Equestrian Arena
Land west of The Manor
CHITTERNE
Wiltshire

Wiltshire Council reference: 22/06410/FUL

Archaeological Observations March – May 2023

Prepared on behalf of:

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SUMMARY

Land west of The Manor, Chitterne, Wiltshire
NGR: 398750 / 143950.
Archaeological watching brief
August 2022

Terrace groundworks for an arena and walker enclosure within a paddock adjacent to The Manor at Chitterne in Wiltshire were not deep enough to expose or affect archaeologically-significant deposits.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Project

1.1.1 This document presents the results of an archaeological watching brief maintained during groundworks associated with construction of an equestrian arena and walker enclosure within a paddock at the western end of the village of Chitterne in Wiltshire during March – June 2023. The archaeological watching brief was commissioned by the landowner, Mr Oliver Hardman, in accordance with a Condition of planning permission (22/06410/FUL) granted by Wiltshire Council.

1.1.2 The watching was undertaken by Michael Heaton MCIfA IHBC in accordance with a 'written scheme of investigations[1]' approved by the County Archaeological Service of Wiltshire Council, the Standards and Guidance of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists and the author's standard specification.

1.1.3 The following pages present a definition of the site; a summary of the archaeological and historical potential of the site; definitions of the types of archaeological work that will be employed; a schedule of works for site operations and report preparation; and project management particulars. It is accompanied by a standard specification for archaeological works.

1.2 Method

1.2.1 The work comprised an archaeological watching brief, as defined by the *Chartered Institute for Archaeologists* thus:

"…a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons…..where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed. The programme will result in the preparation of a report and an ordered archive. " (CIfA, 2018)

1.2.2 The groundworks comprised excavation of a terraced formation level of c. 70m x 30m plan to a depth of c. 300mm, upon which a raised platform was formed with imported chalk rubble. Excavation of the terrace was observed intermittently until its base was reached. The foundation platform of the walker enclosure was encompassed within the existing terrace of the adjacent equestrian barn observed in 2022, and required no additional excavation. All excavations were inspected, the deposits revealed recorded as annotations on a site layout plan and as digital photographs, and the upcast soils scanned visually for artefacts.

1.2.3 Copies of this report have been submitted to the Client and Wiltshire Council, and a PDF version will be uploaded to the OASIS grey literature library in due course. Because of the archaeologically disappointing results, the small archive will not be deposited with a museum.

[1] Heaton,2023 . Ref. MH3881-3WSI

1.3 Caveats

1.3.1 This report has been prepared with reasonable skill and care, following the guidances of the professional bodies cited above and based on information publicly available at the time of writing. Archaeological or historical discoveries made in the area after the date of writing, or changes in research strategies affecting the perceived significance of such discoveries, may affect the currency of the report.

1.3.2 No person other than the Client named in paragraph 1.1.1 to whom this report is addressed shall rely on it in any respect and no duty of care will be owed by the author to any such third party.

1.3.3 The summary contains an overview of the key results and conclusions. However, no reliance should be placed on any part of the executive summary until the whole of the report has been read: other sections of the report may contain information that affects interpretation of the executive summary.

2 THE SITE

2.1 Situation and definition Figure 1

2.1.1 The civil parish of Chitterne encompasses the source of the Chitterne Brook – a tributary of the River Wylye – on the southern edge of Salisbury Plain, approximately five miles east of Warminster, in southwest Wiltshire. The landscape is chalk downland varying between 100mOD and c. 200mOD, with settlements restricted to the narrow valley floors around its periphery. The chalk bedrock supports shallow argillaceous soils typically less than 300mm thick, unless enhanced by cultural or fluvial activity.

2.1.2 The eponymous village is at roughly the centre of the parish. It is a linear settlement constrained within the valley floor of the Chitterne Brook, with small linear extensions along the vehicular routes.

2.1.3 The construction site is the southeast corner of an agricultural paddock at the northwestern edge of the village, centred on NGR: 398750 / 143950.

2.2 Archaeological context

2.2.1 The chalk downland of southwest Wiltshire is an area of outstanding archaeological and historical survival, in which the material remains of prehistoric, Roman, medieval and modern activities survive in densities almost unequalled in Britain. The present landscape of land boundaries and buildings is essentially of 18th century creation, overlain on a parish and settlement pattern of medieval formation, that itself utilised Roman and prehistoric features such as roads, territorial earthworks and burial monuments.

2.2.2 Chitterne existed as an economic and legal entity - a 'manor ' – in AD1086, when it was recorded as *'Chetre'* in the Domesday Survey of that year[2], and as such is certainly of Anglo-Saxon, if not Romano-British origin. For most of the Middle Ages it formed part of the extensive agricultural estates of Lacock Abbey and Bradenstoke Priory, a division reflected in the twin ecclesiastical parishes of St Mary's and All Saints that survived until the early 19th century. At the dissolution of those monasteries in c. 1540, the Chitterne estates were acquired by aristocratic owners who, together with later merchant owners such as the Methuens and the Longs of South Wraxall, oversaw the statutory enclosure of the formerly common lands in c. 1818. Cadastral survey undertaken for the Methuens in the early 19th century indicate that the present village layout and most of its buildings existed then,

[2] Gover, *et al*, 1936

determined by the course of the Chitterne Brook and vehicular routes and droveways established by the 17th century that brought passing commercial traffic. The site lay within a hedged field in 1822 – Plot 207 annotated 'glebe' - alongside a vehicular route that lead north towards Imber and thence Devizes. The house known as The Manor did not exist until c. 1842. The village has changed relatively little since, except for demolition of a small number of buildings and the addition of a relatively small number in the 20th century.

2.2.3 Terrace excavations in 2022 for the equestrian barn that occupies the northeast corner of the site revealed three shallow lynchets, but no other archaeological remains.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Stratigraphic observations

3.1.1 The excavation revealed a consistent stratigraphic sequence across the whole site, with only minor variations of depth and surface disturbances:

0.00-0.30m Dark yellowish brown silty clay loam plough soil containing occasional fragments of brick rubble and modern debris and the upper fill of a blue plastic water main.

>0.30m White bedrock chalk. The weathered upper surface of chalk was exposed only in the NE corner of the terrace. Across the rest of the terrace, excavation did not penetrate below the base of the ploughsoil.

3.1.2 No archaeological remains were identified.

3.2 Artefactual observations

3.2.1 No pre-Modern artefacts were revealed.

3.3 Palaeoenvironmental observations

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeoenvironmental sampling were revealed; no animal bone fragments were observed.

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Archaeological interpretation

4.1.1 The soil sequence revealed is essentially as would be expected at this site: a shallow argillaceous 'brown soil' lying directly on denuded chalk bedrock. The lack of a 'B' horizon subsoil and the frost-shattered structure of the chalk bedrock indicates that immediate surrounds of the site have been subject to prolonged cultivation that has mixed the 'A' and 'B' horizons and removed the uppermost weathered layers of the chalk.

4.1.2 The thickness of that soil increased downslope, masking the chalk bedrock, indicating that the soils on the site are colluviated – i.e. modified by ploughing.

4.2 Significance

4.2.1 The excavations have not penetrated deep enough to expose or affect archaeological remains. The results are therefore not archaeologically significant.

4.2.2 The results relate solely to this site and should not be interpreted as an evaluation of the archaeological potential of Chitterne or the land around it.

4.2.3 The work has been done by a professional archaeologist with personal experience of the soils and archaeological remains of Salisbury Plain, in accordance with a specification approved by the County Archaeological Service.

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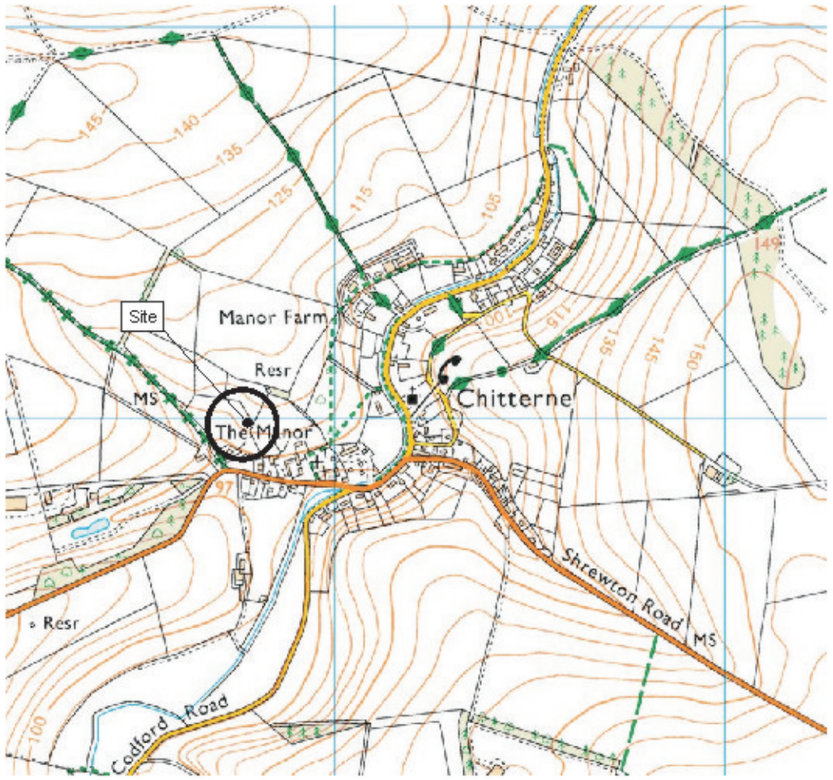
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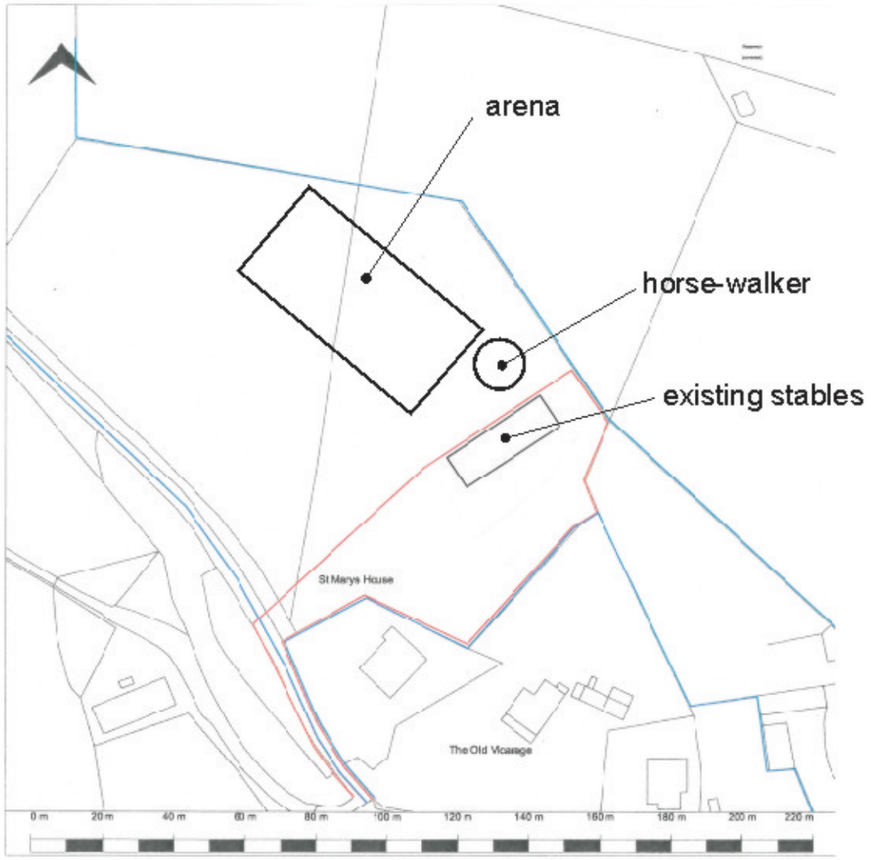
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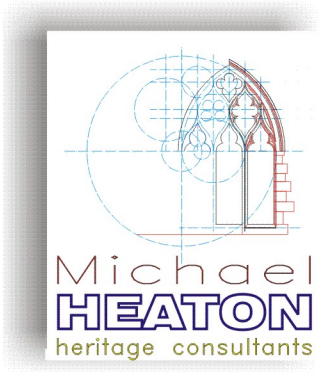


View from the NE showing maximum depth of excavation



View from the SE showing embankment construction using imported chalk rubble

Figure 1/1



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