

BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

WALL TOWN
CAMP
Shropshire

Monument Survey 1989

B.U.F.A.U.



WALLTOWN ROMAN FORT, CLEOBURY MORTIMER, SHROPSHIRE
(N.G.R. O.S. 69257830)

Shropshire County SMR No.1186. County Scheduled Monument: SAM 102

Monument Survey Report 1989

Introduction and Acknowledgements

This survey was commissioned by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission (England) from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in 1988. Its purpose is summarised as follows:

- a) to record the monument in its present condition;
- b) to provide information for HBMC to define management requirements and to consider revisions to the scheduled area.

Topographic instrument and photographic surveys were undertaken by a field team from BUFAU in February 1989 in fulfillment of the requirements for this commission. We are grateful in the first instance to the landowner, Mr. G. Haywood, for his willing permission and co-operation in allowing the survey work to take place. The survey was directed in the field by Jon Sterenberg, assisted by Laurence Jones and Ed Newton.

The Site

Waltown Roman Fort is situated on the B4363, two miles north of Cleobury Mortimer and twelve miles south of Bridgnorth, Shropshire. It comprises the earthworks of an almost square enclosure and an annex to the north and west, approximately two hectares in area and bisected east-west by the road (B4363). The farm covers most of the northern half of the square enclosure, and consists of various barns, a farmhouse and associated outbuildings, separated by connected drives and yards. Much of the remaining areas of the monument are under permanent pasture and are

currently grazed by sheep. Belts of mature trees and scrub surround most of the farm, acting as windbreaks.

Archaeological History

The earthworks were first surveyed in 1908 by the Ordnance Survey, although no real detail is evident from the relatively small scale of drawing (1:2500). During road widening operations in 1929, sherds of pottery dating from the first and second century were found (*Antiquaries Journal* X (1930), 385). Excavations carried out in 1960 by the Kidderminster Archaeological and Historical Society showed that the earthworks comprised two forts, an earlier and larger fort (A) being replaced by the now more prominently traceable square fort (B). The excavations revealed the latter to have had a rampart of timber-strapped turf revetments and three defensive ditches. The inner ditch was V-shaped, three metres wide and two metres deep and was proven to be contemporary with the rampart. Two other ditches were added at a later date; the middle ditch being contemporary with a later inserted stone wall on top of the rampart. As is often the case when a wall is added to existing defences, the inner ditch was infilled and a new one dug further from the wall face to prevent any possibility of collapse. Also excavated at the time were the remains of a cookhouse building behind the rampart, with finds dating it to the latter part of the first century.

Details of the earlier fort (A) were less clear (floor levels and timber beam slots) but suggest that it lies in part to the south of its successor (B), beyond the scheduled area. It was apparently dismantled early in the second century and its remains sealed or cut into during construction of the later fort (*Trans. Shrops. Arch. Soc.* 58(1), 1965-8, 8-18).

Further excavations in 1964 (unpublished) revealed terracing of the slope to the north of the later fort for a street with timber buildings, possibly part of a vicus settlement within the indistinctly defined annex here and to the west. This terracing work was associated with occupation levels which thickened considerably towards the south and produced pottery from

the late first and second centuries, including some from the early Antonine period. The available evidence suggests that the second fort was abandoned militarily towards the end of the second century, but some sort of civilian occupation may have continued into the third century.

Effects of ground disturbance and erosion in and around the monuments

The southern area has changed little since 1953, except for the planting of a small copse (c. 45 x 5m in area) as a windbreak along the southern edge of the road. Some slight to moderate erosion has occurred, the most noticeable caused by two farm tracks; one running through the centre of the southern rampart and a second track along the side of the cut made by the southern edge of the road. These appear to have existed in a 1953 aerial photograph, and are unlikely to become worse, assuming that the area remains as pasture grazed by sheep. Some smaller areas added to the interpretative overlay plan are areas of slight erosion caused by sheep, two around the telephone/electricity poles in the field, and two small areas, one each side of the farm track which cuts the southern rampart, possibly exacerbated by slippage within the rampart make up. Finally, a small, seasonally waterlogged area appears in the south-west corner of the field within the ditch outside the southern rampart.

The farm itself now occupies nearly 90% of the later fort area on the northern side of the road, having been added to considerably on the western side since the 1950s. The building of two large barns and a sheep pen on an extensive modern concrete raft has pushed the farm to the limits of the original fort rampart. This has resulted in a considerable quantity of soil being dumped on the ramparts, presumably in an effort to protect them from further damage. This dumping of soil runs along the western and northern ramparts, raising them considerably, and is apparent to a limited extent on the eastern rampart and also in the garden of the farm house.

As is apparent from the interpretative overlay and the record photographs, the ramparts on the north and west are now covered by mature evergreen trees and shrubs acting again as a windbreak for the farm.

Areas of fairly severe and still active erosion have occurred on the western rampart, especially in the south west corner, where the rampart has been levelled in the past and the land is currently eroded by sheep. Also contributory is a farm track which runs down the bank and alongside a deeply cut modern drain ditch and the fenced pasture area to the north.

Erosion in this area has to some extent been modified by the dumping of topsoil and rubble, but a considerable problem remains, since the run off from the farm yard itself quickly turns the area into mud.

Towards the north west corner, a small area of original rampart is visible beneath modern dumping and eroding, the result of overgrazing and trampling by sheep using a gate at the top of the bank which gives access to the farmyard.

Two areas around the north/east corner are beginning to suffer some erosion. Heavy animal grazing on the corner of the rampart, and vehicle movements on waterlogged ground around a small copse on the northern edge of the farm, are churning up the topsoil in these areas. The latter represents the site of a small pond (now dry) from which a relatively recent channel runs downhill to the north. The northern area as a whole, beyond the farmyard, was evidently disturbed by levelling in the 1960s but now appears to be stabilised under permanent pasture.

Archaeological potential and conclusions

The potential for survival of archaeological finds, and deposits appears to be high, based upon the strictly limited results from excavations in the 1960s (Trans. Shrops. Arch. Soc. 58, 1965, 8-18). Good stratigraphic sequences appear to exist, both within and in association with the sequence of defences. This is well demonstrated to the south, where the earthworks are best preserved, and archaeological deposits almost certainly continue for some way into the (currently ploughed) field outside the bounds of the monument in this direction. It was not possible to carry out any ground survey of this area at the time of the survey due to the state of the crop,

but Roman pottery recovered from time to time during the course of ploughing is in the possession of the landowner - Mr. Haywood.

Further disturbances and very limited archaeological investigations in the western and northern parts of the site, beyond the farm complex, suggest plentiful remains surviving here also, in all probability quite close to the present surface. While most of these areas and that to the south remain under permanent pasture, the risk of significant damage seems to be minimal. The mainly small and localised areas of erosion by animals does not appear to be serious, although some longer-term monitoring of this may be necessary. The greatest potential threat probably lies along the western perimeter of the later fort where animal and vehicular damage is at a maximum. An area of recent coniferous tree planting in an adjacent paddock to the north may also present a longer-term threat for the future.

Although largely excluded from the area of the scheduled ancient monument, the farm yards and buildings may, for the most part, have had a minimal impact upon archaeological preservation within the area of the later fort. The only substantial below-ground disturbance noted are cellars beneath the farm house. Elsewhere, the concrete rafts for the farm yards and outbuilding probably preserve most of the archaeological deposits beneath them from further disturbance.

It is difficult to zone precisely the potential areas of archaeological survival. Excepting the area currently under plough, all that part of the scheduled monument south of the road is likely to contain the best preserved structures and deposits. To the north, beneath and around the farm, varying degrees of disturbance have probably affected the monument and survival of its archaeology but in relatively few instances appear likely to have resulted in total destruction (e.g. the road cutting in places, the farm house cellar, some farm building foundations, and possibly the former pond).

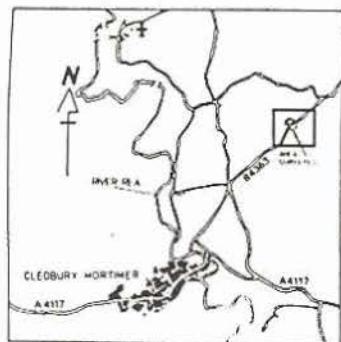
The exact delineation of the scheduled area is somewhat uncertain from the information available, but relates primarily to the perceived definition of the forts by their surviving earthworks. From the additional information

relating to the site (outlined above) the scheduled area would appear to exclude some significant areas of archaeological deposits to the south, and possibly elsewhere, which should be integral with it.

Jon Sterenberg

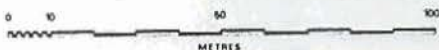
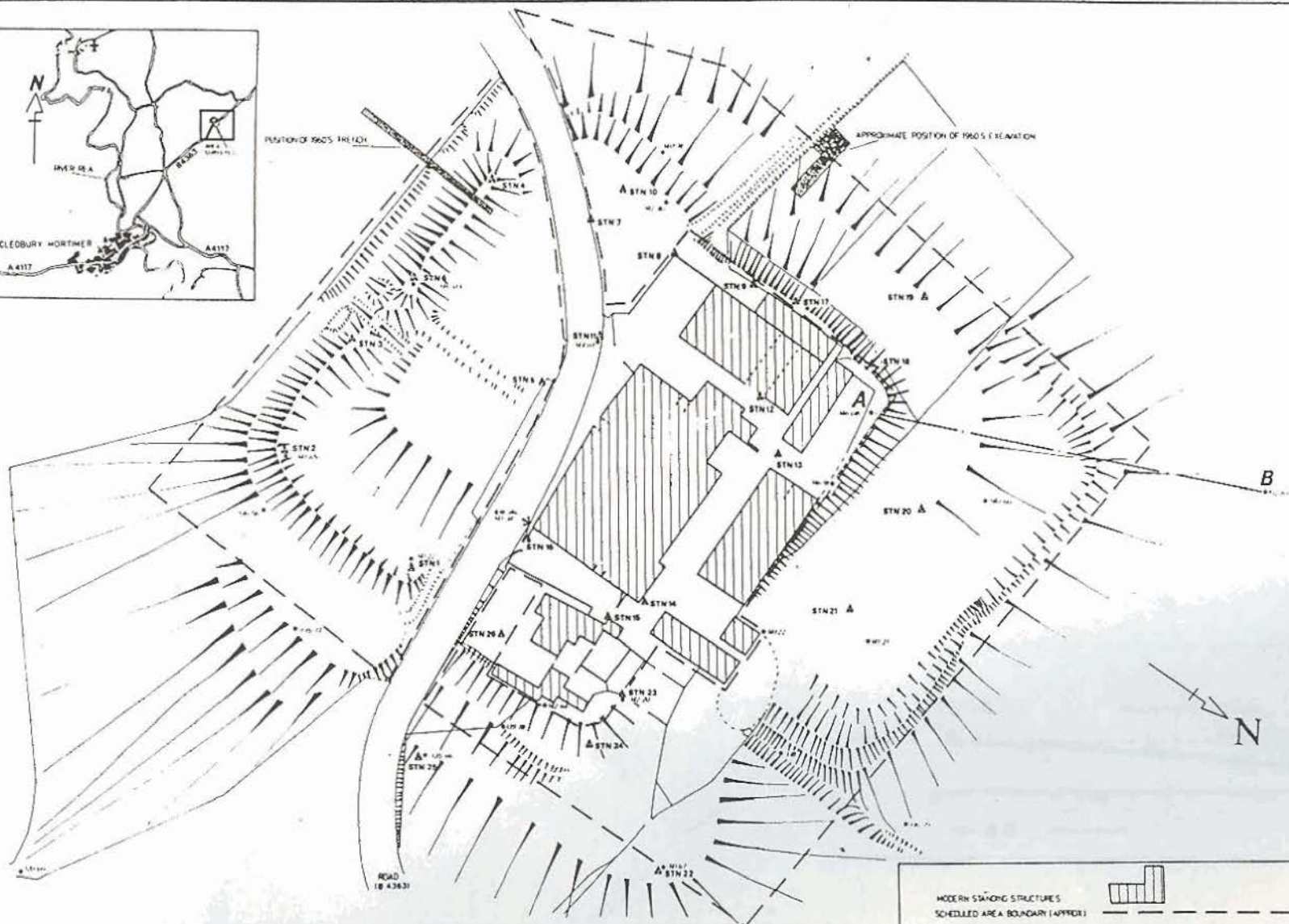
Peter Leach

BUFAU. April 1989



POSITION OF ROAD'S TRENCH

APPROXIMATE POSITION OF 1960'S CREATION



WALLTOWN ROMAN FORT

MODERN STAKING STRUCTURES
SCHEDULED AREA BOUNDARY (APPROX)



SURVEY STATIONS SHOWN AS \triangle STN

DRAWN BY Jan Stenborg B.U.F.A.U

SPOT HEIGHTS SHOWN AS \square

SITE BENCHMARK SITUATED WEST OF STATION 16 ON EASTERN EDGE OF BARN WALL

