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# Northern Archaeological Associates

A1 MOTORWAY: WALSHFORD TO DISHFORTH  
POST-EXCAVATION ASSESSMENT  
OF  
EXCAVATIONS IN FIELD 79 (NORTON GRANGE)  
FOR  
BULLEN AND PARTNERS

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## A1 MOTORWAY: WALSHFORD TO DISHFORTH NORTON GRANGE ASSESSMENT REPORT

### SUMMARY

A rural occupation site of later prehistoric and early Roman date was recorded on the north bank of the River Ure, immediately opposite the newly-discovered Roman military complex at Roecliffe. The location and shape of the excavation trench was dictated by the construction of bridge surcharges at either end of the field and also by a drain running alongside the western carriageway of the proposed motorway. The nature of the archaeological features differed in each of these three areas; in the north surcharge occupation evidence of later prehistoric and early Roman date was present, whilst to the south an elaborate system of ditches was likely to date from the early prehistoric period. Several isolated small pits and postholes were situated in the connecting corridor and a small hoard of 1st century Roman coins was recovered from one of the pits.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report presents a post-excavation assessment of the archaeological excavations of a later prehistoric and Roman site (F79, Norton Grange) on the north bank of the River Ure, near Boroughbridge North Yorkshire (Fig. 1). The excavation was undertaken by Northern Archaeological Associates for Bullen and Partners (Consulting Engineers to The Department of Transport), during April and May 1993 as part of a wider programme of work associated with the upgrading of the existing two lane dual-carriageway A1 to a dual three lane motorway between Walshford and Dishforth.

The post-excavation assessment is a pivotal point in the execution of an archaeological project. The principal reasons for the assessment are to ensure that *academic and archaeological objectives are carefully defined before any work takes place... so that...appropriate selection is made and a publication produced which accurately reflects the value of the data collection* (Paragraph 6.1 Management of Archaeological Projects, English Heritage 1991). A more detailed description and discussion on the nature and purpose of the assessment is presented in *Phase 3: assessment of potential for analysis* (ibid: pages 15-19).

### 2.0 SITE LOCATION

The site was centred at SE 3857 6714 on the western side of the A1 (Fig. 1) and was catalogued as Field 79 in the desktop assessment. The boundaries of the field were defined by Skelton Road to the north and the River Ure to the south.

### 3.0 BACKGROUND

An initial archaeological desktop assessment and field survey of the route was conducted by M. Griffiths & Associates and additional intensive field survey was undertaken by Northern Archaeological Associates. Field 79 was under pasture at the time of the desktop assessment and subsequent fieldwalking survey but a geophysical survey of the area was undertaken following the discovery of a major archaeological site immediately south of the River Ure. As a result of this, a trial trench was excavated in order to evaluate the anomalies recorded by the survey. The

subsequent mitigation strategy was therefore directly linked to the result of the geophysical survey and the excavation of a strategically placed evaluation trench.

The shape and size of the northern and southern surcharges were designed to accommodate the works associated with the widening of the bridges at either end of the field. The width of the connecting corridor equated with the dimensions of the proposed lateral drain on the western edge of the motorway carriageway. Topsoil was removed from an area of approximately 4850 square metres (Fig. 2) and excavation was undertaken over a period of 4 weeks within April and May 1993.

In the northern surcharge and corridor numerous slots and pits were visible which proved upon excavation to be of Roman date. In the northern surcharge these features cut into an homogenous sandy deposit which represented a transitional period of ploughing between earlier and later occupation of the site. This deposit was removed to reveal occupation features of later prehistoric or early Roman date. The ditches within the southern surcharge were partially sealed by a clay layer which became progressively thicker towards the southern edge of the site. The deposits visible immediately beneath the topsoil in the south surcharge included several hearths which lay within the upper fill of a north to south linear ditch. Thermo-remnant magnetism (TRM) samples from three of the hearths produced an early 15th century AD date and two within the 16th century AD.

#### **4.0 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY**

The stratigraphic sequence broadly reflected the results of the geophysical survey and trial trenching. The different orientations of the two agricultural trends shown by the geophysical survey corresponded with the medieval field pattern and the slots of the Roman activity. The group of ditches in the southern surcharge were not visible on the geophysical survey and this may have been due to the layer of dense clay which partially sealed the ditches and the masking effect of the modern bridge over the River Ure.

#### **5.0 METHODOLOGY**

For recording and excavation purposes the site was divided into three areas corresponding with the surcharges and the corridor. The context numbers issued to the northern surcharge ran consecutively from 1000 to 1299 and from 1400 to 1499. The access corridor used numbers between 1300 and 1399. The southern surcharge was recorded using numbers from 1500 to 1999 (Fig.3).

##### **5.1 Site record quantification**

Total number of contexts	552
Plans	95
Sections	89
Photographs	355 (+ 150 general)
Env. samples	63
C14 samples	13
TRM samples	3

#### **6.0 PHASING**

In the northern surcharge (Fig. 4), Phases 1 and 2 related to structural features and associated deposits which were either intercutting or which were sealed by the

extensive homogenous sandy layer of Phase 3. The features within Phase 4 cut through this sandy layer. These included the pits and slots in the corridor, some of which contained finds which dated them to the early Roman period. Other features without finds in this area were dated by association. In the southern surcharge the phasing was largely established by the intercutting of several ditches where they converged at the southeastern corner of the site. A hearth within the upper fill provided a *terminus ante quem* for at least one of the ditches and radiocarbon dates will further clarify the dating sequence.

The phasing can be summarised as follows:

Phases 1 and 2	Later prehistoric
Phase 3	Alluvial/ploughing horizon
Phase 4a-c	Roman
Phase 5	Medieval
Phase 6	Modern

## 6.1 NORTHERN SURCHARGE AND CORRIDOR

### 6.1.1 Phase 1

A sequence of four rectilinear construction trenches 1206, 1215, 1248 and 1292 formed a rectangular structure 14m north-south by 11m east-west (structure A). The profiles of the construction slots were steep sided with a sharp break of slope to a flat base. The sides of these features were well defined with no sign of weathering and appear not to have stood open to the elements for any length of time: interpretation of them as ditches can therefore be discounted. The trenches intersected to form right angles at the corners. It was not possible to discern any difference in either colour or consistency between their fills at the point of intersection in either plan or section and it is therefore considered that they defined a single structure. The absence of post-packing material within the slots suggested a construction technique based on timber planks or hurdles rather than a palisade of upright posts. A curved slot 1250, extended northwards from slot 1248 (the northern side of structure A), and terminated at posthole, 1452.

Ditch 1094 ran on a north-south alignment from the southern limit of excavation and may have intersected slot 1202 to form the eastern side of a second structure (Structure B) which would have been 18m wide.

### 6.1.2 Phase 2

This phase was represented by a series of slots which appeared to form a rectangular structure (Structure C). The structure measured 18m north to south but the east side extended beyond the limit of excavation. The feature was defined by slots 1070, 1081/1091 at the south, 1190 at the west and 1160/1400 at the north.

Construction trench 1160 was truncated to the east by a Roman feature 1438 which extended beyond the limit of excavation. A 0.4m wide gap at the southern end of the structure was formed by the termination of slot 1252 and its continuation as slot 1070. It was not possible to extend the excavation further to the east due to the proximity of the A1 embankment.

Several post settings were visible within the fill of the slots, particularly on the structure's western side. The use of timber uprights as a construction technique differed from the method used in the construction of Structure A of the previous phase.

#### **6.1.3 Post-holes and pits cut into phases 1 and 2**

All of these features were sealed by the overall sand layer of Phase 3, and could therefore be ascribed to earlier phases. Further differentiation of the features into either Phase 1 or Phase 2 should be possible on further analysis of the finds and the nature of the fills of the features.

Several postholes and pits were recorded at the same level as the structures in phases 1 and 2. They were not related to an obvious structural event or sequence and so have been grouped together. The sequence of pits and post-holes which cut structures in phase 1 were: 1408, 1414, 1416 and 1418 which cut 1291. 1104 and 1211 which cut 1206. 1296 which cut 1298 and 1209 which cut 1094.

The sequence of pits and post-holes which cut structures in phase 2 were: 1170, 1217, 1219, 1221, 1235, 1254 and 1288 which cut 1190. 1076 and 1227 which cut 1070.

#### **6.1.4 Phase 3**

Sand layer 1137/1150 sealed the features in phases 1 and 2. It could not be clearly established on site whether it was an alluvium which had been deposited over the features, or a relict ploughsoil which had truncated them. A soil sample was taken for thin section analysis in order to investigate this horizon further.

#### **6.1.5 Phase 4a-c**

This phase was represented by a series of rectilinear slots and pits, mainly at the western end of the site and in the corridor. The features were visible immediately below the topsoil and they cut through buried soil 1137/1150. It was not possible to establish a coherent structure plan for this group of features although a rectilinear building was partially represented by slots 1121, 1131, 1129, 1012 in the northwestern area of the site.

A number of isolated pits were datable to the Roman period by their finds. These included: 1030, 1125, 1223, 1294, 1445 and 1443. Ditch 1381, located at the southern end of the corridor which linked the two surcharges, contained a number of finds, including Roman glass vessel sherds and a small 'hoard' of six Roman coins.

#### **6.1.6 Phase 5 Medieval**

No significant medieval features were noted. The field however had been subject to ridge and furrow cultivation.

#### **6.1.7 Phase 6 Modern**

The modern activity recorded was represented by field drains and three pipe trenches, 1134, 1052 and 1007, as well as pits containing 19th and 20th century finds.

## **6.2 SOUTHERN SURCHARGE**

A series of ditches which converged at the southeastern corner of the site was recorded in the southern surcharge area (Fig. 4). Several discrete features (e.g. hearths and a stone hole) were associated with them. Three of the hearths had been constructed on the upper fill of one of the ditches and TRM determinations provided dates in the 14th and 16th centuries AD. Flint and later prehistoric and Roman pottery was recovered from several of the ditches, suggesting a gradual backfilling process. Radiocarbon samples from several of the fills will allow the dating to be refined.

### **6.2.1 Ditch group 1650**

This major ditch ran north-south almost the full length of the area, turning east at the north end and being lost in a convergence of ditches at its southern end. A possible side branch ran eastwards from near its centre, suggesting that it was part of a field system rather than an enclosure ditch. It was excavated in four sections, 1617, 1633, 1731 and 1733. At a late stage in the infilling of the ditch, the hollow above it was exploited for the excavation of a large pit 1615 within its northwestern corner (see below), and a series of hearths were fired along its edges (or in the case of hearth 1626 within the hollow) and ash dumped within the hollow.

### **6.2.2 Hearths associated with 1650**

A series of 5 hearths were recorded either immediately adjacent to, or, partly overlying ditch 1650, and hearth 1626 was located within the ditch fill. The hearths had apparently been aligned on a ditch which was partially infilled. No evidence was recovered to suggest their function. Hearth 1637 was located similarly at the side of ditch 1639, and was likely to have been part of the same phase of activity.

### **6.2.3 Ditch group 1700**

This group consisted of ditch 1639 running east-west across the southern side of the ditch 1692 which ran south from ditch 1639. At its eastern end 1639 cut the backfill of ditch 1650 and then turned southwards. It also continued to the east as ditch 1688. Group of ditches 1700 appeared to part of a field system. An undated hearth, 1637, was located adjacent to the north side of ditch 1639 at its western end, and was probably the source of large quantities of burnt material in the nearby ditch fill.

### **6.2.4 Pit 1615**

A large oval pit, initially interpreted as the remains of a corn-drying kiln, was cut into the fill of ditch 1650 at its northwest corner. The base of the pit had been heated/burnt, leaving a burnt clay base (1616), and the subsequent backfill (1527) of the pit contained large quantities of burnt material, including numerous charred cereal grains. The fill was extensively sampled in order to obtain both environmental and radiocarbon samples.

### **6.2.5 Pit group 1724**

Pit 1724 was a very large pit located near to the centre of the area, to the west of ditch 1650. It had apparently been backfilled with the clean sand derived from its original excavation (1723). There were indications that it had held a large, heavy vertical object such as a large post or standing stone. This was subsequently removed by the cutting of a large pit 1647 against its eastern side. The pit was subsequently backfilled with a series of layers (1649, 1651, 1721, 1722) including



quantities of charcoal and burnt clay. Later a smaller pit 1725 (fill 1648) was cut into the top of its backfill.

#### **6.2.6 Pits 1659 and 1675**

The archaeological value of these two pits was enhanced by the environmental assessment of their fills. In both cases large samples of grain were recovered in the flots. Pit 1659 (fills 1562, 1658) was one of a group of pits (1728) near the southern edge of the area. Pit 1675 (fill 1535) was located near the southeastern corner of the site, overlying the intersection of ditches 1688 and 1690.

#### **6.2.7 Structure 1645**

Located near the northwestern corner of the area, this small square structure was represented by a construction slot 1645 (fill 1632). Only the southern side and parts of the east and west sides were seen during excavation. The centre of the structure had been truncated by a later plough furrow.

### **7.0 RANGE, VARIETY AND CONDITION OF DEPOSITS**

#### **7.1 North surcharge and corridor**

##### **7.1.1 Structures**

The evidence for Structure A was largely restricted to the rectilinear slots 1248, 1215 1292 and 1206. Additional slots to the north may also have been associated with this group. Features 1202, 1204, 1213 and 1094 formed a second structure, but whose plan was less well defined than Structure A.

Structure B continued beyond the eastern edge of the excavation and its precise plan is therefore conjectural. The lack of weathering on the sides of the excavated slots and the presence of several ash pits within the enclosure suggested that it was used for occupation rather than simply as a field boundary.

The number of construction trenches identified in the Roman phase suggested that more than one structure was present and also that periodic alterations were made. Most of the trenches incorporated a sill beam construction technique although one trench, 1018, seemed to represent a post in trench construction technique.

##### **7.1.2 Non-structural features**

Numerous pits and post-holes were recorded in each of the phases but most of these could not be directly related to any particular structure. A series of possible ash pits were associated with Structure C in Phase 2. A large circular pit 1244 contained a relatively large assemblage of Roman pottery but many of the features had little associated dating evidence and their potential for further study is limited.

##### **7.1.3 Dating**

The phasing in the northern surcharge was established by the intercutting relationships of many of the features exposed beneath a sealing deposit (1150). The later features then cut through the sealing deposit. Few finds were associated with the early phases which will only be firmly dated by radiocarbon dating. Radiocarbon samples were obtained from contexts 1213 and 1247 in Structure A and these are likely to represent the only secure dating evidence directly associated with Phase 1. A radiocarbon sample was also obtained from ditch 1190 in Phase 2.



The pottery and coin assemblages will be used to date the later phases of activity.

#### **7.1.4 Finds**

By comparing the the pottery and coin assemblages with the material from the Roecliffe forts it may prove possible to establish contemporaneity between the two sites. A preliminary assessment has indicated that the Roman element of the finds assemblage from Field 79 is largely of 1st century date (J. Dore & R. Brickstock: pers. comm.).

Animal bone was present in 14 contexts but consisted mainly of comminuted and unidentifiable fragments of burnt bone.

Fifty pieces of worked flint and a single chert flake were recovered and were considered to be of mainly Neolithic and Bronze Age date. Several flints were later Mesolithic.

#### **7.1.5 Environmental evidence**

A total of 73 samples from the whole site were submitted for assessment and it was concluded that thirteen of these from the northern surcharge contained grain and merited further analysis. Soil samples were also taken in order to ascertain how the apparently undifferentiated deposit 1150 in Phase 3 was formed.

### **7.2 South surcharge**

#### **7.2.1 Dating**

The dating of ditch 1650 was handicapped by the lack of finds within its fills. All finds from the primary silting were Iron Age (or earlier) and a radiocarbon sample was recovered from the primary fill.

The ditch had certainly become largely infilled before the late medieval period, since Thermo-remnant magnetism dates for adjacent hearths 1511 (AD 1510-1550) and 1523 (AD 1510-1570) could be directly related to ash dumps within the ditch hollow (1619 and 1522), and hearth 1626 within the ditch hollow pre-dated hearth 1511 by a considerable period, judging by the silt build-up between the two events. A radiocarbon date from pit 1615, which also cut the ditch fill will add to this dating sequence.

Pit 1615 was possibly Roman or later in date. However, the finds assemblage recovered was not sufficiently large to suggest a narrower time range. A radiocarbon date from some of the carbonised grain recovered is required to resolve this question, and would also provide a further *terminus ante quem* for ditch 1650.

Ditch group 1700 was probably Roman in date, on the basis of the pottery assemblage. The date of the important environmental data recovered from above ditch 1692 was uncertain, and needs to be determined by radiocarbon dating. This would also give a *terminus ante quem* for the ditch complex.

Ditches 1682 and 1684, on the basis of their overall curving form and the flint assemblage were considered to have been prehistoric in date. Ditch 1688, although it only produced a single sherd of Roman pottery, might have represented an eastward continuation of ditch 1639, and was therefore also possibly Roman. No evidence was recovered to suggest a date for ditches 1690 and 1696, although if 1690 was a southern continuation of ditch 1650 the same dating criteria could be applied. It should be noted that pit 1675 cut the intersection of ditches 1688 and

1690, so any radiocarbon date from it would provide a *terminus ante quem* for the infilling of the ditches.

Two charcoal samples were recovered from deposits associated with Pit group 1724 1651 for radiocarbon dating. The finds assemblage from this deposit suggested an Iron Age date for the recut, which would not be incompatible with an interpretation of the primary pit 1724 as a standing stone construction cut of Neolithic date.

### 7.2.2 Finds

The amount of pottery recovered from the features in the south surcharge was limited, thus adding increased significance to the radiocarbon samples.

The primary fill of ditch 1650 produced 2 undated flints including a microlith. The surface of the ditch fill yielded 3 flints, including a Mesolithic microlith and two undated flakes, and 1 sherd of Iron Age pottery.

The recovery of flint flakes from the fill of ditch 1650 corresponded with similar finds from the fill of ditch 1094 in the north surcharge. This was on a similar alignment to ditch 1650 and may have been a northern continuation of it.

Finds recovered from the fill of the pit 1615 at the northern end of ditch 1650 included a copper alloy object (1527AB), 2 sherds of probable Roman pottery, 2 flints and fragments of animal teeth. Unsorted environmental sample residues contained further pottery, iron, lead, flint and burnt bone, all of which were recovered.

Ditch group 1700 produced a total of 8 sherds of probable Roman pottery and 6 flints all of which are probably residual.

Six flints were recovered from the fill of curved ditch 1682. One flint and part of an animal jaw were recovered from ditch 1690 at the far south of the site.

The only finds recovered from the pit group 1724 included 4 sherds of Iron Age character pottery and 3 flints. Pit fill 1562 produced some bone fragments and a possible quern fragment. The overlying fill 1658 included a possible rubbing stone and 1 flint blade. Pit fill 1535 only produced fragments of burnt bone.

### 7.3.3 Environmental evidence

Four of the samples (1527, 1535, 1562 and 1691) submitted for assessment were exceptionally rich in carbonised grain and would merit further analysis. Deposit 1527 in particular contained bread wheat and it would be of particular importance to date this material; this species is generally dominant in medieval times having superseded the spelt favoured by the Romans in the north. None of these samples were associated with artefactual dating evidence but the flots could be used as a radiocarbon sample.

## 8.0 STATEMENT OF POTENTIAL

The principal phases of activity on the site were of later prehistoric and early Roman date. The site was well stratified and structures belonging to these phases of occupation could be identified, particularly in the northern surcharge area. The complex soil conditions contributed to the conjoining of several phases of activity but further analysis should make a greater differentiation of the features and their phases possible.

## FIELD 79 - ASSESSMENT AND REPORT COSTS

	Estimated	Actual
<b>1) Preliminary assessment and interim report</b>		
Archive consolidation	1800.00	1800.00
Post excavation assessment	1200.00	1200.00
Environmental sample assessment	800.00	520.00
Archaeomagnetic dating	750.00	750.00
Finds assessment	400.00	160.00
Preparation of research design	1000.00	1000.00
Travel	225.00	225.00
Overheads	1235.00	1131.00
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>7410.00</b>	<b>6786.00</b>
 <b>2) Post excavation analysis</b>		
Preparation of archive report - 6 weeks	3600.00	3600.00
Archive illustration - 5 weeks	2500.00	2500.00
Specialist analysis and reports	5500.00	5154.00
Finds illustrations - 3 weeks	1500.00	1500.00
Preparation of publication report and illustrations	4800.00	4800.00
Travel	500.00	500.00
Overheads	3680.00	3610.80
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>22080.00</b>	<b>21664.80</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£29,480.00</b>	<b>£28,450.80</b>

**FIELD 79**

**Specialist analysis and reports**

**Breakdown of costs**

Flint	150.00
Prehistoric pottery	235.00
Roman pottery	300.00
Querns	158.00
Coins	121.00
Conservation	795.00
Environmental sample analysis and report	1000.00
Soil analysis and report	1315.00
Carbon 14 assays	1080.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£5154.00</b>

The environmental and soil analyses will contribute towards a better understanding of the function of the deposits; particularly in establishing agricultural and dietary regimes and help in determining the date and nature of some of the principal features. A framework of dates derived from radiocarbon samples will add to the significance of the environmental analysis and supplement the typological dating of the pottery and flint.

## **9.0 VALUE OF THE DATA**

The main importance of the site lies in its geographical and chronological proximity to the newly discovered Roman military complex at Roelcliffe, south of the River Ure. Any relationships or associations between the two sites which may become apparent through further analysis of the site archive would be of significance. If the date for the site does coincide with the transition from native settlement to military occupation of the area the importance of the site would be even greater.

The relationship between the features within the southern surcharge to those in the northern surcharge requires further study. The results of the soils analysis may provide a stratigraphic link between the two areas of the site. It is considered that further examination of the pottery assemblage and the analysis of radiocarbon and environmental samples will clarify the nature of the deposits on the site and possibly place them in a wider local and regional context.

## **10.0 CONCLUSION**

Geophysical survey and trial trenching established the presence of a multi-phase archaeological site within Field 79.

The nature of the deposits varied from a network of intercutting linear ditches in the south surcharge to a complex of rectilinear slots forming possible structures in the northern surcharge. Samples were taken from several features for dating and environmental purposes and the information derived from these sources will supplement the limited evidence available from other areas of the site.

The extent and shape of the excavation trench was determined by the area required for the bridge surcharges and the lateral drain. Further archaeological deposits continued beyond the edge of the excavation trench in all directions, but those to the east will probably have been destroyed by the construction of the existing A1.

## **11.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **11.1 Context analysis**

A full description of each context should be undertaken as part of the post-excavation archive compilation and a series of phased illustrations should accompany this text. A publication report should be undertaken on the nature of the structural features and their associated deposits. Provision should be made for the illustration of finds and all appropriate plans and sections.

### **11.2 Pottery analysis**

An assessment of the prehistoric pottery has indicated that although only a small assemblage was recovered, it was largely Iron Age in character. It is recommended that a report on the prehistoric pot is compiled and that a vessel recovered from context 1062 should be drawn. The Roman pottery was exclusively Flavian in date

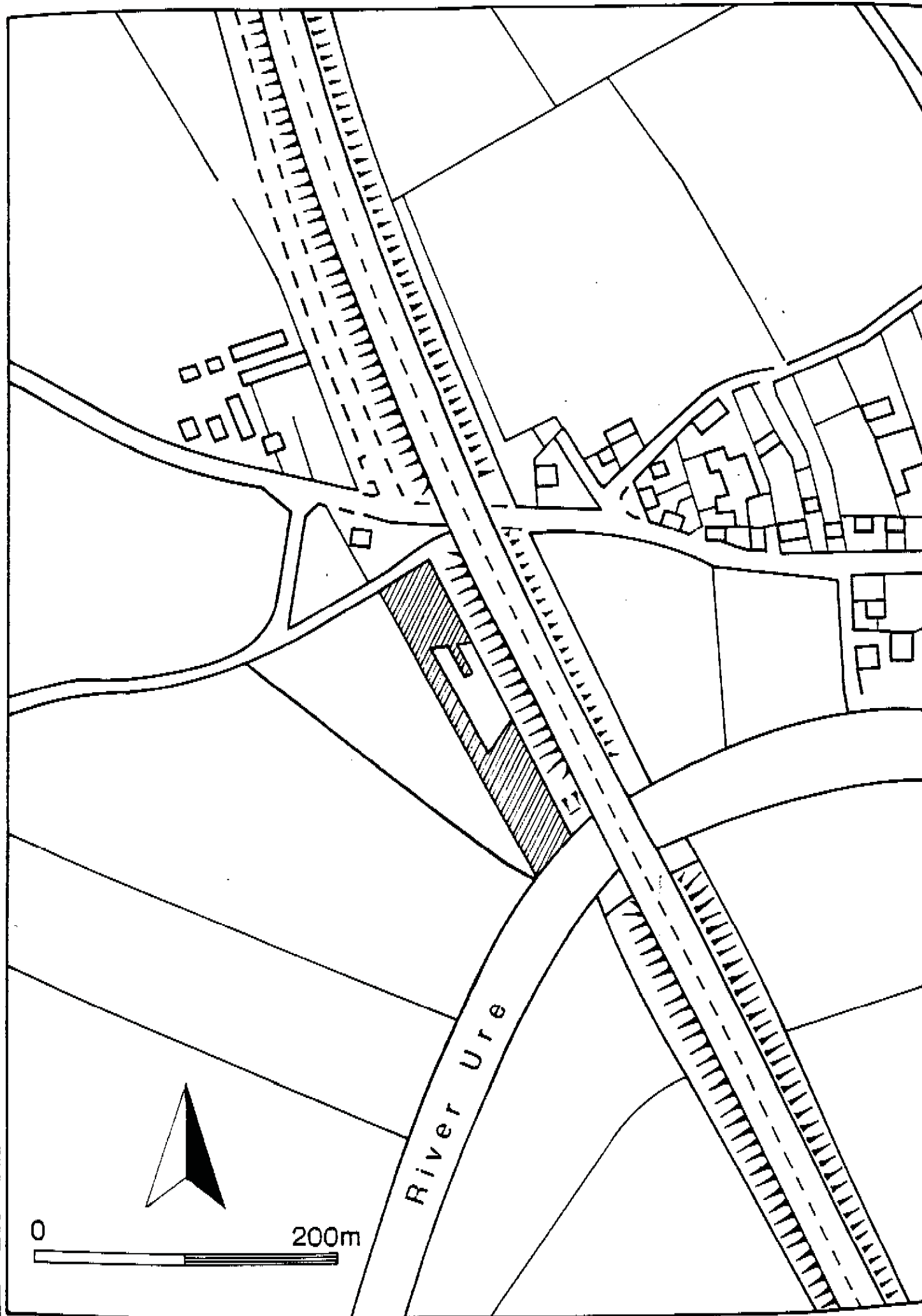


Fig. 2 Area of excavation within Field 79





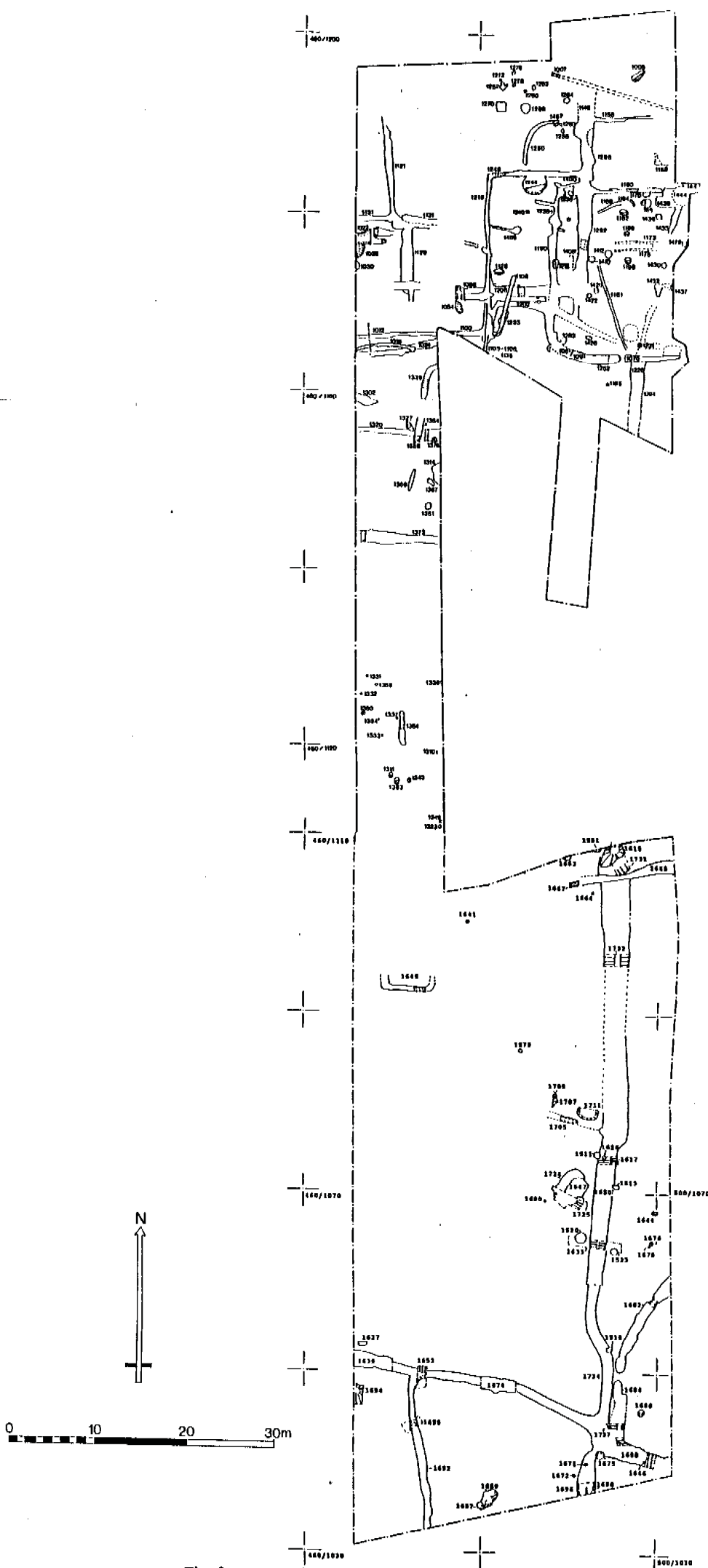


Fig. 3 Location of archaeological features within the excavated area of Field 79

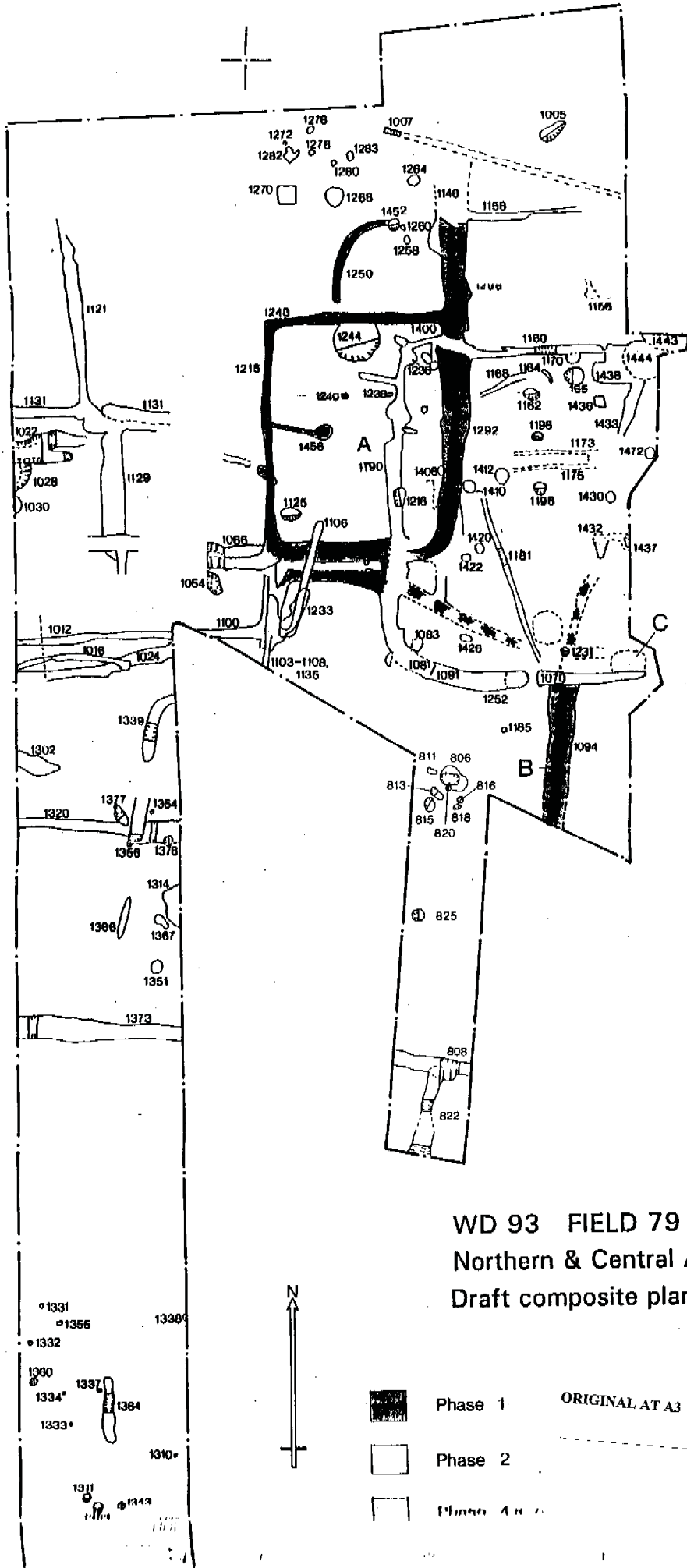
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WD 93 FIELD 79  
Northern & Central Areas  
Draft composite plan

- Phase 1 ORIGINAL AT A3
- Phase 2
- Phase 3