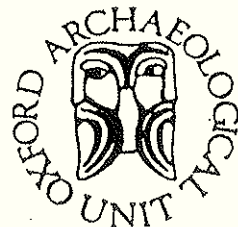


COVINGHAM, (WANBOROUGH) NEAR SWINDON
(Scheduled Ancient Monument No. 888):

Results of Archaeological Survey, August 1987



1. Summary

The trial trenching of the site has given relatively clear results. A ribbon of Romano-British suburban settlement runs alongside the Roman road, Ermin St, the modern A419 on its south-west side and through the entire length of the field. This consists of a deposit of black occupation debris approximately 0.30m thick, and reaching 60 m into the field from its boundary with the A419. The south-west edge of the Roman settlement is precisely delineated probably by a Roman ditch. Beyond that line few archaeological features were observed, except for some possible linear ditches (Plan 2). Within the area of dense Romano-British occupation some areas have been either completely destroyed or partially damaged by the construction of a silage pit in the north-east area and by farm buildings and a pond in the south-west.

2. The Exploratory Survey

2.1 Aims

In August 1986 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a survey of the field between Peregrine Close and the A419 at the request of the Barton Willmore Planning Partnership and with the consent of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission. This field was originally scheduled as an Ancient Monument (No. 888) because it was believed to include a substantial part of the northern suburbs of the Roman town of Durocornovium (modern Lower Wanborough). The purpose of the survey was to establish the nature and extent of these archaeological remains in order to assess the archaeological implications of any development proposals.

2.2 Methods

Following surface examination of the field a series of machine dug trial trenches was cut across both axes of the field. (Plan 2). These were positioned to establish the extent of Roman settlement along and back from Ermin Street. No trenches were dug into or through the Roman deposits on instruction from HBMC. However it was possible to assess the depth of these deposits in several places by observation in existing areas of disturbance. With permission from Wiltshire County Council a small area of modern drainage ditch was cleared on the south-west side of the A419 which established the position and depth of the south-west edge of the Roman road.

3. Results

The field is relatively level at c. 95m O.D., sloping slightly downwards to the West and South. At present it is under damp rough pasture and has not been ploughed in living memory. There are traces of ridge and furrow indicating medieval or early modern ploughing. A modern field ditch and silage pit had been cut through the archaeological deposits into the underlying Kimmeridge Clay (Plan 2). Further south on the site of the farm buildings opposite Nythe Farm it was observed that modern building floors and foundations and a pond had partially or completely removed the archaeological deposits.

Roman occupation was observed over the entire north-east side of the field with the exception of the damaged area. This consisted of a 0.30m thick layer of black occupation soil containing large quantities of carbon, Romano-British pottery and animal bone. The top of this layer was in some areas no more than 0.10m below the modern ground surface and a maximum of 0.30m from the surface. No Roman buildings could be identified with certainty in the narrow trial trenches but fragments of sarsen stone and limestone might indicate pads for timber structures, as previously suggested by archaeologists excavating along the line of the A419 improvement scheme.

The quantity of Roman debris and the build up of black soil leaves no doubt that there was dense occupation alongside Ermin Street along its entire length through this field, probably from the 1st century AD to the end of the 4th century AD (on the basis of pottery and coins). Fragments of prehistoric pottery suggest that earlier occupation features may lie beneath the Roman levels.

The rear boundary of the Roman occupation was sharply defined by a change in soil colour (see Plan 2). Observation suggests that a boundary ditch ran parallel to Ermin Street, approximately 60m into the field. Beyond this line the surface of the natural Kimmeridge clay was observed at about 0.30m deep. A few bands of discolouration within it suggest limited Romano-British activity but these could not be confirmed by deeper excavation.

4. Conclusion

The field east of Peregrine Close contains a strip of Romano-British suburban ribbon development alongside Ermin Street. This consists of a black soil layer with much occupation material, possibly the remains of timber buildings but probably no stone foundations. This occupies approximately 1.2ha or 50 % of the field. An area of approximately 6500 sq m has been previously damaged or destroyed.

The south-west side of the field, an area of approximately 1 hectare contains only relatively scattered archaeological features.

Any building works on the area of Romano-British deposits would inevitably lead to their total removal. Any change of land use could be equally damaging, for example ploughing. Even tree planting or reversion to scrub would have a serious impact on the archaeological deposits. The archaeological value of the south-west area is less convincing. However its development should take place in this limited archaeological investigation would be appropriate.

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5 September 1986