

Hill View Farm
South Cerney, Gloucestershire

SU 045974

Archaeological Evaluation

May 2019



Archaeological Evaluation at South Cerney, Gloucestershire

Cover photograph Trench 3 courtesy of C Snowden.

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Summary

Four evaluation trenches were dug by volunteers from the South Cerney Trust during May 2019. The trenches were located over a number of geophysical anomalies which had been identified in the results of a geophysical survey which had taken place in October and November 2018. None of the anomalies were uncovered during the evaluation. A small rectangular pit/post hole was revealed in trench 1, but no datable evidence was recovered from the fill. At the bottom of trench 2, on the natural surface, an iron smelting furnace was uncovered, along with a quantity of iron pan. The date of this feature is not known.

There was little artefactual material recovered from the four trenches, and none in any sealed contexts. The sandy/gravel sub-surface was continuous from top surface to the natural sandy/clay level, which encountered between 0.80m and 1.2m from the present ground level. The finds which were recovered ranged from worked flint, pots sherds dating to the Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon periods and a clay pipe fragment. With no occupation levels visible in the area, these are probably stray finds from low level manuring activity of the field over a considerable period of time.

Site Owner

The field is owned by Will Seymour who gave permission for the excavations to be undertaken.

Authorship

This report was written and compiled by John Samways.

Copyright

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Disclaimer

This report has been compiled with all reasonable skill, care and attention to detail within the terms of the project design, and within the general procedures of the South Cerney Trust. No responsibility is accepted whatsoever to third parties to whom this report or any part thereof is made known. Any such party relies upon this report at their own risk.

Acknowledgements

The South Cerney Trust would like to express our thanks, gratitude and appreciation to the land owner, Will Seymour, for his permission and enthusiasm to carry out the excavation. Thanks also to S Adams, M Aldridge, T Aldridge, A Beard, R Beard, B Chamberlain, H Finlayson, J Hill, M McQueen, P Mills, S Skene, and C Snowden. Without their help the excavation could not have been carried out.

The Location of the Excavation

The survey was carried out in a field belonging to Hill View Farm at the north-western edge of the village of South Cerney, Gloucestershire. South Cerney is located to the south-west of Cirencester, Gloucestershire and north of Cricklade, Wiltshire; Figure 1.

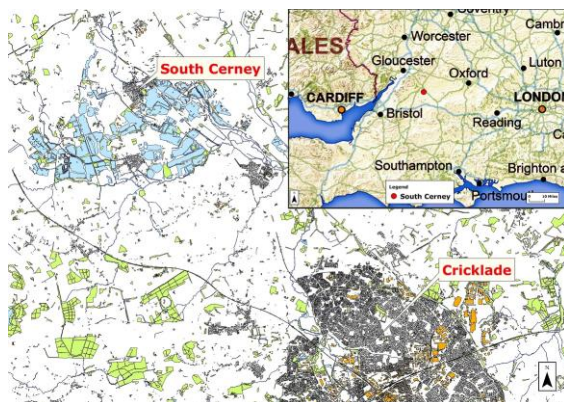


Figure 1: Location of site (Base Mapping: Ordnance Survey, Crown Copyright)

The underlying geology is Kellaways Sand Member - Sandstone and Siltstone, Interbedded (British Geological Survey). Figure 2.

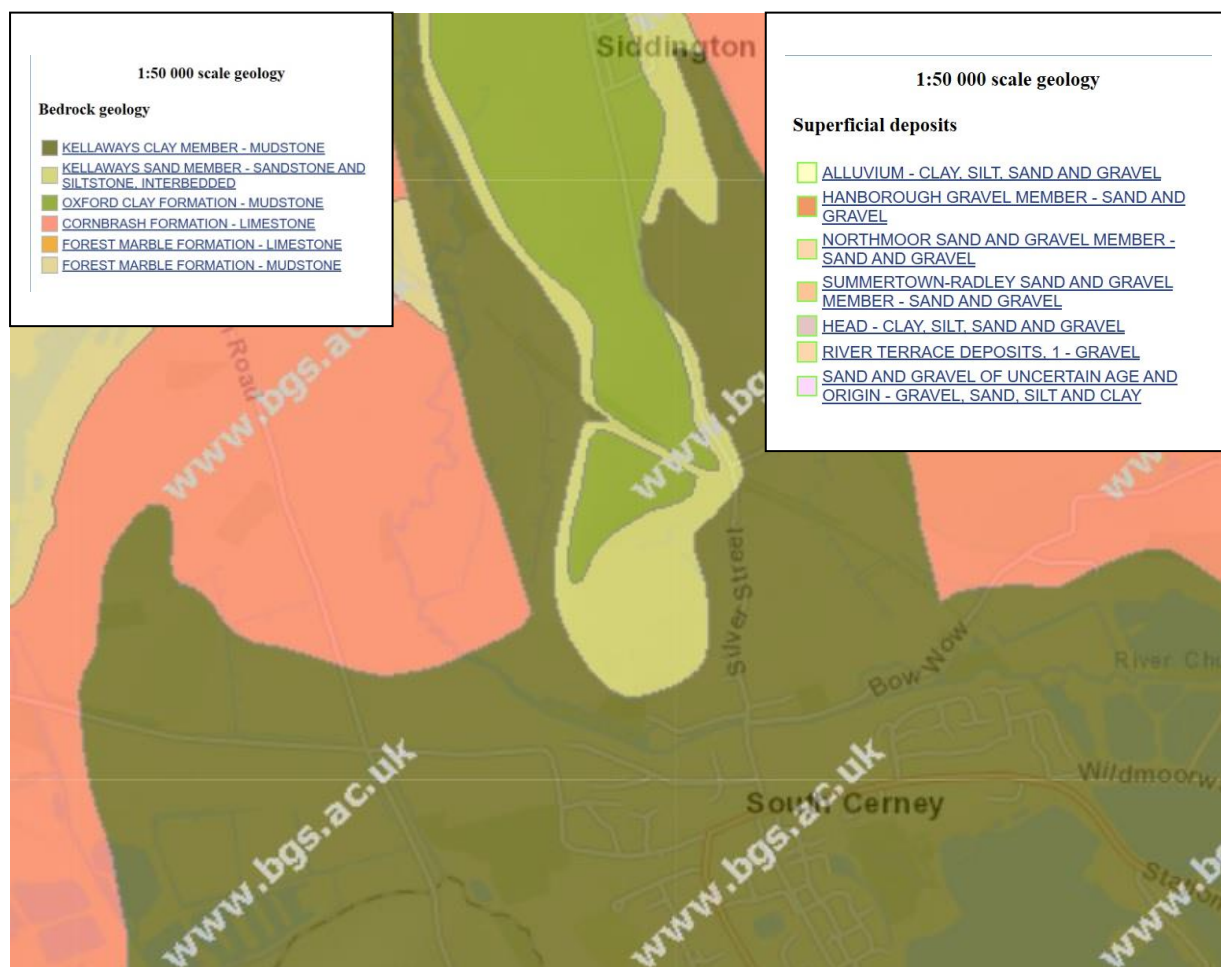


Figure 2: Underlying Geology (British Geological Survey, Crown Copyright)

The trenches were located generally in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI); Figure 3.

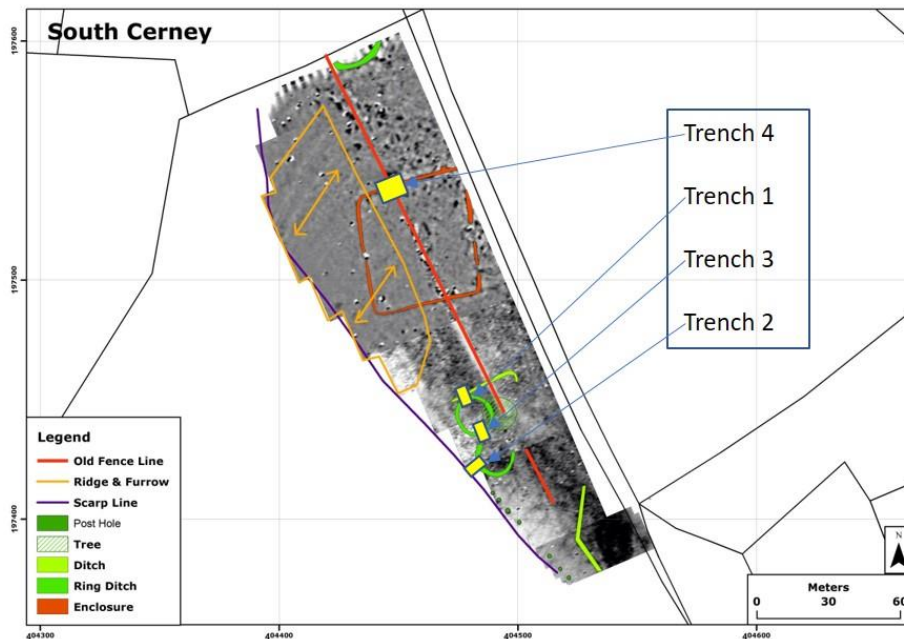


Figure 3: Location of trenches (Base Mapping: Ordnance Survey, Crown Copyright)

The Aim of the Evaluation

The primary aim of the work was to identify and date, if possible, certain anomalies shown in the geophysical survey; Figure 3. A possible rectangular enclosure was identified in the central area of the field, two circular features, with an adjoining ditch in the south-west area and a row of possible post holes along the escarpment edge.

The Gloucestershire HER shows no record of significant earthworks in the vicinity except for an undated ditch in the north of the field (HER 26832), and earthworks associated with a manor house, now identified as fish ponds, but previously recorded as the site of an anarchy period castle (HER 322); see Figure 4 below.

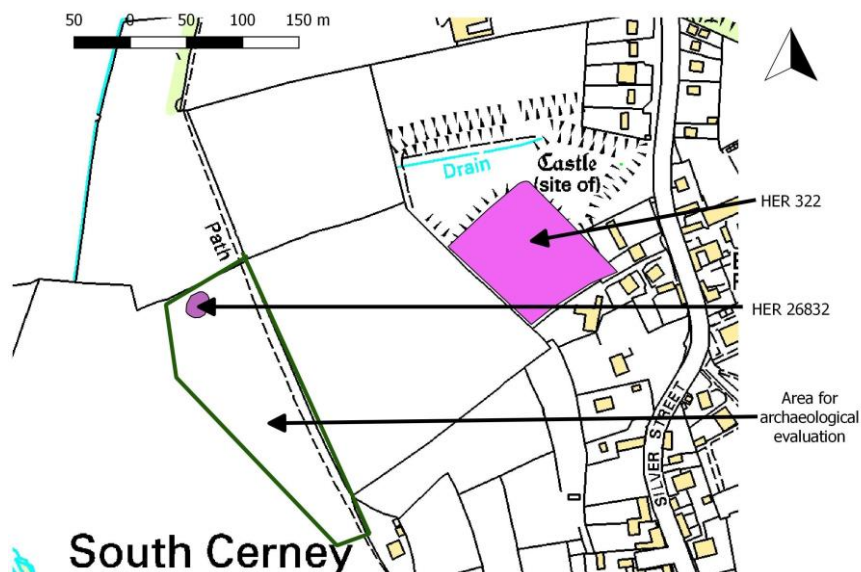


Figure 4: Gloucestershire HER (Base Mapping: Ordnance Survey, Crown Copyright)

Carrying out the Evaluation

The work was undertaken over two weekends 4th to 6th May and 18th & 19th May 2019. The weather was generally dry and partly sunny on the work days and the ground was fairly dry.

Trenches

Trench 1 was located over a circular feature and adjoining ditch; Figure 3. It was originally set out as 3m x 1m, but extended to 3m x 2m on the second day. No evidence for any ditches was seen in the trench. Trowelling revealed possible pit/post hole in the southern part of the trench; Figure 5. A number of large stones were revealed at the same level as the top of the pit/post hole and in close vicinity. They could be connected and perhaps formed a cap to the hole, if feature a storage pit. No dateable material was recovered from the fill of the pit/post hole.



Figure 5: Pit in Trench 1

Trench 2, 3m x 1m, was located over a possible post hole and a ditch; Figure 3. As with trench 1, the features from the geophysical survey were not seen. However, at the west end of the trench, a quantity of iron pan was found at a depth of 60cms from current ground surface, and a possible iron furnace was uncovered nearby. This is a circular feature, 50cms in diameter and 15cms high, with a clay core and surrounded by stones; Figure 6. The date of this feature is not known. A CT scan image of one of the pieces of iron pan is shown in Figure 7.



Figure 6: Furnace in Trench 2

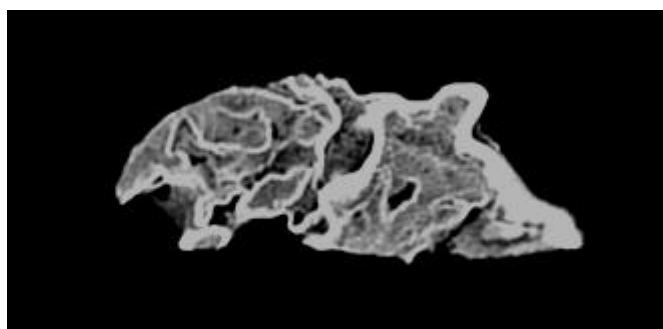


Figure 7: CT scan of piece of iron pan from Trench 2

Trench 3, 3m x 1m, was located to try and pick up the ditch, revealed in the geophysical survey, but not seen in trench 1; Figure 3. However, no archaeological feature could be identified in this trench. The only change in the sub-surface was in the extent of stoniness within the sand. This is thought to be a result of natural deposition/movement rather than human activity. Again, there were very few artefacts found within the trench.

Trench 4 was laid out 6m x 4m across the rectangular feature; Figure 3. Neither the east-west ditch nor north-south field boundary were seen. As with the other trenches, the consistency of the sandy sub-soil varied only by the quantity of stones encountered, and the fact that the dampness of the sand increased with depth. Towards the bottom of the trench, just above the natural surface, water could be seen to emerge in places. With no archaeological features visible, a sondage was cut through the natural clayey sand layer and hard Kellaway Sandstone was encountered at a depth of 1.2m. This Sandstone can be seen in the outcrops visible in the railway cutting 0.5km to the north of the site; Figure 8.



Figure 8: Image of Kellaway Sandstone outcrop in railway cutting

The list of finds from all of the trenches is given in Appendix A.

Assessment and discussion

None of the features visible in the geophysical survey were found within the trenches. It is possible that any activity on the surface was very slight and the nature of sand such that features would be quickly filled with surrounding sand. Weathering and movement of the sand would remove all traces of any features which may have been dug, leaving only a slight magnetic response as evidence. Certainly, no stratigraphy could be picked out in any of the vertical sides of the trenches. The pit/post hole in trench 1 was only detected by careful trowelling, with a minor change in the compactness of the sand which enabled the feature to be picked out.

The iron furnace located on the natural surface in trench 1 was unexpected. It is probable that this would have been located within an area which had been dug into to the sand for the purpose. It is unlikely that the whole of the area around the furnace could have been covered by sand brought in since the furnace was abandoned, so it is probable that natural weathering and accumulation of sand over time has covered the furnace, leaving no trace of the original cut.

The range of the finds suggests that there has been human activity across the field for a considerable time. No evidence for occupation has been found but it is possible that such occupation was in a close vicinity, especially at the time of the use of the furnace. The find of iron pan, probably brought to the site for the production of iron, rather than slag means that no analysis can be undertaken to determine the type of metal work production at the site, and the date of such activity.

The lack of evidence for any of the apparent ditches suggested by the geophysics survey, and no artefactual material found dating from the Bronze Age, would rule out there having been any Bronze Age activity within the excavated areas. It is also unlikely that any agriculture based on ridge and furrow practises occurred within the area. Coring across the top of the ridge revealed a consistent sub-soil of sand to a depth of approximately 1m. This sand thinned quickly going down the slope to the west, to be replaced by a clay sub-soil. Clay sub-soil was also found at the fence line on the east side of the site.

Next Steps

It is proposed that a wide area excavation is undertaken across the mound at the southern end of the area surveyed, as indicated at Figure 9. This would be to look for any evidence of human occupation associated with the furnace, and, if possible, to obtain dateable evidence for such activity at this site. The work would be undertaken using a mechanical digger under suitable supervision.

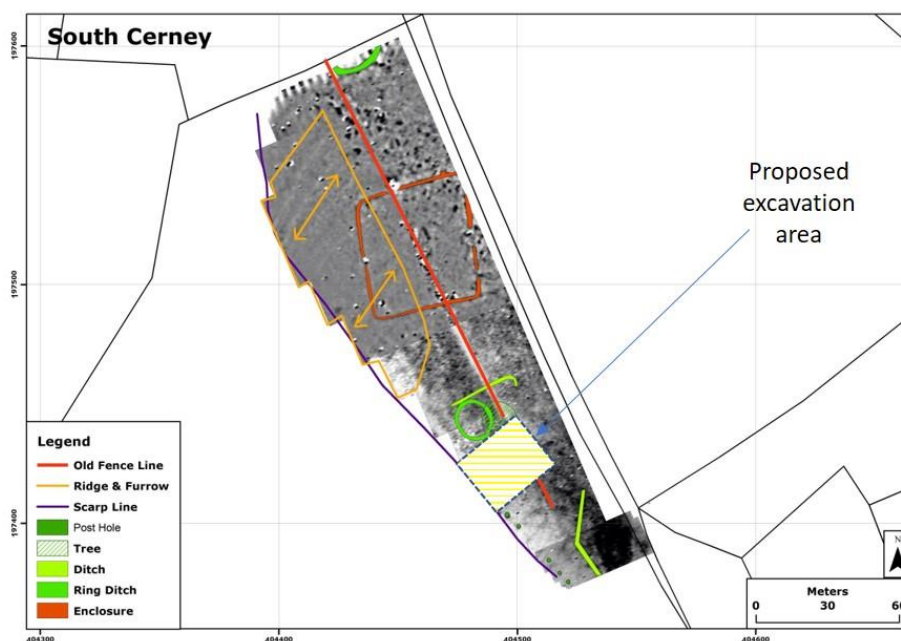


Figure 9. Proposed location for next excavation

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Appendix A - List of Finds

	Trench 1		Trench 2		Trench 3		Trench 4		Total	
	Qty	Weight g	Qty	Weight g	Qty	Weight g	Qty	Weight g	Qty	Weight g
Pottery - Roman	2	9			3	1.9			5	10.9
Pottery - Saxon	13	52	5	8	14	46			32	106
Pottery - Medieval					2	4			2	4
Clay pipe stem							1	1	1	1
Iron pan	9	349	18	625	6	113	8	40	41	1127
Flint - debitage	4	29			3	4.6			7	33.6
Animal bone	3	1	3	14	7	7.3			13	22.3
Copper alloy fragment	1	1.2							1	1.2