

Fields North Of Honeymead, Crocombe, Somerset An Archaeological Desktop Assessment



**RAB/12/14
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1.0 Introduction

Information is being sought by Mr. Kevin Oatley of Oatley Construction Ltd., with regards to the potential archaeological issues which may arise concerning a proposed development for housing on land to the north of the village of Croscombe. This desktop assessment forms an initial phase of any archaeological examination of this land and was conducted on behalf of the developer by R. A. Broomhead acting as Archaeological Consultant during July 2014.

2.0 Aims and Methodology.

In line with both local and national archaeological policy, the aims of this assessment are to establish the possible character, extent, quality and worth of the known or potential archaeological resource within the assessment area and its environs which may be impacted by the proposed development. For the purposes of this assessment, the archaeological resource is taken to include archaeological remains, historic structures and elements of the historic landscape

The work was conducted in two phases comprising firstly, a preliminary phase of data collection including:-

- i.) The collection of historical and topographical data from published and unpublished sources including historic manuscripts, Ordnance Survey maps and online data resources including County Archives.
- ii.) The collection of existing archaeological data. Primarily that contained within the Somerset Historical Environment Record (HER) but also appropriate museum records and other material acquired or collected by local research groups.
- iii.) A site visit to examine the current state of the assessment area and its surrounds.

Secondly, a desktop assessment comprising the correlation of all gathered evidence and report presentation with an interpretation of the evidence under the site code RAB/12/14

3.0 The Assessment Site.

The assessment site lies immediately north of an existing modern housing development above the western end of the village of Croscombe at ST58794457

and occupies an area of 1.5ha (3.7a). The site currently comprises undeveloped grazing land sloping from c90m OD in the north to around 80m OD at its southern boundary. The British geological survey shows the site to stand upon Triassic Keuper Marl with outcrops of Dolomitic Conglomerate.

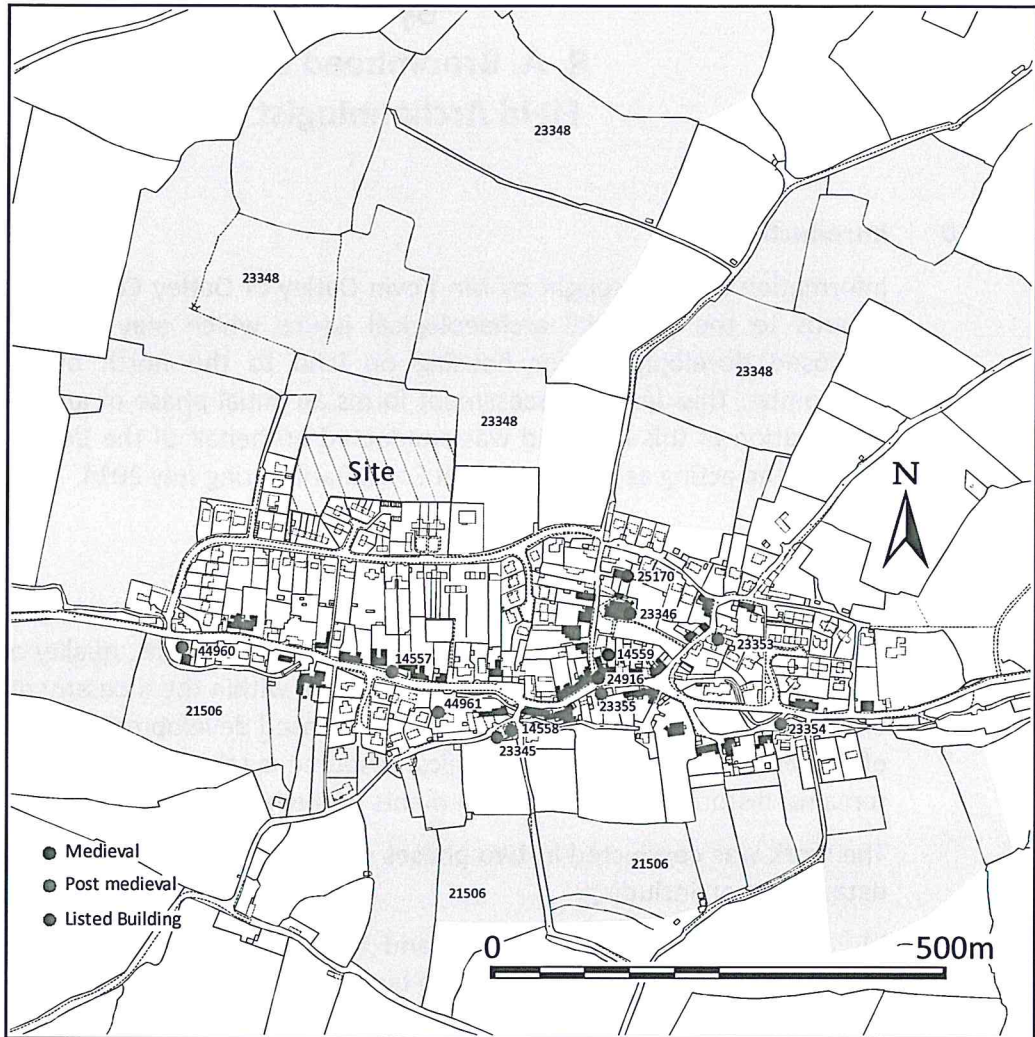


Figure 1 Site Location and HER Detail

3.1 Existing Archaeological Constraints

The currently adopted Local Plan notes that:

'Archaeological remains are a finite and non-renewable resource which are in many cases fragile and vulnerable to damage. They contain irreplaceable information about the past and are valuable for their own sake and for their role in education, leisure and tourism. They also contribute to local identity and are often highly valued by local people.'

The proposal map for Croscombe indicates the site to lie within an Area of High Archaeological Potential within which the presence of archaeological feature or finds may reasonably be expected. Such areas are based on an assessment of the historic landscape, the existence of known, adjacent archaeological sites,

documentary or cartographic evidence or prior archaeological research but yet may not themselves have been subject to archaeological intervention.

As such the site is subject to Local Plan Policy EN13

'Within Areas of High Archaeological Potential planning permission will not be granted unless a field evaluation has been carried out to determine whether archaeological remains of local or national value exist on the site.

Where permission is granted, a mitigation strategy will be required for the remains. Wherever possible, remains should be required to be preserved in situ. Where this is not possible, preservation of the remains by record prior to development will be required.'

4.0 Archaeological & Documentary Evidence

4.1 Existing Archaeological Evidence

There is no indication that the assessment site has been subject to any prior intrusive archaeological investigation. Enquiries directed to the county HER have shown there to be no Scheduled Monuments on or in close proximity to the site nor any current record of significant archaeological finds within it.

The site does lie within an area demonstrated to contain elements of a relict field system subject to a study by Cottrell as part of an unpublished MA dissertation (HER PRN 23373) Details of all those known archaeological sites and events within 500m of the site are listed in Appendix 1

4.2 The Historic Background

4.2.1 Prehistoric

Artifactual evidence of prehistoric activity within 500m of the assessment site is nonexistent. The site does not lie within an environment characteristic of known early prehistoric activity of the Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic periods nor have there been any recorded finds of material which may reasonable suggest later, transient Mesolithic exploitation. Neither does the current archaeological record note any reference to stray flints, finds or landscape features which may point to more settled activity of the Neolithic or Bronze Age Periods although this may merely represent a paucity of research in the surrounding area.

4.2.2 Iron Age and Romano British

The most prominent and only confirmed Iron Age feature in the immediate area is Maesbury Castle, a bivallate hillfort some 3km north-east of the site. Such features frequently developed from defended Bronze-Age enclosures and operated as foci within the landscape, potential proto-towns or trading centres within defined service territories which may well have included the area now occupied by the present village of Croscombe. It is Cottrell's contention (Cottrell, T. 1996) that that the extant earthworks of a number of small, sub-rectangular fields defined by banks in an area 200m to the north-east of the site may represent elements of a field-system of this period although dating evidence is currently unforthcoming. There is no visible evidence that these fields extend into

the current assessment area which has clearly been effected by later agricultural development but this does not preclude the potential for the survival of buried archaeology of this period.

Subsequent Romano-British settlement is recognised as having been widespread throughout Somerset and knowledge of its extent and density is continually increasing as stray artefacts are located and published. The majority of villages in the area have produced some finds commensurate with Romano-British occupation and the Reverend Skinner (1788-1832) records seeing some Roman coins reputedly found in Croscombe (PRN 23347). There is however no recent record of any such material and the surrounding area has produced only a handful of stray Romano-British finds, none being within close proximity to the assessment area.

4.2.3 Post-Roman, Saxon and Medieval

Archaeological evidence for post-Roman and Saxon settlement is in general rare throughout the area and non-existent within any distance of the proposed development site. References to an area of land known as Croscombe first occur in an early 8th century charter (*Correges Combe*) which in its boundary clauses refers to the identifiable Crapnall Farm to the north-west of the site as being sheep pasture. The Domesday Book of 1086 makes only passing reference to Croscombe (*Coristone*), it comprising, together with Shepton (*Sepetone*) part of the manor of Pilton (*Piltone*) held by Roger of Courseulles from the Abbot of Glastonbury.

The form by which the adjacent early village developed is thus obscure but it is clear from the evidence of existing buildings that later medieval Croscombe flourished and surviving earthworks in the surrounding fields testify to a productive agricultural economy. The present church dates from the 13th century (PRN 23346) and lies adjacent to a medieval hall of the early 14th century (PRN 25170). A significant number of the listed buildings lining Long Street, Church Street and Rock Street contain late medieval elements suggesting the maximum extent of medieval settlement is most likely to be that which remains visible in the pattern expressed upon the earliest surviving maps (*Figure 1*).

4.3 Documentary Evidence

Documentation referring to Croscombe and its surrounding lands is relatively plentiful and describes the existence of several substantial open fields within which the present assessment site almost certainly lay. The loss of many field names resultant upon post-medieval enclosure unfortunately means that any direct reference to the current assessment site has been lost.

The Tithe map of 1839 gives the first illustrative description of the site showing it to be undeveloped at that date and to comprise a pasture then known as 'The Knowl' in the ownership of Charles Orledge. No change in its status can be noted in maps of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The lower half of 'The Knowl' was developed for housing in 1956 when the Honymead estate was constructed (Armstrong).



Figure 2: Croscombe Tithe Map (1839) Site Shown - Plot 223 The map also indicates the probable maximum extent of the medieval village

4.4 Aerial Photographic Evidence

Three sets of aerial photographs were consulted including post war aerial photographs taken by the RAF in early 1947, the Hunting Survey verticals of 1977 and SCC colour verticals of 1981. There is no known LIDAR coverage of the assesment area. The usefulness of the latter two sets of aerial photographs has largely been negated by modern housing development however the post war RAF vericals show the assesment area prior to the northward expansion of the present village

Aerial photography (RAF CPE.UK.1992 3420-22 April 1947) gives no indication of any significant settlement within the limits of the assesment area but indicate the site to be bisected by a number of north-south ridges commensurate with medieval ploughing or strip boundaries. The same photograph indicates the extent of the earthworks in the adjacent fields clearly showing two strip lynchets (medieval plough terraces) extending into the area above the proposed development from fields to the east.



Figure 3: RAF CPE.UK.1992 3420-22 (1947) showing the site and visible earthworks. Dashed vertical yellow lines indicate plough ridges or strip boundaries. Horizontal blue lines indicate lynchets and strip boundaries

5.0 Site Inspection

A site visit was made on the 3rd July 2014 and a photographic record made during the excavation of three test pits designed to determine percolation rates. The field had recently been mown but no significant archaeological features were visible within the proposed development area apart from several low north-south ridges corresponding with the evidence of medieval or post-medieval ploughing or strip boundaries visible upon aerial photographs.

An examination of the excavated test pits, each dug to a depth of 1m produced no evidence of archaeological activity showing silty marls with occasional stone throughout. No artifactual material was recovered from the displaced spoil.