Proc. Hampshire Field Club Archaeol. Soc. **75 (pt. I)**, *2020, 140–163 (Hampshire Studies 2020)*
https://doi.org/10.24202/hs2020009

A MULTI-PHASE 20th-CENTURY MILITARY LANDSCAPE NEAR SHIPTON BELLINGER, SALISBURY PLAIN

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ABSTRACT

The investigation of a World War I (WWI) practice trench system on Salisbury Plain has revealed a wealth of detail about the construction and use of this military landscape. The archaeological works has also led to the recognition of at least three later periods of activity on the site, all connected with aspects of conflict, including World War II (WWII) and the Korean War. Finds comprising a mixture of issued equipment and personal objects from the excavations provide evidence of the conditions experienced by personnel while in training on Salisbury Plain. A particularly interesting find is a copper alloy cane finial marked O.T.C. (Officer Training Corps) and embellished with the coat of arms of William of Wykeham, the founder of Winchester College. The examination of aerial photographs further complements the excavation results available, allowing for the construction of a complex narrative for this corner of Hampshire.

INTRODUCTION

Between August 2009 and August 2011, Wessex Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological investigation during the construction of 26km of metalled track intended to facilitate safer and more efficient movement of military vehicles, and personnel, within the Salisbury Plain Training Area (SPTA) (Fig. 1). The works, including associated hard standing areas and improvements to public road crossing points, were predominantly in Wiltshire, however a small area was located just inside the Hampshire border to the north of Shipton Bellinger. It was during works in Hampshire that evidence of military training, and later logistical activity, was identified across the area intended for the new track (Fig. 2).

The key driver to this investigation was the discovery of a World War I (WWI) practice trench system with well-preserved levels of detail surviving. The passing of the last veterans of the Great War, and the survival of the, now fragmentary, trench systems in France and Belgium, serve to increase the significance of the cultural and heritage value of practice trench systems, both within the SPTA and other Defence Training Estate properties around the British Isles (Chippendale 1997; Brown & Field 2007, 170; Brown 2017, 2). The archaeological works has also led to the recognition of at least three later periods of activity on the site, all connected with aspects of conflict, including World War II (WWII) and the Korean War.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND AND LOCATION

The SPTA contains over 2300 known archaeological sites and monuments, predominantly prehistoric sites including round and long barrows, field systems and enclosures. Sections of the training area have been in military ownership for over 100 years, subsequently, this landscape contains features associated with the development of warfare from the 19th and 20th centuries. A background to the extensive archaeological resource of Salisbury Plain is published elsewhere (McOmish *et al.* 2002).

Military practice trenches dating to the early 20th century are common features across parts of the SPTA. Trench systems located at Beacon Hill (Brown & Field 2007), Perham Down and Shrewton Folly (McOmish *et al.* 2002) are both complex and extensive. It appears they were used for large-scale trench warfare training, possibly involving elements of land and air,

rather than basic or routine practice (Brown & Field 2007). Recently an extensive system of practice trenches has been investigated at Larkhill (Wessex Archaeology 2019) (Fig. 1). More modern elements of the military landscape are surprisingly less understood and are highly fragile. The opportunity provided here to record these landscapes is, subsequently, welcome.

The subject of this paper is located on Upper Chalk, with Alluvial and River and Valley gravel deposits situated near the River Bourne at EE crossing (NGR SU 23380 46236) (British Geological Survey 1975, Sheet 283, 1:50,000). The practice trench complex centres on NGR SU 23624 46039.

METHODLOGY

An initial archaeological desk-based assessment and walkover surveys (Wessex Archaeology 2006a and 2006b), followed by a preliminary magnetometer survey (Archaeological Surveys 2007) and archaeological evaluation (Wessex Archaeology 2007), were conducted along the route of the track between February and March 2007. A total of 59 machine excavated trenches were opened during the evaluation, mostly targeting anomalies and geophysically blank areas identified by the magnetometer survey. The evaluation indicated that few of the anomalies related to archaeological features, those that did, dated from the Bronze Age through to the modern period. Evidence of past military training activity, including practice trenches, was also discovered; military activity dominated the archaeological record along the track route through Hampshire.

In locations where archaeological features could not be avoided, they were preserved *in situ* by removing turf to the upper surface of the undisturbed topsoil under archaeological supervision. Layers of protective geo-textile and load distributing geo-cellular material, infilled with inert ballast, were then laid, before the overlying track was constructed.

The rest of the track route was assessed based on the results of earlier archaeological evaluation works (Archaeological Surveys 2007; Wessex Archaeology 2006a; 2006b; 2007); eight sites, in all, were identified as having potential for further archaeological investigation. Watching briefs were carried out where intrusive construction techniques were required. All archaeological features were sufficiently sampled to characterise and, if possible, date the them; while in areas where previously unidentified, yet complex or extensive, archaeological remains were located, investigation and recording was undertaken in advance of track laying activities.

Fieldwork

The section of track to the north-east of Shipton Bellinger extended for 1.6km east–west in a broad U-shape (Figs 1 & 2). This section initially extended south, on an existing track, which bisected the western edge of the extensive Perham Down practice trench system (McOmish *et al.* 2002, 139–42). The track then extended west along the northern edge of Shipton Plantation, before turning north towards EE (Echo/Echo) vehicle crossing on the A338 Salisbury Road.

In the eastern section of the area under investigation, minor elements of the World War I Perham Down practice trench system first recorded by McOmish and Field (2002), were identified. While in the western area, particularly adjacent to EE vehicle crossing and along a north-south scarp which runs parallel to the A338, evidence for early 20th-century trench warfare training was in evidence. This location also contained evidence of multi-phase military use relating to more than one activity during World War II and the Korean War.

SHIPTON BELLINGER SYSTEM AND ASSOCIATED ENCAMPMENT (WW1 AND LATER PERIODS)

Evidence of military training relating to WWI, or, possibly later interwar periods, was identified within the western portion of the section of the new track (Figs 3 & 4). This included an extensive, yet incomplete, backfilled practice trench system and associated refuse pits, located on the relatively steep west-facing escarpment overlooking the A338. Further refuse pits and

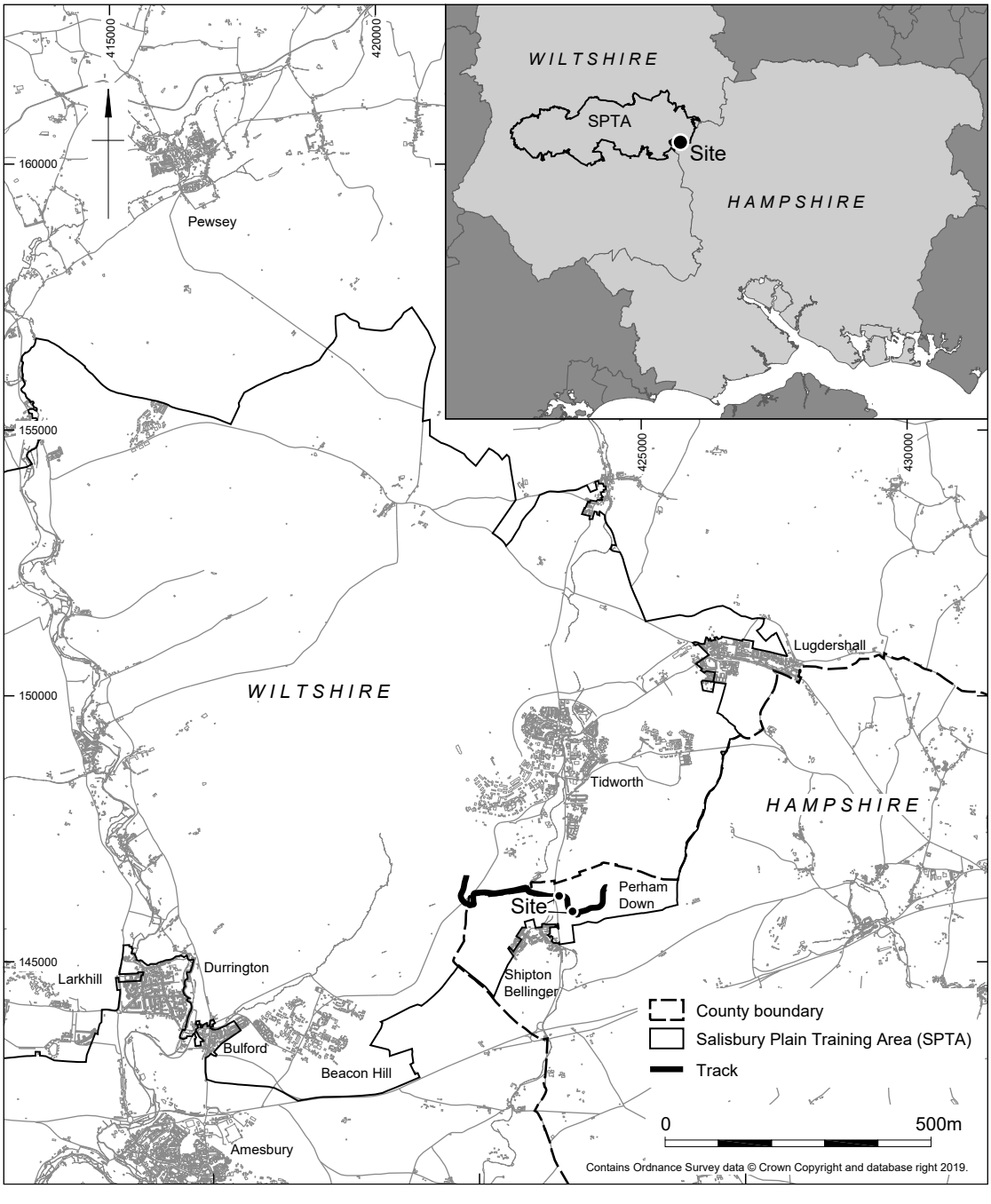

Fig. 1 Location of the Salisbury Plain Training Area (SPTA), the military track and location of selected sites mentioned in the text

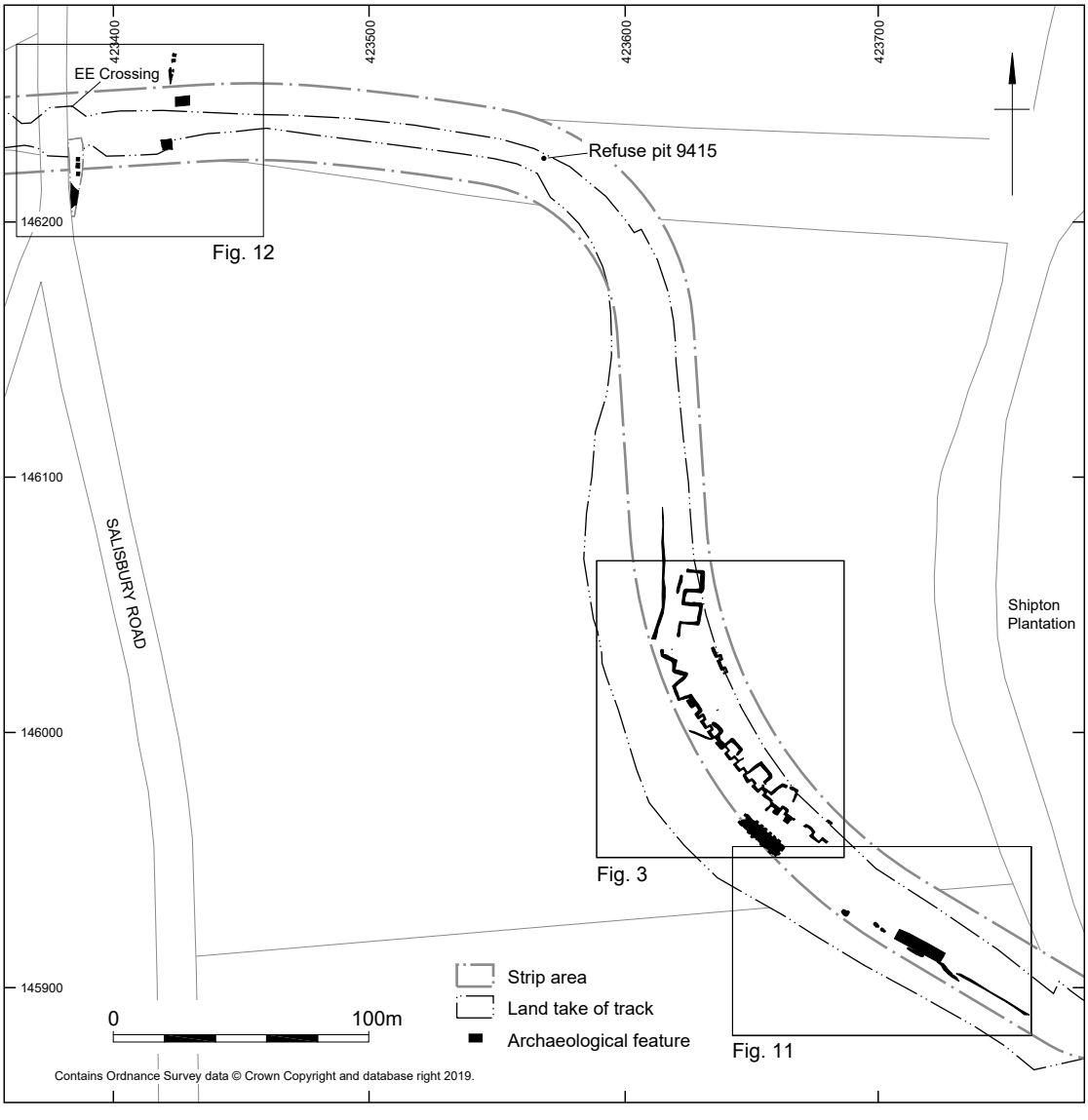

Fig. 2 Location of three concentrations of activity discovered through excavation

several red brick hut foundation pads were also identified adjacent to the current EE road crossing.

The practice trench system

It is important to note that the practice trenches investigated to the north-east of Shipton Bellinger in Hampshire (described here) were considerably more extensive than those encountered in Wiltshire during the archaeological works associated with the construction of the same metalled track (Beach 2018; Powell *et al.* 2018). The exposed system extended for approximately 130m around a relatively steep west-facing escarpment, overlooking the lower ground of

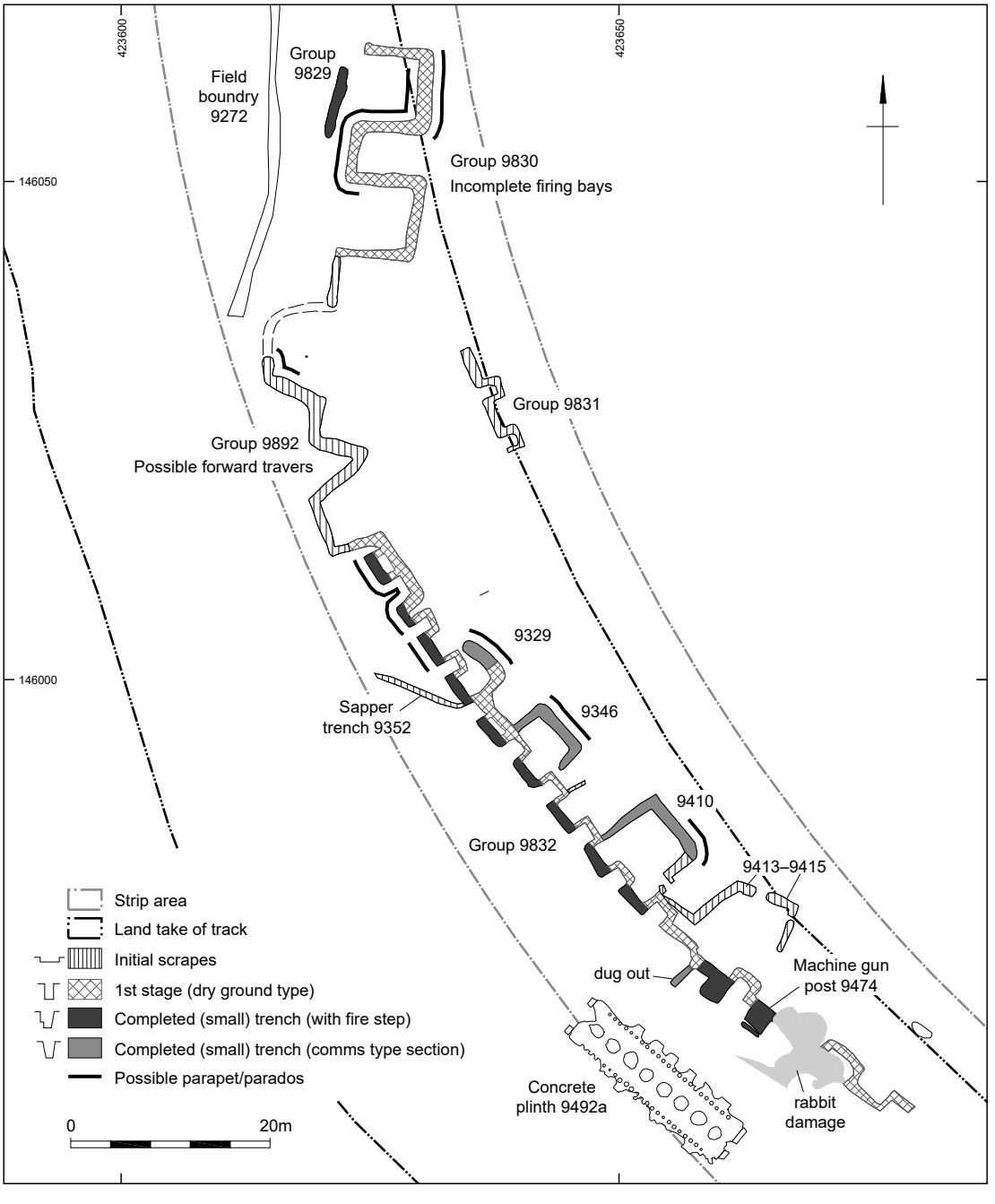

Fig. 3 Detail of central area containing main WWI features

Fig. 4 View looking south across central section of main WWI trench system

the Bourne Valley. The system comprised front line components of a trench system, without any connecting supervision, support, or reserve trenches to the rear.

A review of extant vertical photographs suggests that the trench system was originally accessed via a single feature, likely a communication trench, running north–south. Unfortunately, no evidence was noted of this during the excavation, suggesting the feature was shallow in execution.

Trench 9829 (Fig. 3) comprised a short, straight and shallow linear section of trench, located approximately 2m in front of trench 9830. The feature was 1.20m wide and 0.50m deep; its function in relation to the larger trench system remains unclear. Considered singularly, the feature has parallels with contemporary publications, indeed, it was very similar in size and profile to the dimensions of a 'wet ground' firing trench depicted in a late WWI period reference manual (War Office 1997). Evidence of a simple forward (west) facing 'banquette' or firing step, was also present. Although this trench was not located on wet or boggy ground, it may have been created to a standard pattern for familiarisation purposes.

Trench 9830 was set out in a crenulated pattern that included two possible west-facing forward firing bays (Fig. 3). Trench 9830 was more developed at the northern end (1.45m wide and 1.10m deep from the top of the chalk), the depth reducing very gradually towards the south, the final 5m rapidly reduced to little more than a scrape. It is probable that the feature is incomplete.

Fig. 5 The dug out close to the two machine gun positions at the southern end of feature 9832

Although trench 9830 corresponds, in plan, with a general pattern of crenulated forward firing bays connected by traverses, in section the feature was constructed in the style of a communication trench; no evidence for firing steps was noted. A short length of bell/communication wire was found *in situ* on the lower inside (eastern) edge of the central portion of the trench. While this wire was not present (or did not survive) to the north or south, its presence does suggest that this part of the trench was functional. The deposition patterns of the backfill suggests the presence of a parapet and parados (a forward and rear sandbag or earthen barrier, providing extra protection within a trench) around the more developed, northern portion of the trench.

Trench 9831 was positioned 10m to the south of trench 9830 and approximately 13m to the rear (east) of the northern part of trench system 9832. Trench 9831 was possibly an engineer staged demonstration system, which would explain the progressive nature of the feature. Alternatively, this may represent a command and control area or an example of accommodation in a front-line environment, which may explain the separate siting. The feature was not connected to any other trench but was arranged in a crenulated pattern comprising one, maybe more, firing bays. It appears that this section of trench was never completed and the intended function is now somewhat obscure. However, it may have been utilised as a supervision trench, although the tight crenulated pattern is not necessarily supportive of this supposition. As

Fig. 6 Machine gun position at the southern end of main trench system 9832

this section of trench was situated directly behind two incomplete forward traverses or possible bastions at the northern end of the main trench system (9832), it might also be speculated that this trench represents an incomplete early phase of a concurrent 'strong point' arrangement intended to be linked to the main trench system.

Feature 9832 was the largest, most varied and most developed section of the practice trench system. It comprised at least nine developed forward firing bays, two incorporating island traverses, two possible forward traverses, two probable machine gun posts, a small 'dugout' (Fig. 5), and a potential forward sap point (9352) (War Office 1997, 35). The system was around 100m long aligned in a north-west to south-east direction. The construction of the system proved to be more developed in the larger central portion than at the northern and southern ends. Indeed, the most northerly section of the system (*c.* 20m) comprised only relatively shallow scrapes. These were arranged in plan as two forward traverses connected by a 'dog leg'-shaped trench.

All forward firing bays investigated in trench 9832 were developed in profile, demonstrating a clearly defined, well-cut, firing step. The firing bays were between 0.65m and 1.12m in depth and connected by narrow, or very narrow, straight sided traverse trenches, all approximately 0.88m deep. Evidence for a parapet was detected within the three northernmost firing bays. A potential forward sap extended approximately 10m north-west from the southern corner of the fourth firing bay. This sap was very shallow,

Fig. 7 Machine gun position 9474 at the southern end of the main system 9832

measuring 0.30m deep at the elbow rest of the parent firing bay, reducing to 0.08m deep at its forward (north-western) limit.

Behind the main line of firing bays, four L-shaped trenches extended to the east. The northernmost two were well developed, with communication trench type profiles. The third trench was partially developed and reduced in depth to its terminal end, while the fourth, and most southerly, was only partially constructed and segmented in three shallow component scrapes. The function of these features is not clear; suggestions include practice command posts, shelter trenches, bombing pits or possible latrine trenches.

Connected to the south of the main line of firing bays were two, forward protruding, emplacements; the northernmost had an accompanying dugout tunnel which extended 3.00m forward of the front line (Fig. 6). Both features correspond with the dimensions provided for a machine gun emplacement in the *War Office Manual of Field Engineering* (War Office 1914). Indeed, the more northerly of the two emplacements would have been able to provide enfilade, or flanking fire protection, to the main line of firing bays. The southerly emplacement contained two *in situ* parallel wooden boards (Fig. 7) which may indicate the use of a Stokes mortar in this position. The dugout comprised a single narrow shaft 0.67m wide and 1.40m deep with a tidy rounded arched roof cut in the chalk. At the entrance, the apex of the dugout roof was only 0.06m below the upper surface of the natural. Given the narrow nature of this feature, it is likely that the dugout was used for the storage of the mortar magazine (Guernsey Donkey 2016).

To the south-east of the southernmost emplacements, a large area, covering 40m², has been subjected to substantial rabbit disturbance (Fig. 3). The disturbance is such that little of the trench system survived intact in this area. Beyond this, to the south, a short section of scrape trench survived for 10m. In plan, this feature comprised at least one forward firing bay that terminated with a squared-off end, halfway along the final connecting traverse.

Refuse pits and hut foundations

A series of other features connected to WWI, or interwar period, were identified in the work. These comprised six pits and a group of red brick-built features indicating a possible section of pathway and hut foundation pads. Three of the pits (9493, 9497 and 9505), were located to the south-east of the practice trench system. were irregular in shape (up to 0.84m deep) and contained a mix of waste material including whiteware pottery (tablewares and preserve jars), glass bottles and jars (including two *Shippams* paste jars and two *Crosse and Blackwell* jar tops), copper alloy forks, riveted iron metalwork, and tin cans. The ceramic tablewares included a cup stamped NACB, the mark of the Navy and Army Canteen Board, which superseded the Army Canteen Committee in 1917 and was in turn replaced by the Navy, Army, Air Force Institutes (NAAFI) in 1920 (Barker 2017, 236–7, fig. 32).

A copper alloy cane finial recovered from pit 9505 (Fig. 8) was of particular interest. This was marked O.T.C. (Officer Training Corps) and embellished with the coat of arms of William of Wykeham, the founder of Winchester College, along with his initials 'WW' and the motto of the College ('*manners makyth man*'). Although founded in 1860, the Winchester College Corps were only called the OTC between 1908 and 1940, after which, the name changed to the Junior Training Corp (Anon. 2005); this item is probably pre-World War II in date.

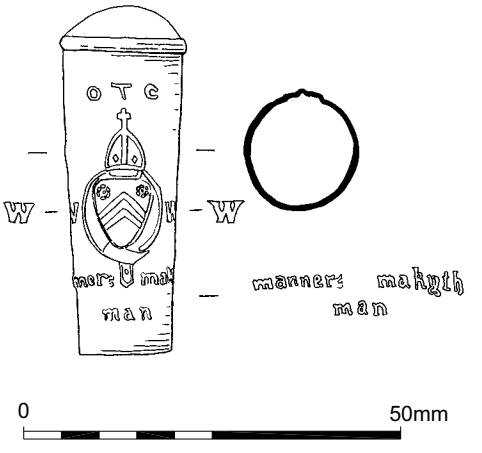

Fig. 8 The Officer Training Corps cane finial

WORLD WAR II AND LATER

Several features relating to WWII activity were identified within the route of the track (Fig. 3). The most prominent of these was a concrete building plinth (9492), measuring 20.50m × 6.50m, the long axis orientated north-west to south-east. The concrete plinth, representing the remains of a toilet block, was constructed within a cutting made into the base of the north-south scarp (Fig. 9). The plinth showed considerable damage to its outside edges, and several large blocks of concrete and plastered brick masonry had been pushed onto the inside edge of the cutting; there was evidence of bulldozing after falling out of use (this was later supported anecdotally during a conversation between two senior residents of Shipton Bellinger and the author).

Surviving internal features include two parallel rows of raised U-shaped concrete ridges integrated into the fabric of the plinth (Fig. 10). These lay along the parallel edge of the structure, representing bucket stops for basic commode type toilets; sub-rectangular holes in the concrete indicated cubicles. Due to the demolition process, the number of toilets present can only be estimated. The internal arrangement is likely to be 22 toilets on each side of the block. Eight large sub-circular holes (1.50m in diameter) extended down the centre of the floor in a parallel line, possibly mounts for washing facilities. Surviving external features were limited to two moulded concrete half pipe drains located along the narrow 'entrance' ends of the plinth.

This kind of toilet block was not necessarily popular with the soldiers. Captain Grevemberg and his men of Battery C, 105th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Weapons Battalion (United States Army) were stationed at Tidworth Pennings Camp to the north-west of Tidworth and described a similar provision:

> 'When the soldiers entered the camp they were not satisfied with their facilities. Long wooden platforms with holes in them and buckets underneath served as latrines. It accommodated approximately sixty men at the same time. A covered truck had to come every day to empty these buckets' (Janous 2010, 17).

A contemporary account has been provided to show not all conditions have changed over the years:

> 'This type of latrine is still in use today (known affectionately as the long drop or desert rose) in operational theatres such as Afghanistan. It is up to the unit stationed to remove the buckets and burn the contents every morning' (Kris Conlin pers. comm.).

A second, contemporary building cutting, (9506 Fig. 11), of similar dimension to the toilet block, was identified 55m to the south-east. There were no surviving structural elements within this cutting, probably indicating a more lightly constructed structure at this site. A single small linear ditch (9499) extended in a south-eastward direction from the south-western corner the cutting. The first fill of the ditch was a dump of burnt material containing a single wine glass stem, rubber objects, and various nails, screws and pieces of wire. A further length of ditch (9487) lay to the south of 9499.

In addition to the structural remains of the toilet block and the second building, an access track, probably contemporary, was cut into the slope. The track extended north-west to south-east from the southern end of the toilet block towards the 'Old Coach Road', running eastwards from Shipton Bellinger. The track appears to have been backfilled at the same time as the two building cuttings. Other, welfare orientated structures may well be in evidence across the site. The exposed nature of training grounds across Salisbury Plain suggests that some features (99506) may well be a form of troop shelter; certainly, the extant evidence is consistent with such a structure. Unfortunately, this feature remains undated.

Other features probably related to WWII activity include a tarmac access road 20m south of the eastern side of EE vehicle crossing. This branched off the A338 and extended in an east–west direction, parallel to the present crossing passing/waiting area and access track. Also, in this area there was a posthole and waste pit (9833 not illustrated); a rectangular soak-away pit (9812 not illustrated) (located 150m north of the toilet block); and a small waste pit (9415 Fig. 2), contained the remains of three sealed, eight ounce, cans of *Planters Cocktail Peanuts*.

20th-century finds by Lorraine Mepham

Considerable quantities of topsoil finds were present along the middle and lower slopes of the north–south scarp. A significant increase in topsoil depth (up to 1m) was encountered against the scarp and over the toilet block; this material appeared to have been pushed into the base of scarp from the lower ground to the west. Finds included building rubble (red bricks, pieces of concrete and corrugated iron), discarded parts from military vehicles including a front mudguard from a motorcycle; galvanised buckets; enamel mugs and plates; large quantities of glass bottles and jars (mainly for beverages and condiments) and fragments of stoneware (containers, mainly preserve jars) and whiteware ceramics (mainly tablewares).

In addition to the general topsoil spread, two distinct concentrations of finds were discovered. The more southerly contained large quantities of glassware, including fragments of 182 drinking vessels (84%, pint/half-pint glasses; 12%, wine glasses; 3%, tumblers and 1%, miscellaneous); 42 colourless glass beverage bottles (including 10 decorated *Idris* ginger beer bottles and one *Allen & Lloyd* soda bottle); 12 brown/green beverage bottles (wine or beer, none marked); 23 colourless jars (including two *Shippams* paste jars); nine scalloped bowls; five fragments of window glass (including one fragment of reinforced glass) and six fragments of mirror glass. The ceramics included 175 identifiable vessels, most of which are tablewares (65%, plates

Fig. 9 Concrete plinth 9492, viewed from the north

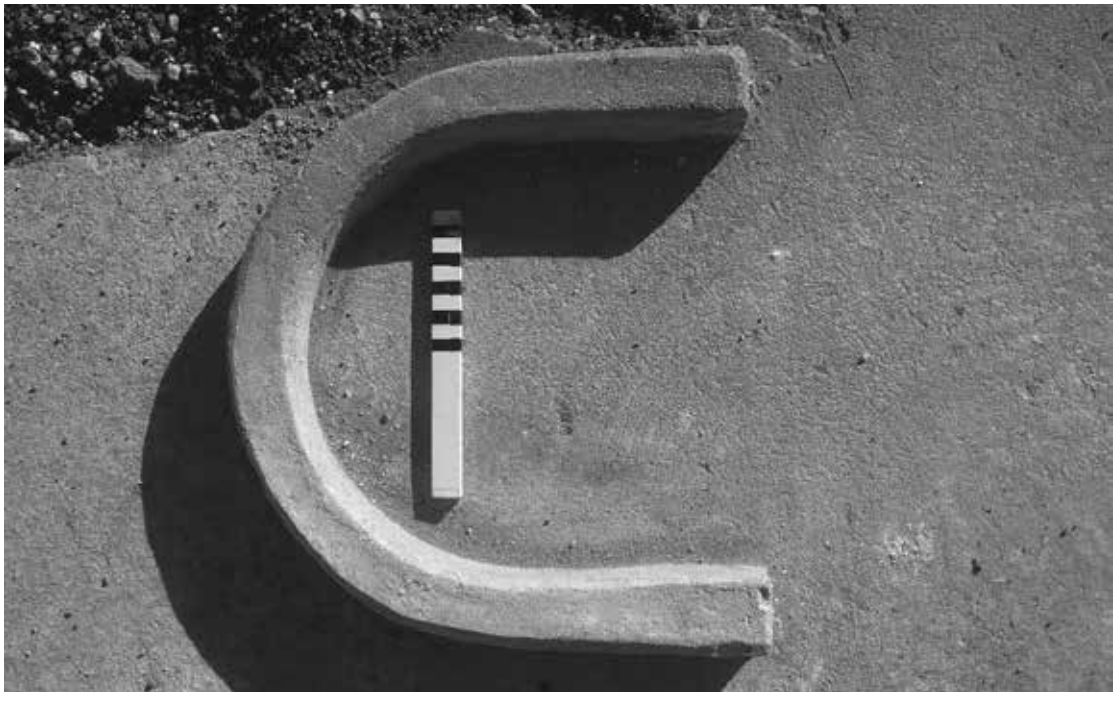

Fig. 10 An internal feature from the toilet block. This is a bucket stop and aids the correct positioning of the receptacle

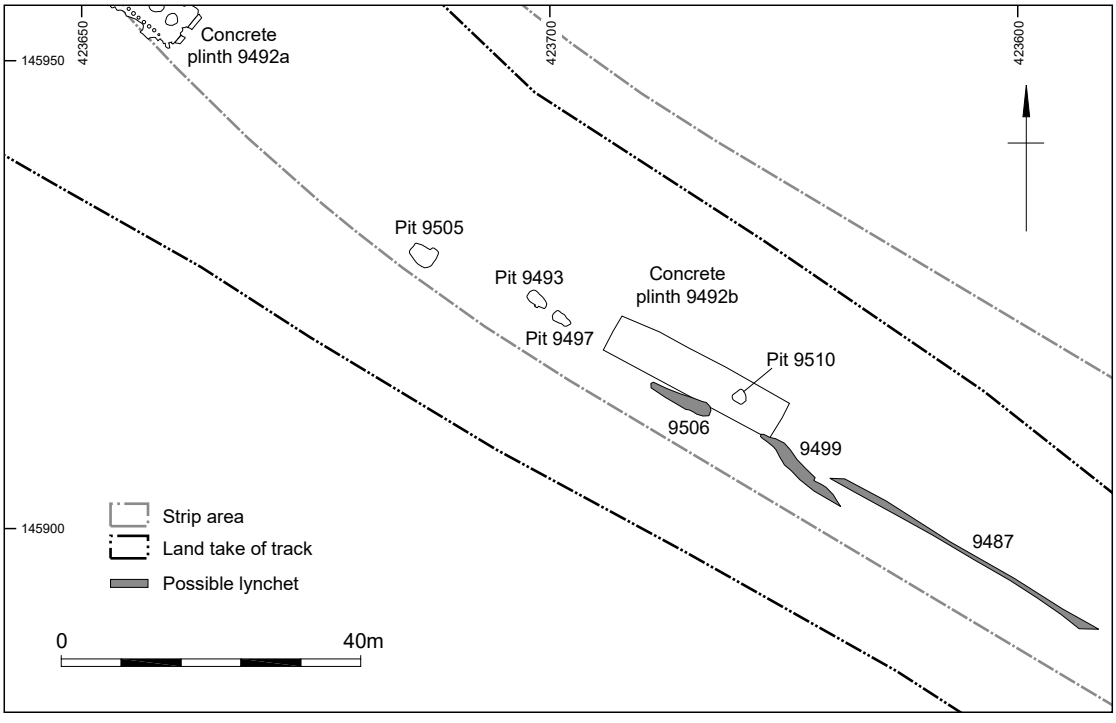

Fig. 11 Detail of southern area containing multi-phase features

in various sizes; 14%, cups; 9%, saucers; 5%, bowls, 5%, preserve jars; 1%, lids; 1%, jugs). The plates are not all in a completely plain utilitarian style but include a high proportion with scalloped and feathered edges. Several carry the backstamp of John Maddock and Sons of Burslem, Staffordshire (Godden 1964, 406–7). Three of the preserve jars contained Frank Cooper's marmalade.

Further to the north, in the locality of the toilet block, finds included a metal '*Sobranie of London*' cigarette tin (possibly indicating an area used by officers as this brand would have been regarded as an officers' cigarette), enamel mugs, two bottles of *Masons O.K.* sauce, three beer bottles and other miscellaneous bottles. The assemblage appears indicative of the presence of mess facilities, probably outside the present excavation area towards the south-west.

The second concentration was identified 130m to the north of the first, situated in the area adjacent to the soak-away pit (9812, not illustrated). Finds from this area included a rather wide bristled, translucent green plastic toothbrush marked U.S. ARMY (possibly WWII G.I. issue), three enamel mugs and two 'Codd style' bottles of *Allen & Lloyd's* (Aldershot) mineral water. The finds appear indicative of a wash room and perhaps other messing facilities in the locality of a soak-away pit.

Other 20th-century features

Several features were located which are likely to originate from the 20th century, but had provided no evidence to support this. The features include three concrete hut platforms/plinths, one to the north (9814) and two to the south (9810 and 9811, latter not shown on plan) of EE vehicle crossing (Fig. 12). Plinth 9814 was rectangular in plan, and measured 5.60m × 3.60m, the long axis of this extending parallel to EE crossing. No *in situ* debris was associated with this feature.

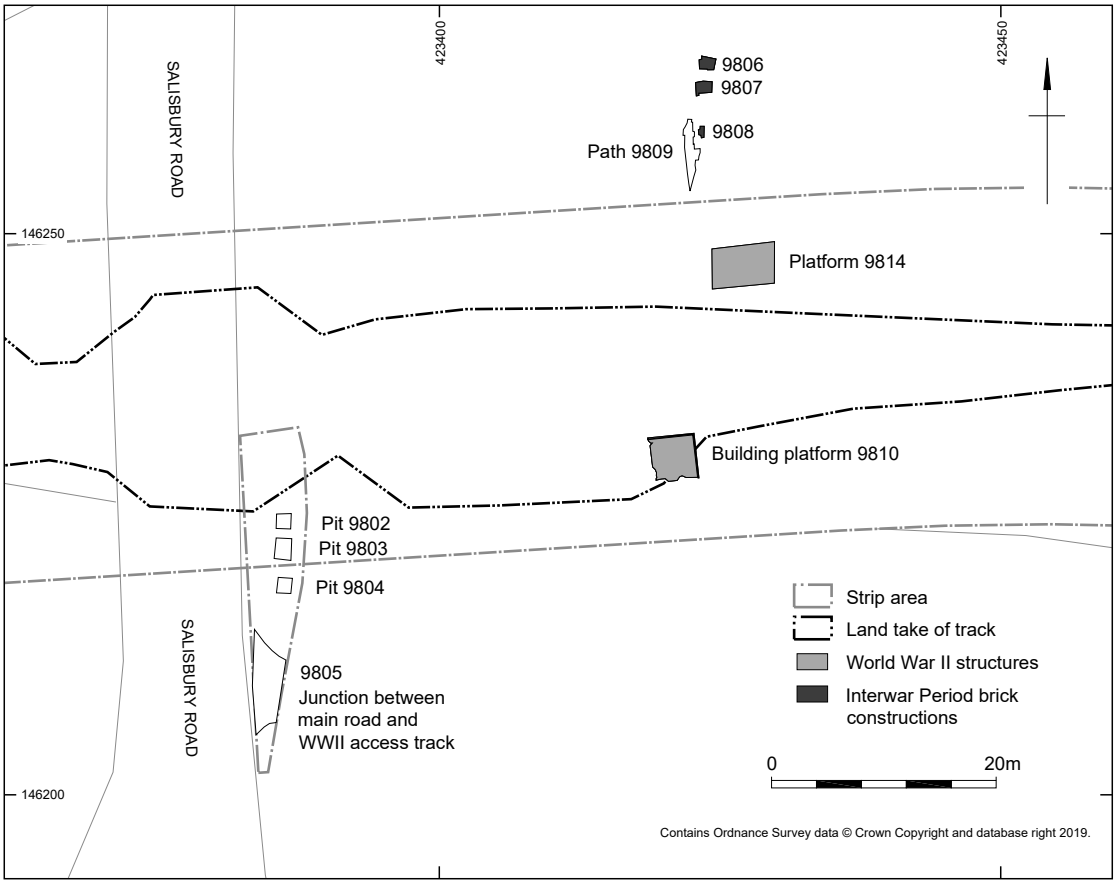

Fig. 12 Detail of northern area containing inter-war period features

Evidence of considerable edge damage to concrete plinth 9810 suggests a mechanical method of demolition similar to toilet block 9492. The surviving element of building plinth 9810 measured 4.15m × 3.98m, unfortunately, the original layout could not be ascertained. Plinth 9811 was located 5.00m east of 9810; it was partially buried under a concentration of demolition debris, set back from present track on ground relatively undisturbed by the current works, it was orientated north–south.

The Officer Training Camps

Tidworth Park Camp was located on the Tedworth Estate, South Tidworth. Previous studies have placed the southern boundary of Tidworth Park Camp to the north of the mitigation area (James 1987). In 1903, the core of the camp was located to the south and south-east of Tedworth House and extended only as far south as South Park Lodge (Ibid., 1987). It appears that sometime between 1910 and 1924, Tidworth Park Camp was expanded to the south occupying the area east of the A338. It is not clear when this occurred although, by 1921 this area contained a line of permanent buildings parallel to the A338 (see Fig. 14). Between the wars Tidworth Park Camp was used intermittently; often by Regular and Territorial units but then only between July and August. The Officer Training Corps (OTC) made most use of the facility during this period (Ibid., 1987).

Officer Training Corps camps were conducted on a large scale. Between 2000 and 3000 cadets attended each camp, nationally this could be in excess of 10,000 (Haig-Brown 1915). OTC camps were mapped out by Regular Army Quartermasters, with four Senior Division cadets sharing a tent, while the Junior Division had to endure eight to a tent (Ibid., 1915).

A picture postcard (Fig. 13) showing numerous bell tents and a range of rectangular mess tents, interspersed with a number of permanent huts, and carrying the title 'O.T.C. CAMP. TIDWORTH PARK' appears to demonstrate the immediate post-war enormity of such camps. The card is franked 2nd class at 7:30 pm, 28 July 1921 at Tidworth. The village of Shipton Bellinger can be clearly seen in the background, while the image depicts the whole western portion of the site currently under investigation.

Documented personal accounts

The experience of the annual OTC camps at Tidworth (Park Camp or Pennings Camp) was clearly a memorable experience for many. Indeed, it has led to a number of published accounts of the camps. In his autobiographical work *Goodbye to All That* published in 1929, Robert Graves describes a display 'of the latest military fortifications, barbed-wire entanglements, machine-guns, and field artillery in action' (Graves 1929, 88). Graves goes on to voice and his opposition to 'the theory of implicit obedience to orders' (Ibid., 88), citing this as his reasons for resigning the OTC.

An account of the OTC Camp held during 1916, at Tidworth can be found in the wartime memoirs of Huntly Gordon:

> 'Contingents from many famous public schools were there, and we were given demonstrations of every aspect of warfare. We put on gas-masks, hesitatingly entering a tent full of chlorine gas, and were relieved to find ourselves unaffected by it. We fired Stokes Mortars, watching the projectiles shoot up into the air and land with a satisfying crash in a nearby quarry. We worked field telephones, sat in the cockpit of an old aeroplane, and generally had an exciting and useful ten days of it…' 'But the biggest thrill was reserved for the last day when we found ourselves being briefed for night operations. On Tidworth Plain the Sappers had constructed an exact reproduction of a section of opposing German and British trench systems- front line, support, and communication trenches complete in every realistic detail' (Gordon 1967, 19).

J.R.R. Tolkien's experience of Tidworth Pennings Camp in 1909 left him physically scarred by an unspecified but self-inflicted escapade involving a tent pole, a candle and a clasp knife (Garth 2003, 23–4), while Evelyn Waugh recorded his derision at the 'horrible' state of the toilet facilities where 'boys had to smoke in protection against the smell' (Wilson 1996, 61) during the 1920 Camp at Tidworth Park, despite that summer having a low average temperature (Parker *et al.* 1992).

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC AND MAP REVIEW

The area of investigation does not, through the archaeological evidence alone, provide a suitable, complete, or satisfactory level of detail. A review of available aerial imagery and historic mapping was undertaken to underpin the assumptions made through the fieldwork. This has enabled a far better level of interpretation to be developed.

The practice trench system

A review of the available vertical imagery of the area has produced no contemporary photographs of the presence of the WWI trench system. It is not until 1953 (see Fig. 16) that a clear representation can be seen. The system appears again in later photographs in decreasing clarity and by 1970 (see Fig. 20) only a couple of crenelated areas can be seen, partially obscured by the encroaching undergrowth.

While the presence of buildings connected to the Trench System cannot be verified through contemporary imagery, it is clear that by 1921, the franked year of the postcard (Fig. 13), more permanent elements were in existence parallel to the A338. Mapping from the Ordnance Survey (OS 1924 Sheet XXII.3 and XXII.7) depicts 12

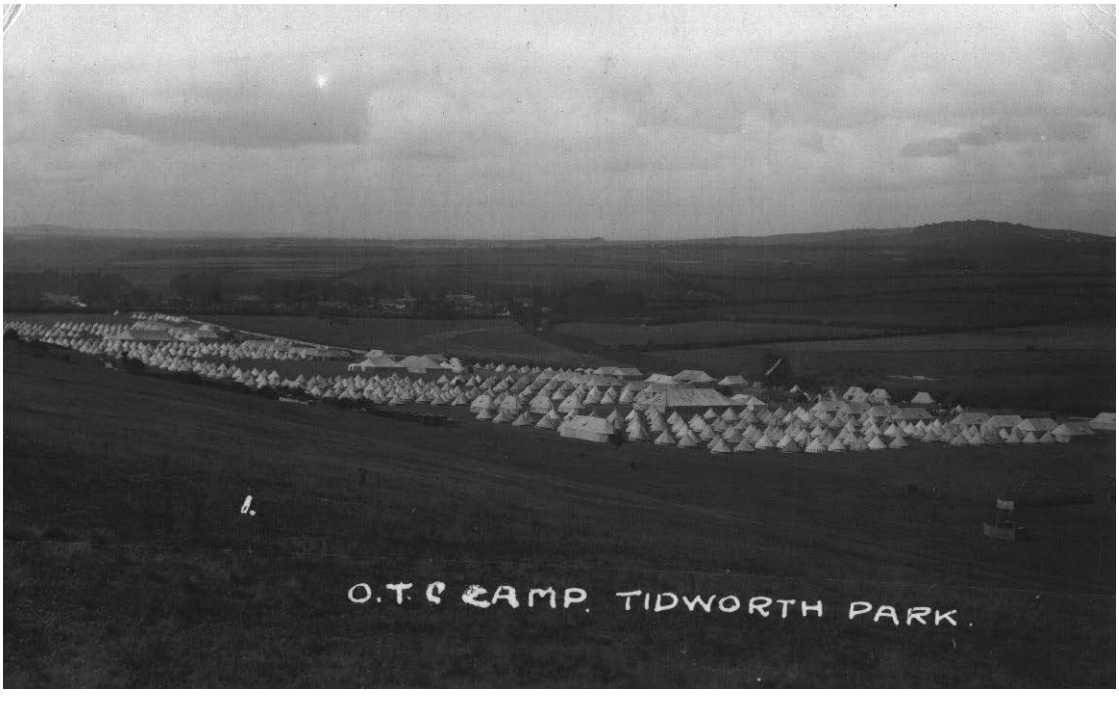

Fig. 13 Postcard depicting an Officer Training Camp at Tidworth Park. The number of tents attest to the enormity of such activities (originator unknown)

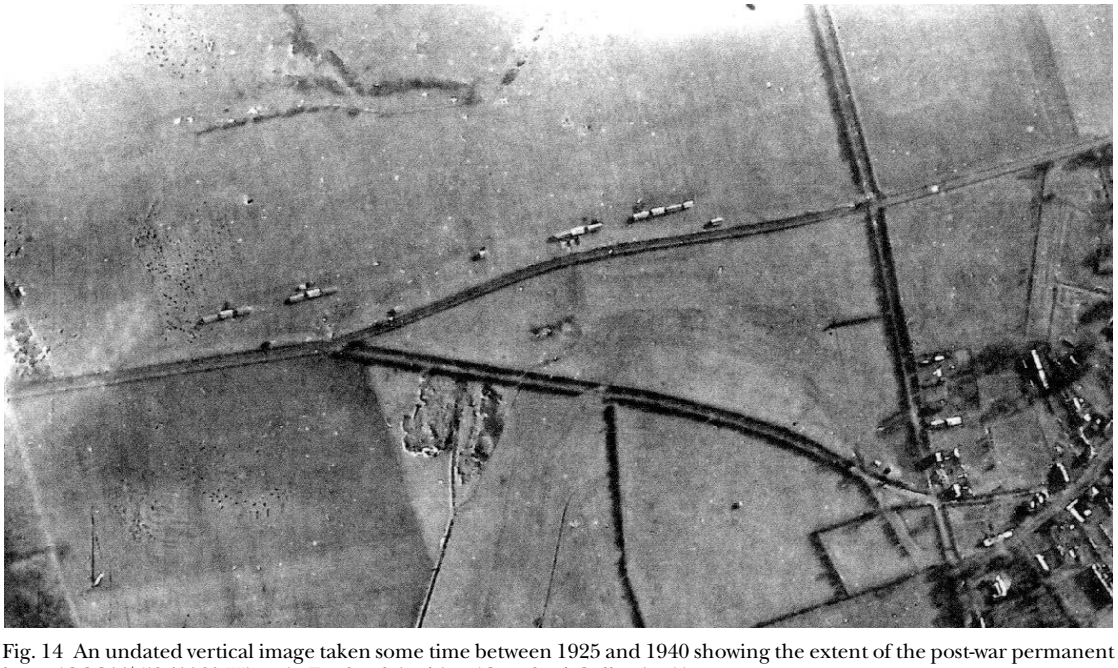

Fig. 14 An undated vertical image taken some time between 1925 and 1940 showing the extent of the post-war permanent huts. (CCC11752/1160 Historic England Archive (Crawford Collection))

huts arranged in four groups, interspersed with four smaller structures. The features are also present in an undated aerial image (Fig. 14). The toilet blocks (features do not appear on the OS mapping until 1937 (Sheet XXII.3), this edition also depicts a number of 'new' structures in the landscape, along the same north–south alignment. An aerial image taken on 24 April 1942, depicts circular scars that mark permanent bases for bell tents in the area to the east of the southern-most permanent structures. These are most probably evidence for the last camp held by the Officer Training Corps in 1940.

By the end of World War II, the area had seen a substantial increase in both temporary and permanent structures. Aerial imagery dated 25 Sept 1945 (Fig. 15), and taken by 544 Squadron, Royal Air Force, a specialist photographic reconnaissance squadron formed in 1942, depicts a range of structures aligned on the Salisbury Road. A looped track (the junction of this at the fork in the main road was discovered (Fig. 12) (feature 9805) runs through the buildings providing vehicular access to those structures extant from the 1920s and a range of new structures to the east. The new structures appear to be Nissen huts, both single and double length, arranged around a small parade area. This complex lies to the east of the looped track. Spurring off the track, at right-angles, are three substantial, rectangular hardstandings. The nature of the material used to create the hardstandings is unknown, however, they leave little evidence by 1953, suggesting a temporary cover such as Pierced Steel Planking (PSP) or Somerfield Tracking. The image depicts the central hardstanding in use, two concentrations of barrels can be made out; utilising the looped track, vehicles could pull off or re-join the main road here, it is likely this is a Petrol, Oil, Lubricant or POL stop. It appears that from at least April 1942, and certainly during the preparations for the Liberation of Europe (from 6 June 1944), the camp was utilised as a component of Tidworth Park Staging Area, established to support units moving through the area south to the coast for embarkation into theatre (see note below).

An image taken by 540 Squadron, operating from RAF Benson, Oxfordshire, demonstrates that by 17 April 1951, the area is probably abandoned or, at least, substantially run down (Fig. 16). Many of the Nissen huts that appeared during WWII have been removed and the looped track appears to be grassing over. The situation is little changed two and a half years later, when, on 14 September 1953, the RAF conduct a further photographic run over the area (Fig. 17) save for the looped track that is clearly back in use.

Sorties by 540 Squadron and 58 Squadron Canberras, operating from RAF Wyton in 1954 and 1955 respectively, capture a very different story. By the time of the image in 1954 (Fig. 18) a substantial vehicle park had appeared in the area east of the Salisbury Road and north of the Old Coach Road. Over 20 rows of vehicles and containers can be made out, arranged in double lines extending east–west across the site they are only interrupted by extant buildings, the rough tracks around the periphery suggest continued, intensive vehicle movement. The photograph taken on 1 October 1955 (Fig. 19) shows that the parking area had been almost doubled in size in the preceding year. Vehicle tracks indicate that equipment had been stored in rows right up to the cops at the northern extent of the area; interestingly, the southern end of the park appears to have been abandoned by then as the grass is already making a recovery. Crucially, the park is empty, whatever the need to use this area so intensively had been, it had passed by late 1955.

A mapping image taken on 3 May 1970 (Fig. 20) by the Ordnance Survey demonstrates the entire site had been cleared of structures and returned to agriculture. Close to the recently established EE road crossing is a structure, possibly acting as a Vedette Post controlling access onto the Plain at this point. The image also depicts that the Bell Tent bases and the southern-most hardstanding put in during World War II, have been exposed by ploughing. Later LiDAR images show the hardstanding as a visible scar on the landscape too.

DISCUSSION

This corner of Hampshire, inextricably linked to activities on and around Salisbury Plain, has

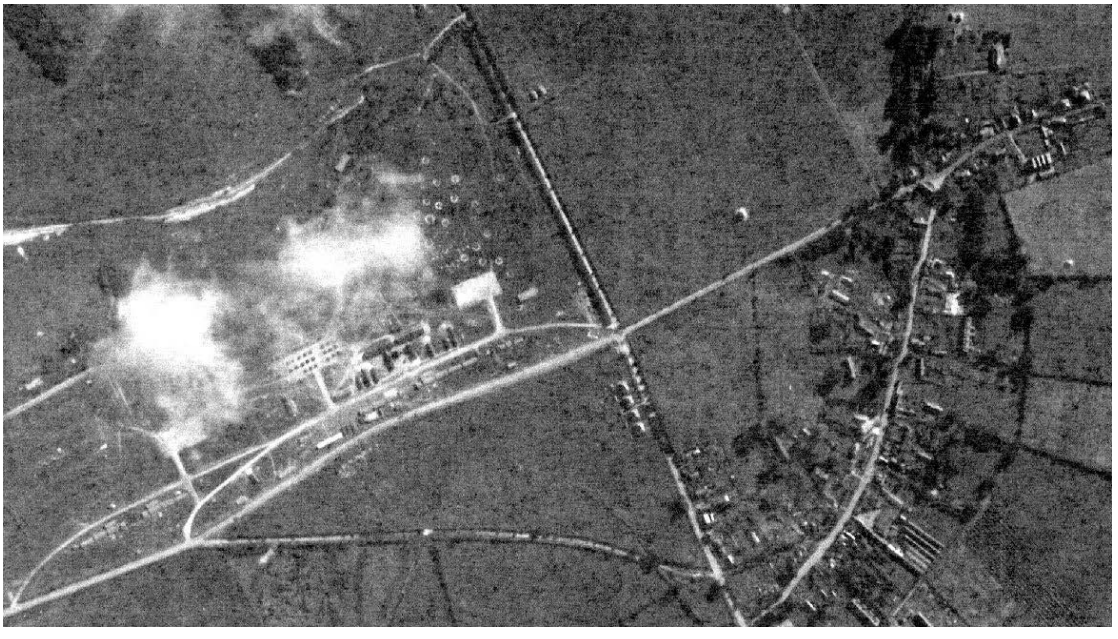

Fig. 15 Dated 1945, this vertical image shows the vehicle pull-in and hutted camp that had appeared during WWII. (RAF/106G/UK/839 fr. 3094 Historic England Archive (RAF Collection))

Fig. 16 1951 This vertical image, taken by 540 Squadron, RAF Benson, Oxfordshire, demonstrates a much depleted site by 17 April 1951 (RAF/540/457 fr. 3055 Historic England Archive (RAF Collection))

been the focus of military training for over four decades; it continues to play a peripheral part in the operation of the Plain as an active training landscape. What is of interest is the multi-phased landscape identified through the recent archaeological works, along with a wide range of techniques to access it physically and historically. Utilising the evidence from decades of aerial photographic sorties, it has been possible to construct an accurate template with which to analyse the archaeology encountered through excavation. In addition, the results have been complemented by local oral testament; naturally these must be treated with caution, but however phenomenological, they do help place activities in a form of local context.

The eastern area of Salisbury Plain has been under the ownership of the War Office since 1897 (Crutchley 2000, 11), Tedworth House and surrounding estate was purchased at the same time, making it one of the very early areas taken in specifically for military training. The practice trench system located in this corner of Hampshire is clearly a component of the huge complex now recognised across the south-eastern expanse of Salisbury Plain (Brown & Field 2007; Brown 2017; Beach 2018), demonstrating the far-reaching implications of modern warfare on the landscape. As with other examples it appears a range of activities were undertaken during training, including trench and dugout construction along with machine gun and mortar positions created and, probably, manned.

With the purchase of the Tedworth estate so early in the militarisation of Salisbury Plain it should come as no surprise that the Officer Training Corps (OTC) would make the area one of their major camp locations. Although, it is not necessarily the Tedworth estate that attracts the use of this landscape since by 1921 (the date of the postcard (Fig. 13) the camp was located next to the Salisbury Road. It is likely this was the first time the camp was at this location as the trench system was probably 'live' until late 1918–early 1919. The association with the road, presumably exploiting better transport links, was to drive all subsequent development episodes.

One aspect of WWI had far reaching consequences on post-war Britain, and to some extent may explain the constant re-use of this location situated next to the Salisbury Road. In the immediate decade after the cessation of hostilities the British road system underwent rapid transformation; this was driven, in part, by a rapid increase in haulage traffic. The railways played a key role in delivering troops and equipment to the front, although, in the same period the technical performance of the internal combustion engine, and the vehicles it was mounted in, dramatically improved motor transport's viability (Mulley 2009, 4). This coupled with a huge amount of ex-service vehicle stock available at the end of the war, and an equally large number of ex-servicemen, now competent drivers and mechanics due to government training, who bought redundant vehicles as business opportunities, initiated a rapid move to road transport (Ibid., 4).

Subsequent periods of activity tend to align themselves with the road running north–south, suggesting vehicular transport links were important. Using the available aerial photography, it is now possible to offer a reasonable interpretation of the site's development. By the interwar period it appears that the strip of land between the, now redundant, trench system and the Salisbury Road is certainly utilised, if periodically, for camps connected with the OTC and possibly regular troops, the evidence for both being discovered in rubbish pits. Structures 9806, 9807, 9808; 9810 and 9814 just east of where the track (EE) (Fig. 12) crosses the Salisbury Road probably indicate structures built in response to the usage of the site during WWII.

The final phase of activity appears to be that as a vehicle and equipment park. Over 200 vehicles, mostly trucks, possibly Bedford three tonners or General Motor Company (GMCs), can be seen along with various crates and shipping containers. Interestingly the Royal Air Force image that captured this is dated Aug 1954, this date is informative as is possible that this image has depicted equipment that has either been destined for, or more likely, returned from the Korean War. The conflict forced a major re-armament programme in the United Kingdom; by the ceasefire in 1953 it had accounted for 15% GDP (Park 1997,

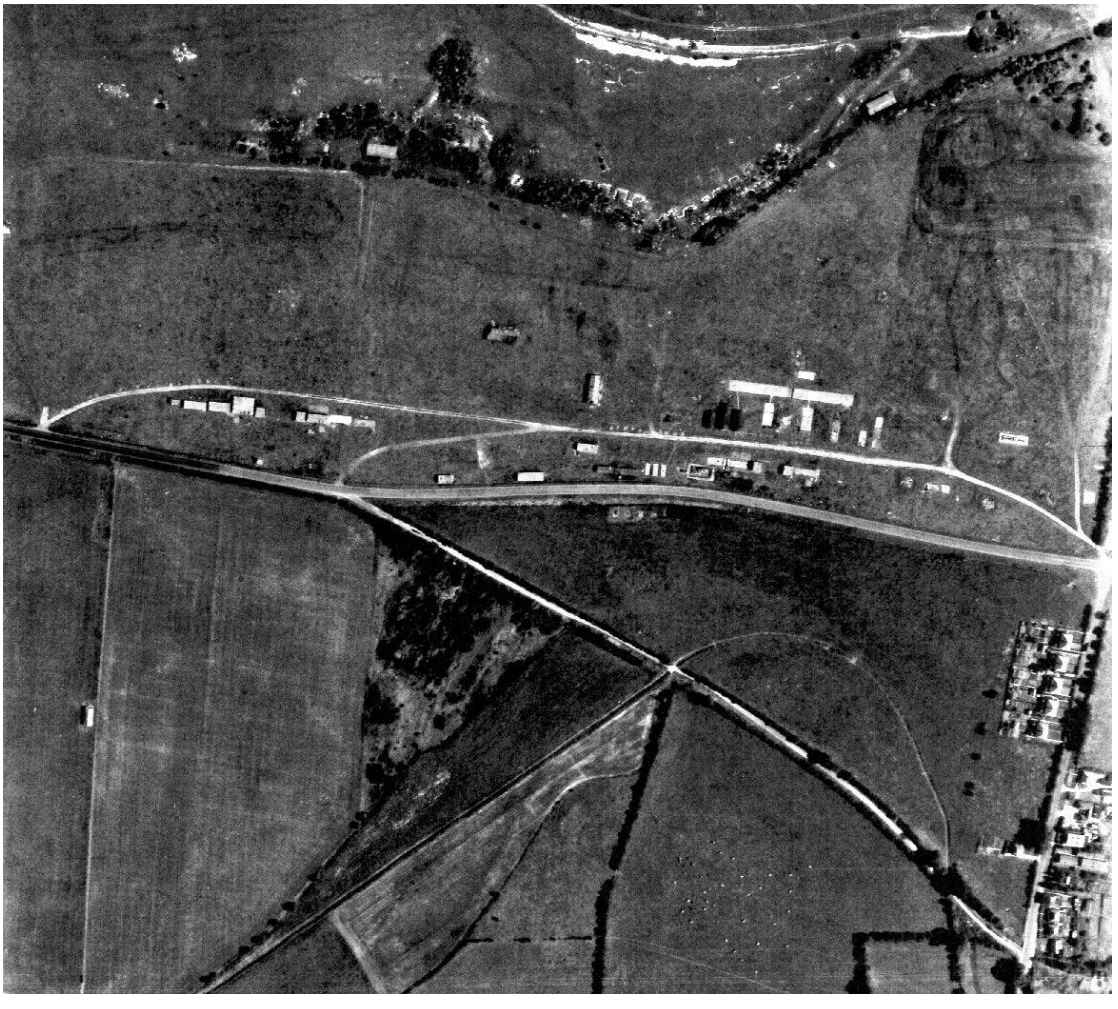

Fig. 17 By 1953 the majority of the WWII buildings have been removed, although the looped track has recently seen heavy usage. (RAF/58/1276 fr. 175 Historic England Archive (RAF Collection))

358). Considering this, the material stockpiled at the site should be viewed as connected, however remotely, a probable consequence of the Korean War. Moreover, this links the immediate area to the first major conflict of the Cold War. Additionally, the park is a physical representation of a major change to government social policy: one that was to re-introduce prescription charges and force the architect of the National Health Service, Aneurin Bevan, to resign his post in April 1951 HC (Deb 23 April 1951 vol 487 cc34-43).

CONCLUSION

Salisbury Plain Training Area has a rich archaeological resource, one could argue, without parallel. This archaeological investigation has demonstrated that it also has a rich historical one too; one that can be accessed by both modern and traditional archaeological techniques. Furthermore, the analysis of the results allows us to expand our knowledge of the landscape impact of global warfare across, in the case here, the whole of the 20th century.

Fig. 18 Compared with the previous image (Fig. 17), this 1954 vertical relayes the substantial nature of the equipment park, with the entire southern half of the area utilised. (RAF/540/1386 fr. 32 Historic England Archive (RAF Collection))

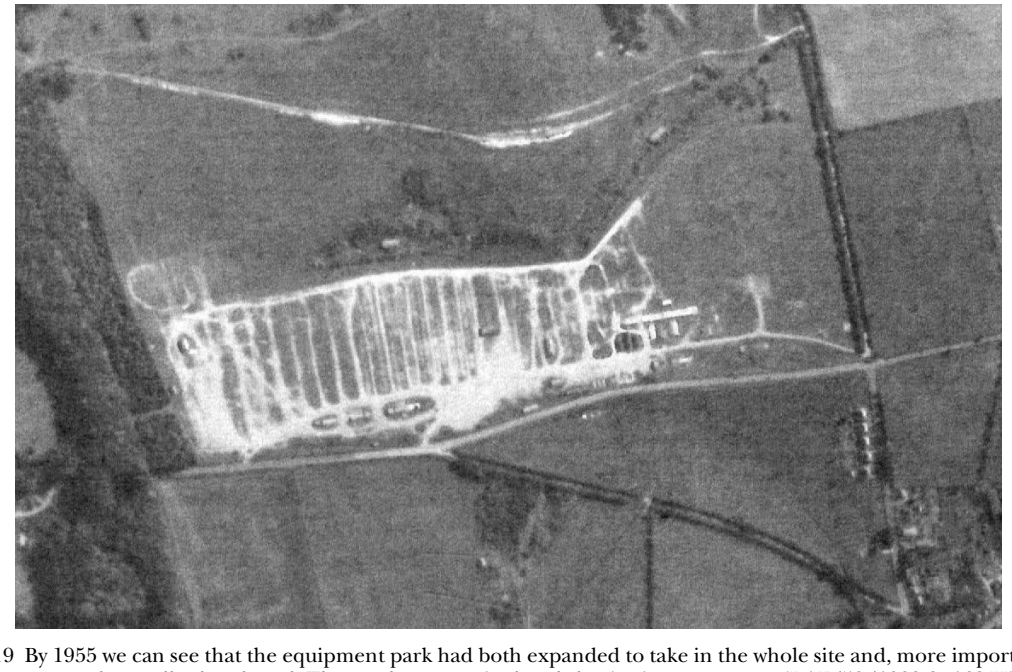

Fig. 19 By 1955 we can see that the equipment park had both expanded to take in the whole site and, more importantly, now appears to be totally abandoned. The southern area is already beginning to recover. (RAF/58/1882 fr. 168 Historic England Archive (RAF Collection))

Fig. 20 This image, taken in 1970, demonstrates that by that date all features from the preceding 60 years have been either levelled or removed. A few soil marks prevail, including the bases for the bell tents from the OTC camps from the inter-war period. (OS/70067 V 271 3 May 1970, Ordnance Survey)

It also forces us to confront those periods while considering the wider implications of both conflict archaeology and the archaeological landscapes of the recent past.

NOTE

Personal accounts of the site in World War II are also recorded. A brief, but illuminating, account of an American unit's impression of the camp during 1942 can be found online at the WW2 US Medical Research Centre website (Med-dept). (https://www.med-dept.com/unit-histories/38th-evacuation-hospital).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by Debut Services SW for Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) through SKMEnviros, and Wessex Archaeology is grateful to Austin Jones, David Sellwood and Rebecca Thompson-Lawrence.

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Martin Brown, then of DIO, for his assistance and invaluable advice during the excavation of the trench system.

Thanks are due Nick Dredge of the DIO and Jonathan Roach, Gerry Bond, Craig Lyttle and Mark Cousins from the main works contractors,

BAM Nuttall, for their assistance during the fieldwork.

The fieldwork project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Paul White who was assisted by Damian De Rosa. The fieldwork was directed by Stephen Beach who was assisted by Naomi Brennan, Vicki Gallagher, Adela Murray Brown, Andy Sole, Kimberley Teale and Alan Whitaker The post-excavation analysis and publication were managed by Matt Leivers and Philippa Bradley. Useful comments on earlier drafts of the text were provided by Kris Conlin, Kate Stevens and Cristina Garcia. Bob Clarke, Philippa Bradley and Finn Cresswell edited the report. The finds were analysed by Lorraine Mepham. Kenneth Lymer drew the plans and Nancy Dixon Figure 8. The authors would also like to thank Bob Davis and Linda Wilhelm for their assistance in obtaining the 1921 picture postcard of the O.T.C. Camp. Figures 14–19 are reproduced with permission of Historic England and we are grateful to Vaughan Roberts and Javis Gurr for assistance with obtaining these images. Figure 20 is reproduced with permission of the Ordnance Survey and thanks are due to James Franklin for his assistance.

The archive will be deposited in due course with the Wiltshire Museum, Devizes, under an accession number to be confirmed.

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