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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Acton Scott is a small village situated about 23km south of Shrewsbury in Shropshire. There is currently a proposal for the construction of an access track to Laundry Cottage, situated 230m to the northeast of Acton Scott Hall. The track would run for a length of 180m from an existing minor road across a pasture field to the cottage (ie between NGRs SO 4581 8988 and SO 4570 8973).
- 1.2 The field across which the proposed track would run forms part of the area of the scheduled monument (see Figs. 1 & 2) designated as ROMAN VILLA NORTH OF ACTON SCOTT HALL, SHROPSHIRE MON. NO. 314 (County SMR no. SA168). The track also cuts through a rectangular cropmark enclosure (SMR no. SA4419) which lies within the scheduled area and which is likely to either pre-date or form part of the villa complex.
- 1.3 In view of the potential archaeological implications of the proposed development scheme it was deemed necessary to undertake a prior archaeological field evaluation of it, which itself was subject to Scheduled Monument Consent.
- 1.4 The Archaeology Service of Shropshire County Council was commissioned to carry out the evaluation, which was undertaken in January 1997.

2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Aims and Objectives of the Evaluation

The aim of this evaluation is to determine the likely impact of the proposed works on the scheduled monument and to provide information that will enable a decision to be made regarding the archaeological provision for the areas affected by the proposed works. The objectives of this evaluation exercise were to locate any archaeological features, deposits, and structures likely to be affected by the proposed works, and to assess their survival, quality, condition and significance.

2.2 Methodology of the Evaluation

In order to achieve these objectives, the evaluation was required to comprise a programme of trial excavation, supported where appropriate by documentary research. A full methods statement was included in a written scheme of investigation for the evaluation

The trial excavations were to take the form of three trenches, each 3m long by 1.5m wide. It was required that all excavation should be limited to the top of significant archaeological deposits, with further excavation undertaken only where essential for achieving the objectives of the evaluation.

Documentary research was to be undertaken as appropriate to assist with the objectives of the evaluation exercise and to elucidate any features recorded during the on-site investigations.

3 THE EVALUATION

3.1 The Documentary Research

3.1.1 Late Prehistoric and Romano-British Occupation

Iron Age and/or Romano-British occupation of the study area is indicated by a cropmark enclosure (SMR no: SA4419) in the northern part of the field. The enclosure is about 0.7ha in extent and is categorised by Whimster as a regular quadrilateral single-ditched enclosure (Whimster, 1989). The cropmark enclosure is shown on an oblique AP in the SMR files (SMR SO4589), and there is also a Whimster plot at 1:2500 scale of the cropmark (SMR file SA4419). The cropmark probably marks the site of a ditch around a farmstead of Iron Age and/or Roman date. Gaps in the eastern and western sides of the cropmark coincide with the line of a road which formerly ran across the study area.

The proposed new track will cut across the northwestern corner of this enclosure (Fig. 2).

In 1817, a Roman villa was discovered during the realignment of a road. The villa was located immediately to the south of a bend in the former road line, approximately in the centre of the modern field (Fig. 3). The villa was re-excavated in 1844 by Mrs Frances Stackhouse Acton. The excavated villa buildings formed a rectangular block 31m long by 12.5m wide. (Stackhouse Acton, 1846.) It is not known how much of the villa survives.

The plotting of all these features onto a modern 1:2500 OS plan gives the approximate location of villa in relation to the cropmark enclosure and modern features (reproduced at 1:1000 scale as Fig. 2). The villa appears to be on a slightly different alignment to the southeastern side of the cropmark enclosure, and possibly partially overlies the enclosure ditch. However, the location plan in the mid 19th-century published account of the excavations is not to an accurate or consistent scale, and so the precise orientation and location of the villa is uncertain. It is possible that the cropmark enclosure is directly associated with the villa building.

The site of the known villa buildings is not affected by the proposed development.

3.1.2 The medieval manor

Acton Scott is first mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086; at that time it lay in Leintwardine Hundred, later it fell within Munslow Hundred. Before the conquest, Acton Scott had been held by Edric, probably Edric the Wild, and was valued at 10 shillings. At the time of the survey, the manor had land for 4 ploughs, with a hedged enclosure, and was valued at 15 shillings. Edric the Wild probably forfeited the manor in c.1070 following his rebellion, and by 1086 the manor was held by Aldred, brother of the rich thegn Siward and a second cousin of Edric; Aldred in turn held the manor from Roger of Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury. Later in the 12th century the FitzAlans

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became the overlords of Acton Scott, and remained so until 1574. (Stamper, forthcoming; Thorn, 1986, 4,27,33 and notes).

3.1.3 The study area in the post-medieval to modern periods

In 1553, a property which consisted of at least one share of the medieval manor was sold to Richard Acton. In 1773, Susanne Acton, the heiress to the estate, married John Stackhouse, the botanist; his daughter-in-law, Frances Stackhouse Acton, was responsible for the identification and excavation of the Roman villa in the mid 19th century. The estate is still held by the Acton family. (Stamper, forthcoming)

Estate plans of 1776 (SRRC 3925/115.2), 1820 (SRRC 3925/115.1) and 1828 (SRRC 2567/115) show the line of a former road which crossed the middle of the study area from east to west, and its re-aligned course after 1817. The 1884 OS 1st edition shows a scar on the line of the old road (Fig. 3). In the mid 19th century the study area was known as *Further Lawn* (Foxall, 1976), indicating it may have been former parkland or pasture at that time (Foxall, 1980). Some of the field boundaries within the vicinity of the study area were altered and regularised at some time between 1776 and 1820, presumably shortly after the realignment of the road. Some traces of former field boundaries can be seen on the AP of the site (SMR SO4589). A further late 19th century field boundary which ran from east to west across the centre of the study area immediately to the south of the former roadline, has been removed since 1974 (OS 1:2500, sheet no SO4589, 1975 revision).

3.2 The Field Evaluation

3.2.1 The Site The study area comprised a field, currently given over to pasture, of about 2.4ha in extent. The northern half of the field is bounded by a road, and lies on the 200m contour; the southern half drops away to a stream and a series of ponds. A low bank in the middle of the western side of the field marks the line of the former road, removed in 1817, which ran from east to west across the study area.

3.2.2 The Excavations

Three trenches, each 3m long by 1.5m wide were excavated along the western edge of the field on the course of the proposed new access track (Fig. 2; A - C). The trenches were excavated wholly by hand, and were then cleaned, sampled, and recorded.

3.2.3 Trench A: This trench was located at the northern end of the study area (see Fig. 2). The top of the natural buff boulder clay subsoil (Figs. 4a & 5a; 8) was seen at a depth of 0.42m below the existing ground surface. The northern edge of a linear feature (7), was seen cut into the boulder clay on the predicted location and alignment of the northern arm of the ditch of the cropmark enclosure SA4419. Fills of this feature were sampled to a depth of 0.5m. The lowest fill seen consisted of a greyish brown sandy clay silt (17); this deposit was not excavated. The lowest sampled fill was a greyish brown sandy silt (Fig. 5a; 16) up to 0.2m depth, which produced a single sherd of Romano-British coarseware pottery and an iron nail. Above this deposit, the upper fill of the ditch consisted of a dark brown silty sandy loam (6 & 15) 0.3m depth. This deposit produced a quantity of Romano-British coarseware, a few sherds of Black Burnished ware, and a single sherd of an imitation Samian red colour-coated ware; also some brick/tile fragments, and a number of stone slate fragments (possibly pieces of roofing slates) of buff and grey micaceous sandstone. All the pottery came from the lower 15cms of this deposit (15); a flint implement, possibly a chisel, was recovered from the upper 15cms (6). 10 litre soil samples were taken from contexts 15 and 16.

The ditch fills were sealed by an impoverished ploughsoil 0.2m thick (4), which produced further fragments of abraded Romano-British coarseware, a small sherd of mortaria, and brick/tile fragments. This layer lay beneath a depth of c. 0.25m depth of turf and topsoil (1), which produced small abraded sherds of Romano-British and medieval pottery, 19th-century pottery and glass, brick fragments, and a flint waste flake.

3.2.4 Trench B: This trench was located immediately to the north of the line of the former road which ran from east to west through the study area. The natural buff boulder clay (Figs. 4b, 5b & 5c; 18) was seen at a depth of about 0.55m below the existing ground surface. The boulder clay lay beneath a layer 0.12m thick of a brown silty sand (9), possibly a buried topsoil, which when sampled produced no finds. The eastern edge of a shallow ditch (10) was seen to cut into this layer on a north/south alignment. This feature was filled with brown sandy clay loam (11) with gravel and pebbles and flecked with decayed buff stone; no finds were recovered from this fill. Although this feature was on the same alignment and

predicted location as the western arm of the cropmark enclosure ditch, the lack of finds from its fill and its shallow form make identification as the enclosure ditch uncertain. 10 litre soil samples were taken from contexts 9 and 11.

The ditch was sealed by a stony impoverished ploughsoil (5) 0.2m deep, which produced a few small and very abraded sherds of Romano-British and medieval pottery and brick/tile fragments. This in turn lay beneath 0.25m of turf and topsoil (3).

3.2.5 Trench C: This trench was located on the slope down to the stream which formed the southern boundary of the study area. In this trench, a turf and topsoil of 0.2m depth directly overlay the buff-coloured natural boulder clay. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered in this trench.

3.3 Discussion

- 3.3.1** Possible prehistoric activity on the site in the neolithic or Bronze Age periods was indicated by the flint flake and implement recovered from trench A.
- 3.3.2** The cut encountered in trench A almost certainly represents the northern arm of the ditch around the cropmark enclosure SA4419. The fills of this feature were sampled to a depth of 0.5m. The full width of the ditch was not exposed within the trench, neither was it excavated to its full depth. The sampled upper fills, presumably representing the final silting of a dis-used feature, contained Romano-British pottery of probable 2nd-3rd century date. The top of these fills were encountered at a depth of 0.45m below the existing ground level.
- 3.3.3** Again, significant archaeological deposits were encountered at a depth of 0.45m in trench B. The feature encountered in trench B may represent the western arm of the enclosure ditch. However, although it was in the right location and alignment, the excavated feature was considerably shallower than the northern arm of the ditch, and its fill produced no real dating evidence.
- 3.3.4** The archaeological remains encountered were sealed by a significant depth (0.45m) of ploughsoil, and may have suffered some degree of truncation by agricultural activity, particularly over the last 100 years or so (a fair quantity of abraded Romano-British pottery and brick/tile was recovered from the topsoil in trenches A and B). However, the evidence from trench A would seem to suggest any such truncation would appear to have only affected the uppermost levels of the original enclosure ditch in this part of the site. The ditch survived here to a depth of over 0.5m, with no sign of its bottom, and its fills were stratified and undisturbed. The sampled fills contained further quantities of Romano-British pottery, brick and tile, and other artefacts. Flecks of charcoal within these deposits also indicated the possibility of good preservation of environmental remains; bulk soil samples were taken for possible future analysis.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1** The field evaluation has confirmed the existence of significant archaeological features and deposits along the northern section of the proposed new access track to Laundry Cottage. The archaeological remains located are associated with the known cropmark enclosure and villa site.
- 4.2** Where encountered, the archaeological deposits commence at a depth of 0.45m below the existing ground surface. Consequently, if all ground disturbance associated with the construction of the proposed access track were limited to a maximum depth of 0.40m below the existing ground surface, then there would be no impact on the archaeological remains.

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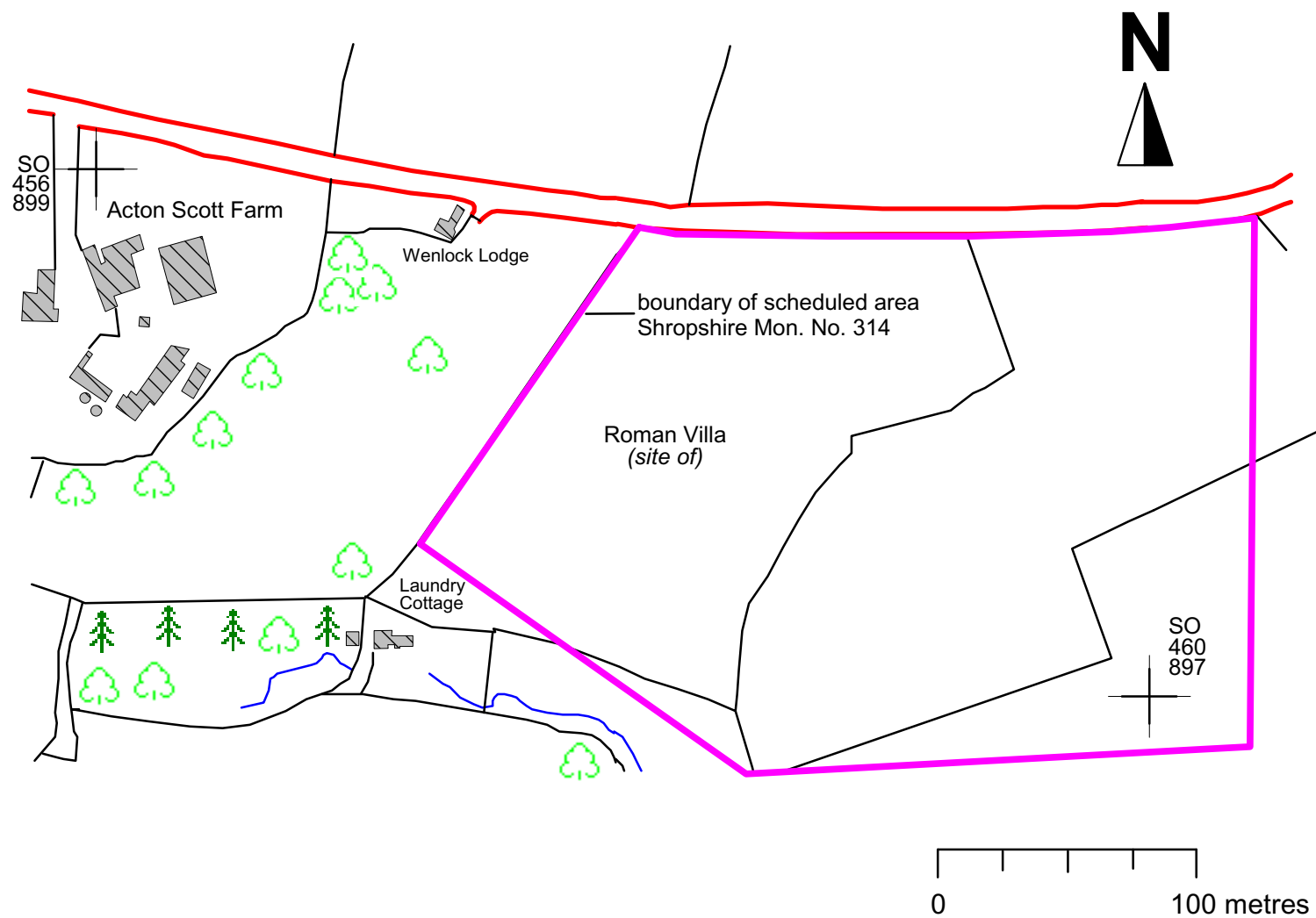
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ABBREVIATIONS

AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
AP	Aerial photograph
DoE	Department of the Environment
EH	English Heritage
NGR	National Grid Reference
OS	Ordnance Survey
RCHME	Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England
SMR	County Sites and Monuments Record, Shire Hall, Shrewsbury
SRRC	Shropshire Records and Research Centre, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
TSANHS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society
VCHS	Victoria County History of Shropshire

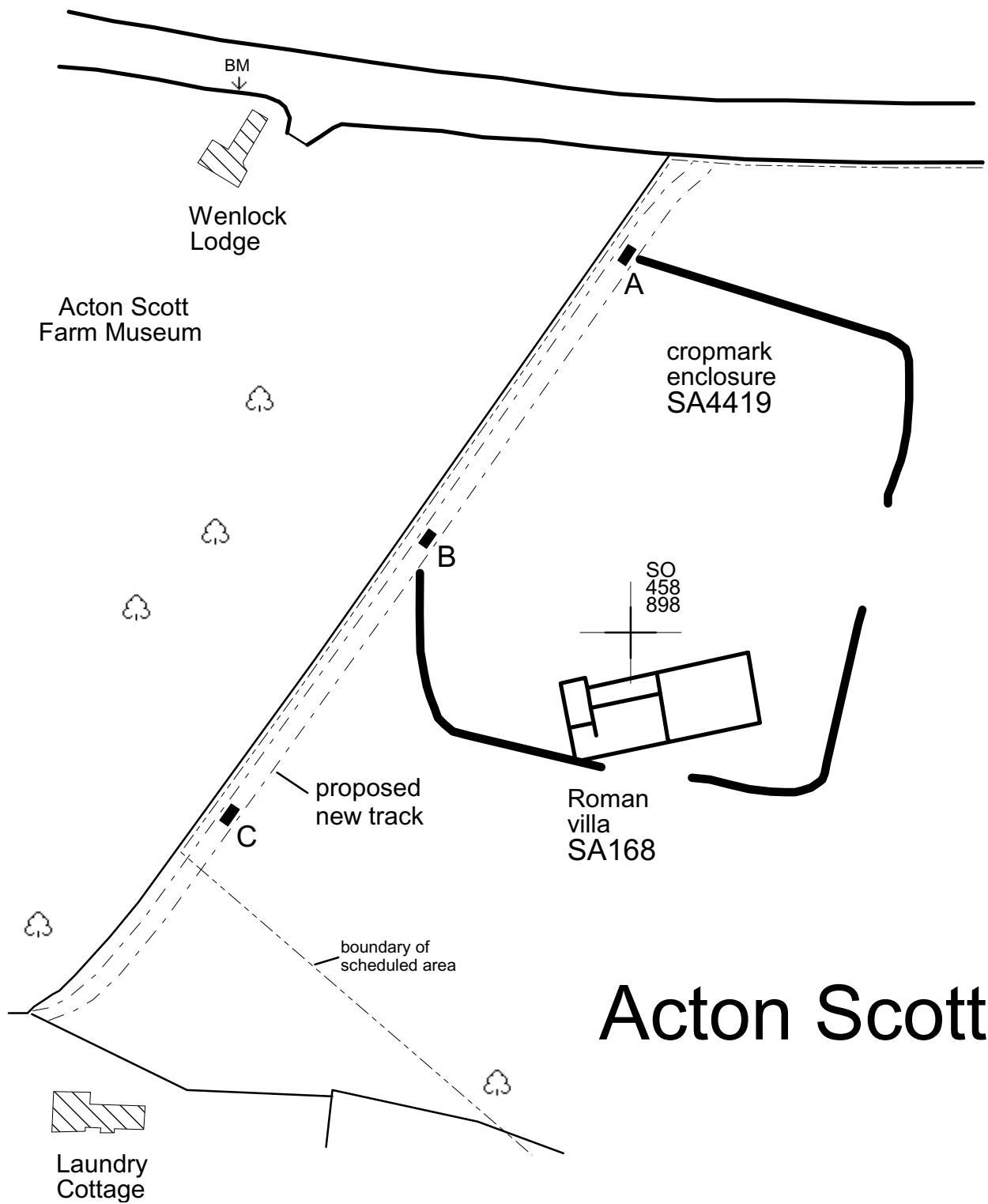
6 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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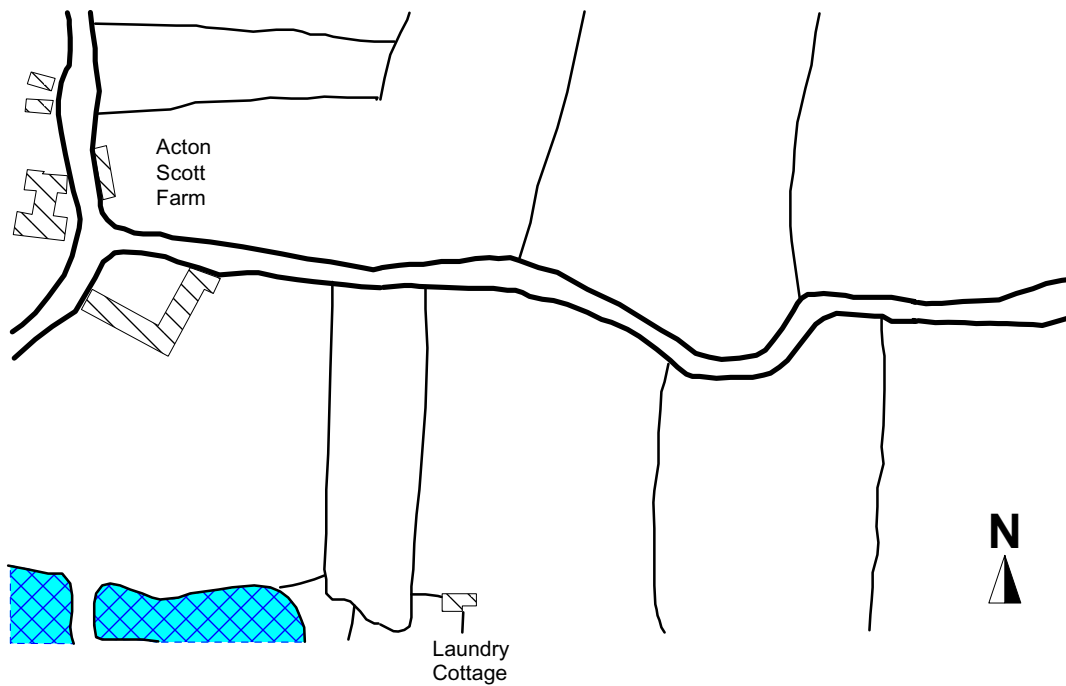
ACTON SCOTT 1997

Fig. 1: Location plan showing extent of scheduled area

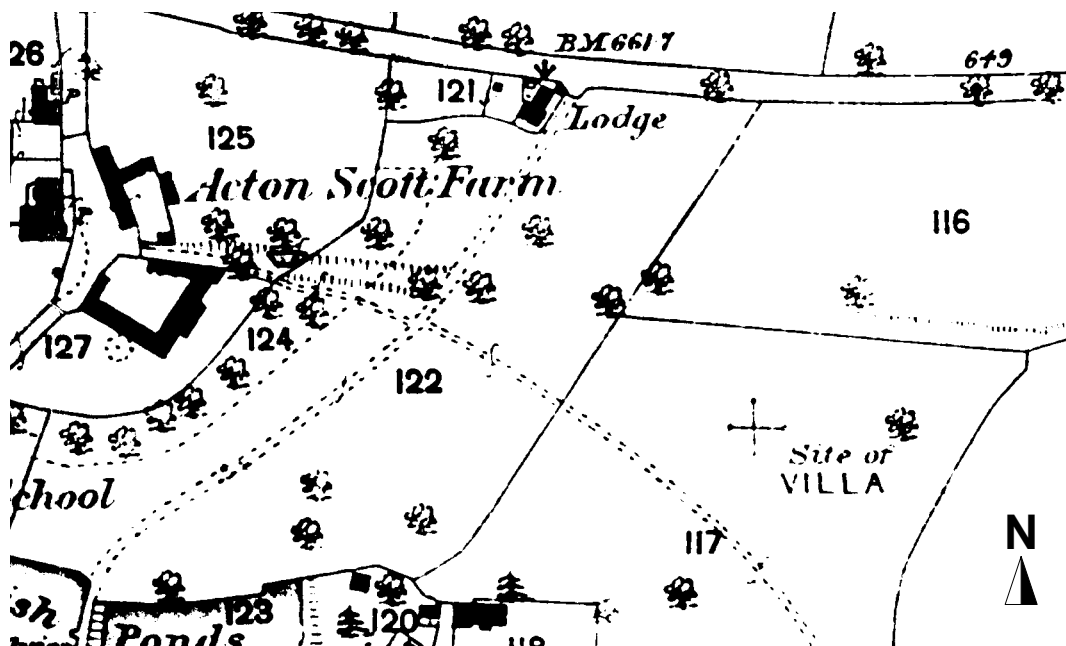


Acton Scott

Fig. 2: Site plan, showing the location of the evaluation trenches (A - C) in relation to the site of the Roman villa and the cropmark enclosure



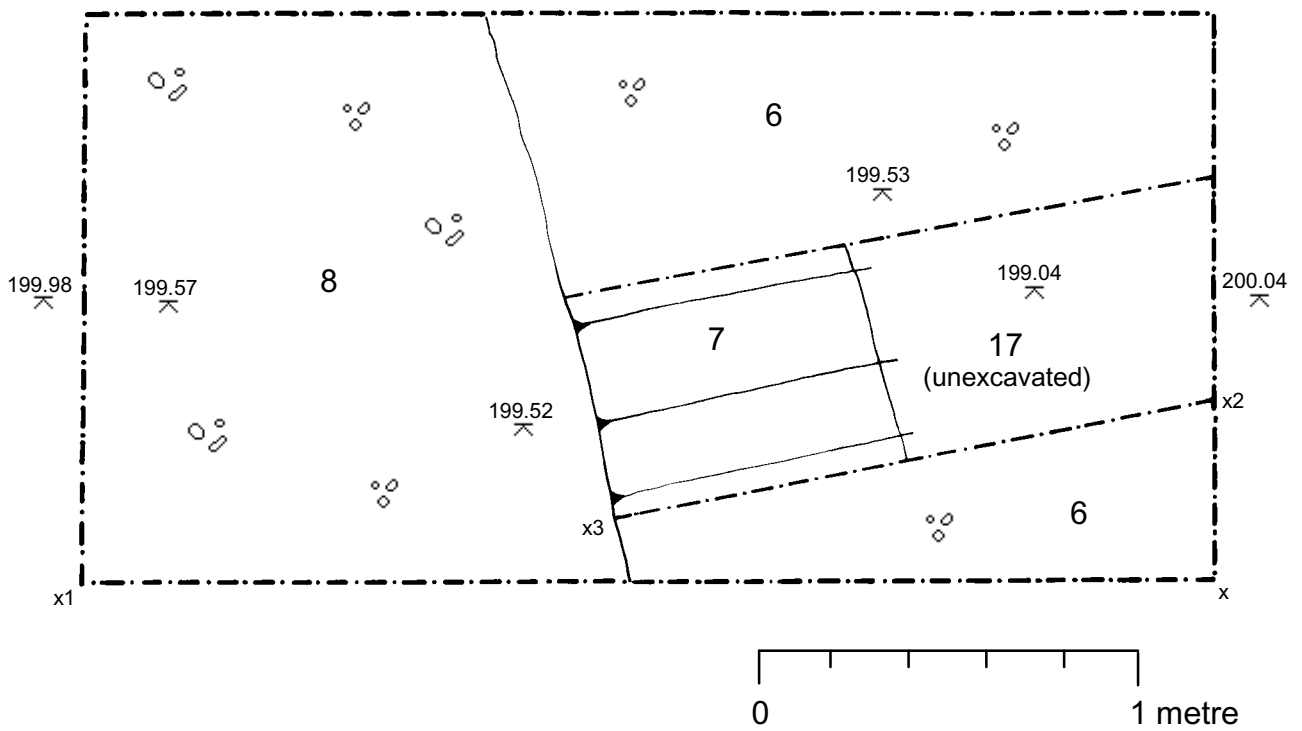
a)



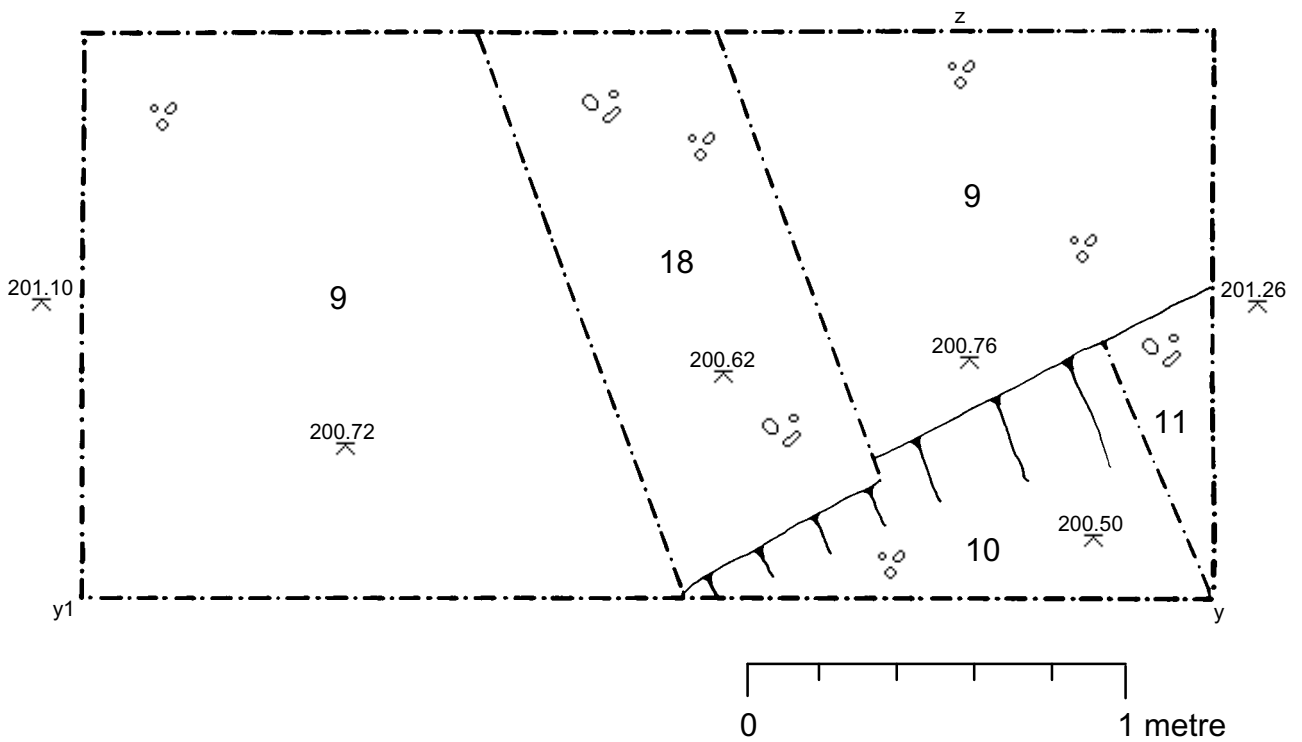
b)

ACTON SCOTT 1997

Fig. 3: The study area; a) from 1776 estate plan (SRRS 3925/115.2); b) from Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1st edition, 1884; both at 1:2500 scale



a)

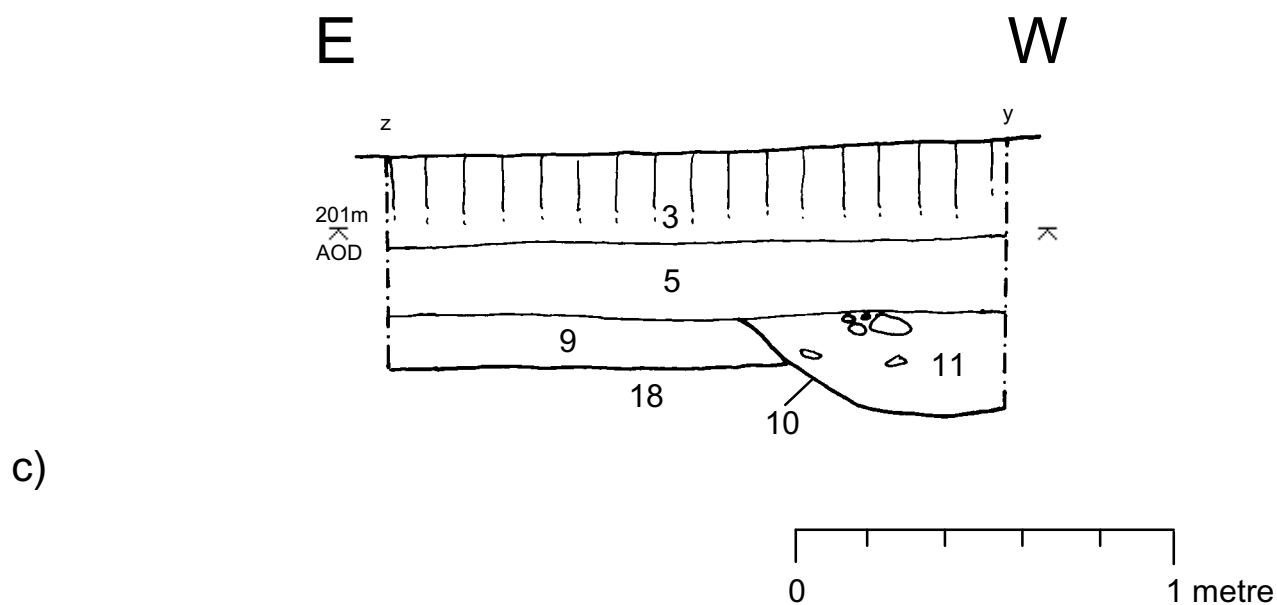
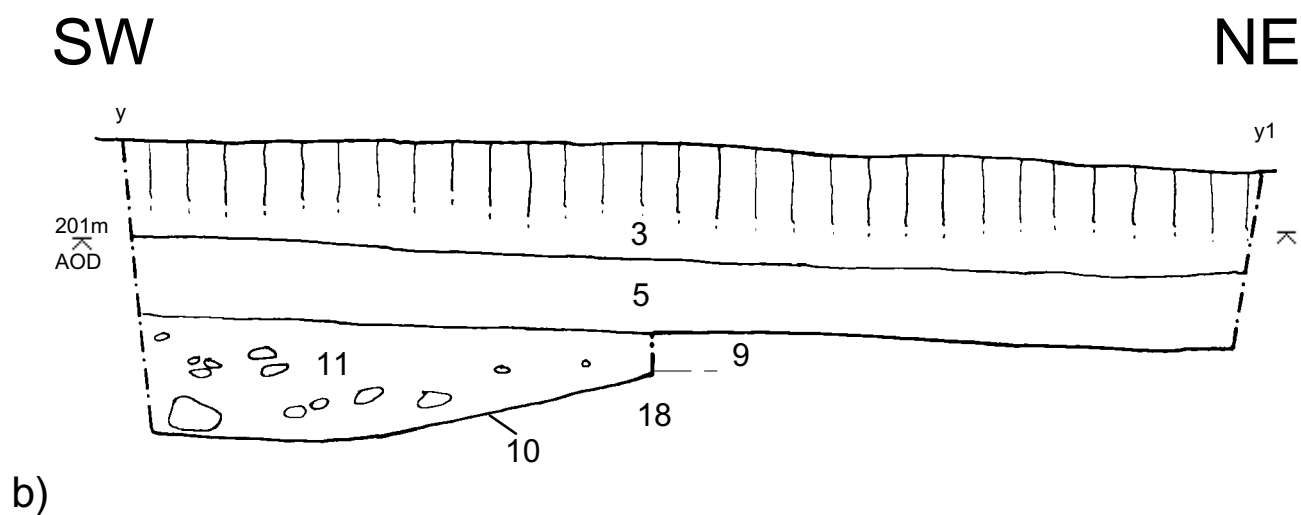
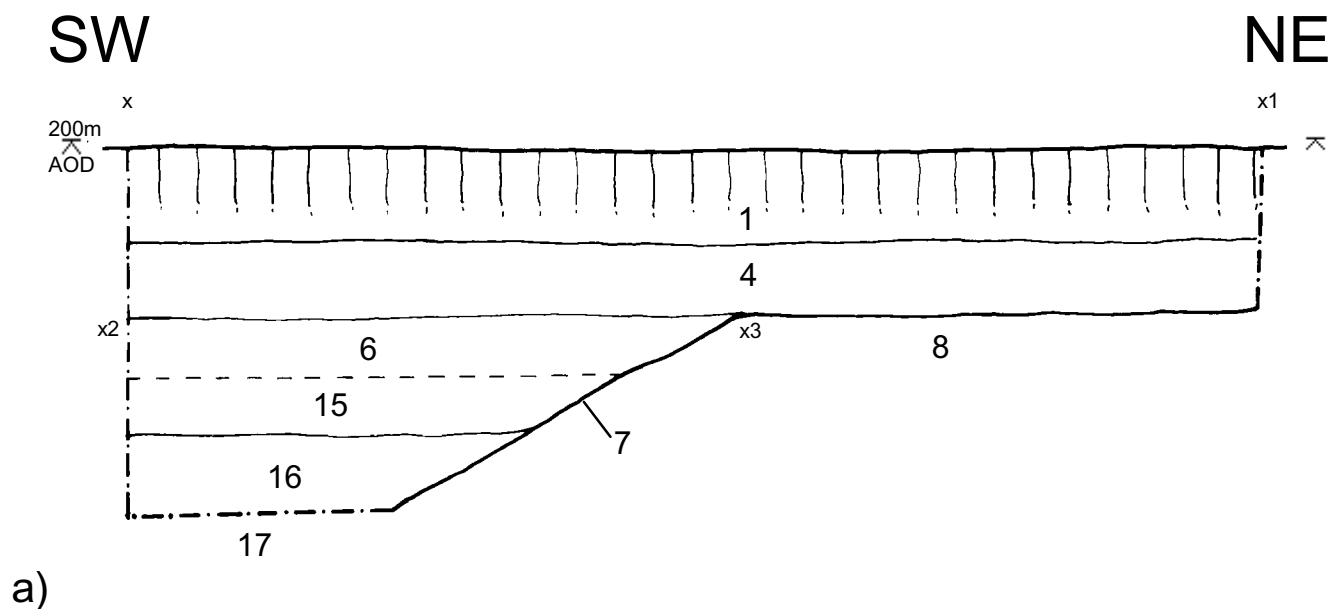


b)

(spot heights in metres above Ordnance Datum)

ACTON SCOTT 1997

Fig. 4: a) trench A, plan view; b) trench B, plan view



ACTON SCOTT 1997

Fig. 5: a) trench A, southeast-facing section; b) trench B, southeast-facing section; c) trench B, section across feature 10; (see Fig. 4 for section locations)

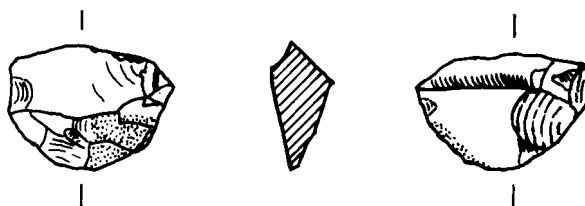


HRH 1997

SITE CODE: AS97

CONTEXT: 1001

OBJECT NO.: 0101



HRH 1997

SITE CODE: AS97

CONTEXT: 1006

OBJECT NO.: 0102

Scale 1:1

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Fig. 6: Flint objects