

Archaeological Observation at
77 Tiddington Road,
Stratford-upon Avon, Warwickshire



Report 0927

May 2009

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Summary

Archaeological observation of foundation trenches for a rear extension to the property in an area in which an extensive Romano-British cemetery had previously been recorded, revealed a single burial of probable Roman date, a single sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery and extensive evidence for modern disturbance.

1. Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Stratford on Avon District Council for the erection of an extension to the rear of 77 Tiddington Road (Ref S09/0049/FUL). The proposed development site lies in an area of significant archaeological potential. The applicant was therefore required to secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological works in accordance with a written scheme of investigation, before the development commenced.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork consisting of the archaeological observation of all significant ground disturbance was commissioned from the Warwickshire Museum Archaeology Projects Group and carried out in accordance with a Proposal for Archaeological Salvage Recording (dated 16th March 2009) and carried out on March 17th 2009.

1.3 This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under site code TV09.

2. Location

2.1 The site lies on the north side of the Tiddington Road, at National Grid Reference SP 2130 5537 (Fig 1).

2.2 The Tiddington Road runs along the southern side of the Avon along the ridge formed by the 2nd river terrace (BGS 1974). The land surface falls away to the north-west across an outcrop of Mercia Mudstone onto the 1st river terrace, and again down to the alluvial floodplain.

3. Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 The earliest datable find in the area is a rare form of stone implement, a possible leaf point of Upper/Final Upper Palaeolithic date (c 40,000-8,000 BC), the period in which modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) began to colonise the part of the continental landmass that is now the British Isles. It was found in about 1930 during the construction of No 80 Tiddington Road (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record Number MWA 893). It is one of only two finds of this period known from the entire county and their general paucity in Britain suggests that there was only a very small population at this time.

3.2 After the last Ice Age had ended c10,000 years ago, the region was sporadically visited by growing numbers of Mesolithic (c8000 BC-4000 BC) hunter gatherers. No finds of this date are known in Tiddington but it is certain that they would have travelled along the Avon Valley during this time. At the beginning of the Neolithic period c4000 BC, domesticated cattle and sheep along with domesticated cereals such as wheat and barley began to arrive from the continent and the indigenous

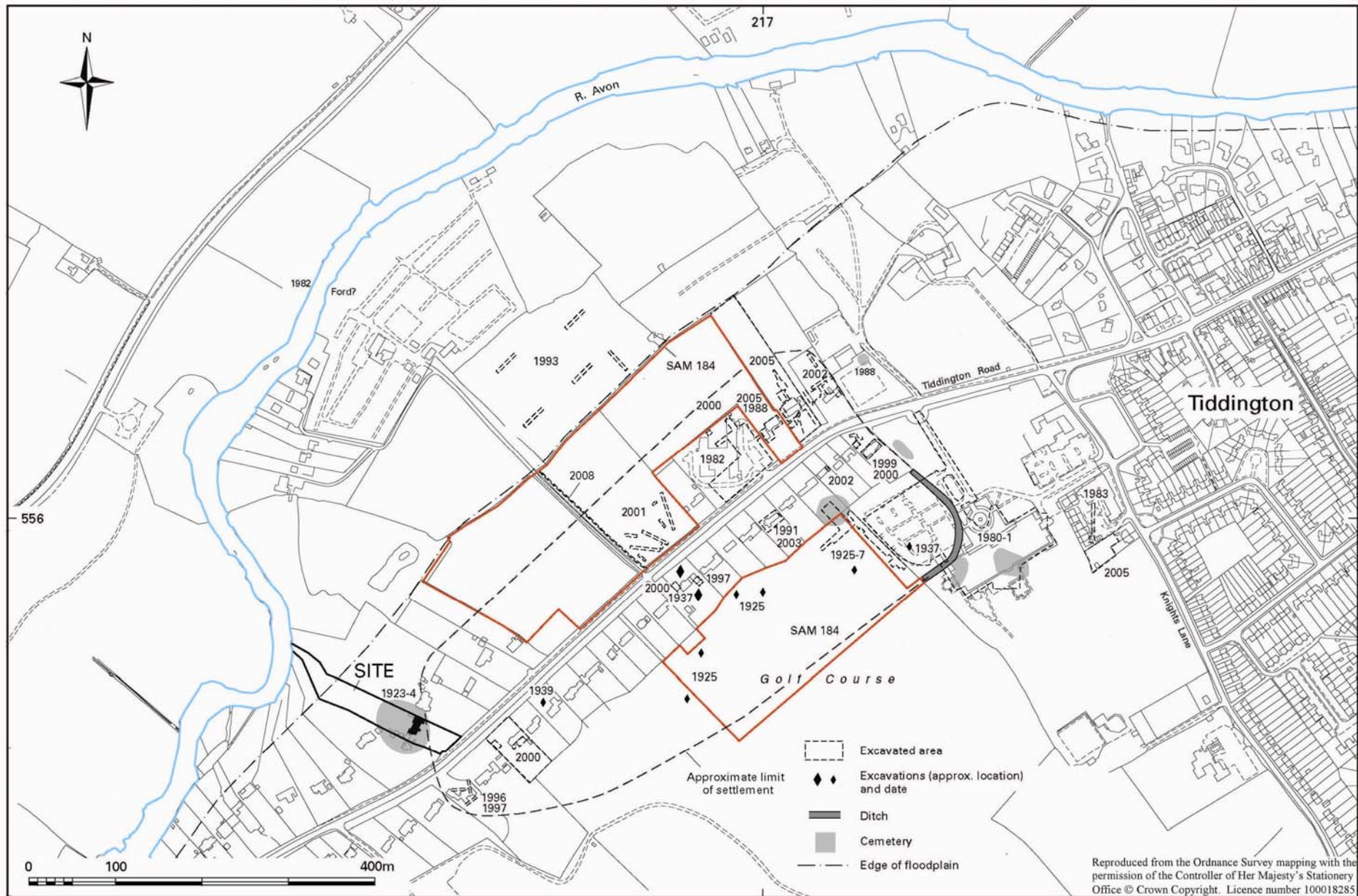


Fig 1: Tiddington Roman Settlement showing the location of archaeological excavations

people slowly adopted a new world view which included the construction of ceremonial and funerary monuments and the inevitable, but piecemeal adoption of agriculture. Thin scatters of flint tools and waste flakes of this date have been found in fields to the east of Tiddington suggesting the locale was visited but no concentrations are dense enough to suggest settlement. The technology for working metals such as copper and tin was imported from the continent around c2500 BC in the Early Bronze Age. There are sporadic flint finds of this date in the area and a number of cropmarks east of Tiddington represent ring-ditches or ploughed out burial mounds of Neolithic or Bronze Age date.

3.3 Permanent settlement of this part of the Avon Valley probably originated in the Late Bronze Age c1000 BC. Cropmarks to the east of Tiddington represent boundary features that define land-units that may well have remained in existence throughout the Iron Age (c800 BC – AD 43) and later.

3.4 The earliest dated settlement evidence in the area is Middle Iron Age (c400 BC – 0 AD) and was excavated at the NFU site in the early 1980s (Fig 1). This was probably one of a number of small farmsteads in this part of the Avon Valley, which is likely to have been heavily exploited by this time (Palmer 1983).

3.5 The Iron Age settlement was succeeded by a large village (HER MWA 4469), during the Roman period (AD 43–410). The impetus for this development may well have been a location at a crossroads: a road along the south side of the river, following the line of the modern Tiddington Road, met another running south-east to north-west down to a ford. The ford was probably at the place where Roman coins and brooches were dredged out of the river in 1982.

3.6 The village grew rapidly during the 1st and 2nd centuries, serving as a market for the farms in the vicinity. The settlement seems to have contracted during the 3rd and 4th centuries, with some areas being abandoned.

3.7 Imperial Rome withdrew from Britain in AD 410, and settlement after this date is often difficult to identify in the archaeological record not least because of the collapse of the Roman industries which produced datable artefacts in the later 4th century which culminated in a total absence by c430 AD (Esmonde-Cleary 1989) and the absence of any building forms which have left a recognisable trace. However, recent finds of early Anglo-Saxon pottery in the vicinity indicate that some form of settlement could have continued into the post-Roman period at Tiddington (Palmer & Palmer 1988; Biddulph 2005; Palmer forthcoming a & b).

3.8 The first modern indications of the existence of the Roman settlement came in the 18th and 19th centuries when large numbers of Roman coins were collected from the fields at Tiddington. Systematic investigation began in the 1920s when housing development spreading along the Tiddington Road uncovered Roman remains. In 1923 a cemetery of 220 burials was encountered during the building of 77 Tiddington Road (HER MWA 1014). The documentation from this site is very sketchy, the only surviving plan suggesting that the excavation extended into the No 79 plot revealing 20 burials. Further burials were probably encountered during the construction of the present swimming pool (Derek Squires pers comm). Another burial was found in the back garden of No 77 in 1936 (Stratford Herald 31st Jan 1936). These excavations also produced some hand-made Iron Age type pottery (HER MWA 1064) but the suggestion that there were also Anglo Saxon finds including a brooch from the site (HER MWA 6268) is unsubstantiated. In 1925-7 the construction of the golf course revealed more Romano-British burials and the remains of buildings (Fieldhouse *et al* 1931). Further excavation work was carried out in 1937-8 at 102 Tiddington Road and in 1939 at 84 (HER MWA 1072).

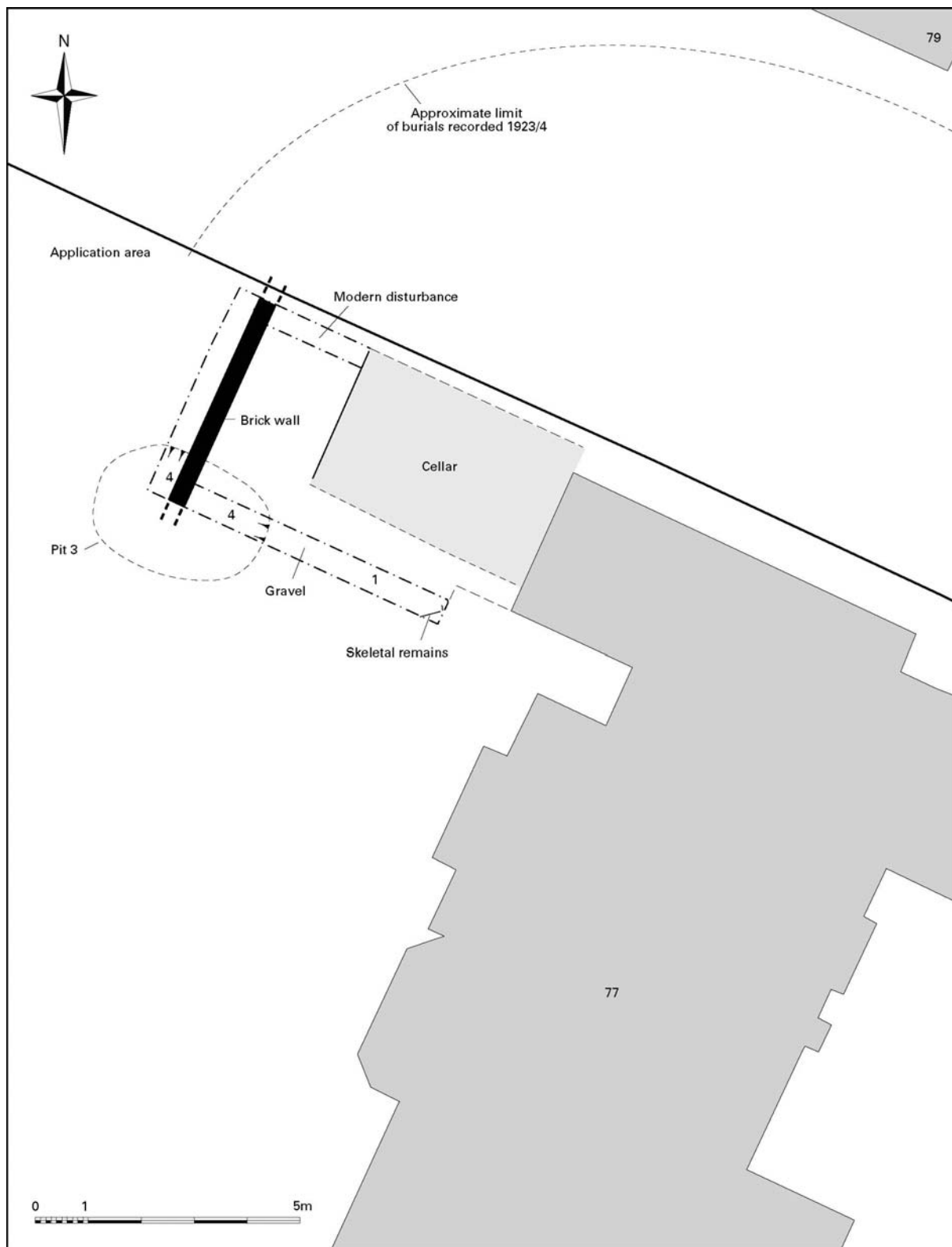


Fig 2: Detailed plan of trenches observed

3.9 In 1980-1 a large scale excavation was carried out in advance of the construction of new offices for the NFU Mutual and Avon Insurance on a 4ha site on the east side of the settlement. This revealed dense Roman occupation from the 1st century AD to the 4th century when a large defensive ditch was dug round part of the settlement. Many settlements were fortified at this time, a reflection of uncertain times at the end of the empire, but the extent of the defended area remains unknown. The houses were mostly of timber with thatched roofs, although one large stone house was also found. The plots also contained outbuildings, corn-drying ovens, wells and rubbish pits, and there were streets paved with gravel. Outside the settlement, areas of cemetery, rubbish pits and field system were located.

3.10 In 1982 another large area, within the settlement to the north of the Tiddington Road, was excavated in advance of the building of the Reading Court sheltered housing. Here also dense Roman occupation dating from the 1st century AD to the mid-3rd century was found. The earliest buildings were timber roundhouses surrounded by animal enclosures. In the 2nd century paved roads were laid out accompanied by more timber buildings, now rectangular, of a more Romanised form. Two pottery kilns, one late 1st-century, the other early 2nd-century were also found. After the early 3rd century no further buildings were constructed, but the roads continued in use and some late (4th-century) burials were deposited alongside them.

3.11 Since 1982 further, mainly small-scale excavations have been undertaken in the area, mostly as a result of local authority planning requirements during redevelopment. These include excavations on the south side of the Tiddington Road at Nos 80 (Jones & Palmer 1996; Palmer 1997) and 82 (Gethin 2000); the excavation of an electricity trench to Rayford Caravan Park in 2008 (Palmer forthcoming b) and excavations at 117 (Palmer & Palmer 1988), 119 (Palmer forthcoming a), 121 and 123 (Biddulph 2005) in advance of the construction of replacement dwellings.

4. Observations

4.1 Foundation trenches for the extension were excavated by a micro-digger using a 450mm wide bucket under archaeological supervision. The eastern side of the new extension covered a former wine cellar and was not therefore examined. The north-eastern foundation, along the inside of the property boundary, was machined through disturbed ground to a maximum depth of 1.2m deep.

4.2 Geological natural gravel (1) was achieved some 0.60m below the current ground level on the southern side of the new footprint. At the south-eastern end of the southern foundation trench, the feet and lower legs of a well-preserved human skeleton aligned approximately WSW/ENE was encountered, some 0.55m below the present ground level. The bones were articulated but there was no sign of a coffin or a grave cut. The gravel was overlaid by 0.30m of undifferentiated reddish-brown sandy loam (5) which was sealed by 0.30m of dark reddish-brown topsoil (2).

4.3 The south-west corner of the new extension footprint overlay a modern pit (3) which contained mixed reddish-brown and dark reddish-brown sandy loam (4) yielding a small assemblage of animal bone and a residual sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery.

4.4 Pit 3 and the modern disturbance encountered alongside the property boundary were overlaid by a brick wall aligned north-east to south-west. This wall appears on the 1940 edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map as the edge of a garden feature (Fig 4).



Fig 3: Human burial as exposed

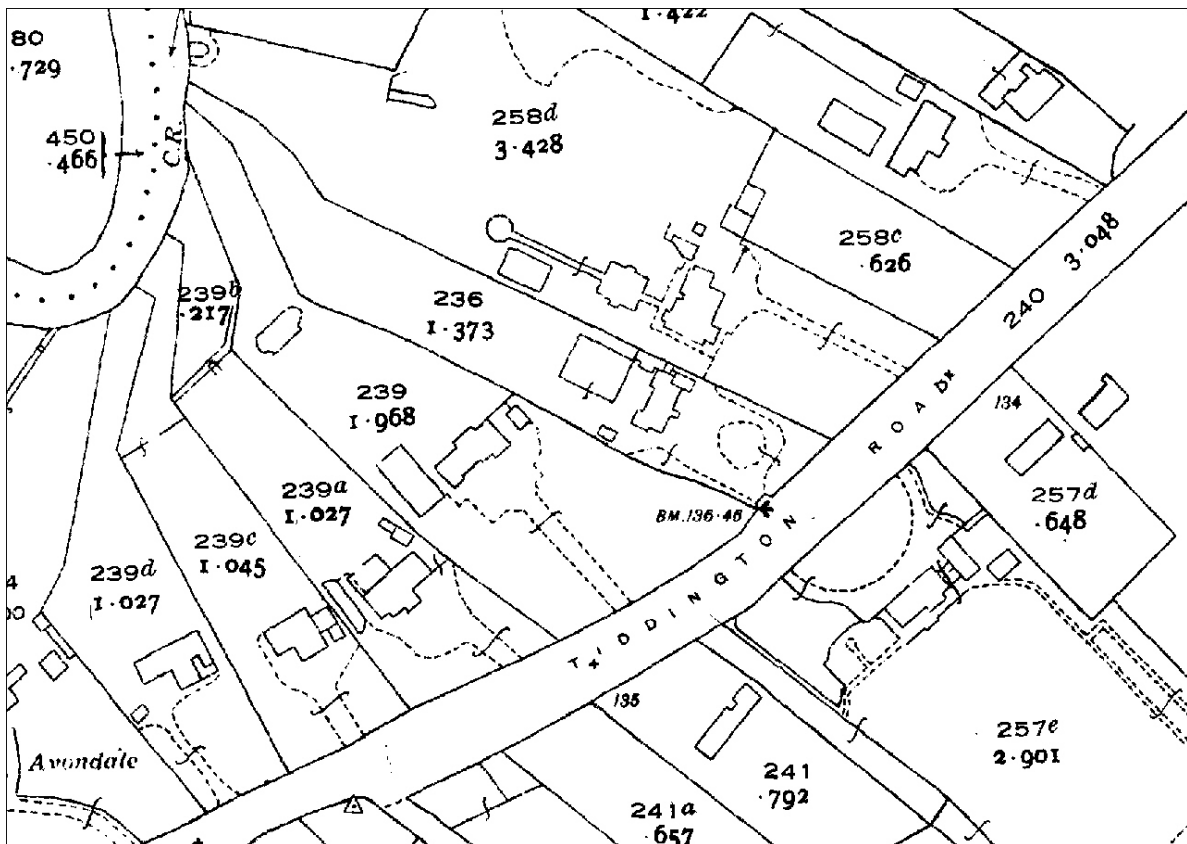


Fig 4: Detail from the 1940 edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map

5. Conclusions

5.1 The human burial encountered in the foundation trench seems likely to have belonged to the cemetery excavated in 1923-4. Together with the burial found in 1936 this new find clearly demonstrates that the 1923-4 excavations did not reveal the full extent of the cemetery. There is therefore good reason to suppose that other burials still exist in the vicinity.

5.2 The single residual sherd of Anglo-Saxon pottery demonstrates that activity of this date occurred in the area. Although too much should not be made of a single sherd, this could represent a further Anglo-Saxon focus along the Tiddington Road, similar to those found at Nos 117-121, and on the track to Rayford Caravan Park (Palmer forthcoming a and b).

Acknowledgements

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