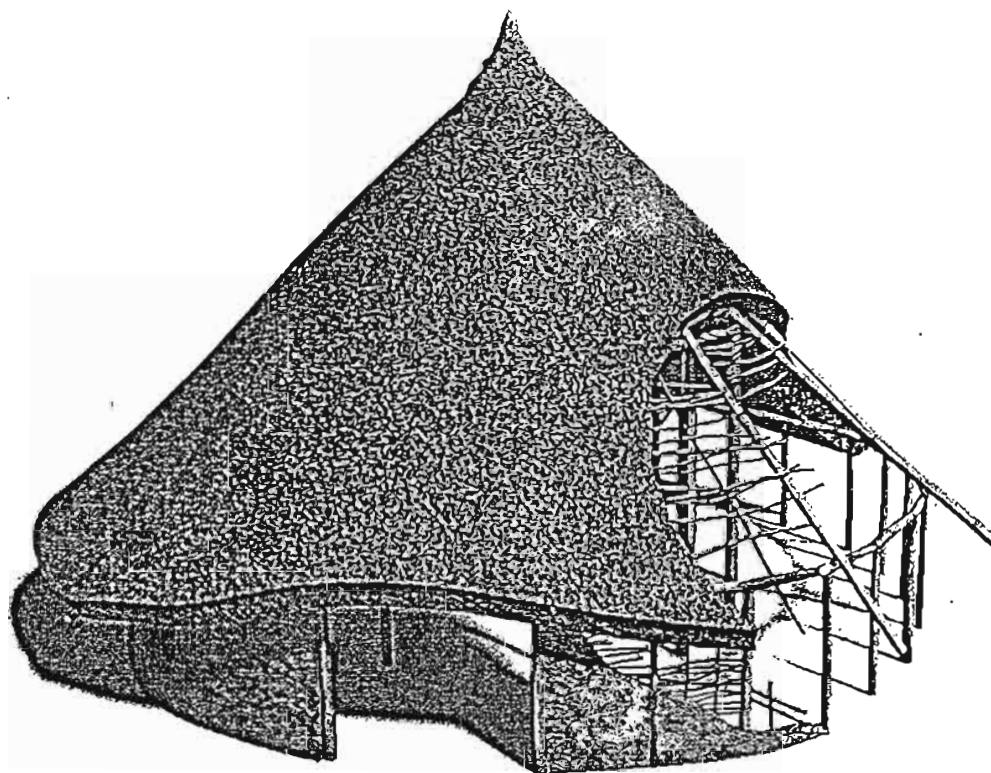


# **Prehistoric and Romano-British Excavations at Duttons Farm, Lathom, West Lancashire**



**Third Interim Report, 1999-2002**  
**June 2003**

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# Prehistoric and Romano-British Excavations at Duttons Farm, Lathom, West Lancashire: Third Interim Report, 1999-2002

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## Background

In the autumn of 1998 staff from the Field Archaeology Section of Liverpool Museum were invited to give advice on the importance of archaeological finds that had been discovered by members of the Lathom and District Archaeological Society. These came from land affected by a Transco gas pipeline to the south of Duttons Farm, Lathom, West Lancashire (Figs 1 and 2). Evidence from the pipeline corridor included a few sherds of sandy orange pottery, a sherd of samian, possible tile, and a beehive quernstone, as well as a number of sub-soil features. This suggested a potentially important Romano-British site lay in the vicinity of the pipeline.

In October to December 1998 a gridded fieldwalking survey was undertaken of the field to the south of the pipeline corridor, covering an area of c. 6.7 ha. In subsequent years, areas to the north of the pipeline, amounting to a further 2 ha, have been walked by Steve Baldwin of the Lathom Historic Society, as well as surrounding fields. Alongside this, four seasons of excavations have taken place. This work has been undertaken by Liverpool Museum on behalf of National Museums Liverpool. Each season has lasted approximately six weeks, with the first four weeks acting as a teaching excavation for Liverpool University students.

## The Excavations

### Method

Six trenches have been investigated so far (Fig. 2). Trenches I and X were dug in the first season (Cowell and Adams 2000) but have not been taken further in subsequent years. The main focus of the excavations, and the subject of this report, has been on trenches IV and IX although trench VIII, opened in 2001, and trench XI, investigated in 2002, neither reported on previously, are also included here.

Each year two or three trenches have been worked on simultaneously by teams of students, each consisting of c. 12-15 members, with six trained supervisors. The topsoil, c. 0.30 m deep, in each trench overlies a light brownish-yellow Shirdley Hill Sand. This surface is extensively cut by recent plough furrows, running in all directions.

Trenches X, IX and IV were placed hard up against the southern edge of the gas pipeline corridor, which is c. 30 m wide (Fig. 3). Here, construction traffic had lowered the subsoil c. 0.1-0.15 m beneath the general excavation level found outside this area. This means that all but the deepest features are quite heavily disturbed in the corridor, outside the line of the actual pipe, which is c. 6 m wide.

### Trench IV

The area excavated in this trench amounts to about 800 sq. m. Its northern edge is defined by the presence of the pipe corridor. About 1-2 m of the corridor is included in the northern part of the trench running parallel to its edge (Fig. 3). This trench was originally placed to investigate the general location of the quernstone found in the pipeline corridor.

### Trench IX

Trench IX is located c. 90 m to the west of Trench IV (Fig. 3). It measures c. 600 sq. m in area, with a small adjacent trench (IXa) of c. 90 sq. m. The cut for the gas pipeline easement runs across the northern edge of the main trench in a band c. 0.5 to 0.6 m wide. This trench was placed here because a number of Romano-British finds came from the general area of a ditch which ran northwards across the pipeline corridor, but which was not investigated in detail at the time.

### Trench XI

This trench lies c. 50 m to the south-east of Trench IV, on the lowest ground so far excavated, at c. 16 m OD. Here the ground falls

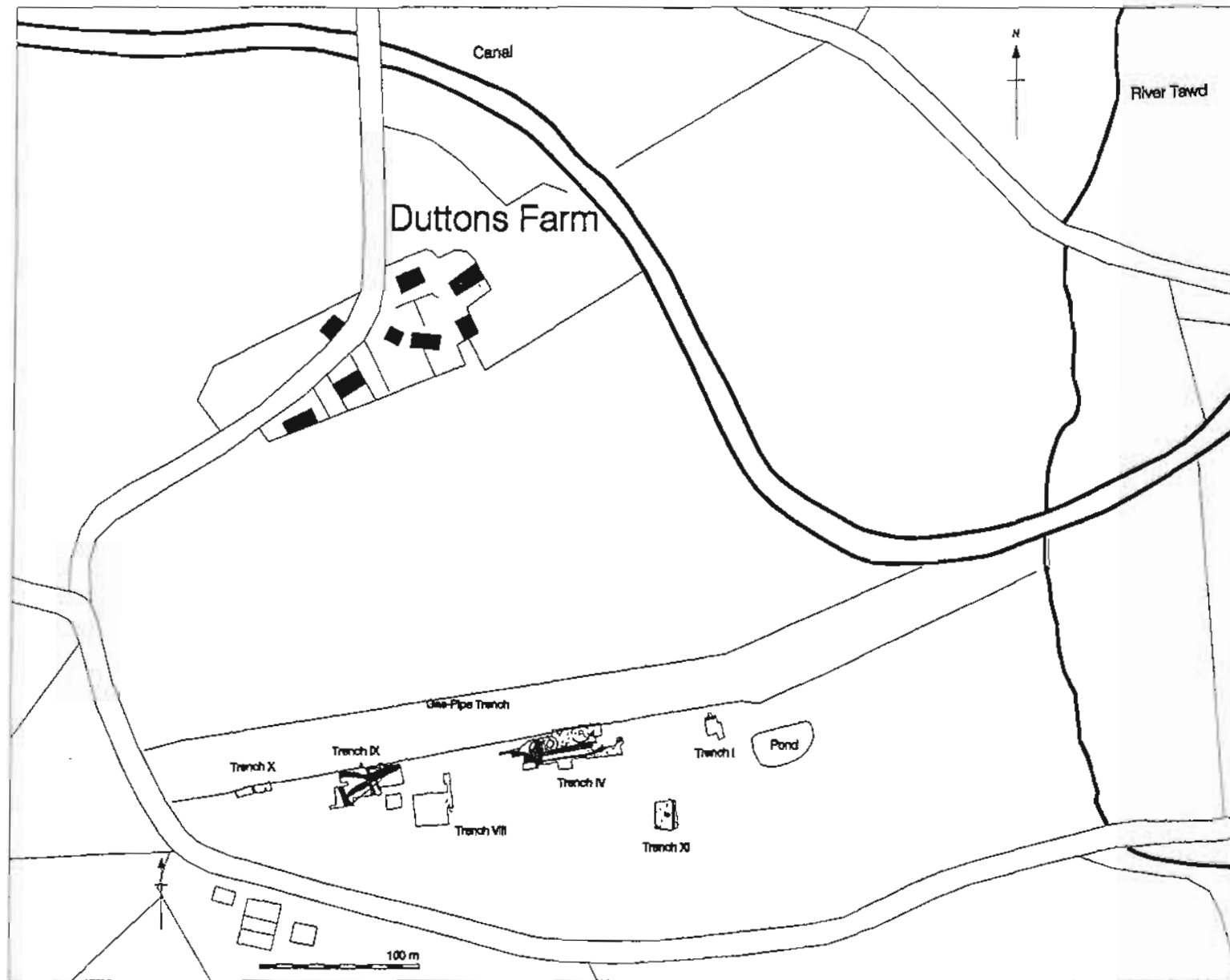


Fig. 2 The Duttons Farm oval enclosure

very subtly towards a slight natural hollow running eastwards towards the pond, south of Trench I (Fig. 3). This has led to the trench being cut by a series of post-medieval field drains running north-eastwards in close proximity disturbing much of the eastern part of the trench. The trench was c. 20 m by 15 m in extent so it is not clear how many more associated features survive outside the excavated area, which makes interpretation here difficult. It is intended to enlarge this area in 2003 in the hope that a wider context will allow a better understanding of the activity in this area. In the interim, there is evidence of relevance in the western half of the trench, that is covered in the sections below, to help understand the settlement and landuse on the site

### **Trench VIII**

Trench VIII is situated c. 20 m to the south-east of trench IX and measures c. 700 sq. m in area. It was opened up in 2001, placed to locate the potential continuation of linear features running southwards from trench IX.

In the event, subsoil conditions made the identification of such features difficult. The surface was laced with curving and linear bands and larger irregular areas of iron-rich, hard orange-brown sand. Features cut into this layer, if rapidly backfilled, would be extremely difficult to spot and may have been missed. Wherever this material was tested, however, it produced profiles that strongly suggested that this particular type of sand had originated in natural circumstances. A preliminary interpretation is that this material may be associated with late or early post-glacial events, perhaps associated with variations in ground water levels or possibly with altered drainage patterns (Sharon Gedye, pers. comm).

A few features were recognised cut into those patches of yellow-brown, unaltered Shirdley Hill sand that existed in the trench on the eastern edge of the trench. These included two short, wide curvilinear gullies, separated by a short gap. Both contained almost identical deep, wide postholes [928] and [934] which must have held massive posts. Initially, it appeared as if they may have formed part of a structure, although perhaps another possible interpretation is that they may represent something associated with the agricultural landscape; possibly gateposts or a field entrance of some kind. One posthole

[892] contained small flecks of Romano-British orangeware, although it may have found its way there through later agricultural practice as it was present only on the surface of the fill at its interface with the overlying topsoil. So the dating of this feature must remain uncertain for the moment.

Although the evidence is limited from trenches I, VIII and X, there is enough from the other areas of the site to attempt a chronological narrative of occupation and landuse over a long period.

### **Early Prehistoric Period**

Fieldwalking has produced evidence, in the form of a concentration of struck flint, of a small early prehistoric site, c. 20 m to the east of the pond (Fig. 2). To the west of the pond, the excavations have produced similar flint material. This is difficult to date, as it has not been found in sealed contexts, nor can it be compared to other regional material dateable on typological grounds. For the moment, until more evidence is available, it is assumed to be early prehistoric in date (ie. somewhere around c. 4000 cal BC). It is found mainly in Trench IV, where later activity has probably disturbed the prehistoric land surface, so that nothing of the activities associated with this period survives, other than the flintwork.

This material is likely to be associated with small groups of people making repeated visits to a favourable area of land. This site has a number of attractions to mobile groups who would have looked for their resources over a wide area of the landscape. These include; the presence of a possible spring in the field, to the west of the pond; the proximity of the River Tawd; light soils; nearby wetlands; and the moderate to high uplands, at over 100 m OD, a short distance to the south.

There is a small amount of struck flint spread widely across the field, that shows that people still used the area after farming had been introduced into Britain, after c. 4000 cal BC up to the period around about 1000 BC. However, very little can be said about this phase of activity yet.

### **Late Prehistoric period**

The most significant results, however, have come from a number of features relating to the

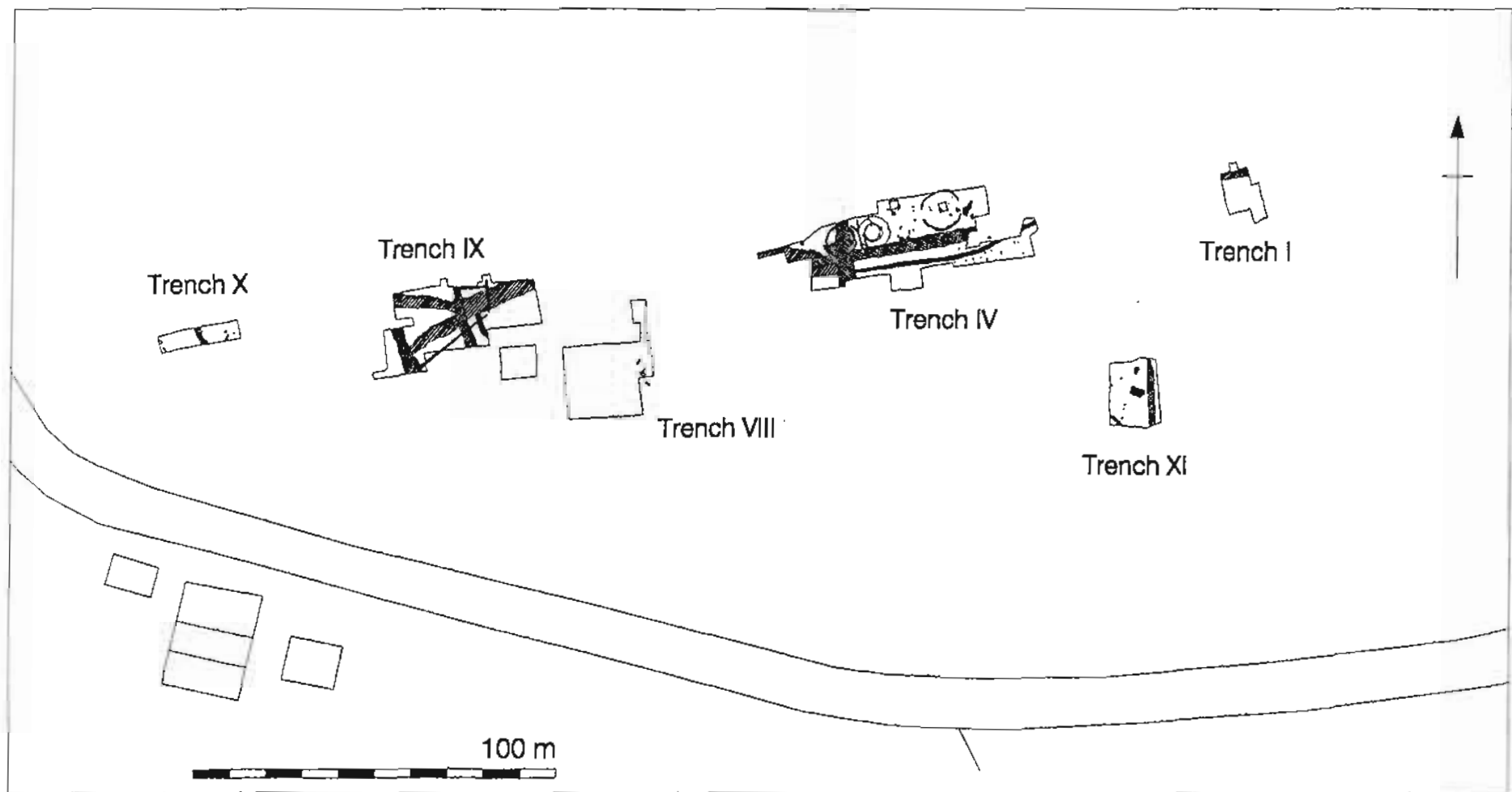


Fig. 3 Plan of trenches

first settled, long term, occupation on the site. This is represented by a late Iron Age/Romano-British farmstead with evidence of adjacent agricultural landscape features in use during the Romano-British period.

The main evidence for this settlement so far comes from Trench IV. It is not yet clear whether this settlement was enclosed by an encircling ditch. A length of ditch, running for c. 35 m, has been located on its southern side (Fig. 4). It is not clear yet whether this represents a field boundary or an enclosure ditch. There is evidence that this ditch was recut at least twice in places, as natural silting took place. Confirmation of its date is also awaited from samples currently being processed for associated burnt material.

The earliest structure in the settlement so far is a four-poster, structure 6 (Fig 4). There were no finds associated with the post-holes from this structure, so dating is uncertain but it is earlier than roundhouse 1, which was in use during either the 2nd or 1st century BC. A second four-poster, structure 7, cannot be adequately associated with any of the buildings on the site on present evidence, although it is very likely associated with some phase of the late prehistoric settlement.

Four-posters are usually associated with the storage of grain (Gent 1983). The thick, deeply set posts are thought to have carried a raised floor perhaps to keep damp at bay. They are found on many late prehistoric and early Romano-British sites (Musson 1991), including high status hillforts, as well as smaller farmsteads. This is the second site to include them in the region, after an example from a double-ditched enclosure at Brook House Farm, Halewood, which was associated with mid to late Iron Age Cheshire Very Coarse Pottery (Cowell 2000).

The structure 6 four-poster was probably dismantled and replaced by roundhouse 1. The positioning of the central post of the roundhouse, over the south-eastern post of the four-post structure 6, may be coincidental. Alternatively, it may have had some social, belief or similar association.

The roundhouse was in use sometime during the period cal BC 170-5 (Beta-153893, Beta-153894). This falls within the period covered by

the use of beech *querus* (Buckley 1979, Welfare 1985), one of which came from the Transco pipeline adjacent to the house.

The circular gully had an internal floor diameter of 10.3 m (Fig. 4). Two entrances were located, one on each side, on an east-west axis, with the eastern one slightly the wider. The western entrance *may* have had a porch attached, although the evidence for this is somewhat equivocal and it is therefore not proposed as an interpretation. The posts may alternatively have marked part of a fence-line, which if so, would seem to have respected the entrance to the house.

A function for the circular gully has not yet been definitively assigned. There is some evidence that the frame of the wall was set in the outer gully, although this kind of feature is often interpreted as a drainage feature, with the line of the wall set several metres inside it.

The roundhouse 1 gully, however, seems to have had posts set at c. 2 m intervals along its internal edge, although because of modern disturbance, these were only located on the southern part of the circuit. The stratigraphic association between gully and post-holes has to be interpreted from very subtle evidence but there is reasonable confidence that these posts could have helped support the rafters of the roof, as part of the wall construction. On some sites, it has been suggested that the rafters would have been set on a continuous tie-beam running around the circuit at the top of the wall posts.

There was some evidence also for stakes being placed either in the gully, or on its internal edge, between the post-holes along this southern segment of gully. These stakes may have operated as part of the wall structure. Some stakes may have been burnt *in situ* in the gully in this area. Additionally hazel, willow and buckthorn charcoal came from the foundation gully, although it is not clear whether this represents structural timber or firewood. Small fragments of daub were found in the gully fill but not enough to suggest that this material formed the facing to the wall, although this is perhaps an option. A mixture of mud and organic matter may be another option. The large pit found outside the eastern entrance, a feature found commonly with roundhouses, may have been associated with this.

The rafters of the, probably conical, roof was also supported by a strong central post, c. 0.3 m wide. This central post is an uncommon feature of Iron Age houses, but it may be that extra support was needed in the soft sandy subsoil at this site. This might also help explain the posts on the edge of the gully, another rare feature, which acted as wall and roof supports. However, there are other potential interpretations for central posts, such as potstands, or a support for a mezzanine floor for storage in the roof area, or a pivot for room dividers (Reynolds 1979, 35-6).

There was no evidence to suggest what the structure was roofed with, but from the evidence of approximately contemporary classical writers, Celtic houses are reported to have been thatched (Reynolds 1979, 30).

Several small pits or post-holes were located inside the building, some of which could have belonged to an internal ring of posts. This would have served to both help support the roof and divide the floor area into different zones, around which different kinds of activities could have been structured. The most likely candidates would suggest a possible diameter for an inner ring of c. 5.8 m.

The only evidence for a hearth inside the building came from an area of pits at the edge of the floor area, by the east entrance. A series of four intercutting pits had truncated potential hearth deposits in an earlier pit. Because of the loss of Iron Age floor levels through modern ploughing, there is no direct evidence that this was necessarily contemporary with the use of the house. Although some late Bronze Age and Iron Age house do have hearths close to doorways, the majority have them in the centre of the house.

The central post was removed, either as part of the dismantling of the house or through a partial reorganisation of its internal space, and its cavity packed with orange clay. There was no obvious indication that this formed the base for a hearth. The northern ditch terminal of the eastern entrance included the only two sherds of late prehistoric pottery from the site, in the final silting of the gully. This may represent a special deposit associated with the disuse of the house. It is noteworthy that this building seems to be of one phase, with no evidence of rebuilding, and was subsequently avoided when new structures were built. This was not the case with a series of

roundhouses lying about 10 m to the west, which had been rebuilt on approximately the same spot. This may allude to its special nature, either in functional or social terms, during its life or resulting from its disuse.

### **Late Prehistoric/Romano-British period**

The group of buildings to the west of roundhouse 1 consists of three secure examples, and another potential two complete or partial rebuilds, for which the evidence is less strong for a confident interpretation.

The earliest of these buildings may be roundhouse 2, which appears to have been built of an internal ring of posts and an external ring of stakes, with short gully segments only around the entrance on the south-east. The western half of this building was destroyed by later structures. The structure, although very fragmentary, exhibited enough regular, repeated features to suggest that such patterns would warrant its interpretation as a roundhouse. Its diameter was a little over 8.5 m.

The posts of the internal ring, which would have taken the rafters of the roof, with a diameter of c. 5 m, had been replaced at least once and possibly some of them twice. This can be seen particularly well where two groups of three adjacent post-holes lie c. 1.35 m apart (Fig. 4). The gap between them mirrors another one, c. 1.6 m wide, between two short segments of gully, which lie c. 1.75 m to the east. This has been interpreted as the entrance, which faces south-eastwards.

A line of two stake-holes, on the northern side of the gullies continues the outer wall. These have identical and distinctive blue-grey clay and charcoal fills, which, with their positioning in relation to the gully entrance, allows a confident interpretation of their function, despite only a curving alignment of about 2 m in length being represented. Several of the post-holes from the internal circuit also had the same kind of bluey-grey silty clay fill as the stake-holes. The same kind of fill is additionally found in a short segment of gully on the south side of the entrance. This though, has been heavily truncated by a series of short, intercutting segments of curving, probable late prehistoric, gullies, which themselves have been cut by the post-medieval ditch [120].



There are several estimates available as to how long a timber-built roundhouse may have lasted before the timbers had rotted enough to warrant rebuilding or replacing. These vary from approximately 20 to 100 years, depending on the type of timber used and other factors. Even using the lowest estimate, it would seem from the post-hole pattern that this house may have been in use over a period of at least c. 40–60 years.

Without radiocarbon dates, it is difficult to know if this house was contemporary with roundhouse 1. An area of pits to the west of the latter appeared to respect its western entrance, leaving a notional 'path' into the building. The entrance to roundhouse 2 was not aligned on this 'path', but led directly into the area of pits. This might suggest that the two may not have been in contemporary use.

The post-built construction, without continuous outer gully, is also unique, so far, on the site. Although it would have been preferable that more of the potential outer circuit of the walls had survived later disturbance, the survival of the stake-holes suggest that an outer gully has not been lost to subsequent erosion. Further work may establish whether the difference in construction results from chronological factors, or has come about as a result of function, or purely through structural choice.

About 17 m to the west of roundhouse 1 lie several more roundhouse structures. Unfortunately, this area has been disturbed by two intersecting large ditches which represent post-medieval field boundaries. One of them [1801] cuts through the centre of the group of roundhouses, while the other [120] truncates its southern edge. This means that most of the floor area and some of the circumferences of these structures have been lost.

There are two structures in this group that can be interpreted securely as buildings; designated roundhouses 3 and 4. The floor areas and some of the circumferences of these structures have been badly disturbed by the two post-medieval ditches. However, enough survives of their outer circular gullies, on the eastern side, to be confident of some details.

Roundhouse 4 provides good evidence for a round or nearly round gully of c. 8.8 m diameter. Roundhouse 3 is more fragmentary, and there is some doubt about the exact location of its

western circumference, but enough of the eastern side is visible to be reasonably confident that the gully had a circumference of c. 7.6 m.

Roundhouse 3 can be shown to be the earlier in the sequence. There may also have been another rebuilding phase lying between these two but too little survives, of extremely subtle deposits, to know if this represents a total rebuild or just a partial reconstruction.

These two (or possibly three) houses were rebuilt almost on top of one another, the roundhouse 3 gully being almost immediately adjacent to that of roundhouse 4. If it is correct to interpret an intervening phase of building, then the roundhouse 4 gully was cut directly into the silted-up gully of this intervening phase (ie. is later than it), while the digging of the latter had cut into the silted up roundhouse 3 gully.

This suggests a minimum of perhaps two to three generations of people living on this spot, if a minimum period of about 40–60 years is covered by the structures. On some calculations, this figure could, of course, be up to double this.

The final building in the sequence, structure 4, contained two sherds of Romano-British pottery in its final fill. This could date to any time from the late 1st to the late 3rd century AD.

This structure did not, however, have an entrance on its eastern side, unlike roundhouses 1 and 4. It is possible that this results from a difference in function. The difference in date between this and roundhouse 1 may suggest the possibility of some reordering of elements of the settlement in the early Romano-British period.

There are also some partial structural elements in this area from which a case for at least one more roundhouse; designated roundhouse 5, might be made. This may partially overlies the western edge of roundhouse 2. Only a short curving segment of gully was identified, and this only on the surface, its fill being too faint to excavate in section. It could not be traced on the western side of the post-medieval ditch (1801). Its southern continuation seems unlikely to be represented by the short curving gully [771] to the south-east of the linear gully [854]. Apart from the two elements not forming a good curving alignment, it would mean that a structure based on these two elements would have had a diameter of c. 13.4m. This seems a little large in the context of what

## Trench IV

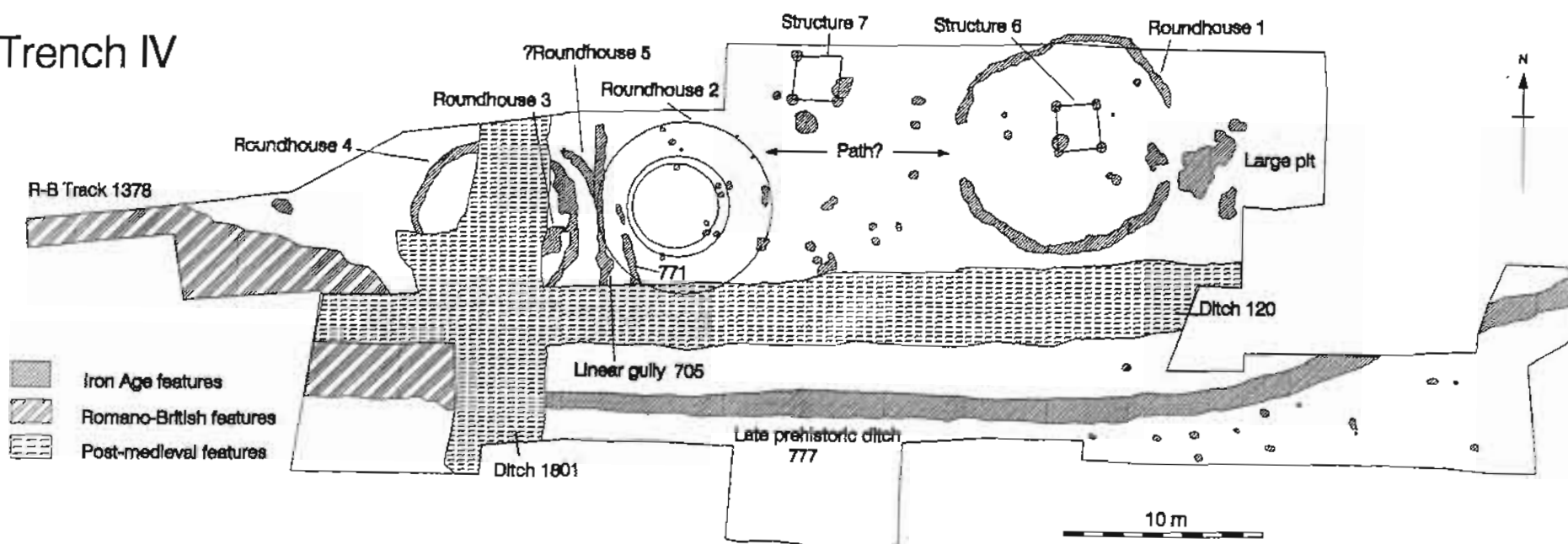


Fig. 4 Trench IV settlement plan

has been found on the settlement so far. It may be safer to say therefore that the segment of the roundhouse 5 gully represents either a short section of recut gully for a roundhouse or is part of a complete circuit the greater part of which is impossible to identify.

The second short curving alignment [771], given that it is difficult to see it as part of potential roundhouse 5, may be interpreted in a number of ways. It may be a recut section of roundhouse gully or part of a larger circuit which is unidentifiable because of the amount of later activity in this area. Alternatively its alignment might argue for it being part of a structure other than a roundhouse.

The chronological position of the linear prehistoric /Romano-British gully [854] immediately to the east of roundhouse 5 is unclear at the moment, other than that it is later than roundhouses 2 and 5. It has yet to be proved to be contemporary with roundhouse 4, but the lack of an eastern entrance to that structure would make it possible that on spatial grounds they could be associated.

Of the large number of Iron Age house known in Britain, an overwhelming majority have entrances orientated in an arc from north-east (midsummer sunrise) and particularly east through south-east (autumn equinox and midwinter sunrise respectively). There are some arguments that this range of orientations may be purely functional; associated with light, or wind direction. Others suggest it is part of a belief system of which these key periods of the year are significant in the construction and use of the house (Giles and Parker Pearson 1999).

The subtle fills of the gullies associated with roundhouse 3 and potential roundhouse/rebuild 5, suggest that these earlier gullies were backfilled largely with sand rather than being allowed to silt up with occupation debris. In contrast, the final fills of the roundhouse 4 gully consisted of very dark silty soil heavily impregnated with charcoal. This suggests that this particular spot was abandoned, sometime during the earlier part of the Roman period. Whether a subsequent new structure was built elsewhere, will occupy the direction of the next phase of research.

## Romano-British period

It will be crucial to tie the date for the abandonment of structure 4 down further, but what seems evident is that, in general terms, this settlement represents a gradual drift of buildings westwards, over several centuries. The significance of this is that during this time Roman rule was imposed on the countryside of Britain. In North West England, the unknown question is; to what extent did this new political and social reality affect the native farmers of Celtic stock, such as those who lived here at the Duttons Farm site?

That this site may hold some of the answers to this question is suggested, not only by the evidence of settlement spanning the period either side of the Roman arrival in Britain, but also by the presence of elements of the agricultural landscape associated with a farmstead of Romano-British date.

The main evidence for this comes from Trench IX, to the west of the settlement area (Fig. 3). This consists of a number of trackways and field boundaries. The trackways consist of short lengths of hollows, many of them with distinctive linear depressions, between c. 0.3 to 0.6 wide, running along their base, which has led to their interpretation as the ruts left by carts.

All the relationships between these features have not been properly understood yet, and it is hoped that the 2003 season will address this further. Their disposition, however, provides great potential for investigating changes in landuse across the late prehistoric-Romano-British chronological boundary.

Most of these features cross each other and several head towards a low, ill-drained area where their alignments are lost in the general homogenous matrix [483]. This is interpreted as a poorly drained area, where movement along the tracks has hollowed out and churned the surface. The upper part of layer [483] is very stony and it seems as if this area may have been consolidated with rubble, which included Romano-British pottery.

At least one of these hollows [422] appears to have been in use during the Romano-British period, to judge by the finds of pottery and coins from its fill. It runs diagonally across the trench in a north-western to south-eastern alignment for

## Trench IX

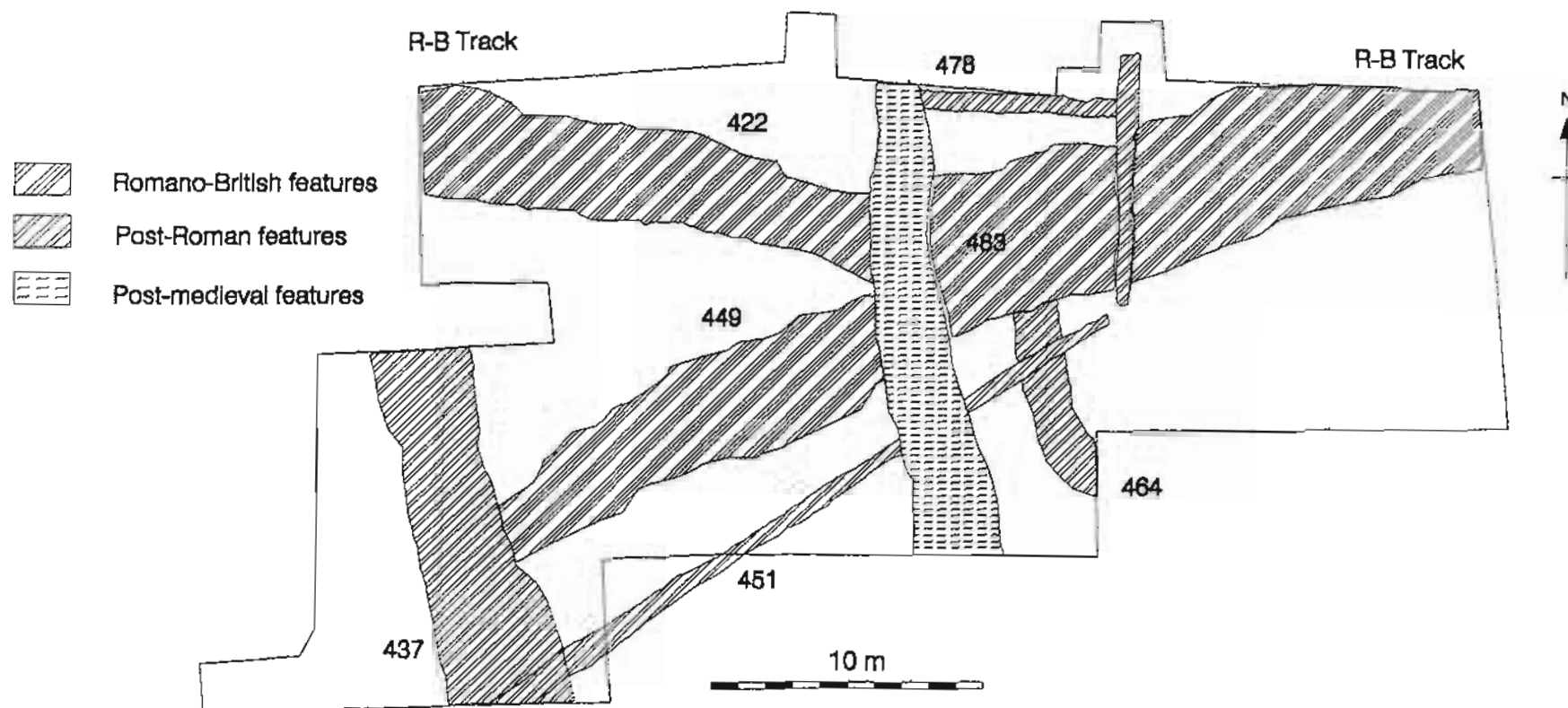


Fig. 5 Simplified plan of features in Trench IX

a distance of c. 15 m (Fig. 5). The hollow is c. 3m wide and c. 0.4 m deep. In the base are a number of linear depressions, c. 0.2 m deep, running in the same alignment. On its eastern edge it is cut by the silted ditch of a late post-medieval field boundary, which runs north-south across the trench.

The fill of the hollow contained heat shattered stones, charcoal flecks, small fragments of coal and concentrations of unworked stone, up to 0.3 m across. These varied between sub-angular, sub-rounded and tabular. The tabular fragments were often laid flat against the edges of the cut. Poorly defined concentrations of stone occurred above the linear depressions described above. In addition to these inclusions, this layer contained occasional fragments of Romano-British orange ware and Black Burnished Ware pottery,

It also contained a small hoard of 14 coins, including 13 silver and one copper alloy. They are issues of Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, Trajan, and Hadrian. This gives a *terminus post quem* for the deposit of AD 138 (ie. they had to have been deposited at an unknown date after AD 138). The coins were found dispersed across an area measuring c. 0.75 by 0.75 m. This suggests that the hoard was not in its original burial place, but had been disturbed, probably prior to its deposition in the track fill. If this is correct, then it is likely that deposition occurred significantly after 138 AD, but is likely to have been during the Roman period (ie. before the beginning of the 5th century AD).

The hollow is interpreted as a trackway, the narrow depressions in the base being wheel ruts. The stones found within the fill may originate in attempts to stabilise the surface. It is likely that the coins were accidentally deposited during one of these episodes.

One implication of this evidence is that the finds from the trackway and from the gas pipeline in this area suggest that the inhabitants of the farmstead associated with these agricultural features had access to Romanised goods such as pottery and tile. They may thus have used building techniques that differed from traditional native styles. This would be particularly important in the light of the settlement evidence from Trench IV, where a roundhouse appears to have been abandoned in the early Roman period. The identification of settlement elements later

than the 1st or 2nd century AD is therefore an important feature of future research on the site.

A second trackway [449], not as deep as trackway [422], converges on the former from the south-west. This has also produced Romano-British finds from its surface. It is c. 2.5 m wide and runs for a distance of c. 15 m, before also being truncated by the post-medieval ditch. It has short sections of narrow, shallow gullies running along its base.

Just to the east of the post-medieval ditch these two features continue as a single length of track heading in a north-easterly direction for a distance of c. 20 m. This has also produced small quantities of Romano-British pottery from its fill.

There is a gap of 70 m between the eastern excavated end of this track and a further trackway [1378] located in the western end of Trench IV (Figs 3 and 4). The two could represent two ends of the same track, if their alignments alone are taken as evidence. The segment of track in Trench IV, c. 20 m long, runs a couple of metres to the south-west of roundhouse 4, which has Romano-British pottery in its abandonment phase. It is not clear if these two features were in use at the same time as there is no stratigraphic relationship between them. The pottery associated with both features also has date ranges that cover several centuries, which does not help tie down if the track and the house were in existence at the same time.

What seems a little more certain is that the track was in use after the late prehistoric ditch [777] had silted up and fallen into disuse (Fig. 4). Although even here there are potential qualifications. Firstly, the disturbance created by the post-medieval ditch [1801] occurs at a key junction between the two earlier features. Secondly, even though despite this the ditch probably can be interpreted as being replaced by the track, there is no clear association yet between ditch [777] and the roundhouses about 10 m to the north of it. It is not dated, other than by a lack of finds, and the presence of burnt pebbles similar to those found in the gully of roundhouse 1. Nor has enough of it been excavated to know whether it is an enclosure ditch for the settlement or a field boundary, although the latter is suspected. If this is the case, then it cannot be automatically assumed that it is contemporary with the settlement.

Thus, the ditch [777] may have been replaced by the trackway but an association between the former and the settlement is necessary before it is possible to be confident that the buildings had also ceased to function by the time the track went through.

### The Post-Roman period

Evidence for this period is so far confined to Trench LX (Figs 3 and 5). Two linear features [437, 464] cross the Romano-British track [449/483] in a north-south direction, although work in 2003 is still needed to be absolutely confident in identifying the chronological relationships between them all.

On the western side of the trench lies feature [437]. It is c. 13.5 m long and c. 3 m wide and 0.3 m deep, with narrow linear depressions in its base. The upper fills of the two features [437 and 449], in approximately the area they cross, have produced five sherds of Romano-British pot and one medieval sherd.

A further linear feature [464] is located in the south-eastern part of the trench, running in a south-easterly direction for c. 8 m from area [483], before it meets the edge of the excavated area. As this is only a short segment, which runs into the homogenous area [483], it is not clear what this represents. Its main identifiable features are two narrow gullies ranging from c. 0.45 to 0.25 m in depth. There are some indications that they might represent two narrow, converging ditches, which might therefore be field boundaries. There is currently no absolute indication of its date, other than that it predates ditch [451].

This latter feature has been identified for a length of c. 22 m in the trench, running north-east/south-west. It is c. 0.6 m wide and 0.5 m deep, in parts V-shaped, while in others it has a more rounded base.

Feature [451] is very different from the other linear features in this trench and represents a boundary ditch of some kind, probably associated with a field. Its dating at the moment is problematic but would seem to date to some time from the Romano-British to the medieval or early post-medieval periods.

Whatever date it has, it does serve to place trackways/linear features [437, 464, 483, 478]

earlier than it. Dating of this feature is, therefore, a priority. It contains four sherds of Romano-British pottery and tile, but also two small finds of post-medieval date. Neither of these groups of material is necessarily accurate in dating the use or disuse of the feature. The Roman material may be redeposited from earlier features cut by the ditch, while the later material could have been introduced into it through more recent agricultural or natural disturbance. It may well turn out to be dated to somewhere in between these two extremes. However, more work needs doing before any of these questions can be answered.

### Undated evidence

This is concentrated in Trench XI, which lies c. 60 m to the south-east of the late prehistoric settlement in Trench IV (Fig. 3). It consists of nothing that could give an indication of an approximate date on typological grounds, such as the form of a structure, nor has it produced any artefacts from the features or sub-surface. In the absence of radiocarbon dates, the best indication of potential date is the very lack of finds, which might suggest a late prehistoric or post-Roman (pre-late medieval) date.

The features consist mainly of a series of post-holes, pits of varying sizes and vague indications of linear gullies badly truncated by the field drains that take up a great deal of the eastern side of the trench. At the moment, there are no indications that this represents a settlement area. The post-holes do not make a coherent pattern and could at best be linked to something like a fence-line. Several of the pits have been recut on a number of occasions, suggesting that the area was a focus of repeated activity over some time. They could lie just outside a settlement area, as in Trench IV but this will not be clear until a wider area is excavated. Another alternative is that this could be associated with activity away from a settlement area, perhaps out in the fields, where it might represent repeated activity associated with various agricultural practices over a period of time. Further work is intended in this area in 2003 to improve understanding of these features and how they might relate to the late prehistoric/Romano-British settlement in the vicinity.

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