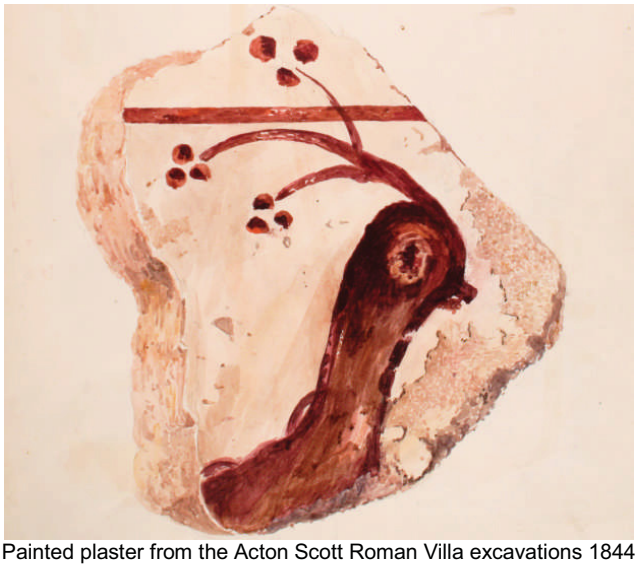
Second interim report on investigations at the
Acton Scott Roman Villa,
Acton Scott, Shropshire

Acton Scott Heritage Project

by
H R Hannaford



Painted plaster from the Acton Scott Roman Villa excavations 1844

Archaeology Service
Community Services Directorate, Shropshire Council

SECOND INTERIM REPORT ON INVESTIGATIONS AT THE ACTON SCOTT ROMAN VILLA, ACTON SCOTT, SHROPSHIRE

ACTON SCOTT HERITAGE PROJECT

by
H R HANNAFORD MIfA

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Archaeology Service
Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury, SY1 2AQ
Tel: 01743 255353 Fax: 01743 255355
Email: archaeology@shropshire.gov.uk
Website: www.shropshire.gov.uk/archaeology.nsf

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SUMMARY

In 1817 a Roman villa was discovered on the Acton Scott estate when the lane from Haddon to Acton Scott was re-aligned to the north. The villa was subsequently re-excavated in 1844 by Mrs Frances Stackhouse Acton. These excavations revealed a large stone built rectangular structure 31m long. In the 1980s a cropmark enclosure was recorded in the same area. In 1997, and 2004 the Archaeology Service carried out small scale evaluation of the western arm of the enclosure, but otherwise the site has not been examined archaeologically since the mid 19th century.

In 2007 - 2009 volunteers with the Acton Scott Heritage Project re-examined the site. A geophysical survey confirmed the location of the cropmark enclosure ditch and found a rectangular structure within it. It also suggested the presence of a number of other features outside the enclosure ditch. Shovel-pit testing of the study area produced a small quantity of small pieces of brick and pottery, some of Roman date, particularly in the vicinity of the structure identified by the geophysical survey within the cropmark enclosure.

In September 08 a first season of trial excavations examined the southern arm of the enclosure ditch and the rectangular structure within the enclosure. The enclosure ditch proved to be over 4m wide, and its lower fills consisted of banded gravels and silty loams, probably representing gradual silting of the ditch. In the upper fill of the ditch was a dump of Roman building rubble which may mark the disuse and deliberate demolition of part of the villa structure. A trench across the structure within the enclosure found a sequence of pebble and clay floors or surfaces, and a possible post-pad associated with a small quantity of Roman pottery. These features and deposits were covered with spreads of stone rubble and Roman ceramic and stone roof tiles and wall-flue tiles.

A second season of trial excavations in September 2009 examined further the structure within the enclosure, and revealed a spread of rubble possibly representing a yard surface, internal floor surfaces, including traces of an opus signinum *floor, and a section of collapsed roof comprised of stone roof tiles. These excavations also examined some of the features identified by the geophysical survey outside the eastern side of the enclosure, and located an Iron Age and Roman ditch and a section of the post-medieval road whose re-routing in 1817 led to the discovery of the Roman villa.*

No definite traces of Frances Stackhouse Acton's 1817 or 1844 excavations were identified, although several shallow gullies may have marked the lines of some of her trial trenches.

The investigations have demonstrated that there are well-preserved archaeological features and deposits associated with both the cropmark enclosure and the Roman villa surviving on the site. These features and deposits lie close to the ground surface and are considered to be vulnerable to agricultural and other activities on the site.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Acton Scott is a small village situated near Church Stretton, Shropshire, about 23km south of Shrewsbury. Acton Scott is an ancient parish; most of the parish forms part of the Acton Scott estate, a typical Shropshire country estate. Acton Scott Historic Working Farm (NGR SO 4572 8988) is one of Britain's leading working farm museums and is based on the former Home Farm of the Acton Scott estate. The Farm Museum aims to interpret the development of this Shropshire estate, telling the story of those who lived and worked there.

1.2 People have farmed at Acton Scott for at least 2,000 years. However, historical evidence and the site as it is seen today only give us a glimpse of this story. The Acton Scott Heritage Project was established, with funding from "Your Heritage" of the Heritage Lottery Fund and Shropshire Council, with the aim of researching the development of the Acton Scott community (the estate and its environs) from prehistoric times to the present day. To do this the project established a community heritage group drawing its membership from the local community, and Museum visitors and existing volunteers.

1.3 The 2 year archaeological project comprised a number of elements that included archaeological fieldwork (survey, field-walking, shovel-pit testing and excavation), historical research, interpretation, and activities and events. It was envisaged that the two-year project would form the basis for a much longer term study by the community group.

1.4 One element of this study focused on the Iron Age and Romano-British periods, and in particular on a cropmark enclosure and Roman villa site adjacent to the Historic Working Farm site. The study area for this investigation is shown in Figure 1.

1.5 The programme of archaeological investigations of the cropmark enclosure and Roman villa site included documentary research, a geophysical survey, shovel-pit testing, and trial excavations in September 2008 and September 2009. A first interim report on the results of the investigations in 2007-8 was produced in 2008 (Hannaford, 2008), and is summarised below in section 4. This second interim report details the findings of the 2009 investigations.

1.6 The cropmark and villa are scheduled as an Ancient Monument as defined by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (“Roman villa 200 yds (180m) north of Acton Scott Hall”, Shropshire County No. 168). Scheduled Monument Consent was obtained from the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport for the programme of archaeological work, to a methodology detailed in a written scheme of investigation produced by the Archaeology Service and agreed with English Heritage (Hannaford, 2007).

2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 The aim of the 2007-9 archaeological investigations was to provide information to assist and inform both the future management and the interpretation of the cropmark enclosure and Roman villa site.

2.2 The objectives of the investigations were:

- To locate and map the extent of archaeological features and deposits associated with the enclosure and villa.
- To assess the survival, quality, condition and relative significance of archaeological features, deposits and structures associated with the villa.
- To provide information that would assist with the interpretation and future management of the site.
- To provide training in archaeological fieldwork techniques to members of the community group

2.3 To achieve these aims and objectives a programme of archaeological activities was carried out. These activities included desk-based assessment, geophysical survey, shovel-pit testing, and trial excavation:

- **Desk-based assessment** The desk-based assessment examined and assessed the available sources, including relevant historic maps and documents, aerial photographs, and reports of previous archaeological work, to assist with the aims and objectives above.
- **Geophysical survey** A geophysical survey was carried out, comprising a gradiometer and resistivity survey of an area of c. 2.5ha, including the sites of both the cropmark enclosure and the villa. A section 42 licence for the geophysical survey was granted by English Heritage (ref AA/91863/5).
- **Shovel-pit testing** A programme of shovel-pit testing was carried out systematically over the study area. The test-pits were excavated on a regular grid at a rate of one pit per 10m^2. The grid and pit locations were determined using GPS survey equipment. Each test-pit was excavated to a maximum depth of 20cms below the ground surface. A 30 litre sample from each pit was sieved for finds. The pits were backfilled and turf replaced immediately.
- **Trial excavation** The sample excavation comprised the excavation of a number of trenches over two seasons, in September 2008 and September 2009. The location of the trenches was determined on the results of the desk-based assessment, the geophysical survey, and the shovel-pit testing, and was agreed in advance with the landowner, occupier, and English Heritage. The trenches were excavated by machine and/or by hand to remove topsoil to a maximum depth of 0.20m or until the top of undisturbed archaeological deposits were encountered. The underlying deposits were then cleaned by hand and examined for archaeological features and deposits. A sample of these deposits and features were then excavated by hand. The trenches were backfilled on completion of the excavations.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Iron Age and/or Romano-British occupation of the Acton Scott area is indicated by a number of cropmark enclosures of a type which have been demonstrated by excavation elsewhere to represent the remains of farmsteads occupied during the late Bronze Age, Iron Age, Romano-British, and early medieval periods. The cropmarks here probably mark the site of enclosing ditches around farmsteads of Iron Age and/or Roman date.

3.2 The cropmark within the study area (Shropshire Historic Environment Record [HER] No: 04419) lies in the northern part of the field (Laundry Meadow). 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 HER files (HER SO4589), and there is also a Whimster plot at 1:2500 scale of the cropmark (HER file no. 04419). The cropmark is also shown on the digital aerial photographic coverage of the county held by Shropshire County Council. 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.

3.3 A Roman villa (HER no. 00168) was discovered in 1817 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 to the east of the study area. It seems likely that this building is only one element of the villa complex and that the main residence was sited nearby. The probable location of the principal house is thought to lie within the nearby cropmark enclosure and situated in the north-west area of the field in which the 1817 discovery was made. 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 was uncertain. The relationship of the cropmark enclosure and the villa was uncertain, as was the precise location and extent of the villa complex.

3.4 The villa was re-excavated in 1844 by Mrs Frances Stackhouse Acton. These excavations revealed a large stone built rectangular structure; it has been suggested that it originated as an aisled barn and was later partly converted into a dwelling house. The excavated buildings formed a rectangular block 31m long by 12.5m wide (Stackhouse Acton, 1846). It was not known how much of the villa survived.

3.5 In 1997, the Archaeology Service carried out an evaluation of a new trackway running alongside the eastern edge of the hedge marking the eastern side of the present study area (Hannaford, 1997). The evaluation confirmed the existence of significant archaeological features and deposits along the northern section of this track. The archaeological remains located were associated with the known cropmark enclosure and villa site. Where encountered, the archaeological deposits commenced at a depth of 0.45m below the ground surface.

3.6 In 2004, a proposal was made to construct a new visitor facility and associated car parking at Acton Scott Farm Museum. The study area abutted on to the scheduled monument area of Acton Scott Roman Villa and the

western arm of the cropmark enclosure also extended into the study area. An archaeological field evaluation included a geophysical survey of the study area by Stratascan and 3 trial trenches excavated by the Archaeology Service, SCC (Hannaford, 2004). The evaluation located the western arm of the enclosure ditch running along the eastern edge of the study area. The fills of this feature were sampled to a depth of 0.5m (the ditch was not excavated to its full depth). The sampled upper fills, represented the final silting of a dis-used feature, and contained Romano-British pottery and building material of 2nd - 3rd century date. The top of these fills were encountered at a depth of 0.45m below the existing ground level. Possible prehistoric activity on the site in the Neolithic or Bronze Age periods was indicated by a flint flake recovered from one of the trenches. No other significant archaeological features were located.

3.7 In 2007 the Acton Scott Heritage Project began a two-year programme of investigations into the archaeology of the cropmark enclosure and Roman villa. A first interim report on the results of these investigations in 2007-8 was produced in 2008 (Hannaford, 2008), summarised below in section 4. A second season of trial excavations was carried out in September 2009 and this second interim report details the findings of the 2009 investigations.

4 THE RESULTS FROM 2007-8

4.1 One of the primary aims of the research on the site of the enclosure and villa was to locate the site and extent of the villa found in 1817 and excavated by Frances Stackhouse Acton in 1844. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25" plan of 1881 (and subsequent mapping) locates the villa in the western of the two fields (Laundry Meadow) comprising the study area. This field also contains the Iron Age / Romano-British cropmark enclosure. Initial analysis of two readily available plans – a location plan of the 19th century finds published in *Archaeologia* XXXI and the Tithe Award map of c.1840 suggested that the site might lie a little to the east, extending into the western edge of the adjoining field, Clover Bank. The land had until recently been under arable cultivation, but at the time of this project was under pasture. The site is generally level, with a slight north to south slope, though immediately beyond the study area it drops away sharply to the south and southeast to a stream course with a series of linked ponds.

4.2 The Desk-Based Assessment

A survey was been carried out of all the documents relating to the villa and enclosure site held by the Shropshire County Historic Environment Record and at Shropshire Archives. A number of documents held by the Acton Estate were also made available to the project for study. The original manuscript illustrations of the excavations carried out by Frances Stackhouse Acton on the villa in 1844 have been digitised together with late 18th and early 19th century estate plans and maps. These enabled the 1817 and 1844 excavations to be more certainly located. A location plan in the manuscript shows the excavated villa building located on a bend in the former road line within the western field of the study area (Laundry Meadow). Although the bend is not shown on other 19th century mapping, it is shown on an estate plan of 1776 (Sherrif, 1776).

4.3 The Geophysical Survey

A geophysical survey of the two fields of the study area (Laundry Meadow and Clover Bank) was carried out on behalf of the project by ArchaeoPhysica Ltd in October and November 2007 (Roseveare and Lafuente, 2008).

The geophysical survey found little convincing evidence for structural remains in the eastern field, Clover Bank, although it located what appeared to be spreads of rubble suggesting a building complex of three ranges with some deeply buried masonry elements, possibly comprising a bath house within ancillary structures to the rear. (*op. cit.,* 4.46 – 4.48)

In the western field, Laundry Meadow, the ditch around the cropmark enclosure was located by the magnetic survey but not the resistivity survey. A number of smaller enclosures were located to the east of the cropmark enclosure. (*op. cit.,* 4.27 – 4.29)

The survey also located in this field a building perhaps 25m – 20m long by 10m north–south abutting the southern side of the cropmark enclosure. To the northeast were signs of a yard area. A large area of magnetic disturbance and an area of low resistance continued westwards from the building for around 30m, suggesting that the building might continue in this direction. (*op. cit.,* 4.35 – 4.38)

Other features recorded included the line of the former road and a possible aqueduct. The survey suggested a possible Roman date for the road because of its apparent relation to both the western building and the eastern rubble spreads. It is worth noting that the line of the road indicated by the survey in Laundry Meadow does not have a bend, as shown on the 1844 manuscript plan. The possible aqueduct is an unusual feature, and follows a sinuous line down a slight slope from Acton Scott Farm, passing to the south of the cropmark enclosure, and terminating at a small structural anomaly on the edge of the (possible) rubble spreads in Clover Bank field.

4.4 The Shovel-Pit Testing

The methodology for the shovel-pit testing was researched by the ASHP Project Officer and the Community Archaeologist. Bespoke sieving frames were designed by the Project Officer and manufactured for the project. The methodology for the shovel-pit testing was trialled in a field on the museum site to the west of the scheduled area. In the light of this trial the methodology was modified slightly. The programme of test pitting over the study area followed the geophysical survey and was carried out between November 2007 and March 2008. The test-pits were excavated on a regular gridded pattern with the pits spaced at 10m intervals. The grid and pit locations were determined using GPS survey equipment. Each test-pit was excavated to a maximum depth of 20cms below the ground surface, with a 30 litre sample from each pit being sieved. (Hannaford, 2008)

The samples generally produced a small quantity of small pieces of brick and tile, some undoubtedly of Roman date, most of indeterminate date, and a small quantity of small abraded sherds of Roman and medieval pottery. A few small sherds of post medieval pottery and glass were also recovered. There was a slight increase in the quantity (though not quality) of the finds over the site of the possible rubble spreads in Clover Bank. One of the pits in this area located a pebble surface with a large fragment of possible building stone. One possible sherd of Iron Age pottery and a small glass bead, possibly of Roman date, were recovered from Laundry Meadow just to the west of the possible rubble spreads.

In the vicinity of the building identified by the geophysical survey in Laundry Meadow, a number of the test pits produced larger fragments of Roman roof tile, possible wall-flue tile, and hypocaust tile, and some larger fragments of Roman pottery.

4.5 Trial Excavation September 2008

Six evaluation trenches were excavated in September 2008 in an attempt to locate and examine some of the features identified by the desk-based research, geophysical survey, and shovel-pit testing (Figure 2, **a**-**d**, **g** & **h**). (Hannaford, 2008)

Three trenches (**d**, **g** & **h**) cut in Clover Bank (the eastern field) demonstrated that the areas of possible rubble spreads in this field were in fact deposits of natural glacial gravel and not man made deposits. A patch of less gravelly clay corresponded to the apparent “courtyard” within these spreads. There was no sign of the circular feature in the “courtyard” area within the gravel spreads, other than some larger stones in the gravel. It is possible that the larger components of the gravel here may have suggested this feature and the rubble

spreads – the size of the some of gravel is larger than that encountered in most lowland glacial and periglacial subsoils in the county. It is worth noting in this respect that the study area lies at a more elevated altitude, at around the 200m contour. Trench **d** did find a shallow gulley that corresponded in alignment to the small rectangular anomaly in the western side of Clover Bank suggested by the geophysical survey.

Three trenches were excavated in the western field, Laundry Meadow, to investigate features and deposits recorded by past aerial photography, the geophysical survey, and the shovel-pit testing.

Trial trench **c** failed to locate the possible aqueduct in the eastern side of Laundry Meadow; a variation in the natural subsoil here may have caused the geophysical anomaly.

In trench **b**, the southern arm of the enclosure ditch lay precisely where plotted by the geophysical survey and the aerial photography. The ditch proved to be over 4m wide, similar in width to the western arm seen in 2004. The ditch was not excavated to its full depth, but just over 1m depth of ditch deposits was excavated. The lower excavated fills consisted of banded gravels and salty loams, probably representing gradual silting of the ditch. There was a distinct horizon above these, either marking a period of stability and lack of silting, or possibly a re-cutting of the ditch. A dump of building rubble, consisting of stone fragments with some pieces of Roman roof tile was deposited in the ditch at this time. This may mark the disuse and deliberate demolition of part of the villa structure to the north. This dumping was followed by a final period of silting of the ditch.

Trench **a** was located to examine the rectangular structure suggested by the geophysical survey. The shovel-pit testing had also produced a concentration of Roman brick and ceramic roof tile in this area. The earliest deposits sampled in trench **a** consisted of a series of pebble and clay floors or surfaces, and a possible post-pad. These features were associated with a small quantity of Black-Burnished Ware and Severn Valley Ware pottery. These features and deposits were sealed by a thin (c.10cms thick) layer of loam with lenses of sooty soil, and then by spreads of rubble of small to medium-sized stone fragments and a quantity of Roman ceramic and stone roof tiles and some fragments of box-flue tiles. The tiles were fragmentary and appeared to have been disturbed by agricultural activity, which was not surprising given that these deposits lay at a depth of c.20cms below the ground surface. These features and deposits probably relate to a structure that formed part of the Roman villa complex, although no definite structural elements were identified that could be related either to the geophysical survey results or to the 19th century excavations.

5 THE TRIAL EXCAVATIONS IN SEPTEMBER 2009

5.1 A further seven evaluation trenches were excavated in Laundry Meadow in September 2009, with the principal aim of trying to define the area occupied by the Roman villa, with secondary aims of attempting to locate some of the 1817 or 1844 excavations (Figure 2; Trenches A – E), and investigating some of the peripheral features identified by the 2007 geophysical survey in this field (Trenches F & G). A maximum of 0.2m of topsoil was removed by machine from each trench, with the underlying deposits cleaned and sampled. Spoil was also regularly scanned with a metal detector.

5.2 Trench A (Figure 3a)

Trench A was located in the southwestern corner of the cropmark enclosure, to the west of the structure identified by the geophysical survey, but within an area of possible rubble indicated by that survey. The trench was 10m long by 2m wide.

The natural subsoil of brown silt with pebbles and gravel (59) was seen at a depth of 0.43m below the ground surface at the north end of the trench. An irregular, roughly horse-shoe-shaped hollow (58), 0.05m deep by about 0.8m wide, was cut into the surface of the natural; the hollow was filled with a light greyish-brown silt (57) which produced no finds. This in turn was sealed by a deposit of dark greyish-brown sandy silty loam (49/56) about 0.1m thick. This lay beneath a deposit of a similar loam (47) 0.15m thick containing stone fragments and brick and tile which gave the appearance of a rough yard surface, extending across the northern part of the trench. The soil (18) embedded in the top of this surface produced Roman pottery and brick and tile, and a sherd of possible Iron Age pottery.

The southern edge of the possible yard surface was bordered by a deposit of loam with pebbles and tile fragments and plaster fragments but few larger stone fragments (32). This butted against the edge of a deposit made up of layers of stone (and a few ceramic) roof slates (Photo 1; 33). This band of tiles was no more than 0.6m wide, but clearly represented a patch of collapsed roof; the northern edge was uneven and the presence of fragments of tile scattered in layer 32 suggested that this edge had been damaged by ploughing. The southern edge was cleaner and bounded by a narrow and shallow deposit of stone-free sandy loam (50), which may perhaps have been the base of one of Frances Stackhouse Acton's exploratory trenches. To the south of this was a deposit of brown silty sandy loam (31) with fragments of decayed mortar, decayed plaster, and stone tile fragments, and a single piece of a Severn Valley ware pot. The cleaning layer from the top of these deposits (21) produced a quantity of Roman pottery and brick and tile. A section was cut through the deposit (32) butting the north edge of the roof collapse, and this revealed a surface made of rounded gravel (98) which ran to the south beneath the roof collapse. This layer may have been the remains of a former floor surface.

These deposits all lay beneath the layer of topsoil 0.2m thick (01). This layer, removed by machine and by hand (14) produced a number metal detector finds of iron nails and other scraps of iron, a lead nail (1102), and three pieces of lead scrap (1020, 1110).

5.3 Trench B (Figure 3b)

Trench B was located to cross the north side of the structure identified by the geophysical survey in 2007. The 2008 evaluation trench **a** had indicated that remains extended north towards the former road line here, and a deeper feature in the corner of that trench had suggested the possible presence of previous excavations here. The 2009 trench was 10m long by 2m wide.

The earliest deposit exposed in this trench was a buried soil layer (55) of greyish brown sandy silty loam at the northern end of the trench. The surface of this deposit lay 0.5m below the ground surface. It was cut by a poorly defined pit or large posthole (54) in the northwest corner of the trench. The pit was filled with a dark greyish brown sandy silty loam (53) with large cobbles and stone fragments. Neither the pit nor buried soil layer were sampled. They lay beneath a further layer of similar soil (45) 0.1m thick containing a small quantity of Roman pottery and brick and tile. To the south this lay under a deposit of dark greyish-brown sandy silty loam (48) 0.15m thick containing stone fragments and Roman brick and tile and pottery. This stony layer was probably a continuation of the possible yard surface (47) seen in trench A. The soil (16) from within the top of this surface produced a few sherds of Roman pottery and Roman brick and tile. A possible kerb or edge was apparent in the northern part of this surface – however, a few stones and tile fragments lay to the north, and when sampled this kerb did not extend down beyond the surface of the deposit. The southern edge of the possible yard surface lay over a soil deposit of greyish brown sandy silty loam (52) which was similar to (if not the same layer as) the buried soil to the north (45). A further rough stone surface (39) lay on top of this soil deposit in the central part of the trench. The southern edge of this surface was bordered by a shallow gulley (35) filled with a greyish brown sandy silty loam (34) which again may perhaps have been the base of an exploratory trench. On the south side of this gulley was a surface of pebbles and fragments of stone roof tile (43). In the southeastern corner of the trench, this surface was covered by a layer of larger, stone roof tile fragments (42) laid flat, and carrying a thin layer of *opus signinum* floor (40) about 0.02m thick. The remains of this *opus signinum* floor lay just 0.25m below the present ground surface (Photo 2). In the southwest corner of the trench, was a square patch of larger stone fragments (41) butted against the pebble surface (43). This patch had the appearance of being the corner of an area of hardcore, perhaps for a timber floor. Again the top of this deposit (41) lay just 0.22m below the ground surface. The thin soil layer (22) removed from within the top of these surfaces contained a small quantity of Roman pottery and brick and tile.

These deposits all lay beneath 0.2m of topsoil. This topsoil layer, removed by machine (02) and by hand (15), produced a number metal detector finds of iron nails and other scraps of iron, a lead strap with two rivets (1105), and a copper alloy radiate coin (Photo 6; 1013) of probable 3rd century date, and a further fragment of an unidentified possible copper alloy coin (1097).

5.4 Trench C (Figure 4a)

Trench C was sited so as to run across the eastern end of the structure identified by the 2007 geophysical survey, and the area between the structure and the former road line. The trench was 20m long by 2m wide.

The natural subsoil (73), consisting of a compact yellowish brown silt with gravel and pebbles, was seen at the northern end of this trench at a depth of 0.66m

below the present ground surface. The natural was cut in the northwest corner of the trench by a large posthole (Figure 5a; 72) which was filled with dark greyish brown loam flecked with charcoal (71) and greyish brown loam (70), with a post-pipe filled with dark greyish brown loam (69) and fragments of wood; the post-pipe was visible in the lower part of the soil layer (28) which sealed the post-hole. The fill of this post-hole was cut by another pit (Figure 5; 68), possibly also a large post-hole, in the northeastern corner of the trench. The dark greyish brown loam fill (67) of this pit contained a number of large stone fragments and cobbles, and a possibly post-packing. It also produced a few fragments of fired clay, possibly oven or furnace lining (Photo 3). The natural was also cut by a linear gulley (37) filled with a greyish brown sandy silty loam (36). These were all sealed by a layer of buried soil (28) up to 0.3m deep.

To the south, this soil lay beneath a layer of loam (66) with stone fragments similar to the possible yard surfaces seen in trenches A (47) and B (48). The soil (19) from within the top of this surface produced a few sherds of Roman pottery and Roman brick and tile and a sherd of possible Iron Age pottery.

The southern side of this rubble spread (66) was bordered by a band of stone-free silty sand (29) beyond which was another patchy stone surface (65). To the south of this was another pebble surface (61 & 64). The stone-free sand (29) produced Roman pottery and brick and tile, and a quantity of slag; it had the appearance of a ditch fill, but when sampled proved to be relatively shallow (0.28m deep), and may again perhaps have been the base of one of Frances Stackhouse Acton's exploratory trenches. Removal of a section of this fill (Figure 4b) revealed a stone surface of angular stone chippings (96). This surface had been cut by a circular pit (95) 1.2m in diameter by at least 0.25m deep filled with dark greyish brown sandy silty loam (94) and containing some large fragments of clay and stone roof tiles.

The stone and pebble surfaces to the south (65 & 64) were also separated by an irregular patch of relatively stone-free silty sand (38 & 44). This deposit was about 0.2m deep and overlay a dark grey brown sandy silty loam (91) with stone fragments (some with mortar attached) and fragments of mortar, clearly representing building debris.

The pebble surface (61 & 64) at the south end of the trench had a relatively smooth surface and may have been an internal surface. It was crossed by a narrow gulley (63) filled with a clean sandy loam (62), possibly yet another 19th century exploratory trench. In the southwestern corner of the trench the pebble surface was covered with a thin compacted layer of burnt clay (60). This lay just 0.23m below the existing ground surface. The thin soil layer (24) removed from within and over the top of these surfaces contained a small quantity of Roman pottery and brick and tile and a medieval silver longcross coin of Henry III (Photo 7; 1025).

These deposits all lay beneath c. 0.2m of topsoil. This layer, removed by machine (03) and hand (17), produced a number metal detector finds of iron nails and copper alloy, including a fragment of the bowl of a silvered copper alloy spoon.

5.5 Trench D (Figure 6a)

Trench D was located just within the eastern side of the cropmark enclosure. The geophysical survey had not indicted the presence of any features or deposits in this area (other than the former road line) although the 1847 manuscript plan suggested that the 1817/1844 excavations were located in this part of the field.

The topsoil (04) was removed by machine and the underlying surface cleaned by hand (23). The spoil produced a metal-detector find of an Iron Age coin (1009). The natural subsoil, here a compact yellowish-brown silt with a few pebbles (90), lay between 0.30m and 0.37m below the ground surface. The only feature seen in the trench was a narrow gulley (89) 0.35m wide by 0.2m deep cut into the natural. The gulley was filled with a dark greyish-brown sandy silty loam (88) and is likely to have been associated with the former road, the line of which lay immediately to the north of the northern end of the trench.

5.6 Trench E (Figure 6b)

Trench E was located outside the eastern edge of the cropmark enclosure. The geophysical survey again had not indicted the presence of any features or deposits in this area (other than the former road line) although the 1847 manuscript plan suggested that the 1817/1844 finds were located in this part of the field.

The natural subsoil comprised a compact yellow-brown silt (87). Towards the northern end of the trench this was cut by two gulleys (79 & 81) both filled with a dark greyish brown sandy silty loam (78 & 80). Both gulleys ran parallel to the edge of the former road, which was seen in the northern end of the trench (Photo 4). The road comprised a surface of pebbles and gravel compacted in a matrix of light brown silt (86). The road surface was cut by wheel ruts (83 & 85) filled with light brown silty loam (82 & 84). The road surface and ruts and gulleys to the south were all sealed by a thin layer (0.05m thick) of compact greyish-brown sandy silty loam (46) which in turn lay beneath topsoil (05) 0.35m thick. Metal detecting of the machine-removed topsoil produced two small finds, a copper alloy band (1008) and a very worn coin (1126).

5.7 Trench F (Figure 7a)

Trench F was located to investigate the southern of two possible enclosures identified by the geophysical survey to the NE of the main cropmark enclosure.

The natural subsoil of gravel in light brown silt (51) lay between 0.3m to 0.4m below the topsoil (06). The natural gravel was cut by a pit (Figure 7a & b; 77) 0.5m in diameter by 0.2m deep, filled with a greyish-brown sandy silty loam (76), which produced no finds. The natural gravel was also cut by a ditch (Figure 7a & c; 12); the lower fill of the ditch (75) comprised a greyish brown pebbly sandy silty loam and produced a single sherd of possible Iron Age pottery. The upper fill comprised a greyish brown sandy silty loam (11) and produced two conjoining sherds of the neck of a Severn Valley Ware jar.

5.8 Trench G

Trench G was located to investigate the northern of the two possible enclosures identified by the geophysical survey to the NE of the main cropmark enclosure. The natural subsoil of gravel in light brown silt (74) lay between 0.3m to 0.4m below the topsoil (07). No archaeological features were seen in this trench.

5.9 The finds from the 2009 investigations

Bulk finds: By weight and count, the vast majority of the finds recovered comprised brick and tile (41.267kg). Nevertheless a significant quantity of Roman pottery (133 sherds weighing 1,239g) was recovered, though this mostly comprised small, abraded sherds. 3 sherds of possible Iron Age pottery were recovered. Only one was from a secure context (75). The other two were residual within late contexts and their identification as Iron Age needs confirmation. 54gms of glass were recovered (though less than half of this would appear to be Roman).

Context	Iron Age pottery	Roman pottery (count / weight)		Brick & tile	Fe	Slag	Glass
		Coarse wares	Samian				
(10)01		2 / 8g		1587g	413g		
(10)02		2 / 10g		213g	159g		
(10)03		2 / 3g		3300g	1077g		
(10)04		2 / 6g		31g	762g		
(10)05		1 / 1g		150g	1297g		
(10)06		6 / 21g		544g	389g		4g
(10)07				78g	102g		
(10)11		2 / 57g					
(10)14		7 / 175g		415g			
(10)15		3 / 74g	1 / 11g	420g	20g		
(10)16		3 / 44g		1793g	27g		
(10)17		2 / 8g		169g	23g		1g
(10)18	1 / 12g	13 / 90g		3255g	58g		
(10)19	1 / 11g	9 / 31g		1736g	100g	26g	19g
(10)21		29 / 371g		2028g	11g	45g	
(10)22		3 / 13g		648g	30g		
(10)23				26g	14g		5g
(10)24		2 / 10g		1175g	5g	5g	
(10)27				4g			
(10)28		2 / 8g		363g	6g	17g	20g
(10)29		14 / 56g		2173g	59g	437g	
(10)31		1 / 40g		740g			
(10)32				1548g	13g		
(10)34				184g	11g		
(10)36				24g			
(10)38		2 / 24g		1489g	37g		
(10)44				508g		44g	
(10)45		3 / 19g		733g	6g		
(10)46				4g	71g		3g
(10)47				2825g	7g		
(10)48		15 / 108		6736g	24g	100g	
(10)49		5 / 46g	1 / 3g	1201g	40g		
(10)67				428g			
(10)75	1 / 6g						
(10)78				3g			2g
(10)80		1 / 2g			56g		
(10)88				7g			
(10)94				4723g			

Table 1: The bulk finds

Small finds: 20 objects were recorded as small finds, including 5 coins (1 Iron Age, 1 Roman, 1 medieval, 2 unidentified). The majority of the small finds were recovered as a result of metal-detecting the spoil (i.e. those recovered from contexts [10]01 – [10]05).

Find no	Context	Material	Name	Weight	Count	Period
1008	(10)05	Cu alloy	Band	25g	1	
1009	(10)04	Cu alloy	Coin	>1g	1	Iron Age
1013	(10)02	Cu alloy	Coin	3g	1	Roman
1020	(10)21	Pb	Scrap	25g	1	
1025	(10)24	Ag	Coin	1g	1	Medieval
1026	(10)05	Cu alloy	Coin	5g	1	Post-med
1097	(10)02	Cu alloy	Coin?	>1g	1	
1099	(10)03	Cu alloy	Spoon	2g	1	Roman
1100	(10)03	Cu alloy	Stud	1g	1	
1101	(10)03	Cu alloy	Rivet	8g	1	?Roman
1102	(10)01	Pb	Rivet	9g	1	?Roman
1103	(10)01	Pb	Scrap	24g	1	
1104	(10)01	Pb	Scrap	13g	1	
1105	(10)02	Pb	Strap	25g	1	?Roman
1106	(10)05	Pb	Scrap	169g	1	
1107	(10)05	Pb	Scrap	114g	1	
1108	(10)05	Pb	Scrap	22g	1	
1109	(10)05	Pb	Scrap	2g	1	
1110	(10)18	Pb	Scrap	11g	1	
1111	(10)49	Pb	Scrap	3g	1	

Table 2: The small finds

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Before these investigations the precise location and extent of the Roman villa discovered and excavated by Frances Stackhouse Acton in 1817 and 1844 had not been determined. The desk-based assessment of archives held at Shropshire Archives and by the Acton family had suggested that the Roman building may have lain in the eastern side of the field known as Laundry Meadow. A sketch plan in Frances Stackhouse Acton's manuscript account of her 1844 excavations also appears to show that the structure she recorded extended both to the east and to north of the area she explored. In 1978 aerial photography revealed the presence of a cropmark enclosure (HER 04419) in the northern and western part of the field, though no remains of the villa were visible. Trial excavations in 1997 and 2004 had confirmed the location of the western arm of the enclosure, and shown that its upper fills contained Roman pottery and building material.

The investigations by the Acton Scott Heritage Project in 2008-9 aimed to locate and map the extent of the cropmark enclosure and villa and to assess the survival, quality, condition and significance of associated archaeological features, deposits, and structures. These investigations included a geophysical survey, shovel-pit testing and trial excavations.

6.2 The geophysical survey of the two fields of the study area (Laundry Meadow and Clover Bank) combined a magnetic and a resistivity survey. It found little convincing evidence for structural remains in the eastern field, Clover Bank, although it did locate what appeared to be spreads of rubble suggesting a possible building complex of three ranges. However, the shovel-pit testing did not produce significantly more finds in this area and the trial trenching in 2008 demonstrated that the "rubble" comprised natural glacial gravel.

The geophysical survey also suggested the presence of a possible aqueduct running through Laundry Meadow, following a sinuous line down a slight slope and passing to the south of the cropmark enclosure, terminating at a small anomaly in Clover Bank field. Again, the 2008 trial trenching could not confirm the existence of this aqueduct.

In the western field, Laundry Meadow, the magnetic survey located a number of smaller linear features – possibly field ditches or enclosures - to the east of the main cropmark enclosure. The 2009 trial excavation did confirm the presence of one of these ditches, which produced pottery of Roman and possibly also Iron Age date. The shovel-pit testing generally produced a small quantity of small pieces of brick and tile, some undoubtedly of Roman date, most of indeterminate date, and a small quantity of small abraded sherds of Roman, medieval and post medieval pottery, from across this area. One sherd of possibly Iron Age pottery and a small glass bead, possibly of Roman date, were also recovered from Laundry Meadow.

6.3 The southern arm of the enclosure ditch was located by the trial excavations in 2008 where both the cropmark plots and the geophysical survey indicated it to be and it was seen to be over 4m wide. Its middle and upper fills were a repository for destruction debris from the villa building. However, neither the origins of the enclosure nor the hierarchical development of the enclosure and villa were determined (artefactual and ecofactual remains within the ditch

fills would be likely to provide further evidence on this issue). Although the enclosure ditch was not examined in the 2009 excavations, of some interest was the retrieval of a small coin from the excavated topsoil near the eastern arm of the enclosure. The coin is a small Iron Age copper alloy coin (9) and appears to be of Iceni type (Photo 5).

6.4 Both the geophysical survey and the shovel-pit testing indicated the presence of a Roman building in the western side of Laundry Meadow, lying within the southern part of the cropmark enclosure, a little to the south of the line of the former road. The geophysical survey indicated a building perhaps 25m – 20m long by 10m north–south abutting the southern side of the cropmark enclosure. To the northeast were signs of a yard area. A large area of magnetic disturbance and an area of low resistance continued westwards from the building for around 30m, suggesting that the building might continue in this direction. Shovel-pit testing here produced larger fragments of Roman roof tile, wall-flue tile, and hypocaust tile, and some larger fragments of Roman pottery.

The 2008-9 trial excavations confirmed the results of the geophysical survey, having found the remains of floors, a collapsed roof, stone surfaces, and other debris associated with a Roman building. The excavations have also now defined the area that contains the building remains, and have shown that they do not extend beyond the eastern arm of the enclosure. These remains appear to belong to the structure found by Francis Stackhouse Acton in 1817 and 1844, though they lie on the opposite side to the field to the remains shown on her sketch plan. The trial trenches located in the eastern part of Laundry Meadow (and in Clover Bank, the adjoining field to the east) found no signs of a Roman structure. No definite traces of the 19th-century excavations were seen in the trial trenching in 2008 or 2009, though it is possible that some of the shallow gulleys located in trenches A – C may be the bases of exploratory trenches cut in the topsoil to locate solid features. Otherwise the Roman deposits encountered all appeared to be intact and undisturbed (other than by ploughing) beneath the topsoil.

A substantial quantity of Roman tile – mostly fragmentary – was recovered by the trial trenching. This comprised mainly ceramic and stone roof tile, but a few pieces of ceramic box-flue tile and occasional fragments of hypocaust bricks were also recovered. The stone roof tiles found in abundance in trenches A – C were of a purple and greenish-grey micaceous sandstone. A selection were examined by Dr Peter Toghill, who has suggested the Clun Forest area as a possible source for the stone (Toghill, *pers.comm.*) Tiles from the same stone have been found at other Roman sites including Wroxeter (Hannaford, 2010) and Whitley Grange and Upton Cresset (Dr Roger White, *pers.comm.*)

Pottery was scarce, but, as would be expected given that it was the upper deposits associated with the villa structure that were sampled, comprised mainly 3rd – 4th century material, including Severn Valley and Black Burnished II wares. Coins were surprisingly rare, though again iron nails – presumably from former roof structures - were frequent finds.

6.5 The presence of charcoal deposits within the lower fills of the enclosure ditch suggests that there is a high potential for obtaining a series of radio-carbon and other archaeo-environmental information from these deposits. Again the presence of charcoal-bearing deposits within the stratigraphic

sequences associated with Roman occupation of the site indicates a high potential for radio-carbon and perhaps archaeomagnetic dating and other archaeo-environmental analysis.

6.6 The trial excavations have demonstrated that, despite the 19th-century excavations, there are well-preserved archaeological features and deposits associated with both the cropmark farmstead enclosure and the Roman villa. In some cases these features and deposits are fragile, and moreover, they lie very close to the present ground surface, at a depth of as little as 20cms below the present ground surface. The survival of floor surfaces at this depth highlights their vulnerability to erosion by cultivation and other agricultural activities. In places this could be seen to be affecting the site already – most of the *opus signinum* floor seen in trench B had been removed by ploughing. Elsewhere, though, the intact section of collapsed roof and other surviving floor surfaces is evidence that a good stratified sequence of deposits does survive. And, in places the deposits are of some depth, particularly in the lee of the former road line.

6.7 Future land management of the site needs to take account both of the vulnerability of the archaeological resource here and its potential for research into the Iron Age and Roman occupation of a rural site on the edge of the Wroxeter hinterland. The site has been damaged in the past, both by the re-alignment of the road and the subsequent 19th century excavations. Whilst the present pasture regime is beneficial to the preservation of the archaeological resource, the site has recently been under arable cultivation. And whereas this has been undertaken with a relatively light touch in the past, modern arable techniques might not be so kind to the archaeological deposits. Whilst preservation of the site *in situ* would be the preferred option for its management, the site offers considerable potential for properly resourced archaeological investigation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
DCMS	Department for Culture Media and Sport
OS	Ordnance Survey
SA	Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
HER	Historic Environment Record, Shirehall, Shrewsbury
TSAHS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society
TSAS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society
VCHS	Victoria County History (Shropshire)

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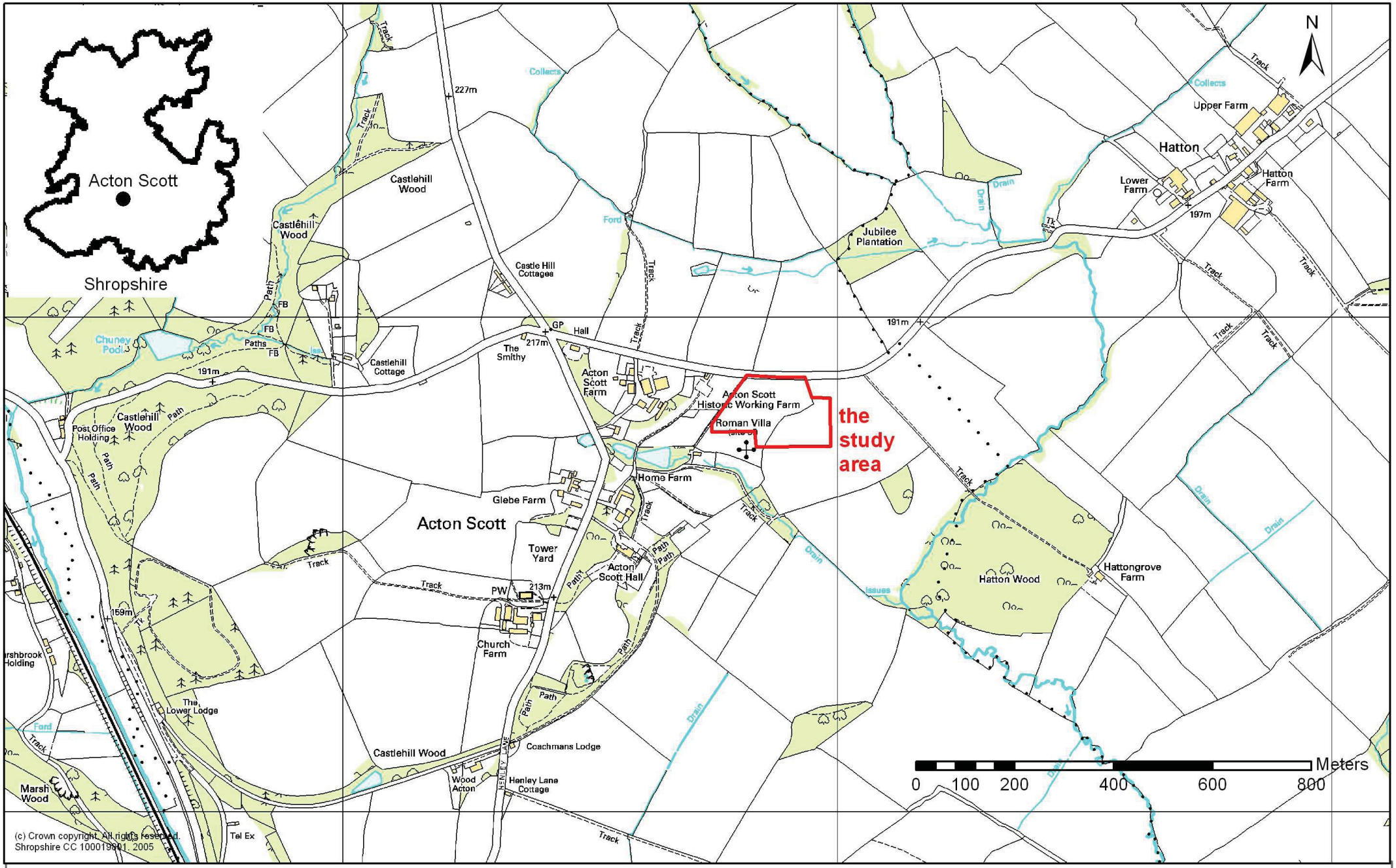
- The Heritage Lottery Fund (Your Heritage), Shropshire (County) Council, and the Friends of Shropshire Archives who funded the investigations, and English Heritage for providing the necessary permissions for the work.



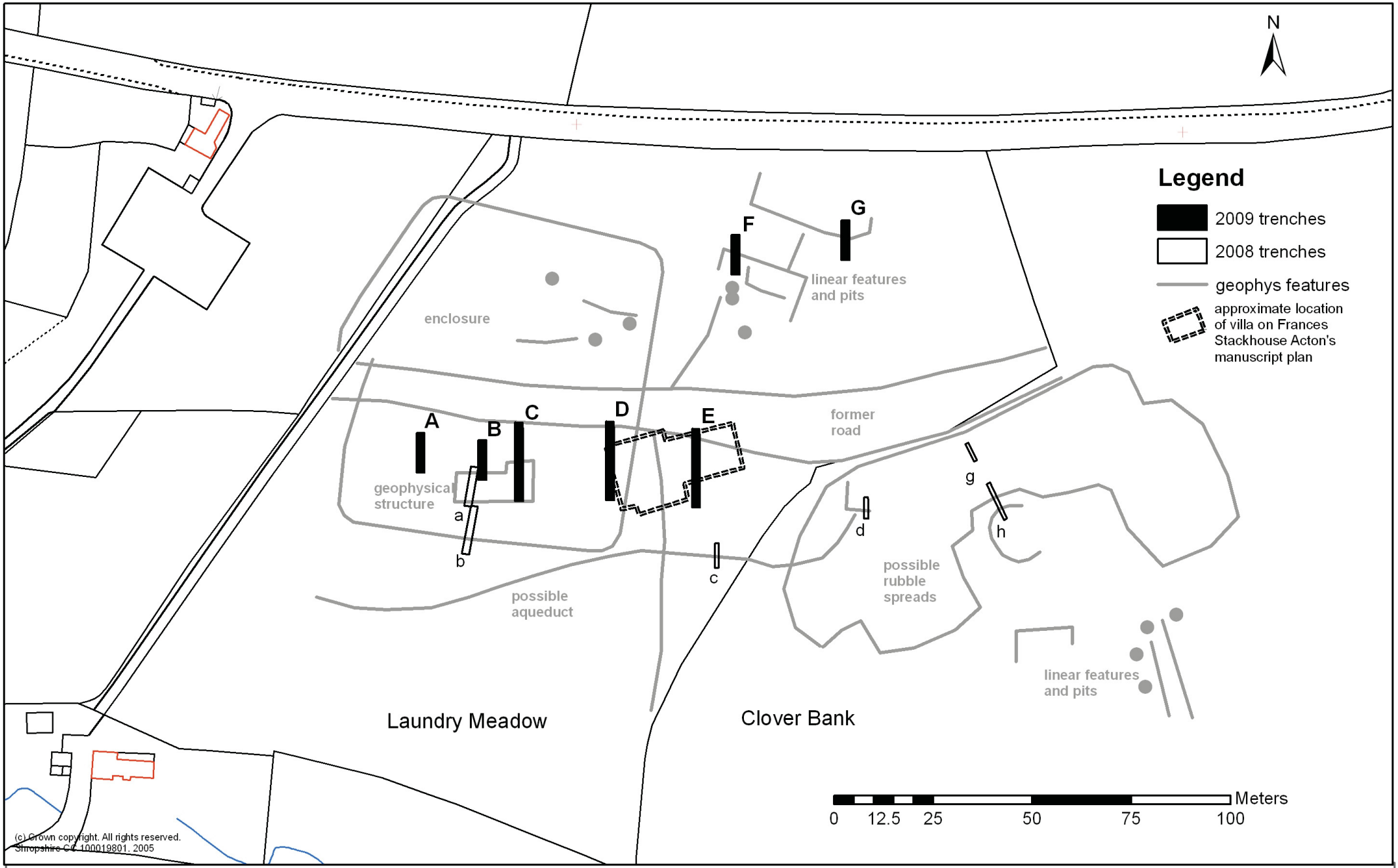
Shropshire Council

ACTON SCOTT ROMAN VILLA, ACTON SCOTT, 2009

Figure 1: Location of the study area

Archaeology Service
Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury, SY1 2AQ

Scale: 1:10,000



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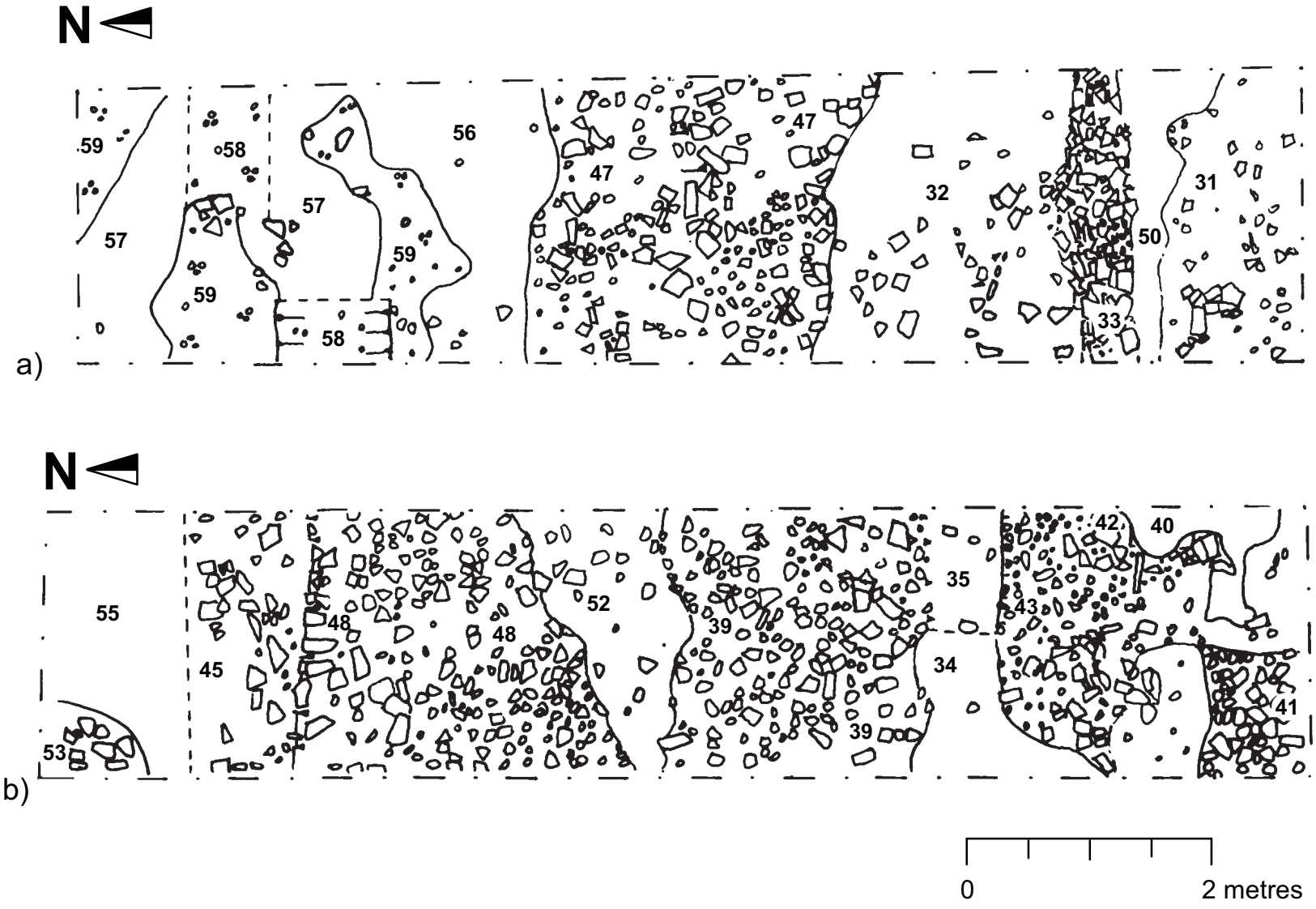
ACTON SCOTT ROMAN VILLA, ACTON SCOTT, 2009

Figure 2: Location of the 2009 trial trenches

Archaeology Service
Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury, SY1 2AQ

Scale: 1:1,250



ACTON SCOTT ROMAN VILLA, ACTON SCOTT, SHROPSHIRE 2009
Figure 3: a) Trench A, plan view; b) Trench B, plan view; scale 1:50

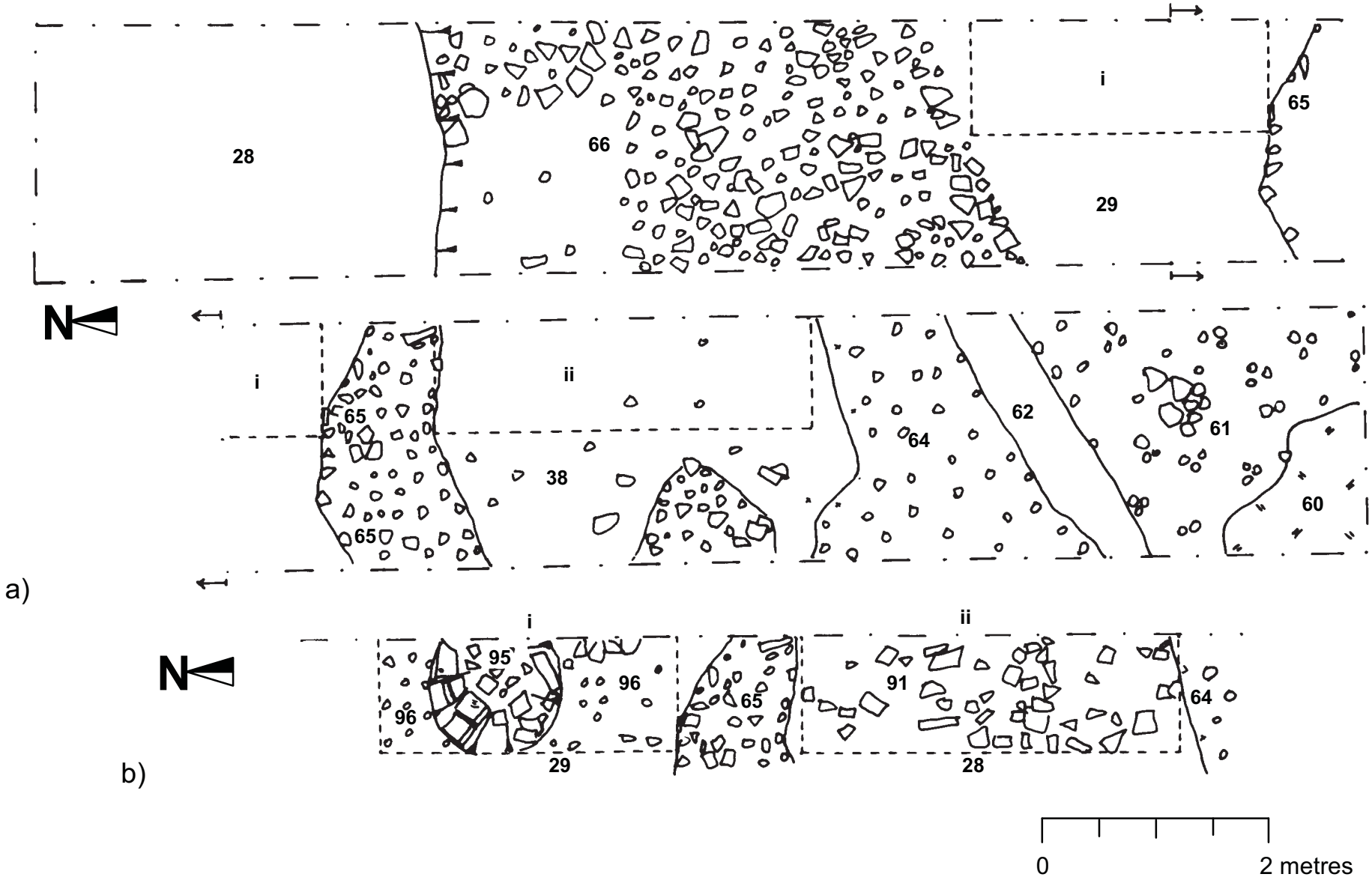


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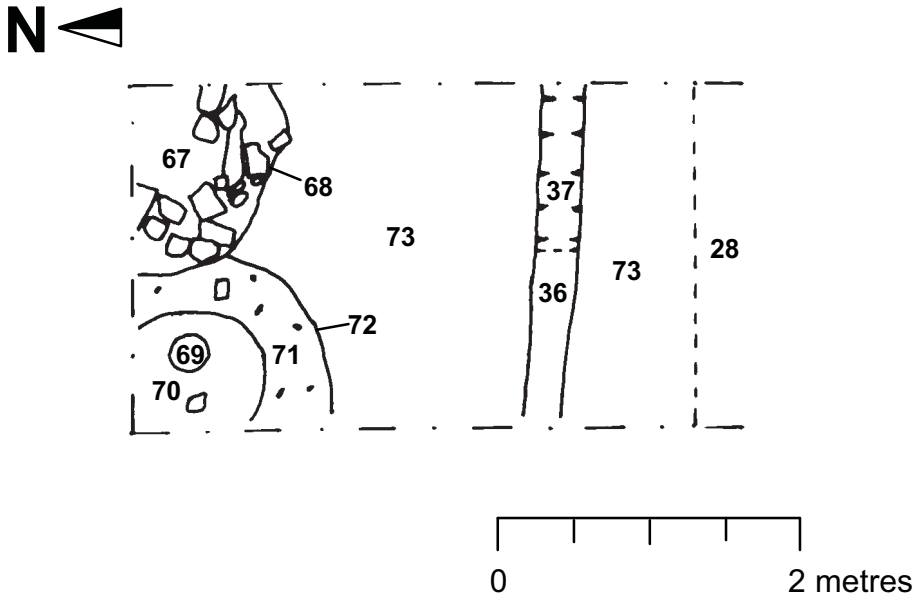
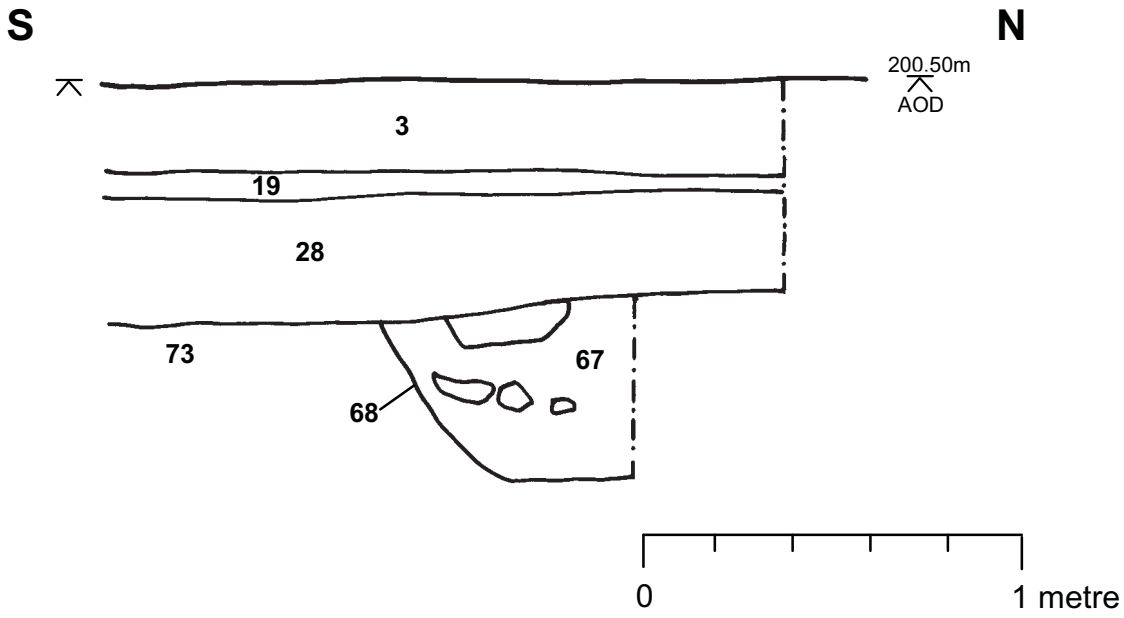
Figure 4: a) Trench C, plan view; b) Trench C, areas i and ii, plan view; scale 1:50



a)



b)

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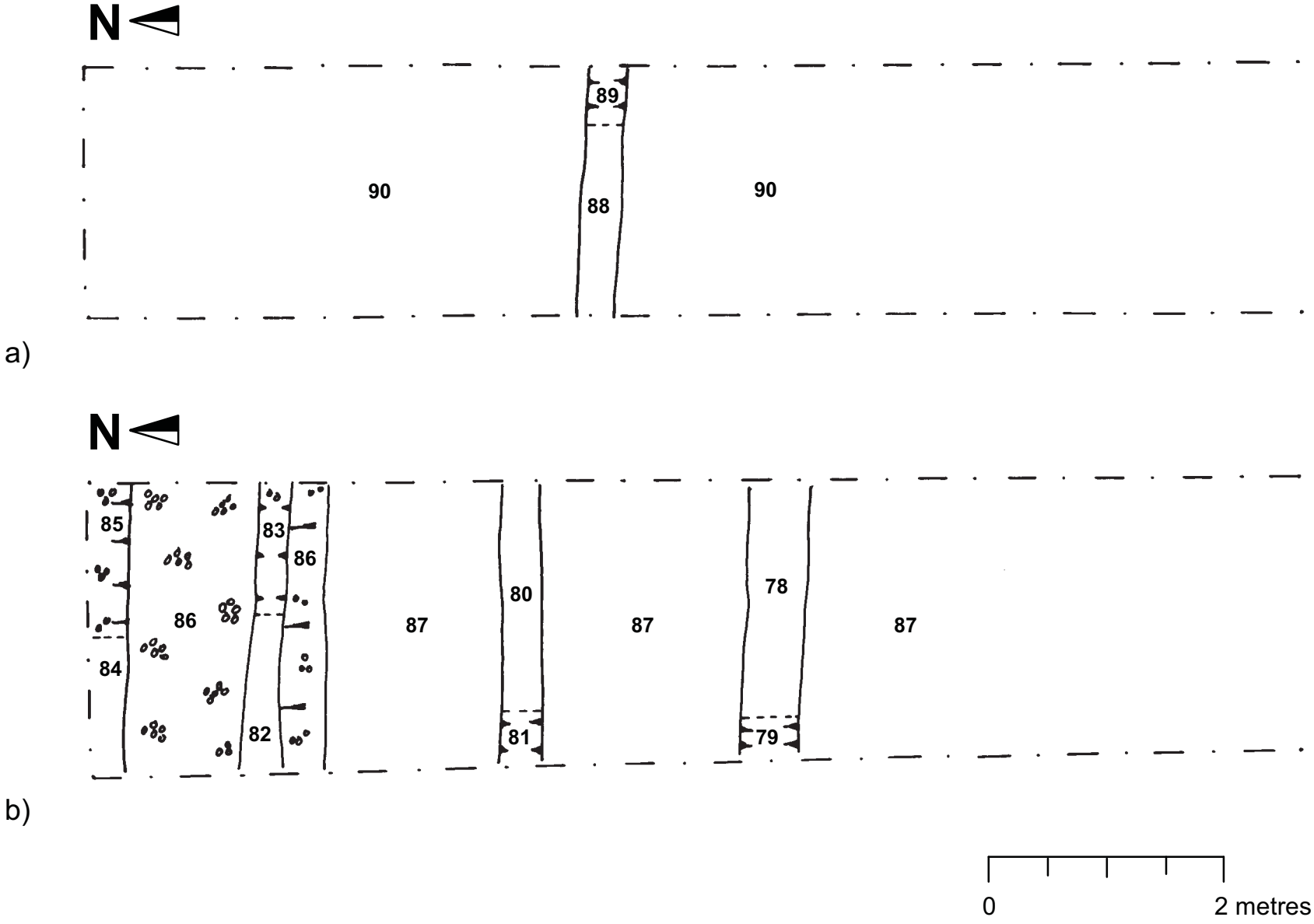
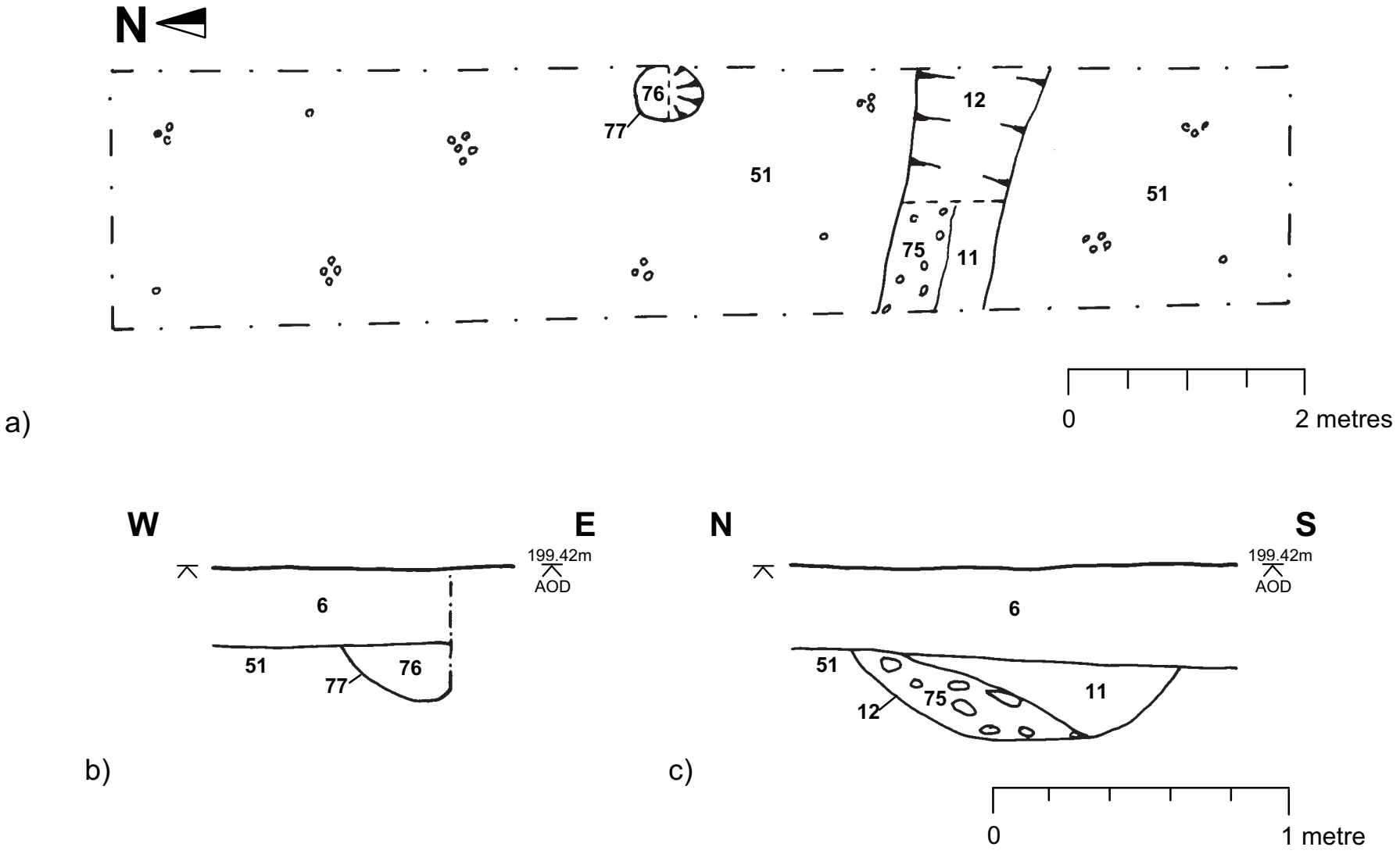
Figure 5: Trench C, north end; a) features 37, 68, & 71, plan view, scale 1:50; b) pit 68, east-facing section, scale 1:20



ACTON SCOTT ROMAN VILLA, ACTON SCOTT, SHROPSHIRE 2009
Figure 6: a) Trench D, north end, showing feature 89, plan view; b) Trench E, showing former road 86, plan view; scale 1:50



ACTON SCOTT ROMAN VILLA, ACTON SCOTT, SHROPSHIRE 2009
Figure 7: Trench F a) plan view, scale 1:50; b) pit 77, south-facing section, & c) ditch 12, west-facing section; both scale 1:20


Photo 1: Collapsed roof 33 at the south end of Trench A


Photo 2: The remains of floor surfaces at the south end of Trench B


Photo 3: Pits 68 & 72 at the north end of Trench C


Photo 4: Road surface 86 at the north end of Trench E


Photo 5: Coin 1009 (diam 9mm) 17mm)


Photo 6: Coin 1013 (diam 20mm)


Photo 7: Coin 1025 (diam