

COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY ON THE MENDIP PLATEAU

**TEST PITTING AT MANOR FARM, EMBOROUGH,  
SOMERSET**

16<sup>TH</sup> & 23<sup>RD</sup> JUNE 2013



SHORT REPORT

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## 1.0 Summary

Community Archaeology on the Mendip Plateau (CAMP) is a community based archaeology group, founded in 2009. Its purpose is to explore and research the landscape in the parishes of the Chewton area from both an archaeological and an historical viewpoint.

Manor Farm, Emborough is a Grade II\* listed building. The Somerset Environment Record no. 21900 states that it is of medieval origin and Pip Osborne proposes that the present building contains elements of an earlier 'hall house' possibly dating to the 15 century or earlier. The house's position, immediately adjacent to the church strongly suggests that an even earlier house could have stood on, or near the site. Emborough manor is listed in the Domesday Book of 1086 and Geoffrey Loxton's extensive researches into the history of the Manor of Emborough from extant Court Rolls of the later medieval period details many of the Lords of the Manor from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The hugely influential Hipposely family took possession of the present house in 1570 when many alterations appear to have taken place. The land surrounding Manor Farm has been the subject of various archaeological investigations dating back to 1936, with speculation that there may once have been a settlement close by. CAMP proposes to investigate further by digging test pits at various places in the vicinity of the farm to look for material evidence of medieval occupation.

## 2.0 Previous Investigations

### *Archaeological Investigations (ref. HER. PRN 23523)*

In 1936 students from Downside School surveyed linear features prominent in the fields to the south of Manor Farm. In 1966 the Ordnance Survey Archaeological Division declared that the various earthworks were 'clearly a shrunken village'.

An earthwork survey undertaken by Gilbert and Gardiner in 1993/4 concluded that the features were no more than field boundaries.

### *Historical Investigations*

Geoffrey Loxton has undertaken extensive research into the origins of the manor of Emborough, which have been published (Loxton 2002).

Emborough manor is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 (Thorn 1980) and Pevsner (1958) states that the present building underwent alterations as long ago as the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The central tower and dedication to the Blessed Virgin Mary hint at an early foundation for the church.

Pip Osborne's cursory investigations based on map study (DD/HI 277) show there to have been an extensive field called the Great Conigar where the 1993/4 earthwork survey took place. It is entirely feasible that the substantial linear earthwork remains relate, in part, to artificially constructed pillow mounds in relation to the breeding of rabbits. However, these could also post-date earlier settlement.

CAMP's researches into the early origins of the minster church of Chewton Mendip have shown that Emborough was once one of its chapelries. It has also uncovered evidence to suggest that Emborough's land was inextricably linked to that of Chewton in the medieval period and Corcos (2002, 53) and Costen (2011, 68) believe that Emborough originated as one small part of a once huge, early Royal Chewton estate.

### 3.0 Research Proposal

The main reason for wishing to investigate the environs of Manor Farm through test-pitting is to look for material evidence of occupation dating to medieval times. This has the potential to inform on life at Manor Farm and may indicate the previous existence of buildings to do with the speculated 'shrunk medieval village' in the surrounding fields.

Initially it is proposed to dig several 1m square test-pits following the guidelines set out by the Higher Education Field Academy of the University of Cambridge. These pits will be recorded and backfilled.

### 4.0 Results

Test pits 1 & 2 were dug on Sunday June 16<sup>th</sup>. The weather was wet in the morning, drying up with cloud cover in the afternoon. The soil in both pits was compacted and required mattocking as well as trowelling and spading. A proportion of the spoil heap was sieved, but the compacted and wet soil proved problematic to handle. Test pit 3 was dug on Sunday June 23<sup>rd</sup>. The weather was windy and overcast with rain developing at the end of the dig. The rather prescriptive methodology of 10cm spit contexts as required by the HEFA guidelines was replaced by the conventional method of context recording ie changing soil colours or content.

Test pit 1 was in a paddock to the immediate east of Manor Farm and south of the church of St. Mary. Test pit 2 was dug in an unused part of an established vegetable plot to the southwest of Manor Farm. Both situations were on land some metre or more higher than the ground level surrounding the farmhouse. Test pit 3 was dug immediately to the rear of the farmhouse. Record sheets were kept and all finds were washed and recorded.

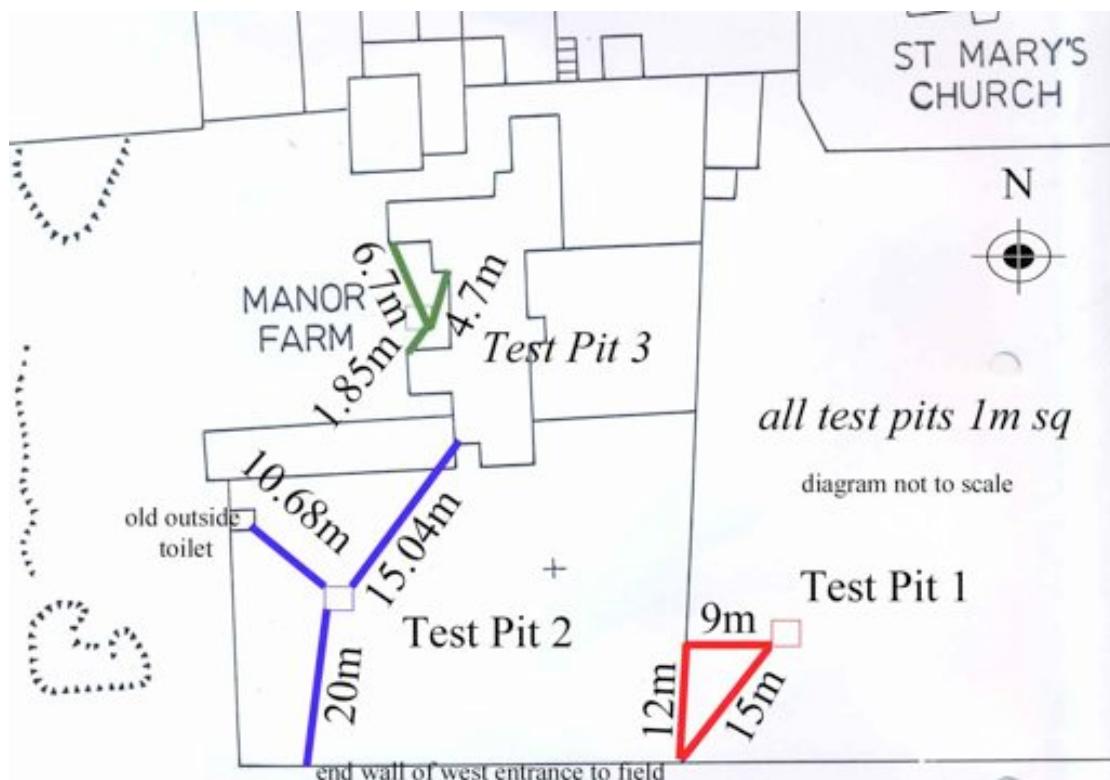


Figure 1 Manor Farm Emborough with positions of test pits

### **Test pit 1**

Context 1 was turf and topsoil consisting of a light brown, fine clayey silt. There were a few inclusions of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century ceramic building material flecks and the occasional plastic flecks. There were 2 sherds of medieval pot, 3 sherds of post-medieval redware (1 with glaze), 1 piece of daub, 1 small unworked flint and 1 tiny piece of slag. This context had a depth of 0.17m.

Context 2 was a yellowish brown clayey sandy soil. Occasional stones up to 15cm diameter looked like limestone and ironstone.

In this layer were 4 fragments of medieval coarseware, 10 sherds of red/pink fabric post-medieval pottery, 1 of cream fabric with dark brown glaze, 3 blue and white porcelain, 9 pieces of CBM, 2 possible worked flints, 1 fragment of coal, 1 piece of yellow ochre and 2 unidentified objects. This context had a depth of 0.27cm from the surface level.

Context 3 was a yellowish brown clayey silt with occasional naturally occurring stones and a flat even top to the deposit. There were 4 sherds of possible c12<sup>th</sup> century coarseware pot, 5 of later medieval coarseware, 1 sherd of glazed post-medieval pot with some being quite abraded and 1 nail. This context had a depth of 0.30cm from the surface level.

Context 4 was the natural yellowish brown silt with occasional natural rocks. A small sondage was sunk in the SE corner to confirm that the true natural level had been reached.

*Comment.* There was an unexpectedly shallow depth to this pit before natural was reached, given its position in a paddock in front of both the Manor House and the farm and also the mention on the 1764 Emborough Estate Map as having been a garden.

### **Test Pit 2**

Context 1 was a dark, reddish brown, humic soil with a large percentage of stone inclusions and charcoal flecks. There was 1 badly abraded medieval pot sherd, 1 piece of Bristol creamware, 3 unglazed sherds of uncertain period, 1 glazed post-med. sherd, 2 sherds of blue and white porcelain, 3 pieces of glass, 1 modern glass bead and 1 piece of lead slag. This context had a depth of 5-10cm.

Context 2 was a dark, reddish brown, silty loam with charcoal flecks and fewer stones than Context 1. There was 1 sherd of post-med redware, 1 sherd of stoneware and 3 pieces of glass. The depth of this context was between 11 and 20cm below the surface level.

Context 3 was a yellowish brown, clayey soil with occasional stone flecks and charcoal flecks to a maximum depth of 22cm below the surface level. There were no finds.

Context 4 was the natural yellowish brown clayey soil with no inclusions, reached at 25cm in the SE corner sondage.

*Comment.* As in TP1 there was little depth of occupation soil, again very surprising given that the site was positioned in an area of cultivation. This cultivated area is clearly not of any age.

### **Test Pit 3**



Figure 2  
Site of test pit 3 in foreground, with rear elevation of the main body of Manor Farm in background

Context 1 was a dark, reddish brown, silty loam with random flecks of charcoal and a few small stones. This produced 1 sherd of white and 1 of blue and white china, the base of a medieval jar with 2 other sherds of the same vessel, 10 red tile fragments, 7 pieces of plaster/mortar, 5 pieces of slag/clinker and 5 pieces of glass.

Context 2 was of builders' rubble with yellow clayey silty sand matrix (Munsell Soil chart 10YR 7/6). It comprised 40% small to medium stones, 55% sand and 5% soil. Only 1 small piece of glass was found. The depth from the surface was on average 12cm.

Context 3 comprised small to medium stones on the north predominantly in the north of the pit clustered to form a semi-circle underlying the section edge, but not thought to be a feature. There was other random rubble elsewhere. Stones represented 70% with a dark yellowish brown clay (10YR 4/6) forming the other 30%. The average depth from the surface was 18cm.

Context 4 was of random stone average size 17x10x5cm. It was tightly packed but not uniformly laid and was interpreted as bedrock. The depth was on average 24cm.

*Comment.* This was an intriguing pit with surprising lack of topsoil and evidence of occupation, although the medieval jar may have significance. The builders' rubble lay directly over the natural with no layers of trapped soil beneath.

### **Additional investigation.**

A small 25cm square sondage was dug in the flower bed in the front garden of the farmhouse. The soil was a humic, dark brown, clayey silt. This produced 28 sherds of post-medieval redware glazed and unglazed, 1 blue and white china and 1 stoneware sherd, 2 pieces of bone, 1 claypipe stem, 2 pieces of glass, 1 piece of slate, 2 pieces of ceramic building material, 1 piece of mortar and 2 pieces of slag, all from within a 10cm depth.

*Comment* This was more in keeping with the expectations of this site, although no medieval pottery sherds were found.

## **5.0 Conclusions**

Geologically, the site of Manor Farm sits over the Harptree Beds, which extend from southwest of Chewton Mendip as far as Emborough. The rocks consist of bedded buff coloured chert with yellowish clayey partings (Green & Welch, 1965). This accounts for the yellowish clayey nature of some soils encountered.

Given the close proximity of the three test-pits to Manor Farm and given its antiquity it was very surprising the shallow depths at which the natural clay and bedrock were reached. There was little evidence in TP 1 of any humic organic topsoil as one would expect, given its location.

TP 2 was even more surprising especially as this was within an area which had seen cultivation, though over how long a period is not known.

TP 3 would appear to have been cleared back to the bedrock at some stage, and the site used to dispose of rubble. As the house has undergone extensive remodelling over the centuries, this site could represent the site of a former builder's yard.

It is felt that the absence of medieval and earlier inclusions would suggest that some engineering of the surface levels of a wide area has taken place in the past, with the topsoils having been removed for some unknown reason.

## **6.0 Recommendations**

Whilst the lack of evidence of occupation in the later medieval period is surprising and defies explanation, conclusions cannot be reached on such a small study. Further pits need to be dug elsewhere in the vicinity to see if the lack of occupation layers is a general trend over the whole site, or whether the sites chosen, to date, have been the subject of landscaping or some other form of modification over time.

More research needs to be undertaken to explore the possibility that the centre of the medieval settlement of Emborough laid elsewhere and not in close proximity to Manor Farm.

## **7.0 Acknowledgements**

CAMP would like to thank Mr and Mrs Trippick for allowing access to their land for archaeological investigations.

## **8.0 References**

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Other documents

DD/HI 277 Emborough Estate Map of 1764 (part of Hipplesley collection at  
Somerset Heritage Centre)