Athelney Spillway, Lyng Somerset

Archaeological Evaluation

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Kier Infrastructure, on behalf of the Environment Agency, to undertake an archaeological evaluation of a 1.35 ha parcel of land to the south of New Road, Lyng, Somerset, TA7 0SD, centred on NGR 334279 129331. The archaeological work was undertaken prior to improvement works to Athelney Spillway, which is located within the Scheduled Monument of Athelney Abbey on Athelney Hill (National Heritage List for England 1019099).

The evaluation, which was undertaken on the 11–13 October 2023, comprised the excavation of five trenches measuring between 15 m and 35 m long, targeted on anomalies identified during a previous geophysical survey.

The earliest human activity on the site is represented by Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic struck flint, which was recovered from subsoil deposits and as residual material in later features. Later activity comprised a substantial ditch, two isolated postholes and an area of heat affected natural that may indicate the position of a hearth or campfire.

Although heat affected natural and the extent of alluvium in trench 1 roughly correlates with anomalies identified by the geophysical survey, this was not the case for the other geophysical anomalies. The geophysical survey is therefore not considered to be an accurate representation of the buried archaeological resource.

Some archaeological remains are present on the site, though the excavated features are widely spaced and likely represent peripheral elements of the documented settlements on Athelney Island. The relative paucity of features likely reflects the relatively low-lying nature of the spillway: the higher ground to the east and west being the preferred locations for settlement.

The presence of Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic flint is interesting, as this does not appear to have been previously noted on Athelney Island. The ditch in trench 2 is also noteworthy: it is a substantial feature, which broadly correlates with the line of a defensive Iron Age and Anglo-Saxon ditch that was uncovered at the western end of Athelney Island during the 2002 *Time Team* investigations. Three tiny scraps of late prehistoric pottery provide some very tentative dating for this feature, though these are not considered to be a reliable dating evidence. Charcoal recovered from this ditch could potentially be radiocarbon dated. The other features are completely undated and could be related to any of the numerous phases of activity on Athelney Island between the prehistoric and post-medieval periods. Construction of the existing spillway has severely truncated the subsoil in this location, though it is possible that deeply cut features could survive within its footprint.

Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Kier Infrastructure for commissioning the archaeological evaluation, in particular Cris Keech. Wessex Archaeology is also grateful for the advice of Atkins Heritage and the Lead Archaeological Advisor for the Environment Agency.

Athelney Spillway
Lyng, Somerset

Archaeological Evaluation

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Kier Infrastructure ('the client'), on behalf of the Environment Agency, to undertake an archaeological evaluation of a 1.35 ha parcel of land located to the south of New Road, Lyng, Somerset, TA7 0SD, centred on NGR 334279 129331 (Fig. 1).

1.1.2 Curry Moor Reservoir was recently subject to an inspection which resulted in a series of flood alleviation recommendations referred to as Measures to be taken in the Interests Of Safety (MIOS). These measures must be carried out by law within the timeframes prescribed in the Inspection Report. One such measure, specific to the set of works detailed in this document, is the improvement of Athelney Spillway, which is located within and on the northern boundary of the Scheduled Monument of the Anglo-Saxon occupation site and site of Athelney Abbey on Athelney Hill (National Heritage List for England [NHLE] 1019099), 0.7 km north-east of the village of East Lyng and 0.5 km north-west of the village of Athelney (Atkins 2023).

1.1.3 The proposed development comprises the improvement of Athelney Spillway. The spillway comprises of a small area of sub-surface concrete armour, rectangular in size and north/south aligned. The improvement works require it be extended to the east and west, following the contour of the two summits of Athelney Hill, as well as to the south to meet an existing sub-surface crest beam, and just beyond.

1.1.4 All works were undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) which detailed the aims, methodologies and standards to be employed in order to undertake the evaluation (Wessex Archaeology 2023a). Atkins Heritage and the Lead Archaeological Advisor for the National Environmental Assessment and Sustainability (NEAS) team approved the WSI, prior to fieldwork commencing. Atkins Heritage forwarded a copy of the WSI to the Senior Historic Environment Officer, South West Heritage Trust, and Historic England (HE) for their records and to obtain Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC). On completion of the evaluation, surface remediation works detailed in an addendum to the WSI (Wessex Archaeology 2023b) were inspected by Wessex Archaeology.

1.1.5 The evaluation comprised the excavation, investigation and recording of five trial trenches (measuring between 15 m and 35 m in length by 2 m in width), equating to a 2% sample of the proposed development area. The location of the trenches was agreed with SWHT, Atkins Heritage, Lead Archaeological Advisor for NEAS and HE (under the SMC process). The trenches were targeted the known geophysical anomalies as well as investigate the stratigraphy of some of areas which are known will be disturbed by the current works.

1.1.6 This evaluation is part of staged approach in determining the archaeological potential of the site, and follows other non-intrusive archaeological work, including a historical and archaeological background (Atkins 2023) and geophysical survey (Wessex Archaeology 2023c).

1.2 Scope of the report

1.2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a detailed description of the results of the evaluation, to interpret the results within a local, regional or wider archaeological context and assess whether the aims of the evaluation have been met.

1.2.2 The presented results will provide further information on the archaeological resource that may be impacted by the proposed development and facilitate an informed decision with regard to the requirement for, and methods of, any further archaeological mitigation.

1.3 Location, topography and geology

1.3.1 The evaluation area is located within and on the northern boundary of the Scheduled Monument of the Anglo-Saxon occupation site and site of Athelney Abbey on Athelney Hill (NHLE 1019099), approximately 0.7 km north-east of the village of East Lyng, 0.5 km north-west of the village of Athelney, Somerset.

1.3.2 The site comprises small segments of three variously shaped and sized fields currently used for pasture and separated by hedgerows. It is bounded to the north by New Road (A361), and to the east, west, and south by the remainder of the fields.

1.3.3 The site lies at approximately 5 m AOD towards New Road to the north and to the north-east but rises to between 6 m and 7 m AOD as the site heads towards the two summits of Athelney Hill.

1.3.4 The bedrock geology is mapped as Mercia Mudstone Group – Mudstone and Halite-stone of the Triassic period. Superficial deposits of alluvium – clay, silt, sand and gravel are also mapped surrounding the site (British Geological Survey 2023).

1.3.5 As the site lies within a low saddle between the two summits of the hill, it is possible that colluvium may be present, but this is currently unsubstantiated. A watching brief undertaken by Wessex Archaeology in 2015 on the existing spillway recorded a mid-greyish brown silty sand topsoil up to 0.12 m thick, which overlay a mid-reddish brown clayey silt subsoil at least 0.46m thick (Atkins 2023).

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The archaeological and historical background was assessed in a prior Archaeological and Heritage background within a Specification for Archaeological Evaluation (Atkins 2023). The document summarised the information gained from previous investigations at the site supplemented by publicly obtainable information. The findings of this document are summarised below, with relevant entry numbers from the Somerset Historic Environment Record (SOMHER) and the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) included. Additional sources of information are referenced as appropriate.

2.1.2 General background

2.1.3 The site is located within the Somerset Levels, an historic flood plain separated by upland ridges and islands of solid geology, gravel terraces and Burtle beds. During interglacial periods the flood plain was inundated therefore archaeological activity has been historically concentrated on these areas of high or dry land. When the sea level periodically decreased an estuarine marsh environment developed in its place within which archaeological and palaeoenvironmental evidence has been recovered showing limited and intermittent use,

such as flint scatters and wooden trackways, until extensive reclamation during the medieval and post-medieval periods.

2.1.4 Athelney Hill on which the site and monument resides consists of a natural low-lying island, known as the Isle of Athelney, with east and west summits connected by a lower saddle of land and as such has potential for prehistoric to modern activity.

2.2 Previous investigations related to the proposed development

Watching brief (2015)

2.2.1 A watching brief undertaken by Wessex Archaeology (2015) during the reprofiling of Athelney Spillway revealed only modern topsoil and subsoil over 0.55 m in depth. The area of the spillway itself is likely to have been significantly disturbed during its original installation in 1960.

Geophysical survey (2023)

2.2.2 As part of this programme of works, a detailed gradiometer survey and ground penetrating radar survey was undertaken in July 2023 by Wessex Archaeology. The survey was requested to tie in and slightly overlap with the previous geophysical survey undertaken on behalf of Time Team (2002) on the two opposing summits of Athelney Hill. This was to help fill in the gap in the data and provide a better understanding of the archaeological potential of the area of impact proposed by the current works which has not been sufficiently covered by previous archaeological investigations.

2.2.3 The geophysical survey identified several anomalies of possible archaeological origin, including several penannular anomalies in the west, potentially indicating the easternmost part of the activity on this summit. Several high-amplitude responses of discrete and linear anomalies were also identified which could relate to small enclosures and pits/postholes or be natural in origin.

2.3 Archaeological and historical context

Prehistoric (800,000 – AD 43)

2.3.1 No prehistoric activity has currently been recorded within the Site although evidence has been recovered from Athelney Hill. An evaluation and geophysical survey conducted by Time Team in 2002 recorded a substantial Iron Age ditch suggestive of occupation at the western end of Athelney Hill (GSB Prospection and Croft 2002). Findspots of two Bronze palstaves have also been recorded.

2.3.2 Worked oak timbers dated to the Bronze Age were recovered from a trench within the Scheduled Monument of Balt Moor Wall located immediately south of the Scheduled Monument of Athelney (Richardson 2003; Watts and Scaife 2008).

Romano-British (AD 43 – AD 410)

2.3.3 The Roman period is not well represented within the site. A bronze mask of Dionysius which is now in the British Museum is thought to have come from Athelney but further details are unknown (Richardson 2003). Roman pottery is also thought to have been recovered from the evaluation, but this is unsubstantiated (*ibid*. 2003).

2.3.4 Two Romano-British sites are recorded near the site, approximately 560 m to the south and 1 km to the south-west. Several low mounds from which Roman pottery and bone have been recovered are located either side of the railway embankment (SOMHER 19927).

2.3.5 A small excavation undertaken in 1995 and 1996 by Bridgwater and District Archaeology Society on the south-western perimeter of Lyng recovered nearly 300 pieces of pottery indicative of a substantial Roman building in the vicinity (SOMHER 12609) (Richardson 2003).

Early Medieval (AD 410 –1066) and Medieval (1066 – 1485)

2.3.6 The village of East Lyng similarly occupies a natural island and is recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as a fortified Anglo-Saxon burh with 100 hides, built at King Alfred's command in AD 878 in association with the site of Athelney (Historic England 2022b). The undeveloped outer perimeters of the village are scheduled (LEN: 1019100) and its street plan retains holloways in an Anglo-Saxon pattern (*ibid*. 2022b).

2.3.7 The occupation site of Athelney (NHLE 1019099) was built in response to the threat of Danish invasion as a refuge for King Alfred. The stronghold or fort for this is recorded to have been constructed on the western summit, with a monastery constructed a short time later in AD 879 on the eastern summit (Historic England 2022a). The remains of both surviving as buried features have been corroborated with geophysical survey and limited excavation, including graves, walls, ditches and evidence of metalworking (ibid 2022c) (GSB Prospection and Croft 2002).

2.3.8 Both Athelney and East Lyng are nationally important, recorded in the early 10th century Burghal Hideage as part of a contemporary survey of defended places, reflecting their importance at the time. Both sites are connected by a causeway and flood defence barrier, Balt Moor Wall, of possible Roman origins. Balt Moor Wall (NHLE 1018952) is also scheduled and now is partially overlain by Cuts Road (Historic England 2022c). Previous investigations in 1996 by Exeter Archaeology and by Wessex Archaeology in 2015 have recorded a layer of stone rubble which may be the remains of the Saxon causeway or bridge and bank material dated to the 5th to 7th century, as well as the two phases of later medieval stone cladding and pottery (1675 and 1880 respectively) (Exeter Archaeology 1996, Wessex Archaeology 2015, Richardson 2003).

2.3.9 The geophysical survey undertaken by Time Team in 2002 also identified a group of pits, boundary or enclosure ditches from which slag was recovered and other linear anomalies on the western summit on the location of the fort (GSB Prospection and Croft 2002). Two partial north-east/south-west aligned linear features of possible archaeological origin were identified running towards to the spillway, as well as a similarly aligned linear trench of unknown origin and ferrous material (*ibid*. 2002). On the eastern summit, the survey identified remains of the abbey including walls, a rubble spread and a sunken floor.

Post Medieval (1485–1900) and Modern (1900–Present)

2.3.10 No post-medieval or modern activity has been recorded on the Site. In 1539, Athelney Abbey was dissolved and acquired as a private mansion by Lord Audley, at which point the monastery was demolished (Wessex Archaeology 2015). However, the mansion was never built, and the land proceeded to pass through various owners before the buildings became ruinous or were demolished. Athelney Farm, immediately south of the eastern summit, was constructed in the 17th century and records state that stone was quarried from the monastery for its construction (Richardson 2003). Immediately north of the site, the Milverton to Taunton turnpike road was constructed in 1752 and later replaced and/or improved as New Road or the A361 (SOMHER 26224).

2.3.11 King Alfred's Monument, a Grade II listed stone obelisk, was constructed in 1801 by John Slade and erected on the site of Athelney Abbey on the eastern summit to commemorate Alfred's occupation (NHLE 1173838).

2.3.12 The 1887 1st edition OS map depicts it the site as part of one large field forming the Isle of Athelney and Athelney Hill. A field boundary partially runs north–south along the eastern edge of the spillway before turning east–west and running along the northern boundary of the hill. By the time of the 2nd edition OS map (1903), the north–south boundary had been extended to bisect the hill and join with a similarly aligned boundary to the south. This boundary, now a hedge, will be removed for the construction works and replaced with a post and barbed wire fence.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 General aims

3.1.1 The general aims of the evaluation, as stated in the WSI (Wessex Archaeology 2023) and in compliance with the CIfA *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2014a), were to:

- provide information about the archaeological potential of the site; and
- inform either the scope and nature of any further archaeological work that may be required; or the formation of a mitigation strategy (to offset the impact of the development on the archaeological resource); or a management strategy.

3.2 General objectives

3.2.1 In order to achieve the above aims, the general objectives of the evaluation were to:

- determine the presence or absence of archaeological features, deposits, structures, artefacts or ecofacts within the specified area;
- establish, within the constraints of the evaluation, the extent, character, date, condition and quality of any surviving archaeological remains;
- place any identified archaeological remains within a wider historical and archaeological context in order to assess their significance; and
- make available information about the archaeological resource within the site by reporting on the results of the evaluation.

3.3 Site-specific objectives

3.3.1 Following consideration of the archaeological potential of the site and the regional research framework (SWARF), the site-specific objectives of the evaluation as set out in the specification (Atkins 2023) are to:

- test the results of the geophysical survey (Wessex Archaeology 2023);
- clarify the depth of archaeological remains, if present;
- generally assess the archaeological potential of the areas; and
- off-set any potential impact any buried remains by the proposed Scheme with specific attention to the areas of impact.

3.4 Site-specific research questions

3.4.1 Following consideration of the archaeological potential of the site and the regional research framework (SWARF), the site-specific research questions of the evaluation are:

- Research aim 21b: Medieval and Post-Medieval agriculture;
- Research aim 26: Post-Roman to Early Medieval landscape changes;
- Research aim 40: Improve understanding of agricultural intensification and diversification in later prehistory;
- Research aim 42: Improve understanding of medieval farming;
- Research aim 62: Examine the evidence for Early Medieval defence and conflict sites across the region.

4 METHODS

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 All works were undertaken in accordance with the detailed methods set out within the WSI (Wessex Archaeology 2023) and in general compliance with the standards outlined in CIfA guidance (CIfA 2014a). The methods employed are summarised below.

4.2 Fieldwork methods

General

4.2.1 The trench locations were set out using a Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS), in the approximate positions proposed in the WSI (Figs 1–2).

4.2.2 Five trial trenches, each measuring between 15 m and 30 m in length and 2 m wide, were excavated in level spits using a 360º excavator equipped with a toothless bucket, under the constant supervision and instruction of the monitoring archaeologist. Mechanical excavation proceeded until either the archaeological horizon or the natural geology was exposed.

4.2.3 Where necessary, the base of the trench/surface of archaeological deposits were cleaned by hand. A sample of archaeological features and deposits was hand-excavated, sufficient to address the aims of the evaluation.

4.2.4 Spoil from machine stripping and hand-excavated archaeological deposits was visually scanned for the purposes of finds retrieval. Artefacts were collected and bagged by context. All artefacts from excavated contexts were retained, although those from features of modern date (19th century or later) were recorded on site and not retained.

4.2.5 Trenches completed to the satisfaction of the client and the Lead Archaeological Advisor for NEAS were backfilled using excavated materials in the order in which they were excavated, and left level on completion. No other reinstatement or surface treatment was undertaken.

4.2.6 Subsequently the client undertook further remediation works, in the form of pegged matting, to prevent soil runoff during seasonal flooding. The remediation work was monitored in accordance with an addendum to the Written Scheme of Investigation (Wessex Archaeology 2023b).

Recording

4.2.7 All exposed archaeological deposits and features were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's pro forma recording system. A complete record of excavated features and deposits was made, including plans and sections drawn to appropriate scales (1:20 for plans and 1:10 for sections) and tied to the Ordnance Survey (OS) National Grid.

4.2.8 A Leica GNSS connected to Leica's SmartNet service surveyed the location of archaeological features. All survey data is recorded in OS National Grid coordinates and heights above OD (Newlyn), as defined by OSTN15 and OSGM15, with a three-dimensional accuracy of at least 50 mm.

4.2.9 A full photographic record was made using digital cameras equipped with an image sensor of not less than 16 megapixels. Digital images have been subject to managed quality control and curation processes, which has embedded appropriate metadata within the image and will ensure long term accessibility of the image set.

4.3 Finds and environmental strategies

4.3.1 Strategies for the recovery, processing and assessment of finds and environmental samples were in line with those detailed in the WSI (Wessex Archaeology 2023). The treatment of artefacts and environmental remains was in general accordance with: *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2014b), *Environmental Archaeology. A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Methods, from Sampling and Recovery to Post-excavation* (English Heritage 2011), and CIfA's *Toolkit for Specialist Reporting* (Type 2: Appraisal).

4.4 Monitoring

4.4.1 The Lead Archaeological Advisor for NEAS and Atkins Heritage monitored the evaluation on behalf of the stakeholders.

5 STRATIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Four of the five excavated trial trenches contained archaeological features and deposits, indicating a sparse spread of archaeological remains across the site (Figs 1–2). The features comprise a ditch, two postholes, an area of heat affected natural, and a waterlogged alluvial deposit. None of the features are reliably dated, though the presence of tiny pieces of late prehistoric pottery in the ditch provides some dating evidence for this feature.

5.1.2 There is also evidence of earlier activity represented by a small assemblage of Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic worked flint, which was found in the subsoil and residually in later deposits. A single sherd of Roman pottery, also recovered from the subsoil, provides very tentative evidence for a human presence at this date.

5.1.3 The following section presents the results of the evaluation with archaeological features and deposits discussed by period.

5.1.4 Detailed descriptions of individual contexts are provided in the trench summary tables (Appendix 1). Figures 1–2 shows all archaeological features recorded within the trenches.

5.2 Soil sequence and natural deposits

5.2.1 The natural geology of the site comprises bluish grey and red clay and mudstone. In trench 1 (Figs 1–4), the solid geology was overlain by a 0.12 m thick layer of dark brown/black organic clay (105). This was sealed by up to 0.49 m of grey silty clay alluvium (104), overlain by subsoil (102) and topsoil (101).

5.2.2 In trenches 2–5 (Figs 1 – 2 and 5–14), archaeological features and the natural geology was overlain by 0.17–0.3 m of mid reddish brown silty clay subsoil, which was in turn capped by 0.26–0.35 m of dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil.

5.3 Uncertain date

5.3.1 The largest feature on the site was a 2 m wide and 0.57 m deep east/west aligned ditch (205; Fig. 6) in trench 2. The western end of this feature was clear and was initially thought to terminate within the trench. A longitudinal slot was excavated at the apparent terminus, but when it was excavated, it became clear that the ditch continued in an easterly direction, though it was very difficult to see in plan due to the similarity of the upper part of the fill and the adjacent natural deposits. The ditch appears to have silted up naturally with a deposit that contained a moderate quantity of charcoal and other charred plant remains (see Section 7). Three very small scraps (1 g from environmental sample) of late prehistoric pottery provide some tentative dating for this feature. Given the very small quantity of pottery, this is not considered to be reliable dating for this feature. Charcoal from the ditch, which contained charred wheat, barley and other plant remains, has been assessed as suitable for radiocarbon dating.

5.3.2 In trench 3, there was a small, probably rectangular area (>0.7 x >0.3 m) of heat-affected natural (304; Fig. 9). A very small quantity of charcoal (see Section 7) was recovered from this deposit (presumably material that had worked its way down through the soil profile by biopedturbation). There was no evidence of metalworking debris. Feature 304 is interpreted as the site of a hearth or campfire. There is some correlation between this feature and a geophysical anomaly.

5.3.3 A shallow isolated posthole (305; Fig. 10) was recorded near the western end of trench 3. The posthole was 0.28 m wide and 0.15 m deep. Its fill contained a single piece of struck flint. A similar posthole (404; Fig. 13) was recorded at the eastern end of trench 4. Posthole 404 was 0.3 m wide and 0.06 m deep. A piece of fired clay was recovered from its fill.

5.4 Modern

5.4.1 Construction of the present spillway truncated the eastern end of trench 3 by approximately 0.5 m (Fig. 8). This was sufficient to heavily truncate the underlying subsoil. There was no apparent ‘cut’ for the spillway: the sides of which appear to have been mechanically ‘feathered in’ to produce a smooth transition from the field to the spillway.

6 FINDS EVIDENCE

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 A finds assemblage, totalling 886 g and comprising only three material types, was recovered from trenches 2, 3, 4 and 5. Most came from the subsoil. The finds range in date from early prehistoric to Romano-British, with a focus on the former. They have been cleaned and scanned to assess their nature, condition, and potential date. The assemblage is summarised by material type in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of finds by material type (No. and Wt. in grammes)

Material type	No.	Wt.(g)
Fired clay	123	777
Flint	10	75
Pottery	4	14
Total	**137**	**886**

6.2 Fired clay

6.2.1 A single fragment was recovered from undated posthole 404 in trench 4, while all the others came from a heat-affected 'natural' layer (304) in trench 3. All are abraded, featureless pieces in fine, oxidised, sandy fabrics and probably represent oven/hearth linings.

6.3 Flint

6.3.1 A small assemblage consisting of nine pieces of flint and one of chert was recovered from three trenches. Primary outcrops of flint are not available locally, and the high quality of material noted here may suggest it has been collected from distant sources. The inclusion of a piece of Portland chert, a material available only in the area around Portland in Dorset, certainly demonstrates the use of non-local material. However, flint does occur as a component of Quaternary marine gravels which are exposed at or near the surface to the north of the site.

6.3.2 Despite the fact that most of the flint derives from the subsoil, most is in a fresh condition and seems unlikely to have moved far from the point of original deposition, perhaps located only a short distance beyond the limits of investigation. Patination is entirely absent, and only one piece is burnt.

6.3.3 Four pieces were found in trench 3, three from the subsoil and one from posthole 305. These include three undiagnostic flakes detached with an indeterminate hammer mode, and the only retouched tool recovered, a combination tool formed of a high-quality brown flint. This is a finely worked end scraper which also exhibits use-wear and glossing on an edge that has also been resharpened with inverse distal retouch, all features indicating use as a knife. While this is not strictly a very diagnostic form, the presence of regular laminar dorsal scars implies it is made on a flake deriving from a blade core and, as such, very probably precludes a date beyond the Neolithic period.

6.3.4 Five other undiagnostic flakes were collected, one from the subsoil of trench 2, two from undated ditch 204 in the same trench, and two from the subsoil of trench 5. However, the latter also contained a neat broken bladelet (defined as a blade 10 mm or less in width) that appears to be the product of a purposeful bladelet technology characteristic of Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic industries.

6.4 Pottery

6.4.1 Three tiny, surface-less scraps (1 g) in a calcite-gritted fabric of probable later prehistoric date were extracted from the residue of an environmental sample taken from ditch 204. The only other sherd, of Romano-British date, was found in the subsoil of trench 2. This is a hard-fired, plain body sherd which retains a small portion of the base and is formed of a pale grey, sandy fabric with frequent argillaceous inclusions and occasional charred voids which may suggest a component of chaff tempering. The fabric is similar to that from the Congresbury kilns, situated approximately 36 km to the north. The relatively unabraded condition of this sherd suggests that it has not been much disturbed from the point of its initial deposition, but if so, this clearly lies beyond the limits of this investigation.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 One bulk sediment sample from layer 105 was processed for the recovery of waterlogged remains, and three bulk sediment samples were processed by flotation for the recovery of charred plant remains and wood charcoal from heat affected natural 304, posthole 404 and ditch 204.

7.2 Aims and methods

7.2.1 The aim of this assessment is to determine the nature and significance of the environmental remains preserved at the site. This assessment has been undertaken in accordance with Historic England's guidelines outlined in *Environmental Archaeology: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Methods, from Sampling and Recovery to Post-Excavation* (English Heritage 2011).

Bulk samples

7.2.2 The size of the bulk sediment samples varied between 5 and 30 litres, with an average volume of 18 litres.

7.2.3 A one-litre subsample was taken from the waterlogged sample and was processed by manual flotation using a 0.25 mm mesh to retain both the flot and residue. The flots and residue were kept wet after processing. The remaining bulk sediment samples were processed by standard flotation methods on a Siraf-type flotation tank; the flot was retained on a 0.25 mm mesh, and the residues retained on a 1 mm mesh and a 0.5 mm mesh. The coarse fractions of the residues (>4 mm) were sorted by eye for artefactual and environmental remains and discarded. The environmental material extracted from the residues was added to the flots. The fine residue fractions and the flots were scanned and sorted using a Leica MS5 stereomicroscope at magnifications of up to x40.

7.2.4 Different potential indicators of bioturbation were considered, including the percentage of roots, the abundance of modern seeds alongside the presence of mycorrhizal fungi sclerotia (e.g., *Cenococcum geophilum*) and animal remains, such as burrowing blind snails (*Cecilioides acicula*), or earthworm eggs and modern insects. The samples were scanned for charred and uncharred plant remains, wood charcoal, and other environmental remains such as terrestrial molluscs.

7.2.5 Plant remains were identified through comparison with modern reference material held by Wessex Archaeology and relevant literature (e.g., Cappers *et al.* 2006). Nomenclature follows Stace (1997) for wild taxa, and Zohary *et al.* (2012) for cereals and other cultivated crops (using traditional names).

7.2.6 All remains were recorded semi-quantitatively on an abundance scale: C = <5 ('Trace'), B = 5–10 ('Rare'), A = 10–30 ('Occasional'), A* = 30–100 ('Common'), A** = 100–500 ('Abundant'), A*** = >500 ('Very abundant'/Exceptional').

7.3 Results

7.3.1 The results are presented in Appendix 2, Table 2.

7.3.2 The flots from the bulk sediment samples were of variable volumes. Potential indicators of bioturbation are present (e.g., modern roots and earthworm eggs), indicating the possibility of contamination from later intrusive material.

7.3.3 Layer 105 produced very eroded waterlogged wood fragments alongside highly degraded, unidentifiable vegetative material and Bryozoa statoblasts,

7.3.4 Charred plant remains are abundant in the sample ditch 204, particularly cereal remains. These include grains and chaff (rachis and culm nodes) of free-threshing wheat varieties (*Triticum aestivum/turgidum*) including rachis of bread wheat (*T. aestivum*), hulled barley grains (*Hordeum vulgare*), indeterminate wheat (*Triticum* sp.) grains and fragments of indeterminate cereals (Triticeae). Also present are garden peas (*Pisum sativum*) and other large-seeded vetches (Vicieae), wild grasses (Poaceae) including oats (*Avena* sp.) and ryegrass *(Lolium* sp.), a onion-couch grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius* subsp. *bulbosum*) tubers, cleavers (*Galium* sp.), stinking chamomile (*Anthemis cotula*), corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*), docks (*Rumex* sp.) and a fragment of hazel (*Corylus avellana*) nutshell.

7.3.5 The samples from layer 304 and posthole 404 contain small amounts of mineral-coated charcoal.

7.4 Conclusions

7.4.1 This assessment has demonstrated the potential for the recovery of environmental material, specifically charred plant remains in ditch 204. The sample provides evidence for a range of cultivated crops (free-threshing wheat, hulled barley, garden peas) characteristic of arable farming regimes which developed after the Romano-British period, and the assemblage would be consistent with a date from the early medieval to post-medieval periods (Moffett 2006, 2011).

7.4.2 The waterlogged wood observed in layer 105 indicates the potential for the recovery of waterlogged material on the site, but this particular deposit is of low potential as the wood is too degraded to enable identification. The deposit sampled may only have remained intermittently waterlogged, contributing to the decay of the remains.

Recommendations

7.4.3 If further fieldwork is undertaken at the site, sampling should continue to follow Wessex Archaeology's in-house guidance. Bulk sediment samples for the recovery of charred plant remains and wood charcoal should be 40–60 litres where possible. The samples should be taken from well-sealed features and deposits, covering as wide a range of phases as possible. For waterlogged deposits, it is recommended that 20 litre bulk sediment samples are taken.

7.4.4 There is potential for further analysis of the charred plant remains from ditch 204 to provide information on arable farming practices. Suitable material for radiocarbon dating is present in ditch 204 and this would help to refine the dating of the feature.

8 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Summary

8.1.1 The evaluation produced evidence for human activity on the site dating from the Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic onwards. The earliest activity is represented by Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic struck flint, which was recovered from subsoil deposits and as residual material in later features.

8.1.2 Later activity comprised a substantial ditch, two isolated postholes and an area of heat affected natural that may indicate the position of a hearth of campfire.

8.2 Discussion

8.2.1 Although heat affected natural 304 and the extent of alluvium in trench 1 roughly correlates anomalies identified by the geophysical survey, this was not the case for the other anomalies. It can therefore be stated that the geophysical survey does not give an accurate representation of the buried archaeological resource.

8.2.2 Some archaeological remains are present on the site, though the excavated features are widely spaced and likely represent peripheral elements of the documented settlements on Athelney Island. The relative paucity of features likely reflects the relatively low-lying nature of the spillway site: the higher ground to the east and west being the preferred location for settlement.

8.2.3 The presence of Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic flint is interesting, as this does not appear to have been previously noted on Athelney Island. The ditch in trench 2 is also noteworthy: it is a substantial feature, which broadly correlates with the line of a defensive Iron Age and Anglo-Saxon ditch that was uncovered at the western end of Athelney Island during the 2002 *Time Team* investigations (Gaffney and Gater 2003; GSB Prospection and Croft 2002, 151–2). Three tiny scraps of late prehistoric pottery provide some very tentative dating for this feature, though these are not considered to be a reliable dating evidence. Charcoal recovered from this ditch could potentially be radiocarbon dated.

8.2.4 The interpretation of the excavated features is hampered by the lack of reliable dating evidence. On balance, it is likely that the large ditch forms part of the previously excavated Iron Age/Anglo-Saxon enclosure. The other features are completely undated and could be related to any of the numerous phases of activity on Athelney Island between the prehistoric and post-medieval periods.

8.2.5 Construction of the existing Athelney Spillway has severely truncated the subsoil in this location, though it is possible that deeply cut features could survive within its footprint.

9 ARCHIVE STORAGE AND CURATION

9.1 Museum

9.1.1 The archive resulting from the evaluation is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology in Bristol and Salisbury. Somerset Heritage Centre has agreed in principle to accept the archive on completion of the project. Deposition of any finds with the museum will only be carried out with the full written agreement of the landowner to transfer title of all finds to the museum.

9.2 Preparation of the archive

Physical archive

9.2.1 The archive, which includes paper records, graphics, artefacts and ecofacts, will be prepared following the standard conditions for the acceptance of excavated archaeological material by Somerset Heritage Centre, and in general following nationally recommended guidelines (Brown 2011; CIfA 2014c; SMA 1995).

9.2.2 All archive elements are marked with an accession code, and a full index will be prepared. The physical archive currently comprises the following:

- 1 airtight plastic box of artefacts and ecofacts, ordered by material type
- 1 file of paper records

Digital archive

9.2.3 The digital archive generated by the project, which comprises born-digital data (e.g., site records, survey data, databases and spreadsheets, photographs and reports), will be deposited with a Trusted Digital Repository, in this instance the Archaeology Data Service (ADS), to ensure its long-term curation. Digital data will be prepared following ADS guidelines (ADS 2013 and online guidance) and accompanied by metadata.

9.3 Selection strategy

9.3.1 It is widely accepted that not all the records and materials (artefacts and ecofacts) collected or created during the course of an archaeological project require preservation in perpetuity. These records and materials will be subject to selection in order to establish what will be retained for long-term curation, with the aim of ensuring that all elements selected to be retained are appropriate to establish the significance of the project and support future research, outreach, engagement, display and learning activities, i.e., the retained archive should fulfil the requirements of both future researchers and the receiving Museum.

9.3.2 The selection strategy, which details the project-specific selection process, is underpinned by national guidelines on selection and retention (Brown 2011, section 4) and generic selection policies (SMA 1993; Wessex Archaeology's internal selection policy) and follows CIfA's *Toolkit for Selecting Archaeological Archives*. It should be agreed by all stakeholders (Wessex Archaeology's internal specialists, external specialists, local authority, museum) and fully documented in the project archive.

9.3.3 In this instance, given the relatively low level of finds recovery, the selection process has been deferred until after the fieldwork stage was completed. Project-specific proposals for selection are presented below. These proposals are based on recommendations by Wessex Archaeology's internal specialists and will be updated in line with any further comment by other stakeholders (museum, local authority). The selection strategy will be fully documented in the project archive.

9.3.4 Any material not selected for retention may be used for teaching or reference collections by Wessex Archaeology.

Finds

9.3.5 The finds assemblage comprises 123 pieces of featureless burnt clay; 10 pieces of worked flint; and 4 pieces of pottery. Thee following selection strategy is proposed:

- fired clay (123 pieces): undiagnostic featureless fragments with no further research potential; discard;
- flint (10 pieces): small assemblage with no strongly diagnostic pieces but possible suggestion of Mesolithic/Neolithic component providing the earliest evidence of activity; retain;
- pottery (4 piece): minimal number of sherds, common fabrics in area. No additional research potential; discard.

Palaeoenvironmental material

9.3.6 The flot from ditch 204 should be retained as part of the site archive. The remaining flots have no further potential and they may be discarded.

9.3.7 Due to the low potential of the waterlogged material in layer 105, it is recommended that the remaining unprocessed material is discarded.

Documentary records

9.3.8 Paper records comprise site registers (other pro-forma site records are digital), drawings and reports (written scheme of investigation, client report). All will be retained and deposited with the project archive.

Digital data

9.3.9 The digital data comprise site records (tablet-recorded on site) in spreadsheet format; finds records in spreadsheet format; survey data; photographs; reports. All will be deposited, although site photographs will be subject to selection to eliminate poor quality and duplicated images, and any others not considered directly relevant to the archaeology of the site.

9.4 Security copy

9.4.1 In line with current best practice (e.g., Brown 2011), on completion of the project a security copy of the written records will be prepared, in the form of a digital PDF/A file. PDF/A is an ISO-standardised version of the Portable Document Format (PDF) designed for the digital preservation of electronic documents through omission of features ill-suited to long-term archiving.

9.5 OASIS

9.5.1 An OASIS (online access to the index of archaeological investigations) record (http://oasis.ac.uk) has been initiated, with key fields completed (Appendix 3). A .pdf version of the final report will be submitted following approval by Atkins Heritage and the Lead Archaeological Advisor for NEAS on behalf of the LPA and HE. Subject to any contractual requirements on confidentiality, copies of the OASIS record will be integrated into the relevant local and national records and published through the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) ArchSearch catalogue.

10 COPYRIGHT

10.1 Archive and report copyright

10.1.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative/digital archive relating to the project will be retained by Wessex Archaeology under the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988* with all rights reserved. The client will be licenced to use each report for the purposes that it was produced in relation to the project as described in the specification. The museum, however, will be granted an exclusive licence for the use of the archive for educational purposes, including academic research, providing that such use conforms to the *Copyright and Related Rights Regulations 2003*.

10.2 Third party data copyright

10.2.1 This document and the project archive may contain material that is non-Wessex Archaeology copyright (e.g., Ordnance Survey, British Geological Survey, Crown Copyright), or the intellectual property of third parties, which Wessex Archaeology are able to provide for limited reproduction under the terms of our own copyright licences, but for which copyright itself is non-transferable by Wessex Archaeology. Users remain bound by the conditions of the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988* with regard to multiple copying and electronic dissemination of such material.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Trench summaries

Trench No 1		Length 20 m	Width 1.80 m	Depth 1.08 m
Context Number	**Fill Of/ Filled With**	**Interpretative Category**	**Description**	**Depth bgl (m)**
101		Topsoil	Dark greyish brown silty clay loam, with rare sub-rounded fine gravel (2–6 mm) inclusions.	0–0.2
102		Subsoil	Mid brown silty clay, with rare sub-rounded gravel (2–40 mm) inclusions.	0.2–0.47
103		Natural	Dark to mid grey silty clay with orange patches.	0.7+
104		Alluvium	Grey silty clay with orange mottles.	0.47–0.96
105		Alluvium	Very dark brown to black organic clay. Common preserved wood up to 100 mm.	0.96–1.08

Trench No 2		Length 30 m	Width 1.80 m	Depth 0.51 m
Context Number	**Fill Of/ Filled With**	**Interpretative Category**	**Description**	**Depth bgl (m)**
201		Topsoil	Dark greyish brown silty clay loam, with rare sub-rounded fine gravel (2–6 mm) inclusions.	0–0.26
202		Subsoil	Mid reddish brown silty clay loam, with rare sub-rounded fine gravel (2–40 mm) inclusions.	0.26–0.5
203		Natural	Mid brownish red with patches of greyish blue sitly clay, with rare sub-rounded fine gravel (2–40 mm) inclusions.	0.5+
204	205	Ditch	Aligned east/west with moderate, concave sides and an irregular / undulating base. Length: >10 m. Width: 2 m. Depth: 0.57 m.	0.5–1.1
205	204	Secondary fill	Pale blueish grey silty clay with rare sub-rounded gravel (6–40 mm) inclusions.	0.5–1.1

Trench No 3		Length 35 m	Width 1.80 m	Depth 0.50 m
Context Number	**Fill Of/ Filled With**	**Interpretative Category**	**Description**	**Depth bgl (m)**
301		Topsoil	Dark greyish brown silty clay loam, with rare sub-rounded fine gravel (2–6 mm) inclusions.	0–0.3
302		Subsoil	Mid reddish brown silty clay loam, with rare sub-rounded gravel (2–40 mm) inclusions.	0.3–0.47
303		Natural	Mid brownish red with patches of greyish blue sitly clay, with rare sub-rounded gravel (2–40 mm) inclusions.	0.47+
304		Heat affected natural	Rectangular area of firm mid reddish brown and yellow silty clay, with rare sub-rounded gravel (2–60 mm) inclusions and rare charcoal flecks. Length: >0.7 m. Width: >0.35 m. Depth: 0.15 m.	0.37–0.6
305	306	Posthole	Circular posthole with steep, concave sides, and an irregular / undulating base. Length: 0.28 m. Width: >0.1 m. Depth: 0.07 m.	0.34–0.41
306	305	Secondary fill	Mid reddish brown clay silt loam with rare sub-rounded gravel (6–40 mm inclusions.	0.34–0.41

Trench No 4		Length 15 m	Width 1.80 m	Depth 0.50 m
Context Number	**Fill Of/Filled With**	**Interpretative Category**	**Description**	**Depth bgl (m)**

401		Topsoil	Dark brown silty clay with rare sub-angular to sub-rounded gravel (2–30 mm) inclusions.	0–0.2
402		Subsoil	Dark reddish brown silty clay with rare sub-angular to sub-rounded gravel (2–30 mm) inclusions	0.2–0.4
403		Natural	Dark red clay.	0.4+
404	405	Posthole	Subcircular with vertical sides and a flat base. Width: 0.3 m. Depth: 0.06 m	0.5–0.56
405	404	Fill	Mid brown silty clay with sparse angular to rounded gravel (2–40 mm) inclusions, including some quartz.	0.5–0.56

Trench No 5	**Length 20 m**	**Width 1.80 m**	**Depth 0.75 m**

Context Number	**Fill Of/Filled With**	**Interpretative Category**	**Description**	**Depth bgl (m)**
501		Topsoil	Dark brown silty clay with rare small sub-rounded to sub-angular gravel (2–30 mm) inclusions.	0–0.35
502		Subsoil	Dark reddish brown silty clay with rare sub-angular to sub-rounded gravel (2–30 mm) inclusions.	0.35–0.65
503		Natural	Pale yellowish red, pale grey, and dark brownish grey silty clay.	0.65+

Appendix 2 Environmental evidence

Table 2 Assessment of the environmental evidence.

Scale of abundance: C = <5, B = 5–10, A = 10–30, A* = 30–100, A** = 100–500, A*** = >500; Bioturbation proxies: Roots (%), Uncharred seeds (scale of abundance), E = earthworm eggs, Moll-t = terrestrial molluscs.

Feature Type	Feature	Context	Sample Code	Sample vol. (l)	Flot vol. (ml)	Bioturbation proxies	Charred plant remains/charcoal							Other	Preservation	Waterlogged remains	
							Grain	Chaff	Cereal Notes	Charred Other	Charred Other Notes	Charcoal >2mm (ml)	Charcoal			Vegetative parts	Invertebrates
Heat affected natural		304	271549_1	9	30	80% modern roots, E	-	-	-	-	-	<1	Mature - Moderate condition	-	-	-	-
Posthole	404	405	271549_2	5	20	90% modern roots, E	-	-	-	-	-	1	Mature - Moderate condition. Occasional mineral coating	Moll-t (C)	-	-	-
Ditch	204	205	271549_3	28	110	15% modern roots, modern seeds (A** - *Juncus* sp.)	A***	A*	*Hordeum vulgare*, *Triticum aestivum/turgidum* (incl. *T. aestivum* rachis), Triticum sp., Triticeae. Culm nodes	A*	Poaceae (incl *Avena* sp., *Lolium* sp.), *Arrhenatherum elatius* subsp. *bulbosum* tuber, *Galium* sp., *Anthemis cotula*, *Agrostemma githago*, Vicieae	15 (estimated)	Mature and roundwood with bark - Very good condition. Occasional mineral coating	Moll-t (C)	Heterogeneous. Occasional mineral coating	-	-

Feature Type	Feature	Context	Sample Code	Sample vol. (l)	Flot vol. (ml)	Bioturbation proxies	Charred plant remains/charcoal							Other	Preservation	Waterlogged remains	
							Grain	Chaff	Cereal Notes	Charred Other	Charred Other Notes	Charcoal >2mm (ml)	Charcoal			Vegetative parts	Invertebrates
											(large-seeded incl. *Pisum sativum*), *Corylus avellana* nutshell, *Rumex* sp.						
Layer	-	105	271549_4	30	30	15% modern roots	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	A*** - Incl. small wood fragments and very degraded plant material	Earthworm eggs (A), Bryozoa statoblasts (A*)

Appendix 3 OASIS summary

OASIS ID (UID)	wessexar1-520408
Project Name	Evaluation at Athelney Spillway, Lyng, Somerset
Sitename	Athelney Spillway, Lyng, Somerset
Sitecode	271548
Project Identifier(s)	
Activity type	Evaluation
Planning Id	
Reason For Investigation	Scheduled monument consent
Organisation Responsible for work	Wessex Archaeology
Project Dates	11-Oct-2023 - 13-Oct-2023
Location	Athelney Spillway, Lyng, Somerset NGR : ST 34279 29331 LL : 51.05954002539908, -2.93916054328853 12 Fig : 334279,129331
Administrative Areas	Country : England County/Local Authority : Somerset Local Authority District : Somerset Parish : Lyng
Project Methodology	Excavation of fivetrenches within the footprint of a proposed new spillway.
Project Results	The evaluation produced evidence for human activity on the site dating from the Late Mesolithic onwards. The earliest activity is represented by Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic struck flint, which was recovered from subsoil deposits and as residual material in later features. Later activity comprised a substantial ditch, two isolated postholes and a probable hearth. These features are all of some antiquity, but at present they are not reliably dated.
Keywords	Ditch - UNCERTAIN - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types Post Hole - UNCERTAIN - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types Hearth - UNCERTAIN - FISH Thesaurus of Monument Types End Scraper - LATER PREHISTORIC - FISH Archaeological Objects Thesaurus Blade - LATE MESOLITHIC - FISH Archaeological Objects Thesaurus Blade - EARLY NEOLITHIC - FISH Archaeological Objects Thesaurus
Funder	Environment Agency
HER	Somerset HER - unRev - STANDARD Scheduled Monument Casework - unRev - STANDARD
Person Responsible for work	Bruce Eaton
HER Identifiers	
Archives	Physical Archive, Documentary Archive - to be deposited with Somerset Museum Service; Digital Archive - to be deposited with Archaeology Data Service Archive;

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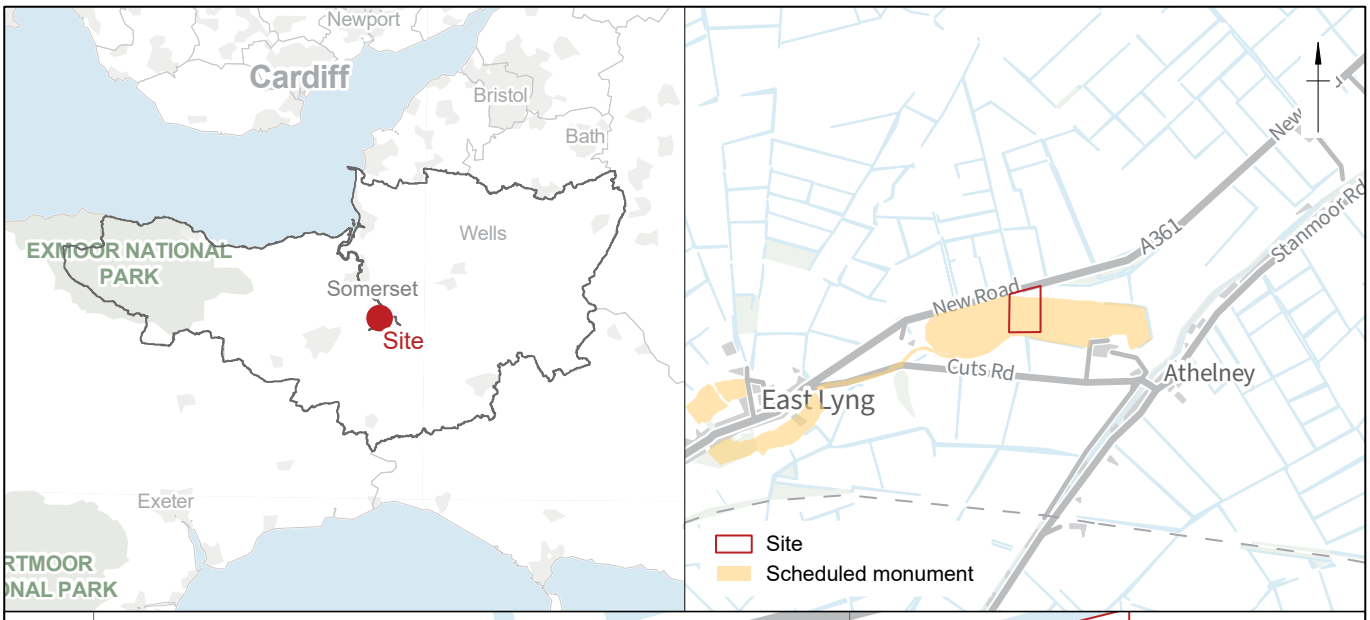

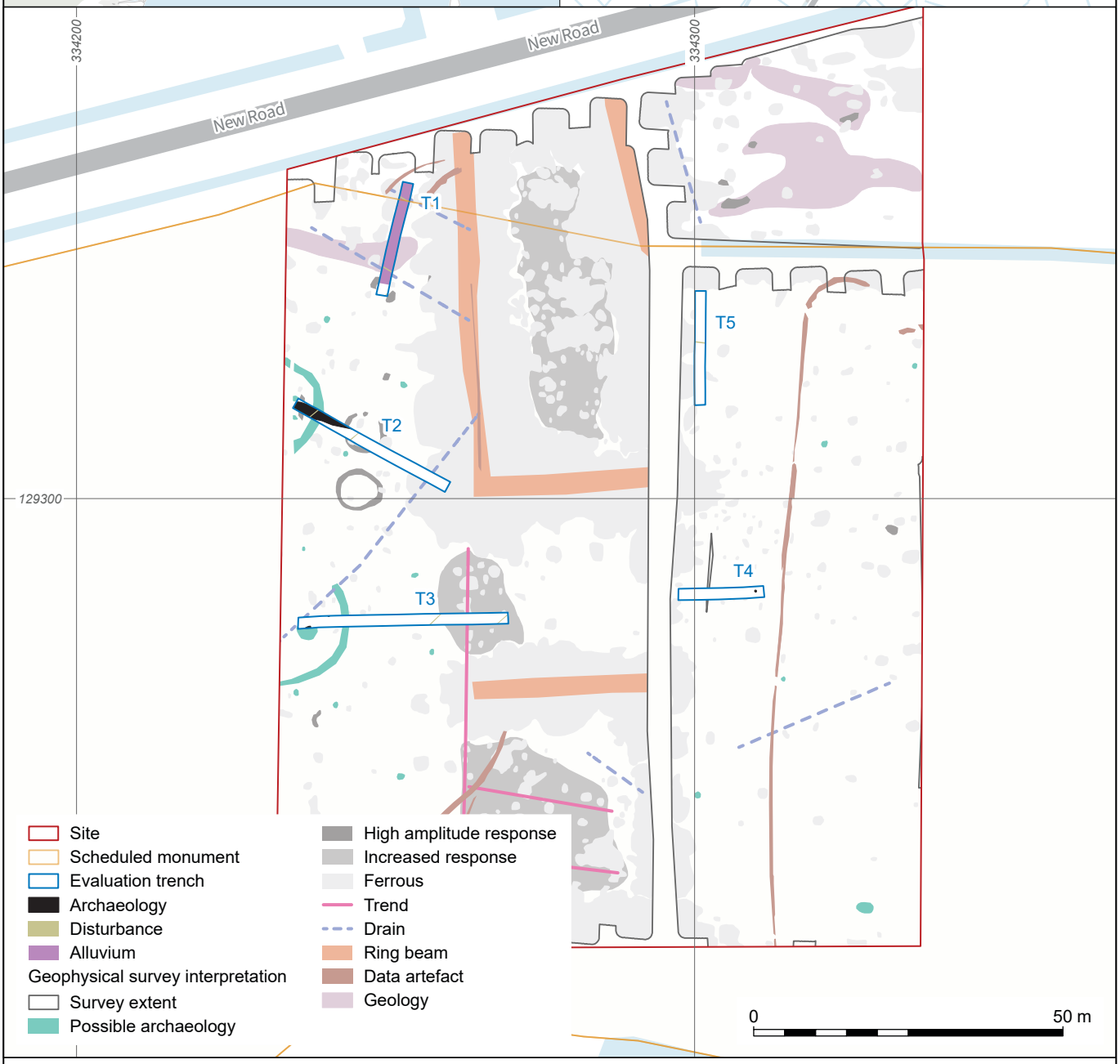

Coordinate system: OSGB 1936 British National Grid

Date: 15/11/2023	Created by: CM	Revision: 0	Scale: 1:1,000 at A4

Figure 1: Site location and trench plan

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T1

104

105

T5

204

T2

T3

304

305

T4

404

Site
Scheduled monument
Evaluation trench
Archaeology
Disturbance
Alluvium
Intervention

Geophysical survey interpretation

Survey extent
Possible archaeology
High amplitude response
Increased response
Ferrous
Trend
Drain
Ring beam
Data artefact
Geology

0 10 m

Coordinate system: OSGB 1936 British National Grid

Date: 15/11/2023 | Created by: CM

Scale: 1:250 at A3 | Revision: 0

Figure 2: Site plan and archaeological features

Figure 3: Trench 1, looking north. 1 m and 2 m scales.

Figure 4: Representative section of Trench 1, looking east. 1 m scale.

Figure 5: Trench 2, looking south-east. 1 m and 2 m scales.

Figure 6: Trench 2, south-east facing section of ditch 204. 1 m scale.

Figure 7: Trench 3, looking west. 1 m and 2 m scales.

Figure 8: Representative section of Trench 3, looking north. 1 m scale.

Figure 9: Trench 3, south-east facing section of burnt natural layer 304. 0.2 m scale.

Figure 10: Trench 3, south-west facing section of posthole 305. 0.2 m scale.

Figure 11: Trench 4, looking west. 1 m and 2 m scales.

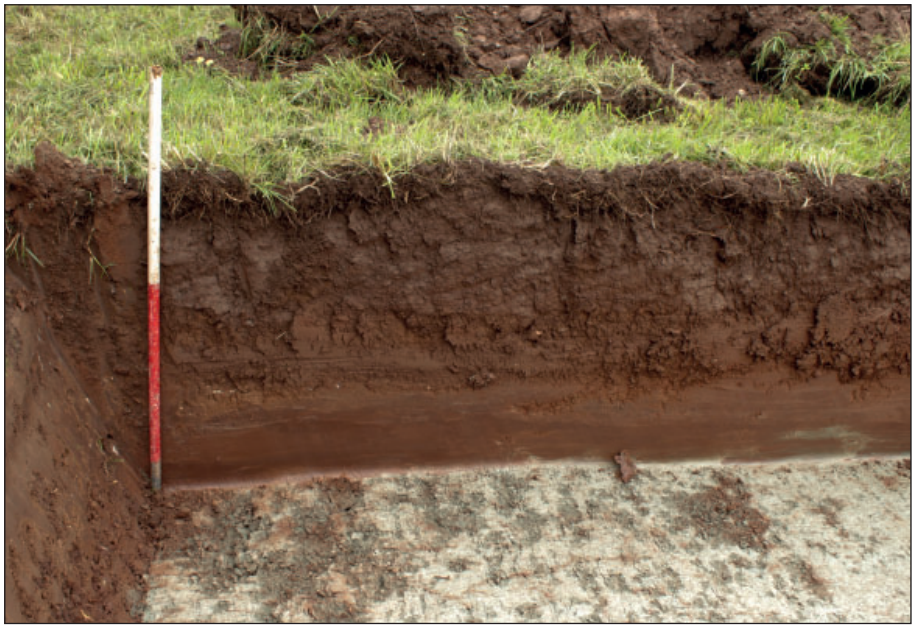

Figure 12: Representative section of Trench 4, looking north. 1 m scale.

Figure 13: Trench 4, posthole 404, looking east. 0.2 m scale.

Figure 14: Trench 5, looking south. 1 m and 2 m scales.

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