LAND AT CROSS, SOMERSET

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

C.A.T JOB: 876
C.A.T REPORT: 991032

MAY 1999

This report has been researched and compiled with all reasonable skill, care, and attention to detail within the terms of the project as specified by the Client and within the general terms and conditions of Cotswold Archaeological Trust Ltd. The Trust shall not be liable for any inaccuracy, error or omission in the report or other documents produced as part of the Consultancy and no liability is accepted for any claim, loss or damage howsoever arising from any opinion stated or conclusion or other material contained in this report or other documents supplied as part of the Consultancy.

This report is confidential to the Client. Cotswold Archaeological Trust Ltd accept no responsibility whatsoever to third parties to whom this report, or any part of it is made known. Any such party relies upon this report entirely at their own risk.

© Cotswold Archaeological Trust
Headquarters Building, Kemble Business Park, Cirencester, Gloucestershire, GL7 6BQ
Tel. 01285 771022 Fax. 01285 771033 E-mail: cots.arch@virgin.net
CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS ............................................................................. 2

SUMMARY .................................................................................................. 3

1. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................. 4
   1.1 Introduction .................................................................................. 4
   1.2 Topography and geology ............................................................... 4
   1.3 Archaeological background .......................................................... 5
   1.4 Methodology .............................................................................. 6

2. RESULTS ................................................................................................ 7
   2.1 General ....................................................................................... 7
   2.2 Trench A (Figure 3) ...................................................................... 7
   2.3 Trench B (Figure 3) ...................................................................... 8
   2.4 Test Pits C and D (Figure 4) .......................................................... 8
   2.5 Trench E (Figure 4) ...................................................................... 9
   2.6 The auger transect ....................................................................... 9
   2.7 Finds .......................................................................................... 10

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS .................................................. 11

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..................................................................... 12

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................. 13
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. Location Plan ................................................................. 14
Figure 2. Study area showing location of trenches and auger transect ....... 15
Figure 3. East facing sections Trenches A and B ................................. 16
Figure 4. Sections: Test Pits C and D, and Trench E .......................... 17
SUMMARY

During May 1999 the Cotswold Archaeological Trust undertook an evaluation of land at Cross, Somerset on two adjacent plots, one occupied by a pumping station and the other covered in hardcore following the demolition of a petrol station. Layers of peat, interleaved with and capped by alluvium, were exposed in several trenches. A further trench revealed deep layers of colluvium, sealing a charcoal-rich former ground surface. One fragment of struck flint was recovered from the base of the peat deposits.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out between the 7th and 11th of May 1999 on land at Cross, Somerset (centred on ST 41605467), (Fig. 1). The evaluation was commissioned by Redcliffe Homes Ltd in connection with a proposal to apply for planning permission to develop the site for housing. The work described below represents the results of a pre-determination field evaluation of the site.

1.1.2 The development area covers c 0.65ha and consists of two plots on the southern side of the Old Coach Road through the village of Cross. The eastern plot was formerly a garage and petrol station, although this has now been demolished and the land is covered in a layer of hardcore. The western plot contains a water pumping station, built in 1898, the remainder being occupied by wet pasture with a spring in the low-lying part of the site.

1.2 Topography and geology

1.2.1 The site lies on sloping ground at a height of c. 8m OD immediately to the south of the road through the village of Cross, which lies at the foot of the southern slopes of the Mendips, immediately to the west of the point where the modern A38 descends from the hills and enters the Somerset Levels. The road through the village lies a little up-slope from the point where solid geological strata disappear beneath the peat and other superficial deposits of the Levels. It was thus thought likely that the area of the evaluation would straddle this boundary. A spring lies immediately beyond the recently infilled storage tank to the south of the pumping station, whilst a water-filled rhyne marks the southern boundary of the site.
1.3 Archaeological background

1.3.1 The depositional history of this part of the Somerset Levels is not as well understood as in the better-documented Brue valley, but the sequence of deposition is likely to be broadly similar to that outlined for the area as a whole in Coles and Coles (1986, 12). Thus by c.5600BP the sea was beginning to retreat from the Levels, having deposited a thick layer of marine clay. The area was then colonised by reed and sedge, which was in turn replaced by water-tolerant trees such as willow in birch, resulting in the development of fenwood. Peat continued to accumulate until it had risen beyond ground water level and a rainwater-fed raised bog of moss and heather became established. Peat growth appears to have ceased at c.1600BP. This represents only a much-simplified outline of the development of the levels and there will have been much local variation from one area to another (Rippon 1994, 239).

1.3.2 In 1898 a gold torc (PRN 11406), which is now in the British Museum, was found at some depth, whilst digging foundations for the pumping station referred to above. Romano-British pottery has been recovered from the gardens of several properties fronting onto the Old Coach Road and also during nearby house building (PRN 11403). Other sites in Cross have also produced Romano-British pottery, including a site at Bourton Lane to the north of Compton Farm, which may be associated with a ditch and earthwork or trackway (PRN 11500). Undated lynchets and quarries lie on the slopes to the north of the present road through the village (PRN 11521). It was thought possible that archaeological information relating to some or all of these periods might be revealed in the evaluation.
1.4 **Methodology**

1.4.1 A detailed project design was prepared by Cotswold Archaeological Trust (Leah 1999) in line with a brief issued by Somerset County Council Environment and Property Department (Architectural and Historic Heritage), and with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (1994) issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists. The evaluation sought to test for the presence of archaeological deposits on the site and, if present, determine their extent, character, date, preservation, and relationship to any sequence of natural deposits that might be exposed. Such sequences of deposits would also be fully recorded.

1.4.2 A total of three long trenches and two test pits were excavated in the locations shown on figure 2. Two trenches (A and B), 10m by 1.5m, were excavated in the area to the west of the pumping station, whilst on the plot to the east, a single trench (E), was excavated measuring 5m by 1.5m. A machine was used to excavate these trenches down to the first significant archaeological horizon. In the event no significant cultural horizons were identified and machine excavation was used throughout, supplemented by hand investigation where necessary. Trenches A and B were excavated to a maximum depth of 1.5m and Trench E to a depth of 2.2m.

1.4.3 In addition, two hand dug test pits (C and D), each 1.5m square, were excavated in the very wet south-west corner of the site. These were dug to 1.5m in depth and then hand augered. In all cases the trenches were then recorded in plan and section, photographed, and the deposits described. Samples were taken as appropriate for possible analysis and the height OD of the trenches recorded. Auger holes were also drilled at the points shown on Figure 2 and the deposits described, although samples were not taken. The height OD of the auger holes was recorded. At the conclusion of the excavations, the trenches were pumped out and backfilled.
2. RESULTS

2.1 General

2.1.1 No discrete archaeological features were identified in any of the trenches or test pits excavated. In each case a horizontal sequence of stratified deposits was exposed, consisting of wetland deposits made up of silts and peat in the southerly part of the site, and colluvial deposits on the up-slope northern side of the site. Both these sets of deposits were sealed in turn by what appeared to be later post-medieval dump layers consisting of clay and rubble. A detailed stratigraphic account of each of the trenches is provided below.

2.2 Trench A (Figure 3)

2.2.1 Orange brown natural clay (106) was encountered in this trench at a depth of 1.3-1.4m below the current ground surface. This was overlaid by a thin layer of dark brown clayey material containing large quantities of charcoal fragments (105). This layer was only 0.05m thick and has been interpreted as a former ground surface. Samples of this deposit were taken at the request of the County Archaeological Officer, to provide further information on this question. This in turn was overlaid by an undated layer of mid brown silty clay up to 0.75m thick (104). This has been interpreted as a hillwash or colluvial layer sealing the former ground surface. A layer of limestone rubble up to 0.4m thick (103) and above that a further layer of orange clayey material 0.5m thick, (102), sealed the colluvial layer (104). Both of these later deposits would appear to be post-medieval in origin and may be material spreads associated with the building of either the pumping station to the east, or the road along the northern boundary of the site. A modern humic turf layer 0.15m thick (101), completed the stratigraphic sequence.
2.3 **Trench B (Figure 3)**

2.3.1 Trench B was excavated a further 12m downslope to the south from Trench A. This placed it in the probable area of transition from the peat deposits of the levels to the south and the solid geology of the hill slope to the north. Once again, as in Trench A, a solid deposit of natural orange-brown clay was encountered at a depth of around 1.3m (209). This was overlaid by a well humified peat deposit up to 0.5m thick (208). A sample was taken of this layer at the request of the County Archaeological Officer for further analysis and possible dating. This peat was covered by a thin layer, (0.1m thick) of pale grey alluvial silt (207), above which was a further layer of peat 0.1m thick (206), which was also sampled, and a second thin band of silt (205), also approximately 0.1m thick. All of these earlier deposits were sealed by a layer of orange clay (202) and topsoil (201) up to 0.6m thick and very similar in appearance to the upper layers of Trench A. A recent pipe trench cut across Trench B from east to west, (203)/(204), probably associated with the pumping station. The cut of this feature was visible truncating the lower peat and silt deposits but was not discernible in the upper clay layer (202). This supports the view that this latter deposit may be very recent, sealing over the pipe trench. One flint flake, described in more detail below, was re-oovered from the interface between the lower peat layer (208) and the underlying clay (209).

2.4 **Test Pits C and D (Figure 4)**

2.4.1 Two test pits 1.5m long and 1.2m wide were hand excavated in the waterlogged southern portion of the site, to a maximum depth of 1.5m. Hand augering below the lowest deposits in these pits allowed an impression of the underlying deposits to be gained. Excavation and augering revealed very wet wood peat, ((306) in Test Pit C, and (404) in Test Pit D), from a depth of
0.9m below the surface, down as far as the limit of augering at 3.0m below the surface. In Test Pit C this wet peat was overlaid by two layers of drier humified peat, (305) and (303), separated at a depth of 0.6m below the surface by a thin band of grey alluvial silt (304), only 0.03m thick. This silt deposit as not discernible in Test Pit 4 and only a single layer of humified peat was recorded (403). In both test pits the peat layers were sealed by a surface deposit of orange clayey subsoil and modern topsoil, 0.35m thick, (302)/(301) in Test Pit C, and (402)/(401) in Test Pit D. This again may correspond with the clay dump layers identified in Trenches A and B.

2.5 **Trench E (Figure 4)**

2.5.1 Trench E was excavated on the eastern side of the site among the former buildings, now demolished, at the rear of the petrol station. A light grey clayey deposit, possibly formed of marine silt (504) was encountered at the lower limit of excavation at a depth of 2.2m. This was overlaid by a peat deposit approximately 1.0m thick (503). This in turn was sealed by a layer of fine light grey silt 0.5m thick (502), which was overlaid by 0.6m of modern hardcore and rubble layers forming the modern ground surface (501).

2.6 **The auger transect**

2.6.1 An east to west transect across the centre of the site was sampled by hand augering to a depth of 2.5m at an interval of 10m. This produced four auger points numbered 1-4 from west to east. A fifth point, '5', was augered at the mid point between the lateral transect and the southern end of Trench B, in order to provide further detail of the north to south profile across the site. None of the auger points struck solid geology. In each case the peat was at least 2.5m deep. This peat was overlaid by a grey silt deposit, which typically extended to a depth of approximately 0.6m below the surface, although the
silt was found to be deeper at point 3, where it extended to 2.05m below the surface. Dumped clay was also encountered below the surface at some points. The results of this augering are tabulated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deposit</th>
<th>Auger Points</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turf/ Clay</td>
<td>0.30m</td>
<td>0.15m</td>
<td>0.75m</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.25m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grey Silt</td>
<td>0.62m</td>
<td>0.35m</td>
<td>2.05m</td>
<td>0.70m</td>
<td>0.55m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peat</td>
<td>2.50m+</td>
<td>2.50m+</td>
<td>2.50m+</td>
<td>2.50m+</td>
<td>2.50m+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Lower limits below modern ground surface of deposits identified in auger transect.

2.7 Finds

2.7.1 Only two pieces of artefactual material were recovered during the course of the project. Both of these were uncovered in Trench B. One sherd of glazed late medieval or early post-medieval pottery, weighing 59g, was recovered from the upper clay or topsoil layers (201)/(202) during machining. Given the recent date suggested stratigraphically for these deposits this sherd is likely to be residual. Of more interest, a single flake of burnt flint was recovered from the interface of the lower peat deposit (208), and the underlying natural clay, (209). This small fragment, weighing only 1g and less that 25mm long, is suggested to be the distal end of a serrated blade of neolithic or possibly mesolithic date.
3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

3.1 From the deposits identified in the trenches and auger cores as described above it is possible to construct a possible depositional sequence for the site as a whole. This divides into two, with a wetland sequence characterised by peat growth at the southern end of the site, while colluvial deposits accumulated on the northern ‘dry-land’ portion of the area. The earliest deposit identified on the site is probably the clay identified at the base of Trenches A and B, (106)/(209). In the lower southern part of the site this is probably overlaid by the possible marine silt identified in Trench E, (505), although this relationship was not directly observed. A thick peat deposit has built up over the possible marine silt in the wetland part of the site, and extends beyond the hillside limit of the silt to overlie the clay directly in Trench B. A thin alluvial silt band was identified in Trench B (207), and Test Pit C (304), above this early peat deposit, with a second peat layer in turn overlying the silt ((206) in Trench B). This lower silt lens was quite ephemeral and was not identified in Test Pit D, or in any of the auger cores. A much more substantial upper layer of silt was, however, identified in the auger cores overlying the upper peat layer, and it is possible that this is represented by the upper silt lens in Trench B; (205), and by the silt above the peat in Trench E; (502). This silt was thickest in the area corresponding to the modern spring and pond (Auger point 3), thus the silting may be related to this feature.

3.2 By contrast, further up the hill slope in Trench A no peat deposits were identified. The natural clay (106) was overlaid by a charcoal rich layer which may represent a former ground surface, (105). Covering this was a further layer of clayey material which is interpreted as hill-wash colluvium (104), but which contained no dating evidence. The rubble and clay deposits covering this colluvium in Trench A, and the deposits of orange-brown clay found
immediately below the surface in many of the other trenches and auger cores, are interpreted as later post-medieval dumping, possibly associated with the construction of the large, recently backfilled, storage tank at the rear of the pumping station.

3.3 No archaeological features were identified in the course of the evaluation, and no finds were recovered to match the treasure found in 1898. The project has nonetheless provided a useful opportunity to examine the depositional history of the peat margins.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cotswold Archaeological Trust would like to thank Mr D C Harryman, and Mr T R O'Connor of Redcliffe homes Ltd, and Mr Richard Brunning, Field Archaeologist at Somerset County Council, for their assistance in the course of this project.

Fieldwork was carried out by David Kenyon, Mark Leah, and Dan Stansbie. This report was compiled by David Kenyon and illustrated by Richard Morton.
5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Coles, J, 1982 Prehistory in the Somerset Levels, in *The Archaeology of Somerset* (eds M Aston and I Burrow)

Coles, B, and Coles, J, 1986 *Sweet Track to Glastonbury*

Leah, M, 1999, *Land at Cross, Somerset, Project design for an archaeological evaluation* Cotswold Archaeological Trust

Rippon, S, 1994 Medieval Wetland Reclamation, in *The Medieval Landscape of Wessex* (eds M Aston and C Lewis), Oxbow Monograph 46, 239-254
Figure 1. Location Plan
Figure 2. Study area showing location of trenches and auger transect
Figure 3.  East facing sections Trenches A and B
Figure 4. Sections: Test Pits C and D, and Trench E
Fig. 2  Study area showing location of trenches and auger transect
Fig. 3
East facing sections Trenches A and B

TRENCH B, EAST FACING SECTION

TRENCH A, EAST FACING SECTION
Fig. 4 Sections: Test Pit C and D, and Trench E

TRENCH E, EAST FACING SECTION

TEST PIT D, NORTH FACING SECTION

TEST PIT C, WEST FACING SECTION