

NORTHERN DEVON IN THE GREY ARCHAEOLOGICAL LITERATURE

REPORTS COVERING NORTH DEVON DISTRICT 2020

Table 1 sets out the reports filed with ADS relating to 2020. The reports are then discussed in a little more detail, in alphabetical order of parish. A brief synthesis of the findings completes the document.

Table 1: Summary of reports for 2020

Parish	Site	Grid Ref	Report Producer	Type of Report*	Nature of Development
Bratton Fleming	Chelfham Mill School	6094 3565	SWARCH	HIA	Residential
Bratton Fleming	Mockham Down	6661 3589	SWARCH	Monitoring and recording	Replacement dwelling
Bratton Fleming	The Barns, Chelfham Barton	6154 3608	SWARCH	HBR and Monitoring	Conversion of barns to dwelling and annex
Challacombe	Withycombe Farm	6854 4210	SWARCH	Heritage Assessment	Potential development
E & W Buckland	A361 junction	2656 1296	Cotswold Archaeology	Strip, map and sample excavation	Road improvement scheme
East Anstey	Bunksland Farmhouse	8502 2627	Historic England	Tree ring analysis	Building at risk
Fremington	Former E Yelland Power Station site	2481 1324	SWARCH	Heritage Assessment	Residential and other development
Heanton Punchardon	Westacombe Cottage	5037 3563	SWARCH	HBR	Repairs
Ilfracombe	Hillsborough	5307 4758	Oakford Archaeology	Monitoring and recording	Construction of gate
Ilfracombe	Hutton, Langleigh Lane	5114 6477	SWARCH	Evaluation trenching	Residential development
Landkey	Land at Birch Road, Phase 2	5997 3141	SWARCH	DBA and geophysical survey	Residential development

Parracombe	Killington Farm	2662 1460	SWARCH	HIA	Telecommunications mast
Shirwell	Post Box Cottage	5971 3740	SWARCH	Monitoring	Construction of driveway
South Molton	Former Quince Honey Farm	7114 2621	AC Archaeology	HBR	Residential redevelopment
Warkleigh	Hilltown Farm	6585 2316	SWARCH	Monitoring and recording	Replacement dwelling

*HBR/S/A - historic building recording/survey/assessment, DBA - Desk-based assessment, HVIA - Historic visual impact assessment

Fifteen reports were recorded in 2020, in twelve parishes. Of these reports, eleven were produced by SWARCH, one each by AC Archaeology, Cotswold Archaeology and Oakford Archaeology, and one by Historic England. Most were developer commissioned.

1. Bratton Fleming/Goodleigh: Chelfham Mill School

The site lies in a steep-sided, flat-bottomed valley and straddles a small tributary of the River Yeo. The tributary forms the boundary between Bratton Fleming and Goodleigh parishes. The site contains a number of buildings, including a former mill building and outbuilding and a Victorian residence to the south of the tributary and a range of largely twentieth century buildings to the north on the Bratton Fleming side. They were last in use as the former Chelfham Mill School. Visually by far the most distinctive feature of the site is the tall narrow Grade 2 listed viaduct that carried the former Lynton & Barnstaple railway over the valley. It dominates the buildings that lie beneath it.

The HIA was carried out as most of the buildings are proposed for demolition, as part of a residential development. The Assessment concludes that the former mill building and associated outbuilding should be retained as containing evidence of their former uses, which may date to the early 18th century. The late Victorian dwelling is also considered to have some local historic merit. None of the twentieth century former school buildings on the northern part of the site is considered to have any historic merit.

2. Bratton Fleming: Mockham Down

The site lies immediately to the north of the Mockham Down Camp and was considered to have high archaeological potential. Monitoring and recording was carried out during the demolition of the existing holiday unit on the site, prior to its replacement with a dwelling. No evidence of significant archaeological deposits, finds or features was discovered.

3. Bratton Fleming: The Barns, Chelfham Barton

Chelfham Barton is a recently refurbished Grade 2 listed former hall house. To the north lie a series of ruinous barns that appear to have originally formed part of a courtyard associated with the hall house in the mediaeval period. Subsequently the buildings were adapted to a variety of agricultural uses, including the use of two of them as threshing barns. The barns are now proposed for conversion to a dwelling and annex.

The ruinous condition of the barns means that they have little intrinsic historical merit. Nevertheless, they contain, in some areas, evidence of their former use as part of a high-status courtyard associated with the hall house. Several phases of alteration were recorded that indicate the slow transition, over at least three hundred years, from a high-status site to a prosperous farm. Whilst the barns have now been separated from the former hall house, they indicate this progression and have some value as a record of the transition over time.

4. Challacombe: Withycombe Farm

This report is of a heritage statement prepared for Withycombe Farm, prior to potential development. The farm was part of the Fortescue estate until 1959 when it was sold. It comprises a farmhouse and outbuildings forming a courtyard. Although there is evidence of earlier buildings on the site, the farm was substantially remodelled between 1840 and 1888. The outbuildings including a threshing barn and horse engine house, Shippon, stables, milking shed and smaller outbuildings, thus comprising the usual range of specialised structures built on late Victorian upland farms. Although they have nor great merit, they are assessed as being highly authentic. The house appears to contain architectural features that may have been salvaged from earlier buildings on the site of nearby.

5. East and West Buckland: A361 junction

An archaeological excavation was commissioned by Devon County Council prior to a road improvement scheme at the junction. Two areas were excavated, targeted on features identified by a previous geophysical survey and a trial trench. The excavation recorded

a rectilinear enclosure which appeared to extend further to the north of the excavated area. No artefactual evidence was present, but an early Roman period radiocarbon date was obtained. A number of undated ditches and pits was also recorded; these were mainly on different alignments to both the Roman period enclosure and the extant field system.

6. East Anstey: Bunksland Farmhouse

Tree ring analysis was carried out by Historic England on this farmhouse, which is on the Heritage at Risk Register. Samples were taken from the roof and ground floor of the building, resulting in the successful dating of 14 of them. The roof timbers were felled in 1396-7, demonstrating that the house was built at the end of the 14th century. A ground floor doorframe was constructed of timbers felled between 1507 and 1532. This is likely to be coeval with a fireplace bressummer beam which was felled between 1515 and 1532. These represent a secondary phase of building work.

7. Fremington: Former East Yelland Power Station site

Major development is proposed at the site of the former East Yelland Power Station on the south bank of the River Taw. A Heritage Assessment was commissioned to determine what impact the development would have on heritage assets (churches, listed buildings) in the area. The site was formerly known as East Yelland Marsh and was farmed as common land until enclosed in the 19th century. A coal-fired power station was built in 1954 and decommissioned 30 years later. It was partly demolished and the site has lain mainly derelict (apart from some industrial uses) ever since.

The assessment concluded that, as the site lies at some distance from most heritage assets in the area, the impact of the proposed development would be negative/minor at worse. The only exception is the Scheduled double stone row at Islay Marsh to the east of the site, where the impact was assessed as negative/moderate to negative/minor.

8. Heanton Punchardon: Westacombe Cottage

This report covers the historic building recording of Westacombe Cottage, a grade 2 listed building on the edge of the village. However, it also gives a wider account of the building and its history, which is indicative of its transition over the centuries.

The cottage has its origins in the late medieval period and retains a significant proportion of complex phased historic built fabric. It displays a wealth of obscured features, both structural and detailed, for example: the scarring and truncated beam in Room 3, the plastered jetty in Room 3, the plastered, closed 17th century ceilings in Rooms 1, 2, 3 and 4 and the blocked fireplaces in Rooms 2 and 4. Room 9 is the most sensitive space in the house, with the fragile, and least altered of the historic

features: a plaster cornice dating to the later 17th century. The roof has three historic trusses and an additional truss blade; these are of neatly shaped and surprisingly lightweight plain A-frames, with face-pegged collars and are likely to be of 16th century date. The purlins are of much heavier scantling and there are a series of 17th and 19th century lath and plaster ceilings and evidence of earlier whitewashing of timbers for open roofs. The rafters across the first phase of the roof are of unusual 'peasant' quality, being little more than branches pulled from local hedges, but it of a sound construction being pegged to the trusses and ridge end purlins. There is an entire second phase of roof from the later 18th or early 19th century on the front south face, addressing the remodelled front wall and a further set of alterations around the rear lateral stack and kitchen block extension. The roof is interesting in that it contains the majority survival of two entire phases and elements which hint at lesser decorative phases. It encapsulates the narrative of the development of this building from Open Hall to in-town farmhouse, to picturesque cottage.

9. Ilfracombe: Hillsborough

Hillsborough is an Iron Age promontory fort which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. A watching brief was carried out during the construction of a gate. No archaeological features were observed and the only finds (sherds and glass fragments) were 19th/20th century.

10. Ilfracombe: Hutton, Langleigh Lane

Three evaluation trenches were dug on the site which was to be developed for housing. It lies on the western edge of Ilfracombe. A previous geophysical survey and reference to earlier mapping indicates that the site previously formed part of the farm complex at Langleigh Farm.

The trenches revealed a number of archaeological features, including demolished walls, robber trenches and cobbled floors. These broadly validate the previous survey. All the features were post-medieval and indicate a complex of farm buildings that were largely demolished in the 19th century. A large amount of stratified material was covered, all of post-medieval date. The majority of the pottery fragments were North Devon Coarseware. Overall, the finds were domestic in nature.

11. Landkey: Birch Road Phase 2

A large area of land north of Landkey, which was scheduled for residential development was the subject of a geophysical survey to ascertain whether there were any significant archaeological features on the site. The survey indicated that there were few such features and that those that were observed related to 19th century or

possible earlier field systems. There was one exception. In the southern part of the site a rectangular enclosure appears, on a different alignment to the field systems, suggesting that it may predate them. The report recommends a targeted programme of archaeological work in that area to further investigate the feature.

12. Parracombe: Killington Farm

This heritage impact assessment was carried out in respect of a proposed telecommunications mast and substation on the edge of South Down, north of the village of Parracombe. South Down was an area of unenclosed moorland attached to the hamlet of Killington and contains the remains of an extensive relict medieval field system. North east of the site lies Beacon Castle, an iron Age univallate enclosure. The site therefore lies in an area of high archaeological potential.

The direct impact of construction of the mast on archaeological features would be permanent and irreversible. However, possible harm can be mitigated through a programme of archaeological monitoring. Indirect impacts would largely be negligible, due to the distance of the site from other heritage assets.

13. Shirwell: Post Box Cottage

Archaeological monitoring was carried out during construction of a drive on this site. No archaeological features were observed and the few finds were discarded as being modern.

14. South Molton: Former Quince Honey Farm

The Grade 2 listed former Quince Honey Farm building on North Road was originally built in 1837 as the South Molton Union workhouse. It was constructed broadly according to Kempthorne's standard design for a workhouse capable of accommodating 200 residents, but with local adaptations. At most it is believed to have accommodated about 133 people in the mid nineteenth century. The building was adapted and extended several times in the nineteenth century, particularly after a major fire in 1892 severely damaged the northern wing, which was rebuilt in 1895.

The building was further adapted throughout the twentieth century, under the successive ownerships of Devon County Council, the NHS, and then from the 1970s as the Quince Honey Farm. Despite these many changes the historic building recording showed that some original features of the building survive. The report is a good example of both the principles on which a large Union workhouse was constructed and managed and of its evolution as social attitudes and health care approaches changed.

15, Warkleigh: Hilltown Farm

Hilltown Farm was a listed seventeenth century farmhouse set within its farmyard, until it was destroyed by fire in 2017. Monitoring was carried out during groundworks for the construction of a replacement dwelling. The monitoring suggested that the farmhouse replaced an earlier mediaeval farmhouse that itself may have had older origins. The site is set within a mediaeval landscape of strip fields.

Conclusions

No significant archaeological features were revealed in these reports. This may be related to the fact that there was an absence of renewable energy developments in rural locations or of major residential developments on the edge of towns and villages (except at Landkey). Two rectilinear features, at Birch Road, Landkey and at the A361 junction, may repay further investigation as they both run against the later field systems, suggesting earlier origins. The latter had Romano-British dating evidence, which would make it an intriguing possibility, in relationship to the iron working of the same period in nearby Brayford.

Of interest, however, are the several historic building surveys carried out, two of them involving tree ring dating. These give accounts of the origins and evolution of a number of historic buildings in the area, ranging from former hall houses, a nineteenth century Exmoor farm complex, a mill and a former workhouse. In each case the report shows the transition through the centuries in how these buildings were used and adapted. Thus, the archaeological investigations help to demonstrate the social and economic development of the area in a variety of settings.

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