

**29 CHURCH STREET
CIRENCESTER**

NGR: SP 028 013

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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Report No. 370

September 2004

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SUMMARY

In July 2004 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording during the construction of two new dwellings at 29 Church Street, Cirencester (NGR: SP 028 013). The work was commissioned by Mr Iles of I.B.A.

Two dry-stone walls, a floor surface and a rubbish pit, all Victorian/modern in date were encountered during this watching brief.

No Roman deposits were disturbed during the works.

GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Archaeology

For the purpose of this project archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

CBM

Ceramic Building Material.

Natural

In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site. However, the natural deposits were not encountered on this site.

NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD

Ordnance datum; used to express a given height above sea-level.

OS

Ordnance Survey

Romano-British

Term used to describe the fusion of indigenous Iron Age traditions with invasive Roman culture. Traditionally dated between AD 43 and *circa* AD 410.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Between 6th and 19th July 2004 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording at 29 Church Street, Cirencester, Gloucestershire (NGR: SP 028 013). The work was commissioned by Mr Iles of I.B.A.
- 1.2 The project involved the observation of groundworks associated with the erection of two new dwellings, which replaced the recently demolished 29 Church Street (planning reference no.CT.3156/T).
- 1.3 The works were undertaken in accordance with the brief supplied by Gloucester County Council (2004). The project was undertaken in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994, revised 2001), *Archaeological Guidance Paper 4: Archaeological Watching Briefs: (guidelines)* issued by English Heritage (London Region).
- 1.4 This document presents the findings of the archaeological monitoring.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The works covered by this project were undertaken as part of an application to construct two new dwellings, which replaced the recently demolished 29 Church Street (Planning reference: CT.3156/T).
- 2.2 The site was bounded to the south east by Church Street, to the south west by 27 Church Street, to the north east by 31 Church Street and by gardens to the north west.
- 2.3 The site lies in an area of high archaeological potential and is situated within the defences of the Roman town of *Corinium*, north of Silchester Gate. It has been suggested that, although Church Street lies outside the main centre of the town, it may be within the location of an annexe to the early Roman fort.
- 2.4 Previous archaeological works in the area have revealed metalling for a northwest-southeast orientated Roman Road at 28 Church Street, residual Roman building material including roof tile, brick, wall plaster and glass at 30 Church Street and a Roman inhumation burial with associated pottery (GSMR 8996) on Church Road itself. In May 2003 Gloucestershire County Council Archaeological Service carried out an evaluation at 29 Church Street. Two 1.50m test-pits were excavated and both revealed undated deposits, which were either sealed or cut by post-medieval contexts. Health and safety concerns prevented further excavation into these unknown deposits. It was noted however, that the undated deposits

were located at a depth of between 0.92 and 1.22m below the modern ground surface.

- 2.5 Any groundworks required for the proposed development had to be excavated within 750mm in order to avoid impacting on possible undisturbed Roman stratigraphy. However there still remained the potential to reveal significant archaeological deposits and/or finds, predominantly associated with the Roman period. This in no way prejudiced the archaeological monitoring works against the recovery of finds or features related to other periods.

3 AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the archaeological monitoring were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature, extent, preservation and potential of any surviving archaeological remains.
- 3.2 These aims were to be achieved by the pursuit of the following objectives:
- i) to define, identify and record any archaeological deposits on the upper and lower terraces, and date these where possible.
 - ii) to attempt to characterise the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site.
 - iii) where possible to recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples.

METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The development was to be constructed on a raft foundation, the thickened 'toe' of which was to be *circa* 750mm below the modern ground surface and all new services of drainage was to be accommodated within this depth.
- 4.2 Prior to the excavation of the footings, the rear of the site was stripped in two stages. The first was to remove the topsoil and the second to reduce the area of the house footings to the rear of the original building.
- 4.3 The footings for the front rooms of the new dwellings were excavated within the footings of the original house. The footings for the rooms to the rear were excavated into virgin ground, which was previously the back garden of 29 Church Street. The party wall for the dwellings was also excavated into virgin ground. Consequently, the groundworks affecting the virgin ground as well as the topsoil

- strip was excavated under constant archaeological supervision; the footings excavated within the original house footings were not subject to constant supervision, but the sections were scanned for any intact soil horizons, which were then recorded.
- 4.4 The groundworks themselves involved the excavation of a series of foundation trenches for the new dwellings, measuring approximately 1m in width and 0.57m to 1.01m in depth. Excavation was undertaken using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket.
- 4.5 Spoil tips were scanned for unstratified finds across the entire study area.

5 RESULTS

Phase 1 Site stripping

- 5.1 An area 5.30m by 9.20m was topsoil stripped down on to the existing subsoil (102).
- 5.2 The topsoil (101), was a black loamy clay silt garden soil, with a depth of 0.53m at the west side of the site and 0.48m at the east side. The soil contained a few Victorian/modern glass and stoneware bottles and sherds of transfer printed blue and white china. A patch of limestone pieces approximately 0.60m in diameter was located in the northwestern corner of the stripped area. The stones were sub-rectangular in shape, did not appear to be part of a construction and did have any signs of mortar.
- 5.3 A southern area (3.30m to 3.60m by 9.20m) was further reduced by 0.10m, this penetrated into the subsoil (102). The subsoil was a dark brown clay silt deposit with occasional limestone chips, which contained fragments of Victorian/modern glass CBM and china.

Phase 2 Excavation of Footings

- 5.4 **Trench 1** (9.10m by 1m) The base fill encountered within the trench was (110), a dark brown, friable silty clay fill, which was sealed by (102). The fill was mixed in appearance with occasional lenses of ashy material throughout. The fill continued beyond the limits of the trench, but was present for a minimum width of 1m and depth of over 0.60m. Context (110) contained a number of complete and broken Victorian/modern bottles as well as frequent late post-medieval/modern pottery sherds and fragments of CBM. This context was cut by [111] and [114] to the northeast and [108] to the southwest.
- 5.5 Located at the northeastern end of the trench, for a length of 7.4m was cut [111]. This was a straight sided cut, sealed by (102) and cutting (110), with one edge,

- orientated northwest-southeast, contained within the trench. The full depth of the feature was not reached within the trench, but the cut was a minimum of 0.40m deep. The cut contained two distinct fills. The base fill encountered was (113), a compacted orange/white limestone rubble, concrete and mortar mix, with frequent gravel inclusions, for a depth of over 0.25m, which included four fragments of Roman CBM. This was in turn overlaid by (112), a mixed rubble layer of small limestone pieces and grey sandy mortar, with a depth of up to 0.25m. One piece of blue and white transfer china and occasional CBM fragments were present within this fill. Both layers contained within [111] appeared to have been roughly levelled to form a hardstanding surface. Although the cut contained dating evidence from two different time periods the feature did cut the Victorian/modern fill (110), so must be Victorian/modern in date with residual Roman material contained within fill (113).
- 5.6 Southwest of [111] was wall [114]. The wall was present for the full width of the trench, continued beyond the trench depth, it cut fill (110) and was sealed by (102). The wall was aligned approximately north northwest-south southeast, was 0.35m wide and over 0.70m high. The wall was of dry-stone construction, with sub-rectangular limestone slabs (115), with dimensions of approximately 0.20m x 0.20m x 0.08m. No mortar, stone packing or dating evidence was present within the wall, but the feature did cut fill (110), so must be Victorian/modern in date.
- 5.7 Southwest of wall [114] was wall [108]. The full width of the wall was not present within the trench as the southwestern edge continued under number 27 and the wall continued beyond the depth of the trench. The wall cut through (102) and (110) and was sealed by (101). The wall was aligned approximately north northwest-south southeast, with a minimum width of 0.30m and a minimum height of 0.76m. The wall was of dry-stone construction, with sub-rectangular limestone slabs (109), with dimensions of approximately 0.20m x 0.20m x 0.08m. No mortar, stone packing or dating evidence was present within the wall, but the feature did cut fill (110), so must be Victorian/modern in date.
- 5.8 **Trench 2** (8.80m by 1m) This was excavated within the footprint of the original house foundations but did not reveal the original sections of the trench. Therefore it was not possible to determine if any archaeological deposits were present within this area.
- 5.9 **Trench 3** (9.90m by 1m) This was excavated within the footprint of the original house foundations but did not reveal the original sections of the trench, except for 1.85m of the southeast facing section, adjoining Trench 8. The base fill encountered within the trench was (103), a mixed fill of dark grey brown clay sand with gravel, ash and sand patches, but no dating evidence. This was present for a width of over 1.40m and depth of over 0.52m. This context was sealed by a layer of tarmac, 0.02m thick, which was in turn sealed by a layer of hardcore, 0.12m thick. Fill (103) was cut by wall [104].

- 5.10 Wall [104] was present for the full width of the trench, continued beyond the trench depth, it cut fill (110) and was sealed by (102). The wall was aligned approximately north northwest-south southeast, was 0.35m wide and over 0.70m high. The wall was not visible in the northwest facing trench section, which was highly disturbed by the construction of Church Street. The wall was of dry-stone construction, with sub-rectangular limestone slabs (105), with dimensions of approximately 0.20m x 0.20m x 0.08m. No mortar, stone packing or dating evidence was present within the wall, however from its line and construction it would appear to be the same wall as [114], which would give the feature a Victorian/modern date.
- 5.11 **Trench 4** (3.20m by 1m). The base fill encountered within the trench was (110), the fill continued beyond the limits of the trench, but was present for a minimum width of 1m and depth of over 0.91m. This was sealed by (106), which was the concrete footing for number 27.
- 5.12 Also present within the trench was the continuation of wall [104]. This was sealed by (106), cut fill (110) and was visible for a length of over 0.70m and then continued under the foundation footings for number 27.
- 5.13 **Trench 5** (2.50m by 1m). The base fill encountered within the trench was (103), no dating evidence for this fill was present within this section. The fill had a depth of over 0.55m, a length of over 1m and continued below the trench footing. This layer was cut to the northwest by [111]. Both [111] and (103) were sealed by (102).
- 5.14 **Trench 6** (5.40m by 1m). The base fill encountered within the trench was (103), no dating evidence for this fill was present within this section. The fill had a depth of over 0.50m, was present for the length of the trench and continued below the trench footing. A concrete foundation was also present within the trench. Both the concrete foundation and fill (103) were sealed by a layer of hardcore, 0.17m thick.
- 5.15 **Trench 7** (2.50m by 1m). Present within this trench was cut [111]. This was present for the full length of the trench and continued beyond the limit of the footing. Fills (112) and (113) were also present for a depth of 0.25m and 0.15m respectively. No further dating evidence was recovered from this feature.
- 5.16 **Trench 8** (6.80m by 1m). This was excavated within the footprint of the original house foundations but did not reveal the original sections of the trench, except for 2.50m of the southwest facing section, adjoining Trench 3. The base fill encountered within the trench was (103), which was present for a length of over 0.70m and depth of over 0.50m. This context was sealed by a layer of tarmac, 0.02m thick, which was in turn sealed by a layer of hardcore, up to 0.13m thick. Fill (103) was cut by wall [104]. The northwestern side of the wall was visible in the trench section for 1.80m and a height of over 0.50m. No dating evidence was present within the wall cut.

- 5.17 **Trench 9** (5.50m by 1m). This was excavated within the footprint of the original house foundations but did not reveal the original sections of the trench. Therefore it was not possible to determine if any archaeological deposits were present. However the footings for number 31 overlapped the foundation trench by 0.10m.
- 5.18 During the works a small quantity of Roman material was recovered from the spoil. This included a single sherd of greyware, a few fragments of undiagnostic CBM and a coin.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The watching revealed two dry stone walls and a floor surface, all these features cut through fill (110), which was Victorian/modern in date.
- 6.2 Context (110) was cut by a number of other features and it was not possible to determine if the context was a layer or the fill of a feature. However the mixed nature of the context, together with the large quantity of debris; in the form of bottles and ceramics would suggest that this was the fill of a large domestic rubbish pit.
- 6.3 Walls [108] and [114] are aligned parallel to each other with a gap of 2m. These were very similar in construction and are most likely contemporary. Wall [108] penetrated the subsoil (102), whereas [114] was sealed by it. The subsoil sealed the Victorian/modern context (110) and must have been recently deposited. Wall [108] is most likely not sealed by (102) as it survives to a greater height than wall [114].
- 6.4 The small patch of limestone slabs revealed during the topsoil stripping is probably a surface related to wall [108].
- 6.5 A small quantity of residual Roman material was recovered during the works, but no features of a contemporary date were present within the depths of the footings.
- 6.6 The watching brief results show that Roman deposits within the study area were not encountered during these works.

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8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foundations Archaeology would like to thank Dave Smart, Mr Iles, Charles Parry of Gloucester County Council and the on-site ground-workers for their help and co-operation.