



Dead Maids Quarry, Mere, Wiltshire.

Archaeological Evaluation Report

July 2019

**Client: Pegasus Group on behalf of Manual
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Prepared by: Ben Attfield (Supervisor)
Checked by: Joakim Thomasson (Senior Project Manager)
Edited by: Gerry Thacker (Senior Project Manager)
Approved for Issue by: David Score (Head of Fieldwork)

Signature:



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OA South

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford
OX2 0ES

t. +44 (0)1865 263 800

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridge
CB23 8SG

t. +44 (0)1223 850 500

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane Mills
Moor Lane
Lancaster
LA1 1QD

t. +44 (0)1524 880 250

e. info@oxfordarch.co.uk

w. oxfordarchaeology.com

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Dead Maids Quarry, Mere, Wiltshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Written by Ben Attfield

With illustrations by Conan Parsons and Charles Rousseaux

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Summary

In July 2019 Oxford Archaeology were commissioned by Pegasus Group on behalf of Manual Investing Ltd to undertake an archaeological trial trench evaluation by at the site of Dead Maid Quarry in Mere, Wiltshire, centered on National Grid Reference ST 80115 32286. The site is the southern part of an arable field bounded to the north by the A303 and to the South by B3092, Castle Street.

The evaluation consisted of the excavation of 6 trenches, each measuring 50m by 1.8m. Trenches 1, 2, 5 & 6 were devoid of archaeology, whereas trenches 3 and 4 contained a potential ditch terminus, and an east-west aligned shallow ditch, respectively. No finds were retrieved.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Pegasus Group for commissioning this project. Thanks is also extended to assistant county archaeologist Martin Brown who monitored the work on behalf of for their advice and guidance.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Joakim Thomasson and Gerry Thacker. The fieldwork was directed by Ben Attfield, who was supported by Camille Guezenec. Survey and digitizing were carried out by Conan Parsons and Charles Rousseaux produced the graphics. Thanks is also due to Nicola Scott for the preparation of the archive.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Pegasus Group on behalf of Manual Investing Ltd to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of a proposed industrial estate at Dead Maids Quarry, Wiltshire.

1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref. 18/05138/OUT). Although the Local Planning Authority did not set a brief for the work, a WSI was formulated in discussion with Martin Brown, Assistant County Archaeologist at Wiltshire Council and Chris Morley, the representative of Pegasus Group.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site lies in the south-western part of Wiltshire c. 5km north of Gillingham (Fig. 1), and on the edge of the Cranborne Chase area of outstanding natural beauty. The site covers an area of approximately 2.1ha, and forms the southern part of an arable field bounded by the A303 to the north and Castle Street (B3092) to the south (Fig. 1). The centre of Mere is c. 1.3km to the east. The western plot boundary of Mere's westernmost house defines the southern end of the eastern site boundary. Beyond it rises Long Hill, the east end of which affords Mere Castle its dominant position over the town, c. 930m east of the site.

1.2.2 The ground undulates slightly towards the western side the site, but otherwise falls fairly evenly from c. 126m above (aOD) in the north to c. 120m aOD at its southern boundary.

1.2.3 The field is underlain by Melbury Sandstone Member – Sandstone (BGS 2019). There is no recorded superficial (drift) geology.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The information regarding the archaeological and historical background derives from Wiltshire Council community history platform (Wiltshire Council 2019), the survey of the towns in Wiltshire (Mcmahon 2004) and historic maps and extracts from the Wiltshire Historic Environment Records available at the digital platform *Know Your Place* (2019).

1.3.2 The landscape surrounding the site is dominated by Mere Down, an irregular hill formation c. 1.5km north-east of the site. Monumental prehistoric monuments, such as Neolithic long barrows, Bronze Age mounds and an Iron Age hillfort named White Sheet Hill with associated dykes (attributed to the Iron Age Durotriges tribe), are located on dominant positions overlooking the plains. A ridgeway across Mere Down provided an early-east west route that would have been used throughout prehistory and into historic times. The site is located on the base of the southern slope of the hill formation, between the medieval town of Mere to the east and the historic village core of Lower Zeals c. 700m further to the south-west. A similar but now forested hill formation, Stourhead, rises about 2.5km west of the site. As with the Mere Down, there are numerous prehistoric monuments on conspicuous positions, as well as castles and a medieval priory.

1.3.3 Evidence of prehistoric activity outside the hill formations is not as frequent, but does occur within the area. Two flint axes are recorded from the Mere town area. There are bowl barrows on Mappledine Hill to the south-east of Lower Zeals and on Castle Hill in Mere. The site of Pen Pits, which is partly in Stourton and Penselwood (Somerset) parishes was used to source greensand for quern stones in the early prehistoric and both late medieval and post medieval periods.

1.3.4 This area would have come under early Roman rule after the conquest of 43 A.D., but the evidence is hitherto limited to finds, including two coin hoards (one uncovered at the present cemetery in Mere), Romano-British burials and jewellery.

1.3.5 Several of the settlements recorded in the Domesday survey in 1086 have Old English place names and derive from the Anglo-Saxon Period (Palmer & Powell-Smith 2019). The name *Mere* derives from the Saxon 'Mere' meaning a marsh or boundary. Mere is located at the boundary of three Saxon shires. Evidence of Saxon activity consists of single burial and architectural remains suggesting a Saxon predecessor to St. Michael's church. *Zeals* comes from the Old English 'sealh' meaning a small willow or sallow and the early name was Seale, Sela and several variants of these. At the time of the Domesday survey Mere consisted of a royal estate and three additional smaller settlement units totalling 11 households. By 1086 Zeals had been divided into two settlements, the larger Upper Zeals and the considerably smaller Lower Zeals.

1.3.6 In 1253 the manor of Mere belonged to the Earl of Cornwall, who obtained permission to build a castle on Castle Hill. The earl probably obtained a market for his manor at this time, which created the foundations for urban growth whereby the village developed to a small town. The oldest structural parts of St. Michael's church derive from the end of the 12th century, and it was continuously developed during the Middle Ages. The Market Place can be traced to the later 13th century. Mills connected to the cloth industry, situated along the Ashfield Water in the eastern part of the town, are known from early 14th century.

1.3.7 The village of Lower Zeals disappeared or was relocated (to Long Cross 1km further west) to make way for an extension to the manor that is today known as Zeals House. The earliest record of a house on the site is from 1304, when it appears to have been surrounded by a defensive moat. A chapel is recorded at the manor in 1585.

1.3.8 Mere was well established as a cloth making industry, controlled by merchants and clothiers, during the 16th century.

1.3.9 By the mid-19th century several coaching and private carriage routes passed through Mere. In 1859 the Salisbury and Yeovil Railway Company built the line between Salisbury and Gillingham, running c. 450m north-east of the site.

1.3.10 The site appears as an agricultural field on historic mapping. The Quarry Cottage and the Dead Maid Quarry immediately east of the site appear on maps after 1844.

1.3.11 A geophysical survey (Context One 2014) was undertaken in the field immediately to the west of the site in November 2014. No anomalies deemed to be of significant archaeological interest were identified within the site. Two linear anomalies were identified within the survey data, representing a footpath and a modern drain or service trench.

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- i. To determine or confirm the general nature of any remains present.
- ii. To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
- iii. To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains.
- iv. To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy.
- v. To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape.
- vi. To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive
- vii. To determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status utility and social activity.
- viii. To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 A summary of OA's general approach to excavation and recording can be found in Appendix A. Standard methodologies for Geomatics and Survey, Environmental evidence, Artefactual evidence and Burials can also be found below (Appendices B, C, D and E respectively).

2.2.2 Site specific methodologies were as follows:

- i. The trenches were laid out as displayed in Figure 2.
- ii. Due to the presence of a service running approx. north-south through the centre of the site, trenches 3 and 4 were repositioned. Trench 6 was also moved due to large amounts of vegetation.
- iii. Trench locations and the site boundary were CAT scanned prior to and during excavation.
- iv. The trenches were excavated using a suitable mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket under direct archaeological supervision.
- v. Spoil was stored adjacent to, but at a safe distance from, trench edges.
- vi. Machining was continued in even spits down to the top of the undisturbed natural geology.
- vii. The exposed surface was sufficiently cleaned to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains. A sample of each feature or deposit type, for example furrows, was excavated and recorded.
- viii. The trenches were backfilled after agreement with the Martin Brown, Assistant County Archaeologist at Wiltshire County Council.

2.2.3 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with established best practice and the OA Field Manual.

2.2.4 Digital photos were taken of deposits, trenches and evaluation work in general, and will form part of the project archive.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, and include a stratigraphic description of the trenches that contained archaeological remains. The full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A.

3.1.2 Context numbers reflect the trench numbers unless otherwise stated e.g. pit 102 is a feature within Trench 1, while ditch 304 is a feature within Trench 3.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil sequence between all trenches was fairly uniform. The natural geology of greensand was overlain by a very uniform friable dark brownish grey sandy silt.

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good, and the trenches remained dry throughout. Archaeological features, where present, were easy to identify against the underlying natural geology.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 Archaeological features were present in two trenches. Trench 3 contained a potential ditch terminus, whereas trench 4 contained an east-west aligned ditch. The empty trenches were all of a similar nature, with between 0.24 – 0.30m of sandy silt overlying the natural greensand deposits.

3.4 Trench 3

3.4.1 Trench 3 contained a north-south aligned potential ditch terminus or elongated pit 302 (Fig. 3; Plate 4), which extended to the south of the trench. It had a concave base, moderately sloping sides and was filled with 303, a firm, brown silty clay with frequent subangular – sub rounded sandstone inclusions throughout. It contained no finds.

3.5 Trench 4

3.5.1 Trench 4 contained a single, east-west aligned shallow ditch 402 (Fig. 3; Plate 6), with a flat base and moderately sloping sides. It was filled by 403, a soft, brown, sandy clay with frequent fragments of sandstone throughout. It contained no finds.

3.6 Finds summary

3.6.1 Both of the features on site were fully excavated for finds recovery. No finds were present.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The results of the field investigation can be considered to be reliable. The weather conditions were good throughout, and the natural greensand deposits were easily identifiable from the overlying soils. The features were easily visible within the trenches.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 The evaluation can be considered successful, although the two features remain undated as no finds or dateable evidence were recovered from their excavation.

4.3 Interpretation

4.3.1 The features within the trenches are in all likelihood representative of former field boundaries or drainage ditches, and attest to the use of the land for arable purposes, although without any dateable evidence, their age is uncertain.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	ENE - WSW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of greensand					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.28
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.28	Topsoil – friable, dark brownish grey sandy silt with sandstone pebble inclusions	-	-
101	Layer	-		Natural Greensand Deposits	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	NNW – SSE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of greensand					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.30
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.30	Topsoil – friable, dark brownish grey sandy silt with sandstone pebble inclusions	-	-
201	Layer	-	-	Natural Greensand Deposits	-	-

Trench 3						
General description					Orientation	NE - SW
Contained a north-south aligned potential ditch terminus					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.26
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
300	Layer	-	0.26	Topsoil – friable, dark brownish grey sandy silt with sandstone pebble inclusions	-	-
301	Layer	-	-	Natural Greensand Deposits	-	-
302	Cut	0.56	0.40	Cut of potential ditch terminus with a concave		

Trench 3						
				base and moderately sloping sides		
303	Fill			Fill of ditch [302] – Firm, brown silty clay with frequent subangular – sub rounded sandstone inclusions throughout.	-	

Trench 4						
General description					Orientation	N - S
Contained an east-west aligned shallow ditch					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.28
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
400	Layer	-	0.28	Topsoil – friable, dark brownish grey sandy silt with sandstone pebble inclusions	-	-
401	Layer	-	-	Natural Greensand Deposits	-	-
402	Cut	1.03	0.28	Cut of E – W aligned ditch with moderately sloping sides and a flat base	-	-
403	Fill	1.03	0.28	Soft, brown, sandy clay with frequent fragments of sandstone throughout.	-	-

Trench 5						
General description					Orientation	ENE - WSW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of greensand					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.24
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
500	Layer	-	0.24	Topsoil – friable, dark brownish grey sandy silt with sandstone pebble inclusions	-	-
500	Layer	-	-	Natural Greensand Deposits	-	-

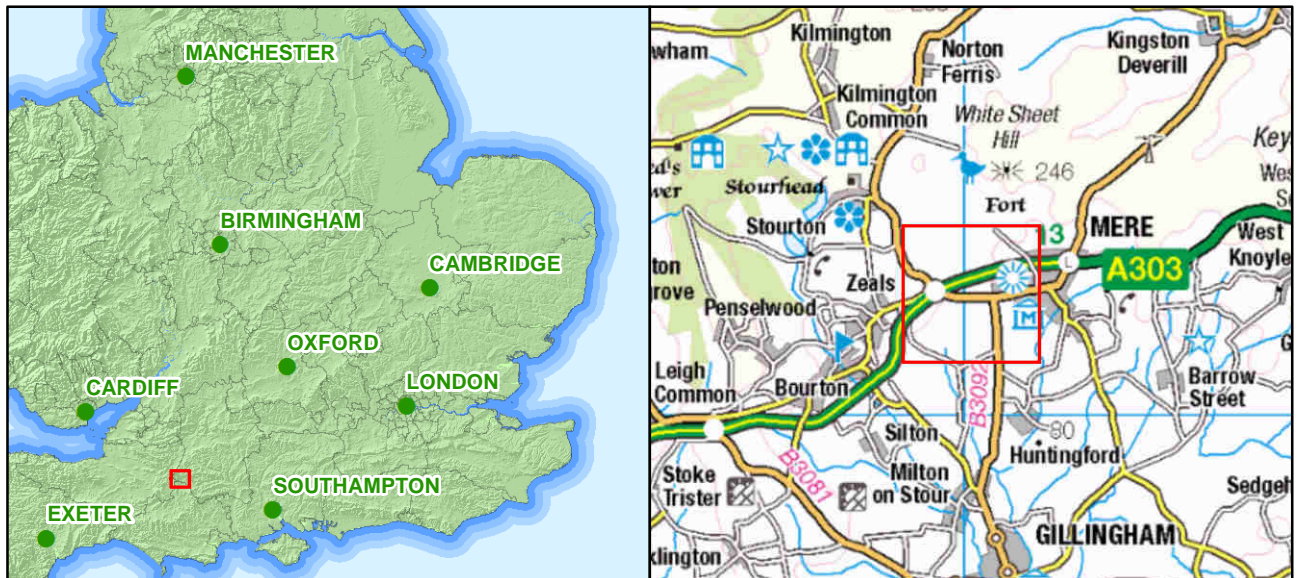
Trench 6						
General description					Orientation	NNE - SSW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of greensand					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.26
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
600	Layer	-	0.26	Topsoil – friable, dark brownish grey sandy silt with sandstone pebble inclusions	-	-
600	Layer	-	-	Natural Greensand Deposits	-	-

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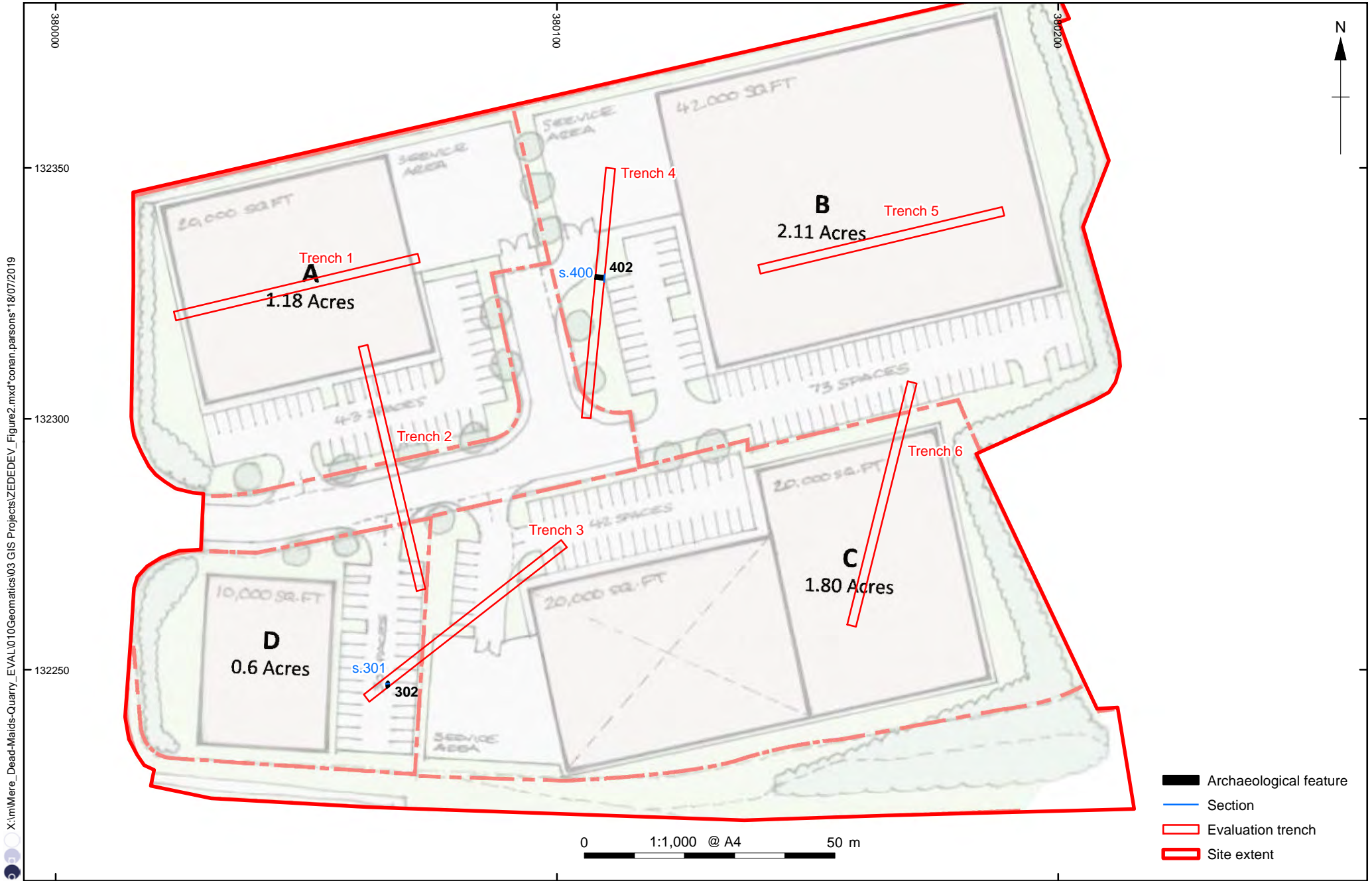
APPENDIX C**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

Site name:	Dead Maids Quarry in Mere, Wiltshire
Site code:	ZEDED19
Grid Reference	ST 80115 32286
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	2019-07-15, 3 days
Area of Site	2.1ha
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum in due course under the accession number SBYWM: 2019.28.
Summary of Results:	The evaluation consisted of the excavation of 6 trenches, measuring 50m by 1.8m. Trenches 1, 2, 5 & 6 were devoid of archaeology, whereas trenches 3 and 4 contained a potential ditch terminus, and an east-west aligned shallow ditch, respectively. No finds were retrieved.



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Figure 1: Site location



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Figure 2: Trench location plan



Plate 1: Trench 1 view to the west

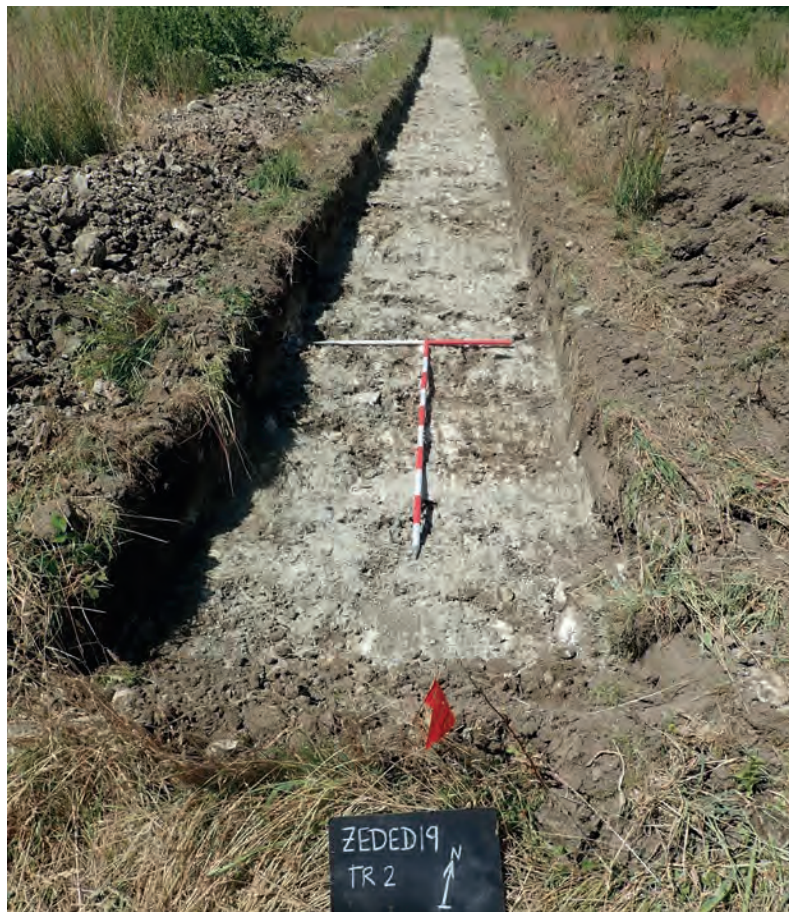


Plate 2: Trench 2 view to the north



Plate 3: Trench 3 view to the south-east



Plate 4: Feature 302 in trench 3 view to the south-east



Plate 5: Trench 4 view to the north



Plate 6: Feature 402 in trench 4 view to the east



Plate 7: Trench 5 view to the east



Plate 8: Trench 6 view to the north



**Head Office/Registered Office/
OA South**

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@oxfordarchaeology.com
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1QD

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: [oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500
e: [oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>



Director: Gill Hey, BA PhD FSA MCifA
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