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Marsh Farm Quarry, Salford Priors, Warwickshire

Archaeological Excavation

3rd Interim Report Extraction Phase 4

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1. Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted to Western Aggregates Limited to extract sand and gravel from Marsh Farm, Salford Priors. The extraction site lies in an area of considerable archaeological interest: a network of ditches, gullies, pits and postholes dated to the late Iron Age and Romano British periods exists immediately beneath the topsoil. Western Aggregates have commissioned the Warwickshire Museum to undertake a continuing programme of archaeological evaluation, observation and excavation in conjunction with their extraction programme.

1.2 The archaeological significance of extraction Phase 4 (Fig 1) was evaluated by a series of twelve trial trenches in September 1992 (Warwickshire Museum 1992). The trenches showed that archaeological features existed over most of the eastern half of the extraction Phase 4, but did not extend to the west. They were similar in character to those excavated in Phase 2. It was recommended that these features be subject to detailed archaeological excavation and recording prior to their destruction during gravel extraction.

1.3 This report summarises the results of the excavation of extraction Phase 4, which was undertaken in August and September 1994.

2. Location

2.1 The site centred on SP079523, lies on the west bank of the River Arrow on 2nd terrace gravels used mainly for cereal and vegetable cultivation. The prehistoric and Roman features are indicated by extensive cropmarks (Warwickshire Sites and Monuments Record No. WA 1499) which were first photographed from the air in 1966 by James Pickering. Successive flights in the years since by various archaeologists have increased the known layout.

3. Previous Work

3.1 Morphological analysis of the cropmarks combined with recent excavations to the east on the line of the A435 Norton Lenchwick Bypass suggest that the area of dense features to the south (Scheduled Ancient Monument, Warwicks No. 162) forms the heart of a Roman villa complex. The two parallel double linear cropmarks to the north are probably to be interpreted as ditches flanking a trackway, or drove road, used to funnel livestock to and from the villa complex, without them straying on the cultivated fields immediately surrounding the villa.

3.2 In Phase 2, a number of occupation features including hut circles and wind-breaks together with a ring groove ditch were recorded on the eastern side of the extraction area adjacent to the edge of the 2nd terrace. Pottery recovered from these domestic features dated to the late Iron Age/early Roman period. These features represented a settlement predating the villa complex, although no particular field or enclosure systems can be assigned to the phase with any confidence. This 'open settlement' was overlain by the enclosure and field systems relating to the villa. An intermediate stage in the development in the complex could be represented by a double sub-circular enclosure situated to the southwest of the main villa cropmarks. Excavation revealed the enclosures to have dated from the 1st century A.D.

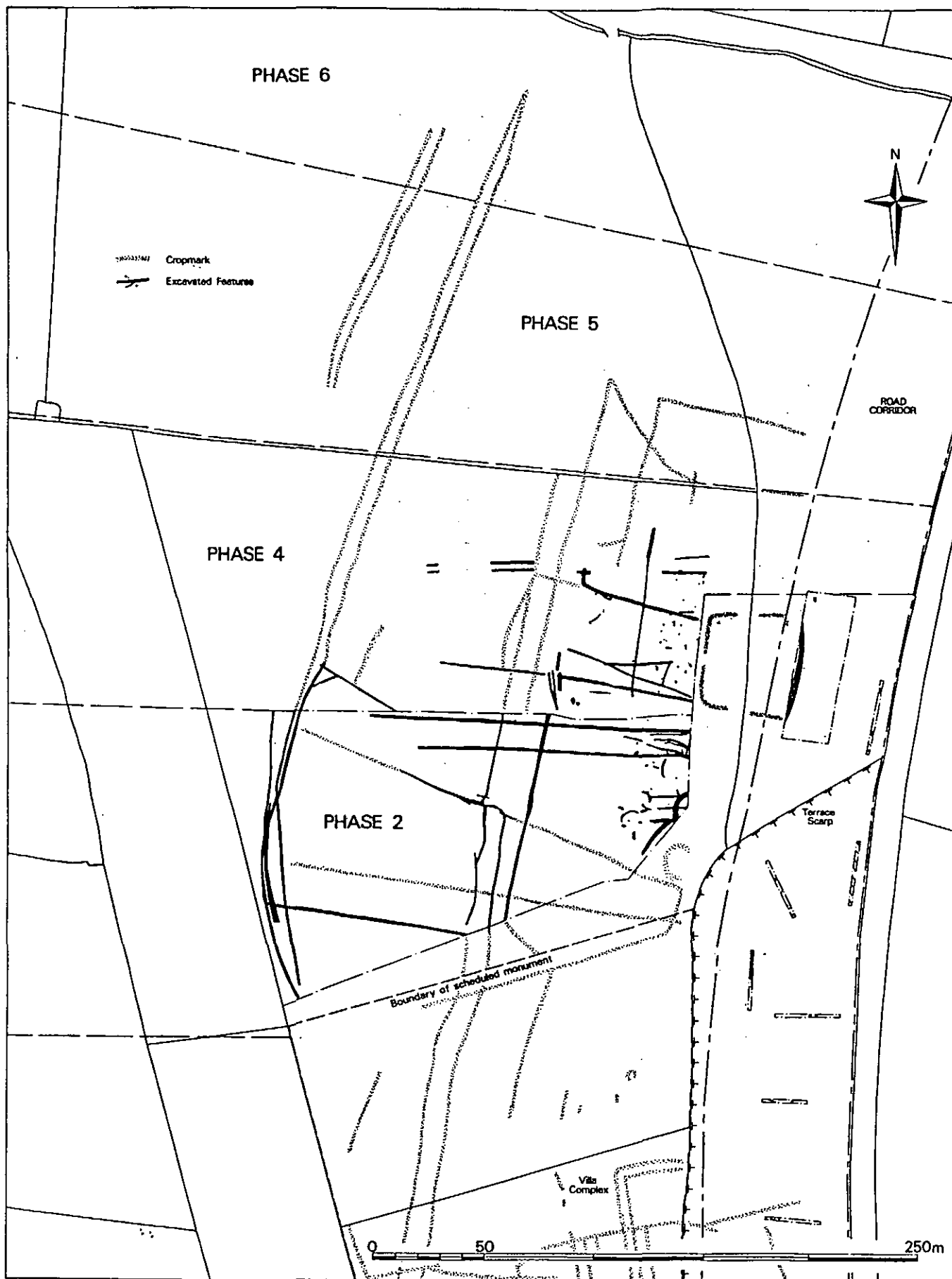


Fig 1. Plan of excavated features and related cropmarks

4. Phase 4 Excavation

4.1 The evaluation had demonstrated the survival of features similar to those excavated in Phase 2. A similar approach was therefore adopted for their excavation. The topsoil was removed by a 360 degree excavator with a flat toothless bucket, and transported away in 25 ton dumper trucks. The exposed surface was then inspected for archaeological features, which were revealed as darker siltier patches within the sand and gravel sub soil, although the definition of some of the features was very slight. The features that were identified were then excavated by hand, photographed, cross sections drawn to scale, the entire site planned to scale and levels a.o.d taken.

4.2 The excavation revealed a far lower density of occupation than in Phase 2. This did not seem to be explained by the truncation of the features by later cultivation or during the topsoil stripping. It is more likely that the focus of the domestic occupation lay to the south in Phase 2, and that the features exposed in Phase 4 were outliers to the main part of the settlement.

4.3 The features themselves were generally shallow and only a single pit which contained much pottery and heat cracked stones showed evidence of more than one fill. A single example of the partial hut circles or wind-breaks prevalent in Phase 2 was encountered, the remaining features being small pits and hollows of uncertain function. The finds recovered from the excavation included pottery, flint, daub and a single iron blade (see Appendix A).

5. Conclusions

5.1 The work to date at Marsh Farm Quarry, has considerably increased our understanding of the utilisation of the Arrow Valley gravel terraces in the later Iron Age and Romano British periods.

5.2 The excavations so far have resulted in the accumulation of a site archive (plans, sections, photographs, detailed context descriptions and finds) which is stored at the Warwickshire Museum. The publication and dissemination of the information is scheduled for the end of the extraction programme.

Acknowledgements

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Bibliography

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Appendix A
Marsh Farm Quarry, Salford Priors, Warwickshire
Extraction Phase 4: 1994: List of Finds

<i>Context</i>	<i>SF No</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Number</i>
1	1	Flint	Flake	1
1	2	Flint	Flake	1
1	3	Flint	Flake	1
1	5	Flint	Flake	1
6/1		Pottery		49
6/1	10	Iron	Object	1
8/1		Pottery		2
9/1		Pottery		10
9/1	4	Flint	Flake	1
11/1		Pottery		1
27/1	6	Flint	Flake	1
36/1	7	Flint	Flake	1
40/1		Pottery		9
41/1		Pottery		1
44/1	8	Flint	Flake	1
44/1	9	Flint	Flake	1
48/1		Pottery		1
50/1		A.Bone		7
56/2		Pottery		15
56/2	11	Flint	Flake	1
57/1		Daub		3
67/1		Pottery		11
95/1		Pottery		10
95/1	12	Iron	Blade	1
95/1	13	Flint	Flake	1
95/1		Clay	Fired	8
95/1		Daub		19

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