

**YCCCART 2011 /Y15
North Somerset HER 2011/168**

**Gradiometry survey at the Cockpit field
(and suggested site of Wraxall Roman villa), Wraxall**

**YATTON, CONGRESBURY, CLAVERHAM AND CLEEVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL
RESEARCH TEAM (YCCCART)**

General Editor: Vince Russett



Lunch at the cock-pit, c1949. Keith Gardner (left), Mrs Sykes & Daughter (right). Courtesy of the estate of the late Keith Gardner.

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Abstract

YCCCART has agreed with the Heritage Lottery Fund to undertake a project over two years commencing May 2009 to establish the extent of the Congresbury Roman kiln sites, investigate the archaeology of the environs of Cadbury Hill, Congresbury and enable the equipment to be used by Community Archaeology in North Somerset teams to identify new archaeological sites / additional features in North Somerset.

This gradiometry survey has revealed the potential site of Wraxall Roman villa and the enigmatic feature called the Cock-pit, as well as what appears to be ditches with magnetically enhanced contents.

Acknowledgements

A Heritage Lottery Grant enabled the purchase, by YCCCART, of a Bartington 601 gradiometer without which this survey could not have been undertaken.

This survey would also not have been carried out without the willing permission of the landowner Mr D Wyatt.

The authors are grateful for the hard work by the members of NEAT and YCCCART in performing the survey and Vince Russett for editing this report.

Introduction

Yatton, Congresbury, Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team (YCCCART) is one of a number of Community Archaeology teams across North Somerset, supported by the North Somerset Council Development Management Team.

The objective of the Community Archaeology in North Somerset (CANS) teams is to carry out archaeological fieldwork, for the purpose of recording, and better understanding of, the heritage of North Somerset.

Site Location



Fig 1: Site location

The field lies north east of Nailsea some 8 miles south of Bristol.
The start point for this survey is at ST 47934 71543

Land use and geology

The field is laid to grass, although it has been ploughed in the recent past.

The bedrock is South Wales Lower Coal Measures Formation and South Wales Middle Coal Measures Formation: a coal seam once outcropped in this and adjacent fields, and this had been worked by bell-pits which were visible in the adjacent field to the west on the 1946 air photographs, but which are no longer present as earthworks (OS Geology maps; air photographs in the North Somerset HER).

Historical & archaeological context

The Villa

There is some confusion in the written record about the exact location of this building, but Keith Gardner (who was involved with its excavation) was sure it was in the field which is the subject of this report. Wraxall Villa excavation was reported in Somerset Natural History & Archaeology Proceedings (Sykes & Brown, 1961), but does not include a plan of the location of the villa.

A different site (the one favoured by the Ordnance Survey, and to be fair, the NGR given by Sykes and Brown in the publication) is also the one favoured by the North Somerset HER, although a letter from 1984 preserved in the site file contains the information from Gardner about his memory of where the site was.

In his publication *A Squabble of Archaeologists* (2003, page 10), he states that 'The villa was in essence little more than a substantial and sophisticated bath suite, supply well and drainage system, with an attached series of rooms around a courtyard.'

However, Sykes and Brown (ibid: 37) state that '..a series of vaguely defined terraces [lie] lower down the slope..[than the villa]..[my italics] which they state is '..on the crest of the hill..', and just such terraces can be seen on the 1946 air photograph below the site taken to be the villa in this report, indicating that Gardner's memory was probably right, and that the NGR given in the report either deliberately or through inaccuracy, misleading.



Fig 2: Wraxall Villa 1959. Courtesy of David Long

The Cock-pit (said to be in the same field)

In Pennant 30, the Local History Journal of Backwell, Nailsea, Tickenham & Wraxall (Nailsea & District Local History Society, page 15, originally published 1992) Keith Gardner records:

'Further to the recent discussions on the Cock-pit at Birdcombe Court Farm, it was this feature that first attracted the attention of Sykes and Usher to the field in which the Roman villa was discovered. It was a circular bank at the top of the hill not in a position to be flooded by the river, and measured about 15-20 yards in diameter with an entrance 'gap' in the north and south.

My diary for Oct 16th 1949 notes

'A trench was dug through about 9 in of very tightly packed earth and stone down to solid rock. Near to the surface a piece of very rough Romano-British pottery was found and later a nail similar to those found in tiles on the adjacent villa'

The 1946 aerial photograph shows it quite clearly; it was I suspect, originally an old coal mine shaft, (obviously pre-enclosure) and part of the old Nailsea Heath. It may well have been used as a cocking pit but has been ploughed flat and there is now no trace'.

Gardner's conclusions are probably sound, although on the 1946 air photographs, the cock-pit, while resembling the bell-pits then still visible to the west, is several times their size.

Survey objectives

The survey had the following objectives.

- 1) To identify Wraxall Roman villa and any other any archaeological features.
- 2) To use the survey to further train YCCCART members and members of Community Archaeology in North Somerset (CANS) in the use of the Bartington 601 gradiometer.

Methodology

The survey was undertaken on 9 May and 27 June 2011 by teams from YCCCART and NEAT using a Bartington 601 gradiometer, with settings as per the site record in Appendix 1.

The completed survey was downloaded to ArcheoSurveyor software.

ArcheoSurveyor composites were adjusted using the following filters

Band Weight Equaliser & Grad shade
Despiked
Destriped
Clip SD2
Colour – Black Green White and Red Green Blue 2

The report was written in Microsoft Word 2007.

Site photographs were taken by members of YCCCART, and remain the copyright of YCCCART.

Results

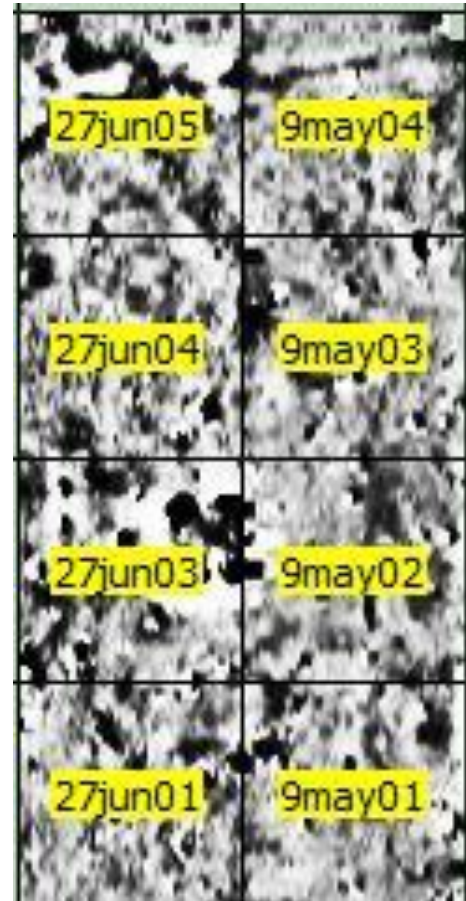
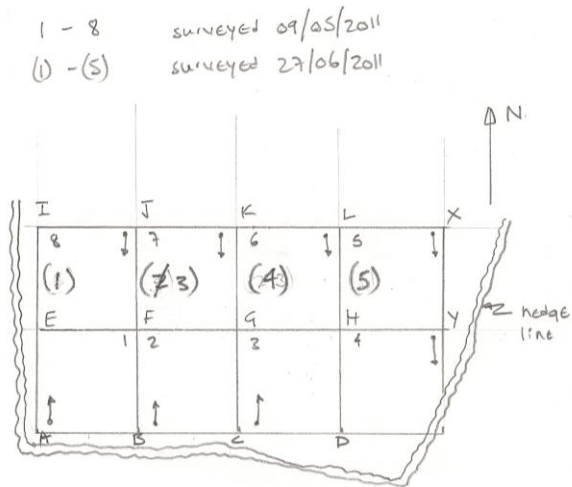


Fig 3: Grid plan (Left) and Grid numbers on ArcheoSurveyor programme

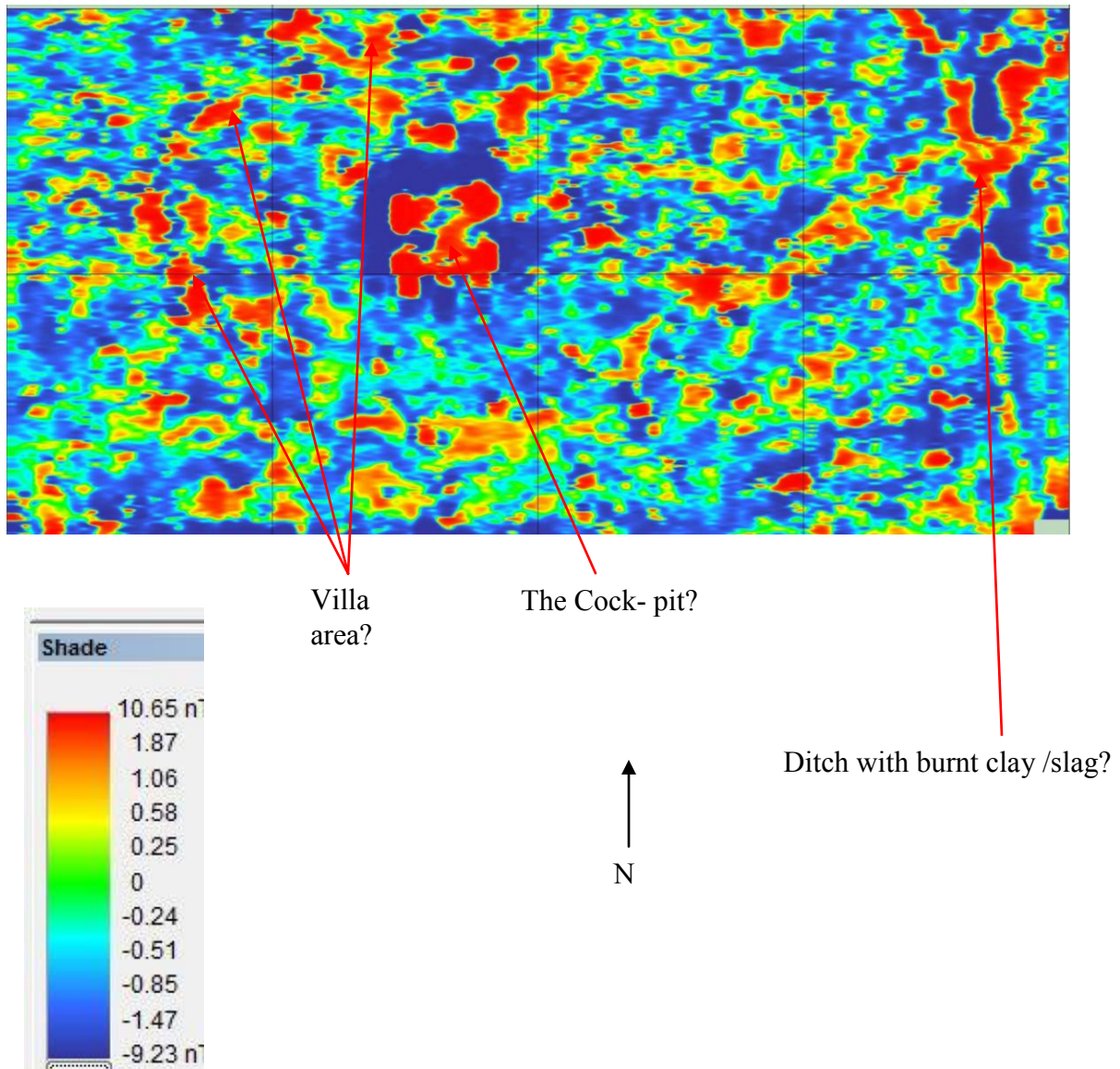


Fig 4: Shade view (ArcheoSurveyor image). High readings are red.

The results in fig 4 above show three main areas giving high readings, as indicated by the red arrows. The most striking feature left of centre appears to be the Cock-pit which shows four corners of high readings. This may imply a symmetric setting of four metal posts or other structures within the cockpit, perhaps helping to imply a potential past use.

To the left of this is an area giving signs of domestic activity (the villa?) and to the right appears to be a ditch filled with burnt clay or slag. The field is magnetically quite noisy, although local information is that tipping has occurred since the villa was excavated, so much of this noise may be from ferrous objects in the tipped material. The arc of high magnetic readings in the 'villa' area is probably coincidental. None of these features today appear as earthworks, although the cockpit is clearly visible on 1946 air photographs, and as a parch-mark in the dry September of 1991.

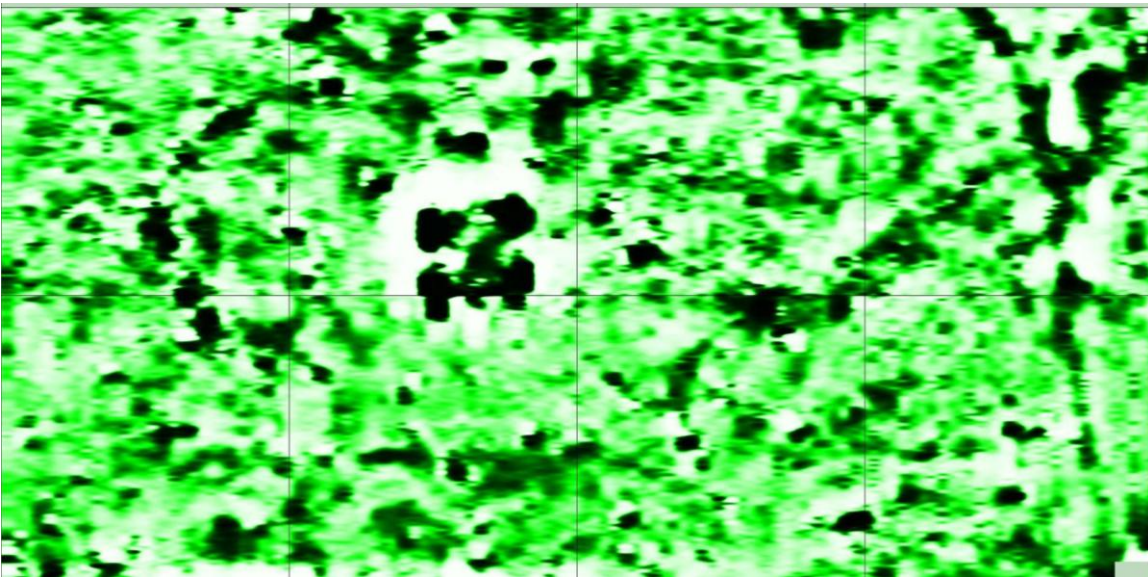
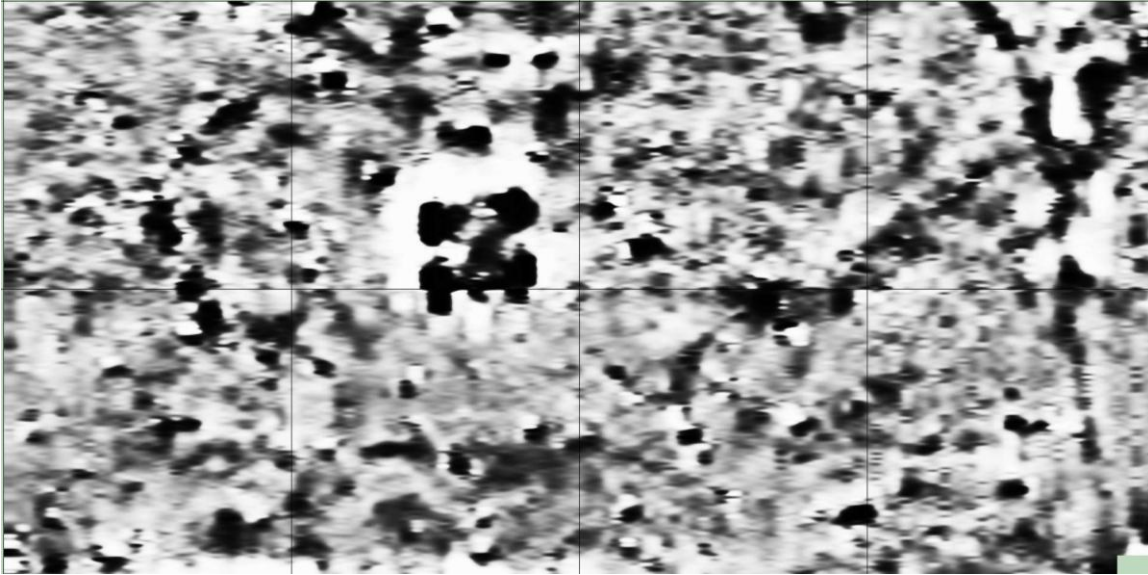


Fig 4: Shade view (ArcheoSurveyor image). Black and White & Green images. High readings are black.

The images again show the features mentioned above.

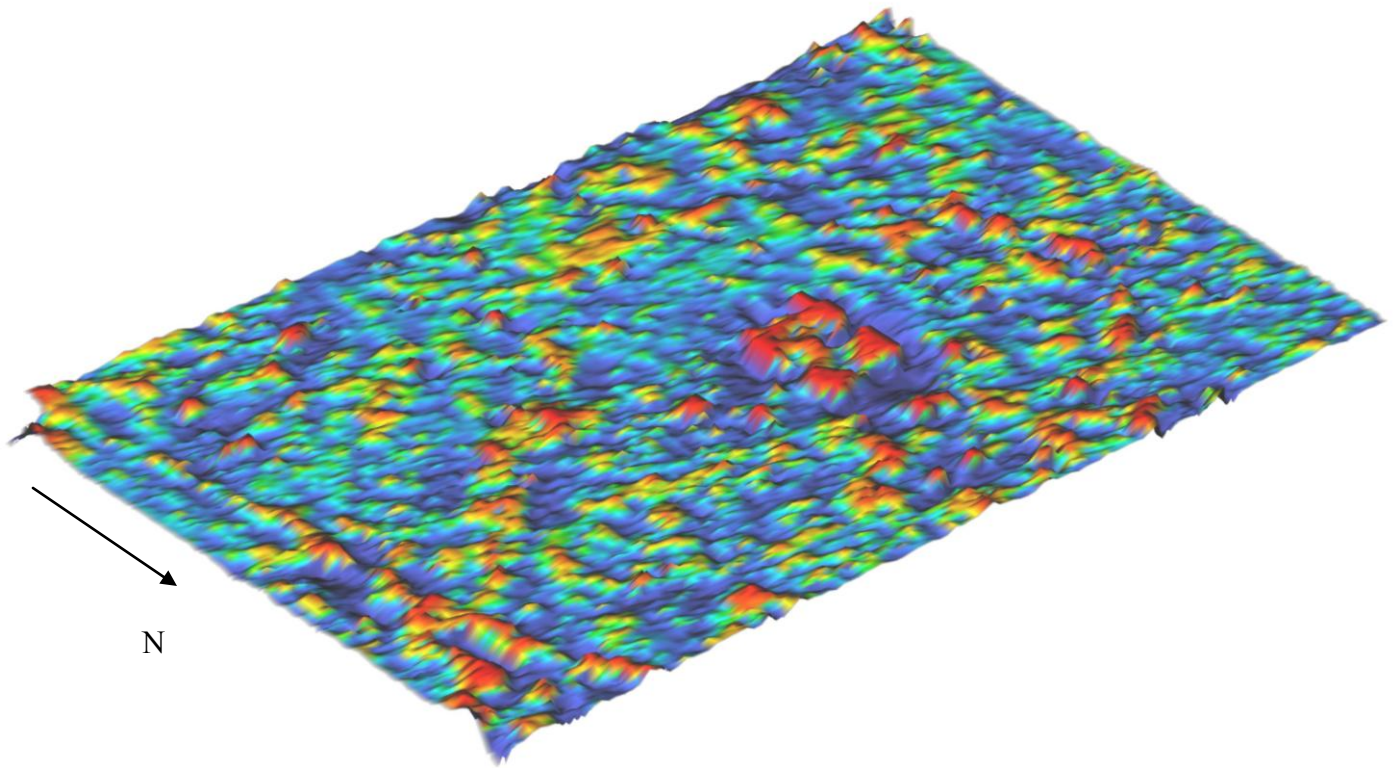


Fig 6: Axonometric view. ArcheoSurveyor colour image. High readings are red.

The image at figure 6 above shows the anomalies from the opposite direction: the ditch is particularly clear in this view, and even seems to have a second, less pronounced linear feature running parallel to it: perhaps this is an abandoned trackway running down to the Land Yeo, although no air photograph even hints at this.

Recommendations

The results show anomalies (Villa, the Cock- pit & ditch?) worthy of further investigation and it is recommended that a resistivity survey is undertaken over the areas covering these features.

References

Gardner K S	<i>A "Squabble" of Archaeologists</i> , Privately published 2003, page 10.
Nailsea & District Local History Society	<i>Pennant 30, the Local History Journal of Backwell, Nailsea Tickenham & Wraxall</i> (Nailsea & District Local History Society, p 15, originally published 1992)
Somerset Natural History & Archaeology Society	<i>Somerset Natural History & Archaeology Proceedings</i> , Volume 105 p37-51.

Authors: YCCCART & NEAT

Date: August 2011

Appendix – Site Record

YCCCART Site Survey Project – Old Roman Villa Wraxall		
Survey date	27 th June 2011	
Report date	29 th June 2011	
Type /Instrument	Grad 601	
	Pace :1.5m/s Lines/m : 1 Range:100nT Volume: High Sensors:2	Grid size: 30m x30m Pattern : Zig Zag Samples/m:4 Audio: On Threshold:10nT Reject:50 Hz
Location	Clevedon Road, Nailsea	
	See annex A	
Ref	none	
Site name	Old Roman Villa	
Landowner	David Wyatt.	
Tenant	TBC	
HER ref	TBC	
Site type	Open field	
Description	Grass	
Period	Unknown	
Geology	Pennant Sandstone	
Land use	grazing	
Survey team and conditions		
9 th May 2011	Team	Anne Dymock, Ferdi, Dave Long, Peter English, Peter Wright, Ian Morton, Susan Dugus, Members of Wraxall Group
	Weather	Bright and warm
27 th June 2011	Team	Anne Dymock, Ferdi, Dave Long, Peter English, Peter Wright, Susan Dugus, Members of Wraxall Group
	Weather	Bright and warm

Survey area			notes		readings		
			size	walk direction	max	min	mean
Grid ref #	09/05/2011	1	30 x 30 m	N	+13.3	-15.9	-0.2
		2	30 x 30 m	N	+53.1	-26.4	-0.2
		3	30 x 30 m	N	+32.3	-17.2	+0.1
		4	30 x 30 m Mirror and return	S	+36.4	-32.9	-0.9
		5	30 x 30 m	S	+32.4	-5.3	+15.6
		6	30 x 30 m	S	+80.9	-1.7	+13.4
		7	30 x 30 m	S	+78.2	-100.0	+14.0
		8	30 x 30 m	S	+96.1	-25.9	+13.6
Grid ref #	27/06/2011	1	30 x 30 m	S	+98.2	-52.5	-0.5
		2	Abandoned				
		3	30 x 30 m	S	+66.9	-98.0	+0.1
		4	30 x 30 m	S	+65.9	-7.2	+0.7
		5	30 x 30 m	S	+13.4	-8.3	+0.9

NOTE on 27/06/2100

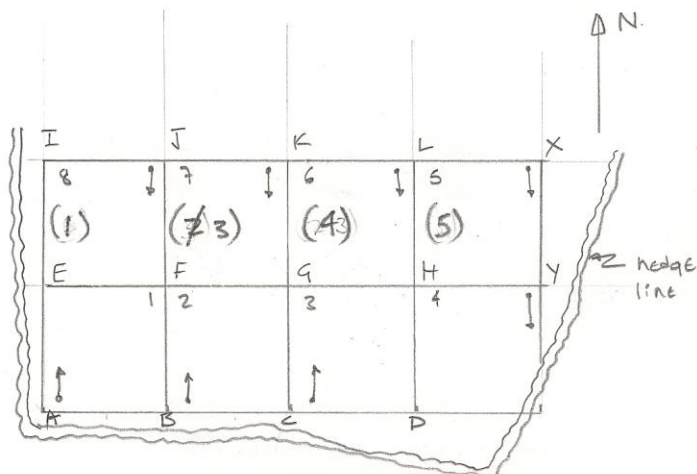
**THIS IS A REPEAT OF 09/05/2011 SURVEY. ONLY GRIDS 5, 6, 7, 8
REPEATED AND RE-NUMBERED 1, 2, 3 4 AND 5**

Annex 1

Setting out details: **NOTE THIS IS A REPEAT OF 110509 SURVEY, ONLY GRIDS 5, 6, 7, 8 REPEATED AND NUMBERED 1,3 4 AND 5**



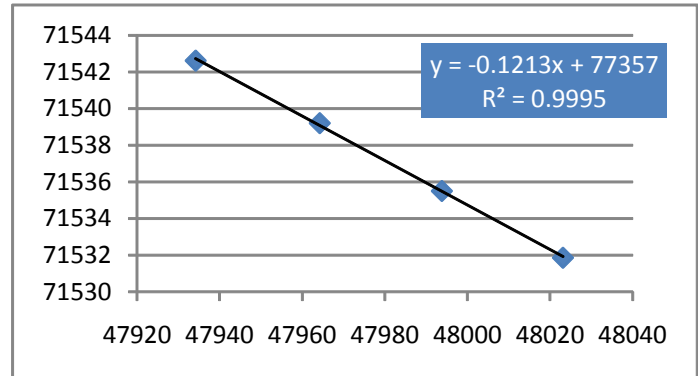
1 - 8 surveyed 09/05/2011
 (1) - (5) surveyed 27/06/2011



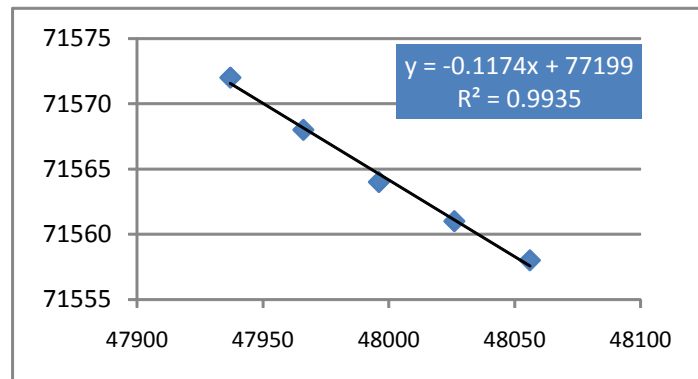
Grid location details

Grid Ref. All ST
see setting out plan eastings northings
for locations

A	47934	71543
B	47964	71539
C	47994	71536
D	48023	71532



E	48056	71558
F	48026	71561
G	47996	71564
H	47966	71568
Y	47937	71572



I	48059	71588
J	48030	71591
K	48000	71594
L	47970	71598
X	47940	71601

