

Colchester Archaeological Trust Ltd

**A Fieldwalking Survey at Abbotstone,
Stanway, Colchester**

for Tarmac Quarry Products Ltd

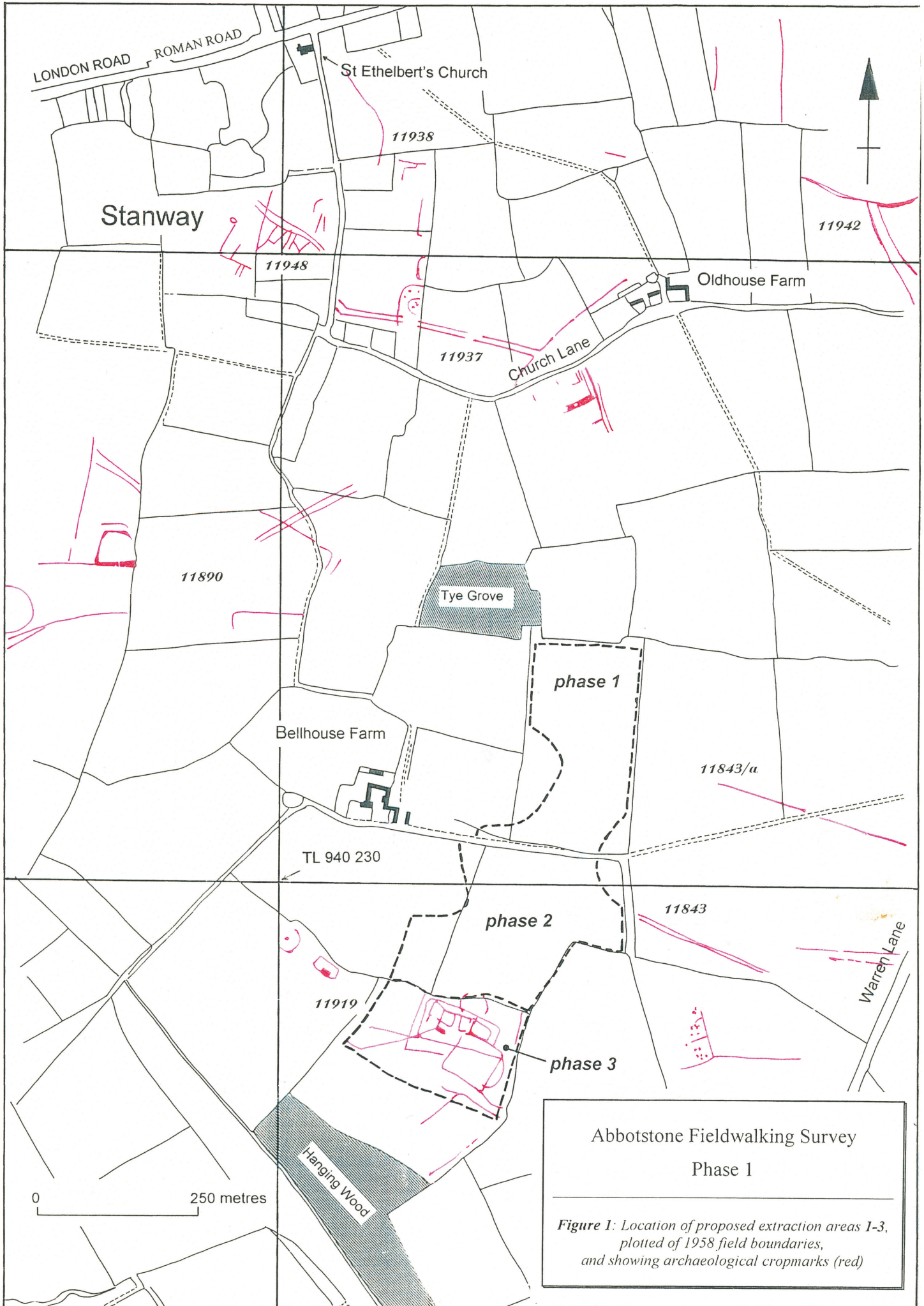
**Phase One
November 1997**

Colchester Archaeological Trust Ltd

Archaeological Fieldwalking Survey at Abbotstone, Stanway

Phase 1

NGR: TL 945 232





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Summary

In October 1997 a fieldwalking survey on 5.2 hectares of land scheduled for mineral extraction recovered a small and widely dispersed sample of Roman tile and brick. Prehistoric activity was represented by a single struck flint flake of possible Bronze Age or Neolithic date.

Introduction

This survey was commissioned by Tarmac Quarry Products Ltd in advance of the proposed Abbotstone pit extension which involves mineral extraction from a core area of 16.2 ha of former farmland adjoining the north-western part of the existing Bellhouse pit at Stanway. The extraction works are planned to take place in three phases. The subject of this report is Phase 1, which affects 5.2 ha of land to the north of footpath no.15.

Archaeological Background

The site lies within an area of archaeological importance to the west of Colchester where surveys and excavations are revealing an extensive pattern of activity belonging principally to the Iron Age and Roman periods. Aerial survey has yielded plentiful cropmark evidence in the area affected by Phase 3 of the proposed extraction works (Fig 1) indicating the underlying presence of enclosures, a ring ditch and other substantial features likely to be of archaeological significance. In contrast, the fields in Phases 1 and 2 have failed to produce cropmarks. However, this does not necessarily mean that the land is devoid of features, as disparities in cropmark definition are common due to local variations in ground conditions.

Methods

The fieldwork was carried out in accordance with the 1997 Colchester Borough Council "Guidelines on Standards and Practices for Archaeological Fieldwork in Colchester". The site grid adopted the established Ordnance Survey 100m grid squares shown on Figure 2. Within the grid, fieldwalkers followed parallel lanes spaced 10m apart with each inspecting a 2m wide strip in the path of his lane to achieve a 20% coverage of the overall area.

Conditions

The ploughsoil is a mid brown sandy silt loam with a high content of rounded and angular medium and small stones. Fieldwalking took place in October in conditions fairly favourable for observation of finds. The field was ploughed one week previously, leaving a fresh but lumpy surface. Weather conditions were dry, bright and clear with the sun low in the sky casting uneven shadows.

Results

Details of post-Roman finds, mainly tile, have been retained in the site archive, but are not included in the distribution plan since the items and their distribution were fairly typical of the background scatter commonly found in the region's ploughsoils.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of Roman and earlier finds from the surface of the field. These are summarised below by period:

Roman

Tile and Brick

The commonest material on the field surface was tile and brick. In several instances the pieces retrieved were too fragmentary and abraded to permit firm identification of their form. The plots thus distinguish between clearly identifiable Roman material (3 plots), and examples of uncertain but possibly Roman date.

Prehistoric

Burnt Flint

An single piece of burnt flint was recorded near the south boundary of the field.

Worked Flint

One prehistoric struck flake, possibly of Neolithic or Bronze Age date, was recovered from the southern part of the field.

Discussion

Roman Period

Although Roman brick and roof tile are present in the ploughsoil the few samples recovered are too widely dispersed to point to a specific location as the source of these materials. When the plots of the less firmly dateable materials are taken into account there is a bias toward the northern half of the field, but this is of doubtful significance in view of the small number of finds involved. In relation to the surrounding cropmark features it was also noted that all but one of the tile plots shown on Figure 2 lie to the north of a line formed by the projected westward course of a 320m long linear cropmark (number 11843/A shown in red on Fig.1). However, this coincidence is of limited value since the antiquity and true extent of the feature is unknown.

Prehistoric Period

When found in quantity burnt flint is frequently an indicator of prehistoric activity. However, little significance can be attached to the isolated find in the southern part of Phase 1 unless future fieldwalking in the adjoining region of Phase 2 produces further examples. Similarly, the flint flake, in its apparently isolated situation does not permit any conclusions to be made, other than noting its presence as an example of prehistoric activity in the area

Existing knowledge of the surrounding areas suggests that archaeologically significant features can be expected to lie within the five hectares due to be affected by Phase 1. While this initial survey of the Phase 1 ploughsoil has yielded evidence of early activity the results at this stage offer little indication of the local intensity of features on which to specifically aim further work.

Archive

Subject to the permission of the landowner, finds will be placed in the permanent care of Colchester Museum. The accession code for the finds and research archive is 1997:64.

Acknowledgements

The survey was commissioned by Tarmac Quarry Products Ltd. Thanks are due to the former farmer, Mr L. Maclean, for advice on the recent history of the field and to Peter Berridge of the Colchester Museum for comment on the flint.

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Appendix

Extracts from the Essex Archaeological Sites and Monuments Record For Abbotstone and Surrounding Areas

For numbered plot locations please refer to the location plan, Figure 1.

Extract From Essex Sites and Monuments Record
(For locations, please see Figure 1.)

11843

NGR: TL 948230

Description: Cropmarks centred on above NGR; possible roads / trackways.

11890

NGR: TL 938235

Description: Cropmark centred on above NGR; an enclosure formed by a wide cropmark. There is a suggestion of a double enclosure to the north. the cropmark is incomplete on the east side; other boundaries are dependant on it to the west of the enclosure. Possibly Roman, it seems not to be a medieval or post-medieval enclosure as there is nothing visible on the tithe and estate maps in the ERO.

11919

NGR: 942227

Description: Cropmarks: rectilinear enclosures, rectangular enclosure, linear features and possible ring ditch.

11937

NGR: TL 944239

Description: Iron Age ditched trackway and enclosures.

11938

NGR: TL 942243

Description: Cropmarks: linear features and possible trackway.

11942

NGR: TL950240

Description: Cropmarks of old field boundary with double ditched trackway, penannular ring ditch.

11948

NGR: TL 939240

Description: Cropmarks: an east-west trackway, linear features, a rectangular enclosure and to the south one ring ditch.