

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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Granville Colliery, Redhill, Shropshire

An Archaeological Evaluation 1994

by A.E. Jones

with a contribution by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford

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1.0: SUMMARY

The archaeological potential of an area proposed for a landfill development (hereinafter the study area) was tested by an evaluation involving a desk-top study of documentary and cartographic sources, followed by geophysical survey and selective trial-trenching. No features of archaeological interest, or possible archaeological interest could be defined in the areas investigated, except for a collapsed drystone wall which defines part of the southern study area boundary.

2.0: INTRODUCTION (Fig 1A, 1B)

This report describes the results of an archaeological assessment of approximately 200 ha. of land off Woodhouse Lane, Telford, Shropshire (centred on NGR. SJ 727115). Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned to undertake the assessment by Shropshire Waste Management Limited, in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Department of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (November 1990). The methodology of this assessment conforms with a brief prepared by the Senior Archaeologist, Shropshire County Council (Watson 1994).

The purpose of the evaluation was to provide information concerning the presence, survival and significance of archaeological deposits which may be affected by the proposed development, and, if appropriate, to provide an informed basis for an agreed mitigation strategy to preserve or record such remains. In particular, the evaluation was intended to determine whether the Roman settlement (Uxacona) centred on Redhill and adjoining Watling Street (the modern A5 route), extended within the bounds of the study area.

3.0: METHODOLOGY (Fig 1C)

As a first stage in site evaluation, a desk-top study of relevant documentary and cartographic sources was undertaken to provide information concerning site history and land use. A walkover survey of the entire proposed development area was also undertaken to locate and record any visible earthworks which may have been of archaeological interest.

An area of 3 ha., located on a plateau just inside the southern boundary of the study area, which lay closer to the bounds of the Roman town was examined by geophysical survey to test its archaeological potential. The results of this survey (Geophysical Surveys of Bradford 1994) are summarised in Section 5.2 below.

Sample excavation was undertaken to test any anomalies of possible archaeological origin identified during the geophysical survey, and also to examine areas where no such anomalies were recorded within this southern plateau. A total of four trenches was opened by machine. In each trench the overburden, comprising the topsoil, was removed by a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, to expose the uppermost subsoil horizon which was then cleaned manually. This subsoil horizon was cleaned in an attempt to define any manmade, or possibly manmade features (if any) cut into the subsoil, to define the profile and fill sequences of individual features, by means of selective hand excavation, and to recover datable artifacts.

Recording was by means of printed pro-forma recording sheets, supplemented by plans, sections and photographs which are held in the archive.

4.0: THE STUDY AREA AND ITS SETTING (Fig 1B, 1C)

The study area comprises three fields, all under permanent pasture. The southwestern corner of the southernmost field forms a plateau, but most of the remainder of the study area is undulating. The study area lies within the limits of Lilleshall Park (Shropshire SMR No. 735/7771), which was imparked at an unknown date in the Medieval period, and contained deer as late as the 18th-century. Of particular interest is a collapsed drystone wall formed of weathered red sandstone blocks, which defines part of the southern boundary of the southernmost field. This wall follows the approximate line of a boundary established by 1642 AD and shown on a map of Lilleshall parish of that date, and which may have defined the southern boundary of the park.

Immediately to the south of this boundary (and outside the study area) are fields named 'wall ashes' on estate maps of the 17th and 19th-century, which name suggests the presence of traces of abandoned stone-walled buildings. This fieldname is unlikely to refer to collapsed material from the drystone boundary wall, since the natural slope would have the effect of eroding the stone northwards, into the study area.

Returning to the study area, the fieldnames (Park Field, Lower Park Leasow, Upper Park Leasow) preserve the association with the medieval park into the 19th-century. Later 19th-century mapping records the excavation of marl pits, and a small opencast quarry in the southern field of the study area. The position of the marl pits and stone quarry is now marked by a pond fringed with trees.

The settlement core of the small Roman town of Redhill (Uxacona; Shropshire SMR No. 1113, Shropshire Scheduled A. M. No. 201) lies to the south of the study area, partly straddling Watling Street. Excavations have produced pottery predominantly of the 3rd and 4th-centuries AD. This settlement was preceded by ditched military enclosures (Shropshire Scheduled A. M. No. 188), which have been interpreted as signal stations or temporary storage depots. Cropmark enclosures, possibly defining farmsteads of late prehistoric or Roman date have been identified immediately to the east of Redhill Farm (Shropshire SMR No. 736), and to the south of Watling Street Grange (Shropshire SMR No. 734). A further cropmark enclosure (SMR No. 416) and scatter of Roman pottery (SMR No. 733) have been found to the northeast of the study area boundary, to the east of New Lodge.

The site of a monastic grange or farm, associated with Lilleshall Abbey, is located to the north of Watling Street Grange (Shropshire SMR No. 733), outside the study area.

5.0: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS (Fig 1C)

5.1: Geophysical Survey by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford

An area of 3ha. was surveyed using a fluxgate gradiometer. The area was slightly reduced in the southeastern corner by a field boundary and by the tree-fringed pond in the centre of the northern edge of the survey area. The survey grid was tied-in by staff of BUFAU.

The results are displayed as an X-Y trace, a dot density plot and a grey scale image. These display formats are discussed in the *technical information* section at the end

of the full survey report (Geophysical Surveys of Bradford 1994). Figs 2 and 3 are data plots and an interpretation diagram produced at a scale of 1:1000.

Ground conditions were ideal for survey, the pasture field was flat and free of obstructions. Two large water-mains ran across the survey area and have produced substantial areas of magnetic disturbance. Responses from archaeological features will have been masked by this disturbance. Minor magnetic interference was caused by the output of a transmission tower, located approximately 300m to the south of the survey area. This results in an increase in the recorded background noise levels. The effect is most apparent in the dot-density plot (Fig 3), where intermittent stripes are visible in the results.

The most dominant magnetic responses recorded by the gradiometer are those produced by two mains water pipes. One crosses the extreme southwestern corner of the survey area, while the other, orientated approximately north-south, runs through the centre of the survey area. The disturbance generated by the pipes is also quite widespread and small-scale responses from possible archaeological features will have been hidden in these areas.

Three groups of pit anomalies were recorded in the northeastern part of the survey area. It was possible that they represented the position of settlement activity. However, they have no obvious context and their broad appearance suggests that they may have been produced by the underlying geology. Trial excavations following the geophysical survey have confirmed the geological interpretation. The magnetic responses appear to have been caused by pockets of clays and silts filling hollows in the near surface bedrock. Given that geological variation has been recorded, the results indicate that enhanced fills contained within archaeological features would also have been detected if they had been present. A curvilinear response was recorded running along the northwestern edge of the survey area, characterised by a series of small ferrous responses. Two similar, parallel responses were detected running north-south through the centre of the survey. These are considered to represent either the remains of former field boundaries, or possibly even a buried pipe (Fig 3). Numerous ferrous responses were recorded throughout the survey area, as indicated on the interpretation diagram. They are thought to have been produced by modern debris.

5.2: Trial-Trenching

Trenches 1 and 2

Trenches 1 and 2 were cut on an approximate north-south alignment, adjacent to the southern boundary of the study area, now defined by the hedgeline, which contains traces of a collapsed drystone wall. Both trenches were dug to determine the possible survival of buried archaeological features associated with this wall, located within the study area. Excavation of these trenches within the area of the geophysical survey also provided an opportunity for cross-comparison with the results of the survey, in an area where no archaeological, or possibly archaeological, anomalies could be defined by the survey.

Trenches 1 and 2 each measured 10m in length. The weathered surface of the fissured red sandstone bedrock (1001), masked in places by patches of red-brown clay-silt (1002), its weathering product, was located at a depth of between 0.2-0.3m below the modern ground surface. The bedrock and clay silt in both trenches were sealed by a layer of topsoil (1000), composed of mid brown clay-silt.

No archaeological features or deposits could be defined in Trenches 1 and 2, and no manmade artifacts were recovered.

Trenches 3 and 4

Trenches 3 and 4 were positioned to investigate two anomalies of possible archaeological interest identified by the preliminary geophysical survey plot. The subsequent processed survey plot identified other possible archaeological anomalies in the northeast corner of the survey area, but these appeared to be similar in response to the anomalies identified earlier.

Trench 3 measured 5m in length, and was aligned approximately southwest-northeast. The surface of the fissured sandstone bedrock was located at a depth of 0.45m below the modern ground surface. The bedrock surface was masked by a shallow patch of buff-brown clay (1003), which coincided with the position of the geophysical anomaly. The bedrock and clay were sealed by a layer of topsoil (1000).

Trench 4 measured 5m in length, and was cut on a northwest-southeast alignment to investigate a further geophysical anomaly. The surface of the sandstone bedrock was located at a depth of 0.5-0.6m below the modern ground surface. An area of buff-brown clay (1005) was recorded as a geological disturbance within the upper subsoil horizon, in the approximate position of the geophysical anomaly. The bedrock and clay were sealed by the modern topsoil (1000).

No archaeological features or deposits could be identified in Trenches 3 and 4, nor were any manmade artifacts recovered.

6.0: DISCUSSION

The walkover survey identified quarry pits visible in the pasture surface. The geophysical survey also identified modern services, abandoned field boundaries, and anomalies subsequently defined by trial-trenching as probably geological in origin.

No archaeological, or possibly archaeological, features could be identified in the trial-trenches. This evidence suggests that the Roman settlement of Redhill probably did not extend within the study area, nor was evidence recorded of any possibly associated ditched field systems. Further, there may be no surviving features within the study area associated with the collapsed drystone wall.

7.0: IMPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS

7.1: Implications

The evidence from this evaluation, in combination with the results of other archaeological evaluations of land to the east of the civilian settlement (Ferris and Buteux 1991, Jones 1994), provides negative evidence for the extent of the Roman settlement zone at Redhill. The results of the present evaluation suggest that the Roman settlement zone did not extend up to the northern limit of the plateau which extends just within the southern boundary of the study area. This evidence, in combination with the natural topography of the area might suggest that the Roman settlement was confined to the higher ground, perhaps as defined by the 180m contour. However, it is usual for such roadside settlements to develop along the line of the road, in a linear pattern, as at Meole Brace near Shrewsbury (Hughes in press).

Although no buried archaeological features associated with the drystone wall could be identified in Trenches 1 or 2, it is possible that such features may be preserved

elsewhere along the line of the wall. Although the remains of this wall are poorly preserved, it is a longstanding landscape feature of some interest.

7.2: Recommendations

(1) Given the negative results of this evaluation, further archaeological input during topsoil stripping may not be worthwhile.

(2) However, if development proposals affect an area immediately adjoining the collapsed drystone wall recorded along the southern boundary of the study area, it is recommended that the maintenance of an archaeological watching brief be considered during groundworks, in liaison with the developer, to identify and record any associated historic features.

8.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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9.0: REFERENCES AND SOURCES

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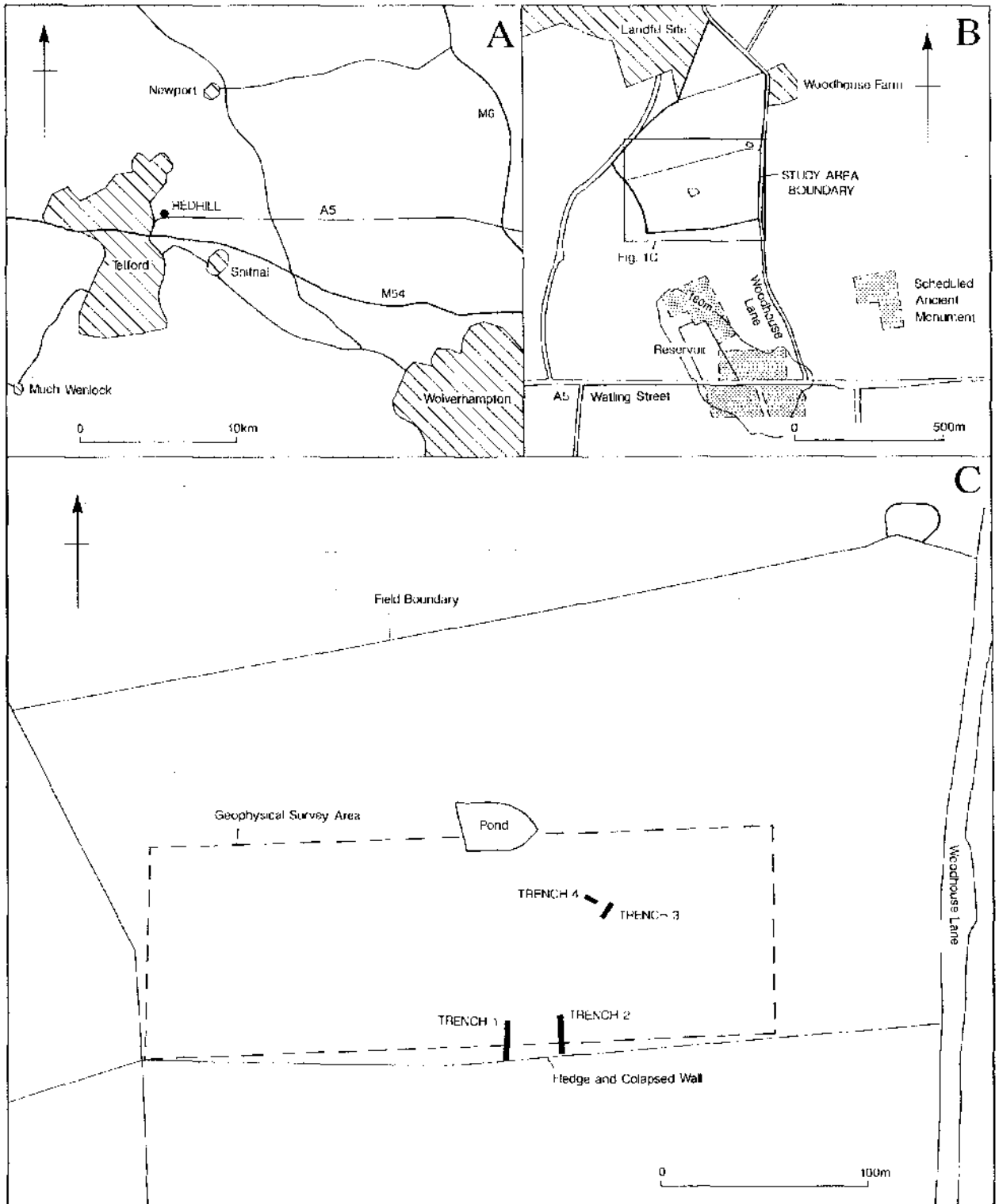


Figure 1

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