

***A Watching Brief at
Wroxeter Crossroads,
Wroxeter, Shropshire, 2010***

by
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Archaeology Service

Community Services Directorate, Shropshire Council



Shropshire
Council

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A Report for
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Figure 2: Location of the new fence, Trenches A & B, and postholes a – h

Figure 3 a) Trench A, plan view; b) trench A, northeast-facing section; c) trench B, plan view; d) trench B, northeast-facing section; (for locations see Fig. 2); scale 1:20

Figure 4: sections through postholes where significant features or deposits were recorded; (for locations see Fig. 2); scale 1:20

PHOTOS

Photo 1: The hedgerow before the realignment

Photo 2: Trial trench A, looking N

Photo 3: Trial trench B, looking NW

Photo 4: Possible wall 13

Photo 5: *Opus signinum* surface 16

Photo 6: Realigned fence and verge.

SUMMARY

In July 2010 the hedgerow on the southwest side of the B4380 Buildwas road west of the B3494 crossing (Wroxeter crossroads) was realigned in order improve visibility at the junction of these roads. The site lay within the area of the Roman city of Viroconium Cornoviorum and as part of the scheduled Ancient Monument consent granted by English Heritage for the work, a programme of archaeological investigation was put in place. This investigation included a watching brief on the excavation of postholes for the realigned fence. Features and deposits of Roman date were recorded, including floor and yard surfaces and the tops of possible walls.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Wroxeter is situated in central Shropshire, about 7.5km southeast of the centre of Shrewsbury. The village lies on the northeast bank of the River Severn, just to the south of the B4380 road, formerly the A5 London to Holyhead Trunk Road (now by-passed). The modern village also lies within the site of the Roman city of *Viroconium Cornoviorum*, the fourth largest walled city in the Roman province. The site of the Roman city is a scheduled Ancient Monument (Shropshire County No. 32, "The site of the Roman Town of Wroxeter [Viroconium Cornoviorum] Shropshire).

1.2 In July 2010 the hedgerow on the southwest side of the B4380 Buildwas road west of the B3494 crossing was realigned in order improve visibility at the junction of these roads.

1.3 This work comprised the removal of a 90m stretch of existing hedgerow and fence. A new fence was erected, set back by up to 4.5m to the southwest. The new fence-posts were augured to a depth of about 600mm. Posts for a replacement gate were set in post-holes excavated to a depth of approximately 800mm. It was originally intended that the verge might need to be reduced in height in places – this proved unnecessary. The original plans also included re-planting the hedgerow; again, this work was not undertaken.

1.4 A water main runs along the west side of the B3494. In 1999 this main was renewed, and this work was accompanied by a programme of archaeological work carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. A trench excavated 16m to the north of the crossroads recorded 0.45m depth of topsoil over 0.55m of grey brown sandy gravel containing Roman pottery and modern brick. The natural subsoil of red-orange sand lay beneath this. (White, 2000).

1.5 In view of the potential archaeological significance of the work area, it was a requirement of the Scheduled Monument Consent for the proposed works that the removal of the hedgerow, the erection of the new fence (and the re-grading of the verge and the re-planting of the hedgerow) were all to be carried out under archaeological supervision. English Heritage also requested that the depth of archaeological deposits on the line of the new fence be evaluated by trial excavation.

1.6 The Archaeology Service was commissioned to carry out this watching brief by Highways and Transportation, Development Services Directorate, Shropshire Council.

1.7 The aims of the archaeological investigation and watching brief were to allow for the preservation by record of any archaeological remains that were encountered during the works, and to establish the depth of significant archaeological deposits in the study area.

2 THE TRIAL EXCAVATION

2.1 Trench A

Trench A was located along the line of the new fence in the field at the southeastern half of study area (Figure 2). This field had formed part of a farmyard. The trench was 2.4m long by 0.65m wide and was excavated by machine and by hand to a depth of 0.95m (Figure 3). A layer of topsoil (1) 0.12m thick was seen to lie over a former farmyard surface (2) 0.18m thick made up of cobbles, tile fragments and stone fragments. This in turn lay over a deposit up to 0.65m thick of a dark greyish brown loam (3). This was cleaned down onto layer of reddish brown sandy clay (4) which contained some building debris and patches of greyish sand and loam. This latter deposit had the appearance of a destruction deposit. As it lay below the depth of the proposed disturbance it was not sampled further.

2.2 Trench B

Trench B was located in the field in the northwestern half of study area, to the northwest of the farmyard. The ground surface here lay c. 0.5m lower than in the former farmyard to the southeast. Trench B was 2m long by 0.65m wide and was excavated by machine and by hand to a depth of 0.38m. A layer of topsoil (5) 0.38m thick lay over a deposit of dark brown sandy silt (6) with stone fragments, tile fragments, mortar, plaster, and small pieces of (?Roman) concrete. Again this deposit probably represented a layer of destruction debris. A post hole (8) 0.20m in diameter, filled with a very dark greyish brown sandy silt (7), cut into this layer.

3 THE WATCHING BRIEF

3.1 Some finds of Roman pottery and tile were recovered from the topsoil in the southeastern (9) and northwestern (10) fields following the removal of the existing hedgerow (see Table 1, below).

3.2 The postholes for the new fence (Figure 2; a – h) were augured to a depth of 0.65m and a diameter of 0.3m (Figure 4). In the northwestern field they were cut through a topsoil of dark greyish brown humic loam (11) (the same as context 5 in para 2.2, above) 0.4m deep. This deposit generally lay over a subsoil of dark greyish brown sandy loam (14) with stone, brick and tile fragments (the same as context 6).

3.3 At a distance of 10.7m from the northern end of the new fence, a wall comprising rounded sandstone fragments (Figure 4a; 13) bonded in mortar were seen 0.6m below the ground surface in the southeastern side of one of the postholes. The topsoil (12) at this particular spot was damp (everywhere else it was seen to be dry). At 19.6m from the northern end of the new fence a dark grey brown sandy loam (Figure 4b; 15) with cobbles and tile fragments was seen 0.55m below ground surface. This may have represented a possible yard surface or a rubble layer. At 25.1m the edge of a floor surface (Figure 4c; 16) of *opus signinum* was seen in the northwest side of a posthole at a depth of 0.48m below the ground surface. The *opus signinum* was 0.08m thick and lay over a dark brown sandy loam (17) with small rounded gravel. Between 39.5m and 43.2m from the northwestern end of the fence, a surface of rounded cobbles in a reddish brown sandy clay (Figure 4d-f; 18) was encountered. The surface was 0.2m thick and lay 0.4m below the ground surface. The cobbles lay over a deposit of dark brown sandy loam (19) (the same as 17) The cobbles formed a surface at least 4m wide, which may have been a yard or possibly a road. Topsoil (Figure 4d-f; 20) was imported and spread over the boundary between the fields to create a smooth gradient for the new fence.

3.4 The topsoil in southeastern field (Figure 4g & h; 21) comprised a dark greyish brown sandy loam (the same as context 3, para 2.1, above). At a distance of 52.1m from the northern end of the new fence a number of sandstone fragments in a dark greyish brown sandy loam (Figure 4g; 22) were seen in one of the postholes at a depth of 0.5m below ground surface. These may possibly have represented the weathered top of a wall, though no bonding material was seen.

3.5 No other features or deposits of archaeological significance were recorded during the watching brief.

4 THE FINDS

Context	Roman pottery (count / weight)			Brick & tile	Stone tile	Roman glass	Iron
	Coarse wares	Samian	Amphora				
(100)3	1 / 3g			303g	Y		
(100)4				1,003g	Y		
(100)6	3 / 53g			165g			Y
(100)9	5 / 68g						Y
(10)10	3 / 22g	3 / 10g		745g			
(10)11	5 / 73g	3 / 23g		1,869g	Y		
(10)12	2 / 47g			942g			
(10)15	13 / 75g		3 / 117g	2,539g			Y
(10)17	2 / 47g	1 / 9g					
(10)18	16 / 741g	3 / 25g					
(10)19			1 / 15g				
(10)21	2 / 42g	1 / 5g		519g			
(10)23 - unstratified finds	6 / 48g	2 / 5g				Y	

Table 1: The finds

5 REFERENCES

Barker, P (ed) 1990: *From Roman Viroconium to Medieval Wroxeter*, West Mercian Archaeological Consultants Ltd, Worcester

White, R, 2000: *Final Report On Excavations In Advance Of Water Main Relining At Wroxeter Roman City, Shropshire*, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit Project No. 462.2

White, R, & Barker, P, 1998: *Wroxeter: Life & Death of a Roman City*, Tempus, Stroud

ABBREVIATIONS

HER Historic Environment Record, Shropshire Council
OS Ordnance Survey
SA Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
TSAHS Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society



