

**OLD POLICE HOUSE,
ROCESTER,
STAFFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION**

2006

Checked by

Supervisor..... date.....

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Project No. 1480

By

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SUMMARY

Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by Dr R.V.H. Aldridge to undertake a programme of trial trenching ahead of the proposed construction of a new doctors surgery at the Old Police House, Rocester, Staffordshire. The proposed development area covers approximately 0.13 hectares. A total of 3 trenches and 3 test-pits were excavated across the site totalling 72m² that provided a 5.5% sample of the total area. Trenches were located to evaluate the archaeological remains across the site and to assess the levels of truncation caused during the construction of the Old Police House.

The evaluation proved successful in determining the character, extent, date and preservation of the buried archaeological remains within the development area. *In situ* archaeological features and deposits were identified in all the trenches and test pits at depths between 0.55 to 0.85m. The natural geology was not encountered during fieldwork.

The majority of the archaeological evidence is dated to the Romano-British period, more specifically the 2nd century AD. It seems likely the archaeological remains identified across the site may represent the eastern section of the *vicus*, or civilian settlement, previously identified in archaeological work immediately to the west. The recovery of animal bone with butchery marks (and the presence of probable rubbish pits on the site) suggests near-by occupation and the discard of domestic waste.

Old Police House, Rocester

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION, 2006.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the project

Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by Dr R.V.H. Aldridge to undertake a programme of trial trenching ahead of the proposed construction of a new doctors surgery at the Old Police House, Rocester, Staffordshire, (hereinafter referred to as the site, Planning Application Number PA/00950/003).

This report outlines the results of a field evaluation carried out from the 7th to the 11th August 2006, and has been prepared in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations (IFA 2001).

The evaluation conformed to a brief produced by Staffordshire County Council, and a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2006) which was approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to implementation, in accordance with guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990).

1.2 Location and geology

The site is located within the town centre of Rocester, covering an area of approximately 0.13 hectares. The Old Police House is situated at the centre of the site. The site is bounded by Mill Street to the south, land belonging to the Augustinian monastery to the east, and properties to the north and west.

The underlying geology is mapped as river terrace sands and gravels associated with the rivers Dove and Churnet.

The derelict Old Police House currently stands at the centre of the site surrounded by a mix of overgrown gardens and vegetation and hard standing.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site is situated within an area of archaeological interest. Although no archaeological work has been undertaken on the site, several sites within the local environs have identified important archaeological remains.

Rocester is located at a point where the Roman road from Derby to Chesterton crosses the River Dove. Excavations in the 1960s located a Roman fort and its associated *vicus*. Further investigations in 1985-7, located approximately 200m to the north of the present site, demonstrated a complex sequence of late 1st century Roman military activity and three successive forts, the latest of which was occupied until c AD 200 (Esmonde Cleary and Ferris 1996).

Further archaeological work, located immediately to the west of the present site, in 1996 recovered further evidence of the Roman *vicus*, or civilian settlement, associated with the forts

(Ellis *forthcoming*). In the later Roman centuries a 'small town', or village, developed and the site was then the focus of Anglo-Saxon and medieval occupation continuing to the present day. Further archaeological work in the vicinity include excavations at Northfield Avenue (Burrows & Halsted *forthcoming*), Orton's Pasture (Ferris et al 2000), and Abbey Farm (Ferris 2004).

A small Augustinian monastery is located to directly to the east of the present site. This, and parts of the Roman forts are designated s Scheduled Monument (Staffordshire SAM no. 66).

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The principle aim of the evaluation is to determine the character, extent, date, state of preservation and the potential significance of any buried remains.

More specific aims were to:

- Determine the presence or absence of Romano-British and medieval features across the site and the potential for further evidence to be present elsewhere.
- Determine the impact of post-medieval and modern activity across the site upon the archaeological remains
- To prepare recommendations, where warranted, for further archaeological investigations in advance of ground reduction.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Fieldwork

The proposed development area covers approximately 0.13 hectares. A total of 3 trenches and 3 test-pits were excavated across the site totalling 72m² that provided a 5.5% sample of the total area (Fig. 2).

Trenches were located to evaluate the archaeological remains across the site and to assess the levels of truncation caused during the construction of the Old Police House. After approval from the Historic Environment Officer, Staffordshire County Council, the trench locations were altered due to the presence of live services. Figure 2 illustrates the locations of the trenches as excavated.

All topsoil and modern overburden was removed using a JCB mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, under direct archaeological supervision, down to the top of the uppermost archaeological horizon or the subsoil. Subsequent cleaning and excavation was by hand.

All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Features were planned at a scale of 1:50, and sections were drawn through all cut features and significant vertical stratigraphy at a scale of 1:10. A comprehensive written record was maintained using a continuous numbered context system on *pro-forma* context and feature cards. Written records and scale plans were supplemented by photographs using monochrome, colour slide, and digital photography.

Twenty litre soil samples were taken from datable archaeological features for the recovery of charred plant remains. The environmental sampling policy followed the guidelines contained in the Birmingham Archaeology Guide to On-Site Environmental Sampling. Recovered finds were cleaned, marked and remedial conservation work was undertaken as necessary. Treatment of

all finds conformed to guidance contained within 'A strategy for the care and investigation of finds' published by English Heritage.

The full site archive includes all artefactual and/or ecofactual remains recovered from the site. The site archive will be prepared according to guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the Management of Archaeology Projects (English Heritage, 1991), the Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-term Storage (UKIC, 1990) and Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological collections (Museum and Art Galleries Commission, 1992).

5 RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

Detailed summaries of the individual trenches are presented in Appendix 1 and full details are available in the project archive. In the following sections both feature (cut) and context numbers are highlighted in bold. The results are presented in numerical trench order, with the results from the test pits following.

5.2 Natural geology

The natural geology was not encountered during the course of this evaluation.

5.3 Summary of archaeological features and deposits.

In situ archaeological features were found all in three of the trenches. The principle features and deposits were:

- 7 ditches
- 3 pits
- 1 cobbled surface
- 1 possible wall

Trench 1.

Trench 1 was located to the south of the Old Police House, along the frontage to Mill Street (Fig. 2). Identified at the eastern end of the trench were three ditches, **1008**, **1016** and **1017** (Plate 2). Ditch 1008 represented the earliest in sequence as it was cut by **1017**, which in turn was truncated by **1016** (Fig. 3). Romano-British pottery was recovered from the fills of all three ditches. The western end of trench 1 revealed stone surface **1003** and stone wall **1013** (situated in foundation trench **1014**). Wall **1013** was cut by large pit **1006**. The pit contained the near complete skeleton of a cow (**1012**). Medieval pottery was recovered from upper fill **1005**. **1005** was overlain by subsoil **1002**, which in turn was sealed by topsoil **1001**. At the eastern end of the trench topsoil **1001** was overlain by tarmac **1018**.

Trench 2.

Trench 2 was positioned along the eastern wall of the Old Police House (Fig. 2). Ditch **2013**, aligned east west, was identified at the southern end of the trench. Although no dating was recovered from ditch fill **2012**, Romano-British pottery was recovered from pit **2011** that cut ditch fill **2012** to the east (Fig. 4). At the northern end of the trench pit **2001** (Plate 1) was

identified which in turn was truncated by ditch **2016**. Medieval/post-medieval layer **2015** sealed the above features, which in turn was overlain by topsoil **2019** and tarmac **2007**.

Trench 3 was situated to the north of the Old Police House (Fig. 2). Ditch **3008** was identified at the western end of the trench, aligned north south (Fig. 4). Romano-British pottery was recovered from fill **3007**. Ditch **3005** was identified running the length of the trench on an east west alignment. Romano-British pottery was recovered from primary fill **3012**. Demolition debris/rubble layer **3003** sealed the above features, which in turn was overlain by topsoil **3002** and hardcore/concrete **3001**.

Test Pit 1.

Test pit 1 was located on the northern aspect of the Old Police House (Fig. 2). Roman layer **4002** was identified at the base of the test pit 0.80m below current ground level. This was sealed by topsoil **4001**, which in turn was overlain by concrete **4000**.

Test Pit 2.

The second test pit was positioned on the western side of the Old Police House (Fig.2). Unexcavated Roman layer **4005** was encountered at the base of the test pit 0.65m below current ground level. This was sealed by demolition debris **4004**, which in turn was sealed by topsoil **4003**. **4003** was cut by foundation trench **4006** which contained the concrete foundations for the existing Old Police House building. The limits of these foundations failed to penetrate *in situ* Roman layer **4005**.

Test Pit 3.

The third test pit was situated on the southern aspect of the Old Police House (Fig. 2). Unexcavated layer **4011** was identified at the base of the trench 0.80m below current ground level. Although undated, this deposit is similar in composition and consistency to layer **4005** in test pit 2. This was overlain by topsoil **4009**, which in turn was sealed by tarmac **4008**.

6 THE FINDS

6.1 The pottery by Jeremy Evans

Spot dates are given for each context considered in isolation. They should act as *termini post qua* for succeeding deposits. Quantities of material from most contexts are small and therefore the dates tend to be rather broad. They may refine a little with a more detailed consideration of the samian ware.

Context	Spot Date
1005	Medieval
1007	AD 120+, perhaps Hadrianic-early Antonine
1009	Later 1 st -mid 2nd century
1010	AD 120+, possibly Antonine
1010	2nd century?
1011	AD 120+, perhaps early-mid Antonine

1015	Roman
2003	Hadrianic-Antonine, perhaps Hadrianic-early Antonine
2008	AD 120-200
2010	Hadrianic-Antonine
2015	A nibbed tile - Mediaeval or post Mediaeval
2017	1st-2nd century
3007	Mid 1st-early 2 nd century
3010	AD 120+, perhaps Hadrianic-early Antonine
3012	1st-2nd century, perhaps early 2nd century+
4002	Hadrianic-Antonine
4005	AD120+

Table 1: Pottery spot dates

Table 2 shows the proportions of major fabric classes in the assemblage. The assemblage is consistent with a military associated assemblage, as might be expected, with high levels of samian ware, amphorae and strong representation of early oxidised wares and whitewares.

It has been suggested above that contexts generally date to the Hadrianic-early Antonine period. The overall site samian assemblage tends to confirm this with an absence of late Antonine types such as Dr 31, Dr31R and Dr45, although the assemblage is small. Some material, both amongst the samian ware and, for example the rustic ware bodysherds, clearly dates to the Flavian-Trajanic era.

A01	7	3.6%	M00	0	0
B01	11	5.7%	O00	30	15.5%
C00	2	1.0%	Q00	4	2.1%
E00	0	0	R00	100	51.6%
F00	1	0.5%	S00	22	11.3%
G00	1	0.5%	W00	16	8.2%

Table 2: Fabric class proportions by sherd count from the assemblage (including unstratified but excluding post-Roman material)

Table 3 shows an approximate functional analysis of the assemblage. Jars are relatively strongly represented at 40%, although so are tablewares (dishes and bowls) at 45%, mainly at the expense of beakers and cups. This suggests an assemblage not typical of an early fort, where jar levels are generally lower.

Flagon	Constricted-necked jar	Jar	Beaker & cup	Bowl	Dish	Mortaria	Lid	n
5%	5%	40%	0	30%	15%	0	5%	20

Table 3: Functional analysis by minimum numbers of rims for the entire Roman assemblage

6.2 Other finds by Erica Macey-Bracken

Other finds from the site included coins, iron, copper alloy, slag, glass, fired clay and oyster shell. The assemblage was fragmentary, and the metal items were quite heavily corroded. The assemblage was quantified by count and weight and examined macroscopically for the purposes of this report.

Two complete coins were recovered from the site (2002, 3010). Both of these coins were heavily corroded, and no surface detail could be seen on either coin. Further examination by a specialist will be necessary to see if further information can be gained from either coin.

The iron assemblage consisted of two nails (2008, 2010). One of these nails (2010) was complete, and may be an example of Manning's Type 4 (Manning, 1985, 133-5). The other nail was incomplete and could not be identified further.

One piece of copper alloy was recovered from the site (2003). This item was a curved piece of copper 22mm x 25mm x 4mm thick. The function of this item is unclear, but it appears to have broken away from a larger piece.

The glass assemblage consisted of seven fragments of glass (1007 x 5, 2020 x 1, Tr. 1 cleaning layer x 1). Most of the fragments were from blue/green clear glass vessels, although one fragment (Tr. 1 cleaning layer) was made from dark blue glass. Blue/green glass is common in 1st – 3rd century vessels (Price & Cottam, 1998, 15), but the lack of diagnostic pieces means that it is not possible to determine the sort of vessel that the fragments came from. The dark blue fragment is cylindrical, and may be from a handle or rib, but it is too small to say this conclusively.

The remainder of the assemblage consisted of two oyster shells (3007) and a piece of fired clay (1010).

6.3 The animal bone by David Brown

Animal bone fragments were recovered from a total of 12 contexts, with species represented being cow, sheep, and pig. Preservation was generally good, although many of the fragments were un-diagnostic. A near complete cow skeleton was recovered from context 1012.

The animal bone seems to represent a standard food/butchery waste assemblage with cow being the main local food. The presence of a number of pig fragments (1007 and 2003) may indicate a certain degree of high status.

Context	Animal Bone
1005	Cow molar and rib with cut marks

1007	Pig mandible fragments
1009	Intermediate fragments
1010	One indeterminate rib fragment
1011	Three rib fragments (cow?)
1012	Near complete cow skeleton
2003	One pig metatarsal
2010	Two indeterminate fragments
2017	Rib fragments
3007	Cow metacarpal, fusing
3010	One cow phalanx, one burnt fragment
3012	One skull fragment, indeterminate. One sheep mandible fragment

Table 4: Animal bone

6.4 Charred plant remains by James Greig

Charred plant remains were floated from three contexts. The material mainly consisted of wood charcoal, but amongst it were a few charred weed seeds and cereal grains, together with occasional bone fragments. These probably represent waste material among ashes from domestic hearths, but these small numbers of seeds are not informative beyond this conclusion. The material in these samples needs no further work. In any future work, any suitable contexts should be sampled for charred plant remains.

<i>Context</i>	<i>amount of flot</i>	<i>contents</i>
<1> 2010	40 ml	wood charcoal, with charred seeds of <i>Rumex</i> sp. (dock), <i>Galium</i> sp. (cleavers), <i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> (vetch/wild pea) and Poaceae (grass/small cereal). Uncharred seeds of <i>Betula</i> sp. (birch), probably modern.
<2> 2003	50 ml	wood charcoal with a charred grain of <i>Triticum</i> sp. (wheat) and another half grain of <i>Cerealia</i> (cereal), together with a few bone fragments
<3> 3010	40 ml	wood charcoal, a coal fragment. Uncharred seeds of <i>Betula</i> sp. (birch) and <i>Sambucus nigra</i> (elder) were present, probably modern. Some bone fragments.

Table 5: Charred plant remains

7 DISCUSSION

The evaluation proved successful in determining the character, extent, date and preservation of the buried archaeological remains within the development area. *In situ* archaeological features and deposits were identified in all the trenches and test pits at depths between 0.55 to 0.85m. The natural geology was not encountered during fieldwork.

The majority of the archaeological evidence is dated to the Romano-British period, more specifically the 2nd century AD. It seems likely the archaeological remains identified across the site may represent the eastern section of the *vicus*, or civilian settlement, previously identified in archaeological work immediately to the west (Ellis *forthcoming*). The recovery of animal bone with butchery marks (and the presence of probable rubbish pits on the site) suggests near-by occupation and the discard of domestic waste.

Very little medieval evidence was recovered from the site, with pit 1006 being the exception. Likewise there was very little post-medieval activity identified across the site. Subsequently the *in situ* Romano-British archaeological features and deposits are in a good state of preservation with very little truncation later activity. Indeed the test pits have demonstrated that the foundations for the existing Old Police House are not of sufficient depth to truncate the archaeological deposits which appear to exist beneath (assuming the Old Police House is not cellared).

The evaluation has demonstrated that the uppermost archaeological features and deposits are present at varying depths (beneath current ground level) across the site ranging from 0.55m to 0.85m. This has implications when considering the future groundworks associated with the proposed development. Figure 5 illustrates the approximate location of the new construction. The proposed foundation depth is 1m, with a width range of 0.45m to 0.65m. It is clear that the excavation of the proposed foundation trenches to a depth of 1m will in all probability encounter *in situ* archaeological remains.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of recommendations can be made to further understand and preserve the archaeology across the site during the proposed development.

- Where ever possible, restrict the substantial groundworks to within the footprint of the proposed construction. Any groundworks associated with the areas of proposed car parking or drainage should be kept to a minimum, with any excavation kept as shallow as possible to avoid impacting the archaeological remains.
- The potential for archaeological remains to be impacted during the excavation of the foundation trenches is high. If the depths of the foundations are set, then further archaeological fieldwork may be required within the footprint of the proposed development. The limited widths of the proposed foundation trenches would hinder any archaeological excavation of any *in situ* remains. An archaeological excavation matching the footprint of the proposed construction (approximately 18m by 15m) would result in preservation by record of any archaeological remains likely to be impacted during the groundworks.
- The option of preserving the archaeology *in situ* would require a change in the construction methodology of the proposed development. Either the foundation trenches would need to be of considerably less depth (probably not an option) or the architect would need to

consider other construction options which utilises less groundworks (for example building off a concrete raft).

9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Appendix 1

Context Number	Trench	Description
1001	1	Grey sandy clay top soil 0.4m deep
1002	-	Grey brown silt sand layer 0.3m deep
1003	-	Cobble surface, 0.6m long, 1.63m wide
1004	-	Orange brown mottled silty sand clay, possibly heat affected 0.4m long, 0.6m wide
1005	-	Light brown silty clay fill of pit 1006 0.25m thickness
1006	-	Cut for large, steep sided subcircular pit, filled by 1005, 1012, 1015, 1.75 x 2.0 x 0.3m
1007	-	Fill of ditch 1008 1.8m wide and 0.85m deep
1008	-	Cut of N-S aligned ditch, 1.8m wide x 0.85 m deep, east end of trench 1
1009	-	Burnt clay layer in section, east end of trench 1, 1.75m long 0.35m deep
1010	-	Grey silt fill of large diagonal ditch 1017, 0.65m deep
1011	-	Grey silt fill of gully 1016, situated between ditches 1008 and 1017, 1.25m wide and 0.6m deep
1012	-	Articulated animal skeleton in pit 1006
1013	-	Stone wall cut by pit 1006, 0.6 x 0.3 x 0.2m
1014	-	Possible foundation trench cut for wall 1013 0.7m long, 0.3m wide depth unknown
1015	-	Dark brown silty clay fill of pit 1006, below 1012, 0.65m long, 0.45 wide
1016	-	Cut of NE-SW gully, filled by 1011, 1.25m wide x 0.6m deep
1017	-	Cut of large diagonal ditch, NE-SW, filled by 1010, possibly 1.5m, length and depth unknown
1018	-	Modern tarmac and hardcore layers
2001	2	Cut of pit/ditch, terminal end 3.0m wide and excavated to 1.02m depth.
2002	-	Brown green silt fill of 2001, excavated to 0.4m wide and 0.1 deep
2003	-	Grey sandy silt fill of 2001, excavated to 0.6 wide and 0.3m deep
2004	-	Grey silty sand fill of 2001, 1.2m wide, 0.4m deep
2005	-	Orange silt and sand mix fill of 2001, 1.15m wide, 0.1m deep
2006	-	Grey silt with clay fill of 2001, 3.0m wide, 0.4m deep
2007	-	Modern tarmac and hardcore layers
2008	-	Brown silt with some clay fill of pit 2011, 3.5m wide, 0.4m deep
2009	-	Brown silt with large cobbles, fill of pit 2011, excavated to 1.75m wide, 0.6m deep
2010	-	Dark grey silt with charcoal, fill of pit 2011, excavated to 1.0m wide and 0.25m deep
2011	-	Pit cut, filled by 2008, 2009, 2010, 3.65m wide and excavated to a depth of 0.9m
2012	-	Grey silt and sand, fill of pit 2013, 0.6m wide and 0.6m deep

2013	-	Pit cut, filled by 2012, dimensions unknown
2014	-	Yellow orange black burnt layer with gravel inclusions c. 5.5m long, 0.5m deep width unknown
2015	-	Brown silt rubble layer/soil, 15.0 x 1.5 x 0.3m
2016	-	Cut of SW-NE aligned ditch, 8.0 x 1.1 x 0.4m
2017	-	Grey silt fill of 2016, frequent pebbles, 0.6 x 0.2 x 0.4m
2018	-	Yellow silt sand, natural.
2019	-	Brown silt sand top soil, 15.0 x 1.5 x 0.3m
3001	3	Concrete and hardcore
3002	-	Grey silt clay top soil 0.3m thickness
3003	-	Demolition/rubble layer with brick and tile fragments, 1.6m wide, 0.25m thick
3004	-	Orange brown grey sand and gravel, upper fill of ditch 3005, 19.0 x 0.55 x 0.7m
3005	-	Cut of large E-W ditch, 19m long (total length and width unknown) 1.2m deep
3006	-	Brown clay fill of ditch 3005, 0.08m deep
3007	-	Brown sandy silt clay with charcoal, middle fill of ditch 3005, 19.0 x 1.0 x 0.5m
3008	-	Cut of N-S ditch in 'L' extension of trench 3; possible 2 phases of this feature, length unknown, total width unknown, excavated width of 0.8m, depth 1.45m
3009	-	Orange brown redeposited natural silt sand in ditch 3008, frequent pebbles, 0.15m wide, depth unknown
3010	-	Brown silt sand clay fill of ditch 3008, 0.2m wide, 0.55m deep
3011	-	Concrete retaining wall at west end of trench 3, 0.8m in height, 0.12m thickness,
3012	-	Grey brown sandy base fill of ditch 3005, 0.6m wide, 0.5m depth
3013	-	Grey silty clay sand upper fill of ditch 3008, 4.0m long, width unknown, 0.9m deep
4000	Test pit 1	Concrete path around Old Police House, 0.15m depth
4001	-	Mid grey brown topsoil with occasional brick and mortar fragments, 0.8m thickness
4002	-	Mid brown silty clay with frequent charcoal below 4001, depth unknown
4003	Test pit 2	Grey silty clay topsoil, 0.6m deep
4004	-	Mid brown silty clay with frequent small stones and pebble inclusions, 2.0 x 2.0 x 0.15m
4005	-	Mid brown grey silty clay with stone inclusions, 2.0m long 2.0m wide
4006	-	Cut of foundation trench associated with the construction of the Old Police House
4007	-	Fill of foundation trench, mixed clay and rubble
4008	Test pit 3	Modern tarmac and hardcore layer

4009	-	Grey silt sand topsoil, 2.7 x 2.2 x 0.7m
4010	-	Concrete footing around building
4011	-	Grey silt clay, unexcavated, in base of test pit, 2.7m long, 2.2m wide thickness unknown.

Dimensions represent length, width/diameter, and depth where available