A Bronze Age enclosure at 'Broome's Field', Misterton

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Extracted from the Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society for 2020.

Volume 164, 288-92

Produced in Great Britain by Short Run Press, Exeter.

1SSN 0081-2056

SHORTER PAPERS

A BRONZE AGE ENCLOSURE AT 'BROOME'S FIELD', MISTERTON

CLARE RANDALL AND RICHARD TABOR

SUMMARY

Geophysical survey of a field between Misterton and Crewkerne identified a three-sided enclosure. Subsequent limited investigation has demonstrated that this is most likely a later Bronze Age enclosed settlement, with evidence of Neolithic activity in the general area.

INTRODUCTION

Broome's Field is part of an area which has produced a large number of metal-detected finds recorded through the Portable Antiquities Scheme. This has been investigated by the South Somerset Archaeological Research Group (SSARG) using geophysical survey to contextualise this multi-period material.

The survey (centred on NGR ST 45060 08600) covered c. 4.0 hectares (Fig. 1) of a field situated 0.50km to the north-west of the centre of Misterton village. The site sits at a height of c. 87m above Ordnance Datum (aOD), and is relatively level, although the land drops away into the valley with a watercourse in it which runs north-north-east to south-south-west on the western side of the site. The underlying geology is Fullers earth formation mudstone in the immediate area beneath the site, but surrounded by Inferior Oolite group limestone, and a band of Bridport

Fig. 1 Site Location, with location of the geophysical survey

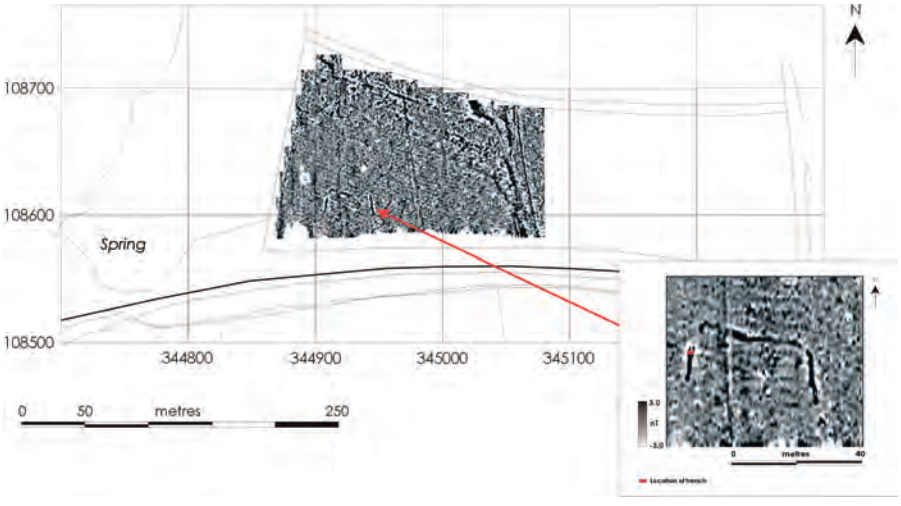

Fig. 2 The fluxgate gradiometer survey, with inset showing the enclosure, with trench location

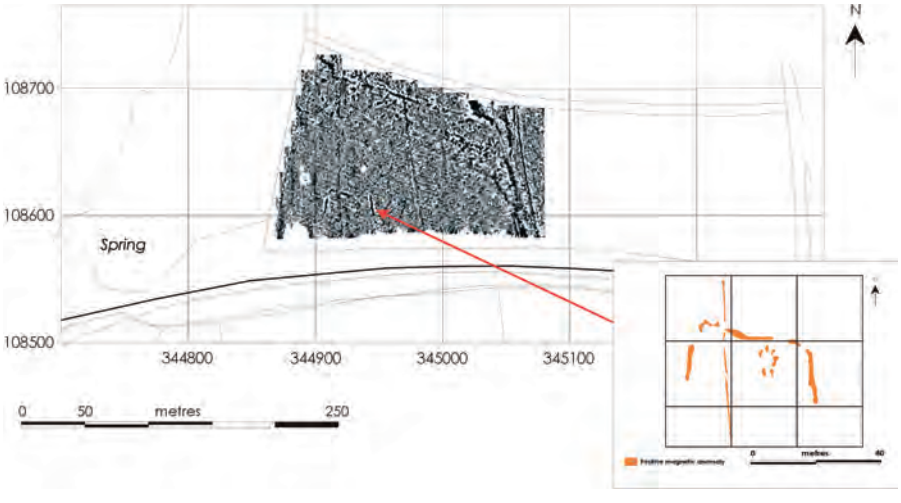

Fig. 3 Interpretation of the enclosure gradiometry

Sand Formation sandstone immediately to the west (BGS 2015). The site is positioned at the point where two soil types meet, those on the site being characterised by loamy and free draining shallow lime rich soils , with slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage immediately to the west (NSRI 2015).

The survey identified a potential enclosure occupying the south western corner of the field. A small evaluation trench was subsequently excavated to examine the nature and extent of any associated archaeological features or deposits, assess preservation and hopefully obtain dateable material.

THE GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY
Liz Caldwell

The gradiometer survey indicated three contiguous linears in the south-west part of the field, the detail of which is shown in an inset in Fig. 2. The strength of the readings suggested ditches, with readings generally within a range of 5 to 12nT which would be consistent with the ditches containing potential thermo-remnant deposits (Caldwell 2013). These linears create an apparent three-sided rectilinear enclosure with rounded corners c. 40m long by c. 20m wide, oriented east/

west and north/south, and open on the longer, southern side. A number of potential entrances or causeways were noted, particularly close to the north-west and north-east corners. A scatter of non linear anomalies across the survey area appears generally random and could be due to modern farming practices such as manuring. However, there does appear to be a more coherent grouping forming a rough oval shape slightly to the north-eastern side of the centre of the enclosure where they appear to form a clear arc (Fig. 3 inset). Readings are generally within a range of 6 to 16nT but peaking almost to 30nT in places which is within the range for highly thermo-remnant or ferrous magnetic deposits. The readings combined with the appearance of the layout could possibly be indicative of some sort of structure.

THE EVALUATION EXCAVATION
Clare Randall

A west-east aligned trial trench 3.0m long by 1.0m wide was positioned on the westerly north-south orientated linear anomaly, at its apparent northern end (Fig. 2; NGR ST 44907 08617). As expected, a single archaeological feature was encountered corresponding to the magnetic anomaly noted on the gradiometer survey. The shallow ditch (F001) was c. 1.3m wide and c. 0.40m deep with concave sides and base (Fig. 4). The ditch appeared to continue rather than forming a terminal. It contained three clay-silt fills, with initial silting on the western (outer) side (004), followed by a main fill (003) which contained the majority of the finds, and an upper fill (002) which occupied the centre of the feature. It appeared that the feature had been considerably truncated, but there was no clear indication of re-cutting the ditch.

THE FINDS
Richard Tabor

Pottery

A total of eight sherds weighing 14g were recovered from fill (003) of F001. Two grog wares were identified:

G1 Soft silty grey fabric including sparse grey grog pellets (up to 1mm). Brown grey surfaces. Three sherds, 4g.

G2 Moderately soft to soft dark grey fabric including rare to sparse grey or buff pink grog pellets (up to 1.5mm) and sparse to moderate sub-angular voids (up to 1.5mm). The voids are likely to have formed after the dissolving of calcite inclusions. Buff orange exterior, dark grey interior surfaces. Five sherds, 10g.

A single rim sherd in fabric G1 is from a deep, straight-sided, open bowl. It is thin-walled at 6mm thick. The rim has a flat internal bevel causing it to taper towards the outer edge. A 1mm wide, 0.5mm deep V-shaped incised line, slightly curved, falls from 8mm to 11mm below the rim. The breaks are moderately sharp in contrast to worn edges of two small re-fitting sherds. The remaining sherds are all in Fabric G2. Two

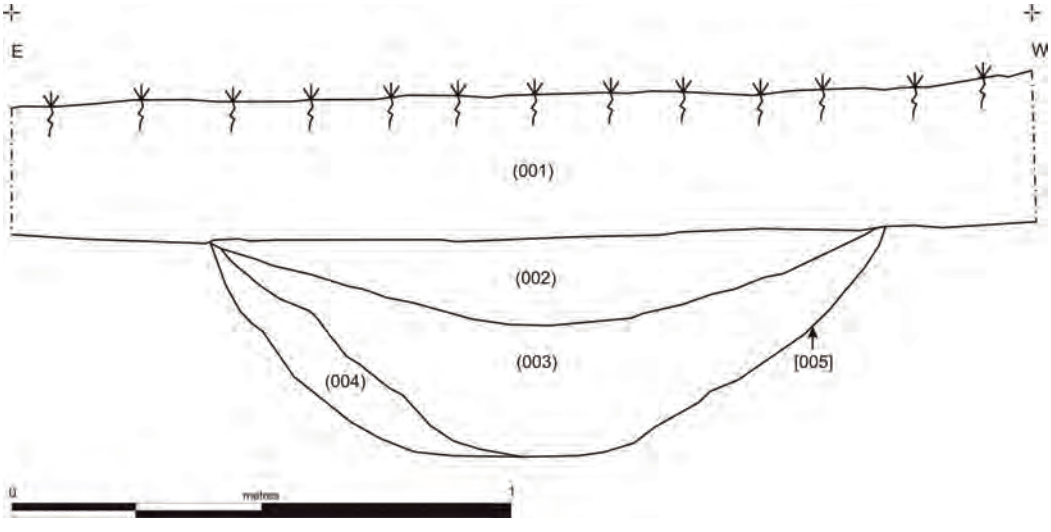

Fig. 4 The ditch, north facing section

have lost all surfaces and two have lost the interior surface. However, a wall sherd from immediately above the base survives to its full thickness of 12mm and has sharp edges in contrast to the other pieces.

Thinned-walled, straight-sided, open bowls occur widely early Neolithic assemblages in southern Britain, from Carn Brea, Cornwall, to Staines, Surrey (Smith 1981, fig. 66, P2; fig. 71, P116). At the latter site the rim of a comparable bowl is very similar to that from Misterton (Robertson-Mackay 1987, fig. 40, P43). Similar vessels with comparable rims in Dorset and Somerset have been found at Maiden Castle and Cadbury Castle (Cleal 1991, fig. 142, 16; Tabor and Randall 2018, fig. 10B, 18). The sherds in fabric G2 are almost certainly later. Coarse calcite features in Early Neolithic pottery in and around Cadbury Castle but small voids in the Misterton sherds imply finer inclusions such as those noted with grog in Middle Bronze Age sherds from Sigwells, Charlton Horethorne (Tabor and Darvill 2020).

Flint

A total of ten pieces of flint, and two of chert were collected during the excavation of three contexts, weighing in total 113.5g (Table 1). The character of the material is summarised by context. Inferences about the assemblage are limited by its condition (seven of the twelve pieces were heat-affected), small size and the presence of only three complete flakes and four measurable butts. Of the latter none show the abrasive preparation which might indicate an earlier Neolithic date (Harding and Bellamy 1991, 87).

The recognisable tools can be assigned approximate dates individually. A saw has been fashioned by removal of coarse flakes from the cortical edge of a broad broken chert flake from (002). Similar tools occurred in later Bronze Age contexts at Sigwells, Charlton Horethorne (Tabor in prep.). One piece from (003) and one from (004) are likely to be of similar date. A flake is comparably denticulated and opportunistic removal of spalls from a flint lump produced a crude point. A second piercer shows more preparation with the direct bilateral removal of spalls from the distal end and may be of Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date.

DISCUSSION

The exploratory excavation of the 'enclosure' at Broome's Field, Misterton has confirmed that the anomalies indicated on the gradiometer survey reflect surviving archaeological features. The evident truncation of the ditch makes it difficult to ascertain the original scale of any enclosure earthworks. However, a small but respectable assemblage of finds was recovered from a limited intervention.

The gradiometer plot appears to provide relatively clear indications of the limits of anomalies, with the southern ends of the eastern and western north-south oriented features apparently ending abruptly rather than petering out. However, it would seem that the apparent causeways in the anomalies at the corners may not be what they seem, although more extensive excavation would be needed to clarify this. The lack of a southern ditch seems more certain however.

The dipolar responses at two points in the arc of features within the interior are reminiscent of anomalies which occurred with a Middle Bronze Age rectangular enclosure at Sigwells, Charlton Horethorne. On excavation this was shown to be related to the discard of refractory material within a round post-built structure used for metal working (Tabor 2008, 63-6, fig. 29, detail).

Both Early Neolithic and Middle Bronze Age pottery was recovered from the enclosure ditch at Broome's Field. The former, although in fair condition, must be residual. A Neolithic phase of use of the area is also indicated by a piercer which may be of Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date. However the majority of artefacts are most likely later Bronze Age in date, and situates this enclosure within that milieu.

Settlements of the Middle and later Bronze Age occur in various forms but typically consist of several post-built roundhouses and other structures and pits (Brück 2006, 298) with or without enclosing palisades or banks and ditches. These types of sites were often occupied for some considerable time, involving repeated construction of buildings within the same site footprint (Brück 2006, 298), which may explain lack of obvious coherence of the interior anomalies seen in this case on the gradiometer survey. These have not been explored, but the potential similarities with the structures used in metalworking within the Middle Bronze Age enclosure at Sigwells, Charlton Horethorne,

TABLE 1 SUMMARY OF FLINT FINDS

	Flakes		**Saw**		**Piercer**		**Other**		**All retouch**	
	no	**Wt(g)**	**no**	**Wt(g)**	**no**	**Wt(g)**	**no**	**Wt(g)**	**no**	%
002			1	48					1	100
003	6	29			1	5	2	3.5	2	
004	1	17			1	8				
Total	7	46	1	48	2	13	2	3.5	3	27.3

have been noted above. A Middle-Later Bronze Age date for the Broome's Field enclosure suggests comparison to the form of an enclosure at Down Farm, Dorset. That settlement consisted of a three-sided ditch with an interior bank, encompassing a palisade within which were a number of buildings (Barrett *et al.* 1991, fig. 5.41). The area enclosed by the ditch at Broome's Field is broadly 40m by 20m, and the Down Farm example roughly 45m by 35m (Green 2000, 106, fig. 73). In the Down Farm case, excavation revealed that the ditch, with a matching internal bank, enclosed a pre-existing settlement comprising a series of post-built roundhouses and a long rectangular building (Green 2000, 106). The geophysical anomalies within the Broome's Field enclosure shown in Figs 2 and 3 would not be inconsistent with a similar arrangement. However at the Broome's Field enclosure, the evidence for a bank is not equivocal; initial silting appears to be from the exterior edge of the ditch. Nevertheless, truncation has removed all indication of a bank on either side, and the intervention covered an admittedly limited proportion of the enclosure ditch. The limited excavation also did not explore further the interior of the enclosure, but its form suggests that even if truncated, evidence of settlement may well be preserved within it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Mr Charles who originally drew attention to the potential of the area, the landowner Mr Broome, and everyone involved in the fieldwork, in particular Nigel Harvey. Figures were prepared by Mike Trevarthen and Liz Caldwell.

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EXCAVATION OF A BRONZE AGE SITE AT MELLS ROAD, VOBSTER CROSS, MELLS, SOMERSET

AGATA SOCHA-PASZKIEWICZ AND RICHARD TABOR

SUMMARY

Excavations in two small areas revealed a four- or six-post structure with associated pits and postholes, and two pits and a posthole cluster of Late Bronze Age date. Charcoal obtained from one of the pits produced a radiocarbon date of 1110-926 cal BC which correlates well with dates anticipated from the pottery assemblage.

INTRODUCTION

In October 2017, TVAS South West conducted an archaeological excavation at Mells Road, Vobster Cross,