

EARLY ROMAN BEDDING TRENCHES AND TWO POST-MEDIEVAL SUB-RECTANGULAR PITS AT WADDES DON

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with contributions by

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In 2006, an archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Albion Archaeology at Waddesdon Church of England School. The school is close to the line of Roman Akeman Street, which is known to have provided a focus for Roman and later settlements, cemeteries and other sites in the vicinity of Aylesbury. The area also lies between the shrunken medieval settlement of Wormstone and the medieval / post-medieval manor of Green End.

A series of bedding trenches, possibly of a type used in viticulture, were revealed. These are of probable early Roman date. Two post-medieval sub-rectangular pits were revealed and share some similarities with Saxon sunken featured buildings.

INTRODUCTION

Between 26 July and 14 August 2006, Albion Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief within the playing fields of Waddesdon Church of England School at School Lane, Waddesdon (Albion Archaeology 2006). The work was commissioned by the school and carried out during groundworks associated with the creation of an all-weather playing surface centred on NGR SP 74609 16515.

The site lies at c.100m OD between outcrops of Portland limestone at Lodge Hill to the west and Waddesdon Hill to the south-east. The underlying geological deposits consist mainly of the Kimmeridge clay formation (British Geological Survey 1994).

The line of Roman Akeman Street runs c.100m to the north (County Archaeological Service (CAS 01050) (Fig.1) and provided a focus for Roman and later settlements, cemeteries and other sites in the vicinity of Aylesbury. These include settlements at Fleet Marston and Grendon Underwood, c.8km to the east and west of the site and, further afield, at Drayton Beauchamp and Northchurch (Smith 1987). In addition, a spread of Roman pottery has been recorded 700m to the east of the school (CAS 06328).

The site lies between the shrunken medieval settlement of Wormstone (CAS02159), c.500m to the south-east, and the site of the medieval / post-medieval manor of Green End (CAS 02184), c.350m to the north-west. Waddesdon itself was recorded as a sizeable manor in the Domesday Book (Morris 1978). Medieval pottery and the possible remains of a medieval house have been discovered in the immediate vicinity of Wormstone (CAS 02159/ CAS 04397/CAS 06607) along with a possible medieval boundary bank recorded in field survey (CAS 02173).

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Rothschild family reconfigured the layout of the village and built Waddesdon Manor. The school site adjoins its grounds.

WATCHING BRIEF

Archaeological features were only exposed in the western part of the site. Elsewhere, the required level for the new playing surface was reached without removal of all the subsoil. Although the exposed features were to be preserved beneath the new playing surface, the Archaeological Officer requested limited investigation prior to reburial.

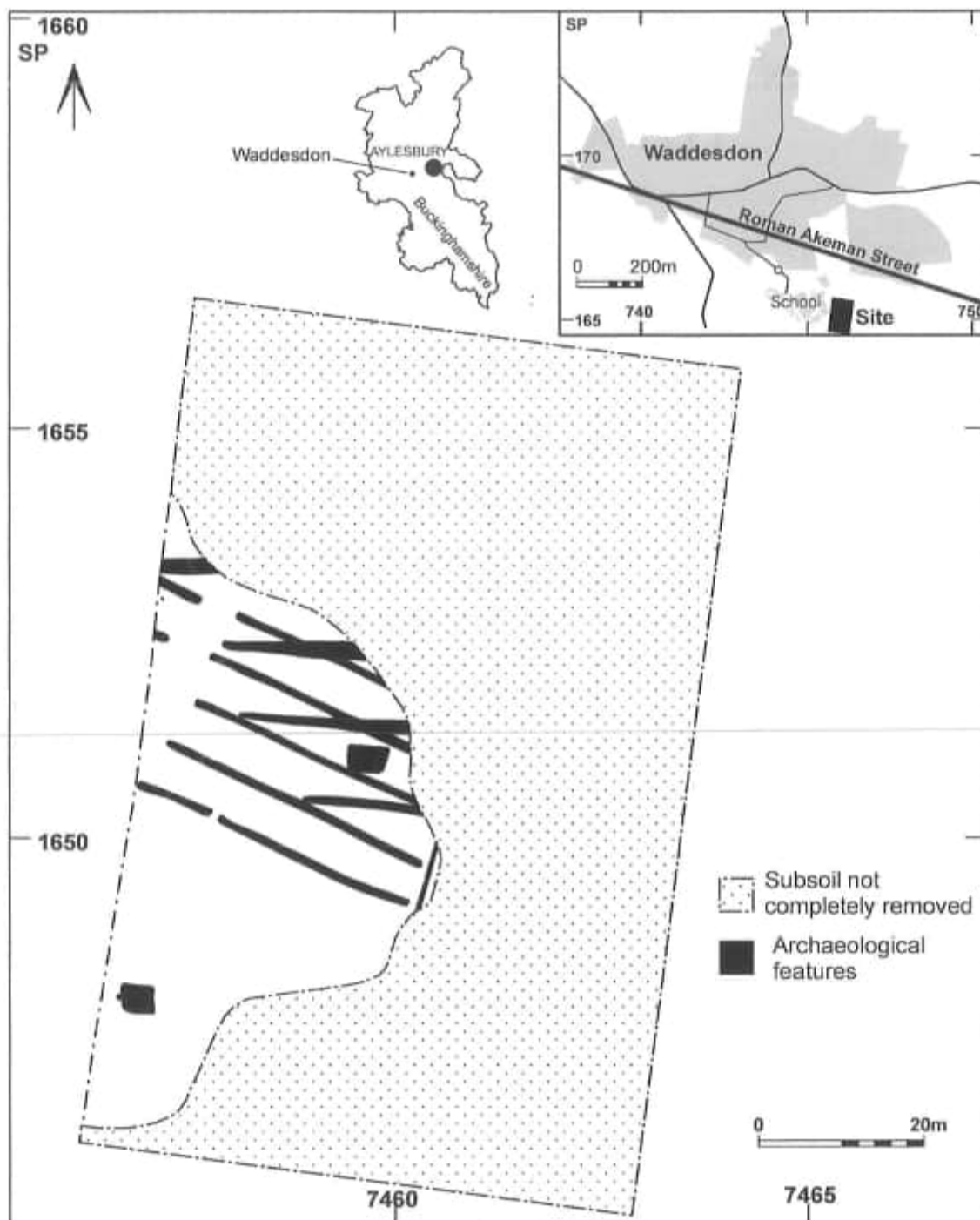


FIGURE 1 Location plan

Early Roman Bedding Trenches

Five parallel, linear features were revealed on a WNW–ESE alignment, similar to that of Akeman Street (Fig. 2). They were spaced *c.*6m apart and were 0.9m–1.2m wide. The only excavated example [5] was 0.3m deep, with steep, concave sides. The eastern end of this array of features was defined by a narrower linear feature at right angles to them. All contained a mid orange-brown silty clay. The primary fill of the excavated example produced a small grog and sand-tempered pottery sherd (3g) of early Roman date. The form and layout of these features suggests bedding trenches.

The regular arrangement of the termini near the western limit of the site strongly suggests the presence of a trackway through them, roughly perpendicular to Akeman Street (Fig. 2). This gap is significantly wider than others to the east and south, which may have provided access to the bedding trenches themselves.

The trenches are crossed by furrows (see below and Fig. 2) of medieval or later date (see below). Although only one sherd of pottery was recovered from them, it is suggested that they are of early-Roman date. Their alignment is close to that of Akeman Street to the north (Fig. 1) – suggesting that they were laid out parallel to it.

Roman roads often had a long-lasting influence on neighbouring land boundaries. Roman roadside settlements and house plots often had extensive agricultural areas to their rear (Smith 1987, 22–30) which may have been the case at Waddesdon.

Medieval / Post-Medieval Field System

Four furrows were revealed (Fig. 2), the truncated remnants of ridge and furrow cultivation. They were up to 2.2m wide, aligned E–W and cut the early-Roman bedding trenches. Ridge and furrow field systems were used throughout the medieval period, and often continued in use later.

Post-Medieval Sub-Rectangular Pits

Two sub-rectangular pits [33] and [35] were revealed (Fig. 2). They were 4m–4.95m long and 3.15m–3.5m wide. At the western end of each pit was a posthole [46] and [48]. These were 0.25m–0.4m in diameter. Pit [35] truncated one of the bedding trenches and both were broadly parallel to the medieval / post-medieval furrows that crossed the site.

Partial excavation of one pit [35] revealed that it

was 0.28m deep, with near-vertical sides and a flat base. Two shallow, circular features [38] and [40] in the base of the pit had concave profiles and were 80mm deep, possibly representing the bases of two postholes.

Apart from a modern flower pot rim (3g) – which is considered intrusive – the remainder of the pottery (72g) from pit [35] comprised glazed and slipped red earthenwares dating to the 17th–18th centuries and a piece of German stoneware (possibly Langerwehe). Other artefacts included pieces of late medieval / post-medieval flat roof tile (126g); a stem fragment of a clay tobacco pipe; and fragments of three timber nails, one of which is a flat-headed ‘figure-of-eight’ nail of late medieval / post-medieval date.

The sub-rectangular shape of these pits and the presence of two postholes (in partially excavated pit [35]) suggest they may represent the partial remains of buildings; while the artefactual assemblage suggests they were in use in the post-medieval period.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The narrow spacing between the early-Roman trenches suggests use for arable cultivation, perhaps viticulture. Similar features were also revealed on the Stoke Hammond Bypass (Moore *et al* 2007, 39–40, fig. 22). These were spaced *c.*6.5m apart with steep-sided profiles (*i.e.* more like trenches than furrows) and also produced early-Roman pottery. At Home Farm, Cranfield, Bedfordshire, Albion Archaeology (2005) recorded a number of parallel bedding trenches with near vertical sides and flat bases. These were spaced *c.*5m–*c.*10m apart and contained late-Iron Age / early-Roman pottery. Sites at Stanton Low, Buckinghamshire (Woodfield 1989, 135–278); Wollaston in the Nene Valley (Brown and Meadows 2000, 491–492); and Caldecote, Cambridgeshire (Kenney forthcoming) have revealed similar features that could be interpreted as possible remains of vineyards.

The two post-medieval sub-rectangular pits are similar in size and shape to sunken-featured buildings common in the Saxon period. Post-conquest examples of such forms of building are rare. Records of a small number do exist and include examples from south-west England, France and Ireland. Suggested functions have included spinning,

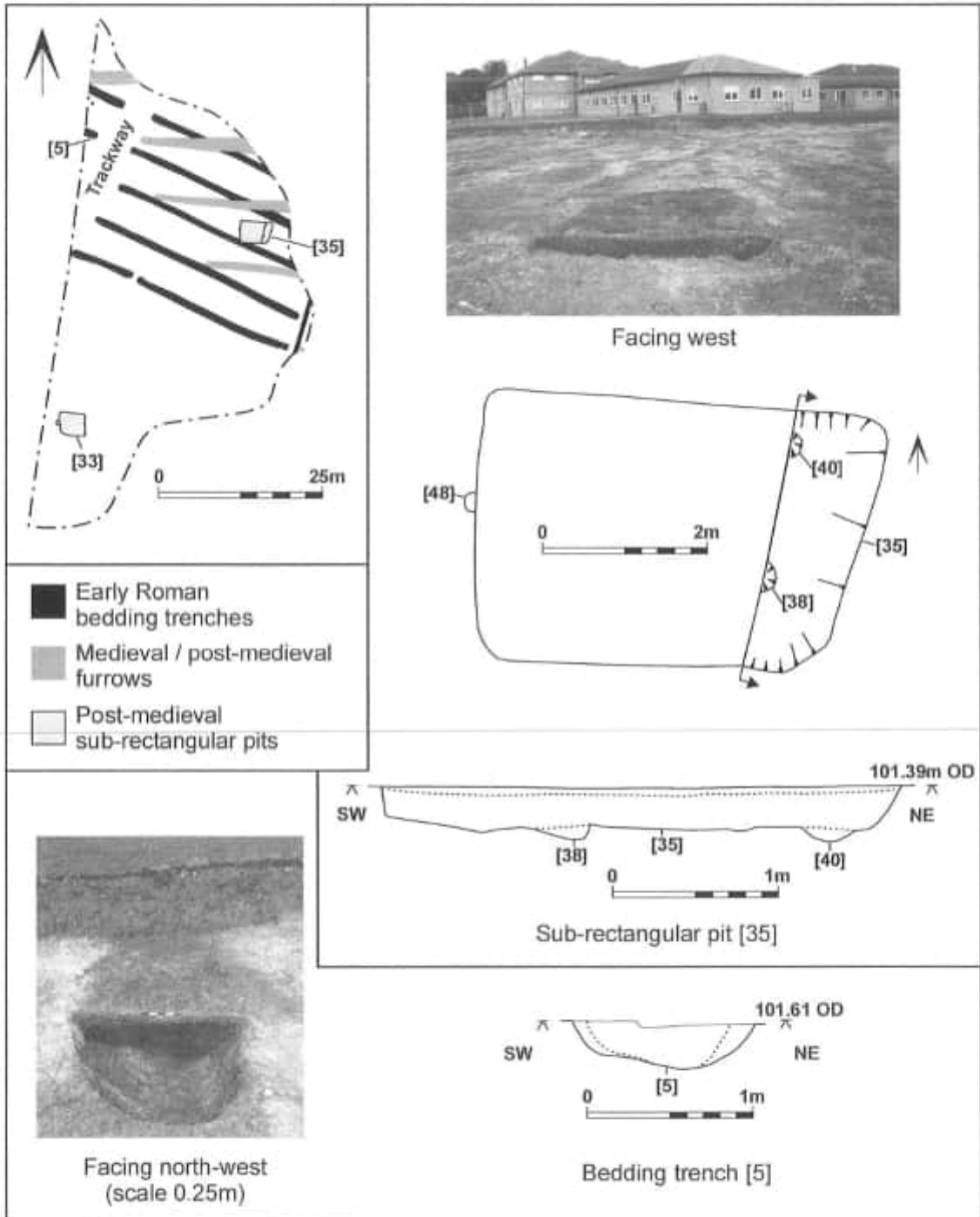


FIGURE 2 Detail of early Roman bedding trenches and post-medieval sub-rectangular pits

weaving, cheese making and general storage (Chapelot and Fossier 1985, 120–125). By the later medieval and post-medieval periods, such buildings tended only to be used by peasants, often on only a temporary basis.

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