

**An Archaeological Watching Brief,
Intermediate Care Unit, Great Western
Hospital, Commonhead, Swindon (GW01),
November 2001.**

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By

Bernard Phillips A.I.F.A.

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**An Archaeological Watching Brief, Intermediate Care Unit,
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(SU1905 8225).**

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Archaeological watching of machine topsoil removal and down grading of land resulted in the discovery of a Romano-British pottery spread and several undated features.

Introduction

An application by the Swindon and Marlborough National Health Service Trust to the Swindon Borough Council Planning Department requested planning permission to build an Intermediate Care Unit for the new Great Western Hospital, at Commonhead, Swindon. Based on advice from the County Archaeological Service, that important buried remains maybe encountered, the Planning Department stipulated that all ground disturbances had to be conducted whilst an archaeological contractor was present.

Geology and Topography

The site (Fig. 1) lies on an underlying geology of Gault Clay, in an area of land that rises gently from 112m at the sites southern end to 117m at it's northern end. To the south a chalk escarpment rises to O.D. 165 metres and just behind Liddington Hill surmounted by an Iron Age Hillfort, at its western end, rises to O.D. 277 metres.

Previous Archaeological Evidence

The site is situated four hundred metres west of 'Broken Street' a Roman road that extends between the Roman towns of *Cvēhtio* (Mildenhall) and *Durocornovium* (Lower Wanborough). An extensive Romano-British site was located adjacent to this road, in 1974, at Moor Leaze (SU1953 8318). Another Romano-British site, a substantial villa (FOWLER, P. J. AND WALTERS, B. 1979/80), was recorded close by, at Badbury (SU1940 8088), during the construction of the M4 motorway. Also nearby at Coate Water (SU1756 8256) a further Romano-British building was revealed in 1975 during the digging of a pond.

A geo-physical survey and a subsequent excavation on the Great Western Hospital building site by a team from John Samuels Archaeological Consultants revealed remains of a Romano-British farmstead. Later the Cotswold Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological evaluation to the south-east of the main hospital site. Here numerous Iron-Age pottery fragments were discovered associated with burning, suggestive of pottery manufacture.

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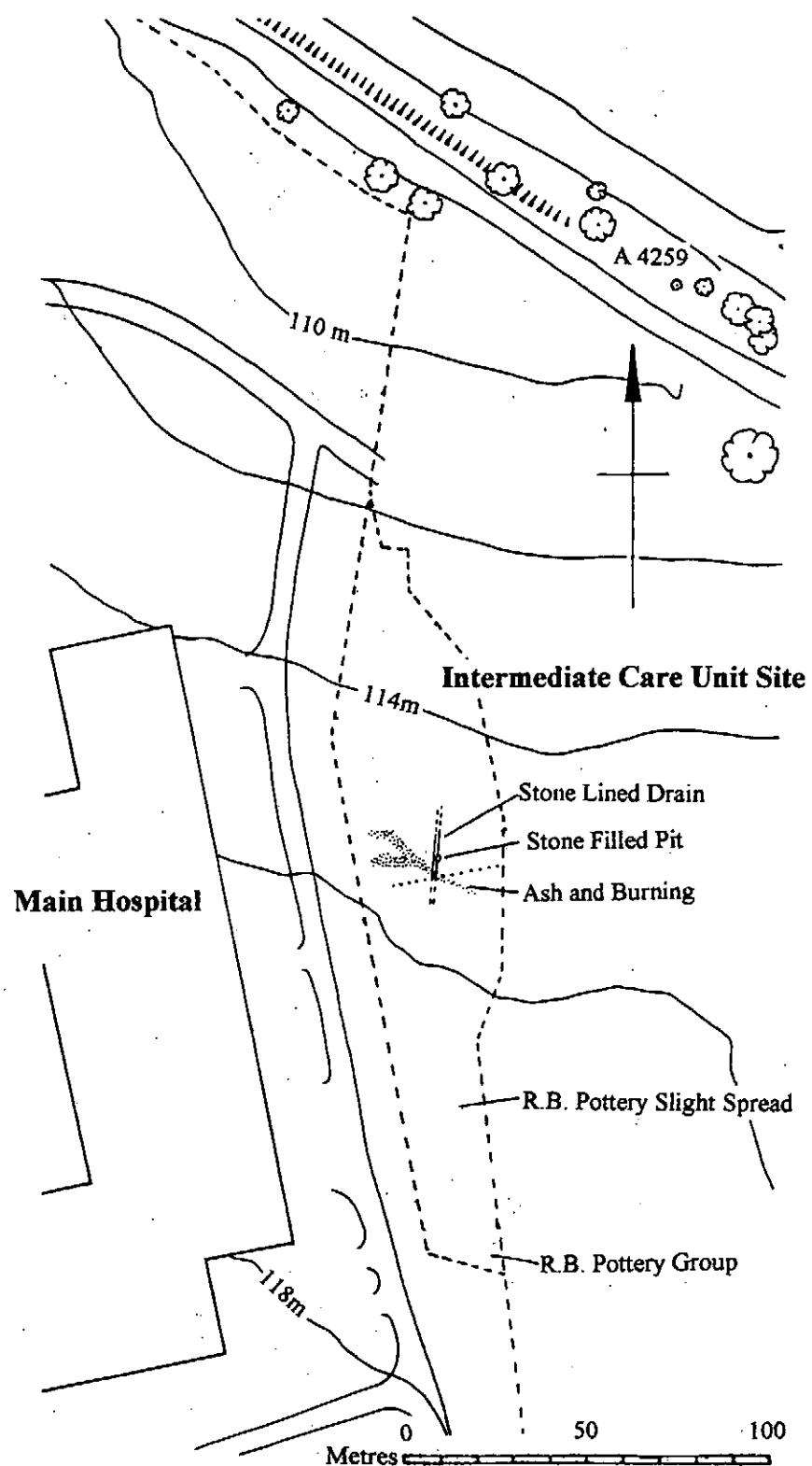


Fig. 1. Site Plan

Archaeological Watching Brief Objectives

The objectives of the archaeological watching brief involved recording, as far as reasonably possible the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological remains revealed by the ground disturbance, and the retrieval of all exposed artefacts.

The post site work objectives, research and analysis of the artefacts, samples and records have resulted in this report. The finds following washing, marking, counting, weighing, identification and packaging, have been deposited in Swindon Museum along with the relevant records.

Archaeological Watching Brief Method

The objectives were achieved through observation, recording and limited excavation of all the potential archaeological features and deposits encountered. During the archaeological watching brief attention was given to all periods. All artefacts recovered during the cutting were retained.

The author an appropriately qualified archaeologist undertook the watching brief.

Drawings undertaken were executed on plastic drawing film at a scale of 1:20. Contexts recorded in a site notebook were later transferred to *pro forma* context sheets.

The Archaeology

Introduction

Stripping of topsoil and some removal of underlying clay had occurred over forty per cent of the site prior to the author being contacted to undertake the watching brief. Examination of the surviving ground on which topsoil only had been removed, cutting edges and stripped topsoil suggested that no serious archaeological loss had occurred.

The remaining southern part of the site, due for topsoil removal only, was also stripped and partly rolled without the author being present. Examination of the stripped surface revealed slight evidence of Romano-British activity but no features.

Findings

Linear gravel slots, terracotta pipes and stone packed channels; attempts to drain the land at various periods, extended across the site. A more substantial drain located near to the centre of the site (Fig. 1), and perhaps channelling for a spring, was in part uncovered aligned with the land slope, running approximately south to north. The drain (F3) 0.64 metre wide and 0.30 metre high was lined and capped with sandstone blocks (Fig. 2). It was completely filled with light greyish brown, tenacious silt.

Cutting into the top of the drain's construction trench backfill a pit (F1) 0.70 metre by 0.82 metre and 0.18 metre deep was packed with small sandstone fragments (Fig. 2). Amongst the pit's fill were the remains of a blacksmith made iron chain having large square links.

Close to this pit several linear hollows (F2), up to 1.3 metres deep, and underlying the topsoil, had been filled with layers of black ash and burnt wood separated by thin clay bands (Fig. 1). Reddening and baking of the underlying clay was discernible. No datable material was recovered from the hollows' fill, but the condition of the wood in some cases only partially burnt indicates that the burning was of fairly recent date. This may represent the burning of trees and shrubs during land clearance or hedge removal.

Towards the southern end of the site, following removal of the topsoil, a slight scatter of Romano-British pottery fragments (F5) was found lying on top of the natural clay. A small group, of Romano-British pottery fragments, representing the remains of two vessels (F4), were also found on top of the natural clay in the sites south-east corner.

It would appear that the pottery fragments found represent a spread of material at the edge of the settlement site uncovered beneath the main hospital building.

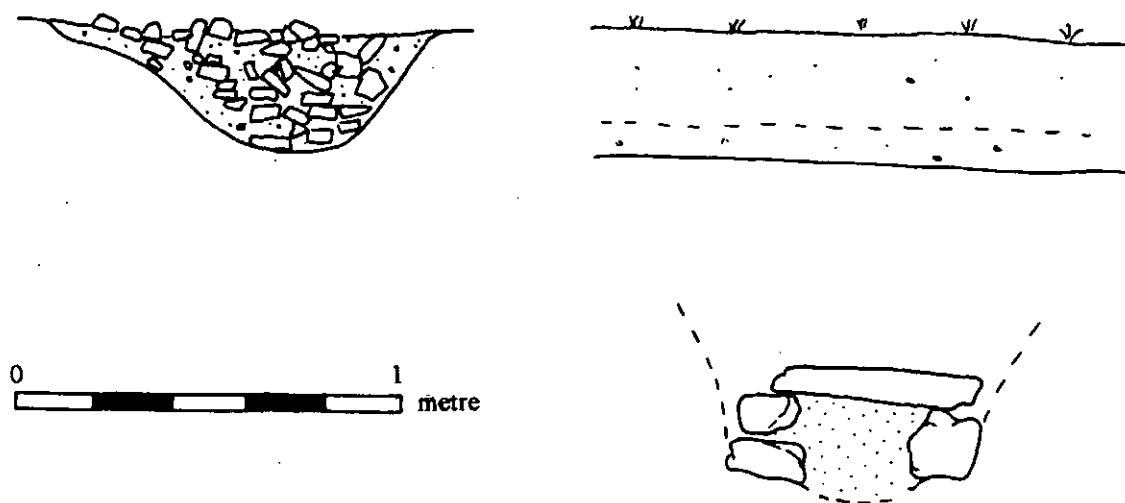


Fig. 2. Pit (F1) and Drain (F3) Sections.

Finds

Romano-British Pottery

Thirty-three Romano-British pottery fragments, totalling 0.3026 kilogram, were recovered during the watching brief. They came from the base of the topsoil at the south end of the site. Four fabric types are represented.

Fabric Types Present

Fabric 1 – West Swindon Oxidised Ware: hard, fairly fine clay matrix; slightly sandy; occasional red and black ironstone <1 mm, and sparse chalk <1 mm; wheel turned.

Total - 14 fragments (0.1033 kilogram).

Fabric 2- West Swindon Reduced Ware: hard, fairly fine clay matrix; slightly sandy; occasional red and black ironstone <1 mm, and sparse chalk <1 mm; wheel turned.

Total - 15 fragments (0.1137 kilogram).

The kiln sites found in recent years in West Swindon began operating around AD 100 and continued into the fifth century. The products were mainly kitchen and table wares; wide and narrow mouthed jars, lids, cooking pots, tankards, beakers, flagons, bowls, and dishes.

Fabric 3 – Black Burnished ware: hard, moderately coarse clay matrix; fairly sandy; micaceous; amount of well sorted, <2 mm, sparse white chalk fragments <3 mm, and occasional red and black ironstone <1 mm; handmade; oxidised.

Total - 2 fragments (0.0182 kilogram).

This mass produced ware was manufactured in South Dorset from the mid first century till the end of the fourth century. Cooking pots, bowls, dishes, beakers and flagons were the main products.

Fabric 4 – Grog Tempered ware: hard, coarse clay matrix; slightly sandy; abundant well sorted grog <8 mm, single white chalk fragment <3 mm and single quartz <4 mm; handmade; oxidised.

Total - 2 fragments (0.0674 kilogram).

This ware was possibly produced on the kilns found at West Swindon where the manufacture of large, grog tempered storage vessels has been evidenced.

375
Gault Clay

Feature 4: Pottery group

Twenty-seven weathered pottery fragments weighing 0.2045 kilogram and representing two fabric types were found in this group. The digger had disturbed some of the fragments the remainder were still packed together in the ground suggesting that they had filled a small cutting.

Fabric type 1: 13 fragments (0.1012 kilogram).

Fabric type 2: 14 fragments (0.1033 kilogram).

Feature 5: Pottery scatter

Six weathered pottery fragments weighing 0.0981 kilogram and representing three fabric types formed this slight scatter.

Fabric type 2: 2 fragments (0.0125 kilogram).

Fabric type 3: 2 fragments (0.0186 kilogram).

Fabric type 4: 2 fragments (0.0674 kilogram).

No rim fragments were present in either grouping making close dating of the deposits impossible. The presence of West Swindon pottery suggests however that the activity occurred between the early second and the late fourth century.

Small Finds**Pottery**

S.F. 1. A body fragment from a West Swindon jar (0.0198 kilogram), which has been cut to form a disc 4.6 centimetres in diameter. It was found with the slight pottery scatter at the south end of the building site.

Ironwork

S.F. 2. Five links from a blacksmith made chain. It is in two sections, one of two links and the other of three. Each link measures approximately 9.5 centimetres square with rounded corners. The bar from which the links are made measure 0.8 centimetres square and has rounded edges. It came from the stone filled pit located at the centre of the site.

References

FOWLER, P. J. AND WALTERS, B. 1979/80, Archaeology and the M4 Motorway, Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine, Vol. 74/75, 1979/1980, p. 69-130.