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Brewery Court, Cirencester:
Stage 1 archaeological assessment

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Summary

A number of archaeological observations have been made on and in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development site, one an excavation, the remainder watching briefs and salvage recording.

There is a considerable depth of archaeological stratigraphy in the zone to the rear of the Castle Street frontage. This can be estimated as between 3m and 4m from the present ground level to the natural gravel. Roman levels occupy the base 1.5m to 2m, with a thick band, as much as 1.5m, of dark soil of medieval and post-medieval date above, and an upper level of recent archaeology directly below the modern surface.

The study area occupies what may be the corner of an insula of the Roman town where buildings would have fronted onto streets to the north and east, with the north street perhaps occurring within the study area. Watching briefs suggest an initial phase of Roman gravel quarrying. This is sealed by a deep layer of silts which could not be differentiated in watching briefs but may mark successive Roman timber building phases. Above this is evidence for mortared stone walls of Roman buildings with successive room floors sealed beneath destruction layers. There is little evidence for the nature of the medieval layers although the study area is suggested to lie in the area of post-Roman development. It may also lie within a bailey of the medieval castle. Post-medieval archaeology is represented principally by rubbish pits and dumps, cess-pits and wells to the rear of properties fronting Castle Street.

All the evidence suggests considerable localised disturbance in the area to the rear of Castle Street. Cellars, tree roots, garage inspection pits, foundation holes, cess pits, wells, and pits of post-medieval and medieval date are recorded. The upper post-Roman levels appear to be highly disturbed. Many of the archaeological records suggest local removal of Roman stratigraphy.

The study area thus presents a considerable depth of stratigraphy and a considerable degree of disturbance.

The report suggests that while watching brief and salvage excavation might be appropriate for the upper levels, the lower, Roman levels merit preservation *in situ* and/or preservation by record through a considered programme of archaeological investigation. To set decision making on a firmer basis it is suggested that a number of test pits are excavated to more fully establish the depth and extent of the Roman levels, and to assess the degree of post-Roman disturbance.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

The following desk-based study has been commissioned by Lyons+Sleeman+Hoare on behalf of Raglan Estates plc. The study was undertaken by Peter Ellis of Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in July 1996.

1.2 Scope of work

No brief was set for the study and its scope has therefore been decided in the light of the available documentation. This is considerable. The study has been based on two key documents: i) Cirencester Town Centre Development, Stage 1 Archaeological assessment - a report analysing the archaeology of the proposed Brewery Car Park development (Darvill 1988), and ii) Cirencester: Town and Landscape - the published results of an urban archaeological assessment of Cirencester (Darvill and Gerrard 1994).

The documentation on which both these is based is held by Corinium Museum, and work since 1992, the cut off date for the urban assessment, has been added to the archive which also includes detailed archives for the Brewery Car Park area since 1988. The present study has limited itself to the area covered by Darvill (1988), ie land bounded by Castle Street, Cricklade Street, Ashcroft Road, and Sheep Street, and, within this area, has focused particularly on the archaeological interventions in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development. The Corinium Museum documentation subsumes all the data on the Gloucestershire County Council Sites and Monuments Record and represents the core database for Cirencester archaeology. The county SMR has not therefore been consulted; it is reported to be of little value for Cirencester (Darvill 1988, 10). Recent volumes of the journals 'Britannia' and the "Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society' which record archaeological work annually have been checked.

No original historical or documentary research has been undertaken. Much of the relevant material was consulted for the Brewery Car Park development (Darvill 1988) and a repeated study was not felt to be cost effective at this stage. Although a closer examination of the documentary evidence focused solely on the proposed development site may be necessary at a later stage of the archaeological programme, there is sufficient evidence in Darvill 1988 for the purposes of this report. Ordnance Survey maps have been inspected back to 1875.

Darvill and Gerrard (1994, Part IV) discuss the importance of archaeology in Cirencester, the process of planning the archaeological dimension of a development, the legal constraints, and mitigation strategies. None of this is repeated here beyond noting that the study area lies within a zone of high archaeological interest (ibid fig 57). It should also be noted that the south-east corner of the development area lies within one of the notified scheduled areas of Cirencester (Fig. 4).

1.3 The site (Fig. 1; Fig. 2)

The proposed development site - the study area - is an irregular 60m x 30m area lying at the north end of the Brewery Car Park, occupied by a single story shop, Richleys, erected in the 1980s, by a brick workshop building, now a shop, Jungle, present in 1921 but not in 1875, and by a small modern garage. The site is otherwise devoted to car parking or paved pedestrian areas. The ground falls from east to west and less noticeably from north to south. To the north are the backs of shops fronting on Castle Street.

1.4 Geology

The underlying geology is known to be quaternary gravels deposited in a series of terraces by the River Churn. The gravel is as much as 9m thick and overlies sands and clays of the Kellaway beds which in turn rest on limestone (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, 29). To the west, along Sheep Street, gravels give way to clay and limestone Forest marble beds (Darvill 1988, 6).

1.5 Summary of archaeological deposit types

Archaeological observations in the vicinity of the study area have shown that the gravel has been quarried in places in the Roman period. Where this has not occurred a buried turf

line has been recorded (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, 29). Above the gravel has been evidence of *in situ* Roman buildings, floors, destruction levels and dumps as much as 2m deep. These are initially of 1st- and early 2nd-century timber buildings, and later of stone-walled buildings. These levels are then sealed by dark earth deposits and disturbed material of medieval and post-medieval date which lie beneath walls, rubbish pits and other features of 19th and 20th century date. The dark earth deposits are often at least 1.5m deep, giving a total depth of 4m in places.

1.6 Roman, medieval and post-medieval background

The Roman *civitas* capital of Corinium was built on the site of a Roman fort and its associated civilian settlement. Initial timber-framed buildings were replaced from the 2nd century AD by stone buildings. The town contained important public buildings, of which more remain to be discovered, private buildings, some with mosaic-floored rooms, and shops along the street frontages. The town was surrounded by defences within which was a grid of metalled streets (Wacher 1995; Holbrook 1994). Within the rectangle formed by Castle Street, Cricklade Street, Ashcroft Road, and Sheep Street, buildings fronting on an east-west street south of and parallel with Castle Street and a north-south street parallel with Cricklade Street are to be expected.

Dark Age and medieval Cirencester developed around the parish church and market place to the north-east of the study area which itself lies within the area of suspected occupation (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, figs 31 and 34). More recently the area lay within the Ashcroft estate focused on Ashcroft House (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, fig 43, site no 54180) which remained largely undeveloped until this century. However a long narrow building is shown crossing the site from north to south on maps of *c.* 1795 and *c.* 1838 (Darvill 1988, figs 6 and 7 respectively). By 1875 this is named as Elm Court by which time the long building had been partly demolished (Fig. 5). The dark earth deposit is most likely to be a gradual accummulation from the later medieval period until the 19th century, a depth of 2m would represent an annual increase of about 5mm over four centuries.

1.7 Organisation of report

In Section 2, previous archaeological work on and near the study area is listed and described. The majority of sites are fully dealt with by Darvill (1988); subsequent work is described in more detail. This information is then collated in Section 3 and an assessment is made of the deposits to be encountered on the site. In Section 4 the archaeological potential is then examined in different periods. Section 5 looks briefly at the development impact, suggests possible mitigation strategies, and draws attention to the nature of previous archaeological responses. Finally in Section 6 recommendations for further work are put forward.

1.8 Acknowledgement

Grateful thanks are due to Linda Viner of the Corinium Museum, Cirencester, for sharing her wide knowledge of the databases and supplying the relevant documentation.

2 Previous work

2.1 Summary of archaeological work on and near the site

There have been a number of archaeological interventions in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development site and on the site itself (Fig. 2; Table 1). Those already described by Darvill (1988) are dealt with more briefly. From west to east the interventions comprise:

A) watching briefs in 1979 on Tesco supermarket site, the Home and Wear site, and street frontage shops to its north (Darvill 1988: PRNs 404, 405 406),

B) observations made in 1954 during the digging of a hole for a tank in Bridges Garage (Darvill 1988: PRN 214),

C) excavations undertaken in 1970 by A McWhirr (Darvill 1988: PRN 99),

D) a watching brief on service trenches for the present single storey shop, Richleys, in 1979 (Darvill 1988: PRN 419),

E) salvage recording in 1981 of groundwork for Richleys (Darvill 1988: PRN 419), and

F) finding of a mosaic floor in 1849 (Darvill 1988: PRN 172).

To the south and south-east of the site are:

G) test pits undertaken in 1989 for the proposed wholesale development of the Brewery Car Park (Gerrard and Johnson 1989);

H) test pits and a watching brief at 20 Cricklade Street by Cotswold Archaeological Trust 1989 and 1990 (Walker 1989; Barber 1990); and

J) a service trench excavation related to H recorded in 1990 (King 1990a).

Finally it should be noted that Roman and medieval pottery was collected in the 1920s during the construction of Bridges Garage on and to the west of the study area (Darvill 1988: PRN 425). One medieval pot was near complete. This evidence suggests that there was a considerable degree of disturbance but also indicates that there may have been intact medieval levels.

Table 1: Summary of archaeological work relating to study area

	Darvill 1988 no	**Date**	**Type**	**Findings**
A	404, 405, 406	1979	WB	early RB levels, industrial feature, RB walls, mosaic floor destroyed, medieval ditch ?of castle
B	214	1954	R	med pits, 1.2m RB strata, med industrial pit
C	9	1970	E	RB walls, RB levels disturbed, med ditch ?of castle, med and post-med pits
D	419	1980	WB	disturbed med and post-med strata, top of RB levels only
E	419	1980	WB	mosaic floor destroyed
F	172	1849	R	mosaic floor
G		1989	E	test pits, 1st century layers, RB road, RB floors, med pits
H		1989	WB	RB floors, street, mosaic destroyed, pilae tiles, bust of Minerva, ?glass making
J		1990	WB	RB street

WB = watching brief; R = record; E = excavation; RB = Romano-British

2.2 Other archaeological work

Within the rectangle of streets there have been further excavations and records, the great majority listed by Darvill (1988, fig 3, Appendix B). The most important were two excavations in the area of the former Mycalex Factory in 1951 and 1961 which located early timber buildings, later, well-preserved, walls and floors (including mosaics), and a post-Roman ditch. In addition an assessment excavation has recently been undertaken at Sheep Street (King 1990b).

2.3 Data retrieval conditions

The data has been collected under differing work circumstances. Most have recorded groundwork intended for development purposes. Not all the examinations have recorded the complete sequence from the gravel to the modern surface. Many of the observations have been rapidly sketched under poor observation conditions. Those where the best conditions applied were nevertheless recording work shaped principally by non-archaeological contractors.

2.4 The Tesco watching briefs 1979 (A) (Fig. 2; Fig. 3)

The provision of foundations for the Tesco supermarket, the Home and Wear store and for shops fronting Castle Street were observed by David Wilkinson in 1979. The archive comprises records of a total of 99 foundation holes recorded under difficult conditions. The watching brief recorded the pre-Roman ground level except where cut by gravel pits. This was sealed by silt layers up to 1m in total depth, which were cut by stone wall foundations and sealed by floors - in one area 8 successive floor levels were recorded. A possible kiln was recorded. A mosaic pavement was destroyed unrecorded by the contractors. It was located near Castle Street. A large medieval ditch was recorded (Fig. 4) and much evidence, particularly toward the Castle Street frontage, of medieval and post-medieval activity, including robbing of Roman walls, rubbish pits, wells and drystone walls. A fragment of a limestone sculpture, possibly a figure of Pan, was recovered.

2.5 Bridges Garage tank hole 1954 (B) (Fig. 2)

One side of the hole showed disturbance by ?medieval rubbish pits down to the natural gravel. On other sides 1.2m of Roman stratigraphy was recorded with, above, sections of walling and a floor cut by the rubbish pits. A medieval sulphur pit was found nearby.

2.6 Bridges Garage excavations 1970 (C) (Fig. 2; Fig 3)

Two trenches, one to the west of the study area and one directly to the south were excavated by A McWhirr in 1970. About 1.5m of the upper levels were removed by bulldozer and trenches then opened from the lower level. The Roman levels were sampled only, and excavation was abandoned because of flood water. The levels that were examined had been heavily disturbed by medieval and post-medieval activity. A length of Roman wall was recorded running east-west to the south of the study area. The interior of the building was thought to be to the south. The corner of a second building with pitched stone footings was also recorded and a possible robbed-out wall line. Stone-lined medieval cess pits and a medieval ditch were also recorded. A Roman Dea Nutrix figurine was recovered.

2.7 Service trench watching brief 1980s (D) (Fig. 2)

Pipe trenches and manholes were recorded as they were laid out prior to the building of Richleys. The trenches were about 2m deep and recorded the upper Roman levels in places. On the west side of Richleys, the trench was cut to less than 2m with no evidence of Roman levels. South of the shop the upper levels exposed in the trench were disturbed.

To the east of the building was tree root disturbance. No Roman levels were recorded there at a depth of 2m but they were noted further south at a depth of 1.7m. East of Richleys were infilled vaulted cellars with Roman archaeology apparent at 2m below the surface. A copper alloy bracelet was recovered a few metres from Cricklade Street.

2.8 Salvage recording during construction of shops, 1980 (E) (Fig. 2)

The construction of the shops at the Mall was not notified to archaeologists, and archaeological observation took place on an emergency basis. Twelve foundation holes were excavated for the two storey block east of the study area, revealing Roman floor levels. A tesselated Roman floor was destroyed by the contractors and only noted by the presence of bonded tesserae in spoil loaded on a lorry. Groundwork for Richleys within the study area comprised a further 12 holes, 2m square, most dug to a depth of over 2m with 3m-deep holes at the east end. The Roman levels were disturbed and only traces of Roman archaeology were seen at the base of the holes which did not penetrate to the natural gravel.

2.9 Mosaic floor found in 19th century (F) (Fig. 2)

This was found in 1849 roughly in the area to the rear of 6 Cricklade Street. In 1869 painted wall plaster and fragmentary pavements were also recorded. In 1938 a pillar base was found 40m to the east on Cricklade Street at the entrance to the Brewery Car Park.

2.10 Test pits excavated in Brewery Car Park 1989 (G1 and 2) (Fig. 2; Fig. 3)

Following the initial archaeological assessment (Darvill 1988), a stage 2 archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the Cotswold Archaeological Trust comprising a number of 2m x 2m test pits (Gerrard and Johnson 1989). Of these, two test pits (nos. 3 and 7) lie near the study area.

Test Pit 3 (G1) revealed a considerable depth of Roman stratigraphy. A flint waste flake was found on the gravels. The presence of 1st-century pottery represented clear evidence for the presence of the early civilian settlement or *vicus* in this area. Roman levels survived with 2nd-4th century pottery, tesserae and painted wall plaster. A sherd of abraded hand-made pottery was dated late-Roman/early medieval. The levels were cut by a medieval pit and a very deep robber trench which may indicate a Roman sewer rather than the wall of a building. The medieval levels comprised a gravelled area, posthole, and hearth which lay beneath a stone-floored yard. These features were of 12th-15th century date. Above, the post-medieval archaeology was represented by butchers' waste and a wall of 16th- or 17th-century date.

In Test Pit 7 (G2) the west side of the Roman street XXI/XXII was excavated. It comprised at least eight metallings, with a ditch to its west. A wall line had been constructed directly above the final road surface. The Roman levels were cut by a large medieval pit which was sealed by a considerable depth of black earth.

2.11 Investigations at 20 Cricklade Street 1989/1990 (H) (Fig. 2; Fig. 3)

Preliminary assessment test pits were followed by an archaeological watching brief during the construction of shops at 20 Cricklade Street. The Roman levels uncovered would have lain in insula XXII on the other side of the street from the study area.

Test Pit 1 revealed evidence for timber and stone buildings, the latter with successive floors. Tesserae and pilae tiles from hypocaust underfloor heating were also recorded, as well as the cast bronze bust of the goddess Minerva, a deity with an association with artisans. The medieval levels were represented by an undifferentiated dark soil. Post-medieval levels were similarly principally dark soil, but a robber trench cut down to the probable line of a Roman wall was recorded.

In Test Pit 2 the Roman levels were represented only by layers which may have been exterior to buildings which, judging by the levels, would have belonged to the timber phase. The upper Roman levels appeared to have been truncated by the medieval levels which were represented by dark earth. Above was a considerable depth of post-medieval dark soil sealing stone yard surfaces.

These test pits were followed by an archaeological watching brief during ground work for the development. Numerous floor levels were recorded including a fine mosaic towards the Cricklade Street frontage. Painted wall plaster was recovered in quantity. A tile was recovered which was possibly the lining of a tank furnace from Roman glass making. In both the test pits and the watching brief particular note was made of the silt layers present on many of the floor surfaces.

2.12 Service trench 1990 (J) (Fig. 2)

The west side of street XXI/XXII was recorded in a service trench much of which repeated an earlier trench which had removed much of the archaeology. Two sections of Roman stratigraphy survived with interior floor surfaces sealed beneath destruction levels. The Roman levels lay beneath a medieval or post-medieval dark earth layer.

3 Archaeological survival

3.1 Relative levels

Crucial to understanding the survival of archaeological deposits is the relative depths as recorded in archaeological interventions (Table 2). In general the depth of stratigraphy increases from west to east and from south to north towards Castle Street and Cricklade Street respectively. In addition to the data in Table 2, the diagrammatic cross-section calculated by Darvill should be noted (Darvill 1988, fig 13).

Table 2: Depths (above OD) of deposits

	Archaeological interventions (see Table 1)								
Levels (upper surfaces)	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G1**	**H**	**J**
Natural gravel	107.5	-	107.7	-	-	-	108.2	108.5	-
Roman	109	-	109	110	-	-	109.4	110	110
Medieval	-	-	-	-	-	-	109.6	-	-
Modern surface	111	110	111.3	112	-	-	110.9	112.2	111
Total	**3.5m**	-	**3.7m**	-	-	-	**2.7m**	**3.7m**	-

3.2 Depth of stratigraphy

Archaeological excavations directly to the south of the study area (2.6 above, area C) showed that the Roman levels had been cut into by later activity. The total depth of stratigraphy was 3.73m. Test Pit 3 (2.10 above, G1) just to the south of the site and east of C demonstrated a total depth of stratigraphy of 2.7m with the Roman levels 1.5m below the surface. These were cut into by medieval pits. Service trenches (2.7, D) for Richleys, which were 2m deep on average, located Roman levels only at the SE corner of the site. The upper levels were highly disturbed. The shop foundation holes (2.8, E) showed much disturbance of the Roman levels.

To the west, the Tesco foundation holes revealed considerable areas of surviving Roman archaeology as did the watching brief to the east at 20 Cricklade Street.

3.3 Disturbance

The degree of localised disturbance in the study area is considerable. The evidence from archaeological interventions shows that the Roman levels have been severely truncated in places, that robbing of Roman walls had taken place in the medieval period, that post-medieval wells, pits, and cellars had been cut into previous levels, and that 20th-century disturbance has been considerable and is particularly associated with the construction of the present buildings in the study area, and with ground work within the garage formerly occupying part of the site. Nevertheless there are likely to be areas of undisturbed stratigraphy. Archaeological observations have recorded intact Roman stratigraphy within the study area, and a mosaic floor existed there until destroyed in the 1980s.

A measure of disturbance is the size and condition of potsherds. Romano-British pottery present in medieval and post-medieval layers is generally reported as being unabraded with sherds of a size suggesting little redeposition. Small finds too, although almost all broken, are reported as occurring in good size sections. The evidence does not indicate a succession of disturbance episodes.

4 Archaeological potential

4.1 1st/2nd century AD

It is clear that 1st- and early 2nd-century civilian buildings extended as far as the study area since they are present at G1. The considerable depth of silt layers at A beneath Roman stone buildings must be associated. These layers are the most likely to survive at the study site.

4.2 Streets

The study area is close to suggested Roman streets. The north-south street has been recognised in recent work and should lie just east of the study area. The east-west street has not been noted in any work south of Castle Street; it is omitted by Holbrook in a recent discussion (Darvill and Gerrard 1994, fig 18). The possibility exists that the study area contains the evidence to confirm its suggested position, which lies directly north of the site.

4.3 2nd-4th centuries

Later Roman buildings are well floored, some with mosaics, and painted wall plaster is present. Building plans have not been recoverable under the circumstances of investigation to date, but should be recognisable given a wide enough area to examine.

4.4 Industry

There are glimpses of industrial activity at the Home and Wear site (A) and at 20 Cricklade Street (H). Finds of pottery and animal bone have been plentiful as well as other finds including the cast bronze of Minerva.

4.5 Early medieval

The sherd of hand made pottery from G1 and the wall overlying the Roman street at G2 may be an indication of early medieval or immediately post-Roman archaeology.

4.6 Medieval

The medieval evidence suggests that the study area may lie within the bailey of the castle (Fig. 4). Although generally represented by dark earth there is some suggestion of the survival of medieval features, particularly pits at A, B, C, and G1. Industrial processes are suggested at B.

4.7 Post-medieval

Post-medieval evidence is of yards, floors, stone-walled outbuildings, cess pits, wells and pits. None have been examined in circumstances where they could be fully understood. Maps show buildings overlying the study area. These need to be researched, and excavation may add to documentary data.

4.8 Research aims

The main objectives would be to understand the silt levels preceding the stone buildings, to recover the plans of Roman structures and understand their function and history, and to examine the latest Roman levels and try to understand the soil formation processes directly overlying them. For the medieval and post-medieval period the aims would be to understand what processes have been involved in the formation of dark earth deposits, to understand the use of the area in the medieval period, and to map the post-medieval changes in land use and property ownership.

5 The development impact

No construction proposals are known at present. However, the design of the proposed development should make use of the fact that 1.5m of disturbed upper deposits overlie the Roman levels. Only at G1 was Roman stratigraphy recorded at less than this below the modern ground surface. Elsewhere as much as 2m of dark disturbed soil is present below the present surface.

Below this level is a different matter. The archaeological impact of any building work penetrating into the Roman levels should be an important consideration. Watching briefs, such as those conducted on the Tesco site, can only hint at what might be recovered and understood under controlled circumstances. There is no doubt that, although disturbed, the Roman levels provide an exceptional resource. Hitherto the treatment of these levels in this area has not been satisfactory, with three mosaics destroyed unrecorded in the last 20 years, and with no excavation under controlled conditions for over 25 years.

6 Recommendations

6.1 It is important in view of the probable survival of Roman archaeology, in particular, that archaeological considerations form a central part of the planning process and that the archaeological implications of the development are fully discussed and properly responded to.

6.2 When development proposals are known, flexible archaeological responses can be designed. The main aim should be the protection of the stratigraphy at a depth of about 1.5-2m and more below the present surface. If disturbance of these levels is unavoidable, then controlled archaeological excavation (preservation by record) must be seen as the correct response. For the upper levels a mixture of watching brief and salvage excavation may be more appropriate.

6.3 The archaeological excavation of a number of test pits in advance of the finalisation of both the development design and the archaeological mitigation strategy would allow firmer and clearer judgements to be made. The purpose of the test pits would be to establish more precisely the extent and height AOD of the surface of the Roman levels. Excavation of the Roman levels themselves would be limited to such minimal work as is required to answer these questions, as the general character of the remains is suffiently well understood from existing evidence.

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