

DRYBROOK (GL)

ARC Southern

Drybrook Quarry Extension, Gloucestershire

Archaeological Assessment

**Oxford Archaeological Unit
April 1989**

DRYBROOK QUARRY EXTENSION, GLOS.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT FOR

ARC SOUTHERN

APRIL 1989

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DRYBROOK QUARRY EXTENSION, DRYBROOK, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

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Summary

Twenty four trenches across the crest of the hill and the valley bottom revealed traces of surface quarrying for iron ore. Although there were no deposits of archaeological significance, several unstratified sherds of pottery suggested possible agricultural activity associated with nearby settlements during the Iron Age - Romano British period. None of these settlements appear to be within the proposed quarry extension.

Location and Previous Land Use

This assessment examined a proposed extension to the west of the existing ARC quarry at Drybrook. The site includes the crest and part of the north side of an east-west valley. The proposed quarry extension rises some 50m from the valley floor to an almost level summit. The land is currently under permanent pasture but parts of the lower fields have been used to grow potatoes until recently (pers. com. Mr Matthews and local residents, ARC APs). The remainder of the land has been used for grazing within the lifetime of the present farmer.

Past Mining Activity

Immediately to the north-west of the proposal quarry extension a 0.5 ha copse conceals the trenches and spoil heaps from early surface digging for iron ore. Until about 20 years ago the remains of this iron ore digging extended eastwards across the hill crest (pers. com. the contractor and Mr Matthews). The platform marking a 19th century trial shaft (1st ed., 0.6. 25 inch, surveyed 1878) was levelled at the same time as the old workings on the hill crest.

Limestone may have been dug from the top of the hill to supply a pre 20th century lime kiln which was located at the north-west corner of the present ARC quarry.

Assessment Strategy

On the crown and sides of the hill the soil varied in depth between 15 and 30cm above weathered bed rock. At the bottom of the hill side, hill wash had increased the depth of soil to about 1m. If quarrying was to go ahead this soil would be stripped and

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APPLICATION AREA

ASSESSMENT TRENCHES 12

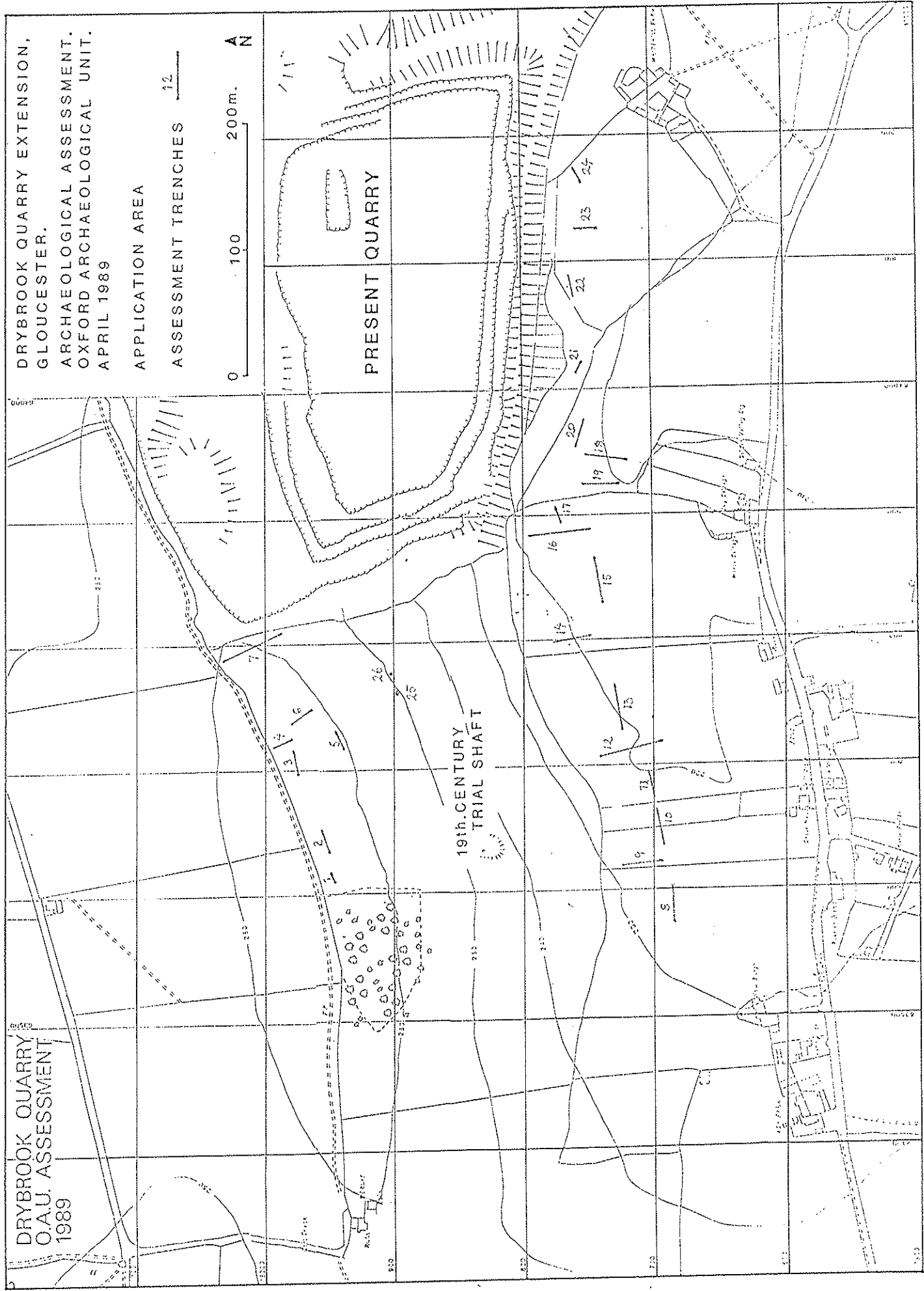
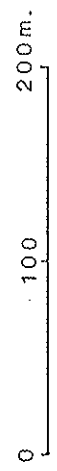


TABLE 1: THE ASSESSMENT TRENCHES

trench no	length and breadth	dated archaeological material in metres
1	1.6 x 10	
2	1.6 x 20	
3	1.6 x 23	
4	1.6 x 18	2 pottery sherds: L IA-RB/Med?
5	1.6 x 16	
6	1.6 x 20	flint scraper - Bronze Age?
7	1.6 x 52	
8	1.6 x 46	
9	1.6 x 45	1 pottery sherd RB 2 pottery sherds possibly RB
10	1.6 x 31	
11	1.6 x 20	
12	1.6 x 31	1 pottery sherd RB or 20th century flower pot
13	1.6 x 37	
14	1.6 x 31	
15	1.6 x 38	
16	1.6 x 49	1 pottery sherd RB?
17	1.6 x 15	
18	1.6 x 34	
19	1.6 x 33	
20	1.6 x 19	
21	1.6 x 12	
22	1.6 x 20	
23	1.6 x 17	
24	1.6 x 15	1 pottery sherd, prehistoric: Bronze Age?
25	1 x 1	
26	1 x 1	1 pottery sherd RB, 2 poss. RB

Abbreviations

IA	Iron Age
RB	Romano-British
Med	medieval

stored for restoration. Such stripping would damage or destroy any archaeological remains that may exist within or beneath the hill wash. Consequently the archaeological assessment included the whole of the current application area from the undated earthworks at the top of the hill to the deeper soil along the southern boundary. Some 24 machine dug trenches were excavated across the hill crest and through the hill wash along the southern boundary (Fig 1). Potential archaeological features were then excavated by hand. Two small hand dug pits examined a more level area of the hill side. A large part of the site was steep hillside which would not be expected to contain past settlement remains and this area was not subjected to assessment trenches.

All of the 24 machine dug trenches were excavated to a width of 1.6m using a toothless ditching bucket.

The Hill Top Trenches

Seven machine cut trenches on the crown of the hill (Fig 1) were arranged to section selected shallow earthworks and curvilinear markings shown on aerial photographs (ARC AP's and GCC S&MR). In many places carboniferous limestone rubble lay immediately beneath the turf. Each of the trenches displayed some disturbance consistent with surface digging through the weathered limestone for nodular iron ore.

There was no artefact evidence to date this activity. Trench 3 revealed a small area in which the weathered surface of the limestone had been removed perhaps for lime burning. Occasional finds of post-medieval clay tobacco pipe stem and fragmentary domestic material occurred within the topsoil.

Trench 4 provided two small sherds of a hard black sandied micaceous pottery from the base of the topsoil. Currently there is insufficient knowledge of pottery types from each period in this locality to be able to date these two sherds with confidence and they may be late Iron Age, Romano-British or medieval.

A prehistoric flint tool was recovered from the topsoil in trench 6. This was an end-scraper and possibly Bronze Age. No other flintwork was recovered.

The Valley Bottom Trenches

Seventeen machine dug trenches 1.6m wide were excavated through the hill wash to the surface of the undisturbed solifluction deposits between 0.5-1m below the ground surface. The surface of the solifluction deposits was marked either by the presence of rounded boulders and sub-angular stone scatters or by a generally lighter coloured soil. The solifluction deposits were certainly in place by the end of the last glaciation as boulders and stones, had in places, been sorted into lines whilst other periglacial features comprising darker red mineral soils filling irregular polygonal features were visible in trenches 8 - 18. Sections 2m deep were cut in trenches 8, 10, 15 and 16 to verify the lithology. Although in several instances boulders from c.

0.1 - 0.5m diameter had been sorted into rough lines by periglacial action selected excavation indicated that none of these features were man made. The periglacial patterning of the subsoil in the field containing trenches 11-13 was visible on the ARC aerial photograph taken during the summer of 1987.

Apart from periglacial features trench 12 revealed a soil-filled depression containing charcoal flecks. An abraded and undiagnostic sherd of either Roman or post-medieval pottery appeared to have been introduced into the subsoil by animal action.

Trench 16 provided one possible Roman sherd. A small, undated, possible post hole lay beneath the topsoil at the northern end of this trench. At the east end of trench 17 and also undated lay a larger sub-circular pit c. 1.5m in diameter with a dark soil filling including charcoal flecks. There were frequent charcoal flecks throughout the soils in trenches 13-17 possibly reflecting earlier land reclamation.

Trench 18 revealed a pit in which a quantity of timber had been burnt. There was no evidence that this pit was not modern.

Trench 19 revealed several post-medieval (18th-19th century) pottery sherds in the topsoil and a gravel spread suggesting the floor of a recent out-building or shed.

Trenches 20-24 were each located on higher ground and bedrock was exposed immediately below the topsoil. No archaeological features were revealed but a single sherd of pottery in a light corky fabric came from trench 24.

The Hill Side Trenches

Following the discovery of a single sherd of Roman pottery from a mole hill, four hand dug 1m square pits were excavated down to bedrock to reveal a single post-medieval pottery sherd.

Conclusions

Two probable prehistoric artefacts were recovered; a probable Bronze Age flint scraper from trench 6 and a possible pre-Iron Age pottery sherd from trench 24 which lay 500m to the south east of trench 6. The flint scraper was a residual find from a post-medieval later deposit. Occasional flint artefacts occur throughout the landscape and need not necessarily represent settlement sites. There was no other identifiable prehistoric material present in any of the trenches. There does not appear to be any significant prehistoric material within the quarry application area.

Of nine sherds of pottery from trenches 4, 9, 12, 16, and 26 only two were definitely Romano-British and three more were probably Roman. Two sherds may have been either late Iron Age, Romano-British or medieval (Table 1). This thin scatter of

unstratified, abraded sherds suggests perhaps a distribution of domestic debris through manuring arable fields. None of the settlements from which these sherds emanated need be within the area included in the proposed quarry extension. The assessment trenches did not reveal any associated archaeological features.

Shallow quarrying for nodules of iron ore (haematite) within the weathered surface of the carboniferous limestone was apparent in seven trenches across the crown of the hill. That the abandoned diggings and spoil tips within the present copse extended across the crown of the hill until they were levelled about 20 years ago was confirmed by local residents. These diggings are difficult to date as there is no artefact evidence to act as a guide. Such workings may be medieval (D. Mullin) and in the surviving copse the range of ground flora, particularly wood anemone, primrose and dog's mercury suggests that these workings had been abandoned for several centuries. The low, rounded earthworks apparent on the top of the hill reflect the bulldozing of this surface mining rather than anything earlier. Apart from two undated pottery sherds and a residual prehistoric flint tool no archaeological remains pre-dating the iron ore digging on the hill crest were seen.

Sources

Mr F Matthews	present farmer and the land owner
'The Contractor'	undertook the reinstatement of the old mine workings and diggings to level grazing land for Mr Matthews
ARC APs	Three oblique colour aerial photographs taken from the east and held by the Drybrook Quarry office. Taken in June 1984, possibly August 1986 and July 1987
1st ed. OS 25"	1st edition Ordnance Survey map 25 inches to the mile, surveyed 1878
HG Nicholls	<u>Iron Mining in the Forest of Dean</u>
C Hart	<u>The Industrial History of Dean</u>
GCC S&MR	Gloucestershire County Council Sites and Monuments Record
D Mullin	Pers. com. Mr D Mullin, Dean Heritage Centre.