YCCCART 2013 / Y6
North Somerset HER2012/051

Court House Farm, Wrington

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

General Editor: Vince Russett

One of the bronze age palstaves from Wrington

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Page	Contents
3	Abstract Acknowledgements Introduction
4	Site location Land use and geology
5	Historical & archaeological context
7	Survey Objectives Methodology
8	Results
10	Recommendations References
11	Appendix – Site Record

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Abstract

Two bronze age palstaves and a socketed axe were found by a local detectorist, while searching private farm land at Wrington. The Portable Antiquities Scheme were informed, and at their request, YCCCART carried out a small resistivity survey. In the event, no structures that might relate to the deposition were found, and it is assumed that this was another example of bronze age ritual deposition in a wet place.

Acknowledgements

A Heritage Lottery Grant enabled the purchase, by YCCCART, of a Geoscan RM 15 Resistance Meter without which this survey could not have been undertaken.

This survey would also not have been carried out without the willing permission of Mrs Clark, the landowner.

The authors are grateful for the hard work by the members of YCCCART and Jonathan Talbot 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 and management of, the heritage of North Somerset.

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Site Location

Fig 1: Site location.

The site lies 175m NNE of Wrington parish church, in the parish of Wrington in North Somerset. It is at ST46606278.

Land use and geology

The site lies at the junction of the Mercia Mudstones that ring Broadfield Down to the north, and the fluvial deposits in the floodplain of the Congresbury Yeo. During the excavation, sheets of thin pale grey material were noticed at the base of the topsoil. These were initially though to be mortar, but closer examination of the material and of the sides of nearby ditches indicated it was very thin sheets of Chara Marl (formerly known as tufa), presumably originating in the natural predecessor of Ladywell, some 190m to the north-east of the site.

The site is used for grazing, although no animals were present at the time of the survey.

There is no public access to this land, although the site can be seen from a public footpath in the adjacent field to the west.

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Historical & archaeological context

Fig 2: The bronze implements from Court Farm

The initial impetus for the survey was the finding of three bronze age implements, two that appear to be looped palstaves (left), and a socketed axe (right). These usually also have a loop for securing the head on its handles, but this has a long projection in its place. They were found by a local detectorist, who reported them to the Portable Antiquities Service, and through Kurt Adams, the local Finds Liaison Officer, YCCCART were invited to carry out resistivity survey at the site, while a small trial excavation was also carried out to attempt to locate the context of the finds.

Lowland bronze age axe finds of this type are quite rare in North Somerset: two flat axes were found at nearby Langford in the early 2000s, but remain in private possession.

Others have been recorded at Burrington Combe (Boon and Donovan 1954); Banwell Wood (Ordnance Survey Archaeological Division (OSAD) 1966) and Worlebury Close, Weston-super-Mare (OSAD 1965).

These are all that are formally recorded on the North Somerset HER. The Portable Antiquities web site (http://finds.org.uk) adds a fragment of an axe from Long Ashton, but there are probably plenty of others in private hands.

In most of North Somerset (i.e. The Northmarsh) the bronze age is represented by deeply buried alluvial and peat layers, which are only ever seen during very deep excavation or in geotechnical exercises.

In the rest of the area, archaeologists have traditionally concentrated on round barrows (or sometimes field systems) in the past: as most of these are Scheduled, they are seldom threatened by development, and so not studied: one or two have been subject to geophysical survey by local community archaeology groups, but otherwise bronze age studies are not active in North Somerset to any degree.

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Survey objectives

The survey had the following objectives.

1) To identify any archaeological features, particularly any associated structures, around the find spot of the axes

Methodology

The survey was undertaken on 9th September 2011, using a resistance meter with the settings as per the site record in Appendix 1.

The completed survey was downloaded to an ArcheoSurveyor and Snuffler programmes

ArcheoSurveyor composites were adjusted using the following filters
Band Weight Equaliser
Grad shade
Despiked
Clip SD2
Colour filters: Red, Green Blue 2 and Black, Green, White

The report was written in Microsoft Word 2003 and edited in OpenOffice 3.1.

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Results

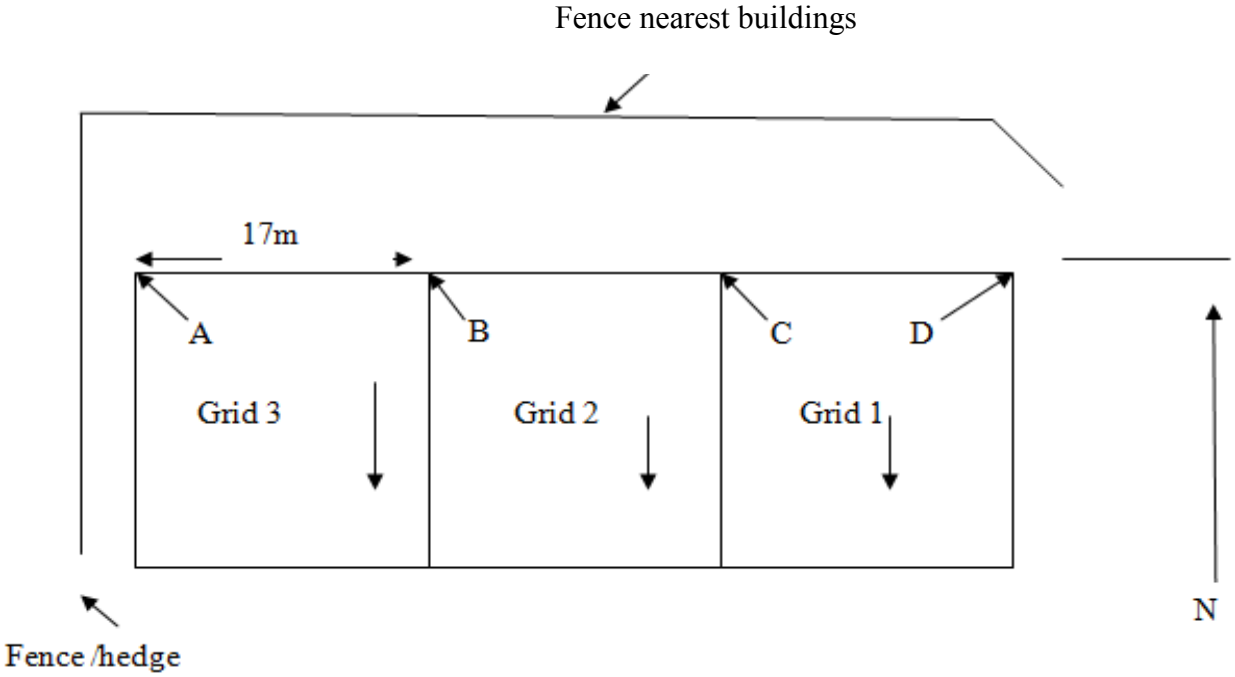

Fig 3: Grid lay out

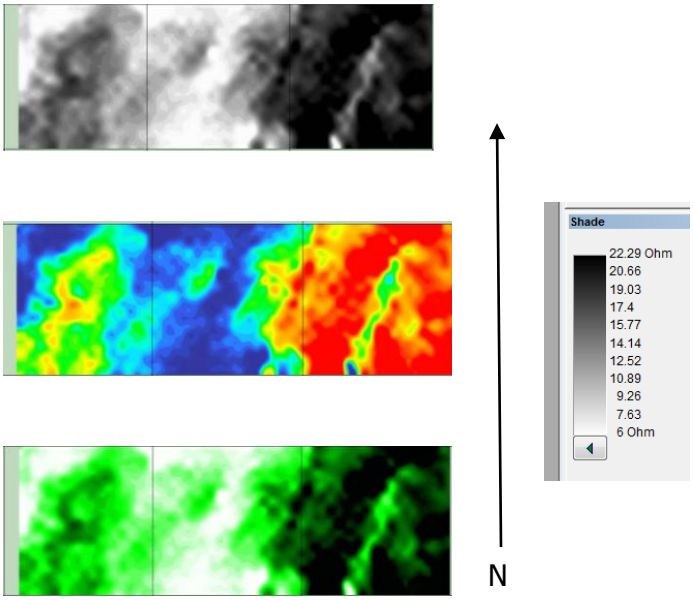

Fig 4: Shade view (ArcheoSurveyor image). High readings are black except for the central image where it is red.

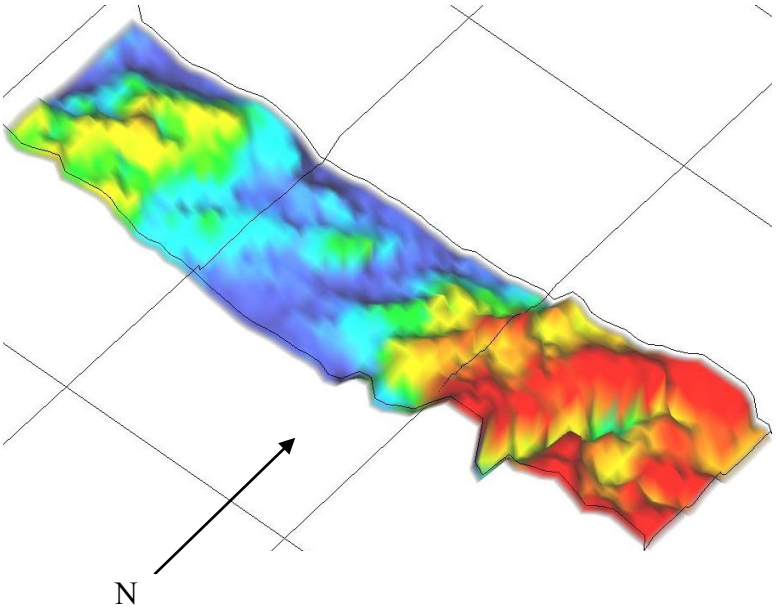

Fig 5: Axonometric view. ArcheoSurveyor colour image. High readings are red.

The findspot of the axes was more or less in the centre of the middle grid.

The results are a little puzzling. There is clearly a trend in the results from NE to SW, with low resistance features between and parallel to high resistance ones. This coincides with the gripe system seen on 1946 air photographs, and indeed, the low resistance (blue) section in the middle of the survey may be the beginnings of a gripe: as we have seen elsewhere on this geology (as in for example in report 2010/Y16, p9, on this web site), gripes (as seen on the ground and on air photographs) and low resistance blue strips usually coincide, presumably because they are wetter than their surroundings.

The higher readings seen in the eastern grid are just inside a farm gate, and thus a contribution to the signal may be made by material dumped inside the gate to make the entrance less muddy in wet weather.

What there is absolutely no indication of is any structure, or archaeological remains that might be associated with the finds, which were therefore probably deliberately deposited in a wet place, possibly at a time when Chara Marl deposits were visible (see the discussion for example, in Kuipers 2008: 63).

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Recommendations

The work revealed no archaeological information about any structures connected with the deposited axes, and it thus seems likely that they are a typical 'ritual' deposit in a wet place, simply dropped into a hole. There is thus no recommendation for any further work.

References

Boon, G. & Donovan, D. 1954	*Fairy Toot: the 'lost cave of Burrington'.* Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society 7(1): 35-38
Kuipers, M. H. G. 2008	*Bronze Age metalworking in the Netherlands (c 200 – 800 BC)* Sidestone Press

Authors. Chris Short and Vince Russett

Date February 2012

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Appendix

YCCCART Site Survey Project **–Court House Farm, Wrington**						
Survey date	9 September 2011					
Report date	9 September 2011					
Type /Instrument	**RM15**					
	Gain x1, Current 1mA Frequency 137Hz Probes 'Config 1' (2 probes)	Grid size: 20m x20m Pattern : Zig Zag Sample interval 1m Traverse Interval 1m. Mode Zig-Zag				
Weather	9 Sept: Overcast, grass wet.					
OS Ref or Lat-Longitude	ST					
Site name	Court House Farm					
Landowner	TBA					
Tenant	N/A					
HER ref						
Site type						
Description	Field					
Period						
Geology						
Land use	TBA					
Survey team	*9 Sept: Cheryl Muriel, Vince Russett, David Long ,Chris Short & Jonathan Talbot*					
Survey area		Notes		Readings		
		Size	**Walk direction**			
9 Sept	Grid 1 Grid 2 Grid 3 (2 lines short)	1 x 20m 1 x 20m 1 x 20m	S S S			
Summary	Downloaded as: ArcheoSurveyor: *9 Sept Grids 1 to 3*					

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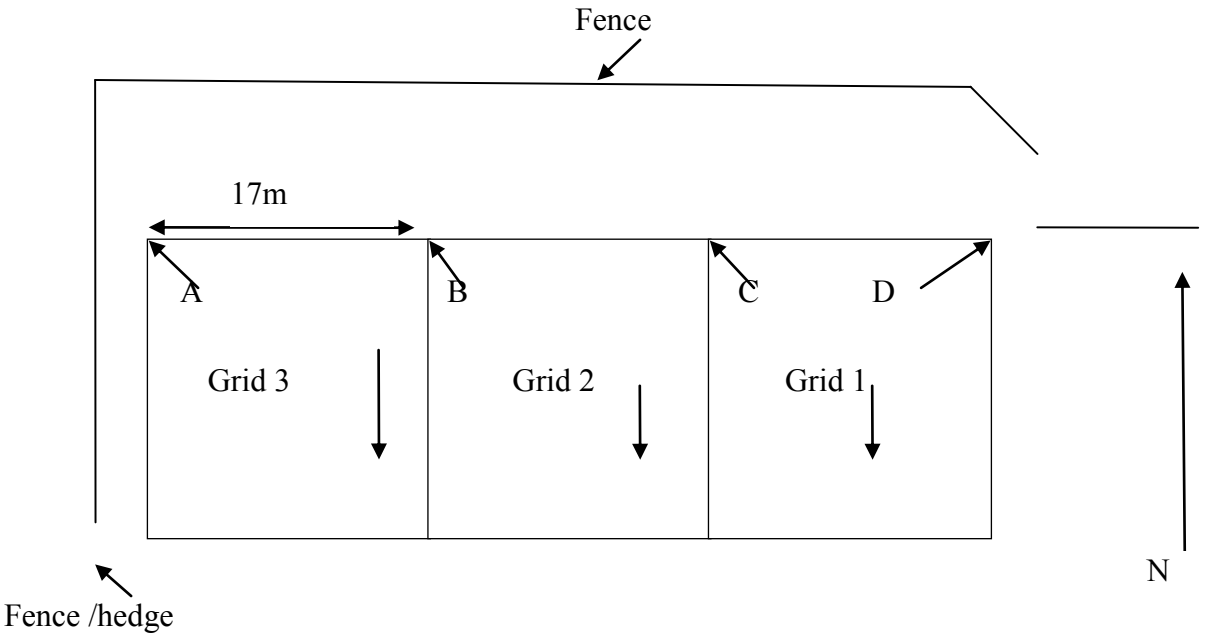
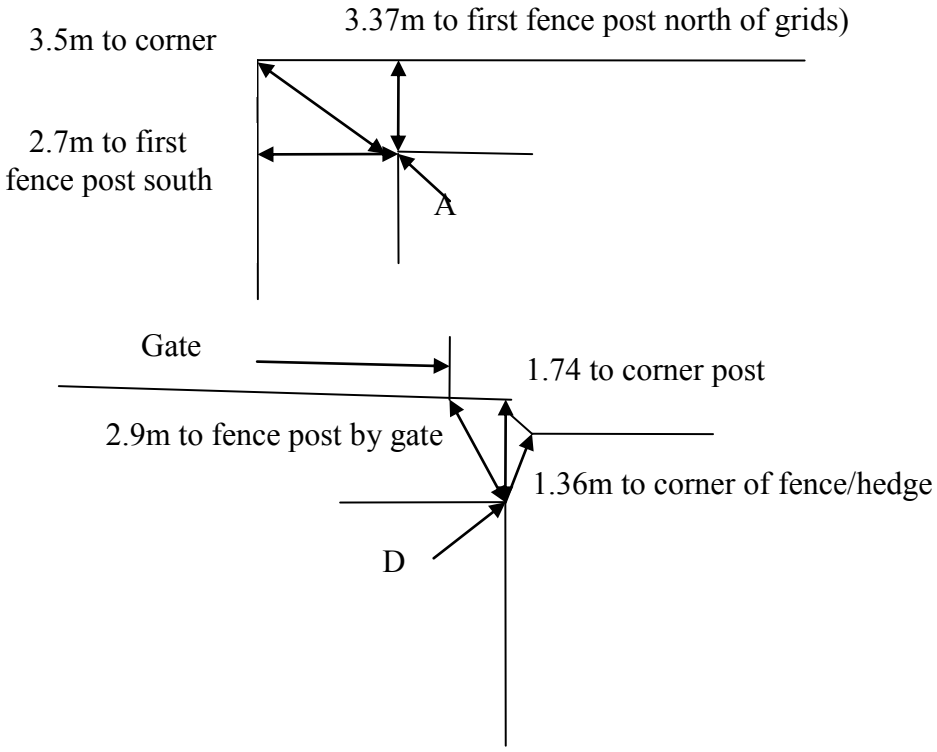
Grid layout (Not to scale).





GPS

A	346563	162793
B	346578.21	162788.76
C	346597.51	162785.28
D	346617.83	162782.67

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