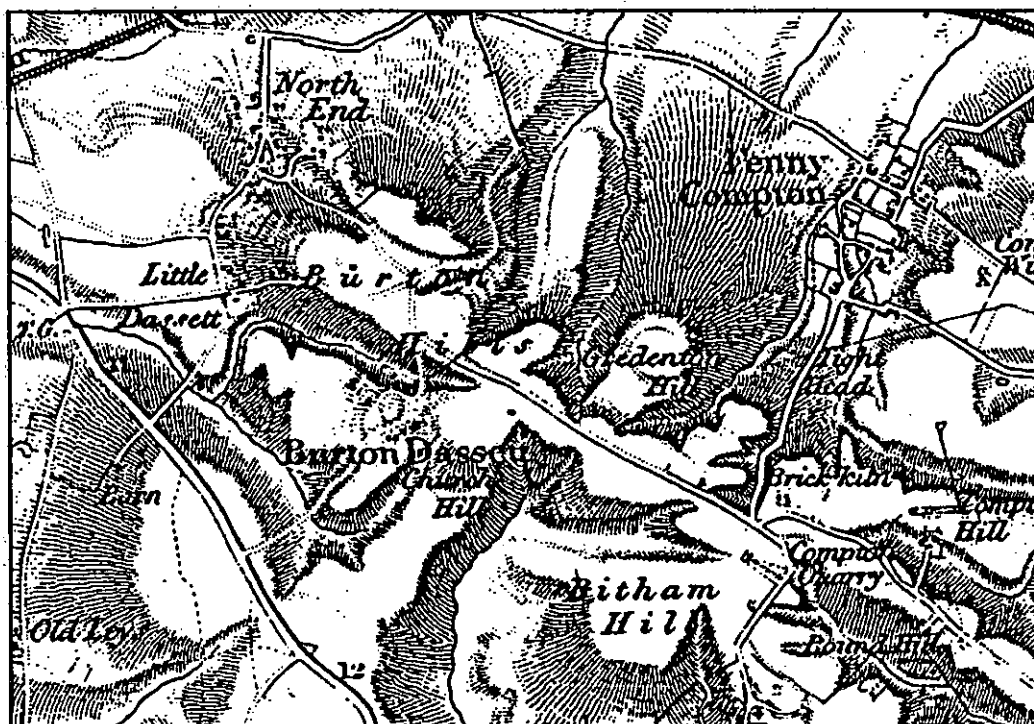


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MAR '00

Archaeological Observation of Severn Trent Water Mains Renewals in Burton Dassett, Avon Dassett and Fenny Compton, Warwickshire



March 2000

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Contents

Summary

1. Introduction
2. Location
3. Archaeological and Historical Background
4. Observation
5. Conclusions

Acknowledgements

Bibliography

Appendix: List of Finds Recovered from Heritage Fields

List of Figures

Cover: Detail of the Ordnance Survey 1 inch map of 1834

Fig. 1: Pipeline Route, Areas Observed and Excavated Areas

Fig. 2: Plan of the Excavation in Burton Dassett Country Park

Report 0013
 March 2000

Warwickshire Museum Field Services
 The Butts
 Warwick
 CV34 4SS

Summary

Archaeological observation during water mains renewal in the villages of Burton Dassett, Avon Dassett and Fenny Compton, revealed two sites in Burton Dassett. South of All Saints church a stone wall, ditches and a scatter of 2nd-4th century pottery indicates Romano-British settlement; and on the northern fringe of Burton a series of 13th-15th century buildings were partially excavated on the edge of the Country Park (the latter will be the subject of a full report).

1. Introduction

1.1 Severn Trent Water Ltd have undertaken pipeline renewal at and between the villages of Burton Dassett, Fenny Compton, Avon Dassett and Farnborough (Project No. S62 OOJ G17). The pipelines in Burton Dassett and Fenny Compton pass through areas of shrunken medieval settlement, and it was recommended by the County Planning Archaeologist that a programme of archaeological work be carried out in conjunction with the development.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of archaeological observation of ground disturbance associated with open cutting and directional drilling, in accordance with a Brief prepared by the Planning Archaeologist on behalf of the Planning Authority, was commissioned from the Warwickshire Museum and carried out in March and May 1998. This report presents the results of that work.

2. Location

2.1 The pipeline at Burton Dassett passes through the area of the medieval village from national grid reference SP 3986 5160 to SP 3998 5118. The pipeline at Fenny Compton runs close to an area of known medieval settlement from National Grid Reference SP 4184 5247 to SP 4190 5255.

2.2 The underlying geology of the area is Lower Lias Clay (British Geological Survey 1974).

3. Archaeological and Historical Background

Burton Dassett Parish

3.1 The oldest archaeological activity in the area is represented by a small group of Mesolithic flints found amongst the quarries on the Burton Hills (Warwickshire Sites and Monuments Record No. WA 4594; Fig. 1). Such finds probably indicate a temporary stopping place rather than a long term or seasonal encampment.

3.2 Iron Age activity has been identified on Church Hill to the east of the parish church (SMR WA 7620). A series of pits associated with a scatter of finds indicating a settlement site of early Iron age date was excavated in 1989 (Booth 1989, 86). A nearby scatter of Romano-British pottery may indicate reuse of the settlement area.

3.3 Further Romano-British activity in the area is evidenced by a scatter of pottery and possible building stone located in a field between Northend and Fenny Compton (SMR WA 7317). An excavation carried out prior to an extension to the graveyard in the 1970s revealed some finds of Roman pottery, suggesting the possibility of settlement of that date in the vicinity (Hunt 1972, 36).

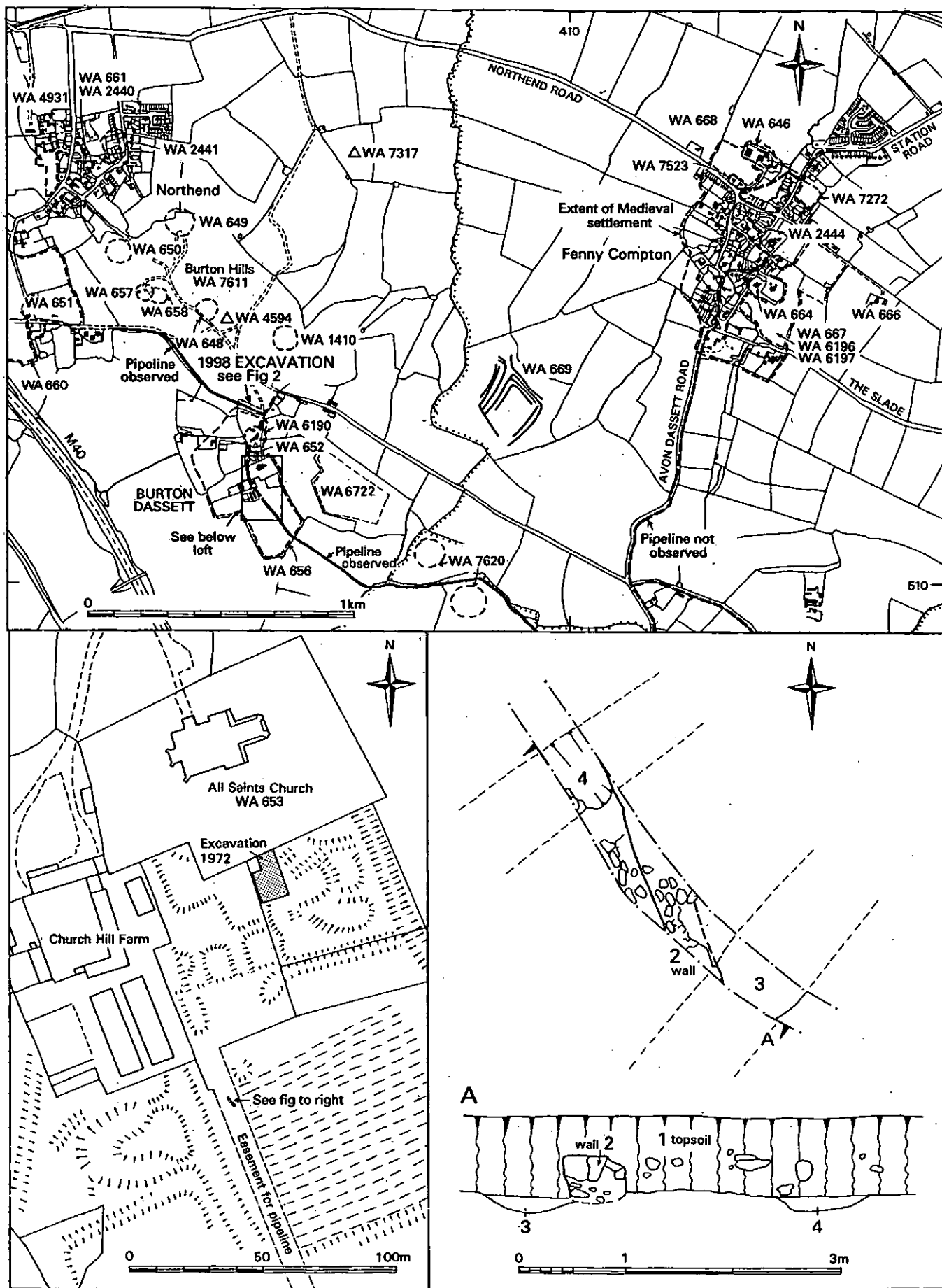


Fig. 1: Pipeline route, areas observed and excavated areas

3.4 In 1908 about 35 Anglo-Saxon skeletons were discovered in the ironstone quarries on Mount Pleasant (SMR WA 649). A number of skeletons unearthed during quarrying in the mid 19th century (SMR WA 648) are thought to be the remains of convicted felons hanged on 'Gallows' or 'Gibbet Hill'. A further skeleton was reported on Windmill Hill (c.1909), although little further information survives (SMR WA 650) and a further burial was photographed in the 1960s on Mount Pleasant (N. Palmer pers. comm.).

3.5 Burton (Dassett) forms one part of a multi-nuclear parish that, in the 14th century, included Knightcote, Temple Hardwick, Northend and Southend, collectively known as Great Dassett (Bond 1982, 157-60). Burton is a Saxon word which implies fortification and could refer to an early settlement on the top of the hill. The excavations in 1972 to the south of the church (Hunt 1972, 36), revealed a dry stone wall interpreted as the boundary walls of a possible croft dated by pottery to the 11th-13th centuries, although the excavation did not uncover the earliest layers or deposits (SMR WA 6190).

3.6 At the time of the Norman conquest the manor was held by the Saxon Harold, the son of Earl Ralph of Hereford and it seems to have remained in this family's hands until the late 14th century (VCH 1949, 69-70). The present church (SMR WA 653) dates from the early to mid 12th century, although it is likely to have replaced an earlier building. A great scheme of enlargement was begun in the 13th century, a testament to the prosperity of the wider township. Earthworks around the existing village are taken to represent the extent of the medieval settlement, although it is not certain from when they date (SMR WA 656). Church Hill Farm seems the likely candidate for the site of the manor house although other buildings in the village are also of some antiquity.

3.7 Adjacent to the church is a 'holy well' (SMR WA 652), its present stone chamber being built in 1840 or 1860, although the spring from which it derives is considerably older.

3.8 To the west of Burton (Dassett) lay the medieval market town of Southend (SMR WA 660), the remains of which have been largely removed by the M40 motorway. The only surviving building relating to the town is the Chapel of St. James which has 13th century features and is now used as a cow shed (SMR WA 651).

3.9 The most famous landmark on the Burton Hills is the stone tower or 'Beacon' on Windmill Hill (SMR WA 658). This enigmatic structure has variously been called a lookout tower, a tower mill and even a warrener's lodge. A wooden post-windmill stood adjacent to the tower until the 1960s (SMR WA 657), perhaps the same one that was recorded as built in 1664. A circular earthwork of 15m diameter on Harts Hill (SMR WA 1410) may indicate the site of a further example, although it could represent an unusual prehistoric funerary monument.

3.10 To the west of Northend earthworks reveal the extent of the medieval village (SMR WA 4931), although a watching brief in 1994 suggested that much has been disturbed by 18th and 19th century activity. Three 19th century religious buildings survive in Northend village, a chapel of ease (SMR WA 661), a Wesleyan Chapel (SMR WA 2440) and a Primitive Methodist Chapel (SMR WA 2441).

3.11 The ironstone Burton Hills have been quarried for stone since the medieval period and a number of sites are recorded on early maps (SMR WA 7611 and WA 7620). Two brick-built 19th century water reservoir tanks also lie within the area; one serves Knightcote (SMR WA 7516) and the other Northend (SMR WA 7517).

Fenny Compton

3.12 A possible Iron Age hillfort has been identified on one of the spurs of the Burton Dassett hills called Gredenton Hill (SMR WA 669). The site has yet to be tested by excavation but has been scheduled as a site of national importance (Scheduled Ancient Monument Warwickshire No. 15).

3.13 Fenny Compton was already a thriving village by the late Saxon period. The Domesday survey of 1086 (VCH 1904, 317) suggests a population of about 250 people for *Contone* and the presence of a priest suggests that a parish church existed by this time. The parish was a ten hide unit divided into three estates. One was held by the Earl of Meulan (later the Earl of Leicester) and the others by Turchil of Warwick.

3.14 The estate of the Earl of Leicester passed to the Duchy of Lancaster, the Botelers of Oversley and the Bigot family. William Compton of Hawton is said to have held the manor in 1427-8 and his son or grandson John sold it to the Pakenhams in 1444-5. The estate then passed through a variety of hands and in the 16th century it was sold to the Wyllys family, passing from them in the 18th century to the Holbechs, after which it descended with the estate of Farnborough (VCH 1949, 47-48).

3.15 Both Turchil's estates passed to the Earl of Warwick. The first was held by John Peche in 1279 and after the death of his great grandson, also John Peche, in 1386, it passed with Wormleighton to the family of Mountford. In 1498 both manors were granted to William Coope, from whom they passed to the Spencer family. The second of Turchil's estates was held by Clattercote Priory in 1279, coming to Sir William Petre at the dissolution and then to Christ Church, Oxford in 1546 (VCH 1945, 47-48).

3.16 The village seems to have had a similar pattern of development to most of the other medieval villages in the area, with a period of expansion from the 12th century to a peak in the early 14th century, followed by a period of decline in the later 14th-15th centuries which led to a marked contraction of the settlement area. About half the medieval villages in the immediate area were deserted in this period and most of those that survived, like Fenny Compton, were shrunken.

3.17 Apart from the parish church of St Peter and St Clare (SMR WA 664) little remains of the medieval village, although its plan survives essentially in that of the modern village. The medieval village was greater in extent than its modern successor and two areas of former medieval settlement are visible as earthworks. One of these lies south and east of the church (SMR WA 667) and the other (SMR WA 668) lies to the south-west of the Manor House (SMR WA 646). It has been suggested that the Manor House was once moated which could mean that it was also of medieval origin.

3.18 The earthworks south-west of the Manor House show on an air photograph taken in 1992 and consist of property boundary ditches and probable building platforms. Some of the medieval properties would appear to have fronted onto Northend Road and are bounded to the rear (north) by what appears to be a hollow way representing a former lane. The limits of medieval settlement to the north-west and east are shown by the extent of the ridge and furrow of the medieval open field systems around the village.

3.19 Following an archaeological evaluation in 1994 (SMR WA 7523), an archaeological excavation in 1997 at Manor Cottages, to the north-west of the pipeline route, revealed medieval building remains fronting Northend Road. The buildings dated to the 12th/13th to early 15th century (Warwickshire Museum 1994,

1998). An archaeological evaluation on the east side of High Street in 1994 recorded a low density of features and finds dating to the 13th-14th century in the northern corner of the site (SMR WA 7272; Oxford Archaeological Unit 1994). Subsequent observation in 1997 recorded a scatter of 13th-15th century pottery and a spread of ironstone rubble (Warwickshire Museum 1997).

3.20 The site of a post-medieval hall (SMR WA 6196) and an associated rectangular fishpond (SMR WA 6197) lie in the field to the south of the church.

3.21 A windmill (or windmills) occupied the hill to the east of Fenny Compton from at least the 17th century through to the end of the 19th century (SMR WA 666).

4. Results

Pipeline Construction

4.1 The Burton Dassett pipeline route runs from Burton Dassett Country Park, past the parish church and Church Hill Farm and then across country towards the Avon Dassett to Fenny Compton road. The section observed is indicated on Fig. 1.

4.2 Pipeline construction involved a mixture of open-cut trenching and underground directional drilling between 'send and receive' pits. For the most part the open-cut method was used, whilst directional drilling was limited to sensitive areas such as road crossings and the more urban areas.

Burton Dassett Country Park

4.3 A c.4m wide easement was stripped of topsoil and a small amount of subsoil in a line running from the west of the cattle grid at the entrance to Burton Dassett village downhill to the north-west towards Home Farm. The amount stripped varied from c.0.10m to 0.35m in depth. In the eastern part of the stripped area three areas of rubble were recorded just below the topsoil. Finds of 13th to 15th century pottery, tile, animal bone, iron and glass were recovered indicating the presence of medieval archaeology.

Excavations (Fig. 2)

4.3.1 The rubble spreads noted above were cleaned by hand and found to represent the remains of a series of medieval buildings. A programme for their excavation and recording prior to their imminent destruction was formulated. It later transpired that the pipe could be drilled beneath the buildings which would not therefore be damaged. No attempt was therefore made to destroy, by excavation, the deposits that had not already been disturbed.

4.3.2 At least three stone-walled buildings were identified although their plans are far from complete due to the narrowness of the easement. A large amount of pottery was recovered from the excavations, nearly all of which was medieval and dated from the 13th to 15th centuries.

Observation to the south of Burton Dassett

4.4. The pipeline corridor from the pumping station at Avon Dassett to the southern edge of Burton Dassett was examined after the topsoil had been excavated, the pipeline laid and the trench backfilled for much of its length. The backfilled topsoil in this length was examined for finds and a single sherd of 13th/14th century

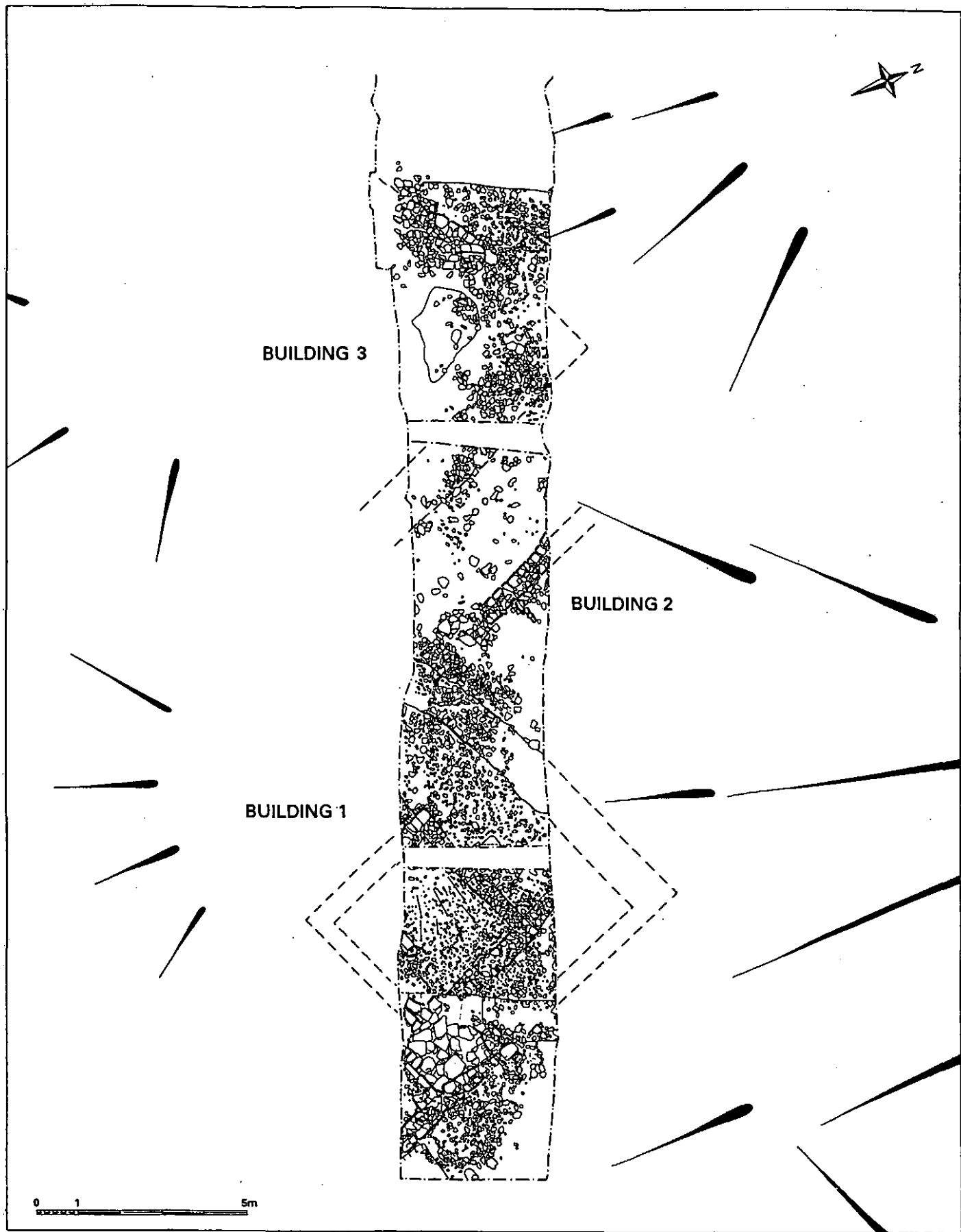


Fig. 2: Plan of the Excavation in Burton Dassett Country Park

pottery was recovered close to Avon Dassett and two sherds of 18th/19th century pottery from closer to Burton Dassett.

4.5 To the south-west of Church Hill Farm, at Heritage Field (see Fig. 1), a narrow trench was dug for a water pipe to an animal trough. This required a winding trench c.0.50m wide to be machined through the area of the pipeline easement. This trench encountered the remains of a sandstone wall (2) and two 0.15m deep depressions that may have been the bases of ditches (3 and 4). The two ditches did not appear to be on the same alignment as the wall, rather they appeared to run NE - SW. Finds recovered from the topsoil in this area (1) and from the vicinity of the stone wall suggest that the wall dated from the Roman period. A single sherd of possible Saxon pottery and five sherds of 12th-13th century pottery were also recovered from the topsoil.

4.6 It seems likely that the wall belonged to a Romano-British house. The site's location on the only flat ground on the hillside and the later siting of the Saxon settlement and church may indicate that occupation in this area was continuous and that the Roman settlement may have supported a large agricultural community which evolved into the medieval village.

Fenny Compton

4.7 The Fenny Compton pipeline route runs along the west part of Station Road and part of High Street, then across private land to Manor Court and the junction with Northend Road. A second section runs along Memorial Road, Church Street, Avon Dassett Road and The Slade. As the Warwickshire Museum was not informed when work was carried out in Fenny Compton no archaeological recording was undertaken in conjunction with the pipeline renewals in this area.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The Romano-British wall evidenced in Heritage Field has provided a vital glimpse of a part of the history and development of settlement. The observation recorded a significant amount of Romano-British pottery and a limestone wall in trenching to the south-east of Church Hill Farm. This suggests settlement in the area, probably dating to the 2nd to 4th centuries AD. A single sherd of possible Saxon pottery and two sherds of medieval pottery in the same area suggests later occupation. It is possible that buildings, yards and paddocks of a sizeable Roman-period settlement lie in the vicinity of Church Farm.

5.2 The excavations in the country park have demonstrated that the medieval village once extended beyond its present boundaries. The location of the excavated buildings on the relatively steep hillside may have been a salient factor in the site's abandonment although it seems to have been occupied for a considerable time. The location of the spring directly above these buildings may have been a factor in their siting and as the added buttresses show, also in their demise. The buildings seem to represent two phases of domestic structure accompanied by barns. This is a standard arrangement in medieval villages as has been demonstrated at the nearby settlement of Southend (Palmer forthcoming). A full report on the 1998 excavations at Burton Dassett is currently being prepared.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix: List of Finds Recovered from Heritage Fields

<i>Context</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Date/Comments</i>
1	Flint	1	flake
1	Animal bone	24	sheep and horse identified
1	Tile	8	
1	Pottery	48	Roman, 2nd-4th century
1	Pottery	1	Possible Saxon, handmade
1	Pottery	5	12th/13th century



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Libraries & Heritage

Archaeology Projects Group, Warwickshire Museum Field Services
The Butts, Warwick, CV34 4SS *Tel: 01926 412280/412278 Fax: 01926 412974*