

An Archaeological Evaluation of a Romano-British Site on the route of the Little Wymondley Bypass Hertfordshire



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by

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Report 9

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<u>Abstract</u>

Archaeological Fieldwork was carried out along a section of the proposed Little Wymondley Bypass route, south of Wymondley Bury, in order to evaluate a Romano-British site suspected from the results of an earlier investigation. A number of trial trenches were dug providing evidence of an extensive settlement, including substantial yard and floor surfaces, a probable road, and the remains of walls. Fieldwalking results provided further evidence of the extent of the settlement.

The cover illustration shows a cobbled yard surface and two wall foundations revealed in trench 3. A more detailed illustration can be seen in Figure 4.

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NB: The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and they take full responsibility for them. They are not necessarily the views of the North Hertfordshire District Council.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In 1990 the proposed route of the Little Wymondley Bypass was finalized describing a line curving around the south of the village, linking the A1(M) with the A602 (Hitchin Road). The chosen route traverses arable fields and pasture land to the south of the Manor House known as Wymondley Bury, and passes through a known area of archaeological interest.
- 1.2 In 1975, during the construction of the Lee Valley water pipeline across field 7800 (see fig. 2), Mr. G. Burleigh (Keeper of Field Archaeology, Letchworth Museum) recorded several features in the sides of the pipe trench, including two pits and an occupation surface which could be traced for one hundred and sixty metres. Pottery fragments recovered from these deposits indicated extensive Romano-British activity. (Burleigh, 1976).
- 1.3 At the time of the water pipeline construction, the whole of field 7800 was plough pasture. This was not the case in 1983 when Mr. J. Hunn for Hertfordshire County Council conducted a rapid survey along the bypass route; by then the field was arable but lying unploughed. Since fieldwalking (to recover surface finds) could not be performed, nothing further was discovered concerning the nature of the site.
- 1.4 Further work was therefore required to assess the archaeological potential of this site, and provide details of the archaeological response required to investigate any remains prior to the destructive process of road construction. Accordingly in October 1990 a team of five field archaeologists from NHDC Museums Service, funded by English Heritage, undertook the work; locating the bypass route and a number of trial trenches. A fieldwalking survey was performed together with a brief survey of landscape features. The results of these investigations are reported on here.
- 1.5 Prior to the arrival of the field team, the Hertfordshire County Council Highways Department had arranged to clear the topsoil from two areas (45 x 30 metres and 85 x 14 metres) on the bypass route in order to confirm the positions of the two earlier pipelines. This operation was observed by Mr. M.J. Daniells and Mr. J. Bryant (County Planning Department) to ensure that archaeological remains might not be disturbed. Only the ploughsoil was removed and thus very little was visible: merely a single patch of silty soil interpreted as a pit fill, but containing no dateable evidence. However unstratified Romano-British pottery sherds were recovered from the ploughsoil.
- 1.6 The section of the bypass route under scrutiny runs in a shallow curve (oriented roughly east to west) for approximately three hundred and fifty metres along the crest of a broad fold in the land overlooking wide valleys to the north-east and south.





Little Wymondley Bypass Location Map

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- The name of the nearby manor house of Wymondley Bury may be 1.7 a degenerate form of the Saxon word burgh, meaning a strong or well defended site. From this one might speculate upon the possibility of an Anglo Saxon antecedent for the later medieval holdings, although this suggestion is tentative at The medieval predecessor to the present structure best. cannot be securely dated before c.1300 (Farris 1989) at which time it was held by the Argentein family who contrived to control the manor until the male line of succession failed in 1420. Little Wymondley manor may have superceded the Argentein's major manorial holding in Great Wymondley which was apparently abandoned in the early fourteenth century. Certainly the Argenteins were generous in their gifts of land and benefices in Little Wymondley to the Augustinian Canons at Wymondley Priory.
- As the manor developed and flourished, the surrounding 1.8 landscape, in particular the lands immediately to the south of the house, underwent considerable alteration, traces of which are still to be observed. There is evidence to suggest that the fields through which the bypass is due to run, together with Bury Wood, may have been formalized into a deer park, perhaps as early as the first half of the twelfth century. Such parks were a popular feature with the Anglo-Norman ruling class and later aristocracy. Usually divided into areas of cultivated grassland and woodland, enclosed by a 'park pale' in the form of a ditch and bank surmounted by a fence, these parks were often devised to provide an impressive 'vista' viewed from the manor house, and in this Wymondley Bury was The large modern field 7800 may have been the no exception. cultivated pasture required by grazing deer, with a rectangular pond at the south of the field for use as a watering place. Sections of the park pale can still be traced in the boundaries of the field and woods.
- 1.9 In succeeding centuries the landscape continued to change. By the nineteenth century the northern third of field 7800 had been subdivided and was subjected to changes in agricultural practices. (There is further discussion of these changes in Fieldwalking Results. s.3.3). In the 1930's and 40's the manor house and a proportion of the surrounding land were acquired by Mr. R.F. Ransom of Hitchin. Under his ownership further changes were made. Areas of previous pasture were ploughed up in order to cultivate lavender bushes, foxglove and belladonna with which to supply his firm of Manufacturing Chemists in Hitchin. Bury Wood has been reduced to less than one sixth of its original area of some seventeen acres.
- 1.10 The subsoil in this area of the Hitchin Gap is a sandy, reddish-brown, flint-bearing clay, incorporating numerous erratic glacial deposits. At the time of this fieldwork the main field (7800) contained no sub-divisions and had been recently harrowed and sown with cereal crops. The paddock to the east (8689) was rough pasture, although bearings signs of previous activity (see trenching Methodology 2.1 and Results 3).

2.1 The Trial Trenches (see figure)

The purpose of this investigation was to determine, with the minimum degree of disturbance, the date, function, extent and state of preservation of the previously identified Romano-British site; specifically in the area where it might subsequently be effected by the construction of the Little Wymondley bypass. A programme of shallow trial trenching followed by detailed cleaning and examination was considered the most appropriate method to achieve those aims.

The NHDC Museums Field Archaeology Team began work in the middle of October 1990. Initially a theodolite was used to locate the bypass route across field 7800 from plans supplied by the Hertfordshire County Council Highways Department. Markers were then placed to define the southern limit of the road easement. For the purpose of this investigation, the area south of the carriageways and verges, which is due to be built up into a large embankment, was not included since this construction does not pose a threat to any underlying features.

The bypass route (excluding the embankment area to the south) varies in width from thirty four metres at the east of field 7800, to forty four metres in the west. A maximum of ten trenches, spaced at thirty five metre intervals, were provisionally allocated in order to sample the entire route across this field, a distance of approximately three hundred and fifty metres.

The trench locations were positioned perpendicular to the southern edge of the easement, and were alternately offset across the width of the bypass in order to sample the maximum area, whilst allowing ample margins for machine access.

Excavation began in the east of the field (trench 1), in the area which had previously produced archaeological evidence, and proceeded westwards. A space of 70 metres was left between trenches 1 and 2 since this area had already been examined during the construction of the water pipeline in 1975.(see section 1.2). The stripped areas for finding the water and gas pipelines were still exposed, and a large spoil heap had been left along the pipeline route. (section 1.5).

The excavation strategy, which was determined for this evaluation, required that the trenching sequence would continue across field 7800, unless two consecutive trenches proved to be archaeologically sterile. Accordingly, the westward progression of trenches ceased after the completion of trench 7.

The results obtained from trench 1 confirmed that the Romano-British settlement had extended as far as the eastern boundary of field 7800 (see section 3.1.1). Furthermore, observations in the low, bright early morning sunshine suggested the presence of extensive earthworks in the paddock beyond (8986) (see sections 3.1.8 and 3.3.2). Permission was granted by the landowner, Mr. Watts, for a single trench (trench 8) to be placed in the paddock, on the route of the bypass.



fig 2

A JCB with a 1.5m ditching bucket attached to its back actor, was used to remove the topsoil from the trial trenches. Mechanical excavation was limited to the depths which revealed either recognisable archaeological activity, or undisturbed subsoil. The possibility that slight traces of timber structures might be encountered was recognised, and great care was taken during this operation.

The trenches were then cleared by hand, and archaeological deposits carefully exposed. Further excavation of the features was not required for the purposes of this evaluation.

All features, including blank subsoil, were allocated context numbers and fully described on pro-forma record cards. Finds were gleaned from the surfaces of each deposit, and stored with the relevant context number in order to provide dating evidence. Artifacts of special interest were allocated co-ordinates with reference to the established base lines in each trench. In addition, finds were gathered from the trench upcasts.

The exact dimension of the trenches were recorded, and sections were drawn to illustrate the depth and nature of the overburden in each case. Field drawings were made of all surfaces, including detailed stone by stone illustrations of the archaeological features. A full photographic record was maintained.

The heights of all aspects of the site were recorded in relation to two temporary bench marks established along the bypass route. These points were subsequently measured against the known height of a bench mark on a railway bridge in Little Wymondley village, and absolute heights calculated above Ordnance Datum.

Finally the trenches were backfilled by machine, carefully ensuring that the archaeological surfaces remained undamaged.

2.2 Fieldwalking Surveys (Field 7800)

2.2.1 The Initial Survey

The quantity of surface finds, scattered in the ploughsoil along this part of the bypass route was noted during the early stage of surveying. This prompted a rapid fieldwalking exercise, not included in the original programme of work, taking advantage of the tapes and markers already laid out to locate the trial trenches. The purpose of this exercise was to establish, by a systematic process of finds recovery related to location, the extent of potential archaeological activity along this part of the bypass route, thereby complimenting information gathered from the trench excavations.

The bypass route was divided into thirty five metre lengths, varying in width according to the width of the easement, correlating with the intervals between the trench positions. Within these rectangular areas, four, randomly spaced east-west transects were walked to collect a sample of the available surface finds. The survey progressed across field 7800 from east to west and then was repeated in the opposite direction to minimise the effect of the intense, low sunlight which caused both glare and deep shadows on the field surface. A good recovery rate was maintained.

2.2.2 The Second Survey

The concentration of archaeological evidence revealed by trenches 2, 3 and 4, together with the results of the initial fieldwalking exercise, indicated that the nucleus of the settlement lay in this area of the field, perhaps extending slightly further north in the vicinity of the nearby electricity pylon (see figure 2). It was evident therefore, that a further brief, yet detailed fieldwalking programme would be valuable in the assessment of the site's extent. Accordingly permission was sought from Mr. Watts to allow the team to investigate beyond the limits of the bypass route.

The centre line of the overhead electric cables was used as the basis for a grid composed of 20 x 20 m squares. The grid was projected both to the north and south of the base line, incorporating the area of the bypass route in the region of the first four trenches. A similar sampling strategy to that of the initial survey was adopted, with three, randomly spaced, east to west transects walked within each square. The squares were examined sequentially in rows. Due to the pressure of time, a diminishing return from two or more squares determined the point at which a row would be abandoned, and investigation transferred to another line. Pro-forma record cards were used to indicate the lines marked in each square, and to mark the positions of concentrated areas of large flints, stones and chalk fragments. A total of thirty nine grid squares (78.000 m²) were examined during which favourable weather conditions and ambient light enabled a high collection of finds.

2.2.3 Both fieldwalking survweys were conducted rapidly, since they did not form part of the original evaluation remit. However a high standard of accuracy and recovery was maintained, encouraged by recent light rain on the harrowed surface of the field, and the limited height of the new crop (40mm maximum). The value of these surveys is evident from the collation of the evidence discussed below (section 3.2).

> The remainder of field 7800 was briefly examined, although there was insufficient time available in which to make a formal survey of surface finds.

2.3 General Survey

During the investigation, numerous remnant landscape features (including disused quarry pits and former field boundaries) were noted on, or adjacent to, the bypass route. These were considered to have implications for the overall archaeological interpretation of the threatened area, and accordingly a rapid survey was performed. In particular, an extensive area of ground disturbance in the north of the paddock (8986), which appeared in low sunlight to represent the vestiges of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation, was planned and photographed in order to make a perminent record prior to road construction.

2.4 The on site work required two weeks to complete, after which the finds and records were checked and analysed. Field drawings were checked and from them final illustrations prepared for this evaluation report. Further plans and diagrams were added as this text was written. Processing of the site finds and data together with the preparation of this report has taken three weeks.

3. <u>Results</u>

3.1 The recorded archaeology from the trial trenches.

The locations of the trial trenches are shown in figure 2. Details of pottery finds are given in Appendix (page 26).

3.1.1<u>Trench</u> 1

22 m x 1.5m x 0.3 m. Average depth of ploughsoil 0.25 m.



Trench 1 was located to the east of the 1975 water pipe, by the boundary of field 7800. This was the first trench to be excavated in the series.

The ploughsoil (5) was composed of a dark greyish brown, sandy silt loam with numerous angular flints. With minor variations, this matrix was uniform over the entire surface of the field.

Beneath the ploughsoil in trench 1, lay a 90mm deep layer of mottled red/yellow sandy clayish silt. No archaeological features were visible in this material, although seven sherds of Romano-British pottery and a fragment of imported Samian ware were recovered during excavation (see appendix).

For most of the length of the trench, layer 2 directly overlay the natural red/yellow sandy clay subsoil. Ιn the north of the trench (which was curved slightly to connect with the area stripped during the pipeline inspection), layer 2 was removed to reveal a 1.6 m wide band of friable, mid-reddish-brown clayish silt, which was identified as the upper, sedimentary fill of a ditch. A fragment of Romano-British coarse ware and a sherd from a reeded-rim vessel (probably manufactured at Verulamium) dateable to the early to mid second century, were recovered from the surface of this deposit, which was not excavated The ditch cut (51) was orientated approximately further. NE-SW and clearly truncated the natural subsoil. Presumably the ditch was originally dug from a higher level which would have formed the contemporary occupation surface. However it would appear that this strata has been subsequently erroded by ploughing, which would account for the finds recovered from the layer 2, interpreted as a homogenous blend of the ploughsoil and the subsoil, perhaps including elements of an occupation surface.

3.1.2 Trench 2

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20.7m x 1.5 m x 0.26 m Average depth of ploughsoil 0.22 m. (see figure 4)

This trench was sited to the west of the areas previously cleared to inspect the pipeline routes.

The ploughsoil was carefully removed to reveal a layer of light yellowish-brown, sandy, clayish loam (6) covering the length of the trench. This material was interpreted as an accumulation layer of silting, which may have formed following the abandonment of the site, and survived below the maximum depth of modern ploughing. This layer was approximately 40 mm deep and produced two fragments of roof tile and eight sherds of R-B pottery. Beneath this layer the extenf of excavation was determined by the discovery of a well-formed, metalled surface extending some five metres from the northern end of the trench. This surface (07) was composed of 80% large angular flints and stones (average size 220 mm x 200mm x 105mm) bonded within a yellow/red-brown, clayish silt matrix. Several fragments of floor and roofing tile, together with fourteen sherds of Romano-British pottery were recovered during manual cleaning of this surface, providing a date range from the late first century AD, to a probable 'terminus ante quem ' in the early third century AD. The surface also yielded twelve iron nail fragments, an iron spike (60 mm in length), and a single hob nail.

The southern edge of the cobbled surface appeared to be either truncated or contained by a ditch, indicated by a 0.98-1.05m wide band of dark greyish-brown, humic clayish silt, oriented approximately noth-west to south-east. A single, abraded pottery sherd of Neolithic/(Early Bronze Age date 2000-2500 BC) was collected from the surface of this deposit. This fragment is likely to be a residual sherd, perhaps disturbed during the construction of the Romano-British ditch (28) and re-interred with the fill (09). The implications of a nearby late Neolithic/early Bronze Age site was noted and is further discussed below (Section 4.8). The remainder of the trench (to the south of ditch 28) displayed natural subsoil (10) which was apparently devoid of archaeological features.

It is certain that the cobbled area (7) extends further beyond the northern end of trench 2. At present it is not possible to determine whether this feature forms part of a road, or a yard surface associated with nearby buildings. Comparable Romano-British road surfaces excavated at Baldock and Pirton (Burleigh forthcoming, Went and Burleigh 1990) usually feature one or more flanking ditches used for construction and drainage. The presence of ditch 28 along the southern edge of the cobbled area may reflect this purpose. Fragmentary deposits of tile incorporated with the cobbling and scattered in the overlying strata are perhaps indicative of nearby structures broadly contemporary with this feature.

3.1.3 Trench 3

24.4m x 1.6m x 0.27m Average depth of topsoil 0.22m (see figure 4)

The shallow ploughsoil was removed to reveal a widespread layer of mid reddish-brown sandy silt loam (19), similar in character to layer 6 in trench 2, and also interpreted as an accumulation of silt post-dating the abandonment of the site. An iron nail shaft and two fragments of Romano-British tile were recovered from Layer 19, which had been subjected to considerable ploughing disturbance. This disruption was also evident in the surfaces of the archaeological features revealed beneath this shallow (70 mm deep) strata.

A cobbled surface (8) extended southwards for almost eleven metres from the northern end of the trench. This was constructed of approximately 70% large and medium sized angular flints and stones (average size 80 x 70 x 40 mm) contained within a yellowish/reddish brown, silty clay matrix. The stones were closely integrated in the northern part of the surface, and became gradually less compact towards the south, perhaps caused by gradual erosion whilst the surface was in use. Seventeen fragments of Romano-British coarse ware pottery (dateable to the mid first to early second century AD) were collected from within this matrix, as well as numerous pieces of tile (roof tile 270g, floor tile 198g) and five unidentifiable lumps of corroded iron. A single nail was also recovered.

The southern limit of the metalled area was well defined. Approximately 1.2 m further south lay a 0.8 - 1m wide band of mid-reddish/yellowish brown sandy silt containing 60% large angular flints (120 x 100 x 95mm) and 15% small stones. This layer (20) was oriented NW-SE and is probably the remnants of a wall foundation. The foundation material was presumably contained by a trench (21), although this could not be proven due to the limitation of this evaluation.

The area intervening between the metalled surface (8) and the wall foundation (20) was interpreted as natural subsoil (30), perhaps retaining vestigies of the Romano-British occupation surface.

A second (60-80cm wide) band of mid reddish/yellowish brown clayish sandy silt (layer 22) was recorded near the southern end of the trench. This material was similar in character to layer 20, although it contained a different proportion of coarse components (75% small stones 80 x 70 x 40 mm), and was mottled with approximately 15% mortar flecks. This feature was also interpreted as the denuded foundations of a wall line, probably contained within a trench (23)running NNE-SSW.

The two wall lines were separated by a 7.5 m wide area composed of three irregular patches of reddish yellowish brown and dark reddish brown sandy clay loam (24, 25 and 27). Layer 24 yielded three fragments of Romano-British coarse ware, two of which were from the same vessel as a sherd collected from layer 25. It is possible that these features Little Wymondley Bypass 1990 Trenches 2·3·4

Refer to figure 2 for location details











are eroded occupation surfaces associated with the walls; however investigation of the stratographic relationship between these layers lay beyond the scope of the present evaluation.

To the south of the wall foundation 22, the overburden (19) was removed to expose natural sandy clay subsoil (29) contaminated by numerous plough marks (31). The effects of modern ploughing could also be seen on the surfaces of all the archaeological features within this trench. This may indicate that a considerable amount of archaeological material which formerly overlay these deposits, have already been eroded.

The two wall foundations may have formed the footings of a building or else they may have defined the limits of a domestic or agricultural enclosure. Projected, their orientation could lead to an intersection beyond the eastern limits of the trench, although at present there is no stratigraphic evidence to indicate that they are contemporary. Neither foundation produced dateable artifacts, however they can be generally assigned to the Romano-British period, since they were both sealed by layer 19 and associated with the intervening layers (24 and 25) which contained Romano-British pottery.

The cobbled surface (8) bears certain similarities to the possible road surface (4) in trench 2. In both the flints were seemingly selected for size and generally placed with flat sides uppermost. However the precise composition of the surfaces differ. By projecting the line of the ditch containing the southern edge of the 'road' it seems improbable that the two surfaces would amalgamate as one. It is perhaps more likely that the cobbled surface 8 forms a yard surface, which may extend northwards towards the putative road. This interpretation is supported by the location of the two wall lines which may form boundaries, or, more likely, a structure associated with such a feature.

For the moment these interpretations remain as unproven hypotheses.

3.1.4 Trench 4

25.2m x 1.5m x 0.32m Average depth of ploughsoil 0.25m (see figure 4)

Trench 4 proved to be the most complex of those examined, and contained numerous features which cannot be definitely stratified or identified without more extensive excavation.

A quantity of large flints and fragments of Romano-British tile contained within the ploughsoil indicated that considerable erosion of the underlying archaeological deposits had occurred in this area. The density of this debris gradually increased as the ploughsoil was carefully machined away, until several features became resolved.

From the northern end of the trench, a plough damaged cobbled surface (39) extended southwards for approximately This surface was composed of 80% large 3.7 m. angular flints (170m x 120 x 120 mm) in a mid grey/brown sandy silt loam, from which fragments of roof tile (100g), two large pieces of floor tile (62g) as well as several pieces of shaped-tile tessarae (coarse mosaic floor components) were gathered during manual cleaning. Α concentrated cluster of twenty iron hobnails was excavated from this surface, representing the decomposed sole of a discarded boot or shoe. Identical hobmails have been found with inhumation burials in Romano-British cemeteries at Four lumps Baldock (Burleigh forthcoming) and elsewhere. three fragments of an iron strap or blade of iron slaq; and a few fragments of animal bone (ovacaprid) were also recovered from this layer, in addition to forty four sherds of Romano-British pottery indicating a potential date range centred on the late first to fourth centuries.

The southern edge of Layer 39 merged within a less compact stony (70% medium & large angular flints) layer of mid yellowish brown sandy silt (layer 18), containing numerous lumps of soft chalky mortar (1,145g). Finds from this surface included two fragments of animal bone; two iron nails and several pieces of roof tile (125g). Tessarae blocks were numerous, made from both tile(220 g) and chalk (58 g), although only four sherds of pottery were discovered (first to second century AD).

It can be inferred from the guantity of tile and tessarae recovered from these two surfaces 18 and 39 and the surrounding ploughsoil (see section3.2.2) that a substantial domestic building containing an elaborate, perhaps patterned, tesselated floor lay in the vicinity. Indeed the cobbled layers themselves may have formed the base for such a floor, from which the majority of the tessarae and mortar have subsequently been removed by modern ploughing.

Layer 18 appeared to be contained by a narrow (0.5m wide) band of moderately stony, mid yellowish/reddish brown sandy silt loam (17) running approximately WSW-ENE. This feature was considered to be the foundations of a wall, probably contained within a trench (53) and probably contemporary with the floor surfaces to the north. However this relationship could not be proven without further excavation.

Trench 53 appeared to truncate an area of chalk flecked, sandy silt loam to the south (layer 40). Further south, this surface merged with a widespread layer of moderately stony, mid-brown sandy silt (14). The relationship between these two layers was unclear. Both yielded fragments of tile, and Layer 14 produced numerous tessarae (512g tile, 47g chalk) as well as two pieces of animal bone and eight sherds of Romano-British coarseware. A single late Pre-Roman Iron Age, grog-tempered ware sherd from Layer 14 indicates earlier activity on the site, although it was probably residual in this context. Both layers were interpreted as plough-damaged occupation surfaces. A 0.5m wide band of mid yellow brown sandy silt loam (16) crossed Layer 40 on a south-west/north-east axis. The matrix contained mortar flecks (approximately 13%), and was interpreted as another denuded wall foundation.

Layer 14 appeared to be cut by a narrow (0.6m wide) buttended ditch (54) or wall trench, which contained quantities of floor tile (298g), roof tile (41g) and tessarae (121g chalk, 345g tile, 11g stone) within a stony, mid brown sandy silt fill (15). A sherd of medieval green-glazed pottery was recovered together with four, very abraded fragments of Romano-British pottery. This feature perhaps represents a later intrusion into the settlement strata.

The southern end of the trench revealed a three metre wide area of friable, mid reddish-brown sandy silt (Layer 13) interpreted as the fill of part of a broad ditch or hollow (52). Layer 13 yielded a single fragment of tile, several tessarae and six sherds of Romano-British coarse ware (second to third century AD). An irregular area of mid brown silt (12) covering part of Layer 13 was perhaps an upper sedimentary deposit within this feature, subsequently reduced by modern ploughing.

3.1.5 Trench 5

24.75m c 1.5m x 0.26m Average depth of ploughsoil 0.26m



Trench 5 revealed a single feature: a 1.7m wide band of yellowish-brown, sandy silt containing occasional angular flints (70 x 60 x 40mm) and a few fragments of Romano-British tile. This feature was interpreted as thefill (36) of a ditch (55), oriented north-west/south-east and truncating the natural, mottled yellow/red silty clay subsoil (35 & 38).

Layer 36 was not excavated, and therefore can be neither precisely dated nor related to other features seen in trench 4.

3.1.6 Trench 6

24.25m x 1.5m x 0.24m Average depth of ploughsoil 0.22m (Not illustrated)

This trench revealed archaeologically sterile, mottled mid-brownish-yellow sandy clay subsoil; truncated by a modern (machine cut) pit, dug in 1985, by the H.C.C. Highways Department in order to test the underlying geology along the proposed bypass route.

3.1.7 Trench 7

24 x 1.5m x 0.24m Average depth of ploughsoil 0.24m (Not illustrated)

This was the final trench excavated westwards along the bypass route - no archaeological activity was revealed.

3.1.8 Trench 8

20 m x 1.5m x 1m (Max.) Average depth of topsoil 0.07m



Trench 8 was located across the bypass route in the Paddock 8986 in order to investigate the possibility of an eastwards spread of the Romano-British settlement perhaps indicated by the ditch (51) discovered in trench 1; and to examine the low earthworks visible in this area (see section 2.3).

The turf was removed together with a very shallow (70mm) layer of greyish-brown sandy silt topsoil, to reveal an uneven layer (0.1m to 0.3m deep) of stony, yellowish reddish brown sandy silt (46). This was interpreted as re-deposited subsoil, and was stripped away to expose natural subsoil in the southern half of the trench, and a friable mid grey stony sandy silt (47) extending to the The latter material appeared to be a comparatively north. modern dump deposit, quite shallow (0.16m max.) and overlying a further layer of re-deposited subsoil (48) contained within a three metre wide ditch (44). Although no finds were discovered within this layer, the friable nature of the material suggested fairly recent deposition. Layer (48) was removed to reveal a 0.2m deep strata of dark brown sandy silt (49) which may have formed the original sedimentation layer within the broad, flat-bottomed ditch.

The date of this ditch is uncertain, although it may be contemporary with the nearby field boundary ditch and bank, which 'formed a division between the cultivated grassland and the woodland within the medieval deer park. (See Section 1.8)

The layers of overburden appear to be the result of comparatively modern landscaping, perhaps dictated by Mr. R.F. Ransom's expanded cultivation of the Bury's land during the 1930s and 1940's. However this could not be proven, and the alterations may equally have been performed more recently or in the previous century.

Three fragments from a single abraded sherd of coarse sand tempered grey ware pottery (first to fourth century AD) were recovered from Layer 47. These were probably residual and do not date the deposit.

The implications of these discoveries for the remaining earthworks in the paddock may be that they are also the product of nineteenth or twentieth century work, perhaps infilling earlier features with excess soil from nearby constructions. However this cannot be determined without further investigation.

3.2 Fieldwalking Results

3.2.1 The Initial Survey (see Section 2.2.1)

The artefacts were assessed according to period and type and the distribution of each category analysed. The datable finds were organised into four categories: Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age (c.2500-2000 BC)., Late Iron Age/Roman (mid 1st century BC - late 2nd century AD), Medieval and Post Medieval. No other periods were identified by the artefacts. Bar charts were compiled to illustrate the distribution of Bronze Age and Roman material. Undatable finds included shell, glass, undiagnostic metal objects and animal bone.

Seven worked flints probably dating from the Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age were recovered during the survey, dispersed but with a slight concentration in the area 280-315m along the baseline indicating Bronze Age activity in the area (fig. 7 (i)).

The Roman finds were of the greatest interest as they represent material spread by ploughing from the Romano-British settlement. The fieldwalking revealed a concentration of material towards the eastern end of Field 7800, in the area 70-175m, confirmed by the later excavation.

Romano-British tile accounted for 74% of Roman finds (fig. 7 ii). The greatest density of tile coincides with the area of the settlement, as indicated by the trial trenching. A second concentration of Roman, also medieval and post-medieval tile, occurs in the central sector of the field, lacking in other archaeological material.

Roman pottery (8% of Roman finds; fig. 7 iii) and tesserae (18% of Roman finds; fig. 7 (iv) were located in greatest densities over the excavation area.

Medieval and Post-medieval tile proved ubiquitous and accounted for over half the total finds. Concentrations of tile probably indicate the direction of manuring and ploughing. Manure heaps in farmyards are liable to become contaminated with building materials and other occupation debris prior to deposition in one part of a field from which they are dispersed. The medieval tile on the site may come from the original Wymondley Bury Manor House or outbuildings; which date from the twelfth century.

A curious anomaly in the distribution of finds was noted covering the approximate area 175-245m along the baseline, which contained tile but a dearth of pottery, tesserae and flint. The absence of finds may be attributed to the differing land use attested by early nineteenth century documentary evidence. An estate map of 1803 shows the

Field divided into three; the area of the Romano-British settlement termed Ploughed Park, whilst the fields to the west and southwest were known as Grass Park and Lawn Park respectively. Although the names of these subdivisions Page 17

.2





of the medieval deer park may not reflect the contemporary use of the land, they may indicate that the north-east section of the field had been subjected to more extensive cultivation. It is possible that this distinction is indicated by the frequency of fieldwalking finds which fell dramatically to the west of this boundary, perhaps as a result of disproportionate continuous plough damage to the underlying deposits. However, it must be stated that modern ploughing generally intrudes deeper than earlier forms, and therefore this possible discrepancy may be negligble in determining the overall expanse of the settlement site enhancing rather than causing the decline in finds recovery.

3.2,2 The Second Survey (see Section 2.2.2)

The dateable finds recovered during the second fieldwalking survey from the Neolithic/Early Bronze Age, Medieval and Post-medieval periods presented a uniform distribution with no anomalies, the information was collated and retained although considered to be largely irrelevant to the current investigation.

Density charts of Romano-British artefacts were compiled to visually locate concentrations of material and hopefully give a clear indication as to the location of the site.

The Romano-British tile (42% of Roman finds) showed two concentrations (fig. 8 (I)); one to the east of the pylon and a second at the western limit of the fieldwalking squares.

Only 29 sherds of Roman pottery (12.5% of Roman artefacts) were recovered. The sherds were scattered and abraded giving no indication as to the nucleus of the site (fig. 8 (II)).

The tesserae which formed over 45% of Roman finds was much more localized, densely packed around trench 4 and virtually absent from much of the remainder of the survey area (fig. 8 (III)).

The density chart of all the Romano-British finds which average six per square (fig. 8 (IV)), show a marked concentration around trench four and to the north and north-west of the bypass corridor, although the finds diminish substantially 20m to the north of the pylon. The relatively low recovery rate between trenches two and four is no doubt affected by the previous fieldwalking in this area. The survey did not include the area between trenches one and two as this area had been topsoil stripped. (see section 1.5)

The quarry pits to the north and west of the excavation area could indicate robbing of the site for building materials as large flints and chalk around the depressions could represent the upcast from such activities. Alternatively they could be from past guarrying for a superficial geological deposit, such as sand or gravel; or they could be dew-ponds from the medieval deer-park.

Little Wymondley Bypass, 1990

Density of Romano-British Fieldwalking Finds (Second Survey)



The small pit to the NW of the group is overlaid by an old field boundary which was in existence by 1803 (see section 3.3.1).

3.2.3 The results of both fieldwalking programmes complement the excavation results and evidence from the 1975 water pipeline which locate the nucleus of the site in the area between and to the north of trenches two to four.

> The Romano-British pottery ranges in date from the mid first century AD to the late fourth century AD, although a central date range from the mid first to the late second century AD can be extrapolated from these finds.

The pottery ranges in quality from locally made coarse ware such as fine sand-tempered grey wares (twenty-three fragments) and shelly wares (three fragments) to imported Samian wares, some decorated but very abraded, and colourcoated wares.

The quality of the ceramic building material, the floor tile and tesserae, and the quantity of roof tile indicate at least one substantially constructed Romano-British building on the site.

3.3 General survey results (see figure 2)

The general survey recorded details of remnant landscape features in the area of the bypass route. Those which are considered to be relevant to the current evaluation are reported here.

3.3.1 The crest of field 7800 was marked by four, large man-made hollows, which lay within, and slightly to the north of the bypass route. These were identified as quarry pits, of a type frequently encountered on upland areas in the district, wherever the topsoil is shallow, usually dug in order to extract construction materials for nearby yards and buildings. Numerous large flints and several worked stone fragments were gathered from around the edges of the hollows, perhaps representing the areas of These may have been disturbed from underlying upcast. Romano-British features. Whether the quarries were deliberately located to extract re-useable building material or this disturbance was incidental whilst mining natural deposits, is unclear. Certainly the quarries are clustered around the area which we can now identify as the focus of the settlement site.

The western edge of the smailest hollow appeared to be overlain by a ploughed-out hedgerow which could be traced running southwards across the field from the corner of the grounds at Wymondley Bury. This feature may be the boundary of a field known as 'ploughed park' mentioned on an estate map of 1803 (Farris 1989). If this is the case, then the guarry must have been backfilled before that date. Further implications of this boundary are discussed in the fieldwalking results above. (Section 3.2.1)

3.3.2 An expanse of low earthworks in the paddock (8986) lay

partially within the bypass route, and extended some fifty metres further to the south. Oblique sunlight enabled the team to determine six narrow banks, oriented north-east/south-west, each separated by approximately four metres, with an average (extent) length of thirty metres. These gave the appearance of medieval, ridge and furrow cultivation. On closer examination, two slight banks (thirty metres and fifty metres in length traversed the pattern of ridges on a perpendicular axis; and further rectilinear divisions (perhaps building platforms) were seen in the eastern corner of the paddock.

The excavation of trench 8 (Section 3.1.8) revealed a ditch, perhaps of medieval date, beneath a comparatively recent series of 'build-up' deposits. The undulations in the area to the east of trench 8 may be the result of similar, landscape alterations which by co-incidence formed regular patterns. However, the possibility that earlier agricultural or structural features exist, perhaps deliberately masked by later layers, cannot be dismissed without further investigation.

3.3.3 The broad ditch and bank forming the boundary between field 7800 and Bury Wood is probably a feature of the ancient deer park which pertained to the medieval manor of Little Wymondley, later rebuilt as Wymondley Bury. (see Section 1.8)

> The bank, which may have served the purpose of separating livestock between the woodland and pasture, is now commonly about three metres wide, occasionally reaching a height of approximately 0.8 metres. The corresponding ditch varies between two and three metres in width, with a maximum depth now of about 0.7 metres below the present ground surface. The boundary is pierced in three places along its length, one of which (the most southerly gap) may have been an ancient access. The section of the bank and ditch to the north of the widest gap lies directly on the bypass route, and consequently received detailed examination. The bank at this point appears little more than a slight mound within the hedgerow. (2m wide). The ditch however remains guite substantial (approximately 35 x 5×0.40 metres). The proximity of this feature to the ditch revealed in trench 8 may indicate contemporary construction.

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- 4. Summary and Conclusions
- 4.1 Evidence of a Romano-British settlement was discovered extending approximately one hundred and eighty metres along the bypass route, between trench 1 and trench 5 (see figure 2). Combined with the fieldwalking results, and the features recorded in 1975 within a one hundred and sixty metre length of the Lee Valley water pipeline, an overall settlement area of nearly three hectares can be postulated.

The nucleus of the settlement appeared to be located between trench 3 and trench 4, where the foundations of several, substantial buildings were found, possibly extending somewhat further to the north. Numerous fragments of worked stone were collected from this sector of the field, together with large quantities of roof and floor tile, which provide details of the composition of the structures; as do scatters of flint rubble.

4.2 Numerically, tessarae accounted for nearly half the total quantity of finds collected during the trench excavations, largely retrieved from the building remains in trench 4. The fieldwalking evidence also displayed a significant concentration of tessarae in this area of the field. It is clear from the range of tessarae types gathered during the investigation (see figure 9), that several materials were used in the construction of floor surfaces; perhaps combining red tile and chalk cubes to create decorative patterns. Such designs are known from other Romano-British sites, and may indicate a moderately prestigious (or indeed pretentious) dwelling. This hypothesis is supported by the fragments of flue tile, perhaps relating to a heating or ventilation system, collected by the fieldwalking surveys.



Relative quantities of tessera types.

- 4.3 The most distinct features revealed during the investigation were three, well constructed cobbled flint surfaces. These were interpreted in trenches 3 and 4 as yard or courtyards perhaps projecting southwards from a northwest/ southeast road surface seen in trench 2.
- 4.4 The combined evaluation results suggest an extensive farmstead with yards, radiating ditches (perhaps forming enclosures) and buildings incorporating stone and flint rubble walls with some tiled and tessalated floors. The entire settlement is well situated on a ridge in field 7800, overlooking fertile valleys to the north-east and south. It is perhaps no coincidence that such a favourable position subsequently became the site of the early medieval manor of Little Wymondley (Wymondley Bury).

Only very small quantities of animal bone were collected during the investigation (see figure 10). Also curious was the dearth of metalwork fragments and the complete absence of coins, despite a thorough metal detector survey performed by Mr. R. Mason. These results are anomalous by comparison to similar Romano-British farmsteads, however they may be partially explained by the fact that no rubbish pits were encountered, nor has excavation of deposits likely to produce such material (trench and ditch fills) formed part of this evaluation. It may also be possible that the power-lines on the site interferred with the results.



Type of Find	Weight (g)	Percentage
Flint (worked)	66	0.55
Stone (worked)	712	5-8
Mortar	1370	11-84
Tile	1068	8-84
Floor	1676	13-9
Flue	85	0.7
Tesserae — { Tile	5083	ſ
Chalk	529	46-8
Stone	41	J
Pottery	1117	9.25
tron	232	1.94
Shell	9	0.075
Animal Bone	63	0-52
	12076	100

Artifacts recovered from the trench excavations.

- Dating the development of the settlement with any degree 4.5 of precision from the pottery recovered is fraught with problems. Fine and coarse sand tempered ware fragments were ubiquitous. However this type of pottery was manufactured from the first to the fourth century AD with only minor variations in fabric, the dates of which cannot be realised from the small abraded fragments collected. (See appendix). Far better dating evidence is provided by other pottery types with shorter periods of use. From examples of these we may deduce that the settlement was in use from about the late first to the early third century AD. However most of this material was collected from unstratified or plough contaminated deposits, therefore no attempt can be made at this stage to phase the development of the site without further, detailed excavation of stratified archaeological deposits.
- 4.6 Plough damage to the archaeological features is extensive, but far from being disastrous. Although the surfaces are eroded and building materials dispersed by plough action (and perhaps deliberate robbery), sufficient evidence remains in situ to warrant a detailed archaeological investigation. For instance the fills of deep negative features such as ditches, rubbish pits and perhaps well shafts should produce valuable stratified evidence.
- 4.7 However, the most important archaeological results from this site can be obtained by exposing the extent of the settlement within the road corridor, particularly where building, road and yard remains are concentrated. This way the plans of these features will be recovered, revealing the layout of the farmstead within its enclosures. Although the site is plough-damaged, the trial-trenching has demonstrated that yard, road, and maybe some floor surfaces survive, as do the footings of the buildings. Phasing and dating may be deduced by selective excavation of key features and relationships for a minimum of effort.
- 4.8 There is slight evidence for earlier activity on the site, implied by a few abraded sherds of late pre-Roman Iron Age pottery (50 BC to 50AD). Also worked flints recovered during fieldwalking, and a single sherd of Peterboroughtype pottery from trench 2, indicate that the area was utilized by Neolithic/Early Bronze Age settlers. However no corresponding settlement features were found.
- 4.9 The bank and ditch which forms the eastern boundary of field 7800, through which the bypass will be constructed, appear to relate to the management of a deer park created by the Lords of Little Wymondley Manor, perhaps as early as the twelfth century.

An area of earthworks, which gave the appearance of ridge and furrow cultivation patterns (and perhaps the outlines of wall foundations) were seen within the paddock to the east (8986). These may also be of medieval date together with a ditch revealed by trench 8. However this could not be confirmed within the limitations of this evaluation.

* *

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 Although plough-damaged, this site has the potential for revealing much of the layout of a modest Romano-British farmstead which must have been typical of hundreds of such farmsteads in Hertfordshire and S.E. Britain. The concensus of professional archaeological opinion within the County is that the archaeological remains are better preserved than any other comparable small R-B farmstead which has become available for fuller investigation in Hertfordshire including Chells.
- 5.2 Within the road corridor, the settlement, including most of the surviving nucleus, will be totally destroyed. It is therefore strongly recommended that the site is further investigated before destruction.
- 5.3 Within the road corridor, between Trial Trenches 1 and 6, all topsoil should be stripped under archaeological supervision well in advance of road construction. The exposed surfaces should be cleaned, where necessary sub-soil deposits should be carefully removed, and archaeological structures and features drawn by means of scale-plans, photographed, and fully recorded.
- 5.4 Selective excavation and recording should occur to determine the dating and phasing of structures and other key features, and to determine their relationships.
- 5.5 In view of the fact that very little is known about the archaeological potential of the Little Wymondley by-pass route, it would be advisable if the whole road corridor (approx. 2.5 kms long) was the subject of a geophysical survey as soon as possible. This would give advance warning of other sites which may lie as yet undiscovered along the route. Although a fieldwalking appraisal was carried out in 1983, at that time, as now, most of the fields were under grass.

At the very least, fields 7800 and 8986 should be subject to geophysical survey at the earliest opportunity.

- 5.6 Provision should be made for archaeological observation and recording of the whole route of this bypass during its groundworks phases. There should be contingency resources to record, and if necessary excavate, any significant remains or sites which may be revealed during construction.
- 5.7 Construction of this bypass is imminent: work is due to commence in April, 1991. The known Romano-British farmstead in field 7800 would be worthy of preservation if it were not on the line of this road. Its further investigation and recording must occur between now (late November 1990) and April 1991 therefore. It will probably take a medium-sized archaeological team two to three months to complete the necessary further investigation on this site. A decision on this and the provision of the necessary resources is therefore urgently required.

5.8

The responsibility for the recording and destruction of this known significant archaeological site, and the potential of the remainder of the route, rests with the Department of Transport, English Heritage and the Hertfordshire County Council. It is incumbent upon these Authorities to liaise with one another and to provide the necessary facilities and resources to enable the further investigation of the archaeological remains in field 7800, and to provide for the other recommendations in this Report.

APPENDIX

The Pottery from the Excavated Areas

The pottery finds from Little Wymondley were compared with examples from the North Herts Museums Pottery Fabric Series (Ashworth 1990). From this analysis, specific date ranges can be suggested for the pottery, which may be used to date their layers of origin.

Date ranges: (All pottery is Romano-British except where stated)

(a) Mid to late first century A.D.

(b) Late first to early second century

- (c) Late first to fourth century
- (d) Early to mid second century
- (e) Second century
- (f) Late second to third century
- (g) Late second to fourth century

Trench 1

- (2) 1 Samian sherd (e)
 4 Fine sand-tempered greyware sherds (The most common Romano-British fabric) (c)
 1 Coarse sand-tempered ware sherd (d)
 1 Coarse grained sandy ware sherd (b)
- (32) 1 Cream sandy ware, reeded rim sherd (d)

Trench 2

(6)

(7)

1 Sherd of flint-tempered, Peterboroughtype ware. Neolithic/Early Bronze Age, Third millenium BC.

(6) (10) (Interface)

5 Fine sand-tempered grey ware sherds	(c)
1 Large , grog-tempered grain jar rim	
sherd. Late Pre-Roman Iron Age.	

- 2 Colour-coated ware sherds (rim and body) (g)
 4 Small, fine sand-tempered greyware
 sherds (c)
 - 5 Coarse-grained sandy ware sherds (b) 1 Coarse sand-tempered ware sherd (c)

Trench 3

- 6 Gritty-textured, grog-tempered ware sherds. (a)
 6 Coarse sand-tempered grey ware sherds (c)
 5 'Pimpled' ware sherds (b)
 (24) 1 Shelly ware sherd (e)
- 2 Well fired, fine sand-tempered greyware sherds. Surfaces slip coated, exterior burnished with lattice decorations. (c)
- (25) 1 Fine sand-tempered greyware sherd, from same vesselas (24) (c)

Trench 4		
(12)	1 Fine sand-tempered greyware rim sherd	(c)
(13)	1 Coarse sand-tempered greyware rim sherd	(c)
	2 Fine sand tempered greyware sherds	(c)
	1 'Pimpled' ware sherd	(b)
	1 Cream sandy ware sherd	(d)
	1 Samian sherd	(e)
	1 Colour-coated ware sherd	(g)
(14)	1 Fine grog-tempered ware rim sherd.	
	Late Pre-Roman Iron Age.	
	2 Coarse sand tempered ware sherds	(d)
	4 Fine sand-tempered greyware sherds	(c)
	1 Shelly ware everted rim sherd	(e)
(15)	2 Fine sand tempered greyware sherds	(c)
• •	2 Coarse sand tempered greyware sherds	(c)
	1 Green glazed pottery. Medieval?	
	(Fourteenth century?)	
(18)	1 Pale sandy ware sherd	(b)
(,	2 Fine sand-tempered grev ware sherds	(c)
	1 Shelly ware sherd	(e)
(24)	E Connar condu unno chonda	(h)
(34)	2 'Dimplod' ware shorte	(D)
,	2 Fimpled wale shelds	(D)
	7 Croam sandy ware chords	(C)
	14 Sholly ware shords (including one rim	(α)
	shord)	(a)
	1 Coarse sand-tempored ware (mortaria)	(9)
	sherd	(f)
	1 Colour-coated ware sherd	(1)
	r coroar coarea ware sherd	(9)
Unstratified	5 Fine sand-tempered grey ware sherds	(c)
	1 Coarse, grained sandy ware	(b)
	1 Cream sandy ware sherd	(d)
	2 Samian sherds	(g)
		-
Trench 8		

(47) 3 Coarse sand tempered grey ware sherds (c)

The grey wares include some Much Hadham pottery; the cream sandy wares and coarse sand-tempered wares were possibly manufactured in Verulamium, and the shelly wares are the produce of Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire. The colourcoated wares come from the lower Nene Valley potteries. Coarse grained sandy wares, grog-tempered and 'pimpled' fabrics were probably manufactured locally.

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D. Went wrote the majority of this report and supervised the fieldwork and post-excavation. C. Colley wrote section 3.2 and assisted with the supervision of the fieldwork and post-excavation work. G.R. Burleigh had overall responsibility for the whole project, edited this report and wrote section 5. Adam Garwood, Faith Pewtress and Chris Colley drew the illustrations.