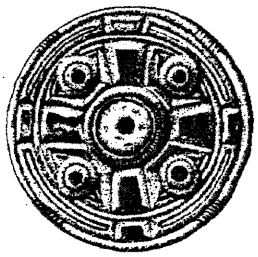

Archaeological Field Unit

# Romano-British Settlement Remains At Mill Reach, Water Newton. An Archaeological Evaluation

Stephen Macaulay

May 2000

**Cambridgeshire County Council**

Report No. 172

*Commissioned by English Heritage Buildings*

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***Summary***

*Between the 6th and 7th of April 2000 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Mill Reach, Mill Lane, Water Newton (TL 1111 9735), by staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit. The work was carried out in connection with a proposed development of the site involving the construction of a single storey building within the present day garden.*

*A single trench was excavated under the proposed building foundation to ascertain the presence or absence of archaeological remains. The subsequent investigation revealed well preserved and extensive archaeological remains of Romano-British date. Buired beneath a substantial overburden were intercutting postholes and pits, an occupation layer and a possible fence/boundary ditch. Most features contained roofing tile, tesserae, worked stone and local Nene Valley pottery wares. The remains date to the early 3rd and 4th centures AD, and are linked to the nearby villas, the closest of which lies less than 50 metres from the site.*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Between 6th-7th April 2000, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Mill Reach, Mill Lane, Water Newton (TL 1111 9735). The proposed development area was 0.21 hectares although the planned building would only affect an area of 84 sq. metres and was located within the garden of Mill Reach. The work was undertaken by staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit. The project was commissioned by English Heritage Buildings (South East), the agents for the owners Prof. & Mrs Coulson-Thomas. The work was carried out according to a brief for archaeological evaluation issued by Cambridgeshire County Council County Archaeology Office (Thomas 2000). The work was supervised on site and managed by Stephen Macaulay.

## 2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The geology of the site is 1st Terrace River Gravel lying within the valley and flood plain of the River Nene, with alluvium also present. Higher ground is situated to the west on the Blisworth and Grantham Formation Upper Estuarine Series. The Roman settlements are generally located on the gravels and higher ground, although archaeological deposits are recorded throughout the area.

The site is located within the garden of Mill Reach, on land which appears to be terraced. The ground level is significantly higher than the mill leat of Water Newton Mill (off the River Nene), which lies immediately to the north of Mill Reach.

## 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) show that extensive archaeological remains, of predominately Roman date, lie immediately adjacent to the proposed development area. The land around Water Newton has long been known to be of archaeological significance (Artis 1828). The Roman town (*Durobrivae*) and surrounding area, has been the subject of much archaeological investigation (see for example Mackreth 1995). Excavations conducted by Ernest Greenfield on behalf of the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments in the 1950's, during the widening of the A1, revealed a portion

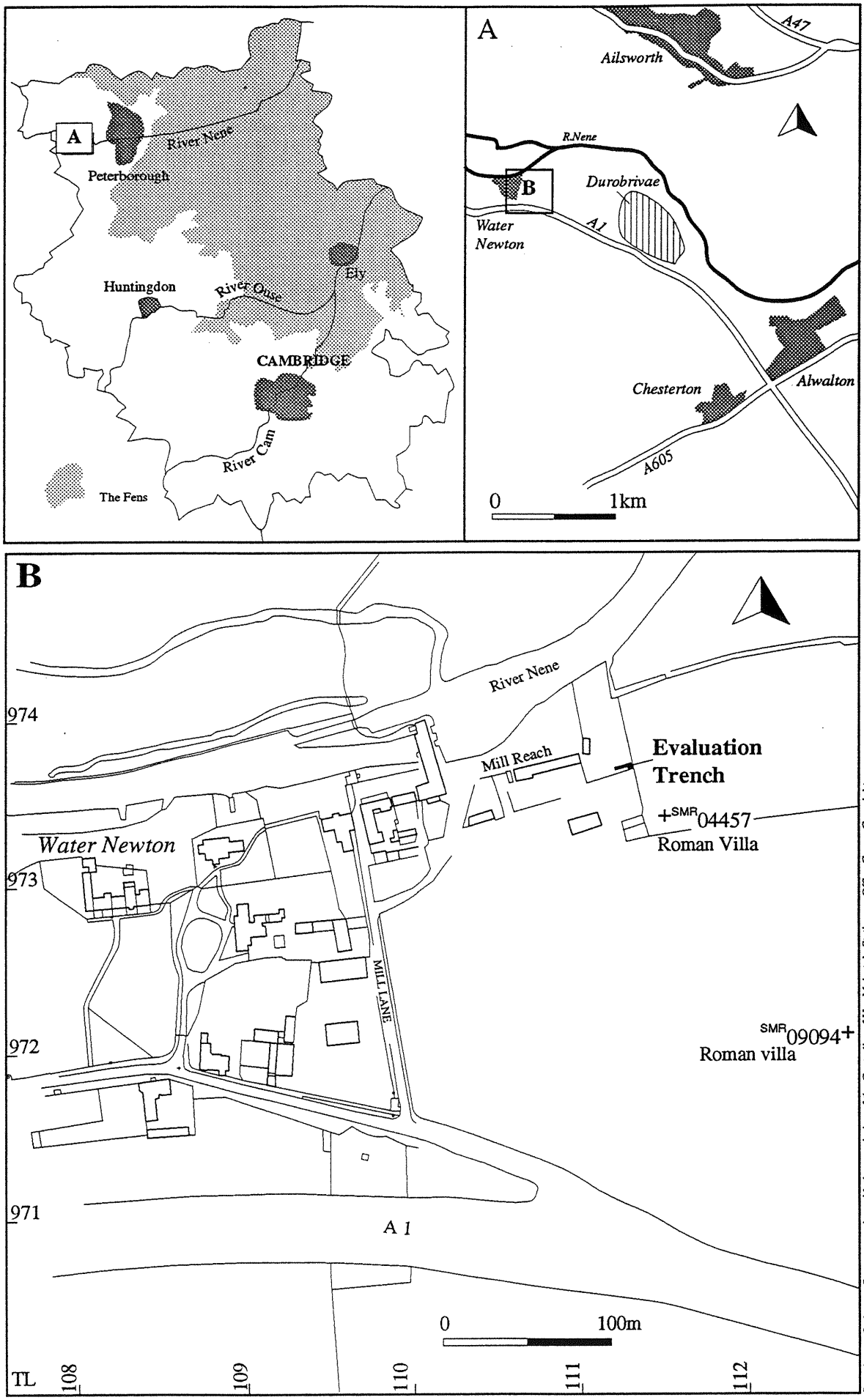


***Figure 1*** *Site location plan*

of the Roman town, and this was followed by the work of the Water Newton Excavation Committee (later to become the Nene Valley Research Committee), which uncovered Roman pottery kilns and rural settlements in the surrounding fields.

**Prehistoric**

Although the Nene Valley is an area of known Prehistoric archaeology, the land around Water Newton is dominated by Roman remains. The only significant Prehistoric archaeology which is close to the site is a Bronze Age barrow which lies on the northern bank of the River Nene (SAM 263, SMR No: 01934).

**Roman**

The site lies to the northwest of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of the Roman Town of Water Newton or *Durobrivae* (Sam 130, SMR No: 9094). This Roman small town lies in a very important landscape of Roman archaeology which includes a number of villas, industrial sites, settlements and forts. The development site lies *within* this landscape.

*Durobrivae* was the centre of the largest industrial complex known in Roman Britain to date. The original settlement developed from a fort which was built some time after AD 44, at the point where *Ermine* Street crosses the River Nene (SMR No: 05316). The name *Durobrivae* literally means the "fort at the ford" or "Walled town with the bridges" (Peterborough SMR) The settlement grew from its military foundation and was considered a town in the late 2nd Century (post Hadrianic/Antonine) and was surrounded by earthen ramparts. *Durobrivae* was situated at the junction of at least three roads, as well as a docking point on the River Nene which was still navigable at this juncture, and was easily accessible from London, East Anglia, the Midlands and the North. The main industries were iron working and the famous pottery industry (Nene Valley Wares). These industries were not restricted to the town itself, rather they developed on both sides of the river, particularly in the Normangate Field (TL 19 76). The success and wealth of the town and associated industries is attested by the elaborate and expensive villas which have been found, especially at Castor and it is thought that *Durobrivae* become a Civitas Capital. Towards the end of the 3rd century AD the importance of the town appears to increase, theoretically linked to the decline of Stonea Grange and the Imperial Fen Estate. However the settlement declines rapidly at the beginning of the 5th century and does not survive the end of Roman rule. It does not form the focus of any later Saxon settlement.

The propensity of villa type settlements is important when considering the archaeological background of the development area. Two substantial villas lie in very close proximity to the excavation (SMR Nos: 04457 & 09094). The closest is thought to lie only 40m to the southeast, it was discovered and excavated by Artis in 1826-1827 (VCH Northants 1, Haverfield 1902, RCHME Northants). Only a small part was excavated, however this revealed a

tessellated pavement, mosaic floors and hypocausts. The records do not mention much pottery being recovered. The second villa (SMR No: 09094) was also excavated by Artis (the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough SMR's both record this taking place in 1896, however this must be an error) and lies approximately 230m to the southeast. Whether these are in fact both part of the same villa complex is uncertain at this stage given the limited areas investigated and poor quality of surviving records. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Sites and Monuments Records both describe the villa (SMR No: 09094) as having a tessellated pavement, mosaic floors and hypocausts, and is in many ways identical to the description of villa (SMR No: 04457). Both SMR's and site observation confirm the presence of a villa style settlement with large quantities of roof and box flue tile, as well as local pottery (Nene Valley Colour Coat and grey wares clearly predominant) visible in the plough soils. The term 'villa' refers to a working farm, so that in addition to any high status buildings, the area close to the excavation and Water Newton would contain archaeology relating to both agricultural practices and outbuildings. Potentially linked to these settlements is a road (SMR No: 09094a) which runs approximately east to west from the fort (SMR No: 05136) and *Ermine Street* and may pass within 40m northeast of the excavation. Today it is visible as a raised bank (*agger*?) in a the adjacent pasture field.

Finally the area was the centre of an important pottery industry. The Sites and Monuments Record identifies kilns to the northeast (SMR No: 02367) and east (SMR No: 09095), south of the River Nene, both within 400m of the investigation area. The largest (SMR NO: 09095) lies in Coneygree Field and was excavated by Artis in 1828 and 1847. This kiln site had a distinct settlement with numerous small buildings (interpreted as potters dwellings and work huts) as well as kilns (Peterborough SMR & RCHM, 1926, 285).

**Medieval**

*Durobrivae* was abandoned after the Roman period and is not thought to continue as an Anglo-Saxon settlement. Burials (SMR No: 09171) have however been recorded close to the town. There is also no recorded evidence of any activity in or around the modern village of Water Newton. The Church of St Remigius is thought to have been founded in the 12th Century, although the latest surviving masonry dates from the 13th century (Cambridgeshire SMR No: 10332). Its name 'Remigius' however suggests Romano-British Christian origins and continuity of settlement might be inferred. There is evidence of early Saxon churches in Castor (St Kynesburgh) and Wittering in the vicinity and the name Water Newton is an Saxon (9th century) derivative of 'place by the Nen' (River Nene).

## 4 METHODOLOGY

A desk-based assessment of known archaeological information for the site was undertaken before fieldwork began. This revealed general but important information about the area, rather than specific information about the site itself. The results of this study appear above as part of the archaeological and historical background and centre on the wealth of Roman remains likely to have been encountered. An additional note is the predicted depth of alluvium in the flood plain of the river Nene which is considered to have deposited on average half a metre of silts above the level of Roman archaeology (Macketh p.150 in A.E Brown 1995)

A single 'L' shaped trench 10.5m x 3m was excavated using a JCB wheeled mechanical excavator with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket. The trench was located directly beneath the area of the proposed building in order to obtain maximum coverage of the area likely to be affected. The lack of previous data regarding archaeology of any period in the immediate vicinity precluded the targeting of trenching to meet specific research aims. Research aims that could be determined were to; (a) investigate the presence, quality and preservation of any archaeological deposits; (b) attempt to understand any relationship with the nearby Roman Villa sites (c) determine the depth of any over burden; and (d) provide a sample of the development area.

The modern ground surface and subsoil were removed to a depth where the natural sands and gravel or archaeological deposits were noted, between 0.60m and 0.90m below the present ground surface. Where potential features were encountered a process of cleaning and excavation took place followed by planning where appropriate. Trench spoil and the excavated surfaces of trenches were scanned by eye in order to obtain artefacts.

Archaeological trenches and features were recorded and a base plan of the site was produced. Archaeological features were sample excavated and recorded using the pro-forma recording sheets of the Archaeological Field Unit. All trenches excavated during the evaluation were described; giving details of topsoil and subsoil depths and the natural geology visible in the base of the trench.

## 5 RESULTS

### Trench 1 (see fig 2)

Trench 1 was 'L' shaped 10.5m long and 1.6m wide. Orientation of the trench was west-east, running parallel to the existing hedge line. Within the trench, a very dark grey-brown sandy silt topsoil Fill 1 0.20-0.27m thick overlay a dark brown slightly clayey silty sand subsoil Fill 2 0.30-0.50m thick. This sequence was seen throughout the trench, although the topsoil and subsoil

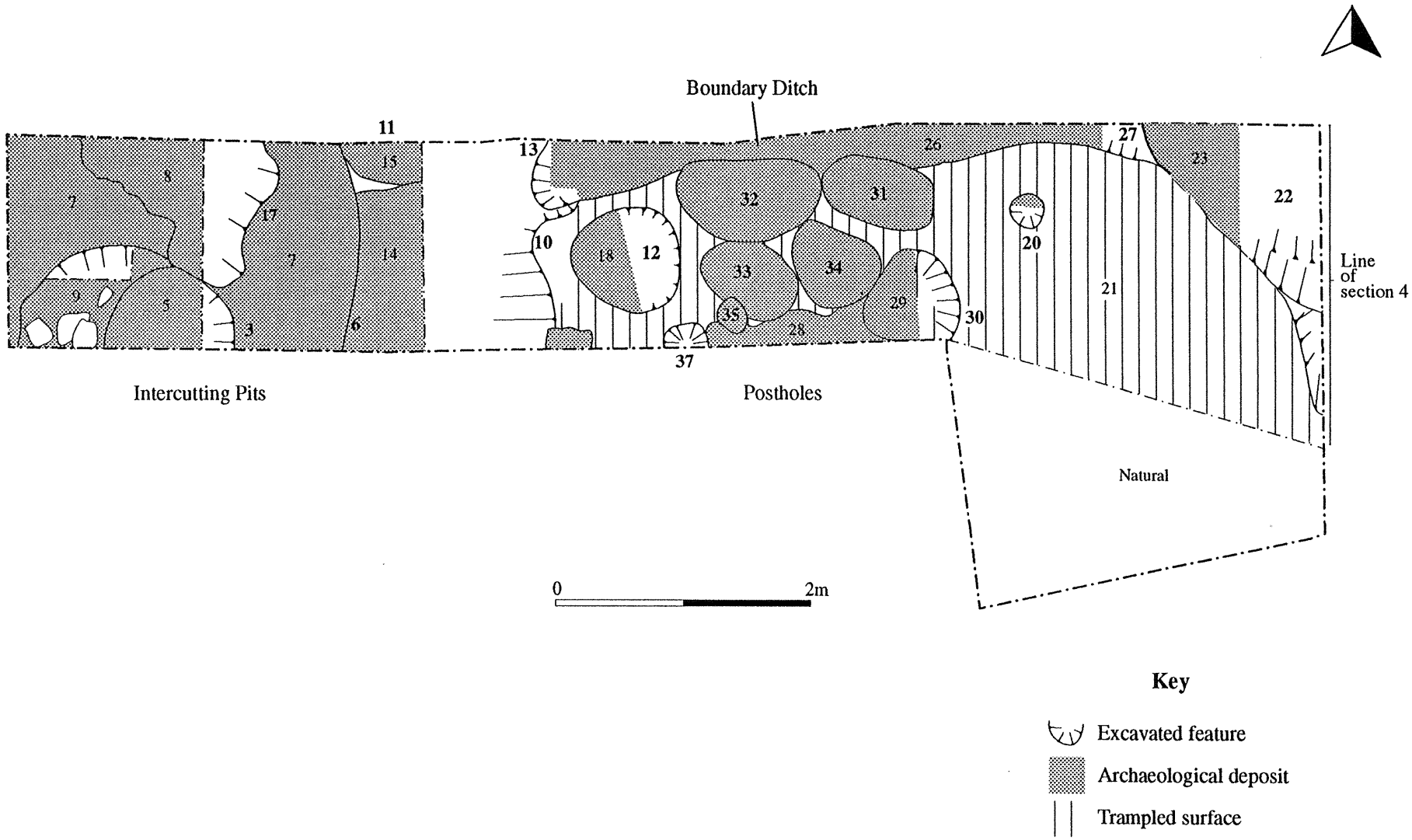


*Figure 2 Detail plan of Trench 1*

thickness was greatest towards the east of the trench. Fill 1 appears to be an imported topsoil, with Fill 2 a buried post-medieval (18th-19th century) plough soil which has been terraced. The natural geology observed in the trench consisted of a yellow (orangy) brown sand interspersed with thin spreads of gravel. However there was little natural observed within the trench. A large number of features (pits, ditches and postholes) were identified cutting into the natural geology and a trample (buried soil?) layer Fill 21. Of the features identified all types were excavated, providing a cross section of all feature types, with no feature type left unsampled. The only features not sampled were some intercutting postholes **Cuts 32-35**, although their relationships were determined.

**Cut 3** (fig 3), c.1.00m long, >0.75m wide & 0.31m deep, oval pit in plan, with steep straight sides, truncates **6** and **17**, contained two fills:
Fill 4, primary fill, a yellow-brown stoney silty sandy soil, contained one sherd 2g of Roman pottery (3rd century NVCC).
Fill 5, a dark yellow-brown sandy silt with occasional large (c.10cm) stones, interpreted as a dumped layer, contained Roman tile (214g) including *Imbrex* and *Tegula* fragments and two pottery sherds (18g, NVGW's).

**Cut 6** (fig 3), c.2.3m+ long, c.1.6m+ wide, c.0.19m deep, large sub-oval? pit, dimensions of which extend beyond the trench, potential area of rubbish tipping, truncated by **3** and **17** (although all should be seen linked in an area of tipping), contained at least two fills:
Fill 7, basal fill, a dark yellow-brown burnt silty sandy deposit, containing a single sherd (6g) of pottery (NVCC - late 2nd-3rd century) and animal bone (12g).
Fill 9, deliberate tipping deposit of building stone and a dark brown silty sandy soil, contained >40% worked stone. Also recovered Tessera (4g) and Roman tile (332g) including *Tegula*.

**Cut 10**, >2m long, >1.6m wide & 0.28m deep, a large steep sided, irregular pit (rubbish?), which extends beyond the trench, truncates 21 (layer) and **11** and truncated by **13**. Contained a single fill:
Fill 14, tipping deposit, an olive brown organic silt which contained Roman tile (462g) inc. *Tegula* & *Imbrex*, worked stone (510g) inc. *Tesserae* and floor paving stones, and pottery (211g): 7 sherds (NV BB2, NVGW, Pink grog temp. shelly ware) with large storage vessels and a cook pot.

**Cut 11**, unknown length, 0.30m wide, 0.23m deep, steep sided sub-rectangular pit, truncated by **10**, contained a single fill:
Fill 15, an olive brown silty organic deposit (midden?), contained fired clay (14g), but no artefacts recovered.

**Cut 12** (fig 3), 0.87m long, 0.80m wide, 0.56m deep, large circular posthole, steep, almost vertical sides, with an irregular base (double or re-set posts), contained a single fill with packing stones:
Fill 18, a dark yellow-brown sand silt soil, with frequent large angular stones (post packing). The posts have been removed and the packing stones

dislodged. The fill contained 7 *tesserae* (121g), Roman roofing tile (898g) inc. *Tegula & Imbrex*, animal bone (16g) and 6 sherds of pottery (23g); NVCC, NVGW, BB2 & local grog shelly ware (late 2nd-4th century).

**Cut 13** (fig 3), 6m+ long, 0.47m wide & 0.36m deep, steep sided linear ditch (slot), potentially a fence or wall foundation, truncates **10** and **11**, truncated by postholes **32** & **32**. Same as **27**?. Contained a single fill:
Fill 16, a dark yellow-brown silty sandy soil, which contained a large pottery sherd (133g) of Nene Valley shelly ware jar (2nd-4th century). Same as 26?.

**Cut 17** (fig 3), 0.94m long, 1.1m wide & 0.12m deep, shallow scoop pit. Truncates **6** and truncated by **3**, contains a single fill:
Fill 8 a white/yellow (lt grey) burnt silty sand & charcoal deposit (in-situ?), with red patches. Contained burnt fragment of NVCC pottery (19g).

**Cut 20**, 0.37m long, 0.35m wide, 0.12m deep, oval posthole. Contained a single fill:
Fill 19, a yellow-brown slightly silty sand soil, contained Roman tile (112g).

Layer 21, a (yellowish) brown slightly silty sandy soil with small stones and gravel. This is a trample (buried soil?) layer (c.0.10m-0.20m deep) which spreads across the site. The Roman remains are cut through this layer and indicates good survival of deposits. Contains Roman tile fragments (804g) inc. *Imbrex & Tegula*, fired clay (23g), *tesserae* (30g) and pottery (22g) Nene Valley shelly ware jar (2nd-4th century).

**Cut 22** (fig 3), 2.5m+ long, 3m+ wide, 0.45m deep, large sub-oval irregular pit which extends to the north and east beyond the trench. Appears to be dug for gravel extraction and re-used as a rubbish pit. Contained at least three fills:
Fill 24, a yellow-brown slightly silty sandy basal weathering fill with >1% gravel. No finds were recovered.
Fill 23, a yellow-brown silty sandy soil, very gravely<25% with large stones <5% and high percentage of building material (tile and stone) <2%. a total of 1996g of Roman tile was retrieved (*Tegula 7 Imbrex*), stone (314g), daub (25g), animal bone (8g) and 2 pottery sherds (62g) NVGW and Nene Valley shelly ware jar (3rd-4th century). This deposit was deliberately tipped.
Fill 25, a dark yellow-brown silty sand with small stones and gravel. Recorded in section.

**Cut 27**, 6m+ long, 0.25m+ wide & 0.26m+ deep, steep sided linear ditch (slot), potentially a fence or wall foundation, truncated by pit **22**. Same as **13**?. Contained a single fill:
Fill 26, a yellow-brown silty sandy soil, which contained Roman tile (502g) *Tegulae & Imbrex*, stone (109g) inc. *Tessera* and four pottery sherds (46g) inc. Nene Valley white ware Mortaria (3rd-4th century), Samian rim sherd (2nd century), NVBB2 (late 3rd- 4th century), NVGW. Same as 16?.

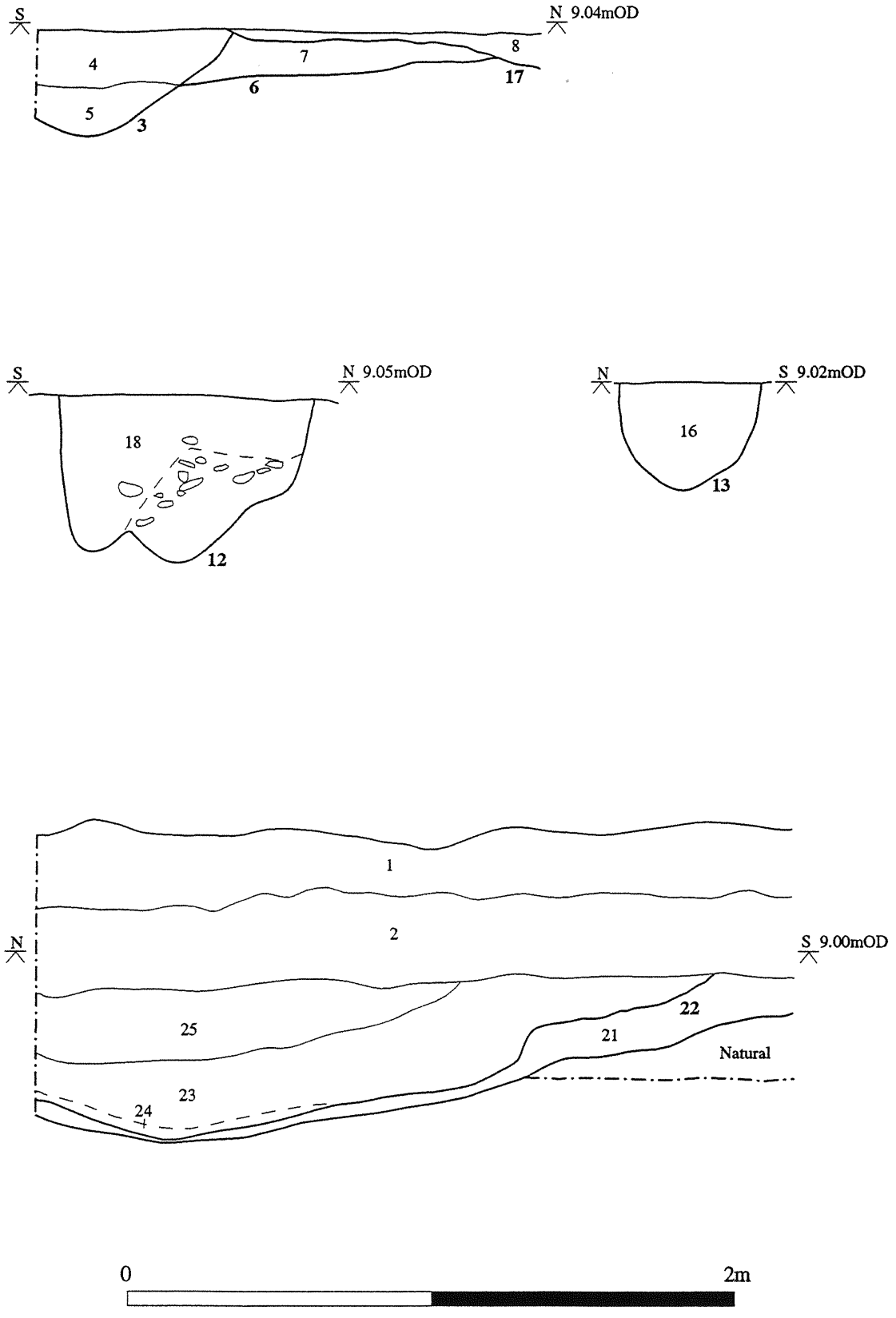


***Figure 3*** *Sections*

Fill 28, area of intercutting postholes/pits which run along the southern trench edge. A single sherd of overfired NVGW pottery was retrieved (6g).

**Cut 30**, 0.60m+ long, 0.65m wide, 0.30m+ deep circular posthole. Not fully excavated. Contained at least two fills:
Fill 29, upper fill, a dark grey-brown silty sand soil with small stones. No artefacts were recovered.
Fill 38, basal fill, a dark yellow-brown sandy soil. No artefacts recovered.

**Cuts 31-35**, at least 5 intercutting postholes, similar to **12** and **30**, these features are cut through layer 21 and may be, in part, linked to ditch **13**. These features appear to re-instate a structure several times.

**Cut 37**, 0.17m long, 0.10m+ wide, 0.30+m deep, circular posthole, steep, almost vertical sides, not bottomed, contained a single fill with packing stones:
Fill 36, a dark yellow-brown sand silt soil, with large angular stones. Not fully excavated, no finds recovered.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The full nature of Roman occupation on the site cannot be entirely determined from a single evaluation trench, however the nature and perceived extent of the deposits encountered indicate that significant Roman occupation has been identified at Mill Reach, Water Newton. The excavation of the exposed surfaces in the evaluation trench revealed archaeological features along its entire length, with little natural observed. There was also much intercutting and a clear indication of longevity of occupation. The nature of material recovered from all feature categories relates to the nearby villa sites, notably the high amounts of roofing tile and *tesserae* identified.

The plan of Trench 1 (fig. 2) raises a number of questions pertaining to the function of the features encountered. A high number of postholes (e.g. Cut **12**) were observed that may be associated to either a fences/boundary ditch (Cut **13**), although the small area observed would make any such interpretation open to question. These postholes, some of which were large, intercut and were substantial features. They are cut through a trample layer (21), the survival of such surfaces clearly indicates a very good level of preservation. The postholes excavated produced both Roman pottery and tile, the majority of the pottery was dated to 3rd-4th century AD and was derived from local sources (Nene Valley).

A number of intercutting pits and dumping layers (**Cuts 3, 6 & 17**) were identified at the western end of the trench and these also produced pottery fragments which were dated to 3rd-4th centuries AD. Of note was the large amounts of building material recovered (worked stone, *tessera* and tile) which

appears to have been dumped in this location following demolition nearby. The area appears to have been used for successive episodes of tipping and potentially burning. Another large pit (**Cut 22**) was identified at the far eastern end of the trench, interpreted as a gravel extraction pit which was later re-used to dump building debris. These pits post-date the ditch/slot and postholes. Very few fragments of animal bone or other indicators of domestic occupation were recovered from features excavated.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The objectives of the project were to establish the character, date, state of preservation and extent of any archaeological remains within the site likely to be affected by ground disturbing development. This information was then to be used to allow an assessment to be made of the proposed development's impact on archaeological remains and to inform an appropriate mitigation strategy. Detailed plans of the proposed development are available, which involve the construction of a single storey building, for which the potential impact on below-ground remains over the whole development area is likely to be extensive.

The project has been very successful in achieving its objectives. Archaeological remains were identified throughout the evaluation trench. The evaluation has identified that extensive Roman remains survive in a well preserved condition, at a depth of c0.50m below the present ground surface (8.90m O.D.). The presence of a buried soil or trample layer indicates this good preservation and the depth of overburden (c0.50m-0.77m) below present ground surface has protected the buried remains.

The density and nature of the remains identified have made it possible to make some predictive models. The area has structural (postholes) and boundary features (ditch slot) which pre-date the use of the site for gravel quarrying and demolition tipping. The nature of artefacts recovered (roofing tile, *tessera* and building stone) indicate that the activities encountered relate, in part, to the nearby villa complexes.

In summary the archaeology encountered dates to the Roman period and is likely to be from activities associated with the villa site located 40m to the southeast. These remains are well preserved and extend in all directions beyond the evaluation trench. Any deep excavation (>0.50m below ground level) during the proposed development would affect these deposits.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author would like to thank the owners Prof. & Mrs Coulson-Thomas who funded the project, and their agent Julian Bluck (English Heritage Buildings) who commissioned the work. The project was undertaken by Stephen Macaulay, who along with Graham Clarke worked on site. Jon Cane produced the illustrations. The brief for archaeological work was written by Andy Thomas, who also visited the site and monitored the evaluation. Finally, I would again like to thank the Coulson-Thomas's who showed a great interest in the dig and kept the staff supplied with tea and coffee throughout the time we were in their garden.

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## APPENDIX A - WNTMR00 Mill Reach, Water Newton, Ceramic Report by Stephen Macaulay

### The Pottery

An assemblage of 30 sherds of pottery was recovered from the evaluation at Mill Reach, Water Newton. The majority of this material was Roman 95%, with 37 out of 38 sherds derived from local sources and only a single sherd of Central Gaulish Samian. The Roman pottery dates to the early 3rd to 4th centuries AD during the period of major Roman activity in the Water Newton and Castor areas. Pottery styles identified include cooking ware, table wares (dish & flagons) and a number of large shelly ware storage jars. The assemblage was dominated, unsurprisingly, by local grey wares and Nene Valley colour coat fine wares.

The remainder of this assemblage implies Roman domestic activity, however it is small given the proximity to local kilns and villas. The pottery is unabraded with some large fragments suggesting excellent survival *in situ*.

| Context | Description | Total Wt. | Sherd Nos. | Context Date Range |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 19th C Bone China, Med Green Glazed, NVCC bs | 35g | 3 | Post-Medieval |
| 4 | NVCC flagon bs | 2g | 1 | 3rd-4th century AD |
| 5 | NVGW cooking pot rim | 18g | 2 | 2nd-4th century AD |
| 7 | NVCC bs | 6g | 1 | 2nd-4th century AD |
| 8 | NVCC bs (burnt) | 19g | 1 | 2nd-4th century AD |
| 14 | BB cook pot, NVGW bs, RSG grog temp. large storage jar rim | 211g | 7 | 3rd-4th century AD |
| 16 | NVSW grog tempered large storage jar lg. bs | 1 | 133g | 2nd-4th century AD |
| 18 | NVCC with lattice decoration, NVGW, BB2 dish, NVSW | 6 | 236 | 3rd-4th century AD |
| 21 | RSG grog tempered storage jar | 1 | 22 | 2nd-4th century AD |
| 23 | NVGW bs, RSG grog tempered large storage jar rim | 2 | 62g | 2nd-4th century AD |
| 26 | BB2, NVGW cook pot, CGS rim, Nene Valley White ware mortaria | 4 | 46g | 3rd-4th century AD |
| 28 | NVCC overfired bs | 1 | 6g | 3rd-4th century AD |

NVGW = Nene Valley grey ware, NVCC = Nene Valley colour-coat, RSG = Roman Shell Gritted ware, BB = Black Burnished ware, CGS = Central Gaulish Samian. rs = rim sherd, bs = body sherd

### The Tile (Ceramic Building Material)

A total of 5320g of tile was recovered from the evaluation at Mill Reach, Water Newton. This represents a substantial assemblage considering the small size of the investigation, however not entirely surprising given the proximity of two villa estates. The fabric is the usual hard fired buff red and red-brown colour with a grey core, almost certainly produced locally. *Tegulae* (square roof tile) and *Imbrex* (curved roof tile) are the most frequent types encountered and must originate from a tiled building in the close proximity. Much of the material has been deliberately dumped, along with *tessera* and worked stone, presumably following nearby demolition activities. In conclusion the assemblage is entirely consistent with that to be expected close to and part of a Roman villa estate.