

*Keynsham Cemetery, Durley Hill,
Keynsham, Bath & NE Somerset.*

Archaeological Monitoring of Cemetery
Extension Groundwork

Bath & NE Somerset SMR 30121



For:
Keynsham Town Council

Avon Archaeological Unit
March 2000

Keynsham Cemetery Extension

EVENT BN2629
SOURCE PN 43319

Keynsham Cemetery Extension Archaeological Monitoring
For Keynsham Town Council

ABSTRACT

The following report details the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by Avon Archaeological Unit on behalf of Keynsham Town Council.

The objectives of the project were to recover any artefacts and record all archaeological remains exposed during ground works and earthmoving associated with the development of a cemetery extension immediately adjacent and to the south of Keynsham Cemetery, Durley Hill, Keynsham (NGR ST6458 6920).

The archaeological monitoring was undertaken during October 1999.

No significant archaeological remains were recorded during these ground works although some pottery dating from the Romano-British period was recovered in topsoil and subsoil contexts. These finds can be attributed to the Romano-British activity associated with the adjacent Durley Hill Roman villa, a late roman building of national importance known to be preserved as subterranean features in the area of the Victorian cemetery immediately to the north of the study area.

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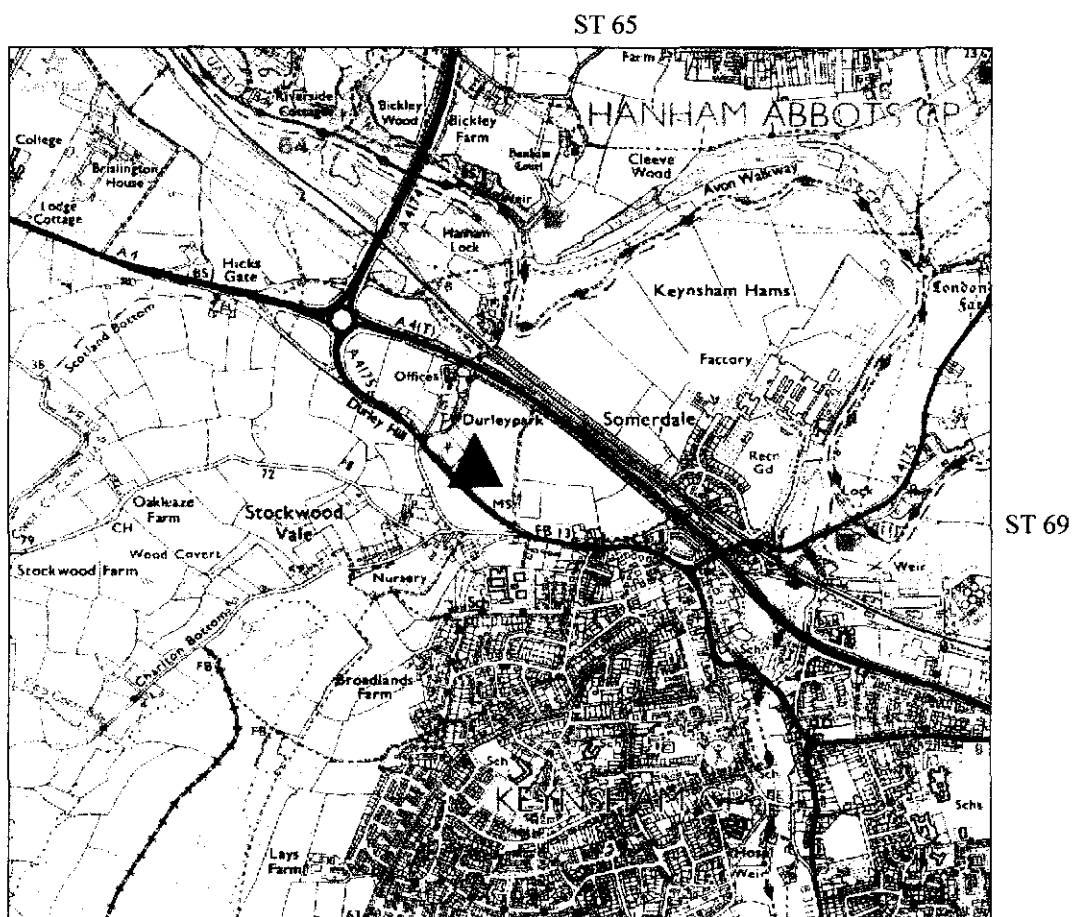
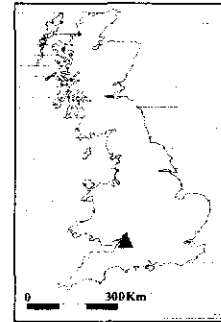
1	Site Location Scale 1:25,000
2	Site Location Scale 1: 2,500
3	Site Development Layout – scale shown

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Cover	Site Reduction viewed from the North East
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Figure 1

**Keynsham Cemetery Extension
Watching Brief, Durley Hill,
Keynsham.
BSMR 30121**



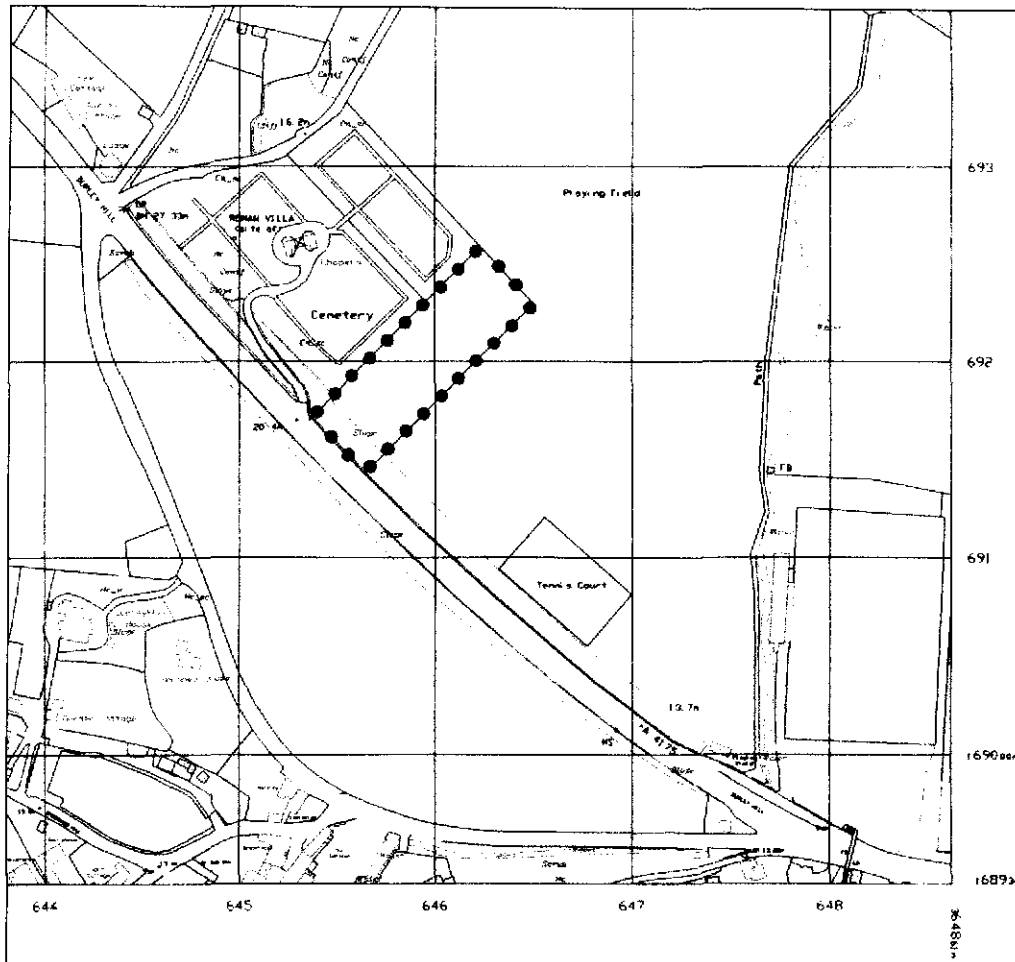
Site Location ▲ Scale

1: 25,000

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Figure 2

Keynsham Cemetery Extension
Watching Brief, Durley Hill.
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Site Boundary

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The development site is located adjacent and to the south east of Keynsham Cemetery, Durley Hill, Keynsham, centred at NGR ST 646692. (See **figures 1 and 2**). This site forms part of the cemetery grounds although had not previously been utilised for burials.

1.2 The development ground work for an extension to the cemetery was carried out by Broadleaf Countryside Contractors, on behalf of the developers, Keynsham Town Council.

1.3 The Archaeological Watching Brief was conducted in accordance with the requirements of Bath & NE Somerset Council Archaeological Officer and was carried out by Andrew Young, BA, AIFA. of the Avon Archaeological Unit.

1.4 An Archaeological watching brief was considered necessary for the ground work construction activities because the development is situated in an area of known archaeological significance (see section 2 below), with sites of the Romano British and other periods recorded closely adjacent to this site.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The Study Area, (see **figures 1 and 2**) comprises a parcel of land, approximately 0.3 ha in extent, situated immediately southeast of Keynsham Cemetery, Durley Hill. At the time of the study the site consisted of open and well maintained grass.

2.2 The study area is located immediately adjacent and to the south of the site of Keynsham Roman Villa (SMR 1208), an opulent colonnaded courtyard complex that has been extensively disturbed by human burials since the mid-19th century. The villa, which is not a Scheduled Ancient Monument, was investigated archaeologically in the 1920's (Bulleid & Horne, 1926), principally because mosaic pavements and masonry were continually being revealed by grave digging. The results of that work provide a general plan of the complex and a tantalising glimpse of the splendidly decorated rooms and terraced corridors which lay within its southern and northern corridor wings, (the former still largely buried beneath the road embankment) and focal suite of west rooms. These latter included at least two highly decorated suites containing octagonal rooms (Bulleid & Grey, *ibid*: p.111, Rooms J and W) complete with geometric and figurative mosaic floors of the highest quality.

The 1920's excavations were hampered by the large number of inhumations already present on the site and work was mainly concerned to reveal masonry features and tessellated flooring. Little attention was paid to detailed stratigraphy or the distribution and meaning of artefacts, whilst the nature and organisation of the impressive courtyard remains unknown. The ground-plan does, however, clearly indicate that further elements of the complex, especially rooms and features located inside the north wing, are preserved on the site which have yet to be investigated. Accordingly, the chronology and structural development of the villa remains poorly understood. No

evidence exists for earlier Roman activity on the site although, in view of the proven 2nd-3rd century settlement at nearby Cadbury Somerdale (Hume, 1993), this remains a strong possibility. Similarly, the early post-Roman history of the site remains unknown.

The concluding 1920's ground-plan suggests a whole range of rooms attached to the southern corridor and north wing remain to be discovered, and that further rooms, possibly including a bathhouse, extended to the north of the north corridor (as indicated by stone drains and possible lavatories (Features Q and Rooms P). The presence of a formal reception suite (the Roman '*aula*'), usually situated centrally in the main residential wing (and therefore lying beneath the road embankment), also remains to be determined.

The known ground plan also suggests the courtyard was open on the east side affording extensive views up the Avon valley, although that interpretation is essentially based on the recollections of the incumbent gravedigger, who can not remember finding any walls in that area.

2.3 Preceding evaluation of the site (Cox, 1998) by trial excavation revealed structural features and evidence of activity associated with the occupation of the adjacent villa. The evaluation evidence indicated that the bulk of the study area lay outside the eastern boundary of the core villa buildings and represented an area where there was a relatively low level of activity. This low level of activity was indicated by the extensive soil layer that contained few finds other than sporadic and highly abraded pottery and tile sherds. The development of this largely sterile horizon was suggested to possibly represent an area of shallow cultivation, possibly an area of formal gardens.

A wall (Structure I) was identified which crossed the approximate centre of the study area in an east-west alignment. The orientation was congruent with the rectilinear layout of the recorded villa buildings although was considered too insubstantial to have formed part of a structure but consistent with a boundary feature, possibly demarcating the southern side of an easterly approach route to the villa. Largely negative evidence was recorded in many of the evaluation trenches (Trenches 1,2,4-6 and 8) Geophysical survey data indicates that the wall continues at least as far north as the modern cemetery wall although its eastern extent remains uncertain.

Features and finds revealed in Evaluation Trench 7 indicated a zone of increased Romano-British activity in the extreme north of the study area. The features, comprising postholes, a gully and a linear stone spread (the latter orientated parallel to Structure I above) indicated the presence of earthfast timber structures contemporary with the villa complex although insufficient evidence was recovered to provide any clear picture as to the precise form and function of those structures.

Substantial masonry foundations revealed in Trench 10 were interpreted as the remains of a major villa building including both external and party walls. Their identification was considered to extend the footprint of the core villa buildings by some 25m to the east whilst the close alignment of foundation wall 1105 and the south wing corridor indicated on the 1925 plan suggests that the south wing may well have

originally extended as far as Trench 10. The alignment of the suggested party wall, which was bonded at an angle of c.70 degrees to the larger foundation and apparently forming the eastern side of a sunken room or chamber, was similar to the walls and hypocaust rooms forming the sides of, and attached to, the two opulent hexagonal rooms recorded at the western ends of the north and south corridor wings by Bulleid and Horne (ibid; and see figure 6). Accordingly, the limited evaluation evidence revealed in Trench 10 suggested the possibility that a further range of opulent and highly decorated hexagonal or non-rectangular rooms were attached to the eastern end of the south wing.

The small assemblage of finds recovered during the evaluation project were of only modest interest. The pottery assemblage was mostly highly abraded and of fairly uniform late Roman type. An apparent preponderance of tile as opposed to vessel fragments was noted and thought consistent with an assemblage largely derived from the former villa structure as opposed to the activities of its inhabitants.

2.4 The archaeological potential of the study area was divided into a series of zones (Zones A-D) based upon the evidence revealed in the evaluation trenches.

Zone A - an area where further structural remains associated with core villa buildings and of potential national importance were likely to be preserved as subterranean features.

Zone B - an area where there is a moderate to high probability that further negative archaeological remains reflecting former Roman timber structures and associated activity were likely to exist as subterranean features.

Zone C - the corridor of the Roman boundary wall.

Zone D - an area where no substantive archaeological features were recorded during the project and where the probability that important archaeological remains are preserved as subterranean features was considered very low.

2.5 On the basis of the evaluation results the subsequent approved design plan for the cemetery extension restricted earthmoving and ground work to inside Zone D above.

3. GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND PRESENT LAND USE

3.1 The study area (figure 2), comprising some 0.3 hectare in total, is located immediately to the south of the existing cemetery and flanked to the west by the embankment for the A4175 Keynsham to Hicks Gate carriageway and to the east by the low lying Keynsham Hams, currently mostly in use for sports pitches. The site slopes gently from west to east, from c. 13.5m OD to 10.8m OD and straddles the junction separating the solid geology (Mercian Mudstone) from recent (Holocene) river alluvium. At the time of the study the site comprised an area of open and lush

grassland bounded by the south wall of the cemetery, a post and wire fence and a mature evergreen hedge. No modern services or other potential hazards or obstacles were known to exist on the site.

4. CONSTRUCTION METHODOLOGY

4.1 Construction activity on site of potential archaeological impact was restricted to topsoil stripping and the removal of excavated material from the site.

4.2 Topsoil stripping was carried out over a specified part of the site (see **figure 3**) using a slew tracked mini-excavator. Topsoil stripping reached an approximate maximum depth of 0.15 m.

5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

5.1 The Archaeological methodology comprised of:-

Visual monitoring of all mechanical ground work excavations and the appropriate recording and assessment of any archaeological deposits present within the development area (figure 3).

All significant artefacts were recovered, recorded, marked with the project reference number and retained for permanent storage. Features of potential archaeological interest were investigated by hand and finds collected.

6. SITE OBSERVATIONS

6.1 The following section details features and deposits observed and/or recorded within the Study Area.

6.2 The reduction of the ground surface over an area of the site measuring approximately 40m x 12m. Reduction involved the removal of a thin, (maximum depth 0.15 m) slightly stony, dark grey, (Munsell colour 10YR 4/1) fine, sandy silt topsoil/turf layer (Context 100). This topsoil contained small amounts of Roman0-British ceramics plus a few fragments of animal bones and modern ceramics (x 2). A single clay tobacco pipe stem was also noted.

6.3 A horizon of olive-grey silty clay subsoil (Munsell colour 5Y 4/2) (Context 101) was revealed beneath the topsoil layer. The deposit contained sparse to moderate amounts of small limestone fragments and slabs. Finds recovered from the surface of the deposit included fragments of heavily abraded Romano-British pottery plus a small collection of natural flint fragments (see Table in Section 7 below).

6.4 The surface exposure of the site after topsoil stripping was of uniform type as described above. No significant archaeological features or deposits were identified therein.

7. FINDS CATALOGUE AND SUMMARY

TABLE 1

Context	No.	Description	Date (C)
100	1	Clay tobacco pipe	18 th -19 th
	1	Romano-British grey ware rim sherd	2 nd -4 th
	2	red ware sherd	c.19 th
	3	white ware sherds (not retained)	19 th -20 th
	2	Flint fragments inc. 1 small blade fragment	prehistoric
	3	Romano-British tile fragments (h. abraded)	2 nd -4 th
101	5	Misc. Romano-British tile (heavily abraded)	2 nd -4 th
	1	Romano-British box-flue tile	2 nd -4 th
	2	Romano-British grey ware	2 nd -4 th
	1	Clay tobacco pipe stem	18 th +
	15	Natural flint fragments	natural
	1	Flint blade fragment (heavy patina)	prehistoric
	1	Struck flint flake (heavy patina)	prehistoric
	1	Blocky flint tool with some steep retouch and crushed edges (no patina)	prehistoric

• Summary

7.1 The finds recovered from the topsoil and subsoil horizons are limited and consistent with the range and quality of objects recovered during the preceding trial excavation project. No further analysis is considered necessary for any of the material.

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1 An area of land closely adjacent to the Romano-British villa at Durley Hill, Keynsham, has been redeveloped to provide an extension to the existing cemetery complex. A watching brief conducted during the earthmoving phase of the development failed to detect any significant archaeological deposits or finds. It is concluded that the preceding assessment procedure has been successful and that no significant archaeological deposits have been disturbed or lost as a consequence of the development programme.

REFERENCES AND GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Keynsham Cemetery Extension Watching Brief
Study Area and Development Footprint

Figure 3

