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Area North West of Gill Mill House Ducklington Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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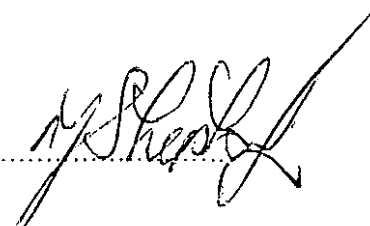
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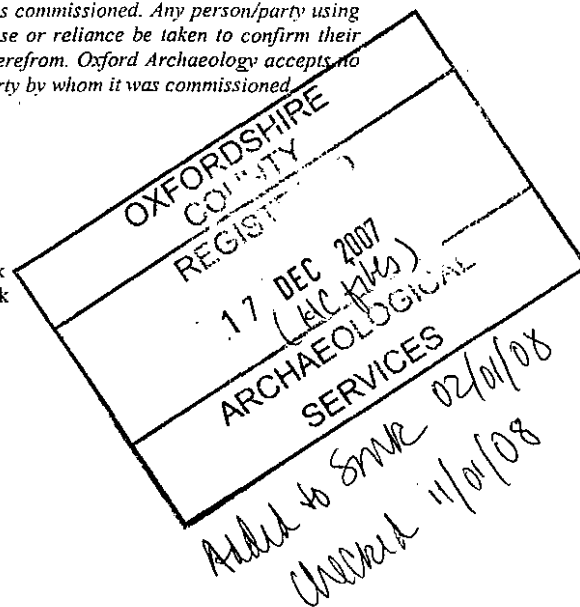
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Gill Mill, Ducklington, Oxfordshire
Area north-west of Gill Mill House

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

Between 1997 and 1999, the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a watching brief during gravel extraction operations at fields north-west of Gill Mill House, Ducklington. The work was undertaken on behalf of Smith and Sons (Bletchington) Ltd. The watching brief recorded extensive Romano-British activity, comprising field systems, probable trackways, quarrying activity and pit workings, wells and a limestone and pebble surface indicating a former stream crossing. Seven inhumations were also recorded and removed during continuing quarrying operations. An exceptional discovery amongst the artefacts from the site was part of a wooden cart wheel.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

Between November 1997 and December 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook a watching brief in advance of gravel extraction operations at Smith and Sons Gill Mill Pit, south of Ducklington, Oxon. The work was carried out on behalf of Smith and Sons Ltd. in accordance with a brief and Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) agreed with Hugh Coddington, the Deputy County Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council.

The watching brief covered fields immediately to the north-west of Gill Mill House, which totalled 6.6 hectares in area (Fig.1) and had previously been subject to evaluation.

1.2 Geology and topography

The site lay north of the River Windrush, and was bordered to the east by the present access lane to the Gill Mill house, to the north by a shallow drainage channel and to the west by the present quarrying pit and operations. The underlying geology of the site consists of gravel overlain by alluvial deposits within the river Windrush floodplain. Areas of 'rag-rock', or solidified gravel beds, occurred intermittently within the natural gravels.

The watching brief area consisted of two level fields formerly divided by a ditch and a broad, partially overgrown, hedge, on an approximately north-east to south-west alignment. The most recent use of these fields prior to topsoil stripping was as rough pasture except to the north east of the site where a vegetable crop (kale) had been left to provide cover for game. Hedge lines and fields were cleared before topsoil stripping commenced.

1.3 Archaeological background

Since 1988 the whole of the Gill Mill pit area has been the subject of several stages of archaeological evaluation and other work. These are summarised below.

In 1988 three parts of the quarry were evaluated. South of the river Windrush and south of Gill Mill House (Areas 2 and 3) a previously unidentified Roman road, areas of limestone rubble, gravel surfaces and spreads of pottery were revealed. These indicated the presence of a ribbon settlement abutting both sides of the Roman road which crosses the Windrush valley at Gill Mill, running NNE-SSW across the river Windrush floodplain. The pottery recovered from this evaluation dated to the 2nd to 4th centuries. Two blocks of land west of Gill Mill House were also examined. South of the Windrush (Areas 1 and Silt Pond 17) few significant features were revealed. North of the river (Areas 10 and Plant Area 16), however, enclosure ditches of an Iron Age (c 200-50 BC) farmstead were located in Area 10, and this site was examined further in 1989-1990.

Also in 1990 an area of some 3.5 ha, situated just south-west of the present site, was salvage recorded after topsoil stripping. This work, located north of Area 2, identified the western limits of the Roman settlement, which consisted of a series of ditches, some of which were waterlogged, that probably defined small fields and paddocks. Nine cremations and three inhumations were also uncovered and an additional area excavation revealed further burials and cremations.

In 1993 an area north of the Windrush adjacent to the 1988 Silt Pond 17 was evaluated, but with few significant results. In 1995 fields to the west of the present site were evaluated. This uncovered a pattern of ditches which probably represent small fields and paddocks dating to the 1st-2nd centuries and a small amount of occupation dating to the 3rd-4th centuries imposed upon this. Four inhumations were also recorded and these probably represent scattered burials similar to those identified in the 1990 salvage excavation. A system of palaeochannels uncovered to the west consisted mainly of shallow, undated, braided streams, which contained only occasional bone fragments.

Ex-2003 In November 1997 the area of the present watching brief was evaluated. The evaluation revealed a Roman ditched enclosure system originating in the 1st to 2nd century AD with quarrying activity within the enclosures overlain by extensive spreads of late Roman occupation debris. Limestone surfaces were located within former shallow channels in trenches at the southern edge of the site. These were thought to be parts of Roman possible fording points in an area liable to occasional flooding. A single poorly preserved cremation burial was also found. Relatively large quantities of finds, particularly pottery, were recovered.

2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS

The aim of the watching brief was to produce a more detailed record of an area of considerable archaeological potential as revealed by the 1997 evaluation. The recording exercise was intended to define the extent and (as far as possible) nature of any

archaeological remains present, and in particular to produce a coherent overall plan of the area and assess the potential for the possible continuation of Roman settlement (and other features, if present) into adjacent areas.

3 WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Machining and watching brief area*

The watching brief covered two fields with a total area of 6.6 hectares. Topsoil and the underlying alluvial deposits were removed in separate machining operations using a 360° tracked excavator equipped with a flat edged ditching bucket. The present field boundary ditches and hedge-lines were also removed during initial topsoil stripping operations. Alluvial clays almost completely sealed the revealed features, which were visible at the level of the underlying natural gravels.

3.2 *Fieldwork methods and recording*

During this watching brief the top of the alluvial clays were examined after initial topsoil stripping. No archaeological features were apparent although some scattered limestone fragments and finds were noted. During a separate machining operation the alluvial clays were stripped to the level of the revealed archaeological features and underlying gravel. These features were briefly recorded and planned at a scale of 1:100. It should be noted that the site grid used as the basis for the plans is not the same as the OS grid. Finds were collected from the revealed machined surfaces. Because of the nature of stripping operations and the limited scope of the watching brief, only minimal excavation of features was possible.

A total of seven human skeletons were uncovered. These were each fully excavated and recorded before removal. Plans of human skeletal remains were drawn at a scale of 1:10.

General fieldwork practice followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (Ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.3 *Finds collection*

Finds collection was generally limited to recovery from the top of features revealed by machine stripping although this was supplemented by further selective excavation. Where large quantities of finds were located within contexts, some selective collection was employed to retain the most diagnostic items. Animal bone was noted but not retained unless it was thought to be of special significance.

3.4 *Environmental sampling*

Previous evaluations at Gill Mill, particularly in 1988, have demonstrated that the environmental potential of the site, particularly with regard to the recovery of waterlogged material, is very high. Gravel extraction during the past 10 to 15 years has, however, resulted in some de-watering of archaeological deposits and has considerably reduced this potential. Consequently only more durable organic materials, such as leather or fibrous plant remains have survived in a waterlogged or semi-waterlogged condition where appropriate feature fills are encountered. This was felt to reduce the scope for recovery of good quality environmental samples. In view of the very limited scale of excavation of features (as opposed to recording in plan), recovery of such samples was in any case at a very low level.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 *Soil and ground conditions*

Topsoil across the site consisted of dark brown clayey silt, which was typically between 0.25 m and 0.30 m thick. This overlay up to 0.30 m of orange brown to grey brown alluvial silty clay, which sealed the revealed archaeological deposits and natural gravel. Ground conditions were generally dry during the watching brief, though they did become poor in wet weather.

4.2 *Presentation of results*

A brief description of the results is presented according to period. The numerous features on the site were, however, almost exclusively of Roman date. The description of that period is first given in general terms and then the features are described in more detail by the following categories: field systems and possible track-ways, pits and quarrying activity, wells, burials, and miscellaneous features.

An interpretation and discussion of the results follows the site description and a brief summary of the finds.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 *Natural and prehistoric features*

Tree-hole disturbances were concentrated within the north of the site. A number of these were investigated by excavation and found to have irregular profiles filled by gravel-free brown-grey to orange-grey silty clay. The fills appeared to be alluvial in nature.

There was little evidence of prehistoric human activity across the watching brief area. The previous evaluation of this area (OAU, December 1997) showed a comparable situation, with only one small residual sherd of Iron Age pottery and a single struck flint recovered.

5.2 *Romano-British features*

The overwhelming majority of features located are thought to date to the Roman period. The general pattern of activity consisted of large rectangular field systems within the south-west and north-east parts of the site. A smaller sub-rectangular enclosure was found towards the western side of the area. Field ditch patterns suggest the presence of a former track-way, leading south-east from this enclosure towards a patchy limestone and pebble surface at the south of the site. Dense concentrations of pits and quarrying activity were identified across the middle of the site and in its south-eastern part. These consisted of both discrete and multiple interrelated pits with extensive spreads of dumped materials. Eight wells were also identified within this region.

5.2.1 *Field systems and track ways*

The general patterns of Roman ditches were aligned either NNE-SSW and WNW-ESE or (to a lesser extent) N-S and E-W. The most obvious site components on the principal (NNE-SSW and WNW-ESE) alignment were rectangular enclosures or divisions within the north-east and south-west parts of the site. In both cases there were indications of WNW-ESE aligned subdivisions of these enclosures/fields. A westward extension of the former component was linked to a smaller, sub-rectangular enclosure situated around site grid coordinates 100E/460N. This enclosure lay on the north side of the probable continuation of the WNW alignment as a trackway running to the west, presumably leading to field systems identified during earlier evaluations (OAU 1995). This trackway may have turned southwards at a point just south of the subrectangular enclosure and headed towards the midpoint of the southern edge of the site.

Several parallel ditches aligned roughly east-west were found close to the southern edge of the site. These appeared to border a former shallow stream course, north of the present course of the River Windrush, but apparently terminated in the general area of the junction with the trackway just discussed. A further boundary ran NNE from the same point. This, which may have run the whole north-south length of the site, was on a similar alignment to that of the two main enclosures/fields, but was clearly later in date than the one in the north-east corner of the site.

A further group of ditched boundaries, mostly on a south-west to north-east alignment, was located in the south-east corner of the site. These turned quite sharply eastwards or south-eastwards at their northern end. There was no indication, however, that they were linked with the east-west boundaries at the southern margin of the site.

5.2.2 Pits and quarrying activity

Dense concentrations of pits and probable gravel quarries were located across much of the central and southern parts of the site. It is difficult to distinguish any particular patterning in the distribution of the pits, except insofar as the rectangular field/enclosure in the south-west part of the site, and the northern part of the corresponding enclosure in the north-east corner were both largely devoid of pits and there were very few pits west of the latter area. In the southern part of the site some pitting occurred along the line of field boundaries indicating that these boundaries had largely gone out of use by the time the pits were dug.

Pits typically measured from between 2 m to 4 m in diameter, although there were some areas of intensive intercutting pit digging activity, within which individual features could not be readily distinguished in plan. Such areas (e.g. one centred c 195E/395N) could be quite extensive. Pitting activity was particularly intensive within the mid-southern part of the site around the area of a probable trackway (around site grid point 160E /340N). A small area of stone surface was uncovered in this vicinity. Smaller discrete pits of 1.0 m or less in diameter were relatively scarce and the size of the majority suggests that they might have been the result of sporadic quarrying activity. Fills typically varied from grey brown or reddish brown to black brown silty clay, to blue-grey or yellow brown clay. Several pits were found to contain partly preserved waterlogged timbers. The most important of these discoveries was of part of a cart wheel, consisting of most of one felloe and two spokes, all of oak, from pit 1312 (at 160E/350N, not numbered on plan). Two further pits in the southern part of the site (close to 110E/360N), had inhumation burials inserted into their tops.

5.2.3 Wells

A total of nine certain or probable wells were recorded. These were all located around the middle of the watching brief area and seem to have been predominantly situated to cut underlying "ragrock" (here this term is used to describe hard, concreted, gravel beds), which occurred in bands across the site.

Because of the constraints of the watching brief it was only possible to record the sections of two of these wells: 1050 and 1300. These are described below.

Well 1050 consisted of a square built dry-stone wall situated above a rounded opening, cut through an underlying bed of ragrock. This well measured 0.8 m square across its internal wall faces and was 1.43 m deep. It is assumed that the former water table has always been fairly high at Gill Mill and the expanded width beneath the well's ragrock opening was a consequence of gradual natural erosion of the well sides beneath the ragrock layer.

Well 1300 was not cut through the hard ragrock beds found elsewhere and instead consisted of a square built, rough limestone dry-stone lining laid directly against the surrounding natural gravel. The internal width of this well was 0.76 m and it measured 0.85 m in depth.

5.2.4 Burials

A total of seven inhumations were uncovered, recorded and removed during the watching brief. All were located in the western half of the site, mostly adjacent to boundary ditches.

Five burials lay in the north-west quarter of the site in the general vicinity of the small subrectangular enclosure located around site grid point 100E/460N. Four of these inhumations were supine, on a north-south alignment; the fifth, skeleton 1304, was a crouched burial apparently set in the top of an earlier pit which also contained Roman pottery. It is possibly significant that this was the only burial not sited adjacent to a boundary ditch.

The two remaining inhumations were located towards the south west of the site in the vicinity of an area of pits around grid point 100E/360N. Both graves partly cut the fills of earlier pits and lay on the western extent of a broad concentration of pits and quarry workings extending into the south eastern corner of the site. These two skeletons also lay adjacent to a series of parallel, north-south ditches that demarcate a change between a pattern of broad field systems to the west and adjacent pit concentrations. Both these skeletons were fairly complete. Skeleton 756 at co-ordinate 97E/363N had been placed supine on a north-south alignment whilst skeleton 700 at co-ordinate 105E/361N lay partly turned on its side, facing north, on an east-west orientation.

The general level of preservation of the human bone was good. No grave goods were recovered in any of the graves. Burial 1304 had been interred wearing shoes, however, since fragments of waterlogged leather were recovered at the feet. Further similar fragments elsewhere in the grave possibly derived from another item of clothing.

5.2.5 Possible trackway surface

Spreads of stony soils and pitting were particularly concentrated around 160E/360N towards the south of the site. A limited area of these spreads was investigated to reveal a patchy stony surface, consisting of pebbly gravel and limestone pieces on a north-south alignment. Only a small area of this surface was revealed between co-ordinates 160E/350N and 170E/350N. This surface measured 7.5 m across and was at least 5.0 m from north to south. The northern and southern extents of the surface could not be fully defined beneath spreads of stony soils that extended for another 20 m to the north and 8 m to the south. The southern limit of these spreads seemed to respect a series of shallow east-west aligned ditches parallel to a former shallow streambed. Scattered Roman pottery and tile was found above the surface, as well as two coins; small finds 23 and 24. These were respectively a radiate of late 3rd century date and a completely unidentifiable piece assignable to the 3rd or 4th century on the basis of its size.

5.2.6 Miscellaneous features

A number of postholes, containing waterlogged remnants of upright timbers, were located a short distance to the east of the surface described above. Three of these features, 1345, 1502 and 1510, were sectioned and had a similar general shape and dimensions. Postholes 1345 and 1510 contained remnants of unworked posts, whilst 1502 contained pitched limestone and a wooden wedge shaped timber, indicating that this was packing material for a subsequently removed post. All three features lay on a roughly north-south alignment parallel to the possible track-way (see above) and may represent a former fence-line.

A separate pair of upright pointed posts was found at co-ordinate 99E/364N, both inserted into the bottom of a shallow pit. The purpose of this feature is uncertain, but it lay quite close to burials 756 and 700, which were located 2 m to the west and 7 m to the south-east, respectively.

Two very large worked timbers, 2002 and 2003, were uncovered during a final machining phase at the site. These timbers measured 0.66 m x 0.66 m wide x 0.66 m high and 0.7 m wide x 0.8 m across by 0.9 m high respectively. Both had been worked, with squared sides and tops and both had been partially burnt, presumably to preserve them in the ground. However only approximate locations could be given for both timbers, which were supposedly found upright within the fills of pits at co-ordinates 229E/426N and 230E/418N, close to the central eastern edge of the watching brief area.

5.3 *Post-Roman activity*

An alignment of parallel north-south ditches within the north-eastern part of the site and these probably delineated a former track-way. These ditches turned south-eastwards just north of a modern hedge line and ditch which divided the site into southern and northern fields. This alignment was linked at the western margin of the site with another modern boundary on a NNE-SSW alignment. The trackway ditches were shallow and undated, but cut the larger, east-west, Roman field systems and their relationship with the modern boundary also suggests a post-Roman date. A surface scatter of stone was noted within the alluvium above the area of this alignment after preliminary topsoil stripping. This also indicates that the trackway was post-Roman, as these alluvial deposits are thought to date from the late or post-Roman period onwards.

A separate series of shallow ditches was aligned from NNE to SSW across the centre of the site. Although undated during the watching brief, these features were investigated during a previous evaluation (OAU 1997) and identified as modern by the inclusion of plastic within their notably humic fills.

5.4 Finds

Quantities of finds recovered were generally small as a consequence of the very limited excavation of the recorded features. Few small finds, in particular, were recovered.

5.4.1 Small finds

Though few in number these included some significant items such as four copper alloy coins (two probably of the late 3rd century, one early 4th and one dated AD 350-351) and two iron objects - a small flat iron baker's shovel or peel and a key. Much the most important individual find was of part of a cart wheel, from pit 1312. This is discussed separately below, but has not yet been examined in any detail, so the present description is of a preliminary nature.

5.4.2 Cart wheel

The wheel fragments, of oak, were relatively poorly preserved, but enough survives to give an impression of the wheel overall. The incomplete fragments are from a single felloe and its two associated spokes. The felloe is from a wheel rim roughly 0.1 m thick. It has a mortise in one end to take a tenon from the adjacent felloe, but the corresponding tenon on the other end of the surviving felloe is missing. The spokes were placed in holes which pass through the entire thickness of the felloe. The spokes themselves are of roughly oval section, rather than being turned, and have simple tenons at the outer ends, which were presumably wedged into place in the sockets in the felloe, the whole being bound with an iron tyre, though no remains of the latter were present. Tenons on the inner ends of the spokes are incomplete, but enough survives to indicate the change in the profile of the spokes where they entered the hub. No trace of the latter was found. The wheel would have been very roughly 1 m in diameter and presumably derives from an agricultural vehicle. The construction is fairly simple and in details of the wheel type and in the use of oak rather than more specialist wheel-wrighting timbers (such as ash) suggests a relatively unsophisticated vehicle. Remains of such vehicles are, however, extremely rare in Roman Britain. The best known Romano-British wheels, from sites such as Newstead and Carlisle, are of rather different character.

5.4.3 Pottery

Some 1443 sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from 250 different contexts. These ranged in date from the mid-late 1st century to the 4th century, though relatively few groups were certainly assigned to the ends of the date range and the majority of material was assignable to the 2nd-mid 4th centuries. In many cases close dating was not possible owing to the small size of the groups and the consequent lack of chronologically diagnostic material.

The pottery was scanned very rapidly. Approximate context dates were noted along with the major ware groups present in each context, but no further quantification was undertaken at

this stage. The condition of the assemblage was variable, but several groups contained large sherds. The soil conditions on the site tend to abrade the surfaces of sherds, but in a few cases, probably where material was more waterlogged, surface survival was very good. In the following brief summary OAU fabric/ware codes are in brackets.

The pottery was derived largely from local or regional sources, coarse wares being drawn from the Oxford industry, perhaps also from North Wiltshire and, most importantly, from a fairly local industry, not precisely located, which produced a range of fine sandy coarse wares (both oxidised and reduced, (O37, R37 and R38) and also occasional oxidised colour-coated wares (F65). A fine example of the latter, imitating samian form 38, was noted, along with occasional other sherds.

Imported wares consisted of samian ware (plain forms only) and small quantities of South Spanish amphora, probably all from form Dressel 20 (A11), of which one rim sherd and one stamped handle sherd were present. Extra-regional imports included Nene Valley colour-coated ware (F52 - in very small quantities) and particularly black-burnished ware which was fairly well-represented, with material both from Dorset (B11) and wheel-thrown versions probably of more local origin (B30). Shell-tempered wares (C10, C11) were also reasonably common, but none of these were certainly identifiable as products of the Harrold (Bedfordshire) industry, probably reflecting the lack of very late Roman groups on the site. The principal product from east of the Oxford region was pink grogged ware (O81), from Buckinghamshire. The distinctive large jars of this industry were relatively common, but it is possible that these were slightly over-represented in the assemblage since the sherds are generally larger than average and readily spotted. Nevertheless, the total number of such vessels appears to be impressive and may reflect a functional aspect of the site distinct from those of lower status rural sites. At least one such vessel had been mended with lead rivets and a lead patch.

Oxford products were not particularly well-represented. Although the detailed work necessary to separate the coarse wares from other more local products was not undertaken, the subjective impression is that the former were not very common. Colour-coated ware (F51) was no more than reasonably common and while the mortaria on the site were without exception Oxford products (all three main mortarium fabrics (M22, M31 and M41) being present) these were again relatively scarce. Other Oxford white wares were almost entirely absent.

In summary, the pottery assemblage contains components such as the amphorae which reflect the middling status of the site as a roadside settlement, and the reasonable quantities of black-burnished ware may also reflect this aspect. Pottery supply to the site is probably dominated by the relatively local but unlocated R37 (etc) industry and Oxford products are therefore of reduced importance. The fine and specialist ware component of Oxford production is, however, also not particularly well-represented. This is in part a consequence of the date range of this part of the Gill Mill site, in which activity after (approximately) the mid 4th century appears to be almost entirely absent (groups dating after this time would normally

contain a fairly high proportion of Oxford colour-coated wares, for example), but there may be a sub-regional marketing factor at work here, because a comparable relative shortage of Oxford products has been noted at the small town at Asthall, on Akeman Street, a little way to the north-west. The explanation of this phenomenon is still to be found. Overall this assemblage, in conjunction with others from Gill Mill, has high potential to inform discussion of a wide range of aspects of the settlement, but this would require detailed recording and analysis.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 *Reliability of field investigation*

A layer of alluvial silty clay overlay the archaeological horizons sealing these deposits. There was therefore very little later disturbance of the archaeological contexts. While the nature of the watching brief allowed only very limited excavation of features and generally precluded detailed recording of contexts, the fact that deposits were mostly undisturbed means that the comparatively plentiful surface finds were a more reliable guide to feature dating than might have been the case.

While the presence of Roman finds within features at the stripped surface level suggests that these features were filled during the Roman period it is not impossible that some features were of earlier origin. However, the lack of any identifiable prehistoric or post-Roman finds strongly indicates that the observed features date almost exclusively from the Roman period.

6.2 *Distribution of archaeological features*

6.2.1 Prehistoric features.

With the exception of natural disturbance such as those caused by probable tree-holes, there were no identifiable pre-Roman features within the watching brief area. Not all the tree-holes need necessarily have been pre-Roman in date.

6.2.2 The Roman period

Elements of a rectilinear NNE-SSW and WNW-ESE aligned field system, defined by ditches, lay across much of the site, with evidence for intensive activity, represented by further ditches and, in particular intensive pit digging, concentrated in the central and south-eastern parts of the site. The alignment of the field boundary ditches is consistent with that of similar field systems suggested by previous evaluations to the west of the present site. The much greater intensity of activity observed in the present site, however, reflects its proximity to the roughly NNE-SSW aligned Roman road which forms the axis of the settlement of Gill Mill. The line of this road

probably lay immediately east of the present site, though few of the features revealed in the watching brief give any indication of its proximity. The principal field system alignment, while close to that of the road, was probably not exactly at right angles to it. The ditched enclosure located in the south-east corner of the site may have extended as far as the road line, and its north-western side may have been aligned quite similarly to the road further east. Regular layouts of ditched plots at right angles to the principal road alignments are a characteristic, but not invariable, feature of roadside settlements in Roman Britain. It is possible that the boundaries located in the south-east corner of the site represent the northern extent of such plots on the west side of the axial road, but this is speculative.

Generally the layout of the Roman features, including a possible trackway heading off into the fields to the west, is consistent with the overall roadside settlement character of Gill Mill. A patchily surviving limestone and pebble surface located towards the middle of the southern edge of the site may represent a south-easterly continuation of the trackway and also the proximity of a possible fording point across the likely stream channel seen at the south-west margin of the site. This channel was also noted within one of the 1997 evaluation trenches.

The location of eight wells in the roadside area, and of skeletons adjacent to boundary features towards the 'back' (i.e. west) of this area are also typical of such settlements, and the latter characteristic was also seen a little further south in 1990, where burials again concentrated just outside a feature interpreted as defining the rear of the roadside zone.

The main focus of activity was concentrated across the middle of the site and towards the south-east. Here dense concentrations of pits, interpreted principally as representing quarrying activity, were evident. The pit concentrations consisted of both discrete and complex groups of intercutting features apparently overlain by extensive spreads of dumped materials. The detailed characteristics of most of the pits remain unknown, however, owing to the limited extent of examination. Apart from an alignment of postholes indicating a possible fence line and two upright stakes within a separate pit, no evidence of structural remains was located.

6.2.3 Post-Roman features

A north-south aligned trackway was located within the north-east of the site. Dating of this feature is uncertain, but a limestone scatter within the alluvial above this alignment indicates that it post-dates a period of flooding during the late Roman period.

A series of shallow ditches running across the centre of the site on a NNE-SSW alignment were dated by a single piece of plastic within their fills, found during the initial evaluation of the site. These ditches correspond with a slightly sunken earthwork, visible during initial stripping of the area.

7 SIGNIFICANCE

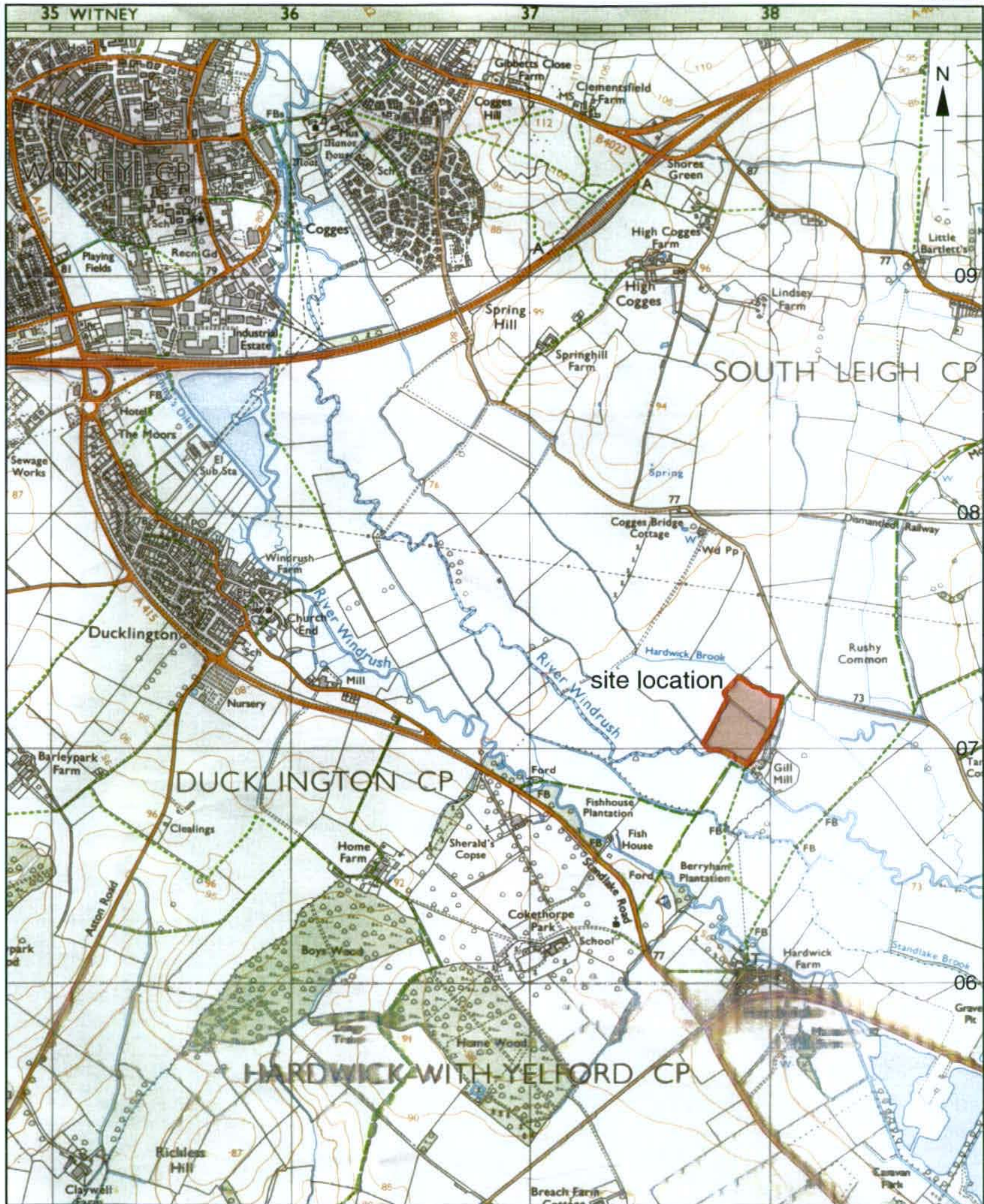
The watching brief confirmed the results of earlier evaluations and demonstrated the presence of intensive activity related to the Roman roadside settlement. The area examined appears to lie at the interface of the settlement's roadside zone with field systems and paddocks which extended beyond the site both to the west and the north. There are hints that the site may lie towards the northern end of the settlement as a whole, so that adjacent areas to the north would see some tailing off in the density and overall extent of Roman features. The peripheral areas of settlements of this type are important in a number of respects, however: fluctuations in the intensity and extent of occupation are often reflected most clearly in these locations, and they are particularly important as the site of burials, as shown here and in earlier work in comparable locations further south. The recording in plan of a large area of the settlement allows some of its component zones to be identified, with a consequent significant improvement in the understanding of its morphology and development on a wide scale. The evidence for waterlogged deposits identified in the limited number of pits and wells which were examined indicates a very important surviving resource, even if this may have declined in quality since gravel extraction started in the area.

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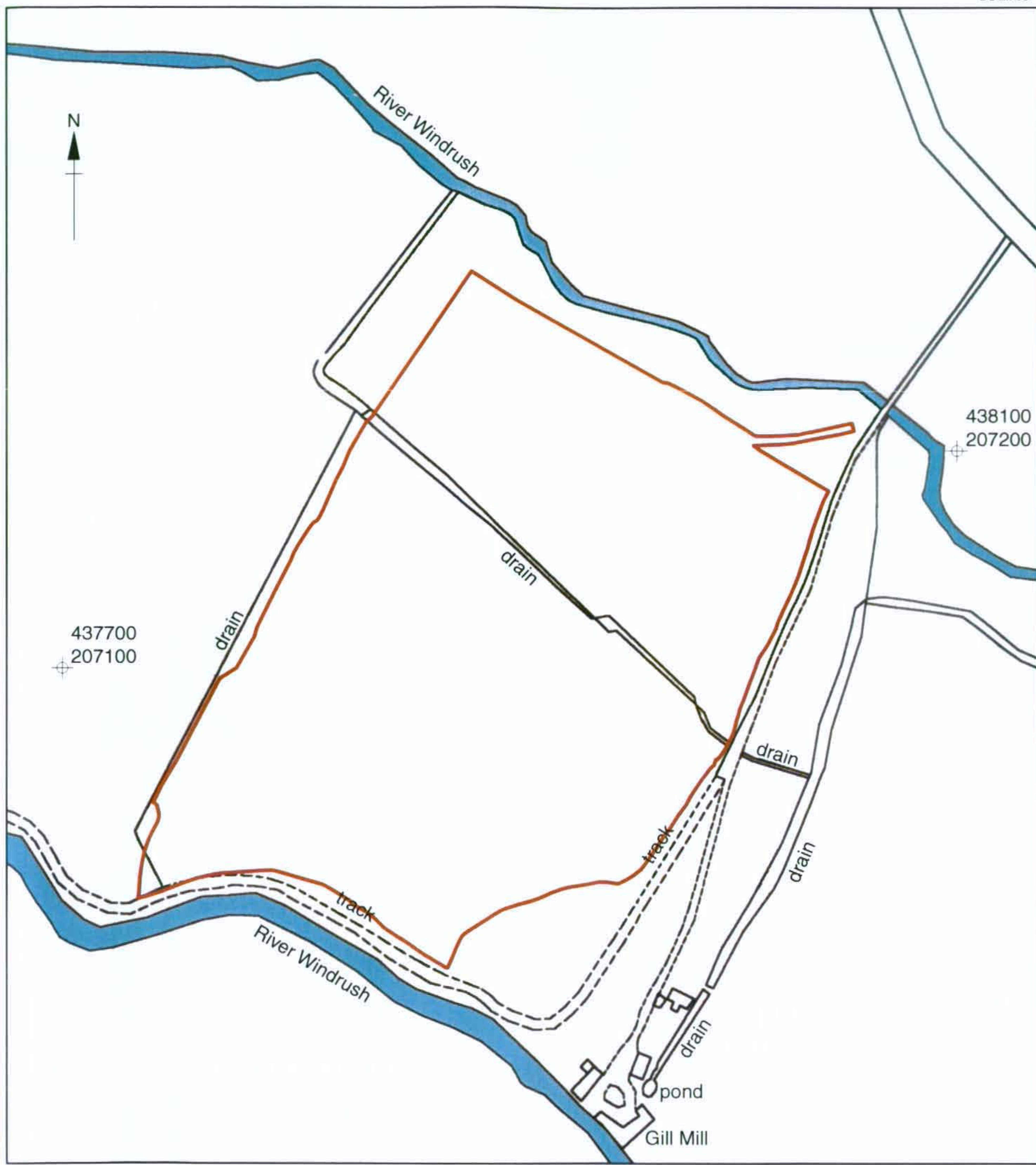
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figure 1: site location



— area of watching brief

figure 2: site plan

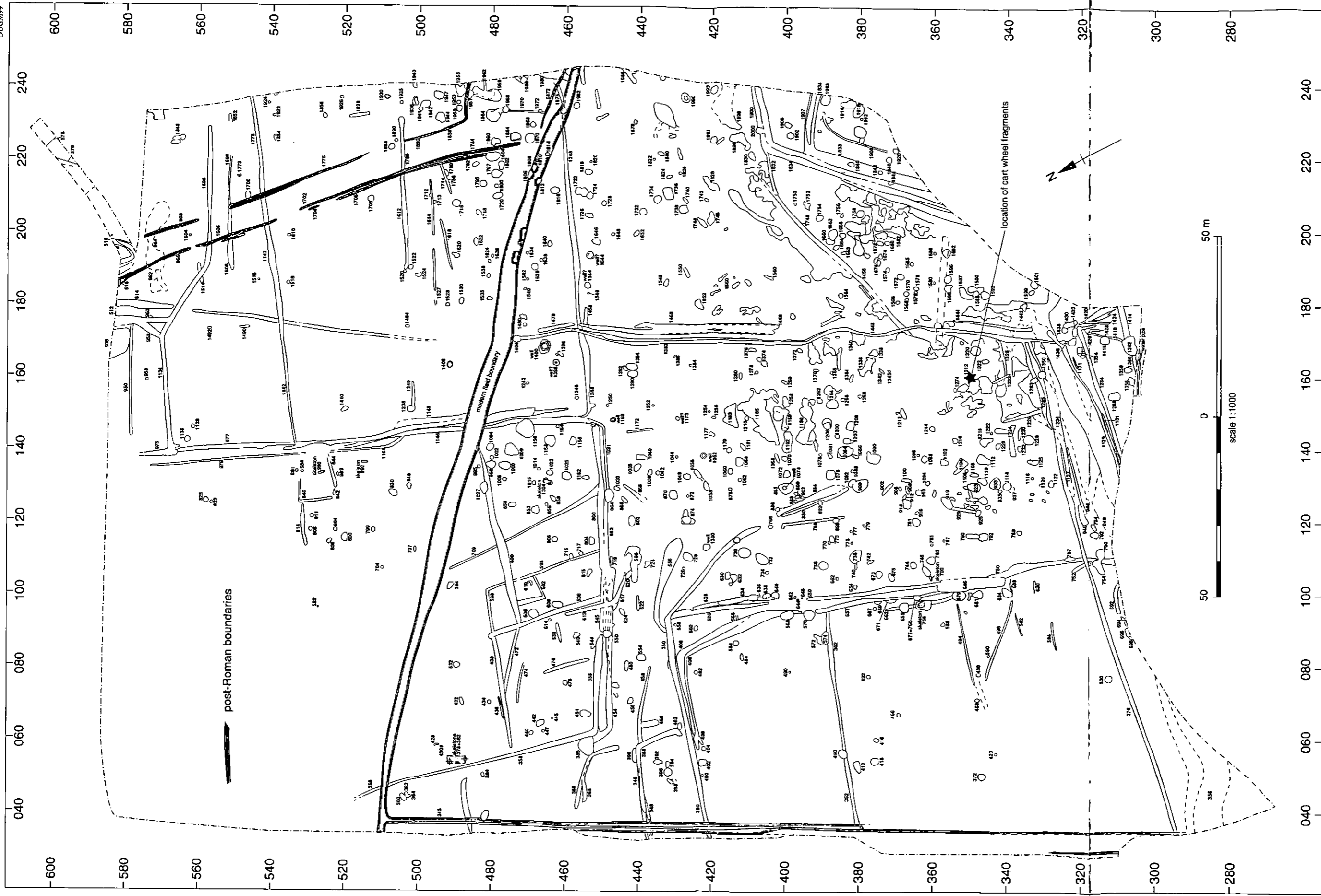


figure 3: site plan



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