

B0405 Wood Hill, Charlton Down, Dorchester, Dorset.

Archaeological Field Evaluation in Support of a Planning Application: Impact Statement



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**Archaeological Field Evaluation in Support of a Planning Application:
Impact Statement**

for

Wessex Water plc

by



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COAS reference: C1/EVA/13/WHD
West Dorset District Council planning reference: n/a
National Grid Reference: centred on SY 67960 94090
Wessex Water plc scheme reference: B0405
Dorset Historic Environment Record no: TBA
Dorset County Museums Service Accession Number: TBA
OASIS reference: TBA

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November 2013

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Non-technical summary

Context One Archaeological Services Ltd (COAS) carried out an archaeological evaluation at Wood Hill, Charlton Down, Dorchester, Dorset in September 2013. The project was commissioned and funded by Wessex Water plc under a Term Agreement with COAS.

The evaluation was requested by Mr Steve Wallis (Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council) in support of a planning application relating to the construction of a new water supply balance tank on the Site.

The Site was considered to be of high archaeological potential. Occupying high ground overlooking the Cerne valley, a number of extant and buried prehistoric round barrows are located within the environs of the Site, one of which enjoys statutory protection as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Other sites in Dorset in similar locales are known to include settlements and field systems.

The evaluation was preceded by a geophysical survey undertaken by Stratascan in March 2013 and this identified a number of 'probable' and 'possible' archaeological features. These appeared consistent with a pattern of prehistoric activity including a possible round barrow, ditches, pits, pit clusters and ponds or sand pits.

The evaluation comprised 16 trenches and these were positioned to target the geophysical anomalies and 'blank' areas to serve as controls. Eight of the trenches produced definitive archaeological evidence and this included two walls; 6 ditches; a pit; a large pit/pond; and evidence of ridge and furrow cultivation. Surprisingly, evidence for early prehistoric activity was modest, most of the features being ascribed to the Late Iron through to the Romano-British periods. Notably, this included the foundation for a possible Roman watch tower and a Roman barn or low status agricultural dwelling. No Roman activity has previously been recorded in the environs.

A programme of mitigation combining 'strip, map, record' and archaeological monitoring is proposed should the development go ahead and where it impacts these heritage assets.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Context One Archaeological Services Ltd (COAS) carried out an archaeological evaluation at Wood Hill, Charlton Down, Dorchester, Dorset (the 'Site'), over 7 days between 9-17 September 2013. The project was commissioned and funded by Wessex Water plc under a Term Agreement with COAS.
- 1.2 The evaluation was requested by Mr Steve Wallis (Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council) in support of a planning application relating to the construction of a new water supply balance tank on the Site. The request followed advice by Central Government as set out in paragraph 141 of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012).
- 1.3 In a consultation e-mail response to Wessex Water Mr Wallis stated:

"The site of the proposed balance tank at Wood Hill, Charminster was initially identified as having high archaeological potential. It occupies relatively level ground in a prominent location overlooking the valley of the river Cerne. Similar locations further up the valley are occupied by prehistoric settlements, field systems and round barrows, and there are several of the latter on Wood Hill, one of which is protected as a Scheduled Monument.

Wessex Water initially commissioned a geophysical survey of the site of the proposed development. This exercise, undertaken by Stratascan, identified a number of potential archaeological features, notably a curvilinear feature that suggests the presence of another barrow, as well as ditches and others of a less certain origin.

The excavation of trial trenches will be the next phase of the evaluation of this site. It is intended to ground-truth the results of the geophysical survey by sample excavation of some of the features identified in that survey and by looking at other areas to act as a control on those results."

- 1.4 The programme of archaeological works comprised four elements: the production of a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) which set out the project strategy; field evaluation through trial trenching; limited post-excavation work; and impact statement production. The WSI was approved by Mr Wallis on 22 August 2013 prior to the commencement of any Site works.

2. Site location, topography and geology

- 2.1 The Site (centred on NGR SY 67960 94090) formed part of a study area covering 4.1 hectares and is located c. 1.6km to the north of Charminster and 0.7km south of Charlton Down (**Figure 1**). The Site occupied two fields, both under crop stubble at the time of the evaluation. The western field slopes steeply from east to west and the eastern field slopes from north to south. The proposed location of the new supply tank occupies a plateau adjacent to Wood Hill Clump at a height of c. 120m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The underlying geology is Spetisbury Chalk Member and the drift geology is Clay with Flints Formation - Clay, Silt, Sand, and Gravel (British Geological Survey website).

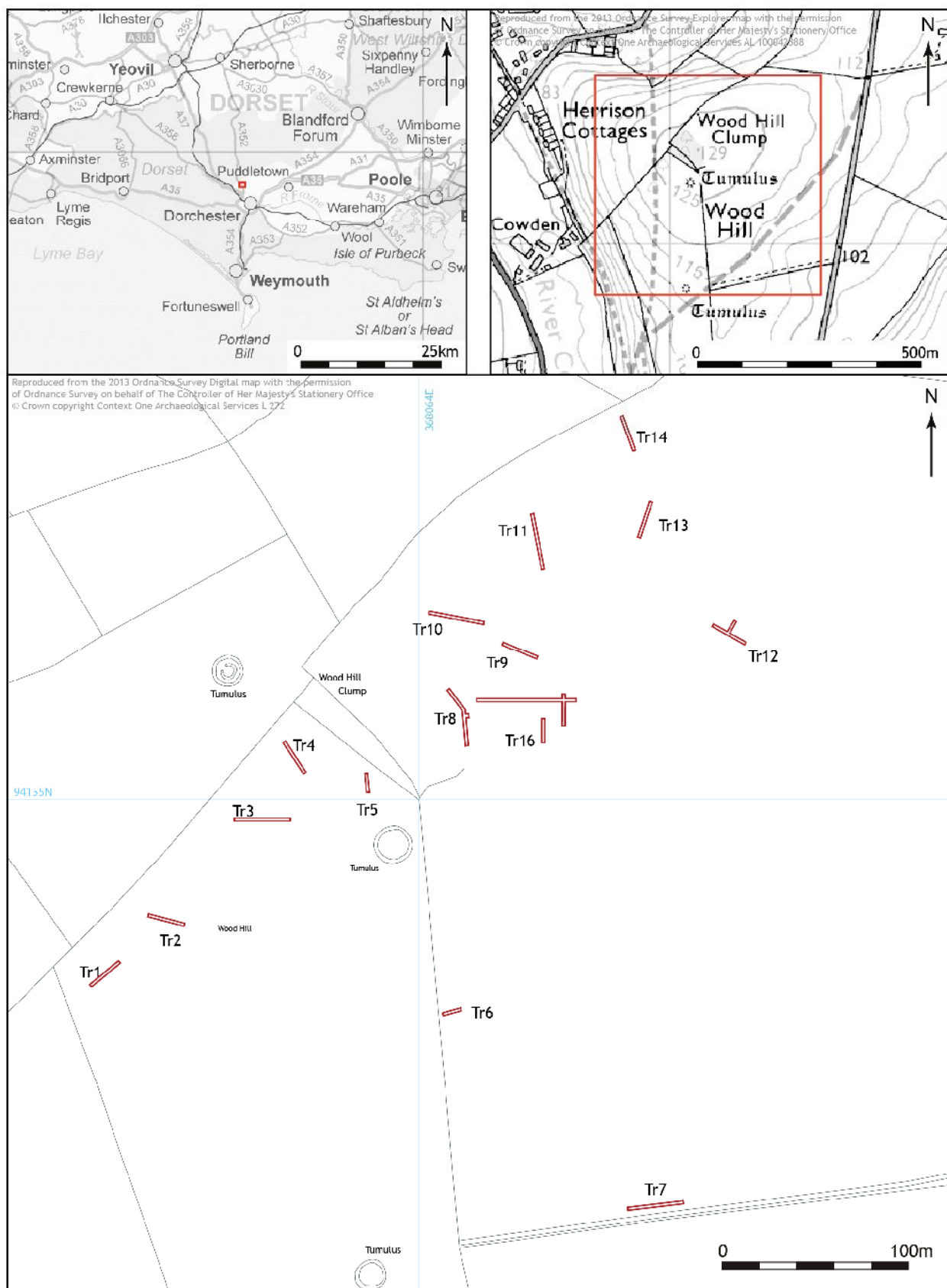


Figure 1. Site setting and location of evaluation trenches

3. Methodology

Archaeological methodology

- 3.1 The programme of archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the codes, standards and guidelines set out by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA 1985, rev. 2012; 1990, rev. 2008; 1994, rev. 2001). Current Health and Safety legislation and guidelines were followed on site.
- 3.2 The evaluation initially comprised c. 330m of trenching, divided down into 15 trenches of variable length (10m, 20m, 30m, and 50m) equating to c. 1.3% sample of the Site (**Figures 1, 2**). The trenches were positioned to target ‘probable’ and ‘possible’ archaeological features identified during a recent geophysical survey carried out by Stratscan (2013), as well as ‘blank’ areas to serve as controls. The geophysical anomalies were thought to represent features including a possible round barrow, ditches, pits, pit clusters and ponds or sand pits.

However, archaeological evidence encountered in Trenches 8, 12 and 15 required further characterisation and were extended. A sixteenth trench, measuring 13m long, was excavated to establish the extent of features encountered in Trench 8. Trenches 1-15 were laid out using a TopCon GRS-1 Global Positioning System pre-loaded with Ordnance Survey grid co-ordinates derived from the Method Statement trench plan and Trench 16 was recorded by GPS once excavated.
- 3.3 A JCB machine fitted with a 1.5m wide toothless grading bucket was used to remove topsoil/ploughsoil and continued until archaeological features or natural geology was encountered, whichever was first.
- 3.4 In the absence of archaeological features and deposits, one long face of each trench was cleaned by hand to define the sequence of deposits. A representative section was then recorded using COAS *pro forma* evaluation trench sheets. A digital photograph was also taken of each section as well as the long axis of each trench. All photographs included an appropriate scale.
- 3.5 Any archaeological remains encountered were sampled by manual excavation to establish stratigraphic relationships, recover sufficient artefacts to establish ‘absolute’ dates, determine feature/deposit morphology and character, and to recover any palaeoenvironmental indicators. All features/deposits were recorded using standard COAS *pro-forma* recording sheets. Stratigraphic relationships were recorded using a “Harris-Winchester matrix” diagram. Soil colours were logged using a Munsell soil colour chart. The location, extent and altitude of archaeological features and deposits were mapped relative to the National Grid and Ordnance Datum using a TopCon GRS-1 Global Positioning System. A photographic record was made of individual features as well as working shots to illustrate the nature of the archaeological operation mounted
- 3.6 Upon completion of the evaluation, all trenches were backfilled by machine and compacted.

4. Results

- 4.1 The evaluation was predominantly carried out during a spell of dry weather. None of the trenches encountered rising groundwater.
- 4.2 In the text, context numbers appear in standard brackets, e.g. (1002) and feature cuts appear as square brackets, e.g. [1001].
- 4.3 No archaeological remains were encountered in trenches 1, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 14. The remaining 8 trenches (2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 15 and 16) produced definitive archaeological evidence (**Figure 2**) and this included two walls (Trench 15); 6 ditch sections (Trenches 2, 8, 10, 12, 15 and 16); a pit (Trench 8); a large pit/pond (Trench 12) and evidence of ridge and furrow cultivation in Trenches 3 and 4. Of particular interest are the walls, ditches, pit and pond/pit.

4.4 Walls

Trench 15: An area covering an estimated 12m x 4m comprising compacted flint nodules pressed into clay (1508), (1509) and (1510) with a discernible concentration of flint marking the northern and southern extents suggestive of outer walls, particularly (1510) (**Plate 2**). A possible foundation cut [1507] was identified on the western edge at the northern end of this area of activity. Sample excavation produced a range of mostly Romano-British pottery in the overlying deposit (1506) with contemporary pottery fragments from one of the possible outer walls (1510).

4.5 Ditches

Trench 2: A section of a ditch [204] running roughly north-south with a convex profile and rounded base. Measuring 0.60m wide and 0.60m deep, the ditch included a single fill (203). No finds were recovered.

Trench 8: A large ditch [808] oriented east-west measuring 3.60m wide at the surface and 2.0m at its deepest (**Plate 1**). With a convex profile that sharply sloped to a tapering flat base, the ditch comprised seven distinctive fills (809-815) that suggested gradual infilling. Pottery recovered from fills (809) (primary fill), (811) and (815) (late re-cut) indicate an exclusively Late Iron Age Romano-British date.

Trench 10: An undated, narrow linear [1002], possibly a ditch, running roughly north-south encountered towards the northern end of the trench. Unexcavated.

Trench 12: A narrow section of ditch [1205] aligned roughly north-south near the south-eastern end of the trench. Comprising a single fill (1204) with Romano-British pottery sherds dating to the 1st-2nd century AD.

Trench 15: An undated, narrow linear [1511] with a single fill (1503), possibly a ditch, running roughly north-south encountered towards the western end of the trench. Unexcavated.

Trench 16: A very wide cut feature [1603] conjectured to be a possible large ditch but not excavated. Oriented approximately west-east, the upper fill spread (1604) measured c. 8m across and exposed fragments of Middle Bronze Age pottery.

4.6 Pit

Trench 8: A pit [803] with convex sides and rounded base. The pit measured 1.20m wide and a maximum of 0.60m deep. Comprising four distinctive fills (804-807), the predominant fill (805) contained fragments of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery.

4.7 Pit/Pond

Trench 12: A large cut feature [1208], possibly a pond or very large pit measuring c. 5.5m in diameter. The exposed fill (1204) was sample excavated and produced a number of 2nd to 3rd century AD Romano-British pottery sherds and a copper alloy ring.

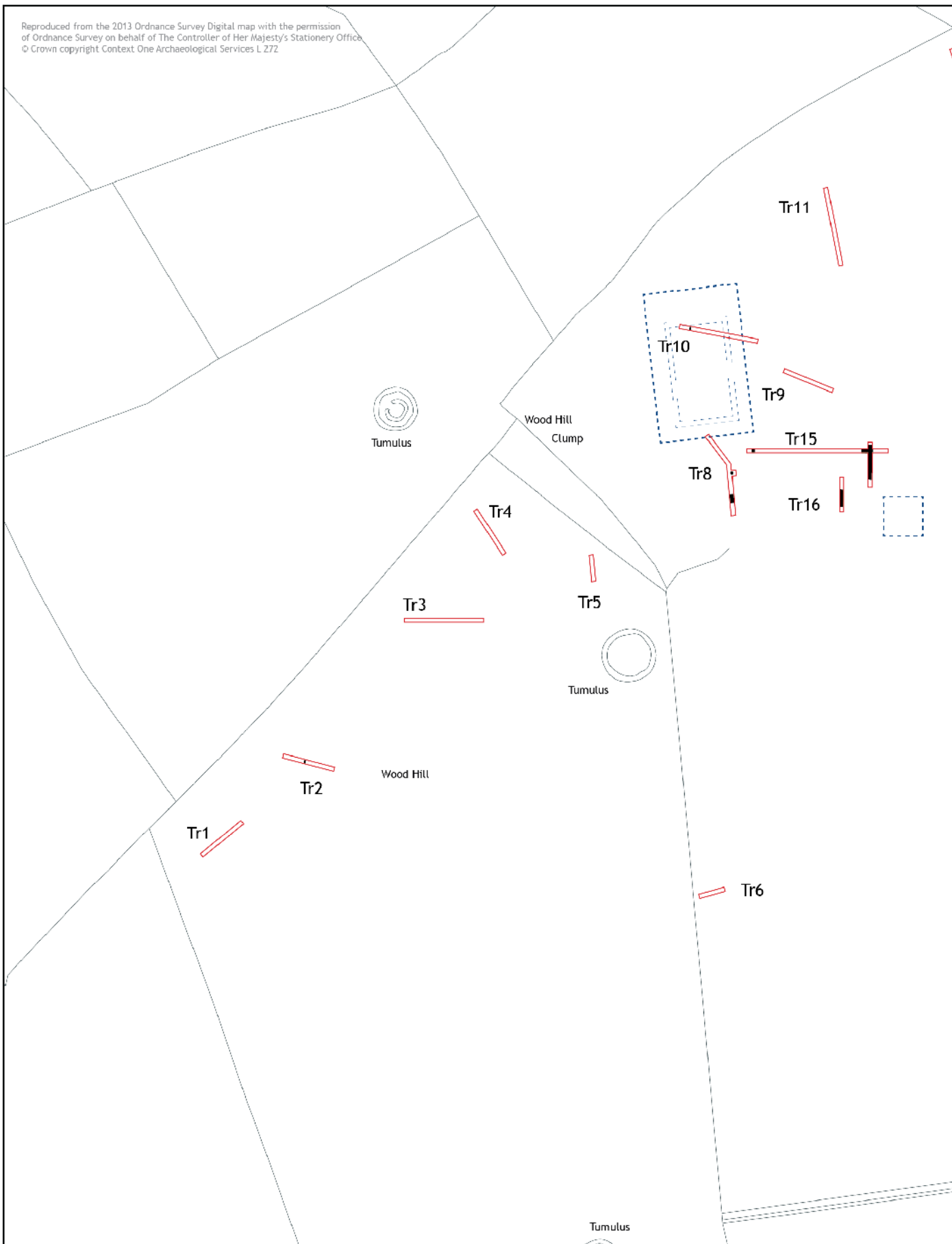


Figure 2. Trench plan showing locations of archaeological features

Wood Hill, Charlton Down, Dorchester, Dorset.



Plate 1. Roman ditch [808] in Trench 8 (from W; 2m scale)



Plate 2. Trench 15 and conjectured area of Roman building (aerial view from S; no scale)

5. The finds

- 5.1 Selective finds recovered from the evaluation were washed and set aside to assist the spot dating of key features/deposits. A total of 13 artefacts, all pottery sherds were used for dating purposes and these represented a possible globular urn with incised decoration dating to the Middle Bronze Age; a bowl and lug from the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age; Late Iron Age/Romano-British pot rims; and dog dishes and New Forest Ware rims and body sherds.
- 5.2 A metal detecting survey of the evaluation spoil heaps and trenches yielded good results including coins, brooch fragments, a possible knife, a horse/ox shoe and various iron objects.
- 5.3 A number of more recent artefacts such as post-medieval and modern mass-produced pottery, brick, tile and slate were noted in the ploughsoil/subsoil and identified as refuse manuring. None of this material was unusual or distinctive and was not collected.

6. Discussion

- 6.1 The geophysical survey indicated a number of possible archaeological features and the interpretation of these was entirely consistent with a known prehistoric landscape combining both extant and buried funerary monuments and settlement activity. Whilst evidence of Middle to Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age material was encountered in the evaluation either as residual material or within features, notably a pit and possible large ditch, it was evidence of Late Iron Age and Roman occupation that dominates here and is previously unrecorded (**Figure 3**).
- 6.2 This includes two confirmed ditches, a possible building and a pond or large pit. Dating evidence indicates a prolonged chronology of use from the Late Iron Age (1st century BC) to the 2nd/3rd century AD although there is insufficient proof to postulate whether the Site was continuously used during this period. The ditches are likely to relate to boundary divisions although the excavator of the large ditch [808] speculated whether this feature might actually represent part of a large foundation pit to support the foot of a wooden watch tower or similar structure. Topographically speaking, the location would be suitable and there are other examples of such remains elsewhere in Dorset. It is possible that the three undated ditches [204], [1002], [1511] are also Late Iron Age/Roman as they share broad similarities with dated ditch [1205] including orientation and width. The possible building of Roman date is of some interest despite the finds suggesting a relatively low status, perhaps a modest farmstead or barn. It is unlikely that this exists in isolation of other, similar occupation remains, particularly as dateable material from the ditches indicate a lengthy span of settlement here. The evaluation may have found evidence of one such associated feature in the form a pond [1205] or large pit.
- 6.3 Given the presence of archaeological remains and material spanning the Early Bronze Age to Roman periods, the features encountered during the evaluation will be impacted where their locations coincide with the position of the proposed reservoir and infrastructure works. On average, all the features survive directly below the ploughsoil and subsoil horizons at depths between 0.30m-0.50m below the ground surface and would be vulnerable to impact below these levels. Any development excavations beyond this depth would necessitate mitigation works, possibly a programme of 'strip, map and record' over the area of the reservoir and compound/working areas (if applicable) and monitoring and recording during construction of the access track and pipe laying. Consideration should also be given to a full metal detecting survey during any such works as a similar survey during the evaluation recovered a notable complement of artefacts.

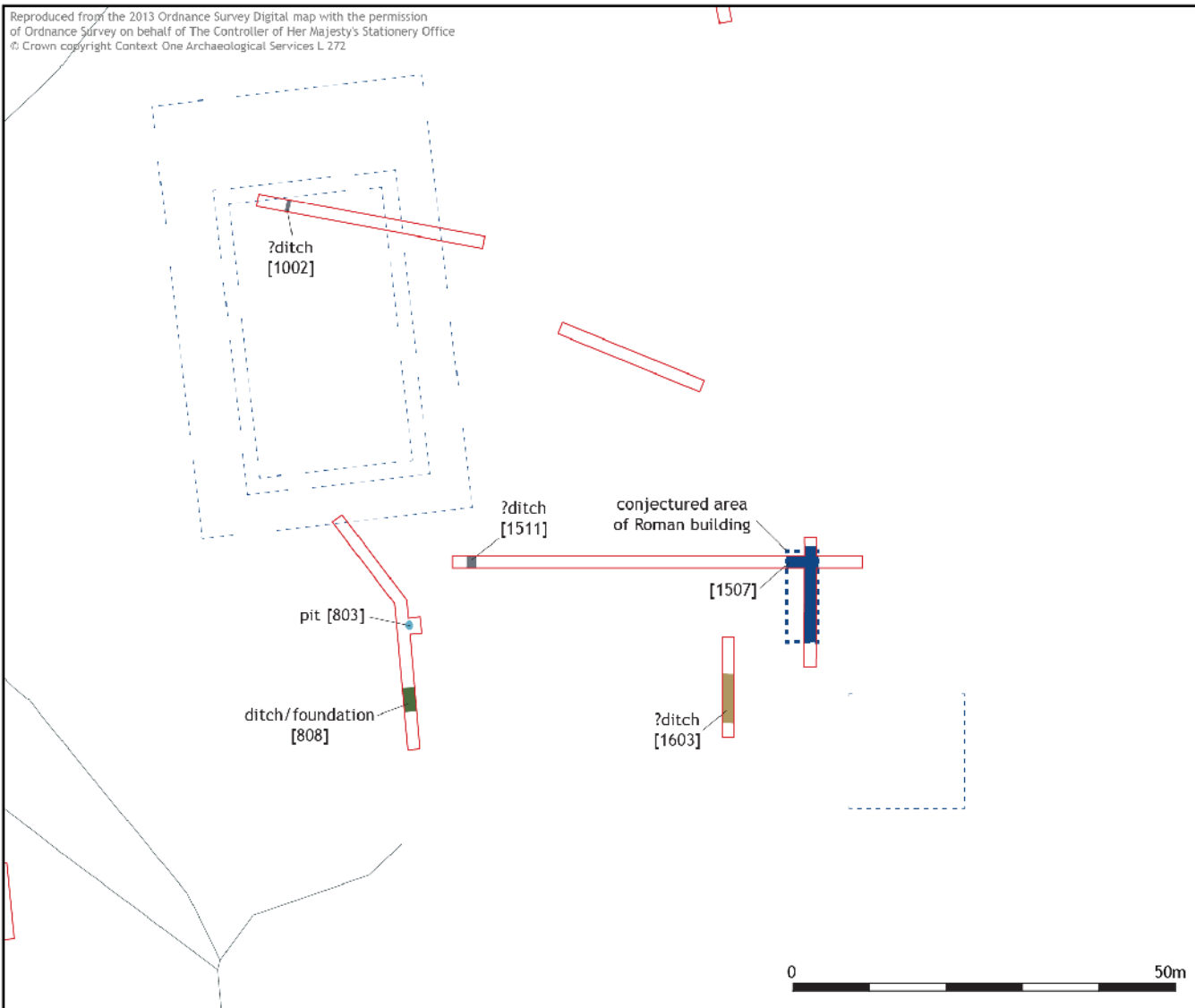


Figure 3. Trench plan showing interpretation and phasing of archaeological features

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive is currently held by COAS and consists of the following:

Item	Number	Format
Evaluation trench sheets	15	Paper
Context sheets	22	Paper
Context summary	1	Paper
Feature summary	1	Paper
Site sketch plan	1	Paper
Metal detecting finds register	1	Paper
Drawings (on 5 no. permatrace sheets)	7	Permatrace
Graphics register	1	Paper
Photographic register	1	Paper
Digital images	78	.JPG

7.2 The paper archive has been scanned as a single file in .PDF format and will form part of the physical Site archive to be deposited with Dorset County Museum. The finds will be temporarily stored at the offices of Context One. It is anticipated that these will be combined with any additional artefacts/ecofacts recovered from any further phases of archaeological mitigation works and deposited as a single assemblage with Dorset County Museum, subject to their agreement and prevailing deposition guidelines.

7.3 Copies of this report will be deposited with the client and included as part of the Dorset Historic Environment Record.

8. COAS acknowledgements

8.1 We would like to thank the following for their contribution to the successful completion of this project:

Phillip Martin & Anne-Marie Mackin, Environmental Services, Wessex Water plc
 Steve Wallis, Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council
 Rachel Hall, freelance pottery specialist

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