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An Archaeological Evaluation of land adjacent to Farmington Quarry, Gloucestershire

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Front cover illustration: Roman finger nail cleaner, probably part of a set of toiletry equipment.

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was carried out within the area of a proposed extension to Farmington stone quarry, near Farmington in Gloucestershire. The evaluation found evidence of early Iron Age settlement and extensive Romano-British activity. The latter comprised a substantial building or building complex, with an associated cemetery and ditches, possibly representing part of a field system, one of which was a roadside ditch to the Fosse Way.

The fieldwork and results are discussed in detail below. It is probable that a full archaeological excavation will be required by the local planning authority, prior to quarrying within the areas of archaeological potential. It is possible that the deposits will be deemed to be of sufficient importance that their preservation in situ is required.

1 Introduction

The aims of the evaluation were to determine whether or not Roman settlement deposits are present in the area, as highlighted by a desk based assessment (Barber 1997), and if so to assess the nature, extent and level of survival of any such deposits.

The field which was the subject of the evaluation is located on the southern side of the Fosse Way, 1km north of Farmington village and 2km north-east of Northleach. The field adjoins Farmington quarry which is to the north-east, and centres on NGR SP 1285 1668. The evaluation site comprises of an area c.12ha and is currently in use as arable farmland. The underlying geology of the site is Greater Oolitic limestone. The site rises gently from 179m OD at the eastern boundary of the site to approximately 199m OD at its western edge.

The brief written by the Archaeology Officer (Planning and Development) of Gloucestershire County Council required an archaeological field evaluation of the entire area of the proposed extension to Farmington Quarry prior to the determination of the planning application. The excavation of thirty three trenches measuring 40m x 1.83m, totalling c.2% of the total proposed development area was recommended. The trenches were located so as to give the best possible coverage of the proposed extension area. The topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under archaeological supervision. All archaeological deposits were hand cleaned, recorded and excavated using standard archaeological techniques as set out in the project design (Catchpole 1997).

The writer would like to thank: Captain JJD Barrow, who commissioned the report; Toby Catchpole who managed the project; Caroline Jamfrey for producing the illustrations; Jan Wills for her advice, and site assistants, Mandy Marshall, Paul Nichols, Kathy Speight and student Avril Hayes.

2 Archaeological and historical background

The background to the site was investigated in April 1997 (Barber 1997) in the form of a desk based assessment. A brief resume of the archaeological background to the site is presented below.

Prehistory

The desk based assessment noted that no prehistoric sites or find spots had been recorded within the evaluation area, despite the presence of Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age activity in the near locality.

Romano-British

A 2nd to 4th century Romano-British pottery scatter (GSMR 2570) had been recorded within the evaluation area in the south-west quadrant of the field. Building materials were also noted. The site borders the Fosse Way which dates from the middle of the 1st century AD, and forms the northern boundary of the site.

A small area noted on the 1707 pre-enclosure map of Farmington, located in the south-west corner of the evaluation area, was named the 'Chessells'. Elsewhere in Gloucestershire this name is associated with Roman settlement or building remains. Saville (1980) classified the area known as the Chestles as an unspecified Roman settlement. More recently it has been listed as a possible villa site. A 4th century villa has been positively identified 1km south of the evaluation area in Farmington village (Gascoigne 1969).

3 Trench Summaries (for individual trench location see Fig 1)

The geological survey map (OS 1946) that covers the area of Farmington illustrates the underlying geology to be Greater Oolitic limestone. Despite this the natural deposits were variable over the whole site. Yellow clay containing small angular, mainly quartzite gravel was found in discrete pockets over the whole site area. A dark ginger coloured clay, containing traces of mineralization, was found in pockets and along fault lines in the bedrock. The majority of the natural bedrock was fragmented limestone brash. Ploughing and weather damage had shattered the top of the bedrock, through which the topsoil had leached. Solid bedrock existed in the south-west corner of the field in the area of trenches 23 and 29.

Changes in the underlying geology will not be discussed on a trench by trench basis, unless considered relevant to the archaeological deposits.

The depth of topsoil across the site varied little and was between 0.25m and 0.35m deep. In area adjacent to the western site boundary the topsoil was deeper at c.0.5m probably due to the hedge roots holding the soil *in situ*. The topsoil covered all archaeological features.

All pottery referred to in the following text was identified by Jane Timby, Archaeological Consultant (Timby 1997).

Trench 1

Cutting the natural deposits were three probable Iron Age and one Romano-British feature (see Fig 2).

Cut (108) was aligned north-west by south-east, with a return at its northern limit running north-east. The cut was 0.3m deep and 0.8m wide and had been roughly excavated into the bedrock, the western side of the cut was sloping at 30° to a flat base with the eastern edge at 90°. The internal corner of the cut had been reinforced with pitched limestone to stabilise

the loose natural through which it had been cut. The cut had been backfilled with clean clay and rubble (107) with 10% of the rubble being pitched against the inner edge of the cut. No dateable material was retrieved from the feature.

A pit (106) was located 6m north of structure (107/108). It was oval in plan, and measured 1.6m by 0.75m and was 0.24m deep, and it had been roughly cut into the bedrock. The cut had been backfilled with a clay and rubble material (105) similar to that in cut (108). No dateable finds were retrieved.

At the northern limit of trench 1 a Romano-British ditch (101) running parallel to the Fosse Way was recorded. The sides of the ditch were well constructed, sloping at 45° to a flat base. Fragments of Severn Valley Ware and Grey Ware were recovered from the fill. The ditch is probably the roadside ditch to the southern side of the Fosse Way. The southern edge of ditch (101) cut an earlier feature, possibly a pit, of uncertain date.

Trench 2

Within trench 2, a 13m length of a curvilinear ditch (202), 0.6m wide and 0.26m deep was exposed. The northern edge of the cut was vertical, to a flat base, the southern edge having a slope of 30°. The cut had been roughly made and had been backfilled with a clean reddish brown clay containing 50% rubble. The cut (202) terminated 7m from the eastern extent of trench 2, and appeared to respect the presence of a semi-circular feature (204) running under the northern section. Cut (204) could be a ditch terminal or possibly a pit. No dateable finds were retrieved from trench 2.

Trench 3

No archaeological deposits or features were present in trench 3.

Trench 4

The western 4m of trench 4 was occupied by a backfilled quarry pit (401). The extent of the quarry is not known, but it is in excess of 1m deep. The quarry had been backfilled with a large dump of clean clay and limestone rubble. The clay and rubble deposit was sealed by a layer of reddish brown clay subsoil, which had only survived in the area of the quarry due to the slumping of its fills, along the remaining length of the trench the sub soil has been ploughed away. Elsewhere on the site (trench 25) remnant areas of sub soil had been found to seal the Romano-British deposits. The quarry lies within 10m of the Fosse Way and although no datable finds were retrieved from this feature it is possible that it may have resulted from quarrying stone for the adjacent road.

Further to the east were two linear areas of worn and disturbed bed rock, positioned at 90° to the Fosse Way. Context (402) was 2m wide and 0.2m deep. Context (403) was 7m wide and of a similar depth. It is possible that these worn areas are trackways leading from the Fosse to the south west.

Trenches 5-8 inclusive

No archaeological deposits or features were present in these trenches.

Trench 9

At the eastern extent of trench 9 a group of Iron Age features was recorded. Cutting the bedrock was an amorphous Iron Age feature (906), possibly a pit, which was cut by a later pit (904). Both pits were cut by a large linear ditch (901) aligned north-west by south-east. The ditch was 1.6m wide and had been backfilled with domestic waste, with pockets of ash and charcoal prominent in the soil matrix. Several sherds of early Iron Age pottery including a carinated bowl were retrieved as well as some fragments of daub. The majority of the trench to the west had suffered from severe plough damage.

Trench 10

All features in this trench date to the Iron Age period. Two curvilinear ditches (1001) and (1002) were recorded in this trench. Ditch (1001), at the southern limit of the trench, contained several sherds of Iron Age pottery. Ditch (1001) cut an earlier posthole c.0.7m in diameter, which was part of a range of similarly large postholes in the southern 10m of trench 10. No alignments or suggested building plan for the post holes could be conjectured from within the limited excavation area. Two additional small curvilinear gullies were also recorded within the area of Iron Age activity.

Trenches 11-13 inclusive

No archaeological deposits or features were present in these trenches.

Trench 14

At the northern extent of trench 14, a shallow deposit (1445) overlay the natural bedrock. The deposit was cut by a pit (1444), possibly Iron Age in date. Adjacent to the pit but cutting the bedrock was a posthole possibly of the same date. Two meters south of the pit was a small gully (1436) aligned south-east by north-west and was probably the northern boundary of the cemetery located immediately to the south of this feature. A burial (1438) was located outside the boundary, which may indicate it being of a later date to the majority of the burials, and probably due to the existing plot being full.

To the south of the gully eight burials were recorded, some of which were not fully exposed due to the limits of the trench. All the burials were aligned north-east by south-west, two had post holes at the north-eastern end of the cut, and were probably for burial markers. Evidence within the trench suggests the cemetery had been formally set out, as the graves were evenly spaced and there was no evidence of intercutting. None of the graves were excavated as their form and date were clear.

Although unexcavated the graves produced a number of surface finds giving a date range of the 1st to the 4th century. Grave (1428) had been disturbed by the machining of the trench revealing something of its structure. The grave cut was made through solid bedrock and after which the body had been placed inside, the cut had not been backfilled, but the grave capped with limestone slabs. It is not clear if the body had also been placed in a coffin or if grave goods had been placed with them. However it is not certain that all the graves are of the same construction. Some of the graves were small and were thought to be those of children.

At the southern end of trench 14 were three probable postholes (1402), (1404) and (1406). When examined more closely (1406) was found to contain a quantity of disarticulated human

bone, possibly of a child. None of the bone had been burnt. Due to the jumbled state of the bone within the cut it would appear to have already been in a skeletal state when deposited. The southern or eastern limits of the cemetery were not identified. All the features in trench 14 were sealed by topsoil.

Trench 15

No archaeological deposits or features were present in trench 15.

Trench 16

A ditch (1601) and a small gully (1602) were recorded cutting the natural in trench 16. Both features were aligned north-east by south-west. Ditch (1601) was 0.7m wide and dated to the 3rd/4th centuries. The ditch represents a boundary but whether this is between fields or settlement areas is unclear, but the ditch fill did contain domestic refuse suggesting the close proximity of a structure. The gully (1602) to the west may be part of a structure of the same date as the ditch fill. Topsoil sealed the features in trench 16.

Trenches 17 and 18

No archaeological deposits or features were present in these trenches.

Trench 19

All features in trench 19 were Romano-British in date. Running under the northern end of the trench were the remains of a wall (1907) surviving only as foundation courses. The wall was aligned north-west by south-east and was butted to the south by a truncated limestone cobbled surface (1906) which contained pottery dating to the 3rd/4th centuries. The surface overlay a Romano-British deposit (1910) which pre-dated the construction of the surface and possibly the construction of the wall; the deposit dated to the 1st century. Three metres south of the truncated surface a group of postholes (1908), (1909) and (1911) were recorded. Cut (1909) was the largest with a diameter of c.0.7m. All appeared to contain limestone packing. The plan of a structure cannot be projected from the three postholes, although their size would suggest a building of some significance. Ten meters to the south of the post holes was a small gully (1905) on the same alignment as the wall (1907).

Eight meters south of the gully ran a ditch (1904) aligned north-east by south-west. The ditch was 1.1m wide and 0.3m deep, and contained pottery from the 1st to the 4th centuries. Immediately to the south of the ditch were postholes (1900) and (1901), a pit (1902) containing Black Burnished Ware and Severn Valley Ware, dating to the 1st/2nd century, and the remains of a shattered limestone surface (1903) dating to the 3rd/4th centuries.

An extremely well preserved Romano-British copper alloy finger nail cleaner was found within the plough soil. The face of the piece had been incised with a basic pattern centring around a green and red enamel inset. The find is illustrated on the front cover of this report.

Trench 20

Cut into the rubbly natural was a large building platform (2004) covering c.12m of the trench. The natural had been cut away to a depth between 0.1 and 0.2m, the area had then been

backfilled with a mixture of clay and limestone rubble, approximately 50% of which had been pitched vertically. Certain areas appeared to contain a higher concentration of pitched stone possibly to support a structure. Through and on top of this a building had been constructed. The nature and the layout of the building is unclear from the limited area excavated, but two phases of building activity were clearly represented. The first phase was represented by a wall foundation (2007) and a ditch (2009), which although adjacent to one another had no stratigraphic relationship and both cut (2004). Sealing the backfilled ditch and demolished wall was layer of domestic refuse (2001) dating to the 2nd century, which in turn was sealed by a fine limestone paved surface (2003) dating to the 4th century and belonging to the second phase of activity within this trench.

Surface (2003) had been closely laid from local limestone, some of the pieces measuring a metre in length. The surface was heavily plough scored but due to the size of the individual fragments and the construction quality of the surface, a significant area had survived and therefore the deposits beneath were also preserved. It was noticeable that to either side of the surface the stratigraphy was 0.2m to 0.3m lower having been truncated by ploughing. Large amounts of Roman pottery were recovered from the contexts in this trench. A particularly fine piece of decorated Samian ware was recovered depicting hounds chasing a lion. The status of the surface is unclear, without further exposure it is not possible to interpret it as either interior or exterior surface.

Trench 21

The deposits within trench 21 will be discussed with those of trench 33 below.

Trench 22

No archaeological deposits or features were present in trench 22.

Trench 23/32

Trenches 23 and 32 were excavated and recorded as one as they were extended to join during machining. A large Romano-British ditch (2302) was recorded 28m from the southern extent of trench 32. The ditch was aligned north-east by south-west, and backfilled with a relatively clean clay and rubble mixture, pottery from which dated the fill to the 3rd/4th centuries. The size of the ditch would suggest a boundary ditch and that it had been backfilled, possibly to change the location of the boundary.

To the north and cut through solid bedrock was a large pit (2301). The pit was poorly defined and may be part of a larger feature. The fill was very dark and contained high concentrations of Roman pottery, bone, burnt stone, ash and charcoal, suggesting it was a major repository for household waste. The pottery dated the feature to the mid 3rd/4th century with residual 2nd century also present. The cut could have been created for the deposition of waste, but due to its location in one of the few bands of solid bedrock, its primary function may have been a quarry.

It is possible that surface (2304) to the north extended as far south as pit (2301) but ploughing had removed any relationships which may have existed. Surface (2304) was made up from medium sized limestone slabs, the largest being 0.4m square. The surface had been closely constructed but had suffered from intense plough damage. It is unclear whether the surface was sitting on a stratified deposit or the topsoil had leached through after the surface was broken up by the plough. Where the surface was *in situ* two circular

scorch marks were recorded both 0.2m in diameter. The marks appeared to have the same alignment as the edge of the surface, and could either be the result of wooden uprights burning down or a hot object being rested on the surface.

The intact northern edge of surface (2304) butted a finer surface (2307) constructed from limestone cobbles. Again the surface had been severely truncated by ploughing. The surface extended northwards for 6m ending 0.2m short of a small gully (2305) aligned north-east by south-west and dating to the 1st/2nd century. Surface (2304) was cut by a large 0.5m by 0.7m post hole (2306), from the fill (2305) a small, square sectioned, rectangular, blue glass bead was retrieved.

Trench 24

The northern half of trench 24 was heavily disturbed by ploughing. Despite this small patches of surface could be recognised within the general disturbance as well as patches of deposits. The most identifiable features were two Romano-British pits (2410) and (2411) which dated to the 2nd century. Cut through the natural clay adjacent to pit (2410) was a shallow 0.2m cut to enable the laying of a clay and rubble bedding (2407) on top of which a limestone slab surface (2406) had been laid. Both the bedding and the surface dated to the mid to late 4th century. The bedding material extended for 4.5m whilst the surface survived only for two metres. Two small stake holes had been cut through the stones of the surface. They were aligned north-west by south-east and are likely to have supported a fence or a similar light structure. Cut through the bedding to the south of the *in situ* surface was a stone packed rectangular post hole measuring 0.5m by 0.6m.

Several features cut through the natural clay in this area were recorded to the south of surface (2406). A large square pit (2405) and two postholes (2402) and (2403) both dating to 240-400AD were aligned at 90° to the surviving northern edge of surface (2406). It is likely that all the features in this trench are of the same phase.

Trench 25

All features in trench 25 were Roman in date. Two phases of building were represented by walls and the remains of surfaces. The stratigraphic relationship between the two phases had been removed within the trench, by robbing at the eastern end and ploughing along the remainder of the trench length. The earlier structure is represented by walls (2503) and (2521). Both walls were aligned north-south, which is contrary to the majority of the Roman features over the site. The walls were some 21m apart suggesting a large building. Surface (2505) is possibly contemporary with this earlier building phase as it appears to respect wall (2503) to which it is adjacent. A pit (2501) cut the surface (2505). The only other remains of this earlier building phase was a truncated possible posthole below the foundation cut of the later wall (2510).

The second phase of building in trench 25 is represented by walls (2509) and (2510), both these walls are aligned north-east by south-west as with other features over the site. Wall (2510) dates to the late 2nd/3rd century. The width of the area between these walls was 13m and the whole of this area was covered by a 0.2-0.3m deep layer of domestic debris (2520), which dated to the 3rd and possibly 4th century. The area covered by (2520) was noticeably lower than the level of the natural to either side of the walls. It is possible that the floor surface to the building represented by walls (2509) and (2510) was wooden and that it was elevated above ground level, this would have allowed domestic waste to slip down between the floor boards producing layer (2520). It is also possible that the constructional elements of the floor are concealed beneath (2520).

A layer of subsoil was noted as surviving above this area and was slumped into the area between the walls possibly representing the collapse of the wooden floor, also the topsoil was 0.1- 0.15 deeper here than elsewhere in the trench also as a result of slumping. Wall (2509) was at right angle to wall (2408) in trench 24 and it is likely that they are part of the same structure.

Trenches 26-31

No archaeological deposits or features were present in these trenches.

Trench 32

See trench 23

Trench 33/21

Overlying the natural was an extensive layer of dirty redeposited natural clay (3305). This was cut by a layer of possible surface bedding (3300) contained within its own cut (3303). Pottery from (3300) dated the layer to the mid to late 4th century. The layer was heavily plough disturbed but central to its area was a patch of crushed and burnt limestone which may have been a hearth or the result of pressure from a large post which subsequently burnt down. The remains of a wall (3301) cut rubble (3300), was aligned north-west by south-east and was positioned 1.5m east of the western limit of (3300). Although the wall was stratigraphically later than the bedding material it cuts, the pottery evidence suggests an earlier date for wall (3301). The later dating material within the bedding layer (3300) may be present due to disturbance by ploughing.

4 Conclusions

The possible extent of archaeological deposits identified during the evaluation is shown on Fig 1.

4.1 Iron Age deposits

The presence of Iron Age ditches and possibly structures was not suspected from the assessment report produced prior to the evaluation. The observed features of this date represent at least two phases of activity. Well preserved structural elements of early Iron Age date were encountered in trenches 1 and 10, suggesting that the north and western part of the site contains archaeological deposits related to early Iron Age settlement.

The evidence for the early Iron Age in Gloucestershire is summarised in Saville (1984). The majority of excavated evidence has come from hill fort sites such as Norbury, located 1km to the south of Farmington Quarry. Non-hillfort settlements are mostly known from crop mark evidence in the Thames Valley. The site at Farmington Quarry is therefore one of very few identified early Iron Age unenclosed settlements in the Cotswold area away from the Thames Valley. It is therefore probable that either full archaeological excavation or preservation *in situ* will be recommended by the local planning authority.

4.2 Roman deposits

4.2.1 Structural and stratigraphic evidence

Well preserved and largely stratified deposits of Roman date were identified in trenches 1, 4, 14, 16, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25 and 33. Two broad phases were identified, the earlier within the 1st and 2nd centuries and the later dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries. The detailed site plan within each phase is imprecise as narrow evaluation trenches can only give an indication of the extent and general nature of deposits and structures.

A large building in trench 25 was the only structure positively dated to the early phase of the site. Interpretation of this feature was not possible due to the limited opportunity for excavation. Despite the lack of other structures or features of this date, pottery from this phase was recovered from trenches 14, 19, 23 and 25.

Structures dating to the 3rd or 4th centuries, were revealed within trenches 20, 24, 25 and 33. All shared a common constructional technique. A shallow area had been excavated into the bedrock and backfilled with clay and rubble, this platform was then used as a base, on top of which structures were constructed. It is unclear whether this later phase is made up of several structures or various parts of one large building. There was a significant difference in levels between the base of the building platform in trench 24 at 190.19m AOD and the platform in trench 33 at 192.0m AOD. The natural slope of the hillside would appear to have necessitated the creation of building platforms to create level areas. The structures are provisionally interpreted as part of a farmstead complex.

The ditches recorded in trenches 16 and 23/32 are interpreted as boundary ditches. They date to the later Roman phase on the site.

The cemetery recorded in trench 14 appears to span both phases of the Roman settlement. It would appear that the burials were undisturbed and had probably been protected from the plough by the extra depth of topsoil adjacent to the western boundary of the site. McWhirr (1981) states "In the Gloucestershire district an increasing number of late Roman farms are being found to have their own burial grounds". The presence of the cemetery at Farmington does not indicate the status or functions of the buildings with which it is associated.

4.2.2 Finds evidence

Pottery evidence indicates a focus of early Romano-British activity in the areas of trenches 14, 19, 23 and 25 although features and deposits of that early date were rare. The majority of Roman material was encountered in the south-western quarter of the site and dated to the 3rd and 4th centuries. Several sherds of imported Roman pottery were recovered from the site. The fragments of Samian Ware from trenches 19, 20, 23, 25 and 33 and mortaria from trenches 25 and 33, may indicate a site of some status as would the small find of a finger nail cleaner from trench 14.

4.3 Assessment of the significance of the Roman site

The focus for both phases of Roman activity was the south-west quarter of the evaluation site. There are numerous known Romano-British settlement sites of various types in the high Cotswolds, particularly of the later Roman period. The site has been subjected to considerable plough damage and a substantial stratigraphic sequence seems to survive only where protected by stone walls and surfaces. The Romano-British site does however offer an opportunity to investigate the plan, buildings, cemetery, boundaries and trackways of a

substantial farm adjacent to the Foss Way. At least two phases of building are present. It is probable that full archaeological excavation or preservation *in situ* will be recommended by the local planning authority.

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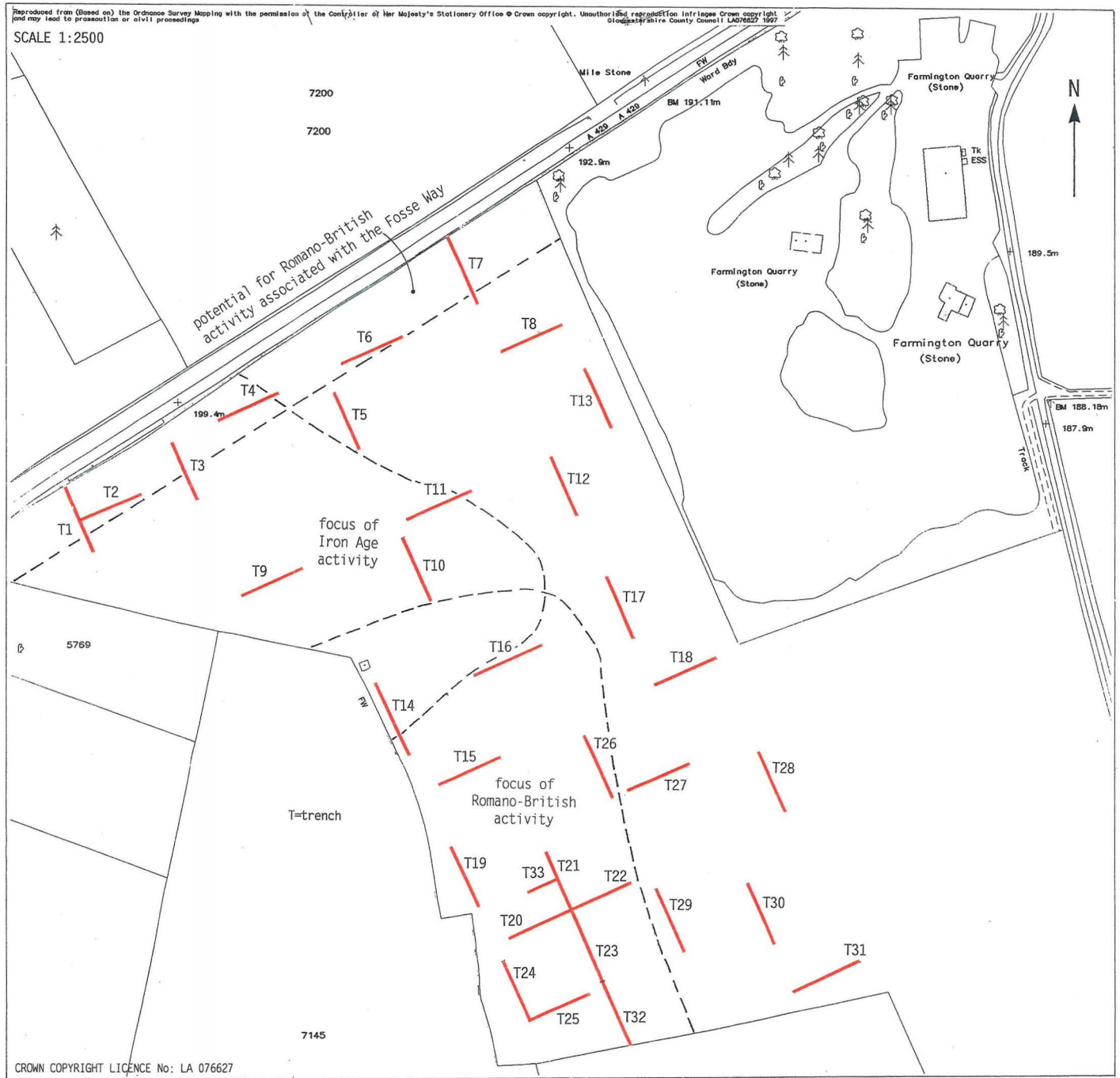
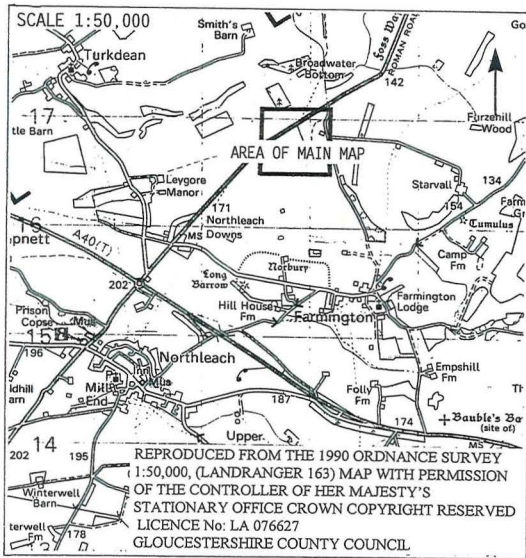
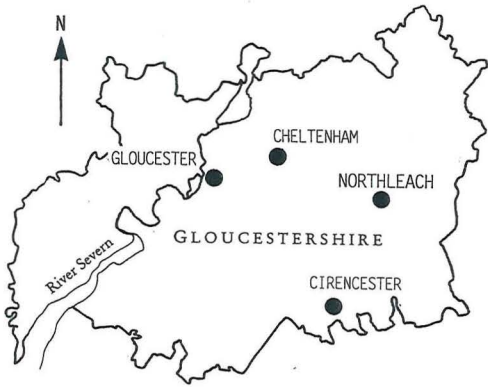


Fig 1: Site and trench location plan