



SOUTH SOMERSET  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
RESEARCH GROUP

## **RESEARCH GUIDELINES**

# **DRAFT**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this document is to inform and outline the research strategy to be employed by the South Somerset Archaeological Research Group (SSARG) from June 2009 to March 2010. This will be reviewed on an annual basis by the SSARG committee.

## **2.0 Background**

### **2.1 Archaeological Background**

Somerset has a rich archaeological heritage with sites and findspots relating to all periods. However, the true distribution of archaeological sites is poorly understood, often defined by the degree of research carried out and the interests of researchers. South Somerset is largely rural, apart from the urban areas of Yeovil and Wincanton. As a result, there is limited developer funded work in the area, although Hod Hill has been a notable exception, and there have been various small pipeline projects. Coverage is however limited, and this is demonstrated by distribution maps of HER entries and scheduled monuments (Webster 2008). The South Cadbury Environs Project (Tabor 2008) has demonstrated that, where landscape survey is employed using gradiometry and a range of other techniques, the density of archaeological remains are much higher than previously assumed. This has implications for the curation of the resource; where little archaeology is known, there is little reason for archaeological conditions in planning consents, leading to a circular lack of discovery where ground is disturbed in rural areas. Field survey and research can therefore assist in informing the HER.

### **2.2 Previous Work**

Research in South Somerset in particular (as well as neighbouring North and West Dorset) has been limited. For example, there are apparently very few prehistoric funerary monuments known in southern Somerset, which may or may not be a reliable distribution. The distribution of Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement and landscape use is not well understood. The South Cadbury Environs Project has carried out considerable investigations in the area surrounding South Cadbury hillfort. Other hillfort hinterlands remain unexamined, and few South Somerset hillforts have been studied at all. Ham Hill has attracted a number of watching briefs and excavations in advance of quarrying (Adkins and Adkins 1992; Ellison and Pearson 1977, Lievers *et al* 2006; Smith 1991; St George Gray 1910; 1924; 1925; 1926), but this lacks integration, is minimal in view of the scale of the site, and lacks landscape context. Reconsideration of the Late Iron Age Durotrigan tribal area indicates that it may not extend into Somerset (Papworth 2008), meriting further study of occupation and land use in the later Iron Age. There are also reasons to re-examine the transition from the Late Iron Age to the Romano-British period, given historical problems with dating and questions over pre-conquest contact and influence and the rapidity of integration of local populations into a more 'Roman' way of life. An assessment of Roman settlement in the area was provided by Leech (1977) but there has been no further synthetic work, and

there is reason to believe that some find spots may not be what they seem. Non-villa settlement in southern Somerset is poorly understood (James Gerrard pers.comm. Webster 2008:286), whilst the pattern and formation of Somerset villages in the Anglo-Saxon and medieval period is far from resolved (Michael Costen pers. comm., Steve Rippon pers. comm., Webster 2008:286-287).

### **3.0 Aims, Objectives and Research Questions**

The value of focussed area research has been proven but has largely been absent from the South West, and is encouraged as part of Research Aim 1 of the SWARF (Webster 2008:275). SSARG is in the position of being able to address in part the bias to upland archaeology in much of the south west of Britain for much of prehistory, as well as numerous other research aims identified by SWARF. This document is intended to provide guidance on SSARG's policy on fieldwork projects, and give overarching research themes. All projects run by SSARG must be based on strong research questions with clearly expressed aims and objectives. This process is described further below.

In addition, all projects run by SSARG should fit within a range of themes defined here, which seek to address gaps in our knowledge of the archaeology of southern Somerset :

- Ancient landscapes (fields, systems and settlement in the Bronze Age and Iron Age)
- South Somerset funerary monuments
- Hillfort hinterlands
- The Iron Age/Romano-British transition
- Roman South Somerset
- Medieval settlement patterns and settlement formation
- Modern defence archaeology
- Placing stray finds in context
- Incorporating/ publishing old research

Projects should also seek to address research aims identified in the South West Archaeological Research Framework (Webster 2008).

### **4.0 Research Design**

All research projects carried out by SSARG must adhere to these guidelines. A research proposal (Appendix A) must be completed and considered by the SSARG committee. If short listed, each project must have a research design produced in line with the template (Appendix B).

The research questions must be clear, with well defined aims, objectives and a full timescale for progressing work through to publication. Publication must be the assumed outcome of all work, although the most appropriate level of publication may be determined by the project leader in conjunction with the

SSARG committee. There must be a full examination of the resources and key personnel required, training needs, risks to the project and additional results, such as the scale of material recovered and data generated and its eventual archiving. The presumption should be against carrying out work that generates large physical archives.

## 5.0 Project Methodology

A range of methods are available to be used, and should be assessed as to suitability dependent on the needs of the particular project. This is to maximise data recovery and enable integration of data across the project area. Projects can utilise:

- Documentary research
- Geophysical survey
- Targeted test pits
- Regularly spaced test pits
- Plough zone sampling
- Small scale excavation
- Earthwork survey
- Augering

All projects should be supported by information from background documentary research. Depending on the type of project and the sites involved, this might include reviews of maps, illustrative and literary documents. A map regression exercise should be undertaken where possible. This will centre around research in the HER, published literature and the Somerset Records and Archives Service holdings. Gradiometry will be a basic method in most projects. It is suitable for locating ditches, pits and magnetic deposits caused by anthropogenic activity, and as such will successfully locate most types of site and land division. Resistivity will also be applied to more limited and specific areas where gradiometer surveys indicate the possible presence of stone or brick buildings or rubble.

1m square test pits arranged at 100m spacing on the same grid used for gradiometry have been extremely successful as part of the South Cadbury Environs Project (Tabor 2008) in identifying specific areas of activity, buried archaeological soils and areas of ancient hillwash. This is however a time consuming and resource intensive activity, and can be problematic where large areas of landscape are covered by agri-environment agreements. It will therefore be used in a limited fashion to sample areas which appear to have archaeological activity from the geophysical evidence that do not warrant a targeted test pit or invite a more diffused investigation. Where this is employed will be determined by geophysical results.

Targeted test pits do not have the same statistical robusticity when considering the distribution of archaeological materials in the landscape. They have however been extremely effective in closely identifying stratigraphical

phases and supplying dating material from sealed strata. Targeted test pits will generally be used as the main intrusive method, and should generally be limited to small (<four square metre) test pits targeted on specific features, especially where it appears that more than one stratigraphic phase of the landscape can be identified, and where anomalies are strong, suggesting the presence of possibly dateable refuse.

The reliability of plough zone samples on particular soil types has been called into question by previous results (Tabor *et al* in prep). It is therefore intended to be used only rarely. However, ploughzone examination (either by fieldwalking or shovel pits) could be an effective method where ground conditions permit, an area survey of finds distribution would be beneficial and test pits are not feasible.

Excavation will only be carried out where there are compelling research needs to do so. In planning excavation work, project design must give full regard to:

- rarity of the resource
- quality of data expected
- minimising the size of the excavated area related to the research questions
- relative merits of using machines to remove overburden
- type and amounts of finds expected
- available personnel and skills

All projects should be planned with full regard to the likely post-fieldwork workload. This will include:

- Geophysical reports
- Field survey reports
- Drawings
- Electronic archiving
- Finds processing, analysis and reports
- Excavation reports

## **6.0 Publication**

It is intended that a basic record will be supplied to the HER within 3 months of a significant additional piece of research being completed. The entries supplied by SSARG will be reviewed and maintained on a regular basis, including the provision of more detailed information as it becomes available by the SSARG HER liaison officer.

The project also undertakes to produce internal reports on all fieldwork, excavation and post-excavation activity. Where appropriate this work may then be prepared for publication in the local county journal and in an annual SSARG report, which will be available electronically on request. Where work

is particularly significant, monographs or articles in national journals will be encouraged.

## **7.0 Resources and Programming**

Projects will take account of the number of regularly attending field volunteers. Small numbers of students, and 'casual' volunteers may also be available during attractive 'peak' activities. It is also assumed that when carrying out fieldwork of any kind there will not be more than 20 persons on site at any given time due to insurance considerations. No excavation shall exceed 2m in depth for health and safety reasons. Appropriate consultation with statutory agencies such as Natural England (on behalf of Defra) and English Heritage will be carried out by the research director and project leaders as necessary.

### **7.1 Schedule**

1 April – 31 October Fieldwork season

1 November – 31 March Post-excavation, training and writing

Post-excavation activities are on-going for project directors and for members when weather does not permit outdoor activity; there are not enough people available on a given day to undertake fieldwork safely (minimum of three); where a member is not able to work outside; or during excavations where a finds director will be available for initial finds control, and where there are more people available than can be reasonably accommodated on site.

### **7.2 Resources and personnel**

Clare Randall acts as research director for SSARG, overseeing all projects and making decisions with regard to targeting fieldwork effort with reference to the SSARG committee and membership. Individual project directors are responsible for directing field and post-excavation work including geophysical survey, excavation, test pitting sessions, post-excavation work and writing up. Liz Caldwell fulfils the role of liaison officer with the Somerset HER.

Several experienced volunteers with experience of supervisory roles in voluntary and commercial settings are available to provide on site assistance and cover. Neil Tinkley is responsible for organising earthwork survey and other surveying tasks. He will also (along with their co-owners of the equipment) be responsible for the carrying out of resistivity surveys. Liz Caldwell will provide expertise in carrying out gradiometer surveys and wet sieving and will take the lead in those two areas. She also leads on the analysis of lithics. Giles Cooper and Tony Dickinson will take the lead on the analysis of Roman pottery, Del Wiggins and Clare Randall prehistoric pottery, and Shirley Ryan, medieval pottery. Peter Wright has responsibility for scanning drawings and the electronic and paper archive. Danielle de Carle is available for queries regarding plant macrofossils, and Matt Laws mollusca. Clare Randall and Sue Jones will provide the specialist function for animal and human bone. Field advice is available from Peter Leach and academic

advice from James Gerrard (Romano-British period), Michael Costen (Medieval period) and Clare Randall (Bronze and Iron Age).

All projects must consider the available resources and any additional costs which will arise from projects. SSARG has access to a gradiometer, computer hardware and software and a resistivity array. All basic excavation equipment is owned by the SSARG, but there is a need to cover wear and tear and consumables such as stationery, drawing equipment and bags. Storage boxes are supplied by Somerset Museums Service. For excavation periods, a mechanical excavator may be hired. Portalooos will normally be hired for all excavations/test pitting sessions over 1 week in duration subject to committee agreement. Insurance for all fieldwork activities will be paid for on an annual basis by SSARG through membership fees. This will cover members wherever they are excavating. A protocol for the creation, backup and archiving of electronic information is under development. The intention is to lodge all electronic data with the AHDS in York in order to ensure the future integrity and accessibility of the archive.

## **8.0 Contact Details**

The first point of contact for a project is the nominated person who will be designated in the individual project documentation. The SSARG archaeological director takes responsibility for oversight of projects:

Clare Randall  
3 White Horse Drive  
Preston  
Weymouth  
Dorset DT3 6BZ  
Home: 01305 833015 Mobile: 07966153647

[chair@ssarg.org.uk](mailto:chair@ssarg.org.uk)

Geophysics Co-ordinator and HER liaison officer:

Liz Caldwell

[Liz.caldwell@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:Liz.caldwell@hotmail.co.uk)

## **9.0 Reflexive project review**

An annual review of the programme of work, including amendments to the work plan in the light of each year's findings, post-excavation work volume and availability of volunteers, will be carried out by the SSARG committee. This review will react to new findings, consider new research issues and themes that arise and enable the plan to adapt to possibilities for collaboration with research students and others.

## References

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St George Gray, H., 1926 Excavations at Ham Hill South Somerset Part III *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society* 72:54-68

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Webster C.J., 2008 *The archaeology of South West England South West Archaeological framework resource assessment and research agenda* Somerset County Council : Taunton

APPENDIX 1

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

PROJECT NAME:.....

PROJECT LEADER: .....

LOCATION:.....

TYPE OF SITE (e.g. Period etc):.....

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BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH: .....

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PROPOSED WORK:.....

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## APPENDIX 2

### RESEARCH DESIGN

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Background (including information from documentary sources etc)

3.0 Proposed work

4.0 Methodology

4.0 Resources and Programming

4.1 Schedule

4.2 Resources and personnel

References