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**An Archaeological Evaluation at  
Wood Farm, Adcote, Shropshire**

by

**Roger White**

For further information please contact:  
Simon Butcux, Iain Ferris or Peter Leach (Directors)  
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
The University of Birmingham  
Edgbaston  
Birmingham B15 2TT  
Tel: 0121 414 5513  
Fax: 0121 414 5516

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In December 1994 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by Mr J M Walker of Kinton Farm, Nesscliffe, Shropshire to carry out an archaeological evaluation of land proposed for infilling at Wood Farm, Adcote, Shropshire (Fig. 1) (centred on NGR SJ 421188). The area for evaluation consisted of approximately 1.8 hectares of agricultural land 5km west of Bomere Heath. The evaluation comprised a desktop assessment, fieldwalking and geophysical survey. Its aims were to locate any archaeological features and deposits likely to be affected, assess their survival, quality, condition and significance, and to identify and recommend options for the management of the archaeological resource. These objectives were in accordance with the brief supplied by Shropshire County Council (Watson 1994).

## Desktop assessment

### Aerial photographic evidence

An initial examination of all relevant aerial photographs held at the county Sites and Monuments Record was made. A number of cropmarks have been recorded in oblique APs within a 1km area around the proposed development including, to the north, a bivallate, D-shaped enclosure (centred on SJ 423189), an east - west linear pit alignment, and a north - south linear feature (all covered by SMR 487) and to the south, two adjacent univallate enclosures (SMR 4571). The 1983 cartographic vertical series showed none of these features and produced nothing further of interest.

The only cropmarks reported in the study area itself comprise the southerly extension of the linear cropmark immediately to the west of the bivallate enclosure. This appears to coincide with the historic field / parish boundary recorded on the 19th century maps of the area (see below).

### Cartographic evidence

The study area historically lies within the estates of the Earl of Powys, on the Little Ness side of the parish boundary between Little Ness and Montford. Consequently, there are a number of maps showing the general area around the site in maps dating from the mid 18th century onwards. None show the study area itself, however, and for a general picture it is best to turn to Rocque's map of 1751. This shows Adcott (sic) with, to the north cultivated land, and to the south rough pasture extending to the Baschurch - Ensdon road. The first surviving plan is that dated to 1826 (SRO 552/8/310) which confirms that the study area was then part of the estate at Adcote (Fig.2). The tithe map of 1844 and another map of 1846 (SRO 552/8/312) shows an almost identical landscape to that recorded in 1826 map. The 19th century map evidence shows that the study area was part of an enclosed landscape probably dating to the late 18th century. This shows most clearly in the regular rectangular fields laid out on either side of the road running west from Adcote.

The study area itself is less regular due to an existing sinuous track leading from Adcote to Nib Heath and a lentoid-shaped plantation which is still in existence. The fields are laid out around these elements but the boundaries imposed on the landscape clearly attempt to regularise the landscape as far as possible (cf the straight boundary projecting northwards from the west side of the plantation). Four of the fields recorded in the 1844 tithe map are included within the specific study area. In Little Ness parish, these comprise Combdale and Big Barn Yard which lay east of the plantation and west of Tinkers Field, and in Montford parish are Gorson's Heath and Close. Of these, only

Close has remained largely intact to modern times; the others have all now been combined. Interestingly, the outline of the north end of Gorson's Heath shows clearly on an Arnold Baker photograph in the SMR (SJ4218/1). This may indicate that this particular field boundary was emphasised, perhaps with a ditch, to highlight its role as a parish boundary. The antiquity of such boundaries can in some cases be considerable but there is no evidence in this case that the boundary is of any greater antiquity than the middle ages. The names of the fields themselves hold little interest other than that of Gorson's Heath which appears to confirm that the area had been rough pasture before enclosure. This conclusion is emphasised by the nearby settlement of Nib Heath.

A major change to the established landscape took place after 1879 when the house was reconstructed by the Darbys of Coalbrookdale (Pevsner 1958, 52-3). This reconstruction involved the laying out of extensive gardens and the emparkment of some of the fields to the south of the house, including some of those within the study area. The 1901 25" to 1 mile series demonstrates clearly the effects of this emparkment, showing that the Big Barn Field ceased to exist and the area of Combdale was halved, the south end being retained as rough pasture, the north end being subsumed within Gorson's Heath. Within this latter field, a small pond shown at its southern end has since entirely disappeared.

The most recent cartographic evidence (1973 OS 1:2500) shows that by that time, only the boundary between Combdale and Big Barn Field existed unchanged and still acted as the limit of the park. The farm changed hands in the late 1980s and part of the park was reclaimed as arable land by removing this park hedge and extending existing hedge lines to the west and east to meet at an apex north of the plantation (Fig.1). A modern trackway was established running to the southern end of the plantation from the road thus retaining the division between Close and Gorson's Heath.

## **Fieldwalking**

### Methodology

As outlined in the brief (Watson 1994), the methodology used for the fieldwalking consisted of establishing the national grid in the field, using an EDM, and then setting out 20m intervals within the 100m grids for fieldwalking. Each 100m north - south transect was further subdivided into two 50m sections. There were thus 10 50m x 20m transects within each complete grid square. The area covered, however, was limited to 50m x 2m for each transect giving a 10% sample. The entire modern field was walked and all artefacts were collected, an area of c.12ha. A more intensive fieldwork survey was also carried out on the site of the enclosure SA487, which adjoined the field under study. This was carried out at 5m intervals and represented total coverage of about 0.25ha.

### Results

The bulk of the artefacts collected consisted of 19th century brick, tile and land drain. Some of the tile and brick was identified by manufacturer's marks as coming from the Ruabon brickworks. Occasional fragments of hand-made brick of probable 18th-19th century date were also located. Much of the pottery consisted of terracotta wares ("plant pots"), which may have derived from the garden waste heaps associated with the extensive gardens of Adcote house. A fragmentary stamp on one of these sherds confirmed this identification. Of the decorated sherds, porcelain and white-bodied wares were identified in small quantities. These are likely to have been 18th or 19th century in date, as were the more numerous sherds of black-glazed earthenwares (with both red and white bodies) and slip-wares. Clay pipes fragments were also noted, although these were invariably pipe stems rather than bowls. The bore of the pipes indicated a 19th century date for these.

Only one sherd of a ware earlier than the 18th century was definitely identified, a basal fragment from a Mancetter-Hartshill *mortarium* which had the characteristic white

fabric and black trituration grits. It was extremely fresh indicating that it had only recently been brought up to the surface of the field. Three other sherds, each weighing 1g, of oxidised Severn Valley ware were more tentatively identified. Two of these, and the *mortarium* sherd, were found within 100m of the geophysical survey area while one was an outlier 150m north-west of the geophysical grid. These sherds can be dated to the 2nd - 4th century, with the *mortarium* being dated from the mid-2nd century. No stone artefacts were identified.

No dating evidence was found which might throw light on the date of the pit alignment seen to the north and west of SA 487. An Arnold Baker plot (1992, Fig. 9.76) indicates that it extends beneath the plantation, a feature which occurs on the earliest maps. It must thus be of some antiquity, although a more precise date is impossible without further evidence.

The enclosure site SA487 was also walked once the main survey had been completed. The more intensive approach (see above) produced a significant group of Roman and later pottery. The latter pottery conformed very much to that which had been identified in the main study area whilst the Roman group consisted of nine sherds in total including four sherds of a white bodied colour-coated vessel. This was probably Castor ware which appeared at Wroxeter in significant quantities in about the early - mid 4th century. Like the *mortarium*, these sherds were well-preserved and showed little abrasion of the slip or broken edges. One complete profile, a 'dog-dish', was identified. The other five Roman sherds were confined to the Severn Valley oxidised fabric group. These tended to show signs of abrasion. The most diagnostic of these was a base fragment which was heavily abraded indicating that it had been within the ploughsoil for some time before its discovery. The exact vessel form was impossible to determine but the thickness and reconstructed basal diameter suggest a closed rather than an open vessel.

### **Geophysical Survey**

A full geophysical survey of the designated area was carried out covering an area of 1.8ha. This detected a group of magnetically strong responses in the south-eastern corner of the survey and a number of parallel linear responses in the north-western corner. The full report of the survey is appended under a separate cover.

### **Conclusion**

The desktop assessment of the area suggested that the first modern intrusive agricultural use of the site occurred within the last 200-250 years when what had formerly been heathland was enclosed. Only one boundary could be tentatively suggested to be of any great antiquity, the line of the western side of Gorson's Heath which coincided with the ancient parish boundary between Little Ness and Montford Bridge. That this was a boundary of some antiquity was suggested by its appearance as a cropmark on photographs taken in the 1970s suggesting that it had at one time been defined by a ditch. There was no sign of this feature in the geophysical plots which suggests that it may only be a shallow feature, or may have been ploughed out altogether.

Fieldwalking confirmed the overall impression of the desktop survey: the bulk of the material was of post-18th century date and the only artefacts older than that date were four sherds of 2nd - 4th century pottery. These sherds might suggest manuring of fields from the nearby enclosure SA487 or conceivably from the undated enclosures SA 4571. It should be noted, however, that the *mortarium* sherd was very fresh and, taken in conjunction with the possibility of an agricultural kiln (see Geophysical Report & below), might suggest unenclosed settlement near the enclosure. The density of post-medieval pottery declined rapidly once the survey crossed into areas that formerly

been parkland. This suggests that manuring was practised only on the arable fields, as would be expected.

The geophysical survey indicated evidence for possible human activity in only two areas. The three parallel oblique lines in the north-west corner of the study area suggested strongly that land drains had been located. The complex of anomalies in the south-east corner, however, are less easily explicable. The responses suggest magnetic anomalies or possible kiln structures. The presence of (modern) ferrous material in this area cannot be ruled out but the size of signal might indicate that the second possibility is more likely. If these anomalies do represent a kiln, then it is highly unlikely that it is a pottery or tile kiln since these invariably produce evidence for production in the form of wasters. The lack of any such evidence from the fieldwalking suggests instead an agricultural use such as a corn-drying or malting kiln. Such structures are relatively common in Romano-British agricultural contexts and the close proximity of an enclosure (c.200m to the north) dated by pottery to the 2nd - 4th century indicates that this is a possibility.

### **Recommendations**

The desktop assessment, fieldwalking and geophysical surveys all indicate that there is little requirement for further work except in one area. Of the geophysical features, we recommend that those in the north-west corner should not be investigated further. Those in the south-east corner, however, may well be of archaeological significance. This being so, it is recommended that this area should be sampled by means of a 20m x 2m area excavation. The pit alignment is not under threat from the proposed landfill and no further work is required here.

### **Acknowledgements**

I should like to thank here the staff of the Shropshire County Records Office who patiently assisted me in researching the area under question. The on-site surveying was ably carried out by Laurence Jones and Mark Allen, both of whom assisted with the fieldwalking while the geophysical survey was carried out by Dan Shiel & Nadia Nemcek of Geophysical Surveys of Bradford. The fieldwalking team also included Fran Bumpus, Les Dolamore, Jon Guite, and Jenny Smith.

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Figure 1. Archaeological and Geophysical survey areas. Bold line marks area fieldwalked.

Figure 2. Adcote Estate Map, 1826 (Based on S.R.O. 552/8/310).

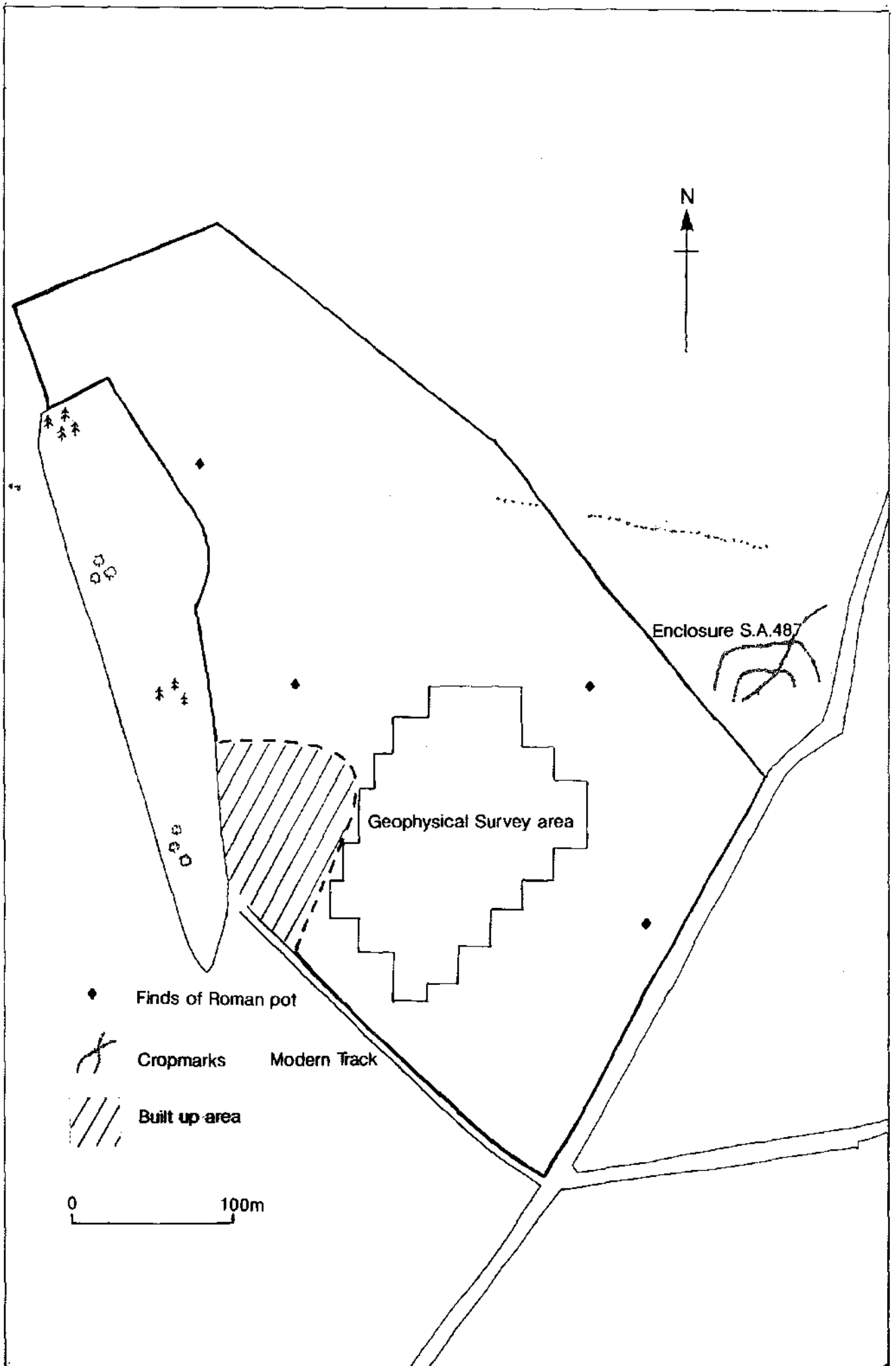


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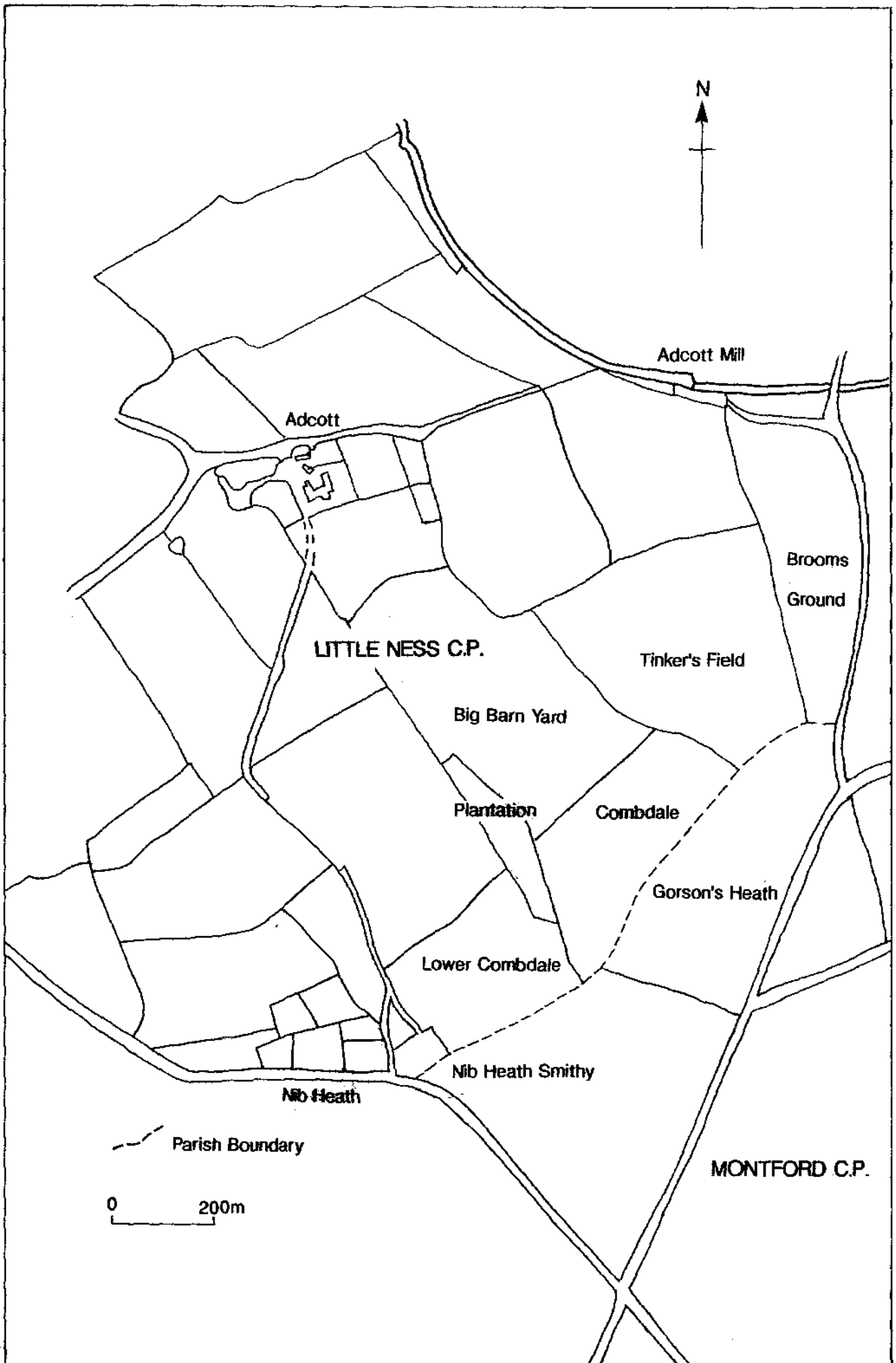


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