

**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
FEBRUARY 2004**

Application Ref: S/2002/1358/PR

NGR: SP 4965 6901

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
AT TOVE VALLEY BUSINESS PARK,
TOWCESTER
AUGUST 2003**

STAFF AND PROJECT DETAILS

Project Title: Watching Brief at Tove Valley Business Park, Towcester
Organisation: Northamptonshire Archaeology
Project Manager: Andy Chapman BSc
Report Author: Barry Lewis MA
Pottery: Tora Hylton
Illustrations: Jacqueline Harding BA HND
Report Date: February 2004
Grid Reference: NGR: SP 4965 6901
Fieldwork Date: August 2003
Site Code: TTV03

QUALITY CONTROL

	Print Name	Signed	Date
Checked by	Pat Chapman		
Verified by	Andy Chapman		
Approved by	Andy Chapman		

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	Archaeological Watching Brief at Tove Valley Business Park, Towcester	
Short description (250 words maximum)	See abstract	
Project type (eg desk-based, field evaluation etc)	Watching brief	
Previous work (reference to organisation or SMR numbers etc)	None	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	No	
Monument type and period	Minor settlement, Roman	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)	Pottery	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address (including postcode)	Tove Valley Business Park, Towcester, Northamptonshire	
Easting (use numbered 100km grid square no.)	44965	
Northing	26901	
Height OD	99.00m OD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	NCC Historic Environment Team	
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Chris Jones and Barry Lewis	
Project Manager	Andy Chapman	
Sponsor or funding body	Hampton Brook Developments Limited	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	August 2003	
End date		
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		pottery
Paper		Watching brief forms (9) Colour slides (11) black and white contact prints (10) Context sheets (53)
Digital		

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT
TOVE VALLEY BUSINESS PARK, TOWCESTER
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Abstract

An archaeological watching brief and a small salvage excavation were carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology during groundworks at Tove Valley Business Park, Towcester in August 2003. The site lies on high ground some 650m north-west of the Roman walled town. A number of heavily truncated ditches and pits in one area of the site were of Romano-British date, 2nd to 4th centuries AD, and probably represent either part of a minor settlement or the periphery of a larger one.

1 INTRODUCTION

A watching brief was undertaken at Tove Valley Business Park, Towcester, in response to a planning application by Hampton Brook Developments Ltd and advice from the Northamptonshire County Council's Historic Environment Team (NCCHET). The site lies in a triangle of land between the A43 Towcester Bypass and Old Tiffield Road (Fig 1: NGR SP 4965 6901). The development will consist of a series of industrial units and associated infrastructure.

The watching brief was designed to meet the requirements of a specification prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA 2003) and approved by NCCHET, dated 19 June 2003. The site was considered to have a limited potential for the presence of archaeological remains, and the mitigation strategy called for a watching brief with a contingency for further work if any significant archaeology was found.

The watching brief was carried out in August 2003. The recording and investigation of a single area of heavily truncated archaeological features was dealt with within the watching brief provision.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The Tove Valley Business Park lies 650m to the north-west of the Roman Town of Towcester (*Lactodorum*). Watling Street, the present A5 road, runs through the centre of Towcester and passes 200m to the west of the development site (Fig 1). Previous archaeological works have identified remains associated with the northern suburbs of the Roman Town, but these have been concentrated towards the modern A5 road.

3 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The site lies on the western slopes of a small valley, which contains a tributary stream, Tiffield Brook, which runs south into the River Tove. The bottom of the valley lies at 90m above Ordnance Datum (OD) and to the west the ground rises to a plateau at 99m above OD. The remains of the Roman settlement were located at the top of the steeper rise, on ground that was still rising gently to the west. The slopes were grassed-over pasture, while the area occupied by the site, which lies adjacent to the A43, was given over to rougher grass wasteland. The site was bounded immediately to the south-west by a large industrial unit. The River Tove flows 300m to the south of the site, skirting the northern boundary of the Roman Town.

The underlying geology consisted of Boulder Clays. These were overlain by clayey subsoil, up to 0.40m thick in places, and a poorly developed topsoil, *c* 0.20m thick.

4 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

4.1 Methodology

Soil stripping of the site was carried out using box-scrapers, and regular visits were made by an archaeologist to examine the freshly exposed surfaces.

On the lower slopes of the hill, Sites A and B, much of the topsoil was stripped to provide areas for topsoil and subsoil storage for material removed from Site C to the west. However, in other areas the ground level was reduced substantially to create a series of level terraces. No archaeological features were recorded during these works.

On the higher ground at the top of the slope, Site C, observation of the soil stripping identified the presence of archaeological features (Plates 1 & 2). A continuous watching brief was maintained during the remainder of the soil stripping on this area. A small excavation team

carried out a rapid salvage excavation of the exposed features (Figs 2 & 3). Areas where features were present were rapidly cleaned to improve definition. However, as the stripping was by box scraper and the ground was already heavily truncated, these features were usually lost in the areas of wheel rutting, making the plan very fragmentary. Plans were drawn at 1:100 and the features were sampled to obtain pottery as dating evidence. All contexts were recorded individually on Northamptonshire Archaeology *pro forma* context sheets. A photographic record was kept in colour transparencies and black & white negatives.

4.2 The Romano-British settlement

Site C comprised a series of heavily truncated linear and curvilinear ditches and a few pits, although some of the pits may have been tree root holes. There were also several post-medieval land drains (not illustrated). The shallowness of the archaeological features, typically only 0.10-0.15m deep, suggests that there had been considerable post-medieval truncation of the natural surface in this area, with a subsequent loss of any shallow archaeological features which may have been present.

To the south there was a linear ditch [8], 0.35m wide. It was cut by a curvilinear ditch [9], 0.45m wide, which may have formed the northern end of a small enclosure lying largely outside the development area (Fig 3).

To the north there was a further isolated linear ditch aligned east-west [36]. To the north of [36] there were remnants of a series of linear and curvilinear ditches on a general east-west alignment (Fig 3). Ditch [25] was traced for 17m. It was 0.30m deep, and much of a large grog-tempered ware jar came from the fill. Shorter lengths of parallel ditch lay both to the immediate south and north [24] and [26].

To the north of these there was a curving ditch [27], with a series of three shallow gullies to its immediate north [28-30]. These ditches were between 0.40 and 0.65m wide. A cluster of three small pits, all 0.70m in diameter lay just to the north of ditch [27]. One pit, [40], contained fired clay but no datable finds.

At the northern end of Site C (Fig 2), there was a more substantial ditch aligned north-south [32]. It was 1.0m wide and pottery was recovered from the exposed fill. Parallel to this ditch

and slightly to the east were two other short lengths of ditch [33] and [34], again suggesting that further lengths had been lost to truncation.

Individual pits lay along the north-western part of the site, [10], [6] and [42], and they all had some Romano-British pottery within their fills.

4.3 Post-medieval activity

A series of linear features aligned north-west to south-east (not illustrated) were partially investigated to confirm that they were post-medieval land drains.

A large spread of post-medieval dumping and truncation was noted across large areas of the south and south-east of Site C. The dumped material contained bricks, ashes and clinker and is interpreted as a mid-to-late 20th century site levelling.

5 THE FINDS by Tora Hylton

The watching brief and salvage excavations produced a small group of Roman and post-medieval finds. The assemblage comprises Roman pottery from a series of linear features and pits and post-medieval pottery from a land drain. The condition of the pottery is good, although a small number of sherds display signs of abrasion. The analysis included sherd count and weight by fabric type. No other finds were recovered.

5.1 The Roman pottery

A total of 140 individual sherds with a combined weight of 3,139g were recovered from 12 individual deposits. The largest quantity was retrieved from two ditches [8] and [25]; much smaller amounts were recovered from some shallow linear features and pits. There is no diagnostically early Roman material, the majority of pottery falling within the 2nd to 4th century AD date range. There appears to be no distinction in the date of the material from individual features.

The assemblage comprises kitchen and tablewares in locally manufactured coarsewares and finewares. The major fabric types represented are greyware and grog-tempered wares; there are no shell-gritted wares. Greyware forms include necked jars, dishes with plain rims and deep bowls with everted rims. The only grog-tempered wares are storage jars, the fabric displaying similarities to Soft Pink Grog (Marney 1989, 174), which dates from the 2nd to 4th centuries.

Finewares are represented by two undiagnostic sherds of Nene Valley Colour Coat, possibly beakers (Howe *et al*), one piece decorated with a barbotine motif.

There is a small quantity of imported wares, these include sherds of Samian and amphora. The one sherd of Samian is a rim sherd in the form of a flange with an upturned edge. It resembles a Ludowici Type Tg dish, which was manufactured in East Gaul and dates from AD 160; such vessels were imported into Britain until the 3rd century (Oswald and Pryce 1920, plate LX, 3; Webster 1996, fig 51, B).

There are nine sherds of amphora. One sherd is furnished with a distinctive protuberance on the underside of the base, formed by a plug of clay that sealed the base of the vessel. The presence of this feature identifies the vessel as a Dressel 20, a large globular vessel with two handles (Tyres 1996, 87). Such vessels were transported from Spain until the mid-3rd century.

Table 1: The pottery assemblage

FABRIC TYPE	CONTEXT/FEATURE NUMBER									
	ditch [8]		ditch [9]		pit[6]		pit [10]		ditch [25]	
	No/Wg	(g)	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	
Roman pottery										
Amphora	4	364								
Greyware	42	312	1	3			6	14		
Grog-tempered ware	16	147	2	1	1	10			38	2122
Nene Valley CC			1	2			1	5		
Oxidised Ware					5	13	1	1		
Samian			1	3						
Total	62	823	5	9	6	23	8	20	38	2122

Table 1 continued

FABRIC TYPE	CONTEXT/FEATURE NUMBER													
	ditch [28]		ditch [27]		ditch [53]		ditch [35]		ditch [32]		ditch [34]		pit [42]	
	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg	No/Wg
Roman pottery														
Amphora					5	39								
Greyware			3	19					1	14			2	9
Grog-tempered ware	1	14	1	21			1	18						
Nene Valley CC														
Oxidised Ware			2	2							1	6		
Samian														
Total	1	14	6	42	5	39	1	18	1	14	1	6	2	9

5.2 Ceramic tile

A single fragment of Roman tile was recovered from ditch [8].

5.3 Post-medieval pottery

Three sherds of 19th century iron glazed earthenware (CTS 426) were recovered from a land drain.

6 CONCLUSION

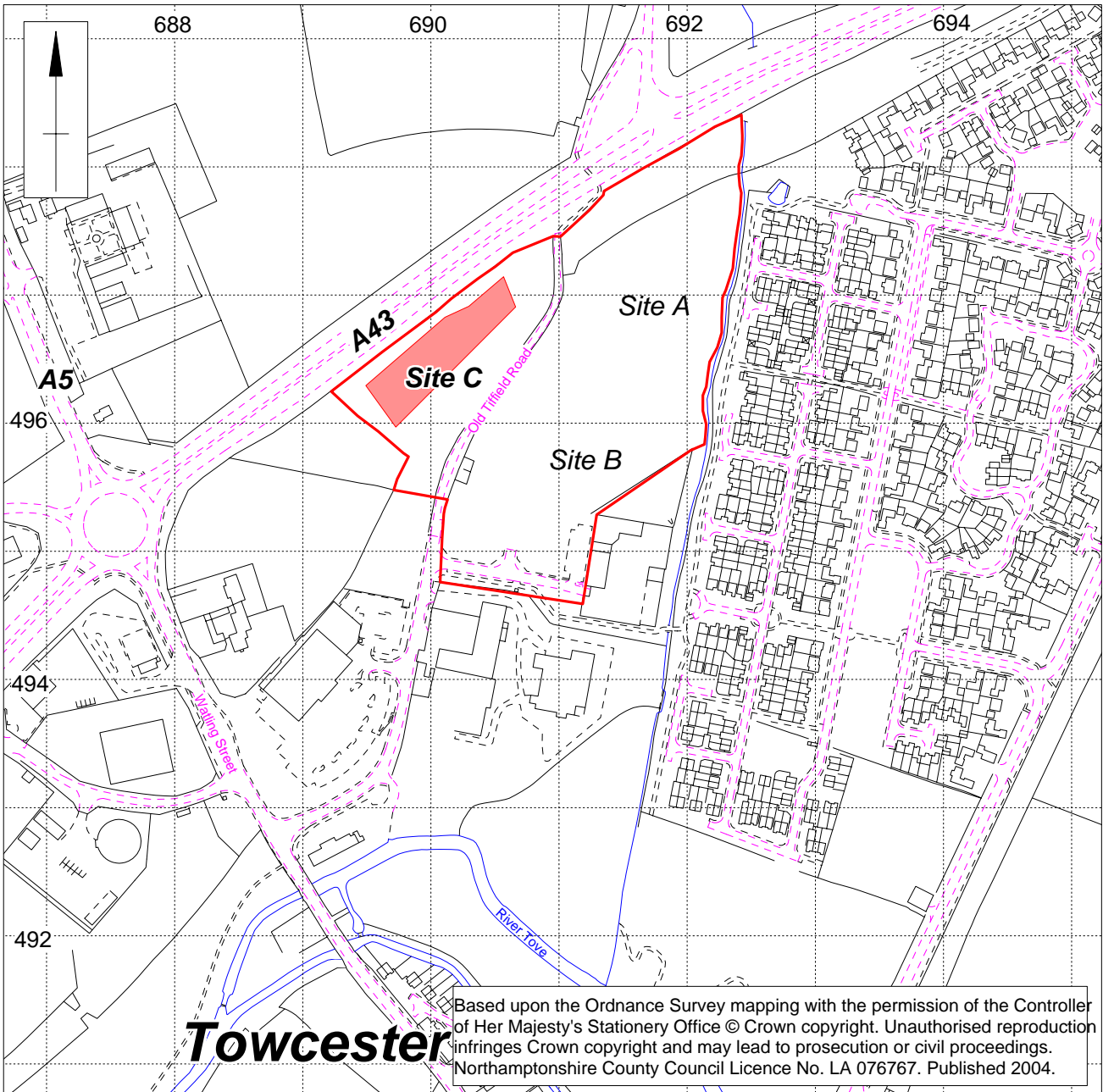
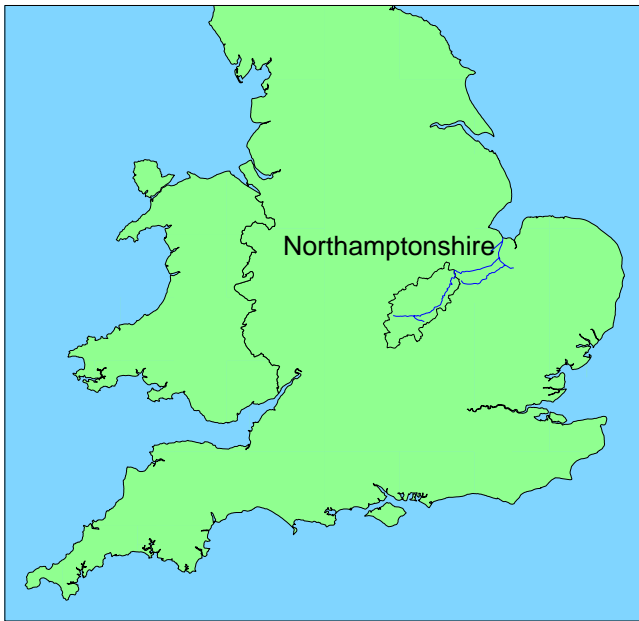
The Romano-British features were likely to be either part of a minor settlement or the periphery of a larger settlement occupied between the 2nd to 4th centuries AD. In particular, the possible corner of a small enclosure at the southern end of Site C may suggest that further features would have lain in the area to the south-west and now under a recently constructed car showroom. This would place the main focus of settlement closer to the modern A5 road, which follows the course of Roman Watling Street as it ran northward from the Roman Town (*Lactodorum*), modern Towcester. The settlement may therefore be the westernmost fringe of activity related to the northern suburbs fronting onto Watling Street.

The alignments of the ditches suggest that there might have been two or more phases of ditch system. The pottery recovered, and a fragment of tile, indicate the presence of the nearby Roman settlement, but any evidence for associated buildings on the site would have been lost in the truncation of the natural surface. The pottery assemblage suggests that activity in this area had begun by around the middle of the 2nd century and continued until at least the early 4th century.

During the post-medieval era land drains were inserted to drain the heavy clay soils for agricultural use. In the later 20th century the site was heavily truncated, particularly in the southern part of site C and later levelled-out using waste building materials. Some of this might result from works related to the construction of the adjacent A43 dual carriageway road.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Scale 1:5000

Fig. 1

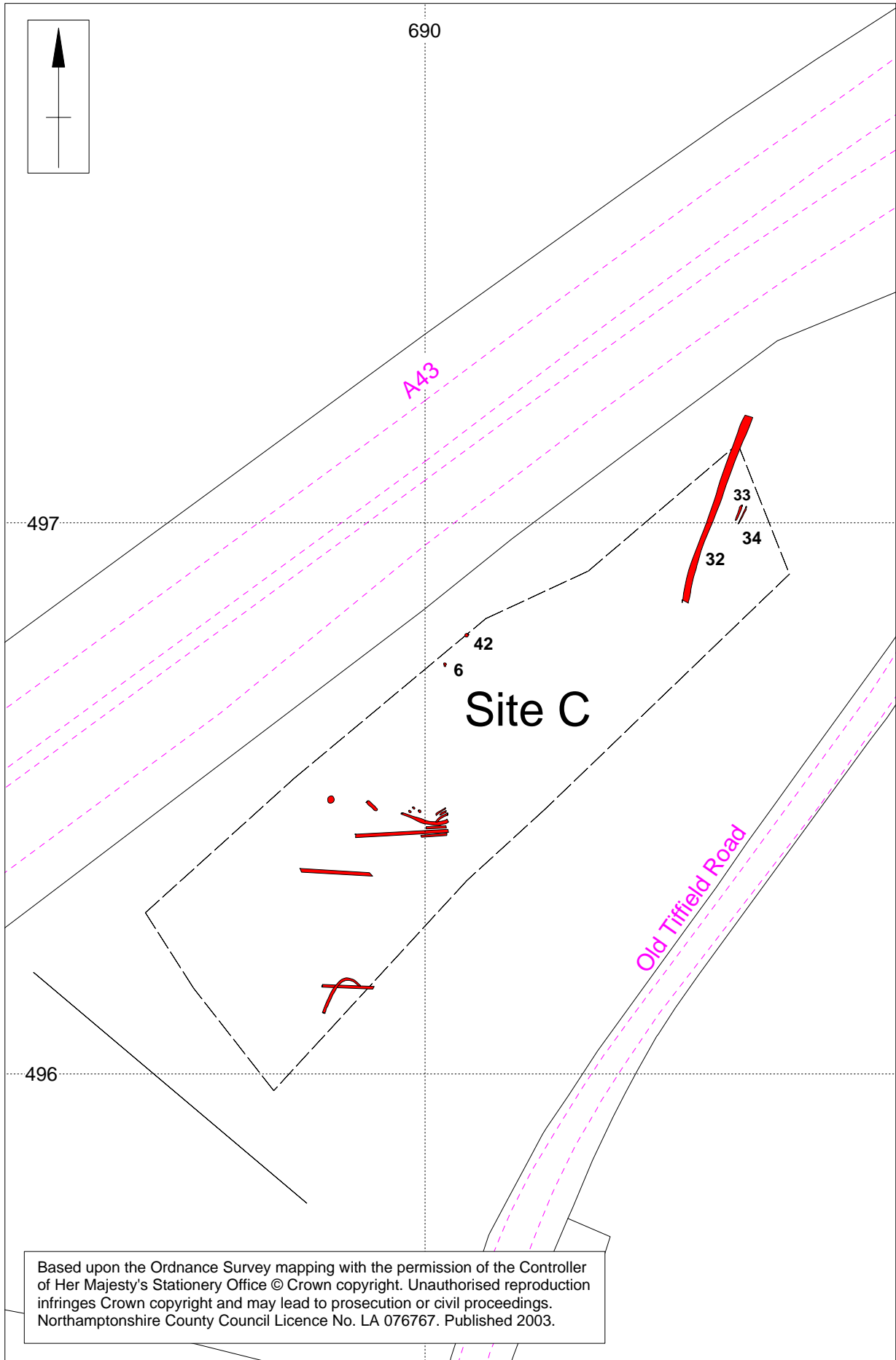
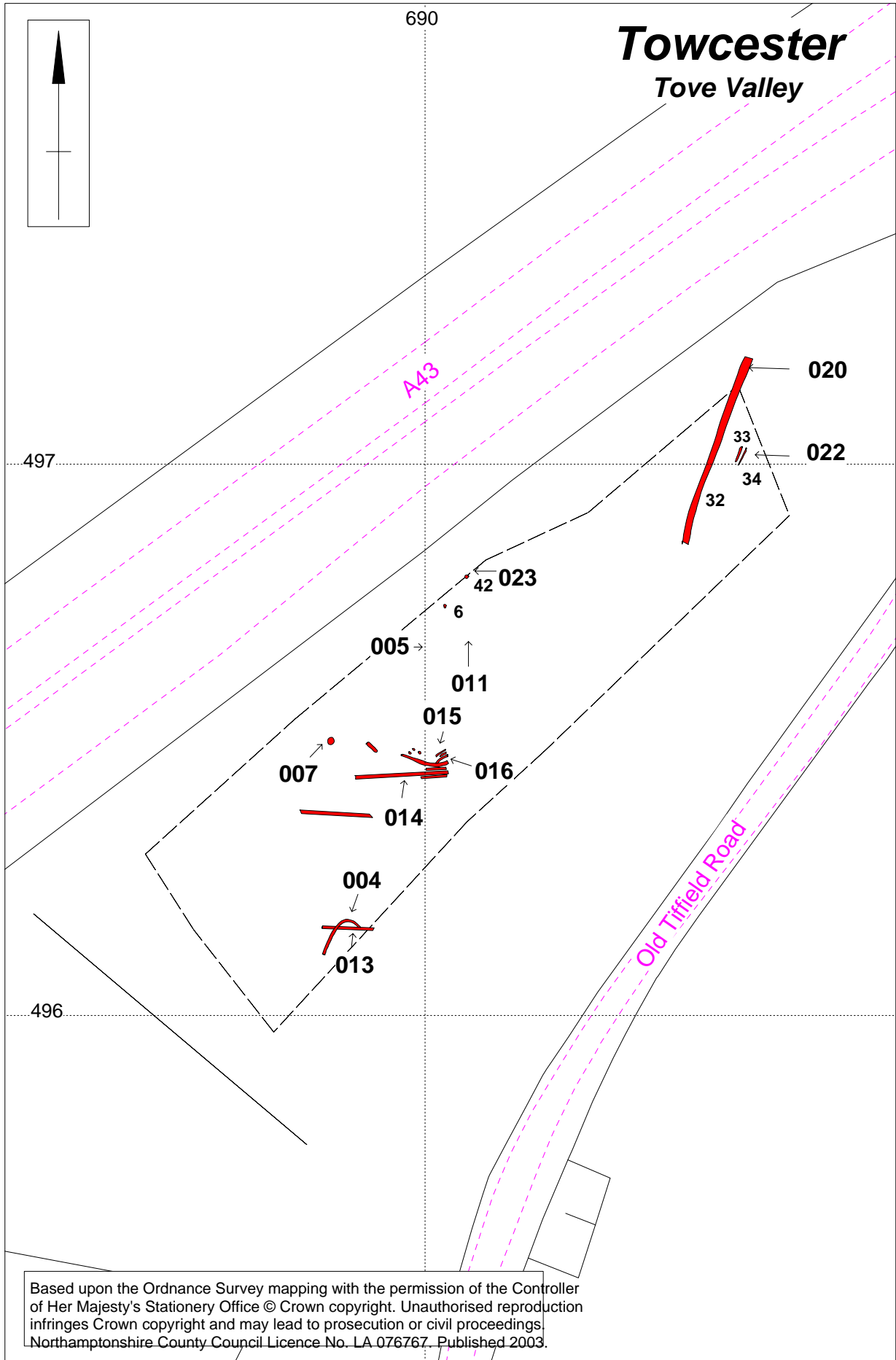


Fig. 2



Towcester

Tove Valley

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Scale 1: 1000

Fig. 3



Plate 1: General view of site during stripping, looking north-east



Plate 2: Truncated Roman gullies cut into the clay natural