

A note on an Iron Age and Roman site at Wigmore Valley Park, Luton

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INTRODUCTION

During the Spring of 1997 Luton Borough Council had an anti-traveller trench dug in Wigmore Valley Park (TL 12 21) alongside the airport emergency access road at the eastern edge of the park. The trench was c.1m in depth and 0.6m wide. Evaluation of the spoil heaps, by the writer, indicated several archaeological features had been disturbed along the line of the trench, with finds of neolithic-Bronze Age flintwork, Iron Age, Romano-British and medieval sherds. Permission for further limited archaeological assessment by the Luton Archaeological Group was obtained through Dr R Holgate, Curator at Luton Museum, and Mr B Clarke, the Parks Manager.

ASSESSMENT

The site is on a clay with flints covered ridge to the east of Luton at c.147 OD (Fig 1). The probable location of a substantial Roman building has been identified in an adjacent field c.200m further east (the Century Park proposed development area) and known findspots of Romano-British material occur at c.1.5km intervals along the ridge. Various features were observed along the trench and were measured from the southern hedgeline (Table 1). Some of these also show on aerial photographs. Of note among the features are the double ditches (F1 and F2) which contained late Iron Age and Romano-British sherds and appear to have been recut along the same line in the medieval period, an undulating dark brown clay layer (F?10 and F13) containing no finds which may be a feature of cultivation or a "wandering" trackway and two linear scatters, or surfaces, of flint and Roman tile (F3 and F8) adjacent to and underlying the modern road, both visible in section. The northernmost scatter (F8) contained a 2-10cm deep "occupation" layer of black soil with sherds, charcoal, nails, reused hypocaust and flue tiles, a glass bead and metalworking fragments, perhaps suggesting a workshop. A bronze follis of Licinius (c.AD316) was found at 0.3m below the surface in the west side of the trench and fragments of an early 4th century bowl recovered from the adjacent spoil heap. An iron "bloom" and other rusted objects found

scattered across the spoil heap may indicate iron working activity. Other finds included quern stone fragments, a jar base holed for use as a loomweight and a fragment of repaired samian. The flint and tile surfaces (if not evidence for collapsed walls or cart rut fill) may have served as building platforms. Late Iron Age pottery was found in a shallow feature (F7) and on the spoil heaps in the area between the two flint and tile surfaces. Other finds of Romano-British pottery suggest a date range for occupation at the site between the 1st and 4th centuries.

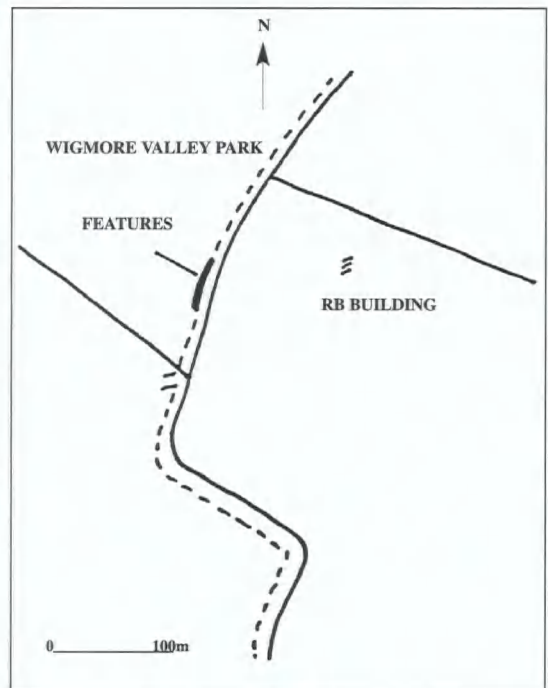


Figure 1

Distance from southern hedgeline	West Section	East Section	Spoil Heap
53-56m (F1 and F2)	Double ditch, brown clay at 0.3-1m below surface. IA and RB sherds.		IA, RB and Medieval sherds
69-74m (F10)	Undulating brown clay layer on chalk at 0.4-0.7m below surface.		
68-70m (F4)		Ditch? at 0.3-1m below surface. Brown fill and RB tile.	
71-72m (F3)	Stone line at 0.3m below surface.		
71-75m (F3)		Flint and RB tile surface at 0.3m below surface.	
74-77m (F?11)	Compacted flint in orange clay "gully" at 0.2-0.7m below surface.		
77-78m (F?12)	Yellow/brown clay mound (no flint) at 0.4-0.6m below surface.		
78-80m (F?13)	Undulating brown clay layer on chalk 0.4-0.6m below surface.		
81-84m (F5)	Ditch? with brown fill 0.4-1m below surface.		
86-88m (F6)	Ditch? with brown fill 0.3-0.8m below surface.		
90m			N/BA flints, IA sherds
94-95m			IA and RB sherds
95-96m (F7)	Ditch? with brown fill 0.3-0.7m below surface. IA sherds.		
97-107m			IA and RB sherds.
101m	4th century coin (Licinius)		Iron objects/bone.
101-107m (F8)		Flints and RB tile at 0.3m below surface. Occupation layer.	
105-107m (F9)	Large flints and RB sherds on chalk at 0.3-0.5m below surface.		

Table 1 Location of Features and Finds at Wigmore Valley Park 1997