

Archaeological Excavation at
the former Peugeot Citroen Ryton Plant
(Remediation Area B2),
Ryton-on-Dunsmore, Warwickshire



Report 0827

June 2008

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Summary

Archaeological excavation of Remediation Area B2 to the south of the main buildings of the former Peugeot Citroen Ryton Plant, Ryton-on-Dunsmore, Warwickshire revealed the corners of two successive enclosures, the later of which probably went out of use in the Romano-British period. Outside the enclosures were a pit, possibly a hearth, and a post hole, both undated. Any evidence for the internal arrangements of the enclosures, and much of the later enclosure, appeared to have been removed by modern activity associated with the car plant.

1. Introduction

1.1 Redevelopment has commenced on the site of the former Peugeot Citroen Ryton Plant, Ryton-on-Dunsmore, Warwickshire. Prior to the start of the development, a desk-based archaeological assessment of the site prepared by CGMS Consulting on behalf of Trenport Investments Ltd had identified a limited potential for the presence of archaeological remains, principally of later prehistoric date (CGMS 2007a).

1.2 In order to confirm the conclusions of the assessment, and establish the need and scope for archaeological mitigation requirements, a programme of archaeological evaluation was undertaken subsequently by the Warwickshire Museum Field Archaeology Projects Group, on behalf of Trenport Investments Ltd and Ryton Properties Ltd. The evaluation consisted of the excavation of twenty five evaluation trenches (reduced to 21 during the course of the work) and the observation and recording of geotechnical test pits, in accordance with a specification prepared by Mr S Weaver of CGMS Consulting (CGMS 2007b), and agreed with Ms A Stocks, Planning Archaeologist and archaeological advisor to the local planning authority.

1.3 The fieldwork recorded limited evidence for archaeological activity. Following the identification of contamination in certain areas of the site it was decided to remove the potentially contaminated materials. One of the areas identified, Remediation Area B2, in which hydrocarbons were identified at depth, coincided with the site of potentially important archaeological features recorded in Trench 25 of the archaeological evaluation. As a result of this the Warwickshire Museum Field Archaeology Projects Group were asked to carry out an archaeological excavation on the site of the affected area. The fieldwork was carried out in April 2008, and this report presents its result. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under the site code RP08.

2. Location

2.1 The site is centred on national grid reference SP 37790 74495 in the parish of Ryton-on-Dunsmore, and consists of a disused car assembly plant with associated vehicle parking and testing areas, undergoing demolition at the time of excavation (Fig. 1). Remediation Area B2 is close to the centre of the south-western boundary of the site, at grid reference SP 37690 74440.

2.2 The underlying geology of the northern part of the site is 4th River Terrace Gravels (British Geological Survey 1984).

3. Archaeological and historical background

3.1 The archaeological and historical background is described in the desk-based

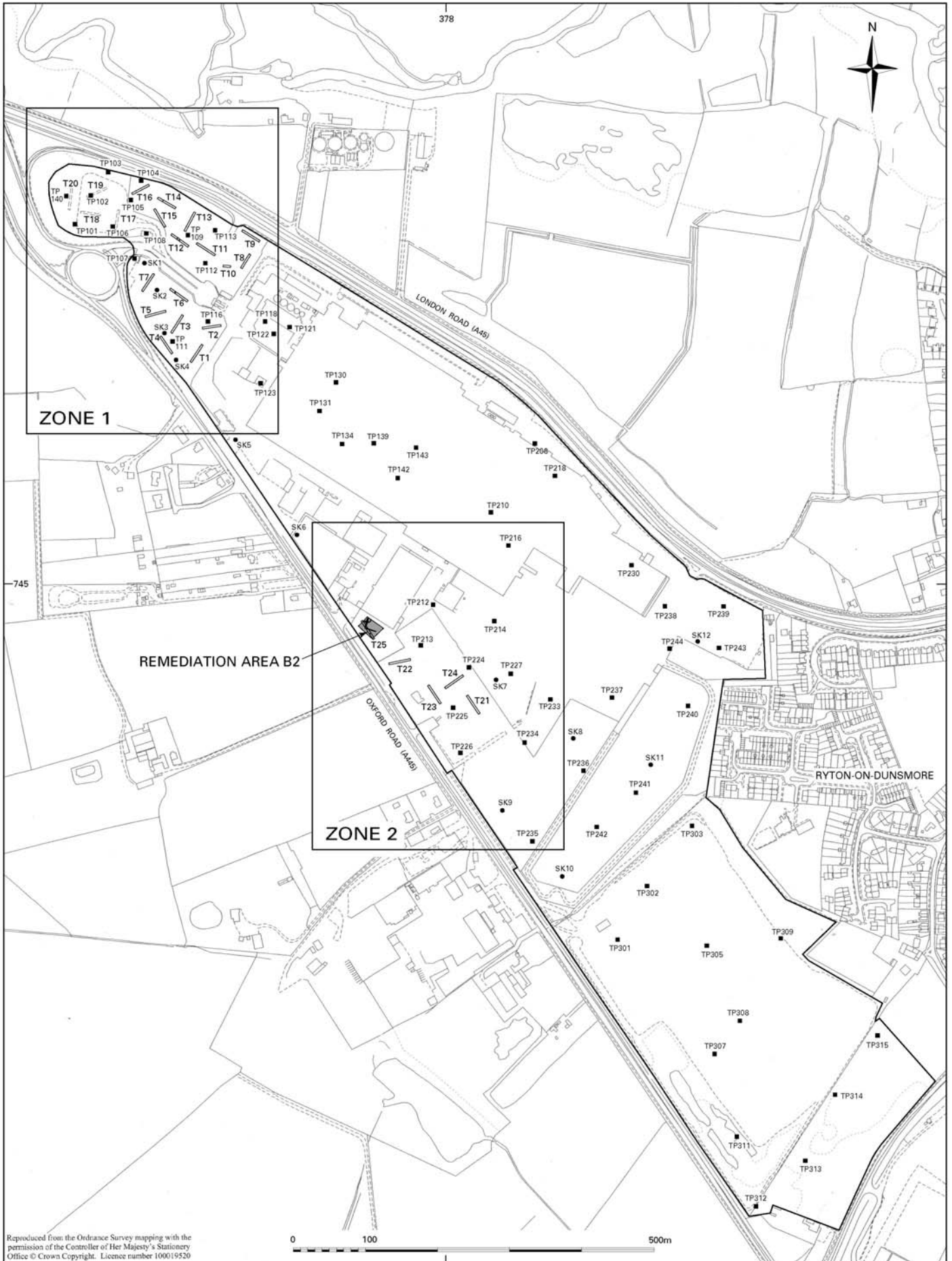


Fig 1: Site location

assessment prepared by CGMS Consulting (CGMS 2007a), summarised below. The site has been significantly affected by the construction of the factory and opencast quarrying, and the potential for archaeological remains was thought to be limited to localised areas of the site, most notably the north-western end (defined as Zone 1), and to the south of the main works building (Zone 2).

Prehistoric and Romano-British

3.2 Prehistoric activity from the site itself is limited to poorly-located chance finds of a neolithic macehead or hammerstone and a Bronze Age barbed and tanged arrowhead, possibly from the south of the site (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record MWA 4279, 4456, not on plan), and undiagnostic flint flakes probably from the north of the site (HER MWA 4286, not on plan). However, the surrounding area contains structured landscapes and settlement sites known from both aerial photographs and archaeological investigations. The only known record of a Romano-British feature within the site is an unsubstantiated 19th-century description of a mound of this date potentially in the southern part of the site (National Monument Record 335786, not on plan), but nothing remains of such a feature and if genuine it is likely to have been removed by quarrying. Field systems of this date have been recorded to the east, and evidence from the surrounding area suggests that the present site is likely to have been within open fields at the time.

Anglo-Saxon and Medieval

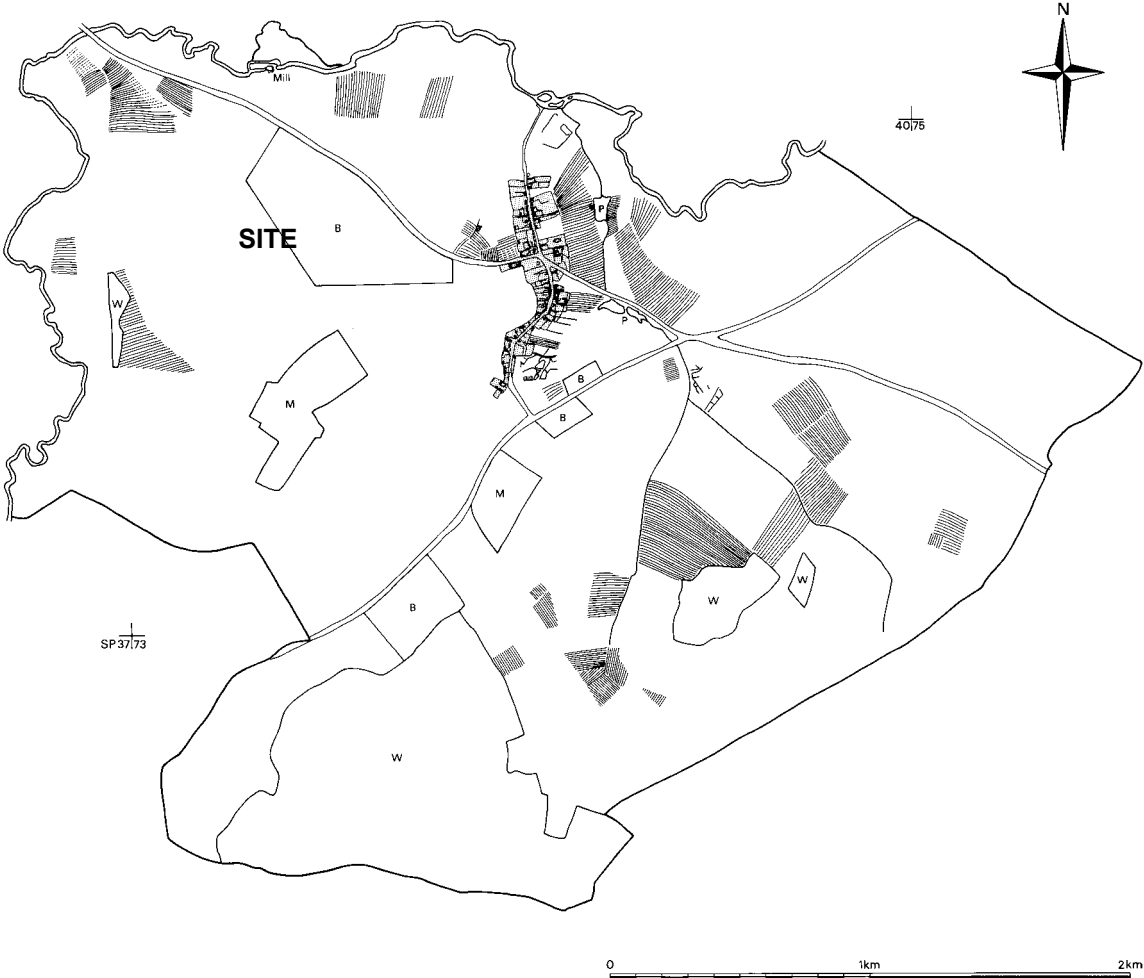


Fig 2: Parish of Ryton-on-Dunsmore, ridge and furrow plotted by Warwickshire Museum from aerial photographs

3.3 There are no records of known Anglo-Saxon or early medieval remains on the site. There is documentary evidence of a settlement at Ryton by the 11th century. Its location is not known, but is likely to have been in the area of the present village of Ryton on Dunsmore, the medieval core of which is based on the present High Street, with the present site in the adjacent open fields. The medieval village was larger than that shown on 19th-century maps, as indicated by earthworks to the south-west, west and north-east of the High Street, the contraction probably being due to land enclosure in the 16th-century. Other records of this period in the area include two mill sites and a bridge, and there have been a number of chance finds made by metal detector. Fragmentary remains of medieval ridge and furrow have been recorded in the surrounding area (Fig. 2) and the site is likely to have been part of the open field system of Ryton-on-Dunsmore before the enclosures of the 16th century.

Post-medieval and modern

3.4 The site appears to have remained in predominantly agricultural use until the 20th century. It was first developed for an aero-engine factory in the 1930s which, after World War II, was converted to car production and progressively extended (HER MWA 12126). Most of the southern part of the site was quarried, later being used as hardstanding for car storage. There was a World War II anti-aircraft battery at the southern extremity of the site (HER MWA 9642, not on Fig. 1).

The 2007 Evaluation

3.5 A number of the 2007 evaluation trenches (Warwickshire Museum 2007) were excavated to the north of the current excavation in the area identified as Zone 1, where activity associated with the development of the car park had reduced the original ground level. The few linear features found in Zone 1 could probably be interpreted as truncated medieval or post-medieval field boundary ditches or ridge and furrow, although the total absence of finds associated with the features, apart from the two flint flakes from Trench 14 (ditch 1405), was surprising and would usually be more indicative of a prehistoric date. It remains possible that this ditch, and possibly other deeper ditch/gully features, were prehistoric, although the similarity of orientation to the boundaries on the 19th-century Ordnance Survey maps, which reflect the known ridge and furrow in the area, suggested a medieval or later date despite the absence of finds. The wider shallow features certainly appeared to be truncated furrows of this type, despite the absence of finds.

3.6 The current excavation lies in the area identified as Zone 2 in the 2007 evaluation, on and around the site of Evaluation Trench 25. Here it was thought that less disturbance had occurred and ploughsoils survived that predated the construction of the factory. In the north-west half of the trench was the junction of two ditches, one orientated roughly north-south and the other east-west. It was thought possible that these features formed the corner of an enclosure or were two field boundary ditches joining at a right angle. No datable material was recovered from either feature, though that very absence suggested that the features could have been of early date. To the south-west of the linear features was a small pit (2512) whose reddish upper fill (2513) suggested burning, indicating that it may have been a hearth. No datable finds were recorded though a fragment of daub was recovered. Adjacent to the west was a small posthole (2515) that was probably associated with the pit, but from which no finds were recovered.

4. Excavation

4.1 The site measured some 30m north-west to south-east by 25m north-east to south-west and the initial work consisted of the removal of modern overburden down to the surface of the geological natural by a tracked 360° excavator using a toothless ditching bucket (Figs. 3, 4). The geological natural appeared at depths of between 1.45m and 1.95m below the existing ground surface, shallower to the south-east and deeper to the north-west. The excavation identified ditches that would probably have surrounded two successive enclosures, although the full extent of neither enclosure was uncovered.

Early enclosure

4.2 The earlier enclosure was located in the northern corner of the excavation and consisted of a ditch running roughly west-east before curving round to run roughly south-north at approximately a right angle to the previous alignment (3009/3010; Fig. 5).

4.3 To the west of the later enclosure, the ditch (3009) was a steep sided feature with a rounded base and measured some 0.9m wide by 0.4m deep (Fig. 6, Section A; Fig. 7). It was backfilled with a dark reddish brown sandy loam (3033). To the east (3010) it became narrower and shallower and the fill became a more mottled greyish brown sandy loam/reddish brown sand (3034; Fig. 6, Section B). Where the ditch turned to the north it dwindled to a steep sided gully 0.45m wide by 0.20m deep (Fig. 6, Section C). At this point its fill was reddish brown silty sand (3036) that merged with the geological natural into which it was cut (3045) and its recorded edges are in places approximate.

4.4 The west-east length of ditch 3009/3010 had a shallower gully or slot (3030, 3011) running parallel and adjacent to its south-west (outer) edge, although it was not possible to establish a stratigraphic relationship. This was a steep sided feature with a flattish or slightly rounded base that measured up to 0.50m wide by 0.20m deep. To the west it had two fills, a reddish brown silty sand (3032) overlain by dark greyish brown silty sand (3031; Fig. 6, Section A; Fig. 7). To the east it became a shallower feature only 0.30m wide by 0.07m deep, before petering out completely at the point where ditch 3009/3010 turned northwards (Fig. 6, Section D). Here the fill was greyish brown sandy loam (3035). While the truncation of the ditch and gully, and possibly the disappearance of the latter, were the result of modern disturbance, it is possible that the gully may not have continued in a north-south direction.

Later Enclosure

4.5 Both backfilled ditch 3009/3010 and gully 3011/3030 were cut by another ditch and parallel gully that appeared to form the boundary of a later enclosure to the east and south. The new ditch was a more substantial feature than its predecessors, and ran north-south (3007, Fig. 8) before turning to run west-east (3005, Fig. 9) at approximately right angles to its previous alignment.

4.6 The more substantial north-south ditch, 3007, measured c.1-2m wide by up to 0.80m deep and at its north end was a steep sided feature with a rounded base (Fig. 6, Section E; Fig. 10). Here its primary fill was reddish brown sand (3029), probably derived from erosion of the sides during the initial silting up of the ditch. The next fill was a deposit of dark reddish brown sandy loam (3028) that was itself overlain by a thin deposit of yellowish brown sandy loam (3027). The latest fill was greyish brown sandy loam (3026) that also appeared to spread eastwards to fill the gully that ran parallel to the ditch (below, 3008).

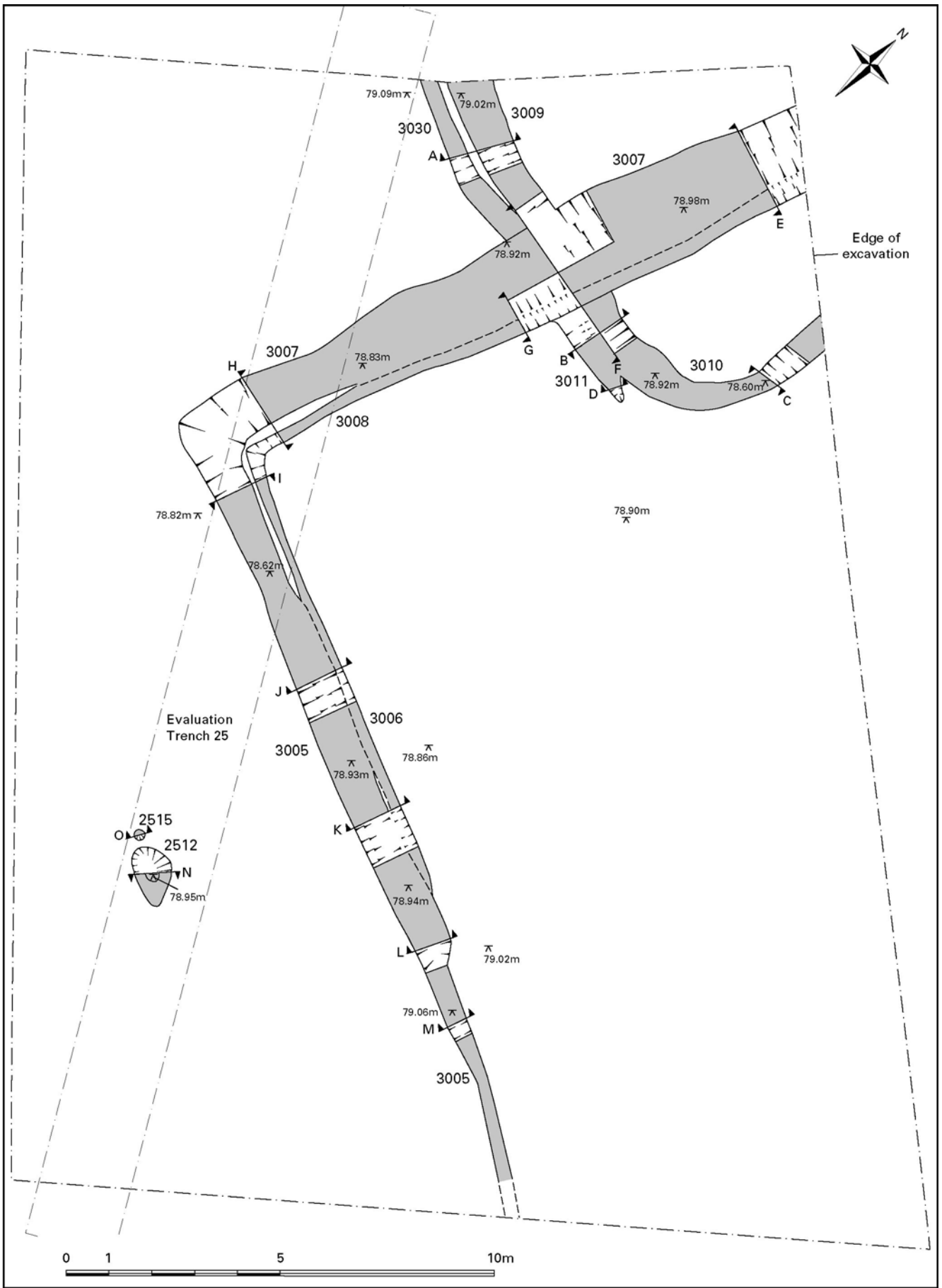


Fig. 3: Plan of excavated area



Fig. 4: The site looking east



Fig. 5: Early enclosure looking south-west

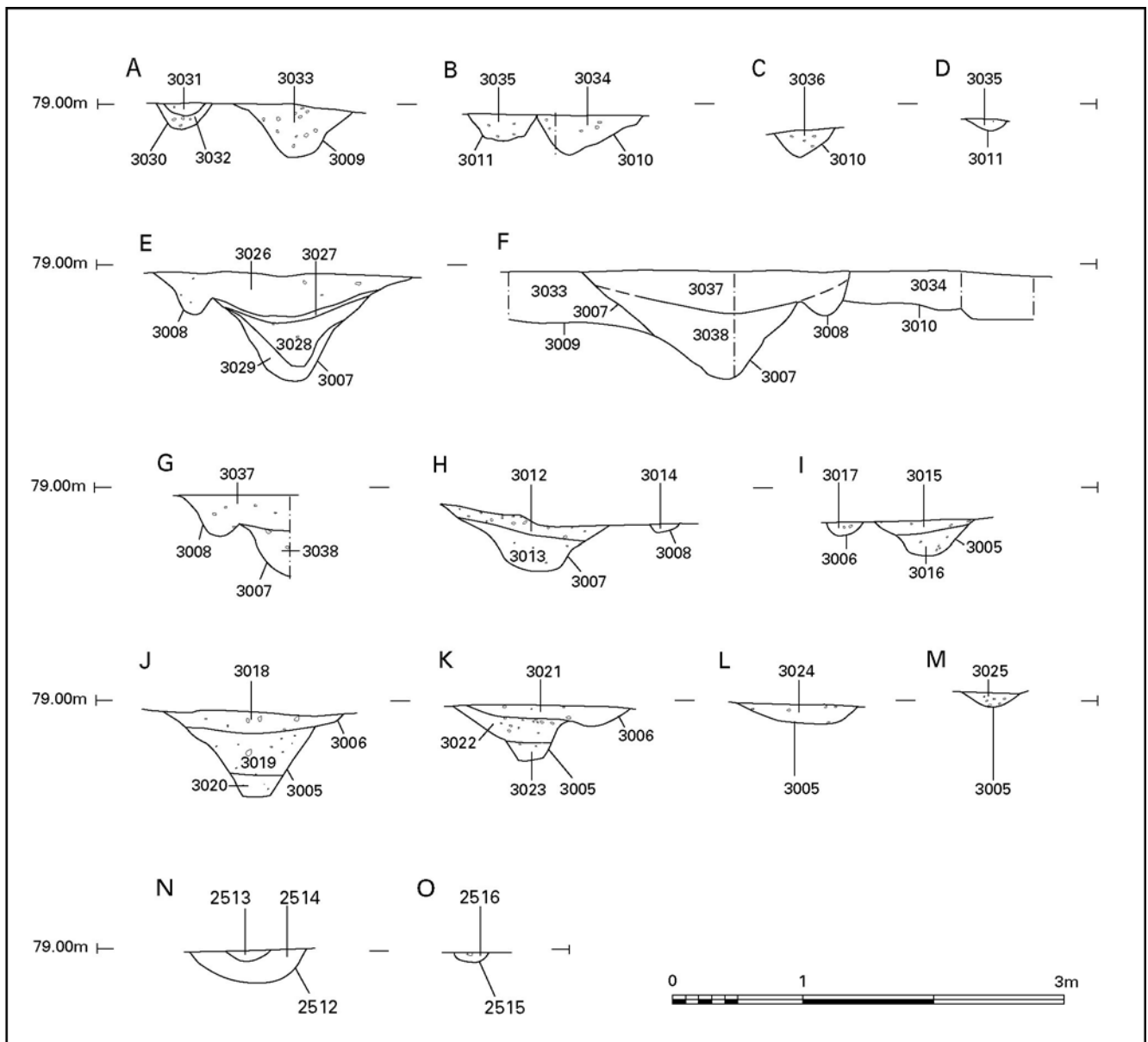


Fig 6: Sections

4.7 The remainder of 3007 kept the same steep sided rounded based profile as seen to the north (Fig. 6, Sections F-H), though it was only filled with two deposits; reddish brown or brown sandy loam (3013, 3038), the equivalent of 3028, overlain by greyish brown sandy loam (3012, 3037), the equivalent of 3026. The ditch also maintained roughly the same dimensions, though it was smaller in the southernmost section (Section H) as this area had been overcut in the evaluation trench, and again during the current work in order to remove the rubble fill of that trench. The absence of a fill equivalent to 3029 suggests that the ditch may have been re-cut or partly cleaned out, but this is uncertain.

4.8 Following the 90° turn to the east, ditch 3005 became a slighter feature and diminished gradually in size further to the east until it petered out before reaching the edge of the current excavation (Fig. 6, Sections I-M; Fig. 9). It would originally have continued further, and this again appeared to have been largely the result of modern levelling of the site. At its maximum extent ditch 3005 measured up to c.1.15m wide by 0.65m deep (Section J). At its western end (Section I), its primary fill was a brown sandy loam (3016) which was overlain by a greyish brown sandy loam (3015). Continuing east, the primary fill became greyish brown sandy loam (3020,



Fig. 7: Gully 3030 & ditch 3009 looking west (Section A)



Fig. 8: Ditch 3007 & gully 3008 looking north



Fig. 9: Ditch 3005 & gully 3006 looking west



Fig.10: Ditch 3007 & gully 3008 looking south (Section E)



Fig. 11: Pit 2512 (from evaluation)

3023, 3024, 3025), overlain (where not removed by modern truncation) by a deposit of brown sandy loam (3019, 3022) that was a variation or continuation of fill 3028/3038/3013 from ditch 3007. This was itself overlain by a deposit of greyish brown sandy loam (3018, 3021) that formed a continuation of fill 3012/3037/3026 from ditch 3007.

4.9 The majority of ditch 3007/3005 had a gully running parallel and immediately adjacent to its eastern (3008) and northern (3006). This was a steep/vertically sided feature with a rounded base that merged into the larger feature, except where the evaluation trench had been overcut leaving only the bases of the features separated by a narrow strip of natural. It was filled with the same greyish brown sandy loam deposit as formed the last fill of the ditch (3014, 3017, 3026, 3037, 3018, 3021; Figs. 6, Sections E-K). To the east gully 3006 petered out, probably removed by modern levelling activity.

Other features

4.10 The only significant discrete features on the site were the two recorded during the evaluation. A sub-oval pit to the south of the enclosure ditches was 1.4m x 0.9m x 0.15m deep had steep sides and a shallow U-shaped base (2512). It had two fills: the upper (2513) was a compact reddish brown sandy loam from which a fragment of daub was recovered, and the lower (2514) was a greyish brown sandy loam with occasional charcoal flecks. Adjacent to the west was a small circular posthole (2515) 0.24m in diameter and 0.1m deep with a U-shaped profile, filled by a greyish brown sandy loam with some patches of black stained sand (2516) from which no finds were recovered (Fig. 6, Sections N, O). All other features examined during the excavation proved to be modern.

4.12 The whole excavation area was covered by a variety of comparatively modern deposits the earliest of which was a former possible agricultural soil to the south-west (3003). Features and deposits associated with the modern factory (none shown on Fig. 3) included a tarmac surface (3045), brick wall (3004), drain (3042-4), brick chamber (3039-40) and various make-up deposits (3001-2) for the existing tarmac surface (3000). The toothmarks of a bucket from modern levelling work were visible in the surface of the geological natural immediately below a modern tarmac surface in the north-east of the area (3046).

5. Conclusions

5.1 The excavation revealed ditches forming the corners of two successive enclosures. The later one had been partially revealed in the previous evaluation, where it was undated and interpreted as either the intersection of field boundary ditches or possibly the corner of an enclosure. The only other archaeological features were a pit and a post hole, also recorded during the evaluation.

5.2 Gully 3011/3030 respected ditch 3009/3010 and the two features would appear to have formed part of the same boundary forming the early enclosure. It is possible that the gully formed the slot for a fenceline running along the southern edge of ditch 3009 and that it originally turned northwards with ditch 3010. However, this would be a curious arrangement as the enclosure lay to the north and the fence would have been outside the ditch. Although the smaller feature is described here as a gully and the larger a ditch, in practice there is not a great deal of difference in dimensions, and it is more likely that the two features simply represent re-cutting of a boundary on slightly different alignments.

5.3 The later enclosure boundary had two components. A gully 3008/3006 is most likely to have been a slot cut to take a palisade-type fence running along the inside edge of the enclosure ditch (3005/3007). The same material forms the fill of the gully and the latest fill of the ditch, and it appears that the ditch had largely silted up before the removal of the fence and final silting or backfilling of the ditch and gully.

5.4 It is possible that both enclosures were part of small settlements or farmsteads, although the paucity of finds suggests that the excavated ditches were not immediately adjacent to the occupation area. The ditches and suggested palisade-type fence do not appear to be substantial enough for a defensive function. Unfortunately, levelling of much of the site in modern times has removed any evidence for activity inside the excavated parts of the enclosures. The levelling appears to have been increasingly severe to the north-east. It is possible that evidence for the earlier enclosure survives further to the north-west but the truncation of the recorded ditch, and the bucket toothmarks in the surface of the geological natural below a modern tarmac surface in the north-east of the area, suggest that the later enclosure to the north-east is likely to have been largely destroyed.

5.5 The only dateable material recovered from the excavation was two sherds of Roman pottery found in the upper fill of the later enclosure ditch 3007. The later enclosure, at least, is thus likely to have dated from the Romano-British period, though it is possible that the two enclosures were the result of continuous use from the later Iron Age. The ground through which the features were cut was generally a compacted sand which would erode quickly, suggesting that either the ditches were short lived or regularly cleaned out/re-cut (there is some evidence for the latter), either of which could also account for the absence of finds.

5.6 The pit or hearth (2512) and post hole (2515) recorded to the south during the archaeological evaluation, and thus outside both of the enclosures, have no obvious function. The reddish colour of the fill of 2512 suggests burning, although not to the high temperature necessary for a kiln or even an oven. It may have been some sort of hearth. The posthole may have been associated with it, although there were no others to suggest a substantial structure. There was nothing to indicate their date (the daub fragment from the pit is not dateable), or whether they were contemporary with the ditches.

Acknowledgements

The Warwickshire Museum would like to thank Steven Weaver of CGMS Consulting for commissioning the work on behalf of Trenport Investments Ltd. Work on site was carried out by Bryn Gethin, Rob Jones, Kevin Wright, Chris Jones and Caroline Rann, and managed by Ian Greig. This report was written by Chris Jones, incorporating some material from the evaluation report by Ian Greig, with illustrations by Andrew Isham. It was checked by Ian Greig.

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Appendix: List of Contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>
3000	modern tarmac surface	3023	fill of ditch 3005
3001	hardcore under 3000	3024	fill of ditch 3005
3002	silty make-up under 3001	3025	fill of ditch 3005
3003	possible old ploughsoil	3026	fill of ditch 3007
3004	modern brick wall	3027	fill of ditch 3007
3005	ditch	3028	fill of ditch 3007
3006	gully	3029	fill of ditch 3007
3007	ditch	3030	gully (as 3011)
3008	gully	3031	fill of gully 3030
3009	ditch (as 3010)	3032	fill of gully 3030
3010	ditch/gully (as 3009)	3033	fill of ditch 3009
3011	gully (as 3030)	3034	fill of ditch/gully 3010
3012	fill of ditch 3007	3035	fill of gully 3011
3013	fill of ditch 3007	3036	fill of ditch/gully 3010
3014	fill of gully 3008	3037	fill of ditch 3007
3015	fill of ditch 3005	3038	fill of ditch 3007
3016	fill of ditch 3005	3039	cut for brick chamber
3017	fill of gully 3006	3040	walls of brick chamber
3018	fill of ditch 3005	3041	cut for manhole
3019	fill of ditch 3005	3042	manhole
3020	fill of ditch 3005	3043	cut for drain
3021	fill of ditch 3005	3044	drain
3022	fill of ditch 3005	3045	geological natural
		3046	former tarmac surface