

Early Neolithic, Iron Age and Roman settlement at Monksmoor Farm, Daventry, Northamptonshire

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with contributions by

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Front cover: Late Iron Age ring gully RG8, looking west

Back cover: Late Iron Age ditched enclosure E2 entranceway and cobbled surface

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Contents

List of Figures	iv
List of Tables	v
Contributors	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Project background	1
Location, topography and geology	1
Historical and archaeological background	3
Prehistoric	3
Late Iron Age and/or Roman period	3
Saxon/medieval and later	3
Archaeological work within the area	3
Site phasing	7
Chapter 2 The archaeological evidence	11
Period 1: Early Neolithic (4000BC to 2500BC).....	11
Neolithic pits	11
Period 2: Middle Iron Age (400BC to 100BC)	11
Period 3: Late Iron Age to post-Conquest (100BC-AD60).....	11
Introduction	11
Area 1.....	13
Enclosure E1	13
Enclosure E2	13
Enclosure E3	15
Ring gully RG1.....	16
Ring gullies RG2 and RG3	17
Ring gullies RG4 and RG5	18
Ring gullies RG6, RG7 and RG8	19
Area 2.....	21
Enclosure E11	21
Ring gully RG13.....	22
Area 6.....	23
Enclosure E4	23
Enclosure E10	23
Enclosure E5	23
Ring gully RG9.....	27
Ring gully RG11	27
Period 4: Early Roman (AD60-AD150).....	27
Introduction	27
Areas 1, 3, 4 and 5	27
Area 6.....	27
Initial phase of enclosure system E15	29
Routeway 1	29
Enclosure E9	32
Enclosures E12, E13 and E14	33
Second phase of enclosure system E16.....	33
Wattle-lined well	37
Period 5: Medieval to post-medieval	37
Open field system	37
Post-medieval quarry pits	38

Chapter 3 Finds	39
Worked Flint by <i>Yvonne Wolfram-Murray</i>	39
Area 6	39
Raw material and condition	39
Pit [356]	40
Pit [359]	41
Areas 1-5	41
The Neolithic pottery by <i>Andy Chapman</i>	42
Iron Age and Roman pottery by <i>Rob Perrin</i>	43
Overview	43
The Iron Age pottery	43
Fabrics and sources	43
The features	44
Roundhouses and ancillary features	44
Area 1	44
Area 2	44
Area 6	44
Enclosures	44
Area 1	44
Area 2	45
Area 6	45
Iron Age pottery from Roman features	45
The Roman pottery	45
Introduction	45
Fabrics and sources	45
Forms	45
Date	46
Roman pottery from Iron Age features	47
Roman features	47
Enclosure E7	47
Enclosures E8 and E9	47
Enclosure E12	48
Enclosure E13	48
Enclosure E14	48
Enclosure E15	49
Enclosure E16	50
Routeway 1	51
Querns and grinding stones by <i>Andy Chapman</i>	51
Fired Clay by <i>Mary Ellen Crothers</i>	55
Daub	55
Kiln, forge, oven or hearth material	55
Floor surface	55
Slag by <i>Andy Chapman</i>	55
Tile by <i>Rob Atkins</i>	56
Other finds by <i>Tora Hylton</i>	56
Roman	56
Post-medieval	57
Catalogue	57
Copper alloy	57
Iron	58
Lead	58
Glass	58

Chapter 4 The faunal and environmental evidence	59
Animal bone by <i>Rebecca Gordon</i>	59
Environmental remains by <i>Val Fryer</i>	59
Introduction and method statement.....	59
Phase 1: Early Neolithic, Area 6	59
Phase 2: Middle Iron Age, Area 6	59
Phase 3: Late Iron Age Area 6	59
Phase 3: Late Iron Age Area 1	61
Phase 4: Roman Area 6.....	61
Conclusions	61
Chapter 5 Discussion.....	67
Overview	67
Period 1: Early Neolithic	67
Period 2: Middle Iron Age	68
Period 3: Late Iron Age.....	70
Enclosures	73
Wootton Hill type enclosure.....	73
Ring gullies	76
Period 4: Early Roman	76
Field system.....	78
Paddocks and well	78
Period 5: Medieval to post-medieval land use	78
Bibliography	79

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Site location.....	1
Figure 1.2 Site topography	2
Figure 1.3 Site geology	4
Figure 1.4 Geophysical survey interpretation and trenches to the north	5
Figure 1.5 Geophysical survey interpretation and trenches to the south	6
Figure 1.6 Areas 1-4 overlying geophysical survey.....	8
Figure 1.7 Area 6 overlying geophysical survey	9
Figure 2.1 Area 6: Early Neolithic pits and middle Iron Age features	12
Figure 2.2 Area 6: Early Neolithic pits [356] and [359], looking north-west	13
Figure 2.3 Area 2: Section of ditch [9144/9149], looking south-west.....	13
Figure 2.4 Area 1: Late Iron Age settlement.....	14
Figure 2.5 Area 1: Late Iron Age ditched enclosure E1 [7124]	15
Figure 2.6 Area 1: Late Iron Age pit [7094]	15
Figure 2.7 Area 1: Late Iron Age ditched enclosure E2 entranceway and cobbled surface	16
Figure 2.8 Area 1: Late Iron Age posthole [7543].....	16
Figure 2.9 Area 1: Late Iron Age ditched enclosure E3 looking west.....	17
Figure 2.10 Area 1: Late Iron Age gully RG2 [7559]	18
Figure 2.11 Area 1: Late Iron Age pit [7601]	18
Figure 2.12 Area 1: Late Iron Age pit [7513]	18
Figure 2.13 Area 1: Late Iron Age ring gully RG5, looking north-east	18
Figure 2.14 Area 1 : Late Iron Age ring gully RG8, looking west	19
Figure 2.15 Area 1: Late Iron Age pit [7315]	19
Figure 2.16 Area 2: Late Iron Age enclosure E11	20
Figure 2.17 Area 2: Late Iron Age ditched enclosure E11	21
Figure 2.18 Area 2: Late Iron Age ditched enclosure E11 showing revetment	22
Figure 2.19 Area 2: Late Iron Age ring gully RG13, looking north.....	22
Figure 2.20 Area 6: Late Iron Age settlement.....	24
Figure 2.21 Area 6: Late Iron Age enclosure E4, looking south-west	25
Figure 2.22 Area 6: Late Iron Age ring gully RG12	25
Figure 2.23 Area 6: Late Iron Age ring gully RG10.....	26
Figure 2.24 Area 6: Late Iron Age ring gully RG9, looking west	26
Figure 2.25 Areas 1, 3, 4 and 5: Early Roman activity	28
Figure 2.26 Area 6: Early Roman settlement.....	30
Figure 2.27 Area 6: Early Roman settlement initial phase.....	31
Figure 2.28 Area 6: Early Roman ditched enclosure E15	32
Figure 2.29 Area 6: Early Roman ditched enclosure E15 showing re-cuts and stake holes	32
Figure 2.30 Area 6: Early Roman ladder enclosures E12, E13 and E14, looking south-west	33
Figure 2.31 Area 6: Early Roman settlement second phase.....	34
Figure 2.32 Area 6: Early Roman ditched enclosure E16.....	35
Figure 2.33 Area 6: Early Roman wattle-lined well [222]	35
Figure 2.34 Medieval field systems and post-medieval quarrying in Areas 1 to 6.....	36
Figure 2.35 Post-medieval quarrying in Area 2	37

Figure 3.1 Flake from polished stone axe, showing flat facet and finely worked, broken flint arrowheads, all from early Neolithic pit [356]	41
Figure 3.2 The radiocarbon determination.....	43
Figure 3.3 Pottery illustration catalogue 1-10.....	52
Figure 3.4 Pottery illustration catalogue 11-21.....	53
Figure 3.5 Pottery illustration catalogue 22-28.....	54
Figure 5.1 Daventry Monksmoor and surrounding sites	69
Figure 5.2 Area 1 phase plan.....	71
Figure 5.3 Area 6 phase plan.....	72
Figure 5.4 Artist impression of Wootton Hill enclosure (after Jackson, 2010, 108)	74
Figure 5.5 Iron Age gateways in Northamptonshire	75
Figure 5.6 Comparative plans of paddocks and routeways	77

List of Tables

Table 1.1 Summary of site chronology and significant archaeological features	7
Table 2.1 Comparison of the late Iron Age ring gullies in Areas 1, 2 and 6.....	17
Table 3.1 Quantification of worked flint in Area 6.....	39
Table 3.2 Catalogue of flint from pit [356].....	40
Table 3.3 Catalogue of flint from pit [359].....	41
Table 3.4 Quantification of worked flint as residual finds from Areas 1-5.....	42
Table 3.5 Late Iron Age pottery by feature group quantification.....	44
Table 3.6 Roman pottery fabric quantification	46
Table 3.7 Roman vessel forms per fabric.....	46
Table 3.8 Roman pottery feature group quantification	47
Table 3.9 Roman pottery feature group vessel form quantification.....	47
Table 3.10 Roman pottery quantification Area 6, enclosure E12.....	48
Table 3.11 Roman pottery quantification Area 6, enclosure E13.....	48
Table 3.12 Roman pottery quantification Area 6, enclosure E14.....	49
Table 3.13 Roman pottery quantification Area 6, enclosure E15.....	50
Table 3.14 Roman pottery quantification Area 6, enclosure E16.....	51
Table 3.15 Roman pottery quantification Area 6, trackway E17.....	51
Table 3.16 Quantification of querns and grinding stones.....	54
Table 3.17 Daub.....	55
Table 3.18 Kiln, oven or hearth material	55
Table 3.19 Quantification of slag.....	56
Table 3.20 Roman ceramic tile	56
Table 3.21 Small finds quantified by material type	57
Table 4.1 Area 6: Iron Age environmental samples	60
Table 4.2 Area 1: Iron Age environmental samples	62
Table 4.3 Area 6: Early Roman ditches environmental samples	63
Table 4.4 Area 6: Early Roman features environmental samples	63

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Project background

The investigations at Monksmoor Farm were undertaken in three parts between July 2013 and March 2015. MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) were commissioned by AECOM to undertake archaeological excavation prior to construction of a residential development.

Desk-based assessment (Rouse and Hunn 2005) was followed by a geophysical and fieldwalking survey of the site (Hancock 2005a, 2005b) and trench evaluation works (Hancock 2006c). A detailed geophysical survey of the entirety of proposed development site was undertaken by MOLA (then Northamptonshire Archaeology) in 2012 (Walker and Walford 2012). A final phase of trial trenching of the northern area was completed in 2014 (Burke and Simmonds 2014). After the evaluation, a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was produced for the excavations by MOLA (MOLA 2014a) following the objectives for the excavation identified in the brief provided by the County Archaeological Advisor for Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) (Mather 2013).

Two separate phases of excavation were undertaken; to the north were Areas 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 which were excavated between December 2014 and March 2015 whilst the south-west part of the development, Area 6, was excavated between July 2013 and September 2013 and then, after a short hiatus, between March 2014 and April 2014. In February 2015 Area 6 was extended to pursue two linear features which extended outside the excavation area. Monitoring was undertaken by Lesley-Ann Mather of NCC on behalf of Daventry District Council (DDC).

Location, topography and geology

The site occupies an area of c51ha located on the north-eastern edge of Daventry, north of Daventry County Park and bordering the Daventry Reservoir (Fig 1.1). To the west lies Welton Lane and beyond is modern suburban development. To the east lies open farmland. The main site has been subdivided into a south-west area of c28ha and a northern area of c23ha. This latter area is bounded by the Grand Union Canal on its northern edge. The

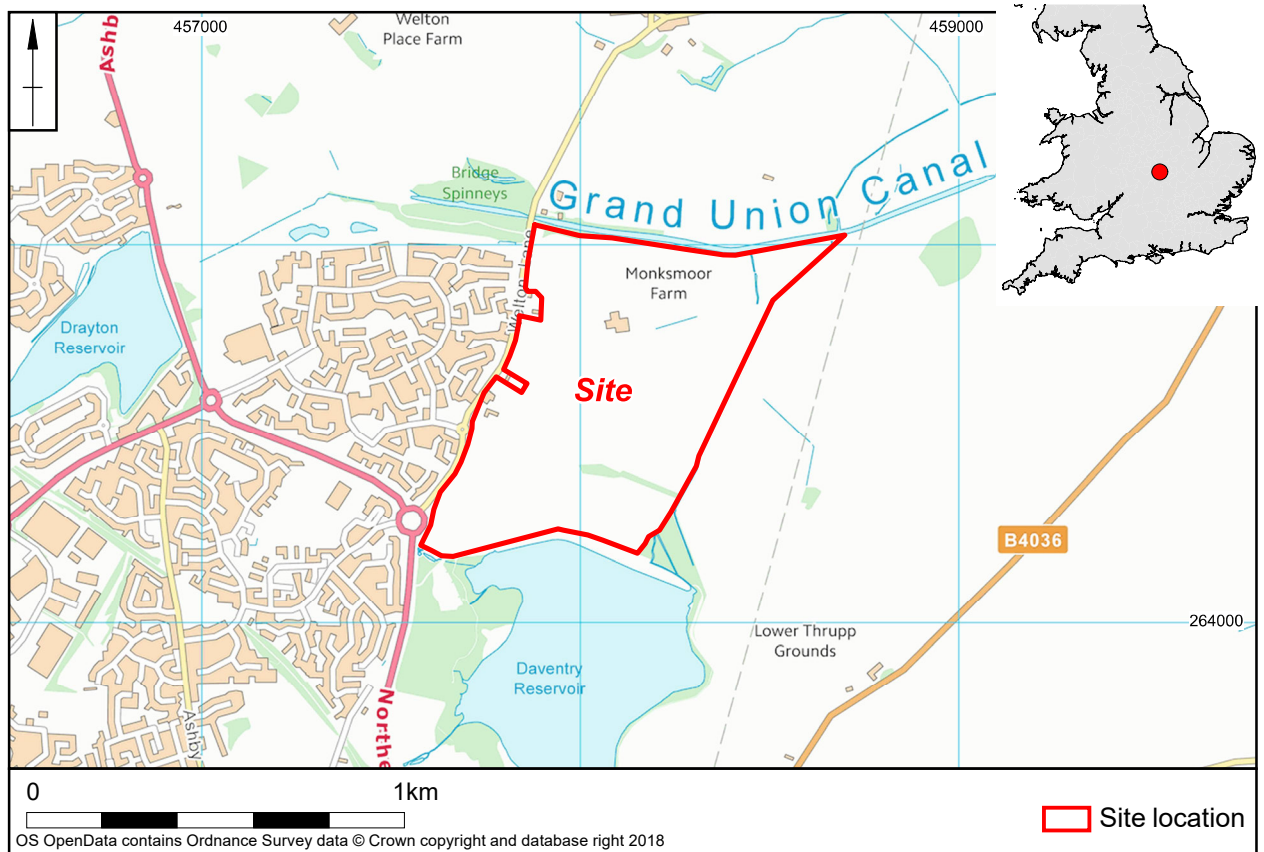


Figure 1.1 Site location

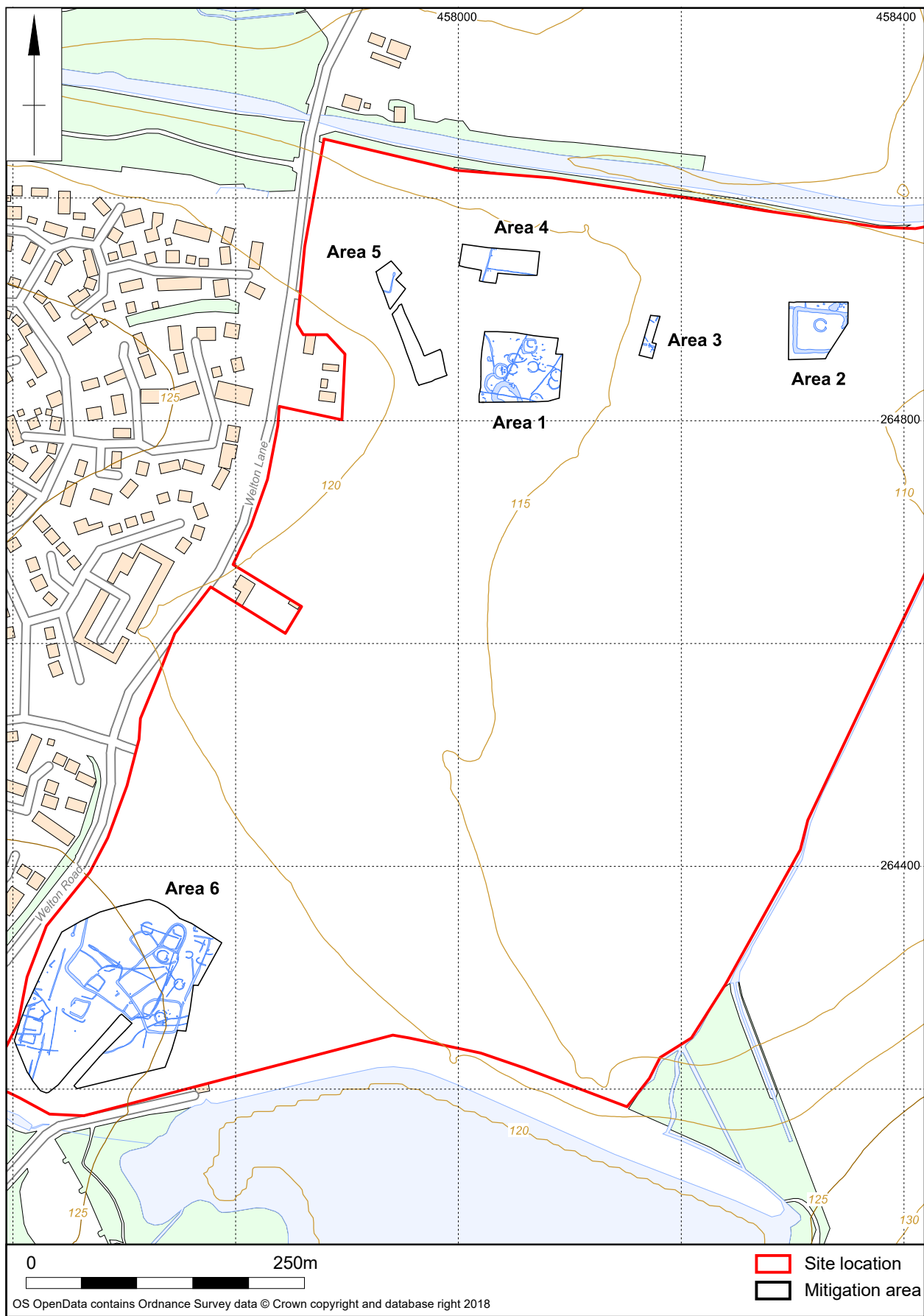


Figure 1.2 Site topography

development area was formerly arable farmland with the recently demolished Monksmoor Farm at its centre. This latter building only survived as a small area of concrete footings during the time of the excavation.

The topography varied across the site; the southern area was largely flat with an average height of 125m above Ordnance Datum, falling to the east towards a stream at the eastern boundary (Fig 1.2). The northern area was on a slight south-eastern slope, with Areas 1, 3, 4 and 5 positioned along the slope at heights between 114m-120m aOD. Area 2 was located on a small plateau at 112m aOD, with the aforementioned slope c15m west of it.

The soils are slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged fine loamy, fine silty and clayey soils (SSEW 1983, 711f) (Fig 1.3). There are small areas of slowly permeable calcareous soils on steeper slopes. The underlying geology consists of glaciofluvial or alluvium deposits (BGS 2017).

Historical and archaeological background

Prehistoric

Scant archaeological remains dating to the early prehistoric period are known within the study area. An Iron Age hillfort, Borough Hill (NHLE 1010696: RCHME 1981, 3, fig 54) is situated c1.5km to the south-east of the site (Fig 5.1). Multivallate ditches enclose the hillfort over a distance of 1.5km north to south. The hillfort has been partly overlain by ditches of another smaller multivallate hillfort on the northern part of the hill. Archaeological sites of both earlier and later date lie within the two hillforts, including two Bronze Age barrows, a Roman building complex and barrow cemetery. Excavations at Daventry Apex Park 2km to the west of Monksmoor Farm revealed an early Bronze Age segmented enclosure, a late Bronze Age to early Iron Age pit alignment and polygonal enclosure and an early to middle Iron Age settlement dating to c450-250BC including ring gullies and post-structures (Markus 2016; Markus and Morris forthcoming).

Late Iron Age and/or Roman period

Late Iron Age and Roman remains have been identified at Borough Hill (*ibid*), and a settlement of this period has been excavated at Middlemore Farm (Wilson 2004), c1.5km to the west of the site. Features comprised a boundary ditch thought to denote the limits of the cultivated areas, separating livestock on the southern side of the hillslope with crops to the north. Further ditches defining enclosures were identified along with associated pits or postholes. The pottery from the site is dated to between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD.

Saxon/medieval and later

No Saxon remains have been identified within the development area but the site is close to the town of Daventry. An excavation in Daventry uncovered 6th-century remains with the site reoccupied from the 10th century (Soden 1996/7). An isolated sunken feature building was investigated during the Apex Park excavations (Markus 2016).

The area around the development site probably comprised open, agricultural land during the medieval period. The area lay to the north-east of the medieval centre of Daventry, within the open field landscape of the township. Ridge and furrow cultivation earthworks have been recorded both within and adjacent to the site boundaries.

The Daventry Extensive Urban Survey records the existence of a windmill and watermill (SMRs 638/0/184, 638/38 and 638/36/1) adjacent to the parish boundary and c400m west of site (Foard *et al* 2006, 3.1.2.5). Directly to the south of Monksmoor Farm, field names recorded in the Daventry Extensive Urban Survey (*Windmill Piece, Old Mill Piece*) show the presence of mills in the area that later became the Daventry Reservoir (Fig 3). The landscape around the site has been reconstructed to indicate that the area was made up of large, open, irregularly shaped furlongs, including *Langdon Furlong, Priors Furze in Daventre Field* and *Windmill Piece shooting East and West*.

The Grand Junction Canal (SMRs 442, 442/1 and 442/1/1) was constructed by William Jessop between 1793 and 1815 and forms the northern boundary of the site. The stretch of the canal within the study area includes the Braunston Tunnel (SMR 442/1/13). The Daventry Reservoir (SMR 7824/0/0) was opened in 1804 and forms the southern boundary of the site.

The 1803 Inclosure Map shows the area surrounding the site consisting of an open landscape, labelled *Bean Field*, with a few rectilinear field boundaries marked along the southern side of the canal. In contrast, by the time the First Edition Ordnance Survey map was published in the 1880s, the entire surrounding landscape had been subdivided by rectilinear field boundaries. Thrupp Grounds Farm, to the east of the site, and Lang Farm, to the west of the site, were both in existence by this time.

Archaeological work within the area

The development area has been subjected to previous archaeological investigations comprising a geophysical survey (Hancock 2005a), fieldwalking (Hancock 2005b) and two phases of targeted evaluation trenching (Hancock 2006b and c).

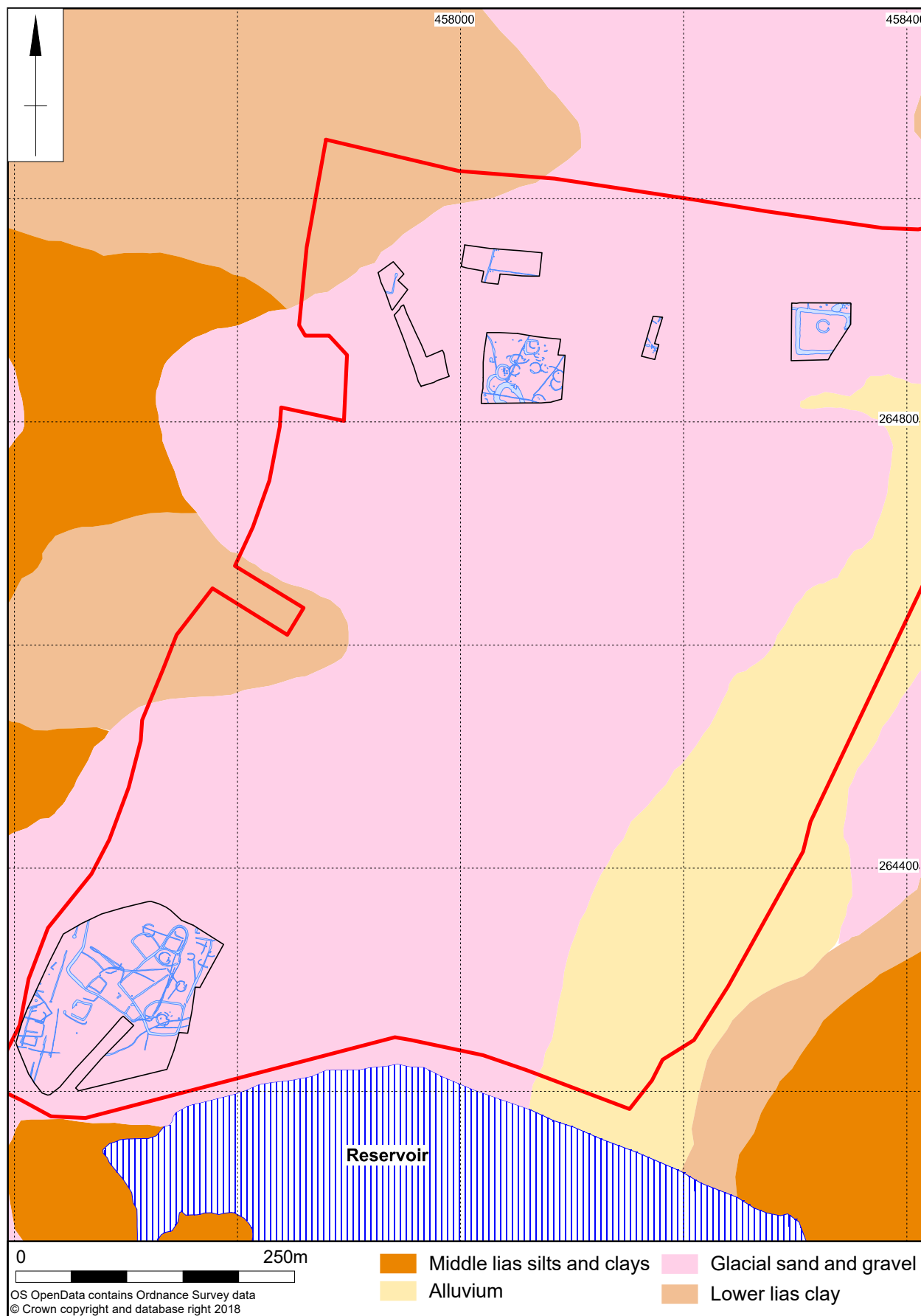
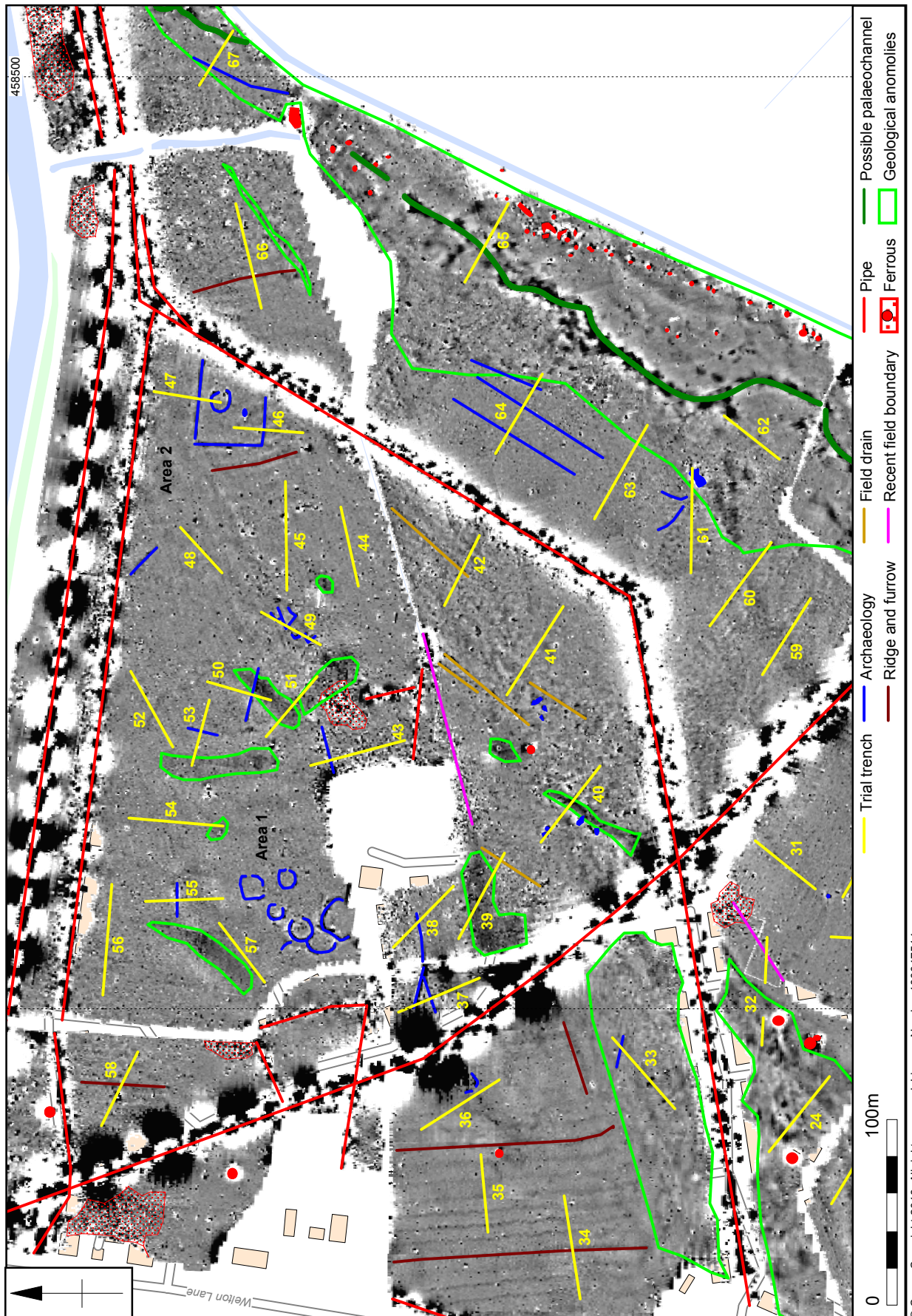


Figure 1.3 Site geology



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Figure 1.4 Geophysical survey interpretation and trenches to the north

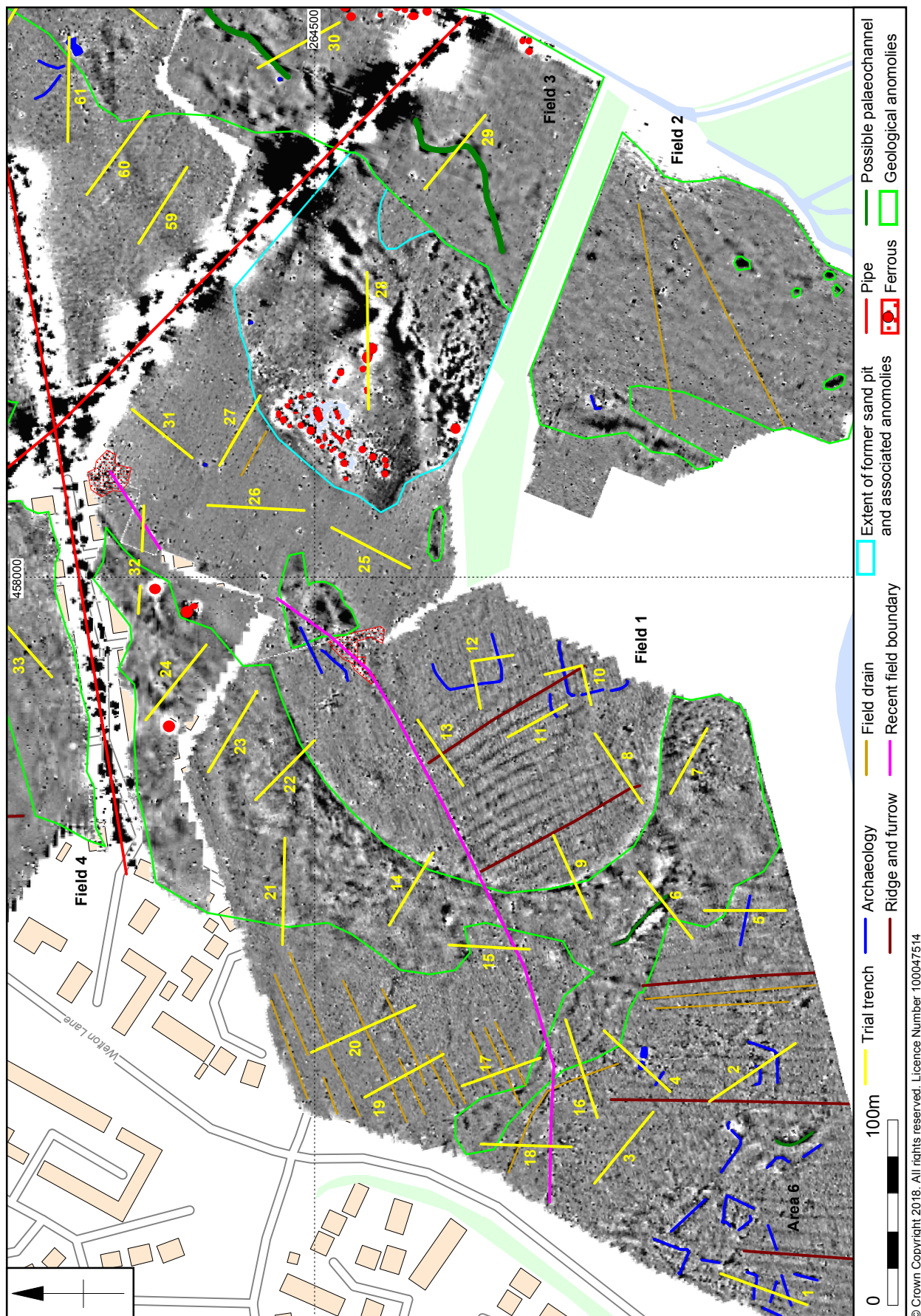


Figure 1.5 Geophysical survey interpretation and trenches to the south

Detailed gradiometer survey blocks were located over two discrete areas of possible archaeology as well as apparently blank areas. The first archaeological area was located to the north of the farm buildings and comprised four ring gullies and two small enclosures. The second area was situated in the south-west corner of the site. Subsequent trial trench evaluations (Hancock 2006a, b and c) confirmed the presence of archaeology in both areas, with the northern area of activity dating to the late Iron Age, with some evidence of continuity of settlement from the early middle Iron Age. The activity in the south-west was shown to comprise a series of Roman ditches.

Subsequent detailed geophysical survey of the entirety of the proposed development site was undertaken by MOLA (formerly Northamptonshire Archaeology) in 2012 (Walker and Walford 2012). Area 6 was located in the south-western part of Field 1 (Fig 1.5) and incorporated the Roman features identified in the previous geophysical evaluation survey (Hancock 2006b). Due to unfavourable magnetic properties of the soil the 2006 evaluation was unable to provide a clear layout and extent of enclosure or boundary ditches. Area 1, to the north consisted of a cluster of six small features, comprising penannular gullies and sub-square ditched enclosures (Fig 1.4). This site was first found and investigated during the earlier phase of evaluation and was shown by excavation to be of Iron Age date (Hancock 2006c). In Area 2, approximately 250m east of Area 1 there was a rectangular ditched enclosure. Its eastern edge lay close to a sewer pipe and was obscured in the geophysical survey by the resultant magnetic halo. Within the enclosure was a penannular feature indicating a possible roundhouse with an east facing entrance.

The 2012 works also included trial trench evaluation of the south-western part of the development area. The trenching confirmed the presence of features associated with the less clearly defined Roman site situated in the south-western corner (Area 6) (Fig 1.5). Fewer pottery sherds were recovered from this phase of the evaluation than previously and features appeared to be earlier, dating from the middle Iron Age to early Roman period. Features investigated during the 2006 evaluation in this area were dated from the 1st to 3rd centuries (Hancock 2006 a, b and c).

In 2014 a trial trench evaluation was conducted in the northern area (Burke and Simmonds 2014). The evaluation identified a series of features of late Iron Age to early Roman (early to mid-1st-century AD) date

which related to subsidiary occupation or to livestock management. A small rectangular enclosure was identified within Trenches 46 and 47 that was defined by a broad ditch, c220m to the east of the settlement. Within the enclosure were the remains of a ring ditch and a pit.

Two separate phases of excavation were undertaken; to the north were Areas 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 (Fig 1.6) whilst to the south-west was Area 6 (Fig 1.7). The southern excavation comprised Area 6 (2.3ha) in one arable field. The northern excavation was split into separate areas over two fields Area 1 (0.4ha), Area 2 (0.22ha), Area 3 (10m x 30m), Area 4 (20m x 70m) and Area 5 (110m x 20m). Both the north and south areas initially targeted archaeological features identified by previous geophysical survey and trial trench evaluation, these areas were then extended to encompass all further exposed archaeological features.

Site phasing

The results of the excavation confirmed the pattern of enclosure and ditch systems highlighted by the geophysical survey and trial trench evaluations. The stratigraphic analysis combined with the pottery has enabled a chronological sequence to be established which is summarised below. Archaeological features were encountered across all six excavated areas with the main concentrations in Areas 1, 2 and 6 and these will be discussed by Area.

Table 1.1 Summary of site chronology and significant archaeological features

	Period	Features
1	Early Neolithic (4000 BC to 2500 BC)	Two pits (Area 6)
2	Middle Iron Age (400 BC to 100 BC)	Ditch (Area 2) Ditched enclosures (Area 6) Ring gully (Area 6)
3	Late Iron Age to post-Conquest (100 BC to AD 60)	Ditched enclosures (Areas 1, 2 and 6) Ring gullies (Areas 1, 2 and 6) Pits (Areas 1, 2 and 6) Postholes (Areas 1 and 6)
4	Early Roman (AD 60 – AD 150)	Ditched enclosures (Areas 1,3, 4, 5 and 6) Pits (Areas 4 and 6) Postholes (Area 4) Well (Area 6)
5	Medieval and post- medieval	Ridge and furrow (Areas 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6) Quarry pits (Area 2)

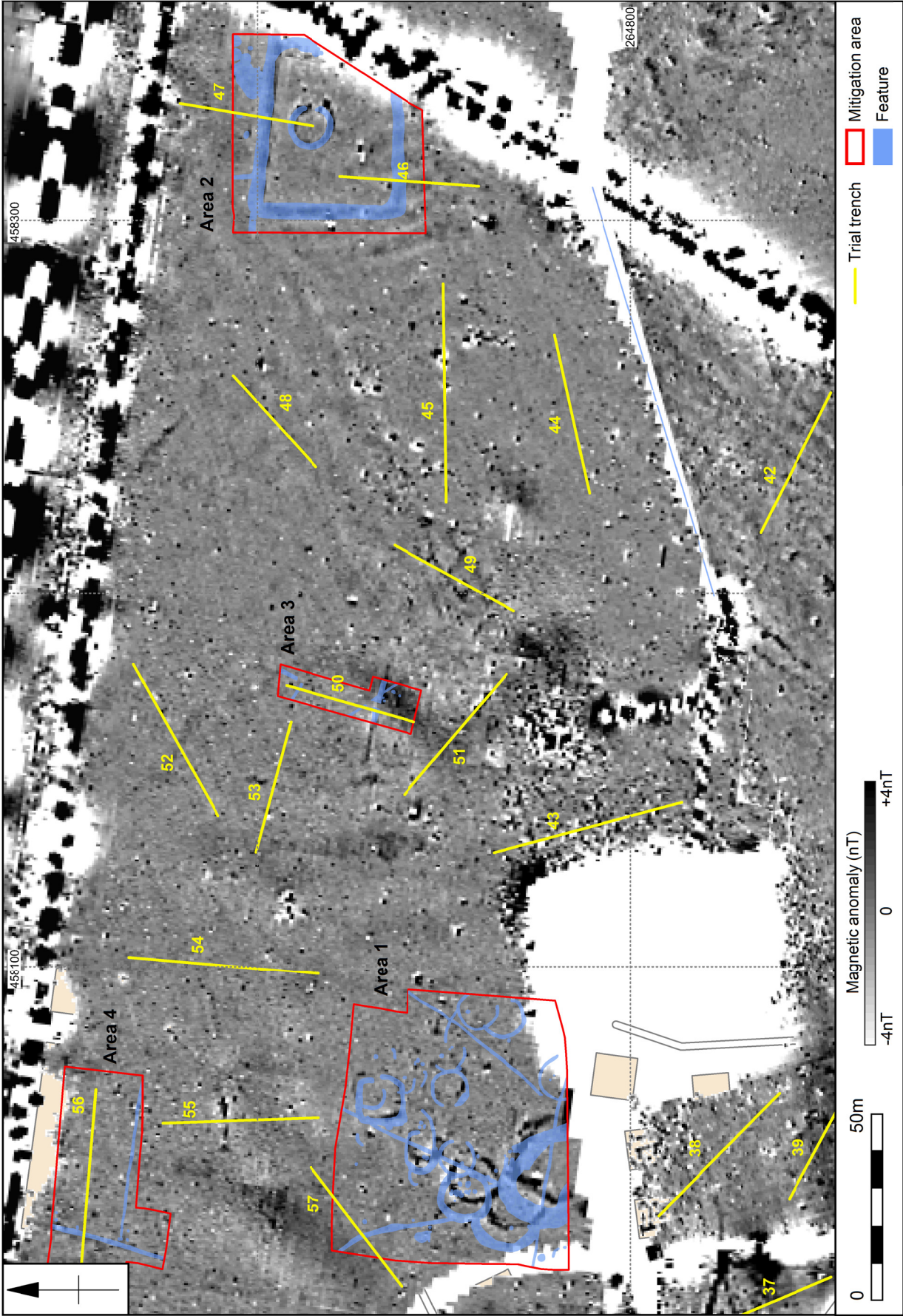


Figure 1.6 Areas 1-4 overlying geophysical survey

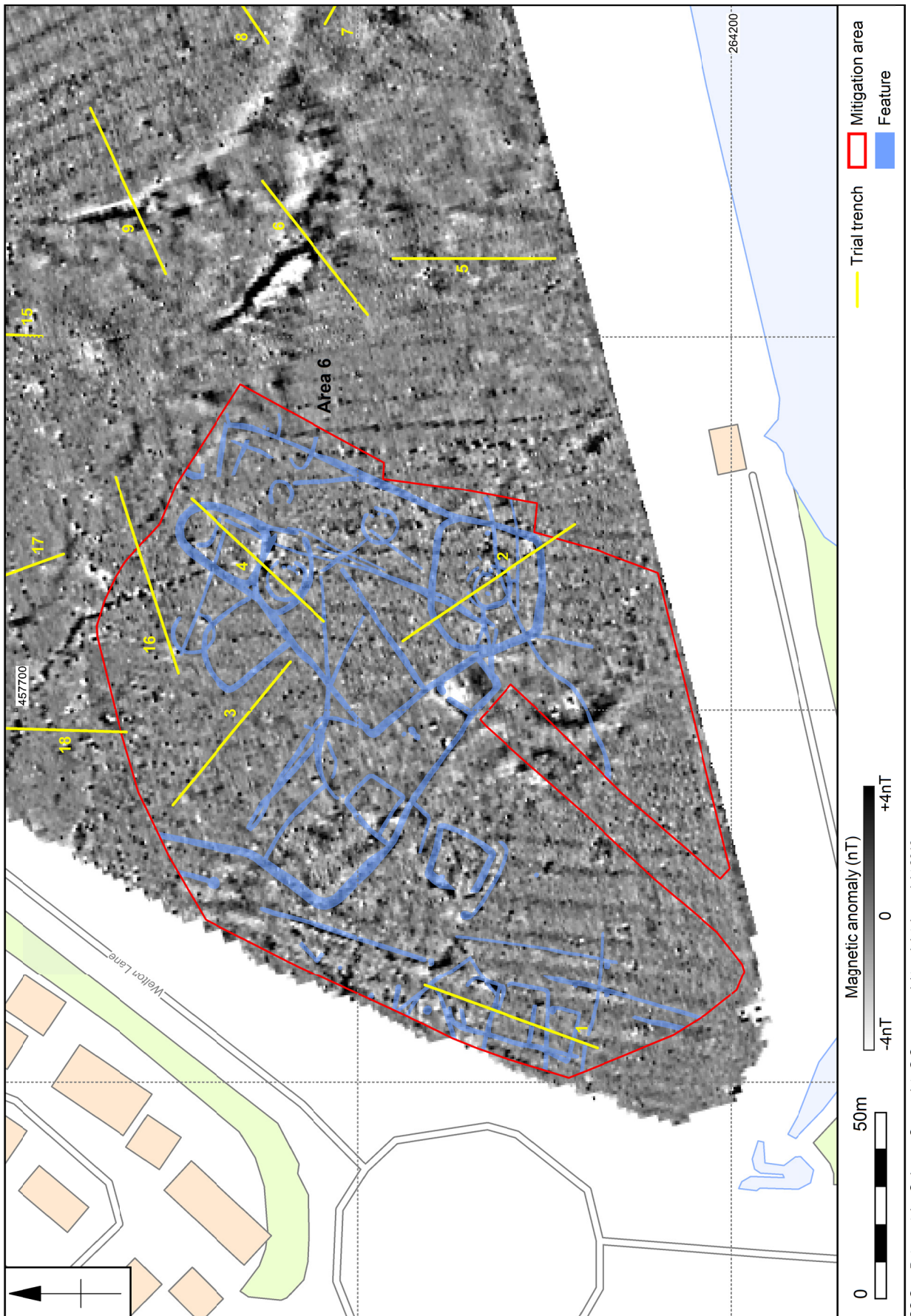


Figure 1.7 Area 6 overlying geophysical survey