

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

**Report 274.**

November 1993

**Marley Works, Shurdington, Gloucestershire  
Archaeological Evaluation: Stage 1**

by  
Peter Ellis

For further information please contact:  
Simon Buteux (Manager), Peter Leach or Iain Ferris (Assistant Directors)  
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
The University of Birmingham  
Edgbaston  
Birmingham B15 2TT  
Tel: 021 414 5513  
Fax: 021 414 5516

## Marley Works, Shurdington, Gloucestershire

### Archaeological Evaluation: Stage 1

#### 1 Purpose and scope of report

1.1 The following report was prepared in October/November 1993 to assess the archaeological impact of proposed development of a 10.12 ha site near Little Shurdington, in Shurdington parish, Gloucestershire (centred on National Grid Reference SO 916177) (Fig. 1). It was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Endsleigh Insurance Services Limited.

1.2 The evaluation followed a brief prepared by the Archaeology Section of the Gloucestershire County Council Planning Department. This recommended a programme of desk-based assessment of the known archaeological data for the site and its surroundings, and an on-site inspection, leading to the formulation of a set of recommendations for further action, if thought necessary, in a second stage; this latter would involve using more interventionist techniques.

1.3 The scope of the desk-based assessment has involved examination of written sources, maps, and air photographs. The wider site setting has been taken as an area of 25 square km centred on the study area (SO 8916 as its south-west corner), although the evidence from the Cotswold plateau has been considered in general terms only.

1.4 Written sources comprised the Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) compiled by the Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division and the County Council; the Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society; the relevant Place Name records (Smith 1964); a typescript history of Shurdington Parish (Maltby 1965); together with other more general sources on the archaeology, buildings, and landscape of Gloucestershire, the relevant Saxon charters, local geology, etc (eg Saville 1984, Verey 1970, Finberg 1975).

1.5 Examination of maps was limited by the current closure of the Gloucestershire Record Office, although the relevant Tithe Award map for Badgeworth with Shurdington (1838) has been seen. Early Ordnance survey maps and more general Gloucestershire maps are duplicated in Maltby 1965.

1.6 The air photograph collection held by the National Monuments Record of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England has been examined. Coverage of the study area comprises 29 photographs resulting from 12 sorties between 1945 and 1976 (NMR library numbers 306, 1636, 1909, 2372, 2418, 2834, 2870, 4906, 4933, 8074, 8951 and 10531). The earliest photographs (1945-1949) show quarrying underway in the west field to the rear of the Marley Works area (see 2.7 for definitions). A large pond (Fig. 1) under the latter area and extensive ground disturbance indicates that the present Marley Works area was quarried at some time before 1945. The quarry in the west field to the rear ceased to be worked at some point between 1949 and 1955, and in the same period factory buildings began to be built in the east part of the Marley Works area. The subsequent photographs show the factory buildings expanding at the expense of the large pond, although the latter was still present in 1976.

1.7 No archaeological features are visible on any of the photographs of the unquarried area (ie the east field - see 2.7 below). Many of the photographs show the extent of ridge and furrow (medieval and post-medieval cultivation marks) in the fields surrounding the study area (Fig. 3).

1.8 The relevant air photograph collections held at the Gloucestershire SMR, and at the Gloucester Reference Library have been checked; none have photographs of the study area.

1.9 All areas of the site were open to inspection at the time of the site visit and conditions were good.

## **2 The site**

2.1 The study area comprises the Marley Works, now disused, fronting on the main A46 Stroud to Cheltenham road, and two fields to its rear (Fig. 1).

2.2 The surrounding terrain and undisturbed portions of the site show a general gradual downward slope from south-east to north-west; the 76m contour crosses the east part of the site.

2.3 The Marley Works exploited deep sand deposits for aggregates and bricks. These wind-blown Pleistocene deposits, generally from the Devensian glacial, are more easily cultivated than the heavier clays generally found in the Vale of Gloucester (Margretts 1984, 53). Other former sand pits lay on the opposite side of the A46, and one, about three quarters of a mile to the north, is still being worked (pers. comm. Mark Johnson GCC Planning Dept).

2.4 The works area itself comprises the factory buildings and its outhouses set within an expanse of level concrete, formerly an open air storage and distribution area. With the exception of the frontage itself everything is sealed under buildings or concrete aprons.

2.5 With regard to the present factory buildings, deep ground disturbance is unlikely and no cellars were seen; however, the buildings overlie a former quarry (see 1.6).

2.6 To the rear of the site it is clear that some terracing into the slope took place when the factory was built. To the eastern end of its rear, southern, perimeter there is a drop of 2m from field to factory level, to the west of the same line and on the western side the drop is about 1m.

2.7 The two fields to the rear (hereinafter the east field and west field) are divided by a barbed wire fence boundary running north-east to south-west. The east field is an undisturbed pasture field sharing the general slope of the land, while the west field is rough, boggy, undulating terrain generally set at a lower level to the surrounding land. Where undisturbed, both are separated from their surroundings by long-standing hedges, those on the south including trees.

2.8 It is clear that the west field has been quarried away in its entirety apart from a few narrow strips round its edge forming the quarry lip. It is also clear that the boundary marks the quarry edge on the east, since the ground slopes down from the fence line westward.

2.9 The western side of the west field is marked by a stream running though Little Shurdington northward. The stream is set within a wider former watercourse marked by slopes on either side up to the general ground level.

2.10 The east field is bounded on its east side by the Shurdington to Little Shurdington road. This sunken way lies about 1.5m below field level and appears to be of long-standing use. The drop of 2m from the field northward to the Marley Works has already been noted (see 2.6).

2.11 A corner of the east side of the east field (not part of the application) is occupied by Rose Cottage, two joining brick-built thatched cottages of late 18th- or early-19th-century date (on external appearance).

2.12 There is a very slight rise, about 0.1m, along the hedge boundary between the east field and the road, visible for about 5m from the boundary, and occurring only to the north of Rose Cottage.

2.13 There is a suggestion of a ditch running in a south-west direction across the east field from the corner of the Rose Cottage property, and disappearing at the field boundary between the east and west fields.

2.14 Spoil from five soil exposures from test pits in the east field were barren of artefacts apart from a sherd of post-medieval pottery.

2.15 A circular area of different growth to the field lay at its south end, and a second area of slightly different vegetation lay to the rear of Rose Cottage.

### **3 The archaeology of the area: Prehistoric and Romano-British (Fig. 2)**

3.1 The Gloucestershire SMR has two records for the study area, both casual finds made by workmen during quarrying. In 1935 or 1936 a Bronze Age beaker was found, and in 1959 a Roman coin of Nerva (AD 96-98); respectively SMR numbers 3799 and 6850. Both have the same NGR of SO 916176 - the present pond area in the west field.

3.2 The topography of the area will have influenced land use and settlement from prehistoric times. The site lies on gently sloping ground on the Vale of Gloucester running from the foot of the Cotswold scarp less than 1km to the south-east. Areas like this on the interface between different land types are frequently well utilised, since settlements tend to occur where different environments can be exploited. Settlements at the foot of the scarp could benefit from both the hilltop and the valley terrain. The excellent soils of the area have been noted above (see 2.3).

3.3 The general alignment of field boundaries in this area runs away from the scarp edge; this may reflect the setting out of blocks of land - whether communally-owned or individual estates - which took in hilltop, hillslopes, and the valley itself. This is sometimes reflected in the layout of parishes as on the Mendip hills (Neale 1976), although in this area the parish boundaries run along the plateau edge.

3.4 Prehistoric sites on the Cotswolds are numerous, while on the hill slopes and in the Vale of Gloucester they are markedly less common - as reflected in the distribution maps from the general survey of Gloucestershire archaeology (Saville 1984). This would seem to reflect a significant distinction although it may also reflect the interests of archaeologists, different land use, or the presence of hillwash deposits. The earliest occupation of the Vale of Gloucester would seem to have occurred in the late Neolithic (c 2400 BC).

3.5 The beaker found in 1935 or 1936 is an early Bronze Age (c 2000 BC) vessel type generally denoting a funerary context. The presence of a small number of beaker finds in the Vale of Gloucester, two others are known from this area, suggest the exploitation of the plain at this time; in the Vale they are found with single flat burials (Ellison 1984, 115 and fig 1). In the environs of the study area, apart from those on the Cotswolds themselves, there are few known prehistoric sites or finds comprising only a group of finds from the hillslopes near Dryhill Roman villa (SMR 450), a round barrow at SO 901175 (SMR 3797), an enclosure known from aerial photographs at Little Witcombe (SMR 4430), and a rapier (SMR 6399).

3.6 In the early and middle Iron Age (700 - 100 BC) the site may well have lain within the zone of influence of the hillforts on Crickley Hill or The Peak. The Little Witcombe enclosure nearby may represent a location for collecting and sorting stock.

3.7 Romano-British villa sites are known at Dryhill and Great Witcombe. A few finds of Roman material have been made near the study area in addition to the coin found on the site, comprising SMR 6856 near Shurdington, and SMR 13176 (a single sherd) near Bentham. Rawes (1977, 39) notes that Roman pottery from SO 918167 was shown at Great Witcombe in 1972 and suggests a Roman site somewhere below Crickley Hill.

3.8 Large estates may have originated in the Romano-British period (AD 43 - 410). These may have been agriculturally-based estates centred on villas, but religious sites are possible too. Great Witcombe itself may be a ritual site owing its origin to a cult associated with its underlying water sources rather than a normal villa.

3.9 Ermine Street to the west ran to Kingsholm and Gloucester. This route owes its origins to Roman military dispositions after the Conquest but nevertheless must have been paralleled by the generality of contemporary and prehistoric communications routes which would have linked higher and lower ground.

#### **4 The archaeology of the area: Medieval (Fig. 2)**

4.1 Shurdington and Little Shurdington are examples of the numerous settlements found along the foot of the Cotswold scarp. A number of medieval estate centres are also present as may be reflected by the number of moated sites in the area at Bentham, Leckington, Urrist Barn and Hunt Court (Cardew 1898). These may owe their form to the streams running from the scarp edge north-westward, of which there are numerous examples. There are also fishponds recorded as well as names indicative of mills (Darby 1954).

4.2 Just to the east of the study area, the Green Way or Greenway Lane is an example of the kinds of route which must have represented the communication system since the earliest settlements. Finberg notes that in the later Saxon period the track connected the Badgeworth estate of St Peter's at Gloucester with the Abbess Eafe's sheep walk on the wold at Upper Coberley (Finberg 1975, 58), but its origins may have been earlier.

4.3 The other routes in the area, for instance the sunken way marking part of the east boundary of the study area (see 2.10), must reflect routes of at least medieval origin connecting settlements and estates.

4.4 Shurdington was a documented settlement in the 12th century and Little Shurdington in the 14th; both were probably of earlier origin.

4.5 Ridge and furrow was widespread judging from the aerial photographic evidence noted in 1.7 above (Fig. 3).

## **5 The archaeology of the area: Post-Medieval**

5.1 There are some field names in the vicinity which reflect brick making (eg 'the brickyard' of 1846, 'brickford' SMR 8524) and many of the 17th- and 18th-century houses in the vicinity are of brick or brick and stone. However there is no evidence for mineral extraction in the study area until some time after 1838.

5.2 The turnpike road fronting the study site (the present A46) was built in 1820. Its influence on the economy of the area was profound, with the growth of Cheltenham leading to the expansion of services at Shurdington and the building of houses along the turnpike as wealthier citizens moved out of the town (Maltby 1965).

5.3 Fruit and vegetable growing areas in the vicinity were common in the 19th century, two examples (one now a garden centre) still bound the Marley Works on either side. These originated after the turnpike road as a result of the demand from Cheltenham; with subsequent railway communications expansion to markets further afield was possible (Maltby 1965).

5.4 The sand and gravel quarries in the study area were not present in 1838 when the area was mapped for the Tithe Award Commission. The date of first quarrying is unknown, but again a response to the expansion of Cheltenham must be suggested.

5.5 The tithe award map of 1838 shows the study area divided into four fields, their boundaries running parallel with the turnpike road (Fig. 4). The slight ditch line to be seen on the ground in the modern east field (see 2.13) is therefore the line of the southernmost field division. The intake of land with Rose Cottage in it was present in 1838.

5.6 In 1838 all four fields were arable. The southern two were both known as Tutland's Piece, while the northern fields (the Marley Works area) were known as 'half acres' and 'the length' for the north and south fields respectively. Tutlands is the name of the modern house at Brock nursery to the west of the west field; a building was present there in 1838.

## **6 The archaeological potential of the study area**

6.1 It is significant that the finds noted on the SMR have not been replicated by other chance finds either in quarrying or in the market gardens nearby where intensive digging would be likely to reveal settlement debris. In the case of the Roman find this may suggest the coin was a stray find, since Romano-British artefacts are relatively easily recognisable and would occur in quantity if a settlement was nearby.

6.2 The Bronze Age beaker find may have been associated with a burial - most likely a single flat burial (ie not a barrow). Presumably this would have been lost in quarrying. The archaeologist Mrs E M Clifford (who lived nearby) was shown the find in the 1930s after part of it had been lost, but she would have appreciated its significance and checked its context.

6.3 The majority of the study area must be regarded as lost terrain from an archaeological point of view. The Marley Works area and the western field to the north, site of the quarrying, can effectively be written off.

6.4 The eastern field is the only area of potential. It is bounded by a medieval or earlier road, and there are currently houses of the 18th or 19th century on the road frontage. Rose Cottage may suggest the presence of other buildings along the road; but these would be buildings which had disappeared by 1838 when the Tithe award map was drawn up. As seen above (2.12) there is a slight rise to the north of Rose Cottage which may be significant, although a context associated with clearing the holloway track would seem most likely. The extent of ridge and furrow nearby suggests that this field may also have been cultivated in the Middle Ages; it was still under the plough in 1838.

6.5 Spoil from test pits (see 2.14) does not suggest archaeological activity.

6.6 The two areas of slight vegetational change (see 2.15) may simply reflect a manure dump or slightly wetter ground.

## **7 Recommendations**

7.1 In general the study area should be regarded as without further archaeological potential. No Stage 2 work is therefore recommended, although a watching brief should be undertaken during groundwork preparation.

7.2 Stage 2 work is not recommended in the Marley Works area. Factory preparation may well have planed down much of the former ground level. Only deep cut archaeological features would have survived; these are possible but there is no reason to suspect them.

7.3 Nor is Stage 2 work recommended for the west field to the rear of the Marley Works since this has been quarried away in its entirety.

7.4 The only area where the original ground surface survives is the east field. Here one might suggest an examination of the slight bank along the road north of Rose Cottage, either by geophysical prospection or by trial trenching, but the evidence does not really support such an approach, and it is not recommended.

7.5 The principal argument against further work is that the east field is only marginally threatened by the proposed development, with a games pitch envisaged in the west part of the field and no disturbance foreseen to the roadside area.

7.6 In view of the finds made during quarrying - the beaker and the Roman coin - a watching brief should be maintained during the initial development stages.

## 8 References and acknowledgements

- Cardew, G A, 1898 'The moats and waterforts of the Vale of Severn', *TBGAS* 21, 58-69
- Darby, H C, 1954 'Gloucestershire', in Darby HC, and Terrett IB (eds), *The Domesday geography of midland England*, 1-56
- Ellison, A B, 1984 'Bronze Age Gloucestershire: artefacts and distributions', in Saville 1984, 113-27
- Finberg, H P R, 1975 *The Gloucestershire landscape*, London
- Maltby, R A, 1965 'Shurdington past and present', typescript booklet, Gloucester library
- Margretts, G, 1984 'A summary of the geology and geomorphology of Gloucestershire', in Saville 1984, 47-55
- Neale, F, 1976 'Saxon and medieval landscapes', in Atthill, R (cd), *Mendip: a new study*, Newton Abbot
- Rawes, B, 1977 'A Roman site at Wells Bridge, Barnwood', *TBGAS* 95, 24-39
- Saville, A, 1984 *Archaeology in Gloucestershire*, Cheltenham
- Smith, A H, 1964 *The place names of Gloucestershire*, Cambridge
- Verey, D, 1970 *Buildings of England: Gloucestershire Vale and Forest of Dean*, Harmondsworth

### Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the staff of Gloucestershire County Council Planning Dept, Gloucester Library, Gloucester Record Office, and the Royal Commission Air Photograph Library for their assistance.

Peter Ellis Nov 3 1993



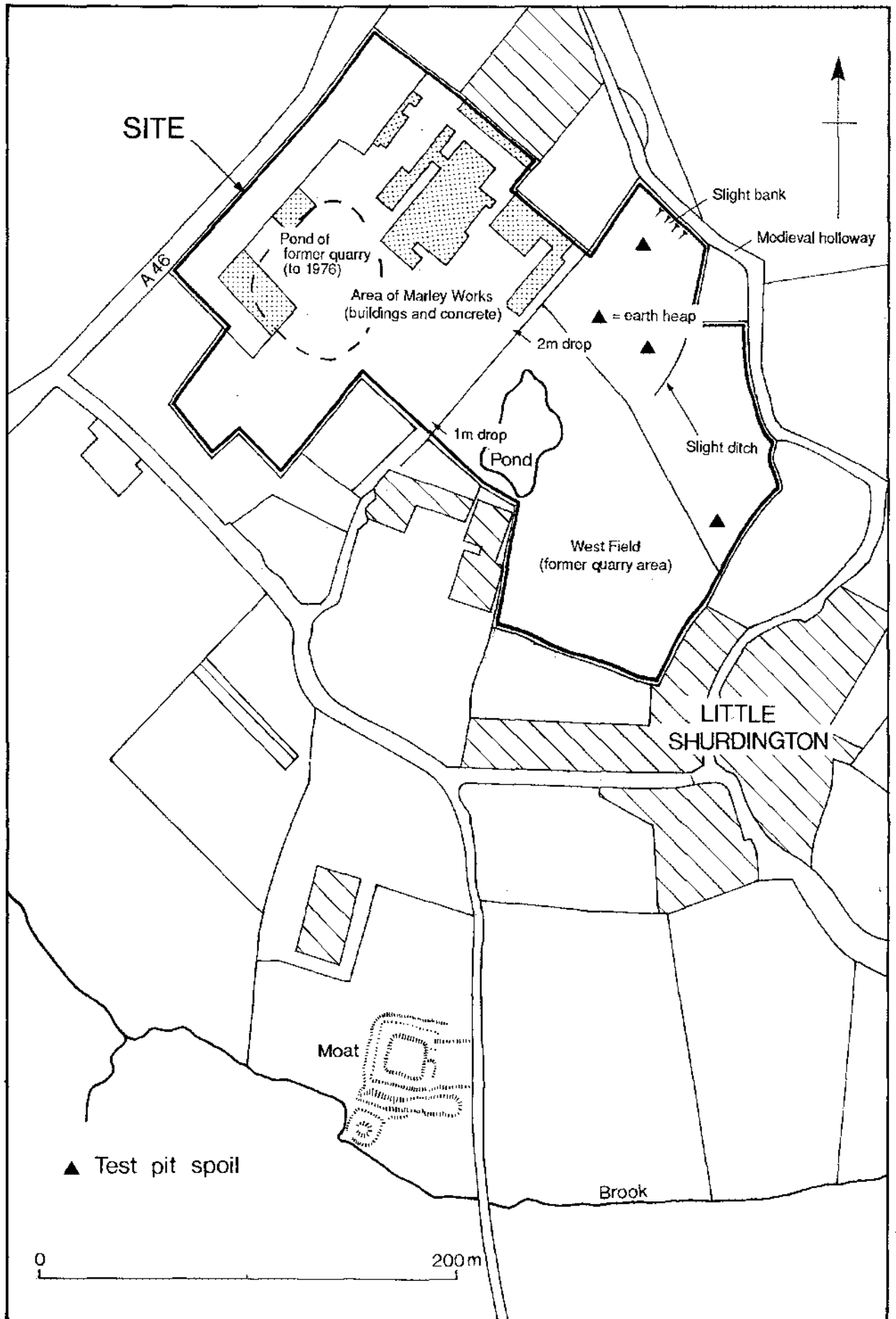
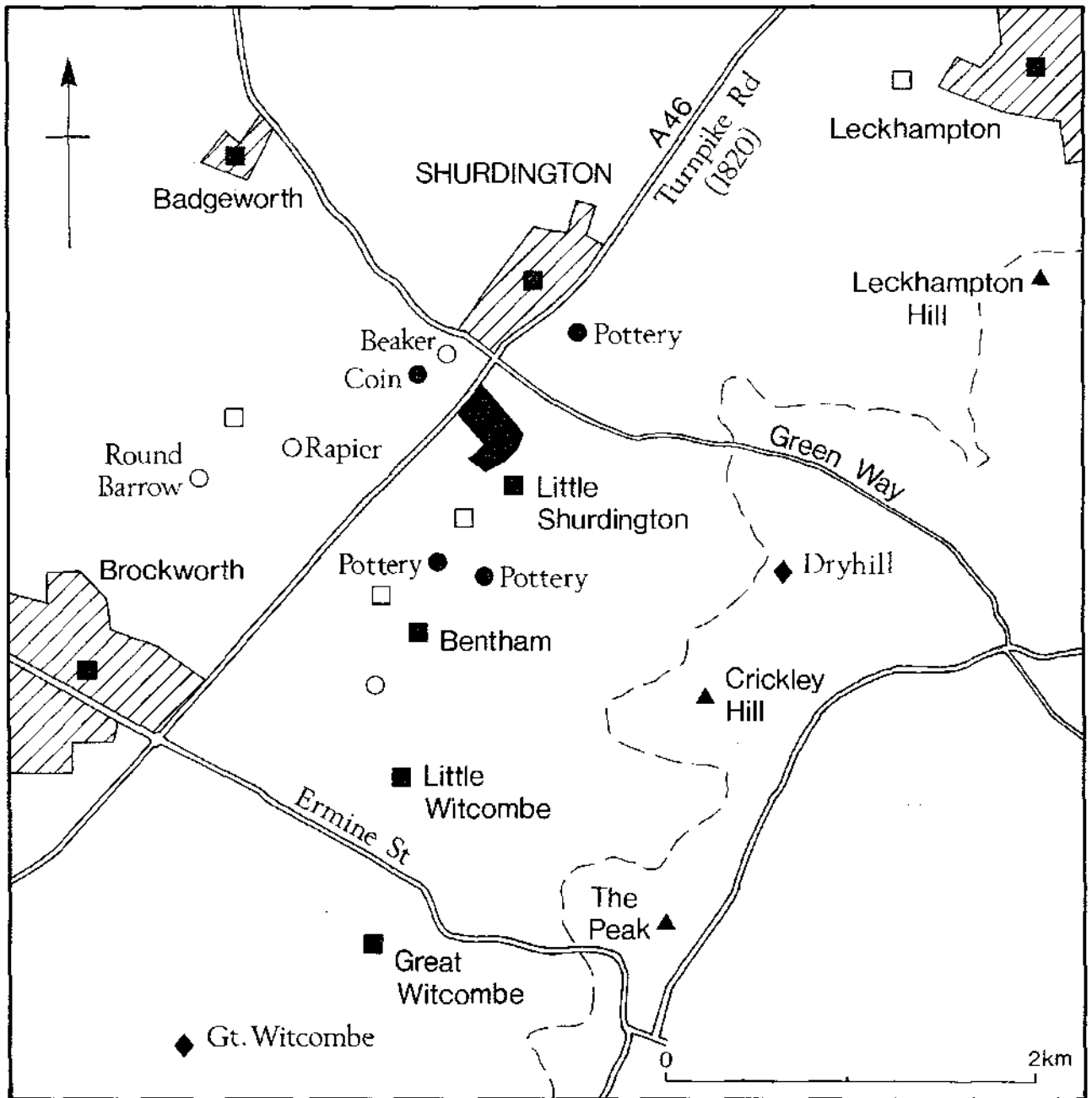
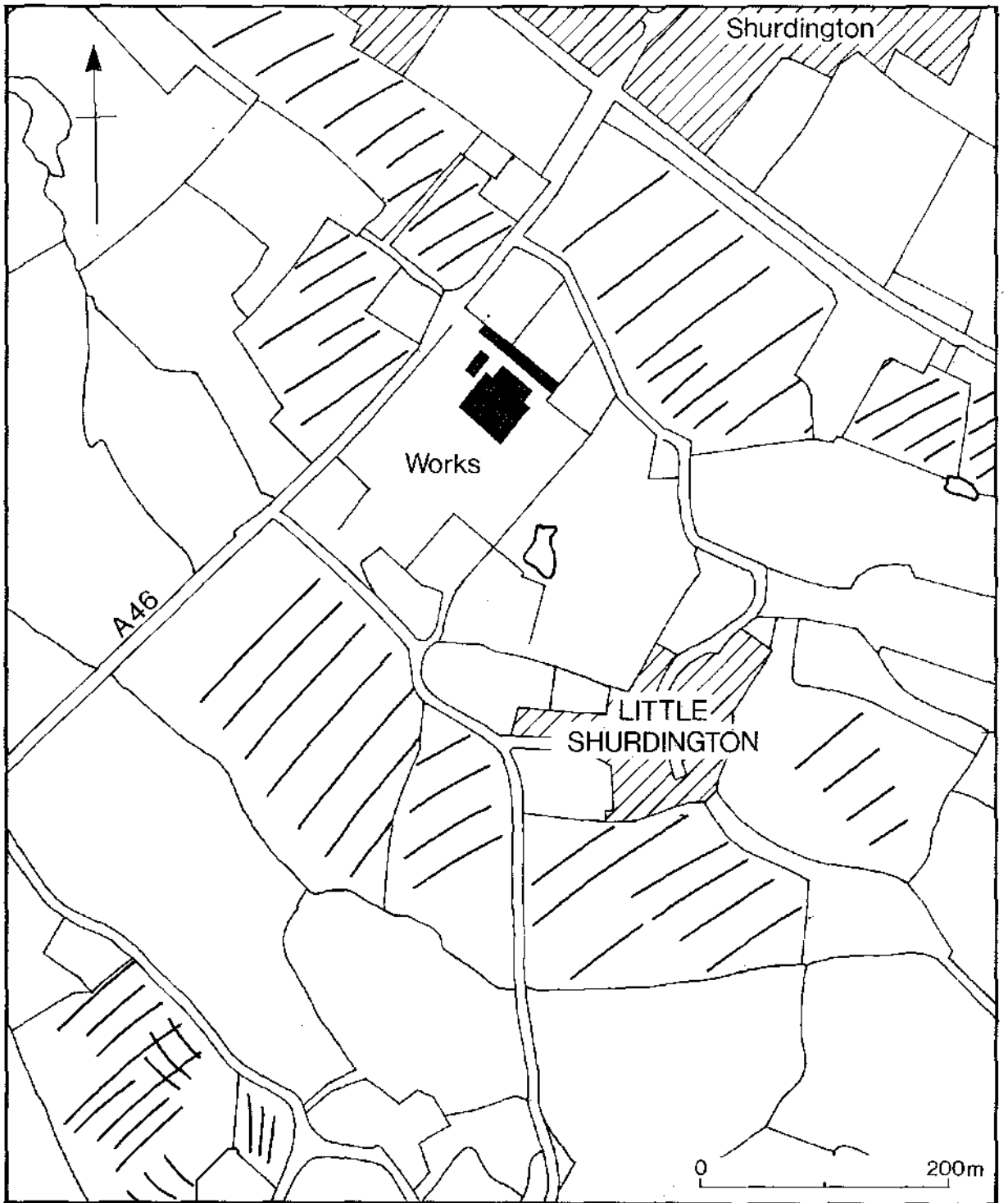


Figure 1



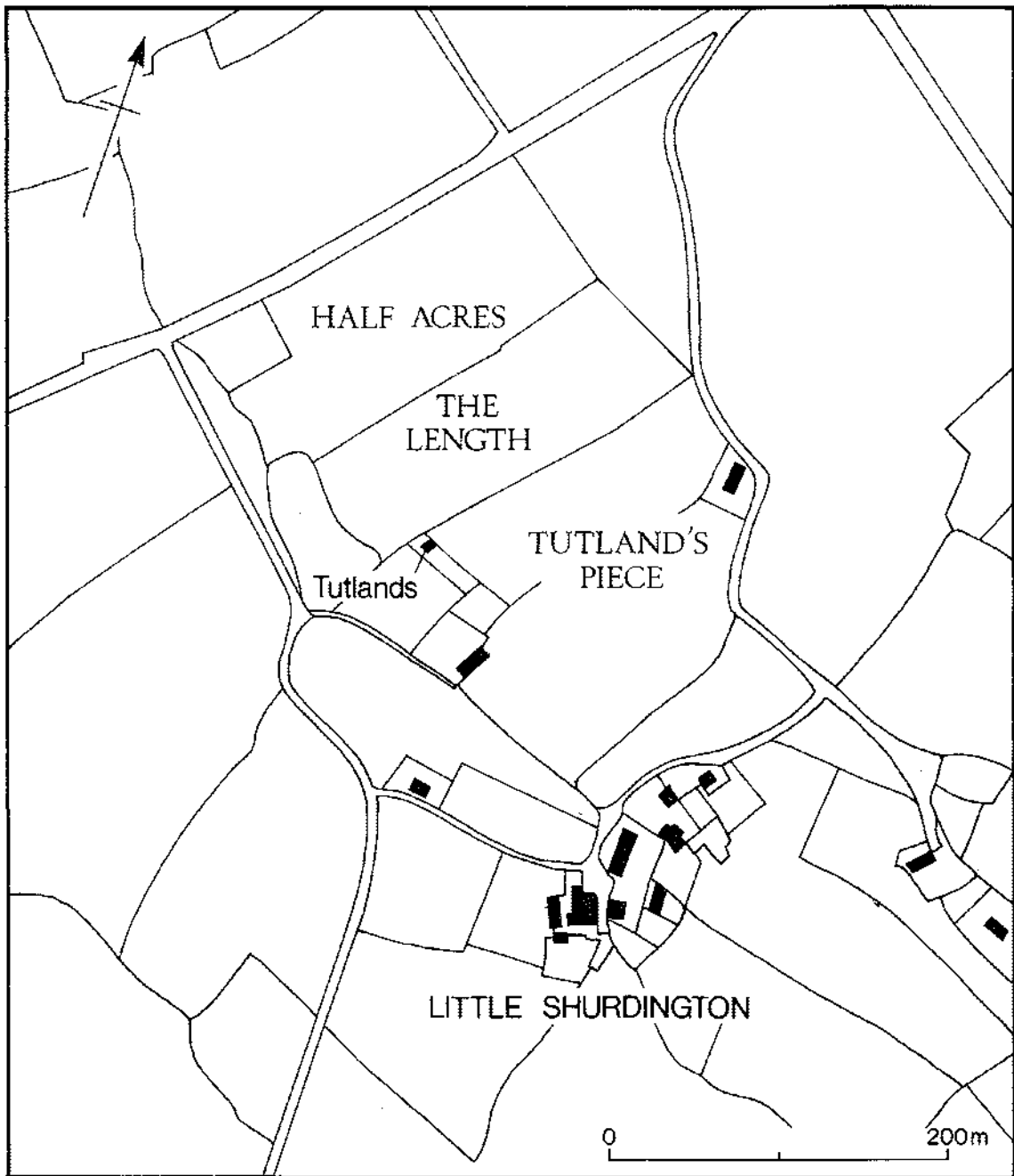
-  SITE
-  HILLFORTS
-  RB VILLAS
-  MOATS
-  RB FINDS
-  PREHISTORIC SITES AND FINDS
-  MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT
-  ) COTSWOLD SCARP EDGE  
(at about 230m)

Figure 2



 RIDGE & FURROW  
FROM AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Figure 3



(From 1838 Tithe Award Map)

Figure 4