

**An Archaeological Evaluation of Land
Adjacent to the Queen's Arms Public House,
Ashbourne Road, Rocester,
Staffordshire.**

1996

1.0 Summary

An archaeological evaluation was conducted prior to a planning application for a residential development on a parcel of land to the north of the Queens Arms Public House, Ashbourne Road, Rocester, by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on 15th October 1996. Although the proposed development site lies outside the known limits of the Roman fort at Rocester and away from the Roman *vicus* and medieval core of the village, it does lie within an area where stray finds of prehistoric material have been made. Prior to this evaluation no below-ground archaeological investigations had been conducted within the proposed development site and the potential for survival of archaeological deposits, their nature and condition, was unknown. A total of four trial trenches was excavated. Although no archaeological features were identified, a small number of Roman pottery sherds were recovered from one of two deposits containing charcoal flecks. These deposits and artefacts were recorded within 0.65m of the present ground surface and may be affected by groundworks associated with the proposed development.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation of land located immediately to the north of the Queen's Arms Public House, Ashbourne Road, Rocester, Staffordshire. The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of John Reynolds and Associates prior to a planning application for a residential development. The archaeological evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluation (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994) and with a Specification prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (Ferris 1996) which was approved by Staffordshire County Council. This evaluation conformed to Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of the Environment 1991).

3.0 The Site and its Location (Figures 1 and 2)

The archaeological evaluation site (centred on NGR SK 10973952), is located on the eastern side of Ashbourne Road, immediately to the north of the Queen's Arms Public House. The site presently comprises overgrown rough pasture, with some dumping of modern waste materials across the site.

The site lies outside the known limits of the Roman fort (Esmonde Cleary and Ferris 1996) and away from the Roman *vicus* (Bell 1986) and medieval centre of the village, but within an area from which prehistoric material has been recovered (SMR PRN 02533).

Historic maps contain no reference to any structural activity on the site, instead it appears that the site has been under pasture from the mid-19th century up to the present day.

4.0 Objective

The objectives of this archaeological evaluation were to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains liable to be affected by the proposed development.

5.0 Method

A total of four trial trenches was excavated. A JCB excavator was used to remove the modern topsoil overburden to the top of any significant archaeological features and deposits, or to the top of the subsoil. The layout of the trial trenches reflected the proposed redevelopment areas and were located to avoid transecting an east-west aligned live service pipe which divided the site into two halves. All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present, and contextual information was supplemented by photographs which, together with recovered artefacts, form the site archive. This is presently housed at the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

6.0 The Archaeological Results

Trench 1

(1.60m x 15m, aligned east-west, excavated to a depth of 86.88m AOD)

The orange-yellow-brown sand-gravel subsoil (1001) was overlain in part by an irregular, shallow deposit of slightly darker and more silty sand-gravel which contained sparse charcoal flecks (1003). Five sherds of pottery, four of which are Roman and one of which cannot be dated, were recovered from deposit 1003. The subsoil and layer 1003 were cut by a modern service trench (F100), which contained a ceramic service pipe. All deposits were sealed by 0.40m of topsoil (1000).

Trench 2

(1.60m x 15m, aligned northwest-southeast, excavated to a depth of 86.72m AOD)

The orange-brown gravel-sand subsoil (2001) was overlain by 0.40m of topsoil (2000). No archaeological features or deposits were identified.

Trench 3

(1.60m x 15m, aligned north-south, excavated to a depth of 87.32m AOD)

In the southern half of Trench 3 the orange-brown sand-gravel subsoil (3002) was overlain by a 0.30m thick layer of black silt-sand, which included a number of limestone pieces, machine bricks and decaying wood (3001). Within the northern half, the subsoil was directly overlain by 0.30m of topsoil (3000). No archaeological features or deposits were identified.

Trench 4

(1.60m x 15m, aligned north-south, excavated to a depth of 87.14m AOD).

A number of charcoal flecks were recorded at the top of the orange-brown sand-gravel subsoil horizon (4003), in the northern half of this trench. The area was cleaned by hand, but no archaeological features were identified and no artefacts were recovered. The subsoil was sealed by 0.30-0.40m of topsoil (4001) in the southern half of the trench. In the northern half, the subsoil was overlain by 0.10m of topsoil - this was sealed by up to 0.50m of re-deposited purple-red clay-gravel (4000).

7.0 The Artefacts

Five sherds of pottery were recovered from Trench 1. One sherd was so severely abraded that it could not be dated. However, the remaining four sherds (one black burnished ware, two samian, including a rim, and one local coarse ware) although very small and abraded, could be dated to the Roman period. The samian rim was identified as a Flavian-Trajanic flanged bowl, dated to the late-1st - early-2nd century (Evans pers comm).

8.0 A Discussion of the Trial Trenching Results

No prehistoric or medieval features were recorded.

The subsoil was contacted in all four trial trenches within 0.65m of the present ground level. This horizon had been disturbed in Trench 1 only, by F100, a modern service pipe and trench.

Two separate deposits of charcoal flecks were recorded in Trenches 1 and 4. Four sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from the deposit in Trench 1. These areas of charcoal flecking may represent evidence of earlier activity. However, the absence of any recognisable archaeological features prevents a more certain interpretation.

The results of this evaluation confirm that the proposed development site was outside the Roman military fort and did not form a part of the Roman *vicus* or of the medieval core of Rocester. However, the presence of Roman pottery and of charcoal patches may suggest activity elsewhere within the site, outside the four evaluation trial trenches.

9.0 An Assessment of the Archaeological Importance of the Proposed Development Site

Prior to the commencement of this evaluation no below-ground archaeological investigations had taken place within the proposed development site and the potential for the survival of archaeological deposits, their nature and condition, was unknown. The geographical distance of this site from the Roman fort and *vicus*, and from the core of the medieval village suggests that the land lay outside the historical centre of Rocester. Although there is some evidence of activity within this site, the results of this evaluation do not contradict existing research on the development of Rocester (Esmonde Cleary and Ferris 1996).

10.0 Implications and Proposals

10.1 Implications

The recovery of pottery and the presence of deposits containing charcoal within 0.40-0.65m of the present ground surface may have implications for the proposed development. Groundworks, the cutting of foundation trenches and the provision of services for the residential housing, could affect any surviving archaeological features outside the four trial trenches excavated during the evaluation.

10.2 Proposals

The proposals below provide an outline of the archaeological mitigation fieldwork which could be required if the proposed development is approved. The precise nature of such mitigation would need to be determined following the completion of a final location design and with the approval of Staffordshire County Council.

- 1) A watching brief could be maintained during groundworks for the proposed development in order to allow the salvage recording of any archaeological features and recovery of further artefacts and samples.
- 2) If significant archaeological remains are recorded during the watching brief, provision could be made for a more intensive archaeological presence, which could allow for the full excavation and recording of remains in advance of further groundworks, allowing for their preservation by record.
- 3) On completion of any such further works, it may be appropriate to prepare an assessment of the significance of the findings, in accordance with the recommendations of Management of Archaeology Projects (English Heritage 1991), with a view to further analysis and publication of the results in a local archaeological journal.

11.0 References

- Bell, A. 1986 Excavations at Rocester, Staffordshire, by Fiona Sturdy in 1964 and 1968. Staffordshire Archaeological Studies No. 3, 20-51.
- Esmonde Cleary, A.S. and Ferris, I.M. 1996 Excavations at the New Cemetery, Rocester, Staffordshire, 1985-1987. Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society Transactions Volume XXXV.

Ferris, I.M. 1996 *Queens Arms Site Redevelopment: Rocester, Staffordshire. Specification for Archaeological Evaluation and Recording.*

11.0 Acknowledgements

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