were tree throws (Plate 2), with the probability that they were burnt out due to the presence of large quantities of charcoal. The sides were irregular, moderate to shallow sloping with frequent tree root channels leading off in all directions and some larger channels had charcoal in them, indicating they were contemporary with the tree removal or burning.

Feature 312 was located on the southern edge of the site and contained large quantities of charcoal. It was also a possible tree throw as it was shallow-sloping and the edges were uneven, but it had no tree root channels extending from it. No finds were recovered.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The excavation of test pits against the granary wall revealed no evidence for earlier structures or any other archaeological features or finds.

6.2 The watching brief has established that there is only limited evidence for archaeological activity in the areas investigated. A small number of natural tree throws were present in the spoil heap area, with only a handful of 19th century and later finds recorded in the position of the new barn. Despite the proximity of the areas investigated to an early farmstead, it appears that the fields are likely to have been farmland since at least the 16th century and possibly before.

7. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

7.1 The paper and digital archive are currently held at the offices of AC archaeology, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. It will be deposited at Somerset Heritage Centre under the accession number 177.2009.

7.2 The OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS) number for this project is 89941.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The evaluation was commissioned by Martin Papworth and Neil Johnson on behalf of The National Trust. The site investigations were undertaken by Richard Sims, Christopher Caine and Kerry Dean and the illustrations for this report were prepared by Cain Hegarty.

9. SOURCES CONSULTED

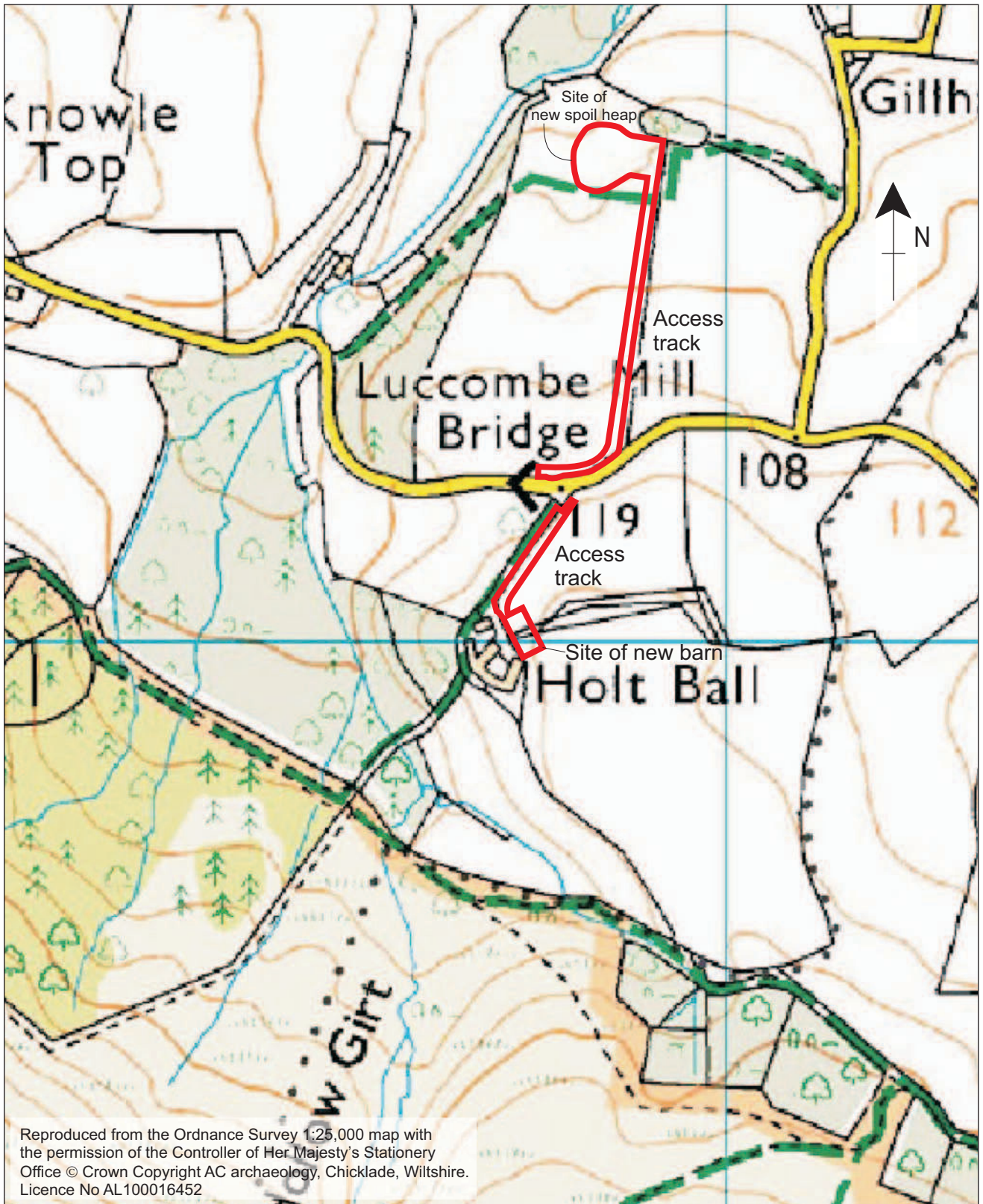
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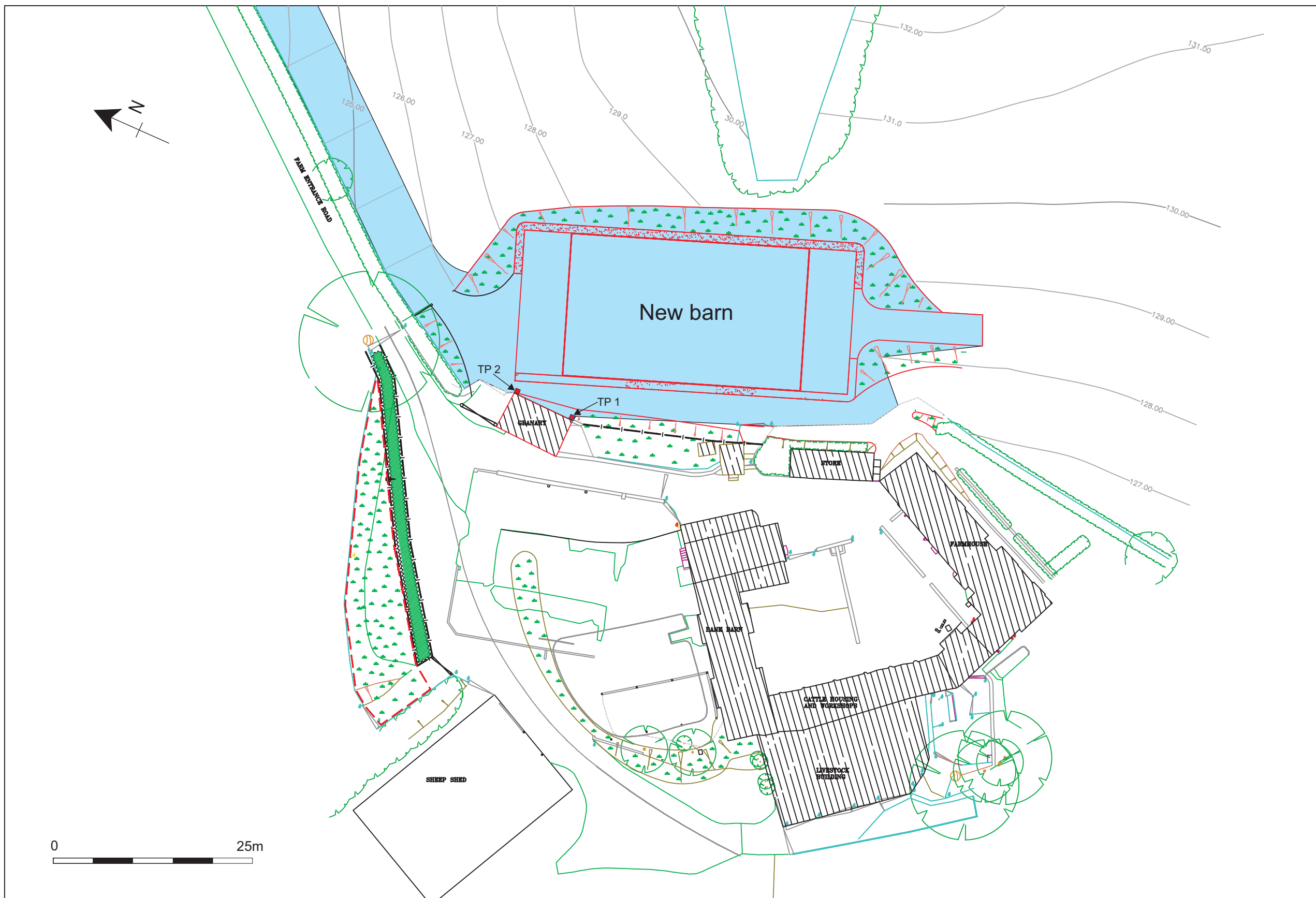
Areas monitored

Holt Ball Farm, Luccombe



Fig. 1 Location plan showing areas monitored



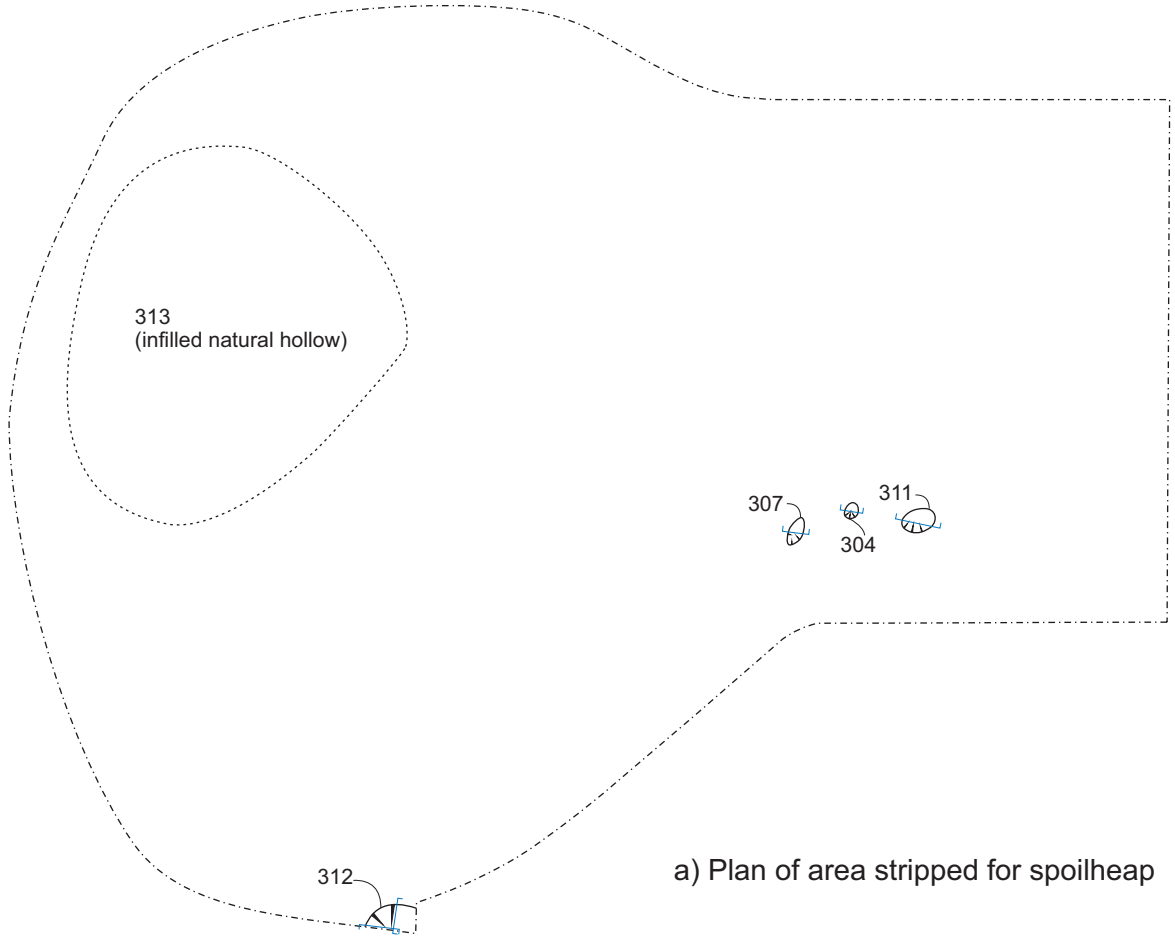


Area Monitored
 TP 2 Test Pit

Holt Ball Farm, Luccombe

Fig. 2 Area monitored for new barn, and location of test-pits





a) Plan of area stripped for spoilheap

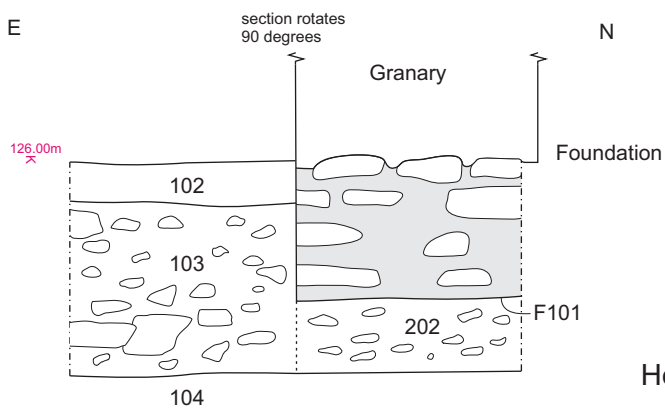
0 Plan 25m



0 Section 1m



b) Section of Test Pit 1



Holt Ball Farm, Luccombe

Fig. 3 Relevant plans and sections





Plate 1: Detail of Test Pit 1, north facing section (scale 0.5m)

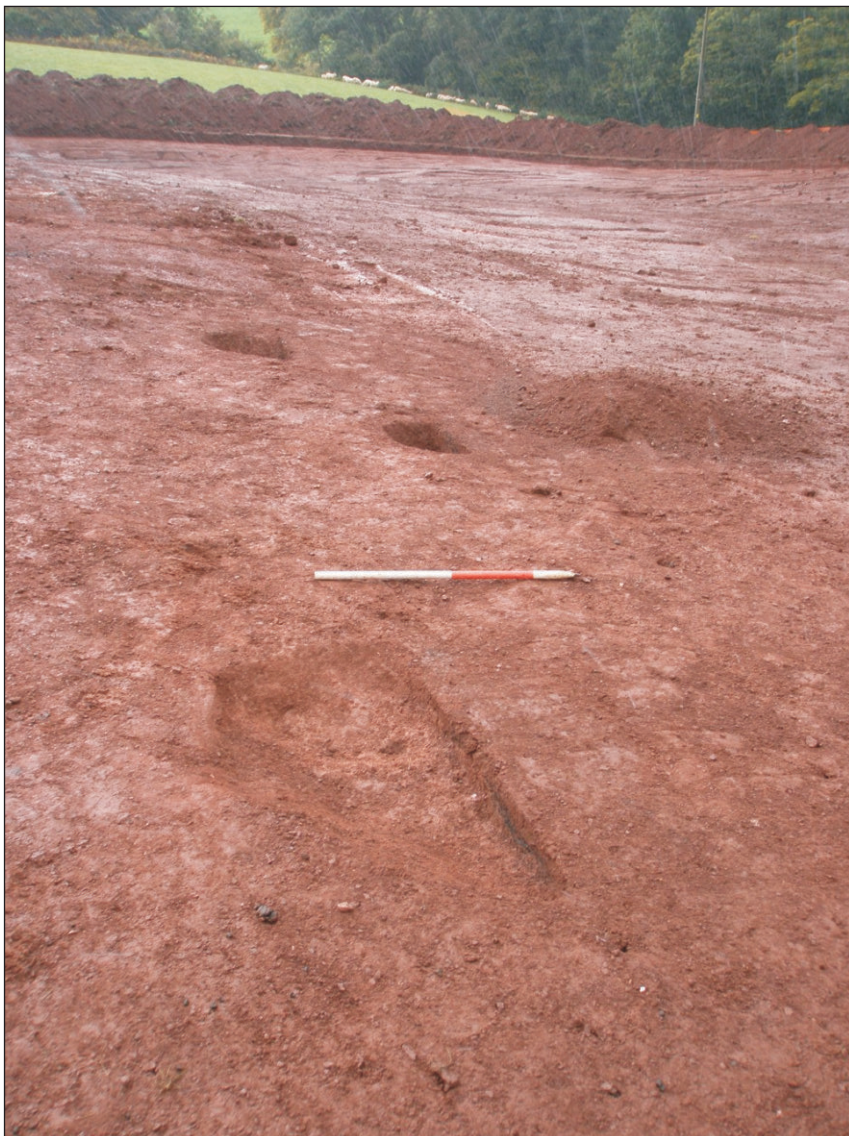


Plate 2: View of tree throws 304, 307 and 311 looking to the south (scale 1m)





Plate 3: View of infilled hollow 313, looking to northeast (scale 1m)



Plate 4: Soil stripping for the new barn, view to west

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

Telephone: 01747 820581
Fax: 01747 820440

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

Telephone/Fax: 01392 882410