Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

Report No. 297

May 1994

Woodhouse Farm, Redhill, Shropshire

An Archaeological Evaluation 1994

by A.E. Jones

with a contribution by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford

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

WOODHOUSE FARM, REDHILL, TELFORD, SHROPSHIRE

An Archaeological Evaluation 1994

CONTENTS

Figures

WOODHOUSE LANE, REDHILL, TELFORD, SHROPSHIRE
An Archaeological Evaluation 1994

1.0: SUMMARY

The archaeological potential of one area proposed for a crematorium development (hereinafter the west study area) and a second area, proposed for the construction of a new golf course access (hereinafter the east study area) was tested by an evaluation involving a desk-top study of documentary, cartographic and air-photograph sources, followed by geophysical survey and selective trial-trenching.

The evaluation indicates the presence of an undated linear feature in each area; there being no identifiable features demonstrably of Roman date, either associated with the nearby Roman military occupation focus, or the later Roman civilian settlement at Redhill.

2.0: INTRODUCTION (Fig 1A, 1B)

This report describes the results of an archaeological assessment of approximately 1ha. of land (the west study area), proposed for a crematorium development, within approximately 5.5 ha. of grounds, off Woodhouse Lane, Telford, Shropshire (centred on NGR. SJ 728111: Fig 1A, 1B). The east study area comprised a zone approximately 6m wide, to the north of the A5 road, and lying to the east of Woodhouse Lane (centred on NGR. SJ 732109: Fig 1A, 1B). Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned to undertake the archaeological assessment of both study areas by ACL Consultants, in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Department of the Environment in the Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (November 1990). The methodology of this assessment conforms with the respective briefs prepared by the Senior Archaeologist, Shropshire County Council (Watson 1994, Watson 1994 a).

The purpose of the evaluations was to provide information concerning the presence, survival and significance of archaeological deposits which may be affected by the proposed crematorium development and by the new access road, and, if approporiate, 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 either 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. The relevant air photographs in the collection held by Shropshire County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) were also examined to provide information concerning possible archaeological features.

An area of 0.8ha., located to the east of Woodhouse Lane was examined by geophysical survey to test the archaeological potential of the entire west study area. The results of this survey (Geophysical Surveys of Bradford 1994) are summarised in Section 5.1.1 below.

In the west study area sample excavation of four trenches was undertaken to test any anomalies of possible archaeological origin identified during the geophysical survey,

and also in an attempt to intercept any major linear features located on the eastern fringe of the identified Roman civilian focus at Redhill which may not be identifiable as geophysical anomalies.

In the east study area four trenches were dug along the northern edge of Roman Watling Street (the modern A5 road), to test the archaeological potential of the area immediately adjoining this roadside.

A total of eight trenches was opened by machine in both areas. 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 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 AREAS AND THEIR SETTING (Fig 1B, 1C)

4.1: West Study area

The west study area lies on the eastern edge of a field of permanent pasture, to the west of Woodhouse Lane, which defines the boundary between the parishes of Lilleshall and Sheriffhales. The course of Watling Street defines the south boundary of this field. The area in the centre of the study area forms a slightly raised plateau, surrounded on the north, east and west sides by more lowlying areas. To the west lies an abandoned clay pit, now a water-filled pond. This area lies just outside the southern bounds of Lilleshall Park. The field name 'Olde Fielde' recorded on an estate map of 1642 suggests a degree of continuity in past cultivation, while in surveys of 1720 and 1813 the field name is shown as 'Alex Stone', possibly in reference to a local tenant.

4.2: East Study area

Little cartographic information is available for this study area, which lies on the southern margin of an area of permanent pasture.

4.3: The archaeological setting

The settlement core of the small Roman town of Redhill (Uxacona: Shropshire SMR No. 1113, Shropshire Scheduled A. M. No. 201) lies to the west and south of the west study area, 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 areas.

5.0: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS (Fig 1C)

5.1: The west study area

5.1.1: Geophysical Survey by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford

An area of approximately 0.8ha. was surveyed using a fluxgate gradiometer to investigate the archaeological potential of the proposed crematorium site. The results are displayed as a dot density plot (Fig 2) and an interpretation diagram (Fig 3). These display formats are discussed in the technical information section of the full report (Geophysical Surveys of Bradford 1994).

Ground conditions were ideal for survey; the pasture field was flat and free of obstructions. Magnetic interference was caused by electromagnetic waves emitting from a transmission tower, located adjacent to the survey area. The result is an increase in the recorded background noise levels. This is evident in the data plots, where a series of stripes are visible in the results. It was hoped, however, that responses produced by possible archaeological features would be recognisable within this area of interference.

A strong ditch-type anomaly, orientated approximately northwest to southeast, was recorded in the centre of the survey. This was provisionally interpreted to be a response from an enclosure ditch located within the settlement or possibly part of the boundary of the Roman town. Several more tentative responses, including possible short ditch lengths and pits, were also detected. Numerous ferrous anomalies, likely to be of modern origin, were also encountered and may also account for some responses interpreted as possible pits. The high frequency of ferrous objects may be due to recent coal workings. The pond on the eastern edge of the survey area is the site of a disused clay pit. Interference from the tranmission tower was detected by the gradiometer. The most severe areas of disturbance are indicated on the interpretation diagram.

5.1.2: Trial-trenching

A total of four trenches (1-4) was dug in the area of the proposed crematorium development. Trench 1 was excavated to test the archaeological potential of the area of the proposed crematorium building. Trenches 2-3 were dug across the line of the linear geophysical anomaly, which was intially interpreted as a ditch. Trench 3 was extended to provide an examination of the archaeological potential of a slightly raised plateau in the area of the development, and also to test a more lowlying area, adjoining the eastern field boundary, and an area in the west of the development zone, where pit-like geophysical anomalies were recorded. Trench 4 was dug on the southern edge of the slightly raised plateau, in an attempt to locate a westward return of the linear geophysical anomaly.

Trenches 1 and 2 measured 20m and 10m respectively in length; both were aligned approximately east-west. A red-orange mixed and mottled silt-clay (1001A) masked the fissured red limestone bedrock (1001B). The subsoil in Trench 2 comprised a mottled red-brown clay (1002A) in the east of the trench, which partly overlay the fissured red sandstone bedrock (1002B) in the west of the trench (in the approximate area of the slightly raised plateau). The subsoil and bedrock in both trenches was sealed by approximately 0.25-0.3m of topsoil, below the surface of the modern pasture. No archaeological features or deposits could be identified in Trenches 1 or 2, nor were any manmade artifacts recovered.

Trench 3, cut on an approximate west-east alignment, measured a total of 60m in length. The subsoil in the east of the trench comprised red-brown silt-clay (1003A), partially overlying the uppermost surface of the fissured limestone bedrock (1003B)

exposed and cleaned over the remainder of the trench. In the west of the trench patches of clay were recorded in the bedrock surface, in the approximate position of the recorded pit-like geophysical anomalies. A disturbance (F3), approximately 2m wide and aligned north-south, was apparent in the cleaned upper surface of the bedrock. Partial excavation revealed this disturbance to be of notably irregular profile and measuring a maximum of 0.1m in depth. Feature F3 was infilled with a red-brown silt-clay (1012), containing traces of iron-pan. The subsoil and infilled feature F3 were sealed by topsoil (1000) measuring between 0.15-0.3m in depth. It was not possible to determine if feature F3 was natural or manmade in origin; no other features, deposits or artifacts of possible manmade origin could be defined in this trench.

Trench 4, cut on a northwest-southeast alignment, was dug for a length of 20m. The surface of the red fissured sandstone bedrock (1013) was disturbed by the excavation of a field drain (F4: not illustrated). The subsoil was sealed by 0.3m of topsoil. No features or deposits of archaeological interest, or manmade artifacts were recovered from this trench.

5.2: The east study area

A total of four trenches (5-8), each measuring 5m by 1.6m, was dug to the north of the A5 road in the area of the proposed new access road. All trenches here were dug to the north of an existing hedgeline, which occupied an area between 2-3m north of the northern edge of the A5 road. This group of trenches was excavated in an attempt to define the extent of Roman roadside settlement in the zone to the east of the Scheduled Ancient Monument (Shropshire A.M. No. 201).

The subsoil recorded in Trenches 5-8 comprised a red-orange silt clay (1006), occasionally mixed with patches of green clay. The southern edge of a linear feature (F1), aligned approximately east-west, approximately parallel to the modern road, was recorded in all trenches. Its full width was not seen, as its northern limit presumably lay beneath the modern hedgeline. Feature F1 was excavated in two trenches (5 and 6) to reveal a shallow flat-based cut, with a gently-sloping northern edge. The fill comprised a mid-brown clay-silt (1010) from which no manmade artifacts were recovered. A band of disturbed subsoil (1011) recorded in Trench 8 which contained rotted roots, probably defined an abandoned hedgeline. The subsoil was sealed by a layer of topsoil (1000), measuring between 0.2-0.3m in depth. Except for F1, no features or deposits of possible archaeological interest were defined in Trenches 5-8, and no manmade artifacts were recovered.

6.0:DISCUSSION

6.1: West study area

No cropmarks of potential archaeological interest could be identified in the aerial photograph coverage. The geophysical survey identified possible features of archaeological interest. Trenching revealed that the pit-like geophysical anomalies probably derived from variations in the underlying geology. Interpretation of the linear anomaly is perhaps more difficult. The undated feature F3, located in Trench 3 follows the alignment and approximate position of this anomaly, but no trace of its northward continuation could be defined in Trench 2. Although the form of this feature perhaps argues against its interpretation as a manmade feature, the possibility that it was associated with the adjoining Roman settlement should not be discounted. Its alignment and positioning coincide approximately with the ditched boundary of the Roman town, recorded on the Sites and Monuments Record. However, the interrupted form of the geophysical anomaly, and the lack of evidence for its continuation in Trench 2 and in the area of a recently laid pipeline (Ferris

and Buteux 1994) may indicate that feature F3 was not such a continuous ditched boundary.

6.2: East Study area

The only feature encountered in the east study area was a flat-based ditch (F1). In the absence of datable artifacts, the positioning and alignment of this feature relative to the roadline could possibly indicate that it was either a Roman, or later, roadside ditch, or even a later field boundary. Neither interpretation explains its unusual, flat-based profile.

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 largely negative evidence for the extent of the Roman settlement zone at Redhill. The results of the present evaluation suggest that the area of intensive Roman settlement did not extend within the west study area. Similarly, any trace of roadside settlement features was absent from the east study area. This evidence, in combination with the natural topography of the area, might suggest 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).

7.2: Recommendations

Although the present evaluation did not identify features of demonstrably Roman date, consideration could be given to the maintenance of an archaeological watching brief during the groundworks in the areas affected by the crematorium development and the proposed access road, to identify and record any archaeological features within the proposed development areas.

8.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was sponsored by ACL Consultants. We are grateful to Mr and Mrs J. Hancock for access. The project was directed by Alex Jones, with the assistance of Ed Newton, Jon Sterenberg and Tom Vaughan. Figure 1 was drawn by Nigel Dodds, and the report was edited by Iain Ferris. The staff of Shropshire County Record Office, Shropshire Sites and Monuments Record, and the Local Studies Department of Shrewsbury Library are thanked for their assistance.

9.0: REFERENCES AND SOURCES

Ferris, I.M. and Buteux, S.T. 1994. An Archaeological Evaluation at Redhill, Telford, Shropshire 1991. BUFAU Report No. 188.

Geophysical Surveys of Bradford. 1994. Redhill Crematorium Site. Geopyhsical survey Report No. 94/44.

Hughes, E. G. in press. A Romano-British Roadside Settlement at Meole Brace, in Ellis, P. et. al. Excavations in the Wroxeter Hinterland 1988-1990: The

Archaeology of the A5/A49 Shrewsbury Bypass. Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society.

Jones, A. E. 1994. Granville Colliery, Redhill, Shropshire: An Archaeological Evaluation 1994. BUFAU Report No. 295

Watson, M. 1994. Brief for an Archaeological Evaluation at Woodhouse Lane, Redhill, Telford, Shropshire. Shropshire County Council.

Watson, M. 1994a. Brief for an Archaeological Evaluation at Woodhouse Farm, Redhill, Telford, Shropshire. Shropshire County Council.

OTHER SOURCES

1642 Map of Lilleshall Parish, Sutherland Coll., Shropshire Record Office.

1720 Map of Lilleshall Parish, by William Levinson, Sutherland Coll., Shropshire Record Office.

1813 Map of Marquis of Stafford Estates, Local Studies Department, Shrewsbury Library (Copy)

1882 Ordnance Survey, First Edition, 25 inch/ mile.

1903 Map of Lilleshall Park Area, Ordnance Survey XXXVI. NE, SE

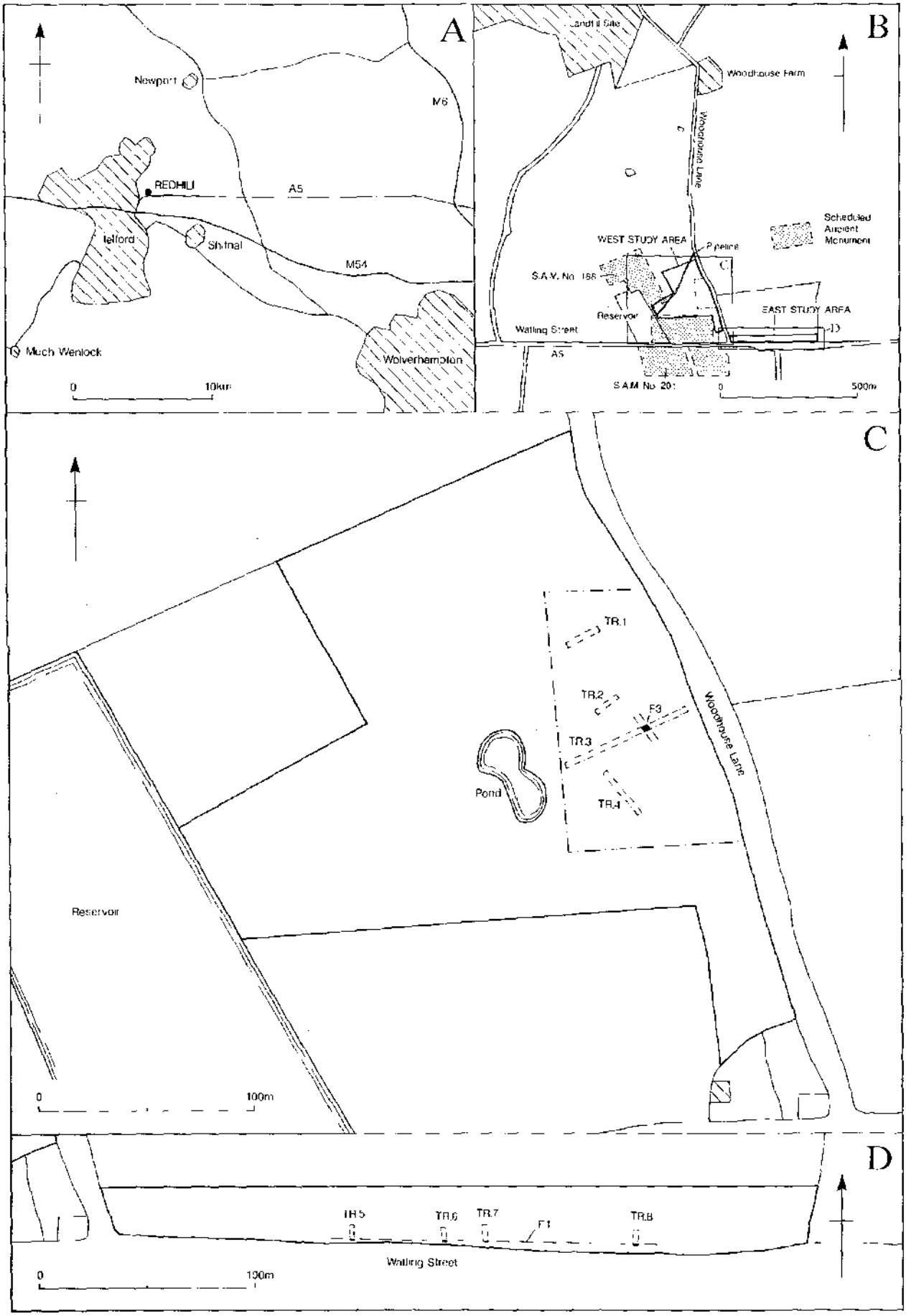
A
Newport
M6
REDHILL
A5
Telford
Shifnal
M54
Much Wenlock
Wolverhampton
0
10km
B
Landfill Site
Woodhouse Farm
Woodhouse Lane
Scheduled Ancient Monument
WEST STUDY AREA
Pipeline
S.A.M. No. 188
Reservoir
EAST STUDY AREA
Watling Street
A5
S.A.M. No. 20
0
500m
C
TR.1
TR.2
F3
TR.3
TR.4
Pond
Woodhouse Lane
Reservoir
0
100m
D
TR.5
TR.6
TR.7
F1
TR.8
Watling Street
0
100m

FIGURE 1

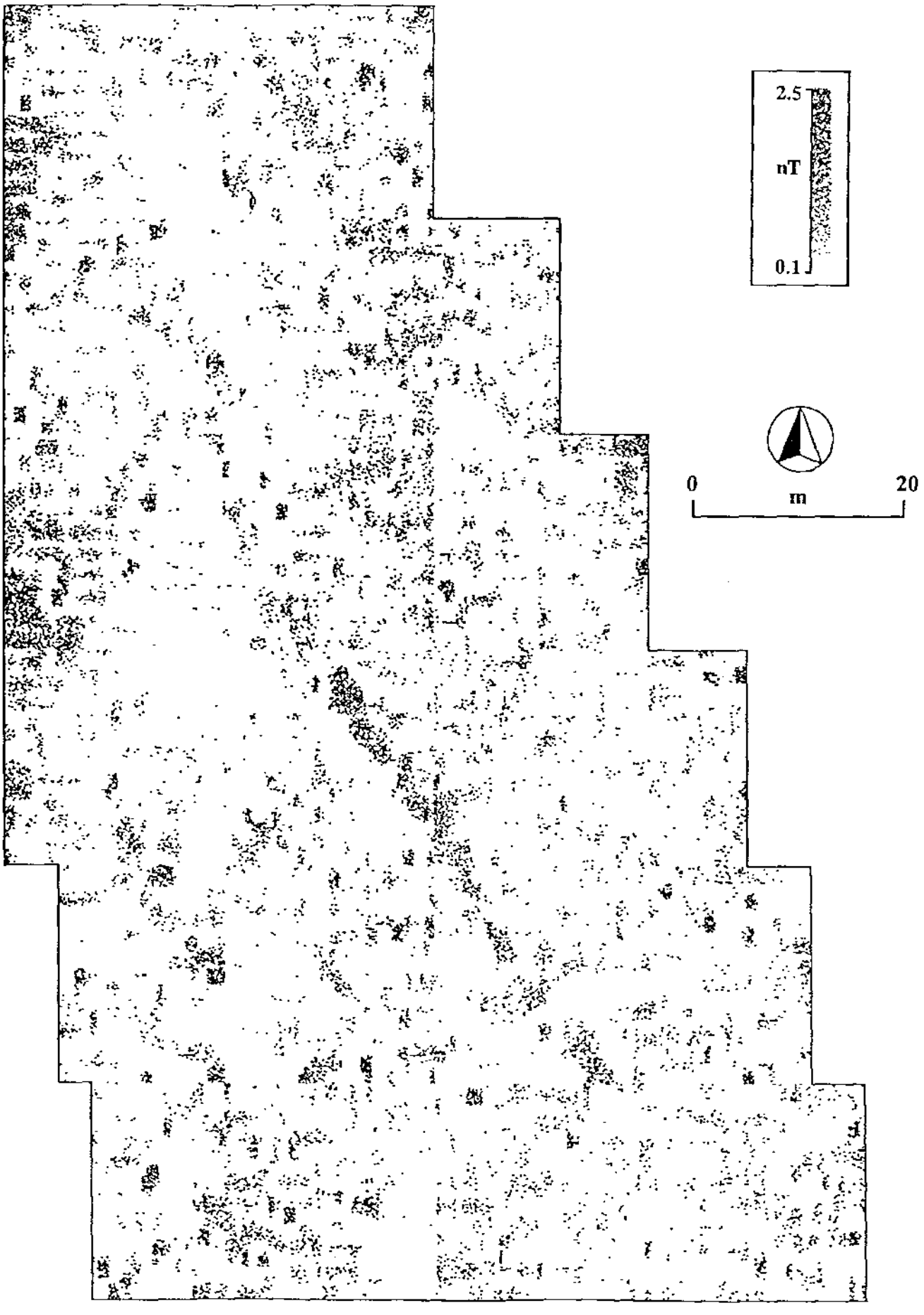

FIGURE 2

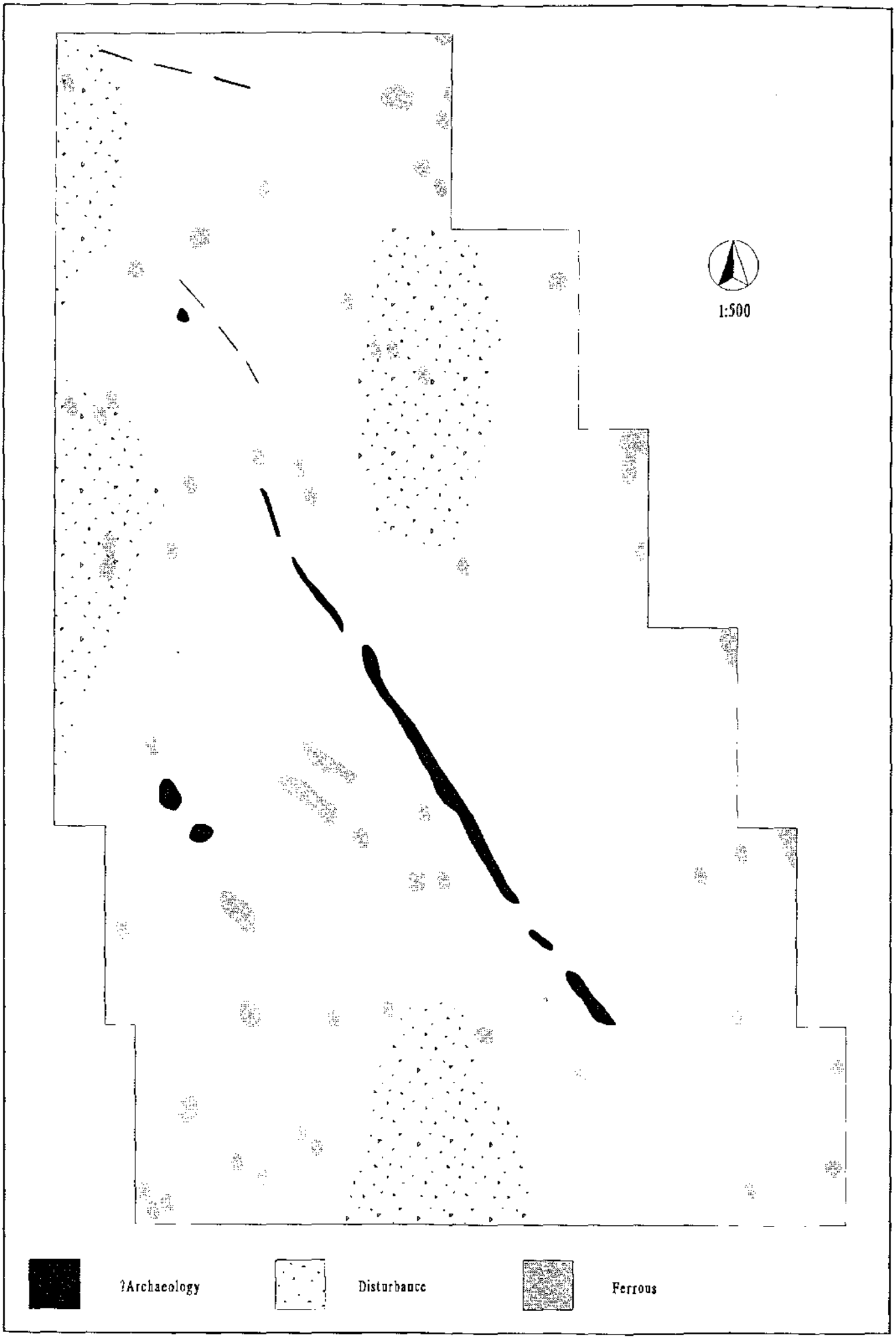

FIGURE 3

ACL Consultants

243 Loughborough Rd

West Bridgford

Nottingham

NG2 7EG

MJ Dunstall