

Robury Ring, Shropshire

An Archaeological Field Survey

by Laurence Jones

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Robury Ring, Near Wentnor, Shropshire (SAM.52)

Shropshire County SMR No. SA.456

O.S. Map Reference SO.39799321

Introduction

This survey was commissioned by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission (England) from the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. Its main purpose was:-

- i) to record the monument in its present condition
- ii) to provide information for HBMC to define management requirements and to consider possible revisions to the scheduled area.

Topographic and photographic surveys were undertaken by B.U.F.A.U. in July 1989. The survey was carried out using EDM equipment by Edward Newton and Laurence Jones, and monitored by Peter Leach. We would like to express our thanks to Mrs. R. Bright, the landowner, for her kind permission and co-operation during the survey.

N.B. It should be noted that no very accurate information relating to the exact position of the scheduled monument boundary was available prior to survey, and that that depicted on the new 1:200 site survey is therefore only approximate.

The figures with this text are reductions from the original 1:200 survey and overlay, as prepared for H.B.M.C.

a. Site Description

Robury Ring is a small circular earthwork some 90 metres in diameter, located 6km. west of Church Stretton and 1.5km east of Wentnor, Shropshire. It is sited on a slight spur of land c. 0.5 kilometres west of the Long Mynd at almost 290m AOD. The monument is generally in very poor condition. It seems originally to have been surrounded by a double ditch and banks, very little of which are visible today. There is a possible hollow-way running south-west to north-east in the field east of the monument. The land to the west is low-lying and rather marshy.

A farmhouse and other modern farm buildings and yards have been constructed on what would have been the interior of the earthwork, and a modern drive leads into the interior at the south-western corner. The land surrounding the farm buildings was under pasture at the time of the survey, being grazed by sheep and cattle.

A 20 metre stretch of the outer bank is visible to the north-west, but some of the inner ditch is now occupied by a modern drainage channel. Here also, from the modern entrance around to the exit north of the drain, the line of the inner bank can be seen best, though almost obscured by modern dumping from behind. To the north east and south-east the inner and outer ditches are just visible as very slight breaks in slope and differential growth of grass. Apart from a bank in the farmhouse garden, nothing more of the earthwork remains to the south. The farmhouse appears to have been built on the south-western corner of the inner ditch and rampart. To the north east a barn and compound built in the 1970s have obscured or destroyed most of the inner rampart and possibly part of the inner ditch here.

b. Archaeology

The identity of this monument is quite uncertain. On morphological grounds it appears to belong to a class of small, generally circular, univallate or multivallate hill-slope or plateau enclosures of Iron Age and

Romano-British date. These are relatively abundant in parts of the Central Marches and South Wales, where they are also known as raths (Savory 1976). Few have been archaeologically investigated but in south west Wales, where most excavation has taken place, they appear to represent small defended agricultural settlements, often little more than single farmsteads e.g. Walesland Rath (Wainwright 1971).

At Robury Ring no records of previous archaeological excavations or discoveries apparently exist. The excavation of two post pits for electricity pylons in 1977 gave an opportunity to see something of the stratigraphy within the monument. The bulk of this appeared to be of recent origin, although an earlier clay-soil horizon survived beneath the makeup and above the natural clay subsoil. No artefacts or other evidence which might have been contemporary with the original construction or use of the site was recorded.

One alternative interpretation, as the site of a medieval ringwork castle, appears less likely in the light of its fairly remote and unstrategic location, and what must always have been relatively slight defensive earthworks.

c. Effects of ground disturbance and erosion

Robury Ring lies on Prolley Moor, which was enclosed about 1858. Since then, recent ploughing in alternate years has nearly obliterated the double ditch and outer bank. Intensive animal grazing and vehicle movements in recent years have also contributed to this destruction, particularly to the east. Currently, what appears to be the face of the original inner bank to the north-west, is being actively eroded by animals and the elements. Erosion in the interior of the original earthwork has been greatly reduced by the dumping of modern topsoil and rubble, prior to the construction of modern yards and farm buildings. However, the farmhouse, unlike the other farm buildings, appears to have been constructed by terracing into the inner rampart.

Without better knowledge of the potential for preservation of archaeological features and deposits within the enclosure it is difficult to assess the impact of the farm outbuildings and yard layouts upon that resource. Those most recently constructed (to the north and east) may have had the greatest effect, but elsewhere (particularly to the west) some levelling up of the interior may have given extra protection. In general, the ramparts have probably suffered the most damage through levelling, although the outer ditch (or ditches) may have survived buried, quite well. The access drive and farmhouse are likely to have caused the maximum destruction to the original monument. Two zones of preservation potential are depicted on the survey plan overlay; that within the inner rampart line distinguished from a zone covering the defensive perimeter, where preservation can at best be only partial.

References

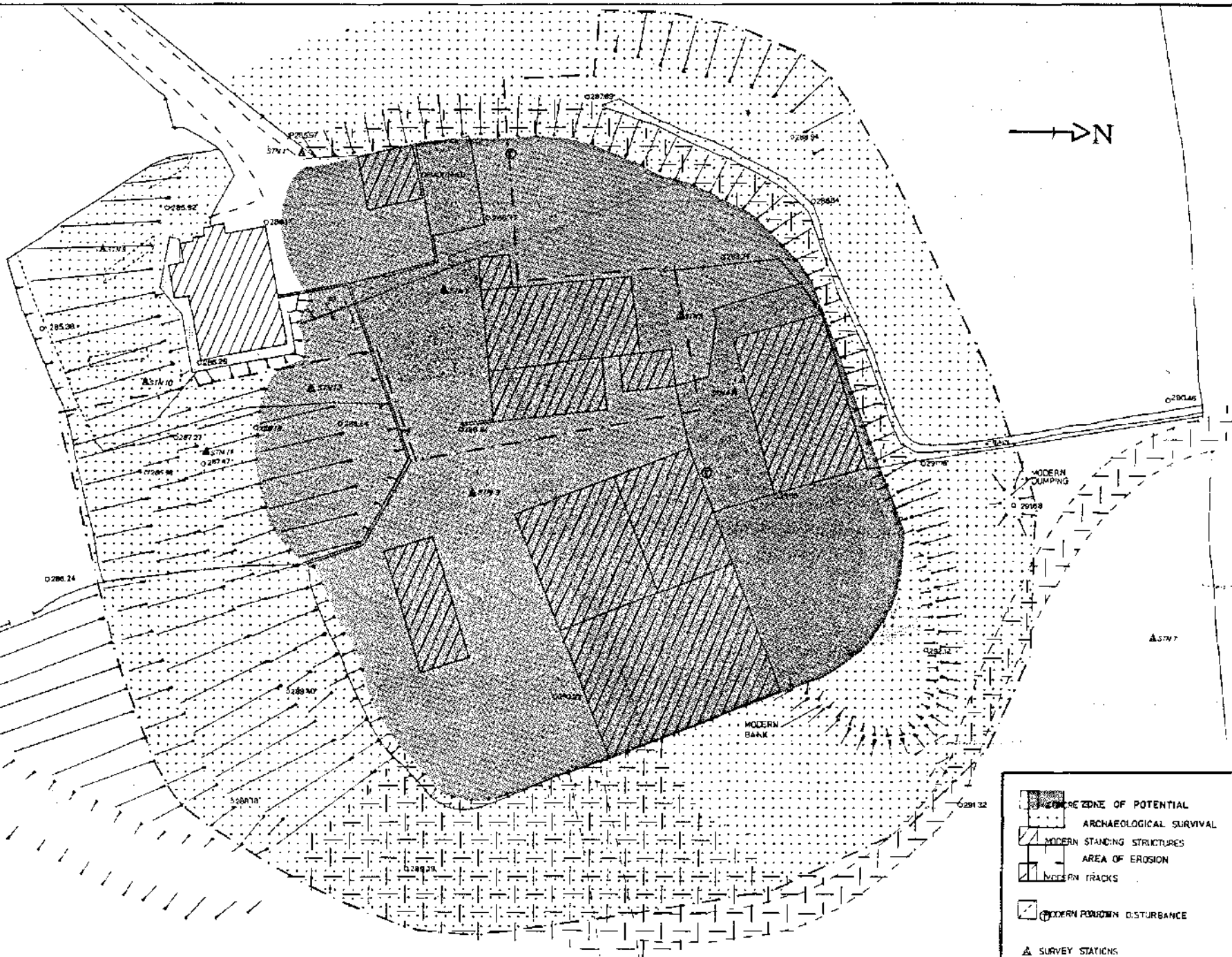
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B.U.F.A.U.
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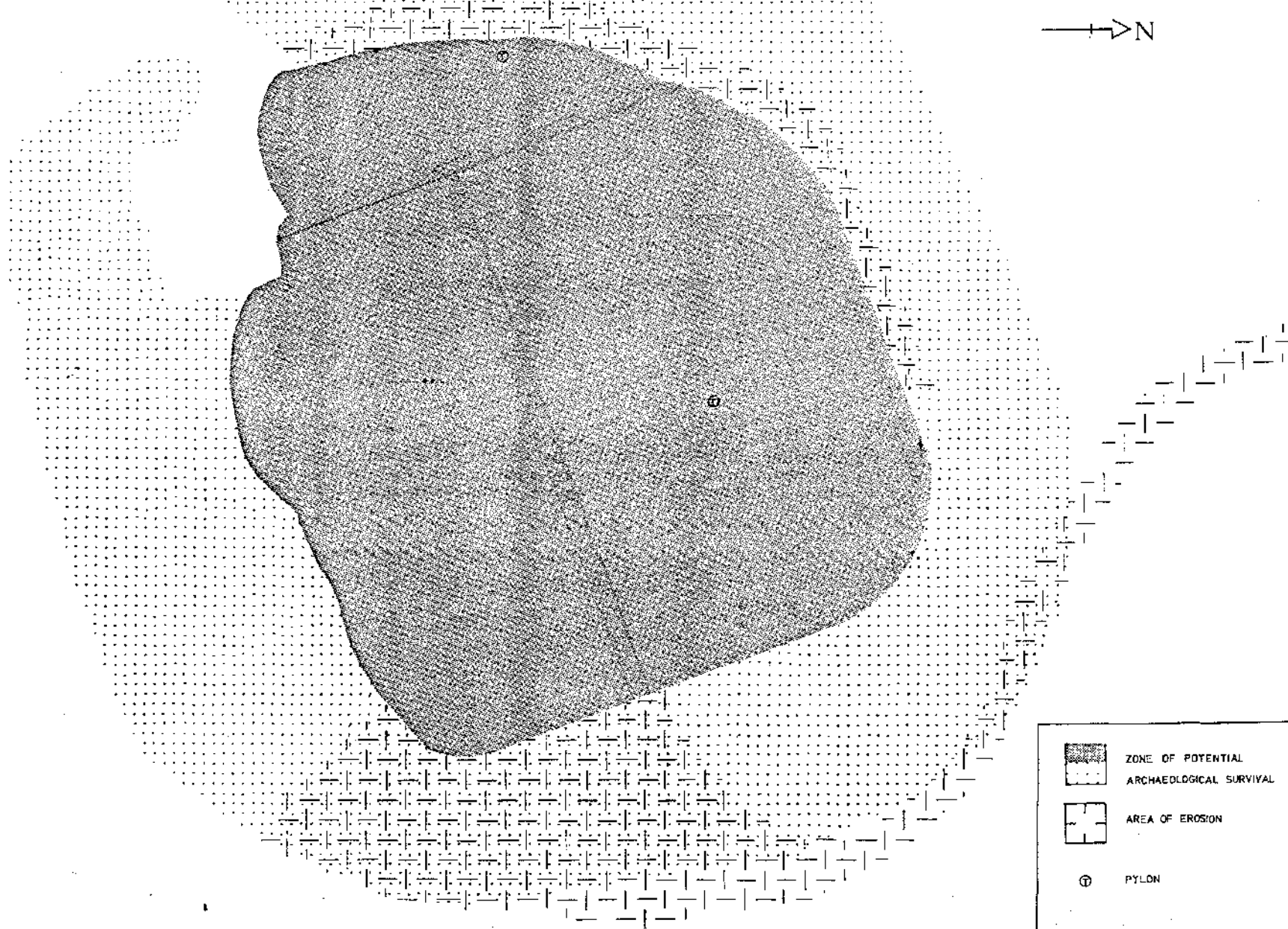
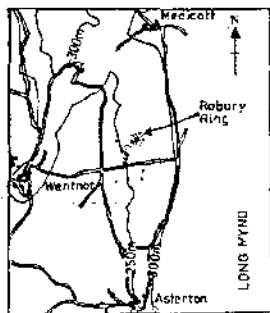
Index of Photographs

1. Inner bank face on south-western side of monument, beneath modern makeup. Looking south-east towards gate onto farm drive.
2. Bank of modern dumping above inner bank face, south-west of monument looking south-east.
3. Bank of modern dumping above inner bank face, south-west of monument looking south-east.
4. Bank of modern dumping above inner bank. West side of monument looking east, also showing modern drainage channel.
5. Inner bank face to the south-west of monument near farm drive looking south-east and showing outbuilding and farmhouse.
6. View along farm drive south-west of monument looking north-east showing modern farm buildings and farmhouse.
7. View of inner bank/modern dumping at north-west corner looking south-east and showing erosion and modern farm building.
8. View of north-west corner from north.
9. View from north looking south at line of modern drainage channel, north end of recently built barn and modern bank.
10. Close-up of modern drainage channel looking south.
11. Modern bank and vehicular erosion on north-east corner of monument.
12. North-eastern quarter of monument showing modern bank and barn constructed over inner ditch.
13. View of south-eastern quarter of monument showing modern barns, looking west.
14. View of modern farm buildings and dumping on east side, looking west.
15. View from south of farm building, possible hollow-way and remains of ditches.
16. View from south, looking north at remains of ditches and hollow-way.
17. View from south, looking north-east at traces of ditches and modern dumping.
18. View from field to the south of monument looking north to farm house.
19. Modern farm buildings and yard from the eastern perimeter of modern dumping, looking east.

20. View of farm buildings on east side of monument from the east, showing area of active erosion caused by vehicular movement and cattle-treading.
21. Farm buildings in the centre of monument looking north-west.
22. Looking south-west from northern interior of monument showing sheep pen with concrete floor and farm buildings.
23. Looking west from northern interior of monument showing sheep pen.
24. View between farm buildings on north side of monument looking east, showing pylon.
25. View from northern interior of monument looking east, showing pylon.
26. Farmhouse garden from south looking north, showing bank.
27. Paddock adjacent to farmhouse garden to the east, looking south showing bank.
28. View across paddock adjacent to farmhouse looking east towards gate, showing bank.
29. View of south side of monument looking west across farmhouse garden.
30. View of farmhouse garden from the west looking east.
31. Farmhouse garden from farmhouse looking south.
32. Drive entering monument to the south-west.
33. View of modern dumping above inner rampart, and outbuilding on the east side of the monument near drive.
34. Outer bank on north-western corner of monument looking north-east.
35. Outer bank on north-western corner of monument looking east.
36. Outer bank on north-western corner of monument looking south.



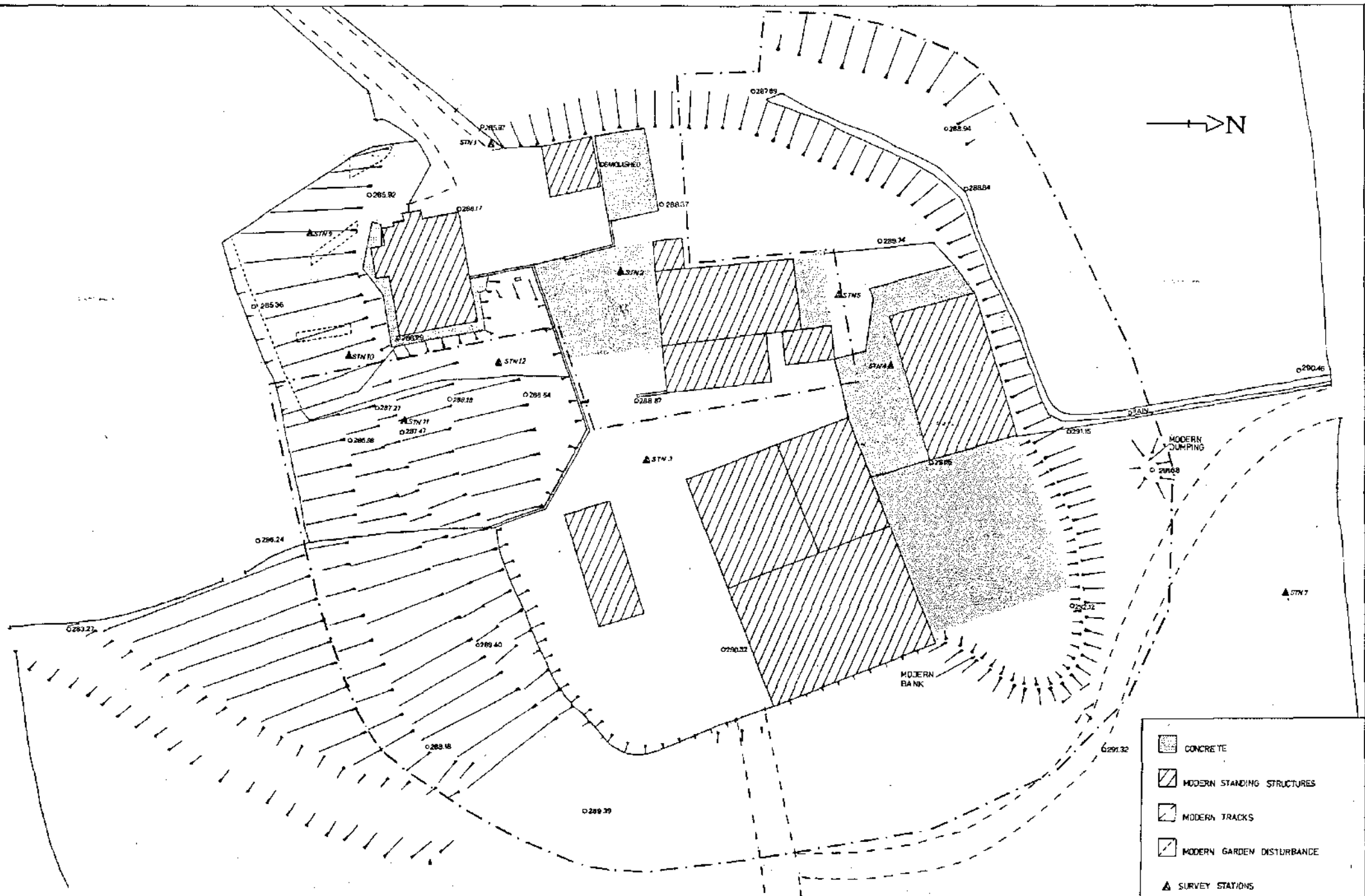
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-  CONCRETE ZONE OF POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVIVAL
 -  MODERN STANDING STRUCTURES
 -  AREA OF EROSION
 -  MODERN TRACKS
 -  MODERN POISON DISTURBANCE
 -  SURVEY STATIONS
 -  SPOT HEIGHTS
- SCHEDULED AREA (APPROX)



ROBURY RING

0 5 10 15 20 25 30m

- ZONE OF POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVIVAL
- AREA OF EROSION
- PYLON



0 5 10 15 20 25 30m

ROBURY RING

- CONCRETE
- MODERN STANDING STRUCTURES
- MODERN TRACKS
- MODERN GARDEN DISTURBANCE
- SURVEY STATIONS
- SPOT HEIGHTS
- SCHEDULED AREA (APPROX)