

Ullwell, Swanage: Excavation of a buried wall at Ullwell Farm (SZ 023 808)

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Abstract

This paper describes the excavation of a fragment of a stone wall at Ullwell Farm, Dorset. Associated finds indicate that the wall is of medieval date.

In June 1987 small-scale archaeological investigations were carried out by Bournemouth University at Ullwell, a small settlement about 1 mile north of Swanage. Ullwell Farm, also known as Ullwell Old Dairy, is situated on the east side of a minor road between Swanage and Studland. The farm buildings and curtilage lie at the centre of this small hamlet; their size may suggest that this was the principal farm of the settlement. The present house is probably of the seventeenth century with later additions. The site stands at about 50 m AOD on a slight west-facing slope at the southern edge of Ballard Down. Geologically the site lies on the boundary between the Lower Greensand and Wealden clays.

Several Romano-British burials of the first century AD were excavated in the vicinity in 1974 (Jarvis 1982). A few pottery sherds, dating from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries, were recovered from the surface of the garden soil. Other sites and features within a 0.5 km radius of the farm are itemised in Table 1 below. Such features include ancient field boundaries and medieval finds including ceramics.

This project was based on the salvage recording of a wall found by the landowner during excavations for an extension to the north side of the present house. The wall ran north-south, on the same alignment as the present enclosure boundary and road 3 m to the

west. It was a substantial structure, 0.8 m wide at base and 0.55 at its top, and it survived to a height of 0.5 m. A length of 1.45 m was exposed; to the south it appeared to have extended for at least a further 1 m, while to the north it disappeared into a section created by the builders' intervention. A resistivity survey was conducted to the north of this section in an attempt to establish the extent of the wall in this area. This survey covered only 11 m x 6 m (the limit of the area available); it showed no interpretable anomalies, probably because the soil deposits were deep and very dry.

The wall was constructed of a mixture of local sandstone and limestone blocks, either used in a natural state or very roughly dressed, and bonded with clay (Figs 1 and 2). Although it appeared to be of one structural phase, its two faces were constructed differently. The east face was vertical and of five, or perhaps six, more or less even courses; the west face was inclined inwards towards the centre of the wall, at an angle of about 55 degrees from the horizontal, and its coursing was very irregular. The core of the wall was made of clay with some stones and flints. A late-medieval sandy-ware pottery sherd with traces of green glaze was found in this core but its presence there might have been residual. On both sides of the wall lay deposits which may have been construction

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Direction from Ullwell Dairy farm</i>	<i>Linear distance from Ullwell Dairy farm</i>	<i>OS 10-figure map reference</i>
Cultivation marks	East-north-east	522.74 m	SZ 02777 80953
Whitecliff Farm	East-south-east	536.16 m	SZ 02807 80733
Field boundary/trackways	East-south-east	459.33 m	SZ 02704 80641
Agricultural site	South-south-west	563.92 m	SZ 01869 80398
Possible enclosure	West-north-west	259.62 m	SZ 02017 80868
Medieval finds	North-west	318.37 m	SZ 02034 81016
Trackways	North-west	386.54 m	SZ 01954 81026
Field boundary	North-west-north	483.35 m	SZ 02004 81188
Ullwell Saxon cemetery	North	141.80 m	SZ 02257 80931
Field boundary	North-north-east	244.39 m	SZ 02404 81001

Table 1 showing the range of archaeological sites and finds identified within 0.5 km of Ullwell Farm.

waste; one of these deposits contained sherds of twelfth-/thirteenth-century coarse quartz-tempered pottery.



Figure 1: East face of the excavated wall section showing the sandstone construction. The scale is 1 m in length.



Figure 2: Oblique photograph taken from the south end of the wall fragment showing the interruption in its length.

Several deposits lay to the east of the wall. Above the natural clay were thick layers of chalk gravels running up to the wall; they could be interpreted as a road or yard. To the west of the wall was a single layer of clay loam containing oyster and winkle shells; it appeared to be a deliberate infilling or levelling of this area. An undefined feature, consisting of limestone slabs within a matrix of dark clay loam, was sealed by the clay loam levelling deposit. Because this feature lay at the limits of excavation it was impossible to determine its size, and whether it was part of a structure or a

paved surface. Its matrix contained a rim sherd of a twelfth-/thirteenth-century cooking pot.

The wall's size and irregular construction may suggest that it was a boundary wall, rather than part of a building. It was probably contemporarily in use with the gravel metalled area to the east, but its relationship to the possible structure or paving to the west could not be determined. It may be that the wall represents an earlier alignment of the boundary between these features; its demolition, probably in the later medieval period, may reflect a re-arrangement of the settlement. The present house lies across the line of the wall, which may have been demolished to make way for this building, or for a predecessor in the same position.

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REFERENCE

Dorset County Council, Historic Environment Record. Jarvis, S.K., 1982. 'Three cist burials at Herston, Swanage', *The Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* **104**, 192-94.

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