Return to Homefield

An update on the Society's Medieval project

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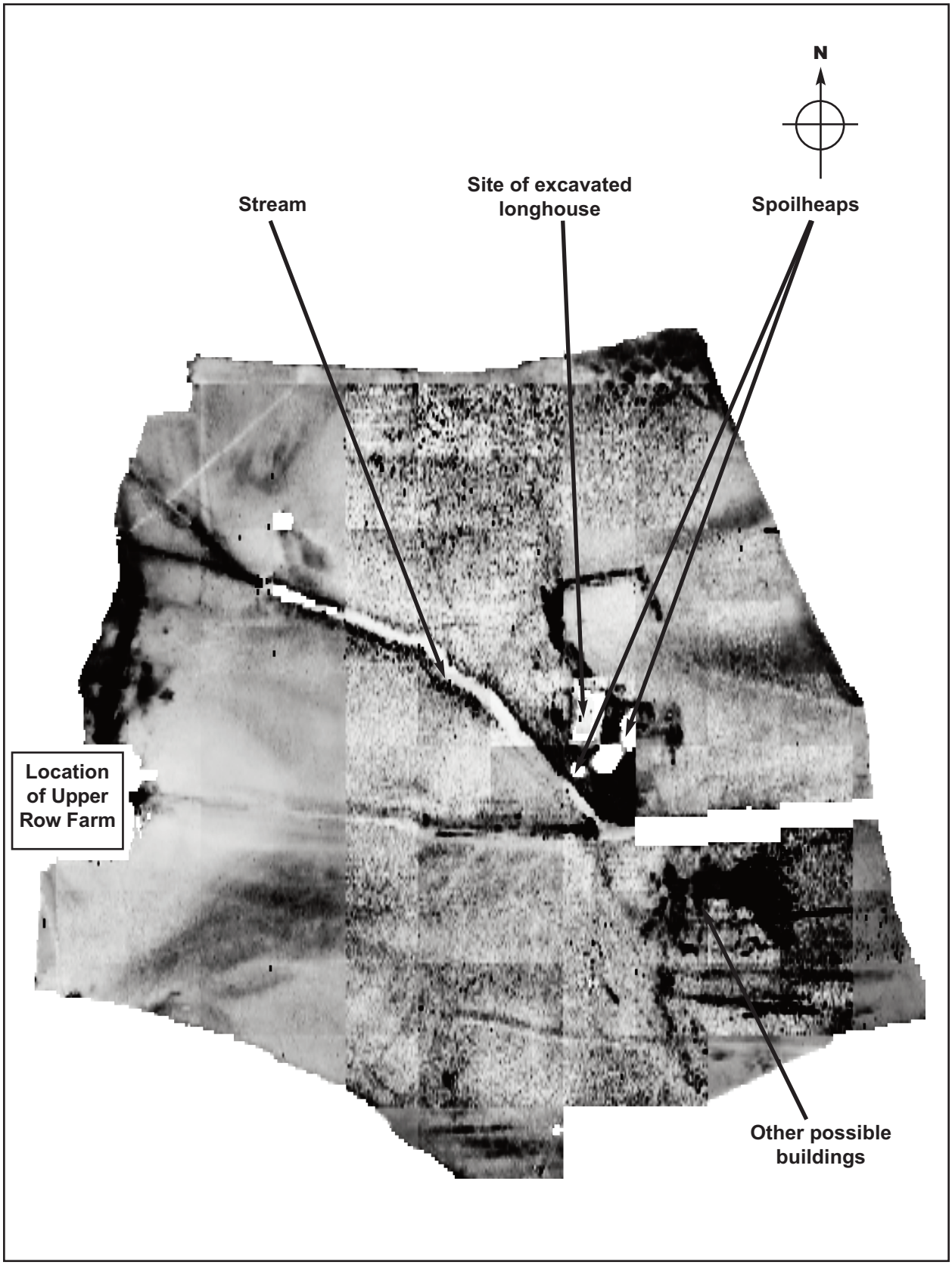
The Society's training excavation of summer 2010 took place in a field called Homefield, which is located 150 metres east of Upper Row Farm in Laverton, near Frome. The site slopes towards the southeast, but has a pronounced flattened area or platform in the bottom half of the field (*see Figure 1*).

The soil is a Heavy Silty Loam with underlying geology of Oolite, Jurassic Limestone, and is at the location of the 'Hardington fault' (British Geological Survey). The land drains naturally to the southeast by means of a small brook that flows southeast and meets the Wheel Brook further down the valley. The farm and adjacent lands of Upper Row Farm has a rich history and there is now evidence of long and varied continuity of occupation, from the Bronze Age to the present day.

Figure 1
Location of Homefield in relation to Blacklands and Upper Row Farm

Homefield was the subject of limited excavations between 2000 and 2006 when a longhouse was discovered, but geophysics (*see Figure 2*) has indicated that the excavated area is just a small part of a complex of buildings. In 2010, we opened a larger area to examine all the features indicated by the geophysics, to establish the dating sequence of these buildings and bring together and publish the previous work on the site.

Figure 2
The geophysical survey of Homefield showing the excavated longhouse and other possible buildings



With the permission of the Hendy family, the site, parts of which were still uncovered from the previous years excavations, was cleaned and enlarged to give us a working area of 20 metres x 10 metres. This greatly enlarged trench gave us access to the anomalies interpreted as walls of buildings, located by geophysics to the east, west and north east of the already excavated longhouse, (*see Figure 3)*. With numerous volunteers and keen students we were able to complete the area.

Figure 3
The site under excavation during the summer of 2010 (looking south)

Dating of the phases

Romano-British

The discovery of two well constructed Romano-British walls (*see Figure 4*), dated by their association with sherds of Samian pottery from the 1st or 2nd Centuries, also box flue tile and *tessarae* strongly suggest that there is a good possibility that there is a bathhouse in the immediate vicinity, which is probably connected to the Roman settlement up the hill at Blacklands.

Saxon

Several sherds of pre-conquest Saxon pottery were recovered in the northeast part of the trench. These have been identified as being identical to Cheddar Fabric E and therefore datable to the later 10th to early 11th Centuries, all of which came from cooking pots.

Medieval

3974 sherds of Medieval pottery were found during the excavation, mostly dating in range from the 12th to the 15th Centuries (*see Figure 5*). This pottery came from several known kilns sites, Minety, Wanstrow, Nash Hill, Redcliffe, Laverstock, Bath, Cheddar and other Bristol sites. The main forms were cooking pots, pitchers, bowls, jugs, tripod pitchers, etc. It was noted that there were a large number of sherds from "West Country dishes" manufactured at the Minety kilns, these dishes may have been used for cheese or butter making.

Figure 4
One of the two Romano-British walls adjacent to the longhouse

Figure 5
Medieval pottery fron the 14th Century from either Wanstrow or Laverstock

Post Medieval

18 pieces of very abraded post-Medieval pottery were found in the topsoil, which may have come from the agricultural practice of applying manure to the fields in the Victorian period.

Discussion

This is a difficult site to fully interpret due to the many phases of construction of the buildings. It soon became clear that the already exposed longhouse was one of several buildings of differing dates on this site, and nearly all were on different alignments.

The excavation has provided stratified artefacts and environmental data that add greatly to that already recovered from this site in previous excavations. The pottery and small finds assemblage is a useful addition to the Medieval material already found.

It was once postulated that the longhouse might have been a mill. This idea was suggested because the original watercourse was located to the north of the building and that there were culverts (stone-lined drains) from this stream which ran around the longhouse and emptied into another culvert running away from the southern end of this house in a easterly direction. This theory has now been disproved due partly to the absence of a mill wheel pit and other construction associated with a mill, and also the limited amount of water available in the summer months.

This building is a standard longhouse in design with two internal bays. The northern half has been identified as the living area, due to the presence of hearths and a stone lined floor. The southern area is now thought to have been a smithy, due to the large lumps or pieces of iron ingots and metal working slag which were present in fairly large numbers. These have been characterised as smithing slag.

In the northeast area of the trench a circular stone construction was found with a stone culvert running out of this structure. This feature has now been identified as the base of a hayrick, which kept the hay out of the water thus ensuring that the hay did not get mouldy (*see Figure 6*).

The excavation produced a number of results, which have added significant data to the archaeological record for this site. Thanks to all the BACAS members who helped with training and supervision, especially Owen Dicker, John Oswin, Roger Vaughan, Dawn Hodgson, Anny Northcote and Keith Turner. Thanks of course are due to the Hendy family for their permission and support.

Figure 6
The circular feature identified as a hayrick

2011 Excavation

A further season of excavation will take place at Homefield in 2011, between June 20 and July 15, with an Open Day on Saturday July 16. The focus of this year will be just to the east of the longhouse (previously under the spoilheaps) in order to establish if the building there is Roman or Medieval. See page 66.