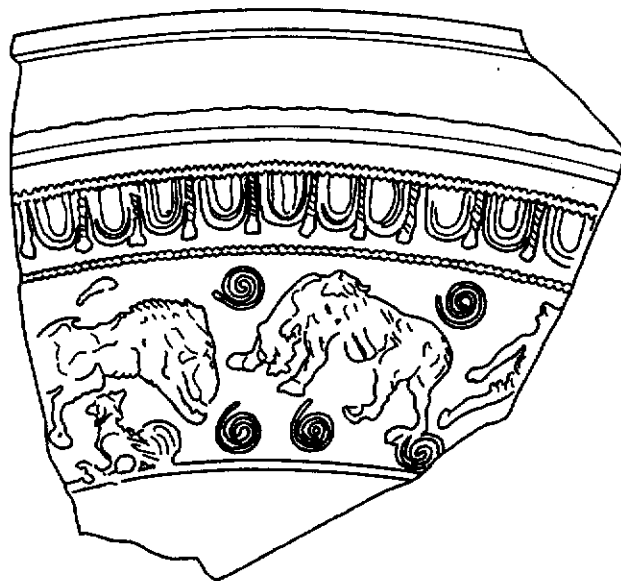


*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY  
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**MENDIP BUSINESS PARK  
SHEPTON MALLET  
A Further Archaeological Assessment 1992**



*B.U.F.A.U.*



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**Mendip Business Park, Shepton Mallet  
A further archaeological assessment 1992**

by  
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# Mendip Business Park, Shepton Mallet

## A Further Archaeological Assessment, 1992

by Peter Leach

### 1: Introduction

In the latter part of 1990 an evaluation report on the archaeological potential of land designated as the Mendip Business Park at Fosse Way, Shepton Mallet, Somerset, was commissioned from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit by Wayopen Estates Limited. At that time, one part of the site to the east was not available for investigation (Fig. 2); this second evaluation and report, commissioned once again from BUFAU by Wayopen Estates Limited, deals with the eastern portion and completes the assessment.

The Mendip Business Park (centred on NGR ST 632247) lies to the east of Shepton Mallet, within an area zoned for new development along Fosse Lane (Fig. 1). Since 1990 much of the area has been the subject of a series of archaeological assessments, following the discovery and partial excavation earlier that year of extensive and well preserved remains of a Romano-British roadside settlement (Fig. 2). Those discoveries rapidly demonstrated the archaeological importance and potential of the whole area (Leach 1991) and prompted the first phase of site evaluation in the Business Park (Leach, Mould and Richardson 1990).

### 2: Methods of Assessment

The procedures adopted for this latest assessment, and the conclusions arising from it, were influenced to a considerable degree by the earlier evaluation and its results. A two-stage approach involving geophysical prospection preceding trial trenching was not applicable in 1992, the area concerned having been completely buried by landfill material derived from levelling and preparation of the warehouse development site in 1990, adjacent and to the south of the Business Park. Trial trenching, involving mechanical removal of the recent overburden, was thus the only effective technique for assessing the character or survival of archaeological features and deposits in the area. The circumstances and

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outcome of the 1990 assessment (Leach, *et al* 1990), as well as the information derived from more extensive excavations on the warehouse site and subsequent archaeological evaluations in the locality, do however provide much complementary data to enhance and amplify the results of this latest assessment.

The area for assessment in 1992 comprises approximately two hectares of land, bounded to the west by service roads and to the east by the perimeter of the property (Fig. 3). A series of five linear trenches were cut here (designated P-T), approximately 2m wide and of various lengths. Their approximate N-S orientation was designed to cut across the principal E-W trend of known archaeological features, demonstrated in the areas examined to the west in 1990 (*op cit*).

Excavation, initially by machine, removed the modern overburden (well over 1m deep in places) and the former topsoil horizon of the fields existing here prior to 1990, where it had survived. Manual cleaning of the subsoil horizon exposed in the trench bottoms at that level (sometimes corresponding to the natural bedrock or clay) then defined the extent of any surviving archaeological features and deposits. These remains were numerically identified and recorded by written descriptions, graphic and photographic record, and associated artefacts were collected where recovered in the manual definition process.

The archive of site records and a small collection of finds are currently housed at the University of Birmingham. Subject to future agreements they may be deposited with the Somerset County Museum and County Records Office; the archive copied to the National Monuments Record.

### 3: Results

The archaeological evidence recorded in each of the five trenches is briefly reviewed and interpreted; the majority of defined deposits are

located on figure 3. Interpretation and recommendations are discussed in sections 4 and 5.

### 3.1: Trench P (Fig. 3)

The most northerly of a pair of trenches cut almost parallel with the eastern boundary of the site, 60m in length. This was situated in the lowest-lying part of the site and cut to a maximum depth of 153.24m AOD at its northern end. Between 1.0 and 1.5m of recent overburden sealed the original ground surface, visible in places as a buried soil, although little survived undisturbed in the northern two-thirds of the trench where the dumped landfill was deepest. There are no archaeological features in this area although limestone bedrock was exposed.

Within the southern one-third of the trench a partly disturbed former ground level survived as buried turf and topsoil. Beneath this level was a soil and stony rubble layer (1021/1024), within which was visible part of a hearth or oven (1020) and an associated layer of burnt debris (1022). This complex was cut by a recent land drain and an earlier stone-lined drainage trench (1023). A little further north was the remains of a suspected east–west boundary ditch (1025), possibly of Roman date.

### 3.2: Trench Q (Fig. 3)

To the south of Trench P its north–south line was continued after a break by Trench Q, cut to over 40m in length and to a maximum depth of 154.70m AOD. The recent overburden here never exceeded 1.0m in depth and in places was little over 0.60m above a buried former topsoil. The latter was absent or disturbed by the landfill of 1990 in places and only a sparse survival of archaeological deposits or features was demonstrated. Deposits of occupation soil (1030 and 1034) at the southern and northern extremities of the trench, respectively, contained Roman pottery and animal bone. Near the centre of the trench were the disturbed cobbles (1031) of a possible east–west street, an area of burnt clay (1032) adjacent may mark the base of a hearth; neither of these features was dated though they were suspected to be Romano-British. A probable post-medieval, pitched stone field drain (1033), aligned east–west, was seen towards the north end of the trench.

### 3.3: Trench R (Fig. 3)

This trench, over 70m long, was cut further to the west and slightly out of alignment with P, Q and S on either side of it. Natural bedrock or clay was encountered at approximately 155m AOD throughout its length, sealed in most places by an intact former turf/topsoil. The latter was buried variably beneath landfill soil and rubble, between 0.55 and 0.85m thick.

In this trench a few archaeological deposits were found. At the northern extremity a spread of stony soil and rubble incorporated the remains of a hearth (1011), associated with Romano-British pottery, a bronze brooch fragment and a large piece of native lead ore (galena). Further south, a narrow stone-lined drainage ditch (1010) cut into the bedrock may be of post-medieval date, possibly linking with the similar drain (1023) in Trench P. Two possible boundary ditches (1009 and 1008) crossed the trench approximately on east–west alignments, and are probably of Roman or earlier date. Part of a small pit (1007) was seen nearby in the west section of the trench. Further south again the remains of a cobbled street (1006) crossed the trench on an approximate east–west alignment. Adjacent and to the south were the remains of a small hearth (1005), defined within the natural clay subsoil. Towards the southern end of the trench were seen portions of two rock-cut pits (1003 and 1004), whose fills were not dated.

### 3.4: Trench S (Fig 3)

This was the most westerly trench, cut once again on a north–south alignment, 75m long. Natural limestone bedrock with patches of orange clay was reached at between 155.80 and 155.50m AOD from south to north along the trench. The original turf and topsoil horizon survived in most places and was sealed by the 1990 landfill at depths varying between 0.50m to almost 1.0m, progressing from south to north. For 10–12m from the north end of the machine trench a layer of silty clay with scatters of stone sealed the horizontal limestone bedrock surface. This appeared to be naturally deposited waterborne clay which merged southwards into a much stonier brown soil and clay deposit (1047) containing some Roman pottery and large stone rubble.

Continuing southwards, parts of other features

and their fills were encountered, for the most part defined within natural limestone bedrock or clay. A small part of a possible rock-cut pit containing fragments of bone (1046) lay almost 10m south of 1047. A few metres beyond this a narrow segment of clay soil-filled ditch (1045) crossed the trench diagonally, aligned NW–SE. Towards the southern end of the trench features were defined by stony soil fills, in some instances containing Roman pottery. What may have been successive definitions of an east–west boundary ditch were distinguished (1043 and 1044) immediately adjacent to each other. A few metres away another area of stony rubble deposit (1042) contained evidence of burning, some animal bone and fragments of pottery. Within it and extending to the north appeared to be the remains of a hearth (1041). Less than two metres away to the south another east–west linear strip of stone fill (1040), also containing Roman pottery and animal bone, cuts into the bedrock. No further features or deposits were detected in the final 17–18m of the trench to its southern extremity.

### 3.5: Trench T (Fig. 3)

The most southerly of the five trenches was cut over 40m long on a NW–SE alignment parallel to the service road and alongside an existing (temporary) topsoil pound. At its northwestern end the natural bedrock and clay occurred at around 155.5m AOD, with an overburden of 0.5m or more above the remains of the turf and topsoil buried in 1990. Within 10m of this end of the trench the modern landfill horizon was observed lying directly upon a limestone bedrock surface for the remaining length of the trench. The bedrock surface was itself truncated to some extent, decreasing to around 154.5m AOD at the southeastern extremity of the trench, where the depth of recent overburden was well in excess of 1.0m.

The only trace of archaeological features was found at the northern end, where the buried soil sealed the weathered bedrock surface. In the east baulk was exposed part of a hearth or oven (1050), while almost opposite, in the west baulk, was a rock-cut pit containing large stone blocks in a dark soil (1051). No finds were recovered in association with either.

## 4: Interpretation

With few exceptions all the archaeological phenomena encountered and their associated finds were of the Roman period. No very coherent pattern can be reconstructed from the evidence recorded, which survived primarily within disturbances penetrating a subsoil of natural clay or limestone bedrock. These features and deposits had originally been buried beneath a relatively shallow turf/topsoil layer, never more than 0.30m thick, and it may be assumed that the majority had been somewhat truncated in the past. The subsequent burial of the whole area beneath landfill deposited here in 1990 had in places caused further disturbance to underlying archaeological deposits, although the buried horizon of original turf and topsoil remained *in situ* above them in most places.

The few features and deposits encountered were scattered relatively sparsely in some trenches – some 30 contexts identified within almost 600m<sup>2</sup> of trenching and increasing slightly in frequency towards the west. The first phase of site evaluation in 1990 identified zones of archaeological interest within the Mendip Business Park area, sub-dividing it north and south between survey areas A and B (Fig. 3), and between an eastern and western zone (Leach, *et al* 1990).

It was postulated in that report that an eastern zone of archaeological activity could be identified close to the eastern extremity of trial trenching, characterised by a much sparser distribution of remains. From this latest phase of work, that speculation appears to be confirmed. No dense spreads of occupation, building remains or great concentrations of portable finds were noted; the evidence from Trenches P–T comprising a scatter of hearths or ovens, boundary ditches, and a few pits. These remains would be consistent with the presence of enclosures to the rear of more densely occupied portions of the Romano-British township, concentrated towards the Fosse Way road frontage and principally relating to survey area 'B'. This eastern zone is now for convenience termed survey area 'C'.

A northern sub-division of the Business Park's archaeology was also suggested in 1990 (*op cit*),

marked approximately by an east–west aligned Roman street and now by the access road from Fosse Lane (survey area 'A', Fig. 3). From the Roman street northwards there is some fall-off in the density of remains, and a thin clay silt deposit was observed, sometimes overlying earlier archaeological features. This phenomenon was noted in some of the 1992 trenches, notably at the north end of S. Once again, this slightly lower-lying zone of the site is apparent, its less well-drained character emphasised in the post-Roman period by several land drains.

The activities affecting this part of the site during the layout of the Mendip Business Park in 1990 must also be considered when evaluating the archaeological potential of this area. The provision of the service roads and associated drainage works are known to have effectively destroyed most archaeological remains beneath and immediately alongside them. These zones of destruction also extend northwards from the northern service road and southeast from the southerly road. This destruction was amply demonstrated in Trenches P and T, respectively. In Trench P the former buried topsoil was absent or severely disturbed for most of its length, and the underlying bedrock surface appeared to be truncated. The recent overburden of landfill was recorded to its maximum depth here (well over 1.0m thick) and rested directly upon the disturbed bedrock surface with no sign of any archaeological features or deposits. Similarly, in Trench T truncation of the underlying bedrock increased progressively southeastwards, as did the depth of modern overburden above, in proportion. Excepting the far north end, no archaeological deposits or features were found. This southern zone of disturbance was also seen in the eastern extremities of the 1990 trenches D, E and H. No archaeological remains were found in these areas, as shown on Fig. 3.

### 5.1: Implications and Recommendations

Following the assessment made in 1990, this subsequent phase of work has clarified the nature and extent of such remains as exist in survey area 'C' of the Business Park.

Excepting some slight evidence of post-medieval activity, all the archaeological remains recorded in 1992 relate to the much more

extensive Fosse Lane Roman settlement first explored and identified in 1990. These remains document the survival of small enclosures and a scatter of activity towards the eastern perimeter of the settlement. Much more intensive evidence of occupation survives in areas evaluated further west, where the principal focus of the settlement is to be expected, closest to the former Roman road – the Fosse Way.

Very recent disturbance and landfill have damaged or totally destroyed the few settlement remains in the eastern zone of the site, although a central portion survives. This sector has been subjected to some limited recent disturbance during the laying out of the Business Park, but is now protected through deep burial beneath landfill deposits. This comprises never less than 0.50m of overburden and sometimes well over 1.0m depth. The planning consent extant for the Business Park as a whole assumes that development will take place, and recommendations in respect of this portion of the site are therefore warranted as follows in section 5.2.

### 5.2: Recommendations

- i Following upon discussions on site with Mr. Bob Croft (County Archaeological Officer) during the excavation and after, it is recommended that the remains in this section (area 'C') where there are excavations for conventional foundations, service trenches and the like, be subject to monitoring by an archaeological contractor. This would involve the controlled excavation of any archaeological deposits encountered, as appropriate.
- ii Two zones of severe disturbance indicated on Figure 3 are not now thought to contain any significant archaeological remains. Development involving these areas should not pose any threat to archaeology but it is recommended that any service or foundation excavations penetrating to the level of underlying bedrock should be archaeologically monitored as in (i) above.

## 6: Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Mr. and Mrs. D.L. Dennet, Wayopen Estates, for their co-operation and assistance at all stages of the project and for the provision of a mechanical excavator. Thanks also to Mr. Bob Croft, Somerset County Council, and to Mr. Brian Hudson, Douglas Smith and

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## 7: References

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# SHEPTON MALLET

## Archaeological Investigations 1990-2

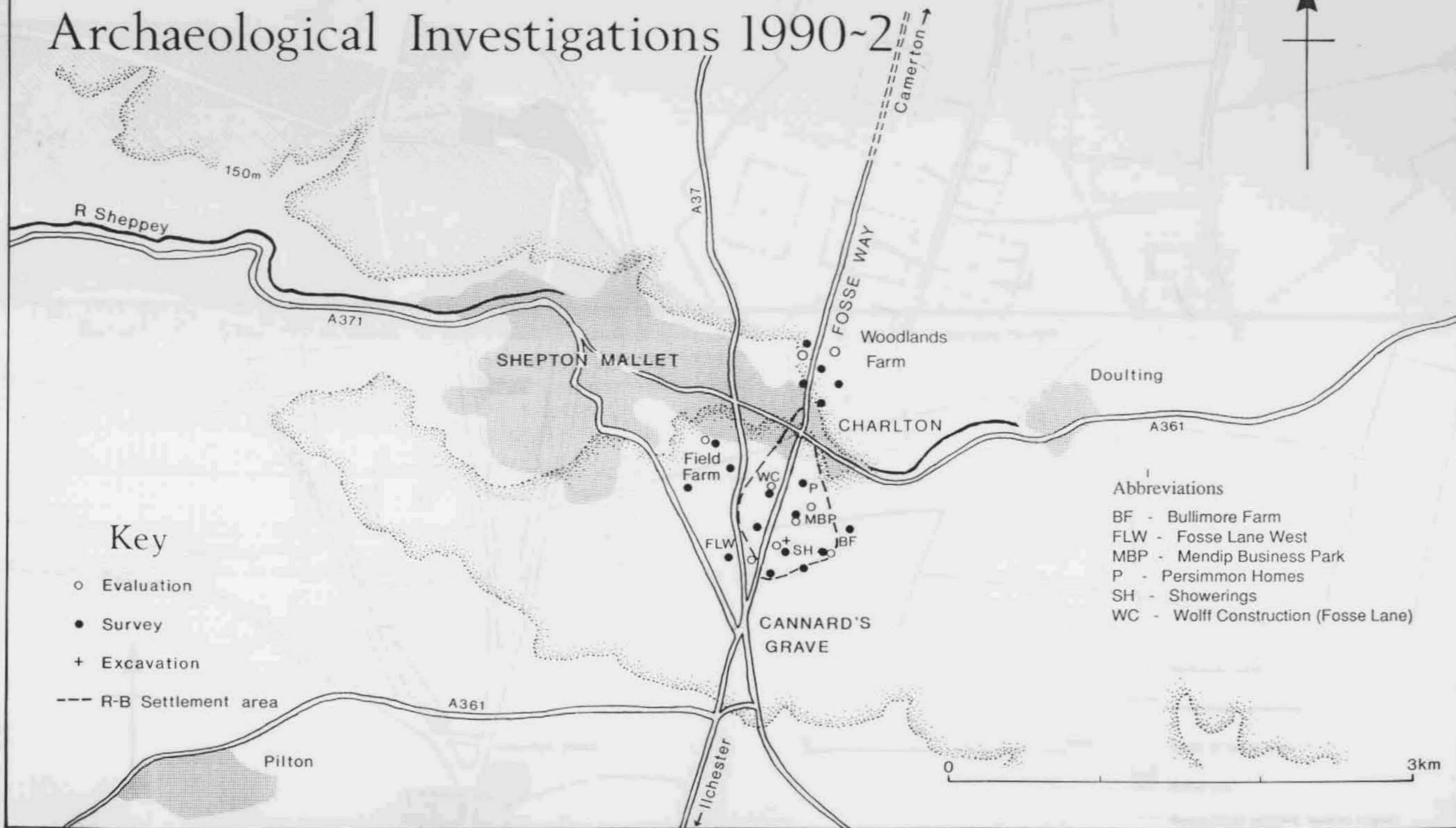


Figure 1

# SHEPTON MALLET

## Archaeological Investigations 1990-92



- Geophysical survey
- Archaeological excavations
- ..... Course of former railway
- /// Built up area
- ..... Romano-British settlement boundary (approx)

# MENDIP BUSINESS PARK Archaeological Evaluations 1990-92

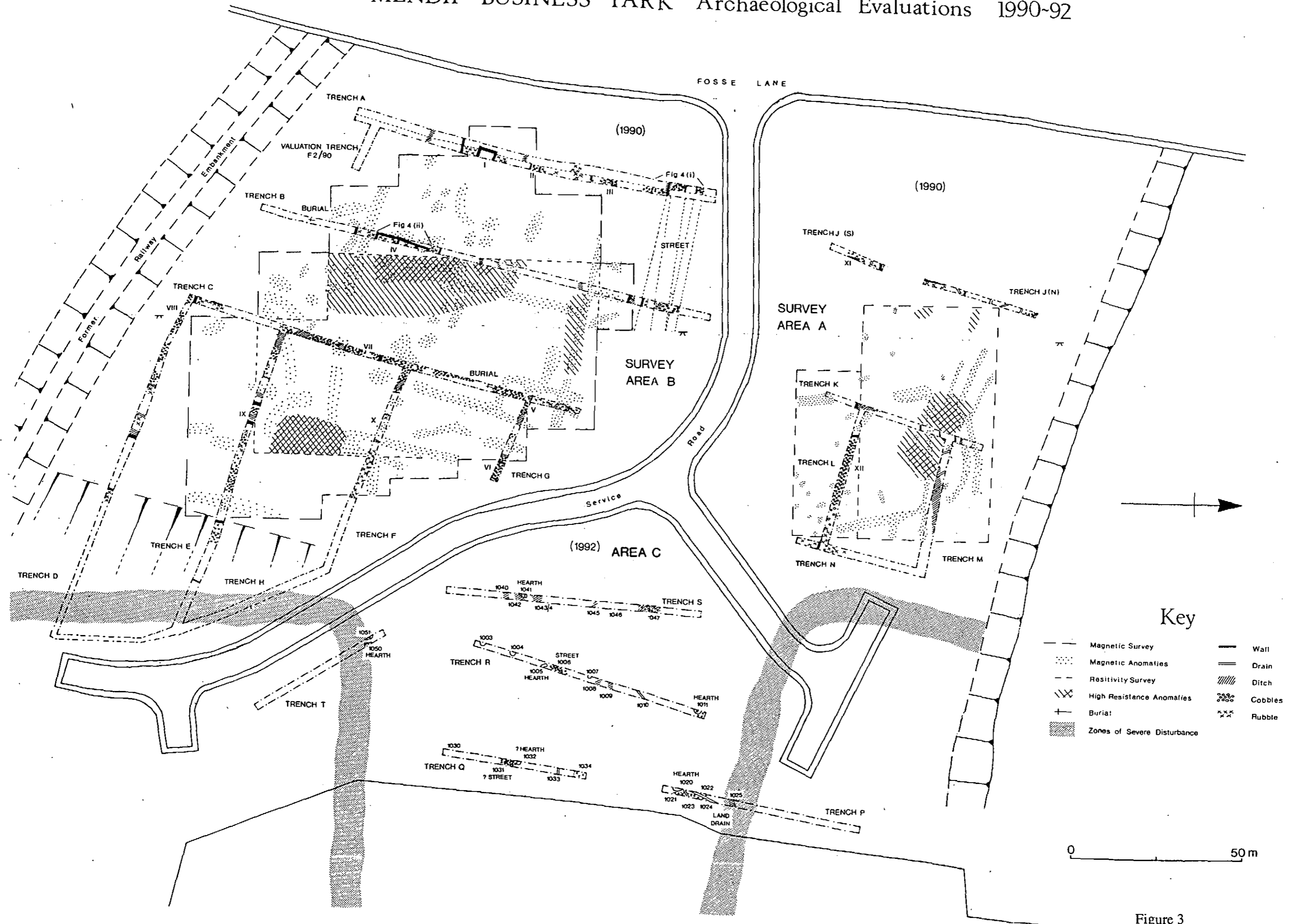


Figure 3