Somerdale, Keynsham: recent investigations at the Roman roadside settlement

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SOMERDALE, KEYNSHAM: RECENT INVESTIGATIONS AT THE ROMAN ROADSIDE SETTLEMENT

TOM BRINDLE

INTRODUCTION

A series of small-scale archaeological interventions and watching briefs were undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology (CA) at Somerdale, Keynsham, between April 2014 and October 2019. The works were undertaken at the request of Environmental Dimension Partnership (EDP) Ltd on behalf of Taylor Wimpey (Bristol) Ltd, associated with major regeneration of the area of the former Cadbury chocolate factory and surrounding land for multi-purpose use. The archaeological work was undertaken to fulfil conditions attached to planning consent for the redevelopment of the area by Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) Council, on the advice of Richard Sermon, Archaeological Officer for BANES Council.

LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

The development site is located at Somerdale, to the north of Keynsham, where a 90ha regeneration scheme involved the redevelopment of the site occupied by the disused Cadbury's chocolate factory (formerly Fry's chocolate factory). The overall site occupies low-lying terrain, between 10m and 15m above Ordnance Datum (aOD), immediately to the west of the River Avon, which snakes around to the north before continuing west (Fig. 1). The western part of the site extends into the area known as the Keynsham Hams, an area of floodplain which stretches towards the River Avon to the north and west.

The underlying solid geology of the area is mapped as Rugby Mudstone Member, comprising Limestone and Mudstone, with no superficial deposits recorded (BGS 2020). The natural geological substrate encountered during the works included river terrace deposits comprising gravels and sand.

BACKGROUND

During 1922, a new Fry's (later Cadbury's) chocolate factory was constructed on a former greenfield site to the north of Keynsham and housing for the factory workers was subsequently built to the south as part of the 'garden city'. This site continued in use as a chocolate factory until its closure in 2011, when the large 90ha site became the focus for the current programme of regeneration. The construction of the factory and its associated facilities during the 1920s is now known to have resulted in the destruction of a large part of the remains of a substantial Roman nucleated settlement, believed possibly to be the Traiectus listed in the Antonine Itinerary. Finds discovered during the construction of the factory led to the recognition that the site was of archaeological importance, resulting in a series of small-scale archaeological investigations undertaken at various times since the first discoveries were made, the results of which are summarised below.

Current understanding of the site during the prehistoric period is poor. A group of animal bones recovered from a natural river terrace deposit during a 2012 evaluation at the site produced bones from a large ungulate (potentially a woolly rhinoceros) and a hyena, indicating a Pleistocene origin (Robinson 2013), although no associated archaeological material was found. Residual worked flints of Mesolithic and Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age date suggest some evidence for earlier prehistoric activity within the area although positively identified cut features of prehistoric date are very limited, being restricted to a single truncated enclosure ditch containing a small assemblage of Bronze Age pottery (Robinson 2013). A small group of pottery of Late Iron Age date recovered from test pits within the area of the sports fields to the west of the former factory may indicate some pre-Roman occupation (Robinson 2012), although the nature of any such activity currently remains unclear. Cut features revealed during a 1995 geophysical survey and evaluation at the site of the former chocolate factory (Yorkston and Hume 1995) were subsequently shown to have been of probable geological origin (Robinson 2013).

The Roman period settlement at Somerdale has a long history of archaeological investigation, with the earliest known interventions dating from 1922, when two stone coffined inhumations (purportedly containing male and female skeletons respectively) were discovered during the construction of the factory, along with coins of 3rd to 4th-century AD date (Gray 1922; Taylor and Collingwood 1921, 211). The investigations were not well-published, but at least one building was identified, thought at the time to be part of a villa, which comprised several rooms arranged around a small courtyard, with an

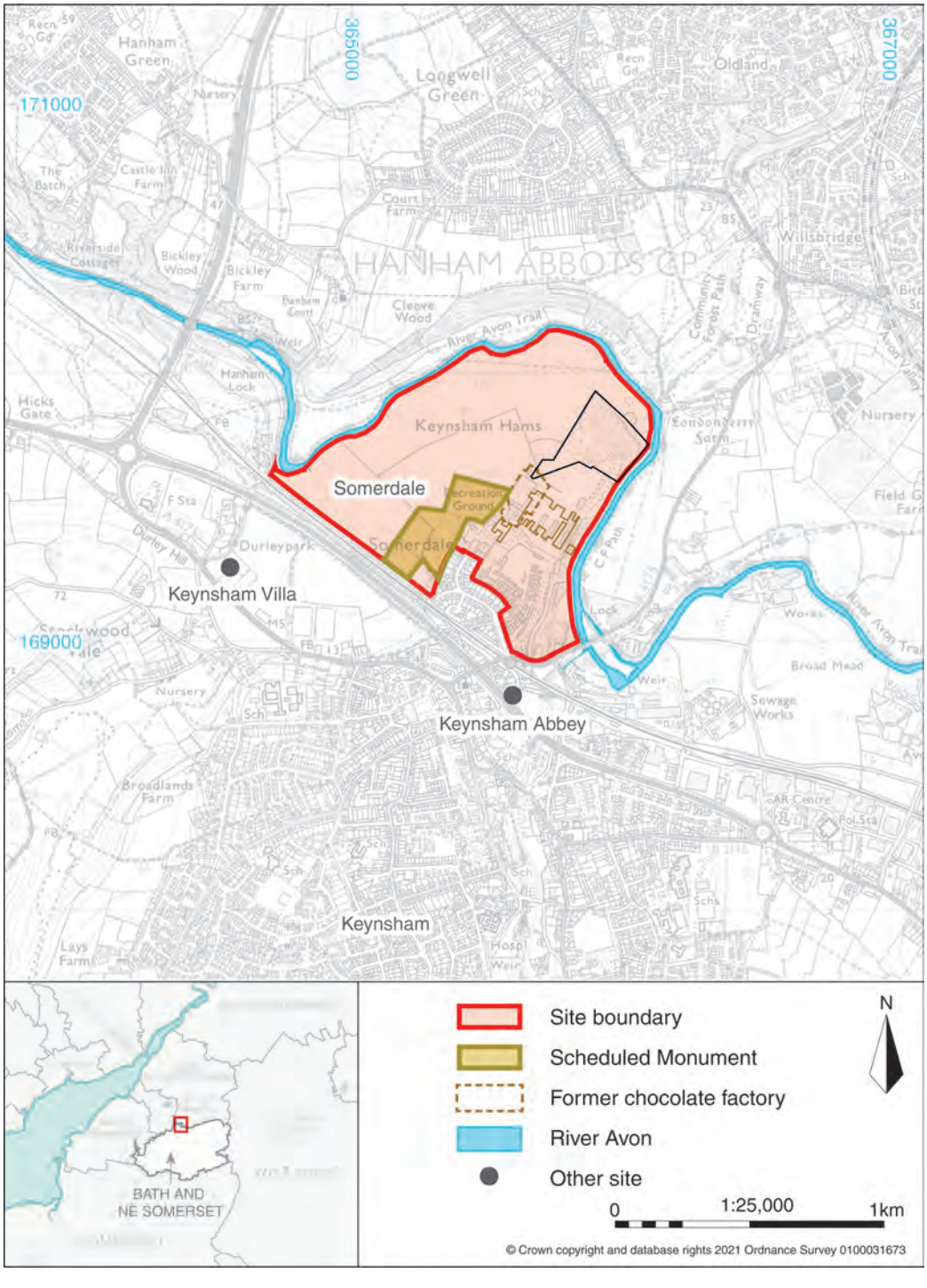

Fig. 1 Site Location

associated private bath suite. A stone-lined well was also discovered, while a section of metalled road, measuring around 2.5m wide and oriented on a north-east/south-west alignment was situated 400m to the west (Collingwood and Taylor 1924, 234; Bulleid and Horne 1926). A group of 65 coins found in the area reportedly date from AD 37 to around AD 365 (Collingwood and Taylor 1924, 234), while a further find of note was an inscribed statue base dedicated to Silvanus (Collingwood and Taylor 1932, 224; Fishwick 1994, 136-7). Many finds recovered during the time of the construction of the factory were housed within a museum at the site, and in addition to the aforementioned skeletons within their coffins, reportedly included two cremation urns, crucibles, metalwork (including many brooches), altars and further fragments of carved monumental stone (Somerset HER Site 61199).

A subsequent small-scale evaluation associated with the construction of a new sports pavilion and associated facilities to the west of the factory revealed substantial evidence for a complex and long-lived sequence of occupation, including drystone walls, postholes, a substantial ditch and a metalled trackway, with finds indicating activity between the 1st and 4th centuries AD (Hume 1993). Aerial photographs taken in the dry summer of 1993 provided an indication of the extent of the settlement, revealing an area of occupation of up to 10ha, with buildings constructed either side of a metalled north-south street, with various side-streets; footings for over 20 buildings were identified (La Trobe Bateman 1999; Young 1994; Browne 1991).

More recent geophysical survey (Sabin and Donaldson 2012) and evaluation (Robinson 2012; 2013) within the area of the sports fields to the west of the factory provided further evidence for the continuation of the settlement into this area, including an area of Roman quarry pitting (Robinson 2012; 2013).

Most significantly, the geophysical survey in the area of the playing fields provided extensive evidence for the layout of the settlement, where it had not been destroyed by the construction of the factory (Sabin and Donaldson 2012) (Figs 2 and 3), and the recognition that much of the western part of the settlement remained undisturbed resulted in its designation as a Scheduled Monument by Historic England in 2014 (Scheduled Monument no. 1416459) (Fig. 1).

The 2012 geophysical survey confirmed the presence of the north-east/south-west oriented metalled road originally identified during the 1920s, which was found to turn on a perpendicular north-west/south-east alignment at its northern end. Ditched rectangular plots can be seen to have fronted the road and a series of small side lanes or trackways appear to have led off it. Wall-footings for many stone-built buildings lined the road on either side, and a stone circular structure measuring over 9m in diameter, located within its own ditched rectangular plot to the north of the point where the road changes direction, is likely to have been a temple (Historic England 2014). The concentration of features is much reduced to the west and to the north, as the site slopes down towards the Keynsham Hams floodplain.

The suggestion that the site represents the Traiectus identified on the Antonine Itinerary has been made for some time (e.g. Browne 1987; 1991), serving as a crossing point of the Avon on the road between Bath (Aquae Sullis) and Sea Mills (Abonae). The various arguments for and against this suggestion are considered in more detail in the discussion below.

The ruins of medieval Keynsham Abbey lie outside the development area to the south (Fig. 1). Very little archaeology associated with this period of activity has been discovered within the area of the factory, although traces of agricultural activity on the Keynsham Hams are of potential medieval or earlier date (Historic England 2014).

The archaeological works described within this report were for the most part undertaken within, or in the immediate vicinity of, the area previously occupied by the chocolate factory, outside the area of the Scheduled Monument, although occasional interventions within the scheduled area were undertaken following the granting of appropriate Scheduled Monument Consent.

THE SITES

Cotswold Archaeology's investigations took place over several years as required by the continuing development and comprised the sites listed below (Fig. 3). This article presents a summary of the key discoveries at these sites, along with an overview of the current understanding of the Roman nucleated settlement at Somerdale. The complete findings, including full specialist finds and biological evidence reports, are presented in typescript reports (CA report numbers 14454, 15279, 15769, 15775, 16353, 16317, 17552, 17681, 17682 and 4845_1), which form part of the archive and are available online via the Cotswold Archaeology website (https://cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/).

2014 Phase 1 Watching Brief (CA 2015a)

The 2014 Phase 1 watching brief took place during groundworks on former playing fields situated to the south of the former factory, which included ground reduction and the excavation of a sewer trench.

2014 New Fry Club and F1 Pitch Excavation and Watching Brief (CA 2015b)

The 2014 excavation took place 400m to the north of

the 2014 Phase 1 area, within the footprint of a new groundsman's hut, which was to accompany a sports pitch located to the south. Further archaeological monitoring was undertaken during groundworks to the south and north of the excavated area, within the area of the former chocolate factory.

2015 Lower Fry Club Car Park Evaluation (CA 2016a)

The 2015 evaluation took place in an area 100m to the west of the former chocolate factory in Lower Fry Club car park (Fig. 2), to the west of tennis courts and a bowling green. The site lies within the area of the Scheduled Monument and was undertaken in support of an application for Scheduled Monument Consent (ref. S00114355) for construction of a new grassed playing surface; it involved the excavation of five evaluation trenches, each measuring a minimum of 2m by 2m. The primary objective of the evaluation was to determine the upper level of any surviving archaeological deposits and only hand cleaning and subsequent limited excavation of the exposed deposits was undertaken.

2015 Phase 2 and Care Home Excavation (CA 2016b)

The 2015 excavation took place during the Phase 2 groundworks at the site and was focussed on playing fields to the south of the factory, within the same area as the Phase 1 Watching Brief.

2016 Flood Compensation Excavation (CA 2016c)

A small excavation was undertaken during flood compensation works to the north of the former factory, within the Keynsham Hams floodplain, immediately north-east of the 2014 New Fry Club and F1 Pitch excavation area.

2016 St Monica's Trust Watching Brief (CA 2018a)

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken in advance of construction of a care home at the site of the former factory, immediately to the north of the 2014 Phase 1 Area.

2016 New School Evaluation (CA 2016d) and Watching Brief (CA 2018b), 2017 Flood Compensation Watching Brief (CA 2018c) and 2019 Cycle Track Watching Brief (CA 2020)

An evaluation and a watching brief were undertaken in advance of and during the construction of a new school in 2016 and 2017 respectively, immediately to the west of and partly within the area of the former factory (CA 2016d; CA 2018b). The evaluation revealed part of a post-medieval or modern ditch and modern deposits; any earlier archaeology had been entirely truncated by this later activity. The subsequent watching brief also revealed nothing of archaeological interest.

Watching briefs associated with further flood compensation works within the Keynsham Hams floodplain in 2017 (CA 2018c) did not reveal any archaeological features or finds. This work took place to the north of the area of known Roman archaeology and may suggest that Roman settlement did not extend into this area.

A watching brief undertaken within the area of the Scheduled Monument during construction of a new cycle track (CA 2020) also revealed no archaeological features or finds, likely reflecting the shallow nature of the works, which did not extend as deep as the archaeological deposits.

In addition to the archaeological investigations undertaken during the groundworks, listed above, a photographic survey of the chocolate factory buildings took place prior to their redevelopment (CA 2014).

RESULTS

Pre-Roman (Fig. 4)

The earliest deposits encountered were associated with a natural silty clay soil overlying the river terrace gravels, which in areas filled natural periglacial features within the gravels (not illustrated). These deposits had previously been encountered during earlier evaluation at the site (Robinson 2013).

The earliest evidence for archaeological activity at Somerdale came in the form of a small group of residual worked flints in later features, including two blades of likely Mesolithic date recovered in the 2014 Phase 1 Watching Brief (CA 2015a).

Prehistoric cut features were not widespread, but a concentration of likely pre-Roman features was identified in the area of the Phase 1 Watching Brief and Phase 2 Excavation (CA 2015a; 2016b). The earliest features were potentially four isolated shallow, oval pits (1140, 1006, 1177 and 1175). The pits had broadly similar dimensions, measuring between 0.5m and 0.9m in diameter and up to 0.22m deep, with fills of silty and sandy clay. All of the pits contained occasional fragments of flint, some of it burned, and flint fragments from Pits 1140 and 1177 had clearly been worked. The flint from Pit 1177 included debitage, indicating that flint was worked locally, and a bulk environmental sample from its charcoal-rich fill produced evidence for discarded domestic waste in the form of a large group of charred hazelnut shells and charcoal of oak and alder.

To the north and west of these pits, the south-east corner of rectangular Enclosure 1 was recorded during the Phase 1

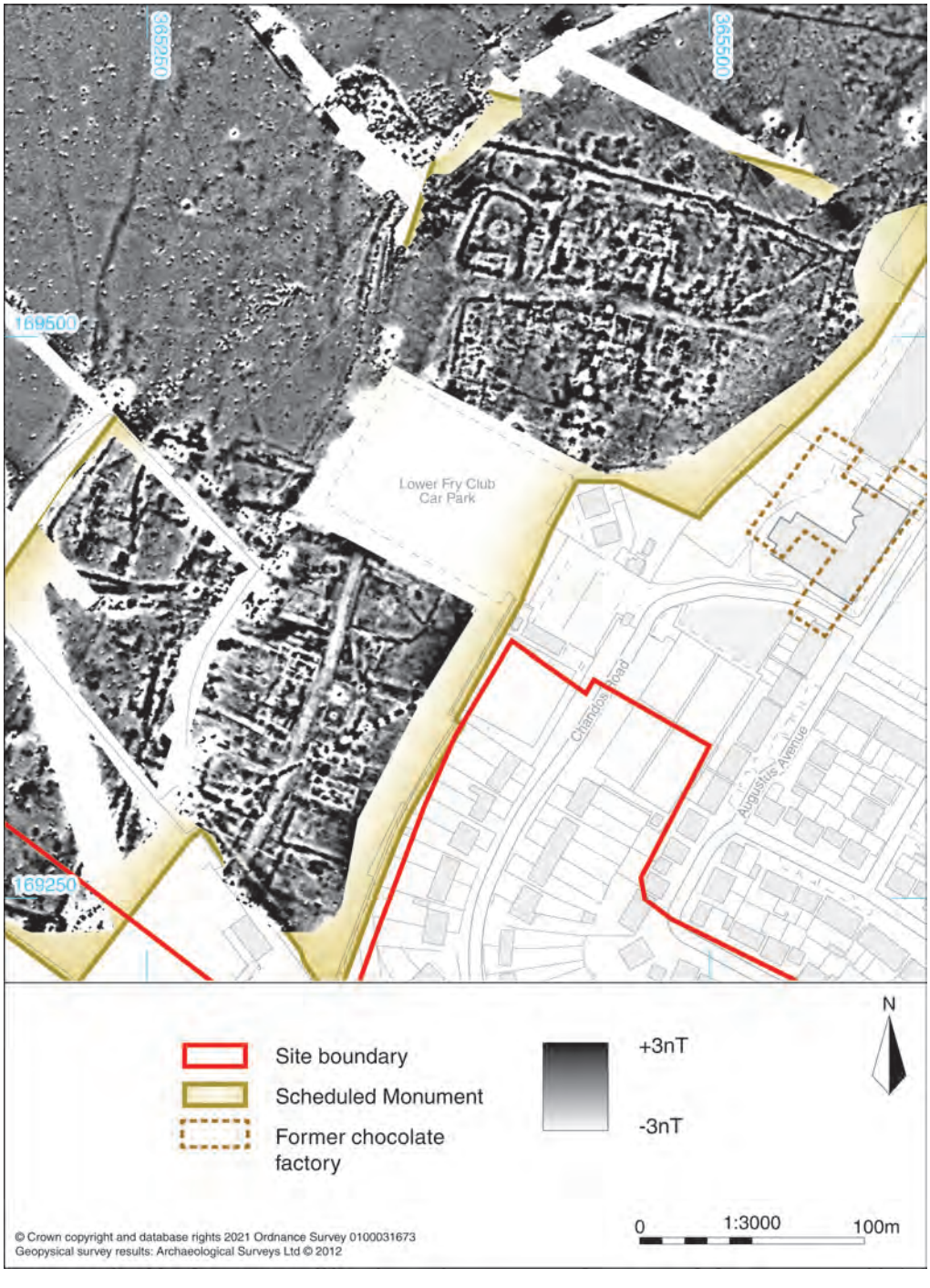

Fig. 2 Results of the 2012 geophysical survey by Archaeological Surveys Ltd, showing the layout of the Roman settlement at Somerdale in the (now Scheduled) area undamaged by the chocolate factory buildings

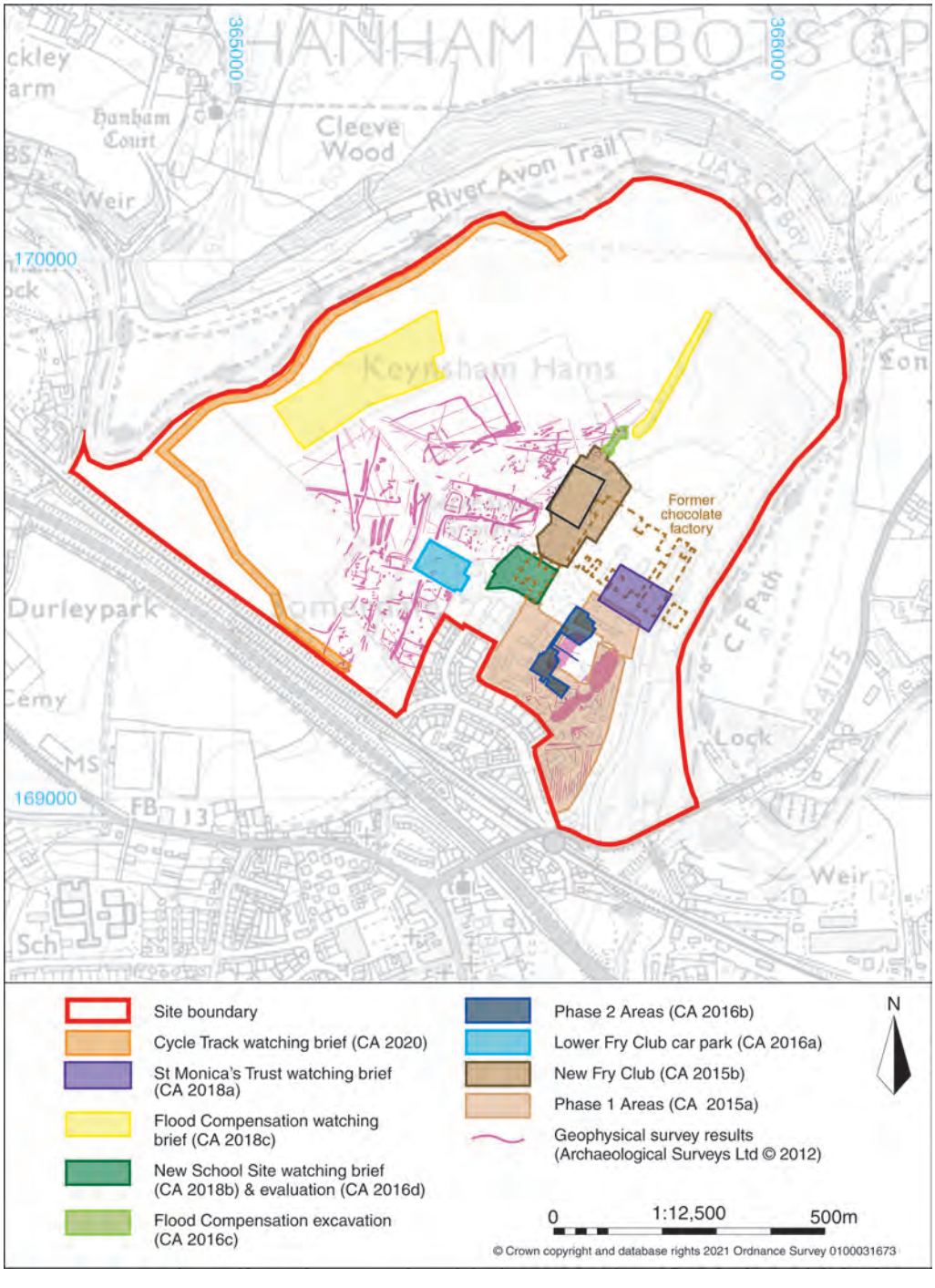

Fig. 3 Cotswold Archaeology's archaeological interventions at Somerdale, shown in relation to the area of the former chocolate factory and the 2012 geophysical survey results

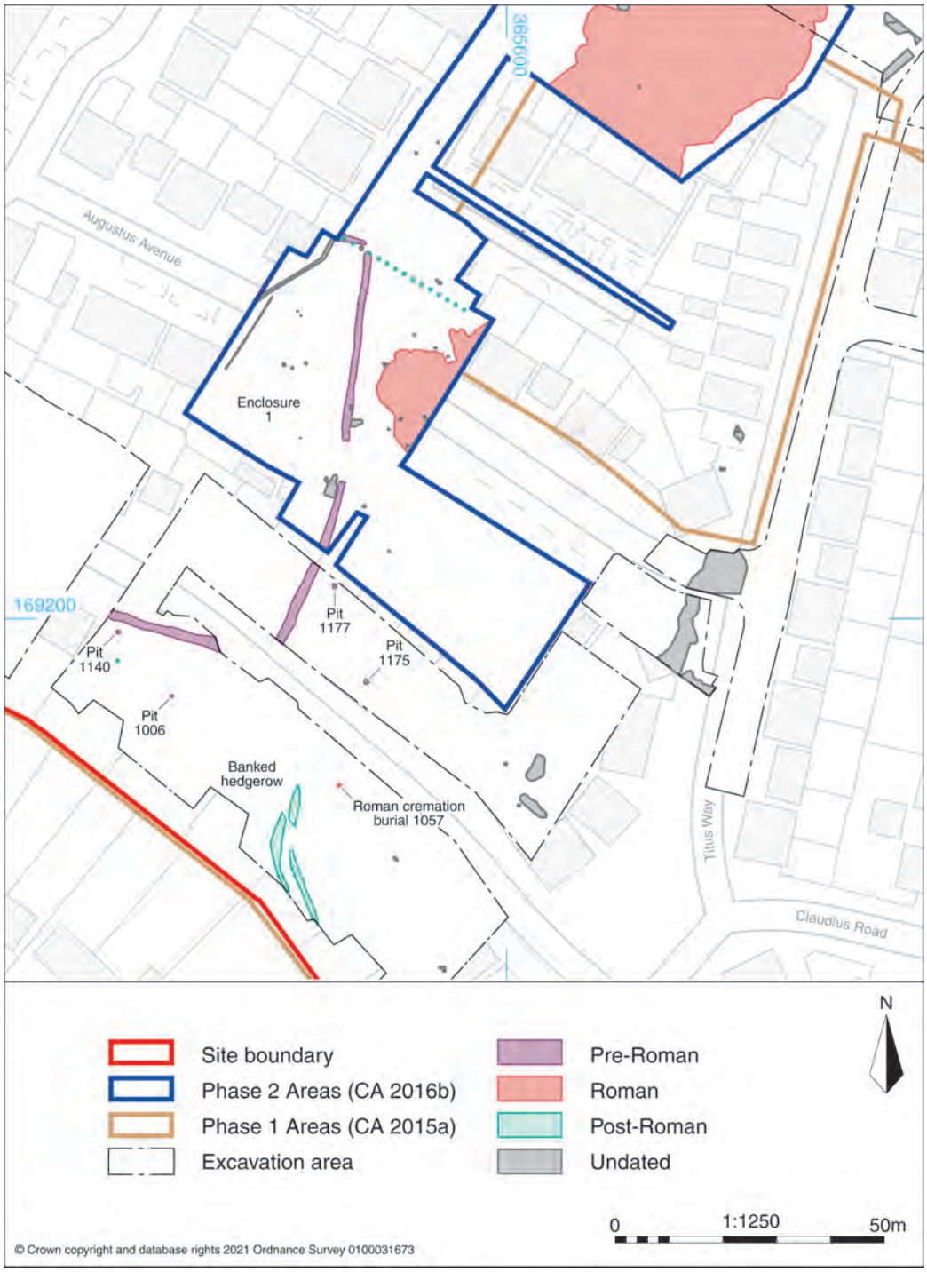

Fig. 4 Archaeological features within the Phase 1 and Phase 2 areas

Watching Brief (CA 2015a), and its continuation and return were identified in the subsequent Phase 2 Excavation (CA 2016b). Part of this enclosure was first revealed during an earlier geophysical survey (Sabin and Donaldson 2012) and evaluation by AC Archaeology (Robinson 2013), although the recent watching brief and excavation revealed considerably more of its plan. The enclosure was broadly north-east/south-west aligned and its eastern arm measured approximately 80m in length. A 5m wide entrance at the east of the enclosure, initially suggested during the geophysical survey, was confirmed. The enclosure ditches had a variable profile, ranging from U-shaped to V-shaped, and measured up to 2.14m wide and 0.81m deep. It contained up to four fills of silt, and a slight concentration of the fills on the western side of the ditch possibly indicate erosion of bank material from this side. Finds from the secondary and tertiary fills of the ditch included occasional worked flints and small quantities of pottery sherds of Early or Middle Bronze Age and probable Iron Age date. Sherds of Bronze Age pottery had previously been recovered during the earlier evaluation (Robinson 2013). This pottery provides evidence for a possible prehistoric date for this enclosure, although the mixed Bronze Age and Iron Age assemblage, and the absence of finds from the basal fill of the ditch, raise the possibility that the pottery represents residual material. It remains unclear whether the enclosure had any relationship with the four pits containing worked flints, although the Iron Age pottery recovered from its fills suggests the features were probably not contemporaneous.

No other features of certain pre-Roman date were identified. A group of ard marks underlay an early Roman droveway at the north-east of the site (Fig. 5), although these are discussed below as possible early Roman features. Small quantities of residual pottery of late prehistoric date were recovered from Roman period Ditch 223 (Fig. 5) during the 2014 work at the New Fry Club and F1 Pitch (CA 2015b); the presence of probable Middle to Late Iron Age pottery amongst this material is of note, adding further evidence for a pre-Roman Iron Age focus somewhere within the vicinity of the site.

Early Roman (1st to 2nd centuries AD) (Figs 4-6)

Unsurprisingly given the nature of the site, evidence for Roman occupation was widespread, although the piecemeal nature and varied scope of the interventions often made interpretation difficult. Dating provided by the Roman pottery recovered suggests that most of the activity took place during the early Roman period, in the 1st to 2nd centuries AD.

Ard marks, Droveway 1 and Well 27028 (Fig. 5)

The earliest features of possible Roman date identified was a series of north/south aligned ard marks (scars left in the soil during tillage by an ard – a light plough without a mouldboard), revealed during the small Flood Scheme Compensation excavation (CA 2016c; Fig. 5). This investigation took place towards the north-east of the core of the settlement as revealed by the geophysical survey and appears to have been at the periphery of the settlement. A single sherd of early Roman pottery was recovered from one of the ard marks, although it is possible that this was intrusive and that these furrows were pre-Roman in date. The ard marks were cut by two parallel east-west oriented ditches, which had been subject to recutting, separated by a gap of approximately 3m. These ditches correspond with an anomaly identified during the geophysical survey and appear to have been part of a droveway (Droveway 1). Sherds of late 1st to 2nd-century pottery from the droveway ditches suggest an early Roman date. The southernmost ditches of the droveway had been cut by a north/south aligned gully of uncertain date; two oval pits of uncertain date and function were identified to the south and north of the droveway respectively.

To the south of the droveway ditches, a circular feature (27028) with steep sides measured 1m in diameter and up to 1.7m deep and is likely to have been a well. Late 1st to 2nd-century pottery was recovered from its two fills. A posthole adjacent to the well may have been associated with a structural feature such as an arm for a bucket. A group of postholes were identified at the south-west of this excavated area, and two produced sherds of mid-1st to 2nd-century AD pottery, suggesting a possible early Roman date, although their function is uncertain.

Droveway 2 and Enclosure 2 (Fig. 5)

To the south-west of Droveway 1 and Well 27028, a further group of features were revealed during the 2014 New Fry Club and F1 Pitch excavation (CA 2015b); these likely represent agricultural activity on the periphery of the Roman settlement. At the east of the excavated area, north-east/south-west oriented Ditch 223 is likely to have formed part of a field boundary, while to the west of this and on the same alignment, a series of ditches appear to have formed a rectilinear enclosure (Enclosure 2). A gap between Ditch 223 and Enclosure 2 possibly represents a droveway, which may have led to a stock holding area, formed by a curvilinear spur of ditch, which extended from the north of Enclosure 2. The ditches share the alignment of those identified in the geophysical survey of the site, and easternmost Ditch 223 corresponds closely with the alignment of one of the ditches displayed in the survey. A group of features within the north-east of the enclosure were possibly contemporaneous, comprising several short sections of ditch and postholes. The modest pottery assemblage from the features (primarily the

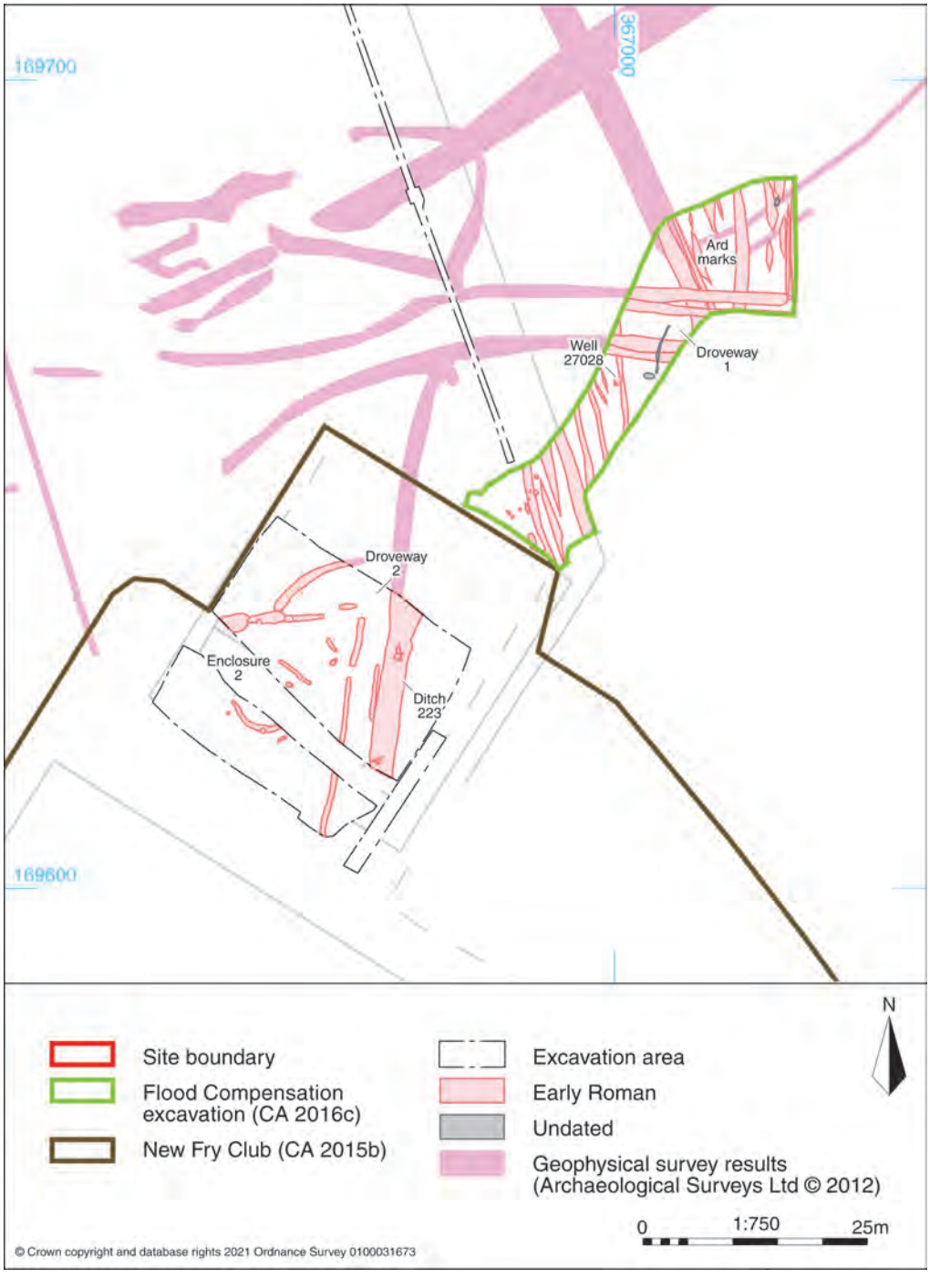

Fig. 5 Archaeological features excavated at the north-east of the settlement, within the Flood Compensation and New Fry Club excavation areas

ditches associated with the enclosure) includes 1st-century material and pottery of probable 1st to 2nd-century date; nothing suggests activity associated with the enclosure extended beyond AD 150. A small assemblage of animal bone was recovered from the features; where bone could be identified this included cattle, sheep/goat, pig, horse and dog. The relative scarcity of meat-bearing bones amongst the assemblage suggests that the assemblage may represent the disposal of waste from the dressing of animal carcasses in this area, although gnaw marks on the bone, and the presence of dog bones within the assemblage, may suggest movement of the bones from their original place of deposition. Of particular note, a small group of bones from a human neonate was recovered from Enclosure 2, suggesting that the ditch had been used for the burial, placement or discard of these remains. Infant remains in Romano-British contexts are increasingly recognised as often having been carefully placed (e.g. Moore 2009, 48; Millett and Gowland 2015), and it is possible that this deposit represents a deliberate act undertaken for spiritual purposes.

Walls 16007 and 17007 (Fig. 6)

Two wall sections of Roman date were exposed (but not fully excavated) during the evaluation at the Lower Fry Club car park **(**CA 2016a), within what appears to have been the core area of the Roman settlement (Fig. 6). Wall 16006 had a north-west/south-east alignment and comprised five courses of sandstone blocks, with a possible daub render. Potential evidence of fire damage may indicate that the wall was associated with a building that had burned down. Later deposits associated with the wall included burnt daub and may relate to clay render disturbed during robbing of the wall for building stone.

The second section of wall (17007) also followed a north-west/south-east alignment and its position and orientation suggest that it formed part of a building which fronted the road running through the settlement, on its western side. The wall was constructed of rough limestone blocks, set in a matrix of friable sandy gravel. It was abutted by deposits containing substantial quantities of roughly hewn limestone, probably forming make-up deposits for a floor surface, now lost. The wall and make-up deposits had been truncated and replaced with a later metalled limestone surface, which measured up to 90mm thick. A single sherd of pottery retrieved from the surface provides a probable late 1st to 2nd-century AD *terminus post quem* for the surface, which, unless residual, suggests that the initial stone building may have dated to the 1st century AD.

Well 2302 (not illustrated)

Also within the core area of the Roman settlement, the stone-lined well first discovered during the construction work for the factory in the 1920s (Bulleid and Horne 1926) was revealed during the 2016 care home watching brief (CA 2018a). Well 2302, which was given Grade II listed status in 1991 (list number 1384575), was formed of roughly hewn limestone blocks. It measured 0.7m in diameter and survived to at least 1.7m below ground level. No other features or deposits of archaeological interest were observed during this watching brief.

Cremation burial 1057 (Fig. 4)

A cremation burial of Roman date was recorded during the 2014 Phase 1 Watching Brief (CA 2015a), located to the south-east of Enclosure 1 (Fig. 4). The unurned cremated remains had been deposited within a pit measuring approximately 0.8m in diameter and 0.15m deep, with concave sides and a flat base. The bone appears to have been from a single adult of undetermined sex, although it did not represent all of the bone from the individual. A group of exceptionally well-preserved iron hobnails and many other small carpentry nails were included within the burial, confirming a Roman date. The hobnails indicate that one or more pairs of shoes/boots were included on the funerary pyre, while the carpentry nails may relate to a pyre structure or funerary bier, or given their small size, more likely one or more possible caskets or items of furniture. An environmental sample from the deposit yielded a large assemblage of charred plant remains, including cereal grains of spelt wheat, barley and oat, alongside a range of herbaceous plants, and wood charcoal of oak and alder/hazel. The cereal grains may represent the remains of food included as offerings on the funerary pyre or alternatively perhaps a bundle of crop-processing waste used as tinder to light the pyre. Together, the material from the deposit is likely to represent a mixture of material gathered from the pyre following the cremation and selected for burial.

Few other features of clear Roman date were identified. Extensive quarrying activity was identified within the Phase 1 watching brief area, as had previously been indicated during the earlier evaluation trenching (Robinson 2013). Dating evidence for this activity was sparse, although the few finds indicate that it took place during the early Roman period onwards, with several phases of activity possibly represented. The quarry pits were sealed by a deposit of clayey silt, which was revealed as a magnetic anomaly during the geophysical survey.

Post-Roman (Fig. 4)

Several features dating from the medieval, post-medieval or modern periods were identified within the Phase 1 Watching Brief and Phase 2 excavation areas. These included a north-west/south-east alignment of 15

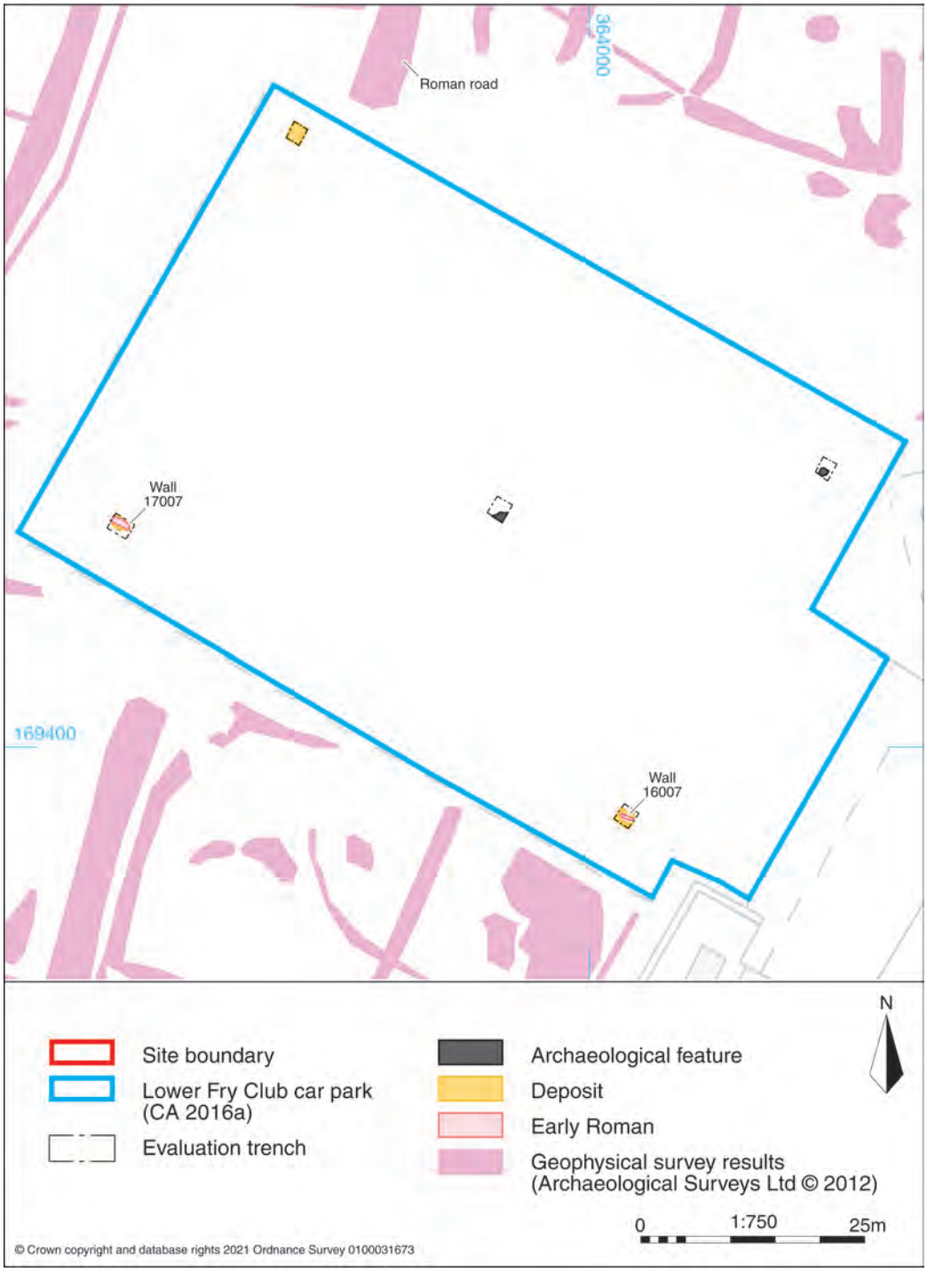

Fig. 6 Archaeological features revealed within the Lower Fry Club car park evaluation

regularly spaced postholes, which cut Enclosure 1 at its north-east corner (Fig. 4). A fragment of medieval pottery from the lower fill of one of the postholes suggests a possible medieval date for these features, although it is possible that the pottery sherd was a residual find and that the postholes were later. A group of square pits (not illustrated) correspond with an L-shaped row of trees first depicted on Ordnance Survey mapping in 1922, which broadly followed the alignment of Chandos Road to the west; several other posthole alignments are considered likely to be contemporaneous, and possibly also related to tree planting from around the time of the construction of the factory. A stone wall-foundation possibly formed part of a field boundary or a revetment for a terrace overlooking the floodplain (not illustrated), and a north-west/south/east aligned double-ditch and banked hedgerow probably relates to a boundary detailed on the 1844 Tithe Map for the area. Several pits and postholes of uncertain date were also identified.

FINDS AND BIOLOGICAL MATERIAL

The relatively small size of each of the archaeological interventions meant that individually they produced only small assemblages of finds and paleoenvironmental material, although, amalgamated, the overall assemblages provide some insights into the Roman settlement at Somerdale.

Unsurprisingly, pottery was the most commonly encountered artefact, and a total of 861 sherds (7.09kg) was recovered, principally from the New Fry Club and F1 Pitch and Phase 2 excavations (CA 2015b; 2016b). While the bulk of the assemblage was of Roman date, a small group of 51 sherds of prehistoric date adds to the growing evidence for some form of activity at the site prior to the establishment of the Roman settlement.

The prehistoric group includes four sherds in a course grog-tempered fragment of probable Early or Middle Bronze Age date, recovered from the fills of Enclosure 1. Most of the remaining handmade prehistoric pottery, almost all of it redeposited, is of probable Iron Age date, including sherds of probable Early to Middle Iron Age and later Iron Age date.

The Roman pottery assemblage from the different interventions were compositionally quite similar, characterised by being of relatively early date, with most of the material ranging from the mid-1st to 2nd centuries AD, with little seemingly suggesting activity much beyond AD 150. The presence of locally made wheel-thrown grog-tempered wares dating to before c. AD 70/80 suggests activity within the early decades of the Roman period. The overall assemblage is dominated by locally manufactured reduced coarsewares and grog-tempered wares, with some Savernake grog-tempered ware of mid-1st to early 2nd century AD date.

Regional 'imports' are restricted but include small numbers of sherds of South-East Dorset Black-burnished ware; their scarcity is an indication that 2nd-century or later activity at the site is limited, as such material is common within the area after the early 2nd century AD.

Continental imports are represented, including Gaulish samian and southern Spanish amphorae, although there was little amongst the assemblages to demonstrate unusually high status or specialised function. The prevalence of samian of South Gaulish origin over that from Central Gaul provides a further indication that activity at the site was early, predating the 2nd century AD, with dateable forms suggesting a Flavian date (c. AD 70-100). La Graufesenque samian pottery typically occurs only at towns and military sites, and rarely at rural settlements in the region (e.g. Brindle 2017; Timby 2017). The recovery during the Phase 1 watching brief of a rim sherd from a La Graufesenque samian form 27 cup of Flavian date is of interest; this sherd includes a scratched ownership graffito in the form of a V below its rim.

Much of the overall assemblage was well broken-up, suggesting that the activity represented by the material may have occurred at the periphery of the settlement. Finds of pottery of post-Roman date were scarce, with medieval and post-medieval pottery numbering just ten sherds.

Few finds other than pottery were recovered. A small group of 14 worked flints, mostly recovered as residual finds, is suggestive of activity within the general area in the prehistoric period, including during the Bronze Age. Other finds included occasional finds of ceramic building material, fired clay, a worked bone handle and iron nails/fittings. Of most note amongst the latter were a large group of nearly 700 exceptionally well-preserved hobnails and carpentry nails, found in association with cremation burial 1057. The hobnails indicate the presence of one or more pairs of footwear included on the funerary pyre, while the carpentry nails may suggest the inclusion of a casket or items of furniture.

The paleoenvironmental material recovered from the sites included a small assemblage of just 287 (3.5kg) animal bone fragments. The small size of the assemblage prevents much meaningful discussion; sheep/goat bones were most numerous, followed by cattle and then by pig, while horse and dog were also represented.

Human remains were restricted to the presence of cremation burial 1057, found during the Phase 1 watching brief, and the neonatal remains from the excavation at the New Fry Club and F1 Pitch, found within Enclosure 2.

Cremation burial 1057 comprised 233.5g of burnt bone from an individual unsexed adult, somewhat less than the 1,000 to 3,600g typically expected total weight of

bone from the cremation of an adult individual (McKinley 2000, 404), suggesting that only part of the remains were recovered from the funerary pyre, as is commonly found in cremation burials (McKinley 2000). The neonate burial comprised approximately 25% of an unsexed individual, including the back of the cranium, upper arms, torso and upper legs, and is estimated to have died at 36-44 weeks gestation, at or around the time of birth.

Three environmental samples were processed (totalling 93 litres). A sample from Enclosure 2 did not contain any material. A sample from the charcoal-rich fill of prehistoric Pit 1177 contained evidence for discarded domestic waste in the form of a large group of charred hazelnut shells and charcoal of oak and alder. A sample from cremation burial 1057 contained a large assemblage of charred plant remains including spelt wheat, barley and oat cereal grains, along with herbaceous taxa including couch onion, dock, goosefoots, medick/clover, vetches and grass stems. Charcoal was rare and identified as oak and alder/hazel, indicating the use of these woods for construction of the funerary pyre. The presence of the cereal remains potentially indicates a food offering included on the pyre (as identified within a cremation burial found on the outskirts of Gloucester; Brindle *et al*. 2018) or possibly a bundle of crop-processing waste used as tinder during lighting of the pyre.

DISCUSSION

Much of the Roman settlement at Somerdale was destroyed during the construction of Fry's chocolate factory and its associated development during the 1920s; the surviving remains, to the west of the area of the former factory, are now a protected Scheduled Monument and have seen limited archaeological intervention. Current understanding of the Roman settlement is therefore limited. Most of the archaeological work undertaken at the site over the past decade has been limited in scale, with much of it taking place within the area truncated by the former factory, and in many areas the interventions appear to have focussed on areas that were outside the core of the main settlement. The results of the work nevertheless provide some new and useful insights into the Roman site.

The chronology of Somerdale

The origins of Roman Somerdale remain obscure, although the recent work by CA has contributed further evidence for probable prehistoric activity of some sort at the site. Residual flints of probable Mesolithic date suggest some activity in the vicinity of the site during this period. The earliest cut features identified comprise a group of four pits identified within the Phase 1 Watching Brief area, which contained worked flints and an assemblage of charred hazelnuts, likely reflecting domestic food waste. Flint debitage within one of the pits is suggestive of a prehistoric (pre-Iron Age) date, although the absence of diagnostic material means more refined dating is unavailable.

Enclosure 1, first revealed during geophysical survey (Sabin and Donaldson 2012) and evaluation by AC Archaeology (Robinson 2013), was located to the north and east of the prehistoric pit group. The western extent of the enclosure is uncertain, although its east-facing arm was almost fully exposed, indicating that it measured up to around 80m wide at this side, with a 5m gap for a south-east facing entrance located approximately halfway along the length of its east-facing ditch. The function of the enclosure is uncertain although its general form and visible dimensions suggest a settlement function is possible. The ditches of the enclosure were found to contain a small quantity of pottery of Bronze Age and probable Iron Age date, along with some worked flints. The presence of probable Iron Age pottery within the ditches of the enclosure may suggest that it is later than the pits containing worked flint, and the Bronze Age pottery and flint within the fills of the ditch is perhaps derived from other pits that were truncated when the enclosure ditches were cut.

The date of the enclosure is made somewhat ambiguous by the mixed nature of the assemblage from its ditches. The pottery may suggest an Iron Age date, and this is possibly supported by the absence of Roman period finds from its fills. The enclosure is broadly comparable in terms of its size and form with an example excavated at Henbury, Bristol, 14km to the north-west, which dates to the very Late Iron Age (probably the 1st century AD) (Evans *et al.* 2006). Many other broadly comparable examples of similar scale, often with east or south-east facing entrances, are also recorded from slightly further afield across Gloucestershire (Moore 2020, 505, fig. 23.6). An Iron Age date for the enclosure is therefore a strong possibility, and its establishment adjacent to the River Avon was perhaps part of the expansion into low-lying wetter landscapes during the later Iron Age seen elsewhere in Somerset (Moore 2006, 72). Caution is required, however; the orientation of the enclosure ditches, on north-east/south-west and south-east/north-west alignments, is broadly comparable with presumed Roman features identified during the geophysical survey within the now Scheduled area to the west (Sabin and Donaldson 2012). While it is possible that the orientation of these features follows a pattern of alignment established during the Iron Age, which partially dictated the layout of the subsequent Roman settlement, without further dating evidence this remains very uncertain.

While it is unclear whether the Roman settlement at

Somerdale had pre-Roman origins, the evidence from Cotswold Archaeology's excavations at Somerdale are at least strongly suggestive of early Roman occupation, as demonstrated through the recovery of dateable pottery. This early evidence corresponds with other early finds from the site, including coins dated to as early as AD 37, and other coins and brooches of 1st- and 2nd-century date, which were housed within the former Somerdale museum (Browne 1987, 13). The recovery of 3rd- and 4th-century coins during the early 20th-century investigations indicates activity continued into the late Roman period (Gray 1922; Taylor and Collingwood 1921).

The status and classification of the Roman settlement at Somerdale

The 2012 geophysical survey plot of the site at Somerdale presents a clear view of part of a nucleated roadside settlement, and part of a metalled road surface was revealed during the early interventions at the site (Collingwood and Taylor 1924; Bulleid and Horne 1926). There are various indications that the site was one of some considerable status, including the rich finds assemblage discovered during the early work and the evidence for several masonry buildings fronting the roadside. The courtyard building with a bath suite excavated in the 1920s indicates that at least one structure at the site was well-appointed, although it is unclear whether this represents a single high-status dwelling in a settlement where buildings were otherwise of more humble construction, as appears to have been the case at Camerton, on the Fosse Way, where a winged corridor building with tessellated pavements and painted plaster stood out over other simpler buildings (Wedlake 1958). The walls for two buildings revealed during the Lower Fry Club evaluation did not produce any evidence for being of particularly high status. The site of a temple is suggested by a circular structure within a rectangular ditched enclosure, raising the possibility that the settlement served a localised religious focus. Amongst the finds discovered during the early 20th century was an inscribed statue base, unusually dedicated to the deified emperors yet fulfilling a vow to Silvanus (Fishwick 1994, 136; RIB 181). The presence of a statue base provides further evidence for at least some prestigious elements at the settlement; it has been conjectured that the abbreviation CON VIC GA at the bottom of the base refers to a conductor (or chief tenant) (Birley 1980, 141), which, if that reading of the text is correct, may even imply state ownership of the settlement, with control placed in the hand of lessees. Given the opulence of the house excavated in the 1920s, is it possible that this house was even the residence of the conductor? The presence of an extensive and lavish 4th-century Roman courtyard villa complex at Keynsham, just 700m to the west (Bulleid and Horne 1926; Russell 1985; Fig. 1), implies that Somerdale continued to be of importance in the 4th century, with the villa perhaps occupied by an elite associated with governance of the settlement at Somerdale. Our current lack of understanding of the chronological development of Somerdale makes it difficult to say much more about the link between the two sites, however.

Regarding terminology, the issues concerning the classification of sites often fairly ubiquitously termed 'Small Towns' has been given recent attention by Smith and Fulford (2019). The term 'town' is problematic because it implies a level of urbanisation that relatively few of the nucleated settlements on the Roman road network typically display, most notably the presence of defences, regular street grids, public baths, a forum/basillica, and monumental public buildings. While many of these attributes were common to the major towns of the province – the *coloniae*, *municpia* and *civitas* centres – they are not all common features at smaller nucleated sites on the road network; while these other sites are often classified as either defended or undefended 'small towns' (a distinction based on whether or not they were ever provided with a defensive circuit), most of the sites are now regarded as being of overarching rural character, usually lacking many features that would allow them to truly be regarded as urban (Smith and Fulford 2019, 141). Referring specifically to sites on the road network with walls or other defences, Smith and Fulford prefer the term *'Defended Vici'* (defended villages) in order to distinguish them from sites with clearer urban characteristics. These defended sites encompass a wide spectrum of settlements with varying characteristics, however; undefended roadside nucleated sites, usually referred to as 'undefended small towns', are if anything even more heterogeneous, encompassing an array of different examples of wildly divergent origin, size, character, function and status. Many such sites are very poorly understood, often lying beneath modern developments and therefore subject to limited and piecemeal archaeological investigation. The widely varied nature of roadside settlements makes it difficult to draw direct comparisons. Unlike some other nucleated sites on the road network in Somerset such as Ilchester (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 62-70) and probably Gatcombe (Smisson and Groves 2014), Somerdale appears not to have been provided with defences. Of local examples, Camerton (Wedlake 1958; Burnham and Wacher 1990, 292-96) and Shepton Mallet (Leach 2001; Leach *et al.* 2004; Broomhead 2006; CA 2009; Ellis and Leach 2012), both on the Fosse Way, perhaps provide the closest parallels.

Shepton Mallet, like Somerdale, developed in the 1st

century AD at the site of a river crossing, and became the focus for a number of masonry buildings fronting onto the road and its side streets. Many coffined burials, including examples of lead and stone, were discovered, buried in distinct burial plots around the settlement. The stone coffins recovered in the 20th century at Somerdale were perhaps therefore also associated with a burial plot established off one of the side streets.

Camerton also appears to have developed alongside the Fosse Way during the later 1st century AD, although, as possibly at Somerdale, the site produced some evidence for Late Iron Age occupation; it is possible that the Roman occupation developed out of a mid 1st-century Roman fort. Initial buildings at the site were of timber construction, although the site was represented by masonry-footed buildings from the 2nd century onwards, and at least one building was opulent. As at Somerdale, some of the buildings fronted the main Roman road, while others were set back and located alongside back-streets. Like Somerdale, there is no evidence that either Shepton Mallet or Camerton were ever provided with defences. Both sites were occupied at least into the late 4th century AD, and probably into the 5th.

While the 2012 geophysical survey plot has provided us with an almost unparalleled glimpse of the layout of part of a nucleated roadside settlement, the piecemeal investigations and poorly recorded early work at the site mean that our understanding of the nature of Roman Somerdale remains uncertain, preventing a clear view of the role the site played within the local settlement hierarchy. While the geophysical survey plot shows lanes or tracks leading off from the road running through the site, indicating that the site was certainly more substantial than a simple ribbon settlement that grew up alongside the road, these are not elements of the type of street grids that define urban settlements, and based upon our current evidence, lacks the features above that would enable it to be characterised as an urban town. As indicated for most roadside nucleated settlements in the province (defended and undefended), the site is likely to have had a primarily agricultural economy, as hinted at by Enclosure 2 and the droveways towards the north of the settlement, which were perhaps associated with stock management. There can be little doubt, however, that the site was of considerable local prominence, as revealed by the nature of the finds discovered, the scale of the settlement revealed through the geophysical survey and the evidence for well-appointed masonry buildings, at least one of which had a private bath suite.

Is Somerdale Traiectus?

The true location of the Traiectus listed in the Antonine Itinerary has for a long time been subject to speculation. As early as 1883, Bitton, which is located 2.5km to the north-east of Somerdale (Fig. 7), was suggested as the location for the site (Browne 1987), and, based on the distances provided between known towns listed in the itinerary, Bitton, or a site very nearby, has long been considered the most likely contender (Margary 1973, 138-9; Rivet 1970, 58-9). The precise location has, however, been open to question, and a site at or near Keynsham has been considered an alternative possibility for some time (Browne 1987; 1991; Prosser 1995; Russell 1985).

The problems surrounding the identification of Traiectus remain complex, however. The Latin term *traiectus* means 'crossing' and is used within the Antonine Itinerary in three different contexts. Most frequently it is used to refer in the maritime itinerary for a long sea crossing to an island, or from Italy to Africa; in the land itinerary it is used to describe a short sea crossing forming part of a longer route; thirdly, it is used as the name of a place where a river was crossed, although in this case the river crossing itself need not have been part of the route described in the itinerary (Rivet 1970, 59; Rivet and Smith 1979, 177-8).

It is generally accepted that, even if the location of Traiectus was at Bitton, the crossing point referred to in the Antonine Itinerary could not be the insubstantial River Boyd, which runs through the modern town. Crossing this minor river would be a simple affair, and the name is usually considered far more likely to refer to a crossing point of the River Avon, further to the south (Higgins 2005, 11). The trajectory of the road identified during the geophysical survey at Somerdale indicates a continuation to the east, where it seems likely to have crossed the River Avon at what is today its most shallow crossing point in the immediate area (La Trobe-Bateman 1999, 12); it is this crossing point of the Avon that provides us with one of the strongest arguments in support of the suggestion that Somerdale is the Traiectus described in the Antonine Itinerary. Examples from the continent where the term was used to describe locations at which rivers were crossed include Utrecht and Maastricht in the Netherlands (Rivet and Smith 1979, 177-8).

Questions remain, however; it is unclear why an inland settlement on the banks of a river was awarded the significance of being termed Traiectus in the Antonine Itinerary, when the crossing of the Severn Estuary between Sea Mills and Caerwent, which the communication route is known to have taken, goes unmentioned (Margary 1973, 138-9; Rivet and Smith 1979, 177-8). There is little doubt that the Avon could easily be crossed, whether by means of a bridge or a ford, whereas a crossing between Sea Mills and Caerwent would quite evidently have required a short

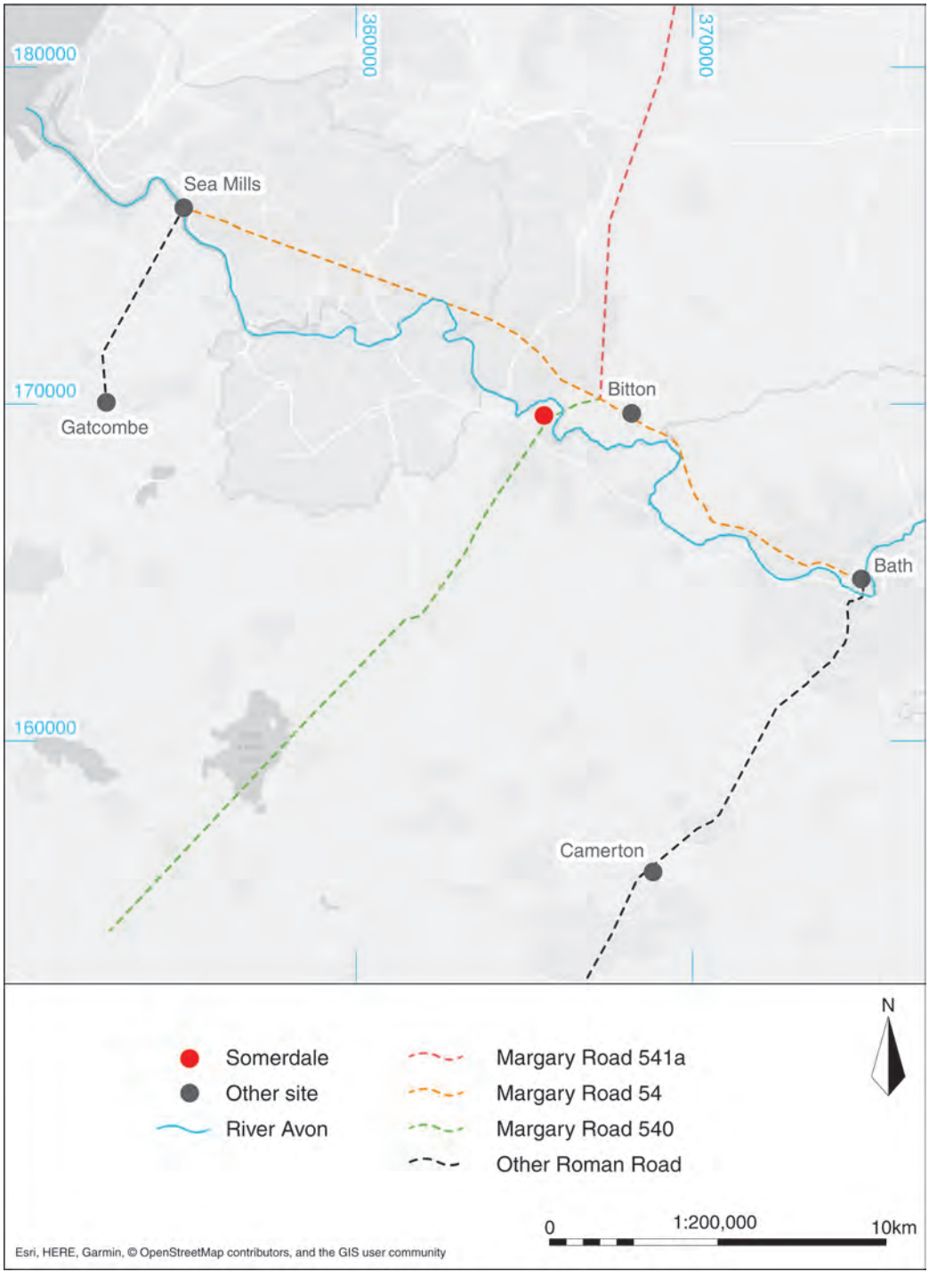

Fig. 7 Somerdale shown in relation to key sites and routes of Roman roads discussed within the text

voyage by boat. The question has received the attention of many authors over time, and an error introduced during transcription of the Antonine Itinerary has frequently been suggested to be at the root of the puzzle (Rivet 1970, 59). Numerous different errors have been suggested, varying in their degree of complexity, but the most straightforward is that the names of Abonae, which is widely accepted as the Latinised name for the River Avon (Rivet 1970, 58; Rivet and Smith 1979, 239-40), and Traiectus were inadvertently exchanged during transposition by a copyist – Traiectus originally described the point of departure for the crossing of the Severn at Sea Mills, while Abonae referred to a settlement on the River Avon. The identification of Somerdale as an important and substantial settlement on the River Avon perhaps increases the validity of this suggestion, and certainly would solve the problem of the itinerary's missing reference to a journey across the Severn. There is, however, no other reason why the term Traiectus shouldn't have referred to a settlement at a crossing point of the Avon, as the use of the name for settlements on rivers on the continent clearly illustrates (Rivet and Smith 1979, 177-8).

Leaving aside the question as to whether the site listed on the Antonine Itinerary should be named Abonae or Traiectus, a further question remains. One of the chief arguments against the identification of Somerdale as the Traiectus (or indeed Abonae) of the Antonine Itinerary is its precise position (Higgins 2005, 11). Traiectus is listed as being located directly on the road running between Bath and Sea Mills (Margary road No. 54) (Fig.7), which is accepted as running to the north of the River Avon in its entirety, and archaeological remains of the road along this proposed route have been recorded (Margary 1973). The site at Somerdale is off-set from this route to the south-west, on the south-side of the River Avon (Fig. 7). The road which ran through the Roman settlement at Somerdale and crossed the Avon here appears more likely to be part of a route believed to have been designed to carry traffic from the Imperial lead mines at Charterhouse-on-Mendip (Margary road no. 540) up to the Avon at Keynsham and beyond, where it joined the crossroads of the Bath to Sea Mills road, and, significantly, continued on to the north up to the fortresses at Kingsholm and Gloucester (Margary road no. 541a). The projected trajectory of Margary's 541a road between Bitton and Gloucester – a route which has been confirmed by the discovery of a substantial roadside settlement at Hall End Farm, Wickwar (Young 2006) – suggests that the junction of these roads lay around 2km to the north-east of Somerdale, between Willsbridge and Bitton (Fig. 7), and traces of the road are reportedly visible on aerial photographs to the east of Willsbridge (Browne 1987, 12).

While in terms of its apparent scale and status, its general location, and its position at an important river crossing, Somerdale would appear to fit the bill for Traiectus (or indeed Abonae), the question therefore remains as to whether it is close enough to the Bath to Sea Mills road to be accepted as such. Is it possible that the site was of sufficient local prominence to have influenced the name given on the itinerary for a smaller and less significant posting station (cf. Rivet 1970, 65) at the road junction between roads 54, 540 and 541a? The point at which the Avon was crossed is likely to have been of very significant strategic importance when one considers the likely cargos of lead and silver from Charterhouse, which following the crossing of the river, could subsequently be distributed at the crossroads west to Sea Mills (and beyond by sea to Caerwent), north to the successive fortresses at Kingsholm and Gloucester and east to Bath (Higgins 2005, 12-13), where an early military presence is also suspected (Cunliffe 1969). If Birley's (1980, 141) interpretation of the presence of a possible conductor at Somerdale is correct, it seems possible that this chief-tenant's role may even have been associated with monitoring the onward distribution of lead and silver from Charterhouse, where, by the Flavian period the mines were likely operated on behalf of the state under lease (Mattingly 2006, 507).

Referring to this crossroads as the point where the Avon was crossed, even if the settlement on the crossing was located some distance to the south-west, possibly makes sense when considered from a strategic viewpoint. In the absence of clear evidence from epigraphy, however, the name of the settlement at Somerdale must remain open to question and is something likely to continue to generate debate. While its name is uncertain, the clear evidence for the scale and status of the site at Somerdale are commensurate with it being a roadside and riverside settlement of considerable local significance from early on in the Roman period, albeit one that for the time being remains poorly understood.

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