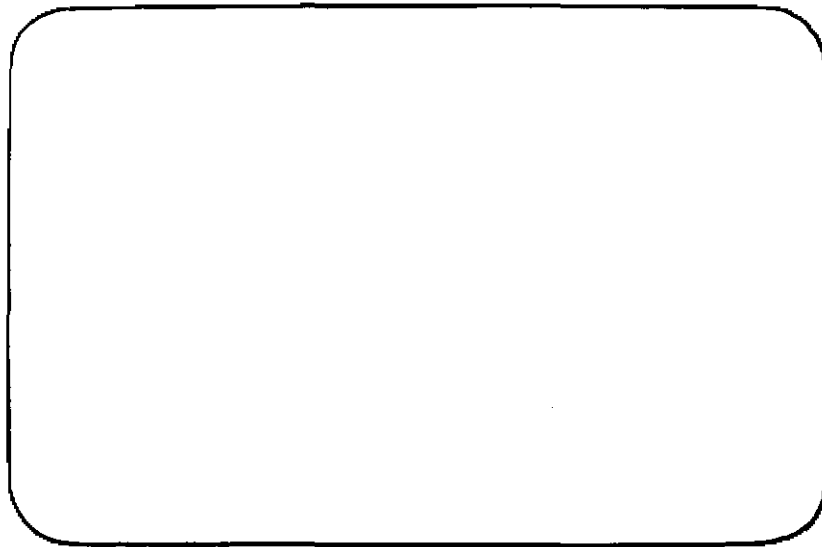


*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*



B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

Report No. 298

April 1994

SMR PRN: 35439

**Mendip Business Park, Shepton Mallet
Site A**

**Archaeological Excavations
in Advance of Development**

by

Peter Leach F.S.A., M.I.F.A.

For further information please contact:
Simon Buteux (Manager), Peter Leach or Iain Ferris (Assistant Directors)
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 021 414 5513
Fax: 021 414 5516

MENDIP BUSINESS PARK, SHEPTON MALLET: SITE A, 4/94
Archaeological Excavations in Advance of Development

An Interim Report

by Peter Leach F.S.A, M.I.F.A.

Introduction

Following the grant of planning permission to erect an industrial unit on a development plot at the Mendip Business Park, Shepton Mallet, Somerset, it was a condition that any excavations for foundations and services should be monitored and recorded archaeologically. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit were commissioned by Wayopen Estates Ltd. in April 1994 to undertake these works immediately prior to the commencement of development.

The development plot lies within the site of an extensive Romano-British roadside settlement (centred NGR ST 630424), an adjoining portion of which was the subject of extensive archaeological excavations during 1990 (Leach 1991). The Mendip Business Park has itself been the subject of several archaeological evaluations employing geophysical prospection and trial trenching; demonstrating that Romano-British remains survive to a variable extent within much of the area (Leach 1990 & 1992). The present site was evaluated by these procedures in 1990 (Fig.1, Area A), when the remains of structures and other Roman features were encountered.

Procedure

The development specifications required the excavation of a series of small trenches c 2m square, as foundation bases to depths of 1m and more below the existing ground level, and a linear trench to carry services from the building to connections under the service road. Numbered 1-58, these trenches were excavated mechanically under archaeological supervision, to horizons where either natural formations or intact archaeological remains were encountered (Fig 2). As a preliminary to this a thin surface layer of turf and topsoil (< 0.20m) was also removed by machine. The deposit sequences encountered in all 58 trenches were recorded. Those revealing suspected archaeological deposits were excavated thereafter by hand, removing where possible all material to expose the underlying natural horizon. Written, graphic and photographic records were made of all defined and excavated archaeological contexts, which were identified according to a numerical sequence. Finds recovered from such contexts are recorded with reference to that sequence and their trench location number. The archive of finds and records recovered and created by this procedure form the basis for this interim report, and are currently held at BUFAU. No resources for further analysis and interpretation of these discoveries are presently available, but may be sought in the context of completion of the development programme for the Mendip Business Park, in due course.

Summary of Results

Of the 58 trenches examined, 22 contained archaeological features or deposits which were excavated and recorded, and a further 9 encountered traces which could not be investigated further. Within the remaining trenches excavation was in some instances

continued through natural formations to the full depth required for the building foundations. This revealed a clean buff-yellow deposit of silty clay to variable depths (up to c 0.50m) above a horizon of horizontally bedded Lias limestone bedrock. Archaeological features and deposits were located upon this clay, in some instances penetrating to the bedrock surface but not through it.

The size and distribution of excavation areas imposes considerable limitations upon the interpretation of data recorded. The evidence is inevitably piecemeal and fragmented, but some patterns can be discerned and inferences made. To the north west, one group of trenches (2-6, 14-16 & 22) contained cobbled surfaces, horizons of occupation soil and possible building foundations (Fig.2). Peripheral to this area were trenches (18,25,29,30,32-34, 39 & 40) containing portions of boundary ditches and other linear features, and in one instance (34) a burial. The latter, a prone juvenile with traces of a coffin, was in poor condition and lay above an earlier ditch. The most easterly line of trenches were positioned within a zone of modern disturbance and landfill dating from the layout of the Business Park in 1990. This had probably destroyed most archaeological evidence which may formerly have existed there, although some truncated remains survived in Trenches 11 and 46.

The most important concentration of remains were encountered in the south east corner trenches (45,49,& 51-56). Stratified sequences of features and deposits were recorded in several trenches, associated with finds datable from the 2nd - 4th centuries AD. The remains here comprised linear boundary ditches, occupation surfaces and deposits, suspected building foundations, and an industrial feature; some of which were superimposed in sequence upon each other. These correspond generally with an intensive area of activity recognised in the 1990 evaluation Trench L, identified then as Structure XII (Leach 1990, Fig 3). None of the most westerly line of trenches contained identifiable archaeological remains, and the water table was encountered before bedrock was reached in the majority. A 2m wide trench (58) cut to take site services revealed an extensive zone of recent disturbance and dumped landfill above natural clay. The only archaeological horizon surviving *in situ* was a layer of cobbles and occupation soil beneath the subsoil and above the clay in the final c.5m at the southern end of the trench.

Conclusions

From the evidence recovered in this exercise and the earlier evaluation of the site, as well as that from more extensive excavations in 1990 (Leach 1991), it is possible to suggest a broad interpretation for these remains. Within the context of the Romano-British settlement at Fosse Lane it is known that away from the road frontage, the site comprised a series of enclosures bounded by ditches and/or stone walls and sometimes separated by streets or pathways. Within the enclosures were a scatter of buildings - some of mortared stone or half-timbered construction, the remains of agricultural or small-scale industrial processes, and occasionally small groups or cemeteries of human burials. Most, if not all of these elements are present among the remains recorded on Site A. The earlier geophysical results hint at some of the enclosure layouts in this locality, and excavation suggests at least two concentrations of activity comprising structural remains, occupation deposits, burial, etc. These appear to be focused towards the north west and the south east corners of the development site, almost certainly within two or more separate enclosures.

As stated previously, there are currently no resources to attempt a more specific and detailed interrogation of the results, although in a wider context of study this would

undoubtedly prove worthwhile. Portions of the back areas of a small Romano-British town astride the former Fosse Way are represented here. Activities commencing early in the 2nd century and persisting with changing patterns and emphasis into the 4th, have been documented. Though small and fragmented in themselves, these pieces of evidence have an importance within the site as a whole; parts of a jigsaw puzzle whose significance will only be appreciated within the context of the whole.

Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Wayopen Estates Ltd., and thanks are due to Mr and Mrs D.L.Dennet for their interest and co-operation. The fieldwork was undertaken and directed by Peter Leach, and I am grateful to Anthony Butler and Doreen Leach for invaluable assistance.

References

Leach,P., et al. 1990 *An Archaeological Assessment of the Mendip Business Park, Fosse Lane, Shepton Mallet, 1990* BUFAU Report no.132.

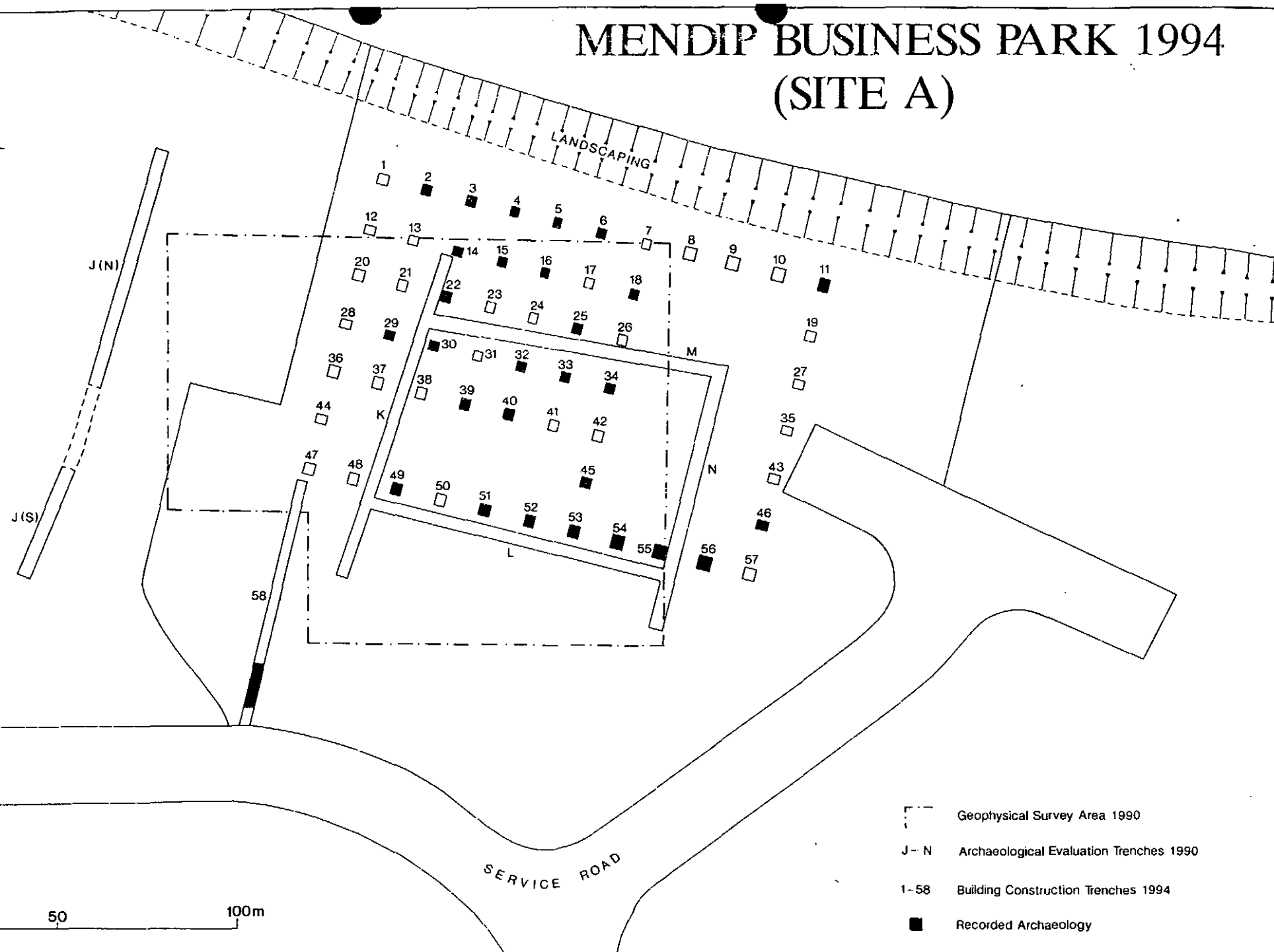
Leach,P. 1991 *Shepton Mallet. Romano-Britons and Early Christians in Somerset* BUFAU & Showerings Ltd.

Leach,P. 1992 *Mendip Business Park, Shepton Mallet. A further archaeological assessment 1992* BUFAU Report no.216



Figure 1

MENDIP BUSINESS PARK 1994 (SITE A)







-  Geophysical Survey Area 1990
-  J - N Archaeological Evaluation Trenches 1990
-  1 - 58 Building Construction Trenches 1994
-  Recorded Archaeology

Figure 2