



Chichester and District Archaeology Society

Medmerry Project



Ham Farm Surveys - September 2011

Summary

The Environment Agency (EA) is undertaking a programme of managed retreat at Medmerry, West Sussex. In September 2010 the Chichester and District Archaeology Society (CDAS) were invited to undertake a programme of archaeological investigation. This report describes two geophysical surveys undertaken at Ham Farm in September 2011. Though not much of archaeological significance was identified, the Society achieved its goals in terms of familiarisation with new resistivity equipment and the execution of a practical training programme. Further opportunities for fieldwork in the Medmerry area are being sought.

Background

Some time during the nineteenth century, the coast line at Medmerry was enhanced by the construction of a gravel sea defence. The land so enclosed had been salt marsh as shown on sheet 197 of the Timeline series of Ordnance Survey maps.

The Medmerry Managed Retreat Scheme is being undertaken for two main reasons.

First, the shingle bank sea defences are being regularly breached during winter storm surges. The work emergency to maintain the defences is expensive and fraught with danger. There was a fatality in November 2009. It is becoming increasingly clear that it is no longer cost effective to maintain these defences in the face of rising sea levels.

Second, the expansion of the container port at Southampton – about 25 miles west will reduce the area of salt marsh habitat available for birds, and the managed retreat project at Medmerry will create a compensating area of salt marsh. It is for this reason that after the completion of the construction element of the project, the area will be managed by the RSPB.

The project involves creating a new sea defence line behind the existing line which follows the contours of slightly rising ground. In fact the line of the new defences follows approximately the edge of the old salt marsh. Once the new defences have been completed, the current sea wall will be breached.

The Environment Agency has purchased the relevant land. It is currently farmed by tenants; much but not all is under arable cultivation. The broader area contains a wide range of archaeological remains including Bronze and Iron Age, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and WWII. However, other than WWII remains few finds have been reported in the Medmerry Area itself.

In the autumn of 2010 Chichester and District Archaeology Society (CDAS) were invited to undertake a programme of archaeological investigation. Initially the key stakeholders were the Environment Agency (EA) represented by Steve Kemp, Chichester District Council (CDC) represented by James Kenny, and the tenant farmers. There were a range of interested parties including Archaeology South East (ASE), a stakeholders group for the overall Medmerry project, Chichester Museum, other archaeological bodies/firms and local Manhood groups. In September 2011 Nexus Heritage (NH) was appointed by the EA to co-ordinate all the archaeological matters that relates to the Medmerry project. The area is now being operated as a constructions site and it is through NH that CDAS agrees access and working practices with the Contractor.

Poor weather in winter 2010/11 and the arable farming cycle limited opportunities for access until September 2011 when two geophysical surveys were undertaken at Ham Farm. CDAS has the long term goal of building a core team of expertise within the society so that CDAS is less dependent on one or two individuals. Part of the objective for these two surveys was to increase the number of members who had

had the opportunity for involvement and to develop those individuals who expressed a willingness to become more involved in the technology.

Surveys

1. Site Selection

Research by CDAS members had identified two targets at Ham Farm. For the western site aerial photos had shown some possible field marks; in addition, a bore hole had produced some un-abraded roman pot and an unstructured field walk near the borehole had shown some pieces of abraded roman pot. For the eastern site aerial photos had also shown possible field marks. There were some access restrictions for both sites as there were areas where the rape had gone in only days after the previous harvest.

2. Site Access & H&S

Since September 2011 the Medmerry Area is regarded as a construction site. The implications for CDAS are that not only does access need to be agreed with NH and the farmer but also our plans, Health and Safety risk assessments and some of our working practises need to be agreed with the Construction Company (via NH). In the short term the only impact has been some amendments to our Health and Safety briefing and a requirement for everyone to wear yellow vests.

The Health and Safety risk assessment is attached as Appendix C.

3. Equipment

These surveys utilised the following equipment:

1. Geoscan RM15 D Resistivity meter that CDAS was able to purchase for the Medmerry project as a result of generous donations for this purpose from the Chichester District Council Coastal Pathfinder Project and the Chichester City Council. The surveys provided the opportunity to explore the capabilities of this machine including the ability to vary the depth of response by varying the distance between the probes.
2. Geoscan FM256 magnetometer. Previously purchased by CDAS as the result of a generous grant from the Chichester Harbour Conservancy.
3. Electronic Theodolite . Previously purchased by CDAS as the result of a generous grant from the Chichester Harbour Conservancy.

4. Volunteer Participation & Training

CDAS spent 14 days at Ham Farm including set-ups. 26 members were involved providing 80 man days of resource. The site is very exposed and for much of the time conditions were demanding. It was very windy and on a number of days there were showers and/or downpours. It was due the volunteers' determination that only 11 man days were lost from the schedule.

For some members this was their first experience of field work and without exception they indicated a willingness to be involved in future surveys. There was a focus on training and involvement even if this slowed the overall process. Some members become very involved in the more technical aspects and showed interest in forming part of a core team. Figure 1 shows the new Resistivity meter in use.

Figure 2 shows an impromptu demonstration of downloading and image processing while the team waited for the weather to clear.

Figure 1 – Resistivity Meter in use



Figure 2 – Downloading Demonstration



Survey Results

In summary, the surveys found little of clear archaeological interest. However, Traces of WW11 activity were found, including:

- Suspected buried cables within the bund and excavations areas that might not be recorded on the site plans.
- Indications of the use of part of the site as a bombing range.

These discoveries should be communicated with the contractors so that appropriate action can be taken.

Future

CDAS is continuing to seek opportunities for fieldwork both during the period of construction and in the future once the area is under the management of the RSPB.

Field work could take a number of forms:

- Regular assessment of the Condition of known archaeological features. CDAS carries out this function in partnership with the Chichester Harbour Conservancy in the Chichester Harbour AONB.
- Field walking fields at suitable points in the cultivation cycle. This is a method of structured sampling of the finds of archaeological interest, which is helpful in identifying locations where there may have been activity in the past.
- Further Geophysical Surveys of likely targets identified by other means. Specifically, CDAS would like to return to the area west of Ham Farm to extend survey to the east – that is towards the farm.

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