OAKFORD ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeological Evaluation of land at Dainton Elms Cross, Ipplepen, Devon Phase II

on behalf of
The Portable Antiquities Scheme and Devon County Council

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Summary
A second phase of archaeological trenching on land at Dainton Elms Cross, Ipplepen, Devon (SX 8473 6650), was carried out by Oakford Archaeology during June 2011. The work comprised the machine-excavation of 3 trenches totalling 53.2m in length. The trenches targeted a series of anomalies identified during the geophysical survey.

Excavation revealed further sub-rectangular enclosures, and evidence for post buildings. Further elements of the Roman road were exposed; this was truncated by at least one undated burial. The finds included sherds of late Iron Age and 1st-2nd century Roman pottery, although a number of later wares indicate continued occupation of the site into the 4th century AD.

The large number of features identified throughout the three trenches confirms that the survival of archaeological features is appreciably more extensive than was initially thought, especially along the eastern edge of the site. The full size and layout of the settlement is not known, although it is likely to extend beyond the site.

1. INTRODUCTION

A second phase of archaeological trenching was undertaken by Oakford Archaeology (OA) in June 2011 on land at Dainton Elms Cross, Ipplepen, Devon (SX 8473 6650). The work was commissioned by the Devon County Historic Environment Service, and the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

The site was discovered as a result of metal detected finds being reported to the PAS. To date, a total of 108 Roman coins have been recorded. This is very significant as with the exception of coin hoards few significant groups of Roman coins have been discovered in Devon, outside of Exeter. The coins range from a Republican *denarius* of 49BC to two *nummi* of the House of Valentinian (AD 364-78).

A geophysical survey (magnetometry) of the site was carried out by Substrata in 2010 (Substrata 2010). This identified a large concentration of linear and other anomaly patterns including possible ditched enclosures, routeways, roundhouses and pits. A subsequent phase of archaeological trench evaluation was undertaken by Exeter Archaeology in March 2011 (Steinmetzer 2011). The interpretation of the survey and location of all trenches is shown on Fig. 2.

1.1 **The site**

The site lies on the east side of Ipplepen at a height of between 79m and 90m AOD and covers an area of approximately 8.2 hectares. It is bisected by a road and consists of 13 irregular shaped fields, with horse paddocks (Fields 1-11) to the north of the road and large arable fields to the south and east (Fields 12 & 13). The solid geology consists of rocks comprising undifferentiated mudstones, siltstones and sandstones, laid down in the Middle Devonian period and gives rise to a brown-earth soil assigned to the Crediton association of well-drained gritty loams (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983).

2. METHODOLOGY

The work comprised the machine excavation of 3 trenches totalling 53.2m in length, with each trench 1.9m wide. They were positioned to target anomalies identified during the

geophysical survey and their positions were agreed with PAS and DCHES prior to commencement on site. The positions of the trenches as excavated are shown on Fig.2.

Machine excavation was undertaken under archaeological control using a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless grading bucket. Topsoil and underlying deposits were removed to the level of either natural subsoil, or the top of archaeological deposits (whichever was higher). Areas of archaeological survival were then cleaned by hand, investigated and recorded.

The standard OA recording system was employed. Stratigraphic information was recorded on *pro-forma* context record sheets and individual trench recording forms, plans and sections for each trench were drawn at a scale of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate and a detailed black and white print and colour (digital) photographic record was made. Registers were maintained for photographs, drawings and context sheets on *pro forma* sheets.

3. RESULTS

Relevant detailed plans and sections are included as Figs 3-5 and context descriptions for each trench are set out in Appendix 1.

A generally uniform overlying layer sequence of ploughsoil/topsoil onto weathered natural subsoil was encountered in all areas. The depth of the overlying deposits ranged from 0.2-0.4m.

3.1 **Trench 4** (Detailed plan and section Fig. 3. Plates 1-14)

This L-shaped trench measured 16.3m x 1.9m, was orientated approximately NW-SE and SE-NE, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.34m. It was sited to investigate a number of anomalies identified by geophysics and interpreted as a possible prehistoric enclosure. A single linear feature (402), a large pit (420) and 8 postholes (404, 406, 408, 410, 412, 414, 416 and 418) were identified. These cut through natural subsoil at a depth of 0.34m below current ground level (81.08-80.74mAOD). Context descriptions for this trench are set out in Table 1, Appendix 1.

A large linear ditch 402 was exposed at the northern end of the trench. The position of this feature correlates with that of a possible enclosure ditch identified during the geophysical survey. Aligned broadly N-S it measured 0.80m wide and 0.12m deep with gently breaking sides and a flat to concave base. It contained a single silty clay based fill (403). No dating evidence was recovered from this ditch.

Eight postholes were exposed at the south end of the trench, beyond enclosure ditch 402. Posthole 404 measured 0.39m in diameter and 0.26m deep. No finds were recovered from its single fill (405). Posthole 406 measured 0.36m in diameter and 0.34m deep. No finds were recovered from its single fill (407). Feature 408 was a small circular posthole, with vertical sides and a flat base. It had a diameter of approximately 0.34m and was 0.28m deep. No finds were recovered from its single fill (409). Posthole 410 measured 0.35m in diameter and 0.28m deep. No finds were recovered from its single fill (411). Feature 412 was a circular posthole, with vertical sides and a flat base. It had a diameter of approximately 0.38m and was 0.24m deep. No finds were recovered from its fill (413). Posthole 414 measured 0.39m in diameter and 0.24m deep. No finds were recovered from its single fill (415). Feature 416 was a large circular posthole, with vertical sides and a flat base. It had a diameter of

approximately 0.40m and was 0.50m deep. No finds were recovered from its single fill (417). Posthole 418 measured 0.30m in diameter and 0.21m deep. No finds were recovered from its single fill (419). Pit 420 measured 0.58m in diameter and was 0.42m deep. The position of the pit and postholes corresponds with elements of a small posthole roundhouse identified by geophysical survey and set within a wider enclosure.

3.2 **Trench 5** (Detailed plan and section Fig. 4. Plates 15-20)
This trench measured 11.5m x 1.9m, was orientated approximately NW-SE and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.6m. The trench was sited to further investigate the known Roman road identified by the geophysical survey. Archaeological features identified included the road, represented by a metalled surface (507) in the centre of the trench, a grave (502) truncating the road and a homogeneous burial horizon (501) at the southern end. Natural subsoil was encountered at a depth of 0.6m below current ground level (85.65mAOD). Context descriptions for this trench are set out in Table 2, Appendix 1.

The road
The road measured at least 3.65m wide and consisted of a very compacted metalled surface (507) formed of re-deposited natural shale bedrock within a brown silty clay matrix. This had been placed directly over the original topsoil (506) without the need for an *agger*. The buried soil was investigated for sampling potential but in view of the presence of later burials excavation of the road was not considered appropriate. Although the road was not half-sectioned there was an indication of defined layering (508 and 509) within the shale which may indicate different stages of construction. Generally the nature of the material made it difficult to distinguish between the initial construction and any later maintenance. A slight camber was noted within the surface, although this may simply be a reflection of the greater wear towards the edges of the road. The road was sealed by a thin layer of agricultural topsoil.

Inspection of the trench showed no evidence of a flanking ditch on the western side previously identified in Trench 3. A number of diffuse deposits (505 and 513) had accumulated along the north-western edge of the road. Two sherds of early 1st century AD Spanish colour coat fineware and a single sherd of samian were recovered from deposit 505; while a further 11 sherds of Romano-British coarsewares, spanning the 1st-4th century AD, were also recovered from this deposit.

An extensive burial horizon (501), containing at least three distinct burials, masked the line of the eastern ditch. This deposit was located immediately below the thin layer of topsoil.

A single burial truncated the western edge of the Roman road. Grave 502 was aligned NE-SW, it was approximately 1.77m long and 0.75m wide. The fill (503) consisted of mid to dark brown silty clay containing frequent shale inclusions. The grave was not excavated and no finds were recovered.

3.3 **Trench 6** (Detailed plan and section Fig. 5. Plates 21-24)
This T-shaped trench measured 25.4m x 1.9m, was orientated N-S and E-W, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.4m. It was sited to investigate an extensive circular anomaly identified by geophysical survey and interpreted as a large oval enclosure - potentially a funerary enclosure. Two parallel and intercutting linears (606 and 610), and 1 irregular feature (604) were exposed. These cut through natural subsoil at a depth of 0.4m below current ground level (86.27-86.13mAOD). Context descriptions for this trench are set

out in Table 3, Appendix 1. All of the anomalies recorded during the geophysical survey were identified.

The most significant feature exposed was a large curving ditch 606, the position of which correlates precisely with that of the possible enclosure ditch identified during the geophysical survey. Aligned broadly NE-SW before curving to the SE, it measured 2.0m wide and 1.06m deep with sharply breaking sides and a flat base. It contained four fills (607, 608, 609 and 614). There was no indication that the base of the ditch had weathered before a large deposit (607), up to 0.6m thick and which probably represents bank material, was deliberately filled in. The middle fill (608) consisted of mid reddish brown clay with occasional sub-angular gravel, while the upper deposit (609) comprised mid-dark reddish brown clay with occasional gravel. The tip-lines visible in the section make it clear that this material had been 'pushed' into the ditch from an area inside the enclosure where the bank would once have stood. No dating evidence was recovered from this ditch.

Truncating the eastern edge of ditch 606 was a small linear (610). This run parallel with the inside edge and measured 1.44m wide and 0.56m deep with gradually breaking sides and a flat base. The lower fills (611 and 612) consisted of mid reddish brown silty clays with frequent shale inclusions and likely represents rapid slumping or backfilling. The upper fill (613), composed of mid reddish brown silty loam with occasional shale appeared to have derived from a natural process of accumulation, and from which was recovered a single sherd of late Iron Age pottery.

The remaining feature consisted of a single shallow irregular feature. Tree throw 604 measured 3.4m in length, 1m in width and was very shallow (0.14m). No dating evidence was recovered from it.

4. THE FINDS
by John Allan

This is a small assemblage largely composed of Iron Age and Roman finds. The majority of pottery types identified are similar in date to those identified during the earlier evaluation. A number of earlier vessel types are present within the assemblage; in particular 1st century samian and Spanish colour-coated ware. Together they point to continued activity on the site from the late Iron Age onwards.

4.1 **Prehistoric pottery**
The Iron Age pottery comprises only 4 sherds, with a single sherd recovered from context 613. All are small plain granite derived chert tempered SW decorated body sherds and date from the mid to late Iron Age. The majority were unstratified from trench 5.

4.2 **Romano-British pottery**
The Romano-British pottery assemblage comprises 50 sherds and ranges in date from early to late Romano-British. The condition of the assemblage is variable with sherd sizes ranging from large with reasonably fresh breaks (confined to the robust types such as amphorae) to small and somewhat abraded (other coarse wares and the Samian).

Samian
A single Samian body sherd, probably 1st-2nd century in date, was recovered from context 505.

Amphora
A total of 4 body sherds are classified as amphora. The globular form represented, Dressel 20, is certain. None of the other types and fabrics has been identified.

Romano-British finewares
Two Spanish colour-coated sherds dating to the 1st-century AD and generally associated with military contexts were recovered from context 505. Three further unidentified colour-coated body sherds were recovered from unstratified context in Trench 5. Colour coat wares are not a common pottery type in Devon; they have been found in small quantities in Exeter and St Loyes, and also at rural sites including Seaton Honeyditches.

Coarsewares
The coarseware sherds are mostly small body sherds and display few diagnostic features. Recognisable local fabrics include wheel-thrown micaceous grey ware body sherds, Black Burnished ware BBI (or derivatives of), and possibly Exeter red earthen ware flagons. The majority of these sherds were unstratified from Trench 5. The assemblage spans the period between the 1st to the early 3rd century with some continuation into the 4th century. Nine sherds of South Devon ware were recovered from unstratified context in Trench 5.

Mortaria
Trench 5 produced a single unstratified plain sherd from a mortarium and probably 2nd/3rd century in date.

4.3 **Undated**
Two further finds were recovered from unstratified context in Trench 5. One is a large fragment of roofing slate with a peg hole. Evidence for late Roman roof slate quarrying has been identified at nearby Crosslands (Farnell 2010, 85-88). A single small piece of worked bone, containing a drilled hole, was recovered from the same context.

5. DISCUSSION

The evaluation has exposed extensive Iron Age and Romano-British activity including further remains of the Roman road. A number of features contained sufficient finds to allow them to be assigned within broad historical periods on the basis of dating evidence alone, and stratigraphic information has allowed for some phasing of features within trenches. Where such stratigraphic information and dating evidence is absent, some relative phasing has been attempted on the basis of similarities of alignment and nature and character of features. The distribution and interpretation of archaeological features identified during the evaluation is shown on Fig. 8.

5.1 **Iron Age activity**
The wider site clearly contains extensive Iron Age settlement evidence; this is apparent from the geophysical survey and the earlier evaluation, although only two features can be ascribed to the mid to late Iron Age on pottery evidence. Ditches 606 and 610 (Trench 6) represent a large sub-circular multi-phase enclosure identified by the geophysical survey, with pottery from a post-abandonment deposit dating to the late Iron Age. No internal features were exposed by the trench.

No dating evidence is available for the postholes (404, 406, 408, 410, 412, 414, 416, 418) identified in Trench 4, but they form undoubtedly part of a roundhouse identified by the

geophysical survey. Also probably associated with the postholes is a ditch exposed within Trench 4 (402). It is highly likely that this forms part of a large sub-rectangular enclosure previously identified by the geophysical survey.

5.2 **Romano-British activity**

The principal feature of this period is the road (507) exposed within Trench 5 that bisects the site on a broad NE-SW alignment. No dating evidence was recovered either for its construction or abandonment; and in view of the presence of later burials excavation of the road was not considered appropriate at the time.

A diffuse deposit (505) located immediately to the north of the road within Trench 5 is of interest, as it contained 14 sherds of Romano-British fine- and coarsewares, spanning the 1st-4th century AD.

Little can be said at this stage about the burials identified in Trench 5 as none were investigated. Their presence would suggest that the road, even if visible, had gone out of use.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Although limited in scope, the trench evaluation has established that archaeological activity continues beyond the eastern edge of the site. Closer analysis of the geophysical data has demonstrated a denser concentration of archaeological features in this area. A number of additional features, including a probably late Romano-British cemetery, were also identified in the central area, suggesting that the site is likely to be even more archaeologically complex than previously thought.

The postholes exposed along the eastern edge, set within a larger sub-rectangular enclosure, are likely to represent the structural elements of a roundhouse. The line of the road of probable Roman date (although it may have originated earlier) has also been further investigated, while the presence of probably late Romano-British burials has been a significant development. Artefactual evidence would suggest that the settlement was in existence from the mid-late Iron Age onwards, while the relatively low-level occurrence of later wares may indicate a reduced level of activity by the late 3rd-4th century.

By its nature, the evaluation can only provide an initial indication of the nature of the Iron Age settlement and its subsequent development during the Roman period. Additional trench evaluation should further assist in a broad characterization of the site, but a degree of area excavation would be required to more fully understand its origins and development.

7. PROJECT ARCHIVE

The site records have been compiled into a fully integrated site archive currently being held by Oakford Archaeology (project no. 1004) pending deposition at Torquay Museum. Details of the investigations, including a copy of this report have been submitted to the on-line archaeological database OASIS (oakforda1-142031).

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APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS BY TRENCH

Table 1: Trench 4

Context No.	Depth (b.g.s.)	Description	Interpretation
400	0-0.34m	mid brown loamy clay	Topsoil
401	0.34+	shale bedrock	Natural Subsoil
402	0.34-0.46m	NE-SW aligned feature	Cut of Ditch
403	0.34-0.46m	mid to dark brown silty clay	Fill of Ditch [402]
404	0.34-0.60m	Circular feature	Cut of posthole
405	0.34-0.60m	mid to dark brown silty clay	Fill of posthole[404]
406	0.34-0.68m	Circular feature	Cut of posthole
407	0.34-0.68m	mid to dark brown silty clay	Fill of posthole[406]
408	0.34-0.62m	Circular feature	Cut of posthole
409	0.34-0.62m	mid to dark brown silty clay	Fill of posthole[408]
410	0.34-0.62m	Circular feature	Cut of posthole
411	0.34-0.62m	mid to dark brown silty clay	Fill of posthole[410]
412	0.34-0.58m	Circular feature	Cut of posthole
413	0.34-0.58m	mid to dark brown silty clay	Fill of posthole[412]
414	0.34-0.58m	Circular feature	Cut of posthole
415	0.34-0.58m	mid to dark brown silty clay	Fill of posthole[414]
416	0.34-0.84m	Circular feature	Cut of posthole
417	0.34-0.84m	mid to dark brown silty clay	Fill of posthole[416]
418	0.34-0.55m	Circular feature	Cut of posthole
419	0.34-0.55m	mid to dark brown silty clay	Fill of posthole[418]
420	0.34-0.76m	Circular feature	Cut of pit
421	0.34-0.76m	mid to dark brown silty clay	Fill of pit [420]

Table 2: Trench 5

Context No.	Depth (b.g.s.)	Description	Interpretation
500	0-0.3m	mid brown loamy clay	Topsoil
501	0.2+	dark brown loamy clay	Burial horizon
502	0.2+	NE-SW aligned	Cut of grave
503	0.2+	dark brown silty clay	Fill of grave [502]
504	0.2-0.35m	mid brown silty clay	Diffuse deposit
505	0.35-0.55m	mid brown silty clay	Diffuse deposit
506	0.35-0.6m	mid brown silty clay	Diffuse deposit
507	0.2+	metalled surface	Road surface
508	0.2+	metalled surface	Road surface
509	0.2+	metalled surface	Road surface
511	0.6+	shale bedrock	Natural Subsoil
513	0.35-0.55m	mid to dark brown silty clay	Diffuse deposit

Table 3: Trench 6

Context No.	Depth (b.g.s.)	Description	Interpretation
600	0-0.4m	mid brown loamy clay	Topsoil
601	0.4+	shale bedrock	Natural Subsoil
602	0.4-0.6m	NE-SW aligned feature	Cut of Land drain
603	0.4-0.6m	mid to dark brown silty clay	Fill of Land drain [402]
604	0.4-0.54m	Sub-oval feature	Cut of tree throw
605	0.4-0.54m	mid orange brown silty clay	Fill of tree throw [604]
606	0.4-1.46m	Curvilinear feature	Cut of Ditch
607	0.6-1.46m	mid reddish brown silty clay	Fill of Ditch [606]
608	0.5-0.9m	mid reddish brown silty clay	Fill of Ditch [606]
609	0.4-0.7m	mid reddish brown silty clay	Fill of Ditch [606]
610	0.4-0.96m	Curvilinear feature	Cut of Ditch

Context No.	Depth (b.g.s.)	Description	Interpretation
611	0.5-0.9m	mid reddish brown silty clay	Fill of Ditch [610]
612	0.4-0.8m	mid reddish brown silty clay	Fill of Ditch [610]
613	0.4-7m	mid reddish brown silty clay	Fill of Ditch [610]
614	0.4-0.6m	mid reddish brown silty clay	Fill of Ditch [606]