

SMR PRN:

35934

Kings of Wessex Community School An Archaeological Evaluation for Somerset County Council



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RAB/14/98

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1.0.0 Summary

- 1.0.1** *A small scale intrusive site evaluation has been undertaken to provide an initial assessment of the likely archaeological implications of plans to erect a new classroom block on land immediately south of the existing school buildings at the Kings of Wessex Community School, Cheddar. The evaluation has demonstrated the presence of widespread Romano-British activity in the area under consideration with well preserved archaeological remains in-situ. The evaluation has also demonstrated that such remains survive at a very shallow depth and are likely to be subject to substantial disturbance should development proceed.*

2.0.0 Introduction

2.0.1 The following report details the results of a small scale intrusive archaeological evaluation on land immediately to the south of the existing main school block at the Kings of Wessex Community School in Cheddar. The evaluation was commissioned by Mr J. Kehoe of Somerset County Council's Property Services Department. It was conducted by R. A. Broomhead acting as Archaeological Consultant. The field evaluation was undertaken between the 8th and 12th August 1988.

2.0.2 The proposed development involves the construction of a new classroom block on virgin ground currently utilised as part of the present school's playing fields and lies just to the south of that area scheduled as County Monument No. 305. The aim of this evaluation is thus to determine whether archaeological remains exist within this area, to determine if they do their nature and extent and to provide evidence to allow a suitable design strategy for any proposed construction to be developed.

3.0.0 The Site

3.1.0 Location (*Fig 1a & b*)

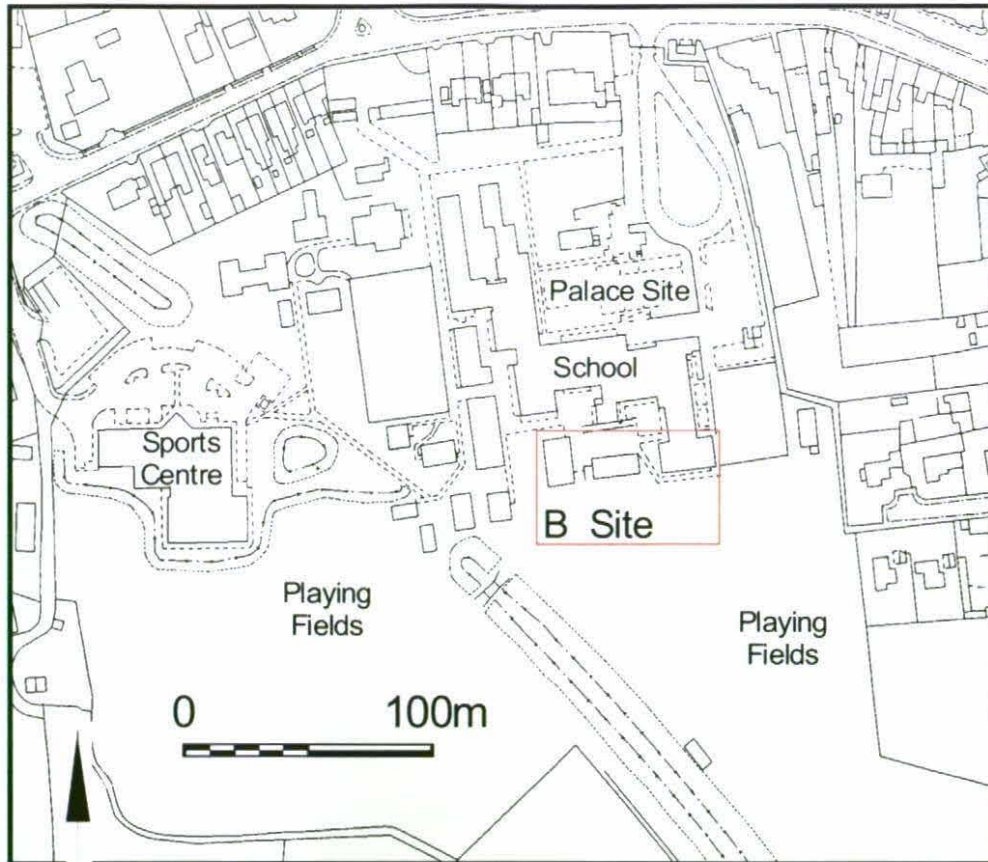
3.1.1 The Kings of Wessex Community School lies within the historic core of the village of Cheddar at the foot of the southern slopes of the Mendip Hills. The school is established on the site of a series of Saxon Royal Palaces identified and excavated prior to the construction of the school in the early 1960's by Professor Philip Rahtz. The evaluation site lies immediately to the south of the now scheduled area relating to these excavations centred at ST45705305.

3.2.0 Topography and Landuse

3.2.1 The site lies at approximately 10m OD and comprises largely level ground currently under grass and utilised as part of the school playing fields.

3.3.0 Geology

3.3.1 The British Geological Survey (Solid & Drift Edition Sheet 280, 1967) shows the area to lie on Pleistocene and Recent Head deposits largely derived from glacial and periglacial outwash.



Site & Trench Location

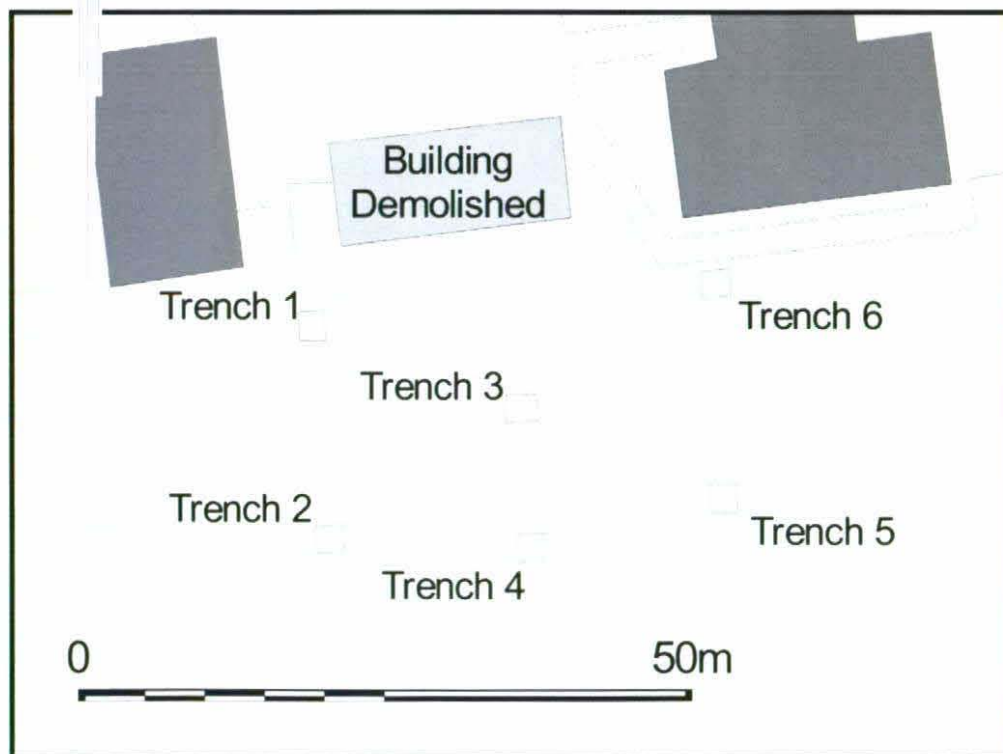


Fig 1

4.0.0 Existing Archaeological Evidence

- 4.0.1** The proposed development site has not previously been examined archaeologically but lies only 40m to the south of the current boundaries of County Monument No. 305 within which excavations by Phillip Rahtz in 1962 – 1963 demonstrated the existence of an Anglo-Saxon Palace complex and prior Romano-British activity.
- 4.0.2** Evaluation trenches excavated by the Oxford Archaeological Unit approximately 80m to the north west of the proposed development have demonstrated the existence of Saxon and Medieval features containing residual Romano-British material.
- 4.0.3** An evaluation excavation approximately 100m to the south-west of the proposed development area by AC Archaeology demonstrated the existence of Romano-British features sealed by only a shallow depth of subsoil in playing fields to the south of the new Leisure Centre.
- 4.0.4** All excavations and evaluations have demonstrated that to the north of the proposed development area surviving archaeological features tend to be cut into the natural underlying head deposits and that little stratigraphy survives above them. Evaluations to the south would indicate that archaeological features here may survive above the level of the natural gravel.

5.0.0 Evaluation Strategy and Methodology

5.1.0 Strategy

- 5.1.1** The strategy adopted for the evaluation trenching was determined by the resident engineer who specified the opening of five 2m × 2m trenches, four of which were to be located on the external corners of the proposed development and one of which was to be placed in its centre.
- 5.1.2** To enable rapid progress the five trenches were partially excavated utilising a KA 66 tracked Mini-digger using a toothless 1m grading bucket under full archaeological supervision. The final cleaning and excavation was done by hand. In order to more fully test the development area a sixth trench was opened on the southern external boundary of the proposed development.

5.2.0 Methodology

- 5.2.1** The six trenches were machine cut in shallow spits of approximately 50mm until either the underlying head deposits were observed or significant archaeological features were determinable. All removed spoil was subsequently scanned for any displaced artefacts.
- 5.2.2** All of the trenches were subsequently hand cleaned and a single, relevant trench section from each was levelled and drawn at a scale of 1:20. All

observed archaeological features were hand excavated and planned at the same scale. A written contextual record was made using *pro-forma* context recording sheets under the site code RAB/14/98. All features were also recorded photographically.

6.0.0 Results

6.1.0 General

6.1.1 Full details of the recorded contexts are given in Appendix 1. Underlying Head deposits were attained in all trenches either by complete excavation or by sondage. Significant archaeological features were observed, excavated and recorded in four of the six trenches.

6.2.0 Natural Deposits

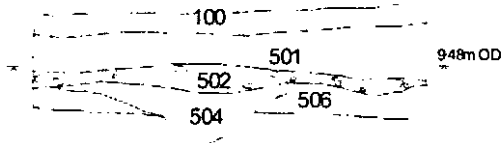
6.2.1 Gravel Head deposits were observed to fall from between 9.4m OD in the northern trenches (1 & 6) to 9.2m OD in the southern trenches (2,4 & 5). However within trench 3 in the centre of the site natural gravel was only observed in a sondage at a depth of 8.9m OD. There was no indication of any archaeological reason for the increased depth of stratigraphy within this trench, the gravel being sealed by a sterile orange brown natural silt [303] which also occurred in trench 6 [602] and trench 5 [506]. In the latter trench this silt was cut by a Romano-British gully [F503]

6.3.0 Romano-British

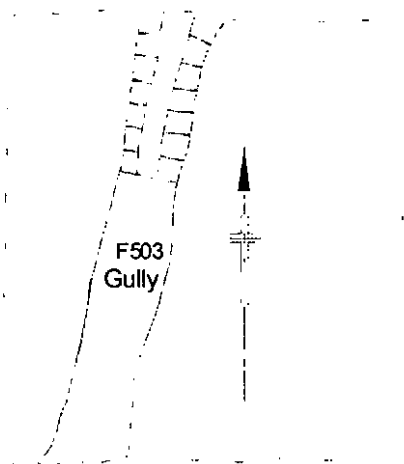
6.3.1 Romano-British material was derived from all the excavated trenches and discrete, recognisable features of this period were recorded in trenches 1,2,4 & 5. In trench 1, the excavation of a clearly defined cut within the natural gravel to the south indicated the presence of a possibly substantial east-west ditch [F107] containing structural rubble, ceramic roof tile, nails, pottery and bone. Trench 2 also produced substantial quantities of probable building debris including worked stone, pennant roof tile and many nails from a charcoal rich rubble horizon [202] which sealed a possible post-hole [F204] only observable in the northern section of the trench. In trench 4, machining revealed two distinct and apparently circular stone packed features [F403] and [F408] in both northerly corners of the trench. Partial excavation of [F403] suggested the existence of a possible well sealed by pitched Draycott Stone [406] within which voids indicated a feature of some depth. [F408] comprised vertically packed limestone and Draycott Stone [409] occupying a distinct semi-circular cut into the underlying gravel implying the presence of a not inconsiderable post-placement. The north-south gully [F503] in trench 5 has already been noted in **6.2.1** (above). This also contained much Romano-British pottery together with cut bone and nails in a charcoal flecked silt [504].

Trench Details

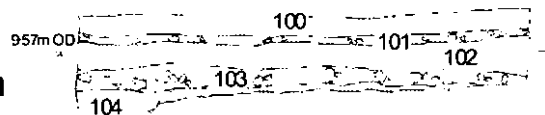
Trench 5 South facing section



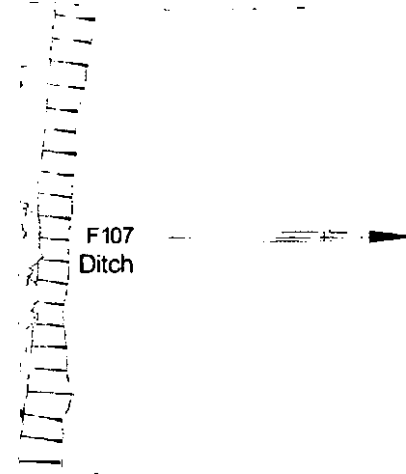
Trench 5 Plan detail



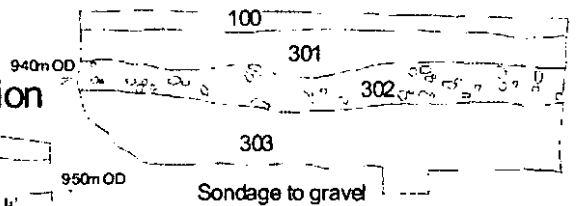
Trench 1 East facing section



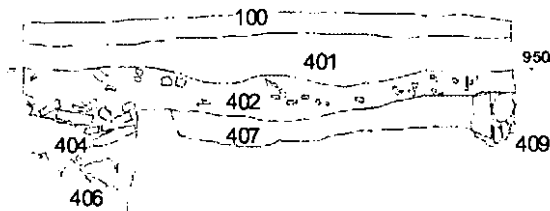
Trench 1 Plan detail



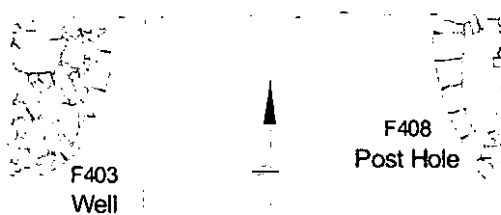
Trench 3 North facing section



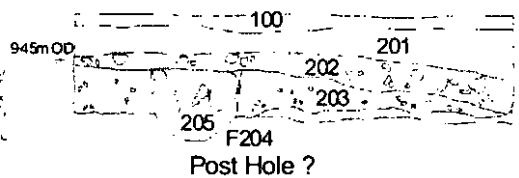
Trench 4 South facing section



Trench 4 Plan detail



Trench 2 South facing section



Trench 6 South facing section

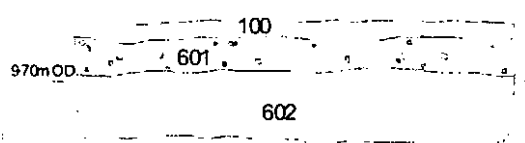


Fig 2

Kings of Wessex RAB/14/98



1a (left)

Trench 1 from
the east showing
F 107



1b (right)

Trench 4 from the
south showing
F403 & F 408
excavated



1c (left)

Trench 5 from
the south showing
F503 excavated



2a (left)

Trench 2 from
the south
F204 visible
in section



2b (right)

Trench 3 from the
north



2c (left)

Trench 6 from
the south

6.4.0 Post-Roman and Modern

6.4.1 A continuous, narrow demolition or rubble horizon 50mm – 150mm in depth and diminishing slightly to the north-east, sealed all observed Romano-British features [103], [202], [302], [402] and [502]. This was noted in every trench with the exception of trench 6 which had been subject to disturbance caused by the construction of adjacent buildings. The evaluation produced no evidence of any Post-Roman activity other than an accumulation of clean plough soil with an average depth of less than 150mm below a final 100mm of turf and topsoil.

7.0.0 Finds

7.0.1 All recovered material has been sorted and quantified by type and weight. With only minor exceptions (4 modern sherds from [601]) the vast majority of material is of Romano-British origin.

7.1.0 Pottery (Including Tile)

7.1.1 The nature of the recovered pottery is indicated in Table 1. Grey wares, primarily of local (Congresbury) origin formed the bulk of the finds with Black Burnished Wares (both BB1 and BB2 types) comprising a further third of the finds. No differentiation has been made between remaining pottery types classed under Other although they include Colour Coated Wares and miscellaneous Severn Valley Wares including a possible sherd of Shepton type. Samian was relatively common although most of the recovered sherds were very small and fragmentary.

Table 1 Pottery by Type Number & Weight (grams)

Context	Grey Wares	Black Burnished	Samian	Other	Tile
103	12 [100g]	10 [35g]		1 [5g]	
105	8 [130g]	16 [55g]		1 [15g]	1 [215g]
202	36 [450g]	18 [115g]	1 [5g]	6 [30g]	
203	4 [35g]		1 [2g]		
302	6 [30g]	10 [55g]	1 [10g]	1 [35g]	
402	12 [130g]	20 [160g]	2 [4g]	17 [95g]	
404	10 [55g]	1 [5g]	2 [5g]	1 [15g]	
409			1 [35g]		
502	7 [30g]	6 [35g]			
504	28 [185g]	5 [20g]		4 [72g]	
601	1 [15g]				
602	3 [35g]			2 [5g]	

7.2.0 Objects of Iron

7.2.1 One large piece of iron slag weighing 80g was recovered from context [104]. A total of 9 nails were also recovered, 2 from [105], 4 from [202], 1 from [402], 1 from [404] and 1 from [504].

7.3.0 Other objects

7.3.1 Context [103] produced a fragment of blue coloured glass, possibly part of a ring. A single and as yet unidentified Roman coin was recovered from [202] and a large fragment of lead was found in [205].

7.4.0 Bone (including teeth)

7.4.1 Cut or fragmentary animal bone weighing in total 345g was recovered from contexts [103], [105], [202], [203], [402] and [504].

7.5.0 Building Materials

7.5.1 Worked stone was not generally retained but was noted in trenches 1 and 2. Pennant tile fragments were recovered from trenches 1-5.

8.0.0 Summary and Conclusions

8.1.0 Summary of the Evaluation Evidence

8.1.1 The evaluation has demonstrated the following principle points:

- i.)** There is recorded evidence of Romano-British, Saxon and Medieval archaeological features in close proximity to the evaluation area.
- ii.)** There is archaeological evidence that well preserved Romano-British features including ditches, gullies, post-holes and a possible well survive within the evaluation area.
- iii.)** There is physical evidence to show that archaeological features within the evaluation area survive at less than 300mm below the present ground surface.

8.2.0 Conclusions

8.2.1 Any development within the current evaluation area is likely to have a severe impact on surviving archaeological features due to their shallow nature. There are slight indications that the density of observed features may be reducing slightly to the north-east however their precise extent remains unknown and cannot be fully elucidated by evaluation trenching alone.

9.0.0 Acknowledgements

9.0.1 Site excavations were assisted by Humphry Woods. Thanks are also due to Steve Bailey for plant hire and excavation.

References

Original Documents, Maps & Plans

Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 280 [1967]

Printed Sources

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
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| Somerset County Council | <i>General Specification for Archaeological Work in Somerset</i> Environment Department, 1994 |
| Wait, G.A., | <i>Kings of Wessex School, Cheddar. Archaeological Assessment of Proposed Development for Somerset County Council</i> Oxford Archaeological Unit Report, 1987 |

Appendix 1 Recorded Contexts

Trench 1

Natural

- [109] Hard packed well sorted gravel with occasional larger rounded limestone.

Romano-British

- [F107] Linear east-west cut feature, ditch.
[108] Cut of [F107]. Steeply cut from the north through [109].
[106] Lowest fill of [F107]. Clean dark brown silt.
[105] Fill of [F107]. Dark brown silt with gravel and worked stone up to 300mm tipping into feature [F107].
[104] Upper fill of [F107]. Clean dark brown silt with frequent pottery sherds, infrequent small fragmentary stone.

Post Roman

- [103] Demolition or destruction layer. Continuous horizon of fine brown silt with frequent fragments of angular limestone and conglomerate 20mm – 50mm. Charcoal streaking fragmentary pottery, bone and other objects.
[102] Subsoil. Clean light brown silt.
[101] Slightly red brown silt with a little small stone probably derived from construction of the adjacent buildings.
[100] Turf and topsoil

Trench 2

Natural

- [207] Hard packed well sorted gravel with occasional larger rounded limestone.

Romano-British

- [F204] Post hole or other feature visible in northern section.
[206] Cut of [F204] Vertically sided but not immediately obvious. Penetrates natural to about 100mm.
[205] Fill of [F204]. Fine dark grey brown silt with some large stone up to 300mm.
[203] Very fine brown silt with some small (20mm – 30mm) fragments of limestone and gravel.

Post Roman

- [202] Very fine brown silt with dense small to medium stone (20mm – 100mm). Frequent pottery fragments, nails, some structural stone and charcoal flecking.
[202] Subsoil. Clean light brown silt.

Trench 3

Natural

- [303] Orange brown silt with some gravel

Post-Roman

- [302] Fine mid brown silt with much rounded limestone 30mm – 70mm, some angular conglomerate and pennant fragments. Infrequent Romano-British pottery.
[301] Subsoil. Clean light brown silt.

Trench 4

Natural

- [411] Hard packed well sorted gravel.
[407] Orange brown silt.

Romano-British

- [F403] Partially excavated feature continuing to some depth, probably a well.

- [405] Vertically sided circular cut of [F403]
- [406] Lowest excavated fill of [F403] laid Draycott Stone (Conglomerate) with notable voids forming an apparent deliberate capping.
- [404] Fine dark brown silt with some charcoal streaking and pot fragments between dense flat conglomerate 100mm – 300mm and large rounded limestone 200mm – 300mm forming upper fill of [F403].
- [F408] Cut feature with stone packing – post hole.
- [410] Almost vertically sided semi-circular cut of [F408].
- [409] Vertically packed limestone and conglomerate up to 350mm.

Post Roman

- [402] Granular brown silt with frequent rounded limestone 20mm – 70mm. Much small angular conglomerate fragments 20mm – 40mm, pot, bone and fairly dense charcoal at its base.
- [401] Subsoil. Clean light brown silt.

Trench 5

Natural

- [506] Granular orange brown silt becoming gravel rich at base.

Romano-British

- [F503] Linear north – south gully.
- [505] U shaped cut of [F503].
- [504] Fill of [F503]. Grey brown granular silt with frequent pot, bone small stone and charcoal streaking.

Post-Roman

- [502] Fine brown silt with occasional rounded limestone up to 60mm but not as pronounced as in other trenches.
- [501] Subsoil. Clean light brown silt.

Trench 6

Natural

- [603] Hard packed well sorted gravel.
- [602] Orange brown silt with infrequent limestone fragments up to 50mm. Rare (infrequent) abraded Romano-British pottery.
- [601] Granular brown silt with dense small limestone fragments 20mm – 50mm, bone, slate and modern tile derived from school construction.