

Heywood Hall

Winfarthing

30650

Gisring Green

Norfolk Archaeological Unit

Gisring Hall Farm

Report No 129

Burstons Hall Farm

Pound Gr

Bridge Green

Shelfanger

A143 Scole-Stuston Bypass

Shimpling Farm

Shelfanger Hall

Burstons Farm

Shimpling Farm

Mill

Shimpling Farm

Thelton or Thelveton Parsonage

Parsonage Green

Brewers Green

Wale Gr

Green

Hall

The Hayer

Toll Gate

DISS

Scole Green

Roydon Fen

June 1995

Scole or Osimunde

Palgrave +

Stuston +

Oakley +

Road from London

**Norfolk Archaeological Unit**

Report No 129

A143 Scole-Stuston Bypass

by

Andy Shelley

June 1995

Cover: Detail from Faden's Map of Norfolk (1797)

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**Location:** Scole, Norfolk  
**Grid Reference:** TM 615065 278523 (temple)  
**Date of fieldwork:** 9 May - 3 June 1994  
**SMR number:** 30650

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### *Summary*

*A watching brief was undertaken along the Norfolk portion of the A143 Scole-Stuston bypass. Evidence for second- and third-century field boundaries, aligning with a known east-to-west Roman road, was found. A small Romano-Celtic masonry temple, of concentric square design, overlaid the field boundaries. Two parallel ditches, containing cremated animal bone, ceramic cremation urns and votive objects, were probably contemporaneous with the temple. An adjacent clay floor or yard surface may also have related to the temple. Further east two post pits may have formed part of a second- or third-century building. A kiln or furnace represented the sole industrial activity found. Remarkably little archaeology from other historical periods was present.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 As part of the road improvement scheme for Scole, Norfolk (Figure 1), a southern bypass (the A143) is being constructed by Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils. Much of the new road passes through Suffolk but 1.075km of its length, between the River Waveney and the A143 Bungay Road is within Norfolk (Figure 2).

1.2 In response to a Norfolk Landscape Archaeology Section recommendation for a watching brief of developer works to be maintained, Norfolk Archaeological Unit were contracted by Norfolk County Council.

1.3 Members of Norfolk Archaeological Unit staff conducted the watching brief between 9 May and 3 June 1994.

1.4 The aim of this interim report is to summarise the principal archaeological discoveries made during the watching brief, put them briefly into the context of what is known about the Roman town of Scole, and indicate where the full report will be published.

## **2.0 Geology**

2.1 The bypass leaves the route of the present A143 650m west of Billingford. At this point the underlying geology is of chalk, sands and gravels. The bypass then descends onto the flood plain of the River Waveney. At the eastern end of the plain an old channel of the river contains as much as 3.5m depth of peat. Most of the plain, however, lies slightly above the water table and consists of sands. To the west of the observed construction site peat again overlies the natural sands, its depth increasing towards the River Waveney.

than being left simply to decay.

6.10 By comparison with other temples in Norfolk<sup>4</sup> this structure was small in area. The *cella* was approximately 3.25m<sup>2</sup>, and the *ambulatory* 7.5m<sup>2</sup> in internal area. Unlike other local examples the *cella* was of timber construction, rather than of masonry. In the latter case two concentric square masonry footings are normal (rather than the single square footing found at Scole).

6.11 Two ditches ran parallel to, and north and south of, the temple. The alignment pattern of the earlier drainage ditches was maintained. No physical link was observed between the ditches and temple; however the presence of large quantities of cremated animal bone and cremation urns, together with several votive objects (one of which is illustrated in Figure 5) in the ditches strongly suggest they were associated with the temple.

6.12 Both ditches extended to the east of the temple building. No termination of either was found, but in the case of the northern ditch it may have ran into an area of wet or boggy ground found some 28m east of the building. Between the ditches a clay floor or yard surface was found. This may have been delineated on its east and west sides by parallel lines of posts. The surface sealed an earlier drainage ditch which was also cut by one of the temple ditches. The excavated evidence is scanty but one could suggest that a large (perhaps 9m by 12m) building or enclosure lay to the east of, and was contemporary with, the temple.

6.13 There is some evidence that the area returned to agricultural use, in the form of a re-cut of the southern temple ditch, after the temple was abandoned. The re-cut silted up naturally.

6.14 Other archaeological features cannot, at this stage, be assigned to the phases described above. Various post-holes, gullies, pits and a possible palisade trench were found in Area AB. Detailed finds analysis may refine interpretation of their age and purpose.

6.15 The sole evidence for industry was a furnace excavated in Area C. A semi-fired clay mould lay beneath fire debris, both being contained in a small, circular feature. The mould will be analysed by a specialist.

6.16 Excavation in Area D was limited to the width of the bypass gullies. However, the remains of a possible Romano-British building, in the form of two post pits, were found. Posts had been placed in the rectangular post pits which were then packed with chalk. The pits had been cut through a layer of material which was probably derived through occupation of the area. The layer sealed an earlier post-hole. The material that had filled the space left by the later posts as they rotted out was sealed by a 300mm depth of colluvium, presumably washed from the surrounding slopes.

6.17 The post pits lay on a slightly different alignment to the features in areas A, B and C. The alignment can however be seen as that which the Roman road (see paragraph 6.3) would perhaps have taken past the pits (Figure 2).

## 7.0 Post-Roman activity

7.1 No evidence for Anglo-Saxon activity on the site has yet been identified.

7.2 A small amount of medieval, post-medieval and modern pottery was recovered, all from subsoil or top-soil deposits.

## 8.0 The Finds

8.1 A metal detector was used during the watching brief. This enabled recovery of many metal finds which would otherwise have been overlooked. A total of 44 small finds was recovered, including 19 coins, a votive miniature axe and 3 brooch fragments. They are presently undergoing conservation.

8.2 15.66kgs of pottery were recovered. Items of intrinsic interest include a miniature votive cauldron (Figure 5). Animal bone totalling 4.45kgs in weight was found and is presently being analysed. Additionally several soil samples contained cremated animal bone. This will shortly be undergoing analysis. Two lengths of waterlogged timber post were retrieved and are presently being identified. 51.16kgs of roof tile were kept and 14 pieces of fired clay and 11 flints were recovered.

## 9.0 Comparative studies

9.1 The results of the watching brief are of importance intrinsically and at local and national levels.

9.2 The newly discovered temple at Scole is the fifth Romano-Celtic masonry temple of concentric-square plan to have been excavated in Norfolk. It is also the smallest. However many temples in southern Britain and the Continent have now been excavated, and the final report of this excavation will seek to categorise the Scole temple by comparative study.

9.3 The archaeology discovered during the watching brief lies directly to the east of the known Roman small town of Scole. Over the years there have been many archaeological finds, watching briefs and excavations in the immediate area, and an impressive picture of the early town has been built up.

9.4 The results of this watching brief complement the results of other excavations within Scole that were occasioned by the A140/A143 road improvement. When viewed together they reveal distinct zoning of activities and settlement. For example, Roman settlement to the south and west of the modern town was later in date, and more industrial in character, than that to the east. The 'ribbon' nature of recent excavation has also demonstrated the sheer extent of Roman activity. A distance of 0.8km separates the Roman post pits in Area D from the inhumation and cremation cemetery uncovered during the 1993 excavations<sup>5</sup>.

9.5 Several archaeological features have been recorded to the north and south of the A143 road line in Norfolk. Of these the east-to-west Roman road (para 6.3 and the 1993 A140 excavations<sup>6</sup>) is of most interest. It appears to have dictated field alignments to the south of it, and later the alignment of the temple which superceded them. The line of the road east of these observations may now be projected with more certainty. The alignment of the Area D building can be used in conjunction with the Area D sections and field contour study to suggest that the Roman road lies slightly to the north of the bypass, joining it at its eastern-most point.

## 10.0 Publication

10.1 It is envisaged that the full results of this watching brief be published in a forthcoming volume of '*East Anglian Archaeology*'. This aims to report on all excavation, in both Norfolk and Suffolk, occasioned by the A140/A143 road improvements.

10.2 Additionally a report on the temple and votive cauldron may appear as a note in '*Britannia*' (the national archaeological journal for the Roman period).

10.3 The site archive will be deposited with Norfolk Museums Service.

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Niall Donald for his expert excavation and interpretation of the site. Thanks also to Andy Letch, Neil Moss, Kevin Sparks and Tony & Alan Smith for their help during the excavation. I am grateful to the following people who have helped with the project so far; Alice Lyons (pottery), Irena Lentowicz and Lucy Talbot (finds), Piers Wallace and Steven Ashley (illustration), Dave Wicks (photograph processing), Trevor Ashwin (bone), Brian Ayers (N.A.U.), David Gurney (L.A.S.) and Gordon Turner-Walker (conservation).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Norfolk SMR No. 7954. Observation of a cambered Roman road during the construction of sewerage filter tanks in 1951.

<sup>2</sup>D R Wilson, 'Romano-Celtic temple architecture: how much do we actually know?', 5-30 in W Rodwell (ed.), *Temples, Churches and Religion: Recent Research in Roman Britain*, (BAR 77(i), 1980).

<sup>3</sup>*Tegulae* - the flat tiles with a raised flange used in the roofing system.  
*Imbrex* - the tiles, semi-circular in section, used to cover the join between *tegulae*.

<sup>4</sup>D Gurney, 'A Romano-Celtic Temple Site at Caistor St. Edmund', 37-54 in Gregory and Gurney, *Excavations at Thornham, Warham, Wighton and Caistor St. Edmund, Norfolk*, EAA 30, 1986.

<sup>5</sup>M Flitcroft and A Tester, '*Site Narrative, A140 Scole Dickleburgh Road Improvement Project*', Norfolk Archaeological Unit, 1994

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

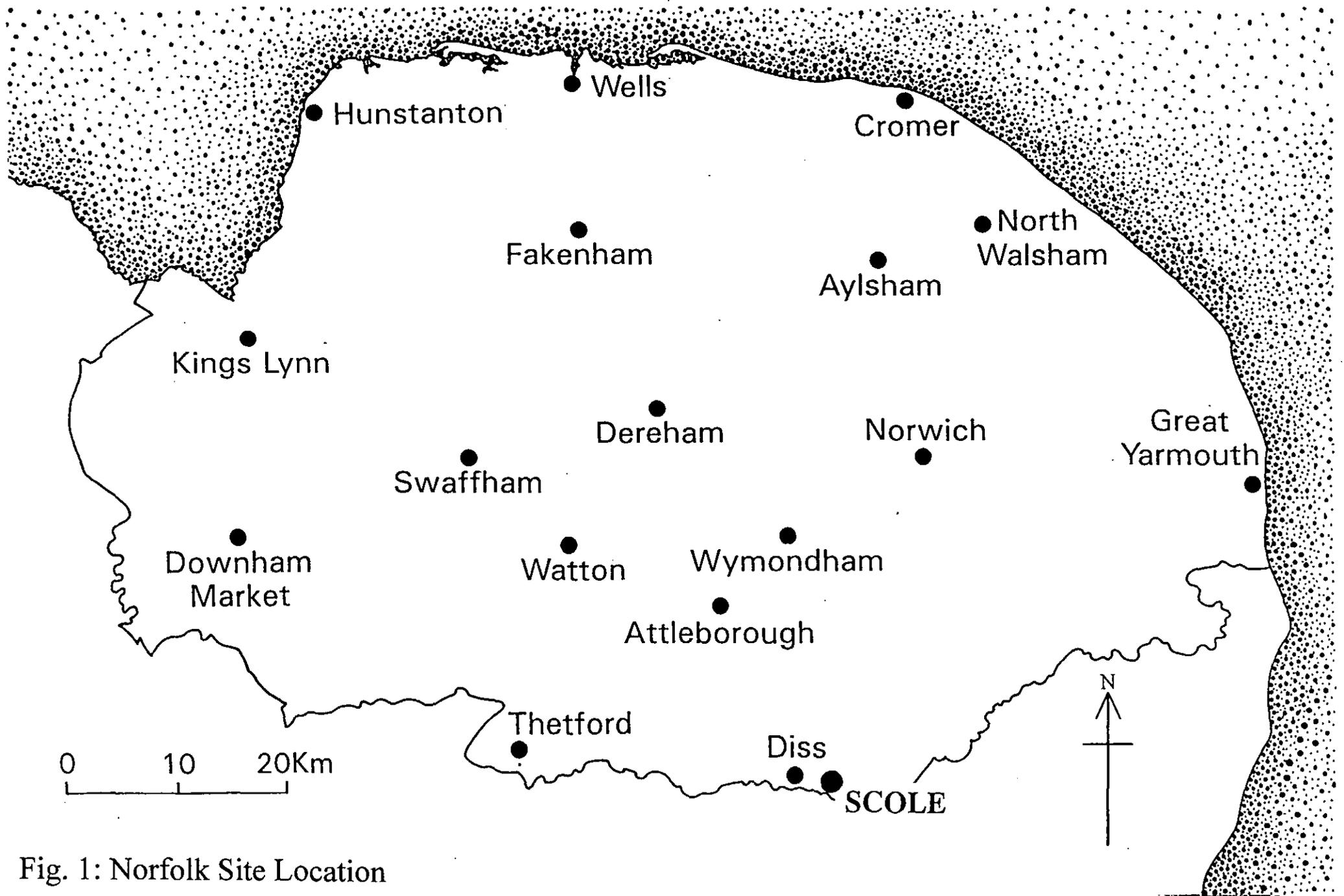


Fig. 1: Norfolk Site Location

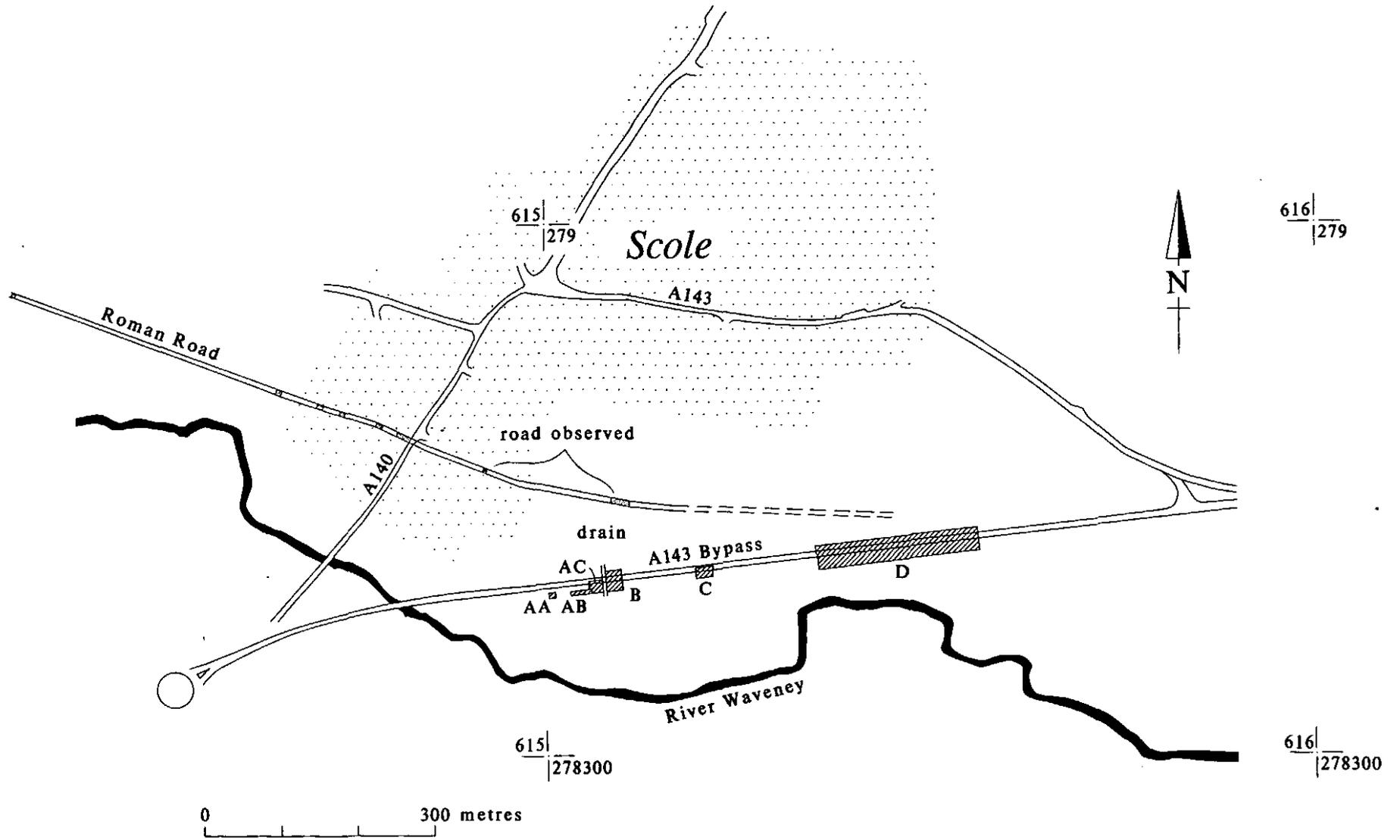


Fig. 2: The bypass, Roman road, excavation areas and River Waveney.

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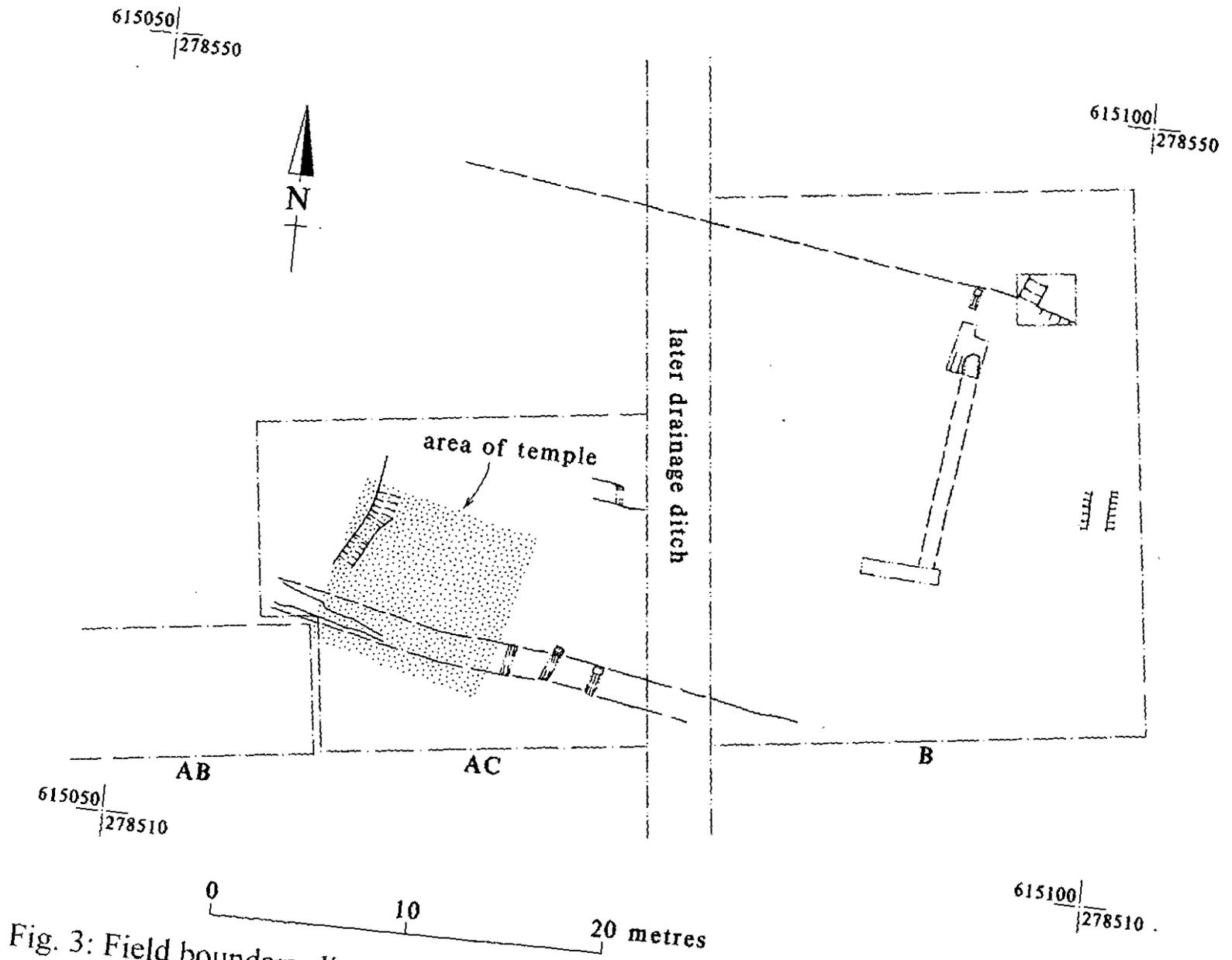


Fig. 3: Field boundary ditches and gullies in areas AC and B.

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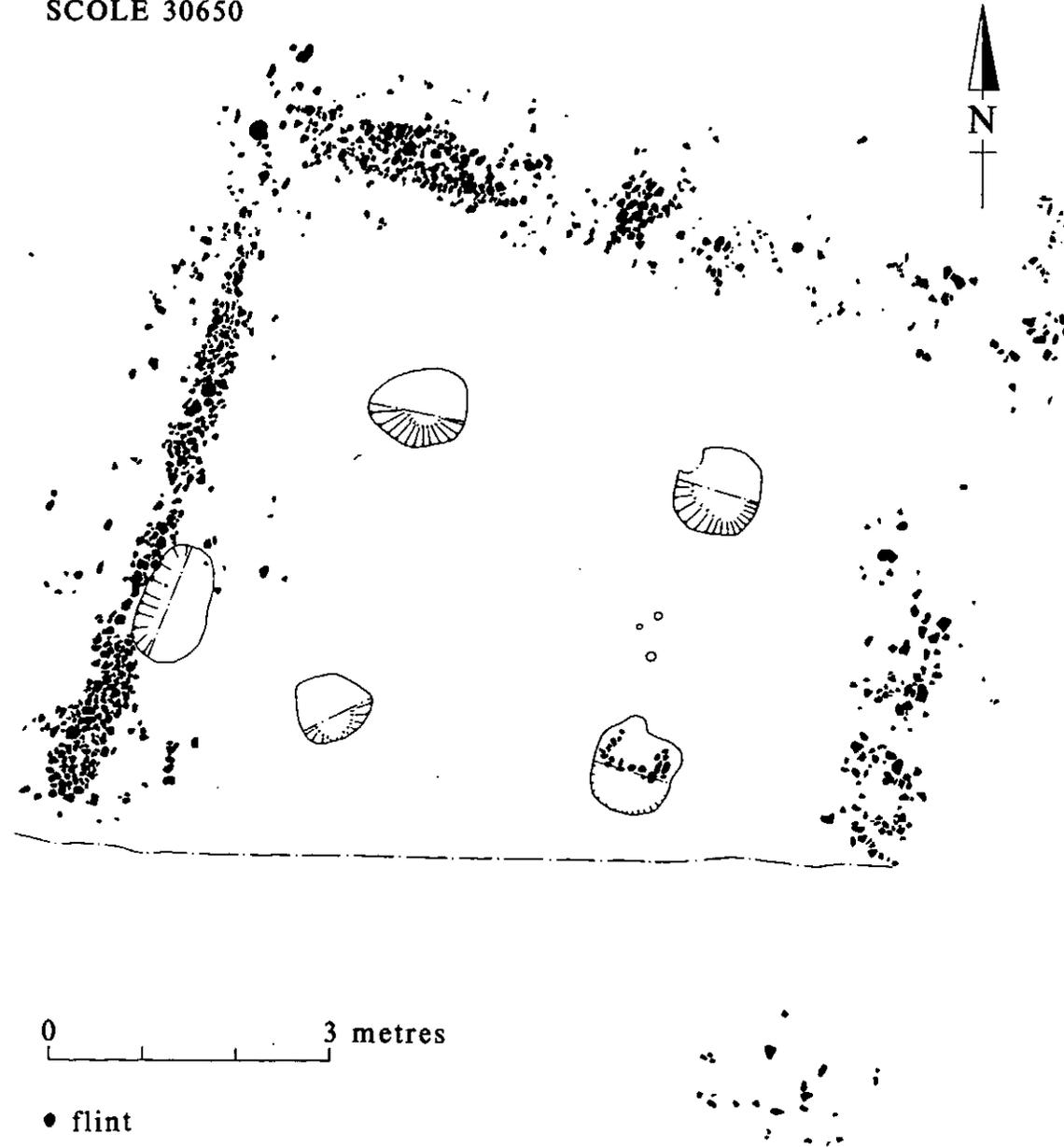


Fig. 4: The temple, showing its concentric square plan

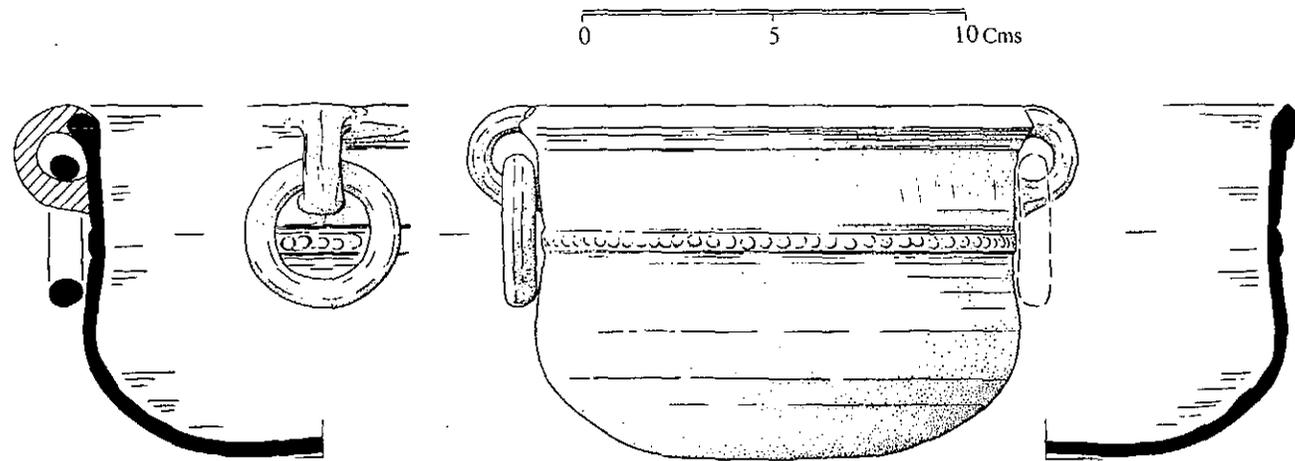


Fig. 5: Miniature votive cauldron, from a deposit within one of the ditches contemporary with the temple.