ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE SOMERSET CLAYLANDS

Report on Survey Work
in 1984-85

Summary report on the area north
of the Polden Hills.

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1. SUMMARY

1.1 This report outlines the result of the first phase of a detailed archaeological survey of those portions of the Somerset Levels and Moors which are composed of clay and alluvium.

1.2 These areas contain many archaeological features and their importance was identified in the Somerset County Council's Levels and Moors Plan. Policy Arch. 6 (part 2) in the Plan requires the County Council to undertake survey in the area in order to define precisely the types of features, their location and importance.

1.3 The survey has identified three major zones of archaeological interest:

1.3.1 The Upper Axe Valley.

1.3.2 An area of 5 sq kilometres (2 sq miles) north-east of Mark.

1.3.3 An area of 60 sq kilometres (23 sq miles) north of the west end of the Polden Hills.

1.4 In all these areas there are extensive earthworks representing settlements, roads, fields and drainage systems. Evidence at present available indicates that these date to the Romano-British period (50 A.D.-450 A.D.). They are of national importance.

1.5 The survey has produced important new insights into the history of the Somerset Levels. The main conclusions are

1.5.1 The Axe valley was of major importance as an agricultural area in the Roman period.

1.5.2 Over much of the area north of the Polden Hills a programme of land reclamation and improvement was carried out in the early Roman period. The result was a planned landscape covering at least 150 sq km (60 sq miles).

1.5.3 Parts of the coastal area were flooded by the sea in the late Roman period. Along the new shoreline a salt production industry was established.

1.5.4 The waterlogged condition of the subsoil means that such material as wood, pollen and other organic remains should survive, adding greatly to the information recoverable from the sites.

1.6 The chief recommendations arising from the report are

1.6.1 Extension of the survey into the remaining clay areas of the Levels and Moors. This is being undertaken in 1985-86 with assistance from the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission.

1.6.2 More detailed assessment of areas of great importance in order to evaluate their archaeological potential and the preservation of palaeo-environmental information.

1.6.3 The preparation of detailed proposals for conservation of sites, including:

(i) Recommendations for Scheduling as Ancient Monuments.

(ii) Revision of the Areas of High Archaeological Potential as defined in the Levels and Moors Plan (Policy Arch. 3).

(iii) Preparation of management guidelines for sites, for distribution to landowners and occupiers.

(iv) The desirability of a heritage centre to make information available locally.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 This survey was undertaken by the Western Archaeological Trust (WAT) on the initiative of the Somerset County Planning Department (SCPD). The work was carried out over a staggered three-month period during the financial year 1984-85 and was funded by Somerset County Council.

Acknowledgement is made to Dr Ian Burrow and Ed Dennison of the SCPD for their practical help and discussion during the survey.

2.2 SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

Stage 1. Examination and plotting of the aerial photographic evidence.
Stage 2. Field assessment of aerial photographic data.
Stage 3. Incorporation of survey data into the SCPD Sites and Structures Record (SSR).
Stage 4. Summary report of survey.

2.3 AREA OF SURVEY

The area examined lay between the Avon County boundary in the north and the Polden Hills in the south. The western limit was defined by the low water mark in the Bristol Channel but went as far west as Combwich in the south of the area. The eastern limit lay on a north south line through Westbury-sub-Mendip and Godney (OS ST 50 easting).

Approximately 400 square kilometres were covered by the survey and 18 OS 1:10000 sheets completed. In the interests of systematic county coverage whole OS sheets were recorded even though some portion of Mendip or other non alluvial clay land was included on them.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Examination and plotting of the aerial photographic evidence.

The first stage of the survey comprised the examination and sketch plotting, at 1:10000 on overlays, of the aerial photographic evidence. A gazetteer was made recording grid square, location, parish, height OD, a short description of the site and a list of the aerial photographs from which the features were recorded.

The recording of natural features from previous landscapes was confined to abandoned river beds, roddens and creek systems in an attempt to relate

them to archaeological and historic landscape features. These natural elements recorded in the survey were not plotted on the archaeological record overlays but separately on the base maps.

Approximately 600 vertical aerial photographs were consulted and came from the following sources:-

(i) RAF, 1946. Scale approx 1:10000, held by the Local History Library, Taunton.

(ii) Hunting Surveys Ltd, 1971. Scale approx 1:12000, held by SCPD.

(iii) Cambridge University coverage, 1975. Scale approx 1:18000, held by SCPD.

(iv) Hunting Surveys Ltd, 1981. Scale approx 1:12000, held by SCPD.

This stage of the survey took 30 days to complete.

3.2 Field assessment of the aerial photographic evidence.

This stage of the survey involved field assessment of the evidence derived from the aerial photographs and was approached in two ways.

(i) The first objective was to assess the value of the aerial photographic evidence and for this purpose SCC land holdings were used as a basis for random sampling in the field.

(ii) The second objective was the examination and definition on the ground of areas of particular significance identified initially from the aerial photographic evidence of Stage 1.

Field recording was undertaken at two levels. The first, more general recording, comprised written descriptions of the site with estimated vertical dimensions, sketch plans and profiles, with paced or measured dimensions, and,where appropriate, a photographic record was made. Other information collected included:-

Parish, name and location of site.

OS 1:10000 sht, NGR, height OD.

Site type, period, form.

Condition of site (A-E).

Owner, occupier.

Area status, site status.

Area vegetation, site vegetation (where significant).

Land use.

Management recommendations.

Source, type/records.

The second level of field recording comprised detailed hachure plans being made at 1:500. This level of recording was undertaken to provide a sample of the quality and detail of the surviving Romano-British (RB) earthwork

sites and to demonstrate the multiphase nature of settlements from this period on the Levels. The detailed surveys made at this scale had the additional value of being on scheduled sites and in an area of the Axe Valley designated by the SCPD as an Area of High Archaeological Potential (AHAP).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Examination and plotting of the aerial photographic evidence

4.1.1 The SCPD programme of updating the SSR graphic record has not, unfortunately, started in this area. The absence of up-to-date SSR maps at 1:10000 scale has meant that no quantification of new sites recorded from the aerial photographic evidence has been attempted. The contribution to the record, however, is likely to be substantial. Many new sites and extensive archaeological landscapes have been recorded in addition to known sites being amplified and areas of known landscape remains better understood. The following is a list of feature types recorded:-

Deserted farm sites	RB, med, post med
Windmill mounds	med, post med
Ridge and furrow	RB, med
Field systems	prehist, RB, med, 18th cent
Land drainage systems	RB, 18th cent
Duck decoys	post med
Canals	RB, med
Causeways	med
Settlements	prehist, RB, med, post med
Sea defences	uncertain date
River walls and tidal controls	RB, med, post med
Pillow mounds	med
House platforms	RB, med, post med
Enclosures	prehist, RB, med, post med
Military sites	20th cent
Shipwrecks	uncertain date
Moated sites	med
Salt production/pottery mounds	prehist, RB
Mineral extraction sites	post med
Barrows	prehist
Hill forts	prehist

4.1.2 Two notable areas of new landscape remains were discovered during the 1st Stage of this survey. The first is north-east of Mark where some five square kilometres of RB fields survive as earthworks. The second, larger area, occupying parts of Huntspill Level, Huntspill Moor, Mark Moor,

Woolavington Level and Chilton Moor, extends for approximately 60 square kilometres. This area comprises earthwork remains suggesting a formal, planned landscape of either fields and/or surface drainage features. The discovery of such extensive landscape remains of this nature and quality is considered here to be of national significance.

4.1.3 The area of previously recorded RB settlement in the Upper Axe Valley (McDonnell, 1979) was re-plotted here in a simplified form in an attempt to determine the sequential development of the area.

4.1.4 The surviving medieval ridge and furrow in the survey area fell into two distinct geographic locations. The first, strictly speaking beyond the terms of reference for this work, was on the Isle of Wedmore where these features, coupled with existing field boundaries, survive to produce a coherent picture of medieval enclosures and arable land division. The second area lay on the coastal levels between Brent Knoll and the Polden Hills.

4.1.5 The plotting of previous natural drainage systems from the aerial photographs proved a valuable contribution to understanding the natural landscape changes that have occurred in the area. The results in Figure 2 were based on and extended by vegetational changes, soil marks, existing rhynes with natural courses, parish boundaries, river walls and of course actual river bed depressions. On the Fen peats some of these features were recorded as roddens. These natural features are briefly described here.

4.1.6 The arterial but looping nature of the River Axe is noteworthy and may help explain the importance of the Upper Axe Valley during the RB period. The extensive settlement here was linked to this river by canal, a feature which highlights the importance of water-borne communications at this time. Prior to their diversions westwards in the 13th century the rivers Brue, Whitelake and Sheppey would have flowed northwards, through the Panborough-Bleadney gap at the east end of the Isle of Wedmore, into the Axe Valley (Williams, 1970). This course is clearly visible on the aerial photographs and would have extended the navigable length of the Axe to Glastonbury and beyond. The significance of this river as an arterial route during the RB period is not diminished during the medieval period when documentary evidence substantiates its importance (ibid).

4.1.7 The tight complex of marks suggesting a creek system immediately south of the Panborough-Bleadney gap may in fact be due to shrinkage of the fen peats in this area.

4.1.8 The levels south of Brent Knoll are characterised by abandoned river systems which flowed generally northwards and feeding eventually into a broad loop south-west of Brent Knoll. At Berrow the coastal deposits of Dune Sand form a tongue reaching inland on the marine alluviums of the Wentloog soil series (Findlay, 1965); it seems likely that they are filling a depression associated with the former course of this large abandoned river (Fig 2). Evidence from a Saxon Charter dated to 663 AD suggests that this river was in existence at this time and called the Siger (Leech, 1981, 24). The similarity with the loop of the River Parrett on the tidal flats to the west, however, should not be overlooked and it is possible that this abandoned water course south-west of Brent Knoll is a former course of the River Parrett.

4.1.9 The creek systems north of the Poldens and south-west of the Isle of Wedmore contain several examples of parallel courses on similar alignment. This phenomena is a reflection of the RB landscape remains in these areas which appear, on dereliction, to have become part of the natural drainage regime.

The potential for relating these natural water courses and drainage patterns to specific archaeological and historic events on the levels is high.

4.2 Field assessment of the aerial photographic evidence

4.2.1 The first objective of the field assessment was to evaluate the aerial photographic data using SCC-owned land as a basis for the random sample.

Five SCC holdings were examined as part of this process and comprised two complete Council farms and three separate blocks of land. The area involved was approximately 90 ha which represents 0.23% of the total survey area. Despite the very small size of the random sample this approach was felt to be useful and it is anticipated that even this limited sample will characterise future results.

4.2.2 Thirty-eight sites recorded from the aerial photographs were located within the sample area and roughly half (20) were confirmed as earthworks. The remaining sites (18) were not located in the field and represented buried sites which were recorded on the aerial photographs as vegetational changes. In view of the fact that aerial photographs from the 1940s were used in this survey, subsequent destruction of sites cannot be ruled out as a factor in the high percentage of aerial photographically recorded sites not being located in the field. No quantification of this possibility was made within the scope of the present survey. Another factor affecting this result is the incidence of one of the SCC holdings which was examined, lying on an area of fen peats where earthwork sites appear to have a low survival rate.

4.2.3 A more significant figure is the further 21 new sites located within the sample area which were not initially recorded from the aerial photographs. This gives an incidence of 0.55 new sites for every aerial photographically recorded site. This figure is qualified, however, by the trend, noted in both approaches to the field work, that most of the new sites located as a result of the field assessment were in areas already occupied by sites recorded from the aerial photographs. These new sites should perhaps be represented as amplifications of the aerial photographic evidence and seen as part of the substantial enhancement that field work brings to surveys based on remote sensing techniques in this type of landscape.

4.2.4 The second objective of the field assessment was the definition of areas of particular archaeological significance.

One of the outstanding academic problems relating to the clay levels and moors lies in our ability to define either the chronological or geographic relationship between the effect of the RB land use, with its attendant flood controls, and the later deposition of the marine alluviums of the Wentloog and Allerton soil series. That such flood and tidal controls were necessary

is implicit in the clear economic significance of such extensive planned landscapes and in the very nature of the Somerset Levels. Understanding of the sequence of land use and marine inundation, and its effect on settlement,is of key importance in the claylands. When assessing the significance of particular areas, assessment of the potential contribution they can make to this problem has been a dominant concern.

4.2.5 Three major areas of surviving landscape remains of particular archaeological significance were identified. These areas are the Upper Axe Valley, the five square kilometres of earthworks north-east of Mark and the 60 square kilometres north of the west end of the Polden Hills (Fig 1).

4.2.6 The last area, north of the Poldens and south of Mark, is the most extensive complex of earthwork remains in the survey area and contains two possibly separate systems of land division. The larger of these is orientated approximately north-north-west to south-south-east and occupies Mark Moor, Huntspill Level, part of Chilton Moor, part of Edington Heath and part of Pawlett Level. The other smaller system is surrounded by the first on three sides, is orientated west-north-west to east-south-east and occupies principally Huntspill Moor with some marginal extension on to Woolavington Level. In the only occasion noted in this survey elements of this land division were recorded as earthworks on the higher ground of the Polden Hills to the east and west of Woolavington.

4.2.7 Within the time available only a limited field assessment of this large area was possible. Generally the linear features were found to survive as shallow ditches but on Huntspill Moor, where they occur with some regular density, they proved on field inspection to be more complex than the aerial photographic evidence suggested. Here they survive as broad, flat topped banks with irregularly spaced ditches. In the bottoms of these broad ditches slight cross banking was noted which was not evident on the aerial photographic record. These features survive best in the area of the Cripps River on the riverine alluviums of the Midelney soil series. The significance of this particular area is enhanced by pedological and archaeological factors.

4.2.8 The pedological significance lies in the apparent correlation between the distribution of landscape features and the surface junction of the fen peats and the riverine alluviums. In all cases where landscape features were recorded from the aerial photographs on the fen peats field examination showed them to be either non-existent as earthworks or, very occasionally, to be represented only by vegetational indicators. On the fen peats of Chilton Moor, however, the ditches from these linear earthworks are clearly visible only where they cross the droves and have been infilled with rubble to create a level surface to these tracks. It is therefore evident that these extensive landscapes continued on to the areas of fen peats but have not survived here in the fields as earthworks. Although it is likely that they also continued on to the deposits of marine sand of the Catcott Complex this is not at present evident.

4.2.9 The archaeological factors which enhance the significance of the Cripps River area are the high incidence of briquetage mounds and the presence of a canal. On the east side of the river briquetage mounds were recorded as overlying the linear landscape features and this relationship provides useful

dating evidence as well as indicating two different types of land use in the RB period. The canal, as recorded from the aerial photographic evidence, is 1.5 km long and in the field survives as a regular, flat-bottomed depression approximately 20 m wide and up to 0.8 m deep. This feature is on the same alignment and is an integral part of the linear landscape features in the area and lies to the east of East Huntspill. It is perhaps significant that at either end of it an abandoned water course was plotted from the aerial photographs. In response to the concentrations of briquetage mounds the SCPD had already designated part of this area as an AHAP.

4.2.10 The second area of particular archaeological significance lies 1.5 km north-east of Mark and 2 km west of the Isle of Wedmore. It comprises approximately five square kilometres of shallow ditches and, less frequently, low banks forming the remains of a field system. The recovery of RB material from the area of the earthworks (SSR 10566) suggests that these features date from that period. The general orientation of this system, north-north-west to south-south-east, also suggests that it is related to the first area of particular archaeological significance described above. Limited field assessment of this area showed that further earthwork features, not recorded from the aerial photographs, were present but that generally they were not in as good condition as similar sites in the Axe Valley. Limited settlement features were recorded in the field but is likely that the main area of settlement lay to the south on the slightly higher ground in the vicinity of Perry Farm where it has not survived subsequent agricultural activity.

4.2.11 The third area of particular archaeological significance, identified as part of the second objective of Stage 2 of this survey, lies to the east of the Isle of Wedmore in the Upper Axe Valley. The multiphase earthworks recorded here extend for approximately fifteen square kilometres and represent a large RB settlement with associated field systems and a canal. This area has already been described in some detail (McDonnell, 1979).

4.2.12 The settlement earthworks in this area were sample surveyed at 1:500 and those on part of Stoke Moor are shown in Figure 3. They comprise ditches and banks up to 0.6 m high defining rectangular enclosures and house platforms. The earliest feature appears to be a massive bank, 30.0 m wide, running into the site from the north-east. This feature is continued beyond the area surveyed to form part of a large rectangular enclosure around the south-east end of the area of settlement. The size of this bank suggests that it may have had a defensive function, in this case possibly against flooding. Later features, such as the building platform with attached enclosure in the centre of the planned area, are built over the top of and into the side of the large bank. Field boundary ditches running in from the west were considered to post date these later constructions to form a third phase of activity.

4.2.13 A second sample area surveyed at 1:500 in the Upper Axe Valley is on the southern corner of Draycott Moor and includes settlement earthworks of the RB period (Fig 4). Banks and ditches define small rectangular and sub-rectangular enclosures and a building platform with attached small enclosure survives as one of the best earthwork sites of its type recorded in the survey area. No phasing is evident on this site other than the disposition of Brook Bank which post dates the RB features. This substantial

causeway is up to 1.5 m higher than the surrounding moors and carries the present Draycott to Cocklake road, it pre dates the late 18th century enclosures of the area and is probably medieval in origin. Cut into the south side of the causeway as a leat is Draycott Brook which is carried across the valley floor at a higher level than the drainage regime of the surrounding moors. On the basis of our present information it is not clear whether this leat is a primary or secondary feature of the causeway. The area of slight surface irregularities marked on the plan at the northern end of the site were recorded as indeterminate marks on a previous aerial photographic survey of the area (McDonnell, 1979). It is probable that the corresponding vegetational changes are pedogenic in origin. The division between the marine alluviums of the Allerton soil series and the riverine alluviums of the Compton soil series lies very close to the line drawn on the plan (Findlay, 1965). The main area of earthworks lies on the riverine alluviums which are derived from a natural, pre RB, system of streams in the area.

4.2.14 Both of the areas surveyed at 1:500 are scheduled sites (AM 467) and both are included in the Stoke Moor/Barrows Hams AHAP.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 The most significant result of this survey has been the identification and plotting at 1:10000 of the extensive RB landscapes on the levels and moors. Many important medieval features were recorded but, within the limitations of this survey, they remain as site specific records without the potential for demonstrating the landscape contexts of their periods. The following discussion deals briefly with the landscape issues of the early historic period and puts forward a short hypothesis for the development of the area at that time.

5.2 In Figure 1 the areas of recorded landscape remains are constrained by three considerations:-

(i) Their initial distribution.

(ii) Pedogenic factors.

(iii) Destruction in later periods.

The incidence of the linear earthwork features occurring as high as 40 m OD on the Poldens near Woolavington suggests that the layout of the levels may have included both the surrounding higher ground and the islands in the lower lying moors. There is no other evidence available at present and it is likely that if this was the case, then subsequent land use on the higher ground, during the medieval and later periods, will have destroyed most of the earthwork evidence there may have been.

5.3 On the south-east side of the area of linear features both the aerial photographic and field records indicate that the RB landscape continued on to the deposits of fen peats of the Sedgemoor soil series but have not survived as earthworks. It should be noted that the evidence at present only indicates a marginal incursion and that understandably there is no evidence at all from the soils of the Turbary Moor Complex which represents the area of the raised bog.

5.4 On the north-west, seaward side, the pedogenic reasons for the apparent termination of the landscape features are not so obvious. The survival of a small linear group of these to the north-west of Brent Knoll suggests that the area of planned landscape extended westwards and northwards to cover a good deal more of the coastal levels than is currently evident. It is suggested, however, that these features may now be buried beneath subsequent deposits of marine alluvium. It has long been recognised that on the coastal levels the RB material is sealed by such alluvium and evidence from the buried sites at Edingworth and Lakehouse Farm indicate that such a deposit cannot have occurred before the 4th century AD (Leech, 1982, 229). If this is the case then the surviving areas of landscape features should indicate those parts of the levels which were not regularly flooded by the sea. Their western limit, which is roughly a line extending north-east from Pawlett through Watchfield to Badgworth and Cross, may then be regarded as a mean high tide line during the 4th century AD. The dereliction of the planned landscape has already been mentioned in relation to the creek systems recorded to the west of the peat deposits but it is significant that these natural features lie to the east, or landward side, of the postulated 4th century coastline; they may therefore represent tidal creeks and pills in a salt marsh environment. Further evidence in support of this theory is the incidence of salt production sites, in the form of briquetage mounds, which concentrate to the west of Burtle island in the same area as the creek systems. These mounds have been dated as a group to the late 3rd and 4th centuries AD (Leech, 1981, 42).

5.5. In summary it seems likely that the demise of the late Iron Age salt production sites in the 1st century AD, which lay as far inland as Badgworth, was the result of the effective draining of the marshland levels by the new RB administration. The buried site at Lakehouse Farm, which may have been a villa, was also in operation during the 1st century AD and it is therefore possible that the planned landscape recorded in this survey could have been laid out as early as this date. At some point in the late 3rd century either a breakdown in tidal management or slight fluctuation in sea levels caused flooding and what was probably a slow accretion of marine alluvium to build up over the coastal levels and thereby burying some part of the derelict RB landscape beneath it. Those unburied areas to the east of the postulated mean high tide line were taken over by tidal creeks where salt production was taking place also by the late 3rd century with briquetage mounds being constructed on and over the banks of the derelict landscape.

5.6 This brief model of sequential land use is advanced on largely circumstantial archaeological evidence and will need to be tested against future records. It is nonetheless important to construct such models in order to formulate priorities and strategies for the management of the resource.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Priorities for environmental work

6.1.1 The generally high water table and the incidence of organic soils and ground water gleys makes the survey area ideal for the waterlogged and anerobic conditions necessary for the preservation of organic material. The coastal

deposits of dune sand will contain other types of environmental evidence and settlement sites will provide valuable information relating to the economic and managerial aspects of the historic environment. In response to this potential data reserve we need to a) identify areas of high potential, and b) to build an environmental sampling programme into all archaeological work undertaken on the clay moors and levels.

On the basis of this survey we can identify chronological areas where environmental evidence will be of value and also, within the limitations of the fieldwork, geographic areas of high potential.

6.1.2 Chronological areas.

(i) The brief hypothesis put forward above with regard to the RB period and the sequence of reclamation, development, dereliction, inundation and salt production would be well tested against an investigation of the environmental evidence.

(ii) In the medieval period the relationship between the management of the natural resources of the levels and the extensive programmes of drainage and canalisation should be examined on the basis of the environmental evidence.

6.1.3 Geographic areas.

The geographic areas fall into two categories of the specific sites and the site types of high potential. Two specific sites were identified during the course of this survey.

(i) The area on Monk Moor in the Upper Axe Valley where the remains of a canal connects the RB settlement with an abandoned loop of the River Axe.

(ii) The area on Huntspill Moor where the remains of a canal is an integral part of the linear landscape features.

6.1.4 The nature of the clay moors and levels suggests that virtually all archaeological sites will to some extent contain environmental evidence but the following list of site types needs to be assessed in the field with specific regard to the management of their potential environmental data.

Canals.	Both RB and medieval, particularly where associated with settlement or landscape remains.
Moated sites.	Waterlogged silts at these sites will contain organic cultural, economic and environmental evidence.
Sea walls and river walls.	Buried soils under these features may contain evidence of local environmental conditions prior to their construction.
Briquetage mounds.	These sites will provide data relating to estuarine or salt marsh conditions and may be dated by ceramic evidence.
Settlements.	Ditches, pits and water ways will contain organic cultural, economic and environmental evidence.

6.1.5 More detailed recommendations regarding the environmental potential of the clay moors and levels can only be developed with the aid of further field assessment and active environmental sampling on archaeological sites or specific natural features.

6.2 Management of the resource

6.2.1 There are currently two types of provision for the management of the archaeological resource on the Somerset Levels. These are the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, 1979, which is of a statutory nature and the voluntary management agreements drawn up by the SCPD under the AHAP system. An incidental umbrella for the archaeology may be found in the designation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) of which there are several in the survey area. The quantity and national significance of many of the new sites recorded in this survey indicates that a revision of the management priorities for the clay moors and levels will be necessary. It is suggested, however, that considerably more field work will need to be undertaken before such a revision is considered.

6.2.2 The presence of an extensive buried archaeological landscape poses obvious problems of management and in the case of the coastal levels such problems are exacerbated by the important academic considerations of the buried material. A critical factor is the depth of the sealing deposit and in the levels some figures for these have been published (Leech, 1981, 42). Within the six coastal level parishes of Burnham-on-Sea, Burnham Without, East Huntspill, West Huntspill, East Brent and Brent Knoll, 23 buried RB sites were related to the present ground surface. The figures indicate that the depth of alluvium ranges from 0.5 m to 2.4 m and averages 1.06 m. Of this sample 34% of sites were buried by 0.6 m, or less, of marine alluvium. Sites at this depth will not be affected by normal cultivational activities but almost certainly will be by drainage, trenching and building operations. Where this deposit thins out to the east or where it laps higher ground the buried material will be more vulnerable and, as is often the case, these marginal areas may prove to be the most significant archaeologically. Further detailed analysis of existing records coupled with an intensive watching brief coverage of the coastal levels may help to define this problem with more accuracy.

6.2.3 The limitations of the time spent in the field reduces our ability to make recommendations about specific site management and only general comments can be put forward here. The most significant of these is the desirability of retaining a high water table. The loss of this physical feature would reduce, in direct proportion, the survival potential of the organic cultural and environmental material of which at present we know virtually nothing. Such a reduction in soil water levels may also lead to an increase in arable farming with its attendant destruction of earthwork features. The only other areas of comparable archaeology in the British Isles are on the Fens of East Anglia where sites do not survive as earthworks to the same extent as they do on the Somerset Levels. In this respect the levels are unique and the retention and management of a representative sample of earthwork sites will be of a high priority.

6.2.4 The educational and interpretative potential of the archaeological sites and landscapes in the survey area is considerable. This aspect of the management of the archaeological resource of the clay moors and levels

will probably best be met by short, non-specialist publications aimed at both the general public and the farming community. The folded A3 leaflet is an ideal format for this level of publication. The nature of land ownership and scattered tenancies, in conjunction with livestock and dairy farming, make the levels unsuitable for waymarked archaeological trails and even guided walks would require considerable route preparation beforehand. On site interpretative treatment in the survey area is considered at best to be limited and generally unsuitable. A heritage centre for the Levels and Moors area would be an effective means of communicating its historic interes to the public.

6.2.5 A more precise formulation of management policies on the clay moors and levels north of the Polden Hills will require further field assessment of the aerial photographic evidence.

6.3 Recommendations for future work

6.3.1 The principal element in this survey has been the examination and plotting of the aerial photographic evidence. The field assessment of that evidence has been little more than a limited sample of the area's potential, but even these results indicate that this is high. The main recommendation for future work therefore lies with further field assessment and recording based on the methods and results of this pilot survey. This work can be broken down into two objectives

(i) The further examination and definition, in the field, of areas of particular archaeological significance. Recommendations for the management of such areas, under either the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 or the SCPD AHAP scheme, should be made to the Field Archaeologist of the SCPD.

(ii) To identify sites of particular potential with regard to their reserves of environmental data. Recommendations for the management of these sites should similarly be made to the Field Archaeologist of the SCPD.

6.3.2 It is further recommended that a similar pilot survey is undertaken on the levels and moors to the south of the Polden Hills. The methods and objectives for this second area should remain the same as those adopted north of the Polden Hills.

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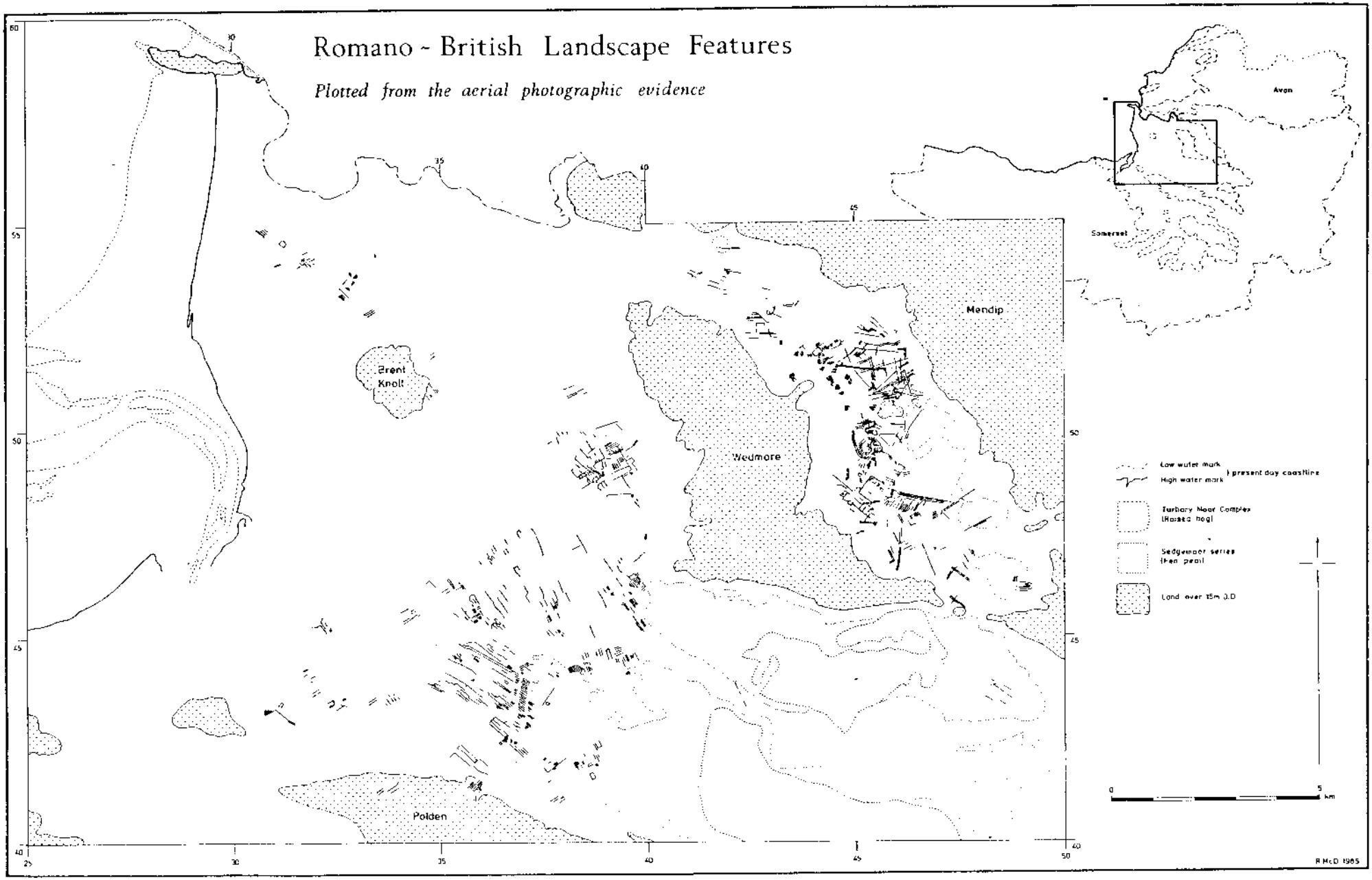
Romano - British Landscape Features
Plotted from the aerial photographic evidence
Avon
Somerset
Mendip
Brent Knoll
Wedmore
Polden
Low water mark
High water mark
present day coastline
Turbary Moor Complex (Raised bog)
Sedgemoor series (Fen peat)
Land over 15m O.D.
0
5
km
R McD 1985

Fig 1

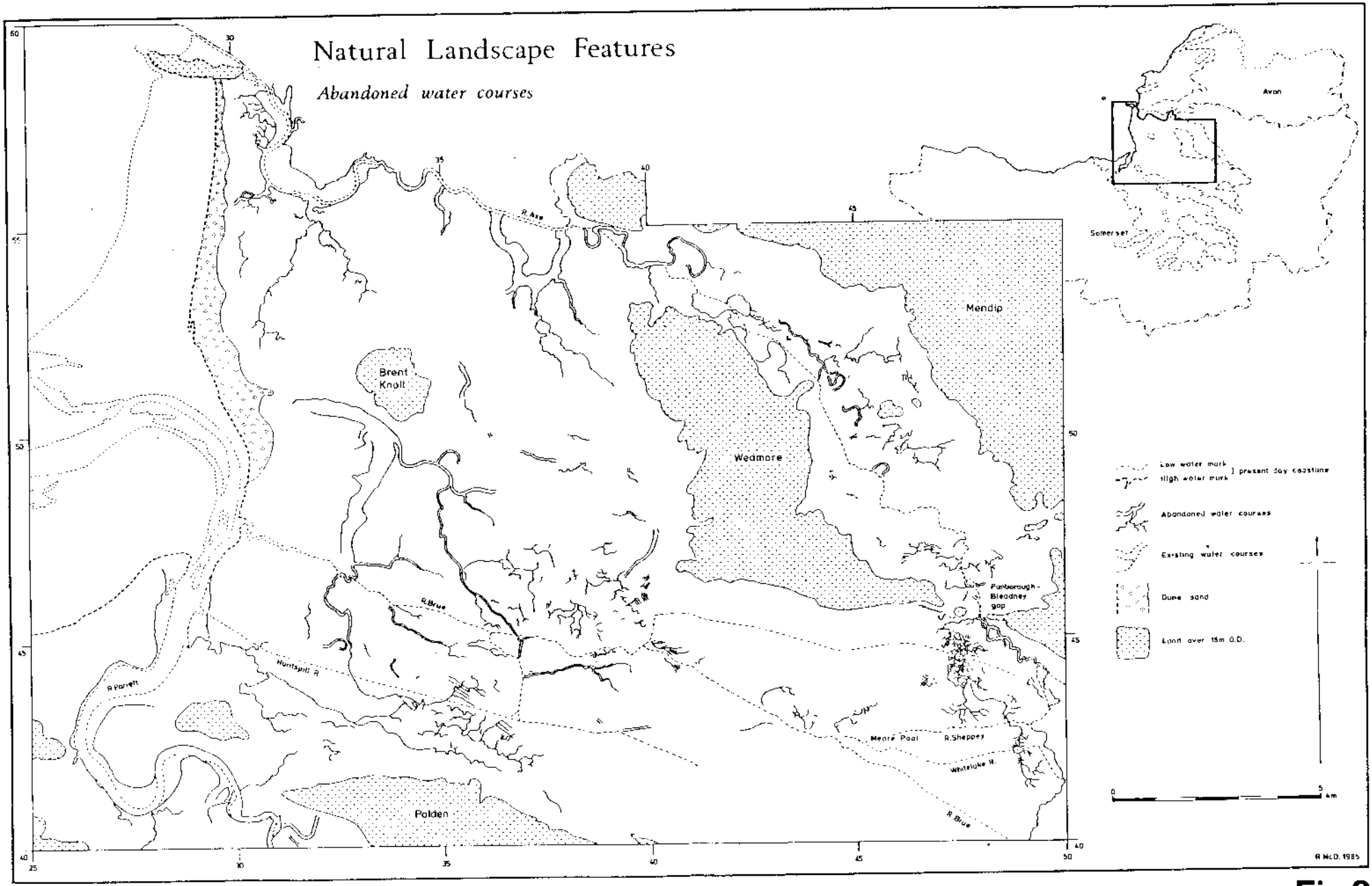
Natural Landscape Features
Abandoned water courses
Avon
Somerset
Mendip
Wedmore
Brent Knoll
Polden
R. Axe
R. Brue
Huntspill R.
R Parrett
Meare Pool
R. Sheppey
Whitelake R.
R Brue
Pawlborough - Bleadney gap
Low water mark
High water mark
present day coastline
Abandoned water courses
Existing water courses
Dune sand
Land over 15m O.D.
0
5
km
R McD. 1985

Fig 2

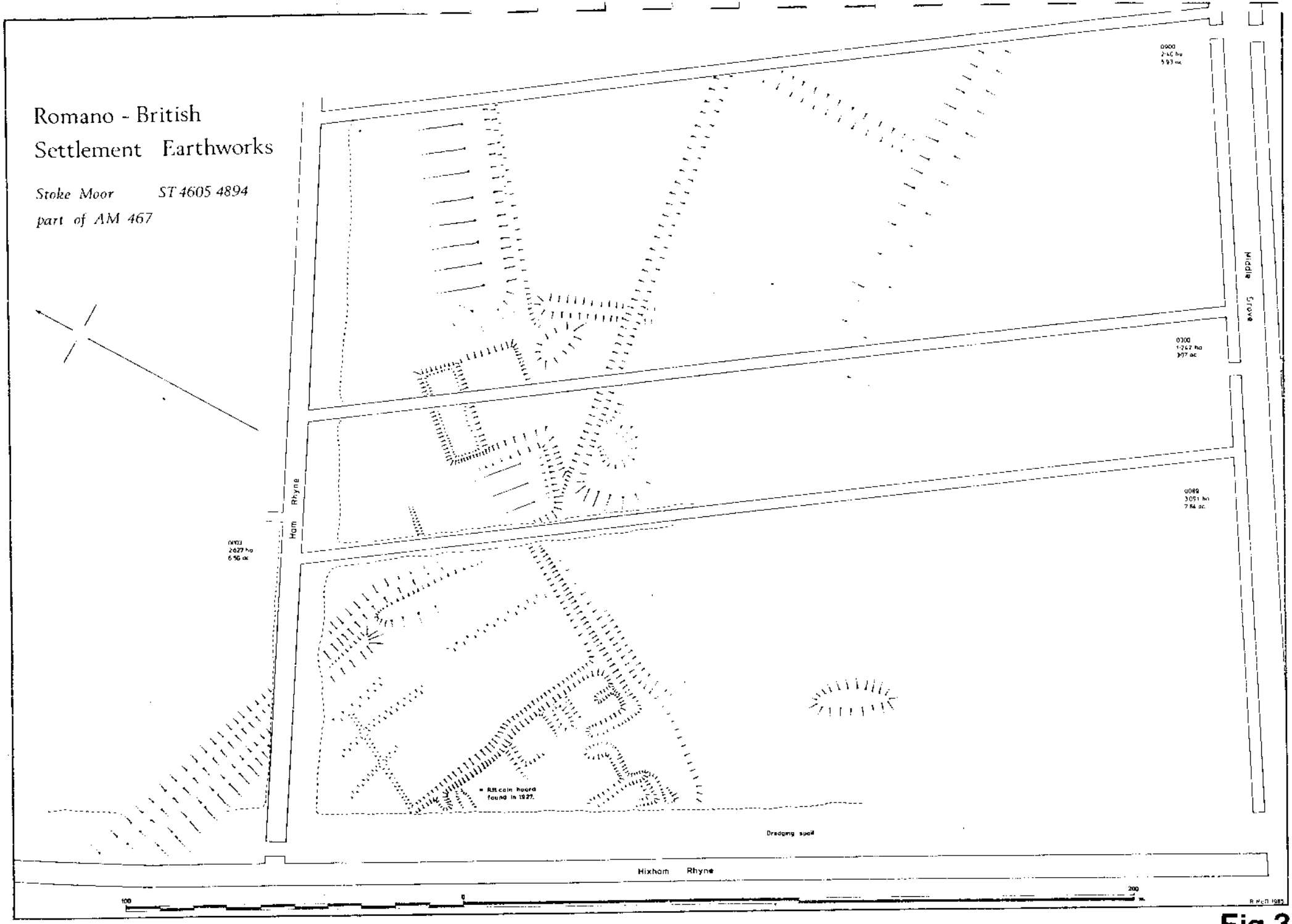
Romano - British
Settlement Earthworks
Stoke Moor ST 4605 4894
part of AM 467
Ham Rhyne
Middle Drove
Hixham Rhyne
Dredging spoil
0300
1·242 ha
3·07 ac
0089
3·091 ha
7·64 ac
100
0
200

Fig 3

Romano - British Settlement Earthworks

Draycott Moor *ST 4585 4932* *part of AM 467*

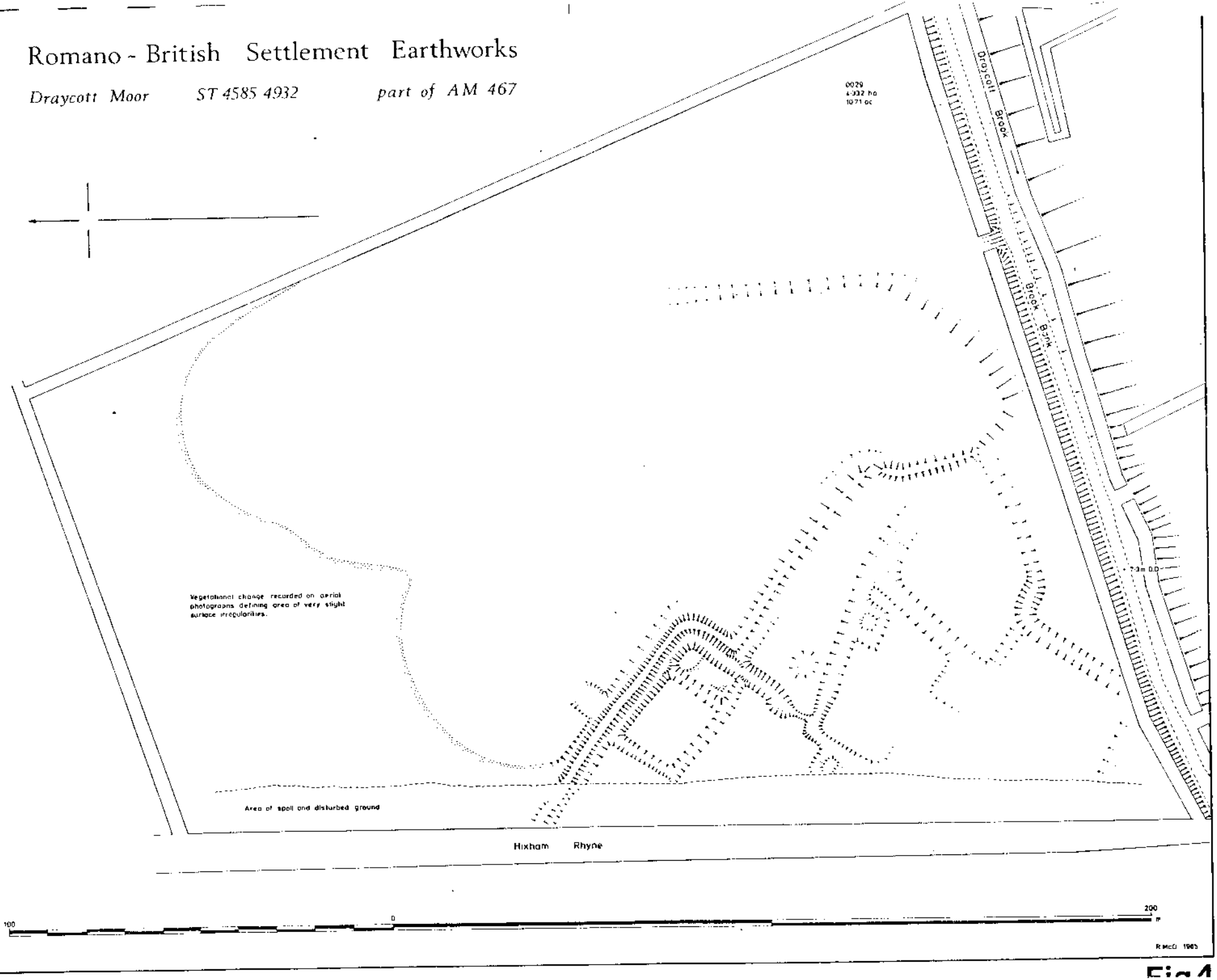

Fig 4