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Archaeology Field Group

TILSHEAD SOUTH

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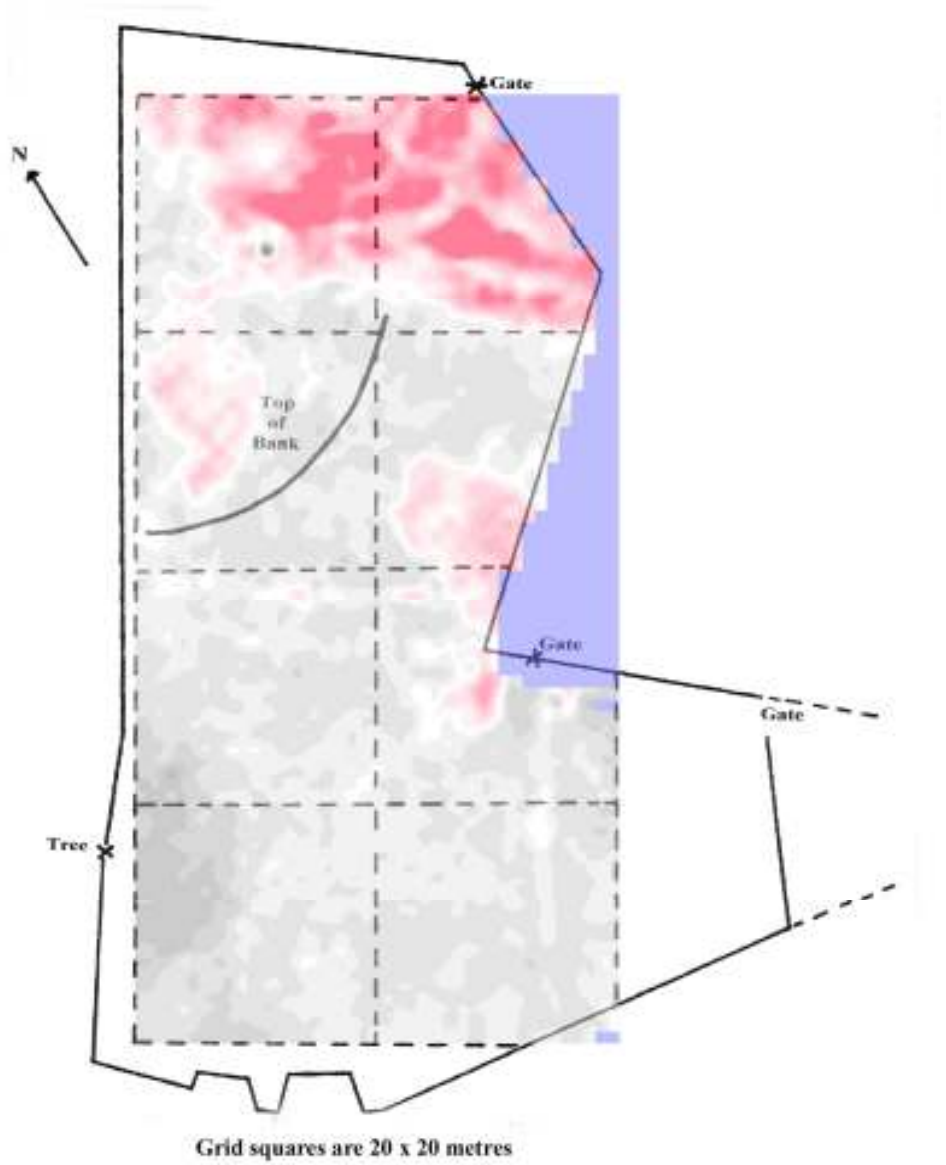
Excavations at Tilshead, Wiltshire in August 2006.

The site is to the south of the A360 in Tilshead at SU03454785 in a field owned by WANHS chairman Bill Perry. A bank running through the field was noted by Archaeology Field Group members when looking for evidence of a southern boundary to a putative enclosure suggested by bank and ditch features to north of the A360 excavated by the Group in 2005 and 2006.

A resistivity survey carried out by TALITS on behalf of the Field Group showed no evidence of an enclosure ditch but several areas of high resistance suggested possible buildings on the site (Figure 1). These were investigated over the August Bank Holiday weekend.

Figure 1. Resistivity Survey Results.



Trenches and test pits were excavated over several features revealed by geophysics. All trenches and test pits were dug by hand after removal of turf.

Trench 1 was positioned east-west across an area of high resistance to investigate a possible building. An area 4 x 1.5 metres was excavated and revealed an extensive area of rubble (120) containing Victorian rubbish with pockets of ash, below this was a layer of soil (130), this overlying a surface of cobbles (140) laid on a bed of crushed chalk (150) over natural (Figure 2). The trench was extended to the west to reveal the edge of the cobbled surface. There was no evidence of the walls suggested by the geophysics and the cobbling is probably the metalled surface of an access route running between the buildings fronting the A360 and fields behind.

Figure 2. West facing Section of Trench 1

Section is 1.5 metres wide (B Clarke 2006)

Trench 2 was a 1x1 metre test pit sited over an area of very low resistance. It revealed a layer of hard packed chalk overlying a layer of soil containing a lens of burnt material. This in turn overlay a bed of stones over natural (Figure 4). There was no feature which would explain the area of low resistance shown by the geophysics. The trench was extended north and south to define the limits of the chalk surface which was 5.2 metres north to south.

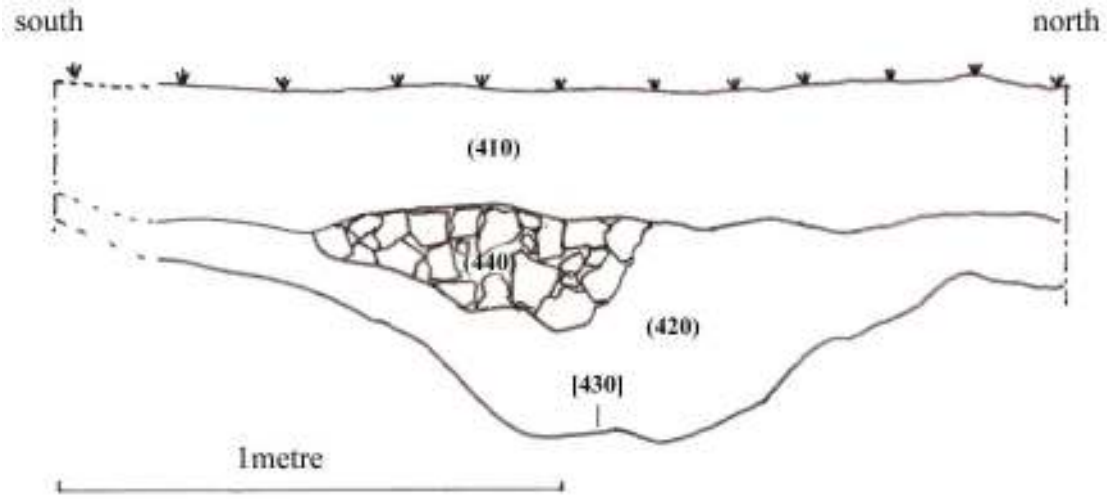
Figure 3. Trench 2

B Clarke 2006

Trench 3 was dug over an extensive area of high resistance at the northern end of the field to determine it represented tumble from demolished structures or was caused by the geology. A 1x1 metre test pit revealed a layer of rounded gravel deposited on natural bedrock suggesting water had flowed over the area in the past. There were no archaeological features.

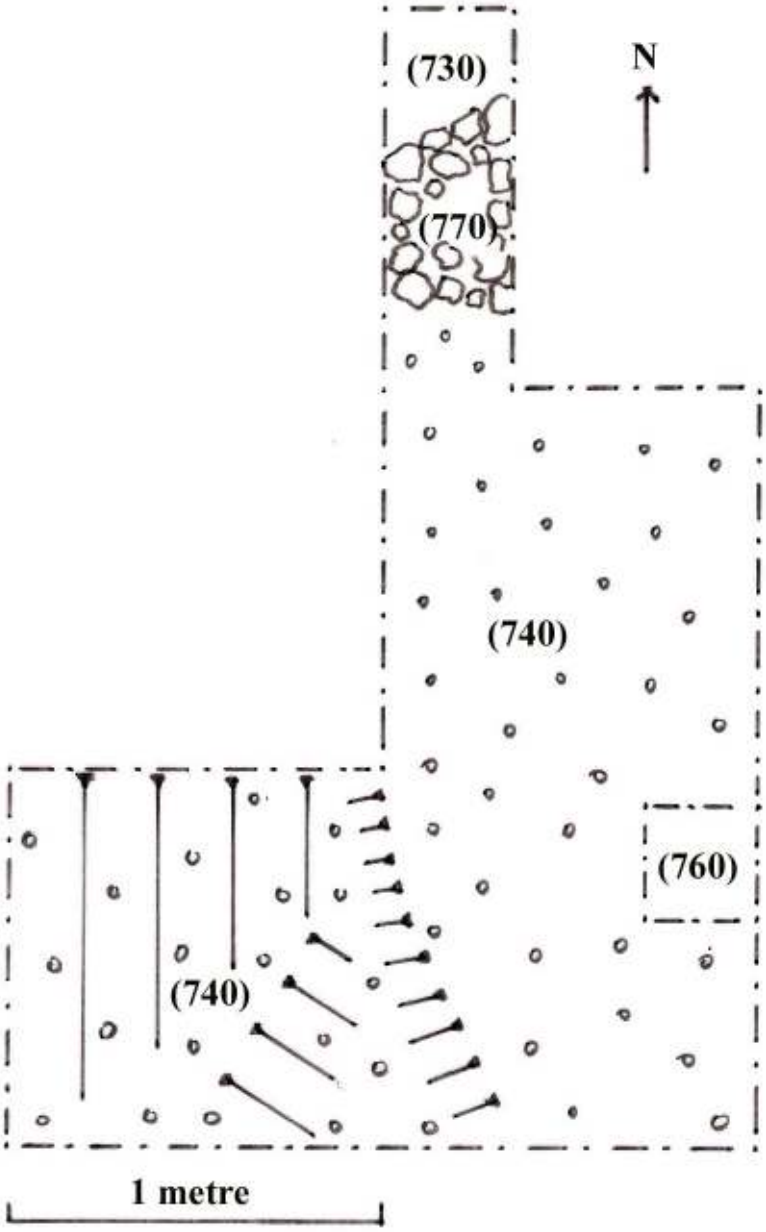
Trench 4 was sited to investigate two parallel linear areas of low resistance. The trench was 1 metre wide and extended 5 metres north to south. It revealed a cut [430] in the natural bedrock filled with soil containing chalk inclusions (420). A layer of stones (440) overlay this fill at the southern edge of the cut (Figure 4). The feature appeared to line up with the boundary wall of the garden to the east and was probably a ditch marking a field boundary which was replaced later by a cob wall built on a base of flint stones similar to that around the garden.

Figure 4. Trench 4 East Facing Section



Trenches 5, 6, 7 and 8 were 1x1 metre test pits dug over an area of high resistance at the eastern side of the field where an early map showed a building. Trenches 5, 6 and 8 contained some building material in the soil which overlay natural but no evidence of building foundations. However, trench 7 revealed a thin layer of chalk (720) beneath the topsoil (710). The chalk overlay dark soil (730) from which a number of finds were recovered – all dating to the Victorian period or later with the exception of one well worn sherd of prehistoric pottery, probably residual. A halfpenny dated 1897 was found in this layer. There was a chalk cobble surface (740) below this soil layer which like that in trench 1 was laid on a bed of hard packed crushed chalk (750) over natural (760). The cobbled surface dipped towards the western side of the test pit and so the trench was extended in this direction to see if this represented the edge of the surface. The surface rose again leaving a channel in the surface draining to the south (Figure 5). The trench was also extended to the north to determine the limit of the cobble surface as it had not been seen in trench 6 to the north. The northern edge of the cobble surface was revealed and it was revetted by a layer of flint stone (770), possibly the base of a cob wall.

Figure 5. Plan of Trench 7



Discussion

There is no evidence for substantial buildings on the site. The laid surfaces and the possible cob walls (indicated by flint base layers) suggest the site may have been used for holding livestock. The possible drainage gully in the cobble surface of trench 7 may indicate stabling possibly associated with the former inn which occupied the building fronting the A360 to the north of the site.

The site may repay further work with a trench across the bank exposing features not revealed by geophysics.