

Summary report on excavations at Church Farm, Rode

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SHORTER PAPERS

SUMMARY REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS AT CHURCH FARM, RODE

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Archaeological excavation was undertaken on land at Church Farm, Rode (centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) ST 8050 5314) in November 2014 by Cotswold Archaeology (CA) (Fig. 1). Three separate areas (A, B and C) totalling 0.4ha were opened up as a condition of planning consent granted by Mendip District Council for the construction of a haulage yard and farm buildings. The site lies to the south of the village of Rode and, at the time of excavation, comprised two flat arable fields at around 70m AOD, bounded by hedgerows, Parkgate Lane and the A361 (Frome Road).

A sub-rectangular cropmark clearly visible on an aerial photograph of 1982 possibly denoting an Iron Age or Roman farmstead, lies 40m to the south (Somerset HER Ref: 12160, CA 2014). Several possible rectilinear crop marks to the west of the site, also recorded from aerial photographs may indicate further prehistoric or Roman field enclosures (CA 2011). Two scatters of Roman finds were also identified during fieldwalking immediately to the west of the site (Aston, 1977). A geophysical survey of the site in July 2011 identified a number of possible archaeological features including a sub-circular cut feature in the north of the eastern field (Stratascan 2011, 2). Subsequent evaluation trenching by CA, which targeted geophysical anomalies, revealed a Roman ditch, four undated ditches, an undated linear feature and three undated pits. A sub-circular segmented ring-ditch, potentially of prehistoric date, was also identified (CA 2011).

Prehistoric (Area C, Figs. 1 and 2)

Area C was targeted upon the sub-circular segmented anomaly. Following the removal of the topsoil, this was clearly visible as a ring ditch consisting of two curvilinear (C-shaped) lengths of ditch, with two opposing gaps, on the northwest – and northeast sides of the ring ditch, with an internal diameter of approximately 10m (Fig. 2). Excavation suggested that the southern segment had at some stage comprised three segments rather than one. Due to the similarity of the fills however a sequence of construction could not be ascertained. Each

segment varied between 1.5m and 2.6m in width and between 0.16m and 0.42m in depth, contained a single silty clay fill and had been left open to infill naturally. There was a pronounced increase in the quantity of irregular limestone inclusions within the fills close to the segment terminals although no evidence could be found to suggest on which side of the ditch any bank may have been located. Only a single pit, probably a geological feature, could be identified within the interior of the ring ditch.

Small numbers of flint flakes were recovered from the ditch during the excavation but most could be ascribed only a broadly prehistoric date. Three flakes recovered during the evaluation were noted to have been in unworn condition, and though not closely dateable could be of Neolithic or Bronze Age date. A proximal flake fragment displayed features indicative of soft hammer percussion. This method is a feature of Mesolithic and Early Neolithic knapping technology. A small amount of burnt flint (17g) and possible burnt quartzite (306g) were also recovered from the ditch. Small quantities (c. 52g in total) of animal bone (including a burnt piece) were also recovered from the ring ditch; mainly from terminals but none of the fragments were identifiable to species. A single small sherd of Roman pottery in a fine, oxidised fabric and probably local in origin, was recovered from the uppermost surface of the ditch fill.

Romano-British (Areas A and B, Fig. 1)

A track or droveway, approximately 2.5m in width, ran on a north-west/south-east alignment in the northern half of Area B. Its apparent terminus towards the eastern extent of Area B was probably a product of truncation from modern ploughing. Four small sherds of sandy greyware pottery broadly dateable as Roman and probably of local origin were recovered from the westernmost trackway ditch.

A paddock, on a similar alignment to the trackway, enclosed an area of at least 35m by 15m within the southern half of Area B. No

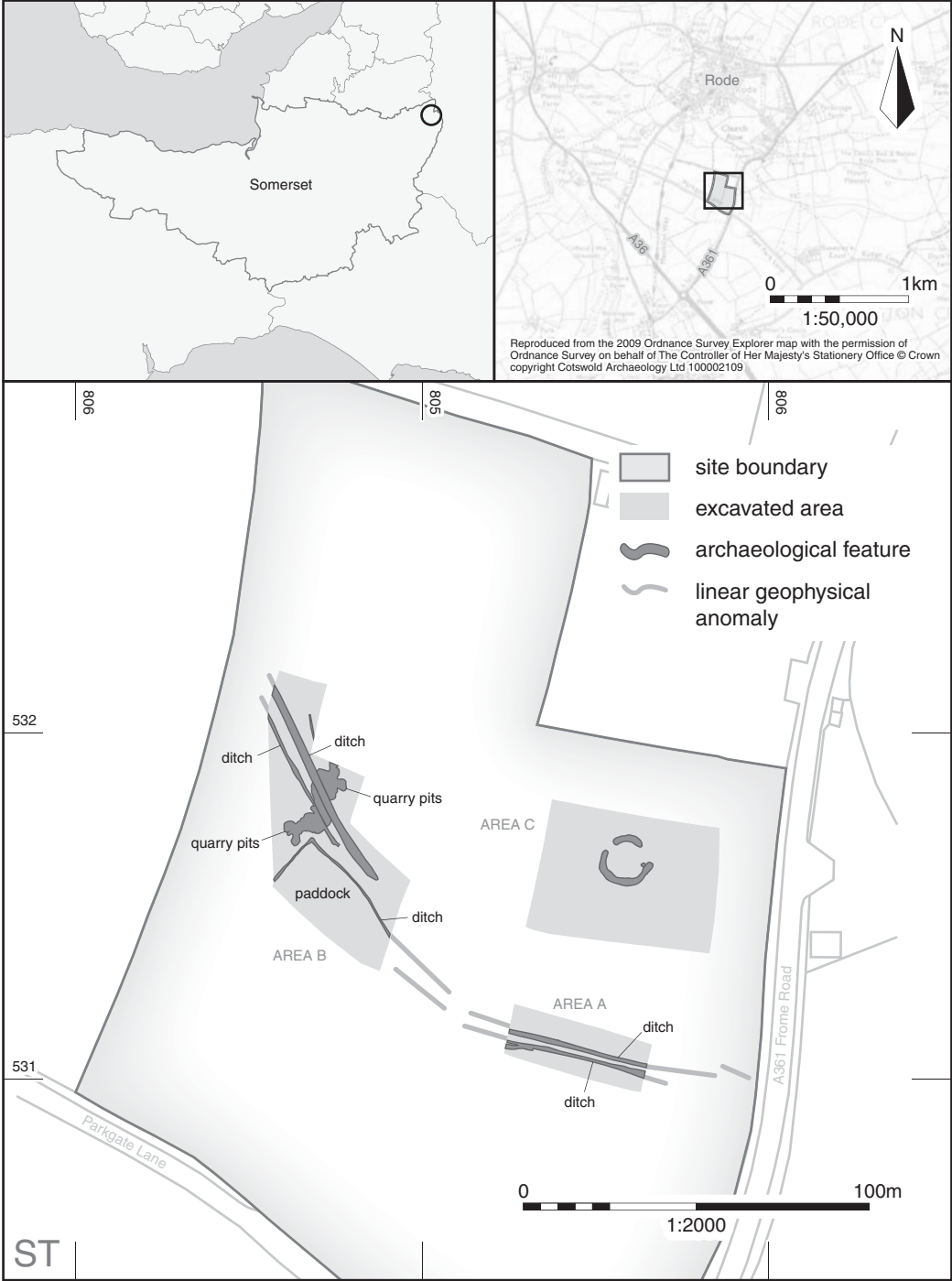


Fig. 1

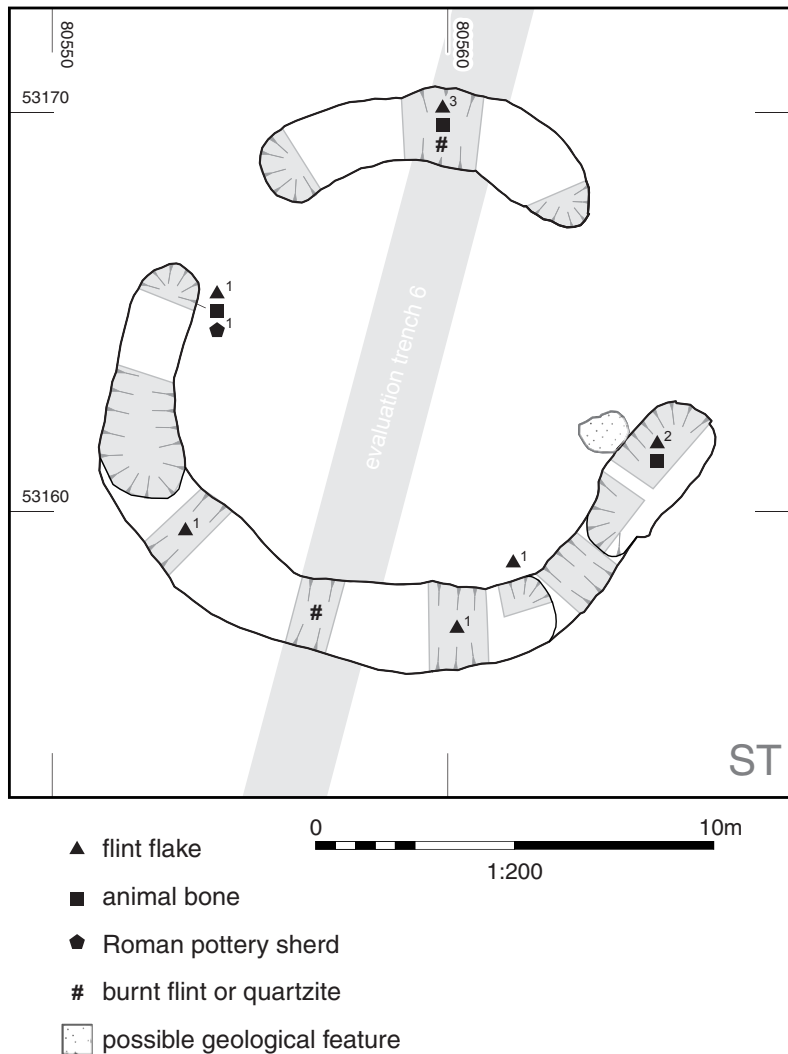


Fig. 2

archaeological features were identified within the paddock area.

During the evaluation, some twenty sherds (29g) of Roman pottery were recovered from a section of a ditch recorded between areas A and B (possibly a continuation of either the paddock gully, or a continuation of a boundary or trackway recorded in Area A (see below). These included ten sherds which appear to come from the same south-west white slipped ware vessel, a type reasonably common from the area and known to date mainly

to the later 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. The vessel represented is thin-walled and probably a flagon. A sherd of greyware possibly of Congresbury type was also identified from this deposit.

A pair of field boundary ditches or a narrow trackway was recorded within Area A. These ditches were not directly dated, two small undiagnostic flint flakes being the only finds produced. They are however considered to be from the Romano-British period on grounds of alignment and morphology.

Undated

An area of intercutting sub-circular quarry pits lay towards the centre of Area B (Fig. 1). Two of these were excavated by hand and contained a single fill derived from natural infilling and no artefactual material. No relationship between the quarry pits and the track or driveway could be established due to the high water table at the time and the similarity in fills.

Discussion

It was evident that the ring ditch was subjected to at least one phase of re-modelling with the increased quantity of stone in the ditch fill denoting the probable presence of a bank, although on which side remained undetermined. It is unlikely that the ring ditch represented a hut circle or stock enclosure considering the gaps in the segments and shallow nature of the ditch. The currently favoured interpretation is that it represents a late Neolithic or Bronze Age barrow, notwithstanding the absence of human remains. A monument of similar size and morphology excavated at Cambridge Road, Bedford of probable late Neolithic or early Bronze Age date was believed to have been a barrow, although all traces of the mound had been removed by ploughing. In that instance, in the centre of the barrow there was a crouched inhumation burial in an oval shaft (Carlyle 2006, 6). A possible parallel can be drawn with a D-shaped segmented enclosure, at Site 2 Field Farm, Shepton Mallett (Leach 2009) which was in use from the turn of the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC through to the ninth-century BC.

The poorly preserved remnants of trackway, paddock and parallel ditches in Areas A and B probably formed parts of a field system associated with the possible Iron Age or Roman farmstead denoted by a sub-rectangular cropmark just to the south of the site (CA 2011, Fig. 2, 17). It is possible that the barrow was still visible during the Romano-British period and this might account for the apparent way that the field system respects the site of the barrow. If the ring ditch still formed a depression during the Roman period this might account for the single sherd of Roman pottery recovered from the upper surface of the ditch.

The full report for this project (including specialist data, photographs and additional illustrations) can be found under the 2011 and 2014 report numbers on the Reports Online section of the Cotswold Archaeology website: <http://www.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/>.

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