JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

SHARPRIDGE FARM, ROCKLEY, MARLBOROUGH

SU 141 747

On behalf of

Davies Light Associates

AUGUST 2006

REPORT FOR Davies Light Associates
The Old Bakehouse
21 The Street
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Near Swindon
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FIELDWORK 15th August – 16th August 2006

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Summary

An evaluation of proposed development site was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services from 15th – 16th August 2006. Five trenches, totalling 150 metres in length, were excavated to reveal the underlying natural geology at a maximum height of 197.19m.

Numerous sub-soil features were recorded in all trenches, including a possible Bronze Age pit. The other features remain undated. These include a series of small parallel ditches with the remains of an associated bank. A large flat based ditch again with the remnant of a bank. Two small ditches with adjacent postholes were reminiscent of domestic structures of the region.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location *(Figure 1)*

The site is located in north-eastern Wiltshire in the Kennet District, in the northern part of the parish of Preshute. The proposed development area lies on Sharpridge Farm within the Barbury Castle Estate on Preshute Down, where it is centred on National Grid Reference SU 141 747. The site encompasses the existing buildings of a former dairy and two small plots of land immediately to the south-east.

The application site is situated on the northern-western fringes of the Marlborough Downs close to the escarpments overlooking Swindon to the north and the upper reaches of the Kennet Valley to the west. This part of the downland landscape is characterised by a series of south-east facing coombes divided by steep ridges. The proposed development area lies towards the head of one of these dry valleys at a height of approximately 199 metres above Ordnance Datum (AOD). This coombe continues to the south-east as Dean Bottom, falling gradually downwards to the River Og between Ogbourne Maizey and Marlborough at 130 metres AOD. On all other sides the land rises steeply from the existing dairy buildings to between 250 and 270 metres AOD on Sharpridge to the north-east, Wick Down to the south-west and Hackpen Hill and the Ridgeway to the north-west.

1.2 Planning Background

A planning application for the erection of a proposed owner/manager dwelling, isolated boxes, office and associated garaging at Sharpridge Farm has been submitted. Two log cabins, that are temporary structures, have been erected and granted temporary planning permission. Due to the archaeological potential of the area an archaeological desk-based assessment of the site has been carried out. This has been followed with an archaeological evaluation of the site prior to the determination of the planning application. This is in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan Policies.

1.3 Archaeological Background

A desk based assessment of the site has been carried out (JMHS 2005). This concluded that the site lies within an archaeologically sensitive area with the potential for the occurrence of remains varying with the period under consideration. It was

concluded that there was little possibility that a significant site of Mesolithic or Neolithic date would be encountered within the proposal site. By contrast, the local distribution of Beaker pottery includes a wider scatter encompassing the proposed development site (*ibid*, Figure 2, 6-9). Along with the two barbed and tanged arrowheads found nearby (*ibid*, Figure 2, 2 and 18) the finds may well relate to contemporary activity.

The potential for later prehistoric remains in the area was considered as high. Aerial photographs and old maps show part of an extensive prehistoric field system extending across the site. Earthworks and some sarsen clearance cairns are shown on a 1938 aerial photograph. A dewpond is also visible along with a small and somewhat faint area of subtle earthworks immediately to the west of the dewpond. However these are now outside the area of proposed impact. An aerial photograph of 1973 shows two curvilinear crop marks (*ibid*, 21-2). It is considered possible that a Bronze Age settlement lies in the vicinity of the application area.

Although a sherd of Roman pottery has been located immediately adjacent to the site the potential for a settlement of this date is considered to be very low (*ibid,* 32). Part of the field systems could be of Iron Age or Roman date. There is no indication that any remains of medieval or post-medieval date, other than the dewpond, will be found on the site. The dewpond lying on the edge of the application area is considered to be of 18th or 19th century origin although it may be earlier.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

In particular

- To establish whether there is any prehistoric settlement within the application area.
- To attempt to date the field system(s).

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In response to a *Brief* issued by Wiltshire County Archaeological Service a scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with the Wiltshire County

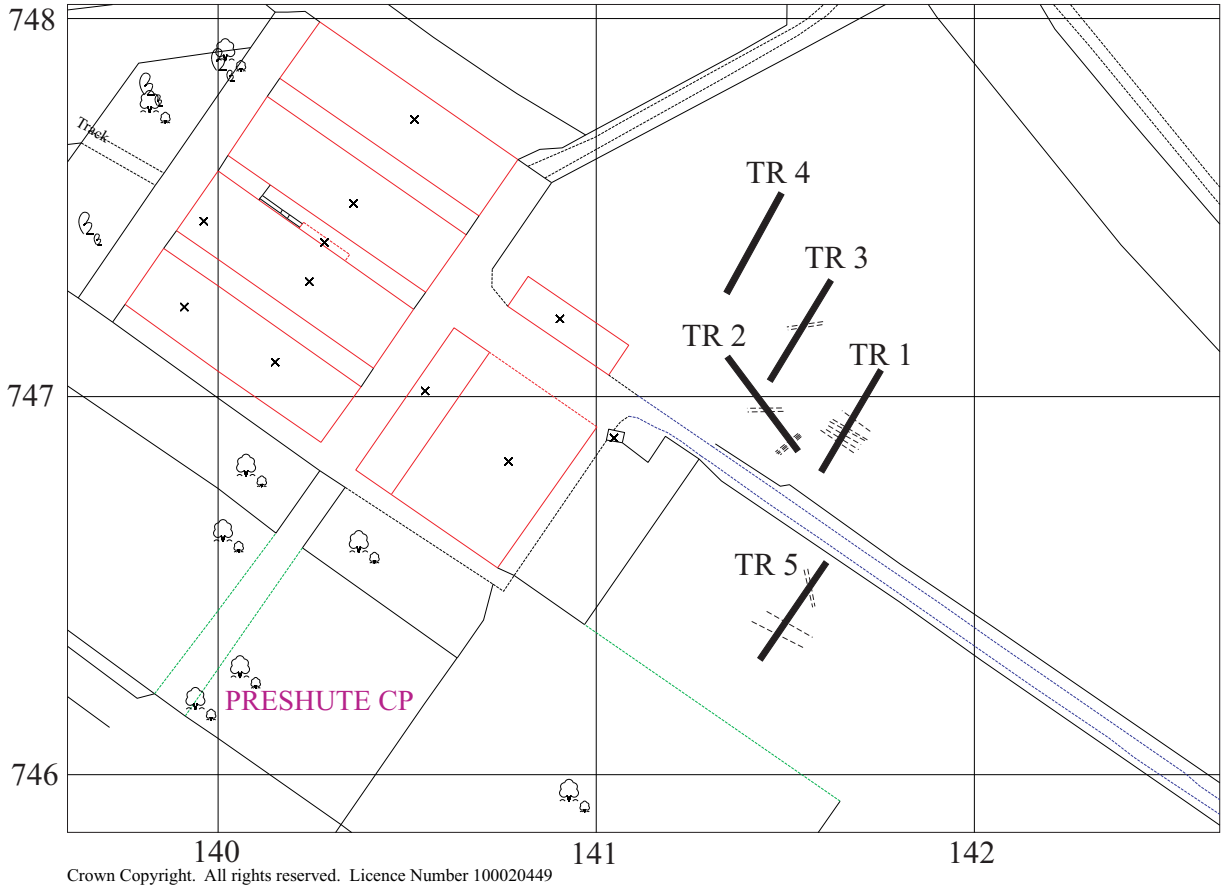


Figure 1. Site and trench

Archaeology Service and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS and was to involve the excavation of a total of five trenches across the site (Fig. 1).

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and the procedures laid down in MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The trenching sample specified within the brief was to be achieved through the excavation of five 30.0m trenches.

Four of the trenches were designed to investigation the area of impact from the proposed three buildings and associated yard while the fifth trench was to determine the level of archaeological remains in relation to the level of impact from the proposed gravel parking and track leading to the temporary buildings.

All trenches were 1.5 m wide and were excavated by a JCB excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand prior to limited hand excavation of any identified archaeological deposits.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced. The trenches were backfilled after recording.

The work was monitored by Sue Farr of Wiltshire County Archaeology Service on 16th August 2006.

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [ ] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material.

The uppermost layer in all trenches was a grey-brown silty loam with small chalk fragments (1/01), (2/01), (3/01, (4/01) and (5/01 that varied in depth from 0.1m to 0.12m across the site. Below this in all trenches was a grey-brown silty loam with large quantities of small chalk fragments (1/02), (2/02), (3/02, (4/02) and (5/02) that was between 0.1m and 0.15m thick. This layer also contained some sarsen chunks. This lay over a layer of degraded chalk and brown-grey loam (1/03), (2/03), (3/03), (4/03) and (5/03). The natural in all trenches was middle chalk (1/04), (2/04), (3/04), (4/04) and (5/04).

Modern plough marks were observed within all trenches scarring the natural chalk.

Trench 1 *(Figure 2)*

At the southern end of the trench was a pit [1/05] within the natural chalk (1/04). It was at least 0.75m in diameter and 0.28m deep. Although in plan it was quite regular, the sides did show characteristic root penetration associated with tree throws. It was filled with an orange-brown silty loam (1/06).

At the centre of the trench was a series of parallel linear ditches aligned roughly south-east to north-west. Each was cut into the natural. The most southerly was [1/07] and was 01.1m wide and 0.14m deep. It was filled with chalk rubble fragments in a grey silty loam matrix (1/08). Next to this was [1/09], it was also 1.1m wide and was 0.2m deep. It was also filled with chalk rubble fragments in a grey silty loam matrix (1/10). The most northerly ditch [1/11] was 1.8m wide and 0.4m deep, again it was filled with chalk rubble fragments in a grey silty loam matrix (1/12). All three ditches had relatively flat bases and sides between 45-60^{o}.

Ditch [1/11] may have had a circular cut or posthole cut into its northern edge, although this was indistinct and a separate fill could not be identified.

Just the north of these trenches was an area [1/13] approximately 3m wide of disturbed natural chalk mixed with small amounts of brown silty loam (1/14). This was not excavated.

Trench 2 *(Figure 2)*

Towards the eastern end of Trench 2 were two parallel ditches. The first [2/08] was 0.6m wide and 0.2m deep. It was filled with chalk rubble in a pale grey silty loam matrix (2/07). The second [2/06] was 0.52m wide and 0.3m deep. This was also filled with chalk rubble in a pale grey silty loam matrix (2/05). Both were relatively flat based with sides about 60^{o}. They were roughly aligned north-east to south-west, and are roughly at right angles to those in Trench 1.

At a distance of 7m to the west of these ditches was a single ditch [2/10], it was 0.6m wide and 0.3m deep. It was filled with chalk rubble in a pale grey silty loam matrix (2/09). The sides were near vertical and the base was flat. It was aligned roughly east to west. This is not a continuation of any seen in Trench 1.

Two metres to the west of [2/10] was a post-hole [2/11]. It was 0.11m in diameter and 0.21m deep. It was filled with dark grey-brown silt (2/12).

At the western trench end were two 1m wide linear areas of disturbance. One appeared to be a modern cut possibly for a water pipe to feed a trough. The other was on the same alignment as the two parallel ditches [2/06] and [2/08]. Neither was excavated.

Trench 3 *(Figure 2)*

This trench was marked by heavy plough damage, especially towards the northern end. Near the middle of the trench was a curvilinear ditch [3/07] 0.27m wide and 0.35m deep. It was filled with an orange-brown silty loam (3/08).

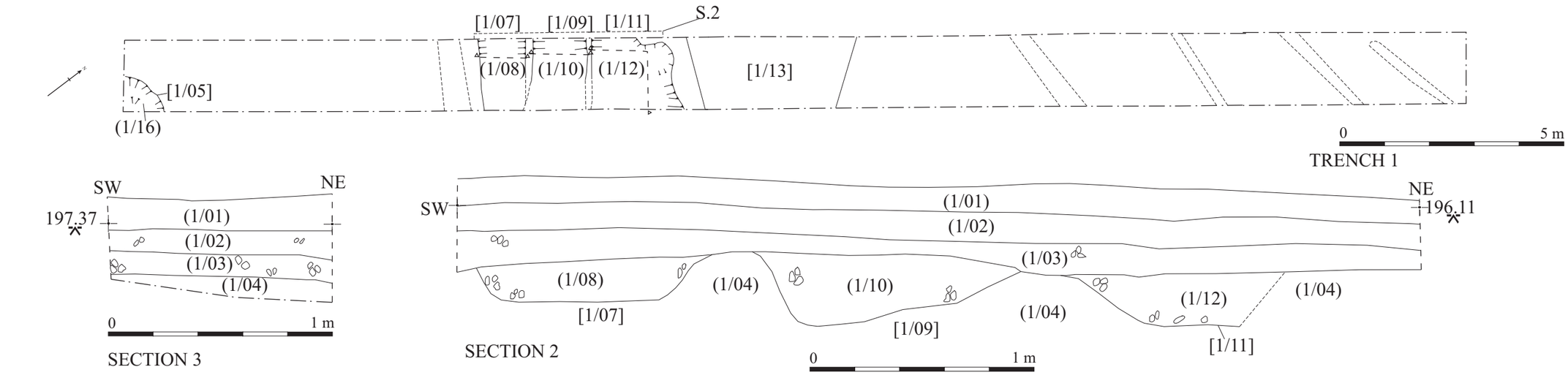


Figure 2. Trenches 1,2 and 3 plans and sections

To the south, 3.5m distance, is a truncated post-hole [3/05]. It was oval 0.3m by 0.45m and only 0.06m deep. Its fill was a dark brown silty loam (3/06).

No evidence was seen for ditches [1/07], [1/09] and [1/11] or the possible bank (1/14) continuing into this area

Trench 4 *(Figure 3)*

Similar to Trench 3 the northern end of this trench was also heavily scarred with modern plough marks.

Near the middle of the trench was a large circular feature [4/05] cut into the natural chalk (4/04). It was 2m in diameter and 0.5m deep. The sides were irregular as was the base, which was deeper towards the north.

The primary fill of the feature was chalk rubble within a grey silty matrix (4/07), which was up to 0.3m thick in places. Above this was a layer of brown-grey silty loam (4/06), which also contained a single flint flake. It was up to 0.3m thick in places. The uppermost surviving fill was more compact chalk rubble with a brown silt matrix (4/08) this was up to 0.1m thick. The irregular base and the strange filling sequence suggests that this is a tree-throw pit although it could be a man-made feature.

Trench 5 *(Figure 3)*

Trench 5 was located within a separate field to the south of the main area.

Towards the middle of the trench was a large north-west to south-east aligned ditch [5/10]. This ditch was 3.9m wide and 0.5m deep. It was filled with chalk rubble in a matrix of brown silty loam (5/09). The edges were steep and the base flat. Cut into the fill was a later pit [5/12]. This was sub-circular 0.55m deep and 0.8m wide. It was filled with chalk rubble in a grey silty matrix (5/11).

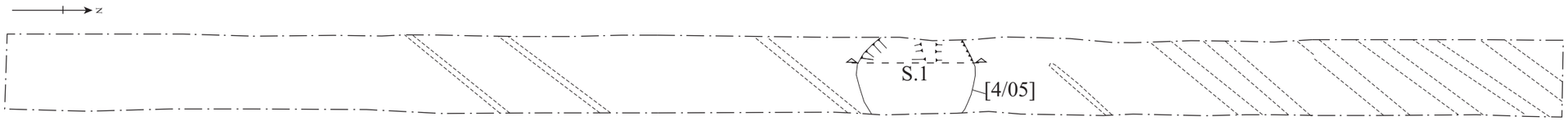
To the north of this ditch was a circular pit [5/08]. This was 0.8m in diameter and 0.56m deep, it was filled with brown loam with a large quantity of chalk fragments (5/07). This pit was cut by a later linear feature [5/06] that was 9m long and at least 0.23m wide. It was 0.56m deep and filled with brown silty loam with some chalk fragments (5/05).

At the northern end of the trench was an irregular rectangular pit [5/16] that was 2.5m long and at least 0.5 m wide. It was 0.35m deep and filled with chalk blocks within a grey silty loam (5/15). It was only partially excavated.

Lying adjacent to this was a north-south aligned linear ditch [5/14]. It was 1m wide and 0.25m deep. It was filled with chalk fragments and grey silt (5/13). A section cut across [5/14] and [5/16] could not find a relationship.

APPENDIX – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
Trench 1			0.39	1.5	30		
1/01	Layer	Topsoil	0.12	Tr.	Tr.	-	Modern
1/02	Layer	Grey-brown silty Loam	0.1	Tr.	Tr.	-	
1/03	Layer	Chalk with brown silt	0.15	Tr.	Tr.	-	
1/04	Natural	Middle Chalk	-	Tr.	Tr.	-	
1/05	Cut	Sub-circular pit	0.28	0.7	0.75	-	
1/06	Fill	Orange-brown silt loam	0.28	0.7	0.5	-	
1/07	Cut	Linear	0.14	1.1	1.6+	-	
1/08	Fill	Chalk with brown silt	0.14	1.1	1.6+	-	
1/09	Cut	Linear	0.2	1.1	1.6+	-	
1/10	Fill	Chalk with brown silt	0.2	1.1	1.6+	-	
1/11	Cut	Linear	0.3	1.8	1.6+	-	
1/12	Fill	Chalk with brown silt	0.3	1.8	1.6+	-	
1/13	Cut	Linear	-	3.6	1.6+	-	
1/14	Fill	Chalk with brown silt	-	3.6	1.6+	-	
Trench 2			0.44	1.5	30		
2/01	Layer	Topsoil	0.1	Tr.	Tr.	-	Modern
2/02	Layer	Grey-brown silty Loam	0.1	Tr.	Tr.	-	
2/03	Layer	Chalk with brown silt	0.17	Tr.	Tr.	-	
2/04	Natural	Middle Chalk	-	Tr.	Tr.	-	
2/05	Fill	Chalk with grey silt	0.3	0.52	1.6+	-	
2/06	Cut	Linear	0.3	0.52	1.6+	-	
2/07	Fill	Chalk with grey silt	0.2	0.6	1.6+	-	
2/08	Cut	Linear	0.2	0.6	1.6+	-	
2/09	Fill	Chalk with grey silt	0.3	0.6	1.6+	-	
2/10	Cut	Linear	0.3	0.6	1.6+	-	
2/11	Cut	Circular stakehole	0.21	0.11	0.11	-	
2/12	Fill	Dark grey-brown silt	0.21	0.11	0.11	-	



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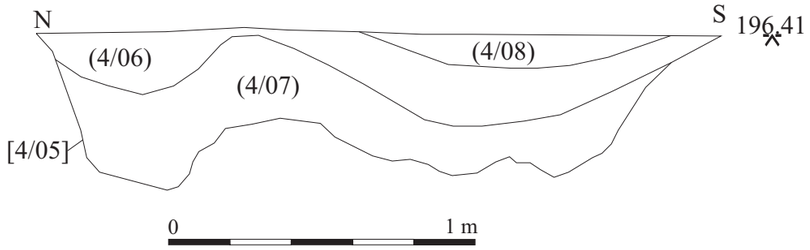
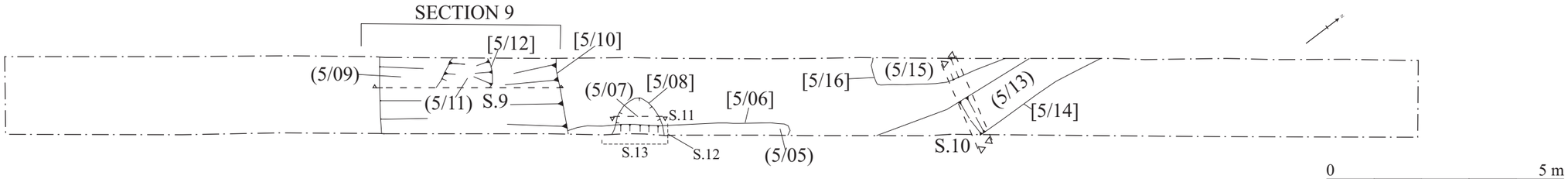


SECTION 1



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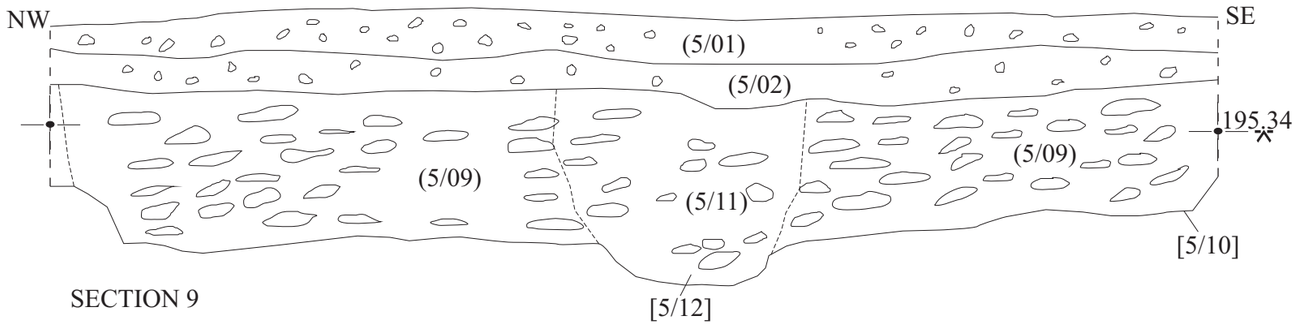

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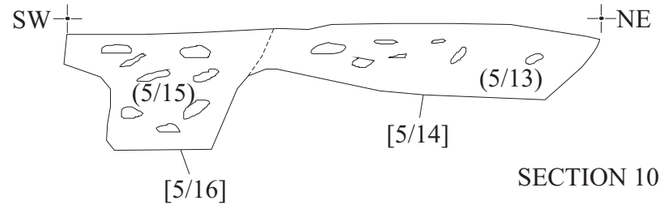

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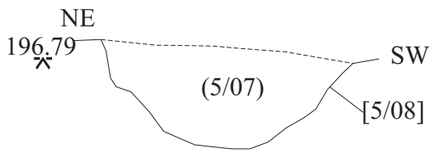

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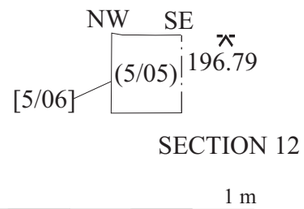

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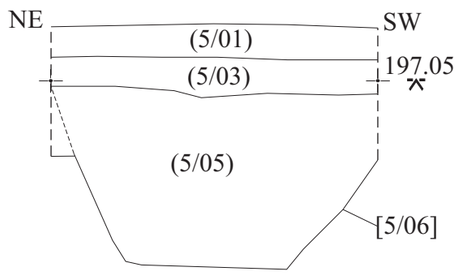

SECTION 13

Figure 3. Trenches 4 and 5 plans and sections

5 FINDS

A single secondary flint flake was recovered from context (2/01) and another from (4/06). Both were hard hammer struck and typical of debitage from the region of a Bronze Age date.

It would be expected that high concentrations of flint would likely occur on site, but this was not the case. This can be explained by several factors. Middle Chalk is flint free; some small weathered nodules were noticed with the upper contexts of each trench. Many of these pieces showing signs of plough damage, while the occasional object showed signs of thermal fractures. Ploughing would have caused significant post-depositional dispersal. Also by problems associated with the recovery during the evaluation: machined dug trenches with no sieving of the spoil.

6 DISCUSSION

Unfortunately the relationship between the three parallel ditches [1/07], [1/09] and [1/11] could not be ascertained. It would appear from the nature of the fills that these ditches had been heavily truncated, leaving only the primary fill in each. The proximity of the ditches could be explained through phases of re-cutting an existing single ditch. The presence of the possible posthole within one ditch may indicate that a palisade or timber revetment had existed.

It would appear likely that the area of disturbed natural to the north of these ditches is the ploughed-out remnant of an associated chalk bank.

The two parallel ditches in Trench 2 [2/06] and [2/08] also appear to be heavily truncated, leaving only the primary fills. It was not possible to determine a relationship between the two ditches, but it is possible that these also show phases of re-cutting a single ditch. A remnant of an associated bank was not visible, although there was an area of heavy plough damage to the west.

Although the terminals of ditch [2/10] were not located it is possible that it could be only a short linear. If this is true the position of post-hole [2/11] becomes very significant. The morphology of ditch [2/10] and the distance from it to [2/11] are very reminiscent of the entrance to House B at Bishops Cannings Down (Gingell 1992). It is also possible that ditch [3/07] and post-hole [3/05] form a similar relationship. House A at Bishops Cannings Down displayed curved or irregular ditches at its entrance.

The possible pit [4/05] has Bronze Age flint work in its secondary fill. It is significantly larger than pits recoded on sites of a similar date in the area, such as Dean Bottom and Burderop Down (Gingell 1992).

Both natural and split sarsen was scattered throughout the upper plough soils. Although no concentrations were noticed, its presence has been considered important on nearby sites such as Rockley Down and Dean Bottom (Gingell 1992) where it was used as metalling for occupation surfaces.

The pit [1/05] in Trench 1 is considered to be a tree-throw, due to the root activity noted with it. However, it is not unheard of for trees to take root in earlier man-dug pits. The pits [5/08] and [5/12] within Trench 5 are similar in size, shape and fill to those recorded at Burderop Down.

The characteristics of ditch [5/10] are reminiscent of the primary fill within a barrow ditch. It is flat bottomed and of similar width to known examples within the region. It is evident that ditch [5/10] has been heavily truncated by modern agricultural activity, yet it survives to a depth of 0.5m. The associated ditch for the Disc Barrow at Burderop Down was only 1m deep, while being in a state of far better preservation from agricultural damage.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The Desk Based Assessment (JMHS 2005) concluded that middle to late Bronze Age or Iron Age settlement may have extended into the area. The evaluation recorded numerous sub-soil features within all trenches.

Although the majority of feature located remain undated, at least one appears to be Bronze Age or is more recent than the occupation and contains a residual artefact. The concentration is significant as features are spread across the entire proposed development area. Many of the features bear strong similarities to those dated on prehistoric sites in the area.

While any decision regarding the archaeological importance of the site rests with Wiltshire County Archaeology Service, it is the view of John Moore Heritage Services that the nature and extent of the archaeological remains should not prevent any future development of the site, as long as a mitigation strategy is implemented. The extent of the remains within the area to be disturbed by the development could be carefully stripped and a programme of archaeological excavation and recording could be carried out prior to development with the aim of recording fully and dating the activity to be affected.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
Trench 3			0.4	1.5	30		
3/01	Layer	Topsoil	0.1	Tr.	Tr.	-	Modern
3/02	Layer	Grey-brown silty Loam	0.12	Tr.	Tr.	-	
3/03	Layer	Chalk with brown silt	0.12	Tr.	Tr.	-	
3/04	Natural	Middle Chalk	-	Tr.	Tr.	-	
3/05	Cut	Sub-circular pit	0.06	0.3	0.45	-	
3/06	Fill	Orange-brown silt loam	0.06	0.3	0.45	-	
3/07	Cut	Linear	0.35	0.27	1.8+	-	
3/08	Fill	Orange-brown silt loam	0.35	0.27	1.8+	-	
Trench 4				1.5	30		
4/01	Layer	Topsoil	0.1	Tr.	Tr.	Plastic	Modern
4/02	Layer	Grey-brown silty Loam	0.15	Tr.	Tr.	-	
4/03	Layer	Chalk with brown silt	0.2	Tr.	Tr.	-	
4/04	Natural	Middle Chalk	-	Tr.	Tr.	-	
4/05	Cut	Circular Pit	0.5	2	2	-	Bronze Age
4/06	Fill	Brown-grey silt loam	0.3	2	2	Flint	Bronze Age
4/07	Fill	Chalk with grey silt	0.3	2	2	-	
4/08	Fill	Chalk with brown silt	0.1	2	2	-	

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
Trench 5			0.56	1.5	30		
5/01	Layer	Topsoil	0.1	Tr.	Tr.	Metal	Modern
5/02	Layer	Grey-brown silty Loam	0.14	Tr.	Tr.	-	-
5/03	Layer	Chalk with brown silt	0.23	Tr.	Tr.	-	
5/04	Natural	Middle Chalk	-	Tr.	Tr.	-	
5/05	Fill	Chalk with brown silt	0.56	0.23+	9	-	
5/06	Cut	Linear	0.56	0.23+	9	-	
5/07	Fill	Chalk with brown silt	0.56	0.8	0.8	-	
5/08	Cut	Circular Pit	0.56	0.8	0.8	-	
5/09	Fill	Chalk with brown silt	0.5	3.9	1.6+	-	
5/10	Cut	Linear	0.5	3.9	1.6+	-	
5/11	Fill	Chalk with grey silt	0.55	0.8	0.8	-	
5/12	Cut	Circular Pit	0.55	0.8	0.8	-	
5/13	Fill	Chalk with grey silt	0.25	1	2.6+		
5/14	Cut	Linear	0.25	1	2.6+	-	
5/15	Fill	Chalk with grey silt	0.35	0.5	2.5	-	
5/16	Cut	Rectangular Pit	0.35	0.5	2.5	-	