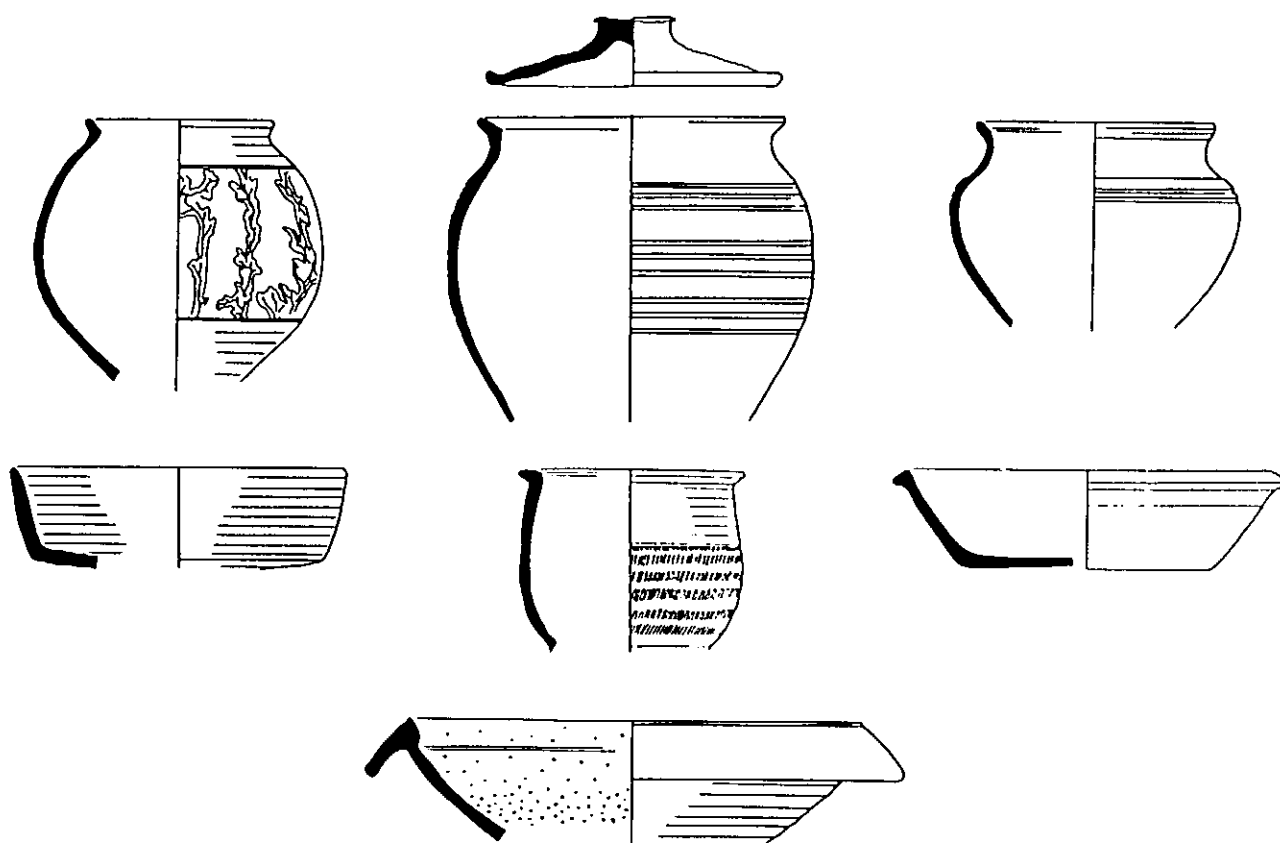


Archaeological Observation
at 102 Tiddington Road,
Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire



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Summary

Foundation trenches for an extension were observed at 102 Tiddington Road on a site in the centre of the Roman settlement previously excavated in 1937-8. Along the south and east trenches there were undisturbed Romano-British features sealed beneath a possible gravel surface. To the north and west there was a large hollow, possibly Roman but probably part of the 1937-8 trench. One middle Iron Age sherd was recovered but most of the pottery dated from the early 2nd to later 4th centuries. Like that from the 1937-8 Excavations it included a high proportion of fine wares suggesting that this area was one of the wealthier parts of the site.

1. Introduction

1.1 In 1996 planning permission was granted by Stratford-upon-Avon District Council for an extension at 80 Tiddington Road, Stratford-upon-Avon (Planning Ref. S96/0657). Because the site lies in the centre of the Romano-British settlement of Tiddington it was a condition of the permission that a programme of archaeological recording should accompany the building work.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork involving the observation of ground disturbance and recording of archaeological features revealed was commissioned from the Warwickshire Museum and carried out in April 1997, in accordance with a Brief prepared by the Planning Archaeologist on behalf of the Planning Authority. This report presents the results of that programme.

2. Location

2.1 The site of the proposed development lies on the south side of the Tiddington Road in the parish of Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, centering around national grid reference SP 2163 5553. The area of the extension to the rear of the garage on the east corner of the house was previously occupied by a single storey outbuilding.

2.2 The underlying geology of the site is 2nd river terrace gravels.

3. Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1 The earliest evidence for human activity in the area is a Palaeolithic hand axe found in about 1930 during the construction of no. 80 Tiddington Road (Sites and Monuments Record Ref WA 893). This is almost certainly a redeposited find in the gravel terrace and does not indicate a site of this period.

3.2 The most important remains in the vicinity are those of a Romano-British settlement (SMR WA 4469), covering an estimated 22ha on the south bank of the River Avon (Fig. 1). It appears to have grown up where a road along the south side of the river, following the line of the modern Tiddington Road, met another running close to the site 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.

3.3 It seems likely that the village came into existence at the very end of the Iron Age, about AD30-50, just before the arrival of the Roman army, but it is possible that it began a little later around a Roman fort set to dominate the river crossing. Whatever its origin it grew rapidly through the late 1st and 2nd centuries, serving as a market for the farms in the vicinity, clustered on the easily worked soils of the gravel terraces along the river. The village was itself linked by Roman roads to the

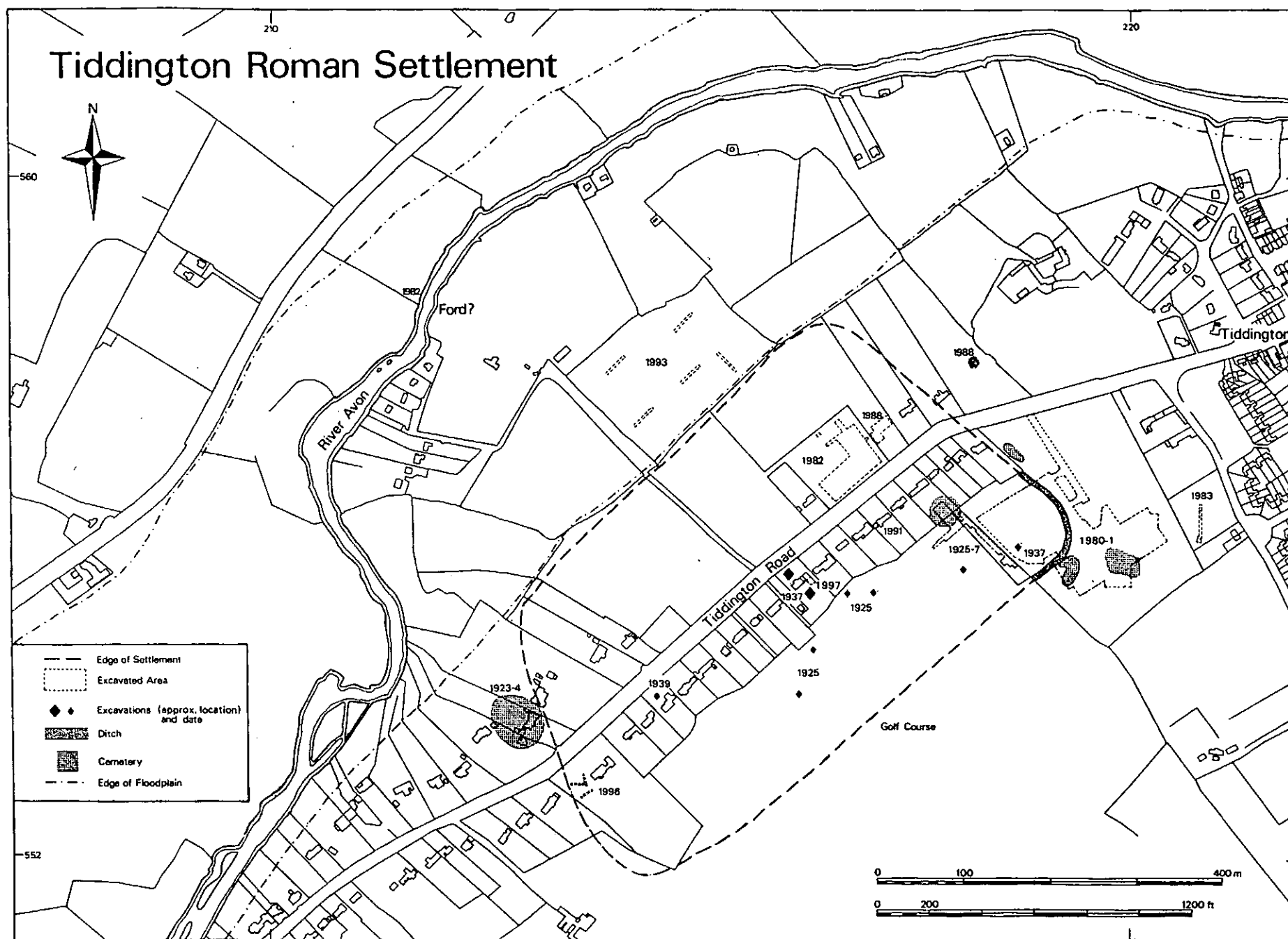


Fig. 1: Tiddington Roman Settlement

main Roman towns in the area at Alcester and Chesterton-on-Fosse. The main road from the Fosse to Alcester by-passed Tiddington using another ford downstream by Clopton Bridge; and it seems to have been the rise in importance of this, the "Straetford", which led to the abandonment of the Tiddington site at the end of the Roman period and the development of modern Stratford in its current position.

3.4 The first modern indications of the existence of the 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 under no. 77 Tiddington Road (SMR WA 1014). These excavations also produced some Iron Age pottery (SMR WA 1064) [but the suggestion that there were also Anglo Saxon finds (SMR WA 6268) is unsubstantiated]. In 1925-7 the construction of the golf course revealed more Romano-British burials and the remains of buildings. Further excavation work was carried out in 1937-8 at no. 102 Tiddington Road and on other sites, and in 1939 at no. 84 (SMR WA 1072).

3.5 Although the 1937-8 Excavations at no. 102 Tiddington Road were extensive their results were never published and no records or photographs of the work survive. However there are large quantities of finds from the site in New Place Museum including 10291 fragments of pottery. This pottery included some middle Iron Age material, suggesting that there may have been a pre-Roman settlement here. There was less 1st century pottery, but the area was occupied by the late 1st century AD and this occupation continued to the 4th century. High proportions of fine wares (including amphorae, all the common mortaria fabrics, flagon fabrics, continental and British colour coated and rough cast fabrics as well as samian ware) suggest that this was one of the wealthier parts of the settlement.

3.6 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 the settlement. The houses of the settlement 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.

3.7 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 third century no further buildings were constructed, but the roads continued in use and some late (4th century) burials were deposited alongside them. In 1983 a small excavation, adjacent to the NFUMAI site, on Knights Lane traced further rubbish pits and a corndrying oven alongside a trackway outside the settlement; and in 1988 in advance of the building of 117 Tiddington Road more late 1st and 2nd century, and some Anglo Saxon, activity was identified.

3.8 As a result of the 1980-1983 excavations the importance of the site, both to the history of Stratford and Warwickshire, and as a well-preserved example of a little understood type of Romano-British settlement, was recognised and the undeveloped parts of the settlement were given legal protection as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Warwickshire No. 184).

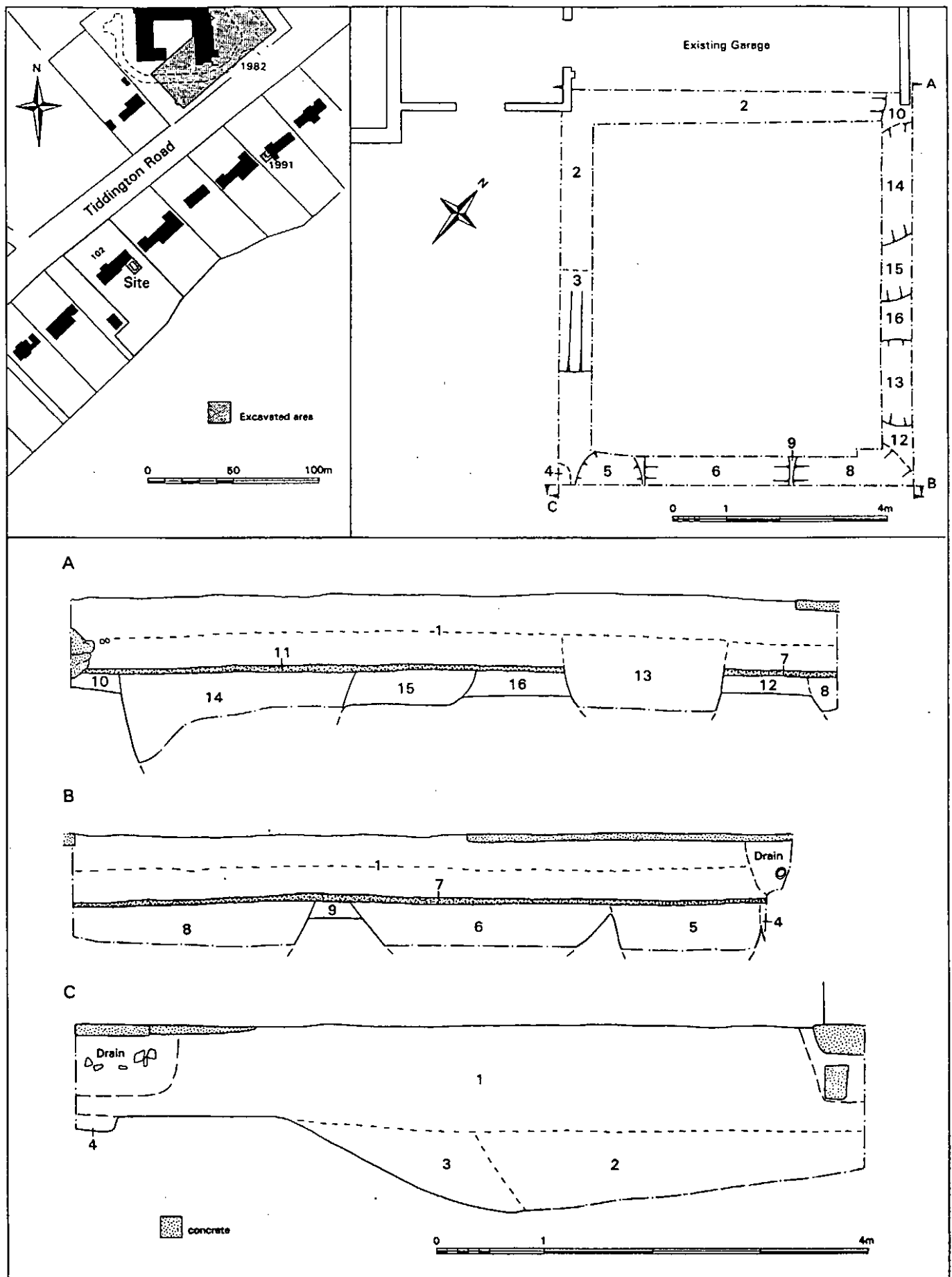


Fig. 2: Site Location, Plan and Sections

4. Observation of Foundation Trenches

4.1 The foundation trenches for the new extension formed a rectangle 7.5m by 6.5m (Fig. 2). They were c.0.60m wide and c.1.1m deep to the south and east, increasing to over 1.5m deep to the north and west where the ground was disturbed. The natural gravel lay c.0.50m below the surface in the south east corner but over most of the area it had been cut away by Roman and later features.

4.2 Over the natural gravel in the north east and south east trenches (Sections A and B) there were patches of brown/dark brown sandy loam (16 and 9), up to 0.25m deep, which probably formed a Roman ground surface. At either end of the north east trench other layers (10 and 12) of dark greyish brown sandy silt loam, ash and charcoal were probably contemporary occupation debris.

4.3 In the north east trench layer 16 was cut by a shallow pit/hollow (15), c.0.32m deep, filled with gravel-free, dark brown sandy loam, which was itself cut by a large, steep sided pit (14), c.2.2m in diameter and over 0.8m deep (its bottom was not reached). Pit 14 was filled with dark brown sandy loam with 10-15% gravel. In the south east trench there were three more pits, all over 0.4m deep: Pit 5 was 1.4m across and filled with brown sandy loam; Pit 6 was 2.4m across and filled with brown/dark brown sandy loam; and, Pit 8 was 2.2m across and filled with dark brown sandy loam. There was also a smaller pit/posthole (4), over 0.35m across by c.0.15m deep, filled with gravel and dark brown sandy silt loam. Although none of the finds collected could be definitely attributed to them, these features were almost certainly Roman. The posthole was presumably structural; the pits may have been dug to produce gravel for floors or yards, and then filled with domestic rubbish. These features were covered by a gravel layer (7, 11), c.0.1m thick. This was quite hard packed and probably represented a yard surface laid over the backfilled pits.

4.4 The gravel surface did not extend over the north west and south west trenches (Section C). Here there was a large hollow (2), over 6m across and over 0.8m deep, filled with dark brown sandy loam, with a steep edge to the north east. To the south west the edge of the hollow was more sloping, its fill was dark yellowish brown and it is possible that this was a separate hollow (3) adjacent to the main one. The fill of the hollow was more or less continuous with the topsoil over it which probably suggests that it represented the backfilled remains of part of the 1937-8 Excavations and not a Roman feature. On the other hand the finds were noticeably denser towards its bottom and not evenly distributed as one would expect if the feature had been backfilled.

4.5 The whole area was covered by a dark brown sandy loam topsoil layer (1). On the east side, over the undisturbed Roman pits and surface, this divided into two distinct horizons, a more compact lower layer (c.0.3m deep) and a much looser upper layer (0.35-0.4m deep). In the north east trench the lower horizon was cut by a pit (13), presumably modern, 1.5m across, filled with dark brown sandy loam and gravel. To the west the topsoil formed one homogenous layer c.0.85m deep; tending to support the suggestion that the hollow was a backfilled excavation trench. The topsoil was also cut by various modern foundation, drains and cables, belonging to the original 1938 house and previous extensions.

5. Finds

5.1 The finds from the trenches included a single Iron Age sherd, along with large quantities of Romano-British pottery and animal bone, some roof tile, quern fragments and a nail, and small amounts of post medieval pottery, tile and brick (For a full list, see Appendix A).

5.2 The Romano-British pottery dated from the 2nd to the later 4th century, the group containing hardly any of the typical 1st century material found elsewhere on the settlement. Most of it was made up of local greywares and Severn Valley wares, but there was also samian ware from Gaul, Black Burnished ware from Dorset, Pink Grogged ware from North Buckinghamshire, mortaria from Mancetter in North Warwickshire and Oxfordshire, colour coated wares from Oxfordshire, the Nene Valley and elsewhere, and late Shell Gritted ware from Northamptonshire. Although there was relatively little samian, the proportion of fine wares (at c.15%) was noticeably high (as with the 1937-8 material).

5.3 All the Roman tile was roof (or floor) tile; there was no hypocaust flue tile. Even roof tile is relatively scarce on the settlement suggesting that most of the buildings were thatched.

5.4 One of the two quern (hand operated millstone) fragments was Millstone Grit from Derbyshire, the other Old Red Sandstone conglomerate from The Forest of Dean/Penallt area. These were the two commonest sources of millstones for Warwickshire in both the Roman and medieval periods.

6. Conclusions

6.1 To the north east and south east the foundation trenches cut through a high density of relatively undisturbed Romano-British deposits suggesting that the 1937-8 Excavations did not cover the whole building plot and that extensive undisturbed remains survive. To the north west and south west the large hollow, in spite of the concentration of finds towards its bottom, was probably a backfilled part of the earlier excavation.

6.2 It is likely that this part of the site would have lain to the rear of a Roman property fronting the road on the line of the Tiddington Road, or possibly one fronting the north west-south east road thought to run c.35m to the south west. Most of the features found were pits, probably gravel pits filled with rubbish; a single posthole was the only evidence of structure. Subsequently a gravel yard was laid over the backfilled pits.

6.3. The finds from the trenches tended to confirm the evidence from the 1937-8 material that there may have been some Iron Age settlement in the vicinity, that the main Romano-British occupation ran from the early 2nd century to the late 4th century, and that this area was one of the wealthier parts of the settlement.

Acknowledgements

The Warwickshire Museum would like to thank Mr and Mrs D. Bishop for commissioning this work. This report was written by Nicholas Palmer with drawings by Andrew Isham.

Appendix A: List of Finds

Context	Material	Dating	No.
1	Animal bone		123
1	Quern		1
1	Quern		1
1	Tile	Romano-British	8
1	Tile	Medieval/Post medieval	2
1	Tile		2
1	Brick	Post medieval/Modern	2
1	Nail		1
1	Pottery	Iron Age	1
1	Pottery	Romano-British	150*
1	Pottery	Modern	2
2	Pottery	Romano-British	1

(*Six sherds - from Nene Valley colour coated beaker, Mancetter mortarium, a greyware jar rim, samian bowl, BB1 bowl and Severn Valley tankard - returned to landowner)

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