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LOWER DUNSFORTH FLOOD ALLEVIATION SCHEME,  
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF.

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ON BEHALF OF RKL-ARUP  
OSA REPORT: 98WB03

National Grid Reference: SE 443 648

June 1998

**ON SITE**  
**ARCHÆOLOGY**

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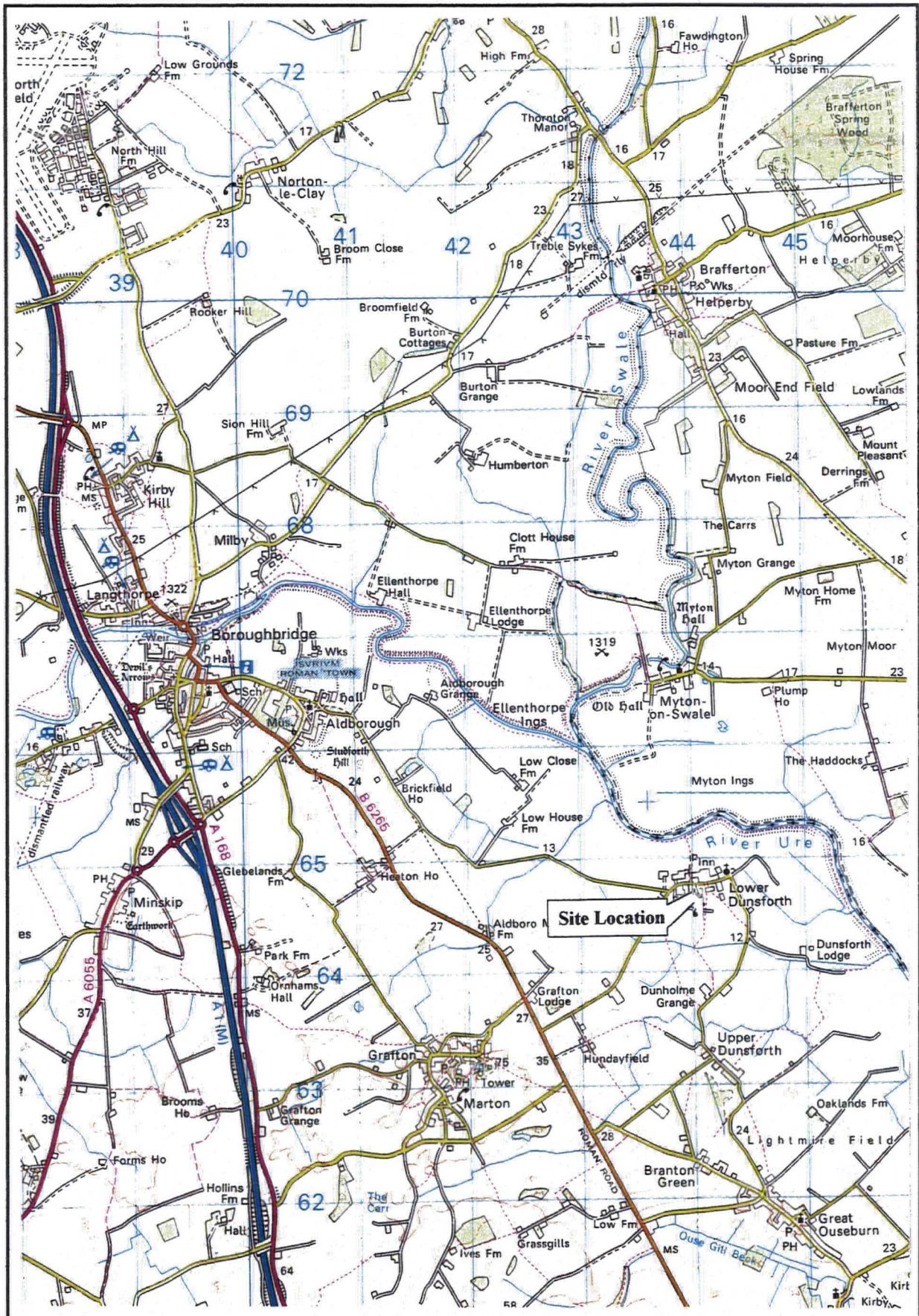


Figure 1. Site Location (NGR:SE 443 648)

Figure 1. Site location (NGR SE 443 048)  
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## 1.0 SUMMARY

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*An archaeological watching brief was carried out on behalf of RKL-ARUP along the topsoil strip associated with the construction of an embankment as part of the Lower Dunsforth flood alleviation scheme. The Engineering Contractor carrying out the work was H. J. Banks of West Cornforth, Ferryhill, County Durham. This watching brief commenced on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> February 1998 and was completed on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> May 1998. A single feature of archaeological potential was encountered.*

*This report was prepared by Nick Pearson of On-Site Archaeology.*

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## 2.0 SITE LOCATION AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

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The village of Lower Dunsforth is situated at NGR SE 44 64, approximately 6 kilometres east south-east of Boroughbridge (see Figure 1 for location). Research into the archaeological background to area surrounding Lower Dunsforth disappointingly revealed little information.

### 2.1 Roman

During the Roman period, Aldborough was the site of the Roman town of *ISURIUM*. A Roman Road, Dere Street, (now the B6265) ran from Aldborough towards York. This road passes about 2 kms south west of Lower Dunsforth. A Roman milestone, urns and human bones were discovered, associated with the road, in an area to the east of Grafton.

### 2.2 Saxon

The site of what is now St. Mary's Church was originally that of a Saxon church. No visible remains of this church still exist as it was demolished in 1860. During the demolition work a hoard of 30 Saxon coins(mostly silver pennies), were discovered along with a clay ring.

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## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

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This project comprised the construction of a low clay embankment intended to prevent the River Ure from encroaching into the village of Lower Dunsforth during times of flood. In order to construct this bund it was necessary to strip the topsoil from an area approximately 15m. in width around the perimeter of the village, which could then be used as the working corridor by the construction team. The low bank was then constructed within this corridor out

of an impervious clay brought from elsewhere. After the mound was built the intention was that the topsoil would be replaced and then turfed over.

The removal of the topsoil was the subject of this archaeological watching brief. Over much of the length of the bund a bulldozer was used to remove the topsoil. In the event it was agreed that this was not the ideal machine to use if it was the intention to observe archaeological features. It was deemed that the watching brief should take place in those areas to either side of the church marked in red on Figure 2. Within these limits a back acting 360 degree tracked excavator (a hymac) was used to remove the topsoil. Unlike a bulldozer, this machine allowed the archaeologist present the opportunity to view the exposed surface before it was tracked over, thus ensuring any features present would be visible. Elsewhere it was decided by the County Heritage Unit that it was only necessary to undertake an intermittent watching brief. In these areas, marked black on figure 2, the choice of machine was left to the engineering contractor, H. J. Banks.

The depth of overburden removed, (approximately 250 mm) meant that over much of the length of the area monitored the subsoil deposits above natural were left in situ. As a result of this, any archaeological features that were cut into the natural, (but masked from view by the presence of the plough soil), would probably not have been observed during this exercise. In fact only one feature with any archaeological potential was observed during this project, (see below).

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#### 4.0 RESULTS.

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A single area of archaeological potential was observed. (see location 1 circled on Figure 2 and plates 1 and 2).

This comprised an area approximately 60 metres in length in which the topsoil across the full width of the easement contained a considerable quantity of large and medium sized rounded cobbles. These were present lying loosely within the soil and did not comprise a well constructed in situ feature or surface. No dating evidence was found associated with this material.

The presence of such a relatively large quantity of cobbles gives rise to perhaps two possible explanations. Either the presence of ploughed out road metalling or simple field clearance.

The presence of the important Roman town of Aldborough to the north west gave rise to the possibility that this material might represent the ploughed out metalling of a road of Roman date leading to this settlement. A search of the available records has however revealed that such an alignment has not been viewed elsewhere. In fact the main Roman road to the south, (Dere Street), leading from Aldborough is located less than 2 kilometres to the west of Lower Dunsforth. It would not therefore seem at all likely that the feature recorded in this watching

brief is indeed a Roman road, unless it is a minor route leading to the south east. If this were the case then its alignment would indicate that it must reach a crossing point across the River Ure.

Given the lack of other evidence it seems perhaps more likely that this cobble spread is in fact field clearance of indeterminate date.

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## 5.0 CONCLUSIONS

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The groundworks had no impact on any features of archaeological importance. It is likely that any features in this area were covered with river silts shortly after the associated activity had ceased. Given this, it is quite feasible that any archaeological features present within this area remain undisturbed beneath subsequent river deposits.

Figure 2:

- Location of flood alleviation scheme
- Extent of watching brief
- ① Archaeological Location

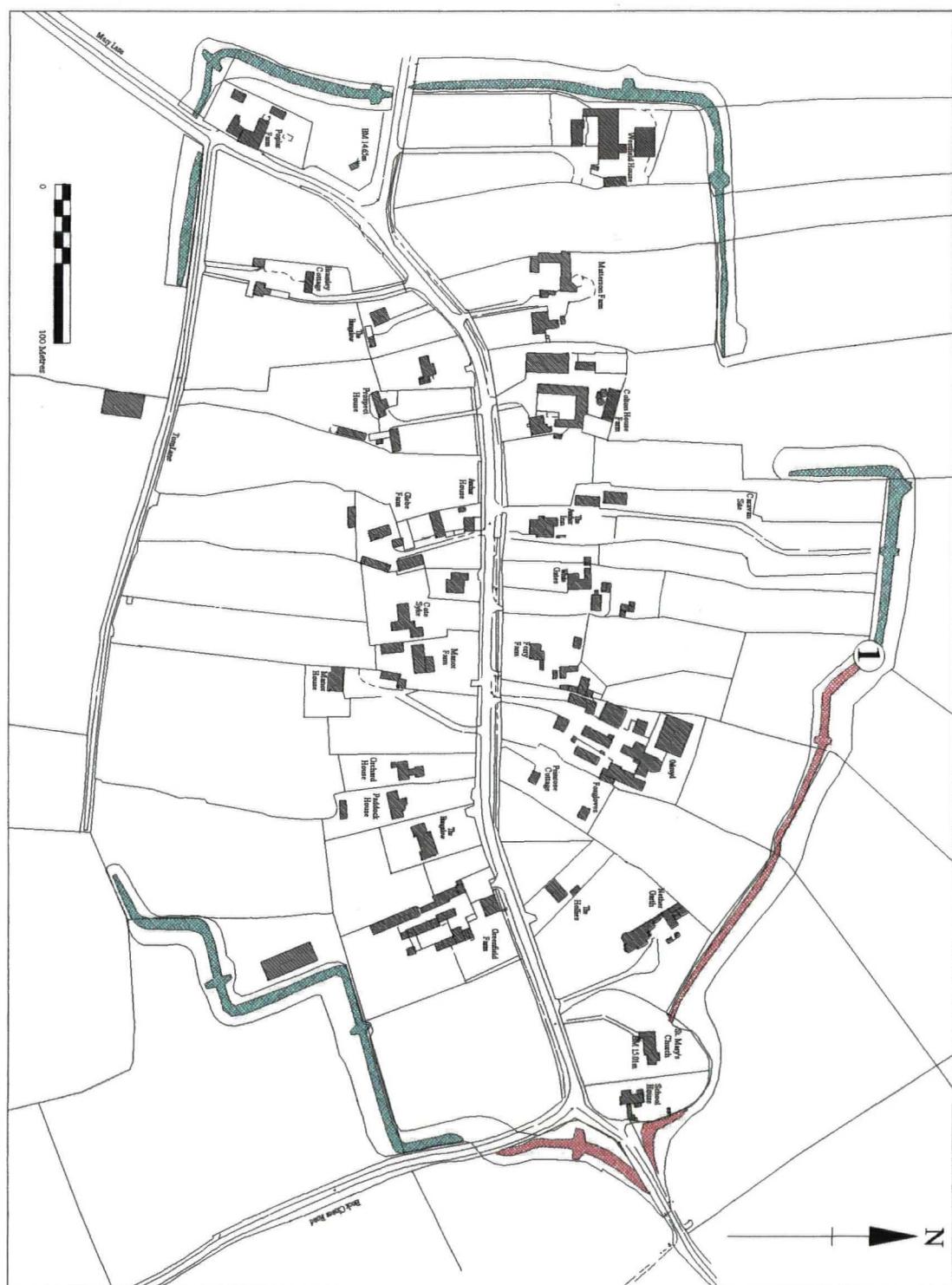


Figure 2. Location of areas monitored during watching brief.



Plate 1. Cobble feature, looking east (scale of 1 metre).



Plate 2. Cobble feature, looking west (scale of 1 metre).